

The background of the cover is a photograph of a stone archway leading to a bright blue sky. The text is overlaid on this image. The words 'The Book of' are in green, 'ACTS' is in large green letters, 'FE' is in large blue letters, 'BOOK' is in large red letters, and 'PUBLICATION' is in large yellow-green letters. The author's name 'by Given O. Blakely' is at the bottom in light blue.

The Book of

ACTS

FE

BOOK

PUBLICATION

by Given O. Blakely

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #1

INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

“ 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, 2 Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen: 3 To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: 4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me. 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.” (Acts 1:1-5)

The book of Acts proclaims the working of the risen and exalted Christ. This work was accomplished through the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said would come after He had left (John 14:16-18). He would also particularly work through the men whom He had chosen, who were “named apostles” (Acts 6:13). These men established the focus and direction of the work of the Lord, having been empowered by Him for that activity. The book of Acts particularly tracks the activity of Peter and Paul – Peter ministering primarily to the Jews, and Paul to the Gentiles (although the ministry of neither man was limited to the groups to whom they primarily ministered) (Gal 2:7-9).

This book is written by a man who was not himself an apostle, yet who was given a “perfect understanding” of the work of Christ “from the very first” (Luke 1:3). He also

traveled extensively with Paul, whose activities dominate this book from chapter thirteen to its conclusion (chapter 28) – sixteen chapters.

Although there is doctrine in the book of Acts, it is not primarily a book of doctrine . Rather, it is fundamentally a revelation of activity – Divine activity . In it we find the record of the vigorous action of the exalted Christ, who, by means of the Holy Spirit, is “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12).

- **THE TITLE AND PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOK.**
- **THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK**
- **WHAT IS NOT IN THE BOOK**
- **LUKE AND THEOPHILUS**
- **HISTORICAL, BUT NOT MERELY HISTORICAL**
- **THE FORMER TREATISE (1:1)**
- **UNTIL THE DAY HE WAS TAKEN UP (1:2)**
- **HE SHOWED HIMSELF (1:3)**
- **THEY COULD NOT DEPART (1:4)**
- **TWO DIFFERENT BAPTISMS (1:5)**
- **CONCLUSION**

We will be exposed to:

- Divine direction.
- Human involvement.
- The fact of suffering and persecution.
- Religious opposition (from the Jews).
- Corruption within the church (Ananas and Sapphira).
- Sharp dissension among brethren (Barnabas and Paul).
- Brethren becoming convinced of realities formerly rejected (the acceptance of the Gentiles), and a host of other things.
- We will be exposed to religious and political rulers.
- The maltreatment of God’s messengers by religious zealots.
- Kindness shown to them by Gentiles and barbarians.

Only the activities of a handful of God’s servants are particularly detailed. They include Peter, John, James. James the Lord’s brother, Philip the evangelist, Stephen, Barnabas, Paul, and Silas. More is recorded about Paul than any other servant mentioned in this book.

The Acts of the Apostles, then, is more about the work than the workers. It relates more to what was done than to those who did it. It provides an overview of the outworking of Divine purpose, with very little being said about the projects and desires of men. Even though men were involved in, and impacted by, the activities, they are not the primary consideration. This is a record of the works of the risen Savior – how He carried out the great salvation that He accomplished in His death, burial,

resurrection, and consequent enthronement, with all power in heaven and earth being given to Him.

With remarkable consistency, those who responded in faith to the Gospel in this record, or to Divine direction, never resist the word or will of the Lord. They gladly acquiesce to the Lord, whether it is the group who were charged with murdering Jesus (2:41), the city of Samaria (8:5-6), Saul of Tarsus who was persecuting the church (9:6), the household of the Gentile Cornelius (10:33), a Gentile jail-keeper (16:30), or those who sought to spread the Word of God throughout the world (16:8-10).

Those with tender hearts were discovered in the most unlikely places:

- The road to Damascus (9:2-6).
- A heathen island (13:6-12).
- In a synagogue where Jews were found contradicting and blaspheming **Paul's First**

Antioch, Selucia to **Salamis** 13:1-3

Through Cyprus to **Paphos** 13:6-12

Perga in Pamphilia 13:13

Antioch in Pisidia 13:14-50

Iconium 13:51-14:5

Lystra 14:6-20a

Derbe 14:20b-21a

Returned to **Lystra , Iconium**

Antioch 14:21b

Pisidia , Pamphylia , then Perga 14:24-25a

Attalia 14:25a-26a

Antioch of Syria 14:26b-28

Through **Syria** and **Cilicia** 15:41

Derbe and **Lystra** 16:1-3

Phrygia and **Galatia** 16:4-6

Opposite **Mysia** 16:7

Passed by **Mysia** to **Troas** , then through **Samothracia (Samothrace) and Neapolis to Philippi** 16:8-40

Through **Amphipolis** and **Apollonia** to **Thessalonica** 17:1-9

Berea (Berea) 17:10-13

Paul sent to coast, then to **Athens** 17:14-34

Corinth 18:1-17

Cenchrea (Cenchreae) 18:18

Ephesus 18:19-21

Caesarea (Syria) , Jerusalem, & Antioch 18:22

Through **Galatia** and **Phrygia** 18:23

Ephesus 19:1-41

Macedonia 20:1-2

Greece, Macedonia, Philippi 20:3-6a

Troas 20:6b-12

Assos..... 20:13-14

Mitylene, opposite Chios, Samos, Trogyllium (KJV), Miletus 20:14-36

Cos, Rhodes, Patara 21:1-2

Tyre 21:3-6

Ptolemais 21:7

Caesarea 21:9-15

Jerusalem 21:16-25

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(13:45-48).

- A jail cell in a Gentile city (16:29-34).
- Athens, a citadel of worldly knowledge (17:34).
- A great multitude from a synagogue in Thessalonica, where Paul was vigorously opposed (17:2-4).
- The chief ruler of a synagogue in Corinth, where Paul was soundly rejected (18:4-8).
- Many in Ephesus, where those converted had been devoted to occultic activities (19:17-20).

Thus we are exposed to the REAL manner of conversion and Divine direction – the way people react when their hearts have been touched and renewed. The power of the Gospel is confirmed as well as the nature of faith.

Real conversion does not involve delivering extensive apologetics and evidences that supposedly confirm the validity of Scripture. It does not require scopic training and orientation courses, or prolonged exposure to the truth. Such things reflect the wisdom of men, and will not be found in this record of the very real spread of the Gospel.

PAUL'S TRAVELS

The book of Acts provides us with an extensive commentary on Paul's travels for the Lord. These travels are encapsulated in, what men have called, his three missionary journeys. Because they comprise a considerable portion of this book, I have provided a brief overview of those journeys in the preceding page, together with the portions of Acts in which they are recorded.

The most ancient title of this book is "The Acts of the Apostles." Although this name was not given by the one who wrote the book, it does reflect the general nature of it. Some have preferred to call it "The Acts of the Holy Spirit," and, indeed, there is a sense in which that is what is recorded. Yet, this does not provide the intended perspective. Jesus had delivered a commandment to His apostles regarding the preaching of the Gospel and the making of disciples. This book tells us how that was carried out.

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This is a faithful and responsible record of the activities of the Apostles AFTER Jesus ascended to heaven and was enthroned on the right hand of God. It is, in fact, an account of how Jesus went about to “build” His church (Matt 16:18), working through the men He had ordained and empowered, together with those they gathered around them. As will become very evident, these men conducted themselves quite differently than when they walked with Jesus. They will not have so many questions (Matt 17:10; Mk 7:17; 9:28; 10:10), but will provide answers. They will not philosophize about why conditions exist (John 9:2), but will have a very real grasp of the situation. They will not ask if they should call down fire on their opponents (Lk 9:54), but will conduct themselves more in keeping with the nature of Christ and the New Covenant.

It will be very apparent that something had occurred to these men that altered their nature. They thought, spoke, and acted differently. We will see “newness of life” in action. That “newness” is strictly owing to the exaltation of Christ, which confirmed the Father’s complete and unquestioned acceptance of His death for the sins of the world.

THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL

This book records the remarkable spread of the Gospel – within a short time and without an elaborate humanly-devised system being in place.

Preaching

- “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word ” (Acts 8:4).
- “Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only” (Acts 11:19).
- “ Preached the Word” (8:25; 13:5; 14:25; 15:36).
- “ Preaching the word” (Acts 8:4; 11:19; 15:35).
- “ Preached the Gospel” (8:25; 14:7,21).
- “ Preach the word” (16:6).
- “ Preach the Gospel” (16:10).
- “And the word of God increased” (Acts 6:7).
- “ The word of God grew and multiplied” (12:24).
- “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (19:20).
- “And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region” (Acts 13:49).
- “ . . . all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus , both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).

Places

The places where the Gospel was preached were divers and extensive. Although the purpose of the book is not to provide every single detail of these places, enough is made known to cause extensive and productive thought among those who are in Christ Jesus.

- Countries: Acahai, Asia, Egypt, Africa, Arabia, Italy, Greece

- Cities: Jerusalem, Samaria, Lystra, Derbe, Philippi, Thyatira, Ephesus, Myra, Lasea, Paphos, Selucia, Salamis, Miletus, Trogyllium, Ptolemais, Caesarea, Rome, Athens, Corinth, Thessalonica, Amphipolis, Apollonia, Azotus, Troas, Mysia, Neapolis, Tarsus, Damascus, Antioch of Pisidia,, Attallia, Perga, Assos, Mitylene, Patara, Tyre

- Regions: Lyconia, Macedonia, Lycia, Galatia, Phrygia, Phenice, Pontus, Lyia, Cyrene, Crete, Pisidia, Syria

- Nations: Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia,

- Coasts: Cilicia, Pamphylia

- Islands: Cyprus, Paphos, Chios, Samos, Samothracia, Melita, Coos, Rhodes

Paul's Extended Ministries

- 1 year in Antioch (Acts 11:26).

- 1 ½ years in Corinth (Acts 18:11).

- 2 years in Asia (Acts 19:10).

- 3 years in Ephesus (Acts 20:31).

- 2 years in his own hired house in **We will find that the emphasis of the activities in this book related to delivering the Word of God to the people in the energy of Divine**

Rome (Acts 28:30).

EMPHASIZING THE WORD

We will find that the emphasis of the activities in this book related to delivering the Word of God to the people in the energy of Divine power . If there are deeds of kindness, they are administered within the context of the Word of God. If there is a ministration of helps or assistance, it is toward those who have embraced the Word of God. Admittedly, this differs significantly from the thrust of contemporary "Christianity." But here, we are being exposed to the REAL work of God, superintended by the risen Christ.

A WORTHY QUOTATION

"This book contains incontrovertible evidence of the truth of Christianity. It is a record of its early triumphs. Within the space of 30 years after the death of Christ the gospel had been carried to all parts of the civilized, and to no small portion of, the uncivilized world. Its progress and its triumphs were not concealed. Its great transactions were not "done in a corner." It had been preached in the most splendid, powerful, and enlightened cities; churches were already founded in Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Philippi, and at Rome. The gospel had spread in Arabia, Asia Minor, Greece, Macedon, Italy, and Africa. It had assailed the most mighty existing institutions. It had made its way over the most formidable barriers. It had encountered the most deadly and malignant opposition. It had traveled to the capital (Rome), and had secured such a hold even in the imperial city as to make it certain that it would finally overturn the established religion and seat itself upon the ruins of paganism. Within 30 years, it had settled the point that it would overturn every bloody altar, close every pagan temple, bring under its influence everywhere the men of office, rank, and power, and that "the banners of the faith would soon stream from the palaces of the Caesars." All this would be accomplished by the instrumentality of Jews — of fishermen — of Nazarenes. They did not have either wealth, armies, or allies. With the exception of Paul, they were people without much education. They were taught only by the Holy Spirit, armed only with the power of God, victorious only because Christ was their Captain, and the world acknowledged the presence of the messengers of the Highest One and the power of the Christian religion. Its success never has been, and never can be accounted

for by any other supposition than that God Himself attended it! And if the Christian religion is not true, the change which was brought about by the twelve apostles is the most inexplicable, mysterious, and wonderful event that has ever been witnessed in this world. Their success will stand until the end of time as an argument for the truth of God's overall plan (see 2 Corinthians 13:8). It will always confound the infidel. And, it will forever sustain the Christian with the assured belief that this IS a religion which has proceeded from the all-powerful and infinitely benevolent God." ALBERT BARNES

THE AUTHOR OF THE BOOK

This being the case, the book of Acts reflects Divine priorities, and passes along to believers the things that God wants us to know about the ongoing work of the enthroned Savior.

The author of this book is Luke, whom Paul referred to as "the beloved physician" (Col 4:14). He accompanied Paul in his tour of Asia and Macedonia (Acts 16:10-13; 20:5-6). He was also with Paul in his journey to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-18). Additionally, Luke accompanied Paul in his final trip to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:31; 2 Tim 4:11; Phile 1:24).

Luke identified himself as the one who wrote the Gospel that bears his name, sending it to the same person to whom this book is addressed: Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1). Luke, like John (Gospel of John, First John, Second John, Third John) does not refer to himself by name. John refers to himself by name only in the book of the Revelation (Rev 1:1,4,9; 21:2,8). Of course neither does Matthew identify himself as the author of the Gospel of Matthew. The same is true of Mark. In the book of Acts Luke refers to himself only as one of those traveling with Paul – "WE" (16:10,11,12,13,16; 20:6,13,14,15; 21:1,2,3,4, 5,6,7,8,10,12,14, 15,16,17; 27:1,2,3,4,5,7,15,16,18,19, 20,26,27,29,37; 28:10,11,12,13,14,16).

There is also a consistency in the early teachers of the church (after the apostles) in ascribing the authorship of this book to Luke. Throughout church history, there has been a unanimous acceptance of Luke as the author of this book. There is no need to engage in lengthy arguments to substantiate that point.

DATE OF WRITING

It is generally understood that Luke completed this book around 63 A.D. It was apparently written from Rome, shortly after Paul had completed spending two years in his own house, teaching things concerning the kingdom of God. The last two verses of the book read, "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Acts 28:30-31). It is probable that Luke compiled records as he traveled with Paul, using them to provide remarkable details in this book. Through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (for "all Scripture" is given by His inspiration – 2 Tim 3:16), the book was then compiled. This being the case, it reflects Divine priorities, and passes along to believers the things that God wants us to know about the ongoing work of the enthroned Savior. The writing of this book was supervised from heaven, written by a holy man who was empowered by the Holy Spirit.

WHAT IS NOT IN THE BOOK

It is interesting to note what is NOT in this book.

- Proportionately little of the evangelization of the Jews, except for preaching in the Temple (2:46; 5:20,25,42) and synagogues (9:20; 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8;).
- Little of the history of the mother church in Jerusalem.

- After the first chapter (1:13), as regarding “the eleven” (without Judas) and “the twelve” (including Matthias, 1:26), only Peter, James, and John are mentioned after chapter one. “Peter and John” are mentioned six times (3:1,3,4,11; 4:13,19; 8:14). Besides that, “John” is mentioned twice (1:13; 4:6). “James” is mentioned twice (1:13; 12:2). By way of contrast, Peter is mentioned sixty-times, and Paul one hundred and forty-six times (as “Saul” as additional twenty-five times).

- There are no community projects, neighborhood outreaches, philanthropy toward the unsaved **There are no community projects, neighborhood outreaches, philanthropy toward the unsaved needy, relief projects for distressed areas, supposedly sanctified entertainment, or efforts directed toward special people groups: i.e. singles, married,**

needy, relief projects for distressed areas, supposedly sanctified entertainment, or efforts directed toward special people groups: i.e. singles, married, youth, senior citizens, etc. Whatever may be said of such activities, they are not recorded in the book of the “Acts.” These are not the activities in which the exalted Christ is represented as being engaged.

- There is not a stereotyped statement of a “plan of salvation,” consisting of a specified number of “steps.”

- There is no reference to “the sinner’s prayer.”

- There is no reference to “the great commission.”

- There is not a solitary reference to “the love of God.”

- No standard version of this book (KJV, NKJV, ASV, RSV, NRSV, NASB, NIV) contains the word “love.”

- Only the NASB, NRSV, and RSV contain the word “charity” (“deeds of kindness and charity” – Acts 9:36).

- “Satan,” or “the devil,” is only mentioned four times (5:3; 10:38; 13:10; 26:18).

- The word “sin” occurs only once (7:60), “transgression” once (1:18), and “iniquity” twice (1:18; 8:23).

By way of contrast, there are forty-six references to “Jesus,” nine references to “Christ,” sixteen references to “Jesus Christ,” sixty references to “the Lord,” sixteen references to “the Lord Jesus,” forty-one references to the “Holy Spirit,” and one hundred and seventy-four references to “God.” There are also forty-one references to the “Word,” “Gospel,” or “Scriptures.” This reflects the kind of context in which the Spirit will develop our ideas about the church.

We must avoid drawing erroneous conclusions from these observations. However, they do suggest an emphasis that is quite different from that to which the churches of our time are being subjected. During the past fifty years, a new and vastly different vocabulary has been adopted and propagated by the self-proclaimed leaders of the Christian community.

LUKE AND THEOPHILUS

LUKE

“Luke” is mentioned by name only two times in Scripture (Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11). In the first, he is referred to as “the beloved physician,” and the second states that he was with Paul when he was imprisoned in Rome (2 Tim 4:11). It is inferred that, since he was a physician, he was a man of superior education and natural mental aptitude. His writings also reflect an extraordinarily disciplined mind, which was obviously a gift given to him and sanctified by his faith.

It is generally understood that Luke was a Gentile, as his name is Greek. Also, when Paul mentioned him among those who were laboring with him, he did not class him among the Jews, whom he said were “of the circumcision” (Col 4:11-14). His name means “light-giving,” which is certainly appropriate. We do not know when he was converted. We do know that He was not an eye-witness of the Lord Jesus Himself. His knowledge of Christ was received from the apostles, but his understanding of their word came from God. Therefore he wrote in his gospel, “Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word ; it seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first , to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus” (Lk 1:1-3).

His unusual devotion to Paul sets him apart from the disciples of our day. The Lord had truly touched his heart, changes his affections, and filled him with holy zeal. This kind of man is most unusual in our time – and no doubt in his time as well.

Luke stands as a sterling confirmation that men do not require the spotlight in order to labor effectively for the Lord. Many good and holy men, like Luke, have willingly labored in the shadow of those who had seen more than themselves.

THEOPHILUS

The name “Theophilus” means “friend of God” – “Theo” (God) and “philos” (friend). Here is a person of some distinction (“most excellent Theophilus” – Acts 1:3), to whom two sizeable books of Scripture were written (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1). Yet, apart from Luke’s salutation in his Gospel and the book of Acts, there is total silence concerning this man in Scripture. Some of the “church fathers” considered him to be a fictitious character – a sort of literary appellation that applies to every believer. Without delving further into this, I will simply say I consider this to be a lot of nonsense.

The term “most excellent” is nowhere applied to a mere fictitious character – a kind of storybook way of speaking to every child of God. The Holy Spirit does have a way of speaking to ALL believers: “ all saints” (Eph 3:8,18; 6:18; Phile 1:5' Rev 8:3), “ all that call upon Him” (Rom 10:12), “ all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:2), “ all that believe” (1 Thess 1:7), “ all that will live godly” (2 Tim 3:12), and “ all that are in Christ Jesus” (1 Pet 5:14).

There are other instances of this manner of addressing men. “Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting” (Acts 23:26). “We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix , with all thankfulness” (Acts 24:3). “But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness” (Acts 26:25).

I conclude, therefore, that Theophilus was some high-ranking official who had a keen interest in things pertaining to life and godliness. He is an example of those few noble souls who are called of God into the fellowship of His dear Son. As it is written , “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble , are called” (1 Cor 1:26). Thank God, it does not read “not any,” but “not many.”

HISTORICAL, BUT NOT MERELY HISTORICAL

The book of Acts is an historical book, but not merely or primarily an historical book. It is a record of things that happened, but they are things wrought by the hand of God, not mere men. Permit me to underscore this with a few phrases found in this precious volume.

- “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this , which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

- “Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

- “But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors , and brought them forth, and said” (Acts 5:19).

- “And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip , saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert” (Acts 8:26).

- “And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him , Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6).

- “And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision , Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him , Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth” (Acts 9:10-11).

- “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

- “And the hand of the Lord was with them : and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

- “And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews” (Acts 12:11).

- “And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:10).

- “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened , that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).

- “Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee ” (Acts 27:24).

If we have a heart for it, we will behold the hand of the Lord throughout this book. He will empower His messengers, convict sinners, open hearts, and pour forth His Spirit. He will direct His people, opening some doors and closing others. When there is increase, it will come from Him.

If we have a heart for it, we will behold the hand of the Lord throughout this book. He will empower His messengers, convict sinners, open hearts, and pour forth His Spirit. He will direct His people, opening some doors and closing others. When there is increase, it will come from Him. When the church is comforted, it will come from the Lord. The Lord Jesus will be seen as present in all of the labors of those He commissions and empowers.

While it is true that those who remain “in the body,” alive in this world, are “absent from the Lord,” He is by no means absent from them. He promised those who labored in His vineyard , “Lo, I am with alway, even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:20). That marvelous promise is lived out in the book of Acts, seen in every account it provides.

THE FORMER TREATISE

“ 1:1 The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.”

Luke again writes to Theophilus. He will not update the Gospel, but will rather chronicle its

proclamation, and the wonderful effects it works among men. He will also provide a glimpse of how the exalted Christ works within His church – how He directs it, and what occurs when the “glorious Gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11) is faithfully proclaimed.

THE FORMER TREATISE

“The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus . . .” Other versions read, “The former account I made, O Theophilus” NKJV “The first account I composed, Theophilus” NASB “In my former book, Theophilus,” “In the first book, Theophilus,” NRSV “I have given an earlier account, O Theophilus,” BBE “I composed the first discourse, O Theophilus.” DARBY “In my earlier work, Theophilus,” NJB “Dear friend who loves God,” LIVING “My former narrative, Theophilus,” WEYMOUTH and “In the former account [which I prepared], O Theophilus.” AMPLIFIED

The word “treatise” is translated from the Greek word **lo,gon** (logov, from “logos”). This precise word is used 130 times in the New Covenant Scriptures. It is used in a variety of ways, but all of them have the same import – an articulated message, or integrated thought. A few of them will serve to substantiate this. I have highlighted the words translated from **lo,gon**.

- SOMETHING SAID AGAINST JESUS. “And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him . . .” (Matt 12:32).
- POINTLESS SPEAKING. “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt 12:36).
- THE GOSPEL. “Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matt 13:21).
- A PRAYER. “And He left them, and went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words” (Matt 26:44).
- AN ACCOUNT. “For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. 41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly” (Acts 19:40).
- THE WORK OF GOD. “For he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth” (Rom 9:28).
- GIVING AN ACCOUNT. “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12).
- MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION. “To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19).
- THE WORD OF GOD. “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Gal 6:6).
- THE LAW SPOKEN AT SINAI. “And the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more” (Heb 12:27).
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As you can see, “word” is not used for a single “word,” but refers to a message, or articulated thought. It can refer to a phrase or idiom (i.e. “idle word”), a prophecy, or a saying. It refers to the entirety of the Gospel, the entirety of the Law, and even the entirety of the Scriptures themselves. It is even used of the presentation of a cause, or giving an intelligent account of something. A synonym for “word” is also “speech” – as in, “John delivered his speech.”

In all of these a purpose is being served by the expression. There is a certain focus in it, and the integration of divers things into a single objective. It is actually a series of statements that make a particular point . All of the details stand together, complement one another, and are a part of a whole concept and single purpose. In ordinary English, we use the term in this way. If we are discussing a certain subject, we might ask a person with expertise in the matter, “Can you give us a word on that?” If a messenger comes from one diplomat to another he might say, “I am sent to deliver a word to you.”

In writing his Gospel, John gave the reason for his word – for a “word” always has an objective. “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31). That is why he wrote. Therefore, he did not highlight the activities of Peter or any of the other apostles. His book did not place the accent on Jewish customs or the state of

the nation at that time. He spoke predominantly of Jesus Christ. If he mentioned other personalities like the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers, it was ONLY as they related to the Lord Jesus. If he wrote of Herod, Pilate, Caiaphas, Augustus Caesar, or some other dignitary it was only because they had something to do with Jesus.

Treatise

As used in this text, a “treatise” is not a mere chronological account of Christ’s birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection. Luke wrote His Gospel to accent Jesus. He provided details that would shed light on the Divine purpose that was fulfilled in Him. When people read his gospel, they would become better acquainted with the Savior of the world.

ALL THAT JESUS BEGAN TO DO AND TEACH

“ . . . of all that Jesus began both to do and teach.” Other versions read, “I wrote about all that Jesus did and taught from the beginning,” NRSV “ I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach,” RSV “of all the things which Jesus did , and of His teaching from the first,” BBE “I dealt with everything Jesus had done and taught from the beginning.” NJB “In my first letter I told you about Jesus’ life and teachings , LIVING “all that Jesus began doing and teaching ,” MONTGOMERY and “I made [a continuous report] dealing with all the things which Jesus began to do and to teach .” AMPLIFIED

There is something here that must be perceived. When speaking about “ all” that Jesus did, Luke wrote only of things that related to His mission to lay down His life and take it up again. He provided two morsels of information that took place within the first two years of Jesus life.

- The visitation of the shepherds on the night of His birth (Luke 2:7-20).
- His dedication as Mary’s firstborn after the days of her purification were complete (Luke 2:21-38).

There are three pieces of information the next ten years of His life.

- Growing, becoming strong, being filled with wisdom, and the grace of God upon Him (Luke 2:40).
- His visitation to Jerusalem and encounter with the “doctors” of the Law (Luke 2:41-50).

One thing is said about the next eighteen years of His life.

- A brief summation of the next eighteen years of His life (subjection to parents, increase in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man (Luke 2:51-52).

There are 1,151 verses in the Gospel of Luke. Of them 45 verses are devoted to the first thirty years of His life – under 4%! Over 86% of Luke’s Gospel is devoted to the last three and a half years of Jesus’ life. So far as doing and teaching is concerned, we have a single record of a particular deed Jesus did prior to His baptism – when He sat in the Temple, heard the doctors, and asked them questions (Lk 2:46). One verse out of 1,151 that speaks of a particular deed Jesus did. We have one record of a particular word He said prior to the beginning of His ministry: “How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49).

Among other things, this confirms that Christ’s teaching was not within the context of the Old Covenant, as some affirm. Rather, Jesus preached in an interim period – between the Law and the Gospel, or the First Covenant and New, or Second, Covenant.

Luke’s “treatise” was a record of Jesus’ life as it bore directly upon the redemption that He came to accomplish. The attention of Jesus became focused on that mission, and He entered fully into it, when He was baptized by John. It was then that He “began” to “do” with the special anointing of God upon Him, and “teach” with the intent of enlightening men concerning God and His Kingdom.

I do not believe there has been a man throughout all of history that would provided a record of Jesus in such a manner. There are those who say the first six years of a child’s life are the most critical. How does their observation sound in view of the life of the premier person in all of history?

Among other things, this confirms that Christ’s teaching was not within the context of the Old Covenant, as some affirm. Rather, Jesus preached in an interim period – between the Law and the Gospel, or the First Covenant and New, or Second, Covenant. That is why the Law is said to have been “until John” (Matt 11:13; Lk 16:16).

There are those who say that Jesus’ teaching was strictly within the context of the Law, and therefore does not apply to the New Covenant era – “the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). In doing this, these sophists imagine they can remove the pungent reality of words like, “believe only” (Lk 8:50; Mk 5:36), or “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk 9:23).

Such miserable teachers are corrupt in both their understanding and objectives. Jesus said of His own words, “My words shall not pass away” (Matt 24:35), and “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life ” (John 6:63). He spoke of the shame that would come upon those who are ashamed of His words (Lk 9:26). He said the person who did not receive His words would be judged on the day of judgment by the very words he rejected (John 12:47). He affirmed that He Himself and the Father would take up their abide in the person who kept His words (John 14:23).

Luke refers to the words of Jesus as what He “began . . . to teach;” that is, what He started to unfold and accomplish in both word and deed. Now, in the book of Acts, he will show how those words were fulfilled after His return to glory, and how they continued to work within the hearts of those who believed them. Let men have done with foolish views of the words of Jesus!

UNTIL THE DAY HE WAS TAKEN UP

“ 2 Until the day in which He was taken up, after that He through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen”

Luke is very particular about the focus of His Gospel. He marks a point in time that terminated Christ’s ministry in His body on the earth. This was an epoch in the Gospel, and thus a special notation is made of it.

UNTIL THE DAY HE WAS TAKEN UP

“Until the day in which He was taken up . . . ” Other versions read, “until the day when He was

taken up,” NASB ““until the day in which He was received up,” ASV “Till the day when He was taken up to heaven,” BBE “until the day He ascended in to heaven,” NLT “until the day when He was carried up,” LIVING and “until the time of His ascension .” PHILLIPS

It is tragic beyond description that popular preachers and teachers have so very little to say about the ascension of Jesus, when He was received back into heaven. It is a mark that clearly identifies that a “falling away” has taken place, and thus much about the real Jesus is not perceived as having any relevancy for us today. The only time people fail to communicate a truth about Jesus, of which they are aware, is when they do not see it as necessary or important.

How important is the ascension of Christ? Is it really a part of the Gospel? Judging from the way men handle this aspect of “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11), one might be led to think of it as something interesting, but relatively unimportant. Does the Word of God speak much about this – the ascension of Jesus?

The Prophets Spoke of It

- “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Psa 24:7-10).
- “God is gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet” (Psa 47:5).
- “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them” (Psa 68:18).
- “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him” (Dan 7:13).

Jesus Spoke About It

- “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into His glory ?” (Luke 24:26).
- “And He saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51).
- “What and if ye shall see the Son of man ascend up where He was before ?” (John 6:62).
- “Then said Jesus unto them, Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto Him that sent Me ” (John 7:33).
- “In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you . And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know” (John 14:2-4).
- “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father ” (John 14:12).
- “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away , and come again unto you. If ye loved Me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father : for My Father is greater than I” (John 14:28).
- “But now I go My way to Him that sent me ; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?” (John 16:5).

- “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart , I will send Him unto you” (John 16:7).

- “And when He (the Comforter) is come, He will reprove the world . . . Of righteousness, because I go to My Father , and ye see Me no more” (John 16:9-10).

- “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see Me, because I go to the Father ” (John 16:16).

It is tragic beyond description that popular preachers and teachers have so very little to say about the ascension of Jesus, when He was received back into heaven. It is a mark that clearly identifies that a “falling away” has taken place, and thus much about the real Jesus is not perceived as having any relevancy for us today.

“I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father ” (John 16:28).

- “And now come I to Thee ; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves” (John 17:13).

- “Jesus saith unto her, Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father: but go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father , and your Father; and to My God, and your God ” (John 20:17).

Mark and Luke Record the Ascension

- “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven , and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).

- “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven ” (Luke 24:51).

The Spirit Moved Upon Holy Men to Write of the Ascension After Jesus Returned to Heaven

- “And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up ; and a cloud received Him out of their sight” (Acts 1:9).

- “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21).

- “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God , who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).

- “Which he wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places ” (Eph 1:20).

- “Wherefore He saith, When He ascended up on high , he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men? (Now that He ascended , what is it but that He also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens , that He might fill all things)” (Eph 4:8-10).

- “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim 3:16).

- “Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3).

- “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus

the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession” (Heb 4:14).

- “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24).

This accents the total harmony of the Godhead in the resurrection of Jesus. God raised Him (Acts 2:32; 3:15), the Spirit was in the matter (1 Pet 3:18), and Jesus took back His own life (John 10:17-18). Now we see that the Holy Spirit was also active in Jesus delivering His last words to the apostles.

I will speak more of the ascension of Christ when we come to the second verse. At this point it is sufficient to note that it is not at all acceptable for those who speak in the name of the Lord to ignore this facet of Christ Jesus – namely, His ascension. If, in the “record” God has given of His Son, and in the prophets as well, so much has been said about this matter, those who omit it in their preaching and teaching must give an account for that omission. Let it be clear, that no reason for such an deletion will in any way be acceptable.

AFTER THAT HE THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . after that he through the Holy Ghost . . . ” Other versions read, “After He through the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “after He had by the Holy Spirit ,” NASB and “ from the Holy Spirit .” NLT

Jesus did not return to glory without preparing His disciples for His bodily absence. Here we are told that Jesus delivered words to His “holy apostles” (Eph 3:5) “by the Holy Spirit.”

The Holy Spirit, then, had “remained” with Jesus, just as John the Baptist was told He would (John 1:33). Speaking of Christ’s resurrection, Peter affirmed that He was “quickened [made alive] by the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18). Paul also alludes to this when he writes , “and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” NKJV (Rom 1:4). He categorically refers to it in Romans 8:11: “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom 8:11).

This accents the total harmony of the Godhead in the resurrection of Jesus. God raised Him (Acts 2:32; 3:15), the Spirit was in the matter (1 Pet 3:18), and Jesus took back His own life (John 10:17-18). Now we see that the Holy Spirit was also active in Jesus delivering His last words to the apostles. There are at least two reasons for this.

- No part of redemption will be wrought independently of the Holy Spirit.
- The apostles themselves would be given the Holy Spirit, who would expound the words Jesus delivered to them, enlightening their hearts.

HAD GIVEN COMMANDMENTS UNTO THE APOSTLES

“ . . . had given commandments unto the apostles whom He had chosen” Other versions read, ““ given orders to the apostles whom He had chosen,” NASB “after giving instructions to the Apostles He had chosen ,” NIV “after He had given commandment . . . to the apostles whom He had chosen,” RSV “after he had given His orders . . . to the Apostles of whom he had made selection ,” BBE “having . . . charged the apostles whom he had chosen,” DARBY “ he gave his instructions to the apostles he had chosen,” NJB “after giving his chosen apostles further instructions ,” NLT “He talked to the apostles whom He had chosen,” IE “He gave the apostles whom He had chosen their orders ,” WILLIAMS “had instructed and commanded the apostles (special messengers) whom He had chosen,” AMPLIFIED and “he gave his instructions . . . to the special messengers of his choice.” PHILLIPS

May no person ever think of the Lord Jesus without remembering that He is “a Leader and Commander to the people” (Isa 55:4). I personally have no tolerance for people who speak of Jesus as though He was their “bosom buddy” and close “friend.” Jesus called His disciples “friends,” but never encouraged them to call Him “Friend.”

When Jesus met with His disciples, He did not make a few suggestions, but gave them “commandments.” Matthew, Mark, and Luke record some of these “commandments” (Matt 28:18-19; Mk 16:15-16; Lk 24:45-49). Briefly summarized, these commandments include the following.

- Go into all the world (Mk 16:15a).
- Preach the Gospel to every person (Mk 16:15b).
- Teach all nations, or “make disciples of all nations” NKJV (Matt 28:18b).
- “Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Matt 28:19).
- Teach them to observe all things that Jesus commanded them (Matt 28:19).
- Repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Lk 24:49).

Jesus had accomplished the destruction of the devil (Heb 2:14), the plundering of dominating spiritual principalities (Col 2:15), and the abolition of death (2 Tim 1:10). He had put away sin (Heb 9:26), made peace through His blood (Col 1:20), ended the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), blotted out the massive debt incurred under the Law (Col 2:14), and delivered us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4). He had opened up a new and living way to God (Heb 10:20), made a way to announce liberty to the captives (Lk 4:18), and made it right and Just for God to justify sinners (Rom 3:26).

Christ’s “commandments” had to do with making these things known to the world through His empowered messengers. God would use them to fully develop what is called “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11).

HE SHOWED HIMSELF

“ 3 To whom also he showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God”

I must confess that I can hardly contain myself as I ponder this marvelous record. It reveals to us the glorious extent to which God has gone to set us free from sin (Heb 1:3), make us separate from the world (Gal 1:4), work in us to will and do of His own good please (Phil 2:13), and at last bring us to glory (Heb 2:10). This work was too staggering to be accomplished by any son of Adam, or group comprised of such sons. Even after the foundational work was done, Jesus labored to convince His disciples of the reality of what He had done and who He was.

TO WHOM ALSO HE SHOWED HIMSELF ALIVE

“ To whom also He showed himself alive . . . ” Other versions read, “to whom He also presented Himself alive,” NKJV “ To these He also presented Himself alive,” NASB “He showed Himself to these men,” NIV “to whom also He presented Himself living,” DARBY “He appeared to the apostles from time to time . . . that He was actually alive,” NLT “He appeared . . . actually alive,” LIVING and “He showed that He was alive.” IE

In this single verse we have a grand summation of nearly one hundred verses of the four Gospels (96).

CHRIST'S LIFE IS THE PRINCIPLE POINT

Jesus “showed Himself alive ” because the salvation men would experience would be by means of His resurrected life. That is the meaning of Paul’s statement: “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life ” (Rom 5:10).

This is a technical point, but it must be made – particularly in view of the general level of understanding that exists within the professed church. We are never said to have been “SAVED” by Christ’s death, or by His blood. The Spirit is very precise on how we are to view Christ’s death, or the shedding of His blood.

- “Much more then, being now justified by his blood , we shall be saved from wrath through him” (Rom 5:9).

- “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son , much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10).

- “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

- “And, having made peace through the blood of His cross , by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:20).

- “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of His flesh through death , to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight” (Col 1:21-22).

- “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death , that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14).

- “And for this cause He is the Mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance ” (Heb 9:15).

- “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus ” (Heb 10:19).

Salvation, however, requires a LIVING Savior, who has not only died, but is “alive for evermore” (Rom 1:18). Salvation required a Lamb to be offered, but a Lamb that is alive in heaven as well (Rev 5:8,12,13; 6:1,16; 7:9,10,14,17; 12:11; 13:8; 14:4,10; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7,9; 21:14,22,23; 22:1,3).

Ponder the aspects of salvation that require a LIVING Savior.

- Captain (Heb 2:10).
- Deliverer (Rom 11:26).
- Leader (Isa 55:4).
- Intercessor (Heb 7:25).
- Shepherd (John 10:14; Heb 13:20).
- Head (Eph 4:15; Colo 1:18; 2:10).
- Author and Finisher of our Faith (Heb 12:2).
- Author of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9).

- Mediator (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 9:15; 12:24).
- Advocate (1 John 2:1).
- Alpha and Omega (Rev 1:8).
- First and Last (Rev 1:17).
- Beginning and End (Rev 22:13).
- The Amen (Rev 3:14).
- One from which comes Grace, Mercy, and Peace (1 Tim 1:2; 2 John 1:3).
- Branch (Isa 4:2; Jer 33:15; Zech 3:8).
- Light (John 8:12).
- Bread (John 6:35,48).
- King (1 Tim 6:15).
- The Power of God (1 Cor 1:24).
- The Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24).
- Counselor (Isa 9:6).
- Door (John 10:7).
- Faithful Witness (Rev 1:5).
- Forerunner (Heb 6:20).
- High Priest (Heb 2:17; 3:1; 4:14-15).
- Vine (John 15:4-5).
- Judge (Acts 10:42; 17:31).
- Living Stone (1 Pet 2:4).
- Lord (2 Cor 4:6; Col 2:6).
- Master (John 13:13).
- Prince of Life (Acts 3:15).
- Teacher (John 3:2; 1 John 5:20).

All of these, and more, require a LIVING and active Savior. None of them can be accomplished by a dead or inactive Savior.

Therefore, Jesus “showed Himself alive ” to His disciples, because from this point on, everything would depend upon Him being alive, in heaven, and at the right hand of God. We are not saved by an historical Christ, but by a living One who has died, and is now risen from the dead! All leaders of all worldly religions – all of them – are either dead or dying! But the Lord Jesus is alive, and we are being “saved by His life.”

In fact, “newness of life” assumes a vital union with the living Savior. Thus Paul reasons, “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him ” (Rom 6:8).

The very last riveting impression that was left with the disciples of Jesus was that HE WAS ALIVE!

AFTER HIS PASSION

“ . . . after His passion . . . ” Other versions read, “after His suffering ,” NKJV “after His death ,” BBE “after He had suffered ,” DARBY “after His crucifixion ,” NLT and “after His passion (His

suffering in the garden and on the cross).” AMPLIFIED

The word “passion” is a good English word, and we have no reason to draw back from it. The English definition of the word is as follows: “1 often capitalized a : the sufferings of Christ between the night of the Last Supper and his death b : an oratorio based on a gospel narrative of the Passion,” MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2003 and “the suffering and death of Jesus.” OXFORD

The meaning of the Greek word used here (**paqei/n**) is, “suffer, to undergo evils, to be afflicted,” THAYER “suffer, undergo, endure, euphemistically die, suffer death.” FRIBERG

The following versions use this word in this text: King James Version (1611), American Standard Version (1901), Revised Standard Version (1952), Douay-Rheims (1899), New Jerusalem Bible (1985), Bishop’s New Testament (1595), Tyndale’s New Testament (1534), The Webster’s Bible (1833), and The Amplified Bible (1954).

Christ’s “passion” refers to the period commencing when He “began to be sorrowful and very heavy.” This took place as they arrived in the Garden, where He would prepare to give Himself “a ransom, to be testified in due time” (1 Tim 2:5). It included His agony in the Garden, when His sweat fell to the ground like “great drops of blood” (Lk 22:44). His “passion” progressed as He was tried and mocked by Caiaphas and his court, Pilate and his court, and Herod and his court. During these occasions – twice before Pilate – He was interrogated, mocked, and beaten (Matt 26:63; John 18:37; Lk 23:8-11; Mk 15:15). He was struck with a reed and with the fists of men (Matt 27:30; Lk 22:64). He was also scourged (Matt 27:26; Mk 15:15; John 19:1). Finally He was crucified, a process that lasted six long and tedious hours (Mk 15:25; Matt 27:46). The “Passion” concluded when His body was buried, and He made His grave with the wicked and the rich. It was then that He made His grave with the wicked, and was identified with the rich in His death, fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy (Isa 53:9).

An “Accomplished” Death

The “passion” of Christ speaks of a death that was “accomplished.” That is, it was an achievement that involved purpose, intention, obedience, and a profound commitment. Much more was involved than men nailing Him to a cross. They could not have taken the first step to do that if Jesus had not laid down His life, if it was not the proper time, or if a Divine purpose was not being served.

Isaiah provides a remarkable overview of Christ’s atoning death. He covers His rejection by men, and them despising Him. He includes Jesus’ own experience while upon the cross. He even speaks of God’s view of the matter.

When Jesus was “transfigured” before Peter, James, and John, two personalities came from the unseen world to talk with Him. Luke provides the details of that awesome time. “And, behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias: who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem ” (Luke 9:30-31). While they walked in this world, neither of these men had said so much as a single word about Jesus’ death. But now, armed with knowledge from another domain, they could speak intelligently, extensively, and no doubt with great comfort, of Christ’s death.

In laying down His life, the following had to be “accomplished.” This is by no means a complete listing.

- His death had to occur at the right time – in the “fulness of time,” and at the right “hour” (Gal 4:4; Lk 22:53).
- In all of the abuse that would be laid upon Him, He could not open His mouth (Isa 53:7; Mk 14:61; Lk 23:9; Acts 8:32).
- The death had to occur in Jerusalem (Lk 9:31; John 19:20).

- The leaders of the Jewish people had to be instrumental in initiating this death (Lk 9:22; Lk 24:7).
- In His death, there had to be a time when He, out of deep need, cried, “I thirst” (Psa 22:15; John 19:28).
- He had to be “vinegar” to drink (Psa 69:21; Mk 15:36).
- They had to cast lots for His garment (Psa 22:18; Matt 27:35; Lk 23:34).
- He had to die with transgressors as well as for them (Isa 53:12; Mk 15:28).
- He had to be identified with the rich when He was buried (Isa 53:9; Mk 15:43-46).
- He had to die childless (Isa 53:8; Acts 8:33).
- He had to be forsaken at his lowest hour (Isa 53:3; Matt 26:56; Mk 14:50).
- He had to pour out His own soul unto death – or lay down His life voluntarily, not having it taken from Him (Isa 53:12; John 10:17-18; Lk 23:46).

An “accomplished” death, indeed! It is no wonder that it is written, “He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed . . .” (Matt 16:21). And again, “He must suffer many things, and be set at nought” (Mark 9:12). And once again, “But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation” (Luke 17:25).

Isaiah provides a remarkable overview of Christ’s atoning death. He covers His rejection by men, and them despising Him. He includes Jesus’ own experience while upon the cross. He even speaks of God’s view of the matter.

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief . . . He was despised . . . Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows . . . stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed . . . the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and He was afflicted . . . He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter . . . for He was cut off out of the land of the living; for the transgression of My people was He stricken. And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death . . . it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief . . . He shall see of the travail of His soul . . . He shall bear their iniquities . . . He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many . . .” (Isa 53:3-12).

That, dear reader, is the “passion” of which Luke speaks. Remarkably detailed, large in scope, and all intended to full a specific Divine objective.

BY MANY INFALLIBLE PROOFS

“ . . . by many infallible proofs . . . ” Other versions read, “by many convincing proofs,” NASB “many proofs,” RSV “He gave clear and certain signs that He was living,” BBE “by many infallible tokens ,” GENEVA “by many demonstrations ,” NJB “proved in many ways ,” NLT “by many tokens ,” TNT “in many certain proofs ,” YLT “Jesus proved this by doing many convincing things ,” IE “many sure proofs ,” WEYMOUTH “many convincing manifestations ,” MONTGOMERY “by [a series of] many convincing demonstrations [unquestionable evidences and infallible proofs],” AMPLIFIED and “in many convincing ways .” PHILLIPS

The thing being confirmed was that Jesus Himself – the same One that died – was now alive. As Jesus ascended into heaven, two angels said to the disciples, “Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus , which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

Some of the “infallible proofs” include the following.

- He appeared first to Mary Magdalene (John 20:14-17).
- He appeared to some women, and told them to tell His disciples to meet Him in Galilee (Matt 28:9).
- He appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus, blessing and breaking bread while with them (Lk 24:30-31).
- He appeared to His disciples while they were behind closed doors (John 20:19).
- He shows His hands, feet and side to the disciples, and especially to Thomas (Lk 24:38-40; 20:20).
- He provides a miraculous catch of fish for His discouraged disciples (John 21:6-13).

SEEN OF THEM FORTY DAYS

“ . . . being seen of them forty days . . . ” Other versions read, “appearing to them over a period of forty days ,” NASB “appearing to them by a space of forty days ,” ASV “being seen by them during forty days ,” DARBY “for forty days He had continued to appear to them ,” NJB “During the forty days after his crucifixion ,” NLT “ through forty days being seen by them,” YLT “The apostles saw Him several times during 40 days ,” IE “appearing to them at intervals during forty days ,” WEYMOUTH “ Revealing Himself to them during forty days,” MONTGOMERY and “appeared to them repeatedly over a period of forty days .” PHILLIPS

These are forty days from the time of Christ’s resurrection. On that resurrection day, He made the following appearances.

- To Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:9).
- To the women who came to anoint His body (Matt 28:9).
- To Simon Peter personally (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5).
- Possibly to James, to whom a special appearance took place (1 Cor 15:7).
- To Cleopas and his companion (Lk 24:13-32).
- To the disciples (John 20:19).

Once again, the purpose of the “infallible proofs” was to confirm that Jesus was alive – alive to administer salvation from the Throne.

These were also the first forty days after the celebration of the Passover, during which Jesus died. The fiftieth day after the Passover, was when the “firstfruits” were to be offered to the Lord (Lev 23:15-21). That was the “day of Pentecost,” also referred to as “the feast of ingathering” (Ex 23:16).

Therefore, Jesus spent 80% of the fifty days between Passover and Pentecost with the disciples, preparing them for a new day of Pentecost in which the first harvest of souls under the New Covenant would be realized.

SPEAKING OF THINGS PERTAINING TO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“ . . . and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Other versions read, “speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God ,” NASB “ spoke about the kingdom of God,” NIV “gave them teaching about the kingdom of God,” BBE “speaking of the things which concern the kingdom of God,” DARBY “ tell them about the kingdom of God,” NJB “ talked to them about the kingdom of God,” NLT “speaking the things concerning the reign of God ,” YLT and “talking with them about the affairs of the kingdom of God.” PHILLIPS

During this 5-6 week period, Jesus spoke with His disciples “of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.” When Jesus first started preaching He “came into Galilee preaching “the Gospel of the Kingdom of God” (Mk 1:14). Throughout Christ’s prodigious ministry, “the Kingdom” was His most prominent subject. The Gospels contain fifty-four references to “the Kingdom of God,” and thirty-two references to “the Kingdom of heaven,” used exclusively by Matthew in the place of “Kingdom of God.” In addition there are fourteen references to “the kingdom,” making a total of one hundred references to the “Kingdom.” By way of comparison, the Gospels contain twenty-nine references to “faith,” twelve references to “baptism,” eighteen references to “church,” and ten references to “repentance.” “Works” are mentioned 35 times, with most of the references pertaining to Christ’s own works. Accenting the priority of the “Kingdom of God,” “God” is mentioned three hundred and twelve times, the “Father” one hundred and eighty-one times, and “the Son” one hundred and twenty-four times. “Jesus” is mentioned six hundred and twenty-five times, “Lord” two hundred and seven times, and “Christ” sixty times. There are at least fifty references to the Holy Spirit.

In Christ’s ministry, therefore, there were at least one thousand, three hundred, and seventy-five references to Deity! Is there really any question what the Savior talked about, the theme of His teaching, or the focus of His doctrine? Nearly 1,500 references the kingdom, God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit! There are also one hundred and forty-three references to “heaven.” That defines Christ’s emphasis !

After He was raised from the dead, Jesus continued speaking about the same things He declared while He walked among men. He elaborated on those things, preparing the disciples for what was to come. He more thoroughly acquainted the disciples with what God was doing, and how He was going to do much of it through them. He spoke of a kingdom that is greater than all others, and will eventually put all other kingdoms out of business, grinding them into powder (Dan 2:44).

During this forty-day period, Jesus set the tone for all preaching and teaching, establishing the priority for the rest of time.

If you read the book of Acts and come up with any other emphasis than the Kingdom of God, together with the Father and the Son who govern it, you have read it without “eyes of understanding” (Eph 1:18)!

HE SET THE TONE

During this forty-day period, Jesus set the tone for all preaching and teaching, establishing the priority for the rest of time. Those who emphasize anything else have shown themselves to be fools. God has placed everything into the hands of His Son (Matt 28:18; 1 Pet 3:22). There is not anything that is not placed under Him, the Father Himself being the only exception (1 Cor 15:27). All judgment has been given to Him (John 5:22). All of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). All power in heaven and earth has been given to Him (Matt 28:18).

What spirit would move any person to major on something of which Jesus says little or nothing at all? What can really be said of any individual who does not speak of “things pertaining to the kingdom of God?” Or, is there a rational soul in all of the universe and in all of time who would dare to postulate that Jesus spoke of secondary things, or things that will pass away, or things that would become obsolete.

You see, in our day, we are cast upon the horns of a dilemma. We are faced with an astronomical amount of religious activity, and a minuscule amount of speaking about “things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” Is it possible to wed those conditions together, and even ask the blessing of the Lord to be upon such an amalgamation? The answer is so obvious, I have full confidence that there is not a person in possession of a sound mind that can possibly arrive at a wrong conclusion on this matter. I leave it with you to judge concerning the seriousness of the current status of professed

Christendom.

For your information, I provide the following record of the activities of our Lord during that forty-day period. I have attempted to put them in a reasonable sequence, and have made an effort to be sure all of the activities are included. Notwithstanding, I may have inadvertently overlooked some.

ACCOUNTS OF CHRIST'S POST- RESURRECTION APPEARANCES

1. Jesus appears first to Mary Magdalene – Mark 16:9; John 20:14-17
2. Mary told his disciples as they were weeping, and they did not believe her – Mark 16:10-11; John 20:18
3. Jesus meets the women after the angels spoke with them – Matt 28:9
4. Jesus tells the women to tell His brethren to meet Him in Galilee – Matt 28:10
5. Jesus appears to Simon – Luke 24:34
6. Jesus appears to over five hundred brethren at one time – 1 Corinthians 15:6.
7. Jesus appears to His half-brother James – 1 Cor 15:7
8. Jesus appears to the two on the road to Emmaus – Mark 16:12; Luke 14:13-31
9. The two go and tell the other disciples, saying that He had also appeared to Simon, and they did not believe them – Mark 16:12-13; Luke 24:32-35; 1 Cor 15:5
10. The “eleven disciples” went to Galilee to meet Him – Matt 28:16
11. He appears to “the eleven” as they ate, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who testified to them – Mark 16:14; Lk 24:35-40; John 20:19; 1 Cor 15:7
12. When the disciples saw Him they worshiped Him, but some doubted – Matt 28:17
13. Jesus shows them His hands and feet – Luke 24:40; John 20:20
14. The disciples “believed not for joy” – Luke 24:41
15. Jesus eats a piece of broiled fish and a honeycomb before them – Luke 24:42-43
16. Jesus tells them these were the words He had told them before, fulfilling the words written in “the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms” – Luke 24:44.
17. Jesus opened their understanding so they could understand the Scriptures – Luke 24:45-46
18. Jesus breathes on the disciples, saying “Receive ye the Holy Spirit” – John 20:21-23
19. The disciples report the event to Thomas, who was not present when the Lord appeared to them. He does not believe them – John 20:24-25.
20. After eight days Jesus appears to the disciples again, and Thomas is present – John 20:26-29.
21. Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples – John 20:30.
22. Jesus shows Himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias (Galilee) – John 21:1-3.
23. In the morning Jesus calls out to the disciples, who had been fishing all night, asking if they had caught anything. They say they had not – John 21:4-5.

24. Jesus provides a miraculous catch for His disciples – John 21:6.
25. John recognizes that it is the Lord, and tells the disciples, “It is the Lord.” Peter casts himself into sea to swim to Jesus – John 21:7.
26. All of the disciples go to the land, dragging the net of fish they had caught – John 21:8
27. When they arrive on shore, they find Jesus had prepared fish and bread – John 21:9
28. Jesus asks them to bring some of what they had caught – John 21:10
29. Peter draws the net to land, filled with 153 large fish – John 21:11
30. Jesus tells His disciples, “Come and Dine,” and they all knew who He was – John 21:12.
31. Jesus gives them bread and fish, this being the third time He had appeared to them – John 21:13-14.
32. After they dined, Jesus asks Peter three times if He loves Him. Peter affirms He does, and Jesus tells him to feed His lambs and sheep – John 21:15-17
33. Jesus reveals the manner in which Peter would die, bringing glory to God – John 21:18-19
34. Jesus tells Peter, “Follow Me,” and Peter asks what was going to happen to John – John 21:20-21.
35. Jesus replies that if John tarried until He came, that was no business of Peter’s. The saying then went abroad among the brethren that John was not going to die – John 21:22-23.
36. Jesus commissions them to make disciples, teaching all nations – Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-18; Luke 24:47-49.
37. Jesus leads them as far as Bethany, lifts up His hands, and blesses them – Luke 24:50.
38. While He was blessing them, He was parted from them, and carried into heaven – Luke 24:51; Mark 16:19.

Those forty days provided the strength and encouragement required for the disciples to wait faithfully and productively until the day of Pentecost. They did not establish a new direction, but elaborated on what Jesus had already “began both to do and teach.” Jesus never did come primarily as an Interpreter and Teacher of Moses! He did not come to “sit in Moses seat,” as He said the scribes and Pharisees did (Matt 23:2). His doing and teaching were, and continue to be, of another order. What Jesus “began to do and teach” was continued and expanded following His triumphant resurrection and ascension into glory.

THEY COULD NOT DEPART

“ 4 And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of Me.”

While Jesus is personal in His dealings with His people, most of His instruction takes place among gatherings of His people. He met privately with Peter (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5), and with James as well (1 Cor 15:6). Yet, we have no idea what He said to them privately. The words He said when He was “assembled together with them” are the subject now related.

BEING ASSEMBLED TOGETHER WITH THEM

“And, being assembled together with them . . .” Other versions read, “And gathering them together,” NASB “On one occasion, when He was eating with them,” NIV “While staying with them,” NRSV

Among other things, this confirms that the book of Acts continues from where the Gospel of Luke concludes – same Jesus, same salvation, and the same purpose .

“And they were all together,” BBE “And eating together with them,” DOUAY “While meeting with them,” NAB “While at table with them,” NJB “In one of these meetings,” NLT “Once when He was gathered with them,” IE “While in their company,” WEYMOUTH “And while being in their company and eating with them,” AMPLIFIED and “On one occasion, while he was eating a meal with them.” PHILLIPS

In his Gospel, Luke refers to this occasion, and confirms that Jesus was, in fact, eating with them. “And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. And He took it, and did eat before them . . . And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:41-49).

The Greek word for “assembled” is **sunalizo,menoj** (soon-al-id-so-min-os), and has the suggested meaning, “to be assembled with, meet with, eating with.” THAYER

Among other things, this confirms that the book of Acts continues from where the Gospel of Luke concludes – same Jesus, same salvation, and the same purpose .

DO NOT DEPART FROM JERUSALEM

This was a critical matter. Jesus was operating by the Divine agenda, and was bringing the disciples into conformity with it. The prophets had promised that the Messianic blessing would originate in Jerusalem, and flow forth from it.

“ . . . commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “He commanded them not to leave Jerusalem,” NASB “He gave them this command, ‘ Do not leave Jerusalem ,” NIV “ He ordered them not to leave Jerusalem,” NRSV “ He charged them not to depart from Jerusalem,” RSV “He gave them orders not to go away from Jerusalem,” BBE “ He enjoined them not to depart from Jerusalem,” NAB and “ He emphasized that they were not to leave Jerusalem.” PHILLIPS

This was a critical matter. Jesus was operating by the Divine agenda, and was bringing the disciples into conformity with it. The prophets had promised that the Messianic blessing would originate in Jerusalem, and flow forth from it. “ . . . for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem ” (Isa 2:3). “ . . . ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem ” (Isa 66:13). “ . . . O Jerusalem , that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” (Isa 40:9). “ . . . and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings” (Isa 41:27). “Break forth into joy, sing together, ye waste places of Jerusalem : for the LORD hath comforted his people, He hath redeemed Jerusalem ” (Isa 52:9). “But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy” (Isa 65:18). “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted in Jerusalem ” (Isa 66:13). “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance , as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call ” (Joel 2:32).

Jerusalem was the place where God chose to place His name (1 Kgs 11:36), and that was primarily done in anticipation of the coming Messiah. Even the glorious future that is promised to Jerusalem is based upon the acceptance of the Messiah (Isa 4:3; 24:23; Zech 8:3; 12:5-6; 14:11). Jesus also told

His disciples that the preaching of repentance and remission of sins among all nations would have its “beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

Thus, Jesus prepared His disciples for the commencement of the opening of the door of salvation. They were to be in the proper place at the proper time. The prophets said that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2) – and He was (Matt 2:1). They said He would come to the Temple (Mal 3:1) – and He did (Matt 21:2; John 8:20). They affirmed that a light would rise in Galilee (Isa 9:1-2) – and it did (Matt 4:13-15). Now God will fulfill His promise concerning the healing waters of salvation flowing out from the holy city (Ezek 47). Therefore, the disciples must wait in Jerusalem until the appointed time arrives.

WAIT FOR THE PROMISE

“ . . . but wait for the promise of the Father .” Other versions read, “but to wait for what the Father had promised ,” NASB “but wait for the gift my Father promised ,” NIV “ but to keep there , waiting till the word of the Father was put into effect , of which,” BBE “but to wait there for what the Father had promised ,” NJB “until the Father sends you what He promised .” NLT “until the Holy Spirit came upon them in fulfillment of the Father’s promise,” LIVING “wait here for the Father’s promise ,” IE and “but to wait for the Father's promise.” PHILLIPS

The prophets had spoken about this promise, but their word was not attended with great clarity.

- “Until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest” (Isa 32:15).
- “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3).
- “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).
- “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek 39:29).

WHICH YE HAVE HEARD OF ME

“ . . . but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.” Other versions read, “‘which,’ He said, ‘you have heard from Me ,” NKJV “which you have heard me speak about,” NIV “of which, he said, I have given you knowledge ,” BBE “about which you have heard me speak ,” NAB “‘It is,’ he had said, ‘what you have heard me speak about ,” NJB “Remember, I have told you about this before ,” NLT “ a matter He had previously discussed with them ,” LIVING “ that you heard me talk about ,” IE and “You have already heard me speak about this,” he said.” PHILLIPS

Jesus, however, is very specific in speaking about this promise. He does not send the disciples to the Prophets to ferret out these promises for themselves, muse upon them, and arrive at some satisfying conclusion. He tells them He is referring to the Father’s promise that He Himself had told them.

How glowingly He spoke of that promise , and what hope His words must have aroused in them when He told them to wait for its fulfillment.

- **DIRECT THEM WHAT TO SAY BEFORE THEIR ENEMIES.** “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak . For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you ” (Mat 10:19-20).

• **THE FATHER WOULD GIVE THEM THE HOLY SPIRIT.** “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13).

• **INSTANTLY THEY WOULD KNOW WHAT TO SAY BEFORE MAGISTRATES.** “And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say ” (Luke 12:12).

• **LIVING WATER WOULD FLOW OUT OF THEM.** “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water . (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)” (John 7:39).

• **THE FATHER WOULD SEND THE SPIRIT TO DWELL WITHIN THEM.** “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever ; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you ” (John 14:16-17).

• **THE HOLY SPIRIT WOULD TEACH THEM ALL THINGS.** “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, He shall teach you all things . . .” (John 14:26a).

• **THE SPIRIT WOULD GIVE THEM A SUPERNATURAL RECOLLECTION OF WHAT JESUS HAD SAID.** “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost . . . He . . . bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you ” (John 14:26).

Jesus, however, is very specific in speaking about this promise. He does not send the disciples to the Prophets to ferret out these promises for themselves, muse upon them, and arrive at some satisfying conclusion. He tells them He is referring to the Father’s promise that He Himself had told them.

THE SPIRIT WOULD TESTIFY OF CHRIST HIMSELF TO THEM, SO THAT THEY WOULD BECOME HIS WITNESSES. “But when the Comforter is come . . . He shall testify of Me : And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).

• **THE SPIRIT WOULD GUIDE THEM INTO ALL TRUTH, GIVING THEM AN UNDERSTANDING OF IT.** “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth . . . All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you ” (John 16:13-15).

• **THE SPIRIT WOULD NOT SPEAK TO THEM ABOUT HIMSELF.** “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come . . . He shall not speak of Himself . . .” (John 16:13-15).

• **THE SPIRIT WOULD TELL THEM WHAT THE LORD TOLD HIM.** “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come . . . whatsoever he shall hear, that shall He speak . . . All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you ” (John 16:13-15).

• **THE SPIRIT WOULD REVEAL COMING THINGS TO THEM.** “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come . . . He will show you things to come . . .” (John 16:13-15).

• **THE SPIRIT WOULD GLORIFY CHRIST IN THEM.** “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come . . . He shall glorify Me . . .” (John 16:13-15).

The Holy Spirit, then, would enable the apostles to fulfill the purpose for which they were chosen. The following was required for that fulfillment.

- Knowing what to say before their enemies.
- Receiving the Holy Spirit.
- Knowing how to answer and speak before magistrates and rulers.
- Life sustaining words issuing forth from them.
- The Holy Spirit remaining with them.
- Being taught “all things.”
- Recalling the words of Jesus.
- Insightfully testifying of Christ Himself.
- Having an understanding grasp of the truth itself.
- Not making the Holy Spirit their subject of exposition.
- Knowing what the Lord Jesus told the Spirit, and being able to declare it.
- Knowing the appointments God had made for the future.
- Glorifying Jesus as the Holy Spirit does.

None of these things could be done in the energy of the flesh. They are deeper than nature can reach, higher than flesh can attain, and require more ability than can be passed through the lineage of Adam.

If these things did not come to them supernaturally, by the will of God, through the Kingly disposition of Jesus, and by the influence of the Holy Spirit, there is not a single aspect of them that could have been accomplished by these, or any other, men.

The Kingdom of God is under the strict supervision of God Himself. He has given the reigns of that Kingdom to His Son, who has been given all power – every bit of it – with the single exception of the Father Himself. He works His will within His people through the Holy Spirit, the heavenly Enabler. That will is summarized in these words: “to give eternal life” (John 17:2).

In this text, the King forbade His subjects to proceed without Divine enablement. There is no place in the Kingdom of God – no place at all – for men working independently of the Holy Spirit. No provision is made for men to implement their own will in matters pertaining to salvation. This will become increasingly evident as we proceed through the book of Acts. We will be exposed to the working of the Lord.

TWO DIFFERENT BAPTISMS

“ 5 For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.”

Jesus now more fully prepares His disciples for what is coming – “the promise of the Father.” What they would experience would transcend everything that went before – even “the baptism of John,” which was, of itself, a sort of epoch. John “prepared” the way for Jesus. Now these men are told they will experience that for which they had been prepared.

Jesus now more fully prepares His disciples for what is coming – “the promise of the Father.” What they would experience would transcend everything that went before – even “the baptism of John,” which was, of itself, a sort of epoch. John “prepared” the way for Jesus. Now these men are told they will experience that for which they had been prepared. Both John’s baptism and their continual

presence with Jesus had prepared them for this experience.

JOHN TRULY BAPTIZED WITH WATER

“For John truly baptized with water . . .” Other versions read, “for John baptized with water,” NASB “For John baptized with [or in] water,” NIV “For John indeed baptized with water,” ASV “For the baptism of John was with water,” BBE “John baptized you with water,” LIVING “John immersed people in water,” IE and “for John used to baptize with water.” PHILLIPS

Although some people say the Jews were accustomed to “baptism,” there is no evidence of this in Scripture. Those who teach this say that the word “washings,” as ascribed to the Old Covenant, included the idea of baptism, or immersion in water.

The Greek word for “baptize” occurs in the Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament Scriptures four times.

- 2 Kings 5:14. “And Naaman went down and baptized himself (e**j**bapti>sato) seven times in the river Jordan,” where the original Hebrew is **IBo**f**]yiw**i**** , from **lbif**; , to dip, plunge, immerse.” “Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan...” KJV

- Isaiah 21:4,6. “Iniquity baptizes me” (h**J** ajnomi>a me bapti>zei), where the word is plainly used in the sense of overwhelm, answering to the Hebrews **t[i**B****; , to come upon suddenly, to terrify.” “My heart panted, fearfulness affrighted me: the night of my pleasure hath he turned into fear unto me.” KJV

- Numbers 19:19. “And the clean person shall sprinkle upon the unclean on the third day, and on the seventh day: and on the seventh day he shall purify himself, and wash his clothes, and bathe himself in water, and shall be clean at even.” KJV

On this usage of the word “baptize” in the Old Testament Scriptures, it is duly noted, “In the Greek, then, of the Septuagint, bapti>zein signifies to plunge, to bathe, or to overwhelm. It is never used to describe the act of one who dips another object into a fluid, or the case of one who is dipped by another .” McClintock & Strong’s Cyclopedia

Those who affirm the Jews practiced the baptism of proselytes prior to Christ, thus making them acquainted with the act of baptism, cannot support their theory. There is no record of such a baptism prior to the second century, well after Jesus had returned to heaven.

Without encumbering you with an unnecessary diversion into this fruitless discussion, I will here cite the generally well accepted McClintock & Strong’s Cyclopedia.

Of the antiquity of lustrations by water among the Jews there is no question, but it is still a disputed point whether baptism was practiced, *as an initiatory rite*, in connection with circumcision, before the coming of Christ. It is well established that, as early as the second century of the Christian sera, this *proselyte baptism* was an established rite among the Jews; and their writers, as well as many Christian theologians (e.g. Lightfoot, Wetstein, Wall, and others), claim for it a much greater antiquity. But this opinion is hardly tenable, for, as an act which strictly gives *validity* to the admission of a proselyte, and is no mere *accompaniment* to his admission, baptism certainly is not alluded to in the New Testament; while, as to the passages quoted in proof from the classical (profane) writers of that period, they are all open to the most fundamental objections. Nor is the utter silence of Josephus and Philo on the subject, notwithstanding their various opportunities of touching on it, a less weighty argument against this view. It is true that mention is made in the Talmud of that regulation as already existing in the first century A.D.; but such statements belong only to the traditions of the Gemara, and require careful investigation before they can serve as proper authority.

Why Address This Matter At All?

Why bring up the matter of the uniqueness of John's baptism at all? Why not let the words of pretended scholars simply go unchallenged? What difference does it really make?

John's baptism was unique. As already established, it was unique for one person to immerse another person in water for any reason – let alone one that involved one's relationship to God. John came baptizing because that was the means by which the Son of God would be made known (John 1:31-34). Jesus birth was unique. His childhood was unique. What would lead anyone to believe God would reveal Him as His "Son" in an ordinary ceremony, familiar to all of the people?

Secondly, John's baptism itself was unique – that is why it is called "John's baptism" (Acts 19:3) and the "baptism of John" (Matt 21:25; Mk 11:30; Lk 7:29; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 18:25). John's baptism, was also "for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4), which itself was a totally new concept. In fact, the expression "the remission of sins" is never mentioned in any major version of Scripture prior to the Gospels. The same is true of the single word "remission." That word only occurs in the New American Standard Bible and New Revised Standard Version. It is mentioned four times, and applies to the remission of a debt one man owed another man, having absolutely nothing to do with man's indebtedness to God (Deut 15:1,2,9; 31:10). The Revised Standard Version uses the word "remission" one time, applying it to the "remission of taxes" (Esther 2:18).

For John to prepare the way for the Savior of the world, he and his ministry had to be different, for there was nothing ordinary about what Jesus would do. The proper perception of Jesus, and an appropriate readiness to receive Him, required a radical adjustment of thought.

The Thought Here

Now Jesus turns the attention of His disciples to the substance into which John baptized the people in general, and the apostles in particular: "with water." That is, they were engulfed by, or immersed in, water – for "baptize" means "To dip . . . immerse, submerge . . . to cleanse by dipping or submerging . . . to overwhelm," THAYER and "to dip in or under the water." LIDDELL-SCOTT

For those in Christ Jesus, baptism is likened to being "buried" with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12). Baptism is a very accurate visible depiction of the "doctrine" made known in the Gospel: the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Therefore, it is referred to as "the form of the doctrine" (Rom 6:17).

For us, the uniqueness of baptism is not its association with the "remission of sins" – although that association is surely there (Acts 2:38;22:16). In Christ, the uniqueness is the receiving of the Holy Spirit : "Then Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit " NKJV (Acts 2:38). That is something that did not accompany John's baptism. It was for this reason that Paul, when confronting certain "disciples" from Ephesus, asked them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" NKJV (Acts 19:2). Upon hearing that these "disciples" said they had not even heard there was such a thing as the "Holy Spirit." Paul interrogated them further. "Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism" (Acts 19:3). It was then that he told them John's baptism was preparatory, and that it was necessary for them to believe "on Christ Jesus." They were then "baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:4). Prior to that, they had only been "baptized with water."

Now Jesus declares that His ministry was transcendent to that of John, and that His baptism was superior as well.

YE SHALL BE BAPTIZED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

" . . . but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." Other versions read, "for John truly baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from

now,” NKJV “but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit,” NIV “for John baptized with water, but before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit,” RSV “but you will have baptism with the Holy Spirit , after a little time,” BBE “but in a few days, you will be immersed in the Holy Spirit ,” IE and “but not many days from now you shall be baptized with (placed in, introduced into) the Holy Spirit.” AMPLIFIED

First, I want to mention some supposedly sanctified “church” expressions that are not in the Scriptures. Their origin is found in religious tradition and human opinion.

- “The baptism of the Holy Ghost.”
- “The Baptism of the Holy Spirit.”
- “Holy Spirit baptism.”
- “The baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues.”
- “Falling under the power.”
- “Slain in the Holy Ghost.”
- “Slain by the Spirit.”

Human opinion is the mother of these phrases, and religious tradition is the child that carries them forward.

John Foretold It

John the Baptist foretold that Jesus would baptize with the Holy Spirit. “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: He shall baptize YOU with the Holy Ghost, and with fire ” (Matt 3:11).

This word was not delivered to the disciples of Jesus, but to the multitudes to whom John preached – specifically to the ones HE baptized “with water.” Mark says John “ preached , saying, There cometh one mightier than I after me, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to stoop down and unloose. I indeed have baptized YOU with water: but He shall baptize YOU with the Holy Ghost ” (Mark 1:7-8).

John the beloved says that John the Baptist said this when people “mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.” “John answered , saying unto them all, I indeed baptize YOU with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize YOU with the Holy Ghost and with fire ” (Luke 3:15-16).

Three Interpretations

There are atleast three differing views of John’s words concerning the manner in which the One coming after him – the Lord Jesus – would baptize.

- That John is referring to a baptism of judgment, in which Jerusalem would be “purged” with the Spirit of burning (Isa 4:4). Matthew’s account of this saying is cited as justification for this view: “And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire . . . He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and fire” (Matt 3:10). This view does not agree with the **There are atleast three differing views of John’s words concerning the manner in**

next phrase of Jesus, which speaks of gathering the wheat into His barn as well as burning the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:12; Lk 3:17). That requires the inclusion of more than the

destruction of Jerusalem. Also, this view contradicts the manner in which Jesus speaks in our text, which has nothing whatsoever to do with the destruction of Jerusalem.

- Another view is that the reference to Jesus baptizing “with the Holy Ghost” has strict reference, is limited to, the apostles and what occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), and is identified with miraculous gifts and manifestations that took place on the day of Pentecost, and at the house of Cornelius. That these words do refer to that time cannot be denied. Jesus said the baptism to which He referred (which was the same as that to which John referred), would occur “not many days hence.” Later, Peter specifically correlates the Spirit’s work on Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius with this word. “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 11:16). This confirms that the word was not limited to the apostles, nor was it confined to the day of Pentecost. Gentile believers experienced the same thing 10-15 years after the day of Pentecost.

- Another view, and the one to which I am inclined, sees this as having a broader fulfillment than the epochs of Pentecost and the house of Cornelius, when the “door of faith” was opened to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27). In this view, Jesus is perceived as announcing the commencement of a new economy that would be under the administration of the Holy Spirit. It would be an era in which men would be “in the Spirit” (Rom 8:9; Gal 3:3; 5:16,25; Eph 6:18; Phil 3:3), as well as the Spirit being “in,” or “given” to them (Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24). Some unique signs did accompany this “gift” on the day of Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius. That does not, however suggest that this exhausted the meaning of Christ’s word. I will now proceed to further develop this view.

Jesus Was Speaking to the Apostles, but Not ONLY to the Apostles

There can be no doubt about these words being spoken to “the eleven.” Luke records the occasion in his Gospel. There he affirms “the eleven” were gathered together, “but adds, “and them that were with them” (Lk 24:33). It was at that particular gathering that Cleopas and his friend came, testifying of their encounter with the living Christ on the road to Emmaus, and in their home (Lk 24:33,35). As they were speaking to “the eleven and them that were with them,” “Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them.” He then spoke to them all concerning several things.

- He questioned them concerning the fear that rose in their hearts (24:38).
- He showed them His hands and feet (24:39-40).
- He asked if they had some food, and then ate before them, confirming the reality of His resurrection (24:41-43).
- He taught them concerning His resurrection, declaring that this is what He had previously taught them concerning the fulfillment of the Law of Moses, the prophets, and the Psalms (24:44).
- He opened their understanding that they might understand the Scriptures, expounding the necessity of His resurrection, that repentance and remission of sins should be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem, and that they were witnesses of these things (24:45-48).
- He then declared that to which our text refers: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

We can learn much about the scope of the baptism administered by Jesus by what is said of it. Is the experience of the baptism itself the final point, or is the result of that baptism the chief matter? Was it the experience itself that moved the Kingdom forward, or the effects of it that

are chronicled?

When the disciples “tarried in Jerusalem,” more were there than “the eleven.” Later in this first chapter Luke records who were remaining in Jerusalem, waiting for the promise of the Father, as Jesus commanded them to do. The number included Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon Zelotes, Judas the brother of James, “the women,” Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren (Acts 1:13-14). “The disciples” that were tarrying are specifically said to be “about one hundred and twenty” (Acts 1:15).

Because I will deal at length with these verses in the following lessons, I will forgo making any further comments on them at this time. This will suffice to establish that the “promise of the Father” was not spoken to the apostles alone. While their role was unique, to be sure, they were not the only ones involved.

How Men referred to the Experience

We can learn much about the scope of the baptism administered by Jesus by what is said of it. Is the experience of the baptism itself the final point, or is the result of that baptism the chief matter? Was it the experience itself that moved the Kingdom forward, or the effects of it that are chronicled?

I am persuaded that there is a certain incumbency for our thoughts on this matter to be in harmony with the Scriptural record itself, and with the inspired record of holy responses to the event. Our view cannot possibly be right if it is not in strict accord with Scripture.

- **FILLING AND UTTERANCE.** Those gathered together on the day of Pentecost were “all filled with the Holy Spirit,” who gave them “utterance” that was understood by the people (Acts 2:4).
- **SPIRIT Poured FORTH.** Peter associated what happened with the prophecy of Joel in which God promises to “pour forth His Spirit” upon men (Acts 2:17-18).
- **INVOLVEMENT OF THE PEOPLE.** This “pouring” would result in the affectation of “sons” and “daughters,” “young men” and “old men,” and “servants” and “handmaids” (Acts 2:16-18).
- **THE SPIRIT SHED FORTH.** Peter said Jesus had “received” the “Spirit” God had “promised,” and had therefore “shed forth” what the people had “seen and heard” (Acts 2:32-33). This coincides with Paul’s statement concerning the abundant reception of the Holy Spirit by all believers (Titus 3:6).
- **THE PROMISE.** Peter then told the people the “promise” of the Spirit was to them as well (Acts 2:38-39). The promised Spirit is specially said to be experienced by all those in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:14; Eph 1:13).
- **REPENTANCE GRANTED.** When Peter rehearsed the events taking place at Cornelius’ house, he specifically told the apostles and elders in Jerusalem that this was a fulfillment of the word Jesus said in our text (Acts 11:15-17). Upon hearing the report, those early saints responded, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).
- **GIVING THE HOLY SPIRIT.** Some time later, Peter testified of this occasion at another special meeting in Jerusalem. At that time, referring to the same events and the same word of Jesus, Peter testified: “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us . . .”
- **PURIFYING THE HEART BY FAITH.** Peter went on to say that purification took place at that time. “. . . and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:8-9).

• SALVATION BY GRACE. Peter added that this was associated with the Gentiles being saved “through the grace of God” (Acts 15:11).

CONSIDER

What Occurs In Our Baptism

Because Peter related the baptism which believers “obey” (Rom 6:17) with “the gift of the Holy Spirit” which was “promised,” we must consider aspects of baptism into Christ that transcend human ability. There are certain realities accomplished in our baptism that necessitate Divine activity.

The things that occur in our baptism require the inner working of the Holy Spirit. I understand these things to be involved in the “baptism with the Holy Spirit” Jesus is said to administer.

- Baptized into “one body” by the Holy Spirit. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body , whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit ” (1 Cor 12:13).
- Baptized into Christ . “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ ” (Rom 6:3). “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ ” (Gal 3:27).
- Put on Christ. “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ ” (Gal 3:27).
- Baptized into Christ’s death. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into His death ?” (Rom 6:3).
- Buried with Christ. “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death” (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- Old man crucified. “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him , that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6).
- Become dead with Christ. “Now if we be dead with Christ , we believe that we shall also live with him” (Rom 6:8).
- Becoming dead to sin and alive to God. “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin , but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- Made free from sin. “Being then made free from sin , ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom 6:18,22).
- The circumcision of Christ. “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ : buried with him in baptism” (Col 2:11-12).

Which of these blessed realities can possibly be accomplished by the believer himself? How is it remotely possible for them to be realized by means of a mere ceremony, like those “divers washings” that occurred under the Law? I am affirming these are all accomplished through the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus’ unique baptism occurs at the time of our baptism.

Raised with Jesus. “Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12).

Which of these blessed realities can possibly be accomplished by the believer himself? How is it remotely possible for them to be realized by means of a mere ceremony, like those “divers washings” that occurred under the Law (Heb 9:10)? I am affirming these are all accomplished through the Holy Spirit, and that Jesus’ unique baptism occurs at the time of our baptism. I understand that to be what Peter was affirming in Acts 2:38-39.

Answering An Objection

Some object to this conclusion, saying that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit subsequent to our baptism into Christ, and in a distinct and separate act. They site the disciples from Ephesus as proof of their postulate. Those disciples, they say, had already believed, and had already been baptized. Yet, they received the Holy Spirit in a second work of grace.

The text, however, does not say these disciples had “believed.” In fact, when Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed, they said “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:1-2). They could not possibly have believed on Jesus, for He spoke of the Holy Spirit (Matt 10:20; 12:28,31,32,36; Lk 4:18; John 3:5,6,8; 6:63) and of men receiving Him (Luke 11:13; John 7:38-39).

Paul then told these disciples that John’s baptism was intended to prepare them to believe on Jesus – the Jesus who spoke of the Holy Spirit. It is evident they had not heard of Jesus, else they would have believed on Him already. It is to be understood that Paul preached Jesus to them just as surely as he did to the Philippian jailor, who also had not yet believed on Him (Acts 16:31-32).

When these disciples were baptized “in the name of the Lord,” Paul laid his hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit, with similar attending phenomena as that which occurred on Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius – speaking in other languages and prophesying (Acts 2:2-3,11-21; 10:46).

Lest some imagine that the events attending this outpouring of the Spirit are the standard accompaniments of the baptism Jesus administers, it ought to be noted that these were all unique occasions – spiritual epochs.

- PENTECOST – The initial fulfillment of the promise to Israel.
- CORNELIUS – The opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles.
- THE DISCIPLES IN EPHESUS – the conclusion of John’s baptism, which is never again mention.

Epochs are never intended to be a precise standard. Instead, there are often unique things that accompany the working of the Lord at such times: i.e., Israel’s epochal deliverance from Egypt, the giving of the Law, the dedication of the tabernacle, the dedication of the Temple, etc. Yet, the deliverance of Israel from Egypt did not present a precise pattern by which Divine deliverance is realized. When God gave the Law at Sinai, it was not attended by standard accompaniments of Divine revelation. Nor, indeed were the dedications of the tabernacle and Temple attended by workings that are standard at every dedication, or setting apart.

Every time God delivers, He does not do so as He did with Israel. Every time God speaks, He does not do so as He did at Sinai. Every time something or someone is set apart to God, things do not occur as when the tabernacle and Temple were dedicated. And, every time God pours forth His Spirit, He does not do so as He did initially in Jerusalem, in the initial acceptance of the Gentiles, and during the closing of John’s baptism.

The era of the New Covenant is particularly referred to as “the ministration of the Spirit,” or “the ministry of the Spirit.” Relating to this matter, we are “baptized” with the Spirit, or put into the Spirit, like our bodies are put into the water in “the form of the doctrine”

That should suffice to provide some input to aid in a personal examination of these things.

THE NEW COVENANT

The Ministration of the Spirit

The era of the New Covenant is particularly referred to as “the ministration of the Spirit,” or “the ministry of the Spirit” NKJV (2 Cor 3:8). Relating to this matter, we are “baptized ” with the Spirit, or put into the Spirit, like our bodies are put into the water in “the form of the doctrine” (Rom 6:17).

Ponder the things that are said to be accomplished by the Holy Spirit.

- Washed, justified, sanctified. “. . . ye are washed , but ye are sanctified , but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- Led in the work of mortifying the deeds of the body. “For if ye live after the flesh , ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:13-14).
- Transformation. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord ” (2 Cor 3:18).
- The Love of God shed abroad. “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5).
- Waiting for the hope of righteousness. “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal 5:5).
- Obeying the truth. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22).
- Affirming Jesus Is Lord. “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit ” NKJV (1 Cor 12:3).
- Spiritual enablements. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit , dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Cor 12:4-11).
- Not Fulfilling Fleshly Lusters. “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit , and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh ” (Gal 5:16).
- Abounding In Hope. “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit ” NKJV (Rom 15:13).
- We Reap Eternal Life through the Spirit. “For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting” (Gal 6:8).
- The Effectual Unity of Believers. “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).
- Prayer and Supplication. “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit , and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph 6:18).
- The Love of the Brethren. “Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit ” (Col 1:8). “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren , see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22).
- Keeping What We Have Received. “That good thing which was committed to you,

keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” NKJV (2 Tim 1:14).

- The Experience of Righteousness, Peace, and Joy. “For the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit ” NKJV (Rom 14:17).

None of these things can possibly be achieved through natural aptitude of human disciplines. They require an induction into the realm in which “all spiritual blessings” are located, where the primary Worker is the Holy Spirit. The baptism Jesus performs has to do with these things.

Believers Are “In the Spirit”

Believers are said to be “in the Spirit” (Rom 8:9; Gal 3:3; 5:16,25; Eph 6:18; Phil 3:3; 1 Pet 4:6; Jude 1:20). This is Scriptural language denoting an effective union with the Spirit.

Similarly, we are said to be “in Christ” (Rom 8:1; 12:5; 16:7; 1 Cor 1:30; 16:24; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 1:22; 3:28; Eph 1:1; 2:13; Phil 1:1; 4:21; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 2:14; ; 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Pet 5:14), having been “baptized” into Him (Gal 3:27). We were put into Christ by God Himself. As it is written, “But of Him [God – vs 28-29] are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). The New American Standard Bible reads, “. . . God . . . But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:29-30).

Also, our lives are “hid with Christ in God ” (Col 3:3). The church is categorically said to be “in God the Father” (1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Believers are spoken of as continuing “in the Son, and in the Father ” (1 John 2:24). They are also said to be dwelling “in God” (1 John 4:15,16).

WHY SHOULD IT BE THOUGHT INCREDIBLE?

In view of these clear pronouncements, why should anyone think it incredible that those “in Christ” are also “in the Spirit?” And, should we choose to believe these affirmations, just how do we account for being “in the Spirit?” It is the Lord Jesus who put us into the Spirit! That baptism is His baptism – the one He performs. John baptized “with water.” Jesus baptizes “with the Holy Spirit.” That is what John said to the people to whom he preached. That is what Jesus said to his disciples, including “the eleven,” them that were with them, with “the women,” and Cleopas and his companion. The ones who tarried for the promise, as Jesus commanded, included “the eleven,” “the women,” “Mary his mother,” and “His brethren.” A count of this holy gathering is provided, being “about an hundred and twenty.” That whole number prayed together. They chose Judas replacement together. On the day of Pentecost it is written , “they were all together with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1).

The baptism with which Jesus baptizes is not to be confused with the gifts required and utilized by the Apostles, as well as those dispensed to others. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is just as essential for the effective working of the other gifts that are placed within the body of Christ.

In Peter’s explanation of the events that took place on that marvelous and unique Pentecost, he affirmed the words of Joel were being fulfilled. Those words included “sons” and “daughters” prophesying, and the Spirit being poured out upon God’s “servants and handmaidens” (Acts 2:16-18). What, then, would constrain anyone to say this baptism was only for the apostles – particularly since some Gentile converts received “the same gift” several years later (Acts 11:15-17).

The Gifts Not to Be Confused with the Gift

The baptism with which Jesus baptizes is not to be confused with the gifts required and utilized by the Apostles, as well as those dispensed to others. The ministry of the Holy Spirit is just as essential for the effective working of the other gifts that are placed within the body of Christ. I am affirming

that it is essential for a person to be “in the Spirit” to perform any of the functions within the body of Christ. No legitimate ministry within the church can be fulfilled independently of the Holy Spirit, who is the Divinely appointed Administrator of those gifts.

Paul makes a particular point of this to the Corinthians, who had many gifts, but a lot of confusion concerning their employment as well. “There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit . . . But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal [for the profit of all NKJV] . . . But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit , dividing to every man severally as He will ” (1 Cor 12:4,7,11).

Regardless of the gift, the Holy Spirit administers it, doing so from within the context of being “in Christ” (1 Cor 1:2), in His body (1 Cor 12:13), and by means of communion with Him (2 Cor 13:14).

All gifts do not perform the same function. As it is written, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet show I unto you a more excellent way” (1 Cor 12:28-31). All of these gifts, however, require the working of the Holy Spirit – not merely upon the people, as He moved upon Samson, or even the holy prophets. In Christ, the Holy Spirit Himself becomes the environment in which the work is done: “IN the Spirit.”

On the day of Pentecost there did come a time when the attention of the multitude was focused on the apostles. That commenced well into the morning. “But Peter, standing up with the eleven , lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you,

I do not know that the ministry of Jesus is ever confined to a certain group of people within His body, which is the church. That, however, would be precisely how the Savior is represented, if the promise of the Spirit, which was the promise made by the Father, was confined to the Apostles, or even to the first century.

and hearken to my words” (Acts 2:14). Those twelve men functioned in strict accord with their place in the body – a place that was “first” (1 Cor 12:28). There is no question but that they did and said things uniquely assigned to them.

That does not, however, suggest that they were the only ones on whom the Spirit was “poured forth,” for that would have contradicted the prophesy of Joel, which Peter said was being fulfilled : “I will pour forth my Spirit upon all flesh ” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

I understand that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit, putting us into the Spirit as John put men into the water.

IN SUMMARY

I do not know that the ministry of Jesus is ever confined to a certain group of people within His body, which is the church. That, however, would be precisely how the Savior is represented, if the promise of the Spirit, which was the promise made by the Father, was confined to the Apostles, or even to the first century. The following is offered in support of this observation.

- Jesus identified the Spirit with which He would baptize the people with “the promise of the Father.” Messianic promises, or the foretelling of the New Covenant era, were always a depiction of the condition of all of the people whom God accepted, not a mere segment of them (Isa 32:15; 44:3; Joel 2:28-29; Ezek 36:27; 37:14; 39:29).

- Jesus said the Spirit with which He would baptize the people, was the One He spoke about to His disciples (Lk 11:13; John 14:16-17,26; 15:26-27; John 16:8-11, 13-15). To suggest this was limited to a small segment of His body, or to a confined period of time during the inauguration of the New Covenant, will require an extraordinary dividing up and distortion of the words of Jesus during that last evening with His disciples (John, chapters 13-17).

- John the Baptist told the multitudes he was baptizing, that Jesus would baptize them with the Holy Spirit (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16).

- Jesus told “the eleven, and those with them,” “the women,” and Cleopas and his companion, “I will send the promise of My Father upon you” (Lk 24:49).

- “About one hundred and twenty” disciples waited together in Jerusalem for the promise, as Jesus had directed (Acts 1:13-15).

- Those who waited together in Jerusalem were all together with one accord on the day of Pentecost, when God poured forth His Spirit (Acts 2:1).

- Peter said the prophecy concerning the pouring forth of the Spirit – the “promise of the Father” – was being fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. That involved the prophesying of “sons” and “daughters,” and God’s “servants” and “handmaidens” (Acts 2:16-17).

- The promise of Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit is said to have occurred within the household of the Gentile Cornelius (Acts 11:15-17).

CONCLUSION

It may appear as though I have labored inordinately to establish the nature of this text. And, indeed, there is a sense in which I regret that I have deemed such an approach to be necessary. However, when I began this review of the book of Acts, there was a sort of burden upon my heart. I have been exposed to some extremely skewed views of this book – views that did not always appear honest. In fact, I had embraced an approach to this book that had more of a Sinaitic savor than “the savor of Christ” (2 Cor 2:15). Because of this, I sought the Lord for special grace to approach this volume with a pure and unsullied heart – uncontaminated with the traditions of men. I did not want to abandon a single morsel of truth that I had received, or deny a solitary legitimate perspective of the truth of God that I possessed. However, I also did not want to carry into this study a lot of confusing and questionable traditions and assumptions.

It was particularly imperative that at the threshold of this series, a level field be established for the consideration of the working of the Lord. A sort of direction must be laid down that will allow us to quickly recognize the precious nuggets of truth that are placed in the orchestrated history of this book. We are going to be exposed to the working of the Lord, and we must be quick to recognize it, else we will miss the blessing. Allow me to mention a few of these workings.

- “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23)

- “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

- “Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

- “But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled” (Acts 3:18).

- “For to do whatsoever Thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done”

(Acts 4:28).

- “But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors , and brought them forth, and said” (Acts 5:19).

- “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

- “And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip , saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert” (Acts 8:26).

- “Then the Spirit said unto Philip , Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (Acts 8:29).

- “And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip , that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:39).

- “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit ’” NKJV (Acts 9:17).

- “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost , were multiplied” (Acts 9:31)

- “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

- “And the hand of the Lord was with them : and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21)

In this book, we will be exposed to the way in which the exalted Christ works through His body: calling, directing, empowering, and protecting. He has not changed, and the church has by no means graduated to as new kind of existence. It is still increased by the Lord adding to it It is still moved along by Divine direction, and empowered by the power that is toward those who believe. The church in Acts is the church to which we ourselves have been “added.”

“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2).

- “Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior , Jesus” (Acts 13:23).

- “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles ” (Acts 14:27).

- “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night ; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9).

- “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened , that she attended unto the

things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).

- “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city ” (Acts 18:10).

- “And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:21).

- “For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar : and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee . Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” (Acts 27:25).

In this book, we will be exposed to the way in which the exalted Christ works through His body: calling, directing, empowering, and protecting.

Jesus has not changed, and the church has by no means graduated to as new kind of existence. It is still increased by the Lord adding to it (Acts 2:47). It is still moved along by Divine direction, and empowered by the power that is toward those who believe (Eph 1:19). The church in Acts is the church to which we ourselves have been “added” – The “one body” over which Jesus still presides. There is no other body through which Jesus works. There is not other form of Divine power available to that body than that with which it was initiated – the power that raised Jesus Himself from the dead (Eph 1:19-20).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #2

FINAL WORDS AND ASCENSION

“ 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? 7 And He said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power. 8 But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. 9 And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight. 10 And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; 11 Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” (Acts 1:6-11)

INTRODUCTION

The “Christian religion,” as some are wont to call it, is not a “way of life.” It is not an external regimen, or a system of rules, procedures, and customs. It is not the induction of a moral change

accomplished by the formation of new habits, or adherence to a code of conduct. In Christ Jesus we do not simply receive a new set of rules, a new standard of conduct, and a different way of doing things. It does not involve the exchange of Moses' law for a higher and more thorough law from Jesus. It is not the replacement of one set of ceremonial routines for another.

When the Scriptures speak of "the law of Christ" and being "under the law to Christ" (1 Cor 9:21), they are not speaking of "law" after the Sinaitic order. Men who imagine that this is the case

CONTENTS

- **WHEN THEY CAME TOGETHER (1:6a)**
- **THEY ASKED HIM (1:6b)**
- **IT IS NOT FOR YOU TO KNOW (1:7a)**
- **TIMES AND SEASONS (1:7b)**
- **YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER (1:8a)**
- **YOU SHALL BE WITNESSES (1:8b)**
- **WHILE THEY BEHELD (1:9a)**
- **A CLOUD RECEIVED HIM (1:9b)**
- **WHILE THEY WERE LOOKING (1:10a)**
- **TWO MEN IN WHITE APPAREL (1:10b)**
- **WHY? WHY? (1:11a)**
- **NOT A DIFFERENT JESUS (1:11b)**
- **TAKEN UP INTO HEAVEN (1:11c)**
- **HE SHALL COME AS HE HAS GONE (1:11d)**
- **CONCLUSION**

are prone to speak of the Scriptures as a "book of rules" and a "roadmap to heaven." Such have an inordinate penchant for external procedures, attaching more significance to the way things are done, than to what is actually being done with and in the heart. These people always emphasize externals, for they have no sensitivity to unseen things.

THE REAL DISTINCTION

Prior to Christ, even the covenanted people of God were "dead in trespasses and sins" (Eph 2:1). After working extensively with them, God said of them, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom 10:21; Isa 65:2). They were a people with "uncircumcised hearts" (Lev 26:41), to whom God had NOT given "ears to hear" (Deut 29:4). Therefore they were prone to wander and rebellious

Ponder how the Lord spoke of this people.

- " . . . I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiffnecked people " (Deut 9:13).
- " . . . for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me , that I should not reign over them" (1 Sam 8:7).
- "But this is a people robbed and spoiled; they are all of them snared in holes, and they are hid in prison houses: they are for a prey, and none delivereth; for a spoil, and none saith, Restore" (Isa 42:22).

- “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways ” (Psa 95:10).

- “ . . . for it is a people of no understanding : therefore he that made them will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them will show them no favor” (Isa 27:11).

Think upon what Moses, their leader, said of them.

- “Understand therefore, that the LORD thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people ” (Deut 9:6).

- “ Ye have been rebellious against the LORD from the day that I knew you” (Deut 9:24).

- “For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD ; and how much more after my death?” (Deu 31:27).

Consider the reaction of the living God to this people – a people He Himself had chosen and cultured.

Men who imagine that this is the case are prone to speak of the Scriptures as a “book of rules” and a “roadmap to heaven.” Such have an inordinate penchant for external procedures, attaching more significance to the way things are done, than to what is actually being done with and in the heart.

“Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against His people, insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance ” (Psa 106:40).

- “And the LORD heard the voice of your words, and was wroth, and sware, saying, Surely there shall not one of these men of this evil generation see that good land , which I sware to give unto your fathers” (Deut 1:35).

- “They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation ” (Deut 32:21).

- “When God heard this, He was wroth, and greatly abhorred Israel : so that He forsook the tabernacle of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men” (Psa 78:60).

Consider! Consider!

The nature of this people remained corrupt, even though they were blessed above all other nations, and favored of God. Consider what did not, and could not, change them. Ponder what did NOT alter their character, change their affection, or move them away from iniquity.

- Deliverance could not change them (Ex 18:18; Josh 9:26; Judges 2:16; Psa 107:6).

- Moral law could not change them (Deut 4:8; Psa 147:19; Mal 4:4).

- Divinely ordained religious ceremonies could not change them (Lev 23:2-4,44; Num, 29:39).

- Witnessing miracles could not change them (Ex 14; 16:15,31-35; 17:6; Josh 10:12-13).

- Godly leaders could not change them (Moses, Aaron, Joshua, etc.).

- Precious promises could not change them (Deut 28:2-13).

- The prospect of grievous curses could not change them (Deut 28:15-46).

- Godly judges could not change them (Deborah, Gideon, Samuel, etc).
- Righteous kings could not change them (David, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Joash, Azariah, Uzziah, Hezekiah, Josiah, etc).

The old covenant was designed for an unregenerate people. It was not designed to bless, benefit, or change. It rather discovered the real condition that was caused by sin. It also kept sin from erupting exponentially, mandating death to the transgressor.

Holy prophets could not change them (Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Zechariah, Daniel, Malachi, etc).

- Blessed circumstances could not change them (Josh 21:44; 2 Chron 15:15; Isaiah 51:1-2).
- Divine kindness could not change them (Neh 9:17; Isa 54:10; Joel 2:13).
- A special environment, in a special land, did not change them (2 Chron 20:7; Jer 2:7; 16:18).
- Tender mercies did not change them (Psa 103:4; Neh 9:19,28-29,31; Lam 3:22; Zech 1:16).
- Faithful warnings did not change them (2 Chron 19:10; Jer 6:10).
- Chastisement did not change the people (Deut 8:5; Jer 31:18).
- Abundant provision did not change the people (Josh 9:5; Deut 28:47; 2 Chron 32:29; Neh 9:25).
- Being in bondage to their enemies did not change them (Judges 2:14; 13:1; Ezra 9:8; Neh 5:5; Isa 14:3).
- Enjoying an inheritance did not change them (Ex 15:17; Num 26:53-54; Deut 4:21; Josh 1:6; Lam 5:2).
- The Presence of Jesus Himself did not change the people (John 1:11; John 3:32; Mk 15:13-15).

It is no wonder that God Himself said of His dealings with Israel, “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” (Isa 5:4). Again He said, “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint” (Isa 1:5). And again He said, “In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction: your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion” (Jer 2:30). And once again, “In thy filthiness is lewdness: because I have purged thee, and thou wast not purged, thou shalt not be purged from thy filthiness any more, till I have caused My fury to rest upon thee” (Ezek 24:13).

This is why it is written, “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16). No person can be made “new” or morally improved from the outside. Advantages do not make people better, or alter their character! The self-help gurus are leading the body of Christ astray, attempting to work moral change by regimen, rules, and the formation of habits. Such an approach may be popular, but it is wrong – seriously wrong. There is not enough place (if, indeed, there is any), for God, Christ, the Spirit, and grace in such approaches.

There is no need for men to speculate about this matter. We do not have to give our attention for a single moment those who hawk their handy routines and secrets for improvement, recovery and moral change. God has shown the absolute vanity of such approaches. He worked extensively with a single nation for 1,500 years, showering them with benefits, punishing them when they were wrong, and

giving them every possible advantage. After all was said and done, He said throughout the entire period, and after it as well, they were nothing more than a “disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:21).

This condition was not the result of Divine failure. It was rather intended to dry up the vain notion that there is any possible way for fallen men to correct their own condition. Even if you put the required tools in their hands, they will either throw them away, or corrupt their use. Until this lesson is learned, all religious labor, when viewed in the most favorable way, is pointed in the wrong direction.

THE OLD COVENANT

The old covenant was designed for an unregenerate people. It was not designed to bless, benefit, or change. It rather discovered the real condition that was caused by sin. It also kept sin from erupting exponentially, mandating death to the transgressor.

It is for this reason that it is written, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). Therefore, it “could not” justify (Acts 13:39). If there was any possibly way for man to be exonerated from sin and morally improved by means of a law – any law – “verily righteousness should have been by the law” (Gal 3:21). That is precisely why “the law made nothing perfect” (Heb 7:19). Moral transformation cannot be realized by means of laws, rules, or any form of human activity. “The flesh,” in all of its varied forms – intellect, emotion, will, and bodily members – cannot carry out the will of God. A transformation is required – a “new creation” – and only God can do that!

ACTS IS A RECORD OF DIVINE ACTIVITY UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

The book of Acts is a record of the working of the Lord under the New Covenant – a covenant in which the people are changed (2 Cor 3:18), regenerated (Tit 3:6), created (Eph 2:10), and born again (1 Pet 1:23). It is a covenant where “newness of life” is experienced, becoming the environment in which one walks (Rom 6:4). Rather than the people finding the commandments of God grievous, they are now the delight of the people (1 John 5:3; Rom 7:22). Rather than shrinking back from God as Israel did at Sinai (Ex 20:19), they flee to Him for refuge, to lay hold of the hope He places before them (Heb 6:18).

In view of these blessed circumstances, we will read of complete and instant responses to the Lord. Believers will be depicted as eager to hear God’s word, and aggressive to obey it. They will be easily directed into the will of God. If sin erupts, it will be the exception, not the rule, and therefore it will often be dealt with harshly, because in Christ there is no excuse for it. Sin does not make sense in the camp of those who have God’s law written in their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 8:10). When people “know the Lord,” it significantly impacts upon their attitude toward “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4; 1 John 2:15-17), “iniquity” (2 Tim 2:19; Tit 2:14; Heb 1:9), and “the flesh” (Rom 7:18; 8:4,5; Gal 5:24).

Now, Jesus will prepare His disciples to operate in this new environment, possessing a new nature. He will speak to them about “power,” and about waiting until they receive it. He will speak of a new era, with new life, and new hearts and spirits. He will tell them that they will become His own witnesses – faithful, insightful, and true.

“ 1:6a When they therefore were come together . . . ” Other versions read, “Therefore, when they had come together,” NKJV “ And so, when they had come together,” NASB “ So when they had come together,” NIV “So when they met together,” NRSV “They, therefore, being come together,” DARBY “And they, when assembled,” MRD “When the apostles were with Jesus,” NLT “And

another time when He appeared to them,” LIVING “Once when they were with Him ,” WEYMOUTH and “This naturally brought them all together .” PHILLIPS

Here is an aspect of “newness of life” that is rarely seen in the contemporary church scene: the disciples “were come together.” One trait of God is declared in Psalm 68:6: “God setteth the solitary in families ” (Psa 68:6). Other versions read, “God who maketh men of one manner to dwell in a house,” DOUAY The idea is not only that a place is found for the “solitary,” “lonely,” NASB or “those without friends.” BBE He rather places them together with those who are of the same disposition. That is the reason for the term “families,” or households.

The book of Acts provides a picture of unity and oneness, with the people often coming together. By way of illustration, here is a listing of words relevant to this matter, and their frequency in this book.

- “Together” – 32 times.
- “One accord” – 11 times.
- “Assembled” – 4 times.

All of this emphasizes that being “together,” or in the same “family” is not a mere technicality. This is not a philosophical view of the redeemed, but a practical one. All believers love one another, fit together, and complement one another. They are made to function together, assist one another, and work together.

“Gathered” – 9 times.

- “Join” and “Joined” – 5 times.
- “We” – 134 times.
- “Disciples” – 26 times.

Believers came together to Jesus, to the temple, to pray, to hear, to rehearse, to consider, and to break bread (Acts 1:4; 3:1; 4:31; 10:27; 12:12; 13:44; 14:27; 15:6; 20:7). They also went out together to preach the word, (8:4,14; 13:4; 15:27; 20:17).

Jesus Himself set individuals in a group of twelve (Lk 6:13), and of seventy as well (Lk 10:1). Every person who is “saved” is placed by the Lord in the family of “the church” (Acts 2:47). Together , the redeemed are referred to as “the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12), “His body” (Eph 1:22; 5:30), and “the body” (1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 4:16; Col 1:18). All of this emphasizes that being “together,” or in the same “family” is not a mere technicality. This is not a philosophical view of the redeemed, but a practical one. All believers love one another, fit together, and complement one another. They are made to function together, assist one another, and work together.

When the first harvest of souls was reaped, the fact that they were put together was duly noted: “And all that believed were together , and had all things common ; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart , Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:44-47). Later is was also said of the church: “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul : neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32).

A body of people professing to be a “church” who have no desire to be together in the presence of the Lord is a living contradiction. It is really no “church” at all, but is more of a business or a social group.

While it is true that Jesus met personally and separately with Peter and James (1 Cor 15:7), the more extensive benefit was wrought when the disciples “came together.” That is the nature of the Kingdom of God! The “pillar and ground of the truth” is not a person, but a people (1 Tim 3:15). The “bride” of Christ is not an individual, but an assembly (Rev 21:2,9; 22:17).

THE RELEVANCE OF THESE OBSERVATIONS

It might appear as though all of this has very little to do with our text, or the book of Acts as a whole. However, that is not the case at all. Those who are “born of God” have a conscious and enjoyable affiliation with all others who enjoy such a birth. “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him ” (1 John 5:1). This is a love that causes those in Christ to become the preferred friends, associates, and companions. The faith they have is “common” among them (Tit 1:4), as well as the “common salvation” that they enjoy (Jude 1:3). It is no wonder that such people assemble together, seeking the Lord and gathering insight and strength from His presence. In the beginning of their new life, they were found together “daily” (Acts 2:46).

Thus, following Christ’s resurrection, the disciples not only were found together when He showed Himself (Mk 16:14; Lk 24:33; John 21:2), they were also found gathering themselves to the Lord, preferring Him above all others, and marvelously doing so “together.”

“The Church”

A body of people professing to be a “church” who have no desire to be together in the presence of the Lord is a living contradiction. It is really no “church” at all, but is more of a business or a social group. The very word “church” highlights one of the chief traits of the people of God. The word “church” is translated from the Greek word **evkkllhsi,a** (ek-klay-sia). This word has the following lexical meaning: “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly; an assembly of the people convened in a public place; an assembly of Christians,” THAYER “the assembled Christian community, congregation, gathering,” FRIBERG “gathering,” UBS “a congregation of Christians, implying interacting membership,” LOUW-NIDA and “the assembly of the citizens regularly summoned.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Technically speaking, this word can mean any assembly called together, whether religious or political. But that is only as technicality of language, not of “ sound doctrine.” In Scripture there are two views of God’s people as an “assembly.”

First, they have been called out of the world into the fellowship of Christ (Gal; 1:4;. 1 Cor 1:9). They have also been seated “together” in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). All believers are part of this vast spiritual gathering that sits at the feet of Jesus, fights the good fight of faith, and presses toward the mark. We have come to this measureless assembly (Heb 12:22-24), and have thus become acutely aware of other redeemed personalities.

Second, our practical, or external lives, perfectly coincide with our spiritual condition. Functionally, we are called together as a “body,” endowed with various gifts and abilities that interact with one another, bringing edification and encouragement. The thought of a “body” being dismembered suggests death, not life. No sane person would give work to a body that had been taken apart. Therefore it is written, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). And again, “For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him ” (1 Cor 12:14-18).

In both of the above passages, the word was delivered to specific assemblies who profited from coming together. They both suggest that this is the Divine intent of placing us in a “body.”

It should not surprise us that the remarkable “proofs” and teaching that Jesus provided following His resurrection were in assemblies – gatherings of believers. These gatherings were sequestered from the world. They were not in the market places.

“ 6b . . . they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?”

The direction of the disciples thinking will be revealed in the questions they ask the risen Christ. You may be sure, their questions will revolve around what Jesus Himself is going to do. They know that He has not come back from the region of the dead to be idle. They also know there is some unfinished work that was prophesied of old.

THEY ASKED . . . LORD

“ . . . they asked of Him, saying . . . ” Other versions read, “they were asking Him,” NASB “they said to Him,” BBE “they kept asking Him,” NLT “were questioning Him ,” YLT and “began to ask Him .” ISV

The word translated “asked” (**hvrw,twn**) is in the imperfect active tense, meaning to ask repeatedly, or over and over. The word itself suggests fervency – i.e. begging or urgently soliciting an answer. In other words, this was not a casual occasion with nonchalant discussion. The whole scenario paints a picture of Jesus bearing long with the disciples, not answering their question at the first. His reaction was similar to His delayed response to Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-49) and the Syrophencian woman (Matt 15:22-23).

This is an aspect of the Divine nature with which we do well to acquaint ourselves. By its very nature, “the flesh” wants instant responses and immediate attention. However, when we are dealing with the Lord of glory, matters are shaped by His will, not ours. He often “bears long” with earnest inquirers, testing their sincerity and faith, and waiting for the appropriate time to answer proper petitions, or deny improper ones (as in the case of Paul – 2 Cor 12:8-9).

As “the pillar and ground of the truth,” it is the business of the church to acquaint men with this aspect of the Divine nature, so they do not stumble through trials in an uncomely manner, or insist upon God paying more attention to them than to His own “eternal purpose.”

RESTORING THE KINGDOM TO ISRAEL

“ . . . Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Other versions read, “Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel ?,” NASB “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?,” NIV “Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” ASV “Lord, will you at this time give back the kingdom to Israel ?” BBE “Lord, has the time come for you to restore the kingdom to Israel?” NJB “Lord, are you going to free Israel now and restore our kingdom ?” NLT “Lord, dost thou at this time restore the reign to Israel? ” YLT “Lord, are you going to free Israel [from Rome] now and restore us as an independent nation ?” LIVING “Lord, is this the time for you to rebuild the kingdom for Israel ?” IE and “Lord, is this the time when You will reestablish the kingdom and restore it to Israel ?: AMPLIFIED

Whatever one may think of the disciples prior to the Lord’s enthronement in glory, they were not political pawns or Scripturally illiterate. Their thoughts had been shaped by the Scriptures themselves, and the words of the Lord Jesus.

God's association with Israel remains an area of great confusion within the churches. I come from a background where many taught that Israel has been totally eliminated from Divine dealings, and is no longer recognized by the Lord. The reasoning is that the church has taken the place of Israel, and that all of the promises given to them have now been transferred to the church, taking them away from Israel.

If this is, in fact, a proper assessment, the question of the Israelites was an ignorant one. In such a case, it did not reflect the mind or purpose of the Lord, and they will surely be rebuked, as when they asked the Lord if He wanted them to call down fire on the Samaritans (Lk 9:54-55). Jesus did not allow His disciples to entertain erroneous views, but would stir their thinking in the proper direction, as when He clarified to them why a blind man they had confronted was blind (John 9:1-3), or when Lazarus died (John 11:3-11).

There Was A Basis for Their Question

There was a sound Scriptural basis for this question. It was not one that was produced by human imagination. This will be confirmed by the Lord's answer, which did not discard the question as being foolish and without foundation.

Israel began as a single and united nation – all twelve tribes coming out of Egypt, receiving the Law, and at last settling in Canaan. They remained united through the reign of David. Then, during the reign of Solomon, ten of the tribes revolted, and a division occurred among the people. The ten tribes were referred to as "Israel," with Samaria being their capital. Two tribes, Benjamin and Judah, became "Judah," with their capital being Jerusalem. Each kingdom had their own kings, and often fought against each other.

A marked deterioration took place within both kingdoms, and the judgment of God was leveled against them. First, the ten tribes – the kingdom of Israel – were judged for their idolatrous propensities. Their capital city was overthrown, and they were carried away into Assyria. It is written of that occasion, "Therefore the LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only" (2 Kgs 17:18).

Speaking through the prophets, the Lord spoke repeatedly to both Israel and Judah about their future. Their sin, to be sure, had thrust them upon hard times. Notwithstanding, the Lord held out a time of blessing for them. Here are a few of the promises, given while they were already in a state of dispersion.

Judah, however, proved unfaithful as well. It is written that they "kept not the commandments of the Lord their God" (2 Kgs 17:18). Eventually, particularly because of their failure to honor the land Sabbaths, they were conquered by the Chaldeans, or Babylonians, and carried captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 29:1). Their captivity lasted for an appointed "seventy years" (Jer 25:11). At the conclusion of those seventy years, they were freed, and in due time, were "caused" to return their own land (Jer 29:10). God worked through Ezra, king Cyrus (of Persia), and a number of others, to accomplish this return.

There is no record of Israel ever recovering from their captivity. They never returned to the promised land, but remained dispersed among the nations. The events that took place on the day of Pentecost confirmed that those dispersed Israelites did not lose their identity, as some suppose (Acts 2:5).

God Spoke of Their Future Through the Holy Prophets

Speaking through the prophets, the Lord spoke repeatedly to both Israel and Judah about their future. Their sin, to be sure, had thrust them upon hard times. Notwithstanding, the Lord held out a

time of blessing for them. Here are a few of the promises, given while they were already in a state of dispersion.

They speak of a reuniting of Israel and Judah – something that has not occurred since Israel was taken captive in 721 B.C.

- “In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel , and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers” (Jer 3:18).

- “In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely : and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:6).

- “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah ” (Jer 31:31).

- “Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand” (Ezek 37:19).

The Lord spoke of gathering Israel from among the nations in which He had scattered them,

- “Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him , and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jer 31:10).

- “Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people , and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel” (Ezek 11:17).

- “And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered , with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out” (Ezek 20:34).

- “I will accept you with your sweet savor, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen” (Ezek 20:41).

God promised He would not forget Israel, even though they were severely punished.

- “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before Me ” (Isa 49:15-16).

- “For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee : but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished” (Jer 30:11).

- “Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee , but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished” (Jer 46:28).

- “Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is His name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever . Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have

done , saith the LORD” (Jer 31:37).

A time of blessing was promised that would be so remarkable that Israel would be joined with its most ancient foes , the Assyrians and the Egyptians – and all of them would be saved. “And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it : and they shall return even to the LORD , and he shall be entreated of them, and shall heal them . In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: Whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance ” (Isa 19:22-25).

God promised Israel would be a light to whom the nations would come.

- “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you ” (Zech 8:23).

The Lord’s indignation with both Israel and Judah was never intended to be a permanent condition. Thus He said through Isaiah, “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee”

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:2-3).

The Lord’s indignation with both Israel and Judah was never intended to be a permanent condition. Thus He said through Isaiah , “In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed , saith the LORD that hath mercy on thee” (Isa 54:8-10).

Jesus Himself spoke of God’s wrath against Israel having a terminal point. “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled ” (Luke 21:24).

Paul referred to the same concluding point. “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom 11:26).

Paul makes a point of the fact that God never did determine to totally eliminate Israel. He refers to a statement made by Isaiah, and fortifies it with apostolic doctrine. “Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: For He will finish the work , and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord

make upon the earth. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made

Although there was a very solid prophetic basis for their question, it was still skewed in the wrong direction. At this time they were viewing the Messiah secondarily, and the kingdom of Israel, primarily.

like unto Gomorrah” (Rom 9:29; Isa 1:9).

There have been whole generations of people in the earth that God has eliminated – blotting them out. The Amalekites were such a people. “Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven ; thou shalt not forget it” (Deut 25:19). Sodom and Gomorrah were cities of this kind, who ”suffered the vengeance of eternal fire,” never again to be built (2 Pet 2:6; Jude 1:7). But this was not the case with Israel! He left a remnant, and where there is a remnant, there is hope!

MORE COULD BE SAID

Much more could be said on this matter. It would not, however, serve our purpose to carry the matter further. I have made these extended remarks because of the remarkable abundance of theological garbage that is being thrown out into then church on this subject. It is also my purpose to show that the question of the disciples was not a display of ignorance.

Their Question was Skewed

Although there was a very solid prophetic basis for their question, it was still skewed in the wrong direction. At this time they were viewing the Messiah secondarily, and the kingdom of Israel, primarily. It was as though they were viewing the risen Christ as a means to the fulfillment of their perception of the prophets. This was not totally bad, but reflected an understanding that was pointed in the wrong direction.

Even in the prophecies of Israel’s restoration, the prophets made a point of the prominence of the Redeemer.

- “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth” (Jer 23:5).
- “But they shall serve the LORD their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them” (Jer 30:9).
- “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land” (Jer 33:15).
- “And I will set up one shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd” (Ezek 34:23).

At the time the disciples asked this question, they were seeing Jesus like the blind man first saw men: “as trees walking” (Mk 8:24). Christ’s answer will point them in the right direction, and diffuse an inordinate desire for Israel’s earthly prominence.

The prophetic references to Israel’s future glory did not pertain to their political prominence, although I don not doubt some of that may occur. Nor, indeed, was the Messiah targeted to be a worldly King. His kingdom was not, is not, and never will be “of the world” (John 18:36). That is why He ascended up on high.

“ 7a And He said unto them, It is not for you to know . . . ” Other versions read, “It is not for you to have knowledge of,” BBE “It is not yours to know,” DARBY “they are not for you to know,” NLT “It is not for you to know these things,” IE “It is not your business to learn,” WILLIAMS “It is not for you to become acquainted with and know,” AMPLIFIED and “You cannot know.” PHILLIPS

Those who linger long in the presence of the Lord are soon aware that there are things to be known. The disciples did not ask Jesus for an experience, or for some supernatural ability. Instead, they asked for some knowledge. My point is that being aware of the Lord Jesus whets the appetite for knowledge and understanding. The prophet Isaiah said of the Lord Jesus and the present day of salvation, “And wisdom and knowledge shall be the stability of thy times, and strength of salvation: the fear of the LORD is his treasure” (Isa 33:6). Suffice it to say, a person who is content to remain in spiritual ignorance knows nothing of the presence of the Lord.

Having said this, there are things that God does NOT intend for men to know. Moses referred to this circumstance when he wrote, “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut 29:29). There are things that God intends to make known, and things He does not intend to make known. As we will see, there are also matters that are revealed at certain times, and are kept secret until that time. For example, Jesus spoke of things that had been “kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Matt 13:35). Paul said he preached a Gospel that revealed a “mystery which was kept secret since the world began” (Rom 16:25).

Jesus once told His disciples there were matters of the Kingdom that certain of the multitudes were not permitted to know. “He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given ” (Mat 13:11). In that case, the disciples themselves were given the privilege of knowing such things. Now, however, the Lord tells them they have asked about something they have no right to know. Their question extends beyond the perimeter of Divine will, and thus will not be answered.

“ 7b . . . the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in His own power.”

Now we consider a subject that is very sensitive to some. There are poor souls who think that humanity is the center of all things, and that no one has a right to withhold anything from any person. They imagine that God has opened up a pipeline from heaven to earth, so that they are licensed to probe into all areas of knowledge, fully expecting to be able to decipher the greatest of mysteries. Such people have overestimated the human intellect, significantly understated the magnitude of Divine knowledge and purposes, and managed to think of the temporal domain as containing more than it actually does. Jesus will now inform us of the real case.

TIMES OR SEASONS

“ . . . the times or the seasons . . . ” Other versions read, “times or epochs ,” NASB “times or dates ,” NIV “times or periods ,” NRSV “knowledge of the times and the order of events ,” BBE “the times of moments ,” DOUAY “dates and times ,” IE “times and occasions ,” MONTGOMERY and “what time brings [the things and events of time and their definite periods] or fixed years and seasons (their critical niche in time).” AMPLIFIED

Seen from the highest perspective, there is no aspect of God’s purpose that is determined by chance, happenstance, or randomness. There is a level at which Divine control is absolute, and everything operates by Divine schedule. This is not the domain of minutia, incidentals, and the inconsequential. Even though Divine purpose has many particular and seemingly small points, yet they all have a specific objective, and blend in with an ultimate aim. Therefore, Jesus speaks of “times and seasons,” which are larger in

However, the circumference of our thought must have a larger perimeter than the incidental things of life. Unless there is some obvious association of experience with God’s revealed purpose, we do not do well to assume God’s vivifying presence in it.

scope than hours and minutes. This should discourage us from thinking about things like stubbing our toe, falling down a flight of stairs, or seeing a penny on the sidewalk, as being ordained by God. I understand that it is quite possible for such things to be on the Divine agenda. However, the circumference of our thought must have a larger perimeter than the incidental things of life. Unless there is some obvious association of experience with God’s revealed purpose, we do not do well to assume God’s vivifying presence in it.

Revealed Times and Seasons

God has graciously revealed certain appointed times and seasons so we may learn to trust in Him. Men can culture their minds and emotions around their own plans, or learn to trust in the Lord fulfilling His purposes.

- The birth of Isaac took place at an appointed time. “Is any thing too hard for the LORD? At the time appointed I will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son . . . For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (Gen 18:14; 21:1).

- The flood commenced on an appointed day. “In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark” (Gen 7:13).

- The plagues upon Israel took place at appointed times. “And the LORD shall sever between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt: and there shall nothing die of all that is the children's of Israel. And the LORD appointed a set time , saying, To morrow the LORD shall do this thing in the land” (Ex 9:4-5).

- Israel’s deliverance from Egypt took place on an appointed day. “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt. And it came to pass the selfsame day , that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies” (Ex 12:41,51).

- God once judged Israel with a pestilence that ended at an appointed time. “So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed : and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men” (2 Sam 24:15).

- Jesus entered into the world at an appointed time. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal 4:4).

What Jesus says to His disciples in this text is similar to the manner in which He spoke to the prophets. They were told of the coming of a Messiah, yet were not provided “times and seasons.” When these holy men earnestly sought to discover precisely who the Messiah was, and when He would appear, they were told that was not for them to know.

The word “times” is translated from the Greek word **cro,nouj** (chron-ous), from which we get the word “chronology.” Lexically, the words means “a definite time . . . period of time with chronological accuracy, by the dates.” LIDDELL-SCOTT That is, not only does “times” speak a certain juncture in history, but of a specific sequence of events. The giving of the Law must follow deliverance from Egypt, and be before the wilderness wanderings. The death of Christ must be after John the Baptist and before the day of Pentecost, etc. This requires a Sovereign God with absolute power and control.

The word “seasons” is translated from the Greek word **kairou,j** (kahee-rous), which has the lexical

meaning, “due measure, a measure of time, a fixed and definite time,” THAYER and “a Divinely allotted time . . . period of time.” FRIBERG This speaks more of duration – a period with a commencement and a close.

Thus, God is depicted as controlling the chronology, initiation, and duration of Divinely appointed events.

IN THE FATHER’S POWER

“ . . . which the Father hath put in His own power.” Other versions read, “which the Father has put in His own authority,” NKJV “which the Father has fixed by His own authority,” NASB “the Father has set by His own authority,” NIV “which the Father hath set within His own authority ,” ASV “which the Father hath kept within His control ,” BBE “which the Father hath put in His own Divine authority ,” GENEVA “that the Father hath established by His own authority,” NAB “that the Father has decided by His own authority,” NJB “The Father sets those dates ,” NLT “that the Father did appoint in His own authority,” YLT “The Father is the only One who has authority to decide such dates and times ,” IE “which the Father has reserved in His own authority ,” WEYMOUTH “which the Father has a right to fix ,” WILLIAMS “which the Father has appointed (fixed and reserved) by His own choice and authority an personal power,” AMPLIFIED and “which have been fixed by the Father’s sole authority.” PHILLIPS

These “times and seasons” are in God’s power, and He does not share that knowledge until the events themselves begin to come to pass . He controls when they will occur and how long they will last. They are in no way determined by men. They are not initiated because of men, nor is their duration determined by them. For example, one of the absurd doctrines taught in our day is that Jesus will come sooner if the church works harder to spread the Gospel.

What Jesus says to His disciples in this text is similar to the manner in which He spoke to the prophets. They were told of the coming of a Messiah, yet were not provided “times and seasons.” When these holy men earnestly sought to discover precisely who the Messiah was, and when He would appear, they were told that was not for them to know. Peter unveiled this to us. “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look” NASB (1 Pet 1:10-12).

The Principle Taught by Jesus

During our Lord’s earthly ministry, He often spoke of things the people did not comprehend. A single example will suffice to confirm this point – namely that when the reality comes to pass, it can then be understood. “I have many things to say and to judge of you: but He that sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of Him. They understood not that He spake to them of the Father.“Then said Jesus unto them, When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am He, and that I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things” (John 8:28).

This is precisely the principle of which Jesus spoke on the night of His betrayal. For example, He said the following of His betrayal by one of them – something they were not able to grasp at the time. However, when it came to pass, it would become apparent to them. “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass , ye may believe that I am He” (John 13:18-19).

The same was true when Jesus earlier washed His disciples' feet. At that time they did not realize what He was really doing. Therefore He said to them, "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter" (John 13:7).

Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Dry Bones

The same principle is seen in Ezekiel's prophecy concerning Israel – when they were shown to him as a valley of dry bones. "And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD" (Ezek 37:14).

A Restatement of the Principle

Allow me to affirm this principle once again. The thorough understanding of "things to come," as declared prophetically, is only available when they begin to come to pass. Such things cannot be opened by scholarship, language expertise, historical proficiency, or human reasoning.

Neither can they be perfectly clarified by piecing prophecies together. Daniel, for example, received several prophecies – many of them, relating to

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silent period between Malachi and the birth of John the Baptist. Yet he was not able to put them all together and thus map out their meaning – and he was a gifted prophet, "greatly beloved" of God! The Lord told him, "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end" (Dan 12:4). That is, what he had prophesied would not be able to be comprehended until the time for them to be fulfilled arrived.

That is precisely what Jesus is telling His disciples. It was not yet time to divulge the times and seasons in which Israel would gain prominence. However, that such a time would indeed come was made clear by the prophets. That is why Paul said God has not "cast away" all Israel (Rom 11:1-5). It is why He spoke of their "fulness," or "full inclusion" NIV (Rom 11:12). He also referred to God "receiving them," of "their acceptance" NIV (Rom 11:15), God being able to "graft them in again" (Rom 11:23-24), blindness happening to them "in part" (Rom 11:25), and of the Deliverer "turning away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom 11:26). God Almighty has gone on record: "For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom 11:27). But God had not made provision for the disciples to know when this was going to happen.

Never Apparent to Unbelief

These things would never be apparent to those in the grip of unbelief. This is why the types, shadows, and prophecies concerning the coming Messiah and the New Covenant remain obscure to Abraham's offspring according to the flesh. That is why the Spirit affirms, "But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away" (2 Cor 3:16). In our case, the prophecies have been fulfilled, meaning "we have a more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet 1:19). Those prophecies are now unsealed, and are no longer shut up. Yet, unbelief seals them to those without faith.

Now Jesus will tell His disciples about things that have been given fore them to know – and they are things that will be taking place in just a few days. They are things that will prepare them for their appointed involvement.

YOU SHALL RECEIVE POWER

“ 8a But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you . . . ”

No person is naturally adequate to be a “laborer together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), or be productive in His kingdom. Even though the disciples had been consistently with Jesus from the baptism of John through His resurrection (1:22), more was needed. Their exposure to Jesus was necessary, but it did not fully qualify them to do the work to which they were assigned. There must be a participation in Christ Himself (Heb 3:14) for spiritual productivity [fruit] to be realized. It is not enough for our vessels [bodies], to be exposed to the truth, and our natural powers to have access to the word and work of God.

If being trained at the feet of Jesus, and being regularly exposed to His words and works had to be matched with Divine endowment, you can rest assured no person will be made adequate today by mere exposure to the truth.

RECEIVING POWER

“But ye shall receive power . . . ” Other versions read, “But you will have power,” BBE “But you shall receive the power,” DOUAY “ye will receive energy,” MRD “but you are going to receive power,” WILLIAMS “ But you shall receive power (ability, efficiency, and might),” AMPLIFIED and “but you are to be given power.” PHILLIPS

There are certain abilities, aptitude, and fortitude that are required in the work of the Lord – things without which, the work cannot be done. Human deficiency cannot be resolved by disciplined procedures and training after the manner of men.

Jesus told the disciples they would “receive” something that they did not yet possess – even though they had once been sent out and empowered to “preach” the Kingdom of God, “heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons” (Matt 10:7-8). That empowerment either had not lingered with them, or was not adequate for the commission they were now being given.

You Will Receive

The word translated “receive” has a particular meaning. It comes from the root Greek word **lamba,nw** (lam-ban-o). Here the word is **lh,myesqe**, which is in the future tense (shall receive). Lexically this word means “to take, to take with the hand, lay hold of . . . to take what is one’s own, to take to oneself, to make one’s own, to claim, procure for oneself,” THAYER “to take hold of, grasp, take for oneself, take into possession,” FRIBERG “Get, obtain,” UBS “to grasp.” LOUW-NIDA

It is important to understand the manner in which we “receive” in the kingdom of God. It is not like a vessel receives water when it is poured into it. Receiving is rather like a person reaching out and taking hold of a gift that has been delivered to him. In this case, the gift was, in fact, beyond the reach of the disciples. Therefore the Holy Spirit, who is “sent down from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12), will bring the needed power, ability, and aptitude to men. He puts it within the reach of faith, which can take hold of that whatever is brought from heaven.

Many professing believers do not receive needed gifts simply because they do not have the faith to reach out and take hold of them. They are too occupied with the realm of sense and time, and faith cannot survive in such a domain. That is why the Lord sets His children in “heavenly places” (Eph 2:6), where faith can flourish, enabling the one possessing it to take hold of the blessings that are also placed within that realm (Eph 1:3).

Thus the disciples would not “receive power” by it sweeping over them with an overwhelming influence, for that is not the manner of the kingdom. Rather, as they waited in faith, like the Lord commanded them, at the proper time the power would be brought within their grasp, and they would be able to “receive” it.

Power

The Greek word translated “power” is **du,namin** (doon-a-min). Sophists have declared us that this is the word from which we get the term “dynamite” – which, in the first place, I am not sure is true. There is certainly no parallel between “dynamite” and the “power” of which our text speaks. Dynamite blows things apart, this power brings things together. Dynamite destroys, this power establishes. When men are said to “dynamite” [verb] something, they are said to “annihilate, decimate, demolish, destruct, dismantle, dissolve, raze, ruin, or shatter” something. MERRIAM-WEBSTER

In Scripture, “power” is a word having to do with the strength, power, and ability to DO the works of God. It is a “power” that exceeds anything produced by nature, whether in natural or in cultured abilities. The word itself includes the idea of authority – imparted authority – so that the individual is granted the right to do a work of God. This “right” is conferred by the Lord Himself.

Uses of the Word

The way in which this word (**du,namin**) is used in Scripture will clarify its true meaning, I will highlight the word translated from **du,namin** .

- ABILITY. “And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability .” (Matt 25:15).
- VIRTUE. “And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned him about in the press, and said, Who touched my clothes?” (Mark 5:30).
- MIGHTY WORK. “And he could there do no mighty work , save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them” (Mark 6:5).
- MIRACLE. “But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me” (Mark 9:39).
- POWER. “And Jesus answering said unto them, Do ye not therefore err, because ye know not the scriptures, neither the power of God?” (Mk 12:24).
- MEANING. “Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me” (1 Cor 14:11).
- STRENGTH. “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength , insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor 1:8).

As Jesus is using the word here, “power” has to do with supernatural aptitude – the ability to do what God requires. The individual is made adequate for the assignment given to him – an assignment that requires resources beyond those possessed by nature.

Spiritual Babylon has done a great disservice to the body of Christ by introducing and maintaining a religion that is close to the earth. It is a religion that does not require Divine input or empowerment. It is shallow, superficial, and powerless. It relies upon human assessment, natural abilities, and the wisdom of men. As a result, those who embrace such an approach consider supernatural abilities to no longer be necessary – even though they acknowledge God has not changed the work that He is doing. This approach to religion has also produced a church that has all of the weaknesses and failures of the world, so that scarcely a real difference can be detected between those who say they are

“Christians” and those who say they are not.

There are surely exceptions to these observations – praise the Lord! However, the average professing Christian is acutely aware that today’s “church” is not noted for its power, ability, fortitude, or productivity. Most of its achievements are nothing more than religious ripples on the surface of life, lacking depth and the power to reach the inner man.

Now Jesus speaks to His disciples of a coming break with mediocrity, unbelief, powerlessness, doubt, fear, ignorance, inability, and other things that are associated with a lack of spiritual power.

AFTER THE SPIRIT COMES

“ . . . after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you . . .” Other versions read, “ when the Holy Spirit has come upon you,” NKJV “when the Holy Spirit comes on you,” NIV “the Holy Spirit having come upon you,” DARBY and “of the Holy Spirit which will come on you .” NJB

“Come Upon”

Now Jesus speaks to His disciples of a coming break with mediocrity, unbelief, powerlessness, doubt, fear, ignorance, inability, and other things that are associated with a lack of spiritual power.

Right here, a lot of confusion has been spewed out like spiritual sewage within the body of Christ. Some people have simply dismissed the whole text, perceiving it as something that pertains to the past, having nothing to do with us today. Others see the Spirit coming upon a person more in keeping with a heathenistic way of thinking, with the Lord striking the person down, side-stepping the mind and heart, which are integral to spiritual life.

The expression “come upon” does not refer to an experience like a brick falling upon one’s head. It rather speaks of a process whereby one person positions himself beside another, coming within their proximity. There are two words translated here. One describes the action – “arrive.” The other describes the position or place – “over against.” In our language, this is something the individual or individuals would experience .

Thus we read of the experience of the shepherds when Jesus was born: “And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them , and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid” (Luke 2:9). That is, the angels came within their proximity and the shepherds knew it.

So it would be with the disciples. The Holy Spirit Himself would come upon them – coming along side of them and bring Divine power within their reach. He would not “come upon them” in answer to prayer, but at the word of the King. That is why they were told to “wait,” not leaving Jerusalem.

The phrase “come upon you” does not necessarily differ from the Spirit being within the individual. In His first message, Jesus said the Spirit of God was “upon” Him (Luke 4:18). That is not intended to differ from the Spirit dwelling in Him, being given to Him without measure (John 3:34). Paul said the grace of God was “bestowed upon ” him (1 Cor 15:10). He lived his life, glorying in his infirmities, that “the power of Christ might rest upon ” him (2 Cor 12:9). None of these expressions are descriptive of something visible, tangible, or sensible. That ought to be obvious enough not to require any further word.

Christ’s promise to the disciples conveyed to them the idea that the Holy Spirit would be sent to them in particular, with specific enabling power that would equip them for their assigned task. It was not an experience that could be stereotyped, codified, or stuffed into a theological mold. It could not be worked up or prayed down. It was something that He, and He alone, would cause.

“ 8b . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

These words of Jesus confirm what I have just said – that the Holy Spirit coming upon them spoke of them being empowered for the work He assigned to them – and they had been given to Him by God (John 17:7,9,11,24). The manner in which He now speaks utterly decimates many of the erroneous views of apostolic empowerment.

THE NATURE OF THE WITNESS

“ . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . . ” Other versions read, “you shall be My witnesses ,” NASB “and will tell the people about Me ,” NLT “to testify about Me with great effect,” LIVING “you must be witnesses for Me ,” WILLIAMS and “and you are to be My witnesses.” MONTGOMERY

Just what is a “witness?” The word used here means “one who avers, or can aver, what he himself has seen and heard . . . one who is a spectator of anything,” THAYER and “*one who declares facts known to himself, from firsthand knowledge of experience.*” FRIBERG Jesus had already told them some of the ways in which the Holy Spirit would empower them.

We know that this is precisely the kind of empowerment to which Jesus refers. When He first announced that the disciples would receive the Holy Spirit, this is what He said: “ . . . wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me.”

The Spirit would abide with them, dwell with them, and be in them. “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you ” (John 14:16-17).

- He would teach the disciples all things. “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things . . . ” (John 14:26a).

- He would bring to their remembrance whatever Jesus had said to them. “ . . . and bring all things to your remembrance , whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26b).

- He would testify to them of Christ. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me ” (John 15:26).

- Jesus Himself would send the Spirit to them. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you ” (John 16:7).

- The Spirit would work through their message. “And when He is come , He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

- He would guide them into all truth. “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth . . . ” (John 16:13a).

- He would deliver to them the things that were spoken to Him. “ . . . for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak . . . ” (John 16:13b).

- He would show them things to come. “ . . . and He will show you things to come” (John 16:13c).

- He would glorify Christ, receiving from Him and giving to them. “He shall glorify Me : for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you ” (John 16:14).

We know that this is precisely the kind of empowerment to which Jesus refers. When He first announced that the

disciples would receive the Holy Spirit, this is what He said: “. . . wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me” (Acts 1:4).

What Jesus Did NOT Say

Because of distorted views extant within the church on this subject, a word about what Jesus did NOT say is appropriate.

- Jesus did NOT say that when the Holy Spirit came to them they would work miracles – although they often did.
- Jesus did NOT say that the evidence of the Spirit coming to them would be speaking in tongues – although initially they did.
- Jesus did NOT say the Spirit would empower them to do many great works – although they did.
- Jesus did NOT say they would become workers, but rather that they would become witnesses.

Jesus associated the Holy Spirit with these realities.

- Abiding in them.
- Teaching them.
- Guiding them into the truth.
- Their recollection of what Jesus had said.
- Testifying of Jesus to them.
- Reproving, or convicting, the world.
- Guiding them into all truth.
- Speaking what He had heard.
- Showing them things to come.
- Glorifying Christ.
- Taking the things of Christ and showing them to the disciples.

The Nature of the Promise Is Clear

There is no ambiguity about these matters. There can be no doubt about their direction, where they are pointed, or their emphasis. These are the matters for which the Holy Spirit would be noted. They were the touchstone by which His presence would be confirmed to them. It is not remotely possible that the Holy Spirit would come upon them, or anyone else, and these things not become prominent! Nor, indeed, is it conceivable that Jesus would speak to his disciples about peripheral or secondary matters relating to the Holy Spirit, then burst upon them a new emphasis when the Spirit came. Such a notion is so utterly foolish that only the devil himself could deceive a person into thinking such things.

In spite of all of this clear evidence, there are still people speaking about Holy Spirit revivals and awakenings in which speaking in tongues and miracles are the fundamental things. Jesus did not associate the coming of the Holy Spirit with these things in His teaching of the key men in the church – the apostles, who are “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28), and part of the “foundation” upon which

it is built (Eph 2:20).

Nowhere is the Holy Spirit elevated to a place of doctrinal prominence – nowhere! He is necessary, to be sure. Those who do not have the Spirit of Christ are “none of His” – and

“the Spirit of Christ” is synonymous with the Holy Spirit, as the context clearly affirms (Rom 8:9-13). However, the Holy does not speak about Himself (John 16:13), and it is not possible for a person filled with the Spirit to speak primarily of the Spirit Himself. Christless preaching is always preaching in which the Holy Spirit is not active – regardless of what is being said.

Some Conclusions

There are some conclusions we can draw from these things – from the fact that the disciples would be empowered by the Spirit according to the promise of God, and in accord with the nature of His great salvation.

- The Holy Spirit had to dwell in them, not come upon them occasionally.
- They had to learn the things of God – things pertaining to God’s purpose in Christ Jesus.
- They had to be familiar with what Jesus Himself had said.
- Their ministry would involve the conviction of sin.
- They had to have an understanding of what was to come.
- They had to have a working knowledge of the truth, and the ability to communicate it.
- They had to glorify Christ.

These realities are like boundaries that keep us from venturing into theological nightfall. When you think about the work of the Lord, you must think properly and with a correct focus. If you begin thinking the main work of God is helping people, relieving the afflicted, establishing domestic stability, etc. then you are faced with the gargantuan task of fitting such objectives into the ministry of the Holy Spirit, as defined by Jesus.

Lest I be misunderstood, it is not that the matters I have just mentioned are unlawful, or that no attention is to be given to them. My point is that they are not granted the right to sit upon the throne of thought, to supervise our focus, or direct our attention. They are not given the crown of emphasis. However you deal with them, it must be within the context of the Divine accent. If that is not done, then the works themselves do, in fact, become wrong. There is no such thing as a valid work for God that does not have Christ Jesus at its center, and the Holy Spirit as its source of power and illumination.

Having said these things, I will leave you to peruse for yourself the kind of emphasis that dominates the modern (2006) Christian world. You should be able to pick up on the thrusts, buzz-words and primary things being said. I will say this one last word. Whatever you may think about the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, the anointing of the Spirit, and being filled with the Spirit, where the Lord Jesus Christ is not central, and where people are not themselves in fellowship with God’s Son, the Holy Spirit is not working for good, bearing fruit, or convicting sinners.

JERUSALEM

“ . . . both in Jerusalem . . . ” Other versions read, “to the people in Jerusalem,” LIVING and “not only in Jerusalem.” PHILLIPS

Jesus told His disciples that the preaching and witnessing was to be “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). Later, Peter would tell some of the citizens of Jerusalem that God had sent Jesus to bless and turn away people from their iniquities “unto you first ” (Acts 3:26). This was done, even though Jerusalem had rejected Jesus, not knowing the time of their “visitation.” Jesus had said to them, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:34-35). Not long before He died, Jesus said to Jerusalem, “For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation ” (Luke 19:43-44). Why, then, did He tell His disciples that their work must begin in Jerusalem? Had they not already rejected Jesus, and was not their judgment already made known? What purpose could possibly be served by preaching to them again? I can think of at least six reasons, and there are no doubt more.

- Two witnesses (2 Cor 13:1).
- In anticipation of the great initial; harvest of Jews at the commencement of the New Covenant (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14 – 3,000 + 5,000 + multitudes of both men and women).
- As a witness to the future citizens who would say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Lk 13:34).
- Because of the remnant who had not yet been made known (Rom 11:5).
- Because God had promised Jerusalem would be a praise in the earth (Isa 62:7).
- In prospect of the fulness of “ the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24).

As was mentioned in the previous lesson, Jerusalem was also prophesied to be the place from which salvation would flow (Isa 2:3; Joel 3:16; Micah 4:2).

ALL JUDAEA

“ . . . and in all Judaea . . . ” There were three divisions in the holy land. From North to South, they were Galilee, Samaria and Judaea. Jerusalem was in Judaea (the Greek for Judah), which was the South-most part of the country. Jesus was born in Judaea – “Bethlehem of Judaea” (Matt 2:1,5-6). John the Baptist began his ministry in Judaea (Matt 3:1). Jesus ministered considerably in this part of the promised land (Matt 19:1; Mk 10:1; John 3:22). Now, as a second witness, the disciples were told to be Christ’s witnesses throughout all Judaea.

SAMARIA

“ . . . and in Samaria . . . ” This was an area in which Jesus forbade the disciples to go when He first sent them out: “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not” (Matt 10:5). Once, when Jesus sent messengers before Him to prepare the way for His arrival, they “entered into a village of the Samaritans, to make ready for Him.” It is written, “and they did not receive Him, because His face was as though He would go to Jerusalem” (Lk 9:52-53). The city of Samaria, former capital of the kingdom of Israel, is where Jesus encountered the woman at the well, as well as a host of people from the city. In fact “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on Him” (John 4:4-41). We know from Christ’s discussion with the woman at the well, that people in this region were not Jews, and thus were ignorant of the Messiah and of the worship of Jehovah – even though they lived in the promised land (John 4:9,20-22). Now Jesus commissions His disciples to be His witnesses to this area.

THE UTTERMOST PART OF THE EARTH

“ . . . and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” Other versions read, “to the end of the earth,” NKJV “even to the remotest part of the earth,” NASB “to the ends of the earth,” NIV “and indeed to earth’s remotest end,” NJB “and to the farthest parts of the world,” IE and “and to the ends (the very bounds) of the earth.” AMPLIFIED

Sin is global, and therefore the proclaimed remedy must be global also. The manner in which this is proclaimed is remarkably precise.

- ALL THE WORLD – the domain. “And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world , and preach . . .” (Mark 16:15). “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world . . .” (Mat 24:14).

- EVERY CREATURE – the individuals. “. . . preach the gospel to every creature ” (Mark 16:15).

- ALL NATIONS – the groups. “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations , baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 28:19). “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations , beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached . . . for a witness unto all nations ; and then shall the end come” (Mat 24:14).

As “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), this continues to be the work of the church. Just as Jesus built up, strengthened, and empowered His disciples for the work of being His witnesses, so must the church be built up, empowered, and strengthened for the work.

No person or region is excluded from this holy work. The disciples were to start where they were, and go into the extremities of the world, being Christ’s witnesses, testifying to His Person, work, and exaltation.

The following information is taken from Foxes Book of martyrs. It provides some perspective of the extensive labors of early believers.

- Peter – Israel, Babylon, Rome.
- John – Asia, Rome, the Isle of Patmos.
- Philip – He labored diligently in Upper Asia, Heliopolis, and Syria.
- Matthew – Parthia, and Ethiopia, Macedonia, Syria, Persia, and Media.
- James – Persia.
- Andrew – Edessa, Sythia, and North of the Red Sea -- Russia.
- Matthias – Ethiopia.
- Bartholomew – India, and Armenia.
- Thomas – Parthia, India, Persia and the East Indies.
- Thaddeus – Edessa, and Egypt.
- Simon – Mauritania, Africa, and Britain.
- Paul – Palestine, Asia, Greece, Italy, Syria, and possibly Spain.
- Mark – Alexandria, Egypt.

The prodigious labors of these and others were owing to several things.

- Their genuine conversion.
- Their love for God and Christ.

- Their tenderness of heart.
- Their belief of the Gospel.
- Their persuasion of the need of all men.
- Their knowledge of, and conviction of, the power of the Gospel.

The only way the church can fail to hold up the truth of the Gospel to the world is for these qualities to be lacking within it. This, I am persuaded, is the condition of the vast majority of American churches. Although men have labored ardently to instill a sense of the necessity and urgency of Christ's words, a weak and emaciated church remains impotent to enter into the work.

Consider This

Although the Gospel is fully intended to be proclaimed to every offspring of Adam, it is not intended only for those who remain in a state of alienation. The Gospel is God's power "unto salvation," not only initially, but after their reconciliation to God as well (Rom 1:16). When the Gospel is not preached to the church, it becomes weak, malnourished, and worldly in its nature. That is precisely why Paul was ready to preach the Gospel to the church in Rome (Rom 1:15). It is why he declared it again to the Corinthians (1 Cor 15:1-3), the Galatians (Gal 2:5), the Ephesians (Eph 6:19), the Philippians (Phil 1:27), the Colossians (Col 1:23), and the Thessalonians (1 Thess 3:2). Paul, like all other laborers that are called into the vineyard of the Lord, was a witness of Christ.

In the epistles, which are all written to believers who Have been added to the church, there are 9 references to "Jesus," 182 references to "Christ." 4 references to "the Son of God," 67 references to "Lord Jesus Christ," 18 references to "Lord Jesus," 9 references to "Christ our Lord," 44 references to "Christ Jesus," and 2 references to "Christ Jesus the Lord." That is 331 references. The epistles also contain 74 references to the "Gospel."

The only way the church can fail to hold up the truth of the Gospel to the world is for these qualities to be lacking within it. This, I am persuaded, is the condition of the vast majority of American churches. Although men have labored ardently to instill a sense of the necessity and urgency of Christ's words, a weak and emaciated church remains impotent to enter into the work.

By way of comparison, the epistles contain 3 references to "baptism," 6 references to "repent" and "repentance," 42 references to the "church," 9 references to "husbands," and 9 references to "wives." Compare that to the number of direct references to Christ and the Lord – not to mention the 561 references to "God" and 45 references to "the Father", all of which are mentioned in reference to Christ and the Gospel.

All of this accentuates what it means to be "witnesses unto" Christ.

Global Proclamations prior to the Gospel

To confirm God's interest in the whole world, there have been some global proclamations of God and His nature. These were prior to the coming of Christ.

KING NEBUCHADNEZZAR. "Nebuchadnezzar the king, unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth ; Peace be multiplied unto you. I thought it good to show the signs and wonders that the high God hath wrought toward me. How great are His signs ! and how mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom , and His dominion is from generation to generation " (Dan 4:1-3).

KING DARIUS. "Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth ; Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom

men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for He is the living God, and stedfast for ever , and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth , and He worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth , who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions” (Dan 6:25-27).

Prophesies of a Global Gospel

The universality of the “glorious

The fact of the Gospel being declared to all of the world has not been left to the will of man. It will be preached “in all the world,” just as Jesus said. The only issue is whether or not individuals, groups, or generations are involved in the process.

Gospel of the blessed God,” and of the resulting knowledge of God were prophesied of old.

- “ All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (Psa 22:27).
- “ All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name” (Psa 86:9).
- “The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God ” (Psa 98:2-3).
- “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea ” (Isa 11:9).
- “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD , as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14).
- “And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth : in that day shall there be one LORD, and His name one” (Zech 14:8-9).
- “And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Mat 24:14).

The fact of the Gospel being declared to all of the world has not been left to the will of man. It will be preached “in all the world,” just as Jesus said. The only issue is whether or not individuals, groups, or generations are involved in the process. Jesus has delivered the mandate to declare the Gospel, and He announced the empowerment to deliver a faithful and accurate witness of Himself.

The book of Acts will provide a record of people who took the word of Jesus to heart, lived by faith, and were empowered to be witnesses of Him. They are an example of what it means to be “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), “ambassadors of Christ” (2 Cor 5:20), and living in “fellowship” with God’s dear Son (1 Cor 1:9). We will find no finely tuned human strategy for the accomplishment of this work. Rather, Jesus will direct His servants by means of their faith in and love for Him.

WHILE THEY BEHELD

“ 9a And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up . . . ”

Luke is marking the final time Jesus spent with His disciples, just prior to “the day in which He was taken up” (Acts 1:2). It is what followed the time when He was “taken up” that will be reported in this book.

WHEN HE HAD SPOKEN THESE THINGS

“And when He had spoken these things . . .” Other versions read, “And after He had said these things,” NASB “After He said this,” NIV “And when He had said this,” RSV “And having said these things,” DARBY “As He said this,” NJB “It was not long after He said this,” NLT “And these things having said,” YLT and “When He had said these words.” PHILLIPS

The words concerning the disciples being His witnesses to the uttermost part of the world were among His last words to them. Matthew, Mark, and Luke, also record these last words (Matt 28:19-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-49). These records contain the following instructions.

- “Go ye therefore” – i.e. in the power with which you will be endued (Matt 18:18a).
- “Teach all nations” (Matt 28:18b).
- “Baptize them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:18c).
- “Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19).
- “Go into all the world” (Mk 16:15a).
- “Preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15b).
- “Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name” (Lk 24:47a).
- The preaching should be “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47b).
- “Tarry in Jerusalem until ye be endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49).

There were also some commitments and promises that Jesus made to His disciples.

•
“Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Mat 28:20).

- “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).
- Certain “signs” would follow those who believed (Mk 16:17-18).
- “Ye are witnesses of these things” (Lk 24:48).
- “I send the promise of My Father upon you” (Lk 24:49).

It ought to be noted that speaking is elevated to its highest and most profitable level in Christ Jesus. The Lord has thus prepared His disciples for what is going to follow. All work within the Lord’s vineyard is based upon words – the words of the Lord Jesus.

WHILE THEY BEHELD

“ , , , while they beheld . . . ’” Other versions read, “while they watched,” NKJV “ while they were looking on,” NASB “ before their very eyes ,” NIV “as they were watching ,” NRSV “they beholding Him,” BBE “ while they were watching,” NLT “leaving them staring after Him ,” LIVING “While the apostles were watching,” IE “while they were looking at Him ,” WILLIAMS and “even as they were looking [at Him].” AMPLIFIED

Luke provides a few more details in his gospel. After Jesus had delivered these words to His disciples, He “led them out as far as Bethany.” Bethany was near to Jerusalem, and the “mount of Olives” was there as well (Mk 11:1). Later in this first chapter Luke states that the disciples returned to Jerusalem “from the mount called Olivet” (Acts 1:12). That means that what now occurs took place

on the mount of Olives. Zechariah spoke of “the mount of Olives” in regard to the last day, saying the

What sacred memories were associated with this mountain! There certainly are places that have been more blessed than others. These are places where a sweeter communion is realized. Therefore, in regard to this mountain, it is said of Jesus, “Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples”

Lord’s feet would stand there (Zech 14:4). This was the mountain on which Jesus spoke to some about the sign of His coming and the end of the world (Matt 24:3-51). On the night of His betrayal;, this is where Jesus led His disciples (Peter, James, John, and Andrew – Mk 13:3), and where He prayed His great intercessory prayer (Matt 26:30; Mk 14:26; Lk 22:39; John 17). He came down from this mountain when He entered into Jerusalem in the triumphal entry (Lk 19:37-38). This was the mountain where He went “at night,” after preaching in the Temple “in the day time” (Lk 21:37).

What sacred memories were associated with this mountain! There certainly are places that have been more blessed than others. These are places where a sweeter communion is realized. Therefore, in regard to this mountain, it is said of Jesus, “Jesus oftentimes resorted thither with His disciples” (John 18:2).

At this time Luke also says, “And He lifted up His hands and blessed them” (Lk 24:50). We do not know what He said, but it was surely much like the Aaronic blessing: “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num 6:24-26). Now, as Jesus is blessing them, they are all beholding Him, their eyes being fastened upon Him.

HE WAS TAKEN UP

“ . . . He was taken up . . . ” Other versions read, “He was lifted up,” NASB “He was raised up ,” DOUAY “He was taken up into the sky ,” NLT “He rose into the sky ,” LIVING “He was carried up ,” WEYMOUTH and “He was caught up .” AMPLIFIED

Luke’s gospel reads, “And it came to pass, while He blessed them , He was parted from them” (Luke 24:51). What a momentous occasion it was! Jesus had told them that He would have to leave them, or the Comforter, who is the Holy Spirit, would not come: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). Further, if the Comforter did not come, they could not receive “power,” for He is the One who was going to bring it to them (Acts 1:8). Additionally, the world could not be convicted of sin, righteousness, and judgment, for that would take place only after the Holy Spirit had come (John 16:8-11). If the Spirit did not come, the disciples would not be guided “into all truth,” or be shown “things to come” (John 16:13). Jesus had told them that it was “expedient” for Him to go away (John 16:7). Now the time had arrived, and they were witnessing Him leave.

“ 9b . . . and a cloud received Him out of their sight.” Other versions read, “and a cloud hid Him from their sight,” NIV “and a cloud took Him out of their sight,” NRSV “He went from their view into a cloud ,” BBE “He disappeared into a cloud ,” NLT “Jesus went into a cloud : they couldn’t see Him anymore,” IE “and a cloud closing beneath Him hid Him from their sight,” WEYMOUTH “and a cloud swept under Him and carried Him out of their sight,” WILLIAMS “and a cloud received and carried Him away out of their sight,” AMPLIFIED and “till a cloud hid Him from their sight .” PHILLIPS

As Jesus was blessing His disciples, he began to rise into the air. He was being “parted” from them (Lk 24:51). They would never again know Him “after the flesh” (2 Cor 5:16), being able to see Him

with their eyes, and handle Him with their hands (1 John 1:1). From another point of view He was “taken” from them (Acts 1:2,9,22), after being sent down to earth for a while.

Jesus had completed His mission, laying down His life, and taking it up again, according to the commandment given to Him by the Father (John 10:17-18). His sacrifice and resurrection from the dead provided the basis for the reconciliation and justification of sinners. The basis and the realization of these, however, are not synonymous. Jesus must return to heaven, receive the Kingdom, and commence bringing many sons to glory.

Mark says of Christ’s ascension, “He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mk 16:19). Paul says of Christ’s ascension that Jesus was “received up into glory” (1 Tim 3:16). Hebrews 1:3 affirms, “when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). It is also written that He entered “into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24). Peter says, “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22).

In speaking of the ascension of Christ, therefore, we are addressing a pivotal aspect of God’s “great salvation.” The fact that so very little is being said about it confirms that, in reality, very little is known of the salvation of God.

DANIEL’S VISION

Daniel is the only man in the Word of God referred to as “greatly beloved.” Thrice an angel, from heaven told this great prophet that he was “greatly beloved” (Dan 9:23; 10:11,19). Owing to this remarkable distinction, he was vouchsafed a unique revelation of the coming Messiah. One thing he was given to behold was the ascension of Jesus Christ, and the results of His return to heaven.

In night visions, Daniel affirms that he beheld “one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before Him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14).

Our text (Acts 1:10-11) speaks of the Lord going up into heaven, showing it from earth’s perspective: the Lord left His disciples and the earth in a cloud. Daniel’s vision speaks of the Lord’s ascension also, except it shows it from heaven’s perspective: the Lord came back to heaven in the clouds, returning to the Father.

Like the Son of Man

The expression “one like the Son of man” refers to the coming Messiah, not a personality that was similar to Him. The idea is that of appearance – a personality had the appearance of a man rather than like God. Comparatively, when Nebuchadnezzar saw a fourth person in the fiery furnace with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, he said he was “like the Son of God.” That is, in appearance – particularly in the fire – he appeared more Divine than human. When, therefore, Daniel saw “one like the Son of man,” he was being shown a man coming from earth into the heavenly realms, where men are ordinarily excluded.

The twenty-fourth Psalm speaks of Christ’s return to heaven, and of the interrogation that was directed to the angelic hosts accompanying Him. First, the accompanying hosts cry out, “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Psa 24:7). Seeing the appearance of a Man, the host of heaven reply, “Who is this King of glory?” (Psa 24:8). The accompanying host reply, “The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come

in” (Psa 24:8-9). Again the inquiry comes back, “Who is this King of glory?” Again they hear the reply, “The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory” (Psa 24:10).

This was “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5), returning from the accomplishment of His vicarious death and triumphant resurrection.

With the Clouds of Heaven

The disciples saw Jesus leave in a cloud. Heaven saw Him returning “with the clouds” – wrapped, as it was, with the highest part of the order of earth, but the lowest part of the order of heaven. It is as though nature joined its Lord in His return to the glory.

To the Ancient of Days

This is a term denoting God the Father. Daniel saw “the Ancient of days” as the one to whom every heavenly personality was subject, reigning in majestic splendor. “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head like the pure wool: His throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened” (Dan 7:9-10).

This is the same Person John saw, seated on the heavenly throne (Rev 4:2-5). John also saw the Savior adjacent to that throne and its Occupant. He saw Him as “the Lamb” (Rev 5:6-7). John saw the Lamb take the book of Divine destiny out of the hand of God. The Lamb was able to open the book, revealing its contents. Daniel sees the exalted Savior returning to the Father to receive a kingdom – another view of taking the book of Divine appointments from the Father.

Given a Kingdom and Glory

Daniel sees the returning King, formally being given “all power in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18). “And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.” This does not refer to Jesus’ empowerment when He returns to earth, but rather to what He received when He returned to heaven. There is no need for confusion on this matter. It is as though the Spirit extended Himself to assure our hearts that we have a Savior who has been exalted, now possesses the Kingdom, and is presently over all.

- “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).
- “For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ ” (Acts 2:34-36).
- “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior ” (Acts 5:31).
- “Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under His feet ” (Eph 1:20-22).
- “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name ” (Phil 2:9).
- “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities

and powers being made subject unto Him ” (1 Pet 3:22).

The government has been placed upon His shoulder, just as Isaiah prophesied (Isa 9:6). The Kingdom has been given to Him, and is now referred to as “the Kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13), and “the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:11). It is also referred to “the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph 5:5). John said that when he was on the Isle of Patmos, he was in “the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9).

Christ’s ascension has to do with Jesus returning to heaven to receive the Kingdom and dominion as a glorified Man.

The ascension of Jesus was more than an event. It was the preparation or the commencement of “the day of salvation” and “the accepted time.” It was necessary for Jesus to return to heaven, as a glorified Man, to be invested with authority and power “over all,” in order for men to be saved.

THE ESSENTIALITY AND CENTRALITY OF THE ASCENSION

The ascension of Jesus was more than an event. It was the preparation or the commencement of “the day of salvation” and “the accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2). It was necessary for Jesus to return to heaven, as a glorified Man, to be invested with authority and power “over all,” in order for men to be saved.

In our time, the grandeur of salvation has been greatly obscured by overly-simplistic explanations of it. I do not believe it has registered on the Christianity community what it actually takes to save a person.

In order for any person or persons to be saved, brought safely to glory, and be able to survive the day of judgment, the Savior, as a Man, had to be invested with ALL power. He Himself prayed to the Father, “As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as Thou hast given Him ” (John 17:2). Further, the salvation must be accomplished by a Man IN heaven! As staggering as the power of angels is, an angel could not save humanity. Neither, indeed, could salvation be accomplished by a fiat, decree, or Divine word, as was the creation (Heb 11:3). Add to this that God must be “just” in saving men, as well as merciful (Rom 3:26; 1 John 1:9). Men must be saved because God is righteous, as well as gracious. Truth must enter into the salvation as well as compassion.

Briefly ponder some of the effects of Christ’s ascension and consequent exaltation.

- Exalted to give repentance and the remission of sins. “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).
- Given to the church as One who is above all principality and power, with everything under His feet. “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church” NIV (Eph 1:22).
- His presence in the glory is preparing that realm for us. “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).
- If He did not go away, the Holy Spirit would not come to dwell with us. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7).
- Having ascended into heaven, He has given gifts to men from heaven. “Wherefore

he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Eph 4:8).

A church that is not heavenly minded is a great contradiction. The presence of Jesus in heaven demands that our affection be placed there. It demands that we look to Him there while we are running the race with patience that has been set before us. Our citizenship is there. Our inheritance is there. We have a “better and enduring substance” there.

He is ministering as our High Priest in heaven – interceding for us, and enabling us to approach to God and be received by Him. “Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession” (Heb 4:14).

- He is ever living to make intercession for us in heaven, else we could not be saved. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

- He is appearing in the presence of God for us, thereby ensuring that we will be received if we come to Him. “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24).

- Redemption was effected by Jesus returning to heaven. “Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us” (Heb 9:12).

- He is mediating the New Covenant from heaven, ensuring that all of its benefits are received by those who believe on Him. This is His “more excellent ministry,” transcending his ministry while He dwelt among men. “But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also He is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6). And again, “And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).

A church that is not heavenly minded is a great contradiction. The presence of Jesus in heaven demands that our affection be placed there (Col 3:1-2). It demands that we look to Him there while we are running the race with patience that has been set before us (Heb 12:1-2). Our citizenship is there (Phil 3:20). Our inheritance is there (1 Pet 1:4). We have a “better and enduring substance” there (Heb 10:34). Our resurrection bodies are there (2 Cor 5:2). We are also waiting for Him to return from heaven (1 Thess 1:10).

OUT OF THEIR SIGHT

For over three years Jesus was in the domain where He could be seen and touched. However, in order for peace to be made, reconciliation be accomplished, and the Holy Spirit be given, He had to leave this domain and return to the untroubled and superior realm of eternal glory. His flesh was actually a “veil” of obscurement, prohibiting men from seeing Him as He is (Heb 10:20).

Therefore, when His work on earth was completed, and He had showed Himself alive to His disciples with “many infallible proofs,” leaving instructions for them, a cloud “received Him out of their sight.” He went beyond the reach of natural aptitude.

Jesus told His disciples He was going to leave them in order that the Holy Spirit might come, and that they would see Him no more. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see Me

no more” (John 16:7-10). He also told Him that the world would see Him no more. “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more ; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also” (John 14:19).

After Jesus rose from the dead, no one who did not prefer His company when He walked among men ever saw Him again. Peter explained this to Cornelius. “Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God , even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:40-41).

The strength of the Christian religion is not found in its rules or special way of life. It is not found in its beginnings or, its greatest workers, or even its pure and profitable doctrine. Rather, at its root, its strength is found in its Living Head – one who “was dead,” but is “alive for evermore” (Rev 1:18). Our Savior had to die – but we are not saved by a dead Savior! We are “saved by His life” – His resurrected life (Rom 5:10) in which He mediates and intercedes.

The basis for our salvation is found in His atoning death and glorious resurrection. But many sons are being brought to glory by a living and active Lord – one who has ascended into the realm from which He is now working.

“ 10a And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up . . . ” Other versions read, “And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was departing,” NASB “They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going,” NIV “While he was going and they were gazing up toward heaven ,” NRSV “As they were straining their eyes for another glimpse .” LIVING “As Jesus was going away, the apostles were staring into the sky ,” IE “But, while they stood intently gazing into the sky as He went,” WEYMOUTH and “and while they were gazing after Him into heaven.” WILLIAMS

It is apparent that Jesus rose slowly into the heavens, permitting some last glimpses of Him. This time the disciples eyes were not “heavy with sleep” as with Peter, James, and John on the mount of transfiguration (Luke 9:32). They were all alert and straining to keep Him in their vision as long as they possibly could. Their eyes were not shifting too and fro. If there were other things within range of their vision, they were certainly paying no heed to them. Their eyes were riveted on the departing Savior, and they would not be turned aside.

THEY HAD BEEN MADE READY

It seems to me that their time with Jesus had prepared them for this singular event. They had witnessed His great power, and while they had not grown accustomed to the unusual, they were not unacquainted with it. Had Jesus risen into the heavens before them when they first started following Him, they would no doubt have cried out in fear, as when they saw Him walking on the water (John 6:19). Now, however, the works and words of the blessed Lord had made their hearts more supple, so that they could look intently upon Him, even though He was disappearing from them, and doing so contrary to all the laws of nature.

A PICTURE OF LOOKING UNTO JESUS

Faith looks intently upon Jesus as the disciples looked intently on Him with their natural eyes, watching Him pass from their sight. Such a look refuses to be distracted. It gives no heed to competing voices that call out, “Lo here! Or “Lo there!”

This is also an excellent portrayal of what it means to look to Jesus, or set our affection on things above. In regard to the progress of faith we are admonished, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross,

despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). How does a person “look unto Jesus” – a Jesus that is not within the range of natural vision?

Faith looks intently upon Jesus as the disciples looked intently on Him with their natural eyes , watching Him pass from their sight. Such a look refuses to be distracted. It gives no heed to competing voices that call out, “Lo here! Or “Lo there!” (Lk 17:21). Convinced of the reality of Jesus, and having tasted of the benefits of His presence, the one who is “looking unto Jesus” has subordinated all other would-be priorities. The “affection” of such a person is “set on things above, not on things o the earth” (Col 3:1). If Jesus left here to prepare a place for us, so we could leave also, then what rationale can be presented for having our minds nailed like Sisera’s head to the earth (Judges 4:21)?

Let there be no mistake about this. The measure of a person’s love for Christ can be precisely measured by how intently he can look upon Christ Jesus. How long can his attention be riveted on the Son of God? How quickly does he need some distraction? How rapidly does the interest in truth wane? How long can an interest be sustained in “those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1)?

When we are confronted with professing “Christians” who have little or

Let no soul be so utterly naive as to imagine disinterest in the Lord of glory will be ignored in our generation, or that a person can ignore Jesus with impunity.

no interest in the King Himself, and even less in His Word, what are we to think? What of those who have not even risen to the level of those precious souls under the Old Covenant, who “spake often to one another,” drawing the attention of the Almighty God (Mal 3:16)? In Malachi’s day an atonement for sin had not yet been made (Rom 5:10). Peace had not yet been made with God (Col 1:20), and the world had not yet been reconciled (2 Cor 5:18-19). The conscience had not yet been purged (Heb 9:14), nor had the devil been destroyed (Heb 2:14). The Holy Spirit had not yet been sent to men, because Jesus had not yet been glorified (John 7:38-39; Gal 4:6). Men had not yet been called into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9), nor had they been washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11). There was no heavenly Intercessor (Heb 7:25), and people were not being changed “from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of our God” (2 Cor 3:18). Men had not yet been “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17).

Can it be that there can possibly be less interest heavenward in this day of salvation, than in the time when men were “not made perfect without us” (Heb 11:40). Is it remotely possible that those who died “not having received the promise” (Heb 11:13) were actually more fervent than those who have received it? If the men of Nineveh will rise up in the day of judgment and condemn the generation who heard Jesus speak on earth, how will they address those who refused Him who is now speaking from heaven (Matt 12:41; Heb 12:25). If the queen of Sheba will rise up in the day of judgment and condemn those who did not go out of their way to go to Jesus in the flesh, what will she say to those who could have come to Him and learned from Him, and yet refused to do so (Luke 11:31; Matt 11:28-30)?

We have here a record of the disciples looking intently upon Jesus as He faded from their view. They did it before they understood what was really happening. They did it before they received the Holy Spirit. They did it before Jesus gave repentance and remission of sins? They did it before Jesus was exalted at the right hand of God. Let no soul be so utterly naive as to imagine disinterest in the Lord of glory will be ignored in our generation (or any other), or that a person can ignore Jesus with impunity.

TWO MEN IN WHITE APPAREL

“10b . . . behold, two men stood by them in white apparel.” Other versions read, “behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them,” NASB “when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside

them,” NIV “suddenly two men in white robes stood by them,” NRSV “two men came to them , in white clothing,” BBE “two men were found standing near them , in white garments,” NAB “two whiterobed men suddenly stood there among them,” NLT and “Suddenly, two angels stood beside them . They were dressed in white clothes.” IE

When “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14), the angels came down to announce the event (Matt 1:20; Lk 1:26-38; 2:9-13). When there was imminent danger for the infant Jesus, angels became involved, directing the holy family on what to do (Matt 2:13,19). Immediately after his baptism, when Jesus was sorely tempted by the devil, “angels came and ministered unto Him” (Matt 4:11). When, on the eve of His betrayal and death, He prayed with “strong crying and tears,” and His sweat fell on the ground like thunderous drops of blood, “there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him” (Heb 5:7; Luke 22:43,44). When He rose from the dead an angel descended from heaven and “rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it” (Matt 28:2). Two angels sat, one at the head, and one at foot, of the place where Jesus lay in the grave (John 20:12).

It should certainly not surprise us that angels would appear when the Lord ascended into heaven. Angels, however, must make themselves apparent to men, for they are “spirits” (Psa 104:4; Heb 12:7) – and “a spirit hath not flesh and bones” (Lk 24:39).

TWO MEN

Saints are reminded that angels can come to them in the form of men. “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2).

- Abraham once entertained three angels, who had the appearance of “three men” (Gen 18:2-33).

- Lot had two angels visit him, who also had the appearance of two men (Gen 19:1-17). Verses 5,8,10,12 and 16 refer to them as “men.” Verses 1 and 15 refer to them as “angels.” These were among the three “men” who had visited Abraham earlier (Gen 18:16,22).

- Joshua saw an angel; – no less than “the captain of the host of the Lord.” He appeared to Joshua as a man (Josh 5:14-15).

- Jacob once wrestled with “a man until the breaking of the day” (Gen 32:24). Hosea tells us that he was actually wrestling with an “angel” (Hos 12:4).

- An angel appeared to Manoah and his wife (Samson’s parents). In the thirteenth chapter of Judges, the messenger is referred to as a “man” (13:6,8,10-12). He is also referred to as an “angel” (13:3,9,13,15,16,17,18, 19,20,21).

- An angel spoke to Ezekiel, appearing as a man (Ezek 10:2-6).

- An angel came to Daniel, who appeared as a man (Dan 8:16; 10:5,18; 12:6-7). The book of Daniel even refers to Gabriel as “the man Gabriel” (Dan 9:21).

- Zechariah saw an angel who appeared as a man (Zech 1:10).

I gather that these appearances were accommodations to the frailty of the natural man – a state brought on by transgression. First, men have no natural faculty that permit them to behold angels, who are “spirits.” Second, were they able to behold angels as they really are, I do not doubt that their hearts would fail them for fear.

WHITE APPAREL

These men were attired in white apparel. When Mary saw two angels sitting in the empty tomb,

they were “in white ” (John 20:12). When the women

Can Jesus have so much attention from heaven, where there is not so much as one angelic spirit for whom He died, and yet be so little preferred among the race for whom He died?

came to the empty tomb, they saw “a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a long white garment” (Mark 16:5). John saw seven angels come out of the heavenly temple, “clothed in pure and white linen” (Rev 15:6).

White is the predominate color of heaven, and speaks of purity and glory. When Jesus was transfigured, “His raiment was white as light” (Matt 17:2). Luke says it was “white and glistening” (Lk 9:29). The glorified saints are depicted as “clothed in white ” (Rev 7:9,13) – robes that had been “washed” and made “white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev 7:14). The glorified Son of man is presented as sitting on a “white cloud, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle” (Rev 14:14). The “righteousness of the saints” is portrayed as “fine linen, clean and white ” (Rev 19:8). The glorified Christ, “called Faithful and True” is set forth as riding “a white horse” (Rev 19:11). His armies are said to ride “upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (Rev 19:14). The heavenly throne is described as “a great white throne” (Rev 20:11).

These angels appeared as “two men,” but they had heavenly attire, and did not comport themselves as mere men. They were from a holy God and a pure realm, and even their appearance as men confirmed this to be the case.

Can Jesus have so much attention from heaven, where there is not so much as one angelic spirit for whom He died, and yet be so little preferred among the race for whom He died? Ah, it is a bitter reality that I often pondered. The church is to be the premier exhibit of what the grace of God can do – not how much it is needed!

WHY? WHY?

“ 11a Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven?” Other versions read, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky?” NASB “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up toward heaven?” NRSV “Ye Galilean men, why stand ye and look toward heaven?” MRD “Men of Galilee, why are you standing there looking at the sky?” NAB and “Men of Galilee, why are you standing here staring at the sky?” NLT

By this time, Jesus has no doubt disappeared from sight. Still, the disciples remain with their vision fixed upon the sky, hoping, no doubt, for yet another glimpse of their blessed Lord. Perhaps they had made a correlation between Elisha seeing Elijah being taken up, and themselves. Elisha was promised that if he saw Elijah “taken from” him, he would receive a double portion of his spirit. He did, in fact, see Elijah parted from him as “there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kgs 2:10-11). He then took of Elijah’s mantle that “fell from him,” and went his way to fulfill the role of a mighty prophet of God.

The parallel is not a perfect one, for the disciples did not receive a double portion of the Spirit Jesus had. God did not give “the Spirit by measure unto Him,” so it was impossible to have a double measure of that Spirit (John 3:34). Still, they were going to enter into a ministry in which they would do “greater works,” because Jesus ascended back to the Father (John 14:12).

The Spirit does not elaborate on the thoughts coursing through the disciples’ minds as they saw Jesus disappear from their sight in His ascent upward. It seems to me, however, that their minds were certainly not empty at the time.

Now, the angels standing by them speak. They are not from earth, but they know what is going on

in earth. They know who these men are, and where they are from: “Ye men of Galilee.” In their words, you sense a certain angelic consternation at the dulness of men. They have come from a realm that is filled with knowledge. They have been privy to the coming of the Messiah into the world, and they have a certain understanding of future events. Coming from the heavenly realm, where understanding and recollection are at a much higher level, it must be something like a trial to confront the slowness and dulness of men. They ask the men why they are standing and gazing up into heaven, even after the Savior had disappeared from their sight.

Jesus had told the disciples where to go and what to do: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). It was now time to leave Bethany and head back to the city. The angels wonder why they have not done so, but remain “looking up toward heaven.” Jesus had passed into the domain that, for men in the flesh, can only be accessed by faith. Too, the corporeal presence of the Lord was to be experienced no more by them – as He had told them: “ye see Me no more” (John 16:9). The angels expect them to quickly return to Jerusalem, yet they remain with the eyes fixed on the heavens. These angels are not as tolerant of retarded responses as we poor mortals. They have questioned holy men concerning their ignorance (Zech 4:4-6,11-14; Rev 7:13-14).

“ 11b this same Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “This Jesus,” NASB and “This very Jesus.”
WILLIAMS

There was a sense in which Jesus was different following His resurrection. Now He was “alive for evermore” (Rev 1:18). Sometimes He was not recognizable because “He appeared in another form” (Mk 16:12), and “their eyes were holden that they should not know Him” (Luke 24:16). Until she heard Him speak her name, Mary thought He was “the gardener” (John 20:15). He had suddenly appeared in the room with the disciples when the doors were “shut” (John 20:19), something He had never done prior to His death.

Following His resurrection, when Jesus appeared to His disciples, they “supposed they had seen a spirit.” It was then that He said to them, “And he said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I myself : handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have. And when He had thus spoken, He showed them His hands and His feet” (Luke 24:37-40). It was the “same Jesus” with whom they had walked for over three years.

Now the angels tell them they have a word to say about this “same Jesus.” He has taken back His life, according to the commandment delivered to Him (John 10:17-18). In some respects He appeared different, but essentially, He was the same – the same Person, the same agenda, and the same purpose.

“ 11c . . . which is taken up from you into heaven . . . ” Other versions read, “who has been taken from you into heaven,” NASB “who was taken up from you into heaven,” NRSV “who was received up from you into heaven ,” ASV “Jesus has gone away into heaven ,” LIVING “ carried away from you into heaven ,” IE and “Who was caught away and lifted up from among you into heaven .”
AMPLIFIED

As already established, this is a pivotal point of sound doctrine. Although Jesus is with His people, even unto the end of the world (Matt 28:20), He Himself is “in heaven.” He presently dwells in our hearts “by faith” (Eph 3:17), but He Himself is in heaven. Christ “in you” is “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), but He Himself is in heaven. Our experience of Jesus is one of faith, not of sight or of touch. Recently, certain American preachers and teachers have been referring to “the tangible presence of Jesus,” and “the tangible presence of the Spirit.” This is foolish talk and, at the very best, is spoken out of ignorance. The word “tangible” means “capable of being touched: able to be perceived as materially existent, especially by the sense of touch.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

Prior to His ascension, Jesus was present with His disciples in a “tangible” way. John wrote of that circumstance, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). Following His resurrection, Jesus appeared in a tangible manner to His disciples. He told them, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have” (Luke 24:39). He was with them tangibly.

Now, however, Jesus has been “taken up from” us “into heaven.” He is no longer with us in a tangible way. He cannot be accessed or perceived by any human senses – He has been taken from us! Human sight cannot see Him. Human touch cannot feel Him. Human ears cannot hear Him. Human smell cannot detect Him. Even if He speaks to men from heaven, as He did to Saul of Tarsus, they must be made to hear and understand His voice by supernatural means. If some person upon earth sees Him, like Stephen when he was being stoned, it both private and miraculous. He has been taken up from us.

Jesus is “in heaven!” A special point is made of this. Our understanding of Jesus is to include this key ingredient: He is in heaven.

- “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven , and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).
- “And it came to pass, while he blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven ” (Luke 24:51).
- “For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself , now to appear in the presence of God for us” (Heb 9:24).
- “Who is gone into heaven , and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22).

The Scriptures affirm that “ God is in heaven” (Eccl 5:2), and Jesus is at His “right hand” – having been seated there with great power and glory (Mk 16:19; Acts 2:33; 7:55-56; Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22). There He is reigning over all.

How, then, can a person be resting in Jesus and have his affection placed on earthly things? If Jesus is in heaven, how is it possible for a person who has faith to focus upon this world? To attempt such a thing is like Peter turning his eyes from Jesus to the storm while he was walking on the water. As soon as he did this, he began to sink! Likewise, the person whose attention is diverted from Jesus, who is in heaven, to the things of this world will surely begin to sink. This is the reason for all backsliding (Jer 14:7), every case of a person being overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1), and every occasion of sin (1 John 2:1). It is why men “draw back” (Heb 10:39), “fall” (Heb 4:11). “depart from the faith” (1 Tim 4:1), and leave their “first love” (Rev 2:4).

It is time to get the psychoanalysts out of the church. There is no place for them among the redeemed. Aberrant behavior is directly traceable to self-interests and a worldly mind-set. See, Jesus is “in heaven,” and therefore it is not possible to be holy, in god’s favor, or provided with Divine benefits unless your affection is placed there.

Jesus has been “taken up” from the world and the access of all who make it their home. As soon as men cease to live within a lively awareness of that reality, spiritual life begins to wane, and all spiritual resources are out of reach.

HE SHALL COME AS HE HAS GONE

The holy angels know that Jesus is going to return from heaven. In fact, they will accompany

Him (Matt 16:27; 2 Thess 1:7). He will come in all of His glory, accompanied by the glory of the Father and that of the angels as well (Lk 9:26). We are even told that an angel will announce the time in which the world will be reaped.

“ 11d . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.” Other versions read, “will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven,” NASB “ will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven,” NIV “shall so come in like manner as ye beheld Him going into heaven,” ASV “will come again, in the same way as you saw Him go into heaven,” BBE “shall thus come in the manner in which ye have beheld Him going into heaven,” DARBY “will return in the same way as you have seen Him going into heaven,” NAB “will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven,” NAS “And someday, just as you saw him go, He will return !” NLT and “and some day, just as He went , He will return,” LIVING

The holy angels know that Jesus is going to return from heaven. In fact, they will accompany Him (Matt 16:27; 2 Thess 1:7). He will come in all of His glory, accompanied by the glory of the Father and that of the angels as well (Lk 9:26). We are even told that an angel will announce the time in which the world will be reaped. “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on His head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in Thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. And He that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped” (Rev 14:14-16).

When Jesus was with His disciples, He told them that He was going to come again “from heaven.”

- “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt 16:27).
- “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory” (Matt 25:31).
- “For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26).
- “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again , and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

Apostolic Doctrine Declares It

This was also a critical point of apostolic doctrine. There is no room for a theology that omits or confuses this!

- “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7).
- “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come , who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor 4:5).
- “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come ” (1 Cor 11:26).
- “And to wait for His Son from heaven , whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).
- “When He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thess 1:10).
- “For yet a little while, and He that shall come will come , and will not tarry” (Heb

10:37).

Now the angels announce that Jesus will return in the same way the disciples have seen Him leave.

WITH THE CLOUDS

- “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mat 24:30).

- “Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven ” (Mat 26:64).

- “And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory” (Mark 13:26).

Many professed “Christian” teachers have neutralized the powerful effects of the knowledge of Christ’s return with their theories and traditions. They have so muddied the theological waters that when some people hear of Jesus coming back, they can only think of the traditions of men.

- “Behold, He cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Rev 1:7).

WITH THE HOLY ANGELS

- “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels ; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Mat 16:27).

- “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory” (Mat 25:31).

- “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of Him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels ” (Mark 8:38).

- “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2 Thess 1:7).

VISIBLY

- “Which in his times He shall show , who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15).

- “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen” (Rev 1:7).

- “And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of Him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (Rev 6:16-17).

Just as surely as heavenly personalities were acutely aware of Christ’s return to heaven (Dan 7:13-14), so all personalities on earth will be aware of His return here. It simply is not possible to hide a Jesus who appears in “all of His glory,” together with the Father’s glory and that of the holy angels (Lk 9:26). To suggest the possibility of such a thing betrays an abysmal ignorance of Christ’s glory, and insults the faith and intelligence of “God’s elect” (Rom 8:33; Tit 1:1).

Many professed “Christian” teachers have neutralized the powerful effects of the knowledge of

Christ's return with their theories and traditions. They have so muddied the theological waters that when some people hear of Jesus coming back, they think of these things:

- The antichrist.
- The tribulation.
- The rapture.
- A glorified kingdom on earth.
- A glorified Christ perceived by men the flesh.
- A war between Jesus and men.
- Pre-millennialism – a return before the millennium.
- Post-millennialism – a return after the millennium.
- A-millennialism – a return during the millennium.

Whatever may be said of these views, the Holy Spirit has not spoken of the return of Christ within such contexts. That is not the "manner" in which He left, and it will not be the manner in which He returns. The angels know this, and the church should not know it as well! The church, as the appointed "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), and is responsible for delivering a

In the book of Hebrews, the Spirit says three central things about Christ. They concern what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. They are also referred to as His appearings, He IS appearing. He HAS appeared, and He WILL appear.

proper view of the return of the Lord. This subject should be clear in the minds of believers, and should be driven into the conscience of unbelievers. The fact that these conditions do not exist negate much of the modern church's profession. If the modern church is not clear about such a central thing as Christ's return, how can we be sure it is clear about anything?

Buttressing the Point

I understand that this may appear too strong. However, God has spoken to this matter, and there can be no question about it.

In the book of Hebrews, the Spirit says three central things about Christ. They concern what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. They are also referred to as His appearings, He IS appearing. He HAS appeared, and He WILL appear.

• **WHAT HE IS DOING.** "For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb 9:24).

• **WHAT HE HAS DONE.** "Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (Heb 9:25-26).

• **WHAT HE WILL DO.** "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb 9:27-28).

In which of these appearings do you feel God allows for us to be wrong, or in error? What is there in all of God's Word that suggests we can be incorrect in our view of the Son of God? If God has given us "the record of His Son," is it one that is so vague that differing views can be entertained of that record, and the individual still be honored by God?

If it is true that faith in Christ is essential (Gal 3:26; Col 1:4; 2:5), can that faith be founded upon an improper perception of Jesus? There is really no need to labor this point. A Jesus that does not precisely conform to the “record” God has given of Him is nothing more than “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:3) – a “Jesus” that cannot possibly save.

If angels, to whom the salvation of Christ does not apply, have an understanding of the fact and manner of Christ’s return, what possible justification can there be for those for whom the salvation was wrought being ignorant of it? What would lead any person to imagine that such a condition is acceptable, or that salvation provides for such ignorance?

In view of this text, I cannot conceive of holy angels being unconcerned about such a situation – and remember, they are our ministers. It is possible that our spiritual condition bears upon their ministry to us.

CONCLUSION

The beginning of this grand book has provided a kind of index that will be seen throughout of its recorded events. According to Divine purpose, and in strict accord with Christ’s ministry, He Himself would be both the substance and incentive of all valid labor. His disciples would labor with a keen awareness of these realities.

- What Jesus had accomplished by the sacrifice of Himself.
- That He is presently in heaven, mediating the New Covenant, making intercession for the saints, and governing the Kingdom.
- That He will come again, bringing His reward with Him, and holding all men in strict account.

At no point will they embark on any mission, or deliver any discourse, that ignores these realities. Circumstances will not be allowed to upstage what Jesus IS doing, ignore what He HAD done, or leave people unprepared for what He WILL do. That, in turn, sets the tone for the work of the church throughout all ages. It is a direction established by heaven, revealed by the Lord Jesus, and facilitated by the Holy Spirit.

Throughout history, the church has been diverted from this Divine focus. This has been owing to the activity of the powers of darkness, which have broke forth in power because of the carnality and ignorance that was found in the professing church. False prophets and pretentious leaders have been used by the devil to shine the theological spotlight on things other than the Son of God. As a result all manner of erroneous doctrines and traditions have erupted like Mount Vesuvius. There have even been whole periods of time when it appeared as though the church had been totally corrupted. The Dark Ages, for example, was a era described as being “A period of intellectual darkness and barbarity.” It extended from the collapse of Roman civilization until the period of the Renaissance – a staggering span of 1,000 years. During this time religious superstition and a hierarchy of authority dominated Christianity. Christ was no longer central in Christendom, but the church itself became primal. Yet, as in all ages, there remained a “remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5).

It was not until the sixteenth century, with the rise of the Reformation Movement that some measure of freshness, understanding, and life, was injected into the mainstream of Christianity.

Toward the eighteenth century, another blow was struck to the emphasis of Christendom. A period referred to as “The Enlightenment” rose on the horizon of human thought. The French led out in this period, exalting human reason to the throne, and expelling religion from the intellectual scene. In the wake of this movement “Higher Criticism” made its entrance. This approach subjected the Scriptures to human assessment, and thus was born the plethora of Biblical footnotes referring to “older and

better manuscripts,” together with the exclusion of such texts as Mark 16 and John 8 from the Scriptures. This particular approach accents the “original language” or “original text” of Scripture, even though there is not so much as a single page of an original manuscript in all of the world. This approach is a major diversion in our day.

Lest I be unduly distracted in this brief digression, let me make the real point. What happened in all of these deviations was that Christ was moved to the back room of theology. Commensurate with all of these misplaced emphases, what Christ had accomplished in His death became obscure, or, at the very least, distorted. What Christ is presently doing became virtually unknown. The declared reality of His return became the basis for a phenomenal amount of speculation and religious opinion – things that have now been codified and imposed on professing Christians, who themselves are without understanding.

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

Why is it necessary to say such things. Are not such observations nothing more references to meaningless history? Indeed not! My point is that the book of Acts presents the very real work of God. It gives us the context of valid labors for the Lord. It identifies how people with pure minds and good hearts thought. This is how God REALLY works, now that Jesus has been enthroned at His right hand, invested with all power in heaven and earth, and given as Head over all to the church.

If we read the book of Acts with the modern church in mind, we will not get much out of it, for that kind of church is not found this volume. If we read it with current religious trends in mind, it will appear nothing more than a record of the way things “used to be.” We will not be confronted with an institutionalized church, formalized Christian education, religious careers, and religious businesses and specialized endeavors. This is a record of how the Lord Jesus worked through His disciples by means of the Holy Spirit. It will not dignify human thought, but Divine purpose. It will not exalt an institution, but the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It will not smother us with cultural concerns, but subject our minds to the truth, the source of that truth, and its power among men.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #3

THE DISCIPLES RETURN TO JERUSALEM

“ 1:12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey. 13 And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. 14 These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.” (Acts 1:12-14)

INTRODUCTION

After being commanded by Him to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with “power from on high,” Christ’s disciples, had witnessed His ascension into heaven. At this time, the world was on the verge of being impacted by a revolutionary and powerful message. It would be delivered by those who were invested with Divine power.

DIRECTED FROM WITHIN

These people, though accustomed to being in the bodily presence of the Lord, would embark upon their mission without that visible and tangible presence. They would not be directed from without, as they were when Jesus was “among” them, but would be empowered and directed from within .

The New Covenant is “new” in every way. The covenant itself is not one of worldly prosperity and visible impressions. It is not a covenant that is established upon signs and wonders, and sensible manifestations – even though such things do occur. This is a covenant in which an essential change is wrought in the people themselves. All of the activities of those who participate in that covenant reflect that essential change.

Lest we forget the nature of the New Covenant, or are unduly impressed by those pretending to represent the Lord Jesus, let your heart again ponder the covenant under which Christ's messengers will operate. Everything about their activities will confirm the

CONTENTS

- **OBEDIENT DISCIPLES (1:12)**
- **THEY WENT INTO AN UPPER ROOM (1:13a)**
- **THE ELEVEN (1:13b)**
- **THE WAITING BEGINS (1:14a)**
- **DO NOT FORGET THE OTHERS (1:14b)**
- **CONCLUSION**

reality of these characteristics.

- The mind would be effected. "I will put my laws into their mind" (Heb 8:10a). That is, the people will think differently. Their thoughts reflect the mind and law of the Lord. Their thinking is in strict harmony with the word of the Lord. The way in which they think, as well as the substance of their thoughts, will be in accord with the mind and will of the Lord. Their thoughts and meditations would be "acceptable" in the sight of the Lord (Psa 19:14).

- The heart would be effected. "and write [My laws] them in their hearts" (Heb 8:10b). That is, the affections, desires, preferences, and objectives of the people will be wholly altered. They would have an appetite for the Word of the Lord, desiring it more than their "necessary food" (Job 23:12). Their "delight" would be in the "law of the Lord" (Psa 1:2), and they would "love" it with zeal and consistency (Psa 119:97). The people will want to obey the Lord.

- God would be their God. "I will be to them a God," or "I will be their God" NKJV (Heb 8:10c). That is, the people would not consider any other god, or be drawn away from the true God. The real God would be their preference, the One they confessed, and the only One they served.

- They will be God's People. ". . .they shall be to me a people" (Heb 8:10d). That is, God will freely identify Himself with the people, not having to confess their recalcitrance as He did with Israel (Ex 32:9; 33:3,5; Deut 9:13; Isa 30:9; 65:2; Rom 10:21).

- They would ALL know the Lord. "And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest" (Heb 8:11). That is, they would all be acquainted with the Lord, know His ways, and walk with Him.

- Sins would be Forgiven and Remembered no more. "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more" (Heb 8:12). That is, sin would be put away, the conscience purged, and justification from all things realized.

It is within the framework of this covenant that Christ's laborers would conduct their affairs. They would speak with circumcised and illuminated hearts. They would teach with understanding and insight. All of this would be made possible through the power of the Holy Spirit who would come upon them.

THEY SPEAK FROM WITHIN

It is within the framework of this covenant that Christ's laborers would conduct their affairs. They would speak with circumcised and illuminated hearts. They would teach with understanding and insight.

From their bellies would "flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). They would, in the ultimate sense, fulfill the words spoken to Job by Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite: "For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles" (Job 32:18-19). Solomon's words would be brought to their full measure: "The mouth of a righteous man is a well of life" (Prov 10:11). They would set the tone for "the day of salvation," with joy drawing "water out of the wells of salvation" (Isa 12:4). In fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy, "living waters shall go out from Jerusalem" (Zech 14:8).

THEY WERE ORIENTED FOR THIS

Throughout their tenure with Jesus of Nazareth, they had been oriented for this time – even though they were not as aware of that orientation as they now would be. The Spirit moved Mark to write this concerning the apostles: "And He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14).

It is true that Jesus, upon returning to heaven, was going to empower them by sending His Spirit to dwell within them. As He Himself said, "And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:16-17). Again He said, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you" (John 16:7).

However, there was a three and one-half year investment in these men before they were given the Holy Spirit. They were exposed to the Divine manner – to the compassion of the Lord, as well as His indignation with pretentious religion. They beheld the subjection of the spiritual underworld to Him, and how readily it yielded to His authority.

It appears as though precious few people have suddenly been wafted into spiritual maturity and empowerment. Many of Christ's disciples were disciples of John first, readying them to become Christ's own disciples. As it is written, "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus" (John 1:35-37). John goes on to tell us that one of those disciples was "Andrew,

It is not proper to expect to make great spiritual strides without some investment of your person. Mediocre disciples are nothing more than the result of second-rate interest and investment.

Simon Peter's brother" (John 1:40).

A Point to be Seen

Suffice it to say, there is something to be seen in all of this. It is not proper to expect to make great spiritual strides without some investment of your person. Mediocre disciples are nothing more than the result of second-rate interest and investment. If you want a lot from the Lord, then you must give Him a lot of yourself.

ORDINARY, YET EXTRAORDINARY

From the standpoint of the flesh, these people were ordinary, but in a few days, they would be

transformed into bold and effective witnesses. When the Spirit of God came upon them, they would be anything but ordinary.”

From this very hour, they will begin conducting their affairs with insight and great expectation. Jesus would no sooner leave them than they would begin doing exactly what He said. They would even be led to fulfill a need of which Jesus had not specially told them.

Now we will begin to see how the people of God go about their lives with an absent Jesus – present with them only in Spirit, and out of the reach of their senses. Keep in mind, this is not how they have lived during the past three and a half years. There have been very few times when they were required to launch out without the physical presence of Jesus – as when they were sent across the sea by themselves (Mk 6:46-48). Now, however, they would live out the rest of their lives in the service of the risen Christ – while they are “absent from the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).

The presence of Jesus with them during the previous forty days has had a calculated effect upon their persons. Even while they wait for “the promise of the Father,” there will be a marked difference in their thinking and conduct.

These disciples will not set up an accountability network, or pass out a list of rules and regulations among themselves. They will operate within the framework of faith’s awareness of the Person of the glorified Christ, and His words to them while He was with them. We will behold how men live by faith.

OBEDIENT DISCIPLES

“ 1:12 Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.”

Having been told by the heavenly messengers that they would see Jesus again – at the appointed time – they commence the time of waiting. Jesus had told them what to do during the next few days, and now they were to commence the doing of it.

MEMORIALS

The disciples do not linger on the Mount of Olives, nor do they build a shrine there, as some professed Christians are wont to do. In fact, there have even been holy men who erected monuments to the occasions of Divine deliverance and revelation.

JACOB. When Jacob “went out of Beersheba, and went toward Haran,” the Lord appeared to him in a dream, confirming the extension of the Abrahamic covenant through him. It so impressed the patriarch that he took the stone he had used for a pillow “and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it.” He called the name of the place Bethel, and made a monument of the stone. “And this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee” (Gen 28:22).

MOSES. When Moses received the Law he made a holy monument to the occasion. “And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD” (Ex 24:4-5).

ISRAEL. When Israel crossed over in to Canaan, according to the word of the Lord through Moses, they assembled some very large stones, plastering them with plaster, and writing upon them all the words of the Law. They also build an altar there with untooled stones (Deut 27:1-6).

JOSHUA. When Israel went into the promised land, the Lord commanded Joshua to have a chosen man from each of the twelve tribes take a stone from the middle of the Jordan – where the priests feet stood as they crossed over. They then erected these stones as a sort of memorial to their crossing. When children of future generations inquired about these stones, the people would testify to the parting of the Jordan, and of their crossing over it into the promised land (Josh 4:1-9).

JOSHUA. After entering the promised land, Joshua gathered the people together in Shechem. There he made a covenant with them to do all the words of the Lord. To mark the occasion, Joshua wrote all of the words of the covenant in a book, took a great stone and set it up under an oak tree. That stone became a witness to the people (Josh 24:25-27).

SAMUEL. During the days of the Judges, when Israel had soundly defeated the Philistines, Samuel “took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us” (1 Sam 7:12).

However, even though the occasion we are considering transcended all of those former occurrences, yet there was no monument or pillar erected on the Mount of Olives. The disciples left the Mount without establishing a visible memorial on it – something that was completely out of harmony with the conduct of many righteous people of the past. Why was this so?

The nature of the New Covenant does not allow for the accent of visible things. It is a covenant in which the heart and mind are the prominent part. While there is nothing inherently evil about memorials as established prior to Christ, they are of a lower order, necessitated because of the rarity of faith. In Christ there are two visible ordinances that are, in one sense of speaking, memorials. They differ, however, from the kind of memorials mentioned above. They are baptism and the Lord’s table. While both of them can be seen with the eye, their power is found in their spiritual nature.

Our Baptism

Baptism identifies a point in time when we came into Christ (Gal 3:27a), put on Christ (Gal 3:27b), our sins were washed away (Acts 22:16), we received the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), realized the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11-12), and were placed in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13). When we ponder our baptism with a mind that is “controlled by the Spirit” NIV (Rom 8:6), we realize that we became “dead to sin,” and therefore can “live no longer therein” (Rom 6:2-7). We also are brought to the conclusion that we are now “alive unto God” as well as “dead indeed unto sin,” and are therefore morally obligated to yield our “members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:8-13). Thus, our baptism does for us what stone monuments did for holy men of old, who lived in inferior times and under an inferior covenant. This difference, however, exists. Our baptism is not something we built, but something we “obeyed from the heart” (Rom 6:17).

The Lord’s Table

The nature of the New Covenant does not allow for the accent of visible things. It is a covenant in which the heart and mind are the prominent part. While there is nothing inherently evil about memorials as established prior to Christ, they are of a lower order, necessitated because of the rarity of faith.

Here is an ordinance in which our memories become intensely active. It is not the table itself that provokes the memory, but eating and drinking what has been spread upon it. “ Take, eat: this is My body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of . . . This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor 11:24-25). There is a very real fellowship, or “communion” that takes place at this table – a “communion” in which we realize afresh our participation in the benefits that flow from the death of Christ. Therefore we read of “the

communion of the blood of Christ” and “the communion of the body of Christ” (1 Cor 10:16). Additionally, at this memorial we openly proclaim our embrace of the death of Christ, and our anticipation of Him coming again: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come ” (1 Cor 11:26). The “table of the Lord,” therefore is to us what memorial pillars and stones were to the godly in past ages. Again, it is different in that it is not something we build or erect, but something we do with devout resolution and purpose.

Why Say These Things?

I have said these things because we are embarking upon the review of a book that details the activities of those living under a new and better covenant. There will be occasions when the apostles must confront the tendency to cling to the manners of the Old Covenant – something that is strictly forbidden under the better testament.

Even in the words we now will consider, there appears to be a marked separation from the old order. There is no request to build a tabernacle on the mountain, as when the disciples witnessed Moses and Elijah returning from the unseen world to speak with Jesus (Matt 17:4; Mk 9:5; Lk 9:33). None of those who were present gathered stones to erect a pillar, devoted to the remembrance of the marvelous ascension of Christ into heaven. No one considered erecting plastered stones in memory of Jesus lifting up His hands and blessing them there. Their hearts were already being reshaped, so that they thought differently about spiritual epochs.

THEY RETURNED TO JERUSALEM FROM THE MOUNT

“Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet . . .” Other versions read, “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives,” NASB “Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet,” NIV “Then they went back to Jerusalem from the mountain named Olivet,” BBE “And afterwards they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called the place of Olives,” MRD “So from the Mount of Olives, as it is called, they went back to Jerusalem,” NJB “The apostles were at the Mount of Olives when this happened,” NLT “Then the apostles went back to Jerusalem from Olive Mountain,” IE and “Then [the disciples] went back to Jerusalem from the hill called Olivet.” AMPLIFIED

They Returned

In his gospel, Luke tells us how the disciples returned: “ And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. And they worshiped Him , and returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:51-52).

They Worshiped Him

Even though Jesus had ascended out of their sight, “they worshiped Him!” – even though they did not see Him. This was something they had never done before. Previously some of His disciples “worshiped Him” “when they SAW Him” (Matt 28:17). When the Lord calmed the storm following walking to the disciples on the water, the disciples “came and worshipped Him” (Matt 14:33). Now, however, they worship a Jesus they could not see. It was the beginning of a new epoch!

With Great Joy

On the eve of His betrayal, the disciples had sorrowed when He told them He was going away. “But now I go my way to Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart ” (John 16:5-6). He also told them, “ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy” (John 16:20). Now the very disciples who were sorrowful when informed their Lord was leaving them, are rejoicing even

though He had, in fact, left them. A new era had begun!

In The Temple

In his gospel, Luke also say, “And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:53). We know this refers to the period prior to Pentecost, for Luke says his gospel covers activities through Christ’s ascension (Lk 1:1-2). This verse, therefore, refers to the ten days that followed Christ’s ascension, until the day of Pentecost.

What a change had been wrought in the disciples! Cleopas and his friend were in a state of despair after Christ’s death (Lk 24:17-24). On the day of the resurrection, the disciples were behind closed doors “for fear of the Jews” (John 20:19). But now that Jesus has ascended, visibly leaving their presence, they “stayed continually at the temple, praising God” NASB (Luke 24:53). Surely, a new day was beginning!

A SABBATH DAY’S JOURNEY

“ . . . which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.” Other versions read, “a Sabbath day's walk from the city,” NASB “which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away,” NIV “which was near to Jerusalem, and distant from it about seven furlongs,” MRD “a short distance away, no more than a Sabbath walk,” NJB “so they walked the half mile back to Jerusalem,” NLT “[This mountain is about three-quarters of a mile from Jerusalem,” IE and “which is near Jerusalem, [only] a Sabbath day’s journey (three-quarters of a mile) away.” AMPLIFIED

A Sabbath day’s journey was 2,000 cubits from one’s house or domicile, or 1000-1200 yards, or around 1/2 to 3/4 of a mile. The following is an explanation of “Sabbath day’s journey,” and of the manner in which it was determined. This was all the result of human interpretation, not Divine iteration.

EXPLANATION of SABBATH DAY’S JOURNEY

Used only in Acts 1:12, where it designates the distance from Jerusalem to the Mount of Olives, to which Jesus led His disciples on the day of His ascension. The expression comes from rabbinical usage to indicate the distance a Jew might travel on the Sabbath without transgressing the Law, the command against working on that day *being interpreted as including travel* (see Ex 16:27-30). The limit set by the rabbis to the Sabbath day's journey was 2,000 cubits from one's house or domicile, which was *derived from the statement found in Josh 3:4* that this was the distance between the ark and the people on their march, *this being assumed to be the distance between the tents of the people and the tabernacle during the sojourn in the wilderness. Hence, it must have been allowable to travel thus far to attend the worship of the tabernacle* . We do not know when this assumption in regard to the Sabbath day's journey was made, but it seems to have been in force in the time of Christ. The distance of the Mount of Olives from Jerusalem is stated in Josephus (Ant., XX, viii, 6) to have been five stadia or furlongs and in BJ, V, ii, 3, six stadia, the discrepancy being explained by supposing a different point of departure. This would make the distance of it from 1,000 to 1,200 yards, the first agreeing very closely with the 2,000 cubits. *The rabbis, however, invented a way of increasing this distance without technically infringing the Law, by depositing some food at the 2,000-cubit limit, before the Sabbath, and declaring that spot a temporary domicile* . They might then proceed 2,000 cubits from this point without transgressing the Law.

And in some cases even this intricacy of preparation was unnecessary. If, for instance, the approach of the Sabbath found one on his journey, *the traveler might select some tree or some stone wall at a distance of 2,000 paces and mentally declare this to be his residence for the Sabbath* , in which case he was permitted to go the 2,000 paces to the selected tree or wall and also 2,000 paces beyond, but in such a case he must do the work thoroughly and must say: "Let my Sabbath

residence be at the trunk of that tree," for if he merely said: "Let my Sabbath residence be under that tree," this would not be sufficient, because the expression would be too general and indefinite (Tractate `Erubhin 4:7).

OTHER SCHEMES for extending the distance have been devised, such as *regarding the quarter of the town in which one dwells, or the whole town itself, as the domicile, thus allowing one to proceed from any part of the town to a point 2,000 cubits beyond its utmost limits*. This was most probably the case with walled towns, at least, and boundary stones have been found in the vicinity of Gaza with inscriptions supposed to mark these limits. The 2,000-cubit limits around the Levitical cities (Num 35:5) *may have suggested the limit of the Sabbath day's journey also*. The term came to be used as a designation of distance which must have been more or less definite.

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The graphic of "A Sabbath Day's Journey" illustrates the manner of calculation described in the above section ("Other Schemes)." The city, in this case, was viewed as a circle. An imaginary box was then drawn around the city. The distance of the "Sabbath Day's journey" was then calculated from the corner of the box Northward (a to f). It was not permitted to be calculated as an angle (a to e). The reason for this was that it made allowance for a slightly longer "journey" (b to f). This indicated that the real intent of the interpretation was not to strictly fulfill the Law. Rather the intention was to give as much allowance to the individual as was possible without actually breaking the Law. Note the assumptions of the makers of this tradition.

- That the prohibition of work on the Sabbath day included traveling.
- That the distance between the ark of the covenant and the people (when crossing Jordan into Canaan) was a standard distance.
- The distance of 2,000 cubits was assumed to be the distance between the tents of the people and the tabernacle around which they were pitched.

Religious men have this penchant for making applications, even if they have to force them into the revelation of God itself. Further, they have no compunctions at all about binding them upon men, even

The rabbi's increased the distance by placing some food at the 2,000-cubit limit, and declaring that a temporary domicile.

- If traveling, the individual could select a wall or a tree at a distance of about 2,000 paces, and declare that his domicile.
- An elaborate calculation was made by making the town an imaginary circle, then placing an imaginary square around it. The calculation was then made to give the greatest possible advantage to the individual.

AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF THE TRADITIONS OF MEN

Here we have a most excellent example of the traditions of men, and the reason for their development. Men form their religious tradition by starting with something God said. Then they attempt to weave their own opinion together with that word, finally concluding with a tradition that, they say, is as binding as the Word of God itself.

The Initial Building Block

Here is the word the Lord with which the rabbis started. "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD

made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Ex 20:8-11).

Notice, there is not a single word about travel. Yet, the human mind is most imaginative, and the heart of natural men is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked” (Jer 17:9). Religious men have this penchant for making applications, even if they have to force them into the revelation of God itself. Further, they have no compunctions at all about binding them upon men, even doing so in the name of the Lord.

Adding Another Building Block

The Jewish teachers took the Sabbath day instructions, and then merged them with instructions given for the gathering of manna during the forty-year wilderness wandering. “And it came to pass, that there went out some of the people on the seventh day for to gather, and they found none. And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws? See, for that the LORD hath given you the sabbath, therefore he giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day. So the people rested on the seventh day” (Ex 16:27-). Now, they conclude that even though the Israelites were commanded to stay in their tents on the Sabbath day (in regard to gathering manna), the fact that they did, in fact, leave their tents, indicated that travel was allowed within the perimeter of the camp. They had abused this allowance by looking for manna, but the travel itself was allowed.

Adding Another Building Block

Now, the Rabbis must come up with a legitimate traveling distance. It must be as lenient as possible, giving every advantage to themselves. Therefore, they take a text from the book of Joshua that had to do with traveling. When Israel crossed Jordan, a certain distance had to remain between the people and the ark of the covenant, that was being carried by the priests. “Yet there shall be a space between you and it, about two thousand cubits by measure: come not near unto it, that ye may know the way by which ye must go: for ye have not passed this way heretofore” (Josh 3:4). That seemed like a comfortable distance – one with which they could live. Therefore 2,000 cubits was set as the distance of legitimate travel on the Sabbath day.

Adding An Assumption

Working with these three building blocks, some human assumption was also required. The first assumption was that the Sabbath day commandment was, in fact, addressing the matter of travel.

Adding Another Assumption

To this, another assumption was added – namely that the distance between the people and the ark of the covenant was also the distance established between the encampment of the Israelites and the tabernacle, which was in the center of the camp.

Adding Another Assumption

Yet another assumption is made, namely that the rules were more lenient for someone who was traveling on the Sabbath day. They were thus allowed to establish a temporary place of residence, and do their calculations from that point.

Adding Another Assumption

The additional assumption that men were free to create the most favorable scenario with their own calculations was also added. They could assume the city was a circle, assume it was proper to

have an imaginary square around it, and assume that through mathematics they could produce a rule that favored men the most.

Thus we see what fleshly cunning is employed in the development of “the traditions of men.” Jesus said that men must “lay aside the commandment of God” in order to “hold the tradition of men” (Mk 7:8). He also told scribes and Pharisees that they “transgressed the commandment of God BY” their tradition (Matt 15:3), and “made the commandment of God of none effect” by it (Matt 15:6). With even more strength He affirmed, “Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition” (Mark 7:9).

Paul warned the church that the “tradition of men” has a spoiling effect upon believers. That is, they “cheat” NKJV them, by taking from them things essential for life and godliness. They take man “captive,” relying upon the “philosophy and empty deception” of men NIV (Col 2:8). It is particularly important that professing “Christians” give heed to these words. We are living in a period when there is an astounding dominance of religious tradition, making it a most dangerous time.

During the days of Jehoiada, the priest, he established “keepers of the watch” to guard the king’s house and the house of the Lord (2 Kgs 11:7-9). They were to “go forth on the Sabbath,” but not a word was said about any distance they traveled, or considerations that were to be given at that time.

During the time of Nehemiah, there were certain merchants who came into the city “to sell.” Even though the people were mingling about in the city on the Sabbath, Nehemiah determined they would not buy anything from these greedy merchants on that day. There was not, however, any mention of how far the people could walk on the Sabbath (Neh 10:31). Again, when Nehemiah saw the people treading wine presses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves and “loading them on donkeys,” he “testified against them.” No mention was made of the distances they traveled, but only to the work that they did – work that was expressly forbidden for both man and beast on the Sabbath day.

Jeremiah forbade the people to bear a burden or do any manner of work on the Sabbath, but said nothing about how far they could travel (Jer 17:21-22,27).

Why Is A Sabbath’s Day Journey Mentioned Here?

This is the only reference to “a Sabbath day’s journey” in all of Scripture. There is not the slightest hint of it anywhere else. Not a syllable is mentioned in the Law or the Prophets concerning an appropriate distance to

travel on the Sabbath day. Why is it mentioned here?

In mentioning this fact – that the Mount of Olives was a Sabbath’s journey from Jerusalem – Luke is not condoning the tradition. This was rather a means of declaring to Theophilus the distance the disciples traveled back to Jerusalem. They did not return on the Sabbath day, so the statement has no relevance from the standpoint of Law.

Jesus made various appearances to His disciples for forty days following His resurrection. He rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Sunday). The day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover, would occur on the first day of the week. Ten days prior would be on a Friday. This reference, then, is nothing more than a means of measurement. It also suggests that, should the scribes and Pharisees be privy to their trip, they could find no fault with them, even if they used their tradition to judge them.

INTO AN

“ 13a And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room . . . ” Other versions read, “And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room,” NKJV “When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room ,” NASB “When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs ,” NRSV “And when they were come in, they went up into the upper chamber,” ASV “And when they came in, they went up into the room ,” BBE “And when they were come in, they went up into a parlor ,” PNT “The apostles entered the city. They went to the place ,” IE “And when they had entered [the city], they mounted [the stairs] to the upper room,” AMPLIFIED and “On entering Jerusalem they went straight to the upstairs room .” PHILLIPS

WHEN THEY WERE COME IN

It is important to be where the Lord has directed you to be if you are to receive His blessing, or be favorably used in His purpose.

“ And when they were come in ...” That is, the disciples came into the city of Jerusalem, to which they had returned. Jesus had expressly told them, “but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem , until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). They were not to tarry in Capernaum, where Jesus had moved from Nazareth (Matt 4:13). They were not to dwell in one of the cities “wherein most of His mighty works were done” – namely Chorasin or Bethsaida (Matt 11:20-21). Philip, Andrew, and Peter were also from the city of Bethsaida. Surely that would be a good place to “wait.” Perhaps some might think it would be more appropriate to wait in Bethlehem, where Jesus was born (Matt 2:1), or Nazareth, where He was raised (Lk 4:16). Some might have thought it would have been appropriate to wait on the sea shore, from which several of them had been called (Matt 4:19-22).

Of old time God Himself had said Jerusalem was the city He had “chosen” (1 Kgs 11:13). He chose the city out of all of the tribes of Israel “to put His name there” (1 Kgs 14:21). “And unto his son will I give one tribe, that David My servant may have a light alway before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen me to put my name there ” (1 Kgs 11:36; 2 Kgs 21:4). He even said of this city, “will I put My name for ever” (2 Kgs 21:7). Through the Psalmist God revealed that His praise would be “in Jerusalem” (Psa 102:21).

The Lord spoke of a time when Jerusalem would be called “the throne of the Lord” (Jer 3:17). It would even be called “The Lord our righteousness” (Jer 33:16). Joel prophesied of the city, “and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance” (Joel 2:32). Jesus told His disciples that the Gospel “should be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47).

It was therefore not only appropriate, but mandatory, that Christ’s disciples return to Jerusalem to “wait for the promise of the Father.” This was a matter in which convenience or human assessment had no part. The disciples may cast their lots for a the replacement of Judas’ “bishopric,” but they will not cast them for the place where they will “wait,” or “tarry.”

A Principle to be Seen

There is something to be seen here. It is important to be where the Lord has directed you to be if you are to receive His blessing, or be favorably used in His purpose. The “promise of the Father” would not seek out where the disciples themselves had chosen to wait. The Holy Spirit would not “come upon” them while they remained in a convenient place, or one they thought more suited to the occasion. They HAD to be in Jerusalem. If they were not there, they would not be endued “with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). A choice to be somewhere else was also a choice to be excluded from the promise.

All of this seems quite apparent to even the casual student. Yet, we must be able to “handle the Word of God aright” (2 Tim 2:15), beholding the manner of the King and His kingdom.

Ponder the Lord's insistence that His disciples be WHERE He says, and associate it with what He has said to us concerning the place we occupy.

- “ Abide in Me , and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me” (John 15:4).
- “ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers : for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14).
- “And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not ” (Gal 6:9).
- “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is ” (Eph 5:17).
- “In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight: If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel . . . ” (Col 1:22-23).
- “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation ; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him” (Heb 2:3).
- “But Christ as a son over His own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end ” (Heb 3:6).
- “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end ” (Heb 3:14).

What of those who have not taken such admonitions seriously. Will a person who does not “abide” in Christ receive the benefits promised to those who do abide? Can a person be unequally yoked together with unbelievers and be received by the Lord just as though that was not the case? Can a professing believer quit, fainting in the way, and still reap benefits along with those who did not faint? Is it really possible to be spiritually ignorant, not understanding the will of the Lord, and yet taste of all the good things promised to those who are not ignorant and do understand His will? Can a person really fail to continue in the faith, remaining ungrounded and unsettled, and still be presented unblameable and unproveable in His sight? Is it remotely possible to neglect God's great salvation and still, in the end, dwell forever with the Lord? If men do not firmly hold the confidence and rejoicing of hope firm to the end, will they still remain in Christ's household? Can a person partake of Christ, gloriously benefitting from His great work of salvation, and not hold the beginning of the confidence steadfast unto the end?

Notwithstanding this rather elementary observation, there are still professing believers who want their prayers answered even though they are not where Jesus said they should remain. They are waffling back and forth, flirting with the ways of the world, and still expecting the Lord to love, care for, and bless them.

Such things are not any more likely than the disciples being endued with power from on high while they waited in Jericho. One might just as well expect the Spirit to come on the disciples while they waited in Chorasin, than the above things could take place. The empowerment and blessing of the disciples was contingent upon them being where Jesus told them to be.

If they would have been out of town when the day of Pentecost had fully come, you may rest assured the Holy Spirit would not have chased them down and blessed them anyway. Notwithstanding this rather elementary observation, there are still professing believers who want their prayers answered even though they are not where Jesus said they should remain. They are waffling back and forth, flirting with the ways of the world, and still expecting the Lord to love, care for, and bless them. Such ways of thinking are only imaginations. There is not so much as a

speck of truth in them!

THE UPPER ROOM

“ . . . they went up into an upper room .” Jesus did not tell them to tarry “together.” Yet, the disciples knew this was what He meant. There are visitations, such as that which occurred on the day of Pentecost, which is not intended to be experienced one at a time. There are certain Divine activities that require the saints to be, and work, together.

In all probability, this was the “upper room” in which Jesus had spent His last evening with His disciples. That room was located in Jerusalem – “the city” – and was most memorable. When Jesus instructed His disciples to prepare the Passover for Himself and them, He said, “And he will show you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us” (Mark 14:15; Lk 22:12). The word “large” comes from the Greek word **me,ga** (mega), which has this lexical meaning: “superlative, great,” THAYER “large, spacious, wide, long, extraordinary, great,” FRIBERG “large, greatest,” UBS “big, great, extensive,” LOUW-NADA and “spacious, wide, more than enough.” LIDDLE-SCOTT

The room, then, was of sufficient size to accommodate the people who resided there, as well as all of those who joined them. It was also “furnished,” with all that was required for their stay. It qualified as a residence by being in Jerusalem, and there were memories associated with it that would be great benefit to them. For them, waiting was not a time of leisure, but of great expectation – an expectation that required great attentiveness.

THE ELEVEN

“ 13b . . . where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.”

Here is an example of giving “honor” to those to whom is it due (Rom 13:7). Because they were especially chosen and ordained to be with Jesus and to preach, Luke takes the time to mention “the eleven,” and that the residence where the brethren were gathered was where they were staying, or dwelling.

WHERE ABODE

“ . . . where abode . . .” Other versions read, “where they were staying ,” NKJV “they were abiding ,” ASV “where they were living ,” BBE “which was now their fixed place of meeting ,” WEYMOUTH “where they were accustomed to meet ,” MONTGOMERY and “where they were [indefinitely] staying .” AMPLIFIED

This “upper room” had become the residence of the disciples. Evidently this was so following that dreadful evening when the Lord was betrayed, followed by His vicarious death. This is evidently where Cleopas and his companion had testified to the disciples following His revelation to them. “ And they rose up the same hour, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them ” (Luke 24:33). This was also the place where Jesus first appeared to His disciples on the same day He had risen from the dead. “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews , came Jesus and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (John 20:19).

THE APOSTLES

Prior to the betrayal and death of Jesus, the Apostles were referred to as “the twelve apostles” (Matt 10:2; Lk 22:14), “the twelve disciples” (Matt 10:1; 11:1; 20:17; Lk 9:1), and “the twelve” (Matt 26:14,20,47; Mk 4:10; 6:7; 9:35; 10:32; 11:11; 14:10,17,20,43, etc).

Following Christ’s death, and prior to the disciples “waiting” in Jerusalem, the apostles were referred to as “the eleven disciples” (Matt 28:16), and “the eleven” (Mk 16:14; Lk 24:9,33; Acts 1:26).

Following the filling of Judas’ vacated position, and before Saul was converted, they are again referred to as “the twelve” (Acts 6:2), and “the twelve apostles” (Rev 21:14,21).

It is important to note these things because the first chapter will explain the necessity for replacing the position vacated by Judas.

PETER

“Peter.” Peter and his brother Andrew were the first ones called to be Apostles (Matt 4:18-20). He was a fisherman by trade (Matt 4:18), and was from the city of Bethsaida (John 1:44). He eventually settled in Capernaum, which was the place Jesus also lived after beginning His ministry (Lk 4:31-38). He was a married man, whose mother-in-law was healed by Jesus during His prodigious ministry (Matt 8:14-15). He was one of the three disciples who were with Jesus when:

- He healed Jairus’ daughter (Mk 5:37-43).
- Jesus was transfigured (Matt 17:1-4).
- Jesus prayed in Gethsemane on the night of His betrayal (Matt 26:36-46).

Peter was one of the four who were privileged to hear the Olivet discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and Christ’s second coming (Matt 24:3; Mk 13:3-4).

It was Peter who asked Jesus to explain the following.

- The parable of the steward (Lk 12:41).
- The law of forgiveness (Matt 18:21).
- The law of defilement (Matt 15:15).

Peter is the one who blurted out on the mount of transfiguration, “Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias” (Matt 17:4). He is the only person in the history of the world, other than Jesus, who walked on water (Matt 14:29).

His natural name was “Simon,” meaning “a hearing,” and his father’s name was Jonah. Hence, Peter was called “Simon Barjona,” Barjona meaning “son of Jonah.” Jesus changed his name to Cephas, which means “A stone.” When Andrew, his brother, brought Peter to Jesus, it is written, “And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, A stone” (John 1:42). “Cephas” is Aramaic, and has the same meaning as “Peter” (a stone) .

There are 158 references to “Peter” in the Scriptures, 6 references to “Cephas,” 18 references to “Simon Peter,” 1 reference to “Simon Barjona,” and 14 references to “Simon.” That is nearly 200 references to this key man.

According to Scripture, Peter is the only man prior to Pentecost to whom God revealed most fully the Person of Christ: “And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16-17; Mk 8:29; Lk 9:20). When Jesus rose from the dead, an angel appeared

to some women who came to the tomb, telling them “But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as he said unto you” (Mark 16:7). Following His resurrection, the Lord Jesus made a special appearance to Peter (Lk 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5).

He is the first man to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, as he himself confessed: “Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe” (Acts 15:7; 10:5-48).

Peter was one of the “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9). Three years after Paul was converted, he went up to Jerusalem and spent fifteen days with Peter (Gal 1:18). The thrust of Peter’s ministry was “unto the circumcision,” or the Jews – even though through him God first granted the Gentiles “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

When Jesus sent someone to prepare the last Passover, to be spent alone with His disciples, He sent Peter and John (Lk 22:8). He is the one who called the attention to the rapid withering of the cursed fig tree (Mk 11:21). Peter is the one who attacked the legion of soldiers arresting Jesus, cutting of the right ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest (Matt 26:51; Mk 14:47; Lk 22:50; John 18:10).

Peter is the one Satan “desired,” to sift as wheat. The severity of the sifting is confirmed by Peter’s denial of Jesus three times in the same night (Luke 22:31-32,55-61). Peter was the first apostle to see the empty tomb (Lk 24:12; John 20:2-6).

Peter is mentioned 77 times from Acts through Second Peter (“Peter” – 64 times; “Cephas” – 5 times; “Simon” – 8 times).

According to history, Peter preached in Pontus, Galatia, Bithynia, Cappadocia, Asia, Babylon, and Rome. Historian Hegesippus (110-180 A.D.) says that “Nero sought matter against Peter to put him to death; which, when the people perceived, they entreated Peter with much ado that he would fly the city. Peter, through their importunity at length persuaded, prepared himself to avoid. But, coming to the gate, he saw the Lord Christ come to meet him, to whom he, worshiping, said, "Lord, whither dost Thou go?" To whom He answered and said, "I am come again to be crucified." By this, Peter, perceiving his suffering to be understood, returned into the city. Jerome saith that he was crucified, his head being down and his feet upward, himself so requiring, because he was (he said) unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as the Lord was.”

When Jesus sent someone to prepare the last Passover, to be spent alone with His disciples, He sent Peter and John. He is the one who called the attention to the rapid withering of the cursed fig tree. Peter is the one who attacked the legion of soldiers arresting Jesus, cutting of the right ear of Malchus, a servant of the high priest

The following is also of interest. “According to church tradition, the Roman Emperor Nero, publicly announcing himself the chief enemy of God, was led in his fury to slaughter the Apostles. Because of the persecution, Peter was crucified upside down while in Rome. Concerning the last hours of his life, it is said that when Peter saw his own wife led out to die, he rejoiced because of her summons and her return home, and called to her very encouragingly and comfortingly addressing her by name, and saying, "O thou, remember the Lord." Of the final days of the apostle Peter in Rome, Jowett wrote that Peter was cast into a horrible prison called the Mamertine and for nine months, in absolute darkness, he endured monstrous torture manacled to a post. Mamertine (also known as Gemonium) could be seen with the dungeon and pillar to which Peter was bound in chains. During Peter's entire incarceration, Peter was manacled in an upright position, chained to the column, unable to lay down to rest, yet ,his magnificent spirit remained undaunted. In spite of all the suffering Peter was subjected to, he converted his jailers, Processus, Martinianus, and forty-

seven others. Peter met his death at the hand of the Romans by crucifying him in an upside-down position in Nero's circus 67AD. *The Search For The Twelve Apostles*, William McBirnie, PH.D

Peter wrote the books of First and Second Peter. It is generally understood that he dictated the Gospel written by Mark.

JAMES

“James.” “James” is the Graecized form of “Jacob,” which means “supplanter.” He was the brother of John the beloved, who were the “sons of Zebedee” (Lk 5:10). Jesus called them both immediately after calling Simon Peter and his brother Andrew (Matt 4:21-22). James was also among the favored three, who enjoyed benefits that were not vouchsafed to the other apostles (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37; 14:33). He was also with Peter, John, and Andrew as they listened in private to our Lord’s discourse on the fall of Jerusalem, the end of the world, and His coming (Mk 13:3).

James, the brother of John and an apostle of Christ, is mentioned two times in the book of Acts, and never again after he was martyred (Acts 1:13; 12:2).

James was the first apostle to be martyred, being slain with the sword by Herod, in a wicked initiative against “certain of the church” (Acts 12:1). “Clement of Alexandria, in a fragment preserved by Eusebius (Hist. Eccles. 1, 9), reports that the officer who conducted James to the tribunal was so influenced by the bold declaration of his faith as to embrace the Gospel and avow himself also a Christian; in consequence of which, he was beheaded at the same time.”

McCLINTOK and STRONG

JOHN

“John.” The younger brother of “James,” whose name generally precedes that of John (ex: Matt 4:21; 10:3; 17:1). Prior to their call by Jesus, James and John were formerly business partners with Simon and Andrew in the fishing trade (Lk 5:10). “John” is known as the disciple that Jesus loved, confirming that he was especially close to the Lord (John 19:26; 20:2; 21:7,20). At the Last Supper, John reclined on Jesus “bosom,” or chest. When Jesus told His disciples that one sitting at the table would betray Him, it finally resulted in Peter asking John to ask Jesus “who it should be of whom He spake.” Jesus answered it was the one for whom he would dip a morsel and give it to him. No one at the table caught the significance of what Jesus said and did (John 13:23-29).

The Gospels give us the name of John’s mother – “Salome” (compare Matthew 27:56 with Mark 15:40; 16:1).

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, both Peter and John followed the group and Jesus to the place of the high priest. We are told that the high priest personally knew John, who went into the palace of the high priest: “And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple: that disciple was known unto the high priest, and went in with Jesus into the palace of the high priest” (John 18:15). Even though John went into the palace, Peter remained on the outside. John then spoke to the woman who was keeping the door, and she let Peter in. “But Peter stood at the door without. Then went out that other disciple, which was known unto the high priest, and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter” (John 18:16).

John stood at the foot of the cross when Jesus was crucified, together with Jesus’ mother, her sister, the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. It was at that time that Jesus committed the care of his mother to John, who took her into his house “from that hour” (John 19:25-27).

History records that Andrew preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely

in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross. Andrew labored in Sythia, North of the Red Sea – Russia.

When a report was brought to the disciples that Jesus had risen from the dead, Peter and John ran to the tomb, with John outrunning Peter. He looked into the tomb, and saw the “linen clothes” of Jesus lying there – yet he did not go in until after Peter had arrived and entered the sepulcher. Then John entered the tomb, “and he saw, and believed.” Later, when Jesus appeared to several of the disciples, John again was the first to recognize Him, saying, “It is the Lord” (John 20:3-8).

Church history tells us that an attempt to kill John took place during the persecution of Domitian. “In the persecution under Domitian he is taken to Rome, and there, by his boldness, though not by death, gains the crown of martyrdom. The boiling oil into which he is thrown has no power to hurt him (Tertull. De Proscript. c. 36). The scene of the supposed miracle was outside the Porta Latina, and hence the Western Church commemorates it by the special festival of “St. John Port. Latin.” on May 6th. He is then sent to labor in the mines, and Patmos is the place of his exile (Victorinus, In Apoc. 9; Lampe, 1, 66).”

John wrote the Gospel of John, First, Second, and third John, and the book of the Revelation. The churches of Smyrna, Pergamos, Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea, and Thyatira, were founded by him, and he was best noted for his labors in Asia Minor (Western Asia).

John is mentioned 26 times in Acts through Revelation.

ANDREW

“Andrew.” Was the brother of Peter, and they were both called together to be followers of Jesus (Matt 4:18). He is the only other disciple that was with Peter, James, and John, when Jesus delivered the Olivet discourse (Mk 13:3). He was originally a disciple of John the Baptist. When he heard John say, “Behold the Lamb of God,” he, with another of John’s disciples, “followed Jesus” (John 1:36-40). He and Peter were from the city of Bethsaida (John 1:44).

Andrew is the disciple who, when Jesus was about to feed 5,000 men, said to the Lord, “There is a lad here, which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes: but what are they among so many?” (John 6:9). When some Greeks came to Philip, saying that they wanted to “see Jesus,” Philip told Andrew, and together they went and told Jesus (John 12:21-22).

History records that Andrew preached the gospel to many Asiatic nations; but on his arrival at Edessa he was taken and crucified on a cross, the two ends of which were fixed transversely in the ground. Hence the derivation of the term, St. Andrew's Cross. Andrew labored in Sythia, North of the Red Sea – Russia. He is not mentioned in Scriptures after Acts 1:13.

PHILIP

“Philip.” Philip the apostle is distinguished from Philip, one of the first deacons, who later became an “evangelist” – (Acts 6:5; 8:5,6,12,13,26, 29,30,31,34,,35,37,38,39,40; 21:8). He was from Bethsaida, and among the first disciples that Jesus called (John 1:43-44). He is the one who called Nathanael, alerting him to the fact that they had found the Messiah (actually, Jesus found them (John 1:45-51).

When Jesus was about to feed the five thousand, He asked Philip, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5). Philip answered, “Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little” (John 6:7).

Certain Greeks came to Philip saying, “Sir, we would see Jesus.” He went and told Andrew, and together they told Jesus of the Grecian inquiry (John 12:21-22).

During the Last Supper, Philip is the one who said, “Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us” (John 14:8). Jesus answered Him with a remarkably extensive reply, beginning with, “ Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father?” (John 14:9-21).

Philip born at Bethsaida, in Galilee and was first called by the name of "disciple." He labored diligently in Upper Asia, and suffered martyrdom at Heliopolis, in Phrygia. He was scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified, A.D. 54. Philip also preached in Syria. There is no mention of him after Acts 1:13.

THOMAS

“Thomas.” The name Thomas means “twin.” Therefore, he was also called “Didymus,” which is the Aramaic word for “twin” (John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2).

When Jesus went to raise Lazarus from the dead, Thomas is the one who said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him” (John 11:16). At the Last Supper, when Jesus said He was going away, Thomas is the one who said, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5).

Following His resurrection, when our Lord first appeared to His disciples, it is written, “But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came” (John 20:24). When told about the Lord’s appearing, he responded, “Except I shall see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into His side, I will not believe” (John 20:25). Eight days later, when Jesus appeared to the disciples again, Thomas was with them. When Jesus challenged him to put forth his finger and behold His hands, also thrusting his hand into His side, Thomas replied, “My Lord and my God.” Jesus then told him that the blessing belonged to those who did not see, yet believed – something that none of the other disciples had done (John 20:26-29).

Thomas was with the seven disciples who went fishing, only to again confront the living Christ (John 21:2-12).

Thomas preached the Gospel in Parthia and India, where exciting the rage of the pagan priests, he was martyred by being thrust through with a spear. Thomas also preached in Persia and the East Indies. There is no mention of him after Acts 1:13.

BARTHOLOMEW

Luke informs us that Matthew made Jesus “a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them.” In his Gospel, Matthew does not say it was his house, but in humility simply refers to Jesus being in the house, declaring that His disciples were also with Him.

“Bartholomew.” This apostle is only mentioned four times in the entire Bible – all of them listings of the apostles (Matt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:14; Acts 1:13). Some are of the opinion that references to “Nathanael” (John 1:45-49; 21:2), actually refer to Bartholomew by a different name. The Gospel of John is the only book that contains the name “Nathanael.”

History records that Bartholomew preached in several countries, and having translated the Gospel of Matthew into the language of India, he propagated it in that country. He was at length cruelly beaten and then crucified by the impatient and aggressive idolaters Bartholomew also preached in Armenia. There is no mention of him after Acts 1:13.

MATTHEW

“Matthew.” “Matthew” is mentioned five times in Scripture – four of them are in apostolic listings (Matt 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:3). He is also referred to as “Matthew the publican” (Matt 10:3), “Levi the son of Alphaeus” (Mk 2:14), “ a publican, named Levi” (Lk 5:27) His name means “Gift of Jehovah.”

Matthew was called to the apostleship while he was on the job, “sitting at the receipt of customs,” or “at the tax collector’s booth” NASB (Matt 9:9; Lk 5:27). When Jesus saw him sitting there, He “said unto him, Follow ME.” The Scriptures emphasize his immediate and thorough response. “And he left all, rose up, and followed Him” (Luke 5:28), and “he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him” (Matt 9:9).

Luke informs us that Matthew made Jesus “a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them” (Luke 5:29). In his Gospel, Matthew does not say it was his house, but in humility simply refers to Jesus being in the house, declaring that His disciples were also with Him. “And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples” (Matt 9:10). This is the place where Jesus was criticized by the bigoted scribes and Pharisees, who said to His disciples, “Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” (Matt 9:11; Lk 5:30). Jesus soundly rebuked His critics by saying, “They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick” (Luke 5:31).

It is thought that Matthew wrote his gospel in Hebrew, which was afterwards translated into Greek by James the Less. The scene of his labors was Parthia, and Ethiopia, in which latter country he suffered martyrdom, being slain with a halberd (a battle ax with a handle of approximately six feet in length) in the city of Nadabah, A.D. 60. Matthew also preached in Macedonia, Syria, Persia, and Media. There is no mention of him after Acts 1:13.

JAMES THE SON OF ALPHAEUS

“James the son of Alphaeus.” Other versions read, “James of Alphaeus.” DOUAY

“James the son of Alphaeus” is mentioned four times in Scripture – all in apostolic listings (Matt 10:3; Mk 3:18; Lk 6:15; Acts 1:13). His mother was named “Mary,” as indicated by Mark, who refers to this James as “James the less” (Mk 15:40; Matt 27:56; Mk 16:1; Lk 24:10).

At the age of ninety-four he was beaten and stoned by the Jews; and finally had his brains dashed out with a fuller's club.

SIMON ZELOTES

“Simon Zelotes.” Other versions read, “Simon the Zealot,” NKJV “Simon [known as the Revolutionary],” IE and “Simon the Patriot.” PHILLIPS

This apostle is also referred to as “Simon the Canaanite” (Matt 10:4; Mk 3:18), and “Simon called Zelotes” (Lk 6:15). The word “Zelotes” is a political term meaning “Zealot” – a “member of the party of Zealots.” ROBERTSON Within the context of Roman dominance and citizenry, this party was particularly zealous for the Mosaic law and institutions. This type of zeal is mentioned in the book of Acts where James and the elders told Paul, “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20). This extreme nationalist party was founded about A.D. 7 by Judas of Gamala, a city that appears to have lain near the east coast of the sea of Galilee (vide Schurer, 1. 2:225). PULPIT COMMENTARY

As to the designation “Simon the Canaanite,” this does not refer to the condemned nation of the Canaanites, but is a translation of the Aramic equivalent of “Zealot.” It is appropriate here because

the zeal for the Law was not being exhibited in foreign countries (where there were many “devout” Jews – Acts 2:5). The word is used here in a political or nationalistic way rather than in comparison with the Jews, who were given that land.

History says that Simon the Zealot preached the Gospel in Mauritania, Africa, and even in Britain, in which latter country he was crucified, A.D. 74. There is no mention of him after Acts 1:13.

JUDAS THE BROTHER OF JAMES

“Judas the brother of James.” Other versions read, “Judas the son of James,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV “Judas James brother,” GENEVA “Judas James son,” TNT and “Judas, of James.” YLT

“Judas” is the Graecized form of the Hebrew “Judah,” and means “he shall be praised.” Matthew refers to this apostle as “Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus” (Matt 10:3). Mark refers to him as “Thaddaeus” (Mk 3:18).

This man is mentioned five times in Scripture: “Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus” (Matt 10:3), “Thaddaeus” (Mk 3:18), and “Judas the brother of James” (Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13). The fifth mentioning records a question he asked Jesus on the night of His betrayal. “Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? (John 14:22).

Judas, brother of James, was crucified at Edessa, A.D. 72. He also preached in Egypt. There is no mention of him after Acts 1:13.

There are the original twelve apostles, minus Judas, who “fell by transgression” – especially chosen and empowered men: chosen to be with Jesus, and empowered to preach (Mark 3:14). Among them were four fishermen (Peter, Andrew, James, and John), a political zealot (Simon), and a tax collector (Matthew). There are two sets of brothers (Peter and Andrew, and James and John), and one twin (Thomas). Some were known as “the son of” (James and John the sons of Zebedee, and James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the son of Jonas), and some as “the brother of” (John the brother of James, and Judas the brother of James).

As you can see, these men had no worldly prominence. They did not come from a highly revered culture, and did not have impressive qualifications. The work to which Jesus called them did not require such distinctions. They would be given a message from another world. They would receive a Spirit the world could not receive, and would call upon people to save themselves from the very generation in which they resided.

The book of Acts will reflect these circumstances. It will unfold the kind of work for which Jesus empowers men. It will establish heavenly priorities among men. What these men will declare and promote will not be impressive to worldly minded people. It will tend to aggravate those with a stereotyped religion, and will be challenging, calling men away from spiritual mediocrity and disinterest in the world to come. These men will think differently. They have been cultured by Jesus, and will be empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so. Their perception of Scripture will not be that of the religious professionals.

It will become increasingly apparent to your heart and mind that contemporary Christianity does not have the faintest resemblance to the book of “the Acts.” This is a book of Divine revelation, working, and empowerment. Heaven is involved in what is being done: God the Father, Christ Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit, and holy angels. Those who are used by the Lord will not see their circumstances as other men. They will not adopt the assessments of the religious professionals,

politicians, philosophers, or business world. They will not see “issues” as the people of the world see them. Their objectives will have no similarity to those of this world. They will not ask the questions the world asks. The things that confound the world will not confound them.

As you are exposed to them in action, you will behold a spiritual composure in them the world cannot emulate. Men cannot be trained to react as they did. When they are being threatened, they do not react as other men. They will not make plans as other men. They will not speak as other men. They will not comport themselves among their enemies as other men.

Make no mistake about this, in the book of Acts we are being exposed to real believers, real preachers, and real teachers. This is the way God really works. The fact that they do not fit the fanciful molds that men have created only confirms the falsity and pretension of much that is around us. Take note of what these people do. Seriously consider how they speak, react, assess, and purpose. You will be exposed to people that have been “joined to the Lord.”

THE “WAITING” BEGINS

“ 14a These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication. . .”

Before He was taken up into heaven, ascending on high, Jesus told His disciples what they were to do.

- “ Wait for the promise of the Father, which . . . ye have heard of Me“ (Acts 1:4).
- “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

What does it mean to “wait?” There are a number of promises given to those who do “wait” on the Lord.

- “ Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart : wait , I say, on the LORD” (Psa 27:14).

- “Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for Him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass. Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth” (Psa 37:7-9).

- “Therefore turn thou to thy God: keep mercy and judgment, and wait on thy God continually ” (Hosea 12:6).

- “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. I waited patiently for the LORD; and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry ” (Psa 40:1).

- “The LORD is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him” (Lam 3:25).

- “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength ; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint ” (Isa 40:31).

- “Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and He shall save thee” (Prov 20:22).

- “And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us : this is the LORD; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation ” (Isa 25:9).

- “For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear,

neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for him” (Isa 64:4).

It is apparent that “waiting” is something critical in spiritual life. But what does it mean to “wait.” Some might be tempted to think that “waiting” is equivalent to idleness – or simply doing nothing. We will see from our text that the disciples certainly were not idle. In fact, they were quite active. Some of the things they were doing include the following.

- The “waiting” ones were continually in the Temple (Lk 24:53a).
- Were continually praising and blessing God (Lk 24:53b).
- Continued in one accord in prayer and supplication (Acts 1:14).
- Took Divinely sanctioned measures to replace the office vacated by Judas (Acts 1:15-26).
- When the day of Pentecost arrived ten days later, they were all together with one accord and in one place (Acts 2:1).

A SPIRITUAL POSTURE. Waiting upon the Lord is a spiritual posture – a stance, if you please, that is driven by the persuasion of the truth of a specific word from God. It does not shut down all human activity, but rather marshals all of one’s ransomed powers, focusing them upon matters having to do with a Divine commitment – a promise. In this case, the promise was “Ye shall receive power . . . and ye shall be witnesses unto Me” (Acts 1:8). The soul for which this blessing is targeted cannot be distracted, or caught up with the cares of this world. The spiritual senses and cognitive powers must be gathered together for one grand purpose. David described this posture when He pled, “Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name” (Psa 86:11).

CULTURING THE SOUL. In a way, “waiting” is culturing the soul – drawing away from the mundane and becoming acutely conscience of heavenly priorities. In this case, the sending of “the promise of the Father” would require that all of one’s sensitivities and abilities be honed to a fine spiritual edge. It will be imperative for the disciples to be keenly aware of heavenly purposes and influences, and ready to respond instantly.

NECESSARY PREPARATION. In yet another way, “waiting” describes a period of time in which specific preparations are made that directly impact involvement in the will of the Lord. In the first chapter of Acts we find that there is a vacated bishopric that must be filled – a place of responsibility and participation that was never intended to be left unoccupied. In order to address this situation, there must be a grasp of the Word of the Lord. Some level of understanding must be possessed concerning what happened when Judas fell. The disciples must know why the matter needs to be addressed, and how to go about doing it.

These days we are hearing a lot of religious talk about man’s chief purpose being to praise and worship the Lord. To the spiritually uncultured soul, and the individual who does not have a working knowledge of Scripture, it all sounds pretty good – even holy.

TUNING THE HEART. Yet another thing is accomplished in “waiting” – the heart is tuned, so to speak, to the heavenly frequency, so that the message that is sent will not be missed. No one can be struggling with sadness as Cleopas and his companion had done earlier (Lk 24:17). This was a time when they could not be described as they were earlier: “while they yet believed not for joy” (Lk 24:41). No one could be doubting, as “some” has done when they first saw the risen Christ: “And when they saw him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted” (Matt 28:17). They all had to be in the receiving mode.

PERFECTLY JOINED TOGETHER. While the disciples waited, there had to be unity among them. No division could exist, as when Thomas was absent during the resurrected Christ’s initial

appearance to His disciples (John 20:12). After that appearance, Peter said he was going fishing, and only six of all the disciples of Jesus went with him (John 21:1-2). When the promise of the Father comes, they cannot be scattered. They must have “the same mind and the same judgment” – the only proper environment in which the work of the Lord can be done (1 Cor 1:10). It is in that kind of environment – and only that kind of environment – that the Lord “commands the blessing” (Psa 133:3).

The activities that will be described in the remainder of this first chapter were conducive to the development of the things just mentioned. They were the kind of involvements in which the flesh is crucified, and all places for the entrance of the wicked one are removed.

The Necessity of Spirituality

It is deeply troubling to me that the modern church is not cognizant of the necessity of and reason for waiting upon the Lord. Far too many professing Christians do not have the faintest notion of a Divine agenda, a specific promise, or the essentiality of a proper mindset. Others are seriously deficient in their perception of what God is doing through Christ Jesus, and of the bearing of the death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Christ upon that purpose.

These days we are hearing a lot of religious talk about man’s chief purpose being to praise and worship the Lord. To the spiritually uncultured soul, and the individual who does not have a working knowledge of Scripture, it all sounds pretty good – even holy.

In our text, the revealed purpose was that of the disciples becoming witnesses to Christ – His “ambassadors” (Acts 1:8; 2 Cor 5:20). Their witness had to be precise, without the slightest bit of corruption in it. It could not contain some residual traditions of the elders that lingered in their thinking. They were going to be the initial “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), and “workers together with Him” (2 Cor 6:1).

That is very different from the stated purpose of praising and worshiping Christ – at least as modern men conceive of praise and worship.

The involvement of the disciples in the coming events would be within the framework of God’s revealed purpose for redeemed humanity. The following texts are statements of Divine intent. They have a different tone than that of the religious sophists of our day. This IS what God has to say on the subject.

In these texts, the word “that” describes the purpose for the stated Divine activity. It is synonymous with “in order that . . .”

- **CONFORMITY.** “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son , that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

- **BEING BLAMELESS.** “Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ ” (1 Cor 1:8).

- **KNOWING.** “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God ” (1 Cor 2:12).

- **BEING MADE SOMETHING.** “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him ” (2 Cor 5:21).

- **BEING JUSTIFIED.** “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be

justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified” (Gal 2:16; 3:24).

- RECEIVING THE PROMISED SPIRIT. “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ” (Gal 3:14).

- RECEIVING ADOPTION. “To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons ” (Gal 4:5).

- BEING ABLE TO STAND. “Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil ” (Eph 6:11,13).

- OUR HEARTS BEING ESTABLISHED. “And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints ” (1 Thess 3:12-13).

- PARTAKING OF HIS HOLINESS. “For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness” (Heb 12:10).

- BEING FOUND WITHOUT SPOT. “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot, and blameless ” (2 Pet 3:14).

- LIVING THROUGH CHRIST. “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him ” (1 John 4:9).

These are only representative of

It is necessary to say these things because of the cloud of confusion that has fallen upon the church. Men are being taught that proper preparation is found in praise – praise as men define it. On the other hand, our text outlines in great detail precisely how the disciples prepared for the blessing of the Lord. It reveals how they waited.

the many statements of the revealed purpose of God’s great salvation. As you can see, it is quite different from what is being pawned off on the church of our day. These are things that cannot be accomplished by singing trite little choruses that are not accompanied by holy hearts and an affection that has been placed on things above.

Why Say These Things?

It is necessary to say these things because of the cloud of confusion that has fallen upon the church – cast upon it by teachers who do not have a grasp of the truth. Men are being taught that proper preparation is found in praise – praise as men define it. On the other hand, our text outlines in great detail precisely how the disciples prepared for the blessing of the Lord. It reveals how they waited. The strict propriety of what they did is confirmed by the events that took place on the day of Pentecost.

Many poor souls have never received the resources provided in Christ Jesus because they simply are not ready to receive them. They are too close to the world, and, consequently, too far from God. Like the Corinthians, they are “carnal,” and “walk as men” (1 Cor 3:3). Therefore, they are really not able to be “blessed.” They stand in need of correction, because they are lingering around the spiritual cesspool from which Jesus delivered them.

CONTINUED

“These all continued . . .” Other versions read, “They all joined together,” NASB “All these were constantly,” NRSV “continued steadfastly,” ASV “gave themselves up to,” BBE “All these were persevering,” DOUAY “were continually devoting themselves,” NAS “constantly,” NIB “all these joined constantly,” NJB “these all were continuing,” YLT “They were all together,” IE “kept devoting themselves to,” ISV “gave their constant attention to,” MONTGOMERY and “devoted themselves steadfastly.” AMPLIFIED

In today’s religious culture, this is a strange concept – CONTINUANCE ! Men have grown so accustomed to seven minute devotions, fifteen minute sermons, and “hour of power,” that they know nothing about being steadfast, continuing, and running with patience. They demand religious brevity so they can get on with the things they really prefer.

But that was not the posture of these disciples. They had just spend forty days with the risen Savior, with Him speaking to them “of things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

However, they had not reached that infamous saturation level where they could contain no more. They “continued” without a break.

It is possible to be on the edge of some great spiritual epoch, and be completely oblivious of it. That was not the case with these disciples. Jesus had told them, “Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). That had whetted their appetites, and they would not be dissuaded by lesser things. Peter does not suggest that they go fishing now!

How frequently we are reminded of the role of continuance in spiritual life – perseverance and faithfulness.

- Continue in God’s goodness (Rom 11:22).
- Continue in the faith (Col 2:3).
- Continue in prayer (Col 4:2).
- Continue in taking heed to ourselves and the doctrine (1 Tim 4:16).
- Continue in what we have learned (2 Tim 3:14).
- Let brotherly love continue (Heb 13:1).

It ought to be apparent that spiritual life can be maintained by fits and starts. It requires continuance, persevering, holding on, abiding, remaining, enduring, and persisting.

WITH ONE ACCORD

“ . . . with one accord . . .” Other versions read, “with one mind,” NIV “unitedly . . . with one soul” MRD “with one heart,” NJB “with their minds in full agreement,” AMPLIFIED “with the same purpose,” IE and “by common consent.” PHILLIPS

Men sometimes labor for years to try and accomplish religious unity. Here, before the Holy Spirit even came, the disciples were “with one accord.” Their hearts were united. Their minds were single. They were in full agreement, desiring and anticipating the same thing. Not only that, they “continued” to be of one accord, one mind, and a common purpose!

In all of these cases, the people saw things the same way. Whether for good or for evil, it is their perception that brought them together. They were not merely together physically, or in body, but in mind and heart as well.

They had not been this way before! There were times when some of these same people “disputed” among themselves about who “should be greatest” (Mk 9:33-34). One time James and John

aggravated the other ten disciples by asking that they be granted the honor of sitting on Christ's right and left hand in His glory (Mk 10:37-41). However, that sort of thing is behind them now. The risen and empowered Christ has directed their attention to great things, and they are all in one accord.

This matter of being "in one accord" is central in the work of the Lord. It is not the result of avoiding speaking about the things of God, or ignoring the Gospel and its implications. Being of "one accord" is not the result of a fleshly preference for one another, or being close friends, and operating within the framework of a humanly devised systematic theology. "One accord" is the translation of a single Greek word – **ὁμοθυμαδον** (hom-oth-oo-mad-on). Lexically it means, "with one mind," THAYER "action agreed on unanimously with one mind, with one purpose, by common consent," FRIBERG "with one mind, by common consent, together," UBS "pertaining to mutual consent or agreement, with one mind, by common consent, unanimously," LOUW-NADA and "with one accord, mostly joined with." LADLE-SCOTT

This word is used twenty-two times in the book of Acts. It is translated "one accord" (1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29). It always has to do with a united perception of things, and being united together by that perception.

- With one accord in prayer and supplication (1:14).
- With one accord and in one place on the day of Pentecost (2:1).
- Continuing steadfastly together in the Temple and from house to house (2:46).
- Lifting up their voice in prayer to God together (4:24).
- Being of one accord amidst the wondrous working of the Apostles (5:12).
- The people of the city of Samaria with one accord giving heed to the Gospel preached by Philip.
- With one accord choosing Barnabas and Paul, sending them to a specific work for the Lord (15:25).

Even those under the grip of Satan worked together, doing their work in a state of agreement and focus.

- The Jewish council with one accord thrust Stephen out of the city and stoned him (7:57).
- The people of Tyre and Sidon came together in one accord, appealing to Herod for peace (12:20).
- The Jews made an insurrection against Paul with one accord, bringing him before the judgment seat of Gallio (18:12).
- In an aggressive defense of their false God Diana, the Ephesians rushed together in one accord, and in opposition to Paul (19:29).

In all of these cases, the people saw things the same way. Whether for good or for evil, it is their perception that brought them together. They were not merely together physically, or in body, but in mind and heart as well.

This is the kind of accord that will be seen throughout the book of Acts. When there is discord, there will always be some form of disruption, for the Lord only works for good in an environment in which the people are of one accord before Him. This is precisely why Paul wrote to the Roman brethren, "That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:6).

Much of the Christianity of our day is devoid of these essential qualities: “one mind and one mouth.” It is not at all unusual to find “church” people singing things they do not want to sing, hearing things they do not want to hear, and doing things they do not want to do. Many gatherings of professing Christians are not the result of the people being of “one accord” or of “one mind.” Some people come together because they think that is what they are supposed to do. Others come together because of carnal friendship. Still others imagine that coming together will somehow compensate for their failure to live by faith, live by every word of God, and live unto the Lord.

I personally know of gatherings of religious leaders – gatherings in which I have personally participated – in which the mind of the constituents on the things of God is not even known – much less has it drawn the people together. Some religious gatherings can only simulate oneness by avoiding speaking about “the things of the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). I have even heard “Christian” leaders boast that they have agreed not to be overtly disagreeable, thereby acknowledging that they are not in “one accord.” Most people with “Christian” involvements know this is the case. It is not, however, fashionable to talk about it.

Such is the religion of our day. It is what has produced denominations, factions, and schisms among professed believers. It is what has produced contradicting doctrines or teachings. Such circumstances are the result of worldly and demonic wisdom. As James well said, “But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:14-16).

However, this is not the kind of environment that salvation creates. It is not what happens when people are born again, reconciled to God, and added to the church. Such it is not the religion of the book of Acts – which is an inspired account of what really happens when people are washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11).

What we are going to read is the result of single-mindedness, focused consideration, and being absorbed with the will of the Lord.

IN PRAYER

“ . . . in prayer . . . ” Other versions read, “continual prayer,” DARBY “constantly praying,” IE and “earnest in prayer.” WEYMOUTH

The word from which “prayer” is translated is a most interesting one. It has a two-fold meaning: “prayer addressed to God,” and “a place set apart or suited for the offering of prayer.” THAYER This word emphasizes asking , as the next phrase will confirm. Prayer does have many forms, and we are to learn to employ them all. As it is written, “praying always with all prayer” (Eph 6:18). Some of the types of prayer include:

- Confession, or penitential prayers (Psa 51; 1 John 1:9).
- Intercession (1 Tim 2:1).
- Thanksgiving (Psa 50:14; Phil 4:6; Col 4:2).
- Praise (Psa 118:21; Acts 16:25).

In this text, the emphasis is on asking, petitioning, requesting, calling on the name of the Lord, seeking, and inquiring. In such a wide sweeping expression, these brethren were in “one accord.” Their session was not one of diverse mingled requests and varied objectives. They were “waiting” for the promise that was to be sent to them. Their attention and prayers were doubtless centered on that event. It was at that time, when they were “endued with power from on high,” that the New Covenant would be inaugurated, and the purpose for which Jesus “came into the world” would be

put into action.

AND SUPPLICATION

“ . . . and supplication . . . ” Most later versions omit this word (ASV, NASV, NIV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NLT). The following versions do contain the word: New King James (1982), Geneva (1599), Bishop’s New Testament (1595), Revised Websters (1995), Tyndale (1534), Websters (1833) Young’s Literal Translation (1862).

The word “supplication” has the lexical meaning of, “seeking, asking, entreating, entreaty,” THAYER “plea, entreaty, as addressed to God in prayer, request, petition,” FRIBERG “to plead, to beg, that which is asked with urgency based on presumed need,” LOUW-NADA and “an entreating, asking, a prayer, entreaty.” LADLE-SCOTT

A WORD ON THE TRANSLATION

Technically, and for those who are interested, The Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions leave out the last clause, “*and supplication.*” These words do occur in a significant number of Greek manuscripts. William Tyndale, a unique and heralded Scriptural and language scholar, included the words in his 1534 translation of the New Testament into English.

All of this is really of little consequence. I only mention it to underscore the petty nature of some in their approach to translation. First, there are sufficient acceptable manuscripts to justify the inclusion of the words. Second, there are sufficient godly and extensive scholars who see a need to include them. Third, the very nature of the text lends itself to the employment of this language. Fourth, the same Greek expressions (**proskarterh,sei kai. deh,sei** and **proseuch/ kai. th/ deh,sei**) are also found in Ephesians 6:18 and Philippians 4:6. Versions omitting the expression in Acts 1:14, include it in those verses (“*prayer and supplication,*” ASV/ESV/VRSV “*prayers and requests,*” NASB “*prayers and petitions*” NIV). I do not see this as a critical matter. However, I have been compelled to say a few words about it to illustrate the dreadful propensity of worldly wisdom to the nonsensical and meaningless. Only eternity will unveil the extent of the confusion that has been caused in the Christian community by multiple, and often sloppy, translations of the Scriptures.

For what were these disciples praying and making supplication? First, it could not be unrelated to the reason for them waiting for what God had promised. Holy people do not wait for the promise of God while praying about other matters. The fact that the Father had promised to send His Spirit by no means indicated that it would all happen automatically and without the involvement of others. Concerning this promise, made by the Father, Jesus had said, “And I will pray the Father , and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16). No doubt they also remembered the words of the Lord Jesus concerning men receiving the Holy Spirit. “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him ?” (Luke 11:13). It is, therefore, perfectly reasonable to understand one of their chief petitions was that they would received the Spirit.

Included in that petition could have been such things as being delivered from evil and protected from their enemies, remaining faithful, that their faith would remain strong, and that they would all remain “of one accord.” All of that, and more, was associated with receiving “the promise of the Father.”

Why Supplicate for Something Promised?

The sophist will ask, “Why should God’s people ask for something that the Lord has promised? Isn’t that a sign of unbelief?” To the unlearned, that makes a lot of sense. However, it really borders

on spiritual insanity. God has revealed that the fulfillment of His purposes in the earth includes the involvement of men. The One who can save to the uttermost will use the work of Noah to preserve the eight souls who will multiply in the earth after the flood. He who gives repentance will employ men like John the Baptist and Peter the Apostle to facilitate that repentance. This is, as Job would put it, “parts of His ways” (Job 26:14).

The Principle Declared

All of this would bring the heathen around them to know the Lord Himself had done such great things – things that could in no way be accomplished by men. However, even though God had purposed these things, He would be moved by supplications of His people to do them.

Speaking through Ezekiel, the Lord made known what He had purposed for Israel. Their land, which was made desolate, would become like the garden of Eden. Abandoned cities would be built, walled, and inhabited. All of this would bring the heathen around them to know the Lord Himself had done such great things – things that could in no way be accomplished by men. However, even though God had purposed these things, He would be moved by supplications of His people to do them. Here is how Ezekiel said it. “And they shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are become fenced, and are inhabited. Then the heathen that are left round about you shall know that I the LORD build the ruined places, and plant that that was desolate: I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them ; I will increase them with men like a flock” (Ezek 36:35-37).

Again, God spoke through Jeremiah, assuring the people of His purposes for them. Yet, they would be realized by means of the involvement of the people. “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me , and I will hearken unto you” (Jer 29:12).

The Principle Illustrated

This Divine principle of human involvement is lived out in the prophet Daniel. Because he lived within the awareness of the Lord created by the Word of God, he sensed that a time for accelerated prayer and supplication had come. Here is how he recorded the experience. “In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications , with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan 9:2-3).

The books of reference were the writings of Jeremiah – particularly the Divinely determined length of the Babylonian captivity: seventy years (2 Chron 36:21; Jer 25:11-12). Of particular importance was the promise of God concerning the conclusion of those seventy years. “For thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place” (Jer 29:10).

When Daniel realized that the seventy years of captivity in Babylon were coming to a close, he did not lift his hands in praise saying, “Thank God the time of judgment is coming to an end!!” Instead he said, “And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes” (Dan 9:3). His prayer is one of the great prayers of Scripture, extending from 9:4 through 9:17). In this prayer, which he called a “confession,” he said the following.

- God was great and dreadful (4a).

- God keeps covenant and mercy with those who love Him and keep His commandments (4b).
- Israel had sinned, committed iniquity, and done wickedly in departing from God's precepts (5).
- Israel had not hearkened to God's prophets (6).
- Righteous belonged to God, but confusion of face to Israel (7-8).
- Mercies and forgivenesses belonged to God, even though they had rebelled against Him (9).
- Israel had not obeyed the Lord, but transgressed His law, departing from Him (10-11).
- The Babylonian captivity had confirmed God's word against them (12-14).
- God had brought the people out of Egypt, but they had sinned against Him (15).
- Jeremiah asked the Lord to turn away His anger from them (16).
- He asked the Lord to make His face shine upon His sanctuary, which was then desolate (17).
- He pleads with the Lord to look upon the desolation of His people and the city of Jerusalem (18).
- He asks the Lord to forgive, and not defer to consider His city and His people (19).

I suppose some would argue that all of this was totally unnecessary. After all, God had already promised that He would visit the people after seventy years to perform His good word toward them and cause them to return to their land (Jer 29:10). But let us hear the response of heaven to reasoning like that of Jeremiah! That will settle the matter.

While Daniel was still speaking his prayer and making his confession, God sent the angel Gabriel to Daniel. He said that he was sent by God to give Daniel "skill and understanding." Gabriel said, "At the beginning of thy supplications the commandment came forth, and I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved : therefore understand the matter, and consider the vision" (Dan 9:23). He then revealed to Daniel not only the end of the Babylonian captivity, but the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and the eventual coming of the Messiah who would be "cut off" for the people (9:24-26).

Jesus In Gethsemane

Somehow, the preachers and teachers of the day have produced a people who have neither eye nor heart, discernment nor sensitivity. Like some Hebrews, they are "dull of hearing." Like the disciples at one time, they are "slow of heart to believe"

If God has ever established His will, it is in the matter of His great salvation. He announced His intentions to destroy the devil through the seed of the woman before Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden (Gen 3:15). He declared His purpose to bless the world through the seed of Abraham (Gen 12:3; 18:18). The manner of the death of Christ was revealed through David (Psa 22). What would take place in His death was revealed through Isaiah (Isa 53). The willingness of the Savior to enter a body prepared for Him and satisfy God through a willing sacrifice was also made known through David (Psa 40:6-8).

If anything can be accomplished without any further involvement on earth, surely it will be this! But that is not the way it all played out! When the hour began to approach when Jesus would lay down His life, He "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" where the death would be

accomplished (Lk 9:51). When the night arrived when He would, according to prophecy, be betrayed by His own “familiar friend” (Psa 41:9), He agonized in prayer, thrice crying out, “not as I will, but as Thou wilt” (Matt 26:39,42,44). This is the manner of the kingdom!

In Our Text

Therefore, just a few days away from the promised coming of the Holy Spirit upon them, the disciples engaged in focused and consistent prayer. They began to seek fervently what was shortly going to be accomplished. Their action was not a sign of the lack of faith, but the evidence of the strength of their faith.

Our Times

The modern church has delivered a gospel that has not led people to think in this manner. They appear to have no sense of the approaches of Divinely appointed epochs – whether judgments like the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt 24:15-17), or blessings, like events leading up to the return of our Lord.(Lk 21:24-28). Somehow, the preachers and teachers of the day have produced a people who have neither eye nor heart, discernment nor sensitivity. Like some Hebrews, they are “dull of hearing” (Heb 5:11). Like the disciples at one time, they are “slow of heart to believe” (Lk 24:25). Like Jerusalem of old, they are unable to perceive when they have been “visited” by the Lord (Lk 19:44).

These are not the kind of disciples we will find in the book of the Acts. Here we will be faced with a people who know what to do when they are apprised of coming events. They know what to do when they are challenged. Their responses will be immediately and zealous. This is a recounting of life under the New Covenant – of the nature of that life, and of the world’s reaction to it.

DO NOT FORGET THE OTHERS!

“ 14a . . . with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.”

“The eleven” were the principal people gathered together, but they were not the only ones. Furthermore, they were primary by Divine appointment, not by achievement or human merit. As it is written, “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles , secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28). The apostles would not be the only people the exalted Christ used to establish the truth. In this book, we will read of several who were used in an unusual way, yet were not “first.” They include men like Barnabas (4:36; 9:27; 11:22-30; 12:25; 13:7; 43-50; 14:12-20; 15:2,12,22-39), Stephen (6:5-9; 7:1-59), Philip (the evangelist – Acts 6:5; 8:5-40; 21:8), James (the Lord’s brother – Acts 15:13; 21:18), Silas (Acts 15:22-40; 16:19-29; 17:4-15; 18:5), Agabus (a prophet – Acts 11:28; 21:10-12), Timotheus (Acts 16:1; 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4), Judas (a prophet – 15:22,27,32), Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen (prophet-teachers – 13:1-4), and others.

All of these were used mightily by the Lord, not being equal to the apostles, yet putting their hands to the work of the Lord with them.

Now, Luke tells us of the people who were waiting for the promise of the Father. All of these had apparently understood themselves to be included in those who should wait for “the promise of the Father.” All of them had concluded they should not depart from Jerusalem, and that they would, in some way, be included as Christ’s witnesses.

“The eleven” certainly did not consider it a reproach to be gathered with these personalities, nor did they despise their prayers. There are a significant number of professed Christian leaders who would not have allowed these people to be included in this number – particularly sense a major decision

will be made by this very group.

THE WOMEN

“ . . . with the women . . . ” Other versions read, “ along with the women,” NASB “together with certain women ,” NRSV “ together with the women,” RSV “with several women,” DARBY “with some women,” NAB “several other women ,” NLT “with women,” YLT [waiting together] with the women,” AMPLIFIED and “together with the women who had followed Jesus .” PHILLIPS

I understand these to be “women” that were previously defined as being associated with Jesus, either personally or in a specific group. Here are some references to these women – especially noted for following Jesus and being devoted to Him.

- “And many women were there beholding afar off, which followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering unto him: Among which was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James and Joses , and the mother of Zebedee's children ” (Mat 27:56).

- “There were also women looking on afar off: among whom was Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the less and of Joses , and Salome ; (Who also, when He was in Galilee, followed Him, and ministered unto Him;) and many other women which came up with Him unto Jerusalem” (Mark 15:41).

- “And when the sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene , and Mary the mother of James, and Salome , had bought sweet spices, that they might come and anoint Him” (Mark 16:1).

- “And certain women , which had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities, Mary called Magdalene , out of whom went seven devils, and Joanna the wife of Chuza Herod's steward, and Susanna , and many others , which ministered unto Him of their substance” (Luke 8:3).

- “And all His acquaintance, and the women that followed Him from Galilee , stood afar off, beholding these things” (Luke 23:49).

- “And the women also, which came with Him from Galilee, followed after, and beheld the sepulcher, and how His body was laid” (Luke 23:55).

- “It was Mary Magdalene , and Joanna , and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles” (Luke 24:10).

- “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother , and His mother's sister , Mary the wife of Cleophas , and Mary Magdalene ” (John 19:25).

The significance of at least some of these women is found in the fact that Jesus Himself upbraided the men for not believing their testimony that they had seen the risen Christ. “Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen” (Mark 16:14; Lk 24:22).

Women who are specifically named, were identified with Christ, and no doubt with His disciples, include Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Mark the mother of James and John, Joanna, Susanna, and Mary's (mother of Jesus) sister. In addition there were clusters of women referred to as “other women” and “ many other women.” By mentioning them, the Spirit endears them to our hearts.

THE MOTHER OF JESUS

“ . . . and Mary the mother of Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “Jesus' mother,” LIVING “Mary,” WILLIAMS and “Mary His mother.” PHILLIPS

Mary is referred to as “the mother of Jesus” three times (John 2:1,3; Acts 1:14), “His mother” fourteen times (Matt 2:13,14,20,21,; 12:46; Mk 3:31; Lk 2:33,43,48,51; Lk 8:19; John 2:5,12; 19:26), “His mother Mary” once (Matt 1:18), “the mother of my Lord” once (Lk 1:43) and “Mary, of whom Jesus was born” (Matt 1:16).

Prior to her bearing the “holy child,” she was referred to as Mary, “a virgin to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David” (Lk 1:27). The angel Gabriel appeared to her, announcing that she had been chosen and was “highly favored, the Lord was with her, and she was “blessed among women” (Lk 1:28). He specifically told her that she had “found favor with God” (Lk 1:30). Mary’s response to this marvelous announcement was, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word” (Luke 1:38).

Mary was related to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, who is called her “cousin” (Lk 1:36). At the time of his announcement to Mary, the angel told her that Elizabeth had conceived a son “in her old age, and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Lk 1:36-37).

Upon visiting Elizabeth and saluting her, the babe John the Baptist leaped in Elizabeth’s womb, and she was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Lk 1:41). At that time, Elizabeth pronounced a blessing upon Mary: “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. . . And blessed is she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord” (Luke 1:42-45).

Upon hearing these things, Mary praised God in a most unique and insightful manner. This is one of the great expressions of the salvation of God.

“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to his seed for ever” (Luke 1:38-55).

When Jesus was born, and the shepherds told Mary and Joseph what the angel had told them concerning the Babe, “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart” (Luke 2:19).

Mary was an extraordinarily blessed, holy, and insightful woman. Much of the religious world has not beheld her as they should – “blessed among women” and “highly favored” of God.

When Jesus was twelve, and was found in the Temple “in the midst of the doctors,” upon being questioned by her concerning the occasion, Jesus told her that He had to be about His “Father’s business.” Upon their return to Nazareth, it is written of Mary, “but His mother kept all of these sayings in her heart” (Lk 2:51).

At the beginning of Christ’s ministry, when He performed the first of His miracles, “the mother of Jesus was there” (John 2:5). When Jesus was on the cross, “His mother” was there (John 19:25). Now, after His ascension into heaven, when the disciples are waiting for the promise of the Father, “Mary the mother of Jesus” is there.

This is the last mentioning of her in the Scriptures, and we are left with a most favorable impression of her.

Mary was an extraordinarily blessed, holy, and insightful woman. Much of the religious world has not beheld her as they should – “blessed among woman” and “highly favored” of God.

HIS BRETHREN

“ . . . and with His brethren.” Other versions read, “His brothers,” NKJV “as well as His brothers,” NRSV and “the brothers of Jesus.” NLT

These are the half-brothers of Jesus, Joseph being their father. Their names are given in Scripture: “Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas ?” (Mat 13:55).

After Jesus turned the water into wine, He “went down to Capernaum.” At that time, His brethren stayed briefly with Him. “After this He went down to Capernaum, He, and His mother, and His brethren , and His disciples: and they continued there not many days” (John 2:12).

Once, when His brethren had heard the multitudes were swarming around Jesus and His disciples, and they could not even take time to eat, they concluded He was “beside Himself” and journeyed there to rescue Him (Mark 3:21,32).

Well into the ministry of Jesus, His brothers still did not believe in Him. Once, when the Feast of Tabernacles approached, they said to Him, “Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that thy disciples also may see the works that thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If Thou do these things, show Thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in Him” (John 7:5). They knew He was a great Teacher and miracle worker, but they were not aware of who He really was. Therefore they are properly said to not “believe in Him.” At that time, they were much like the average church member.

Now, however, His brethren have believed on Jesus, and have joined with the disciples in waiting for the promise of the Father.

James

James, the Lord’s brother, became a prominent and leading member of the Jerusalem church. He is the one who wrote the book of James. Another of Jesus’ brothers, Jude, wrote the book of Jude. James the Lord’s brother is also quite prominent in the book of Acts, particularly in regards to special meetings that were called to consider the acceptance of the Gentiles (12:17; 15:13-21; 21:18).

After Jesus had risen from the dead, He made a special appearance to His brother James, as distinguished from the rest of the Apostles (1 Cor 15:7). After Paul was converted, He went up to Jerusalem, spending fifteen days with Peter (Gal 1:18). At that time, Paul said he did not see any of the other apostles – but He did see “James the Lord’s brother” (Gal 1:19). The account of that meeting is found in Acts 21:18-26).

When Paul went to Antioch, and had to confront Peter “to his face” about his improper conduct toward the Gentiles, mention is made of several brethren who had been sent to Antioch by James (Gal 2:12). James, together with Peter and John, were “pillars” in the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9). This was after James the apostle had been killed by Herod (Acts 12:2). James, the Lord’s brother was now a leading figure.

Wrapping It Up

We are left considering this band of disciples, patiently waiting for “the promise of the Father,” and

doing so at the direction of Jesus.

It appears to me that there were a minimum of twenty-six disciples present. The eleven, seven specific women, Jesus' four brothers, and four others: Barsabas and Matthias (identified later), and Cleopas and his companion.

An unbiased consideration of this gathering is devastating to certain views concerning “the role of women” in the church. To this point, after being taught by the Son of God Himself during His ministry, and after having Him teach them concerning the Kingdom of God for the forty days following His resurrection, there was no apparent restrictive views of the women among them.

Barsabas and Matthias were doubtless there, because they were with the disciples “until the day He was taken up” into heaven (Acts 1:22). The others were included when they were with the eleven, when Jesus appeared to them, after which He led them out to Bethany, blessed them, and was parted from them (Luke 24:36-50).

All of these people had apparently concluded that the word to “tarry in Jerusalem” applied to them. I conclude that their presence was something more than a gesture of comfort and kindness toward “the eleven.”

Considering the Women

An unbiased consideration of this gathering is devastating to certain views concerning “the role of women” in the church. To this point, after being taught by the Son of God Himself during His ministry, and after having Him teach them concerning the Kingdom of God for the forty days following His resurrection, there was no apparent restrictive views of the women among them.

Following His resurrection, Jesus had “appeared first to Mary Magdalene.” He charged her, “go to My brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.” Obediently, “Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things unto her” (John 20:17-18).

When holy women went to anoint the body of Jesus, they confronted a holy angel. Unaware of any restrictions on women speaking to men, this angel told them, “And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see Him: lo, I have told you” (Matt 28:7). As they went on their way the risen Christ Himself met them. He told them, “Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me” (Matt 28:10).

In these texts, if there is any doubt about Jesus “brethren” being “the eleven,” that doubt is shattered by Mark. “Afterward He appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen Him after He was risen” (Mark 16:14). If it is countered that those bearing the testimony really refers to Cleopas and his companion, let it be remembered that Cleopas referred to the testimony of the women BEFORE he and his companion told the disciples they had seen the Lord. They told Jesus (whom they had not yet recognized), “Yea, and certain women also of our company made us astonished, which were early at the sepulcher; and when they found not his body, they came, saying, that they had also seen a vision of angels, which said that He was alive” (Luke 24:22-23).

The Relevance of These Observations

There is a certain and contemporary relevancy in these recorded events. We have been exposed to the mind of Christ, and how holy and informed angels thought about women – holy women. They

knew nothing of their inherent subordination to all men, or of them not being allowed to bear witness to any man. Jesus commanded Mary, plus a group of women, to deliver a message to His own disciples. It was a message of revelation and of direction as well. They were to tell the men the fact of Him being raised, and then instruct them where to meet Him. Angels from heaven were not aware of any limitations being placed on women bearing witness to men – and men are, in their best state, “a little lower than the angels” (Psa 8:5; Heb 2:7).

Men are told to be cautious about how they speak before angels (Eccl 5:6), and women are told to conduct themselves within an awareness of the presence of angels (1 Cor 10:10). But angels are never admonished to be careful how they speak before men. You may be sure they will not have regard for the traditions of men when they speak, no matter how hoary those traditions are.

In my judgment, men ought to be cautious about adopting any view of women speaking that is at variance with what the Son of God and holy angels have actually done. No view should be taken that perceives Jesus or angels acting in contradiction of the nature of the New Covenant. If it is difficult to put various texts together, then admit to the difficulty, but do not take it upon yourself to impose rules upon your sisters that have not been honored by either Jesus or holy angels. Men will have to give an account for such views, and explain why they ignored what Jesus did, and what angels did, in preference for a human interpretation or tradition.

What the women I have just mentioned did, would be something like some godly women informing certain elders of some truth of God, then telling them what they should do about it. If it is countered that Jesus would never do something like this, I have just shown you where He DID do it.

All people will eventually face these holy women – women whose record was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. How embarrassing it will be to have to give an accounting for binding rules upon the “daughters” of God that make Mary Magdalene and the holy women appear to be acting in contradiction of the New Covenant! How will men explain that condition on the day of judgment?

Let no one remonstrate, saying that Jesus was at liberty to break the Law, or violate a Divine principle. He was prophesied to be the One who would “magnify the Law, and make it honorable,” not the One who would break it (Isa 42:21).

CONCLUSION

I have spent an unusual amount of time dealing with, what may appear to be, mere incidentals. However, as we approach this marvelous record of Divine working, it is essential that we maintain a proper perspective. The era of the New Covenant is going to be launched, and it is important that we see how this was done. The Gospel of salvation will be declared, and it is crucial that we see what is said, and how it is proclaimed. We will be exposed to the reshaping of the thinking of the disciples, and it is critical that we discern the what, why, and how of that reshaping.

The book of Acts cannot be read through the filter of the Mosaic Law. Much less can it be read through the foggy spectacles of human tradition. We will be exposed to the work that Jesus started, when He “BEGAN to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). Christ’s ministry among men was not an extension of the Old Covenant, and it is disastrous to sound thought if we think that it was. Jesus Himself said that “the prophets and the Law prophesied until John [the Baptist]” (Matt 11:13). As Luke said it, “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16).

Jesus, then, as well as John the Baptist, preached during a transitional period. This was a time of preparation for the period of the New Covenant, and the preaching of both John and Jesus conformed to that objective. That is why their subject matter is described as “the Kingdom of God,” or “the Kingdom of heaven,” which Matthew prefers to use (Matt 3:2; 4:17). These synonymous

expressions are used no less than eighty-four times in the Gospels alone. Acts uses them seven times. Neither one of them is used a single time from Genesis through Malachi – not in any standard translation of the Scripture!

Jesus commented on the Law, but He did not preach the Law – He preached the Kingdom of God. He spoke of the traditions of the elders, but He did not preach those traditions – He preached the Kingdom of God. In keeping with the thrust of His preaching, He spoke about such things as being “born again” (John 3:3,7), receiving the Holy Spirit (Matt 7:112; Lk 11:13; John 7:37-39), names being written in heaven (Lk 10:20), having “eternal life” (Matt 19:29; Mk 10:30; John 3:15,16,36; 4:14; 5:24; 5:39; 6:27,40,47,54; 10:28; 17:2), never dying (John 11:26), seeing Abraham (Lk 13:28), and the day of judgment (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Mk 6:11). None of these things – not a single one of them – was the thrust of the words of either Moses or the Prophets.

The ministry of Jesus before He died, His ministry to His disciples on earth after He rose from the dead, and His ministry in heaven after He ascended up where He was before, ALL have to do with the New Covenant, Redemption in Christ Jesus, and newness of life. Nothing – absolutely nothing – having to do with the enfleshment, death, and glorification of Jesus is unrelated to those realities.

My posture in all of these lessons will exhibit a total intolerance for the lifeless and unprofitable traditions of men. It will make no effort at all to synchronize the book of Acts with human perceptions. Where there is a conflict between what men have said or are saying, and the record in this book, I will energetically default to Luke’s record. The Gospel preached in Acts is the only valid Gospel there is. It is not a special one for the Jews. If there are weaknesses in the understanding of the people whose

records are in this book, that deficiency will be dealt with forthrightly in the book and clearly resolved. If people have conducted themselves improperly, it will be clearly identified and a response recorded. This is an inspired book, and is to be so regarded. It provides an index in the Divine manner of working.

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #4

THE CHOOSING OF MATTHIAS

“ 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,) 16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus. 17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry. 18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. 19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood. 20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take. 21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection. 23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. 24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two Thou hast chosen, 25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. 26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. ” (Acts 1:15-26)

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INTRODUCTION

As the disciples “wait for the promise of the Father,” Peter is inspired to see that certain Scriptures must be fulfilled BEFORE that promise comes upon them. He perceives a text in which David refers to Judas, though not by name, and sees what needs to be done. His great heart is directed to review the fall of Judas, integrating that perception with the Word of God. In this text, we will see how the Holy Spirit can lead a person to think. The thought processes will be honed to their finest edge, so that a sound diagnosis of events, a remarkable exegesis of Scripture, and a flawless course of action can be articulated. It will also become apparent that the unity of the Spirit removed all carnal obstacles to the fulfillment of the will of God. People will be aware of what they can and cannot do. They will know what to do when their knowledge reaches its limitation. Their faith will also enable them to settle for the answer God gives.

When He was yet with them, Jesus said to His disciples, “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mat 18:19-20). In the text before us, this promise will be fulfilled in a remarkable way. The people are gathered together, and they are in agreement. During this time, when outward circumstances were most unfavorable, they had come together like the saints in Malachi’s day: “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another” (Mal 3:16). They worshiped Jesus and rejoiced together in their return to Jerusalem (Lk 24:52). They were continually “in the Temple, praising and blessing God” (Lk 24:53). Further, they were asking for something to be done by the Father which is in heaven: “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication” (Acts 1:14). Now it will be confirmed that Jesus is among them, and the Father will hear them. The Sovereign God of heaven will take due note of this solemn assembly.

I am persuaded that many noble spiritual desires are virtually aborted by the condition of the people. They are not together as they should be. They tend to be joined together by a fleshly unanimity rather than by their faith and common fear of the Lord. They really do not meet in the name of the Lord, but in the name of their church, or their theological persuasion, or some other earthly purpose. They are not operating by the Divine agenda.

Consider what remarkable circumstances attend this gathering.

- They have been tutored by Jesus for forty days in things pertaining to the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).
- They have been told what was going to happen to them (Acts 1:5).
- Jesus had blessed them (Lk 24:50).

- They have witnessed Jesus ascend, returning to heaven (Acts 1:10).
- Angels have told them He will return in the same manner (Acts 1:11).
- They returned to Jerusalem, worshiping Jesus and filled with joy (Lk 24:52).

I am persuaded that many noble spiritual desires are virtually aborted by the condition of the people. They are not together as they should be.

They have been in the Temple continually (Lk 24:53).

- They are all together (Acts 1:13-14a).
- They are in one accord (Acts 1:14b).

They have been continuing in prayer and supplication (Acts 1:14c).

Does anyone marvel that such a place is fertile spiritual ground? These brethren were not fishing, as some had chosen to do after Jesus had first risen from the dead (John 21:3). They were not filled with all manner of questions, as when they had first met with the risen Christ (Acts 1:6). There is a certain assurance and stability among this people. Their hearts have been affected, so that they are more in tune with heaven than with the earth. Holy desires have been awakened. Great expectation has risen to prominence. The promises of Jesus have moved to the forefront of their thinking. Some of them no doubt included the following – promises Jesus stated to those who followed Him and inquired of Him.

- “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).
- “I am the bread of life: he that cometh to Me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).
- “He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

There must have been recollections of such statements as, “theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” “they shall be comforted,” “they shall be filled,” “they shall obtain mercy,” and “they shall all be taught of God” (Matt 5:4,6,7; John 6:45).

There were also promises Jesus gave to His disciples on the night of His betrayal, when He chose to meet with the Twelve apostles. After the dismissal of Judas the traitor, He spoke of things that were going to come – things that would involve the other apostles.

Those with tender hearts do want blessing from the Lord. They want to participate in His work, be used by Him, and walk with Him in the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. We can learn from this text that such benefits require a certain spiritual soil. There is a frame of mind that is capable of receiving from God.

- “If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it” (John 14:14).
- “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17).
- “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you” (John 14:18).
- “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest

Myself to him” (John 14:21).

- “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23).

- “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me” (John 15:26).

- “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you” (John 16:7).

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

- “And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you” (John 16:23).

- “At that day ye shall ask in My name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you. For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God” (John 16:26-27).

DO YOU WANT A BLESSING?

Those with tender hearts do want blessing from the Lord. They want to participate in His work, be used by Him, and walk with Him in the fulfillment of His eternal purpose. We can learn from this text that such benefits require a certain spiritual soil. There is a frame of mind that is capable of receiving from God. There is a public environment that is conducive to blessing and Divine direction.

There is an approach to a proper environment in which men seek to simulate what they really do not possess. They feign a preference for the Lord, but their manner of life betrays the absence of such a thing. They pretend that they enjoy the presence of the Lord, but can only do so when their kind of music and other expressions are employed. An acute consciousness of God is missing, and thus they try to bring Him down into the assembly, as though He leaps from His throne to give heed to those going through certain routines. Fresh from the world and its involvements, such people imagine they can produce a spiritual environment by means of a routine, or an exercise, or some other external expression. These are fundamentally wrong ways of thinking.

The brethren in our text have come from the presence of the Lord, they are not seeking that presence. Their minds have been exposed to extended teaching about the Kingdom of God. They have been enraptured by the presence of the Lord, and “many infallible proofs” that accompanied His matchless teaching. They are not trying to contact the Lord, attempting to appropriate honest and good hearts, or get free from enslaving carnal habits. Their worship, praise, prayer, and supplication are the RESULT of what they have seen and heard – what they have experienced.

These brethren are in a position to be directed from heaven. The words of Jesus Himself are in their hearts and minds. They are expecting what the Lord has promised. They are in strict accord with the Divine agenda, refusing to leave the city until what has been promised to them has come to pass.

Now that they are in tune with the heavenly frequency, there will no doubt be some Divine direction. They will become even more fully involved in God’s purpose. Having removed themselves from worldly influences, they are “meet for the Master’s use” (2 Tim 2:21).

PETER STANDS UP IN THEIR MIDST

“ 1:15 And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty).”

Now, in this most excellent spiritual environment, something is sure to take place. The Lord Himself is prominent in the thinking of the people. What has been promised by Jesus is now their focused expectation. They are anticipating an unusual baptism (Acts 1:5). They are looking forward to being “endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). Their hearts are being oriented for the experience of being Christ’s witnesses (Acts 1:8). They are praying to God, and lifting up supplications to Him. Now, some communication will come back from heaven – some direction from the Lord. There is something to be done, and the Lord will direct them in how to do it.

It is possible to pray and beseech the Lord for some needed benefit or direction, yet not remain in the presence of the Lord long enough to get an answer. Often the Lord bears long with His children, not answering or directing them at once (Lk 18:7). This is such a time.

IN THOSE DAYS

“And in those days . . .” Other versions read, “And at this time,” NIV “In these days,” ASV “During those days,” NAB “During this time,” NLT “This prayer meeting went on for several days . During this time,” LIVING “It was on one of these days,” WEYMOUTH , “It was during these days ,” MONTOMERY “Now on one of those days ,” AMPLIFIED and “It was during this period .” PHILLIPS

The following event occurred on one of the days after Christ’s ascension, and before the day of Pentecost – one of the days the disciples were all together, in one place, in one accord, and continuing in prayer and supplication. It was while they were waiting for “the promise of the Father,” as Jesus had instructed them to do (Acts 1:4) – tarrying “in the city of Jerusalem” until they “be endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). We have no idea on which of the ten days what follows occurred. The Ethiopic version (5th-6th Century) reads “on that day,” suggesting that it was the same day they went to the upper room (1:13). This cannot be supported. However, it does appear as though it was early in the ten-day period. The important thing to note is that what follows took place in a truly spiritual environment where hearts were supple and united in Christ Jesus.

PETER STOOD UP IN THEIR MIDST

“Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said . . .” Other versions read “among the believers,” NASB “in the midst of the brethren,” NIV “got up among the brothers,” BBE “stood up to speak to the brothers,” NJB and “Stood up and addressed them as follows.” NLT

Peter, together with Andrew, was the first to be called to follow Jesus (Mat 4:18-19). Frequently, he had spoken out first, or in behalf of the disciples during Jesus’ ministry (Matt 14:28; 15:15; 16:16; 17:4; 18:21; 19:27; 26:33,35; Lk 5:5; ; 12:41; John 13:37).

Now Peter rises to speak again. This, time, however, he is not going to ask any questions, or make some casual suggestions. He has been renewed in the “spirit of his mind,” and he sees things with the kind of clarity that comes from being consciously in the presence of the exalted Christ.

Now Peter rises to speak again. This, time, however, he is not going to ask any questions, or make some casual suggestions. He has been renewed in the “spirit of his mind,” and he sees things with the kind of clarity that comes from being consciously in the presence of the exalted Christ. His spiritual senses have been honed to a fine edge, and his reasoning powers have been sanctified in the crucible of prayer and supplication. He is in tune with heaven, and thus can receive insight and direction. All of the Scripture to which he has subjected his mind will now be accessible to his

reasoning powers. He will be able to integrate the truth of Scripture with circumstance, and associate key events with the will of the Lord.

Looking at it from another point of this, Jesus is among the assembly, for it has been convened in His name. He had promised them He would be in such gatherings: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them ” (Matt 18:20). He is at this gathering, not as an Observer, but as the Director and Revealer. Speaking through Peter, the Head of the body will address the body through one of its premier members. He will lead them in the fulfillment of what has already been determined in heaven.

THE NUMBER OF NAMES

“ . . . the number of names together . . . ” Other versions read, “a group numbering,” NASB “a gathering of ,” NIV “together the crowd,” NRSV “now the number of names that were in one place,” ESV “people in the congregation,” NJB “the multitude also of the names at the same place was,” YLT and “the whole number of whom gathered together.” AMPLIFIED

Some of the versions do a disservice by depersonalizing the people who were gathered together. This is done by using such terms as “a group,” NASB “a gathering,” NIV and “the crowd.” NRSV The word used here (**ovnoma,twn**) means “the name by which a person is called; proper names.” LIDDELL-SCOTT In commenting on the significance of this word, the lexicographer Thayer writes, “By a usage chiefly Hebraistic **the name** is used for everything which the name covers, everything the thought or feeling of which is roused in the mind by mentioning, hearing, remembering, the name, i. e. for one's rank, authority, interests, pleasure, command, excellences, deeds, etc.” THAYER

While some may consider this an insignificant point, the Spirit is accenting the composition of this group, and not the group itself. Expressions like “the eleven,” “the women,” “Mary the mother of Jesus,” and “His brothers,” summon a body of thought into our minds. When we hear the name “Peter,” or “John,” or “James,” it brings with it all kinds of associations. These were individuals who had been touched by the Lord Jesus. Their lives had been significantly altered by their association with Him. Their primary allegiance was to Him. That is why they were gathered together. That is why they engaged in pray and supplication, rather than in mere social activities.

In the world, you can have a large crowd with only a few that are actually involved in the purpose of that crowd. But this is not the case with the gathering of which Luke is writing. These people were not only in the same place, they were all of one accord. They did not come to be entertained, but joined in continuing in prayer and supplication.

When God calls people out of the world, He does not destroy their personal identity. He rather sanctifies it. They do not lose their individuality in the group – something that often happens in worldly gatherings. When God changed the identity of a person, or altered their role and significance, He often changed their name. Abram to Abraham, Sarai to Sarah, Jacob to Israel, Simon to Cephas, Saul to Paul, etc. Thus they would be remembered primarily for what occurred to them after they became involved in the purpose and work of the Lord.

In the world, you can have a large crowd with only a few that are actually involved in the purpose of that crowd. But this is not the case with the gathering of which Luke is writing. These people were not only in the same place, they were all of one accord. They did not come to be entertained, but joined in continuing in prayer and supplication. This assembly bore little resemblance to the common church gatherings of our day.

ABOUT AN HUNDRED AND TWENTY

“ . . . were about an hundred and twenty. ” Other versions read, “about a hundred and twenty,”

NASB “about one hundred and twenty persons,” NIV “there were about a hundred and twenty people in the congregation,” NJB and “as it were, an hundred and twenty.” YLT

We do not know if this was the original number that gathered, or if the numbers had significantly increased. If the number had grown, it was doubtless owing to the disciples being regularly in the Temple, “praising and blessing God” (Lk 24:53). Perhaps some had inquired about their exuberance and, upon hearing the reason for their rejoicing and praise, had joined the number.

Above Five Hundred At Once

In recounting the post resurrection appearances of Christ, Paul mentions Christ showing Himself to a rather large gathering. “And that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles” (1 Cor 15:5-7).

We do not know for sure when or where this post-resurrection appearance took place. There is a general agreement among Bible students that this is probably the appearance of Jesus in Galilee, where He had made most of His disciples. Even before He died, Jesus told the Apostles, “But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee ” (Matt 26:32). An angel told the women who came to the tomb, “And go quickly, and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and, behold, He goeth before you into Galilee ; there shall ye see Him : lo, I have told you” (Mat 28:7). Mark’s record reads, “But go your way, tell His disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee : there shall ye see Him , as He said unto you” (Mark 16:7). On their way to the disciples, Jesus Himself met the women and said, “Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee , and there shall they see Me ” (Matt 28:10). While it is admittedly an assumption, it is difficult to believe that the promise that His disciples would see Him in Galilee was kept secret by “the eleven,” or the women who first heard the message confirmed, which Jesus had promised on the night of His betrayal. Notwithstanding, it is not a matter worthy of extended argumentation.

The point to be noted here is that all of these 500 people were not present at the time of our text – during the ten days when the disciples were waiting “for the promise of the Father.” It was certainly not because a great number of that five hundred had passed away, for nearly twenty-seven years later Paul said of them, “of whom the greater part remain unto the present” (1 Cor 15:6).

Now, only 24% of that original five hundred are present, continuing in one accord with prayer and supplication (assuming that number included the ones now present). We will find that there is no effort to round up the missing ones. The work of the Lord proceeds without them, with not so much as a word being said about them. Those who insist on absenting themselves from holy assemblies do not take anything away from those assemblies, as we will see. They are the ones who miss the blessing, as Thomas did when He was not present when the Lord Jesus “breathed on them, and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit”” (John 20:22). Be assured that God’s work is not hindered because some professing disciples refuse to be involved in it! The Lord will use the ones that are present. In this case, the three hundred and eighty missing disciples did not participate in the following.

- Hearing Peter’s exposition of the fall of Judas and the necessity of filling his vacated office (1:16-25).
- The casting of lots, used by God to make His choice of the twelfth apostle (1:26).
- Being together on the day of Pentecost when a sudden sound came from heaven like a rushing mighty wind (2:1-2).
- Being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance (2:3-4).

- The gathering of the multitude at the report of these happenings (2:5-13).
- The inaugural address of Peter, in which an interpretation of the death and resurrection of Christ was expounded (2:11-36).
- The conviction, response, and baptism of 3,000 “devout” Jews (2:37-41).

Whether or not those three hundred and eighty were included in those who “continued steadfastly in the

There are still multitudes of professing Christians of which we stand in doubt. We do not know if they have really “tasted that the Lord is gracious.” We do not really know if their affection has been set on things above, where Jesus sits on the right hand of God. We do not know if they are giving diligence to make their “calling and election sure.” or if they are really “strangers and pilgrims” in the world

Apostles doctrine,” witnessing the “many signs and wonders” that “were done by the apostles,” we do not know. Did they finally join them when “all that believed were together,” and continued “daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people” (2:44-47)? We simply do not know.

But that is the whole point of bringing this up. There are still multitudes of professing Christians of which we stand in doubt. We do not know if they have really “tasted that the Lord is gracious” (1 Pet 2:3). We do not really know if their affection has been set on things above, where Jesus sits on the right hand of God (Col 3:1-2). We do not know if they are giving diligence to make their “calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10), or if they are really “strangers and pilgrims” in the world (1 Pet 2:11). It is not clear whether or not they are fighting “the good fight of faith,” and seeking to “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). When we think of them it is not clear if they are seeking “a better country” or a “continuing city” (Heb 11:14; 13:14). Like the five hundred, they have seen something, but it is not bearing acceptable fruit in their lives. Alas, we must say of them what Paul said of the Galatian church: “I stand in doubt of you” (Gal 4:20). When we consider their manners, we stand in fear, like Paul did of the Corinthians: “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3).

I would like to be able to say this applies to only a few professing believers, and represents the exception rather than the rule. However, as with the five hundred, it appears to be the majority (in their case 76%), rather than the minority. It is a sad consideration, but one that we must ponder!

THE SCRIPTURE MUST BE FULFILLED

“16 Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.”

Now Peter will surface as a leader, fulfilling the name that Jesus gave Him – “Cephas. Which is by interpretation, A stone” (John 1:42). The meaning of “stone” (from the Greek word **Πετρος**) is “a rock, a ledge or cliff.” THAYER Of the word Robertson says, “In the ancient Greek *petra* was used for a massive ledge of rock like Stone Mountain, while *petros* was a detached fragment of the ledge, though itself large. This distinction may exist in Matthew 16:17-18, except that Jesus probably used Aramaic which would not have such a distinction,” ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

Some have said that “Cephas,” or “Peter,” meant “pebble,” while “Rock” (as in Matthew 16:18) means boulder. This is not so, even though Peter was, from one point of view, small and meaningless when compared to Jesus Himself. Jesus did not, however, give Simon a new name that

compared him with the Lord. Peter did not have to be renamed to see that there really was no comparison between his natural self and the Lord Jesus (i.e. Luke 5:8). The point of the name is that Peter would be noted for strength, stability, and stamina. He would be made into the kind of man that could not be moved too and fro by circumstances. He would speak words that were foundational – words men could act upon in full confidence of being advantaged by them. He would be of the same spiritual substance as Christ, but not in the same measure.

Now, behold how Peter speaks. It will be as a great stone. His words will be firm, stable, and sure. There will be no shifting sand in them, or stubble that is easily consumed. He will ask no questions. He will make no inquiries. He will not put forth various alternatives. He will not voice a mere opinion. He will not make a casual observation.

MEN AND BRETHREN

“Men and brethren . . .” Other versions read, “Brothers,” NASB “Friends,” NRSV and “My brothers.” BBE

This expression is used eleven times in the book of Acts (1:16; 2:29,37; 13:15,26,38; 15:7,13; 23:1,6; 28:17). In all of the instances, Jews are involved. Peter uses these words to speak to Jews, both converted and unconverted (1:16; 2:29; 15:7). Paul used them when speaking to Jews (13:26,38; 23:1,6; 28:17). When certain Jews were convicted of sin on the day of Pentecost, they used these words to inquire what they ought to do (2:37). In Antioch of Pisidia, the ruler of the synagogue used them when asking Paul and those with him if they had anything to say (13:15). James used them when addressing the conference in Antioch concerning the Gentiles (15:13).

Even though, strictly speaking, the New Covenant had not yet been formally introduced, Peter and the rest of the disciples had already been introduced to its nature. Jesus had spent over three years preaching “the Kingdom of God” among them, and forty days delivering concentrated teaching on the matter.

Some have imagined that Peter was actually speaking only to the men, excluding the women. The use of this expression does not require such a narrow interpretation. Peter surely did not address only the men on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29). When Paul addressed the synagogue in Antioch using this expression, he added that he was speaking to “children of the stock of Abraham” (Acts 13:26). Paul referred to all believers as “brethren” (Rom 8:29; 12:1; 1 Thess 5:26). John referred to the love of saints as the love of “brethren” (1 John 3:14,16).

There is a spiritual rationale behind the use of “brethren.” joined to with Jesus than of those who wear His name. Therefore Jesus is called “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:11), and is said to not be shamed “to call them brethren” (Heb 2:11). He is said to refer to believers as “My brethren” (Heb 2:12). His incarnation is described as Him being “made like unto His brethren” (Heb 2:17). All saints are addressed as “holy brethren” (Heb 3:1). However, strictly speaking, they are “brethren” among themselves openly because of their identity with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The expression “men and brethren” is to be understood as a way of saying “everyone,” or “all of you.” There is no sound reasoning that can support the notion that “men and brethren” excluded the women here, but included them in Acts 2:29). Specially, the word “brethren” included both men and women, perceiving them as they are, in truth, related to the Lord Jesus – and in Him, there is “neither male more female” (Gal 3:28). I cannot conceive of spending time joined in one accord with the saints, only to rise and address an assembly choosing to speak only to the men. Those who think in such a manner have surely not spent much time in the presence of the Lord. The marvelous effects of His glory dissolves human distinctions. It does not solidify them.

THIS SCRIPTURE MUST BE FULFILLED

“ . . . this scripture must needs have been fulfilled . . .” Other versions read, “ had to be fulfilled,” NKJV “the Scripture should be fulfilled , ASV “the word of God had to be put into effect ,” BBE “ it was necessary that the scripture should have been fulfilled,” DARBY “ the passage of scripture had to be fulfilled,” NJB “it behoved this Writing that it be fulfilled,” YLT “it was necessary for the Scriptures to come true ,” LIVING and “the Scripture . . . was bound to come true .” PHILLIPS

While pouring out prayers and supplications to God, the thoughts of Peter have included a contemplation of the Word of God. A particular text has come into his mind, and he has considered it while consciously in the presence of the Almighty. He is not thinking as an academic student, but as a disciple of Christ. His primary interest is not the obtainment of information, but the fulfilling of the Word of God.

Peter does not assume that the Word of God will be fulfilled independently of their involvement. He knows that is not the way the Lord works. Even though, strictly speaking, the New Covenant had not yet been formally introduced, Peter and the rest of the disciples had already been introduced to its nature . Jesus had spent over three years preaching “the Kingdom of God” among them, and forty days delivering concentrated teaching on the matter.

Jesus taught a Kingdom that was to be sought – “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness” (Mat 6:33). Once seen, Jesus said there were even men who “have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake ” (Matt 19:12). Others were described as leaving “house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake ” (Luke 18:29). Perceiving that this was a kingdom of involvement, men would “press” into it (Lk 16:16), and “seize it by force [as a precious prize—a share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion]” (Matt 11:12, AMPLIFIED That is precisely what we are seeing in this text – men seizing the Kingdom, taking hold of it as something to be sought with great zeal. There is no other way to account for Peter’s opening words: “The Scriptures must needs be fulfilled!”

Peter is not speaking of something that has already been fully accomplished. He is rather referring to something that remains to be done. His great heart having been sensitized by the presence of the Lord, he perceives that this is something in which the people in that very room must involve themselves. There is no doubt in my mind but that he recalled that dreadful night in the garden, when Jesus was arrested, and Peter himself drew his sword and cut off the right ear of Malchus, servant of the high priest. It was at that time that Jesus articulated the manner of the kingdom: “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled , that thus it must be?” (Mat 26:54). Jesus knew that at that time He was in the center of God’s determined will. The Scriptures were going to be fulfilled, and nothing must interfere with that happening.

Peter now stands in a similar position. They are the threshold of receiving “power from on high,” but something remains to be done. There is a Scripture – a prophecy – pertaining to the very situation in which they find themselves, that “must be fulfilled” – a Divine utterance of purpose that God has placed within their reach. They have been cultured for this occasion and all that follows it. This is something that must be done before they are “endued with power from on high.”

Perhaps Peter recalled that when the virgin Mary was visited by Gabriel and given the announcement of being chosen to bear the Son of God: “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet” (Matt 1:22). When Jesus sent His disciples to get a “colt” on which He could ride triumphantly into Jerusalem, it was “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet” (Matt 21:4). When He was arrested in the garden, He told those who came to take Him that they could never arrest Him during His ministry. Now, however, they were able to do so. Matthew then adds, “But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets

might be fulfilled” (Matt 26:56).

Peter knew that if they did not fulfill the Scriptures, they would be excluded from the things now determined to be done, and someone else would do them. He was, in a sense, speaking like Mordecai did to Esther. Taking her life in her hands, Esther was to go before the king and seek the deliverance of her people from the ruthless designs of Haman. “For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place ; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this ?” (Esther 4:14).

Through the Spirit Peter knew they had come to the Kingdom for such a time as this – a time when the Scripture was to be fulfilled. He will therefore lead the people into that holy involvement.

An Application

Peter now stands in a similar position. They are the threshold of receiving “power from on high,” but something remains to be done. There is a Scripture – a prophecy – pertaining to the very situation in which they find themselves, that “must be fulfilled” – a Divine utterance of purpose that God has placed within their reach.

Here is an area in which there is a near-total lack of consciousness in the modern church. Christianity has been so inundated with “the flesh” that scarcely a soul can think in this manner. To begin with, there is not an adequate grasp of the text of Scripture, which is essential to thinking of the necessity of it being fulfilled. Allow me to briefly develop this thought, for I am persuaded it is a critical one.

- When professing members of the church are not acquainted with the Lord’s Person and ways, how will the Scripture be fulfilled? “for they shall all know Me” (Jer 31:34).
- When professed believers are not joyfully obtaining what the Lord has provided in Christ, how will the Scripture be fulfilled? “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3).
- When “Christians” and disobedient, recalcitrant, and wayward in their manners, how will the Scripture be fulfilled? “And I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).
- If those who say they are Christ’s yield to the flesh, and do not subdue it, how will the Scripture be fulfilled? “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).
- When church members do not understand the things of God, and are not able to speak of them, how will the Scripture be fulfilled? “The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly” (Isa 32:4).
- If those who say they are following Christ do not recognize Him or follow wherever He leads, how will the Scripture be fulfilled? “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).
- If a professing “Christian” is easily led astray, and is prone to follow those with a strange message, how will the Scripture be fulfilled? “And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:4-5).

While we are not involved in the specific kind of work Peter will mention, we are in the same Kingdom. We are to have the same interest in the Scriptures being fulfilled. If there is a text that is

within our reach, we must extend ourselves to fulfill it. That is the kind of reasoning Paul put forth to the Corinthians. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:14-18).

In view of these pivotal considerations, what can be said of those who cast doubt upon the Scriptures, telling us it contains flaws, omissions, or additions? What is the possible source of such allegations? Will the God of heaven, who speaks so firmly about our reliance upon His word, move men to cast the shroud of doubt upon it?

May you personally have a renewed and sustained interest in seeing the Scriptures fulfilled through your manner of life, direction of thought, and involvement in the will of the Lord.

WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT SPAKE

“ . . . which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake . . .” Other versions read, “ which the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the mouth of David ,” NASB “which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David,” NIV “in which the Holy Spirit, speaking through David ,” NJB “The Holy Spirit spoke ahead of time through David’s lips,” IE “which the Holy Spirit uttered by the lips of David ,” WEYMOUTH and “the Holy Spirit spoke long ago through the voice of David .” ISV

The manner in which Peter refers to Scripture is most arresting. Scripture is writing – which is what the word “Scripture” means. It is the “Scripture,” or writing, that Peter affirms must be fulfilled. There are two things to note here.

- First, the words to which Peter refers are said to have been spoken by the Holy Spirit. It is His influence that makes writing “Scripture.” That is why Paul said, “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16). The inspiration factor is the Holy Spirit Himself. This is why Peter said of the prophets, “for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). Before men take it upon themselves to tamper with Scripture, let them first consider that these are words spoken by the Holy Spirit.

- Second, the Holy Spirit spoke through a man – a holy man: “by the mouth of David.” Well, technically, it was the pen of David – it was something he wrote. Later Peter will say, “It is written in the book of Psalms” (1:20). However, from heaven’s point of view, what a person writes is no different than what he says with his mouth. It is considered an expression that comes from his mouth.

In view of these pivotal considerations, what can be said of those who cast doubt upon the Scriptures, telling us it contains flaws, omissions, or additions? What is the possible source of such allegations? Will the God of heaven, who speaks so firmly about our reliance upon His word, move men to cast the shroud of doubt upon it? Will He seek to assist us by such words, after telling us we “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4) – a word that applied to Scripture (Deut 8:3)? And, if His Spirit has not moved men to speak in such a critical manner about Scripture, then what is the source of such words?

How They Thought

There is a certain manner of thought revealed here. Peter, speaking for the gathering, will think in

terms of Scripture. He will not reason after the manner of men. He will be guided in his thinking by what has been written in Scripture. In him a word of Solomon was fulfilled: “The preacher sought to find out acceptable words: and that which was written was upright, even words of truth” (Eccl 12:10).

WHICH WAS GUIDE

“ . . . before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.” Other versions read, “concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus,” NKJV “concerning Judas, who served as a guide for those who arrested Jesus,” NASB “who was the leader of them that apprehended Jesus,” DOUAY “concerning Judas, who guided the Temple police to arrest Jesus,” NLT and “concerning Judas, who betrayed Jesus by guiding the mob to Him.” LIVING

You will not find the name “Judas” in the text of which Peter speaks. The texts to which the apostle alludes are as follows”

- “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa 41:9). Jesus confirmed this referred to Judas: “I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against me” (John 13:18).

- “For it was not an enemy that reproached Me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated Me that did magnify himself against Me; then I would have hid Myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company” (Psa 55:12-14).

All through the ministry of Jesus, none of the disciples suspected that Judas was anything but an apostle – even though Jesus knew from the beginning that he was “a devil” (John 6:70). He was the treasurer of Jesus and the twelve, described as “a thief; as keeper of the money bag,” and “used to help himself to what was I it” NIV (John 12:6). Yet, the disciples had witnessed the arrest of Jesus, and saw Judas leading them and betraying Jesus with a kiss (Luke 22:47-48). Now, in the midst of extended prayer and supplication all of this becomes clear in Peter’s mind. He, through the Spirit, correlates those events, and the present circumstances

Far better to seek to understand the Scripture (Luke 24:45; John 20:9), or know the times (1 Chron 12:32; Matt 16:3), or comprehend the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2; Col 1:9). It is within the framework of that kind of understanding that all of the lesser questions can be seen properly – first their validity, then what can be known about them.

with Scripture.

There are a number of things people seek to understand – and are willing to extend themselves to appropriate the desired understanding. They include such things as “Who am I?” “Why I am here?” “What is my duty in life?” “What is the secret to success?” “How can I be a better person?” – and so forth. None of these are unlawful, but none of them are the preeminent thing to be known either. Far better to seek to understand the Scripture (Luke 24:45; John 20:9), or know the times (1 Chron 12:32; Matt 16:3), or comprehend the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2; Col 1:9). It is within the framework of that kind of understanding that all of the lesser questions can be seen properly – first their validity, then what can be known about them.

Peter states that Jesus “was guide to them that took Jesus.” That is, he is the one who clarified precisely who Jesus was. Thus Judas is repeatedly referred to as “Judas . . . who also betrayed Him” (Matt 10:4; 26:25; 27:3; Mk 3:19; John 18:2,5).

Judas was aggressive in this matter of betraying Jesus – while he was yet “numbered” with the apostles. Immediately after Judas had complained about the woman who poured precious ointment upon Jesus (Matt 26:8-9; John 12:4-5), it is written that he “went unto the chief priests, and said unto them, What will ye give me, and I will deliver Him unto you? And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray Him” (Mat 26:14-16). Matthew also records the manner in which Judas agreed to betray Jesus – what Peter here refers to as being “guide to them that took Jesus.” “Now he that betrayed Him gave them a sign, saying, Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is He: hold Him fast” (Mat 26:48). Thus is described this act of treachery!

JUDAS WAS NUMBERED WITH THEM

“ 17 For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.”

From the standpoint of being a person, Judas is one of the great blotches on human history. For the informed, he is the epitome of contradiction, and the personification of human iniquity. Now, Peter has been illuminated concerning this former companion, and speaks with understanding concerning him.

NUMBERED WITH US

“ For he was numbered with us, . . .” Other versions read, “he was one of our number,” NASB “he was counted among us,” NIV “was one of us,” NLT and “was reckoned as one of our number.” WEYMOUTH

Judas was not like one of the multitude that simply followed Jesus Matt 4:25; 8:1; 12:15; 19:2; 20:29; 21:9; John 6:2). He was one of Christ’s disciples – one of the chosen twelve. It is written, “And when it was day, He called unto him His disciples: and of them He chose twelve , whom also He named apostles . . . and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:13-16).

The “us” of this verse is the twelve apostles, and therefore Peter will also refer to “this ministry.” Because Judas was “numbered with” them, he is included in all of the listings of the apostles representing “the twelve” before Jesus was betrayed (Matt 10:2-4; Mk 3:16-19; Lk 6:14-16). He is also referred to as “one of the twelve” (Matt 26:14,47; Mk 14:10,43; Lk 22:3,47). He is also referred to as “one of His disciples, Judas Iscariot” (John 12:4).

Thus Judas was a real apostle, filling a real office – chosen by Christ Himself. That is why he was “numbered” with the twelve. This is an honor that no man took upon himself.

OBTAINED PART OF THIS MINISTRY

“ . . . and had obtained part of this ministry.” Other versions read, “shared in this ministry,” NASB “received his portion of this ministry,” NIV “was allotted his share of this ministry,” NRSV “had his part in our work,” BBE “received a part of this service,” DARBY “was chosen to share in this ministry,” ISV and “and received [by Divine allotment] his portion of this ministry .” AMPLIFIED

Judas was, then, a legitimate apostle, and that legitimacy was not questioned by any of the other apostles. This man stands as a stirring rebuke to anyone who declares that men cannot fall away – or that someone once accepted can never be rejected.

Not only was Judas chosen by Jesus, he was given a portion of the ministry that was assigned to them. When he sent out the twelve, empowering them to do all manner of miraculous works, Judas was among them. It is written, “And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave

them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these . . . and Judas Iscariot which betrayed Him” (Mat 10:2-4). Mark adds that sent them (including Judas) forth “to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast our devils” (Mk 3:13-19). Luke says, “Then He called His twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. And He sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2).

Thus, Judas could be described as one who preached the kingdom of God, healed the sick, and cast out demons. He truly “obtained part of this ministry.” In addition, he was the treasurer of the band – Jesus and the twelve. He “had the bag” – the money bag – having charge of “what was put therein” (John 12:6), and what dispensed from it (John 13:29).

All through Christ’s earthly tenure, none of the disciples suspected that Judas had any evil intent toward Jesus. On the very night Judas committed his act of infamy, Jesus had revealed that one of His disciples would betray Him (Matt 26:21). When Judas asked if it was him, Jesus responded “Yes, it is you” NIV (Matt 26:25). When Peter requested John to ask Jesus who the betrayer was, Jesus said, “He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when He had dipped the sop, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon” (John 13:26). Upon doing this, “Satan entered into” Judas, and Jesus said to him, “That thou doest, do quickly.” It is written of that event, “Now no man at the table knew for what intent He spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor” (John 13:29).

Judas was, then, a legitimate apostle, and that legitimacy was not questioned by any of the other apostles. This man stands as a stirring rebuke to anyone who declares that men cannot fall away – or that someone once accepted can never be rejected. His office was authorized, and his occupancy of the same was also initiated and sanctioned by Deity. All of this was so, even though Jesus knew from the very beginning that Judas as a “devil.” Early in His ministry, when He fed the five thousand, He said “Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil?” (John 6:70). The word “devil” here is not the one used for “demon” in the King James Version (– daimon). Here the word is **dia,bolo,j** (dee-ab-ol-os), normally applying to Satan himself – “the devil” (ex, Matt 4:1,5,8,11; 13:39, etc). This appellation is applied to Satan thirty-nine times, and here to Judas Iscariot. That is, Judas was like an incarnation of Satan, and is therefore referred to as “the son of perdition” (John 17:12).

Peter has seen that David spoke of Judas when he wrote of a “familiar” betraying the holy one – one of His own number: “Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me” (Psa 41:9). Again he wrote of Judas, “For it was not an enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: but it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company” (Psa 55:12-14). Prior to this, the disciples did not know this of Judas, but Jesus knew throughout His ministry that this was the case. Twice it is said of the Savior that he “knew who should betray Him” (John 6:64; 13:11).

Who but God could have arranged things in this manner, and carried them out with such precision? A valid position was filled by a “devil,” and thus Jesus would be betrayed by one of His own chosen disciples. This would precisely fulfill a prophecy that was given nearly eight hundred years earlier – and the Savior would be aware of the whole matter throughout His prodigious ministry! “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33).

Also, consider that Peter would “deny” Jesus on the night of His arrest (Matt 26:34), but he would not betray Him, nor would any other apostle! When He was arrested in the garden, all of the

other apostles “fled.” As it is written, “Then all of the disciples forsook Him and fled” (Matt 26:56). But, it was only Judas who betrayed Him – which is certainly enough! Being with Jesus did not have a lasting impact upon Judas, if, indeed, it had any favorable impact at all. He was, after all, the “son of perdition”, and “a devil,” walking among those God would use to found and nurture the church.

A REVIEW OF JUDAS' END

“ 18 Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. 19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.”

With his mind illuminated, and now understanding the whole matter of Judas, Peter begins an analysis of what happened. This is heaven’s view of the matter, and that view has been vouchsafed to Peter. This was done while the disciples had been continuing in prayer and supplication (1:14), and were also continually “in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Lk 24:53).

With his mind illuminated, and now understanding the whole matter of Judas, Peter begins an analysis of what happened. This is heaven’s view of the matter, and that view has been vouchsafed to Peter.

THIS MAN PURCHASED A FIELD

“Now this man purchased a field . . .” Other versions read, “Judas bought a field,” NASB “this man acquired a field,” NIV “this man obtained a field,” ASV “got for himself a field,” BBE “This man then indeed got a field,” DARBY “he indeed hath possessed a field,” DOUAY “bought a parcel of land,” NAB “the same hath now purchased a field,” PNT and “his dishonest money was used to buy a field for his body.” IE

As men would think, Judas did not buy the field. Having betrayed the Savior for “thirty pieces of silver,” it is written that Judas “repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us? see thou to that. And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself” (Matt 27:3-5). The chief priests, who thought nothing of having Jesus crucified, were very particular the treasury. It is written, “And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. and they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field , to bury strangers in” (Matt 27:7).

Yet, the money that they used never had lost its association with Judas – even though Judas had made a valiant attempt to disconnect it from himself. Here is an example of what it means to be unforgiven. The sin committed maintains its association with the one who committed it. Only God can break that association, but Judas did not qualify for forgiveness. His repentance was nothing more than “the sorrow of the world” that “worketh death” (2 Cor 7:10).

The “potter’s field” was a place where anonymous people were buried – “strangers” who were unknown, and perhaps died while they were passing through.

Now this parcel of land is associated with Judas – a sort of memorial to his wicked deed.

Some might reason that since this was all determined ahead of time (for Jesus was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” –), that Judas was nothing more than a pawn in the hands of the Lord. But such reasoning is foolish, for sin is never excused in such a flippant manner . In

fact, Jesus spoke to this very issue. He referred to Divine determination, and the betrayal through which it would be carried out. “The Son of man goeth as it is written of him : but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born ” (Matt 26:24). Luke writes, “And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined : but woe unto that man by whom He is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22).

Sovereignty and Divine choice can never be cited as justification for iniquity. Nor, indeed, can the fact that Satan used a person (for Satan “entered into” Judas, John 13:27) provide an acceptable rationalization for committing sin: i.e., “the devil made me do it.”

THE REWARD OF INIQUITY

“ . . . with the reward of iniquity . . . ” Other versions read, “ wages of iniquity ,” NKJV “reward he got for his wickedness,” NASB “with the price of his wickedness ,” NIV “the reward of his evil-doing,” BBE “the wages of sin ,” MRD “the money he received for his treachery ,” NLT “the reward of unrighteousness ,” YLT “the money he got for his crime,” ISV “[money paid him as a] reward for his treachery and wickedness ,” AMPLIFIED and “the proceeds of his infamy .” PHILLIPS

Among other things, this provides us with the heavenly view of money gained by unlawful means. It is tainted, and cannot be accepted by God. Under the Law it was written, “Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God” (Deut 23:18). “Dog” is a term applied to a “male prostitute,” or sodomite. NIV The fact that “the Lord your God detests them both” NIV confirms that the Law was not speaking of mere animals. The source of money makes a difference! In this case, this was money paid for sinning, for doing iniquity, for betraying the Son of God!

Matthew refers to this passage in his account of Judas returning the money to the chief priests. “Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me” (Matt 27:9-10).

A Difficulty With Matthew's Text

The obvious difficulty with the text is that the words quoted by Matthew are not found in Jeremiah, but are actually found in Zechariah. Zechariah prophesied of this very event – the betrayal of Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. “And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD” (Zech 11:12-13).

There are a number of explanations that have been put forward for this circumstance. From an academic standpoint, none of them are satisfactory. Yet, from the standpoint of spiritual reasoning, they confirm that we do not need to have undue concern about the seeming contradiction. It is Divine intention that must be seen.

- It is affirmed that the custom of the rabbis was to consider Jeremiah the chief of the minor prophets. Therefore, his name was ascribed to the latter prophetic writings (Jeremiah through Malachi). In this case, “Jeremiah” would refer to a section of the Bible rather than to a single book. This would be similar, but not identical, to referring to the first five books of the Bible as “Moses” (Matt 8:4; 19:7; John 5:46; 7:19; Acts 3:22; Mk 10:4-7).

- Some say that Matthew referred to the spirit of several texts written in Jeremiah that refer to the “ potter,” buying a field with silver, and the evidence of the purchase (Jer 18:2;

19:1-2; 32:8-14). Matthew appears to use this kind of generalization in Matthew 2:23: “And He came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.” Mark does the same thing in giving a sort summation of the words of Malachi (Mark 1:2-3). I am personally inclined to this view.

- Still others say this was a mistake made by Matthew, where he had a sort of lapse of memory.

In the text before us, Peter is providing a kind of reasoning that strictly conforms to Divine purpose, gleans from both the spirit and text of Scripture, and mingles it all with Divine intent.

There are also those who say that the word “Jeremiah” was inserted by some scribe some time after the original writing of Matthew.

There is no need to dwell upon this matter. It is enough to observe that there is no thoroughly satisfactory academic solution. Then again, Scripture is really not written from a pedantic point of view, and we should not seek solutions in that arena.

In the text before us, Peter is providing a kind of reasoning that strictly conforms to Divine purpose, gleans from both the spirit and text of Scripture, and mingles it all with Divine intent. That is quite often the manner in which holy men handled the Word of God – and it was all done by inspiration (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:21).

It All Came Together

All of this has come together in the mind of Peter, and therefore he is speaking with insight and remarkable precision.

FALLING HEADLONG

“ . . . and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.” Other versions read, “and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his entrails gushed out,” NKJV “there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out,” NASB “and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out,” NAS and “he fell there with his face downward, and, his body bursting open, he became disemboweled.” WEYMOUTH

This is a gruesome sight, indeed, and thus it should be, for it is associated with the betray of the Son of God by one of His own disciples. But it not nearly as gruesome as the time when the “counsels of the heart” will be laid bare before an assembled universe (1 Cor 4:5).

When David prophesied of the one who would betray Jesus, the “guide” and His own “acquaintance,” he added, “Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them” (Psa 55:12-15). That is, indeed, what took place in Judas.

The Gospel record simply tells us that Judas “went and hanged himself” (Matt 27:5). That is the sole Gospel record concerning the death of Judas. Now Peter provides some additional information. The words “falling headlong” mean that he fell head-down, landing on his face. Although the details are not provided, there have been conjectures as to how this happened. Some see this as meaning Judas tied a rope around his neck and jumped from some high place. When the weight of his body hit the rope, it broke, with Judas falling head-down to the bottom. Others feel that Judas must have hung their for a while, and finally the body fell to the ground below. However one chooses to view it, the account is intended to awaken us to the seriousness of iniquity, and the fact that, unless forgiven, it will be visited upon the person.

A Most Vivid Picture

This language provides a most vivid picture of the time when all of man's inward thoughts, inclinations, and imaginations will be made known. Every person will, so to speak, "burst asunder," and what has been hidden from mortal view will be exposed to an assembled universe. The ministry of Jesus introduced us to this reality. It is said of the Savior, "He knew what was in man" (John 2:25); "And Jesus knowing their thoughts, said" (Matt 9:4; Lk 11:17); "Jesus perceived in His spirit that they so reasoned within themselves" (Mk 2:8); and "Jesus perceived their thoughts" (Lk 5:22).

The day of judgment is also described as a time when secret thoughts and intents will be shouted from the housetop, and human intentions will be made known.

- "Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment" (Eccl 11:9).

The report of Judas' death was associated with the deed he committed, and, in the minds of the people, there was no doubt a correlation of his end with his works. Here is a living example of this Scriptural saying: "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after."

"For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl 12:14).

- "For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known" (Luke 12:2).

- "In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel" (Rom 2:16).

- "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (1 Cor 4:5).

Thus, just as surely as Judas' body broke in two, "and all his bowels gushed out," so the counsels and imaginations of every heart will be fully exposed and known before God and every created personality. To be sure, this is an arresting consideration, just as surely as the account of Judas falling headlong calls us to alertness and sobriety.

EVERYONE KNEW!

"19 And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem . . ." Other versions read, "Everyone in Jerusalem heard about this," NASB "And it became known to all living in Jerusalem," NIV "This became known to the residents of Jerusalem," NRSV "And this came to the knowledge of all those who were living in Jerusalem," BBE "The news of his death spread rapidly among all the people of Jerusalem," NLT "all the people who lived in Jerusalem learned about this," IE "This fact became widely known to the people of Jerusalem," WEYMOUTH and "and all the residents of Jerusalem became acquainted with the facts." AMPLIFIED

The report of Judas' death was associated with the deed he committed, and, in the minds of the people, there was no doubt a correlation of his end with his works. Here is a living example of this Scriptural saying: "Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after" (1 Tim 5:24). That is, the wicked works of some people are made known before the day of judgment, so that there is no question about what they are. In Judas' case, he had secretly arranged to betray Jesus, secretly received money for the deed, and secretly betrayed Jesus at night in a removed garden. But his deed was no longer secret, nor was the dreadful end of his life.

THE FIELD OF BLOOD

“ . . . insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood.” Other versions read, “the blood field,” PNT and “Blood land.” IE

The field was named “The Field of Blood” because it was purchased with blood-money – the price of Christ’s blood. This is doubtless also associated with Judas’ confession when he threw down the pieces of silver “in the Temple” – “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood ” (Matt 27:4). His own blood was also found in this field, the result of his wicked deed of suicide, or self-murder. The field and the name of it, were like Judas’ tombstone – an epitaph to his wicked deed, for which he is suffering at this very hour.

Historically it is written, “This field, as it is reported by some, was by the appointment of the Empress Helena compassed about with four walls, in the manner of a tower, upon the top of which are seven distinct doors, like windows, by which the dead bodies of Christians are let down into it; and that it is fifty feet wide, and seventy two long: it stands not far from the valley of Himom, and is upon the south side of Mount Zion, where, as Jerome says it was showed in his time.” JOHN GILL

IT IS WRITTEN

“ 20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take.”

Peter will anchor the thinking of the brethren in Scripture. That is what will direct their thinking and confirm the necessity of the action that must now take place. Peter will not buttress his remarks by reminding them who he is – an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, and a chief one at that. He will not tell them that, by virtue of his placement in the body of Christ, they must listen to him. Whatever truth may be found in such conjectures, they must take their place behind the Word of the Lord.

These days, appeals to the Word of God appear to be rapidly diminishing within the professed church. There are strong solicitations for the devotion and activity of believers that are based upon humanly conceived theological persuasions, statistics, physiological concerns, religious tradition, and logic that is based upon human understanding alone. Any demand for action among the saints of God must be founded upon the Word of God. If Scripture cannot be properly presented as requiring the action, it simply cannot be bound upon the people of God. Any reasoning that is presented must have an obvious association with the Word of the Lord. It seems to me that this is plain enough to require no further justification.

LET HIS HABITATION BE DESOLATE

“For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein . . .” Other versions read, “For it is written in the book of Psalms: ‘Let his dwelling place be desolate, And let no one live in it ,’” NKJV “May his place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in it ,” NASB “Let his homestead be made desolate, and let no man dwell in it,” NIV “Let his house be waste, and let no man be living in it ,” BBE “May his place be deserted; let there be no-one to dwell in it,” NIB “Reduce his encampment to ruin and leave his tent unoccupied ,” NJB and “Let his place of residence become deserted and gloomy, and let there be no one to live in it .”

AMPLIFIED

This word is taken from Psalm 69:25. and 109:8. “Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents” (Psa 69:25). In this particular Psalm, David was speaking about His own enemies: “Draw nigh unto my soul, and redeem it: deliver me because of mine enemies” (Psa

69:18). These enemies had caused great grief to David, for he says they caused him “reproach,” “shame,” and “dishonor” (verse 19). They had also caused reproach to break his heart. As a consequence, he was full of heaviness, and looked for someone who would take pity on him, someone who comfort him, only to find that he could find “none” (verse 20). His enemies increased his misery, giving him “gall” for his meat (or food), and “vinegar” to drink (verse 21).

Therefore David prays against his enemies – an imprecatory prayer, invoking evil upon them.

- Let their table become a snare to them (22a).
- Let what could have been for their welfare become a trap to them (22b).

Those who have a strictly contextual approach to Scripture will be unable to see Judas in the sixty-ninth Psalm – but Peter saw him there. Inspired by God, he was able handle, or rightly divide the “word of truth.” There is a spirit in Scripture as well as words – and Peter saw it.

Let their eyes be darkened so they cannot see (23a).

- Make their loins shake continually (23b).
- Let God’s indignation be poured out upon them (24a).
- Let God’s wrathful anger take hold of them (24b).
- “LET THEIR HABITATION BE DESOLATE; AND LET NONE DWELL IN THEIR TENTS” (25).
- Let God charge them with iniquity after iniquity (27a).
- Let God not allow them to come into His righteousness (27b).
- Let them be blotted out of the book of the living , and not be written with the righteous (28).

A further reason is given for such remarkable judgments: “For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded” (Psa 69:26).

Now, the Spirit has directed Peter to extract a single phrase from this Psalm, applying it to Judas. He had come against the ultimate Man, and therefore was the ultimate flesh-and-blood persecutor. His table did, in fact, become a snare to him, and he could not stand to hold the money he had received – money that ultimately was used to buy the field where he was dashed in two. What could have been of great welfare to him – the apostleship – became a snare to him – where he conducted himself as an enemy while posing as a friend. His eyes were darkened, so that he could see any way out of his dilemma, and thus hung himself. His loins did shake as he cried out to the chief priests that he had sinned in betraying “the innocent blood.” Indignation was poured out upon him, and God’s wrath took hold of him, as he had a dreadful and shameful end. Iniquity was heaped upon him, as he is now noted for this one despicable deed. There is not a single good deed for which he is noted. His name was also blotted out of the book of life, so that he was no longer associated with the Lord Jesus.

Those who have a strictly contextual approach to Scripture will be unable to see Judas in the sixty-ninth Psalm – but Peter saw him there. Inspired by God, he was able handle, or rightly divide the “word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). There is a spirit in Scripture as well as words – and Peter saw it. There is a direction to Scripture as well as affirmations – and Peter saw it.

The habitation, or dwelling place, of Judas was left desolate. His name was blotted out, and none of his relatives could resume his role in his name – like Isaac stood in the place of his father Abraham, Jacob stood in the place of his father Isaac, and Solomon stood in the place of his father David. No such benefit was afforded to Judas.

If you are ever tempted to think that betraying Jesus, or giving the enemy a reason to speak reproachfully of Him, is not serious, remember Judas! If you are ever inclined to conduct your life in a manner that will enable the wicked to smear the name of Jesus, remember Judas!

HIS BISHOPRIC

“ . . . and his bishopric let another take.” Other versions read, “Let another take his office.” NKJV “May another take his place of leadership ,” NASB “his office let another man take,” NIV “let another take his position of overseer ,” NRSV “Let his position be taken by another,” BBE “let another take his charge ,” GENEVA “let another take his service ,” MRD “let his position be given to someone else ,” NLT “ his oversight let another take,” YLT “Let his work be given to someone else to do,” LIVING “his work let another take up ,” WEYMOUTH and “Let another take his position or overseership .” AMPLIFIED

Again, Peter resorts to the Scripture. Like a scribe that is “instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven,” NKJV he takes out of his “treasure” something that is “old” (Matt 13:52). Peter refers to Psalm 109:8 “Let his days be few; and let another take his office” (Psa 109:8). This is also an imprecatory Psalm in which David prays concerning those who have opened their mouths against him, speaking lies, and doing so “without cause” (2-3). Even though he have loved them, they had become his “adversaries” (4-5). David asks the Lord to do the following.

- Set a wicked man over them, and let Satan be at their right hand (6).
- Let them be condemned when they are judged (7a).
- Let their prayer become sin (7b).
- Let his days be few, “AND LET ANOTHER TAKE HIS OFFICE” (8).
- Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow (9).
- Let his children be continual vagabonds, have to beg, and get their bread from desolate places (v 10).
- Let the extortioner get all that they have(11),
- Let there be none that will extend mercy to them, or favor their fatherless children (12).
- Let their posterity be cut off, and their name blotted out of succeeding generations (13).
- Let the iniquity of both their father and mother be remembered (14).
- Let the Lord remember them and cut off the memory of them from the earth (15).

Some would see nothing but an inappropriate response of David in this Psalm. Peter saw it as a prophecy concerning Judas, and the placement of another in his apostolic office.

It ought to be noted that all of this did, in fact, happen to Judas. You may recall that Jesus once prayed for Peter (Lk 22:32). He did not for Judas. The Savior prayed for his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, and Judas was present with them. Yet he referred to Judas as someone he had “lost” in order that the Scriptures be fulfilled , referring to him as “the son of perdition” (John 17:12).

If you are ever tempted to think that betraying Jesus, or giving the enemy a reason to speak reproachfully of Him, is not serious, remember Judas! If you are ever inclined to conduct your life in a manner that will enable the wicked to smear the name of Jesus, remember Judas!

A Bishopric

A “bishopric” is a position of authority in which a person becomes responsible for some portion of a sovereign’s rule – in this case, one that is in some sense ruling in the behalf of Christ. Lexically the word means, “an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, any curator, guardian, or superintendent,” THAYER “overseer, one who watches over the welfare of others,” FRIBERG “overseer, one who watches over the welfare of others,” LOUW-NIDA “one who watches over, an overseer, guardian.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

As this word applies to those laboring for Christ, the emphasis is not on leadership (as ordinarily conceived), but upon caring for the believers – and there is a vast difference between the two meanings. Leadership, in this case, had to do with directing the flock into green pastures and beside still waters. It is quite true that correction is often required, and even rebuke. However, the purpose for them both is to get the people to a place where they can be built up in Christ Jesus – a place where they can appropriate the things God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:9-10).

Judas had occupied such a place – a “bishopric.” He was included among those who were sent out to release the people from dominion of the wicked one, and announce the glad tidings of the Kingdom of God (Matt 10:1-4). In his case, his office took precedence over his person. He fell but his office did not. The work to which Judas had been appointed still had to be done, and therefore the vacated position needed to be filled by “another.”

A Point to be Seen

The precise manner in which Jesus was betrayed, fulfilling the Scripture, would also allow for a foundational office that would continue AFTER the one who originally filled it was removed from it. This was not true of any other Apostolic office. No one replaced James when He was beheaded by Herod early in the history of the church (Acts 12:1-2). Nor, indeed, was a single other vacated “bishopric” filled. The bishoprics” of Peter, Andrew, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, and Simon were never filled after their departure from this world . The same is true of the office of the apostle Paul.

PETER’S REASONING

Our text provides us with an excellent example of spiritual reasoning. With his capacity for thought sanctified by prayer, supplication, praise, expectant waiting, and holy recollections , Peter was able to survey the landscape of thought with discernment. He gleaned from the Scriptures, his own experience with Judas, the facts that were generally known, and His awareness of the purpose of God. These were gathered together in his heart, then passed to his mind, where they were woven together in a tapestry of holy conclusion. He was able to associate all of this with the present time, during which they were waiting for “promise of the Father” according to Christ’s own word. He perceived something that had to be done before the promised Spirit would come, enduing them with power. There is no record of Jesus telling them that this would have to be done. The manner in which this whole incident is reported to us confirms that the disciples had not given thought to the subject previously. Here is an example of the Lord directing His people through processes of sanctified thought, or “spiritual understanding.”

How sorely this kind of reasoning is needed in the church of our day. There is far too little acquaintance with Scripture and the revealed purpose of God, and a blanket of “gross darkness” has been spread over God’s “eternal purpose,” which has been revealed, and is intended to be known by the church (Eph 1:11; 3:9-11,18). The absence of this kind of thinking has opened the door for all manners of sophists to enter into the church and distribute their corrupt reasoning. We are faced with a church that cannot think correctly. That is why so many divisions exist within it. It is why sin is springing up within it in unprecedented measures. It is why men are easily seduced, deceived, and led astray.

The irony of the situation is that this happening in time when “the Sun of righteousness” has risen (Mal 4:2), and the mystery of God’s will has been revealed (Eph 1:9). Things that were formerly “NOT made known to the sons of men,” are “NOW revealed” (Eph 3:5). This is “the day of salvation” in which men can “test and approve what God’s will is – His good, pleasing and perfect will” NIV (Rom 12:2). They can even “be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). In this day it is inexcusable to have a church – any church – that remains in a state of spiritual ignorance, unable to think and reason in a godly manner. Those who have allowed such a condition to arise, and have even contributed to the condition must be held accountable for their action.

THE QUALIFICATIONS OF AN APOSTLE PLACED BEFORE THEM

“ 21 Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.”

Peter will not stab in the dark on this matter. He will speak with insight and with confidence. He will not think as he did when he rebuked Jesus for speaking of His death (Matt 16:22-23). He will not blurt out wrong words like he did on the mount of transfiguration (Matt 17:4-5). He will have no questions as he did when he asked Jesus about forgiving those who sinned against him (Matt 18:21-22), or when he inquired what the future held for John the beloved (John 21:21-22). Those occasions all occurred while Peter was being prepared. This event reveals a Peter that is being directed by the Lord. Although it is quite fashionable for men to compare themselves and others to the Peter prior to our text, it is more in keeping with redemption to find men who are like the Peter AFTER Jesus ascended into heaven.

OF THESE MEN

“Wherefore of these men . . .” Other versions read, “Therefore, of these men ,” NKJV “Therefore it is necessary to choose one of the men ,” NASB “It is therefore necessary that of the men ,” NIV “So one of the men ,” NRSV “For this reason, of the men,” BBE “It should therefore be, that one of these persons ,” MRD “So now we must choose another man to take Judas’s place,” NLT and “It behoveth, therefore, of the men.” YLT

Judas’ replacement must come from a certain company of people. It is understood that the people then present were the ones from which the replacement would come. There was no time to run about looking for someone. This was occurring sometime within the ten day period between Jesus’ ascension and the coming day of Pentecost. What needed to be done must be accomplished quickly, and within the framework of sound reasoning and spiritual clarity.

Briefly stated once again, a “bishopric,” or Divinely ordained office, had to be filled. It had been vacated by Judas, and yet remained valid. It had to be filled prior to the coming of the “promise of the Father.” Now, Peter will describe the kind of person that must fill the office.

ALL THE TIME

“ . . . which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us . . .” Other versions read, “ the whole time the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,” NASB “ during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us,” NRSV “all the time in which the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us ,” DARBY “all the time that the Lord Jesus was conversant among us ,” GENEVA “the whole time that the Lord Jesus was living with us ,” NJB “has been with us constantly from our first association with the Lord,” LIVING and “during the whole time the Lord Jesus lived his life with us .” PHILLIPS

The person was not be chosen because of their natural abilities – although they no doubt did have some. Their preeminence among the brethren was not enough. They could not be new to the group of disciples, having only recently become acquainted with Jesus.

The qualification is clear. The replacement had to have been with Jesus continually, as He went in and out among men, “doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). They had to be among those who heard Jesus preach – all of the time He preached. They had to be witnesses of His works. They had to be privy to His questions and answers, His skirmishes with the scribes, Pharisees, lawyers, and sadducees. They had to be with Him in the Temple, in the synagogues, the cities, and even the deserts. The only times during which their presence was not required were those times when Jesus took the twelve aside (ex: Matt 20:17; 26:20; Mk 6:7; 9:35; 10:32), or only allowed the inner circle, Peter, James, and John (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37), or when he taught only four of them, Peter, Andrew, James, and John (Mk 13:3).

There is a certain penalty to be paid for a lack of spiritual consistency. In this case, those who were not with Jesus throughout the entire time of His ministry – approximately three and a half years – were excluded from consideration. Even during this remarkable day of salvation, there are some people who have not followed Jesus consistently for that length of time.

THE REQUIRED PERIOD

“ 22 Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us . . . ” Other versions read, “beginning from the baptism of John, unto the day that he was received up from us,” ASV “from the time he was baptized by John until the day he was taken from us into heaven,” NLT “from the time John started to immerse people, until the time when Jesus was carried away from us,” LIVING and “From the baptism of John at the outset until the day when He was taken up from among us.” AMPLIFIED

Specificity is one of the undeniable marks of Divine direction. Peter, being led along by the Spirit of God, does not leave it up to the people to interpret the meaning of “all the time.”

From the Baptism of John

The period that is being defined is “all the time that Jesus went in and out among us” (v 21). This definition of the period of the Lord’s ministry is described in the Gospels. His ministry was launched when He was baptized by John in Jordan (Matt 3:16-17; Mk 1:9-10; Lk 3:20-21), was led up of the Spirit to be tempted by the devil (Matt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13), began going about preaching that men should repent, for “the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:12-25; Mk 1:14-15; Lk 4:14-15), and, following His resurrection showing Himself to the disciples alive, and speaking to them of the kingdom of God (Luke 24:1-51; Acts 1:3). That entire period is referred to in the following ways.

There is no place for spiritually uninformed people in the ministry. There is no legitimate office or role within the body of Christ that does not require an exposure to and knowledge of

- “ . . . all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us” (Acts 1:21).
- “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).
- “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

- “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us)” (1 John 1:1-2).

The individual chosen for the vacated bishopric had to have been thoroughly exposed to Jesus – His person, what He taught, and what He did. It was not enough to have only a brief exposure to Him. The person must be acquainted with what prepared men for the Savior – the preaching of repentance. They must be aware of the conflict between Him and His teaching and the world. They must have an idea about His compassion, and the priority of the Kingdom of God, of which Jesus spoke. There must be no doubt about Him being alive, or having ascended into heaven, but they must have been eye witnesses of both events.

There is no place for spiritually uninformed people in the ministry. There is no legitimate office or role within the body of Christ that does not require an exposure to and knowledge of the Son of God. Having spent over fifty years in the ministry I can tell you that, within the professed “ministry” itself, the degree of fundamental ignorance concerning God, His purpose, and His great salvation in Christ Jesus is at an appalling level. Further, the more specialized the ministry, the greater the ignorance appears to be.

ONE MUST BE ORDAINED

“ . . . must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection.” Other versions read, “one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection,” NKJV “one will have to be a witness with us of His coming back from death,” BBE “one must be appointed to serve with us as a witness to his resurrection,” NJB “Whoever is chosen will join us as a witness of Jesus' resurrection,” NLT “one of these to become with us a witness of his rising again,” YLT “one should be appointed to become a witness with us to His resurrection,” WEYMOUTH “Must be added to our number as a witness to His resurrection,” WILLIAMS , “one of these men must join with us and become a witness to testify to His resurrection,” AMPLIFIED and “This man must be an eye-witness with us to the resurrection of Jesus.” PHILLIPS

The word “ordained” is an interesting one. It comes from the Greek word **gene,sqai** (ghin-es-thai), from **gi,nomai** (ghin-om-ahee). For those with a linguistic interest in the word, it is a verb infinitive aorist middle deponent. Simply put, it speaks of the initiation, or beginning, of something, and not of its duration, completeness, or incompleteness. The word is translated in a variety of ways, each one speaking of a specific beginning, when something or someone started to be.

- “Done” (Matt 1:22) – all this was done.
- “Made” – made of the seed of David (Rom 1:3) and made unto us wisdom (1 Cor 1:30)
- “Fulfilled” (Matt 5:18) – till all be fulfilled.
- “Came to pass” (Matt 7:28) – it came to pass.
- “Arose” – there arose a great tempest (Matt 8:24).
- “Become” – become guilty before God (Rom 3:19), and – become the father of many nations (Rom 4:18).
- “Manifest” – every man’s work shall be made manifest (1 Cor 3:13).

What we have here is this: one of the hundred and twenty gathered together is going to become something he never was before – something that will begin at this meeting. A specific responsibility is going to be initiated – something for which the individual was never before responsible, and for which he had no former obligation. It was something required and known by God by God, yet put

into motion by men, and sanctioned by God. Here is a wonderful example of being “workers together WITH God” (2 Cor 6:1), and of God working in men “both to will and to do” (Phil 2:13).

THEY APPOINTED TWO

“ 23 And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.” Other versions read, “And they proposed two,” NKJV “And they put forward two men,” NIV “And they made selection of two,” BBE “And they presented two,” GENEVA “Having nominated two candidates ” NJB “So they nominated two men,” NLT “And they set two ,” YLT “The assembly nominated two men,” LIVING “They found two men ,” IE “And they accordingly proposed (nominated) two men,” AMPLIFIED and “Two men were put forward.” PHILLIPS

Those who labor for the Lord must be noted for their understanding of the Lord and what He has done. As I have indicated, I have personally found there is generally a great deficiency of this kind of understanding in the professed and professional ministry.

There is a wonderful circumstance to be seen here. This was not a call for volunteers, but for those who met the required criteria. The candidates had to have been with the twelve “all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us” (Acts 1:21-22). This is something that had to be known by those who were assembled together. These were not to be men who had to be brought up to speed on what Jesus “began to do and teach.” They had to have first-hand acquaintance with those things. The people (“they”) knew that Barsabas and Matthias met this criteria, and therefore “appointed” them, putting them forward as fully meeting the qualifications. There was no question about their suitability.

When religion becomes professionalized, as it has in our day, it becomes nearly impossible to distinguish people who have been with Jesus, and are acquainted with His ways. Having spent more time than I care to acknowledge in the presence of specially convened meetings of religious leaders, and conferences supposedly devoted to the cause of Christ, I can tell you that I scarcely have any idea at all concerning the relationship those people have with the Lord Jesus. What they personally know of Him, His ways, His accomplishments, His Word, and His present activity, are generally well kept secrets. The meetings of reference provide no format for the proclamation of such things, but are largely devoted to the promotion of the institutions represented. It is not that everything about these meetings is bad, or that all who attend them are to be suspected of being charlatans. However their real spiritual status is not known. The works that they represent are generally not associated with wisdom and spiritual understanding, and Christ and His accomplishments are not the subject of exposition. In such a setting, the activities of our text would be difficult, if not impossible, to carry out.

Those who labor for the Lord must be noted for their understanding of the Lord and what He has done. As I have indicated, I have personally found there is generally a great deficiency of this kind of understanding in the professed and professional ministry. If you have found otherwise, you have been most fortunate.

Remember, we are being exposed to the manner of the heavenly kingdom. We know from Isaiah’s prophecy that the government of that kingdom was placed upon the shoulders of the Lord Jesus, and that it will prosper under His administration (Isa 9:6-7). We know from Daniel’s prophecy that when Jesus returned to heaven from the completion of His mission on earth, there was given to Him “dominion, and glory, and a kingdom” (Dan 7:14). The Apostolic declaration is that “all things” have been put under Jesus’ feet, and that He has been appointed “to be head over everything for the church” NIV (Eph 1:22).

Now, what we are seeing in the book of Acts is the manner in which He governs His Kingdom –

How He works. In this particular text, He works among those who have these characteristics.

- They have been followers of Him.
- They are united together by their faith, and continue in one accord.
- They have taken His word seriously.
- They are obedient to Christ.
- They place a superior value on His promises.
- They are moved by their understanding of the Scriptures.

Having chosen two men who meet the qualifications required to fill the vacated “bishopic,” the work of this holy group is not completed. Only one of these men can be chosen, for only one office is available. Jesus did not tell them how to go about this procedure. They are having to be directed in the crucible of prayer, supplication, the words of an insightful disciple, and holy activity. The people proceed with wisdom and understanding.

CHOICE FOLLOWED BY PRAYER

“ 24 And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen. 25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.”

The people have gone as far as they can. Now the Lord must make His will known to the people. This group has been in the presence of the Lord, and their souls have been tuned to heavenly frequencies. No one from the group dares to suggest which of these two men should take the bishopic from which Judas fell. They know in their hearts that is not a choice they are qualified to make. Therefore, they will lay the matter before the Lord, who alone can manage His own Kingdom.

Care must be taken to discern the manner of this prayer, for it reflects the posture of faith. This is not intended to be an official pattern of prayer. It does, however, reveal how holy people think when they are in the presence of the Lord. It also reveals how the Lord directs those who are submitted to Him.

THE LORD KNOWS THE HEARTS

“And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men . . .” Other versions read, “And they prayed and said, “You, O Lord, who know the hearts of all,” NKJV “Then they prayed, “Lord, you know everyone's heart,” NASB “And they made prayers and said, Lord, having knowledge of the hearts of all men, BBE “And when they had prayed, they said: Thou, Lord, knowest what is in the hearts of all,” MRD “Then they all prayed for the right man to be chosen. ‘O Lord,’ they said, ‘you know every heart.’” NLT and “You, Lord, Who know all hearts (e their thoughts, passions, desires, appetites, purposes, and endeavors).” AMPLIFIED

How often a point is made of God knowing the hearts of men!

- “ . . . the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart ” (1 Sam 16:7).
- “ . . . every man according to his ways, whose heart thou knowest; (for thou, even Thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)” (1 Kgs 8:39).
- “ . . . for the LORD searcheth all hearts , and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts . . . ” (1 Chron 28:9).

- “Shall not God search this out? for He knoweth the secrets of the heart ” (Psa 44:21).
- “I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins . . . ” (Jer 17:10).
- “And God, which knoweth the hearts . . . ” (Acts 15:8).
- “ . . . I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts . . . ” (Rev 2:23).

They have gone as far as they can, and have found two men who, by human observation, meet the qualifications. However, this did not include the matter of the heart, which is known to God alone. Therefore they ask for God to make His choice known to them.

This is a sobering reality – the Lord knows the hearts of men – what they really are, how they really think, what they really desire, what they really understand. The outward qualifications for filling this bishopric was that the person had to be with Jesus all the time of His ministry, from the baptism of John until He was taken up into heaven. That, however, did not exhaust the qualifications. The heart of the person had to be pure and acceptable to God. The person could have no ignoble motives. He could not be an undiscerning or disinterested person. There must be a preeminent love for the Lord and “His Christ,” and the Kingdom of God and His righteousness must be sought first. This individual must have a genuine commitment to the Lord, be separated from the world, and be willing to leave all for Jesus. However, these are all matters of the heart, and cannot really be known by the peers of the one to be chosen. Therefore, the disciples make their appeal to the Lord, unto whom all of the heart is laid bare.

Here is something that human organization and systemization cannot discover – “the thoughts and intents of the heart ” (Heb 4:13). However, before a person can be used in the work of the Lord, the condition of the heart must be discovered – and that is something God alone can do. Further, lest men oversimplify this matter, our text makes known that this is often done through the instrumentality of holy brethren who make an appeal to God for His direction.

SHOW US

“ . . . show whether of these two thou hast chosen.” Other versions read, “show which of these two You have chosen,” NKJV “Show us which of these two You have chosen,” NASB “ make clear which of these two has been marked out by you ,” BBE “ manifest which thou hast chosen of these two,” MRD “ show us which of these men you have chosen as an apostle to replace Judas the traitor,” LIVING “ show clearly which of these two men thou hast chosen,” WILLIAMS “Show us which one of these two men You choose to be an apostle and to do this work ,” IE and “ indicate to us which one of these two You have chosen.” AMPLIFIED

Here another critical matter is made known: these disciples know who makes the real choices! Years later, Paul will further clarify the matter by writing, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). That is, God and God alone determines their role or function in the body of Christ. In this case, the role is that of an “apostle,” a class that has been set “first” in the body (1 Cor 12:28).

Technically, the choice had already been made. Practically, it had to be revealed, or “shown” to the people. They knew God’s choice was the only acceptable one, and yet the matter has been cast into their lap, and they must make a decision. They have gone as far as they can, and have found two men who, by human observation, meet the qualifications. However, this did not include the matter of the heart, which is known to God alone. Therefore they ask for God to make His choice known to them. This revelation, as we will see, will be made known in a very practical way.

TAKE PART OF THE MINISTRY

“ 25 That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, . . .” Other versions read, “to take over this apostolic ministry,” NASB “to occupy this ministry and apostleship,” NIV “to take the place in this ministry and apostleship,” NRSV “To take that position as a servant and Apostle,” BBE “to receive the lot of this service and apostleship,” DARBY “That he may take the room of this ministration and Apostleship,” GENEVA “that he should take part in this ministry and legateship ,” MRD “to take over this apostolic ministry,” NIB “to take over this ministry and apostolate,” NJB “as an apostle to replace Judas the traitor in this ministry,” NLT “to receive the share of this ministration and apostleship,” YLT and “To take the place in this ministry and receive the position of an apostle.” AMPLIFIED

The degree of specificity is most edifying to consider. Here are minds that are being influenced from heaven. These are people whose affection has been set on things above. They are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

These brethren know in their hearts the way in which the Lord works. The history of their people was used to introduce them to the concept. There are positions to be filled – specific areas of responsibility that are of greater significance than the individuals who fill them. Technically, these positions do not change the individual. That is, when they are filled they do not change or sanctify the person. In such a case, a despot could fill them, being made acceptable by virtue of his position. That, however, is not how God works. We know this is the case because of Judas, who fell from his apostolic position, confirming that the position does not sanctify the person.

In the Divine workings, God prepares the position, then prepares the one that is to occupy that position. This is why Jesus chose the original twelve – to prepare them to occupy this lofty office.

Dividing By Lot

By means of the nation of Israel, God acquainted people with dividing an area by “lot.” When Israel came into Canaan, it was not every tribe for themselves, each group picking out the area of the land they preferred. Rather, the promised land was divided into lots, and distributed to each tribe. Before he died, Moses told the people, “Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot : according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few” (Num 26:56). And again, “ye shall divide the land by lot for an inheritance among the families” (Num 33:54). When they arrived in the promised land, God told Joshua, “divide thou it by lot unto the Israelites for an inheritance, as I have commanded thee” (Josh 13:6). That mandate was carried out and “ By lot was their inheritance , as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses” (Josh 14:2). Joshua then told the people, “Behold, I have divided unto you by lot these nations that remain, to be an inheritance for your tribes, from Jordan, with all the nations that I have cut off, even unto the great sea westward” (Josh 23:4).

The Body of Christ

Similarly, the body of Christ involves various spiritual “lots” – areas of ministry through which the saints are edified and properly prepared for glory, where they will receive their full inheritance. Some of the more prominent “lots” are described in these words: “And He gave some, apostles ; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists ; and some, pastors and teachers ” (Eph 4:11). A more extensive listing of lots include the following: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles , secondarily prophets , thirdly teachers , after that miracles , then gifts of healings , helps, governments , diversities of tongues ” (1 Cor 12:28). Emphasizing their diversity of the “lots” , as well as the way in which they are governed, those at Corinth included, “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom ; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy ; to another discerning of spirits ; to another divers kinds of tongues ; to another the interpretation of tongues ” (1 Cor 12:8-10).

Paul mentioned the following “lots” to the church at Rome: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness” (Rom 12:6-8). Peter gives a general admonition concerning these lots. “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:10-11).

The Point

The point is that the various ministries within the body of Christ are not left up to the discretion of men. God places the members in the body as it has pleased Him (1 Cor 12:28). The gifts themselves are distributed and managed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-11).

The holy conclave that is praying in Jerusalem knew this was the way the Kingdom was administered. They knew who made the choices, and how to go about finding out what they should do. Whether they knew it intuitively or by a special word, I am not sure. I am inclined to think they knew it intuitively.

The holy conclave that is praying in Jerusalem knew this was the way the Kingdom was administered. They knew who made the choices, and how to go about finding out what they should do. Whether they knew it intuitively or by a special word, I am not sure. I am inclined to think they knew it intuitively. However one may choose to view it, this occasion must be seen as quite different from the approaches used by the contemporary church.

JUDAS FELL BY TRANSGRESSION

“ . . . from which Judas by transgression fell . . .” Other versions read, “which Judas left,” NASB “from which Judas turned aside,” NIV “from which Judas fell away,” ASV “from which Judas by his sin was shut out,” BBE “from which Judas transgressing fell,” DARBY “from which Judas hath gone astray,” GENEVA “from which Judas broke away,” MRD “which Judas abandoned,” NJB “for he has deserted us,” NLT “from which Judas, by transgression, did fall,” YLT and “from which Judas fell away and went astray.” AMPLIFIED

The insight of these brethren BEFORE Pentecost and BEFORE the Spirit came as Jesus promised, is refreshing to consider. Under the leadership of Peter, not only did these brethren know what needed to be done, and how to go about it, they also knew WHY it had to be done.

Judas had filled a legitimate office, and He was chosen by Jesus to do so. Now, will sin have an effect upon his function in that office, and even his eternal destiny? Some, who are unlearned in the ways of the Lord would contend that such a thing is not possible. Wresting the Word of the Lord, they would declare that “the gifts and calling of God are without repentance” (Rom 11:29). How, then, could the chosen one fall, or be removed from the office to which he had been called? However, their thinking is too simplistic, and unbecoming for anyone who has a love for the truth. Too much is revealed for us to think like that. First, Judas was chosen with the fulfilment of the Scripture in mind, as well as to fill a valid slot in the kingdom. Jesus said of him, “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Thy name: those that Thou gavest Me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12).

Who is the person who will have the audacity to say that everyone affiliated with the church, or making a profession of faith, has been called with permanency in mind? What of the angels who

“left their own habitation,” and have now been “reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 1:6). These are angels who “sinned,” and thus judgment was passed upon them – even though they occupied a legitimate “habitation.” Peter says of them, “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet 2:4). Peter further reasons on the matter, affirming that this has very much to do with how we consider our own lives. “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet 2:9).

Judas, like the fallen angels, “left” his habitation – the one into which Jesus Himself had placed him. Instead of following Jesus and remaining with Him, as He was chosen to do (Mk 3:14), he chose to side with Christ’s enemies, and even realize financial gain through the process. He was in Christ’s house, but was used for a base purpose. As it is written, “In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble” NIV (2 Tim 2:20). Peter was intended for noble purposes, and Judas for ignoble purposes. Notwithstanding, it was by transgression that he fell. It was the result of his own doing, and not the result of Jesus’ choice.

Sin was Judas’ undoing, and it is the same with every person who indulges iniquity.

THAT HE MIGHT GO TO HIS OWN PLACE

“ . . . that he might go to his own place.” Other versions read, “to go where he belongs,” NASB “to go to his proper place,” NJB “and gone where he belongs,” NLT and “to go [where he belonged] to his own [proper] place.” AMPLIFIED

It appears as though their thoughts became more clear as they prayed. In other words, responses were coming back to them from heaven. No one spoke of Judas in this manner prior to them continuing steadfastly in pray and supplication. Before Pentecost, and before they were “endued with power from on high,” however, they made this assessment of Judas. Now, some years after the event actually occurred, Luke, moved along by the Holy Spirit, records it for our learning, “upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11).

Precisely why did Judas “fall by transgression?” The praying brethren provide the ultimate cause: in order “that he might go to his own place!” Among other things, this confirms that our real place, or position, is not in this world! Woe to that person who conducts his life as though this world was the primary one, and his present position was the only one.

The term “his own place” indicates that the bishopric that he temporarily occupied did not really belong to him. The other apostles left this world as “apostles.” Judas did not. Note he did not fall by transgression in order that he might be removed from the apostleship, but in order that he might go “[where he belongs] to his own [proper] place.” AMPLIFIED To say the least, this is an arresting consideration!

Judas was like certain false teachers of whom Peter wrote. He likened them to “brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed” (2 Pet 2:12). Other versions read, “made to be caught and destroyed,” NKJV “born . . . to be captured and killed,” NASB and “born only to be caught and destroyed.” NIV Like Pharaoh, Judas was “raised up” as one in whom God’s power could be shown (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17).

Admittedly, this is not a common way of thinking, but the early church was quite capable of handling this kind of thought. They were more God-conscience than the church of our day.

Ultimately, there is a place where everyone “belongs” – a final destiny! There is a place where

they will fit in, and for which their present conduct is preparing them. It may be difficult to consider such things, but it is far better to do it now, taking the appropriate measures to ensure that you will be dwelling with the Lord for ever.

THEY GAVE FORTH THEIR LOTS

“ 26 And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. ”

Having heard the words of Peter, selected candidates for the office, and prayed for God to make known His choice, the disciples now provide a means through which the Lord can make His choice known.

THEY GAVE FORTH THEIR LOTS

“And they gave forth their lots . . .” Other versions read, “And they cast their lots,” NKJV “And they drew lots for them,” NIV “And they put it to the decision of chance ,” BBE “And they gave them lot ,” DARBY “Then they drew straws ,” LIVING “Then the apostles gave the two men lots ,” WEYMOUTH “And they drew lots [between the two] ,” AMPLIFIED and “Then t hey drew lots for these men .” PHILLIPS

On the surface, this appeared to be an action of chance. Some have likened it to drawing straws – in fact, the Living Bible translates the phrase “gave forth their lots” as “drew straws.” Others have paralleled it with throwing dice. In the simplest form, casting lots would involve writing the names on individual stones, placing the stones in a container, then drawing one of the stones out of the container. The name on that stone was the official choice. In its most complex form, it would involve each person casting their lot to write the name they chose on a stone or piece of wood. That would then be thrown into a container, and the stones would be tallied, with the majority of stones signifying the choice. The latter form is something like the voting that is common in our country.

It is generally understood that each person had one of these articles – a stone, piece of wood, or other media, that contained their name. This would be used when casting lots. That, however, does not appear to fit this scenario.

The Practice Foreshadowed

- When the land of Canaan was divided among the tribes. It was done by the casting of lots. In this case, each tribe would be represented by a stone on which their name was written. When considering a specific portion of the land, the lot would be cast, and the name of the tribe on the stone that was drawn was given the land. “And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the LORD: and there Joshua divided the land unto the children of Israel according to their divisions” (Josh 18:10).
- Among some Gentiles, this was the mode of the men determining the cause of the storm that fell on the ship in which Jonah was running away from the Lord. In this instance, the names of the possible culprits were written on some media, and the name on the media that was picked was the person charged. “And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots , that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah ” (Jonah 1:7).
- When determining who would be included in the singing for the house of the Lord, the choice was made by casting lots. Similar the case above, names of the candidates were placed on a piece of stone or wood, and the name on the article selected was given the office. “All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's

order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the LORD, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight. And they cast lots, ward against ward, as well the small as the great, the teacher as the scholar” (1 Chr 25:6-8).

- Using the same method, under Nehemiah’s administration, it was determined that one out of every ten people would dwell in Jerusalem. Lots were cast to determine who it would be. “And the rulers of the people dwelt at Jerusalem: the rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one of ten to dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine parts to dwell in other cities” (Neh 11:1).

- Similarly, when Jesus was crucified, the soldiers cast lots for His garments, thereby fulfilling the Scripture. “And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots” (Matt 27:35; Lk 23:34; John 19:24; Psa 22:18).

Keep in mind that a considerable amount of effort had went into the process BEFORE the lots were cast.

- The people had prayed and made supplications to the God of heaven.
- Peter had shown the gravity of the situation by unfolding what had to be done.
- The qualifications that had to be met were clearly specified.
- Men meeting the qualifications had been selected.
- The people had asked God to reveal the man whom He had chosen.

CASTING LOTS

(properly **lr;G** or **lr;Go**, *goral'*, *klh~rov*, literally a pebble, used anciently for balloting; other terms occasionally thus rendered are **lb,je** or **lb,j**, *che'bel*, a portion, Deuteronomy 32:9; 1 Chronicles 16:18; Psalm 105:11, referring to an inheritance; and *lagca>nw*, to obtain by lot, Luke 1:9; John 19:24), strictly a small stone, as used in casting lots (Leviticus 16:8; Numbers 33:54; Joshua 19:1. Ezekiel 24:6; Jonah 1:7), hence also a method used to determine chances or preferences, or to decide a debate. The decision by lot was often resorted to among the Hebrews, but always with the strictest reference to the interposition of God. As to the precise manner of casting lots, we have no certain information; probably several modes were practiced. In Proverbs 16:33 we read that "the lot," i.e., pebble, "is cast into the lap," properly into the bosom of an urn or vase. It does not appear that the lap or bosom of a garment worn by a person was ever used to receive lots. McCLINTOK and STRONG’S

Thus, from one point of view, this was not a decision thrown, as it were, into the wind.

Solomon provided some insight into the matter of casting lots, showing that this was a means by which God reveals His own choices. “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov 16:33). Other versions read, “But its every decision is of the Lord,” NKJV “but the decision is the Lord’s alone,” NRSV “but the decision is wholly of the Lord,” RSV “but the LORD determines how they fall,” NLT “And from Jehovah is all its judgment,” YLT “but it is the Lord who controls the decision,” LIVING and “but the decision is wholly of the Lord [even the events that seem accidental are really ordered by Him]” AMPLIFIED

This was, then, an act of faith. It was preceded by doing everything possible to men, then leaving the matter in the hands of the Lord. In a sense, this was something like casting all your care upon the Lord. As it is written, “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for

Remember, this is being written over thirty years later, as Luke was led by the Spirit.

Matthias was, then, the God-ordained person to fill the bishopric vacated by Judas. They had asked for God to reveal His choice, and He did.

you” (1 Pet 5:7). That too is preceded by doing what we can: “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time:” (1 Pet 5:6). The verse beginning “casting all your care,” is the last part of the sentence commencing in the previous verse.

THE LOT FELL ON MATTHIAS

“ . . . and the lot fell upon Matthias . . .” Other versions read, “and the decision was given for Matthias,” DARBY “and it came upon Matthias,” MRD “and as the lot fell to Matthias ,” NJB “and in this way Matthias was chosen ,” NLT and “Then the apostles gave the two men lots. The lots showed that Matthias was the one .” IE

Thus God, working through their casting of lots, revealed His choice was Matthias. All of the souls present were in the proper frame of spirit, and there were no dissenting voices. I should not doubt that, if there were lots for everyone present, they were all cast for Matthias. They were, after all, in “one accord.” Voting, as we know it, generally assumes different preferences. In this case, God could very well have directed every participant, thereby controlling the decision.

HE WAS NUMBERED WITH THE ELEVEN

“ . . . and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.” Other versions read, “so he was added to the eleven apostles,” NASB “and he was by a common consent counted with the eleven Apostles,” GENEVA “and he was numbered with the eleven legates,” MRD “he was listed as one of the twelve apostles,” NJB “and became an apostle with the other eleven,” NLT “and became an apostle with the other eleven,” LIVING “So, he became an apostle like the other eleven,” IE “and he was added to and counted with the eleven apostles (special messengers),” AMPLIFIED and “and thereafter he was considered equally an apostle with the eleven.” PHILLIPS

Remember, this is being written over thirty years later, as Luke was led by the Spirit. Matthias was, then, the God-ordained person to fill the bishopric vacated by Judas. They had asked for God to reveal His choice, and He did.

Additionally, the people recognized that this was God’s choice and immediately acclimated themselves to it, numbering Matthias with the eleven. Now, when we read of “the twelve” (Acts 6:2), the number includes Matthias. When we read of “the apostles,” Matthias is now among them (Acts 2:37,42,43; 4:33,25,26,37; 5:2,18,34,40; 6:6; 8:1,15,18; 9:27; 11:1; 14:14; 15:2,4,6,22,23,33; 16:4).

Thus everything is ready for the “promise of the Father” to be received, and for the disciples to be “endued with power from on high.” The preparatory things that needed to be done have been accomplished. The stage is set, and the curtain is about to be lifted on “the day of salvation” and the “accepted time.”

CONCLUSION

Thus Luke has provided us with the essential activities that took place during the ten days between Christ’s ascension and the coming day of Pentecost. The minds of all of the disciples have been properly focused, and therefore they have all been in one accord, joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. Both men and women have joined together in the activities: praising God, praying, hearing Peter, and choosing Matthias. There is not the slightest hint that anyone present was excluded, for that would render the phrase “with one accord” meaningless. There is no point to being of one accord if that accord is not in some way expressed. That is

precisely why Paul wrote, “That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6). And again, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

Now they are ready for “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4), and to be “endued with power from our high” (Lk 24:49). They are ready to receive, ready to become Christ’s witnesses, and ready to be empowered to preach the Gospel, “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47), then in “in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

This account has taught us that those who are used by God must have adequate preparation. They must be sanctified by being in the presence of the Lord. They must also address any unfinished business that remains. This is all involved in being “prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

It has also taught us that the government of the kingdom is really upon Christ’s shoulders, and that the ultimate choices are made by God, not man. Jesus is the One who is building His church. His brethren are involved, but are strictly under His administration. Blessed is the person who knows, comprehends, and acquiesces to this.

This account reveals the details of Divine thought, and the extent of human involvement in God’s eternal purpose. All of this takes place in an environment of willing submission and discernment. It is driven by faith and accompanied by hope. This is how the Lord works. It reveals how faith responds. It confirms how the will of the Lord is sought, and how the will of the Lord can, in fact, be known.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #5

THE DAY OF PENTECOST FULLY COME

“ 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ” (Acts 2:1-4)

INTRODUCTION

There had been many Pentecosts celebrated in Jerusalem – but never one like the one about to take place. The “promise of the Father” of which Jesus had spoken would be fulfilled. The disciples would “endued with power from on high,” just as Jesus had said. The Holy Spirit would come, sent forth by Jesus from the Father – and it would be with extraordinary accompaniments that the disciples had never before experienced. The nature of these accompaniments would confirm that something of significant proportions had taken place in heaven – something that allowed for the grace of God to be poured forth in unprecedented measures.

Many of the things that would take place were formerly associated with curses, but now they would be the signs of blessing. All of this would take place while the disciples “were all with one accord in one place.” They would be waiting as Jesus had instructed them, and now the blessing for which they were waiting would begin to take place. This would be a new day!

It is a principle of spiritual life that those who wait upon the Lord are in a most excellent position – in our text, a receiving position. A waiting people grow stronger, their spiritual senses being

honed to a fine edge, and their spiritual stamina increasing, enabling them to endure. As it is written, “He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the

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- **PENTECOST FULLY COME (2:1a)**
- **WITH ONE ACCORD IN ONE PLACE (2:1b)**
- **A SOUND FROM HEAVEN (2:2)**
- **CLOVEN TONGUES OF FIRE (2:3)**
- **THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (2:4a)**
- **THE SPIRIT GIVES THEM UTTERANCE (2:4b).**
- **CONCLUSION**

youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:29-31). This promise is being fulfilled in our text.

THE PRINCIPLE OF PROMISE

As we approach this text, it is important that we see, what I will call, the principle of promise. By this I mean that being motivated by a promise is more powerful than be prompted by Law, or a commandment . It is true that, from one point of view, Jesus had commanded His disciples to stay in Jerusalem, and not depart from it: “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem” (Luke 24:49). Luke states that Jesus “commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem” (Acts 1:4). From one point of view, that should be enough, for “the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psa 19:8). No follower of Christ would object to having a word than this.

However, the Lord adds certain promises to this commandment, thereby adding more incentive to the believers. In this, the nature of the New Covenant is marvelously confirmed. How they must have pondered those precious promises!

- “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things , and bring all things to your remembrance , whatsoever I have said unto you ” (John 14:26).

- “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father , even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness , because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).

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

- “He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you . All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14-15).

- “And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you . Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24).

“And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you : but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high ” (Luke 24:49).

- “. . . wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of Me . . . ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5).

- “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The promises are addressed to faith, and faith has the ability to reach forward and take hold of them. Thus, faith moved these disciples to remain in Jerusalem, address immediate Kingdom concerns, and wait expectantly for the fulfillment of the promises delivered to them.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

There has not been unanimity among professed believers concerning the events that took place on the day of Pentecost. Some have viewed the involvement in the fulfillment of the promise as confined to the twelve apostles. Others have taken the position that the events of the day of Pentecost were intended to be duplicated throughout the remaining history of the church. There is, however, another view of these things that is, in my judgment, more in harmony with revealed Divine objectives.

What we have in the book of Acts is the beginning of a new era – “the day of salvation” and “the accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2). It is the time of the promised “new covenant” in which men would be changed by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18). This would be accomplished BY beholding the “glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” – the glorified Christ (2 Cor 4:6). A marvelous accord with the Law of God would be wrought by it being written in their hearts of the people, and “put” into their minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16). This would lead to them thinking like God.

All of the promises of a Messiah and the covenant He would implement were applicable to this period of time – “the day of salvation,” when men would actually be “reconciled to God” (Rom 5:10), be “justified from all things” (Acts 13:39), and become “a new creation” NKJV in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17).

None of these promises focused on any individual other than Jesus Christ. None of these promises were presented as being applicable to a certain group of people within the body of the ones made “accepted in the Beloved”

None of these promises focused on any individual other than Jesus Christ. None of these promises were presented as being applicable to a certain group of people within the body of the ones made “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). When doctrines are contrived that represent the experiences of the second chapter of Acts as particularly and exclusively those of the twelve apostles, a fundamental error in reasoning has taken place. Unless the text clearly is limited to “the twelve,” there is no form of spiritual reasoning that can justify men creating such limitations. After the commencement of the day of Pentecost, there was a point at which “the twelve” became the focus of attention (2:14). Until that time, no such limitation is affirmed. Because we are dealing with the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, it will be well to mention some of them, confirming what I have just said. I will limit myself to the texts that speak of the affectation of the people themselves during the promised “day of salvation.” The texts referring to a solitary Savior, or Messiah, are evident, and do not require substantiation at this time. The following texts pertain to the people who will be blessed by the Messiah – the people who will enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant.

- **THE PEOPLE WOULD ALL HEARKEN TO THE MESSIAH.** “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken . . . I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words

which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him” (Deu 18:15,18-19)

- **THE PEOPLE WOULD BE WILLING.** “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth” (Psa 110:3).

- **JOY AND GLADNESS OBTAINED.** “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa 35:10).

- **AGREEMENT.** “Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion” (Isa 52:8).

- **THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34).

- **HOLY INVOLVEMENT.** “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My spirit” (Joel 2:28-29).

- **MADE NEW.** “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26).

When declaring redemption and its glorious benefits, holy men declared the prophets had spoken of these things.

- “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:24).

- “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ” (Acts 26:22).

- “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

- “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets ; as it is written” (Acts 15:15).

- “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets , from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

MAKING A POINT

If, as some allege, the book of Acts concerns only a record of the apostles, it will have no power, and will even contradict the prophecies of the coming Savior and the New Covenant over which He would mediate.

After Acts 1:13, only Peter, James, and John are ever mentioned in the book. James is only mentioned twice, and neither reference has anything at all to do with what he did (12:,17). Most of the time John is mentioned, he is said to have been with Peter (3:1,3,4,11; 4:13,19; 8:14). Other significant people in the book of Acts include Stephen (6:5,8,9; 7:59; 8:2; 11:19; 22:20), Philip (6:5; 8:5-6, 12-13,26,29-31,34-35,37-40;21:8), Barnabas (4:36; 9:27; 11:22,25,30; 12:25; 13:1-

2,7,43,46,50; 14:12,14,20; 15:2,12,22, 25,35-37,39), and Silas (15:22,27,32,34, 40; 16:19,25,29; 17:4,10, 14,15; 18:5).

Add to this the general references to all believers. (2:1,2,4,44,45; 4:32). There are also numerous references to “the disciples” (6:1,2,7; 9:1,19,25,26,38; 11:26,29; 13:52;14:20,22,28; 15:10; 18:23, 27; 19:9,30; 20:1,7; 21:16).

New Covenant life does not center in the Apostles, nor are they the subjects of the Prophets. They themselves were ministers of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6), declaring and expounding its benefits to the people. While there is no question about them occupying a unique position in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28), and possessing unique insights into the purpose of God (Eph 3:5), they themselves are not the heart of the New Covenant, nor are they the subjects of the book of Acts.

There is no sound basis for imagining that being endowed with power from on high pertained only to the apostles, or that the “promise of the Father” was for them alone. If we are going to benefit from the remarkable record before us, it must be seen as a revelation of the New Covenant itself, and not a mere display of extraordinary power or ability. The day of Pentecost that follows is noted for a proclamation of the exalted Lord Jesus, not the unique experience of His apostles. It chronicles the discretionary activity the enthroned Savior, not the heightened capabilities of His disciples.

Nothing will be done on this day that does not shine the spotlight of attention upon the risen Christ. Nothing will take place that is not immediately associated with the salvation of God as foretold by the holy prophets. The accent will not be on the apostles.

PENTECOST FULLY COME

“ 2:1a And when the day of Pentecost was fully come . . . ”

In order to appreciate the text, one must have some understanding of the prefigurements God instituted under the Law. These prefigurements, or foreshadowings, were included in, what is called, the ceremonial Law. That is, these were not the laws that were written upon the tables of stone, which were “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28). They were not a moral code, as ordinarily conceived, but one of ceremony or disciplined routine. It was within the framework of these God-ordained ceremonies that certain conduct was imposed upon Israel. This imposition was required for at least two reasons. First , because Israel did not have a circumcised heart. For this reason they were fundamentally rebellious and wayward (Deut 9:24). This condition necessitated particularization concerning their conduct. Second , these ceremonies contained types and shadows of the redemption that would be realized in Christ Jesus. They provided a means through which the people could become acquainted with such things as atonement, redemption, sacrifice, offering to God, and other related matters.

Of particular note was the requirement to observe three annual feasts. These were special occasions that were to be attended by all of the males of the congregation. Thus it was written, “Thrice in the year shall all your men children appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year” (Exodus 34:23-24). The three occasions involved feasts, which are also specified. “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in 1 the feast of unleavened bread, and in 2 the feast of weeks , and in 3 the feast of tabernacles : and they shall not appear before the LORD empty” (Deut 16:16).

THE PASSOVER. “The feast of unleavened bread” was identified with the “Passover,” and was instituted the night Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage. On the

night it was said, “And ye shall observe the feast of unleavened bread; for in this selfsame day have I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt: therefore shall ye observe this day in your generations by an ordinance for ever” (Exodus 12:17). It was codified under the Law, and was the first of the three annual feasts to be observed (Ex 23:15). The feast lasted seven days, and was held in commemoration of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt: “The feast of unleavened bread shalt thou keep. Seven days thou shalt eat unleavened bread, as I commanded thee, in the time of the month Abib: for in the month Abib thou camest out from Egypt” (Ex 34:18; Lev 23:6). This feast was tied to the Passover, which occurred on the fourteenth day of the month, with the feast of unleavened bread beginning on the fifteenth day (Lev 23:5-6; 2 Chron 35:17). This association is clearly made by Ezekiel the prophet: “In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, ye shall have the passover, a feast of seven days ; unleavened bread shall be eaten” (Ezek 45:21).

When Jesus dwelt among men, He observed the Passover feast, and it was associated with “the feast of unleavened bread.” As it is written, “Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto him, Where wilt thou that we prepare for thee to eat the passover ?” (Matt 26:17). Mark 14:1 refers to “the feast of the passover, and of unleavened bread.” Mark 14:12 reminds us, “the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the passover.” Luke 22:1 reads, “Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover ” (Luke 22:1). This should be sufficient to establish the fact.

THE FEAST OF HARVEST. This was the second annual feast , during which the firstfruits were reaped (Ex 23:16). It is also referred to as “the feast of weeks,” because of the manner in which the time of its observance was calculated (Ex 34:22; Deut 16:10,16; 2 Chron 8:13). I will comment on this day more extensively after this introduction.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES. This is the third feast, and primarily referred to as “the feast of tabernacles” (Lev 23:34; Deut 16:13,16; John 7:2). It is also referred to as “the feast of ingathering” (Ex 23:16; 34:22). Nehemiah referred to it as the time during which Israel dwelt in “booths” made of branches (Neh 8:14-17; Lev 23:40-43). It also lasted seven days (Lev 23:39), and took place at “the end of the year,” when all of the crops were gathered in from the fields (Ex 23:16).

Thus, in these three feasts we have a marvelous depiction of the salvation of God.

- First, there is a sacrifice and deliverance. Just as surely as Israel had a passover lamb, so Christ is “our Passover,” having been “sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7). Just as Israel was delivered from a prolonged bondage over which they had no power, so we have been delivered from this present evil world (Gal 1:4), saved from our sins (Matt 1:21), and rescued from the prince of the power of the air (Eph 2:2).

- Second, just as there was a celebration of the harvest of firstfruits – a pledge of the full harvest to come – so in Christ there has been an initial reaping of genuine fruits. This took place on the day of Pentecost, during which both the nature and the effectiveness of the sacrifice for sin was confirmed. The caliber of the spiritual grain was revealed at that time, as well as the sureness of the harvest.

- Third, there will be a final harvest in which the thorough field will be reaped, and the grain gathered into the everlasting garner.

See, it is all revealed in those three annual feasts of Israel. In them is encapsulated the whole of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, and will be carried out to the finest detail.

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

“And when the day of Pentecost . . . ” Other Versions read, “And when the fiftieth days was come,” TNT “Seven weeks had gone by since Jesus’ death and resurrection,” LIVING “On the day

of the harvest festival,” WEYMOUTH and “the actual day of Pentecost.” PHILLIPS

Under the Law, the day of Pentecost was never identified by that name. “Pentecost” is used exclusively in the New Covenant writings, and pertains to the way in which the day was calculated. The word “pentecost” means “the fiftieth day.” It is a transliteration of the Greek word, with each letter being converted to an English letter, rather than the word itself being translated. The Greek word is **penthkosth/j** (pen-tay-kos-tay). It is mentioned in this text. It is also mentioned in Acts 20:16: “For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost ” (Acts 20:16). It is mentioned again in First Corinthians 16:8: “But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost ” (1 Cor 16:8).

There are three ways in which this day is referenced under the Law.

- The Festival of Weeks (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10, 16; 2 Chronicles 8:13) – because it was celebrated seven complete weeks, or fifty days, after the Passover (Leviticus 23:15, 16).
- The Festival of the Harvest (Exodus 23:16), because was a reaping of the grains that were sown during the final harvest of ingathering.
- The Day of Firstfruits (Numbers 28:26), because the first loaves made from the new grain were then offered on the altar (Leviticus 23:17) .

The time of the day of Pentecost was precisely calculated. It came after the Passover, which was a feast of seven days. Measuring from “the seventh sabbath” of that feast, Israel was to count fifty days forward. “Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days . . .” (Lev 23:16). Stated another way, they were to count seven sabbaths forward – a period of forty-nine days. “And ye shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that ye brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete” (Lev 23:15). On the next day – the fiftieth day – the “feast of weeks,” or the day of “Pentecost,” was observed.

The all important feature of this day was the presentation of two loaves of leavened, salted bread unto the Lord. The size of each loaf was specified: “Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall ye number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meat offering unto the LORD. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals : they shall be of fine flour; they shall be baked with leaven; they are the firstfruits unto the LORD ” (Lev 23:17). These were to be accompanied by the burnt offerings of “seven lambs without blemish of the first year, and one young bullock, and two rams.” One “kid of the goats” was also offered “for a sin offering,” and “two lambs of the first year for a sacrifice of peace offerings” (Lev 23:18-19). The priest was then to wave these offerings before the Lord “with the two lambs.”

This was to be a festival of good cheer because of the harvest, and a day of joy. Free will offerings were also to be made to the Lord: “And thou shalt keep the feast of weeks unto the LORD thy God with a tribute of a freewill offering of thine hand , which thou shalt give unto the LORD thy God, according as the LORD thy God hath blessed thee” (Deut 16:10). There was to be a liberal spirit at this time, with special consideration being given to the strangers, the fatherless, and widows. “And thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God, thou, and thy son, and thy daughter, and thy manservant, and thy maidservant, and the Levite that is within thy gates, and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow , that are among you, in the place which the LORD thy God hath chosen to place His name there” (Deut 16:11).

The day of Pentecost, then, was marked by the following.

- It was between the time of Divine deliverance and the final harvest.

It was a time when the firstfruits of the latter seed was offered to the Lord.

- All of the people enjoyed the day, including sons, daughters, manservants, maidservants, the Levites, strangers, the fatherless, and the widows – “all flesh,” so to speak.
- It was a day attended by great joy.

By instituting this day, the Lord confirmed that seed that was sown would grow and produce a harvest. He declared that what was first reaped was to be especially offered to the Lord. There was an affirmation that this day belonged to everyone, including even menservants and maidservants. It was a time when being a servant brought with it no inhibition.

Thus, the following sequence of events have taken place.

- Jesus had died been buried, and remained in the tomb for three days and three nights.
- Jesus has raised from the dead.
- Jesus has appeared to His disciples, spending forty days with them, speaking about things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.
- Jesus has ascended back into heaven.
- The disciples have joined together in prayers and supplications.
- Peter has revealed that the bishopric vacated by Judas must be filled.
- The qualifications for the replacement have been specified.
- Two qualified individuals were identified.
- Prayer is was made to God, asking that He reveal His choice.
- Lots were cast, and the lot fell on Matthias.
- Matthias is numbered with the eleven.

The stage is now set for the fulfillment of the promise.

Let no one imagine that in this day of salvation the will of God is being done independently of human involvement. This is a day when God has called the redeemed to participate in what He is doing. We will find that this is a consistent pattern throughout the book of Acts. We will find the frequent involvement of angels. However, the primary work of the Lord will be carried by those whom He recognizes as being identified with His only begotten Son.

FULLY COME

“ . . . was fully come . . . ”

The words “fully come,” while omitted from several versions (NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, BBE, GENEVA, NAS, NAU, NLT, PNT, TNT, IE, ISV), are integral to the text. Several versions reflect the true idea of the text. “Was now come,” ASV “was now accomplishing,” DARBY “were accomplished,” DOUAY and “was fulfilled.” NAB The Greek word translated “fully come” is **sumplhrou/sqai** (soom-play-rous-thai). Its lexical meaning is, “to fill completely, to complete entirely, be fulfilled of time,” THAYER and “figuratively of a span of time in God’s planning, be fulfilled, come to an end.” FRIBERG

This is language that speaks of Divine purpose and government. The will of God is inserted into time, surrounded by all manner of challenging circumstances, and an adversary as well. Time itself, which ordinarily erodes everything placed within its confines will be powerless against this purpose. The adversary, the devil himself, will use all of his subtlety to thwart the fulfillment of this

purpose. Principalities and powers will attempt to frustrate it as well.

The particular day is not merely a day on the calendar of men. This is a day on the calendar of heaven – a day on which “the promise of the Father” will be sent by Jesus into the adversarial and decaying realm. It is the day Jesus had in mind when He said to His disciples, “ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). Will the enthroned Savior be able to fulfill what has been determined for this day? Will the purpose that has been set in motion be brought to its determined culmination?

Certain Things Had to Happen

There are certain things that had to happen before this day could be fulfilled. Many of them will be worked out “in the presence” of Christ’s enemies. They will be carried forward by the Man from heaven who has humbled Himself, coming in “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3), and wrapped in “weakness” and servitude (Phil 2:7). Some of the work must be accomplished while the Man from heaven is in a weakened state (2 Cor 13:4).

What had to take place before this day could “fully come?” In a grand display of Sovereignty, all of the requirements were fulfilled, thoroughly and in a timely manner. Here are some of them.

- **A VIRGIN CONCEIVES.** A virgin had to conceive and bring forth a Son (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:22-23).
- **CALLED OUT OF EGYPT.** The Holy Child must have been called out of Egypt (Hos 11:1; Matt 2:15).
- **SLAUGHTER OF INNOCENTS.** There must be a slaughter of the innocents, causing the mothers to weep for their children (Jer 31:15; Matt 2:17-18).
- **RAISED IN NAZARETH.** The Redeemer had to be raised in Nazareth (Matt 2:23).
- **THE WAY PREPARED.** One had to come to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus (Isa 40:3; Matt 3:3).
- **LIGHT IN GALILEE.** A Light had to rise in the Galilean area (Isa 9:1-2; Matt 4:12-16).
- **KNOWLEDGEABLE REDEEMER.** The proposed Redeemer had to know to choose the good and refuse the evil (Isa 7:15; Heb 1:9).
- **HEALING.** His earthly ministry must include the healing of the sick (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17).
- **PARABLES.** The Messiah must have spoken to the multitudes in parables (Psa 78:2; Matt 13:35).
- **FREE FROM SIN.** The Savior had to have lived free from sin, so that when He was offered it was not for His own sin (Dan 9:26).
- **TRIUMPHAL ENTRY.** The Savior must have ridden triumphantly into Jerusalem, sitting upon a young colt, with the people praising Him (Zech 9:9; Matt 21:4-9).
- **DISCIPLES SCATTERED.** When arrested, His disciples had to be scattered (Zech 13:7; Matt 26:56).
- **BETRAYAL.** The Redeemer must be betrayed by one identified with Him (Psa 41:9; 55:12-15; Matt 26:47-48; John 17:12; Acts 1:16).
- **THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER.** Jesus had to be betrayed for thirty pieces of silver (Zech 11:12-13; Matt 27:9).
- **WITHOUT CAUSE.** When the Savior was crucified, with men there could be no

just cause for His death (Psa 35:19; John 15:25).

- **CASTING LOTS.** When crucified, the men had to cast lots for Jesus' garments (Psa 22:18; Matt 27:35).

- **I THIRST.** When He died, Jesus had to have cried out "I thirst" (Psa 22:15; 69:21; John 19:28).

- **NUMBERED WITH TRANSGRESSORS.** When He died, Jesus had to be identified, or numbered, with transgressions (Isa 53:12; Mk 15:27-28).

- **NO BONE BROKEN.** When the Savior died, no bone of His body could be broken (Psa 34:20; John 19:36).

- **VALIDATE NEW COVENANT.** The death of the Christ must validate the New Covenant, thus bringing an end to the Old Covenant (Heb 9:16-17).

- **SIN REMOVED.** The sin of the world had to be taken away (John 1:29), put away (Heb 9:26), and judged in a Man (Rom 8:3).

- **MADE TO BE SIN.** A Man had to be "made sin for us" – to become sin incarnate (2 Cor 5:13).

- **MADE A CURSE.** A Man had to become a curse for us (Gal 3:13).

- **SIN CONDEMNED.** What the Law could not do must be done: sin had to be condemned "in the flesh" (Rom 8:3).

- **BURIED WITH THE RICH.** When buried, the Savior had to have been buried with the rich (Isa 53:9; Matt 27:60).

- **RISE ON THIRD DAY.** The Savior had to rise from the dead on the third day (Hos 6:2; Lk 9:22; Acts 10:40; 1 Cor 15:4).

- **ETERNAL REDEMPTION.** Eternal redemption had to be obtained (Heb 9:12).

- **GOD SATISFIED.** God had to be "satisfied" regarding the offering made for sin (Isa 53:11).

- **PURGING.** The heavenly realms had to be purged, or readied for reception of men (Heb 9:23).

- **SATAN BRUISED.** Satan's Head had to be bruised (Gen 3:15; Heb 2:14).

- **POWERS SPOILED.** Principalities and powers had to be "spoiled," or plundered (Col 2:15).

- **HANDWRITING BLOTTED OUT.** The handwriting of ordinances that was against us had to be blotted out (Col 2:14).

- **ALL POWER GIVEN.** A Man had to be invested with all power in heaven and earth, in order to bring men to glory (Dan 7:13-14; Matt 28:18; 1 Pet 3:22).

- **ABOUNDING GRACE.** The grace of God had to be able to abound "by one Man, Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:15).

- **ONE MAN BARES SIN.** The sins of the world had to be effectively laid upon one man, thereby enabling justification (Rom 5:16).

- **FREE GIFT FOR ALL.** The "free gift" must be able to come upon all men upon the basis of the righteousness of one Man, Jesus Christ, and be accomplished justly (Rom 5:18).

- **ONE ACT OF OBEDIENCE.** There must be one act of obedience whereby many can "be made righteous" (Rom 5:19).

- **A JUST GOD.** God must be "just" in the justifying of men (Rom 3:26).

- **LIFE TAKEN UP.** The Son must take up His own life again, rising from the dead (John 10:17-18).
- **JESUS RECEIVED IN HEAVEN.** Jesus must be received back into heaven, and the Kingdom given to Him (Dan 7:13-14).
- **CHRIST GLORIFIED.** Christ must have been exalted and “glorified,” in order that He might send forth the Spirit (Acts 2:33; 3:13).
- **INTERCESSOR IN HEAVEN.** An Intercessor had to be in place in heaven, to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him (Isa 53:12; Heb 7:25).
- **MEDIATOR IN PLACE.** A Mediator had to be established in order to apply the covenant to the people (Heb 8:6; 12:24).

If these works had not taken place at the foundational level, as they did BEFORE Pentecost, nothing could have been worked together for eternal good at the individual level.

WORD FROM JERUSALEM. Everything must be ready for the word of the Lord to go out from Jerusalem (Mic 4:2; Zech 14:8; Lk 24:49)

- **BISHOPRIC FILLED.** The bishopric vacated by Judas must be filled by a qualified individual (Psa 109:8; Acts 1:20,25,26).
- **WORLD RECONCILED.** The reconciliation of the world had to have been wrought (2 Cor 5:18-20).
- **LAW ENDED AS MEANS.** The Law must have been ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).

This is by no means a complete listing of the considerations. Here, however, are forty-seven things that had to be fulfilled BEFORE the day of Pentecost could “fully come.” If a single one of them, or any other requirement, had not taken place, the events that follow could not possibly have occurred. The day could not “fully come” until all of these things were accomplished. They were all essential in order for salvation to be declared to all men.

The Divine will had to have been satisfactorily accomplished in three realms. There could be no flaw in what was done.

- **HEAVEN.** There could be no discontent in heaven concerning what the Son had accomplished. In God’s assessment, sin must have been satisfactorily put away, Satan destroyed, the Law as a means to righteousness terminated, and the Savior exalted to the place of absolute preeminence.
- **EARTH.** On earth an effective ministry must have been accomplished in the midst of darkness, an efficacious death achieved, a confirmed resurrection accomplished, and a visible ascension into heaven completed.
- **SATAN’S DOMAIN.** In the world of darkness, Satan had to have been destroyed, principalities and powers spoiled, and the basis for condemning accusation removed.

Here is a marvelous example of God working “all things” “together” “for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” NIV (Rom 8:28). If these works had not taken place at the foundational level, as they did BEFORE Pentecost, nothing could have been worked together for eternal good at the individual level.

A SANCTIFYING VIEW

It is only as this book is seen against the backdrop of Divine accomplishment that it will minister grace to the hearers. We will find the book of Acts is the chronicling of the effects of

an exalted Savior. On this day He started a work that is continuing to this day.

Having been myself exposed to a suffocating legalistic approach to the book of Acts, I can testify to the refreshment that is ministered by the “fully come” view. This is the view that sees the events taking place on the day of Pentecost as having a firm and unmoveable foundation. A considerable amount of Divine activity preceded this day, when “the day of Pentecost was fully come!” It is only as this book is seen against the backdrop of Divine accomplishment that it will minister grace to the hearers. We will find the book of Acts is the chronicling of the effects of an exalted Savior. On this day He started a work that is continuing to this day. God be praised that when the day arrived, everything was ready!

THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

As I have already indicated, the day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week – fifty days after the “seventh sabbath” of the Passover week (Lev 23:16). Throughout history certain have questioned the superiority of the first day of the week, choosing to honor the seventh day – the Sabbath – as the primary day for believers. Those of us who prefer the first day of the week have good reason for doing so. Consider the following.

- Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week: “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week , . . .” (Mark 16:9).
- Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene on the first day of the week: “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene , out of whom he had cast seven devils” (Mark 16:9).
- Jesus appeared on the first day of the week to the women who came to the tomb: “In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. . . . And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them , saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him” (Mat 28:1,9).
- Jesus appeared to Cleopas and his companion on the first of the week: “Now upon the first day of the week . . . And, behold, two of them went that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was from Jerusalem about threescore furlongs . . . And it came to pass, that, while they communed together and reasoned, Jesus himself drew near, and went with them ” (Luke 24:1,13,15).
- Jesus appeared to the eleven and those who were with them on the first day of the week: “Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week , when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst , and saith unto them, Peace be unto you” (John 20:19; Lk 24:33-36).
- One week later, again on the first day of the week, Jesus appeared to His disciples again: “And after eight days again His disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus , the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you” (John 20:26).
- Pentecost was on the first day of the week, fifty days after the last Sabbath of the Passover week: (Lev 23:16).
- The disciples at Troaz gathered on the first day of the week to break bread: “And upon the first day of the week , when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7).
- The brethren at Corinth were noted for gathering on the first day of the week: “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath

prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come” (1 Cor 16:2).

- This is no doubt the day on which John was “in the Spirit” when on the isle of Patmos: “I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet” (Rev 1:10). Those who say John’s reference to “the Lord’s day” referred to the day Lord appeared to Him overlook that He was in the Spirit on that day BEFORE Jesus spoke to Him. This is not a strange view, but has been generally accepted throughout the ages. It is obvious that, to John, the day was a distinguished day, else there would be no significance to saying “the Lord’s day.”

The resurrection of Christ on the first day of the week gave it a special significance – as well as two of His appearances to His disciples on that day. It is therefore fitting that believers honor Him on the first day of the week. It is superior to the Sabbath day because of the events taking place on it. It also is more in harmony with the New Covenant, which is a covenant of beginnings and first things. Under the Law, rest from labor was the emphasis. Under the New Covenant, newness of life is the point.

The sabbath day of the Law is, in a firstfruits sense, fulfilled in Christ Jesus. As it is written, “For we which have believed do enter into rest . . .” (Heb 4:3). A point is made of the fact that Israel never did enter into God’s intended rest. That is, keeping the seventh day holy was really only a token of the rest to which the Lord referred. Here is how the Spirit states the case: “For if Joshua had given them rest, then He would not afterward have spoken of another day. There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. For he who has entered His rest has himself also ceased from his works as God did from His. Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience” NKJV (Heb 4:11).

If it is countered that the Spirit is not speaking with the seventh-day-Sabbath in mind, then I draw attention to the fact that He was, in fact, speaking with that very day in mind. Thus, the fourth chapter of Hebrews begins, “For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in My wrath, if they shall enter into My rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For He spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all His works. And in this place again, If they shall enter into My rest. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: again, He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 4:4-7).

The “first day of the week” was never intended to replace the Sabbath day of the Ten Commandments. It is a day sanctified by the resurrection of Christ, not the rest of God following the creation. It is a day that marks the beginning of a new thing. The Sabbath day is initially fulfilled when we enter God’s rest by ceasing from our own works in order to justification. It is at that point that we “enter into rest” (Heb 4:3, 10). We are also to continue to “labor to enter into that rest” (Heb 4:11).

The Sabbath will be ultimately realized when we enter the glory, finally passing beyond the domain of tiring labor and the struggle to attain. It is then that we will experience the fulfilling of this word, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them” (Rev 14:13).

It is far beneath the noble activity of remembering a risen and exalted Christ through whom we obtain salvation, to place an accent upon the observance of the Sabbath day as specified under the Old Covenant.

While there is certainly nothing wrong with honoring the Sabbath day in remembrance of the creation, there is nothing particularly commendable about it either – at least not in view of the

glorification of Jesus and the institution of the New Covenant. It is far beneath the noble activity of remembering a risen and exalted Christ through whom we obtain salvation, to place an accent upon the observance of the Sabbath day as specified under the Old Covenant.

Jesus never affirmed that He came to bind the Sabbath day upon men, or remotely suggest that it should be kept by those who are following Him. In fact, during Christ's ministry, some of the most fierce opposition He encountered pertained to what He did on the Sabbath day (Matt 12:2; Mk 2:24; 3:2; Lk 6:2; 13:14; 14:1-3; John 5:16). Although He kept the Sabbath day, regularly attending the synagogue (Lk 4:16), it must be remembered that the Sabbath day commandment did not say to assemble on that day, nor did Moses ever institute the synagogue. Jesus did affirm, "For the Son of man is Lord even of the Sabbath day" (Matt 12:8). He reminded His critics that "the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless" (Matt 12:5). He also said a sheep that had fallen into a pit could be lifted out of it on the Sabbath (Matt 12:11), and that it was "lawful to do well on the Sabbath days" (Matt 12:12). With the confidence of the Lord of glory He declared, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath" (Mk 2:27). By this, Jesus meant that the Sabbath was an inferior institution, being made for man, who was a higher creation. It was made on account of man, and not man on account of the Sabbath. It was further made as a day of rest from toil (Ex 20:9-10; 31:15; Deut 5:13-14).

Even though Paul was sent to the Gentile world, where, with the exception of being among the Jews, there was no extensive knowledge concerning the Sabbath day, he never provided a single word of instruction concerning keeping the Sabbath day – not so much as a syllable. In all of his epistles there is one solitary reference to "sabbaths." That word is not an admonition to keep the Sabbath day, but a warning for believers not to allow any person to judge them regarding sabbaths. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days : which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ" (Col 2:16-17). Other versions read, "or a Sabbath day." NASB/NIV This admonition must be taken seriously by every child of God.

It cannot be coincidence that the day of Pentecost occurred on the first day of the week – the day Jesus rose from the dead! It appears clear to me that the Feast of Pentecost, of the "Feast of weeks," was ordained in expectation of the arrival of the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem, following Christ's exaltation. On that day salvation was implemented.

WITH ONE ACCORD IN ONE PLACE

"1b . . . they were all with one accord in one place." Other versions read, "they were all together in one place," NASB "while they were all assembled together," MRD "they were all in one place together," NAB "they had all met together," NJB "the believers were meeting together in one place," NLT "they were all with one accord together in one place," YLT "as the believers met together that day," LIVING "they had all met in one place," WEYMOUTH "they were all meeting in one mind," WILLIAMS "they were all together in the same place," MONTGOMERY and "they were all assembled together in one place." AMPLIFIED

THEY WERE ALL

"1b . . . they were all . . ." It may seem to be bordering on insanity to ask "Who are the ALL?" Who is it that was "gathered together?" A number of people affirm it was "the twelve," and that these first few verses are all about them. This conjecture assumes that the final words of the first chapter shift the emphasis to the twelve apostles: "and he (Matthias) was numbered with the eleven apostles" (1:26) – as though after everyone cast their lots, they all went to their own abode following the outcome of the casting of lots.

This would mean that only the twelve continued tarrying in Jerusalem, obeying the word of

the Lord: “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.” That word was spoken to “the eleven . . . AND them that were with them,” included the women, Mary Magdalene.

This would mean that only the twelve continued tarrying in Jerusalem, obeying the word of the Lord: “tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). That word was spoken to “the eleven . . . AND them that were with them,” included the women, Mary Magdalene, and Cleopas and his companion (Lk 24:33). Those people, and several others, including the mother of Jesus and His four brothers, had assembled in an upper room, waiting in prayer and supplication for “the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:14). Whether it was the original number or not, those who continued “waiting” numbered one hundred and twenty at the time Peter stood up and delivered an inspired word about filling the “bishopric” vacated by Judas (Acts 1:15).

Precisely what kind of reasoning leads one to believe that when the day of Pentecost fully came, only the twelve remained? Are we to believe, for example, that “the seventy” who were empowered and sent out by Jesus were excluded from this number, as well as from the promise? Why would not the glorious unity of mind and soul that they were enjoying extend into the day of Pentecost? When did the “one accord” cease? Although they are not the final word on the matter, conservative commentators agree among themselves that the “all” of our text refers to the hundred and twenty. These include Albert Barnes, Adam Clarke, Pulpit Commentary, Matthew Henry, John Wesley, Biblical Illustrator, John Gill, John Calvin, Joseph Benson, Matthew Poole, and others. In fact, you will be hard pressed to find a reputable commentator who affirms this passage to be limited to the twelve apostles, or to present a sound case for such a notion.

I present the following reasons for concluding that “they all” include the hundred and twenty of 1:14.

- It is in harmony with the Gospel record (Luke 24).
- It reflects a better flow of the record from the first chapter.
- It serves to accent the magnificent unity that characterized the disciples following Christ’s ascension.
- There is no record of “the twelve” isolating themselves from the other disciples after Jesus ascended into heaven.
- There is no record of a cessation of the waiting of the other disciples between the ascension of Christ and the day of Pentecost.
- There is no record of “the twelve” tarrying in Jerusalem while the others ceased doing so.
- It violates no promise of Jesus, no Scriptural account, or any apostolic exposition of Scripture to see the “all” as applying to the previously mentioned one hundred and twenty.
- It is difficult to believe that the day of Pentecost was not honored by all of the waiting disciples, or that “the twelve” did so in isolation from the others.

WITH ONE ACCORD

“ . . . with one accord . . . ” A considerable number of the translations neuter the power of the text. They accent the visible gathering, without equally confirming the harmonious aspect of the gathering – i.g. “assembled together,” MRD “meeting together,” NLT and “met together.” LIVING This is another one of those cases involving a difference in manuscripts. One set of manuscripts employ the Greek word **ο`μοϋμαδο.ν** (hom-oth-oo-mad-on), which has a lexical meaning of “with one mind, by common consent, together, unanimously.” THAYER The other set of manuscripts only use the Greek expression **παντε.ν ο`μου** / (pan-tez om-ou), which has the lexical

meaning of, “all, or everyone together.” THAYER This latter meaning is synonymous with the former if “together” is perceived as meaning more than a mere bodily presence – an emphasis that is not ascribed to gatherings of believers. We have already been exposed to the people of this text in the previous chapter “These all continued with one accord” (1:14). It is inconceivable that the Spirit would now mention the same group with only their bodily presence in mind.

These were people who had been going to the temple together (Lk 24:53), meeting together (Acts 1:13), praying together (Acts 1:14), listening together (Acts 1:15-22), together choosing men who were qualified to fill Judas’ place (Acts 1:23), praying together for God to reveal the man He had chosen (Acts 1:24-25), casting their lots together (Acts 1:26), and together confirming the choice of Matthias (Acts 1:26).

The whole nature of the text demands that these people be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. No view of this text must be taken that would remotely suggest anything else, for that would disrupt the intended flow of the text.

Being of “one accord” is one thing. For everyone – “all” – to be of “one accord” is something else. In reference to believers, this phrase is mentioned no less than seven times in Acts (1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12; 8:6; 15:25). In all of these instances, it refers to the single-mindedness of the disciples. There were no divisions among them.

It ought to be noted that this is the kind of environment in which the promised blessing of the Lord will be realized. The Psalmist, having the Spirit of God, saw this with remarkable clarity for the times. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psa 133:1-3).

It is no wonder that the church is frequently admonished concerning this matter.

- “Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits” (Rom 12:16).
- “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).
- “Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor 13:11).
- “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3).

Where this unity and single-mindedness is lacking, the ground of the heart and mind become hard and fallow. This is not simply an honorable goal, it is a revelation of real accord with the Lord. Where this accord does not exist someone is at enmity with God.

“Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27).

- “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil 2:2).
- “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing” (Phil 3:16).

- “Finally, be ye all of one mind , having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous” (1 Pet 3:8).

Where this unity and single-mindedness is lacking, the ground of the heart and mind become hard and fallow. This is not simply an honorable goal, it is a revelation of real accord with the Lord. Where this accord does not exist someone is at enmity with God.

Christ Himself is not divided. In addressing the matter of divisions in Corinth Paul wrote, “Is Christ divided?” (1Cor 1:13). What is the answer to that question, and who is there who does not know it? And, if Christ is not divided, He surely will not minister His life to those who are divided. For Him to do so would be to “deny Himself” – and He cannot do that (2 Tim 2:13).

In spite of this rather obvious reality, there are multitudes of casual church members who expect to receive the blessing of the Lord, even though they are at fundamental variance with His people. Let it be clear that this cannot be.

When prophesying of the day of salvation, the Spirit moved Isaiah to write, “Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye , when the LORD shall bring again Zion” (Isa 52:8). It is not coincidence, therefore, that the brethren in the second chapter of Acts were gathered together “in one accord.”

The Lord works toward this aim – that His children may be of “one accord.” Therefore Paul wrote, “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus : that ye may with one

I know that it all sounds a bit ridiculous. That is because it is! It is ridiculous for those who wear the name of Jesus to seek to find ways to maintain division, or to meet separately, or not to be together in one accord. It is nonsensical to think that a people who are fundamentally divided would be used by God to represent His Son, who is not divided.

mind and one mouth glorify God , even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:5-6).

The modern church does not make enough of this. Spiritual Babylon presents a variety of approaches to Christianity that allows the individual to maintain fundamental views that are at variance with those of other believers. It allows for differing views concerning things that God has revealed – like justification, holiness, the return of Christ, the Lord’s table, and what men must do to be saved. If this environment had been in place on the day of Pentecost, the blessing would have come! Further, where it is found now, the blessing still does not come. It allows for differing views of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, as well as the present focus of Jesus.

IN ONE PLACE

“ . . . in one place.” Whatever one may think about gathering together, that is the kind of setting in which the New Covenant was inaugurated, and the Gospel was first preached with power and understanding. If the disciples who were gathered together when the day of Pentecost was “fully come” were suddenly transported to our day and time, one can only imagine what would have happened. For one thing, they would not have met so early. Even when they did come together someone would have suggested having cell groups – perhaps twelve, with an apostle leading each one. They surely would not have remained together for so long, and a lot of people would not be participating.

I know that it all sounds a bit ridiculous. That is because it is! It is ridiculous for those who wear the name of Jesus to seek to find ways to maintain division, or to meet separately, or not to be together in one accord. It is nonsensical to think that a people who are fundamentally divided would be used by God to represent His Son, who is not divided.

In the record to which we are now being exposed, the real God is working among His real children, and the real Jesus is ministering among them. The real will of God is being worked out, and all of it is according to God's eternal purpose and the word of His prophets..

A SOUND FROM HEAVEN

“ 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”

Ten days earlier, Jesus had told these disciples, “ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now ” NKJV He did not give them any indication of how this would happen, or if there would be some remarkable phenomenon that would attend that baptism. Further, the prophecies about the pouring forth of the Spirit provided no details about any impersonal accompanying phenomenon.

- “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3).

- “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh ; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: and also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit” (Joel 2:28-29).

- “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zech 12:10).

Jesus had spoken more specifically of what they were about to experience. He referred to these, and other, things when He said, “wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith He, ye have heard of Me ” (Acts 1:4). He had spoken specifically to them about this.

- “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter , that He may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him: but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:16-17).

- “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name , He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

- “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father , even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).

- “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you . And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7-8).

- “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come , He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14).

SUDDENLY

“And suddenly . . .” All versions read the same. While they were waiting, there was a sudden

intrusion. While they were tarrying something unnatural took place. It was as though something was being imposed upon them. Both time and space had to yield, for this was something superior to nature – something miraculous. The word “suddenly” means “unexpectedly, unawares,” FRIBERG “at once, immediately,” LOUW-NIDA and “of a sudden.” LIDDELL-SCOTT . This is something over which men have no power, either to purpose it or initiate it. It cannot be stopped by men or Satan. In this case, it involves heavenly beings invading, as it were, the domain of time and space. Such intrusions frequently occur in God’s dealings with men.

- A SUDDEN PREPARATION. “And Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, that God had prepared the people: for the thing was done suddenly ” (2 Chron 29:36).

- SUDDEN SHAME. “Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly ” (Psa 6:10).

- SUDDEN PUNISHMENT. “But God shall shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly shall they be wounded ” (Psa 64:7).

- SUDDEN CALAMITY. “Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy” (Prov 6:15).

- SUDDEN DESTRUCTION. “He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed , and that without remedy” (Prov 29:1).

- SUDDEN FULFILLMENT. “I have declared the former things from the beginning; and they went forth out of my mouth, and I showed them; I did them suddenly , and they came to pass” (Isa 48:3).

- GOD’S MESSENGER APPEARS SUDDENLY. “Behold, I will send My Messenger, and He shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple , even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal 3:1).

The saints of God must learn to live with THE SUDDEN FACTOR in mind. Conditions that are the result of long periods of time can be suddenly corrected, and what was taken restored. This is all involved in the phrase, “For with God nothing shall be impossible.” In fact, in this very chapter several remarkable things will happen suddenly.

SUDDENLY, A HEAVENLY HOST. “And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God . . . ” (Luke 2:13).

- JESUS APPEARS TO SAUL. “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven ” (Acts 9:3).

- A SUDDEN EARTHQUAKE. “And suddenly there was a great earthquake , so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed” (Acts 16:26).

- CHRIST’S SUDDEN COMING. “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping” (Mark 13:35-36).

All of this may appear to have little or nothing to do with our text, being nothing more than an academic study. But this is not at all the case. This is describing the manner of the Kingdom, and its superiority to this world and everything in it. Heaven is not subject to the laws of this world, and often does not act in accordance with them.

With God, things that appear impossible can happen suddenly. A despot like Herod can be suddenly struck down (Acts 12:23). Sennacherib’s impressive army can be suddenly destroyed (2 Kgs 19:35). The soul can be suddenly illuminated, so that the things of God can be understood (2

Pet 1:19). Joseph can be suddenly exalted to the throne (Gen 41:39-40). Job's affliction can suddenly end (Job 42:10). Prayers can be suddenly answered (Acts 4:31). Gross sinners can be suddenly convicted (Acts 2:37; Acts 16:30). Hearts can be suddenly opened (Acts 16:14).

The saints of God must learn to live with THE SUDDEN FACTOR in mind. Conditions that are the result of long periods of time can be suddenly corrected, and what was taken restored (Joel 2:25). This is all involved in the phrase, "For with God nothing shall be impossible" (Luke 1:37). In fact, in this very chapter several remarkable things will happen suddenly.

Child of God, do not despair as you travail in prayer for matters of deep concern. It may be that in a moment everything will change, and you will become the head, and no longer be the tail (Deut 28:13). In fact, there is a day on God's calendar of purpose when a climactic change will take place. "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:52). You have "received a kingdom" (Heb 12:26) that is noted for causing sudden intrusions and changes.

A SOUND FROM HEAVEN

If you are enslaved to ordinary things, and are offended by the extraordinary, you will not long remain with Jesus.

"... there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind..." Other versions read, "there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind," NASB "a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven," NIV "from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind," NRSV "a sound like the rushing of a violent wind," BBE "a sound out of heaven as of a violent impetuous blowing," DARBY "a sound from heaven, as of a rushing and mighty wind," GENEVA "there was a sound from heaven, as of a violent wind," MRD "there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind," NAB "there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind," NAS "there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them," NLT "there came a sound from heaven, as it had been the coming of a mighty wind," TNT "out of heaven a sound as a bearing violent breath," YLT "a noise from the sky. It sounded like a strong wind blowing," IE "there came from the sky a sound as of a strong rushing blast of wind," WEYMOUTH "a sound like the roaring of a mighty windstorm from heaven," ISV "there came from heaven a sound like a terrific blast of wind," WILLIAMS "from the sky a sound like the onrush of a mighty wind," MONTGOMERY and "a sound from heaven like the rushing of a violent tempest blast . AMPLIFIED

If you are enslaved to ordinary things, and are offended by the extraordinary, you will not long remain with Jesus. Now, as the disciples are waiting for the promise of the Father, and ready to keep the feast Pentecost, the sound of a rushing mighty wind from heaven is heard. Those familiar with Scripture know that before the day of Pentecost, mighty winds were associated with fear, disruption, and destruction. Such a sound was not ordinarily a comforting one, or a promise of good things to come. The day the Law was given is a case in point. That was a time when the people were kept at a distance, both by Divine mandate, and because of fear. Scripture contrasts that time with what we experience in the New Covenant. "For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest [whirlwind NASB]" (Heb 12:18). The various associations made with God's "wind" are arresting to consider. Historically, they do not offer much room for hope.

- An East wind brought in locusts upon Egypt (Ex 10:13).
- When the Lord passed by Elijah, a great and strong wind rent the mountains and broke the rocks (1 Kgs 19:11).
- A great wind smote the house in which Job's children were feasting, and killed them

all (Job 1:19).

- The ships of Tarshish were broken with an East wind (Psa 48:7).
- A stormy wind causes grievous disruption (Psa 107:25; 148:8).
- God's "mighty wind" is associated with destruction (Isa 11:15).
- God has provided a "hiding place from the wind" Isa 32:2).
- The wicked are carried away with God's wind (Isa 41:16; 57:13).
- God scatters His enemies with His wind (Jer 13:24; 18:17).
- There is such a thing as a "destroying wind" (Jer 51:1).
- There is a "stormy wind" that destroys (Ezek 13:11,13).
- A mighty wind threatened the lives of Christ's disciples (Matt 14:24; Mk 4:37; 6:48; Lk 8:23).
- A "boisterous" wind frightened Peter (Matt 14:30).
- A "tempestuous wind" destroyed the ship on which Paul was sailing (Acts 27:14,40-42).

How will this sound influence this gathering of disciples? Will it be destructive? Will it bring fear? Sounds to which people are not accustomed are not ordinarily the source of comfort. In fact, men have been noted to be frightened at sounds – particularly those associated with the living God (Gen 3:10; Psa 77:17; Jer 50:22; 51:54).

IT FILLED ALL THE HOUSE

" . . . and it filled all the house where they were sitting." Other versions read, "and it filled the whole house where they were sitting," NKJV "and it filled the entire house where they were sitting," "and all the house where they were was full of it," BBE "and it filled the entire house in which they were," NAB "and it filled the house where they were meeting," NLT "and it filled the whole house in which they were sitting." AMPLIFIED

This was not a sound that filled all of Jerusalem, nor was it a sound like some of those that went throughout the land of Egypt (Ex 10:13,19). This was a focused sound "from heaven" that "filled all the house where they were sitting." It was the prelude to a new era during which the Lord would be the center of all activity.

There is some resemblance between the filling of this house and the dedication of the Tabernacle and Temple.

The tabernacle dedication. "Then a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle . And Moses was not able to enter into the tent of the congregation, because the cloud abode thereon, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle" (Ex 40:35).

The dedication of the Temple. "And it came to pass, when the priests were come out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD , so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of the LORD" (1 Kgs 8:10-11). "It came even to pass, as the trumpeters and singers

At the dedication of both the tabernacle and the temple, when they were filled, no man could enter. Here, however, it was the place where they were sitting that was filled! The people were not excluded from the place where extended revelation was given!

were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking the LORD; and when they

lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised the LORD, saying, For He is good; for His mercy endureth for ever: that then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of the LORD; So that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud: for the glory of the LORD had filled the house of God” (2 Chron 5:14).

Here, There Is A Difference

At the dedication of both the tabernacle and the temple, when they were filled, no man could enter. Here, however, it was the place where they were sitting that was filled! The people were not excluded from the place where extended revelation was given! When the tabernacle was filled, even Moses could not enter into it (Ex 40:35). When the Temple was filled, the priests “could not stand to minister” in the Temple (2 Chron 5:14). However, on the day of Pentecost, when the house was “filled,” the people remained. No one had to leave.

Something Had Happened

It is obvious that something has happened in the heavenly realms that enabled Divine influence to be among men without major disruption. A reconciliation had, in fact, taken place, so that what was before noted for destroying and causing fear upon the earth was now endured with peace and tranquility. When the sound of a rushing mighty wind from heaven falls upon the ears of men, and they do not run in fear, an accord between heaven and earth is being exhibited that was never before known. We are witnessing a gracious act.

CLOVEN TONGUES OF FIRE

“ 3 And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.”

Not only is something supernatural heard, there is also a supernatural sight. Something is brought within the range of human vision that could not possibly have been produced by men. The external phenomenon that accompanied the coming of the Spirit was as extraordinary as the coming of the Spirit Himself.

THERE APPEARED

“And there appeared unto them . . .” Other versions read, “They saw what seemed to be,” NIV “appeared among them,” NRSV “And they saw,” BBE “Then, what looked like . . . appeared,” NLT “They saw something which looked like,” IE and “ Before their eyes appeared.” PHILLIPS

When something or someone from heaven comes to earth, it has to “appear,” or be accommodating to the awareness of men. Heaven is of a differing order, consisting of a kingdom that “cannot be shaken,” and will “remain” after heaven and earth have passed away (Heb 12:27). When something or someone from the eternal realm comes into a temporal domain, some provision must be made for men to be aware of it. There are no natural capacities that can perceive things from heaven! God, however, can so clothe invisible realities that they can be seen. Thus, when God descended upon Mount Sinai, it was “in fire” (Ex 19:18). When He descended to show Himself to Moses, it was “in the cloud” (Ex 34:5). When the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus, He did so “in a bodily shape like a dove” (Lk 3:22; Matt 3:16; Mk 1:10; John 1:32). In these cases, the fire, cloud, and dove were not the point. They were a visible sign of realities that could not be perceived by flesh and blood.

Thus, on the day of Pentecost, when “the promise of the Father” took place, certain signs were given in order to alert the disciples.

What was seen did not “appear” over the city of Jerusalem, like the accompanying signs of God’s presence appeared on Mount Sinai. This appearance was intended for those who were being

“endued with power from on high.” It was not something designated for the general populous of the city.

CLOVEN TONGUES LIKE AS OF FIRE

“ . . . cloven tongues like as of fire . . . ” Other versions read, “ divided tongues, as of fire,” NKJV “tongues as of fire distributed themselves ,” NASB “tongues of fire that separated ,” NIV “tongues as of fire , distributed,” RSV “tongues parting asunder , as of fire,” ASV “tongues like flames of fire ,” BBE “tongues, which were divided like a flame ,” MRD “ “flames of fire separating ,” IE “tongues of what looked like fire distributing themselves over the assembly ,” WEYMOUTH “tongues resembling fire, which were separated and distributed ,” AMPLIFIED and “tongues like flames which separated off .” PHILLIPS

With the sound of a rushing mighty wind in their ears, their eyes were arrested with what appeared to be fire. Within the mass of fire, a division took place, and separate tongues shot out like arrows aimed at specific targets.

The word “cloven” means divided, cut in pieces – “to cleave asunder . . . to distribute among themselves,” THAYER “separated off, to be dispersed, divide up among,” FRIBERG “to distribute objects to a series of persons, to distribute, to give to each in turn,” LOUW-NIDA “to divide or part among themselves,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

There was purpose and deliberation revealed in sight. From a single fiery source, specific measures of the fire were being formed for distribution. It must have appeared like the breaking up of a single flame. Yet, this dividing was not random, nor was it like an explosion that results in disintegration. This was a magnificently orderly distribution of the fire.

To say that this was a very unusual phenomenon would surely be an understatement. God had, indeed, been associated with fire. The Psalmist wrote, “ A fire goeth before Him , and burneth up His enemies round about” (Psa 97:3). And again, “Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him , and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him” (Psa 50:3). In the tabernacle service, when the law of the burnt offering was instituted, a sacrifice was placed upon the altar. It is written of that time, “And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat ” (Lev 9:24).

Solemnly Israel was told, “For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire , even a jealous God” (Deut 4:24). That word is also delivered to the church: “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:28-29). That is, He is a jealous God, and fire depicts the burning and destructive nature of that jealousy.

How often this was overtly demonstrated in Divine history.

- When Sodom and Gomorrah was destroyed, it was by means of a fire that came out from the Lord. “Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven ” (Gen 19:24).
- When Nadab and Abihu offered strange fire to the Lord, refusing to take fire from off the altar, as the Lord commanded, “ there went out fire from the LORD , and devoured them, and they died before the LORD” (Lev 10:2).
- Once, when Israel was complaining and murmuring before the Lord, it is written, “And when the people complained, it displeased the LORD: and the LORD heard it; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the LORD burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp” (Num 11:1).

- When Korah and his cohorts rebelled against Moses, demanding that they be given honor equal to him, the earth opened up and swallowed them. But that was not the end of the matter, lest the rebellion spread further, “And there came out a fire from the LORD , and consumed the two hundred and fifty men that offered incense” (Num 16:35).

- On one occasion, Ahaziah, king of Samaria, sent some men to get the prophet Elijah. Of that incident it is written, “Then the king sent unto him a captain of fifty with his fifty. And he went up to him: and, behold, he sat on the top of an hill. And he spake unto him, Thou man of God, the king hath said, Come down. And Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, If I be a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And there came down fire from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty . Again also he sent unto him another captain of fifty with his fifty. And he answered and said unto him, O man of God, thus hath the king said, Come down quickly. And Elijah answered and said unto them, If I be a man of God, let fire come down from heaven, and consume thee and thy fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty . And he sent again a captain of the third fifty with his fifty. And the third captain of fifty went up, and came and fell on his knees before Elijah, and besought him, and said unto him, O man of God, I pray thee, let my life, and the life of these fifty thy servants, be precious in thy sight. Behold, there came fire down from heaven, and burnt up the two captains of the former fifties with their fifties: therefore let my life now be precious in thy sight. And the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah, Go down with him: be not afraid of him. And he arose, and went down with him unto the king” (2 Kgs 1:9-15).

- During the trial of Job, a servant reported to him the destruction of his sheep. “While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them ; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee” (Job 1:16).

- Commenting on the history of Israel the Psalmist wrote, “ The fire consumed their young men ; and their maidens were not given to marriage” (Psa 78:63).

- When God descended on Mount Sinai, it was anything but comforting. “And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire : and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly” (Ex 19:18).

- When God judged Egypt, one of the plagues was a hail that came from heaven, mingled with fire. “So there was hail, and fire mingled with the hail , very grievous, such as there was none like it in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation” (Ex 9:24).

- Even in the most favorable sense, the fire of God was associated with the consumption of an acceptable sacrifice (Lev 9:24; 1 Kgs 18:38; 1 Chron 21:26; 2 Chron 7:1).

Apart from the consumption of sacrifices offered to God, no person acquainted with the Lord ever associated a fire from heaven with blessing! When the fire of God, or fire from heaven, was perceived, it was connected with consumption. In the case of an acceptable sacrifice, that denoted acceptance. In every other case, fire meant rejection and judgment.

There is a single exception to this rule, and it ought to be noted here. When leading Israel from Egypt to Canaan, the Lord employed a “pillar of fire” by night. The purpose of that pillar was to provide illumination. “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light ; to go by day and night” (Ex 13:21).

Although it is not depicted as a fire coming from heaven, Moses once saw a bush that burned with fire, but was not consumed. This was when God called him to deliver Israel from Egypt (Ex 3:2).

How will this phenomenon be regarded by this band of disciples? There certainly was no Scriptural account of such a happening before. Jesus had not told them they would see fire dividing itself and being distributing among them.

It is obvious from what follows that something has taken place in the heavenly realms – something that has impacted upon God’s dealings with men. This fire will not consume, but will rather bring great advantages to men. Instead of fear, men will become bold. They will become strong, not weak.

IT SAT UPON EACH ONE OF THEM

“ . . .and it sat upon each of them.” Other versions read, “and one sat upon each of them,” NKJV “and they rested on each one of them,” NASB “and came to rest on each of them,” NIV “and a tongue rested on each of them,” NRSV “coming to rest upon every one of them,” BBE “and came to rest on the head of each of them,” NJB “and settled on their heads,” LIVING “staying over each one of them,” IE “and on the head of each person a tongue alighted,” WEYMOUTH “resting on their heads, one to each of them,” WILLIAMS “and which settled on each one of them,” AMPLIFIED and “and settled above the head of each one of them.” PHILLIPS

This was a fire directed from heaven – a single source divided into several parts, with each part settling upon each of the people present. This is the body of people described in the first verse as being “with one accord in one place.” As I have already said, nothing in the text suggests this was only the twelve apostles. That would have indicated that they had separated from the rest of the hundred and twenty – a supposition that cannot be supported. Indeed, there is no valid cause to even pursue such a line of reasoning.

Later in this chapter, the attention will be focused on the twelve, with Peter being the chief speaker. However, at this time, the whole group is involved. They had all heard Jesus’ word. They had all waited as He had commanded, tarrying in Jerusalem. They had all continued with one accord in the Temple, and in prayer and supplication in the upper room. They had all participated in the choosing of Matthias. What possible justification is for excluding these people from the fulfillment of “the promise of the Father?”

The Forming of the Body of Christ

Whether or not this was the initial forming of the body of Christ, it certainly provides us with a very vivid picture of the manner of that formation. In this case, tongue-like flames of fire from a single source have settled upon each of the disciples’ heads. This, we will find, portrayed a particular endowment given to each one of them.

In the apostolic doctrine, this very truth is delineated with great care, confirming that special enablements are given to every member of the body of Christ. What is declared doctrinally is seen in the experience of this text. Further, by reviewing the doctrine itself, the text will be disassociated from much of the tradition that has been wrapped around it. If we can associate the text with the revealed purpose of God, and see it as a beginning, rather than an end of itself, we will be much profited. If, on the other hand, we choose view it only as a unique epoch, much of its significance will be missed.

The Doctrine

Because of their ordained diversity, believers are referred to as “the body of Christ.” They have one spirit, like one eternal flame, and yet He rests in a unique way upon each believer, like a tongue of fire.

Amidst some corrective teaching concerning spiritual gifts, Paul clarified the Source, nature, and intent of spiritual gifts. He also affirmed that certain spiritual enablements were given to every member of the body of Christ, and that no member could stand on his own, or was not a part of the body itself. The following is a brief synopsis of First Corinthians 12:4-18.

- **There are a variety of gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit.** “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:4). Just as the fire divided into different, yet harmonious, tongues of fire, so there are a variety of spiritual gifts that work together for the common good.

- There are different kinds of service, or ministry, but they all serve the same Lord, who has a single purpose. “And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord” (1 Cor 12:5). Spiritual gifts are allocated with a strict interest in the will of the Lord. Just as the dividing tongues of flame in our text were designed to carry out the will of God, serving His interests, so it is with all spiritual enduements.

- The various gifts work in differing ways, yet it is the same God who works them all. “And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all” (1 Cor 12:6). Because “God is one” (Deut 6:4; Mk 12:29; Gal 3:20), there is no work of His that is at variance or in competition with another one of His works.

- Each particular manifestation of the Spirit is given for the profit of all, and is not intended for the receiver alone. “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Cor 12:7). Spiritual profit comes by means of edification, which is the essential outcome of every spiritual gift.

- For Corinth, the wide variety of gifts included speaking, extraordinary faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, and speaking or interpreting other languages. “For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues” (1 Cor 12:8-10). This is not intended to be a standard listing of spiritual gifts, and must not be so regarded. It differs from the listings provided in Romans 12:6-8, and Ephesians 4:11. These various lists are intended to reflect those the gifts were prevalent in the individual churches.

Distinctions in the body of Christ are not after the manner of the flesh. Nor are spiritual abilities distributed in accordance with fleshly distinctions. It is our baptism into the body of Christ that qualifies us for these gifts, and in Him there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus”

All of the gifts are the work of the Spirit, who distributes them as He wills, or determines. “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Cor 12:11). Just as surely as the people of our text had no power over the tongues of flame that were being distributed, so no member of the body of Christ has power over the distribution of spiritual gifts.

- Just as the body is a unit, made up of many different parts, so also is Christ. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ” (1 Cor 12:12). The variety of functions within the body of Christ requires the appropriate distribution of Divine enablements. These must come from a single source and serve a single purpose.

- By the Holy Spirit, we are baptized into one body, independent of cultural concerns or fleshly distinctions. “For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Distinctions in the body of Christ are not after the manner of the flesh.

Nor are spiritual abilities distributed in accordance with fleshly distinctions. It is our baptism into the body of Christ that qualifies us for these gifts, and in Him there is “neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Those who depict the distribution of spiritual gifts as being upon the basis of flesh-and-blood differentiations could not possibly be more wrong.

- The body is not one member, nor is there a single standard for the ministry of each one. There are many members because there are many functions. “For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor 12:14). There is no member of the body of Jesus Christ that has no need of the other members. If the body is the means through which Jesus works (Eph 1:23), then no one can affirm they have no need of the other members without saying they have no need of the Head of the body Himself.

- There are no incidental members, nor can any imagine that because they cannot do this or that, they are not part of the body. “If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?” (1 Cor 12:15-17). No part of the body is unnecessary, so as to be considered shamefully inferior.

- God has arranged the body precisely as He has desired – in strict accord with His own purpose. “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Cor 12:18). God does not consult with men when it comes to executing His will. As it is written, “Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being His counselor hath taught Him?” (Isa 40:13). No one can outline the manner in which it would be best for God to work. Nor, indeed, is it the prerogative of the members of the body to determine what role they should play in the body of Christ. It is quite true that one can, for example, “desire the office of a bishop” (1 Tim 3:1). Let such a person know, however, that such aspirations have certain boundaries (1 Tim 3:1-7). Far better to learn to function within the parameters of Divine appointment, and in harmony with Divine objectives (Acts 20:28).

IN OUR TEXT

The principle of spiritual gifts is being lived out in our text. The flame of fire is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said He would send from the Father. In strict comportment with His administrative role in the Kingdom, the Spirit begins to divide to the various members of the body appropriate aptitudes. This is depicted by the tongues of fire resting upon each one of them.

Again let me point out that there is no reason to limit this to the Apostles. They are, indeed, placed “first” in the body (1 Cor 12:28), and they will eventually assume the leadership on this grand day – the first Pentecost following Christ’s ascension into heaven.

But for the time of our text, all of the disciples are involved. In fact, Peter will later draw attention to their involvement, confirming that this was done in order to fulfill the prophecy of Joel. Furthermore, Joel did not prophecy of God pouring forth His Spirit upon apostles, but rather upon “all flesh.”

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

When someone or something from heaven is found upon the earth there is generally, if not always, some kind of disruption. This is because the eternal confronts the temporal, the unseen invades the area of the seen, and incorruption is found amidst corruption.

- This was confirmed at Mount Sinai, where the Living God was revealed. The entire mountain was engulfed in smoke and fire, and quaked greatly (Ex 19:18; Psa 68:8; Heb 12:26).

- When the Lord passed by Elijah, there was a great wind that split rocks, a mighty earthquake, and a devouring fire (1 Kgs 19:11-12).
- When Jesus was born, and angels announced the event to shepherds, the glory of the Lord shone all about them – at night (Luke 2:13).
- After Christ rose from the dead, an angel descended from heaven, and there was a great earthquake (Matt 28:1).
- The Revelation describes an angel coming down from heaven, and the earth being “lightened with his glory” (Rev 18:13).
- When the Son of God entered into the world, it produced a revelation of the hearts of men. Simeon told Mary that “the thoughts of many hearts” would be “revealed” (Lk 2:35).

The point I am making is that heavenly beings cannot come into the zone of earth without it being affected. Some kind of change will take place. In the text before us, a significant change will be wrought within the disciples. They will not be the same.

It is no wonder that is said of all who are in Christ Jesus: “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17). That change continues, until we will, according to Divine purpose, be conformed to Christ’s image – something God has “predestinated” (Rom 8:29).

THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ 4a And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost . . . ”

The text continues, referring to what was occurring in all those who were “with one accord in one place” (2:1). What is being described is the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to His disciples.

- “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high ” (Luke 24:49).
- “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence ” (Acts 1:5).
- “But ye shall receive power , after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

THEY WERE ALL

“And they were all . . .” Other versions read, “ All of them,” NIV and “And everyone present .” NLT

There can be no doubt about this. Whatever took place here involved “all” – everyone that was there. The Greek word translated “all” is **pa,ntej** (pan-tes). Its lexical meaning is, “quite all, the whole, all together,” THAYER “everybody, all, everything, the whole, all the people,” FRIBERG and “the totality of any object, mass.” LOUW-NIDA

It seems to me that it is a most irrational view to assume that the day of Pentecost as described by Luke commenced with only the twelve apostles. That would require that the twelve be isolated from the other disciples, without a single word that suggests such a thing. It would also diminish the significance of the disciples being together with one accord and in one place.

These are the same people that Luke has been referencing

- Those who continued with one accord “in prayer and supplication” (1:14).
- The disciples, who numbered about “an hundred and twenty” (1:15).
- Those who were “with one accord in one place” (2:1).
- All those who were “sitting” in the house when it was filled with the sound of a rushing mighty wind (2:2).
- Those on whom “tongues like as of fire” sat (2:3).

This “all” is the hundred and twenty who have been the “group” of reference since 1:15. It adds no weight to the matter to cite what other men have said on the subject. Notwithstanding, I thought it well to confirm that this has never been a strange view among professed believers.

- Chrysostom (347-404 A.D.) affirmed this text referred to “the hundred and twenty, and not the twelve” (Homily 4).

- Augustine (354-430) also states that “the hundred and twenty all received the Holy Spirit.” PULPIT COMM

- Johann Meyer (1737-1795) also taught this. PULPIT COMM

- Christopher Wordsworth (1774-1846) also espoused this position. PULPIT COMM

- Alford said of this passage, “Not the hundred and twenty only, but all believers in Christ then congregated in Jerusalem.”

- George Lange (1740-1806) said the same. Lange added, “Not only the apostles, but all the disciples, were filled with the Holy Ghost. There is a universal priesthood of all believers, and the Holy Ghost is the anointing.” ADAM CLARK

- Albert Barnes says, “Probably not only the apostles, but also the hundred and twenty mentioned in Acts 1:15. BARNES NOTES

- Adam Clarke says, “It is probable that the ALL here mentioned means the hundred and twenty spoken of in Acts 1:15, who were all together at the election of Matthias.” CLARKE’S COMM

There are many others, but this will suffice to confirm that this is not a strange position among those acquainted with Scripture.

I have come from a background that took another position – namely, that “the twelve” were the only ones involved in Acts 2:1-4. The basis for this position is stated by one of the venerable leaders of the movement with which I was identified – J.W. McGarvey. Here is what he said. “It is important to determine who are the parties declared by Luke to be “all with one accord in one place;” for upon this depends the question whether the whole hundred and twenty disciples, or only the twelve apostles, were filled with the Holy Spirit. The words are almost uniformly referred, by commentators, to the hundred and twenty. Any who will read the first four verses of this chapter, noticing the connection of the pronoun “they,” which occurs in each of them, will see, at a glance, that it has, throughout, the same antecedent, and, therefore, all the parties said in the first verse to be together in one place, are said in the fourth to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to speak in other tongues. The question, then, Who were filled with the Holy Spirit? depends upon the reference of the pronoun in the statement, “They were all together in one place.” Those who suppose that the whole hundred and twenty are referred to, have to go back to the fifteenth verse of the preceding chapter to find the antecedent. But, if we obliterate the unfortunate separation between the first and second chapters, and take the last verse of the former into its connection with the latter we will find the true and obvious antecedent much nearer at hand. It would read thus: “The lot fell upon Matthias, and he was numbered together with the eleven apostles. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.” It is indisputable that the antecedent to

they is the term apostles; and it is merely the division of the text into chapters, severing the close grammatical connection of the words, which has hid this most obvious fact from commentators and readers. The apostles alone, therefore, are said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit. This conclusion is not only evident from the context, but it is required by the very terms of the promise concerning the Holy Spirit. It was to the apostles alone, on the night of the betrayal, that Jesus had promised the miraculous aid of the Spirit, and to them alone he had said, on the day of ascension, "You shall be immersed in the Holy Spirit." It involves both a perversion of the text, and a misconception of the design of the event, to suppose that the immersion in the Holy Spirit was shared by the whole hundred and twenty. It was the apostles, then, and they alone, who were assembled together." A COMMENTARY ON THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES, 1863

It seems to me that it is a most irrational view to assume that the day of Pentecost as described by Luke commenced with only the twelve apostles. That would require that the twelve be isolated from the other disciples, without a single word that suggests such a thing. It would also diminish the significance of the disciples being together with one accord and in one place. Does that suggest that the accord described in Acts 1:14 was suddenly disrupted? The whole position requires too many assumptions, and none of them add any weight to the text, or tend to give God more glory. It disrupts the concept of Christ's body, and of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:5,9; Rev 1:6).

It is not my purpose to spend an inordinate amount of time on this matter. It would prove to be too distracting, and would take away from the text. As we proceed through this chapter, however, I will further show how utterly erroneous this view is, and how it even contradicts the text of Scripture that Peter pointedly declared was being fulfilled by what is not taking place.

FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

" . . . filled with the Holy Ghost . . ." Other versions read, "filled with the Holy Spirit," NKJV "full of the Holy Spirit," BBE and "filled (diffused throughout their souls)." AMPLIFIED

It is important to note that the sound of a rushing mighty wind and the appearance of cloven tongues of fire, were not the Holy Spirit Himself. They were rather arresting evidences of His presence. Jesus referred to this kind of thing when He said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8).

The Holy Spirit had come from heaven to earth, and the sound and appearance confronting the disciples were evidences of His presence.

To this point, the phenomenon now being described has been referred to in differing ways.

- "The promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4).
- Being "endued with power from on high" (Lk 24:49).
- Being "baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5).
- Now, this experience is referred to as being "filled with the Spirit" (Acts 2:4).

If, as some allege, being baptized with the Holy Spirit was a unique apostolic experience, then "the promise of the Father" is also limited to them. Being "endued with power" is also confined to them. Being "filled with the Spirit" is also for the apostles alone. It would require that the prophets wrote specifically of the apostles when they referred to God pouring forth His Spirit (Isa 44:3; Joel 2:28-29). Such a notion is too absurd for us to waste any more time upon it.

What Does It Mean to be Filled?

Some of the lexical definitions of “filled” include, “to be full . . . what wholly takes possession of the mind is said to fill it” THAYER , “fill with . . . of intellectual and spiritual processes being filled with, experience completely,” FRIBERG “to cause something to be completely full, to fill completely,” LOUW-NIDA “to fill full of a thing.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

This filling relates primarily to the mind, not the body, for although the body is “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19), He is never depicted as filling the body. As will be confirmed in the following phrase, the mind and the ability to express it were being controlled by the Holy Spirit. The people themselves became wholly devoted to the cause of the Lord, and “the flesh” lost all of its intrusive powers.

These were not the first people “filled with the Spirit,” although this would prove to be a unique filling. Others include the following.

- John the Baptist: “For he will be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. He will also be filled with the Holy Spirit , even from his mother's womb” NKJV (Luke 1:15).

- Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist: “And it happened, when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, that the babe leaped in her womb; and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Luke 1:41).

- Zecharias, the father of John the Baptist: “Now his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Spirit , and prophesied, saying” NKJV (Luke 1:67).

- Peter, when testifying before the Jewish council: “Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit , said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel” NKJV (Acts 4:8).

- Following the release of Peter from prison and a powerful prayer, the whole church was filled with the Spirit: “And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit , and they spoke the word of God with boldness” NKJV (Acts 4:31).

- Ananias was sent to Saul of Tarsus that, among other things, he might be filled with the Holy Spirit: “And Ananias went his way and entered the house; and laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you came, has sent me that you may receive your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit ” NKJV (Acts 9:17).

- Barnabas is said to have been “full” of the Holy Spirit: “For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

Prior to John the Baptist, being filled with the Spirit specifically related to obtaining wisdom, knowledge, and understanding for a particular God-appointed task (Ex 28:3; 31:3; 35:31; Deut 34:9). The Spirit is also said to have “come upon” certain people to speak a word, or perform a mission (Num 24:2; Judges 6:34; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 19:20,23; 1 Chron 12:18; 2 Chron 15:1; 24:20).

This filling” is a condition in which the Holy Spirit controls the whole person – spirit, soul, and body. Within, the intellect, emotion, and will are under the control of the Spirit. The thought processes are illuminated. The emotion is devoted wholly to the Lord. The will is sanctified so that it becomes one with the will of the Lord. The expressive abilities are marshaled and managed by the Holy Spirit – all within the context of willingness and perception.

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thought processes are illuminated. The emotion is devoted wholly to the Lord. The will is sanctified so that it becomes one with the will of the Lord. The expressive abilities are marshaled and managed by the Holy Spirit – all within the context of willingness and perception.

The people are not turned into robots. They are not carried away into a subconscious state where their cognitive powers lie dormant. They do not go into convulsions, or indulge themselves in irrational babble. They will not break out in laughter, or utter inhuman and unintelligible sounds. These are all things that some professing Christians associate with being filled with the Spirit. But this is NOT what Jesus promised His disciples. He said their experience would turn them into “witnesses” – Christ’s own witnesses (Acts 1:8).

They would not be mindless tools, but “witnesses.” They would declare something they understood, and testify to something they had personally seen. Their witness would be a rational one that they themselves understood.

The Filling Was Not For Pentecost Alone

The apostolic doctrine confirms that being “filled with the Spirit” was not intended to be the inaugural experience of the church. It was the beginning of a covenant that would involve interpersonal and unprecedented relations between Deity and redeemed humanity. The New Covenant is one in which the justified ones are “joined to the Lord,” becoming “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17). It is one in which God pledges to walk in the people and dwell in them (2 Cor 6:16). The revealed objective is for the church to be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). In this covenant Christ lives in the individual to such an extent that they live no longer for themselves (Gal 2:20). This is according to the revealed purpose of God (2 Cor 5:15).

In view of these marvelous realities, all believers are admonished “BE filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). In writing of the same thing to the Colossians, Paul referred to letting “the word of Christ dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16). That is exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost – the word of Christ would dwell richly within those filled with the Spirit. Jesus said this is what was going to happen. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me ” (John 15:26). And again, “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

In some ways, the filling on the day of Pentecost was unique. However, that uniqueness related to the commencement of a covenant that would continue. The Spirit would continue to be noted for managing the intellectual and expressive powers of men – which is what it means to be “filled with the Spirit.”

In confirmation of this, Paul wrote of a certain mind-set – one that was controlled by the Spirit. He spoke of being “spiritually minded.” “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:6). Other versions read, “the mind set on the Spirit,” NASB “to set the mind on the Spirit.” NRSV And, how is it that the mind of a man can be set on, and brought into harmony with, the Holy Spirit of God? Is this accomplished by an act of the will? Is it the result of a sanctified procedure of some kind? Is it the conclusion of a lengthy process? This is nothing less than the accomplishment of the Spirit Himself. Thus other versions translate the expression, “the mind controlled by the Spirit,” NIV/NIB “if the Holy Spirit controls your mind.” NLT

How is it that such a phenomenon is possible? Does the Holy Spirit overpower the individual and take control of his mind? This cannot be, for the Spirit can be quenched or grieved by us (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). The Holy Spirit can be resisted, confirming that He does not invade the individual

(Acts 7:51). The Holy Spirit can be “vexed” (Isa 63:10), and can cease to “strive” with men (Gen 6:3). Those who have once been joined to the Lord can live “after the flesh,” and die – even though they had been made alive (Rom 8:13).

Thrust from you any notion that the Holy Spirit will ignore a person’s fleshly propensities, paying no heed to the lack of purity and commitment to God, and take over the way a person thinks. Such a thought borders on blasphemy and belies the very reason for the salvation of God. It was because God could NOT dwell within a defiled people that necessitated salvation in the first place. Sin had to be taken away, the conscience cleansed, and the heart purified before there could be any profitable involvement of God with man. He will not receive a person who is not separate, or touches the “unclean thing” – much less dwell within them (2 Cor 6:17).

This is why separation is required in this day of better things . “If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use , and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

The Ministration of the Spirit

Integral to this passage is the fact that the Holy Spirit is the Administrator of the New Covenant. When teaching concerning the New Covenant, Paul referred to it as “the ministration of the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:8). Other versions read “the ministry of the Spirit,” NKJV “the dispensation of the Spirit,” RSV “the operation of the Spirit.” BBE

• It is inconceivable that being filled with the Holy Spirit is disassociated from these indispensable ministries, or that being filled with the Spirit is confined to a certain segment of the body of Christ. What occurs in our text is unique in the sense of

- Under the Kingship of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is the one to dispenses and manages all spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4-11).
- He is the one who changes believers from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).
- When we are born again, we are “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6,8).
- He causes us to “abound in hope” (Rom 15:13).
- The essential characteristics of the Kingdom (righteous, peace, and joy), are ministered by the Spirit (Rom 14:17).
- He leads believers in the mortification of the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13-14).
- From within, the Spirit makes intercession for us according to the will of God (Rom 8:26-27).
- The Spirit bears witness with our spirit, confirming that we are the children of God (Rom 8:16).
- The Spirit is sent into our hearts, and cries out within us of our relation with the living God (Gal 4:6).
- We are washed, sanctified, and justified by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:11).

It is inconceivable that being filled with the Holy Spirit is disassociated from these indispensable ministries, or that being filled with the Spirit is confined to a certain segment of the body of Christ. What occurs in our text is unique in the sense of being a beginning. However, the filling itself is not unique. That is a covenantal experience that is adapted to the various roles found within the body of Christ.

The remainder of the book of acts will confirm that being “filled with the Holy Spirit” was not an experience uniquely for the apostles, nor was it something that was intended to occur only on Pentecost.

THE SPIRIT GIVES THEM UTTERANCE

“ 4a . . . and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. ”

Because being filled with the Spirit is associated with Divine purpose and human aptitude, something unique will take place at this time. The Holy Spirit does not come as a Spectator or heavenly Monitor. He is not sent from heaven to assist men to fulfill their own personally conceived ambitions. He is the Spirit of God, sent from the Father because of the request of the Son. He comes on the Father’s business, and because of man’s involvement with His Christ. However He works within these people, it will be in strict concert with God’s eternal purpose and the heavenly agenda. This will not be about men having a unique experience, but about men being involved in the “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). The disciples have been waiting to be endued with power, and now we will see what the power will do.

BEGAN TO SPEAK WITH OTHER TONGUES

“ . . . and began to speak with other tongues . . . ” Other versions read, “and began to speak in other tongues (languages),” NIV “began to speak in other languages,” NRSV “and were talking in different languages,” BBE “and they began to speak in divers tongues,” DOUAY “and began to speak in divers languages,” MRD “began to speak different languages,” NJB “and began speaking in languages they didn’t know,” LIVING “and began to speak in foreign languages,” WEYMOUTH and “and began to speak in other (different, foreign) languages (tongues).” AMPLIFIED

The word “tongues” has been greatly corrupted in our day – so much so, that men hardly have any intelligent notion about what it means. Unfortunately, it has been associated with something unintelligible – something that is not understood, yet yields remarkable benefit and blessing. Before espousing such folly, men must first establish that a personality made in the image of God can be profited by something unintelligible, or that salvation, in any sense, is divorced from understanding, discernment, and perception.

The word “tongues” comes from the Greek word **glw,ssaij** (gloce-sa-is). The word accents the tongue, or what is spoken, and refers to “the language used by a particular people in distinction from that of other nations,” THAYER and “language, utterance.” UBS

These people were not uttering unintelligible sounds. They were delivering a message – and the entire reason for a message is that something is intended to be understood. A message that is not understood is no message at all. A word that is unintelligent is no word at all, for the sole purpose of a word is to communicate something understandable.

Various Scriptures refer to “tongues” in the sense of a specific language.

- When nations were formed, they were according to language: “By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations” (Gen 10:5).
- God told Israel their disobedience would bring their captivity by a nation whose language they did not understand. “The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand ” (Deut 28:49).
- There was a Syrian language. “And in the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam,

Mithredath, Tabeel, and the rest of their companions, unto Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in the Syrian tongue, and interpreted in the Syrian tongue ” (Ezra 4:7).

- There was a special Hebrew language. “Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches” (John 5:2).

- On the day of Pentecost, a message was understood in different languages. “Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11).

- Men are considered in groups according to their language. “After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands” (Rev 7:9).

The phrase “other tongues” refers to languages other than the native language of the individual. On the day of Pentecost, these were new “new tongues,” referring to languages that were not acquired by natural processes, but were obtained supernaturally. Jesus said this would happen. “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues ” (Mk 16:17).

An Extraordinary Occurrence

This was a most extraordinary occurrence – a body of people speaking different languages, or “with other tongues.” You may recall that when such a thing had previously occurred, it was a judgment from God, and aborted the building of the tower of Babel. At that time “the whole earth was of one language” (Gen 11:1). Upon noting that the people were conspiring to make themselves a name by building a tower, “the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do” (Gen 11:6).

These were a people who were perfectly united, as evidenced by them speaking “one language.” Such a condition guaranteed that they would accomplish their diabolical will. The Lord, therefore, judged them by confounding their language. “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech . So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city” (Gen 11:7-8).

On the day of Pentecost, however, their speech was not “confounded,” even though they were speaking different languages. Instead of the work coming to an end, it was actually launched within the context of Divine blessing.

Something must have happened in heaven to enable a blessing to come from speaking different languages. Surely some effective work had been done in heaven for the Spirit to enable a body of people to speak different languages, yet remain “in one accord.”

AS THE SPIRIT GAVE THEM UTTERANCE

“ . . . as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Other versions read, “as the Spirit was giving them utterance,” NASB “as the Spirit enabled them,” NIV “as the Spirit gave them the ability,” NRSV “as the Spirit gave them power,” BBE “as the Spirit gave them to speak forth,” DARBY “according as the Holy Ghost gave them to speak,” DOUAY “as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim,” NAB “as the Spirit was giving them to declare,” YLT “for the Holy Spirit gave them this ability,” LIVING “the Spirit was giving them the power to do this,” IE “according as the Spirit gave them words to utter,” WEYMOUTH “as the Spirit gave them to utter Divine things,”

WILLIAMS “as the Spirit kept giving them clear and loud expression [in each tongue in appropriate words],” AMPLIFIED and “as the Spirit gave them power to proclaim His message .” PHILLIPS

These people were not uttering unintelligible sounds. They were delivering a message – and the entire reason for a message is that something is intended to be understood. A message that is not understood is no message at all. A word that is unintelligent is no word at all, for the sole purpose of a word is to communicate something understandable. Those who take the position that speaking in tongues refers to saying something that cannot be understood do not have a sound basis for their opinion. In Scripture, when we read the words “unknown tongue,” it always refers to an expression unknown by the hearer, not the speaker . The only place the expression is used is the fourteenth chapter of First Corinthians (14:2,4,13,14,19,27). The subject of that chapter is “spiritual gifts” (14:1). Further, the sole purpose for spiritual gifts is the edification of the body, for “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all ” (1 Cor 12:7). Paul further establishes that no person can be profited, or edified by what he does not understand. That is why unknown tongues, or languages, are to be interpreted to the hearers. If no one can do this, all are prohibited from speaking in a language that is not known by the people. “But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God” (1 Cor 14:28).

When something that is not understood is declared, it makes for confusion, not edification. Paul reasons on the matter in this way. “Now, brothers, if I come to you and speak in tongues, what good will I be to you, unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or word of instruction? Even in the case of lifeless things that make sounds, such as the flute or harp, how will anyone know what tune is being played unless there is a distinction in the notes? Again, if the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle? So it is with you. Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air. Undoubtedly there are all sorts of languages in the world, yet none of them is without meaning. If then I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner to the speaker, and he is a foreigner to me” NIV (1 Cor 14:6-11).

Within this context, Paul refers to an “unknown tongue” six times.

- “For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries” (1 Cor 14:2). The language is not unknown to himself, but to the hearers. The fact that he does not speak to men does not mean he himself does not understand, for that would not be “speaking.” Speaking “mysteries” does not mean the person himself does not know what he is saying, but that what he says is mysterious to the hearers – for that is the whole subject of this passage: conduct in the assembly.

Edification cannot be accomplished where the message is delivered in a language that is not known by the people. The fact that the speaker edified himself confirms that he knows what he said, but the people do not.

“He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church” (1 Cor 14:4). Edification cannot be accomplished where the message is delivered in a language that is not known by the people. The fact that the speaker edified himself confirms that he knows what he said, but the people do not.

- “Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret” (1 Cor 14:13). The speaker is not to pray that he himself will be able to understand what he says, for no spiritual gift is for personal profit. His prayer is that he can make what he says understandable to his hearers.

- “For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful” (1 Cor 14:14). Paul does not say he does, in fact, pray in a language he does not understand. He rather speaks in this manner to confirm the absurdity of thinking there is profit in something that cannot be understood. Therefore he relates his own resolve: “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor 14:15). Here the words “and” and “also” indicate that speaking and understanding are joined together, not separated.

- “Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue” (1 Cor 14:19). The ratio of five to ten thousand confirms the foolishness of thinking you can profit the people of God by saying something – anything – that is not in a language they speak.

- “If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret” (1 Cor 14:27). Even when men are delivering a message in a foreign language, with an interpreter, no more than two or three are to speak in an assembly, and they are to speak one at a time with a single interpreter. That is because any lack of clarity in the speaking makes for confusion.

Two Doctrinal Examples

Paul sites two practical examples of the uncomeliness of speaking in a language that is not known.

There is a vast difference between saying the speakers are “mad,” or out of their mind, NIV and being convicted, falling on the face, worshiping God, and reporting that God is in the assembly. And what is the difference? It is that the message was understood.

IN MOSES AND THE PROPHETS. Paul cites examples from the writings of Moses and the prophets, confirming that hearing something in an unknown language is anything but a blessing. “In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe” (1 Cor 14:21-22). This passage is taken from the books of Deuteronomy and Isaiah. First, Moses related the curses God would bring upon Israel if they did not hearken to the voice of the Lord. Among a significant number of curses was this one: “The LORD shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flieth; a nation whose tongue thou shalt not understand” (Deut 28:49). Isaiah prophesied of judgment against Israel for their waywardness. “For with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people” (Isa 28:11). Jeremiah spoke of this in an even more pointed way. “They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine: And the prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them: thus shall it be done unto them.

Wherefore thus saith the LORD God of hosts, Because ye speak this word, behold, I will make my words in thy mouth fire, and this people wood, and it shall devour them. Lo, I will bring a nation upon you from far, O house of Israel, saith the LORD: it is a mighty nation, it is an ancient nation, a nation whose language thou knowest not, neither understandest what they say” (Jer 5:12-15). What did all of this mean? Simply this. God had spoken to Israel, and they had refused to listen to Him. Instead, they had thrust His word from them. Therefore, God would bring a people against them whose language they would not understand. When this happened, they would know that had been judged by the Lord, and were under His curse. That is why Paul adds, “Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe” (1 Cor 14:22). This was not a sign of blessing, but of judgment and cursing.

- A HYPOTHETICAL EXAMPLE. Paul also provides a hypothetical example to

confirm the foolishness of speaking to the saints in a language they do not know. “If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth” (1 Cor 14:23-25). There is a vast difference between saying the speakers are “mad,” or out of their mind, NIV and being convicted, falling on the face, worshiping God, and reporting that God is in the assembly. And what is the difference? It is that the message was understood.

As The Spirit Gave Them Utterance

Although it should not be necessary to say so, when the Holy Spirit gave these people “utterance,” or the ability to speak, He did not violate the guidelines He Himself moved Paul to write. We may fully expect for every word that is spoken to be understood, and for there to be an association of what is spoken with the Lord, His purpose, and what He had foretold of the day of salvation.

This text is an example of the Holy Spirit taking over and dominating the tongue – a member that no man can tame (James 3:8). But it can be tamed by the Spirit, and employed for noble purposes! He did this with a people who had been waiting for “the promise of the Father.” This was a people noted for their “prayer and supplication.”

CONCLUSION

In every aspect, “the day of salvation” is ordered and orchestrated by the Lord, its Author. That day, along with all of the other works of the Lord, was “finished from the foundation of then world” (Heb 4:3). All men were born and placed in strict accord with Divine purpose, to give them the advantage in seeking the Lord (Acts 17:26-27). The giving of the Law came at the right time, and fulfilled is preparatory ministry (John 1:17; Rom 3:19-20). John the Baptist, the prophet appointed to prepare the way for the Lord and make the people ready, was born at the right time, and his ministry fulfilled at the right time (Lk 1:68-79). Jesus Himself came into the world in “the fulness of the time” (Gal 4:4). He was baptized and commenced His ministry at the right time (Matt 3:13-16; Lk 4:18-21). The death of Christ was accomplished at the appropriate time, in the right way, and in strict accord with Divine determination (Mk 14:41; John 12:23; 17:1; Acts 2:33; 4:27-28; Rom 8:32; 2 Cor 5:21). In due time, and in fulfillment of the Prophets, Jesus was raised from the dead, ascended into heaven, and was given the Kingdom, the government being laid upon His shoulder (Psa 68:18; Isa 9:6-7; Dan 7:13-14; 9:26). It should not surprise us that the day of Pentecost was “fully come,” and that the purpose of God was carried out in the most precise way. This was an act of Divine government!

No person has seen the day of Pentecost correctly until it is seen within the context of God’s “eternal purpose.” This was a day when the door of faith swung open, and the way to glory was exposed to men for the first time. The accomplishments that took place on this day will confirm that it was a display of Divine government – the kind of government that is in place to this very day. We are witnessing the inauguration of the New Covenant by the glorified Christ. This day the destruction of the devil and the reconciliation of the world to God will be confirmed.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #6

**THE NEWS OF THE EVENTS, AND
THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE**

“ 2:5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. 6 Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. 7 And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born? 9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11 Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God. 12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.” (Acts 2:5-13)

INTRODUCTION

Compared to the occasion – the Feast of Pentecost – and the multitude who were in the city of Jerusalem, the attention of the Spirit is focused on a relatively small number of people. One Hundred and Twenty individuals are involved, and their activities appear to be wholly unrelated to the traditional day of Pentecost. This was a God-ordained day, and had been in place for fifteen hundred years. It was intended to be a public gathering, festive in nature, with the involvement of

all of the people – including women, children, servants, handmaidens, strangers, widows, and

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- **THE POPULOUS (2:5)**
- **THE REPORT GOES OUT (2:6a)**
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orphans (Deut 16:10-11). Yet, on this day something was taking place that is superior to the common feast of Pentecost. There was a transition taking place from the old to the new, from the shadow to the substance, and from the type to the antetype. This was in fact, the day that was in the mind of the Lord when He ordained the feast of Pentecost, or, as it was commonly called, “the feast of weeks” (Ex 34:22; Deut 16:10,16; 2 Chron 8:13). Because it is important that we be familiar with the principle of types and shadows, a few words concerning them are appropriate in our preparation for a review of the text before us.

TYPES AND SHADOWS

The Kingdom of God is driven by purpose – an “eternal purpose.” It is progressive in its revelation, but not in its conception. An “eternal purpose” is neither conceived nor carried out according to human responses. Nor, indeed, is it adjusted here and there because of unexpected circumstances.

Before the world was made, the purpose of God was fully conceived, and fixed determinations made. This purpose is called God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11). That is, it is an expression of His very nature. It is a purpose that was conceived independently of the human condition. It is not a response to the dilemma of humanity. This is why it is said to have been “purposed in Himself” (Eph 1:9). So far as its execution in the world is concerned, it was “purposed in Christ Jesus” (Eph 3:11b).

This purpose is included in the works of God, which were “finished from the foundation of the world” (Heb 4:3). As a vicarious sacrifice that would enable God to be “just” in the justification of men (Rom 3:26), Jesus is referred to as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8). In regards to His death, He is also referred to as “a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world,” (1 Pet 1:19-20). Concerning the justified ones themselves, they are said to have been “chosen” in Christ “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4).

If we consider the wisdom of God as made known in His great salvation, we must speak of “the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Cor 2:7). When referring to salvation itself, the Spirit informs us that God has “saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9). If we speak of the ultimate aim of salvation – eternal life – we speak in this manner: “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Titus 1:2). If we consider the inheritance that has been prepared for the

redeemed ones, we refer to “the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ” (Matt 25:34).

Admittedly, this kind of language is exceedingly difficult for some to receive. They associate it with a form of fate that depersonalizes every aspect of salvation. Others see it as guaranteeing that some will be saved, even though their conduct contradicts the Divine nature. God’s choice, in such a case, is seen as overriding circumstances that are at variance with His own nature. God is, therefore, perceived as tolerating conduct that He elsewhere condemns, because of His choice that makes human conduct irrelevant. Such a God is a contradiction, conducting his affairs contrary to His revelation of own nature. Still others brush this whole matter aside by saying it is nothing more than “Calvinism.”

These responses, and others that are related to them, are nothing more than proof that such people cannot handle “accurately the word of truth” NASB (2 Tim 2:15). Their minds have not been molded by truth, but by the traditions of men. Thus they have mutilated the Word of God like Jehudi did the writings of Jeremiah (Jer 36:23). Like some of the Jewish teachers Paul confronted, they are “Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).

If you remove the “before the foundation of the world” perspective, you make Scripture fundamentally unintelligible. For, if what God has done is not connected with who He and what He purpose before the world was created, you make the Gospel subjective, and open the door for all manner of corruption.

Why is it wrong to neglect Moses and the Prophets, as though they had been erased from Scripture. It is not so much because of their history, and the manner in which the Lord worked with and responded to men – although that is of inestimable value. In all of God’s dealings – particularly during the administration of the Law – there were types and shadows that portrayed both the nature and the effectiveness of the great salvation He would accomplish in Christ Jesus. There were not only specific prophecies that declared “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11). Couched within the ceremonial law, there were reflections of the High Priesthood of Jesus (Lev 21:10; 7:26; 8:1), being sanctified by blood (Ex 24:8; Heb 13:12), and making continual intercession for the people (Ex 18:19; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). Those ceremonies introduced men to a substitutionary sacrifice (Lev 9:7; 10:17; 1 Cor 5:7), a living sacrifice (Lev 14:6-7; 16:20-21; Rom 12:1; Rev 1:18), partaking of the sacrifice (Ex 29:32; Heb 3:14; 13:10), and atonement (Ex 29:36; Rom 5:11).

Before “the worlds” (Heb 1:2; 11:3) were created, God’s “eternal purpose” was cast in stone. In fact, it was His reason for making the world, which would be a stage on which the drama of that purpose would be worked out. None of God’s workings among men is independent of that purpose. When, for example, He gave the Law and its attending ceremonies, it was filtered through this purpose. They acquainted men with the things that were required for their redemption, and with the Savior who would carry them out.

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

For too long, men without spiritual understanding have been shaping the thinking of the Christian community. They have taught men of a Kingdom that has differing, and even competing qualities. The blessings of salvation have been divided into those pertaining to the first century, and those pertaining to following centuries.

It is necessary to say these things because of the view some have chosen to take of the day of Pentecost. Such treat it as though it had only an ancient purpose, and stands by itself upon the terrain of theology. Others perceive it as something that is repeated over and over throughout

remaining history.

It is important that this day be seen from a two-fold point of view. First, it was the fulfillment of something that was promised by the prophets, and the prophets did not speak of a single day, but of “the day of salvation.” Nor, indeed, did they speak of a blessing that would be experienced by a select group within the company of the redeemed. While there are differing ministries within the body of Christ, they all partake of the benefits that were foretold by the prophets. Ponder what was said of the prophet’s message.

- **THE GOSPEL OF GOD.** “Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures)” (Rom 1:1-2).

- **THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.** “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets ” (Rom 3:21).

- **THE MYSTERY OF REDEMPTION.** “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets , according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:25-26).

- **THE PIVOTAL CHRIST.** “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets , Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:20).

- **SALVATION.** “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you : Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11).

- **A FALLING AWAY.** “That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets , and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior: Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts” (2 Pet 3:2-3).

- **THE COMPLETION OF THE MYSTERY OF GOD.** “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to his servants the prophets ” (Rev 10:7).

It is essential that we realize the nature of these prophecies as well as their details. None of them were confined to a particular period or region . The healing waters that went throughout the world were of the same substance as the waters that initially flowed out from right side of the altar (Ezek 47:1-9). The living waters that flowed out from Jerusalem did not assume a different nature and manner as they spread into distant regions (Zech 14:8).

For too long, men without spiritual understanding have been shaping the thinking of the Christian community. They have taught men of a Kingdom that has differing, and even competing qualities. The blessings of salvation have been divided into those pertaining to the first century, and those pertaining to following centuries. The high sounding logic that is presented to support these suppositions may appear flawless, but it is rotten to the core. If the prophets foretold of the days of salvation, as is solidly affirmed (Acts 3:24), then their words will support all sound theology . However, if they do not, the theology is false, and is not to be given the luxury of a moment of consideration, If a person’s view of “the day of salvation” does not comport with what the prophets said was coming, we do not need to disprove the notion. The very fact that is not supported by what God said was coming, confirms it belongs in the dung heap, together with all other imaginations.

I have said these things because the chronicling of the events of the day of Pentecost will confirm

that they were in strict accord with the words of the prophets. In fact, Peter will appeal to the message of the prophets to confirm the truth of the Gospel he declares (Acts 2:16-21,25-28, 30-31,34-35). He will affirm that what the people saw and heard was precisely according to the prophets.

THE POPULOUS

“ 2:5 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.”

Whatever men may think about the environment in which Jesus chose to minister, the events of this day will perfectly harmonize with the nature of the Savior’s earthly ministry. His work did not contradict the nature of the Kingdom of which He preached. Some thoughtlessly say Jesus chose to identify with harlots and base people. I do not know who started that bit of nonsense, but it surely reveals a miserable level of spiritual understanding, and possibly the presence of a fundamentally dishonest heart. When Jesus chose the people He wanted to be with Him, He did not choose harlots or people who were in any way degenerate. In times when He wanted only a few select people to be with Him, He did not choose harlots and publicans. When these people were found with Jesus, they had come to Him, not He to them (Matt 9:10; Mk 2:15; Lk 5:29; 15:1). However, they did not come as publicans and harlots, but as those who were in quest of the Christ. This is precisely why Jesus said to His critics, “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you” (Matt 21:31). They were not Jesus’ preferred company. It was He who became their preferred company!

Daily He taught in the Temple, not the marketplace (Matt 26:55; Lk 19:47; 21:37). When he went throughout the cities, He is not said to have taught in the various places where the common multitudes gathered, but in the synagogues (Matt 4:23; 9:35; ; Mk 1:39; Lk 4:15,44; 13:10). Wherever people listened to Him, Jesus remained. Wherever the people ignored Him, contradicted what He said, or criticized Him, He left (Matt 13:53; 16:4; 21:17; Mk 6:46; 8:13; John 6:15).

The inauguration of the New Covenant did not take place in Athens, Rome, or Alexandria. It did not even take place in Bethlehem or Nazareth, both of which were blessed by the presence of the Lord. God had chosen a particular city, placing His name there, so that it was identified with Him.

This is not even to mention the manner in which God involved Himself with humanity prior to Christ. He was selective about the ones to whom He spoke (Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc). He cultured a nation with whom He worked exclusively, “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). This very manner contradicts the philosophy of the modern church, which has chosen to neglect those who hunger and thirst for righteousness – a manner that is blatantly against everything we know about the Lord. Although it should not be necessary to say it, this does not suggest that it is ever proper to withhold the truth from the needy, or to seek and save that which is lost. It does mean that the interest of the people in the things of God is what keeps the godly coming to them.

Now, this Divine manner will be confirmed again by the location in which this outpouring was taking place, and the people who would gather to observe what was happening.

AT JERUSALEM

“And there were dwelling at Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “living in Jerusalem,” NASB “staying in Jerusalem,” NIV “resident in Jerusalem,” MRD and “in Jerusalem that day.” LIVING

The inauguration of the New Covenant did not take place in Athens, Rome, or Alexandria. It did not even take place in Bethlehem or Nazareth, both of which were blessed by the presence of the Lord. God had chosen a particular city, placing His name there, so that it was identified with Him. God said of this city, “. . . Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there” (1 Kgs 11:36). And again, “In Jerusalem will I put My name” (2 Kgs 21:4). And again, “in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all tribes of Israel, will I put My name for ever” (2 Kgs 21:7). He referred to Jerusalem as the city “which I have chosen” (1 Kgs 11:13). It is described as “Jerusalem, the city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there” (1 Kgs 14:21).

Jeremiah prophesied of Jerusalem, “At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart” (Jer 3:17). Again, Jeremiah said of Jerusalem, “In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely: and this is the name wherewith she shall be called, The LORD our righteousness” (Jer 33:16). Joel said of this city, “for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call” (Joel 2:32).

Ponder the church multitudes who have little or no perception of the Lord or His requirements. They want to be called “Christians,” and be known as members of Christ’s church, yet they have no compelling interest in the things of God. They are not “devout.”

Now we will see the reason for this emphasis on Jerusalem. It was in expectation of “the day of salvation” and the announcement of good news! A Deliverer would be announced in this city who would ultimately “turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom 11:26). This is why God chose this city, blessed it, and placed the sign of His presence there – the Temple, in which the “ark of God the Lord” was placed, whose name was “called on it” (1 Chron 13:6). This city had been cultured for this occasion as no other city.

Dwelling At Jerusalem

There were more people in Jerusalem than normal. A whole host of people – several thousand – were there for the celebration of Pentecost, having come from other areas. According to the Law, they had been drawn there by obligation. According to the Spirit, they had been drawn there by God Himself, who is the One who draws men to Christ. As it is written, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). According to Jeremiah, He was drawing them with “lovingkindness” (Jer 31:3). According to Hosea, they were being drawn with “the cords of a man” (Hos 11:4).

Isaiah said of “the mountain of the Lord’s house,” “and all nations shall flow into it” (Isa 2:2). Here is the initial, or preliminary, fulfillment of that promise. It is a pledge of what will yet happen, just as surely as the day of Pentecost was the celebration of the firstfruits of a greater harvest to come.

DEVOUT MEN

“. . . Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.” Other versions read, “God fearing Jews from every nation,” NIV “Jews, God-fearing men from every nation,” BBE “Jews, pious men from every nation,” DARBY “Jews, men that feared God, of every nation,” GENEVA “Godly Jews from many nations,” NLT “godly Jews . . . for the religious celebrations, having arrived from many nations,” LIVING “devout Jews . . . from every country in the world,” IE “devout men from every part of the world,” WEYMOUTH “devout Jews from many and distant lands,” MONTGOMERY “devout and God-fearing men from every country under heaven,” AMPLIFIED and “Jews of deep faith from every nation of the world.” PHILLIPS

What kind of people will the Lord draw into Jerusalem? In what kind of soil will the initial sowing of word of salvation be done? This will tell us something about the Lord, and be a sort of pledge to all who hunger and thirst for righteousness, that they will be “filled” (Matt 5:6).

I do not question that all types of people were in Jerusalem at this time – serious and frivolous, holy and profane, zealous and casual, thankful and unthankful. Israel came out of Egypt with a “mixed multitude” (Ex 12:38; Num 11:4), and it is sure that one came to this feast. However, when the Spirit wrote up the record of these events, He mentioned only “devout men,” which made their way to Jerusalem “from every nation under heaven.”

And what are “devout men?” The word “devout” comes from a word that means, “taking hold well, carefully and surely; reverencing God, pious, religious,” THAYER “cautious, devout, pious, as a characteristic of one who carefully observes the law,” FRIBERG “pertaining to reverent toward God,” LOUW-NIDA and “undertaking prudently, discreet, cautious, circumspect,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

These were people characterized by the utmost seriousness about the Lord. They took His word seriously, being fully aware of what was required of them. They had a mind that was prone to ponder upon, and take hold of, the things of God.

Simeon, who was privileged to see the Lord’s Christ before many others, was noted for being “just and devout ” (Lk 2:25). When Stephen was stoned to death, “devout men,” knowing the danger of the circumstances, came forward to bury him (Acts 8:2). Cornelius, who was honored by heaven with a minister who declared the Gospel to him, was known as “a devout man” (Acts 10:2). Ananias, who was chosen by God to heal Paul and see to it that he received the Holy Spirit, is also described as “a devout man” (Acts 22:12). A word used in Moses and the prophets that is quite similar is “upright” (1 Sam 29:6; 2 Sam 22:24; 2 Chron 29:34; Job 1:1; Psa 7:10).

Ponder the church multitudes who have little or no perception of the Lord or His requirements. They want to be called “Christians,” and be known as members of Christ’s church, yet they have no compelling interest in the things of God. They are not “devout.” They have Bibles, have access to teachers, and are invited by God to ask for wisdom – and yet they remain ignorant of matters pertaining to life and godliness. They are not devout. They know that Jesus told them to remember Him at the Lord’s table, but they do not take it seriously. They are not devout. They have been told that the Lord is coming again, and that His reward will be with Him, but they are not prepared. They are not devout.

Let us not be naive about this. God will not work for good in the midst of such a people. He granted no covenantal favors to those in Israel who were not devout, and He has not pledged Himself to act any differently under the New Covenant. An unholy church is, by the very nature of things, a spiritually ignorant one. A people who remain aloof from God reflect that aloofness in their

Let us not be naive about this. God will not work for good in the midst of such a people. He granted no covenantal favors to those in Israel who were not devout, and He has not pledged Himself to act any differently under the New Covenant.

understanding, their manners, and their preferences. If such people come to Jerusalem in ignorance, unless their apathy is changed to interest, they will leave the same way – in ignorance.

Take the great conversions of Scripture. The multitudes at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:36-48), the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-6), and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39). Ponder Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:3-18), Lydia (Acts 16:14-15), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:30-34), Crispus (Acts 18:8), and the barbarians of Melita (Acts 28:9-10). Which of them was not

devout? Who among them had no interest in what was being said? Which of them lacked a fervent desire to obtain what the Gospel offered? What would lead anyone to believe that God would suddenly shower grace and favor upon a person who had no interest in Him? And, where is there a case of such a thing occurring? If someone cites Saul of Tarsus, it must be remembered that he was “zealous for the tradition of” the Jewish “fathers” (Gal 1:14), was living “in all good conscience” (Acts 23:1), and “was zealous toward God” (Acts 22:3). He was not a political insurrectionist like Barabbas (Mk 15:7).

We cannot make too much of our text – about “devout men” being gathered in Jerusalem. They were men who acted upon what they knew, and therefore were given more. However deficient they may have been, they had a desire to fulfill the word of the Lord – even when it was rather inconvenient. When “the love of many” waxes “cold” (Matt 24:12), a most dangerous situation is found.

THE REPORT GOES OUT

“6a Now when this was noised abroad . . .” Other versions read, “And when this sound occurred,” NKJV/NASB “When they heard this sound,” NIV “And at this sound,” NRSV “And when this sound was heard,” ASV “And when this sound came to their ears,” BBE “But the rumor of this having spread,” DARBY “When they heard this sound,” NLT “And when they heard the roaring in the sky above the house,” LIVING and “they heard the noise.” IE

There is a technical differentiation in the words being used. In verse two, there is reference to “a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind.” There the Greek word used is **h=coj** (ay-khos), which generally means an impersonal roar – like the sea, the wind, etc. In verse six, however, the Greek word used (for “noised”) is **fwnh/j** (phone-aas) which has the meaning, “a voice i.e. the sound of uttered words,” THAYER “a sound produced through the throat of living creatures . . . voice, speech, utterance,” FRIBERG “normally a distinctive type of sound as opposed to confused noise” LOUW-NIDA and “a sound, tone, properly the sound of the voice, mostly of men.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

There are, it is true, some students of language that say this refers to the “sound of a rushing mighty wind,” and that the Greek word used here is also used of impersonal sounds. However, first, this precise Greek word is used twenty-three times in Scripture (Lk 17:15; John 5:25,28; 10:3,16,27; 18:37; Acts 2:6; 9:7; 11:7; 22:7; 24:21; 1Cor 14:11; Heb 3:7,15; 4:7; 2 Pet 1:17; Rev 3:20; 10:7; 11:12; 14:13; 16:12,13). With the exception of Acts 2:6, all of these texts employ the word “voice,” and refer to the utterance of words, as compared to a loud unintelligible sound.

Second it is not likely that the “sound of a rushing mighty wind” would draw people together. It would rather move the people to withdraw from such a place. It is not likely that “devout Jews,” familiar with Moses and the Prophets, would be drawn together by “a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind,” – a sound associated with danger and destruction.

Third, the sound is said to have filled “all the house” where the disciples were sitting. It is not said to have filled all Jerusalem, or a specific area in Jerusalem other than this particular house.

Fourth, when the multitude came together they confessed their astonishment was not at the sound of wind but at the voice of words.

The words “noised abroad” have at least two possible meanings. One is that the speaking of the disciples themselves was heard extensively outside of the house where they were sitting. A. T. Robertson takes this view: “The meaning seems to be that the excited ‘other tongues’ of verse 4 were so loud that the noise drew the people together. The house where the 120 were may have been (Hackett) on one of the avenues leading to the Temple.” ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

When God begins to work in a public manner, the word of it will spread. More than being a human trait, this is the manner of the Kingdom.

Another meaning, and the one that I prefer, is that some did, indeed, hear the disciples speaking in other languages, and began to report the happening, spreading the rumor throughout the city. Some of the translations present this view: “But the rumor of this having spread,” DARBY “Now when this was noised,” GENEVA “When this was noised about,” PNT and “and the rumor of this having come.” YLT

Some students and translators of Scripture often use the rules of language to determine their view, rather than contextual considerations, and the revealed manner of Divine working. For example, some feel that the antecedent of “this” is “the sound of a rushing mighty wind,” of verse two. Even from a linguistic point of view, this is most difficult to support. However, it is also hard to accept that God would pour out a gift calculated to appeal to the multitudes, then draw them together by the sound of a wind that is said to have been inside the house where the disciples were sitting. Some argue that if the words of the disciples are meant, a plural verb would have been used here rather than a single one. However, this is easily resolved when we realize that it is the report of the “sounds” that was spread throughout the community, and not the sounds themselves.

WHAT MAY BE LEARNED FROM THIS?

When God begins to work in a public manner, the word of it will spread. More than being a human trait, this is the manner of the Kingdom. Allow me to briefly establish this to be the case.

The deliverance of Israel. When Israel was delivered from Egypt, passing through the Red Sea, and Pharaoh and his armies destroyed, the report was spread to all surrounding areas. Num 22:5; Josh 2:10; 9:9).

- **The ministry of John the Baptist.** John the Baptist did not go to the people. He prepared the way for Jesus, but himself had no appointed harbinger. The people came to him. Word of him spread rapidly, and the people gathered to hear him preach (Matt 3:5; 14:5; Mk 1:5; Lk 3:7,15).

- **The ministry of the Lord Jesus.** This is also in keeping with the ministry of Jesus, during which the witness of His mighty works were spread throughout the area by reports, thereby drawing the people to Him (Mk 2:1-2; 7:24; John 4:47).

- **The ministry of Paul.** News of the ministry of Paul spread wherever he was (Acts 17:6; 21:28; 23:9; 28:8-9).

When speaking to Festus, Paul reminded him that the thing of which he preached “was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). That is, what God did, particularly regarding Christ Jesus, was known by the multitudes. This was not because everything was actually done before them, but because the report of the doing was spread abroad. Even when Jesus told those He had healed to not speak about the matter, they did so anyway (Mk 7:36; Lk 5:14-15). This is because the working of the Lord is so unique that men cannot keep silence about it. That is why periods of history in which the Gospel was clearly and powerfully and insightfully preached experienced great awakenings and revivals.

The report of the working of the Lord has a certain spiritual drawing power to it. This is not intended to suggest that if men want big crowds they should preach the Gospel in order that their objectives may be reached. That is a corrupt way of thinking. Godly means are intended for godly objectives.

THE MULTITUDE COMES TOGETHER

“ 6b . . . the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.”

The people had gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of Pentecost, yet their interest has suddenly been turned to something else . We will find that it is more than a mere novelty that brings them together.

THE MULTITUDE CAME TOGETHER

“ . . . the multitude came together . . . ”Other versions read, “a crowd came together,” NIV “the crowd gathered,” NRSV “They all came together,” BBE “all the people collected together,” MRD “they gathered in a large crowd,” NAB “they came running to see what it was all about,” NLT “crowds came running to see what it was all about,” LIVING “a large group of them came together,” IE “they came crowding together ,” WEYMOUTH “the crowd rushed together ,” ISV and “a crowd quickly collected .” PHILLIPS

There have been times when God called only one person, speaking to him alone, and in isolation. This is how he called Noah (Gen 6:13), Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), Jacob (Gen 28:12-15), and Moses (Ex 3:2-3). Their role in God’s dealings with humanity required this approach. However, for the most part, when it came to blessing the populous, there came a point where they had to come together. In these cases, isolation deprived the people, and left them in a state of ignorance. The interest of the people had to be turned from personal preferences to collective concerns. They had to cease living for themselves alone, and become a part of a greater and more extensive work. One of the greater jeopardies of religion is when men become self-centered. Twice it is said of Israel, “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes ” (Judg 17:6; 21:25). Men may call that liberty, but, when speaking of things relating to God, it is really a liability. Ponder how the “together factor” was made known in God’s dealings with men.

- Israel came out of Egypt together (Ex 13:3).
- Israel crossed the Red Sea together (Ex 14:22).
- Israel received the Law together (Ex 24:7).
- Israel crossed the Jordan river together (Josh 3:17).
- Israel entered Canaan together (Josh 6:5).
- The rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem required the people to work together (Neh 4:6).
- New sinews, flesh, or skin came upon the bones in Ezekiel’s valley until they “came together ” (Ezek 37:7).
- The initial blessings of the day of Pentecost took place when the people were “ with one accord in one place ” (Acts 2:1).
- The “power of Christ” was associated with the saints coming together (1 Cor 5:4).
- Edification takes place when the “whole church be come together into one place” (1 Cor 14:23).
- God’s ultimate objective is to gather all things “ together ” in Christ (Eph 1:10).

Israel was a nation that had been cultured for interest in the things of God. With all of their imperfections, which were many, God had worked with them in such a way as to promote them being together in His presence.

Israel was a nation that had been cultured for interest in the things of God. With all of their imperfections, which were many, God had worked with them in such a way as to promote them

being together in His presence. Paul itemizes the unique advantages that were given to them. They included “the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). While these did apply at the individual level, their strength was made known primarily when they were together – whether around Mount Sinai, camped around the tabernacle, or entering into the Temple.

On the day of Pentecost, the interest of the people who came together was kindled in the surroundings of honoring a commandment from God. This is the kind of people and culture in which the day of Pentecost took place.

Today’s church world is a vastly different kind of environment. It is characterized by an inordinate amount of self-interest. The average church spends a maximum of five hours a week together – that is, the ones that have gatherings Lord’s day and Wednesday evenings. That is less than 3% of the week (168 hours). Even then, a lot of the time is not spent in an actual exposition or discussion of the Word of God. Time exposed to the word of God would be about 2 1/4 hours a week – if the people attend Lord’s day morning classes, and Wednesday as well. That would be a little over 1% of the week. The majority of professing Christians do not meet Lord’s day evening or Wednesday evening – times generally noted for their sparse attendance. Those people are exposed to the Word of God about 30 minutes a week, in rare cases, perhaps 45 minutes at the most. That is less than 1/2% of the week such people are “gathered together in the name of the Lord.

In spite of these prevailing conditions, with a few exceptions, it is not uncommon to hear small thinking preachers challenge their congregations to take their faith “outside of these four walls.” It seems to me that it is really time to get it inside the four walls, then it will be sure to “get outside,” just as it did on the day of Pentecost.

If it seems as though I have taken this matter too far, that is only because we have a largely dead church on our hands. It is an environment in which the events of the day of Pentecost could never take place.

CONFOUNDED

“ . . . and were confounded . . . ” Other versions read, “and were confused ,” NKJV “and were bewildered ,” NASB “in bewilderment ,” NIV “and were greatly surprised ,” BBE “and were astonied ,” GENEVA “ and they were agitated ,” MRD “and were stunned ,” LIVING “and were amazed ,” WEYMOUTH “and was startled ,” ISV “in great excitement ,” WILLIAMS “and they were astonished and bewildered ,” AMPLIFIED and “were completely bewildered .” PHILLIPS

When the people finally came together, they witnessed extraordinary phenomenon. They saw Jewish people, gathered together on a Jewish holy day, but conducting themselves in a wholly different manner. They could not account for or explain what they saw. It extended beyond the border of ordinary human experience. No merely human aptitude or ability could have created such a condition, and they knew it.

Let no one tone down the message of the Gospel to make it more palatable to the unlearned and ignorant. If men cannot understand what is said, let a person with the mind of the Lord expound it to them – but let no person try and attract the world with spiritual pablum and worldly sounds!

The word “confounded” means “to pour together, mingle, confuse, and cause dismay,” ROBERTSON “to confound or bewilder,” THAYER “confuse, stir up, cause dismay,” FRIBERG “to cause consternation, to confound,” LOUW-NIDA and “commingle, make ruinous, obliterate, to confound, make of none effect, frustrate.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The meaning “poured together” is the

picture of a building collapsing, thus causing confusing. The idea here is that what these people saw and heard could not be processed by their minds. They could not account for it. Later, it will be confirmed that the people knew precisely what was being said, but they were wholly unacquainted with the way it was being done. They could not explain it. The house of human logic caved in. Their reasoning powers were deprived of all of their strength. They could not associate what they saw with any previous experience. They could not even relate it to the Word of God, or anything that had been commanded them concerning observing the day of Pentecost.

Kindred words are “amazed” (Ex 15:15; Judges 20:41; Matt 12:23; 19:25), “perplexed” (Isa 22:5; Mic 7:4; Lk 9:7; 24:4), “astounded” (Ezra 9:3-4; Isa 52:14; Dan 5:9), “astonished” (Lev 26:32; 1 Kgs 9:8; Matt 7:28; Mk 7:37), “marveled” (Psa 48:5; Matt 8:27; 9:33; Mk 15:5), and “dismayed” (1 Sam 17:11; 2 Kgs 19:26; Jer 8:9). Similar English words include “consternation,” “confusion,” “bewildered,” “puzzled,” “baffled,” “dumbfounded,” “nonplused,” and “mystified.”

There is a certain condition that exists in a state of unregeneracy that must be acknowledged. It is that the “natural man,” or the “carnal mind,” cannot comprehend the things of God. They extend beyond the perimeter of their capability. There is no question about the impotency of unregenerate mind.

- “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be ” (Rom 8:6-7).

- “But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man , the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor 2:9).

- “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

Take, for example, the Son of God, who was wisdom incarnate, God manifest in the flesh, and the ambulatory presence of God. It is said of Him, “He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not . He came unto His own, and His own received Him not ” (John 1:11). Ponder also what is said of the Holy Spirit. “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth Him not, neither knoweth Him : but ye know Him; for He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17).

Thus, when these people came together, even though they were “devout,” and had been exposed to Word of God, and many of His manners, they were “confounded” by what they saw and heard. It did not conform to what they knew about the day of Pentecost – the “feast of weeks.” Their faculties of discernment were equal to what now faced them.

A Word About Practices and Observance s

We are not as many, who oppose the observance of traditionally Christian holidays – like Christmas and Easter. However, if the church does observe them, they ought to leave stale bread off of the table, and bring something fresh and unique for men to ponder. There is enough mediocrity in the world without the church contributing to the mental garbage heaps men have made.

If the church is going to sing, let it be as a result of being “filled with the Spirit,” and the word of Christ dwelling “richly” in them. Let them teach and admonish one another in their songs, as they are exhorted (Eph 5:18-29; Col 3:16). Let their songs reflect their understanding, not their simplicity. Let the stench of the world not be found on their music.

Let no one tone down the message of the Gospel to make it more palatable to the unlearned and ignorant. If men cannot understand what is said, let a person with the mind of the Lord expound it

to them – but let no person try and attract the world with spiritual pabulum and worldly sounds!

All of these manners, and more, are reflected in the events of the day of Pentecost. The working of the Lord is always perfecting consistent with His Divine nature and eternal purpose.

WHAT THEY HEARD

“ . . . because that every man heard them speak in his own language.” Other versions read, “every one heard them speak in his own language ,” NKJV “they were each one hearing them speak in his own language,” NASB “each one heard them speaking in the native language of each ,” NRSV “every man was hearing the words of the disciples in his special language ,” BBE “each one heard them speaking in his own dialect ,” DARBY “each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language,” NAU “to hear their own languages being spoken by the believers ,” NLT “they were each one hearing them speaking in his proper dialect ,” YLT and “to hear their own languages being spoken by the disciples .” LIVING

This was the first response to hearing a real gift of tongues! These words could not be said of by those visiting many assemblies boasting that they can speak in tongues. The visitors might marvel, but not because what they heard was understood ! We do not have to apologize for this observation. Here, we are reading of something that God did. If it does not comport with the public tongue speaking of the day, it is the responsibility of those who speak in tongues to see to it they do not contradict Scriptural examples of the same.

What Was the Miracle

Some have conjectured that the miracle was in the hearing of the people. In that case, the disciples would have spoken in an ordinary language, but would have been heard in a diversity of languages. However innocent this view may seem, it does not agree with the text.

- The disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other languages (Acts 2:4a).
- The Holy Spirit gave the disciples utterance . He is not said to have given hearing to the multitude (2:4b).
- Every man heard the disciples speak in their native language (2:6).
- The multitude marveled that the speakers were Galileans, yet spoke in the native languages of their hearers (2:7-8).
- Jesus had given the promise that the disciples would speak with “new tongues ,” or languages (Mk 16:17).

The miracle, then, was in the speaking, not the hearing. The Spirit dispensed languages, not hearing aptitudes. If this was not the case, how could the hearers have been so astounded? Why would they have noted the natural inability of the speakers if the real miracle was their hearing. And, how would they possibly have known that it was a miracle of hearing? In such a case, how would they have known that the disciples were speaking one language and they were hearing another? How could the Spirit be poured out upon the disciples, and the effects of it register upon the crowd?

THE RESPONSE OF THE MULTITUDE

“ 7a And they were all amazed and marveled . . . ” Other versions read, “ utterly amazed,” LIVING “Amazed and astonished ,” NRSV “they were amazed and wondered ,” RSV “they were full of wonder ,” BBE “ wondered at and marveled,” GENEVA “ astounded , and in amazement,” NAB “were beside themselves in wonder,” NLT “were all amazed at this ,” IE “ stunned and

amazed,” ISV “were perfectly astounded ,” WILLIAMS “were beside themselves with amazement ,” AMPLIFIED and “they were absolutely amazed .” PHILLIPS

There was no earthly explanation for what these people were seeing and hearing. It went beyond all human aptitude and training. It could not be produced by some form of trickery or deception. Further, there were no skeptics in the crowd – “they were ALL amazed.” No one doubted that something significant was happening – and there was an extremely large diversity of people present. Some would question why and how what they were beholding and hearing was taking place, but no one doubted its reality.

In a day when the philosophers have gained undue prominence within the professed church, and charlatans foist pretentious signs and wonders upon the church, it is important to know that what the Lord works is real.

In a day when the philosophers have gained undue prominence within the professed church, and charlatans foist pretentious signs and wonders upon the church, it is important to know that what the Lord works is real. There have always been people who did not receive a mighty work from God – as those who said Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub (Matt 12:24). But they did not deny that the work itself had been done. When confronted with a man who had received his sight, though born blind, Jesus’ critics questioned the authority of Jesus, but they did not question the sight of the man (John 9:24). Some people doubted that the seeing man was the one who was born blind, saying he only looked like him. But they did not question the fact of his sight (John 9:8-10). When the chief priests and Pharisees called a council about the disruptive influence of Jesus upon their religion, they acknowledged the reality of His miracles (John 11:47). When Peter and John healed the lame man at the gate Beautiful, they encountered opposition from the Jewish leaders. Yet those leaders affirmed that a “notable work” had been done, and they could “not deny it” (Acts 4:16).

No one in their generation doubted that Israel was really delivered from Egypt. No one questioned that they really passed through the Red Sea, ate manna, or drank water that came from a rock. Everyone in Israel and among the Philistines knew that David slew Goliath. All those present knew that Daniel had been delivered from the lion’s den. No one doubted that Shadrach and Abednego actually came out of a fiery furnace with no evidence upon them that they were even in it. See, this is the manner of the Lord’s working. It is of another order, and it is exceedingly apparent that it is real, even if men do not want to honor the One who did the work.

The situation before us is this: we are faced with a people who say they are “Christian,” yet have no appetite for the Word of God, which sustains Christians. They profess to be in the family of God, but have no profound love for the other members of the family, not preferring to gather frequently, or for any duration, with them. They say they are followers of Christ, who is not of this world, yet they have an obvious love for this world.

However, since the early times, a new kind of “Christianity” has risen to prominence. It is one that is noted for sham, pretension, and fraud. In this new form of “Christianity,” a change in the people is not required. It is a religion of empty profession that allows its constituents to remain fundamentally like the world. In fact, the structure of this religion presumes that the people have not really been changed. The church has all of the problems the world has. Divorce, marital unfaithfulness, theft, extortion, division, hatred, malice – they are all found within the professing church. There are even a whole category of professional therapists and counselors within the church who are hired to deal with these things.

It is not unusual to hear preachers and teachers admit that the people are at fundamental variance with God, not agreeing with Him, and really desiring to do things contrary to His will. Some say Christians are really just like the Israelites of old, always resisting God and preferring to go in

another direction.

The situation before us is this: we are faced with a people who say they are “Christian,” yet have no appetite for the Word of God, which sustains Christians. They profess to be in the family of God, but have no profound love for the other members of the family, not preferring to gather frequently, or for any duration, with them. They say they are followers of Christ, who is not of this world, yet they have an obvious love for this world. Their affection is not set on things above, but they say they want to go to heaven. They say they believe every word of the Bible, but they do not read it and meditate upon it. They say they believe God can do anything, but they seek help from the world instead of from Him.

Everyone with any measure of discernment knows that these observations are really understated. Yet, they are so prevalent that some are thinking they are normal, and are really no cause for concern.

In the face of all of these things, we are now being confronted with a working of the Lord that caused all of the “devout” people to marvel. It did not produce a shred of indifference. Everyone knew that something was happening that could not be accounted for by human wisdom. What they were seeing and hearing was not in the “ordinary” category, and everyone knew it.

As “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), the church is charged with the responsibility of setting the truth before the people. Not only must the message be authentic, but the power of it must be exhibited in those who proclaim it and have embraced it. There is no place within the Kingdom of God for fundamentally unchanged people. No Intercessor is provided for them (Heb 7:25). No indwelling Spirit is promised to them (Gal 4:6). The “things of the Spirit of God” are not for them (1 Cor 2:14). The “exceeding great and precious promises” of God are not for them (2 Pet 1:4). The “fruit of the Spirit” is not intended for them (Gal 5:22-23). “Things that pertain to life and godliness” are not for them (2 Pet 1:3). When the law of God has not been written into the hearts of people, and put into their minds, they are outside the circumference of the New Covenant (Heb 10:16). If they do not “know the Lord,” being acquainted to some degree with His Person and ways, they are not beneficiaries of the New Covenant (Heb 8:11). God has blessed His people “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (Heb 1:3), but any person who is himself not in those “heavenly places” has absolutely no access to them.

IS THIS RELATED TO OUR TEXT?

It may appear that these observations are wholly unrelated to our text, and are nothing more than a strong opinion. However, when we consider what follows, it will become apparent that they are, indeed, related to our text. Now we will be confronted with a people who did something their kind of people simply could not do. They were doing things that were really impossible.

THE TONGUES – THE MIRACLE OF SPEECH

“7b . . . saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?”

The people who are seeing and hearing these disciples assess the situation. They cannot find an answer for what is going on within the arsenals of human experience or understanding.

SAYING ONE TO ANOTHER

“ . . . saying one to another . . . ” Other versions read, “they asked,” NIV “saying among themselves,” GENEVA “they exclaimed,” LIVING and “they continued to say.” WILLIAMS

Real awakening begins when the people begin speaking to one another about the Gospel they have heard. This happened when John the Baptist started preaching.

- “And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not” (Luke 3:15).

- “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself?” (John 1:19-22).

It was also so when Jesus walked among men.

- “And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?” (Luke 4:22).

- “And when He was come into his own country, He taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were **The point to be seen is that the working of God is so radically different from this world, it draws attention – either favorable or unfavorable. However, no one is strictly neutral or indifferent when the Lord works or speaks in their presence. They will praise or scoff; approach to Him or leave Him; open their**

astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” (Matt 13:54).

- “The officers answered, Never man spake like this man” (John 7:46).

- “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine: for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Mat 7:29).

- “Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee?” (John 7:41).

The point to be seen is that the working of God is so radically different from this world, it draws attention – either favorable or unfavorable . However, no one is strictly neutral or indifferent when the Lord works or speaks in their presence. They will praise or scoff; approach to Him or leave Him; open their hearts or close them; accept Him or oppose Him. It is not possible for heavenly influences to be among men, for men to be aware of those influences, and yet remain indifferent to them. There is something about God, Christ, and the Gospel that demand a response. This is because of the stark contrast between God and man, Christ and this world, and the Gospel and the wisdom of men. There is such an obvious difference that it elicits a human response of some kind.

This is confirmed by the experience of the believer – the real believer. In Christ there is a different motive for living – it is the hope of what will be experienced after life in this world, after the world passes away, and after the day of judgment. For those in Christ, this is a “good hope” (2 Thess 2:16). We are “begotten” in order to the possession of this “lively hope” (1 Pet 1:3), and are being ”saved” by it (Rom 8:24). The difference in the life that is lived by this hope becomes very apparent because it contradicts the worldly manner of life. The observation of this difference is assumed – that is, one of the underlying premises of Scripture is that people can see the difference this hope makes in ones manner of life. This is why believers are admonished, “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your

good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet 3:16). There are several things to be noted in this text.

- First, persecution is the result of the world perceiving the difference in the believer – a difference that is not admired.
- Second, believers are to be glad, or happy, that the difference can be seen.
- Third, we are to devote our whole heart to the “Lord God,” allowing no one else to sit upon its throne.
- Fourth, the radical difference in our manner of life will provoke an inquiry by those who see it.
- In order to neutralize the powerful effects of a holy life, those of the world will speak evil of, and falsely accuse, those who live for Christ.
- By maintaining a good conscience, our lives, joined with the reason for our hope, will cause those who criticize us to be ashamed.

These principles are being lived out in our text. The Lord is really working. His people are really the ones in whom He is working. The results of that working are really being seen and heard. These things are producing a very real response among the people. That is the manner of the kingdom. Where society is indifferent to the presence and message of the church, a very serious deficiency exists.

THE INSTRUMENTS – GALILAEANS

“ . . . Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? . . . ” Other versions read, “ Look , are not all these which speak Galileans?” NKJV “Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” NASB “Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans?” NAB “These people are all from Galilee ,” NLT “Are not all these who are talking Galileans?” AMPLIFIED and “Listen, surely all these speakers are Galileans?” PHILLIPS

How is it that these people were startled at Galileans speaking in such a manner?

Galileans were inhabitants of the region of Galilee. History tells us that they spoke “a dialect of the vernacular Syriac,” McClintok which was different from that of Judaea – another region of “the land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39). It was generally considered to be a crude language, with a special tone that was regarded to be near barbaric. It might be likened to the speech of, what is called, a “hillbilly,” as compared to the more polished speech of a highly educated man. This manner of speech is what caused Peter to be detected as he sat in the room where Jesus was being tried: “Surely you too are one of them; for the way you talk gives you away” NASB (Matt 26:73). Mark writes of that event, “Surely you are one of them; for you are a Galilean , and your speech shows it” (Mark 14:70).

Jesus was raised and ministered in Galilee. You may remember that Nathaniel observed of Him, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). Also, this was a region which, in the minds of the people, was completely disassociated with any spokesman for God. Once, when Nicodemus spoke in defense of Jesus, and of the injustice of the Pharisees judging Him without hearing Him, the Pharisees responded, “They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet” (John 7:52).

Historically, some of opponents of Jesus and His disciples referred to them all as “Galileans.” It was a term of derision, describing a people who were given no dignity, and were viewed as nearly barbaric. Their manners did not match the requirements of a more cultured society.

The point of marvel was that those with so little culture were speaking with such precision and

obvious expertise. They had not been educated in the schools of men, and yet spake as though they were. They were doing something that, technically speaking they were not able to do. Indeed, they had never done this before, yet they were doing it, and doing it well.

The time has come for the processing church to go back to its roots and consider its beginnings. Rather than going to the world to obtain the culture and training they imagine is necessary to deliver the message of God, let them explain why this was not the method their Lord chose. If they say their objectives require that they pursue the course they have chosen, then let them explain why their objectives differ from those of God. What has led them to think in this manner? Is it anything in Scripture? Is it any word from Jesus? Is it seen in any example of Scripture?

ON GALILEANS

“Galileans: one of the names of reproach given to the early Christians. It was the ordinary phrase of Julian the apostate, when he spoke of Christ or Christians. He was accustomed to call Christ ‘the Galilaeen God.’ Not only did he use this epithet himself, but made a law, requiring that no one should call the Christians by any other name, thinking thereby to abolish the name of Christians. He died fighting against them; and as he caught the blood in his hand which flowed from a wound in his side, he dashed it towards heaven, saying these memorable words: Vicisti, O Galilae! ‘Thou hast conquered, O Galilaeen!’”

Bingham; Orig. Eccles. book 1, chapter 2, § 2.

Mind you, it is not my intent to heap condemnation upon those who earnestly desire to serve the Lord. However, it is my desire to probe why the desires of contemporary church leaders are so different from those of the One they say they are following.

Behold the Men the Lord Chose

We have a significant number of men who were chosen by God to deliver His message. Let me remind you of a few of them. Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Samuel, Moses, Elijah, Elisha, David, Ezra, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi, John the Baptist, Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Lebbaeus, Simon the Canaanite, Stephen, Philip the evangelist, Barnabas, Paul, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Jude, James the Lord’s brother, Luke.

Which of these men provide an example of advantaging from worldly wisdom? Is it Moses? After all, he was “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and deeds” (Acts 7:22). Did God employ that wisdom? Did He not wait for forty years before He called Moses while he was on the back side of the desert (Ex 3:1) – time enough for his repertoire of Egyptian wisdom to diminish?

The truth of the matter is that we have no example of a servant of God who employed wisdom acquired from the world to do His work.

This is precisely the way the church begins in Acts. Just as surely as the ancient altar of the Lord did not have a tool of man raised upon it (Ex 20:25), so the inauguration of the New Covenant was devoid of the flesh. Nothing originating with man was in it – nothing at all. If such a thing had been there, it would have “polluted” the beginning of “the day of salvation,” just like man’s tools would have “polluted” the altar. That pollution would also have spread.

Using Things Despised

Here, at the very threshold of the beginning of “the body of Christ,” the Lord uses what was

despised by men to accomplish His work. This is in strict accord with His revealed manner: “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world , and things which are despised , hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not , to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor 1:27-29).

It is not easy for some to accept this Divine mode. This is because it is properly denigrating to “the flesh,” for which no place has been made in Christ Jesus. It is not that it is sinful to be educated, learn a skill, or acquire professional credentials. Luke was a doctor (Col 4:4). However, he was not chosen to write Scripture for that reason. The point to be seen is that the work of God does not depend upon expertise learned from the world that has been cursed, and from which we must be delivered.

If, on the day of Pentecost, a great orator like Tertullus (Acts 24:1) would have been speaking, is there anyone who imagines the words would have had greater weight? Is the Holy Spirit prone to speak through those who have impressive credentials and are cultured in a manner acceptable to the world? We do not have to speculate on this. Our text affirms that God used people who were derisively called “Galileans” – people who could not possibly have done this if the Holy Spirit had not given them “utterance.”

WE HEAR IN OUR OWN TONGUE

“ 8 And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?” Other versions read, “And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?” NKJV “Then how is it that each of us hears them in his own native language ?” NIV “And how is it that every one of us is hearing their words in the language which was ours from our birth ?” BBE “how do we hear them each in our own dialect in which we have been born,” DARBY “How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language?” NJB “yet we hear them speaking the languages of the lands where we were born !” NLT ”and yet we hear them speaking all the native languages of the lands where we were born,” LIVING “How then does each one of us hear his own native language spoken by them ?” WEYMOUTH “Then how is it that each one of us hears them speak his own mother tongue ?” MONTGOMERY “Then how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own (particular) dialect to which we were born?” AMPLIFIED and “Then how does it happen that every single one of us can hear the particular language he has known from a child ?” PHILLIPS

This is not how men would have done it! The Jews had their own tongue – “the Hebrew tongue” (John 5:2; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14). Would it not have been better to speak in that language? And what of those who have given undue veneration to the Greek language. It is vaunted as being more precise, and more capable of communicating the truth. Why not deliver the message in that language? This is not to mention Latin, which was the language of Empire. Jesus had a sign over him while on the cross written in Greek (the universal language), Latin (the language of the Empire), and Hebrew (the language of the Jews). Why not confine the speaking to those languages. Would that not have meant any technical requirements? The answer is that such an approach did not meet the Divine requirements, and that is why it was not used.

There are at least three things that can be seen in this marvelous display of aptitudes given by the Spirit of God.

A Global Salvation

First, this is the announcement of a global salvation. It is intended, and is effectual to the fullest extent of the effects of sin. There is no place among men where sin has reached, that salvation will not also reach. Its provision will be realized by all who believe, regardless of their location or language. Paul wrote it this way: “For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the

grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many . . . for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification . . . by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ . . . by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life . . . by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous . . . where sin abounded, grace did much more abound ” (Rom 5:15-20).

Later the Holy Spirit will move John to write that men would be redeemed to God “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation ” (Rev 5:9). Zechariah also prophesied of the universality of this great salvation. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations , even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech 8:23). This is beginning to take place in our text.

A Personal Salvation

This occasion also confirmed the intensely personal nature of salvation. Every single person heard what was being said in their own personal native tongue. “Every man” heard it in the language of the land where he was born. The word came from Jerusalem, but it was not for Jerusalem only. This is a salvation, the Lord affirms, in which “they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11).

A Harmonious Salvation

The word was heard in each language, but it was the same word. A difference in cultures did not require an adjustment of the message itself. Salvation is provided for sinners, not for this nation and that nation , or for men or women, or for rich or poor. Sin does not reflect a respect of persons, and neither does salvation. This is because “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). It is not possible for the God of heaven to provide a partial remedy for a universal condition. If what sin caused – everything – cannot be remedied by salvation, then it really is no salvation at all.

How marvelously the unique nature of salvation is summarized in the book of Ephesians. “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:6). Every facet of salvation is harmonious with its revealed intent – the eternal purpose of God, and that purpose is never contradicted! That purpose is to gether everything together in one. “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph 1:10). From the beginning, this is made clear. It is not possible for God to do anything that is not in strict harmony with that aim. That should be evident.

THE DIVERSITY OF THE CROWD

“ 9 Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10 Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11a Cretes and Arabians.”

We should not be surprised that from the very first day, the diversity of those being saved is emphasized. If it is true that in Christ there is “ neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), then this will be reflected at the very first opening of the door of salvation. If it is true that “there is no respect of

persons with God” (Rom 2:11), then it will be confirmed in the events taking place on the day of Pentecost. If “One died for all” (2 Cor 5:14-15), and “all things” belong to all saints (1 Cor 3:21). then from the very beginning salvation will be realized by a vast panorama of people. If “all spiritual

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blessings” have been provided for all who are raised up with Jesus and made to sit together with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3; 2:7), then we can expect this circumstance to be verified by the very first people who hear the message of that salvation.

There is no second class salvation or second-rate benefits. In this salvation, there are none who gain spiritual advantages because of their position in this world. The flesh, together with every single one of its traits, cannot possibly bring a spiritual advantage or opportunity to anyone – not so much as a single soul. No person becomes inferior because of their flesh-and-blood birth, or their station in this world. No kingdom benefits are withheld from a person because of where they were born, their nationality, or where they reside.

Further, because this salvation delivers humanity from this present evil world (Gal 1:4), how can it be possible for any distinction pertaining to this world to impose limitations upon those delivered from it?

All of this may seem quite apparent, but there are vast numbers of believers who are being treated as though they are second-rate citizens in the Kingdom of God. The restriction may be based upon their age, their gender, their attainments, their color . . . etc. But when we come to the day of Pentecost – a day which set the tone for all of time unto the coming of the Lord, no such restrictions will be found!

In this text we will see the reality of the dispersing of the Jews after the era of the kings, and before the birth of Christ. The prophets often spoke of this dispersion, affirming that God would regather the Jews into their own land.

In this text we will see the reality of the dispersing of the Jews after the era of the kings, and before the birth of Christ. The prophets often spoke of this dispersion, affirming that God would regather the Jews into their own land. Some years after Pentecost, James wrote his epistle to dispersed Jews: “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting” (James 1:1). Peter did the same, referring to their status in Christ: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1).

Moses prophesied of this scattering: “I said, I would scatter them into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men” (Deu 32:26).

Prior to Pentecost, various prophesies were delivered to the dispersed Jews – prophesies that kindled the flame of hope, as the purpose of God was declared.

- “And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth” (Isa 11:12).

- “And it shall come to pass in that day, that the great trumpet shall be blown, and they shall come which were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and the outcasts in the

land of Egypt, and shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem” (Isa 27:13).

- “I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth ” (Isa 43:6).

- “And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far : and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim” (Isa 49:11-12).

- “The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him” (Isa 56:8).

- “Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him , as a shepherd doth his flock” (Jer 31:10).

- “Yet will I leave a remnant, that ye may have some that shall escape the sword among the nations, when ye shall be scattered through the countries ” (Ezek 6:8).

- “Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen , and although I have scattered them among the countries , yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even gather you from the people , and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered , and I will give you the land of Israel” (Ezek 11:16-17).

- “And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered , with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out” (Ezek 20:34).

- “I will accept you with your sweet savor, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered ; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen” (Ezek 20:41).

- “Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered , and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to my servant Jacob” (Ezek 28:25).

- “And they were scattered , because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered . My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, My flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them” (Ezek 34:5-6).

- “As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered ; so will I seek out my sheep , and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day” (Ezek 34:12).

- “Because ye have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, till ye have scattered them abroad ; Therefore will I save my flock , and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle” (Ezek 34:21- 22).

- “And I scattered them among the heathen , and they were dispersed through the countries : according to their way and according to their doings I judged them” (Ezek 36:19).

- “I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations , and parted my land” (Joel 3:2).

- “From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia my suppliants, even the daughter of My dispersed , shall bring mine offering” (Zeph 3:10).

Even in Jesus’ day, there was a keen awareness of the many Jews that were still dispersed: “Then

said the Jews among themselves, Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" (John 7:35).

From these texts, together with the one before us, several key things ought to be noted.

- Israel was scattered by God because of their transgression.
- God has made a commitment to gather them from the countries through which they were dispersed.
- At the time of Christ, Israel itself was keenly aware of this dispersion.
- The Jews had not lost their identity in the nations throughout which they were dispersed. Our text confirms this to be the case, for they came to Jerusalem from many of these nations – and were clearly identified as “Jews” (2:5). They were scattered, yet remained known.

Our text takes place on the day of Pentecost – the harvest firstfruits. As such, it is a pledge of the future gathering of all of the dispersed Jews. The manner in which the Lord works will reveal much of Himself.

The listing of the nations commences in the East, and goes toward the West. All of the areas are ancient areas.

PARTHIANS

“Parthians . . .” Other versions read, “Men of Parthia.” BBE This was a mountainous region lying to the northeast of Media. It extended from India to the Tigris River, and was a part of Persia. The people have been referred to as descendants of Abraham by Katurah. McCLINTOK The Parthian empire, present in the first century, lasted for a period of 400 years, and was considered very significant. As the crow flies, this country was approximately 1,100 miles from Jerusalem. This is the only Scriptural reference to this area and its inhabitants.

MEDES

“ . . . and Medes . . . ” Other versions read, “Men of . . . Media.” BBE This country was also associated with Persia, lying to the Northwest of Persia Proper. It was a smaller country, being about 150,000 square miles in size – about 3/4 the size of modern France. Media was prominent in the history of Esther (Esth 1:3,14,18; 10:2). Isaiah mentions Media as being instrumental in the judgments of God (Isa 21:2). Daniel prophesied of “the kings of Media and Persia,” who overthrew the Babylonian kingdom (Dan 8:20). As the crow flies, Media was about 800 miles from Jerusalem.

ELAMITES

“ . . . and Elamites . . . ” This territory was to the south of Assyria and east of Persia. At one time, Daniel states that he was “at Shushan in the palace, which is in the province of Elam” (Dan 8:2). This identified Elam with the same general area as Parthia and Media. This was an ancient area, being mentioned in Genesis 14:1. It appears from Genesis 10:22 that this country was originally populated by the offspring of Shem, one of Noah’s three sons. As the crow flies, Elam was about 700 miles from Jerusalem.

DWELLERS IN MESOPOTAMIA

“ . . . and the dwellers in Mesopotamia . . . ” This is considered to be the entire region between the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. Abraham was called from this area (Acts 7:2). Isaac obtained his wife from this area (Gen 24:10). The mysterious prophet Balaam, who prophesied for wages, was

also from this area (Deut 23:4). Significant Bible cities in this area include Ur (Gen 11:27-28), Haran (Gen 11:31-32), Charchemiah (2 Chron 35:20), Hena (2 Kgs 19:13), and Sepharvaim (2 Kgs 17:24). Now some citizens of this area come for Pentecost. As the crow flies, Mesopotamia was about 600 miles from Jerusalem.

JUDAEA

“ . . . and in Judaea . . . ” For some, the inclusion of Judea offers some problems, because that is the area in which Jerusalem itself was located. However, those who were speaking were not from Judea, but were remaining in Jerusalem according to the word of Jesus – not because they lived there. We understand Judea to be mentioned because the language spoken in that part of Israel was different than the more rough dialect of the Galileans. It is also mentioned to highlight the diversity of the languages being spoken on this memorable occasion.

CAPPADOCIA

“ . . . and Cappadocia . . . ” This was an area in Asia Minor. It is said by ancient Greek writers that this place was noted for its wickedness. History tells us it was converted to Christianity. ALBERT BARNES Peter wrote his first epistle to converted Jews who lived in this place (1 Pet 1:1). As the crow flies, this area was about 600 miles from Jerusalem.

PONTUS

“ . . . in Pontus . . . ” This was another province in Asia Minor, and was situated close to Cappadocia.. It was the birthplace of Aquila, who, with his wife, were faithful workers with Paul (Acts 18:2). Peter also addressed his first epistle to Jewish brethren in this area (1 Pet 1:1). As the crow flies, this area was about 700 miles from Jerusalem.

ASIA

“ . . . and Asia . . . ” This area was west of Cappadocia and Pontus, and is frequently mentioned in Scripture (Acts 6:9; 19:10,22,25,27,31). Tychicus and Trophimus, known for laboring with Paul, were from this area (Acts 20:4). Early in the history of the church, the Holy Spirit forbade the gospel to be preached in Asia (Acts 16:6). That ban, however, was eventually lifted. Ephesus was the capital of Asia. This was the area in which the seven churches were located to whom John wrote the book for the Revelation (Rev 1:4). As the crow flies, this was about 700 miles from Jerusalem.

PHRYGIA

“ 10 Phrygia . . . ” This was another province in Asia Minor, surrounded by Galatia, Cappadocia, and Pamphylia. It is thought that their language was pure Greek. Paul and Timothy preached extensively in this area (Acts 16:6). Paul went through the area again, strengthening the churches there (Acts 18:23). As the crow flies, this was about 600 miles from Jerusalem.

PAMPHYLIA

“ . . . and Pamphylia . . . ” This was also in Asia Minor. When Paul and the company with him came to this area, John Mark departed from them, returning to Jerusalem (Acts 13:13) – something that greatly irritated Paul (Acts 15:38). As the crow flies, this was about 400 miles from Jerusalem.

EGYPT

“ . . . in Egypt . . . ” This was an extensive country, well known to the Jews. At the time of our text, the language used there was the Coptic language. History tells us that the first translation of Moses and the Prophets into the Greek language took place here (the Septuagint Versions).

ALBERT BARNES It was located to the south of Jerusalem. As the crow flies, this was about 400 miles from the holy city.

PARTS OF LIBYA ABOUT CYRENE

“ . . . and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene . . . ” Other versions read, “the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene,” NKJV “the districts of Libya around Cyrene,” NASB and “parts of Libya belong to Cyrene.” NRSV Libya is the general name for Africa. The Greeks gave it the name “Africa.” Ezekiel mentions this area, associating it with Ethiopia (Ezek 30:5; 38:5). As the crow flies, it was about 700-800 miles from Jerusalem.

ROME – JEWS AND PROSELYTES

“ . . . and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes . . . ” These were certain Jews who had taken up residence in Rome, the capital of Italy. A great number of Jews lived there at this time. “Proselytes” are Gentiles who were converted to Judaism. The Pharisees were noted for working hard to make proselytes (Matt 23:15). One of the first deacons, Nicolas, was a “proselyte” (acts 6:5). In Antioch, a great number of proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, intensely interested in their message (Acts 13:43). Josephus says there were eight synagogues in Rome. ALBERT BARNES Some years after Pentecost, Claudius commanded all Jews to depart from Rome. This forced Aquila and Priscilla to leave that area and go to Corinth (Acts 18:1-2). As the crow flies, Rome was about 1,350 miles from Jerusalem.

CRETES

“ . . . Cretes . . . ” Crete is an island in the Mediterranean sea. It is 200 miles long and 50 miles wide. In Paul’s travels, he touched this island (Acts 27:7-8,13). Paul left Titus there to “set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city” (Tit 1:5). The Cretians were noted for their deceptive ways. One of their own prophets said, “The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies [lazy gluttons] ” (Tit 1:12-13). As the crow flies, Crete was about 700 miles from Jerusalem.

ARABIANS

“ . . . and Arabians” Arabia is a large peninsula with Syria to the North, the Euphrates on the East, the Indian ocean on the South, and the Red Sea on the West. Isaiah prophesied against Arabia (Isa 21:13). This is the area into which Paul entered shortly after Jesus appeared to him and called him to the apostleship (Gal 1:17). Mount Sinai is also in Arabia (Gal 4:25). As the crow flies, this was about 300 miles from Jerusalem.

WHAT BROUGHT THESE PEOPLE TO JERUSALEM?

What brought this remarkable melting pot of people to Jerusalem? From one point of view, it was the feast of Pentecost. Even so, that was quite remarkable, for Jews were not noted for faithfully keeping their Divinely appointed feasts. Once, in the days of king Josiah, a glorious passover was observed. Although their observance conformed strictly to the instructions of the Lord, it was said of that Passover, “And there was no passover like to that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did all the kings of Israel keep such a passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah and Israel that were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (2 Chron 35:18). Yet, during the Passover of our text, “devote men” flooded into the city from many different regions.

From a higher perspective, these men were drawn into Jerusalem by the Living God – drawn, as it were, to the Lord Jesus (John 6:44). He allured them into Jerusalem like Hosea said He allured

Israel into the wilderness. “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her” (Hosea 2:14).

The Lord drew these “devout men” to Jerusalem to fulfill the promise of Joel and other prophets. He brought them in to gather a firstfruit harvest of the nation – a pledge of an even greater harvest to come that would involve the whole of the nation of Israel (Rom 11:15-26). He also brought them in as a firstfruit harvest of the world – the time when the whole field will be reaped according to Revelation 14:15-16.

WHAT THEY WERE HEARING

“11b . . . we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.” Other versions read, “the mighty deeds of God,” NASB “the wonders of God,” NIV “God’s deeds of power,” NRSV “the great works of God,” BBE “the great things of God,” DARBY “the mighty acts of God,” NAB “the marvels of God,” NJB “the wonderful things God has done,” NLT “the mighty miracles of God,” LIVING “the wonderful things they are saying about God,” IE and “the magnificence of God.” PHILLIPS

We are witnessing the Lord Himself at work! The disciples – all of them – are speaking in different languages as the Spirit of God “gave them utterance.” The Holy Spirit not only enabled them to speak in languages they had not learned, He also gave them the message to deliver. What is it that the disciples were saying in these various languages?

FOR “DEVOUT MEN”

This particular verse is important because it reveals something essential about the work of the Lord – particularly of the manner in which the interest of people is solicited. In order to draw the hearts and minds of the people, a word was being delivered. The disciples did not prepare a banquet to draw in the people. They did not engage in various entertaining activities, descending down into the arena of carnal interests. First, the appeal drew the attention of “devout men.” It was Divinely calculated to do precisely that.

The events of the day of Pentecost contrast sharply with the manner in which the modern church is trying to attract the people. This was not simply a language-speaking display, with unlearned Galileans merely speaking in other difficult and more sophisticated languages. That might have drawn a crowd of linguists, but would have no appeal to “devout men.”

It ought to be noted that as soon as you adapt the Gospel to a certain group you must dilute it, for the Gospel itself is tailored for all men. If you modify this message to suit the interests of people, you must dilute it and rob it of its power. It is for all, and must be presented to all. A gospel that cannot be preached to everyone should not be preached to anyone!

Keep in mind that both Jesus and the apostles delivered a message that appealed to “devout men.” That is why Jesus preached in synagogues (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; Mk 1:21,39; 3:1; 6:2; Lk 4:15,16,44; 6:6; 13:10). It is why He taught “daily” in the Temple (Matt 21:14,23; 26:55; Mk 12:35; 14:19; Lk 19:47; 20:1; 21:37-38; 22:53; John 7:14,28; 8:2,20; 18:20). It is why Paul preached in the synagogues (Acts 9:20; 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1-2,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8). It is why the early disciples taught much in the Temple (Acts 2:46; 4:1; 5:20-21,25,42).

When the Gospel was first preached to the Gentiles, the Spirit sent Peter to the house of Cornelius, “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house” (Acts 10:2). When the Gospel was sent into the regions of Macedonia, the Spirit sent Paul to a river where prayer was being made by certain women (Acts 16:13). The message Paul preached in Thessalonica was embraced by a multitude of “devout Greeks” (Acts 17:4). When Paul was agitated with the pervasive idolatry of Athens he “disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout

persons, and in the market place with them that met with Him” (Acts 17:17).

I understand that there were others who heard the Gospel. However, they did not hear “another Gospel,” or one that was especially tailored for them. There is only one valid Gospel, and it centers in the Lord, not men. It is an “everlasting Gospel” (Rev 14:6) that has remained unchanged through the ages. It does not require some special adaptation to reach certain cultures. It is fully adequate to be declared in a synagogue (Acts 18:4), a market (Acts 17:17), on a desert highway (Acts 8:26), a special coliseum (Acts 17:19), an educational building (Acts 19:9), a place devoted to prayer (Acts 16:13), a prison (Acts 16:32), or in a political chamber (Acts 24:24-25).

Tragically, we are living in a day when professed preachers and teachers are delivering a word that has little or no appeal to “devout men.” It ought to be noted that as soon as you adapt the Gospel to a certain group you must dilute it, for the Gospel itself is tailored for all men. If you modify this message to suit the interests of people, you must dilute it and rob it of its power. It is for all, and must be presented to all. A gospel that cannot be preached to everyone should not be preached to anyone! The Western world needs to hear a word that has a strong appeal to “devout” people, and that challenges gross sinners to yearn to be “devout.” We must not allow the mega-church moguls of our time to divert our attention to “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4).

WHAT DID THE PEOPLE HEAR IN THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE?

What kind of message were these people hearing? What had the Holy Spirit of God moved these people to say? Was it a message of what men could be? Was it a word concerning prosperity? Were they hearing words about how to be successful, or how to conquer failure in its various forms? Precisely what was the content of the message they were hearing?

We are not left to conjecture. The Spirit speaks expressly on this matter. They were hearing “the wonderful works of God!” That is, they were hearing a message of what God Himself had done! This was the proclamation of Divine accomplishments, not human possibilities or obligations!

The expression “wonderful works” is the translation of a single Greek word: **megalei/a** (mega-laia). The lexical meaning of this word is works that are “magnificent, excellent, splendid, wonderful . . . the mighty works of God, the glorious perfections of God and His marvelous doings,” THAYER “great, powerful, splendid, the mighty acts, powerful works,” FRIBERG “prominence, greatness, importance,” LOUW-NIDA “magnificent, splendid, mighty works, splendidly.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

What Was NOT the Subject

The great works of God are numerous and impressive. Yet, on this day, when “the promise of the Father” was being realized, there are certain works that were NOT the heart of the message.

NOT the Works of Creation

The people to whom, the Holy Spirit had given utterance were not speaking of the wonderful works of creation. These were, indeed, marvelous. However, these people were not speaking of God laying “the foundations of the earth” (Job 38:4-6). They were not declaring when God “framed” the worlds with His Word” (Heb 11:3), separating light from darkness (Gen 1:4), the waters above from the waters beneath (Gen 1:7), and the land from the water (Gen 1:9-10). They were not chronicling God’s creation of a vast array of plant life (Gen 1:11-12), sea life and the fowls of the air from water (Gen 1:20-22), and animal life (Gen 1:24-25). These were not the “works” being declared.

NOT the Marvels of Nature

Nor, indeed, were the marvels of nature the things being declared: “the treasures of the snow,” “the treasures of the hail,” discretionary “rain,” and “drops of dew” (Job 38:22,26-28). They were not speaking about the rising and setting of the sun (Eccl 1:5), establishing a boundary for the sea (Job 38:11), and the marvelous instincts of wildlife (Deut 32:11; Job 39:1-30; Jer 8:9). These were not the “works” being declared.

NOT the Wonders Of Israel’s Deliverance

Nor, indeed, were they rehearsing the many wonderful works that God had wrought upon and among the Israelites. He delivered them from Egypt (Deut 4:20,37), preceding their deliverance with ten mighty plagues (Ex 7:17-12:29; Deut 4:34; 26:8). In that deliverance He gave them favor with the Egyptians so that they gave them everything they required for their journey (Ex 12:36). He brought them through the Red Sea on dry ground, then drowned Pharaoh and his armies in the same sea (Ex 14:22-29). However, these were not the “wonderful works” being declared by the speakers.

NOT the Exploits Wrought in Israel

During their journey to Canaan, God provided Israel miraculous meat (Num 11:21-23,31-33), fed them with miraculous bread (Deut 8:3,16; Josh 5:12), provided them rivers of water from a wilderness rock (Ex 17:6; Num 20:11; Psa 78:16; 114:8), caused their clothing to remain new for forty years (Deut 8:4), and wrought countless miraculous deliverances among them (Ex 15:25; Ex 17:9-13; Deut 11:6-7; Num 17:1-7; Josh 3:14-17). Neither were these the “mighty works” now being spoken into the ears of these “devout men.”

NOT the Miracles In Their Captivity

When Judah was in the Babylonian captivity, some mighty miracles were wrought. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were delivered from a fiery furnace, with not a single evidence of being in the furnace remaining of them (Dan 3:23-27). Daniel was delivered from a den of famished lions, spending an entire night with them (Dan 6:22). But these works were not what was being reported by the Spirit-filled disciples on the day of Pentecost.

Why Were Not These Works Reported?

There is a reason why the wonderful works just mentioned were not being reported. None of these works had any redemptive power. None of them were integral to the New Covenant. None of them can reconcile the world to God. None of them can remove sin, or make peace between God and sinful man. None of them could provide a basis upon which men could be “made acceptable” to God. None of them required the “the Word” to be “made flesh” (John 1:14). None of them required Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, or intercession. None of them could induct “the day of salvation” or “the accepted time.” This day was the beginning of “the day of salvation,” and a higher order of works were being declared.

The Wonderful Works Being Reported

The “wonderful works” of our text related specifically to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. These were all accomplishments of God. None of them were done by man. They were, strictly and most precisely, “the wonderful works of God.”

All of the other works that I have just mentioned could have been heard in the local synagogues. The Pharisees and scribes knew of those works very well. But the ones that the people were now hearing declared were not known among the people.

All of the other works that I have just mentioned could have been heard in the local synagogues.

The Pharisees and scribes knew of those works very well. But the ones that the people were now hearing declared were not known among the people. Here is a brief sampling of the kind of works involves.

- **God sending Christ.** “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law” (Gal 4:4). “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9). “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14).

- **God confirming Christ.** “And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). “While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him” (Mat 17:5). “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22).

- **Christ’s triumphant death.** “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4). “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). “He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32). “For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21).

- **Christ’s glorious resurrection.** “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 3:26). “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30).

- **Christ’s illuminating appearances.** “Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.” (Acts 10:40-41).

The true value of a person or group of persons is found in the frequency of their references to “the wonderful works of God.” The closer men are to the Lord, and the more they are “endued with power from on high,” the more they speak of the works of God.

Christ’s Exaltation. “Wherefor God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9). “Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:20).

- **God sending forth His promise.** “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26). “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me” (John 15:26). “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

The priority of God the Father in redemption is seen in the frequency of the references to Him that are in the letters written to the churches. There are twenty references to “the Father” in the Epistles, and six hundred and sixty-two references to “God.” At the highest level the “works” are His. As Jesus Himself said, “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The

words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, He doeth the works ” (John 14:10).

This is how the inauguration of the New Covenant began: by proclaiming “the wonderful works of God.” This is in strict accord with the prophecy of the sweet Psalmist of Israel: “They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power” (Psa 145:11). The restoration of a wayward people is characterized by such talk. As it is written, “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them. The LORD hath done great things for us ; whereof we are glad” (Psa 126:3). The heavens and the earth are not set to praising because of what men have done, but because of what the Lord has done. Thus it is written, “Sing, O ye heavens; for the LORD hath done it : shout, ye lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, ye mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel” (Isa 44:23).

The true value of a person or group of persons is found in the frequency of their references to “the wonderful works of God.” The closer men are to the Lord, and the more they are “endued with power from on high,” the more they speak of the works of God. I was raised in a church and institutional environment in which there were very few references to what the Lord had done. If it had not been for my beloved Father, who had understanding in these things, I suppose I would scarcely have heard of them at all. There was actually more talk about the “church fathers” and the “restoration fathers” than “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

I well remember that after I had been preaching for several years, it finally registered upon my spirit how very little I had been talking about God, and of the Lord Jesus who is bringing us to Him (1 Pet 3:18). When, by the grace of God, I determined to remedy that situation, I was at once charged with being a Calvinist. I found that my “brethren” were not at all comfortable with all of the glory being given to God – even though it is written, “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). However, that did not lend itself to the advancement of the institution. It is a great liberty to be freed from the shackles of human institutions and their corrupting influence.

FOR CLARITY

For purposes of clarity, we are being exposed to disciples who were filled with the Holy Spirit, and to the focus and content of their speaking. This is how men spoke when they were “endued with power from on high.” This is the manner in which those who are filled with the Spirit speak. Here, we are exposed to the “mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27). Here is a message that heaven intends for men to know.

The assessment of their message is provided a vast array of “devout men” – men who have a heart for God, and are serious about their manner of life. Here is an environment in which God will work.

CONSTERNATION!

“ 12 And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? 13 Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.”

Here again, the Spirit emphasizes the total inability of the natural mind to account for what is happening. Today there are sundry things being done in the name of Jesus, some of which appear to be supernatural. Often, however, men can account for these things by causes that are not from God. Thus, for example, some healings are said to be nothing more than a psychosomatic phenomenon. Some trace effective alterations in human conduct to a twelve-step plan of recovery, or the human will, or some other humanly conceived procedure.

But on the day of Pentecost, there was absolutely no way for these men to legitimately account for what was happening. It simply dried up fleshly abilities to diagnose or account for what was being done. It is in the same category as one man killing a thousand seasoned warriors with the jawbone of an ass, or two aged people having a son, or the sun standing still, or a virgin conceiving. There simply is no human explanation for such things.

AMAZED AND IN DOUBT

“And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?” Other versions read, “So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘Whatever could this mean?’” NKJV “And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’” NASB “And they were all surprised and in doubt saying to one another, What is the reason of this?” BBE “And they all wondered and were astonished, saying one to another: From whom is this thing?” MRD “And all were beside themselves with amazement and were puzzled and bewildered, saying one to another, What can this mean?” AMPLIFIED and “Everyone was utterly amazed and did not know what to make of it, Indeed they kept saying to each other, “What on earth can this mean?”” PHILLIPS

Notice how these men have been said to respond to what they are seeing and hearing.

- They were “confounded” (2:6).
- They were all “amazed and marveled” (2:7).
- They were all “amazed, and were in doubt” (2:12).

In these verses there are four different Greek words used to express the reaction of the listeners. They all are similar in meaning, with some slight variations.

When it comes to the working of the Lord, professionals such as psychiatrists, motivators, sociologists, experts in physiology, statisticians, analysts, and medical experts can bring nothing to the table of explanation.

sunecu.qh – “confounded” (2:6). Disturbed, bewildered, stirred up to tumult. Here there is an agitation brought on by the total inability to account for what is happening.

• **evxi,stanto** – “amazed” (2:7,12). Astounded, to be out of one’s mind. In this case, all that one can do is stand there with their mouth open.

• **evqau,mazon** – “marveled” (2:7). To wonder. Here the intellect is surprised and stunned by what is seen and heard – astonished.

• **dihpo,roun** – “in doubt” (2:12). To be entirely at a loss, to be in perplexity.

In the case of “doubt,” the mind challenges what is seen, questioning whether or not the senses can be trusted with what confronts them. The is mental perplexity, where all ability to account for the happening withers and dies.

One of the great characteristics of the work of God is that it transcends all human explanation. This is why it is such a serious transgression to appeal to the wisdom of the world in matters pertaining to life and godliness. When it comes to the working of the Lord, professionals such as psychiatrists, motivators, sociologists, experts in physiology, statisticians, analysts, and medical experts can bring nothing to the table of explanation. What can experts like this clarify for us in the matter of regeneration, the cleansed conscience, a peace that governs the heart and mind, and a joy that overflows in the midst of great difficulties? How can they account for spiritual understanding, a dominating hope, or a resilient confidence and assurance? They can only feign explanations, for such things have been accomplished by a power that is transcendent to nature. When there is a

period such as ours (the twenty-first century), when such men are given places of preeminence in the church, spiritual stupidity is inevitable. Men will be brought to wrong conclusions, just as surely as these “devout men” were when they were exposed to Divine workings.

By doubting, these men were saying, “Can this be true?” “I cannot believe my eyes and ears!” “This can’t be happening!” On this day, however, matters will not end with human consternation! The God who is working will provide the explanation for what is happening.

THE MOCKERS

“ 13 Others mocking . . .” Other versions read, “But others were mocking ,” NASB “Some, however, made fun of them,” NIV “But others sneered NRSV “But others, making sport of them ,” BBE “Others however ridiculed them ” MRD “Some, however, made fun of them ,” NIB “Some, however, laughed it off.” NJB “But others in the crowd were mocking .” NLT “But others, scornfully jeering ,” WEYMOUTH “But others made a joke of it ,” AMPLIFIED and “But there were others who laughed mockingly .” PHILLIPS

When something happens that is too much for the human intellect, some resort to “mocking,” attempting to laugh off what is happening as though it was some deviate expression. The word from which “mocking” is translated has the following lexical meaning: “jesting, to deride, jeer,” THAYER “of derisive behavior, jeer, scoff, sneer,” FRIBERG “make fun of,” UBS “to make fun of someone by joking or jesting,” LOUW-NIDA “to joke, jest, scoff, jeer . . . to mock, scoff at.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Paul encountered this kind of response when he spoke of the resurrection of the dead in Athens. “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked : and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter ” (Acts 17:32). Ishmael “mocked” Isaac, chiding him and making fun of him (Gen 21:9). Some foolish children made the mistake of mocking Elijah (2 Kgs 2:23). In the time of Nehemiah, a man named Sanballot “mocked” the Jews who were rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem (Neh 4:1).

Mocking is the attempt of flesh to shake off the influence of truth. It is the reaction of the natural man to something he does not understand. Rather than inquiring further into the matter, what is seen is simply brushed aside with some foolish explanation.

FULL OF NEW WINE

“ . . . said, - These men are full of new wine.” Other versions read, “They are full of sweet wine ,” NASB “They have had too much wine. ” NIV They are filled with new wine ,” NRSV “They have drunken new wine, and are intoxicated ,” MRD “They have had too much wine” {Or sweet wine },” NIB “ They're drunk , that's all ! they said,” NLT “They are brim-full of sweet wine,” WEYMOUTH “They are simply drunk and full of sweet [intoxicating] wine,” AMPLIFIED and “These fellows have drunk too much new wine !” PHILLIPS

This was not an intellectual assessment, but an attempt to brush the whole matter aside. A serious mind could not conclude that hearing men speak in many different languages – all of which were known to the hearers – was something resulting from intoxication. Drunkenness garbles the speech, it does not bring more versatility to it. That is why this is called “mocking.” What these men laughed at, saying it was absurd, was nothing to compare with the absurdity of affirming “that strong drink can teach languages.” Dr McLerlland

Throughout history this has often been the tactic of those subjected to the people of God. For example “the disciples were called Christians first at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). This was not a complimentary statement. The word “Christian” means “of Christ,” or “a follower of Christ.”

Instead of the citizenry of Antioch inquiring into the spread of the truth in that area – “a whole year” – they simply brushed aside the whole phenomenon by saying the people were followers of Christ – a Christ they themselves did not embrace. Similarly, when Festus heard the convicting words of Paul, he cast them from him with a mocking reply: “much learning doth make thee mad” (Acts 26:24). Who can forget what Jesus’ critics said of Him: “Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners” (Matt 11:19). Again, certain people brushed aside the words of Christ saying, “Thou hast a devil” (John 7:20), and “Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil?” (John 8:48).

It is ever true, “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now ” (Gal 4:29). That text refers to Ishmael mocking Isaac – an occasion which resulted in him and his mother being expelled from the house of Abraham (Gal 4:30; Gen 21:9-14).

Thus these mockers attempt to cast aspersions upon those who are miraculously speaking in their own native tongue. For them, marveling led to mockery instead of inquiry.

New Wine

Precisely what is “new wine?” The expression itself suggests it was not what the Scriptures refer to as “strong drink.” The Greek word from which “new wine” is translated is **Gleu,kouj** (glu-cose). Its lexical meaning is, “the sweet juice pressed from the grape . . . sweet wine,” THAYER “strictly unfermented juice of grapes; hence sweet new wine,” FRIBERG “new, sweet wine in process of fermentation: sweet wine,” LOUW-NIDA The prophets writings frequently refer to “new wine” or “sweet wine” (Isa 49:26; Hos 4:11; Joel 1:5; Amos 9:13; Zech 9:17). Jesus referred to putting “new wine” into old bottles, saying that it would cause them to break in the process of fermentation (Matt 9:17). Isaiah said “new wine” was found “in the cluster,” from which it was pressed (Isa 65:8).

NEW WINE

“One of the methods in use among the Greeks and Romans of doing this was the following: An amphora or jar was taken and coated with pitch within and without, and was then filled with the juice which flowed from the grapes before they had been fully trodden, and was then corked so as to be air-tight. It was then immersed in a tank of cold water or buried in the sand, and allowed to remain six weeks or two months. The contents after this process were found to remain unchanged for a year, and hence, the name **aei gleukov** — always sweet. The process was not much unlike what is so common now of preserving fruits and vegetables. Sweet wine, which was probably the same as that mentioned here, is also mentioned in the Old Testament (Isaiah 49:26; Amos 9:13).”
ALBERT BARNES

“New wine” was not the hard liquor with which men are familiar today. It was, indeed, intoxicating, but only when it was imbibed in enormous quantities. In this case, much of the fermentation actually occurred after it was ingested. Paul refers to this kind of drinking when he wrote, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess ; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18).

However, even though the disciples were not being charged with being persistent drunkards, they were being mocked . By foolishly charging that they were “drunk with new wine,” these men thought to reduce the impact of what they were hearing. They were seeking to shift the occasion from one of sobriety to one of levity, and from one of wisdom to one of foolishness.

It should not surprise us that men refuse to receive the truth when it is so plainly and evidently declared. In this text “the wonderful works of God” were being reported in the native tongues of the people. It is not possible for the truth to be more plainly presented to the human intellect .

And yet, with all of this apparency, there were some who “mocked,” charging the disciples with

being excessively full of new wine. Such a charge is utterly ridiculous, and could in no way be supported by any form of sound reasoning.

That, of course, is precisely how the flesh and the natural mind responds when the truth of God is brought within its grasp. The “things of the Spirit of God . . . are foolishness” to the natural men – even when they are “devout,” and have traveled many miles to observe a God-ordained feast (1 Cor 2:14). Do not be stunned when you encounter such things.

The stage has now been set for a remarkable exposition of the events concerning the Lord Jesus Christ. The vehicles through whom, the Lord will work have been duly prepared, and the audience to whom they will speak have been drawn together, and their attention has been captured for the moment. All of those is the Lord’s doing.

CONCLUSION

The remarkable precision associated with the day of Pentecost is worthy of much contemplation. It reflects the nature of God, His ways, the manner of His kingdom, and the effectiveness of His work. The events of this day took place in a particular year, on a particular day, and at a particular time. They were focused on a particular country, in a particular city, on a particular house, and upon a particular people. That is how precisely the Lord’s purposes are fulfilled. Those are also associations that have been made with the “great salvation” that is in Christ Jesus “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

You have probably noticed that as soon as “the day of Pentecost was fully come,” things began to happen in strict accord with the promises of Christ. He had promised His disciples, “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5). He had assured them, “I send the promise the promise of My Father upon you,” and “ye shall be endured with power from on high” in Jerusalem (Lk 24:49). The twelve were particularly told that the Holy Spirit would teach them “all things” (John 14:26a), bringing what Jesus had said to them to their “remembrance” (John 14:26b). The Spirit would “testify” of Christ to them (John 15:26), and they would “bear witness” of Him (John 15:27). He would “guide” them “into all truth,” “show” them “things to come,” and “show” to them the things He received from Christ (John 16:13-14). Now, in strict accord with these promises, the day of Pentecost has arrived, and these things are beginning to happen.

Divine purposes are always executed in a timely manner. When the time for Noah’s deliverance came, he entered into the ark “the selfsame day” (Gen 7:23). When the “appointed” time for Isaac to be born arrived, the birth occurred “at the set time of which God had spoken to him” (Gen 21:2). When the time for Israel’s deliverance from Egypt arrived, “it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt” (Ex 12:41). To emphasize the truth, it is stated again: “And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the LORD did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies” (Ex 12:51). Jesus came into the world “when the fulness of the time was come” (Gal 4:4). When the very “hour” appointed for the commencement of Christ’s death arrived, the powers of darkness were loosed and went to work (Lk 22:53). When the exact time for Christ’s resurrection arrived, He burst forth from the tomb, taking up His life again on “the third day,” as He was commanded (Luke 24:46; Acts 10:40)

Within the New Covenant, men are brought into the realm in which Divine appointments are made and carried out with meticulous precision (Eph 2:6). Satan cannot stop, alter, or modify a single one of them – something that has been confirmed by the execution of revealed will of God. Men must learn that this is the case, for it is essential for their assurance and confidence. No one has or can speak like God in this regard: “The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand” (Isa 14:24). Again He

testifies, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure : calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass ; I have purposed it, I will also do it ” (Isa 46:10-11).

Nebuchadnezzar was precisely correct when he praised the God of heaven, “I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Dan 4:34-35).

Gamaliel was right when he observed, “But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (Acts 5:39).

Satan and all the powers of darkness blinded and bound all humanity. The whole world remained under his sway (1 John 5:19). Not a single one of Adam’s offspring successfully stood against Him. Yet, he could not stop Jesus from being born! He could not remove Him after He was born, and was a helpless child. He could not stop Him from growing up, increasing in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man. He could not thwart the vicarious death of Christ, in which the sins of the world were taken away and his own head was bruised. He could not stop the resurrection of Christ, through which He was “declared to be the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4). He was powerless to stop Jesus from appearing to His disciples after He rose from the dead, and teaching them of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. He could not stop Him from ascending back into heaven, being given all power in heaven and earth, and being seated at the right hand of God. He could not stop the day of Pentecost from coming. He could not stop Jesus from sending forth the Holy Spirit, or His disciples from being filled with the Spirit, or them speaking with insight and power concerning “the wonderful works of God.” In these things he was impotent.

You may be sure, our adversary will not have power to thwart the completion of what is being started on this marvelous day of Pentecost of our text. The work of God will be completed – even in you personally (Phil 1:6)!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #7

PETER INTERPRETS THE EVENTS OF THE DAY

“ 2:14 But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: 15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day. 16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; 17 And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: 18 And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: 19 And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: 21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. ” (Acts 2:14-21)

INTRODUCTION

God will not leave it to men to assess the events of the day of Pentecost, voicing, as it were, their own opinions about what has taken place. Those who must themselves be saved cannot be trusted to properly interpret the working of the Lord. It makes little difference how seemingly expert they are in Scripture, or diagnosing what they see. A logical mind is, of itself, of no value in this matter.

In confirmation of this, behold what conclusions have already been expressed. These are the observations of “devout men,” cultured under a Divinely given law.

- They were “amazed and marveled” (2:7a).
- They properly observed that Galilean **CONTENTS**
PETER STAND UP WITH THE ELEVEN (2:14a)
THOSE ADDRESSED, AND WHY PETER SPEAKS (2:14b)
IT IS NOT WHAT SOME OF YOU THINK (2:15)
THIS IS WHAT JOEL PROPHESED (2:16)
THE SPIRIT POURED OUT UPON ALL FLESH (2:17a)
SONS AND DAUGHTERS WILL PROPHECY (2:17b)
YOUNG AND OLD WILL HAVE INSIGHT (2:17c)
SERVANTS AND HANDMAIDENS WILL PROPHECY (2:18)
WONDERS IN HEAVEN, AND SIGNS UPON EARTH (2:19)
NATURE BLIGHTED (2:20)
A UNIVERSAL PROMISE (2:21)
CONCLUSION

•

were speaking (2:7b).

- They were confused because these men were speaking in the native languages of the hearers (2:8).
- They pondered how it was possible for them to be hearing of the wonderful works of God in their own language, and from crude Galileans at that (2:11).
- They were all amazed and perplexed about these events (2:12a).
- Some of them, overcome with much perplexity, doubted, and asked what this could possibly mean (2:12b).
- Some mocked, saying that the speakers were filled with new wine.

Now, are these the kind of people whose judgment can be trusted? Remember, they were “devout men.” Yet, with all of their devotion, God had not revealed to them what was really taking place. That explanation must come from someone who has been privy to what the Lord was doing.

Peter will therefore tell the people what is really happening, and how it is the fulfillment of the promises of the prophets.

It has always been God’s manner to interpret what is made known to those who do not have His mind. This is because men cannot discover the mind of the Lord, or arrive at an understanding of His purposes by means of academics or pedagogy. Whether it is the dreams of Pharaoh, the visions of Nebuchadnezzar, or the Scriptures themselves being read by an inquiring official from Ethiopia, truth must be expounded to the unlearned. Sin has so blighted the natural mind that it cannot comprehend any initial exposure to the mind and purposes of the Lord. If nothing else, it will constrain people, like those in our text, to stand aghast at even the intellectually clear proclamation of “the wonderful works of God.”

PREPARING OUR MINDS

Those who represent themselves as speaking for the Lord must have a proper view of things. They cannot be wrong in their emphasis. The foundation of their reasoning cannot be erroneous, or subject to obsolescence.

It is necessary that we prepare our minds for what Peter will say on this occasion. While men are prone to consider what happened to the disciples, and particularly to the apostles, on this occasion, Peter will proclaim what happened to Christ. In fact, he will not make a single reference to the apostles themselves, and will refer to the experience of the disciples as something foretold by the prophets. In other words, this is nothing less than the outworking of the purpose of God, settled before the foundation of the world, and prophesied by holy men who were moved by the Holy Spirit. However, as important as human experience may be, it is not the heart of the Gospel message. The heart of Peter's message will not be what men get, but what God gives. Technically, that may appear to be the same, but the emphasis is significantly different.

What men desire, and what men can receive may seem to be of paramount importance. However, the truth of the matter is that what God desires, and what He gives is ALL important. The only significance that can be found in the will of man occurs when it is brought into harmony with the mind of the Lord. The only desires of men that have lasting legitimacy are those which reach out for what God has promised and provided in Christ Jesus.

Those who represent themselves as speaking for the Lord must have a proper view of things. They cannot be wrong in their emphasis. The foundation of their reasoning cannot be erroneous, or subject to obsolescence. Their perception of fundamental issues cannot be distorted. They must have an acute awareness of the primary Person, the core message, and the appointed objectives of redemption.

It simply is not possible for an "eternal purpose" to focus upon a temporal need, a purely earthly circumstance, or something that is not integral to man's association with God Himself. It may sound comforting to assert that God is interested in every single aspect of your life – but where is the support for such a notion? If it is so, then why did Jesus refuse to come to the aid of that young man who requested that He speak to his brother about their inheritance (Lk 12:13)? Why, when there were "many widows in Israel," did God choose to work in the behalf of a Gentile widow (Lk 4:25)? Even though "many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elijah," why did the Lord heal a Syrian leper (Lk 4:27)? Why did Jesus say to the people while He remained among them, "For ye have the poor always with you" (Matt 26:11). If Jesus came to

resolve human difficulty, why did He not deliver the poor of His own people from poverty while He was among them? Why, not two months after Jesus concluded His ministry, was there a man lame from his mother's womb still being placed at one of the Temple gates (Acts 3:2)? He was over forty years old (Acts 4:22). Had they failed to place him at the gate when Jesus was daily teaching in the Temple (Matt 26:55). If Jesus' came to heal the sick, why was this man still lame?

Although there should be no necessity to say so, this by no means diminishes the compassion of the Lord, as confirmed in the countless people He healed while among us. However, it also confirms that this was not the focus of His ministry.

As grievous as man's physical and interpersonal relations are, they are not the driving cause behind the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ. In the text before us, Peter will not give any attention to the earthly conditions of men. He will, not hold Jesus up as the answer to human problems as men perceive them. He will not present Jesus as the answer to deviate behavior, domestic difficulty, or various forms of social disorder. He will not say that Jesus is the way to fulfill your dreams, reach your goals, stabilize your finances, and secure success. These are things that men proclaim, but there is a glaring and consistent absence of them in apostolic doctrine.

If men have no driving compulsion to have their sins remitted, be reconciled to God, be at peace with God, and obtain an eternal inheritance, the only minister who can help them is Moses. They must be led to the point where they see a need for Jesus as defined in the Gospel – and that is something that the Law does well (Rom 3:19-20; Gal 3:24-25). If “this present evil world” forms the boundary of human thought, the Jesus of the Gospel will make no sense to men.

Because of its elemental nature, in a sense, this is, what might be called, “Theology 101.” Notwithstanding, because of the prevailing thrust of American Christianity, it is necessary to buttress both our faith and our conscience on this matter.

Sin not only defiled humanity itself, but the entire realm that was made for its habitation. It has been revealed that death, or mortality, has been imposed upon the entire creation. This is referred to as “the bondage of corruption.” Thus it is written, “For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Rom 8:20-21). This is condition from which creation cannot extricate itself. Contrary to the wicked theory of evolution, things are actually devolving, not evolving. They are decaying, dying, and passing away. This also applies to everything that is limited to the created realm. That is, the “fashion of this world” is also passing away (1 Cor 7:31).

In addition to this, the entire human race – the offspring of Adam – is also passing away, and by nature is totally unacceptable. This circumstance requires two things that can only be accomplished by Deity. First, man must be fundamentally changed – born again. Secondly, he must be delivered from the domain of death, or the realm of mortality. If either of these things does not occur, all hope vanishes like smoke. The heavens and the earth, and everything in them, will ultimately pass away (Matt 24:35; 1 John 2:17). As for mankind, “it is appointed unto man once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27).

Salvation is calculated to take men out of the world, effectively separating them from that order. Therefore it is written that God visits humanity “to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). It is also written that Jesus died to “deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4). In view of this circumstance, Jesus told His disciples, “I have chosen you out of the world” (John 15:19). From an even higher vantage point, the Father gave Jesus people “out of the world” (John 127:6) in order that He might “bring them to glory” (Heb 2:10). This is because the inheritance to, or for, which they were “begotten” (1 Pet 1:3-4) is an “eternal” one (Heb 9:15). As such, it is not possible that it can be realized by men “in the flesh,” or “in the world.”

This is precisely why all believers are admonished, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). This is not a mere prohibition, or a legal matter. It is something that makes perfect sense to faith. If we have been delivered from the world, and no longer belong to it, and if our inheritance is eternal and apart from it, what possible reason can be given for lusting after what is of the world? Of necessity, this includes everything pertaining to temporary life – everything ! Such things cannot become our focus without forfeiting what Jesus really came to do. Only a person who is in the grip of delusion can choose life in this world as a priority.

The fuller benefits of being in Christ will be revealed after the earth passes away. They will be realized after men have met their appointment with death. They will be received after the day of judgment, the dismissal of Satan and his hosts, and the consignment of the damned to the lake of fire. At that time the purpose of salvation will be fully comprehended as well as experienced.

PRELIMINARY CONCLUSION

God will be declared to be doing precisely what He promised to do. If this declaration contradicts what men preach or teach, then their teaching and preaching must be immediately forsaken. In such a case, there is not the slightest chance that it is true.

I have said these things because the second chapter of Acts deals with the beginning of “the day of salvation.” Here is where the direction of Kingdom labors will be established. Here is where the nature of the Gospel message will be confirmed. Here is where the priority, as well as the necessity, of the Lord Jesus will be affirmed. Peter will preach a message that will clarify what has happened. He will do so by anchoring the minds of the people to the word of the Lord – particularly as expressed in the prophets. God will be declared to be doing precisely what He promised to do. If this declaration contradicts what men preach or teach, then their teaching and preaching must be immediately forsaken. In such a case, there is not the slightest chance that it is true. What is here said of New Covenant life will not be contradicted later by inspired men, for God is not capable of such contradiction. If what men say is required within the church conflicts with what Peter here declares to be what God promised, then men are wrong, and we are to pay no heed to what they say.

HARMONIZING THE BIBLE

Some, taking upon themselves to explain how God thinks, have introduced a certain approach to Scripture that neatly allows for them to entertain erroneous views. They call it “harmonizing the Scripture.” By this they mean that truth is assembled something like a puzzle, which infers that it is basically disjointed as presented in the written word. In this view, it is very important to present “balance” in the teaching, and much is made of this mythical approach. While this method seems to be honest and quite safe, that is not at all the case. The truth of the matter is that this view allows for certain texts of Scripture to remain basically offensive to the individual. By pointing to another text, and seemingly acknowledging the truth of it, the offence of the other text is neutralized, and everyone remains happy. For example, people like this cannot put statements together like “a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28) and “by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:24). Thus, when they read, “justified by faith” (Rom 5:1), they affirm that expression must be tied together with James 2:24 to get at its true meaning. Therefore, the truth is actually constructed by men piecing together a collage of carefully selected texts that satisfy the theology they have already accepted.

I will tell you up front that Peter’s words will not fit handily into any man-made theology. They will appear to deceived people as though they are not complete enough, not thorough enough. Their scope will seem too small, and their breadth too narrow. However, after all is said and done, the Holy Spirit will take the words of Peter and convince those who murdered Jesus that they have done the wrong thing, and that they must make amends. After all philosophizing is done, that circumstance confirms that God was, in fact, speaking through Peter. We do well to give heed to his words.

PETER STANDS UP WITH THE ELEVEN

“ 2:14a But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them . . .”

Until this time all of the disciples have been speaking, declaring “the wonderful works of God” in the native languages of “devout men out of every nation under heaven.” Now the attention shifts to Peter and the eleven – the

The significance of Peter is confirmed by the frequency of the references to him. The Gospels refer to him one hundred and six times. There are 54 references to Peter in the book of Acts, and twelve in the epistles.

twelve apostles. The church is built upon the foundation that they will lay, in strict accord with the

declarations of the prophets of old. As it is written, “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets , Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:20). Again Paul referred to this arrangement: “Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:5). In his epistle to scattered Jewish believers, Peter also refers to this circumstance. “That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (2 Pet 3:2). Jude, the half brother of our Lord, also referred to the priority of the words of the apostles. “But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:17).

“The apostles” (the twelve) are prominent in the book of Acts, being mentioned no less than twenty-eight times (1:2; 2:37,42,43; 4:33,35,36,37; 5:2, 12,18,34,40; 6:6; 8:1,14, 18; 9:27; 11:1; 14:4,14; 15:2,4,6,22,23,33; 16:4). They were not always considered by themselves, but were often linked with others. “The apostles and brethren that were in Judaea” (11:1), “the apostles and elders” (15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4).

However, when it came to rank, the apostles were placed “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). Their message and insight was more full, adapting them to initiate the actual building of the body of Christ, who worked uniquely with them. This is why they were chosen to accompany Jesus throughout His entire earthly ministry – to “be with Him,” and to be sent forth “to preach” (Mk 3:14).

Therefore, now that the people have gathered together, the apostles step forward to fulfill their ministry.

PETER

“But Peter . . .” Other versions read, “Then Peter,” NIV “And afterwards Simon Cephas,” MRD and “and Peter,” YLT “Peter however.” WEYMOUTH

Peter was the leading man among the apostles. In all of the listings of these men, Peter is first (Matt 10:1-4; Mk 3:15-19; Lk 6:13-16; Acts 1:13-14). When the inner circle of three are mentioned, Peter is always first (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37; 9:2; Mk 14:33; Lk 8:51; 9:28). When Jesus delivered the Olivet discourse to four of His disciples, Peter was the first one listed (Mk 13:3). When He rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to Peter first, then to “the twelve” (1 Cor 15:5). Following his conversion and call to the apostleship, Paul went up to Jerusalem “to see Peter,” but saw none of the other apostles (Gal 1:18-19). Paul said the “Gospel of the circumcision” was given “unto Peter,” as the chief among the twelve (Gal 2:7-8).

The significance of Peter is confirmed by the frequency of the references to him. The Gospels refer to him one hundred and six times. There are 54 references to Peter in the book of Acts, and twelve in the epistles.

Now Peter rises in his appointed role, taking the lead to which He had been appointed, and for which he had been chosen.

STANDING UP WITH THE ELEVEN

“ . . . standing up with the eleven . . .” Other versions read, “taking his stand with the eleven,” NASB “stood up with the Eleven,” NIV “standing with the eleven ,” NRSV “getting up, with the eleven,” BBE “rose up, with the eleven legates ,” MRD “stepped forward with the eleven,” NLT “standing forth with the eleven,” RWB “having stood up with the eleven,” YLT “ together with the Eleven,” WEYMOUTH and “with the eleven standing by Him .” PHILLIPS

There are three ways in which this text is viewed.

- That Peter rose up with the eleven who were already standing and speaking.
- That all twelve stood up at this time, with Peter stepping forward as the spokesman.
- That Peter stood up with the eleven standing up with him.

The idea here is that Peter stood up as one who had a grasp of the situation, and “the eleven” joined him in a show of unity and mutual understanding. The others probably joined in the speaking in an orderly manner, yet the Spirit brings Peter to the forefront of the occasion. He had been prepared for this moment, and seized the opportunity with zeal and insight.

Up to this point, as Peter will confirm, all of the disciples had been speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance. Now, however, the emphasis shifts to the twelve, and they move into the spiritual limelight. Just as within the whole church, they are “first” among the redeemed, not isolated from them (1 Cor 12:28). Those who teach that only the twelve were gathered together, and only the twelve were filled with the Spirit, and only the twelve spoke in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance, are in sharp conflict with the Spirit’s representation of the body of Christ. Such an approach violates the prophecy that Peter said was being fulfilled in the presence of his listeners.

Notice that Luke states Peter stood up “with the eleven,” thereby confirming that Matthias was, indeed, “numbered with the eleven apostles,” filling the vacated bishopric of Judas (1:26). Those, therefore, who say that Peter took it upon himself to replace Judas, and that Matthias was really not the twelfth apostle, could not possibly be more wrong – and they are foolish besides. “The twelve” are also mentioned in the sixth chapter as being in charge of the church, gathering them together to appoint the first deacons (6:2).

LIFTED UP HIS VOICE

“ . . . lifted up his voice . . . ” Other versions read, “ raised his voice,” NKJV “said in a loud voice ,” BBE “ elevated his voice,” MRD “and shouted ,” NLT and “spoke loudly .” IE

If the Holy Spirit makes a point of this, then we ought to give due heed to what is said. Peter spoke to be heard, for there is no point to speaking if one cannot be heard. God gave the following instructions to the Levites, who were to read all the curses of the Law to the people: “And the Levites shall speak, and say unto all the men of Israel with a loud voice ” (Deut 27:14). When Solomon blessed all of the people at the dedication of the Temple, he did so with a “loud voice”: “And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice , saying” (1 Kgs 8:55). God’s praise was also to be done with “a loud voice ” (2 Chron 20:19; Neh 12:42; Psa 98:4).

The prophets frequently spoke of the voice being lifted up, thereby accenting the importance of what was being said.

- “Lift up thy voice , O daughter of Gallim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth” (Isa 10:30).
- “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid ; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” (Isa 40:9).

This is a marvelous spiritual aptitude that those who speak for Christ must culture. They are to have a message from God that is addressed to the people. That requires an acute awareness of both the Lord and the audience – who is being represented, and to whom the word is being delivered.

“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet , and show my people their transgression, and

the house of Jacob their sins” (Isa 58:1).

- “Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up thy voice in Bashan, and cry from the passages: for all thy lovers are destroyed” (Jer 22:20).

It is not that this is a heartless law, or an empty routine that men are to adopt. It is rather a way of loving the Lord with all of our “strength” (Mk 12:30), and using our capacities to their fullest when they are employed in the work of the Lord.

Thus Peter’s voice rises to its peak, overshadowing the speaking going on among the multitude, and the reporting of the wonderful works of God by the other disciples. I gather that, at this point, the other speaking ceased as the attention of the people was drawn to an inspired explanation of the startling events they were witnessing.

AND SAID UNTO THEM

“ . . . and said unto them . . .” Other versions read, “declared to them,” NASB “addressed the crowd,” NIV “addressed them,” NRSV “spoke forth unto them,” ASV and “proclaimed to them.” NAB

Peter did not “speak into the air” (1 Cor 14:9), but clearly and powerfully addressed the inquiring crowd. His words were not only inspired as to their content, they were focused as to their objective. This is a marvelous spiritual aptitude that those who speak for Christ must cultivate. They are to have a message from God that is addressed to the people. That requires an acute awareness of both the Lord and the audience – who is being represented, and to whom the word is being delivered. This should bring empty academic lectures to a grinding halt within the church. Impressive displays of knowledge have no real value if the word is not from God and particularly for the people. This is what Solomon would call a word that is “fitly spoken,” or “spoken in right circumstances” NASB (Prov 25:11). Again, he referred to “a word spoken in due season” (Prov 15:23), and lips that give “a right answer” (Prov 24:26). The words Peter will speak will be, as Solomon stated, “acceptable words” (Eccl 12:10).

THOSE ADDRESSED, AND WHY PETER SPEAKS

“ 14b . . . Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words.”

Peter aims his words like an archer aims his arrow. This is characteristic of a person speaking through the Spirit.

MEN OF JUDEA AND ALL DWELLING IN JERUSALEM

“ . . . Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “ Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem,” NASB “ Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem,” NIV “Men of Judaea, and all ye inhabitants of Jerusalem,” DARBY “ Men, Jews, and all ye who reside in Jerusalem,” MRD “ fellow Jews and residents of Jerusalem,” NLT “Ye men of Jewry , and all ye that dwell in Jerusalem,” PNT “ visitors and residents of Jerusalem alike,” LIVING and “ My Jewish brothers and all of you who are staying in Jerusalem .” IE

The word “Judaea” comes from the Greek word **Vioudai/oi** (je-hu-dah-ios), which means “belonging to the Jewish race, Jewish as respects race, before exile, citizens of the kingdom of Judah, after exile, all Israelites, the Jews, the Jewish race,” THAYER “Jew in respect to race or religion, as opposed to non-Jew,” FRIBERG “Jewish,” UBS “the ethnic name of a person who belongs to the Jewish nation,” LOUW-NIDA Other verses containing this word translate it “Jews” (Acts 2:9; 14:5; 21:21; Rom 1:16; Gal 2:13).

Here Peter uses the word to accent the superiority of their Jewish nation over the foreign nations in which they were residing. It is as though he was saying, “Although you are residing in many different nations, you are, in reality, primarily members of the Jewish race.” This same kind of reasoning is found in the terms “Spanish-American, “

“African-American,” etc.

Peter, then, speaks to all of the Jews, whether naturally born or proselytes – those who were from other countries, and those who made their home in Jerusalem and the surrounding area.

BE THIS KNOWN UNTO YOU

“ . . . be this known unto you . . . ” Other versions read, “Let this be known to you,” NKJV “let me explain this to you,” NIV “ take note of this,” BBE “Listen carefully, all of you,” NLT “ Listen , all of you,” LIVING “Listen to me. I will tell you something you need to know ,” IE “be in no uncertainty about this matter,” WEYMOUTH “You must understand something,” ISV “ have no doubt about this matter,” MONTGOMERY “let this be [explained] to you so that you will know and understand ,” AMPLIFIED and “ listen carefully to what I say.” PHILLIPS

This is not an occasion for entertainment, or presenting some curious and intriguing insights. This was a time of revelation, when needful things would be made known. The knowledge that will be disseminated will have to do with “the wonderful works of God” as wrought out in and through Jesus Christ. Peter will not expound the Law. There were men present who could do that. He will not deliver an oration about how men ought to live under the Roman yoke, or exhort the people to free themselves from it. He will not rehearse something that was already known among the people. This will be a time of fresh and invigorating knowledge – knowledge that is intended to be embraced by the listeners.

HEARKEN TO MY WORDS

“ . . . and hearken to my words.” Other versions read, “ heed my words,” NKJV “ give heed to my words,” NASB “ listen carefully to what I say,” NIV “ give ear to my words,” RSV “with your ears receive my words ,” DOUAY “listen to my words,” NAB “ Make no mistake about this,” NLT “hearken to my sayings ,” YLT “Listen carefully,” IE “ pay attention to what I say,” WEYMOUTH “ pay close attention to my words,” WILLIAMS “ listen closely to what I have to say,” AMPLIFIED and “ while I explain to you what has happened.” PHILLIPS

Here Peter calls upon the people to fasten their attention on what he is saying with a mind not to miss anything he says. They were to marshal all of their powers of concentration, and gather together all of their attention. Let no distraction take hold of them. Let them not be drawn aside to other sights and sounds. Gird up the loins of your mind! Shut out inferior and troubling thoughts! Words will now be said that must be comprehended, and that circumstance required the undivided attention of the people.

We have lived to see a new kind generation rise – at least new in this part of the world. Actually, it is a generation that can be traced back to heathen cultures. This kind of generation is referred to as “hedonistic.” Hedonism is the doctrine that “pleasure or happiness is the sole and chief good in life.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER This doctrine was taught by the Epicureans and Cyrenaics. Paul encountered some of these people in Athens (Acts 17:18).

This approach to life was also adopted by the Nicolaites, who are mentioned twice in the letters to the seven churches in Asia. To the angel of the church at Ephesus John was told to write, “But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate ” (Rev 2:6). To the church at Pergamos he wrote, “So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes,

which thing I hate ” (Rev 2:15). While much of the details of their teachings is not known, its general thrust is acknowledged to allow for extensive promiscuity, covetousness and fleshly gratification. IRENAEUS, Adv. Haeres. 1,26 This, of course, is precisely the approach to life taken by the Epicureans: self is all important, and the gratification of the flesh is primary.

EPICUREAN PHILOSOPHY

There is no constraint, no obligation to rectitude; there is no moral compulsion; there is no domain for conscience; there can only be a more or less judicious and provident adaptation of actions to the judgments or dispositions of men, and to the supposed satisfaction of the individual. Morality without religion is a pretense and a delusion. A tranquil and pleasurable existence becomes the *summum bonum* of the sage; the gratification of every passion as it arises the sole duty of an eager and undisciplined nature. Every restraint is removed except such as may be voluntarily imposed; and though cool, impassive, and indolent dispositions may maintain an external propriety of demeanor when exposed to no temptation, there can be no guarantee for rectitude of conduct, and the license of all passions will be gratified by the unclean beasts who wallow in the Epicurean style. McCLINTOK and STRONG

This kind of approach to life has now crept more fully into the church, even though Jesus twice affirmed His hatred of it. This is the mother of all church division – someone is seeking their own desire. It is at the root of the present controversy over music in the church. It is the origin of watered down preaching, adopting worldly philosophies, and striving to appeal to the natural inclinations of the people.

What Does This Have to Do with the Text?

While this may very well appear to be a pointless diversion, it does have much to do with our text. When Peter shouts out, “be this known unto you, and hearken to my words,” he is calling them to consider something greater than themselves. This is a summons to consider something that is wholly separate from fleshly interests, the care of the body, and earthly appetites. He will not speak of the gratification of personal desires – although what He says, if duly heeded, will produce a deep satisfaction. This will not be a “how-to” seminar, or a lecture on how to achieve success in life, and find real satisfaction in the flesh, obtaining all manner of worldly objectives. That kind of approach belongs to the Epicureans and the Nicolaitanes.

Admittedly, this is in sharp conflict with the modern approach to Christianity with its youth movements, senior citizen retreats, and the likes. It is not that such things are of themselves wrong. They are not in concert with the manner of Divine appeals and emphases. This will become exceedingly apparent.

IT IS NOT WHAT SOME OF YOU THINK

“ 15 For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.”

Peter does not allow for the remotest possibility that what they said had one spec of truth in it. He gives them no right to utter such an absurdity – free speech or not. Whatever one may think about freedom and liberty, men are never free enough to speak a lie, or cast reproach upon the truth.

Being led by the Spirit, Peter is not content for the events of the day to be misunderstood. An “imagination” concerning what is occurring has been voiced, and now, being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter will cast it down.

THESE ARE NOT DRUNKEN AS YE SUPPOSE

“For these are not drunken, as ye suppose . . .” Other versions read, “For these men are not overcome with wine, as it seems to you ,” BBE “for these are not full of wine, as *ye* suppose,”

DARBY “For these are not intoxicated, as ye suppose ,” MRD “Some of you are saying these people are drunk. It isn't true !” NLT “These men are not drunk as you think ,” IE “This is not intoxication as you suppose,” WEYMOUTH and “For these men are not drunk, as you imagine .”
AMPLIFIED

Peter does not descend into the arena of speculation or opinion. He does not say, “There is another way of looking at these things,” or “That is just your opinion.” Some among them had declared, “These men are full of new wine” (2:13). Peter does not allow for the remotest possibility that what they said had one spec of truth in it. He gives them no right to utter such an absurdity – free speech or not. Whatever one may think about freedom and liberty, men are never free enough to speak a lie, or cast reproach upon the truth. Salvation is not declared in an arena of free thought and unfettered opinion.

When men begin to allow for differing views of the truth, they move further away from it. This has become such a common practice that professing Christians often think nothing of men maintaining views of Scripture that are actually in conflict with one another. They imagine that men are free to do this, and that God thinks nothing of it. All of this is embraced in spite of the fact that the Spirit has said, “That ye may with ONE MIND and ONE MOUTH glory God” (Rom 15:6), “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment ” (1 Cor 1:10), “be of one mind ,” (2 Cor 13:11), “with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27), “be of one accord , be of one mind ” (Phil 2:2), “be ye all of one mind ” (1 Pet 3:8), and “arm yourselves likewise with the same mind” (1 Pet 4:11).

Some sophist will say, “What about Romans 14?” That text appears to justify the maintenance of differing views about spiritual matters (Rom 14:1-6). However, the whole point of that text is NOT the continuance of varying views, but refusing to condemn those who see such things differently (14:10-13). The variant views are to be maintained in a conscientious effort to please the Lord (14:7-9). Further, the postulate is that as each person lives unto the Lord, their views will be brought into synch with the truth itself (14:17-19). This is what Paul meant in his statement to the Philippians: “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Phil 3:15). The point is that different views may, indeed, be entertained. However that condition must not continue, and there is nothing about salvatration that allows for their continuance.

Thus, from the very outset, Peter will throw down erroneous thoughts, for they really have no place with the truth of God. Before he explains what HAS happened, he will clearly define what has NOT happened.

IT IS BUT THE THIRD HOUR OF THE DAY

“ . . . seeing it is but the third hour of the day.” Other versions read, “It is only the third hour of the day,” NKJV “It’s only nine in the morning ,” NIV “it is only nine o’clock in the morning,” NRSV “t’s much too early for that. People don't get drunk by nine o'clock in the morning,” NLT “for it is [only] the third hour (about 9:00 a.m.) of the day,” AMPLIFIED and “ is after all only nine o'clock in the morning of this great feast day.” PHILLIPS

The charge that had been leveled at the speakers was foolish, and wholly without any basis at all. That, of course, is how the flesh is, leaping to ignorant conclusions so that it justifies ignoring what is being said. But Peter will not let the speakers go so easily. He will point out the absurdity of what they have said. He does not assume their sincerity, for sincerity does not move one to leap to foolish conclusions. Sincerity moves one to consideration, examination, and the pursuit of the truth. Where these traits are not found, sincerity is not present – at least, not in the matter at hand. That is, they may very well have been sincere about keeping the Passover and Pentecost, but they were not

sincere in their response to the miracle that had confronted them.

The “third hour of the day” was nine o’clock in the morning. This gives us some idea about when the events of the day started. Ponder what had already taken place.

- They were all together with one accord in one place (2:1).
- A sound came from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and filled all the house where they were sitting (2:2).
- There appeared cloven tongues like fire, sitting upon each of the disciples (2:3).
- They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance (2:4).
- What was happening was “noised abroad” (2:6a).
- A multitude came together and were confounded because they heard the disciples speaking in their native tongues (2:6b).
- The multitude were amazed, and began speaking to one another, observing that they were hearing of “the wonderful works of God” (2:7).
- The multitude were all amazed, and wondered what all of this could mean (2:12).
- Some mocked, saying that the disciples were “full of new wine” (2:13).

I cannot conceive of such remarkable things happening within a few minutes. However one chooses to look at this, it appears clear that the events of the day commenced rather early – quite unlike gatherings during our time. One senses a feeling of expectancy.

THIS IS WHAT JOEL PROPHESED

“ 16 But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel.”

Peter immediately takes them to the Scriptures – their Scriptures. He will explain what was happening by showing God had foretold through the prophets what the people were now witnessing. That is how he will account for legitimate spiritual experience.

We will now see that valid spiritual happenings will correlate with Scripture. This is because “the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Of old time, God told His people to test what was put before them by Scripture. “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them ” (Isa 8:19-20).

There are self-proclaimed prophets in our day who declare new things are happening. These include such things as being “slain in the Spirit,” falling out under the power,” “laughing in the Spirit,” and people expressing animal-like sounds. However, they are not speaking according to God’s word. No prophet foretold such occurrences, and the church is built upon the foundation of “the apostles and prophets ” (Eph 2:20) – not contemporary prophets, but those who “prophesied of the grace that should come unto you” (1 Pet 1:10). These were the prophets who “testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11).

Now, let us behold how Peter speaks, and how he explains the events of the day.

THIS IS THAT

“But this is that . . .” Other versions read, “But this is what,” NKJV “No, this is what,” NIV “On

the contrary, this is what,” CSB “What you see this morning was predicted centuries ago ,” LIVING “This is the thing,” IE “But [instead] this is [the beginning of] what,” AMPLIFIED and “No, this something which was predicted .” PHILLIPS

Peter immediately takes them to the Scriptures – their Scriptures. He will explain what was happening by showing God had foretold through the prophets what the people were now witnessing. That is how he will account for legitimate spiritual experience.

This is not the manner in which explanations are being provided today. For example, those who are telling us that God is dramatically working through a new praise movement have not shown us any prophecy of such a thing. Those who are saying that a great revival will break out among the youth have not correlated it with Scripture. The people who are testifying of a latter day outbreak of healing are not buttressing their words with the prophets.

I understand that this may appear too critical and too demanding. However, in this text we are being exposed to a very real Divine beginning, and therefore it sets the stage for proper thought and proclamation as well. We must discipline our minds to remember that Peter is speaking just as the others had been speaking – as one “filled with the Holy Spirit”

SPOKEN BY THE PROPHET JOEL

“ . . . which was spoken by the prophet Joel.” Other versions read, “spoken of through the prophet Joel,” NASB “uttered through the prophet Joel,” ESV “this is what the prophet was saying,” NJB “predicted long ago by the prophet Joel,” NLT and “said through the prophet Joel.” IE

So far as the record is concerned, Jesus had not made a point of Joel’s prophecy to the disciples. Now, however, the Holy Spirit will make this association. He will “guide them into all truth” (John 16:13) – and God’s WORD “is truth” (John 17:17).

Peter does not speak as a robot, or as one who is in a trance and knows not what he is saying. Peter knows who he is addressing – Jews from afar, and those who were dwelling in Jerusalem as well. He speaks as one who has heard the charges the listeners have made, being fully aware of their words. He speaks as one who is fully aware of the time – “the third hour of the day.” He has all of his powers of reason, knowing that drunkenness does not happen at that time of the day.

Now, in a display of spiritual aptitude, that can only be given by the Holy Spirit, he correlates what is happening with something that Joel said at least 600 years before, and possibly nearly 900 years prior to this particular day of Pentecost. What Peter now says are words “taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” NASB (1 Cor 2:13). These words are suitable containers for carrying the news of salvation. They are words confirming that God always speaks and acts with His purpose in mind, and in accord with the holy prophets, to whom He revealed these things.

THE SPIRIT POURED OUT UPON ALL FLESH

“ 17a And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh . . . ”

Joel appears to be one of the earlier prophets, although the precise time of his labors are uncertain. There are a number of allusions to his prophecies by other prophets.

- “Roar from Zion” (Amos 1:2 compared to Joel 3:16).
- “Mountains drop sweet wine” (Amos 9:13 compared to Joel 3:18).

- The Lord “repenting” of evil (Amos 7:3 compared to Joel 2:13).
- Devouring the deep and eating up part (Amos 7:4 compared with Joel 1:20).
- Heavenly bodies darkened (Isaiah 13:10 compared with Joel 2:10,31).
- Shaking heaven and earth (Isaiah 13:13 compared with Joel 3:15,16).
- Faces burning with shame and reproach (Isaiah 13:8 compared with Joel 2:6).
- Casting lots for the people (Obadiah 1:11 compared with Joel 3:3).
- Violence against Jacob (Obadiah 1:10 compared to Joel 3:19).
- The nearness of the chastening day of God (Obadiah 1:15 compared with Joel 1:15).
- Signs, wonders, and deliverance (Zechariah 12:2,9; 14:1, 5-11 compared with Joel 2:30-32)

If Joel prophesied before Isaiah, that would put him prior to 760 B.C. Amos, who appears to allude to Joel’s prophesy, lived and prophesied around 760 B.C. Zechariah prophesied around 750 B.C. Obadiah prophesied around 550 B.C. Based upon these generalities, the particular prophecy to which Peter refers was given somewhere between 800 and 600 years prior to this day of Pentecost.

For modern religious men, contemporary circumstances and needs are the emphasis of the hour. Men cry out for relevancy, and for things that will assist them in living happy and successful lives. However, there is a total absence of this sort of thing in our text. No one would have imagined that Jerusalem needed what is now going to

THE PROPHECY OF JOEL

JOEL 2:28-32

“ 28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: 29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. 30 And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come. 32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.”

be announced. The people drawn to behold what was taking place saw nothing pertinent in it – it only produced consternation in them. However, this was something that God was doing – something of which He had spoken centuries earlier. Nothing can possibly be more relevant in a world created by God than what He Himself is doing.

Since the people could not possibly have made a correlation between what they were seeing and what the prophets declared, Peter will show it to them. He will show them that their own Scriptures had spoken of this day, yet they knew it not.

IT SHALL COME TO PASS

“And it shall come to pass . . .” Other versions read, “and it shall be,” NASB “it will be,” NRSV “it will come about,” BBE and “It will occur.” WILLIAMS

There is a certitude in the Word of God that is refreshing to those who are living by faith and being saved by hope. Faith cannot survive on a message or possibilities or probabilities. Hope will wither and die if all it has is the thought of something that might be. It is not wrong to consider the

possibilities, but it must only be done after the consideration of certainties.

The prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) used this phrase – “it shall come to pass” – seventy-eight times. The words affirm an “eternal purpose” that cannot possibly be negated or altered. God affirms, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa 46:10) Again He shouts to the world, “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa 46:11). And again He says, “I work, and who will reverse it?” NKJV (Isa 43:13). David affirmed, “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psa 33:11). Again David wrote, “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6).

If these statements were not absolute truth, Peter could never have said “This is that which was prophesied by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass!” Satan could not stop it. His principalities and powers could not deter it. The chief priests and rulers of the Jews could not cause it to be delayed. Pilate and Herod were powerless to hinder it in any way. The inauguration of the New Covenant took place on the appointed day, and at the appointed hour, and without any modification from the original intention, announced centuries before by Joel.

Now Peter begins his explanation of the events.

IN THE LAST DAYS

“ . . . in the last days saith God . . . ” Other versions read, “in the last days says God,” NASB “in the last days . . . God declares,” NRSV and “in the last days – the Lord declares .” NJB

Here Peter is caught up in the spirit of the prophets, giving the sense of the text. Joel does not use the expression “last days,” but relates his prophecy to certain workings of the Lord with Israel. He uses the phrase, “And it shall come to pass afterward” (Joel 2:28). Peter here employs the words of Isaiah, who said, “And it shall come to pass in the last days . . . ” (Isa 2:2). Micah used the same phrase, denoting, as did Isaiah, the times of the Messiah (Micah 4:1). This is the last major division of time.

There is a sense in which the phrase “last days” pertains to the closing period of “the day of salvation.” Thus Paul, warning of a coming apostasy, writes around thirty years after Pentecost, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Tim 3:1). Peter does the same thing: “Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts” (2 Pet 3:3).

Yet, in our text, the phrase is used to describe the entire “day of salvation,” or period of the New Covenant – particularly of the initiation of that era. The book of Hebrews also uses the expression in this way. “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:1-2).

From the perspective of our text, the closing period of time is viewed as the most productive one enlightened of all eras. In other words, the latter period of this world will be the time of the greatest revelation and opportunity. As when the water was turned into wine, God has “kept the good” for the last segment of human history (John 2:10). Such marvelous realities as justification (Rom 4:25; 5:18), eternal life (John 17:2-3), fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and the “communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:10) are all being realized in “the last days.”

This means that, in the fullest sense of the word, “the last days” are not reserved for the “antichrist” (1 John 2:18), the “man of sin” (2 Thess 2:3), “the beast” (Rev 13:11-18; 19:19), and “the false prophet” (Rev 16:13; 19:20). These blotches on human history will have their day during

the “latter times” (1 Tim 4:1), but they will not close out “the last days.” The “last days” will be brought to an end when the Lord appears in all of His glory. At that time, the seeming success of the wicked one will be brought to a grinding halt. As it is written, “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming ” (2 Thess 2:8).

Until the Lord returns in all of His glory, “the day of salvation” and “the time accepted” is in place (2 Cor 6:2), and “whosoever will” may “take of the water of life freely” (Rev 22:17). What we have in this text is the beginning of this period of time.

I WILL POUR OUT OF MY SPIRIT

“ . . . I will pour out of My Spirit . . . ” Other versions read, “I will pour forth of My Spirit,” NASB “I will send out My Spirit,” BBE and “I will pour out a portion of My Spirit .” NAB

As I have pointed out previously, this is according to several prophecies, given long before this Pentecost.

- “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3).

It is important that we comprehend the prophecy Peter affirms is being fulfilled. It is not a prophesy about twelve men, or even one hundred and twenty disciples. What we have here is the beginning of something that involves all humanity.

- “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).
- “And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My Spirit ” (Joel 2:29).
- “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplications : and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn” (Zec 12:10).

The words “pour out” speak of copiousness, coming from a word that means “bestow or distribute largely, an abundant bestowal,” THAYER and “to give in abundance, cause to fully experience, generously provide.” FRIBERG This speaks of a lavish shedding forth of the Holy Spirit. It is not a moving of the Spirit “at times,” like Samson experienced (Judges 13:25).

This is what Jesus referred to as being “baptized with the Spirit” (Acts 1:5). It was being “endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). It was the experience to which Jesus referred when He said, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you” NKJV (Acts 1:8). It was “the promise of the Father,” for which the disciples had been waiting (Acts 1:4).

Notice that this is a baptism that was accomplished by pouring. Some find it difficult to reconcile the meaning of baptize (immerse or plunge into), with pouring. However, when you consider a lavish and abundant pouring, it is at once perceived that the recipients of this pouring were, indeed, immersed in the Spirit by this heavenly deluge.

The determining factor in this pouring forth of the Spirit was not the people receiving the Spirit, but the One administering the pouring forth. The basis for this marvelous act was death of Christ, through which sin was taken away and the devil destroyed (Heb 9:26; 2:14), and the resurrection of Christ through which He was “declared to be the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4).

UPON ALL FLESH

“ . . . upon all flesh . . . ” Other versions read, “upon all mankind ,” NASB “on all people,” NIV “on all humanity ,” CSB and “on everyone .” GWN

It is important that we comprehend the prophecy Peter affirms is being fulfilled. It is not a prophecy about twelve men, or even one hundred and twenty disciples. What we have here is the beginning of something that involves all humanity. In fact, in speaking of all believers, Paul refers to the Spirit in the same manner. “. . . according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6). It cannot be mere coincidence that the language is so similar.

I know of no prophecies of salvation, a Savior, the New Covenant, or anything pertaining to them that is regional, provincial, or only for a group of people with fleshly distinctions. No number of grammar studies, verb tenses, word antecedents, and the likes, can neutralize what Peter is saying. His inspired interpretation of the events is based upon Joel’s prophecy – a prophecy that involves “all flesh,” “all mankind,” NASB , “all humanity,” CSB and “everyone.” GWN

I hardly see how Peter could have made the matter any clearer – and yet he does elaborate, confirming that what Joel prophesied was, in fact, happening at that time.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS WILL PROPHECY

“ 17b . . . and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy . . . ”

Joel speaks with precision, leaving no doubt about what would take place “in the last days.” Also, in referring to Joel’s prophecy, Peter will leave no doubt about what was actually happening before the eyes and ears of the people. What Joel had foretold was taking place in Jerusalem, in the house where the disciples were gathered on the day of Pentecost. If this is not true, then Peter would be speaking words into the air, and adding further confusion to the moment.

SONS AND DAUGHTERS

“ . . . and your sons and your daughters . . . ” Every version reads the same. No translator had any doubt about how the text reads. In this case, “all flesh,” or “everyone,” does not mean every single person, but representatives from every class. The pouring forth of the Spirit as prophesied by Joel, would be indiscriminating as regards gender: “sons and daughters.” This blessing would not be realized only by the sons, to the exclusion of the daughters. Is it possible for Joel to say it with any more clarity?

No amount of reasoning can sanctify such a view or justify its propagation. After all of the explanations have been given, we must still confront the “sons” and “daughters” of our text.

Some have great difficulty with this text, even though it is something revealed to Joel, and to Peter as well. Such people have no trouble understanding that when God sends the rain “on the just and on the unjust,” both classes receive the rain and enjoy the benefits of it (Matt 5:45). Yet, when the Lord reveals that one of the marks of “the last days” (not “day”) is that He will pour out His Spirit on “all flesh,” and that this includes “your sons and daughters,” these same people stand back aghast, as though this introduces some kind of theological difficulty. Is it not more likely that the difficulty is caused by their understanding? Who would dare to say that Christ would direct His church to function in contradiction of the revealed nature of this “day of salvation.”

PROPHESYING

“ . . . shall prophesy . . . ” Other versions read, “will be prophets,” BBE “will prophesy,” CSB

“will speak what God has revealed,” GWN and “prophesy [telling forth the divine counsels].”
AMPLIFIED

The evidence of the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit will not be some euphoric feeling, or some strange physical and unintelligent bodily reaction. The “sons” and “daughters shall prophesy.” The word from which “prophesy” is translated means “to speak forth by Divine inspiration, to predict . . . to utter forth, declare a thing which can only be known by Divine revelation . . . to teach, refute, reprove, admonish, comfort others,” THAYER “generally, of speaking with the help of divine inspiration proclaim what God wants to make known, preach, expound,” FRIBERG “proclaim God's message, preach; prophesy, predict; speak God's message intelligibly,” UBS “proclaim God's message, preach; prophesy, predict; speak God's message intelligibly,” LOUW-NIDA “to expound scripture, to speak and preach under the influence of the Holy Spirit,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “proclaim or interpret a divine revelation.” GINGRICH

This particular word is the subject of some significant Pauline doctrine and exposition. He makes clear that this is a word relating to public declarations and mixed audiences. Some brief observations are in order, for Paul also speaks with regards to the nature of the days of the New Covenant.

- After affirming that “the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God,” Paul affirms that both men and women are to prophesy with a mind to honoring their head (1 Cor 11:3-5).
- All believers are urged to desire spiritual gifts, especially to be able to prophesy (1 Cor 14:1).
- The person who prophesies “speaketh unto men to edification, exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3).
- Paul said he would like everyone in the church to “prophesy” (1 Cor 14:5).
- Paul poses a scenario of a gathering where everyone is prophesying, and someone who does not believe, or is unlearned in the ways of God, enters the assembly. That person is convicted by the prophesying he hears, and acknowledges the presence of God in the assembly (1 Cor 14:24-25).
- Paul categorically states, “ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and be comforted” (1 Cor 14:31).
- Paul again exhorts the whole church to “covet to prophesy” (1 Cor 14:39).

The persons who would take upon themselves to exclude the women from these texts have a gargantuan task before them. They must contradict Joel, Peter, and Paul, to espouse their view.

In addition to the doctrinal implications of any such contradicting position, we have the very events of our text to consider. Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, affirms that Joel's prophesy is being fulfilled at that present time: “this is that!” Unless his words were empty and filled with air, what Joel had prophesied was actually taking place at that time: sons and daughters were prophesying. If that was not taking place, then in what sense was Joel's prophesy being fulfilled? And why did Peter refer to something as being presently exhibited if it was not taking place at all? How would this have set with those “devout men” who were listening to him – men who had a working knowledge of the Scriptures?

In the matter of granting spiritual insight and the ability to speak it forth, whether one is a son or a daughter will have no bearing on the experience. That is the not basis of Divine determination. For that matter salvation itself, and the world to come for which it prepares us, recognize no such distinctions (Gal 3:28; Matt 22:50).

ANOTHER IMPLICATION

Also, precisely how does this fit in with the notion that ONLY the apostles had been “baptized” with the Holy Spirit? Or, was the baptism unrelated to Joel’s prophecy? What of those who say only “the twelve” had been speaking? How would that circumstance possibly have fulfilled Joel’s prophecy, who said not so much as a word about the Spirit being poured upon a limited class of people?

How can “all flesh” and “sons” and “daughters” be in any sense descriptive of “the twelve?” What rules of grammar can cause Joel’s prophecy to be fulfilled in a unique and isolated gathering of “the twelve,” with them alone receiving “the promise of the Father,” and them alone speaking “the wonderful works of God?” The whole idea that such a thing is possible is nothing more than a foolish tradition, and is to be rejected as spurious, injurious, and contradictory of the very nature of the day of salvation.

No amount of reasoning can sanctify such a view, or justify its acceptance and propagation. After all of the explanations have been given, we must still confront the “sons” and “daughters” of our text.

YOUNG AND OLD WILL HAVE INSIGHT

“ 17c . . . and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.”

Not only is “the day of salvation” marked by a lack of distinction on the basis of gender, it is also without discrimination as regards age.

YOUNG MEN SHALL SEE VISIONS

“ . . . and your young men shall see visions . . . ” Other versions read, “your young people shall see visions,” NJB “your young men will have visions,” WILLIAMS and “your young men shall see visions (h divinely granted appearances).” AMPLIFIED

The word from which “young men” is translated is **neani,skoi** (neh-an-is-koi). Lexically it means, “youth,” THAYER and “a young man beyond the age of puberty, but before marriage.” LOUW-NIDA From the standpoint of the flesh, “young men” are immature, and have not had sufficient experience.

A “vision” is a phenomenon where the individual is given to see things inaccessible to the natural senses. It is as though the curtain of obscuring nature is pulled aside and the individual is given glimpses of hidden things. Men who had visions include Abraham (Gen 15:1), Ezekiel (Ezek 8:4), Daniel (Dan 7:2; 8:1), Obadiah (Obad 1:1), and Habakkuk (Hab 2:2). The witness of the transfiguration of Jesus, with Moses and Elijah speaking with Him is referred to as a “vision” (Matt 17:9). When Gabriel the angel appeared to Zacharias, announcing the birth of John the Baptist, it was called a “vision” (Lk 1:22).

During the time of Moses, God said He would speak to prophets by means of a “vision,” even though it was inferior to the way in which He spoke to Moses (Num 12:6-8). There were also lengthy periods of time when no vision at all was given to the people – such as the time when young Samuel came on the scene (1 Sam 3:1). So far as the Scriptural record is concerned, visions were exceedingly rare for the first 4,000 years of human history.

The heavenly bodies are presently a picture of absolute precision and stability. Years, seasons, months, days, hours, minutes, and seconds are determined by them. This is so true that some have ascribed Divine traits to them, even trusting them for assessing the present, and

predicting the future.

However, when the Lord poured forth His Spirit “upon all flesh,” even young men would “see visions.” Because Peter declared this was being fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, some young men had no doubt received visions relating to God’s “wonderful works.” It is doubtless true that some of the “wonderful works of God” that were being declared were a rehearsal of these visions.

OLD MEN SHALL DREAM DREAMS

“ . . . and your old men shall dream dreams.” Other versions read, “your elders will dream dreams,” DARBY “your old people will dream dreams,” NJB “your old men will have special dreams,” IE and “your old men shall dream [i divinely suggested] dreams.” AMPLIFIED

Although an inferior form of revelation (Jer 23:28), God has spoken to men in dreams. Men who had dreams include Ahimelech (Gen 20:3), Jacob (Gen 28:12), Laban (Gen 31:24), Joseph (Gen 37:5,9), Solomon (1 Kgs 3:5), Dan 7:1), and Joseph , Mary’s husband (Matt 1:20; 2:13,19,22). With the possible exception of Daniel, none of these individuals were “old men.” However, Peter affirmed that, in strict accord with Joel’s prophecy, when God poured forth His Spirit upon “all flesh,” even the “old men” would dream dreams. This too must have been fulfilled to some extent on the day of Pentecost, as old men were able to have dreams relating to life in Christ Jesus. Because dreams are ordinarily during the night hours, the events of the day of Pentecost would have involved the speaking forth of dreams in which the “wonderful works of God” had been revealed.

The idea here is that God will not divulge His will to people, and employ them in His service, with regard for their age. Even in the granting of visions and dreams, being young or old will not be a determining factor.

THE INSTITUTIONAL CURSE

Although the New Covenant

Let it be clear that such circumstances are in no way related to what God is doing. Where these attitudes prevail God cannot possibly be working for good, for that is not His manner.

functions without regard for age, sending forth benefits to both young and old, this is not the manner of institutions associated with “the church.”

A young man or woman, even though the Spirit of God is upon them and they have the “gift of prophecy,” are often classed with the children, or the “unlearned and ignorant.” Even though they may have an acute understanding of the things of God, and have a profitable understanding of things unseen, they are placed in subordination to those who are wholly lacking of such understanding, yet are considered to be elders or leaders in the household of faith.

The notion of the modern church concerning “old men” also clashes with that of our text. Such are frequently “put out to pasture” as though they are worthless, even though God may give them “dreams,” and they be gifted to expound the things of God with great discernment and profit. “Legion” is the name of such men who, at the height of their fellowship with God are placed on the institutional shelf, and given menial tasks to perform that require neither insight nor spiritual understanding. Let it be clear that such circumstances are in no way related to what God is doing. Where these attitudes prevail God cannot possibly be working for good, for that is not His manner.

The day of Pentecost was an occasion when the real ways of God were proclaimed.

SERVANTS AND HANDMAIDENS WILL PROPHECY

“ 18 And on My servants and on My handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”

As though it was not enough to mention the sons and daughters of the people themselves, the Lord now speaks of the same people from the standpoint of their relationship to Him.

ON MY SERVANTS AND MY HANDMAIDENS

“And on My servants and on My handmaidens . . .” Other versions read, “My bondslaves, both men and women,” NASB “My servants, both men and women,” NIV “My slaves, both men and women,” NRSV “My men-servants and My women-servants,” BBE “upon My bondmen and My bondwomen,” DARBY “My male servants and on My female servants,” ESV and “all my servants, men and women alike.” LIVING

God is very specific on this point. He is not speaking of the servants and handmaidens of people – slaves who served them. Abraham had “trained servants” (Gen 14:14), and an older, or senior, servant as well (Gen 24:2). Isaac had servants who dug a well for him (Gen 26:19). The Jews had servants, and were instructed to treat them properly (Ex 21:20). There were also “hired servants” (Lev 25:40). King Saul had servants (1 Sam 16:15). King David had servants (2 Sam 2:30). Elisha had a servant (2 Kgs 5:20). Paul gave special instruction to this kind of “servants” (Eph 6:5-6; 1 Tim 6:1). Peter did the same, instructing the slaves (1 Pet 2:16).

Sarah had a handmaid named Hagar (Gen 16:1). Rachel had a handmaid named Bilhah (Gen 35:25). Leah had a handmaid named Zilpah (Gen 35:26).

But these are not the kind of servants of which this text speaks. God is speaking of HIS servants and HIS handmaidens, not those of men! God referred to “My servant Abraham” (Gen 26:24), “My servant Moses” (Num 12:7), “My servant Caleb” (Num 14:24), “My servant David” (2 Sam 3:18), and “My servant Job” (Job 1:8).

Hannah referred to herself as the Lord’s “handmaid” (1 Sam 1:11). Mary, the mother of the Lord, also referred to herself as “the handmaid of the Lord” (Lk 1:38). These are the servants of whom the Lord is speaking – both men and women. God Himself affirms this is true. Joel leaves no question about this. Peter confirms this is the case, and cites the events taking place as incontrovertible proof of the matter.

IN THOSE DAYS I WILL POUR OUT OF MY SPIRIT

“ . . . I will pour out in those days of my Spirit . . .” Other versions read, “I will pour out My Spirit in those days,” NKJV “I will in those days pour forth my Spirit,” NASB “I will send my Spirit,” BBE “I will even pour out my Spirit . . . in those days,” CSB “I will pour out a portion of My Spirit in those days,” NAB and “the Holy Spirit shall come.” LIVING

Again, Joel draws attention to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon both men and women. This time, instead of saying “last days,” he refers to “Those days” – that is, the days in which His servants and His handmaidens will be blessed. Not only will the outpouring be indiscriminating from the social point of view (“your sons and your daughters”), it will also be without partiality concerning His own servants, whether male or female.

This is how the Lord will fulfill His will and convey His will in the days beginning at Pentecost, and described as being “before that great and notable day of the Lord will come.” He does not say His Spirit will be poured out upon the Apostles alone, but upon His servants and handmaidens. That, Peter states, is what is under way that very day.

That means that God was pouring forth His Spirit upon both His servants and His handmaidens – men and women who were united with Him through Christ Jesus.

THEY SHALL PROPHECY

“ . . . and they shall prophesy.” Other versions read, “and they will be prophets,” BBE “they will speak what God has revealed,” GWN and “they shall prophesy [j telling forth the divine counsels and k predicting future events pertaining especially to God’s kingdom],” AMPLIFIED

Some are willing to concede that the Holy Spirit can be poured out upon men and women – as long as only the men speak. But the Holy Spirit strikes their conclusion down to the ground. He does not do it uncertainly, or with some form of theological ambiguity. He does not leave it to men to decipher what is going to happen to these men and women whom God calls His own servants and handmaidens.

“They shall prophesy!” That, Peter says, is what is being fulfilled before the multitudes of “devout” Jews that is standing before him. Joel’s prophecy is the word the Spirit moved Peter to say was being fulfilled. Isaiah had also spoken of the Lord pouring out His Spirit: “I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3). Men and women are not mentioned there. I suppose it would have better suited those who altogether exclude women from speaking in a mixed assembly. But that is not the prophecy God chose to use! He rather chose the one that most precisely described the situation. He also chose the one that put matters in perspective, declaring this to be a condition that would prevail “before the great and notable day of the Lord will come.”

Is anyone willing to affirm that God really has no “handmaidens” – handmaidens that prophesy? Should one be so foolish as to take such an argument into their mouth, what will they do with the prophecy of Mary, who was the Lord’s “handmaiden.” ?

“My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For He hath regarded the low estate of His handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. For He that is mighty hath done to me great things; and holy is His name. And his mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation. He hath showed strength with His arm; He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts. He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich He hath sent empty away. He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy; as He spake to our fathers, to Abraham, and to His seed for ever” (Luke 1:46-55).

I realize this prophecy was delivered in the presence of Elizabeth. However, so that none would imagine that it was tailored for the women alone, the Spirit moved it to be written in the Scriptures, so all of the men could read it as well! Surely no one will charge the Spirit with breaking the rules in doing this. Is there anyone courageous enough to say the Lord acted out of character in moving Mary to speak in such an exalted manner? Or is there someone who would dare to say she spoke on her own accord and without inspiration?

This is the kind of thing Joel said would become common in “the last days.” It was going to be an era in which the word of the Lord would be delivered by men and women, young and old – and all at the discretion of the Lord. It is He who would pour forth His Spirit upon “all flesh,” without regard to age or gender! This is in anticipation of the great day.

To confirm that this did continue after Pentecost, Philip “had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy” (Acts 21:9). The church at Corinth had women that prophesied (1 Cor 11:5).

Let me once again state that Peter preceded these words by saying, “But this is that which was

spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). He had also drawn attention to the ones who were speaking: “For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15). He was, therefore, speaking of something that was taking place at that time, and that was characteristic of the days from then until “the great and notable day of the Lord.”

I cannot conceive of those to whom he was speaking drawing the conclusions that many self-professing Bible students have drawn. What would possibly have led them to associate this remarkably detailed prophecy with a speaking group limited to twelve men?

WONDERS IN HEAVEN AND SIGNS UPON EARTH

“ 19 And I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke.”

It is fitting that the closing era of time be characterized by climactic and unusual events. There may be some difficulty associated with the precise events now described, but there should be no question about their nature, or the association with the “great and notable day of the Lord.” There should also be a correlation with the words of our Lord, who also spoke of the days preceding His glorious return.

I WILL SHOW WONDERS IN HEAVEN

“And I will show wonders in heaven above . . .” Other versions read, “I will grant wonders in the sky above,” NASB “And I will show portents in the heaven above,” NRSV “wonders will be seen in heaven,” BBE “I will display wonders in the heaven above,” CSB “I will work miracles in the sky,” GWN “I will perform portents in the sky above,” NJB “I will cause wonders in the heavens above,” NLT “And I will cause strange demonstrations in the heavens,” LIVING “I will show amazing things in the sky above,” IE “I will display marvels in the sky above ,” WEYMOUTH and “I will work wonders in the sky above.” ISV

The first thing to note is that this is something the Lord Himself will do. Joel is not prophesying of global warming, quirks of nature, or mere natural disturbances. This is something that God Himself will do – “work,” “perform,” and “cause.” Whatever one may think of these things, they are “wonders” shown, or wrought, by God Himself. They will be imposed upon nature, just as surely mortality was enjoined upon it.

THE HEAVENS

Jesus Speaks

- The sun darkened (Matt 24:29a; Mk 13:24a). This is something that men cannot do, nor can any natural cycle or disturbance cause it. The sun is out of the reach of man, and he has no power whatsoever to alter its activities or existence. The same is true of the moon and the stars, not to mention other heavenly bodies.
- There shall be signs in the sun, moon, and stars (Lk 21:25a).

It is fitting that the closing era of time be characterized by climactic and unusual events. There may be some difficulty associated with the precise events now described, but there should be no question about their nature, or the association with the “great and notable day of the Lord.”

The moon will not give its light (Matt 24:29b; Mk 13:24b).

- The stars shall fall from heaven (Matt 24:29c; Mk 13:25a).

- The powers of heaven will be shaken (Matt 24:29d; Mk 13:25b; Lk 21:26b). This appears to refer to a disruption of the powers of order that are reflected in the heavens – powers ordained by God for “signs, and for seasons, and for days and years” (Gen 1:14). One version reads, “the forces which control the heavens will be disordered and disturbed.” MONTGOMERY This could also refer to the spiritual principalities and powers that reside in the “air” (Eph 2:2), although that does not fit well with the context.

- The sign of the Son of Man appears in the heavens (Matt 24:30a; Mk 13:26; Lk 21:27).

The Apostles Speak

- The heavens pass away with a great noise (2 Pet 3:10).
- The elements melt with fervent heat (2 Pet 3:10).
- The sun becomes black (Rev 6:12).
- The moon becomes as blood (Rev 6:12).
- The stars fall unto the earth (Rev 6:13).
- The heaven departs a scroll (Rev 6:14).

The heavenly bodies are presently a picture of absolute precision and stability. Years, seasons, months, days, hours, minutes, and seconds are determined by them. This is so true that some have ascribed Divine traits to them, even trusting them for assessing the present, and predicting the future. Before the great and notable day of the Lord, this misplaced confidence will be shaken to its very foundations.

I WILL SHOW SIGNS IN THE EARTH

“ . . . and signs in the earth beneath . . . ” Other versions read, “signs on the earth beneath,” NASB “signs on the earth below,” NIV “and prodigies on earth,” MRD “and miraculous signs on the earth below,” NET “and tokens in the earth beneath,” TNT and “I will do miracles on the earth below.” IE

Before “the great and notable day of the Lord,” God will confirm that the entire seen realm is temporary, and therefore unworthy of a preeminent place in our hearts. Just as surely as “the day of salvation” had a beginning, the present earth has an appointed end, or conclusion. Isaiah said of the earth, “The earth is utterly broken down , the earth is clean dissolved (split open NKJV) , the earth is moved exceedingly. The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard , and shall be removed like a cottage ; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again ” (Isa 24:19-20).

The signs “in the earth beneath” have to do with it being broken down, split open, moved exceedingly, reeling to and fro, being removed, and falling and not rising again.

THE EARTH

Jesus Speaks

- Famines in diverse places (Matt 24:7a). The earth will refuse to yield fruits to many different peoples, as the ground refused to yield fruit to Cain (Gen 4:12). It appears as though these will occur simultaneously.

- Pestilences in divers places (Matt 24:7b). These are plagues or diseases, breaking out in an unusual manner, and contrary to reason. Again, this is not speaking of plagues over a lengthy period of time.

- Earthquakes in divers places (Matt 24:7c). There have been occasions when the earth “shook and trembled,” and “the foundations also of the hills were moved and were shaken, because He was wroth” – as at Sinai (Psa 18:7). Here, however, simulataneously, the earth will convulse and heave up and down in “various places.” NIV
- Great earthquakes in divers places (Lk 21:11). There will also be mega-earthquakes in different places.

The heavens and earth “which are now” (2 Pet 3:7) are not truly stable – not from the standpoint of Divine purpose. That is, our trust cannot be placed in them. They are destined to pass away. Salvation is presented with this ultimate reality in mind. It is not a way of making the earth “a better place to live.” It is not a means of securing stability, security, success, and happiness in this world.

Troubles in divers places (Mk 13:8c). This speaks of agitation, turmoil, upheaval, and disturbance in unprecedented levels.

- Distress of nations (Lk 21:25b). Whole nations will be smitten with despair, dismay, and anguish. Their wisdom will run out, and fear will grip their hearts.
- The sea and the waves roaring (Lk 21:25c). The sea will toss and roll as though it is beyond all control.
- Men’s hearts failing for fear of the things coming upon the earth (Lk 21:26a). It will become exceedingly apparent that man is not, nor has he ever been, in control. It is ever true that “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1). The dominance of fear among those who are not reconciled to God confirms that they will finally become acutely aware of this fact – even if it is too late.

BLOOD AND FIRE AND VAPOR OF SMOKE

“ . . . blood, and fire and vapor of smoke.” Concerning “blood and fire,” all versions read the same – “blood and fire.” Concerning “vapor of smoke,” other versions read, “billows of smoke,” NIV “smoky mist,” NRSV “a cloud of smoke,” CSB “clouds of smoke,” NET “thick smoke,” IE “pillars of smoke,” WEYMOUTH and “smoking vapor.” AMPLIFIED

Admittedly, this is a difficult passage, the details of which I am most uncertain. However, there is a general message here that speaks of the latter end of this “day of salvation.” Not only will the reality of salvation itself be confirmed to those who receive it, the destruction of this present evil world will also be confirmed. Those who believe the Gospel will realize the remarkable benefits that it promises. Those who reject the Gospel will eventually realize the absolute vanity of choosing this world over the world to come.

The day of salvation commenced with a great outpouring of grace in this world. The conclusion of that day will be accompanied with a destructive visitation of the wrath of God upon the world itself, and the enemies of Jesus in particular.

The expression “blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke” speak of the destruction of human life (blood), the consumption of the entire natural order (fire), and the final evidence of the removal of all things that offend (vapor of smoke). Jesus referred to this closing destruction when He said, “Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world , for the heavenly bodies will be shaken” (Luke 21:26).

The Conclusion of the Matter

The heavens and earth “which are now” (2 Pet 3:7) are not truly stable – not from the standpoint of Divine purpose. That is, our trust cannot be placed in them. They are destined to pass away.

Salvation is presented with this ultimate reality in mind. It is not a way of making the earth “a better place to live.” It is not a means of securing stability, security, success, and happiness in this world.

The coming of the Lord will be preceded by some awareness that the end is nigh. Christ depicted this in the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-12). The five foolish virgins then saw their need of oil. They made a last attempt to obtain some, but it was too late. The door of opportunity was closed, with no more chance of entering in. Even so, in the last stages of time, some will call out for rocks and mountains to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:16-17). Just as surely as the Israelites were not hurt by the plagues that fell upon Egypt, so those who have put their trust in the Lord will not suffer in the day of His wrath.

I must acknowledge this to be, in a sense, very general. For that reason it is not satisfying to the intellect. However, the power of this text is, in fact, in its

The present heavens and earth will not conclude by a clock, but by a word. They will not simply wear out, but will be forcibly brought to an abrupt conclusion.

generality. It is enough for us to know that the conclusion of our salvation will not be realized in “this present evil world.” This is not where the greatest blessings are realized. However, even though life may be sanctified and blessed while in the body, the entire realm to which the body belongs is destined for destruction – total destruction.

The Universe Is Not Winding Down

The universe is not simply winding down. While there is a sense in which deterioration is all about us, the final disintegration of the universe will be by Divine decree – a word! It will not be by means of a natural process. “Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain” (Heb 12:26-27).

The present heavens and earth will not conclude by a clock, but by a word. They will not simply wear out, but will be forcibly brought to an abrupt conclusion.

NATURE BLIGHTED

“ 20 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come.”

The most stable aspects of nature are said to be no longer dependable. I cannot supply the details of this, and freely confess that to be the case.

THE SUN TURNED INTO DARKNESS

“The sun shall be turned into darkness . . .” Other versions read, “the sun will become dark,” BBE “the sun shall be changed to darkness,” DARBY “then sun shall turn black,” LIVING and “into darkness shall the sun be turned.” MONTGOMERY

This condition was foretold by the prophets. “the sun shall be darkened in his going forth” (Isa 13:10). “Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed” (Isa 24:23). “And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord GOD, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the clear day” (Amos 8:9).

Jesus spoke of it as well. “after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened” (Matt 24:29; Mk 13:24).

John the revelator also heard language like this. “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood” (Rev 6:12).

An introduction to this kind of phenomenon took place during the plagues in Egypt, when “thick darkness” descended upon Egypt that lasted for three days (Ex 10:21-22). A similar thing happened when Jesus died – when, from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, “there was a darkness over all the earth” (Lk 23:44).

But this was only a vague shadow of what is coming when the sun will no longer give its light, for there will be no further need for the universe as it now is.

THE MOON TURNED INTO BLOOD

“ . . . and the moon into blood . . . ” Other versions read, “the moon will become red as blood,” GWN “and the moon will turn blood red,” NLT and “the moon will become blood.” IE

In speaking of the demise of nature, the book of the Revelation also refers to a time when “the moon became as blood” (Rev 6:12). That is, instead of reflecting the brightness of the sun, throwing forth light, it will be crimson dark, for there will be no light for it to reflect.

The language, while no doubt very literal, speaks of the extinguishing of all hope. There is a time scheduled for this world, when hope will no longer be available to men. The door of salvation will be shut, and sinners will at last face an angry God before whom they will not be able to stand.

BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD COME

“ . . . before that great and notable day of the Lord come.” Other versions read, “Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD,” NKJV “BEFORE THE GREAT AND GLORIOUS DAY OF THE LORD SHALL COME,” NASB “before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day,” NRSV “before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day,” RSV “Before the day of the Lord come, That great and notable day,” ASV “before that great day of the Lord comes in glory,” BBE “before the great and gloriously appearing day of the Lord come,” DARBY “before the great and manifest day of the Lord come,” DOUAY “before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day,” ESV “before the terrifying day of the Lord comes,” GWN “before that great and fearful day of the Lord come,” MRD “before the coming of the great and splendid day of the Lord,” NAB “before the coming of the day of the Lord -- the great and illustrious,” YLT “before that awesome Day of the Lord arrives,” LIVING “Then the great and glorious day of the Lord will come,” IE “to usher in the day of the Lord – that great and illustrious day,” WEYMOUTH “ere the day of the Lord come, that great and terrible day,” MONTGOMERY and “before the obvious day of the Lord comes — that great and notable and conspicuous and renowned [day].” AMPLIFIED

There are those who say this is referring to the destruction of Jerusalem. That time, however, was not a time when the Lord was made manifest. It was not a day when His glory shown forth. Nor, indeed, was the day, in the eyes of the people, strictly associated with Christ Jesus. If that had been the case, the people would have repented. Even at that time, in the midst of a great and unparalleled judgment, a veil remained over the eyes of most of the people.

By way of contrast, the “great and notable day of the Lord” is one of full revelation, when God will “show” Christ, and He will come in all of His glory. It is true that the present day of salvation is “notable” in its effects through faith. However, in my judgment, that is not the sense of this text. Note what is said about the return of the Lord Jesus – and only one more return is proclaimed.

• **THE PUBLIC DISPLAY OF THE GLORIFIED CHRIST.** “Which in his times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen” (1 Tim 6:15-16).

• **EVERY EYE SHALL SEE HIM.** “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Rev 1:7).

• **SEEN COMING WITH POWER AND GREAT GLORY.** “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Mat 24:30).

• **WHEN HE COMES HE WILL REWARD EVERY MAN.** “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works” (Mat 16:27).

• **HE SHALL COME IN HIS OWN GLORY, THE FATHER’S GLORY, AND THE GLORY OF THE ANGELS.** “For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Luke 9:26).

• **PUNISHMENT OF THE WICKED AND ADMIRATION OF THE SAINTS SIMULTANEOUS.** “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thess 1:9-10).

• **EARTH AND HEAVEN FLEE FROM BEFORE HIS FACE.** “And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev 20:11).

BEFORE this appointed day comes, massive disturbances and disruptions will occur in the heavens and on the earth. The duration of these things is not known, but it will apparently be of sufficient duration to convince the hardhearted that the end of all things is upon them. This will not, however, be a time when preaching will be delivered, the door of salvation opened, or repentance urged. At this time, repentance will not be possible. This is portrayed in the symbolic language of the Revelation, the details of which are not supplied.

• “And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk” (Rev 9:20).

• “And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory” (Rev 16:9).

• “And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (Rev 16:10-11).

The particular things of which Peter is speaking – “this is that” – are the matters relating to “BEFORE that great and notable day of the Lord.” He is speaking of the door of faith which was opened on the day of Pentecost, and will be closed shortly before the Lord returns in all of His glory. In that final day, even though people are alive, the door of hope will no longer be opened. I do not have the faintest idea about the length of this period of time. It will be sufficient to confirm

to the hearts of the wicked how foolish they were not to prepare for “that great and notable day of the Lord.” It will be long enough to substantiate that there is no way to obtain what is necessary to make preparations after the door has been shut. All of that can happen in a very brief period of time – particularly in view of the collapse of the natural order. Even though men hurry about to find a way of being saved, like the five foolish virgins, none will be found. The understanding of this should promote great sobriety and an earnest quest for the salvation of God.

NOT INTENDED TO CAUSE FEAR AMONG THE SAINTS

This is not intended to cause fear among the saints of God. Although all of the particulars have not been revealed, salvation is calculated to prepare us for the end of the world. It provides a new heart that is not attached to the world, and is even repulsed by it. It takes hold of promises that relate to another world, “wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet 3:13), and compels those living by faith to prepare for that “world to come.”

When the plagues came upon Egypt, the Israelites were protected from them. In the plagues God “put a division” between His people and the people of Egypt (Ex 8:23). When a grievous disease fell upon all the cattle of Egypt, the Lord “severed between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt” (Ex 9:4). When the plague of boils came, it came only on “the Egyptians” (Ex 9:11). When the plague of hail mingled with fire came, “there was no hail” in the land of Goshen (Ex 9:26). When a thick darkness fell upon Egypt, the Israelites had light in all of their dwellings (Ex 10:23). When all of the firstborn in Egypt died in the last plague God “put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel,” and none of firstborn of Israel died” (Ex 11:5-7).

I am cautious at this point not to venture into the realm of speculation. However, God has given the saints no cause to fear the demise of nature, whether over a brief or extended period. He has told us that the whole creation, presently in “the bondage of corruption,” is patiently waiting for the “manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom 8:19). It appears to me to be unreasonable to think that those whose hearts have been removed from the world would be harmed or overly alarmed by its actual disintegration and demise. When it goes, all of our troubles go.

A UNIVERSAL PROMISE

“ 21 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. ”

Joel prophesied, and Peter is confirming, things that will take place BEFORE “the great and notable day of the Lord.” He has first declared a period during which God would pour forth His Spirit without discriminating between men and women. This would result in prophesying, which had been taking place before the multitude now before him. It will now continue to take place in an even more specific manner.

IT SHALL COME TO PASS

“And it shall come to pass . . . ” Other versions read, “And it shall be,” NASB and “Then.” NRSV

Joel not only prophesied that God would pour put His Spirit upon all flesh, but that a day would be ushered in that would have certain marvelous characteristics. This is something that was appointed by God, and it would surely come to pass. It is not something that might come to pass: it would come to pass. It is not something that would come to pass if some variable condition was met: it would come to pass. This is the language of Divine appointment, and will be brought to pass by Divine power. Peter now announces to the people, that the very day in which he is speaking is the time when this word is being fulfilled. This would be a mark of the day of salvation. The door of salvation will be thrown wide open. No special race will be targeted. This will not be limited to any

social class, or other group according to the flesh.

WHOSOEVER SHALL BE CALL ON THE NAME

“ . . . that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord . . . ”

Further, no aspect of salvation will contradict this distinction by God making determinations according to the flesh. The outworking of salvation cannot resort to fleshly distinctions as a basis for Divine working within that salvation.

“Whosoever”

Other versions read, “ everyone ,” RSV “whoever” BBE “ all ,” NJB and “ anyone .” LIVING Peter continues to point out the universality of Joel’s promise. He has already spoken of “all flesh,” “your sons and your daughters,” and God’s “servants” and “handmaidens.” Now he makes it even more personal by saying “whosoever.” The only qualification is the one that will be stated. If that qualification is met, there is no natural or fleshly distinction that can disqualify the individual.

Let it be clear that Peter is establishing the border of salvation. Further, no aspect of salvation will contradict this distinction by God making determinations according to the flesh. The outworking of salvation cannot resort to fleshly distinctions as a basis for Divine working within that salvation.

“Call Upon the Name of the Lord”

Other versions read, “ makes his prayer to the Lord,” BBE “ asks for mercy from the Lord,” LIVING “ trusts in the name of the Lord,” IE and “call upon the name of the Lord [invoking, adoring, and worshiping the Lord—Christ].” AMPLIFIED

Peter now gives a wonderful summation of Joel’s words – which words are even more extensive. Joel wrote, “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call ” (Joel 2:32). Now, Peter fastens on those who “call upon the name of the Lord.”

What does it mean to call upon the Lord’s name? It is an action that is frequently mentioned in Scripture.

- In the days of Enos, the son of Seth, “began men to call upon the name of the Lord ” (Gen 4:26).
- “And he [Abraham] removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD ” (Gen 12:8).
- “And he [Isaac] builded an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD , and pitched his tent there: and there Isaac's servants digged a well” (Gen 26:25).
- “And call ye on the name of your gods, and I [Elijah] will call on the name of the LORD : and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken” (1 Kgs 18:24).

Let it be clear that Peter is establishing the border of salvation. Further, no aspect of salvation will contradict this distinction by God making determinations according to the flesh. The outworking of salvation cannot resort to fleshly distinctions as a basis for Divine working within that salvation.

“But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the LORD his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper” (2 Kgs 5:11).

- “What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD” (Psa 116:12-13).

- “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD” (Psa 116:17).

- “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zeph 3:9).

- “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

- “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13).

- “Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (1 Cor 1:2).

Calling upon the name of the Lord is invoking God through prayer, acknowledging that He alone is God. That is, it is an earnest request for God to act, or to move, in the behalf of the individual. This kind of call is the result of the persuasion of at least two things: first, that “God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward” (Deut 10:17). This does not refer to a frantic stabbing in the dark, inquiring if there really is a God, then asking Him to make Himself known. Calling on the name of the Lord reveals the individual is convinced of who God is, and that He does whatsoever He pleases. Second, this “call” is a plea for God to come to the aid of the individual, work in his behalf, or make Himself more fully known to the one calling on God’s name.

The “name of the Lord” is what God has revealed about Himself. It refers to His being, character, and what may be known of Him. When Moses asked God to show him His glory, the Lord replied, “And He said, I will make all My goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee” (Ex 33:19). The actual proclamation is recorded. “And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex 34:5-7).

The proclamation of the Lord’s “name” was a declaration of His Person – His character and manner.

To “call upon the name of the Lord” is to beseech the Lord to focus those traits upon the individual; i.e., to show mercy, grace, and longsuffering toward the one who is calling out. To cause goodness and truth to come to such a one, and to forgive their sins. What has happened in such a case is that the individual has now made an association between his condition and what God is inclined to do. He sees his need for mercy and grace, and thus pleads for it. He sees his need of goodness and truth, and, with a strong desire for them, beseeches the Lord to give them in abundance.

If, for example, a person wants a new Rolls Royce, an annual income in six figures, and a stately mansion, he cannot call upon the name of the Lord for them, for God has not declared Himself as being disposed to give such things. It is not that He cannot do this, but that this is not how He

wishes to be known. If a person wants to make that desire known to the Lord, according to Philippians 4:6, I suppose it might be considered proper. However, it seems to me that it would be difficult to reconcile such requests with God's call to "love not the world" (1 John 2:15), "set your affection on things above" (Col 3:2), and "lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" (Matt 6:19).

When a person calls "upon the name of the Lord," he is asking God to respond in accordance with what He has revealed about Himself.

It is important to note that while preaching is one of the preeminent activities of "the day of salvation," it is calling upon the name of the Lord that actually brings the blessing. This suggests that the Gospel of Christ is calculated to constrain one to call upon the name of the Lord. Where this is not done, the Gospel has not really been perceived or believed.

In our day, men have come up with different ways of appropriating salvation. Some ask the individual to repeat a certain prayer, following the lead of the preacher. Others simply ask the people to come forward and receive prayer for their salvation. Such methodologies do not speak strongly of the yearning of the one who needs salvation. They do not encourage one to call upon the name of the Lord – to verbally and zealously seek what is being offered in the name of the Lord.

Let me be clear about this. Only a response to the real Gospel of Christ can properly be referred as "calling upon the name of the Lord." Acceptable calling requires the God-ordained message, and not "another Gospel" (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). It is quite possible that the prevalence of unacceptable conduct within the churches is directly related to the belief of "another gospel" – one that does not provoke one to "call upon the name of the Lord."

SHALL BE SAVED

" . . . shall be saved." Other versions read, "will be saved," NIV "will have salvation," BBE and "shall live." MRD

This same promise is reaffirmed in Romans 10:13. There the Spirit states that men cannot call upon the name of the Lord unless they have believed on Him: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?" Further, they cannot believe on the Lord unless they have heard of Him: "and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" Further, they cannot hear without a preacher: "and how shall they hear without a preacher?" Even further, how can anyone preach unless they are sent "And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:14-15).

What does it mean to be "saved?" Perhaps you have heard people say things like, "I am saved, but I am not living close to the Lord." Or, "I am a Christian, but not a committed one." Or, "I was a Christian, but was not walking with the Lord." Then, there are church cliches like "carnal Christian," or "worldly Christian," or "uncommitted Christians." All of this has caused people to speak glibly about being "saved." For some people being "saved" is the result of repeating the mythical "sinners prayer." For others, it means they have been "baptized" – at least that is what they call it. A significant number of professing Christians rarely even use the term "saved." For example, I come from a background where this word was not part of the vocabulary.

The word "saved" occurs in the book of Acts ten times (2:21,47; 4:12; 11:14; 15:1,11; 16:30,31; 27:20,31). I know those times, two refer to being saved from physical calamity (27:20,31).

As used in our text, the epistles use the word "save" fourteen times (Rom 11:14; 1 Cor 1:21; 2:2; 7:16; 9:22; 1 Tim 1:15; 4:16; Heb 7:25; James 1:1; 2:14; 4:12; 5:20; 1 Pet 3:21; Jude 1:23); "saved"

is used twenty-one times (Rom 5:9,10; 8:24; 9:27; 10:1,9,13; 11:26; 1 Cor 1:18; 3:15; 5:5; 10:33; 15:2; ; 2 Cor 2:15; Eph 5:2,8; 1 Thess 2:16; 2 Thess 2:10; 1 Tim 2:4,15; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5; 1 Pet 4:16; 2 Pet 2:5; Jude 1:5); “saving” two times (Heb 10:39; 11:7; and “Savior” nineteen times (Eph 5:23; Phil 3:20; 1 Tim 1:1; 2:3; 1 Tim 4:10; 2 Tim 1:10; Tit 1:3,4; 2:10,13; 3:4,6; 2 Pet 1:1,11; 2 Pet 2:20; 3:2,18; 1 John 4:14; Jude 1:25).

Any term or concept that is mentioned this many times ought to be a prominent part of the vocabulary of the church.

The word “save” comes from the Greek word **σωθη, setai**, the verb form of the Greek word **σω, ζω** (so-zo). The lexical meaning of this word is, “to save, to keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger and destruction, to save a suffering one from perishing, to make well, restore to health, to bring forth from; positively, to make one a partaker of the salvation of Christ,” THAYER “save, rescue, bring to salvation,” FRIBERG and “save rescue, deliver, keep safe, preserve, cure, make well.” UBS

Several concepts are captured by the word “saved.” These concepts speak of a change in ones moral and spiritual condition.

- **DELIVERANCE** : rescue, bring out. This presumes a former state of imprisonment, confinement, capture, and condemnation. When a person is “saved,” he is “delivered from the Law” – the condemning law (Rfom 7:6). He is also “delivered from this present evil world” – from its dominance (Gal 1:4). There is also a deliverance “from the power of darkness” (Col 1:13), those Satanic powers that hold men captive. There is also deliverance “from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10). There is even deliverance “out of temptation,” so that we are not overcome by it (2 Pet 2:9). A salvation that does not deliver the people from the power and dominion of the enemy and the world is not “the salvation of God” (Psa 50:23; Acts 28:28).

- **RECOVERY** : get back, reclaim, redeem, revive. This presumes a former state of lostness, forfeiture, decline, weakness, and perishing. How marvelous to consider that we have been “redeemed from the curse of the Law” (Gal 3:13), so that are free from condemnation. There is also redemption “from all iniquity,” so that we live no longer in sin (Tit 2:14). Redemption is referred to as “the forgiveness of sins” (Col 1:14).m A salvation that does not restore men to God and to spiritual wholeness cannot possibly be “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

Isaiah foretold the conditions of safety that would be brought in by the Messiah. “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land”

SAFETY : protection, security, defense. This presumes a former condition of hazard, jeopardy, peril, and vulnerability. Isaiah foretold the conditions of safety that would be brought in by the Messiah. “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa 32:2). Ponder the wonderful and reassuring word: “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18). A salvation that leaves people vulnerable to the devil and subject to fits and starts is not “the salvation of the Lord” (Lam 3:26).

- **PRESERVATION** : keep, sustain, maintain. This presumes a previous state of deterioration, weakness, and imminent death. To know that we are kept has a stabilizing effect upon the soul. “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber” (Psa 121:3). Again we are reminded, “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5). A salvation that allows

for people to fall, go backward, forget, and stumble through life has nothing whatsoever to do with “the salvation of our God” (Isa 52:10).

The state from which we were saved is often mentioned in Scripture. It is always a past condition.

- “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin , but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. . . For when ye were the servants of sin , ye were free from righteousness. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death” (Rom 6:17,20-21).

- “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:9-11).

- “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ” (Eph 2:12).

- “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

- “For ye were sometimes darkness , but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8).

- “Which in time past were not a people , but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy , but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10).

- “For ye were as sheep going astray ; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25).

Isaiah foretold the conditions of safety that would be brought in by the Messiah. “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” From the very beginning of the church people who are said to have been “saved” experienced and manifested the kind of changes the prophets said would come to pass.

When Peter referred to being “saved,” the “devout men” before him would have a good idea about what he meant. When seven years of famine struck the land of Egypt, and Joseph, directed by the Lord, resolved the dilemma, the people said, “Thou hast saved our lives” (Gen 47:25). When Israel passed safely through the Red Sea on dry ground, then saw their enemies drowned in the same sea, the record was written up in these words: “Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore” (Ex 14:30). When Moses stood before the people at the end of his days, he cried out to them, “Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD , the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places” (Deut 33:29). When Israel realized victory over the Philistines, the record was written up in these words: “So the LORD saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Bethaven” (1 Sam 14:23).

These men no doubt knew the various expressions of the Psalmist which spoke of salvation. “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved ” (Psa 80:3). “Turn us again, O God of hosts, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved ” (Psa 80:7). “Turn us again, O LORD God of hosts, cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved ” (Psa 80:19). Now Peter will put the matter squarely before them.

This is the day when salvation will be realized by whoever calls upon the name of the Lord! Now that Peter has the ears of the people, he will proclaim the name of the Lord as it has been revealed in Christ Jesus – in particular as it was revealed in Christ’s death and resurrection.

CONCLUSION

We are being exposed to the time when God first poured out His Spirit upon “all flesh” – both men and women. This has been done in strict accord with the “promise of the Father,” as expounded by the Lord Jesus, the prophecies of the prophets in general, and the of Joel in particular. This whole matter sets the stage for the very nature of life in Christ Jesus. This is the inauguration of the New Covenant, and serves to confirm the nature of that wonderful “ministration of the Spirit,” as the New Covenant is called (2 Cor 3:8). The Spirit’s abundance is described as Him being “poured forth,” lavished upon the people because of atoning death of Jesus Christ. Peter will affirm that Jesus has caused what the people are seeing and hearing, and that it is in strict accord with His role as the Savior of the world. In fact, Jesus is declared to have done this in His exalted capacity of “both Lord and Christ” (2:36). With great power, Peter will relate the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ with the events being witnessed by the people.

The day of Pentecost is not at end of itself, but was the beginning of a new era – an era in which the outworking of the eternal purpose of God was commenced, and in which men and women would be prepared for the world to come. Years later Peter will refer to this very day as “the beginning” (Acts 11:15). The more we are able to see that day as a “beginning,” the more we will be able to glean from it. Everything occurring on that day will reflect the revealed purpose of God, administered and completed by the Lord Jesus.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #8

“ 2:22 Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: 23 Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain: 24 Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it. ” (Acts 2:22-24)

INTRODUCTION

The day of Pentecost marked, what Peter later referred to as, “the beginning” (Acts 11:15). Pentecost is to the New Covenant what Sinai was to the Old Covenant. As long as the world remains, there will never be a heaven-sent view of salvation that is at variance with what was presented on the first Pentecost after Jesus ascended “up where He was before” (John 6:62).

Here, the Gospel of Christ was first preached with understanding, by someone other than Jesus – someone who was “filled with the Spirit.” The account before us is not the outworking of the wisdom of men. The minds and mouths of men were employed, but they were under the direct supervision of the Holy Spirit, who was working under the direction of the exalted Christ. Any analysis of this day, and the events that took place on it, must be considered within the framework of the will of God, the authority of Christ, and the working of the Holy Spirit. Peter will not deliver a Gospel that is tailored only for the Jews, as some theologians imagine. There are those who, “understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7), teach that Peter preached one Gospel to the Jews, and Paul preached another to the Gentiles. The Gospel Peter preached was the same one Jesus commanded to be preached “to every creature” (Mk 16:15). Paul preached the same Gospel, but was given to elaborate extensively on both its nature and content. However, the Gospel itself was the same. We do well, therefore, to give heed to what Peter

declares, and to the manner in which he directs the thinking

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- **YE MEN OF ISRAEL (2:22a)**
- **HEAR THESE WORDS (2:22b)**
- **JESUS OF NAZARETH (2:22c)**
- **A MAN APPROVED OF GOD (2:22d)**
- **THE MEANS BY WHICH HE WAS APPROVED (2:22e)**
- **YOU KNOW IT WELL (2:22f)**
- **HIM! (2:23a)**
- **BEING DELIVERED UP (2:23b)**
- **YOU HAVE TAKEN (2:23c)**
- **YOU USED WICKED HANDS (2:23d)**
- **GOD RAISED HIM UP (2:24a)**
- **SOMETHING THAT WAS NOT POSSIBLE (2:24b)**
- **CONCLUSION**

of the people. He will give a brief exposition of some of the greatest events in all of history: the death Christ, the resurrection of Christ, the enthronement of Christ, and the events taking place on that day of Pentecost.

There are several things to be noted in this singular event. First, the focus of the preaching. Second, the manner in which that focus, who is Jesus Christ, is expounded. We will find that the words of Peter bear very little, if any, similarity to the preaching of our day. There will be no mention of God loving the people and wanting to be a part of their lives. No reference will be made to contemporary issues, domestic goals, or successful living. Peter will not allude to worship, praise, or “the will of God for your lives.” Prior to the inquiry of the people themselves, he will not refer to the remission of sins, Christ dying for our sins, or a step-by-step way of appropriating salvation. There will be no presentation of Bible study methodologies, no reference to the one true church, and not a single word about reaching certain people groups – like youth, singles, etc. Jesus will not be presented as a problem solver.

I understand such proclamations are cherished traditions in the minds of many, and am certainly not set to summarily reject them. However, the truth of the matter is that the Holy Spirit did not provide us a single example of this kind of preaching. That certainly ought to establish that such cannot be a revelation of “the mind of the Lord.”

In particular, this lesson will focus on the manner in which the death of Christ is declared. What Peter does say about that death is as startling to the institutionalized mind as what He does not say. He will say little about why Jesus died, as ordinarily conceived.

Peter’s focus is placed on Deity. Everything is perceived and expounded in view of the Person and working of the Lord. Such a view is not strange to those who “have the mind of Christ.” Notice the references to Deity in our text.

- “Jesus of Nazareth” (22a).
- “A Man approved of God ” (22b).
- “. . . miracles and wonders and signs, God did by Him ” (22c).

- “Him , being delivered” (23a).
- “By the determinate counsel . . . of God ” (2:23b).
- “By the . . . foreknowledge of God ” (2:23c).
- “ Whom God hath raised up” (2:24a).
- “ . . . it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (2:24b).

When the results of this preaching are recorded, it will be apparent that the Holy Spirit worked with the words of Peter, convicting the people of the sin of unbelief, the need for righteousness, and the judgment of the devil.

There are eleven references to Deity in the three verses of our text.

- The only town mentioned is the one from which Jesus came – Jesus of Nazareth (2:22a).
- The only approval mentioned is that of God Himself – approved of God (2:22b).
- The means of approval are the things God did through Christ – miracles wonders and signs (2:22c).
- The first reason for Jesus being delivered up is traced to the “determinate counsel of God” (2:23a).
- The second reason for Jesus being delivered up is related to “the foreknowledge of God” (2:23b).
- God raised Jesus from the dead (2:24a).
- God loosed the pains of death from Jesus (2:24b).

Amidst a gigantic departure from the faith, this kind of preaching is virtually unknown in our country. Human assessment and reasoning have become the standard basis for proclamation, and it is not right. By way of comparison, Peter will employ the Spirit’s nomenclature, “combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” NASB (1 Cor 2:13). When the results of this preaching are recorded, it will be apparent that the Holy Spirit worked with the words of Peter, convicting the people of the sin of unbelief, the need for righteousness, and the judgment of the devil (John 16:7-11).

At least one reason for an impotent church is the employment of unfertile words – words that have no spirit of life in them (John 6:63), and consequently cannot be used by the Holy Spirit.

As we consider Peter’s message we will find no reference to the Pharisees, their activities, or their persuasions. The scribes will not be mentioned, nor their teaching. There will be no reference to the traditions of the elders, or the tactics of the lawyers, who were specialists in the law of Moses.

Peter will not call the people to consider finances. He will not promise them worldly success. He will not upbraid anyone for being poor, or congratulate anyone for being rich. He will make no appeal to worldly status or achievement. All of this, of course, is very apparent. I only mention it because there is so much of this kind of preaching all around us. It may be said of such preaching that it is “of the earth, earthy” (1 Cor 14:47).

There will be an urgency in Peter’s words, as well as a staggering tone of judgment. He will describe men as they really are, and make no effort make them feel good about themselves. He will declare what they have really done – whether they knew it or not – and will make no effort to gloss it. We will also be made privy to “the mind of the Spirit,” who is moving Peter to speak. His reasoning did not originate with him, but, by faith, he had been brought into accord with the thinking of the Spirit of God. There is no variance between Peter’s understanding of God’s purpose

and the purpose itself. From the “heavenly places” where he is seated (Eph 2:6), and through the Holy Spirit with whom he is “filled” (Acts 2:4), Peter is speaking with absolute precision and spiritual understanding.

YE MEN OF ISRAEL

“ 2:22a Ye men of Israel . . . ” Other versions read, “You that are Israelites,” NRSV “Men, ye sons of Israel,” MRD “Men! Israelites! YLT “O men of Israel,” LIVING and “Fellow Israelites.” ISV

At the time of our text “the door of faith” (Acts 14:27) was opened “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16). This was necessary because all of the promises concerning the day of salvation had been given to the Jews. It is said of them: “Israelites; to whom pertaineth . . . the promises” (Rom 9:4). Jesus also announced to a certain Samaritan woman, “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

The location of the various peoples of the earth – “the sons of Adam” – was determined in accordance with the number of the children of Israel. It is written, “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel”

The employment of the word “Israel” links the people with the Abrahamic promise and “the fathers” – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, through whom “the twelve tribes” came (Gen 49:28; Ex 24:4; 28:21; 39:14; Ezek 47:13; Matt 19:28; Lk 22:30; Acts 26:7; James 1:1; Rev 21:12). After wrestling with Jacob throughout the night, a heavenly messenger gave him a new name – “Israel.” It is written, “And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Gen 32:28). In Hebrew the name Israel means “God prevails.” STRONG’S In the Greek language it means, “he shall be a prince with God.” STRONG’S This change of name reflects Divine purpose.

There several names given to these people. They are called “the Jews” (2 Kg 16:6; Ezra 4:12; Matt 2:2; Gal 1:13; 1 Thess 2:14). The book of Acts contains sixty references to “the Jews,” and eight to “a Jew.” They are also referred to as:

- “Jacob” (Rom 11:26).
- “The tribes of Israel” (Gen 49:16; Num 31:4; Josh 22:14; Judges 20:2; 1 Sam 2:28; Psa 78:55).
- “The twelve tribes of Israel” (Gen 49:28; Ex 24:4).
- “The tribes of the children of Israel” (Josh 4:5,8; 19:51; 21:1; Rev 7:4).
- “The people of the children of Israel” (Ex 1:9).
- “The people of Israel” (Num 21:6; Josh 8:33; Ezra 2:2; Neh 7:7; Amos 9:14).
- “The people of God” (Judges 20:2).
- “The people of the Lord ” (Judges 5:11).
- “The children of Israel” (Ex 3:14; 19:2; Rom 9:27; Heb 11:22; Rev 2:14). There are six hundred and thirty-five uses of this expression in Scripture – 621 in the Genesis through Malachi, and 14 in Matthew through Revelation.

The word “Israel” is found 2,566 times in Scripture. The only name mentioned more is “God” (4,019). “Lord” is mentioned 1,055 times. By way of comparison “Gentiles” and “Gentile” are mentioned 123 times, and “nations” 336 times.

The location of the various peoples of the earth – “the sons of Adam” – was determined in

accordance with the number of the children of Israel. It is written, “When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel ” (Deut 32:8).

THE LOFTIEST VIEW

“Ye men of Israel” reflects the highest view of the Jewish nation. Although many Israelites found confidence in being a “Jew,” resting in the Law and making a boast in God (Rom 2:17), the term “Israel” removes all cause for national boasting. This traces their existence back to God, who “chose Israel” and made Himself “known” to “the house of Jacob” (Ezek 20:5).

Lest the Gentiles imagine that the Israelites no longer have any significance with God, Paul presents a lengthy argument for the absurdity of such an imagination. It is appropriate to briefly consider his argument, lest we be tempted to view Pentecost as a mere technicality. This was a “first fruits” harvest, and was reaped in anticipation of a fuller harvest of the children of the Israel, as well as the “other sheep” that would be added from the Gentile world (John 10:16). Peter will also acknowledge this greater harvest when he cries out, “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off , even as many as the Lord our God shall call ” (Acts 2:39).

ROMANS CHAPTERS 9-11

Here, I will only provide an outlined overview of Paul’s argument, confirming that at no point is the offer of salvation, and the anticipation of it being received, withdrawn from Israel.

- Paul maintains a great concern for Israel (9:1-3).
- God made a determined investment in Israel (9:4-5).
- There is a remnant within the nation, chosen by God, as confirmed in their history (9:6-13).
- The righteous character God supports the maintenance of Israel, for His will is the determining factor, in both those who reject and those who accept (9:14-24).
- There is a remnant within Israel who will yet be reaped. The reasonableness of this is seen in the fact that the Gentiles were themselves redeemed from an unacceptable state. It makes all the more sense for the Israelites to also receive mercy (9:25-33).

Lest the Gentiles imagine that the Israelites no longer have any significance with God, Paul presents a lengthy argument for the absurdity of such an imagination. It is appropriate to briefly consider his argument, lest we be tempted to view Pentecost as a mere technicality.

Just as with the Gentiles, the present state of unbelieving Israel is due to their own spiritual obtuseness (10:1-3).

- Faith, however, induced by the hearing of the Gospel, can triumph over such a sordid past (10:4-17).
- Although the sound of the Gospel has been heard by the Israelites, God, in accord with His word through Moses, will provoke them to jealousy by the acceptance of the Gentiles (10:18-21).
- It is categorically stated that God has not cast away His people Israel (11:1a).
- Paul presents himself as proof of this, for he was not cast away (11:1b).
- The fact that God has always preserved a remnant among this people is confirmed by such a preservation in the days of Elijah (11:2-4).
- Thus there remains a remnant among the people, “according to election,” even

though they are presently in a state of unbelief (11:5).

- This arrangement is in perfect accord with the grace of God (11:6).
- Israel as a whole has not obtained the benefit, but the remnant within them did, and “the rest were blinded” (11:7-10).
- The stumbling of Israel is not a permanent condition – i.e., they have not utterly fallen (11:11a).
- Instead, this has been God’s means of bringing salvation to the Gentiles, to whom, God had not sent a prophet affirming a coming salvation (11:11b).
- The salvation of the Gentiles is not intended to be an end of itself, but is designed to provoke Israel “to jealousy” (11:11c).
- If the fall of Israel brought the riches of salvation to the world, and the diminishing of them meant salvation’s wealth was brought to the Gentiles, much more will blessing be brought by their restoration (11:12).
- Paul magnified his ministry to the Gentiles in order that he might provoke the Israelites to jealousy (11:13-14).
- If the casting away of Israel meant the reconciling of the whole world, receiving them again will induce an even greater spiritual resurrection (11:15).
- If the beginning of the nation (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) was holy, then so are their offspring (11:16).
- Only “some of the branches” were broken off of the tree, making room for the grafting in of the Gentile branches, who came from a wild tree (11:17a).
- The Gentile branches are partaking of the stability and vitality of a Jewish root and tree. Therefore, it cannot be that the total Jewish tree has been rejected (11:17b).
- Gentile believers should not be proud against the Israelites, for the Gentiles are being supported by the Israelite’s tree (11:18).
- Some Gentiles may assume that the Israelites were broken off in order that they might take their place. This is not so. It was because of unbelief that the “some” branches were broken off, and the Gentiles are in the tree by faith, and thus will, also be broken off if they abide not in that faith (11:19-22).
- Likewise, the fallen Israelites will also be grafted in again if they abide not still in unbelief. That makes more sense to men that the grafting in of the Gentiles, who never were a people. What is even more, “God is able to graft them in again” (11:23).
- If the Gentiles were put into the rich olive tree “contrary to nature,” “how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?” (Rom 11:24).

A TECHNICAL POINT

Prior to the time when Peter was speaking, Jesus had already told Jerusalem it would be rejected, because it had rejected Him, knowing not the day of it’s visitation (Luke 19:42-44). He categorically told them, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate : and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me , UNTIL the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Luke 13:35). Yet Peter rises on this memorable Pentecost, and will call forth the remnant, fulfilling this word: “until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” True, it will be a remnant, yet it will also be the “first fruits” of an even greater harvest to come!

Therefore, when Peter addresses these people he is appealing to their Divine heritage. He is stirring up a recollection of “the fathers” and the unequivocal promises that were made to them. He will therefore, by this means, plead with great insight and power. We do well to give heed to his words.

HEAR THESE WORDS

“ 22b . . . hear these words.” Other versions read, “listen to these words,” NASB “listen to this,” NIV “listen to what I have to say,” NRSV “give ear to these words,” BBE and “I beg you to listen to my words.” PHILLIPS

We cannot make too much of these words. If it is true that “faith cometh by hearing,” then men must be exhorted to hear – to listen, hearken, give heed, and take into their hearts and minds what is being said by the Gospel.

Jesus had told His disciples, “Preach the Gospel to every creature!” (Mk 16:15). The promise that those who “believe” and are “baptized” shall be saved, postulates that the Gospel has been heard. The emphasis here is on the preaching, not on the baptizing. For some, this is too hard to hear, because they imagine that it is somehow demeaning baptism. Such a notion is only an unfounded thought to be cast down.

Paul stated the case, and it is to be received, offensive or not. “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor 1:17). Paul said this because there were some in Corinth who attached more significance to their baptism, and who performed it, than to the Christ into whom they were baptized. He wrote, “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other” (1 Cor 1:13-16).

It was certainly not that Paul was indifferent about the subject of baptism. Much of what we know about this ordinance was delivered to us by Paul himself (Rom 6:3-17; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:12-15). However, if you remove Jesus Christ from Paul’s writings, you will also have to remove the subject of baptism, for it all hinges on Christ Jesus the Lord.

Now Peter calls upon the people before him to “hear” his words. The word “hear” comes from a word meaning, “to attend to, using the faculty of hearing; consider what is said; understand, perceive the sense of what is being said.” THAYER A summons to “hear my words” is a call to consider and understand with the intention of obeying. This is the kind of statement a spiritually confident man makes. Peter does not assume this posture because of his natural speaking ability. His is an sureness produced by faith – the “full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), and “the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2). He has not been taught speaking skills, nor has he taken a course in the art of persuasion. The truth of God has impacted his spirit, and he himself comprehends what he is going to say.

RECEIVING IS NOT OPTIONAL

Jesus made quite clear how heaven regards those who refuse the ones He sends, not hearkening to them, or treating them just as though they had said nothing important. “He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me”

I have often heard men present what they conceive to be the truth as though there was an option available to men to reject it. They call upon men to research the possibility of what they say, and

buttress their remarks with words like, “I believe this with all of my heart.” Such produces an atmosphere much like an academic classroom where the students are asked to consider various contradicting theories, then pick the one to which they are attracted. It all sounds innocent enough, and maybe even “intellectually honest.”

However, when you are speaking of matters with eternal consequences, and issues that relate to the God with whom we have to do, there is no room for such approaches. When we address the death of Christ, human guilt, and the resurrection of Christ, there really is no room for any opinion. We need the unvarnished truth on such issues, and men must be exhorted to hear what is being said.

IS IT IMPORTANT TO HEAR?

If you are tempted to wonder how important hearing is, consider the words of the prophet Isaiah. “Incline your ear, and come unto me : hear, and your soul shall live ; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isa 55:3). Is there anything about that word that makes for indifference, differing opinions, or the development of some lifeless philosophy? Is there no consequence for failing to “incline your ear” to the living God? Is being made alive irrelevant? What of passing by an “everlasting covenant, even the sure mercies of David?” Does that sound like something that is neutral, unimportant, or merely interesting?

Remember, Peter is speaking as Christ’s witness. Jesus had already told the disciples that when the Spirit came upon them, and they were “endured with power from on high,” they would be His “witnesses” (Acts 1:8). That is, God was speaking to the people through Peter , perfectly coinciding with Paul’s later statement, “as though God did beseech you by us” (2 Cor 5:20).

Jesus made quite clear how heaven regards those who refuse the ones He sends, not hearkening to them, or treating them just as though they had said nothing important. “He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me ” (Luke 10:16). There is a “threefold cord” (Eccl 4:12) that is woven by God. It consists of God Himself, the Lord Jesus whom He has sent, and those who are sent out by Christ. To reject the one who is Christ’s witness is to reject Christ Himself. To reject Christ, is to reject God.

Ponder the word that Jeremiah was given to speak. “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD” (Jer 22:29). Consider the outcome of rejecting that threefold admonition. I will venture to say there has never been a time when God spoke to men through holy men that He was indifferent about their response.

Let your mind take in the words of Moses, the servant of the Lord. “ Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of My mouth . My doctrine shall drop as the rain, My speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass: because I will publish the name of the LORD: ascribe ye greatness unto our God” (Deut 32:1-3). God’s word is copious, supplying nourishment to those tender souls, whether they are new in the household of faith, or a bruised reed, or smoking flax. It also supplies rich nourishment to the stable and strong, who are like the robust and full-grown grass of the field. However, the profitable and abundant word of the Lord brings no benefit to those who do not hear it, failing to give their ears to the Lord. Peter knows this well, and that is why he calls upon the people to hear his words.

If you have “an ear to hear” you will sense that one of the besetting sins of the modern church is that its ministers rarely have very much to say. Too many of its preachers speak only of modern day issues. They do really have a message – one through which faith “comes” (Rom 10:17), because it is the means through the Holy Spirit works on the hearts of men. Too many professing ministers are only giving sundry responses to what is happening among men. You will at once perceive that this is not the way it is with Peter. He does have something to say, and he therefore bids the people to give heir attention to it. He will speak forcefully and candidly, and will demand that the people

listen to him.

JESUS OF NAZARETH

“ 22c . . . Jesus of Nazareth . . .” Other versions read, “Jesus the Nazarene,” NASB and “Jesus from Nazareth.” GWN

The phrase “Jesus of Nazareth” occurs seventeen times in Scripture (Matt 26:71; Mk 1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Lk 4:34; 18:37; 24:19; John 1:45; 18:5,7; 19:19; Acts 2:22; 6:16; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9). John records the full writing of the inscription that Pilate had “prepared and fastened to the cross.” NIV “And Pilate wrote a title, and put it on the cross. And the writing was, JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS” (John 19:19).

Herein is a most interesting circumstance! At this point, Peter does not refer to “Christ the Lord,” “the Son of God,” the “Savior of the world,” or even “Christ” or “Messiah.” He rather speaks of the Lord as He was last publically known – when He was crucified and a sign was placed above His head identifying Him as “Jesus of Nazareth”

Matthew refers to the writing as an “accusation,” or charge against Him. “And set up over his head his accusation written, THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Matt 27:37). Mark refers to the sign as a “written notice,” NIV and represents it as saying, “THE KING OF THE JEWS” (Mk 15:26). Luke also refers to it as a “superscription,” and says it read “This is the king of the Jews” (Lk. 23:38). John informs us that the “chief priests” objected to this sign. They went to Pilate about the matter. “Then said the chief priests of the Jews to Pilate, Write not, The King of the Jews; but that he said, I am King of the Jews” (John 19:21). Ponder the following.

- His enemies were known to refer to Jesus as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Matt 26:71; Mk 14:67).
- The demons calls him by this title (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34), indicating they were well familiar with Him, and where He was raised and conducted His affairs unto thirty years of age.
- When Bartimaeus asked who was passing by, this was the description the people used (Mk 10:47; Lk 18:37). Angels called him “Jesus of Nazareth” (Mk 16:6).
- On the road to Emmaus Cleopas referred to Him in this way (Lk 24:19).
- When Philip found Nathanael and told him they had found the one of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote, he called Jesus by this title (John 1:45).
- When the soldiers came to the garden to arrest Jesus, and He asked them who they were seeking, they twice replied, “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 18:5).
- When Stephen’s opponents raised charges against him, and eventually stoned him, they said, “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:14).
- When Peter preached to Cornelius and his household, this is how He referred to the Savior (Acts 10:38).
- When Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, and Saul asked Him, who He was, the Lord replied, “I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest” (Acts 22:8).
- When Paul recounted his past life, he said, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth ” (Acts 26:9).

CONSIDER THE SAYING

Herein is a most interesting circumstance! At this point, Peter does not refer to “Christ the Lord,”

“the Son of God,” the “Savior of the world,” or even “Christ” or “Messiah.” He rather speaks of the Lord as He was last publically known – when He was crucified and a sign was placed above His head identifying Him as “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 19:19). When He was arrested in the garden by “the men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees,” this was how they referred to Him (John 18:3). This is how He was known among the people. Those standing before Peter well knew that this was the man concerning whom they had cried out “Crucify Him, crucify Him” (John 19:6), and “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him,” and “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). When Pilate told the crowd he was “innocent of the blood of this just person,” the people shouted out, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt 27:25).

That was the “Jesus of Nazareth” the people standing before Peter knew. When the people had been exposed to His matchless words, in spiritual coldness and rebellion they had responded, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him” (Mark 6:3). So far as they were concerned, that was the Jesus they knew, and they had clearly made known their view of Him. Now Peter would face them with who Jesus really was, what they themselves had done, and how the very purposes of God had been fulfilled in their presence.

A MAN APPROVED OF GOD

“ 22d . . . a Man approved of God among you . . . ”

The people to whom Peter was preaching had not approved of Jesus – not as He had represented Himself. They had received Him as “the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses, and of Judah and Simon” (Mk 6:3). They had received Him to some degree as “the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee” (Matt 21:11). But they had never perceived this Jesus as Peter was going to proclaim Him.

Although much is not made of this fact during our time, what the Father thinks of the Son of paramount importance. Many spend a considerable amount of time speaking to men about what God thinks of them. It all sounds very nice, but it is not. The Gospel focuses on the Father’s approval of Jesus, for without that approval salvation is simply not possible.

This is the man they had rejected, not knowing that in Him they had experienced “the time of” their “visitation” (Lk 19:44). Jesus Himself told them He had brought them the “things which belong to thy peace! But now they are hid from thy eyes” (Lk 19:42). In fact, in accordance with the word of the prophets, God had “visited and redeemed His people” (Lk 1:68). God had even sent a forerunner to announce the Savior’s coming, and ready the people to receive Him. Thus Zecharias, the father of that prophet John the Baptist, declared, “Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78-79).

APPROVED OF GOD

. . . a Man approved of God. . . ” Other versions read, “a Man attested by God,” NKJV “a man accredited by,” NIV “a man who had the approval of God,” BBE “a man pointed out . . . by God,” CSB “a man borne witness to by God,” DARBY “a man whom God brought to . . . attention,” GWN “a man made manifest . . . by God,” MRD “a man commendedto you by God,” NET “God publicly endorsed,” NLT “a very special man. God clearly showed this,” IE “a Man accredited and pointed out and shown forth and commended and attested . . . by God,” AMPLIFIED and “a man proved . . .by God himself.” PHILLIPS

First, this is something that was done deliberately by the living God, and directly specifically to the Israelites. The aim was to sanction “Jesus of Nazareth” as the promised Messiah.

From the very beginning this was made plain. When, for example, Jesus was born, a holy angel told lowly shepherds, “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord” (Luke 2:11). Before Jesus was born “of a woman,” an angel from the Lord told Joseph, to whom Mary was espoused, “And she shall bring forth a Son, and thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). When Jesus was baptized by John, God Himself said “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matt 3:17). In His first message in His own home town, Jesus read Isaiah’s prophecy of the coming Messiah and what He was sent to do. He then announced, “This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (Luke 4:21).

In addition, throughout Christ’s prodigious ministry, He was “approved of God.” Later, Peter declared to the household of Cornelius, “How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Nicodemus, an inquiring Pharisee, acknowledged that it was evident that God was “with Him” (John 3:2). When the Jews objected to Jesus saying God was His Father, He said to them, “the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36). He also affirmed that “the Father” had “sealed” Him (John 6:27).

A Critical Requirement

Although much is not made of this fact during our time, what the Father thinks of the Son of paramount importance. Many spend a considerable amount of time speaking to men about what God thinks of them. It all sounds very nice, but it is not. The Gospel focuses on the Father’s approval of Jesus, for without that approval salvation is simply not possible. If men are going to be saved, someone who is, without any question, approved by God must accomplish it, for we cannot extricate ourselves from the bondage into which sin cast us.

Salvation in all of its aspects must come from outside ourselves. This is because sin has made men thoroughly unacceptable to God. That is a condition that results in unregenerated men being “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

The One charged with effectively addressing and correcting this condition must be approved by God, being well pleasing to Him, for God Himself is the reason for the salvation. Also, His work must be accepted. Scripture affirms this in a number of ways.

- Jesus “suffered for sins” that He might “bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18).
- Jesus reconciled us “to God” (Rom 5:10).
- We have been “alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- Being made “free from sin,” we have become “servants to God” (Rom 6:22).
- We have been “married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).
- Only those who serve Christ are “acceptable to God” (Rom 14:18).
- In salvation we turn “to God” (1 Thess 1:9).
- It is through Christ that we “come unto God” (Heb 7:25).
- Through Christ we have been made “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:5).
- There is only “one Mediator between God and man, the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5).

The entirety of our salvation, from beginning to end, depends upon God’s approval of Christ. The Jesus we embrace MUST be the One God approved and sent into the world. It MUST be the One

whom God sustained during His earthly ministry. It MUST be the One whose death God accepts, as confirmed by His resurrection from the dead. It MUST be the One to whom God listens as He makes intercession for those who come to God through Him.

There is a “Jesus” that is sanctioned, accepted, and approved by God for the work of saving men. That means that God honors His words and His works. It means He blesses those who receive Jesus in the capacity God has ordained.

If God has “approved” Jesus, there can be no acceptable reason for rejecting Him. It can never be acceptable to ignore what He says, or refuse what He offers.

The entirety of our salvation, from beginning to end, depends upon God’s approval of Christ. The Jesus we embrace MUST be the One God approved and sent into the world. It MUST be the One whom God sustained during His earthly ministry. It MUST be the One whose death God accepts, as confirmed by His resurrection from the dead. It MUST be the One to whom God listens as He makes intercession for those who come to God through Him.

AMONG YOU

. . . among you . . .” Other versions read, “to you,” NKJV “ to your attention ,” GWN “ publicly endorsed ,” NLT

Now Peter informs the audience that God’s approval of Jesus did not take place behind closed doors, or on a mountain apart from the people. God approved, sanctioned, and endorsed “Jesus of Nazareth” among them . He drew their attention to Him, publicly endorsing Him. Paul referred to the public nature of Christ’s life, ministry, and death when he said to Festus, “For the king knows about these matters, and I speak to him also with confidence, since I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice; for this has not been done in a corner ” NASB (Acts 26:26).

The Divine approval of “Jesus of Nazareth” was not merely general – only for the masses of people at large. It was a targeted approval – “among you ,” “to your attention.” The Israelites were the ones among whom Jesus ministered. His activities were primarily in their villages, towns, and cities (Matt9:35; Mk 6:6; Mk 6:56). He was in their synagogues (Matt 4:23), and taught daily in their Temple (Lk 19:47). He ministered in all three parts of their land: Galilee (Matt 15:41; John 7:1,9), Samaria (Lk 17:11; John 4:4),and Judaea (Matt 19:1). He attended, and ministered at their feasts (Matt 26:17; John 5:1;6:4; 7:2, 37). He ministered by their sea shores (Matt 13:2), desert places of their area (Matt 13:13-15), as well as throughout their country (Matt 9:31; 14:35). He ministered in Caesarea Philippi in the far North(Matt 15:13), and the southmost region of Idumaea (Mk 3:6).

In all of these regions, it was apparent and beyond question that Jesus was no ordinary man. Multitudes flocked to Him “from every quarter” (Mk 1:45). It is written, “And there followed Him great multitudes of people from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan” (Matt 4:25).Three times Matthew wrote, “great multitudes followed Him” (Matt 8:1; 12:15; 19:2). Seven times the people to whom Jesus ministered are referred to as “the multitudes” (Matt 5:1; 9:33,36; 11:7; 14:22,23; 21:9).

In the ministry of Jesus the rich were exposed to Him (Lk 18:23), the “common people” (Mk 12:37), the religious elite (Matt 15:1), and the socially unapproved(Matt 9:10). The king heard about Him and His mighty works (Mk 6:14). Special religious councils were convened because of Him (Matt 22:15;Mk 3:6). Two times He fed a multitude miraculously with very small supplies of bread and fish (Matt 14:21; 15:38). He went into their homes (Matt 9:10,28; 26:6). He healed their sick in the streets (Mk 6:56), throughout “all Syria” (Matt 4:24), and in desolate places (Matt 12:15).

All of this is a commentary on “among you.” Peter will establish that there was no possible excuse for the Jews missing the significance of Jesus, much less for their rejection of Him.

A PRINCIPLE TO BE SEEN

In the end, we will see that there is no valid reason for the ignorance of God – not so much as a single one. Even where it appears as though the Gospel has not been preached, men have been created with a conscience that should compel them to engage in a quest for God, for the “work of the law” has been Divinely written upon it (Rom 2;15). In addition to this, God has strategically and purposefully positioned every person in both time and geography in order that they might seek the Lord . “From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” NIV (Acts 17:26-27). I hardly see how anything can be stated with greater precision and objectivity.

Add to this the ministry of the Prophets and John the Baptist among the Jews, together with the prodigious ministry of Jesus, and the words of Peter obtain unusual strength and conviction – “A Man approved of God among you.” There was not a soul in that region that had not in some way been exposed to “Jesus of Nazareth.” He was like a household name throughout the length and breadth of the land.

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THE MEANS BY WHICH HE WAS APPROVED

“ 22e . . . by miracles and wonders and signs which God did by Him in the midst of you . . . ”

Now Peter declares the means by which Jesus was publicly “approved by God” among them . The appointed means were in no way ambiguous, vague, or open to question. They were thorough, unquestionable, and beyond all controversy.

Three classifications of mighty works are given, with each of them transcending the natural order. By “transcending the natural order” I mean the works Jesus wrought could not have been accomplished by natural means, even though some of them had to with natural activities. They occurred in nature, but were not done by employing the forces, or laws, of nature. Take, for example, the feedings of the four thousand and the five thousand. Both of them involved a natural activity – eating. The multitudes were not fed miraculously by nourishing the people without them eating. They also were given bread and fish – ordinary food. They were not fed with “bread from heaven,” (John 6;31-32) or “angels’ bread ” (Psa 78:25). Yet, Jesus used a means of multiply the bread and fish that were outside the boundaries of natural power. Bread cannot reproduce itself, or increase in quantity by means of natural laws.

I say these things because there are those who teach that miracles, signs, or wonders are wholly outside the limits of nature. Those holding to this view take the position all works within he categories of our text are creative in nature. However, as in the case of Jesus feeding the multitudes, He did not create

bread and fish, but rather increased them. That is the same kind of miracle wrought when the widow of Zarephath found her small portion of oil and meal being sustained throughout a famine, even though it was being used (1 Kgs 17:16). The same was true of the widow’s “pot of oil,” which, though small, was used to fill a great number of vessels, yet the oil in the “pot” did not diminish (2 Kgs 4:3-6).

BY MIRACLES . . .

“ . . . by miracles and wonders and signs . . .” Other versions read, “with deeds of power,” NRSV “mighty works,” ASV “works of power,” DOUAY “mighty deeds,” NAB “powerful deeds,” NET “by the miracles and portents and signs,” NJB “by doing tremendous miracles,” LIVING

The Greek word from which “miracle” is translated is **duna,mesi** (doon-a-mesi). It comes from the same root word as the word used in Romans 1:16: “the gospel of Christ . . . which is THE POWER of God unto salvation.” Often the word is translated “mighty works” (Matt 11:20-23; 13:34), and “power” of God (Matt 22:29). In Matt 25:15, it is translated “ability” (Matt 25:15). In Mark 5:30, it is translated “virtue.”

This word accents the ability and authority of the Lord to do something. The deed that is wrought is accomplished because of the power and dominance that is resident in the Lord – inherent. The lexical meaning of this word is, “inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts and puts forth,” THAYER “able to produce a strong effect, power, might, strength,” FRIBERG and “ability, capability.” LOUW-NIDA That is, the worker, is able to cause something to happen that could never be accomplished through the ordinary or extended course of nature. An example of a “miracle” is “the miracle of the loaves” (Mk 6:52). Here, the accent is on the one who DOES the miracle, and the power or authority HE possesses.

By these supernatural means – miracles, wonders, and signs – God sanctioned the Person, word, and works of “Jesus of Nazareth.” No adversarial power, whether Satanic or human, could stand before the Lord’s Christ. No demon ever argued with Jesus or sought to resist His will. No infirmity could remain when Jesus had dismissed it. No natural element ever failed to yield to Him, whether wind, storm, waves, water, trees, or fish.

As used in this text, the word “miracle” does not mean sign, or proof. It rather speaks of the ability and authority to do something – like dismiss demons with His word (Matt 8:16).

BY . . . WONDERS

Other versions read, “ did amazing things,” GWN “prodigies,” MRD and “portents.” NJB

Coming from the Greek word *te,rasi* (teras), a “wonder” is something that is so unusual it draws the attention of men. It is something wrought externally that can be observed and analyzed by others. Lexically the word means, “something so strange as to cause it to be watched or observed,” THAYER and “something so unusual it arouses close observation.” FRIBERG Here the accent is on the NATURE of the work that is done.

The healing of a man with a withered hand, and the raising of an impotent man, might be called a “wonder” – something that could be seen. By way of comparison, in the woman who was miraculously healed of an issue of blood the effects of the miracle were seen, and not the miracle itself.

In this sense, not all of Christ’s mighty works were “wonders” – done openly with the intent to gain the attention of the people. It is not that they were not wonders in the sense of being able to cause the people to marvel. Rather, they were not done openly – like turning water into wine (John 2:1-10), and Peter getting a coin from a fish’s mouth (Matt 17:27).

Examples of “wonders” would be the more open works that caused the people to marvel (Matt 8:27; 9:8,33).

BY . . . SIGNS . . .

Other versions read, “miraculous signs,” NET and “wonder-works/” WILLIAMS

The word “sign” comes from the Greek word **shmei,ojj** (say-mi-ois), which refers to a supernatural work that serves as a pointer to some distinguishing characteristic. Lexically the word means, “that by which a person or a thing is distinguished from others and known,” THAYER “basically, what serves as a pointer to aid perception or insight; sign, mark, distinguishing characteristic” FRIBERG and “a sign, a mark, a token,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

An example would be the healing of the paralytic man who was let down through the roof to Jesus’ feet. Before healing Him, Jesus said: “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (he saith to the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house” (Mark 2:10-11).

Although not the point of this text, the preeminent “sign” is the resurrection of Christ, which confirmed that He was the Son of God with authority and power (Rom 1:4). Using the same word that is employed in this text, Jesus said of His resurrection, “But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign ; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: for as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:40).

In this case, the PURPOSE of the work is the point – the reality to which it points.

WHICH GOD DID AMONG YOU

“ . . . which God did by Him in the midst of you.” Other versions read “which God did through Him in your midst,” NKJV “Which God performed through Him in your midst,” NASB “which God wrought by Him in your midst,” DARBY and “which God performed through Him right here among you .” WILLIAMS

By these supernatural means – miracles, wonders, and signs – God sanctioned the Person, word, and works of “Jesus of Nazareth.” No adversarial power, whether Satanic or human, could stand before the Lord’s Christ. No demon ever argued with Jesus or sought to resist His will. No infirmity could remain when Jesus had dismissed it. No natural element ever failed to yield to Him, whether wind, storm, waves, water, trees, or fish. He spoke “with authority” (Lk 4:36) because He had authority from God, being approved by Him. No man could touch, harm, answer, or arrest Jesus until the time came for Him to lay down His life. The reason for this – He was “approved of God.”

This Divine approval did not take place in a remote area, but “among” the Jews themselves. It was a public approval, a frequent approval, and an effective approval. God gave the people enough evidence of His unqualified sanction of “Jesus of Nazareth”, so that no question concerning the identity or authenticity of Jesus could possibility be legitimate.

Jesus had gone “among the people,” working the works of God. As it is written, “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people ” (Matt 4:23). And again, “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people ” (Matt 9:35). His presence among them was so arresting that it is written, “So there was a division among the people because of Him ” (John 7:43), and “There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings” (John 10:19). The entire area was aflame with an acute awareness of the presence and ministry of Jesus, His words, and His works. Peter powerfully places this before the people.

YOU KNOW IT WELL

“ 22f . . . as ye yourselves also know.” Other versions read, “just as you yourselves know,” NASB “as you yourselves have knowledge,” BBE “as you also know,” DOUAY “as you well know,” NLT “according as also ye yourselves have known,” YLT “You know this is true,” IE and “as you very well know.” PHILLIPS

Peter now appeals to the conscience of the people. They were fully aware of the Divine approval to which Peter has referred. It was their hard hearts and unwillingness to yield that caused them to ignore all of that evidence, rejecting the Son of God. Ponder the many references to the response of the people to Jesus. They confirm they knew– at last intellectually – of the extraordinary nature of Christ, His words, and His works.

- **ASTONISHED AT HIS DOCTRINE.** “And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine ” (Matt 7:28).
- **THE PEOPLE WERE AMAZED.** “And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?” (Matt 12:23).
- **THE PEOPLE FOLLOWED HIM.** “When Jesus heard of it, He departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed Him on foot out of the cities” (Matt 14:13).
- **THE PEOPLE PRAISED HIM.** “And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matt 21:9).
- **THE PEOPLE RAN TO HIM.** “And straightway all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him” (Mark 9:15).

Peter now appeals to the conscience of the people. They were fully aware of the Divine approval to which Peter has referred. It was their hard hearts and unwillingness to yield that caused them to ignore all of that evidence, rejecting the Son of God.

THE PEOPLE GLORIFIED GOD. “And immediately he arose, took up the bed, and went forth before them all; insomuch that they were all amazed, and glorified God, saying, We never saw it on this fashion” (Mark 2:12).

- **THE PEOPLE RESORTED TO HIM.** “And He arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan: and the people resort unto Him again; and, as He was wont, He taught them again” (Mark 10:1).
- **EVEN THE SCRIBES AND CHIEF PRIESTS KNEW OF HIM.** “And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy Him: for they feared Him, because all the people was astonished at His doctrine” (Mark 11:18).
- **THEY WONDERED AT HIS WORDS.** “And all bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?” (Luke 4:22).
- **THE PEOPLE PRESSED TO HEAR HIM.** “And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon Him to hear the word of God, He stood by the lake of Gennesaret” (Luke 5:1).
- **THEY GLORIFIED GOD AND WERE FILLED WITH FEAR.** “And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to day” (Luke 5:26).
- **THE PEOPLE RECEIVED HIM.** “And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people gladly received Him: for they were all waiting for Him” (Luke 8:40).
- **MANY BELIEVED ON HIM.** “And many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done?” (John

7:31).

The above texts are all confirmation of the impact of God's approval of Jesus among the people. There was no acceptable reason for the Jews rejecting Him – not so much as a single one. He had been approved with unwavering consistency over and over, time and again, among them .

HIM!

“ 23a Him . . .” Other versions read, “This man,” NASB “this Jesus,” RSV “This same,” DOUAY and “This very man.” ISV

In this single word Peter narrows the focus of his words to a solitary Individual – the Lord Jesus Christ. The prophets had declared that the hopes of humanity depended upon “a Man” – not a nation, not an army, not a body of people, but “a Man.” And a Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa 32:2). Again, speaking of the coming Messiah – a single person – Isaiah wrote, “And He shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isa 8:14).

What spirit would provoke any one to shine the spotlight of attention on any other person? How is it possible for a people to become so enamored of an individual, a movement, or a line of thinking that do not give the obvious preeminence to this man?

The Divine assessment of every person will be made upon the basis of this Person. He will either be a place of refuge, or a Stone of stumbling, a great Rock to shelter them from the heat or a “gin (trap) and a snare” by which they will be discovered and condemned. He would be either a Foundation – the means of their stability – or a crushing Rock that would grind them into powder.

What spirit would provoke any one to shine the spotlight of attention on any other person? How is it possible for a people to become so enamored of an individual, a movement, or a line of thinking that do not give the obvious preeminence to this man? Keep in mind, that to divide the people of God, you must focus on something other than Jesus, for He is not divided, and cannot be the cause of division among His people.

Throughout history – from very early times – the focus of the church has been its weakness. Paul stated the case well to the Colossians, who were being pulled away from a proper focus. “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him , which is the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). It is not possible to obtain any resource required for life and godliness that is not resident in the Person of Christ. There is no body of human knowledge that contains so much as a mote of spiritual value. No mere man has ever, or can ever, present a new line of reasoning to the people of God, a thought-out procedure that will enhance spiritual life, or a principle that will cause a person to in any way excel in spiritual life. Men may extol such things as hermeneutics, homiletics, apologetics, logic, and the likes, but there is no life in any of them. No person can in any way say of such principles of thought, “they are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). None of them can make “the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17). Unlike the Word of God, none of them can beget a soul (James 1:18), save the soul (James 1:21), build men up (Acts 20:32), or make men “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15). Only the Word of God, which focuses on the Lord's Christ, can accomplish such things – and they are all essential to our identity with God through God.

There are at least two principle diversions from Christ in the “Christian” community. These have to do with appropriating and maintaining a productive relationship with the living God. Both of them have this one thing in common: Jesus is not the main thing. He is not the solitary means of

Divine approval or moral improvement. All of them are driven by an overestimation of the human mind and an underestimation of the need for the grace of God as ministered exclusively through the Lord Jesus Christ.

LAW

Within, for what of a better term, “Christendom,” there is an approach to man’s association with God that is based upon the Law principle . This approach assumes a fundamental recalcitrance within “Christians.” This primary propensity requires an approach to Divine acceptance and godly living that is much like surrounding the individual with a fence. Boundaries are established beyond which men cannot go, and within which they are bound to operate by obligation. This particular view prompts unlearned preachers and teachers to say to believers, “We are just like the Israelites of old,” or “You know how we are; we seek our own will and do not want to do God’s will,” or “We just do not listen to the Lord as we should,” or “We need to make Jesus the Lord of our life.” All of this has a kind of holy sound to it, and draws affirmative responses from the half-hearted and lukewarm.

The premier Law is the one inculcated upon men by the living God Himself – The Ten Commandments and the ordinances that surrounded them. This Law stands for all moral law. It’s purpose was never to justify. It was never intended to be a means of obtaining Divine approval. Rather, it’s purpose is summarized in these words: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19). In this ministry, it is appropriately referred to as “our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). In other words, it confirmed the need of a Savior to all who took it seriously.

In its ministry, this Law also confirmed the inability of law – any law – to justify a person, or exonerate him from sin and its defiling effects. In confirmation of this the Spirit says, “Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law ” (Gal 3:21). That is, for a law to be effective as a means of obtaining God’s approval, it must be able to confer life .

No person who can handle the Word of God aright will affirm that life – spiritual life – can be conferred upon men by means of a law, or a rule of conduct. Such a postulate borders on insanity. Jesus has made quite clear that life lies in a Person, not a code. He affirmed that He Himself is “the Life” (John 14:6), and that He alone, having life “in Himself,” has been given the power or authority, to confer life (John 5:26).

Peter’s employment of the term “HIM” draws the attention of His hearers to the Lord Jesus, the sole means of obtaining eternal life and the Divine acceptance that is bound to it.

PHILOSOPHY

A philosophical approach to obtaining life is based upon human reasoning. While it may be associated with various laws, rules, routines, and disciplines, the imagined strength of this system is human reasoning itself.

Paul warned the Colossians of this dreadful approach to spirituality, which was already being perpetrated among them by false teachers. “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world , and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:8-10). Other versions read, “philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men,” NKJV “philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world,” NASB “hollow and

deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world,” NIV and “so-called philosophy and intellectualism and vain deceit (idle fancies and plain nonsense), following human tradition (men’s ideas of the material rather than the spiritual world), just crude notions following the rudimentary and elemental teachings of the universe.”

AMPLIFIED

Notice that this approach is contrasted with one that is “after Christ.” This erroneous approach exists because men do not believe there is completeness in Christ (Col 2:9). The fulness of the Godhead is not seen as resident in Christ, which imagination allows for the appropriation of needed resources elsewhere. Also observe that the philosophical approach borrows from the world (“rudiments of the world”), and has human tradition as one of its main pillars (“the tradition of men”).

The word “philosophy” is an interesting one. It is a transliteration of the Greek word **filosofia** (fil-os-of-ee-as). As used in the Colossian text, its lexical meaning is, “a world view, as opposed to that derived from Divine revelation; human wisdom or understanding,” FRIBERG “human understanding or wisdom and, by implication, in contrast with Divinely revealed knowledge,” LOUW-NIDA “sophistry,” GINGRICH

Human reasoning, and the knowledge resulting from it, must never be allowed to become the basis, or foundation, of religious thought. There is nothing unlawful about reasoning itself. In fact, there is a certain necessity of reasoning within the fabric of spiritual life. However, the conclusions reached by human reasoning are only valid when they are found in perfect harmony with Divine utterance. Legitimate conclusions are always founded upon precise Scriptural affirmations.

Hermeneutics

There are a number of bodies of human knowledge that fall into the classification of philosophy. Chief among these intellectual culprits is hermeneutics. The definition of this term is, “The study of the methodological principles of interpretation; a method or principle of interpretation,” MERRIAM-WEBSTER “a philosophical technique concerned with the interpretation and understanding of texts. It may be described as the theory of the interpretation and understanding of a text on the basis of the text itself. The concept of “text” has been extended beyond written documents to include, for example, speech, performances, works of art, and even events. Thus, one might speak of and interpret a ‘social text.’” OXFORD

The Spirit clearly states that there is a thoroughness in Christ Himself that makes us completely adequate. “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). Thus Christ is described as “all, and in all” (Col 2:11), “our Life” (Col 3:4), and “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). If all of the “fulness of the Godhead” dwells in Christ Jesus (Col 1:19; 2:9), how could there possibly be any emphasis other than “Him” ?

There are a number of official hermeneutics – scientific principles by which the Bible is interpreted (as compared with “believed”). The Britannica Encyclopedia provides four of the primary ones. “Its (HERMENEUTICS) primary purpose is to discover the truths and values of the Bible, which is seen as a receptacle of divine revelation. Four major types of hermeneutics have emerged: LITERAL (asserting that the text is to be interpreted according to the “plain meaning”), MORAL (seeking to establish the principles from which ethical lessons may be drawn), ALLEGORICAL (interpreting narratives as having a level of reference beyond the explicit), and ANAGOGICAL or MYSTICAL (seeking to explain biblical events as they relate to the life to come). More recently the word has come to refer to all “deep” reading of literary and philosophical texts.” BRITANNICA ENCLYCLOPEDIA

For example, some read the Bible like a manual of human conduct – a sort of roadmap to heaven.

In this view, the Scriptures are primarily a legal document written to spell out the details of human conduct. Others read it as a kind of unreachable goal that is set before us – the ideal toward which we hopelessly strive. Still others perceive it within an institutional setting – a way of finding out how to identify the one true church. In this approach to Scripture, the lense of human perception is placed over the Scripture, so that it is read with a purely human conclusion in mind.

No absolutely hermeneutical approach perceives Christ Jesus Himself as being the central subject of Scripture, and Object of personal quest (Phil 3:7-14). Some, for example, perceive the primary focus to be the worship of God. Others see it is obtaining the secret to success in this world. Still others see the fundamental matter to be holiness. More could be said, but this will suffice.

At the lowest possible rung of the ladder of human perception there are those who read the Scriptures as a Baptist, Presbyterian, Methodist, Christian Church, of Christ of Christ, Charismatic, Catholic, and even a professing Christian sodomite. Each of these manage to find justification for their particular division of institutionalized Christianity. All of these, however, read over the real point of Scripture, and manage to miss the key Person of God's Son. Oh, they know He is there, and even acknowledge that He is the great Primary One. However, in the development of their distinction in the Christian community they put Him into the background.

Peter does not do this. Immediately He brings the Lord Jesus Christ into the foreground – “HIM!” All of the people knew that Jesus stood out among men as He went about “doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). However, as Peter will confirm, they did not regard Jesus as absolutely preeminent.

THE FOCUS DIVINELY DEFINED

If God's message centers in His Son, why would our message revolve around anything else. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son . And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in His Son ” (1 John 5:10-11).

The message focuses upon what Jesus did, not what we should do. “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand ; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried , and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:1-4). If we “stand” in the Gospel, then who is the author of the notion that the Gospel is not to be preached to the church?

If accomplishment is the point, then the summary of our doctrine must be Christ Himself. “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest , who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a Minister of the sanctuary , and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb 8:1-2). What Jesus IS doing is the primary activity. All other activities are prioritized after that consideration, and are only valid as they are directly related to Christ's activity.

The Spirit clearly states that there is a thoroughness in Christ Himself that makes us completely adequate. “And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). Thus, Christ is described as “all, and in all” (Col 2:11), “our Life” (Col 3:4), and “the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). If all of the “fulness of the Godhead” dwells in Christ Jesus (Col 1:19; 2:9), how could there possibly be any emphasis other than “Him” ? If salvation in all of its multifarious aspects is described as receiving “of HIS fulness” (John 1:16), then we are shut up to Him for all resources required for life and godliness.

BRIEF CONCLUSION

Peter now turns the attention of the people to the Son of God – “HIM.” This is the one individual who is of eternal relevance, and upon whom the destiny of all men is hinged. He will declare that what happened to Jesus is infinitely more important than what has happened to them. He will attribute the most important counsel, knowledge, and work to be that of God Himself. He will also declare that what they did to Jesus was more pertinent to their current status than anything else they ever did. Christ Jesus is the most relevant Person who has ever walked on earth.

BEING DELIVERED UP

“ 23b . . . being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God . . . ”

The subject is Christ Jesus – the One who had been clearly approved by God among the very people now standing before Peter. What would men do with the Man whom God unquestionably and powerfully approved among them? What advantage had their religion given them in the matter of recognizing the One foretold by the holy prophets? How ready had the teaching of the scribes made them to receive “the Lord’s Christ” ? That is what Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, will now address.

BEING DELIVERED

“ . . . being delivered . . . ” Other versions read, “delivered up,” NASB “ handed over to you,” NIV “when He was given up ,” BBE “given up,” DARBY “who was given over to death ,” GWN “ delivered over ,” NAU “who was put into your power ,” NJB “after He was delivered ,” TNT “being given out ,” YLT “God . . . let you ,” LIVING and “after He was betrayed .” WILLIAMS

Jesus was put into their hands. That is, He was placed within the perimeter of their power. They could do with Him whatever they desired. The border of their wills now was extended to include “Jesus of Nazareth.”

Prior to the time when He was “delivered” into their hands, they had absolutely no power of influence of any kind over Him. When the people of His own home town “rose up and thrust Him out of the city,” they “led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon the city was built, that they might cast Him down

Here is what men did when they were given the opportunity by God to do so. The hearts of Jews, Gentiles, common people, religious people, religious leaders, and politicians will now be revealed.

headlog.” It looked like He was within their power at that time – but He was not. It is written, “But He passing through the midst of them went His way” (Luke 4:30). Another time, later in His ministry, the Jews “took . . . up stones to cast at Him: but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by” (John 8:59). Of another occasion it is written, “Therefore they sought again to take him: but He escaped out of their hand” (John 10:39). When the “officers from the chief priests and Pharisees” came to arrest Jesus in the Garden, He acknowledged that He was, indeed, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Of that occasion it is written, “As soon then as He had said unto them, I am He, they went backward, and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). Up to that moment, He had not yet been delivered into their hands. That is why they could not so much as lay a hand on Him, much less do Him harm.

However, following the above-mentioned event, Jesus was put into their hands. Of that occasion it is written, “Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to Him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves. When I was

daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against Me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness ” (Luke 22:53).

It was God Himself who delivered Jesus into the hands of the people. Later Peter will tell another group of Jews, “But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled” (Acts 3:18). It was God who “delivered” Jesus up “for our offenses” (Rom 4:25). It is categorically stated, “ He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all . . .” (Rom 8:32). If God had not handed His own Son over to this hateful mob, they would have been totally frustrated in every one of their attempts to take Him. They were used by God and did not even know it.

Here is what men did when they were given the opportunity by God to do so. The hearts of Jews, Gentiles, common people, religious people, religious leaders, and politicians will now be revealed. Thus the word of Simeon will be fulfilled: “Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed ” (Luke 2:34-35).

BY THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL

“ . . . by the determinate counsel . . . ” Other versions read, “by the determined purpose ,” NKJV “by the predetermined plan ,” NASB “by God’s set purpose ,” NIV “according to the definite plan ,” NRSV “by the decision,” BBE “according to God’s determined plan ,” CSB “by a plan,” GWN “being hereto appointed . . . the good pleasure of God,” MRD “by the deliberate intention ,” NJB “His prearranged plan ,” NLT “it was part of His plan which He made long ago ,” IE “God’s settled purpose ,” WEYMOUTH and “according to the definite and fixed purpose and settled plan .” AMPLIFIED

What occurred to Jesus was not a “prediction.” God does not “predict” or “forecast.” Men make predictions upon the basis of observation, experience, or scientific reason. MERRIAM-WEBSTER Jesus referred to such predictions when He said, “When it is evening, ye say, It will be fair weather: for the sky is red. And in the morning, It will be foul weather to day: for the sky is red and lowering. O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?” (Mat 16:2-3). However, this is NOT the nature of Divine dealings, prophecies, and inspired foretelling.

Early believers knew this is the manner of the Kingdom. When they prayed for Divine power, they referred to God’s determination in regard to the suffering and death of Jesus. “For of a truth against Thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done ” (Acts 4:28).

Jesus Himself said of His imminent death, “And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined : but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22). It was God who set the agenda for Christ’s vicarious death. The prophet Zechariah traced the vulnerability of Jesus to the Father’s work. “Awake, O sword, against My shepherd, and against the man that is My fellow, saith the LORD of hosts: smite the Shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn Mine hand upon the little ones” (Zech 13:7).

Determinate Counsel

The words “determinate counsel” speak of something that is Divinely purposed to happen. It takes place because God has decreed it. It would never have taken place if God did not determine that to happen.

The word “counsel” means “purpose . . . the contents of a Divine plan,” THAYER “an inward thought process leading toward a decision . . . the result of inner deliberation, resolve, decision, purpose, plan,” FRIBERG “that which has been purposed and planned,” LOUW-NIDA “determination,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “resolution.” GINGRICH

“Determinate counsel” speaks of an appointed objective. It declares the will of God that is inherent in Himself, and is not a mere reaction to earthly circumstance. In this “counsel” there is an unwavering and unalterable decision. There is a determination that cannot be changed or in any way thwarted. There is a Divine resolve that will be carried out to the fullest extent, and without a single minuscule omission. This is God’s will at its highest level, where there is no input from any source other than the Godhead. This “counsel” cannot be improved or negated by any influence external to God Himself.

There is a level of God’s will that is subject to variation – a level that interfaces with human circumstance. For example, God is described as One “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). However, this does not mean that all men will be saved. It rather leaves men with the thought that the door of salvation has been opened to them. At this level of the Divine will, faith is the actuating agent.

Again it is written, “In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you” (1 Thess 5:18). This by no means suggests that every one wearing the name of Jesus is thankful. It rather presents God’s will as a sort of circumference within which insightful thanksgiving is offered by faith. Again it is written, “For this is the will of God , even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 Thess 4:3). This is a “will” into which we enter, knowing that all of the resources required for its accomplish are found in Christ Jesus. However, this does not mean that personal sanctification is realized independently of our own involvement in the process.

As declared in Peter’s words, the “counsel” of the Lord involves a Divine will that cannot possibly be contradicted. God says of His “counsel,” “My counsel shall stand , and I will do all My pleasure” (Isa 46:10). This is a “counsel” that cannot possibly be frustrated – you might say it is unconditional: “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever , the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psa 33:11). The delivering up of Jesus took place at a precise period of time – “the fulness of the time” (Gal 1:4). It also was fulfilled in an exact segment of that time – “the hour” (John 12:23; 17:1). Man had absolutely no input into this “counsel.” The only reason any man knows about it is that God has revealed it to us.

AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD

“ . . . and foreknowledge of God . . . ” Other versions read, “and knowledge of God ,” BBE “God had determined in advance ,” GWN “the prescience ,” MRD “God knew what would happen ,” NLT and “God knew ahead of time .” IE

Right here a lot of confusion has been introduced among believers. Several of the translations reflect this confusion, presenting the “foreknowledge of God” as though it speaks of God looking into the future, and seeing what was going to happen. Thus James Murdock’s translation reads, “the prescience.” The word “prescience” means “Divine omniscience, foresight,” MERRIAM-WEBSTER “ability to foresee future events, having knowledge of events before they take place.” OXFORD The New Living Translation reads, “God knew what would happen,” and the International English Version reads similarly, “God knew ahead of time.” It is not possible for a view to be more off-target than is represented by these versions. Our salvation has not been accomplished by means of God foreseeing what men would do to Jesus. To even suggest that the expiation of sins, the reconciliation of men to God, and the making of peace could rest upon such a foundation displays an staggering ignorance of God, Christ, and redemption.

The word “foreknowledge” comes from the Greek word **prognw,sei** (prog-no-sis). Lexically it means, “forethought, prerarrangement,” THAYER “foreknowledge or purpose,” UBS “chosen beforehand.” LOUW-NIDA The Louw-Nida Lexicon translates this verse, “God, in His own will and foreknowledge, had already decided that this One would be handed over to you.”

Even in the lexical definitions, many of the lexicographers miss the point. “Foreknowledge” has to do with purpose, not mere awareness. That is why it is tied with God’s “determinate counsel.”

Divine “foreknowledge” relates to what God Himself purposes to do, NOT what He knows in advance that man will do. Therefore it is written, “Known unto God are all His works from the beginning of the world” (Acts 15:18). Other versions read, “To the Lord was His own work known from the beginning of the world,” DOUAY “From the beginning of the world God knoweth all His works ,” GENEVA and “Known from the ages to God are all His works .” YLT

When it comes to things immediately related to God’s eternal purpose, He is motivated by Himself, and not by the works of fallen man. This fact is made clear by the Holy Spirit.

- “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9).

- “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself ” (Eph 1:9).

- “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will ” (Eph 1:11).

“According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11).

It is essential that this be seen, else a distorted view of God and His purpose will take hold of the heart. The Divine will, particularly as it relates to salvation, was conceived and implemented within the confines of His Person, and without any input from without Himself. Therefore we read of God purposing “in Himself” (Eph 1:9).

Now, it should be apparent that Peter is not speaking about God merely foreseeing what the Jews were going to do to Jesus. Peter affirms that what they did was in strict accord with what God had determined. In this case, His foreknowledge was the cause of the action. If this is not the case, then we would have a redemption that was initiated and carried out by men, not God. Who would dare to embrace such a foolish notion? This would mean that God took what men did and reworked it, so to speak, so that salvation was brought from it. It is not comely to imagine that this can be involved in a salvation that is “of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

The Use of “Foreknowledge”

The word “foreknowledge” is likewise used in First Peter. There it is also causal in nature: that is, it is what causes things to happen . “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Pet 1:2). Some choose to believe that men are “elect” because God foresaw what they were going to do. However, even a cursory perusal of Peter’s inspired utterance will confirm the folly of such a view. There he joins three elements together to explain our salvation.

- The “foreknowledge of God .”
- The “sanctification of the Spirit. ”
- The “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ .”

How likely is it that, at the foundational level, the foreknowledge of what men would do could be blended together with what the Spirit would do and what the blood of Christ would do? In my judgment this would be like the “tool” of man being used to build the altar of God – something that was strictly forbidden. As it is written, “And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it ,” and “And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them ” (Ex 20:25; Duet 27:5). The same was true in the building of the Temple. “And the house, when it was in building, was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither: so that there was neither hammer nor ax nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building ” (1 Kg 6:7).

Here, the entire Godhead is involved. The “sanctification of the Spirit” refers to the Spirit’s own activity. It’s effectiveness is in no way mingled with the aspirations or works of men. The “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” speaks of Divine activity, not human activity. This is not a process that is in any way accomplished by men. How, then, could it be possible for these two works to be joined with “the foreknowledge of God,” if it is nothing more than God seeing in advance what men would be and do? The whole notion is too absurd to merit any further discussion.

Jesus Foreordained

The vicarious death of Christ was foreordained by God, independently of human input. Therefore it is written, “But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world , but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet 1:19-20). Jesus is also referred to as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8).

The Spirit reveals that a Divine caucus between the Father and the Word was held in the heavenly chambers. This event took place with the eternal counsels of God in the background. The prophetic portion announcing this conversation is found in the fortieth Psalm. “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psa 40:6-8). The exposition of that Psalm is found in the book of Hebrews. The Savior Himself is depicted as saying these things when He made His entrance into the world.

“Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering

Here, the entire Godhead is involved. The “sanctification of the Spirit” refers to the Spirit’s own activity. It’s effectiveness is in no way mingled with the aspirations or works of men. The “sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” speaks of Divine activity, not human activity. This is not a process that is in any way accomplished by men.

thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:5-10).

There are several key considerations found in this passage. Remember, we are speaking of the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.”

- God never desired the sacrifices offered under the Law. They were not provided for

Himself, but were designed to prepare the way for the Lamb whom He did desire.

- A special body was prepared for Jesus that enabled Him to be a Man – a Man that could die, offering up His own body.
- Burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin never did please the Lord. That is, they brought no satisfaction to Him, and no cleansing for men.
- When it became apparent that this was the case – that the offerings of the Law were not satisfactory to God or effective for men – then the Word prepared to enter the world to do the will of God – a “will” that had already been determined.
- Jesus did not come into the world because men requested Him to do so. He came to “do the will of God.” In so doing, He would take away “the first” (covenant), and “establish the second” (covenant).
- It is that “will,” or second covenant, that would be the means of sanctifying men.
- The sanctification itself would be accomplished “through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”

Men Will Be Held Responsible

Thus God is set forth as the One who delivered Jesus into the hands of the people. This was done in order that His counsels, not man’s need, might be fulfilled. Even so, men will be held responsible for what they did to Jesus.

For some, “this is a hard saying.” Why would God deliver Jesus into the hands of men, then hold them responsible for what they do? There is no need of stumbling at this. God has revealed that this is His manner.

- He raised up Pharaoh to make a name for Himself, hardened his heart, and then punished him for that hardness (Ex 9:16-17; Psa 136:15).
- God raised up Nebuchadnezzar to chasten His people for not honoring the land Sabbaths, then punished him for what he did to Israel (Jer 27:6; 25:11-12).
- Judas was an instrument in the hands of the Lord, raised up to fulfill the word of the Lord. Yet, he fell by transgression, which transgression was the deed appointed by God Himself (John 6:64; Acts 1:25).

Admittedly, this is a line of reasoning that flesh cannot trace. Yet, God has revealed this to be His manner, and especially when it comes to matters directly related with salvation. Further, this is the precise application that Peter will make to his audience.

PRELIMINARY SUMMATION

Peter has drawn the attention of His hearers to the activity of God Himself. Jesus had not simply fallen into their hands. They had not outsmarted Jesus, or taken Him unawares. If God had not delivered Him into their hands, they would never have been able to put their hands upon Him. Furthermore, God was not backed into a corner on this matter. He did not deliver Jesus into their hands because of what they desired, or because He saw what they would do. Who is the fool who would imagine that the salvation of God would rest upon such a flimsy foundation?

Now Peter will face the people with what they did to Jesus when they had the power to do so. Although God delivered Him into their hands, and did so in accordance with His own determined purpose, He did not make them do what they did. Given the opportunity to do whatever they wanted with Jesus, their wicked hearts drove them to do what they did, fulfilling the very objective of God. In Christ’s death, not only was the purpose of God made known, but the depravity of man as well.

For some, this view is very difficult to receive, and they cannot process it in their minds. They become confused when they hear of an unrestricted God carrying out His will by the hands of fickle men who are under the domination of Satan. Nor, indeed, can they imagine that a person could do such evil as is here presented, and do it because they themselves were evil, or that a holy God could even use such people to fulfill His counsels. However, those are the circumstances before us, and Peter will bring them to bear upon the people. He will do it under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

YOU HAVE TAKEN

God handed His Son over to them, and they promptly took Him into their custody to do whatever they willed. When Jesus was made accessible to Peter, Andrew, James, and John, they followed Him. When He was accessible to Matthew, he left his place of business and followed Him. But these men, when they had a chance, took Jesus.

“ 23c . . . ye have taken . . . ” Other versions read, “you,” NASB “after you had taken,” GENEVA “ye have delivered,” MRD “ You took ,” NJB and “being given out .” YLT

The emphasis here is on “YE” – in particular, the Israelites standing before Peter – the Jews, the “men of Judea,” the “devout men.” God “delivered Him,” and they took Him. God handed His Son over to them, and they promptly took Him into their custody to do whatever they willed. When Jesus was made accessible to Peter, Andrew, James, and John, they followed Him. When He was accessible to Matthew, he left his place of business and followed Him. But these men, when they had a chance, took Jesus. Of that taking it is written, “Then the band and the captain and officers of the Jews took Jesus, and bound Him , and led Him away to Annas first; for He was father in law to Caiaphas, which was the high priest that same year” (John 18:12-13). Matthew reads, “And they that had laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled” (Matt 26:57).

The word “taken” is one associated with violence. It means “to take with the hand . . . in order to use it.” THAYER Here the idea is that they took hold of Jesus to implement their own wills. Now they would be able to express what they really thought of Jesus. It appears on the surface that they did this by force – and, indeed, the deed is attributed to them just as though that was the case. However, it was the submission of Christ to the will of the Father that enabled them to “take Him.”

ISAIAH’S PROPHECY

Isaiah prophesied of this taking in his inspired treatise of the sacrificial Lamb of God. “ He was taken from prison and from judgment : and who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of My people was He stricken” (Isa 53:8). Other versions read, “By oppression and judgment He was taken away,” NASB/NIV “He was arrested, taken away, and judged,” GWN “Oppressed and condemned, he was taken away,” NAB and “Forcibly, after sentence, he was taken.” NJB

Isaiah views the purpose for which Jesus was “taken away.” This was the passage the Ethiopian eunuch was reading when Philip was directed to him: “ In His humiliation his judgment was taken away : and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth” (Acts 8:33). Another version reads, “In His humiliation He was taken away by distressing and oppressive judgment and justice was denied Him [caused to cease].” AMPLIFIED This text is quoted from the Septuagint version which places the accent on the experience from Christ’s point of view : “In His humiliation His judgment was taken away.” SEPTUAGINT

The reference to Christ’s “humiliation” accents His submission, not the manner in which men humiliated Him. It is written that Jesus “ humbled Himself , and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8). That is the only reason Jesus was able to be taken in the garden,

taken from the courtrooms in which He was tried, and taken to the cross where He was crucified. Nevertheless, the responsibility for this dastardly deed will be placed squarely upon the shoulders of the Israelites.

That is why Peter accents the ones who took Jesus away, in order that they might judge Him and terminate His life cutting Him “off out of the land.” Peter charges the people themselves for the deeds appearing to be done by relatively few people.

- Judas (John 18:2).
- A band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees (John 18:3).
- The chief priests and elders of the people (Matt 26:47).
- Annas, a former high priest and father in law to Caiaphas (Luke 3:2; John 18:13,24).
- Caiaphas the high priest, together with the scribes and elders (Matt 26:57).
- The multitude of chief priests and rulers of the people who cried out “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” (Lk 23:13,21).

During those earlier times, the leaders could not implement their will toward Jesus because the people were for Him. But when “the hour arrived” for His appointed death the climate was not the same. The Jewish leaders no longer “feared the people,” but boldly launched their initiative against the Lord Jesus, taking Him.

Jesus did the same thing when He stood over the city of Jerusalem and said weeping, “Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation ” (Luke 19:42-44).

John the apostle did the same when he wrote, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not ” (John 1:11).

During Christ’s ministry the “scribes and chief priests . . . sought how they might destroy Him: for they feared Him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine” (Mark 11:18). Again, His enemies “sought to lay hold on Him, but feared the people ,” who, at that time, favored Christ (Mk 12:12). Luke says of that occasion, “And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people” (Luke 20:19). Again it is written, “And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people” (Luke 22:2).

During those earlier times, the leaders could not implement their will toward Jesus because the people were for Him. But when “the hour arrived” for His appointed death the climate was not the same. The Jewish leaders no longer “feared the people,” but boldly launched their initiative against the Lord Jesus, taking Him. There was a sense in which the nation was united in their rejection of Christ.

That is why Peter now speaks with such convicting candor. Being moved along by the Holy Spirit of God, and in full possession of his faculties of mind, he will now address the death of Christ from the perspective of those upon earth.

YOU USED WICKED HANDS

“ 23d . . . and by wicked hands have crucified and slain”

It is the nature of the Spirit of God to press matters of critical importance, whether in the area of

comfort or conviction. When eternal issues are at stake, it is not the time to mince words and seek to appease the wills of the people. Not only had the people taken Jesus, they had done something with Him after they took Him – something that was evil, and could only have been done deliberately. Peter will now place that squarely before them, doing so with precise and weighty words.

BY WICKED HANDS

“ . . . and by wicked hands . . .” Other versions read, “by lawless hands,” NKJV “by the hands of godless men,” NASB “with the help, of wicked men ,” NIV “by the hands of those outside the law ,” NRSV “by the hands of evil men ,” BBE “you used lawless people ,” CSB “with wicked hands,” GENEVA “by using men who don’t acknowledge Moses’ teaching ,” GWN “into the hands of the wicked ,” MRD “using lawless men,” NAB “by men outside the law ,” NJB “with the help of lawless Gentiles ,” NLT “by the hands of unrighteous persons ,” PNT “by the hordes of unrighteous people,” TNT “God . . . let you use the Roman government ,” LIVING “by the hands of Gentiles ,” WEYMOUTH “by the hands of lawless and wicked men ,” AMPLIFIED and “and you used for your purpose men without the Law !” PHILLIPS

To that you could also add rejection, unbelief, ignorance, hatred, hardness of heart, wickedness and spiritual adultery, and perversity. Sin is never a simple matter. It is always accompanied by all manner of inward as well as outward corruption.

In their handling of Christ, the Jews solicited the aid of ungodly men. The record of this is provided by the Spirit. Having held a caucus in which they condemned the Lord’s Christ, “all the chief priests and elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death: and when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered him to Pontius Pilate the governor ” (Matt 27:1-2). First they bound Jesus and “led Him away to Annas” (John 18:13). Then “Annas had sent Him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest” (John 18:24). Then, from Caiaphas, Jesus was bound again and delivered to Pontius Pilate (Mk 15:1).

When Pilate was confronted with Jesus, he asked them the purpose for delivering Jesus to him. The Jews answered, “If He were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered Him up unto thee” (John 18:30). A “malefactor” is an “evildoer,” NKJV or “criminal” NIV – an extremely vague generalization. Pilate replied, “Take ye Him and judge Him according to your law.” The people quickly replied, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death” (John 18:30-31).

Of that occasion John says, “That the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled, which he spake, signifying what death he should die” (John 18:32). The “saying” of reference was, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. This He said, signifying what death He should die” (John 12:32-33), referring to His crucifixion. Jesus had also said of His death, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be betrayed unto the chief priests and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify Him ” (Matt 20:19). And again Jesus said, “Ye know that after two days is the feast of the passover, and the Son of man is betrayed to be crucified ” (Mat 26:2).

A sophist might reason that since God’s “determinate counsel and foreknowledge” was involved, together with the words of Jesus being fulfilled, the people ought not be charged with any responsibility. After all, it was the will of the Lord that was being carried out. Such reasoning is too simplistic, and is unbecoming of anyone professing to know the Lord. The Jews did not do these things mindlessly, being moved along by some mystical source that neutralized their powers of reason. They entered into matter with great zeal, knocking down every barrier that was raised before them. It is true that the will of the Lord was being done, but it was through the instrumentality of vessels of “dishonor” who were dominated by unbelief, and filled with all manner of wickedness (2 Tim 2:20).

Here “the intents of the heart” are made known as well as the “determinate counsel” of the God of heaven. When Pilate told the people he found no fault in Jesus, “they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place” (Luke 23:5). It was then that Pilate, now knowing Jesus was a Galilean, sent Him to Herod, who had jurisdiction in that area (Lk 23:7). After “Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe,” he “sent Him again to Pilate” (Luke 23:11).

All of this was the playing out of our text: “ye have taken, and by wicked hands” (Acts 2:23). The Jews employed the Roman government carry out their own wicked will, and Peter boldly confronts them with that fact.

HAVE CRUCIFIED AND SLAIN

“ . . . have crucified and slain.” Other versions read, “have crucified and put to death,” NKJV “you nailed to a cross . . . and put Him to death,” NASB “put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross,” NIV “you crucified and killed,” NRSV “did crucify and slay,” ASV “you put to death on the cross,” BBE “did crucify and slay,” ERV “you crucified Jesus,” GWN “you killed,” NAB “put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross,” NIB “you took and had crucified and killed,” NJB “you nailed Him to a cross and killed Him,” NLT “having crucified – ye did slay,” YLT “ nail Him to a cross and murder Him,” LIVING “you . . . have nailed to a cross and have put to death,” WEYMOUTH “kill by nailing Him to a cross,” WILLIAMS “you crucified and put out of the way [killing Him],” AMPLIFIED and “you nailed up and murdered.” PHILLIPS

Two deeds are charged to the Jews – Israelites and men of Judea: the crucifixion and killing of “Jesus of Nazareth.” The killing was done by means of crucifixion, and the intention of the crucifixion was to impose death. Yet, there were two distinct deeds, and they were both charged to the very people now being addressed by Peter.

A transgression is a compound matter. Here the effects alone are addressed: crucifixion and killing. Peter had also associated other deeds with this transgression: “ye have taken,” and the employment of “wicked hands.” To that you could also add rejection (Mk 8:31), unbelief (Matt 13:58), ignorance (Lk 19:44), hatred (John 15:25), hardness of heart (Mk 10:5), wickedness and spiritual adultery (Matt 16:4), and perversity (Lk 9:41). Sin is never a simple matter. It is always accompanied by all manner of inward as well as outward corruption.

Keep in mind that the Man these people had crucified and slain through the hands of wicked men had been clearly and unquestionably “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22). Yet, with all of staggering evidence placed before them, they eagerly entered into the most dastardly deed ever committed by men – crucifying and killing the prince of life. Those who choose to stifle the impact of truth in order to walk in their own ways to not have the faintest notion of how capable of sin they become by doing so.

The words are staggering in both clarity and conviction. Peter plainly says the Jews – “men of Judaea, and all that dwell in Jerusalem” – took the life of Jesus. They put Him to death, nailed Him on the cross, killed Him, murdered Him, and put Him out of their way. They used the hands of wicked men to do it, but the responsibility for the deed belonged to them.

According to appearance, it looked like the Romans did this. However, Peter says the Jews did it. They were the ones who delivered Him to the Romans, and the ones who accused Him. They were the ones who refused to do the deed themselves, yet insisted that it be done anyway. They were the ones who charged Him with being a criminal. They were the ones who unrelentingly cried out “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!”

Did the Jews kill Jesus? Some say they did not, and vainly seek to argue their case. However, the Spirit has said too much on this matter for any doubt about it. Later, after the day of Pentecost, Peter said to the Jews, “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:14-15). Still later, Peter will again make a point of this to the rulers and elders of the people. “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10). Again, Peter hurled this charge at the people. “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30).

When preaching to the Jewish council, Stephen also charged them with the murder of Jesus. “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:52).

When Peter preached to the household of Cornelius, he made mention of the Jews responsibility for Christ’s death. “And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 10:39).

In Antioch of Pisidia, Paul made mention of this on the Sabbath day in a synagogue. “And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre” (Acts 13:28-29).

Paul also referred to the general guilt of the Jews in the matter of Christ’s death when writing to the Thessalonians. “For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess 2:15). There can be no doubt in our hearts on this matter!

GOD RAISED HIM UP

“24a Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death . . .”

There are two basic postulates behind Peter’s words – realities that undergird what He is saying. First, the things that have happened to Jesus were according to “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” That is, if God had not willed that Jesus be taken, crucified, and slain, those things could not possibly have occurred. It was true of the Jews just as surely as Jesus said was the case with Pilate. “Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11).

Second, God determined the outcome of these events as well as their actual occurrence. A Divinely intended purpose was being served which involved the destruction of the devil and the reconciliation of the world. The fulfillment of that purpose was confirmed and validated by the resurrection of Christ Jesus, which Peter will now proclaim.

WHOM GOD RAISED UP

“Whom God hath raised up . . .” Other versions read, “And God raised Him up again,” NASB “But God raised Him from the dead,” NIV “But God gave Him back to life,” BBE “Whom God has raised up,” DARBY “But God raised Him from death to life,” GWN “But God . . . raised Him back to life,” NLT “Jesus suffered the pains of death, but God set Him free,” IE and “He raised

Him to life again .” PHILLIPS

The Jews took Jesus, crucified Him, and killed Him. That was a revelation of the value they attached to Jesus. In their judgment He was not worthy to live. That is why they cried, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him . . . King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15).

God, however, reversed their verdict, thus nullifying it. Their judgment was completely false, as confirmed by the resurrection of Christ. He came back from the judgment they passed upon Him. They said He was not fit to live. God said He was not fit to stay dead! Christ’s death confirmed what the Jews thought. His resurrection confirmed what God purposed and knew. The purposes of the Jews were carried out in Christ’s death. However, their purposes were voided, and the determination of God confirmed by His resurrection.

Throughout the book of Acts, there are repeated pivotal references to the resurrection of Christ. Most of the time, the raising of Jesus is contrasted with the malicious deed of the Jews.

- “And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead ; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15).
- “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead , even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).
- “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:30-31).
- “And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day , and showed him openly” (Acts 10:439-0).
- “And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead ” (Acts 13:29-30).

Throughout the book of Acts, there are repeated pivotal references to the resurrection of Christ. Most of the time, the raising of Jesus is contrasted with the malicious deed of the Jews.

“Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead ; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3).

- “That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead , and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23).

In addition, the fact that Christ's death fully met its Divinely intended purpose, was proved by His resurrection from the dead. Much is made of this in Scripture.

- “And declared to be the Son of God with power , according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead ” (Rom 1:4).
- “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification ” (Rom 4:25).
- “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again , who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).
- “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power ” (1 Cor 6:14).
- “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and

shall present us with you ” (2 Cor 4:14).

- “That I may know him, and the power of His resurrection ” (Phil 3:10).
- “Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Tim 2:8).
- “Now the God of peace , that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus , that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20).
- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ” (1 Pet 1:3).
- “Who by him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead , and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Pet 1:21).
- “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ” (1 Pet 3:21).

The resurrection of Christ was therefore necessary for our justification, His intercession for us, and our own resurrection from the dead. It was essential for us to obtain Divine power, have a Good Shepherd, and be born again. It was needed for us to believe in God, and have faith and hope in God. His resurrection is even the thing that validates our baptism into Christ.

Those who crucified Christ did not have a single one of these intentions in their evil objectives . Further, if their will had prevailed, we would not receive any of them. Therefore, God reversed their verdict, raising Jesus from the dead.

HAVING LOOSED THE PAINS OF DEATH

“ . . . having loosed the pains of death . . . ” Other versions read, “ putting an end to the agony of death,” NASB “ freeing Him from the agony of death,” NIV “ having freed from death,” NRSV “having loosed the pangs of death ,” RSV “having made Him free from the pains of death,” BBE “ ending the pains of death,” CSB “having loosed the sorrows of hell ,” DOUAY “and loosed the sorrows of death ,” GENEVA “and destroyed the pains of death,” GWN “and hath loosed the cords of the grave,” MRD “ releasing Him from the throes of death,” NAB “freeing Him from the pangs of Hades ,” NJB “freeing Him from the horrors of death ,” NLT “having terminated the throes of death,” WEYMOUTH “ liberating Him from the pangs of death,” AMPLIFIED and “But God would not allow the bitter pains of death to touch him.” PHILLIPS

In this statement, Peter reaches beyond the perimeter of earthly experience. By inspiration he reaches into the domain of death and declares that a certain freedom was realized in the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

The Pains of Death

This is, indeed, an intriguing expression – particularly when we are speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ. The word “pains” is the same word translated “travail” (**wvdi/naj** – o-deen-as). This is the word used to describe a woman in the travail of birth. It is also the word used in reference to the Lord’s return as it relates to the wicked. “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail (**wvdi.n**) upon a woman with child ; and they shall not escape” (1 Thess 5:3).

In each of these three cases (a woman giving birth, the wicked experiencing wrath, and the Lord Jesus raising from the dead), travail, or pangs, is the prelude to something else. The travail is not the point, but what comes after it. Travail, or pains, or pangs, are the mean by which the appointed

outcome is realized. For the mother, the travail is the prelude to the birth of a child. For the wicked, the painful travail realized at the coming of Christ will be the prelude to damnation. For the Lord Jesus, death itself was the preface to “the power of an endless life” (Heb 7:16).

In the case of Christ, it is not possible for the mind of man to comprehend what was involved in “the Prince of life” experiencing death. There is no greater contradiction than what is found in life and death. That is the comparison from which other contradictions spring – such as light and dark, and righteousness and unrighteousness.

In the matter of the salvation of man, it was essential that, in the Person of Christ, life spring forth from death. This was necessary because salvation involves making the dead alive, both in the spirit and in the body. However, this could not happen unless a Pioneer blazed the path from death to life, triumphing over him “that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). The way back to God had to be raised up and sanctified for us coming to God.

By loosing “the pains of death,” Peter was saying death could no longer retain Jesus. His tenure in that domain was over. His Spirit was loosed from Hades, and His body was loosed from the grave.

SOMETHING THAT WAS NOT POSSIBLE

“ 24b . . . because it was not possible that He should be holden of it. ”

The word “because” precedes the explanation of Christ’s resurrection. While it was an area of great Divine power (Eph 1:20), it was also something that could not possibly fail to take place. This is a form of reasoning that is outside the circumference of human logic. For men, something cannot be possible and impossible at the same time. However, that is only because human experience, as men view it, has only one dimension. It is like a vapor that eventually dissipates (James 4:14), or breath that is confined to the narrow passages of our nostrils (Isa 2:22). However, when we consider the workings of the Lord, particularly in death, there are two dimensions: what can be seen, and what cannot be seen. Peter will now point us to something that cannot be seen with any purely human sense or ability.

IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE

“ . . . because it was not possible . . . ” Other versions read, “since it was impossible ,” NASB “ because it was impossible,” NIV “ inasmuch as it was not possible,” DARBY “because it could not be ,” MRD “for in fact it was not possible,” WEYMOUTH “ seeing that it was not possible,” AMPLIFIED and “indeed there was nothing by which .” PHILLIPS

When the Spirit says “ not possible,” or “ im possible,” He does not speak after the manner of men. When men say such words, there is still a crack in the door of hope. But with the Spirit, there is not a single ray of hope for something that is “impossible.”

There are things that are “impossible with men” (Lk 18:27). In such matters no man or amalgamation of men can make them possible. Jesus said that it is “easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” When the disciples heard it they responded, “Who then can be saved?” The all-knowing Christ replied, “With men this is impossible ; but with God all things are possible” (Mat 19:26). It is not common for men to associate salvation with something beyond all human capability. But that is the way it is.

When the angel Gabriel appeared to Mary, announcing she was going to give birth to the Son of God, he boldly announced, “For with God nothing shall be impossible” (Luke 1:37).

In this text, Peter will affirm that there was something death could not do. It was an area where death was impotent.

THAT HE SHOULD BE HOLDEN

“ . . . that He should be holden of it. ” Other versions read, “that He should be held by it ,” NKJV “for Him to be held in its power ,” NASB “to keep its hold on Him ,” NIV “for Him to be overcome by it ,” BBE “that He should be held in the grave ,” MRD “death could not keep Him in its grip ,” NLT “to be held fast by death,” WEYMOUTH “seeing that it was not possible for Him to continue to be controlled or retained by it ,” AMPLIFIED and “and indeed there was nothing by which death could hold such a man .” PHILLIPS

After three days and nights had elapsed death could no longer retain the Lord Jesus. It would have been easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for Jesus’ body to remain in the grave, or His spirit remain in Hades, for one more day. Jesus had said, “the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again ” (Mark 8:31). It was not possible for this saying to fail!

Christ’s death and burial were intended to accomplish something. In His death, and prior to His resurrection, the following were to accomplished. This is only a sampling of the many things carried out by Christ’s death.

- He had to “put away sin,” taking it away (Heb 9:26; John 1:29).
- He had to “destroy the devil” (Heb 2:14).
- He had to blot out “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us,” taking it “out of the way” (Col 2:14).
- He had to “spoil principalities and powers” (Col 2:15).
- He had to “reconcile” those who were enemies (Rom 5:10).
- He had to “make peace” (Col 1:20).

Once these appointments had been accomplished, death had no alternative – it had to release Jesus. The “gates of Hades” had to swing open of their “own accord,” just like the prison gates opened for Peter (Acts 12:10).

The resurrection of Christ was the fact to which Jesus was alluding when He said of the foundation of His Sonship, “And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my

If the truth concerning Jesus is not declared, men will not be saved. God will not give life to men by means of a corrupt view of His Son. It is also gloriously true that He will not allow death to hold any person who embraces His Son as He is declared in the Gospel – the record God has given of His Son.

church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it ” (Matt 16:18). Death would not maintain its grip upon Jesus, nor will it maintain its grip upon those who “die in the Lord” (Rev 14:13).

In the world, death is more powerful than life. It finally conquers all life, swallowing up humanity, and refusing to let any of them return. Even when such great men as Abraham, David, John the Baptist, and Paul passed into the domain of death, it appeared as

In the world, death is more powerful than life. It finally conquers all life, swallowing up humanity, and refusing to let any of them return. Even when such great men as Abraham, David, John the Baptist, and Paul passed into the domain of death, it appeared as though

their lives had been permanently terminated.

though their lives had been permanently terminated. They never again showed themselves to men in the earth. It appeared as though the hold of death was invincible.

However, when Jesus “descended into the lower parts of the earth” (Eph 4:9), death took hold of a different kind of man. This is one Man it could not retain! He is the pledge of our own resurrection, in which “all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). Thus it is written for our comfort, “Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:14). Thus we see that the resurrection is a fact – and yet it is more than a fact. It is also a pledge that God will not leave us in the domain of the dead either! There is a time for the redemption of the body!

Those who teach and lead the people of God must keep the facts of the resurrection of Christ and our own resurrection before the people, that they “faint not.” They are absolutely critical to our survival in a world destined for destruction.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Peter has powerfully declared the death of Christ as no one standing before Him had ever heard it. They heard that this was an appointed death, designed by God to accomplish His own inscrutable will. They also were made aware of what they had really done, and that they were as guilty of Christ’s blood as Judas himself. That fallen bishop betrayed Jesus, but the people had eagerly taken the One he betrayed, then crucified and killed Him through the hands of wicked men. They let nothing stand in their way. They

There is no place in the Divine economy for human opinion, traditions, or methods. If the truth concerning Jesus is not declared, men will not be saved. God will not give life to men by means of a corrupt view of His Son. It is also gloriously true that He will not allow death to hold any person who embraces His Son as He is declared in the Gospel – the record God has given of His Son.

ignored the clear approval of God. They refused to consider Christ’s own witness. They declined to consider the testimonies of those who had been healed and delivered by “Jesus of Nazareth.” They even disregarded the challenging questions of Pilate, and turned his offer of a prisoner exchange. That is what sin does to a people. It blinds them, hardens them, and makes them utterly unreasonable and foolish.

It is imperative that God’s people see the necessity of insightful preaching, and declaring the truth about Jesus. It is to be admitted this is not fashionable to do. To those who have a “form of godliness, but deny the power thereof,” it seems totally irrelevant. Such people prefer an emphasis on the “here and now,” because that is all they can see. Their hearts have a veil over them, and they are insensitive to the issues of eternity. This is the kind of people Peter addressed on the day of Pentecost. They were blissfully unaware of the judgment that had been pronounced by Jesus upon their city. Although many of them had heard about the day of judgment, and of the appearance of Nineveh and the Queen of the South, it had made no impact upon them. They had already forgotten their cries for the crucifixion of Jesus less than two months ago, to say nothing of the triumphal entry a few days before. They were in a sad state.

As Peter addresses this crowd of people, it will become increasingly apparent that there is no place in the Divine economy for human opinion, traditions, or methods. He will not speak as the wise men of his day – or as the religious experts of our day. He will not in any way employ the wisdom of men, or seek to please men, or try and catch them with cunning words. There will be a freshness in his words, as well as penetrating power. They will be words the Holy Spirit can use.

If the truth concerning Jesus is not declared, men will not be saved. God will not give life to men by means of a corrupt view of His Son. It is also gloriously true that He will not allow death to hold any person who embraces His Son as He is declared in the Gospel – the record God has given of His Son.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #9

THE PREACHING OF JESUS: HIS RESURRECTION

“ 2:25 For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: 26 Therefore did My heart rejoice, and My tongue was glad; moreover also My flesh shall rest in hope: 27 Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. 28 Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life; thou shalt make Me full of joy with Thy countenance. 29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day. 30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. 32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”
(Acts 2:25-32)

INTRODUCTION

Peter continues his insightful,

powerful, and inspired declaration of “Jesus of Nazareth,” a Man who was clearly and publicly approved by God in the midst of the people who had taken, crucified, and killed Him. Because their deeds were provoked by the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” heaven did not

interfere with what they did. Because their personal judgment was wrong, and because a living Christ was required to both author and finish salvation, God reversed their verdict, raising Jesus from the dead. Death could not hold Christ, for He who is “the Life” is superior to death. Also, death could not hold Him because death is a consequence of sin, and Jesus had “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.” The consequence of sin cannot maintain its power over the One who took away the sin of the world.

Peter will establish that a dead Christ is of no value. While the death of Christ is essential to our salvation, so is His resurrection. His death established the basis for the remission of sins and our reconciliation to God. In His death, God was able to fully and satisfactorily

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- **DAVID SPEAKS CONCERNING CHRIST (2:25)**
- **HEART, TONGUE, AND FLESH (2:26)**
- **SOUL AND BODY (2:27)**
- **KNOWLEDGE AND JOY (2:28)**
- **DAVID WAS NOT SPEAKING ABOUT HIMSELF (2:29)**
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- **THE RESURRECTION AND ENTHRONEMENT (2:31)**
- **WE ALL ARE WITNESSES (2:32)**
- **CONCLUSION**

judged sin. Sin had to be handled judiciously – judged and condemned by God. This was required because, as God Himself revealed, He cannot acquit the wicked, or clear the guilty. That is, He cannot dismiss sin with a word, or simply begin treating sinners as though they had never sinned at all.

THE DIVINE NATURE DECLARED

God revealed this aspect of Himself to Moses, when He declared His own name, showing forth His glory. “Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty . . .” Ex 34:7). Moses confessed this back to God when pleading for the people: “The LORD is longsuffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty . . .” (Num 14:18). Nahum was also given to see this aspect of the Divine nature. “The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked . . .” (Nahum 1:3).

God’s nature will not allow Him to pass over sin, dismissing it from His mind because of His mercy . “Mercy and truth” must meet together, and “righteousness and peace” must kiss each other (Psa 85:10). Salvation must not require that God abandon His own nature, clearing the guilty when He says He cannot do such a thing, and acquitting the wicked when He says He will “not at all” do this. There must be a way found in which God can remit sins without violating His own nature. Praise God, a way was found, and the resurrection of Christ proves it.

Romans 3:25

The salvation of man, while being a revelation of the love of God, is actually founded upon the righteousness of God. We are not left to conjecture about this matter. In a remarkable statement of the cause behind the remission of sins the Spirit affirms, “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through

faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:24-25). Other versions read, “to demonstrate His righteousness,” NKJV “to demonstrate His justice ,” NIV “to show His righteousness,” NRSV “to make clear His righteousness,” BBE “the manifestation of His righteousness,” MRD and “to prove His righteousness.” NAB

An unjust salvation is no salvation at all. It was not enough for God to justify fallen humanity. He had to do it in a just and righteous manner, for He “cannot deny Himself”

In this passage the Spirit reminds us of the sins that were committed in the past – by the people of God – “sins that are past.” On the surface, it appeared as though God has passed over them, clearing the guilty and acquitting the wicked. If this is the case, then God has violated His own nature, or denied Himself – and that is something He “cannot” do (2 Tim 2:13). The point is that God viewed the sins of the ancients in the prospect of His Son taking sin away. When Jesus died, the effectiveness of His death reached backward, severing sin’s association with those, who were trusting in God, upon the basis of their faith. The Spirit states it this way: “And for this cause He is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament , they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).

The remission of sins – even the sins of believers before Christ – was a display of God’s righteousness. He was righteous in being forbearing, and not cutting the people off, and He was righteous in finally clearing their record upon the basis of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:3

The judgment of sin took place in the body of Jesus. The Spirit states the case this way: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3). That is, God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son Jesus. The New International Version thoroughly misrepresents the case here reading, “condemned sin in sinful man.” Another version also corrupts the text: “That way God condemned sin in our corrupt nature.” GWN The thought declared by the Spirit is that God condemned, or judged, sin in Christ’s body , for it was “in His body on the tree” that Jesus bore our sins (1 Pet 2:24). The sin that was found in men was condemned in a Man – “THE MAN Christ Jesus.”

Jesus was “made sin for us,” and was also “made a curse for us” (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). Thus God dealt with sin justly, which allowed Him to be “the just and the Justifier of him that believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:26). An unjust salvation is no salvation at all. It was not enough for God to justify fallen humanity. He had to do it in a just and righteous manner, for He “cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:13). Following Jesus’ death, no one must be able to condemn or lay anything to the charge of God’s elect (Rom 8:33-34). If there is anything unjust about salvation, it will not be able to stand. If there is some characteristic of God that is blurred or violated by the death of Christ, then it will not be effective.

This is why the resurrection of Christ is integral to the FOUNDATION of our salvation. In His resurrection the death of Christ is validated, and His Sonship is confirmed. In it the deeds of the men who crucified and killed Jesus are shown to be unrighteous, their hearts impure and hard, the their eyes blinded. Also, the NEED for salvation is substantiated by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. And over and above all of this, God was shown to be impeccably and uncompromisingly righteous in His “great salvation.” It is no wonder that those who neglect this salvation are offered no way of escape from the judgment of the Almighty (Heb 2:3). A salvation of this magnitude and effectiveness cannot be treated casually. A God that has gone to this extent to “save His people from their sins” cannot be afforded a secondary, or even lesser, place in the lives

of men. Those who allow “other things” (Mk 4:19) to upstage their commitment to the Lord do so at the expense of their own salvation. They are exchanging their souls for something that is worthless (Matt 16:26).

In Christ’s death, the Son of God dealt effectively with sin. He removed it in its totality, taking it away from the face of God. This opened the way for the remission of sins and the cleansing of the conscience. It also cleared the path for justification, in which a person is “made righteous” through the judicious and holy act of Divine imputation (Rom 5:19; 4:22-25). In His death Jesus also destroyed the devil, thereby removing the power of sin. Now, men could be freed from enslavement to sin (Rom 6:17,18).

In Christ’s burial, it was confirmed that Jesus really did die. He “made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death” (Isa 53:9), there He was thoroughly identified with fallen humanity. The curse of God had been effectively administered (Gal 3:13), and the soul of Jesus was separated from His body. Preceding His burial, the spirit of Jesus separated from His body, leaving it lifeless, “for the body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26). This too was an voluntary act of Jesus, as on the cross He committed His spirit to the Father (Lk 23:46). In His burial the fact that He was not destroyed was confirmed in the unseen world where He “preached the Gospel also to them that are dead” (1 Pet 3:18; 4:6).

CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus confirmed that God was satisfied with His death, and would require no more “sacrifice for sins” (Isa 53:11). It also declared that Jesus was not only the Son of God, but that He was “the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4). For this, and other reasons Peter will elaborate on Jesus being raised from the dead. He will proclaim that the people before him have to do with a living Jesus – one who has been exalted to the right hand of God.

The people standing before Peter considered Jesus to be dead – even as His disciples once thought, prior to His appearances to them. Very early on the first day of the week, women came to the tomb to anoint the body of Jesus thinking He was dead (Mk 16:2). Mary Magdalene came early to the tomb, and she thought Jesus was dead. When she saw that His body was no longer there, she thought someone had taken it away (John 20:15). Cleopas and his companion pondered the happenings related to Christ’s death, and concluded that He was still dead, and all of their hopes had been dashed to the ground (Lk 24:19-21). Even “the eleven” apostles thought Jesus was dead, and did not believe the testimony of the women who said He was alive (Mk 16:14; Lk 13:9-11). You might say they believed in a “historical Jesus.”

THE HISTORICAL JESUS

It is true that some make much of “the historical Jesus.” By this they mean that He was a real person in real time, and that what He did upon the earth was real, not metaphorical. Although “Jesus of Nazareth” was, from this point of view, a historical person, we are not saved by such a Christ. It is wrong to present Jesus as though He was not presently active. The Lord Himself revealed, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev 1:18).

It is a living Christ that is presently seated at the right hand of God (Mk 16:19). He who lives is mediating the New Covenant (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). We are not being shepherded by a record of Jesus, but by the “Good Shepherd” Himself (John 10:11,14). One who is alive intercedes for us (Heb 7:25). A living Savior sends us grace and peace (Rom 1:7; 1 Tim 1:2). The One who is teaching us is alive (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 5:20).

The resurrection of Christ is the link between His effective death and the administration of the

New Covenant. There could be no “day of salvation” or “accepted time” without a risen Savior. The One who laid down His life had to take it up again, else His death was in vain, as well as all of His earthly ministry, gracious words, and marvelous works.

Although I desire to be gracious on this matter, the nature and direction of modern preaching does not confirm the necessity of a risen Savior. It does not appear that this has been burned into the conscience of men. There is far too much talk about men, and too little about Jesus. When the love of God is mentioned, it is often wholly unrelated to the righteousness of God and the confirming resurrection of Christ. But I will not linger on this morose thought. Instead, let us consider how the Holy Spirit moved a holy man to speak about Christ’s resurrection. He will anchor his words in the firm ground of Scripture, and will show us unseen things about Jesus being raised from the dead. Prior to this Peter had affirmed of Jesus, “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). Now Peter will expound that glorious reality. As we should expect, his exposition will be with great power and effectiveness.

DAVID SPEAKS CONCERNING CHRIST

“ 2:25 For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved.”

Prior to this day, Peter had associated the events related to Christ’s death with Scripture. At that time he had referred to statements made by David, nearly eight hundred years before Jesus (Acts 1:16 [PROPHECIES Psa 41:9; 55:12-15]; Acts 1:18 [PROPHECIES Matt 27:9-10; Zech 11:12-13]; Acts 1:20 [PROPHECIES Psa 69:25; 109:8-15]).

There is not a valid word pertaining to the salvation of God that is not stated in Scripture, or “contained in the Scripture” (1 Pet 2:6). While this may seem to be very obvious, it is staggering to consider how many statements are made by men concerning some aspect of redemption that are not affirmed in Scripture.

Now Peter again turns to the Scriptures to support what he is saying. There is not a valid word pertaining to the salvation of God that is not stated in Scripture , or “contained in the Scripture” (1 Pet 2:6). While this may seem to be very obvious, it is staggering to consider how many statements are made by men concerning some aspect of redemption that are not affirmed in Scripture. A brief rehearsal of a few of them will serve to substantiate this point.

- “God loves everyone the same.”
- “God’s love is unconditional.”
- “Nothing you do can affect what God thinks of you.”
- “Born again Christian.”
- “Carnal Christian.”
- “New Testament Church.”
- “New Testament Christian.”
- “Eternal security.”
- “Seven year tribulation.”
- “Pre-tribulation”
- “Post-tribulation”
- “Mid-tribulation”

- “The baptism of the Holy Ghost.”
- “Full gospel.”
- “Healing is in the atonement.”
- “God wants to bless everyone.”
- “Praise and worship.”
- “Soul sleeping.”
- “Jesus will come again to reign.”
- “The thousand year reign of Christ.”
- “Christ will reign a thousand years in Jerusalem.”
- “Once saved, always saved.”
- “The plan of salvation.”
- “Believer’s baptism.”
- “Water baptism.”
- “The free will of man.”
- “The sinner’s prayer.”
- “The Lordship of Christ.”
- “Make Jesus the Lord of your life.”

These are only representative of a host of expressions that are nearly beyond number. They all represent vast bodies of theological thought – thought that is related to the salvation of God and its appropriation. Some may affirm that there are aspects of truth in some of these sayings, and that it is good to use them as long we tell the people what we mean. Is this really true? Does it represent a pattern of thought that has been revealed by the Spirit of God? I would rather say that they are all nothing more than theological bags “with holes” (Hag 1:6). They are like “broken cisterns that can hold no water” (Jer 2:13). The truth of God is too large to fit into them. If someone imagines that they have, after all, stuffed the truth of God into such sayings, they will find it is like “new wine” that will cause these frail theological “bottles” to break (Lk 5:37).

Who is the person willing to affirm that God has left it up to men to formulate statements that depict His Christ and His salvation? Is it possible that the truth of God is in any sense nothing more than a conclusion of men – for that is precisely the nature of all of the statements I have placed before you.

I will proceed no further in this matter, for we have an actual example of the nature of “acceptable words” in the text before us. Peter will resort to the Scriptures in his exposition of resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

DAVID SPOKE CONCERNING CHRIST

“For David speaketh concerning Him . . .” Other versions read, “For David says of Him,” NASB “This is what David meant when he said about Jesus,” GWN “For David says about Him,” NET “King David said this about Him,” NLT “For David saith in regard to Him,” YLT “King David quoted Jesus as saying,” LIVING “This is what David said about Jesus,” IE “For David says in reference to Him,” WEYMOUTH and , “When David speaks about Him he says.” PHILLIPS

Here is an excellent example of “the testimony of Jesus” being “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). It clarifies the saying of Jesus Himself, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have

eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). Peter also referred to the encapsulation of Scripture when he wrote, “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow ” (1 Pet 1:10-11). Christ Jesus Himself is the Sum and Substance of Scripture. He is the Theme of Scripture, and the Life-line that holds it all together. The day Jesus Christ is seen in Scripture is the day it comes alive to its reader.

The idea here is that David prophesied what Jesus would say. He is, from one point of view, quoting Jesus eight hundred years before He came unto the world. He is expressing “the mind of Christ” – how Jesus thought.

Peter attributes the 16 th Psalm to David. Paul does the same (Acts 13:35-36). The idea here is that David prophesied what Jesus would say. He is, from one point of view, quoting Jesus eight hundred years before He came unto the world. He is expressing “the mind of Christ” – how Jesus thought. The words of this section of the Psalm are declared by Peter to have been said by Jesus Himself. Whether they were audibly said, or were expressed in the heart and mind alone is not the point.

The Holy Spirit had revealed this to David because David was “a man after His own heart” (1 Sam 13:14). The Lord could entrust gems of redemptive truth to David, knowing he would declare them for succeeding generations. In this regard David was much like Abraham, the father of all who believe (Rom 4:11). God said of father Abraham, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him , and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen 18:19).

The text of reference is Psalm 16:8-11. It may appear on the surface as though David is speaking only of himself. However, Peter, being moved by the Holy Spirit, says he was really speaking about Jesus. That is, these are words attributed to Jesus. The words “David speaketh concerning Him,” do not mean that David was talking ABOUT Jesus like a sort of commentator, but that the Spirit, speaking through David, was divulging what the Lord Jesus would say. While David may have experienced some measure of the fulfillment of these words, it was very small. Strictly speaking, the Psalm was not intended to be a testimony of David (although some of the things were no doubt experienced by him), but a prophecy of Christ. This prophecy refers to the resurrection of Christ, as Peter will strongly affirm.

I FORESAW THE LORD ALWAYS

“ . . . I foresaw the Lord always before my face . . . ” Other versions read, “I was always beholding the Lord in my presence,” NASB “ I saw the Lord always before me,” NIV “ I beheld the Lord always before my face,” ASV “I saw the Lord before my face at all times,” BBE “I foresaw the Lord continually before me,” DARBY “I always see the Lord in front of me,” GWN “I was always beholding the Lord in my presence ,” NAS “ I kept the Lord before my sight always,” NJB “I see the Lord is always with me ,” NLT “I know the Lord is always with me,” LIVING “I constantly fixed my eyes upon the Lord,” WEYMOUTH and “I always kept my eyes upon the Lord.” WILLIAMS

The word “foresaw” does not mean “saw ahead of time.” Here the idea is to keep in one’s own constant view – as in “ fore most.” That is, Christ’s view of God was His primary, foremost, and preeminent view. Even while upon the earth, He walked within a constant awareness of God.

To what period of time does this Psalm refer? There is doubtless a sense in which it referred to the life and ministry of Jesus who said, “And He that sent Me is with Me : the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29). However, is that the experience of

which this Psalm speaks?

HE IS ON MY RIGHT HAND

“ . . . for He is on My right hand, that I should not be moved.” Other versions read, “for he is at My right hand , that I should not be shaken ,” NASB “I cannot be moved because He is by My side,” GWN “with Him at My right hand I shall not be disturbed ,” NAB “God’s mighty power supports Me ,” LIVING “because He is at My right hand to keep Me secure ,” IE and “for He is at My right hand that I may not be shaken or overthrown or cast down [from My secure and happy state].” AMPLIFIED

The idea here is that of Divine fellowship. The Son is speaking of the closeness of the Father to Him, and of the sustaining power of that Presence. This phraseology is used elsewhere in the Psalms to denote the keen awareness of the Lord’s presence. “Nevertheless I am continually with Thee : thou hast holden me by my right hand” (Psa 73:23). “My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever ” (Psa 73:26). “The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand ” (Psa 121:5).

Jesus is not here speaking of His time with the Father “ before the world was” (John 17:5), for there was no need for the Lord to be sustained at that time, nor was He in any danger of being moved or shaken. Nor does this refer to Christ’s earthly ministry when God was, indeed, with Him. As He acknowledged on the eve of His betrayal, “the Father is with Me” (John 16:32).

I am going to affirm, and establish, that this is referring to the experience of Jesus after He died and before He rose from the dead.

This text establishes the absurdity of the soul-sleeping doctrine, and confirms Christ’s anticipation of His resurrection after He died, awaiting “the third day.” It is one of those rare glimpses into the netherworld, and solicits our attention.

HEART, TONGUE, AND FLESH

“ 26 Therefore did My heart rejoice, and My tongue was glad; moreover also My flesh shall rest in hope.”

This is the language of consciousness after death, and it is very detailed. It speaks of awareness, rejoicing, gladness, and anticipation. Peter affirms that all of this has to do with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. As we should expect, this will be a sort of optimum view, for it is speaking of the experience of the Lord of glory.

THEREFORE DID MY HEART REJOICE

Here is a view of death that was not enjoyed by the ancients. Prior to Christ, death was largely associated with inactivity and hopelessness.

“Therefore did My heart rejoice . . . ” Other versions read, “Therefore My heart rejoiced ,” NKJV “Therefore My heart was glad ,” NASB “Therefore My heart doth rejoice ,” MRD “Therefore My heart has been glad,” NAB “ No wonder My heart is glad,” NLT “because of this My heart cheered ,” YLT “No wonder My heart is filled with joy ,” LIVING “ For this reason My heart is glad,” WEYMOUTH “ That is why my heart is glad,” ISV and “ So my heart is glad.” WILLIAMS

This is the result of the Lord Jesus keeping God always before His face. As He considered the Father, His heart began to rejoice, because, as it is also written 16 th Psalm, “Thou wilt show Me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy ; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for

evermore ” (Psa 16:11).

Here is a view of death that was not enjoyed by the ancients. Prior to Christ, death was largely associated with inactivity and hopelessness. This we read, “For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?” (Psa 6:5). And again, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Eccl 9:10). And yet again, “Wilt thou show wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?” (Psa 88:10-12). Isaiah wrote, “For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known Thy truth” (Isa 38:18-19).

However, these expressions are not the ultimate view of death. They are the apparent view, and teach us that if we are to live for the Lord, we must do so now . However, they are not the ultimate view, for Christ has “hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:10). Now, more is known about human experience after death, even though some mystery remains concerning it.

What does it mean for one’s heart to rejoice? This is rejoicing in its most precise expression. It is a rejoicing that proceeds from perception and understanding. It is connected with the knowledge of what the Lord will do.

MY TONGUE WAS GLAD

“ . . . and My tongue was glad . . . ” Other versions read, “my tongue exulted,” NASB “my tongue rejoices ,” NIV “my tongue rejoiced,” NRSV my tongue full of joy,” BBE “and my glory exult ,” MRD “my tongue delighted ,” NJB “my tongue shouts His praises ,” LIVING “my mouth spoke with joy ,” IE and “my tongue exulted exceedingly .” AMPLIFIED

Here is the expression of a spirit that has been separated from the body. That spirit is not content to remain without a body. Paul expressed this frame of mind, ascribing it to all of the elect, who prefer being “absent from the and present with the Lord.” Speaking of that period after death and prior to resurrection he writes, “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life ” (2 Cor 5:4). Prior to the resurrection, death had not yet been “swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54). However, while the body of Jesus was buried, His tongue was “glad,” rejoicing in the prospect of being raised from the dead. His spirit would not remain in Hades, and His body would not remain in the grave. The thought of this set the Lord’s Christ to rejoicing!

By saying “My tongue,” the text does not suggest that Jesus, while His body remained in the tomb, was occupying a body as He did upon the earth. This is language that accommodates itself to the frailty of human understanding. The idea is that Jesus’ joy was expressed – put into words and addressed to God Himself.

Whatever Jesus employed to preach “unto the spirits in prison” (1 Pet 3:19) – “them that are dead” (1 Pet 4:6) – was also employed in this expression of gladness.

MY FLESH SHALL REST IN HOPE

However, in our text, Jesus is not anticipating the general resurrection of the dead. He is looking forward to His own resurrection, which was a pledge of the general resurrection that would take place when He comes “the second time,” at “the last trump”

“ . . . moreover also My flesh shall rest in hope.” Other versions read, “moreover My flesh also will abide in hope,” NASB “My body also will live in hope,” NIV “moreover My flesh will live in hope,” NRSV “moreover My flesh will dwell in hope,” RSV ‘My body also rests securely,’ GWN “I know all will be well with Me in death,” LIVING “Yes even My body will live in hope,” IE “even My body still rests secure in hope,” ISV “My very body also shall pitch its tent in hope,” MONTGOMERY and “My flesh also will dwell in hope [will encamp, pitch its tent, and dwell in hope in anticipation of the resurrection].” AMPLIFIED

Here Jesus is depicted as contemplating the resurrection of His body from the grave. Remember, Peter is associating this passage with Christ’s resurrection , not with His thoughts while He remained in the body on the earth.

Prior to Christ, some sensitive souls were made aware of the coming resurrection.

The Reasoning of Job

Although there was no Scripture at the time of Job, he thought upon a tree that had been cut down, yet sprouted again “at the scent of water.” In a marvelous display of holy reasoning he said, “For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; Yet through the scent of water it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant” (Job 14:7-9). Later he reasoned further on the matter. “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold , and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:26-27).

From the standpoint of God’s people, our flesh resting in hope is another way of saying, “the hope and resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:6). Again it is written, “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead , both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15). Seeing this matter very faintly, Solomon was still able to make out the rough outline of the resurrection: “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in his death ” (Prov 14:32). With the eagle eye of faith, Isaiah foresaw the resurrection of the dead. “ Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise . Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead ” (Isa 26:19).

However, in our text, Jesus is not anticipating the general resurrection of the dead. He is looking forward to His own resurrection, which was a pledge of the general resurrection that would take place when He comes “the second time,” at “the last trump” (1 Cor 15:52). In His resurrection, Jesus was the “firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor 15:20). Christ was raised first, and “afterward they that are Christ's at His coming” (1 Cor 15:23).

Thus Jesus is portrayed as saying His flesh would “rest in hope,” knowing that He would be raised from the dead, because it was not possible that He should be held within the grasp of death (Acts 2:24).

Glimpses of Life After Death

Scripture provides us several examples of personalities of personalities after they left this world.

Thus David spoke of Jesus’ experience after He died and before He rose again from the dead. During that three-day interim the following took place.

- Abraham: (1) Knew of the status of some men living long after he had died. (2) Was aware of circumstances attending life out of the body. (3) Knew of Moses and the Prophets,

who lives more than five centuries after he died. (4) Had understanding about what was required to convince men of the necessity of repentance (Luke 16:24-31).

- Samuel: (1) Knew the Lord had departed from Saul. (2) Knew the kingdom of Israel had been given to David. (3) Knew why the Lord had taken the kingdom from Saul. (4) Knew the Lord would deliver Saul into the hand of the Philistines. (5) Knew the Lord would deliver the Israelites into the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 28:11-19).

- Lazarus: (1) Was in the bosom of Abraham. (2) Was seen by someone in the fires of torment. (3) Was being comforted (Lk 16:23-25).

- A certain rich man: (1) Lifted up his eyes in Hades, being in torment. (2) Saw Abraham, and Lazarus in his bosom. (3) Asked for some relief from his suffering. (4) Was aware of those remaining alive in the earth. (5) Petitioned Abraham to send a messenger to his five brothers, lest they also come to the place of torment (Lk 16:23-28).

- Moses: (1) Appeared in glory with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. (2) Talked with Jesus about the death He would accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:30-31).

- Elijah: (1) Appeared in glory with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. (2) Talked with Jesus about the death He would accomplish in Jerusalem (Lk 9:30-31).

- Paul: He did not know whether he was dead or alive when these things took place. That confirms consciousness and alertness exist after death, else he could not have spoken in this manner. (1) Was caught up into paradise. (2) Heard unspeakable words that are not lawful for a man to utter. (3) Recalled the experience when God raised him up (1 Cor 12:3-4).

- Departed Spirits from Noah's day: (1) Had the capacity to hear words from Jesus, who preached to them (1 Pet 3:19-20; 4:6).

- Martyrs: (1) Were seen under the heavenly altar. (2) They had some sense of things happening on the earth. (3) Asked how long it would be until their blood was avenged on them dwelling on the earth. (4) White robes were given to them. (5) They were told to rest for a while.

CONCLUSION

Thus David spoke of Jesus' experience after He died and before He rose again from the dead. During that three-day interim the following took place.

- He saw the Lord before His face at all times.
- He was aware that He would not be moved.
- His heart rejoiced.
- His tongue was glad.
- His flesh rested in hope.

Peter will now explain WHY these conditions existed, confirming that we are speaking about things related to His death – not His life .

SOUL AND BODY

“ 27 Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.”

With the care that comes from being led by the Holy Spirit, Peter opens up why Jesus spoke as He did – rejoicing in his heart and articulating it with His tongue, or in words.

THOU WILT NOT LEAVE MY SOUL IN HELL

“ Because Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell . . . ” Other versions read, “ For you will not leave my soul in Hades,” NKJV Because Thou wilt not abandon My soul to Hades,” NASB “because you will not abandon me to the grave.” NIV “Because Thou wilt not leave my soul unto Hades ,” ASV “For you will not let my soul be in hell ,” BBE “because you will not abandon my soul to the netherworld ,” NAB “For you will not leave my soul among the dead ,” NLT “because You won’t abandon my soul in death ,” IE “Thou wilt not leave me un the Unseen World forsaken ,” WEYMOUTH and “For You will not abandon my soul, leaving it helpless in Hades (the state of departed spirits).” AMPLIFIED

We are now entering a subject concerning which we have only limited information. However, enough has been revealed for us to have an intelligent grasp of the general facts in the case.

Did Jesus Go to the Lake of Fire

Our first task is to define what is meant by “hell” – “Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell.” There are some who affirm that Jesus went to the “hell” into which the devil and his angels have been cast. It is averred that Jesus went there to get the keys of death and hell from the devil. However, there is nothing in Scripture that even suggests such a thing. The doctrine of men that brings this teaching to us states that “the keys” originally belonged to Adam – although nothing in Scripture associates Adam with these “keys.” When he sinned, they say, Adam gave the keys to Satan, who retained them in his grasp until Jesus came. It is affirmed that this is what is meant by the words stating that Satan “had the power of death” (Heb 2:14). Although “keys” are not mentioned here, this man-made doctrine says that Jesus wrested them from the hand of the devil, keeping them for Himself. These are the “keys,” they say, to which the glorified Christ referred when He said, “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev 1:18).

The flaw in the reasoning is found in the fact that Jesus not only raised the dead during His earthly ministry (Matt 11:5; Mk 5:41; Lk 7:13-15; John 11:43-44), He also gave power to His disciples to raise the dead (Matt 10:8). This all took place before He died, and suggests that He already had the keys, being able to loose death from whomsoever He willed. There was no need for Jesus to “go to hell” to obtain these keys.

Secondly, Jesus is not said to have tasted hell for every man. It is

Christ’s meaning is not that the gates of hell, or hades, will not prevail against the church – although they will not – but that they will not prevail against the Foundation. That is, He would rise from the dead, for “the gates of hell,” or “hades,” refer to the ability of death to keep its victims within its grasp.

rather pointedly stated, “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man ” (Heb 2:9). Here death refers to being separated from God – cut off from Him. This took place when He was forsaken by God upon the cross , and constituted the bitterness of the cup that He was given to drink (Matt 27:46). This is when Jesus was “cursed” (Gal 3:13), “smitten of God,” “wounded,” “bruised,” and chastised for the sins of the world (Isa 53:4-5). That was His ultimate suffering. It did, indeed, foreshadow the agonies of hell, but was not the domain for which Satan is known.

The absurdity of the doctrine is also highlighted by the fact that Jesus said where He was going when He died – and it was not hell. He said to the penitent thief, “Verily, I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with Me in paradise ” (Lk 23:43). If Jesus went to the lake-of-fire “hell,” He would

have to pass the uncrossable gulf between the place of comfort and the place of suffering. He would either have had to do this en route to “paradise,” taking the thief with Him, or leave the thief in “paradise,” and then cross over into “hell” to get the keys. Such thinking requires an extraordinary amount of imagination – the kind that needs to be cast down (2 Cor 10:4-5).

Those who embrace the soul-sleeping nonsense argue that the punctuation in this verse is wrong. They say Jesus had a mind to the distant future, and did not mean the day He died. Thus they read, “I say to thee today, Thou shalt be with Me in paradise” – that is, will eventually be with Jesus in paradise. In the day Jesus spoke, therefore, they say that both Jesus and the thief fell asleep, entering an unconscious and idle state. Jesus was raised three days later, and the thief is still asleep, his spirit remaining in his lifeless body until the day of the resurrection. Perhaps there is some remote chance that Jesus also raised the thief at that time, although that would mean that He alone was not the “firstfruits of them that slept” (1 Cor 15:20). The penitent thief would also have been raised at that time. Indeed, false doctrines do tie all kinds of knots that ravel rather than unravel the truth.

Soul In Hell

The Authorized Version often uses the word “hell” as a synonym for “hades,” or the abode of the dead. In Moses and the Prophets, “hell” is often translated from the word “Sheol” – “hades or the world of the dead” (2 Sam 22:6; Psa 18:5; 116:3).

Referring to the abode of the dead, Jesus said the “gates of hell” would not prevail against the fact and foundation of His Sonship (Matt 16:18). It would not keep Jesus within the confines of its “gates.” Other versions properly render the word “hell” as “hades.” This does not refer to the lake of fire, or the present base of operation for the devil. It is the same use of the word employed by David: “For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell” (Psa 16:10). This refers to the resurrection from the abode of the dead, as confirmed by Peter’s exposition of this verse (Acts 2:27-32).

Christ’s meaning is not that the gates of hell, or hades, will not prevail against the church – although they will not – but that they will not prevail against the Foundation. That is, He would rise from the dead, for “the gates of hell,” or “hades,” refer to the ability of death to keep its victims within its grasp. Death, however, could not keep its hold on Christ Jesus – the Jesus Peter had just confessed (Acts 2:24). Christ is affirming He will rise from the dead to build His church. In a secondary sense, this also applies to the church, which will also be raised from the dead to assume the stewardship of “the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven” (Dan 7:27).

THE PROCESS OF DYING

1. Shadow of “death” (Matt 4:16).
2. Deliver to “death” (Matt 10:21).
3. The “death” of Christ (Rom 5:10).
4. “Death” entered the world” (Rom 5:12).
5. The second “death” (Rev 21:8).

ABODE FOR RIGHTEOUS SPIRITS

1. Abraham’s bosom (Lk 16:22)
2. Paradise (Lk 23:43; 2 Cor 12:4)
3. Under the altar (Rev 6:9)
4. Present with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8)

ABODE FOR UNRIGHTEOUS SPIRITS

1. Hell KJV (Lk 16:23; 2 Pet 2:4)
2. Hades NKJV (Lk 16:23)
3. Tartarus GREEK (2 Pet 2:4)

In this sense, Revelation also associates “hell” with death, not punishment. “And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death , and Hell (Hades) followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death , and with the beasts of the earth” (Rev 6:8).

Because man is a complex being, death is a complex experience. Man is a tripartite being, having three parts: spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). The spirit and the soul are the unseen part of man, and are most difficult to distinguish from one another. However, the Word of God is able to probe the inward parts of man, “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit” (Heb 4:12).

The process, or experience, of dying is often referred to as “death.” It is even personified in Revelation 6:8: “And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death , and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.” Notice that “Hell” followed “Death.” The word used here is “Hades,” and is so translated in other versions. In the experience of death, there is a separation of the seen and unseen parts of man. The unseen part is sometimes referred to as the “spirit” (Lk 23:46; Lk 8:55), and sometimes as the “soul” (Gen 35:18; 1 Kgs 17:22). At “death,” this unseen part leaves the body, or is separated from it. The grave is the residence for the body, and “hades,” or the “hell” of our text, is the abode for the unseen part of man.

Because there are no exact English words for these domains, it is difficult to translate them. “Hades,” for example, is a transliteration of the Greek word **a[ldhj** (Ha-des). It is not a translation, for there is no precise English word that parallels this Greek word.

Hades is a domain in which both righteous and wicked spirits remain until the resurrection of the dead. At that time, both the graves and Hades will yield up their dead. This is the meaning of the phrase, “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them : and they were judged every man according to their works” (Rev 20:13). It is at this point that there will be a uniting of the body and spirit at the resurrection.

Jesus provided us with a picture of Hades, the abode of the departed spirits, in his account of the death of the rich man and Lazarus. It was in “Hades” that the rich man lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham “afar off.” Abraham was also in “Hades,” but was not suffering. He was on the other side of a vast and uncrossable gulf (Lk 16:26).

There is one other word translated “hell,” and it refers to the place where the fallen angels are presently reserved. The text referring to this reads, “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell , and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Pet 2:4). Here, the word “Hell” is not taken from “Hades,” nor is it taken from the word “Gehenna,” which is the lake of fire. The Greek word used here is quite different; it is **tartarw,saj** (tar-tar-oos-as). Some versions read, “threw them down into Tartarus ,” CSB “the infernal regions ,” MRD “the chains of Tartarus,” NAB “the underworld ,” NJB “having cast them down into Tartarus ,” YLT “hurling them down into Tartarus ,” WEYMOUTH/WILLIAMS and “cast them down to Tartarus .” MONTGOMERY

Lexically, the word “Tartarus” means, “the name of a subterranean region, doleful and dark,

regarded by the ancient Greeks as the abode of the wicked dead,” THAYER “regarded by the Greeks as a place of torment and punishment below Hades,” FRIBERG and “thought of as a place of divine punishment lower than Hades.” GINGRICH Again, there is no appropriate English word into which this can be translated. The closest English word is “Hell.”

The point here is that these unseen abodes are all characterized by consciousness. They are not a place of calm repose. In the case of wicked angels, they have no bodies as men do, but are spirits.

When Jesus said, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,” He was saying He would not remain in the abode of the dead. This was part of the experience of Him “tasting death,” but was never intended to be an extended period (Heb 2:9). The “Prince of life” cannot remain in the abode of the dead! It is not that He was suffering or in pain at that time. That is not the portion of His “cup” that He dreaded (Matt 26:39; John 18:11). His sufferings occurred while He was dying, not after He was dead!

This is a technical point with God, but it is necessary for us to see it. There are some aspects of death that Jesus did not “taste.” They were not necessary to the accomplishment of our reconciliation to God and deliverance from sin.

Just as the Throne room of God (Rev 4:2-9) is superior to the abode of the dead, so Jesus anticipated being delivered from the lower realms and elevated to the high ones. It was not the contemplation of His return to His disciples that brought Him joy, but the prospect of ascending “up where He was before” (John 6:62), and enjoying “the glory” He had with the Father “before the world was” (John 17:5).

The “gates of hell,” or “the gates of hades,” would swing open for the Lord Jesus, and He Himself would rise from the dead. David told of the Savior’s joyful anticipation of that event.

THOU WILT NOT SUFFER THINE HOLY ONE TO SEE CORRUPTION

“ . . . neither wilt thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.” Other versions read, “nor allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay,” NASB “nor will You let Your Holy One see decay,” NIV “or let Your Holy One experience corruption,” NRSV “Neither wilt thou give Thy Holy One to see corruption,” ASV “and you will not give up Your Holy One to destruction,” BBE “nor wilt thou give Thy gracious one to see corruption,” DARBY “or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave,” NLT “or let the body of Your Holy Son to decay,” LIVING “You will not allow the body of Your Holy One to decay in the grave,” WEYMOUTH and “nor let Your Holy One know decay or see destruction [of the body after death].” AMPLIFIED

This is a technical point with God, but it is necessary for us to see it. There are some aspects of death that Jesus did not “taste.” They were not necessary to the accomplishment of our reconciliation to God and deliverance from sin. The putting away of sin did not require them. Two of them are listed here. (1) He was not left in Hades until the general resurrection. (2) His body did not experience decay, or corruption. This latter point is the subject of this phrase.

When Lazarus died, his body decayed, and putrefaction set in – even though he would be raised from the dead (John 11:39). Joseph’s body rotted in the grave, leaving only his “bones” (Ex 13:19). The holy prophet Elisha died and was buried. His body also decomposed, leaving only his “bones” (2 Kgs 13:21). But no decay touched the body of Jesus. Although a consequence of sin, it was not necessary for the body of Jesus to experience decay.

There is a reason behind this. The resurrection is not a mere rejuvenation of flesh, but the putting on of incorruption (1 Cor 15:53-54). Although the new body will emerge from the graves, it will be a different kind of body, not subject to corruption (1 Cor 15:35-44). This circumstance did not

require that Jesus' body pass through the stages of corruption. Redemption depended more upon what happened to His body "on the tree" than in the grave (1 Pet 2:24). The Divine cursing that Jesus experienced did not take place after He died, in the grave, or in the abode of the dead. It took place on the cross. Thus, it is written, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal 3:13). Jesus was cursed while He was on the cross, when He was bearing our sins in His body "on the tree" (1 Pet 2:24). To say Jesus "went to Hell" would require that He be cursed after He died and after peace was made (Col 1:20). This is another reason why those who say Jesus went to the place of punishment – "Hell" – are wrong. Such a view betrays a fundamental ignorance of what was required to save man, the nature of the Divine curse, and the extent to which Jesus tasted of death. Such views ought to be zealously discarded, for they misrepresent God, Christ, and the salvation that is "with eternal glory." They are like clouds without water and trees without fruit. They obscure the truth, blind the eyes, and tend toward spiritual bondage.

KNOWLEDGE AND JOY

" 28 Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life; thou shalt make Me full of joy with Thy countenance."

Remember, this Psalm provides some insight into the experience of Jesus after He died and before He was raised. If the soul-sleeping theory is right, then Jesus was separated from the Father for three days. God forsook Him for three days, and there was no communion between Them. I consider such a postulate impossible to prove. The judgment of God upon Christ was associated with His death, not His burial! WHILE He was upon the cross, there was a period of three hours – from the sixth to the ninth hour (12:00 PM - 3:00 PM). It is written, "And it was about the sixth hour, and there was a darkness over all the earth until the ninth hour" (Luke 23:44). It was around the ninth hour that Jesus cried out concerning being forsaken by God. "And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt 27:46). Jesus was "made sin" on the cross (2 Cor 5:21). He was "cursed" on the cross (Gal 3:13). That is where He bore our sins (1 Pet 2:24). There is where the reconciliation occurred (Eph 2:16). There is where the peace was made (Col 1:20). There is where the record against us was taken out of the way (Col 2:14). Not in the tomb, but on the cross! Later, after He was raised from the dead, Jesus would enter into heaven "by His own blood . . . having obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb 9:7).

THOU HAST MADE KNOWN TO ME THE WAYS OF LIFE

"Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life . . ." Other versions read, "You have made known to Me the paths of life," NIV "You have made Me see the ways of life," BBE " You have revealed the paths of life to Me," DARBY " You make the path of life known to Me," GENEVA "You have taught Me the way of life," NJB "You will give Me back My life," LIVING and "You taught Me how to live." IE

"The ways of life" are the ways leading to life – the way from death to life. Again, Peter confirms that the Psalm is a depiction of the resurrection of Christ. In particular, it is a behind-the-scenes view of the Savior's frame of mind while He was "absent from the body" in Hades. Never before had any person blazed a trail from death to life. There had been some few people who had been raised from the dead, but they, through the power of God, were called back by someone outside of themselves. We have a record of several resurrections.

- The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17-23).
- The Shunnamite's son (2 Kgs 4:32-37).
- A dead young man who, when he was cast into a sepulcher, touched Elisha's bones

(2 Kgs 13:21).

- The son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:12-15).
- Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:49-55).
- Lazarus (John 11:43-44).
- Dorcas (Acts 9:37-40).
- Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12).

None of these people navigated their way back to earth from the abode of the dead. Jesus, however, had received a commandment to take His life back (John 10:17-18). How will the Savior make the transition from death to life, and from Hades back to the world? This Psalm affirms that the Father would show Him the way back. Care must be taken not to assume more in this text than is obvious to faith. It does not suggest that Jesus was ignorant or in a hopeless state. It does confirm that the resurrection of Jesus from the dead involved the activity and direction of the Father. Therefore it is written that "God raised" Jesus (Acts 2:32; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30,37).

God did not do this by the imposition of His power, but by means of His fellowship and oneness with the Son. It seems to me that the work here described transcends both the language and the minds of men. Thus it is stated in a manner that is familiar to those who walk in the light as He is in the light. Because of His holy nature, God had forsaken Jesus when He was dying. However, He joined with Him in His resurrection, showing Him "the path" to life, and doing so while He was in the region of the dead. Jesus, then, was not asleep, and is never said to have been.

In confirmation of this, the 16th Psalm reads, "Thou wilt show Me the path of life: in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore" (Psa 16:11).

THOU SHALT MAKE ME FULL OF JOY

"... thou shalt make Me full of joy with Thy countenance." Other versions read, "You will make Me full of joy in Your presence," NKJV "Thou wilt make Me full of gladness with Thy presence," NASB "You will fill Me with joy in Your presence," NIV "You will make Me full of gladness with Your presence," NRSV "Thou shalt make Me full of gladness with Thy countenance," ASV "I will be full of joy when I see Your face," BBE "In Your presence there is complete joy," GWN "and give Me wonderful joy in Your presence," LIVING " You came near Me , and I felt great joy," IE "You will fill Me with delight in Your presence," WILLIAMS and "You will enrapture Me [diffusing My soul with joy] with and in Your presence." AMPLIFIED

This is the experience to which Paul referred when He said "Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father" (Rom 6:4). It is as though the glory of God came into that tomb like it did into the Tabernacle and Temple. When God's glory invaded the region of the dead, death lost all of its power, and path to life was clear. The presence of the Father filled the Christ with great joy. This was the glory that He laid aside to enter into the world. It was the glory withheld from Him while He bore our sins in His body on the tree.

Here is the ultimate experience: coming near to the Lord, and being in His presence, beholding His countenance. Jesus experienced the most joy when He was relishing the presence of the Father. That neutralized whatever was involved in being in the region of the dead. That compensated for being in a bodiless state, confined, from one point of view, to a distant condition.

We ought to learn from this that our most debilitating circumstances are decidedly reduced when we know the Lord is with us. There are times when we, in measure, experience what Paul did when the Lord "stood by" him (Acts 23:11). Somehow that compensated for the difficulties he was experiencing at the time when he was about to be "pulled in pieces" by a frenzied crowd of hostile

Jews (Acts 23:10).

The 16th Psalm says, “in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore” (Psa 16:11). It may appear as though it is speaking only of being where the Father is – in His presence. In this text, however, it is speaking of the Father being where Jesus was, gladdening Him with His countenance and refreshing Him with His presence.

DAVID WAS NOT SPEAKING ABOUT HIMSELF

“29 Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.”

Peter continues with this seemingly technical point, insightfully and powerfully affirming that Jesus is “risen indeed” (Lk 24:34). He will now confirm how unreasonable it was to think David was testifying of his own experience. Even though David did not say, “I am speaking about the coming Messiah,” the people should have been able to conclude that this is what he was saying. Some of them had, after all, represented themselves as thinking men. They had said, “These men are full of new wine” (Acts 2:13). Peter has already shown them how foolish they were in thinking such a thing (Acts 2:15). Now he will move them to consider something that they had not yet associated with the Christ.

LET ME SPEAK FREELY TO YOU

“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David . . .” Other versions read, “Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David,” NASB ““ Fellow Israelites , I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David,” NRSV “My brothers, I may say to you openly that David,” BBE “Brethren, let it be allowed to speak with freedom to you concerning the patriarch David,” DARBY “Men and brethren, I may boldly speak unto you of the Patriarch David,” GENEVA “Men, brethren, I may speak to you explicitly of the patriarch David,” MRD “Brothers, no one can deny that the patriarch David himself,” NJB “Dear brothers, think about this ! You can be sure that the patriarch David wasn't referring to himself ,” NLT “Men, brethren! it is permitted to speak with freedom unto you concerning the patriarch David,” YLT “My Jewish brothers, I can tell you plainly about David, our ancestor,” IE “As to the patriarch David, I need hardly remind you , brethren,” WEYMOUTH and “Men and brother-Jews, I can surely speak freely to you about the patriarch David.” PHILLIPS

From one point, what Peter is saying is very obvious. Yet, like blind men do, the people had not considered what Peter declares is very plain. Men – particularly religious men – have a tendency of “doting about questions and strifes of words” (1 Tim 6:4), neglecting powerful realities that are before them. Sometimes it is necessary to bring very obvious things before the people, and cause them to look closely at them. Take, for example, the women who had come to the tomb of Jesus to anoint His body. They were confronted with an angel who told them not to be afraid. He reminded them , “He is not here, for He is risen, as He said.” As if that was not enough he continued, “Come, see the place where the Lord lay” (Matt 28:6). From one point of view, the facts were very clear. Jesus had said He was going to rise from the dead (Matt 16:21), and He was not there. However the classroom in which the facts are seen is not enough.

There must be a perception of the facts before they can wield their power upon the heart and mind. Men delight in entertainment and novelty, but God is in neither one.

The Patriarch David

Now, it is as though Peter said, “Let me tell you what is obvious about the patriarch David.”

What is the meaning of the word “Patriarch”? Some versions read “our ancestor.” NRSV/IE Abraham is also called a “patriarch” (Heb 7:4). The twelve sons of Jacob are also called “the twelve patriarchs” (Acts 7:8-9). The word is a transliteration of the Greek word **patria,rcou** (pat-ri-archs-ou). Lexically, it means “founder of a tribe, progenitor,” THAYER “chief father . . . chief of a family,” FRIBERG and “father of a nation.” GINGRICH Thus, a “patriarch” is more than an important person, or someone who is positioned in a certain lineage. This word had to do with being the first of a certain order.

As used here, David is seen as the one through whom the Messiah came. That is precisely why the Messiah is called “the Son of David.” This was confessed to be true during Christ’s ministry among men. It was acknowledged by two blind men, all the people, a woman of Canaan, multitudes, the Pharisees, and the scribes (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 15:22; 20:30; 21:9; ; 22:42; Mk 12:35).

David was not only a type of Christ, he was the first of a kingly lineage through which Jesus came. As the head of that kingly lineage, David is called “the patriarch.”

This particularly relates to Christ’s authority and kingship. The prophets said He would sit on “the throne of David ” (Isa 9:7). It is written that He would be given “the key of the house of David ” (Isa 22:22). His salvation is referred to as “the sure mercies of David ” (Isa 55:3). He is “the branch” that was raised up unto David (Jer 23:5; 33:15). The Messiah is even referred to as “David their King” (Jer 30:9; Hos 3:5), and “My servant David ” (Ezek 34:23-24). This is, then, a key association!

David was not only a type of Christ, he was the first of a kingly lineage through which Jesus came. As the head of that kingly lineage, David is called “the patriarch.” Peter will elaborate on this more extensively as this word continues.

HE IS BOTH DEAD AND BURIED

“ . . . that he is both dead and buried . . .” Other versions read, “that he both died and was buried,” NASB “came to his death, and was put in the earth,” BBE “he is both dead and buried,” GENEVA “he died, and also was buried,” MRD “not only died and was buried,” MONTGOMERY and “There is no doubt that he died and was buried.” PHILLIPS

The point Peter is making is this: the word David wrote in the 16 th Psalm could not have been about himself. There are some Psalms that have a dual application, the partial one being found in the writer, and the complete fulfillment in Christ Jesus (Psa 18:43; 47:5-9; 65:2-4; 69:1-4; 75:2; 93:2-3; 102:24; 109:25; 118:19,21). However, the Psalm now being declared by Peter is not in that category. It applies exclusively to the Christ, as Peter will now affirm.

HIS SEPULCHER IS WITH US

“ . . . and his sepulcher is with us unto this day.” Other versions read, “His tomb is with us to this day,” NKJV “his resting-place is with us today,” BBE “and his monument is amongst us unto this day,” DARBY “his tomb is in our midst to this day,” NAB “his tomb is still here among us,” NLT “His grave is still here with us today,” IE and “we still have his tomb among us.” WEYMOUTH

The point is that the body of David was still in “his tomb.” Further, if his body was in his tomb, his spirit was still in Hades – the abode of the dead. He was still under the dominion of death. This confirms that David could not possibly have been speaking about himself, for his present condition contradicted the Psalm. He had been left in Hades, and his body did see corruption. He had, in fact, just as Joshua and David, gone “the way of all the earth” (Josh 23:14; 1 Kg 2:2).

THE PROPHET SPOKE ABOUT CHRIST

“ 30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.”

Peter now affirms that David was not speaking as a mere man. He was not recounting his own personal experiences.

BEING A PROPHET

“Therefore being a prophet . . .” Other versions read, “And so, because he was a prophet,” NASB “But he was a prophet,” NIV “Since he was a prophet,” NRSV “Whereas therefore he was a prophet,” DOUAY “David was a prophet,” GWN “Therefore, seeing he was a prophet,” PNT “a prophet, therefore , being,” YLT “Being a prophet, however ,” WEYMOUTH and “But while he was alive he was a prophet.” PHILLIPS

Phillips’ translation captures a facet of this text that is most intriguing. In the 16 th Psalm we have Jesus speaking after He died – after He had left the world for a season. The Psalm represents Jesus as speaking prophetically: “My flesh shall rest in hope . . . Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell. . . neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption . . . Thou shalt make Me full of joy with Thy countenance.” David, however, only prophesied while he was alive.

Peter leaves no doubt about this matter. David is speaking as a prophet. He is not speaking of himself, or out from himself. God is, in fact, saying something about the Christ through David, and doing so far in advance of the appearance of the Messiah.

Being a faithful prophet, David prophesied “according to the proportion of faith” (Rom 12:6). That is, he spoke what he saw, or understood. He spoke “as the oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11), uttering the mind of the Lord, and doing so with understanding. We are again reminded that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10).

KNOWING THAT GOD HAD SWORN WITH AN OATH TO HIM

“ . . . and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him . . .” Other versions read, “And so, because he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn to him with an oath,” NASB “that God had promised him on oath,” NIV “and having in mind the oath which God had given to him,” BBE “and knew that God had sworn him an oath,” NJB “and knowing that with an oath God did swear to him ,” YLT “and knew God had promised with an unbreakable oath ,” LIVING “God vowed to David,” IE “and knowing that God had solemnly sworn to him,” WEYMOUTH “and knowing that God had sealed to him with an oath,” AMPLIFIED and “He knew that God had given him a most solemn promise .” PHILLIPS

David engages his mind – his memory and his contemplative powers – as he prophesies. He prophesies “knowing” what God had promised to him, not while in a trance.

The prophecy (a promise of God) of reference is found in the seventh chapter of Second Samuel. Because this is such a pivotal prophecy, we will do well to consider it in some depth.

“And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that He will make thee an house . . . And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: but my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before

thee: thy throne shall be established for ever ” (2 Sam 7:11-16).

Another account of this occasion is found in the book of First Chronicles.

“And it shall come to pass, when thy days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me an house, and I will stablish his throne for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son: and I will not take my mercy away from him, as I took it from him that was before thee: but I will settle him in Mine house and in My kingdom for ever: and his throne shall be established for evermore. According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David” (1 Chr 17:11-15).

In his Psalms, David refers to this promise.

“I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah” (Psa 89:3-4).

David engages his mind – his memory and his contemplative powers – as he prophesies. He prophesies “knowing” what God had promised to him, not while in a trance.

“Then thou spakest in vision to thy Holy One, and saidst, I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people. I have found David My servant; with My holy oil have I anointed him: With whom My hand shall be established: Mine arm also shall strengthen him. The enemy shall not exact upon him; nor the son of wickedness afflict him. And I will beat down his foes before his face, and plague them that hate him. But my faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him: and in My name shall his horn be exalted. I will set his hand also in the sea, and his right hand in the rivers. He shall cry unto Me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah” (Psa 89:19-37).

“ The LORD hath sworn in truth unto David; He will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore. For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for his habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it. I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread. I will also clothe her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy. There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for Mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame: but upon himself shall his crown flourish ” (Psa 132:11-18).

There are several key factors to note in this prophecy.

- God would make a house for David.
- David’s seed would build a house for God’s name.
- God would establish the throne of David’s kingdom forever.
- God would be a Father to David’s seed, and the seed would be His son.

- David's house and kingdom would be established forever.
- God would settle David's seed in His house and kingdom forever.
- God's hand would be established with David.
- David's horn would be exalted.
- God would make his firstborn higher than the kings of the earth.
- God covenant would stand fast with him.
- His seed would endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven.
- David's seed would endure forever, and his throne as the sun before Him.
- God swore in truth and would not turn from it, that of the fruit of David's body He would raise up one to sit on his throne.
- He would make the horn of David to bud.
- The crown of the seed would flourish.

Observations

First, there is a part of this prophecy that does not refer to Christ Himself. "If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men ."

In the prophecy itself, there is no direct reference to the Messiah. This is an association that comes with understanding. It is clear from the Psalms of David that he came to grasp the significance of the promise. In fact, Peter says it was David's understanding of this promise that prompted the statements of the sixteenth Psalm.

Second, there is a sense in which much of promise pertained to Solomon, who would build the Temple. "He shall build an house for My name."

In the prophecy itself, there is no direct reference to the Messiah. This is an association that comes with understanding. It is clear from the Psalms of David that he came to grasp the significance of the promise. In fact, Peter says it was David's understanding of this promise that prompted the statements of the sixteenth Psalm. Prophecy, then, was actually joined with understanding, and also gave birth to additional prophecies through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to note the role of the mind in prophesying. Even when prophecies were intended for later generations, the minds of the prophets were involved. Peter says of those who spoke of Christ's sufferings and glory, "Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently , who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow" (1 Pet 1:10-11). Rather than speaking or writing while in some kind of subconscious trace, these prophets knew what they were prophesying. They knew it concerned the coming Christ. They probed what they expressed, "trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." NIV What is even more, the Lord answered their earnest inquiries, making known that "not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven; things which angels desire to look into" (1 Pet 1:12).

Thus, while many of the particulars about the promised Messiah were not made known to David, His kingly nature was revealed, as well as the eternal and uninterrupted nature of His beneficent kingdom.

OF THE FRUIT OF HIS LOINS

“ . . . that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, . . .” Other versions read, “that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh,” NKJV “one of his descendants,” NASB “that of the fruit of his body,” BBE “one of David’s descendants,” GWN “of the fruit of thy bowels,” MRD and “one of David’s own descendants.” NLT

The coming Messiah would come from David’s progeny – from his natural offspring. Although David had several sons, the Messianic lineage would be traced through only one of them – Solomon. All through the lineage of Jesus this was the case. Abraham had seven sons beside Isaac: Ishmael, Zimran, Jokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (Gen 16:16; 25:2). However, the Messiah came through Isaac. Isaac began Jacob and Esau, but the Messianic lineage came through Jacob (Mal 1:2). Jacob had twelve sons, but the Christ came from only one of them – Judah (Heb 7:14). Judah had five sons, but the Messiah came through Pharez (Matt 1:3).

I say these things only to point out that David had to understand which of his sons would provide the lineage for the coming Christ. He understood the prophecies delivered through him to have a secondary reference to Solomon, who did build a house for God, even as the Messiah would also do. I understand this to be the purpose for the dual nature of the prophecy. Solomon was the secondary reference, and the building of the Temple was a secondary building, in order that the lineage itself might be better understood.

TO SIT ON HIS THRONE

“ . . . He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne.” Other versions read, “He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne,” NKJV “to sit . . . upon his throne,” NASB “he would place . . . on his throne,” NIV “He would put . . . on his throne,” NRSV “he would set one upon his throne,” ASV “would take his place as king,” BBE “one should sit upon his throne,” DOUAY “I will seat [one] on thy throne,” MRD “succeed him on the throne,” NJB “that Christ . . . should sit on his seat,” PNT “would [be the Messiah and] sit on David’s throne,” LIVING “would sit upon David’s throne,” IE and “He would set one on his throne.” MONTGOMERY

The throne of reference was not an earthly throne, for Jesus would later make clear that His kingdom “is not of this world” (John 18:36). That being the case, its throne could not possibly be established in this world. Further, the purpose for Christ’s rule was not the establishment of a worldly empire. A higher purpose is being served by Jesus’ kingdom than worldly prominence.

Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would sit upon David’s throne. “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever . The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:7). Thus, we have a Messiah coming from the seed of David, and sitting upon the throne of David.

Peter is now going to relate all of this to “Jesus of Nazareth.” He has clearly stated that David was not speaking about himself when he wrote of not being left in Hades, and his body not being subject to corruption. He was actually speaking of the Messiah, for the present circumstances confirmed he could not have been speaking about himself. His body was still in the grave.

In Peter’s inspired exposition, he will speak of Jesus sitting on David’s throne quite differently than many historical and modern self-professed theologians. He will not speak of Christ’s second coming. He will not speak of Jesus setting up His kingdom in Jerusalem. He will not speak of an earthly empire. Men have made these associations, but they cannot associate them with Peter’s

exposition.

Lest this appear to be a mere gloss of the text, let me remind you that Peter is now speaking of Jesus being “raised up to sit ” on David’s “throne.” “Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ” (Acts 2:30). He is relating this to the prophecy of One not being left in Hades, and His body not seeing corruption. He is referring to One coming back from the dead, not to One coming back to earth from heaven!

This is highly disruptive to much eschatology – humanly conceived eschatology.

THE RESURRECTION AND ENTHRONEMENT

“ 31 He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption.”

Peter leaves no doubt concerning the reason and focus of David’s prophecy. He will not tie that prophecy to the book of Daniel, or to a Messianic kingdom upon earth – and he is “filled with the Spirit.” He will not associate it with the overthrow of the antichrist, or with a magnificent kingdom in Jerusalem. This word is how an inspired man speaks, who knows the truth about Christ.

HE SEEING THIS BEFORE

“He seeing this before . . .” Other versions read, “he, forseeing this,” NKJV “he looked ahead,” NASB “Seeing what was ahead,” NIV “he foresaw,” RSV “He, having knowledge of the future,” BBE “Seeing this in advance,” CSB “He knowing this before,” GENEVA “David knew,” GWN “he spoke with foreknowledge,” NJB “having foreseen,” YLT “David was looking far into the future and predicting,” LIVING “David knew this before it took place,” IE and “with prophetic insight.” WEYMOUTH

And what is it that David saw before – that is, saw before it actually came to pass. What is the sight that prompted him to speak as he did? It was the enthronement of his own Seed upon his throne. It was the fulfillment of God’s promise to make him a house (2 Sam 7:27), and to have it governed by the King on a throne that is established forever (1 Chron 17:11-14). This is what David saw “before.”

HE SPAKE OF CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

“ . . . spake of the resurrection of Christ . . .” Other versions read, “spoke concerning the resurrection of Christ,” NKJV “spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah,” NRSV “was talking of the coming again of Christ from the dead,” BBE “that the Messiah would come back to life , and he spoke about that before it ever happened,” GWN “speaking of the Messiah’s resurrection,” NLT “he did speak concerning the rising again of the Christ,” YLT “predicting Messiah’s resurrection,” LIVING “the resurrection of Christ and told it,” WILLIAMS “spoke [by foreknowledge] of the resurrection of the Christ (the Messiah),” AMPLIFIED and “THE resurrection of Christ, and it is this of which he is speaking .” PHILLIPS

Let me go over this once again. Here are the facts in the case.

- God would build David a house (2 Sam 7:11).
- He would raise up One from David’s own lineage to sit upon his throne (2 Sam 7:16).
- He would reign forever (2 Sam 7:13).

- His kingdom would have no end (2 Sam 7:16).
- As a King, He would build God's house (1 Chron 17:12).
- God would make this King higher than the kings of the earth (Psa 89:27).
- God swore and would not repent, that He would raise up one to sit on David's throne (Psa 89:3-4).

Given these facts, exactly how would David correlate his prophecies with the coming King? With what event would he associate the fulfillment of these prophecies? How will the Holy Spirit lead him to speak? Peter leaves no doubt on the matter. David was inspired, and Peter is also inspired. Now Peter affirms the matter clearly, and without any ambiguity whatsoever. David was moved to speak "of the resurrection of Christ." He did not speak about Christ's second coming, but about His resurrection. He did not speak of Jesus returning to earth from heaven, but of Him returning from the region of the dead!

Is it possible to state the case with any more clarity? With the insight of faith and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David saw the raising up of a King to sit upon his throne, and it moved him to speak of the resurrection of Christ! He foresaw a King being raised up to build God's house, and he spoke of the resurrection of Christ. He looked ahead by faith and saw an eternal reign, and spoke of the resurrection of Christ

Some men say that Jesus is coming back from heaven to be seated on the throne and reign. Peter will declare He rose from the dead to do so!

This is Peters exposition of resurrection – Christ's resurrection in particular, and resurrection in general. It involves a twofold deliverance: one from Hades, and one from the grave. The spirit is in Hades, and the body is in the grave. Both deliverances must occur for there to be a resurrection from the dead.

This prophecy is all the more remarkable when you consider how very few references are made in Moses and the Prophets to the resurrection of the dead in general, and to the resurrection of Christ specifically. Job alluded to the resurrection of the dead (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27). David spoke of Christ's resurrection (Psa 16:9-10). He gave some veiled words about the general resurrection (Psa 17:15; 49:15). Isaiah spoke of death being swallowed up in victory (Isa 25:8), and the earth casting out her dead (Isa 26:19). Daniel spoke of many that sleep in the dust of the earth awakening (Dan 12:2-3). He was told by a heavenly messenger that he would "rest" and stand in his lot at the end of his days (Dan 12:13). Hosea spoke of God's people being ransomed "from the power of the grave", and being redeemed "from death" (Hos 13:14).

In all of this, David, being a man after God's own heart, spoke with the greatest clarity on the nature the resurrection itself. It involves not being left in Hades, and the body coming out of the grave. He also is the only prophet that spoke of Christ's resurrection from the dead – and his reference needed to be interpreted by Peter for men to see it.

Peter also affirms that David's prophecy was prompted by what he saw . That is, through the Spirit he saw the enthronement of Jesus, and was moved by the Spirit to prophesy of Christ's resurrection. That is an association made in heaven, not upon earth. Yet, you will be hard pressed to find anyone speaking about Christ being raised up to sit upon David's throne that points to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. That, however, is what Peter did as he was moved by the Holy Spirit.

HIS SOUL AND HIS FLESH

“ . . . that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption.” Other versions read,

“that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption,” NKJV “that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh decay,” NASB “that He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay,” NIV “He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption,” NRSV “He was not left in Hades, and His flesh did not experience decay,” CSB “that neither has he been left in hades nor his flesh seen corruption,” DARBY “that neither was he abandoned to the netherworld nor did his flesh see corruption,” NAB “He was saying that God would not leave him among the dead or allow his body to rot in the grave,” NLT “He will not be left in death. His body will not decay in the grave,” IE “to the effect that He was not left forsaken in the Unseen World, nor did His body undergo decay,” WEYMOUTH “that He was not deserted [in death] and left in Hades (the state of departed spirits), nor did His body know decay or see destruction,” AMPLIFIED and “Christ was not deserted in death and His body was never destroyed. 'Christ.” PHILLIPS

This is Peters exposition of resurrection – Christ’s resurrection in particular, and resurrection in general. It involves a twofold deliverance: one from Hades, and one from the grave. The spirit is in Hades, and the body is in the grave. Both deliverances must occur for there to be a resurrection from the dead. It has already occurred in Jesus, it will yet be fulfilled in the resurrection when “ all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).

I am chagrined at the bent of some translations in the direction of soul-sleeping. They translate this verse as though it involves redundant expressions. “He was not abandoned to the grave, nor did His body see decay,” NIV “He will not be left in death. His body will not decay in the grave,” IE “Christ was not deserted in death and His body was never destroyed.'Christ.” PHILLIPS “He said that the Messiah wouldn't be left in the grave and that his body wouldn't decay,” GWN “he was not left in the grave, neither did his body see corruption,” MRD and “He will not be left in death. His body will not decay in the grave.” IE

These are wholly inappropriate translations. They reflect human persuasion rather than Divine intent. Two parts are mentioned (“soul” and “His flesh”) , and two locations or conditions are mentioned (“Hell” [Hades] and “corruption.”

SOUL-SLEEPING

The soul-sleeping heresy affirms that both the seen and unseen parts of those who are dead are “asleep.” This is base on the Scriptural references to death as “sleep” (Deut 31:16; Job 7:21; 14:12; Dan 12:2; John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor 15:6,18).

These references pertain to the body, and are used to confirm the reality of the coming resurrection. The use of the term “sleep” is not intended to denote unconsciousness, but the prospect of being raised from the dead. Thus Job speaks of death as sleeping “in the dust” (Job 7:21), and Daniel to “sleep in the dust of the earth” (Dan 12:2).

A Separation

At death, there is a separation of the seen and unseen parts of men. It is not possible, therefore, that they would both remain in the same place. Rachel’s death is described using this kind of language. “And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing , (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin” (Gen 35:18).

When the son of a widow of Zarephath died, Elijah raised him from the dead. The prophet asked the Lord, “I pray Thee, let this child’s soul come into him again .” When the boy was raised, it is described in these words: “And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came

into him again , and he revived” (1 Kgs 17:22).

Referring to his preference of death over life in the body, Paul wrote of being “ absent from the body” (2 Cor 5:8).

When referring to an epochal vision he received, Paul said he did not know whether he was “in the body or out of the body” – and he was very conscious at that time (2 Cor 12:3).

When Stephen died, he is said to have fallen “sleep” (Acts 7:60). However, before he died, he referred to the separation of his spirit from his body. He prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:59). It is inconceivable that he was referring to a period of unconsciousness, or to the resurrection of the dead that would be in the future.

At death there is a separation of the seen and unseen part of men.

Consciousness After Death

Scripture does not support unconsciousness after death, or a lack of awareness of the surroundings. Our text is proclaiming a prophecy that referred to Jesus having gladness in the presence of the Lord after He died, and expecting His appointed resurrection.

There are both teaching and testimonies that affirm the consciousness of those who have died. This is pertinent to the significance of our text, which speaks of Christ’s anticipation of His resurrection.

Jesus preaching to the spirits. The very person who, in our text, was preaching on the day of Pentecost, later referred to Jesus’ activity after He died, and before He was raised. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also HE went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Pet 3:18-20). Those seeking to defend the soul-sleeping view, as well as several others, say that the preaching of reference was that of Noah, in whom, they aver, the spirit of Christ was present. However, Noah is never depicted as possessing “the Spirit of Christ,” prophesying of Christ, or preaching to “spirits.” Later Peter again refers to this incident. “for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead , that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet 4:6). Noah preached no Gospel, nor did he preach that anyone might “live according to God in the spirit.” Although this incident presents some difficulties for surface thinkers, it is in Scripture. It testifies to the Lord having no pleasure in the death of the wicked. There is no reason to imagine that all of those who died in the flood were wicked, and consequently went to Hell. Scripture does not affirm this. Nor, indeed, are we to suppose there were no children, demented, or some who did not have the faintest notion of the existence of Noah. This text does not clarify all of the issues of post-death misery, but it does affirm the activity of Jesus after His death and before His resurrection. Peter says of Jesus “ HE went and preached to the spirits!”

Revelation while out of the body. When Paul was caught up into the “third heaven,” he was very aware of what was happening. He “heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” The experience was so vivid that Paul gloried in the experience (2 Cor 12:4-5). If the soul-sleeping theory is true, then Paul was speaking ignorantly and without due regard for the truth. Who is the fool who will postulate such an absurdity?

In no way can any of these verses be perceived as speaking about men in the flesh, or in the body. We have come to an assembly of “spirits” who have been perfected – that is, freed from

the encumbrances of the flesh. That this could refer to unconscious beings in the grave is an absurdity unworthy of being embraced by intelligent men.

We have come to the spirits of just men made perfect. Candidly the Spirit affirms of all who are in Christ Jesus, “But ye are come unto . . . the spirits of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:22). Other versions read, “You have come,” NKJV “you have approached,” NAB “what you have come to is.” NJB This is a description of where believers remaining “in the body” have come. Elsewhere these coming ones are referred to as “being yourselves also in the body” (Heb 13:3). And to whom does the Spirit say we “have come?” Pertinent to this discussion, He states it includes “the spirits of just men made perfect.” The word “spirits” is translated from the Greek word **pneu,masin** (pnyhoo-mah-sin). This exact word is found five times in Scripture, and its meaning is obvious. It is never applied to people on earth.

- “And they were all amazed, insomuch that they questioned among themselves, saying, What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits [**neu,masin**] and they do obey Him” (Mark 1:27).

- “And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits [**neu,masin**], and they come out” (Luke 4:36).

- “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits [**neu,masin**], and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim 4:1).

- “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits [**neu,masin**] of just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23).

- “By which also he went and preached unto the spirits [**neu,masin**] in prison” (1 Pet 3:19).

In no way can any of these verses be perceived as speaking about men in the flesh, or in the body. We have come to an assembly of “spirits” who have been perfected – that is, freed from the encumbrances of the flesh. That this could refer to unconscious beings in the grave is an absurdity unworthy of being embraced by intelligent men.

The rich man and Lazarus. Jesus gave the account of “a certain rich man,” and “a certain beggar named Lazarus.” Some affirm that this was really a parable, and not an actual account. However, who has ever heard of a parable that likens reality to something that is nothing more than a myth. If the soul-sleepers are right, then Jesus used a lie to teach truth – and I view that as a serious suggestion. In that case we have the One who is “the Truth” using a fable to teach something. In the account, Jesus did not speak like a soul-sleeper would speak. In fact, no soul-sleeper could talk like this. The Lord, who is “full of grace and truth,” said Lazarus died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. There he was comforted. The rich man died, was buried, and lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torment. This dead man spoke to Abraham, received an answer from Abraham, made another petition of Abraham, and was given another answer by Abraham. Both the rich man and Abraham knew about the rich man’s brothers, and of their spiritual condition. Abraham knew about Moses and the Prophets, who did not live until more than 500 years after he died. Abraham also spoke of other personalities who existed with both the rich man and Lazarus, and how, if they desired to do so, they could not pass from one region to the other. That is how Jesus spoke about life after death.

Souls under the altar. John was given a glimpse of some of these “spirits of must men made perfect.” He tells us who they were, where they are now, and of their former lives on the earth. “And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God , and for the testimony which they held” (Rev 6:9). He did not see men in the

body, but “souls.” They were not men in the earth, but those who had been killed because of their testimony. These “souls” cried out to the Lord “a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, with a loud voice, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10).

Far from being asleep, these souls were very conscious, both of their surroundings, and of their former lives. Heaven knew this was the case, so there was an immediate response to their cry. “And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Rev 6:11). Methinks if some person had told these “souls” of the doctrine of soul-sleeping, they would have laughed at them in derision.

Moses and Elijah came back. We have the record of two men who left this world – one by death, and one by translation – yet came back in glory. When Jesus was transfigured, “behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). They both talked with Jesus about His appointed decease, or death – and on earth neither of them said so much as one syllable about Christ’s death. They surely could not have talked if they were asleep or unconscious – even doing so with prophetic insight.

Thus we have the record of several departed souls, or spirits, and of their activity after they died. Whether some of them are viewed as parables or reality, the fact of consciousness after death still remains. It is unimaginable that the premier Personality, the Lord Jesus Himself, would have come behind “the spirits of just men made perfect” (Abraham, Lazarus, Paul, Moses, and Elijah), not being active after He died and before He rose from the dead.

CONCLUSION

Peter has introduced the resurrection of Christ in a most insightful way. He has declared that David “foresaw” it, and prophesied of the Savior’s anticipation of it. That is, this is something that was in God’s eternal purpose – Jesus taking back His life again, just as He was commissioned to do. God, therefore, alerted humanity to it more than 800 years ahead of time. It was foretold by David before Jesus, and anticipated by the Savior while He yet remained in the region of the dead.

WE ALL ARE WITNESSES

“ 32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.”

Peter has already stated that God has raised Jesus from the dead: “Whom God hath raised up , having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). He has also declared this was something prophesied by David. Now He will affirm the truth of Christ’s resurrection once again, and buttress it with yet another witness.

THIS JESUS

“This Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “ This man Jesus,” GWN/NJB “He was speaking of Jesus,” LIVING “So Jesus,” IE “It was this very Jesus ,” ISV “I mean Jesus,” WILLIAMS and “Christ is the man Jesus.” PHILLIPS

“This Jesus” is “Jesus of Nazareth,” a man approved by God in their presence, and over an extended period. It is the Jesus they took, crucified, and killed “by wicked hands.” It is also the One David foresaw, as well as the One who testified to God Himself that He would not leave Him in Hades, or allow His body to see corruption.

The people had tried to put “this Jesus” from themselves, thereby fulfilling the second Psalm. “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psa 2:3). Now, they are having to face that “same Jesus” again!

GOD RAISED UP

“ . . . hath God raised up . . .” Other versions read, “God has raised up,” NKJV “God raised up again ,” NASB “God has raised . . . to life ,” NIV “God has given back to life ,” BBE “God has resurrected,” CSB “ God brought . . . back to life ,” GWN “Jesus rose from the dead ,” LIVING and “God raised from death .” WEYMOUTH

“This Jesus” is “Jesus of Nazareth,” a man approved by God in their presence, and over an extended period. It is the Jesus they took, crucified, and killed “by wicked hands.” It is also the One David foresaw, as well as the One who testified to God Himself that He would not leave Him in Hades, or allow His body to see corruption.

Like the wise man of Solomon’s reference, Peter is fastening truth in the minds of those before him. “The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies , which are given from one shepherd” (Eccl 12:11). He once again faces them with the stark reality of God’s reversal of their judgment. They killed Him, God raised Him! They rejected Him, God accepted Him! They hated Him, God loved Him!

Twenty-one times it is stated that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:24,32; 3:26; 5:30; 10:40; 12:7; 13:22,30,33,34; 17:31; Rom 4:24; 6:4; 8:11; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:15; 2 Cor 4:14; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Col 2:12; 1 Pet 1:21). By way of comparison, fourteen times it is stated that Christ “died” (Rom 5:6,8; 6:10; 8:34; 14:9,15; 1 Cor 8:11; 15:3; 2 Cor 5:14,15; 1Thess14; 5:10). To say that Christ’s resurrection is central to the preaching of the Gospel is an understatement, to say the least. Yet, there is a great deal of purported Gospel preaching that does not make much of Christ’s resurrection.

WE ALL ARE WITNESSES

“ . . . whereof we all are witnesses.” Other versions read, “ of which we are all witnesses,” NKJV “to which we are all witnesses of the fact ,” NIV “and of that all of us are witnesses,” NRSV “We are all witnesses of this ,” CSB “We are all eye-witnesses of this!” IE “a fact to which all of us testify ,” WEYMOUTH “and of that all we [His disciples] are witnesses,” AMPLIFIED and “ a fact of which all of us are eye-witnesses!” PHILLIPS

Technically, no one actually witnessed the resurrection itself – not even the soldiers who watched the tomb. They were startled by an angel , not the rising of Jesus from the dead (Matt 28:2-4). These witnesses saw Jesus after He was risen form the dead.

Jesus had told them, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem , and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” NKJV (Acts 1:8). Prophetically He had said to them, “And ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:48). Later Peter would say it again: “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses ” (Acts 3:14-15). Again, he would say, “And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him” (Acts 5:32). At the house of Cornelius he again testified, “And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God , even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead” (Acts

10:39-41).

Technically, no one actually witnessed the resurrection itself – not even the soldiers who watched the tomb. They were startled by an angel, not the rising of Jesus from the dead (Matt 28:2-4). These witnesses saw Jesus after He was risen from the dead. In fact, He had spent considerable time with them, showing Himself “alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of things pertaining to the Kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). Further, His appearances were not limited to “the twelve,” but included “above five hundred brethren” (1 Cor 15:6), “James” (1 Cor 15:7), Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:9), “the women” (Matt 28:9), Cleopas and his companion (Luke 24:15-34), and others (Lk 24:10-11,35-36).

Some might conjecture that it would have been better to have the actual Jesus there, and thus the people could have the witness of the disciples corroborated. However, there is something that must not be overlooked. A faithful witness is verified to the conscience of men by the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised that when the Spirit came, He would “reprove,” or convict, NKJV “the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:8-11).

This promised work is precisely what will be accomplished on this marvelous day of Pentecost – a day when the “door of faith” was being opened to the sons of men. During the events of this Christ’s resurrection will be confirmed.

CONCLUSION

Thus, Peter has presented the resurrection of Christ, so essential to man’s salvation. He has declared it as the work of God Himself, who raised Him from the dead, thereby negating the judgment of those who took Him, crucified Him, and killed Him. He has also affirmed that David prophesied of Christ’s resurrection, knowing that God was going to raise up a King to sit on his throne, and that He would reign forever. He has also declared that he and those with him are eye-witnesses of the risen Christ.

All of this confirms that salvation must be implemented and completed by a living Savior. Spiritual life is not maintained by rules, regulations, ceremonies, and procedures. Such things have a little measured value. As it is written, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim 4:8). This is not referring to “exercise,” as ordinarily conceived. It rather refers to disciplines of the body – religious disciplines like fasting, abstinence, celibacy, regular religious activities, etc. Thus, the New American Standard Version reads, “for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (1 Tim 4:8). However valuable these things, and other similar activities, may appear, they cannot culture the soul, feed the spirit, or heighten spiritual sensitivity. They do not enhance Divine fellowship, cause grace to come to us in greater measures, or make our prayers more effectual.

From beginning to end, we require a living Savior, and that is what Peter is declaring. He is opening up the nature of the New Covenant, which significantly differs from the Old Covenant which “stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10). Now, instead of a ceremony, men are being called “into the fellowship” of God’s dear Son (1 Cor 1:9). Instead of coming to the Temple, they will be urged to “draw nigh unto God” Himself by means of a “better hope” (Heb 7:19), and to do so “with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). All of that requires a living Savior – one who can say, “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev 1:18). That is the Jesus that Peter is declaring!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #10

THE PREACHING OF JESUS: HE IS LORD!

“ 2:33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. 34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, 35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool. 36 Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (Acts 2:33-36)

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to the doctrines of many, Peter will affirm that Jesus has been seated on David's throne, and that this was necessary to the salvation of men. He will relate this enthronement to the resurrection of Christ, not His second coming.

It is critical that men obtain an understanding of what is required to save a man, as well as a race. Once the requirements are seen, it will at once expose the folly of salvation by works, or the imagined power and effectiveness of the human will. The blow that sin dealt to the human race removed all hope of self-improvement and recovery.

Men became so corrupt that they extended themselves to crucify the Lord of glory. The whole human race joined in condoning this death, and insisting that it take place: Jews and Gentiles, men and women, masters and servants, rulers and subjects, religion and politics.

It is not possible for an acceptable strategy for recovery from such a fall to rise from those in a depraved and hopeless state. Such a plan cannot be produced by religious leaders – they had joined in having Jesus killed. It cannot come from the political branch of society – they too were involved in carrying out the death of Christ. The common people cannot produce a strategy for recovery – they

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- **HAVING RECEIVED OF THE FATHER (2:33b)**
- **HE HATH SHED FORTH THIS (2:33c)**
- **DAVID IS NOT ASCENDED (2:34a)**
- **SIT ON MY RIGHT HAND (2:34b)**
- **UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES THY FOOTSTOOL (2:35)**
- **LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW (2:36a)**
- **GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS “LORD” (2:36b)**
- **GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS “CHRIST” (2:36c)**
- **CONCLUSION**

were carried along by the enemies of Jesus, and also agreed to His death.

The redemptive plan itself must be conceived by the living God – traced back to His determinate counsel and foreknowledge. Such a purpose cannot be developed by those who have been blighted by sin and taken captive by the devil. Further, the initiation and completion of salvation requires a reigning King with all power. Heavenly resources are requisite to the extrication of men from enslavement to sin, and the maintenance of holiness, “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

THE CRITICALITY OF THIS SERMON

I have stated this before, but am compelled to say it once again. We are being exposed to the inaugural act of the exalted Christ – the pouring forth of His Spirit and the consequent laying of the foundation upon which the church, both as individuals and as a “body,” is built. It is not possible that this initial work can in any way be flawed. The message cannot be partial or faulty. There can be no exaggeration or understatement in the declaration. Jesus must be precisely presented, for this will set the tone for Gospel labors during the rest of time.

Nothing in this message can be subject to obsolescence. Nothing will be presented that will be upstaged by a later message or further insight. If there is a message presented as Gospel that is in any way at variance with the word of Christ to which this text exposes us, then there is not the slightest chance that it is correct. A view of the death of Christ that clashes with Peter’s presentation can be nothing more than a lie. It is not possible that salvation can be wrought by the means of such a contradicting message. A perception of the resurrection of Christ that is in any way antithetical to Peter’s message is in every way corrupt.

Any word that is presented as pertinent to salvation that is not characterized by the absolute, obvious, and unwavering centrality of Christ (as made known through Peter’s words) is a fabrication of man, and has been conceived in the energy of Satanic power and demonic delusion. It

Any word that is presented as pertinent to salvation that is not characterized by the absolute,

obvious, and unwavering centrality of Christ (as made known through Peter's words) is a fabrication of man, and has been conceived in the energy of Satanic power and demonic delusion. It can be properly classified as "doctrines of demons" NKJV (1 Tim 4:1). I understand that this may appear unjustifiably strong. However, if anything, it is an understatement. This is because we are dealing with foundational realities – things upon which the whole of salvation has been built. It is no more possible for a doctrine to survive that is built on a flawed foundation than it is for a house that is built on the sand to survive the rain and floods (Matt 7:26-27). The criticality of foundations is well stated by the Psalmist: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psa 11:3). How will it be possible for them to build if the foundations have been "cast down" GENEVA or "undermined" ? GWN When the things that support thought are erroneous, how is it possible for the process of thought itself to be right?

WHAT HAS BEEN SAID?

With these things in mind, what has been said of the Christ to this point?

- Jesus Christ was a Man "approved by God" (2:22a).
- He was "approved" by three categories of works: "miracles," "wonders," and "signs" (2:22b).
- Jesus was "delivered" up by God's "determinate counsel" (2:23a).
- He was "delivered up" by God's "foreknowledge" (2:23c).
- Once placed in the hands of the Jews by God Himself, they took Him, crucified Him, and killed Him (2:23d).
- The Jew did this by employing the "wicked hands" of men – Gentiles who did not know God (2:23e).
- God raised Jesus from the dead, negating the verdict of the people (2:24a).
- It was not possible for death to retain Jesus (2:24b).
- David spoke of Christ and of His experience after His death and prior to His resurrection. The Father was His focus, He was at Jesus' right hand, Jesus' heart therefore rejoiced, His tongue was glad, and his flesh rested in hope – i.e., in anticipation of His resurrection(2:25-26a).
- Jesus knew and said that God would not leave His soul in hades (the abode of spirits), nor allow His body to see corruption (in the grave) 2:27.
- The way back to life from the dead was made known to Jesus by God (2:28a).
- Jesus was made glad with the Father's countenance, while He remained in the region of the dead (2:28).
- Knowing that God had sworn to raise up an everlasting King from his lineage, to sit upon his throne, David spoke of the resurrection of Christ (2:29-30).
- Christ's resurrection, not His second coming, is directly related to His enthronement – sitting upon David's throne (2:30b-31).
- The resurrected Christ was seen by His disciples, confirming that He was, indeed, alive (2:32).

Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit, will now proceed to build upon these realities. In fulfillment of Jesus' promise, the Spirit will "guide" him into "all truth" (John 16:13), testifying of Christ (John 15:26), and presenting the view of Him that is necessary if men are to be brought salvation.

These, then, are essential as the foundation of our salvation: the death, burial, resurrection, and

enthronement of Jesus. In order to bring salvation within the reach of men, we cannot begin with self-perceived human needs. It is wrong – seriously wrong – to present Jesus as the means of correcting domestic, political, and social dilemmas. The Father did not send the Son to make the world a better place to live, or to address the difficulties that men rank most highly. Even though this is not commonly acknowledged, it ought to be abundantly clear.

There are people in the earth who prosper on every hand, experiencing little difficulty along the way. Of old time, before truth had been extensively proclaimed to men, this condition troubled “Asaph the chief” 1 Chron 16:5 among the singers of Israel. “For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked . For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men . . . they have more than heart could wish . . . Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches ” (Psa 73:3-12). In some professed Christian circles, those would be considered evidences of Divine blessing. In fact, for a moment, that is what Asaph tended to think. However, that was only because he was thinking on a lower plain, and in the wrong area of thought. He said of the occasion, “When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors” (Psa 73:16-19). It ought to be abundantly evident that it is wholly inappropriate to present Christ as the means of achieving such a status! Peter will not speak a single syllable that will lead men to think of worldly prosperity, political excellence, or domestic stability – not so much as a word. There will be no possible way to build such objectives upon the words Peter delivered on the day of Pentecost.

Neither, indeed, can we begin with the church and its necessary role in redemption – although it does have a role in redemption, being the appointed “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3;15). In this case, men hold before the people the official religious institution with which, they say, men must be aligned. However, in Scripture WHICH church one chooses is really not the point. Rather what any given church is saying and doing is the point – and each congregation is personally judged by the Lord, as clarified in the second and third chapters of Revelation, in which Jesus measures His churches.

We must begin and end with the Son of God, for He is, in truth, “the Beginning and the End,” the “First and the Last,” and the “Alpha and the Omega.” The secret to acceptance with God and sound theology is where Jesus ranks in both allegiance and doctrine. Within the Kingdom of God, no place has been provided for any other priority or emphasis. If Jesus is not “The First,” dictating the direction, and “the End,” identifying its objective, the whole of religion is meaningless, and even damaging.

All of this is being gloriously clarified in the words of Peter as he, under the direction of the Spirit of God, brings the people to focus upon the Lord Jesus Christ, whom they had taken, crucified, and killed. He will not allow the people to become diverted to some other matter – like the corruption of the religious leaders, the chicanery of Judas, or the heartlessness of both Pilate and Herod. He will shine the light upon the Son of God Himself. In so doing he is establishing the direction of preaching.

BEING BY THE RIGHT HAND EXALTED

“ 2:33a Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted . . . ”

Peter is in the midst of expounding the resurrection of Christ. It is important to see that our Lord’s resurrection is not confined to Him rising from the dead. The total view of the resurrection includes at least four elements. Even though there is a sense in which each one of these is

considered separately, there is also a sense in which they have all been joined together.

- Raised from the dead. Here death was defeated, for it was not possible that Jesus should be held within the “gates of Hades.” Our salvation required this raising .
- Ascended. In the ascension, Jesus bodily left the domain of the seen – the earth. Our salvation could not be implemented while He remained on the earth.
- Received in heaven. Having left the domain of death and the realm of the seen, Jesus must be received in heaven, else salvation cannot be implemented. God must be pleased with what Jesus had accomplished.
- Enthroned. In order for salvation to be realized, Jesus had to be enthroned at the right hand of God. This great salvation can only implemented by a King who is in possession of all power in heaven and earth.

Scripture often speaks of the risen Christ with these realities in mind. For example, we are said to be saved “by His LIFE” (Rom 5:10). This “life” includes Christ being raised from the dead, ascending into heaven, being received in heaven, and being enthroned at the right hand of God. The book of Ephesians also presents this view – the resurrection of Christ and His exaltation tied together. “Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:20). The book of Philippians does the same, viewing Christ in His death and exaltation. “And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9).

As Peter will confirm, the resurrection of Christ is not to be viewed independently from His exaltation. They are to be viewed together.

THEREFORE

“Therefore . . .” Here the word “therefore” introduces that which necessarily followed Christ’s resurrection. There was a reason why the soul of Jesus was not left in Hades, nor His body see corruption. The resurrection of Jesus was not an end of itself, but was the required prelude to His exaltation. Jesus could not be exalted until His death had accomplished its appointed objectives. Among them were the following:

-

Taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29).

- Reconciling Jew and Gentile in one body (Eph 2:16).
- Making peace (Col 1:20).
- Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us (Col 2:14).
- Spoiling principalities and powers (Col 2:15).
- Being made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- Being made a curse for us (Gal 3:13).
- Reconciling us to God (Rom 5:10).
- Tasting death for every man (Heb 2:9).
- Redemption for the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant (Heb 9:15).
- Destroy the devil (Heb 2:14).

When these were satisfactorily accomplished, God raised Jesus from the dead. This was done in order that He might be exalted, for the Savior of men must be an exalted Savior – One who possesses all power in heaven and earth, and is enthroned at the right hand of God. No one could possibly obtain “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9) until this was done.

BEING BY THE RIGHT HAND

“ . . . being by the right hand of God . . .” Other versions read, “to the right hand of God,” NKJV “at the right hand,” NRSV “God used His power,” GWN “by God’s right hand,” NJB “at His right side,” IE “by the mighty hand of God,” WEYMOUTH and “by and to the right hand of God.” AMPLIFIED

Here there are two possible meanings.

- That Jesus is positioned at the right hand of God.
- That Jesus was exalted BY means of the right hand of God – that is, God’s right hand exalted Him. NJB/WEYMOUTH/AMPLIFIED

There is no angel in heaven or in hell that is not under the government of Jesus. There is no cherubim or seraphim that is not subject to Him. Arch angels and chief angels are under His control. All of nature is governed by Him. All circumstances are under His command. All men are regulated by Him, and no person is completely free.

While both are true, it appears that the meaning of this text is that God’s right hand exalted Christ . Thus the Scriptures contain the following expressions: “Thou that savedst by Thy right hand . . . Thy right hand hath holden me up . . . the saving strength of His right hand . . . neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm . . . save with Thy right hand” (Psa 17:7; 18:35; 20:6; 44:3; 60:5).

The expression “being by the right hand of God exalted” means, “being exalted by means of the right hand of God.” Elsewhere we know that the place of exaltation was also at the right hand of God (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Heb 1:13; 12:2). In fact, Peter will make that point later.

EXALTED

“ . . . exalted . . .” Other versions read, “being lifted up,” BBE “to give Jesus the highest power,” GWN “raised to the heights,” NJB “exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven,” NLT “now He sits on the throne of highest honor in heaven,” LIVING “Jesus was lifted up,” IE and “lifted high .” WEYMOUTH

The exaltation of Jesus was to the throne in heaven – and “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). The Spirit witnesses that God has “highly exalted” the Lord Jesus (Phil 2:9). That is, He has exalted Him to “the highest place,” NIV “given Him exceptional honor,” GWN “greatly exalted Him,” NAB “raised Him high,” NJB and “elevated Him to the place of highest honor.” NLT

The Spirit is very precise concerning the exaltation of Jesus. “All things” have been put under Him, or under His control and government (Eph 1:22). The only personality that is not under Him is God Himself. As it is written, “For He [God] hath put all things under His [Jesus] feet. But when He [God] saith all things are put under Him [Jesus], it is manifest that He [God] is excepted, which did put all things under Him [Jesus]” (1 Cor 15:27). The Amplified Bible reads, “For He [the Father] has put all things in subjection under His [Christ’s] feet. But when it says, All things are put in subjection [under Him], it is evident that He [Himself] is excepted Who does the subjecting of all things to Him.”

Again, the exaltation of Christ is something that has already taken place, and is associated with

His resurrection, not His second coming. Solid and unquestionable affirmations of this fact remove any and every basis for doubt.

- “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him ” (1 Pet 3:22).

- “ . . . the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion , and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet , and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:19-22).

There is no angel in heaven or in hell that is not under the government of Jesus. There is no cherubim or seraphim that is not subject to Him. Arch angels and chief angels are under His control. All of nature is governed by Him. All circumstances are under His command. All men are regulated by Him, and no person is completely free. Life and death are totally in the hands of the exalted Christ. He can summon holy angels to your aid, or command that the devil and his hosts leave you alone.

The significance of the exaltation of Christ is seen in the summation of the extensive commentary on Christ that is found in the book of Hebrews. “Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum : We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man” (Heb 8:2). From this, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn.

- The exaltation of Christ has to do with His High Priesthood.
- Jesus is presently functioning in the work for which His exaltation has suited Him.
- He is now seated at the right hand of the throne of the “majestic [God] in heaven.”

AMPLIFIED

- He is currently ministering in the behalf of redeemed men within the place of ultimate effectiveness – “the true tabernacle which is erected not by man but by the Lord.”

AMPLIFIED

According to our text, Jesus is not waiting to be exalted, He IS exalted. There will never be a time when Jesus is more exalted than He is at this present time. When He is revealed in all of His splendor and glory, we will see what He is presently . We will behold the glory that He presently possesses. That is the meaning of Paul’s statement concerning the showing, or unveiling, of Jesus . “That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in His times He shall show, who IS the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” – “the ONLY Sovereign (Ruler)” AMPLIFIED – (1 Tim 6:14-15).

Whatever men may think about “the antichrist” (1 John 2:18), the “man of sin” and “the son of perdition” (2 Thess 2:3), and “a king of fierce countenance” (Dan 8:23), Jesus IS King over him, or them. No matter how fierce the opponent of the people of God, the exalted Christ is Lord over him. However men may choose to view “the great tribulation” (Matt 24:21), and “those things which are coming upon the earth” (Lk 21:26), the enthroned Jesus is over them all. He can shorten such times “for the elect’s sake” (Matt 24:22). He knows “how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet 2:9).

We do not preach a Gospel of doom – one that speaks more of the reign of a despot than of the reign of Christ Jesus the Lord. We do not announce a time when things will be hopeless, moving men to fear. We proclaim the same Jesus Peter heralded on the day of Pentecost – one who has been exalted to the throne and rules over all. There are no despots who do not ultimately yield to His word. There are no foes that cannot be totally subdued by a word from Him – by the breath of His

mouth, or even by His majestic splendor. There are foes, to be sure, but they are all without question subject to Christ!

HAVING RECEIVED OF THE FATHER

“ 33b . . . and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost . . . ”

The exaltation of “this same Jesus” was not an end of itself. There was a Divinely appointed objective that was being served by the enthronement of “the Man Christ Jesus.” God Himself had purposed the salvation of man, who was languishing in hopelessness, and was “without strength” (Rom 5:6). Given insight into this purpose, Paul wrote, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace , which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9). That “purpose and grace” is the subject of earnest inquiry among believers. Faith confirms to the heart that this speaks of surety .

Notice the order of Divine activity: first He “saved” us, then He “called” us. The language here is very precise, and, in a rare display of unanimity, all of the versions present this order: “saved,” then “called.” The following versions present this sequence: King James (1611), New King James (1982), American Standard (1901), New American Standard (1977), New International (1984), Revised Standard (1952), New Revised Standard (1989), Christian Standard Bible (1999), Darby (1884), Douay-Rheims (1899), English Revised (1885), English Standard (2001),

There is domain of activity between heaven and earth that is, by Divine intention, ruled by “the prince of the power of the air.” Everything that is required for life and godliness must come down to us from heaven, through that infested domain, and into the realm of the curse.

Geneva (1599), God’s Word (1995), James Murdock Translation (1852), New American Bible (1991), The Net Bible (2004), New Jerusalem Bible (1985), New Living Translation (2004), The Bishop’s New Testament (1595), Revised Webster (1833), Tyndale New Testament (1534), Noah Webster Bible (1833), Young’s Literal Translation (1862), Living Bible (1971), International English (?), Weymouth’s New Testament (1903), International Standard (1967), Williams New Testament (1937), Montgomery New Testament (2001), Analytical Literal Translation (2005), Bishop’s Bible (1568), Good News Bible (1966), Modern King James (1998), Literal Translation of the Holy Bible (1976), Amplified Bible (1965), J.B. Phillips New Testament (1962).

There are thirty-seven translations that are in perfect accord concerning the order of this text – “saved,” then “called.”

The point I am making is that salvation in Christ is sure. It is grounded in a purpose that antedated the creation of the world – an “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11). That is one reason it is referred as an “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9).

The means by which this salvation is realized must be as sure as the purpose that drives it. In the last analysis this salvation cannot depend upon the ones who are being saved. They are involved, to be sure, and their faith is the appointed means of appropriating the salvation. However, the salvation itself does not rest upon their faith, nor does it depend upon their works. Men are not exalted so they can accomplish this salvation. Jesus was exalted for that purpose! This is a salvation that must be carried out by One to whom every personality but God is subject.

There is domain of activity between heaven and earth that is, by Divine intention, ruled by “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). Everything that is required for life and godliness must come down to us from heaven, through that infested domain, and into the realm of the curse. How will that happen if the “Captain” of salvation is not unquestionably over all?

One of the reasons for the failure of the modern church to present an accurate depiction of Jesus is that it has failed to see the seriousness of the human dilemma. Not only is man grossly deficient in every area, he is dominated by the powers of darkness, and there is no way of escape for him within the confines of “this present evil world.” That is why our former condition is so vividly described. “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. . . Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ” (Eph 2:2-3, 12).

Now, that is a circumstance in which the word of an all powerful Savior who has not only settled our account and defeated our adversary, but is also reigning for the singular purpose of bringing us to glory, is “good news!”

HAVING RECEIVED OF THE FATHER

“ . . . and having received of the Father . . . ” Other versions read, “having received from the Father ,” NKJV “He has received from the Father,” NIV “having received the Father’s word ,” BBE “just as promised , the Father gave Him ,” LIVING and Father has now given . IE

It is a principle in Christ’s dealings with men that what He gives them is what the Father has given Him. When He was with His disciples He said to them, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you ” (John 15:15).

THE ARRANGEMENT

Every redemptive benefit comes from the Father, through the Son, and is received by faith. This arrangement reflects the will of God, the mediatorial ministry of Jesus, and the pivotal role of faith. It requires that whatever is received be in strict accord with the “eternal purpose of God.” It also requires that the Lord Jesus be inclined to the individual that is to receive the benefit. The one receiving the benefit must possess faith and be living by it.

A request for something that is not integral to the purpose of God is a pointless request (Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9). Something that is not in harmony with the New Covenant, which Jesus is mediating, will not be ministered by Him, for He will not step out of His New Covenant role to bring advantages to men (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24). A person in whom Jesus is not dwelling, and with whom He is not fellowshiping (John 14:21,23; 1 Cor 1:9), cannot receive blessings from God. It simply is not possible. The person who is not believing cannot receive what Christ gives to men from God (Rom 11:20; 2 Thess 2:12; Heb 3:19; 4:6; 11:6).

Why Say These Things?

It might appear as though these observations have little or nothing to do with this text. On the contrary, it is imperative that we make these associations. Our text is a record of the laying of the foundation upon which the church was to be built. It involved a kingdom that God Himself, according to His Word, would “set up” among men (Dan 2:44). It involved a Savior who would bless men in strict accord with the promises of God (Acts 3:26). It is also related to the mediation of a better covenant that was established upon better promises (Heb 8:6). The words delivered by Peter must also be words that the Holy Spirit can use, for the word of mere man is never His “sword” (Eph 6:17). Additionally, what he says must perfectly comport with what Jesus said He was going

to do, and what He said His disciples would experience. Peter's interpretation of the events must be precise and in strict comportment with the will and word of the Lord, for God never blesses men by means of a lie, a misrepresentation, or an exaggeration.

As I have emphasized before, the words Peter delivers must not be at variance with any words regarding salvation that will be delivered by others. Nor, indeed, is there such a thing as a valid word pertaining to salvation and its appropriation that contradicts, or is at variance with, the words Peter is now speaking.

THE PROMISE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . the promise of the Holy Ghost . . . ” Other versions read, “the promise of the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “the promised Holy Spirit ,” NIV “word that the Holy Spirit would come ,” BBE “a promise respecting the Holy Spirit,” MRD “the Holy Spirit who was promised ,” NJB “as He had promised , gave Him the Holy Spirit,” NLT “ just as promised, the Father gave Him the authority to send the Holy Spirit,” LIVING and “the promised [blessing which is the] Holy Spirit.” AMPLIFIED

Keep in mind, this is speaking of what Jesus received from the Father following His return to heaven. While He remained with them, He had told His disciples of this promise. “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: . . .” (Luke 24:49).

“I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you ” (John 14:18). “And I will pray [ask NKJV] the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter , that He may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16). “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name . . .” (John 14:26). “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father , even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father . . .” (John 15:26). “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you ” (John 16:7). “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father , which, saith he, ye have heard of Me” (Acts 1:4).

There are several things to be noted from these texts. They reflect a Divine precision that acquaints us with the complexities of salvation itself – not complexity in the receiving of salvation, but in its provision and effectiveness.

- Jesus would “send the promise of the Father” to His disciples (Lk 24:49).
- Speaking of the Spirit coming and abiding with His disciples, Jesus said, “I will come unto you” (John 14:18).
- The Father would give them the Spirit – “another Comforter” (John 14:16).
- The Father would send the Spirit in Jesus’ name (John 14:26).
- Jesus would send the Spirit “from the Father” (John 15:26).
- The Spirit would not come unless Jesus went away. Then, Jesus would “send Him” (John 16:7).
- The coming of the Spirit was “the promise of the Father” – a promise delivered to the disciples by Jesus (Acts 1:4).

Among other things, this accentuates the effects of Adam's transgression in particular, and the human condition in general. When sin and death entered into the world (Rom 5:12), God could no longer have direct, or immediate, dealings with humanity. The Holy Spirit could not be “given” until Christ Jesus was “glorified” (John 7:39). There was a moral and spiritual distance between God and man that forbade a direct confrontation with the Living God. That is why God, after being asked to reveal His glory, said to Moses “Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see

Me, and live” (Ex 33:20). Again it is written, “Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see ” (1 Tim 6:16).

This is also why His “only begotten Son” was required in order for men to become intimately acquainted with God. Therefore it is written, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18).

The Father promised He would give His Holy Spirit, pouring Him forth upon humanity (Isa 44:3; Joel 2:28-29). However, He would do it indirectly – through His Son. He would give that promised Spirit to the Son to give to those whom the Son judged to be proper recipients of the Spirit. This is also involved in “all judgment” being committed to the Son (John 5:22).

As you might expect, men tend to understate the human condition, presenting God as though He was free to have immediate and intimate involvements with humanity. This, however, is not at all the case. No man can come to the Father except through Christ (John 14:6). That not only refers to our initial coming to the Father, but to our post-conversion approach as well. Thus it is written, “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25). Even after we are justified,

God had promised to give His Holy Spirit to men. Jesus had elaborated on that matter, revealing what the Spirit would do. He had also revealed that the Spirit would not be given until He left this world and returned to heaven.

“we shall be saved from wrath through Him” (Rom 5:9). The love of God that believers experience “is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39). It is “through Him” that we have “access by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18). It is even “by Him” that we “do believe in God” (1 Pet 1:21).

Therefore, Peter carefully states the case, giving proper glory to God, and anchoring the thoughts of the people to a sure foundation. God had promised to give His Holy Spirit to men. Jesus had elaborated on that matter, revealing what the Spirit would do. He had also revealed that the Spirit would not be given until He left this world and returned to heaven. Now Peter tells the people Jesus has, indeed, left the world, and has been exalted into heaven. Now is the time for the Holy Spirit to be given, and God has given the Holy Spirit to His Son to give to the people. Jesus will now perform His first Kingly act upon earth.

HE HATH SHED FORTH THIS

“ 33c . . . He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.”

Peter continues to explicate what is occurring before the people. Already he has told them the following.

- He clarified the nature of the speakers. Those who were speaking were not drunk (15).
- He revealed that a prophecy was being fulfilled. They are witnessing the initial fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (2:16-22).
- He defined what had happened. The Holy Spirit has been poured out (2:17).
- He faced them with the Man they had rejected – a Man “approved of God.” Jesus Christ was approved by God among them by means of miracles, wonders, and signs (2:22).
- He expounded the role of God in Christ’s death. Jesus had been delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (2:23a).
- He told them what they had actually done. They had taken, crucified, and killed

Jesus by the hands of wicked men (2:23b).

- He announced the Divine reversal of their judgment. God had raised Jesus from the dead. (2:24)

- He announced the fulfillment of David's prophecy. In raising Jesus from the dead, one of David's key prophecies was fulfilled (2:24-28).

- He announced Christ's superiority over death. It was not possible for the pains of death to hold Jesus (2:24).

- He expounded a prophecy a reigning Messiah. David spoke of the resurrection of Christ when he referred to God raising Christ to sit on his throne (2:30).

- He declared they were eye witnesses. Peter and those with him were witnesses of the resurrected Christ (2:32).

- He affirmed that Jesus had been exalted by God. Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God (2:33a).

- He announced that Jesus had received the Spirit to dispense. Jesus had received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father (2:33b).

Now Peter will reveal what Jesus is doing from the Father's right hand – now that He has received the promised Spirit from the Father.

HE HATH SHED FORTH THIS

“ . . . He hath shed forth this . . . ” Other versions read, “He poured out this,” NKJV “He has poured forth this,” NASB “and has poured out,” NIV “He has sent this thing,” BBE “hath sent this gift,” MRD “and poured it forth,” NAB “the outpouring of that Spirit,” NJB “to pour out upon us,” NLT “He was shedding forth this,” YLT “Jesus poured out this,” IE and “He has made this outpouring.” AMPLIFIED

God had promised HE would pour forth His Spirit (Joel 2:28-29), but He did it through the exalted Jesus whom they took, crucified, and killed. They perceived “Jesus of Nazareth” as unworthy to live, but God the Father saw Him as worthy to impart life. They thought him unfit to minister, but God saw Him as the ultimate One to minister. They saw no advantage in the presence of Jesus, but God gave the ultimate advantage through Him.

Now, for the first time in history, the Holy Spirit was being poured forth indiscriminately – on male and female: “all flesh.” As a result, there was a profuse declaration of “the wonderful works of God,” an inspired interpretation of the events that were occurring, and an exposition of the death, burial, and resurrection of “Jesus of Nazareth.”

With this lavish and unprecedented outpouring of the Holy Spirit, men were speaking with clarity, and all of the people understood what they were saying. None of the people fell to the ground “under the power” of the Holy Spirit. No one lapsed into a state of unconsciousness. There is no record of strange fleshly sensations. While there was a obvious excitement among the people, it was all harnessed for the glory of God, being characterized by sanctified intelligence, with lucidity of thought and clarity of speech.

Rather than the pouring forth of the Spirit overpowering the people, causing them to act irrationally or without the control of their faculties, it sanctified their expressive capabilities. That is precisely why Peter will draw the attention of His listeners to what they are beholding. Something of inestimable profit will be realized on this occasion.

Similar Language

Rather than the pouring forth of the Spirit overpowering the people, causing them to act irrationally or without the control of their faculties, it sanctified their expressive capabilities. That is precisely why Peter will draw the attention of His listeners to what they are beholding. Something of inestimable profit will be realized on this occasion.

Further clarifying the shedding forth of the Holy Spirit, Paul refers to it in his letter to Titus. This letter was written approximately thirty-five years after the day of Pentecost, during which Peter delivered the words of our text. Here is what Paul wrote. “But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior; that being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:4-7). Notice that the Holy Spirit was “shed on us abundantly.” Other versions read, “poured out on us abundantly,” NKJV “poured out upon us richly,” NASB “poured on us generously,” NIV “gave us freely,” BBE “poured a generous amount of,” GWN “poured out on us in full measure,” NET “Poured out upon us with wonderful fullness,” LIVING and “abundantly poured out upon us.” WILLIAMS

The words of our text – “shed forth” – are a translation of the Greek word **evxe,ceen** (ek-kheen), the exact word that is used in Titus 3:6. The Titus text adds the word “abundantly” (from **plousi,wj**), which means “richly, in an abundant way,” FRIBERG “in full measure,” UBS and “in large amount, in abundance, rich, richly.” LOUW-NIDA There can be no question that Paul is writing about the same outpouring that Joel prophesied, and Peter confirmed was happening on the day of Pentecost. It is inconceivable that Paul would use precisely the same language, even adding a superlative, of a lesser kind of outpouring.

However, we are not shut up to our own conclusions on this matter. Paul makes associations with this abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit that confirm it is related to salvation, and not an apostolic epoch alone.

- It is said you have been conferred upon those who were formerly “foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving diverse lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” – the general condition of all unregenerate souls (Tit 3:3).
- It is associated with the appearance, or experience, of “the kindness and love of God” (Tit 3:4).
- It is related to being saved, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to God’s mercy (Tit 3:5a).
- It is connected with being “saved by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit” (Tit 3:5b).
- The Spirit was “shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior,” which perfectly correlates with Peter saying Jesus had “shed forth this” (Tit 3:6).
- The pouring forth of the Spirit is associated with being “justified by grace” (Tit 3:7a).
- It is related men being “made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Tit 3:7b).

There is no possible way that Peter could be referring to a uniquely apostolic experience. Such a view contradicts Joel’s prophecy. It also negates the explanation of Peter, and is in conflict with the teaching of Paul. Those who take this view do so only to justify their stilted and traditional theology. Those who take it upon themselves to attach sectarian meanings to Scripture stand in an extremely perilous position.

WHICH YE NOW SEE AND HEAR

“. . . which ye now see and hear.” Other versions read, “which you both see and hear,” NASB “what you now see and hear,” NIV “which now you see and have knowledge of,” BBE “behold and hear,” DARBY “you yourselves are seeing and hearing,” ESV “just as you see and hear today,” NLT and “with the results you are seeing and hearing today.” LIVING

And, what were the people seeing? They were beholding people under the influence of the Holy Spirit, yet in possession of all of their anointed faculties. They were seeing men and women prophesying, in fulfillment of Joel’s prophesy. They were witnessing people speaking with boldness about a man that this very audience had rejected. They were witnesses to a group of people who were perfectly united, having no variance among them. They may also have witnessed tongues of fire resting upon the heads of all who spoke, without consuming or harming them.

Ponder what the people were hearing. They had heard a proclamation of the “wonderful works of God.” They had heard this proclamation in their own native languages, spoken by Galileans, who had no natural or learned expertise at all in those languages. They had heard an explanation of what they were seeing. A fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel was declared to them, as well as the fulfillment of the prophecy of David. Their ears had heard a detailed exposition of the death of Christ, His activity while His body remained in the tomb, and of His resurrection from the dead. The enthronement of Jesus had been announced in their ears. And now, they are hearing that the exalted Christ is the One who has caused all of this extraordinary phenomenon – He has shed forth the Holy Spirit “on all flesh.”

DAVID IS NOT ASCENDED

“34a For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord”

The truth is not illogical, even though, strictly speaking, it has a logic of its own. There is no contradiction within the fabric of the truth itself – no weakness that can cause the whole of truth itself to collapse. No amount of human reasoning can weaken the structure of the truth, or justify any degree of doubt or unbelief. Therefore, Peter proceeds to confirm the truth of Christ’s exaltation, showing that although appeared as though David was speaking of himself, he was not.

DAVID IS NOT ASCENDED INTO THE HEAVENS

“For David is not ascended into the heavens . . .” Other versions read, “David did not ascend to heaven,” NIV “For David has not gone up into heaven,” BBE “For it was not David who ascended into the heavens,” CSB “David didn’t go up to heaven,” GWN “For David himself never went up to heaven,” NJB “No, David . . . never ascended into the skies,” LIVING and “David never ascended into heaven.” PHILLIPS

Christ’s Ascension

By saying “David is not ascended,” Peter is affirming that Jesus IS ascended into heaven, from which He has “shed forth” the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling the 110 th Psalm. The ascension of Jesus is a critical facet of the Gospel, and was elsewhere foretold by the Psalmist. “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them” (Psa 68:18; Eph 4:8-

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10). Mark writes that Jesus “was received up into heaven” (Mk 16:19). Luke writes that Jesus “was parted from them and carried up into heaven” (Lk 24:51), and that “He was taken up” (Acts 1:9). Paul writes that “He that descended (into the lower parts of the earth 9) is the same also that ascended far above all heavens, that He might fill all things” (Eph 4:9-10). Paul also writes that Jesus was “received up into glory” (1 Tim 3:16). It is also written that Jesus “passed into the heavens” (Heb 4:14), and “entered... into heaven itself” (Heb 9:24).

It is from this exalted position that Jesus dispensed the Holy Spirit, pouring Him forth “on all flesh,” as Joel prophesied He would. Jesus did not shed forth the Holy Spirit while upon the earth. This had to be done from heaven. With all of the marvelous miracles He wrought, He Himself never did fill anyone with the Holy Spirit. John the Baptist was “filled with the Holy Spirit, even from the mother’s womb” (Lk 1:15). Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Spirit” when she confronted Mary, who came to her after receiving the word that she would bear the Son of God (Lk 1:41).

Zechariah, father of John the Baptist, was “filled with the Holy Spirit” when he prophesied after John was born (Lk 1:67). However, in all of Christ’s ministry, only He was said to be “full of the Holy Spirit” (Lk 4:1). He Himself declared that the effusion of the Spirit would come after He was glorified: “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on Me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)” (John 7:37-39).

Now, however, Jesus IS glorified, having ascended “up where He was before” (John 6:62). Fulfilling His own word, He went “unto Him that sent” Him (John 7:33; 16:5). And again, “I go unto My Father” (John 14:12; 16:16,28). Referring to His ascension, Jesus prayed to the Father on the eve of His betrayal, “And now come I to Thee” (John 17:13). Following His resurrection Jesus said to Mary Magdalene, “I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God” (John 20:17).

The essentiality of the ascension of Christ will be confirmed by Peter’s words.

Two Other Ascensions

In addition to Jesus, there have been two men who did ascend “into the heavens.” Prior to the Law, Enoch “was translated that he should not see death” (Heb 11:5), FOR “God took him” (Gen 5:24). During the administration of the Law, “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kgs 2:11). However, neither of these men “descended” into “the heart of the earth” as did Jesus. The souls of these two men did not enter into Hades prior to their ascension, nor their bodies enter the grave. Both of those experiences, were realized by “Jesus of Nazareth” before His ascension.

There are three primary periods of time associated with this world. The time before the Law, the time during the Law, and the time after the Law. In all three periods, life after death was confirmed by the bodily ascension of a man into the heavens. The latter, the ascension of Christ, was the greater, because it involved His soul returning from Hades, and His body coming out of the grave. During all three periods it was also confirmed that this world was not the primary place, and death was not man’s ultimate destiny.

Now, Peter refers to something that is obvious, showing that David was not giving a personal testimony when he spoke of the soul not being left in Hades, and the body not seeing corruption. He has already drawn attention to this fact by reminding the people that David’s sepulcher was still with them – that is, that his body remained in the grave, substantiating that his soul was still abiding in Hades, for the soul only leaves Hades when it is going to be united with its resurrected body.

HE SAITH HIMSELF

“ . . . but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord . . .” Other versions read, “but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord,' NKJV “The Lord declared to my Lord ,” NJB and “ God spoke to my Lord, the Messiah , and said to Him.” LIVING

Notice how Peter continues to rivet the thinking of the people to the Scriptures. He does not demand that the people believe him because he is an apostle – although it was right for the people to do so, for Jesus sent Peter. He does not depend upon oratorical or persuasive skills, but on the “sword of the Spirit.” Jesus had said when the Spirit came, He would “reprove,” or “convince” men. If ever there were men who needed to be reproved, it was those now standing before Peter. They had taken, crucified, and killed the Man God had clearly approved before them. However, the Spirit will not use the wisdom of men to convict “the world.” He will not employ natural aptitude for this great work. He will use “words” – words that are characterized by “spirit” and “life” (John 6:63). He will work through men who are able to handle “accurately the word of truth” NASB (2 Tim 2:15).

Having “the Spirit of prophecy,” David spoke of the coming Messiah. He knew the appointed Savior would possess all authority and power, and thus spoke of Him as being “equal with the Father” (John 5:18; Phil 2:7) – i.e., “Lord.”

“The Lord said to my Lord”

Although the Messiah had not yet been born, David saw Him as his own “Lord.” By faith he subjected himself to Him, anticipating His coming.

Here there is a play on words: “ THE Lord” versus “ MY Lord.” “ The Lord” is God the Father, and “ my Lord” is the exalted Christ. Both are properly called “Lord,” and both are Divine. In another place, the Father addresses the exalted Son as “God.” “But unto the Son He saith, Thy throne, O God , is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Thy kingdom” (Heb 1:8). There can be no higher assessment of the

Savior of the world – “Lord” and “God.” You may recall that, upon beholding the risen Jesus, Thomas exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28). Rather than rebuking Thomas, Jesus affirmed that he, upon seeing, had believed the truth. While yet among us, Jesus Himself declared, “That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father . He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him” (John 5:23).

David’s confession fulfills the word spoken by Paul: “Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). In this word David acknowledges that He is an “Israelite indeed” (John 1:47), and “a Jew, which is one inwardly” (Rom 2:29). He saw the promise and embraced it!

The quotation is taken from the 110 th Psalm, one of the great Messianic prophecies. “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psa 110:1). In this Psalm, the coming Christ is made known.

- He is the “rod” of God’s “strength,” proceeding forth to rule over all in the behalf of the Father (110:2a).
- His Kingdom is one in which He rules “in the midst” of His enemies, bringing sons to glory from among those long enslaved to the devil (110:2b).
- The people would “be willing” in the day, or time, of His power (110:3).
- The Father declared Him to be a “priest forever after the order of Melchizedec” – i.e., a priest that is also a King (110:4; Gen 14:18).

- He would ultimately decimate all of His enemies, and they would publicly and obviously become His footstool (110:5-7).

During His earthly ministry the Lord Jesus referred to the prophecy to which Peter now refers. Once, when “the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, What think ye of Christ? whose son is he?” Knowing the text, of Scripture, but only in a surface sense, “They say unto him, The son of David.” With a wisdom that stopped their mouths Jesus replied, “How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son?” (Mat 22:41-45). The question was so powerful that it is written, “And no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions” (Matt 22:46). Obviously, a lot of truth is packed into that passage.

Of course, Jesus was “the Son of David” according to the flesh, and is so called (Matt 1:1). This referred to His kingly nature and ministry, fulfilling the promise God made to David. However, Jesus is preeminently “the Son of God,” and therefore David called Him “Lord.”

SIT ON MY RIGHT HAND

“ 34b Sit Thou on My right hand...”

Peter continues his exposition of the exaltation of Jesus – something that was essential to the saving of men. Men can only be delivered from this present evil world, reconciled to God, and gain access to the Father by a Savior who is enthroned in glory.

SIT THOU

“Sit Thou . . .” Other versions read, “Sit at ,” NKJV “Be seated ,” BBE “Take,” GWN and “take Your seat .” NJB

In this text, “sitting” is not a posture of rest, but of reign. It is not the language of inactivity, but of receiving the reins of Divine government. Having completed His work on earth, Jesus now commences His work in heaven. His work on earth would be the foundation, or basis, for His work in heaven, and His work in heaven would be the outcome of His work on earth. Thus we read, “Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down . . .” (Heb 1:3). Notice the remarkably glorious things that are associated with Christ sitting down. All of them pertain to salvation.

Being “the brightness” of God’s glory – that is, the fullest and most complete revelation of that glory.

- Being the “express image” of God’s Person – that is, the most exact depiction of who God is, and of His will, or “eternal purpose.”
- Total control of everything that has been created – “upholding [sustaining] all things by the word of His power.”
- By Himself, without any aid from any created personality, purging our sins.

Before Jesus could be seated, He had to “finish” the work the Father gave Him to do (John 4:34; 17:4). Once the work of taking away the sins of the world was completed, the accuser of the brethren could be cast down, principalities and powers spoiled, and the Law terminated as a means to righteousness (Rev 12:10; Col 2:15; Rom 10:4). Now men could be reconciled, and peace could be made between men and God (Col 1:20-21). Once seated, He must be invested with “all power in heaven and earth,” for the work of salvation was an aggressive one.

Thus, being fully qualified by both His nature and His accomplishments, Jesus “sits” upon the throne, taking charge of the Kingdom. Speaking of being seated, Jesus said to the church in Laodicea, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His throne ” (Rev 3:21).

Thus, being fully qualified by both His nature and His accomplishments, Jesus “sits” upon the throne, taking charge of the Kingdom.

When Pharaoh ruled Egypt, it is said that he “ sat on his throne” (Ex 12:29). When Solomon assumed the rule, it is written that he “ sat upon the throne of his father David” (1 Kgs 2:12). Previously Peter had made a point of this, declaring, “Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:30-31). Therefore, Peter announces that the reign of the Messiah has begun.

ON MY RIGHT HAND

“ . . . on My right hand . . .” Other versions read, “My highest position of power,” GWN “here in honor beside Me,” LIVING “at My right side ,” IE and “at My right hand and share My throne .”
AMPLIFIED

The “right hand” of God is the place of both favor and rule. Much is made of Jesus being on the right hand of God.

- He was received in heaven and “sat on the right hand of God” (Mk 16:19).
- When Stephen was dying, he “saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55).
- It is from “ the right hand of God” that Jesus is making intercession “for us” (Rom 8:34).
- Jesus, being at God’s “own right hand ,” is described as “ Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph 1:21).
- The “things which are above,” which are to be fervently sought, are said to be “where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1).
- The summation of the message of the book of Hebrews is that “We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Heb 8:1).
- The “Author and Finisher of our faith” is described as being “set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).
- The preeminence of this position is described by Peter: “Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22).

The “right hand of God” is a working and ruling hand, representative of His great power. It is associated with the giving of the Law, saving strength, purchase, and victory (Deut 33:2; Psa 20:6; Psa 78:54; 98:1). Jesus is sitting there because this is the kind of power that is required to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). Our salvation demands a powerful and active Savior.

UNTIL I MAKE THY ENEMIES THY FOOTSTOOL

“ 35 Until I make Thy foes Thy footstool.”

Salvation is being accomplished in the midst of God's enemies. As it is written of the Christ, "rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies" (Psa 110:2). He is bringing "many sons to glory" in the capacity of "the Governor among the nations" (Psa 22:28). The 22 nd Psalm is also a Messianic Psalm.

While men remain in "this present evil world," they are being readied for glory. Here, while they are "absent from the Lord," they are being "changed from glory unto glory" (2 Cor 3:18). En route to the promised land, they must "resist the devil" (1 Pet 5:8-9), and wrestle "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph 6:12). They must take up their cross (Mk 10:21), crucify the flesh (Gal 5:24), deny themselves (Matt 16:24), mortify their members that are upon the earth (Col 3:5), and work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). They must run the race that has been set before them (Heb 12:1-2), deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts," and learn to live "soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Tit 2:11-12). They must learn to "fight the good fight of faith," and "lay hold on eternal life" (1 Tim 6:12). They are required to learn how to "use" the world, while not abusing it (1 Cor 7:31). They must master the art of looking (Tit 2:13; Heb 12:2; 12:15; 2 Pet 3:12), seeking (Rom 2:7; Col 3:1; Heb 13:14; 1 Pet 3:11), and waiting (Rom 8:23; Gal 5:5; 1 Thess 1:10; 2 Thess 3:5).

All of this presumes we are facing hostility, opposition, and an aggressive foe. That is the nature of salvation – it is being wrought in an arena of conflict. For this reason, we need a King that is reigning, who has un questionable power and authority. It must be a King to whom the foe consistently yields, and whose will cannot be effectively contested. If we do not have such a King and Leader, we will not be able to be saved!

UNTIL

"Until . . ." Other versions read, "Til," NKJV

The word "until" speaks of a limitation in time – a span that lies between the commencement of an activity and its conclusion. In this case, it limits the duration of Christ being seated at the right hand of God in His mediatorial and intercessory capacities.

A few examples of the use of the word "until" will confirm the nature of its use in Scripture.

- "And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, UNTIL the waters were dried up from off the earth" (Gen 8:7).
- "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him UNTIL the breaking of the day" (Gen 32:24).
- "And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, UNTIL they were finished" (Deut 31:24).
- "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, UNTIL these calamities be overpast" (Psa 57:1).
- "He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: UNTIL the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him" (Psa 105:17-19).
- "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, UNTIL the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom 11:25).
- "Which is the earnest of our inheritance UNTIL the redemption of the purchased

possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:14).

- “That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, UNTIL the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim 6:14).

Jesus being seated at the right hand of God denoted the commencement of His reign and present ministry. His reign is in order to the bringing of many sons to glory. His ministry relates to His mediation of the New Covenant and His intercession for the saints.

Rather than Christ’s “reign” focusing on the subjugation of His enemies, its intent is to take out of the world a people for His name, wash, sanctify, and justify them, and bring them to glory, perfecting them on the way. That is the purpose that is being fulfilled in Him. In this work, rather than pummeling His enemies to the ground, He is reigning “in the midst of them,” and there is not a thing they can do about it.

There is an appointed duration of Christ’s present ministry. His mediation of the New Covenant is not intended to be an eternal one, but is adapted to the circumstance of the saints being in a fallen and hostile world. Neither, indeed, is His present intercessory work intended to last forever. It is also required because the sons of God are currently in a “coming” posture (Heb 7:25), living by faith, resisting their foes, and seeking to lay hold on eternal life (James 4:7; 1 Tim 6:12). However, as long as this world remains, believers are “in the body,” and the devil is moving about, Jesus must remain at the right hand of God. Salvation itself requires that He do so.

I MAKE THY FOES THY FOOTSTOOL

“ . . . I make Thy foes Thy footstool.” Other versions read, “ I make Your enemies Your footstool,” NKJV “I make Thine enemies a footstool for Your feet,” NASB “ I put all those who are against you under your feet,” BBE “ I have put thine enemies to be the footstool of thy feet,” DARBY “ I put your enemies under your control,” MRD “ I humble your enemies, making them a footstool under your feet,” NLT and “I bring Your enemies into complete subjection.” LIVING

Notice that Jesus Himself does not subdue His enemies. The Father does so. This is not owing to any weakness on the part of Jesus, for He presently possesses “all power in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18), and is fully equal to any work He has been given to do. That work, however, does not have to do with the subjugation of hostile forces. In His death He has already destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14) and plundered principalities and power, making a public display of them (Col 2:15). All of that, however, was in order to the salvation of men. John’s apocalyptic Gospel associates the overthrow of Satan with the coming of salvation. “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ : for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:7-10).

Upon the expulsion of Satan and his angels from heaven, salvation, strength, the kingdom of God, and the power of Christ came within the access of men. This is because sin had been removed, and a reconciliation had been accomplished. Satan cannot remain in his accusatory capacity under such circumstances.

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As long as sin was not removed, there was a basis for the accusations of the devil. Once sin was removed, however, that basis was destroyed, and therefore the accuser was thrown out of heaven. Now an Intercessor is speaking for the saints, for their record has been cleared of guilt.

A Future Revelation

At the present time, Jesus has been “highly exalted,” and “angels and authorities and powers” have been “made subject to Him” (Phil 2:9; 1 Pet 3:22). The saints are presently “the sons of God” (1 John 3:1-2), and have been “justified from all things” (Acts 13:39). Satan has really been “destroyed” (Heb 2:14), “principalities and powers” spoiled (Col 2:15), and captivity “led captive” (Eph 4:8). However, for men, these things are only apprehended by faith. They have not yet been made known openly.

Notwithstanding, there is a time appointed when these realities will be fully revealed, and there will be no question about their reality.

- Jesus will be revealed. “. . . our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in His times He shall show , who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:14-15). “Behold, He cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see Him , and they also which pierced Him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him. Even so, Amen” (Rev 1:7).

- The children of God will be revealed. “ When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory” (Col 3:4). “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God ” (Rom 8:19). “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him ; for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

- The defeated status of Jesus’ foes will be revealed. “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Psa 110:1). “ Until I make thy foes thy footstool” (Acts 2:35). “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?” (Heb 1:13).

Being made Christ’s footstool speaks of a public display. Jesus is presently seated at the right hand of God, waiting expectantly for this to take place. As it is written, “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till His enemies be made His footstool” (Heb 10:12-13). This involves the fulfilment of Daniel’s prophecy of His kingdom: “but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan 2:44).

That Christ’s present sitting posture is one of reigning is confirmed by Paul’s teaching. “Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet . The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death” (1 Cor 15:24-26).

Presently Christ’s reign is one in which His enemies are being continually frustrated. Daily there are people being delivered from the clutches of Satan and the guilt and power of sin. For the informed ones, this confirms that a devastating blow has already been struck to the powers of darkness, together with their “prince” (Eph 2:2).

When His Enemies Become His Footstool

Jesus’ “enemies” will be made His “footstool” when they are publicly humiliated like the “five kings of the Amorites” in the days of Joshua. It is written of these five kings, “Therefore the five kings of the Amorites, the king of Jerusalem, the king of Hebron, the king of Jarmuth, the king of Lachish, the king of Eglon, gathered themselves together, and went up, they and all their hosts, and

encamped before Gibeon, and made war against it” (Josh 10:5). The men of Gibeon quickly sent to Joshua saying, “Slack not thy hand from thy servants; come up to us quickly, and save us, and help us: for all the kings of the Amorites that dwell in the mountains are gathered together against us” (Josh 10:6). As Joshua ascended from Gilgal, together with “all the people of war” and “all the might men of valor,” the Lord spoke to him: “Fear them not: for I have delivered them into thine hand; there shall not a man of them stand before thee” (Josh 10:8). The kings were defeated, and their armies killed “with a great slaughter.” As the foe ran from Joshua, the Lord “cast down great stones from heaven,” so that “they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword” (Josh 10:11). It was on this occasion that the sun stood still in the heavens for a whole day as the Lord mightily delivered the enemies of the Lord into the hands of Joshua and his army (Josh 10:12-13). Of that occasion it is written, “And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel” (Josh 10:14).

During this whole affair, the five kings of the Amorites fled, hiding themselves “in a cave in Makkedah.” When that was reported to Joshua, he had stones rolled before the mouth of the cave, confining the kings to that place. After the battle was over, Joshua returned to that cave and said, “Open the mouth of the cave, and bring out those five kings unto me out of the cave” (Josh 10:22). When the kings were brought out, Joshua called to the captains of the men of war and said, “Come near, put your feet upon the necks of these kings. And they came near, and put their feet upon the necks of them” (Josh 10:24). When they had done so Joshua continued, “Fear not, nor be dismayed, be strong and of good courage: for thus shall the LORD do to all your enemies against whom ye fight” (Josh 10:25). Then the kings were slain and hanged “on five trees” in public disgrace. **THE ENEMIES OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD HAD BECOME THEIR FOOTSTOOL!**

There is an appointed day when the enemies of Christ will all be brought forth. They will stand in shame before an assembled universe. Jesus will call for the saints, which are His body, to come forth and put their feet upon the necks of these enemies. At the time the saying will be fulfilled, “And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly” (Rom 16:20). That will be the ultimate fulfillment of the Lord making Christ’s enemies His footstool, and will be the prelude for them all being cast into the lake of fire – the devil, his chief workers, and all who followed them (Rev 19:20; 10:10,14-15).

DO NOT MISS THE MEANING

In quoting this prophecy of David, Peter is at variance with great bodies of modern theology. Some have Jesus leaving the right hand to secretly rapture the church, returning to heaven for a period of time while all havoc breaks out upon the earth. Then they have Him returning to engage in great battle which will consummate in the overthrow of “the Antichrist” and his followers. Then they have Him reigning in Jerusalem for a thousand years. All of this, if true, must occur **WITHOUT** Jesus being at the right hand of God.

That will be the ultimate fulfillment of the Lord making Christ’s enemies His footstool, and will be the prelude for them all being cast into the lake of fire – the devil, his chief workers, and all who followed them.

However, what must we do with these word from the Father Himself? “Sit thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool” (Psa 110:1). This certainly is a valid word. Jesus quoted it (Matt 22:44; Mk 12:36; Lk 20:42-43). Peter quoted it in our text (Acts 2:34-35). Paul affirms that this word was never said to any angel: “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?” (Heb 1:13). He also affirms that Jesus is presently awaiting the fulfillment of this word: “But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till His enemies be

made His footstool” (Heb 10:12-13). Note, He is not awaiting the time when He Himself will make His enemies His footstool, but when they will be “MADE His footstool.”

The Father has told Him to remain seated at His right hand UNTIL the time comes when His enemies are made His footstool – brought forward and shown to be utterly defeated, humiliated, and frustrated in all of their wicked intentions.

The Truth Seen In The High Priesthood

The truth of Jesus being seated at the right hand of God “until” a specified time was foreshadowed in the High Priesthood under the Law. This had particular regard to the day of atonement, when the High Priest went into the Most Holy place to appear before God. This had particular regard to atonement: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Speak unto Aaron thy brother, that he come not at all times into the holy place within the veil before the mercy seat, which is upon the ark; that he die not: for I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat. Thus shall Aaron come into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering . . . And this shall be an everlasting statute unto you, to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year. And he did as the LORD commanded Moses” (Lev 16:2-20, 34).

The atonement was made while the High Priest was in the Most Holy place, and ended when He came out of it.

“And there shall be no man in the tabernacle of the congregation when he goeth in to make an atonement in the holy place, until he come out, and have made an atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel” (Lev 16:17).

Confirming that this did depict the present ministry of Jesus, the book of Hebrews refers to this occasion. “But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people” (Heb 9:7). “Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others” (Heb 9:25). “But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year” (Heb 10:3).

When Jesus descends “from heaven” (1 Thess 4:16), and is “revealed from heaven” (2 Thess 1:7), He shall leave His present position. That is a position of mediation and intercession. When He leaves, just as surely as the work of the High Priest had been completed within the Most Holy Place, so the mediatorial reign of Jesus shall be concluded. “The day of salvation” will come to a close. There will be no more distribution of the oil of the Spirit (Matt 25:8). No more preachers will be “sent” (Rom 10:15). No more repentance will be given (Acts 5:31).

There will be no more battles to fight – particularly by Jesus. He has already won all of His battles, defeating the foe in His death, when He was “crucified through weakness” (2 Cor 13:4; Heb 2:14; Col 2:15). It only remains for Jesus to be shown, or manifested, in all of His glory. That appearance itself will destroy His enemies. As it is written of Satan’s primary worker, “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess 2:8-9). Until this time, Jesus will remain at the right hand of God, bringing many sons to glory.

LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW

“ 36a Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly . . . ”

We are beholding an example of being “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). Not only does Peter know what facts to accentuate, he also

knows how to use them to build sound conclusions and promote holy reasoning.

THEREFORE

“Therefore . . .” Other versions read, “For this reason,” BBE “So let,” NLT “So , therefore,” TNT and “Now , therefore.” PHILLIPS

This is the day of frothy choruses with simplistic lyrics and endless repetition. This is the kind of fare the emotion loves. However, those with productive minds find such things highly offensive, and unbecoming of anything associated with the God of heaven.

The word “therefore” takes two related thoughts, ties them together, and reasons upon the basis of the conclusion to which they lead. This requires the sanctified use of the mind, as compared with moving men to a conclusion or action based upon the response of emotion. Those who seek to force a favorable response by merely emotional entreaty are actually appealing to the weakest part of the human constitution. The emotion is part of the most erratic and unpredictable makeup. Matters of eternal consequence cannot be decided within such boundaries. Therefore, Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, will summon his listeners into the domain of concentrated thought, contemplation, and cognition.

In the modern church, this approach is not at all common. This is the day of frothy choruses with simplistic lyrics and endless repetition. This is the kind of fare the emotion loves. However, those with productive minds find such things highly offensive, and unbecoming of anything associated with the God of heaven. When sophists tell us how wonderful such approaches are, and how much they have personally gained from them, we should ignore what they say. Let them take the words of Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, and the Apostles into their mouths, and tell us how simple and repetitious they are!

LET ALL THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL KNOW

“ . . . let all the house of Israel know . . . ” Other versions read, “let all Israel be assured,” NIV “let the entire house of Israel know,” NRSV “Let the whole house of Israel . . . know,” DARBY “All the people of Israel should know ,” GWN “the whole House of Israel can be,” NJB “let everyone in Israel know,” NLT “I . . . state to everyone in Israel,” LIVING “let the entire house of Israel understand ,” ISV “let all the descendants of Israel understand,” WILLIAMS “let the whole house of Israel recognize ,” AMPLIFIED and “the whole nation of Israel must know .” PHILLIPS

All the House of Israel

Peter’s word is not for the religious leaders, but for “ all the house of Israel.” It is not for the men or the women, but for “ all the house of Israel.” This is not a word for the young people, or old people, or married, or singles, but for “ all the house of Israel.” If the people thought of themselves primarily as male, or female, or young, or old, now they are to think of themselves as members of “ all the house of Israel” – the covenanted people of God.

This is something that a covenant people should know. It is something of which those who are associated with the God of heaven should be aware.

In our time, valid doctrine pertains to everyone who is in Christ Jesus. There is not a separate doctrine for the doctors of the Law, and another for the common people. We have no idea about the social makeup of the audience Peter is addressing – age, gender, or social status. Truth does not come packaged for special groups. What is more, when men seek to tailor the truth for special groups it is at the expense of moral and spiritual power. This is because truth is presented with two fundamental groups in mind: the alienated and the reconciled, the saved and the lost, those who are at peace with God and those who are not. When you attempt and make the truth more versatile than

that, you are walking in a forbidden area. In the case of Peter, he is speaking to those who are alienated from the life of God.

ASSUREDLY

“ . . . assuredly . . . ” Other versions read, “or certain ,” NASB “be assured,” NIV “with certainty ,” NRSV “most certainly ,” DOUAY “ beyond a doubt ,” GWN “for a surety ,” TNT “ clearly state,” LIVING “ beyond all doubt and acknowledge assuredly,” AMPLIFIED and “beyond the shadow of a doubt .” PHILLIPS

To know something “assuredly” is to have no doubts about it. This word is translated from a word that means, “safely (so as to prevent escape), assuredly, THAYER “knowing something beyond doubt, for sure, certainly,” FRIBERG and “securely, steadfastly, unshaken in purpose, assuredly, knowing.” LEH

What Is Involved

There are certain things that characterize redemptive truth – that is, “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:5,14; Eph 1:13; Col 1:5).

Truth – Gospel truth – is like a two-sided coin. By its very nature, it is not neutral, and thus it cannot be ignored with impunity, or embraced without being blessed. Because it is foundational, it will support the person who embraces it. Because it is ultimate reality, it is characterized by unwavering certainty, or sureness. For that reason faith can confidently rest upon it, bringing assurance and stability to the soul. For those who “know the truth,” there is freedom from the enslavement of sin (John 8:32). To such it may be said, “ye heard the word of truth, the Gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13). These people become “partakers of His promise in Christ by the Gospel” (Eph 3:6).

However, that is not all there is to “the truth of the Gospel.” There are also those who do not believe the Gospel, imagining that they are free to reject it. Such individuals see no urgency in the Gospel – no need to embrace it quickly and heartily. For them, there is another side to the Gospel, and it is not so pleasant. First, the Gospel is appropriately called “the everlasting gospel” (Rev 14:6). It involves a “mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God” (Eph 3:9), and is connected to “the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). It is also associated with “eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began” (Tit 1:1-3).

All of this means that the Gospel (which Peter is preaching) will ultimately confront every person who has rejected it. This is involved in Jesus’ poignant words, “He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day . For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:48-49).

When, therefore, Peter says “let all the house of Israel know assuredly,” he is referring to more than the certainty of the words that he speaks. These are words that must be received now, or, in the day of judgment, they will testify against those who heard and rejected them. There is no chance that these words are not true, or that men can treat them indifferently.

How is it possible for “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9) to speak, and there be no requirement for those whom He has created to hear? What would lead any soul to imagine that something graciously purposed before the world began could be ignored without eternal consequences? What person of sound mind can reason that a Divinely prepared way of escape from condemnation can be thrust aside, and no more be said about the matter?

There is a tone of urgency in the words of Peter than cannot be contained in human language. Only a sensitive heart can grasp it – and it must be grasped. This is particularly true when such words are being delivered to the very people who took, crucified, and killed “the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15).

Commensurate with the induction of psychological and fundamentally self-centered preaching, this sense of urgency has all but disappeared from, what is called, “preaching.” There is too much allowance for delay, indecision, and procrastination. The people are not made to feel the very real necessity of embracing the message – a necessity that is reflected in the Gospel itself. The word concerning Jesus Christ that follows cannot be ignored without heaven taking due note of it. There is an evident tone of urgency in it.

GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS “LORD”

“ 36b . . . that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord . . . ”

Peter will now affirm who Jesus is – particularly what God has exalted Him to BE. He does not speak of who the Israelites are – although much could be said about that. He does not declare who the Apostles are, although considerable could be said about that. He does not comment on the brethren assembled with them, and of the outpouring all of them have experienced. There is no saving power in any of those things, and the church is not built on them.

The power of Peter’s preaching is seen in its focus. He has referred to the outpouring they have received, and the fact that they are witnesses of the resurrected Christ, but that is not his main point. The meat of what was said at the first, and what he himself has been saying, pertains to Deity.

- The “wonderful works of God ” (2:11).
- The promise of God , that He would pour forth His Spirit ” (2:17).
- God’s servants and handmaidens prophesying (2:18).
- God showing wonders in heaven and signs upon earth (2:19).
- Calling on the name of the Lord (2:21).
- Jesus of Nazareth (2:22a).
- God’s approval of Jesus (2:22b).
- God doing miracles, wonders, and signs through Jesus (2:22c).
- The “determinate counsel” of God (2:23a).
- The “foreknowledge” of God (2:23b).
- God raising Jesus from the dead (2:24a).
- God loosing the “pains of death” from Jesus (2:24b).
- What the LORD said to David’s Lord , who is Jesus (2:25a).
- Christ’s words while He was awaiting His resurrection (2:25b-28).
- The “oath” that God swore to David (2:30a).
- God’s promise to “raise up Christ to sit” on David’s throne (2:30b).
- David seeing “the resurrection of Christ ” ahead of time (2:31).
- God “raised up Jesus ,” whereof they were witnesses (2:32).
- Jesus being by “the right hand of God exalted” (2:33a).

- Jesus receiving “the promise of the Spirit ” from God (2:33b).
- Jesus was seated at the Father’s right hand until His enemies are made His “footstool” (2:34-35).

For some people, such an approach could be called theological, which, to them, means it lacks practicality. Oh, they would not charge Peter himself with declaring impractical theology – but that is really what they think.

There are twenty-one major references to the works of Deity, and thirty-eight secondary ones. That is focus! The Person being expounded is Jesus Christ. The context of that exposition is the purpose and work of God the Father.

For some people, such an approach could be called theological, which, to them, means it lacks practicality. Oh, they would not charge Peter himself with declaring impractical theology – but that is really what they think.

GOD HATH MADE

“ . . . that God hath made . . . ” Other versions read, “God made Jesus,” GWN “did God make,” YLT “God has declared,” PHILLIPS and “God made Him,” LITERAL TRANSLATION All other versions read “God has/hath made.”

Behold the centrality of God Himself in Peter’s preaching. The works they declared were God’s works (2:11). The promise was God’s promise (2:17). The servants and handmaidens belonged to God (2:19). God approved of Jesus (2:22a). God worked by Jesus (2:22b). It was God’s determinate counsel (2:23a). The foreknowledge was God’s (2:23b). God raised Jesus (2:24a). God loosed the pains of death (2:24b). God spoke to David’s Lord (2:25). God swore with an oath to David (2:30a). God promised to raise up Christ to sit on David’s throne (2:30b). God exalted Christ with His right hand (2:33a). God promised the Holy Spirit (2:33b). God gave the Holy Spirit to the exalted Jesus (2:33c). Jesus is seated at the right hand of God (2:34).

Remembering that Peter is filled with the Spirit, and that he has been “endued with power from on high,” consider how rare such preaching is in our time. There is a marked emphasis on men, their needs, and what they can be. But you will find no such preaching in the Word of God – particularly in our text, where the focus and tone of true preaching is being established. Peter has no gimmicks, no catch-phrases, no buzz-words to catch the attention of the people. He is not thinking of the response of the people, but of the God who made the people.

Peter affirms that God “hath made” Jesus to be something. The word “made” is a most interesting one. It comes from the Greek word **εποίησεν** (e-poi-aa-sen). Lexically the word means, “to make; i.e., to fashion, construct, form, fashion . . . to create, produce,” THAYER “of God’s creative activity... accomplish,” FRIBERG “make, do, cause, effect, bring about, accomplish, perform, provide,” UBS “to make, produce, create,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to cause, to bring about,” LEH and “do, cause, accomplish.” GINGRICH

When Jesus ministered among men, He frequently spoke of His association with the Father. Here is a very small sampling of the manner of His speaking.

- “All things are delivered unto Me of My Father” (Mat 11:27).
- “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me” (Luke 22:29).
- “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

- “For the Father loveth the Son, and showeth Him all things that himself doeth” (John 5:20).

- “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22).

“For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself” (John 5:26).

- “I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me” (John 5:30).

- “. . . for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36).

- “Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed” (John 6:27).

There is a sense in which Jesus is what the Father made Him. He prepared a body for Him (Heb 10:5), sent Him (1 John 4:14), told Him what to say (John 17:8), and gave Him a work to finish (John 5:36). It was in this way that God’s “own arm” brought salvation to Himself. As it is written, “And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him ; and His righteousness, it sustained Him” (Isa 59:16).

God provided Himself with a Savior that met all of His requirements, allowing Him to be both the “just and the Justifier” of the believer (Rom 3:26). He did not provide a Savior that reflected the desires of humanity, but One that met His own requirements. That is why it is so wrong to present Jesus as the answer to every self-conceived human need. Sin has rendered men obtuse, so that they do not know what they “need.” Fallen men think in terms of this world, without regard to their association with the living God. Their perception of need is not accurate, as they think within the confines of time and the duration of life in the body. Christ cannot be placed within such a restricted context, and those who attempt to put Him there have seriously erred. They have not seen Christ or life correctly.

God has made Jesus what He Himself needed Him to be. That need was based upon His “eternal purpose,” which took into account the real condition of humanity, and what was required for them to obtain a good standing in His sight. The proper perception of mankind is this: “All have sinned [past tense] and come short [present tense] of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23). What God has “made” Jesus, is within that framework.

Let me speak candidly about this. Men present Jesus as the One appointed to heal marriages, bring good health, stabilize finances, and produce security in this world. No such representation of Jesus is found in Scripture. The abundant life that Jesus came to bring is not earthly life brought to its maximum level. Those who suggest such a thing could not possibly be more wrong.

Living under an inferior covenant with inferior promises, Asaph knew that the ungodly experience more of that kind of life than the godly! He spoke of the wicked enjoying “prosperity,” having “firm” strength, “not” being in “trouble,” not being “plagued like other men,” having “more than heart could wish,” prospering “in the world,” and experiencing “increase in riches” (Psa 73:1-12). Yet, with all of that, they are referred to as “the wicked” (73:3), “corrupt” (73:8a), speaking “wickedly” (73:8b), speaking “loftily” (73:8c), setting “their mouth against the heavens” (73:9), and are called “the ungodly” (73:12).

After he “went into sanctuary,” and considered these prospering people in the presence of the God of heaven. He saw them quite differently. Then he “understood their end ,” which is more important than their present circumstances! God had placed these people “in slippery places,” and

had targeted them to be cast “down into destruction.” They would be “brought into desolation,” and “utterly consumed with terrors.” God is described as despising “their image” (73:17-20).

What shall we say of those who present a Christ who brings such things to men? How shall we regard preachers and teachers who present Jesus as the appointed means of optimizing life in “this present evil world?” We shall regard them as liars of the worst order – as imposters who bring unspeakable handicap to the sons of men. God has not “made” Jesus this kind of Minister! There is no need to expend ourselves to support such a statement. The Gospel does not contain so much as a syllable that presents the Son of God in this manner. Even a fool should know that if we are “not of this world,” and the kingdom of Christ is “not of this world,” the benefits brought by Jesus cannot be “of this world.”

Speaking of the Savior in the same manner as Peter, Paul said “God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Rom 3:25). The words “set forth” parallel Peter’s words “God hath made that same Jesus.”

In the Gospel, God presents Jesus as He has made Him. The acceptance or rejection of Jesus pertains directly to the way in which God has presented Him. Peter will now provide a summary statement regarding this matter.

THE SAME JESUS YOU CRUCIFIED

“ . . . that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified. . . ” Other versions read, “this Jesus, whom you crucified,,” NKJV “this Jesus, whom you put to death on the cross ,” BBE “this Jesus, I say, whom ye have crucified,,” GENEVA and “the Man whom you nailed to a cross .” IE

Speaking through the Spirit, Peter will not let the people forget what they did to Jesus. What God has “made” Jesus is in spite of what they have done, not because of it. I do not doubt that someone in the flesh might have objected that they really did not crucify Christ. But their objections would not have been heard. They were just as guilty as if the hammer had been in their own hands. In a secondary sense, it was THEIR will that was carried out, not the will of the Romans. That is why Jesus said to Pilate, “Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11).

Ponder some of the things the Jews had said of Jesus. This was their assessment of Him – the One who God had now made “both Lord and Christ.”

- “And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad ; why hear ye him?” (John 10:20).
- “Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil ?” (John 8:48).
- “And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth ” (Matt 9:3).
- “Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy ” (Mat 26:65).
- “And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned ?” (John 7:15).

Peter, however, mentions none of these things. Instead, he goes straight to the deed to which their faulty conclusions led them: “Jesus, whom ye have crucified!”

Much could be said about the principle that is made known in this text. Think of the stoning of

Stephen, and the opposition that Paul experienced. All who went along with such things were guilty of them, whether they personally entered into the opposition or not. Think of churches that have terminated faithful preachers of the Word, or refused to act upon their words. The day of judgment will clarify the remarkable extent to which men were personally involved in their rejection of the truth of God. This is because they had no love for it.

GOD HATH MADE HIM LORD

“ . . . God hath made . . . both Lord . . . ” Other versions read, “God has made . . . Lord,” NKJV and “God has made Him . . . Lord.” NASB

What does it mean to be “made Lord?” Someone might say, “Was He not Lord already? Didn’t John the Baptist say he was sent to ‘prepare ye the way of the Lord ’ (Matt3:3)? Did not men call Him “Lord” (Matt 8:2,6,21; 9:28; 15:22; 17:15, etc)?” Indeed, this is so. However, as Jesus walked among men, He was not doing so as their “Savior.” That role was fulfilled after He died and rose again. As Peter said some time later, “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior , for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). Paul said much the same thing in Antioch of Pisidia when he spoke of the risen Christ: “Of this man's [David] seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus ” (Acts 13:23).

Peter is here expounding what is involved in Jesus being Savior. First, God has made Him “LORD!” As used here, the term “Lord” means King, Ruler, and Sovereign.

Twelve times Jesus is referred to as “the Lord Jesus” (Lk 24:3; Acts 4:33; 7:59; 19:13; Rom 10:9; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 4:10,145; Col 3:17; 2 Thess 1:7; Heb 13:20; Rev 22:20).

Fifty-one times He is referred to as the “ Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 11:17; 15:11; 16:31; 20:21; Rom 1:7; 5:1,11; 13:14; 1 Cor 1:3,7,8; 8:6; 15:57; 2 Cor 1:2,3; 8:9; Gal 1:3; Eph 1:2,3,17; 3:14; 5:20; 6:23,24; Phil 1:2; 3:20; Col 1:2,3; 1 Thess 1:1; 2:19; 3:11,13; 5:9,23; 2 Thess 1:1,2,8,12; 2:1,16; 1 Tim 1:1; 6:14; 2 Tim 4:1; Tit 1:4; James 2:21; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:16; 2 John 1:3; Jude 1:4).

Twice He is referred to as “Christ the Lord ” (Lk 2:11; James 2:1).

Four times He is called the “ Lord and Savior” (2 Pet 1:11; 2:20; 3:2; ,18).

Once He is called “the Lord Christ” (Col 3:24).

Once He is called “ Lord of all” (Acts 10:36).

Three times He is referred to as “ Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15; Rev 17:14; 19:16).

Once He is called “the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8).

He is called “the Lord ” twenty-six times (Acts 9:6,10,11,15; 18:9; 23:11; 1 Cor 4:5; 6:14; 1 Cor 9:5; 15:47; Eph 5:29; Phil 4:5; 1 Thess 1:6; 4:15,17; 5:2; 2 Thess 1:9; 2:8,13; 2 Tim 4:8; Heb 2:3; James 5:7,8; 2 Pet 2:1; 3:10; Rev 1:5).

There are 101 clear and uncontested references to Christ as “Lord.” There can be no question about this. It is consistently found in the Apostles’ doctrine, and it is so because the Father has, indeed, made Him “Lord.”

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The Prophets Speak

Consider how Jesus being Lord is expounded in Scripture – first by the Prophets, who prepared men for a Savior who would be the Ruler.

- “I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth” (Num 24:17).
- “The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces; out of heaven shall he thunder upon them: the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth; and He shall give strength unto His King, and exalt the horn of His Anointed ” (1 Sam 2:10).
- “Yet have I set My King upon My holy hill of Zion” (Psa 2:6).
- “Thou hast delivered Me from the strivings of the people; and Thou hast made Me the Head of the heathen : a people whom I have not known shall serve Me ” (Psa 18:43).
- “Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in” (Psa 24:7).
- “Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David , and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:7).
- “And the key of the house of David will I lay upon His shoulder; so He shall open, and none shall shut; and He shall shut, and none shall open” (Isa 22:22).
- “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness , and princes shall rule in judgment” (Isa 32:1).
- “Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him : behold, His reward is with him, and his work before him” (Isa 40:10).
- “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high ” (Isa 52:13).
- “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper , and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth” (Jer 23:5).

The Lord Jesus Speaks

Ponder what the Lord Jesus said about being “made” Lord.

- “ All things are delivered unto Me of my Father” (Mat 11:27).
- “And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18).
- “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as My Father hath appointed unto Me ” (Luke 22:29).
- “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will ” (John 5:21).
- “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22).

The Declaration of the Apostles

The messengers sent forth by Jesus left no doubt about Him being made Lord.

- “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all)” (Acts 10:36).
- “Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all , God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:5).
- “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living ” (Rom 14:9).
- “Which he wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion , and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet , and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:20-22).
- “And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord , to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:11).
- “Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords ” (1 Tim 6:15).

The Particular Emphasis

The particular emphasis of Jesus being “made Lord” pertains to God’s promise to David: that He “would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (Acts 2:30). Isaiah also spoke of Jesus being “upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:7). Jeremiah also spoke of Jesus in this way: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper , and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth” (Jer 23:5).

Jesus is presently reigning as Lord upon the throne of David – that is Peter’s proclamation. That reign is associated with Christ’s present exaltation in heaven, not with Him returning the second time to earth. We have a reigning Savior!

Making Him Lord

Perhaps you have heard people refer to making Jesus “Lord of your life.” The talk goes something like this: “Now that Jesus is your Savior, you need to make Him Lord of your life.” The postulate is that you can be saved, yet not be willingly under the government of Jesus. Whatever this kind of language is intended to declare, it is certainly flawed to the core. It is really nothing more than the language of Ashdod – Babylonish jargon.

God has already “made” Jesus Lord, and He cannot be made any more “Lord” than He is right now. The fact that people do not submit to Him as Lord has nothing whatsoever to do with Him being Lord. He is “Lord both of the dead and the living” (Rom 14:9). The phrase “the dead and the living” is without regard to whether or not people are reconciled to God. All of the dead, who have left the body, are under the authority of Christ. That is how He will be able to raise them all from the dead. All of the living, whether they are saved or lost, are under the government of Jesus. That is why, regarding the lost, He can call them, judge them, and draw them to Himself. For the saved that is why He can feed them, lead them, and bring them to glory.

There is no personality in heaven, earth, or under the earth that is not subject to Christ – the Father Himself being the only exclusion (1 Cor 15:27). The knowledge this should provoke men to “call upon the name of the Lord.”

There is no such thing as a salvation in which “the saved” do not acknowledge, confess, and

submit to Jesus as “Lord of all.” The notion that a person can be “saved,” and yet not own Jesus as their Lord is nonsense. That is why we read, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the LORD Jesus , and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved . For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation ” (Rom 10:9-10). In this case, “confession” is not a mere intellectual acknowledgment. Technically, the word “confession” means “the substance of our profession which we embrace with hope,” THAYER “a statement of allegiance expressing binding assent and public commitment,” FRIBERG and “to express openly one’s allegiance to a proposition or person.” LOUW-NIDA

Where there is no embracement of Jesus “as Lord,” there is no salvation. Why would God save a person who did not acknowledge and embrace Jesus as LORD, when that is what God has made Him? The whole notion is unbecoming of anyone who loves the truth. It just is not right, and we must avoid speaking as though there was even a grain of truth in it. It is devoid of truth.

GOD HATH MADE THAT SAME JESUS “CHRIST”

“ 36c God hath made . . . and Christ.” Other versions read, “God has made . . . Messiah,” NRSV and “God has made . . . Christ (the Messiah).” AMPLIFIED

While “Lord” denotes Jesus’ relationship to us, “Christ” speaks of His relationship to God. Thus He is referred to as “the Lord’s Christ” (Lk 2:26), “ His Christ” (Acts 4:26; Rev 11:15; 12:10), “the Christ of God ” (Lk 9:20), “Christ, the chosen of God ” (Lk 23:35).

The word “Christ” means “anointed One,” and is also translated “Messiah” (Dan 9:25,26; John 1:41; 4:25). The word “Jesus” speaks of His saving capacity: “He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). The term “Lord” speaks of Him in He reigning, or ruling , capacity: “ rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies” (Psa 110:2). The term “Christ” emphasizes the Savior in His working capacity: “Christ died” (Rom 5:6,8; 14:15; 1 Cor 8:11; 15:3), “Christ hath redeemed” (Gal 3:13), “Christ being come an High Priest” (Heb 9:11), “Christ also hath once suffered” (1 Pet 3:18), etc.

As the anointed One, Jesus was “chosen of God” to do for man what man could not do for himself. These were things that had to be done before God could save us – and they all had to be done by a man – “the Man Christ Jesus.”

The fifty-third chapter of Isaiah speaks in detail about a Man through whom God would provide a just basis for the salvation of men.

- He bore our griefs (4a).
- He carried our sorrows (4b).
- He was stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted (4c).
- He was wounded for our transgressions (5a).
- He was bruised for our iniquities (5b).
- The chastisement of our peace was upon Him (5c).
- By His stripes we are healed (5d).
- The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all (6).
- He was oppressed and He was afflicted (7).
- He was taken from prison and from judgment (8a).
- He was cut off out of the land of the living (8b).

- For the transgression of the people He was smitten (8c).
- He made His grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death (9).
- It pleased the Lord to bruise Him (10a).
- It pleased the Lord to put Him to grief (10a).
- His soul was made an offering for sin (10b).
- The pleasure of the Lord prospers in His hand (10c).
- The Lord saw the travail of His soul and was satisfied (11a).
- He bore the iniquities of the people (11b).
- He poured out His soul unto death (12a).
- He was numbered with the transgressors (12b).
- He bore the sin of many (12c).
- He makes intercession for the transgressors (12d).

All of this, and much more, is summarized in the words, “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8).

“Christ” was the “Man” of whom Isaiah prophesied: “And a Man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa 32:2). He was the “Immanuel” that was “made of a woman,” and grew up in a fallen world (Isa 7:14-15). He is the One chosen to announce deliverance (Lk 4:18-19). If anything was required for salvation to be effective, the Christ is the One who did it. This covered everything from taking away the sin of the world (John 1:29), to destroying the devil (Heb 2:14) and triumphing over death (Acts 2:24). All of that is encapsulated in the word “Christ.”

Peter has already said that David prophesied that God “would raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (2:30). Here is a glorified Man. Enthroned in glory, with all power in heaven and earth in His hand. He has been exalted because of what He has, as a Man, accomplished. Thus it is written, “And after He had appeared in human form, He abased and humbled Himself [still further] and carried His obedience to the extreme of death, even the death of the cross! Therefore [because He stooped so low] God has highly exalted Him and has freely bestowed on Him the name that is above every name, That in (at) the name of Jesus every knee should (must) bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, And every tongue [frankly and openly] confess and acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” AMPLIFIED (Phil 2:8-11).

In making “Jesus of Nazareth” both Lord and Christ, God has fully provided for the salvation of men. As “Christ,” God has affirmed that Jesus fully accomplished all that was necessary for God to be both the “just and the Justifier” of him that believes on Jesus (Rom 3:26). He has fulfilled all of the prophecies relating to the Savior, crushing the enemy, removing all obstacles, and sanctifying the way – the “high way” – to God (Isa 35:8; Heb 10:20).

As “Lord,” Jesus has been invested with all of the authority and power required to bring the sons home to glory. He has, and is ready to dispense, all of the resources men require to navigate from earth to glory (Col 2:3). Those who are “in Christ” are, in every sense of the word, “complete,” wanting nothing (Col 2:10). Nothing essential for “life and godliness” can be obtained anywhere else (2 Pet 1:3). It is all in Christ – every single resource. Those who seek elsewhere will be disappointed.

God hath made the same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ

CONCLUSION

Thus Peter has presented the Savior of the world, clarifying “Jesus of Nazareth,” making known both the fulfilled intentions of God and the completely wrong assessments of the Israelites. In his powerful presentation of Christ he has made no reference to the love of God. He did not speak of the removal of sin, or say that Christ died for the sins of the world. He has not yet not offered the remission of sins, or told the people what to do to be saved. He has not delivered a word about Jesus meeting the needs of the people, or being there to help them through their troubles. He has, however, presented a view of Christ with which the Holy Spirit will surely work. Permit me to briefly review what this Spirit-filled man has declared.

In his powerful presentation of Christ he has made no reference to the love of God. He did not speak of the removal of sin, or say that Christ died for the sins of the world. He has not yet not offered the remission of sins, or told the people what to do to be saved. He has not delivered a word about Jesus meeting the needs of the people, or being there

Jesus was a man “approved” by God among the people through miracles, wonders, and signs (2:22).

- He was “delivered by the determinate counsel of God” (2:23a).
- He was “delivered” by the “foreknowledge of God” (2:23b).
- The people had taken Him, and by “wicked hands” had crucified and slain Him (2:34).
- God “raised Him up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (2:24).
- David prophesied concerning Jesus’ experience while His body was in the grave, declaring that He anticipated His own resurrection (2:25-26).
- Christ’s soul was not left in Hades (2:27a).
- Christ’s body did not see corruption in the grave (2:27b).
- The “way of life” was made know to Jesus – i.e., the way from death to life (2:28).
- God promised David that He would raise up his offspring to sit upon his throne (2:30a).
- The prophecy related to the resurrection of Christ (2:30b-31).
- Those upon whom the Spirit had come were all witnesses of the risen Jesus (2:32).
- Jesus was exalted by means of the right hand of God (2:33a).
- Jesus received from the Father the promised Spirit, in order that He might pour Him forth upon men (2:33b).
- Jesus had poured forth the Spirit, producing the results that were being witnessed by the people (2:33c).
- David spoke of Jesus when he said the Lord said to His Lord, “Sit Thou on My right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool” (2:34-35).
- God has made Jesus “both Lord Christ,” having raised Him from the dead, and enthroned Him at His own right hand (2:36a).
- God did this to the Jesus the people had crucified (2:36b).

I do not believe there is a homiletical expert in the world who would have suggested such a presentation – yet, that is the one inspired by the Spirit of God, who “searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10).

In the verses that follow, we will see whether or not the Holy Spirit was able to accomplish His reproving and convicting ministry through these words.

I want to press upon you to consider the manner and message that Peter delivered. You will find that it does not agree with modern day evangelistic methods. I am quick to say that this is not intended to be a template for every presentation of Christ to sinners. However, it does provide insight into the proper direction and emphasis of preaching. It also confirms that what men think about Jesus is of critical importance. It is the responsibility of every preacher and teacher to assist people in discerning the true Jesus, what He has accomplished, and how the Father has exalted Him above all. We must have zero-tolerance for any doctrine that leaves people fundamentally ignorant of the Lord's Christ. Such teaching places men in eternal jeopardy, and robs the soul as well. It must not be tolerated in the body of Christ!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #11

THE RESPONSE OF FAITH

“ 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? 38 Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. 39 For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. 40 And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. 41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
(Acts 2:37-42)

INTRODUCTION

After men have reviewed the Divine summation of Peter's message, they may be tempted to speculate or philosophize about it. It is admittedly difficult to perceive any humanistic approach in it. It is clearly based upon the Scriptures, and focuses upon the Person and experience of “Jesus of Nazareth.” I have never heard or read of anyone who made an effort to systematize the message itself, or develop a pattern of preaching from it. Nor, indeed, would such an effort be in order. Honest and good hearts will be duly impressed by the result of Peter's words

CONTENTS

- WHEN THEY HEARD THIS, SOMETHING HAPPENED (2:37a)

- **THEY SAID TO PETER AND THE REST OF THE APOSTLES (2:37b)**
- **REPENT! (2:38a)**
- **ALL OF YOU, BE BAPTIZED (2:38b)**
- **YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT (2:38c)**
- **THE PROMISE IS TO EVERYONE WHO IS CALLED BY GOD (2:38d)**
- **HE HAD MORE TO SAY (2:40a)**
- **SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS UNTOWARD GENERATION (2:40b)**
- **THEY THAT GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD (2:41a)**
- **THREE THOUSAND SOULS WERE ADDED (2:41b)**
- **IT DID NOT STOP THERE (2:42)**
- **CONCLUSION**

– the effects that it produced in those who heard it. That will confirm that the Holy Spirit took the words of the apostle and worked with them, causing something to occur in the people that truly constituted an epoch.

The things that took place in this text are outside the perimeter of natural aptitude. What was perceived and spoken was influenced by the touch of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. No amount of natural ingenuity, effort, or wisdom could have produced such insight and speech. This is confirmation of a Divine work within men – both within the speaker and the hearers.

WHAT HAS BEEN SAID THUS FAR

Jesus prepared his disciples for the events that took place on the first Pentecost following His ascension back to heaven. I do not doubt that, when the Lord spoke them, His words lacked the clarity that was realized when the Spirit came upon the disciples, and they were filled with His mind and power.

What Jesus Said

- **HE WOULD BE WITH THEM.** “ I am with you always , even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt 28:20).

- **THEY WOULD SPEAK WITH NEW TONGUES.** “And these signs shall follow them that believe . . . they shall speak with new tongues . . .” (Mark 16:18).

- **THEY WOULD PREACH AND WITNESS WITH POWER.** “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things . And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high ” (Luke 24:47-49).

- **THE SPIRIT WOULD REMAIN WITH THEM.** “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever ” (John 14:16).

- **THE SPIRIT WOULD TEACH THEM AND STIR UP THEIR MEMORY.** “But the Comforter . . . He shall teach you all things , and bring all things to your remembrance , whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

- **THE SPIRIT WOULD TESTIFY THROUGH THEM.** “But when the Comforter is come. . . He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness . . .” (John 15:26-27).

The things that took place in this text are outside the perimeter of natural aptitude. What was perceived and spoken was influenced by the touch of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. No amount of natural ingenuity, effort, or wisdom could have produced such insight and speech.

THE SPIRIT WOULD GUIDE THEM INTO ALL TRUTH, SHOW THEM THINGS TO COME, AND GLORIFY CHRIST. “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth . . . He will show you things to come . He shall glorify Me : for He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you . . .” (John 16:13-15).

• **THEY WOULD RECEIVE POWER AND BE WITNESSES.** “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father . . . ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence . . . But ye shall receive power , after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me . . .” (Acts 1:4-5,8).

• **HE SPENT FORTY DAYS WITH THEM, TEACHING CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD.** “To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God ” (Acts 1:3).

The fact that these words were all veiled in mystery at the time they were spoken, is confirmed by the disciples’ words to Christ after He rose from the dead, and before He ascended into heaven. “When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). Their understanding was not yet illuminated.

The Experience of the Disciples

1. Thus far, the Spirit has come upon the disciples as the Lord had said. Attending signs confirmed this had happened (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:4) .

• There came a sound from heaven “as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting” (2:2).

• There “appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them” (Acts 2:3).

• “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).

2. All of the disciples had, in fact, become witnesses, testifying of the works of God (John 15:27; Acts 1:4,5,8).

• “. . . we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11)

3. They spoke with “new tongues,” as Jesus had promised (Mk 16:18).

• “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4).

Peter affirmed Jesus had received the promised Spirit from God, and poured it out upon the people. “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear”

4. In confirmation of Christ’s promise, the Holy Spirit had led the speakers into all truth, showing them the things of Christ, and revealing things to come (John 16:13-15).

• Opened the prophecy of Joel. “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet

Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy: and I will show wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke: the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come: and it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:17-21).

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

- Accounted for Jesus being taken. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God . . .” (Acts 2:23a).

- Proclaimed what they did when Jesus was put into their hands. “ , ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain ” (Acts 2:23b).

- Proclaimed the resurrection of Christ, declaring the rationale behind it. “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24).

- Declared the fulfillment of Psalm 16:8-11. “For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved . . .” (Acts 2:25-28)

- Declared the intent of David’s Psalm. “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne. He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ...” (Acts 2:29-31).

- Provided insight concerning the nature of death and the state of the dead. “ . . . that his soul was not left in hell” [Haded}, “neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:31).

- Comprehended that David spoke of Christ’s resurrection when he spoke of someone being raised up to sit on his throne. “Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ...” (Acts 2:30-31).

- Declared that Jesus had been exalted, and was presently at the right hand of God, fulfilling David’s Psalm. “Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, He would raise up Christ to sit on his throne . . . Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted . . .” (Acts 2:30,33).

- Affirmed Jesus had received the promised Spirit from God, and poured it out upon the people. “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

- Revealed that David could not have been speaking of himself. “For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand . . .” (Acts 2:34-35).

- Declared Jesus would remain at God’s right hand until His enemies were made His footstool. “ . . . The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool” (Acts 2:35).

- Affirmed that God had made Jesus Lord, fulfilling the promise to seat one upon David's throne. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord . . ." (Acts 2:36).

- Announced that God had made Jesus Christ, fulfilling David's promise to raise up "Christ" to sit on His throne. "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus . . . Christ " (Acts 2:36).

Brief Summation

We have witnessed a man speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit – the Spirit who had been "poured forth" by Jesus. Peter spoke with lucidity, confidence, and power. He was able to reason, correlate Scripture, and maintain a clear focus on the Lord Jesus Christ. Although he had an abundance of personal experience with Jesus Himself, he founded his reasoning on the Word of God, confirming that God had done what He had promised in Scripture. He had no difficulty speaking of the Sovereignty of God and the responsibility of men in the same sentence (2:23).

Men could not have taught Peter to preach in this manner. He was speaking while enjoying "the communion of the Holy Spirit" NKJV (2 Cor 13:14). He was in possession of his sanctified faculties of reason and speech, and was able to speak pointedly about God, Christ, and the people standing before him.

It is quite clear that Peter's message stands in sharp contrast to human methodologies. He was not motivated by an institutional spirit, the desire to straighten out the personal difficulties experienced by those in his audience, or the promotion of fleshly interests.

Further, the events were of such a nature that no one could satisfactorily account for them according to human wisdom. Some "mocked," or made fun of the people, saying that the speakers were "full of new wine" (2:13). If someone filled with the Holy Spirit had not explained what was happening, the facts of the case would never have been known.

It will be helpful to identify the generation to whom Jesus had spoken – the very generation to whom Peter is now speaking. This will accent all the more the marvelous things that will occur. Here is how Jesus referred to this generation.

THE GENERATION TO WHOM PETER WAS SPEAKING

It will be helpful to identify the generation to whom Jesus had spoken – the very generation to whom Peter is now speaking. This will accent all the more the marvelous things that will occur. Here is how Jesus referred to this generation.

- "But whereunto shall I liken this generation ? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented" (Matt 11:16-17).

- "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation , and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matt 12:41).

- "The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation , and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt 12:42).

- "And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark 8:12).

- "That the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the

world, may be required of this generation; From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple: verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation ” (Luke 11:50-51).

- “But first must he suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation ” (Luke 17:25).

This was the generation in which “the builders” rejected the Stone which became the Head of the corner (Mk 12:10). It was one in which the Jewish leaders (the scribes and Pharisees) had “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men” (Matt 23:13). It was one in which the “lawyers” (experts in Moses’ law) “took away the key of knowledge” (Lk 11:52). Jesus said of the inhabitants of the chief city of this generation, “For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Luke 19:43-44). And again He said, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Mat 23:39).

Throw into this revealed scenario the fact of the impotence of “the natural man” (1 Cor 2:14) , the hostility of “the carnal mind” (Rom 8:7) , and the depravity of worldly wisdom, and you have, what appears to be, an utterly hopeless situation.

Now, we will behold the power of the Gospel, and how it will work among those who “killed the prince of life” (Acts 3:15). To this point in our text, they have shown no remorse or sorrow about what they have done.

WHEN THEY HEARD THIS, SOMETHING HAPPENED

“ 2:37a Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart . . . ”

Spiritual powers are at work as Peter speaks. Do not think for a moment that “the old serpent” is not moving in and out among the people, exerting all of his deceptive powers. When the Lord Jesus sheathed His sword in Gethsemane, submitting to the powers of darkness because it was their hour, the people appeared effective in resisting His influence. However, on this day, Christ’s sword is no longer in its sheath, but is drawn, proceeding out of His mouth. The Holy Spirit is at work among the audience also, convicting men of sin, righteousness, and judgment – just as Jesus said He would (John 16:8-11).

WHEN THEY HEARD THIS

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“Now when they heard this . . . ” Other versions read, “When the people heard this,” NIV “Now when these words came to their ears,” BBE “And having heard this,” DARBY and “hearing this,” NJB “Peter’s words.” NLT

These people were not moved God-ward but what they saw, but by what they heard . You could not have asked for any more impressive material for the eye-gate. People in a state of rational ecstasy, people speaking in the native languages of their hearers, and possibly even tongues of fire sitting upon the heads of the speakers. Yet, our text does not read, “when they saw this,” but rather “when they heard this.”

The Myth of Faith Superiority of Sight

You have probably heard someone say, “I would rather see a sermon than hear one.” Of course, that is said by those who have no understanding. The most precise visual that was ever presented to humanity was the Word that was “made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This was not a vague image, but “the express image” of the “Person” of God (Heb 1:3). Divine qualities dwelt corporally in Him, for “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 1:19; 2:9). Yet, when men saw this walking sermon, men said, “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isa 53:2). Is it possible for the eye to be privileged to see anyone more precise, more holy, more thorough, more like God? Was there anything about this Man that was inadequate, insufficient, or not to the point? Once, when certain of the country of the Gadarenes “saw Him,” they asked Him to “depart out of their coasts” (Matt 8:34). After being exposed to Him for over three years, the Jews followed their leaders and cried out, “crucify Him, crucify Him” (Lk 23:21).

What kind of commentary is that on the value of vision – seeing a sermon, as men would say? Does this shed any light on the “media-ministry” fad that is sweeping the country? Exactly what can these electronic marvels do that the incarnate Word could not do?

Faith Comes by Hearing

The truth of the matter is that “faith cometh by hearing,” not seeing. It does not come by working, but by “hearing.” It does not come by thinking, but by “hearing.” The message directed to the hearing is the Gospel itself, as expressly taught in the tenth chapter of Romans. Pointedly it is stated, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?” (Rom 10:14-16). Peter was not preaching about secrets to a successful life in this world. He did not promise the people health and wealth, happy homes, and the right to have a lot of fun. That is not the kind of message that results in faith. It was not so in Peter’s day, and it is not so in our day either.

The very next verse reads, “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” or “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ” (Rom 10:17). That is, the message that is heard is the Gospel of Christ itself, and the hearing that appropriates that message comes by the word, or commandment, of Christ.

Faith is clearly said to come from God and Christ. “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23). Thus we are said to have “obtained like precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1). It has therefore been “given” to us “to believe” (Phil 1:29). Believers are therefore said to have “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).

A message that promises well being in this world does not do such a work. What kind of piercing does a health and wealth gospel do? Will someone say it will convict the sinner of the sin of poverty and ill health? Is that what people are willing to say?

What of Peter’s message? Was it Gospel? He preached of the death of Christ (2:24), His burial (2:15-31), and His resurrection (2:31-32). He also spoke of His exaltation and enthronement (2:33-36). Is that the kind of message the Holy Spirit can use? Will Jesus give grace to believe to those who hear a message like that? The text will speak for itself. Make no mistake about this, the response that follows was prompted by what the people heard – and “faith cometh by hearing.”

PRICKED IN THEIR HEARTS

“ . . .they were pricked in their heart . . .” Other versions read, “they were cut to the heart,” NKJV “they were pierced to the heart,” NASB “their hearts were troubled ,” BBE “they had compunction in their heart,” DOUAY “they were deeply upset ,” GWN “they were agitated in their heart,” MRD “they were acutely distressed ,” NET “pierced their hearts,” NLT “ moved them deeply,” LIVING “they felt a sharp, cutting pain in their conscience ,” IE “ stung to the heart,” WEYMOUTH “they were stabbed to the heart,” WILLIAMS “they were stung (cut) to the heart,” AMPLIFIED and “they were cut to the quick .” PHILLIPS

We are told, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart ” (Heb 4:12). Here is an example of this happening. Remember, many of these hearers were the same people who took Jesus, crucified, and killed Him (2:23). It takes hard and calloused hearts to do something like that! How can such steeled persons be reached? What can awaken their conscience and convict them of their unbelief and wrong doing? It is the truth preached by someone who has been illuminated!

The Holy Spirit used His “sword,” and drove Peter’s word down into their hearts, convicting them of sin, righteousness, and judgment. They saw their own miserable unbelief. They saw that Jesus was righteous, and that they had rejected and killed Him. They saw that Satan had been judged, and yet they had been his vassals when they rejected and denied “the Just One” (Acts 7:52).

A Message That Pricks the Heart

Peter delivered a word that caused the hearts of the people to be pricked, pierced, and stabbed into spiritual alertness. A message that promises well being in this world does not do such a work. What kind of piercing does a health and wealth gospel do? Will someone say it will convict the sinner of the sin of poverty and ill health? Is that what people are willing to say? How will such people handle the word of the Lord, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5). And, how can such an inspired statement be true if Jesus came to remove poverty?

Being “cut to the heart” does not always result in a favorable reaction. Later, when Peter preached to another group, “they were cut to the heart and took counsel to slay him” (Acts 5:33). When Stephen preached powerfully to the Jewish council, “they were cut to the heart , and they gnashed on him with their teeth” (Acts 7:54). In both of these cases, the conscience of the people had been seared. The word used for “cut” is one meaning to exasperate, as though the heart was cut in two. There is no healing properties in that word, only destruction. Therefore, when they were “cut to the heart” they lashed out in rebellion against God’s Word. For hearts of this order, the Word of God pushes the person further and further away from God until he has no compunctions about killing the speaker – whether it be Jesus, Stephen, or one of the prophets. This oppressive effect of the Word is described in Scripture. “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken ” (Isa 28:13). Those who steel their heart against the Word of God have no guarantee that their condition will not consummate in eternal destruction.

In our text, the word for “pricked” means to cause deep pain, or sorrow and regret. In this case, instead of becoming obstinate and even violent, a solution to the grievous condition is earnestly sought. There is profound lamentation for what has been done, and a determination to do whatever is necessary to recover from it. If this seems like an impossible reaction, our text records how it was actually lived out in Peter’s listeners.

THEY SAID TO PETER AND THE REST OF THE APOSTLES

“ 37b . . . and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?”

It appears that the people interrupted Peter’s message, unable to contain themselves any longer. His word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, had penetrated to their inmost being, and they saw what they had done to Jesus from an entirely new point of view. They could not keep quiet, social conventions notwithstanding.

Right here we are given to see an aspect of the Kingdom of God that is rare in our time. When men see the truth – really see it – they will do anything they can to obtain it. This is precisely the point of Jesus’ words concerning the radical change in people’s approach to God following John the Baptist. “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force ” (Mat 11:12). Other versions read, “forceful men lay hold of it,” NIV “the violent are taking it by storm,” NJB “ardent multitudes have been crowding toward,” LIVING and “violent men seize it by force [as a precious prize—a i share in the heavenly kingdom is sought with most ardent zeal and intense exertion].” AMPLIFIED

Luke’s record of this saying confirms that men were eagerly coming into the Kingdom, refusing to be denied. “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it ” (Luke 16:16). That is, those who desire the Kingdom extend themselves to enter into it, sparing no effort. Other versions read, “everyone is forcing his way into it,” NIV “and everyone is eager to get in,” NLT “eager multitudes are pressing in,” LIVING and “everyone is trying hard to get into.” IE The attitude of the people is emphasized. Since John the Baptist, something was being preached that solicited the intense interest of the people. They concluded that this was something to be possessed, and they made every effort to do so.

This reaction agrees with the words of Jesus concerning entering the way that leads to life . “ Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are” (Luke 13:24-25). Other versions read, “Make every effort to enter,” NIV “Do your best to go in,” BBE “Strive with earnestness,” DARBY “Try hard [tol enter,” GWN “exert every effort,” NET “Try your hardest,” NJB “work hard to,” NLT “Strain every nerve to force yourself through,” WEYMOUTH “Keep on struggling to,” ISV and “You must struggle on to get in through.” WILLIAMS

Since John the Baptist, something was being preached that solicited the intense interest of the people. They concluded that this was something to be possessed, and they made every effort to do so.

It is, therefore, clear from Jesus’ words that this is the manner of the Kingdom. If the people do not quench the Spirit, this is what He will lead them to do. If they in any way comprehend what is declared by the Gospel, this is what they will do.

Now, behold in our text the fulfillment of this very thing – men striving to enter, and seizing the Kingdom as a prize to be grasped.

TO PETER AND THE REST

“ . . . and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles . . .” Other versions read, “to Peter and the other apostles,” NIV “and they said to Simon and to the rest of the legates,” MRD “They asked Peter and the other apostles,” IE “ and they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles (special messengers),” AMPLIFIED and “they cried to Peter and the other apostles.” PHILLIPS

The fact that the question is addressed to “Peter and to the rest of the apostles” confirms they were standing together as a group – in the “unity of the faith” and “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3,13). The text does not indicate that all of the apostles were speaking. Peter “stood up with the eleven,” but there is no evidence that they were also speaking, as though different groups were being addressed. Whatever the circumstances, it was apparent that these men were all in one accord, and there were no divisions among them.

The view one entertains of men of God is vastly different when their hearts have been “pricked.” Before they had referred to these men as “Galileans” (2:7). Now they refer to them as “Men and brethren.” What a difference conviction makes! Once some of them “mocked,” saying the speakers were “full of new wine” (2:13). Now, however, their hearts have been pierced, and they speak with respect and recognition.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

“Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Other versions read, “Brothers, what should we do?” NIV “what are we to do?” BBE and “Men and fellow-Jews, what shall we do now?” PHILLIPS

This is how those who are convicted by the Holy Spirit speak. They want to know what they are to do, and they are urgent in their quest for this information. They do not assume they know what to do, they are asking for enlightenment on the subject. Peter has not told them in advance what they are to do, even though that has become a common practice within the Christian community. It is as though people think outlining the duties of men is a proper constraining influence. There is no need to enter into a debate about this matter. I will simply observe that Peter had not told them what was required, and therefore the people asked.

When Saul of Tarsus confronted the exalted Christ, he asked, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do” (Acts 9:6). When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he was met with these words: “Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33). After an earthquake had opened the doors of a prison in Philippi, loosing every man’s bonds, the jailer burst forth and said to Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

It is not my intention to outline a procedural approach to Christ. My point is that those who have genuinely been impacted by the Gospel will not be content to remain ignorant. If they are convicted of sin, they will want to know how to rid themselves of it right away. Once they are convinced that Christ is, in fact, greater than themselves, they will be compelled to seek a means of reconciliation, and then adjust their lives to please only Him. Until this awareness bursts upon the soul, men only play at religion. They will not throw themselves into something that has not captured their interest. They will not seek to enter the Kingdom if they have attached no ascendant value to it. When men are not valiant for the truth, we do not need to wonder why. They simply have not yet been convinced of the truth, for once the truth is KNOWN, it frees the individual from bondage to Satan, sin, and self (John 8:32,36). It is no marvel, therefore, that these men spoke out in earnest inquiry, not waiting for a further word, but interrupting Peter.

REPENT!

“ 38a Then Peter said unto them, Repent . . . ”

Prior to this, the last recorded words of Peter are, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36). Now, he must quickly move from declaring the Gospel to instructing sinners what to do. The Spirit will enlighten him in this area just as surely as He did in that of proclamation. He will be able to perceive the condition of the people, recall the words of the Lord Jesus, discern the

proclamations of the holy Prophets, and correlate it all into a spiritually rational response.

THEN PETER SAID UNTO THEM

“Then Peter said unto them . . .” Other versions reads, “Peter replied,” NIV and “Peter answered them.” GWN

Peter was one of the apostles, but he not over them. He was not superior to them, but one with them. This appears to have been apparent to the listeners, for they addressed “Peter and the rest of the apostles.” It was doubtless the unanimity in the message that led them to this conclusion.

Peter had been given “the keys of the kingdom of God” (Matt 16:19), and he opened the door of salvation to the “Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). He will now bring salvation within the reach of the people. If you wonder concerning the largeness of salvation, Peter is addressing the very people who took Jesus, crucified Him, and killed Him (Acts 2:23). These are people who had refused to come to the light (John 3:19), rejected the Lord (Lk 17:25), and had demanded that He be put to death (Lk 23:21). What word of instruction will Peter deliver to such a people?

Peter was one of the apostles, but he not over them. He was not superior to them, but one with them. This appears to have been apparent to the listeners, for they addressed “Peter and the rest of the apostles.” It was doubtless the unanimity in the message that led them to this conclusion. This does not necessarily imply that all of the apostles were speaking. However, it was abundantly evident that they were all of one accord.

REPENT!

“ . . . Repent . . . ” Other versions read, “Let your hearts be changed ,” BBE “Do penance ,” DOUAY “ Amend your lives,” GENEVA “all of you must turn to God and change the way you think and act,” GWN “You must repent,” NJB “Each of you must repent of your sins, turn to God,” NLT “ Reform ,” YLT “Each of you must turn from your sins, return to God,” LIVING “ Change your hearts,” IE and “Repent (change your views and purpose to accept the will of God in your inner selves instead of rejecting it).” AMPLIFIED

Peter’s reply is of special interest because it conflicts with the kind of answers given to inquiring sinners today. Can you imagine Peter saying, “If there is anyone here who wants to receive Jesus, raise your hand, and I will pray for you.” Or, “Bow your head and repeat this prayer after me. When you are finished, you will be a new creature.” Or, “If those who are interested will come forward, someone will take you to another room for counseling.” Or, “We require that you take a six week course that outlines what is involved in being saved. Please come forward and enroll if you are interested.” Or, “If you have received Jesus into your heart, please fill out one of the cards in front of you and pass it to one of the ushers. We will give you some materials on how to walk in newness of life.” Or . . .

If all of this seems foolish, it is because it is!

The word “repent” is a large one and is absolutely requisite to any profitable involvement with the Living God. This is a word that has to do with the heart, and is reflected in the conduct of the individual as well. It is not something that is to be talked about, but is to be done.

“Repent” comes from the Greek word *Metanoh,sate* (met-a-voas-at-a). Its lexical meaning is, “to change one’s mind . . . feel sorry that one has done this or that . . . conscious of their sins and with manifest tokens of sorrow, are intent on obtaining God’s pardon . . . heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins . . . conduct worthy of a heart changed and abhorring sin . . . to

withdraw, or turn one's soul from," THAYER "predominately of a religious and ethical change in the way one thinks about acts," FRIBERG "have a change of heart, turn from one's sins, change one's ways," UBS "To change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness," LOUW-NIDA and "to change one's mind or purpose." LIDDELL-SCOTT

Repentance has to do with actual moral change – a change in thought, conduct, and manner of life. By that I mean the penitent person begins to think differently, speak and do differently, and live for a different reason. Such a person has turned around, leaving the broad road that leads to destruction, and getting on the narrow way that leads to life. This is an individual that is intent, and will allow nothing to dissuade him from his determination to amend his ways and come to God.

Repentance is not a philosophical subject, nor is it something about which men are to theorize. It is something that is to be done, and there are eternal penalties for not doing so.

Repentance is on the threshold of the Kingdom. It precedes one's entrance into the Kingdom, and until it is accomplished, the wrath of God abides on the individual. As the "pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), it is the responsibility of the church to keep this fact before the people. That is one of the reasons Jesus said that "repentance," as well as "remission of sins" was to be "preached" (Lk 24:47). In my judgment the modern church has not done well in this matter.

The word "repent," in all of its varied forms (repent, repented, repentance, repenting) is found forty-five times in Moses and the Prophets. Of those times, thirty-six refer to God Himself repenting (Gen 6:6,7; Ex 32:12,14; Num 23:19; Deut 32:36; Judges 2:18; 1 Sam 15:11,29,35; 2 Sam 24:16; 1 Chron 21:15; Psa 90:13; 106:45; 110:4; ; 135:14; Jer 4:28; 15:6; 18:8,10; 20:16; 26:3,13,19; 42:10; Ezek 24:14; Hos 11:8; 13:14; Joel 2:13,14; Amos 7:3,6; Jonah 3:9,10; 4:2; Zech 8:14). That leaves nine direct references to men repenting in all the Old Covenant writings (Ex 13:17; Judges 21:6,15; 1 Kgs 8:47; Job 42:6; Jer 8:6; 31:19; Ezek 14:6; 18:30).

By way of comparison repentance, in all of its varied forms, is mentioned sixty times in the New Covenant writings. Of those a single text refers to God Himself, where it is written "The Lord swore and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" (Heb 7:21).

It ought to be evident that something of an epochal nature occurred after the writings of Moses and the Prophets. John the Baptist, who was "sent from God" (John 1:6), called upon men to "Repent" (Matt 3:2; Mk 1:15). Luke says he came "preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Lk 3:3). He insisted that those seeking to be baptized by him "bring forth fruits meet for repentance" (Matt 3:6; Lk 3:8).

When Jesus began preaching, He also preached that men ought to "Repent" (Matt 4:17). When He sent His disciples out to preach, "they went out, and preached that men should repent" (Mark 6:12). Jesus said He came to call "sinners to repentance" (Matt 9:13; Lk 5:32). However, it is written of "the cities wherein most of His mighty works were done . . . they repented not" (Matt 11:20). He told people, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3), and announced "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10).

But with all of that, there are precious few direct references to people repenting in the Gospels. So far as the record is concerned such occasions were exceedingly rare prior to Christ's enthronement at the right hand of God.

To tell someone to "Repent" is equivalent to telling an impotent man, "Take up thy bed and walk," or a man with a withered hand, "Stretch forth thy hand" (Matt 9:6; 12:13). In their own strength, men cannot do such things, as even the prophets testified. "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jer

13:23). It is true of the whole of humanity, just as surely as it was true of favored Israel: “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment” (Isa 1:5-6).

Yet, Peter delivers this word – and it is to be taken seriously. “REPENT!” He calls upon them to renounce what their response was to “Jesus of Nazareth,” a “man approved by God.” They must, as Jeremiah thundered, “thoroughly amend your ways and doings” (Jer 7:5). As Joel said, they were to “rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God” (Joel 2:13). As Isaiah said, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD” (Isa 55:7). That is what is involved in repentance, and it had to be done – while Peter was speaking to them!

The modern church, for the most part, has very little to say about repentance. That is because convenient ear-tickling doctrines have been invented by men that gloss the presence of sin. Iniquity is being explained as something that is possibly inherited, and is often referred to as a “generational curse.” It may even be defined as a sickness, addiction, a malady that is physiological, or in one’s genetic makeup, and disassociated from one’s will. To such people, repentance from sin would be like repenting of having cancer, or some other disease. They have been taught to view sin as a consequence of something outside of the human will and responsibility. All of this fits handily into a psychological emphasis that is fueled by human wisdom and driven by delusion.

Instead of repenting, we now have “Christian counselors” who can lead the people into a more productive life through special routines, procedures, disciplines and even special diets. If, for example, people have outbursts of anger, they can enroll in an “anger-management” course. Thus, they are conveniently led to ignore the Holy Spirit’s word on the matter, “put off . . . anger” (Col 3:8).

Behind the Scenes

The Spirit takes us behind the scenes, shedding light on this great work of repentance. He reveals that “the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance” (Rom 2:4). That is, the fact that an opportunity to repent is given testifies to the goodness of God, who is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Therefore, the fact that men are commanded to repent is itself proof that God is good, and that repentance is therefore possible.

It is also revealed that being “made sorry after a godly manner” leads “to repentance” (2 Cor 7:9). That is, when the heart is made sorrowful over what has been done, a pathway has been opened up that leads to repentance. It is therefore stated that “godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented” (2 Cor 7:10). In other words, when “godly sorrow” leads one to repent, the individual will not regret repenting, but will rather realize benefits that will lead to gladness of heart and satisfaction.

When our text states that those hearing Peter’s words were “pricked in their hearts,” it is to be understood that they were experiencing “godly sorrow” that leads to repentance. Through the Spirit, Peter perceived this sorrow, and told them to “Repent.”

We are even told that God can give a person repentance – even of sin that has taken control of the individual. “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will ” (2 Tim 2:26). Later in the book of Acts, Peter will boldly announce that Jesus has been exalted to “ give repentance to Israel” (Acts 5:31).

Thus, from one point of view, when Peter calls upon the people to repent, he is requiring the people to do something impossible to the flesh. It is like Jesus saying to a paralytic, “Rise up and walk” (Lk 5:23), or telling an impotent man, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk” (John 5:8). It is like Peter himself saying to a lame man who had to be carried here and there, “rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). Yet, if the people will believe his word, they will, in fact, be given the power to repent. Further, Divine power is always dispensed and realized in the domain of faith. That is precisely why Jesus said, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:23). Where men do not believe, they cannot repent. Their impenitence is confirmation that they have not believed on Christ. Thus they do not hold His word in high regard, nor are they willing to renounce their sins. However, it is still their duty to repent.

ALL OF YOU, BE BAPTIZED!

“38b . . . and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins . . .”

Being filled with the Spirit, Peter knows how to answer the inquiry of the people. He does not have a handy manual of church doctrine in his hand, but rather has the Word of God in his heart. Christ’s word is dwelling in him richly, and therefore truth comes out of his mouth.

What Peter will now say has become a subject of disputation among professed believers. Even though the Lord commands His people to be “of one mind” (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8), the professing church does not have “one mind” on this subject. Wherever men are at variance with this word, they are at enmity with Christ, profession notwithstanding. There is no division in Christ (1 Cor 1:13), and therefore it is not possible for Him to bless contradicting views, or use them to accomplish His will.

BE BAPTIZED, EVERY ONE OF YOU

“ . . . and be baptized every one of you . . .” Other versions read, “and let every one of you be baptized,” NKJV “and let each one of you be baptized,” NASB “every one of you, and have baptism,” BBE “and be baptized, each of you,” CSB “and each of you must be baptized,” GWN “and every one of you must be baptized,” NJB “and each one of you must be immersed,” IE and “and, as an expression of it, let every one of you be baptized.” WILLIAMS

Our baptism is a point from which holy reasoning proceeds – reasoning that can bring unparalleled confidence to the heart. The sixth chapter of Romans is a case in point. Here the issue is not whether or not a person should be baptized. Rather, it is assumed that the professing “Christian” has been baptized.

Peter does not say baptism is a consideration, or an option to be pondered. He does not tell the people, “Now that you are saved, you need to be baptized.” There is no doubt that He remembered the words of the Lord Jesus. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Again, emphasizing what the Apostles themselves were to do, Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). With the emphasis placed on the benefits themselves, Luke records Jesus as saying, “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

Each of these statements is no doubt a summation of what Jesus said, providing insight, and a key perspective of His words.

Not Baptized in the Spirit

This is not, as some suppose, a reference to being baptized in the Holy Spirit – a baptism that Jesus Himself performs (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16). That baptism is not represented as a commandment, or an obligation to be fulfilled by men. It is more of a result than an obligation.

The baptism of which Peter speaks is something men do, and it is associated with many facets of spiritual life. A list of some of associations follows – things tied to baptism.

1. Repentance (Acts 2:38).
2. The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
3. The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
4. Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).
5. Salvation, or being “saved” (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
6. Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
7. In baptism we were raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
8. Being identified with Christ's death (Rom 6:3).
9. Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
10. Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
11. The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
12. Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
13. Coming into Christ (Gal 3:27).
14. Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).
15. A commandment (Acts 10:48).
16. The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
17. Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
18. Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).
19. Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
20. Something that is done “in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19).

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- We were baptized into Christ's death (6:3).
- We were buried with Him by baptism into death (6:4a).
- We were baptized into Christ's death in order that we might be raised from the dead (6:4b).
- We were raised from the dead to walk in newness of life (6:4b).
- Those truly planted in the likeness of Christ's death will, in fact, also be in the likeness of His resurrection (6:5).

- Our “old man” is crucified with Christ in order that “the body of sin,” or whole sinful nature, might be destroyed (6:6a).
- The “old man” was crucified in order that we might not “serve sin” (6:6b).
- The one who is “dead to sin” is freed from its dominating power (6:7).
- If we are really “dead with Christ ,” we will “also live with Him” (6:8).
- Once Christ was “raised from the dead,” He never again returned to that domain (6:9-10).
- Just that surely, those in Christ are to consider themselves to be “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” – or by means of our union with Him (6:11).
- In view of our condition in Christ, we are not to allow sin to reign in our “mortal bodies,” that we should yield to its every whim (6:12).
- Neither are we to yield our various capacities of expression to sin (6:13a).
- Rather, we are to yield those capacities to God, as those who are “alive from the dead” (6:13b).
- Now that we are saved by grace, we are no longer “under the Law” (6:14).
- Grace does not allow us to live in sin (6:15).
- Rather than being ruled ruthlessly against our wills, we are ruled by that to which we subject ourselves – whether of “sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness” (6:16).
- Baptism is “the form of the doctrine,” and was “obeyed from the heart” by those in Christ (6:17). The “doctrine” is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, which is depicted in baptism (6:17).
- The freedom realized when we were baptized into Christ’s death, and raised up by the glory of the Father, caused us to become “servants of righteousness” (6:18).
- Just as surely as those who have been baptized were once servants of sin, just that surely they are now to yield their capacities “to righteousness unto holiness” (6:19).
- When those who have been baptized were the servants of sin, they had no righteousness. They had no approved fruit in the things of which they are now ashamed, which things always conclude in death (6:20-21).
- Now, being made from sin and become servants to God, they have their “fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (6:22).
- All of this experientially confirms that “the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (6:23).

SOME GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

If, as some allege, baptism has nothing to do with salvation, then the sixth chapter of Romans is nothing more than the spurious ranting of a madman. In order to justify the doctrine of salvation without baptism, one must take Jehudi’s “penknife,” and cut this chapter out of the Bible. As long as it is there, it stands as a condemnation of those who make baptism optional.

Although these things may appear unrelated to our text, I have taken the time to say them because they explain WHY Peter spoke as he did. In the context of that day, with murderers of Jesus standing before him, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, he spoke in perfect accord with “the mind of Christ.”

Although these things may appear unrelated to our text, I have taken the time to say them because they explain WHY Peter spoke as he did. In the context of that day, with murderers of Jesus standing before him, and being filled with the Holy Spirit, he spoke in perfect accord with “the mind of Christ.”

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . in the name of Jesus Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “in the name of Jesus the Messiah,” CSB and “by the authority of Jesus the Messiah.” IE

Whatever one may think of baptism, Peter now associates it with Jesus Christ – the Savior of the world and Mediator of the New Covenant. You cannot connect unessential and optional things to the King of kings and Lord of lords. That would allow for men to be selective in their obedience.

Here, the phrase “in the name of Jesus Christ” means “of that upon which any action, effect, condition, rests as a basis or support; properly, upon the ground of; and of that upon which anything is sustained or upheld.” THAYER That is, they were to be baptized upon the basis of Christ’s person and command. If there was no other reason for being baptized than the word He gave to disciples (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16), that was reason enough to cast down any suggestion that men should refuse to be baptized, or even hesitate to do so.

It is interesting that we have no example in the book of Acts of any convicted sinner refusing to be baptized, or any preacher of the Gospel saying it was not necessary to do so.

FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS

“ . . . for the remission of sins . . . ” Other versions read, “for the forgiveness of your sins,” NASB “so that your sins may be forgiven,” NRSV “unto the remission of your sins,” ASV “so that your sins will be forgiven,” GWN “to show you have received forgiveness for your sins,” NLT “to the remission of sins,” YLT “so that your sins may be forgiven,” IE “with a view to the remission of your sins,” WEYMOUTH “that you may have your sins forgiven,” WILLIAMS “to [or, for; or, because of] [the] forgiveness of sins,” ALT and “for the forgiveness of and release from your sins.” AMPLIFIED

Owing to flawed theology, some have taken it upon themselves to wrest this text. These are people who consider baptism to be unrelated to salvation, even though it is specifically associated with Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection, upon which salvation is founded. The New Living Translation (a true misnomer) reflects this confusion: “to show you have received forgiveness of your sins.” The Amplified Bible also suggests this as a possible meaning: “because of the forgiveness of sins” – although “because” can refer to intent.

This argument (whether baptism is because of remission already received, or in order to the receiving of remission) rages around a single Greek word – **εις** (eis). This is a preposition that can be translated in a number of ways, all of which are determined by the context. These possible translations include “into” (into the city, Matt 26:18) “toward” (to heaven, Lk 9:16), “in” (in the house, Mk 10:10) “among” (among the thorns, Mk 4:17), “to” (gave them over to, Rom 1:26), “for” (for a catch, Lk 5:4), “so that” (that they might be saved, 2 Thess 2:10), and “because of” (in the name of, Matt 10:41).

In the latter case, Jesus speaks of receiving a prophet “in the name of a prophet,” or because he is a prophet; and receiving a righteous man “in the name of a righteous man,” or because he is a righteous man. Seizing upon this usage, some reason that Peter was admonishing the people to be baptized because they had already been forgiven, and not in order to obtain remission. Let us consider the implications of such a position.

- In such a case, Peter would have announced remission before they had received it.
- The people would have received remission before they had gladly received the Word.
- Remission would have been announced upon the basis of repentance alone.
- Newness of life would have been experienced without being identified with Christ's death, into which death we are "baptized" (Rom 6:3-4).

The meaning of the text is that baptism was the appointed means through which the remission of sins was appropriated. This perfectly agrees with the words of the Lord Jesus Himself. Let it be clear, our doctrine must rest upon Divine utterance, not varied linguistic meanings. Here is what the Head of the church said. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

There are three activities to be considered. Two are done by men, and one is done by God: (1) Believe, (2) Baptized), and (3) Saved. The sequence in which Jesus used these words is beyond question, whether they are considered in Greek or in English. Theologically, men have viewed the appropriation of salvation in at least three different ways – as least as it touches upon this text.

- Believe, be baptized, be saved.
- Believe, be saved, then be baptized.
- Saved by Divine appointment, then believe, and after that be baptized.

There really is no question about this among honest souls. Jesus has spoken plainly, and, as His representative, Peter could not possibly have spoken in contradiction of the One in whose name he was preaching.

I am sure that none of the listeners would have disputed with Peter about whether or not they had to be baptized. After all, this was the only thing they could do perfectly, and it was perfectly doable. Being baptized is one of the very few things men can do with near-perfection. In view of this, it is a marvel that men have chosen to be so contentious about this ordinance, squabbling over its necessity as though it was vague, ambiguous, or not necessary. Men ought to rejoice to submit to be baptized – to have the opportunity to participate in an ordinance to which such marvelous and plenteous benefits are attached.

Keep in mind the magnitude of the sins of which this particular multitude was guilty: taking Jesus, crucifying Him, and killing Him by means of "wicked hands" (2:33). Now Peter announces a salvation so grand and so extensive that even these people can be forgiven! But Peter now provides further incentive to obey.

YOU WILL RECEIVE THE GIFT

“ 38c . . . and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

It is at this point that Peter separates baptism into Christ from John's baptism. The remission of sins is not the unique thing about this baptism, even though extensive arguments have arisen over that matter. John's baptism was also in order to the remission of sins. As it is written, "John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4). And again it is said of John, "And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Luke 3:3). You may recall that those who did not submit to John's baptism are said to have rejected the counsel of God. "And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him "

(Luke 7:29-30). Who is the person willing to affirm that baptism into Christ has less importance than John's baptism? In fact, we do have a record of "certain disciples" who had been baptized "unto John's baptism." When it was determined that they had not been baptized into Christ, and consequently had not received the Holy Spirit, "they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:1-5). This confirms that baptism into Christ supercedes and now even invalidates John's baptism. This verse will lead us to that inevitable conclusion.

YE SHALL RECEIVE

" . . . and ye shall receive . . ." Other versions read, "and you shall receive," NKJV and you will receive," NIV "and you will have . . . given to you," BBE "then you will receive," GWN "so that you may receive," MRD and "then you also shall receive." LIVING

Here is the first promise Peter directly offers to his hearers. He has already told them of Joel's promise that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved" (2:21). However, he has provided no details on the matter of calling upon the name of the Lord . Now, the people are actually calling upon the name of the Lord, and Peter will tell them how salvation will be ministered to them. First, upon their baptism into Christ (Gal 3:27), they will experience "the remission of sins ." That is, the record of their sins will be "blotted out" (Isa 44:22; Acts 3:19), and their conscience will be freed from guilt (Heb 9:14). Now he tells them they will also receive a "gift." This is not a gift that it is possible for them to receive, but is one they will receive. This is not something they ought to receive, but could possibly pass them by. Upon their repentance and baptism, this is what will be given to them by the exalted Christ.

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY GHOST

" . . . the gift of the Holy Ghost." Other versions read, "the gift of the Holy Spirit," NKJV "and you will have the Holy Spirit given to you," BBE "receive the Holy Spirit as a gift," GWN "this gift , the Holy Spirit," LIVING and "the free gift of the Holy Spirit." ALT

Here we see the act of man and the promise of God tied together. Man is given something to do that brings him into the realization of a Divine commitment. This sheds some light on a statement made concerning this great salvation: "And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him" (Heb 5:9). This is not "obedience" as made known under the Law. That obedience had nothing to do with faith, for "the Law does not rest upon faith" NRSV (Gal 3:12). This is an obedience that springs forth from faith. As it is written, "Through Him and for His name's sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people . . .to the obedience that comes from faith" NIV (Rom 1:5).

"The Gift"

Ordinarily, we would think of a gift as something not attached to conditions. Here, however, is a gift from God that is connected with the conditions of repentance and baptism. Those conditions, however, do not produce a merit on the part of men, causing them to deserve the gift. Rather, they bring men into the area in which the gift can be received. Both repentance and baptism have separating qualities. Repentance separates us from the direction in which we lived, turning us around so that we face another goal, and progress toward it. Baptism separates us from the condition and guilt of our past, moving us from death to life, and from a defiled conscience to one that is purged. Now, "the gift" can be received – not because we deserve, but because we are in the place where it can be conferred.

It is to be understood that this gift is essential to salvation. It is not a mere novelty to be enjoyed, like a new possession that has no purposeful utility, but is only used during times of leisure or for purposes of entertainment.

“The Holy Spirit”

The “gift of the Holy Spirit” is the Spirit Himself, not something that He gives. Peter has already identified the enthroned Christ as the Giver: “Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear ” (Acts 2:33). Peter does not turn from his emphasis upon Christ the Giver to the Holy Spirit’s gifts.

This is the promise to which Jesus Himself referred when He said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38). Clarifying this word, the Spirit adds, “(But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive : for the Holy Ghost was not yet given ; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)” (John 7:39). Thus, Jesus spoke of receiving something that was given, and Peter declared the same thing, referring to a gift that was to be received. The Holy Spirit Himself is the gift of reference.

Peter is particularly referring to the prophecy of Joel: “I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28-29). That pouring was never intended for the apostles alone, for they were not “all flesh,” nor were they “sons and daughters.” While they did experience some unique gifts and abilities (Acts 2:43; 5:12; 2 Cor 12:12), the “gift of the Holy Spirit” was not unique to them. Nor, indeed, is there the slightest hint in the prophets of such a thing.

The receiving of the Holy Spirit is something that is common among all who are in Christ Jesus. No one should dispute this, for it is consistently declared.

- “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us ” (Rom 5:5).

- “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His ” (Rom 8:9).

- “For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption , whereby we cry, Abba, Father” (Rom 8:15).

What is there about Christ’s exaltation that suggests He would pour out the Holy Spirit upon twelve men alone, with the purpose of giving them unique abilities that were intended for only a time. How can such a view in any way be termed “Gospel” – and why would Peter declare such a word to a general audience?

“What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God , and ye are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19).

- “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:22).

- “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit ” (2 Cor 5:5).

- “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts , crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

- “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His holy Spirit ” (1 Thess 4:8).

- “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost ” (Heb 6:4).

- “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And

hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us ” (1 John 3:24).

- “Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit ” (1 John 4:13).

Now, I have only cited the texts that affirm those in Christ have, in fact, been given the Holy Spirit. I have not dealt with the various ministries performed through the power of the Spirit, or the sundry abilities that He confers upon men. Those considerations are not common to the household of faith, and our text is speaking of something that is common.

The Spirit that is promised is the same one Jesus had poured out – it was the gift Peter and those with him had received. That is the point of this word. The only meaningfully exposure of these people to the Holy Spirit was taking place before them. Peter had interpreted it by saying it fulfilled the word of Joel, but He is offering to the people the very same Spirit he and the others had received.

Remember, Peter is laying the foundation of the church, and declaring the requirements for induction into Christ. His words cannot be referring to unique experiences, or to ones that were intended to be temporary. Nothing about Christ’s exaltation pertained to temporal conditions. Jesus is permanently out of Hades (2:27a). His body is forever out of the grave (2:27b). He has been raised from the dead to sit on David’s throne (2:30). He is exalted into the heavens for all of time (2:34). He has made Lord and Christ⁵ – invested with all power in heaven and earth for all time (2:36).

What is there about Christ’s exaltation that suggests He would pour out the Holy Spirit upon twelve men alone, with the purpose of giving them unique abilities that were intended for only a time. How can such a view in any way be termed “Gospel” – and why would Peter declare such a word to a general audience?

Now Peter will elaborate on the matter, leaving no doubt concerning what is intended by this word. He will speak with a clarity becoming of the occasion.

THE PROMISE IS TO EVERYONE WHO IS CALLED BY GOD

“ 39a For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”

Peter now dispels all doubt about the applicability of the promise of the Spirit to his listeners. “The promise” of reference is the Holy Spirit. This expression is frequently associated with the sending of the Spirit to those who are in Christ Jesus.

- “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

- “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost , He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

- “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ” (Gal 3:14)

- “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise ” (Eph 1:13).

- “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father , which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not

many days hence. (Acts 1:4-5).

This is not the promise of speaking in tongues, but the promise of giving the Holy Spirit. It is not the promise of miraculous gifts, but of receiving the Holy Spirit of God.

THE PROMISE IS TO YOU AND YOUR CHILDREN

“For the promise is unto you, and to your children . . .” Other versions read, “the promise is for you and your children,” NASB “the promise is for you, for your children,” NRSV “the promise is to you and to your children,” RSV “the word of God is for you and for your children,” BBE “for the promise is made unto you, and to your children,” GENEVA “This promise belongs to you and to your children,” GWN “the promise that was made is for you and your children,” NJB “for Christ promised Him to each one of you . . . and to your children,” LIVING “For the promise [of the Holy Spirit] is to and for you and your children,” AMPLIFIED and “For this great promise is for you and your children.” PHILLIPS

This parallels with Joel’s words, “ your sons . . . your daughters . . . your young men . . . your old men” (2:17; Joel 2:28). This was not an outpouring intended only for the Apostles. That is not what Joel promised, and it is not what Peter preached.

The promise of the Holy Spirit is included in the vast array of promises that were given exclusively to Israel. Thus Paul writes, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises ; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

Once again, I emphasize that Peter is putting down the foundation, opening the door to the Kingdom of God with the “keys” that were given to him (Matt 16:19). His words cannot be viewed in a provincial manner, or as being applicable to a few, and only relating to the initial activities of the church.

The expression “to you and your children” confirms that “the promise” is to all generations of Jews. They only have to meet the conditions to receive it, just as the generation standing before Peter was about to receive it.

This being the case, there is no hint in Peter’s words that Israel would be summarily cut off, and the Gentiles would be grafted in their place. Although some do believe this has happened, this is not at all the case. Peter is not delivering a special Gospel for the Jews alone, but the “truth of the Gospel,” which pertains to all men (Gal 2:5,14; Col 1:5).

Once again, I emphasize that Peter is putting down the foundation, opening the door to the Kingdom of God with the “keys” that were given to him (Matt 16:19). His words cannot be viewed in a provincial manner, or as being applicable to a few, and only relating to the initial activities of the church.

THE PROMISE IS TO ALL WHO ARE AFAR OFF

“ . . . and to all that are afar off . . .” Other versions read, “and to all who are far off,” NASB “for all who are far away,” NRSV “and even to the Gentiles,” NLT “even to those in distant lands,” LIVING and “it is also for people who are far away.” IE

Now Peter, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit announces that this promise is also applicable to other nations, both distant and disassociated with Israel.

These are the “other sheep” of whom Jesus spoke, declaring that He must “bring” them into the

“fold” (John 10:16). Unwittingly, Caiaphas also spoke of this. “And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; and not for that nation only, but that also He should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad ” (John 11:49-52).

The promise of the Gentiles being participants in God’s great salvation was sprinkled throughout the Prophets. Here are a few of the references.

- “His name shall endure for ever: his name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed” (Psa 72:17).
- “ All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name” (Psa 86:9).
- “The LORD hath made known his salvation: his righteousness hath he openly showed in the sight of the heathen. He hath remembered his mercy and his truth toward the house of Israel: all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God” (Psa 98:2-3).

The acceptance of the Gentiles is one of the great aspects of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This was not a reaction to Israel’s rejection of Christ, but was a purpose determined before the foundation of the world, as confirmed by its announcement through the Prophets.

“And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest shall be glorious” (Isa 11:10).

- “Sing unto the LORD a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof ” (Isa 42:10).
- “And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles , that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth ” (Isa 49:6).
- “The LORD hath made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations ; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isa 52:10).
- “The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to Him, beside those that are gathered unto Him ” (Isa 56:8).
- “And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and shall be My people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent Me unto thee” (Zech 2:11).
- “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities : and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD” (Zech 8:20-22).

The acceptance of the Gentiles is one of the great aspects of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. This was not a reaction to Israel’s rejection of Christ, but was a purpose determined before the foundation of the world, as confirmed by its announcement through the Prophets.

EVEN AS MANY AS THE LORD OUR GOD SHALL CALL

“ . . . even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” Other versions read, “as many as the Lord our

God shall call unto Himself,” NASB “everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him,” NRSV “even all those who may be marked out by the Lord our God,” BBE “as many as the Lord our God may call,” DARBY “It belongs to everyone who worships the Lord our God,” GWN “for all those whom the Lord our God is calling to Himself,” NJB “who has been called by the Lord our God,” LIVING and “[even] to and for as many as the Lord our God invites and bids to come to Himself.” AMPLIFIED

Here is an aspect of salvation that is not consistently declared these days. The promise of the Spirit is for “as many as the Lord our God shall call.” This puts the initiation of salvation in the Divine court. It all has to start with Him!

Those in Christ are referred to as “the called” (Rom 1:6), “called to be saints,” Rom 1:7; 1 Cor 1:2;), and “them which are called” (1 Cor 1:24). Those for whom God works everything for good are said to be “called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:29), and those He justifies are said to be “whom He called” (Rom 8:30). The whole church, both Jews and Gentiles are referred to as those “whom He hath called” (Rom 9:24). We have been “called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” NKJV (1 Cor 1:9). We were also “called into the grace of Christ” (Gal 1:6), and “called into liberty” NKJV (Gal 5:13), and “called in one hope of your calling” (Eph 4:4). We have been “called in one body” (Col 3:15), “called” into “His Kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12), “called . . . unto holiness” (1 Thess 4:7), and “called” to “eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). We have even been “called with a holy calling” (1 Tim 1:9), and only those who are “called . . . receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). God is described as “He which hath called you” (1 Pet 1:15) – the One who has “called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9), and “called . . . unto His eternal glory” (1 Pet 5:10).

Those in Christ are admonished to “see your calling” (1 Cor 1:26), and “make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10).

The Meaning of “Call”

We ought to expect any term that is associated with the Lord to be important, and pregnant with meaning. That certainly is true of this word– “call.”

The Greek word from which “call” is translated is **proskale,shtai** (pros-kal-eh-on-tie). Its root meaning is “to call to oneself; to bid to come to oneself,” THAYER and “summon, call in . . . appoint.” FRIBERG

There is a sense in which the call of God can be ignored. The prophets spoke of this – a very real call by God that was really despised.

- “Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? when I called, was there none to answer . . .” (Isa 50:2).
- “Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer ; when I spake, ye did not hear . . .” (Isa 65:12).
- “I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer ; when I spake, they did not hear . . .” (Isa 66:4).
- “. . . I called you, but ye answered not” (Jer 7:13).

In the above sense, “many are called, but few are chosen” (Matt 22:14; 20:16). However, in the above texts from Matthew, a different word is translated “called.” It is not the same as the word used in our text. Matthew uses the word **klhtoi** , (klay-tos), which accents the idea of being “invited.” THAYER

Peter's use of "called" is stronger than an invitation – although there is an invitation inherent in the call. We know this is the case because the promise is to "as many as the Lord our God shall call" – not as many as respond to the call. In this case, those who are "called" DO respond because they have been given "ears to hear" (Deut 29:4; Matt 11:15).

These two uses of the word "call" provide differing views of God's activity man-ward. A "call" that is primarily an invitation views salvation prior to human involvement. That is a call that comes by means of the Gospel: "Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess 2:14).

A "call," in the sense of being effectual, is accounting for human involvement, explaining why they were saved. That view couples the "call" with those to whom the call came being "given" to "believe" (Phil 1:29).

Isaiah prophesied of this latter sense of calling. "I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by my name" (Isa 65:1). The New American Standard Bible reads, "I permitted Myself to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I permitted Myself to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I,' To a nation which did not call on My name."

The words "Behold Me, Behold Me!" speak of the kind of call of which our text speaks. It is the Divine explanation for why God was sought by them that asked not for Him, and was found by those who were not seeking Him. Paul confirms the truth of this grace when he wrote to the Romans, "But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me" (Rom 10:20). This explains why the promise could be made to "as many as the Lord our God shall call." It is not merely that an invitation was offered to those who were not seeking. The Lord declares "I have been found by those who did not seek me; I have shown Myself to those who did not ask for Me." RSV

I want to reiterate that "the promise" is the one Peter declared was being fulfilled at that time – the promise made by Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-18). Peter is providing the rationale behind his words, "and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" NKJV (2:39). Upon repenting and being baptized, his hearers will surely receive this gift because the promise of the Spirit applies to them, and to their children, and even to the Gentiles – "everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him." RSV

Now we again see the utter absurdity of the teaching that says the Spirit was poured out only on the apostles, and was only intended for them. This view contradicts so many facets of the truth it is a marvel that anyone has embraced it.

- The promised Spirit was for all flesh (Joel 2:28a; Acts 2:17a).
- It was for the sons and daughters of the Jews (Joel 2:28b; Acts 2:17b).
- it was for the young men and the old man (Joel 2:28c; Acts 2:17c).
- It was for God's servants and handmaidens (Joel 2:29a; Acts 2:18a).
- It was for the ones now being addressed by Peter (2:39a).
- It was for the children of the ones being addressed by Peter (2:39b).
- It was for the Gentiles, who were afar off (2:39c).
- Ten to fifteen years later, Peter affirms that the very same promise was fulfilled in the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:15).
- Paul affirms that the Spirit has been "poured out abundantly" upon all who are in

Christ Jesus (Tit 3:6).

Truly the promise is to everyone the Lord our God shall call . That is not a word that became obsolete after the day of Pentecost. Throughout the Apostolic writings, the people of God are told of things that are wrought within them through the power of the Holy Spirit. These include love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (Gal 5:22). It includes everything that falls under the categories of “righteousness and truth” (Eph 5:22). The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Spirit (Rom 5:5). It is “through the Spirit” that we mortify the deeds of the body, subduing the sinful nature (Rom 8:13). The Spirit confirms to us that we are the sons of God (Rom 8:16). From within, He helps our infirmities through effectual intercession (Rom 8:26-27). Righteousness, peace, and joy are all realized through Him (Rom 14:17). We “abound in hope” through His power (Rom 15:14). The New Covenant in which presently participate is administered by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:8). He is the One who is changing us from glory to glory, conforming us to the image of God’s Son (2 Cor 3:18). We even obey the truth “through the Spirit” (1 Pet 1:22).

What is there about life in Christ Jesus that does not require an abundant “supply of the Spirit” (Phil 1:19)? What part of the newness of life is independent of the Holy Spirit? Even at the threshold of the experience of salvation, we are washed, sanctified, and justified “ by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

All of these things were neither known by the people nor declared to them by Peter on the day of Pentecost. However, Peter spoke so as to awaken holy expectation. Something significant had happened to Christ’s disciples when the Spirit was poured forth upon them, and it would be no different for those who heard his voice. He did not tell the people how they would react, or what external phenomenon might take place. Peter devoted not so much as a syllable of speech to such things. All of that would have been pointless, for such things are determined by the Lord Himself. He did not tell the people the same outward things they had experienced would also be realized by the hearers. Today, there are some men who are telling people such things, but Peter did not. That was not the manner of his preaching.

Peter has accented Christ Jesus, who is the One pouring forth the Spirit. He told the people the exalted Christ did this (Acts 2:33). Now he assures the people that the pouring, or shedding forth, was not completed. It was for them also.

HE HAD MORE TO SAY

“ 40a And with many other words did he testify and exhort . . .”

Once again, let me remind you that we are being exposed to a man who is filled with the Holy Spirit. His mental and expressive capacities are sanctified, and the Holy Spirit is actually speaking through him – even though Peter is well aware of what he is saying. His spirit has been “joined” to the Lord, and they are “one spirit”

Once again, let me remind you that we are being exposed to a man who is filled with the Holy Spirit. His mental and expressive capacities are sanctified, and the Holy Spirit is actually speaking through him – even though Peter is well aware of what he is saying. His spirit has been “joined” to the Lord, and they are “one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). When He was yet among them, the principle of speaking to which we are now being exposed, was revealed by Jesus. “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak . For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you ” (Matt 10:19-20).

Peter has not been “delivered up,” in the sense of that Matthew text. However, he is standing before the people who took, crucified, and killed Jesus through the hands of lawless men. The Lord

is giving him words to say. He is not doing it in a mechanical and impersonal way. Jesus is rather enabling Peter to correlate Scripture, associate his experience of Jesus with the anticipatory words of the prophets, and consciously speak the mind of the Lord while in perfect accord with it.

We must therefore take Peter's words as a revelation of the mind of the Lord. This is precisely how the Spirit speaks. It is exactly how the Lord of glory thinks. This is not the mere expression of a man, but the words of someone who has been joined to the Lord and knows it.

WITH MANY OTHER WORDS

“And with many other words . . .” Other versions read, “And with much more such words,” BBE “Peter said much more,” GWN “in many other words,” MRD “he spoke to them for a long time using many other arguments,” NJB “then Peter continued preaching for a long time,” NLT “then Peter preached a long sermon,” LIVING “Peter was warning them with many other words,” IE “and with many more appeals,” WEYMOUTH “with many more words he continued,” ISV “and [Peter] solemnly and earnestly witnessed . . . with much more continuous speaking,” AMPLIFIED and “Peter said much more than this.” PHILLIPS

Peter is not finished. The matter salvation is not simplistic and momentary as some have led us to believe. The main objective here is not to make sure the people are baptized – even though that must be done. He will assist the people in discerning the gravity of their situation.

“MANY Other words”

Peter uses “many other words.” The word “many” is a significant one. It indicates a large quantity, yet is not limited to quantity. It comes from the Greek word **plei,osin** (plei-o-sen), which has a root meaning of “numerous, abundant, plenteous,” THAYER “heartily . . . a long time,” UBS “great in degree of comparison.” GINGRICH The word also implies “greater in quality, superior, more excellent.” STRONG’S It incorporates the idea of “further” STRONG’S – that is, Peter developed the thought extensively more.

This is an aspect of “reasoning” – being able to take a thought and develop it further, showing the full sense of it, so that a fuller perspective comes within reach of the hearer. The modern church is especially weak in the area of reasoning with words. You may recall that when Paul spoke to Felix he “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). The result was that Felix “trembled,” and asked Paul to leave. Oh, that those who profess to be preachers and teachers were more adept in the holy art of “reasoning” on the things of God! Such an activity will often call for “many more words.”

A Modern Situation

I have often heard some question whether or not people knew what they were doing when they were baptized. Of course, no person who has “obeyed the form of the doctrine” delivered to them knew at that time what he now knows of his baptism (Rom 6:17). The original sincerity of the individual is not to be determined by the level of understanding that is realized after years of growth.

Perhaps one way to ensure an acceptable level of sincerity, is to use the “many other words” method. Rather than attempting quick and easy conversions with a minimal amount of effort on the part of the speaker, and abbreviated thinking on the part of the hearer, why not make every effort to clarify the real situation of the hearer?

Behold how the man who is filled with the Spirit speaks. This will, in part, account for the response that will be realized.

TESTIFY AND EXHORT

“ . . . did he testify and exhort . . .” Other versions read, “testified and kept on exhorting,” NASB “he warned them and pleaded with them,” NIV “many other arguments and exhorted them,” NRSV “he gave them his witness , offering them salvation,” BBE “testified and strongly urged them,” CSB “bore witness and continued to exhort them,” ESV “he besought and exhorted them,” GENEVA “he testified to them, and entreated of them,” MRD “ strongly urging all of his listeners,” NLT “he was encouraging them,” IE “ solemnly warned and entreated them,” WEYMOUTH “he continued to bear testimony , and kept entreating them,” MONTGOMERY “warned (reproved, advised , encouraged) them,” AMPLIFIED “he gave his testimony and implored them,” PHILLIPS and “urgently warning and urging .” ALT

To testify means to “earnestly, religiously to charge . . . to attest, testify to, solemnly affirm,” THAYER “earnestly ask, strongly tell, strongly urge, insist,” FRIBERG “declare solemnly and emphatically, charge under solemn oath,” UBS “to make a serious declaration on the basis of presumed personal knowledge,” LOUW-NIDA and “to be in earnest.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

You see, then, with what vigor Peter speaks to the people. He is at once solemn, emphatic, and earnest. He affirms, insists, and urges. There is no casualness in his words. The content, tone, and manner of his speech all convey the ideas of importance and urgency.

The word “exhort” is also a significant one, denoting pressing the issue upon the hearers. It has a lexical meaning of “call for, summon . . . entreaty . . . admonish,” THAYER “speaking with persistence, earnestly ask for, implore, urge,” FRIBERG and “to plead for, earnest request, appeal.” LOUW-NIDA

Again, behold the manner in which Peter speaks, calling for action, summoning, admonishing, imploring, urging, and earnestly persisting. He does not leave his hearers with the slightest suggestion that what he has affirmed can be ignored, or that an immediate response is not essential. He knows he is dealing with people who have unwittingly been the vassals of the devil. He is sensitive of the fact that such people must be snatched from the fire, and that the laborer who does so must show mercy, being “mixed with fear” NIV (Jude 1:23). He has not proclaimed an alternative Gospel, but the only one that is invested with Divine power (Rom 1:16). He has not declared a Savior that is one of many, but One who is the “only Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). There is only one acceptable response to such a Redeemer, and it must not be delayed.

Oh, the utter bane of shallow and frothy approaches to evangelism that leave men thinking they can delay to “repent and be baptized!” May the Lord remove from men all gospels that leave people thinking they can delay to obey the Gospel. There is no place in earnest appeals for the souls of men for levity, casualness, and intellectual novelty! Our text confirms this is the case, so there is no need to argue the point.

Is there a thinking man in all the world that imagines Peter could have done better with a video presentation? Would he have been wiser to have couched his presentation in a modern scenario of life, or filled it with contemporary illustrations? How would he have fared if he had presented only the introduction to Gospel, and asked the people to come back tomorrow so they could hear the rest? To some, all of that may seem like pointless chatter. However, it is my firm persuasion that the modern gurus of evangelism have not improved on the approach of Peter.

Candidly, I am angry at those who have handled this text in a cursory manner, and have taught others to do the same. I am angry because I myself was a victim of their misguided and uninformed manners. Like the religious leaders of Jesus’ day, they have muddied the waters and blocked the door of entrance to the Kingdom of God (Matt 23:13)! My personal persuasion is that Peter would

not be welcomed in the average church. If that is true then Jesus is not welcomed either (Luke 10:16).

SAVE YOURSELVES FROM THIS UNTOWARD GENERATION

“ 40b . . . saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.”

Luke will now give a summation of Peter’s extended words. This is the matter concerning which he delivered “many other words.” it was the point concerning which he testified and exhorted, speaking persistently, with great urgency, and with imploring tones.

SAVE YOURSELVES

“ . . . saying, Save yourselves . . .” Other versions read, “Be saved,” NKJV “come out,” BBE “live ye from,” MRD and “escape from,” WEYMOUTH

This escape is from a generation – a generation that is headed in the wrong direction, and is destined for condemnation.

Peter’s words will make no sense to a Babylonian, or someone at home in the nominal church. But they are serious words. Even the sound of them arrests our attention. “SAVE YOURSELVES!”

Here, the word “save” does not mean to remit sins, be justified, or raised from death in trespasses and sins. This is something assigned to men, and it is to be done. Peter will be specific in his use these words. Let me first establish what “save” means. This is not a simplistic thing that does not relate to actual life. I know that for some, salvation, or being saved, is nothing more than a theory, with no real substance to it.

The word “save” comes from a word with this lexical meaning: “to keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger and destruction . . . to bring safe forth from . . . save from evils that obstruct,” THAYER “to deliver, to rescue, to make safe,” LOUW-NIDA and “escape to a place,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

There are two perspectives seen in the word “save.” First, what one is saved from , and second, what one is saved to . Speaking of salvation in general, we are saved:

- From sin to righteousness.
- From death to life.
- From Satan to Christ.
- From condemnation to justification.
- From the power of Satan to God.
- From darkness to light.
- From vanity to purpose.
- From bondage to freedom.
- From deception to illumination.
- From alienation to reconciliation.
- From uselessness to sanctification.
- From enmity to fellowship.
- From having no part to obtaining an inheritance.

In this text, the emphasis is placed on the “from” – what we are saved from. There is a further emphasis on human involvement, so that the meaning of saved is synonymous with ESCAPE. Here we are speaking of getting away from, coming out of, departing, running away, and fleeing. There is a realm in which unspeakable danger – yea, eternal jeopardy – exists! Peter calls upon his listeners to get out of that realm – escape from it, flee from it, depart from it. “SAVE YOURSELVES!”

FROM THIS UNTOWARD GENERATION

“ . . . from this untoward generation.” Other versions read, “this perverse generation,” NKJV “this corrupt generation,” NIV “this crooked generation,” RSV “this evil generation,” BBE “froward generation,” GENEVA “the evils of the nation,” LIVING “this twisted generation of people,” IE “that crooked age,” WILLIAMS “this crooked (perverse, wicked, unjust) generation,” AMPLIFIED “this perverted generation,” PHILLIPS and “this wicked people.” GNB

And what is it from which they are to save themselves? It is not from sin, for Jesus alone can for that! It is not from condemnation, for they must be “delivered” from that. It is not from the power of darkness, for that is work the Lord alone can accomplish (Col 1:13).

This escape is from a generation – a generation that is headed in the wrong direction, and is destined for condemnation.

“Generation”

Precisely what is a generation? A generation refers to one’s nativity or birth (Gen 31:3; Matt 1:17). It is a people who are of the same stock, having been begotten by a common father – a family (Matt 17:17; Mk 9:19). It can be a race of men, or a multitude of people living at the same time (Matt 24:34; Mk 13:30; Lk 1:48). It can also refer to an age, or period of time (Acts 14:16; Eph 3:5; Col 1:26).

There are entire periods of time that are especially noted for evil – like the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:20; Gen 3:5,11,13). There are whole groups of people who are noted for their wickedness – like Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20; 19:13). There is a generation that is noted for cursing father and mother, being pure in their own eyes though not washed from their filthiness, who are lofty in their own eyes (Prov 30:11-14). God was especially grieved with a whole generation of Israelites (Psa 95:10).

God said there were generations who hated Him (Ex 20:5; Deut 5:9). Asaph the psalmist spoke of a generation who “set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God” (Psa 78:8). Jeremiah spoke of a generation associated with God’s wrath (Jer 7:29). John the Baptist and Jesus spoke of a “generation of vipers” (Matt 3:7; 12:34). Jesus spoke of an “adulterous and sinful generation” (Mk 8:38).

It is imperative that a person comprehends the kind of generation in which he is living. David spoke of a generation that sought God (Psa 24:6). He also mentioned “the generation of the upright” (Psa 112:2), and “one generation” that would praise God’s works “to another” generation (Psa 145:4). What kind of people are you identified with? To what “generation” do you willfully belong?

“Untoward”

An “untoward” generation is one that is directionally crooked, curved, and headed in the wrong direction. Morally and spiritually it is a perverse, wicked, unfair, surly, and froward generation. STRONG’S An “untoward generation” is opposed to God, and thus chooses its own way over the ways of God. The thoughts and ways of such a generation contradict the thoughts and ways of God,

and are set in opposition to Him. Given the opportunity to do so, there is nothing such a generation will not do to maintain its own wicked preferences. Untoward generations have yielded men who killed their own brother (Gen 4:8), those who murmured against Moses (Ex 16:2), and others who killed the Prophets (Matt 23:31). There have been others who “killed the prince of life” (Acts 3:15), stoned Stephen (Acts 7:59), and took a vow not to eat until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12). Those who seek the Lord must escape from such a generation, saving themselves from it.

Noah lived in such a generation, and therefore had to escape from it. By faith he “prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb 11:7), saving himself from an untoward generation. Angelic messengers from the Lord urged Lot to save himself from an untoward generation, saying, “Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed” (Gen 19:17).

Those to whom Peter was speaking were part of an untoward religious generation. They honored God “with their lips, but their heart was far from” Him (Matt 23:8). Using “many other words,” Peter urged his listeners to come out from that generation – to separate themselves from it, thus saving themselves from its dreadful destiny.

By repenting, they were turning around, forsaking the direction of the “untoward generation,” and having no more to do with it. Their hearts and minds would now be set in another direction, and affections set on things above. They were thus turning from their way “to God” (Acts 26:20), for repentance is “toward God” (Acts 20:21). By being baptized, they were becoming “dead to sin” by virtue of being baptized into Christ’s death (Rom 6:3,11). Thus they would be escaping from the world, which lies “under the sway of the wicked one,” NKJV and is therefore condemned (1 John 5:19). This, of course, would bring them into accord with the will of God, which moved Jesus to give Himself “for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).

In our deliverance from the world, we are given something to do, just as Israel was given when they were saved out of the land of Egypt. The Holy Spirit speaks of that great deliverance after this manner.

- “ . . . the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt” (Jude 1:5).
- “ I brought up Israel out of Egypt, and delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all kingdoms, and of them that oppressed you” (1 Sam 10:18).
- “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself ” (Ex 19:4).
- “And they departed from Rameses in the first month, on the fifteenth day of the first month; on the morrow after the passover the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians” (Num 33:3).
- “And Moses told his father in law all that the LORD had done unto Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, and all the travail that had come upon them by the way, and how the LORD delivered them ” (Ex 18:8).

And yet, there was a sense in which Israel saved themselves from Egypt – by doing the things God required of them. I trust you have not forgotten the extensiveness of their involvement in the deliverance. Here are some of their activities.

- Killed the passover lamb (Ex 12:21).
- Placed the blood of the lamb upon their doorposts, on the side and on the top (Ex 12:7-7).

While it may not be popular to do so, it seems to me that there is a need to make the people

more aware of the jeopardy of remaining connected to an “untoward generation.” The church must make much of this facet of salvation to our generation. If the revealed will of God is to “deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), then bringing the world into the church is a most serious transgression.

- Roasted the passover lamb and made unleavened bread (Ex 12:8).
- Ate the passover lamb, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs (Ex 12:8-10).
- Girded themselves, and held their staffs in their hands (Ex 12:11).
- Spoiled the Egyptians, gathering gold, silver, and clothing (Ex 12:35).
- Carried their bread-dough, and bound their kneading troughs in their clothing upon their shoulders (Ex 12:34).
- Took their flocks, and herds, “even very much cattle” (Ex 12:38).
- Baked unleavened cakes and brought them out of Egypt (Ex 12:39).

Now, Peter calls upon people to engage in activities associated with deliverance from sin, and thus separate themselves from the “untoward generation” among whom they found themselves.

What About Today

While it may not be popular to do so, it seems to me that there is a need to make the people more aware of the jeopardy of remaining connected to an “untoward generation.” The church must make much of this facet of salvation to our generation. If the revealed will of God is to “deliver us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), then bringing the world into the church is a most serious transgression. If men are allowed in the church while holding on to worldly manners and values, then we must treat this word from Peter – a man filled with Spirit, as though it has no relevance for the people of our time. God will not treat lightly those who so blatantly impose their corrupted wills upon us. Such people are a blotch on the church, and must be thrust from it.

THEY THAT GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD

“41a Then they that gladly received his word were baptized . . .”

How will such an uncompromising word be received by the people? They have been charged with killing Christ, even though He was approved by God in their very midst by incontestable miracles, wonders, and signs. Peter has called upon them to repent, turning from their wicked ways, and to be baptized for the remission of their sins. Now, what will they do?

THEY THAT GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD

“Then they that gladly received his word . . .” Other versions read, “So then, those who had received his word,” NASB “those who accepted the message,” NIV “those who welcomed his message,” NRSV “those who gave hearing to his words,” BBE “those who accepted what Peter said,” GWN “some of them readily received his discourse,” MRD “accepted what he said,” NJB “believed what Peter said,” NLT “who joyfully welcomed his Message,” WEYMOUTH “those who accepted and welcomed his message,” AMPLIFIED and “the ones gladly welcoming His Word.” LITV

You will note that a number of the later translations omit the word “gladly.” Here again, we are faced with differing manuscripts, and the human choice of the later manuscripts over the earlier ones – and the earliest ones are still around 300-400 A.D.

Let us take the word that is common to all accepted manuscripts – the one translated “received.”

The Greek word is **avpodexa,menoi** (ap-od-ekh-om-enoi). The accepted lexical meaning of this word is, “accept what is offered, to receive with joy, to receive into the mind with assent, to approve,” THAYER and “welcome, receive favorably . . . recognize, acknowledge, praise for.” FRIBERG

Even if we had no access to manuscripts and lexicons, we should know that it is the peculiar quality of faith to joyfully receive. Would anyone care to postulate that God would honor someone who reluctantly received – if there is such a thing in Christ Jesus. Can one welcome and receive something from God with bitterness of soul and chaffing of spirit? And, where is there an example of such a thing in Christ Jesus?

I have taken the time to briefly mention this matter because of the text itself. Peter has not spoken casually, but forthrightly. He has not made suggestions, but earnestly pled for an immediate and uncompromising response. I do not believe it is possible to receive such words without gladness. The prospect of the conscience being purged from such guilt as taking, crucifying, and slaying Jesus could not but produce gladness in the hearts of those hearing this word.

Thus, the Spirit has done His work of conviction, or reproving, just as Jesus said He would. “And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).

- OF SIN – “because they believe not on Me” (John 16:9). That is, they did not believe on Jesus even though God had clearly approved of Him. They did not believe on Jesus even though He “went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:39). They did not believe on Him, even though no one could convince Him of sin, or find a legitimate fault in Him (John 8:46; 18:38).

- OF RIGHTEOUSNESS – “because I go to My Father and ye see Me no more” (John 16:10). That is, the Father received and welcomed Him, enthroning Him at His right hand. That substantiated that He was, in fact, righteous. In fact, He is “the Righteous One” (1 John 2:1).

- OF JUDGMENT – “because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11). This was confirmed in the fact that it was not possible for Jesus to be held in realms of the dead, or by him who “had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). Jesus thoroughly and unquestionably overcame the devil, even at His own weakest point (2 Cor 13:4). No person aligned with the devil will be able to avoid being cast into the lake of fire with him.

And what do people do when they “gladly receive” the Word? They joyfully yield to it, and that with great expectation.

WERE BAPTIZED

“ . . . were baptized . . . ” Other versions read, “had baptism,” BBE and “were immersed.” IE

Here we are confronted with the first act of obedience to the Gospel. If those who “obey not the Gospel” will suffer the vengeance of Christ (2 Thess 1:8), then what do you suppose the prospects are of those who obey it? They were baptized just like Peter had commanded them to be – as those who had repented, and for the remission of their sins. No one contested what Peter had said. Furthermore, it is obvious that his extended words buttressed what he had told them to do, so that it made perfect sense to “be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (2:38).

The first visible response of the people was not praying, but being baptized – and that is a matter of record – inspired record. Under the conditions of Pentecost, it would have been out of order to pray for salvation.

THREE THOUSAND SOULS WERE ADDED

“ 41b . . . and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”

This is still the day that started with the disciples being together with one accord and in one place. It is obvious that Divine blessing has an impact on how people consider “time.” So far as the record is concerned, no one is discontent with the nature or length of the meeting.

We do not know the time of day at this time. When Peter commenced speaking, it was only the third hour of the day – nine O’clock in the morning. We know that Peter said “many other words,” and the preaching went on for “a long time,” NJB with Peter preaching “a long sermon.” NLT This is “long” by Jewish definition, not by the American church. In Nehemiah’s day, when an awakening took place, the people spent half a day (eight hours) in sacred activity. They heard the priests read “in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God” (Neh 9:3). Earlier, Ezra had read the book of the Law to everyone who “could hear with understanding” “from the morning unto midday” (Neh 8:2-3). I find it difficult to conceive of the announcement of a glorified and saving Jesus to have less of an impact upon the people than revivals under the Law, which had a diminishing glory, as compared to the greater glory of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:8-11).

THE SAME DAY

“ . . . and the same day . . . ” Other versions read, “ that day,” NKJV “ on that day,” MRD “that very day,” NJB “on that one day,” WEYMOUTH and “on that day alone .” PHILLIPS

This is still the day that started with the disciples being together with one accord and in one place. It is obvious that Divine blessing has an impact on how people consider “time.” So far as the record is concerned, no one is discontent with the nature or length of the meeting. Of course, this was an epochal day, and it is fitting that a lot is accomplished in it.

THREE THOUSAND SOULS

“ . . . there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” Other versions read, “three thousand were added to their number,” NIV “three thousand persons were added,” NRSV “three thousand souls were joined to them,” BBE “3,000 people were added to them,” CSB “there were added to the church about three thousand souls,” GENEVA “about 3,000 people were added to the group .” GWN “about 3,000 in all ,” NLT “three thousand persons united with them that day,” WILLIAMS and “about three thousand souls were added to the number of disciples .” PHILLIPS

The last known number that were said to have been “together” was one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15). Now, in a single day, the number of disciples swells to at least 3,120, for 3,000 were “added” to their number. That is a 2600% increase! In other words, at the end of the day, there were 26 times as many disciples than there were at the beginning!

Isaiah prophesied of this time, when Zion travailed and brought forth children. “Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God” (Isa 66:8-9). Notice the holy reasoning.

- No one had ever heard of such a thing. “Who hath heard such a thing?”
- Can the earth produce a harvest in a single day? “Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? ”
- Can a nation be born at once, or suddenly? “ . . . or shall a nation be born at once?”

- As soon as travail began, the birth was consummated. “. . . for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.”

- Does God cause the infant to mature in the womb, and yet no birth take place? “Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God.”

Indeed, in this single day, a nation was born within a nation, and a people were produced where there had been no indication of hope. We shout with the Psalmist, “This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23).

ANOTHER CONSIDERATION

Indeed, in this single day, a nation was born within a nation, and a people were produced where there had been no indication of hope. We shout with the Psalmist, “This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes”

There is something else to be noted here – something that confirms the superiority of the New Covenant. When the Law was given from Sinai, people did not “gladly receive the word.” Instead, the people called for Aaron to make them an idol, to which they ascribed their deliverance from Egypt. Indignant with the reprehensible sight Moses called out, “Who is on the LORD'S side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him” (Ex 32:26). These were to Moses what the eleven were to Peter, standing with him. What will Moses have them do? You that would serve God under a system of law, hear what Moses said. “Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor” (Ex 32:27). There is the first record of the law working wrath, just as Paul said it did: “Because the law worketh wrath” (Rom 4:15).

The outcome of that dreadful day is recorded for our admonition “upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11). “And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men ” (Ex 32:28). Thus, when the Law was given, and in keeping with its nature, “about three thousand died.” But on this day, when the risen Christ “shed forth” the Holy Spirit upon His disciples, three thousand were made alive: “and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). They are said to have been “added” when they “gladly received his word” and “were baptized.”

Peter and those with him reaped here where others had sown, including John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Himself. They also reaped where Holy Spirit had done His work, and where the reigning Christ had shed forth His Holy spirit.

IT DID NOT STOP THERE

“ 42 And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

For many, this would have been enough: long preaching, and three thousand souls added. “Let the names be added to the roles, and life continue on as it had been before” – that is how the flesh thinks. But that is not how these people thought. Remember, we are being exposed to the real work of God. We have been exposed to how men speak when they are filled with the Holy Spirit. We have seen the focus of Spirit-filled men. We have also witnessed how people initially respond who gladly receive the Word. However, it did not end there. The Spirit will witness concerning the ongoing effects of people having their sins forgiven and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit.

THEY CONTINUED STEADFASTLY

“And they continued steadfastly . . .” Other versions read, “were continually devoting themselves to,” NASB “devoted themselves to,” NIV “kept their attention fixed on,” BBE “persevered in,” DARBY “were persevering in,” DOUAY “continued in,” GENEVA “remained faithful to,” NJB “joined with other believers in regular attendance at,” LIVING “the believers dedicated themselves to,” IE “were constant in listening in,” WEYMOUTH “steadfastly persevered,” AMPLIFIED “continued steadily learning,” PHILLIPS and “spent their time .” GNB

Newness of life does not ebb and flow, moving back and forth, and up and down. It is not erratic, wandering here and there, characterized by inconsistency, and blowing hot and cold. Admittedly, these characteristics are found within the professing church, but not in the one that Jesus is building.

The expression “continued steadfastly” comes from a single Greek word – **proskarterou/ntej** (pros-kar-ter-oon-tez). Lexically it means, “to persevere in anything, to give constant attention to a thing . . . to adhere . . . to be devoted or constant . . . steadfastly attentive unto, to give unremitting care to a thing . . . to continue all the time,” THAYER “to persist at, stay by... occupy oneself diligently with, pay persistent attention to, persevere in,” FRIBERG “keep close company with,” UBS “to continue to do something with intense effort, with the possible implication of despite difficulty, to keep on,” LOUW-NIDA “to persist obstinately,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “spend much time in,” LEH “busy oneself with, be busily engaged in be devoted to.” GINGRICH

For these believers, the day of Pentecost was a start, not a consummation. Continuing steadfastly involved persistence, faithfulness, devotion, and constant attention. It included, intensity, keeping on, and spending a lot of time. For these people, in rising to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:34), everything had become new, and old things passed away (2 Cor 5:17). They did not simply add something new to their lives, like seasoning to a pot of soup. In fact, they threw out the old pot, and began consuming something new!

The things in which these brethren “continued steadfastly” are of note. This is the beginning of the church. It is the time when the Spirit was first “shed forth” by the exalted Christ. It is the time when the proper foundation was put in place, and the right perspective of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ was declared. There was not contamination at this point, no diversion, and no corruption. This was to the new creation what Adam was to the natural creation. Ulterior motives had not yet been developed, and the old serpent was reeling from his absolute defeat. If ever the focus was right, it was at the time of our text.

What will the people conclude from the things they have heard? Where will they place their emphasis. What will be precious to them? How will they conduct their lives, and what will be the center of those lives?

Four pivotal considerations are mentioned: the apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers. What is not mentioned is impressive. Among the things NOT mentioned are praise, worship, soul winning, counseling, entertainment, higher education, missions, church planting, training, and family activities. It is not that any of these things are wrong, and God forbid that this impression be found among us. We are speaking of focus here – of main things, primary activities, and key involvements. These are matters in which the greatest benefits were found, and where the most genuine profit was realized.

Because these will be developed at length in the remainder of the book, I will only introduce them here. Two things will be obvious to you. First, how important these things were to the brethren of that time, and second, how relatively unimportant they are to brethren in our time.

IN THE APOSTLE’S’ DOCTRINE

“ . . . in the apostles' doctrine. . .” Other versions read, “apostles’ teaching,” NASB “teaching

and fellowship of the apostles,” ASV/DARBY “”doctrine of the apostles ,” DOUAY “ teachings of the apostles,” NAB “ instruction and fellowship of the apostles,” AMPLIFIED and “ learning from the apostles.” GNB

The Spirit has revealed that the church is “ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone” (Eph 2:20). The “prophets” of reference are those who “testified before hand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:10-11). The Apostles, guided by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), correlated the prophets with the words of Jesus, declaring that what was promised was fulfilled in Christ the Lord. Apostles have been “set,” or placed, “first” in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28). God especially made known to them the “mystery of Christ” which had been kept secret from the foundation of the world (Eph 3:4-5). What they said was of such importance that Peter, who is the speaker in our text, once wrote, “That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior ” (2 Pet 3:2).

The “apostles’ doctrine” is what they taught – their teaching, or core doctrine. That “doctrine” particularly had to do with Christ, and is therefore referred to as “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9). They were chosen to establish the truth of God among men, and are therefore depicted as the “twelve foundations” of the glorified church (Rev 21:14).

By continuing steadfastly in “the apostles’ doctrine,” these new converts resorted continually to them. They were like fountains of living water, opening the truth of salvation to the people, clarifying the prophecies of Christ, confirming His centrality, and showing how spiritual life centers in and relies solely upon Him.

Wherever there is a body of people who claim to be followers of Jesus, yet who do not continue steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, acquainting themselves with what they have delivered to the people, we have a sort of spiritual freak on our hands. When professing Christians are unacquainted with apostolic doctrine, a kind of spiritual crisis exists. The Apostles have been placed “first in the church,” which is built upon the foundation they have put in place (Eph 2:20). If men entertain ideas about Christ, salvation, grace, truth, the church, and the world to come that have not been spoken by the Apostles, then there is no possibility that they are right – not at all!

Imagine yourself with the responsibility of determining the spiritual IQ of church people concerning the following the books. Romans, First and Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First and Second Thessalonians, First and Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, First and Second Peter, First, Second, and Third John, Jude, and Revelation. These all contain apostolic doctrine. Yet, there is a remarkable level of ignorance in nearly every American church concerning them. Think how very few people know anything at all about key points of apostolic doctrine: atonement, justification, sanctification, appropriating righteousness, the resurrection of the dead, the intercession of Jesus, the gift of the Holy Spirit, our eternal inheritance, the depravity of the flesh, the new birth, the new covenant, being in Christ, and a host of other themes.

Somewhere between the time of our text and now, the professing church has stopped continuing in the apostles’ doctrine, and the results of that abandonment are well know to every person who is in fellowship with Christ.

IN FELLOWSHIP

spiritual life that places no value on saints meeting together? We are not talking of meeting to play, like Israel did at the foot of Mount Sinai (1 Cor 10:7). If the Lord has put us in a body, precisely what defense can be presented for not meeting together? Of what value is a segmented body?

“ . . . and fellowship” . . .” Other versions read, “and to the fellowship,” NIV “were united together,” BBE “in the communication,” DOUAY “and were associated together,” MRD “to the brotherhood,” NJB “teaching sessions,” LIVING “sharing with each other,” IE “to fellowship with one another,” WILLIAMS “and joined in their fellowship,” PHILLIPS and “taking part in the fellowship.” GNB

From the very beginning, believers – real believers – have been attracted to one another. In fact, that is one of the evidences that they have passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14). Jesus said this is a point in which being His disciple is confirmed (John 13:35). Before Pentecost the disciples “assembled together” (Acts 1:4,5). On the day of Pentecost they “with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). As soon as what was happening was “noised abroad, the multitude came together” (2:6). Now, with an exponential growth, they all continue steadfastly, persevering “in fellowship,” in honor “preferring one another” (Rom 12:10). Jesus said where two or three were “gathered together” in His name, He was “in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20). Now the people are intense about meeting together. They will be found “together” in the Temple and “from house to house” (Acts 2:46).

What can be said of an approach to spiritual life that places no value on saints meeting together? We are not talking of meeting to play, like Israel did at the foot of Mount Sinai (1 Cor 10:7). If the Lord has put us in a body, precisely what defense can be presented for not meeting together? Of what value is a segmented body?

The truth of the matter is that heaven takes note of the people of God when they meet together (Mal 3:16-17). Jesus meets with them (Matt 18:20). The “power of our Lord Jesus Christ” is there (1 Cor 5:4). Such times can be an occasion when “great grace” us upon us all (Acts 4:33). Then is when we can especially comfort and edify one another (1 Thess 5:11). Early believers were devoted to continuing steadfastly in fellowship – sharing, communing, and bringing profit to one another.

IN BREAKING OF BREAD

“ . . . and in breaking of bread. . .” Other versions read, “taking of broken bread,” BBE “in breaking the eucharist,” MRD “the Communion services,” LIVING “to eating,” IE “attendance at the Communion,” WEYMOUTH “to the breaking of bread [including the Lord’s Supper],” AMPLIFIED and “breaking of the loaves.” MKJV

Some people do not believe this pertains to the Lord’s Supper. They say this simply had to do with sharing meals with one another. However, how can we justifying simply eating together being joined with the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, and prayer? If men meet only for this purpose, what do they do with the Pauline admonition, “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord’s supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not” (1 Cor 11:22). Let us have done with foolish teaching. It has no place in the body of Christ!

And what of those multitudes of disciples who do not continue steadfastly in this ordinance? Either they have not been taught correctly, or they have “counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith” they “were sanctified, an unholy thing”

Early disciples “came together” on “the first day of the week” to “break bread” (Acts 20:7). Do some imagine that this means they came together only to have a common meal? In a pointed statement about breaking bread Paul wrote, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). These early believers did not focus their lives on themselves, meeting as

friends and neighbors. Men ought to be able to conclude this with no difficulty on the basis of at least two revealed points.

- First, we know no man after, or according to, the flesh. “Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh : yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more” (2 Cor 5:16).

- Second, we do not live for ourselves but for the Lord Jesus Christ. “And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves , but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15).

Jesus said, “this do in remembrance of Me” (Lk 22:19). Jesus also told His disciples, “teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19). Paul taught the Corinthians about this matter (1 Cor 11:23-29). It is obvious that Peter and the apostles also taught these converts on the subject. That is precisely why they “continued steadfastly” in “the breaking of bread.”

And what of those multitudes of disciples who do not continue steadfastly in this ordinance? Either they have not been taught correctly, or they have “counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith” they “were sanctified, an unholy thing” (1 Cor 10:29).

IN PRAYERS

“ . . . and in prayers.” Other versions read, “ to prayer,” NASB “the prayers,” NRSV “and prayer meetings,” LIVING and “to times of prayer.” ISV

There is something about praying together that brings benefits that can be realized in no other way. Take the early church as an example. When threatened by the religious bigots of their day, Peter and John, “being let go, they went to their own company , and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.” Together, and “with one accord,” “they lifted up their voice to God.” what an occasion it must have been, and what fervency must have exuded from their tongues as they presented their case to God. They prayed with insight and intent, correlating Scripture with circumstance, and asking the Lord to look upon the threats of their foes, and grant themselves “that with all boldness they may speak the Thy word.” Together they asked the Lord to do this by stretching forth His hand “to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy Child Jesus.” It is written that “when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and 1 they were all filled with the Holy Ghost , and 2 they spake the word of God with boldness . And 3 the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul : neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; 4 but they had all things common . And 5 with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus : and 6 great grace was upon them all ” (Acts 4:33). That is but one example of the potency of those with one heart and soul praying for proper things at the proper time.

The converts of our text continued steadfastly in prayers, confirming the awareness of absolute dependency upon the Lord Jesus , who alone is “Head over all things,” and has been given in that capacity “to the church” (Eph 1:20-23).

. CONCLUSION

We have seen the marvelous effects of people being “endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49). This is what happens when men are guided into all truth, and are shown “things to come” (John 16:13). We have beheld the “power of God unto salvation” brought to bear upon men as a result of preaching the Gospel (Rom 1:16). We have witnessed how men react when they have, in fact, been convicted of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). We have been privy to how men speak when they are Christ’s witnesses (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8). We have also been exposed to

what is involved in calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21). We have been shown how to speak to the guilty, and what to say to the convicted. Our ears have heard, and our hearts have pondered, how people live in newness of life (Acts 2:42).

Whatever men may say about preaching, conviction, duration, counsel, and the likes, what we have seen in this text is the real thing. It is something by which all other contemporary activity can be measured, evaluated, and appropriately accepted or rejected.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #12

THE EFFECT OF CONVERSION

“ 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, 47 Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. ” (Acts 2:33-47)

INTRODUCTION

The impact of truth upon the human spirit is staggering to consider. Upon knowing, or apprehending, “the truth of the Gospel,” the character of the individual is reshaped – the consequence of being born again. When one makes the Divinely accomplished transition from “the power of darkness” to “the Kingdom of” God’s “dear Son,” life in all of its aspects becomes radically different . A purported conversion that leaves the individual fundamentally the same is no conversion at all. A person cannot be made “new,” yet remain basically “old.” Sins cannot be remitted and the Holy Spirit given without it impacting on a person’s perspective, focus, and reason for living. That is why conversion is referred to as being raised from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1). While the measure of a person’s change may not appear the same, the fact of it will be evident. This is why the liberated souls of our text begin doing what no code could

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- **MANY SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE DONE (2:43b)**
- **THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER (2:44a)**
- **THE ABSENCE OF A COVETOUS SPIRIT (2:45)**
- **DAILY CONTINUANCE (2:46a)**
- **BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE (2:46a)**
- **EATING WITH GLADNESS AND SINGLENESS OF HEART (2:46b)**
- **PRAISING GOD (2:47a)**
- **HAVING FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE (2:47b)**
- **ADDITIONS EVERY DAY (2:47c)**
- **CONCLUSION**

make them do. They began fulfilling the righteousness of the Law (Rom 8:2).

BABYLON'S CONTRIBUTION

Babylon the Great, that spiritual monstrosity that is noted for its fornication and opposition to the saints (Rev 17:5-6; 18:2-3), has promoted a religion that does not involve a radical moral and spiritual change. In fact, it is exceedingly difficult in our country to distinguish believers from unbelievers. From within the church itself, it is often confessed that those in the world often have more comely observable traits than those who profess to be members of the body of Christ. While care must be taken not to overemphasize appearance, it must be made clear that an ungodly appearance strongly suggests, if not outrightly proves, an ungodly character.

ABOUT APPEARANCE

When Jesus spoke of not being deceived by appearance, He was not speaking of a wicked and worldly appearance, but of a comely appearance that was nothing more than simulation. "Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity" (Mat 23:28). He never suggested that a person who was genuinely godly could appear as though they were ungodly, and a person who had been delivered from the world could continue to look as though that had not occurred. This is precisely why Paul solemnly admonished believers "abstain from ALL appearance of evil" (1 Thess 5:22). Speaking of our outward manners, it is also written, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor 10:32). And again, "Giving no offence in any thing" (2 Cor 6:3). And again, "Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men" (2 Cor 8:21).

It is out of order for any professing Christian to ask other believers to overlook their carnality, or not judge them for uncomely manners. Not knowing men "after the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16a) does not suggest that we ignore ungodly conduct and manners. We do not know Jesus "after the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16b), but that does not suggest He had uncomely ways that we are asked to ignore. Let all believers have done with suggesting that worldly manners are to be glossed, and that we are to pretend that unrighteous conduct can be ignored. If we are told "touch not the unclean thing" (2 Cor 6:17), "let not corrupt communication come out of your mouth" (Eph 4:29), and "be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet 1:15), who is the person willing to suggest such things are to be ignored? How can men be convicted of sin if believers act as though it is not really there? It is the solemn obligation of every professing believer to see to it that their lives are not a distraction, and that they do not contradict their profession.

THE FACT OF REAL CHANGE

It is out of order for any professing Christian to ask other believers to overlook their carnality, or not judge them for uncomely manners.

All of this is true because in Christ a very real change does take place. That is why conversion is referred to as being “born again” (John 3:3,7; 1 Pet 1:23). There is a termination of one manner of life, and the commencement of another manner. Jesus called it making “the tree good” (Matt 12:33), becoming “as little children” (Matt 18:3), being born “of God” (John 1:13), and being made “free indeed” (John 8:32,36). The book of Acts refers to this as the hearts being “purified by faith” (Acts 15:9), and the Lord opening the heart (Acts 16:14).

The Apostles referred to the new birth in a variety of ways: being “freed from sin” (Rom 6:7), being “made free from the law of sin and of death” (Rom 8:2), God putting us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), becoming a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), putting on Christ (Gal 3:27), being quickened “together with Christ” (Eph 2:5), and being saved by “the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Tit 3:5).

It is inconceivable that such things could occur without a change becoming very evident. Ponder how regeneration involves moving from one domain to another.

- From being blind TO having our eyes opened (Acts 26:18a; 2 Cor 4:4,6; Hb 10:32).
- From darkness TO light (Acts 26:18b; Eph 4:18-23; 5:8).
- From the power of Satan TO God (Acts 26:18c; Col 1:13; Heb 2:15).
- Made free from sin and become servants TO God (Rom 6:22).
- Passing from death TO life (1 John 3:14; John 5:24; Rom 6:4; 8:2).
- From being alienated TO being reconciled (Col 1:21).
- Out of darkness INTO His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).
- From being “not a people” TO being “the people of God” (1 Pet 2:10a).
- From not having obtained mercy TO obtaining mercy (1 Pet 2:10b).

It approaches blasphemy to suppose that the work accomplished by the Son of God would not have moral and spiritual consequences of unspeakable magnitude.

The God of Salvation

Is it possible for God to really work without anything significant really happening? – and salvation in all of its intricacies is a work of God (Jonah 2:9; Rev 7:10). When God worked in creation, something observable and of significant duration took place. When He sent a flood to destroy the ungodly and save Noah, something evident took place. When He delivered the children of Israel from Egypt, something perceptible took place. Can it be that in His greatest work – recreating men in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10) – nothing really takes place? In a moral and spiritual recreation are we to expect that no genuine change occurs? Do those who are “saved” remain fundamentally the same as they were before? Do their basic appetites remain as they were before? Are their primary inclinations unchanged? I acknowledge that if we look at the modern church we might be inclined to think this is the case. If we consult with the religious counselors and professed Christian psychiatrists, we might consider this to be likely.

How is it possible for the transition from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, to take place without it impacting upon the conduct of the individual? And, if a change of this magnitude can, in fact, occur without effecting our lives, precisely in what sense have we been changed, or delivered, or reconciled, or regenerated, or born again? It is the business of those who wear the name of Jesus to press these matters upon the conscience of men.

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

It is necessary to say these things because of the religious climate in which we are living. It suggests that a person can be reconciled to the Lord and still be a friend of the world. But this is not so, for a holy God has no tolerance of sinners just because they call themselves Christians. If they are not changed, then they are not His children, for, in Christ, He does not beget sinners. Or, is there someone who would care to affirm that He does do such a thing?

But there is another reason why these things must be declared. The change wrought in regeneration accounts for the conduct in those of our text. If we do not see their manners as a consequence of their reconciliation to God, we will be inclined to view them as moral supermen – a sort of lofty example that is wholly divorced from our situation. Therefore, instead of perceiving them as a means to measure our own profession, we will be moved to think of them as superior believers, quite unlike ourselves. They will, in such a case, be more like heroes than like brethren. If that is so, their record will no longer be profitable to us, and will not be perceived as a relevant word.

Unless a person is a fool, the absurdity of such thinking will be evident. It approaches blasphemy to suppose that the work accomplished by the Son of God would not have moral and spiritual consequences of unspeakable magnitude. But let me say no more on the matter. Let the text speak to you. Matthew Henry well says of the believers of our text, “They kept close to holy ordinances, and abounded in all instances of piety and devotion, for Christianity, admitted in the power of it, will dispose the soul to communion with God in all those ways wherein He has appointed us to meet Him and promised to meet us.” MATTHEW HENRY NOTES

We must never allow ourselves to become accustomed to lifeless religion. It is lethal to the soul dishonoring to God, and reproachful to Christ.

FEAR CAME UPON EVERY SOUL

“ 2:43a And fear came upon every soul . . . ”

When it comes to the results of repenting and believing the Gospel (Mk 1:15), they are always the same. The effects of being regenerated do not differ from individual to individual. Personalities may differ. Ministries, or assigned functions within the body of Christ, may differ. However, the essential nature of the redeemed is the same. This is seen in the initial response of those within our text. They all repented and were baptized – “every one of you” (Acts 2:38). Everyone who “gladly received his word were baptized” (2:41). Everyone “continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine” (2:42a). Everyone continued steadfastly “in fellowship” (2:42b). Everyone continued steadfastly in “the breaking of bread” (2:42c). Everyone continued steadfastly in “prayers” (2:42d). Now we will be introduced to another thing that was common among them all.

FEAR

“And fear came . . . ” Other versions read, “kept feeling a sense of awe,” NASB “ filled with awe,” NIV “Awe came upon ,” NRSV “ feeling of fear came over,” GWN “And fear was on ,” MRD “ Reverential awe came over,” NET “A deep sense of awe,” LIVING “felt great respect for God,” IE “A sense of reverence seized ” WILLIAMS and “sense of awe (reverential fear).” AMPLIFIED

I must confess that I have never been fully satisfied with the explanations I have heard concerning this kind of “fear.” Perhaps the words “reverence,” “awe,” and “respect” are etymologically correct, but in our culture they do not have much of an impact upon the human spirit. We are living in a time and place where the concepts of reverence, awe, and respect are

hardly known. It is a self-centered society in which self has been enthroned in the place of God. That is the reason for the dominance of indulgence, entertainment, sports and various forms of, what is called, addiction. All of these are driven by the perception that “self” is the center of the world, and nothing really matters but self-satisfaction. In this kind of society, “fear” means very little. It is only associated with things that are harmful and overpowering – whether a force of, what is called, “nature,” of some facet of human abuse and oppression.

As used in this text, “fear” is a noun (as opposed to the verb usage “they feared”) and has a very strong meaning. Coming from the Greek word **fo,boj** (fob-os, from which we get the word “phobia”), it includes the ideas of “dread, terror,” THAYER “causing fear, source of fear, terror . . . dread, alarm,” FRIBERG “a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger . . . troubled in every way,” LOUW-NIDA “panic, fear . . . terror, properly of the outward show of fear, and so distinguished from the sensation of fear . . . to strike terror into one,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “terror,” LEH “a terror . . . fear, alarm, fright.” GINGRICH

One lexicographer observes, “In a number of languages there is no noun-like word for ‘fear.’ Accordingly, expressions containing such a noun in Greek must often be restructured so that the corresponding semantic unit may be expressed by a verb. Therefore, instead of ‘fear,’ one may have expressions such as ‘be afraid,’ or ‘to fear.’ Instead of ‘fears within (2 Cor 7:5), one may translate ‘in our hearts we were afraid.’” LOUW-NIDA

As the next phrase will confirm, this is not a human response, but something that comes upon the individual. It is a consequence of being in the presence of Divine working, and knowing that this is the case. Where the truth of God is proclaimed, and the works of God are being wrought, this kind of “fear” is realized.

This exposes the fallacy of much of the modern praise movement , which tends to promote casualness that is totally foreign to this text. We are being

This is something outside of men that comes upon them – “fear came upon every soul.” There are a number of places in Scripture where this same type of thing occurred – fear imposed upon men from outside of themselves.

exposed to a record of genuine Divine working, bona fide repentance, and actual spiritual effects. These circumstances are unsullied with religious tradition and corruption. Such intrusions will eventually find their way into the church – even in its early days. But they are totally absent in our text.

CAME UPON EVERY SOUL

“ . . . upon every soul . . .” Other versions read, “everyone,” NASB “every mind,” MRD and “every person.” IE

Keep in mind that this is a noun, not a verb. Strictly speaking, as I have already said, in this text it is not a human response. This is something outside of men that comes upon them – “fear came upon every soul.” There are a number of places in Scripture where this same type of thing occurred – fear imposed upon men from outside of themselves.

- ZECHARIAS. “And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him ” (Lk 1:12).

- THOSE IN THE HILL COUNTRY OF JUDEA. “And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea” (Lk 1:65).

- DURING JESUS' MINISTRY. "And there came a fear on all : and they glorified God, saying, That a great prophet is risen up among us; and, That God hath visited his people" (Lk 7:16).

- WHEN ANANIAS WAS STRUCK DEAD. "And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things" (Acts 5:5).

- AFTER SAPPHIRA WAS STRUCK DEAD. "And great fear came upon all the church , and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

- WHEN THE SONS OF SCEVA WERE OVERCOME BY A DEMON-POSSESSED MAN . "And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all , and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:17).

Eliphaz the Temanite described to Job the kind of fear in our text, saying he personally had experienced it. It was a fear that came upon him. "In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on men, Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake. Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up: It stood still, but I could not discern the form thereof: an image was before mine eyes, there was silence, and I heard a voice, saying, Shall mortal man be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker? Behold, he put no trust in his servants; and his angels he charged with folly: How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, which are crushed before the moth? They are destroyed from morning to evening: they perish for ever without any regarding it. Doth not their excellency which is in them go away? they die, even without wisdom" (Job 4:13-21).

On the banks of the Red Sea, when Moses led Israel in the song of triumph, they insightfully said of their enemies, " Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of Thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till Thy people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over, which Thou hast purchased" (Ex 15:16). Jeremiah spoke of a fear that seized Damascus. "Damascus is waxed feeble, and turneth herself to flee, and fear hath seized on her : anguish and sorrows have taken her, as a woman in travail" (Jer 49:24). David said of the enemies of the Lord, "fear took hold upon them " (Psa 48:6).

This is the kind of fear that brings with it the utmost sobriety. Those upon whom such a fear comes do not speak hastily, stand in judgment of God, or treat His people with contempt. They become keenly aware of their own weakness, and the irresistible and mighty power of the great God. The frailty of humanity is seen in the light of the all consuming presence of God. That is why we read of people being "taken with great fear" (Lk 8:37), and "great fear" falling upon people (Acts 5:5,11; Rev 11:11).

This "fear" cannot be induced by men. This is the result of the perceived working of the Lord. In the case of our text, it was not an awesome judgment, like the death of Ananias and Sapphira. Rather, it was the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the displaying of Divine power in the mighty deeds wrought by the Apostles. It was clear to all that God Himself was among them! This is why Paul spoke of a stranger coming into an assembly of the righteous and being convinced by their speaking that God was among them. "But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth" (1 Cor 14:24-25). That is the effect of the kind of fear to which our text now exposes us.

We must ever keep before us that we are being introduced to real conversion and its very real effects. These are the kind of results that proceed from believing and obeying the Gospel of Christ, and receiving the Holy Spirit. It is glaringly obvious that there is a total absence of the dreaded

presence of institutionalism in this text. Jesus Christ has truly “apprehended” these people (Phil 3:12).

MANY SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE DONE

“ 43a . . . and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.”

Here the focus is the confirmation of the apostles as messengers sent forth by Christ Jesus Himself. There is also a matter of confirming that the word was from God, and was to be heeded. In this kind of miracle, the point was not the miracle itself, but something of even greater import.

Commencing with the fourteenth verse of this chapter the apostles have risen to prominence. In fulfilment of Joel’s prophecy, other “sons” and “daughters” and “young men” and “old men” had spoken. But now, the foundation-layers, in whose doctrine the people “continued steadfastly,” are in the spiritual limelight. Everyone who is saved is in the body of Christ, but they are not all equal as regards their ministry. The Holy Spirit speaks of a certain ranking in the body of Christ. “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28). Note that godly “teachers” rank higher in the body of Christ than those with “gifts of healing,” administrators, and those who can speak a multiplicity of languages through the power of the Holy Spirit.

MANY WONDERS AND SIGNS

“. . . and many wonders and signs . . .” Other versions read, “many wonders and miraculous signs,” NIV “all sorts of wonders and signs,” BBE “many amazing things and miraculous signs,” GWN “many signs and prodigies,” MRD “many signs and miracles,” NJB “many miracles,” LIVING “many powerful and amazing things,” IE and “many marvels and signs.” WEYMOUTH

“Wonders”

A “wonder” is “something so strange as to cause it to be watched and observed.” THAYER Other lexical meanings are “something so unusual it arouses close observation.” FRIBERG Here, the emphasis is on the nature of the thing that is wrought. It is outside the sphere of creation and the ordinary, and thus demands the attention of the people. Especially at the beginning of the New Covenant era, the apostles wrought “many wonders,” drawing attention to the uniqueness of this time and the nature of Divine involvements with men. In their very essence, “wonders” are something visible to the eye, for their purpose is to capture the attention of men. Technically, all miracles are not “wonders” – designed to capture the attention of the people. Some were wrought out of the Lord’s compassion, as when He fed a multitude of five thousand men, besides women and children (Matt 15:32). Other miracles were wrought in relative seclusion, not intended to get the attention of the people – as when He raised Jairus’ daughter, Mk 5:40 and Peter obtain a coin from a fish. Matt 17:27

“Signs”

A “sign” is a miraculous work by which “a person or thing is distinguished from others and known” THAYER Other lexical meanings include, “what serves as a pointer or means of confirmation,” FRIBERG “that by which something is known or distinguished,” UBS and “an event regarded as having some special meaning.” LOUW-NIDA

Here the focus is the confirmation of the apostles as messengers sent forth by Christ Jesus Himself. There is also a matter of confirming that the word was from God, and was to be heeded. In this kind of miracle, the point was not the miracle itself, but something of even greater import. An

example is the healing of the impotent men who had been let down through a roof to the feet of Jesus. On that occasion Jesus said, "But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Matt 9:6).

"Many"

The word "many" comes from the Greek word **polla**, (pol-lah), which means, "much, multitude, many, numerous . . . abundant plenteous," THAYER "of extent or magnitude great, large, much, many, plentiful . . . things that occur in a mass or in large quantities," FRIBERG "much more, all the more,, many more," UBS "a great number of," LOUW-NIDA "great populous," LEH and "very great, very large." GINGRICH

Sometimes men refer to things being "many," when there is only a nominal number of them. They use the word relatively, speaking of things that do not really appear to be numerous or abundant: "many people are saying," or "many surveys confirm." However, the Holy Spirit does not speak in this manner. He is not given to exaggeration, hyperbole, or overstatement. Both the number and nature of these works were extraordinary, matching the uniqueness and effectiveness of the New Covenant being implemented through the apostles.

Thoughts on Many Miracles

The word "miracles" (plural) is mentioned four times in Genesis through Malachi (Num 14:22; Deut 11:3; 29:3; Judges 6:13). Other versions employ the word once, NKJV six times, NASB ten times, NIV and five times. NRSV/RSV Alternate words used in the KJV for these are "wonders" (Ex 3:20), "marvels" (Ex 34:10), "signs" (Psa 105:27), "marvelous things" (Mic 7:15), "marvelous works" (Psa 105:15), and "wondrous works" (Psa 106:22). Throughout the Old Covenant Scriptures there is not a single reference to "many miracles," or "many signs," or "many wonders" in any standard version of Scripture.

I mention these things to show the uniqueness of our text. The word "miracles" is mentioned twenty-three times in Matthew through Revelation (John 2:11,23; 3:2; 6:2,26; 7:31; 9:16; 11:47; 12:37; Acts 2:22; 6:8; 8:6,13; 15:12; 19:11; 1 Cor 12:10,28,29; Gal 3:5; Heb 2:4; Rev 13:14; 16:14; 19:20). There are also ten references to "mighty works." Add to that the twenty-five references to "signs" and "wonders," and you see the significance of the New Covenant era.

Prior to Jesus, there were a few individuals through whom great miracles were wrought: Moses, Joshua, Elijah, and Elisha. Samson accomplished several feats of unparalleled strength. But I do not believe there were ever two persons who were working miracles simultaneously. Joshua's feat of making the sun and moon stand still took place after Moses died (Josh 10:12-14). All of Elisha's miracles were accomplished after his predecessor Elijah had been translated. There were no miracle workers who were contemporary with Samson.

But with Jesus, the rarity of miracles came to an end. Even His enemies confessed that He did "many miracles." Once He sent out His twelve apostles to work miracles – "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils." Another time He sent out seventy disciples, telling them to "heal the sick."

But with Jesus, the rarity of miracles came to an end. Even His enemies confessed that He did "many miracles" (John 11:47). Once He sent out His twelve apostles to work miracles – "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils" (Matt 10:8). Another time He sent out seventy disciples, telling them to "heal the sick" (Lk 10:9). When they returned, saying even the demons were subject to them, He told them, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you"

(Luke 10:19). Never before in the history of the world had there been such an assault on the kingdom of darkness! Many miracles by many people.

WERE DONE BY THE APOSTLES

“ . . . were done by the apostles.” Other versions read, “were done through the apostles,” NKJV “were taking place through the apostles,” NASB “were being performed through the apostles,” CSB “took place through the apostles’ means,” DARBY “happened through the apostles,” GWN “were [wrought] by the hand of the legates in Jerusalem,” MRD “came about by the apostles,” NET “the apostles worked ,” NJB “the apostles performed ,” NLT “were showed by the apostles,” TNT “were being done through the apostles,” YLT “God used the apostles to do,” IE and “were performed through the apostles (the special messengers).” AMPLIFIED

A point is made of this confirmation in several different texts of Scripture.

- “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen” (Mark 16:20).
- “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch” (Acts 5:12).
- “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness , both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?” (Heb 2:4).

These particular “wonders and signs” were not simply a ministry among the people. In fact, although there was ministry in them, that was not their primary purpose. Just as God had “approved” of Jesus “by miracles and wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22), so He was approving of the Apostles and their message through these means. The “power of God unto salvation” is not through “wonders and signs,” however voluminous and epochal they may be. It is the message that is the power, and these “wonders and signs” buttressed the message delivered by the Apostles. In the words of Scripture God “confirmed the Word” (Mk 16:20), and was “bearing witness” to the veracity of the apostles and their message (Heb 2:4).

Again, I want to underscore that, in my persuasion, the modern church has not been persuaded of the need of the “apostles’ doctrine.” This is confirmed by their general ignorance of it, even though it has been made accessible to them. Some might imagine that this condition requires the working of many wonders and signs again, to confirm that the message is true. This, however, is not the case. When Israel came to despise the Law, they were not required to return to Sinai and see the thunderings and lightning again. God did not speak out of heaven to them once again. When the church drifted from the truth, it was not necessary to have Jesus rise again, or that Pentecost be experienced once again. Surely this is evident to everyone.

The reason for this condition is plain. Once the Apostles and their message had been “confirmed,” the church became a custodian of confirmed word. The world does not need eye witnesses of the resurrected Savior in every generation. It is not necessary to have the word confirmed over and over again, because it has been invested with power. Now, the people who embrace that Gospel become a living “epistle of Christ” themselves – letters that are “known and read of all men” (2 Cor 3:2-3).

All miracles, signs, and wonders are not devoted exclusively to confirming the Word of God, even though some suppose this to be the case. God “set” the gift of working miracles in the church “after” the apostles (1 Cor 12:10,28,29; Gal 3:5). Those workings were not placed there to further confirm the Word. That has already been done. Such miracles are not in the same category as the “signs of an apostle” (2 Cor 12:12). They are given at the Lord’s discretion (1 Cor 12:5-11,18), over

which men have no control, and for the good of the whole body.

THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER

“ 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common.”

Remember, we are reading of the effects wrought by repentance, remission, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These experiences had a transforming effect upon the people.

ALL THAT BELIEVED

“And all that believed . . .” Other versions read, “all those who had believed,” NASB “All the believers,” NIV “all those who were of the faith,” BBE “All who shared the faith,” NJB “all those believing,” YLT “all who believed (who adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus Christ),” AMPLIFIED and “all the ones believing.” ALT

The Spirit is very precise in the statement concerning the church. He does not say “all the members,” or “all who had joined the church,” or “all who were baptized.” To be sure, all of them were part of the church, and all them had been baptized. Here, however, we get to the heart of the matter. There may very well have been some pretenders who

33,000+ DENOMINATIONS OF PROTESTANTISM, AND COUNTING

David Barrett, et al, does indeed refer to "over **33,000** denominations in 238 countries." (Table 1-5, vol 1, page 16). This refers to his unique definition of a "Christian denomination" but does not include small ones (congregations of a couple hundred or less), which would dramatically increase this number beyond all imagination.

Denominations / Paradenominations:

1995: **33,820**

The definition of a denomination, as used by David Barrett, is this: "*an organized Christian Church or tradition or religious group or community of believers or aggregate of worship centers or congregations, usually within a specific country, whose component congregations and members are called by the same name in different areas, regarding themselves as an autonomous Christian church distinct from other denominations, churches and traditions.*" For my part, this is an acceptable definition.

liked to think of themselves as part of the number. The situation, however, is stated as it should be: “all that believed .” That is, all who had perceived the truth and embraced it; all who had heard the Gospel and obeyed it; all who were trusting in the Lord and not leaning to their own understanding.

Ponder this in view of the condition of the professed church in our day. The World Christian Data Base records 9,000 major denominations within the Christian community.

WERE TOGETHER

“ . . . were together . . .” Other versions read, “kept together,” BBE “were in one place,” GENEVA “met together in one place,” NLT “kept themselves together,” PNT “were at the same place,” YLT “met together constantly,” LIVING “stayed together,” IE “lived together,” WILLIAMS “were united and [together],” AMPLIFIED and “continued together in close fellowship.” GNB

Real faith unites all those who possess it! That is why we read of “the unity of the faith” (Eph

4:13). Where there are divisions (something the Lord strictly forbids – 1 Cor 1:10), it can always be traced to unbelief, for faith never divides those who have it. Considering that all who are in Christ Jesus also have received the Holy Spirit, their unity is accented all the more by the expression “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3).

The unity of reference was not merely creedal, and it surely was not theoretical, or just something people talked about. These people wanted to be together, and therefore they stayed together. That is the practical circumstance that confirms whether real unity exists or not: do the people want to be together? People who do not want to be together are not truly united.

“Together”

There is a considerable emphasis on togetherness in the epistles. It is clear that a “common salvation” (Jude 1:3) and a “common faith” (Tit 1:4) unites people, bringing them together. After all, there is a certain singleness associated with salvation that makes for “the unity of the Spirit” : “There is ONE body, and ONE Spirit, even as ye are called in ONE hope of your calling; ONE Lord, ONE faith, ONE baptism, ONE God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4-6). How is it possible for such realities to in any way contribute to division, dissension, or a lack of harmony?

What caused this selfless spirit to assert itself, and why was it done so willingly? This remarkable circumstance was not a response to a commandment. Those who teach that we can only offer to God what he has commanded or authorized, or serve Him in strict accord with specific directives, could not possibly be more wrong.

Ponder how much is said about the matter of being “together.” For many, this is an ambition or goal. In our text this was actually happening.

- Being “comforted together ” by “mutual faith” (Rom 1:12).
- Believers will be “glorified together ” (Rom 8:17).
- The church can “strive together ” in focused prayer (Rom 15:30).
- Saints can be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).
- Believers are said to be “gathered together ” (1 Cor 5:4).
- The church can “come together for the better” (1 Cor 11:17).
- God has tempered, or combined, the body of Christ “ together ” (1 Cor 12:24).
- “Believers are said to “come together in one place” (1 Cor 14:23).
- Needy brethren can be helped by brethren praying together (2 Cor 1:1).
- Believers are said to be “workers together with Him” (2 Cor 6:1).
- The church is described as a building “fitly framed together ,” and “built together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:21-22).
- The “whole body” of Christ is intended to be “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (Eph 4:16).
- Saints are to “stand fast in one spirit, striving together for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil 1:27).
- The saved are to be “comforted, being knit together in love” (Col 2:2).
- As we cling to the Head, Jesus Christ, individual believers have “nourishment ministered,” and are “knit together ” (Col 2:19).

- In their assemblies, the faithful comfort themselves “ together , and edify one another” (1 Thess 5:11).
- Solemnly we are told “Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together ” (Heb 10:25).

There is a sense in which our individuality is minimized in Christ’s body, thereby allowing for a very real togetherness. Therefore those in Christ are admonished, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves ” (Phil 2:3). And again, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others ” (Phil 2:4). And again, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another ” (Rom 12:10). Where such a condition exists, division is not possible, and the “unity of the Spirit” is inevitable.

In Christ Jesus our attention is turned toward Him, not ourselves. In fact He died and rose again that this might be the case. As it is written, “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). In our text there was a certain purity that did not allow for self-interests to be present. Such would soon be found in the church (chapter five), but had not yet made its entrance at the time covered in this passage.

THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON

“ . . . and had all things common.” Other versions read, “had everything in common,” NIV “they shared everything with each other,” GWN “whatever belonged to them, was of the community,” MRD “shared everything they had ,” NLT “held all they had as common goods to be shared by one another,” WILLIAMS “shared everything on common ,” PHILLIPS “they were having all [things] common,” ALT and “ shared their belongings with one another.” GNT

What caused this selfless spirit to assert itself, and why was it done so willingly? This remarkable circumstance was not a response to a commandment. Those who teach that we can only offer to God what he has commanded or authorized, or serve Him in strict accord with specific directives, could not possibly be more wrong. Such barbaric teaching is from Sinai, and lacks both the quality and effectiveness of teaching that comes from “mount Zion,” to which we “are come” (Heb 12:22). Those who embrace a Sinaitic approach to newness of life only confess they do not have genuine spiritual life, for that is not how it is lived out. If, at some time, such poor souls were, in fact, “born of God,” then they have gone backward, are withdrawing from God, and moving closer to perdition (Heb 10:38-39).

There is not the slightest hint that Peter and the rest of the apostles required this of the people, or implied that it was essential to their acceptance by God. This was rather the voluntary response of the “new creature” (2 Cor 5:17) – the “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24), and is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10). This was an expression of the “newness of life” in which these new converts were walking (Rom 6:4).

When a person, or group of persons, is “joined to the Lord,” becoming “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17), a radical change takes place within. Old things had really “passed away,” and “all things” had become new (2 Cor 5:17). Their former nature, now their “old man,” had been “crucified” with Christ (Rom 6:6), and they were no longer the center of their world. Now it was no longer them that was living, but Christ within them (Gal 2:20). Rather than serving God “in the oldness of the letter,” they were serving Him “in newness of the Spirit” NKJV (Rom 7:6).

THE CIRCUMSTANCE

Some sophists, cavorting about on the surface of truth (if there be such a thing), have concluded that this was a form of communism – communal living where no one had any possessions of their own. However, that is a grossly corrupted view. Some time later, there were great numbers of these very people who still had personal possessions (Acts 4:34-37). Years later, when Paul taught the Corinthians, he admonished to give proportionately to what they possessed (1 Cor 16:2; 2 Cor 8:12). When these people were converted, it did not become sinful for them to keep and maintain their possessions.

Their whole lives were changed. Now, after the Passover and after Pentecost, they were still going to the Temple every day, and from there moving about from house to house. It was time to go home, but it was obvious they did not desire to do so. It is also clear that the converts from Jerusalem did not want them to leave either.

This was no ordinary circumstance. High Jewish feasts had been observed: the Passover and Pentecost. Multitudes of people had come in to Jerusalem for the occasion – “devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). It had certainly been an eventful series of days. Not only had the Passover occurred, but “Jesus of Nazareth” had supposedly been found guilty of blasphemy and was crucified. This had taken place with their consent, as well as their insistence that He be crucified, while Barabbas, a murderer, was chosen for release (Mk 15:10-14). Now, on the day of Pentecost, they had witnessed miraculous phenomenon and heard the exposition of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. Their hearts had been pricked, and, upon being told what to do, they repented, were baptized, and received the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Their whole lives were changed. Now, after the Passover and after Pentecost, they were still going to the Temple every day, and from there moving about from house to house. It was time to go home, but it was obvious they did not desire to do so. It is also clear that the converts from Jerusalem did not want them to leave either.

If they brought resources with them for the feasts, they had run out by now. They were not from that area, and thus were not employed there. What will they do? Those who were from that area, and any wealthy people who came in from afar, refused to let go of their brethren. They looked upon their own possessions as a resource for their brethren as well as themselves. Everyone who believed stayed together, pooling their resources and having everything common. They simply did not want to separate from one another. They had one faith and one hope, and thus were united.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There is a unity that transcends anything men can accomplish. This is a unity that is created, not achieved. Once that unity is destroyed by the intrusion of flesh, it must be earnestly sought once again. When professed Christians are divided, that means they are not united, for that is what division is. When that condition exists, the Divine mandate is, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). That is not an option, and must not be treated as though it was. Here is the word of the Spirit delivered by Paul.

- Speak the same thing.
- Have no divisions among you.
- Be perfectly joined together in the same mind.
- Be perfectly joined together in the same judgment.

Is there any soul who is at liberty to ignore this summons, and still remain in Divine favor? When we came into Christ we did not come in divided, but were “one body in Christ” (Rom 12:4-5). We

were “one spirit” with the Lord – and He is not divided (1 Cor 6:17; 1:13). Although “many,” we were “one body” (1 Cor 10:17; 12:20). All believers were “called in one body” (Col 3:15). That is the way every single person in Christ started newness of life. If, after some time, there is friction, division, and even hostility, it is not owing to God’s “great salvation” (Heb 2:3). It is not the nature of “newness of life” to finally break up, divide, and become separate warring factions. The Holy Spirit certainly does not promote separation among those who are united to Christ. If that condition is found, “an enemy hath done this” (Matt 13:28). None of this existed at the time of our text. It is as though the devil had been caught off guard, neutralized by the striking blow of Christ’s heel on his head, the disruption in the regions of the dead, and the leading of captivity captive when Jesus rose triumphant, defeating the grave and taking the spoils of battle.

THE ABSENCE OF A COVETOUS SPIRIT

“ 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”

Remember, we are not witnessing the implementation of a new law, but the expression of newness of life.

The body of the redeemed is “in the world,” but it is not “of the world” (John 15:19). For this reason, the “newness of life” cannot be lived while one is dominated by “this present evil world.” In Christ we are, in fact, “delivered from this present evil world” – from its thinking and its ways. However, because of our close proximity to the world, and the presence of our “adversary the devil,” there are strong influences exerted upon us to move closer to the world, once again adopting its ways and its manners. The struggle against these inclinations is called “resisting the devil,” “abstaining from all appearance of evil,” wrestling “against principalities and against powers,” and “fighting the good fight of faith” (James 4:7; 1 Thess 5:22; Eph 6:12; 1 Tim 6:12). If we fail to resist these inclinations, we will modify our mindset with notions from the world order – maintaining a religious stance, yet allowing worldly ways of thinking into our thought processes. This, in turn, modifies our conduct, causing us to become basically selfish, or self-centered. The more the carnal mind dominates men, the more like the world they become, and the less they are like Christ. In such a stance, they once again become the enemies of God.

In our text, these withdrawals had not yet begun to happen. Newness of life was pure and uncontaminated, as is evidenced by the manner in which these brethren conducted their affairs.

Once again, this is not a standard to be adopted, but is a revelation of real newness of life. The intent of the passage is not to provide a pattern for all churches to follow. It rather reveals to us how “the newness of life” responds to unplanned situations or crises. There will be times when uncomely responses to such situations will occur – such as in the sixth chapter of Acts, when “there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations” (Acts 6:1). However, in that circumstance neither the neglect nor the murmuring were expressions of newness of life. Those were expressions of the flesh, which, in our text, had not yet made its way into the church. Our text is an exhibit of “pure religion and undefiled” (James 1:27). It was not the result of an admonition, a commandment, or an exhortation. It was real, unsullied, and without hypocrisy.

THEY SOLD THEIR POSSESSIONS AND GOODS

“And sold their possessions and goods . . .” Other versions read, “began selling their property and possessions,” NASB “exchanging their goods and property for money,” BBE “sold their possessions and substance,” DARBY “were selling their possessions and belongings,” ESV “sold their property and other possessions,” GWN “they sold . . . the things they owned,” IE “they sold their lands and other property,” WEYMOUTH “they made it their practice to sell their possessions and goods,” ISV “they continued to sell their property and goods,” WILLIAMS and “they sold their

possessions (both their landed property and their movable goods).” AMPLIFIED

Here is an example of the robust and aggressive nature of spiritual life. It is a stark contrast of the being driven by Law. Here is what happens when the law is written upon the heart, and put into the mind I(Heb 8:10; 10:16). At once you see that spirituality in no way promotes or maintains “covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5). It confirms how a person reacts to the circumstances of our text when they “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15). Here, the love of the brethren is lived out, and there is no need to exhort the people to do so. The text is not a theoretical statement concerning unity. It is not a summons for those professing allegiance to Christ to unite. This is the report of people who were actually united, and of the effects that unity produced.

Something had happened among these people to cause them to devalue worldly possessions for self. They now saw “treasures upon earth” as a means to minister in the name of the Lord. Their definition of family and household had changed.

AND PARTED THEM TO ALL MEN

“ . . . and parted them to all men . . . ” Other versions read, “ divided them among all,” NKJV “ sharing them with all,” NASB “gave to everyone ,” NIV “distribute the proceeds to all ,” NRSV “ distributed them to all,” RSV “they made a division of it among them all ,” BBE “distributed the money,” GWN “distributed the proceeds among them all,” WEYMOUTH “distributed the price among all,” AMPLIFIED and “divided the proceeds among the fellowship .” PHILLIPS

I am quick to point out that this is not to be construed as an attack upon the practice of ministering to the poor in general. However, as confirmed in this text, the thrust of godly philanthropy concerns the people of God, to whom we are especially to do good

Although it may not be popular to say so, distribution was not made among the poor of the community. It was made among the brethren. Even though there is nothing wrong, and everything right, with assisting the poor in general, the emphasis in Scripture has always been placed upon assisting the poor among God’s people. Even when reference was made to “strangers,” it was always those among the people of God (Lev 19:10; 23:22; Deut 14:29).

Under the Law

- “And if thy brother be waxen poor, and fallen in decay with thee; then thou shalt relieve him: yea, though he be a stranger, or a sojourner; that he may live with thee” (Lev 25:35).

- “If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: but thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth” (Deut 15:8).

Under the New Covenant

- “Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality” (Rom 12:13).

- “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye” (1 Cor 16:1).

- “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do” (Gal 2:9-10).

- “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

- “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?” (1 John 3:17).

I am quick to point out that this is not to be construed as an attack upon the practice of ministering to the poor in general. However, as confirmed in this text, the thrust of godly philanthropy concerns the people of God, to whom we are especially to do good (Gal 6:10). Of course, if the New Covenant provides the guarantee of prosperity here and now, and all-sufficiency in this world's goods, then such admonitions would be pointless. In such a case, it would only be contributing to the unbelief of the those who were not prospering, or stood in lack. Such a thought is utterly absurd!

AS EVERY MAN HAD NEED

“ . . . as every man had need.” Other versions read, “as anyone had need,” NKJV “as anyone might have need,” NASB “according as any man had need,” ASV “as anyone had a need,” CSB “as everyone had need,” GENEVA “ according to what each man needed,” NJB “those in need,” NLT “according to everyone’s necessities,” WEYMOUTH “as anyone had special need,” WILLIAMS “just as anyone from time to time had need,” MONTGOMERY and “according to individual need.” PHILLIPS

Remove from your mind the notion that everyone in our text divested themselves of all wealth, and pooled it, dividing it up equally among all the brethren. Possessions were not the point, but necessities – and there certainly is a vast chasm between those two conditions.

Remove from your mind the notion that everyone in our text divested themselves of all wealth, and pooled it, dividing it up equally among all the brethren. Possessions were not the point, but necessities – and there certainly is a vast chasm between those two conditions. The objective was not for everyone to have the same amount of money or other resources. Rather, it was that no one would suffer lack, or be without the things required for life – “ need.”

In Christ, “Need” Is Redefined

In the American society, need is often equated with comfort and preference. Thus people speak of needing a new car, a larger house, a new television, or the likes. Often need is associated with convenience and ease. The legitimacy of such things is not to be questioned, and that is not the issue here. The mega-church mentality, together with the human sanctification of the opulence that accompanies it, has caused people to think of need quite differently than the way it is used in our text. Even in seemingly legitimate Christian enterprises, need is often related to large and comfortable buildings for orphans, new media production studios, and four-wheel all-terrain vehicles. Once again, it is not that these things are of themselves wrong. The issue is whether or not they can be defined as needs .

Jesus spoke of “need” as eating, drinking, and being clothed. “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things” (Matt 6:31-32). Even then, the accent was not to be placed upon these “things,” although they may have been scarce. Jesus continued, “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33). Here, “need” is related to the maintenance of life, not the comfort and ease of life. Jesus said, “But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick” (Matt 9:12). Others are said to have Had “ need of healing” (Lk 9:11). John spoke of those with substance seeing the “need” of a brother, and ignoring it (1 John 3:17). He was speaking of the necessities of life – things

required to maintain life.

In Christ, the concept of “need” obtains a new perspective. This is because the accent is placed on “things above,” and not on “things on the earth” (Col 3:2). While “newness of life” does not sanctify poverty and the lack of any conveniences, neither does it sanctify their abundance.

Once, when Paul was in prison, he wrote to Titus, telling him to assist Zenas the lawyer and Apollos to come to him. “Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them. And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful” (Titus 3:14). Other versions read, “to meet urgent needs,” NKJV “to meet pressing needs,” “to help cases of urgent need,” RSV and “in order that they may provide for daily necessities.” NIV Here, “good works” refers to honest trades, or a way of earning a living that is honorable before God. The reason for engaging in such a posture is twofold. First, to provide for the necessities of life, including the need of Kingdom servants as well as their own. Second, that their lives may be fruitful, and not unproductive. That is, that they might be noted for assisting the people of God, as well as being in situation where they did not require assistance themselves.

Our Text

When our text speaks of distributing goods “as every man had need,” it is referring to those who did not have the regular requirements of life – food, drink, and clothing. I assume that some form of shelter is also included. This had particular reference to the brethren from other parts of the world, who had remained in Jerusalem.

This text also reveals freedom from covetousness, although that dreaded trait will soon surface among the disciples (Acts 5). When Jesus walked among men He said, “Beware of covetousness” (Lk 12:15). Now, under the influence of the newness of life, there was a freedom from that vice. Paul admonished the Ephesians to see to it that “covetousness” was not named among them – even one single time. “But . . . covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (Eph 5:3). The Colossians were instructed to mortify, or put to death, “covetousness” (Col 3:5). Believers are also exhorted to let their entire manner of life be “without covetousness” (Heb 13:5).

In the beginning, there was a certain purity and holy innocence that is refreshing to ponder. We are being given a view of newness of life itself, before the church became contaminated by various individuals like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), Hymanaeus and Alexander (1 Tim 1:19-20), Phygellus and Hermogenes” (2 Tim 1:15), certain in Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-8), the Galatians (Gal 1:6), Demas (2 Tim 4:10), and others.

We are being exposed to the Kingdom norm, or standard of conduct. In our time, the norm has become drawing back, but it was not so in the beginning, nor is it now. This text is telling us HOW newness of life makes itself known – at least one of the ways. The life that is given to us in Christ Jesus is not an inconsiderate one. It is not one that focuses upon self, and wants a lot of this world. It is Christ’s own life that is given to men, and is made manifest in their conduct. Thus it is written, “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:10-11). That is the life that is being revealed in our text.

DAILY CONTINUANCE

“46a And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple . . .”

Already we have read that these early believers “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). They did not blow hot and

cold, or tend toward inconsistency and a lack of involvement with one another. That is not the nature of “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2). Later in this book, believers will be persuaded to “continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43). Others will be exhorted to “continue in the faith” (Acts 14:22). We are told that “eternal life” will be given to those who “by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality” (Rom 2:7). We are told they will not be cut off the source of life “if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off” (Rom 11:22). We will, in fact, be presented to the Lord “holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight: if ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel” (Col 1:22-23).

Sporadic discipleship, though quite common in our day, is wholly unacceptable in Christ’s Kingdom. That is not the way Jesus is. It is not the way the Spirit operates. It is not the kind of life that is given to believers. Therefore, we ought to expect continuance to be prominent in the early days of the church, before Satan regrouped, as it were, and sowed tares among the wheat.

THEY CONTINUED DAILY

“And they, continuing daily . . .” Other versions read, “So continuing daily,” NKJV “day by day continuing,” NASB

“every day they continued,” NIV “day by day continuing steadfastly,” ASV “every day they devoted themselves,” CSB “every day, being constantly,” DARBY “each day,” NLT “regularly . . . each day,” LIVING “day by day attending constantly,” WEYMOUTH and “day after day.” AMPLIFIED

What Do We Have Here?

There are at least two ways that we can look at this fact. First, some are quite comfortable with seeing this as the initial response of new life – a beginning that, by its very nature, will finally cool, as the people return to a normal way of living. Those who embrace this view – and legion is their name – see such continuance as unusual, inconvenient, and only intended to get things started. They see it as a possible aspect of novicehood – something that is not required, and is not even consistent at the beginning of spiritual life. Even then, it is a rare circumstance. Second, we can view this as a normal expression of spiritual life that is intended to be preserved. In this case, this becomes one of the means of sustaining the life that is realized in Christ Jesus. It accompanies the awakening of a voracious appetite for the word of God, a remarkably strong love for the people of God, and a fervent desire to understand things pertaining to life and godliness.

If we choose to accept the first view, then we must also conclude that “newness of life” ebbs and flows, and tends to diminish and wane in its effects upon the individual. I do not know how any person could support such a view, and what would really be accomplished if they did manage to support it.

Another alternative is to see the life given on the day of Pentecost as being of a different order than normal spiritual, and therefore intended only for that time. Again, I do not know how a person could hope to defend such a postulate, which has all manner of unacceptable ramifications.

I will proceed accepting the view that this was genuine spiritual life that did not differ from the life that is granted to all who are in Christ Jesus. Like all gifts that come from God, life is characterized by purity, an unwavering trait of the Divine nature. Where this purity is lacking, it is not owing to any deficiency in the life that is realized in Christ Jesus. When the people of God become lacking in any way, it is due to the intrusion and dominance of the flesh. What is born of God cannot decline or be corrupted, because the “wicked one” cannot “touch” that begotten life. As it is written, “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God

keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18).

This was confirmed when Jesus Himself walked among men. It is written that He “ increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52). That is what Divine life in human form does – wherever it is found. The nature of spiritual life is thus described as one of increasing change: “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another ; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18). The reflection of the glory of God is seen “in the face of Jesus Christ” NRSV (2 Cor 4:6). The transformation that results is found in “the new man,” who grows and matures in the prospect of being finally “conformed to the image” of God’s Son, Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29).

Where there are no obstacles, or where the Holy Spirit is not grieved or quenched (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19), spiritual life advances and expresses itself in ways that are pleasing to God, advantageous to the individual, and beneficial to the body of Christ.

The Conclusion of the Matter

And what can we say is the conclusion of this whole matter? What we have in our text is the expression of the newness of life – an expression that perfectly agrees with the advancing and continuing nature of spiritual life. The continuance of these people was not their response to a command to keep on meeting together. It was not adherence to a special series of ordinances that were bound upon them by the apostles. Rather, when two or more people are born again, this is the kind of thing they are prone to do – continue “together.” They have been placed in “one body,” have received the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:4), and were “called in one hope” of their calling (Eph 4:4). Why would they not continue together? It is reasonable for them to do so, and unreasonable for them not to do so. This is confirmed in the words that follow.

WITH ONE ACCORD

“ . . . with one accord . . . ” Other versions read, “with one mind ,” NASB “to meet together,” NIV “ spent much time together ,” NRSV “going in agreement together,” BBE “had a single purpose ,” GWN “with one soul ,” MRD “by common consent ,” NET “with one heart ,” NJB “with the same purpose ,” IE “with united purpose ,” AMPLIFIED and “ as a group .” GNB

Here we have a group or meeting defined by the unanimity of the people. It was their minds that brought them together. It was their hearts that drew them together. They were in agreement, and it compelled them to come together. They all consented to do so, being driven by a common purpose. They were thinking in the same direction. Their affection was centered on the same thing.

When the disciples prayed together prior to Pentecost, they were in “ one accord” (Acts 1:14). When the day of Pentecost commenced, these same disciples “were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). Now, every day they are still “in one accord ” (Acts 2:46). Later, when they were threatened by the Jewish leaders, they lifted up their voice to God “with one accord ” (Acts 4:24). After the incident with Ananias and Sapphira, “they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch” (Acts 5:12). When Philip went and preached in the city of Samaria, “the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake” (Acts 8:6). When Barnabas and Paul were sent out, they were sent out by brethren that were “of one accord ” (Acts 15:25).

The Philippians were admonished to be “ likeminded” and “of one accord ” (Phil 2:2), and that they would be found standing “fast in one spirit , with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil 1:27). The desire of Paul was that the Romans would glorify God “with one mind and with one mouth ” (Rom 15:6). The Corinthians were urged to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment ” (1 Cor 1:10), and to “be of one mind ” (2 Cor 13:11). Paul

said to scattered believers, “be ye all of one mind” (1 Pet 3:8).

Institutionalized religion has made it convenient to maintain different ways of thinking – to have divided thinking, even though it is contrary to both the nature of spiritual life and the Word of the Lord. Even though it involves division, heresy, sectarianism, and a party spirit, men can gather together under the banner of humanly devised theological systems. They call themselves by different names, and maintain separate theological schools to perpetuate their peculiar way of thinking. Oh, they all say they are right, and are ready to take God’s word in their mouth as though it was written to support their view.

My point in bringing up this miserable and reproachful condition is that it cannot be found in our text. We are considering the real thing – genuine spiritual life, or “newness of life” as it really is. The continuing together of our text was not the result of organization. It was not the consequence of sectarianism, or an effort to promote an institutional agenda. They continued together because they were united by their faith (Eph 4:14), and their possession of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:3).

IN THE TEMPLE

“ . . . in the temple . . .” Other versions read, “in the temple courts ,” NIV “ attending the temple,” RSV “t o the temple,” BBE “In the temple complex ,” CSB “in the temple area ,” NAB and “in the temple courtyard .” IE

Keep in mind the number of brethren involved in this text. The number started with at least one hundred and twenty. Three thousand were added, and daily additions were being made “to the church.” We have no idea of the exact number, but it was well over 3,100 at the very least. If the response of the people to Peter’s initial words was so significant, we could very well be talking about a number in the vicinity of 3,500-4,000.

But do not be distracted by the number itself. All of these brethren were continuing to meet together every day! They did not meet in a coliseum, but in the Temple, which had been used of God to introduce the glorious things to be realized in the New Covenant. They did not meet in the Temple proper, where only priests were allowed to minister. They were, rather, in what might be called the temple complex, courtyard, or area. Rather than seeing their new lives as a contraction of the things related to the Temple, they now doubt saw the types and figures that were embedded in the Temple service as now being fulfilled: sacrifice, lambs, shedding of blood, a High Priest, intercession, cleansing, prayers, service, worship, and much more.

Herod’s temple itself, according to some historians, had the same dimensions as that of Solomon: 60 cubits long (90 feet), 20 cubits wide (30 feet), and 30 cubits high (45 feet). A number of courts, porches, and other structures surrounded the Temple itself, creating a rather large complex. You may recall that the disciples once showed Jesus the “ buildings of the temple” (Matt 24:1; Mk 13:1). Within the Temple there was also “Solomon’s porch,” in which Jesus walked (John 10:23). This appears to have been a rather large area. When Peter healed the man at the Temple gate called “Beautiful,” many people “ran together” to Solomon’s porch I(Acts 3:11). In the fifth chapter of Acts, Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for lying to the Holy Spirit, the disciples were in Solomon’s porch (Acts 5:12).

Thus, the Temple area clearly could accommodate great crowds of people. Historians tell us that the wall around the Temple complex was 600 cubits square. The minimum measurement assigned to a cubit is eighteen inches. That would make the area nine hundred feet square, or an area in which nine football fields could be placed. Some affirm that a royal cubit, which it is likely that Herod used, is 20.67 inches in size. That would make the Temple area 1,033.5 feet square, or nearly 15% larger. We are speaking of an enormous area.

One section of this massive wall remains to this day. The section is referred to as “the wailing wall,” and is referred to as ‘the holiest shrine of the Jewish world.’ ZOLA LEVITE MINISTRIES
The wall is presently about sixty feet high (equivalent to a six story building).

My point in spending an unusual amount of time on this is to accent the nature of real spiritual life. Brethren want to be together! After all, they are headed for a place where they will “go no more out” (Rev 3:12), either from the conscious presence of the Lord or from one another. It makes a lot of sense that kindred spirits do not want to be separated from one another. Therefore, these brethren sought means to be together, and they found them in the Temple area.

For general information “the Temple” is mentioned twenty-four times in the book of Acts (2:46; 3:1,2,3,8,10; 4:1; 5:20,21,24,25,42; 19:27; 21:26,27,28,29, 30; 22:17; 24:6,12,18; 25:8; 26:21). Peter and John went there “at the hour of prayer” (3:1). The angel of the Lord told the apostles, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life”, which they did (Acts 5:20,21,25). When the apostles had been released from prison, they were found “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). Paul went to the Temple (21:26,30). He prayed in the Temple (Acts 22:17).

This does not suggest that the Temple was intended to remain in place, or that the Lord dwelt there in a unique and special way. It does suggest, however, the early believers were able to make holy associations, and took advantage of them to meet together. They were not against buildings, and took measures to ensure that they could be together in one place. Those who imagine that there is more sanctity and advantage in dividing the saints into small numbers will not be able to account satisfactorily for this refreshing record.

People who have one mind, or are of “one accord,” perceive being “together” as a most pleasant advantage. They do not attempt to limit the number with whom they meet, but seek to gain every possible benefit.

BREAKING BREAD FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

“ 46b . . . and breaking bread from house to house . . . ”

Even after they spent time “together” in the Temple, the freshness of salvation, and the vigorous nature of “newness of life” compelled them to spend more time together. Again, this was not a matter of law, or of apostolic requirement. Those who only spend time together because they have to do so will seek opportunity to separate for a season. These people sought opportunities to be together.

This is an expression of new life, especially at its inception. It should be contrasted with a new converts in our time who become part of a group that meets from 1-3 hours a week – and even that time is often bereft of food for the soul and profitable fellowship.

I must take care to confirm that the events taking place in our text are not the establishment of a standard, or norm. Neither are they the response to a particular apostolic directive – unless it be to save themselves from that “untoward generation” (2:40). This is an expression of new life, especially at its inception. It should be contrasted with a new converts in our time who become part of a group that meets from 1-3 hours a week – and even that time is often bereft of food for the soul and profitable fellowship. Such a circumstance is a religious aberration – an abnormality from which nothing of lasting goodness will emerge. It assumes that new life progresses without involvement in the body of Christ to which it has been joined. By way of contrast, we are reading of how real believers, responding to the real Jesus, were compelled to conduct themselves.

BREAKING BREAD

“. . . and breaking bread . . .” Other versions read, “they broke bread,” NIV “taking broken bread,” BBE “they received their food,” ESV “did eat their meat,” GENEVA “they ate,” GWN “broke bread and took food,” MRD “taking their meals together,” NAU “ate together,” NIB “for the Lord’s Supper,” NLT “met in small groups . . . for Communion,” LIVING “they ate,” ISV “they practiced breaking their bread together,” WILLIAMS and “they broke bread [including the Lord’s Supper].” AMPLIFIED

There is by no means agreement among the commentators on whether this refers to the Lord’s Supper, or to a common meal enjoyed by the people. However, in the wake of the sudden burst of spiritual life, it would not be strange for disciples to frequently partake of the table of the Lord, at which a most blessed remembrance of the Savior was the focus.

- This ordinance provided a vivid depiction of the marvelous unity, or oneness, that they were enjoying. As it is written of the ordinance, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:17).

- The matter of resolution and commitment also takes place at this table as we recall, “Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (1 Cor 10:21).

- There is also the matter of discernment, when the Lord Jesus is seen more clearly, and understood more precisely: “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body” (1 Cor 11:28-29).

- There is even a proclamation in the observance of the Lord’s Supper, as we declare the Lord’s death, doing so in the prospect of His coming: “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor 11:26).

- There is also a very real participation in the benefits that were realized by means of Christ shedding His blood, and bearing the sins of the world in His body on the tree: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). In the place of “communion,” other versions read “sharing,” NASB “participation,” NIV “give us a part,” BBE “fellowship,” YLT “joint-participation,” WEYMOUTH and “participate in and share a fellowship.” AMPLIFIED

I doubt that these early disciples had a cognitive grasp of all of these things. Yet, as they entered into the ordinance they were realizing all of these marvelous benefits, being drawn into more intimate involvement with the Savior Himself, and realizing more fully the marvelous unity they were experiencing in Christ Jesus. I know from experience that the effects of such realities upon the soul brings with them a fervent desire to be with those of kindred spirit. All of this is accented by the Lord’s promise to be among those who meet together in his name, or because of Him and for His sake (Matt 18:20). If the ultimate objective of salvation is that Deity will dwell among them (Rev 21:3), then salvation itself is bound to promote a longing for such a presence. There is no better precursor to this aim than saints assembling together – particularly in remembrance of Christ.

In my own judgment, both the Lord’s Table and the eating of common meals are included in the activity of this verse – just as it was on that marvelous evening when Jesus ordained this feast. Ponder the wonderful things that took place at that occasion – when they ate together, and first observed the Lord’s Table.

In my own judgment, both the Lord’s Table and the eating of common meals are included in the activity of this verse – just as it was on that marvelous evening when Jesus ordained this feast.

Ponder the wonderful things that took place at that occasion – when they ate together, and first observed the Lord’s Table.

- Jesus washed their feet (John 13:4-12).
- Jesus confirmed that He had chosen them (John 13:18; 15:16).
- Jesus revealed the one who would betray Him, even though it was not understood by the disciples (John 13:21-27).
- He gave them a new commandment, that they love one another as He had loved them, declaring their connection to Him would be made known in that love (John 13:34-35).
- He revealed He was going away to prepare a place for them, so they could be with Him (John 14:1-3).
- He declared Himself to be the only means of gaining access to the Father (John 14:6).
- He told them He was going to send a Comforter to them, the Spirit of truth, who would abide with them forever (John 14:16-18).
- He told them the day was coming when they would know He was in the Father, they were in Jesus, and Jesus was in them (John 14:20).
- Jesus declared that the person who had His commandments and kept them would be loved by Him, and that He would reveal Himself to that person (John 14:21).
- He revealed that the person who loved Him and kept His words would be loved by the Father, and that the Father and the Son would make their abode with that person (John 14:23).
- He told them the Comforter, when He was come, would teach them of all things, and bring to their remembrance His life-giving words (John 14:26).
- He declared He was going to give them His own peace (John 14:27).
- He told them He was the Vine, and they were the branches, and developed the implications of those realities (John 15:1-8).
- He revealed that the Holy Spirit would testify of Him to them, making them competent and effective witnesses (John 15:26-27).
- He unveiled the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-11).
- He affirmed that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, withholding nothing from them that He was given to say (John 16:13).
- The Holy Spirit would glorify Christ by taking what He had given, and showing, or unveiling, it to the disciples (John 16:14-15).
- He promised that He was going to speak plainly to them of the Father (John 16:25-26).
- He revealed that the Father loved them because they loved Him, and believed that He came out from God (John 16:27).

All of that was done BEFORE Jesus died, before the sin of the world was taken away, before the devil was destroyed and principalities and powers were plundered. It was said before Jesus made peace, before He reconciled the world to God, and before he blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us. These things were said before Jesus rose from the dead, before He ascended into heaven, and before He was exalted, being made both Lord and Christ!

Now that He has been exalted above every name than is named, will Jesus do less when He is

among those who eat at His table, and joyfully eat together as His disciples? All of this was done during a meal, and when they first took of the Lord's Supper. What may we expect Him to do now when His disciples come together to remember Him?

In view of this, consider something Jesus said after the memorable institution of the Lord's Supper. "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). "Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God" (Mark 14:25). To what time was Jesus referring? Was it to the world to come? Will we require that ordinance to assist us in remembering Jesus when we are with Him face to face? Did Jesus not tell these people they would see the Kingdom of God come with power (Mk 9:1)? If this table involves communing with Christ's body and blood, is He not there among us, eating and drinking in a "new" way with us?

The Relevancy of This

There is a certain relevancy to be seen in this brief diversion. In keeping with the nature of the Kingdom and spiritual life, these people did not know one another "after the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16). That is, their closeness was not owing to fleshly friendship, or institutional camaraderie. They were one in Christ Jesus, and therefore their activities tended to center in Him, not in natural relationships and activities.

FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

"... from house to house..." Other versions read, "in their homes," NIV "at home," RSV "in their houses," BBE "at each other's home," GWN "met in homes," NLT "every house," TNT "in private houses," WEYMOUTH and "in their own homes." MONTGOMERY

Leaving the Temple, the disciples, now well over 3,100, meet in smaller groups in various homes. It is likely that this was determined more by the area in which they resided, rather than mere fleshly acquaintance. Just as in our times, it is apparent that some homes were more commodious, and able to house more. As you can see, these disciples did not view their houses as their own alone, but shared them with their brethren. It is also likely that some of the "devout men out of every nation under heaven" needed places to stay. It is not unlikely that local brethren opened their homes to such.

By saying "from house to house," a certain movement is implied. That is, there were no cliques, sects, or isolated groups. The expression used here "from house to house" comes from an interesting Greek expression. The word "from" comes from the Greek preposition **kat** (kot), which "denoted motion of diffusion or direction from the higher to the lower... down from," THAYER "generally downward movement" FRIBERG

The idea is that the environment and benefits realized when the disciples were all together in the Temple, went with them as they met in various houses.

Here is another place where true spiritual life radically differs from institutional hype. For example, it would not be difficult to conceive of professing Christians going straight from a Lord's day assembly to an athletic event, or some family outing, or an amusement park. Life after the average assembly – assuming it is an assembly with any degree of substance – is anything but a continuance of the spirit of the assembly. For example, the concept of praise and worship that is being hawked in the churches today is one of entering into an activity, then leaving it. There is absolutely no need for a praise and worship leader after the gathering. Further, things that take place in the assembly are generally of a different gender than things outside of the assembly. Should there be some kind of break from routine in the assembly, it is not surprising to find people speaking of

things wholly unrelated to life and godliness. All of this is generally accepted being normal among modern professing Christians.

However, would you expect that sort of conduct among the disciples of our text? Do you imagine they went from continually meeting in the Temple to descend together into the quagmire of purely earthly interests? Is there any record of Jesus Himself ever wholly devoting Himself to such interests – or the twelve apostles, or Paul, or Timothy, or anyone else of Scriptural record? Is there any record of believers becoming absorbed with politics, or business, or community events, or any other form of ordinary life?

The sophist will object, saying that I am suggesting they never did such things – that all believers were totally divorced from any lawful involvements with the world. However, that is not at all what I am saying. I rather suggest that such involvements were always secondary, and never primary. I am saying that “newness of life” is, by its very nature, is fundamental, primary, and principal.

The Kingdom of God, together with all of its facets, is to be sought “first” – not secondarily or as some other subordinate interest. That is why we are admonished, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). And again, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col 3:17). And again, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col 3:23).

This is why Jesus died and rose again, “that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). This is involved in presenting our bodies as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). Simply put, this is the way life in Christ Jesus is lived. It is the manner of regenerated life. What we are witnessing in this text is the expression of that life. In our day, it will take different forms. We may not meet in the Temple, but we meet. We will take the benefits received when we meet together and carry them into our homes, which will be open to all of our brethren. That is newness of life! That is simply how it functions. It is not self centered, but Christ centered. It sees God’s people as the primary people.

EATING WITH GLADNESS AND SINGLENES OF HEART

“ 46c . . . did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart . . . ”

This is a unity that continues because it produces gladness. It is not cumbersome. It does not tax the patience of those who possess it. It is not forced upon men, so that they must continue together out of obligation, whether they like it or not. It is not a theoretical unity that men only talk about, but which is never evidenced in their daily lives.

The unity that is accomplished in Christ Jesus – the “unity of the Spirit” – is very real. It is not institutional unity that is turned on and off as men deem appropriate. This is a unity that continues because it produces gladness. It is not cumbersome. It does not tax the patience of those who possess it. It is not forced upon men, so that they must continue together out of obligation, whether they like it or not. It is not a theoretical unity that men only talk about, but which is never evidenced in their daily lives. Behold how glorious it is to be of “one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32).

DID EAT THEIR MEAT WITH GLADNESS

“. . . did eat their meat with gladness . . . ” Other versions read, “they ate their food with gladness,” NKJV “they were taking their meals together with gladness,” NASB “ate together with glad . . . hearts ,” NIV “ partook of food with glad . . . hearts,” RSV “they took their food with joy ,” BBE “they received their food with gladness,” DARBY “they were joyful . . . as they ate,” GWN

“took food rejoicing,” MRD “they ate their meals with exultation,” NAB “sharing their food with glad . . . hearts,” NET “shared their food gladly,” NJB “shared their meals with great joy,” NLT “eating their good with joyful hearts,” IE “took their meals with great happiness,” WEYMOUTH “partook of their food with gladness,” AMPLIFIED “sharing their meals with simple joy,” PHILLIPS and “sharing food with great happiness.” ALT

This is newness of life in its purest form. It will not be long until the old serpent will corrupt the church with his ministers and their doctrine. Later, in Corinth, they ate together, but there was a total absence of the spirit made known in this text. Paul chastens that wayward assembly. “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken” (1 Cor 11:21). Oh, when they met, they did take the Lord's Supper – but not in the proper spirit. They had a meal together also, but they did not eat their food with gladness. Instead, everyone thought only of themselves, eating their own food sumptuously while poorer hungry brethren sat right next to them. What happened in Corinth? Why was it so contradictory to what is happening in our text? I will tell you why. They had heard about and received another Jesus, another Gospel, and another Spirit (2 Cor 11:4). That reception caused differing and contradicting attitudes to arise among them. Those attitudes did not come because they were believing, or loved the brethren, or were worshiping God. They were expressions of people who were regressing, walking in the flesh, and quenching the Spirit.

However, in our text, life was fresh, dominating, invigorating, and refreshing. This is real life, and their devotion was real devotion. There is no simulation here, no pretension, no hypocrisy. Those dreadful traits will soon enter, but it will not because it is the nature of spiritual life to allow them.

Here we read of the meals of the brethren. This is in addition to the breaking of bread, which, in the least consideration, included the Lord's table. Now, they share their food, and do it gladly. They did not leave their gladness in the Temple, but brought it into their houses. God is said to fill men's heart “with gladness” (Acts 14:17), and indeed He does! Jesus was anointed “with the oil of gladness” (Heb 1:9).

Gladness has always been a mark of the godly. In Nehemiah's time, when a revival took place, “there was very great gladness” (Neh 8:17; 12:27). When Divine deliverance was experienced by the Jews of Esther's time they had “gladness and joy” (Esther 8:16,17). David sang that God had “put gladness” into his heart (Psa 4:7), and even “girded” him with gladness (Psa 30:11). God is to be served “with gladness” (Psa 100:2). When God brings forth His people, whether it is Israel being brought from Egypt, or the those in Christ being brought from the world and sin, it is “with joy” and “with gladness” (Psa 105:43). Isaiah prophesied

It ought to be noted that this is not a gladness brought on by a drum roll and a pounding base. In scripture, “gladness” is rational, and is the result of insight, perception, and understanding. It is not simply a feeling that is caught, so to speak, by being in a tumultuous environment, or the result of being led into a frenzied state by a charismatic personality.

of the day of salvation, saying the people would “obtain joy and gladness” (Isa 35:10; 51:3,11). Jeremiah spoke of the coming age as one in which “the voice of joy and the voice of gladness” would be heard (Jer 33:11).

The word “gladness” is an especially strong one, as you might suppose. Coming from the Greek word **avgallia,sei** (ag-al-lee'as-ei), it means “exultation, extreme joy,” THAYER “gladness, (extreme) joy, feeling of great happiness,” FRIBERG “extreme joy or gladness,” UBS “a state of intensive joy and gladness, often implying verbal expression and body movement (for example, jumping, leaping, dancing) – to be extremely joyful, to rejoice greatly, extreme gladness,” LOUW-

NIDA “great joy, exultation.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

It ought to be noted that this is not a gladness brought on by a drum roll and a pounding base. In scripture, “gladness” is rational, and is the result of insight, perception, and understanding. It is not simply a feeling that is caught, so to speak, by being in a tumultuous environment, or the result of being led into a frenzied state by a charismatic personality. That is why it is wed to such things as light, joy, and honor (Esther 8:16), rejoicing (Psa 45:15), the upright in heart (Psa 97:11), holy solemnity (Isa 30:29), thanksgiving (Isa 51:3), and the love of truth and peace (Zech 8:19).

It is what these believers had received and understood that made them glad. It was not a gladness that created distraction and chaos, for they “ate their food with gladness,” and that is an orderly involvement.

AND SINGLENESS OF HEART

“ . . . and singleness of heart . . . ” Other versions read, “ simplicity of heart,” NKJV “ sincerity of heart,” NASB “sincere hearts,” NIV “ generous hearts,” NRSV “ true hearts,” BBE “ humble hearts,” NET “ generosity ,” NLT “ thankfulness ,” LIVING “ single-heartedness ,” WEYMOUTH “simple hearts,” WILLIAMS and “ undivided hearts.” MONTGOMERY

A single heart is an uncluttered one. The phrase “singleness of heart” is mentioned three times in Scripture (Acts 2:46; Eph 6:5; Col 3:22). Under the law, the matter of a “singular vow” was addressed (Lev 27:2), meaning dedicated vow that was unmixed with any other commitment. Jesus spoke of commitment to a single objective as having an eye that was “single” (Matt 6:22; Lk 11:34). The word used here means “simplicity,” or “plain,” like soil without rocks , THAYER “smoothness, evenness, hence sincerity of heart, humbleness,” FRIBERG and “humility associated with simplicity of life – humility, humbleness, simplicity.” LOUW-NIDA

The idea is that the people had no ulterior motives, hidden objectives, or secret ambitions. There was no exploitation, or shrouded intentions. No person was trying to get on the good side of another, or plotting to gain some sort of advantage. Friends were not sought for personal gain.

These brethren were not driven by a lifeless institutional agenda, or humanly conceived laws. They were glad to share their homes and their food, and happy to be together, focusing on the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers.

PRAISING GOD

“ 47a Praising God . . . ” Other versions read, “ Giving praise to God,” BBE “ At the same time they praised God,” GWN “all the while praising God,” NLT “the believers were praising God,” IE “they kept praising God,” ISV “ constantly praising God,” WILLIAMS and “they praised God continually .” PHILLIPS

Right here we confront something with which the modern church has great difficulty. For the most part, it has allowed the young and unlearned to shape their thinking on praise. This was not a separate activity, with a separate specialized leader. It does not say they were singing, although that certainly would not have been strange. As some versions indicate, they were praising God throughout their sundry activities. They praised Him in the Temple. They praised Him as they went from house to house. They praised Him when they broke bread. They praised Him when they ate their food with gladness and singleness of heart. What is there about praise like this that would require a leader, and how would he go about leading such praise should such a person be required?

WHAT IS PRAISE?

Precisely what does it mean to praise God? You will note from the text that this was not their response to a commandment, or a procedure, or to some form of human leadership. Whatever had happened to these people had set them to praising God.

Coming from the Greek word **aivnou/ntej** (ahee-noon-tes), “praising” means, “extol,” THAYER “praise, speak in praise of, in the NT used only of praise for God,” FRIBERG “to speak of the excellence of a person,” LOUW-NIDA and “to glorify.” LEH

As is common with all spiritual expressions, praise is characterized by both truth and perception. Praise is the result of perception – perceiving the work of God. When men praise God, like their perception, it flows from faith, for praise is the eye and hand of the soul, that takes hold of the things of God.

As used in this text, this word occurs nine times in Scripture.

- When Jesus was born, the shepherds heard “multitude of the heavenly host praising God” (Lk 2:13). Their words were insightful: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men” (Luke 2:14).
- When the shepherds returned from seeing the holy child, they did so “glorifying and praising God” (Lk 2:20).
- When Jesus came into Jerusalem in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy, “the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works that they had seen” (Luke 19:37). Their words were also insightful: “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38).
- After Jesus was risen from the dead, and ascended into heaven, it is said of the disciples, “And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God. Amen” (Luke 24:53).
- When the lame man was healed at the gate Beautiful, it is written, “And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3:8).
- When Paul was commenting on the acceptance of Gentiles, he sited a text from the 117 th Psalm: “And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him, all ye people.” (Rom 15:11; Psa 117:1).
- From the Isle of Patmos, John the beloved heard a voice coming out of the Throne: “Praise our God, all ye His servants, and ye that fear Him, both small and great” (Rev 19:5).

As used in all of these texts, there were expressions of refreshing insights concerning the Person, purpose, and accomplishments of God Almighty. Understanding was reflected in the words, as well as appreciation and thankfulness.

I have lamentably noted over the years how very little insightful speech is found among professing believers. Only recently I was with a group of Christian leaders where insight into the Person of God was glaringly absent. If you have ever been part of a meal attended by church folk, you probably heard very little “praise” for God – very few words of understanding concerning holy involvements with the sons of men.

However, if you had been with those early believers – thousands of them – you would have heard them praising God. They would not have been speculating about why He did this or that, or allowed something they did not understand. Even though those saints lived in politically difficult times, you would not have heard them philosophizing about why Pilate was allowed to mix the blood of certain Galileans with their sacrifices (Lk 13:1). You would not have heard them speaking about the

miserable architects of the day whose tower collapsed on eighteen people, killing them all (Luke 13:4). Something had happened to those early believers that transformed how they saw things, as well as the things on which they focused.

As I have already emphasized, we are being exposed to real conversion and the impact their transformation had upon them. If their conduct is at variance with that of modern day professed believers, what kind of person would assume it was because the times have changed, and people are no longer so radical. Who would say that those early believers tasted of something unique – something that was not intended for all time? Of course, if that really is the case, then precisely what is there about salvation that is “common” (Jude 1:3). And, how can faith be “common,” yet yield such dramatically different results (Tit 1:4). These are things to ponder.

CONTINUAL PRAISE

Believers are admonished, “By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name” (Heb 13:15). Praise is one thing, “continual” praise is something else. A person may be able simulate praise for a short time, but the person who cannot perceive the working of the Lord cannot praise Him “continually.” For such pretenders, praise is not “fruit,” but only pretension.

Without apparent prodding, the disciples of our text continued to praise the Lord – in the Temple, and from house to house. They did not see it as a duty, but as something their hearts compelled them to do. It was not an activity to which time was assigned, or that required a leader and instruction. Their praise was the spontaneous and insightful expression of their faith. They had a “like precious faith” just as the apostles (2 Pet 1:1), who would say later, “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). That involves praising as well as preaching.

ONE MORE WORD ABOUT PRAISE

In all of these texts, the people themselves become “a praise.” That is, they are seen as the work of God, and thus produce praise to God in those who see them. That praise is primarily in heaven, among the hosts who have a clearer and more extensive view of the greatness of the work of God than ordinary men.

Because of the current teaching concerning praise, it is necessary to say few more words about this matter. Through the prophets, the Lord foretold a time when the people of God themselves would become “a praise.” The apostles confirmed that this occurred in those who are joined to Christ Jesus, and thus participate in both His death and His life.

The Prophets

- “And give Him no rest, till He establish, and till He make Jerusalem a praise in the earth” (Isa 62:7).
- “For as the girdle cleaveth to the loins of a man, so have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear” (Jer 13:11).
- “And it shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honor before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it” (Jer 33:9).
- “At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the LORD” (Zeph 3:20).

The Apostles

The apostolic equivalent of this is stated in the following manner.

- “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6).
- And again, “That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ” (Eph 1:12).
- And again, “Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:14).
- And again, “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:11).
- And again, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7).

It should be apparent, and yet it is necessary to say it, this is the only kind of people that can praise God – a people who themselves have been “made a praise.” All other purported praise is pretentious, and is actually obnoxious to the Lord.

In all of these texts, the people themselves become “a praise.” That is, they are seen as the work of God, and thus produce praise to God in those who see them. That praise is primarily in heaven, among the hosts who have a clearer and more extensive view of the greatness of the work of God than ordinary men. The praise will also be upon earth among those who perceive that the people of God are, in fact, the work of God.

Expressions of This Praise On Earth

Remembering that giving thanks is expressly said to be “praise” (Heb 13:15), an expression of this kind is found in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. “Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers” (Eph 1:15-16). A similar expression or praise was expressed to the Colossians. “We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints” (Col 1:3-4). Another such expression related to the Thessalonian saints. “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (1 Thess 1:2-4).

In these three cases, Paul perceived the work of God in the people. It was obvious to the eye of faith that God had “created them in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). It was evident that they had passed from death unto life, and that God was working in them “that which is well pleasing in His sight” (Heb 13:20). The people had become “a praise.”

The Relevancy to Our Text

It should be apparent, and yet it is necessary to say it, this is the only kind of people that can praise God – a people who themselves have been “made a praise.” All other purported praise is pretentious, and is actually obnoxious to the Lord. Both the prophets and Jesus spoke of such a thing in these words: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me. But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:8-9).

The seriousness of the condition is accented by the prophets. “Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs ; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols” (Amos 5:23). And again, “That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David” (Amos 6:5). And again, “And the songs of the temple shall be howlings in that day , saith the Lord GOD: there shall be many dead bodies in every place; they shall cast them forth with silence” (Amos 8:3). The people had simulated praise. They used instruments like David, but it was for their own satisfaction, and not for the Lord. What the people called praise, God called “noise” and “howlings.” It all sounds like a page out of modern times.

The point is that the people of our text had really been made new. They had once been charged with killing Jesus, now they had been forgiven and liberated by Him, and they knew it. The product of that was their praise – daily praise, and continual praise.

Today the professing church is being taught by sophists that praise is the secret to receiving from God. It is like a key that unlocks heaven, and causes God to come and dwell among the people. The whole matter is presented leaving the impression that praise makes a people, rather than a people making praise. It is a serious error praise is purported to be coming from a people in whom the working of God is not evident. A people whose very appearance and manners is a distraction to godly minds cannot possibly be found in “the courts of the Lord” (Psa 84:2). It is not possible for a people to truly praise God who are not continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread and in prayers. It is time for godly teachers and leaders to rise up and insist that people be “holy in all manner of conversation,” or “conduct” NKJV (1 Pet 1:15). This is God’s requirement, and it must be ours as well. If men object, saying it is not possible to determine who is really holy, they should be removed from positions of leadership. God has not put them there, for He places no members in functions for which they are not suited (1 Cor 12:28).

Of course, in our text, such unsavory conditions had not yet arisen. That is the whole point of saying these things. We are beholding true purity.

HAVING FAVOR WITH ALL THE PEOPLE

“ 47b . . . and having favor with all the people.” Other versions read, “enjoying the favor of all the people,” NIV “having the goodwill of all the people,” NRSV “having the approval of all the people,” BBE “were looked up to by everyone,” NJB “the whole city was favorable to them,” LIVING “All of the people liked them,” IE “regarded with favor by all the people,” WEYMOUTH “being in favor and goodwill with all the people,” AMPLIFIED and “all the people respected them.” PHILLIPS

Here is a phenomenon that is most arresting to consider – “favor with all the people.” This confirms that God does not produce a people whose appearance and manner of life is offensive to others. Christians are not social oddities, who look like fools and conduct their lives as though they did not have good sense. It is their doctrine that causes all of the trouble, not their appearance. Solomon once said, “Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man” (Prov 3:3-4).

The people of Jerusalem looked favorably upon this growing body of believers. There was a certain comeliness in their conduct that reflected the working of the Lord. They were not seeking their own. They were not moved to exploit others. There was no cause for legal restraint among them. The city was not made worse because of their presence. No one’s possessions were in jeopardy because of their presence. They did not engage in disruptive or abusive conduct. Thus, the people looked favorably upon them. That does not mean they all rushed to embrace the truth that had liberated these souls, and that is not what our text means. It rather highlights that even the

inhabitants of Jerusalem saw that the people were better, not worse.

This assisted the church in its beginnings, as the Lord protected them from harsh opposition at the first. In due time, because of their aggressive preaching and testimony, much of this favor would be lost. However, that would not be due to the way they lived, or to any adverse effects their lives had upon others. True godliness is of such an order that it is written, “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ ” (1 Pet 3:16).

The Working of the Lord

From one point of view, this “favor with all the people” was the working of the Lord, who gave the new disciples favor in the eyes of the people. When God appeared to Moses and told him He was going to deliver Israel from Egypt,. He said, “And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians : and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty” (Ex 3:21). When the time of deliverance came, this is precisely what he did: “And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians ” (Ex 11:3). And again it is written, “And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians” (Ex 12:36).

It is also written of Joseph, “And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt ; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house” (Acts 7:9-10). As young Samuel advanced in years, it is said of him, “And the child Samuel grew on, and was in favor both with the LORD, and also with men ” (1 Sam 2:26). It is also said of Esther, “And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her ” (Esther 2:15).

However, when men look unfavorably upon us, it must not be because of the way we live, or because of our behavior among men. It is wrong for believers to be criticized for their work ethic, or because they are lazy, or because they cannot be trusted. Our light shines through our works, thus adorning the doctrine

The Example of Jesus

When the very nature and life of God was embodied a person, the Lord Jesus Christ, it is said of Him, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man ” (Luke 2:52).

On one occasion, the Jews took up stones to kill Jesus. At this time Jesus asked them which one of His “good works” had provoked them to such action. Here is the record. “Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from My Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy ; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God” (John 10:33). It was what Jesus SAID that brought men to oppose Him. As for His life itself, it was not offensive to ordinary men – not even men like Pilate. When Pilate looked for some deed or expression in the life of Jesus that would justify His death, even he had to twice acknowledge, “I find no fault in Him” (John 19:4,6).

True Godliness

When the redeemed live their lives within the context of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, there is a sense in which they are “approved of men.” Thus it is written, “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men ” (Rom 14:17-18). When admonishing the Corinthians, Paul urged them to provide “for honest things, not only in the sight of

the Lord, but also in the sight of men ” (2 Cor 8:21). Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works , and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

It is not that we are to do things to please men, for that is a wholly improper motive (Gal 1:10). Rather, it is that true godliness is not of itself offensive to men. It is the reason and objective of godliness that causes the offense, particularly as it is expressed in preaching.

A Word to the Wise

We are not to be naive or overly simplistic in our view of this matter. There is no guarantee that you will experience overwhelming acceptance by everyone around you, and you should not expect this to be the case. However, when men look unfavorably upon us, it must not be because of the way we live, or because of our behavior among men. It is wrong for believers to be criticized for their work ethic, or because they are lazy, or because they cannot be trusted. Our light shines through our works, thus adorning the doctrine (Tit 2:10).

Likewise, when we find favor with men, let it not be because we keep silence about the truth, or because we present the truth so that it is more palatable to men. And, even in our speech, may it be said that we have “sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you ” (Titus 2:8).

We can be assured that when it is appropriate, and when it is best for our own advancement and the glory of God, our Lord can still give us favor with all of the people. We can let it rest at that.

ADDITIONS EVERY DAY

“ 47c And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved. ”

Those who are looking for a pattern in the book of Acts, or for precedents established for all time, will surely have a difficult time with this text. I do not know that I have ever heard someone say that daily additions are the standard for all churches – even though, considering that “the field is the world” (Matt 13:36), this is surely happening. The very fact that this is something that the Lord did confirms that it is not subject to systemization or exploitation by men.

THE LORD ADDED TO THE CHURCH

Here we have the first time the words are used with particular reference to the body of Christ, those who have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son

“And the Lord added to the church daily . . . ” Other versions read, “the Lord was adding to their number daily,” NASB “ day by day the Lord added to their number,” NRSV “every day the number . . . was increased by the Lord,” BBE “the Lord added to them,” CSB “the Lord added to the assembly daily,” DARBY “the Lord increased daily together ,” DOUAY “every day the Lord saved people ,” GWN “the Lord added to their community ,” NJB “each day the Lord added to their fellowship ,” NLT “the Lord added to the congregation daily,” TNT “ each day God added to them,” LIVING “every day the Lord continued to add to them,” WILLIAMS and “the Lord added to their group .” GNB

Luke is not speaking of a church roster, or a set of books on earth. It was the assembly itself that as increased – “the church.” This is only the second time the expression “the church” is used in the New Covenant Scriptures. Jesus referred to “My church” in Matthew 16:18, speaking of a time to follow His enthronement in glory. He referred to “the church” in Matthew 18:17, where he was addressing the matter of one brother trespassing against another. His immediate reference was not to “the church” as comprehended in the apostles’ doctrine – that is to say, His body – even though

the principle continues to apply.

Here we have the first time the words are used with particular reference to the body of Christ, those who have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13).

As used in this text, there has been considerable dialog among believers concerning the word "church." Some have chosen to use it in reference to the structure in which the people of God meet. There is, however, no Scriptural basis for such a use, and it contradicts the way the word is employed by the Holy Spirit.

The word "church" is translated from the Greek word **evkkhhsia** (ek-lay-see-ah). The foundational, or root, meaning of the word is, "called out, or called forth." THAYER The predominate idea in the word is that of an assembly – a group people that have been "called out." This the lexical definition of its use is, "a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; as assembly," THAYER "the assembled Christian community," FRIBERG "congregation of Christians, implying interacting membership," LOUW-NIDA "community, congregation, church," LIDDELL-SCOTT "assembly," LEH "church or congregation; as a church meeting." GINGRICH While there are other uses of the word like a political gathering (Acts 19:39), the gathering of Israelites at Sinai (Acts 7:39), and an unruly assembly of people (Acts 19:32), the emphasis is always on the gathering – an assembly . Even when the "church" is used of the body of Christ in general (Col 1:18), the emphasis is upon the people being called out of the world and assembled together in Christ.

Therefore, when our text says the Lord "added to the church daily," the immediate reference is to an increase in the assembly – in those who were continuing "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers" (Acts 2:42). The larger implication is that the body of Christ – the people called out of the world and set in the heavenly places – was increasing daily.

Note that it was the Lord who was doing the adding. This means that His criteria for addition had been met. Other expressions that speak of the Lord adding to the church are as follows.

- "But of Him [God] are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor 1:30).
- "But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body , as it hath pleased Him" (1 Cor 12:18).
- "For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body , whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13).
- "Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col 1:13).
- "I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase " (1 Cor 3:6).
- " For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6).
- "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us , by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior" (Titus 3:5-6).

Ultimately, the things required for our salvation are accomplished by God, through Jesus, and in the Holy Spirit. Some of the accomplishments include the following.

- Reconciled (Col 1:21).
- Washed (1 Cor 6:11).
- Sanctified (1 Cor 6:11; Jude 1:1).
- Justified (1 Cor 6:11).
- Purged (Heb 1:3).
- Purified (Acts 15:9; Tit 2:14).
- Delivered (Gal 1:4; Col 1:13).
- Translated (Col 1:3).
- Called out (1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 1:3).
- Joined to the Lord (1 Cor 6:17).
- Baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13).
- Drink in one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- Baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27).

Those who have experienced such things, by the very nature of the life given to them, are drawn together. They have all been “added” to the church, being made a part of Christ’s body. Further, their “common salvation” and “common faith” bring them together

Enlightened (Heb 6:4).

- Tasted of the heavenly gift (Heb 6:4).
- Made partakers of the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:4).
- Tasted of the good word of God (Heb 6:5).
- Tasted of the powers of the world to come (Heb 6:5).

Those who have experienced such things, by the very nature of the life given to them, are drawn together. They have all been “added” to the church, being made a part of Christ’s body. Further, their “common salvation” and “common faith” bring them together (Tit 1:4; Jude 1:3).

SUCH AS SHOULD BE SAVED

“ . . . such as should be saved.” Other versions read, “those who were being saved,” NKJV “those that were saved,” ASV “those who had salvation,” BBE “those that were to be saved,” DOUAY “those destined to be saved,” NJB “those whom He was saving,” WEYMOUTH “those who were being saved [from spiritual death],” AMPLIFIED and “those who were finding salvation” PHILLIPS

As you can see, there are a number of differing perspectives reflected in the various translations. Note the different emphases.

- **DIVINE DETERMINATION:** “should be saved,” KJV “were to be saved,” DOUAY “destined to be saved.” NJB
- **THE PROCESS OF BEING SAVED:** “were being saved,” NKJV “He was saving,” WEYMOUTH “who were being saved.” AMPLIFIED
- **A RESULT OF SALVATION:** “who had salvation.” BBE
- **HUMAN INVOLVEMENT:** “who were finding salvation.” PHILLIPS

Obviously, some of these versions are actually commentaries rather than translations, for words

themselves cannot have such a diverse meaning. My purpose here is simply to determine as best I can what the verse is actually saying. You may be sure that it will perfectly agree with the Scriptural doctrine of salvation itself.

The word “added” (the Lord added) is an imperfect active verb. That is, it is an action that is continuing – as though the text read “kept on adding.” The words “should be saved” are derived from a single Greek word, **swlzome,nouj** (sozo-amen-ous). From the standpoint of linguistics, or the structure of language, this is a present perfect participle. This means it is referring to an action that was complete at the time of writing – something that had already happened.

Putting the concepts of “adding” and “should be saved” together, the text means that God kept on adding to the church those who had been saved . That is, salvation was required for them to be added to the church, or made a part of the assembly. Simply stated one might say, “upon being saved, God added them to the church.”

Divine Determination

He is the One who is the “Author and Finisher of our faith.” He is also the One to whom all judgment has been committed. He, therefore has the last word on who is and who is not a part of His church. He is the One who is building it, adding to it daily all are appropriately described as “saved.”

Here is where ones theology can dictate the meaning. For example, if a person accepts the view that Divine determination is the driving force, the text will be perceived as saying God added to the church every day those who were “ destined to be saved.” NJB There are texts that suggest this is the case. “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed ” (Acts 13:48). “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44). “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd” (John 10:16).

The Process of Being Saved

This meaning emphasizes that being added to the church is part of the process of salvation itself: “were being saved.” NKJB Salvation itself is often viewed as a process, commencing with the new birth, and culminating when the Lord returns . “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” NKJV (1 Cor 1:18). “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing” NKJV (2 Cor 2:15). “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5).

The Result of Salvation

This perspective would view salvation as something completed, the result of which was being added to the church: “who had salvation.” BBE There are also texts that view salvation from this perspective. “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) ”(Eph 2:5). “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

Human Involvement

This view traces the cause of being added to church to what men have done: “were finding

salvation.” PHILLIPS The Scriptures also view salvation as the result of what men do. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13). “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). “And being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him ” (Heb 5:9).

Conclusion

As you can see, there is a sense in which each one of these meanings is true. I have taken the time to briefly delineate them to confirm why men translated the text differently. They were looking at it from differing angles.

As for the text itself, and what it is intended to convey, it seems to me that the paramount consideration is the Lord Himself – referring to the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter said He had been made “both lord and Christ,” and thus He is involved in the affairs of the Kingdom. It is He who addressed the matter of sin, taking it away. He is the One who sent out the messengers to deliver the good news. He is the One who is the “Author and Finisher of our faith.” He is also the One to whom all judgment has been committed (John 5:22). He, therefore has the last word on who is and who is not a part of His church. He is the One who is building it (Matt 16:18), adding to it daily all are appropriately described as “saved. ” It is not possible to be “saved” without being “added to the church,” and no one is a part of the church who is not, by Divine definition, “saved. ” There is no point or facet of salvation in which it becomes institutional. No part of it is confined within a routine or a procedure. Nothing about salvation is disassociated from the One who has wrought it.

CONCLUSION

Thus we conclude our considerations of the second chapter of Acts. It is to the church what the six days of creation are to the universe. For the body of Christ, it is the beginning, paralleling Israel coming out of Egypt, crossing the Red Sea, and commencing the journey to Canaan. We have been exposed to the ruling Christ, the working Spirit, and the consequent preaching and response of men. Christ’s influence upon earth was confirmed when He, being exalted to the right hand of God, poured out the Holy Spirit upon men (verse 33). The convicting power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel has been seen (verse 37). We have been exposed to how men respond when they are convicted – pricked in their hearts – and how aggressive they are to appropriate salvation (verses 38 and 41). It has been made clear that the matter of salvation involves being separated from the world as well as having one’s sins forgiven (verse 40). The fact that the Word of God is gladly received when it is believed has been confirmed (verse 41). The impact of the truth upon human hearts is seen when men continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers (verse 42). The unity of believers and their lack of covetousness was confirmed (verse 43-45). The unanimity that results from the common faith and common salvation was clearly corroborated (verse 46). The effect of real salvation was evidenced by continual praise (verse 47).

These are all realities, not mere creedal statements or theological positions. Jesus did not come to institute an organization or a program, but that men might have “life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). This did not mean the accumulation of worldly goods, for these brethren sold their goods, distributing to their brethren as they had need. Individuality was not the main thing, but joint-participation. This has all been lived out in this chapter.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #13

“ 3:11 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; 3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. 4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. 5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. 6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. 7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. 8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God: 10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. 11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.” (Acts 3:1-11)

THE HEALING OF THE LAME MAN

INTRODUCTION

In the process of honoring and serving God, Peter and John confront a man who has been lame from birth. The man, who is a beggar, does not know these two apostles, or that they are representatives of Christ. He obviously concludes that if they are going to the Temple at the hour of prayer, they are kindly disposed to the needy, as are others who will confront him here. The discernment required for Divine assistance will be on the part of Peter and John. Their perception of the circumstance, their gift, and their faith will determine the outcome of this

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- PETER AND JOHN GO INTO THE TEMPLE (3:1)

- **A CERTAIN LAME MAN SEES PETER AND JOHN (3:2-3)**
- **“LOOK ON US!” (3:4-5)**
- **WHAT I HAVE, I GIVE (3:6)**
- **SOMETHING HAPPENS IMMEDIATELY (3:7)**
- **LEAPING UP, ENTERING, WALKING, AND LEAPING (3:8)**
- **ALL THE PEOPLE RECOGNIZED HIM (3:9-10)**
- **THE PEOPLE RUN TOGETHER, GREATLY WONDERING (3:11)**
- **CONCLUSION**

confrontation. The consequence of the incident confirms that it was driven by Divine purpose, not mere human need, and was primarily for the glory of God.

In His first message, Jesus confirmed that the heavenly Kingdom is not driven by human need, and that there is no satisfying earthly rationale for His working. You will recall that He said there were “many widows in Israel,” but God sent the prophet to a Gentile widow, who herself was sustained with Elijah during a grievous famine. He also said that “many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” – a Gentile (Luke 4:24-27). These Israelite widows and lepers were among God’s own chosen people, yet, in these two cases, the Lord chose to bestow His favor upon Gentiles. His Kingdom is not driven by human need – and there are other factors to consider.

THE REASON FOR DIVINE ACTIVITY

The reason for Divine activity is sometimes associated with the will and word of holy men (as Moses – Ex 32:31-34), but it is not driven, or governed by that means. There is a high and holy purpose that ultimately determines what God does. Further, it is the reconciling work of Christ that causes that work to be done in a righteous manner. It is the awareness of this circumstance that moved men to say, “It is the Lord: let Him do what seemeth Him good” (1 Sam 3:18), “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14), and “let Him do to me as seemeth good to Him” (1 Sam 15:26).

It represents a significant leap forward when the individual is brought to a productive awareness of the fact that the kingdom is the Lord’s, and He is the Governor among the nations” – including our own nation (Psa 22:28). As long as men are taught that they plot their own earthly future by what they say and do, they will not give themselves wholly to the Lord. They will view their own purposes and condition as primary, and will consider God as the means of implementing their own desires. This is not a pleasing posture for men to hold before God, and yet it is being heavily promoted throughout the land.

It is necessary to say these things because our text deals with the healing of a single man in the whole of Jerusalem. We know this was not the only sick person around Jerusalem, for later we read, “There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one” (Acts 5:16). The reason for this healing, therefore, cannot be merely that the man was infirm. This matter was driven by the will of God, and His glory was the primary objective of it all. This will become more clear as we witness the significance of this man’s man healing from our text through the twenty-second verse of the fourth chapter.

DUMBED DOWN LANGUAGE

The reason for this healing, therefore, cannot be merely that the man was infirm. This matter was driven by the will of God, and His glory was the primary objective of it all.

I am compelled to say a word about the current dumbing down of language, so that words no longer appear to have the significance given to them by the Holy Spirit. There are a number of special words throughout the book of Acts that speak of heightened awareness and impressions. We will confront some of them in this text. It is important that we perceive them as they are intended to be understood. A sampling of the kind of words to which I refer follows.

- “Confounded” (2:6). Other translations include confused, NKJV and bewildered. NASB
- “Amazed” (2:7a,12). Other translations include wondered, GENEVA stunned, GWN and baffled. NET
- “Marveled” (Acts 2:7b). Other translations include astonished, NRSV and wondered. RSV
- “Rejoice” (2:26a). Other translations include glad, NASB and cheered. YLT
- “Glad” (2:26b). Other translations include exulted, NASB rejoices, NIV and full of joy. BBE
- “Full of joy” (2:28). Other translations include full of gladness, NASB and complete joy. GWN
- “Pricked in their heart” (2:37). Other translations include cut to the heart, NKJV pierced to the heart, NASB hearts were troubled, BBE deeply upset, GWN acutely distressed. NET
- “Gladly received” (2:41). Other translations include received, NASB accepted, NIV welcomed, NRSV gave hearing, BBE and readily received. MRD
- “Fear” (2:43). Other translations include a sense of awe, NASB filled with awe, NIV awe, NRSV feeling of fear. GWN
- “Gladness” (2:46a). Other translations include joy, BBE joyful, GWN and rejoicing. MRD
- “Singleness” (2:46b). Other translations include simplicity, NKJV one mind, NASB sincere, NIV and generous. NRSV
- “Praising” (3:9). Other translations include laud. TNT
- “Wonder” (3:10a). Other translations include awe, CSB amazed, GENEVA amazed, GWN and amazement. NAB
- “Amazement” (3:10b). Other translations include surprise, BBE astonishment, CSB sore astonished, GENEVA stunned, GWN admiration, MRD and perplexed. NJB
- “Greatly wondering” (3:11). Other translations include greatly amazed, NKJV full of amazement, NASB astonished, NIV utterly astonished, NRSV and astounded. RSV
- “Marvel” (3:12). Other translations include surprise you, NIV wonder, NRSV greatly surprised, BBE astonished, DARBY and amazed. GWN

All of these words presume the centrality of God’s work, and a focus upon what He is doing. They describe emotions and responses that are focused and single. However, if the language of a people has been reduced to expressions that are limited to known experiences, and require little genuine contemplation, the reflection of that language in Scripture will rob it of its power. Let me be more specific, when words like “awe,” “amazed,” “exciting,” and “awesome” are considered within the context of sports, entertainment, and ordinary worldly experiences, what possible significance will be seen in them when they occur in Scripture? When men are “amazed” at athletic ability, or eat “awesome” hamburgers, or “marvel” at a roller-coaster ride, what will they possibly think when they read in Scripture of people “marveling,” or being “amazed?”

Using Proper words

What is even worse, when men take it upon themselves to put the Scriptures into the dumbed-down language of an alienated society, they rob the people, and may actually misrepresent the Lord. There are certain “words” that are pivotal in Scripture. These are words into which Divine concepts are poured. Scripture refers to them as words “which the Holy Spirit teaches” NKJV (1 Cor 2:13). These are not thoughts that the Spirit teaches, but “words!” They are not ideas, but “words!” The Greek expression for “words” is **λογοι** (log-oi). It refers to spoken or written expression that embodies a conception of an idea. Its lexical meaning is “a word which, uttered by the living voice, embodies a conception of an idea . . . a distinct word, intelligible speech” THAYER and “of speaking, but always with rational content.” FRIBERG When one perceives the criticality of knowing the mind of the Lord, “words” are perceived as absolutely important. Ponder the things with which “words” are associated: prophecy, commandments, reports, a message, a declaration, a statement, and the Gospel of Christ – to name a few.

The Corinthian text cited above refers to words “which the Holy Spirit teaches.” Paul affirms these were the words he employed to communicate “the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor 2:12). He maintained that by employing words driven by the wisdom of men, the preaching of the cross was rendered ineffective (1 Cor 1:17). He contrasted “enticing words of man’s wisdom” with the “demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4). There is such a thing as “wholesome words” – words that are not sickly with worldly wisdom, or that tend to enticement (1 Tim 6:3). Further, when a person speaks for God, his speaking is to have “the form” [or pattern NKJV] “of sound words” – that is, spiritually healthy words that convey the mind of the Lord.

When men, seeking to reduce Scripture to the language of the street, impose their own wisdom upon the Word of God, they are actually chiseling away its power and effectiveness. Paul clearly states this when he writes, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect ” (1 Cor 1:17). Again he writes, “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God ” (1 Cor 2:4-5).

This reduction of the power of Scriptural words is done in at least two ways.

- The first is by substituting what is conceived to be parallel words. Often then is done because there is not an equivalent word in the language of the people, so a parallel word is sought. The action taken by early citizens of our country is far better. They shaped the language of the people around Scripture itself – as the Hebrews did with their language, the “Hebrew tongue” (John 5:2; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14).
- The second is to allow the society to change the meaning of the word, so that it no longer carries the idea that Scripture intends. Thus words like “believe,” “faith,” “repentance,” “justify,” etc, become watered down in the minds of the people. This leads to attaching little or no significance to the text of Scripture in which they are found. Pertaining to our text, this would include words like “praising,” “wonder,” and “amazement.”

Our text will use words to describe the effect of the works of God upon men. It is essential that we view those words as they have been intended to be viewed. The witness of the working of God cannot possibly work ordinary effects upon men, for the works themselves are not ordinary. If we do not see this text properly, perceiving human responses as unique and extraordinary, the text will have no power in us, but will appear to be nothing more than an historical account. In our thinking, it will be reduced to nothing more than a record of events wholly unrelated to us.

PETER AND JOHN GO INTO THE TEMPLE

“ 3:1 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.”

First, there were holy associations with the Temple. Jesus had referred to it as “My Father’s house,” “My house,” and “house of prayer.” Particularly during the last phase of His ministry, He Himself had taught there every day.

Unlike Western civilization, the life of God’s people was built around their religion – or the expression of their commitment to God. This was true in Judaism as well. Key events were identified by their relationship to God, rather than mere self-indulgence. When those with faith considered life, and what was essential to it, they thought altogether differently than the average American Christian. Activities having to do directly with the Lord were not put on the back burner of life. This is particularly noteworthy when we consider the followers of Jesus, for procedural concerns and religious habits receive very little attention in the words of Jesus or apostolic doctrine. Yet, salvation so impacted their lives that their commitment to the Lord was very obvious in their conduct.

PETER AND JOHN WENT UP TOGETHER INTO THE TEMPLE

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple . . .” Other versions read, “were going up to the temple,” NASB “were going up together to the temple complex,” CSB “were going to the temple courtyard,” GWN “went to the temple,” NLT “were going at the same time to the temple,” YLT and “were on their way up to the temple.” WILLIAMS

From the very outset, Peter and John were found together (Acts 3:1,3,11; 4:13,19; 8:14,25). Even prior to their calling to the apostleship, they were in business together (Luke 5:10). They were also part of the inner circle of disciples, which also included James (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37; Mk 14:33). When Jesus was arrested and taken to the palace of Caiaphas, these were the only two disciples who followed Him (John 18:15). After Jesus was buried, upon hearing His body was not in the tomb, it was Peter and John that ran to the tomb (John 20:3-4). Following His resurrection, when Jesus caused the disciples to catch a great host of fish, John told Peter it was the Lord (John 21:7).

From this we learn that those who walk together with Jesus are more prone to prefer one another’s company. This is because Jesus draws those who walk with Him together, so that they come to prefer one another. This is actually the secret of unity, which appears so difficult for the Christian world. The reason professed believers are not close to one another is because closeness to Christ Himself is not common among them. That is why oneness is referred to as “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13) and “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3) – both of which are realized in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

“Into the Temple ”

Admittedly, it is difficult for some to understand why these men went into the Temple. There is no record of Gentile believers returning to the temples of their former gods. Why did the early disciples go daily to the Temple (Lk 24:53; 2:46; 5:20,25,42)?

First, there were holy associations with the Temple. Jesus had referred to it as “My Father’s house” (John 2:16), “My house,” and “house of prayer” (Matt 21:13). Particularly during the last phase of His ministry, He Himself had taught there every day (Lk 21:37). Think of the names by which the Temple was called.

- “Temple of the Lord” (2 Kgs 11:10).
- “Holy Temple” (Psa 79:1).

- “Holy House” (1 Chron 29:3).
- “House of God” (2 Chron 23:9).
- “House of the Lord” (2 Chron 23:5).
- “House of the God of Jacob” (Isa 2:3).
- “House of My Glory” (Isa 60:7).
- “House of Sacrifice” (2 Chron 7:12).
- “House of Their Sanctuary” (2 Chron 36:17).
- “Holy and Beautiful House” (Isa 64:11).
- “Palace” (1 Chron 29:1).
- “Sanctuary” (2 Chron 20:8).

The point here is that the Temple was associated with God Himself, and, through Christ, the people had been reconciled to God. While it is true that the Temple would no longer be the center of devotion to God, the fact that His name and glory were associated with it made it a most suitable place for meeting. The religion, or outward expression, of the faith of those early saints was not driven by rules, but by faith – and faith connected with what the Temple stood for.

One other consideration is that devout people came to the Temple. Now, within the framework of a conscience toward God, these people would hear the good news of the Gospel. The outcome of this hearing will justify the propriety of the apostles and early believers going to the Temple. As Jesus would say, “But wisdom is justified of all her children” (Luke 7:35). That is, those who walk in godly wisdom confirm its worth.

AT THE HOUR OF PRAYER

“ . . . at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.” Other versions read, “at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer,” NIV “at the hour of prayer, at three o’clock in the afternoon,” NRSV “at the ninth hour of prayer,” DOUAY “for the three o’clock prayer,” GWN “at the time of prayer, being the ninth hour,” MRD “for the prayers at the ninth hour,” NJB and “to take part in the three o’clock daily prayer meeting.” LIVING

There were apparently three hours of prayer in Jewish life. David refers to such a practice: “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psa 55:17). We understand the evening prayer to have taken place at the ninth hour (3 o’clock PM), the prayer at noon at the sixth hour (12:00 PM), and the morning prayer at the third hour (9 o’clock). Even when he was a captive in Babylon, Daniel prayed three times a day: “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day , and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Dan 6:10,13). Somewhere between ten to fifteen years after Pentecost, Peter is said to have prayed “about the sixth hour” (Acts 10:9). This

However, the Law itself contained no commandment to pray. There is no directive requiring the people to “call upon the name of the Lord.” In the Law, there is not even a commandment for the people to “seek” the Lord!

was reckoning the day as twelve hours in length (John 11:9), and no part of it was wholly without prayer and supplication to God. That is the manner of life that was cultured in the people God called unto Himself. Sensitive souls were made acutely aware of their dependence upon the Lord. Thus men were taught to associate the beginning of the day with God – when the sun was in the process of rising to its appointed rule over the day. The time of the day when the sun had risen to its

meridian, or apex, was also associated with the Lord. The time when the day began to conclude was equally a time during which the people exercised a consciousness toward the Lord.

Each of these periods constituted an hour that was devoted to prayer. Thus, every day, devout Jews consecrated three hours to prayer – 25% of the time of light, and 12-½% of the entire day of twenty-four hours. All of this was done under the shadowy administration of the Law – a time that lacked the clarity that is now realized in Christ Jesus. During the Law, the people were taught to begin and end the day with God in mind. Therefore every day there was a morning and an evening sacrifice (Ex 29:38; Num 28:3-4; 2 Chron 31:3).

A legalist might imagine that God had laid down a law that men ought to pray three times a day. However, no such law can be found. In fact, the Law itself contained not so much as one word about prayer. Also, the words “prayer” and “supplication” do not occur a single time in Exodus through Deuteronomy of the King James Version, New King James Version, Revised Standard, or New Revised Standard Bibles. The word “prayer” occurs once in the NIV (Ex 9:29 – “I will spread out my hands in prayer to God” (other versions “in prayer,” reading “spread out my hands”)). The word “entreat,” in its varied forms, and when referring to pleading with God, occurs eight times in Exodus through Deuteronomy – all of them pertain to Pharaoh, his request that Moses plead with God for him, and the actual prayers Moses offered KJV (Ex 8:8,9,28,29,30; 9:28; 10:17,18). The NKJV has six references to that occasion, and also employs the word “entreat” in its varied forms (Ex 8:8,29,30; 9:28; 10:17,18). The NASB has three references to this word (Ex 8:8,9; 32:11). The NIV contains no references to it. The NRSV has one usage (Deut 3:23) – other versions use the word “besought,” KJV and “pleaded.” NKJV

However, the Law itself contained no commandment to pray. There is no directive requiring the people to “call upon the name of the Lord.” In the Law, there is not even a commandment for the people to “seek” the Lord! There is a promise that the people will find the Lord when they seek for Him with their “whole heart,” but there is no commandment that requires that they do so.

This, of course, dashes to the ground the erroneous teaching that one can only offer to God what he has commanded. Those who say it is not lawful to use musical instruments in praise to God affirm this mythical law of prohibition, referring to it as “the law of silence,” or “the law of exclusion.” How will such people explain Peter and John going up to the Temple at the “hour of prayer?”

Peter and John were not compelled by Law to go into the Temple at the hour of prayer. Their faith in the Lord, love for Him, and conscious dependence upon Him drew them into this activity. Their lives centered in the God identified with the Temple. They were also desirous to proclaim the good news of Christ’s enthronement, as will be confirmed in the events that followed.

The newness of life, realized in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon them, had heightened their awareness of God Himself, His exalted Son, and their access to heaven. That is not what new life ought to do, but what it DOES do!

A CERTAIN LAME MAN SEES PETER AND JOHN

“ 2 And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple 3 Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.”

This is the record of one of the Great epochs of Scripture. It drew the attention of both men and angels. The effects of this encounter are recorded in the next one hundred and five verses (3:1-6:42). I do want to draw your attention to the fact that this all took place while Peter and John were serving God – not indirectly, but directly. I am persuaded that many people are used very little, or

perhaps not at all, by God because they are never close enough to Him. Choosing to live on the periphery of spiritual life, they become dull of hearing, their hearts become calloused, and they fail to see opportunities around them in which God can receive glory. It is a tragic circumstance, indeed.

A CERTAIN LAME MAN

“And a certain man . . .” Other versions read, “a man.” NIV

The presence of this man is, indeed, a most interesting phenomenon. It is not coincidence that this man is positioned by the Temple gate precisely when Peter and John are entering into the same gate. This is a classic example of the providence of the Lord – how He works to produce circumstances that will result in His glory. It is written that “Man’s goings are of the Lord” (Prov 20:24). That is, God is at work among the sons of men for His own glory. As for Peter and John, their steps were being “ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23). The lame man was being positioned by God for His own glory, for “the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23).

It is written that God is “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12). Here is an example of some of the ways in which this is being done. Some men bring a lame man to the Temple, arriving at precisely the same time and place as Peter and John – the ninth hour at the Gate Beautiful. This is made all the more remarkable when we consider that historians say Herod’s Temple had eight gates, and possibly ten. Statistically, how likely is it that Peter and John would arrive and enter at this gate precisely when the lame man had been placed there?

All of this is included in God “working salvation in the midst of the earth.” It is an example of what is involved in the drawing power of God (John 6:44). We also see in this something of how God works “all things” together for good to them who love Him (Rom 8:28). The Lord can direct the steps of men, so that Peter and John arrive at the appointed place at the right time (Prov 21:29). This incident provides a small glimpse of the involvements of all things being “of Him, and through Him, and to Him” (Rom 11:36).

The Example of Jesus

The Kingdom of God is not run by happenstance, nor is it governed by circumstance. That is, it is not that the people of God go here and there, confronting random and disorderly circumstances, and responding as they deem most appropriate. It is true that on the surface, it might appear as though that is the way it is. However, we have the manner of the Kingdom lived out in the Person of Christ when He walked among men. He provided an explanation of the effective works He wrought. “I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it is day:” (John 9:4). “. . . the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works” (John 14:10). “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

While the effectiveness of Christ’s work among men was owing to His power, it was even more because He was in the will of His Father. Jesus never operated independently of the Father, or was moved by a mere human assessment of circumstances. For example, there were many blind people in Israel, yet Jesus spoke of a specific blind man as being blind “that the works of God should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3). He gave the same assessment of the seemingly terminal sickness of Lazarus, whom He would raise from the dead: “This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby” (John 11:4).

Men may view this as fate, saying that there really is no point to doing good, for everything will automatically work out for the glory of God. But this is faulty reasoning, and not befitting of any person who has faith. This is not the way Jesus thought. Even as a young boy, He saw the necessity

of personal and willing involvement in the will of His Father: “I must be about My Father’s business” (Lk 2:49). Once, when He was alone with His disciples, he told them, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent” (Luke 4:43). Another time He sent word to Herod, saying, “Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected” (Luke 13:32).

Jesus did not live casually, walking about and waiting for the Father to move Him, jarring Him out of the normalities of life. It is true that some of His professed followers live in such a manner. However, their ways are a distortion of spiritual life, and not life itself. Jesus moved about in a state of spiritual alertness and commitment. That is why he could say, “I do always those things that please Him.” In fact, He said that is why the Father had not left Him alone (John 8:29).

Assessing Effective Works

When a Jesus is preached that earnestly desires to give people what they want, “another Jesus” is being declared. Jesus has not been exalted to give people what they want, but to grant “the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him”

Proper assessments can only be formed in the high spiritual altitude of the “heavenly places.” When the real work of God is done through men, it is not because they have prevailed upon God to work in their behalf. Men might reason it was because the individual had a strong and consistent faith, and therefore the Lord yielded to his desires. Is that a proper assessment of effective work? I understand there is a sense in which this is true, for “all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk 9:23). However, our understanding of that statement must not be childish, as though the will of God ever was put into action because of the will of man.

Currently (2006), it is being taught in certain Christian circles that God cannot work on earth until He has a request from men – that He is only moved when men of faith move Him to do so. If this is the case, how do we account for the cessation of the building of the tower of Babel and the scattering of the people (Gen 11:11:7-8)? And what of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah? Who moved the Lord to do that (Gen 18:21)? What man on earth constrained the Lord to do this? Also, precisely who was it that moved the Lord to provide Elijah bread and flesh by means of ravens (1 Kgs 17:4-5)? What of the resurrection of Christ? Who requested that (Acts 13:30).

There is no need to speculate on this matter. The manner of the Kingdom was lived out in the Person of Jesus Christ. Jesus never did say the Father did His [Jesus’] will, but that He did the Father’s will. With great poignancy He declared, “I do always those things that please Him” (John 8:29) – NOT “He always does what pleases me!” Jesus said His “meat” was to “do the will of Him that sent Me” (John 4:34). He clearly declared, “I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me” (John 5:30). Again He affirmed, “For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38).

Is it really possible to harmonize such an approach to living with statements like, “What is your dream? What do you want God to do for you?” I understand that Jesus twice asked people what they wanted Him to do. One request was turned down because, Jesus said, “Ye know not what ye ask” (Matt 10:36-38). The other request was granted because of the person’s faith (Matt 10:51-52). What was the difference between these two requests? One was in the will of God, and one was not. One was prompted by faith, and one was not.

When a Jesus is preached that earnestly desires to give people what they want, “another Jesus” is being declared. Jesus has not been exalted to give people what they want, but to grant “the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). It is true that the real people of God desire these things, but that is not the basic reason for them receiving them.

So, What Am I Saying?

All of this may appear to have little to do with our text. What I am saying is that what follows was the result of Peter and John being in the heart of the “good and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). They had yielded their bodies as a “living sacrifice to God,” abandoning their will in favor of embracing the will of the Lord. Thus they were able to walk in the works for which they were created in Christ Jesus. As it is written, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

One Other Factor

In further consideration of this event, keep in mind that this is after the devil has been cast into the earth, coming down “with great wrath, for he knoweth he hath but a short time.” Men are warned of the danger that this creates for them: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you!” (Rev 12:12). However, his presence and influence present no difficulty to the King of kings and Lord of lords. Even though Satan was, so to speak, on a rampage, seeking to destroy the people of God, the circumstance of our text will be carried out just as though the devil did not even exist – even though Satan’s presence and intentions were very real.

LAME FROM HIS MOTHER’S WOMB

“ . . . lame from his mother's womb . . . ” Other versions read, “ crippled from birth,” NIV “lame from birth ,” NRSV “from birth had no power in his legs ,” BBE “ cripple from his mother’s womb,” GENEVA and “who had been crippled all his life . He couldn’t walk.” IE

Here is a hopeless case. The man had never been able to walk – from the day he was born, his legs were defective. There was, then, nothing at all to start with – no natural aptitude that had ceased, no latent ability that merely needed to be strengthened.

In this we have a most vivid picture of salvation. Although it is not fashionable in many circles to speak of man’s fallen state, the Word of the Lord addresses the matter with unquestionable clarity. Men have chosen to speak of natural human goodness, the age of accountability, free will, and the volitional capacity of men. However, these subjects are never brought up in Scripture – there is no doctrinal presentation of them. Of course, that is why men have had to develop systematic theologies concerning them. A few texts that address this matter will suffice to confirm this man – lame from his mother’s womb – is an accurate depiction of fallen humanity.

- “And the LORD smelled a sweet savor; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth ; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done” (Gen 8:21).
- “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one ” (Psa 14:2-3).
- “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity , and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5).
- “And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in Thy sight shall no man living be justified ” (Psa 143:2).
- “ Who can say , I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Prov 20:9).
- “For there is not a just man upon earth , that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccl 7:20).

that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way , they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one ” (Rom 3:10-12).

- “And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ” (Eph 2:1).

- “That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ” (Eph 2:12).

This condition is why we have to be delivered (Gal 1:4; Col 1:13; 1 Thess 1:10; Heb 2:15), raised (Eph 2:6), begotten (1 Pet 1:3; 1 John 5:1,18), born again (John 3:7; 1 Pet 1:23), saved (2 Tim 1:9; Tit 3:5), regenerated (Tit 3:5), and quickened (Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13). If there were any vestiges of goodness within men, none of these Divine activities would be required. In such a case, all that would be needed is some help, assistance, and additional strength. Of course, it can be argued that if any assistance in any form is absolutely required, then without that assistance recovery is impossible. At any rate, this man – lame from birth – is a precise portrayal of the natural condition of all men – without exception.

CARRIED AND LAID DAILY AT THE GATE

“ . . . was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful . . . ” Other versions read, “was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful,” NASB “was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful ,” NIV “was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate,” NRSV “was taken there every day, and put down at the door of the Temple which is named Beautiful,” BBE and “ was being carried along , who was laid each day at that gate of the temple [which is] called Beautiful.” AMPLIFIED

We are not certain which of the eight gates (Josephus says there were ten) leading into the temple complex was called “Beautiful.” Several believe it was the gated commonly called Nicanor, which led from the court of the Gentiles to the court of the women. Others feel it was the gate called Susan, which was the gate at the eastern entrance of the Temple. Its proximity to Solomon’s Court, which is later mentioned, makes this very probable. It is reported that this gate was massive, and of a most splendid appearance, being made of Corinthian brass. Josephus, Jewish Wars, bk 5, chap 5, sec 3 We assume the man was placed there because it was a heavily traveled area.

We will learn that he had been lame all of his life, and was over forty years old (Acts 4:22). How long he had been brought to the gate we do know. However, when we consider that the Lord Jesus had been in the Temple less than two months earlier, going there every day (Matt 26:55; Lk 22:53), it is highly likely that this man had seen Jesus. However, in all of His visits to the Temple, Jesus had not healed this man. Further, when Jesus sent out the twelve, and later the seventy, telling them to heal the sick, neither had they healed him. It is apparent that the Divine arrangement was for this man to be healed by Peter on this day. This will be confirmed by the remarkable events that follow.

TO ASK ALMS

“ . . . to ask alms of them that entered into the temple . . . ” Other versions read, “in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple,” NASB “to beg from those entering into the temple courts,” NIV “ requesting money from those who went into the Temple,” BBE “There he would beg for handouts from people going into the courtyard,” GWN “so that he could beg from the people going in,” NLT “to ask a kindness from those entering into the temple,” YLT and “so that he might beg for charitable gifts from those who entered the temple.” AMPLIFIED

“GATE BEAUTIFUL: the name of one of the gates of the Temple (Acts 3:2). It was the entrance

to the Court of the Women, immediately opposite the Gate of Shushan, the eastern portal through the outer wall into Solomon's Porch (see Strong's *Harmony and E position of the Gospels*, App. II, p. 33, and Map.) It is evidently the same described by Josephus as immensely massive, and covered with plates of Corinthian bronze (*Ant.* 15, 11, 5; *War*, 5:5, 3; 6:5, 3). (See *Jour. Sac. Lit.* Oct. 1867.)" McCLINTOK & STRONG'S

"The gate itself was of unusual size and splendor. It received the name "Nicanor" from its being the work, or having been constructed at the expense, of an Alexandrian Jew of this name. Lately an ossuary was discovered on Mt. Olivet bearing the Greek inscription: "The bones of Nicanor the Alexandrian, who made the doors." Its other name, "Corinthian," refers to the costly material of which it was constructed--Corinthian bronze. Josephus gives many interesting particulars about this gate, which, he tells us, greatly excelled in workmanship and value all the others (BJ, V, v, 3). These were plated with gold and silver, but this still more richly and thickly. It was larger than the other gates; was 50 cubits in height (the others 40); its weight was so great that it took 20 men to move it (BJ, VI, vi, 3). Its massiveness and magnificence, therefore, well earned for it the name "Beautiful." W. Shaw Caldecott

"Alms" are compassionate gifts, or gifts of charity. To this very day, the word "charity" is often equated with helping the needy. "Alms" are donations given out a sense of pity. Jesus said to give "alms" without trying to gain attention (Matt 6:1-4). He also said, "give alms of such things as ye have" (Lk 11:41; 12:33). Cornelius was a Gentile who was noted in heaven for giving "much alms to the people" (Acts 10:2,31). Paul was noted for bringing "alms" to his needy brethren (Acts 24:17). Dorcas was known for her "almsdeeds" (Acts 9:36). This man, therefore, unable to help himself, was relying on the kindness of people as taught by the law, and confirmed by Jesus.

If, as some modern day teachers allege, poverty is a "curse of the law," then this man was under a Divine curse. Of course, the Scripture does not say poverty is the curse of the Law. It rather defines that curse in this manner: "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal 3:10). The "curse" is not what the people were in this world, but what they were before God. That is, they were not righteous in his eyes. If poverty is a curse of the Law, then Asaph was right in being envious of the wicked who were prospering, for such would not have been under the curse (Psa 73:3). Of course, such thinking does nothing more than reveal a covetous heart and a confused mind.

There are several beggars mentioned in Scripture: Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46), Lazarus (Lk 16:20), the man in our text (Acts 3:2), and a blind man who was born blind (John 9:8). None of them were rebuked for being beggars, even though their state certainly was not an enviable one. Under the Law, men were to be merciful to the poor, not rebuke them for being poor (Ex 22:-27; 23:11; Lev 19:9,10; 23:22; ; 25:25-28, 35-43; Deut 14:28-29; 15:2-14; 24:12-21; 26:12-13). Jesus said to "give" to such people (Matt 5:42; 19:21; Lk 11:41). The apostles said to "remember the poor" (Gal 2:10). No person of God ever told men to rebuke the poor or consider their poverty to be a sign of them being cursed.

Admittedly, this was a humbling experience – to have to beg for sustenance. It was not a sanctified experience, but one that was required because of his condition.

What About Psalm 37?

An objection may be raised to the legitimacy of begging by citing the thirty-seventh Psalm: "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread" (Psa 37:25). Does this mean that if a person is reduced to begging, they have been "forsaken" by God? First, the Psalm does not say the "righteous" had not been seen begging bread, but their "seed." Second, Jesus Himself spoke of Lazarus, who was "a certain beggar," and of his

happy state after he died (Lk 16:20-22). He was an exception to the general state of the righteous, but he is mentioned to show the worst circumstances in this world are only temporary, and the godly who pass through them will be richly compensated on the other side.

SEEING PETER AND JOHN

“Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.” Other versions read, “And when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms,” NASB “When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money,” NIV “He then, seeing Peter and John going into the Temple, made a request to them,” BBE “When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple complex, he asked for help,” CSB “When the man saw that Peter and John were about to go into the courtyard, he asked them for a handout,” GWN “When this man saw Peter and John on their way into the Temple he begged from them,” NJB “who, having seen Peter and John about to go into the temple, was begging to receive a kindness,” YLT “When he saw Peter and John about to go in, he began to ask them for money,” IE “When he saw Peter and John were about to go into the temple, he asked them to give him something,” ISV and “So when he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them to give him a gift.”
AMPLIFIED

Notice that it does not appear Peter and John took special note of him as they were entering. Whether this was the case or not, we do not know. The point to be seen in this text is that this was one of those “ordained” works in which Peter and John were to walk (Eph 2:10). They were busy about their Father’s business, and thus the opportunity will be made evident to them, and they will know what to do.

It is interesting that this crippled beggar associated the people entering into the Temple with kindness and consideration. After all, the Law had instructed the people to make provisions for the poor in the reaping of their own fields (Ex 23:11; Lev 19:9). However, those who were reduced to poverty were also to give what they could to the Lord. They were not exempted from giving, although they were allowed to give a lesser amount (Ex 30:15; Lev 5:7; 14:21).

For this man, it was a glad day when he saw Peter and John! I do not doubt that for the rest of his life he recalled this wonderful day when, at three o’clock in the afternoon, when he was begging as usual, he saw Peter and John. In a few moments, his life would be turned around.

I have often pondered how close the most adequate people are to poverty and begging. A depression, a flood, a war, a famine, thieves and robbers – the possessions of every person can be quickly brought to nothing. A hurricane, a Tsunami wave, a sudden war, and all can be lost. That is not even to mention business collapses, the plundering of retirement funds, a sudden extended illness, etc. Let us give thanks for our daily provisions.

“LOOK ON US!”

“ 4 And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. 5 And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.”

Peter and John were entering the Temple at the hour of prayer, and yet they were not insensitive of their surroundings.

FASTENING HIS EYES UPON HIM

“And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John . . .” Other versions read, “f ixing his eyes on him,” NKJV “fixed his gaze upon him,” NASB “looked straight at him,” NIV “looked intently at him,” NRSV “directed his gaze at him,” RSV “looking steadfastly upon him,” DARBY “earnestly

beholding him,” GENEVA “looked directly at him,” NET “ having looked steadfastly toward him with John ,” YLT “looked him straight in the eye ,” ISV “ directed his gaze intently at him,” AMPLIFIED and “Peter looked intently at the man and so did John.” PHILLIPS

Here we will behold another facet of Kingdom work. It is not done inadvertently, or without giving due regard to a matter. The work of the Lord is not accomplished as professing believers stumble through life, living only for themselves. Just as surely as Peter became aware of the circumstances of Pentecost, so he became aware of this poor man, begging at a Temple entrance.

Just as surely as selfishness tends to blindness and obtuseness, so godliness tends to alertness and holy responses.

Additionally, before a work for God is accomplished, attention must be given to it. The godly know that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose (Rom 8:28). They are also aware that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (Psa 37:23), and that the Lord directs the upright (Prov 16:9; 21:23). However, this does not mean that everything simply falls together while we stroll inattentively through life, oblivious of what is around us.

Here we will behold another facet of Kingdom work. It is not done inadvertently, or without giving due regard to a matter. The work of the Lord is not accomplished as professing believers stumble through life, living only for themselves. Just as surely as Peter became aware of the circumstances of Pentecost, so he became aware of this poor man, begging at a Temple entrance.

This text does not blend well with the manner of life that is being promoted in our part of the world. Self tends to be at the center of everything – even in religion. It is not unusual to see people walking about with the entirety of their surroundings shut out, devoting themselves wholly to their own pleasure. By way of comparison, Peter is quickly perceives his surroundings, and prepares to minister in the name of the Lord.

LOOK ON US

“ . . . said, Look on us . . . ” Other versions read, “Look at us,” NKJV “ Keep your eyes on us ,” BBE “Look toward us,” YLT “Look here ,” LIVING and “Look straight at us !” PHILLIPS

Perhaps the man was hanging his head, ashamed of his miserable lot in life. He had to be carried wherever he was going, and then commence begging when he got there. It was a humiliating circumstance. Peter, however, insists that the man look to the one from whom his help will come. He was firm in his demand that the man lift up his head and look at them, turning his attention away from his own predicament.

For those who require help or assistance, there does come a time when they have to look away from their circumstance, no longer allowing it to dominate their consideration. Thus God Himself cries out, “ Look unto Me , and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Isa 45:22). Again He calls out to a diminished people, “ Harken to me , ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the LORD: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn , and to the hole of the pit whence ye are digged” (Isa 51:1). Micah responded, “Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me” (Micah 7:7).

As we progress through this book of Acts, it will become apparent that ministering to the needs of people, while essential, is secondary to the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). Preparation for eternity is superior to life in this world.

Looking is the posture of expectancy. Believers are looking for that “blessed hope” (Tit 2:13). While they run the race set before them, they are “looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:2). Even though they are in an evil and decaying world, they are “looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:12). While keeping themselves in the love of God, they are “looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 1:21).

The very fact that Peter said this confirms that he was walking in the confidence of faith. He knew who he was in Christ, and what he had. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to grant the confident awareness of these things.

There is another thing to be seen here. While kindness toward the needy is essential, it is secondary, not primary. The second commandment of the law, not the first, is to love one’s neighbor as himself (Matt 22:39). A similar order exists in the New Covenant: “And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (1 John 3:23). It is only within the greater awareness the Lord Himself that the consideration of men is sanctified. It appears to me that this is becoming more and more obscure in professed Christian work. There is more of a catering to people than to God, and relief work appears to have the dominance over the preaching of the Gospel. As we progress through this book of Acts, it will become apparent that ministering to the needs of people, while essential, is secondary to the “ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:18). Preparation for eternity is superior to life in this world. It is inevitable that when men major on temporal life, eternal matters become obscure, and are treated only in an accommodating manner.

HE GAVE THEM HEED, EXPECTING TO RECEIVE SOMETHING

“And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.” Other versions read, “So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them,” NKJV “And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them,” NRSV “And he gave attention to them, hoping to get something from them,” BBE “But he looked earnestly upon them, hoping that he should receive something of them,” DOUAY “ So the man watched them closely . He expected to receive something from them,” GWN “The lame man looked at them eagerly , expecting a gift,” LIVING “He looked at them, thinking that they might give him some money ,” IE and “So the man watched them closely , expecting to get something from them.” ISV

I do not doubt that the man thought he was going to receive a significant gift from Peter and John. It is equally apparent that he did not know who they were, even though they, together with the other disciples, had been going to the Temple daily (Luke 24:53; Acts 2:46). Considering the number of people involved in that daily Temple gathering (at least 3,120), it is remarkable that it had gone unnoticed by this man. Of course, earthly difficulties and hindrances can blind us to good things that may be going on around us.

Now, having fastened his attention on Peter and John, the man is positioned for the blessing – even though he is not aware of it. He is thinking he will remain lame, but receive a gracious gift of money. For him, that would be quite sufficient. However, he will be proved wrong in both conclusions.

WHAT I HAVE, I GIVE

“ 6 Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.”

Peter’s response will unveil the nature of spiritual life, and where its thrust has been placed. The man speaking is no ordinary disciple. He is not even an ordinary apostle, for Jesus had given him “the keys of the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:19). He was a member of the inner circle of Jesus’

disciples, was the leader by default following Christ's resurrection, and was used to inaugurate the New Covenant on the day of Pentecost. The church is both new and pure. Believers are all together, and are of one mind. They have also been filled with the Holy Spirit. If the condition of a person in Christ ever depicted the ideal situation, surely it will be in this man, Peter.

SILVER AND GOLD HAVE I NONE

“Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none . . .” Other versions read, “Silver and gold I do not have,” NKJV “I do not possess silver and gold,” NASB “I have no silver or gold,” NRSV “I have neither silver nor gold,” CSB “I don't have any money,” GWN “I don't have any silver and gold for you,” NLT “We don't have any money for you,” LIVING and ““If you are expecting silver or gold,’ Peter said to him, ‘I have neither .’” PHILLIPS

Note, Peter admits that he has no money – yet he is not begging ! Remember, the believers had pooled their resources, and gave to every man as he had need. If Peter did have anything, he may have relinquished it, making himself dependent upon the distribution. Also, by saying John and himself had no money, he was acknowledging that if he did, he would have gladly given to the man. It was not his heart that prohibited the giving, but his circumstance.

I also observe that Peter gave no indication of being concerned about his lack of silver and gold. He obviously had not embraced the health and wealth gospel that is making the rounds these days. Nor, indeed, did he go about to defend his status. He knew that “a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (Luke 12:15), and that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim 6:6).

Although the early disciples had pooled their resources, they were not apparently for beggars, else Peter and John would have alerted the others of the need of this man. This is not intended to suggest that they had no care for the needy. However, it does confirm that those holy and pure brethren were not driven by an awareness of general human need. Rather, as will be confirmed, their attention was upon a higher and lasting order of treasure.

At any rate, it is certain that Peter and John did not have the mindset of the prosperity-mongers of our day. Perhaps, if they were among us today, they would even be ridiculed by some of the televangelists for being so destitute.

Peter did have something – something that was better than silver and gold. In fact, silver and gold could not procure what Peter had. What is even more, Peter was going to give what he had to this poor man.

After everything is said concerning the legitimacy of financial prosperity, and even a Divine desire that this be the condition of the people of God, Peter's word's thunder down to the current century: “SILVER AND GOLD HAVE I NONE.” This is no ordinary man, but is the appointed leading spokesman for Jesus – the man given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Apparently those keys were not intended to unlock financial gain for Peter. He does not speak with any degree of shame – “I don't have any money!” GWN He is not apologetic about the situation – “I have no silver or gold!” WEYMOUTH Try as they can, the marketers of prosperity cannot remove these words from Scripture. Here was the then-leading man of the body of Christ, endued with power from on high and filled with the Spirit, yet his condition contradicts their doctrine!

SUCH AS I HAVE GIVE I THEE

“ . . . but such as I have give I thee . . .” Other versions read, “but what I do have I give you,” NKJV “but I give you what I have,” NRSV “but what I have , that give I thee,” ASV “but what I have, this give I to thee,” DARBY “but I'll give you what I do have,” GWN “but I will give you

what I have,” NJB “But I’ll give you something else ,” LIVING “but what I do have, this I am going to give to you ,” MONTGOMERY and “but what I have I will certainly give you .” PHILLIPS

Peter did have something – something that was better than silver and gold. In fact, silver and gold could not procure what Peter had. What is even more, Peter was going to give what he had to this poor man.

There is something else to note here. Peter does not refer to what he can DO, but to what he HAS. He does not say, “I will do what I am able,” but “such as I have I give.” In Christ Jesus, doing flows from possession, and ability is the product of spiritual giftedness. Elsewhere Peter speaks of ministering according to “the ability that God giveth.” This arrangement is in order “that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:11).

From one point of view, what men are given is their measure of being “made partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), or being “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). It is not that God beefs up human aptitude, but that He gives them something that is not resident in human nature. Flesh cannot produce what God alone gives, for it belongs to the order of the Spirit, with which the flesh has absolutely nothing to do. As Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6).

Peter knew what he had been given, and lived his life in view of it. He was keenly aware of an unseen realm that is transcendent to the domain in which silver and gold exist.

IN THE NAME . . . RISE UP AND WALK

“ . . . In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.” Other versions read, “In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk !” NASB “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk ,” NRSV “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up on your feet ,” BBE “Through the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth, walk!,” GWN “In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk !” NLT “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and be walking ,” YLT and “in the name of Jesus of Nazareth start walking .” WILLIAMS

Before He ascended into heaven, Jesus told his disciples, “Ye shall receive power” (Acts 1:6). Behold how confident Peter is that he had, in fact, received that power. Already “many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43), so this was not an experiment. Peter’s words were also something that were said in public, and therefore the honor of Jesus was at stake.

This is not an acceptable manner! Life in Christ is not intended to remain at a juvenile and unlearned level, and those who produce such followers are not doing the work of the Lord. People must be brought to the point where they can stand up and walk.

Peter makes clear that the source of the power is not himself. He is not a superman, so to speak. He declares that this is being done “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” whom he had preached on the day of Pentecost (2:22). That is, Peter was an appointed representative of Jesus, and thus the exalted Christ would work through Him. He was an appointed vehicle through whom the Lord Jesus Himself would work.

This is something no person can do if he does not possess the power. It is not the kind of thing someone would “try” to do. We see here a confirmation of the boldness, or confidence, that faith brings to the one possessing it – “the full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22). Whatever is done in faith – whether it is approaching the throne of grace, or ministering to men – will be done in confidence and assurance. As you already know, this is not something you can develop in the energy of the

flesh. A person cannot be trained to have such confidence. It is not developed by means of habit or discipline. It is not the result of positive thinking. It does not ensue from knowing the kind of natural aptitude one possesses, for those in Christ have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3).

A Principle to Be Seen

With the fulfillment of this word, the man will be able to provide for himself. He will not become a walking beggar but a walking worker! This is also a principle in spiritual life. Those who are converted become capable of building themselves up on their most holy faith (Jude 1:20). Those in Christ are granted the grace to be personally “Rooted and built up in Him, and established in the faith” (Col 2:7)

A Matter of Concern

One of the weaknesses of many modern mission activities is that the people are not being brought to a point where they can sustain themselves in Christ Jesus. They do not “grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ,” even though that is the appointed work of the Lord (Eph 4:15). Therefore these poor souls remain spiritual beggars, depending upon milky morsels that are supposedly brought to them by the missionaries. They remain spiritual toddlers, with little or no understanding of God and the benefits that are realized in Christ Jesus. They are too often woefully ignorant of why they were delivered, and of the exceeding great and precious promises that are their’s in Christ Jesus. They cannot navigate through Scripture, nor are they noted for being “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). Yet, this is the appointed objective for all who are in Christ Jesus.

This is not an acceptable manner! Life in Christ is not intended to remain at a juvenile and unlearned level, and those who produce such followers are not doing the work of the Lord. People must be brought to the point where they can stand up and walk. While it may sound very holy to say the most important thing is to win souls, the Head of the church said “Go ye therefore and TEACH all nations,” or “make disciples of all nations” NKJV (Matt 28:19). “Disciples” do not stagnate! They are rather brought into the area of Divine tutelage where the knowledge of God is ministered (1 John 5:20), and a change from glory to glory is experienced (2 Cor 3:18). In other words, the real Gospel effectively shouts out to them, “rise up and walk!” Begin moving about in heavenly places! Those who are seated in heavenly places have also been made spiritually mobile, and they are to move about, walking in the light as He is in the light. They are to grow and increase in the faith, walking in the light (1 John 1:7).

SOMETHING HAPPENS IMMEDIATELY

“ 7 And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.”

Here we will see the involvement of Peter in the miraculous working of the Lord. He will speak, and he will act. He is a laborer “together with God” (1 Cor 3:9).

HE TOOK HIM BY THE RIGHT HAND

“And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up . . .” Other versions read, “And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up,” NASB “Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up,” NIV “And he took him by the right hand and raised him up,” NRSV “And he took him by his right hand, lifting him up,” BBE “And having taken hold of him by the right hand he raised him up,” DARBY “Peter took hold of the man's right hand and began to help him up,” GWN “Then Peter took the lame man by the hand and pulled him to his feet,” LIVING “Then Peter took hold of his right hand and began to help him up,” ISV and “Then he took hold of the man’s right hand with a

firm grip and raised him up .” AMPLIFIED

There is not a stereotyped approach to miracles – taking the afflicted by the hand and lifting them up. The Kingdom of God does not operate by lifeless rules and procedures. Once virtue went out of Jesus, healing a woman with an issue of blood, without any visible assistance from Him (Lk 8:46). Another time, a blind man washed clay off his eyes in the absence of Jesus, and his sight was restored (John 9:6-7). Still another time, a man with a withered hand was told to stretch it out, receiving no visible assistance from the Lord (Matt 12:13). When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, he came out of the tomb unassisted (John 11:43). On the other hand, when He raised Jairus’ daughter, He took her by the hand (Matt 9:25). He did the same when healing Peter’s mother-in-law of a debilitating fever (Mk 1:31). There are no humanly rational explanations for the difference in these approaches. However, they are a manifestation of God’s “ways,” which are often “past finding out” (Rom 11:33). Those enamored of procedures, laws, and fixed ways of doing things will be confused by Divine workings. Often they are wholly lacking of a perceivable pattern – at least in man’s estimation.

Here, as led by the Holy Spirit, Peter assists the man in getting to his feet. This confirms that it was not the man’s faith that wrought this work, but that of Peter. That is why Peter said, “Such as I have.”

This is not always the way such works are done. In Lystra Paul raised up a man who was also “cripple from his mother’s womb.” It is said of that occasion, that Paul perceived the man

So far as men are concerned, faith is the actuating principle in the Kingdom – whether in the one through whom the work is being done, or the one upon whom the work is done. Although it is quite common to hear modern preachers speak of a point of contact through which faith can be released, no such concept is taught in Scripture.

himself “had faith to be healed” (Acts 14:9). It is Jesus who is the “Head of the body” (Col 1:18), and the works that are done by the members of that body are according to His will, and through His power. Luke is reporting how Jesus worked on this occasion.

In His marvelous working, Jesus often employs His people in extended ways, as when those who were present at the raising of Lazarus were told, “Loose him, and let him go” (John 11:44). Jesus could have caused these death-wraps to fall off, just as surely as the chains that bound the imprisoned Peter’s hands “fell off” (Acts 12:7). This time, however, this is not the manner in which Jesus chose to work. The man would be given assistance, and Peter would be the one who is employed by heaven.

Thus Peter takes hold of the man’s hand – a man who was over forty years old, and had never once stood on his feet – not a single time. I do not know if the man had faith, or what the level of his faith was if he had any. Whatever the circumstance, Peter’s action doubtless kindled hope in the man, and assisted his faith to burn more brightly. Perhaps Peter recalled when the blessed Lord took him by the hand and lifted him from the briny deep in which he had sunk (Matt 14:31). Jesus could have caused Peter to simply surface and stand on the water without stretching forth his hand and catching him. However, what blessed accompaniments there must have been when Peter felt the hand of Jesus grasp him and gently hoist him to the surface of the raging sea!

A Principle to Be Seen

It is the Divine nature to extend “grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16). In responding to the commands of the Lord, whether to stand up and walk, or to cast our care upon Him (1 Pet 5:7), encouragements are granted from the Throne. These cause faith and hope to rise to prominence, and enable the individual to put down unbelief and fear. Some professed believers have never seen this

because they live in the ordinary. They think in terms of trying, attempting, and experimentation. They never see Jesus as requiring something that is impossible to the flesh, and therefore they never attempt anything that requires grace that helps.

A Point of Contact?

The text says Peter “lifted him up,” or “helped him up.” NIV Some might imagine that the power of God flowed through the hand of Peter, thereby entering into the body of the man. It is not unusual to hear men boast of the power of God being resident in their hand, so that whatever or whoever they touch if impacted by the touch. Such views cannot be clearly supported by the Word of God. So far as men are concerned, faith is the actuating principle in the Kingdom – whether in the one through whom the work is being done, or the one upon whom the work is done . Although it is quite common to hear modern preachers speak of a point of contact through which faith can be released, no such concept is taught in Scripture. I understand that there is a network of reasoning that supports such a view. However, after all is said and done, such reasoning belongs to men, not to God. Men must take care not to shape thoughts by the conclusions of men.

It is necessary to make these observations because of the conditions that exist within the professing church. One segment of believers wholly neglect the matter of miracles, teaching that they belong to an age that has passed away. Another segment affirms that this is not the case, and buttress their position with all kinds of traditional jargon: “release your faith,” “a point of contact,” etc. Such teachings are more related to the occult than to Christ. An unreleased faith is no faith at all, for “faith without works is dead” (James 2:20,26). Too, how likely is it that faith, which is “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), would be ministered through fleshly touches or contact? Would not such a circumstance be in contradiction of our Lord’s words, “the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63)? Is it remotely possible that the flesh could beget or produce something spiritual? Did not our Lord declare, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John 3:6). Thus, the miraculous is not wrought through a physical touch. It is what Peter possessed that wrought this deed. That is precisely what Peter said: “what I do Have, I give to you.” NKJV

Contrary to, and in spite of nature, this man’s “feet and ankle bones” received strength. The man’s condition was changed instantly, with no apparent progression. What is more, it is obvious from what follows that the man knew this had happened. Perhaps for the first time there was feeling in the man’s feet and ankle bones.

IMMEDIATELY HIS FEET AND ANKLE BONES RECEIVED STRENGTH

“ . . . and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.” Other versions read, “and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened,” NASB “and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong,” NIV “and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong,” NRSV “and immediately his feet and his ankle-bones received strength,” ASV “and straight away his feet and the bones of his legs became strong,” BBE “and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong,” NAB “Instantly his feet and ankles became firm ,” NJB “and presently his feet and ankles were strengthened ,” YLT “And as he did , the man’s feet and ankle-bones were healed and strengthened,” LIVING “Immediately, the man’s feet and legs became strong,” IE “and his feet and ankles instantly grew strong ,” WILLIAMS “And at once his feet and ankle bones became strong and steady ,” AMPLIFIED and “ At once his feet and ankle bones were strengthened.” PHILLIPS

Peter’s faith was evident in his action – he took the man by the hand and lifted him up, confident that he would stand up and walk as he had commanded. The man’s faith was evident in his cooperation with Peter as, for the first time in his life, he made an effort to get up on his feet. Remember he had been “lame from his mother’s womb.” In the flesh, Peter could have reasoned that this was wholly impossible, and the man could have scoffed at the demand that he stand up and

walk. However, both men acted upon the word that was spoken.

As soon as Peter extended his hand to raise the man, something miraculous took place. The debilitated part of his body, though never endued with strength “received strength.” It is apparent that the man’s feet and ankle bones were not previously able to support him. This strength did not come gradually, being accomplished by some form of therapy. It was not the result of medication or some physical adjustment of the skeletal makeup of the man. This was strength that was commanded from the Throne of Jesus. David once said, “Thy God hath commanded thy strength” (Psa 68:28). Ezra confessed, “I was strengthened as the hand of the LORD my God was upon me” (Ezra 7:28). Jacob prophesied of Joseph, “the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob” (Gen 49:24). The book of Hebrews testifies of those who “out of weakness were made strong” (Heb 11:34).

Contrary to, and in spite of nature, this man’s “feet and ankle bones” received strength. The man’s condition was changed instantly, with no apparent progression. What is more, it is obvious from what follows that the man knew this had happened. Perhaps for the first time there was feeling in the man’s feet and ankle bones.

PONDER THE POSSIBILITIES

The concept of immediate working must be welcomed into our hearts and minds. Correction does not always require lengthy periods of time, and we should not approach life as though that was the case. A group of people who had called for the death of Jesus can suddenly be convicted, change their minds, and seek to know what they ought to do (Acts 2:37). A persecutor on his way to arrest Christians can suddenly change his mind and seek to serve the One he is opposing (Acts 9:5-6). A jailer who has beaten holy men for their work for God can suddenly cry out “What must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:30). An entire city sitting in the squalor of unbelief can “with one accord” give heed to the preaching of a godly man (Acts 8:6).

We certainly do not want men to live foolishly, imagining they will never experience disadvantages, heartaches, or hindrances. However, the door of hope must be left ajar. Those in Christ must think often, and in an extended manner, of the fact that “with God all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). The pursuing armies of Pharaoh can be suddenly “thrown into the sea” (Ex 15:1,21). Sennacherib’s oppressing massive army can be stricken dead in a single night (2 Kgs 19:35). The miserable plight of four impoverished lepers can be instantly turned around (2 Kgs 7:3-9). It is still true that God can “command deliverances” for His people (Psa 44:4). There is still a generation of whom it is said, “He sent His word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions” (Psa 107:20). He can still “rebuke the devourer” (Mal 3:11). It is also said of those whose ways are pleasing to the Lord, “When a man’s ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov 16:7) – and it makes no difference whether those enemies agree with the action or not.

The professing church would do well to be more faithful to remind the people of the greatness of the God to whom Jesus has reconciled and brought them. The more they are conscious and perceptive of God himself, the more clearly their circumstances will appear! Conversely, if the Lord is unclear to men, their condition will appear distorted and exaggerated. Hope will begin to wither, and faith will, at best, be “little.” Life will therefore become a burden.

LEAPING UP, WALKING, ENTERING, WALKING, AND LEAPING

“ 8 And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.”

Where there is life and recognized blessing, there is activity. The activity is the confirmation of

the life.

HE LEAPING UP STOOD

“And he leaping up stood, and walked . . .” Other versions read, “So he, leaping up, stood and walked,” NKJV “And with a leap, he stood upright and began to walk ,” NASB “He jumped to his feet and began to walk,” NIV “Jumping up , he stood and began to walk,” NRSV “And, jumping up, he got on to his feet ,” BBE “So he jumped up, stood , and started to walk,” CSB “Springing to his feet , he stood up and started to walk,” GWN “and he sprang , stood up, and walked,” MRD “And with a leap , he stood upright and began to walk,” NAS “Leaping up , he stood upright and began to walk,” WEYMOUTH “and at once he leaped to his feet and started walking,” WILLIAMS and “he positively jumped to his feet , stood, and then walked.” PHILLIPS

The actions are recorded, and all of them took place immediately. The man was not gradually trained to do any of them, even though he had never engaged in a single one of them!

- He leaped up. This expression comes from a word of unusual action. Lexically it means “to leap up,” THAYER “leap or jump up, spring up,” FRIBERG “to leap to a standing position – it is possible that the paralyzed man actually jumped up from the ground,” LOUW-NIDA “to leap out of or forth from a place,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to leap out of.” LEH Thus, the man bounded to his feet from a possible sitting position.

- He stood. This word means to be made to stand in place, without wavering or being unsteady: “to cause or make to stand; to place, put,” THAYER and “to stand firm, hold one’s ground, stand firmly on one’s feet.” FRIBERG

- He walked. This word speaks of mobility in the environment – being able to go from one place to another without difficulty. Lexically it means “to walk about, make one’s way, progress,” THAYER “go about,” FRIBERG “move about,” UBS and “to walk along or around.” LOUW-NIDA

All of this confirmed that the man’s feet and ankle bones were strong, able to cause him to jump, stand without assistance, and move about with dexterity. There was no question about it: a mighty work had been done.

A Picture of Regeneration

This is a most marvelous and precise picture of the newness of life! There is a resurrection from the dead – a quickening in which the individual leaps to life (Rom 6:4; Eph 2:1,5; Col 2:13). There is a certain stability in which one is caused by God to stand, not being dislodged or moved by trials and oppression (Rom 5:2; 14:4; 2 Cor 1:24; 1 Pet 5:12). There is also a certain mobility in which the person walks in the light, making progress to the eternal inheritance to which he is appointed (Rom 6:4; Rom 8:1,4; 2 Cor 5:7; Eph 2:10; 1 John 1:7). None of these things are the result training or mere human effort. Further, all of them are required for Divine acceptance.

ENTERED WITH THEM INTO THE TEMPLE

“ . . . and entered with them into the temple . . .” Other versions read, “Then he went with them into the temple courts ,” NIV “and he entered the temple complex with them,” CSB and “He went with Peter and John into the temple courtyard .” GWN

The healed man did not run home and show himself to any friends or family that he may have had. Instead, he went into the Temple complex with Peter and John. Keeping in mind how long it takes children to learn to walk, the magnitude of this miracle becomes even more obvious. Immediately the man enters into the Temple complex. Historians tell us that the area into which he entered had fifteen entry steps. PULPIT COMMENTARY Just as surely as this man was

remarkably strong and mobile, so those who have been born again are able to move about in heavenly realms in most remarkable ways.

It is interesting to observe that the Temple is not said to be in the midst of other buildings and a courtyard, but that the whole area is associated with the Temple itself (“Temple,” “Temple complex,” “Temple courtyard.” etc). That is, the Temple sanctified the remaining area which was devoted wholly to matters pertaining to the Temple. The people could not enter the Temple itself. This was made evident when an angel appeared to Zacharias, who became the father of John the Baptist. He had gone into the Temple proper to burn incense at his appointed time: “And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course, According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord” (Luke 1:8-9). Having a deep regard for this activity, it is written that “And the whole multitude of the people were praying without at the time of incense:” (Luke 1:10). All during the time when an angel was speaking to Zacharias the people “waited” for him, marveling “that he tarried so long in the Temple” (Lk 1:21). When he “came out” of the Temple, they “perceived that he had seen a vision in the Temple” (Lk 1:22). These people were standing in the general area into which Peter, John, and the healed man now entered.

Something to Be Seen

There is a nugget of truth couched in this whole circumstance of the Temple complex. In the courts, provision was made for the people to come and remain close to the Temple. The “courts of the Lord” (Psa 84:2), however, were not a place for activities unrelated to the Lord. That is precisely why Jesus twice cleansed the Temple area of moneychangers and marketers – once at the beginning of His ministry, and once toward its close (John 2:13-16; Matt 21:12).

The same kind of centrality was given to the tabernacle, when Israel was journeying through the wilderness. The various camps of the Israelites were to be pitched around the tabernacle (Num 2:1-17). It was the heart of the encampment, and the Levites, who had charge of the tabernacle, were the inner circle of the encampment, being the closest to the tabernacle. Everyone camped facing the tabernacle so that the cloud that abode over it could be seen (Num 9:20-23). If the cloud moved, the children of Israel moved. If the cloud remained, the Israelites remained. Their lives were determined by the tabernacle.

Likewise the lives of believers are lived out close to the presence of the Lord, with His dwelling place being preeminent. The heart is where Christ dwells. As it is written, “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17).

The various aspects of life are to be lived within the proximity of Christ's indwelling. The intention is to please Him, follow Him, and fellowship with Him. No facet of life is excluded from these objectives. Likewise, our life in Christ Jesus finds expression in our daily life. In order of importance, this relates to 1 our function in the body of Christ, 2 our general influence in society (both domestic and interpersonal relationships related with life in this world), and 3 personal interests.

All of these areas are to be lived out as to the Lord. As it is written, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). And again, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (Col 3:17). And again, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Col 3:23).

WALKING, LEAPING, AND PRAISING GOD

“ . . .walking, and leaping, and praising God.” Other versions read, “walking, jumping , and

praising God,” NIV “walking and jumping and giving praise to God,” BBE “walking and leaping and lauding God , TNT “walking and springing , and praising God,” YLT and “where he walked about, leaping and thanking God .” PHILLIPS

The conduct of this blessed man outwardly fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart” (Isa 35:6). And again, “they shall walk and not faint” (Isa 40:31). Here was a man who had only been near to the Temple court – sitting at the gate. Like the scribe who answered Jesus “discreetly,” it could be said of this man, “thou art not far from the kingdom of God” (Mk 12:34). Now he is in the court, walking about, surveying the glorious sights. Perhaps he thought of the expression of the sweet Psalmist of Israel: “Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof. Mark ye well her bulwarks , consider her palaces ; that ye may tell it to the generation following” (Psa 48:12-13). What a sight it must have been for him!

The man is vigorous in his expression, leaping, jumping, and springing up and down. This was not the expression of raw and uncontrollable emotion, but of great joy at the working of the Lord. As David had leaped and danced before the returning ark of the Lord, so this man was leaping with joy because of the mighty work that had been done in him. While this is a strange reaction to many, Jesus once said to some disciples who, He said, would experience persecution, “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy : for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets” (Luke 6:22-23). It is what they would KNOW that would cause them to leap. And, so it is as with this man. He was not responding to a praise leader, or the rhythmic sounds of a musical instrument. His joy was within, and was the result of his insight concerning what had happened to him.

When professed believers must be admonished to “praise the Lord,” a serious deficiency must exist. In fact, we do not have a single example in all of scripture of Christians being admonished to praise the Lord! There is no record of Jesus ever commanding or admonishing a person to praise God.

We know this is the case because it is written this man was “praising God.” The word used here (**aiwnw/n** – ai-known) means to “extol,” THAYER “to speak in praise of, in the NT used only of praise to God,” FRIBERG “to speak of the excellence of a person,” LOUW-NIDA “to tell or speak of,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to glorify.” LEH

Precise what do words like “extol,” “laud,” and “glorify” mean? First, they are all intelligent expressions – the verbalization of understanding. Praising God is not done in grunts and groans, or speaking unintelligibly. If eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20), and the means through which God ministers to us is “the knowledge of God” (2 Pet 1:2,3; 2 Pet 2:20), what possible place can there be for a lack of intelligence in the Kingdom of God?

The Uniqueness of True Praise

To praise, laud, extol, and glorify involves expressing in words what is seen of the Lord. It is the expression of an understanding that has come through the experience of behold and recognizing the hand of the Lord.

When professed believers must be admonished to “praise the Lord,” a serious deficiency must exist. In fact, we do not have a single example in all of scripture of Christians being admonished to praise the Lord! There is no record of Jesus ever commanding or admonishing a person to praise God. As used in this text, the word “praise,” in all of its forms, is used eleven times in Scripture.

- God has “perfected praise” out of the mouth of babes (Matt 21:16).

- Heavenly hosts “praising” God (Lk 2:13).
- The shepherds “praising” God upon their return from seeing the Holy Child Jesus (Lk 2:20).
- Upon receiving his sight, Bartimaeus “gave praise unto God” (Lk 18:43).
- A multitude of disciples who “began to praise and rejoice” when they saw “all the mighty works” of Jesus (Lk 19:37).
- The disciples were found “praising and blessing God” following Christ’s ascension into heaven (Lk 24:53).
- The early disciples were found “praising God” following the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:47).
- The man of our text was “praising God,” and all the people saw him doing so (Acts 3:8-9).
- The glorification of God by the Gentiles is said to fulfill the word of the Psalmist which said , “Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles; and laud Him all ye people” (Rom 15:11; Psa 117:1).
- Upon the announcement of the fall of Babylon the Great those to serve God and fear Him are admonished, “Praise our God” (Rev 19:5).

There are other Greek words that are translated “praise.”

- **euvlogw/n** (eu-log-own). To speak well of (Lk 1:64).
- **e;painon** (epa-in-on). To laud, approbation, commendation (Eph 1:6,12,14; Phil 1:11; 4:8; 1 Pet 1:7)
- **u`mnh,sw** (hum-naa-so). To sing praise (Heb 2:12).
- **aivne,sewj** (ai-ne-os). A thank offering (Heb 13:15).
- **doxa,zhtai** (dox-adz-aat-ai). Honor, ascribe dignity to with the tongue (John 9:24; 1 Pet 4:11).

In all of these, understanding and insight are preeminent. None of the references to “praise” are associated with a routine, being led or directed, or a prescribed period of time.

No one told this man to praise the Lord. He did so because of what he had experienced, and because he knew the source of the benefit he received. Peter had spoken to him precisely on the matter: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). Having perceived what Jesus had done, the man commences to praise God, honoring Him publicly.

ALL THE PEOPLE SAW HIM AND RECOGNIZED HIM

“ 9 And all the people saw him walking and praising God: 10 And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.”

This entire incident is being managed from heaven – and that is with the insight and whole-hearted consent of Peter and John. We know this is the case because of the fruit that will come from what has been done. A tree is always known by its fruit!

ALL THE PEOPLE SAW HIM

“And all the people saw him walking and praising God . . .” Other versions read, “All the people saw him walking and heard him praising God,” NLT “And all the people saw him walke and laude

God,” TNT and “and all the people saw him walking about and praising God.” AMPLIFIED

This being “the hour of prayer,” the courtyard was filled with people. Suddenly the people behold this man walking throughout the area, jumping up and down, and praising God. For some, no doubt, it was a disruptive sight. For others, it might have peaked their curiosity. If any of the people that gladly received the word of the Lord on the day of Pentecost were there, they would have understood what was happening.

Here was a man whose candle had been lit by God (Psa 18:28), and he had not placed it “under a bushel” (Matt 5:15). Like a city that is “set on a hill,” this man could not be hid (Matt 5:14). Here was an example of something that was done in relative secret, yet was now being “made known” and “brought out into the open” NIV (Matt 5:17).

Just as surely as Jesus Himself “could not be hid” (Mk 7:24), so His works are luminous, shining forth before the eyes of men. That is the reason it is said of those embracing his Gospel, “Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men ” (2 Cor 3:2).

There is such a sharp contrast between those who are of this world, and those who have been “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places” (Eph 1:3), that it is exceedingly difficult to conceal life from God. It is possible for such life to be relatively concealed if it does not mature, being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). In such a case, the distinction between “the children of the Kingdom” and “the children of the wicked one” is not so readily apparent, as revealed in the parable of the wheat and the tares. The tares were only distinguishable “when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit , then appeared the tares also” (Mat 13:26). Until the fruit started to appear, no apparent distinction could be seen.

In the account before us, what had been done by the power of God was evident. It was like “fruit” that appeared before the eyes of men, and they saw it.

There is such a sharp contrast between those who are of this world, and those who have been “blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places,” that it is exceedingly difficult to conceal life from God. It is possible for such life to be relatively concealed if it does not mature, being conformed to the image of God’s Son .

It ought to be noted that as long as professed believer remain juvenile and immature, any claim to being “of Christ” cannot be fully substantiated – even though that association may exist. In fabricating and promoting spiritual Babylon, Satan has provided men with a “church” in which growth and maturity are not required. They are not required in the leaders or the constituency. Only identity with the institution is an absolute requirement. The outcome of this Satanic arrangement is universally known. Men have a weak church on their hands that requires all manners of specialists to keep it afloat. Further, very little difference can be detected between Christians and non-Christians. It is a most tragic situation.

THEY KNEW WHO IT WAS

“And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple . . .” Other versions read, “Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple,” NKJV “and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms,” NASB “ they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful,” NIV “and they took knowledge of him, that it was he that sat for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple,” ASV “and they saw that it was the man who made requests for money at the door of the Temple,” BBE and “When they realized he was the lame beggar they had seen so often at the Beautiful Gate.” NLT

In those days, the people went frequently and for extended periods to the Temple area. This man had been seen many times, and, no doubt, over an extended period. He was a man that was begging, but now he was praising. He was lame, but now he was walking and leaping. He had distinguished himself as a beggar, always needing a handout because of his debility. But he is not asking for a handout now, and all of the people have noticed the difference.

It is a glad day when the people among whom we once walked can see a difference in us. When it becomes apparent that we can move about freely in the things of God, and that we are prone to praise, we will surely stand out.

THEY WERE FILLED WITH WONDER AND AMAZEMENT

“ . . .and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.” Other versions I read, “they were full of wonder and surprise at what had taken place,” BBE “So they were filled with awe and astonishment at what had happened to him,” CSB “and they were amazed, and sore astounded at that, which was come unto him,” GENEVA “The people were

Like a lot of people today, this multitude was not used to anything actually happening when they were at the Temple. Oh, they went about their routines faithfully. At the required times, the priests offered the incense, fulfilling their responsibilities. However, there was not much leaping and praising. Deliverance was not common to most of the people.

amazed and stunned to see what had happened to him,” GWN “and they were filled with wonder and admiration at what had occurred,” MRD “they were all astonished and perplexed at what had happened to him,” NJB “they were absolutely astounded !” NLT “they were shocked and amazed . They couldn’t understand how this could have happened,” IE “and they were filled with wonder and amazement (bewilderment, consternation) over what had occurred to him,” AMPLIFIED and “and they were all overcome with wonder and sheer astonishment at what had happened to him.” PHILLIPS

Like a lot of people today, this multitude was not used to anything actually happening when they were at the Temple. Oh, they went about their routines faithfully. At the required times, the priests offered the incense, fulfilling their responsibilities. However, there was not much leaping and praising. Deliverance was not common to most of the people.

This day, however, the monotony was interrupted by a joyful man walking about the courts, jumping, and praising God. While the man was familiar to the people, his current manner was not. The text says that the people were filled with wonder and amazement because of what had happened to him. He did not have to tell the people, “Look what has happened to me!” It was all very apparent to them. With them, how this had happened was the issue. There was no question in their minds about something significant having really taken place.

A Type of A Dominating Hope

By comparison, Peter confirmed that when believers sanctify the Lord in their hearts, and are dominated by hope, it will become very apparent. Just as surely as the people wanted to know what had happened to this man, those who witness a person living by hope will want to know more about it. Thus Peter wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet 3:15-16).

Sanctifying the Lord God in our hearts is the inner equivalent of presenting our bodies a living sacrifice to Him (Rom 12:1-2). It is to set Him apart in our hearts, or give Him space to work within

us, making no place for the devil (Eph 4:27). This involves being wholly motivated by our consideration of the Lord. As Isaiah would say, “Sanctify the LORD of hosts Himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread” (Isa 8:13). This is why Jesus liberated us from the condemnation of, and servitude to the Law, that we might “live unto God” (Gal 2:19), and “live unto righteousness” (1 Pet 2:24). In Christ, men have a different reason for living. The future has been redefined.

When life is lived in such a manner – with the Lord God being sanctified in the heart – it becomes evident to those who observe us that we have a different reason for living. To them, we are like a former lame man walking, leaping, and praising, and they do not know why. Therefore, they will ask to “give an account for the hope” that is us. NASB Until the manner of our lives has caught the attention of those about us, it is doubtful that any purported testimony will have much effect. If we do not have a different reason for living, then we are really no different than those who are not in Christ Jesus.

THE PEOPLE RUN TOGETHER, GREATLY WONDERING

“ 11 And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.”

Not only is the attention of the people riveted upon the man who was healed, it is also on the men with whom he is walking. Perhaps some had recognized Peter and John as being among that vast multitude who were found every day in the Temple, praising God and having favor with all the people (2:47). At any rate, the trio of men have caught the attention of the people.

THE MAN HELD PETER AND JOHN

“And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John . . .” Other versions read, “held on to,” NKJV “clinging to,” NASB “ clung to,” NRSV “while he kept his hands on ,” BBE “The man wouldn't let go of,” GWN “ held fast to,” MRD “the man was hanging on to ,” NET “the man was still clinging to,” NJB “the man was holding tightly ,” NLT and “Now while he [still] firmly clung to Peter and John.” AMPLIFIED

The idea here is that the man remained closely identified with Peter and John, and would not leave them. The fact that they were representatives of Christ had been confirmed to him, as Jesus had worked with Peter in the healing of the man. He would not be like those thoughtless nine lepers who did not return to Jesus to give thanks (Lk 17:17).

He did not hold on to them for physical support, but because they were precious to him. It certainly was not burdensome for him to be with Peter and John. Some have conjectured that he held on to them because he might have been fearful of his lameness returning to him again. It seems to me to be more comely to think of him as having a deep affection for them, who had ministered the grace of God to him.

I do not doubt that in his praise to God he was thanking the Lord for the men through whom he had received his healing. Others had given him silver and gold, but these men had given him something that changed his whole person within and without.

An Application

It is the manner of those who are blessed from God to want to remain with those through whom they were blessed. When Jesus cured the Gadarene wild man, the man “prayed Him that he might be with Him ” (Mk 5:19). When Jesus healed blind Bartimaeus, he “followed Jesus in the way” (Mk 10:52). When Elijah was about to be translated, he told Elisha, “Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the

Lord hath sent me to Jordan.” However, Elisha refused to remain behind saying, “As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee ” (2 Kgs 2:6). When Paul was in Athens, speaking about the things of God, “certain men clave unto him , and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:34). They refused to leave the one through whom they had believed. On one occasion, when the multitudes forsook Jesus, He asked His disciples, “Will ye also go away?” It was then that Peter spoke for the holy band of disciples. “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:68-69).

I have noticed over the years my own attraction to those who minister to my spirit – people through whom the Lord works. While they have been relatively few, their company was much preferred, and there was never any shame in being seen with them. I have also observed the absence of this within the church at large. The inattention of professed Christians to those who preach and teach the truth of God betrays a corresponding absence of either the work of God itself within the people, or of an acute awareness of such a working.

When Paul came to Troas, he spoke to the assembled brethren all through the night (“until midnight”) , and then “talked a long while, even till break of day” (Acts 20:7-11). What kept those people there? They were clinging to Paul because their souls were being nourished, and they did not want to leave.

Once, when Paul was in Miletus, he “called for the elders of the church” in Ephesus (nearly 100 miles away). They came, meeting him and remaining while he spoke to them of many things. Then “he kneeled down and prayed with them all.” Those men “wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship” (Acts 20:38). Why did they cling so to Paul. Was it a requirement from which they could not escape? Indeed not! It was because he was precious to them. He had been the man who “taught them publicly, and from house to house” (Acts 20:20) for a period of “three years” (Acts 20:31), and they could not easily forget him.

Men may speak of the insignificance of kingdom laborers, or treat them as though they were nothing but peers. But this is not the manner of the Kingdom. Paul once wrote to Jewish believers, “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Heb 13:7).

When Paul told the Corinthians, “Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me,” he was admonishing them to cling to him like the healed man held on to Peter and John (1 Cor 4:16). He said the same thing to the Philippians: “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample” (Phil 3:17).

I have found that there are brethren with whom I tend to gain greater benefits. They have seen more, and they minister more. They are to me what Peter and John was to this unnamed man. It is a joy to take every advantage of being with such people. I have also found that very few people within the professed church have such a persuasion.

THE PEOPLE RAN TOGETHER

“ . . . all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's . . . ” Other versions read, “all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon,” NASB “and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade,” NIV “all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico,” NRSV “all the people came running together to the covered way which is named Solomon's.” BBE

Suddenly, the people were drawn together, running at the same time to the same place – and a

single man had sparked this aggressive interest! Of course, behind this, God was at work, drawing the people as only He can do (John 6:44). Jeremiah said the “lovingkindness” of the Lord had drawing power (Jer 31:3). Here is an excellent example of this, for the man they were viewing had surely been touched with the lovingkindness of the Lord, and, like David, he had not concealed it (Psa 40:10).

Solomon’s Porch

Solomon’s Porch was a long covered portico, or colonnade. It consisted of a series of columns that held up a roof, covering the area, which was not enclosed with walls. It is purported to have been on the east side of Herod’s Temple, and is not mentioned in connection with the first (Solomon’s) Temple, or the second one (Zerubbabel’s). It is mentioned in the Gospel of John, and in Acts as well. Jesus is said to have personally “walked in the Temple, in Solomon’s porch” (John 10:23). The other mentionings are Acts 3:11 and 5:12 – both gathering places in which the Apostles spoke and worked. It is said to include a portion of the Temple build by Solomon. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia states the following: “The portico bearing Solomon’s name was that running along the eastern wall in the Court of the Gentiles of Herod’s temple.” The porch is said to have been above 800 feet in length, and supported by 162 pillars, each one being about 100 feet high.

It is interesting to observe that Peter and John did not go to the people. Rather, the people ran to them. While this did not always happen, it occurred quite often. The people came to John the Baptist (Matt 3:5). They also ran to Jesus (Mk 6:33; 9:25; John 8:12). An entire city came out to hear Paul (Acts 13:44-45).

It is fashionable these days to develop strategies through which to reach the people. This is certainly not wrong if it is done by people who have something to say. Jesus did tell His disciples to “go into all the world” (Mk 16:15). However, in our day, the time has come for the professed church to earnestly seek to obtain something that can be given in the name of the Lord. It needs a riveting and undeniable testimony through which people can be drawn to hear the truth.

GREATLY WONDERING

“ . . . greatly wondering.” Other versions read, “greatly amazed,” NKJV “full of amazement,” NASB “were astonished,” NIV “utterly astonished,” NRSV “full of wonder,” BBE “astounded,” ESV “They were excited,” GWN “admiring,” MRD “completely astounded,” NET “in great excitement,” NJB “awed,” LIVING “stunned,” IE “awe-struck,” WEYMOUTH “dumbfounded,” ISV “in utmost amazement,” AMPLIFIED and “in their excitement.” PHILLIPS

The words “greatly wondering” come from a single Greek word: **ekqamboi** (ek-tham-boi). The lexical meaning of this word is “astonished, amazed,” THAYER “utterly astonished, amazed, awestruck,” FRIBERG “greatly surprised or alarmed,” UBS “amazed, utterly astonished,” LOUW-NIDA and “astounded.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The idea is that there was absolutely no natural explanation for what they saw. The condition of the once-lame man could not be traced to any quirk of nature. No mere man could have caused this to happen, nor could it be accounted for by any proposed law of nature. However wise any of the people were concerning diseases and physical infirmities, this incident confounded both the wise and the mighty (1 Cor 1:27). In both the Gospel and the works related to it, the saying is fulfilled, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent” (1 Cor 1:19; Isa 29:14).

One of the great deficiencies of modern Christendom is that its seeming achievements can easily be traced to human sources. Too many of its works can be explained on a rational and humanistic

level. That is one reason why psychiatrists and motivators have become so popular in the churches. They can account for much of what is happening in the churches from a worldly point of view.

But what you do when you face a man who earlier the same day was sitting and begging (obviously crippled) at a gate of the Temple. Now, however, he is walking, and leaping in the Temple court, and praising God rather than begging from men? How do you account for him? How do you explain what has happened to him? The truth of the matter is that this circumstance could not be explicated from a human point of view. That is why the people came running to Solomon's porch "greatly wondering."

An Application

When the promises of Scripture concerning the manner of salvation are actually fulfilled in the church, it will solicit the attention of men. They may be hostile toward the people, but they will not be able to deny that something of great significance has taken place. Perhaps it will be of benefit to cite some of the remarkable promises that are realized in Christ Jesus.

- "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken" (Deu 18:15).
- "And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live" (Deu 30:6).
- "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (Isa 35:6).
- "And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know Me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer 31:34).
- "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (Ezek 36:26-27).
- "But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (Isa 40:31).
- "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one consent" (Zeph 3:9).
- "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God" (Psa 84:7).

It is not possible for such marvelous things to take place, and yet remain undetected. That would be like a lame being healed, leaping up, standing, walking, leaping, and praising God, and no one noticing it! The Psalmist said, "He hath made His wonderful works to be remembered: the LORD is gracious and full of compassion" (Psa 111:4). If God has, in fact, made His wonderful works to be remembered, then they can be seen.

CONCLUSION

I have sought to emphasize that we are being exposed to "pure religion before God and the Father" (James 1:27). No encroachment of evil has yet taken place. Suppressing influences have not

raised their heads. There are no divisions among the people. No controversies have arisen. No heresies have been promulgated. No false apostles have made an appearance. There has not yet been any open resistance of the truth of the Gospel. All of that will come in due time – in fact, it will begin showing very soon. However, at this point, all is well, and a season of uninterrupted blessing is taking place.

WHY MAKE THIS POINT?

I am making this point to underscore that salvation is being wrought within a hostile world that is dominated by the devil. The fact that corruption was introduced at all confirms Satan's subtlety and aggressiveness. The Kingdom of God was not "set up" (Dan 2:44) with seeds of corruption within it. The newness of life does not have inherent flaws resident within it. Spiritual degradation and decline are not Kingdom normalities. Spiritual life is not like a mechanical clock that is wound up at the first, only to begin an unwinding process in which zeal and devotion eventually cool.

However, if we confined our observations to the modern church, we would conclude that spiritual life did wane, and that those who began leaping with joy eventually end up sitting in apathy. The religious world all about us would seem to indicate that monotony is inevitable, and frequent revivals and awakenings are, by the very nature of spiritual life, a necessity. That would require novelty, religious trends, fads, and the likes, else spiritual life will die out.

Of course, none of this is true, and those who are walking in the light know it. Newness of life never wanes – it increases, advancing from one stage of life to another by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is only the introduction of "the flesh" that causes retrogression or spiritual death to begin its work. We know this is the case because it is written, "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16). It is also written that faith always overcomes the world: "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:4-5). The only way to be overcome by the world is to quit believing, and no longer live in the invigorating persuasion that "Jesus is the Son of God." It is not possible to maintain fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), and fall into the snare of the devil! You cannot walk in the light and stumble (John 11:9-10). A person cannot walk on the way of holiness and err (Isa 35:8).

If, in fact, professing Christians add to their faith "virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity" – and if those things remain in us "and abound," two things will occur. They will MAKE us, that we will be "neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." They will also guarantee that we will "never fall" (2 Pet 1:5-10). It simply is not possible for these affirmations to be found untrue!

Therefore, what we are seeing in the beginning of the church are the confirmed effects of nourishing, culturing, and maintaining the life that is conferred upon every soul that is begotten of God!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #14

“ 3:12 And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? 13 The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. 14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. 16 And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. 17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. 18 But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled.” (Acts 3:12-18)

PETER SPEAKS TO THE PEOPLE, #1

INTRODUCTION

How does a man of God speak to people who are attracted by a mighty miracle to come running to him? If he does speak to them, what will he say, and how will he say it? What kind of opportunity will he see before him?

In this text these questions, and more, will be answered. We will find the man of God comprehending the circumstances and delivering words that were “fitly spoken” (Prov 25:11). He will also speak with an acute understanding of the nature of sinful man, the Kingdom of God, and the objectives of salvation. He will have an understanding of what God is doing. He will also face the people with what they did to Jesus, the circumstances under which they did it, and why they did it.

Peter will not allow undue glory to go to himself and John. He also will not permit glory to fail to go to God. He will not let the people to remain in ignorance concerning Jesus – who He was, what

He did, and how God had

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- **PETER SAW AND ANSWERED (3:12a)**
- **WHY MARVEL YE AT THIS? (3:12b)**
- **THE GOD OF . . . (3:13a)**
- **GOD HATH GLORIFIED HIS SON (3:13b)**
- **YOU DELIVERED AND DENIED HIM (3:13c)**
- **YOU DESIRED A MURDERER AND KILLED THE PRINCE OF LIFE (3:14-15)**
- **FAITH, FAITH, AND FAITH (3:16)**
- **THE EFFECTS OF IGNORANCE (3:17)**
- **GOD SHOWED, AND HE HAS FULFILLED (3:18)**
- **CONCLUSION**

glorified Him. All of this will be accomplished in a single message. It will be delivered with obvious confidence and great convicting power. No worldly agenda will be found in what he says.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF UNDERSTANDING

As we walk through this text, it will be very apparent that a different manner of understanding is being employed than is being touted in the church of our time. We will be exposed to an understanding that has Jesus Christ as its absolute center-point. What men think of Jesus is the key area of thought. How they respond to the Son of God is considered their fundamental response. What they do for Jesus is their primary activity.

Peter will speak from a lofty position in which it is surprising that truth is not perceived, or that wrong conclusions are reached. He is not naive, but informed. It is his grasp of truth that moves him to speak in such a manner.

CURRENT CIRCUMSTANCES

The nominal church has propped itself up on the crutches of scholasticism and the favor of men. Because of this, its leaders, for the most part, are not able to navigate in the ocean of Divine purpose or objective. It is too deep and intimidating for them. Therefore, they have chosen to sail their theological vessels on humanly conceived tributaries of truth – and that is the most favorable view of the situation. To them, truth has to do with what men consider practical. They see relevancy as something that assists men in fulfilling their own ambitions, which relate exclusively to this world. This is a mindset that now dominates the Christian world. It has given rise to a new kind of religious professional – self-acclaimed experts in matters relating to life in the world, yet who function in the name of Christ.

Peter will speak from a lofty position in which it is surprising that truth is not perceived, or that wrong conclusions are reached. He is not naive, but informed.

Religious specialists and counselors now negotiate on the shallow ponds of marital life, political circumstances, organizational issues, and motivational climes. They do this because redemptive matters are too deep for them, and therefore they have no appetite for them. This is because “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Were it not for the

corruption of religion, they would have no part in it, for the world is really the field in which they prefer to plow. Of such teachers John wrote, "They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them" (1 John 4:5). Paul said of them, "For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Rom 16:18). Peter said of them, "But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction" (2 Pet 2:1).

Jude spoke of these intruders, describing them according to their character. "Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 1:11-13). In other words, these pretenders have nothing of spiritual substance to offer the people of God. Their message neither promotes nor maintains faith. A hope that sustains the soul is not obtained through their words.

The passage before us has no relevancy to such men. It is not the kind of text upon which you can build a career, a religious institution, or fame. Yet, we are being exposed to the expressions of men who are filled with the Holy Spirit. In this case, Peter will assess his audience, and deliver words through which the Holy Spirit will work. He is not only handling the truth, he is doing so as one "approved of God" (2 Tim 2:15).

THE NECESSITY OF PROPERLY FOCUSED THOUGHT

Spiritual Babylon brings a different focus – one that is clearly skewed toward this world. Within the professed Christian community, all false doctrine focuses on this world. This does not mean there is no mention of the Lord's return, heaven, rewards, judgment, and the likes. However, they all come behind issues relating to life in this world. The shape of false theology is determined by the here and the now, and life in the body. The real essence of such religion is what occurs in this world, not what will take place in the world to come.

By way of contrast, Apostolic doctrine approaches this life with the life to come in mind. In fact, when boiling down the subject matter of the message of Hebrews, the Spirit makes to succinct statements.

- "For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak" or "about which we are speaking" NIV (Heb 2:5).

- "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an High Priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens; a Minister of the sanctuary, and of the true *The message preached today is God desires His children to be wealthy. Kenneth Hagin says that God not only wants to deliver believers from poverty, "He [also] wants His children to eat the best, He wants them to wear the best clothing, He wants them to drive the best cars, and He wants them to have the best of everything." (Quoted by D.L. McConnell A Different Gospel p.175) Fred Price agrees and boldly says, 'That's the "Financial prosperity is just as much a part of the Gospel as anything else. ... And I'm going to tell you something right now. I'm with the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter one: I'm not ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, .. I'm not ashamed of prosperity. I'm not ashamed that Jesus bought and paid for me to be wealthy.... Let me just tell you from the heart of God, "The very first thing on Jesus` agenda was to get rid of poverty! Would you like to know why some people, including ministries, never get out of poverty? Its not because they aren't*

smart. Its not because they don't have windows of opportunity. Its because they're not anointed. If you're not anointed, poverty will follow you all the days of your life. His first "You will walk in blessings, favor, prosperity, health and wealth, and you will do this without having to pursue wealth. First you must seek God's method of operation and His righteousness. When you find out how to live your life according to the Word of God you will become a money magnet . . . Well, you need to hear about money, because you ain't gonna have no love and joy and peace until you get some money!" (Creflo Dollar, Praise the Lord, "According to Word-Faith theology, financial prosperity and wealth was also included in the Atonement. This is based on an interpretation of the words of the Apostle Paul: 'Yet for your sakes he became poor, that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9). Critics believe Paul was speaking of spiritual riches, rather than material prosperity. Faith proponents support their view by arguing that the context is the giving of material wealth. It is often taught that Jesus and the apostles were rich, and therefore believers should expect the same financial success. Supporters such as Kenneth Copeland have argued that Prosperity Gospel is validated by the teachings of the Apostle John: 'Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 2). Copeland posits that 'as the seeds of prosperity are planted in your mind, in your will and in your emotions...they eventually produce a great financial harvest.'" Wikipedia

tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man" (Heb 8:1-2).

Therefore, so far as place is concerned, "the world to come," or the heavenly "sanctuary" is the emphasis. It is referred to as "the world to come" from the perspective of our future presence in, and involvement with, it. It is called the "sanctuary" with Christ's present activity in mind.

With little effort, we should be able conclude that the main place is the heavenly realms – where Jesus presently resides. The main Person is the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom every need, benefit, and advantage come to men. A religion – any religion – that does not lead men to conclude that Jesus Christ is the fundamental and preeminent Man, and that heaven is the primary place, cannot possibly be true. If earth was the main place, Jesus would have stayed here. If life in this world was the main life, then there would be no need for faith and hope, both of which have to do with the unseen realm.

The Word of Faith Movement

In the past few years, televangelists have affirmed that when Jesus said He had been anointed to "preach the Gospel to the poor" (Lk 4:18), that news meant they would no longer be "poor." Officially termed "The Word of Faith Movement," this theological approach affirms that healing and prosperity are in the atonement – that is, that Jesus died to procure bodily health and financial prosperity for Adam's race. In this view, faith has primarily to do with improving one's life in the flesh – life in this world.

This doctrine is built upon two primary texts.

- "Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed" (1 Pet 2:24).
- "Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth" (3 John 1:2).

As already stated, a fundamental supposition that theoretically undergirds this corruption is that the blood atonement includes provision for both health and prosperity – that is, that Christ's death paid for, or redeemed from, sickness and poverty. The First Peter text, which alludes to Isaiah 53:5, is affirmed to support this view. It is also stated that Isaiah 53:4 and Matthew 8:17 declare this to be

the case: “Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows : yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4). Matthew reads, “When the even was come, they brought unto him many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses ” (Matt 8:17).

Unlike these false prophets, Matthew says that prophecy was fulfilled in Jesus’ earthly ministry, not in His death. His healing of the sick when He “went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38) fulfilled Isaiah’s word, not His death upon the cross, or the administration the chastening stripes of God (not those administered by men).

Peter further defines what is meant by were healed: “ For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls ” (1 Pet 2:25). The healing was from straying, not from being sick! That, of course, is exactly what Isaiah said as well: “But He was wounded for our transgressions , He was bruised for our iniquities : the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all ” (Isa 53:5-6). God did not wound Jesus because we were ill, or because we were poor! He was not “bruised” because we were sick, or because we lacked earthly resources. He was not chastened for our health, but for our peace. The Lord did not lay our sicknesses upon Christ, but our “iniquities.” It was not our illnesses He bore in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).

It was not our bodily health that alienated us from God, for that was not the common malady among men. We were not separated from God because we were sick and poor, and it is a gross and deliberate misrepresentation of the case to affirm such a thing. All men are not sick, and all men are not poor – yet Jesus “died for all ” (2 Cor 5:14,15), “gave Himself a ransom for all ” (1 Tim 2:6), and His body was offered “once for all ” (Heb 10:10). Words like “reconcile,” “justify,” “sanctify,” and “wash” do not apply to illness and poverty, but to the guilt and contamination of sin and iniquity. It is “enemies” that are “reconciled” (Rom 5:10). Men are justified from sin (Rom 3:23-24). Sanctification is associated with wisdom, righteousness, and redemption – not health and wealth (1 Cor 1:30). Washing has to do with being cleansed from sin, not sickness or poverty (Acts 22:16; 1 Cor 6:9-11; Rev 1:5).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

It is necessary to say these things because, in our text, we are being exposed to the setting up of the Kingdom of God (Dan 2:44; Lk 22:18; Acts 28:31). If the above doctrine is true, it will be preached at the beginning, when the foundation is being laid. If deliverance from sickness and poverty is what redemption is all about, then Peter will surely proclaim it with power and clarity, for he has “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:19). Or, is this a doctrine that was not clear when the Lord Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit, and His disciples were “filled with the Spirit,” and spoke “as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

If Peter did not preach this gospel of prosperity in the beginning, then those who do preach it must be held in account for why they do so. Has God revealed something to them that was not revealed to Peter? Have they received keys that Peter did not receive? Have men now believed on Jesus through their word, instead of through the words of the Apostles, as Jesus said (John 17:20)?

The Rapid Growth of This Group

The New York Times (10/5/2006) estimates that 25% of the total Christian population (2.3 Billion) is in this group (575,000). The most recent survey of ten nations show their remarkable influence.

Nearly all of these people subscribe to and embrace the prosperity gospel. It dominates the air waves of both radio and television. The majority of the mega-churches represent this line of thought. We are not speaking of a small and fledgling movement. By comparison, the Restoration Movement, with its three primary branches, comprise about 3 million people. The movement called “renewalists” has just celebrated its 100 th anniversary, and it is well over 575 million , and growing. Yet, though gaining in size and popularity, it is promoting a primary view that requires one to wrest the Scriptures.

IF THE VIEW IS CORRECT

If the view of health and wealth – the prosperity gospel – is true, it will be made known in the beginning chapters of the book of Acts. This is the record of the beginning of the church Jesus said He would “build” (Matt 16:16). The first outpouring of the Spirit is recorded, as well as the first anointed public proclamation of the exalted Christ. We have the first inspired exposition of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. The door of salvation is first opened, and for the first time, inquiring souls are told what to do, and what to expect.

In our text the record of a specific man being healed at a particular time is given. It will prove to be an occasion that will result in Peter delivering a word about Jesus. He will trace Jesus’ sufferings back to the prophets, and deliver an inspired view of what was entailed in that suffering. Individuals will have to judge for themselves whether or not it is appropriate to imagine that a differing view of the purpose of Christ’s death can possibly be delivered later by means of the Holy Spirit. If such a view is entertained, then some form of reasoning must be presented that justifies such a conclusion, particularly when that reasoning clashes with Peter’s preaching.

PETER SAW AND ANSWERED

“ 3:12a And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people . . . ”

One of the confirmations of a person being directed by God is their ability to recognize a situation, and properly respond to it. Our text for this lesson begins with what Peter saw, and the consequent action resulting from that insight.

PETER SAW

“And when Peter saw it . . .” Other versions read, “when Peter saw this ,” NASB “And Peter, seeing it,” DARBY “But Peter seeing,” DOUAY “When Peter saw the people ,” NJB “When Peter saw his opportunity ,” NLT “when Peter saw that ,” TNT “Peter having seen ,” YLT and “and seeing this, Peter.” LITV

Here, however, the emphasis is on him perceiving an open door – an opportunity much like that which took place on the day of Pentecost when “the multitude came together” (Acts 2:6). At that time they were also drawn together by the working of the Lord.

Once the people saw a familiar man leaping, walking and praising God, and recognized that this was the same man who had been regularly begging at one of the Temple gates, “all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon’s, greatly wondering” (3:11). This is what Peter “saw,” and his sight was not limited to what his eyes beheld. He saw what appeared to the eye, but what he took into his heart and mind was more than what his eyes beheld. The word translated “saw” means “to know... to perceive . . . notice, discern, discover.” THAYER

In a rare show of technical accuracy, the New Living Translation correctly renders the sense of the text: “When Peter saw his opportunity .”

The use of this word emphasizes discernment – perceiving the significance of a thing, and seizing

the opportunity.

- The wise men who came to worship the Holy Child confessed, “we have seen His star in the east, and are come to worship Him” (Matt 2:2).
- When Jesus was baptized He “ saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Matt 3:16).
- It is said of Jesus prodigious ministry, “The people which sat in darkness saw great light” (Matt 4:16).
- The same word is translated “know” in Paul’s prayer for the Ephesians. “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling . . . ” (Eph 1:18).
- The word is again translated “know” in the Thessalonian letter, when Paul said he was aware of their election. “ Knowing , brethren beloved, your election of God” (1 Thess 1:4).
- Again, when speaking of the Lord’s return in glory, Paul writes that He will come “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:8).

Therefore, in this text, in saying Peter “saw them,” the Spirit means refers to more than the seeing of the eye. To be sure, Peter witnessed the people running together. Here, however, the emphasis is on him perceiving an open door – an opportunity much like that which took place on the day of Pentecost when “the multitude came together” (Acts 2:6). At that time they were also drawn together by the working of the Lord.

Being himself enlightened, Peter will not turn away the people as the disciples once did when the children were being brought to Jesus (Matt 19:13); or when they asked Jesus to “send away” that “woman of Canaan” who sought for help for her daughter (Matt 15:23); or when the disciples asked Jesus to send away the hungering multitudes that were lingering with Him, so that they could buy some food (Mk 6:36). In all of those circumstances the disciples saw, yet did not perceive.

What was the difference in this occasion? Why didn’t Peter think this crowd to be a distraction? It was because he was “endued with power from on high,” as Jesus had promised (Lk 24:49). This “power” enabled him to discern the circumstances and know what to do when he confronted them. That is an aspect of God working within men that has been largely lost in a time when entertainment and men-pleasing have become dominate.

PETER ANSWERED

“ . . . he answered unto the people . . . ” Other versions read, “he responded to the people,” NKJV “he replied to the people,” NASB “he said to them,” NIV “he addressed the people,” NRSV “he said to the people,” BBE “he answered and said to them,” MRD “he declared to the people,” NET “addressed the crowd ,” NLT and “ spoke to the people.” WEYMOUTH

The word “answered” comes from a Greek word meaning, “to give an answer to,” THAYER and “to reply to a questioner or question.” LIDDELL-SCOTT Here, however, there has been no question addressed to Peter – yet, he is said to have “answered.”

In this text, “answer” does not mean replying to a question or inquiry, but responding to a circumstance. One time, when Jesus was in the process of upbraiding the cities “wherein most of His mighty works were done,” He is said to have “answered” without anyone asking Him a question. “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.

Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight” (Mat 11:25-26). Another time, when the Pharisees sought to lay hands on Him, and without them asking Him anything, “Jesus answered and spake unto them again by parables, and said” (Matt 22:1). Another time, a blind man named Bartimaeus was told that Jesus called for him. He threw off his cloak and came to Jesus. Without the man saying a word to Jesus, “Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?” (Mark 10:51). When Jesus saw a fig tree with nothing but leaves, He “ answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever” (Mark 11:14). When Jesus was arrested in the garden, before anyone asked a question, “Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take Me?” (Mark 14:48). When Peter cut off Malchus’ ear, “Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him” (Luke 22:51).

In all of these case, Jesus was responding to a circumstance, a situation, an opportunity. He perceived the situation and uttered words appropriate for the occasion. Jesus is still this way, answering situations and circumstances, speaking words to the heart when He has been asked no questions.

Thus Peter, having the mind and spirit of Christ, perceives the situation and has something to say. Because he has a grasp of the circumstance, and sees it in view of the purpose of God, he knows that to say. He does not have to ask questions of the multitude, inquiring what is on their minds, or why they have come running to him and John as the former lame man held onto them. Unlike the psychiatrists and counselors of the day, he does not have to probe their background, inquire into their past, and obtain sundry information that will assist him in knowing what to say. He already has a grasp of the situation, and has no need to ask what the people want. He already knows what they need.

Under the New Covenant the people, particularly those chosen to lead, can have a grasp of a situation, knowing what to do. Under the Old Covenant, this was not always the case. For example, under the Law there were occasions when the people had to ask counsel of the Lord. During these times, the judgment of the Lord was often made known in an impersonal manner – by means of “the judgment of the Urim before the Lord” (Num 27:21). This was a stone that, together with “the Thumim,” was kept in “the breastplate of judgment” (Ex 28:20), and very little is known about them. It was one of the means by which an answer from God was obtained. Dreams and prophets were two other means (1 Sam 28:6). These two stones apparently stood for a Divine “Yes” and “No,” with the Urim standing for “Yes.” This means of obtaining direction appears to have been quite similar to the casting of lots.

The thing to be seen here is that men were often directed independently of discernment, or a personal understanding of the situation. During those times, sin had not yet been taken away, and thus men did not participate in the Divine nature. Their hearts had not been circumcised, they did not have a new spirit, and the Holy Spirit did not dwell in them. By way of comparison we are told, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect ” (Heb 11:39-40). They did not enjoy the benefits of the New Covenant in which all of the people “know the Lord,” having His laws put into their hearts and written into their minds (Heb 10:16).

We are also told that the purpose of God, as realized in Christ Jesus, was not “made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the spirit” (Eph 3:5). Whatever may be said of the most excellent of the human race prior to Christ, they did not have the advantages that are now realized by all saints, by grace through faith. For this reason Divine direction and confirmation often came by comparatively crude means. It might be a “sound in the tops of the mulberry trees” (2 Sam 5:24), dew seen either on or off of a fleece spread upon the ground (Judges 6:37-40), the casting of lots (Lev 16:8), a personal dream (Gen 46:2-4), or

overhearing a man relating a dream (Judges 7:13-15).

I approach this matter with extreme caution, lest I be misunderstood, or leave the impression that men no longer rely upon the Lord. Yet, there is something to be said about possessing “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), having the eyes of our heart “enlightened” (Eph 1:18), and being “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). In Jesus, God has given more of Himself to men, and brought the redeemed into a lofty partnership in which they work together with Him (1 Cor 3:9).

It is not comely for those who are in Christ and have tasted of the heavenly gift to walk about in perpetual ignorance, never knowing what to do, and unable to assess the circumstances in which they find themselves. This is not to say that everything will always be crystal clear to us, or that we will never grapple with ignorance. It IS to say that life in Christ is not lived within the tent of ignorance. We are summoned to so present ourselves to the Lord that we will come to “discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect” NRSV (Rom 12:2).

The Magnitude of the Challenge

In every circumstance of life there are a number of significant factors. There is the presence of diverse personalities. For the child of God, the Holy Spirit is present to direct, illuminate, and empower. Satanic hosts are also present to deceive, blind, and lure into sin. There are also human personalities – “flesh and blood” – against whom we do not wrestle, yet which can capture our attention and distort our judgement.

Behind the circumstance, and hidden from all natural senses, there are certain objectives and tendencies. There is an eternal purpose under which everything is operating (Eph 1:10-11; 3:11). There is also the intention of the devil, who has come down to earth “having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). Then, there is the matter human nature – a fallen nature that is bent in the wrong direction, seeks self, and has no clear view of humanity, the world, or God Himself. Often, there is also the factor of redeemed men, who are seeking the things above, are strangers in this world, and are seeking “a better country, that is, an heavenly” (Heb 11:16).

With that rather complex set of circumstances, how is a person to know what to do? Regarding our text, how will Peter know what to do? He is with a man whose heart has been touched, and he is leaping and praising God. He is with John, a fellow worker, who thinks as he does. He is confronting some people who have recently called for the death of Jesus, and yet have been intrigued by what is happening before their eyes.

Peter and John do not step to the side, withdrawing from the people to pray and seek Divine guidance. They are not thrown into a state of consternation in which they do not have the slightest idea what to do. They do not run away from the circumstance, being intimidated by it. You at once sense that Peter is actually in charge of the circumstance. He knows exactly what has happened to the man who insists on remaining with them. He knows why that lame man is leaping and praising God. He also knows the people who are running to them, and what they have done in the past. He does not fear that they will kill him and John as they did Jesus. It is not that he is simply a brave soul. He is rather a discerning soul – one who is in fellowship with God’s Son and knows what He is doing from heaven. Peter will therefore speak with discernment and confidence, and therefore with power and effectiveness.

WHY MARVEL YE AT THIS?

“ 12b Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?”

Here we will behold the confidence with which Peter speaks – just as he did on the day of Pentecost. He is not intimidated by this circumstance. He is walking in the light and knows what to do and say. This is one of the remarkable benefits of maintaining the fellowship with Christ into which God has called us (1 Cor 1:9). Peter and John do not have to pray on this occasion, seeking Divine guidance. They do not have to summon the other apostles to assist them in deciphering the proper response to this multitude. Solomon once said, “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14; 24:6). Again he said, “in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Prov 15:22). In this case, however, these words have no place, for Peter is in fellowship with the Master Teacher.

John will write later of the advantages of being taught by God – particularly through the Holy Spirit: “But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you : but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:27). John is referring to the use of the truth rather than its acquisition – to the employment of wisdom in situations for which there are no express instructions in Scripture.

Therefore Peter, with a grasp on the truth and a perception of the opportunity before him, speaks with great assurance and power. It ought to be noted that powerful speaking is always attended by confidence and assurance.

YE MEN OF ISRAEL

Ye men of Israel . . .” Other versions read, “You Israelites,” NRSV “Men, sons of Israel,” MRD “People of Israel,” NLT “Men, Israelites,” YLT “Israelites,” WEYMOUTH and “Fellow Israelites.” ISV

One of the marked distinctions between Peter and John and the modern church is this: the modern church is surprised if anything unusual or supernatural takes place. Peter and John would have been surprised if such things did not take place.

As elementary as it may be, the word “men” is not a description of gender, but is used of all mankind in general. Thus we read of followers of Jesus being “hated of all men ” (Matt 10:22), that “ all men should honor the Son” (John 5:23), and that the crucified Christ would “draw all men unto” unto Himself (John 12:32). With the announced fulfillment of God pouring out His Spirit upon “all flesh,” including sons and daughters, and God’s servants and handmaidens (Acts 2:17-18) , it is not likely that Peter would speak only to males.

Peter addresses the people according to their God-ordained lineage: “men of Israel,” or offspring of Jacob. From a politician’s point of view, they might have been considered vassals of the State of Rome. From the scribes and Pharisees viewpoint, they might have been considered as devotees to the Law. Peter, however, perceives them in their most noble status.

WHY DO YOU MARVEL?

“ . . . why marvel ye at this?” Other versions read, “why do you marvel at this?” NKJV “why does this surprise you ?” NIV “why do you wonder at this ?” NRSV “why are you so greatly amazed at this man ?” BBE “why are you astonished at this ?” DARBY “why are you amazed about this man ?” GWN “why are you so surprised at this ?” NJB “ what is so surprising about this?” NLT and “Why are you so surprised and wondering at this ?” AMPLIFIED

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Take hold of the gravity of this situation. A man of over forty years of age, who had been lame from the day he was born, was instantly cured, and is walking, leaping, and praising God in the Temple courts. Seeing this take place, the multitude come running to “them” – the man, together with Peter and John. Boldly, Peter asks them, “Why are you so greatly surprised at this man?” BBE It is as though he asked, “what is all of this excitement about?” This certainly was not the response of Peter and John to the healing of the man. After he had leaped up, they simply proceeded into the Temple as they intended.

The amazement of the crowd confirmed they had not seen God in the matter. They saw this as a worldly phenomenon, and did not connect it with the risen Christ, whom they had crucified earlier through the hands of lawless men. Their eyes were fixed upon the result of the Lord working, and not on the working Lord.

The amazement of the crowd confirmed they had not seen God in the matter. They saw this as a worldly phenomenon, and did not connect it with the risen Christ, whom they had crucified earlier through the hands of lawless men. Their eyes were fixed upon the result of the Lord working, and not on the working Lord. Even though they were in the “courts of the Lord,” they were not conscious of Him, and therefore could not detect His working.

All of this was really inexcusable. The Lord Jesus had been among them, and had healed great numbers of people “in the Temple” (Matt 21:14). He had gone throughout their cities and villages “teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people” (Matt 9:35). His “fame” as a miracle worker had spread throughout the entire region, and even into “all Syria” (Matt 4:24; 9:26-31; Lk 4:37). Now, within a little over fifty days, they had apparently forgotten about Jesus of Nazareth, even though the world had never before, nor since, beheld such a display of Divine power in a Man. In addition to all of this, Pentecost had taken place, followed by the disciples continuing to meet daily in the Temple (Acts 2:46), with “many wonders and signs” being “done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). Yet, all of this had not impacted this multitude.

Do you wonder at the obtuseness of the flesh? Wonder no more! Even when they are witnessed by unregenerate men, great works of God are easily forgotten. Also, the flesh cannot make an association between the hand of God and the circumstances of life. It is simply blind to such associations.

There is also something to be said about God-consciousness versus man-consciousness: i.e. between perceiving God in a matter and only seeing men. One of the fundamental ministries of Jesus is to make us aware of the Living God, His purposes, and His gifts. Being filled with the Spirit, Peter is keenly aware of this. Therefore he sees this circumstance quite differently than the multitudes. This whole matter has interrupted their religion. Now Peter, perceiving their situation, will speak to them with the wisdom that comes down from above.

WHO DO YOU LOOK EARNESTLY AT US?

“ . . . or why look ye so earnestly on us . . . ” Other versions read, “why look so intently on us?” NKJV “why do you gaze at us?” NASB “why do you stare at us?” NIV “why fasten ye your eyes on us?” ASV “why are you looking at us ?” BBE “why look ye so steadfastly on us,” GENEVA and “why do you keep staring at us?” AMPLIFIED

This is the kind of attention false prophets and charlatans crave. However, Peter and John do not have a lust for attention. They are “ambassadors of Christ,” and they desire attention to be given to Him. That is what godly men do. They do not just talk about Jesus receiving the attention, they see to it that through their words that actually happens – whether the people consent to it or not. It is one thing to talk about Jesus getting the glory, it is quite another to see to it that He does.

POWER OR HOLINESS

“ . . . as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” Other versions read, “as though by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?” NKJV “But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, “as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk?” NASB “as if by our power or virtue we had given him the use of his legs?” BBE “as if by our strength or power we had made this man to walk?” DOUAY “as though we have made him walk by our own power or godly life ?” GWN “as if by our own power or authority we had made this man to walk?” MRD “Do you think this was done because we are good ?” IE and “as though by our [own individual] power or [active] piety we had made this man [able] to walk?” AMPLIFIED

Peter’s words are arresting. He questions why the people are looking upon him and John intently as though they had made this man walk by their own “power or holiness.” That is a most interesting combination of words: “power or holiness,” “power or godliness,” NKJV “power or piety,” NASB or “power or godly life.” GWN

The word “power” comes from a word meaning, “strength, ability, or power residing in a person,” or inherent in their nature, THAYER “a capacity for something, ability, capability,” FRIBERG “capacity,” UBS “ability to perform a particular activity,” LOUW-NIDA “authority.” LEH As used here, this speaks of a natural ability – resident in, and developed by, human aptitude.

The word “holiness” comes from a word meaning, “piety toward God, godliness,” THAYER “behavior directed dutifully toward God, piety, devotion, godliness,” FRIBERG “godliness, godly life; religion; good deeds or godly living,” UBS and “appropriate beliefs and devout practice of obligations related to” God. LOUW-NIDA

Peter is affirming that this man was not made to walk through any natural ability (power) of his own – the art of healing, medicinal expertise, etc. He is also declaring that it was not done because God had given them a special ability because they led disciplined religious lives, keeping all of the rules, and thus becoming worthy of receiving such an aptitude. These are the two areas law-keepers accentuate: having natural gifts, or being rewarded by God for being so good. This power did not come from Peter and John themselves, and it was not given to them because of their excellent works and rule-keeping. Thus, in spiritual wisdom, Peter turns the attention from himself and John. He has “the mind of Christ.” He therefore denies that they are superior by birth or by conduct. What they have done is not owing to their persons or their religious achievements. The Source was of a higher order than nature.

THE GOD OF . . .

“ 13a The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers . . . ”

Peter will now identify the God of whom He will speak. It will not be the God of the Pharisees, who dealt with men according to their excellence. It will not be the God of the scribes, who was devoted to rules and procedures relating to human conduct. He was not the God of the Sadducees, who governed a realm without spirits or angels. He was not the God of the Lawyers who exalted human understanding above Divine intention. Peter will be very precise in his delineation of God.

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, AND OF ISAAC, AND OF JACOB

“The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob . . .” Other versions read, “The God of Abraham, (the God) of Isaac, and (the God) of Jacob.” NAB

This is the God who made Himself known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the God who chose them, blessed them, and directed them. It is the God they worshiped, obeyed, and served.

The first person to refer to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was God Himself. He used this phrase when appearing to Moses at the burning bush: “Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And

This is the God who made Himself known to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is the God who chose them, blessed them, and directed them. It is the God they worshiped, obeyed, and served.

Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God” (Ex 3:6). The Lord instructed Moses to refer to Him in this manner: “And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations” (Ex 3:15). When Moses told the Israelites God had appeared to him, he was to refer to Him in this manner: “Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt” (Ex 3:16). God even gave Moses a special sign to work before the Israelites so they would believe this is the God who sent him: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Put forth thine hand, and take it by the tail. And he put forth his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand: that they may believe that the LORD God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath appeared unto thee” (Ex 4:4-5).

Jesus Christ referred to God in this manner: “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Mat 22:32; Mk 12:26; Lk 20:37).

Stephen also referenced to God in this way (Acts 7:37).

Elaborating on this point, Moses reveals how God heard the groaning of Israel under the oppression of the Egyptians and “remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob” (Ex 2:24). God also reminded Moses of His personal appearance to these three patriarchs: “And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them” (Ex 6:3). The entrance of Israel into the land of promise was owing to a promise God made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: “And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD” (Ex 6:8; 33:1; Num 32:11; Deut 1:8; 6:10).

When God promised to enable Israel to drive out the inhabitants of Canaan, it was only because of what He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may perform the word which the LORD swore unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Deut 9:5).

When Moses pled for God to spare Israel, not destroying them for their wickedness, he did so upon the basis of His commitment to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “Remember Thy servants, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin” (Deut 9:27).

When Moses spoke to the people about God establishing them and being a God to them, he reminded them that this was owing to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “That He may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that He may be unto thee a God, as He hath said unto thee, and as He hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Deut 29:13).

God revealed to Moses that Israel would depart from Him, and be punished by Him. Yet, if they would repent and turn to Him, even in their captivity, He promised “Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember ; and I will remember the land” (Lev 26:42).

During their history, when God was gracious to Israel, having compassion on them, it was because of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. “And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob , and would not destroy them, neither cast He them from His presence as yet” (2 Kgs 13:23).

An Application

All of this provides insight into the nature of salvation. With Israel, they were blessed because of others (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), and not because of their own persons or achievements. How could they boast in such a circumstance? They were sustained because of a covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Likewise, the saved are not blessed because of themselves, but because of Christ Jesus. Strictly speaking, they are not blessed because they have obeyed, but because of the Son of God. God has forgiven them “for Christ’s sake” (Eph 4:32). It is the Father’s love for Christ that has brought the blessing to us (John 15:9), and the Father loves us because we love His Son. “For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God” (John 16:27).

Whatever you may think of God’s love for you, His love for Jesus is greater! He is the “beloved Son,” and, when we have “received Him” (John 1:12), we are blessed because of that. I am not sure that it is proper to continually speak of how much God loves people. There certainly are not a lot of examples of this kind of speaking in Scripture. Further, when the love of God toward men is mentioned, it is not on a sentimental or emotional level. God’s love is associated with purpose, not mere attraction.

- “For God so loved the world, that he gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life ” (John 3:16).

- “But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us ” (Rom 5:8).

- “Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver ” (2 Cor 9:7).

- “But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:4-7).

- “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace ” (2 Thess 2:16).

- “But after that the kindness and love of God our Savior toward man appeared ” (Titus 3:4).

- “For whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth , and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb 12:6).

- “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1).

- “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him ” (1 John 4:9).
- “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins ” (1 John 4:10).
- “ We love him, because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19).
- “And from Jesus Christ, who is the Faithful Witness, and the First Begotten of the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6).

Nowhere is God represented as desiring to be a part of our life, or earnestly wanting to bless us because He loves us so much . Thoughts pertaining to the love of God are crafted much more carefully than that. Men are never left with the thought that there is so much as a spark of Divine love or concern toward them that is not strictly because of Christ Jesus.

Further Development

Like Peter, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob could claim no personal power or holiness as the basis of the Divine favor they experienced. Abraham came from an idolatrous background (Josh 24:2). Isaac had a supernatural birth (Gen 17:15-19; 21:12), and was the Divinely determined seed (Gal 4:28). Jacob also was conceived by Divine intervention (Gen 25:21), and was chosen above his older twin brother Esau before they were born (Gen 25:22-23; Mal 1:2-3; Rom 9:11-13).

Nowhere is God represented as desiring to be a part of our life, or earnestly wanting to bless us because He loves us so much. Thoughts pertaining to the love of God are crafted much more carefully than that. Men are never left with the thought that there is so much as a spark of Divine love or concern toward them that is not strictly because of Christ Jesus.

Peter and John were also chosen by Jesus. The Lord Himself reminded them that they did not choose Him. “ Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you , that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:16).

Ultimately, all blessing is traced back to the Son of God. Even in the case of Abraham, it was his Seed, Christ Jesus, who was the cause for Divine beneficence. For those who are in Christ, Jesus Himself is the reason for them being received and blessed. Nothing that they received through their flesh and blood lineage – Adam – brought the blessing to them! Contrary to the statements of some, the secret to blessing is not obedience, and it is not praise. It is Jesus Himself, and our only association with Him is our faith – and even it came from God , as Peter will affirm in this very passage.

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS

“ . . . the God of our fathers . . . ” Other versions read, “the God of our ancestors ,” NRSV “the God of our forefathers ,” NET “the God of all our ancestors ,” NLT “ and of all our ancestors,” LIVING and “ the same God of all our ancestors.” IE

Here, the expression “our fathers” is not a repetition of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” This rather refers to the mass of the Israelites who had trusted in God. The word “fathers” is frequently used in this sense.

- “But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven unto wrath, he gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed

this house, and carried the people away into Babylon” (Ezra 5:12).

- “ Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea” (Psa 106:7).

- “ Our fathers did eat manna in the desert; as it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat” (John 6:31).

- “ Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen” (Acts 7:44).

- “And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers , Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive” (Acts 28:25-26).

- “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Cor 10:1).

Why Did Peter Speak In This Manner?

Peter does not speak of the God of the human race, or all men, although He is “the Father of spirits” (Heb 12:9) and “the God of all flesh” (Jer 32:27). By referring to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the God of our fathers, Peter is distinguishing the God who had revealed Himself to a selected, or chosen, people . He is also distinguishing Him from the idols of the nations.

God had spoken and revealed Himself to other people – Abimelech (Gen 20:3-6), Balaam (Num 22:20), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:45), Cyrus (2 Chron 36:23), etc. But He was not the God of Abimelech, or of Balaam, or of Nebuchadnezzar, or of Cyrus. His covenant of blessing was not through them, and they were not in the Messianic lineage. God was, in a very special sense, “the God of the Hebrews” (Ex 3:16; 5:3; ; 7:16; 9:1,13; 10:3), and “the God of Israel” (Josh 7:13; Judges 4:6; 1 Sam 1:17; 1 Kgs 1:13; Psa41:13).

Peter is going to affirm that the same God who called Abraham, and confirmed His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is the God who sent and raised Jesus of Nazareth from the dead.

Something to Be Learned

There is a lesson to be learned here concerning our perspective of Scripture. Some, who are unlearned, speak of the God of the Old Testament, and the God of the New Testament. Even those who acknowledge One God often represent Him as being quite different prior to and during the Old Covenant – more harsh and less tolerant than He is in this day of salvation.

All of this is nothing more than fleshly nonsense, borne out of a gross ignorance of God Himself. Technically, the New Covenant is really the oldest one, having been promised to Abraham. Thus Paul writes, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ , the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after , cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal 3:16-17). The covenant that is fulfilled in Christ is said to be before the Law, which was given four hundred and thirty years later at Mount Sinai. The Law was a sort of interlude between the promise of salvation through the Seed of Abraham and its actual fulfilment. Its purpose was to clearly identify sin, convincing men of both its nature and dominance. In this way, it prepare the people for a Savior. In fact, the Gospel is said to have been “preached . . . unto Abraham” (Gal 3:8).

He does not refer to the creation of “the worlds” (Heb 1:2; 11:3). He does not refer to the creation of man (Gen 2:7). He does not refer to the institution of marriage (Gen 1:27; 5:2). He does not refer to the giving of the Law (Ex 20:1-17). He does not even refer to the occupation of the promised land by Israel (Josh 21:43). All of these were magnificent works, but none of them were sufficient to redeem men.

Some might imagine that the Law was meaningless, and completely disassociated from the promise made to Abraham. Thus it is written, “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made . . . Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law . . . But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe” (Gal 3:19-22).

Now Peter will masterfully declare Jesus Christ to be the One through whom the promises of God are fulfilled, and in whom faith must be placed. This Anointed One has been approved by the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the fathers, and all Israel – the same God they professed to follow..

GOD HATH GLORIFIED HIS SON

“ 13b . . . hath glorified His Son Jesus.”

Having established the God of whom he is speaking, Peter now declares His work. He does not refer to the creation of “the worlds” (Heb 1:2; 11:3). He does not refer to the creation of man (Gen 2:7). He does not refer to the institution of marriage (Gen 1:27; 5:2). He does not refer to the giving of the Law (Ex 20:1-17). He does not even refer to the occupation of the promised land by Israel (Josh 21:43). All of these were magnificent works, but none of them were sufficient to redeem men. Hence, such things cannot be the emphasis of preaching, for none of them is Gospel, and the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). Suffice it to say, any preaching or teaching that emphasizes the world, man, marriage, the keeping of the Law, or blessedness in this world cannot possibly be true.

HATH GLORIFIED

“ . . . hath glorified . . .” Other versions read, “has given glory,” ASV “has brought glory,” NLT “did glorify,” YLT “He gave glory,” IE “has conferred this honor,” WEYMOUTH “has glorified . . . [doing Him this honor],” AMPLIFIED “who has done this thing to honor,” PHILLIPS and “has given Divine glory.” GNB

If this word was used to describe anyone other than Jesus, I would carry the matter no further. However, since this is descriptive of Jesus, it seems to me that we must extend ourselves to be sure we hold a God-honoring view of the term.

Peter refers to something that God has already accomplished – “hath,” or “given,” ASV “did,” YLT or “conferred,” WEYMOUTH This not something God observed, but something He executed. It was not a joint enterprise, but something achieved by His “own arm” (Isa 63:5).

The accomplishment was glorification – a Person was “glorified.” The word “glorified” comes from the Greek word **evdo,xasen** (the aorist active tense of **doxa,zw** – that is, it is an action that has already been accomplished . The word itself means “to praise, extol, magnify . . . to honor, hold in honor . . . restore to a state of glory,” THAYER “as giving or sharing a high status,” FRIBERG “magnify,” LEH and “to clothe in splendor.” GINGRICH

This is not something man does. It is the work of God Himself. It is not glory after the manner of

men, who cannot actually invest anyone with glory. It is not mere talk, but the conferment of a high status that can be confirmed by a public showing.

HIS SON JESUS

“ . . . His Son Jesus.” Other versions read, “His servant Jesus,” NKJV “His child Jesus,” YLT and “to Jesus,” His Servant and Son Jesus.” AMPLIFIED

“Son” Versus “Servant”

Nearly all later translations say “Servant” instead of “Son” **NKJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, BBE, CSB DARBY, ERV, ESV, GWN, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NIB, NJB, NLT, LIVING, IE, WEYMOUTH, ISV, WILLIAMS, and MONTGOMERY.** Two of the literal translations (Young’s Literal and Literal Translation of the Bible) translate the word “child.” The Amplified Bible translates it “Servant and Son.”

The Greek word translated “Son” and “servant” is common in all Greek manuscripts. It is *pais* (pie-dah), and is in the masculine gender. Its lexical meaning is “a child,” with the second usage “servant, slave,” THAYER “in reference to age, child; in reference to descent son, in reference to social position servant, slave,” FRIBERG “servant, slave, child,” UBS “a young person,” LOUW-NIDA “in relation to Descent, a son, in Relation to age, a child, in relation to Condition, a slave, servant,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “child (in relation to parents,” LEH and “boy, son, but even more probable is servant, slave.” GINGRICH

It is clear from the lexical definitions that the meaning of the word is not cut and dried. It is used in a number of differing ways to denote age, descent, and social status. If this word was used to describe anyone other than Jesus, I would carry the matter no further. However, since this is descriptive of Jesus, it seems to me that we must extend ourselves to be sure we hold a God-honoring view of the term.

The complicating factor is the words modified by this expression: “ His Son (Servant) JESUS .”

First, this precise Greek word is used five times in Scripture. Luke 9:42 (“child,” KJV “boy” NASB), Acts 3:13 (“Son,” KJV “Servant,” ASV “Child” YLT), Acts 3:26 (“Son,” KJV “Servant,” ASV “Child.” YLT), Acts 4:27 (“Child,” KJV “Servant,” ASV “Child.” DOUAY), and Acts 20:12 (“young man” named Eutychus, “lad,” ASV “youth,” DOUAY “boy.” NASB

There can be no question about Jesus being God’s Servant. That is how Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah (Isa 42:1; 49:5-7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11). Zechariah also prophesied of the Messiah as God’s “Servant the Branch” (Zech 3:8). Matthew specifically confirms Jesus is the “Servant” of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt 12:16). None of these prophecies had to do with the exaltation or glorification of Jesus. They rather had to do with Him carrying out God’s commission in the earth – accomplishing salvation.

I affirm that, from a technical point of view, Jesus was exalted in the capacity of the Son of God. In this capacity He is the Foundation upon which the church is Built (Matt 16:16-18; 1 Cor 3:11). Our faith involves a persuasion that Jesus is “the Son of God” (John 20:21; Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:5). The text loses nothing by retaining the expression “He Hath glorified His Son Jesus.” KJV, DOUAY, GENEVA, MRD, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, BISHOP’S BIBLE, MKJV

The Glorification

The glorification of Jesus involved His exaltation above all others, and the conferment of “all power in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18). This all has to do with Him being a Man – the “Son of

God.” He is, beyond all question, the preeminent Man through whom salvation is realized. Various expressions of that exaltation are as follows.

- He is “by the right hand of God exalted” (Acts 2:33).
- God has exalted Him “with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).
- God has “set Him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:20-22).
- God has “highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9).
- Jesus Has “gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22).

Thus it is stated that God “hath glorified His Son Jesus” (Acts 3:13). That is, now he is clearly “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15). He is no longer in a humbled state, as He was in this world, nor is He in the “form of a servant” (Phil 2:7-8). He is no longer “in all points tempted as we are” (Heb 4:15).

This glorification of Jesus took place after His death and resurrection. Jesus prayed about this in the garden prior to His betrayal. “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify Thee . . . And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John 17:1,5).

Just as Christ’s entrance into the world as a man concealed who He really was, so His glorification reveals who He really is.

Now, Peter will contrast what God has done with Jesus with what the Jews did to Him. As we would expect, he will do so in a powerful and uncompromising manner. His words will take the form of an affirmation.

YOU DELIVERED AND DENIED HIM

“ 13c . . . whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.”

What will religious men who reject Christ do when given the license to do so? With whom will they form an alliance? How far will they go in their opposition to Jesus? Man may speculate about this matter, but there certainly is no need to do so. God has given us the account of what men will do to Jesus when all restraint is removed.

YOU DELIVERED UP

“ . . . whom ye delivered up . . .” Other versions read, “You handed Him over,” NIV “whom you handed over,” NRSV “whom you gave up,” BBE “whom you indeed delivered up,” DOUAY “you delivered over,” ESV “whom ye betrayed,” GENEVA and “you handed Jesus over.” IE

When we read of Jesus praying, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Lk 23:34), we must take care not to form a false conclusion. This does not mean our Lord was indifferent to what the covenanted people were doing. His desire for the Father to forgive them was not the expression of a sentimental attitude. Rather, it was the result of His keen awareness of God’s

covenant to them, when He will “take away their sins” (Rom 11:27).

Thus Peter, speaking again while filled with the Spirit, reminds the people that they had delivered up Jesus to the State – to take His life as though He was a criminal instead of a Savior. Therefore it is written, “And when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor” (Matt 27:2). Verily, Isaiah had spoken the truth concerning them: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see Him, there is no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isa 53:2).

If you wonder what sin can move a people to do, we have a sterling example of such conduct in the Jews handing Jesus over to Pilate.

The zeal with which the Jews carried out their hatred against Jesus is remarkable to consider. Their efforts extended throughout the night, and well into the next day. A brief outline of that period is provided in the box below.

JEWISH OFFICERS ARREST HIM IN GETHSEMANE

Matt 26:47-56

BOUND AND LED TO ANNAS

John 18:12-13

ANNAS SENDS HIM TO CAIAPHAS

John 18:24

EXAMINED BEFORE CAIAPHAS ALL NIGHT

(Matt 26:57-75; Mk 14:53-72; Lk 22:54-62; John 18:13-21; 24-27)

TRIED BY THE JEWISH COUNCIL

Lk 22:66-71

BOUND AND LED TO PILATE

Matt 27:1–2, 11-14; Mk 15:1-5; Lk 23:1-5; John 18:28-38.

PILATE ORDERS HIM SENT TO HEROD

Lk 23:6-11

HEROD, SENDS HIM BACK TO PILATE

Luke 23:12-13

TRIED BY PILATE

Matt 27:15-26; Mk 15:6-15; Lk 23:13-25; John 18:39-19:16

Ponder what the Jews themselves did with and to Jesus before they delivered Him to Pilate. Their actions were involved in delivering Him up.

- They came to arrest Him, armed with swords and clubs (Matt 26:47).
- They “laid their hands on Jesus, and took Him” (Matt 26:50).

- They bound Him and took Him to Annas (John 18:12).
- They “sought false witness against Jesus, to put Him to death” (Matt 26:59).
- Many volunteered, lying about Jesus, yet they could not agree in their lies (Mk 14:56).
- When Jesus declared His words had been public, an officer struck Him (John 18:22).
- They “spit in His face, buffeted Him” and “smote Him with the palms of their hands” (Matt 26:57).
- They “blindfolded Him” (Lk 22:64).
- They challenged Him to prophesy who had struck Him (Matt 26:68).
- They spoke “many other things blasphemously” against Him (Lk 22:65).
- They again bound Him and led Him to Pilate (Matt 27:2).
- When taking Him to Pilate “they themselves went not into the judgment hall, lest they should be defiled; but that they might eat the passover” (John 18:28).

Do you wonder what rejecting Jesus can lead a person to do? Ponder to what extent people – religious people – will go to justify their rejection of Jesus! When Peter charged the people with delivering up Jesus, all of these actions were covered. That included their aggressive arrest of Jesus, even after the arresting multitude drew back and fell on the ground after hearing Jesus say, “I am He!” (John 18:4-6).

These were the people who fulfilled the words of the prophet Isaiah: “I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting” (Isa 50:6).

YOU DENIED HIM IN THE PRESENCE OF PILATE

“ . . . and denied Him in the presence of Pilate . . .” Other versions read, “ disowned in the presence of Pilate,” NASB “ disowned Him before Pilate,” NIV “ rejected in the presence of Pilate,” NRSV “denied before the face of Pilate,” ASV “” turning your backs on Him,” BBE “rejected Him in Pilate’s presence,” GWN “ denied and rejected and disowned in the presence of Pilate,” AMPLIFIED and “denied [or, disowned] Him to [the] face of [fig., in the presence of] Pilate.” ALT

The actions of the Jews before Pilate were utterly despicable. They revealed how hardened the people were in hearts, and how calloused their consciences had become.

The actions of the Jews before Pilate were utterly despicable. They revealed how hardened the people were in hearts, and how calloused their consciences had become.

- The chief priests and elders accused Jesus “of many things” before Pilate (Mk 15:3).
- They charged Jesus with “perverting the nation” (Lk 23:2a).
- They said had found Jesus “forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is king” (Lk 23:2).
- They said He stirred up the people, teaching throughout Jewry, beginning at Galilee to the place occupied by Pilate (Lk 23:5).
- They charged him with being “a malefactor,” or evildoer, NKJV or criminal.” NIV
- They said it was not lawful for them to put a man to death, demanding that Pilate do

so (John 18:31).

In all of this, Pilate was unmoved, for “he knew that for envy they had delivered Him up” (Matt 27:18; Mk 15:10). After a preliminary hearing Pilate said, “I find no fault in this man” (Lk 23:4).

Yet, the Jews, filled with hatred, and intent on ridding themselves of Jesus, pressed Pilate in their quest to have Jesus killed.

HE WAS DETERMINED TO LET HIM GO

“ . . . when he was determined to let him go.” Other versions read, “when he had decided to release Him,” NASB “though he had decided to let Him go,” NIV “when Pilate had made the decision to let him go free,” BBE “when he had judged that He should be let go,” DARBY “when he would have justified Him and set Him free,” MRD “after he had given his verdict to release Him,” NJB “when he had judged Him to be loosed,” PNT “he having given judgment to release Him,” YLT and “despite Pilate’s determination to release Him.” LIVING

Pilate’s words on this matter were strong and to the point. “Ye have brought this man unto me, as one that perverteth the people: and, behold, I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him: No, nor yet Herod: for I sent you to him; and, lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him” (Luke 23:16). He had, then, made a determination to release Jesus, not being able to find any cause of death in Him. All of this was accentuated by a special message Pilate had received from his wife: “Have thou nothing to do with that just man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of him” (Matt 27:19).

The Jew’s response is recorded, and it is dreadful to consider, for it reveals what a person in the grip of Satan can do. “And they cried out at once saying, Away with this man!” (Matt 27:18).

Today, if the real Jesus were being made known – being preached to the people with discernment and power – perhaps some who presently appear to have confessed Him would really reject Him!

YOU DESIRED A MURDERER AND KILLED THE PRINCE OF LIFE

“ 14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; 15 And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.”

Peter is unrelenting in pressing the guilt of his listeners upon them. He knows that if they are going to be extricated from their iniquity, they will have to be more intent than they were in their opposition to and killing of Jesus.

YOU DENIED THE HOLY ONE AND THE JUST ONE

Although they could not get any witnesses to make a legitimate charge against Jesus, and even though Pilate himself had affirmed he found no fault in Jesus, yet the people rejected Him. That is, they rejected Him because of who He said He was.

“But ye denied the Holy One and the Just . . .” Other versions read, “But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One,” NASB “You rejected the man who was holy and innocent,” GWN “But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One,” NET “It was you who accused the Holy and Upright One,” NJB “You didn’t want Him freed – this holy, righteous One,” LIVING “Jesus was holy and innocent, but you said you didn’t want Him,” IE and “But you denied and rejected and disowned the Pure and Holy, the Just and Blameless One.” AMPLIFIED

Although they could not get any witnesses to make a legitimate charge against Jesus, and even

though Pilate himself had affirmed he found no fault in Jesus, yet the people rejected Him. That is, they rejected Him because of who He said He was. The High Priest had asked Him, “Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?” (Mark 14:61). When Jesus responded, “I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62), His words were rejected: “Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death” (Mark 14:63-64).

Now, before Pilate, when asked if they desired Jesus to be released, they rejected the offer saying, “Let Him be crucified” (Matt 27:22). When Pilate remonstrated, they insisted all the more: “And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified” (Matt 27:23). They “denied the Holy One and the Just One,” insisting that He was worthy of death. None could find any evil or sin in Jesus. Annas could not. Caiaphas could not. The Jewish council could not. The false witnesses could not. Herod could not. And now, Pilate does not. Yet, the people denied Jesus was holy and righteous.

YOU DESIRED A MURDERER

“ . . . and desired a murderer to be granted unto you . . .” Other versions read, “and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,” NASB “and asked that a murderer be released to you ,” NIV “and made request for a man of blood to be given to you,” BBE “ You asked to have a murderer given to you,” GWN “and demanded that a murderer should be released to you,” MRD “ Instead , you demanded the release of a murderer,” LIVING “ You told Pilate to give you a murderer instead of Jesus,” IE “you asked as a favor the release of a murderer ,” WEYMOUTH “you asked a murderer to be pardoned as a favor to you ,” WILLIAMS “and demanded [the pardon of] a murderer to be granted to you,” AMPLIFIED “and begged to be granted instead a man who was a murderer!” PHILLIPS and “and instead you asked Pilate to do you the favor of turning loose a murderer .” GNB

Pilate had made an effort to reach the sensitivity of the people. He knew it was the Passover, and that it was customary for the Jews to ask for the release of a Jewish prisoner at that time. It is written, “But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the passover: will ye therefore that I release unto you the King of the Jews?” (John 18:39). Matthew tells us that Pilate was accustomed to release a prisoner at this particular time, and would therefore do so. “Now at that feast the governor was wont to release unto the people a prisoner, whom they would” (Matt 27:15). Luke says, “For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast” (Luke 23:17). This was the politically expedient thing to do.

At that time, a well-known Jewish prisoner was being held – “a notable prisoner, called Barabbas” (Matt 27:16). He had caused a political insurrection in the city, and had even committed murder: “Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison” (Luke 23:19). We are also told, “Now Barabbas was a robber” (John 18:40).

In an effort to reach the people, Pilate first abused Jesus, then presented Him to the people in an effort to touch their sympathy. “Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers platted a crown of thorns, and put it on His head , and they put on Him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote Him with their hands . Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him . Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, Behold the man! ” (John 19:1-5).

I do not know precisely how the Lord appeared before the people, but it must not have been a comely sight, for He had been “scourged,” or “flogged,” NIV had been pummeled, and had a crown

of thorns pushed upon His head. Yet, “When the chief priests therefore and officers saw Him, they cried out, saying, Crucify Him, crucify Him” (John 19:6). As for Barabbas the insurrectionist, murderer, and thief, they “cried out all at once, saying, Away with this Man, and release unto us Barabbas” (Luke 23:18). Matthew says of this, “When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it. Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt 27:24-25).

When Pilate told the people, “Take ye Him, and crucify Him: for I find no fault in Him” (John 19:6), the people replied, “We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made himself the Son of God” (John 19:7). Upon hearing this, Pilate “was the more afraid.” Again he went into the judgment hall and examined Jesus asking Jesus where He came from. After Jesus failed to reply, Pilate asked Jesus if He knew who Pilate was, and of the power he possessed. Jesus replied, “Thou couldst have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:9-11).

Pilate then made a valiant effort to release Jesus, leaving no stone unturned – at least as far as he was concerned. However, his efforts were met with the reply of the people, “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (John 19:12).

Philosophically, one might reason that it was impossible to take the life of the “Prince of life” – the One who Himself is the Author of life. However, when we consider that Jesus laid down His life of Himself, and that He came into the world to “give His life a ransom for many,” it becomes apparent why such a thing was possible.

Pilate then brought Jesus forth, and himself sat down in “the judgment seat,” where final determinations were made. Knowing it was the time of the Passover, he cried out to the people, “Behold your king!” The people replied, “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!” Refusing to yield, Pilate said, “Shall I crucify your king?” With the venom of asps dripping from their lips the people responded, “We have no king but Caesar.” Then Pilate delivered Him unto them “to be crucified” (John 18:13-16).

You see, then, with what determination the people delivered Jesus to Pilate and demanded His death. There was nothing casual about their efforts. They barged past obstacle and obstacle, insisting that Jesus was worthy of death, and should therefore die.

YOU KILLED THE PRINCE OF LIFE

“ . . . And killed the Prince of life . . .” Other versions read, “and put to death the Prince of life,” NASB “You killed the Author of life,” NIV “and put to death the Lord of life,” BBE “and you killed the Source of life,” CSB “You killed the Originator of life,” NET “and so, you killed the One who gives life,” IE “The Pioneer of life you put to death,” MONTGOMERY “but you killed the very Source (the Author) of life,” AMPLIFIED and “You killed the One who leads to life.” GNB

Here is the ultimate murder – killing “the Prince of life.” The word “Prince” has a lexical meaning of, “author . . . the chief leader . . . the one who takes the lead,” THAYER “the one who causes something to begin, originator, founder, initiator,” FRIBERG “beginning, originating a thing, a prince, chief, a first cause, originator,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “leader, ruler, prince, or originator, founder,” GINGRICH

The antithesis of their request is staggering: they requested Pilate to release a murderer, and killed the Prince of life! Jesus is, indeed, the Source of life. Thus we read, “In Him was life; and the life

was the light of men” (John 1:4). And again, “For the bread of God is He which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world ” (John 6:33). Barabbas took away life, Jesus gives it – and the Jews chose Barabbas over Jesus! By way of contrast, Jesus said, “For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:56). Again He said, “The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life , and that they might have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). By comparison Barabbas was both a thief and a killer – yet the Jews preferred him to Jesus!

Philosophically, one might reason that it was impossible to take the life of the “Prince of life” – the One who Himself is the Author of life. However, when we consider that Jesus laid down His life of Himself (John 10:17), and that He came into the world to “give His life a ransom for many” (Matt 10:28; Mk 10:45), it becomes apparent why such a thing was possible.

Yet, this circumstance did not absolve its perpetrators from their guilt. If people are wicked enough to be used to carry out such deeds, none of them can say to God, “Why hast Thou made me thus?” (Rom 9:20). Indeed, these people could not charge that God made them do this – even though it was because of God’s determinate counsel and foreknowledge that Jesus was delivered up (Acts 2:23). God used them because they were wicked – they were not wicked because God used them. In fact, they proved to be worse than Judas, who himself was a “devil” (John 6:70). He confessed, “I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood” (Matt 27:4) – and that was before Jesus died! But these people made no such confession. In fact, they extended themselves to kill “the Prince of life,” barging over repeated obstacles that were thrown in their path.

The confirmation of resurrection was the life that followed. Although none of the Apostles, or anyone else, witnessed the resurrection itself, they had seen, talked with, and handled the risen Christ.

Peter will make no room for them making a mistake, or acting hastily. They did the deed in ignorance, but they did not do it unwillingly. They stooped beneath Pilate, who acknowledged He could find no fault in Him. But their conscience was not pricked by his acknowledgment. Instead, they trumped up lies against Jesus, and hurled false accusations at Him. Now, Peter faces them with their willing and intentional deed, for sin must be acknowledged before it can be forgiven!

GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD

“ . . . whom God hath raised from the dead . . . ” Other versions read, “whom God gave back from the dead,” BBE “But God brought him back to life,” GWN “God, however , raised him from the dead,” NJB “whom God did raise out of the dead ,” YLT and “but God raised Him from death .” IE

From the standpoint of those hearing Peter, Christ’s resurrection was a Divine reversal of their verdict, which proved they were wrong. From Christ’s standpoint, His resurrection was the confirmation that God had received His atoning death as a just basis for the remission of sins. From our viewpoint, His resurrection validates that he is, in fact, the Son of God with power.

“The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” is the One who raised Jesus from the dead. Although the people had claimed identity with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, they had developed and maintained an entirely different view of Jesus of Nazareth than He did . God had publicly “approved” of Jesus by means of “miracles, signs, and wonders” (2:22). Yet, in the hardness of their hearts, they had not only rejected Jesus, but “killed Him.” Now, by raising Jesus from the dead, God has exposed their folly, and condemned their malicious deed.

WE ARE WITNESSES

“ . . . whereof we are witnesses.” Other versions read, “ of which we are witnesses,” NKJV “ a

fact to which we are witnesses,” NASB “to this we are witnesses,” NRSV “and we are witnesses of fact,” NLT “And John and I are witnesses of this fact, for after you killed Him we saw Him alive,” LIVING “We saw this with our own eyes,” IE and “a fact of which we are eye-witnesses.” PHILLIPS

The confirmation of resurrection was the life that followed. Although none of the Apostles, or anyone else, witnessed the resurrection itself, they had seen, talked with, and handled the risen Christ. Paul gives an account of the appearances of Christ following His resurrection. “And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:4-8). Later, Peter will give an account of Christ’s post-resurrection appearances to Cornelius and his household: “Him God raised up the third day, and showed Him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead” (Acts 10:40-41).

With such a host of witnesses, it would be futile to affirm that Jesus had not risen from the dead. Literally hundreds of eye witnesses would strike down such an affirmation.

An Application

There is a principle to be seen here. The confirmation of Christ’s resurrection was found in His post-resurrection life, not in the witness of the resurrection itself. It is the same with those who are “risen with Christ” (Col 3:1). No man actually witnesses this resurrection “with Christ.” The proof is found in the life that follows.

This is the reasoning employed in the sixth chapter of Romans. Being raised with Christ takes place in our baptism, but baptism itself is not the proof of that resurrection. The life that follows will confirm or deny the reality of being “risen with Christ” (Colo 3:1).

- “Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).
- “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6).
- “For he that is dead is freed from sin” (Rom 6:7).
- “Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him” (Rom 6:8).
- “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12).

A person or a church that lacks holiness, or is not obviously living to the Lord, should make no mention of baptism. Such people are a living contradiction of baptism, bearing no evidence that they have been raised with Christ. An unholy church contradicts the very purpose of God (Eph 5:27), and therefore can make no claim to having the life of Christ!

“Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead,

and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God ” (Rom 6:13).

- “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness ” (Rom 6:18).
- “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness ” (Rom 6:19).
- “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life ” (Rom 6:22).

A person or a church that lacks holiness, or is not obviously living to the Lord, should make no mention of baptism. Such people are a living contradiction of baptism, bearing no evidence that they have been raised with Christ. An unholy church contradicts the very purpose of God (Eph 5:27), and therefore can make no claim to having the life of Christ! Ungodliness, worldliness, carnality, and the likes, confirm the ABSENCE of life, not its presence. These are attributes of death, not life. They are the result of rejecting Christ, not accepting Him.

Preferences

It also ought to be noted that when men have preferences other than Christ Himself, they will eventually oppose Christ. That opposition has no known boundaries. In our text, it drove men to kill “the Prince of life.”

Later in this book, this relentless opposition will compel men to persecute and even kill the messengers sent out by Jesus as well.

FAITH, FAITH, AND FAITH

“ 16 And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”

With great strength Peter presses Jesus Christ upon the people. He will not be diverted to other considerations. They “killed the Prince of life,” and God raised Him up. Now, with great insight and power, Peter will show the relationship of Jesus Christ to the miracle the people have just witnessed. As he speaks to them, the proof, or evidence, of the power of Christ is standing with himself and John – a former lame beggar, who was well known to the multitude.

HIS NAME

“And His name . . .” Other versions read, “in the name of Jesus,” NIV “the one named Jesus,” GWN “in Jesus’ name,” NET “Jesus’ name,” LIVING “the authority of Jesus,” IE “It is His name,” WEYMOUTH “It is the name of this same Jesus,” PHILLIPS and “it is the power of His name.” GNB

I do not know why men wax so academic when they refer to “the name of Jesus.” For some, this refers to a formula, as though there was some mystical power released when the name is mentioned. For others, it speaks of authority, like “in the name of the king.” It is true that there is an element of truth in these approaches, but it certainly comes far short of the potency that is proclaimed.

“The name of Jesus” speaks of His Person – more specifically, of the recognition of His Person. If the person does not actually bear the qualities that are declared in “the name,” there is no power in the utterance of that name. Therefore we read of the name of Jesus, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given Him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus

every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:9-11). This is a name that God Himself has “given” to Jesus. This is not a reference to His birth, when His name was “called Jesus: for He shall save His people from their sins” (Matt 1:21). The Philippian text refers to the exaltation of Jesus, after He had taken away the sins of the world.

There was a sense in which personalities bowed to Jesus even when He was enfleshed among men. An unclean spirit inhabiting a man in a local synagogue once cried out, “Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art, the Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). That spirit recognized who Jesus was, although men did not. However, now that Jesus has been exalted, wherever men know they are being exposed to Him, they bow to Him. Ultimately, “every eye shall see Him” (Rev 1:7), and thus “every knee shall bow” before Him (Rom 14:11).

When Jesus was on the earth, He was veiled by the flesh – concealed beneath a body of flesh and blood. However, this is not the case now. The only reason people cannot perceive Jesus now is that He has not yet “appeared.” When He made an appearance to Saul of Tarsus, he bowed (Acts 9:6)! When He made an appearance to Stephen as he was being stoned to death, Stephen asked Him to receive his spirit (Acts 7:59).

Jesus really is invested with “all power in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:18). Angels, authorities, and powers have really been made subject to Him (1 Pet 3:22). The government has really been placed upon His shoulder, and He is really reigning until His enemies are openly under His feet (Isa 9:6; 1 Cor 15:25).

The exaltation of Jesus is not merely part of a creedal statement. He has been exalted, and is governing the Kingdom. Wherever He works, there are results. By referring to “His name,” Peter is affirming that the risen and exalted Christ has been involved in the healing of this man. He has worked in the presence of these people, and no adversarial power could hinder or neutralize that work.

FAITH IN HIS NAME

“ . . . through faith in His name . . .” Other versions read, “ on the basis of faith in His name,” NASB “ by faith in the name,” NIV “by faith in His name,” NRSV “in the faith of His name,” DOUAY “we believe in the One,” GWN “by the faith in His name,” MRD “through faith in Him,” NJB “on the faith of His name,” YLT “this happened because we trusted in the power of Jesus,” IE “faith in that name being the condition,” WEYMOUTH “on the condition of faith in His name,” WILLIAMS “ on the ground of faith in his name,” MONTGOMERY “ through and by faith in his name,” AMPLIFIED and “it is faith in that name.” PHILLIPS

“The name” is the capacity in which He has been revealed. To be precise, “the name” of Jesus is confirmed by “the record” God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). It is what God has said about Jesus that clearly defines Him. He has “given Him a name” by associating certain realities with Him. He has affirmed who Jesus is, and what He is doing. The following is representative of what God has revealed about Jesus.

- “For HE IS our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (Eph 2:14).
- “. . . Christ is the head of the church : and HE IS the Savior of the body ” (Eph 5:23).
- “And HE IS before all things, and by Him all things consist ” (Col 1:17).

- “And HE IS the head of the body , the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence ” (Col 1:18).
- “For in that He Himself hath suffered being tempted, HE IS able to succor them that are tempted ” (Heb 2:18).
- “Wherefore HE IS able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).
- “But now hath He obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also HE IS the mediator of a better covenant , which was established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6).
- “And HE IS the propitiation for our sins : and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:2).
- “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for HE IS Lord of lords, and King of kings : and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful” (Rev 17:14).

Faith in Jesus’ name is believing, trusting, and relying on what has been revealed of Him. Where dependence upon Jesus is not found, faith is not present. When men do not lean the weight of their souls upon Jesus, it is because they do not have faith in Him. This is the faith without which “it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6).

In this time of the New Covenant, if Jesus is not declared to the people, faith becomes impossible, for it comes by means of hearing the Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:14-17). If a Jesus is being held out to men that is defined by mere human thought, faith will not be possible. Faith – real faith – cannot possibly be in “another Jesus.” That kind of reliance – trust in “another Jesus” – is delusion , not faith. By its very nature, faith must rest on revelation, for it is the “ substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen (Heb 11:1).

Therefore, “faith in His name” is reliance upon the revelation of the exalted Christ. This revelation was brought to its peak when the Holy Spirit was “poured forth.” When He came, He did precisely what Jesus said He would.

- He taught them all things (John 14:26).
- He testified of Christ (John 15:26).
- He guided them into all truth (John 16:13a).
- Whatever He heard, He made known to them (John 16:13b).
- He showed them things to come (John 16:13c).
- He glorified Christ (John 16:14a).
- He received the things of Christ and gave them to the disciples (John 16:14b-15).

That is nothing less than a revelation of the exalted Christ, and Peter now speaks of the effects of having faith in the Christ who had been revealed to him.

HATH MADE THIS MAN STRONG

“ . . . hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know . . .” Other versions read, “which has strengthened this man whom you see and know,” NASB “this man whom ye see and know was made strong ,” NIV “has made this man strong, whom you see and have knowledge of ,” BBE “whom you have seen and known, hath His name strengthened ,” DOUAY “hath made this man sound , whom ye see, and know,” GENEVA “this man, whom you know, was healed , as all of you saw,” GWN “ He hath strengthened and cured this man , whom ye see and know,” MRD “has brought back the strength of this man whom you see here and who is well known to you,” NJB “this

man was healed -- and you know how crippled he was before ,” NLT “has healed this man – and you know how lame he was before ,” LIVING “He was made completely well . . . You all saw it happen,” IE “has made this man whom you see and recognize well and strong ,” AMPLIFIED and “which has cured this man whom you see and recognize.” PHILLIPS

Peter is very specific in his utterance: “His name, through faith in His name.” It is the revealed Christ who has done this work, but He did through Peter and John’s faith in Him. That is, Jesus healed the man, but He did so by means of the faith that was found in Peter and John primarily, and the man himself secondarily.

This is the Jesus these people had “killed,” and now He has worked powerfully in their very presence. In this, Peter is giving glory to Jesus – identifying the Source of the miracle. On the surface, it looked as though Peter and John did the deed. Peter, however, affirms that Jesus Himself actually did the work through their faith.

While it is true that faith brings one into the unwavering belief of Scripture, faith itself is larger than that. To be more precise, faith involves believing and relying upon what God has revealed, or said. Thus Abraham had faith before the Bible was written, yet it rested upon what God had said to him.

THE FAITH WHICH IS BY HIM

“ . . . yea, the faith which is by Him . . . ” Other versions read, “Yes, the faith which comes through Him ,” NKJV/NASB/NIV “the faith that is through Jesus ,” NRSV “the faith which is through Jesus ,” RSV “So the faith that comes through Him ,” CSB “the faith that comes through it [the name],” NAB “even the faith that is through Him ,” YLT “faith given us from God ,” LIVING “the faith which He has given ,” WEYMOUTH “yes, faith inspired by Him,” WILLIAMS “[Yes] the faith which is through and by Him [Jesus],” AMPLIFIED and “and the faith which came through Him .” LITV

I must acknowledge that for years I did not see this wonderful expression. I had been taught by the group to whom I belonged that faith did not come from God – that it was simply believing the Bible. While it is true that faith brings one into the unwavering belief of Scripture, faith itself is larger than that. To be more precise, faith involves believing and relying upon what God has revealed, or said. Thus Abraham had faith before the Bible was written, yet it rested upon what God had said to him.

Further, there is a relying or trusting factor in faith – it is not simply giving assent to a matter, or acquiescing with it. Faith is not really faith until the person acts upon it, relying upon the integrity of God and the details of His revelation. If a person does not shape his life around what God has said, he has not really believed it. If he does not do what God has said, He has not believed God.

Because we are dealing with matters outside of the circumference of human experience, faith must be given to us. The reservoir of nature cannot yield faith, or cause us to believe. Knowing this, Peter refers to “the faith which is by Him” – that is, by Christ. The word “by” (faith which is BY Him) is translated from the Greek word **δι** (die), which is a form of the preposition **δια**, (dee-ah). There is no way that this word can be made to mean “in.” It does not speak of the object of faith, but of its Source, or the means through which faith is realized. The lexical meaning of this word is, “the Means or instrument by which anything is effected . . . of one who is the author of the action as well as its instrument, or of the efficient cause,” THAYER “of the intermediate agent of an action by, through, by agency of,” FRIBERG “through, by means of,” UBS “casual, through, by . . . of the agent,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “through (the agency of) (personal agent), by (originator of an action),” LEH and “of means, instrument, agency by means of, through, with—of means, instrument.” GINGRICH

But there is more to this than the lexical definition of a word. Doctrine cannot rest upon etymology, for, in the last analysis, that is a human science. Here I have provided the technical definition of the word to confirm that men of integrity and sound scientific approaches will never contradict the word of the Lord.

If faith is not of the flesh, or natural – or if faith delivers the perception of things unseen, enabling one to see the invisible God – it cannot possibly be the exercise of a natural or learned aptitude. It is not possible that faith is dispensed to every person naturally, and is then released by some act of the human will, as some affirm.

Although some of us – myself included – lived for a considerable time in Christ before realizing that faith came from Christ, Peter boldly announces it even before these people have believed. This was part of the Gospel that he preached. It was included in his explanation of the events that had taken place before the eyes of this people. Oh, how far the modern church has drifted from its original moorings! What was once confessed without inhibition must now be buttressed with all manner of doctrine and reasoning – and even then, it is frequently denied. This is another evidence that a “falling away” has, indeed, taken place (2 Thess 2:3). When things that are apparent in the Spirit must be taught, defended, and expounded to the church, a tragic condition exists!

The fact that faith comes to us from outside of ourselves and nature is frequently affirmed in Scripture.

- **GIVEN TO BELIEVE.** “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on Him , but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29).

- **BELIEVED THROUGH GRACE.** “And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace ” (Acts 18:27).

- **FAITH IS OBTAINED.** “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1).

- **FAITH WAS DELIVERED.** “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints ” (Jude 1:3).

- **FAITH CAME TO US.** “So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17). “But before faith came , we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” (Gal 3:23). “But after that faith is come , we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:25).

- **FAITH IS FROM GOD AND THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ” (Eph 6:23).

- **FAITH AND SALVATION ARE NOT OF OURSELVES.** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves : it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

- **BY JESUS WE BELIEVE IN GOD.** “Who by him do believe in God , that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Pet 1:21),

If faith is not of the flesh, or natural – or if faith delivers the perception of things unseen, enabling one to see the invisible God – it cannot possibly be the exercise of a natural or learned aptitude. It is not possible that faith is dispensed to every person naturally, and is then released by some act of the human will, as some affirm. Nor, indeed, is faith simply being convinced that a statement is true. Faith brings to the human spirit the reality of something inaccessible to any of the natural senses – “the evidence of things not seen.” Faith includes a fervent desire to possess what has been declared,

and is accompanied by the restructuring of life that leads toward its obtainment – “the substance of things hoped for.”

It should be evident that something as effective as faith cannot be the product of human effort. If the things accomplished and appropriated by faith are themselves transcendent to nature, then the means of obtaining them (faith) cannot possibly have its genesis in nature. It is not possible for nature to produce a quality or aptitude that can obtain eternal things.

HATH GIVEN HIM PERFECT SOUNDNESS

“ . . . hath given him this perfect soundness . . .” Other versions read, “ perfect health ,” NASB “ complete healing ,” NIV “made him well ,” BBE “ complete soundness,” DARBY “perfect healing ,” LIVING “ completely well ,” IE “ sound and strong again,” WEYMOUTH “Has given the man this perfect soundness [of body] before all of you,” AMPLIFIED “perfect health and strength ,” PHILLIPS and “ wholeness .” EMTV

Just a few minutes before, this man was a helpless beggar that had to be carried to a gate of the Temple. Now there is not a flaw in him. His condition is perfect. His health is complete. He is thoroughly healed, with no remaining vestiges of the like-long lameness he had.

I have noticed over the years how few things of this sort are being reported. I do not doubt that their infrequency is one of the many results of a massive departure from the faith. The Spirit has spoken “expressly” concerning “the latter times,” that “some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim 4:1). During such times faith is no longer present – for the departure is from “the faith.” As a result, there is no fellowship with Christ, and grace cannot be received. In that condition, of course, all manner of moral and spiritual imperfection will continue without interruption.

While the Lord is certainly able to give us perfect health, that work does not rank high in the priorities of His will. The reason is that bodily health, as wonderful as it is, is temporary. However, wherever it is found, it mirrors the spiritual health that is realized in Christ Jesus – like a “sound mind” (2 Tim 1:7), a “pure heart” (1 Pet 1:22), and a “good conscience” (1 Tim 1:5). Of course, there is also such a thing as a “single eye” (Matt 6:22), “holy hands” (1 Tim 2:8), and feet that are “shod with preparation of the Gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15). Such things portray an inner health that also comes from the Lord – a health in which the soul is healed (Psa 41:4). There is a spiritually deficient state in which the hands “hang down,” the knees are “feeble” (Heb 12:12), the mind is “double” (James 4:8), the conscience is “seared” (1 Tim 4:2), eyes are “full of adultery” (2 Pet 2:1), and hearing is “dull” (Heb 5:11). How we long for “perfect soundness” to be found in all those who wear the name of Jesus!

IN THE PRESENCE OF YOU ALL

“ . . . in the presence of you all.” Other versions read, “as you can all see,” NIV “before you all,” BBE “in front of you all,” CSB “in the sight of you all,” DOUAY “as all of you saw,” GWN “before your very eyes,” NLT “You all saw it happen,” IE “you all see,” WILLIAMS “before all of you,” AMPLIFIED and “in full view of you all.” PHILLIPS

As Paul said to Festus, who charged him with being “mad,” or out of his mind, NASB “this thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). The events of the day of Pentecost were public (2:1-12), and so was this miracle. Peter and John did not retire to the back room to exert the power with which they had been endued. When Jesus walked among men, He spoke and worked publicly (Mk 8:32; John 18:20). Boldly Jesus challenged His critics, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” (John 8:46).

Every work of Christ will stand the test of human scrutiny. The truth of God will stand up under the most vigorous examination. It is only the works and words of the devil and the flesh that cannot pass honest and thorough examination.

After telling the people that Jesus had been witnessed by them all, and that He had been approved before them all, Peter now affirms that the same Jesus they had “killed” had been raised from the dead, and had, through their faith, given this man “perfect soundness” in their presence.

Men must be brought to confront what the Lord has done in their presence. Holy things that cannot be accounted for by the flesh and natural aptitude must be traced back to their Divine Source, and Peter does not hesitate to do so.

THE EFFECTS OF IGNORANCE

“ 17 And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.”

Peter now sets out to diagnose the people before him. He will identify why they took, crucified, and killed the Lord’s Christ. Then, much to their consternation, he will affirm that God worked through their ignorance for His own glory and their condemnation.

I WOT

“And now, brethren, I wot . . .” Other versions read, “I know,” NKJV “I am conscious,” BBE “I realize,” NLT “have known,” YLT and “Now of course I know.” PHILLIPS

This is an old English word that means the opposite of “unwittingly.” The English definition is “wist; witting . . . to know, come to know” MERRIAM-WEBSTER The Greek word employed here is **oi=da** (oi-da), which lexically means, “to perceive, notice, discover,” THAYER “know, understand, perceive,” UBS and “know . . . acquainted with . . . understand, recognize.” GINGRICH

This is not a rhetorical expression, said merely for effect – like casually dismissing something by saying, “I know, I know!” Peter is going to say what he sees, perceives, and understands.

Something To Be Seen

There is a vital Kingdom principle to be seen here. It was revealed in the ministries of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, and the Apostles. Those who entered into the work of the Lord labored within the circumference of understanding.

- When many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John’s baptism, he said discerningly, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matt 3:7). He had an understanding of the circumstances, as well as his role in the work of the Lord, and what needed to be said.
- The Lord Jesus was always aware of what He was doing. It is said of Him, “as My Father hath taught Me, I speak these things” (John 8:28). It is also written, He “needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man” (John 2:25). He had an understanding of what He was to say, and of those to whom He said it.
- When Peter dealt with the matter of Ananias and Sapphira, he knew their condition and what needed to be done (Acts 5:3-10). When he confronted a crafty Simon, he knew his condition and what needed to be said and done (Acts 8:18-23).
- When Paul wrote his epistles, he understood what he was teaching (Eph 3:3-4,9). He also had an understanding of the circumstances that required a word from the Lord (2 Cor

11:4; Gal 3:1; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 1:4).

All of this, as well as our text, confirms that being inspired to speak, or being filled with the Spirit, does not bypass the understanding or powers of reason and discernment. The essential attribute of knowing God that is resident in the New Covenant (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11), is also found in proper preaching and teaching.

Much of what is being said in the pulpits and Christian literature of the day is characterized by a personal ignorance of the ways of both God and man. The religious schools are filling their students with borrowed knowledge, and a staggering percentage of it is from the world. Their understanding of Scripture has been shaped by hermeneutics and linguistics rather than “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). Their view of mankind is formed by psychiatrists and analysts rather than the Word of God. To assist professional preachers and teachers to continue their careers in a state of ignorance, there are a multitude of ready-made sermons and lessons that they can deliver without so much as a grain of discernment.

All of this might very well appear to be of little consequence, if it were not for accounts like the one before us. Here is an example of God working through a man. He does not simply cause words to flow out of his mouth independent of understanding – as when king Saul prophesied. It is said of king Saul, “behold he prophesied among the prophets . . . he prophesied in the midst of the house . . . he went on, and prophesied , until he came to Naioth in Ramah. And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night” (1 Sam 10:11; 18:10; 19:23-24). You will note that the Holy Spirit did not move any man to write a single word of Saul’s prophecies. His understanding did not accompany them, and thus their content remains unknown. Neither, indeed, was he laboring together with God.

Suffice it to say, those who speak for God must have a grasp of the real situation, and be able to deliver words from God that are appropriate to that situation. This will be lived out in our text, and it is imperative that we be able to perceive it.

Now, in Christ Jesus, the manner of the Kingdom is quite different. The people are reconciled to God and His Holy Spirit is resident in them. The New Covenant provides access to God (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18), learning from Christ (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 5:20), and the acquisition of knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual understanding (Col 1:9). We also have the Scriptures, which are able to make us “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15). In view of these realities, it is inexcusable for men to take it upon themselves to preach or teach without understanding. Such persons need to be consigned to the “room of the unlearned” until such time as they can speak properly (1 Cor 14:16).

Much of the miserable condition of the modern church is directly owing to the lack of discerning preaching and teaching that is found within it. Until this situation is corrected – if it is even correctable – the modern church will continue in an ignorant and dead state.

Suffice it to say, those who speak for God must have a grasp of the real situation, and be able to deliver words from God that are appropriate to that situation. This will be lived out in our text, and it is imperative that we be able to perceive it.

THROUGH IGNORANCE YOU DID IT

“ . . . that through ignorance ye did it . . .” Other versions read, “you did it in ignorance ,” NKJV “you acted in ignorance,” NASB “you did this . . . without knowledge ,” BBE “you didn’t know what you were doing,” GWN “through misapprehensions ye did this,” MRD “neither you . . . had any idea what you were really doing,” NJB “you acted in ignorance [not aware of what you were doing],” AMPLIFIED “you had no idea what you were doing,” PHILLIPS “was due to your ignorance ,” GNB and “acted according to ignorance.” LITV

The world has a saying: “What you don’t know won’t hurt you.” It is a foolish saying that imagines that oppositions not obviously aimed at you, and matters in which you are not seemingly involved, really have no impact upon you. Hence, they are things you really do not need to understand. Thus, imagining that not knowing about such things is actually an advantage, the world also says, “ignorance is bliss.” Such people imagine that ignorance is docile, indifferent, and non-disruptive.

Here, however, we see the extent to which ignorance will drive a person. You may remember that Jesus, while on the cross, prayed “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). One time, God sent lions among the cities of Samaria, that killed them because they did not know the manner of God. “And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them . . . therefore He hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land ” (2 Kgs 17:26). Once Jeremiah said of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, “Surely these are poor; they are foolish: for they know not the way of the LORD, nor the judgment of their God ” (Jer 5:4). Amos spoke of wayward Israel as those who “ know not to do right” (Amos 3:10). Micah accounted for Israel’s waywardness by saying, “But they know not the thoughts of the LORD, neither understand they His counsel” (Micah 4:12).

There is no moral or spiritual depths to which an ignorant soul cannot sink. An ignorant church is capable of astounding things. It can oppose a man who preaches the truth, and rid themselves of him in a manner that is convenient to them.

There is no moral or spiritual depths to which an ignorant soul cannot sink. An ignorant church is capable of astounding things. It can oppose a man who preaches the truth, and rid themselves of him in a manner that is convenient to them. It can condone sin like Corinth (1 Cor 5:1-2), be bewitched like the churches in Galatia (Gal 3:1), and be led to do reprehensible things like the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:20).

In this text ignorance moved the people to listen to their leaders and call for Christ’s brutal crucifixion – apparently without a twinge of conscience (Matt 27:25; Mk 15:11-14). This did not diminish the magnitude of their sin, for there was no excuse for them to be ignorant. God had approved of Jesus by means of “miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22).

YOU RULERS DID ALSO

“ . . . as did also your rulers.” Other versions read, “just as your rulers did also,” NASB “as did your leaders,” NIV “as did also your governors,” GENEVA “as did also your chiefs,” MRD “as did also your heads,” TNT and “ as was the case with your rulers also.” WEYMOUTH

Even though the rulers of the people operated under the cloak of wisdom, they were really ignorant. They spoke with great confidence when they examined Jesus. “Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned Him to be guilty of death” (Mark 14:63-64). With seeming confidence they told Pilate, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King” (Luke 23:2).

Their assessment sounded as though it was well thought out: “We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God” (John 19:7). But this was not sound thinking at all! Rather than breaking the Law, Jesus had actually come to magnify it and make it honorable (Isa 42:21). Rather than making Himself the Son of God, God had twice declared from heaven, “This is My beloved Son” (Matt 3:17; 17:5). Of all of this, they were abysmally ignorant, and thus called for the swift death of Jesus.

Although this was done “in ignorance,” it did not remove them from being murderers. These people were not exonerated because they were ignorant. After all, these were a covenanted people “to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). If ever there was a people on the face of the earth who should not have been ignorant about Jesus, it was this people!

An Added Word

I feel compelled to add one more word to this brief treatise. Jesus spoke of religious leaders who “have taken away the key of knowledge” (Lk 11:52a). Such teachers were a hindrance to anyone who was trying to enter the Kingdom: “ye entered not in yourselves, and them that were entering in ye hindered” (Luke 11:52b). By means of withholding the knowledge of God, they effectively “shut up the kingdom of heaven against men,” or “locked people out of the kingdom of heaven” NRSV (Matt 23:13).

When this condition happens, the door is opened for all manner of foolishness, wickedness, atrocity and injustice. It is not possible to fully state the danger of such a condition. All manner of transgression within the professing church is directly traceable to the ignorance of the people – an ignorance that is the direct result of not hearing sound preaching and teaching.

GOD SHOWED, AND HE HAS FULFILLED

“ 18 But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled. ”

Once again, Peter will trace everything concerning Jesus back to God. This will confirm that salvation is wholly of the Lord, with nothing of human origin in it – and that includes Jesus’ vicarious death!

THOSE THINGS GOD SHOWED BY ALL OF HIS PROPHETS

“But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all His prophets . . .” Other versions read, “But those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets,” NKJV “But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets,” NASB “what He had foretold through all the prophets,” NIV “But the things which God foreshowed by the mouth of all the prophets,” ASV “But the things which God had made clear before , by the mouth of all the prophets,” BBE “But what God predicted through the mouth of all the prophets,” CSB “what He had announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets,” DARBY “but those things which God before had shewed by the mouth of all the prophets,” DOUAY “and God, according as He had previously announced by the mouth of all the prophets,” MRD “But the things God foretold long ago through all the prophets ,” NIB “that all the prophets had foretold about the Messiah ,” NLT “the declarations He made through all the Prophets,” WEYMOUTH “what He predicted through the voice of all the prophets ,” ISV “what he by the lips of all the prophets foretold,” WILLIAMS and “But God had foretold through all his prophets .” PHILLIPS

In the determined scheme of things, there was a certain priority assigned to the prophetic office. Often prophets were used to call Israel back to God (Jer 3:12,22). They were counselors to kings (Isa 37:2-3). Concerning Israel, God is said to have “hewed them” by the prophets (Hos 6:5). Nations were often rebuked by the prophets (Amos 1:6; Obad 1:1-8; Nah 1:1; Zech 9:1). God raised up the prophets to denounce the absence of truth, mercy, and the knowledge of God (Hos 4:1). Before God moved in the earth, He made known what He was going to do through the prophets: “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

Yet, with all of this activity, the real reason for the Prophets was to prepare the world for the Messiah – the Christ of God. In this text, Peter speaks of “all” God’s prophets speaking of things pertaining to the death of Christ and its accomplishments. Some spoke of these things directly, some in parables, and some in types and shadows. However, if you were to remove Jesus Christ from history, there would be no need for the Prophets. Their ministry was in view of the salvation wrought by Jesus.

It was this condition that enabled Paul to reason concerning Christ “out of the Scriptures” (Acts 17:2-3). Elsewhere Paul said He spoke “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22).

THAT CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER

“ . . . that Christ should suffer . . .” Other versions read, “that the Christ would suffer ,” NKJV “that His Christ would suffer,” NASB “that His Messiah would suffer,” NRSV “the things . . . that the Christ would have to undergo ,” BBE “the sufferings of His Messiah,” GWN “that His Christ {or Messiah} would suffer,” NIB “that the Messiah must suffer these things,” LIVING “that His Messiah would suffer and die ,” IE “that His Christ (the Messiah) should undergo ill treatment and be afflicted and suffer ,” AMPLIFIED and “that His Messiah had to suffer .” GNB

There are not only words in prophecy, but there is a spirit in it as well – a living principle that drives and directs prophecy. We are categorically told that the spirit of prophecy is Christ Jesus. That is, He is the reason for prophecy, and the ultimate objective of it.

Here, suffering plus death equals suffering. From the redemptive point of view, these sufferings began when Jesus was pinioned on the tree. They concluded when He died. That death was the “baptism” to which Jesus referred when He said, “But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). This was the “baptism” of suffering. That is, Jesus was engulfed by, or immersed into suffering – He died.

In his first Epistle, Peter also refers to the prophets’ emphasis of the sufferings of Christ. “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ , and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:10-11).

The very first promise of God, spoken to the devil in the presence of Adam and Eve, spoke of the sufferings of Christ as His heel being bruised (Gen 3:15). By way of further example, the twenty-second Psalm provides a remarkably detailed prophecy of the sufferings of Christ (Psa 22:1-21). The sixty-ninth Psalm does the same thing (Psa 69:1-21), as well as the entire eighty-eighth Psalm (Psa 88:1-18). Psalm 109:25 foretold how He became a reproach. Isaiah 50:6 prophesied of Him giving His back to the smiters. Isaiah 52:13-14 provides details about the disfigurement of Jesus during His sufferings. The entire fifty-third chapter of Isaiah even gives the Divine rationale that produced the sufferings of Christ (Isa 53:1-10). Daniel affirmed the effects of His sufferings, and how they eventuated in His death (Dan 9:24-26). Micah 5:1 foretold of Him being smitten on the cheek. Zechariah foretold of His betrayal (Zech 11:12-13), of the wounds in His hands (Zech 13:6), and how the sword of God Himself was directed against Christ (Zech 13:7).

The many sacrifices for sin that were ordained under the Law testified in type of the sufferings of Christ (Lev 4:26, 35,37; 23:19; Num 15:25). The general rejection of and persecution of the Prophets also testified to the suffering of Christ, confirming that those aligned with God are always opposed by the world (1 Kgs 18:1; 19:1,10,14; Jer 2:30; 26:5; Matt 5:12; 23:34; Lk 6:23,26; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15; James 5:10).

This circumstance does not diminish the guilt of the people standing before Peter. His words are not declared to excuse them from their guilt. The fact that the prophets foretold their deed did not decrease its character. The Divine determination was that Jesus would die for the sins of the world, suffering the curse of the Almighty

There are not only words in prophecy, but there is a spirit in it as well – a living principle that drives and directs prophecy. We are categorically told that the spirit of prophecy is Christ Jesus. That is, He is the reason for prophecy, and the ultimate objective of it. Thus, an angel from heaven told John the Apostle, “worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). In other words, the Subject of Scripture is Christ Jesus. Jesus Himself said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). The Bible is not primarily a manual of human conduct – even though it addresses that subject. However, directions for conduct without empowerment from Christ results in condemnation. This is because Divine requirements exceed the capacity of nature. Apart from Christ, they only confirm that man is in a fallen state, at enmity with God, and a child of wrath.

Therefore, Peter does not launch into a dissertation about how his listeners are to address the challenges of life, or what they are to do to fulfill the Law. He rather speaks of Christ, who is the ultimate Subject. He will measure the conduct of the people by their response of Jesus.

HE HATH SO FULFILLED

“ . . . He hath so fulfilled. ” Other versions read, “He has thus fulfilled,” NKJV “God fulfilled,” NIV “He thus fulfilled,” RSV “He has put into effect in this way,” BBE “God has thus fulfilled,” DARBY “God made . . . come true ,” GWN “hath in this manner fulfilled [it],” MRD “God has brought to fulfillment,” NAB “He has fulfilled in this way,” NET “this is the way God carried out what He had foretold,” NJB “But God was fulfilling all,” NLT “He did thus fulfill,” YLT “God made this happen ,” IE “God has fulfilled what He foretold ,” AMPLIFIED and “He made it come true in this way.” GNB

This is an arresting statement. On the day of Pentecost, Peter also referred to God’s primary role in the death of Christ. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God , ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). The people did, indeed, take Jesus, crucifying and slaying Him through the “wicked hands” of the Roman government. The matter, however, was supervised by God, whose purpose was being fulfilled. The people could not go one millimeter beyond the Divine appointment in this matter, nor was it possible for them to in any way come short of it. Even though the death of Christ appeared as though it was governed by men, it was being precisely carried out under Divine control. Every single prophecy concerning that death had to be executed – and there was not a man on earth, or a spirit among the powers of darkness that was intent upon fulfilling prophecy!

Peter does not did not say the Jews fulfilled what the prophets had foretold about Christ’s sufferings! He rather declares that it was God who fulfilled the words of the prophets – God has fulfilled what He foretold.” AMPLIFIED

Fulfilled prophecy is not things taking place that God saw ahead of time. With God, prophesying is not a matter of knowing ahead of time what men will do! Prophecy has to do with what GOD will do! Peter announces that it was God Himself who fulfilled what He had purposed. Again, prophecy has to do with Divine purpose, not foresight of what men are going to do.

This circumstance does not diminish the guilt of the people standing before Peter. His words are not declared to excuse them from their guilt. The fact that the prophets foretold their deed did not decrease its character. The Divine determination was that Jesus would die for the sins of the world, suffering the curse of the Almighty (Gal 3:13). The Jews’ purpose in Christ’s death was to rid

themselves of His influence – to break His restraining bands from themselves (Psa 2:3). Which purpose prevailed? They did not have a solitary notion of fulfilling the will of God. Thus it was not them who fulfilled the word of the Lord, but God Himself.

God actually overruled the purposes of men, fulfilling His own determinations. In this, the wrath of man praised God. As it is written, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise Thee: the remainder of wrath shalt Thou restrain” (Psa 76:10).

Why, then, does Peter speak in this manner, and why does this message not free the people from guilt? We must see that Peter is confirming that Jesus of Nazareth is, in fact, the promised Messiah.

- First, in order for Him to be the Messiah, or Anointed One, what happened to Him must be traced back to God, not men, for He was “the Lord’s Christ” and “the Christ of God” (Lk 2:26; 9:20).

- Second, God “looketh on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7), and “searcheth the heart” (Jer 17:10). He “weigheth the spirits” of men (Prov 16:2), probing and discerning the “thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12).

And what was found in the hearts of those who took, delivered, crucified, and killed Jesus? Did they contain noble thoughts? Were their intentions to please God? Were humbleness and contriteness found in them? Indeed, their hearts were utterly corrupt. They “despised and rejected” Jesus, just as God had declared (Isa 53:3). They hated Him “without a cause,” as the Psalmist foretold (Psa 69:4). Even though they could find no sin in Him, they “vehemently accused Him” (Lk 23:10). Such corruption within men could not be overlooked, for God is righteous.

Years later, Paul delivered a scathing word to some Jews in Antioch of Pisidia. He told them they had fulfilled the Scriptures in condemning Jesus. “For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre” (Acts 13:29).

There is no conflict between Peter and Paul on this matter. Both said the Jews had done the deed in ignorance:

If the purpose of God could be fulfilled when malice filled their hearts, and they were driven by a depraved nature and the wicked one himself, the mercy of God can surely be awakened toward these very people if they have contrite hearts. God is not only Sovereign in the matter of providing salvation, He is also Sovereign in the matter of fulfilling that salvation.

“through ignorance ye did it,” PETER and “they knew Him not, nor yet the voice of the prophets.” PAUL Both highlight the determination of the Jews: “whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go,” PETER and “And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain.” PAUL Both emphasized that it was the Scriptures that were fulfilled: “But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer,” PETER and “the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them.” PAUL Peter’s point is that the will of the Lord was done. Paul’s point is that the will of the people was not done.

Something To Be Seen

While Peter’s proclamation did not excuse the wicked deeds of the people, or remove guilt from them, there was something it did do. It did, in fact, open the door of hope. If the purpose of God could be fulfilled when malice filled their hearts, and they were driven by a depraved nature and the

wicked one himself, the mercy of God can surely be awakened toward these very people if they have contrite hearts. God is not only Sovereign in the matter of providing salvation, He is also Sovereign in the matter of fulfilling that salvation. It is inconceivable that God would provide a remedy for sin, then not be able to effectively apply it.

In every aspect of salvation, the ultimate worker is God Himself. He sent Jesus (1 John 4:14). He drove Him into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil (Mk 1:12). He dispatched angels to minister to Him (Mk 1:13). He sustained Jesus (John 8:29). He taught Jesus what to say (John 8:28). He directed Jesus in what to do (John 5:36). He is the One who delivered Jesus up (Rom 8:32). He is the One who smote Jesus (Isa 53:4). He is the One who withdrew from Jesus (Matt 27:46). He is the One who raised Jesus (Acts 13:37). He is the One who enthroned and empowered Jesus (Phil 2:9; Matt 28:18). That is why the redeemed shout, "Salvation to our God . . . and unto the Lamb" (Rev 7:10). I know from experience that little spiritual growth can be realized until this marvelous truth is seen with decided clarity.

As long as men associate salvation primarily with their initiatives and activity, they will remain spiritually juvenile.

CONCLUSION

We are being exposed to Peter's second proclamation of Christ. Thus far, in both proclamations, there has been no reference to the love of God, the grace of God, or the longsuffering of God. The reason for Christ's death has been traced to Divine intent, not human need. Both messages have emphasized the vileness of the people their rejection of and opposition to Christ. Both messages have accentuated the words of the prophets. Both have also underscored that God was at work, fulfilling His own determinations.

In all of this, we are beholding what is involved in using "the keys of the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt 16:19). From another point of view, we are beholding the involvements of laying the foundation, and providing something upon which faith can be based.

It is becoming increasingly apparent to me that the modern church has drifted far from its first moorings. The thrust of modern preaching is being placed upon what men need, not what God has done, or what He has provided. By its very nature, the work of God defines what men need. What God has provided precisely identifies what men require.

There is no need to be diverted to contrived and elaborate explanations of what men need, particularly when they are based upon a purely human analysis. Touching the hearts of men is really the work of the Holy Spirit. Only He can effectively convince men of the guilt of sin, the need for righteousness, and the futility of serving the devil (John 16:80-11). Further, His work is realized through the proclamation of Christ, particularly regarding His association with God and the fulfillment of His purpose.

There are two things that Peter is making clear, and they both throw light upon the human condition. (1) What men did to Jesus. (2) What God did to Jesus. So far as intention is concerned, these two areas of activity are at variance with one another. The actions of men were intended to get rid of Jesus. The action of God was to get rid of sin and destroy the devil. So far as outcomes were concerned, the activity of the people was to be able to live without Jesus. The action of God was to provide real life through Jesus.

It seems to me that much of the Christianity of our time is managing to obscure both of these perspectives. The result is a people who have "a form of godliness," yet deny, or reject, "the power thereof" (2 Tim 3:5). In other words, the modern message is man-centered, not God-centered. Relevancy is perceived as having to do with life in the world – the here and the now.

For this reason, I find the book of Acts particularly refreshing. Its water is pure. There are no institutional corruptions in it – no sectarian motives. We are witnessing the expression of genuine spiritual life, and it is comforting and enlivening!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #15

“ 3:19 Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; 20 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: 21 Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. 22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. 23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. 24 Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. 25 Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. 26 Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” (Acts 3:19-26)

PETER SPEAKS TO THE PEOPLE, #2

INTRODUCTION

Peter masterfully continues to lay the Foundation upon which Jesus is building is own church. His presentation has no corruption within it, and no moral or spiritual taints are upon it. He is not moved along by any humanly devised agenda, but is governed by a heavenly order of business. He is obviously not interested in establishing his own greatness. They are no hoary religious traditions that have shaped the understanding he now possesses. He is “filled with the Spirit,” and the things that he says relate to what the enthroned Christ is doing. Endued with the Spirit, he has been ably proclaiming the exaltation of Christ – an exaltation that took place in spite of the deeds of the people. Jesus was not elevated by the populous, but by God Himself, and it is essential that men have a grasp of this. Their attempted exaltation of Christ was seen in His triumphal entry into

Jerusalem. The people shouted out,

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- **PETER SAW AND ANSWERED (3:12a)**
- **WHY MARVEL YE AT THIS? (3:12b)**
- **THE GOD OF . . . (3:13a)**
- **GOD HATH GLORIFIED HIS SON (3:13b)**
- **YOU DELIVERED AND DENIED HIM (3:13c)**
- **YOU DESIRED A MURDERER AND KILLED THE PRINCE OF LIFE (3:14-15)**
- **FAITH, FAITH, AND FAITH (3:16)**
- **THE EFFECTS OF IGNORANCE (3:17)**
- **GOD SHOWED, AND HE HAS FULFILLED (3:18)**
- **CONCLUSION**

“Hosanna to the son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest” (Matt 21:9). Mark records them saying, “And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest” (Mark 11:9-10). Luke records them saying, “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest” (Luke 19:38). Matthew says of this event, “All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass” (Matt 21:5).

It all sounded good, and the words they said were true. However, the multitudes had not seen Jesus as He really was. Just a few days later the same group was crying out “Crucify him, crucify him” (Lk 23:21).

The exaltation of Jesus had nothing whatsoever to do with popularity among men. Jesus had realized unparalleled prominence among the people, and it is often affirmed. “There followed Him great multitudes of people . . . great multitudes followed Him . . .” (Matt 4:25; 8:1). There were times when the people, eager to see Jesus, ran on foot ahead of Him, reaching His destination before He did (Mk 6:33). Once, when He was teaching in a house, the crowd of people was so great there was not room to draw near to Him, even on the outside of the house (Mk 2:2). Frequently, when His enemies sought to lay hold on Him, they were “afraid of the people” because He was so popular with them (Mk 12:12; Lk 22:2). However, such favoritism is not what caused Jesus to be exalted, and Peter will not speak to men as though that was the means to His exaltation.

It is alarming to see how men will bend over backwards to make Jesus popular with the people. They will represent Him as something like a great sympathizer, who is desperately seeking some way to become a part of their lives. He is also presented as the means to domestic and social stability, and even personal health and wealth. No such approaches will be found in the Word of God. We will find that the real Jesus led those whom he sent to forcefully declare the transgressions of the people, and then to announce a remedy for sin – not for social maladjustment, financial deprivation, and physical debility.

It is alarming to see how men will bend over backwards to make Jesus popular with the people. They will represent Him as something like a great sympathizer, who is desperately

seeking some way to become a part of their lives. He is also presented as the means to domestic and social stability, and even personal health and wealth.

Men contribute absolutely nothing to the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. His supremacy does not depend upon what men do. What men do, however, does depend upon His absolute preeminence. In other words, what God now requires of men can only be achieved through the Lord Jesus, who is presently exalted and over all things.

Now Peter will delineate the proper response to the Gospel. There is something that men are required to do, and no benefit will pass from Christ to them until it is done. It will not be something that is appealing to the flesh, for “the flesh” is quite content to sin, and does not want to die to it. Peter will declare that a response is necessary that involves the heart, attitude, conscience, and will. He will not spell out a mere routine, easily memorized and codified for future generations. If you are familiar with Peter’s instructions on the day of Pentecost, you will recognize that he does not here merely repeat them as though they were a formula. On Pentecost Peter admonished the people to do the following (Acts 2:38-40).

- Repent.
- Be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Save yourselves from this untoward generation

You will find similarities in the text before us, but it is not precisely the same. Among other things, this confirms the absurdity of developing a “plan of salvation” that consists of a number of steps – most of which can be performed mechanically. In every case where such a “plan” is presented, there is a glaring absence of requirements for the heart. Rather, an emphasis is placed upon precisely conforming to a procedure.

The logic behind such an approach is that the examples of appropriating salvation that are provided in Scripture contain the essential points. I come from a five-point background – that is, of a “plan of salvation” that consisted of five points.

- Hearing the Gospel.
- Believing the Gospel.
- Repentance from sin.
- The public confession of Christ.
- Baptism into Christ.

Some add an addition step: “faithfulness until death.” This is either chosen as a sixth step, or replaces the first step of hearing the Gospel.

However, formulating these into a credal presentation overlooks the involvement of Deity in the process of genuine conversion. Once a person yields his attention to the Gospel, and focuses his heart upon the truth, there are certain things that take place because of Divine working.

As noble as this “plan” may appear, it never occurs as such in Scripture. It is a “plan” that had to be constructed by men. It is also obvious that it is intended to contain, what is conceived to be, the bare minimum requirements. Glaringly absent from it are such things as conviction (John 16:8; Acts 2:37), being called by God (Acts 2:39; Rom 8:28,30), being pricked in the heart (Acts 2:37), inquiring what to do (Acts 2:37; 8:36; 9:6; 16:30), calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:12-13), the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11-12), conversion, or turning back to God (Acts

3:19), etc. Of course, it is exceedingly difficult to codify such things. They require discernment on the part of the preacher or teacher. In fact, there are some inquirers who have been rejected (Matt 3:7; Acts 8:21; 13:46).

Only a fool will deny the necessity of the responses outlined in the five step plan. Hearing the Gospel is a requisite (Rom 10:14-17). Believing the Gospel and believing on Christ is an absolute requirement (Rom 1:16; Acts 15:7). The public confession of Christ is also required, as is seen in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:37), and the affirmation of Romans 10:9-10). Baptism into Christ is clearly involved in the appropriation of salvation (Acts 2:38,41; 10:47; 18:8; 19:5; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27). There is also no question about the necessity of being faithful until death (Heb 6:1-7; 10:36; 2 Pet 1:10; Rev 2:10).

However, formulating these into a creedal presentation overlooks the involvement of Deity in the process of genuine conversion. Once a person yields his attention to the Gospel, and focuses his heart upon the truth, there are certain things that take place because of Divine working. A recollection of a few of them will be helpful.

• **THE SENDING OF A PREACHER.** “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:15). “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ?” (1 Cor 3:5).

• **CONVICTION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** “And when he is come, He will reprove [convict NKJV] the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more” (John 16:8-10).

• **THE DRAWING POWER OF GOD.** “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

• **OPENING THE HEART.** “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened , that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).

• **BELIEVING BY GRACE.** “And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace ” (Acts 18:27). “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Phil 1:29).

• **REPENTANCE IS GIVEN.** “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life ” (Acts 11:18).

• **CONFESSING JESUS AS LORD.** “ Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost ” (1 Cor 12:3).

• **THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SPIRIT UNTO OBEDIENCE.** “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto [for NKJV] obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Pet 1:2).

IS THIS RELEVANT TO THE TEXT?

It is not my desire to set sail on a mere tributary of thought. I mention these things because our text is not a mere duplicate of Peter’s instructions to the inquirers on the day of Pentecost. The background of Divine activity accounts for WHY the apostles did not present a stereotyped “plan of

salvation.” They could perceive the working of the Lord and, in view of that, directed the people accordingly. Furthermore, we do not have a single example of any person who evidenced an inclination to the Gospel rejecting what the men of God told them to do.

Something else will be quite evident in this text. There are no convenient shortcuts to Divine blessing, even though men have done their best to create some. The key matters of alienation from God and the guilt of sin must be addressed before Divine favor can be realized. The people will be given something to do – but not merely something to do. A deliberate, conscious, and sustained change of direction will also be required in their lives. They can no longer live the same.

REPENT THEREFORE

“ 3:19a Repent ye therefore . . . ”

So far as this text is concerned, Peter’s words have not been prompted by an inquiry – as occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37). However, from the tone and substance of his words, as well as the staggering response to his words (Acts 4:4), he had obviously detected the presence of the same spirit that was demonstrated during that initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

REPENT

“Repent ye . . .” Other versions read, “let your hearts be changed and be turned to God,” BBE “Be penitent,” DOUAY “ Amend your lives,” GENEVA “ Change the way you think and act,” GWN “repent of your sins,” NLT “ reform ye,” YLT “ change your mind and attitude to God,” LIVING and “repent (change your mind and purpose). AMPLIFIED

Repentance involves a fundamental change in the way a person thinks – a change that results in an alteration of conduct. Where the conduct is not changed, there has been no repentance, for there is no such thing as a change of mind that does not produce a corresponding change in one’s manner of life.

Although we have done this before, I want to go over the meaning of repentance once again. This is a critical matter. Twice Jesus said, “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Lk 13:3,5). “Repentance” is something, Jesus affirmed, that is to be “preached” (Lk 24:47). Paul told Agrippa he had preached to both Jew and Gentile “that they should repent and turn to God” (Acts 26:20). Even when Jesus first sent out His disciples, they preached “that men should repent” (Mk 6:12). One of the attributes of God Himself is that He is not “ the son of man that He should repent ” (Num 23:19), nor is He “a man, that He should repent ” (1 Sam 15:29). One of the traits of the reprobate, who are depicted as suffering Divine judgment, is that “they repented not to give Him the glory” (Rev 16:9). Indeed, their hearts were so hardened by the deceitfulness of sin that they “repented not of their deeds” (Rev 16:11). The “goodness of God” is affirmed to lead men “to repentance” (Rom 2:4), so that where there is no repentance, there is no sound view of God’s goodness. Paul set himself against those who had “ not repented of the uncleanness and fornication, and lasciviousness which they have committed” (2 Cor 12:21). Repentance is so critical, that if God does not give it, men cannot “recover themselves out of the snare of the devil” (2 Tim 2:25). Thus, if men are repeatedly overcome by the devil, it is because they have not repented. When addressing the matter of God’s longsuffering toward His people, it is affirmed that it is owing to the fact that God is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance ” (2 Pet 3:9).

The fact that so very little is being said about repentance these days is evidence that “a falling away” is taking place (2 Thess 2:3).

Defining Repentance

This technical definition of repentance is as follows. "To change one's mind (to feel sorry he has done this or that), of having offended someone; used especially of those who, conscious of their sins and with manifest tokens of sorrow, are intent; on obtaining God's pardon; To change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins," THAYER "predominately of a religious and ethical change in the way one thinks about or acts, repent, change one's mind, be converted; as feeling remorse regret, feel sorry," FRIBERG "repent, have a change of heart, turn from one's sins, change one's ways," UBS "repent, have a change of heart, turn from one's sins, change one's ways," LOUW-NIDA "change one's mind or purpose," LIDDELL-SCOTT "feel remorse, repent, lit. 'change one's mind.'" GINGRICH

Repentance involves a number of fundamental and perceptible changes in one's character.

- A change of mind for the good.
- Sorry over having offended God.
- An acute consciousness of sin.
- A condition produced by godly sorrow.
- A hearty amending of one's ways.
- An abhorrence of past sins.
- Turning from one's sins.
- The changing of one's ways.
- A godly determination, or purpose, to please the Lord.

There is doubtless more involved in repentance than this. However, this provides a clear index concerning the direction and effectiveness of repentance.

This is not the kind of repentance found in Judas, when he "repented himself." Although he was much more aggressive than many who are professing to embrace Jesus, his was not a repentance unto salvation, and it was not induced by godly sorrow (Matt 27:3-5).

- He "repented himself."
- He brought back the money he had received for betraying Jesus.
- He confessed, "I have sinned."
- He knew what he had done: "I have betrayed the innocent blood."
- He threw down the money in the Temple, disowning any commitment to it.
- He went out and hanged himself.

"Godly sorrow" was not the impetus behind the repentance of Judas, nor did it lead to "salvation." He did not amend his conduct – in fact it is apparent that such amending did not seem possible to him.

A Controversy With Counseling

At its very foundation, psychiatry does not view man as the "offspring" of God, nor is it built upon the fact that man has sinned and comes short of the glory of God. As ordinarily conceived, it gives no weight to the sinfulness of man, the presence of the devil, or the direction of the Holy Spirit.

I am aware that I am attacking a sacred cow when I come against the modern religious concept of counseling. Professed Christian institutions of higher learning have reshaped their curriculum and

degree programs to fit the modern concept of counseling. The reasoning behind counseling has been borrowed from the world, who has bowed its knee to the pseudo-science of psychiatry. At its very foundation, psychiatry does not view man as the “offspring” of God, nor is it built upon the fact that man has sinned and comes short of the glory of God. As ordinarily conceived, it gives no weight to the sinfulness of man, the presence of the devil, or the direction of the Holy Spirit. I understand there are those within the Christian community who are engaged in counseling, and yet do acknowledge all of these realities. Yet, they have embraced a science (falsely so called) that makes no room for them. This forces them to trace deviate behavior to earthly circumstances, physiological conditions, fleshly genealogy, or matters of heredity.

In this context “repentance” is often wholly out of order. This is because the reason for sinful conduct is frequently imagined to be circumstances over which the individual has had no control – which circumstances are not considered to be fundamentally spiritual, and having to do with the powers of darkness and man’s natural propensity to iniquity.

Turning Around

The word “repent” does have a secondary meaning of turning around – but that is not its fundamental meaning. The emphasis in repenting is a change of perspective, and the consequent change in conduct that, of necessity, results. There is also a condition of heart that is appropriately identified with sorrow, contrition, regret, remorse, and penitence.

THEREFORE

“ . . . therefore . . . ” Other versions read, “then,” NIV “so then,” BBE “So,” GWN “Now you must,” NJB “Now,” NJB and “So now.” WILLIAMS

Peter is employing wisdom and spiritual understanding. In view of what the people did to Jesus, in consideration of God raising Him from the dead, and in light of Jesus healing this lame man, the demand is for the people to repent. It is evident that they sinned in killing Jesus, for God reversed their judgment, then confirmed He had raised and glorified Christ by the healing of a lame man who was well known to them.

More Than A Commandment

While repentance is certainly a commandment (Acts 17:30), it is more than a commandment. Repentance is reasonable as well as essential. Once the facts in the case are seen, it becomes totally unreasonable not to repent. Men do need to repent of fighting against God, rejecting His Son, and resisting the Holy Spirit. Those are matters with which men cannot be content to live. The flesh must be crucified, and those who are Christ’s have done precisely that (Gal 5:24).

Those who continue in sin after they have heard how God has exalted Christ are guilty of the most heinous sin. They have not believed the record God has given of His Son. They have chosen their will over God’s will. They have also resisted the Spirit of God. It is no wonder Peter tells them to “Repent!”

BE CONVERTED

“ 19b . . . and be converted . . . ” Other versions read, “and return,” NASB “and turn to God,” NIV “and turn again,” RSV “and be turned to God,” BBE “and turn back,” CSB “and convert,” PNT “and turn to Him,” LIVING “Come back to God,” IE “and reform your lives,” WEYMOUTH “and reform,” MONTGOMERY and “turn around and return [to God].” AMPLIFIED

The word “converted” is one that blends well with the revealed purpose of God in Christ Jesus. It is translated from the Greek word **evpistre,yate** (ep-ee-stref-at-aa). For those who are interested in

the use of the word, it is in the imperfect aorist tense. “Imperfect” means the intended action is to be continual . It does not refer to a instant and fixed state. “Aorist” means the condition is something that has actually happened. It is not an objective or a mere idea, but an experience that really takes place. The “imperfect aorist” tense means that the matter under condition actually takes place, and continues to exist. It is not something that wanes, or finally passes away.

Lexically, the word means “to turn to, to cause to return, to bring back; to return, turn back, come back . . . to turn back morally, to reform,” THAYER “moral change, to change one’s ways,” FRIBERG and “to turn towards (God), to turn from error.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

A technical definition of the word, as used in Scripture, is provided in the box below. This is precisely stated, and will assist us in approaching this subject in a proper frame of mind.

CONVERT – CONVERSION

In its more restricted meaning the word denotes the action of man in the initial process of salvation as distinguished from the action of God. Justification and regeneration are purely Divine acts, repentance, faith, conversion are human acts although under the influence and by the power of the Divine agency. Thus, conversion denotes the human volition and act by which man in obedience to the Divine summons determines to change the course of his life and turns to God. Arrested by God’s call man stops to think, turns about and heads the opposite way. This presupposes that the previous course was not directed toward God but away from Him. INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA

The fact that Peter tells the people to “be converted” substantiates that this is an action in which they themselves are involved. Conversion is the moral change that results from faith and repentance. While being born again involves a change of character, or the essential person, conversion has to do with a firm resolve to appropriate salvation. Acting in faith, the individual sets out to do what is utterly impossible apart from Divine empowerment.

Now, what Peter declares is absolutely essential. There will be no Divine acceptance and remission if these things are not done by the people. What is more, the changes that are made in the people must continue, else they will have no value before God. Salvation is not a sporadic experience, and woe to those who represent it as though it was.

Conversion has to do with an abrupt change in the direction of life – a change that impacts upon both the inward and outward man. Inwardly, the mind is altered to think differently. There are new purpose and objectives, new loves, and new hates. Righteousness is loved and iniquity is hated, which is an expression of the Divine nature (Heb 1:9). These thoughts and sensitivities are carried out in deeds of righteousness – godly expressions in words and deeds. If there is no change in conduct, there has been no inward change. We know this is the case, for “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17). Concerning the transformation of the individual it is also written, “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). And again, “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10).

Turning to God (being converted) is a consequence of a change of mind (repentance). It has to do with an actual forsaking of sin. It is turning from the course, or path, of wickedness.

The Greek word used in this text is frequently translated “turn” in the King James Version of the Scriptures.

- “And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord” (Acts

9:35).

- “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

- “And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:15).

- “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God” (Acts 15:19).

- “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18).

- “But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

- “Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away” (2 Cor 3:16).

- “For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1 Thess 1:9).

- “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25).

As will be confirmed in the next clause, conversion [as used in this text] is an action that precedes the remission of sins.

To “be converted” is to turn our attention and commitment from one thing to another. It is to redefine what men consider to be their “treasure” – i.e. what is worthy of their attention. There is an adjustment of values, and a change in priorities. Divine acceptance and the remission of sins cannot be received until this change, or turning, occurs.

Even after one has been “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), if a person returns again to a self-centered life, that corrupt commitment must be abandoned if Divine acceptance is to be realized. This is not a matter for conjecture, for God has spoken directly to this matter. The following word was addressed to those who were once washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11). “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:17-18).

Men must become conscious of God’s total intolerance of sin. Even when the sins of the world were laid upon His own Son, God cursed Him (Gal 3:13), condemning sin in the flesh of His Son (Rom 8:3). Sin does have separating power, driving a wedge between men and God. The Lord once said, “But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear” (Isa 59:2). This is precisely why God had to deal with sin. It is the reason for the new birth.

Once a person comes into Christ, God does not relax His attitude toward sin. Jesus has not enabled God to look upon sin without it provoking His wrath! If there is any doubt about this, the record of Ananias and Sapphira should make it clear to us (Acts 5:1-10).

In my judgment, the modern church is not making this clear to the people. Peter’s words would actually be contested in the average church. Doctrinal spears would be hurled at him, objecting that men can come to Jesus as they are, with no turning or changing required on their part. For that

matter, the one God sent to prepare the way for Jesus refused to receive people who did not bring forth fruits “meet for repentance,” or “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8). The sophist will object, saying that such a message is no longer appropriate. It is different now. However, Paul gave testimony to Agrippa concerning what he preached several years after the events of our text. “Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:19-20).

I realize that men can distort this word, teaching that men are saved by mere human effort. However, it must become clear to every person that God does not receive people only to allow them to return to their old manners, asking for some time to clean up their act, so to speak. When men turn to God, they will receive the strength that is required to implement their determination to “sin not.” But that turning is absolutely essential.

THAT YOUR SINS MAY BE BLOTTED OUT

“ 19c . . . that your sins may be blotted out . . . ”

If there is a codified “plan of salvation” – a revealed series of steps by which remission of sins is obtained – then it will be articulated in the book of Acts. If that is really the ordained way of leading people to Christ, then it will be expressed by Peter, who was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Later in this book, when Paul becomes the prominent figure, he is sure to speak it out also. To be a legitimate “plan,” it must also be spoken consistently, with no inspired man deviating from it.

Some imagine that truth is always delivered in a prepackaged form – like the Law was delivered. In this view, the same God who gave Ten Commandments has also revealed five steps, or two steps, or three steps . . . etc. This all makes perfect sense to those ensnared by a legal mind-set. But after all is said and done, the plan approach is never found in Scripture, and how to be saved is not presented in a perfectly consistent manner. This does not mean that baptism is not necessary, or that confession can be ignored, or that there is no need to repent. It does mean that these things are not implemented by means of, what men call, a plan . If this is not true, then we will be confused by the instances of obtaining salvation in the book of Acts, for they are not perfectly consistent.

- **THE DAY OF PENTECOST** (Acts 2:38-40). The people were told to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remissions of sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Those who “gladly received his word were baptized.”

- **OUR PRESENT TEXT** (Acts 3:19; 4:4). The people were told to “repent” and “be converted” so their sins would be “blotted out” and “times of refreshing” would “come from the presence of the Lord.” Then God would “send Jesus.” Many of them that heard the word “believed.”

- **THE CITY OF SAMARIA** Acts 8:5-6,12-13). There is no record of the people being told what to do. The people “with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.” When they believed Philip, “they were baptized, both men and women.”

- **THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH** (Acts 8:35-38). Philip preached Christ to this man. There is no record of him being told what to do. The Gospel he heard provoked him to ask what was hindering him from being baptized. Philip said if he believed he could. The man confessed that he believed Jesus was the Son of God, and Philip baptized him.

- **SAUL OF TARSUS** (Acts 22:10-16). When Jesus appeared to Saul, upon being asked by Saul He wanted him to do, He told Saul to go where another man would tell him

what to do. When the man came (Ananias), he told Saul why Jesus had called him, and asked him why he was tarrying, saying that he should arise and be baptized, washing away his sins and calling upon the name of the Lord.

• **THE HOUSEHOLD OF CORNELIUS** (Acts 10:44-48). Peter preached Jesus **The book of Acts is the only place in scripture where we have a verbatim record of what was preached, inquiries that were made, and what men were told to do. No Epistle contains instruction concerning how to preach to sinners, or precisely what to**

to this household, and while he was preaching to them the Holy Spirit fell on them in an evidential way. There is no record of a plan being presented to them. However Peter did ask who could forbid water that these people should be baptized, He than commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.

• **SERGIUS PAULUS** (Acts 13:12). There is no record of this man being told what to do. It simply states that he “believed.”

• **LYDIA AND HER HOUSEHOLD** (Acts 16:14-15). There is no record of a plan being presented to Lydia and those with her. It is written that the Lord opened Lydia’s heart so she could respond to the things spoken by Paul. It is also written that she was baptized, together with her household.

• **THE PHILIPPIAN JAILOR** (Acts 16:27-34). This is the only place in all Scripture where the question is asked, “What must I do to be saved?” The answer given was, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). After Paul preached to the household, they were all baptized.

• **CRISPUS AND HIS HOUSE AND MANY CORINTHIANS** (Acts 18:8). No record is provided concerning what was said to these people – only that Paul “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and Greeks.” It is written that Crispus “believed on the Lord with all of his house,” and “many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”

The book of Acts is the only place in scripture where we have a verbatim record of what was preached, inquiries that were made, and what men were told to do. No Epistle contains instruction concerning how to preach to sinners, or precisely what to say to those desiring to be saved. Things such as “The Plan of Salvation,” “The Sinners Prayer,” “the Roman Road,” and “Four Spiritual Laws” – or anything remotely similar to them – are nowhere stated or outlined in Scripture. Such are all constructed by men, and reflect human understanding. No one in Scripture was ever told to pray for salvation, or to ask Jesus into their heart. No one was ever asked to “repeat after me . . .” Those are just the facts in the case.

By no means does this suggest that every man can do that which is “right in his own eyes” (Judges 17:5; 25). I have said these things only to confirm that a codified or stereotyped approach to being saved is not presented in Scripture. Such an approach has been authored by men, and they must assume the credit for it. The reason for the absence of a fixed procedure ought to be apparent. Coming to Christ involves Divine activity as well as that of men.

- There is a drawing of the individual (John 6:44).
- There is conviction, in which the individual becomes acutely aware of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11).
- There is the ministry of the Law, which is a schoolmaster that brings us to Christ (Gal 3:24).
- There is the reception of “the love of truth,” so that the individual can be saved (2

Thess 2:10).

- It is also given unto men to believe (Phil 1:29).
- Jesus gives repentance to the coming one (Acts 5:31).
- Hearts are opened by the Lord (Acts 16:14).

Instructing people in what to do to be saved involves some measure of discernment concerning the condition of the people. The spouting of a preconceived “plan” can cause none of the above things to take place. They are all the result of delivering the Gospel of Christ, not a plan of salvation. Those who have no understanding in these matters should confine their witness to what they know, and leave the rest to others who better know the manner of the kingdom.

THAT

“ . . . that . . . ” Other versions read, “so that,” NIV “for,” DARBY “to have,” GWN “that so,” MRD “so,” LIVING and “to have.” ISV

Thus far, Peter has told the people to repent and be converted, i.e., change, or turn to the Lord. Now, upon the basis of fulfilling those two requirements he places before the people a most wonderful benefit. Keep in mind, these are the people who “killed the Prince of life.”

SINS BLOTTED OUT

“ . . . your sins may be blotted out . . . ” Other versions read, “your sins may be wiped away,” NASB “your sins may be wiped out,” NIV “your sins may be completely taken away,” BBE “for the blotting out of your sins,” DARBY “that your sins may be put away,” GENEVA “to have your sins removed,” GWN “your sins may be done away,” PNT “so He can cleanse away your sins,” LIVING “He may wipe out your sins,” IE “the record of your sins may be cancelled,” WEYMOUTH “your sins may be erased (blotted out, wiped clean),” AMPLIFIED and “so that He will forgive your sins.” GNB

A great number of preachers that I know could never say these words. They simply could not come out of their mouths. They would have insisted on a more thorough presentation. However, we will give no heed to such men. Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit, they are not. Peter had the keys of the kingdom of heaven, they do not. Peter had discernment of the situation, they do not. The remission, or forgiveness of sins is traced to several things.

• **BEING BAPTIZED.** “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38). “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

• **BELIEVING IN JESUS.** “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

• **BELIEVING.** “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

• **FOR CHRIST’ SAKE.** “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32).

• **CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.** “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13).

It is challenging to compare Acts 2:37-40 with 3:19-26. If there was a static procedure involved in obtaining the remission of sins, then they would undoubtedly read the same – particularly since the same man is delivering the Word to the people. However the words that were said are not

identical, as indicated in the chart below.

These are not two different approaches to obtaining remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. They rather accent the personal nature of salvation, as well as the effects of discerning the Divine work that has occurred in the background. No point of apostolic doctrine concerning repentance confession, or baptism is ignored. Rather than each account of people obtaining salvation being unique unto itself, they provide differing perspectives of salvation, and of its various involvements. In order to have this kind of view, being saved is not associated with a fixed procedure to be fulfilled by men. Participating in God's "great salvation" involves His activity as well as that of men. Further, we see throughout the book of acts that there is not a single instance of people refusing to do what they were told to do. That fact explains why every word about the "How to" aspect of salvation is not recounted. The obstinance that has become so common among those who say they believe was not a problem at the time of our text.

Blotted Out

This is the language used by the holy prophets when speaking of the totality of Divine remission. David prayed, "blot out my transgressions" (Psa 51:1). Again he prayed, "Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities" (Psa 51:9). Through Isaiah God said, "I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and, as a cloud, thy sins" (Isa 44:22). Translated from the Greek word **evxaleifqh/nai** (ex-al-i-fo-than-ai), "blotted out" means "removal, to wipe off, wipe away . . . to obliterate, erase, wipe out, blot out," THAYER "do away with, erase, remove, eliminate," FRIBERG "cancel, destroy," UBS and "destroy utterly." LIDDELL-SCOTT

The following Takes place when one's sins are "blotted out."

- In heaven, the record of the sin is totally removed.
- God remembers the sins no more (Heb 8:12; 10:17).
- The sin is removed from the conscience of the transgressor (Heb 9:14).
- The sin is removed from any association with the one who committed it (Psa 103:12; Num 23:21).

Those whose sins have been "blotted out" are said to have been "washed" (1 Cor 6:11), forgiven "all trespasses" (Col 2:13), and "justified from all things" (Acts 13:39). The action is so thorough that it is written, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth" (Rom 8:33).

What About Forgiving Yourself

Adopting the jargon of psychiatry, some say they know they have been forgiven by God, but they find they cannot forgive themselves. God's people must avoid using such words, for they cannot contain the truth. Words that find their genesis in human wisdom cannot convey the truth of God.

Scripture never speaks of people forgiving themselves, and neither should we. The Word of God does recognize a condemning conscience, i.e. one that is not purged. That is the kind of conscience that prevailed under the Law. As it is written, "Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience" (Heb 9:9). Again it is written, "For since the Law has merely a rude outline (foreshadowing) of the good things to come—instead of fully expressing those things—it can never by offering the same sacrifices continually year after year make perfect those who approach [its altars]. For if it were otherwise, would [these sacrifices] not have stopped being offered? Since the worshipers had once for all been cleansed, they would no longer have any guilt or consciousness of sin. But [as it is] these sacrifices annually bring a fresh remembrance of sins

[to be atoned for], Because the blood of bulls and goats is powerless to take sins away”
AMPLIFIED (Heb 10:1-4).

This approach to cleansing the conscience is a subtle form of idolatry – attempting to achieve appointed results independently of the God who ordained them. It represents a serious departure from the truth, and is not to be taken lightly.

In the above texts perfection does not speak of a moral condition, but of a cleansed conscience. Under the law, although there was a multiplicity of sacrifices, the offering of them had no effect upon the conscience. Instead of removing guilt, they actually accented it: “But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year,” or “there is a reminder of sins every year” NKJV (Heb 10:3). This is the condition the psychiatrist attempts to explain by the phrase “forgive yourself.” The cleansing of the conscience is thus sought through a therapeutic means.

This approach to cleansing the conscience is a subtle form of idolatry – attempting to achieve appointed results independently of the God who ordained them. It represents a serious departure from the truth, and is not to be taken lightly.

The blotting out of sins includes the purging of the conscience. As it is written, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14). The purging is experienced when the truth of justification registers upon the soul. David wrote of this, and Paul confirmed it: “Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin” (Rom 4:6-8). This state of blessedness belongs to the individual – “the man.” That is, the person is blessed in the realization of this truth.

In his First Epistle, Peter associates this initial condition with baptism. “. . . when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21). In this statement Peter affirms that baptism is not an empty ceremony. The “putting away of the filth of the flesh” does not have to do with taking a bath, as some translations infer. It rather speaks of the ceremonial cleansing under the Law (Lev 16:30; Num 8:6-7). The “putting away” of First Peter 3:21 is the perfected conscience of the ninth and fourteen verses of the ninth chapter of Hebrews.

Peter is saying that in baptism a person is making an appeal for a purged, or good, conscience. The New American Standard version reflects this meaning: “an appeal to God for a good conscience.” He also means that God’s response to the obedient soul is the cleansing of the conscience. Thus the King James and New King James read “the answer of a good conscience.” The New International Version represents baptism as the response of a good conscience: “the pledge [response] footnote of a good conscience.” The New Living Translation does the same thing: “but as a response to God from a clean conscience.” This view does not comport with the rest of Scripture. When instructing Saul of Tarsus, Ananias said, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Peter made the same association in Acts 2:38: “baptized . . . for the remission of sins.” Thus the cleansing of the conscience occurs in the baptism itself. Baptism is not the response of a conscience that has already been cleansed.

After our baptism, the blood of Christ continues to provide cleansing for the believer. We are told, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Again it is written, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all

unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

What I am saying is that this cleansing includes the purging of the conscience. I will even wax bold and affirm that God is never represented as forgiving sin without notifying the conscience of the individual that He has done so. Nor, indeed, is any person represented as having been “washed” who, at the time, was not made aware of the cleansing.

This is the manner of the New Covenant. A person with a defiled conscience should not assume that they have been forgiven, but examine themselves to see if they are in the faith.

TIMES OF REFRESHING

“ 19d . . . when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.”

The greatness of salvation is seen in the various perspectives of it. In Acts 2:38-39, Peter said the people, upon their repentance and baptism, would receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” This, he affirmed, was according to the promise of God. Now Peter refers to that benefit from the standpoint of its effects. In other words, this is what happens when a person receives “the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

TIMES OF REFRESHING

The plural use of the term accents a lengthy period of time, not a series of random periods of time. The length of time depicted in this expression precisely parallels living by faith, life in this world, and walking in the newness of life.

“ . . . when the times of refreshing shall come . . . ” Other versions read, “so that times of refreshing may come,” NKJV “in order that times of refreshing may come,” NASB “ so there may come seasons of refreshing,” ASV “and times of blessing may come,” BBE “Then times will come when the Lord will refresh you,” GWN “and times of rest may come to you,” MRD “times of refreshment ,” NAB “the time of comfort ,” NJB “and send you wonderful times of refreshment,” LIVING “that there may come seasons of revival ,” WEYMOUTH and “that times of refreshing (of recovering from the effects of heat, of reviving with fresh air),” AMPLIFIED

This is a most marvelous statement. The described experience is the appointed result of repenting and being converted, or changing and turning. The circumstance now described will never be found in those who do not repent and amend their ways.

Times

Here is a most interesting word. As you will note from the various translations, the word “seasons” is an alternative word. Coming from the Greek word **kairoi** . (kai-poi), the word is plural: i.e., “times” or “seasons.” It is not in the singular. The lexical meaning of the word is, “a measure of time,” THAYER “times, periods,” GINGRICH As it is used in this text, this word occurs in two other texts.

- “And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” (Lk 21:24).
- “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Tim 3:1).

The plural use of the term accents a lengthy period of time, not a series of random periods of time. The length of time depicted in this expression precisely parallels living by faith, life in this world, and walking in the newness of life. In other words, it refers to the period of time between our translation into the Kingdom of God’s Son (Col 1:13), and our disembarkment from this world,

whether by death (Heb 9:27), or the coming of the Lord (1 Thess 4:17).

These “times” come only after we have repented and been converted – after we have been turned from the power of Satan unto God.

Refreshing

The word “refreshing” comes from a word meaning, “cooling, refreshing,” THAYER “recovery . . . rest,” FRIBERG “Refreshment, spiritual strength,” UBS “relief from distressful, burdensome circumstances – relief, breathing space,” LOUW-NIDA “relief, respite,” LEH “refreshing, relief, rest.” GINGRICH

Spiritual life postulates a certain depletion of strength that attends it. The walk of faith produces a kind of wearing down, or eroding of durability. This is owing to having a heavenly treasure in an earthen vessel (2 Cor 4:7), and it is by design.

This condition requires a constant renewal, or refurbishment of our strength. This restoration of spiritual capability occurs in the fellowship of Christ, into which we were called (1 Cor 1:9). In other words, we are as dependent upon Christ to maintain spiritual life as we were when we first received it. Spiritual life does not continue on its own, but is maintained by faith. As it is written, “the just shall live by faith” (Hab 2:4; Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

This is a side of salvation that has been grossly understated. Somehow, people are being left with the impression that once we come into Christ we are locked into a state of strength and safety. This is a most serious error, for salvation, in all of its facets, is ever “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). Just as surely as Deity had to be involved in your reclamation from sin, so Deity must be involved in the maintenance of that condition.

There are two sides to salvation, and both are absolutely essential. One has to do with separating us from sin, and the other has to do with keeping us separate. One has to do with the creation of newness of life, and the other has to do with maintaining that life. One has to do with putting us into Christ’s Kingdom, and other has to do with keeping us there, for we cannot be ultimately saved if we are not consciously under His very real rule.

The renewing of the Holy Spirit refers to the post-regeneration life – after we have been “added to the church.” Renewing is reviving, revitalizing, refurbishing, or refreshing. It involves comfort, encouragement, and the restoration of strength. It is what Isaiah spoke of when he said, “But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint” (Isa 40:31). It is what David referred to when he said, “They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God” (Psa 84:7). Paul referred to this as knowing “the power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10). The renewing ministry of the Holy Spirit accounts for Paul’s testimony: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8-9).

“Times of refreshing” do not refer to periods of mere exhilaration or excitement. These are times of spiritual productivity when the saved are enabled to continue walking (2 Cor 5:7), running (Heb 12:1), fighting (1 Tim 6:12), wrestling (Eph 6:12), and striving (Col 1:29). No person can complete the race without these “times of refreshing.” However, they will not come unless they are preceded by repenting and converting.

FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD

“ . . . from the presence of the Lord.” Other versions read, “from the Lord,” NIV “from before

the face of the Lord,” MRD and “From the presence of God .” PHILLIPS

In salvation, required resources are dispensed from heaven. “Times of refreshing” can come to the earth, but they cannot originate in the earth.

There is a place from which the Kingdom of God is being administrated – and it is not upon the earth. Before Jesus took the reins of the Kingdom, He was seated “on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3). The “times of refreshing” are sent from there. In order to receive them, one must be within the circumference of blessing, which is identified as “heavenly places in Christ” (Eph 1:3) – where Christ Himself has been seated (Eph 1:20). Believers are presently there by faith (Eph 2:6).

The phrase “from the presence of the Lord” involves not only the direct involvement of the Lord, but His willingness and forwardness to dispense “times of refreshing.” This is part and parcel of the package of salvation, which means we cannot be saved without it. If it seems as though this is not the case, living by faith will confirm to your heart that you do need renewal, reviving, and revivifying. There are times when you need to have your strength “renewed,” and when encouragement will be necessary. When those times come, take heart! There are “times of refreshing!”

HE SHALL SEND JESUS CHRIST

“20a And He shall send Jesus Christ . . .” Other versions read, “And that He may send Jesus,” NKJV “And that He may send the Christ,” NIV :and that He may send the Messiah,” NRSV “and He shall send Him,” DOUAY “He will send you Jesus,” GWN “and He may send to you Him,” MRD “and send you the Messiah,” NAB “Then He shall send you the Christ,” NJB “and He will again send you Jesus,” NLT “and He may send back Jesus ,” WILLIAMS “and that He may send [to you] the Christ (the Messiah),” AMPLIFIED and “then He will send you Jesus, your long heralded Christ.” PHILLIPS .

This promise embraces both “now” and “then” – when we first receive newness of life, and when we are finally gathered unto Him.

NEWNESS OF LIFE

Upon becoming a new creature, and being strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inward man, Christ dwells in our hearts by faith. That is, He takes up permanent residency in them. The Word of God addresses this matter in these words: “That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith . . .” (Eph 3:16-17). That is primary meaning of our text – and “He shall send Jesus.” The context seems to require this meaning, for the second coming of Christ is in no way driven by human response. That appearing will be on a appointed day (Acts 17:31; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Pet 3:7). It is wholly inappropriate to relate the coming of Christ “the second time” (Heb 9:28) with repenting and being converted. It is true that Christ’s second coming is, sequentially, the third of these three events: (1) sins blotted out, (2) seasons of refreshing, and (3) sending Jesus the second time. However, Peter is speaking of immediate benefits, not the grand scope of things.

In sending forth Jesus to the believer, God is providing for the tutelage required for men to walk in fellowship with Himself. John referred to this teaching in this way: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true , and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). Paul referred to this tutorship in these words: “But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him , as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man , which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts;

and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:20-24).

While some men say that we are to ask Jesus into our hearts, Peter says men are to repent and be converted so their sins may be blotted out. Then God will “send Jesus” to them.

THE SECOND COMING

In a secondary sense, this text can relate to the coming of the Lord, at which time those to whom Jesus has been sent will be “changed” outwardly, to fully bear the image of Christ (1 Cor 15:52; 1 John 3:1-2). That sending, however, is not determined by whether or not men repent, are converted, have their sins blotted out, and receive times of refreshing. For them, He will appear “without sin unto salvation” (Heb 9:28), but their acceptable condition is not the only reason for Jesus being sent back. Rather, men will be called into for their response in Christ. They will also be rewarded appropriately, reaping what they have sown, whether in blessing or cursing. He will come, in other words, “to judge the earth” (Psa 96:13; Acts 17:31).

In this world, when men repent, are converted, have their sins blotted out, and experience “times of refreshing,” they commence the time or preparation for the return of the Lord. However, God will not send Jesus the second time because of those experiences. Rather, they are required because He is coming back – in order to involve men in the required change from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18). While this may appear to be a very small point, it is, in fact, one that has managed to elude many poor souls.

WHICH BEFORE WAS PREACHED UNTO YOU

“20b . . . which before was preached unto you.” Other versions read, “the Christ appointed for you,” NASB “who has been appointed for you – even Jesus,” NIV “who was marked out for you from the first, even Jesus,” BBE “who has been appointed Messiah for you,” CSB “who was foreordained for you,” DARBY “who was made ready for you,” MRD “the Christ He has predestined,” NJB “your appointed Messiah,” NLT “the Christ appointed beforehand form you,” WEYMOUTH “Who before was designated and appointed for you,” AMPLIFIED “Jesus, your long-heralded Christ,” PHILLIPS “who had been ordained to be your Messiah,” EMTV and “who is the Messiah he has already chosen for you.” GNB

Here there is an apparent significant difference in the translations. Jesus is represented as being “before preached unto you,” KJV/NKJVDOUAY/GENEVA/PNT/RWB/TNT/WEB/YLT/BISHOPS/LITV/MKJV and “appointed,” “foreordained,” “predestined,” or “chosen.” NASB/NIV/NSRV/RSV/BBE/DARBY/NJB/NLT/WEYMOUTH/AMPLIFIED

Briefly summarized, the Alexandrian manuscript copy reads “preached,” the Syriac and Arabic copies read “predetermined or prepared for you,” and the Ethiopic copy reads “anointed.”

This is another case of manuscript mania, where differing Greek texts exist. Briefly stated, one set of manuscripts supports the translation “before was preached unto you,” ALEXANDRIAN another supports the translation “predetermined, or appoint for you,” SYRIAC-ARABIC and another “anointed for you.” ETHIOPIC

There is no need to be pressed into choosing one of these statements over another, for there is a sense in which they are all saying the same thing. The sense of the text is this: “God will send the Jesus who was appointed and anointed for you, and then preached to you.” A “Jesus” that is appointed, but not declared, is of no value. Nor, indeed, is a “Jesus” that is anointed, yet is not proclaimed, effective for the people. “Faith comes by hearing,” ROM 10:17 not, by mere

appointment or anointing.

The church, which is being initially formed in our text, is built “upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20; 3:5; Rev 18:20). The “apostles” are first in rank, even though, compared with the prophets they were second in appearance and ministry. However, the Jesus they preached, as Peter will affirm, declared the Jesus that was foretold by the prophets (Rom 3:21; 16:26; Heb 1:1; 1 Pet 1:10).

The words “which before was preached unto you” refer to the words of the prophets “from Samuel” through John the Baptist, who most precisely identified the Christ. Peter will later state this to be the case (3:24).

The point of logic here, as will be confirmed by the reasoning that follows, is that the Messiah was foretold by the Prophets in such details as allowed a ready recognition of Him when He actually began to walk among men.

In the interim – between John the Baptist and the death of Jesus – the people were exposed to the real Jesus, who precisely conformed to the proclamations of the prophets. John the Baptist also preached Christ (Matt 3:11; John 1:15,29,36; 3:26-36).

In measure, it is the preciseness of Jesus’ fulfillment of the prophets’ that verified to discerning people that He was Christ. Philip was able to say to Nathaniel, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write” (John 1:45). The woman at the well of Samaria said to those of the city of Samaria, “Is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29). After hearing Jesus speak, the Samaritans, “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42). There was no acceptable excuse for those standing before Peter failing to recognize Jesus.

HEAVEN MUST RECEIVE HIM

“ 21a Whom the heaven must receive until . . .”

Peter will now declare that the sending of Jesus, whom he has just proclaimed, will not be a bodily one – as was His initial appearance during His earthly ministry, and His second appearance, when every eye shall see Him. Those who repent, are converted, and have their sins blotted out will experience Jesus by faith. That is, He will dwell in their hearts “by faith” (Eph 3:17). While Jesus is within them “by faith,” His actual presence is in heaven. Technically, He is not reigning from our hearts, but from His throne in heaven. That is why believers are described as those who are waiting “for His Son from heaven” (1 Thess 1:10).

Having “the keys of the Kingdom of heaven,” Peter will now establish a point of doctrine that is pivotal to the maintenance of faith. It will contrast sharply with certain teachings to which men are presently exposed – and that will become very apparent. This is, however, “sound doctrine,” and anything contrary to it is to be forthrightly abandoned (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1). If we are going to continue “steadfastly in the apostles doctrine,” then we must view their words as having greater weight than contradicting expressions of secondary expositors. As is characteristic of a real proclaimer of the truth, Peter will make his point with both precision and clarity.

THE HEAVEN MUST RECEIVE

“Whom the heaven must receive . . .” Other versions read, “He must remain in heaven,” NIV “Who is to be kept in heaven,” BBE “heaven must welcome Him,” CSB “whom heaven indeed must receive,” DARBY “whom the haven must contain,” GENEVA “Heaven must receive Jesus,” GWN “whom the heavens must retain,” MRD “whom heaven must keep,” NJB “whom it

behoveth heaven , indeed, to receive,” YLT But Jesus must stay in heaven ,” IE “Whom heaven must receive [and retain],” AMPLIFIED “ although for the time He must remain in Heaven,” PHILLIPS and “whom it is necessary [for] heaven indeed to receive.” ALT

This is a description of the present status of Christ, and our hearts must take hold of it. In order for the salvation of men to be accomplished, heaven had to receive Jesus back – receive Him following His death and resurrection. This is one of the key elements of the Gospel: “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven , and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19). When the time of Jesus’ appointed death drew near, Jesus not only thought of the death itself, but also of being received up into heaven. “And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up , He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51). In delineating the Gospel, which Paul referred to as “the mystery of godliness,” he cited Jesus being received up as one of the key points: “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory ” (1 Tim 3:16).

From the subjective point of view, Jesus was “carried up into heaven” (Lk 24:50). John’s dialog concerning the final hours of Jesus with His disciples began this way, “Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father , having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end” (John 13:1). That night He said to His disciples, “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father ” (John 16:28). When Jesus prayed extensively to the Father on the night of His betrayal He said, “And now come I to thee” (John 17:13).

Apostolic doctrine makes much of Christ’s return to heaven, and His present activity there (Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20-22; 4:8-11; Heb 1:3; 4:14; 6:20; 7:25-26; 8:1; 9:24; 10:12-13, 19-22; 1 Pet 3:22).

The receiving of Christ in heaven commenced, for example, the following.

- His governing of the Kingdom (Isa 9:6; Eph 1:22; Col 1:18; 1 Pet 3:22).
- The mediation of the New Covenant (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24)..
- The building of His church (Matt 16:17; Acts 2:47; Eph 3:10).
- His intercessory ministry (Isa 53:12; Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).
- His care and nourishment of the church (Isa 40:11; John 6:50-51; Eph 5:29).

No person can be repent, be converted, have their sins blotted out, or experience “times of refreshing,” without Jesus being “in heaven.” Those experiences are all administered by Jesus from heaven. That is the only reason they can be realized upon earth.

Must Receive

The word “must” has the following lexical meaning: “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper.” THAYER In other words, as long as the world remains, and men are tabernacling in a body of flesh and blood, the salvation of men requires the presence of Jesus in heaven. He must be there, or men cannot be delivered from sin and duly prepared for glory.

The word “receive” covers the duration of the reception as well as its commencement. It involves receiving one into a specific environment and among certain personalities. THAYER It means to welcome into a place, not as a visitor, but as a resident. FRIBERG It involves taking and accepting. UBS It carries the idea of being transferred from one realm to another . LOUW-NIDA

As used in this text, “receive” carries the idea of remaining in heaven, as the words that follow will confirm. The word “receive” includes the entire period covered by the present ministry of

Jesus. He was not received as a Visitor who was passing through, but One who was commencing an appointed work that must be carried out in heaven.

Thus the word is properly translated “remain,” NIV/NRSV/NIB/NLT “be kept in,” BBE “must contain,” GENEVA “retain,” MRD/WILLIAMS “must keep,” NJB “must stay in,” IE and “receive [and retain].” AMPLIFIED

Therefore, Peter is going to affirm that Christ’s presence is required in heaven until a certain appointed time. That time will be specified with remarkable detail.

An Application

Those who emphasize this world and its experiences, by that very emphasis, obscure Christ’s presence in heaven. Christ is remaining in heaven to fulfill certain appointed objectives. Those objectives required His sufferings, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. The maintenance of our fleshly status did not require one of these things, much less all of them. The utter absurdity of an earth-centric religion is worthy of nothing more than instant rejection. If such an fatuousness was true, Jesus would have remained on the earth, governing the Kingdom from here, and conducting His ministry in stark contradiction of what He clearly affirmed to Pilate (John 18:36).

UNTIL

“ . . . until . . . ” All versions use “until” or “till.”

The word “until” identifies the duration of a condition. Thus the word “until” marked the conclusion of the time during which the waters of Noah covered the mountains (Gen 8:5). It also identified how long Noah’s raven flew “to and fro, until the waters were dried up from the earth” (Gen 8:7). When Rebekah providentially met Abraham’s servant who was in quest for a wife for Isaac, she told him she would “draw water for thy camels also, until they have done drinking” (Gen 24:19). When the Passover lamb was selected, it was to be kept “until the fourteenth day of the same month,” at which time it was to be killed (Ex 12:6).

Much is also made of the word “until” in the apostolic doctrine. Blindness has happened to Israel in part, “until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom 11:25). We are to “judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor 4:5). The gift of the Holy Spirit is said to be God’s pledge to us “until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory,” which will occur at the resurrection of the dead (Eph 1:14). We are told that God will continue to perform the work He has begun in us “until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). Paul admonished Timothy to resolutely “keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim 6:14). The First Covenant is pointedly said to have been in force “until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10).

There is no justifiable reason for being ignorant about what the word “until” means. Whether we consider it from the standpoint of the English language, the Greek language, the text of Scripture, or the apostles’ doctrine, it always means the same thing. It marks the conclusion of something.

Now, our text informs us that heaven must receive and retain Christ until a certain time. That clearly means that there is an appointed termination to what he is presently doing. Christ’s current presence in heaven, with His people remaining in this world was never intended to be a permanent condition. Surely, this is clear to all.

It now becomes necessary to accent what Jesus is doing now – His present activity, or ministry. Everything associated with Jesus currently being seated at the right hand of God will cease when

Jesus leaves His seat, returning to gather His own unto Himself. So, what is Jesus declared to be doing in His present ministry? Here are a few examples for your consideration.

- Giving repentance and remission of sins (Acts 5:31).
- Mediating the new Covenant (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).
- Interceding for those who come to God through Him (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).
- Sending the Holy Spirit (John 16:7; Acts 2:33).
- Sending grace, peace, mercy, and faith (Eph 6:23; 1 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; 2 John 1:3).
- Bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).
- Expecting until His enemies are made His footstool (Heb 10:13).
- Nourishing and caring for the church (Eph 5:29-30).
- Teaching His people (Eph 4:10-21; 1 John 5:20).
- Dwelling in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17).
- Speaking to us from heaven (Heb 12:25).
- Giving God a reason to forgive men of their sins (Eph 4:32).

All of these things require the presence of Jesus in heaven. Jesus once said of the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit, “if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you” (John 16:7). Peter has, therefore, announced that Christ’s presence in heaven will continue until an appointed time. After that, what Jesus is presently doing in heaven will no longer be done. In fact, it will no longer be required. Christ’s present ministry is designed to accomplish the salvation of God in this present evil world. When He leaves heaven, that ministry will cease. All of this was foreshadowed by the ministry of the High Priest. When He went unto the Most Holy Place, his ministry began. When he left it, it ended (Ex 28:35; Lev 16). Now Jesus is a “Minister of the sanctuary” (Heb 8:2). That ministry pertains exclusively to preparing the saints to be with Him. When He leaves to gather the saints, they will be made known, seeing Him as He is (1 John 3:1-2). At that time, creation will be liberated from “the bondage of corruption,” which liberation that are eagerly anticipating (Rom 8:21-22). Then, being itself loosed from mortality, the earth will no longer be able to be the residence for flesh and blood, or the place where fleshly activities take place.

THE TIMES OF RESTITUTION

“ 21b . . . the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.”

At this point, Peter will speak in glaring contradiction of a host of church doctrines. He will throw down any notion of an earthly kingdom following Christ’s present ministry in heaven. Admittedly, this will oppose many cherished doctrines. Men will thus be faced with a decision – whether to embrace the words of the man who had the “keys of the Kingdom of heaven,” or whether to continue to hold to the cherished traditions of men. Admittedly, this may involve some difficulty, but do not think for a moment that God will be tolerant of any frame of mind that leads a person to ignore what Peter now declares.

THE RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS

“ . . . the times of restitution of all things . . . ” Other versions read, “the times of restoration of all things,” NKJV “the period of restoration of all things,” NASB “”the time comes for God to restore everything ,” NIV “ the time of universal restoration ,” NRSV “the time for establishing ,” RSV

“the time when all things are put right ,” BBE “the times of the restoring of all things ,” DARBY “the times of the restitution of all things ,” DOUAY “the time when everything will be restored ,” GWN “the completion of the times of those things,” MRD “the times of universal restoration ,” NAB “ the time comes for God to restore everything,” NIB “the time for the final restoration of all things,” NLT “the time that all things . . . began to be restored again ,” TNT “the final recovery of all things from sin,” LIVING “the time when all things will become whole again ,” IE “the times of the reconstitution of all things,” WEYMOUTH “the time for the complete restoration of all,” AMPLIFIED “until that universal restoration ,” PHILLIPS and “the time comes for all things to be made new .” GNB

This will be disruptive of some very cherished theological views. However, there really is no question about Peter’s insight, spiritual expertise, or authority. We do well to give heed to what he proclaims, for we will eventually face these words once again.

There have been times appointed for certain things to cease. For example, “ until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Lk 21:24), or “ until ye be endued with power from on high” (Lk 24:49), or “ until the Lord come,” 1 Cor 4:5), or “ until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph 1:14), or “ till we all come in the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:15), or “ until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19). But this is not the kind of “until” in this text – an earthly “until!”

The Restitution

Peter refers to “ the restitution.” The manner in which he speaks makes clear that he is referring to something that is well known – something on which God has spoken with clarity.

The word “restitution” comes from the Greek word **avpokatasta,sewj** . It has the lexical meaning, “restoration . . . to a perfect state,” THAYER “to restore, to cause again to be.” LOUW-NIDA Being led by the Spirit, Peter will not allow his listeners to speculate about the meaning of his words. He is not speaking of the restoration of Israel, but the restoration of “all things.” He is not referring to the restoration of fallen man, but to the restoration “of all things.” Paul referred to this as “the creation itself” being “delivered from the bondage of corruption,” associating that deliverance with the “manifestation of the sons of God” in a state of “glorious liberty” (Rom 8:19-21). This refers to the time appointed by God when He will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph 1:10). Even this language, however, is not precise enough, and may leave room for novices and charlatans to draw false conclusions. Thus Peter is very specific about “the restoration” to which he refers. This will be disruptive of some very cherished theological views. However, there really is no question about Peter’s insight, spiritual expertise, or authority. We do well to give heed to what he proclaims, for we will eventually face these words once again.

SPOKEN BY THE MOUTH OF ALL HIS HOLY PROPHETS

“ . . . which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began.” Other versions read, “ about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time,” NASB “as He promised long ago through his holy prophets,” NIV “that God announced long ago through His holy prophets,” NRSV “whereof God spake by the mouth of His holy prophets that have been from of old ,” ASV “of which God has given word by the mouth of His holy prophets, who have been from the earliest times ,” BBE “which God spoke about by the mouth of His holy prophets from the beginning ,” CSB “of which God has spoken by the mouth of his holy prophets since time began ,” DARBY “which God proclaimed , speaking through his holy prophets,” NJB “as prophesied from ancient times,” LIVING “ God told about these things long ago when He spoke through His holy prophets,” IE “of which God has spoken from the earliest ages through the lips of His holy prophets,” WEYMOUTH and “that God spoke by the mouth of all His holy prophets for

ages past [from the most ancient time in the memory of man].” AMPLIFIED

Peter affirms that Jesus will stay in heaven until these things begin to come to pass. That is, when He leaves heaven, the heavens and the earth as they now are will be terminated.

The Prophets spoke of “the times of the restitution of all things.” It was a time when everything would be renewed, and all issues would be resolved.

- **NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH.** “For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind” (Isa 65:17).
- **A NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH THAT WILL REMAIN.** “For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain” (Isa 66:22).
- **HEAVENS AND EARTH CHANGED.** “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed” (Psa 102:25-26).
- **NO HURT OR DESTRUCTION.** “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD” (Isa 65:25).
- **THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.** “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isa 26:19).
- **DEATH SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY.** “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 25:8).
- **SATAN BROUGHT DOWN TO HELL.** “Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit” (Isa 14:12-15).
- **PRESENT HEAVENS AND EARTH PASS AWAY.** “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish . . .” (Psa 102:26).
- **THE WORLD TO BE JUDGED.** “But the LORD shall endure for ever: He hath prepared His throne for judgment. And He shall judge the world in righteousness, He shall minister judgment to the people in uprightness” (Psa 9:8).
- **ALL FLESH WILL SEE THE GLORY OF THE LORD.** “And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 40:5).

This is only representative of a host of prophecies having to do with final outcomes. Peter affirms that Jesus will stay in heaven until these things begin to come to pass. That is, when He leaves heaven, the heavens and the earth as they now are will be terminated. This was also revealed to John on the Isle of Patmos. “And I saw a great white throne, and Him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev 20:11).

Paul also spoke of the climactic nature of Christ’s appearing. Here are some of the things that will occur, all of which have to do with the “restitution of all things.”

- **THE DEAD WILL BE RAISED.** “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:52). Paul said there would be a single resurrection, including the

just and the unjust. “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15). Jesus Himself said that at the sound of His voice, all of the graves would yield up their dead. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29).

• **ALL OF THE RIGHTEOUS WILL BE GATHERED TOGETHER.** “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Mat 24:30-31).

• **AT THE SAME TIME, THE WICKED AND ALL THINGS THAT OFFEND WILL BE GATHERED OUT OF THE EARTH.** “The Son of man shall send forth His angels, and they shall gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 13:41-42).

• **THE ARCH FOE OF CHRIST WILL BE DESTROYED BY HIS COMING.** “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess 2:8-9).

• **THOSE WHO KNOW NOT GOD AND OBEY NOT THE GOSPEL WILL BE PUNISHED WHEN JESUS COMES TO BE GLORIFIED IN HIS SAINTS.** “In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Thess 1:8-10).

• **JESUS WILL RETURN WITH HIS REWARD, TO GIVE TO EVERY MAN.** “And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev 22:12).

• **AT HIS RETURN, JESUS WILL BRING TO LIGHT THE HIDDEN THINGS OF DARKNESS, AND MAKE MANIFEST THE COUNSELS OF THE HEART.** “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God” (1 Cor 4:5).

The words of our text – “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things” – affirm that Jesus will not leave heaven until the time when these things are to be fulfilled – things that involve everything the prophets have spoken.

MOSES PROPHESED OF HIM

“ 22 For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you.”

Peter continues to anchor his proclamation in the preparatory word of the prophets, of which Moses was primary. As it is written, “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face” (Deut 34:10). Now, Peter refers to one of Moses’ key prophecies. His reference is found in the book of Deuteronomy. “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall

hearken . . . I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deut 18:15,18).

RAISED UP BY GOD

“For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me . . .” Other versions read, “The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me,” NRSV “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet from your brethren as he raised me up.” RSV and “A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up to you out of your brethren like me.” DARBY

This “Prophet” would not be one cultured by the Jewish teachers. He would not be a product of the Temple or synagogue systems. He would not be one who rose to prominence through His own natural aptitude. The people would not put this Prophet in the position of prominence. This Prophet would be “raised up” by God Himself.

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Raised Up FOR the People

“ . . . raise up unto you.” Because “the people” were helpless in themselves, Jesus was “raised up” for them. They could not discern the mind of the Lord, so He raised up a Prophet for them – to declare the Father to them (John 1:16). Because their perception of the Law was flawed and unprofitable, God raised Jesus up to “magnify the Law, and make it honorable” (Isa 42:21). If it was not for “the people,” there would have been no need for this “Prophet.” There would have been no need for Him on earth, and the Father would not have needed Him to be His “Lamb” (John 1:29,36) and “Christ” (Lk 2:26; Acts 4:26).

Raised up FROM the People

“ . . . of your brethren.” This “Prophet” would be a Jew, for “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). He would be the “Seed,” or offspring, of Abraham, and through Him “all nations of the earth” would “be blessed” (Gen 22:18). His kingly lineage would be through David (Psa 89:35-36; Isa 9:7; Jer 23:5). It was through the nation of Israel that Jesus was given to the world (Rom 9:5).

I affirm that those who are of God DO hear His Prophet, Jesus Christ, just as Moses said they would. I will further affirm that only those who are alienated from God do NOT hear the Prophet God has raised up. Additionally, I will also declare that unless this condition is remedied, there cannot possibly be any hope of being saved.

Does pedigree or ancestry make a difference? When it comes to this “Prophet” it does! Moses told the people He would be “from your brethren.” NKJV

A Prophet Like Moses

This would be a distinct prophet – like Moses was. Like Moses, God would speak “face to face” with Him (Ex 33:11; Deut 34:10). That is, He would not speak to this Prophet by means of dreams

and visions, as He did to others. Like Moses it could be said of Him, “If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make Myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against My servant Moses?” (Num 12:6-8).

Like Moses, this Prophet would be called independently of the people themselves. He would not be called in the midst of the congregation, but in a solitary place (Ex 3:1-4:19).

HIM YE SHALL HEAR

“ . . . Him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever He shall say unto you.” Other versions read, “To Him you shall give heed in everything He says to you,” NASB “you must listen to everything He tells you,” NIV “You must listen to whatever he tells you ,” NRSV “ You shall listen to Him in whatever He tells you,” RSV “ you will give ear to everything which He will say to you,” BBE “Him you shall hear according to all things whatsoever He shall speak to you ,” DOUAY “You must obey Him in everything He tells you,” NET “ you will listen to whatever He tells you,” NJB “You must listen attentively to everything He tells you,” WILLIAMS “Him you shall listen to and understand by hearing and heed in all things whatever He tells you,” AMPLIFIED and “Him you will hear [or, pay attention to] in all [things], as many [things] as He shall speak to you.” ALT

There are two ways in which this text can be taken. First, it can be seen as a prophecy : “you shall . . . you will.” Second, it can be seen as an obligation : “you must.” Both are true. However in this text, the emphasis is on the prophetic, not the obligatory. The responsibility for hearing this Prophet will be accented in the next clause. This word, however, declares the nature of the era of Christ – the time of the New Covenant.

Take, for example, an obligation that the inspired Moses placed upon the people. “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut 10:16). That was, to be sure, something that had to be done. The circumcision, however, would actually be accomplished during the age of the Messiah. Thus Moses later said, “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6). That was the prophetic sense of the word, just as “ye shall hearken” is in the prophetic sense.

I affirm that those who are of God DO hear His Prophet, Jesus Christ, just as Moses said they would. I will further affirm that only those who are alienated from God do NOT hear the Prophet God has raised up. Additionally, I will also declare that unless this condition is remedied, there cannot possibly be any hope of being saved. Here, in this world, men may learn to countenance an ignorance of God and a lack of appetite for His Word and will. However, this is not the attitude maintained in heaven.

A person may be able to be a member of a local congregation, yet remain fundamentally ignorant of God and essentially anchored to this present evil world. This condition may continue for years, even decades, with the individual being acknowledged as a “Christian” and a church member in good standing. I will now establish that such a condition directly contradicts the prophecy of Moses, the words of Jesus and the doctrine of the apostles, and is therefore totally unacceptable. Remember, we are considering the promise that the real people “shall hearken” to the real Prophet God has “raised up” – the Lord Jesus Christ.

The sheep and their exclusive identity with Christ. “And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them, and the sheep follow Him: for they know His voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers” (John 10:4-5). In this remarkable expression, the Lord Jesus reveals a number of things. First, all of the sheep are in the

posture of following. They are not seeking their own will, and they have an unmistakable attraction to Christ. Second, in the capacity of a Shepherd, Jesus does not walk by the side of the sheep, but is in a leading stance, and the sheep do follow Him. Third, the sheep have no inclination to leaders other than Jesus. In fact, once they have identified Christ, they will withdraw from pretentious leaders, even running from them. Fourth, when they are summoned to follow other shepherds who do not themselves have the truth, the real sheep refuse to follow them, for there is a strange and offensive sound in their voice.

The dividing line between the real sheep and the pretenders is found in spiritual hearing . . . A failure to believe is directly owing to the inability to hear Christ's "voice." That means that faith is not possible where men have not been drawn to Christ.

Even before they knew of Christ, the real sheep were not enamored of false shepherds. "All that ever came before Me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them" (John 10:8). Throughout history, there have been self-proclaimed messiah's – men who affirmed they had the answer to the human dilemma. But they were only interested in what they could get from the sheep, not what they could give to them. Such men could not bring satisfaction to the sheep. Their words had a hollow sound to them, and could not divert the sheep from longing and looking for the Good Shepherd. Even when the sheep were within range of the voice of these shepherds, there remained in their words a tone of spiritual poverty. The sheep knew what they were hearing could not really enrich them, and thus they could not give their undivided attention to these "thieves and robbers."

The singularity of both the fold and the flock is confirmed by the nature of the sheep. That nature is fundamentally revealed in their consistent response to the Good Shepherd. "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice ; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd" (John 10:16). The appointed means by which the sheep are gathered together is, in this perspective, the "voice" of the Lord Jesus – His words. They prove to be a rallying point for the real people of God.

The dividing line between the real sheep and the pretenders is found in spiritual hearing. "But ye believe not, because ye are not of My sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). A failure to believe is directly owing to the inability to hear Christ's "voice." That means that faith is not possible where men have not been drawn to Christ (John 6:44; 12:32). That drawing is accomplished through Christ's "voice." That is, the real sheep are attracted to Him because of what He says . This is not the attraction of intellectual intrigue or mere curiosity. Rather, there is a satisfaction realized when the "word of Christ" is embraced. That is why the real sheep allow it so dwell in them "richly" (Col 3:16).

It is not possible to have favorable identity with God if there is not a fundamental propensity toward His Word , particularly as it has been revealed through Christ . " He that is of God heareth God's words : ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God" (John 8:47). Men cannot "live by every word of God" out of a sense of mere obligation. Rather, life is realized through "every word of God" because of insight and preference.

In the New Covenant, God has no children who do not hear Christ's words. They ALL hear Jesus, and they ALL know God. The Father begets no sons who lack an appetite for His Word, or the aptitude to detect when He is speaking. Admittedly, this does have alarming implications.

THE OUTCOME OF FAILING TO HEARKEN TO HIM

" 23 And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people."

Do we dare to be casual about this matter of listening to and obeying Jesus? Is there some

institutional quality that will make up for not listening to the One through whom God is speaking to us? The words that follow confirm the gravity of the failure to listen to and disobey Jesus. Whatever men may think or say about “unconditional love,” here is something that is absolutely without exclusion. If a person refuses to listen to Jesus, here is what will happen, and there are absolutely no exceptions to it.

IT SHALL COME TO PASS

“And it shall come to pass . . .” Other versions read, “And it shall be,” NKJV “And it will be,” NRSV “From it shall be,” GENEVA “For the time will come,” TNT and “The result will be.” WILLIAMS

What follows will happen. It is based upon Divine determination. If the specified condition is found, there is no possible way to avoid the pronouncement concerning it.

EVERY SOUL THAT WILL NOT HEAR

“ . . . that every soul, which will not hear that prophet . . .” Other versions read, “every soul that does not heed that prophet,” NASB “Anyone who does not listen to Him,” NIV “ everyone who does not listen to that prophet,” NRSV “ every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet,” ASV “every soul who does not give attention to that prophet,” BBE “Those who won’t listen to that prophet,” GWN “every soul that does not heed that prophet,” NAU “Every person who does not obey that prophet,” NET “Anyone who refuses to listen to that prophet,” NJB “everyone, without exception, who refuses to listen to that prophet,” WEYMOUTH “every soul that does not listen to and understand by hearing and heed that Prophet,” AMPLIFIED and “every soul who does not hear [or, pay attention to] that Prophet.” ALT

Those who do not hearken to Jesus will not be accepted by God, and will be held in strict account for their failure to give heed to His words. The prophecy is very precise on this matter.

Those who do not hearken to Jesus will not be accepted by God, and will be held in strict account for their failure to give heed to His words. The prophecy is very precise on this matter

It is difficult to conceive of anything being more serious than refusing to listen to the One through whom God is speaking to us in these “last days.” However, when men listen to “another Jesus,” they fall into this class of people: “whoever will not listen to My words when He shall speak in My name” (Deut 18:19). It seems to me that this requires no further explanation. For God to receive those who have listened to “another Jesus” would be nothing less than a repudiation of His own Son, His death, His resurrection, His exaltation, His mediation of the New Covenant, and His intercession for the saints. In such a case, all of those benefits would actually be received from another “Jesus” who was nothing more than an imposter. Either that, or Jesus would administer the benefits through an imposter – which thought is utterly preposterous. Men are held responsible for listening to the right Jesus – the Prophet of whom Moses spoke.

Moses said the Prophet would speak what God put into His mouth. That removes His words from the arena of interpretation, opinion, and philosophy. It makes His words of the utmost importance, for God is not capable of conceiving or expressing vain, pointless, and irrelevant words.

- **“FOLLOW ME”** (Matt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23; John 12:26). If we desire the benefits Jesus brings, we have no alternative but to follow Him, pursue Him, and seek to be close to Him. Jesus said this involved denying self and taking up our cross every day. If a person is to serve Christ, He must be a follower of Him.

- **“LAY UP FOR YOURSELVES TREASURES IN HEAVEN”** (Matt 6 :20; Lk

12:33). This is not a suggestion. This word is preceded by another one: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth ” (6:19). At some point men must decide where they are going to make their investment. Will it be in a world that is perishing, or in heaven, that will remain? Jesus gives us no reason to expect that anyone will be in heaven who did not make preparations for it.

- **“SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS”** (Matt 6:33; Lk 12:31). Does anyone imagine that Jesus will allow a person to be His disciple, and be blessed by Him, who does have a prevailing interest in God’s Kingdom and the appropriation of His righteousness? This word from Jesus is heard by all of His people. Those who reject it, by that very rejection, confirm that they are not among His sheep, for His sheep “hear His voice.”

- **“ENTER YE IN AT THE STRAIT GATE”** (Matt 7:13; Lk 13:24). The “strait gate” is the one that makes no provision for the flesh (Rom 13:14). The real sheep follow the real Jesus. They are not seeking a religion that allows them to retain fleshly preferences and worldly status. They willingly enter the gate that does not allow “the flesh,” “the carnal mind,” or “the natural man” to enter.

- **“TAKE HEED WHAT YE HEAR”** (Mk 4:24). The sheep hear this word and are careful about the stewardship of their minds. They do not allow every religious word to have free course in their mind. When words are spoken in the name of Christ, yet do not promote a fundamental interest in Christ, they turn away, hearkening to this warning word. When they hear a word that sharpens their consciousness of Christ, they give heed to it, having embraced this utterance.

- **“COME UNTO ME”** (Matt 11:28; John 7:37). The sheep are glad to hear this word, because in this world they have become “weary and heavy laden” because of it’s inability to meet their primary needs and concerns. In Jesus they see a “hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest.” They find in Him “rivers of water in a dry place,” and the “shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa 32:2). They come to Him because they desire to do so. Only those who are not His own fail to do this.

- **“WATCH THEREFORE; FOR YE KNOW NOT WHAT HOUR YOUR LORD DOTH COME”** (Matt 24:42; 25:13; Mk 13:33). The people of God take this word seriously, because they know this world, and its “fashion,” is passing away (1 Cor 7:31; 1 John 2:17). Their affection has been set on things above, and they are anticipating the return of their Lord – so they are watching. Only those who do not belong to Jesus remain dull and insensitive to this word.

- **“IF YE LOVE ME, KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS”** (John 14:15). It is one thing to boast of a love for Jesus. It is quite another to confirm it by maintaining a preference for, and a grasp of, His commandments. To the real people of God, Christ’s commandments “are not grievous” (1 John 5:3). His “yoke is easy,” and His “burden is light” (Matt 11:30). Only those who do not love Jesus fail to retain His commandments.

- **“ABIDE IN ME, AND I IN YOU”** (John 15:4). Backsliding and departing from Jesus may be common in the professing church, but it is not so with the “sheep” – the real people of God. They give heed to this word, remain in Him, and experience the refreshment of Jesus remaining in them. Some people may view this as a goal. It is rather to be regarded as a point at which the profession of being joined to Christ is confirmed. Those who do not remain in Him cannot be identified with Him.

- **“TAKE HEED THAT YE BE NOT DECEIVED”** (Luke 21:8). It is the responsibility of every person claiming identity with Jesus, or declaring themselves to be Christian, to see to it that they are “not deceived.” This requirement exists even though “many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). The real people of God

“hearken” to this word of Jesus, and therefore He helps them through the power of the Holy Spirit to avoid being swept away in the tide of delusion.

Once a person comes into Christ, the absolute requirement to listen to Jesus does not cease, nor does the curse against such people come to an end. In fact, hearing, or listening to this “Prophet” is one of the appointed means of deciphering who is genuine and who is not.

SHALL BE DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE

“ . . . shall be destroyed from among the people.” Other versions read, “shall be utterly destroyed from among the people,” NKJV “ completely cut off from among His people,” NIV “will be utterly rooted out of the people,” NRSV “shall be destroyed out of the people,” GENEVA “will be excluded from the people,” GWN “that soul shall perish from among the people,” MRD “will be cut off from the people,” NAB “will be completely cut off from God’s people,” NLT “ he will die , cut off from God’s people,” IE “shall be utterly exterminated from among the people,” AMPLIFIED and “shall be separated from God’s people and destroyed.” GNB

The penalty for failing to listen to Jesus is so plain that one must be stubborn and rebellious to miss it. Note the clarity. Such a person will be “destroyed,” NKJV “cut off,” NIV “rooted out,” NRSV excluded,” GWN caused to “perish,” MRD spiritually “die,” IE be “exterminated,” AMPLIFIED and “separated.” GNB

Notice that this will take place “from among the people,” or “out of the people,” GENEVA and “from God’s people.” NLT/GNB That is, they will be removed from the class of individuals identified as THE PEOPLE – the ones who are associated with God. This is not speaking of the people of this world, or sinners in general. In the sense of our text, this is not the people to which Jesus, or “the Prophet,” is speaking. When reference is made to Jesus speaking “from heaven,” it always has reference to Him speaking to His people (Heb 12:25).

A Conclusion

This word dashes all theology to the ground that affirms the indestructibility of anyone who has been identified with God’s people. Once a person comes into Christ, the absolute requirement to listen to Jesus does not cease, nor does the curse against such people come to an end. In fact, hearing, or listening to this “Prophet” is one of the appointed means of deciphering who is genuine and who is not. Although those refusing to listen to Jesus may wear the name “Christian,” and be officially classed among His people, they are really nothing more than intruders. They are

“tares” (Matt 13:38-39), “bad fish” (Matt 13:48), and have “neither part nor lot in this matter” (Acts 8:21). They “serve not our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:18), and are “plants” that the heavenly Father “hath not planted” (Matt 15:13).

If that seems too strong, please know that it is really rather weak. The announced judgment against such people confirms the seriousness of the transgression. Anyone and everyone who is not actively listening to Jesus, receiving His word, and responding in faith to it, stands in jeopardy of losing their soul. They are giving their soul in exchange for some worldly bauble.

ALL THE PROPHETS FROM SAMUEL AND THOSE FOLLOWING

“ 24a Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after . . .” Other versions read, “from Samuel and his successors onward,” NASB “all the prophets from Samuel on,” NIV “from Samuel and those after him,” NRSV “from Samuel and those who came afterward,” RSV “from Samuel and them that followed after,” ASV “from Samuel and thenceforth,” GENEVA “Starting with Samuel,” NLT “Samuel and every prophet since,” LIVING “Samuel and all the other prophets after Samuel,” IE “All the prophets . . . from Samuel down,” WILLIAMS “all the prophets from

Samuel and those who came afterwards,” AMPLIFIED and “all the prophets . . . including Samuel and those who came after him.” GNB

FROM SAMUEL

Samuel recorded the kingly aspect of the Messiah, declaring that He would come from David’s lineage and sit upon his throne. The words were actually spoken by Nathan, yet were recorded by Samuel. “I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for My name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever” (2 Sam 7:12-13).

Commensurate with Samuel, God began to speak with greater clarity concerning the coming Messiah. From Samuel on, the promised Deliverer was associated with a covenant.

Moses and Samuel are also mentioned together in the Psalms. “Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the LORD, and he answered them” (Psa 99:6). And again, Jeremiah makes mention of them as being powerful intercessors: “Then said the LORD unto me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth” (Jer 15:1).

Commensurate with Samuel, God began to speak with greater clarity concerning the coming Messiah. From Samuel on, the promised Deliverer was associated with a covenant. Thus the 89th Psalm says of the promise delivered to David by Nathan, “I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David My servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah . . . Also I will make Him My firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth . . . My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and My covenant shall stand fast with Him . . . His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and His throne as the days of heaven . . . My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips. Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and His throne as the sun before Me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah” (Psa 89:3-4, 27-29, 34-37).

AND THOSE THAT FOLLOW

The role of “the prophets” who followed Samuel in the defining and announcing of the Savior of the world has been greatly neglected by the professing church. They “preached” the coming Messiah with remarkable precision.

- **The abundance of revelation concerning Jesus confirms both the sureness and the greatness of salvation. All of the prophecies were, in a way, a challenge to Satan and**

- **BORN IN BETHLEHEM.** “But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be Ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting” (Micah 5:2; Matt 2:5).

- **HE WOULD BE DESPISED BY THE PEOPLE.** “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; He was despised, and we esteemed him not” (Isa 53:3; Matt 27:25).

- **HE WOULD BE HATED WITHOUT A CAUSE.** “They that hate Me without a cause are more than the hairs of Mine head: they that would destroy Me, being Mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away” (Psa 69:4; John 15:25).

- **UNDER OPPRESSION, HE WOULD BE MEEK.** “He shall not cry, nor lift up,

nor cause his voice to be heard in the street” (Isa 42:2). “The Lord GOD hath opened mine ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away back. I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isa 50:5-6).

• **HE WOULD BE CUT OFF, BEING PUT TO DEATH, BUT NOT FOR HIS SIN.** “And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself . . .” (Dan 9:26; Gal 3:13).

• **WHEN YOUNG, HE WOULD BE CALLED OUT OF EGYPT.** “When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt” (Hosea 11:1; Matt 2:14-15).

• **HE WOULD BE CUT OFF WHEN YOUNG, HAVING NO FLESHLY OFFSPRING.** “He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken” (Isa 53:8).

• **HE WOULD MINISTER IN GALILEE.** “Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined” (Isa 9:1-2; Matt 4:14-15).

• **HE WOULD BE A REDEEMER.** “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth” (Job 19:25).

• **HE WOULD HEAL THE SICK.** “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted” (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17).

• **HE WAS A STONE REFUSED BY THE BUILDERS.** “The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner” (Psa 118:22).

• **HE WAS FROM THE LINEAGE OF JESSE:** “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots” (Isa 11:1).

• **HE WAS NOTED FOR WISDOM.** “And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears” (Isa 11:2-3; Matt 13:54).

• **HE WAS PRECEDED BY A VOICE CRYING OUT IN THE WILDERNESS.** “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa 40:3).

• **HE WAS A WITNESS TO THE PEOPLE.** “Behold, I have given him for a witness to the people, a leader and commander to the people” (Isa 55:4).

• **HE WOULD RIDE INTO JERUSALEM ON A FOAL.** “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: He is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zech 9:9).

The abundance of revelation concerning Jesus confirms both the sureness and the greatness of salvation. All of the prophecies were, in a way, a challenge to Satan and his hosts to do their best to abort their fulfillment.

THEY FORETOLD THESE DAYS

“ 24b . . . as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.”

Now Peter is even more specific, affirming that the prophets have foretold the times during which Jesus is administering salvation – “these days.”

AS MANY AS HAVE SPOKEN

“ . . . as many as have spoken . . .” Other versions read, “who spoke,” NAB “that have ever spoken,” NJB “as many as spake,” YLT “who spoke for God,” IE and “all who have spoken.”
WEYMOUTH

The phrase “as many as have spoken,” particularly relates to, what Peter called elsewhere, “the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11). As many as spoke of the coming Savior, referred of what would occur during His administration. In other words, the Spirit moved holy men to speak of the times during which men would be delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13).

FORETOLD THESE DAYS

“ . . . have likewise foretold of these days.” Other versions read, “announced these days,” NASB “also predicted these days,” NRSV “also proclaimed these days,” RSV “gave word of these days,” BBE “spoke about these days,” GWN “spoke about what is happening today,” NLT “have likewise told you about these days,” PNT “did also foretell these days,” YLT “talked about these days,” IE “have also announced the coming of this present time,” WEYMOUTH and “also promised and foretold and proclaimed these days.” AMPLIFIED

Paul referred to the time as “the accepted time” and “the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). He also referred to this as the time when God is speaking through his Son (Heb 1:2). “These days” are those which followed “the fulness of the time,” when God “sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the Law” (Gal 4:4).

And, what did the prophets say of “these days” – these days of salvation, and the open heavens? We will find their words to be most wonderful. They will also be words that will be a confirmation of the blessedness of the time. A few of them will suffice for verification of this.

- “In His days shall the righteous flourish ; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth” (Psa 72:7).
- “They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power” (Psa 145:11).
- “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto Him shall the gathering of the people be ” (Gen 49:10).
- “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it ” (Isa 2:2).
- “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths : for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:3).
- “And in this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things , a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isa 25:6).
- “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be

unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:5-6).

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

- “And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads : they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa 35:10).

- “ I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles; To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house ” (Isa 42:6-7).

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them , saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34).

- “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26).

- “In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness ” (Zech 13:1).

According to the prophets, during “these days” of salvation the Gentiles will be called (Isa 49:22), Israel will be converted (Ezek 11:17-19), a unity among God’s people will be realized (Zeph 3:9), and the whole earth would be filled with the knowledge of the Lord (Hab 2:14). There would be a change in the character of the people (Ezek 36:25-27). The appointment of beauty, joy, and praise would be realized (Isa 61:3). A remarkable recovery would be experienced (Isa 61:4). A way to God would be found in, what was conceived to be, impossible circumstances – like a way being made in the wilderness, and rivers in a desert (Isa 43:19). The people would receive a new identity (Isa 62:2). A new and better covenant would be put into place (Jer 31:31-34). Iniquities would be subdued, and sins would be cast “into the depth of the sea” (Mic 7:19). There would be “showers of blessing” (Ezek 34:26). “These days” are also referred to as “these last times,” and are described as the period during which Jesus Christ has been made “manifest” (1 Pet 1:20). They are also described as “these last days” during which God is speaking to humanity exclusively through His Son (Heb 1:2).

Self-centered living is wholly inappropriate during “these days” (2 Cor 5:15). Sin in all of its forms is out of order (1 John 2:1). No place has been made for an ignorance of God (Heb 8:11; 1 John 5:20). These are days in which Divine leading has been provided (Rom 8:13). Access to God has been graciously provided (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12). Men can now “obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16).

How can it possibly be that a weak and emaciated church could exist in “these days” ? What possible excuse can be offered for continuance in sin? We should discern from both the tone and content of Peter’s message that wholesome responses are expected from men, and he will press the people for such to occur.

It is time for the professed church to cease being tolerant of sin. Let it discontinue its miserable explanations for sin and declare that remission itself proves that sin is always out of place, else it would not need to be forgiven. Let it purge from its ranks those sophists who spend their time promoting sympathy for sinners instead of calling them repentance. We have before us the man with “the keys of the Kingdom of heaven.” Let us hear what he says. The Holy Spirit is speaking

through him, and therefore he will speak with insight and depth, precision and power.

YE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE PROPHETS

“ 25a Ye are the children of the prophets . . . ” Other versions read, “the sons of the prophets .” NKJV “the heirs of the prophets ,” NIV “the descendants of the prophets ,” NRSV “descendants (sons) of the prophets,” AMPLIFIED and “ The promises of God through his prophets are for you.” GNB

The meaning here is not that the people were the offspring of the prophets, or that they were merely in their fleshly lineage. The idea is that they were the proper recipients of the words of the prophets. The prophets were like their instructors, and they were like children being directed by the prophet’s words. They were disciples, or pupils, of the prophets. The Jews, particularly the ones standing before Peter, lived among the people that were addressed by the prophets. They were in the family over which the prophets presided – and the prophets were sent to them by God Himself (2 Chron 24:19; Jer 7:25; 25:4; Zech 7:12).

A PRINCIPLE TO BE SEEN

In our time, it can be said that the churches are the children of the Apostles. God placed them “first” in the church, to ground and settle it in the truth. The “apostles’ doctrine” is the teaching of the church, and they, like the early disciples, are to continue in it

There is a principle seen here that requires brief elaboration. When a word from God is sent to a person or people, they are under obligation to hear it – hearkening to and obeying it. This is why God judged Israel for not giving heed to the prophets. Their word was actually God’s word to the people. God made this clear through Jeremiah. “And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets , rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear . They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: and go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto ME , saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt” (Jer 25:4-7).

The failure of Judah to hear the words of God’s prophets was so serious that God sent Nebuchadnezzar against them, to overcome, plunder them, and take them captive (Jer 29:19-23).

God also spoke through Zechariah years later, upbraiding the people for not hearing His prophets. “Be ye not as your fathers, unto whom the former prophets have cried, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings: but they did not hear, nor hearken unto Me , saith the LORD” (Zech 1:4). The prophet cried out, “ Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited the south and the plain?” (Zech 7:7). There was no acceptable excuse for not giving heed to the prophets. That is because the prophets were sent to them – they were “the children of the prophets,” the ones they tutored. God did not give them the option of ignoring His prophets. It may have appeared as though they were free to do so, but they were not. They sinned in not hearing them, and thus were punished.

IN OUR TIME

In our time, it can be said that the churches are the children of the Apostles. God placed them “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28), to ground and settle it in the truth. The “apostles’ doctrine” is the teaching of the church, and they, like the early disciples, are to continue in it (Acts 2:42). The

church is “build upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20). They have delivered to the church a message that was hidden from all previous ages (Eph 3:5). Peter said believers are to “be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (2 Pet 3:2). They are to remember “the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:17).

Is there a person of sound mind in all of the world that is willing affirm that the church is free to ignore the apostles Christ has given to them? Are they at liberty to remain in ignorance concerning their message, or to fail to give heed to it? Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (John 13:20). Again He said to His disciples, “He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16).

Now, I must press this matter because of its seriousness. I am going to say that the professing church is rejecting the Apostles, refusing to hear them, and thrusting their word from themselves. Does that sound too strong? Then let us examine some of the things the Apostles have said.

- **GO ON TO PERFECTION.** “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection ; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God” (Heb 6:1).

- **LET THERE BE NO DIVISIONS AMONG YOU.** “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you ; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

- **SIN NOT.** “Awake to righteousness, and sin not ; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor 15:34).

- **BE NOT CHILDREN IN UNDERSTANDING.** “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men” (1 Cor 14:20).

- **GROW IN THE GRACE AND KNOWLEDGE OF CHRIST.** “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ . To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen” (2 Pet 3:18).

- **ADD TO YOUR FAITH.** “And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Pet 1:5-7).

- **DESIRE THE SINCERE MILK OF THE WORD.** “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby ” (1 Pet 2:2).

- **LET THIS MIND BE IN YOU.** “ Let this mind be in you , which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:5).

- **HEAR WHAT THE SPIRIT IS SAYING TO THE CHURCHES.** “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ” (Rev 2:7,11, 17,29; 3:6,13,22).

Seeing that the Lord Jesus has fully provided for the church by giving it the gifts of “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11), how can a condition of ignorance and disobedience be so prominent? It is because those who lack these qualities have, in fact, rejected the apostles, even though they are, so to speak, their sons.

LOVE ONE ANOTHER WITH A PURE HEART FERVENTLY. ‘Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye

love one another with a pure heart fervently ” (1 Pet 1:22).

• **LET NO IMMORALITY BE ONCE NAMED AMONG YOU.** “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you , as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph 5:3-4).

• **LOVE NOT THE WORLD.** “ Love not the world , neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

• **COME YE OUT FROM AMONG THEM.** “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? . . . Wherefore come out from among them , and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:14-17).

• **SPEAK PROPERLY.** “Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying , that it may minister grace unto the hearers” (Eph 4:29).

Is there any person of faith who is not painfully aware of the poverty of the modern church in all of these areas? And if that assessment is correct, why does it exist? Has not the exalted Christ taken deliberate measures to see to it that these words are fulfilled? Did He not endue His “holy apostles” (Eph 3:5) with power, provide them insight into God’s eternal purpose, and set them in the church to teach it?

Have you not personally encountered professing Christians without number that are not even aware of these words? Seeing that the Lord Jesus has fully provided for the church by giving it the gifts of “ apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11), how can a condition of ignorance and disobedience be so prominent? It is because those who lack these qualities have, in fact, rejected the apostles, even though they are, so to speak, their sons. This, in my judgment, is even more serious than the Jews rejecting the prophets.

YE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE COVENANT

“ 25b . . . and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.”

THE COVENANT WHICH GOD MADE

“ . . . and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham . . . ” Other versions read, “of the covenant that God gave to your ancestors,” NRSV “and of the agreement which God made with your fathers,” BBE “and of the covenant that God made with your forefathers ,” CSB “and of the testament which God made to our fathers,” DOUAY “and the heirs of the promise that God made to our ancestors,” GWN “you are included in the covenant God promised to your ancestors,” NLT “You have received the agreement which God made with your ancestors,” IE “and the heirs of the sacred compact which God made with your forefathers,” WILLIAMS “and the heirs of the covenant which God made and gave to your forefathers,” AMPLIFIED “and of the covenant which God covenanted to our fathers ,” ALT and “and of the covenant which God appointed to our fathers.” LITV

Let it be clear that the coming of the Savior into the world depended ONLY upon God! There was no way in which this promise depended upon Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or the children of Israel – no way at all! This covenant was a promise of what would be – even though all manner of sin was found among the offspring of Abraham.

Peter tells the people they are also the “children” of the covenant God made with Abraham. That is, they are heirs and recipients of it. It properly belongs to them, and they belong to it.

As is apparent in the text, Peter is not speaking about the “First Covenant” (Heb 8:7; 9:1) that was made with the people at Mount Sinai (Gal 4:24). This covenant, we will find, is the very one that is presently being mediated by the Lord Jesus. Paul referred to it in this manner: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ. And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal 3:17).

Notice that “the covenant” is also called “the promise.” That is, this was a unilateral covenant – a one sided covenant. It was not an agreement, where two parties agreed to terms involving the activity of both. Paul makes a point of this one-sided nature of “the covenant” God made “unto Abraham.” “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one” (Gal 3:19-20). The Amplified Bible gives the sense of this latter verse. “Now a go-between (intermediary) has to do with and implies more than one party [there can be no mediator with just one person]. Yet God is [only] one Person [and He was the sole party in giving that promise to Abraham.]”

This is, of course, the promise of the coming Messiah, who was the “Seed” to which the promise referred. Of that Seed Paul says, “Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16).

Let it be clear that the coming of the Savior into the world depended ONLY upon God! There was no way in which this promise depended upon Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, or the children of Israel – no way at all! This covenant was a promise of what would be – even though all manner of sin was found among the offspring of Abraham.

It is true that “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). However, that it not owing to their excellence, but is rather according to Divine appointment. The covenant presently being mediated by Jesus is not two-sided, and those who so represent it could not possibly be more wrong. The “promise” given to Abraham was not conditioned upon what men would do, but upon what God had determined to do. This is the only reason these people could be called “the children” of the covenant God made “unto Abraham.” In every other sense, they were disqualified.

ALL KINDREDS OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED

“ . . . And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.” Other versions read, “And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” NKJV “through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed,” NIV “And in your descendants all the families of the earth shall be blessed,” NRSV “And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” RSV “Through your seed a blessing will come on all the families of the earth,” BBE “And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed,” ESV “through your descendant all people on earth will be blessed,” GWN “to bless the entire world through the Jewish race – that is the promise God have to Abraham,” LIVING “I will bless all nations of the earth. I will use one of your descendants to do this,” IE “all families of the earth are to be blessed through your posterity,” WILLIAMS and “And in your Seed (Heir) shall all the families of the earth be blessed and benefited,” AMPLIFIED

This is the covenant “made with Abraham” (Psa 105:9): “ And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed ” (Gen 22:18). As already confirmed, the “Seed” was the Lord Jesus, not the Jewish race.

There is something else to note here that is essential to an understanding of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. The promise [or covenant] was made with Abraham and his “Seed, which Seed is Christ” (Gal 3:16). That means that the New Covenant, at the foundational level, has actually been made with Christ Himself. That is the only way the guarantee of blessing can be given. In confirmation of this, God spoke through Isaiah of the coming Messiah. “I the LORD have called Thee [in righteousness, and will hold Thine hand, and will keep Thee, and give Thee for a covenant of the people , for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6).

It is this condition – the covenant being made with Christ – that accounts for expressions like “in Christ” (Rom 3:24; 8:1,39; Gal 3:26; Eph 1:10; 2:6,10,13; 3:11; Phil 3:14; 1 Tim 1:14), “by Christ” (2 Cor 1:5; Eph 3:21; Phil 4:19; 1 Pet 5:10), and “through Christ” (2 Cor 3:4; Eph 2:7; Phil 4:7,13). Everything related to salvation comes to us because of Christ.

Peter will now confirm that what was promised to Abraham – the blessing of all families of the earth – belonged to those standing before him, and they were the people who had “killed the Prince of life.” They were not workers of good deeds, yet were “children . . . of the covenant” of blessing. It belonged to them, as Peter now affirms. They could partake of the promised blessing!

GOD SENT HIM FIRST TO YOU

“ 26a Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you . . . ”

Peter now declares what is involved in being “the children . . . of the covenant” God made unto Abraham. He has already commanded them to act upon His word by repenting and being converted. Now he will give them a reason to do so.

RAISED AND SENT

“Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “ To you first , God having raised up His Servant Jesus,” NKJV “ For you first , God raised up His Servant” NASB “When God raised His Servant, He sent Him first to you ,” NIV “God has brought His servant back to life and has sent Him to you first ,” GWN “It was for you in the first place that God raised up His servant and sent Him,” NJB “When God raised up His servant, Jesus, He sent him first to you people of Israel ,” NLT “And as soon as God had brought His Servant to life again, He sent Him first of all to you ,” LIVING

This text does not refer to Christ’s resurrection from the dead, but to Moses’ prophecy: “thy God will raise unto thee a Prophet . . . I will raise them up a Prophet” (Deut 18:15,18). This has to do with the totality of Christ’s manifestation – including His birth, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement. It parallels what Paul referred to as “the mystery of godliness” – “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory” (1 Tim 3:16).

Also, “having raised up Jesus” includes His accomplishments in His humbled state. These include at the following, and much more.

- Being made sin and enduring the curse of God (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13).
- The removal of sin (Heb 9:26).
- The destruction of Satan (Heb 2:14).
- The plundering of principalities and powers (Col 2:15).
- The blotting out of what was against us (Col 2:14).

- Making peace (Col 1:20).
- Reconciling the world (2 Cor 5:18).
- Satisfying God (Isa 53:11).
- Sanctifying the way to God (Heb 10:20).
- Sanctifying the people (Heb 13:12).

All of these, and more, are involved in God raising up Jesus – that is, bringing Him out of the human race in general, and Israel in particular, then exalting Him at his own right hand. Now, in the capacity of “the Man Christ Jesus,” He can deal more directly with men, and they can thus have access to Him.

God sent the exalted Christ “first” to Israel, for the promise was first to them. God spoke frequently to Abraham of his “seed” – the people that would come from him.

- The Messiah would come through this people – the “seed” (Gen 21:12; 22:18).
- Many of these references had to do with Canaan, the land of promise, and things relating to it. Thus God said He would give “this land” to his “seed” (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:6; 26:3; 28:4,13; 35:12; 48:4).
- He also spoke of making his “seed” numerous, so that they would be a great people (Gen 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 22:17; 24:60; 26:4,24; 28:14; 32:12; 48:4).
- Additionally, he spoke of Abraham’s “seed” being in the land of Egypt for a season (Gen 15:13).
- The covenant God established with Abraham would also apply to his “seed” (Gen 17:7,).
- There also the covenant of circumcision made with Abraham and his “seed” (Gen 17:9-12).

All of this confirms the absolute priority of the Israelites – the lineage of Abraham, through Isaac, and through Jacob. Everything from God pertained to them. As Paul well said, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

Thus, we read of the Gospel being “the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16). The punishment of evil doers will also be “of the Jew first” (Rom 2:9). Glory, honor, and peace “to every man that worketh good” will also be “to the Jew first” (Rom 2:10). When Jesus commissioned His disciples to preach the Gospel “among all nations,” it was to be “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). When Paul and Barnabas went out preaching the Word of the Gospel, they told the Jews that “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you” (Acts 13:46).

Therefore, Peter preaches with heavenly priorities in mind, thereby fulfilling the will of the Lord. God had prepared this nation for the proclamation of this message.

Peter now provides a grand summary-reason for the raising up of the Lord Jesus.

TO BLESS YOU

“ . . . sent Him to bless you . . . ” Other versions read, “blessing you,” BBE and “to bring you great blessing.” PHILLIPS

This precisely fulfills the promise God made to Abraham: “I will bless ” (Gen 12:2-3); “thou shalt be a blessing ” (Gen 12:2); “ in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed ” (Gen 12:3; 28:14); “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed ” (Gen 18:18); “in blessing I will bless thee” (Gen 22:17).

The word “bless” means, “to confer benefits,” THAYER “act kindly toward,” FRIBERG and “to provide benefits, often with the implication of certain supernatural factors involved,” LOUW-NIDA

Therefore, Peter announces, God has sent Jesus to the people to bless,

Therefore, Peter announces, God has sent Jesus to the people to bless, benefit, and show kindness to them. And how will Jesus do this? What kind of benefit will He bring to the people. What advantage will He give them? In the announcement that follows, we behold the heart and core of salvation.

benefit, and show kindness to them. And how will Jesus do this? What kind of benefit will He bring to the people. What advantage will He give them? In the announcement that follows, we behold the heart and core of salvation. The chief or fundamental benefit will be affirmed, and everyone who believes will at once agree with what is said. Such individuals will therefore energetically seek to obtain the benefit. They will take the Kingdom with violence, seizing it as a prize to be obtained.

TURNING EVERYONE FROM HIS INIQUITIES

“ 26b . . . in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.” Other versions read, “by turning every one of you from your wicked ways,” NASB “in turning every one of you from your wickedness,” RSV “by turning every one of you from his sins,” BBE “by turning each of you from your evil ways,” CSB “by turning each of you back from your sinful ways,” NLT “by turning each one of you from doing evil things,” IE “by causing every one of you to turn from your wickedness,” WEYMOUTH and “in turning every one of you from your wickedness and evil ways.” AMPLIFIED

Peter has already admonished the people to turn, or “be converted” (3:19). That is, they were to amend their ways, and cease from their sinful expressions. However, though necessary, outward reform and inward resolve is not enough. There is a work required within men that can only be done by the exalted Christ. It is something that must be caused by Him! If He does not make it happen, it will not happen. What is more, this is a blessing, benefit, or advantage, of the greatest magnitude.

The key factor, however, in this nonsensical approach to sinful inclinations, is that it is “not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.” That is, such routines “lack in value in restraining sensual indulgence.” NIV They can stop neither the appetite for sin nor its expression.

What does it mean to turn a person away from their iniquities? This is not a reference to forgiveness, even though forgiveness is surely integral to salvation. This is the removal of an appetite for sin. It is the removal of a stony heart, and the granting of a soft and tender one (Ezek 36:26). It is what moves a person to truthfully confess, “I hate every false way” (Psa 119:104,128). It enables a person to fulfill the admonition, “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psa 97:10).

This is what moved Paul to say of the eruption of carnal thoughts by means of temptation, “what I hate, that do I” (Rom 7:15). It is what moves the regenerated soul to say of struggles with the flesh, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24). There is a requisite for this kind of mind-set within the walk of faith. Therefore believers are exhorted, “Abhor that which is evil” (Rom 12:9).

Where this work is not made known, a fundamental deficiency exists that will lead a person to destruction. No individual who “loves the world” loves God. There is absolutely no question about

this. The Holy Spirit has embalmed the word in print: “If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). It is therefore imperative that every person be turned away from “HIS iniquities” – the ones that “so easily beset” him (Heb 12:1).

Perhaps you have heard of someone, or knew one, who said they could not keep from doing this sin or that sin. It appeared to them that they had conquered a certain transgression, only to have it surface once again. They attempted various disciplines and routines to resolve the matter, but only to be frustrated with failure after failure. Why does this circumstance exist? It is because the person has not been turned away from their iniquity. It is still too close to them, too attractive, and too, powerful.

There is no discipline that can rectify this situation. Jesus Himself will have to bless them, in turning them away from their iniquities. Paul precisely addressed this matter in his epistle to the Colossians. They were being tempted to adopt a regimen, or systematic plan, to subdue the tendency to sin. Paul did not commend them for their disciplined approach, but rather sternly rebuked them. “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?” (Col 2:21-22). Rather than their procedures being a display of excellent resolve, it was a revelation of a possible failure of having died with Christ. If, in fact, they were “dead with Christ,” precisely why were they subjecting themselves to rules of discipline? That is the world’s approach, and has no place in the body of Christ – “the rudiments of the world.”

Further, such an approach requires “the commandments and doctrines of men.” Oh, the commandments may have a real show of intelligence. They may take the form of twelve steps, or forty days, or Journaling, or the culture of some other supposedly effective habits. However, habits, by their very nature, can never be effective by spiritual definition – for, if they were effective, they would not be a habit.

Paul cuts to the chase, and explains why such an approach to moral and spiritual purity is nothing more than foolishness. “Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col 2:23).

- They look wise, but they are not. They are characterized by “will worship,” or “self-imposed worship.” NIV The individual does not serve God out of a basic preference for Him, and thus must be directed by rules.

- Such an approach, because it is against the will and nature of the person, requires “false humility” and “harsh treatment of the body.” NIV – mere external routines that appear smart, but are tedious and laborious.

The key factor, however, in this nonsensical approach to sinful inclinations, is that it is “not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh.” That is, such routines “lack in value in restraining sensual indulgence.” NIV They can stop neither the appetite for sin nor its expression. They “have no value for holding back the constant desires of your corrupt nature,” GWN and “provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.” NLT

What, then, is the answer? Peter sets forth the blessedness of the ministry of Jesus. He turns men away from their iniquities, so that they are no longer attractive to them. That, is a sorely needed blessing. It does what no other blessing can do! In this regard, of what value are health and wealth? Can they turn a person from their iniquities? Can they take away the desire to sin, or stop sin from constantly erupting – i.e. “the superfluity of naughtiness” (James 1:21)? Indeed not!

This is a work for the exalted Christ, and God has sent him to do it! If the work is not being done, it is not because God has failed to send Jesus. Nor, indeed, is it because Jesus refuses to do it. Every

“broken and contrite heart” has reason to be of good cheer! God has gone on record on this matter. “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa 57:15). And how does He revive those precious souls? It is by sending forth his exalted Son to turn them away from their wickedness – to cause sin to become detestable to them, and righteousness to be attractive! What a marvelous ministry this is, and how essential it is for we poor mortals.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to “the mind of Christ” – expressed through a man who was filled with the Spirit, chosen by Christ, and in possession of “the keys of the Kingdom of heaven.” The record was written by a man who had “perfect understanding of all things from the very first” (Lk 1:3). The words have been inspired by the God who has “magnified” His word “above” all His name, so that what “is written” is able to make “the man of God . . . perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17).

It is not possible for a theological view that is in any way at variance with this text to be right. It cannot possibly be right to embrace such a view, for God is “a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He” (Deut 32:4). No perspective of life that makes sin tolerable, or even acceptable has so much as a grain of truth in it! If men can learn to live with what God hates, they will do so without God and without hope.

The fact that a person may have adopted a view that he does not realize is at variance with the truth does not make the condition acceptable. There is no sanctifying power in ignorance. In fact, ignorance alienates a person “from the life of God” (Eph 4:18). Therefore, wherever there are church leaders who fail to apprise the people of the truth “as it is in Jesus,” the entrance into the Kingdom of God is blocked, and both the leader and the people will fall into the ditch. It is the responsibility of every person to seek the Lord, love and pursue the truth, and prepare to meet God. The Gospel addresses all of those matters.

Just as surely as it was the responsibility of the Israelites to know, understand, and yield to what their prophets said, so it is the responsibility of every Christian to know, understand, and yield to what the apostles have said. They are Christ’s ambassadors, and it is not possible that their word is incorrect, insufficient, or in some way beyond our reach.

To neglect their words is actually to neglect “so great salvation,” and there is no escape from such a dilemma. As it is written, “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him” (Heb 2:3).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #16

THE LEADERS GRIEVED WITH PETER AND JOHN

Although the Gospel is “good news” and “glad tidings of good things,” it is not so perceived by those who have embraced a lifeless religious system. For those who are weary and heavy laden under the burden of the Law, the Gospel of Christ brings a message of hope and deliverance. However, for those who are intent upon being saved by works, and have judged their condition only by their ability to meet outward requirements, the Gospel is a threat. That is why those who attempt to serve God under a system of law rarely speak of the Gospel, the promises, the New Covenant, or the glories of justification. They are occupied with other things, being snared by a mind-set that is focused on things that appear, for there is no other way to embrace a rules-and-regulation approach to religion. The Gospel is thus offensive because it places no value on empty ceremony, but rather offers consolation to those who have a “broken and contrite spirit,” and are seeking for mercy. Neither of these qualities are highly esteemed by men, but are considered to be signs of personal weakness and inferiority. They are the opposite of loving one’s self, and thinking more highly of self than is appropriate. Yet in God’s sight, they are of great price, and draw His attention to the individual possessing them.

Even though the Law said nothing of faith, God confirmed its priority in Abraham. Moses wrote that Abraham “believed in the Lord, and He

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counted it to him for righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Later, in being prepared for deliverance from Egypt, Aaron spoke to the people, telling them everything that God had told Moses about that deliverance, while doing the signs that God had commanded to be done before them. It is written, “And the people believed : and when they heard that the LORD had visited the children of Israel, and that he had looked upon their affliction, then they bowed their heads and worshiped” (Ex 4:31). Later, when they had walked out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, they saw their enemies strewn

on the shore the Red Sea. At that time, “Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and His servant Moses” (Ex 14:31). That was the last time Moses said anything about Israel believing (Exodus through Deuteronomy).

Years later, Jehosaphat cried out to Judah “Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God , so shall ye be established; believe his prophets , so shall ye prosper” (2 Chron 20:20). However, there is no record of them ever having done so (1 Samuel through Malachi).

David, a man “after” God’s “own heart” (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22), sensed the priority of faith and acknowledged, “I had fainted, unless I had believed to see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living” (Psa 27:13). He also said, “ I believed , therefore have I spoken: I was greatly afflicted” (Psa 116:10), and “I have believed Thy commandments” (Psa 119:66). The next person said to have believed God was Daniel, far removed from David: “So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God ” (Dan 6:23). In a rare showing of the power of faith, after Jonah had preached to the city, it is written, “So the people of Nineveh believed God ” (Jonah 3:5). Also, confirming the priority of faith, God said through the prophet Habakkuk who lived after Daniel “the just shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4).

You see that, of old time, an emphasis was placed upon faith, yet it did not appear to be an emphasis. That is why people did not pick up on it. Only sensitive hearts detected the priority of faith. Because of this, for the most part, the religion of the people degenerated into nothing more than ritual. Owing to the repugnance of such an approach to God, He often rebuked Israel for their religious service (Isa 1:12-14; 66:3; Jer 6:20; Hos 8:13; Amos 5:21-23; Mal 1:6-8). Their religion became nothing more than a heartless external activity, and they were soundly and repeatedly rebuked by the prophets for it.

Now, as an example, we will see the reaction of the Jewish officials to Peter’s teaching in the Temple. They will actually be grieved by what he is saying, even though he has spoken of sins being blotted out, Jesus being sent, together with times of refreshing.

This manner continued into the time of Jesus. He also rebuked the religious leaders for their vain outward religion (Matt 23:27-28). He said that they “worshiped” in vain, being driven by traditions and the commandments of men (Matt 15:9). This was a trait among the people, and only those who broke away from mere tradition were any different.

The Apostles will face the same dreadful mind-set in the book of Acts, and it will generate hostility toward them – religious hostility. Now, as an example, we will see the reaction of the Jewish officials to Peter’s teaching in the Temple. They will actually be grieved by what he is saying, even though he has spoken of sins being blotted out, Jesus being sent, together with times of refreshing. In preparation for this, I want to say a few words about the clash of truth with stereotyped and traditional religion.

It is important that we see what causes opposition to rise from the religious sector. Many young zealots for Jesus have been confounded when they faced opposition from professing Christians. Countless preachers have been discouraged by the lack of reception of the church itself to the word of God. The records and reports of men and women of God being rejected by the imagined leaders of the church and Christian institutions are voluminous and historical. Laborers for Christ have encountered opposition from those to whom they ministered, just as the holy prophets did (2 Chron 16:10; 24:20-21; 36:16; Neh 9:26; Jer 2:30; Jer 26:8, 21-23; Amos 2:12; Matt 5:12; Acts 7:52; 1 Thess 2:15). In fact, Jesus said, “A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house” (Matt 13:57).

Why is this so? Why has religious persecution historically been among the worst and most extended

opposition of the people of God? Why must the messengers of God experience rejection from the people who say they are Christians? Who is the servant of the Lord who has not tasted of this rejection – if not in outright opposition, in being ignored and treated as though they had

leprosy? There is a reason for it, even though it is often hard to bear.

THE CLASH OF TRUTH WITH STEREOTYPED AND TRADITIONAL RELIGION

There is an inevitable clash between “the truth of God” (Rom 15:8) and “the tradition of men” (Col 2:8) – between living by faith and living according to “the works of the law” (Rom 9:32). It is not possible to serve God and avoid this conflict. Truth and tradition cannot live peaceably together, anymore than God can dwell among those who honor Him with their lips, yet their heart is “far from Him” (Matt 15:8).

Moral corruption is evil, excluding one from the kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9; Gal 5:21). However, religious corruption is even worse because it is not obviously wicked. It lulls one into sleep, so that a claim of identity can be made, while the individual is immersed in sin. Corrupt religion is like a noxious salve that, when applied to the conscience, causes the person to imagine God receives them, even while they possess no dominating appetite for His Son or His word.

When I speak of religious corruption, I am particularly referring to systems of thought among those who claim identify with the true God. As represented in Scripture, those embracing these systems of thought fall into two categories: those related to Judaism, and those professing identity with Christ. Wherever they are found, the truth of God clashes with their way of thinking, and therefore they oppose those who express that truth in words.

The following examples confirm that faithful ministers of God are often opposed by those who also claim to be the servants of God.

UNDER THE FIRST COVENANT

- **ZECHARIAH.** “And the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest, which stood above the people, and said unto them, Thus saith God, Why transgress ye the commandments of the LORD, that ye cannot prosper? because ye have forsaken the LORD, He hath also forsaken you. And they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of the LORD” (2 Chron 24:20-21).

- **JEREMIAH.** “Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the LORD had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die . . . Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy to die; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears” (Jer 26:8,11).

THE LORD JESUS

- “And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy him: for they feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine” (Mark 11:18).

- “And the Pharisees went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy Him” (Mark 3:6).

UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

- **PETER AND JOHN.** “But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:17-18).

• STEPHEN. “Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen . . . And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council” (Acts 6:12).

• PAUL . “But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him” (Acts 9:22-24).

All of these conflicts were with the professed people of God. When the pure Word of the Lord was delivered, it sharply contrasted what others were saying, and thus opposition and even persecution followed. Why do such conflicts arise?

This is because erroneous religion moves ones into the domain of “this present evil world,” and consequently into the vicinity of the devil himself (1 John 5:19). God is “the God of truth” (Isa 65:16), and can therefore have no part of a lie, misrepresentation, or delusion. Righteousness and unrighteousness cannot be co-mingled. Light and darkness can have no communion. There can be no accord between Christ and Belial. One who believes God and one who does not believe God can have no part with one another (2 Cor 6:14-15).

The clash of which I speak is not the result of two honest and good people disagreeing. It is not the outcome of two sincere people merely having differing opinions. It is rather the outcome of men embracing conflicting views, and espousing perceptions of God and His purpose that are contradictory in nature. When they are received, views that move one closer to the world cause a person to oppose those who declare the truth of God. This is a conflict that cannot be avoided, for being interlocked with this world puts one at variance with the God of heaven. That is, to be a “friend of the world” is to become “the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

There is form of friendship with the world that has the appearance of being very religious – even godly. It occurs when one chooses to embrace the traditions of men rather than the truth of God. This has a remarkable appeal. Jesus said of such people, “Ye are of your father the

However amiable men may attempt to be, those who embrace and proclaim erroneous teachings cannot be at peace with those who “speak the truth in Christ.” When the truth of God is aggressively and consistently proclaimed, it will greatly agitate those who cling to mere religious tradition.

devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). Again, “And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not” (John 8:45). And again, “I know that ye are Abraham's seed; but ye seek to kill me, because my word hath no place in you” (John 8:37).

John said of self-professing Christians who had neither embraced nor declared the truth, “They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them” (1 John 4:5). Paul said of them, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil 3:19). Speaking of their influence, Peter wrote, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Pet 2:1). Jude said of them, “These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 1:12-13).

However amiable men may attempt to be, those who embrace and proclaim erroneous teachings cannot be at peace with those who “speak the truth in Christ” (1 Tim 2:7). When the truth of God is aggressively and consistently proclaimed, it will greatly agitate those who cling to mere religious tradition.

Some, seeking to promote fleshly accord, compromise the truth, tone it down, or altogether cease to proclaim it. In order to avoid the conflict, they may even choose to speak in traditional jargon in order to maintain peace. However, the truth of God will not do its work if it is not declared. When, owing to neglect and even outright rejection, it falls in the street (Isa 59:14), it ceases to work on the hearts of men. We have a case in point in our text. Peter and John continue their preaching, and at last the religious leaders can stand it no longer. Their hearts are revealed as they burst forth in opposition to what is being said, and zealously seek to subdue it.

AS THEY SPAKE

“ 4:1 And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them.”

Peter and John have been speaking to the people, declaring that the miracle they have just witnessed was done through the exalted Christ – the One the people had “killed.” The Temple courts are ablaze with interest, as the people witness a man leaping and praising God because he has been healed. Because this whole event has extended over some period of time, it now draws the attention of the religious authorities.

AS THEY SPAKE

“And as they spake unto the people . . .” Other versions read, “ as they were speaking to the people,” NASB “ while they were speaking to the people,” NIV “While Peter and John were speaking to the people,” NRSV “While they were still speaking to the people,” NAB “While they were still talking to the people,” NJB “While they were saying this to the people,” WEYMOUTH and “While they were addressing the people.” MONTGOMERY

Peter and John have not been introduced to crowd-drawing techniques, advertizing, and the likes. It is the effective work of the Lord that first captured the people’s attention, and now they are hearing insightful and powerful preaching. Peter and John are not singing, or hyping up the people with some pretentious form of “worship.” They are proclaiming Christ, bringing Him to bear upon the immediate situation. They have not only declared how God has exalted Christ, but how wrong the people were in delivering Him to be crucified.

These holy men knew nothing of abbreviated presentations, tailored for the disinterested. They know that faith “cometh by hearing,” not by seeing, and therefore they are speaking the message through which faith “comes” – “glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:14-17). Ponder the summation of what they have said to this point.

These holy men knew nothing of abbreviated presentations, tailored for the disinterested. They know that faith “cometh by hearing,” not by seeing, and therefore they are speaking the message through which faith “comes” – “glad tidings of good things.”

The people should not have been marveling at the healing of the Lame man (3:12a).

- They should not have been looking at Peter and John as though this had been done through their own power or holiness (3:12b).
- God had glorified His Son Jesus, whom they had delivered up and denied (3:13).
- The people had denied the Holy One and Just, and desired the release of a murderer

(3:14).

- They had killed the Prince of life (3:15a).

- God raised the Prince of life from the dead, and the apostles were witnesses of Him being alive (3:15b).

- Through Jesus' name, and faith in that name, the man had been healed (3:16a).

- The faith by which the man was standing in perfect health before them had been given by the Lord (3:16b).

- Peter said he knew the people, together with their rulers, had acted in ignorance (3:17).

- God Himself had fulfilled what the prophets had said about a suffering Christ (3:18).

- The people were admonished to repent and be converted in order that their sins might be blotted out (3:19a).

- Upon their sins being blotted out, they would receive 'times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord' (3:19b).

- When their sins were removed, God would "send Jesus" to them (3:20).

- Jesus would remain in heaven until the times of "the restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (3:21).

- Moses had foretold of the coming of Jesus, affirming that the real people would hearken to Him, and those who did not would be destroyed from among the people (3:22-23).

- All of the prophets, from Samuel and those who followed him, had spoken of the days of Jesus, and His great salvation (3:24).

- The people were the children of the prophets, and therefore were obligated to hear them (3:25a).

- The people were children of the covenant God gave to Abraham, and could therefore receive the promise (3:25b).

- God had raised up Jesus from among their brethren, just as Moses had said (3:26a).

- God had sent the resurrected and enthroned Jesus to them first, in order to bless them (3:26b).

- The blessing ministered by Jesus was summarized in turning them away from their iniquities (3:26c).

The words "as they were speaking" indicate that Peter and John were continuing to elaborate on this subject. They parallel the description of Peter's preaching on the day of Pentecost: "and with many other words he did testify and exhort" (Acts 2:40).

Here we are provided a glimpse of the manner in which the truth of the Gospel is presented. Notice that Peter does not speak in parables. He does not tell stories, give homespun illustrations, or deliver dark sayings. Speaking as a man, he depends upon affirmation to get the point across – the bold and unmitigated proclamation of the truth. In so doing, he has opened the door for the working of the Holy Spirit, for the word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6:17).

PRIESTS, CAPTAIN OF THE TEMPLE, AND SADDUCEES

" . . . the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees," Other versions read, "priests

and captain of the Temple guard, and the Sadducees” NASB “the priests, the commander of the temple guard, and the Sadducees,” CSB “the priests, and the officer of the temple, and the Sadducees,” DOUAY “Some priests, the officer in charge of the temple guards, and some Sadducees,” GWN “the priests and the Sadducees and the rulers of the temple,” MRD “the priests . . . accompanied by the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees,” NJB “the priests, and the magistrate of the temple, and the Sadducees,” YLT “the chief priests, the captain of the Temple police, and the Sadducees,” LIVING and “the high priests and the military commander of the temple and the Sadducees.” AMPLIFIED

Having been aroused by the events taking place, the Temple authorities enter the scene.

The Priests

Some versions read “chief priests,” LIVING “Jewish priests,” IE and “high priests.” WILLIAMS/AMPLIFIED These were Divinely appointed servants in the Temple (2 Kgs 23:4; 2 Chron 29:16; Matt 12:5; Heb 9:6). These were probably, what is called, “chief priests” – a term used sixty-four times in the Gospels and the book of Acts. This expression – “chief priests” – is generally taken to refer to the high priests, or the ones under whom the ordinary priests served. These are thought to be former high priests, and members of their families, who maintained significant authority among the Jews. THAYER Others define “chief priests” as principal priests, most important priests. FRIBERG or members of the high priest’s family. UBS At any rate, it appears as though “the priests” do refer to these “chief priests,” who maintained significant authority within the Temple.

The Captain of the Temple

Other versions read, “captain of the Temple guard,” NIV “commander of the Temple guard,” CSB “officer of the Temple,” DOUAY “the officer in charge of the Temple,” GWN “rulers of the Temple,” MRD “magistrate of the Temple,” YLT and “the military commander of the Temple.” WILLIAMS

This office is mentioned again in chapter five: “Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow” (5:24). This is not an office defined in the Law, but was added some time later. According to history, the role of this “captain” was to maintain order in the Temple. A brief summary of the office is found in the box below.

CAPTAIN OF THE TEMPLE

The "captain of the Temple," mentioned by Luke (Acts 4:1; 5:24) in connection, with the priests, was not a military officer, but superintended the guard of priests and Levites who kept watch by night in the Temple. The "captains" mentioned in Luke 22:4, were probably his subalterns. The office appears to have existed from an early date the "priests that kept the door" (Kings 12:9; 25:18) are described by Josephus (*Ant.* 10:8, 5) as "the officers guarding the Temple:" a notice occurs in 2 Macc. 3:4, of a praefect of the Temple; this officer is styled captain by Josephus (*Ant.* 20:6, 2; War, 6:5, 3); and in the Mishna (*Middoth*, 1, § 2) "the captain of the mountain of the Temple;" his duty, as described in the place last quoted, was to visit the posts during the night, and see that the sentries were doing their duty (comp. 1 Chronicles 9:11; 2 Chronicles 31:13; 35:8, 9; Jeremiah 20:1). McCLINTOK AND STRONG ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE

The very existence of this office suggests the possibility of disruption and disorderliness in the Temple courts. In a way, it is a kind of commentary on the nature of an administration of Law. Such a system cannot remove from men the propensity to unacceptable behavior.

When Jesus was arrested by soldiers in the Garden, it was not a Roman militia, but one from the Jewish high priest. “Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and

Pharisees , cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons” (John 18:3). “And one of them smote the servant of the high priest , and cut off his right ear. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him. Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves?” (Luke 22:50-52). Perhaps the “captain” of our text was involved in that night during which “the power of darkness” was given leave to act against the Son of God.

The Sadducees

The “Sadducees” are mentioned fourteen times in Scripture (Matt 3:7; 16:1,6,11,12; 22:23,34; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27; Acts 4:1; 5:17; 23:6,7,8). Nothing good is ever said about this group of people. John the Baptist rebuked them for coming to his baptism, yet not having works “meet for repentance” (Matt 3:7-8). They tempted Jesus, desiring a sign from heaven (Matt 16:1). Jesus told His disciples to beware of their doctrine (Matt 16:6,11-12). It is pointed out that they said there was “no resurrection” (Matt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27). They are referred to as a “sect” (Acts 5:17). They aligned themselves against Paul (Acts 23:6). Not only did they deny the resurrection of the dead, they also said there was “neither angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8). This party is believed to have originated after the dominance of Greece, which was after the time of Daniel the prophet. We first read of them when they confronted John the Baptist (Matt 3:7).

The spiritually depraved condition of the Jews is confirmed by the ready acceptance of the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, the existence of angels, and the reality of spirits. In our text, we find them consorting with the priests.

CAME UPON THEM

“ . . . came upon them. ” Other versions read, “came up to,” NIV “came to them,” NRSV “confronted them,” CSB “came up to them,” NJB “came over to them,” LIVING “came down upon them,” WILLIAMS “moved towards them,” PHILLIPS “arrived,” GNB and “stood near them.” LITV

Seeing the activity in the Temple court, this motley group makes their way to Peter and John, who are in the process of speaking. To them, this is a disruption. By saying they “came upon them,” Luke means they confronted Peter and John. This is not a casual expression, as though they were walking about in the Temple court and, quite by chance, “came upon” Peter and John.

From the standpoint of language, the words “came upon” mean, “to stand over one, place oneself above,” THAYER “to stand near, be always alert to.” FRIBERG This means that the group intentionally came and stood in front of Peter and John, conducting themselves as though they were superior. This was a confrontation in which they imagined that these two men of God were accountable to them, even though they were only caring for the house of God. These men really were not in charge of it. Jesus referred the Temple complex as “My Father’s house” (John 2:16), and “a house of prayer” (Matt 21:13). When but a boy, Jesus referred to activities within the Temple as “My Father’s business” (Lk 2:49).

These men, however, did not view this area in such a manner. Like many of our day, they had chosen to lord it over those who were in the Temple area, imposing their own will and ignorance upon the people. They will thus oppose Peter and John.

THEY WERE GRIEVED THAT THEY TAUGHT THE PEOPLE

“ 2a Being grieved that they taught the people . . . ”

The Spirit will now explain why the priests, captain of the Temple, and some Sadducees confronted Peter and John. They lacked no boldness, even though an obvious display of power had been wrought

in their presence.

BEING GRIEVED

“Being grieved . . .” Other versions read, “greatly disturbed,” NKJV “much annoyed,” NRSV “sore troubled,” ASV “greatly troubled,” BBE “provoked,” CSB “being distressed,” DARBY “taking it grievously,” GENEVA “These religious authorities were were greatly annoyed,” GWN “being angry with them,” MRD “extremely annoyed,” NJB “they were upset,” IE “highly incensed,” WEYMOUTH “Being vexed and indignant through and through,” AMPLIFIED and “thoroughly incensed.” PHILLIPS

Those who have not “received the love of the truth that they might be saved,” are grieved by the truth. Their lack of appetite for, and enjoyment of the truth causes it to be abrasive to them. This is particularly true concerning the Gospel of Christ and its implications. It is possible to speak of the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and various moral requirements as specified in the Law, and enjoy a rather wide range of receptive people. If you chose to speak of marital relationships, raising children, and employees being honest and industrious, you might find many people who would agree with you, or even support your cause. However, in matters of the Kingdom of God and His great salvation, an entirely different set of circumstances arise. The Gospel of Christ is like a sword that divides the interested from the disinterested.

Many highly successful Christian ministries owe their popularity to the

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lower nature of the work and their message. While rescuing people from the street, relieving the socially deprived, and assisting in the good work of solidifying marriages are, in a sense, wholesome and good, they are not good enough to be a primary work. They are not of such a magnitude as to require the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. They do not demand an Intercessor in heaven or the indwelling of the Holy Spirit of God.

I understand that such statements are exceedingly difficult for some to believe, for they think we are set to oppose such works. However, this is not the case at all. We oppose those things as an emphasis. We oppose them as being representative of the thrust of the ministry of the church. We know this is the case because of the Scriptural accounts of how Jesus directed the church, what he told them to do, and how He is represented in the Word of God.

Take our text as a notable example of these things. As this group confronted Peter and John, they did not do so because they had healed a man who was lame from birth. If they had let the matter drop there, they would not have been opposed. The priests, captain of the Temple, and Sadducees, were not grieved because the former lame man was remaining with Peter and John, and was no longer at the gate Beautiful asking for alms.

The word “grieved” is a very strong word. It means “to be troubled, displeased, offended, and pained,” THAYER and “to be much grieved.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The thing that grieves is like a thorn to the flesh – it hurts because it is a foreign object that penetrates with great pain. It is something contrary to the heart and mind, and therefore it is offensive to hear, and obnoxious to consider.

THEY TAUGHT THE PEOPLE

“ . . . that they taught the people . . .” Other versions read, “they were teaching the people,” NASB “continued to teach the people,” WILLIAMS and “that they should be teaching the people.”

PHILLIPS

As I have already stated, the grief of these men was not caused by the man who was leaping and praising God. Here it is stated that they were grieved because Peter and John were teaching the people. The word “teach” means “to hold a discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses,” THAYER and “to instruct.” LEH This was not a discussion. It was not a question and answer session. It is not that either of those things is wrong, and God forbid that any should think so. Both of them, however, require some degree of understanding on the side of both parties. Either the person has some understanding of what is being discussed, or they are learned enough to ask the right questions.

In the case before us, the people did not have sufficient understanding to contribute to a discussion. Further, their conduct toward “the Prince of life” confirmed they did not know enough to ask the proper questions. Therefore, Peter and John were instructing them – bringing knowledge to them that they did not possess, and an understanding that was out of their reach.

As used in this text, “taught” carries the idea of delivering a discourse – not an academic discourse, but a spiritual with a sharp focus.

Technically, a discourse is a system of organized knowledge – facts that are interrelated, and contribute to the expansion of one’s understanding. In this case, the facts surrounded Jesus of Nazareth, where He came from, what He did, why He did it, and what He is doing now. Having a grasp of the facts, Peter was able to reason upon them, draw valid conclusions, and call upon men to respond in a certain way.

Throughout the book of Acts we will be subjected to a Kingdom rationale – a spiritual way of thinking. In this manner of thought, there will be certain pillars that hold up sound conclusions. There will also be a focus, which holds all of the reasoning together, leading one to an inevitable conclusion. Sound words will be employed, for unsound words can neither support nor promote the truth. What is said will precisely depict the truth as it is in Jesus, and shed light upon the eternal purpose of God.

THEY PREACHED THROUGH JESUS THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

“ 2b . . . and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.”

The particular point of contention will now be mentioned. It is important that we note precisely what is here affirmed, for it will address an error in thinking concerning preaching and teaching that is common among many.

THEY PREACHED

“ . . . and preached . . . ” Other versions read, “and proclaiming,” NASB “and preaching,” DARBY “spreading the message,” GWN “and announcing,” NET “were claiming,” LIVING “and declaring,” ISV “and should assure them,” PHILLIPS and “and announced” LITV

The preceding verse said the opponents were grieved because Peter and John “taught” (**didasko**) the people. Now Luke affirms that they had “preached” (**katagelein**). The word used here (preached) means to “announce, declare, promulgate, make known.” THAYER

The movement with which I have been identified, as well as many purported scholars, have labored the point that preaching and teaching are two different kinds of speaking for two different kinds of people: preaching is for sinners, and teaching is for believers. Those who embrace this view say the Gospel is not preached to the church, but to sinners, and teaching is for the church, not for sinners. The thought is that something that is proclaimed, or preached, is being made known for the first time.

However, this is not the case. For example, this same word is used in Paul's instruction concerning the Lord's Table: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show [proclaim, NKJV] the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor 11:26). Rather than being proclaimed only for the first time, this is a proclamation that takes place every time we eat at the Lord's Table. Paul also used "preach" and "teaching" to describe his work among believers: "Whom we preach , warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus" (Col 1:28).

In our text, the Holy Spirit uses both words to speak of the same discourse given by Peter and John. It was both preaching and teaching – proclaiming and instructing. Preaching is the proclamation of a message through which faith comes and is maintained – an affirmation of accomplished, fixed, and unchangeable realities. Teaching is instruction based upon those realities, yet it is not the means of obtaining and maintaining faith. Instruction declares the implications of the realities proclaimed, making an association between them and the responsibility of those who hear them.

Faith is based upon the affirmation of unchanging realities. It cannot be based upon commandments, exhortations, or admonitions. Correction does not produce or maintain faith. There is a vital role for all of these things, but they necessitate faith, which requires a statement of things that cannot be changed. These relate directly with the Persons of both God and Christ, what they have purposed, and what they have done.

The things that are grasped by faith are, by their very nature, offensive to the flesh – particularly religious flesh. This will be confirmed in the confrontation now described.

THROUGH JESUS

“ . . . through Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “in Jesus,” NKJV “Jesus as the example ,” BBE “ in the person of Jesus,” CSB “by Jesus,” DARBY “in Jesus name,” GENEVA “through Jesus,” GWN “ by the Messiah,” MRD “through the power of Jesus ,” IE “in the case of Jesus,” WEYMOUTH “in [the case of Jesus],” AMPLIFIED and “ had been proved through the rising of Jesus.” PHILLIPS

Peter and John had been preaching something to the people that depended upon the Lord Jesus Christ. He was the primary example of what they were affirming. He was, as well, the proof of it.

Sound preaching and teaching is based upon the foundation of Jesus Christ. The foundation of preaching and teaching cannot differ from the foundation of salvation. If the things being declared and expounded do not relate to Christ Jesus, they cannot possibly relate to the salvation that is in Him. “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 3:11). And again, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Profitable preaching and teaching is not based upon impersonal laws or principles, just as salvation itself is not based on such an approach. Doctrine must be ultimately traced back to the Son of God, in whom all the fulness of the Godhead dwells “bodily” (Col 1:19; 2:9). If teaching addresses the proper employment of knowledge, it must be remembered that “ all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). When dealing with the appropriation of resources and the attainment of goals , we are “complete in Him, which the Head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10).

What will be the subject of Apostolic exposition? What will be the point they seek to establish in the hearts of men? Why are the priests, the captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees grieved with what they are saying?

THE RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD

“ . . . the resurrection from the dead.” Other versions read, “there is the resurrection of the dead ,”

NRSV “the coming back from the dead,” BBE “the resurrection from among the dead,” DARBY “the message that the dead will come back to life,” GWN “the rising again out of the dead,” YLT “people can rise from death,” IE and “proved that the dead will rise to life.” GNB

Peter had affirmed on the day of Pentecost, and here as well, that God had raised Jesus from the dead. “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24). “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). “And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15). However, the preaching of Christ’s resurrection itself is NOT the point of this text.

Here, Peter and John were teaching the people concerning the dead being raised – “the resurrection of the dead.” They were setting forth Jesus as the cause and confirmation of all of the dead would be raised. First, Jesus Himself was raised, proving that He was superior to death, and that “the keys of hell [Hades] and death” are in His hands (Rev 1:16). Death had no power over Jesus, and therefore could not retain Him in the grave. For that reason, all of the graves will yield to Him, giving forth their dead at His final command (John 5:28). Then, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy, “the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isa 26:19). This is the resurrection that Peter and John were teaching.

The Resurrection of the Dead

The resurrection of the dead will confirm that existence in this world is not the only existence. It will corroborate that what follows time in this world is more important than what occurs in this world. Then all men will see, whether they are ready for it or not, that life in this world is the time of preparation for “the world to come” (Mk 10:30; Heb 2:5). The resurrection of the dead will be a time when every person will be summoned before the Throne of God for the day of judgment, “that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

Revelation of the Fact of the Resurrection Before Jesus

Although the disclosures were few and far between, there were revelations of the coming resurrection in ancient times.

- Before the law, Job was persuaded of the resurrection of the dead (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27).
- David testified to the coming resurrection of the dead (Psa 16:9-10; 17:15; 49:15).
- Isaiah prophesied of the dead being raised (Isa 26:8,19).
- It was revealed to Daniel that the dead would be raised (Dan 12:2-3,13).
- Hosea prophesied of the dead being ransomed from the grave, and the grave being destroyed (Hos 13:14).

Jesus Spoke of the Resurrection

Commensurate with Jesus, there was an abundance of revelation concerning the resurrection of the dead. You may recall that during His ministry, a very prominent sect among the Jews – the Sadducees – did not believe there was a resurrection of the dead (Matt 22:23). Although familiar with Scripture, they passed over the few references to the resurrection. Although other Jewish teachers and leaders did accept the fact of the resurrection, they had no difficulty receiving the Sadducees. That confirmed the general perception that the resurrection of the dead was not a critical issue. However, Jesus dashed that notion to the ground in His teaching.

- Jesus spoke of things that would occur “in the resurrection” (Matt 22:30).

- He spoke of “the resurrection of the dead” (Matt 22:31).
- He spoke of “the resurrection of the just” (Lk 14:14).
- He spoke of “the resurrection from the dead” (Lk 20:35).
- Jesus taught of “the children of the resurrection” (Lk 20:36).
- He affirmed that “the dead are raised” (Lk 20:37).
- He referred to the dead being raised “unto the resurrection of life” and “unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29).
- He said the day was coming “in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth” (John 5:28-29).
- In His lengthy teaching about Himself being the Bread of life, Jesus thrice affirmed of those who believed on Him, “and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:40,44-54).

The Apostles Expressions Concerning the Resurrection

- They preached Jesus and the resurrection. “Then certain philosophers of the some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection . . . And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead , some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter” (Acts 17:18,32).
- The resurrection of the dead is clearly, by nature and necessity, tied to hope. “And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead , both of the just and unjust” (Acts 24:15).
- There is a certain logic in the fact of the resurrection that makes it unreasonable to refuse to acknowledge it. “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ?” (Acts 26:8).
- God is identified as one that raises the dead. “(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before Him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead , and calleth those things which be not as though they were” (Rom 4:17). “But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead ” (2 Cor 1:9).
- The Gospel affirms that God raised Jesus from the dead, and that He will also raise us from the dead. “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Cor 6:14). “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus , and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:14).
- An extensive teaching about the necessity of the resurrection, and the different nature of the resurrection body is provided (1 Cor 15:12-57).
- There is a strong affirmation of both the fact and the certainty of the resurrection. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible , and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:52).
- In redemption, we are said to have been wrought by God to inhabit the resurrection body. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens . . . Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor 5:1,5)
- Paul stated his objective was to be profitably involved in resurrection. “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead ” (Phil 3:11).

- Jesus shall “change our vile body” at the resurrection, when he comes. “Who shall change our vile body , that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil 3:21).

- Immortality will to be experienced at the resurrection. “For this corruptible must put on incorruption , and this mortal must put on immortality . So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality , then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:53-54),

The resurrection of the dead will not transform our spirits. It has to do with our bodies. There will be no change of character at that time. If, while we were “in the body” of flesh and blood, we did not culture an appetite for God and the things of God, we will receive no such appetite at the resurrection.

Immortality has been brought to light through the Gospel. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel ” (2 Tim 1:9-10).

- A distortion of the understanding of the resurrection can overthrow one’s faith. “And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some ” (2 Tim 2:17-18).

- The resurrection of the dead is among the principles of the doctrine of Christ. “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead , and of eternal judgment” (Heb 6:2).

- The resurrection of the dead will precede the day of judgment. “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them : and they were judged every man according to their works” (Rev 20:13)

A Word About Preaching and Teaching

Preaching and teaching that are not done with an acute consciousness of the resurrection of the dead will eventually go astray. If men preach and teach as though this life is the only life, or as though it was the primary or most important life, they actually push men into a helpless state. Thus it is written, “If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor 15:19). If what is being declared to men in the name of Christ is not relevant in view of the resurrection of the dead, it cannot be from God. Such declarations are not to be received, honored, or in any way dignified. If men cannot make a connection between what they preach and the resurrection of the dead, then they should be not be preaching.

It is alarming how very little is being said these days concerning the resurrection of the dead. I remember a message I heard in the late 1990's by a young minister at a highly regarded preaching and teaching convention. He had been assigned the subject of the resurrection of the dead, and publicly declared that he regretted he did not have a subject with more relevancy. His statement had no apparent adverse impact on the audience. It also revealed that he had grasped very little, if any at all, of the truth of the Gospel.

It appears as though this is a very common way of thinking – that the resurrection of the dead is not germane to daily living for Christ. However, once in a while a man like the one just mentioned is

ignorant enough to actually express such foolish thinking.

We know from the general condition of the churches that there is very little understood about the resurrection of the dead. The resurrection body, concerning which considerable is said in Scripture (1 Cor 15:12-37; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Phil 3:20-21), is a matter concerning which there is very little expressed interest. This is so because very little is being said about it. Contemporary issues and fads have no come to dominate what is called preaching and teaching, and the resurrection of the dead simply does not blend with such instruction.

There Is A Reason

There is a reason for the muted preaching and teaching of our day. It is not possible to capitalize on the resurrection of the dead for earthly fame, gain, or other temporal benefits. True faith moves a person to live with the aim of attaining “unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:11). That is, that the resurrection might prove to be a blessing (the resurrection of life), and not be unto cursing (the resurrection of damnation). If, when the resurrection takes place, our spirits have not been cultured for immortality, we shall be thrust from the presence of the Lord. While we were in this world, if our minds were preeminently occupied with the things of this world, there will be no place in the glory for us.

The resurrection of the dead will not transform our spirits. It has to do with our bodies. There will be no change of character at that time. If, while we were “in the body” of flesh and blood, we did not culture an appetite for God and the things of God, we will receive no such appetite at the resurrection. When the dead are raised, death will be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:54). There will no longer be anything present that is dead or dying. The world shall have passed away, and everything that is in it. All temporal relationships will be gone. For those who had primary appetites for such things, the resurrection of the dead will be the commencement of unimaginable pain and regret. For the damned, all of the things they want will be gone, and yet their longing and preference for them will remain. Who is able to estimate the terror of such a condition?

Salvation Is To Be Seen Correctly

Men often view salvation with a mind for what can be realized in this world – and, indeed, there are present benefits to be realized. Lawful things include the remission of sins (1 John 1:7,9), times of refreshing (Acts 3:19; Tit 3:5), being taught to put off the old man and put on the new man (Eph 4:20-24), resisting and overcoming the devil (James 4:7; Rev 12:11), and receiving and enjoying lawful possessions and relationships (Mk 10:29-30). We have the opportunity to “do good unto all men, especially unto them which are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

However, these things are only benefits in view of what takes place AFTER the passing away of the present heavens and earth. If there is no resurrection of the dead, there is no real point to forgiveness, renewal, profitable relationships, or overcoming the devil. All religion, and all attempts to be and do good are foolish and pointless if the dead are not raised. All of Divine benefits presume a conclusion to life in this world, the resurrection of the dead, and the day of judgment. Behind them all there must be a keen awareness of the fact that we will give an account of ourselves to God.

It is how you fare after the heavens and earth pass away that really matters. Your concern must be for what you will be when you are raised from the dead. It is your state after the day of judgment that should concern you. What will happen to you when Jesus comes, and you see Him as He is?

The Divine appointments of death and judgment must not be forgotten (Heb 9:27).

It is how you fare after the heavens and earth pass away that really matters. Your concern must be

for what you will be when you are raised from the dead. It is your state after the day of judgment that should concern you. What will happen to you when Jesus comes, and you see Him as He is? Will you be fully conformed to His image then, or will you be targeted for “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (1 Thess 1:9)? The coming of the Lord will be a time when all things are revealed.

These considerations, and more, are what move faithful men to teach through Jesus the resurrection. A lack of this awareness is what moves men to be silent about the resurrection, giving themselves to temporal matters, and things that are more pleasing to men.

THEY LAID HANDS ON THEM

“ 3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide.”

We are witnessing the outworking of the Holy Spirit being within men. Some have imagined that once you are in Christ Jesus, that circumstance alters the whole of life, so that you will have no more trouble with your enemies. Men must take care not to speculate in such a manner as to contradict the experience of holy men. Our theology must not reflect mere human perception. It must rather be in perfect harmony with the life and doctrine of Jesus, and the life and teaching of those in whom He works.

THEY LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM

“And they laid hands on them . . . for it was now eventide.” Other versions read, “laid hands on them . . . for it was already evening,” NKJV “They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening,” NIV “they arrested them . . . for it was already evening,” NRSV “they took them . . . for it was now evening,” BBE “So the temple guards arrested them. Since it was already evening,” GWN and “So they laid hands on them (arrested them) . . . for it was already evening. AMPLIFIED

This is the first recorded persecution of Christ’s followers. It came from a collection of sinners: the religious sector (priests), the military sector (captain of the Temple), and the rationalizers (Sadducees). The priests held to corrupted religion, and were thus intimidated by the truth. The military sector saw the enthusiasm of faith as causing disruption. The rationalizers, who used human logic to interpret Scripture, saw the truth as toppling their way of thinking. These were all enemies of the faith and contradictors of truth.

These ungodly men forcibly took Peter and John, laying their hands on them. They even did so within the confines of a sacred environment. They seized and led off as prisoners [for so the words “laid hold” mean] these two holy men. In fact, they did this “as they were speaking.” NASB

These sinful men forced themselves upon Peter and John, so that, according to appearance, it looked as though they were stronger than the Apostles.

We are told that these enemies arrested Peter and John because it was late in the day. That is, things were going to be winding down in the Temple area, and they considered it too late to examine them at that time. As you know, this is a consideration that Jesus was not given. In fact, His trial was during the night.

THEY PUT THEM IN HOLD

“ . . . and put them in hold unto the next day .” Other versions read, “and put them in custody until the next day,” NKJV “and put them in jail until the next day,” NASB “and put them in ward until the morrow,” ASV “and put them in prison till the morning,” BBE “jailed them overnight,” LIVING and “put them under guard until the next day.” MKJV

As if it was not enough to forcibly seize these righteous men, this triad of wicked persons confined them over night, putting them in jail until the next day. Then, they would have more time to examine them and make a determination concerning their state. Thus the Temple discourse was cut short – or, at least, that is how it appeared.

Why? Why? Why?

How is it that chosen men, empowered by the Holy Spirit, and sent on a mission by Jesus, could be successfully opposed – at least according to appearance? How was it possible for their enemies to lay hands on them, arrest them, and place them in confinement? For those who are acquainted with the manner of the Kingdom, this is not difficult to process. However, for others who have a view of life in Christ that accents status in this world, it is more comfortable to simply ignore the whole situation.

Today we are faced with religious blusterers that speak of victory and triumph as though there really is no opposition at all. They remind us that “greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (John 4:4), but fail to accent how this is made known in overcoming opposition, not failing to have any of it. When the Lord asserts, “no weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper,” and “every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgement thou shalt condemn,” those conditions are not to be equated with smooth sailing and the absence of contradiction (Isa 54:17).

Jesus had prepared His disciples for the stark realities of spiritual warfare. “In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). And again, “But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you , delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons , being brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake” (Luke 21:12). Now, the opposition begins. You will sense from the text that it does not surprise the apostles, nor are they hesitant to know what to do.

OUR REAL CONDITION

When men are saved, God has “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated . . . into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13). However, until they die, or Jesus returns, they remain in the very world from which they have been delivered, even though they are separate from it. Their deliverance is seen in the change wrought in their character and the spiritual fellowship they have with Christ in the heavenly places (1 Cor 1:9; Eph 2:6). Yet, because they remain “in the body,” they are also in the presence of the ungodly. That circumstance sets the stage for opposition, suffering, and even persecution.

The world senses the enmity that exists between the redeemed and themselves, and therefore they lash out against them. The measure of the opposition will be as strong as the believer’s insistence on maintaining his walk with the Lord. It will erupt to the extent that the believer declares the truth. While the opposition may take different forms, and vary in its intensity, it will always be present. Light and darkness cannot avoid each other.

IN SPITE OF THE LEADERS, MANY BELIEVED ANYWAY

“ 4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”

Now, we will see if the opposition of men can cause the Word of God itself to cease to be effective. Can opposing the proclamation of the Gospel cause those with an ear for hearing to no longer profit from that word.

HOWBEIT

“Howbeit . . .” Other versions read, “ However ,” NKJV “But,” NASB “How be it,” TNT “and,” YLT and “ Nevertheless ,” PHILLIPS

“Howbeit” is like the flip side of the coin of Kingdom work. On the one side, there is aggressive opposition from those who have not received the love of the truth. On the other side, the Word does its work in the hearts of those who have received the love of the truth.

The working of the Lord continued just as though no opposition was present.

MANY WHICH HEARD THE WORD BELIEVED

“ . . . many of them which heard the word believed . . .” Other versions read, “many of those who heard the message believed,” NASB “a number of those who gave hearing to the word had faith ,” BBE “many of those who had heard the message became believers , GWN “many of those who heard the word came to believe ,” NAB “many of those who had listened to the message believed,” NIB “many of the people who heard their message believed it ,” NLT “many of the people who heard Peter and John preach believed the things that they said ,” IE and “many of those who heard the message believed (adhered to and trusted in and relied on Jesus as the Christ).” AMPLIFIED

Even though the Temple authorities were grieved by what Peter and John were preaching, many who heard their words were pleased with them and believed. The word “howbeit” indicates that the believing came after the confrontation with the priests, captain of the Temple, and Sadducees. That is, the rift with the religious authorities had no impact upon the people. They had a higher regard for the Gospel they had heard than for the officials who were opposed to it. The Temple authorities were offended by what Peter and John said, but the multitude was not. Here the word of Jesus was being fulfilled: “And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in Me” (Matt 11:6).

It is possible for the Gospel that is preached to be so marvelous that those who believe it will not be turned aside by the enemies of the faith. There are gospels – other gospels (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6) – that are not so characterized. They do not offer something that is transcendent to all that is in the world.

The Word Is Not Bound

Here is a wonderful example of the prevailing condition stated by Paul: “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound ” (2 Tim 2:9). This is why Paul could say to the Philippians, “both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace” (Phil 1:7).

Do you have something from God – a word from God, an insight, an understanding of the Gospel? Do not become discouraged if you face opponents, or those who attempt to curtail your influence. The word of God is “not bound,” and as you speak it boldly, it will yield results. God Himself has declared, “So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa 55:11).

Also, if faith comes “by hearing” (Rom 10:17), then Deity must be involved in the process, else no such statement could be made. There can be no such guarantees on something that is wholly of man and through man. Because the circumstances of man himself are uncertain, everything he says and does obtain the same characteristics. The only way to avoid this fluctuation and uncertainty is for the deeds to be “wrought in God” (John 3:21). That is, if God is actually in the matter, His influence in it makes it certain. This is why “faith COMETH by hearing” – not that it may come, or is possible to so come, but that is actually does. It is the God-factor that makes this true.

Faith does not “come” according to some law of automation, or some impersonal principle. In the Kingdom of God, this is true of everything that is effective. God has not set certain principles in motion that automatically function when certain criteria are met. Men who represent the things of God as though this was the case have not told the truth. Take, for example, the matter of sowing and reaping – something that is being greatly corrupted in contemporary Christianity (which expression is really a misnomer).

Sowing and Reaping

Some declare that if you sow this or that, it will yield an increase – no matter who you are. This is a law that God has set in motion, they affirm, and it cannot fail. They have forgotten that it is written, “Thou shalt sow, but thou shalt not reap; thou shalt tread the olives, but thou shalt not anoint thee with oil; and sweet wine, but shalt not drink wine” (Micah 6:15). And again it is written, “And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits” (Lev 26:20). Again, it is possible to reap something you did not sow: “They have sown wheat, but shall reap thorns” (Jer 12:13). One can also sow a lot, but bring in little, or store an abundant harvest in a place where it deteriorates and wastes away: “Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes” (Hag 1:6).

There are other factors entering into the equation that lie between sowing and reaping. Those factors relate personally to God Himself. First, the seed must be watered, or nurtured. Something must be done that assists the seed to do its work. Too, reaping does not come according to a law or principle, but according to the Living God. Here is how Paul stated it. “I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase” (1 Cor 3:6-7).

In our text, Peter and John both planted and watered. They planted the seed of the Gospel – things that were accomplished prior to their time. They watered that seed by interpreting what had happened before them, exhorting the people to act, and setting before them the promises of God.

Kingdom benefits cannot be realized without the planting of Kingdom seed. Such things as the blotting out of sin, times of refreshing, and the sending of Jesus will not be experienced if the Gospel is not preached. Men are not brought to a liberating knowledge of the truth (John 8:32) without the truth actually being proclaimed. Religious tradition cannot produce “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). The wisdom of men cannot induce people to believe “unto the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39). Cunningly devised fables cannot move men to “call upon the name of the Lord” (Acts 2:21).

Additionally, there is no way for a man of God to “water,” or nurture, humanly devised seed. Spiritual watering cannot be directed to the seed of traditional and lifeless religion. The principles of a religious movement cannot be watered with Scripture. Psychological appeals cannot be strengthened so that a person will believe the Gospel and call upon the name of the Lord. As rudimentary as these things may appear, they are not generally acknowledged.

From beginning to end, “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9; Psa 37:39). It is said to belong to the Lord (Psa 3:8). He is therefore referred to as “the God of salvation” (Psa 68:20). Because salvation is appropriately called an “everlasting salvation” (Isa 45:17), it can in no way be accomplished by “man, whose breath is in his nostrils” (Isa 2:22). It is God who begins the work, and it is God who will perform it “unto the day of Christ” (Phil 16). Faith itself has an “Author” and a “Finisher” as well – the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 12:2).

Now, increase will come – a harvest that will spring from the seed that was sown and watered. In this record, we are to take due note of the means the Lord used to bring the people to believe. The

words that Peter declared are the means.

ABOUT FIVE THOUSAND

“ . . . and the number of the men was about five thousand.” Other versions read, “the number of men came to about five thousand,” NKJV “the number of men grew to about five thousand,” NIV “and they numbered about five thousand,” NRSV “the number of the men came to be about five thousand,” ASV “they were now about five thousand,” BBE “and the number of the men had become about five thousand,” DARBY “and the number of the men was made five thousand,” DOUAY “and the number of the men was about five thousand,” GENEVA “so the number of men who believed grew to about 5,000,” GWN “ they were , in number, about five thousand men,” MRD “the total number of men had now risen to something like five thousand,” NJB “so the number of believers now totaled about 5,000 men, not counting women and children ,” NLT “and the number of the men was about five thousand,” TNT “There were about 5,000 men in the group of believers ,” IE “the number of adult men had now grown to be about 5,000,” WEYMOUTH “ their number grew and came to about 5,000,” AMPLIFIED and “the number of men alone rose to about five thousand.” PHILLIPS

There are two ways of viewing this count, and the commentators are by no means in agreement on it. First, this could be the number of men who believed on this occasion. Second, it could be a summation of all believers up to this point.

There are occasions in the book of Acts when the growth in the number of total disciples is the point: “the number of disciples was multiplied . . . the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem . . . “so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (6:1,7; 16:5). There are other times when it is simply said that many believed, but no number is specified: “ many believed in the Lord . . . a great number believed . . . a great multitude both of Jews and also of Greeks believed . . . as many as were ordained unto eternal life believed . . . And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude , and of the chief women not a few . . . many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized . . . and many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds” (9:42; 11:21; 13:46; 14:1; 17:4; 18:8; 19:16).

It is not the manner of Luke to provide a running total of believers, and there is no reason to suppose that he is doing so in this text. We have done no violence to the text by taking it to mean that the number of those believing on this occasion was five thousand.

It is not beyond reason to say that at this early stage of the work eight thousand men had believed the Gospel. It is as though Jerusalem was invaded with the Gospel – and to date, according to the record, it had only been formally declared in a “house” on the day of Pentecost, and in the Temple.

We must not read this text through institutional eyes, supposing that an invitation was offered at the conclusion of Peter’s discourse. We know they entered into the Temple at “the hour of prayer.” That was “the ninth hour,” or three o’clock in the afternoon (Acts 3:1). At the time they were arrested it was “eventide,” considered to be after the sun set. McCLINTOK-STRONG At the earliest, therefore, the arrest took place at 6:00 PM. There is reason to believe it could even have been later, after darkness was beginning to settle over the land. Peter and John had been speaking for a minimum of about three hours, possibly more. During this time, around 5,000 men believed what they were preaching. They did not change their minds when Peter and John were arrested.

It is not beyond reason to say that at this early stage of the work eight thousand men had believed the Gospel. It is as though Jerusalem was invaded with the Gospel – and to date, according to the record, it had only been formally declared in a “house” on the day of Pentecost, and in the Temple. Years later James will draw Paul’s attention to the great number of Jews in Jerusalem who had

believed. “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20). The word translated “ many thousands” is an indefinite number similar to our word “myriad.” It is translated “innumerable company” in Hebrews 12:22, and “ten thousands” in Jude 1:14).

I do not want to leave this point without accenting the remarkable and refreshing growth of the body of Christ throughout the book of Acts. It is a phenomenon that testifies to the power of the Gospel of Christ, and the nature of salvation as well. It is worthy of our attention.

- “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls ” (Acts 2:41).
- “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).
- “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand ” (Acts 4:4).
- “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women)” (Acts 5:14).
- “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied . . . ” (Acts 6:1).
- “And the word of God increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly ; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith ” (Acts 6:7).
- “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women ” (Acts 8:12).
- “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied ” (Acts 9:31).
- “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord ” (Acts 11:21).
- “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord ” (Acts 11:24).
- “But the word of God grew and multiplied ” (Acts 12:24).
- “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed . And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region ” (Acts 13:48-49).
- “And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5).
- “And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed ” (Acts 19:18-20).

Why Did This Occur?

What was the reason for this remarkable burst of spiritual life? Is this something intended only to characterize the beginning of the church? Is it something that, by its very nature, would eventually wane? In the New Covenant is spiritual life at its strongest at the beginning? Is there anything about salvation that places the stress upon its start? Are spiritual beginnings noted for their largeness, only to be followed by decline and dissipation?

I must acknowledge that this is the nature of religious movements. They are their best in their beginning, but tend to diminish in both power and content. But that is not the subject of discussion here. In the book of Acts we are dealing with real beginnings, not fabled or traditional ones. The prophets foretold a this day of salvation as involving a Kingdom that would continue to increase. They did not make the slightest suggestion that it would be characterized by diminishment.

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

- “Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psa 2:8).

- “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth . They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and His enemies shall lick the dust. The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents : the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. Yea, all kings shall fall down before Him: all nations shall serve Him ” (Psa 72:8-11).

- “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever ” (Dan 2:44).

The beginning of this Kingdom revealed its nature, or character. It would not wax and wane. Wherever its seed was sown, God would bring results.

Jesus also confirmed it was the nature of the Kingdom to grow – to advance and to increase .

As soon as men attempt to mingle that Gospel with human wisdom, ignoble motives, and institutional objectives, the power is removed, and the results are not as they are in this text.

“The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs , and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matt 13:31-32).

- “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened ” (Matt 13:33).

Add to this the increasing nature of spiritual life. Those in Christ are “being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” NRSV (2 Cor 3:18). Speaking of the era of the New Covenant, the Psalmist wrote, “They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God” (Psa 84:7). The strength of those who wait upon the Lord is renewed, not depleted (Isa 40:31).

All of this contradicts the notion that the life of the church itself, or the power of the Gospel, tends to degenerate. I do not know how a person could substantiate the view that the church began strong, and the Gospel was unusually effective at first, only to have things decline to an imagined state of normalcy after some time.

If there is a difference in the apparent success of preaching today, it cannot be owing to the nature of the Gospel or the manner in which the Lord works through that Gospel. It is not possible that those things could change!

By “institutionalism,” I mean a lifeless approach to religion that relies upon human organization, rules, and regulations. Today, the power of religion is thought to be in its external structure and hierarchical authority. It is characterized by form without power, and does not require the involvement of the heart.

Institutionalism has greatly impacted how men think about the power of the Gospel. Because God is left out of the reasoning process, men overlook what the Gospel can do. The whole city of Samaria, for example, gave heed to the preaching of Philip “with one accord” (Acts 8:5-8). All of this happened with opponents, adversaries, and even persecution. Yet, because the message was pure, and those delivering it were holy, it yielded great increase.

It is good for us to behold what takes place among believers and opponents when the pure Gospel is preached. As soon as men attempt to mingle that Gospel with human wisdom, ignoble motives, and institutional objectives, the power is removed, and the results are not as they are in this text. When men “turn away their ears from the truth,” embracing “fables,” they also abandon its power (2 Tim 4:4). When “after their own lusts,” they “heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears,” the work of God will no longer be done among them (2 Tim 4:3). Then, truth will fall in the streets, and integrity will not be able to enter (Isa 59:14).

The Identity of the People

Note how these people are identified: “many of them which heard the word believed.” This was not a preliminary, or preparatory activity, for a count was taken of them. This would not be acceptable language among many professing Christians. On the day of Pentecost it was stated, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). Here, however, “believed” describes the response of the people. It is a precise, accurate and comprehensive description of the people.

Peter had previously told these people, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you” (Acts 3:19-20). By saying the people “believed,” we are to understand that they did what Peter had commanded them to do.

However, within the average American and European church, people are not noted for being “believers” – firmly convinced of the Person of Christ, and cleaving to Him with purpose of heart. The obedience that was characteristic of believers in Scripture is not all characteristic of contemporary Christians.

The word “believed” is not descriptive of a step in a procedure or plan. It rather depicts a response in which the message is heartily embraced. In such a case, the individual is eager to do whatever the Lord requires, and always does so.

The word “believed” is used to describe those who became aligned with the Lord Jesus Christ.

- “And all that believed were together, and had all things common” (Acts 2:44).
- “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).
- “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32).
- “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

- “And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42).
- “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17).
- “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).
- “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).
- “And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:23).
- “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few” (Acts 17:4).
- “Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:12).
- “Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:34).
- “And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).
- “And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds” (Acts 19:18).

Those in Christ are also referred to as “believers” (Acts 5:14; 1 Tim 4:12).

Why Mention This?

This is so elementary some might wonder why I have mentioned it at all. However, within the average American and European church, people are not noted for being “believers” – firmly convinced of the Person of Christ, and cleaving to Him with purpose of heart. The obedience that was characteristic of believers in Scripture is not all characteristic of contemporary Christians. It is not evident in their lives or their assemblies. Further, it does not appear that there are many efforts being expended to produce believers and strengthen faith.

By its very nature a law-mentality is opposed to believing, for “the law is not of faith,” or, “is not based upon faith” NIV (Gal 3:12). Wherever there is a reliance upon rules and procedures, there is an abrasiveness to anything that requires or promotes faith. A system of thought that does not require faith will not allow the one embracing it to live by faith. Such a posture becomes impossible.

Also, this unacceptable condition exists wherever there is reliance upon human wisdom. In such a case, there is no perceived need for much of the word of God, or assemblies devoted to the edification of the saints. That, in my judgment, is the primary reason for the great difference between the preaching and responses in the book of Acts and our times. In Acts, there was a very real unity of the people with the Christ. Through the Spirit, they were in Christ, and Christ was in them.

THE OPPONENTS GATHER TOGETHER

“ 5 And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.”

Now, in a remarkable display of unity, the wicked join together to oppose the truth of Christ and those who are proclaiming it. However, as Solomon well said, “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered” (Prov 11:21). We will see how their efforts will fall, and whether or not they will be able to stop the spread of the Gospel.

The nature of the flesh is to gather the wicked together against the things of God. However, the amalgamation of the wicked can never remove the truth of God from a people or society. If truth falls in the street, or fails (Isa 59:14-15), it will not be because of its enemies! Such a condition can only come if those responsible for carrying the truth cease to do so, no longer being “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). No law can effectively cause the Gospel to cease to be preached, or prayer to be made. It is only when the professing church becomes weak and emaciated that it will become powerless. Our text will confirm that this is the case.

The answer to a godless society is not Christian politicians, for government has not been charged with the dissemination of the truth of God. There is certainly nothing wrong with rallying Christians to vote for noble causes and good men. However, if the church remains in a weakened, ignorant, and lifeless state, it is all for nought. Government cannot compensate for that.

THEIR RULERS, AND ELDERS, AND SCRIBES

“And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes . . .” Other versions read, “rulers, elders, and teachers of the Law,” NIV “rulers and those in authority and the scribes,” BBE “their princes, and ancients, and scribes,” DOUAY “the Jewish rulers, leaders, and scribes,” GWN “their rulers, elders, and experts in the law,” NET “the council of all the rulers and elders and teachers of religious law,” NLT “the leading members of the council, the elders, and the scribes,” WILLIAMS “their magistrates and elders and scribes,” AMPLIFIED and “members of the council, the elders and scribes.” PHILLIPS

These three classes composed the Sanhedrin, ROBERTSON This was “the supreme council of the Jewish nation in and before the time of Christ.” McCLINTOK & STRONG The basis for its formation is said to be Numbers 11:16. “And the LORD said unto Moses, Gather unto me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom thou knowest to be the elders of the people, and officers over them; and bring them unto the tabernacle of the congregation, that they may stand there with thee.” The members of the Sanhedrin, seventy in number, represented three classes of people: priests (24), elders (24), and scribes (22). The priests had expertise in holy procedures and the Temple activities. The elders were noted for their godly wisdom. The scribes were noted for their expertise in the Law and its application.

SANHEDRIN QUALIFICATIONS

The qualifications for membership were both very minute and very numerous. The applicant had to be morally and physically blameless. He had to be middle aged, tall, good looking, wealthy, learned (both in the divine law and diverse branches of profane science, such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy, magic, idolatry, etc.), in order that he might be able to judge in these matters. He was required to know several languages, so that the Sanhedrin might not be dependent upon an interpreter in case any foreigner or foreign question came before them (*Menachoth*, 65 a; *Sanhedrin*, 17 a; Maimonides, *Iad Ha-Chezaka*, *Hilchoth Sanhedrin*, 2, 1-8).

McCLINTOK & STRONGS CYCLOPEDIA

This group of people is frequently referred to as a gathering of the priests, elders, and scribes (Matthew 26:3, 57, 59; 27:41; Mark 8:31; 11:27; 14:43; Luke 9:22; 20:1; 22:66; Acts 5:1; 6:12; 22:30; 25:15). It is also referred to as “the council” (Matt 26:59; Acts 4:15; ; 5:21,27, 34; 6:12,15).

With all of its deficiencies, it ought to be noted that wisdom and Scriptural expertise was required

in this body of people. There seemed to be an overriding awareness that there was a unique body of knowledge within the Old Covenant Scriptures and ceremonies. Although that knowledge was greatly corrupted by the leaders, it represents a perspective that has been largely lost in the modern church.

ANNAS, CAIAPHAS, JOHN, AND ALEXANDER

“ 6 And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander . . . ” Other versions read, and “with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, Jonathan, Alexander.” NJB

Annas and Caiaphas

Annas was the father-in-law of Caiaphas (John 18:13), and was the previous high priest. Their tenure as high priests overlapped, as confirmed by Luke 3:2: “Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests.” Caiaphas was considered to be the official high priest (Matt 26:3,57; John 11:49). When Jesus was placed on trial, Annas, the outgoing high priest, had sent Him bound to Caiaphas, the new high priest (John 18:24).

John and Alexander

We are not told any more of these two men. It is certain that they were Jews, being member of the Jewish high council. Some commentators identify them as two rabbis, or teachers of the law, that were prominent among the people at that time. The Scriptures, however, provide no further details concerning them.

However, there is something to be seen here. It is as though the Holy Spirit is confirming that this council, together with all of its members, was duly noted in the heavens. They shall all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an account for their involvement in this event.

AS MANY AS WERE KINDRED OF THE HIGH PRIEST

“ . . . and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest . . . ” Other

Once again, I want to emphasize the hostility that exists between the Spirit and the flesh, between truth and error, and between believers and unbelievers . . . Whatever causes a person to be an enmity with God also produces hostility against His people.

versions read, “as many as were of the family of the high priest,” NKJV “and all who were of high-priestly descent,” NASB “and other man of the high priest’s family,” NIV “and all the relations of the high priest,” BBE “the rest of the chief priest’s family were present,” GWN “all who were of the high-priestly class,” NAB “all who were of high-priestly descent,” NAU “all the members of the high-priestly families,” NJB “everyone from the high priest’s family was there,” IE and “all others who belonged to the high priestly relationship.” AMPLIFIED

This is a continued explanation of those who made up the categories of priests, elders, and scribes. It particularly expands on “the priests,” identifying them as being chosen from among the relatives of the high priests, Annas and Caiaphas. As was characteristic under the Old Covenant, fleshly lineage was of great significance. Under Christ, however, it counts for nothing.

GATHERED TOGETHER AT JERUSALEM

“ . . . were gathered together at Jerusalem.” Other versions read, “met in Jerusalem,” NIV “assembled in Jerusalem,” NRSV “came together in Jerusalem,” BBE “assembled,” MRD and “held a meeting in Jerusalem.” NJB

It is apparent from the text that this meeting was called especially to deal with Peter and John. This

is no doubt why those who arrested Peter and John put them in jail overnight, waiting until this group convened. They thought nothing of the comfort of Peter and John, but thought only of their own convenience. Flesh thinks like that.

Some of these people, if not all of them, had probably been among “the rulers” who had “gathered together against the Lord and His Christ” (Acts 4:26-27). At that time, they had fulfilled the second Psalm: “Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psa 2:3). Their gathering had been in vain at that time, and it would be the same on this occasion.

Once again, I want to emphasize the hostility that exists between the Spirit and the flesh, between truth and error, and between believers and unbelievers. Paul stated the case well when he wrote, “for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols?” (2 Cor 6:14-16).

Whatever causes a person to be an enemy with God also produces hostility against His people.

BY WHAT POWER OF NAME HAVE YOU DONE THIS?

“ 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? ”

With the Jewish council now convened, Peter and John will be questioned as though they were inferior to their judges. Their critics will present themselves as having authority over the situation.

THEY SET THEM IN THE MIDST

“And when they had set them in the midst . . .” Other versions read, “ placed them in the center,” NASB “had Peter and John brought before them,” NIV “ made the prisoners stand in their midst,” NRSV “sending for Peter and John,” BBE “after they had Peter and John stand before them,” CSB “they made Peter and John stand in front of them,” GWN “brought them into their presence,” NAB “made the prisoners stand in the middle ,” NJB “ brought in the two disciples,” NLT and “They had the apostles brought in to stand before them.” PHILLIPS

This group had convened to examine Peter and John, and now they have them brought before the council. This is what they did to Jesus Himself (Lk 22:54). Later they would do the same thing to Stephen (Acts 6:12). There were some in the church at Corinth that dared to examine Paul (1 Cor 9:3). Jeremiah was brought before Pashue, chief governor in the house of the Lord, as though Jeremiah was subject to him (Jer 20:1-3).

The language speaks of a vigorous interrogation, not the asking of a few casual questions. Further, there is a sense in which what they are asking is not honest. They are seeking an occasion to condemn, and do not have so much as a spark of interest in the truth.

Speaking of this kind of phenomenon Paul once wrote, “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Cor 4:9). Jesus did not choose the apostles and endue them with power in order that they might become famous, or be approved of men. Those who seek a career in religion must take this into consideration. In Christ, the ministry is not about obtaining financial security and becoming a celebrity of some sort. Those who faithfully serve the Lord might very well find themselves brought before the tribunals of men, and treated as though they were subject to institutional assessments.

Referring to the frequent reaction of religious men to his labors, Paul wrote, “And labor, working with our own hands: being reviled , we bless; being persecuted , we suffer it: Being defamed , we

entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day ” (1 Cor 4:12-13). Paul alluded to a statement made by Jeremiah: “Thou hast made us as the offscouring and refuse in the midst of the people” (Lam 3:45). Jeremiah referred to the punishment of Israel for walking in their own sinful ways. Paul was speaking of the effect of his ministry and message upon Jewish leaders.

In our text Peter and John are being treated as though they were the “filth of the world,” having dared to come into the Temple area preaching a Christ-centered message, and doing works to which the leaders were not accustomed. It will appear on the surface as though they had no power at all, even though they had just healed a man who was crippled from his mother’s womb.

Among other things, this confirms that God does not give power to men in order to get the attention of people or break down hostilities against the truth. Heaven’s intent is the promotion of the glory of God, and the exposition of the Lord Jesus Christ. Where men entertain little or no interest in either of these, Christ’s co-laborers will be viewed as intruders, and enemies of the religious systems that have been embraced.

THEY ASKED

“ . . . they asked . . . ” Other versions read, “they began to inquire,” NASB “ began to question them,” NIV “they asked the question,” CSB “they interrogated them,” MRD “ questioned them,” NAB “ began to interrogate them,” NJB “ demanded ,” NLT “they were inquiring ,” YLT “the Council demanded ,” LIVING “asked them again and again ,” IE “began asking ,” ISV “repeatedly inquired of them,” WILLIAMS “ repeatedly demanded,” AMPLIFIED and “they asked them formally .” PHILLIPS

The language speaks of a vigorous interrogation, not the asking of a few casual questions. Further, there is a sense in which what they are asking is not honest. They are seeking an occasion to condemn, and do not have so much as a spark of interest in the truth.

The hypocrisy of this council will be seen in the questions that they ask. The Temple authorities were grieved because Peter and John “taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2). That is what occasioned this whole event. Yet, they will not ask a word about the resurrection of Christ, or the resurrection of the dead – not a word.

BY WHAT POWER?

“By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” Other versions read, “By what power, or by whose authority have you done this,” LIVING “ How did you make this crippled man well? What name did you use? By whose authority did you do this?” IE “By what sort of power and authority have you done this?” WILLIAMS “By what sort of power or by what kind of authority did [such people as] you do this [healing]?” AMPLIFIED ““How did you do this? What power do you have or whose name did you use?” GNB and “By what sort of power, or by what sort of name did you do this?” LITV

Keep in mind that this event was preceded by approximately three and a half years of Christ’s ministry. It was one in which He was “approved of God” among them “by miracles and wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22). Jesus had gone about “doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). Jesus ministry was public – in the Temple, in the synagogues, and among the people. Himself a Pharisee, Nicodemus had told Jesus “no man can do these miracles that Thou doest except God be with Him” (John 3:2). Great multitudes had followed Jesus “because they saw His miracles which He did on them that were diseased” (John 6:2). During Jesus’ ministry, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered in a council, “and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles ” (John 11:47). Yet now, they speak as though they had never been privy to a miracle such

as the one wrought by Peter and John.

The issue here was really not the miracle. This is only a subterfuge. Peter and John have broke with religious convention, and it has upset those who did not have faith. It will become evident that these men have no interest in the man upon whom this miracle was wrought. They have not been relieved to see the oppressed liberated. They did not welcome his praise in the Temple courts. They found not one spark of delight in the earnest inquiry of the multitude, and were even agitated that they had dared to believe in the Temple courts.

They did not deny that a mighty work had been done. The “this” to which they refer is the healing of the lame man. They did not even insinuate that there was anything fake about it. This was a real healing, and they knew it.

When Jesus was among men, no doubt some of the very ones who were interrogating Peter and John, He was charged with doing miracles through the power of Satan. “But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils” (Matt 12:24). And again, “But some of them said, He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils” (Luke 11:15). They could not deny that a mighty work had been done, so they sought to associate it with an evil source.

By what Power?

A similar inquiry was made of Jesus by the chief priests and elders, who also asked the question when Jesus was teaching the people. “By what authority doest Thou these things? and who gave Thee this authority?” (Matt 21:23). Jesus exposed their hypocrisy by refusing to answer their question. “And Jesus answered and said unto them, I also will ask you one thing, which if ye tell Me, I in like wise will tell you by what authority I do these things. The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; He will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And He said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things ” (Matt 21:24-27).

The very asking of this question confirmed that the Jewish leaders could not merely dismiss the healing of the

They did not deny that a mighty work had been done. The “this” to which they refer is the healing of the lame man. They did not even insinuate that there was anything fake about it. This was a real healing, and they knew it.

lame man as though it did not occur. Later these very men will observe, “What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it ” (Acts 4:16). That is why they did not question the reality of the work. They rather asked about the power and authority through which this work was done.

These men knew the authority had not come from them, and yet they assumed that all rights to teach the people should originate with them. They could not accept an authority outside of their own. I do not doubt that they were seeking to intimidate Peter and John, causing them to back away from their work because of a fear of this council. The thought did not seem to occur to them that the miracle itself confirmed that Peter and John were empowered by the God of heaven.

Thus these men sought to silence God’s messengers by pressing their own imagined authority upon them. They sought to conform them to religious protocol and institutionalism. The council, or Sanhedrin, felt that only they could authorize people to speak in the name of the Lord, or teach the people. If we find any element of the fear of man in Peter and John, they will succumb to their

interrogators.

This kind of trial did not end with the ministry of the apostles. To this very day, this spirit is found within the churches and Christian institutions. Men set themselves up as authorities, and seek to bind their own depraved wills upon servants of the Lord. I remember my own encounter with such a tribunal when but a young preacher. I was summoned before these judges to give an account for preaching on the street without being given official approval to do so. It was an intimidating and embarrassing experience for me. I was treated as though I was seeking to destroy their imagined kingdom, even though there was not a fragment of truth in their supposition. The outcome of the whole affair was my expulsion from the institution, and the successful barring of my presence from any of the churches sanctioned by that institution. That ostracization lasted for thirty years. Yet, it proved to be the means through which Jesus rescued me from lifeless religion.

There are countless ministers of the Gospel who have been ordered not to preach on this or that subject – or perhaps, not to preach at all. Councils of elders, church boards, and the likes, have sat in judgment upon men who declared truth that was perceived as threatening to the institution. This is so common that anyone who has labored in preaching and teaching has confronted some form of this kind of opposition. Like Peter and John, they have confronted men who could not conceive anything being valid that was at variance with their own stunted views.

We must learn from this text that it is never appropriate to yield to such men, as though their pretentious authority was sanctioned by God. When it comes to the body of Christ and the preaching and teaching of the Gospel, God recognizes no authority that seeks to neutralize or forbid the propagation of the truth. No God-ordained office has any authority to suppress the truth. It matters not if we are speaking of the Sanhedrin or a board of elders.

Peter's response to these men will display how faith reacts to opposition. It will confirm that it is never right to yield to those who are opposed to the truth. God's servants must speak boldly against such men in order that the truth be not blasphemed. That is why Paul wrote to young Timothy, "Do not receive an accusation against an elder except from two or three witnesses. Those who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" (1 Tim 5:19-20). The Amplified Bible reads, "Listen to no accusation [presented before a judge] against an elder unless it is confirmed by the testimony of two or three witnesses. As for those who are guilty and persist in sin, rebuke and admonish them in the presence of all, so that the rest may be warned and stand in wholesome awe and fear." Strong words, indeed, and yet they are to be strictly heeded.

No religious man is worthy honored who is opposed to the truth and those to speak it.

CONCLUSION

We are being exposed to Kingdom realities. When men of God are granted insight into the truth, and are empowered by Jesus to preach it with power, opposition will be encountered. Whatever you may think about Satan fleeing, do not entertain the notion that he is afraid of you, or will back away from you, allowing you to freely preach. God can cause this to happen, to be sure, but he does not always do so, as our text confirms. It is true that He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). However, that does not mean your enemies will never have any influence over your circumstances. Peter and John may be arrested while they are speaking the truth to the people (Acts 4:3). Stephen may be stoned by a religious body (Acts 7:59). Paul may be incarcerated and chained, and eventually beheaded (Acts 24:27; 2 Tim 1:16; 2 Tim 4:6-7). Peter may be arrested and finally put to death (2 Pet 1:14-15). John may be exiled on the Isle of Patmos because he was preaching the Word of God (Rev 1:9). Timothy may be put into prison (Heb 13:23).

We must purge from our thinking the notion that well being equals blessing. While we do not seek to be opposed, we must not be alarmed when we are. Even though we endeavor to be peaceable (1

Pet 3:11), and not to intentionally offend the people (1 Cor 10:32), the truth has an abrasive effect upon all who do not love it.

Let all who seek to speak for Christ come to an understanding of the enmity of religious institutionalism – when the promotion of the organization supercedes a quest to glorify God. When life in this world is unduely exalted – for whatever reason – at some point, the truth of God will be opposed, together with those who declare it.

These observations are not theoretical. They are actually lived out in the book of Acts. We are made privy to the conduct of the tares when they are in the field with the wheat. It will become apparent what happens when good and bad fish are caught in the same net. When the children of the wicked one and the children of the kingdom confront each other, there is always friction, opposition, and conflict.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 12/8/2006. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The Seventeenth lesson will cover verses 8 through 14 of the fourth chapter: “PETER RESPONDS TO THE LEADERS.”

Peter and John are not intimidated by the opposing leaders. This is because they have embraced the message they are delivering, and have proved by their own experience that it is everything they have affirmed. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #17

PETER RESPONDS TO THE LEADERS

“ 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, 9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. 11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. 12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. 13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. 14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. ” (Acts 4:8-14)

INTRODUCTION

Peter and John have been confronted by Jewish leaders from the Temple: the priests, the captain of the Temple guard, and the Sadducees. They have been asked concerning the power or authority under which they operated. This had particular regard to the healing of the lame man – a man with whom all the people were acquainted.

NO WORLDLY HELP AVAILABLE

Peter and John do not have an organization to represent them. There is no help group that has been set up to assist those oppressed by the authorities. What is happening to them is outside of the provisions of Roman law. They can make no appeal to Temple precedent, and the rights of men who heal people lame from birth. This is an occasion in which faith is their only asset. They cannot depend upon oratorical skills, and rely upon certain Temple friendships that have been developed over the years. There is no known defender of Temple rights, or some individual or group to champion the

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- **PETER, FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT (4:8)**
- **IF WE ARE BEING EXAMINED (4:9)**
- **BE IT KNOWN UNTO YOU (4:10a)**
- **HERE IS WHAT YOU DID, AND HERE IS WHAT GOD DID (4:10b)**
- **THIS IS THE STONE YOU SET AT NOUGHT (4:11)**
- **NO SALVATION OUTSIDE OF JESUS CHRIST (4:12)**
- **THEY SAW PETER AND JOHN AND TOOK NOTE OF THEM (4:13)**
- **THEY COULD SAY NOTHING AGAINST IT (4:14)**
- **CONCLUSION**

exercise of public religious liberties. There are no friends in the Roman senate who can intervene for Peter and John, negating the influence of the religious leaders. All of the supposed provisions for social and individual human rights of an imagined Christian nation are non-existent at this time.

FELLOWSHIP WITH CHRIST IS REQUIRED TO DO HIS WORK

What Peter and John do now will depend wholly upon the fellowship they have with Christ, and whether or not they are suitable vessels through whom He can speak and work. Their only effective resources will come through their faith. Of course, this is the manner of the Kingdom, and no work for God is ever done any other way. However, because of the prominence of carnal religion, scarcely a Christian leader is ever brought to the point where these things are clearly seen. There is too much fleshly help that is held out as available to opposed and oppressed believers.

For those who are working for the Lord – doing the real work of the Kingdom – a wholly different set of circumstances exist. If they are close to Christ, they will be sustained. If they are not close to Him, they will not be sustained. If they are abiding in Christ, the resources that are required will be ministered to them. If they are not abiding in Him, these resources will not be given to them. If they are laboring together with Christ, they will be granted what is necessary for those labors. If they are not laboring together with Christ, having rather adopted their own agenda, they will not be given such necessities. If their faith is strong, they will stand. If their faith is not strong, they will not stand. If they fear God more than men, He will come to their aid. If they fear men, they will fall into a snare. If they are holding fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope, they will not be intimidated. If they are not holding these fast, they will be shaken by opposition.

The work of Christ cannot be done apart from an immediate association with Him by faith. It is not so much that this is owing to a moral law, so that it is simply wrong to attempt to do the work of God apart from Christ. Rather, it is that it is impossible to do God's work apart from a lively affiliation with His Son. The body of Christ, whether individual members or as a whole, cannot function acceptably or effectively apart from its Head. All nourishment and required aptitudes are ministered "from the Head" as the members are holding to Him. As it is written: "And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God" (Col 2:19).

If the connection between the members and the Head is not being maintained, the work being done will fall to the ground. The work simply cannot be done without the involvement of the One for whom it is being done. Further, that involvement can be no stronger than the faith through which it is realized.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF NOT FEEDING THE FLOCK OF GOD

Right here the seriousness of not feeding the flock of God becomes more evident. Where edification

is not occurring, the people are actually becoming unsuitable vessels for the honor of God. Importing praise leaders, motivational gurus, and organizational experts will not make the people usable, or “meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). A people who are not themselves being blessed by the Lord cannot, in any sense, become a source of genuine blessing to others.

There are “good works” that God has “before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Our involvement in those works, however, requires men to be “created in Christ Jesus.” That creation is “unto,” or in order to, the doing of the specified pre-ordained works. I am not sure that a suitable defense can be made for these being generic work’s that are only general in nature, and are common to all saints. To be sure, there are works like that, described as “doing good unto all men, specially those of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). However, it seems to me that being “prepared unto every good work” carries the idea of specificity – a particular deed at a particular time, and regarding a particular people.

THE REQUIREMENT FOR HOLINESS

All believers are required to be holy – and the requirement is declared with unusual clarity. “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy ” (1 Pet 1:15-16). “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ” (Eph 5:1). “For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness ” (1 Thess 4:7). “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord ” (Heb 12:14).

In Christ God has provided all of the resources required to be holy in every aspect of our lives. There is really only one basic reason for a professing Christian to lack holiness – self interests have taken the precedence over the will of the Lord. This condition is a contradiction of new creaturehood (2 Cor 5:17). It belies any claim to newness of life (Rom 6:4). A lack of holiness is opposed to a condition in which the stony heart has been removed and a heart of flesh has been given (Ezek 36:26).

There are consequences for refusing to be holy. In a nutshell, those results may be summarized like this: all of the benefits associated with salvation are forfeited. Godlike qualities cannot be poured into un-godlike people.

I know that much of what is paraded as the work of the Lord fails to make these associations. The vitality and effectiveness of spiritual life have been upstaged by the traditions and institutions of men. Certain organizers and motivators, moved by the prevailing ignorance that is resident in the professed church, have crept in to market their wares, and they have been very well received.

But let me get more to the point of these words. I am saying that the account of Peter and John answering the Jewish council cannot fit into the modern view of the church, giving answers, and standing up for Christ. They conducted themselves in a manner that is at total variance with many of the ways that are being taught within the professed church. You sense in their reply that they are not placing a high value on their own lives, being accepted by their peers, or appearing successful before men – all of which rank very high in the institutional church. They are keenly aware of the sharp conflict between flesh and Spirit, this world and the world to come, and life and death. They are not trying to bridge the gap between the spiritually minded and the carnally minded. Their aim is not to impress men or be approved by them.

PETER, FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ 4:8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel.”

Concerning the healing of the man lame from birth, Peter and John have been asked, “By what

power, or by what name have ye done this?" (4:7). Peter will now answer this question. He will not do so with his own welfare in mind, but will speak for the glory of the Lord, for he is His witness.

PETER, FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them . . .” Other versions read, “ being full of the Holy Spirit,” BBE “ because he was filled with the Holy Spirit,” GWN “full of the Holy Ghost,” PNT “ having been filled with the Holy Spirit,” YLT and “[because he was] filled with [and controlled by] the Holy Spirit. AMPLIFIED

This is now the second time a point is made of the servants of God being “filled with the Spirit” (2:4; 4:8). The point of the text does not seem to be that Peter became filled at this time, but that he had been filled previously, and the filling had remained. What is recorded of Peter must be perceived as him speaking through the Holy spirit, and not through the flesh.

- His preaching on the day of Pentecost (2:14-37).
- His answer to the inquirers on the day of Pentecost (2:37-40).
- The “apostles’ doctrine” in which the early believers continued (2:42).
- Peter’s words to the man born lame (3:6).
- Peter’s words to the people who noted the miracle of the healing of the lame man, and came running to them (3:12-26).

What Does It Mean to Be

Filled with the Spirit?

What is involved in a person being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” Is this an experience that throws one into a subconscious state, where the mind and the will are basically unproductive – a state where the person becomes like a robot, speaking independently of the involvement of the human spirit?

First, the “Filler” is the Lord Jesus. He is the One who determines the recipient of the Holy Spirit, then sends Him to the individual. There is no automatic process involved in being filled with the Spirit that excludes the involvement of the One who gives the Spirit. Therefore, in his explanation of the initial pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, with which individuals were filled, Peter declared, “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear ” (Acts 2:33).

Second, being filled with the Holy Spirit involves the sanctification of the spiritual qualities of men – the heart, soul, mind, and strength. This, in turn, impacts upon the person’s expressive capabilities. They are able to think the thoughts of God, speak His Word, and do His works. All of this is done consciously and perceptively – with the “soul.” Unless those hearing and beholding the expressions of those filled with the Spirit are privy to the working of the Lord, there is nothing about the expressions that associate them with the Holy Spirit. They appear to the uninitiated to be human expressions. While they are unusual, and staggering to consider, those expressions are viewed as being purely human expressions. It is only when faith comes, and the individual is illuminated, that they can be recognized as the working of the Lord. All of this will become very evident in our text.

The book of Acts contains a number of references to people being filled with the Holy Spirit.

- The disciples were “filled” on the day of Pentecost (2:4).
- Peter’s defense in this text was made when he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:8).

- All of the disciples after an insightful prayer was made to God (4:31).
- The first deacons were required to be “full of the Holy Spirit” (6:3).
- Stephen is said to have been “full... of the Holy Spirit” (6:5).
- When Stephen was being stoned to death he was said to have been “full of the Holy Spirit” (7:55).
- Ananias told Saul of Tarsus he was sent to him in order that he might be “filled with the Holy Spirit” (9:17).
- Barnabas is described as a “good man, and full of the Holy Spirit” (11:24).
- When Paul dealt harshly with Elymas the sorcerer, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (13:9).
- The disciples at Iconium were said to have been “filled with the Holy Spirit” (13:52).

Peter will now speak the mind of the Lord. His words will reflect Divine purpose and the will of the Lord. There will be no element of “flesh” in them – no worldly agenda or ambitions. They will fit the description Paul gave the Thessalonians: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe ” (1 Thess 2:13).

YE RULERS OF THE PEOPLE, AND ELDERS OF ISRAEL

“ . . . Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel.” Other versions read, “rulers of the people and men of authority,” BBE “princes of the people and ancients,” DOUAY “ rulers and leaders of the people,” GWN “rulers of the people and Elders of the house of Israel ,” MRD and “Rulers of the people and members of the council (the Sanhedrin).” AMPLIFIED

Previously, with regard to the crucifixion of Jesus, Peter had charged the leaders of the people with ignorance: “And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:17). At that time, the leaders did not appear to be present. Now, however, they are not only present, but are attempting to establish themselves as being the judges of Peter and John. Peter is not intimidated by this circumstance. He is filled with the Spirit, and will therefore speak the mind of the Lord on this matter. Here we will see how the Lord addresses leaders who have walked in ignorance.

Peter is not intimidated by this circumstance. He is filled with the Spirit, and will therefore speak the mind of the Lord on this matter. Here we will see how the Lord addresses leaders who have walked in ignorance.

We also learn from this text that rulers and leaders are held in account for their deeds. In this world, men imagine that leadership puts them beyond the scrutinizing eye. But this is not the case at all. Just as surely as servants are held responsible for properly serving, so leaders are held accountable for leading correctly. No position puts a person beyond the circumference of judgment – particularly the judgment of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The prophets declared the Messiah would be noted for righteous judgment.

- **GOVERNING WITH A LOVE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS, AND A HATRED FOR WICKEDNESS.** “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre . Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness : therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Psa 45:6-7; Heb 1:9).
- **HE WILL JUDGE RIGHTEOUSLY AND REPROVE WITH EQUITY.** “But with

righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth . . .” (Isa 11:4).

- HE WILL REIGN IN RIGHTEOUSNESS AND RULE IN JUDGMENT. “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment” (Isa 32:1).

- HE WILL EXECUTE JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE. “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth” (Jer 23:5).

- HE WILL EXECUTE JUDGEMENT AND RIGHTEOUSNESS. “In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and He shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land” (Jer 33:15).

When Jesus walked among men, He held religious leaders in strict account for their devious manners. He rebuked the scribes and Pharisees severely (Matt 23:13-36). The lawyers also were subject to His righteous scrutiny (Lk 11:46-52). He rebuffed the Sadducees, telling them they erred because they did not know the Scriptures or the power of God (Matt 22:23-32).

This is a Divine characteristic that we do well to remember. It is said of God, “He hath prepared His throne for judgment” (Psa 9:7). And again, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of His throne” (Psa 89:14). And again, “righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne” (Psa 97:2). It was prophesied of the Messiah that he would order the Kingdom “to establish it with judgment and with justice” (Isa 9:7). Isaiah also saw the coming Savior “judging, and seeking judgment, and hastening righteousness” (Isa 16:5).

Now Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, will speak to the Jewish council – the priests, the captain of the Temple, the Sadducees and others who had convened to judge His apostles. While the circumstances appear to indicate that Peter and John were being examined and judged, it was really their critics who were now on trial.

IF WE ARE BEING EXAMINED

“9 If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole”

Peter will clear the air of the fog of vain tradition, clarifying the real issue, and shedding light upon what has been done in the Temple courts. He will not subject himself to the analysis of these men, or pretend as though their judgment was anything but wrong.

IF WE ARE BEING EXAMINED

“If we this day be examined . . .” Other versions read, “are judged,” NKJV “are on trial today,” NASB “are being called to account today,” NIV “are questioned today,” NRSV “called upon to answer,” DARBY “for as much as we this day are examined,” GENEVA “today you are cross-examining us,” GWN “if we are judged by you this day,” MRD and “If we are being put on trial [here] today and examined.” AMPLIFIED

At once, Peter shines the light on the nature of the work that had been done. A man who had been crippled from the moment he was born had been thoroughly healed, and was standing before them in perfect health.

Peter cuts straight to the heart of the matter. A naive person might have imagined that the council was asking an honest question. But Peter knew that was not the case. Even though Peter and John were the servants of the Lord, this council was examining them as though they were under their authority. It reminds me of Paul’s response to certain in Corinth who took it upon themselves to

examine him. “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self” (1 Cor 4:3).

The word “examined” comes from a word meaning “investigate, examine, inquire into, scrutinize, sift, question,” THAYER “hold a preliminary hearing, cross-examine, investigate, interrogate,” FRIBERG “sit in judgment, call to account.” UBS As used here, the examination was not an honest one. It was not an effort to establish the truth of a matter. Rather, the council was called because of the conflict of what Peter and John were preaching with the position of the leaders – particularly the Sadducees. Actually, Peter and John were already considered guilty of unacceptable conduct. This caucus was nothing more than an attempt to justify that conclusion.

THIS GOOD DEED

“ . . . of the good deed done to the impotent man . . .” Other versions read, “a good deed done to a helpless man ,” NKJV “a benefit done to a sick man,” NASB “an act of kindness shown to a cripple,” NIV “good deed done to someone who was sick ,” NRSV “ a good work done to a man who was ill,” BBE “good deed done to a disabled man ,” CSB “good deed done to an infirm man ,” DARBY “ the good we did for a crippled man,” GWN “the good deed to the ailing man ,” YLT “ the benefit conferred on a man helplessly lame,” WEYMOUTH and “a good deed done to benefit a feeble (helpless) cripple,” AMPLIFIED

At once, Peter shines the light on the nature of the work that had been done. A man who had been crippled from the moment he was born had been thoroughly healed, and was standing before them in perfect health. This court had referred to this good work as “this”: “By what power, or by what name, have ye done this ?” (4:7). Every version reads the same way: “this.”

Peter will not submit to such a demeaning reference to the working of the Lord. He will refer to it in the proper manner: “the good deed,” “benefit done,” NASB “act of kindness,” NIV and “benefit conferred.” WEYMOUTH This was one of those “good works” that had been ordained of old, to be done by Peter and John (Eph 2:10).

In confronting His critics, it was also Jesus’ manner to more precisely define what was being done. After calling for a man with a withered hand to “Stand forth” in the local synagogue, Jesus addressed His opponents. “ Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life , or to kill?” (Mark 3:4). Another time, when Jesus had healed a woman who had been bowed over with a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years, He faced an indignant ruler of the synagogue. Heartlessly this pretentious ruler said, “There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day” (Luke 13:14). Jesus responded with these words, “The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day ?” (Luke 13:15-16). Another time, when the Jews took of stones to kill Jesus, He challenged them by saying, “Many good works have I showed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me?” (John 10:32).

The people of God do well to culture a godly manner of referring to

In my judgment, a severe weakness exists in the modern church when it comes to defining matters. Too often the jargon of the world is used, and that reduces, if not altogether removes, any need for appealing to the Word of God. It also excludes Divine power.

what the Lord has done. When facing questions about our life in Christ Jesus, let us be swift to call it what it is: “newness of life,” “born again,” “begotten of God,” the “new creation,” etc. Let us never speak in such a manner as to confuse darkness and light, or life and death. Well did Isaiah

say, “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isa 5:20).

BY WHAT MEANS

“ . . . by what means he is made whole” Other versions read, “ how this man has been made well,” NASB “how he was healed ,” NIV “ you want to know how he was made well,” GWN “ Are you asking us who made him well?” IE “as to how this man was cured ,” WEYMOUTH and “ by what means this man has been restored to health.” AMPLIFIED

Again, Peter speaks with wisdom and godly care. The Spirit of God is in him, sanctifying both his mind and his heart. What his judges have referred to as “this,” Peter refers to as the man being “made whole.” He will now testify to the “means” by which this man was “made whole.” That is not the way in which the council preferred to state the case, but Peter clearly defines the circumstance before declaring precisely how it was produced.

In my judgment, a severe weakness exists in the modern church when it comes to defining matters. Too often the jargon of the world is used, and that reduces, if not altogether removes, any need for appealing to the Word of God. It also excludes Divine power.

BE IT KNOWN UNTO YOU

“ 10a Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . ”

The confidence with which Peter speaks will be very apparent. It is the assurance that proceeds from faith, and the unwavering persuasion of the truth concerning Jesus Christ. As Jesus had promised, it was given to Peter at that very hour what he should say: “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt 10:19-20). Yet, Peter does not speak as a sort of robot. It is apparent that he knows what he is saying and is speaking with great personal confidence. That is what real faith does for a person.

BE IT KNOWN UNTO YOU ALL

“Be it known unto you all . . . ” Other versions read, “ Let it be known to you all,” NKJV “then know this ,” NIV “ Take note , all of you,” BBE “You . . . must understand ,” GWN “all of you . . . should know,” NAB “Let me clearly state to all of you,” NLT “ We want all of you . . . to know,” IE “Let it be known and understood by all of you,” AMPLIFIED and “it is high time that all of you . . . knew .” PHILLIPS

Those who are sent forth by God to speak a word, generally have a compelling desire to be understood. It is true that some of God’s messengers were told to speak to people who would not understand. That condition, however, constituted a sort of trial, because it is not a normal situation. Thus Ezekiel was told, “And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious. But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee; Be not thou rebellious like that rebellious house : open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee” (Ezek 2:7-8).

In this case, Peter is not rebellious, even though he is standing before his critics. He will speak boldly and call upon the council to comprehend what he says . “Be it known!” Here something that is not to be hidden. It is a public word, and it is to be spoken. This is what God told Ezekiel to say to Israel – “be it known unto you” (Ezek 36:32). It is what Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego said to Nebuchadnezzar when they refused to bow before his idol – “be it known unto thee” (Dan 3:18). It is what Paul declared to those in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia when he announced that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins was being preached – “be it known unto you” (Acts 13:38). During the

close of his ministry, these are the words Paul spoke to some Jews when he boldly announced the salvation of God was being sent to the Gentiles – “be it known therefore unto you” (Acts 28:28).

We also see in this expression an essential aspect of the Kingdom of God. It is an economy of understanding and spiritual knowledge – not of raw emotion of feeling. There is a segment of the Christian community who teaches that utterances that are not understood are profitable, and even designed to build the faith of those who speak them. Such utterances cannot be preceded by, “Be it known unto you all.”

AND TO ALL THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

“ . . . and to all the people of Israel . . .” One version reads “the whole house of Israel.” AMPLIFIED The others all read the same – “people of Israel.”

This word was not for the council alone. Peter is saying that his answer to the inquiry of his pretentious judges is not for them alone, but for all the people of Israel – all of the covenanted people. His words would be tailored for the group before him, but would not be limited to them. The promises pertained to all the house of Israel, and Peter knew it (Rom 9:3). Concerning the New Covenant, God has never made promises to only a segment of the people who would be accepted in Christ Jesus. Therefore, Peter addresses all of the leaders and all of the people of Israel. Earlier, on the day of Pentecost, he also said “the promise” was to “ all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39).

The Gospel of Christ, and all things relating to it, is tailored for everyone – “every creature” (Mk 16:15). It addresses the needs that are common among men, and announces a resolution to a universal dilemma. Ponder what Peter has offered thusfar.

- The remission of sins (2:38a).
- The gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38b).
- Sins blotted out (3:19a).
- Times of refreshing (3:19b).
- God will send Jesus to them (3:20).
- Jesus sent to bless you (3:26a).
- Turning away every one from their iniquities (3:26b).

These are all benefits for all of those participating in the New Covenant.

BY THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH

“ . . . that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . .” Other versions read, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” BBE “because of the power of Jesus Christ from Nazareth,” GWN “by the powerful name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene,” NLT “in the name and power of Jesus from Nazareth, the Messiah,” LIVING “by the authority of Jesus of Nazareth,” IE “through the name of Jesus the Anointed, the Nazarene,” WEYMOUTH “in the name and through the power and authority of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” AMPLIFIED and “through the power of the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” GNB

The expression “the name of Jesus of Nazareth” is pregnant with meaning. I have never been fully satisfied with “the name of” being equivalent to “by the authority of.” It is true that “all authority” in heaven and earth has been given to the Lord Jesus (Matt 28:18). Peter, however, mentions the name of “Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” This is not the name by which Jesus is known in heaven. It is rather the name by which He was known particularly among the Jews, and those who were close to them – as Cornelius. The phrase is used seventeen times in Scripture (Matt 26:71; Mk 1:24; 10:47;

14:67; 16:6; Lk 4:34; 18:37; 24:19; John 1:45; 18:5,7; 19:19; Acts 2:22; 6:14; 10:38; 22:6; 26:9). He is referred to as “Jesus Christ of Nazareth” in Acts 3:6 and 4:10, and “Jesus the prophet of Nazareth” in Matthew 21:11.

The “name” is the repository into which what has been revealed of a person is poured. It stands for everything that is known about that person. In this case, there are certain things that have been tied to the name “Jesus” – the One came from Nazareth. These are things that had an impact in heaven as well as upon the earth. Upon earth, His human identity was established among men as “Jesus of Nazareth.” He was noted for being a spokesman for God – a “prophet, mighty in deed and word” (Lk 24:19). He was also noted for His deeds – “mighty works” (Matt 14:2; Mk 6:2). Nature yielded to Him, the wind and sea obeying Him (Mk 4:41). In all of these things, He was, in a sense, gaining a name.

But never was the name of Jesus more prominent than when He was exalted in heaven. As it is written, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil 2:9-10). Again, speaking of the presence of Jesus in heaven, it is written, “. . . the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:19-22).

Earlier in human history, it was revealed that “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). It has always been true that God “doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Dan 4:35). That is the way it has always been! It has always been true that God’s counsel stands, and He does all of His pleasure. If He wants Adam and Eve in the Garden, He places them there. If He does not want them there, He expels them. If He does not want the building of the tower of Babel to continue, it will be stopped. If He no longer wants His earth to be contaminated by Sodom and Gomorrah, He will remove them. If He wants Joseph on the throne of Egypt, He will place him there. If He is displeased with King Nebuchadnezzar, He will remove him from the throne. In every way, and in every sense, “the heavens do

It was Jesus who actually did the work, but He did it through vessels who were “meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). Further, if Jesus was not everything for which His name stands, the man would not have got up and walked.

rule.”

Now, the exalted Christ is heaven’s Ruler. So far as men are concerned, He is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15). This is the very Jesus the Jewish leaders, before whom Peter and John are standing, rejected and “killed” (Acts 3:15). Now, two of Jesus’ men come into the Temple and do a work that no priest or Sadducee was ever able to do. They did not engage in a battle with the forces of evil, but simply told a man afflicted from birth to “rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). The disease yielded to the word of these men because of the One for whom they spoke. They were not speaking a mere formula when they said, “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” If they had not been connected with that Jesus by faith, nothing would have happened.

It was Jesus who actually did the work, but He did it through vessels who were “meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). Further, if Jesus was not everything for which His name stands, the man would not have got up and walked – it would have been impossible.

However, none of this is known by those who have taken upon themselves to examine Peter and John. Therefore, Peter will spell it out for them, confirming how this was done. He will not depend upon them going home and thinking about it, but will declare the truth of the matter, regardless of whether or not it is received.

HERE IS WHAT YOU DID, AND HERE IS WHAT GOD DID

“ 10b . . . whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.”

Fortunately, Peter had not been trained in the theology of our time. He will not say the Jews really were not responsible for Jesus’ death – that it was something for which all humanity was responsible. That might appear a wise course to take for those who are battling against racial prejudice. However, when men commit unusual sins, it is not to be swept under the rug as though such sins are common – or that all sin carries the same weight.

WHOM YOU CRUCIFIED

“ . . . whom ye crucified . . . ” Other versions read, “whom you put to death on the cross,” BBE “whom ye have crucified ,” DARBY “ You crucified Jesus Christ,” GWN “the man you crucified,” NLT “whom ye did crucify ,” YLT “Although you nailed Him to the cross ,” IE and “He is the One whom you crucified .” PHILLIPS

Is it possible for a clearer statement to be made on the matter? Think of the statements made on this subject through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

- “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain ” (Acts 2:23).
- “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified , both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).
- “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up , and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go” (Acts 3:13).
- “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life , whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:14-15).
- “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree ” (Acts 5:30).
- “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers ” (Acts 7:52).
- “ . . . the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus , and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess 2:14-15).

The Jesus whom they killed, and whom God raised again, is the One through whom the man standing before them had been made perfectly whole. No natural man could have done this, and that was very apparent.

The Jews arrested and tried Jesus (Mk 14:60-65; Acts 2:23), delivered Him up (Acts 3:13), denied Him (Acts 3:14), demanded that He be crucified (Acts 2:36), and pressured Pilate on the matter (John 18:30; 19:7,12). They are categorically said to have crucified him (Acts 2:23,36), slain Him (Acts 2:23), killed Him (Acts 3:15; 1 Thess 2:15), hanged Him on a tree (Acts 5:30), and murdered

Him (Acts 7:52).

It simply is not right to speak in a politically-right manner as though the Holy Spirit had not spoken clearly and concisely concerning the responsibility of the Jews in Christ's death. In fact, the following statement concerning Christ's resurrection will not have its intended power if the Jew were really not guilty of killing Him.

WHOM GOD RAISED FROM THE DEAD

“ . . . whom God raised from the dead . . .” Other versions read, “whom God gave back from the dead,” BBE “whom God has raised from among the dead ,” DARBY “whom God raised again from the dead,” GENEVA “God has brought Him back to life ,” GWN “whom God raised again from death ,” TNT and “whom God did raise out of the dead .” YLT

The resurrection of Jesus was a miracle – but it was more than a miracle. It was also a heavenly denunciation of all who rejected Jesus – particularly those who demanded his death. When Caiaphas asked Jesus, “Art Thou the Christ, the son of the Blessed,” Jesus answered Him in truth. “I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:61-62). Instead of Caiaphas believing the truth, he tore his clothes and said, “What need we any further witnesses. Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye? And they all condemned him to be guilty of death” (Mark 14:64). Now, in raising Jesus from the dead, God exposed how wrong they were. He revealed the hardness of their hearts, and how they had been willing vassals of the devil himself.

IT IS BY HIM

“ . . . even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole.” Other versions read, “by this name this man stands here before you in good health,” NASB “by this man stands before you healed,” NIV “this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,” NRSV “by Him this man is standing before you well,” RSV “it is by His authority that this man stands here healed,” LIVING “This man who was crippled is now well and able to stand here before you because of Jesus ,” IE “through that name this man stands here before you in perfect health,” WEYMOUTH “in Him does this man stand before you strong and well,” MONTGOMERY and “in Him and by means of Him this man is standing here before you well and sound in body.” AMPLIFIED

The Jesus whom they killed, and whom God raised again, is the One through whom the man standing before them had been made perfectly whole. No natural man could have done this, and that was very apparent. The works of the Lord are not only “great” (Psa 111:2) and “wonderful” (Psa 40:5), they are also unique, for only He can do them. They are all “done in truth” (Psa 33:4), and all of them are “holy” (Psa 145:17). None of them can be replicated by unholy or unacceptable people.

This confirms that the “same Jesus,” whom they rejected, is the One who, seated at the right hand of God, had wrought this deed they have all seen. The resurrected Christ was not a new Messiah, but the very One who had went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil.

We learn something significant here about the resurrection of the dead. It is only the body that will be changed – not the person. It is the body, and the body alone, that is “sown in corruption,” “in weakness,” “in dishonor,” and as a “natural body” (1 Cor 15:42-44). The spirit, which is the essential man, is not “sown,” and it will not be “raised” from death. Those who belong to Christ will be brought back with Jesus when He comes again (1 Thess 4:14). However, they will come with the same character they had when they left the body. It will be the same for the wicked.

While this may not be expressly said by the modern church, it seems that a general notion exists that the resurrection will resolve basic character flaws. This is not so. The persons we are when we

die will be the persons we are when we are raised from the dead. We know this is the case because of the resurrection of Christ. Further, His resurrection is the prelude of our own resurrection. As it is written, “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Cor 6:14). And again, “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:14).

THIS IS THE STONE YOU SET AT NOUGHT

“ 11 This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.”

Peter will not let this matter go, only saying a few words about it, so as not to be too offensive. At this point, he is more interested in the honoring of Jesus than the appeasement of men. He will show the deliberate nature of the Jews’ treatment of Jesus, and how determined they were to fulfill their own will.

THIS IS THE STONE

“This is the Stone . . .” Other versions read, “He is the Stone,” NASB “This Jesus is the Stone,” NRSV “For Jesus is the one referred to in the Scriptures , where it says, 'The stone . . .’ NLT and “For Jesus the Messiah is [the One referred to in the Scriptures when they speak of] a Stone.” LIVING

Peter will base his statements upon the affirmation of Scripture. It is the responsibility of His hearers to see the truth of what He says. Of course, in that day, devout Jews were familiar with the Scriptures – particularly those regarding the Messiah. It ought to be noted here that when a professed church is not familiar with the word of God, it puts the preacher, as well as the people, at a great disadvantage. Sound reasoning, whether in the conviction of sin or the perfecting of the saints, must be founded upon the Word of God.

“The Stone”

Nearly eight hundred years before, David had written about the rejection of Christ by the Jewish leaders. “ The Stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:22-23).

Isaiah also spoke of this Stone as a foundation: “Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a Stone , a tried Stone , a precious corner Stone , a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16).

During the ministry of Jesus, he brought the attention of the leaders to these things, leaving them without excuse. “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?” (Matt 21:42; Mk 12:10-12; Lk 20:17).

Later, in his First epistle to scattered believers, Peter wrote, “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner Stone , elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the Stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner” (1 Pet 2:6-7).

Jesus of Nazareth was, then, the prophesied “Stone” which would be the most prominent part of the “house” God was going to build for David (2 Sam 7:27). He was a Teacher, but not merely a teacher! He went about doing good, but there was more to Him than that. He decimated the devil’s kingdom, but He was sent to do much more than this!

The Word “Stone”

The word from which the word “Stone” is translated is a critical one. Interestingly, it is not the word translated “rock” (**Pe,troj** – petros, or **pe,tral** – petra). That word refers to a ledge of rock upon which the house is built. This is not the kind of “Stone” to which our text refers. This “Stone” is integral to the building itself. It is a smaller, yet most critical, stone. The word from which it is translated is **li,qoj** (lithos). This is the word used in the texts referring to Jesus as the “Stone” (Matt 21:42,44; Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17-18; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4,6,7,8). This “Stone” will be more precisely defined later.

SET AT NOUGHT OF YOU BUILDERS

“ . . . which was set at nought of you builders . . .” Other versions read, “ rejected by you builders,” NKJV “rejected by you, the builders ,” NASB “you builders rejected,” NIV “ set at nought of you the builders,” ASV “which you builders had no use for ,” BBE “ despised by you builders,” CSB “ cast aside of you builders,” GENEVA “ discarded by the builders,” LIVING “which you builders thought worthless ,” IE “ treated with contempt by you the builders,” WEYMOUTH “that was thrown away by you builders,” WILLIAMS “which was despised and rejected by you, the builders,” AMPLIFIED and “ having been rejected by you the builders.” ALT

The primary Stone of the building was “set at nought,” “rejected,” NKJV “discarded,” LIVING and “thrown away” WILLIAMS by the builders. They saw it, considered it, and “despised” CSB it. They thought it is “worthless,” IE treated it with “contempt,” WEYMOUTH and “had no use for” BBE it. The “Stone” had been placed among them, and was “approved of God” in their presence by unparalleled confirmations (Acts 2:22). In word and deed, He was confirmed to be superior. His words were with power, and His deeds with staggering effectiveness. Yet, “the builders” – THE BUILDERS – saw no use for the Stone.

“The builders” are the leaders charged with the responsibility of putting the people on the right path. They are responsible for the establishment of proper thoughts and objectives. It is their duty to prepare the people for what God gives, and lead them in seeing this world and the world to come with clarity. “The builders” are not merely religious leaders. They are to ready the people for the work of the Lord – the building. They are to prepare the people to receive the blessing. That is what they will be held accountable for doing. That is how they will be judged!

There is no acceptable excuse for “the builders” constructing something that is wrong. In the work of the Lord, whether preparing people for the initial appearance of Jesus, or when He appears “the second time,” the builders are to get the people ready. They are to make sure those who are under their influence have a proper perception of Jesus. Their ministry is to lead the people to see the Lord Jesus correctly, and to be prepared to be fed and led by Him to glory. If they do not do this, they will be held accountable for their negligence, for everything has been supplied for them to do the work. If that work is not done, it had better not be because of “the builders.”

In our text, Jesus of Nazareth did not fit in with what these “builders” were doing – no place for Him in the work in which they were engaged. Peter does not gloss this condition as though it did not exist. He plainly tells them “ you builders” have “set at nought” the main Stone!

It ought to be noted that this is also the reason for the general neglect of Jesus today. Men have chosen to specialize in other things, and they can find no prominent place for Jesus in those things. He simply does not fit into them as an emphasis, whose will is supreme and whose work involves deliverance from the world. Such men can use a little Jesus – something like a spiritual spice that supposedly makes their teaching palatable.

However – and it is essential that men know this – Jesus will not take second place! He will not

come to assist men in fulfilling objectives that are wholly unrelated to God's revealed and eternal purpose.

WHICH IS THE HEAD OF THE CORNER

“ . . . which is become the head of the corner.” Other versions read, “which has become the chief cornerstone,” NKJV “but which is become the very corner stone ,” NASB “which has become the capstone ,” NIV “which was made the head of the corner,” ASV “which has been made the chief stone of the building,” BBE “which is set in the chief place of the corner,” TNT and “which became the capstone of the arch .” LIVING

CORNER-STONE Job 38:6; Isaiah 28:16; Sept. and N.T. a quoin or block of great importance in binding together the sides of a building. (On Psalm 144:12, see No. 9 above.) Some of the corner-stones in the ancient work of the temple foundations are 17 or 19 feet long, and 7.5 feet thick (Robinson, *Researches* , 1:422). Cornerstones are usually laid sideways and endways alternately, so that the end of one appears above or below the side-face of the next. At Nineveh the corners are sometimes formed of one angular stone (Layard, *Nineveh* , 2:201). The corresponding expression, “head of the corner,” in Psalm 118:22, is by some understood to mean the coping or ridge, “coign of vantage,” i.e. top-stone of a building; but as in any part a cornerstone must of necessity be of great importance, the phrase “corner-stone” is sometimes used to denote any principal person, as the princes of Egypt (Isaiah 19:13), and is thus applied to our Lord, who, having been once rejected, was afterward set in the highest honor (Matthew 21:42; see Grotius on Psalm 118; comp. Harmer, *Obs* . 2:356). The symbolical title of “chief corner-stone” is also applied to Christ in Ephesians 2:20, and 1 Peter 2:8, 16, which last passage is a quotation from Isaiah 28:16, where the Sept. has the same words. The “cornerstone,” or half-underlying buttress, properly makes no part of the foundation, from which it is distinguished in Jeremiah 2:56; though, as the edifice rests thereon, it may be so called. Sometimes it denotes those massive slabs which, being placed towards the bottom of any wall, serve to bind the work together, as in Isaiah 28:16. Of these there were often two layers, without cement or mortar (Bloomfield, *Recens. Synop. on Ephesians* 2:20). Christ is called a “corner-stone,” stone,” (1.) In reference to his being the foundation of the Christian faith (Ephesians 2:20); (2.) In reference to the importance and conspicuousness of the place he occupies (1 Peter 2:6); and (3.) Since men often stumble against a projecting corner-stone, Christ is therefore so called, because his gospel will be the cause of aggravated condemnation to those who reject it (Matthew 21:44). *SEE STUMBLING-STONE* . The prophet (Zechariah 10:4), speaking of Judah, after the return from the exile, says, “out of him came [i.e. shall come] forth the *corner* [i.e. *prince*], out of him the nail;” probably referring ultimately to the “cornerstone,” the Messiah. McCLINTOK STRONG'S

Some of the corner-stones in the ancient work of the Temple foundations are 17 or 19 feet long and 7 ½ feet thick. At Nineveh the corners are sometimes formed of one angular stone. The phrase "corner-stone" is applied to our Lord (Isaiah 28:16; Matthew 21:42; 1 Peter 2:6,7).

Binding together the sides of the building. Some of the temple ones are 19 ft. long and 7 ½ thick. Compare Solomon's temple, 1 Kings 5:17; 7:9. Christ is the true grainer stone, laid by the Father in Zion, on whom the whole church rests (Isa. 28:16). He is also "the head stone," or fifth crowning top grainer of the pyramid, in which the whole building meets and culminates (Zech. 4:7). Compare Gen. 49:24; Ps. 118:22; Mt. 21:42; Rom. 9:33,34; Eph. 2:21. FAUSSET'S BIBLE DICTIONARY

Part of the public or imposing buildings, to which importance has been attached in all ages and in many nations, both on account of its actual service and its figurative meaning. Ordinarily its use in the Bible is figurative, or symbolical. No doubt the original meaning was some important stone, which was laid at the foundation of a building. INTERNATIONAL STANDARD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE BIBLE

In ancient architecture, the “cornerstone,” or “head stone of the corner,” was the primary stone of a building. As seen in the illustration, it not only joined the corners of a building, but was the foundation upon which an entrance arch was based. It is what held everything together, making the building stable.

God has made Jesus the primary Component of life, and of the church itself – the “Cornerstone.” The principal part of the church is not its members, but its Head. It is not its name, but the One presiding over it. It is not its role in society, but Christ’s role within it. Take Jesus out of the church, and it is nothing and has no purpose. The professed church is relevant only to the degree that Christ Jesus is working within it, fulfilling the will of the Father.

In the same way Jesus is the main component of life. No person will benefit from Christ by treating Him as an adjunct or accessory to life. He is not like medicine, to be taken when sick, but stored away when everything appears to be going well. Obtaining grace to help in “the time of need” (Heb 4:16) assumes that we are within the proximity of grace, living in fellowship with Christ and the communion of the Holy Spirit.

One of the Dangers of Our time

One of the great dangers of our time is the growing prevalence of an approach to religion in which Jesus is not the primary component. He is seen more as an assistant designed to help men fulfill their own ambitions. Life in this world is being held forth as the primary life, and thus Jesus is rejected as the “Head of the corner” of life. The nominal church assists the maintenance of this corrupt view by offering all manners extracurricular activities, designed to make carnally-minded people more comfortable. Everyone with even a modicum of understanding knows that Jesus Christ is not the center of such activities. His Gospel is not the primary subject of exposition, and the Scriptures themselves are largely unknown.

Let me be clear about this. There is no place for Jesus other than that of the Head of the corner. If He is not received as the primary Person, and His work as the primary work, He cannot be received, and no advantages can be experienced from Him. Jesus will not take a secondary position to anyone but God the Father Himself. He is the only one who is not subject to Christ (1 Cor 15:27). For Jesus to be anything but primary would be a sin, for the Father has exalted Him as “Head over all things” (Eph 1:22). It is not possible to receive Jesus as anyone but Lord, for that is what He is.

Jesus Refers to David’s Statement

Jesus referred to David’s statement concerning “the builders” rejecting the very Stone that became the Head of the corner. “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?” (Matt 21:42; Mk 12:10-11). Luke says of this Stone, “Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Luke 20:18). That is, whoever rejects Jesus as the principal Person will be destroyed by Him. Paul affirms that Jesus is “the chief Cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). Peter says of Jesus, “To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,” (1 Pet 2:4).

Peter also says of Jesus Christ, “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone , elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them

Failing to recognize the real Person of Jesus is disastrous in every sense of the word – particularly when we are speaking of “the builders.” Although I have said this before, I must affirm it again. Men cannot be wrong about Jesus!

which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed , the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling , and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (1 Pet 2:6-8). Thus, Jesus is the Stone revealed in three different ways.

- The Head of the corner , solidifying the house of God, which is the church.
- A stone of stumbling , that causes men who reject Him to stumble, or err.
- A rock of offense , that causes those who reject Him to fall into a helpless and hopeless state.

Failing to recognize the real Person of Jesus is disastrous in every sense of the word – particularly when we are speaking of “the builders.” Although I have said this before, I must affirm it again. Men cannot be wrong about Jesus!

If men do not receive Jesus as the “Head of the corner,” they will stumble over Him, falling into perdition. To perceive Jesus as anything but Head over all things, and the Objective of living, will cause Him to be offensive to the individual, and thus rejected. That is why Jesus said, “And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder” (Matt 21:44). To “fall on this Stone” means to depend wholly upon Him for salvation, willingly placing our destiny in His hands, and being subject to Him in all things. The result of that will be the destruction of self-will, and a godly sorrow over the vanity to which one has given himself. If, however, the person does not throw himself upon the mercy of the Lord, submitting to Jesus without any qualifications, Jesus will ultimately destroy him. He will “grind him to powder,” or punish him “with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:9).

Peter is setting the facts before “the builders” – the religious leaders – in order that they might recover from their blunder. He is calling upon them to fall upon the Stone that they had previously rejected, and thereby be saved. Their treatment of Jesus did not have any effect upon who He was and is. He is still the Head of the corner, even though the builders had rejected Him.

NO SALVATION OUTSIDE OF JESUS CHRIST

“ 12 Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

Because men speak too casually about salvation, it is particularly important to grasp what Peter here affirms. In heaven, there is zero-tolerance of those who do not receive Jesus as God has presented Him – “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). I am not speaking of how Jesus is referenced in creedal statements. This gets to the matter of how the individual or group actually goes about appropriating and maintaining salvation. If Jesus in any sense takes the back seat, or is perceived as being in a secondary or subordinate position to anyone or anything else, salvation is forfeited. God will not play games with men on this matter, or engage in semantics and philosophical bantering. Whatever men may perceive to be important, Jesus is always more important! Whatever men may identify as the critical issue, Jesus is a more critical issue! There is no leeway or margin of tolerance on this matter! If, for example, a person defers to anyone other than Jesus, he cannot possibly be a disciple of Jesus, be taught by Him, or led by Him. Here is how Jesus stated the matter: “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). In this case, “hate” means that when there is a conflict between Jesus and father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, or personal preferences, if the person does not choose Jesus, he cannot be Jesus’ disciple.

There is a single “name” through which we are “saved.” It is the “name” of the only Person God has unqualifiedly received, and to whom He has given all power in heaven and earth. He will honor to no other “name” – no other Person.

This is not an ideological statement. This is really the way it is, even though the statement appears to disqualify great segments of the professing church. An absolute requirement for being Jesus’

disciple is forsaking every competing interest. Jesus said, “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). Jesus taught men to consider the cost of following Him, and to do so before they attempt to enroll in his ranks (Lk 14:27-32). Salvation is serious business, and that is why Peter is speaking as he does. Zealously rid yourself of any approach to salvation or being in Christ that allows for your interests to compete with His, or that permits you to give the affections that belong to Him to anyone else. Once you have made this decision, the words that follow will make perfect sense.

NEITHER IS THERE SALVATION IN ANY OTHER

“Neither is there salvation in any other . . .” Other versions read, “Nor is there salvation in any other,” NKJV “And there is salvation in no one else,” NASB “Salvation is found in no one else,” NIV “No one else can save us,” GWN “Neither is there deliverance in any other,” MRD “There is no salvation through anyone else,” NAB “Jesus is the only One who can save people,” IE “And in no other is the great salvation to be found,” WEYMOUTH “And there is salvation in and through no one else,” AMPLIFIED and “Salvation is to be found through Him alone.” GNB

Salvation has to be accomplished by someone outside of ourselves. We are saved by a Person, not a procedure. We are saved by God’s Man, not an organization. While this Savior is eager to save, He is not so eager as to violate the will of His Father, or to allow you to dictate the means by which you are saved. It goes without saying that the person who is to be saved must be on good terms with the Savior. Those good terms are met when faith is found in the individual – an unwavering trust in Jesus that compels the individual to cry out, “What wilt Thou have me to do” (Acts 9:6), and then responds to what he is told.

For multitudes, this has not yet dawned upon the soul: “Neither is there salvation in any other .” I know this is the case, for they seem to have no other interests than their own. They give too much value to their families, their peers and their favorite institutions. They speak too much of themselves, their friends, their church, their will, etc. However, if a person wants salvation, freedom from sin, deliverance from the curse, and reconciliation with God, he must come to the “none other” point – be able to perceive it and desire it above everything else.

NONE OTHER NAME UNDER HEAVEN

“ . . . for there is none other name under heaven . . .” Other versions read, “neither is there another name under heaven,” DARBY “Under all heaven there is no other name,” LIVING “His authority is the only power,” IE and “there is no second name under heaven.” WEYMOUTH

There is a single “name” through which we are “saved.” It is the “name” of the only Person God has unqualifiedly received, and to whom He has given all power in heaven and earth. He will honor to no other “name” – no other Person.

We should be interested in the expression “under heaven,” for that is where we presently are. Solomon spoke of things “done under heaven” (Eccl 1:13), but Peter speaks of a name that has been given “under heaven.” That is, this is a Person who has been given to “every creature under heaven” (Col 1:23). God has only given one name, and there is no other, even though some affirm that one exists.

GIVEN AMONG MEN

“ . . . given among men . . .” Other versions read, “given to men,” NIV “given among mortals,” NRSV “given to people,” CSB “given to the human race,” NAB “for men,” LIVING “given to the world,” IE and “appointed among men.” WILLIAMS

This is a Person who has been provided for men – Adam’s offspring, for he is the federal head of natural men, who, as a consequence of his transgression, are sinners (Rom 5:12). Jesus has not been given to angels, but to men.

By saying “among men,” Peter means that He has been made accessible to men. It would be pointless to declare this name if man could not derive eternal benefits from it. If any person remains ignorant of Jesus, it is not because He has not been made accessible to men. No person will ever be lost because God did not do enough! The catch is that the name of Jesus has been given to the church, who is the custodian of the truth of God (1 Tim 3:15). It is responsible for declaring the name, and making men aware of the salvation of God.

If the church is distracted from its stewardship to other things, a most serious condition will ensue, as confirmed in the Dark Ages, a dreadful period of spiritual darkness that spanned a thousand years (500-1500 A.D.). This was an era in which stagnation and obscurity dominated in literature and art – but chiefly in Christianity . It was a time when, in the minds of men, Jesus was displaced by the institutional church.

WHEREBY WE MUST BE SAVED

“ . . . whereby we must be saved.” Other versions read, “ by which we must be saved,” NKJV “ wherein we must be saved,” ASV “ through which we may have salvation,” BBE “whereby to live,” MRD “by which we are to be saved,” NAB “ in which it behoveth us to be saved,” YLT “for men to call upon to save them,” LIVING “ by and in which we must be saved,” AMPLIFIED and “it is by this name that we must be saved.” PHILLIPS

Being saved by the name of Jesus is not being saved by a formula, or merely fulfilling a routine. The idea here is that Jesus Himself is involved in the salvation. It is through Him that men are forgiven, escape the pollutions of the world, and receive the benefits of the New Covenant. As mediator of the New Covenant, Jesus administers the blessings of that covenant, as affirmed in Hebrews 8:10-12.

- He puts God’s laws into our hearts.
- He writes God’s laws in our minds.
- God becomes our God, not only by profession, but in allegiance and service.
- We become God’s people, being especially blessed by Him.
- We come to know the Lord, becoming acquainted with His ways and purpose.
- Being blotted out, our sins are remembered no more.

Jesus Himself brings to pass what is said to occur, or take place, in those who are made partakers (Heb 3:14) of Him (Heb 6:4-5).

- We are enlightened.
- We taste of the heavenly gift.
- We are made partakers of the Holy Spirit.
- We taste of the powers of the world to come.

The things that are said to occur when we are “saved” are accomplished in and through the exalted Christ – that is what it means to be saved by His name.

- We pass from death unto life (1 John 3:14).
- We die with Christ and are raised with Him (Rom 6:8; Col 3:1).

- Our “old man” is crucified (Rom 6:6).
- We are “made accepted” (Eph 1:6).
- Our names are written in heaven (Heb 12:23).
- We are begotten again to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3).
- We are begotten again to an incorruptible inheritance (1 Pet 1:4).

If Jesus does not save us, we will not be saved. In salvation we do not flee to a code but to a Savior, who not only wrought the basis for our salvation, but also accomplished that salvation in us. There is only one Person who can do this, and His name stands for His Person and everything that has been revealed about Him. God will honor no other name, and so no one else can save.

We are made “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14).

All of these, and more, are included in the term “saved.” Does anyone imagine that these experiences can be accomplished by a routine or procedure? These are all experiences that are transcendent to nature. They are not things that can be realized by some lifeless principle or law.

If Jesus does not save us, we will not be saved. In salvation we do not flee to a code but to a Savior, who not only wrought the basis for our salvation, but also accomplished that salvation in us. There is only one Person who can do this, and His name stands for His Person and everything that has been revealed about Him. God will honor no other name, and so no one else can save.

It ought to be noted that salvation denotes preservation as well as deliverance. Not only must a person be delivered from the world and translated into the kingdom of Christ (Col 1:13), that status must be maintained.

- We must also be “kept by the power of God unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5).
- We must be kept “from falling” (Jude 1:24), and made to “stand” (Rom 14:4).
- A “way of escape” must be “made” for the saved, in order that they might bear up under temptation (1 Cor 10:13).
- They must be caused to triumph, or they will not do so (2 Cor 2:14).
- “All grace” must be made to abound toward them (2 Cor 9:8).
- The saved must be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).
- The “love of the truth” must be given so it can be “received” (2 Thess 2:10-11).
- The word of God must work in us “effectually” (2 Thess 2:13).
- There is also the matter of being made “to increase and abound in love one toward another” (1 Thess 3:12), and even being “taught of God to love one another” (1 Thess 4:9).
- We must be brought “to glory” (Heb 2:10)
- We must realize effective intercession (Heb 7:25), and be “helped” from within by someone greater than ourselves (Rom 8:26-27).

While there is human instrumentality in the salvation of God, the salvation itself, in its entirety, is wrought by Christ Jesus. Once men have, to some profitable degree, seen the greatness of salvation, the absolute necessity of Christ’s involvement becomes apparent.

Someone must make us “perfect in every good work to do His will” (Heb 13:21).

- After we have “suffered a while,” someone must “perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle” us (1 Pet 5:10).
- Faith must be finished as well as authored (Heb 12:2).
- The work of salvation must be continually performed “until the day of Christ” (Phil 1:6).
- Angelic ministers must be sent forth to assist us in our trek through this present evil world (Heb 1:13-14).
- And finally, we must be raised from the dead, receiving a glorious body (Phil 3:20-21).

These are all part and parcel of salvation – of being “saved.” There is no salvation from God that is without all of these glorious realities. And how are they all to be ministered effectively to us? It ought to be very clear that no mortal or group of mortals is capable of conferring or accomplishing such things. They all require a Person who is alive forever more – the Lord Jesus Christ.

No other religion offers such benefits, or anything remotely similar to them. The only other revealed religion – “The Jew’s religion” (Gal 1:13-14) – offered no such benefits. Rather, it “stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10). There was no salvation through it, and it was never intended to be so. The Old Covenant, or the Law, was designed to prepare men for salvation, not to be a means of appropriating it. Therefore we read, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:24-25). There was no salvation in Moses. The only man prior to Christ that did not come behind Moses was John the Baptist. He himself confessed that Jesus was “preferred” before himself (John 1:15,27,30). John was the one of whom Isaiah prophesied, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Matt 3:3). You may rest assured that if salvation was not in Moses or John the Baptist, it cannot possibly be found in some non-Messiah who followed them.

While there is human instrumentality in the salvation of God, the salvation itself, in its entirety, is wrought by Christ Jesus. Once men have, to some profitable degree, seen the greatness of salvation, the absolute necessity of Christ’s involvement becomes apparent. The difficulty is that men tend to have a very small view of “salvation.” They imagine that the forgiveness of sins is the whole of the matter, forgetting about “times of refreshing” and God sending Jesus to dwell with us (Acts 3:19-20).

Why Say These Things

I say these things because of my own background. I come from a heritage in which very little was made of this verse (Acts 4:12). Even though Peter makes much of this point, placing an obvious emphasis upon it, “we” did not make much of it. I know the conviction of realizing how very little was said about Christ’s necessary and pivotal role in salvation. Although, by God’s grace, I was given to correct my emphasis before I was twenty years old, I know of poor souls who remain in the grip of a lifeless and traditional religion, even though they are in their twilight years. This is a tragedy than cannot be overstated.

THERE IS NO OTHER ONE

Peter has charged “the builders” with rejecting the fundamental “Stone” of the house of God. Search as they may, as long as that “Stone” lies on the trash-heap of neglect, the building can be neither stable nor safe. There is absolutely no sense in which any individual can be “saved” while Jesus is neglected, and other foundations are either sought, declared, or embraced. It is not possible to be “saved” while rejecting Jesus Himself as the chief Component of “the house of God, which is

the church of the Living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

From a practical point of view, Jesus must be seen as the main Person in the church. He is its “Head,” and all distributions of grace are through Him. In fact, the church has absolutely no significance apart from Jesus. It has not been placed in the world to be a community leader, social reformer, or political advisor. Its exclusive role is to do the work of Christ. That has to do with preparing people for the revealed grand consummation when, according to God’s “eternal purpose,” and “in the dispensation of the fulness of times, He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph 1:10). Apart from this objective, neither Jesus nor His church has any relevance. Everything of genuine value blends with that purpose, and, through heavenly influences, moves toward its realization.

Unfortunately, this has a strange sound to many professing Christians. They have adopted an approach to religion in which Jesus is not perceived as unqualifiedly essential. He can, in their mind, be neglected, or be received in a secondary role.

THEY SAW PETER AND JOHN AND TOOK NOTE OF THEM

“ 13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.”

Peter and John are not speaking as the scribes were noted for teaching – giving their seemingly learned disquisitions. During Jesus’ ministry the people noted how differently He spoke: “For He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt 7:29; Mk 1:22). The Living Bible reads as follows: “The congregation was surprised at His sermon, because He spoke as an authority, and didn’t try and prove His points by quoting others – quite unlike what they were used to hearing.” Now, the Temple authorities will behold the different manner in which Christ’s apostles spoke.

THEY SAW THE BOLDNESS

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John . . .” Other versions read, “when they observed the confidence,” NASB “When they saw the courage,” NIV “When they saw that Peter and John were without fear,” BBE “seeing the constancy,” DOUAY “how boldly they spoke,” GWN “the speech . . . which they pronounced confidently,” MRD “the fearlessness shown by,” NJB “beholding the openness,” YLT “were not afraid to speak,” IE “so fearlessly outspoken,” WEYMOUTH “the glad fearlessness,” MONTGOMERY “the boldness and unfettered eloquence,” AMPLIFIED and “the complete assurance.” PHILLIPS

The word “boldness” comes from the Greek word **parrhsian** (par-ras-ian), which has the following lexical meaning. “Freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speaking . . . freely, openly, frankly, without concealment or ambiguity,” THAYER “courage, confidence, boldness,” FRIBERG and “boldness, confidence, assurance before the public.” UBS

The perception of “boldness,” or unembarrassed confidence, in Peter and

John drew the attention of their critics. They were not intimidated by religious authorities and spoke with an obvious confidence. Not only was the Holy Spirit giving them insights and words that they might speak, He was also strengthening their hearts and minds. As they spoke, the truth was clear to them, and it was so refreshing and satisfying to them that it thoroughly neutralized any threats against them.

They did not speak haltingly as though they were not sure of what they were saying. They had no doubts concerning the Scriptures they had expounded, but knew they were right. They knew their view of the exalted Jesus was precisely correct. They knew their assessment of the actions of the Jews

was flawless. There was no doubt in their minds concerning the rejection of Jesus by “the builders.”

These days, it is exceedingly rare to hear a man speak for God that exudes this kind of confidence. It is as though the church has been captured by the modern-day scribes – the religious academicians. When they evince some kind of confidence, it is rooted in the Greek, or in a hermetical principle, or in an historical position. It is not, however, rooted in spiritual insight or understanding. Perhaps they have assembled a collage of Scriptures that seems to support what they are saying. Any confidence they may have is traceable to the wisdom of men, not spiritual enlightenment or empowerment. They do not have the “spirit of faith” that moved Paul to say, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; knowing . . .” (2 Cor 4:13-14).

I have personally been impressed with the number of supposedly learned men who cannot speak confidently and boldly concerning the pivotal matters and principal Person of the Kingdom. Often I have seen seemingly seasoned leaders unable to speak on the spur of the moment, or take the advantage of an opportunity to speak for Christ. It is a sad commentary on the impotence of a purely pedantic thrust.

In our text, we are being exposed to how men speak when they are “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:8). This is a condition to be coveted, and there is nothing in the Word of God to suggest that this manner became obsolete after the first century.

PERCEIVED THEY WERE UNLEARNED

“ . . . and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men . . .” Other versions read, “perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men,” NKJV “ understood they were uneducated and untrained,” NASB “realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men ,” NIV “perceived that they were uneducated, common men ,” RSV “men of no education or learning ,” BBE “ unlettered and uninstructed ,” DARBY “ illiterate and ignorant ,” DOUAY “unlearned and without knowledge ,” GENEVA “No education or special training ,” GWN “unschooled ordinary men,” NIB “ uneducated laymen ,” NJB “with no special training in the Scriptures ,” NLT “ unlettered and plebeian [common, lowly],” YLT “obviously uneducated non-professionals ,” LIVING “illiterate persons, untrained in the schools ,” WEYMOUTH and “they were unlearned and untrained in the schools [common men with no educational advantages].” AMPLIFIED

It is essential that we comprehend what this text is saying. It is not saying that Peter and John were speaking clumsily, and as those who were illiterate. Reading their words should be sufficient to confirm that. I know of no individual who has ever read this text and concluded that Peter and John were crude and untaught men.

The point that boggled the minds of their critics is that these men had not been taught in their schools, yet spoke with confident boldness. They did not rely on rhetoric, or the astute observations of the elders, or the scholarly disquisitions of the scribes. This is the same thing they noted about Jesus. “And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?” (John 7:15). And again, “And when He was come into his own country, He taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?” (Matt 13:54). Even as a twelve year old boy, the doctors of the Law “were astonished at His understanding and answers” (Luke 2:47).

Those before whom Peter and John were now standing could not conceive of anyone being an expert in Scripture who was not taught in their schools – who had not been subjected to their training.

The religious schools of men too often produce a kind of theological clone. Official and historical positions are taught. There can even be theological buzz-words, catch phrases, and cliches that

identify the particular school one attended.

You may remember that Paul said he was “brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers” (Acts 22:3). Yet, we have no record of anyone hearing Paul and concluding that he had been taught by Gamaliel. Further, none of his epistles makes any reference to Gamaliel or what he taught. The wisdom employed by Paul, as well as Peter and John, did not come from men. They were not clones of a religious system, but were men filled with the Holy Spirit.

The religious schools of men too often produce a kind of theological clone. Official and historical positions are taught. There can even be theological buzz-words, catch phrases, and cliches that identify the particular school one attended. I say this knowing full well that some who attend these schools rise above these trends and lay hold of the truth of God in spite of their surrounding. Their views come from their faith, not their training. Their boldness is the product of their confidence and assurance, not rhetorical skills or knowing how to manage a crowd.

The Example of My Father

My own father, Fred O. Blakely, is a most excellent example of one with learning who did not appropriate it in the schools of men. He lived during hard times, during and after the great Depression. As a result of economic conditions, he was forced to leave school after the seventh grade, even though he was an excellent student, and delighted in the appropriation of knowledge. At that time, he was twelve years old. Some, no doubt, considered him a helpless victim of circumstance.

As he advanced in years, he became a typesetter in the printing business. When he worked for a newspaper, he carefully read everything he set in type. When he later worked for a book publisher, he read every book he set in type, including three major sets of encyclopedias. When he was away from work, he devoured the Scriptures, memorizing great portions of the Word, and constantly seeking understanding from the Lord. During the same time, a well known man of God who taught in the area in which my father lived (Jesse A. Mason), observed my father’s love of the truth, and spent time with him, sharing what he had been given to see.

In his mid-twenties, my father began publishing “The Apostles’ Doctrine,” a periodical of several pages in which he shared his various insights and convictions. Later, he published two major volumes entitled “The Apostles’ Doctrine. These were widely distributed throughout the world. During the sixties and seventies, copies were given to thousands of Bible College graduates.

No one who has ever heard my father speak, or read his writings, has ever concluded that he was uneducated, simple, or unlearned. All, however, could pick up on the fact that he had not been trained in the standard religious schools. Today, he is with the Lord, and a host of insightful souls can trace their spiritual beginnings and advancements to his influence.

Today, it is very difficult for such men to surface – at least in the organized church. Some are even persuaded that no decisive influence can be exerted for Christ unless one is professionally trained for the work. They believe they will not be received unless they have acceptable religious credentials. It is not my purpose to condemn such men. However, I will observe that I have personally never known a man who relied upon such credentials, and yet by that means became a great influence for Christ.

What the Jewish council was witnessing were two men who had been taught by Jesus, were being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and were dominated by faith and hope. They were not able to detect the source of Peter and John’s boldness, but were keenly aware of the fact that it was not received in their halls of learning.

Preachers and Teachers are Responsible

Developing effective communicators of the truth is the responsibility of every insightful preacher and teacher. As it is written, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:1-3). Note this sacred charge.

- Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. There is a strength that comes from the grace of God. It enables one to resist evil encroachments, and live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world (Tit 2:11-12). The servant of God must be able to stand, press toward the mark, and resist the devil.

- Commit what is known to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. No person is an end unto themselves. What they have been given to see is to be committed, or entrusted, to faithful men – men who have proved their allegiance to Christ – whose faithfulness to God has been confirmed. These are men who will be “able to teach others also.” If no such men are found where one is laboring, then one must labor to produce such. If they are still not present, then the minister should question the propriety of remaining there.

- Endure hardness as a good soldier. The servant of God must be able to stand in the furnace of affliction without wavering, and sit in the den of lions without being intimidated. The work of the Lord is no occupation for weaklings and overly sensitive people. This is why James wrote, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation,” or “will be judged more strictly” NIV (James 3:1).

None of these requirements (being strong, committing what is learned to faithful men, and enduring hardness) can be achieved in a purely academic environment. These are all of an intensely personal nature, and can only be realized while in fellowship with the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 1:9), and walking in the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).

What the Jewish council was witnessing were two men who had been taught by Jesus, were being illuminated by the Holy Spirit, and were dominated by faith and hope. They were not able to detect the source of Peter and John’s boldness, but were keenly aware of the fact that it was not received in their halls of learning.

THEY MARVELED

“ . . . they marvelled . . . ” Other versions read, “they were marveling ,” NASB “they were astonished,” NIV “they were amazed ,” NRSV “they wondered ,” RSV “they were greatly surprised ,” BBE “they were wondering ,” YLT and “they were staggered .” PHILLIPS

The carnal mind cannot process the truth or properly assess those who speak it. Natural men (1 Cor 2:14) can only associate boldness and confidence with knowing the party-line, or the professional culturing of natural aptitudes. They cannot conceive of a person understanding human nature without having taken a course in psychology. They find it difficult to believe anyone can understand the Scriptures without an understanding of the Greek and Hebrew languages. They do not have the faintest notion how a man could assemble a group of people with a common interest in the truth of God without taking a course in church-planting. Such people view books like Romans and Hebrews beyond the reach of those uneducated in their schools, requiring special advanced training.

These people consider learning valid, only if it comes from their institutions. In their judgment, all other learning, at the very best, is vastly inferior.

Now, these men have heard Peter and John, and it is obvious to them that their minds have been challenged. What astounded them was that they could speak in such a manner without having gone

to their schools.

THEY TOOK KNOWLEDGE OF THEM

“ . . . and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.” Other versions read, “ they realized they had been with Jesus,” NKJV “and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus,” NASB “ they took note that these men had been with Jesus,” NIV “and recognized them as companions of Jesus,” NRSV “and knew they had been with Jesus,” CSB “and knew them, that they had been with Jesus,” GENEVA “and recognized them as having been conversant with Jesus ,” MRD “they recognized them as associates of Jesus ,” NJB “they were taking knowledge also of them that with Jesus they had been,” YLT “and realized what being with Jesus had done for them ,” LIVING and “They recognized them as men who had been with Jesus .” PHILLIPS

First, let us dispense with an imagination that seems to be reflected in certain translations. There is an insinuation that the council physically “recognized” Peter and John as having been with Jesus. It is as though they said, “Oh yes, we remember seeing these men with Jesus when He was teaching here and there.” This is a wholly erroneous view. Note the construction of the sentence: They saw the boldness of Peter and John . . . perceived they were unlearned and ignorant men . . . marveled . . . and took note that they had been with Jesus. The thing provoking these reactions was not the appearance of the Peter and John, but what they said, and the confident manner in which they spoke. How is it that what they said would move the men to look at their appearance and observe, “Oh yes, we remember now: these men were companions of Jesus.”

AN INSIGHTFUL WORD

“Had they not had his teaching, the present company would soon have confounded them; but they spoke with so much power and authority that the whole sanhedrin was confounded. He who is taught in spiritual matters by Christ Jesus has a better gift than the tongue of the learned. He who is taught in the school of Christ will ever speak to the point, and intelligibly too; though his words may not have that polish with which they who prefer sound to sense are often carried away.” ADAM CLARKE

First, Jesus had told His disciples they would be His witnesses, testifying of Him, and by His power. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth ” (Acts 1:8). Now, after hearing Peter and John, these men thought of Jesus, and of their association with Him – not a mere physical association, but by means of their message and the confidence with which they spoke. Because Jesus said they would be witnesses “unto” Him, it is evident that this involved Divine purpose or objective. That is, this was not something that men would be forced to conclude through mere human rationality. Rather, it would happen by Divine determination. I gather that Jesus Himself, through the Holy Spirit, was in some way instrumental in men making that association.

How Are Men Associated With Jesus?

How are men identified as being associated with Jesus – being His disciples, or followers?

- By profession. Peter and John did not hesitate to declare their identity with the Lord Jesus Christ, declaring Him as the One in whose name they were ministering. “ . . . we are witnesses . . . His name, through faith in His name” (3:15-16), “by the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (4:10).

- By their words. The words of Peter and John evidenced their obvious identity with Jesus. Were it not for Him, they would have had nothing to say. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (3:6), “ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel” (4:8), “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel,

that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (4:10).

- By their deeds. The works of Peter and John were of the same gender as those done by the Lord Jesus. “And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (3:16). “If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole” (4:9).

- By their focus. There was a marked focus in the speaking of these holy men. Commencing with Peter’s words to the lame man, there are forty-three references to Deity in his words. Jesus Christ (2), God (9), His Son Jesus (2) Whom (5), Him (5), the Holy One (1), the Just (1), Prince of life (1), His name (2), His (2), Christ (1), He (3), the Lord (2), Which (2), Prophet (2), the name of Jesus Christ (1), the Stone (1), the Head (1). That focus was very obvious in the things they proclaimed. “And killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead” (3:15), “God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you” (3:26), “preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (4:2), “Jesus Christ of Nazareth . . . whom God raised from the dead” (4:9), “none other name under heaven, given among men” 4:12).

- By their handling of the Scriptures. The manner in which they handled the Scriptures bore an undeniable similarity to the manner of the Master Teacher himself. “God before had shown by the mouth of all His holy prophets” (3:18), “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets” (3:21), “Moses truly said unto the fathers” (3:22), “all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after” (3:24) “the covenant made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham” (3:25), “this is the Stone net at nought of you builders” (4:11).

- By their demeanor. Peter and John conducted themselves as their Lord did. They went to the Temple for noble motives, and spoke as strangers and pilgrims in the earth. “Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour” (3:1), “Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (3:6), “And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” (3:12).

- By their power. The works of Peter and John were reminiscent of the works of the Lord Jesus. They were characterized by power, or authority, which even the spectators could not deny. “. . . Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” (3:12). “And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” (4:7).

- By their boldness or confidence. Peter and John were not intimidated by men – even men of religious significance. They spoke respectfully to them, but altered none of their words to dull their power or leave their critics imagining they were afraid of them. “If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole” (4:9), Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John . . .” (4:13).

- By their clarity and pointed proclamations. There was no ambiguity in the words of Peter and John. They spoke clearly and to the point – a manner that clearly characterized their Master. “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus, whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go” (3:13), “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (3:26),

“This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among **However, in a society that has very little understanding of God, His ways, His Son, and His Word, preachers and teachers must take special care how they speak. They must refuse to speak in the religious jargon of the day, for the people will come to**

men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:11-12).

AN OBSERVATION

Some of the unfortunate traits of our time are Scriptural illiteracy and very little acquaintance with the Lord Jesus Christ. All of this makes it exceedingly difficult to make an association of ministers with Jesus, for He is largely unknown. “Another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4) is being proclaimed, and it has caused all manner of complications. Were it not for the Holy Spirit working through the Word of God, particularly the Gospel of Christ, it would be well-nigh impossible for anyone to be saved.

Peter and John could speak knowing that their listeners had a working acquaintance with Scripture. They could draw attention to pivotal texts that awakened the interest of the people. However, in a society that has very little understanding of God, His ways, His Son, and His Word, preachers and teachers must take special care how they speak. They must refuse to speak in the religious jargon of the day, for the people will come to wrong conclusions. If, for example, they speak of “praise and worship,” “the true New Testament church,” “cheap grace,” Sovereign grace,” “the baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues,” “the plan of salvation,” “the centrality of the family,” and other such terms, their message will have no power to it. The Holy Spirit does not work with such words. They are not a sword in His hands. Such terms are very small containers with very large holes, and cannot contain the truth, or bring grace to the hearts of the people.

This is a day when preachers and teachers must make a point to fulfill this word, “Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor 2:13). Those are the words to be affirmed and expounded, for the Spirit works through them – the Word of God being His sword. Even though, owing to ignorance, the hearers may not be able to detect the speaker has been with Jesus, the Holy Spirit will use such words to do His unique work, and bring holy influences to bear upon men..

THEY COULD SAY NOTHING AGAINST IT

“ 14 And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.”

We are living in a time when religious appearance does not always match religious claims. There are professed healed people who still have the symptoms of their illness, and those who say they are forgiven, yet remain under the dominion of sin. We have New Testament churches without new Testament manners, and those who say they believe, yet do not possess the evidences of faith. Such things have become so common that scarcely a person has not become accustomed to them. Assuring us God really does work, even though there is no evidence of it, we are told not to judge a book by its cover, even though Jesus said we are to judge a tree by its fruit. When we are told not to judge according appearance (John 7:24), it is not suggested that holy people can have a wicked appearance, or that believers can appear as though they were unbelievers. The warning is that what appears good may not be good – not that what appears evil may not be evil. That is, a wicked person can feign godliness, but a righteous person does not and cannot feign wickedness.

BEHOLDING THE MAN WHICH WAS HEALED

“ And beholding the man which was healed standing with them . . . ” Other versions read, “But

since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them,” NIV “When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them,” NRSV “And, seeing that the man who had been made well was there with them ,” BBE and “And they saw that the lame man, who had been healed, stood near them.” MRD

This is the manner of the Kingdom – the evidence of Divine working is put before the people. When Jesus the Righteous One was among men, the evidence of His righteousness was set before them. He challenged His critics, “Which of you convinceth Me of sin?” (John 8:46). He boldly said, “the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me” (John 14:30) – and no one could contradict it! He confessed, “I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:10) – and there was not a shred of evidence that was at variance with that statement. It is written of Him that He, “was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15). The two thousand years that have followed that statement has not produced one valid claim to the contrary.

Now, since the Kingdom has been given to Jesus, it maintains the same qualities as its Head. When a legitimate work has been done, there is no evidence that can successfully negate it. For example, when Saul of Tarsus was converted, some of the disciples were hesitant to believe it, and feared that his presence among them was a subtle means of carrying out a persecution against them (Acts 9:26). However, “Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27). It is written that following that, Saul “was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:28). There was not a single time when his life contradicted what Barnabas had said of him. That is the manner of the Kingdom.

When there is “newness of life” it manifests itself outwardly, just as surely as the healing of a lame man was confirmed by his outward appearance. Peter said of the man that was healed, “the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all” (Acts 3:16). There was nothing about the man that remotely suggested he did not have “perfect health.” NASB He had no limp, did not appear weak, and did not wear down as the evening came upon the people. He did not cry out with pain, had no difficulty walking, and was even leaping vigorously. The appearance confirmed what had been done.

And now, Peter and John make sure the evidence is kept before the people. I do not know if the man went to jail with Peter and John, but at this time, he was standing by their side – incontrovertible proof that a mighty work had been done. The judges could not help but see him. There he was, a living contradiction of their stilted theology.

Something To Ponder

The Gospels contain the record of at least thirty-five miracles wrought by the Lord Jesus. These do not include His death, in which He laid down His own sinless life, and His resurrection, in which he took back His life. Neither do they include the times when He healed multitude of people of divers conditions (Matt 4:24; 8:16; 12:15; 14:14; 15:30; 19:2; 21:14; Lk 4:40; 5:15; 6:19; 9:11). Because of the relevancy of this, I want to take the liberty to list our Lord's miracles.

1. Turned water into wine (John 1:1-11).
2. Healed the nobleman's son (John 4:46-54).
3. Commanded a great draught of fish (Luke 5:1-11).
4. Healed a demoniac with an unclean spirit (Mk 1:23-26; Lk 4:33-36).
5. Healed Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (Matt 8:14-17; Mk 1:29-31; Lk 4:38-39).
6. Cleansed a leper (Matt 8:1-4; Mk 1:40-45; Lk 5:12-16).

- 26). 7. Healed a paralytic carried to Him by four men (Matt 9:1-8; Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26).
8. Healed an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-16).
9. Restored a withered hand to wholeness (Matt 12:9-13; Mk 3:1-5; Lk 6:6-11).
10. Restored a centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10).
11. Raised a widow's son from the dead (Lk 7:11-16).
12. Healed a demoniac of blindness and dumbness (Matt 12:22-37; Lk 11:14-15).
13. Stilled the tempest (Matt 8:23-27; Mk 4:35-41; Lk 8:22-25).
14. Stilled the tempest again (Matt 14:32).
15. Casts a legion of demons out of the Gadarene (Matt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-39).
16. Raises the daughter of Jairus from the dead (Matt 9:18-26; Mk 5:22-24,35-41; Lk 8:41-56).
17. Cures a woman with an issue of blood (Matt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48).
18. Restores sight to two blind men (Matt 9:27-31).
19. Feeds five thousand men with five loaves and two fishes (Matt 14:15-21; Mk 6:35-44; Lk 9:12-17; John 6:5-14).
20. Walks on the sea again (Matt 14:22-33; Mk 6:45-52; John 6:16-21).
21. Heals a demon possessed daughter of a Syrophenician woman (Matt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30).
22. Feeds four thousand men with seven loaves and a few little fishes (Matt 15:32-39; Mk 8:1-9).
23. Restores one who was deaf and had an impediment of speech (Mk 7:31-37).
24. Restores a blind man from Bethsaida (Mk 8:22-26).
25. Restores a lunatic child (Matt 17:14-21; Mk 9:14-29; Lk 9:37-43).
26. Causes a fish to deliver tribute money to Peter (Matt 17:24-27).
27. Restores ten lepers (Lk 17:11-19).
28. Opens the eyes of a man born blind (John 9:1-41).
29. Raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11:1-45).
30. Heals a woman with a spirit of infirmity, bowed together for eighteen years (Lk 13:10-17).
31. Cures a man with dropsy (Lk 14:1-6).
32. Restores two blind men near Jericho (Matt 20:29-34; Mk 10:46-52; Lk 18:35-43).
33. Curses a fig tree (Matt 21:17-22; Mk 11:12-14,20-24).
34. Heals the ear of Malchus, cut off by Peter (Lk 22:49-51).
35. Commands a second draught of fish (John 21:6).

Keep in mind, these were only samples of the mighty works of Jesus. John said of the signs wrought by Jesus after His resurrection specifically, and throughout His ministry in general: "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book" (John 20:30).

It would be of incalculable benefit if a holy church could be held forth as confirmation of the glorious work of the Savior. It certainly would not remove opposition to the truth, nor would it rid us of skeptics. It would, however, bring a greater glory to the doctrine if it was adorned with godly lives.

Yet, in all of those miracles, there was not a single instance in which the outward appearance did not perfectly confirm that the work had been done. No blind man remained partially blind. No lame man remained crippled to some small degree. No person healed of deafness required a hearing aid. There is no record of demons repossessing those from whom Jesus had expelled them. If Jesus fed a multitude they “were all filled” (Lk 9:17). Of course, these things are all evident, and no one with understanding contests the truth of them.

None of Jesus’ enemies charged Him with deceiving people with His miracles. They sought to charge Him with working these miracles through the power of Satan, but no one suggested the miracles were not real. That is the manner of the Kingdom – the result of Divine working confirms its reality. That is what we have in our text: a lame man who was healed who displays no evidence of ever being lame.

Making the Transition

We must be able to make the transition to spiritual realities, of which our Lord’s miracles were types. Is it possible for the benefits of the New Covenant to be realized, and yet there is no evidence of them. Permit me to name a few of them.

- A new heart (Ezek 36:26; Acts 15:9).
- A new spirit (Ezek 36:26; Rom 8:16).
- The circumcision of the heart (Col 2:11-12).
- The experience of newness of life (Rom 6:4).
- Reconciled to God (Rom 5:10).
- A new creation in which old things pass away and all things become new (2 Cor 5:17).
- The Holy Spirit sent into our hearts (Gal 4:6).
- Delivered from the power of darkness (Col 1:13).
- Born again (1 Pet 1:23).
- Receiving the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10).

Is it possible for these to actually occur, and yet there be no evidence of them? And if it is possible, how can it be established that they took place?

I am aware that our condition is complicated by the presence of the “old man” (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9), also referred to as “the flesh” (Gal 5:17), and “the natural man” (1 Cor 2:14). It is possible for inconsistencies to occur in our lives because of this condition. For the believer, this is very troubling, as Romans 7:14-25 confirms. However, the absence of evidence of the new creation is also to concern us. That is why we are to examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5).

It would be of incalculable benefit if a holy church could be held forth as confirmation of the glorious work of the Savior. It certainly would not remove opposition to the truth, nor would it rid us of skeptics. It would, however, bring a greater glory to the doctrine if it was adorned with godly lives. If those who profess to be Christians had an obvious longing for glory, and it was equally apparent that they did not place an inordinate value on the things of this world, it might even cause some to be ashamed that they oppose the truth. Thus Paul wrote, “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you ” (Titus 2:6-8). Peter also wrote, “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ ” (1 Pet 3:16). Again he wrote, “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works , which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12). And again, “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ” (1 Pet 2:15).

An Example

Take, for example, a circumstance with which many of us are familiar. Even though the Scriptures speak with great clarity concerning baptism into Christ, many groups have chosen to view it as an option that is not really necessary. I come from a background in which great stress was placed on baptism. Formal debates were held on the subject, and baptism was aggressively promoted. However, there was a very troubling circumstance in the presence of all of this controversy. The people with whom I was identified were not generally a holy people. They appeared no different than the ones who did not practice baptism. Newness of life was not generally apparent among them, nor was any death with Christ, or circumcision of the heart – all of which are associated with baptism. The people were much like a group of helpless cripples, sitting on the ground and saying they had been healed. If those who faithfully spoke the truth about baptism could have pointed to a people who had the evidence of real baptism in them, their words would not have been so easily contested.

It is time for the evidence of newness of life to be presented to the world. Of course, it really has to be present for this to be done – just like the

That is how the work of the Lord is – whether it is Israel crossing the red Sea, the defeat of the Amalekites while Moses’ hands are lifted up, David slaying Goliath, or lame man made whole – it cannot be denied!

man in our text had to really be healed before the people really noticed him. It is out of order to tell people who say they are Christians to “act like Christians” – just as surely as it would have been out of order for Peter to commission the former lame man to “Go, and act like you are healed!”

THEY COULD SAY NOTHING AGAINST IT

“ . . . they could say nothing against it. ” Other versions read, “they had nothing to say in reply,” NASB “there was nothing they could say ,” NIV “they had nothing to say in opposition ,” NRSV “they were not able to say anything against it,” BBE “they had nothing to say in response ,” CSB “they couldn't say anything against the two apostles ,” GWN “and they could say nothing to confront them ,” MRD “they could find no answer ,” NJB “the council could hardly discredit the healing,” LIVING “they had no reply to make,” WEYMOUTH “they could not contradict the fact or say anything in opposition,” AMPLIFIED “they could find no effective reply ,” PHILLIPS and “But they could not deny what had happened.” CEV

The evidence standing before those who were judging Peter and John was so potent that they could not deny it. Later they will confess, “that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it ” (Acts 4:16).

These judges could not speak against what had been done. They could not point to a flaw in the man who once sat at the gate of the Temple. His feet were not deformed. His ankles were strong and able to support him. Although he had never walked before, he now had great dexterity, walking, and even leaping, while he praised the Lord.

That is how the work of the Lord is – whether it is Israel crossing the red Sea, the defeat of the Amalekites while Moses’ hands are lifted up, David slaying Goliath, or lame man made whole – it cannot be denied! Men may not like it, but they cannot deny that something has happened to those in whom Jesus has really worked. Professing Christians who do not carry some evidence of new life within them are in a precarious position.

There are countless people who wear the name of Jesus who are a living contradiction of His salvation. They are like a man standing on crutches boasting that he has been healed of lameness, or a man with glasses testifying that he has been healed of blindness. Suffice it to say, such circumstances are a disgrace.

CONCLUSION

There is such an abrasiveness between the truth of God and institutional religion that it causes expressed conflict – like the Temple authorities arresting, incarcerating, and interrogating Peter and John. This was not a mere battle between human personalities. Ultimately, Peter and John were confronting the devil himself – the personality that was dominating the Jewish council.

This kind of dominance differed from demonic oppression, as evidenced in the demon-possessed people Jesus liberated. Those demons wrought all manner of physical afflictions upon the people: dumbness (Matt 9:32), a bowed back (Lk 13:11), blindness and dumbness (Matt 12:22), and a child thrown into convulsions, and into fire, and water (Matt 17:15-18). While these were the work of the devil, there is another kind of work that he does – a work that is not so evident. He takes the Word out of the hearts of those who have no interest in it (Lk 8:12). He also blinds the minds of those who do not believe (2 Cor 4:4). He can tempt people who do not control their lusts, drawing them into immorality (1 Cor 7:5). Through subtlety he can cause the minds of men to be corrupted from the simplicity that in Christ, so that their religion becomes pretentious (2 Cor 11:3). Through deceptive devices, he can gain the advantage over professing believers so that they serve him rather than God (2 Cor 2:11). He hurls temptations at believers – “fiery darts” – that are designed to lure them into sin (Eph 6:16).

This latter manner of working is what the apostles were facing. Just as with Jesus, no demon-possessed wild man ever attacked them. Their opposition originated in a rational form, even though it often led to beatings and other forms of physical abuse. They faced aberrant reasoning – contradicting intellectualism. Those who opposed them were not driven by madness, but by opposing concepts and persuasions.

This kind of opposition is the most dangerous because it wears the cloak of rationality. To be sure, it can erupt in the most vicious external abuse imaginable. Yet, at its root, it is not found in the physiological – the realm of flesh and blood, or living matter. This is why it is written, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). These evil personalities corrupt the mind, and they delight to do so through religion.

Throughout the book of Acts, the opposition of holy men will largely come in the name of religion. There was much opposition from corrupt Jews, as in our text (Acts 6:9-14; 7:1-60; 9:23-24; 13:50-51; 14:19; 17:5,13-15; 18:12-18; 23:12-15; 2 Cor 11:24; 1 Thess 2:14-15). There were also professing followers of Christ who proved to be opponents (1 Cor 9:3; 2 Cor 10:10; Phil 1:16; 1 Tim 1:19-20; 2 Tim 2:17-18; 4:14; 3 John 1:9). Even when Paul and Silas were beaten and cast into prison in Philippi, it was at the instigation of religious men who “made silver shrines for Diana,” a goddess of the Ephesians (Acts 19:24-35).

Therefore, in this book we are, among many other things, being subjected to the very nature of the “good fight of faith” (1Tim 6:12). A fight involves facing opponents and engaging in warfare.

Effective weaponry is required, as well as an alert military stance, consistency, and vigilance. Very often, the greatest opposition does not come from the worldly sector, but rather from the religious sector. It is important that you have a grasp of this circumstance.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #18

DIALOG BETWEEN PETER AND THE LEADERS

“ 4:15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. 17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name. 18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard. 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done. 22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.” (Acts 4:15-22)

INTRODUCTION

The initial answer of Peter has moved the council to withdraw for a brief caucus. The apostle has proved a bit challenging for them, even though they considered him to be “unlearned and ignorant.” The wisdom of God that is graciously given to men is precisely that – wisdom! As also confirmed in Stephen, it is a wisdom that cannot be successfully resisted, or coped with by those who are opposed to it (Acts 6:10). This is precisely why Peter and John have been arrested, as though they were lawbreakers. Their opponents were not able to contend with what they were saying, so they resorted to threats and attempts to restrain them.

Because the leaders cannot contend with Peter and John on a rational level, they determine to stop the spread of this Gospel by threatening them. However, when they called for the two disciples to stand again before them, and informed them of their decision, they found it had no effect at all upon the

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- **CONCLUSION**

men. They continued to speak boldly, challenging the council to consider if it was right to listen to men rather than to God. They then informed their judges that could not refrain from speaking what they had seen and heard, whether it met with their approval or not. The words of Peter and John, coupled with the people glorifying God for the work that had been done, so frustrated the council, that they would let them go.

It is important to take note of who is opposing Peter and John. It is not the political authorities – even though Pilate had been known to mingle the blood of some Jews with their sacrifices. Some people had “told Jesus about what had happened to some people from Galilee. Pilate had killed those people while they were worshiping, mixing their own blood with the blood of the animals they were sacrificing” IE (Lk 13:1). He had also had Jesus crucified, violating his own conscience, to please the people. Yet, this wretched man was not interfering with the preaching of Peter and John. Nor, indeed, was Herod, who had also joined in the responsibility for Christ’s death. He too was no defender of the faithful, and even “killed James the brother of John with the sword . . . because he saw it pleased the Jews” (Acts 12:2-3). Yet, even that despot was not seeking to stop Peter and John from preaching. Instead, their opponents were the “rulers of the people, and elders of Israel” – God’s chosen people.

When Peter and John began preaching “through Jesus the resurrection of the dead,” it “grieved” these leaders (4:2). It was disruptive to their work, and contradicted their influence. They could not view the apostles as men of spiritual understanding, but could only see them as competitors. How could such things be? How could those with a working acquaintance with Scripture raise such opposition against men chosen by God?

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

Although all delusion is potentially damning, there is a form of delusion that is in a class by itself. It is religious delusion. There are at least five forms delusion can take. Ranked from the highest to the lowest they are, Christian delusion, Jewish delusion, heathen Idolatry, Philosophical, and Sensual. Permit me to briefly define these terms as I am using them.

- **CHRISTIAN.** This centers in “another Jesus,” “another Gospel,” and “another Spirit” (2 Cor 11:4). It involves the embrace of an erroneous view of Christ, and a spurious view of salvation and Divine purpose.

- **JEWISH.** This is a view of Judaism, or the Old Covenant, that does not accept Jesus Christ as the Savior. It sees Jesus as being in conflict with the truth, and thus vigorously opposes Him and those who embrace Him.

- **IDOLATRY.** This form of delusion embraces another God – not Jehovah. It maintains religious devotion, yet recognizes neither the true God, nor the Scriptures which

He has given. This approach to religion is generally based on fear.

- **PHILOSOPHICAL.** This approach to life sees religion of all kinds as mindless superstition. It ranges from outright atheism to the power of positive thought.

- **SENSUAL.** This manner of life capitalizes on the lust of the flesh, and sees life as revolving around the satisfaction of lower appetites, ranging from pleasure and the accumulation of goods to all manner of fleshly indulgence and immorality.

Men tend to rank these manners of life from sensual to Christian delusion. However, they are actually ranked the opposite, with Christian delusion being the most difficult from which to recover. Jewish delusion comes next because it is a distortion of something God has revealed. Idolatry is next because it retains the idea of Deity, yet creates its own God, together with ideas of how to approach him.

The more revelation God has given on a matter, the more serious the perversion of it becomes. When there is an effort to attach meanings to Divine revelation that were not intended, Satan gains a more firm grasp on the mind and soul of the individual. Under such conditions the soul becomes insensitive to God, and the conscience becomes “seared” (1 Tim 4:2). This whole circumstance is enhanced if the individual has once known the truth, yet falls from it.

If a person has not received “the love of the truth” (2 Thess 2:10), or if they “turn away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim 4:14), they at once become hopelessly vulnerable to all of these forms of delusion. Recovery from such a condition is not simplistic, and can only take place through the authority of Christ and the truth of the Gospel, which is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16).

IN OUR TEXT

In our text, the opponents of Peter and John have sinned against much truth. Certain advantages had been providentially given to them – all by divine intention.

- The ministry of the Law, that was designed to bring them to Christ (Gal 3:24).
- The ministry of the Prophets, whose children they were (Acts 3:25).
- The ministry of the Old Covenant, with its varied ceremonies and directives. They were the children of that covenant, and should therefore have prepared for Christ (Acts 3:25).
- The ministry of John the Baptist, who was sent by God to prepare the way for Christ (Lk 1:76; Mk 11:32).
- The ministry of the Son of God, whom God “approved” in their presence by many incontrovertible signs, miracles, and wonders (Acts 2:22).
- The notable miracle of the healing of the man who was lame from birth (Acts 4:14,16).
- The illuminating explanations of Peter and John (Acts 4:8-13).

It is not possible to account for the hardness of these people apart from the powers of darkness. Their condition confirms what happens when a place is made for Satan – whether on purpose or inadvertently. I say that because these men were not knowledgeably yielding to the devil. Yet, because of their refusal of the truth, Satan’s power over them was totally dominating. Only the true can free men from delusion. Therefore, when truth is rejected, delusion dominates.

Now, we will see if these men will yield to godly reasoning. Will their wills give way to the truth? Will they change their intentions, or acknowledge their own waywardness?

THEY CONFERRED AMONG THEMSELVES

“ 4:15 But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves . . .”

Peter has made his first defense, and it has been a powerful one. Consider again what he said.

Just as the wicked are prone to do, these men plot their strategy in secret, removing those on trial from their presence.

They had crucified Christ, yet He had made the man whole who was standing before them (4:10a).

- They had crucified Christ, yet God had raised Him from the dead (4:10b).
- He identified Jesus as “the Stone” that was rejected by them – “the builders” (4:11).
- He announced there was no salvation in any one other than Jesus (4:12a).
- He declared men “ must be saved” through Christ (4:12b).

Peter and John had spoken with remarkable power, so that the council marveled. They had also taken note of them “that they had been with Jesus” (4:13). They also had beheld the healed man standing before them, and “could say nothing against it” (4:14). Surely, that will be enough to turn their hearts!

THEY COMMANDED THEM TO GO OUTSIDE

“ But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, . . .” Other versions read, “ withdraw from the Sanhedrin,” NIV “ leave the council,” NRSV “leave the council room,” GWN “ remove them from the presence of the council,” MRD “ go away out of the sanhedrim,” YLT and “ sent them out of the Council chamber.” LIVING

Since the man that was healed was standing with them, it is probable that he was sent outside with Peter and John. At any rate, they did not want to continue their deliberations with them present. They could not speak freely while the men they were judging were in their presence. Had they been truthful and possessing noble motives, they could have proceeded with Peter, John, and the healed man in their presence.

Like the wicked whom David faced, this council spoke in secret about this matter. “Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: that they may shoot in secret at the perfect: suddenly do they shoot at him, and fear not. They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily ; they say, Who shall see them?” (Psa 64:4- 5).

Just as the wicked are prone to do, these men plot their strategy in secret, removing those on trial from their presence. “He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor. He lieth in wait secretly as a lion in his den: he lieth in wait to catch the poor: he doth catch the poor, when he draweth him into his net. He croucheth, and humbleth himself, that the poor may fall by his strong ones” (Psa 10:8-10).

When Peter and John began speaking, they did not ask for any religious officials among them to leave. In fact, being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter said, “Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel” (Acts 4:8). Further, when Peter gave his first defense before the council he was careful to say, “Be it known unto you all , and to all the people of Israel” (Acts 4:10). But when these men address the matter, they put Peter and John away from the chamber in which they were meeting.

THEY CONFERRED AMONG THEMSELVES

“ . . . they conferred among themselves . . .” Other versions read, “discussed the matter with one another,” NRSV “had a discussion among themselves,” BBE “had a private discussion,” NJB “The Jewish Council wanted to talk among themselves ,” IE “They conferred [debated] among themselves,” AMPLIFIED and “hold a conference among themselves.” PHILLIPS

I suppose this would have been an excellent time to ask for the view of Gamaliel, a man held in high esteem among the Jews. Later, after considerably more had taken place, he would deliver a word of wise caution concerning the handling of Peter and

They did not sent out Peter and John so they could pray or seek the face of the Lord. They did not call for the high priest to bring in the Urim and the Thummim so they could inquire of the Lord. Nor did they call for a prophet who could declare the mind of the Lord to them.

John. However, at this stage of the events, the council appeared self confident in their own judgment.

These men were not aware that they were opposing the Lord Himself – but they were. The words of the Psalmist certainly applied to them: “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength” (Psa 33:16). They were trusting in their own hearts, imagining they were sufficient to carry out an initiative against the messengers of Jesus of Nazareth. In this matter, they proved themselves to be fools. As it is written, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool: but whoso walketh wisely, he shall be delivered” (Prov 28:26).

They did not sent out Peter and John so they could pray or seek the face of the Lord. They did not call for the high priest to bring in the Urim and the Thummim so they could inquire of the Lord (Num 27:21). Nor did they call for a prophet who could declare the mind of the Lord to them (1 Sam 28:6).

This council gave no evidence of even the smallest degree of consciousness toward God. Of course, that is the way of “the flesh.” It does not reason with God at the center of thought. Instead, ungodly personal objectives and the maintenance of a cherished, yet lifeless, religious system is dictating their approach to this threatening situation.

To emphasize the matter, and lest we forget the absurdity of the flesh , let us remember the unsettling things that had happened in the Temple courts. These had arrested the attention of these men.

- A man who was lame from his mother’s womb had been healed, and was present with the people in a state of perfect health.
- Peter and John have been preaching through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Although a wonderful work had been done, and a marvelous Gospel was being preached, it had caused grief for the Temple authorities. Now a council has been called as though a law had been broken, and wrong had been done.

WHAT SHALL WE DO TO THESE MEN

“ 16 Saying, What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it.”

When works and words of truth are disruptive, the cause that is disrupted by them is neither right nor true. Truth is always harmonious, and one facet of it never contradicts or competes with another aspect of the truth. Any valid work of God will never negate or diminish another work of God. The fact that what was done and said by Peter and John had caused trouble among the Jewish leaders proves they were not engaged in the work of the Lord.

WHAT SHALL WE DO TO THESE MEN?

“Saying, What shall we do to these men?” Other versions read, “What are we going to do with these men?” NIV

The idea here is not how they would punish the men, but how they could restrain them from preaching. Would it require the council to kill this pair of preachers? Would incarceration be the only alternative? Should they be severely punished? Or, was their authority sufficient to simply order Peter and John to stop preaching. That is what this unholy caucus was all about: stopping the apostles from preaching.

A NOTABLE MIRACLE

“ . . . for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem,” NKJV “ the fact that a noteworthy miracle has taken place through them is apparent to all who live in Jerusalem,” NASB “ Everybody living in Jerusalem knows they have done an outstanding miracle,” NIV “They said, “For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them,” NRSV “for certainly it is clear to all who are living in Jerusalem that a most important sign has been done by them,” BBE “for surely a manifest sign is done by them, and it is openly known to all them that dwell in Jerusalem,” GENEVA “clearly, they've performed a miracle that everyone in Jerusalem knows about ,” GWN and “For that an extraordinary miracle has been performed by (through) them is plain to all the residents of Jerusalem.” AMPLIFIED

The miracle of the lame man being made whole was “notable” in that it was seen by all: “And all the people saw him walking and praising God. And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him” (Acts 3:9-10).

We will find that incontrovertible facts do not necessarily cause the opponents of the Lord to change their mind. This is because they are not driven by sound reasoning. Their minds have been “blinded” by the god of this world, so that they cannot receive the Christ or believe the Gospel that declares Him.

The reaction of the council is reminiscent of the reaction of the same council to Jesus. “Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this Man doeth many miracles. If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on Him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:47).

Exactly what can men do when they face a work of God – a “notable work” that contradicts the thrust of their religion. What do they do when the work is done in the name of the One they rejected, delivered up, crucified, and killed? What justification can be offered for opposing such a work and the One in whose name it was done?

We will find that incontrovertible facts do not necessarily cause the opponents of the Lord to change their mind. This is because they are not driven by sound reasoning. Their minds have been “blinded” by the god of this world, so that they cannot receive the Christ or believe the Gospel that declares Him. Because of this condition the light of Divine illumination does not shine upon them. As it is written, “But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them ” (2 Cor 4:3-4). Unlike citizens of Samaria who would later believe, this council did not see the miracle that was done. That is, they did not perceive or discern it. They knew something supernatural had been done, but they obstinately refused to embrace its

implications.

WE CANNOT DENY IT

“ . . . and we cannot deny it.” Other versions read, “and it is not possible to say that it is not so,” BBE “we are not able to deny it,” YLT and “that is something we cannot deny.” PHILLIPS

It was not that these men could not deny that a notable work had been done. It was rather because that work was “manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem.” That is why they could not deny it. It was not because their conscience would not let them deny it. That would have been easy enough for them to do, for they were not honest men. Now, however, they are out of their league. Their religion consisted of nothing more than talk. Peter and John had backed up their message with a mighty work, and it was done publically. The healing of the lame man was not an experiment. It was rather a revelation of the power of the exalted Christ. These men would appear to be nothing more than fools if they denied the miracle of a healed man who was standing before them – a miracle that was known throughout the city of Jerusalem.

Not A Kingdom of Talk

The Kingdom of God is not a domain of talk. As it is written, “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor 4:20). That is, it is not limited to talk, doctrine, or verbal communication. Even the preaching of the Gospel would be pointless if “the power of God unto salvation” was not resident in it (Rom 1:16). Spiritual life is more than a belief system contained in words. Words without power are like a body without a spirit. Herein is the uniqueness of the Gospel – it is “the power of God” to effect a very real salvation, or deliverance.

This is not to insinuate that speaking has no place in the Kingdom of God. In fact, the primary placements in the body of Christ had to do with the communication of knowledge: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that . . .” (1 Cor 12:28). However, these words are supported by eternal verities, and are the means through which the very power of God is realized. When it comes to life in Christ Jesus, men are not merely promoting philosophical views. Jesus said His words were “spirit and life” – i.e., they give and sustain spiritual life. The miracle of the healing of the lame man confirmed this was the case, for it was brought about by words: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6). That same power undergirded the teaching of Peter and John, which had so irritated the Temple officials. Those officials were grieved because “they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (4:2).

The Need for Something in Religion That Men Cannot Deny

Contemporary Christianity suffers much because of the inconsistency of many of its adherents. When the lives of those who profess identity with Christ contradict the “doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9), a most serious condition exists. A doctrine that affirms deliverance from the world does not allow for harmony with the world. A doctrine that places stress on the hope of what is to come cannot be joined with a stress that is placed on things that are here and now. If citizenship in heaven is fundamental, there can be no room for at-homeness in this world. If we have been “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), there can be no place given for a lack of interest in Him. If we escape the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of God, and obtain everything pertaining to life and godliness through the same means, how is it possible for a fundamental ignorance of God to exist in those so described?

What I am saying is that a religion that has a manner that contradicts its profession cannot possibly be true. Those who wear the name of Christ must have lives that support the doctrine – “that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things” (Titus 2:10). This is letting our light shine

(Matt 5:16), walking worthy of the vocation wherewith we have been called (Eph 4:1), living a life that becomes the Gospel of Christ (Phil 1:27), shining as lights in the world (Phil 1:27), having our manner of life honest among the Gentiles (1 Pet 2:12), and being in possession of a good conscience (1 Pet 3:16). It involves walking in wisdom toward those who are without (Col 4:5), giving no occasion to the adversary (1 Tim 5:14), and making no place for the devil (Eph 4:27).

By walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25) and living by faith (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38), we will remove any justification for the enemies of Christ to accuse us. We will be like the testimony of the healed lame man before the council. They will behold righteous and focused life that cannot be effectively denied.

A WORLDLY SOLUTION

“ 17 But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.”

Thus the members of the council are cast upon the horns of a dilemma. They cannot deny the reality of what has been done, because the inhabitants of Jerusalem have seen it, and know it is true. Furthermore, however, they can find no just cause to punish Peter and John, for they have broken no law – either of God or man. Still, they will not back away from this matter. They will insist on maintaining their opposition.

THAT IT SPREAD NO FURTHER

“But that it spread no further among the people, . . .” Other versions read, “But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people,” NIV “But that it be noised no farther among the people,” GENEVA “But that the fame of it spread no further,” MRD “But to keep this matter from spreading any further among the people,” NET “But to keep them from spreading their propaganda any further,” NLT “But perhaps we can stop them from spreading their propaganda,” LIVING and “But in order that it may not spread further among the people and the nation .” AMPLIFIED

The council feared the spread of the report of this healed man – but even more, the spread of the Gospel preaching that had attended it. These men could not deny that the miracle had occurred, but they sought some means to suppress the spread of the report of it.

The teaching and preaching of Peter and John were so diametrically opposed to that of the council that they felt it should not be allowed to spread. Particularly since it was confirmed by this leaping and praising man whom everyone knew had been sitting helpless at the Temple gate for years.

The council feared the spread of the report of this healed man – but even more, the spread of the Gospel preaching that had attended it. These men could not deny that the miracle had occurred, but they sought some means to suppress the spread of the report of it. This particularly referred to the report and interpretation of the event by Peter and John. “Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? . . . And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong , whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all . . . Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole ” (Acts 3:12,16; 4:10). That is the particular report they were seeking to suppress.

It is the nature of lifeless institutionalism to oppose anything that does not promote its own interests. This is particularly true of the proclamation of the name of Jesus. It is very obvious to “the enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18) that the message of Christ cannot promote their cause. It is at a sharp variance with it, and therefore they oppose it in every way possible.

However, when those who profess to follow Christ support the truth of God by their manner of life, it makes it more difficult for opponents to suppress the Gospel. They will not be altogether stopped unless they are judged from heaven, but they will have to work harder in their efforts to suppress the truth of God.

LET US THREATEN THEM

“ . . . let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.” Other versions read, “let us severely threaten them , that from now on they speak to no man in this name,” NKJV “let us warn them to speak no more to any man in this name,” NASB “we must warn these men to speak no longer to anyone in this name,” NIV “let us put them in fear of punishment if they say anything in future in this name,” BBE “let us threaten them severely no longer to speak to any man in this name,” DARBY “let us threaten and charge them , that they speak henceforth to no man in this Name,” GENEVA “So let's threaten them. Let's tell them that they must never speak to anyone about the one named Jesus .” GWN “let us interdict their speaking any more to any man in this name,” MRD “We'll tell them that if they do it again we'll really throw the book at them ,” LIVING “we must make them afraid to talk to anyone about this man,” IE and “let us warn and forbid them with a stern threat to speak any more to anyone in this name [or about this Person],” AMPLIFIED and “let us warn them that if they say anything more to anyone in this name it will be at their peril .” PHILLIPS

These men have an inordinately high estimation of their own perceived authority. They imagine that their word carries a lot of weight. That supposition, however, is founded upon two cracked pillars.

- The assumption that those who declare the truth have any respect for authorities who oppose the truth.
- That those who proclaim Christ have interest in any organization that is an end unto itself.

Righteous men are not motivated by the fear of man, or the institutions they have formed. Ungodly men, however, have no understanding of this. They cannot conceive of someone who does not shake with fear when they are called to account before them.

Righteous men are not motivated by the fear of man, or the institutions they have formed. Ungodly men, however, have no understanding of this. They cannot conceive of someone who does not shake with fear when they are called to account before them. Thus, when charges were brought against Jesus and He did not reply to them, the high priest “arose, and said unto Him, Answerest Thou nothing? what is it which these witness against Thee? But Jesus held his peace” (Mat 26:62-63). Again, when the high priest “asked Jesus of His disciples, and of His doctrine. Jesus answered him, I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple, whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing. Why askest thou me? ask them which heard Me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when He had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou Me?” (John 18:19-23). You sense the consternation of the high priest at a person who did not fear him at all.

Our Lord faced the same thing when He stood before Pilate. “And Pilate asked Him again, saying, Answerest Thou nothing? behold how many things they witness against Thee. But Jesus yet answered nothing; so that Pilate marvelled” (Mark 15:4-5). Again stymied by the conduct of Jesus, Pilate said to Him, “Speakest Thou not unto me? knowest Thou not that I have power to crucify Thee, and have power to release Thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:10-11).

Completely unacquainted with this kind of fearlessness, the council actually thinks a severe threat will cause Peter and John to cease preaching in the name of Jesus. These holy men knew something the council did not know: “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov 29:25). They had heard Jesus speak concerning the fear of man, and had heartily embraced His words. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). And again, “And I say unto you My friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him” (Luke 12:4-5).

I do not doubt that the Spirit brought these words to the minds of Peter and John, buoying up their spirits, granting them boldness, and making them more firm in the resolute determination to declare the truth in the persuasion and confidence of faith.

Now, we will behold the audacity of carnal men, who think they have a right to suppress speaking in the name of Jesus. We will also see how those who did not fear such men will respond. There is much in this text that needs to be learned in our generation.

COMMANDED NOT TO SPEAK OR TEACH

“ 18 And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.”

The council now summons Peter and John into their presence. They have settled among themselves how they will address, what they conceive to be, a most serious problem.

THEY CALLED THEM

“And they called them . . .” Other versions read, “summoned them,” NASB “called them in again,” NIV “sent for them,” BBE “called them back,” NAB “called the apostles back in,” NLT and “they recalled the Apostles.” WEYMOUTH

Although we have nothing to fear from the tribunals of men, I must admit I am still irritated by the brazenness of religious professionals. They have the temerity to summon holy men before them and speak to them as though they are, in any legitimate sense, subject to them. Oh, that more would have the spirit of Paul in such circumstances: “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court . In fact, I do not even judge myself” NKJV (1 Cor 4:3). It is ever true, “But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man ” (1 Cor 2:15). It is not that godly men fear such conflicts. Rather, it is that they attach no real significance to them.

If one was to judge according to appearance, which Jesus expressly forbids (John 7:24), it would seem that Peter and John were actually subject to these men. However, they were not, for those who declare the truth are not subject to those who reject it. Peter and John know this, but the members of the council do not. They will therefore proceed as though the two men before them were under their jurisdiction.

COMMANDED NOT TO SPEAK

SOME MODERN EXAMPLES

1. In March 1998, The ACLU put pressure on the small town of Republic, Missouri to remove a fish symbol from its official logo, calling it a "secret sign of Christianity."
2. In April 1998, Rev. Patrick Mahoney was arrested for praying on the steps of the Supreme Court.

3. Tourists visiting Washington D.C. in 1997 were ordered by the police to stop praying in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol.

4. In 2003, the National Park Service removed 30 year-old plaques inscribed with Bible verses at Grand Canyon following complaints from the American Civil Liberties Union.

5. A Christian employee of Hewlet Packard was fired for posting Bible verses condemning homosexual behavior on his desk in response to posters displayed during a company campaign to promote a diverse work force.

6. The City council in Oceanside, CA banned public prayers that begin or end with the phrase "in the name of Christ."

7. In 1997 U.S. District Court Judge Ira DeMent struck down a law that required schools to allow voluntary student-initiated prayers at school events, saying it created excessive state entanglement in religion. He ordered the end to school-sponsored religious activities, such as prayers during morning announcements and at school events even though it isn't forced on students.

8. In 1997, a high school student in Florida was suspended for handing out religious literature before and after - but not during - school hours.

9. Two high school students in Texas were told by their principal they could not wear rosaries. The Principal claimed that they were symbols of gang activity, even though the boys were not involved in any gang.

10. In 2002, music teachers in Michigan, Maryland, and Virginia didn't allow students to perform traditional carols like "Silent Night" and "The First Noel" during Christmas.

11. A New Jersey public school banned the Charles Dickens play, "A Christmas Carol" because of its spiritual overtones and message of redemption.

12. Confessed child rapist James Arnett's sentence was overturned by an Ohio appeals court. The reason: the judge in his case quoted from Matthew 18:5-6 during sentencing.

13. Even though Krispy Kreme promises to give students a free doughnut for each "A" on their report cards, a store in Schereville, Indiana refused to reward the Kamp children for A's received in Bible classes.

**Taken from, JEREMIAH PROJECT: War Against Christianity –
<http://www.jeremiahproject.com/prophecy/warxian.html>**

“ . . . and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach . . . ” Other versions read, “ ordered them not to speak or teach at all,” NRSV “ charged them not to speak or teach at all,” RSV “gave them orders not to make statements or give teaching,” BBE “gave them a warning on no account to make statements or to teach ,” NJB “told them never again to speak ,” LIVING “ordered them altogether to give up speaking or teaching ,” WEYMOUTH “ imperatively instructed them not to converse in any way or teach at all,” AMPLIFIED and “ ordered them bluntly not to speak or teach a single further word.” PHILLIPS

Notice with what authority they speak – yet these men did not have so much as one weightless mote of authority over Peter and John. Jesus had told them to preach (Matt 28:19; Mk 16:15), and now these men command them not to speak at all or teach, and are bold to do so. Flesh is that way – it asserts itself against the believer. Our text will provide us an example of how those in Christ react to legislation against the spread of the Gospel or the promotion of the name of Jesus.

Believers cannot be naive about this matter. In American we are already experiencing aggressive initiatives against those who speak of Christ and things associated with Him. Below are a few

examples.

- Not to pray publicly in the schools.
- No more religious baccalaureate services.
- Not to pray in Jesus' name (Armed Services chaplains).
- Not teach creation in the schools.
- School children in some states forbidden to carry Bibles.
- Some schools forbid singing Christmas carols.
- A move to remove "in God we trust."
- A move to remove "one nation under God."
- Ordered to remove public manger scenes.
- Ordered to remove Ten Commandments from public places.
- Removing Christian meeting places on the basis of zoning (currently [11/2006] Washington DC and Tennessee).

The Gravity of the Situation

When the church is in a weakened state, laws like these can be more readily passed. Some will counter that we should not be concerned about this. Since the church is the pillar and ground of the truth, they say, we should not expect Christian representations to be condoned by the State. However, this reasoning is not sound.

First, modern attempts are to remove a presence that already exists. It is an effort to withdraw from society an existing influence, thereby reducing the level of God-consciousness. In that case, this Divine utterance applies: "The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God" (Psa 9:17).

IN THE NAME OF JESUS

"... in the name of Jesus." Other versions read, "teach about Jesus , or even mention His name ," GWN "about Jesus," LIVING and " by the authority of Jesus." IE

They did not command Peter and John to do no more healing – although they were no doubt opposed to that because of the interest it caused. It was speaking in the name of Jesus that raised their furor. I suppose if Peter and John had healed the man, swearing by the gold of the Temple, it would have been acceptable (Matt 23:16-17).

Because "there is none other Name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), Satan opposes speaking or acting in His name. Candidly, he has no aggressive objections to people speaking with the family in mind, or the government, or the assistance of the poor. None of these things are wrong of themselves, but they are not the foundation upon which eternal issues are based. The remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit do not depend upon such matters. Nor, indeed, is the New Covenant centered in them. As vital as they may seem, they are auxiliaries to life, and not life itself.

The real issues of life all depend upon Jesus Christ – who He is, what he has accomplished, and what he is doing! Therefore, the powers of darkness, against whom we wrestle, seek to put Jesus into the background at the least, and altogether remove Him from consideration at the worst. They are very active in our time. These powers have moved the Sanhedrin to mandate the cessation of speaking in the name of Jesus, or even mentioning His name. How will holy men respond to that?

ANSWERING WITH A QUESTION

“ 19 But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.”

There are statements that ought to be answered, and there are also times when silence is golden. Blessed is the one who can distinguish between the two. There is no handy set of rules that make that distinction easy to perceive. Such wisdom is rather the result of walking in the light as Jesus is in the light.

Just as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, Peter and John are “not careful” to respond to the demand of the counsel (Dan 3:16). That is, they really did not even “need to answer” NKJV what was demanded of them. The Sanhedrin had overstepped their bounds, and Peter and John were not obligated to enter into any dialog with them. Actually, the council is responsible for their own conduct, not Peter and John. Therefore, the two apostles will hurl the matter back at their accusers.

PETER AND JOHN ANSWERED

“But Peter and John answered and said unto them, . . .” Other versions read, “But Peter and John replied,” NIV “But Peter and John answered them,” NRSV “Peter and John, however, said to them in reply,” NAB “But Peter and John retorted,” NJB and “But Peter and John gave them this reply.” PHILLIPS

Here is an interesting thing: the council had not asked them anything, but had rather made a threatening demand of them. Yet, Peter and John are said to answer them – answering a commandment of men! That is, when men speak foolishly and outside the circumference of their responsibility, it is correct to challenge them to think more clearly about what they have required.

Note that the boldness of Peter and John did not wane when they were threatened, and even order, to keep silence. If anything, this council has increased their boldness, so that their mouths will not be stopped.

There are statements that ought to be answered, and there are also times when silence is golden. Blessed is the one who can distinguish between the two. There is no handy set of rules that make that distinction easy to perceive. Such wisdom is rather the result of walking in the light as Jesus is in the light.

RIGHT IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

“ . . . Whether it be right in the sight of God . . .” Other versions read, “right in God’s sight,” NIV “right in the eyes of God,” BBE “righteous before God,” DARBY “just in the sight of God,” DOUAY “whether God wants,” GWN “God wants us,” NLT and “What would God want?” IE

The Law-mentality asks, “Is it wrong?” The insightful person asks, “Is it right.” The word “right” comes from the Greek word **di,kaiο,n** (di-kai-on), which has the lexical meaning, “righteous . . . such as it ought to be, upright, righteous, virtuous,” THAYER “morally and ethically righteous, upright, and just,” FRIBERG “conforming to the standard, will, or character of God; upright, righteous, good, just, right,” UBS and “pertaining to being in accordance with what God requires.” LOUW-NIDA

Peter adds “in the sight of God” – that is, in the presence of God, or before Him. In other words, if a person was consciously in the presence of Almighty God, would this be considered the right thing to do? Would it incur the judgment or approbation of God? Would it please or displease Him? For the sensitive soul, this is an arresting consideration.

Of old time, the whole of a persons life was evaluated upon the basis of whether he did what was

right in the eyes of the Lord or not.

- The Law commanded men to do “that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God ” (Deut 13:18).

- It is said that David, “did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD , and turned not aside from any thing that He commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite” (1 Kgs 15:5).

- During the first part of his rule, Asa also “did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD , as did David his father” (1 Kgs 15:11).

- Omri, on the other hand, “wrought evil in the eyes of the LORD , and did worse than all that were before him” (1 Kgs 16:25).

- Jehoshaphat “walked in all the ways of Asa his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of the Lord ” (1 Kgs 22:43).

- Zedekiah “did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD , according to all that Jehoiakim had done” (Jer 52:2).

- Jesus spoke of things that were highly regarded or esteemed by men, yet were “abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16:15).

- Paul wrote to Timothy concerning things that were “good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior ” (1 Tim 2:3).

- The aim of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is to present the people of God “holy and unblameable and unproveable in His sight ” (Col 1:22).

- All of this is accented by the fact that no person “is not manifest in His sight : but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13).

No imagined earthly advantages will exist at that time. No personal agendas will be in place, other than the purpose of God Himself. No institutions or competitive kingdoms will exist, for they shall all have been decimated by the Kingdom of God. At that time, it will be evident that only God’s will really matters.

Peter and John do not philosophize about right and wrong. They do not leave the matter to human discretion, as though every person had a right to their opinion. They knew that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad?” (2 Cor 5:10). Things that are “right in the sight of God” will be “right” in that day – after “the heavens and the earth which are now” have passed away (2 Pet 3:7-12). No imagined earthly advantages will exist at that time. No personal agendas will be in place, other than the purpose of God Himself. No institutions or competitive kingdoms will exist, for they shall all have been decimated by the Kingdom of God (Dan 2:44). At that time, it will be evident that only God’s will really matters.

Now Peter and John call upon their judges to consider their mandate with Divine judgment in mind. They insist that their judgment be in light of God, not their own corrupted wills. They make no allowance for their judges to say they do not know what God wants, or how He views their decision. If they are religious leaders, it is their business to know the will of the Lord, and to have an accurate perception of what it right in this matter.

JUDGE YE

“ . . . to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.” Other versions read, “to listen to you more than to God, you judge,” NKJV “to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge,” NASB “to obey you rather than God, you must judge” NRSV “It is for you to say . . . to give attention

to you more than to God,” BBE “to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge,” NAS “Should we obey you or God ?” IE and “to listen to what you say rather than to what He says .” PHILLIPS

This is a weighty consideration, indeed! The men now addressed are religious men. In fact, they are leaders among the chosen people of God. They have a knowledge of Scripture, and some measure of awareness of the One who gave them. Now, rather than allowing this council to judge them, Peter and John call upon them to turn their supposedly discerning minds to this consideration. Is it right for their word to supercede the word of the Lord? Is it proper in the sight of God for His servants to go about as though they were actually answerable to this council?

Peter and John challenge their critics to consider that they are demanding their word to be honored above the word of the One whom God had approved among them. Of course, Peter and John will not subscribe to that condition. Their fear is of God, not man, and they choose to obey Him.

The response of Peter and John may appear to be pointless. Flesh reasons that their critics had hard hearts and would not subscribe to an honest consideration of this challenge. Therefore it reasons, “What is the use of making such a statement?” When one considers the nature of the Kingdom, and the involvement of heavenly influences, it makes perfect sense to speak as Peter and John did. Their words became a means through which the Holy Spirit would work – either to convict or harden. Additionally, their determination was precious in the sight of God. He would therefore take their side in this matter, and work in their behalf.

There Are Matters to be Judged

Even if we had not been specifically told to judge certain matters, we should know to do so by what has been said about our future. “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?” (1 Cor 6:2-3). These words are not given to us to promote speculation and vain imaginations. Rather, through this revelation we are provoked to learn to judge righteously while we are tabernacling in the flesh: “judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Believers are exhorted, “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way” (Rom 14:13). Again Paul wrote, “I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say” (1 Cor 10:15). And again, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge” (1 Cor 14:29).

The Right Approach

Let men have done with merely emotional approaches to the things of God. Every word and every action among those wearing the name of the Lord is subject to righteous scrutiny. If someone says they have a word from God, the wise among the assembly must judge whether it is the truth. If a person declares God has shown something to him, then those with the mind of Christ must put it to the test. If the apostle Paul challenged those to whom he wrote to judge what he said, where is the person who would draw back from such an approach today?

Those who speak in the name of the Lord are to submit to the judgment of the wise, as confirmed in Paul’s direction to the Corinthian prophets (1 Cor 14:29).

A Mode of Reasoning

There is a mode of reasoning that characterizes newness of life. It enables one to arrive at proper conclusions and avoid falling into Satan’s snare. The word “judge” comes from a word meaning, “to separate, put asunder, to pick out, select, choose,” THAYER “reaching a personal or group decision,” FRIBERG “to come to a conclusion in the process of thinking and thus be in a position to make a

decision,” LOUW-NIDA and “distinguish.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

All of this presumes contradicting things that must be weighed, being carefully considered. This judgment is to lead to a conclusion that is in keeping with what is right – the will and nature

of God. Because righteousness and truth hold up under the strictest scrutiny and most careful consideration, honest and good hearts will arrive at the proper God-honoring conclusion. Further, this summons to “judge” is not an invitation to express a private opinion. This is rather a call to judge righteously. Peter and John already know the answer to the question. That is why they have chosen to obey God. It is why they have chosen to hearken to Him rather than to men.

Notice that Peter and John do not preface their remarks by suggesting that the council’s view of God and His will have any bearing on the subject at all. They obviously have no tolerance for varying views of God or His ways. If there is only one God, which the Jewish Scriptures affirm (Deut 6:4), His ways cannot possibly be diverse, for that would contradict the revealed concept of God.

This is not a philosophical question, as though these apostles were merely asking the council what they thought about the matter. There are, in effect, asking the council to judge whether Peter and John were right in hearkening unto God, or whether the council was right in demanding that they not do so. In other words, these two men were actually doing what God had told them to do, and now a council of religious authorities was commanding them not to do it.

There are issues within the religious community that must be addressed in a similar manner. Men should be called to judge whether it is right to do this or that. Let me give you a few examples. Is it right to hearken unto God and insist that elders be “apt to teach” (1 Tim 3:2), or is it right to allow men to be elders who do not have the slightest interest in teaching? Is it right to hearken to God and insist that wicked and immoral men be expelled from the church (1 Cor 5:13), or is it right to allow them to remain in hopes of changing them? Is it right to hearken to the Lord and command men who believe to be baptized (Acts 10:48; Mk 16:16), or is it right to declare baptism is nothing more than an option? Is it right to hearken to God and require all things to be done “unto edification” (1 Cor 14:26), or is it right to let the novices establish the priorities of an assembly?

Oh, that there were more godly men and women who would demand that righteous judgment be found among those who profess to be leaders. When there is a disputation, particular regarding what is spoken, someone must be found who can distinguish who is hearkening to the Lord and who is not. What is more, a demand ought to be placed upon the decision-makers, that they make a determination if it is better to listen to God or to men. Once that judgment is made, let the will of God be clearly articulated and substantiated. The modern church is deficient in this matter. However, there is no need for it to remain in this condition. Salvation provides for making right choices.

COMPELLED TO SPEAK

“ 20 For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”

Hearkening to God assumes that He has addressed words to Peter and John – that He has made demands of them, and revealed certain matters to them. Peter and John are engaged in doing the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, and they are challenging their opponents to put their deeds to the test, and to do so publicly.

THE COMPULSION OF LOVE

“For we cannot but speak . . .” Other versions read, “for we cannot stop speaking,” NASB “we cannot help speaking about,” NIV “it is not possible for us to keep from saying,” BBE “for we are unable to stop speaking about,” CSB “for as for us we cannot refrain from speaking of,” DARBY

“We cannot stop talking about,” GWN “for it is impossible for us not to speak about,” NET “We cannot stop proclaiming,” NJB “We cannot stop telling about,” NLT “We are not able to keep silent,” IE “We cannot keep quiet about,” CEV and “For we can do none other but to speak.” EMTV

Peter and John were not compelled by a moral law. They were not motivated by the threat of condemnation if they did not speak. It is to be acknowledged that men can be moved by law and threats. Further, this is not necessarily wrong – although the requirement for such things confirms a deficiency in the person that must be so constrained. That is a valid, but lower, form of motivation. It is for those whose hearts have not been touched by grace, and are more obstinate in their rebellion. That is why Jesus said to the Pharisees, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Mat 23:14). And again, “Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?” (Matt 23:33). He did not set the hope of glory before them, for their hearts were hard – calloused by sin.

This was not the case with Peter and John. Their hearts had been made new. Their affections had been purified, and their consciences purged. In such a state, there is a loftier and more effectual constraining power: “For the love of Christ constraineth us” (2 Cor 5:14). In my own estimation, the following traits characterize those who cannot refrain from speaking the things of God, even when they are severely threatened. This is by no means a complete list, but does show the kind of traits that make for competent and faithful witnesses.

- A pure heart (1 Tim 1:5).
- A strong faith (Rom 4:20).
- Living hope (1 Pet 1:3).
- Full assurance of faith (Heb 10:22).
- Full assurance of hope (Heb 6:11).
- Full assurance of understanding (Col 2:2).
- Purged conscience (Heb 9:14; 10:22).
- Confidence (Heb 3:6).
- Fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9).
- Communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).
- Walking in the light (1 John 1:7).

The person who has a dominating love for Jesus obtains the ability to hear and see what He is doing. With that love comes a determination to speak that cannot be suppressed. This is being lived out in our text.

Separation from the world (1 John 2:15).

- Crucifixion of the flesh (Gal 5:24).
- Pressing toward the mark (Phil 3:14).
- Compelling desire to know Christ (Phil 3:10).
- Dominate desire to do God’s will (John 7:17).
- Thankful spirit (Col 3:15).
- Spiritual understanding (Col 1:9).
- The love of the truth (2 Thess 1:9).

Things of this order cannot be produced by Law. They can be commanded, but in order for them to be experienced, the heart must be drawn to the Lord through a perception of His great love and great salvation. I affirm that it is not possible to truly love Jesus until His love for us, and His great salvation are perceived to some significant measure. That is why the Scriptures speak of knowing Christ's love: "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:19). Knowing a love that surpasses knowledge is not knowing about that love, by realizing it by experience. Through the Holy Spirit, who sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5), a measure of understanding is realized that cannot be obtained academically.

The person who has a dominating love for Jesus obtains the ability to hear and see what He is doing. With that love comes a determination to speak that cannot be suppressed. This is being lived out in our text.

THINGS SEEN AND HEARD

"... the things which we have seen and heard." Other versions read, "the things which we saw and heard," ASV "the wonderful things we saw Jesus do and heard Him say," LIVING and "what we have actually seen and heard ." PHILLIPS

In order for one's religion to be effective, it must be lifted out of the realm of philosophy. In some effectual way, the individual must be exposed to the person of Jesus Christ. For Peter and John, this exposure was twofold: in the flesh and in the Spirit. At the time of their exposure to Jesus in the flesh, their perception was very limited. When, for example, Peter, James, and John came down from the mount of transfiguration, Jesus told them not to say anything about what they saw and heard until He was risen from the dead. At that time the disciples "kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean" (Mark 9:10). Following Christ's ascension into glory, however, they spoke discerningly of what they had seen and heard on that mountain (John 1:14; 2 Pet 1:16-18). This is owing to the indispensable ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised them the following.

- "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, 1 He shall teach you all things, and 2 bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

- "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, 3 He shall testify of me" (John 15:26).

- "Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, 4 He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and 5 He will show you things to come" (John 16:13).

- "6 He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall 7 show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you" (John 16:14-15).

There are seven things Jesus promised the Holy Spirit would do.

1. Teach them all things.
2. Bring what Jesus had said to their remembrance.
3. Testify of Christ.
4. Guide them into all truth.
5. Show them things to come.

6. Glorify Christ.

7. Show the things of Christ to them.

In this text, we see the impact of the ministry of the Holy Spirit upon the hearts and minds of the apostles. Once the truth was seen in clarity, and its extensive horizon dawned upon their souls, it was not possible to keep them silent. They became like young Elihu who spoke to Job – they could contain what they confidently knew within. They had to speak it out. Elihu said, “For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me. Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak, that I may be refreshed: I will open my lips and answer” (Job 32:18-20).

The Spirit of Faith

Peter and John had “the spirit of faith,” that always moves a person to speak. As it is written, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak; Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:13-14.).

Observe the role of believing and true knowledge in holy speaking: “we also believe,” and “knowing that . . .” This is a micro view of confidence: whole-heartedly believing the truth, and knowing, or possessing a cognitive familiarity [thinking and reasoning, as opposed to mere emotion or exhilaration] with what has been seen and heard.

This is something that cannot be accomplished through academic learning or humanly devised routines of learning. This relates to “the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual” – something Paul affirmed is required by those who are in Christ Jesus (Col 1:9).

This also involves “rightly dividing,” or “handling accurately” NASB the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). That is, not only must what has been seen and heard be declared accurately and without error, it must be discreetly imparted, so that the audience is given what is appropriate for the occasion. It would not have been proper for Peter and John to have described what they saw and heard when Jesus came walking to them on the water, and even summoned Peter to join him on the tumultuous water (Matt 14:25-33). That would certainly have been true, but it would not have been what was needed at that time.

They Preached the Resurrection of the Dead

The circumstance that brought about this whole occasion was Peter and John preaching “through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (4:2). This revealed the decided advancement in their understanding that had taken place after Christ’s enthronement.

Remember that at the time of the transfiguration the disciples questioned among themselves “what the rising from the dead should mean.” However, in our text, they have been preaching “through Jesus the resurrection of the dead,” affirming that Jesus Himself had been raised from the dead (4:10). In other words, they were declaring what they had “seen and heard” with understanding. They were not merely rehearsing some mysterious facts, but expounding their significance as well as their reality. Their love for Christ and understanding of the Gospel would not allow them to keep silence on these matters, regardless of the demands of the council before whom they stood.

This, among other things, is why you cannot train people to be witnesses. Nor, indeed, is it possible for one man to confer spiritual understanding upon another. Effective witnesses have been exposed to the truth in their hearts as well as their minds. They have a love for the truth as well as a knowledge of it.

This, among other things, is why you cannot train people to be witnesses. Nor, indeed, is it possible for one man to confer spiritual understanding upon another. Effective witnesses have been exposed to the truth in their hearts as well as their minds. They have a love for the truth as well as a knowledge of it. They not only see the need for declaring the truth, but have an unquenchable desire to do so. This kind of experience moved the prophet Jeremiah to say, “Then I said, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name. But His word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay” (Jer 20:9).

The modern church stands in great need of competent witnesses – people who know and love the truth, see its implications, and are compelled to declare it without regard to the consequences of doing so. Such people will not yield to the threats of the ungodly, but will speak for and of Jesus. They will faithfully bring the truth to bear upon the consciences of the people.

As painful as it is to consider, much of contemporary Christianity has very little to do with proclamation – with the confident affirmation of eternal verities. The variety of pulpit offerings to the people appear to cover a range of things from entertainment to problem resolution. In the seemingly more advanced assemblies, the presentations are peppered with “good words and fair speeches” through which the people are “deceived” (Rom 16:18). However, there is very little proclamation of spiritual verities that have been “seen and heard.” This is a tragic circumstance with far reaching implications.

NOTHING WORTHY OF PUNISHMENT

“ 21 So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.”

How important is it that the church be holy? What if all kinds of questionable conduct is found within it? Will that circumstance have any impact on its message – if it is, indeed, even noted for its message?

A Peculiar Modern Circumstance

The nominal church has introduced a peculiar circumstance. It is perpetrating a doctrine that tends to minimize sin and transgression. Unacceptable behavior is being traced to things like physiological conditions, chemical abuse, environment, or some other influence that has nothing to do with choice or human reference.

There are certain things that God has associated with sin – things that have been revealed. Although these are rarely mentioned in church circles, they are very much present wherever sin is found. A failure to clarify the association of these things with sin has caused the people to be unable to relate them to the moral flaws that are found within the church itself, which are often traced to psychological disadvantages. Here is a sampling of those terms or conditions.

- **Rebellious.** “Because they rebelled against the words of God, and contemned the counsel of the most High” (Psa 107:11). To rebel is an aggressive human response against God – one in which the individual refuses to hear or obey the Lord.

- **Blindness .** “But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes” (1 John 2:11). This has to do with not being able to understand, perceive, or discern. Since Jesus has come, there is no justification for such a condition, for regeneration includes God shining light and knowledge into the heart, so that sin is seen and can be avoided (2 Cor 4:6).

- **Hardness of heart .** “And when He had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts ” (Mark 3:5). This is a deliberate hardness,

where the people steel themselves against the Lord and His word.

- Stiffnecked . “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51). This is yet another human response in which they refuse to turn to the Lord, choosing rather to indulge themselves in sin.

- Disobedience. “For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience ” (Col 3:6). Disobedience is deliberate. It takes place when one knows what God requires, yet refuses to yield the heart to Him.

- Not wanting God. “But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of Me ” (Psa 81:11). Here men prefer their own ways to those of God, and therefore do not want Him or His influence among them.

- Unholy. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy ” (2 Tim 3:2). This is being unlike God – that is, contrary to Him.

8. Reprobate. “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates ?” (2 Cor 13:5). The ultimate conclusion of sin is reprobacy, or being rejected by God. If a person refuses to turn from sin, this is the inevitable result.

Whatever may be said about being only human, or being among those who are beset with moral or spiritual weaknesses, no such charges are leveled against Peter and John. They have broken no law of God, nor have they violated any known law of man.

Rejecting the Word. “The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the LORD ; and what wisdom is in them?” (Jer 8:9). In this case, the person hears the Word of the Lord, but simply refuses to receive or yield to it.

- Impenitence. “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:5). This is a refusal to turn or repent. The soul who is impenitent is obstinate, and insists on continuing in sin, even when he knows it is wrong.

- Being of the devil. “He that committeth sin is of the devil ; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Sin is the result of the devil’s work, and where it is committed, he is always present. Sin within the church is a flagrant contradiction of the affirmation that Jesus came to “destroy the works of the devil.”

- Displeasing to God. “And God was displeased with this thing; therefore he smote Israel” (1 Chron 21:7). God does have a reaction to sin, and it is not one of pleasure or pity.

I have mentioned these things because they are totally absent in our text. Peter and John have not been confronted with any personal sin, spiritual dulness, or inappropriate conduct before God. The work for which they have been called to account – the healing of the lame man – was unquestionably a good one. The word that had grieved their critics – preaching through Jesus the resurrection of the dead – was also good, announcing through Jesus the resurrection of the dead.

Whatever may be said about being only human, or being among those who are beset with moral or spiritual weaknesses, no such charges are leveled against Peter and John. They have broken no law of God, nor have they violated any known law of man. They have not participated in an insurrection like Barabbas (Mark 15:7). They were not like a notable Egyptian who would surface later, causing an uproar and leading four thousand known murderers into the wilderness (Acts 21:38). They have not been charged with any moral indiscretions.

Now we will see that however their judges may view them, it will not be as immoral people who have displeased the Lord, or those who have not spoken in strict accord with Scripture.

THEY FURTHER THREATENED THEM

“So when they had further threatened them . . .” Other versions read,. “After further threats,” NIV “After threatening them again,” NRSV “And when they had said more sharp words to them,” BBE “The authorities threatened them even more ,” GWN “The court repeated the threats ,” NJB “The court added further threats ,” WEYMOUTH and “So the Council warned them even more strongly .” GNB

These warnings all postulate a fear of those who were speaking them. They assume that those who were warned were afraid to fall into the hands of this tribunal. It is not possible to have a legitimate “threat” if these things are not so. For example, if a man in the ICU unit of a local hospital who possessed neither authority nor influence threatened you, there would be no reason to fear his words. Or, if a two-year-old boy shouted a threat at you, it would mean nothing, and would simply be discarded. Threats presume that the ones issuing them are actually dangerous, and that their words must be respected.

Now, on the surface, it may appear that this council should have been feared. Later they would stone Stephen, so they were actually able to carry out a judgment leading to death – at least that is the way it appeared. However, Peter and John have knowledge of One who is greater than their judges, and they are deferring to Him. They have already announced His exaltation by “the God of the Jews” (Rom 3:29; Acts 2:33-34),. His power was confirmed in the raising of the lame man in the presence of the people (Acts 3:16). They have also confirmed the word of Moses that foretold anyone failing to listen to Jesus would be “destroyed from among the people” (3:23).

Fearing Men Is Sinful

Solomon said, “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov 29:25). That is, “the fear of man” is the exact opposite of trusting in the Lord, producing danger rather than safety. For those who believe, such a fear is wholly unwarranted. That is why God Himself said, “Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; For why should he be esteemed?” NASB (Isa 2:22).

When king Saul went against the word of the Lord, he confessed, “I have sinned: for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD, and thy words: because I feared the people, and obeyed their voice” (1 Sam 15:24). That, however, was not a satisfactory explanation. Samuel corrected Saul by saying, “thou hast rejected the word of the Lord” (1 Sam 15:26).

Those whose faith is in the Lord will not be moved by the threats of mere mortals. Thus it is written, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me ” (Heb 13:6). The liberating knowledge of God strengthens the soul, so that the servants of God are not moved by the threats of men. Therefore, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were threatened by the King of the whole world with death if they did not bow to his image, they replied, “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up” (Dan 3:17-18). When Daniel was threatened with an edict from a world emperor that prohibited prayer being made to the God of heaven, “he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime” (Dan 6:10).

Only a person with faith has any intelligent view of these reports. Such know that the fear of God is a legitimate fear, while the fear of man is nothing but the result of delusion.

Notwithstanding these fairly obvious facts, they were neither perceived or acknowledged by the council. They placed an inordinately high value on their position among the Jews, and thus imagined that their words were with power. Because this council cannot be moved by the fear of the Lord, God will restrain them in other ways, even though they will not be able to detect them.

NO CAUSE FOR PUNISHMENT

“ . . . they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them . . .” Other versions read, “they let them go, finding no way of punishing them ,” NKJV “they let them go (finding no basis on which they might punish them),” NASB “they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them ,” NIV “they released them. They found no way to punish them,” CSB and “they let them go, not seeing how they could secure a conviction against them .” AMPLIFIED

Some of the versions totally obscure the meaning of the text, suggesting that they simply could not reach a consensus among themselves on how to punish Peter and John.

Those in Christ are not to be found with glaring moral and spiritual blemishes that can be perceived by the ungodly. That is what James would call the “superfluity of naughtiness,” or the “overflow of wickedness.” Such things are to be “put away,” together with “all filthiness.” There can be no defense of moral corruption within the church.

The key to this text is found in the words “finding nothing.” First, they diligently sought for a person or a condition that would clearly justify the punishment of the two standing before them. However, they could find “nothing.” There was no person, word, or deed that clearly justified the punishment of these men – and they made a diligent search to find one. I suppose they could have hired someone to bear false witness. However, the next clause explains why they did not choose that course of action.

Spotless Lives

Believers are reminded to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). Blamelessness is something to be found in the body, as well as the spirit and the soul (1 Thess 5:23). Paul admonished Titus to take care to show himself a “pattern of good works,” having “uncorruptness” in his doctrine and “sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:8). The structure of contemporary Christianity makes no such demands. Instead, a God is being presented that does not require such a condition. When these things are absent, we are told to be patient and uncondemning, for the transgressor has just showed his human weakness. Such approaches betray corrupt hearts, and bring reproach upon the cause of Christ.

Peter admonished all believers to maintain “a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ ” (1 Pet 3:16). While no child of God will boast that they are perfect, all of them will confess their earnest desire to be found in such a state. Those in Christ are not to be found with glaring moral and spiritual blemishes that can be perceived by the ungodly. That is what James would call the “superfluity of naughtiness,” or the “overflow of wickedness.” NKJV Such things are to be “put away,” together with “all filthiness” (James 1:21). There can be no defense of moral corruption within the church. Such a condition gives power to the enemy, a place being made for the devil (Eph 4:27).

The council could find no cause for punishing Peter and John – that is, they could find no wrong in them. The apostles could have shouted out as Paul did before another tribunal: “to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest” (Acts 25:10). If they had been able to lay some “wrong” at the feet of Peter and John, the whole of Christian history would have been impacted. Such a

condition would have contradicted the message Peter preached, affirming that “God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities ” (Acts 3:26).

One of the seeming advantages of a false gospel is that it sets the stage for a carnal allowance of iniquity. There is not a shred of this kind of preaching at the time of our text. Nor, indeed, was flawed conduct kindly tolerated among the believers. I do not doubt that in today’s Christian circles, the sin of Judas would be conveniently explained, and a hearty effort made to restore him to his office, or bishopric. However, such an approach is not found in Scripture.

BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE

It ought to be noted that we should have a holy optimism about the power of the truth. While we may not be surprised when people reject the truth, we certainly should not be astounded if they receive it. Throughout history God has spoken of the acceptance of the truth by the people.

“ . . . because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.” Other versions read, “ on account of the people , because they were all glorifying God for what had happened,” NASB “because all the people were praising God for what had happened,” NIV “because of the people; for all men were giving praise to God for what had taken place,” BBE “because they didn't know how to punish them without starting a riot . For everyone was praising God,” NLT “on account of the people, because all gave God the glory for the thing that had happened,” WEYMOUTH and “because all the people continued to praise God for what had happened.” ISV

This statement must be understood within its context. If they could have found some supposedly credible witness of iniquity in Peter and John, they would have proceeded with punishing them. They did so after false witnesses rose up against Jesus (Matt 26:60-62), and against Stephen as well (Acts 6:13-14).

The point here is that the people were so praising God for the work that had been done through Peter and John, that the council did not dare to conjure up false witnesses against them. The work of Peter and John was too unique, and the glory of it was still fresh in the minds of the people. The council saw it would be politically incorrect to make any attempt to invent charges against the two standing before them.

Not the First time

This was not the first time rebellious Jews faced the good response of the people to Divine workings.

- “And the scribes and chief priests heard it, and sought how they might destroy Him: for they feared Him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine ” (Mark 11:18).
- “But if we shall say, Of men; they feared the people : for all men counted John, that he was a prophet indeed” (Mark 11:32).
- “And they sought to lay hold on Him, but feared the people : for they knew that He had spoken the parable against them: and they left Him, and went their way” (Mark 12:12).
- “And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people ” (Luke 22:2).

All of this would have been of little consequence if they could only have substantiated a legitimate charge against Peter and John. If they could have found a true charge against them, they would have presented that to the people and proceeded with their opposition. However, no such charge could be validated. This is an example of being “blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in

the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Phil 2:15).

The Power of Truth

It ought to be noted that we should have a holy optimism about the power of the truth. While we may not be surprised when people reject the truth, we certainly should not be astounded if they receive it. Throughout history God has spoken of the acceptance of the truth by the people. Understanding that more is involved here than meets the eye, we do well to take heed to these proclamations.

- “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken ” (Deut 18:15).
- “ All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD : and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (Psa 22:27).
- “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it ” (Isa 2:2).
- “And He said, It is a light thing that Thou shouldest be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mayest be My salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6).
- “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD , as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14).
- “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me ” (John 12:32).

The point to be seen is that the Gospel is powerful, and capable of provoking instant and extensive results. Of course, we cannot afford to be naive about this matter. This does not mean that every time the Gospel is preached there are marvelous results without opposition. Our text confirms this is the case. Even though above 5,000 men have believed, yet Peter and John have been arrested, and are standing before a critical and hostile tribunal.

Gospel Power Revealed

The power of the Gospel is not only revealed in its acceptance, but in its rejection as well. Just as the sowing of the seed revealed the manner of the soils upon which it fell, so the Gospel makes known the hearts that are subjected to it. Paul stated it this way : “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish : to the one we are the savor of death unto death ; and to the other the savor of life unto life . And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:14-16).

When declared with power and insight, the Gospel reveals the hearts of men. This is seen in both the conversion of the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-8), and the rejection and the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58-59). In our text, the turning of 5,000 men, and the provocation of the Temple authorities were both owing to ministry of the Gospel.

Requirements for the Gospel Being “Unto salvation”

There are two fundamental requirements for the realization of salvation through the Gospel.

- First, the true Gospel, not “another Gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6) must be preached. Salvation is never realized through a spurious gospel. Spiritual freedom is never experienced through a lie.

The extensive length of time during which hard-hearted people are exposed to the truth does

not necessarily break them down. It can also make them more hardened. When men continue to labor among dull people, their message tends to become weaker and weaker. Their hearts grow heavy, and they can even become insensitive to the unacceptable condition of the people.

- Second, the Gospel must be received by “honest and good hearts” (Lk 8:15). We know from the Scriptures that when the minds of people are blinded by the devil, they will not believe (2 Cor 4:4). This condition is not determined by men, but is revealed in the failure of people to believe the Gospel.

There Are Ungodly Generations

There are whole generations, fully known to God, that are fundamentally ungodly, and who will not be changed. The generation of Israel who fell in the wilderness was such a generation (Num 32:13). It is called an “evil generation” (Deut 1:35). God referred to them as a “froward generation” (Deut 32:20). It made no difference how many wonderful works they saw, their hearts remained obstinate.

When Jesus dwelt among men, there was a body of people who “could not believe” (John 12:39). God Himself confirmed their fundamental hardness by blinding their eyes and hardening their hearts (John 12:40). Even the prodigious and gracious ministry of the Son of God could not turn them from their ways. They were a generation among whom He could “do no mighty work” (Mk 6:5). It is sobering to consider the presence of such a generation.

David spoke of “a stubborn and rebellious generation; a generation that set not their heart aright, and whose spirit was not steadfast with God” (Psa 78:8). Solomon affirmed, “There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness” (Prov 30:12). Jeremiah referred to “the generation of His wrath” (Jer 7:29). Only the Lord is able to fully identify such generations – but He does do so, and we must learn to reckon upon that.

When men perpetually have the marks of a rejected generation, we must consider and confirm the validity of our presence and ministry among them. This is a judgment the laborer must make for himself – but it must be made.

It is possible to expend labor on the wrong people, so that all of one’s work is pointless. Paul referred to this dreaded circumstance when he wrote to the Galatians, “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain” (Gal 4:11). Paul and Barnabas left some people, refusing to spend any more time among them (Acts 13:46). Peter and John will not develop a special ministry to the council, or the Sanhedrin.

The extensive length of time to which hard-hearted people are exposed to the truth does not necessarily break them down. It can also make them more hardened. When men continue to labor among dull people, their message tends to become weaker and weaker. Their hearts grow heavy, and they can even become insensitive to the unacceptable condition of the people. It is true that we are to be longsuffering and forbearing (Eph 4:2; Col 3:13). It is also true that we are to turn away from those who insist on maintaining a form of godliness while rejecting the power of it (2 Tim 3:5).

When men – even religious men – are grieved with the proclamation of the truth, we must not cease to declare it. This must be done even when we are in the territory over which they imagine they have complete control. If we have the opportunity to speak the truth, we must do so – in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2). If the people can be saved, then it will be through the declaration of the truth. If they cannot be saved, the truth will also make that circumstance known.

A NOTABLE MIRACLE

“ 22 For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed.”

This verse is an explanation for the people glorifying God “for the work that was done” (4:21). The response of the people was a reasoned one, not hype. It proceeded from thought, not hysteria. Peter and John had not whipped up the people, as some false prophets are prone to do. They had wrought a work before the people, and then expounded how that work had taken place.

Although much of modern Christianity relies on raw emotion, and the expert rallying of the emotional capacities of people, this is not the manner of the Kingdom of God. This is a Kingdom that involves perception, discernment, understanding, and other facets of thought – like consideration, contemplation, and reasoning. We now will be exposed to one facet of this miracle that moved the people to give glory to God.

ABOVE FORTY YEARS OLD

“For the man was above forty years old . . .” Other versions read, “ over forty years old,” NKJV “ more than forty years old,” RSV and “a man who had been lame for more than forty years.” NLT

The age of the man is important because he had been “lame from his mother’s womb” – and everyone knew it (Acts 3:1,16). Thus his age also defined the length of his affliction – “more than forty years.” NRSV Here was an uninterrupted malady that had gripped the man for over four decades. There had to be a remarkable level of physical deterioration in his legs and ankles, so that no recovery could be expected from natural resources. As with the miracles of our blessed Lord, this man was in a helpless state. The work could only be accounted for by working of the Lord.

It is not that a miracle wrought on a child is any less a marvelous work of God. It takes no more power to raise the twelve year of daughter of Jairus, than to raise the grown man Lazarus who had been in the grave for four days. It is only in the minds of men that duration seems to diminish possibilities. However, this work was done to get the attention of men, and to elevate their thoughts to a point where they could see God alone was capable of doing such a work.

The Necessity of Better Things

When God receives credit for things than can be done through natural means, the glory is not great. In our time, a lot is associated with the Lord that is not unique, to say the least. Perhaps it is straightening out one’s marriage or finances, or getting a child off the streets to be more productive. It may be deliverance from some purported addiction, or enslavement to immorality. Claims to recovery from things like this are also boasted by spiritists, yoga experts, psychiatrists, and doctors of medication and diet.

I must speak with care on this subject, lest I be misunderstood. Such works were never emphasized in Christ’s miracles, or those of His disciples. There is no record of Jesus healing a drunk, a sloth, a harlot, a whoremonger, or a talebearer. He is never said to have corrected by means of a miracle a marriage, a financial condition, or a wayward child. That such conditions are a great weight to those having to deal with them cannot be denied. Nor, indeed, am I suggesting that such things should not be taken to the Lord. What I am saying is that these are only symptoms of a more serious problem – being enslaved by Satan. Thus Jesus referred to a woman bowed over for eighteen years as being “bound” by Satan (Lk 13:16).

I am not sure that Jesus specializes in providing shortcuts to conditions that can be achieved by mere human discipline and attention. That is why our condition before being in Christ is described as one of absolute hopelessness: “dead in trespasses and sins,” “no hope,” and the impossibility of being saved (Eph 2:1,12; Matt 19:26).

There are professing Christians who say that the secret to the spread of the truth is the conversion of the youth. In our text, the healing of a man who had been lame for over forty years was the means through which 5,000 men believed! That condition is in stark contrast to such reasoning. Men tell us it is too difficult to change people who are set in their ways. That is like saying it is more difficult to heal a man who has been lame for forty years than a boy who has been lame for only a few months.

What I am saying is that a mediocre church is quite willing to settle for religious improvement that is, at the best, only slight. God said of Israel's degenerate priests and prophets, "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14; 8:11). The result of their activity was only superficial. Such things will not move men to glorify God, for there are also a myriad of fleshly experts who boast of being able to make slight improvements in the lives of people.

I am not sure that God is glorified through mediocre, average, and usual means. Something must be done in His name that can be distinguished from other works. The economy of grace is one of abundance, better, and great.

Better

- We are persuaded of "better things" (Heb 6:9).
- We have a "better hope" (Heb 7:19).
- Jesus is the Surety of a "better testament" (Heb 7:22).
- We have a "better covenant, which is established upon "better promises" (Heb 8:6).
- The heavens have been cleansed with "better sacrifices" (Heb 9:23).
- We have in heaven "a better and an enduring substance" (Heb 10:34).
- We "desire a better country" (Heb 11:16).
- God has provided "some better thing for us" (Heb 11:40).

Abundance

- Jesus came that we might "have life, and have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).
- In Christ we receive "abundance of grace" (Rom 5:17).
- God is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think" (Eph 3:20).
- The grace of God is "exceeding abundant with faith and love" (1 Tim 1:14).
- God has shed His Holy Spirit "abundantly" on us (Tit 3:6).
- We have been begotten through God's "abundant mercy" (1 Pet 1:3).

"Great"

- Those in Christ are said to do "greater works" (John 14:12).
- God loved us with a "great love" (Eph 2:4).
- We have "great joy" (Phil 1:7).
- We have been granted a "great salvation" (Heb 2:3).
- We have a "great High Priest" (Heb 4:14).
- Jesus is ministering in a "greater and more perfect tabernacle" (Heb 9:11).
- Our confidence has a "great recompense of reward" (Heb 10:35).

- God has given us “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Pet 1:4).
- “Greater is He” that is in us than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).

Exceeding

- The New Covenant is described as one that exceeds in glory (2 Cor 3:9).
- Our afflictions work for us a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17).
- The “exceeding grace of God” can be in a person (2 Cor 9:14).
- God’s power toward those in Christ is characterized by “exceeding greatness” (Eph 1:19).
- In accordance with the power that is at work in us, God is able to do “exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think” (Eph 3:20).
- Our faith can grow “exceedingly” (2 Thess 1:3).

All of these extend beyond the circumference of mediocre, ordinary, average, and common. That is because everything about the Kingdom of God is related to the two fundamental aspects of salvation: deliverance from the powers of darkness, and translation into the kingdom of God’s Son – that is, the Kingdom over which He is presently presiding (Col 1:13). Deliverance from the powers of darkness necessarily involves deliverance from this present evil world (Gal 1:4). Mediocrity relates more to the realm from which we have been delivered, and has no place in the Kingdom into which we have been translated. That is why we are to “excel to the edifying of the church” (1 Cor 14:12), and “abound to every good work” (2 Cor 9:8).

The works of God invariably have His traits – that is how an association with Him can be seen in them. Works that can be accomplished without God ought not to be placed before the people as being from Him. It will take an extraordinary effort to substantiate that the God of heaven assists men to do what can really be done independently of Him.

Spiritual Babylon

Spiritual Babylon has perpetrated a false view of God, Christ, and their work. It claims an association with the Lord, but provides no evidence of such an affiliation. Because this is so dominant, men have grown accustomed to religious deadness and ineffectiveness. They have now accommodated themselves to claims of conversion that provide no evidence of change, theological positions that do not agree with the truth, and professions of loving Jesus that are not accompanied by obeying His commandments.

At the time of our text, these corruptions had not yet penetrated into the church. Years later Peter warned the saints that false prophets and teachers would be found “among” the people of God, and would privately bring in “damnable heresies” (2 Pet 2:1). Paul warned of the same intrusion (Acts 20:30). One of the telling effects of this prophesied invasion of lies is the dominance of religious mediocrity, or averageness. Jesus referred to the condition as being “lukewarm,” and affirmed that it would not be tolerated among His people, all excuses notwithstanding (Rev 3:16).

A MIRACLE OF HEALING SHOWED

“ . . . on whom this miracle of healing was showed.” Other versions read, “on whom this miracle of healing had been performed,” NKJV “who was miraculously healed,” NIV “on whom this sign of healing had been performed,” NRSV “on whom this act of power was done,” BBE “in whom that miraculous cure had been wrought,” DOUAY “on whom this miracle of healing was showed,” GENEVA “this miracle of restoration to health had been performed,” WEYMOUTH and “on whom

this wonderful cure had been performed.” WILLIAMS

This passage is an example of the church at work – or, more accurately, of the church being used by God to do the works He has ordained. This view of the matter is consistently emphasized in Scripture. It is especially refreshing to consider it in a time when human strategies and methodologies are being stressed.

The living testimony standing before the people was one in whom “a miracle of healing” had been “showed.” Some of the translations point our thinking in the wrong direction: i.e. “performed,” NKJV/NRSV and “done.” BBE This tends to place the accent on Peter and John rather than the work itself. The word “showed” comes from the Greek word **evgego,nei** (e-geg-on-ei). The following is its lexical definition: “to become, so come into existence, begin to be . . . to come to pass, happen . . . to appear in history,” THAYER “come to be, originate . . . to be produced . . . be made, be done, be brought into existence,” FRIBERG “to be created, to come about,” LEH “to be made, created, or done.” GINGRICH

This was a work that was ordained before it took place, and therefore is said to come into being. The Spirit refers to such works in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Although, from one point of view, Peter and John did the work, it was actually God working His will through them . They were involved because they were suitable vessels, “meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

This is an example of the church at work – or, more accurately, of the church being used by God to do the works He has ordained. This view of the matter is consistently emphasized in Scripture. It is especially refreshing to consider it in a time when human strategies and methodologies are being stressed.

DIVINITY WORKING IN HUMANITY

This is a wonderful consideration, and opens up some of the remarkable involvements revealed in salvation.

- “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power ” (Eph 1:19).
- “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all ” (Eph 1:22-23).
- “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them ” (Eph 2:10).
- “Whereof I was made a minister , according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of His power ” (Eph 3:7).
- “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us ” (Eph 3:20).
- “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part , maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16).

- “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

- “Whereunto I also labor, striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily ” (Col 1:29).

- “Now the God of peace . . . Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:20-21).

What we have in our text is an example of the above affirmations – God working in and through the members of the body of Christ. This is in perfect accord with the nature of salvation and the revealed characteristics of the Covenant Jesus is presently mediating.

The New Covenant is not an economy of works, but one of God working within His people “to will and to do of His own good pleasure.” In Christ Jesus men are “joined to the Lord,” so that He can work through them in unprecedented ways. Because their natures have been changed, the people enter into the work insightfully and joyfully, thereby causing glory to be brought to the Lord.

There is no prophecy of a time when Christ, by intent, will cease working in His church. The prophets did not associate the New Covenant with a beginning alone. In fact, the description of the covenant is, by its very nature, something that is ongoing.

- God putting His laws into the mind.
- God writing His laws into the heart.
- God being to the people “a God.”
- The people being to God “a people.”
- Every one within the covenant, from the least to the greatest, knows God.
- God is “merciful to their unrighteousnesses.”
- God remembers their sins “no more.”

Exactly what is there about that covenant that is temporal, limited to a beginning, or destined to cease before the end of the world? Has it not been ratified as an “everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20)?

The sophist will ask what this has to do with our text. It has much to do with it. Our text reveals a working that is within the framework of the New Covenant. If that is not the case, then we have a temporary agenda that has been adopted. I would consider such a postulate to be heretical from beginning to end!

In this text, Jesus is working as the Savior of the world. He is doing the will of the Father through those who have been reconciled to God and joined to Him through the Holy Spirit. He is working for the glory of God, and in strict concert with His Father’s revealed eternal purpose.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to the hostilities of corrupt religion. Such is never indifferent to the truth when powerfully and insightfully delivered. Further, because false religion always tends to institutionalization, it cannot tolerate those who proclaim the Divine emphasis, and do works that are consonant with the salvation of God. This circumstance is owing to the nature of truth, as well as that of the lie. What is true can never be merged with what is not true. What flows out from God’s eternal purpose cannot blend with the purposes of men. There is a hostility between what is false and what is true, and it cannot be avoided.

As soon as men begin to adjust their message to make the lie and those who embrace it more tolerable, they move into the unacceptable category. If they choose to obey men they at once cease to obey God. If they choose to please men, they immediately begin to displease God. If the world and its citizens become their focus, God can no longer be seen or understood. These are the stark realities of the case. Peter and John knew these things, and therefore refused to give heed to the Temple authorities. In so doing, they have set the standard for all Kingdom labors. Paul stated it well when he wrote, “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ ” (Gal 1:10). That is something to be regarded with the utmost sobriety! This is particularly true when we are considering religious men who seek to suppress the truth of God.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #19

DIALOG BETWEEN PETER AND THE LEADERS

“ 4:23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them. 24 And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to GOD with one accord, and said, LORD, THOU art GOD, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is: 25 Who by the mouth of THY servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? 26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD, and against HIS CHRIST. 27 For of a truth against THY HOLY CHILD JESUS, whom THOU hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, 28 For to do whatsoever THY hand and THY counsel determined before to be done. 29 And now, LORD, behold their threatenings: and grant unto THY servants, that with all boldness they may speak THY word, 30 By stretching forth THINE hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of THY holy child Jesus. 31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:23-31)

INTRODUCTION

Because the council could find no cause for punishment in Peter and John, and because they feared the people and were therefore unwilling to trump up charges against them, they determined to let them go with a stern warning. Having been with this council for some time, and because they were devoted to the Lord who gave Himself for them, and had chosen them to be His witnesses, when they were released, they immediately repaired to their brethren. Because they were not ignorant of Satan's devices, they perceived that a bold and intense initiative was being launched against them. They did not determine to go to another place, for Jesus had solemnly commissioned them to fill Jerusalem,

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- **THEY WENT TO THEIR OWN COMPANY (4:23)**
- **THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE WITH ONE ACCORD (4:24a)**
- **THOU ART GOD (4:24b)**
- **WHY DID THE HEATHEN RAGE? (4:25)**
- **THE KINGS AND THE RULERS GATHERED TOGETHER (4:26)**
- **GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE HOLY CHILD JESUS (4:27)**
- **TO DO WHAT DIVINE COUNSEL HAD DETERMINED (4:28)**
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- **STRETCH FORTH YOUR HAND TO HEAL (4:30)**
- **THE PLACE WAS SHAKEN, AND THEY WERE FILLED (4:31)**
- **THOSE WHO BELIEVED WERE OF ONE HEART AND SOUL (4:32a)**
- **CONCLUSION**

Judea, and Samaria with the Gospel. Therefore, having made a report to the brethren, and undaunted by the threats of the council, they all prayed to the Lord, petitioning Him to grant them boldness to preach His word. Their prayer was insightful, got the attention of heaven, and a great visitation from God was experienced. This is one of the great events of the book. That is a summation of the text before us.

There is much to be learned from this text, particularly when we consider the realities to which we are being exposed.

- We are beholding the clash of the Spirit with the flesh, truth with error, and life with tradition.
- The initiative of faith is evident, as Peter and John boldly affirm what they have seen and heard.
- The full assurance of understanding is evident, which cannot be suppressed by opposition.
- We are introduced to messengers that are holy as well as bold, and therefore no legitimate cause of punishment can be found in them.
- Among the faithful, there is a total absence of institutionalism.
- There is no division in the body of Christ.
- There is no absence of the love of the truth among the disciples.
- There is no discernable outward pattern that allows for an external duplication of the responses of Peter and John.

If you were lay the activities of the average mega-church [and most smaller churches as all] beside this record, you would be at a total loss to find any similarities. The message is different. The manner is different. The motives are different. The focus is different. There is a level of zeal that is virtually unknown. There is a degree of confidence that challenges the religious mind. These observations are very evident.

The mitigating factor is that we are beholding real life, real faith, and real commitment. This is how men of God respond to opposition. The difference between then and now is that a significant departure from the truth has taken place between the time of our text and our day – a “falling away.”

This falling away was foretold by the Lord Jesus. He traced it to the prevalence of iniquity, and the consequent diminishment of a love for Himself among those professing His name. “And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt 24:12). When love grows cold, NKJV the fruits that spring from love wither and die.

The Apostles also spoke of a time of falling away, delivering various insights into its cause and nature. It was always an obvious point of concern.

• BECAUSE TRUTH WILL NOT BE LOVED, GOD WILL SEND STRONG DELUSION UPON THE PEOPLE, CONSTRAINING THEM TO BELIEVE A LIE.

“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition . . . And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:3,10-12).

• FAITH WILL NO LONGER BE PIVOTAL, AND THUS DEMONIC DOCTRINES WILL BE EMBRACED. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim 4:1-2).

• A POWERLESS FORM OF RELIGION WILL BE EMBRACED THAT ALLOWS FOR SIN TO REMAIN AMONG THE PEOPLE. “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

• ABANDONING THE TRUTH OF GOD, MEN WILL STRUCTURE THEIR RELIGION AROUND THEIR OWN FLESHLY INTERESTS. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

• DOCTRINES WILL BE BROUGHT IN THAT LEAD MEN INTO CONDEMNATION AND CAUSE THE TRUTH TO BE MALIGNED. “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Pet 2:1-2).

It is not that such displays of Divine power and influence were assigned to a specific age, or that they were limited to certain men. The book of Acts is revealing the manner of “the day of salvation.”

The falling away foretold was of great concern to the apostles. Paul, for example, admonished Timothy to “preach the word; be instant [ready NKJV] in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine . . .” (1 Tim 4:2). That is, in view of the coming falling away, he was to make the most of the time, letting no opportunity pass him by. The time was coming when “sound doctrine” would not be tolerated by the professing church. It would develop its own agenda and priorities, ignoring Divine purpose and emphasis. There would be a marked propensity to preaching and teaching that would please those with no faith. That means it would be anchored to the world – the temporal

order. Teaching would be man-centered, not Christocentric, or Christ-centered. Note again the traits of this “falling away.”

- No love for the truth.
- An empty form of godliness.
- Powerless religion.
- An tolerance of worldiness.
- A lack of interest in sound doctrine.
- Turning away from the truth.
- Gathering of teachers who will pacify the desires of sinful men.
- Doctrines that push one into the broad leading to destruction.
- Inconsistencies in Christianity that will lead men to speak evil of truth.

I am drawing attention to these characteristics because none of them were present at the time of our text. Their absence, together with the hearty embrace of the truth, is what enabled such mighty works and powerful preaching to take place. It is not that such displays of Divine power and influence were assigned to a specific age, or that they were limited to certain men. The book of Acts is revealing the manner of “the day of salvation.” It is unveiling the nature of the New Covenant, showing us the results of men being truly reconciled to God and in fellowship with Jesus Christ.

GODLY RESULTS CANNOT BE REALIZED WITHOUT GODLY CAUSES

Godly results can only proceed from godly causes. Powerful outcomes can only come from powerful causation. If men abandon the truth, they lose all access to the experiences wrought by truth. These include:

- Freedom (John 8:32).
- Sanctification (John 17:19).
- The teaching of Jesus (Eph 4:21).
- The experience of hope (Col 1:5).
- Salvation (2 Thess 2:10-12).
- Believing (2 Thess 2:13).
- Godly knowledge (1 Tim 2:4).
- A valid ministry within the church (1 Tim 3:15).
- Repentance (2 Tim 2:25).
- Obedience (1 Pet 1:22).
- A godly life (1 John 1:6).
- Assurance (1 John 3:19).

If “the truth” is removed, all of these benefits go with it – all of them! If there is no “love of the truth,” there is no possible way to experience the benefits that come from it. If it appears as though these things are present while the truth is absent, there really is only a simulation of them. What is derived from the truth itself cannot be obtained independently of that truth.

When we are faced with a fundamentally flawed church, it is because somewhere men have chosen to deny or abandon the truth. At some point they cease to love it and demand it. Their ears were turned away from the truth.

I have taken the time to say these things because they help to explain the realities that are taking place in our text. The evidences of falling away are totally absent. There is, at this point, no false teaching among professing Christians. Not only are they together, they are “of one heart and of one soul” (4:32). The truth is being proclaimed with power, and it has accomplished two things:

- Men have been brought to believe.
- The enemies of Jesus have been provoked.

Thus the marks of the New Covenant are being clearly shown. “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish : to the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:16).

We have every reason to believe that if the professing church will “walk in the light as He is in the light,” God will work through it to bring glory and honor to his own name. This will be done by flushing out those who have no love for the truth, and by awakening those who do have such a God-given love. When this happens, God will work for good.

THEY WENT TO THEIR OWN COMPANY

“ 4:23 And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.”

Here we will see a trait of newness of life: it moves men to seek out kindred spirits. Peter and John will not go into hiding, but will immediately join themselves to fellow believers.

THEY WENT TO THEIR OWN COMPANY

“And being let go, they went to their own company . . .” Other versions read, “their own companions,” NKJV “their own people,” NIV “their friends,” NRSV “their own fellowship,” CSB “their fellows,” GENEVA “their brethren,” MRD “their fellow believers,” NET “the community,” NJB “the other disciples,” LIVING “the other apostles,” GWN and “their own group.” IE

The word “company” means “pertaining to oneself . . . family . . . generation . . . one’s own people,” THAYER and “one’s own people, family, household, countrymen.” FRIBERG

One modern translation affirms “their own company” to be the apostles themselves. GWN This is not true. There is no evidence that the apostles tended to cluster together following Christ’s ascension into heaven. They were not a group unto themselves, but were placed within the body of Christ, being a part of the whole (1 Cor 12:28). Thus we read in the book of acts of “the apostles and the brethren” (11:1). Special gatherings for the examining of issues and drawing valid conclusions involved “the apostles and elders” (15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4). Once a mass of people were noted for siding “with the apostles” NKJV (14:4). Key analysis and decisions were made by James, the Lord’s brother, after the apostle James had been killed (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18).

In our text, “their own company” does not describe the office they held in the church – “apostles” – but those with whom they had commonality in Christ Jesus.

- A common salvation (Tit 1:4; Jude 1:3).
- A common faith.

Following Christ’s ascension, the eleven “continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren.” At that time, we are told, there were “together” about one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:14-15). When Jesus rose from the dead, He did appear to “the twelve” (1 Cor 15:5), but He also did to James, and to “above five hundred

brethren at once” (1 Cor 15:5,7). When Jesus appeared to the disciples and “opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures,” there were others “with” the eleven, including several women and Cleopas and his companion (Lk 24:33-44).

Following ascension of Jesus, there is not a single clear account in all of Scripture of the twelve apostles having a unique gathering by themselves – not a single one. What would lead anyone to imagine that, in this text, “their own company” means only the apostles themselves?

After Pentecost, the believers “were together” (Acts 2:44). Later, when Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, “he came to the house of Mary the mother of John . . . where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12). Following ascension of Jesus, there is not a single clear account in all of Scripture of the twelve apostles having a unique gathering by themselves – not a single one. What would lead anyone to imagine that, in this text, “their own company” means only the apostles themselves?

What we have here is an circumstance similar to that which was experienced in the days of Malachi. “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name” (Mal 3:16). In my judgment, we do a great disservice to the church by suggesting the apostles were a group unto themselves. While they did possess special gifts, and were given a unique role within the church, they did not isolate themselves from the rest of the body. They were part of the “all that believed” that were “together” (Acts 2:44). While their faith was adapted for their ministry, it was nevertheless a “common faith,” and blended perfectly with the faith of those who believed on Christ through their word (John 17:20).

This is actually a critical point of sound doctrine – the apostles doctrine . That is why Peter wrote this to scattered believers, “Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours , by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ” NASB (2 Pet 1:1). There is, after all, only “one faith,” and it perfectly joins the people of God together (Eph 4:5). The apostles did not have a different kind faith, but a different “measure” – and there is a vast difference between those two concepts (Rom 12:3; Eph 4:7,16).

The Preference of Godly People

The fact that people of God do not fear men does not suggest that they attach no significance to their threats. Believers know very well that they are not of themselves equal to the challenges of opposition. Further, their connection with the “Head over all things” is through their faith.

Faith brings to the heart a preference for godly people – “the household of faith” (Gal 6:10), or “the whole family” (Eph 3:15). Where this preference is absent, a most serious deficiency exists! For some people “their own company” has absolutely no reference to the children of God. However, in our text, it provides us insight into the very real closeness among brethren that is produced by fellowship with, and the love of, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Peter and John sensed they were not alone in this warfare. In their hearts they had already appropriated the truth of Romans 12:15: “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” Here we will behold an example of “striving together for the faith of the Gospel” (Phil 1:27). They will call upon the brethren to “strive together” in “prayers to God” for them (Rom 15:30). This will be an excellent example of being “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). We will be exposed to a “whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (Eph 4:16).

Of course, such things are not even possible if there is not a preference for the people of God. Such a preference is inherent in brotherly love which, under no circumstances, is to be lacking among the saints of God. That such a love was present is confirmed by what follows. At this time, the brethren

did not require exhortations to love one another, or be mindful of one another, or to labor together. This will not be a response to an admonition, or the fulfillment of a commandment. It is rather the spontaneous response of those who were walking in the newness of life.

THEY REPORTED IT ALL

“ . . . and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.” Other versions read, “gave an account of all,” BBE “ related all,” DOUAY “ showed all,” GENEVA “ told them all,” MRD “told them everything ,” NJB and “ declared whatever.” YLT

The fact that people of God do not fear men does not suggest that they attach no significance to their threats. Believers know very well that they are not of themselves equal to the challenges of opposition. Further, their connection with the “Head over all things” is through their faith. They cannot live as though their enemies did not exist, or their empowerment and protection were automatic. I acknowledge that some people appear to live in this manner, but it is not right to do so. To suggest that we have been called into the fellowship of God’s Son (1 Cor 1:9), only to have Him work in us apart from that fellowship, is nothing but an imagination. If we have been “joined to the Lord,” and are “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17), how is it that Divine benefits could possibly pass to us apart from that joining ? It is the lively connection between brethren that becomes the channel through which the Head ministers nourishment to them. As it is written, “ . . . the Head, from Whom the entire body, supplied and knit together by means of its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God.” AMPLIFIED

As confirmed in Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones, a disjointed and disassembled body is utterly useless. That is because it has no power, much less mobility and dexterity. An army cannot be assembled from bones, no matter how many there are, and irrespective of their imagined antiquity. It is not that a divided church IS not doing anything, it is rather that it CANNOT do anything. This is confirmed by the judgment at the tower of Babel. At the very instant the people became separated from one another, “they stopped building the city” NASB (Gen 11:8).

Further, let no man imagine that the marvelous affinity revealed in our text is apart from a lively awareness, or consciousness. Salvation includes the confirming testimony of the Holy Spirit, who “beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). It is within the framework of an acute consciousness of God – called “the knowledge of Him” – that men receive everything pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:1) – including the abilities to give insightful reports, and to pray with obvious power.

Now the disciples are going to go to the Lord concerning the threats that have been made to Peter and John. It is in view of this that the two reported everything that had been said to them. They know they have “access . . . unto the Father,” and they will avail themselves of it” (Eph 2:18). As Job said he would do, and in keeping with the nature of the New Covenant, they will “order” their cause before the Lord (Job 23:4), and “plead” with Him, (Isa 43:26), producing their “cause,” and bringing forth their “strong reasons” (Isa 41:21).

To assist the brethren in framing their petition, a full report of the cause has been given. Now, like spiritual lawyers, they will present their case to, and reason with, the Lord.

THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE TO GOD WITH ONE ACCORD

“ 24a And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said . . . ”

We will now be exposed to the unity of the Spirit and its utility in Kingdom matters. Unity is not an end in itself. Its value is seen in its effects. This is owing to the peaceable environment that it produces – an environment in which “the fruit of righteousness” is sown (James 3:18). No genuine

and lasting work of God will be accomplished where division in heart and mind exist.

In the Spirit, legitimate difference involves differing, yet harmonious, perspectives of the same things. In the Spirit the truth is loved as well as the brethren. The Divine agenda has been adopted, and purely selfish interests are mortified. Therefore, the unity of the Spirit is conducive to godly productivity and advance.

In the flesh, difference results in competition and division. It drives people apart rather than bringing them together. The truth is not loved, nor are the brethren. Carnal interests drive the objectives of those walking in the flesh. Therefore, the work of God cannot be done in such an environment. This is because “the carnal mind is enmity against God.” Therefore, “they that are in the flesh cannot please God ” (Rom 8:7-8).

Our text involves people that are “spiritually minded.” Therefore life and peace will exude from the assembly (Rom 8:6). When they hear the report, there will be “no divisions” among them. There will not be differing and conflicting views of the report. These are people who have “ears to hear,” and such ears are tuned to the same heavenly frequency. These are people who are “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

In modern Christian cultures, there must be admonitions to have the “same mind,” and to be harmonious in judgment. That is because corruption has crept into the church. Now, because the corruption is at the fountainhead of the institution, a great amount of time must be spent correcting, directing, rebuking, and instructing. This condition began very early in the history of the church – like a seemingly harmless crack in a dam. We will see it’s entrance as we progress through the book of Acts.

However, in our text, this condition did not yet exist. There will be no need to admonish the brethren to be of one mind. Peter and John will not have to suggest various ways in which this problem can be addressed. Time will not have to be spent warning the disciples what to avoid. Here, we will behold the spontaneous expression of real spiritual life. When there are no inhibiting obstacles to perception or devotion, this is what the people of God do. Anything less, or where there is a variance with this response, it is always owing to carnality, the flesh, and worldly-mindedness.

WHEN THEY HEARD THAT

“And when they heard that . . .” Other versions read, “hearing it,” BBE “having heard it,” DARBY “when the apostles heard this,” GWN and “upon hearing the story.” WEYMOUTH

Again, I draw the flawed translations of this text to your attention. As I have already stated, nothing in the text, or the book of Acts itself, justifies the view that this group was limited to the apostles. That is an opinion that is driven by a traditional view of the Kingdom. Secondly, this is not a “story” – a word which should be stricken from our vocabulary when speaking of Scriptural accounts. While the word “story,” in an archaic sense, can apply to historical incidents (hi-story), it is too impersonal for use here. What these people heard was the report of a personal experience – one that bore directly upon the work of the church.

By saying “they heard,” an interest in what was said is implied. That is, they “heard” the report as those who were themselves involved in its implications. They were not simply hearing a report of the experiences of someone else.

Also, the disciples “heard” with discernment. That is, they were able to associate the report with life in Christ Jesus, the preaching of the Gospel, and the need for Divine assistance. They could see the source of the opposition. They could discern its relation to the worldly opposition that was revealed in the death of the Lord Jesus. They knew this opposition had been prompted by the devil,

and they realized their personal inability to deal with it. It was apparent to them that this could not be ignored, as though it never happened, or had no direct bearing upon them. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, they had launched a bold spiritual initiative. Now, Satan had retaliated with an opening move of his own. They knew his efforts would not wane, but would rather intensify. Therefore they immediately called upon the name of the Lord.

THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICE WITH ONE ACCORD

“ . . . they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said . . . ” Other versions read, “they raised their voice to God with one accord,” NKJV “they raised their voices together ,” NIV “they all, with one mind, made prayer to God,” BBE “raised their voices to God unanimously ,” CSB “they were united and loudly prayed to God,” GWN “ unitedly lifted up their voice to God,” MRD “raised their voices to God with one mind ,” NET “lifted up their voice to God with one heart ,” NJB “all the believers lifted their voices together in prayer to God,” NLT “they prayed to God with one purpose ,” IE “with one united prayer to God,” WILLIAMS “lifted their voices together with one united mind to God ,” AMPLIFIED and “ with one passion lifted voice to God.” LITV

Lifting Up the Voice

Here is an aspect of human expression that is rapidly waning in our time – the lifting up of the voice. From an etymological point of view, lifting up the voice is straightforward. The expression “lifted up” comes from a single Greek word meaning, “to lift up, raise up . . . raise upward, elevate.” THAYER The word “voice” comes from a Greek word meaning “a sound, tone . . . the sound of the uttered voice.” THAYER When the human voice is lifted up, it is made louder and stronger. More energy is put into speaking. If we say someone lifts up their hands, every knows what we mean. If we ask someone to lift up their eyes, it is apparent we are asking them to raise their heads and focus on some sight above the ground. If we ask someone to lift up their voice, we mean to speak louder.

God commanded the Levites to speak to the people “with a loud voice ” (Deut 27:14). When Solomon prayed and blessed the people, he did so “with a loud voice” (1 Kgs 8:55). When the Lord spoke to a troubled and timorous people He said, “Lift up thy voice, O daughter of Gallim: cause it to be heard unto Laish, O poor Anathoth” (Isa 10:30). When He challenged Jerusalem to spread good tidings He said, “O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up , be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” (Isa 40:9). He told Isaiah, “Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet , and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins” (Isa 58:1). When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost he “lifted up his voice” (Acts 2:14). In the book of the Revelation, a “loud voice” is mentioned thirteen times (5:2,12; 6:10; 7:2,10; 8:13; 10:3; 12:10; 14:7,9,15,18; 19:17).

Now the brethren lift up their voice to God in elevated tones. They do not do this to be better heard by God, but to be more focused, and to be of more assistance to each other. Even their external expression is in harmony with their hearts, confirming the urgency of the situation. Also, the lifting up of the voice is a kind of sacrifice in which the best of one’s ability is thrown into the act of praying.

With One Accord

Now the brethren lift up their voice to God in elevated tones. They do not do this to be better heard by God, but to be more focused, and to be of more assistance to each other. Even their external expression is in harmony with their hearts, confirming the urgency of the situation.

There were not a lot of examples of men doing something “with one accord” prior to Christ. The Israelites, with very few exceptions were noted for strife and dissension rather than single-mindedness. In all of Moses and the prophets, they are never said to have been “in one accord.” The expression “one mind” is never applied to them. Once they were said to have been of “one heart to

make David king” (1 Chron 12:38). Once “the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD” (2 Chron 30:12).

However, in Christ, as promised by the prophets, such marvelous oneness occurs. Isaiah prophesied, “they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion” (Isa 52:8). Jeremiah prophesied, “And I will give them one heart, and one way” (Jer 32:39). Through Zechariah the Lord promised, “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zeph 3:9). These are not things that should take place in Christ – something like goals to be achieved. Rather, these traits would characterize the people of the Lord. They would be the result of being reconciled to God. Where they are not found, “the flesh” is in control, and men are walking in it. Further, walking in the flesh is always willing, for “the flesh” cannot override the Spirit. We know this is the case because it is written, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). Unity is “of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3), and divisions are “of the flesh” (dissensions, factions NASB – Gal 5:20).

Now, in our text, the people are one – “with one accord.” They are all of “one mind and one mouth” (Rom 15:6), and are “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,” and therefore will “speak the same thing” (1 Cor 1:10). They will require no exhortation to be this way, for their faith has already done the work. We do not know if they all prayed at once, spoke individually, or one or more spoke for all. The point is that the prayer flowed out from a people who had one mind and one purpose. There was no dissenting voice or heart among them. The flesh had not yet risen in their presence, and no place had been made for the devil.

This is spiritual life in all of its pristine pureness. It is how those who have maintained the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace pray to God.

THOU ART GOD

“24b . . . Lord, Thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is . . .”

Reference to Deity

Before beginning this exposition, I want to draw attention to the many references to Deity that are found in this prayer. They provide us a glimpse into the nature of effective prayer, which concentrates on the Lord and His will primarily, and human need secondarily. “1 to God . . . 2 Lord . . . 3 Thou . . . 4 God . . . 5 which . . . 6 Who . . . 7 Thy servant David . . . the 8 Lord . . . 9 His Christ . . . 10 Thy Holy Child . . . 11 Jesus . . . 12 whom 13 Thou hast anointed . . . 14 Thy hand . . . 15 counsel . . . 16 Lord . . . 17 Thy servants . . . 18 Thy word . . . 19 Thine hand . . . 20 the Name . . . 21 Thy Holy Child 22 Jesus.”

There are competitors to be sure – other “gods,” as well as men who think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. However, they are all under the true God, and must yield to Him at His word. These disciples know this is the case, and therefore they present their supplication to the Lord, knowing full well that their opponents cannot stand against Him.

Here was a body of people whose minds were immersed in Scripture. They had a grasp of the purpose of God, as well as His Sovereignty. Consider the marvelous scope of their understanding.

- **LORD, THOU ART GOD** – they recognized His dominion and power.
- **CREATOR** – They traced all things back to Him.
- **THY SERVANT** – They saw David as serving God’s interests and purpose.
- **THE LORD** – He is Sovereign.

- **HIS CHRIST** – The Lord was perceived as primarily serving Divine interests.
- **THY HOLY CHILD JESUS** – Only a holy Christ could save men.
- **THOU HAST ANOINTED** – Christ’s purpose and power was traced back to God.
- **THY HAND** – God is involved in the affairs of men.
- **THY COUNSEL** – The death of Jesus is seen as the outworking of God’s purpose.
- **DETERMINED TO BE DONE** – God’s will is causal – it makes things happen.
- **LORD, BEHOLD** – God focuses on the affairs of men.
- **THY SERVANTS** – The disciples pray as bond slaves to God and His purpose.
- **THY WORD** – This word reflects God’s purpose, and is empowered to accomplish

it.

One time, while Jesus was yet with them in the flesh, His disciples asked Him, “Teach us to pray” (Lk 11:1). Somewhere between Luke 11:1 and Acts 4:24, some Divine tutelage had been realized. No deficiency in prayer will be apparent on this occasion. The saints will pray with insight, persuasion, and confidence. They will not ask what they should do, but will pray for boldness to do what they already know to do.

THOU ART GOD

“ . . . Lord, thou art God . . .” Other versions read, “O Lord,” NASB “Sovereign Lord,” NIV/NRSV/RSV/ESV/NAB/NIB/ WEYMOUTH/MONTGOMERY/AMPLIFIED “Master,” CSB “Master of all,” NET “Lord, You are God,” PHILLIPS and “Master, You are the God,” ALT

The sophist sees no need for such a confession. To such, these words appear to be a pointless redundancy. However, this is not the recitation of a formula or a standardized introduction to supplication. This is the confession of faith – the acknowledgment of something that has been seen, or comprehended. Elsewhere we are apprised, “he that cometh to God must believe that HE IS , and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him” (Heb 11:6).

“Thou art God” is the confession that the people believe that “He is.” There is no point in praying if God is nothing more than an idea, or part of a creed, or something other than a real person.

The word “God” is intentionally singular. Lexically, and as used in this text, the word means “the supreme Divine being, the true, living, and personal God,” FRIBERG It is true that Satan is also referred to as “god” (same Greek word – qeo.j). However, the domain over which he rules is limited. Therefore he is called “the god of this world .” However, the God of our text is appropriated called “the God of gods,” for He is over them and rules them all. “For the LORD your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, a mighty, and a terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward” (Deut 10:17). Being “the God of gods,” He knows all things, thereby distinguishing Him from other gods. “The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, He knoweth, and Israel He shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day)” (Josh 22:22). David also confessed that God was “the God of gods” (Psa 136:2). When Daniel interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the king confessed, “Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings” (Dan 2:47).

There are competitors to be sure – other “gods,” as well as men who think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. However, they are all under the true God, and must yield to Him at His word. These disciples know this is the case, and therefore they present their supplication to the Lord, knowing full well that their opponents cannot stand against Him.

RELATING THE CREATOR TO THE CIRCUMSTANCE

“ . . . which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is . . .” Other versions read, “Thou didst make,” NASB “Maker of,” BBE “Creator of,” LIVING “the One having made,” ALT and “You created.” CEV

Here is a fundamental view that must not be distorted. It is consistently affirmed throughout Scripture, so that there can be doubt about this – God’s association with the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything inhabiting them.

This is the “heaven and the earth” that was created “in the beginning” of time. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen 1:1). It is the first thing about God that Scripture affirms. The “heaven” is the area around the earth, filled with celestial bodies beyond number. The “earth” is the area in which everything housed in a body lives – man, beast, fowl, and creeping things. The sea is the vast collections of water in which both animal and vegetable life is maintained, the number of which is also unimaginably vast.

This is the domain some have called the universe. Scripture refers to it as “the worlds” (Heb 1:2; 11:3). It also refers repeatedly to these three domains: heaven, earth, and sea (Ex 20:11; Psa 146:6; Ezek 38:20; Amos 9:6; Acts 14:15; Rev 5:13; 10:6; 14:7). This entire domain, with all three of its components, will eventually pass away according to Divine appointment (Rev 21:1).

One might wonder why the disciples prayed in this manner. There is a basic postulate behind this confession, and it is marvelous to consider. The One who made these realms governs and controls everything within them.

It is not possible to have a proper view of God that ignores the fact that He “made heaven, and earth, and sea, and all that in them is.” This includes the fact that He made them “in six days,” as affirmed in Exodus 20:11 and 31:17. Men may haggle over what kind of days these were – 24 hour days, or very lengthy periods of time. However, each of the six days in which the Lord created the heaven, earth, sea, and everything within them are each summarized with the words, “and the evening and the morning were” (Gen 1:5,8,13,19,23,31). This confirms they were periods of identical length, each consisting of two components. There is not a shred of Scripture – not so much as a syllable – that suggests these days were anything other than the days with which we are familiar.

While I do not stand in judgment of anyone’s faith, those who do not acknowledge God as the Creator [as it is presented in Scripture] cannot possibly be serving the true God. They cannot confess God as these disciples did. What I am saying is that God himself is identified as the One created the worlds, thereby distinguishing Him from all other gods, over whom he rules.

The Basic Postulate

One might wonder why the disciples prayed in this manner. There is a basic postulate behind this confession, and it is marvelous to consider. The One who made these realms governs and controls everything within them. There is no personality, thing, or activity within them over which God does not have absolute dominion. This is particularly good news when facing opposition.

WHY DID THE HEATHEN RAGE

“ 25 Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things?”

Spiritual minds gravitate to Scripture. There is where the mind of God is articulated, and the thoughts of God are communicated to men. The Scriptures are the means through which we learn to speak properly concerning the things of God. That is why it is through them that the man of God is

made “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17).

Now we will behold how a grasp of Scripture impacts upon forming a prayer to God.

BY THE MOUTH OF DAVID

“Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said . . .” Other versions read, “by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Thy servant,” NASB “by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of Your servant, our father David,” NIV “by the Holy Spirit through our ancestor David , your servant,” NRSV “who by the mouth of our father David, thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit,” RSV “who through the mouth of our father David, your servant, said by the Holy Spirit,” ESV “ and You said through the Holy Spirit, who spoke through your servant David (our ancestor).” GWN

Here is a glimpse of what can be involved in God speaking to men. There are few examples of God speaking directly to men: Adam (Gen 3:9-12), Noah (Gen 6:13), Abraham (Gen 17:9), Jacob (Gen 35:1), and Moses (Num 12:7-8), etc. Some of the occasions during which God was said to speak to men were actually accomplished through an angel. Some examples are Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:1-4:19; Acts 7:30), and the giving of the Law at Sinai (Ex 20:1-19; Acts 7:53; Gal 3:19). Several other instances where it is stated that the Lord spoke to men could actually have been accomplished through angels, as when Jacob said He had seen God “face to face” (Gen 32:30), yet had actually wrestled with an angel (Hos 12:4).

Here, however, we have a reference to the more standard way of God speaking to men – if, indeed, any such way can be called standard . The affirmation of the text is that God delivered a word to men through David – a prophecy of the coming Messiah. Some versions read, “by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of David.” NASB The King James and New King James Versions, together with several others, do not contain the reference to the Holy Spirit. There is no need to balk at this, as we are informed elsewhere that “holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” NKJV (2 Pet 1:21). This is what “the inspiration of God” means, as stated in Second Timothy 3:16.

We also know that fallen man cannot have direct access to God Himself. Jesus said, “And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me. Ye have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His shape” (John 5:37). Again He said, “Not that any man hath seen the Father, save He which is of God, He hath seen the Father” (John 6:46). Additionally, John wrote, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him” (John 1:18). All of this shows how Divine communication is, in a manner of speaking, filtered as it comes to man.

Here is a profitable thing to ponder – something that accents the extent to which the human race has fallen. The manner in which God speaks to us confirms that sin has created a separation between man and God. Even though in Christ we are reconciled to God, there must still be someone between us and God to deliver His words. In the past, through the Spirit and holy angels, he spoke to men through the prophets. Now, however, He speaks to us through the Son. As it is written, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb 1:1-2). Now the Son is in total charge of all communication with men. If sinners are to be convicted , the Son must send the Spirit to do so (John 16:8-11). If the Scriptures are to be opened to us, and the eyes of our understanding be illuminated, the Son must do it (Eph 1:18). The government is upon His shoulder, and hearing and understanding the truth is within the perimeter of His Kingdom.

Now the disciples will speak to God about something He had spoken through the Spirit and by David the prophet. They will discern this particular passage of Scripture, and be able to correlate it with the events that have recently occurred in their presence.

WHY DID THE HEATHEN RAGE?

“Why did the heathen rage . . .” Other versions read, “Why do the nations rage?” NKJV “Why did the Gentiles rage?” NASB “Why are the nations so violently moved ?” BBE “Why have the nations raged haughtily ?” DARBY “Why do the nations act arrogantly ?” GWN “Why this uproar among the nations?” NJB “Why were the nations so angry ?” NLT “Why do the heathen rage against the Lord ?” LIVING “Why were the nations so mad?” IE “Why did the heathen (Gentiles) become wanton and insolent and rage ?” AMPLIFIED and “Why are the Gentiles so furious ?” CEV

The passage to which they are referring is Psalm 2:1-6: “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion.”

“The heathen” is a reference to the Gentile peoples – the nations to whom no revelation was given, and who were not in covenant with God. It speaks of the opposition of the nations to the purposes and objectives of God Almighty. We will see that it particularly relates to the enthronement of the Lord’s Christ.

The word “rage” speaks of arrogant and haughty behavior – like a prancing horse to stomps on the ground wildly. What caused the nations to be agitated and bluster about against the Lord? Why were they so angry, and moved to violence?

There are numerous examples of this rage. In an introductory manner, it was made known in Cain slaying Abel (Gen 4:8), Ishmael mocking Isaac (Gen 21:9-10), and Esau threatening Jacob (Gen 27:41). The nations raged against Israel, the covenanted people: Egypt, Assyria, Syria, Philistia, Media, Samaria, Chaldea. They raged at a people who were blessed by the Lord, and were given a land of their own. They raged at their religion, their prophets, and their law?

Behind all of this, Satan was at work, seeking to stop the promised Seed from coming into the world. Following Christ’s entrance into the world, the devil focused on Him, making every effort to turn Him from His mission or destroy Him. His efforts were all in vain, as Jesus triumphed over him, destroying Him by means of His death (Heb 2:14).

Following our Lord’s resurrection, ascension, and enthronement, Satan would continue to harass the disciples of Christ, trying to stamp them out from the earth (Rev 12:17). In this effort he would also employ the nations of the world – heathen governments. Though seemingly successful in some of his efforts, this too would prove to be futile. All who are in Christ Jesus will be brought safely home to glory.

WHY DID THE PEOPLE IMAGINE VAIN THINGS?

Imagining vain things is the development of cunning plots that were destined to failure. It is the making of plans that cannot be fulfilled. It is not because the plans are foolish of themselves, but because they are against the Lord, whose purpose cannot be overthrown.

“ . . . and the people imagine vain things?” Other versions read, “And the people plot vain things ?” NKJV “And the peoples devise futile things ?” NASB “and the peoples plot in vain ?” NIV “and why are the thoughts of the people so foolish ?” BBE “and the peoples meditated vain things ?” DARBY “Why do their people devise useless plots ?” GWN “and the peoples entertain folly ?” NAB “this impotent muttering of the peoples?” NJB “Why did they waste their time with futile plans ?” NLT “and the foolish nations plan their little plots against Almighty God ?” LIVING “Why

did the people of the world plan things ?” IE “and the people make vain designs,” WILLIAMS “and the people imagine and study and plan vain (fruitless) things [that will not succeed]?” AMPLIFIED “and [the] people think about [fig., plot futile][things]? ALT and “and the people conspired vain things ?” EMTV

Some have conjectured that “the people” refers to the heathen in another way – as individuals rather than nations. They reject the idea that it refers to the Jews, who were a unique people in the world. However, I am rather inclined to see this as the Jews – particularly since the disciples make that connection in the expressions that follow.

We have numerous examples of the Jews objecting to, and opposing, the words and working of the Lord. They murmured against Moses (Ex 15:24; 16:2; 17:3; Num 14:2; 16:41). They persecuted, and even killed, the holy prophets (Matt 23:31; Acts 7:32; Thess 2:15). They killed Stephen (Acts 7:59), and took delight in the beheading of James (Acts 12:2-3). They hounded Paul in his prodigious travels throughout the world (Acts 9:22-23; Acts 13:45,50; 14:19; 17:13; 18:12; 20:3; 21:27; 23:12; 25:7; 2 Cor 11:24; 2 Thess 2:14). All of this opposition started with “the people” rejecting Jesus, and imagining vain things against Him.

Imagining vain things is the development of cunning plots that were destined to failure. It is the making of plans that cannot be fulfilled. It is not because the plans are foolish of themselves, but because they are against the Lord, whose purpose cannot be overthrown.

Why ???

In asking “Why?” the heathen raged and the people imagined vain things, neither the Psalmist nor the disciples are not seeking an answer. Rather, through the Spirit, they are declaring the absurdity of their actions. Although they did not know it, they were nothing more than vassals of Satan, and Satan cannot overthrow God. This is confirmed by the fact that he himself was cast out of heaven with his angels. As it is written, “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev 12:9). His opposition against God in the heavenly realms was futile. It is also futile upon the earth.

The futility of all opposition to God reaches an apex in the matter of Christ’s enthronement. After citing the raging of the heathen and the plotting of the people, the second Psalm continues, “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall He speak unto them in His wrath, and vex them in His sore displeasure. Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion ” (Psa 2:6). All opposition, from the slaying of Abel to the crucifixion of Christ, was nothing more than an exercise in vanity. God did what He had purposed, and there was not a chance that any person or group of persons could thwart or delay it. As it is written, “as I have purposed, so shall it stand ” (Isa 14:24), and “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass ; I have purposed it, I will also do it ” (Isa 46:11).

Now, the disciples will reason with the Lord. They will build their case upon the truth of the second Psalm. They do so because they know they are in synch with Divine purpose, and thus call upon Him to sustain them in their work. This is a prayer of remarkable insight, revealing how the Spirit works in those whose hearts have been submitted to the Lord. Much can be learned here.

THE KINGS AND RULERS GATHERED TOGETHER

“ 26 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.”

This is heaven’s view of the conspiracy against Jesus. It is depicted as a bold and deliberate

initiative against God Himself and His Christ, or Anointed One – the One chosen to take away the sins of the world, soundly defeat the wicked one, and administrate the Kingdom of God with a mind to bringing many sons to glory.

THE KINGS OF THE EARTH STOOD UP

“The kings of the earth stood up . . .” Other versions read, “The kings of the earth took their stand .” NKJV “The kings of the earth set themselves in array ,” NRSV “The kings of the earth were lifted up ,” BBE “The kings of the earth were there ,” DARBY “The Kings of the earth assembled ,” GENEVA “The kings of the earth stood together ,” NET “Kings on earth take up position ,” NJB “The kings of the earth prepared for battle ,” NLT “the kings of the earth came near ,” WEYMOUTH and “The kings of the earth took their stand in array [for attack] .” AMPLIFIED

From the human point of view – which is never the right one – it may appear as though “the kings of the earth” were, from one extreme, only pleasing the people. While, from the other extreme, they may be thought to be nothing more than pawns manipulated by the King of kings. However, such views are too simplistic. Man does have a will, and he is responsible for the way he uses it.

“Kings” are rulers over large areas of the earth – some were global in their power, ruling the entire world. This is what the kings of the earth eventually do – stand up against God. They initiate opposition to righteousness in order to promote their own cause. If Joseph be sited as an example of king who did not do this, it must be remembered that he was king in the earth, but not of the earth. He was not spawned by the world’s system, but assumed his office according to Divine appointment.

To be more specific, “the kings of the earth” stand for the governments of the world – the heads over the kingdoms which will all be crushed by the real Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the King of kings” (1 Tim 6:15). Eventually, “their kingdoms will “become the kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ” (Rev 11:15). Until then, they are in competition with the Lord and the Truth that he has brought to the world (John 1:17). At some point, “kings,” who stand for the governments of the world, stand up against Christ . History can boast of no significant or global government that has altered its manner to agree with the truth of God. Even where amiable governments exist who tend to favor Christianity , there comes a time when they in some way stand up against Christ. Our own country, the United States of America, is a case in point.

THE RULERS GATHERED TOGETHER

“ . . . and the rulers were gathered together . . .” Other versions read, “the rulers gather together ,” NIV “the rulers have gathered together,” NRSV “the rulers came together ,” BBE “the rulers assembled together,” CSB “and the princes assembled together,” DOUAY “Rulers make plans together ,” GWN “the potentates stood up,” MRD “princes plot together ,” NJB and “and the rulers were assembled and combined together .” AMPLIFIED

As this pray will affirm, the “rulers of the people” are not just another way of saying “kings of the earth.” This rather refers to religious leaders, as seen in the leaders of Israel. More specifically, it is corrupt religious leaders than find the apex of their expression in spiritual Babylon, depicted so vividly in the book of Revelation (Rev 17:1-18:24). There she is depicted as a whorish woman sitting upon a beast – a graphic picture of an religion being carried along by the principles that support worldly governments.

The “rulers” of reference lead in the name of God, but they lead people into the ditch, error, and outright opposition to God. This will be clarified when we come to the application the disciples make of “the kings of the earth and the rulers.”

AGAINST THE LORD, AND AGAINST HIS CHRIST

“ . . . against the Lord, and against his Christ.” Other versions read, “against the Lord and against His Anointed One,” NIV “against the Lord and against His Messiah,” NRSV “against the Lord and against His anointed,” ESV “against the Lord, and too, against His Christ,” WILLIAMS and “against the Lord and against His Anointed (Christ, the Messiah).” AMPLIFIED

“The Lord” is God the Father – “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:3). “His Christ” is the Man God has anointed to deal with the human situation. It is the Lord Jesus Himself, who was sent to remove sin, the inhibiting factor, thereby providing a basis upon which men could be rescued and brought into Divine favor. The “Christ” was also the Divine means of putting a crystal-clear representation of God Himself among the people. It is said of Jesus, “in Him dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). And again it is said of Him, “Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person” (Heb 1:3). Jesus Himself said, “he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

When it is said the kings and rulers “gathered together against the Lord and His Christ,” it does not mean they stood up against two perceived personalities. Precisely how do “kings and rulers” gather together against an invisible God? This rather means that when the people opposed “His Christ,” they opposed the God who sent Him as well, for “God was in Christ” (2 Cor 5:19). Jesus also made this fact clear when He said, “He that hateth Me hateth My Father also” (John 15:23). And again, “he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16). This is further accented by the fact that whoever receives Jesus receives the Father also. As it is written, “he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (Matt 10:40). Therefore, whether we are speaking of receiving Christ or rejecting Him, the action is considered to apply to both the Father and the Son – “the Lord and His Christ.” Thus it is clear that two peoples cannot worship the same God while one of them rejects Christ.

It must be clear in our minds that God takes the rejection or neglect of His Son personal. It is impossible for God to extend His mercy to those who are rejecting, and even opposing, His Son. That is why it is utterly impossible for those who stand up against Jesus to succeed, seeing they oppose both God and Christ – an opposition that cannot possibly succeed.

Now, we will see how the disciples employ this understanding in prayer – how they take the truth and work with a situation through prayer.

GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE HOLY CHILD JESUS

“ 27 For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together . . . ”

Here we are exposed to the exactness, or precision, of “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

FOR

“For . . .” The word “for” is “a particle of affirmation and conclusion” THAYER That is, it is a way of drawing a conclusion, or applying the truth that was just stated. In other words, in the hearts of the disciples, what follows is an example of the Second Psalm. Two parallels in particular are to be seen.

- Opposition to God and His Christ.
- The utter vanity of such opposition.

AGAINST GOD’S HOLY CHILD

“ . . . of a truth against thy holy child Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “holy Child, Jesus”

DOUAY/PNT/RWB/TNT/WEB/YLT/BISHOPS/LITV/MJKV “Your holy Servant Jesus,” NKJ “Thine holy Son Jesus,” GENEVA/MRD “Your Son . . . Your holy Servant,” LIVING and “Your holy Child and Servant.” AMPLIFIED

Again, as in Acts 3:13 and 26, several versions use the word “servant” instead of “child” (“Son” in Acts 3:13 and 26). I offer the following as a brief exposition of this matter because, when referring to Jesus, any alternative to the word “Son” must be buttressed with sound reasoning and linguistic expertise.

“Son” Versus “Servant”

Nearly all later translations say “Servant” instead of “Son” NKJV/NASB/NIV/ NRSV/RSV/ASV/BBE/CSB/DARBY/ERV/ESV/GWN/NAB/NAS/NAU/NET/NIB/NJB/NLT/LIVING/IE/ WEYMOUTH/ISV / WILLIAMS , and MONTGOMERY . Two of the literal translations (Young’s Literal and Literal Translation of the Bible) translate the word “*child*.” The Amplified Bible translates it “*Servant and Son*.”

This confirms that those who oppose Jesus oppose God also. Those who reject His words, reject God also. Those who argue with what Jesus says speak against God. Those who are indifferent to Jesus are indifferent toward God. It makes no difference what such people affirm.

The Greek word translated “*Son*” and “*servant*” is common in all Greek manuscripts. It is **pai/da** , (pie-dah), and is in the masculine gender. Its lexical meaning is “a child,” with the second usage “servant, slave,” THAYER “in reference to age, child; in reference to descent son, in reference to social position servant, slave,” FRIBERG “servant, slave, child,” UBS “a young person,” LOUW-NIDA “in relation to Descent, a son, in Relation to age, a child, in relation to Condition, a slave, servant,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “child (in relation to parents,” LEH and “boy, son, but even more probable is servant, slave.” GINGRICH

It is clear from the lexical definitions that the meaning of the word is not cut and dried. It is used in a number of differing ways to denote age, descent, and social status. If this word was used to describe anyone other than Jesus, I would carry the matter no further. However, since this is descriptive of Jesus, it seems to me that we must extend ourselves to be sure we hold a God-honoring view of the term.

The complicating factor is the words modified by this expression: “His Son (Servant) JESUS.”

First, this precise Greek word is used five times in Scripture. Luke 9:42 (“child,” KJV “boy” NASB), Acts 3:13 (“Son,” KJV “Servant,” ASV “Child” YLT), Acts 3:26 (“ on,” KJV “Servant,” ASV “Child.” YLT), Acts 4:27 (“Child,” KJV “Servant,” ASV “Child.” DOUAY), and Acts 20:12 (“young man” named Eutychus, “lad,” ASV “youth,” DOUAY “boy.” NASB

There can be no question about Jesus being God’s Servant. That is how Isaiah spoke of the coming Messiah (Isa 42:1; 49:5-7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11). Zechariah also prophesied of the Messiah as God’s “*Servant the Branch*” (Zech 3:8). Matthew specifically confirms Jesus is the “*Servant*” of Isaiah’s prophecy (Matt 12:16). **None of these prophecies had to do with the exaltation or glorification of Jesus.** They rather had to do with Him carrying out God’s commission in the earth – accomplishing salvation.

I affirm that, from a technical point of view, **Jesus was exalted in the capacity of the Son of God and “Jesus.”** In this capacity He is the Foundation upon which the church is Built (Matt 16:16-18; 1 Cor 3:11). Our faith involves a persuasion that Jesus is “*the Son of God*” (John 20:21; Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:5). The text loses nothing by retaining the expression “He Hath glorified His Son Jesus.” KJV, DOUAY, GENEVA, MRD, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, BISHOP’S BIBLE, MKJV

Notice how the disciples relate the opposition to Christ with the kings of the earth and the rulers of the people gathering together against “the Lord and His Christ.” This confirms that those who oppose Jesus oppose God also. Those who reject His words, reject God also. Those who argue with what Jesus says speak against God. Those who are indifferent to Jesus are indifferent toward God. It makes no difference what such people affirm. As “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), the church is to make this clear to the people. Our attitude toward Jesus reflects our attitude toward God – the God before whom we will surely stand.

“Holy”

Several things are to be noted in this singular expression. It is only mentioned here, and later in verse 30. Coming from the Greek word **agion** (hag-ion), this word has several primary meanings.

- **WAY HE IS VIEWED.** Viewed with veneration because of association with God. THAYER
- **MANNER OF EMPLOYMENT.** Set apart for God, being exclusively His. THAYER
- **HIS ORIGIN.** Prepared for God – that is, having its origin exclusively for Divine employment. THAYER

Now, how successful will “the kings of the earth” and “the rulers of the people” be in gathering themselves together against this “holy child?” The answer to this question will determine whether or not men are ever justified in fearing man rather than God.

HIS CHARACTER. In a moral sense, pure, sinless, and upright. THAYER

- **HIS TOTAL ACCEPTANCE BY GOD.** A quality of one who can be brought into the presence of God with perfect acceptance. FRIBERG
- **ABSOLUTE SUPERIORITY.** Superior in all respects and possessing certain Divine qualities that set him apart from all other created beings. LOUW-NIDA

“Child”

This has particular regard to Christ’s origin. He was begotten by God through the Holy Spirit, and is therefore properly and fully referred to as God’s “Son.” Thus, when providing an explanation for her conception of a child, the angel Gabriel said, “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35).

This means there was nothing from the fallen race within Jesus, even though he took upon Himself the human “form” (Phil 2:7). He came in “the likeness of sinful flesh,” but Himself was not housed by “sinful flesh” (Rom 8:3). He had a body – a specially prepared body (Heb 10:5), but it was not a “vile body” (Phil 3:21), or a “body of this death” (Rom 7:24). In other words, there was nothing from Adam in Jesus! That is why He is called “the last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45), and “the second man” (1 Cor 15:47).

In reckoning genealogies, the seed is always reckoned through the man. Thus we read, “And Adam . . . begat a son in his own likeness” (Gen 5:3), and “This is the book of the generations of Adam . . .” (Gen 5:1-32). Matthew traces the genealogy of Jesus from Abraham to Jesus, always mentioning the men as begetting (Matt 1:1-16). Luke traces the genealogy from Jesus back to Adam, also mentioning the men as begetting (Lk 3:23-38). From the human point of view, the birth of Jesus was through Mary, not her husband Joseph. He is properly referred to as the “seed” of the woman (Gen 3:15), thus setting apart from all other men. Thus Isaiah prophesied, “a virgin shall conceive,

and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel” (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23).

Jesus, therefore, came from heaven, not from “the loins of a man,” as did others (Ex 1:5; Heb 7:5,10). This is why Jesus referred to Himself as “He that came down from heaven” (John 3:13). He also said, “I came down from heaven” (John 6:38), and “I am the living bread which came down from heaven” (John 6:51). Jesus is, then, the only person ever born of a woman that pre-existed. If that is not the case, this language would have no meaning, nor would He have been unique.

Now, how successful will “the kings of the earth” and “the rulers of the people” be in gathering themselves together against this “holy child?” The answer to this question will determine whether or not men are ever justified in fearing man rather than God.

AGAINST THE ONE WHOM GOD ANOINTED

“ . . . whom thou hast anointed . . .” Other versions read, “who was marked out by You as Christ,” BBE “Your anointed Son,” LIVING “the One You made Messiah,” IE “whom You had consecrated,” WILLIAMS “Whom You consecrated by anointing,” AMPLIFIED and “Your chosen Messiah.” CEV

Not only was Jesus uniquely born, He came into the world for a unique purpose. Through the prophets, God made known that a diligent search had been made by the Omniscient One to see if there was anyone in all the human race who was capable of addressing the human dilemma. “And I looked, and there was none to help ; and I wondered that there was none to uphold : therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and My fury, it upheld Me” (Isa 63:5). Again it is said of Christ’s vicarious sacrifice, “I have trodden the winepress alone ; and of the people there was none with Me ” (Isa 63:3). The expression “of the people” refers to the chosen people, who were the most unique people in all the world. They had been chosen and cultured by God Himself, given every possible advantage to correct their behavior. Yet, among even this people, no one could be found who could take away sin, destroy the devil, and provide a just basis for salvation.

Jesus – the incarnate Word (John 1:14) – anointed to do this work. That is, He was sanctified, or set apart to accomplish what had to be done for men to be delivered from the clutches of the devil, as well as sin and death. There was no other compelling reason for Him to come into the earth. It is true that God the Father was seen in Him (John 14:9), and that He was the appointed expositor of Him (John 1:18). It is also true that “Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps” (1 Pet 2:21). But none of these were His primary or fundamental reason for coming into the world. Rather, they all were related to Him laying down His life, and taking it up again (John 10:17-18). Were it not for those requirements, the other things would have no real purpose.

How serious do you suppose it is to be aligned against such a Man – “the Lord’s Christ” (Lk 2:26). Understanding who sent Him into the world, and the “eternal purpose” that provided the reason for sending Him, how successful will anyone be in standing up against Him?

Knowing these things, the disciples will now spell out in their prayer precisely what was involved in the kings and rulers of the people gathering together against the Lord and His Christ.

HEROD, PILATE, THE GENTILES, AND THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL

“ . . . both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together . . .” Other versions read, “both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the nations, and peoples of Israel , have been gathered together in this city,” DARBY “ In this city Herod and Pontius Pilate made plans together with non-Jewish people and the people of Israel,” GWN “Herod and Pilate, with the Gentiles and the congregation of Israel, have been combined together in this city ,” MRD “in this very city Herod and Pontius Pilate plotted together with the gentile nations and the peoples

of Israel ,” NJB “In fact, this has happened here in this very city ! For Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united,” NLT “That this is what is happening here in this city today ! For Herod the king, and Pontius Pilate the governor, and all the Romans – as well as the people of Israel,” LIVING “These words came true when Herod, Pontius Pilate, the nations of the world, and the Jewish people all came together,” IE “Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and also the tribes of Israel,” WEYMOUTH “Herod and Pontius Pilate actually met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel,” ISV “Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the heathen and the peoples of Israel ,” WILLIAMS and “Herod and Pontius Pilate got together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel.” CEV

Now the disciples give the names of the opponents they have experienced, and of their disdain of the Christ. Herod Antipas was the fickle king, and Pilate the crafty governor. There was a time when these two men did not get along. However, when it came to being against Jesus, they came into agreement and were reconciled. It is written, “And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate. And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves ” (Luke 23:11-12).

Notice how the people relate the crucifixion of Jesus to the opposition just experienced by Peter and John . They do not consider the opposition to be against Peter and John, but against the Lord and His Christ. This is a liberating view, freeing us from the fear of man, which does bring a snare (Prov 29:15). These brethren know that if the opposition is against God and His Christ, the response to that opposition will be orchestrated from heaven, accomplishing the will of God, not of man.

It ought to be noted that only those who are laboring together with God in His revealed purpose can pray in this manner. Those who have adopted the agendas of men, and are engaged in sectarian enterprises cannot call God to their aid – at least not with any confidence.

Those who choose to abandon the revealed work of God have, by that very action, forfeited the right to ask for His empowerment and assistance. Although a vital view, it does not appear to me that this is commonly known among professed believers.

TO DO WHAT DIVINE COUNSEL HAD DETERMINED

“ 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

FOR TO DO

“For to do whatsoever . . .” Other versions read, “to do whatever,” NKJV “they did what ,” NIV “they did everything ,” GWN “to do as much ,” NET “to bring about everything ,” NJB “to do all that ,” ISV “to carry out all .” AMPLIFIED

The purpose of this gathering was to do something. They did not come together to talk, but to fully implement their own desires. These men were meeting to carry out their desires concerning the presence of the “Jesus of Nazareth.” They had analyzed the situation before them and determined what they felt had to be done. In fact, viewing the whole matter according to the flesh, it looked as though they did carry out their designs, finally ridding themselves of this troublesome Teacher and miracle worker. However, the disciples do not view this matter as something the kings and rulers intended to do. They will confess to God that what they did really had very little to do with their intentions.

THY HAND

“ . . . Thy hand . . .” Other versions read, “to do whatever Your hand,” NKJV “to bring about the

very thing that you in your strength.” NJB

The “hand” of the Lord speaks of what He does – of His works, and the execution of his will. The Psalmist said of God’s hand, “The right hand of the LORD is exalted : the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly ” (Psa 118:16). The fact that God’s right hand is “exalted” means that He is in a position to do whatever He pleases. The fact that His right hand does “valiantly” means that what He sets His hand to do is effective. As it is written, “He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35).

Viewed from heaven’s perspective, the enemies of Christ were assembled to execute the will of God the Father. None of this was apparent to them, and at the time it was not even apparent to the followers of Christ. But that is not the case now. At this time they have been enlightened, and are praying with an acute understanding of what really took, place when Jesus was crucified.

THY COUNSEL

“ . . . and Thy counsel . . . ” Other versions read, “ Your purpose ,” NKJV “and will ,” NIV “and your plan ,” NRSV “and thy pleasure ,” MRD “and Your wisdom .” NJB

The “counsel” of the Lord has to do with His purpose, intention, or aim. Men might associate God’s “counsel” with His plan, or what He wills to do. A “council” plotted the death of Christ (Matt 26:59; Mk 14:55). A “council” “bound Jesus, and carried Him away, and delivered Him to Pilate” (Mk 15:1). A “council” had also forced Peter and John to stand before them, and issued a threat to them (Acts 4:15). But this is not the kind of counsel that is in the minds of the disciples as they pray.

They now see the whole matter of Christ’s death as associated with the will and purpose of the God of heaven – which it was. If God had not purposed that Jesus die, it would not have been possible for Him to die.

DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE

“ . . . determined before to be done.” Other versions read, “ predestined to occur ,” NASB “predestined to take place ,” NRSV “ foreordained to come to pass ,” ASV “had been fixed before ,” BBE “ decreed to be done ,” DOUAY “You had already decided should be done,” GWN “ previously marked out to be done,” MRD “had long ago planned to take place,” NAB “had decided beforehand would happen ,” NET “had predetermined should happen ,” NJB “made Your plan come true;” IE and “had predestined (predetermined) should occur .” AMPLIFIED

Viewed from heaven’s perspective, the enemies of Christ were assembled to execute the will of God the Father. None of this was apparent to them, and at the time it was not even apparent to the followers of Christ. But that is not the case now. At this time they have been enlightened, and are praying with an acute understanding of what really took, place when Jesus was crucified.

This is something that all of the disciples saw, for they were praying “with one accord” (4:24). At this point we confront a fact that jars against the flesh – a point with which many have a controversy. On the one hand, we have read about “the kings of the earth and the rulers of the people.” It might appear on the surface as though they are running the affairs of the earth. However, there is a Divine will that is superimposed upon the human will, and it causes things to happen.

The second Psalm is a bold affirmation of the futility of opposition to God. In the case of Jesus, the opposition itself is an expression of God’s determination. This is exactly what Peter declared on the day of Pentecost, not many days before the time of our text. “Him, being delivered by the determinate

counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

For some, this is too hard to accept. To those so described it is viewed much like the saying of Jesus concerning eating His flesh and drinking His blood. The doubters replied, “This a hard saying, who can hear it,” or “This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?” NRSV (John 6:60). However, men do well to mortify such distracting thoughts, for they suggest the absence of God from the affairs of men, as though the world was running independently of its Creator.

Does God Really Determine Things?

Some suggest that God really does not determine things, for, say they, this interferes with the free will of man. But what will they do with the worst thing men have ever done – gather together against the Lord and His Christ and kill

“The Prince of life” (Acts 3:15). Here the disciples declare this was done in strict accordance with God’s counsel, and was something He had determined before to be done.

What kind of reasoning leads people to imagine that God determined the worst things to be done, but left everything else to men? Is it possible to live in God’s world, employing the life that He has given, and yet to do be completely apart from any involvement from Him? And how would a person go about substantiating such a notion?

God once sent a prophet to king Amaziah who “said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel” (2 Chron 25:16). The record confirms that Amaziah was not able to avert that Divine determination (25:27). Job confessed that man’s days “are determined,” adding that God has “decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed” NIV (Job 14:5). Isaiah spoke of a “consumption,” or “complete destruction” NASB of the land that had been “determined” by God (Isa 10:23). Isaiah also prophesied of a time when Judah would be a terror to Egypt according to “the counsel of the Lord, which He hath determined against it” (Isa 19:17). Daniel spoke of “seventy weeks” that were “determined upon the people and the holy city” (Dan 9:24), also affirming “for what has been determined shall be done” NKJV (Dan 11:36). Paul announced to the Athenians, “From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” (Acts 17:26).

In this prayer it comes across that the disciples were convinced of the absolute Sovereignty of God. They did not have all of the answers concerning their situation, but they knew who did. They prayed to the God who controls men as well as created them. With them, being aligned with the purpose of God had placed them in a position to pray with such keen insight and holy boldness.

We do well to learn from this account. If we pray as though this world is governed by men, we pray in error. It is still true, “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1). That includes our opponents as well as our friends. It encompasses the saved and the lost, the tender and the hard.

BEHOLD THEIR THREATENINGS

“29a And now, Lord, behold their threatenings . . .” Other versions read, “Now, Lord, look on their threats,” NKJV “And now, Lord, take note of their threats,” NASB “Now, Lord, consider their threats,” NIV “And now, Lord, take note of their cruel words,” BBE “Lord, pay attention to their threats,” GWN “behold and see their menaces,” MRD ““O Lord, hear their threats,” NLT Lord, listen to what they are saying,” IE “Lord, pay attention to their threats now,” ISV and “And now, Lord, observe their threats.” AMPLIFIED

Why would the saints pray in such a manner, asking the Lord to pay attention to, behold, or look upon the threats that had been made against them? The sophist might perceive this to be rather foolish, seeing that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). Others might reason, “Is it not true he looks from heaven, beholding the sons of men? (Psa 33:13). Why would we ask the Lord to behold something that is already being assessed by Him? Is it not true that ‘by Him actions are weighed’ (1 Sam 2:3)? Is there anything that is hidden from Him, or that He does not see? If God is omniscient, why should any informed person pray in such a manner?” Such is the prattling of fools who have no understanding. They do not know of Divine manners, and that is why their thinking is so flawed.

Do you wonder how unconventional it is for believers to bring their enemies to the attention of the Lord? Those who live by faith do not avenge themselves. They know the Lord has said, “Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people” (Heb 10:30). Of course, as the statement indicates, there are two sides to that vengeance. The first is His vengeance upon those who persecute His people. The second is the judgment of His people for their omissions, commissions, or folly.

This prayer seeks for God’s intervention on both sides. First, toward His enemies, that their ways may not prosper. Second, to give them grace to avoid His judgment for failure to do his revealed will.

Holy men have taken their enemies before the Lord in prayer. These prayers have come under the harsh criticism of those who are not acquainted with His ways. Nevertheless, they are a facet of spiritual life that are to be addressed in wisdom.

- “Arise, O LORD; save me, O my God: for thou hast smitten all mine enemies upon the cheek bone; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly” (Psa 3:7).
- “Let all mine enemies be ashamed and sore vexed: let them return and be ashamed suddenly” (Psa 6:10).
- “Arise, O LORD, in thine anger, lift up thyself because of the rage of mine enemies: and awake for me to the judgment that thou hast commanded” (Psa 7:6).
- “O my God, I trust in thee: let me not be ashamed, let not mine enemies triumph over me” (Psa 25:2).
- “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8).
- “Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works” (2 Tim 4:14).

We are to understand these prayers as relating to persecutions for the cause of Christ, which threaten to obstruct His servants. I understand that this prayer is of that order. The call for God to “behold their threatenings” is a plea to do something about them.

The Nature of God in Such Matters

It is God’s nature to bring men into His purpose. He did so in the matter of Christ’s crucifixion, as already affirmed in this text, and He also does so in the matter of assisting His people. Through Ezekiel, God once made some elaborate and extensive promises – all related to a specific work among them. Permit me to itemize some of the things He said He would do. They are recorded in the thirty-sixth chapter of Ezekiel.

- He would be sanctified in them (23b).
- He would take them from among the heathen, gather them out of all countries, and bring them into their own land (24).

- He would sprinkle clean water on them, making them clean from their filthiness, and cleansing them from all their idols (25).

- He would give them a new heart and a new spirit (26a).

This is the way the Lord works, and we are seeing it in this very text. The people are praying to God with one accord, asking Him to take special note of the threats that have been made against them. They do so because they know the Lord is affected by what He sees. They know He hates unrighteousness, loves His people, and will come to their defense.

He would remove their stony heart and give them a heart of flesh (26b).

- He would put His Spirit with them, and cause them to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments (27).

- They would dwell in the land He gave to their fathers (28a).

- They would be His people (28b).

- He would be their God (28c).

- He would save them from all of their uncleannesses (29a).

- He would “call for the corn,” increase it, and lay no famine upon them (29b).

- He would multiply the fruit of the tree, and the increase of the field (29c).

- They would no more receive the reproach of famine among the heathen (30).

- They would remember their evil ways and doings that were not good, and would loathe themselves in their own sight because of their iniquities and abominations (31).

- He would not do this for their sakes (32).

- In the day he cleanses them from all their iniquities, He will also cause them to dwell in cities, and the wastes will be built (33).

- The desolate land will be tilled, which lay desolate in the sight of all that passed by (34).

- Now, the passers by will say the land is like Eden, and places once lying waste would become fenced and inhabited (35).

- Then the heathen that are left around them will know that God builds ruined places, and plants that which was desolate (36a).

- Solemnly the Lord says, “I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it” (36b).

This is the God of heaven with whom there is nor restraint, whose purposes are executed flawlessly precisely as planned, when they were appointed, and to the extent they were determined. It is a God with whom many professed Christians are not acquainted.

An Extension of the Promise

But there is more to these promises than their utterance – although that is quite sufficient to cause them to come to pass. As He said elsewhere, “I have spoken it, I also will bring it to pass” (Isa 46:11). Of another purpose He said through Jeremiah, “because I have spoken it, I have purposed it, and will not repent, neither will I turn back from it” (Jer 4:28). There is no question, therefore, about the decrees and promises of God coming to pass! It is HOW they come to pass that is of particular interest here. This is matter of “the ways of God.”

In the text I have outlined above, God revealed something more. “Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them ; I will increase them with men like

a flock” (Ezek 36:37). Here we are exposed to the Divine manner. He moves His people to ask for what He has promised. This is what is intended by a Psalmic expression: “LORD, Thou hast heard the desire of the humble: thou wilt prepare their heart , thou wilt cause thine ear to hear” (Psa 10:17).

Solomon said, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD” (Prov 16:1). When David prayed for the people, He asked God to “prepare their heart unto Thee” (1 Chron 29:16). Hezekiah rejoiced when “God had prepared the people” (2 Chron 29:36). Once, in the land of Judah, “the hand of the Lord was to give them one heart” (2 Chron 30:12).

The Lord’s Way of Working

This is the way the Lord works, and we are seeing it in this very text. The people are praying to God with one accord, asking Him to take special note of the threats that have been made against them. They do so because they know the Lord is affected by what He sees. They know He hates unrighteousness, loves His people, and will come to their defense. They know how He feels about the record He has given of His Son, and of its faithful proclamation among the people. They are not praying because they are afraid, but because they know the Lord. They are not praying because they are intimidated, but because they have a heart to preach the Word. They are not praying in the spirit of vengefulness, but for His kingdom’s sake.

GRANT BOLDNESS TO YOUR SERVANTS

“ 29b . . . and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word . . . ”

“ . . . AND . . . ”

“ . . . and . . . ” The disciples do not conclude their prayer with the consideration of their persecutors. They turn to the consideration of the work they have been sent to do. Their personal inconvenience is not the issue with them, or person-to-person opposition. They sense they have been “joined to the Lord,” and their lives are not their own. This is an expression of people who are living “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15).

GRANT! GRANT! GRANT!

“ . . . grant unto thy servants, . . . ” Other versions read, “grant that Thy bond-servants,” NASB “enable your servants,” NIV “give your servants,” BBE “grant that Your slaves ,” CSB “give to Thy bondmen ,” DARBY “allow us,” GWN “help Your servants,” NJB “give us , Your servants,” NLT and “We are Your servants. So make us .” CEV

The words “grant unto” come from a single Greek word which means, “of one’s own accord to give something . . . to bestow, give as a gift . . . give to one asking, let hand . . . to supply, furnish, necessary things,” THAYER and “to give authority to carry out a task . . . as a favor or privilege to give . . . as giving something valuable to gain a return investment,” FRIBERG

There are several conditions or circumstances that attend a “grant” from God.

- That the resource cannot be obtained anywhere else.
- That there is a willingness on the part of the One granting the favor.
- That the work in which the petitioner is engaged is a God-ordained one.
- That there is a willingness on the part of the one receiving the benefit to do the task requiring the resource.

Note that petitioning a grant from the Lord is not the last recourse of the disciples. They did not attempt other strategies, or run from the challenge they were facing. Right here, at the

threshold of trouble, much of the heart of those being oppressed is discovered. If they immediately resort to flesh-and-blood resources, they are at once displeasing to the Lord.

Note that petitioning a grant from the Lord is not the last recourse of the disciples. They did not attempt other strategies, or run from the challenge they were facing. Right here, at the threshold of trouble, much of the heart of those being oppressed is discovered. If they immediately resort to flesh-and-blood resources, they are at once displeasing to the Lord. This was precisely the point at which the Lord became displeased with Israel. “Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay [rely] on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!” (Isa 31:1). Again, it is written, “Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him” (Isa 36:6). By seeking help from heathen rulers, the Lord told Israel they had debased themselves. “And thou wentest to the king with ointment, and didst increase thy perfumes, and didst send thy messengers far off, and didst debase thyself even unto hell” (Isa 57:9).

Ezekiel was told to tell the people that in sending ambassadors to Egypt for help, they had actually rebelled against God. “But he rebelled against Him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things? or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?” (Ezek 17:15). The Psalmist contrasted those who trusted in human help and innovations with those who trust in the Lord. “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Psa 20:7). The Spirit even moved the Psalmist to declare true deliverance does not even come from men. “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength.

An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength” (Psa 33:16-17).

We are categorically told that, when it comes to matters of the Kingdom, the wisdom of this world is worthless. “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain” (1 Cor 3:19-20).

It is necessary to say these things because of the propensity of the modern church to trust in men and their wisdom. This accounts for the staggering increase of counselors and how-to gurus.

However, you will find none of these inclinations in our text. The disciples immediately resort to the Lord, and the Lord alone. This is what people do who are really walking by faith and in the Spirit. This is the manner of newness of life.

Also ponder the manner in which they describe the servants of the Lord: “Thy servants.” The word “servants” has a rich and strong meaning. It does not refer to a mere social status, or one that is forced upon a servant. This is a status that is preferred, and is as thorough as though the individual was a bond-slave, being made to serve against his will. The word used here does mean one that is bound, or tied, to the service of another. Technically, the word “servant” means “a slave, bondman, man of servile condition . . . one who gives himself up wholly to another's will.” THAYER The distinction here, however, is that this is a willing servant, or slave. This is not a slave such as those during the era when black people were treated as mere chattel, purchased and sold as personal property without any respect or fairness. The kind of “servants” referenced in this text are described in the ceremonial law. It is the kind of servant that is primarily depicted in the Lord Jesus Himself, and secondarily in His followers. Here is the law of the willing servant.

“If thou buy an Hebrew servant, six years he shall serve: and in the seventh he shall go out free for nothing. If he came in by himself, he shall go out by himself: if he were married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master have given him a wife, and she have born him sons or daughters; the

wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. **And if the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free** : then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; **and he shall serve him for ever** ” (Ex 21:2-6).

That law is fulfilled in Jesus, who refused to live in self-interest. He volunteered to remain in a place of subjection to the Father in order that he might be with His children. Thus it is written of Him, “And when all things shall be subdued unto Him, then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him that put all things under Him , that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:28). That is the ultimate fulfillment Exodus 21:2-6.

However, the true disciple of Christ possesses the nature of Christ. As it is written, “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord” (Mat 10:25). And again, “The disciple is not above his Master: but every one that is perfect shall be as his Master” (Luke 6:40). Therefore, the servants of Christ have voluntarily chosen that position. They have willingly laid aside their own interests in preference for “that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2). For them, there is no alternative to serving the Lord. Now, the disciples of our text know what the will of the Lord is, and they have heartily acquiesced to it. However, they know full well that His will cannot be done in their own self-strength. Therefore, they are asking for what it takes to DO what that will, and they are doing so with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength – that is, they WANT to do this. This is the manner of the Kingdom. Where this spirit is missing, there is a fundamental spiritual deficiency. Furthermore, it is quite possible that a state of full-blown alienation exists because of a lack of conversion and consequent divine acceptance. It is rather startling to consider that this situation actually exists in many professed churches.

THAT WITH ALL BOLDNESS THEY MAY SPEAK THY WORD

“ . . . that with all boldness they may speak thy word . . .” Other versions read, “may speak Thy word with all confidence ,” NASB “ to speak your word with great boldness ,” NIV “to be preachers of your word without fear ,” BBE “may speak Your message with complete boldness ,” CSB “to continue to speak your word with all boldness,” ESV “that they may proclaim thy word boldly ,” MRD “to speak your message with great courage ,” NET “with all freedom to speak Thy word,” YLT “great boldness in their preaching ,” LIVING “speak the things You want us to say without fear,” IE “to proclaim Thy Message with fearless courage ,” WEYMOUTH “with perfect courage to continue to speak your message,” WILLIAMS “[full freedom] to declare Your message fearlessly ,” AMPLIFIED and “ brave enough to speak your message.” CEV

Remember, what is being asked will come by means of a “grant” – by God’s willing conferment of the required blessing. That means that the petition is in keeping with His will (1 John 5:14), and that the ones making the request are “meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). You must not allow yourself to think of this text independently of these considerations.

“With All Boldness”

As used in Scripture, the word “boldness” carries a more weighty meaning than is reflected in its common usage. The lexical meaning of the Greek word is, “freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech . . . openly, frankly, and without concealment . . . without ambiguity or circumlocution [unnecessarily large number of words] . . . without the use of figures and comparisons . . . free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance . . . of the confidence impelling one to do something . . . the deportment by which one becomes conspicuous or secures publicity,” THAYER “in attitude of openness that stems from freedom and lack of fear; (1) in speech boldness, plainness, outspokenness . . . in public work openness.” FRIBERG

As is apparent, the disciples are not asking to appear bold, but to actually be forward and fearless

in the proclamation of God's Word. This involves the following characteristics, which are integral to spiritual boldness.

- **PLAINNESS** . That is, without ambiguity or vagueness; being unequivocal in the proclamation of the word.
- **CONSPICUOUSNESS** . That is, obvious, not hidden, and apparent; attracting the attention of the people.
- **FEARLESS** . That is, brave, and without fear; not intimidated by the enemy, or challenging circumstances.
- **ASSURANCE** . That is, being certain in the mind of what is being said; freedom from all self doubt or uncertainty.
- **COURAGE** . That is, mental, moral, and spiritual strength that enables one to speak in difficult situations.
- **CONFIDENCE** . That is, a consciousness of Divine support and acceptance; knowing the certainty of what one is proclaiming.
- **CLEARNESS** . That is, purity, clarity, unmistakable. Because of its contrast with darkness, the spoken Word becomes more readily apparent.
- **FRANKNESS** . That is, forthright, sincere, candid, willingly and without hesitation declaring what is clear to the one speaking.

I do understand that it is not necessarily sinful to employ the use of figures, parallels, illustrations, and the likes. However, when they become the focus of preaching, that preaching becomes nothing more than a means of entertaining the people.

OPENNESS . That is, not hiding behind commonly accepted traditions, or veiling the truth with words that tone it down and make it more acceptable to the disinterested.

- **FREEDOM** . The absence of coercion or a sense of mere obligation; free from the cares and worries that proceed from the fear of man, a defiled conscience, and the restraints of ignorance and uncertainty.

“May Speak thy Word”

This has particular reference to the Gospel – “the record” God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). If it is, as the Spirit affirmed, “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16), then it must be courageously and forthrightly declared, or affirmed. While explanations, or expositions, of the Gospel are important, they are never in order until the Gospel itself has been reported, declared, or announced. Before Jesus and the salvation He has wrought can be clear, the facts in the case must be presented by someone who himself discerns them.

These disciples do not pray for boldness to present the view of some sect, or the historical perspective of a movement, or a peculiar list of the tenets of a belief-system men have created. They rather seek to declare what God has revealed – His Word.

What Is “Thy Word”

Although it may sound rather simplistic, preaching God's Word is affirming, or announcing, what God has actually said. It is not merely saying something religious or theoretically helpful. It is not declaring what one may think God meant by what He said. It is not surrounding God's Word with all manner of humanly-devised parallels and stories, and pawning it off to men as though that is what God said. I do understand that it is not necessarily sinful to employ the use of figures, parallels, illustrations, and the likes. However, when they become the focus of preaching, that preaching

becomes nothing more than a means of entertaining the people.

That is precisely why Paul confessed, “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). He knew that the employment of such things tends to upstage the Gospel, for they have more of an appeal to the soulish part of man, and leave only a small impact upon the heart.

This condition is owing to the fact that the Word of God is the “sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17). He simply does not use other means to bring Divine power to bear upon a situation. If you want the Spirit to actually work, convicting the world (John 16:8-11), or comforting and edifying the saints (1 Thess 4:18; 5:11), then you are going to have to preach, or declare, the word of God. You will have to tell the people what God has said – i.e., “thus saith the Lord” (Jer 15:2; Ezek 12:23), “the Scripture saith” (Rom 10:11; 1 Tim 5:18), or “hear what the Spirit saith” (Rev 3:22).

Once a person knows what is to be declared, and is firmly resolved to do so, this prayer will make perfect sense – particularly when significant opposition is faced. However, until that happens, it will appear to be only a historical record. Perhaps it will be viewed as novel, and maybe even interesting. However, in such a case, it will be void of power.

STRETCH FORTH YOUR HAND TO HEAL

“ 30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.”

Notice that they did not pray that their lives might be preserved, or that their enemies might go away, or that they might be directed into another area. They did not pray for protection, but for God to stretch forth His hand. They did not pray for eloquence, but for boldness that would flow from a perception of the working of the Lord.

If a person is living with an acute awareness of the current Christian environment, this request will have a strange sound. It might be viewed as peculiar to the times, and thus is completely irrelevant for our times. It might also be considered to be idealistic, and thus impractical. However, such conclusions will become repugnant to us when we consider the purity and commitment of these brethren. This is the expression of real spiritual life. Institutionally structured thinking was not yet in place. There was no bad leaven among the brethren – no hypocritical people. To be sure, such would soon surface, but none were known at this time. The disciples had not been distracted to lesser things, but were totally absorbed with the will and word of the Lord. When they thought of the work of the Lord, they were not thinking of relief work, community service, impacting the youth, familiarizing the community with their church, and the likes. None of those corruptions were present at the time.

This is the pouring out of a petition from pure hearts that are acquainted with the ways of the Lord, and are wholly devoted to doing His will. As simplistic as that may appear, it significantly alters the way the passage is perceived.

STRETCH FORTH THY HAND TO HEAL

“By stretching forth thine hand to heal . . .” Other versions read, “by stretching out Your hand to heal,” NKJV “while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal,” NASB “Stretch out your hand to heal,” NIV “while your hand is stretched out to do works of mercy,” BBE “while You stretch out Your hand for healing,” CSB “By stretching forth thy hand to cures,” DOUAY “So that thou stretch forth thine hand, that healing,” GENEVA “Show your power by healing,” GWN “Stretch out your hand with healing power,” NLT “and send your healing power,” LIVING “Show your power: make sick

people well ,” IE “whilst Thou stretchest out Thine arm to cure men ,” WEYMOUTH and “Show your mighty power, as we heal people .” CEV

People with a theological background like my own, approach this text with a turtle-shell mentality. That is, they withdraw into their shell – a theological shell – for this text does not fit into their theology.

First of all, this was not a mechanical prayer – something uttered without the involvement of spiritual minds. This prayer was birthed by faith and understanding. These disciples knew that when Jesus was among men, He went about “healing all who were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). When He sent out the twelve, He told them “Heal the sick” (Matt 10:8). When He sent out the seventy He said, “heal the sick” (Lk 10:9). When He delivered what is called “the great commission” to His disciples, He said those who believed would “lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mk 16:18). At no time did Jesus suggest this healing was only a temporary. Now, those are just the facts in the case – facts that were apparent to those who were praying.

Notice that they did not pray that their lives might be preserved, or that their enemies might go away, or that they might be directed into another area. They did not pray for protection, but for God to stretch forth His hand. They did not pray for eloquence, but for boldness that would flow from a perception of the working of the Lord.

Furthermore, this entire episode of opposition had been initiated by a “miracle of healing” (Acts 4:22). The “natural man” (1 Cor 2:14), or “the carnal mind” (Rom 8:7), would reason that healing would not be the wise thing to pursue. Such a mind would see this as fundamentally disruptive, and would associate wisdom with choosing another approach to preaching the Word. Of course, these were not carnal people, so they did not think in such a manner.

The fulfillment of this prayer is described in these words: “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following . Amen” (Mark 16:20). The book of Hebrews also alludes to this. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will ? ” (Heb 2:4). It is important to note that the words “at the first” specifically refer to the words that “began to be spoken by the Lord.” Another version reads “After it was first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.” NASB What we are reading of is the confirming – that is, the disciples were preaching the same doctrine Jesus preached, and the signs proved it.

The Source of the Healing

The disciples do not pray that God would merely give them power to heal, but that He would stretch forth His hand to do so. That is, they knew healing was only possible through Divine discretion.

By saying “stretching forth thy hand,” the disciples were pleading for God to exert His mighty power by focusing it on their situation. In other words, no legitimate mighty work can occur independently of Divine involvement, and they knew it. God did not wind up the Kingdom like a clock, and let it tick away of its own accord. There really is no such thing as a ministry or heavenly-approved activity that does not require the hand of the Lord! The activities of the modern church would be radically revolutionized if this was seen.

Should We Pray In This Manner?

Let me first be clear about this. There is nothing in the Scriptures themselves that suggest this prayer became obsolete after the death of the apostles. There is no point of apostolic doctrine that

clearly affirms such a thing. It is to be acknowledged that some have taken certain texts and presented their reasoning on those texts to justify such a claim. Allow me to give two examples.

• **TEXT #1.** “But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away” (1 Cor 13:10). Here, some reason that “that which is perfect” is the completed canon of Scripture – the compiling of the full sixty-six books. It is further conjectured that “that which is in part” included the working of miracles, which were required to buttress, what is conceived to be, partial revelations. Once the Word of **This is a matter that requires the merging of faith, insight, and a fervent commitment to the proclamation of the Word. If those things are not present, there is no need to even**

was in written form, they hypothesize, there was no further need for miracles, because they confirmed the spoken word. Therefore, the miracles ceased to occur, for they were no longer needed. This composite blob of human reasoning is then presented as apostolic doctrine. Any work that is contrary to it is considered to be spurious. Now, keep in mind that the text did not really say these things, but that is the meaning assigned to it by certain men. What the text DID say is that when what was perfect came, what was in part would be done away. That can more properly be perceived as meaning at least two things. First, it obviously explains the next verse, which speaks of spiritual maturity, which is a form of perfection. “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Cor 13:11). Second, it also explains what will happen in, what Jesus called, “the regeneration” when everything that is partial, introductory, or in a first-fruit form, will be done away. With this in mind Paul continued, “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known” (1 Cor 13:12).

• **TEXT #2.** “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him” (Heb 2:3). Here the text is read as though it said, “at the first only, the Word was confirmed.” However, that is not what it says – in any version or manuscript. Further, the words “them that heard Him” are conceived to be only the apostles. However, there were others who heard Him, including the seventy, the holy women, the two on the road to Emaeus, Joseph called Barnabas, James the Lord’s brother, a cluster of above five hundred brethren, and a host of others. The text does not forbid men to think that God still stretches out His hand to heal.

So, is it right to pray this prayer? Why would a person ask such a question? Remember that God placed “gifts of healing” within the church (1 Cor 12:9,30), and there is no word that clearly states He has taken them out. Also, James, who was not an apostle, gave a procedure to be followed dealing with the sick (James 5:14-16). His words were addressed to the twelve scattered tribes – believing Jews who were in a state of retrogression. Nothing in his book suggests his word was only for the first century, or that there would come a time when God would no longer honor the approach he makes known.

This is a matter that requires the merging of faith, insight, and a fervent commitment to the proclamation of the Word. If those things are not present, there is no need to even discuss the matter.

THAT SIGNS AND WONDERS MAY BE DONE

“ . . . and that signs and wonders may be done . . . ” Other versions read, “and signs and wonders take place ,” NASB “and perform miraculous signs and wonders,” NIV “performing miracles, and doing amazing things ,” GWN “and prodigies ” [something extraordinary and beyond explanation], MRD “ to bring about miraculous signs and wonders,” NET “and to work miracles and marvels ,” NJB “and may miracles and wonders be done ,” LIVING “ give proofs , and cause miracles to take place,” IE “and to give signs and marvels,” WEYMOUTH “ grant too , that signs and wonders may

be done,” MONTGOMERY “and work miracles and wonders,” CEV and “and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed . GNB

Perhaps you have heard some prideful person say to some who were noted for seemingly doing miracles: “If you can really work a miracle with me, come to the hospital, and raise a few sick people.” Or, “Why don’t you go to some of those oppressed countries and cure all of their sick?”

Following the initial events of the day of Pentecost, “many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43). There was also the healing of the lame man at the gate beautiful (Acts 3:6). Yet, here they appear to pray as though such things had never taken place – at least that is how a novice would view it. Perhaps some would even dare to say there was unbelief among the disciples, else they would not have prayed in this manner. Others might suppose they were fearful, and that is why they so addressed the Lord. However, such notions are nothing more than worldly nonsense, and betray a mind that is out of synch with heaven.

It is true that the apostles were truly gifted men. Yet, it is clear from this text that they could not go about healing people at will. It is true that the Kingdom will be given to the saints of the most high God (Dan 7:18,22,27). Now, the saints are in the Kingdom (Col 1:13), and have been given the first fruits of that Kingdom. However, they do not possess the whole of it yet, nor are they yet significant participants in its government. Jesus is presently administrating the Kingdom. From time to time, we may participate in that rule in some extraordinary way, but it is presently only a sampling of what is to come. As long as we remain in the body, it is ever true that “it doth not yet appear what we shall be” (1 John 3:1-2). Of course, if we have unbridled control of the Kingdom, that saying would be true, and we all would be very evident, even to the world.

Even extraordinarily gifted men cannot employ their gifts at will. Paul, for example, who had wrought several healings (Acts 13:11; 14:10; 16:18; 19:11-12; 28:8-9), lay in a cell with sick Epaphroditus, and could not heal him (Phil 2:27). He did not heal chronically ailing Timothy, but admonished him to treat the matter medicinally (1 Tim 5:23). He could not simply summon up the gift, and heal people at will – nor could any other man.

Perhaps you have heard some prideful person say to some who were noted for seemingly doing miracles: “If you can really work a miracle with me, come to the hospital, and raise a few sick people.” Or, “Why don’t you go to some of those oppressed countries and cure all of their sick?” For some, this is an infallible argument. However it really displays a remarkable level of ignorance. First, miraculous power was never used in such a way (Luke 4:27). Second, a sign will not be given to an unbelieving generation (Matt 12:39). Third, any spiritual aptitude is strictly administered by the Lord (1 Cor 12:5), are operated by God (1 Cor 12:6), and come through the manifestation of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:7).

With the knowledge of such things, the disciples implore the Lord to work in a special way, in order that they might preach His word with boldness. Nothing in Scripture suggests that it is no longer proper to approach God in this manner. However, if anyone does come to the Lord with a petition like this, they had better have something insightful to say, and refuse to be silenced in the saying of it. If that is not the circumstance, they should pray for other matters.

IN THE NAME OF THY HOLY CHILD JESUS

“ . . . by the name of thy holy child Jesus.” Other versions read, “done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus,” NKJV “by the name of Thy holy Son Jesus,” DOUAY “by the power of Jesus , Your holy servant,” IE “by the authority of your holy Servant Jesus,” WILLIAMS “ through the authority and by the power of the name of Your holy Child and Servant Jesus,” AMPLIFIED and “through the power and the name of your holy servant Jesus.” GW

Here is the real circumstance. Jesus had been raised from the dead by the glory of the Father. He had returned to heaven, and had been invested with all power in heaven and earth. Through Him, men may receive forgiveness of sins, and an eternal inheritance.

Everything is subject to Christ, with the only exclusion being the Father Himself. Jesus is bring many sons to glory, and the government is on His shoulder. That is the way things really are! However, it does not look as though these things are true. Appearance does not seem to support such a message. Jesus did not appear to be preeminent, and His power was not evident.

It is in view of this circumstance that the disciples pray. They are praying for the honoring of Jesus, not for their own exaltation. They desire for it to become apparent to the minds of men that what they are saying is true, and that salvation is within the reach of fallen man. They know Jesus is on the throne of the kingdom (Acts 2:30-31), ordering and establishing it, and causing it to increase (Isa 9:7).

Now, they ask for God to draw attention to this fact by stretching forth His hand to heal, and to do signs and wonders, for that is the message they are bringing.

THE PLACE WAS SHAKEN, AND THEY WERE FILLED

“ 31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.”

After men have speculated about this prayer, they must consider how heaven received it , for, after all, that is the most important thing. We know that certain promises are made concerning answered prayer.

When Answers Are Guaranteed

- **AGREEMENT.** “Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:19-20).

- **ASK BELIEVING.** “And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive” (Matt 21:22).

- **ASKING IN JESUS’ NAME.** “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it” (John 14:13-14). And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you” (John 16:23).

- **ABIDING IN CHRIST, AND HIS WORDS ABIDING IN US.** “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you” (John 15:7).

- **BEARING FRUIT THAT REMAINS.** “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16).

- **COMING BOLDLY.** “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16).

- **KEEPING HIS COMMANDMENTS, AND DOING THOSE THINGS THAT ARE PLEASING IN HIS SIGHT.** “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight” (1 John 3:22).

• **ASKING ACCORDING TO GOD’S WILL.** “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (1 John 5:14-15).

The condition of the people themselves is vital. They must be in agreement, be abiding in Christ and His words abiding in them, bearing fruit that remains, and keeping his commandments and doing the things that are pleasing in His sight

Now, according to these texts, we will see if this prayer qualifies for heaven’s approval and a favorable answer. The condition of the people themselves is vital. They must be in agreement, be abiding in Christ and His words abiding in them, bearing fruit that remains, and keeping his commandments and doing the things that are pleasing in His sight. How they come to God is critical. They must come believing, asking in Jesus’ name, and approaching the throne with boldness. The nature of this petition appears to me to require that all of these things be found in the ones presenting it. For those who associate spiritual maturity with lengthy periods of time, these people have not had a lot of time to mature. Yet, the circumstance requires that condition.

THE PLACE WAS SHAKEN WHERE THEY WERE ASSEMBLED

“And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together . . .” Other versions read, “the place where they were was violently moved,” BBE “the place in which they were assembled shook ,” DARBY “their meeting place shook,” GWN and “the house where they were assembled rocked .” NJB

The word “shaken” comes from a word meaning, “the motion produced by winds, storms, waves, etc: to agitate or shake . . . to cause to totter [tremble or rock as if about to fall] . . . to shake thoroughly,” THAYER “to shake, cause to move to and fro, cause to waver or totter, make to rock,” FRIBERG “to cause something to move back and forth rapidly, often violently - to shake,” LOUW-NIDA “to cause to rock, make to oscillate, shake to and fro,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The environment in which they resided was disturbed, moving too and fro as though situated on a stormy sea. Yet, there appeared to be no fear, even though, judging from appearance, the place where they were meeting appeared to become suddenly unstable.

This was the effect of God’s presence in the natural realm. It is caused by the impact of Divine purity and holiness upon a defiled and decaying domain. There are other instances of such disruptions.

• **WHEN THE LAW WAS GIVEN AT SINAI.** When God came down on Sinai there were thunders, lightnings, smoke ascended from the mountain like a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly (Ex 19:16-18)

• **THE DEATH OF CHRIST.** When Jesus died, the gigantic Temple veil was ripped in two from the top down, the earth quaked, the rocks split, and many bodies of the saints that slept rose from the dead (Matt 27:51-52).

• **THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.** When Jesus arose, and an angel came down from heaven to the sepulcher, there was a great earthquake (Matt 28:2).

the era of the New Covenant is appropriately described as “the ministration of the Spirit,” or “ministry of the Spirit. Salvation itself involves the shedding forth “abundantly” of the Holy Spirit upon the regenerated ones. It should not surprise us, therefore, to read of people be “filled with the Spirit.”

THE DAY OF PENTECOST. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out by Jesus, there was a sound from heaven as a mighty rushing wind, it filled all of the house where they

were sitting, and there appeared tongues of fire that separated and rested upon the heads of those present (Acts 2:1-3).

- **THE PHILIPPIAN JAIL.** When Paul and Silas sang praises at midnight, suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken, and the doors opened (Acts 16:26).

Both naturally and spiritually the earth becomes unstable when the Lord draws near. Spiritually, for the ungodly, there is fear and dread, agitation, and disquietude. For the godly, there is comfort, empowerment, and holy aptitude.

There are also times when peace and tranquility are the signs of the Lord's absence. Such times are described by Jeremiah. "They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace" (Jer 6:14). When Jesus was born, and news of the birth of a King reached the ears of Herod, "he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him" (Matt 2:3).

In our text, however, there will be no disruption, agitation, or fear among the disciples. Instead, the powers of darkness will be shaken.

THEY WERE ALL FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

" . . . and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost . . ." Other versions read, "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit," NKJV "and they all became full of the Holy Spirit," BBE "and they were, one and all, filled with the Holy Spirit," WEYMOUTH and "and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." ISV

I have mentioned before that the era of the New Covenant is appropriately described as "the ministration of the Spirit," or "ministry of the Spirit: NKJV (2 Cor 3:6). Salvation itself involves the shedding forth "abundantly" of the Holy Spirit upon the regenerated ones (Tit 3:5-6). It should not surprise us, therefore, to read of people be "filled with the Spirit."

This is now the third time in the book of Acts when people are said to have been filled with the Holy Spirit.

- "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost , and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4)

- "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost , said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel" (Acts 4:8).

- "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost , and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

Thus far the results of being "filled with the Spirit" all have to do with intelligent speech: 1 speaking with other languages that were understood by the audience, 2 Peter speaking to the ruler and elders of the people, and now, 3 speaking the Word of God with boldness.

We also know that being filled with the Holy Spirit was not a unique or one time event.

- Stephen is described as a man who was "full of faith and the Holy Spirit" (Acts 6:5).
- When Stephen died by stoning, he was "full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 7:44).
- Ananias told Saul of Tarsus he had been sent to him in order that he might receive his sight and be "filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17).
- Barnabas is described as "a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 11:24).

- When Paul confronted Elymas the sorcerer who was seeking to turn someone to whom Paul was speaking away from the faith, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and soundly rebuked him, even striking him blind for a season (Acts 13:8-11).

- All believers are admonished to “be filled with the Spirit; speaking . . .” (Eph 5:18-19).

It is most arresting to consider that every one of these instances involved speaking in the behalf of God. Whatever one may conjecture about the meaning of being filled with the Spirit, all of the instances we have did equip people to speak with boldness and absolute truth. We know from other occasions, that this was not a kind of robotic response, but involved the consciousness, minds, and intelligence of the people. Being filled with the Spirit sanctifies human capacities so that a flawless and relevant word is delivered from God to the people through one of their peers. Such will be the case in our text also.

THEY ALL SPAKE THE WORD OF GOD WITH BOLDNESS

“ . . . and they spake the word of God with boldness.” Other versions read, “and began to speak the Word of God with boldness,” NASB “and spoke the Word of God boldly ,” NIV “preaching the word of God without fear,” BBE “and began to speak God's message with boldness,” CSB “and they spoke the word of God with confidence ,” DOUAY “and continued to speak the word of God with boldness,” ESV “and began to speak the word of God courageously ,” NET “and began to proclaim the word of God fearlessly ,” NJB “Then they preached the word of God with boldness,” NLT “and were speaking the word of God with freedom ,” YLT “and boldly preached God's message,” LIVING “and they began to speak God's message without fear ,” IE “and proceeded to tell God's Message with boldness,” WEYMOUTH “and continued courageously to speak God's message,” WILLIAMS “and they continued to speak the Word of God with freedom and boldness and courage ,” AMPLIFIED and “and bravely spoke God's message.” CEV

The request of these brethren was, “grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” (Acts 4:29). Now, no sooner have they finished their petition, than Jesus sends forth the Spirit to fill them, and they begin (or continue) preaching the word of God with boldness. Then ALL spoke the word of God with boldness!

This would be equivalent to a scenario that Paul posed to the Corinthian church. “If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy , and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all” (1 Cor 14:23-24). Paul’s secondary point related to a stranger coming into the assembly and being convicted by the absolute oneness of many people insightfully declaring the word of the Lord. In our text, conviction was not the point, but courageous and confident proclamation. They spoke with great freedom, confidence, and clarity.

In them the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled, “the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly ” (Isa 32:4). Again, as it is written, “The Lord GOD hath given me the tongue of the learned , that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: he wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear as the learned” (Isa 50:4).

And how was all of this done? By the Lord filling them with his Holy Spirit, sanctifying all of their expressive capacities. Their minds were able to navigate in the truth, and their mouths were able to utter it. This is truly an experience much to be coveted. It is sorely needed in this day of dead religious institutionalism and pumped up enthusiasm. You cannot nominate and choose someone to lead people into this condition. It is something that comes from receiving from God, not human leadership.

When “all” assuredly speak the Word of God, those present are edified and provoked “to love and

to good works” (Heb 10:24). They are built up “in the most holy faith” (Jude 1:20), and comfort one another with insightful proclamations of the truth of God.

A FINAL NOTE ON THIS

I am compelled to comment on the role of encouragement, confidence, and freedom when preaching the Word. Anyone who has publicly declared the truth of God knows how discouragement can impact the speaker. Such a condition cannot be avoided by organization, scholastic preparations and the likes. This is something that is ministered out of the Throne from which Jesus is administering the Kingdom. As seen in this text, it is in order to seek the face of the Lord for boldness when men are in a spiritually cast down state.

A person must have recourse to some brethren who will react properly when religious threats are leveled against those who preach the Word. Peter and John went to “their own company” when they faced this challenge. They reported in detail what had been said to them, and the brethren knew what to do about it.

As in the text before us, this kind of relationship is to be initiated and cultured. Somewhere in our religious connections, we must have access to a group of holy people. If such are not in the house of God or among religious leaders, they still must be found. There must be someone with whom the preacher or teacher is of “one accord” – someone with the same heart and mind – like Timothy was to Paul (Phil 2:20). This is not the fabled accountability approach, where men make themselves accountable to one another. Rather, this is a means of survival – the cultivation of friendships that are based solely upon the life that is in Christ Jesus, and working together with Him.

CONCLUSION

As the work of the Lord proceeds, it is as though Satan has been caught off guard. At the very first, the believers are described as “having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). However, we see, this did not last long. The reason for this is the very real enmity that exists between “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), and the people of God. Jesus said it succinctly and powerfully when He told His disciples, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not Him that sent Me ” (John 15:19-21). Now, this is the way it really is. Jesus has chosen us OUT of the world, and the world takes it personally.

The fundamental enmity that exists between the person born of the flesh and the one born of the Spirit cannot be neutralized or removed. It is there because heaven and earth are at war. This is owing to Satan being the prince and god of this world (John 12:31; 2 Cor 4:4). In fact, “the whole world is under the control of the evil one” NIV (1 John 5:19). He will not allow his children to make peace with God’s children, and God will not allow His children to make peace with them.

This condition is why it is true in every age, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12). The persecution may take differing forms, but it will be there. This too is being played out in the book of Acts.

The first opposition the church faced was from the religious world – the Temple authorities. It was not bloody or unto death in the beginning. As confirmed in this text, it only consisted of words – threats. These enemies, however, will not be content to spout words. Soon they will be throwing stones, and rejoicing when one of the apostles is beheaded.

For this, and a number of other reasons, it is utter folly to attempt to adapt the truth to the carnal

mind. First, if it is the truth that makes men free (John 8:32), what have you accomplished when you water it down to make it palatable, or even withhold it altogether? If the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:17), what can you possibly achieve by mixing it with the wisdom of the world, or becoming something other than a preacher of the Word? If the Gospel is God's power in order to salvation – all of it from “A” to “Z,” what have you really done when you build your theology or your work around some other message? If the church is actually “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), what can possibly be more important than declaring it and bringing it to bear upon the affairs of men?

All of these things are issues in our day – but they were not in the time of our text. That is precisely why the disciples knew what to do. They were in an environment where the Spirit of God could move about and work freely. But it will not be long, until some tares will be sown among the wheat, and corrupting influences will begin. We must remember, however, that tares were sown “while men slept” (Matt 13:25). They still are!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #20

THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT

“ 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. 33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, 35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. 36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.” (Acts 4:32-37)

INTRODUCTION

Within the context of the modern church, the subject of “the unity of the Spirit” is largely theoretical. The professed church at large is a gigantic contradiction of unity, being torn asunder by division. Within the organized church, there is very little awareness of true unity. Things have been reduced to being able to get along amiably, and that generally is perceived as requiring being quiet about the things of God.

Men think of uniting on a certain point, or around a project or effort of some kind. For example, if they can agree

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on the priority of reaching the lost, that is counted for unity. Or, if they can find some kind of agreement on the inspiration of the Bible, that is thought to be a considerable advancement in the cause for unity. But all of this has nothing whatsoever to do with the real “unity of the Spirit.”

Under the New Covenant unity is created by a common birth, and the constituents of the covenant are told to keep the unity that comes with being born again. While modern efforts are little more than talk, real unity is actually lived out in our text. It really existed, and was therefore manifested. It was not the result of exhortation, but of genuine life.

Because an understanding of the nature and reality of unity will assist us in appreciating this text, I want to take the time to look more closely at unity. The church is to be a place where this marvelous oneness is revealed, not a place where it becomes a goal!

The word unity is not found often in Scripture. However, when the Spirit used this word it was always very weighty. The following table shows where this word is used in the major versions of Scripture.

KING JAMES VERSION. Psalm 133:3 – “. . . how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity . . . for there the Lord commanded the blessing.” Ephesians 4:3 – “. . . keep the unity of Spirit in the bond of peace.” Ephesians 4:13 – “Till we all come in the unity of the faith.”

NEW KING JAMES VERSION. In addition to the above, Job 10:8 – “Your hands have made me and fashioned me, An intricate unity ” (“together round about.” KJV)

NEW AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION. In addition to the three listed under the KJV, John 17:23 – “. . . that they may be perfected in unity” (“in one.” KJV) Colossians 3:14 – “. . . love, which is the perfect bond of unity ” (“bond of p[erfectness.” KJV)

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION. In addition to the four listed under the NASB, 2 Chronicles 30:12 – “. . . the hand of God was upon the people to give them unity of mind” (“one heart.” KJV) Romans 15:5 – “. . . God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity ” (“like-minded.” KJV)

NEW REVISED STANDARD VERSION. In addition to the three listed under the KJV, Zechariah 11:7 – “. . . I took two staves; lone named Favor, and one names Unity ” (“Bands” KJV). Zechariah 11:14 – “. . . I broke my second staff Unity .” 1 Peter 3:8 – “. . . have unity of Spirit ” (“Bands” KJV).

The word “unity” is translated from the Greek word *e`no,thta* (hen-o-tes), which is a noun. It is used with the definite article (“the”), which signifies something special, with a specific identity: i.e.

“I am speaking of THE real thing.” Lexically the word means, “equivalent to unanimity, agreement,” THAYER “oneness, unity, unison,” FRIBERG and “to be as one person.” LOUW-NIDA

In Scripture, “unity” has to do with oneness – like the various parts of our anatomy comprise one body. It assumes working together for a common objective – like the parts of an engine, or a machine. There is something that holds the things united together – like ligaments, cartilage, and muscle hold a body together. We will also see that true unity is an evidence of Divine activity as well, and that only Divine influences and resources can hold the people of God together.

First, there is a certain “unity,” or oneness, that is created when we are “set,” “placed,” NASB , or “arranged,” NIV in the body of Christ by God (1 Cor 12:18) – for “by His doing you are in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:30). NASB No person who comes into Christ is excluded from this unity. He is placed into Christ’s body as a functional part that works harmoniously and effectively with the rest of the body. Unlike the social entities of this world, the church has no true misfits at the point they are born again.

It is in view of this that the church is admonished, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). In this case, the unity already exists, created by the Lord Himself, who alone can ,make diverse things into one thing. Now, it is the work of every believer individually, and of all members collectively, to be “diligent to preserve the unity,” NASB “make every effort to keep the unity,” NIV or to be “eager to maintain the unity.” RSV It is not that the unity is an end of itself, or the fundamental objective. Rather, it is that the Divinely appointed objective cannot be accomplished without the unity.

WALKING WORTHY OF OUR CALLING

How is it that the unity into which we were placed is to be maintained? First, the lives of the members are to be lived in strict keeping with the calling – “worthy of the vocation wherewith ye were called.” Our lives cannot contradict the purpose for which God called us. If Jesus delivered us from “this present evil world,” then we dare not live as though that there the place of our primary citizenship (Gal 1:4). If He called us to be holy, then we must give attention to being “holy in all manner of conversation,” or conduct (1 Pet 1:15-16). If we have been called to suffer for Christ, then what fools we would be to make any attempt to avoid that suffering by modifying our conduct to please the world. Living in a manner that is not in strict consonance with our call disrupts the unity, handicaps the body of Christ, and dishonors the Lord.

Secondly, this unity is maintained by refusing to live for self – “with all lowliness and meekness, forbearing one another.” This is a life in which men do not seek their own good primarily, but the good of their brethren. They actually live “in honor preferring one another” (Rom 12:10), “esteeming other better than themselves” (Phil 2:3), and being “subject one to another.” At the point an individual asserts self-will, the unity is disrupted. In such a case, the person has violated a fundamental tenet of life in Christ Jesus: “And He died for all, so that all those who live might live no longer to and for themselves, but to and for Him Who died and was raised again for their sake” AMPLIFIED (2 Cor 5:15). Let it be clear, it is not possible to truly live to and for Jesus and yet fail to be united with all others who are doing the same.

On this matter, I must note the stultifying influence of institutionalism. By stultifying, I mean an influence that causes right to appear absurd and without advantage. It is like causing a person’s vision to be blurred, so that truth cannot be seen clearly. I have noticed that many of the things that now appear quite evident to me were once hidden from me. I could not see them, even though now they appear quite plain – things like the spiritual qualities that are revealed in this text. Further, I do not recall hearing the preachers, teachers, and professors under whom I sat mention such things, much

less emphasize them.

Why did this circumstance exist? It was largely, if not totally, owing to the fog of a sectarian environment. It taught men to live with disunity, and settle for division. It actually moved us to break the commandment, not keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Subtly, it caused men to sanction a life that was not harmonious with the call of God.

There is a kind of unity that requires extensive effort on our part to achieve. While based upon “the unity of the Spirit,” there is a sense in which it is separate from it. The Spirit refers to this as “the unity of the faith.” “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). This is not a long-range plan, but an immediate objective. A person or group cannot fail to accomplish this and yet remain in Divine favor. That is because this is a Divine objective, and it is not possible to ignore a heavenly objective, and yet be treated as though such a deviation did not occur.

There are two spiritual components within this unity: faith and knowledge. That is, faith and trust in Christ, and reliance upon Him; and an intimate knowledge of, or acquaintance with Him and His ways. This is what is referred to as becoming “a perfect man,” which is a Scriptural synonym for spiritual maturity.

There are two spiritual components within this unity: faith and knowledge. That is, faith and trust in Christ, and reliance upon Him; and an intimate knowledge of, or acquaintance with Him and His ways.

There are revealed things that lead men into this unity. These conditions are not by means of special procedures and disciplines. The appointed means are the various teaching gifts that have been placed within the church. “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; FOR the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Simply stated, the Divinely established objective is this: to build up, and edify the church until its individual members fit and work together in faith. That faith, which involves “the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), enables the saints to live consistently and endure, while seeing Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27). That faith has a unifying power against which Satan cannot devise an effective delusion or inhibition.

In contradiction of the claims made by many, “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God” is not academic. It is not seeing everything alike, for everything is not seen by everyone. Perception is developed, and everyone does not move at the same pace. However, what is truly seen will be seen alike, for truth does not have contradicting characteristics. If brethren do not see the Scripture alike (which is the articulation of the mind of God, or His purpose), then at least one of them is wrong, and both of them can be wrong. Furthermore, it is not right to be wrong, and consequently it is never acceptable.

This is why the work of godly teachers and preachers is to aggressively promote the growth of the people of God – not the number of the people, but their personal growth. I know of no commandment that charges Christian leaders with causing the church to grow numerically. If they execute their ministry properly the Lord will do just as He did at the beginning – adding “daily to the church such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

It might appear as though there is little or no need to say such things. However, the religious culture that is all about us make it necessary to speak about this. Because of the condition of the modern church, much that is in the book of Acts is totally foreign, from the standpoint of experience. For this reason, some are prone to view the activities and

In these lessons, I am approaching the recorded events as an expression of spiritual life. It is an example of what Jesus said would happen once He was glorified at the right hand of God. He plainly spoke of things that would occur in those who believe on Him.

responses of those early believers as something peculiar to the first century. Others perceive the record as a kind of goal to be achieved by means of a regimen. Still others think of it as a kind of superhuman effort that is wholly unrelated to life in Christ Jesus.

In these lessons, I am approaching the recorded events as an expression of spiritual life. It is an example of what Jesus said would happen once He was glorified at the right hand of God. He plainly spoke of things that would occur in those who believe on Him. “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water . (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified)” (John 7:39). This is similar to what Jesus said to that Samaritan woman who met Him at the well of Jacob. “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life ” (John 4:13-14).

What we are seeing in this text is living waters flowing out from the inmost part of believers.

- It is the well of the water of life “springing up.”
- This is the spontaneous expression of spiritual life. It is an interpretation of life “more abundantly” (John 10:10).
- This is an example of grace reigning through righteousness unto eternal life (Rom 5:21).
- It is what happens when the Spirit is not grieved (Eph 4:30) or quenched (1 Thess 5:19).
- The “unfeigned love of the brethren” is exhibited in this text (11 Pet 1:22).

If the same faith and life that were in those brethren are in us, they will also express themselves in most remarkable ways. They will rise to any occasion to the glory of God.

THOSE WHO BELIEVED WERE OF ONE HEART AND SOUL

“ 32a And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul . . . ”

How do you refer to a body of people who have been “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27)? What kind of primary identity do you reference when speaking of them? If you were asked to summarize them as a group, what would you say? In our time, some prefer to refer to believers in terms of the movement with which they are associated: i.q. The Reformation Movement, The Restoration Movement, and The Holiness Movement.

Other classified Christian movements include, but are not limited to, the following. Some people think it to be sufficient to be identified with them.

- The Brethren Movement, arising in Britain and Ireland in the 1830's.
- The Charismatic Movement, of Neo-Pentecostals – renewal among what was traditionally called Pentecostals .
- The Grace Movement, a movement during the 1930's that embraced a dispensational system of Bible Interpretation.
- The Oxford Movement, originating in the nineteenth century, which sought to more

closely align Anglicanism with its Roman Catholic heritage.

Other broad classifications of Christians include the following.

- Calvinists
- Armenians
- Fundamentalists
- Liberals.
- Premillennialists
- Postmillennialists
- Amennialists
- Preterists
- Trinitarian
- Non-Trinitarian

Then there are more many additional group names that reflect the body of theology the particular community embraces. There are numerous sub-groups within each of these. Familiar names include Catholics, Orthodox, Reformed, Lutheran, Methodist, Baptist, Apostolic, Church of Christ Non-Instrumental, Church of Christ Instrumental, Christian Church, Presbyterian, Mennonite, Quaker, Shakers, Assembly of God, Church of God, Anglican, etc, etc, etc.

Of course, none of these distinctions existed at the time of our text. They are all post-apostolic, and were the result of some form of spiritually wayward thinking . The Gospel will not replicate or contribute to any of these movements. The Holy Spirit will not lead someone into any of them, or sustain them while within them. Whatever good may be found in them, the movements themselves were originated by men.

It is not unusual to hear the general term Christians used to describe the entire body of believers – although no inspired person ever so described the body of Christ. It is true that it is written, “And the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Even though some affirm they were Divinely called by that name, there is no evidence that this is the case. No apostle ever referred to the aggregate church, either locally or globally, as “Christians.” Rather, it appears clear that this name was given to the children of God by the Gentiles among whom they were found. That is, it was so readily apparent WHO they were following, that they ascribed this term to them, which means “follower of Christ.” FRIBERG It is a noble term, to be sure. However, it is only proper if it is very evident that the people are, in deed, followers of Christ. It is an evidential appellation, not a formal one.

How did inspired men refer to collections of Christ’s followers, and of them as a whole? What kind of perspective did the Holy Spirit inspire? It is good to make a special note of this, for it reveals something of the manner in which grace impacts upon the mind.

THE MULTITUDE OF THEM THAT BELIEVED

“And the multitude of them that believed . . .” Other versions read, “of the multitude of those that had believed,” DARBY “the whole group of believers,” GWN “And in the assembly of the persons that believed,” MRD “The community of believers .” NAB “And the congregation of those who believed,” NAS “All the believers,” NIB “Among all those who had embraced the faith,” IE “Among the large number who had become believers,” PHILLIPS and “The group of followers .” CEV

Within any of the groups that I have mentioned, and literally thousands of others, this kind of description is not sufficient to identify the whole of the church. It would take in some people an institutionalist would not take in. The term “believed” would also be too limited.

What a wonderful and precise expression this is: “the multitude of them that believed ..” Exactly what does the word “believed” mean? The word is translated from a Greek word meaning, “to think to be true; to be persuaded of . . . place confidence in; a. universally . . . the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul; thus it stands . . . absolutely *to trust* in Jesus or in God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something ,” THAYER “to believe something to be true and, hence, worthy of being trusted - to believe, to think to be true, to regard as trustworthy,” LOUW-NIDA “believe, believe in, be convinced of, give credence.” GINGRICH

Although believing does involve the intellect, it is not primarily intellectual. More of the person is involved in believing than the part that processes thoughts. There is a strong conviction that compels the individual to do something because he believes – something that agrees and blends with what is believed. Conviction calls for an action that is consistent with the truth. There is also an unwavering persuasion – like Abraham had when he offered up Isaac – being “fully persuaded that, what” God “had promised, he was able also to perform” (Rom 4:20). There is also the reality of being obligated from within – from the heart. There comes a compelling desire that is perceived as rational, or reasonable, and thus cannot be denied. To be impelled from within is to be driven forward by faith. There is also unwavering trust – a willingness to entrust one’s life into the hands of the Lord, because the truth of the Gospel has been seen.

In our society individuals so described are exceedingly rare in the average congregation. In the early church, this was a suitable description of everyone in the church – “all that believed.” This was not descriptive of a handful of people, but of the entire “multitude,” for unbelievers are excluded from the church, and are in no sense a part of it (Lk 12:46; Mk 16:16; Rev 21:8).

In the book of Acts, some form of “believe” appears no less than thirty-six times (2:44; 4:4,32; 5:14; 8:12,37; 9:42; 10:43,45; 11:17,21; 13:12,39,48; 14:1, 23; 15:5,7,11; 16:1,31,34; 17:4,2, 34; 18:8,27; 19:2,4,18; 21:20,25; 22:19; 24:14; 26:27; 28:24).

- The followers of Christ are described as those who had “believed” (2:44; 4:32; 10:45; 11:17; 14:23; 15:5,7,11; 18:27; 19:2; 21:20,25; 22:19; 24:14)
- Those responding to the Gospel are described as those who “who heard the word” and “believed” (4:4; 8:12; 11:21; 13:12; 14:1; 16:1; 16:34; 17:4, 12,34; 18:8; 19:18; 28:24), and as “believers” (5:14).
- Those inquiring about appropriating salvation were told to “believe” (8:37; 16:31; 19:4)
- The promise of “remission of sins” was offered to those who “believed on Him” (10:43).
- Justification is said to be realized by “all that believe” (13:39).
- It is said that “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (13:48).
- When challenging Agrippa, Paul spoke of believing (26:27).

It is fully appropriate, therefore, to refer to those who are in Christ as those who have “believed.” It is an all-encompassing word that does not permit the omission of any required obedience. All “that believed” were all who had embraced and obeyed the Gospel. They were the ones relying upon and trusting in the Lord – the ones persuaded that He is, and that He is a Rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.

Now, what will be said of these believers? How will they be described, and what traits will they possess?

THEY WERE OF ONE HEART

“ . . . were of one heart . . . ” Other versions read, “ “the heart. . . were one,” DARBY “ . . . lived in harmony ,” GWN “ . . . were one in heart ,” NIB “ . . . was united, heart ,” NJB “ . . . were joined in their hearts ,” IE “ . . . there was but one heart ,” IE “Now there was but one heart . . . in the vast number of those who had become believers,” WILLIAMS “ . . . there was complete agreement of heart ,” PHILLIPS and “ . . . all felt the same way about everything .” CEV

“Heart” is a word to which the Holy Spirit assigns a new meaning. The word itself is translated from the Greek word **kardi,a** (kardia), which means “properly, that organ in the animal body which is the center of the circulation of the blood, and hence, was regarded as the seat of physical life,” THAYER “heart, as the seat of physical life” GINGRICH Theologically it means “the causative source of a person's psychological life in its various aspects, but with special emphasis upon thoughts - 'heart, inner self, mind,” LOUW-NIDA

God has made man after His own image. This involves a kind of central headquarters in the human makeup that determines how a person thinks, and what he says and does. It is like the throne of the human personality from which all motives are determined. The Scriptures refer to this as “the heart of man” (1 Cor 2:9; Psa 104:15; Prov 12:25; 18:12; 20:5; 27:19). As used in Scripture, the word “heart” speaks of centrality – like “this is the heart of the matter.” It is the core of man’s makeup – what he really is. From one point of view, this appears to limit people to individuality. However, that is not the case here.

- Jesus said that the evil THOUGHTS of a man originate in his heart: “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts ” (Mark 7:21).
- He also said a man SPEAKS out of the abundance of his heart: “out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh ” (Mat 12:34) – that is, what he really is comes out.
- He added deeds are really expressions of the heart: “A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things : and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things ” (Mat 12:35).
- He also spoke of the deeds of men as coming from the heart. “For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies” (Matt 15:19). There you have the entirety of human expression – thoughts, words, and deeds – proceeding from the heart.

The Heart Apart From Christ

Apart from Christ, the heart was man’s primary problem – the one from which all other moral and spiritual deficiencies sprang. Thus it is written of those of Noah’s day, “the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually ” (Gen 6:5). The judgment of the flood did not alter this situation, for after the flood had subsided, and an acceptable offering was presented to God, this is what He said in His heart: “I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth ” (Gen 8:21). Years later, the prophet Jeremiah confirmed this condition had not changed. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer 17:9).

Knowing this condition, Solomon threw out an unanswerable challenge to humanity: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?” (Prov 20:9). Again he affirmed, “the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil ” (Eccl 8:11). Again he said, “This is an evil among

all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live” (Eccl 9:3).

Of the choice people of the earth, the very ones God Himself chose and cultured, it is written, “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint” (Isa 1:5). Of the entire Gentile world Paul wrote, “Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). From the human point of view, the situation was utterly hopeless. Man was sinful at the core, and had no power at all to alter or renew that core. In fact, God challenged the only people upon the earth who were acquainted in any way with Him, “Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 18:31). Even in those spiritually primitive times, honest men knew that only God could create such a heart. Thus David pled, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10).

The Divine Remedy

Speaking through the prophets, the Lord revealed that He was going to give men a new heart. How marvelous the promise must have sounded to those who had been convinced of their natural condition through the ministry of the Law. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26). The heart that had become hard because of sin – that stony heart – would be personally removed by the Lord. The new heart and spirit would be prone to God, and would constrain the people to walk in His ways, willingly and consistently. Therefore He continued, “And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).

Although this new heart would be conferred upon individuals, it would not be individualized – tailored for the person. The heart would be the same in all of the people – “one heart.” It would be tailored for the things of God, and designed to properly constrain and motivate His people. That is why the Lord also said through Ezekiel, “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19-20). A “heart of flesh” is living heart, one that can grow and be enlarged for the glory of God (Psa 119:32). This would be a heart that did not consider the commandments of God “grievous” (1 John 5:3).

THE BELIEVERS OF OUR TEXT HAD THAT “NEW HEART”

The marvelous unity, or oneness, that was experienced by these brethren was not something they accomplished. It was not hammered out at a negotiating table, or taught in a classroom. This is the church in its infancy, and yet it realized things the church of our time only dreams about. The Lord promised, “I will give them one heart!” Our text affirms, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart.” They had the heart that was promised, receiving it when they were “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17). For them, old things had passed away, and all things had become new (2 Cor 5:17). They were all looking to Jesus (Heb 12:2). All of them had their affection set on things above (Col 3:2). None of them were friends with the world (1 John 4:4).

THEY WERE OF ONE SOUL

“And the multitude of them that believed were . . . of one soul . . .” Other versions read, “and mind,” NIV and “and they were united in spirit.” IE

These brethren were also of “one soul.” It is as though one principle of life animated them all,

moving them to think in the same direction, and feel the same way about pivotal and essential matters.

The soul is distinguished from the heart. Thus God commanded the Israelites, “thou shalt find Him, if thou seek Him with all thy heart and with all thy soul” (Deut 4:29). Again it is written,

“And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul , and with all thy might” (Deut 6:5). Yet again they were admonished to “ serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul ” (Deut 10:12). They were further admonished to “ lay up these my words in your heart and in your soul ” (Deut 11:18). When they strayed from the Lord. They were commanded to return to the Lord “with all thine heart and with all thy soul ” (Deut 30:2).

When the Lord circumcises the heart – something that occurs when we are baptized into Christ (Col 2:11) – it is done in order that we might love Him with all of our heart and soul. Thus God spoke to Israel through Moses, “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul , that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6). Jesus confirmed that our relationship to God was to be one involving ALL of our soul (Mark 12:30). This “soul” is singular, being the same in all of the brethren – “one soul.”

What Is The “Soul?”

The soul has more to do with the expression of the individual. It is connected with rationality, or the ability to reason, desire, and purpose. Here is where man perceives, remembers, and wills. The soul has its seat in the mind, not the heart or spirit. It is a part of us that is governed from within, by our spirit, or heart.

Sometimes the word “soul” is used to describe man as an individual personality. Thus we read of “eight souls ” being saved in the ark Noah built (1 Pet 3:20). Similarly, when referring to a group of people who did the same thing, the expression “every soul ” is used (Lev 17:15). Also, when referring to the totality of humanity, the Lord says, “all souls are mine” (Ezek 18:4). On the day of Pentecost, amidst all of the startling events, it is said, “fear came upon every soul ” (Acts 2:43).

In this text, however, the word is not used of the individuals themselves, but of a part of their created makeup. Viewed technically, man is comprised of three parts. Listed in order of their priority, they are spirit, soul, and body. Perceived from the evidential point of view, and listed in order of their manifestation, they are body, soul, and spirit.

The Word of God makes clear that each of these remarkable components is intended to be for the Lord. Thus, it is written, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly ; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

It is said of the body, “Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor 6:13). Even more explicitly it is stated, “your bodies are the members of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15). The text continues by affirming that our spirits, or essential persons, also belong to the Lord. “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit , which are God's” (1 Cor 6:20). In a special benediction to the Galatians Paul wrote, “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit . Amen” (Gal 6:18). The same was written to Philemon (Phile 1:25).

In a most arresting statement, the Scriptures declare that the Word of God is able to distinguish between the two unseen parts of man – the spirit and the soul, two parts that men have a great deal of difficulty distinguishing. “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit ” (Heb 4:12).

But what about the “soul?” The soul has more to do with the expression of the individual. It is connected with rationality, or the ability to reason, desire, and purpose. Here is where man perceives, remembers, and wills. The soul has its seat in the mind, not the heart or spirit. It is a part of us that is governed from within, by our spirit, or heart. If the heart (which is more closely aligned with the spirit), is corrupt, it causes thoughts, intentions, and all manner of reasoning to be corrupt. If the heart is right, it sanctifies the mind, and consequently the rational part of our makeup becomes spiritually productive.

Technically speaking, the soul has not yet been saved or delivered. Thus Peter writes to those who are in Christ, “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls ” (1 Pet 1:8-9). The soul of the redeemed has the capacity to think and desire wrongly. Here is the area of our persons at which Satan hurls his “fiery darts” – “flaming arrows,” NASM or “flaming missiles” NIV (Eph 6:12). These “darts” or “arrows” are designed to inflame evil passions, and awaken the old nature. If they are not quenched, they will spread their deadly venom throughout our minds, bringing us into captivity. This warfare is the subject delineated in Romans 7:15-25).

When our text says the people were of “one soul,” the following conditions are briefly comprehended in the saying.

- They were “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).
- They were dwelling “together in unity ” (Psa 133:1).
- They were minding “the same thing,” or thinking in the same manner (Phil 16).
- In matters requiring judgment, they were of “ one accord” (Acts 5:12).
- They had “ one mind” (Phil 2:2).
- They were of “the same mind one toward another” (Rom 12:16).
- They spoke “the same thing” (1 Cor 1:10).
- They had “the same care one for another” (1 Cor 12:25).
- They were “like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, one mind” (Phil 2:2).
- They were walking “by the same rule,” of principle (Phil 3:16).
- They were “of the same mind in the Lord” (Phil 4:2).
- They were showing “the same diligence” (Heb 6:11).
- They were ministering “the same one to another” (1 Pet 4:10).

These are examples of what happens when men receive a new heart and a new spirit, and walk in newness of life. These are fruits that grow unhindered where the Spirit is not grieved or quenched. When people are seeking the things that are above, and delight themselves in the Lord, this is what happens – but only so!

In most Christian circles, being of “one soul” is nothing more than a distant goal that looks beyond reach. However, in our text, not long after the day of Pentecost, this was a reality – they were of “one soul.” There was one animating principle of life among them. This was, in fact, a sterling example of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

At this point, it is necessary to make some few brief observations about unity – particularly in view of the complex nature of man. Unity – or being of “one heart and of one soul” – is not something

accomplished in “the new man” alone. It is essentially a uniting of what we really are, and secondarily a harmony in the way we think, perceive, desire, and purpose. Our souls and bodies are involved in the unity because of the governing ability of the renewed spirit – the “new man.” The parts of our person that have not yet been regenerated (the soul and the body), must be brought into subjection. This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor 9:27).

Unity – the unity of the Spirit and of the faith – is not on the intellectual level. The intellect is associated more with the soul than the body, and is characterized by staggering limitations. If professing believers attempt to unite the people of God by bringing them to all see the Scriptures alike, for example, they will never be united. That is why unity is referred to as “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13), not the unity of views.

This by no means suggests that there are differing views of Scripture that are all valid. Difference is not created by faith, but by unbelief and a lack of discernment. A person’s view of Scripture is strictly determined by their level of maturity and degree of insight. Actually, there is no provision for any person in Christ affirming things he does not know. Such a posture involves thinking of oneself more highly than he ought to think (Rom 12:3). It throws one in the category of those described as “understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7). When, like Jesus, men speak what they “know” (John 3:11), they will be perfectly harmonious with everyone else who speaks what they know.

Our text is a classic illustration of the effects of receiving the love of the truth, and walking in the light as He is in the light (1 Thess 2:10; 1 John 1:7). As we proceed through the text, it will become apparent what being of one heart and soul causes people to do. Remember, this is genuine spiritual life working itself into the circumstances of life, like leaven into a lump of dough. Because it is comprised of the Divine nature, that “newness of life” always has the same character and preference. If it is not suffocated with the dreaded blanket of institutionalism, it will still cause those who have it to address challenging circumstances with singleness of heart, and do so effectively and for God’s glory. It cannot conduct itself any differently.

THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON

“32b . . . neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”

I want to ever keep before you that what we are witnessing is not the result of detailed teaching on “how to” live. There is absolutely no evidence that continuing steadfastly in “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42) involved procedural instruction concerning handling crises, what to do if needs arose, and similar matters. Since the motivators and proceduralists have gained prominence in the church, it is most difficult for some to conceive of anyone doing what is right without having to be told to do so. However, when men receive the love of the truth, and are subjected to the unveiled Gospel, they are taught within themselves how to abide in Christ. Rather than memorizing procedures and submitting themselves to ordinances, they become “partakers of the Divine nature.”

The Doctrine

The marvelous capacity to partake of the Divine nature is by means of the “exceeding great and precious promises,” not a set of commandments or ordinances. Thus it is written that God “hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet 1:3-4). The promises set before us are “the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (1 Cor 2:9). These are very real things, and because of that circumstance “the

Spirit of truth” can work with them to teach us.

Concerning this teaching of the Spirit, it is written, “But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as It hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:27). Abiding in Christ involves several factors. It is more than staying saved. It also involves being sanctified, or being those in whom God works to will and do of his own good pleasure (Phil 2:13; Heb 13:20-21). This impacts upon how men live in this world, and how they respond to life’s challenges.

John is not saying believers can be isolated from the teachers God has set in the body (1 Cor 12:28). John himself was, after all, teaching them. Here, he is rather referring to the implications of the truth that relate to translating it into life. Jesus referred to the one who “doeth truth,” or “practices” NASB it (John 3:21). The Spirit takes the truth to which we have been subjected, and directs our paths through our perception of it. There is no need for “how-to” sessions, which have become so popular in the church today. Men have elevated problem resolution and developing goals and objectives as though they were of paramount importance.

This teaching assumes the condition of several things. First, that the individual has, in fact, been “delivered from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4). That deliverance is not theoretical, but is very real. In it, the individuals have lost affinity with the world, and is now constituted a “stranger and a pilgrim” (1 Pet 2:11). They are, after all, citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20-21). Such an one has a fundamental inclination to the “things that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1-2).

Having been delivered from the world, and experientially detached from it, these liberated souls are utterly selfless – for it is attachment to this world that causes people to be selfish.

Why Say These Things?

It is necessary to say these things because, in this text, we are being exposed to the expression of spiritual life. The brethren in the fourth chapter of Acts were really new in Christ Jesus, and their conduct confirmed it.

THEY DID NOT SAY THE THINGS THEY POSSESSED WERE THEIR OWN

“ . . . neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own . . .” Other versions read, “and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own,” NASB “No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own,” NIV “and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions,” NRSV “and not one of them said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own,” ASV “and not one of them said that any of the things which he had was his property only ,” BBE “no one claimed private ownership of any possessions,” NJB “And they felt that what they owned was not their own ,” NLT and “and not one of them claimed that anything which he possessed was [exclusively] his own.” AMPLIFIED

It is one thing to talk about being “born again,” it is quite another thing to confirm it in life. Remember, we are not talking about a small nucleus of people – like the apostles. This is not a statement made concerning a single extraordinary person. There was not a single individual among them who said what he possessed belonged to him alone – not a single one!

From a higher point of view, this was actually a test of the faith of those early disciples. Just as the Israelites were tested in their trek through the wilderness, so this circumstance was testing the faith of these new converts.

It ought to be apparent that this statement is made of those of whom it was said, “And the multitude

of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. . .” This affirmation is being said of that entire multitude.

In our time, this would qualify as a mega-church. Considering that the five thousand who believed could have been just “men” (4:4), we are being confronted with a significant number of possibly well over 10,000. It is absolutely inconceivable that any such group of believers in our time could be so described – “one heart,” “one soul,” and “no one claimed that any of his possessions were his own.” NIV

It is at once obvious that these people looked at life in a wholly different manner. They were really sojourners, seeing this world as temporal, and their possessions as a stewardship from God.

These people had “mortified” covetousness, as all believers are admonished to do (Col 3:5). They had done what Paul exhorted the Ephesians to do – not letting covetousness be named one time among them (Eph 5:3).

This whole incident reminds me of the prayer of David upon gathering an abundant offering for the building of the Temple. It is said of those who gave, “Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD” (1 Chron 29:9). Commenting on that marvelous circumstance David said, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of Thine own have we given Thee. For we are strangers before thee, and sojourners, as were all our fathers: our days on the earth are as a shadow, and there is none abiding” (1 Chron 29:14-15). Upon seeing such display of cheerful giving, observe the manner in which David reasoned.

- He marvels that they were “able to offer so willingly,” knowing that the aptitude came from the Lord.
- He knew that every comes from God.
- He knew that God owns everything – even the things we have in our hand.
- He knew they had really returned to God what already belonged to Him.
- He knew they were strangers and sojourners in the world, and therefore should hold lightly what was in their hands.

All of these observations were embraced by the brethren in our text. They also had the advantage of being delivered from the world and given a “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8). They did not have to be told to have this view. Their view was the result of their understanding. They had a perspective of

salvation that was more thorough, and more becoming of those who wear the name of the Lord.

A Trial Of faith

There is another view of this text that is essential. From a higher point of view, this was actually a test of the faith of those early disciples. Just as the Israelites were tested in their trek through the wilderness (Deut 8:2), so this circumstance was testing the faith of these new converts. Multitudes were among them who did not live in Jerusalem. They were from other countries, and were there because of their new identity in Christ. They did not have the normal provisions for living. There was probably a considerable amount of inconvenience associated with this. How would the disciples react to it? I have no doubt that holy angels were leaning over the ramparts of heaven to see their response. Less than two months before this, some of these same people had called for the crucifixion of “the Prince of life.” Now, what would they do?

Had a change really taken place in them? Were they walking in the newness of life? Were they

walking in the Spirit, refusing to quench or grieve Him? Their response to this challenge will tell the real story!

THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON

“ . . . but they had all things common.” Other versions read, “but all things were common property to them,” NASB “but they shared everything they had,” NIV “but everything they owned was held in common,” NRSV “I nstead , they shared everything,” GWN “but whatever was theirs, it was the community's,” MRD “everyone was sharing,” LIVING and “but everything they had was in common and for the use of all .” AMPLIFIED

This was not a response to a law, or an edict by the apostles. This was a spontaneous response of newness of life . The language tends to sound strange to our ears because of the glaring absence of unity among professing believers. These are spiritually dark days, even though we are living in the blazing light of “the day of salvation” and “the accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2). However, the experience available to men during this time, and their actual attainment are two different things. This is confirmed by the near-total absence of apparent unity among professing Christians . Even in the smallest congregations – which are nothing in comparison to the numbers involved in this text – there are often abrasive differences and divisions. However, if we are to appreciate this text, we must rise high above this circumstance in our thinking. There are reasons for the vast chasm between the church of which we are reading and the church of our day.

In conversion – real conversion – there are a number of things that happen. These are all involved in the primary term “believed” – “all that believed” (2:44), and “the multitude that believed” (4:32).

- Sins remitted (Acts 2:38).
- Justified from all things (Acts 13:39).
- Reconciled to God (Col 1:21).
- The conscience purged (Heb 10:22).
- Joined to the Lord (1 Cor 6:17).
- Made partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14).
- Made righteous (Rom 5:19).
- Born again (1 Pet 1:23).
- Holy Spirit sent into heart (Gal 4:6).
- Baptized into one body by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- Made a new creation (2 Cor 5:17).
- Created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph 2:10).
- Baptized into Christ’s death (Rom 6:3).
- Baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27).
- Our old man is crucified (Rom 6:6).
- Raised up by God to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).
- Washed, sanctified, and justified in the name of Jesus and by the Spirit of our God (1 Cor 6:11).
- Delivered from the Law (Rom 7:6).
- Escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust (2 Pet 1:4).
- Were enlightened (Heb 6:4).

- Christ made us free (Gal 5:1).
- Placed in the body where God pleased (1 Cor 12:18).
- Called into the fellowship of God's Son (1 Cor 1:9).
- Given access into the grace wherein we stand (Rom 5:2).
- Entered into a process in which we are changed from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- Started out in unity with all other believers (Eph 4:1).
- Were taken out of the people by God for Himself (Acts 15:14).
- Became citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20).

These twenty-eight things are common to every single person who is in Christ, has been saved, or has been born again. There is no real Christian in whom these things, and many more, have not been realized. They are not benefits that come later in spiritual life, but are all integral to "newness of life." It is to be acknowledged that many, because of flawed teaching, lived for some time in Christ before coming into the knowledge of these things. Notwithstanding that deficiency, they are all very real possessions of those who have "believed."

Can These Take Place Without Impacting Upon One's Morality?

I do not mean to philosophize on this matter, and therefore will labor to avoid leaving that impression. Is it remotely possible that such significant benefits could be obtained without altering both thought and conduct? And if such a thing is possible, precisely what is conversion, and how does one know when it has been experienced? I am going to affirm that it is not possible to be a new creature without undeniable evidence of the change. This is the very point made in Second Corinthians 5:17. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new". NKJV The Amplified Bible reads, "Therefore if any person is [ingrafted] in Christ (the Messiah) he is a new creation (a new creature altogether); the old [previous moral and spiritual condition] has passed away. Behold, the fresh and new has come!" There is not the slightest possibility that this is false, a misrepresentation, or an exaggeration!

Revealed In our Text

The condition that is realized "in Christ Jesus" accounts for the totally selfless spirit described in our text. These people had really cut loose from the world, and they knew why. They had found a better thing in Christ, and were living in the satisfaction of it.

Their view of life in this world perfectly comported with their situation in Christ Jesus. The Savior clearly said when He walked among men, "I am not of this world" (John 8:23). Now, having been joined to the Lord, the believers were also "not of this world." Jesus had also said, "I seek not Mine own will" (John 5:30). Now that they were in Him, they also sought not their own will.

While with His disciples in the body, Jesus said to them, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life" (John 6:27). Now, that is precisely what these brethren were doing. Christ also said, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth" and "lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt 6:19-20).

Statements that are made concerning those in Christ are being lived out in this text.

- "Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you" (Rom 8:9).
- ". . . ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written

not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God . . . ” (2 Cor 3:3).

- “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph 2:19).
- “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3).

THEY HAD ALL THINGS COMMON

Therefore, we should not consider it strange that these brethren “had all things common,” or “shared everything they had.” NIV

This is the manner in which newness of life reacts. The exact circumstances may not be the same as those of our text. However, wherever men are living by faith, they will “prefer other better than themselves.” They will consider their resources as a stewardship to be used in a manner that glorifies God and brings edifying advantages the saints.

This does not mean they at once divested themselves of all their goods and property, warehousing it for equal distribution. We know that Barnabas did not sell his property unto later, when he deemed it was best to do so (4:36-37). At this point, the emphasis is not on what the believers did, but how they thought: “neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own” (Acts 4:32).

That is, they thought of themselves according to truth: they were stewards, handling the goods of their Lord. When speaking of wealth (“mammon”), Jesus said this: “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?” (Luke 16:12). The time when the Lord will give the faithful what is their “own” will be when He comes again, bringing His reward with Him (Rev 22:12).

Until that time, what we have is really not ours – it still belongs to the Lord. Men look upon wealth as something they have either earned, invested, or accumulated. Those in Christ Jesus look as it as something they have been given. Therefore, when they refused to say what they possessed was their own, they were simply acknowledging the truth. They had seen the transitory nature of life, and simply accommodated themselves to it.

The proceduralizers will find they cannot reproduce the circumstances of our text by human wisdom. This was the expression of spiritual life, not adherence to a system. We know this is the case because of the next incident in which two people are judged for lying to the Holy Spirit. They had overstated what they had received for a possession they had sold, doing so in an attempt to look better than they really were. Peter told Ananias, “Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” (Acts 5:4).

Thus, at the time of our text, the totally selfless spirit that was evidenced as strictly voluntary. It was the result of personal insight and commitment.

This is the manner in which newness of life reacts. The exact circumstances may not be the same as those of our text. However, wherever men are living by faith, they will “prefer other better than themselves” (Phil 2:3). They

As men examine themselves to see of they are in the faith, this is something to take into consideration. We know that this kind of response is not the result of long-term maturity, for most of these brethren had been in Christ only a few days.

will consider their resources as a stewardship to be used in a manner that glorifies God and brings

edifying advantages the saints. They will do what God intended to be accomplished by redemption: “And He died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died and was raised for them ” (2 Cor 5:15). Because of their view of, commitment to, and fellowship with, Christ Himself, their view of His people is elevated. Now they have a heart to live “in honor preferring one another” (Rom 12:10), being “subject to one another” (1 Pet 5:5). This is also revealed in the spirit of an admonition Paul delivered to certain in Ephesus: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth ” (Eph 4:28). Only the intrusion of “the flesh” can interfere with these results.

As men examine themselves to see if they are in the faith, this is something to take into consideration. We know that this kind of response is not the result of long-term maturity, for most of these brethren had been in Christ only a few days. It cannot be argued that the attitude of these brethren was the result of a miraculous and overriding intrusion of the Lord into the situation. It should rather be viewed as a sterling example of what the Lord does when men have thrown off the sins and weights that so easily beset them. When men are walking in the light as He is in the light, they DO “have fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:7). This is revealed in very practical ways, as this text confirms.

Another example of this is seen in the poverty-stricken brethren of Macedonia. Although their circumstances were less favorable than those of the Corinthian brethren, they excelled in giving to the needy brethren in Jerusalem. They reacted to the need of which they heard, much as the brethren of our text. Paul said of them, “Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves ” (2 Cor 8:1-3). That is the kind of response that cannot be commanded or orchestrated. It is the overflow of the well of the water of life.

A POWERFUL WITNESS

“ 33a And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus . . . ”

Where the people are filled with the Holy Spirit, there tends to be an extension of holy speaking. This took place on the day of Pentecost. First, all the people spoke, testifying to “the wonderful works of God” (2:4,11). Then Peter rose and spoke with inspired precision (2:14-36). Then he delivered an extended discourse to those who inquired what they should do (2:38-40). A very similar thing took place when Peter and John went to the Temple. First, they spoke to a lame man, healing him in the name of Jesus (3:1-9). Then they spoke to the multitude concerning the death and resurrection of Christ (3:12-26).

We are living in a time when there is an ungodly predilection for brevity in the proclamation of the Word of God. We are now being told that the attention span for most people is around twenty minutes. After that, it is imagined that people cannot really benefit from what is being said. Such a case cannot be made from the Word of God. Even under the Old Covenant, Divine communication and holy instruction were never characterized by briefness. The delivering of the Law at Sinai was certainly not brief (Ex 19:17-24:3). When God communicated with Moses, he did so for forty consecutive days (Ex 24:18; Deut 9:9-11). The children of Israel stood for a fourth part of the day, hearing the Word of God read (Neh 9:3). When Jehosaphat made an extensive petition to the Lord, “all Judah stood before the Lord, with their little ones, their wives, and their children” (2 Chron 20:13). God never led Israel into a convenient religion!

While it is true that these brethren were all filled with the Holy Spirit, it is also true that they were fillable . That is, their hearts were pure, their faith strong, and their hope stable.

WITH GREAT POWER GAVE THE APOSTLES WITNESS

“And with great power gave the apostles witness . . .” Other versions read, “And with great power the apostles were giving witness,” NASB “With great power the apostles continued to testify,” NIV “With great power the apostles gave their testimony,” NRSV “And with great power gave the apostles their witness,” ASV “The apostles testified powerfully,” NLT “And the apostles preached powerful sermons,” LIVING “The apostles used great power to give evidence,” IE “while the Apostles with great force of conviction delivered their testimony,” WEYMOUTH and “And with great strength and ability and power the apostles delivered their testimony.” AMPLIFIED

Now, just as on the day of Pentecost, the apostles confirm that they have been set “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). While all of the brethren there had been speaking the Word with boldness (4:31), now the apostles rise to establish the people, for the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20).

In the body of Christ, speaking plays a primary role. This is seen in the first three gifts placed within the church: “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that . . .” (1 Cor 12:28). Paul expressed the same order to the Ephesians, combining three gifts into the latter category. “And He gave some, 1 apostles; and some, 2 prophets; and some, 3 evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (“pastors and teachers being a single gift that has two sides – Eph 4:11). In this text, “evangelists” (proclaimers), and “pastors” (shepherds) “teachers” (instructors) are a breakdown of the wider term used in First Corinthians – “teachers.” In these offices the truth of God is declared and expounded. You will notice there is no office termed “praise leader,” “worship leader,” or something similar. In the Divine economy, a leader is a teacher who leads the people into spiritual thoughts, not in an external exercise. That concept is more in keeping with the Old Covenant than the New Covenant. The term “rule” (also translated “led,” NASB) and “leaders,” NIV , also carries the connotation of leading by insightfully speaking God’s Word. “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God : whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation” (Heb 13:7).

Types of Speaking

In my judgment, there are at least four different kinds of helpful speaking among the saints. All of them are not equal. Here are some general comments concerning those kinds of speaking.

- **FOUNDATIONAL.** This is the communication of the verities upon which faith is established. These cannot be changed, and have been wrought or declared by the living God. They are expressions of God’s “eternal purpose,” center in the Lord Jesus Christ, and bear directly upon the salvation of the soul.

- **IMPLICATION.** Implications are inherent to the verities, yet are not apparent to the unlearned. For example, in the sacrifice of Himself Christ “put away sin.” That is an inseparable part of His death. Yet, it must be proclaimed. This type of speaking can be called exposition or the expounding of the truth.

- **EXHORTATION.** An exhortation is a spiritually logical conclusion that flows out from the implication of truth. It summons the people to involvement in the truth, calling upon them to believe what they have heard, do what God requires of them, and use what they have been given.

TESTIMONY. A testimony is the witness of something personally experienced by the believer. It can take the nature of a report, as when Paul “declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry” (Acts 21:19).

Being of first rank in the church, the apostles were not limited in what they said. They operated freely in all four of these areas, knowing the foundations of the faith and their implications – fully

able to handle the word of God correctly.

In this text, we will see how the apostles spoke of something foundational – something containing many implications, and upon which exhortations and admonitions were based.

Particularly during the past few years, there has been a marked decrease in this kind of speaking within the professed church. There is even a growing tendency to expound psychological and sociological principles rather than Scripture, and to exhort people in areas that are not extensively addressed by Scripture – such as finances, marriage, and material success.

The Apostles

With regard to the “apostles,” these were the men chosen by Jesus to lay the foundation, declaring the pivotal matters on which faith is built. In a unique way, the Holy Spirit directed them into all truth (John 16:13). The eternal purpose of God was revealed to them. That purpose was introduced by the prophets, but it was revealed in its fulness to the apostles. Paul had particular insight into this purpose (Eph 3:1-12).

In the apostles’ witness, they would not major on local issues or matters unrelated to faith. Their objective was to bring men to, and ground them in, faith. In doing this, their proclamation always centered in the Gospel itself – something into which they were given unique insight. It is not possible for men to read the Gospel accounts of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and arrive at the conclusions proclaimed by the apostles. As a witness to this, consider some of the things the apostles revealed about the death of Christ. Independently of the apostles, no man is ever represented as having arrived at these conclusions. It is necessary that men see this.

- He bore, or carried, our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).
- He was made to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- In His death, He was cursed by God (Gal 3:13).
- God has set Jesus forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood (Rom 3:25).
- We are justified through His blood (Rom 5:9).
- We are reconciled to God through the death of His son (Rom 5:10).
- God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son (Rom 8:3).
- God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom 8:32).
- We are bought with the price paid in Christ's death (1 Cor 6:20).
- If One died for all, then all are dead (2 Cor 5:14).

There is not an equality among the members of the body concerning insight or understanding. Some revelations are not made to everyone, but are passed on by means of the teaching of those who received the revelations.

He died that we might no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us (2 Cor 5:15).

- He gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
- In His death, He redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13).
- We are made nigh unto God by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).
- In His flesh, Jesus abolished the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances (Eph 2:15).
- He gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse the church (Eph 5:26).

- Christ died in order to present His church to Himself without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph 5:27).
- He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- In the cross, He plundered principalities and powers, making a public display of them (Col 2:15).
- In His death, he delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10).
- He died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we might live together with Him (1 Thess 5:10).
- He gave Himself to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a special people, zealous of good works (Tit 2:14).
- He tasted death for every man (Heb 2:9).
- Through His death, He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
- He obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb 9:12).
- In offering Himself in death, Jesus has perfected forever all who are sanctified (Heb 10:14).
- Through His blood, we are washed from our sins and made kings and priests unto God (Rev 1:5-6).

This should be sufficient to show why the apostles rose to prominence in any assembly of the godly. There is not an equality among the members of the body concerning insight or understanding. Some revelations are not made to everyone, but are passed on by means of the teaching of those who received the revelations.

This is why no person can grow in grace and truth while ignoring the writings of the apostles. Thus it is said of early believers, “they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine . . .” (Acts 2:42). Anyone that is only casually familiar with the modern church knows there is a staggering ignorance of apostolic teaching. Some are more familiar with Proverbs and Ecclesiastes than with the Epistles. Others feel quite content to know John 3:16, imagining that the most profound theology of all is, “Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so.” This is a very foolish statement, and betrays an unsettling ignorance among the people. No apostle ever approached the love of God as revealed in Christ in such a manner.

Therefore, it ought to be clear why the apostles rose to prominence in this grand prayer gathering. Then, following the prayer, all who were there began to speak the Word of God with boldness. Now the apostles step forth to deliver their revealed understanding, which pertained to the role of Jesus Himself in the new Covenant economy. We are given a word about the manner in which the apostles gave their witness.

With Power

Here is a word that remains very nebulous among professing Christians. The word used here is the same word used in Romans 1:16 (*du, namij – doon-a-mis*), which describes the Gospel as “the power of God.” Lexically this word means “strength, ability, power . . . inherent power, power residing in a thing by virtue of its nature, or which a person or thing exerts or puts forth,” THAYER “ability, capacity,” UBS “power, might, authority,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “influence,” LEH Somehow, all of that tends to muddy the waters for many people.

As used in this text, the word “power” means the apostles were able to witness effectively – that is, in strict comportment with, and in fulfillment of, God’s objective for them. In particular, this means

they were able to strengthen and build up the saints with their insightful words.

Paul spoke of possessing that same kind of power. “Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction” (2 Cor 13:10). Again he wrote, “For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification, and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed” (2 Cor 10:8). Paul was emphasizing the purpose of the power, our text is emphasizing its effectiveness.

This is the only text in Acts and the Epistles that uses the phrase “great power.” This is true in every major translation KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV/RSV/ASV as well as 24 other translations. They had the ability to establish the saints – a God-given ability. Speaking with power is not shouting louder, or speaking with a tone of authority. It is speaking that yields results.

A Controversial Point

At this point I will say something that will appear very controversial and perhaps even agitating. But it is the truth, and I challenge you to weigh it in the balances of spiritual understanding and the Scriptures. Why is it that some men can preach for years, and yet those who are paying attention to them never become spiritually stable, discerning, or spiritually strong? It is because the speaker has not been given power to edify – else that is what he would be doing! If this is the case, they have usurped the office of preacher (evangelist) or teacher, for we are pointedly told that the purpose of those functions is to perfect the saints and edify the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12). On the other hand, there are preachers and teachers who deliver words that establish and mature those giving heed to them. That condition is owing to the fact that they have been given power, or the ability, to edify.

It might be countered that some have possibly been given the ability, but do not use it. In that case, they are unfaithful stewards, and the ability will be taken from them, as confirmed in the parables of the talents and the pounds.

Now, the matter the apostles witnessed with “great power” is specified. They did not speak in mere generalities, but focused upon a pivotal pillar of sound doctrine. It will have particular relevance under the circumstances.

OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

“ . . . of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus . . .” Other versions read, “the coming back of the Lord Jesus from the dead,” BBE and “that the Lord Jesus has been raised from death.” IE

Again, let me emphasize that the implications and conclusions that are resident in the Gospel cannot be discovered by human wisdom. No amount of study, even of the four Gospels themselves, will lead one to the inspired conclusions concerning resurrection life that were made known to the apostles.

Given their situation – being threatened by the religious authorities – some might have thought it appropriate to speak on being steadfast, or the role of suffering in the life of faith, etc., etc. In this circumstance, however, the apostles are filled with the Spirit, and are speaking to their brethren who are also filled with the Spirit. Their message is being directed from the throne of heaven, not by the wisdom of men.

Again, let me emphasize that the implications and conclusions that are resident in the Gospel cannot be discovered by human wisdom. No amount of study, even of the four Gospels themselves, will lead one to the inspired conclusions concerning resurrection life that were made known to the apostles. Let me mention a few of these marvelous revelations.

- In regeneration, we are united with Him "in His resurrection" (Rom 6:5).
- The desire to know the power of His resurrection dominates those living by faith (Phil 3:10).
- Jesus was declared to be "the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:4).
- We are begotten again to a living hope "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3).
- The resurrection of Christ is what validates our baptism (1 Pet 3:21).
- The resurrection of Christ validated His death, and inducted Him into His intercessory ministry (Rom 8:34).
- We are reconciled by His death, and saved by His (resurrection) life (Rom 5:10).
- He is able to save us because, being raised from the dead, He "ever lives to make intercession" for us (Heb 7:25).
- The blood of the cross obtained its effectiveness when, after His resurrection, Jesus entered into heaven with it (Heb 9:12).
- The risen Christ, having entered into heaven, is now appearing in the presence of God "for us" (Heb 9:24).
- The power employed to raise Jesus from the dead, is precisely the power that is now devoted to those in Christ (Eph 1:19-21).
- Jesus was "raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25).
- His resurrection is God's pledge that we will also be raised (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14).
- Jesus being raised from the dead, we can now be joined to Christ and bring forth fruit unto God (Rom 7:4).
- The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in believers, giving life to their mortal bodies (Rom 8:11).
- Confessing the Lord Jesus with our mouth, and believing in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, results in our salvation (Rom 10:9).
- If Christ is not raised, our faith is vain (1 Cor 15:17).
- Believers are raised up together with Christ and made to sit with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
- In His resurrection, we were "delivered from the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1:10).

Giving a powerful witness of the resurrection of Christ is not merely repeating the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead, reiterating it in varied tones and voice inflections. The resurrection of Christ is like a great net in which many perspectives of salvation are found – as illustrated above. Part of the witness of the apostles no doubt included their personal contact with the resurrected Christ, and the things that took place at that time. He did meet with them at the conclusion of the first day of the week on which He was raised (Lk 24:36-45). He appeared to them again on the next first day of the week (John 20:26-29). There was the time He appeared on the shore after some of them went fishing, and directed a great catch of fish to come into their nets (John 21:3-25). Luke tells us Jesus spent forty days speaking with the disciples "of things pertaining to the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). The apostles may have born witness to these things. However, to do so powerfully, or effectively, the effectiveness and implications of that resurrection must have been delineated. All of the disciples knew the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead. However, with the resurrection a number of marvelous realities were being experienced. These included the new birth, justification,

sanctification, reconciliation, the gift of the Holy Spirit (who was not given until Christ was glorified – John 7:39), the intercession of Jesus, and the pledge of our own resurrection from the dead.

Paul spoke of his compelling desire to “know,” or participate in, “the power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10). He knew that we “shall be saved by His life” (Rom 5:10). That is not the life Jesus lived before He died. To be sure, that was an impeccable holy life, thoroughly pleasing to the God of heaven. Yet, that life is not the means through which we are saved. Christ’s holy life was in order to make Him a suitable sacrifice. It was not the means through which our sins were remitted and we are set right with God. When Jesus dwelt among men, He “went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). But that is not the means by which we are being saved! We are being saved “by His life” – His resurrection life. That is the life by which we are begotten again – God has “begotten again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:3). He “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

The “power of the resurrection” is particularly comforting to those who are experiencing opposition and persecution. This is because it testifies of coming back power – coming back from the ultimate adverse experience in the body – death. All other bodily circumstances are secondary to that, and are thus comprehended in the greater experience of death itself.

This precise point is a matter of apostolic doctrine, and may very well have been expounded at this point. Paul said it this way. “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; . . . what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all” (Eph 1:18-23).

Therefore, in declaring the resurrection of Christ, liberating truth was brought to bear upon their immediate circumstance. The power of God was fully capable of delivering these brethren from what appeared to be impossible circumstances! They had access to the very same power that raised Jesus from the dead. In Fact, that power was toward them – intentionally focused on them by the God who raises the dead.

There are several pertinent things to be seen in the marvelous prayer just cited.

- That there are certain things godly leaders strive for the people to have: “. . . my prayers that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ may give unto you.”
- That all spiritually profitable knowledge springs from knowing, or being acquainted with, God Himself: “the spirit of wisdom and revelation **These early believers were able to grasp these things, deriving comfort and strength from them. Their view of the things of God had not been contaminated with the wisdom of men and thinking that springs**

in the knowledge of Him.”

- The greatness of the power that is “toward us” transcends all human, or natural, wisdom: “may give unto you . . . that ye may know.”
- That the perception of this wisdom and knowledge requires the opening of the eyes of our understanding: “the eyes of your understanding being enlightened.”
- That God alone can open these eyes: “That the God and Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you.”

- That the opening of these eyes permits certain existing realities to be known, or discerned: “that ye may know what is . . . ”

- That the magnitude of the power that is particularly for those who believe must be perceived: “what is the exceeding greatness of the power to us-ward who believe.”

- That this is an active power, not rooted in history, but in Divine activity: “according to the working of His mighty power, which he wrought.”

- That the power was demonstrated in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and His enthronement at the right hand of God: “which He wrought in Christ when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in heavenly places.”

If this kind of power is devoted to working in, and in the behalf of, those who believe, what possible circumstance can put those people – those who believe – beyond the reach of that power? If death, “the last enemy,” was impotent before this power, what of all of the experiences that derive their power and effectiveness from death?

These early believers were able to grasp these things, deriving comfort and strength from them. Their view of the things of God had not been contaminated with the wisdom of men and thinking that springs out of the flesh . It is apparent from the results that followed that their faith took hold of the truth of Christ’s resurrection, associating it with the threatenings that had been hurled at them. They knew such men had no ultimate power over Jesus. He came back from the lowest possible depths of human experience. Through faith, spiritual reasoning will now move the disciples to a conclusion. They will be able to triumph over this threatened assault on their faith – one that came from religious authorities.

GREAT GRACE

“ 33b . . . and great grace was upon them all.”

The language of the text will sound strange to those who have been immersed in the institutional church. A highly profitable assembly is generally measured by the number of the people who were there, a hearty response to some financial appeal, or perhaps the honoring of some elite member. It will generally pertain to something the people have done. However, in this text, it will be measured by what came upon the people from the Lord.

GREAT GRACE

“ . . . and great grace . . . ” Other versions read, “ abundant grace ,” NASB “much grace,” NIV “God’s abundant good will ” GWN “ “there was warm fellowship ,” IE “there was warm fellowship among all the believers,” WILLIAMS “God greatly blessed His followers,” CEV “and great grace (loving-kindness and favor and goodwill) rested richly,” AMPLIFIED and “God poured rich blessings .” GNB “ among all the believers ,” LIVING

Exactly what is “great grace?” For some, the very expression is foreign. In the minds of many, greatness is generally associated with human achievement. We hear of a “great person,” “a great business man,” “a great athlete,” or a “great mechanic.” Someone may say that had a “great day,” or a “great time.” But what does “great grace” mean?

Keep in mind that this is traceable to two things: (1) A powerful prayer that was answered, and (2) A powerful word that was spoken. Both of them were God glorifying and Christ honoring.

“Great”

The word “great” comes from the Greek word **mega,la** (mega-la), which lexically means, “large, abundant, and extraordinary,” THAYER “extensive.” LOUW-NIDA It speaks of something superlative, and outside of the bounds of normality. If we speak of a great distance, it is very long . A great light is very bright . A great weight is very heavy . A great number is very high in count . A great trial is severe and unusual. A great noise is very loud . Something that is “great” goes beyond the standard, exceeds the norm, and transcends the familiar.

“Grace”

This is a word that, by its very nature, is worthy of much consideration. This is the first time it is mentioned in the book of Acts. It is only mentioned four times in the Gospels.

- The grace of God was upon the growing young Jesus (Luke 2:40).
- When Jesus came into the world, He was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).
- It is “of His fulness that we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16).
- Grace and truth “came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).

By way of comparison, “grace” is mentioned 126 times from Acts through Revelation. This confirms the marvelous effect of Christ’s death, burial, resurrection, and enthronement.

As to the technical meaning of the word, it comes from the Greek word **ka,ri** (kar-is), which is rather nebulous in its lexical meaning. Generally, it means “good-will, loving-kindness, favor,” THAYER “grace, kindness, mercy, goodwill,” UBS and “favor, grace, gracious care or help, goodwill.” GINGRICH Theological definitions assigned to this word by contextual considerations include: “contains the idea of kindness which bestows upon one what he has not deserved . . . pre-eminently of that kindness by which God bestow: favors even upon the ill-deserving, and grants to sinners the pardon of their offences, and bids them accept of eternal salvation through Christ . . . the merciful kindness by which God, exerting his holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to the exercise of the Christian virtues.” THAYER Although very true, these contextual considerations are interpretive, not definitive.

- The favor or good will of God is contrasted to rendering a reward that is due. Thus, a person who earns what he receives from God does not receive it by grace: “Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace , but of debt” (Rom 4:4).
- The basis for obtaining grace is faith, which is itself the gift of God. Thus it is written, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace . . .” (Rom 4:16).
- Grace is associated with the gift of righteousness, which is contrasted with the effects of Adam’s offence. “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace , which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many” (Rom 5:15).
- Grace is known for its superior and abounding qualities. “Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound ” (Rom 5:20).
- Being under grace is contrasted with being under Law. “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14).
- Something received by grace is contrasted with something received by works. “ And if by grace, then is it no more of works : otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom 11:6).
- Rather than grace being associated with the works of men, it is connected with the

purpose of God. “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9).

All of this leaves the matter of defining grace academically extremely difficult. If you research lexicons, dictionaries, and encyclopedias on the subject of grace, you will be struck with the difficulty men have defining it. They draw some very proper conclusions, but leave us grasping when it comes to a technical definition. For example, the English word “grace” is defined as “unmerited divine assistance given humans for their regeneration or sanctification b : a virtue coming from God c : a state of sanctification enjoyed through divine grace.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER Technically, that is a use of the word, not a definition of it. The definition is lexically brief: “good-will, loving-kindness, favor.”

Briefly stated, the grace of God speaks of God’s basic inclination to bless, or benefit – something He does because of desire, not obligation. With this in mind, “great grace” equates to abundant favor, copious benefits, and unusual profit resulting from the presence of the Lord. It is God lavishing His care upon men, as He did upon His Son, in whom He was “well pleased” (2 Pet 1:17).

What Does This Tell Us?

First, this confirms that the concept of a God of favor and good will is foreign to human thought. That is precisely why it is so difficult to explain “grace.” The traditional definition of grace is unmerited favor. That very definition assumes that the basic Divine tendency is to give men what they deserve. Grace, in such a case, is a departure from the normal Divine reaction. This, however, is a distorted view. The basic Divine inclination is to show favor and goodwill. Sin, however, brought forth the wrath of God, for it clashed with His holiness. It is not that God wants to condemn us, but has grace on us instead. Rather, He wants to show us favor, and now He can do so because of Jesus, and by means of our faith, which we receive from Him. In other words, the whole purpose for the salvation of God is in order that He might do what He wants to do – show forth His grace.

Under the Law

On Mount Sinai, God revealed to Moses His inclination to show favor: “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex 34:7).

Note that although the Divine hatred for sin is clearly made known, yet His gracious disposition is mentioned first and most extensively. Even so, those living under the Law were not left with this view of the Lord. All their lifetime they lived “in fear of death” (Heb 2:15). Every time the Lord’s glory was seen, the people feared and quaked (Ex 20:18-19; Deut 5:5; 9:19). Even the appearance of an angel from God caused great dread to come on the people (Judges 13:21-22).

Heathen Religions

This inability of natural men to discern this primary Divine trait of grace is also seen in all heathen religions. They depict God as basically angry, requiring that men do something to appease His wrath. This is a universal perception.

Things Grace Presumes

There are a number of things presumed by the New Covenant experience of God’s grace.

- That a satisfactory atonement for sin has been accomplished.

- That sin has been put away from Divine consideration.
- That the person has been reconciled to God.
- That a fundamental peace between God and man has been made.
- That faith is found in the recipient of the grace.
- That God finds delight in the one receiving the grace.
- That a suitable Representative of redeemed humanity is sitting at God's right hand.

Where these, and similar, traits are found, grace can be dispensed: that is, God's favor, good will, and loving-kindness can be righteously lavished upon the people.

What This Means

All of this means that at the time of our text, the people had a heightened awareness of the Person of God and the effectiveness of the work of Jesus Christ. To put it another way, their faith was strong. Their prayer had yielded results in them that was bringing glory to God, and he was kindly disposed toward them. Rather than provoking the Lord, as some in Corinth would do later (1 Cor 10:22), they were walking "worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God" (Col 1:10).

In this, the threats that had been leveled against them no longer had any effect upon them. Like the righteous do, they became "bold as a lion" (Pro 28:1), confidently and insightfully speaking forth the word of God without being intimidated in the slightest by their enemies.

If "great grace" was found among them, then the things grace brings must have been abounding. If it is true that we have "believed through grace" (Acts 18:27), then believing must have risen to unprecedented measures, pushing all doubt and fear from their presence. If it is true that God has "given to us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace" (2 Thess 2:16), then enriching comfort must be been poured forth in copious measures, and hope must have risen to prominence. In this, the threats that had been leveled against them no longer had any effect upon them. Like the righteous do, they became "bold as a lion" (Pro 28:1), confidently and insightfully speaking forth the word of God without being intimidated in the slightest by their enemies. They were thus enabled to boldly conduct their lives toward God in a hostile world and a threatening religious environment. Paul spoke of this posture when he wrote, "For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward" (2 Cor 1:12).

One other thing that accompanies "great grace" is great Divine tutelage. This perspective is encapsulated in the word declared in Titus 2:11-12. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 11-2:13).

This being the case, a great outpouring of grace would result in a keen discernment of both good and evil, together with a undiminished preference for righteousness and an abhorrence for ungodliness. There would also be a corresponding fervent looking for, and anticipation of, the return of the Lord Jesus. The presence or absence of such virtues testifies to the presence or absence of the grace of God.

WAS UPON THEM ALL

" . . . was upon them all." Other versions read, " was with all of them," GWN "among all the believers," IE "and a wonderful spirit of generosity pervaded the whole fellowship." PHILLIPS

This confirms there were more at this meeting than the apostles. First, as I have mentioned before, we have no text of Scripture that clearly states that the apostles gathered together alone following Christ's ascension into heaven.

There are frequent references to "all" in the book of Acts. None of them clearly indicate they are limited to the apostles, and there is no reason to be bound to such a conclusion here.

- "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14).

- "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1).

- "And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4).

- "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses" (Acts 2:32).

- "And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44).

- "And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

- "And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all" (Acts 4:33).

- "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

- "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch" (Acts 5:12).

- "And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles" (Acts 8:1).

I conclude that "great grace" all of the church – particularly those who prayed. That great outpouring of Divine favor followed the powerful witness of the resurrection of Christ by the apostles. It is as though God was well pleased to hear His Son extolled, for He Himself had exalted Him high above all things.

Finally, "great grace" is for the whole church, not just a segment of it. It was the apostle John himself, who is a central figure in our text, that wrote, "And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). Concerning that "fulness" it is also written "the church, which is his body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:22-23). The church, therefore, is the intended repository for the fulness of Christ Jesus, which includes "great grace."

If we desire "great grace" to be upon the church today, we must be about speaking the things that honor Jesus and point to His glorious triumph over ever foe of man: the devil, the world, corrupt religion, death, and the grave. We must not allow anything to upstage the risen and exalted Christ – particularly a message that centers in the church. When the Gospel message becomes corrupt, great grace will not be conferred upon the people.

FERVENT BROTHERLY LOVE

" 34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold . . . "

At that time, a little over thirty years later, considerable carnality had crept into the church through false teachers. That necessitated an exhortation to have fervent love for one another.

Peter, also prominent in our text, wrote to scattered believers, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22). And again, “And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves” (1 Pet 4:8). Again he wrote, “And beside this, giving all diligence, add . . . to godliness brotherly kindness” (2 Pet 1:7). At that time, a little over thirty years later, considerable carnality had crept into the church through false teachers. That necessitated an exhortation to have fervent love for one another.

James, doubtless among the number of our text, also had to speak about the matter of fervent charity and brotherly kindness, being compelled to do so by the miserable state of those to whom he wrote. “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone” (James 2:15-17). But he did not have to speak in this manner on the occasion of which we are reading.

John delivered a similar exhortation to those receiving his first epistle. “But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18). In our text, however, no such exhortation was required.

Even though there may not have been full maturity in these saints, yet they were able to participate in a level of spiritual life that is scarcely seen in our time. It was their purity of heart and total enthrallment with the Savior that moved them in this direction, for this is the manner of newness of life. They had crucified the flesh, as we are told those in Christ do, and therefore were more mindful of one another. “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).

It is important that we see why the following conditions were found within the early church. They did not represent a major achievement, preceded by sundry exhortations. It was rather owing to two primary causes.

- They had severed their association with the world, having effectually “escaped” its corrupting influence (2 Pet 2:2).
- Unlike the Corinthians, they were experientially “reconciled to God,” putting them in harmony with Him (2 Cor 5:20).

I cannot overemphasize that the present state of the church is not a normal one. What we have on our hands is a church at large that is not the intended outcome of Christ's atoning death. Generally speaking, the modern church cannot appropriately be described as the bride of Christ who is making herself ready for her Husband. However, this is the description of those who will be “forever with the Lord.” As it is written, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honor to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready” (Rev 19:7).

The church in our text is not the pattern church, it is the normal church – the one that is living by faith and walking in the Spirit. That is what accounts for the conditions of which we now read. This is the kind of thing the Holy Spirit does in those who do not quench, grieve, or resist Him (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19; Acts 7:51).

NONE THAT LACKED

“Neither was there any among them that lacked . . .” Other versions read, “For there was not a

needy person among them,” NASB “For neither was there any one in want among them,” DARBY “None of them needed anything,” GWN “And no one among them was destitute,” MRD “None of their members was ever in want,” NJB “no poverty,” LIVING and “Nor was there a destitute or needy person among them.” AMPLIFIED

We know that at least one member of the early church was formerly a beggar. It was the man around which all of this controversy was initiated (Acts 3:2,3,10). But he was not begging now! Luke is very specific in his statement, going out of his way to reveal the condition that existed among those early followers of Jesus. “None of their members was ever in want.” NJB “None of them!” That is an arresting statement.

This text does not mean that everyone divested themselves of all property, bringing the proceeds to a common place for equal distribution among the brethren. This was not the practice of communism, as ordinarily perceived. Rather, this was done from time to time, and on an as needed basis.

This text explodes the “prosperity” myth. These brethren did not lack because they owned things, or was blessed by the Lord with an abundance, as some allege, saying that this is involved in being freed from the curse of the Law. Rather, it will be confirmed, no one lacked because they became recipients of mercy from the rest of the brethren. That is wholly a different matter than obtaining personal wealth.

If the “prosperity” gospel was true, this is the time when it would have been demonstrated, for the church was pure. Now, the Spirit moves Luke to provide an explanation for this remarkable circumstance.

AS MANY AS WERE POSSESSORS

“ . . . for as many as were possessors of lands or houses. . . .” Other versions read, “for all who were owners of land or houses,” NASB “owned property or houses,” NAB “possessors of fields or houses,” YLT and “owners of farms or houses .” WILLIAMS

Not everyone had lands or houses, therefore we read of those who did, which distinguished them from the others in this regard. This again contradicts the “prosperity” doctrine that, as of 2007, is sweeping the church world. Here was the church in its purest state, yet of all the grace that was showered upon them (and “great grace was upon them all”) that grace did not include an increase of property and possessions.

Being moved along by the Holy Spirit, Luke provides an explanation for why not a single person lacked among them. This is the manner in which the lord worked within the body of Christ.

SOLD THEM AND BROUGHT THE PRICES

“ . . . sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold” Other versions read, “sold them and brought the proceeds,” NKJV “would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales,” NASB “From time to time . . . sold them and brought the money from the sales,” NIV “exchanging them for money, took the price of them,” BBE “Selling them, brought the price of what was sold,” DARBY “would sell them , bring the proceeds of the sale,” NAB “were selling them and bringing the proceeds from the sales,” NET and “proceeded to sell them , and one by one they brought (gave back) the amount received from the sales” AMPLIFIED

This text does not mean that everyone divested themselves of all property, bringing the proceeds to a common place for equal distribution among the brethren. This was not the practice of communism, as ordinarily perceived. Rather, this was done from time to time, and on an as needed

basis. When any of the brethren, particularly those who were from other parts of the world, ran out of needed resources, those with lands and houses rose to the occasion, selling some of their possessions in order to obtain the funds required to meet the need of other brethren.

All of this is against the backdrop of these brethren being very real “pilgrims and strangers” in the world (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 13:14). They did not love the world, or the things that are in the world. Unlike in later times, these brethren did not need to be exhorted, “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15). This is what being born again does in a person. Only the intrusion of “the flesh,” in which “dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18), can alter this frame of mind.

These brethren were also aware that their citizen was in heaven. Therefore, what they had upon the earth, they held lightly.

This outpouring of brotherly kindness was not a response to a commandment. Nor, indeed, was it their reaction to an exhortation. This was a response of newness of life to a very real need among the brethren. This is a most excellent example of loving one another fervently, and of having no attachment to this present evil world. It reflects priorities that are not common today.

As ought to be apparent, this is not something that can be legislated. Nor, indeed, is it intended to be a precedent bound on all believers. That is not the nature of the New Covenant.

When genuine spiritual life is nurtured, this is the kind of thing that will happen. There will be a holy spontaneity when “needs” arise among the saints.

SUBMISSIVE GIVING

There is a willing submissiveness revealed here that is most refreshing to ponder. Personal humility is perceived, as well as giving honor to those to whom honor is due. All of this flowed out from those upon whom “great grace” had been lavished because of sound and foundational preaching.

“35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.”

There is a willing submissiveness revealed here that is most refreshing to ponder. Personal humility and sacrifice are perceived, as well as giving honor to those to whom honor is due. All of this flowed out from those upon whom “great grace” had been lavished because of sound and foundational preaching. Herein a great deal can be perceived.

LAID THEM AT THE APOSTLES FEET

“And laid them down at the apostles' feet . . .” Other versions read, “and put them at the apostles' feet,” NIV “to the apostles,” GWN “and placed it at the feet of the legates,” MRD “placing them at the apostles' feet,” NET “to present it to the apostles,” NJB “and bring the money to the apostles,” NLT “were laying them at the feet of the apostles,” YLT “and gave it to the apostles,” LIVING and “and to put it at the disposal of the apostles.” WILLIAMS

There was a recognition of the leaders God had appointed. Doctrinally, we are told God placed the apostles “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). At the first, this was made clear by what they did as well as what was said of them. From the very first, those in Christ were said to have “continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine” (Acts 2:42). There was not competitiveness at that time, as when Korah and his rebels objected to Moses' leadership (Num 16:1-50), or when Moses' own brother and sister challenged him by asking if God had spoken to Israel only by him (Num 12:1-16). In both cases, God responded to the insolence of those objecting to the leaders He established. Korah and all of his

followers were swallowed up as the earth opened wide and received them into an early grave. Miriam was stricken with leprosy in the other incident, being healed only when Moses prayed for her.

Later in the history of the church, some will dare to doubt the apostles. Some at Corinth did not respect Paul as an apostle, even doubting that he was one (1 Cor 9:1-3; 2 Cor 12:12-13). Diotrophes, one of the leaders of the church toward the close of the first century, did not receive John the apostle, even casting out of the church those who did (3 John 1:9). But there was none of that in our text. It was a time in which the church was enjoying purity, which is the result of real life from God.

While this was not intended to be a permanent arrangement, as the next chapter will confirm, everyone seemed to recognize that the apostles had been endued with much wisdom. It is apparent that one of the enduements given to the apostles was that of how to wisely commence a needed practice. In other words, they knew how to employ the truth of the Gospel in practical ways, and in usual times.

The thing that is refreshing here is that their capacity in the church was recognized and honored. All of this accrued to the glory of Christ, who had made the apostolic appointments. The respect these brethren had for the apostles was not due to the office they held. Rather, it was because the people themselves were subject to Christ in all things. That is why they could do this. On the surface, it may appear as though the people had confidence in the wisdom of the apostles. And, indeed, there probably is an element of truth to that. However, speaking more precisely and in keeping with the life of faith, their faith was in the Christ who had appointed these men to their office.

DISTRIBUTION WAS MADE TO EVERY MAN

“ . . . and distribution was made unto every man . . .” Other versions read, “and they distributed to each one,” NKJV “and they would be distributed to each,” NASB “and it was distributed to anyone,” NIV “for distribution to everyone,” BBE “to give to those,” NLT “each person was given,” LIVING and “then distribution was continuously made to everyone.” WILLIAMS

No one was intentionally excluded from the distribution. There were no individuals or groups that received special consideration because of their age, gender, or social status.

This was a managed distribution. They did not simply place all of the goods in a kind of warehouse, with each taking what they said they required. The apostles themselves made the distribution, employing their God-given wisdom to do so. They would also make distribution as those who themselves did not love the world, were not covetous, were content with what they themselves had, and were consciously strangers and pilgrim in the world. That would dictate how they assessed “need.”

ACCORDING AS HE HAD NEED

“ . . . according as he had need.”

Other versions read, “as anyone had need,” NKJV “according as anyone might have need,” DARBY “anyone who needed it,” GWN “the things he needed,” LIVING and “in proportion to his need.” WILLIAMS

The Spirit makes a point of accenting the basis for the distribution – “need.” Precisely what is “need?” The Greek word from which this is translated means “necessity, need . . . what is absolutely necessary for life,” THAYER “necessities of life,” FRIBERG Dispelling any doubts about the meaning of this term, Jesus said, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat ? or, What shall we drink ? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things . But seek ye first the kingdom

of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:31-33).

Paul referred to these as “necessary uses,” or “pressing needs” NASB (Tit 3:14). “Need” is also to be understood within the framework of our Lord’s words. They follow immediately after the above text. “Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt 6:34). Just as the traveling Israelites were not permitted to hoard up manna, so these brethren were not given license to accumulate for themselves from the general storehouse, or on a long-range basis. This, of course, requires a keen sensitivity to the tenuous nature of life in the flesh. We simply do not know what tomorrow will bring – or what a day may bring forth.

All of this was done in consideration of those with “need.” There was no rule against having property or goods. That is what makes this incident all the more remarkable. The brethren were content with this arrangement – at least for the time being. They considered life in Christ Jesus to be superior to any life that is related to this world.

Fulfillment of a Principle

There is a Divine manner made known here that is taught elsewhere. It pertains to the way in which God works among His people. Because he had to deal with lethargic spirits in Corinth, Paul made special mention of this Divine manner. “But to have equality [share and share alike], your surplus over necessity at the present time going to meet their want and to equalize the difference created by it, so that [at some other time] their surplus in turn may be given to supply your want . Thus there may be equality, As it is written, He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little did not lack. [Exod. 16:18]” AMPLIFIED (2 Cor 8:14-15).

The principle is this: a surplus is what is used to provide assistance for those who lack. It was first lived out when Israel gathered manna during their wilderness trek. Every family gathered according to the number in their tent. This included all adults and all children. Each person was allowed one omer of manna. As the food was prepared and set before them, everyone ate according to their appetite. When the day’s meals were completed, everything equaled out. Those with a larger appetite ate more, and those with a smaller one ate less. Everyone had their required sustenance. This we read, “And when they did mete it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating” (Ex 16:18).

Paul then applied that principle to the Corinthians in regards to the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem. In Jerusalem the brethren had little. In Corinth they had an excess. That excess provided for the less fortunate brethren in the mother church.

This is the kind of giving that took place in our text.. Everyone thought in terms of what they needed, not what they wanted. No one was reduced to poverty by giving, for there was no one among them that lacked. Those who did have lands and possessions felt moved to sell them as a need arose among the brethren, laying the proceeds at the apostles’ feet for distribution to the needy.

It ought to be obvious to all that this kind of arrangement cannot be accomplished by means of Law. It cannot be replicated by means of a convenient and heartless procedure.

AN EXTRAORDINARY MAN SURFACES

“ 36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.”

The environment of the early church was conducive to the revelation of good and godly men. It is

written, “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18). One of the great consequences of a dead church is that righteous men do not rise to the surface within it. If there are any such men present in such a place, they remain buried under the rubble of mediocrity. This is because there really is no perceived need for them. Consequently, they are ignored in the preference of those who have little or nothing profitable to offer. Thus, a Jezebel could rise to a place of prominence in Thyatira simply because the people allowed her to do so (Rev 2:20-25). Those who are of a godly temperament and possess some measure of insight know the effects of a lukewarm and indifferent assembly upon them. If they are recognized at all, it is only a token recognition that is couched in an institutional setting. I am aware of no small number of gifted and knowledgeable believers who attend churches where they feel like a fish out of water. There appears to be no perceived need of them in such environs.

But this was not the case with the brethren in our text. There was a spiritual surrounding there. People resorted first to the Lord, and sought grace to do his will, even in the face of growing opposition. In this case, a hard circumstance caused a gracious spirit to become known.

A Godly Environment

A godly environment will cause great men and women of God to surface. It is one of the great benefits of brethren dwelling together in unity. It is often through such souls that the Lord “commands the blessing,” bringing comfort, edification, and all manner of advantage to hungering and thirsting souls. Contrary to what is being taught by many today, a spiritual environment of this kind cannot be produced by outward exercises or disciplines. People who have been living in practical attachment to this world cannot be suddenly changed into spiritual people by singing a few choruses, or a prayer beseeching the Lord to come among them. Legitimate spiritual change is wrought by the Holy Spirit while people live beholding the face of Jesus, considering His Person and ministry (2 Cor 3:18). If that has not been the manner of the people outside of the assembly, it cannot be their manner in the gathering of the saints. Transformation does not come from being in the assembly, but by steadfastly beholding the face of the Lord Jesus. That is a matter of revelation.

Growth is not from flesh to faith, but from faith to faith (Rom 1:17). Men do not make a quantum leap from being swallowed up with the cares of the world to being strong in faith, giving glory to God. As in the assembly we are considering, the people entered full of faith. They heard a report of threatening being made against Peter and John, and instantly knew what to do and where to go. Having prayed powerfully, heaven answered by filling them with the Holy Spirit. Then they all spoke the Word of God boldly and insightfully. The meeting rose to an even higher pitch when the apostles stepped forth and powerfully gave witness to the resurrection of Christ. It is then stated that “great grace was upon them all.” This is a sterling example of going from “strength to strength” (Psa 84:7), “faith to faith” (Rom 1:17), and “glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18). It is no wonder that a man of the caliber of Barnabas surfaced during this time.

A MAN WHO WAS SURNAMED

“And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation) . . .” Other versions read, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement),” NKJV “And Joseph . . . who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means, Son of Encouragement), NASB “And Joseph, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas (which is, being interpreted, Son of exhortation),” ASV “And Joseph, who was given by the Apostles the name of Barnabas (the sense of which is, Son of comfort),” BBE “Joseph . . . The apostles called him Barnabas, which means ‘ a person who encourages ,’” GWN “For instance, there was Joseph (the one the apostles nicknamed ‘Barnabas, the encourager ,’” LIVING “One of the believers was named Joseph. The apostles called him Barnabas. (This name means ‘a person who encourages others’), IE and “ It was at this time that Barnabas (the name, meaning son of comfort, given by the apostles to Joseph.” PHILLIPS

Apostolic priorities are seen in the surnaming of Barnabas – “the son of consolation,” encouragement, or comfort. This was the ministry this man had to the saints of God, for no others can be truly consoled, comforted, or encouraged in the name of the Lord. This kind of comfort is of particular significance to God.

The name “Joses” is understood by some to be the Greek form of “Joseph,” although that is difficult to substantiate, for both “Joses” and “Joseph” are represented by unique Greek words – not the same word (Joses – **Viwsh/j**), and Joseph – **Viwsh.f**). The name Joses means “exalted.”

There are three men bearing this name in the New Covenant Scriptures.

- One of the brothers of Jesus (Matt 13:55; Mk 6:3).
- A brother of a man named “James the less,” whose mother was Mary, who was distinguished from our Lord’s mother (Mk 15:40,47; Matt 27:56).
- The distinguished man of our text.

It is said that the apostles gave this man a “surname,” which stands for a title. These surnames were given to either distinguish the man from others having the same name, or to emphasize some aspect of his character or ministry. Other examples of surnaming include the following.

- Jesus “surnamed” Simon “Peter,” which means “a rock” (Mk 3:16; Acts 10:16).
- Because of their apparent volatility, Jesus “surnamed” James and John Boanerges, which is, “The sons of thunder” (Mk 3:17).
- Judas was surnamed “Iscariot,” meaning “man of Kerioth,” a town in the souther part of Judah.
- One of the men selected as qualified to fill the office vacated by Judas was “Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus,” meaning Just one (Acts 1:23).
- There was also a man chosen by the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send with Paul and Barnabas, “namely Judas surnamed Barsabas,” which means the son of Sabas (Acts 15:22).

Apostolic priorities are seen in the surnaming of Barnabas – “the son of consolation,” encouragement, or comfort. This was the ministry this man had to the saints of God, for no others can be truly consoled, comforted, or encouraged in the name of the Lord. This kind of comfort is of particular significance to God. Of old time He said through Isaiah, “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” (Isa 40:1). Again God said of His own ministry to Israel, “Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak comfortably unto her” (Hosea 2:14).

Thus the apostles duly noted Barnabas, and dubbed him “son of consolation,” because of his ministry to the people of God. They did not identify him with his travels, any church he had founded, or the number of people he had made disciples. None of those things are wrong, but they are not worthy of great Kingdom distinction. In the end, Jesus will assess “all nations” upon the basis of how they treated His brethren, the saints of God : “I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. . . Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.” The former will “inherit the kingdom,” and the latter will “go away into everlasting punishment” (Matt 25:32-46). Therefore it should not surprise us that the apostles assessed Barnabas upon the basis of what he did for the children of God.

We also know that Barnabas was also a prophet and teacher, as stated in Acts 13:1: “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas . . .” He was of such significance at that time that while the brethren there “ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts

13:2). It is said that they were “sent out by the Holy Spirit” NKJV (13:4). This man is mentioned twenty-four times in the book of Acts (4:36; 9:27; 11:22,25,30; 12:25; 13:1,2,7,43,46,50; 14:12,14,20; 15:2 12,22,25,35,36,37,39). His name is mentioned more than any of the twelve apostles, with the single exception of Peter (by “Peter” 57 times, and by “Simon” 5 times). Barnabas is also described as “a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith” (Acts 11:24)

BARNABAS, A MAN FROM OUT OF TOWN

“ . . . a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus . . .” Other versions read, “A Levite of Cyprian birth,” NASB “A Levite from Cyrus,” NIV “a Levite, a native of Cyrus,” NRSV “a Levite, a man of Cyprus by race,” ASV “a descendant of Levi, had been born on the island of Cyprus,” GWN and “He was from the tribe of Levi and came from the island of Cyprus.” NLT

In stating the natural identity of Barnabas, Luke first associates him with Israel, the chosen people, then with his native country. He was a Levite, that is, of the tribe and lineage of Levi, from which the priestly order was taken. However, he was a faithful Levite, and not like the one Jesus depicted as passing by a wounded Samaritan (Lk 10:32).

He was also from the Island of Cyprus, an island that is one hundred and forty miles long, and varies in width from one to five miles. Coincidentally, this was the first place Barnabas and Saul went to preach after they were sent out by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:4-13). According to Pliny, the island was separated from Syria by an ancient earthquake. Ib. 50:2. c. 88 According to historians this city was “Notorious for its licentious worship of Venus, or the Assyrian Astarte.” FAUSSET’S Another resource says of this island, “The Pagans worshiped Astarte (Venus), in a licentious manner.” SMITH’S BIBLE DICTIONARY Yet, here was a man who remained godly, though a native of a godless environment. He was unlike those whose love, because iniquity abounded, “waxed cold” (Matt 24:12). Certainly he is a noble example for our generation. Like Jesus, and in his own measure, he was like “a root out of a dry ground” (Isa 53:2).

WHAT THIS MAN DID

“ . . . Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the

Being a godly man, and recognizing the role of the apostles, Barnabas placed the proceeds at their feet, to be used as they deemed proper. These were Jesus’ hand-picked and appointed men, with duly sanctioned authority for directing the church.

apostles' feet.” Other versions read, “and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet,” NASB “sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet,” NIV “He had some land . He sold it and turned the money over to the apostles,” GWN “He owned a piece of land and he sold it and brought the money and presented it to the apostles,” NJB “He was one of those who sold a field he owned and brought the money to the apostles for distribution to those in need,” LIVING “sold the farm he had and brought the money and put it at the disposal of the apostles,” WILLIAMS and “Sold a field which belonged to him and brought the sum of money and laid it at the feet of the apostles .” AMPLIFIED

Barnabas was one of several who did this, divesting himself of earthly possessions for the sake of the people of God. We do not know where this piece of land was located – whether in Cyprus or Judea, where the disciples were at the time of our text. However, wherever it was located, it required some inconvenience to sell it and obtain liquid assets that could be used for the support of needy brethren. There is no word about how Barnabas went about doing this. I do not doubt that this is owing to the human tendency to systematize and emulate others. We are only told that he sold the property, and what he did with the proceeds. That kind of brevity allows us to maintain a godly focus, as the details of human involvement must be divulged with great discretion, and with godly objectives.

Being a godly man, and recognizing the role of the apostles, Barnabas placed the proceeds at their feet, to be used as they deemed proper. These were Jesus' hand-picked and appointed men, with duly sanctioned authority for directing the church.

Barnabas did not consider himself equal to them in rank, but willingly submitted to them as Christ's special servants. Whether he was the first man to sell his property, or merely one of a number of willing servants, we do not know. However, special mention is made of him because he was, like Andronicus and Junia, "of note among the apostles" (Rom 16:7). He is also noted because of his prominence throughout the first half of the marvelous record of the early church – working extensively with the beloved apostle Paul.

CONCLUSION

Up to this point in the book of Acts, we have beheld a body without "spot or wrinkle or any such thing." No false teachers, erroneous doctrines, or covetous or immoral person has surfaced. The environment has been peaceable, faith has been strong, and commitment has been consistent. From this point on, however, sundry difficulties will be faced – situations that require holy judgment, words, and action. Doctrinal challenges will be faced as well.

As I have mentioned before, it is possible to view the introduction of corruption as a kind of inevitability. In such a view, the beginning of the book of Acts, and of spiritual life itself, is perceived as a blazing fire that gradually dissipates, and eventually dies out, or remains in a perpetual smouldering state. That this is the manner of the natural order is readily acknowledged. That situation is because the curse of God is upon it – it is destined to pass away, together with all of the objects of its lusts (1 John 2:17). However, this is not the nature of spiritual life.

In Christ, the lowest point is the beginning point, as in a race that is being run. From that point, increase is the mode of the Kingdom. This is a point that must be ever set before us, lest we lapse into a carnal way of thinking.

- Speaking of those who dwell in the presence of the Lord David wrote, "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God" (Psa 84:7).

- Isaiah clearly prophesied this when he spoke of the Kingdom of the Messiah: "Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end . . . zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this" (Isa 9:7).

- Jesus said, "The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Mat 13:31-32).

- Through Paul, the Spirit said the righteousness of God, which is given to men, is revealed in a process called "faith to faith" (Rom 1:17).

- Transformation is described as a change "from one degree of glory to another" RSV (2 Cor 3:18).

- The part of us that is born again – the "inward man" – is described as being "renewed day by Day" (2 Cor 4:16).

- The aim for every believer is "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:17-19).

- The maturity of believers is declared to be coming into "the unity of the faith, and of

the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ ” (Eph 4:13).

Spiritual growth is described as going “on unto perfection ” (Heb 6:1).

Any backward motion or retrogression among believers is soundly condemned, for it contradicts the very nature of the Kingdom, dishonors King Jesus, and makes God a liar. Let there be no question about this, for the Spirit has made it abundantly plain.

- “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing , but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men” (Matt 5:13).

- “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away ” (Luke 8:13).

- “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God ” (Heb 3:12).

- “Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief” (Heb 4:11).

- “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers , ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb 5:12).

- “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him . But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition ; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:38-39).

I know that people have become accustomed to church members who do not grow, failing to advance in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Somehow they have the idea that spiritual growth is more of a luxury than a necessity – something that may be required for leaders, but certainly not for the average church member. I cannot begin to tell you the number of professing Christians I have seen and known who are not advancing toward glory. They seem to think they are holding their own, forgetting that we are advancing upwardly, not horizontally.

If a person does not grow in Christ, it is inevitable that they will fall away. That is the exact reason of the sixth chapter of Hebrews. “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection . . . For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put Him to an open shame” (Heb 6:1-6).

It is not possible for spiritual life to be maintained in a static condition. No person can fail to grow and yet be guaranteed of their acceptance with God. That is because spiritual life must be nourished to continue. Further, when it is nourished, it is its nature to grow.

Our text has exposed us to genuine life in Christ Jesus, and what occurs when people walk in the light, live by faith, and walk in the Spirit. They cannot be silenced. They will not abandon the work of the Lord. They will resort to the Lord in times of testing. They will be willing to sacrifice in the interest of their brethren. They will not hold tightly to the things of this world. Now, it only remains for each one to examine themselves on these matters.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #21

THE CASE OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

“ 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet. 3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? 4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God. 5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him. 7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. 9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. 10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband. 11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things. ” (Acts 5:1-11)

INTRODUCTION

In this text we are introduced to a pair that sharply contrasted with Barnabas, who sold some land and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. Here is a couple who appeared outwardly to follow the example of Barnabas, yet did not have his heart. In fact, they had made their hearts available to the old serpent . This is the first recorded sin within the church, and it is traced back to the working of Satan himself. Because of the

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- **CONCLUSION**

time and nature of the sin, it will be judged quickly and harshly, lest it spread further contamination within the body of Christ. Here we will be exposed to the deadly nature of sin, even though it might appear mild, with no danger of harming others – like the first sin in Eden. It will also be made quite clear how sin in any form is viewed from heaven. Additionally, we will obtain a perspective of the dispatch with which sin is to be addressed. This whole matter could never have been detected according to appearance. It had to be revealed by God – and it was.

This is the second attack against the church. The first was from without – by the Temple authorities and the Sanhedrin. The second is from within the church, through a weak section of the body. In this we are being exposed to the devil's malicious attack against the people of God. This attack is depicted in the Revelation, in which the aggressiveness and the wrath of Satan is accentuated.

THE APOCALYPTIC GOSPEL

The Revelation contains the apocalyptic Gospel. The word “apocalyptic” means a revelation that is contained in a figure that is threatening and pernicious. In the depiction of revelation, Satan is seen as attempting to destroy Christ, but being frustrated in his effort. He is then declared to have been cast out of heaven into the earth, experiencing Divine indignation. Then, he is also set forth as launching an aggressive initiative against the church of God, which is provided a haven of protection from his wrath.

• **THE TWO PARTIES IN CONFLICT.** First, the two parties in conflict are set before us. “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (Rev 12:1). This is Israel in particular, and is set forth in a figure quite similar to that of a dream given to Joseph in his youth (Gen 37:9). “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth . . .” (Rev 12:3-4). This is a portrayal of the devil, after his insurrection in heaven, during which a vast host of angels “kept not their first estate” (Jude 1:6).

Once Jesus had entered into the true holy place, and obtained eternal redemption for humanity (Heb 9:12), there as no further basis for Satan's accusations. With an Intercessor in heaven, the accuser was cast out.

THE WOMAN IS TO BRING FORTH A CHILD. The woman (Israel) is depicted as about to bring forth a child, which refers to the Messiah. “And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered” (Rev 12:2). This is the primary reason for God raising up Israel. It was the nation out of which the Savior of the world would come forth.

• **SATAN STANDS READY TO DEVOUR THE CHILD.** Having lost his position

in heaven, Satan now endeavors to stop the entrance of the Savior into the world. “. . . and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her Child as soon as it was born” (Rev 12:4). This initiative accounts for the slaughter of the innocents by Pharaoh (Ex 1:22; Acts 7:19), the string of barren women in the Messianic lineage (Gen 11:30; SARAH 25:21; REBEKAH 29:31 RACHEL), and the slaughter of the infants by Herod (Matt 2:16).

• **THE MESSIAH WAS BROUGHT FORTH.** The Christ of God was born in spite of Satan’s efforts. He completed His ministry upon earth, taking away the sins of the world in His death, and justifying men by His resurrection. He then ascended into heaven without the slightest setback by Satan. “And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne” (Rev 12:5). Thus, the prophesied purpose of God was brought to completion in exacting precision.

• **THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE PROTECTED FROM THE DEVIL.** In the interim between Christ’s ascension and His appointed return to gather the saints, the people of God are provided a hiding place from the wrath of the devil. “And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days” (Rev 12:6). The specified period is figurative of the time during which the church is targeted by the devil for persecution and destruction (Rev 11:2-3; 12:14; 13:12). 1,260 days, 42 months, and time, times, and half a time (3 ½ years) all refer to the same period of time – a time of affliction and opposition (1260/30=42 months; 42/12=3 ½).

• **WHEN JESUS ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN, AND THE RECONCILIATION WAS FINALIZED, SATAN WAS EXPELLED.** Once Jesus had entered into the true holy place, and obtained eternal redemption for humanity (Heb 9:12), there as no further basis for Satan’s accusations. With an Intercessor in heaven, the accuser was cast out. “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him” (Rev 12:7-9). This was a permanent expulsion, for the redemption was an eternal one.

Satan becomes more dangerous as his anger increases. Now, since he has been defeated by the Messiah he vainly sought to destroy, he will pick up his aggression – particularly against the people of God. He knows he does not have long to work, so he will be relentless in his efforts.

WITH SATAN’S EXPULSION FROM HEAVEN, THE DAY OF SALVATION BEGAN.

Now, with a satisfied God (Isa 53:11), the Savior seated at God’s right hand, and the expulsion of the devil from the heavenly realms, salvation was brought to men, and God’s kingdom was set up on earth, fulfilling Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 2:44; Matt 3:2; Acts 28:23,31). “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:10). Now, the Good News could be freely declared because of the satisfaction of God and the absolute frustration of the devil. A just basis for remission had not been provided that not even the devil himself could contest.

• **VICTORY OVER THE DEVIL IS NOW EXPERIENCED BY THE PEOPLE OF GOD.** Now, because of the purging of the conscience and the experience of Divine power, the people of God can triumph over their enemy . “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death” (Rev 12:11). Both the expression (“word of their testimony”) and the character (“loved not their lives unto the death”) become the means of the saints overcoming the devil.

• **THE HEAVENS REJOICE, BUT DANGER REMAINS IN THE WORLD.**

Although Satan has been expelled from heaven, he has increased his activity upon the earth, which is now a danger zone. “Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). Satan becomes more dangerous as his anger increases. Now, since he has been defeated by the Messiah he vainly sought to destroy, he will pick up his aggression – particularly against the people of God. He knows he does not have long to work, so he will be relentless in his efforts.

• **UPON REALIZING HIS UTTER DEFEAT, SATAN TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.** It appears as though Satan was caught off guard, and, speaking as a man, had to re-group. As soon as he gathered his diabolical composure, he leveled an attack against the people of God with whom the Messiah was associated. This includes believing Jews and Gentiles, but particularly the Jewish Christians at the first, before Gentiles were added in any significant numbers to the church. “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child” (Rev 12:13).

• **THE PEOPLE OF GOD ARE PROTECTED FROM THE DEVIL BY MEANS OF A SPECIAL PLACE AND SPIRITUAL NOURISHMENT.** Doctrinally, the people of God have been placed in the heavenly places, in which God has placed “all spiritual blessings” for their sustenance (Eph 1:3; 2:6). This is set forth pictorially in the Revelation. “And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent” (Rev 12:14).

• **SATAN MAKES AN EFFORT TO GAIN ACCESS TO THE SAINTS, TO REMOVE THEM FROM THEIR SAFE HABITATION .** Although he himself has been excluded from the heavenly realms he seeks to gain access to the people of God as a whole, by means of a flood – something from the world over which he is “god” (2 Cor 4:4). “And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood” (Rev 12:15).

• **SATAN IS UNSUCCESSFUL IN HIS EFFORTS, AS THE AGGREGATE PEOPLE GOD ARE GIVEN HELP.** Here, the people of God are considered as a whole, and the earth helps them. This is another way of portraying them as scattered, absorbed, as it were, into the nations. This makes it impossible for Satan to destroy them as a whole – as a “woman.” “And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth” (Rev 12:16).

• **BEING FRUSTRATED IN HIS EFFORTS TO REMOVE THE CHURCH FROM THE EARTH, SATAN TURNS HIS ATTENTION TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS.** Satan was not able to divert the church as a whole, as he was with Israel. Therefore, he seeks to introduce corruption through individuals who are a part of the church. “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17).

All of this is being lived out in our text. Within a short period of time, Jesus has ascended into heaven, been enthroned, and unseated principalities and powers that had enslaved humanity. He has then poured forth His Spirit. Within as few days, thousands have been added to the church. Efforts to bring the church down working with the Sanhedrin have been dashed to the ground, as the disciples have prayed, are now speaking the word of God with unparalleled boldness, and “great grace is upon them all.” Satan, however, has not given up, and it is not his nature to do so.

He will now try to penetrate the ranks of believers through a person, as he did when Achan coveted the spoils of the first Israelite victory in Canaan. He saw “a goodly Babylonish garment, and two

hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight,” coveted them and took them, even though he had to break the commandment of God to do so (Josh 6:18-19; 7:21). It is said of his sin, “But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel” (Josh 7:1). That sin went undetected among both the leaders and the people of Israel. As a result, an army of 3,000 Israelites were soundly defeated by an extremely small number of men from the little city of Ai, and 36 of them were killed, causing the hearts of the Israelites to “melt” (Josh 7:5).

Remarkably, the “old serpent” will use the same tactic – “covetousness” – in his attempt to bring down the church. In this, however, he is working with a people who are a new creation in Christ Jesus. They have been reconciled to God, and there is an abundant and free access to God, as well as the enjoyment of the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are hidden in Christ Jesus. He will not be able to work as covertly as he did under the Old Covenant. In this case, we ought not expect the results to be the same as they were with Israel.

A CERTAIN MAN AND HIS WIFE

“ 5:1 But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2 And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet.”

The time is at the beginning of the New Covenant period, in which the saved were occupying new territory – the “heavenly places.” The circumstance is much like that of Israel when they began its occupation of the promised land. There had already been a great triumph in the adding of 3,000, and then 5,000 believers to the body of Christ. That paralleled the occupation of the city of Jericho. People had experienced a great outpouring of the Spirit upon praying for boldness. Believers are speaking the Word of God with boldness, and great grace is upon them all. Alas, however, we now face the revelation of some corruption among them. This is nothing less than a manifestation of Satan’s working. It is like a menacing flood sent forth by him to lure the church out of its hiding place – away from spiritual nourishment into the world.

The circumstance is much like that of Israel when they began its occupation of the promised land. There had already been a great triumph in the adding of 3,000, and then 5,000 believers to the body of Christ. That paralleled the occupation of the city of Jericho.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA SOLD A POSSESSION

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession . . .” Other versions read, “sold a piece of property,” NIV “got money for his property,” BBE “sold his field,” MRD “sold some property” LIVING “sold a farm of his,” MONTGOMERY and “sold some property that belonged to them.” GNB

Perhaps the action of Barnabas (4:36-37) provoked this deed. The fact that Barnabas had received special attention by the apostles might also have played a role in this. If so, neither his person nor his deed were seen correctly.

This is the only place in all of Scripture that Ananias and Sapphira are mentioned. In the book of Acts, there are two other men with the name Ananias. The first was a righteous man chosen by God to go to Saul of Tarsus, in order that he might receive his sight, be filled with the Holy Spirit, and be called into the apostleship (Acts 9:10-17; 22:12). The second was a high priest before whom Paul the apostle once stood. This is the priest who commanded that Paul be smitten on the mouth (Acts 23:2; 14:1).

Ananias and Sapphira are like several others concerning which only their transgression is known. Among the others are, Judas, Alexander the coppersmith, Hymanaeus, Philetus, Diotrephes, and others. This circumstance confirms these people are examples to be duly noted. It is possible for an individual to be known only for the iniquity they do – even people who were associated with the church, as the example before us corroborates.

Although this verse does not specify what the “possession” was, the third verse tells us it was a piece of land. Coincidentally this is the same kind of possession Barnabas had sole – “land” (Acts 4:37). To this point, the deed seems very commendable – that is, if we judge according to appearance. The Spirit, however, divulges a condition that will affect the nature of the deed itself.

Sin in any form is always out of order. However, it is even more serious when it is within the framework of greater grace and truth, and more brightly shining light. When unusual benefits are lavished upon men from heaven, unusual responses are also required.

THEY KEPT BACK PART OF THE PRICE

“ . . . and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it . . . ” Other versions read, “And he kept back part of the proceeds , his wife also being aware of it,” NKJV “and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge ,” NASB “With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself,” NIV ‘with his wife's knowledge, he kept back some of the proceeds ,” NRSV “And by fraud kept back part of the price of the land, his wife being privy thereunto,” DOUAY “And kept away part of the price , his wife also being of counsel ,” GENEVA “They agreed to hold back some of the money they had pledged ,” GWN “and carried away [part] of the price and concealed it, his wife consenting ,” MRD “With his wife's consent, he kept the rest,” NLT “and did keep back of the price – his wife also knowing,” YLT “His wife had agreed to this deception ,” LIVING “with her full knowledge and consent, dishonestly kept back part of the price which he received for I,” WEYMOUTH “kept back some of the purchase price, with the connivance of his wife .” MONTGOMERY and “And with his wife’s knowledge and connivance he kept back and wrongfully appropriated some of the proceeds .” AMPLIFIED

Remember the environment in which this deed occurred. A number of brethren who “were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold , And laid them down at the apostles' feet” (Acts 4:34-35). Among these was a notable man named Barnabas who had a piece of land, “sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet” (Acts 4:37). In both references, all of the proceeds were being brought for distribution among those who had “need.” Furthermore, this was strictly voluntary, with no compulsion being placed upon the people other than their own conscience.

In addition to this, these people were in a spiritually charged environment. The church had been filled with the Holy Spirit and were speaking the Word with much boldness (4:31). Everyone was of “one heart and of one soul,” and no one said that what they possessed was their own (4:32). The apostles had powerfully given witness to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and “great grace was upon them all” (4:33).

Sin in any form is always out of order. However, it is even more serious when it is within the framework of greater grace and truth, and more brightly shining light. When unusual benefits are lavished upon men from heaven, unusual responses are also required. Jesus Himself said, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required ” (Luke 12:48). God will not receive mediocre responses to extraordinary grace – much less sinful ones! When a lot has been given and revealed from heaven, a lot is expected of the people to whom it was granted.

When Jesus walked among men, it is said of His ministry, “The people who sat in darkness saw a great light ” (Matt 4:16). To reject or spurn that light constituted a greater transgression. That is why

Jesus said to those who saw Him work, yet did not receive Him, “And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Matt 11:23-24). And again, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Matt 12:41). And yet again, “The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it : for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Matt 12:42).

And, why is it that Sodom and Gomorrah will receive more consideration on the day of judgement than many who were exposed to Jesus? Why will the city of Nineveh rise up in the day of judgment and condemn whole generations who knew about Jesus? What is the reason for the Queen of Sheba condemning those who did not avail themselves of the ministry of Jesus? It is because all such people and generations had been give more – more advantages, more truth, more opportunities! This is the manner of the Kingdom, and it has always been that way.

Take, for example, our own assembly. All who know the situation here know that we have been given more, see more, and have a greater understanding than is ordinarily found in the churches. No person of sound mind will contest that we are regularly exposed to matters of greater depth and larger scope than the average Christian. However, all of that does not justify any boasting. It means that God expects more of us. Mediocrity and spiritual stupidity had better not been found among us. None among us can be guilty of leaving their first love, or growing tolerant of sin, or even indulging their carnal appetites. This is not a matter of moral law, but of spiritual principle. God will simply not shower an abundance of holy rain upon a field, then stand by tolerantly when it yields “thorns and briars.” Should that circumstance be found, we are solemnly told the land “is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned” (Heb 6:8).

They Kept Back Part

The words “kept back” are most arresting. They come from a Greek word that is only used three times in the Scriptures – twice in this text, and once in Titus 2:10. There is it translated “purloining,” KJV “pilfering,” NASB or “steal.” NIV For those who are interested, the Greek word used here is **evnosfi,sato** (e-nos-fi'-sa-to). Its lexical meaning is, “to purloin, embezzle, withdraw covertly and appropriate to one’s own use,” THAYER “misappropriate, steal, embezzle,” FRIBERG “to steal, to rob,” LEH “put aside for oneself, misappropriate.” GINGRICH

How serious is it when someone gives something to the Lord and His work, then holds back part of it for themselves? When once a decision has been made to commit something to the Lord, whether it is one’s life, their goods, or a portion of their money, does it make any difference whether or not that person decides later to keep back a portion for himself? This text refers to that kind of act as embezzlement, theft, and misappropriation. It is really taking something that no longer belongs to the person.

The seriousness of this deed will be confirmed in what happened to both Ananias and Sapphira. This is a record of heaven’s response to covetousness, deception, and making a place for Satan. Actually, we will be told exactly what took place in this incident, so there will be no question about what was involved.

An Application

The practice of Ananias and Sapphira is far more common within the professed church than may be thought. It is not at all unusual for someone to formally commit their life to Christ, then take back some of it for themselves. There are those who promise to honor the Lord the firstfruits of their labor,

as God requires (Prov 3:9), for the tithe is the Lord's, as holy men of all ages have acknowledged (Gen 14:20; 28:22; Deut 14:22; Mal 3:8-10; Matt 23:23; Heb 7:8). Referring to the practice of the tithes supporting the Levitical priesthood, Paul said, "Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel" (1 Cor 9:13-14).

Yet, some take of this firstfruits for themselves, as though it belonged to them. If ever we are tempted to engage in such activity, we must remember this incident. It will contribute to our sobriety in this most personal, yet vital, part of living unto the Lord. In the case of the tithe (which existed before the Law), there is a slight difference. The tithe in its entirety belongs to the Lord. In the case of our text, the determination of the people was the point. They were not under any obligation to sell their land and give the proceeds to the apostles for distribution. However, when that determination had been made, it became a moral law to them, and was not to be violated in any way.

THEY BROUGHT A CERTAIN PART

" . . . and brought a certain part, and laid it, at the apostles' feet." Other versions read, "and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet," NASB "but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet," NIV "and brought only a part and laid it at the apostles' feet," NRSV "and took the rest and put it at the feet of the Apostles," BBE " and turned only part of it over to the apostles," GWN "took the remainder , and put it at the feet of the apostles," NAB "He brought part of the money to the apostles, claiming it was the full amount ," NLT "and, from the sale, he gave some of the money to the apostles," IE and "and brought only a part of it and put it at the disposal of the apostles ." WILLIAMS

As will be made clear, the sin here was in representing the "certain part" as though it was the whole. Once the proceeds had been devoted to the Lord, it became unlawful to separate them for personal use. Therefore, there was deceit in this matter, as well as a deliberate lie and misrepresentation. While the whole incident may appear minor on the surface, the consequences will show that a great deal of significance was attached to it.

The Figures Given Under the Law

Under the Law, which contained deliberate and numerous figures of New Covenant realities, the Lord introduced the principle violated by Ananias and Sapphira. The principle is this: what is given to the Lord cannot be taken for personal uses . An example is the incense that was used in the tabernacle. It emitted a fragrant odor, yet could not be compounded for personal use. "And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put

Ananias and Sapphira had taken what they publically said was given to the Lord, and kept it for their own use. They surely knew the Law concerning making vows to the Lord. "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee"

of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy. And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof : it shall be unto thee holy for the LORD" (Ex 30:36-37). The firstfruits of the land were also devoted exclusively to the Lord, and were to be given without delay. " Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me" (Ex 22:29). The tithe was also to be given wholly to the Lord – all of it. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD" (Lev 27:30).

Also, in the sacking of the city of Jericho, the people were told to take all of the "silver, and gold,

and vessels of brass and iron,” and bring them into the treasury of the Lord. They were consecrated to Him. “But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, are consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD” (Josh 6:19). Ignoring the word of the Lord, Achan saw “two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels.” He did not bring them into the “treasury of the Lord,” but rather put them in his own tent, mingled with his personal possessions (John 7:18-19). His deed “troubled” the whole house of Israel, and cost him his life, as well as the lives of his sons and daughters. He had put what belonged to the Lord in his own tent, and thus was judged.

Ananias and Sapphira had taken what they publically said was given to the Lord, and kept it for their own use. They surely knew the Law concerning making vows to the Lord. “When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it : for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee” (Deut 23:21). They departed from the spirit of David, from whose lineage the Savior had come according to the flesh. They would have done well to have embraced the spirit of David, and said, “I will pay Thee my vows” (Psa 66:13), and “I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all His people” (Psa 116:14,18). God takes the vows of men seriously.

SATAN FILLS HIS HEART, AND ANANIAS LIES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ 3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land?”

In Eden, there was no door of repentance opened for Eve, nor for Adam. Once Cain had committed his dreadful deed, there was no provision for recovery. When Esau sold his birthright, it could not be recovered. After Judas had betrayed the Lord Jesus, there was no way to undo the deed. There have been sins from which recovery was not possible – like the sins of Uzzah (2 Sam 6:6-7), Onan (Gen 38:9-10), Jehoram (2 Chron 21:18-19), Herod (Acts 12:23), and others. In this text, no space will be allowed for Ananias to repent and recover. Here, judgment will be rendered immediately.

Among other things, this account would produce a high level of sobriety among professing Christians. There is an attitude about sin in the modern church that is altogether too tolerate. Somehow, a God has been proclaimed that can easily endure sin, and is not at all provoked when it is found among those who claim identity with Him. In such a case, the name of the Lord has been taken in vain, violating the commandment of the Lord: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain,” or “You shall not use or repeat the name of the Lord your God in vain [that is, lightly or frivolously, in false affirmations or profanely]” AMPLIFIED (Ex 20:7a). In my judgment, this includes the following.

- Claiming to worship Him, while serving other gods, and having other priorities.
- Singing to Him without having grace in the heart.
- Expressing humorous anecdotes concerning God.
- Thoughtlessly speaking out His name in oaths and other forms of profanity.

If we wonder how the Lord feels about the flippant use of His name, here is what He said about it: “for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain” (Ex 20:7b). Another version reads, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.” This text will reveal some of the involvements in taking God’s name in vain. Remember, the incident before us regards selling a piece of land that was owned by the sellers, receiving proceeds from the sale, and the seller keeping back a part of those proceeds for himself. All of this is within the context of an appearance that suggested the entire proceeds from the sale of the land were being given.

WHY HAS SATAN FILLED YOUR HEART?

“But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart . . .” Other versions read, “how is it that Satan has so filled your heart,” NIV “why has the Evil One put it into your heart,” BBE “why hath Satan tempted thy heart,” DOUAY “why did you let Satan fill you with the idea,” GWN “how can Satan have so possessed you,” NJB “wherefore did the Adversary fill thy heart,” YLT “why has Satan taken possession of your heart,” WEYMOUTH “why has Satan so completely possessed your heart,” WILLIAMS and “why has Satan so filled your mind.” PHILLIPS

Right here we see the superiority of the New Covenant over the Old. When Achan coveted the goods in Jericho, it was not known at the time it took place. Joshua did not know about the whole matter until some time later, after the Israelites had suffered defeat at the hand of the small city Ai, and a few of their men. Joshua “tore his clothes, and fell on the earth on his face before the ark of the Lord,” remaining there until evening, and “with the elders of Israel,” while putting dust upon their heads. He then pled with the Lord, saying that the Canaanites and all the inhabitants of the land would hear of this embarrassing defeat, surround the Israelites, and cut off their name from the earth. God then told him to get up. He proceeded to tell Joshua the following:

- Israel had sinned.
- Israel transgressed the covenant which God commanded them.
- Israel took of the accursed thing.
- Israel had stolen.
- Israel had dissembled, or lied.
- Israel had put what was cursed among their own stuff, or belongings.

Keep in mind, technically, only Achan had committed this deed. However, that is not the way the Lord viewed the matter, and the Lord’s view is really the only view.

Now, in this new era, Peter through the Holy Spirit sees the matter before it spreads or causes any spiritual decline among the saints.

Satan Filled Ananias’ Heart

You may remember that Satan “put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray” Jesus (John 13:2).

There are other instances where God Himself put certain things into the hearts of people.

- God put it in the heart of Artaxerses to beautify the temple of God (Ezra 7:21-27).
- God put it into the heart of Nehemiah to restore the wall around Jerusalem (Neh 2:12).
- God put it into the heart of Nehemiah to gather the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, for a genealogical reckoning (Neh 7:5).
- God put an earnest concern for the Corinthians in the heart of Titus (2 Cor 8:16).
- God put it in the heart of kings of the earth to fulfill His will purpose, and give their kingdoms to the beast (Rev 17:17).
- God turned the heart of the Egyptians to hate His people and deal craftily with them (Psa 105:25).
- God put wisdom in the heart of Solomon, when he was tender and humble before the Lord (1 Kgs 10:24; 2 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chron 9:23).

- The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, and He turns it however He pleases (Prov 21:1).

- In the promised New Covenant, God said He would put His fear into their hearts so they would not turn away from Him (Jer 32:40).

For those who are champions of men naturally having a free will, precisely how are these texts explained? Did the people have the option to reject what was put into the hearts? And if that is the case, how can it be established that they had such an option. Or, where is there a case where either God or Satan is said to have put something in the heart of a person, yet they failed to fulfill what was placed there?

The condition of the heart determines who writes upon it, and God alone is the one who assesses the condition of the heart. He alone searches the hearts of men (1 Chron 26:9), knows their hearts (Lk 16:15; Acts 15:8; Rom 8:27), and tries their hearts (Prov 17:3). When they are not pure in His sight, Satan is often given leave to put things into them, such as was put into the heart of Ananias. If they are right in His sight, noble things can be put into them – things that accord with God's purpose.

If people choose to live at a distance from God, they are in great jeopardy, having been made accessible to the wicked one. This is why wicked people often surface within the church itself, even opposing the choicest of saints, as Diotrephes did John the beloved (3 John 1:9).

Peter affirms that Satan not only put something in the heart of Ananias, but that he had "filled" his heart. That is, Ananias, was under the control of Satan, taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim 2:26). This happened because he failed to "resist the devil," and therefore the devil did not "flee" from him (James 4:7). The faith of this man failed, because he did not repel the adversary's attack by remaining "steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet 5:8-9). This was not a thoughtless deed. It was not committed inadvertently, but was founded upon deliberation and purpose. Satan cannot captivate the one who resists him. Those who are remaining "firm" NASB in their faith, cannot be deceived or knocked down by the devil! At some point, Ananias ceased to embrace the fact that Jesus was the Son of God, else he would not have been overcome. As it is written, "Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?" (1 John 5:5).

Therefore, Satan not only hurled a fiery dart at Ananias – one that could not be repelled because of his lack of faith – but the dart stuck in his heart, emitting its venom throughout his soul. Thus Peter said Satan "filled" his heart, compelling him to do something unthinkable!

The Circumstances Under Which This Occurred

All of this happened in the midst of a great spiritual awakening, and the experience of profound empowerment. When other souls were filled with the Holy Spirit, Satan filled the heart of Ananias. While others were bold to speak out the Word, Ananias was brazen enough to think only of himself. While "great grace" was upon all of the others, great deception was upon Ananias and Sapphira.

Spirituality and holiness are not caught by being where it is evident in others! I understand that men tend to think if they can only get others to sit under the sound of the truth, and be around those who are filled with the Spirit, that some of it will rub off on wayward souls. However, the case of Ananias and Sapphira prove that this is not the case. The truth of God must be loved (2 Thess 2:10). The things of the Spirit of God must be received (Rom 8:5). The Spirit Himself must not be grieved, quenched, or resisted (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19; Acts 7:51). The Word of God must fall on honest and good hearts (Lk 8:15). One's affection must be set on things above, and there must be an earnest quest for the things that are resident where Christ is sitting on the right hand of God (Col 3:1-2). We cannot afford to be naive about these things.

LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . to lie to the Holy Ghost . . . ” Other versions read, “that you have lied to the Holy Spirit,” NIV “to be false to the Holy Spirit,” BBE “that you could deceive the Holy Spirit ,” GWN “that thou shouldst lie against the Holy Spirit,” MRD “you are lying to the Holy Spirit,” MONTGOMERY “that you should lie to and attempt to deceive the Holy Spirit,” AMPLIFIED and “that you could cheat the Holy Spirit.” PHILLIPS

This is a most arresting word! First, I have no doubt that Ananias did not think of his report as a lie. He and his wife had already determined to keep back part of the price of the land, and now the thought was not of how this appeared to God. He was no doubt only thinking of his own determinations, and not the pronouncement of the living God upon such decisions. He was not aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but thought of himself as having only to deal with Peter. Further, it is evident that he did not perceive Peter as one possessing the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19).

A Pervading Spiritual Environment

Among things this is like a commentary on the spiritual environment of that early church. The Spirit was maintaining a pervading presence, inspiring and directing the assembly. That surrounding was of such a nature that a lie was considered to be to and against the Holy Spirit Himself. That is, in order to speak as Ananias did, he had to purposefully thrust Divine influences from himself. We know that the Holy Spirit strongly desires the heart and affection of the people of God, lusting against the propensities of the flesh. Thus it is written, “The Spirit lusteth against the flesh,” or the Spirit sets its desire “against the flesh,” NASB or “what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh” NRSV (Gal 5:17). James states this condition in a most unique way: “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously” NKJV (James 4:5). Another version reads, “The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us and He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] with a jealous love?” AMPLIFIED

Do not imagine for a moment that Ananias did not feel the tug of the Spirit here, yearning for his heart and affection. He had to run roughshod over such desires, choosing to give place to the devil, and to follow the vastly inferior callings of the flesh. Within such a context, it is clear that he was lying to the Holy Spirit. There is no adequate way to put the seriousness of that circumstance into words.

KEEPING BACK PART OF THE MONEY

“ . . . and to keep back part of the price of the land?” Other versions read, “and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land?,” NIV “and put aside for thyself a part of the price of the estate,” ESV “and conceal of the money of the price of the field,” MRD “When you claimed this was the full price ,” LIVING “You misused the sale price of the land,” IE and “and should [in violation of your promise] withdraw secretly and appropriate to your own use part of the price from the sale of the land.” AMPLIFIED

This whole matter did not have the appearance of iniquity. However, it was altogether iniquitous in spirit. In fact, there are some similarities between this transgression and that of Eve in the garden.

There are at least five parallels here, and each one is worthy of noting. All of these presume the presence and

The original deception of Eve and the transgression of Ananias both occurred at the beginning of an era. At that time, things were pure, and no defilement had yet entered. This should teach us not to trust in beginnings, but in the One who Himself is “the Beginning”

influence of the wicked one, who is ever seeking to destroy the people of God.

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beginning of an era . At that time, things were pure, and no defilement had yet entered. This should teach us not to trust in beginnings, but in the One who Himself is “the Beginning” (Rev 22:13).

- Both sins had to do with appearance – things that could be seen with the natural eye – the fruit of a tree, and the fruit of man’s labor. Neither of them appeared to be dangerous according to appearance.

- A decision was required in both cases. Temptation was leveled at the parties by the devil, but they had to decide to yield to his influence. Neither of them were captured by brute force, but by deception.

- In both cases, the transgression of the one was shared with the spouses: Eve gave the fruit to Adam, and Sapphira consented to the sin of Ananias.

- Both transgressions resulted in death. In both cases, the parties involved suffered death. Their’s was a “sin unto death” (Rom 6:16; 1 John 5:16).

The Strategy Seen in the Revelation

This also parallels the strategy of the devil as depicted in the Revelation. There he is also seen as aggressive at the beginning, or as soon as he was aware of what was happening. The twelfth chapter contains the following pictures.

- Satan stood before the woman, ready to devour her child as soon as it was born. “. . .and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born” (Rev 12:4).

- As soon as Satan was cast into the earth, he set out to persecute the woman. “And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child” (Rev 12:13).

- As soon as the woman began to be nourished, the serpent cast out a flood to destroy her. “And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood” (Rev 12:15).

The devil was frustrated in all of his efforts, never able to fully accomplish what he intended. He made inroads into human activity, but was not able to subvert the purpose of God.

The Strategy Seen in Israel’s Beginning

The same was true in the case of Israel. We have no record of them murmuring until the time of their deliverance came. It was then that they objected to Moses’ intrusion into, what they conceived to be, their affairs (Ex 2:14). After their exodus from Egypt, when they faced the Red Sea, they said they wanted to go back and serve the Egyptians (Ex 14:12). When they found only bitter waters in the wilderness, they murmured (Ex 15:23). Prior to the Lord sending them manna, when they ran out food, they again murmured against the Lord (Ex 16:1-20). Once again, when they could find no water at all, they also murmured (Ex 17:2-3). All of this was at the beginning of their trek to Canaan, and after officially becoming a covenanted people.

This was all the evidence of Satan, seeking to thwart Israel’s entrance into Canaan. He was not able to fulfill his objectives. However, God did fulfill His purpose.

Seen In Zerubbabel’s Experience

When Zerubbabel was stirred up by the Lord (Hag 1:14), and “began to build the house of God” (Ezra 5:2), the beginning proved to be very challenging. The people did not cooperate, spending more time on their own houses than on the house of the Lord (Hag 1:2). The heart of Zerubbabel grew faint,

and he became discouraged with the beginning of the work. It did not appear to even be getting off the ground, so to speak. God sent him two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, to strengthen his hand in the Lord (Ezra 5:1-2).

God sent His prophets to Zerubbabel to admonish him not to despise the day of “small things,” or “small beginnings.” NAB They assured him the work would be finished, just as God had said – and, indeed, that is precisely what happened: “this house was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was kin the sixth year of the reign of Darius” (Ezra 6:15). Satan tried to stop the work from its beginning, but was not able to do so.

Written for Our Admonition

The records of the covenanted people have been provided “for our admonition” (1 Cor 10:11), and “for our learning” (Rom 15:4). Not only do they provide a sterling example of the nature of the flesh, but they also speak of both Divine and Satanic activity. They confirm God’s wisdom, Satan’s craftiness, man’s weakness, and our need for Divine guidance and empowerment. From the very dawn of human history, Satan has opposed holy beginnings. It should not surprise us that he did the very same thing when Jesus began building His church (Matt 16:18). His efforts, however, will not produce the results he desires.

IT WAS THEIRS, AND THEY COULD DO WHAT THEY WANTED

“4a Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?”

Peter now reasons with Ananias, but he does not do so to persuade him. He will rather set the stage for the Lord to receive glory and honor in this matter. Because of the nature of the transgression, and the circumstances under which it was committed, recovery is not possible. This will be confirmed by what follows.

Those who flirt with sin, willingly providing a place in which Satan can work, must learn from this incident. This was an example of tempting the Lord – seeing how far one could go in testing Divine tolerance and longsuffering. Such efforts are sinful, as both covenants confirm. In the law it is written, “Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah” (Deut 6:16). It was at Massah, when the people encountered bitter water that it is written, “the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?” (Ex 17:1-2).

Those in Christ are also reminded concerning tempting the Lord: “Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents” (1 Cor 10:9). And again, “Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years” (Heb 3:9). Once more it is written, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor 10:22).

After everything has been said about how much God loves every soul, how He has good plans for us, and wants us to have the best of everything, we must consider the text before us – the case of Ananias and Sapphira.

IN SENSE, IT BELONGED TO YOU

“Whiles it remained, was it not thine own?” Other versions read, “While

I want to emphasize that Ananias’ decision would not be considered a serious matter in the average church. It might be considered unwise, or dishonest, but not worthy of as much attention as Peter is giving to the issue. However, this is a serious matter because it revealed a

lack of the fear of the Lord, and of faith as well.

it remained unsold, did it not remain your own ?” NASB “Didn’t it belong to you before it was sold?” NIV “While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own ?,” NRSV “While you had it, was it not your property ?,” BBE “the property was yours to sell or not sell, as you wished ,” NLT and “ before you sold the field , it belonged to you.” IE

This confirms that the selling of their goods was not something compulsory for the early church. It was not driven by the presence of need, but by “the law of Christ,” which has love and faith as its primary pillars (Gal 6:2,6). There was not an inexorable law that required all believers to meet the needs of their brethren. This was a matter addressed by brotherly love and kindness, not by law.

Thus Peter reminds Ananias that as long as the land remained in his care, he could have done with it what he pleased. He did not have to sell it. Yet, when he chose to do so, and to associate that sale with the people and work of the Lord, personal preferences had to be mortified. Selfish interests and godly interests cannot be served by the same action. If something is given to God, self-will is taken out of the picture.

YOU COULD HAVE HANDLED THE MONEY AS YOU SAW FIT

“ . . . and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?” Other versions read, “And after it was sold, was it not in your own control ?,” NKJV “And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal ?,” NIV “and after you had given it in exchange, was it not still in your power ?” BBE “After it was sold, you could have done as you pleased with the money,” GWN “And when sold, again thou hadst authority over the price of it ,” MRD “and having been sold, in thy authority was it not ?,” YLT “Even after you sold it, you could have used the money any way you wanted ,” IE “And [even] after it was sold, was not [the money] at your disposal and under your control ?” AMPLIFIED and “and after the sale the disposal of the price you received was entirely in your hands , wasn't it?” PHILLIPS

Once again, neither the apostles nor the church had required that the complete proceeds of anything sold were to be given to the apostles. If Ananias had said he had decided to give nothing, he would not have been confronted by Peter in this manner. Neither would this confrontation have been necessary if Ananias had said he was giving a part of the proceeds, doing so cheerfully and with a pure heart.

How he handled the proceeds was entirely at his discretion. That is, if he had sold the property purely as a business transaction, then he could have used the money in any way he saw fit. Peter even suggests that after he sold the property, he could have diverted some of the funds for his personal use, as long as he had stated this was the case. However, when he said he was bringing the whole of the proceeds for distribution as every man had need, that changed the whole matter.

I want to emphasize that Ananias’ decision would not be considered a serious matter in the average church. It might be considered unwise, or dishonest, but not worthy of as much attention as Peter is giving to the issue. However, this is a serious matter because it revealed a lack of the fear of the Lord, and of faith as well. Nothing that is represented as being done unto the Lord is minor. Anything and everything that is associated with His name gets the attention of heaven. Such things are expected to be precisely what they are represented as being. If it is giving, it is to be done cheerfully and to the Lord (2 Cor 9:7). If it is singing, it is to be done with grace in the heart unto the Lord, while the word of Christ is dwelling in us richly (Col 3:16). If it is living itself, it is to be done in self denial, carrying the cross, and following Jesus (Matt 16:24; 2 Cor 5:15). If it is dying, it is to be done “unto the Lord” (Rom 14:8).

Here we are confronted with the sin of hypocrisy – of pretending to be something that one is not. In this case, Ananias pretended to have sold his property with the Lord in mind, then given all of the

proceeds to His work, as Barnabas did.

This type of conduct is resident in the wisdom of the world, and is wholly incompatible with the wisdom that comes down from above – which wisdom is “without hypocrisy” (James 3:17). The wisdom of this world, which is the only wisdom possessed by the natural man, is always thinking of personal worldly advantage. The spiritual man is always thinking of the glory of God.

You may recall how sternly Jesus spoke to hypocrites, pronouncing repeated woes upon them (Matt 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13,14,15,23,25,27,28,29). Solemnly He told His disciples, “be not as the hypocrites” (Matt 6:2,5,16). We are told that a hypocrite shall not come before the Lord – that is, in a state of approval (Job 13:16). The tabernacles of hypocrites will be left desolate (Job 15:34). Isaiah declared that “the vile person” is the one who is a hypocrite (Isa 32:6). Yet here, in the early church, this dreadful sin is found among them.

No body of believers must live as though they were insulated against the attacks of the wicked one, or that he cannot penetrate the thinking of some of their members. We can never take faith for granted, or imagine that we can enter a spiritual coasting mode while we remain in the body. It is not in vain that we are admonished, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet 5:8-9). Men who do not take this adversary seriously are very foolish, and they are sure to be overcome by him. Believers cannot live casually!

It is true that we are also reminded, “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4). However, the presence of this gracious Guest, the Holy Spirit, must not be confronted with disinterested souls who grieve and quench Him. In such a case, the blessing of the Spirit will not be experienced by the individual, and he will consequently be overcome – like Ananias.

SIN WAS CONCEIVED IN THE HEART, AND THE LIE WAS TO GOD

“4b . . . why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.”

Here we will see a fulfillment of something Jesus told His disciples they would do. “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”

Peter continues to reveal what has actually taken place in the heart of Ananias. The Holy Spirit has made this known to Peter, for “what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?” (1 Cor 2:11). Here we will see a fulfillment of something Jesus told His disciples they would do. “Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Mat 18:18). What Peter says will be fully implemented, confirming that the power of Christ was resting upon him. Today, there are some men who say they are binding and loosing things upon the earth, but it is largely nothing more than talk. Peter’s words are with both discernment and power.

CONCEIVED IN THE HEART

“ . . . why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?” Other versions read, “What made you think of doing such a thing ?” NIV “How is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart?” NRSV “how has this purpose come into your mind ?” BBE “Why is it that you planned this thing in your heart?,” CSB “So how could you do a thing like this?,” GWN “Why hast thou set thy heart to do this purpose ?” MRD “How have you thought up this deed in your heart?” NET “What put this scheme

into your mind ?” NJB “How could you do a thing like this ?” NLT “why is it that thou didst put in thy heart this thing?” YLT “ Why did you think of doing this evil thing?” IE “How is it that you have cherished this design in your heart?” WEYMOUTH “How could you have the heart to do such a thing!” WILLIAMS “Why then, is it that you have proposed and purposed in your heart to do this thing? [How could you have the heart to do such a deed?]” AMPLIFIED and “Then whatever made you think of such a thing as this?” PHILLIPS

On the one hand, Peter said Satan filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit (5:3). Now he asks Ananias why HE conceived of this deed. From this we see that Satan works in those who make themselves available to him, taking them captive at his will (2 Tim 2:26), and working in them (Eph 2:2).

Second, sin is always unreasonable – totally nonsensical. That is why Peter challenged Ananias with the word, “Why?” The land was his. The choice of what to do with the proceeds from its sale was his. There was no compulsion placed upon him by the apostles to do this thing. It was not a requirement of the collective brethren. Ananias could have resisted the devil. He could have told the truth concerning the whole transaction.

Add to this some of the things he could have done – things that everyone in Christ can do.

- He could have asked for wisdom from the Lord for the occasion (James 1:5).
- He could have sought for grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).
- He could have followed the Spirit’s leading to mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13).
- He could have drawn nigh to God, and then resisted the devil (James 4:7).
- He could have considered his ways (Hag 1:5,7).
- He could have responded to the grace of God that teaches men to deny ungodliness (Tit 2:11-12).
- He could have set his affection on things above instead of on things upon the earth (Col 3:1-2).
- He could have called upon the name of the Lord and been delivered (Rom 10:13).
- He could have avoided the appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22).
- He could have preferred the brethren over himself (Rom 12:10).
- He could have put on the new man and put off the old man (Eph 4:22-24).
- He could have sought and found the way of escape that comes with every temptation (1 Cor 10:13).
- He could have refused to make a place for Satan (Eph 4:27).
- He could have been sober and vigilant (1 Pet 5:8).
- He could have “put on the whole armor of God,” and thus been able to stand in the evil day (Eph 6:10-18).
- He could have made “no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:14).

The question was a rhetorical one, like the one God asked Adam: “Hast thou eaten of the tree?” Or the one He asked Cain: “Why art thou wroth?” A rhetorical question is actually one in which no answer is expected. It is rather asked for effect – in this case to emphasize the absolute foolishness of what was done.

It is really not as easy for a Christian to sin as some allege. Some aver that all one has to do is nothing – but that is not true! Failing to do the things I have just mentioned is not synonymous with doing nothing . It is rather doing something other than what ought to be done. A person does not sin, or plan to sin, by doing nothing, but by doing something. They choose to walk in the flesh, listen to the wrong voice, and put their affection in the wrong place.

When Peter asked Ananias, “Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart?” NASB he was not seeking an answer. The question was a rhetorical one, like the one God asked Adam: “Hast thou eaten of the tree?” (Gen 3:11). Or the one He asked Cain: “Why art thou wroth?” (Gen 4:6). A rhetorical question is actually one in which no answer is expected. It is rather asked for effect – in this case to emphasize the absolute foolishness of what was done. Ananias’ deed was done with thought and careful planning and deliberation. Then it was carried out in meticulous detail and without any evidence of shame or a twinge of conscience.

LYING TO GOD

“. . . thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” Other versions read, “You did not lie to us , but to God!” NRSV “you have been false, not to men, but to God,” BBE “You didn't lie to people but to God!” GWN “Thou hast not lied against men , but against God,” MRD “You have lied not to human beings , but to God,” NAB “You have been lying not to men , but to God,” NJB “It is not to men you have told this lie , but to God,” WEYMOUTH and “You have not [simply] lied to men [playing false and showing yourself utterly deceitful] but to God.” AMPLIFIED

On the surface, it certainly looked like Ananias was lying to men. I am sure that God was not in his mind when he delivered a thoroughly false view of what he was doing. Although it is true that this man sought to deceive men, yet that was not his crowning sin, and Peter knew it. At the root of the matter, sin is against God himself, the Creator and Sustainer of all men. That is why David, when convicted in his heart concerning the incident with Bathsheba, cried out to the Lord, “ Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight : that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest” (Psa 51:4).

When Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron, the Lord said they had “gathered together against the Lord ” (Num 16:11). When Israel rejected Samuel, their aging judge, the Lord told Samuel, “they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me ” (1 Sam 8:7).

Ananias had not transgressed an apostolic commandment, for they had not issued one in regard to this matter. God Himself is the One who said, “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Ex 20:16). Again He said, “. . . neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another” (Lev 19:11). Jesus also confirmed this commandment: “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Matt 19:18). Ananias, however, chose to ignore this word, and even planned to do so, conceiving sin in his heart, and then carrying it out.

The only way to arm the church against such intrusions is to deliver the truth, for only the knowledge of the truth makes men free. In this regard, the church is the appointed “pillar and ground of the truth.” Whatever the church may or may not get done, this is its fundamental work – to make the truth known! It is to set forth an accurate view of both God and Christ.

As the fifty-first Psalm indicates, this constituted doing evil in God’s sight, or sinning in His face, so to speak. It likewise involved judging God, as also declared in David’s confession. That is, Ananias evaluated his own judgment above that of the Lawgiver Himself! Of course, in order to commit sin, this is what a person has to do – he has to give the greater weight to his personal view, and the lesser weight to the word of the Lord.

Seeking to Deceive God

Lying to God is nothing less than an attempt to deceive Him. There are several ways that this can

be done.

- First, sin assumes that it will not be detected by God, and thus the person will not be called into account for it. Deceived souls reason, “The Lord seeth us not” (Ezek 8:12). Thus, when Israel tried to hide their counsel from the Lord, they reasoned in their hearts, “Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?” (Isa 29:15). Sensitive souls, however, know such a thought is nothing more than a delusion. That is why David wrote, “For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, Thou knowest it altogether ” (Psa 139:4).

- Second, in order to sin, a false view of God must be embraced – a view in which it is thought that sin is not repulsive to God, and that He will not respond adversely to it. Israel had this attitude when they dishonored the Lord with unacceptable sacrifices. In insolence they said, “Wherein have we despised Thy name?” and “Wherein have we polluted Thee?” (Mal 1:6-7). When God charged them with robbing him, they replied, “Wherein have we robbed Thee?” (Mal 3:8). How is it that they could reason in such a manner – one that was diametrically opposed to the Divine assessment of their condition? It was because they had an improper view of God.

As shown above, neither of these false postulates is true. God not only beholds the actions of men, but weighs them in the balance of Divine judgment. As it is written, “the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by Him actions are weighed ” (1 Sam 2:3). Yet, Satan so deceives the hardened heart that the one who is sinning reasons that either his sin will not be detected, or that God will be gentle and forbearing when He sees it. Both views are dangerously wrong, as this incident will confirm.

The Responsibility of the Church

The incident of Ananias and Sapphira took place when the people were being submitted to “sound doctrine” and the preaching of “all the counsel of God” (Acts 2:42; 20:27; 1 Tim 1:10). While it is true that this was a most unusual occurrence, it does confirm the intrusive nature of the flesh.

The only way to arm the church against such intrusions is to deliver the truth, for only the knowledge of the truth makes men free (John 8:32). In this regard, the church is the appointed “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Whatever the church may or may not get done, this is its fundamental work – to make the truth known! It is to set forth an accurate view of both God and Christ. It is to assist men in obtaining a proper view of both the nature and purpose of God. If the church does not do that, it makes no difference what else it may appear to be doing.

God has declared Himself to be “a God of truth” (Deut 32:4). That is, not only does the truth issue forth from Him, but He works within the context of truth. Nothing in all of Scripture suggests that God works for the good of people within the context of a lie, or the misrepresentation of His Person. And, where is there an insightful person who does not know there are serious falsifications of God within the church. Let me remind you of a few of them.

- That God’s love is unconditional, even though Jesus declared it was conditional (John 14:21,23; 16:27).

- That God gravitates to praise, even though the actions of the people themselves are not “thankworthy” (1 Pet 2:19).

- That if people are winning souls, that offsets every other moral and spiritual condition – when God has declared walking “worthy of God” is the critical factor (1 Thess 2:12).

- That God desperately wants to be part of every person’s life, when reconciliation is clearly declared to be that of man to God, not God to man (Col 1:20-21).

- That God has established certain inexorable laws for good that will be fulfilled in

every person, whether they are true worshipers or now – when God has declared “unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure” (Tit 1:15).

- That God is tolerant of an ignorance of Himself – even though that is the kind of ignorance that alienates people “from the life of God” (Eph 4:18).

- That God does not require holiness – even though He has affirmed of holiness, “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14).

- That a person can remain in a state of spiritual juvenility, and still be acceptable to God – even though we are told that failing to go on to perfection leads to falling away and perdition (Heb 6:1-6; 10:38-39).

Add to this the fact that only Jesus really knows who the Father is, and that He must “will” to reveal Him to a person before they can know Him. As Jesus said, “Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and the one to

Remove the truth from the picture, and the new birth, growth, and spiritual stability are rendered impossible. Men cannot be established with a lie, or bear fruit unto God by means of misrepresentations of Him.

whom the Son wills to reveal Him” NKJV (Mat 11:27). If, therefore, a person does not know God, or is unacquainted with His ways, Jesus has not instructed him. If that person has been in an environment in which Jesus has been obviously teaching and working (as in our text), then they have ignored the teaching Jesus, choosing their own way over His.

First, if the religious environment has not been one in which Jesus is teaching and working, then it is because the truth has not been set forth – for Jesus always teaches and works within the context of truth. In that case, both the church leaders and the ones who are ignorant will be held in account. Because the blind led the blind, they both will fall into the ditch. Jesus said of the false leaders of his day, “Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt 15:14). The injunction “Let them alone” means “Leave them,” NIV “ignore them,” NLT and “disregard them.” AMPLIFIED The reason for getting away from them ought to be obvious. First, they are a living contradiction to the fact that the church is “the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Second, God does not root and ground His people through a defective message and emphasis. This is because true growth is preceded by speaking “the truth in love” (Eph 4:15). It also is the direct result of being taught by Christ “as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:21). Remove the truth from the picture, and the new birth, growth, and spiritual stability are rendered impossible. Men cannot be established with a lie, or bear fruit unto God by means of misrepresentations of Him.

All of this ought to be readily apparent, and require no further proof. If God allowed any form of genuine life to be initiated or maintained by means of a lie, He would have to deny Himself – and that is something that simply is not possible (2 Tim 2:13). These are matters that must be declared by teachers and be pondered by the elect.

ANANIAS DIES AND IS BURIED

“5 And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6 And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.”

The words of Peter have been strong. Will the God of heaven stand behind them? Has the transgression of Ananias really been as serious as the insightful assessment of Peter suggests? Is this occasion nothing more than an exchange of opinions? Or is this actually a revelation of an

unacceptable condition? In a time such as ours, when religious is largely powerless, and the Lord is not obviously at work within the professing church, it becomes easy to say, “That is just your opinion.” Or, “I cannot agree with what you have said.” Or, “That is not the way I see it.” But in an environment charged with the presence of the Lord that will not always be the case. The more God is evident, the more clearly His work will be seen. The more the name of the Lord is at stake, the more likely it is that contradicting conduct will be judged. There is no law, or principle, revealed on this matter. It is possible for Herod to kill James, and the council to have Stephen stoned. However, when it is essential for the propagation of

the truth, and the execution of the purpose of God (things He alone knows), we can count on Him to judge sin. Such a case is before us.

ANANIAS FELL DOWN AND GAVE UP THE GHOST

“And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost . . .” Other versions read, “Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last,” NKJV “When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died,” NIV “And at these words, Ananias went down on the earth, and his life went from him,” BBE “When he heard these words, Ananias dropped dead,” CSB “and Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and expired,” DARBY “When Ananias heard these words he collapsed and died,” NET “As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor and died,” NLT and “As soon as Ananias heard these words, he fell to the floor, dead!” LIVING

Remember, this is an account of a “sin unto death” (1 John 5:16) – that is, a sin that led to death, which could not be averted. John reminds us that prayer has no point in such cases: “There is a sin [that leads] to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.” AMPLIFIED

In his words to Ananias, Peter was not calling him to repentance, and Jesus gave him no space at this time to repent. There are times when such “space” is granted (Rev 2:21), but men cannot insist that such an allotment of time be given to them. There is a sense in which any and every sin can potentially lead to instant death – as in this case. Men ought to keep this in mind when they are assaulted with temptations. It will assist them in standing against the wiles of the devil.

Ananias Heard Peter’s Words

There is a sense in which any and every sin can potentially lead to instant death – as in this case. Men ought to keep this in mind when they are assaulted with temptations. It will assist them in standing against the wiles of the devil.

It seems to me that the manner of Peter’s speech, and the remarkable level of insight that he had been given, must have captured the attention of Ananias. It would have been exceedingly difficult for him to be indifferent at that time. This is because there is a certain weightiness to the spoken truth that penetrates to man’s inner being.

An example of this is Paul’s reasoning with Felix concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” Upon hearing those words, “Felix trembled.” However, in spite of that trembling, he opted to not respond to Paul’s words. He thought it best to wait for a “more convenient season” (Acts 24:25). So far as the record is concerned, that season never came. Again, when Paul reasoned with Agrippa, the king responded, “Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

The words delivered to Ananias were also weighty and powerful – but they were not intended to provoke repentance. The point to see here is that, contrary to all fleshly inclinations, Ananias did not speak so much as a word in the defense of his deceptive deed. Neither was he gripped with contrition of heart – at least there was no indication of such a reaction. You can rest assured he was not indifferent to what Peter said to him. It will become apparent that this judgment was primarily for the

sake of those who saw it and heard about it.

Ananias Falls Down Dead

Here a case where heaven stood solidly behind Peter's inspired assessment of the case. Ananias did not drop dead due to natural causes. This was a judgment from God. There are numerous judgments record in Scripture that are of this order. Here are a few examples.

The Ungodly In the World Slain

There are several instances of the wicked who had no covenant association with God being judged unto death.

- **THE FLOOD.** The judgment of the entire world at the time of Noah. "Every man" died as a result of Divine judgment, with the exception "eight souls" (Gen 7:21; 1 Pet 3:20).
- **SODOM AND GOMORRAH.** The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and "the cities of the plain" were decimated by fire and brimstone, together with "all the inhabitants" (Gen 19:24-25).
- **ONAN.** The Lord "slew" Onan because he "did the thing which displeased the Lord" (Gen 38:9).
- **THE FIRSTBORN IN EGYPT.** The firstborn of all of Egypt were smitten dead in the last plague the Lord leveled upon Egypt – "all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle" (Ex 12:29).
- **PHARAOH'S ARMIES.** Pharaoh and his armies were drowned in the Red Sea at the direction of God (Ex 14:28; 15:4).
- **THE ARMIES OF THE AMORITES.** Great numbers of the Amorite armies were killed with "large hailstones from heaven" (Josh 10:11).
- **KING HEROD.** King Herod was smitten dead for receiving honor that was due only to the God of heaven (Acts 12:23).

Death Judgments Among the Covenanted People of God

There have also been judgments of death ministered from heaven against those who were numbered among the covenanted people of God. Here are a few examples.

- **NADAB AND ABIHU.** Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, were killed with fire from heaven because they offered "strange fire" upon the altar (Lev 10:1-2).
- **THE UNFAITHFUL SPIES.** The men who brought up an evil report when they spied out the land of promise, "died by the plague before the Lord" (Num 14:37).
- **AN INSURRECTION AGAINST MOSES.** 14,700 men died because of an insurrection that was raised up against Moses (Num 16:49).
- **FIERY SERPENTS SENT.** "Much people of Israel died" in the judgment of fiery serpents, sent among them by the Lord because they murmured (Num 21:6).
- **AN OUTBREAK OF IMMORALITY IN ISRAEL.** 24,000 Israelites died because of an outbreak of whoredom with "the daughters of Moab" (Num 25:9).
- **KORAH'S INSURRECTION.** In the insurrection of Korah against Moses, the earth opened up and swallowed them, with an additional 250 men being devoured by fire (Num 26:10).

• **THE ISRAELITE BELIEVE A FALSE REPORT.** 600,550 Israelites died in the wilderness because they believed a false report concerning the promised land (Num 1:44-45; 14:22-23,29,32-33; Heb 3:17).

• **THE BENJAMITES.** 25,100 of the Benjamites were killed because “they trusted unto the liars in wait which they had set beside Gibeah” (Judges 20:35).

• **THE CASE OF UZZAH.** The Lord was “kindled against” Uzzah because he touched the ark of the covenant, and “smote him” so that “he died by the ark of God” (2 Sam 7).

• **KING SAUL.** King Saul “died for his transgression which he committed against the Lord” – specifically in asking counsel from a woman with a familiar spirit (1 Chron 10:13-14).

• **THE CORINTHIANS.** The Lord caused some in Corinth to die because of their conduct at the table of the Lord (1 Cor 11:30).

Some Conclusions

What takes place in our text should not be counted as a strange thing. The Scriptures clearly make known a God who is wholly intolerant of sin. They also reveal that He does judge iniquity in this world as He deems best.

The “true God” (John 17:3) can react in the manner made known in our

In this day, we have a situation similar to a time in the history of Israel. It is said of that period, “Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law.” God had certainly not ceased to exist, but he was no longer being proclaimed to any measurable degree.

text, and we cannot afford to be ignorant of that fact. In this day, we have a situation similar to a time in the history of Israel. It is said of that period, “Now for a long season Israel hath been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law” (2 Chron 15:3). God had certainly not ceased to exist, but he was no longer being proclaimed to any measurable degree. Today, people have been led to believe that the “God of love and peace” (2 Cor 13:11) is limited to that description. However, in that capacity, God is promised ONLY to those who give heed to this admonition: “Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you” (2 Cor 13:11) – or, “and [THEN] the God of love . . . will be with you,” AMPLIFIED or “And then God who gives love and peace will be with you.” WEYMOUTH

In this text, not only are we being exposed to genuine faith and legitimate spiritual life, the “true God” (1 John 5:20) is also being made known, as well as the real “Head of the body” (Col 1:18).

Babylon the Great has seriously distorted both God and Christ, so that neither is known to any significant degree within the professing church. In our text, sinners were the exception within the church. In our day, it is the godly who are the exception. We do well to be aware of these things, and to arm ourselves for that situation. It is a dangerous one.

GREAT FEAR CAME ON THOSE WHO HEARD

“ . . . and great fear came on all them that heard these things.” Other versions read, “And great fear seized all who heard what had happened,” NIV “and great fear came on all who were present,” BBE “Everyone who heard about his death was terrified,” GWN “and great fear gripped all who heard about it,” NET “Everyone was terrified,” LIVING “Everyone who heard about this was filled with fear,” IE “and all who heard the words were awe-struck,” WEYMOUTH “and a strange awe seized everybody who heard it,” WILLIAMS “And great dread and terror took possession of all who heard

of it,” AMPLIFIED and “All who were within earshot were appalled at this incident.” PHILLIPS

There are two ways in which this text can be understood.

- First, it may be thought that this was a private incident, involving only Peter and Ananias, and during which no one else was present. In this case, when the word got out to the rest the saints, great fear took hold of them.
- Second, this matter took place before witnesses, who saw and heard what took place. In this case, the fear seized the ones who were in attendance when the confrontation of Ananias and his death took place.

I am persuaded that the latter is the meaning. That is, there were witnesses present, and fear took hold of them when they heard what Peter said, and saw Ananias drop dead. Two versions represent this meaning: “all who heard the words ,” WEYMOUTH and “all who were within earshot .” PHILLIPS The literal rendering of the text is “heard these [things IMPLIED],” NOT “heard OF these things.” The fact that these things were later said to have been reported to those outside of the immediate surroundings (verse 11), justifies the view that this verse is speaking about those with a first-hand knowledge of what took place.

Although I have made mention of this in a previous lesson, it seems to me that it should also be accented here. As used in this text, the word “fear” is a noun, not a verb. That is, this was something that came upon and seized the people. This was not a mere human reaction, as some versions suggest i.e., “was terrified,” NLT “were appalled.” PHILLIPS This fear is something that originated outside of men, came upon them, and took hold of them, or seized them. This was not something within the control of men. Those who heard with any degree of understanding were seized by this fear. It was not like the fear of a wild beast or threatening storm. All of the standard versions read “fear came .” Other versions expand the word owing to the fact that in the English there is no adequate noun for “fear,” as used in Scripture: “fear seized ,” NIV/NRSV “fear gripped ,” NET “awe- struck ,” WEYMOUTH “strange awe seized ,” WILLIAMS “great dread and terror took possession ,” AMPLIFIED

Remember, there were people there who were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 4:31). They were of “one heart and one soul,” and were living selfless lives, wholly devoted to the Lord, and great grace was upon them (Acts 4:32-35). Yet, a certain terror gripped them when they heard and saw the judgment of the Lord.

The Missing Perception

Here is an aspect of the Lord that is largely unperceived in our day. There is a certain dread that accompanies the immediate presence of the Lord, or the perception of that presence through some judgment coming from Him. David depicted this in most vivid language. “Clouds and darkness are round about Him: righteousness and judgment are the habitation of His throne. A fire goeth before Him, and burneth up His enemies round about” (Psa 97:2-3). This is precisely why Moses, to whom God spoke face to face, feared and quaked in the presence of the Lord (Acts 7:32; Heb 12:21). It is why Habakkuk “trembled” in himself when he heard a word of judgment directly from the Lord (Hab 3:16). It is why the centurion “feared greatly” when Jesus died, and he was convinced He was the Son of God (Matt 27:54). This is the reason the three disciples, who had personally witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus, and Moses and Elijah speaking with him, “feared as they entered into the cloud,” in which God addressed them personally (Lk 9:34-35).

No one has ever been keenly aware of the presence of the Lord, or of His focus on the place they occupy, and been casual about it. After Jacob had encountered the Lord in a dream he awakened and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not” (Gen 28:16). It is written that “he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the

gate of heaven” (Gen 28:17) – and that was his response to a blessed confrontation!

Today, we are being introduced to a “God” that bares the characteristics of a congenial grandfather who has no real hatred for anything, and is scarcely capable of becoming angry. However, this is not the God we see in the book of Acts.

Some people associate the presence of the Almighty with tingling sensations, carnal surprise, and fleshly curiosity. Such reactions, however, are evidence of spiritual blindness and ignorance, not of wisdom and spiritual understanding. No person in the body, however tenured in spiritual life, can knowingly be in the presence of God without experiencing the gripping reality of fear. That is the result of being in a body that cannot survive Divine confrontation, for “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50), and, as God Himself said, “there shall no man see Me and live” (Ex 33:20).

A measure of the legitimacy of any body of professed believers is their response to the awareness of the Lord. If they are prone to question His requirements, stagger at His judgements, and be angry with Him when things do not go their way, they are not thinking of the real God. Such people have, in fact, embraced an idol – a God that has not been taught by Jesus. Thus John concludes his first epistle by saying, “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (1 John 5:21). An “idol” is any God other than the One Jesus leads us to “know.”

The brethren in our text were keenly aware of the God who “is true.”

THE YOUNG MEN BURIED HIM

“ . . . And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.” Other versions read, “And the young men arose and wrapped him up, carried him out, and buried him.,” NKJV “And the young men arose and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him,” NASB “Then the young men came forward, wrapped up his body, and carried him out and buried him,” NIV “And the young men went and made ready his body, and took it out, and put it in the earth,” BBE “And the young men, rising up, swathed him up for burial, and having carried him out, buried him,” DARBY “Some young men got up, wrapped his body in a sheet, carried him outside, and buried him,” GWN and “The young men got to their feet and after wrapping up his body carried him out and buried him.” PHILLIPS

The dispatch with which these young men operated is arresting.

- They got up.
- They came forward.
- They found Ananias dead.
- They wrapped his body.
- They carried him outside.
- They buried him.

All of that required thought, perception, and action. All of this took place while fear had seized, or gripped them. This was not, then, a paralyzing fear. It was rather a motivating one. Immediately these men knew to get the dead body out of the church, or away from those who were alive unto God. They knew that the body of Ananias had to be placed out of sight. It no longer could remain among the living.

These were “the young men,” not the old men. They were obviously discerning and devoted. They apparently knew what to do, and did not need to be told. Their promptness indicates that they were privy to what had happened, hearing Peter’s words and beholding the collapse of Ananias. They were not stunned into a stupor, but aroused into action.

These are the kind of “young men” faith produces. The words “young men” come from the Greek word **new,teroi** , which means “younger people,” or youthful ones.” THAYER It covers a wide range of ages ranging from children with understanding, to those who are eligible for marriage. These younger brethren had not isolated themselves from the rest of the church, but were a part of it. They did not have a separate leader, but, with the others, were under the leadership of the apostles. They were familiar with the gatherings and activities of the people of God, as this text confirms.

One wonders how “the young men” of the average American church would respond to such an event. How would those enamored of entertainment, music, and games, react to a member of the church dropping dead before their eyes after hearing a scathing rebuke by a man of God? Well, the text before us records precisely how such persons reacted when the church had not been defiled with all manner of erroneous instruction and false doctrine. No divisions existed in the church at this time, and they were all together with one accord. Think of a new youth ministry such as that of our text – carrying out and burying the dead ones. Given today’s situation, that could be very demanding!

SAPPHIRA IS QUESTIONED

“ 7 And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8 And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much.”

The seriousness of this occasion can be measured in part by the Lord’s extended judgment of it. It does not conclude with the stern rebuke and death of Ananias. A further confirmation will be given of the total intolerance of God for sin, and the unacceptability of it within the body of Christ. Actually, men should be able to deduce this from the very nature of salvation. If God could endure even the minuscule presence of sin (if there be such a thing), why would there even be a need for forgiveness, justification, and the advocacy and intercession of Jesus Christ? Why would there be a need for the new birth, sanctification, and the mortification of the deeds of the body if God could tolerate sin in any measure? However, the entrance of sin into the human race brought a certain obtuseness toward God, and thus, even among the saved, a point must be made of the repulsiveness of sin to the holy and eternal God.

THE SPACE OF THREE HOURS

This is a miniature picture of day of judgment, when all men will be called into account for what they have done, whether it be good or bad.

“And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in . . .” Other versions read, “Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours , and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened,” NASB “And it fortuned as it were about the space of three hour after that his wife came in ignorant of that which was done ,” TNT “ About three hours later , the wife of Ananias came in, but she did not know what had happened to her husband,” IE and “About three hours later, his wife came in, without having learned what had taken place .”

WILLIAMS

Ananias, who apparently hatched this plan (for Satan had filled his heart), was not given space to repent. Instead, he died immediately upon hearing his wicked deed exposed. However, it appears that his wife was granted sufficient space to have repented of this deed – three hours. It was not a day or a week, but “about the space of three hours.” The incident was not forgotten because judgment had

been poured out upon Ananias, but “about the space of three hours” was allotted before the matter was dealt with once again. During this time, sufficient time was granted for Sapphira to consider what had been done and repent of the deed.

Every advantage is given for an honest and good heart to surface. She did not know what had happened to her husband, so she could be prompted by any genuine love for the Lord and his people that she may have possessed. She was even brought in by herself, so there would be no intimidation from her husband.

Peter does not take for granted that Sapphira remains hardened. He earnestly seeks for an opportunity to show mercy, inquiring if the money Ananias had brought was the amount they had received for the land. He knew that Sapphira had been privy to the matter, being an accomplice in the determination.

This is a miniature picture of day of judgment, when all men will be called into account for what they have done, whether it be good or bad.

PETER ASKS THE QUESTION

“ . . . And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?” Other versions read, “And Peter responded to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price ?’” NASB “Peter asked her, ‘Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?’” NIV “And Peter answered her, Tell me if ye gave the estate for so much ?” DARBY “ Peter said to her, ‘Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land ?’” NET and “‘Tell me, how much money did you receive for your field? Was it this much ?’” IE ” Other versions read, “And Peter responded to her, ‘Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price ?’” NASB “Peter asked her, ‘Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?’” NIV “And Peter answered her, Tell me if ye gave the estate for so much,” DARBY “Peter said to her, ‘Tell me, were the two of you paid this amount for the land ?’” NET and “‘Tell me, how much money did you receive for your field? Was it this much ?’” IE

Peter does not take for granted that Sapphira remains hardened. He earnestly seeks for an opportunity to show mercy, inquiring if the money Ananias had brought was the amount they had received for the land. He knew that Sapphira had been privy to the matter, being an accomplice in the determination. The property had been sold by “Ananias, with Sapphira his wife” (5:1a). Further, a certain amount had been kept back for personal use, “his wife also being privy to it” (5:1b).

Some might consider this to be prying into private matters, and, ordinarily, such an inquiry would not have been launched. However, a statement had been made concerning what was given – that it was the whole price of the land. This was not the truth, and therefore Peter seeks confirmation of the complicity of Sapphira in the whole matter, at the same time providing an opportunity for her to reassess her involvement and repent of the deed.

Sapphira Agrees That Was the Price

“And she said, Yea, for so much.” Other versions read, “And she said, ‘Yes, that was the price ,” NASB “‘Yes,’ she said, ‘ that is the price ,’” NIV “And she said, Yes, for so much ,” DARBY “Sapphira said, ‘ Yes, that much ,’” NET and “‘Sapphira answered, ‘Yes, that was all we got for the field,’” IE

This will prove to be a dreadful error! To conspire to lie is one thing. It is still worse to proceed with the doing of it. But what can be said of a person who slams the door of escape in the face of the one making it available?

Here we see the hardening effect of sin upon the individual. The longer it is held within the heart, the more calloused the heart becomes. A certain proverb comes to mind in reading this account. “He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Prov 29:1). In view of this, men ought to be quick to repent, and not provoke the Lord to anger, for He is stronger than us (1 Cor 10:22). In this case, the wife following her husband and submitting to his judgment will prove to be disastrous. Here, the wife will be responsible for her decision independently of her husband.

AGREEING AND TEMPTING THE SPIRIT

“9 Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. 10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.”

There is a certain mind-set that is penetrating the modern church. It has a wholesome sound to it, yet it is punctured with many flaws. It is this – that the church is in the world to “help people.” By this men mean that the church is at its finest when it is assisting people with their difficulties, and helping them over situations which are many times the result of their own miserable choices. In fact, a considerable percentage of religious professionals are devoted to this very work – helping people resolve their problems. Theological schools have joined this enterprise by provided courses that equip and credential people for this purported ministry. We now have marriage counselors, financial advisors, life coaches, and a host of other professionals devoted to helping people recover from wrong choices.

When I question the validity of this kind of religious thrust, it will at once appear that I am heartless. It is assumed that this is a God-ordained work, and is more or less implied in the Gospel of Christ. “Hurting people” need help, we are told, and then reminded that is the work of the church. Behind this whole facade is an overemphasis of the importance of life in this world. If we approach life here without the perception that is it an allotted time in which we prepare for death, the day of judgment, and eternity, we will at once find ourselves on an uncharted sea.

How do you suppose these pseudo-professionals would have approached Ananias and Sapphira? Perhaps they would have assigned them to a four or six week course on Handling Your Finances, or How to Include God In Your Finances, or How to make sound decisions. Nothing of that sort is found here. I can tell you that there is not a person with a counseling mind-set in the world that would have considered the sin of Ananias and Sapphira to be one worthy of instant death. Anyone suggesting such a thing would be considered a religious bigot.

However, after men have philosophized about human difficulties and flawed decisions, we have a case before us that is provided by the Holy Spirit of God. The issues are spelled out in precise detail. The people involved are specified. The nature of the sin is declared, together with the results that were imposed by God. The whole matter is totally lacking of any mystery or ambiguity. All of this demands that we take the incident seriously.

WHY DID YOU AGREE TO TEMPT THE SPIRIT?

“Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” Other versions read, “How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord ?” NKJV “Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test ?” NASB “Why have you made an agreement together to be false to the Spirit of the Lord ?” BBE “How could the two of you even think of conspiring to test the Spirit of the Lord like this ?” NLT “How could you and your husband even think of doing a thing like this – conspiring together to test the Spirit of God's ability to know what is going on?” LIVING “How was it . . . that you two agreed to try an experiment upon

the Spirit of the Lord ?” WEYMOUTH “How could you two have agreed and conspired together to try to deceive the Spirit of the Lord ?” AMPLIFIED and “ How could you two have agreed to put the Spirit of the Lord to such a test?” PHILLIPS

In order to avoid committing sin, it must be addressed at the temptation level, when the individual is “carried away and enticed by his own lust.” That is the point at which grace can be “obtained,” for it is the time of need

This question is asked against the background of reconciliation, the New Covenant, and the new creation. Jesus had reconciled the world to God (2 Cor 5:18-20). The New Covenant was in effect, in which the laws of God were written upon men’s minds, and put into their hearts (Heb 8;10; 10:16). Those in Christ were a new creation, with old things passing away and all things becoming new (2 Cor 5:17). These were not mere goals, they were realities. Add to these the marvelous things that had been taking place among the disciples. Three thousand souls were added to the church on the day of Pentecost. People had been witness of great miracles wrought through the hands of the apostles. A man lame from birth was healed, and in the aftermath, about 5,000 men believed on the Lord Jesus Christ. When threatened by the temple authorities, Peter and John reported the events, and a great prayer meeting was held. Everyone was in one accord at that time. Following the prayer, the place where they were was shaken, all of the people were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the Word of God with great boldness. The apostles stepped forth and gave powerful witness to the resurrection of Christ. As a result, great grace was upon them all. That grace was evidenced in a remarkable display of selflessness and liberality among the disciples. A man of great faith stepped forward, sold a piece of land that he owned, and laid the proceeds at the feet of the apostles.

Now, in view of that, Peter asks, “How could you two have agreed and conspired together to try to deceive the Spirit of the Lord?” AMPLIFIED Aside from the moral and spiritual compulsions of the new man , how could they have proceeded with this embezzlement with the evidence of a present God all around them? What line of sound rationality could have possibly moved these two to plan such a deceitful move? Had they forgotten that “all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13)?

Of course, sin, when seen properly, is totally irrational. One aspect of deception is that it renders all views of sin to be theoretical, and therefore opens the door for a kind of self-definition of it. Ananias and Sapphira did not consider what they did to be sin. That is why they did it. Perhaps they thought it expedient, preferable, or more advantageous to their own social condition. But they did not view it as a transgression against God, and lying to the Holy Spirit.

This is an aspect of sin that those who flirt with the unlawful fail to see. Their senses become numbed, like a moth who flies round and round a flame, as though it was impervious it, only to finally singe it’s wings and fall to helpless to the ground. That is a illustration of James’ portrayal of sin. “But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death” (James 1:15).

In order to avoid committing sin, it must be addressed at the temptation level, when the individual is “ carried away and enticed by his own lust.” NASB That is the point at which grace can be “obtained,” for it is the time of need (Heb 4:16). For whatever reason, Ananias and Sapphira had conducted their lives so that an awareness of the tug of the flesh was not apparent to them – at least, not as it could have been. They had lived too close to the world, thereby creating a place in which Satan could work more freely.

In asking this question, Peter has shown the absurdity of what they had done. In order that the rest of the church might be duly warned, Sapphira will not be allowed to recover from her error. Peter will now announce that her death is imminent. Nothing further will be heard from her, and no additional time will be allotted to her.

THE YOUNG MEN ARE WAITING

“. . . behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out . . .” Other versions read, “See, the feet of the young men who have put the body of your husband in the earth, are at the door, and they will take you out ,” BBE “Those who buried your husband are standing at the door, and they will carry you outside for burial,” GWN “Listen, the footsteps of those who have buried your husband are at the door , and they will carry you out,” NAB “The men who have buried your husband are already at the door , and they will carry you out,” WEYMOUTH and “Listen, you can hear the footsteps of the men who have just buried your husband coming back through the door , and they will carry you out as well!” PHILLIPS

No sooner had Peter spoken, than Sapphira dropped dead, just as her husband did – a judgment from the Lord. They conspired together, they lied together, they died together, and they will be buried together.

How true it is, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” or “It is a fearful (formidable and terrible) thing to incur the divine penalties and be cast into the hands of the living God!” AMPLIFIED (Heb 10:31). Whatever men may think about God, His nature, and His will, their thoughts cannot change this fact. God is not One with whom men may trifle – conducting their lives as though He loves them so much that He cannot be moved against them, or raise His hand against them. Ananas and Sapphira had tread in the courts of the Lord. They had been identified with his people, had seen His hand move among them, and heard the truth declared. Yet, they chose the pathway of their own will over His, all the while presenting themselves as sacrificial servants of God.

Now Peter tells Sapphira that her death is sure, and those who will bury her are on their way to perform that task. We are not told what thoughts coursed through her mind in that brief moment, but you may be sure her mind was active, and there was no indifference in her. The point here is Divine judgment, not human feelings. By the Spirit, Peter knew what was going to happen, and made no effort to forestall it. No prayer was made for Sapphira, and no appeal was made for her to repent. With her husband, she had crossed the line of Divine forbearance.

SHE FELL DOWN AND DIED

“ 10 Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost . . .” Other versions read, “Then immediately she fell down at his feet and breathed her last,” NKJV “At that moment she fell down at his feet and died,” NIV “Instantly she dropped dead at his feet,” CSB “At once , she fell down at his feet and breathed her last,” NAB “At once she collapsed at his feet and died ,” NET “Instantly she dropped dead at his feet,” NJB “and she fell down presently at his feet, and expired ,” YLT and “Instantly she fell to the floor, dead .” LIVING

No sooner had Peter spoken, than Sapphira dropped dead, just as her husband did – a judgment from the Lord. They conspired together, they lied together, they died together, and they will be buried together.

She Yielded Up the Ghost

The words “yielded up the ghost” are translated from a single Greek word – **evxe,yuxen** (ek-spool-khen). The word means, “to expire, to breathe out one’s life,” THAYER “breathe one’s last,” FRIBERG “die,” UBS “the process of dying.” LOUW-NIDA Other versions read, “her life went from her,” BBE “expired,” DARBY “breathed her last,” ESV and “died.” MRD

This expression is to be understood in view of the creation of Adam. It is written that God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen 2:7). During the flood, when

every living creature died, and all men, except the eight in the ark, those dying are described as “all in whose nostrils was the breath of life” (Gen 7:22). Job described life in this way, “All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils” (Job 27:3). The frailty of man is described in these words, “whose breath is in his nostrils” (Isa 2:22).

In death, the breath of life that is given by God is called back by Him. When the call is issued, there is no way of resisting it, or creating a way of sustaining that life. Thus death is said to be “yielding up the ghost,” or the unseen part of the human constitution. While the word “ghost” is generally considered from a superstitious point of view, the modern primary definition of the word is, “The seat of life or intelligence: soul <give up the ghost>” MERRIAM-WEBSTER Websters Unabridged Dictionary 2003 gives the definition as “the life principle or vital spark : the soul regarded as the seat of life or intelligence — now used chiefly in the phrase to give up the ghost.”

This is a more precise view of what is involved in dying. From a medical point of view, the brain ceases to function, the heart stops beating, the organs no longer operate, and breathing stops. However, that is a purely physiological view of death. It describes the symptoms of death, and not death itself.

Solomon described the difference between man and the brute creation when he wrote, “Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?” (Eccl 3:21). Elsewhere he wrote that the spirit returned to the God who gave it: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Eccl 12:7). Solomon is not using the word “spirit” in its most refined sense, as defined in Christ Jesus (1 Thess 5:23; Heb 4:12; 2 Tim 4:22). The word translated “spirit” in Ecclesiastes is taken from a Hebrew word meaning “wind, or breath,” STRONG’S and refers to the most apparent evidence of life, and not life itself.

The idea is that just as God breathed into Adam’s nostrils giving him life, so He withdraws life from man, as though inhaling instead of exhaling. In other words, life in any form cannot be maintained independently of the Author of life. When the Lord took Sapphira’s life from her, her body collapsed to the ground, for “the body without the spirit is dead” (James 2:26).

With this in mind, death is described as the essential person and personal life itself, leaving the body.

- Departing (Gen 35:18; 2 Chron 21:20; Phil 1:23).
- Giving up the ghost (Gen 25:8; 35:29; Lam 1:19).
- Going to ones fathers (Gen 15:15; 25:8; 35:29).
- Putting off the tabernacle of the body (2 Pet 1:14).
- God requiring the soul (Lk 12:20).
- Going in a way from whence there is no return (Job 16:22).
- Being gathered to our people (Gen 49:33).
- Fleeing like a shadow (John 14:2).

Only God can recall the soul of an individual, refusing to allow life to

The circumstances were different, and therefore the judgment meted out was also different. The church was in the midst of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and grace. Sin is out of order under any circumstances, but especially when it is committed during a time of great blessing, renewal, and insight.

continue. So far as judgment in this world is concerned, this is the ultimate Divine judgment in which the Sovereign God determines that a person is no longer fit to live.

Lest we are prone to minimize sin, the transgression that caused this Divine edict was lying about how much money was appropriated in a land sale! Further, the lie was said to be to the Holy Spirit and God, even though it was spoken to Peter.

SAPPHIRA IS BURIED

“ . . . and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.” Other versions read, “When the young men came in they found her dead, so they carried her out and buried her beside her husband,” NRSV “and the young men came in and saw her dead, and they took her out and put her in the earth with her husband,” BBE “ When the young men came back, they found Sapphira dead . So they carried her outside and buried her next to her husband,” GWN “and the young men came in and, seeing that she was dead, carried her out and buried her beside her husband,” LIVING and “When the young men came into the room they found her a dead woman, and they carried her out and buried her by the side of her husband.” PHILLIPS

The young men were busy that day. It only took them three hours to wrap the body of Ananias, carry him out, and bury him. Now, they return from the burial site to find another dead body. They were perceptive, and not distracted to other things as young men are often wont to do. Immediately they are described as “seeing that she was dead.” LIVING They did not comment about the matter, but simply did what had to be done. They “carried her out and buried her by the side of her husband.” PHILLIPS I cannot help but wonder how such a sight would be handled in a modern-day assembly.

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF THE SIN

Ananias and Sapphira sinned against the Spirit of God by lying. Although they were clearly covetous, that is not the transgression with which they are charged. Their overriding sin was that they wanted to appear more generous than they really were, i.e. being counted in the class of Barnabas – “the pride of life” (1 John 2:15).

The immediate death for this couple, and that within the brief span of three hours, might appear too harsh of a judgment. After all, Simon of Samaria, a sorcerer, tried to buy the ability to confer the Holy Spirit from Peter. That was certainly an offence of great magnitude, yet he did not die because of it. Peter rebuked him sharply, saying he had no part in what Peter was doing, admonishing him repent and pray to God, “if perhaps the thought” of his heart might be forgiven him (Acts 8:18;24). And what of Elymas the sorcerer who sinned grievously when he sought to turn the proconsul of Cyprus away from the faith. But he did not die. Instead, he was struck blind for a season (Acts 13:8-11). But Ananias and Sapphira are stuck down by sudden death.

The circumstances were different, and therefore the judgment meted out was also different. The church was in the midst of a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit and grace. Sin is out of order under any circumstances, but especially when it is committed during a time of great blessing, renewal, and insight.

Also, because this was a beginning, the unacceptability of sin had to be emphasized. If this did not take place, the foundation upon which the people were being built would not have been sturdy.

Also, it needed to be established that it was not possible to deceive the Lord. A body of believers is in no way harmonious with the course of this present evil world. Should they be tempted to pursue such a route, it will be at the expense of the essential ministry of the Holy Spirit.

THE DESCRIPTION OF THE SIN

This text contains several different views of the sin of Ananias and Sapphira – and all of them are most sobering.

- First, they embezzled money that had been committed to the work of the Lord, keeping back part of the price a property they sold (5:2).

- Second, Satan filled the heart of Ananias, moving him to sin against the Lord, and Sapphira agreed to it (5:3a). Thus they both had made a place for Satan, and had quenched the Spirit as well.

They tempted the Spirit of God (5:9). In this deed, they were putting God to the test. This couple obviously thought they could get by with what they had done. In this case, the temptation was for God to remain gracious toward them, even though they had lied to Him.

Third, both Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit (5:3b). They sought to deceive the Spirit, proceeding as though the Spirit could not see what they were doing. In lying to a man of God, they were lying to the Spirit who was within him.

- Even though Satan filled his heart, Ananias is charged with conceiving this plan in his heart (5:4a). Simply put, he planned to sell the property, keep back part of the proceeds for himself, yet say that the whole price was being given to the apostles for distribution as needed.

- They did not lie to men, but to God (5:4b). Even though it appeared as though the lie was told to men, Peter emphatically says it was not to men, but to God. That is how heaven viewed the matter, and that is how it was.

- Ananias and Sapphira agreed together (5:9). This was a joint effort, with both parties agreeing to what was being done. There was no dissent by either party.

- They tempted the Spirit of God (5:9). In this deed, they were putting God to the test. This couple obviously thought they could get by with what they had done. In this case, the temptation was for God to remain gracious toward them, even though they had lied to Him. The Word of God makes clear that He does not operate in this manner. “With the pure Thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavory” (2 Sam 22:27). “With the pure thou wilt show thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt show thyself froward” (Psa 18:26).

WERE ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA DAMNED?

The question might be raised, “Were Ananias and Sapphira damned?” The bottom line answer is, We do not know. The fact that this is not revealed confirms that we should not press the matter. We do know that there are cases when people are turned over to Satan “for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord” (1 Cor 5:5). We also know that there is chastening from the Lord “that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor 11:32). However, we have no idea whether either of these applied to Ananias and Sapphira or not. In fact, their record is in the Scripture in order to induce fear among those who are sloppy in their approach to sin. Here we are not talking about the sin of fornication, as found in Corinth. In that case, it was a low level of fornication that was not even tolerated among the Gentiles “who know not God” (1 Cor 5:11; 1 Thess 4:5). That fornicator was expelled from the church, and given a space to repent. What is even more, he did repent, and the church was urged to receive him graciously (2 Cor 2:6-8).

Suffice it to say, every person professing faith in Christ should culture an absolute hatred for sin.

The case of Ananias and Sapphira has been recorded to confirm to our hearts how serious it is to find sin in the body of Christ – any sin! Let us thrust from us any tendency to be tolerant of iniquity.

FEAR FALLS UPON THE CHURCH

“ 11 And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.”

How should reports like this effect those who know the Lord? How should the church react when it is evident the Lord has judged a person? Our text does not proclaim a teaching on the subject, but gives us an example – an example that the Holy Spirit selected to be included in Scripture.

UPON ALL THE CHURCH

“And great fear came upon all the church . . .” Other versions read, “And great fear came upon the whole church,” NASB “Great fear seized the whole church,” NIV “The whole church . . . were terrified,” GWN “Great fear gripped the whole church,” NET “And a great fear came upon the whole church,” NJB “and great fear came upon all the assembly,” YLT “Terror gripped the entire church,” LIVING “This incident struck terror into the whole Church,” WEYMOUTH “So a strange awe seized the whole church,” WILLIAMS “And the whole church . . . were appalled [great awe and strange terror and dread seized them],” AMPLIFIED and “At this happening a deep sense of awe swept over the whole Church .” PHILLIPS

Here is a body of people that have been basking in the grace of God. Permit me to recall what has been said about those within the number of these people to this point.

- 3,000 of them had been “pricked in hearts” on the day of Pentecost, and inquired what they ought to do (2:37).
- Those among them are described as having “gladly received his Word, and were baptized” (2:41).
- They were continuing “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (2:42).
- Fear had come upon every soul as they witnessed “many wonders and signs done by the apostles” (2:43).
- Those who believed “were together and had all things common” (2:43).
- They “continued with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house” (2:46a).
- They ate their food “with gladness and singleness of heart” (2:46b).
- They were “praising God” (2:47).
- At one time, about 5,000 of them had believed when the Temple authorities opposed Peter and (John 4:4).
- When they had heard the report of Peter and John, they had all prayed with one accord (4:24-30).
- They were all filled with the Spirit, and spoke the Word of God with boldness (4:31).
- The multitude of those who believed were of one heart and of one soul (4:32).

For anyone in the body, a keen sense of the Lord’s presence is actually terrifying. This is owing to the absolute holiness of the Lord, and the total unprofitability of the flesh. The more the Lord becomes evident, the more our comparative weakness and uncomeliness become manifest.

It is again witnessed that they had all things common, with no one saying that what he had was his own (4:32).

- After hearing the apostles witness of the resurrection of Christ, “great grace was upon them all” (4:33).

These were the people who were “seized” by a “great fear.” NIV They had been close to the Lord and blessed by Him, yet they were not close enough to be casual before Him, or blessed enough to not tremble in His presence.

Again, I want to emphasize that the word “fear” is a noun, and not a verb. “A great fear came upon all the church” is not exactly the same as “all the church were found fearing.” Here, the word fear refers to “that which arouses fear,” GINGRICH or causes men to be in terror or trembling. One lexical definition is, “In an objective sense, that which strikes terror.” THAYER

An example of this condition is articulated by Isaiah the prophet. “Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread ” (Isa 8:13). It is only men’s lack of the awareness of God that permits them to live in a slovenly manner, parading the flesh before God, speaking unadvisedly with their lips, and entertaining foolish thoughts.

For anyone in the body, a keen sense of the Lord’s presence is actually terrifying. This is owing to the absolute holiness of the Lord, and the total unprofitability of the flesh. The more the Lord becomes evident, the more our comparative weakness and uncomeliness become manifest.

- This is precisely why Daniel said of his experience of an arresting vision from God, “And I Daniel fainted, and was sick certain days; afterward I rose up, and did the king's business; and I was astonished at the vision, but none understood it” (Dan 8:27).

- On another occasion, after he had seen a vision, Daniel records, “Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me : for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength ” (Dan 10:8).

- When an angel came to tell him of the vision, Daniel said, “O my lord, by the vision my sorrows are turned upon me , and I have retained no strength . For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me ” (Dan 10:16-17).

- When Habbakuk heard a message of coming woe from the Lord, he said of the occasion, “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself ” (Hab 3:16).

- This accounts for the reaction of John to seeing the glorified Christ: “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead . And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last” (Rev 1:17).

- It is why Moses, while in the presence of the Lord, said, “I exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb 12:21).

Men today speak very loosely about the presence of the Lord, often associating it with mysterious and uninterpretable evidences. However, we would see a sudden and drastic change in men’s behavior, attire, and words if something like the striking down of Ananias and Sapphira took place in the average church.

David, the man after God’s own heart, who panted for the living God, said, “My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee ; and I am afraid of thy judgments” (Psa 119:120).

- When Isaiah saw the Lord, he responded, “Woe is me! for I am undone ; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5).

None of the men I have just mentioned were ungodly. All of them stood tall among men, and had

few, if any, equals upon the earth. Yet, in the presence of the Lord, even their comeliness turned into corruption. If we were to take Jesus out of the equation of salvation, there would be no hope of enduring the confrontation of the Living God.

In our text, God was, so to speak, experientially very near, having lavished both grace and power upon the people. However, when that nearness was clearly evidence in striking Ananias and Sapphira dead (members of the church) – a great fear took hold of the entire congregation. What had aroused His anger was not heavy on the moral scales of men. No government official would have arrested or incarcerated a person for misrepresenting their gift. However, when the presence of the Lord is clearly known, men think more seriously about themselves, sin, and judgment.

For those with faith, a sense of the Lord's nearness can be a most profitable experience. For those who are unbelieving and riveted to the earth, it produces the ultimate jeopardy and danger. Men today speak very loosely about the presence of the Lord, often associating it with mysterious and uninterpretable evidences. However, we would see a sudden and drastic change in men's behavior, attire, and words if something like the striking down of Ananias and Sapphira took place in the average church.

Fear Came Upon All the Church

This is only the second mentioning of the word "church" (**evkkllhsi,an**) in the book of Acts. We first read of the Lord adding "to the church daily such as should be saved" (2:47). Now, for the first time, we read of "all the church" – all believers, everyone who was in Christ Jesus. Fear came upon them "all." They had been exposed to a holy God, who will not tolerate sin among His people. That is why "judgment must begin with the house of God" (1 Pet 4:17). When Ezekiel was given a vision concerning the punishment of Jerusalem, he heard the Lord instruct an angel to "set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof." Having done that, six heavenly messengers were sent on a mission of destruction. They were told to spare those who had been marked, but to "slay utterly" everyone else, sparing no additional persons. Confirming this, the Lord then added, "and begin at My sanctuary !" (Ezek 9:4-6).

That is precisely what the Lord was doing in our text. His judgment was beginning with His house, and the purging started in his sanctuary. The presence of extensive corruption within the professed church does not testify to the Divine leniency, but to the absence of the living God! There is absolutely no way to dignify such a condition, for it is one in which the fear of God cannot possibly be experienced.

AND AS MANY AS HEARD

" . . . and upon as many as heard these things." Other versions read, " and upon all who heard of these things," NKJV "and all who heard about these events ," NIV "and on all who had knowledge of these things ," BBE and "and into the hearts of all who heard of it ." WEYMOUTH

The news of these two deaths spread rapidly, for it was the working of the Lord. No sooner had people heard of the first death, than the report of a second sounded in their ears. Amidst an environment of great and unparalleled blessing, a severe judgment had taken place. The people were not mystified, they were terrified. They did not have a lot of questions, but a lot of fear. They made the association between the death of the wayward couple and the hand of the Lord. They had witnessed the holiness of God, and it was sobering.

I do not doubt that similar judgments have occurred in our day, yet have not been recognized. This is largely owing to the propagation of a false God. The God that is embraced by multitudes of people is not even capable of action such as that to which we have been exposed. However, this is the real God, who will "by no means clear the guilty" (Ex 34:7), and "not at all acquit the wicked" (Nah 1:3).

In Christ, God has provided a way out of the category of “the guilty” and “the wicked.” However, He has promised neither forbearance nor mercy for those who insist on remaining there. Our text, as well as the general tone of Scripture demolishes any argument to the contrary..

CONCLUSION

The passage we have just considered confirms heaven’s sensitivity to sin. It is in perfect harmony with all of Scripture, which leaves this indelible impression, beginning in the third chapter of Genesis. The very first sin committed by the human race appeared incidental. However, the Divine response to it confirms that was not the case at all. In his epistle to the Romans, Paul spells out something of the involvements of Adam’s single transgression. The ramifications of that solitary sin have sent a devastating wake across the whole of human history, down to this very day. It has even impacted upon the entirety of the natural creation. The universe was cursed, from the earth on which we live, out to the extremities of the celestial order. The impersonal creation was consigned to “the bondage of corruption” because of that single deed (Rom 8:20-21). As for the effect of Adam’s sin (singular) upon humanity, this is what has been revealed.

- **SIN ENTERED THE WORLD** . By means of that transgression, sin entered into the world (Rom 5:12a).

- **DEATH ENTERED THE WORLD.** Death entered the domain of humanity by means of that single sin (Rom 5:12b).

- **DEATH PASSED ON ALL MEN.** Death passed upon all men, being imposed upon them independent of their own will or action (Rom 5:12c).

- **SIN REIGNED OVER THOSE WHO VIOLATED NO LAW.** Sin reigned over the progeny of Adam until Moses, even though they did not sin after the same manner as he did – infracting a law. Men die because of Adam’s sin, for there was no law from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:13-14).

- **EVERY MEMBER OF THE HUMAN RACE DIES.** Because of the sin of Adam, all of his generations are dead (5:15).

- **JUDGMENT RESULTING IN THE CONDEMNATION OF ALL.** Adam’s sin brought judgment to condemnation throughout the entirety of the human race (5:16).

- **DEATH REIGNS OVER HUMANITY TO THIS VERY DAY.** To this very day, death reigns because of Adam’s transgression (5:17).

- **ONE SINNED, ALL ARE CONDEMNED.** By the offense of Adam, judgment came unto all “to condemnation” (5:18).

- **ONE SINNED, MANY (ALL) MADE SINNERS.** By Adam’s single act of disobedience, “many were made sinners” (5:19).

And what was the sin that caused these devastating global effects? What deed was done that caused death to be imposed upon every person, every living thing, and the entirety of the domain of matter? It was eating a piece of fruit!

What human court would judge Adam’s sin to be worthy of such dire consequences? Apart from those who have been illuminated by God, what individual is there in all of history, or in all of the world, who would defend such a sweeping and unwavering judgment? To this very day, theologians haggle about Adam’s sin and its effects upon the human race. But God has spoken on the matter, and stamped his decision throughout the entire domain of nature, and upon all who inhabit it.

Our text has exposed us to another judgment from God that does not appear to the flesh to match the sin committed. Those, however, who struggle with this do not know how serious sin is, and what is involved in committing the most apparently minor transgression.

A person has to rebel against God to sin – to commit any sin! When king Saul failed to carry out the commandment of the Lord, Samuel told him his sin was a display of “rebellion” and “stubbornness,” which were themselves akin to “witchcraft” and “idolatry” (1 Sam 15:23). Israel’s sin was said to have stemmed from being “stiffnecked,” and unwilling to turn (Ex 32:9). Their unwillingness to give heed to the Lord was a state identified as “impudent and heardhearted” (Ezek 3:7).

Modern Day counselors and psychologists have rendered a great disservice to the church by providing all manner of explanations for sin. In attempting to rationalize iniquity, they have muddied the waters, dulled ears, and hardened hearts.

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was addressed sternly because it, like all sin, was serious. But that condition is only made worse when the environment in which sin is committed is one in which the Lord has been working for good.

A MICROCOSM OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

This passage is a sort or micro-view of the day of judgment. Whereas the day of judgment will deal with all of the counsels of the heart, every word, and every deed, our text dealt with one counsel, one deed, and one lie. However, in those things all of the requirements of the day of judgment are revealed.

The Certainty of the Day of Judgment

When we speak of “the day of judgment,” we are not speaking theoretically. In the Gospels, Jesus refers to “the day of judgment” five times (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Mk 6:11).

- Sodom and Gomorrah will be at the day of judgment, together with the generations that followed (Matt 10:15; 11:24; Mk 6:11).
- The citizens of Tyre and Sidon will be at the day of judgment, together with the generations that followed (Matt 11:22).
- Men will give an account for “every idle word” in the day of judgment (Matt 12:36).

Jesus referred to the same occasion as “the judgment” four times (Matt 12:42; Lk 10:14; 11:31,32).

- The queen of the South, or the Queen of Sheba, will be there, together with the generations that followed (Matt 12:42; Lk 11:31).
- Tyre and Sidon will be there with the generations that followed (Lk 10:14).
- The men of Nineveh will be there with the generations that followed (Lk 11:32).

The epistles refer to the certainty of the day of judgment, and the accounting that will take place at that time.

- We will all “stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom 14:10).
- We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ “to receive the things done in the body . . . whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).
- It is appointed to men to die once, then appear at “the judgment” (Heb 9:27).
- God knows “how to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet 2:9).
- The present heavens and earth are “reserved unto fire against” [or for] “the day of judgment” (2 Pet 3:7).
- Those living by faith and walking in the Spirit can “have boldness in the day of

judgment” (1 John 4:17).

- God has “reserved” the fallen angels “in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day” (Jude 1:6).

- Solemnly men are told that God is going to “judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom he hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance to all men, in that he hath raised Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

In order for men to be convinced of the reality of the judgment, there are numerous examples in Scripture of the judgment of men while they remained in this world. This does not always happen when men sin against the Lord. This circumstance has caused some men to be presumptuous, imagining that they will escape the judgment of God.

In order for men to be convinced of the reality of the judgment, there are numerous examples in Scripture of the judgment of men while they remained in this world. This does not always happen when men sin against the Lord. This circumstance has caused some men to be presumptuous, imagining that they will escape the judgment of God. Thus Solomon wrote, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl 8:11). Others reason, “Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation” (2 Pet 3:4). Because of the hardness of their hearts, such people do not know they are actually piling up a treasure of wrath that will be poured out upon them in the last day. This is why Paul wrote to presumptuous Christians, “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds” (Rom 2:5-6).

For this reason, and no doubt many more, examples of God’s intolerance of sin are recorded for our learning. I have already listed numerous examples of such judgments, particularly those resulting in death, in the commentary of verse five, under the heading “The Ungodly In the World Slain.”

The case of Ananias and Sapphira provide some details of Divine judgment.

- The fulness of the deed committed was made known (5:1-2).
- The reason for the deed was revealed – Satan filled Ananias’ heart (5:3).
- Exactly what was done was made public (5:3).
- The unreasonableness of the deed was made clear (5:4).
- The agreement made between Ananias and Sapphira was made known (5:9).
- The confirmation of Divine judgment was declared (5:9).

The day of judgment will be characterized by such details. It is then that the counsels of the heart will be revealed (1 Cor 4:5). The absurdity of sin will be proclaimed while others who had lesser advantages declare their superior responses during inferior times – like the queen of Sheba and the city of Nineveh.

It is no wonder the church is warned, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences” (2 Cor 5:11). We must not adopt as view of God or of His purpose that ignores the reality of His intolerance of sin. One of the associations contained in the Gospel is that “the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold” [hinder , ASV suppress , NKJV keep down , BBE detain , DOUAY hold down , ERV] “the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). That is, “the truth” is inhibited by the presence of wickedness – particularly among those who claim identity with God! That is

precisely why the wrath of God is “against” all ungodliness and unrighteousness in men!

In an environment where the truth is being declared, such as that of our text, those who remain hard hearted, seeking and doing their own will and ignoring the will of God, are taking their lives into their own hands. There simply is too much in the Word of God about this for it to be doubted. Further, the church is to faithfully make this known.

In all ages, whether during the era of the Old Covenant, or in these latter days of the New Covenant, when the truth has not been proclaimed, iniquity has become dominant. The ascendancy of sin further has a dampening effect upon what little truth is being proclaimed. A perusal of history will confirm this to be the case. Further, recovering from such times has always been a monumental work in which Divine working and influence was an absolute requirement.

No generation has ever recovered from a falling away by means of scholarship, discipline, or mere human organization. Renewal and recovery have always come by means of the declared truth – particularly that of the Gospel of Christ and the distinctions of the New Covenant. Where these proclamations were not in place, the professing church was locked into mediocrity and deadness. Liberty simply cannot be realized independently of the truth (John 8:32).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #22

DIVINE INFLUENCES

INTRODUCTION

The church has been purged of Ananias and Sapphira, and the people have been seized by great fear. Judgment had begun in the house of God, just as Peter would write much later, and just prior to his appointment with death (1 Pet 4:17). The government had been placed upon Christ's shoulder, as Isaiah had prophesied (Isa 9:6-7), and He was adjudicating that Kingdom with "all power in heaven and earth," which had been given to Him (Matt 28:18). Believers were "added" to the church by Him (Acts 2:47), and those who proved to be unworthy were removed from it, as the fifth chapter of Acts confirms. The latter activity – removing Ananias and Sapphira – and was followed by a wake of fear throughout the church, and among all others who heard of the matter.

However, this does not bring a cessation to the working of the Lord among the brethren, as those in the flesh might be prone to think. Instead, the work seems to accelerate, now that the "old leaven" has been purged out of the assembly. When Corinth had uncomely people among their number, Paul wrote, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are

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- **SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE WROUGHT BY THE APOSTLES (5:12a)**
- **THEY WERE ALL OF ONE ACCORD (5:12b)**
- **AMONG THE REST, NO MAN DARED TO JOIN THEM (5:13a)**
- **THE PEOPLE MAGNIFIED THEM (5:13b)**
- **MULTITUDES OF BELIEVERS WERE ADDED, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN (5:14)**
- **INSOMUCH THAT THEY BROUGHT FORTH THE SICK INTO THE STREETS (5:15)**
- **A MULTITUDE CAME FROM SURROUNDING CITIES (5:16)**
- **CONCLUSION**

unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor 5:7). When iniquity is found among the people of God, it is always detrimental, and must be dealt with in forthrightness and discretion. This has been done, and now our text proceeds.

Many signs and wonders are wrought "among the people" by the apostles. There continued to be a remarkable unanimity among the people of God, as they were all with one accord in Solomon's Porch,

where the initial opposition arose. Fear – even trembling fear – did not stop them from assembling, being of one accord, or continuing in the apostles’ doctrine.

There was a sense among the general populous of the things that were occurring among the believers. Those who were not in Christ Jesus did not dare to join themselves to the church. There seemed to be a lively sense of the holiness of God upon every soul – so much so that insincere people were afraid to be numbered with the disciples.

THE FRESHNESS OF NEW LIFE REVEALED

The freshness of newness of life is revealed in this text. There is a total break with empty ceremony and lifeless rituals. The people were gathered together in a place noted for ceremony and ritual, yet such are not evidenced in their gatherings.

There are a number of firsts in this text. Permit me to mention them so they will be more obvious as we go through the next few verses.

- For the first time, we read about people being afraid to be identified with this body of believers (5:13a).
- Outsiders magnified or praised the believers (5:13b).
- People were said to have been “added to the Lord ” (5:14a).
- For the first time, women are mentioned as being added (5:14b).
- People sought to have the even the shadow of Peter pass over the sick 5:15).
- For the first since Jesus returned to heaven, everyone was healed (5:16).

These are the results of having the laws of God written upon the heart and put into the mind. This is what occurs when the people acknowledge the true God to be their own, and He identifies Himself with them. When the people know God, as everyone in the New Covenant does, these are the things that can take place.

The nature of new life is clearly emerging in the book of Acts. This is what happens when people are “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). These are the results of having the laws of God written upon the heart and put into the mind. This is what occurs when the people acknowledge the true God to be their own, and He identifies Himself with them. When the people know God, as everyone in the New Covenant does, these are the things that can take place.

Permit me to briefly review what has been said to this point of receptive and believing hearts,

- “These all continued with one accord” (1:14).
- “They were all with one accord in one place” (2:1).
- “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart , and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (2:37).
- “They that gladly received the word were baptized” (2:41).
- “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).
- “Fear came upon every soul” (2:43).
- “And all that believed were together, and had all things common” (2:44).
- “And they , continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (2:46).

- “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (4:4).
- “They lifted up their voice to God with one accord ” (4:24).
- “. . . they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (4:31).
- “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul : neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (4:32).
- “. . . great grace was upon them all ” (4:33).
- “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold ” (4:34).
- “. . . and great fear came on all them that heard these things” (5:5).
- “. . . and great fear came upon all the church” (5:11).
- “. . . and they were all with one accord in Solomon’s porch” (5:12).

The prophets foretold that the age of the Messiah, the era of the New Covenant, would be characterized by dramatic changes. It was not to be a period of new laws, but rather of new life and holy aptitudes. The recollection of some of their statements is like holy fragrance that clears the air of spiritual contaminants.

- **A CIRCUMCISED HEART.** “ And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deu 30:6).
- **PROTECTION IN THE MIDST OF DANGER.** “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isa 32:2).
- **GOING FROM UNDISCERNING TO DISCERNING.** “And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly” (Isa 32:4).
- **GOING FROM INABILITY TO ABILITY.** “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:6).
- **A HIGHWAY OF ULTIMATE SAFETY.** “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8).
- **MAN NO LONGER AT VARIANCE WITH GOD’S LAW.** “But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer 31:33).
- **FAMILIARITY WITH GOD.** “And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:34).
- **TOTAL NEWNESS OF CHARACTER.** “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh: that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances,

and do them: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God” (Ezek 11:19-20).

• **THE HOLY SPIRIT PUT WITHIN.** “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).

• **PURENESS OF SPEECH, AND ONENESS AMONG THE PEOPLE.** “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent” (Zeph 3:9).

What we are witnessing in the book of Acts is the RESULT of these Divinely instituted changes. The character of the people, as well as their marvelous unity, is the result of walking in the “newness of life” (Rom 6:4). No regimented procedure could have produced such changes. This was not the result of special tutoring by the apostles on how to live. This is what happens when the Father and the Son take up residence in men. Jesus promised, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23). Technically speaking, spiritual empowerment does not come because we love Christ and keep His words. It is the indwelling of the Father and the Son that follows these responses, that is the source of this much-needed empowerment.

When Christ and man are united through the Holy Spirit, and through faith there is a participation with the Lord. The only limits imposed upon man relate to the choice, will, and purpose of God. There is no point at which the Lord relinquishes the government of His Kingdom to men. Their insight and participation in the Kingdom directly relate to Divine discretion and purpose. That is why Jesus said to His apostles, “I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you ” (Matt 17:20).

The execution of mighty works among men is not at the behest of the will of man. The government of the Kingdom is with the exalted Christ, not men. All accomplishments within that Kingdom are according to Divine purpose – the grand master plan that drives all that God does. His will is associated with the details of that plan, and nothing is accepted by Him outside the perimeter of that will. His choice involves the

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selection of those who become a part of what He is doing. Our text will focus particularly upon His apostles, which have been placed “first” in the church.

When God’s will is done on earth as it is in heaven – something for which Jesus taught us to pray (Matt 6:10) – the purpose of God is accomplished by His determined will being done through men of His choice. Faith is the appointed means through which it is done. This will become very apparent in this text as we behold what is done through Christ’s appointed men, as well as what is done within them. It will be evident that men cannot cause such things to happen. Apart from Christ, they are simply impossible. They are the Lord’s doing!

SIGNS AND WONDERS WERE WROUGHT BY THE APOSTLES

“ 5:12a And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people . . . ” Other versions read, “The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people,” NIV “Now a number of signs and wonders were done among the people by the hands of the Apostles,” BBE “Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the

hands of the apostles,” ESV “Thus by the hands of the Apostles were many signs and wonders showed among the people,” GNV “The people saw the apostles perform many miracles and do amazing things,” GWN “And through the hands of the apostles came many signs and wonders among the people,” YLT “Meanwhile, the apostles . . . did many remarkable miracles among the people,” LIVING “The apostles did many miracles and powerful things among the people,” IE “Many signs and marvels continued to be done among the people by the Apostles,” WEYMOUTH “Now many signs and wonders were continuously being performed by the apostles among the people,” ISV “Now by the hands of the apostles (special messengers) numerous and startling signs and wonders were being performed among the people,” AMPLIFIED and “Many signs and wonders were now happening among the people through the apostles' ministry.” PHILLIPS (part of v 15)

This is the third time miracles are said to be have done through the hands of the apostles.

• **THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** “And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43).

• **AT THE TEMPLE.** “Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God” (Acts 3:6-8).

• **FOLLOWING THE DEATHS OF ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.** “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch” (Acts 5:12).

This is the second time that the apostles are said to have worked a multiplicity of signs and wonders – “many wonders and signs” and “many signs and wonders.” When the disciples prayed for boldness to be granted to them to speak the Word of God, they supplicated, “By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:30). Now, that is precisely what is taking place. Their supplication is being answered.

Notice that their prayer was that they might be granted boldness to speak the word through this means. In referring to such incidents, Mark says the Lord was “working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen” (Mark 16:20). Speaking of this beginning of the Gospel Paul also wrote of, “so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will?” (Heb 2:3-4). This was not extraordinary men doing extraordinary things, but God working through men in strict accordance with His own will. That is how we must think of this text.

The Spirit is not establishing an official doctrine concerning the working of miracles, even though men have done their best (or worst) to establish such a teaching. I come from a background where the attempt was made to limit the period during which miracles were wrought. Others go to the opposite extreme, saying that it is always God’s will to work miracles, and that you ought to expect Him to do so. Neither position has been revealed from God, but is rather only the imaginations of men.

Many

The word “many” comes from a Greek word meaning, “multitude, many, numerous, great . . . abundant, plenteous.” THAYER “of extent or magnitude great, large much, many, plentiful,” FRIBERG “for a large sum,” UBS “a great deal of, a great number,” LOUW-NIDA and “many, numerous, great, populous.” LEH The idea is that of abundance, and great in type or order.

Throughout the history of the world, there have been exceedingly few periods of time in which signs and wonders were in plentitude.

The Plagues of Egypt

The first outbreak of several miracles occurred prior to Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The epochal signs were ten in number, and unparalleled for sheer magnitude.

1. **WATER TURNED TO BLOOD.** (Exodus 7:14-25) – Rivers and other water sources turned to blood, and all the fish in them die, causing the water to stink. Water in all vessels was also turned to blood, and the Egyptians could not drink the water from the river.
2. **PLAGUE OF FROGS.** (Exodus 8:2-8:11) – The plague of frogs, coming out of the river and covering the land, and entering every Egyptian house.
3. **PLAGUE OF LICE.** (Exodus 8:16-18) – The plague of lice. The sand became lice throughout all the land of Egypt, covering both man and beast.
4. **PLAGUE OF FLIES.** (Exodus 8:21-28) – The plague of swarms of flies, filling every house in Egypt and corrupting the land.
5. **LIVESTOCK PLAGUED.** (Exodus 9:1-3) – A grievous plague was imposed upon on all the livestock in Egypt, including cattle, horses, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep.
6. **PLAGUE OF BOILS.** (Exodus 9:8-12) – The plague of festering boils that broke out upon every man and beast in Egypt.
7. **PLAGUE OF HAIL AND FIRE.** (Exodus 9:13-35) – Hail mixed with fire, with the hail beating down, killing every beast in the fields, and destroying all of the grain..
8. **PLAGUE OF LOCUSTS.** (Exodus 10:4-15) – Plage of locusts that covered the ground so the earth could not be seen. They ate every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left, and nothing green remained in the land.
9. **THICK DARKNESS.** (Exodus 10:21-29) – Thick darkness covered the land that could be felt. For three days the Egyptians were not able to see one another, and no one left their house.
10. **DEATH OF ALL EGYPTIAN FIRSTBORN.** (Exodus 11:1-12:36) – The death of all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, to the firstborn of the maidservants, and of even the beasts.

Israel experienced several miraculous things in their journey through the wilderness. Daily miracles included being led by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:21), the provision of manna (Ex 16:35), their clothes not becoming old (Deut 8:4a), and their feet not swelling (Deut 8:4b). There was the miraculous provision of water (Ex 17:6; Num 20:11), and the healing of polluted waters (Ex 15:25). There were also miraculous judgments, such as consuming fire (Num 11:1; 16:35), a plague of poisonous snakes (Num 21:6), and the ground opening up and swallowing rebels (Num 16:32). These, together with some great deliverances, occurred over a period of forty years.

Aside from these occasions, and with the exception of the prodigious ministry of Jesus, clusters of miracles were exceedingly rare. In fact, there were very lengthy periods of time during which no miracle was recorded. One such time was in the days of Gideon, during which he asked an angel, “where be all His miracles which our fathers told us of? ” (Judges 6:13). However, in the book of Acts, within a period of a few days, there has already been two periods in which “many” signs and wonders have been done (Acts 2:42; 5:21). This was more owing to the time than to abilities imparted to men.

The term “signs” presumes that there is some overriding reality that is being established. The “sign” is pointing to a fact that has been obscured by either circumstance or obtuseness. In this case, the reality was the Gospel itself, which proclaimed the exalted Christ and the opening of the door of salvation – neither of which could be detected by human senses. In addition to this, and in answer to the prayers of the church, boldness was granted through this means for the word of God to be preached boldly and confidently.

Wonders

A “wonder,” by definition, is a “portent, or prodigy” – something that foreshadows a coming event. THAYER Again, the wonder itself is not the point, but what it moves people to consider. In this case, it would be the unquestionable presence of God Almighty, to whom all men are accountable.

As is apparent, signs and wonders are not an end of themselves. That is, after they have been witnessed, they are not intended to leave the people thinking about what they have seen. Rather, the Person and cause behind the signs and wonders, together with the message that is being declared, are to be pondered.

An Unjustified Trend

It has now become fashionable in certain Christian circles to speak of your miracle – some special supernatural work tailored particularly for you, and with your personal interests in mind. While there may be some small fragment of reality in the statement, it is exceedingly small, and much like a jewel in a swine’s snout (Prov 11:22). Such a view tends to contradict the centrality of Divine purpose, and the working of God according to His own will. Miracles have never been an end of themselves, but have always been an indication of something greater that was to be apprehended. I do not believe any person can support the statement that God wants every person to have their own miracle. In fact, Jesus Himself contradicted this doctrine when He said in His hometown synagogue, “But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:27).

God does not work with a primary interest in men, but with His own immutable purpose in mind. His works are consistently “done in truth,” not with a mind to simply please men (Psa 33:4). He is not merely sympathetic in His works, but is declared to be “holy in all His works” (Psa 145:17). It is never right to approach the subject of the miraculous as though mankind was at the center of Divine purpose, or was ever the sole object of His focus.

The Apostles and Miracles

Throughout the history of the world, there have been exceedingly few periods of time in which signs and wonders were in plentitude.

To this point in Acts, no one but the apostles have worked a sign or wonder. As I understand it, this reflects the superior rank of the Apostles as the foundation of the church – that is, they laid down the foundation upon which faith and hope could be built. In view of their position, they were given power to confirm the truth of what they were speaking by working signs and wonders that substantiated that message. However, their miracles were never designed to merely satisfy the desires of any given person. If that was their objective, then the fact that they did not stamp out all illness would be evidence of a respect for persons.

Rather, the miracles that came through their hands were precisely after the manner of those wrought

by the Lord Jesus Himself. Jesus said of His miraculous works, “the same works that I do, bear witness of Me , that the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36). And again, “The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do : for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19). Like their Lord, the apostles did not come to satisfy the quest of men for the miraculous, or to resolve everyone’s problems. By their very nature, the working of the miraculous is always discretionary, and in strict accordance with the Divine agenda. I know of no exception, in any age, or under any circumstance, to this rule.

A False View of Apostolic Empowerment

During my early days, I was taught that the apostles received the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit , which accounted for their ability to work miracles. Their reception of “the gift of the Holy Spirit” was thus declared to be different from that of the ordinary believers. Of course, such a teaching is dashed to the ground in the account of the conversion of the house of Cornelius. Peter confirms that God gave the household of Cornelius the Holy Spirit “ as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). Aside from magnifying God in other languages, the household of Cornelius is nowhere noted for working miracles as did the apostles – even though they received the same Spirit in the same manner as the apostles. In addition to this, Peter declared that the “gift” received by those on the day of Pentecost was available to the multitudes who heard him, and to “all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:38-39).

To my knowledge, the promised coming of the Spirit is not specifically associated with the working of miracles, as ordinarily conceived. This includes promises by the prophets, and the Lord Jesus Himself.

- “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3).
- “And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).
- “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions” (Joel 2:28).
- “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt 10:19-20).
- “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever” (John 14:16).
- “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).
- “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: and ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:26-27).
- “And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:8).
- “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:14).

Later, other men will work miracles, including Stephen (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6), and Ananias (Acts 9:17-18). Also, Paul will write that one of the gifts God placed in the church was “the working of miracles” (1 Cor 12:10). However, even that gift, so far as rank is concerned, was put into the church only “after” the gifts of apostles, prophets, and teachers had been given (1 Cor 12:28) – and then it was given to certain individuals and not to every member of the body (1 Cor 12:29).

The point here is that nothing in Scripture suggests to us that God has determined that miracles would become common among His people, so that everyone has a right to expect one to be wrought particularly for them. To begin with, that would contradict the very concept of a miracle, which is a departure from the norm.

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This does not mean that God has determined a time when miracles will no longer be possible among His people on the earth. It does mean that they are always wrought in strict accordance with His will, and with His established purpose in mind. Miracles are always circumscribed by the purpose of God and the faith and spiritual condition of His people.

It might also be noted that many of the professed miracles of our time are not of the same order as those recorded in Scripture. Many of them, though they may very well involve answers to prayer, would appear out of place if they were recorded in Scripture. This is not to be construed as a denial that the hand of the Lord is working among His people.

This rather has to do with the loose and unwarranted use of words like “miracles,” “signs,” “wonders,” and the likes. For such things to become commonplace would make them counterproductive. One of the powerful testimonies of miracles, signs, and wonders is their uniqueness. The fact that they are not common is what draws the attention of people to them.

Dealing with Mark 16

Following Christ’s commission to “preach the gospel to every creature,” promising that “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned,” Jesus gave a word concerning certain signs that would follow. “And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mark 16:17-18).

There are some who affirm that this is a general word to all of the churches, and is intended for every believer. It all sounds innocent enough, yet such a representation is not made by any writer of Scripture. No church was told such a thing. No new believers were promised this was intended for them – i.e., something that would follow every person who believed.

This promise does not obviate the subjection of all things to the Lord. Nothing is here sanctioned that is not in strict comportment with the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Neither, indeed, does this mean that every time anyone believes, these signs will break forth. The text refers primarily to those who preached the Gospel, and secondarily to those who believe that Gospel. The signs follow by Divine discretion, and are nowhere declared to be automatic. Even in the book of Acts, there were times when such signs are not said to have followed those who believed. Cases in point include the following.

- When the Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia believed (Acts 13:48).

- When the Philippian jailor and his household believed (Acts 16:34).
- When certain in Athens believed (Acts 17:4).
- When Crispus, his household, and many Corinthians believed (Acts 18:8).

During Paul's stay in Iconium, where several did believe, many signs and wonders were wrought by Paul and Barnabas ("they"). The record is carefully stated, and confirms the miracles did not simply take place automatically. "Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands" (Acts 14:3). The word "granted" is truly discretionary. It does not refer to some law or principle that had been set in motion. That ought to be apparent.

We cannot be overly simplistic in our understanding of the Lord's words in Mark sixteen. Just as in His own ministry, the confirmation of His word was according to the strict prudence of the Father. When it is appropriate for such workings to occur, they will be done in accordance with the will of the Lord and the presence of faith. We know this did not happen every time someone believed the Gospel.

- There is no record of any of them occurring among those who believed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:37-47).

- None of them occurred when about five thousand men believed in the Temple (Acts 4:4).

- None are recorded as being wrought by believers when the whole city of Samaria believed, where the miracles are said to have been done by Philip (Acts 8:6-7).

- One of them took place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:46).

- In their report of the great conversions among the Gentiles, Barnabas and Paul made no reference to the believers themselves doing such thing, but plainly declared the "miracles and wonders" were wrought by them personally (Acts 15:12).

- None of these miracles were reported to have happened at the conversion of Lydia's household (Acts 16:14-15).

- None are said to have taken place among the Philippian jailor's household (Acts 16:32-34).

- There is no record of them in the household of Crispus and "many of the Corinthians" (Acts 18:8).

- Those who believed in Achai are not said to have wrought such signs (Acts 18:27).

- One of the signs was wrought in certain disciples from Ephesus who believed (Acts 19:2-6).

- When a goodly number of people from Ephesus believed, these signs did not follow. Instead, they burned their occultistic books (Acts 19:17-20).

- None of the Epistles contain evidence of the working of these signs among all those who believed. Corinth was reminded of individuals among them who were granted the gift of "the working of miracles" (1 Cor 12:10) – but were also reminded all of them had not received such a gift (1 Cor 12:29).

- The Galatians were also reminded that certain among them "worketh miracles" (Gal 3:5), doing so according to "the hearing of faith."

It cannot be true, therefore, that Mark 16:17-18 is intended to teach that men everywhere ought to expect the signs of reference to break out wherever men believe the Gospel. Indeed, some are bold

enough to affirm that this is, in fact,

Let us thrust from us the doctrines of men, and choose to believe on the Lord Jesus, laboring in hope for Him, and, in our hearts, submitting to Him who works in accordance with His own immutable will.

what Jesus was promising. But they are not right. They are merely spouting a tradition they have received from men. How is it possible for the Head of the church to make a commitment to the church, and then the Holy Spirit omit its fulfillment in His record of conversions?

Let us thrust from us the doctrines of men, and choose to believe on the Lord Jesus, laboring in hope for Him, and, in our hearts, submitting to Him who works in accordance with His own immutable will.

There may be environments like Bethsaida in which Jesus can do “no mighty work” (Mk 6:5) – even though there were some believers from that city (Philip, Andrew, and Peter (John 1:14)). There may also be a “wicked and adulterous generation” to whom the Divine nature refuses to show a sign (Matt 16:4) – even though a holy remnant of disciples may be found within it, like the apostles themselves. We cannot afford to be naive on this matter.

Why signs and wonders?

At this time, there are at least three reasons for many signs and wonders being done through the hands of the apostles.

- First, this was an answer to the prayer of the church just previous to this: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus ” (Acts 4:29-30). This was taking place in a way that could not be denied.
- Second, they had been preaching in the name of Jesus, and these signs and wonders were an obvious proof of the truth of that claim. These were the type of works Jesus Himself did, and the association of the apostles with Him was now beyond all question.
- The results of these displays, coupled with the preaching of the powerful Gospel of Christ, confirmed that this was the purposeful and timely working of the Lord (Acts 5:14).

DOCTRINE CANNOT BE DEVELOPED FROM EXAMPLES AND PRECEDENTS

It is important to establish one more thing in regard to these matters. It is never proper to found doctrine upon examples, precedents, or human interpretation. “Sound doctrine” (1 Tim 1:10) is factual, not the result of interpretation. It consists of the affirmation of unalterable realities. True doctrine relates primarily to the Lord Jesus, and is therefore called “the doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:12), “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9), and “the doctrine of God our Savior” (Tit 2:10). If we read of “the doctrine of baptisms,” the reference is not to a network of teaching developed by men. It is rather factual Divine affirmations on that subject, such as are found in Romans 6:1-23 and Colossians 2:10-15). You cannot compile a valid doctrine on baptism by gathering all of the examples of baptism and piecing them together like a puzzle. It is what the Spirit has declared on the subject that constitutes the doctrine .

Those who have confused the body of Christ with their contrived teaching on miracles have harmed the people of God. They have led people to believe that miracles are common, when, with the single exception of the ministry of Jesus, this has never been the case. Even in the book of Acts, the recording of miracles being done is not an emphasis. References to them even diminish as the book progresses. The graphic on the right charts the use of the singular and plural use of the words “miracles,” “signs”

and “wonders” in all the book of Acts. I have limited the references to affirmations that an individual or individuals did these might works.

The point is that there is no apostolic doctrine concerning miracles. There is no promise to believers concerning their frequency, or guarantee of their perpetual availability. They are never an apostolic emphasis. A rebuke is never administered because they are not present within the church, and a commendation is never granted because they are present in any given assembly.

When Paul was in prison with Epaphroditus, and this brother almost died, Paul did not cry out, “Where are the miracles?” He did not claim the promise that if he laid hands on Epaphroditus he would recover. Instead, he wrote that “God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow” (Phil 2:27). The mercy was probably an answer to prayer – the prayer of a known miracle-worker.

In view of this, when our text affirms that “many signs and wonders were wrought among the people” “by the hands of the apostles,” we are to understand that an unusual thing was taking place – which is the whole point of the text. This marvelous working was in answer to their prayer, and it was yielding results that appropriately glorified God. We must be willing to leave the matter there, and be confident that God will continue to work in accordance with His own good pleasure. God is too holy and too powerful for men to guess about His intentions.

The frequency of such ,marvelous works will not be determined by our persuasion that they can take place. Actually, no person who has faith in God, or knows Him, has any question about the possibility of the miraculous. To develop a theological position that boldly announces that, by Divine intention, miracles have ceased, is to betray the presence of unbelief. Men do not have a right to banter about the possibility of the supernatural, or assign time periods and limitations to the discretionary working of the Lord. If they are engaged in such efforts to neutralize what they conceive to be false doctrine, let them cast down such imaginations with the

Men cannot control the miraculous, or make grandiose announcements about its borders or assigned time periods. It will rather be governed by what God is doing in any given generation, and whether or not there are vessels present that are “meet for the Masters use, and prepared unto every good work”

assigned spiritual weaponry provided for this purpose (2 Cor 10:4-5). If they are unskilled in the use of that weaponry, they should leave iconoclastic work to those with more Kingdom understanding, who are able to wield the appointed weaponry effectively.

Men cannot control the miraculous, or make grandiose announcements about its borders or assigned time periods. It will rather be governed by what God is doing in any given generation, and whether or not there are vessels present that are “meet for the Masters use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

Some generations are being judged (Lk 21:20), while others are being blessed (Matt 4:16). The eyes of some are being opened (Acts 26:18), while the eyes of others are being shut (Isa 44:18). Some are being awakened (John 5:25, while others are having the spirit of deep sleep poured out upon them (Isa 29:10). For some, desires are withheld (Matt 16:4), while for others, and answer to “the prayer of faith” is promised (James 5:15). I know of no word from God that leads to the conclusion that there will ever be a time when the Kingdom of Christ will continue to function without His involvement. If that seems ludicrous, consider that such would have to happen if the miraculous were ever to cease, and things functioned strictly according to nature, and within the boundaries of human power.

Should anyone care to postulate that such a supposition is right, they owe us an explanation of how such an arrangement brings glory to God. It appears to me that such efforts tend to glorify the

institutions of men, not God. It cannot be countered that God has placed everything under men at this time. We are expressly told that this is the purpose of God, but that it is not yet being fulfilled. Thus is it written, “Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him . But we see Jesus . . .” (Heb 2:8-9).

That is, the ONLY Man who presently has everything under His feet is Jesus Christ. The redeemed will have their part in that subjugation in the world to come, but not in this world.

A RECORD OF THE MIRACLES REPORTED IN SCRIPTURE

RECORDED MIRACLES ADAM TO JESUS, 4000 Years

- 001 The flood (Genesis 7)
- 002 Confusion of tongues at Babel (Genesis 11)
- 003 Fire on Abraham’s sacrifice (Genesis 15:17)
- 004 Conception of Isaac (Genesis 17:17; 19:12; 21:2)
- 005 Destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19)
- 006 Lot’s wife turned to pillar of salt (Genesis 19:26)
- 007 Closed womb’s in Abimelech’s house (Genesis 20:17-18)
- 008 Opening of Hagar’s eyes (Genesis 21:19)
- 009 Conception of Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:21)
- 010 Opening of Rachel’s womb (Genesis 30:22)
- 011 Burning bush (Exodus 3:2)
- 012 Moses’s rod turned into serpent (Ex 4:3-4; 7:10-12)
- 013 Moses’ hand becomes leprous (Exodus 4:6-7)
- 014 Ten plagues in Egypt (Exodus 8-12)
- 015 Pillar of cloud/pillar of fire leading Israel (Exodus 13:21-22; 14:19-20)
- 016 Israel crosses Red Sea (Exodus 14:22)
- 017 Pharaoh and army drowns in Red Sea (Exodus 14:23-30)
- 018 Sweetening of waters at Marah (Exodus 15:25)
- 019 Manna for forty years (Exodus 16)
- 020 Quails given to Israel (Exodus 16:13)
- 021 Defeat of Amalek (Exodus 17:9-13)
- 022 Moses’ face glows from the Divine presence (Exodus 34:29-35)

- 023 Water from the rock (Exodus 17:5-7)
- 024 Miriam stricken with leprosy (Numbers 12:10-15)
- 025 Destruction of Korah and cohorts (Numbers 16:31-35)
- 026 Aaron's rod buds (Numbers 17:1-9)
- 027 Scourge of serpents (Numbers 21:6-9)
- 028 Destruction of Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-2)
- 029 Balaam's ass speaks (Numbers 22:22-30)
- 030 Jordan divided (Joshua 3:14-17; 14:16-18)
- 031 Fall of Jericho (Joshua 6:20)
- 032 Midianites destroyed (Judges 7:16-22)
- 033 Destroying hail on confederation of kings (Joshua 10:11)
- 034 Sun and moon stand still (Joshua 10:12-14)
- 035 Dew on Gideon's fleece (Judges 6:37-40)
- 036 Samson's strength (Judges 14:6; 16:3,29-30)
- 037 Samson supplied with water (Judges 15:19)
- 038 Fall of the idol Dagon (1 Samuel 5:1-4)
- 039 Cows return the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 6:7-14)
- 040 People struck with hemorrhoids (1 Samuel 5:9-12; 6:1-5)
- 041 Destruction of people at Bethshemesh (1 Samuel 6:19-20)
- 042 Uzzah struck dead (2 Samuel 6:1-8)
- 043 Jeroboam's hand withered (1 Kings 13:3-6)
- 044 Elijah fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:6)
- 045 Elijah fed by an angel (1 Kings 19:1-8)
- 046 Elijah increases widows oil/meal (1 Kgs 17:9-16)
- 047 Elijah raises widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24)
- 048 Elijah prays it will not rain (1 Kings 17:1)
- 049 Elijah prays it will rain (1 Kings 18:41-45)
- 050 Elijah brings fire on Ahaziah's army (2 Kings 1:10-12)
- 051 Elijah divides Jordan (2 Kings 2:8)

- 052 Elijah translated (2 Kings 2:11)
- 053 Elisha divides Jordan (2 Kings 2:14)
- 054 Elisha sweetens waters of Jericho (2 Kings 2:19-22)
- 055 Elisha increases widow's oil (2 Kings 4:1-7)
- 056 Elisha raises Shunammite's son from dead (2 Kings 4:18-26)
- 057 Elisha heals pottage (2 Kings 4:38-41)
- 058 Elisha feeds 100 men (2 Kings 4:42-44)
- 059 Elisha cures Naaman's leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-9)
- 060 Elisha puts leprosy on Gehazi (2 Kings 5:26-27)
- 061 Elisha causes axe head to float (2 Kings 6:6)
- 062 Elisha reveals counsel of king of Syria (2 Kings 6:12)
- 063 Elisha prays eyes of his servant will be opened (2 Kings 6:17)
- 064 Elisha smites Syrian army with blindness (2 Kings 6:18)
- 065 Dead man restored when touching Elisha's bones (2 Kings 13:21)
- 065 Destruction of Sennacarib's army (2 Kings 19:35; Isaiah 37:36)
- 066 Shadow on sun dial turned backward ten degrees (2 Kings 20:9-11)
- 067 Three Hebrews children delivered from fiery furnace (Dan 3:23-27)
- 068 Daniel delivered from lion's den (Daniel 6:22)
- 069 Jonah in fish's belly (Jonah 1-2)
- 070 Jonah's gourd (Jonah 4:6)
- 071 Jonah's gourd destroyed by a worm (Jonah 4:7)

Number of recorded miracles – 71. Period covered – 4,000 years. Average – a miracle every 56 years, if not clustered

MIRACLES OF JESUS

- 001 Water into wine (John 2)
- 002 Heals nobleman's son (John 4:46-54)
- 003 Draught of fishes (Luke 5:1-9)
- 004 Heals demoniac (Mark 1:23-26)
- 005 Heals Peter's mother-in-law (Matthew 8:14-17)

006 Cleanses leper (Matthew 8:1-4)

007 Heals paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8)

008 Heals impotent men (John 5:1-9)

009 Restores withered hand (Matthew 12:9-13)

010 Restores Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13)

011 Raises widow's son from the dead (Luke 7:11-16)

012 Heals demoniacs (Mark 3:11)

013 Stills the tempest (Matthew 8:23-27)

014 Casts demons out of Gadarene (Matthew 8:23-34)

015 Raises Jairus' daughter from the dead (Matthew 9:18-26)

016 Cures woman with issue of blood (Matthew 9:20-22)

017 Restore sight to two blind men (Matthew 9:27-31)

018 Heals demoniac (Matthew 12:23-30)

019 Feeds 5,000 (Matthew 14:15-21)

020 -Walks on raging sea (Matthew 14:22-30)

021 Heals Syrophenician woman's daughter (Matthew 15:21-28)

022 Feeds 4,000 (Matthew 15:32-39)

023 Restores deaf and dumb (Mark 7:31-37)

024 Restores blind man (Mark 8:22-26)

025 Restores lunatic child (Matthew 17:14-21)

026 Tribute money from fish's mouth (Matthew 17:24-27)

027 Restores ten lepers (Matthew 17:11-19)

028 Opens eyes of man born blind (John 9:1-9)

029 Raises Lazarus from the dead (John 11)

030 Heals woman with spirit of infirmity (Luke 13:10-17)

031 Cures man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)

032 Restores two blind men near Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34)

033 Curses a fig tree (Matthew 21:17-21)

034 Heals ear of Malchus (Luke 22:49-51)

035 Second draught of fish (John 21:6)

036 Resurrection from the dead (Acts 13:30)

037 Many unrecorded miracles (John 21:25)

MIRACLES WROUGHT BY CHRIST'S DISCIPLES

001 By the twelve Apostles prior to Pentecost (Matt 10:1-8)

002 By the seventy (Luke 10:17-20)

003 By other disciples (Mark 9:39)

004 By the Apostles (Acts 3:6-16; Acts 9:34-35; Acts 16:19)

005 Peter cures the sick (Acts 5:15-16)

006 Peter cures Aeneas (Acts 9:34)

007 Peter raises Dorcas (Acts 9:40)

008 Peter brings death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5,10)

009 Peter and John cure lame man (Acts 3:2-10)

010 Peter and other Apostles delivered from prison (Acts 5:19-23; 12:6-9)

011 Philip carried away in the spirit (Acts 8:39)

012 Paul strikes Elymas with blindness (Acts 13:11)

013 Paul heals cripple (Acts 14:10)

014 Paul casts out spirits and cures sick (Acts 16:18; 19:11-12; 28:8-9)

015 Paul raises Eutychus to life (Acts 20:9-12)

016 Paul shakes deadly viper from hand (Acts 28:5)

THEY WERE ALL OF ONE ACCORD

“ 5:12b . . . and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch.”

The threats of the Jewish leaders have not driven the disciples underground. Rather, having been filled with the Spirit, granted boldness, and with great grace upon them all, they have returned to the Temple area with power – the very area in which they had first encountered fierce opposition. Further, it is not only the apostles that have returned, or the apostles with a handful of faithful ones. Multitudes were gathering, and they were all of one accord.

These days the professing church has degenerated into such a condition in which relatively few people in the average congregation are noted for diligence and spiritual stamina. In fact, it is exceedingly difficult, if not altogether impossible, to get all of the people together at one time. Who does not know that this is the case?

However, we must not allow ourselves to look at the contemporary church scene and think of it as

being ordinary. What we see today is NOT an appropriate view of the body of Christ, but is more of an lifeless apparition – the phantom church!

What we are being exposed to in the book of Acts is the real church. This is the authentic body of Christ, over which He presides, and in which He dwells. Their manners are the ways of “the elect of God.” This is how “newness of life” makes itself known. These people do not meet because they have been commanded to do so, but because their desires compel them to come together. They do not meet to “play,” as Israel did at the foot of Mount Sinai (1 Cor 10:7). They have a solitary focus, and one heart and soul animates them all. When we behold them, they are not a pattern of what we SHOULD be, but the evidence and confirmation of what people ARE in Christ Jesus.

These are not people who can be emulated. Their spiritual stance is too aggressive and too consistent for anyone who does not have a new heart and a new spirit. Institutional Christians are like invalids in this kind of arena. They cannot climb the mountains these people climb, or walk into intimidating areas like they do. A mind that is riveted to the earth cannot adopt the priorities of such people.

Notice the candor with which the Spirit speaks. He does not move Luke to marvel at what these people are doing. He simply reports it as a fact – and one that is not at all surprising. Yet, if the very thing mentioned in this verse was to actually take place in the average church, it would be astounding beyond all measure.

ONE ACCORD

“ . . . and they were all with one accord . . . ” Other versions read, “And all the believers used to meet together,” NIV “and they were all together ,” BBE “By common consent they would all meet,” CSB “The believers had a common faith in Jesus,” GWN “And they were all assembled together ,” MRD “ One in heart , they all used to meet,” NIB “And all the believers were meeting regularly .” NJB “Meanwhile, the apostles were meeting regularly,” LIVING “The apostles were together . . . they all had the same purpose ,” IE “And by common consent they all met together ,” AMPLIFIED “and they were all of one mind ,” ALT “All of the Lord's followers often met ,” CEV and “they were all with one passion .” LITV

This is now the fifth time believers are said to have been “in one accord” (1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12). The words “one accord” are translated from a single Greek word: **ο`μοϋμαδο.ν** (hom-oth-oo-mad-on). It means “with one mind, of one accord,” THAYER “with one purpose, by common consent,” FRIBERG “unanimously,” LOUW-NIDA and “with one mind or purpose or impulse.” GINGRICH

“One accord” is an expression for which there is no single English word that is adequate. As is evident in the various versions of Scripture, the wide-ranging meaning of the term is somewhat difficult to put into words. It should not surprise us that the extent of spiritual experience transcends the capacity of language. This is why the range of translations for this expression include “together,” NIV “common consent,” CSB “common faith,” GWN “one in heart,” NIB “had the same purpose,” IE “one mind,” ALT and “one passion.” LITV

The technical meaning of the word includes unanimous . LOUW-NIDA This is a fairly good view of the meaning. The English word “unanimous” means “being of one mind.” Related words are listed as “agreed, agreeing, concordant, concurrent, and harmonious.” Contrasting words are listed as “differing, disagreed, disagreeing, discordant, and inharmonious.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2003

When it comes to matters related to religion, and within the context of the modern church, the very concept of unanimous, one accord, and agreement , is staggering to consider. Often, I have heard preachers and teachers say they know of no one with whom they are in perfect agreement. The very existence of differing bodies of theology confirms that division and a lack of harmony is at the very

root of institutionalized religion. Few people expect harmonious thought to ever exist among professing Christians. Therefore, all manner of approaches are taken to get people to work together, forget their differences, and try to concentrate on the few things upon which they may happen to agree. Instead of harmony, men have come to believe that tolerance is commendable, and agreement is not even expected. All of this exists in spite of the fact that “God is one” (Deut 6:4; Mk 12:29; Gal; 3:20), and Christ is not “divided” (1 Cor 1:13).

After all the arguments have been presented, and the various defenses of contradicting hermeneutics have been put forward, our text thunders at us with a tone of rebuke: “they were all with one accord.” “THEY were all of one accord!” They were ALL of one accord!” They were all of ONE accord!” They were all of one ACCORD !” In this, the prophecy was fulfilled, “ they shall see eye to eye , when the LORD shall bring again Zion” (Isa 52:8). Jeremiah foretold, “And I will give them one heart, and one way ” (Jer 32:39). Zephaniah said the people would serve the Lord “with one consent ,” or “one accord” NKJV (Zech 3:9).

In this text, with all of the divisions within the Jewish community, there was a body of considerable size who were “all” of one accord. It is as though one heartbeat was in them all, and they were animated by a single soul. They were, in fact, a sterling example of “one body,” fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies (Eph 4:16). This is not merely what the people of God should be, it is what they are when they mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13-14; Col 3:5), live by faith (Heb 10:38), walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16), and put off the old man, while putting on the new man (Eph 4:22-24). If those conditions are found in our time, the very same unity and oneness will be exhibited.

THEY MET IN SOLOMON’S PORCH

“ . . . in Solomon's porch.” Other versions read, “in Solomon's Colonnade,” NIV “in Solomon's portico ,” NASB “in Solomon's covered way ,” BBE “in the porch of Solomon ,” MRD “in the Portico of Solomon,” NIB “in the area known as Solomon's Colonnade,” NJB “in the area known as Solomon's Hall ,” LIVING and “[at the temple] in the covered porch (walk) called Solomon’s.”

This was the very area where the conflict with the Temple authorities arose (Acts 3:11). It is also a place where Jesus walked during the Feast of Dedication, when “it was winter” (John 10:22-23). At that time, Jesus also taught in this area, as the people came to Him (John 10:24-39). It is evident that it was a place where large numbers of people could convene for a common cause. In the case of our text, the cause was to hear the apostles, for to continue “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42), it had to be regularly heard. Here we see the people aggressive to gather together, submitting their hearts and minds to the truth as declared by Christ’s ambassadors.

No man can find the truth of justification, sanctification, the coming of the Lord, or the hope of glory independent of the doctrine of the apostles! If you are ever going to learn of the struggle of the flesh and with Spirit, you will have to become familiar with what the apostles said about it.

Solomon’s porch was of considerable size, being 800 feet long. That is nearly three football fields placed end-to-end. It was a covered area, with the covering supported by 162 Corinthian pillars. The pillars were one hundred feet high – that is equivalent to a ten story building. I do not know the width of the porch , although some have estimated it to have been about one hundred feet wide. Whatever the estimate, it is evident that it was of considerable size, and could have accommodated a significantly large crowd of people.

At this point, the people did not break up into small groups, meeting only in houses, as some have alleged. When these disciples met from “house to house” (Acts 2:46), it was apparently in addition to these general gatherings. It appears that the apostles did not move about from house to house, but

taught in the Temple, as they were later expressly told to do (Acts 5:20).

Feeding the Flock

Converts did not go on their way, resuming their lives as they were lived before. Now they were alive unto God (Rom 6:11), and that life could not be sustained independently of the Word, as expounded by the apostles. Neither, indeed, did the converts return to take up the Scriptures (Moses and the Prophets) and begin deciphering them for themselves. Spiritual babies can no more eat properly than babies in the flesh, They must be “fed” by someone who can properly dispense spiritual nourishment (John 21:16-17; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2). This was particularly true before the apostles’ doctrine was in written form. The body of Christ could not be established by independent thinking and the voicing of varied opinions. The people had to be subject to the teaching of those who had themselves been taught by God, and knew whereof they spoke.

How would the people know of the cessation of the sacrifices and the necessity of circumcision as a sign of the covenant? How would they learn of the leading of the Spirit and the implications of the newness of life. What person would be able to comprehend as they should the truth of justification, the presence of the grace of God, and the existence of a High Priest in heaven? Are such things simply discovered along the way without due proclamation? That such a thing is possible with the writings of the apostles cannot be denied. There have been a few noble souls who have found the truth in that manner, but it was generally preceded by a very lengthy period of heart-wrenching searching, during which there were very fundamental flaws in their thinking.

The point to be seen here is that the people were conscious of the need to be fed with knowledge by men of spiritual understanding. Thus the word of Jeremiah would be fulfilled, “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding” (Jer 3:15). Here were people who were hungry and thirsty for righteousness. Together, and with one accord, they purposefully assembled in Solomon’s commodious porch to hear the word of the Lord.

The apostles were especially guided into all truth for the purpose of putting the church on a solid foundation. This is the reason for the common consent of the people to gather in the Temple – not merely for informal fellowship, but to hear the word of the Lord from the apostles. The word, as our text affirms, was attended by many confirming “signs and wonders” that were wrought by the hands of the apostles. Mark says that as the apostles preached, God worked with them “confirming the word with signs following” (Mk 16:20). Paul also testifies of those early days when the apostles, who had personally been taught by Jesus, continued to deliver His word. It is said of that time that God Himself was “also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will” (Heb 2:4).

Our text is relating one of the historical occasions when these things were taking place. The people were being established in the faith through the words of God-ordained men of understanding, and God was verifying their word by an outburst of many signs and wonders. All of this was done in answer to their prayer.

The Need for the Apostles’ Doctrine Today

While the Spirit does direct people into the truth today, it is not in the precise manner as He directed the apostles. No man can find the truth of justification, sanctification, the coming of the Lord, or the hope of glory independently of the doctrine of the apostles! If you are ever going to learn of the struggle of the flesh and with Spirit, you will have to become familiar with what the apostles said about it. If you want to know what really took place when you were baptized into Christ, you will have to sit at the feet of the apostles. If you desire to know the rationale behind fleeing from fornication, you must be subjected to the apostles doctrine. Where else can you learn about “the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:10-18), the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:22-23), or the continual change that is

wrought within the saints by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18)?

The ministry of the apostles has not been given to anyone else. Respecting doctrine, they are still the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20). If a person chooses to neglect apostolic doctrine, spiritual ignorance will prevail. It simply is not possible to grow up into Christ while neglecting the apostles' doctrine.

This is confirmed by the general condition of the professed church, together with the vast majority of its ministers. There is such an abysmal level of ignorance concerning the apostles' doctrine that it is mind-boggling. This gross deficiency of understanding has given rise to a plethora of religious charlatans. Their air waves, religious book stores, and schools of purported higher learning are filled with their flawed and misdirected works – and men love to have it so.

Today, within the average church, “the apostles’ doctrine” is lying dormant in sectarian ruins. The people do not even know what the doctrine says, much less what it means. For this reason nothing significant can be built for God where this condition exists.

However, in our text, these conditions did not yet exist. The conversions were unquestionably genuine. When pretenders surfaced, they were at once known, and God dealt with them. The people had a faith that could not be suppressed, and a love of the truth that dominated their hearts and minds. They loved each other, and came together to be taught “the truth as it is in Jesus” (Eph 4:20). They did not come together to be entertained.. They did not come together reluctantly, or because they were forced to do so. One heart, one soul, and common consent brought them together – a common faith, a single hope, and a love of the truth.

Not Intended To Be Unique

Do not think that this was something unique to the first century! This very same thing has happened throughout history when the apostolic doctrine was again found and treasured. That doctrine presents a precise picture of Jesus and His great salvation. Once believed, all of heaven becomes involved.

Our times are much like those that existed in Israel during the reign of Josiah. In the eighteenth year of his reign it was determined “to repair the breaches” of the house of the Lord. As they went about their work, Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the book of the law in the house of the Lord!” The book was read before the king, and it registered upon his heart. Upon hearing the words, he knew at once that the nation was living in contradiction of their God, and he set out to obtain more of the mind of the Lord on the matter (2 Kgs 22:8-20).

Today, within the average church, “the apostles’ doctrine” is lying dormant in sectarian ruins. The people do not even know what the doctrine says, much less what it means. For this reason nothing significant can be built for God where this condition exists. The foundation of the apostles is not there, and thus the house cannot be built. The question must be asked of this generation, “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psa 11:3).

The conditions of the church in the book of Acts cannot be replicated independently of the causes behind them. It is not possible to have the blessing without the Blessor, or the gifts without the Giver. Understanding cannot be had without God-sent teachers. Organization cannot achieve these things. Any effort to do so cannot possibly succeed.

AMONG THE REST, NO MAN DARED TO JOIN THEM

“ 13a And of the rest durst no man join himself to them . . . ”

Real disciples are always observed. Further, the nature of what they possessed is, to some degree, sensed by those who watch them attentively them. What happens among Christ's followers eventually

gets out – just as it did on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:6). In our text, word had circulated about these people, what they said, and what took place among them.

This was not the result of promotion. It was rather the revelation of the nature of new life in Christ Jesus – which life tends to manifest itself. It obtains the same nature as the Savior Himself, who shed light wherever He was. Life in Christ Jesus emits a certain glory that cannot be hidden. Paul said of the Philippian brethren, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world ” (Phil 2:15). That is, when our walk is in the Spirit, our light will shine!

If we devote ourselves to the proper priorities, a godly influence will come from us that cannot be hidden. Paul referred to this condition when speaking of certain traits of the New Covenant. He applies this truth particularly to himself, and the preaching in which he was engaged. The principle, however, is also woven into the very fabric of the life that is in Christ Jesus. “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place. For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ , in them that are saved, and in them that perish: to the one we are the savor of death unto death ; and to the other the savor of life unto life . And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:16). In the place of “savor,” other versions use “aroma,” NKJV “fragrance,” NASB “smell,” NIV “sweet perfume,” BBE “sweet odor,” DARBY “sweet wholesome fragrance,” LIVING and “pleasant smell.” IE

In the above passage, there are several different recipients of the “savor,” or fragrance.

- **TO ALL WHO HEAR THE GOSPEL.** “. . . God . . . maketh manifest the savor of His knowledge by us in every place ” (2 Cor 2:14). The Gospel of Christ is like the pervading aroma of a powerful incense. Wherever it is preached in truth, people become keenly aware of a non-worldly influence – one that is not found in the common course of life in the flesh.

- **TO GOD HIMSELF.** “We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ” (2:15). The faithful heralds of the Good News are themselves a sweet and pleasant aroma of Christ to God. That is, it is Christ in them that brings great pleasure to the Father. Further, that presence is something that is not taken for granted. Jesus does not remain where He is not wanted, or is stifled. He Himself affirmed that He manifests Himself only to the ones who love Him. He further defined that love as having His commandments and keeping them, or maintaining a hold upon them (John 14:21). It is the manifesting Christ who causes us to emit a pleasant odor to the Living God.

- **TO THE PERISHING.** “To the one we are the savor of death unto death ” (2:16a). To the ones who are perishing, the fragrance of the godly appears as the offensive stench of death. It is not pleasant to them at all. In fact, it only serves to drive them still further from the Lord. That is, it is the smell of death that moves them deeper into spiritual death.

- **TO THOSE WHO ARE SAVED.** “. . . to the other the savor of life unto life ” (2:16b). The very same fragrance that is offensive to those who are perishing, is most pleasant to those who are being saved – pleasant in the same sense as it is to God. Instead of driving them further from the Lord, it brings them closer to Him.

Our text will show us the response “in them that are saved, and in them that perish” (2 Cor 2:15) – a fragrance that repels, and a fragrance that draws. No one will be neutral, for in spiritual life, there is no such thing as neutral. As Jesus Himself said, “He that is not with Me is against Me” (Matt 12:30). And again He said, “he that is not against us is for us” (Lk 11:23).

THE REST

“And of the rest . . . “ Other versions read, “Yet none of the rest,” NKJV “No one else,” NIV “The others ,” BBE “None of the other people,” GWN “The other believers,” LIVING “Not one of those on the outside ,” WILLIAMS “And none of those who were not of their number ,” AMPLIFIED “But as far as the others were concerned,” PHILLIPS and “No one outside their group .” CEV

There are varied opinions within the Christian community concerning the identity of “the rest.” Lightfoot, a notable commentator, says it refers to “the remainder of the 120 disciples of whom Ananias had been one; and that they feared to put themselves on an equality with the apostles.” A cluster of commentators, including Pricaeus, Morus, Rosenmuller, Schleuser, and others suppose “the rest” refers to “the rich men, or people of authority and influence among the Jews, of whom Ananias was one.” In this case, no one from this group stepped forward to donate proceeds from the sale of their goods. John Gill believes “the rest” refers to the rest of the real Christians who did not dare “to come nigh to the apostles, or familiarly converse with them, much less put themselves on an equal foot with them, but with great reverence of them kept their distance from them.” A more reasonable explanation is given by the commentator Calmet who observes “that the Jewish nation was then divided into many different sects, who entertained widely different opinions on various articles. The apostles adopted none of these jarring sentiments, and none of the different sects dared to join themselves to them; neither Pharisees, Sadducees, nor Herodians, as such, were found in this simple, holy Church.”

I am not satisfied with any of these explanations. With the exception of the last one, they appear to be said to justify a theological persuasion rather than open up the text. To me, it is clear that “the rest” refers to those who were not “of one accord” (5:12). The Living Bible could not possibly be more wrong in its representation of this verse – “the other believers.” If that is a proper rendition, then those who believed were not of “one accord.”

The word “rest” comes from a word meaning, “the remaining . . . the rest of any number or class under consideration.” THAYER At this point a comparison is not being made to the apostles, for the subject of reference is “all the church” (5:11). Further, it does not do justice to the text to imagine that it was only, or even primarily, the apostles who were meeting in Solomon’s court, working signs and wonders among themselves. This is the view represented by the International English Version: “The apostles were together in Solomon's Porch; they all had the same purpose.” IE Such a view is utterly foolish!

The main subject of the verse is those who “were all of one accord in Solomon’s porch.” However, they were not the only ones in Solomon’s porch. Verse fourteen will affirm that, as a result of the apostles’ words and works during this occasion, “multitudes” believed. There were, then, others who were also hearing and observing what was taking place. Those who were not “of one accord” constitute “the rest,” or “the others.” BBE

I know of no text that directly states or infers that believers ever purposed to gather together with “the rest,” or outsiders. The presence of an “unlearned” people, or “unbelievers” is considered something unusual – something that is part of an “IF” factor.

You will note that nothing about the text suggests that these gatherings were tailored for “the rest.” That does not mean that words were not addressed to them. It does mean that the purpose was to separate them from that unholy number, not cater to them while they remained there. It was the believers who convened this meeting – those who “were all of one accord.” The purpose of their gathering related primarily to them. Otherwise the expression “the rest” makes no sense. The term “others” presumes a core group of which such people were no part.

I know of no text that directly states or infers that believers ever purposed to gather together with “the rest,” or outsiders. The presence of an “unlearned” people, or “unbelievers” is considered something unusual – something that is part of an “IF” factor (1 Cor 14:23). It is quite true that in an

institutional setting, such people are critical to success, for the aim is generally numerical growth, which is a primary means of sustaining the institution. Some have even invented gathering formulae that postulates the necessity of a considerable percentage of the people being “unbelievers.” The most recent (2007) figure is 25% – that is, an ideal church gathering is constituted of 75% Christians and 25% non-Christians. Together with this concept comes the necessity to dumb-down things that take place in the assembly. This is done to make an appeal to people who really do not have a preference for the things of God. In order to dumb-down things relating to the Lord, you must mix them with the things of this world. This may be done by simply speaking more about human experience than the truth, or by modifying the truth itself in an attempt to shape it so it is not offensive.

The transgression of this approach is this: as soon as something from man is theoretically mingled with the truth, the truth loses its power, and is no longer truth. It is the same principle that was made known under the Law. When building the altar of God, there could not be a stone in it that was hewn, or fashioned by man’s hand. No matter how skillful the stone-worker may have been, his work could not be included in God’s altar. Therefore the Law reads, “And if thou wilt make Me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it ” (Ex 20:25). Moses faithfully commanded the people on this critical matter. “Therefore it shall be when ye be gone over Jordan, that ye shall set up these stones, which I command you this day, in mount Ebal, and thou shalt plaster them with plaster. And there shalt thou build an altar unto the LORD thy God, an altar of stones: thou shalt not lift up any iron tool upon them ” (Deut 27:4-5). Upon entering into the promised land, Joshua built an altar to the Lord, faithfully adhering to Moses’ word. “Then Joshua built an altar unto the LORD God of Israel in mount Ebal, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses, an altar of whole stones, over which no man hath lift up any iron : and they offered thereon burnt offerings unto the LORD, and sacrificed peace offerings” (Josh 8:30-31).

Carrying this idea even further, Paul affirmed that he took care in the presentation of the Gospel not to mingle it with the wisdom of this world. “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God . . . And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom , but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:1.4). This was not something Paul thought up on his own. He makes clear that Jesus sent Him to preach the Gospel, but NOT with wisdom of words. “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor 1:17). He also declared that he preached only the Gospel, without human additives, “That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:5).

In view of these things, transgression is involved in the effort to attract sinners by anything other than the Gospel and a godly life. I understand that it is not fashionable to speak in this manner. Many men would have very little, if anything at all, to say if they could not speak in the jargon of this present evil world. However, such a posture cannot in any way be dignified. If it is declared that the people doing this mean well, we simply reply that this cannot be supported. How can a heart be pure when it adopts a manner that conflicts with the revealed purpose of God?

The church must learn to think in terms of “the rest,” thereby placing the accent on the people of God’s choice! God has made known the people who are preeminent before Him. This is made clear by such expressions as “the elect of God” (Col 3:12), “God’s elect” (Tit 1:1), “a peculiar (special NKJV) people” (Tit 2:14), “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet 2:9), and “the people of God ” (1 Pet 2:10). These are the only people on the face of the earth He has washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11). They are the only people to whom He has given “His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:8). The intercession of Jesus is only for these people (Heb 7:25). Only these people have been given “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). These are the only people who are “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14).

Who is the person who has the audacity to call a meeting of these people, and then speak to someone other than them? Where is the professing minister who would stand before these people and throw our carnal trivia in an attempt to impress the ungodly? Words fail me to emphasize the seriousness of such folly. In such a setting, the saints become conceptually “the rest,” when all of heaven knows they are the primary people in the world!

Every gathering of God’s people must be one in which those who are of one accord and those who are “the rest” should be evident.

DURST NO MAN JOIN

“ . . . durst no man join himself to them . . . ” Other versions read, “ dared to join them,” NKJV “dared to associate with them,” NASB “dared join them,” NIV “in fear, kept back from joining them,” BBE “no one ventured to come near them,” MRD “ was daring to join himself to them,” YLT “dared to attach themselves to them,” WEYMOUTH “dared to join and associate with them,” AMPLIFIED and “was daring to be joining himself to them.” ALT

And, what of “the rest” of those found in Solomon’s Porch? How did they feel about this impressive and growing body of people who were exuding the very life of Christ? Were they attracted to their size? It was sufficient to get anyone’s attention. Did the signs and wonders being wrought by the hands of the apostles compel them to be part of what was happening? An institutional man might imagine this to be an ideal setting to attract outsiders. But that was not the situation at all!

These “rest” did not dare join this number of disciples – “durst no man.” They stood aloof from believers, not finding any particular thing to criticize, as did the Temple authorities, yet afraid to be identified with them. The word “durst” comes from a Greek word that means, “not to dread or shun through fear . . . to be bold, bear oneself boldly,” THAYER “being bold enough to defy danger or opposition,” FRIBERG “be brave,” UBS “to be so bold as to challenge or defy possible danger or opposition,” LOUW-NIDA “to undertake, take heart either to bear or do anything terrible or difficult,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to have courage, to be brave enough.” GINGRICH In the English, the word means, “to confront boldly: invite the opposition of fearlessly.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2003 In others words, “the rest” did not have the courage to join these disciples. It took a lot of boldness to do so, and they did not have it.

As is apparent from these texts, joining is not merely being added to a roster, or obtaining a kind of formal identity with a group. It has to do with actually being a functional part of that to which one is joined. It includes participation, and a bodily presence.

In the context of the nominal church, this verse sounds exceedingly strange. Why would anyone be afraid to join a body of people who were being blessed by the Lord – a people whose sins had been forgiven, preached a glorious message, and among whom all manner of signs and wonders were being wrought? It just does not make sense to the carnal mind, and it is not considered an appropriate response to a modern church – perhaps a mega-church . Of course, the church to which we are being introduced was, by modern standards, a mega-church, consisting of several thousand members, and growing rapidly.

“Join Himself to Them”

The expression “join himself” comes from a single Greek word which means, “to glue, glue to, glue together, cement, fasten together, hence universally, to join or fasten firmly together.” THAYER This word is used several times in Scripture. The manner in which it is used clarifies precisely what is meant in this verse.

- The prodigal son “joined himself” to a citizen of “that country” in which he had

squandered his living (Lk 15:15).

- The Spirit directed Philip to “join thyself to this chariot,” in which the Ethiopian eunuch was riding (Acts 8:29).

- Following his conversion, Saul of Tarsus made an effort to “join himself to the disciples” in Jerusalem (Acts 9:26).

- When Peter met Cornelius he told him that it had been “an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation” (Acts 10:28).

- Following Paul’s preaching in Athens, “certain men clave unto him, and believed” (Acts 17:34).

- Concerning the responsibility of believers toward the good, Paul wrote, “cleave to that which is good” (Rom 12:9).

- A description of what occurs in regeneration is, “he that is joined to the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17).

As is apparent from these texts, joining is not merely being added to a roster, or obtaining a kind of formal identity with a group. It has to do with actually being a functional part of that to which one is joined. It includes participation, and a bodily presence. There is a oneness of the individual with the group which includes both his heart and mind. This is quite different from the concept of being a member of a given church, yet rarely meeting together. That concept is one borrowed from the world.

Two Key Factors

There are two factors that caused “the rest” to draw back. Both of them are very intimidating to an unbeliever.

It should be noted that it is foolish to avoid the body of Christ out of a fear of being judged. In view of the fact that God will ultimately judge every individual, it is far better to repent and seek His face now. In this time, before Jesus returns, a person can call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

Remember, those who are not in Christ have themselves as their primary interest, while believers have the Lord as their fundamental concern, and are aggressive in crucifying themselves, denying themselves, and taking up their cross to follow Jesus. For those who lacked these higher motivations, here are two insurmountable conditions.

- First, the Jewish authorities opposed these people. The priests, captain of the Temple guard, and Sadducees opposed them (Acts 4:1-3). The Sanhedrin, consisting of the Jewish “rulers, and elders, and scribes” also opposed them (Acts 4:5). In addition, the high priests Annas and Caiaphas, together with a key man named John, Alexander, and the kindred of the high priest opposed this body of people. This conglomerate of Jewish authorities did not approve of the message of these people, and had issued an ultimatum for them “not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). When they finally let the spokesmen Peter and John go, they “further threatened them,” being unable to find a technical point that would justify punishing them (Acts 4:21).

- Secondly, it was now general knowledge that dishonest people did not fare well among these believers. Ananias and Sapphira had been stricken dead after hearing a pointed word of rebuke and exposure by Peter. Such an assembly was not at all attractive to “the rest.”

Given these two arresting factors, all interest in this assembly disappeared among those who did not have honest and good hearts. The “rest” had an unlawful respect for the religious leaders, and a fear that their ways would be discovered, should they join themselves to this number.

It should be noted that it is foolish to avoid the body of Christ out of a fear of being judged. In view of the fact that God will ultimately judge every individual, it is far better to repent and seek His face now. In this time, before Jesus returns, a person can call upon the name of the Lord and be saved. However, when the Lord appears in all of His glory, no such opportunity will be granted. The fear one may entertain now about being judged by the Lord is nothing to compare with the experience of facing the glorified Christ without having been justified and made accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6).

Of course, none of these attitudes are evidenced when people confront a powerless church, or one that carries upon itself the stench of this world. The modern church is not vigorously opposed by the world, and its message is quite palatable to worldly people. Some are opposed to the church because of its stand on political and/or social issues. The Scriptures, however, provide no example of this kind of opposition to believers. It is a modern day phenomenon that reflects the adoption of distorted priorities by the professing church.

Something That Is Dangerous

A word also ought to be said about the danger of an academically-based religion – that is, a message and stance that is based upon scholarship, research, statistics, and the likes. Scholarship can neither produce nor maintain faith, without which it is not possible to please God (Heb 11:6). This may be said of any approach to the things of God that does not absolutely require faith. Faith is the catalyst for all understanding and spiritual growth. It is the appointed means by which we perceive, will, and do. Furthermore, faith cannot be passed from one person to another. It cannot be derived from a theological system, or identification with a historical religious movement. If faith could not be produced by those who were scholarly experts in a revealed religion – like the Law of Moses – you may be sure it cannot be produced by experts in some systematic theology invented by men. Faith simply cannot be commenced or maintained from the wellspring of this world’s wisdom. It is too shallow, and its waters are stagnant.

The remarkable productivity of the early church was owing to its separation from the world, and the awareness of its complete dependence upon the Lord. During those early days the truth itself was the point, and not a particular view of it.

BUT THE PEOPLE MAGNIFIED THEM

“13b . . . but the people magnified them.” Other versions read, “but the people esteemed them very highly,” NKJV “however, the people held them in high esteem,” NASB “even though they were highly regarded by the people,” NIV “but the people held them in high honor,” RSV “but the people made much of them,” BBE “but the people praised them highly,” CSB “although everyone spoke highly of them,” GWN “but the people were loud in their praise,” NJB “but the people were magnifying them,” YLT “but all had the highest regard for them,” LIVING “but all of the people were saying good things about them,” IE “but the people held them in high regard and praised and made much of them,” AMPLIFIED “even though their general popularity was very great,” PHILLIPS and “even though everyone liked them very much.” CEV

Here is a third observation made of the people within Solomon’s court. First, there were the believers who were all of one accord. Second, there were those who were afraid to join themselves to the believers. Third, it is said that “the people” magnified the believers, even though many, if not all, of them did not dare to join them.

I am of the persuasion that here, the expression “the people” equates to

“the common people” of the Gospel account of Jesus’ ministry. It is written, “and the common people heard Him gladly” (Mk 12:37). At that time, Jesus was teaching in the Temple. A number of people were listening to Him, among whom were the Sadducees, some scribes, and others (Mk 12:1-36).

Everyone did not receive His words. In fact, some even sought to take hold of Him (12:12), while others sought to trap him with crafty questions (12:13-28). When, therefore, the Mark text refers to “the common people,” it is referring to the remnant of the people who were not sceptics, or seeking to trap Jesus.

That is the kind of thing that is involved here. “The people” are those who were not opposed to the apostles’ preaching, as were the Temple authorities. And, while they did not rush forward to join the disciples and continue in the apostles’ doctrine, they saw something good in the people, and therefore “magnified them.” In this they fulfilled the word of Jesus, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven ” (Matt 5:16).

The word “magnified” is an aggressive one, meaning, “to deem or declare great, i.e. to esteem highly, to extol, laud, celebrate,” THAYER “pay great respect to, highly honor,” FRIBERG “Praise, hold in high honor,” UBS “exalt, glorify, praise, extol.” GINGRICH In other words, the people “were saying good words” about the believers. IE They “esteemed” NKJV them, “highly regarded” NIV them “spoke highly of them,” GWN and “their general popularity was very great.” PHILLIPS

This is the kind of thing that first occurred on the day of Pentecost when the believers were “having favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). This also had particular regard to the teaching of the apostles, which sharply contrasted with that of the scribes and Pharisees. This same kind of response also occurred when the lame man was healed. As it is written, “for all men glorified God for that which was done” (Acts 4:21).

When men participate in the traits of the Kingdom of God – “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Rom 14:17) – there is a comeliness to it all that appeals to good men. Thus it is said of such people, “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men ” (Rom 14:18). That is, there is nothing about spiritual life that contradicts the general consciousness of honesty and goodness. Thus believers can commend themselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God, knowing that grace works nothing in the heart that is inherently wrong or offensive. Those who oppose the people and work of God do not do so because of any fundamental flaw in them, but because of their own love for the world and consequent hatred of God.

I understand that such a condition does not always prevail – a circumstance where the people of God are being praised and respected. There have been times when holy men have been “defamed,” and made “the filth and offscouring of all things” (1 Cor 4:13). However, the majority of the opposition against the church, that is recorded in Scripture, has come from religious men.

There are records of persecution against the following Christians: the whole Church (Acts 8:1; 9:1-3; Gal 1:13), James (Acts 12:2), the apostles (Acts 4:1-5:52), Peter (Acts 5:3-9), Stephen (Acts 6:9-15; 7:1-60), Paul (Acts 9:23-29; Acts 16:19-25; 20:23-24; 21:27-28; 23:10-15; 2 Cor 11:23-33; 2 Tim 3:11-12), The Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:14); Timothy (Heb 13:23), John (Rev 1:9), Antipas (Rev 2:13), the church of Smyrna (Rev 2:8-10), and the church of Philadelphia (Rev 2:9-10). Most of these oppositions were generated by either Jews or idolaters – religious men. This was also generally true of the persecutions prior to Christ, with proportionately few exceptions. Even in the bloody persecutions of the Roman empire, religion was the issue, as the believers would not bow to Caesar, even as Shadrach, Meshech, and Abednego would not bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s image.

The point to be seen here is that true believers have never been opposed because of immorality, a lack of goodness, or fundamental inconsideration. They have never been noted for being bad citizens, or being an essential hindrance to the welfare of humanity. Those who were aggressive against the saints had to generate false reports about them, and raise spurious accusations. The strength of their morality, and their devotion to their God was never the issue. When the church was spiritually strong, as in our text, those things were always apparent.

In our time, and in our country, Christians, as a whole, are not well spoken of – at least not in the sense of our text. They do not have a good reputation in the financial world, or in the business world. Often they are associated with slothfulness, questionable appearances, and misrepresentation. Their distinctiveness, if, indeed, they have any at all, is not generally found in the domain of wisdom, spirituality, or good works. Some professing Christians are noted for their social oddity, others for their flamboyance, and still others for their political persuasions. Some are only noted for their institutional prominence, impressive building structures, and social involvements. Among professed Christian experts there are those who deal with marital life, economic issues, motivation, and even health. Proportionately few Christian leaders are noted for their expertise in the word and ways of God, or their insightful exposition of the Scriptures.

The thrust was never placed on outsiders, yet outsiders were brought in! The message pertained exclusively to the Lord Jesus, and yet individuals perceived enough relevance in the message to believe! No special interest groups! No contemporary social issues addressed! Yet, “believers were the more added!”

It is not that these are all unlawful areas. Rather, it is that they are not primary, or fundamental domains of thought and deed. None of them require a strong faith, everlasting consolation, or good hope. They are all on the periphery of life, and not at its center .

The church of our time has been led to involvement in extracurricular activities, which they have been taught to view as primary. The result is that its spiritual light has dimmed, if not gone out altogether. It is associated too much with this present evil world , from which Jesus is said to have delivered it (Gal 1:4). In our text, the Herodians, a political branch of the Jews (Matt 22:15-16; Mk 12:13) were not inclined to join themselves to the disciples – at least not in the capacity of Herodians. The Zealots, particularly promoting Jewish Law and Institutions, did not set up camp in the church – even though one of their number, Simon the Zealot (Lk 6:15) was called to be an apostle – but not in the capacity of a Zealot.

The point is that the light of the church shines most brightly in its unwavering commitment to the Lord and its separateness from the world. The more intimately it becomes involved in the affairs that are limited to this world, the less its light shines. I understand that the modern church sees involvement with the world as a means through which its light shines more effectively. That view, however, contradicts the affirmation of Scripture: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty (influential NIV) , not many noble , are called” (1 Cor 1:26). This is the call that comes from God Himself! He has not called many who are great in the flesh. However, if the postulate that spiritual light is shed more profusely within the framework of worldly involvements is true, this text could not possibly be right. Nothing in Scripture remotely suggests that the conversion of prominent worldly men and women will result in more godly influence. If that was the case, God would call a lot of them, not a few!

In this text, the people did not praise the believers because they were great athletes, businessmen, entertainers, or politicians. It was because of the spiritual and moral nobility that was evident in their lives, just as it is in believers today! Of course, it will not be possible to exploit this condition for personal advantage. No person can gain worldly prominence by being holy, spiritual or heavenly minded.

MULTITUDES OF BELIEVERS WERE ADDED, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN

“ 14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”

Wisdom is “justified of her children,” or “vindicated by her deeds” NASB (Matt 11:16). That is, the results of wisdom confirm that it is, in fact, true wisdom. In our text, the manner in which the church was proceeding was confirmed to be the God-ordained one, for the work of the Lord was

being made known through their activity. Lest we forget, permit me to once again set before you what these holy brethren had been doing.

Here Is What Had Happened

- Prior to Pentecost, the disciples had first met and prayed together (1:14).
- On the day of Pentecost they were all together in one place and in one accord (2:1).
- On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was poured forth, resulting in the supernatural speaking of the “wonderful works of God” (2:4,11).
- When a crowd of people gathered, Peter stood up and delivered a word that precisely told what had happened when Jesus died, and how He had been exalted to the right hand of God (2:14-36).
- When the people inquired what they should do, they were told to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and for the remission of sins, and they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:37-39).

Wisdom is “justified of her children,” or “vindicated by her deeds.” That is, the results of wisdom confirm that it is, in fact, true wisdom.

With many other words, Peter exhorted the people, telling them the promise was for them, and that they should save themselves from that wayward generation (2:39-40).

- The word was gladly received and obeyed (2:41).
- The disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (2:42).
- Great fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles (2:43).
- All that believed were together and had all things common (2:44-45).
- They continued daily with one accord in the Temple, breaking bread from house to house (2:46).
- When healing a man lame from birth, Peter again gave an insightful summary of the death and exaltation of Christ (3:12-18).
- He told the people to repent so their sins could be forgiven, times of refreshing would come to them, and God would send Jesus to them (3:19-26).
- Peter and John preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead (4:1).
- About 5,000 men believed the preaching (4:4).
- When questioned by the Temple authorities, Peter delivered a stirring exaltation of the Lord Jesus (4:8-12).
- When released, Peter and John reported to the church how they were threatened, and they immediately prayed an insightful prayer, asking for boldness to preach the Word (4:23-30).
- When they had prayed, the house was shaken, they were all filled with the Spirit, they spoke the word of God with boldness, the apostles gave powerful witness to the resurrection of Christ, and great grace was upon them all (4:31-33).
- No one among them lacked, as those who were possessors of lands or houses, sold them and gave the proceeds to the apostles for distribution (4:34-36).
- Ananias and Sapphira were stricken dead for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:1-10).

- Great fear came upon the whole church, and as many as heard what had happened (5:11).
- The disciples gathered with the apostles, and in one accord, in Solomon’s porch, where many signs and wonders were done by the apostles (5:12).

Ponder the Environment

The nature of all of these things is most arresting. They all had to do with the Lord and His great redemption . There was no word delivered concerning contemporary issues. There was no exhortation about the poor and the needy. There was no appeal to any particular age group – like the youth. There was no social outreach in the community. There was no political crusade. There is no record of any attempt to stamp out poverty in Jerusalem. There was no praise service. No man or group of men were unduly exalted. There was no word about the family structure. There was no inquiry about possible personal problems among the people. There was no entertaining event to attract the people – in fact, they were meeting in the Temple, not a local coliseum. No one announced a specialized ministry, asking for support. The solitary Person that was extolled was Jesus, and the only documented reference was the Word of God.

This Is the Context

This is the kind of context in which it is now said, “And believers were the more added!” The thrust was never placed on outsiders, yet outsiders were brought in! The message pertained exclusively to the Lord Jesus, and yet individuals perceived enough relevance in the message to believe! No special interest groups! No contemporary social issues addressed! Yet, “believers were the more added!”

Why was this so? It was because they were in the heart of the will of God, and therefore His hand was made known among them! Men may theorize about what is effective, and there certainly is a lot of that these days. However, in the book of Acts, we have a record of the work of God actually being accomplished. It is not a study on how to do the work, but a report of the work itself!

Keep in mind that this occurred in spite of, what could be viewed as, hindering influences: the threats of the Jewish council, and the sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira.

ADDED TO THE LORD

“And believers were the more added to the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “And believers were increasingly added to the Lord,” NKJV “And all the more believers in the Lord . . . were constantly added to their number,” NASB “ Nevertheless . . . believed in the Lord and were added to their number,” NIV “Yet more than ever believers were added to the Lord” NRSV “had faith, and were joined to the Lord ,” BBE “Believers were added to the Lord in increasing numbers ,” CSB “also the number of them that believed in the Lord, both of men and women, grew more and more ,” GENEVA “And the more were those added who feared the Lord,” MRD “and the numbers . . . who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily ,” NJB “Yet more and more people believed and were brought to the Lord,” NLT “and more and more believers in the Lord joined them ,” WEYMOUTH “Nevertheless, still more believers . . . were being added to the Lord,” ISV “but still a vast number of people . . . who believed in the Lord, continued to join them ,” WILLIAMS “More and more there were being added to the Lord those who believed [those who acknowledged Jesus as their Savior and devoted themselves to Him joined and gathered with them],” AMPLIFIED and ”more than ever believing [ones] were being added to the Lord.” ALT

For the first time we read the expression “added to the Lord.” In the second chapter it is written that 3,000 souls were “added unto them” (2:41), and that the Lord “added to the church” (2:47). The fourth chapter affirms 5,000 “believed” (4:4). Here, however, we read of the same kind of response in different words: “added to the Lord.”

Some of the versions drift at this point, distorting what was said. They render an interpretation of the text rather than a translation: “added to their number,” NASB “came to believe in the Lord,” NJB “brought to the Lord” NLT “continued to join them,” WILLIAMS

The word “added” is not a numerical one, but rather speaks of the process of uniting one to another. It comes from the Greek word **proseti,qento** , which means, “to put to, to add, join to,” THAYER and “to add something to an existing quantity.” LOUW-NIDA The object to which the addition is made is particularized – **tw/l kuri,wl** , “the Lord.” The idea is that believers “kept on being added to the Lord.”

The thought of being added to the Lord is also expressed in these words, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit ,” or “one spirit with Him” NKJV (1 Cor 6:17). Another way of saying this is that we have been “made to drink in one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Again, one might say it this way, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones ” (Eph 5:30).

Jesus spoke of this marvelous addition, or joining, when He prayed on the night of His betrayal: “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us . . . I in them , and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one . . .” (John 17:21-23).

Being added to the Lord Himself does not make Him any larger, or bring to Him any inherent advantages. It does, however, put us in a position where we can receive of His fulness (John 1:16). Christ is in us (Rom 8:10; 2 Cor 13:5; Col 1:27), and we are in Him (1 Cor 1:30; 16:24; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 5:20). Because of this circumstance, the aim is for Christ to be “formed” in us, so that His life is lived out in us (Gal 4:19). Paul put it this way, “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh ” (2 Cor 4:10-11). You see, then, what a marvelous thing is accomplished when a person is “added to the Lord.”

This particular facet of redemption is also delineated in the exposition of men being put into “the body of Christ,” which is His church. The Holy Spirit baptizes us into that body (1 Cor 12:12-13). The relationship of this body to Jesus Himself is reflected in the words, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30).

MULTITUDES BOTH OF MEN AND WOMEN

“ . . . Multitudes both of men and women.” Other versions read, “ more and more men and women .” NIV “ great numbers of both men and women,” NRSV “a great number of men and women,” BBE “ crowds of both men and women,” CSB “the numbers of men and women who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily ,” NJB “ including great numbers of both of men and woman,” WEYMOUTH “a vast number of both men and women,” ISV and “both men and women in really large numbers .” PHILLIPS

This is the first time women are mentioned in the increase of believers. They were included in the pre-Pentecost disciples (Acts 1:14). As time progressed, women were considered an integral part of the body of Christ. When Saul of Tarsus launched a persecution against the church, he dragged off both “men and women” (Acts 8:3; 9:2), which indicates they were not in a non-functioning role. When the whole city of Samaria believed the powerful preaching of Philip the evangelist, “they were baptized, both men and women ” (Acts 8:12). The first converts in Macedonia were some women (Acts 16:13). When Paul preached in Athens a number of the “chief women,” or “leading woman,” NASB believed and joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17:4). In Thessalonica a number of “honorable women which were Greeks” believed, and in his record of their conversion, Luke lists them before the men who also believed (Acts 17:12).

The increase of believers, and the growth of the body of Christ, included the women. They are nowhere declared to be second class citizens of the heavenly Kingdom, although they are clearly declared to be in subjection to their own husbands. However, husbands and wives and not apt descriptions of members of the body of Christ, for in Him there is “neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28).

In Paul’s letter to the Romans, he mentions several women who were prominent in the work of the Lord. They include Phebe (Rom 16:1), Priscilla who is listed before her husband Aquila (16:3), Mary (16:6), Junia, who was imprisoned with her husband (16:7), Tryphena and Tryphosa who “labored much in the Lord” (16:12), Julia, the sister of Nereus (16:15). Paul also mentioned some women to the Philippians who labored with him “in the Gospel” (Phil 4:3). Philip also had four daughters who were prophetesses (Acts 21:9).

Therefore, as the church begins to grow and people are added to the Lord, the glorious extent of salvation is being made known by the addition of both men and women.

Those who are added to the Lord obtain all of the advantages inherent to being in Him. This includes washing, sanctification, and justification (1 Cor 6:11). It includes access to God (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12), the right to obtain grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16), and being taught by the grace of God

Throughout the history of God’s people, men and women have been involved in the work of the Lord and devotion to Him. For example, when the gathering of supplies for the building of the tabernacle took place, “both men and women, as many as were willing,” brought gifts (Ex 35:22). When Moses gathered the people together for the hearing of the covenant, the Lord commanded him to “gather the people together, men, women, and children” (Deut 31:12). When a great time of repentance occurred during the ministry of Ezra, “there assembled unto him a very great congregation of men and women and children” (Ezra 10:1). When he delivered the Law to the people, it was before “men and women and all that could hear with understanding” (Neh 8:2).

Now, in our text, the cleansing wave of the Gospel sweeps over both “men and women.” It was not merely brought to the men, who, in turn, delivered it to the women and the children. Both men and women received the Gospel and were “added to the Lord.”

What Is Involved In Being Added to the Lord?

Those who are added to the Lord obtain all of the advantages inherent to being in Him. This includes washing, sanctification, and justification (1 Cor 6:11). It includes access to God (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12), the right to obtain grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16), and being taught by the grace of God (Tit 2:11-12). Those who are “in Christ” have been placed in the heavenly places, and have access to “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3; 2:6). They are “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10), and have been “created unto good works” (Eph 2:10). They are a part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), and therefore have a necessary function within the body itself (1 Cor 12:18). They have access to “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). They are among those of whom it is written, “Now the God of peace . . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:21). All of the promises of God are “Yes” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 1:20). All believers are “made the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21). All of those things were made available to the multitudes of men and women who were “added to the Lord.”

Faith brought them to the arena of spiritual blessing and plentitude far beyond the conception of any man. No redemptive distinctions were declared.

INSOMUCH THAT THEY BROUGHT FORTH THE SICK INTO THE STREETS

“ 15 Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.”

We are witnessing the outbreak of spiritual life, and it was all brought on by the powerful preaching of the Gospel. It is the belief of the Gospel, not the witnessing of miracles, that results in men and women being “added to the Lord.” Now, the word of what is happening in Solomon’s porch spreads throughout the city, and eventually even into surrounding areas. That indicates that this was an extended period of blessing – one that was befitting of an enthroned Savior and “the glorious gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11). God is being glorified in these responses.

INSOMUCH

“Insomuch . . .” Other versions read, “so that,” NKJV “to such an extent that,” NASB “As a result,” NIV “And they even,” BBE “Thus,” NAB “so as,” YLT and “in consequence .”
MONTGOMERY

The word “insomuch” is translated from the Greek word **w[ste** (hoce-the), which is a consecutive conjunction, expressing consequence. The lexical meaning of the word is, “so that,” THAYER “therefore for this reason . . . so that, with the result that,” FRIBERG and “the result or effect of the action in the principle clause.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The fifteenth verse is a continuation of the first part of verse twelve. After stating that many signs and wonders were being done through the hands of the apostles, there is a parenthetical statement. It enlarges on what was taking place at that time, showing the blessed harmony between what the apostles were saying and doing.: (“and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women”) – (Acts 5:12b-14).

Therefore, the word “insomuch” provides an explanation for the extent of the signs and wonders that were being done by the apostles. This was a most unusual display of Divine power. In a way, it is reminiscent of one of the occasions during which Jesus wrought many miracles. It is written of that occasion, “and the power of the Lord was present to heal them” (Lk 5:17). On another occasion it is said of Jesus, “for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all” (Lk 6:19).

In this text, Jesus, as the Administrator of the Kingdom, is working from heaven through the men He had ordained to represent Him. He is not working in a static or unchanging manner, but with holy variableness. He knows when to send forth a special measure of power, and when to seemingly withhold it, as when James was beheaded some time later. As always, these works were done in strict accord with the will of God, and in keeping with His eternal purpose.

As with all spiritual gifts, the power to work signs and wonders was not resident in the apostles themselves. It was delegated to them in a Divinely determined and timely manner. No person endued with such power can employ it at will. The power is given to the faithful in order to do God’s will alone. Once this is seen, it will assist in diffusing the inclination of men to want to emulate the working of miracles. Those who have such a desire have a marked tendency to overstate the works that are done, and to make valiant efforts to assign to God things that do not bear Divine distinction. I find this is a common weakness in certain Christian circles.

However, no such thing will be found in the signs and wonders that were wrought through the hands of the apostles. The effectiveness of their work is confirmed by the flood of people who brought forth the sick when they heard of what was happening. These people did not come out of curiosity, but in a full persuasion that genuine miracles were taking place.

Keep in mind that this has all happened suddenly and totally without any human planning. It is

something that was initiated from heaven, and all the powers of darkness could not diminish the greatness of what was happening. It is as though Satan's arms and legs withered, and he became impotent. Even though he filled the heart of Ananias to lie to the Holy Spirit, and embezzle funds that had been pledged to God, the devil was not able to stem the tide of renewal that was breaking forth in Jerusalem.

In this text we are given confirming evidence of the exaltation of Jesus, the superiority of His rule, and the power of the Gospel. It speaks of a certain purity of heart and whole-hearted commitment to the Lord that was present. In my judgment, this was an environment in which the Lord could work more freely. Consider the following descriptions of the surroundings.

- The unvarnished truth of the Gospel was being preached.
- An unquestioned faith and commitment was found in those who were speaking.
- The believers were of one heart and soul, and were thus of one accord.
- A certain priority was present regarding the Lord Jesus Christ, His accomplishments, and His ministry.
- Sin had been purged from presence of believers.

In the early days of the church, there was a more rapid spread of the Gospel, and a more extensive multiplication of disciples, in addition the display of many wonderful works. It appears to me that this was directly related to the moral and spiritual purity that were found among the disciples, as well as the unadulterated Gospel that was being preached.

In such surroundings, the Spirit would not be quenched, grieved, or resisted. Any expression of unbelief would come from those who were clearly against the preaching of the Gospel, and were not numbered with the believers. In addition to these cursory observations, the reports of the workings of the Lord would go abroad, for God "hath made His wonderful works to be remembered" (Psa 111:4).

The Nature of Those Times

In the early days of the church, there was a more rapid spread of the Gospel, and a more extensive multiplication of disciples – in addition the display of many wonderful works. It appears to me that this was directly related to the moral and spiritual purity that were found among the disciples, as well as the unadulterated Gospel that was being preached. Some allege that these traits gradually reduced and finally disappeared because they were Divinely assigned only to the beginning of the New Covenant era. I am rather inclined to think that it is the introduction of pervasive false teaching and hypocrisy that caused this apparent reduction.

Early in the church, corrupt doctrine was introduced by profane teachers (Acts 15:1,5; 20:29-30; Rom 16:17-18; 1 Cor 11:18-19; 2 Cor 2:17; 11:3-4,13-15; Gal 1:6-8; 5:10; Eph 4:14; Phil 1:15-16; 3:2; Col 2:4,8,18-19; 1 Tim 1:3-7; 4:7; 6:3-5; 6:20-21; 2 Tim 2:14-18; 2 Tim 3:6-9; Tit 1:10-14; Heb 13:9; 1 John 2:18,26; 4:1-5; 2 John 1:7,10-11).

Error and falsehood cannot be introduced within the professing church without impacting upon the working of the Lord among men. There are several reasons for this condition.

- Sin in all of its deceptive forms quenches and grieves the Holy Spirit.
- Truth is held back by unrighteousness, particularly when it is found among confessing Christians (Rom 1:18).
- When found among God's people, sin drives a wedge between men and God, as confirmed in the case of Achan (Josh 7:10-26).

Thus, the purity of the environment of the time can, in part, account for the outstanding things that took place during it.

THEY BROUGHT THE SICK

“ . . . that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches . . .” Other versions read, “they even carried the sick out into the streets , and laid them on cots and pallets,” NASB “people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats ,” NIV “they even took into the streets people who were ill, and put them on beds,” BBE “into the broad places to bring forth the ailing , and to lay them upon couches and mats,” YLT “So that they [even] kept carrying out the sick into the streets and placing them on couches and sleeping pads,” AMPLIFIED “people would bring out their sick into the streets and lay them down on stretchers or bed ,” PHILLIPS “ [they were] bringing out the sick and laying [them] on cots and mats along the open streets ,” ALT and “ sick people were brought out to the road and placed on cots and mats.” CEV

This was not an experiment, for it is doubtful that people would put themselves to such an inconvenience for something that was doubtful. The signs and wonders that were being done by the apostles were genuine, and the people knew it.

The text does not say sick people came, although I do not doubt that many such people came in the press – people like lepers (Matt 8:2) and the woman with an issue of blood (Matt 9:20). Here, however, the emphasis is on the sick being “brought” to the apostles – even as they were often brought to Jesus (Matt 4:24; 8:16; 9:2; Lk 4:40). The fact that the sick were laid on “beds and couches” confirms they were invalids, or in an extremely weakened and hopeless condition. The people had done the same thing when Jesus ministered among them. As it is written, “And when they were come out of the ship, straightway they knew Him, and ran through that whole region round about, and began to carry about in beds those that were sick , where they heard he was” (Mk 6:54-55).

This was not an experiment, for it is doubtful that people would put themselves to such an inconvenience for something that was doubtful. The signs and wonders that were being done by the apostles were genuine, and the people knew it. There was no doubt about their reality. Even those who were openly opposing the apostles said of the particular work that caused their opposition to surface, “that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it” (Acts 4:16).

Many of the professed miracles of our day are viewed with scepticism. However, that was not the case in the book of Acts – and particularly in our text.

AT LEAST THE SHADOW OF PETER

“ . . . that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.” Other versions read, “so that when Peter came by, at least his shadow might fall on any one of them ,” NASB “ so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by,” NIV “that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them,” RSV “so that when Peter went by, some of them might be in his shade ,” BBE “that when Peter came, his shadow at the least, might overshadow any of them, and they might be delivered from their infirmities ,” DOUAY “so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some sick people as he went by,” GWN “for Peter's shadow to touch them when he came by,” IE and “[in the hope] that as Peter passed by, at least his shadow might fall on some of them.” AMPLIFIED

This suggests that we are reading of an extended period during which the apostles were going in and out of the Temple, walking through the streets. It also confirms the leadership of Peter among the apostles, as Paul affirms (Gal 1:18; 2:7-8). Additionally it gives us a commentary on what was

involved in Jesus giving the keys of the Kingdom of heaven to Peter (Matt 16:19). That is why Peter is the only one of the twelve that is mentioned in Acts after 12:2.

Luke provides no further explanation for this most remarkable incident. We are not told why the people concluded that even the shadow of Peter's body was sufficient to work a miracle of healing. Further, Luke does not suggest their perception was wrong. The very fact that he records it strongly suggests its possibility. Perhaps this had happened before – something like those who sought to touch Jesus that they might be healed (Lk 6:19). There was also the woman who reasoned, "If I may but touch His clothes, I shall be whole" (Mk 5:28). Later, a multitude of people "sought Him that they might touch only the hem of His garment: and as many as touched were made perfectly whole" (Matt 14:36). In the book of Acts we read that "God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them" (Acts 19:12).

What we are seeing here is Jesus building His church, just as He said He would. He was not doing it through the strategies and methodologies of men, but through the Gospel and mighty deeds. The apostles had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine largely by means of reports, and what they had declared being "noised abroad"

Such miracles were by no means a standard way of Divine working. This kind of miracle is classified as "special," or "unusual." NKJV These were, then, wrought according to the will of God, as affirmed in Hebrews 2:4. There is no need to suppose that the reasoning of those who sought for even the shadow of Peter to pass over the sick was not rewarded with healing. After all, there is such a thing as Divine working that is "according to your faith" (Matt 9:29). I am going to assume that is the case here, for there is no clear reason to do otherwise.

It does not seem reasonable that this is a proper place to insert the record of futile deeds that were driven by misconceptions of what the apostles were doing. Further, the fact that this verse is an extension of the statement that "by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people" (v 12), seems to me to compel the conclusion that the people's quest was favorably seen by the Lord.

There is no need for us to impose modern-day skepticism on the text. Nothing about it suggests that the people had misjudged what was possible, or that this is nothing more than a record of their wishes. This comes under the general heading of "inasmuch" – i.e., it is an extension of apostolic miracles.

A MULTITUDE CAME FROM SURROUNDING CITIES

" 16 There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one. "

This verse also supports the conclusion that people were really healed when Peter's shadow fell upon them. If this had not been the case, the report of failure would also have spread, and would not have contributed to such a remarkable multitude being brought into Jerusalem. Remember, this is still part of the "insomuch" statement that elaborated on the many signs and wonders being done "by the hands of the apostles."

MULTITUDES CAME, BRINGING SICK FOLKS

"There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits . . ." Other versions read, "Also a multitude gathered from the surrounding cities to Jerusalem, bringing sick people and those who were tormented by unclean spirits," NKJV "And also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming

together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits.” NASB “Crowds gathered also from the towns around Jerusalem , bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, NIV “A great number of people would also gather from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those tormented by unclean spirits,” NRSV “And numbers of people came together from the towns round about Jerusalem, with those who were ill and those who were troubled with unclean spirits ,” BBE “and there were coming together also the people of the cities round about to Jerusalem, bearing ailing persons, and those harassed by unclean spirits.” YLT “They were coming from all the towns around Jerusalem . They brought their sick and those who were bothered by evil spirits,” IE “The inhabitants, too, of the towns in the neighborhood of Jerusalem came in crowds , bringing sick persons and some who were harassed by foul spirits,” WEYMOUTH “The people of the towns near Jerusalem also continued to come in crowds , bringing their sick and those who were harried by unclean spirits,” MONTGOMERY “And the people gathered also from the towns and hamlets around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those troubled with foul spirits ,” AMPLIFIED and “In addition a large crowd collected from the cities around Jerusalem , bringing with them their sick and those who were suffering from evil spirits.” PHILLIPS

Behold how rapidly the people were multiplied! There was no human plan, no contrived strategy, no special advertisement or appeal to the multitudes. The people came together upon the basis of a report of what was taking place – just as they on Pentecost (Acts 2:6), and when the lame man was healed at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:11).

Later the “council” will charge the apostles with filling Jerusalem with their doctrine (5:28). Actually, there is no record of them going throughout the city preaching. At this point, we are expressly told that the preaching was going on in the Temple, in Solomon’s Porch. I do not doubt that wherever the apostles went they spoke the Word, but to this point they were generally gathered with believers, with outsiders, or “the rest,” being drawn to them because of their great works and poignant words.

What we are seeing here is Jesus building His church, just as He said He would (Matt 16:18). He was not doing it through the strategies and methodologies of men, but through the Gospel and mighty deeds. The apostles had filled Jerusalem with their doctrine largely by means of reports, and what they had declared being “noised abroad” (Acts 2:6).

It is most difficult for a person in the grip of spiritual Babylon to think in this manner about the spread of the truth and the gathering of people. Notwithstanding, this should not surprise us. Jesus said if He was “lifted up from the earth,” speaking of His death, He would “draw all men” to Himself (John 12:32). That is, when He had put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, and returned to heaven, He would compel men from within to come to Him. This would be done through the powerful Gospel, the light of the good works of His people, and the report of “the wonderful works of God.”

Where these things are not present, men must caucus together and figure out a way to reach the people. For example, in my fifty-five years of ministry (as of 2007), I have heard the professing church speaking endlessly about reaching the world for Christ. In the past twenty-five years, we have been hearing a lot about the “10/40” window of the world, which represents the people groups largely unreached by the Gospel. This window lies across Africa and Asia from 10 degrees latitude north of the equator to 40 degrees latitude north of the equator. More than 3.2 billion people live in this area – about half of the world’s population. There are literally hundreds of mission groups plotting ways to carry the Gospel to these areas – and the area remains basically the same. So far as I know, no significant number of people from these areas are migrating to where the work of God is being reported.

But that is the kind of thing that is happening in our text. Already, when the church was launched on the day of Pentecost, there were devout Jews there “from every nation under heaven” (2:5). The growth in the number of disciples is recorded in these words: “there were added unto them about

three thousand souls . . . the Lord added daily to the church . . . many of them which heard believed, and the number of the men was about five thousand . . . and believers were the more added to the Lord, both men and women” (2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14). All of this without any human organization, strategy, or initiative! As it is written, “This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23).

Now the people pour into the city of Jerusalem from the surrounding towns. To give an idea of the number of towns surrounding Jerusalem, the following towns were within a five mile radius of the Holy City. (1) Ramah JOSH 18:25 , (2) Shiloh, JOSH 18:1 (3) Beth-Horon, 1 KGS 9:17 (4) Bethel, JOSH 18:13 (5) Ai, JOSH 10:1 (6) Michmash, 1 SAM 13:2 (7) Gilgal, JOSH 15:7 (8) Ajjalon, JOSH 21:24 (9) Ramah, JOSH 18:25 (10) Jericho, MATT 20:29 (11) Anathoth, JOSH 21:18 (12) Zorah, JOSH 19:41 (13) Zanoah, JOSH 15:34 (14) Jarmuth, JOSH 15:35 (15) Bethlehem, MATT 2:1 (16) Makkedah Gedor, JOSH 15:41,58 (17) Adullam, JOSH 15:35 (18) Keilah, JOSH 15:44 (19) Mamre, GEN 14:13 (20) Machpelah, GEN 23:9 (21) Hebron, JOSH 21:11 and (22) Engedi. JOSH 15:62

During Christ’s ministry, people often came to Him out of many different cities (Matt 14:13; Mk 1:45; 6:33). Now, after He had ascended into heaven and assumed the reins of the Kingdom, the same thing is happening regarding the ministry of His apostles. Also, during Christ’s ministry they brought the infirm and “laid the sick in the streets, and besought Him that they might touch if it were but the border of His garment” (Mk 6:56). Here again, the sick were placed in the street.

The point to be seen here is simply that God can so work that people will flock to hear the Word and experience deliverance. That working, however, requires both a pure message and a holy people. There is no human strategy that can manipulate God into a position where He draws people in the manner seen in this text. This drawing is a result of a heavenly determination, not a human scheme.

I must confess that I long to behold such marvelous workings on a among an obviously holy people with spiritual understanding. Already, as a sort of firstfruits, we have seen this kind of drawing in our assembly. It has not been the result of promotion, or some human initiative. The only thing we have to offer is a revealed and unchanging message that is the appointed catalyst for Divine working and blessing.

EVERY ONE WAS HEALED

“ . . . and they were healed every one.” Other versions read, “and they were all healed,” NKJV “and they were all being healed,” NASB “ and all of them were healed,” NIV “ and they were all cured ,” NRSV “and they were all made well ,” BBE “and each person was cured ,” GWN “who were all healed ,” YLT “and every one of them was healed,” LIVING “ All of these people were healed,” IE “ and they were cured, one and all ,” WEYMOUTH

The Scriptures contain several references to everyone being healed by Jesus . “ . . . and He healed them . . . and healed all that were sick . . . and He healed them all . . . he laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them . . . “for there went out of Him virtue, and healed them all” (Matt 4:24; 8:16; 12:15; Luke 4:40; 6:19).

This was not always the case. Sometimes it is said that Jesus healed “many.” “And He healed many that were sick . . . for He had healed man” (Mk 1:34; 3:10). Once it is written that He healed them “that had need of healing” (Lk 9:11). Another time it is written that “as many as touched were made perfectly whole” (Matt 14:36; Mk 6:56). Once the Lord was at the pool of Bethesda where “a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered” were found. Passing over them all, Jesus singled out a solitary man and healed him, commanded the man to pick up his bed and walk (John 5:1-9).

In the wilderness, when Israel was plagued with poisonous snakes, Moses was commanded to make

a serpent of brass and hoist it on a pole. Any person who was bitten, “when he beheld the serpent, he lived” (Num 21:9).

The point to be seen here is the extraordinary nature of the times. Jesus did not always heal everyone, which indicates that is not always the will of the Father – for Jesus always did the things that pleased His Father (John 8:29). This was a time when the extraordinary Gospel was being preached by spiritually uncommon men, in an environment of strong faith.

The Lord was working in such a manner as to confirm who He was, and the reality of His great salvation. This does not mean the Lord only worked in such a manner at the beginning of the New Covenant era – the day of salvation. It does mean that God works in such a way when His purpose is advanced by this manner of working.

The aim was not merely to heal sick people. If that was the aim, then they all would have been healed when Jesus walked among them. This is evident, because a whole host of sick people were brought in from outlying areas – areas in which Jesus preached for more than three years. Mind you, this was the area around Jerusalem, where our Lord spent considerable time, especially during the latter part of His ministry. Yet a few weeks after His ascension back into heaven, a multitude of sick people still remained. It should not be difficult to see that there is a higher purpose being fulfilled by the exalted Christ than ensuring that everyone has good health.

Again, this was a fulfillment of the prayer of the church: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus ” (Acts 4:30). Until that time, so far as the record of the apostles’ working is concerned, there had been a

single healing – the man at the gate Beautiful (Acts 3:1-11). On Pentecost, the apostles were said to have done “many wonders and signs” (Acts 2:43). These probably included healings, although a point is never made of it. What should be seen here is the sudden quantum leap from very little healing to an abundance of it. Limiting ourselves to the written record, we have one man being healed. A short time later many sick people were brought in from the neighboring cities were all healed – “every one.”

Throughout history there have been periods of spiritual dryness, when men and women of faith longed for the Lord to bare His holy arm, working in an apparent manner. Our text has confirmed that in a very short span of time there can be an outbreak of spiritual life and Divine workings – workings with an impact upon men.

This should establish to our hearts that nothing is too hard for the Lord, His arm is not shortened, and He can suddenly show Himself strong and convincingly. It seems to me that, if we are engaged in the will of the Lord, it is in order to pray for the Lord to work in such a manner. This is in keeping with David’s petition, “O Lord God. . . show Thyself!” (Psa 94:1). With, David, the plea was for recompense upon his enemies. For Moses it was for glory. Both sought revelation.

CONCLUSION

The remarkable incidents that are chronicled in our text took place immediately after a great judgment – the death of Ananias and Sapphira. At the time of that judgment, the Spirit moved Luke to record a number of things.

- “Great fear came upon all them that heard these things” (5:5).
- “And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (5:11).

- “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people” (5:12).
- “And of the rest durst no man join himself to them” (5:13a).
- “. . . but the people magnified them ” – the apostles in particular, and the believers in general (Acts 5:13b).
- “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women)” (Acts 5:14).

Those who are prone to think in terms of, what is called, positive thought, and of its power, could not navigate well in such a surrounding. No amount of positive thought, no matter how extensive, could have produced the things of which we are reading.

Apart from the working of the Lord, where could such a mixture of human responses be found? As natural men perceive things, some of these responses are so contradictory they could never occur at the same time – i.e., fearing and magnifying, no man daring to join yet believers being added in great numbers, etc. The working of the Lord does not fit into the natural order, but is rather imposed upon it! It stands separate and apart from nature, which has no powers to produce such things – things that liberate the soul, glorify God, and clarify His eternal purpose. There simply is no power resident in the natural order that can produce such marvelous things.

Those who are prone to think in terms of, what is called, positive thought , and of its imagined power, could not navigate well in such a surrounding. No amount of positive thought, no matter how extensive, could have produced the things of which we are reading. The recollection of Ananias and Sapphira being struck dead would keep the people sober, forbidding the outbreak of carnal jubilation or fleshly joy. The signs and wonders wrought by the apostles would remind the people that God ’s power was the source of blessing as well as judgment, and that it was altogether transcendent to the natural order. Multitudes of believers being added to the Lord would accent the power of the Gospel, and neutralize any inordinate fear brought on by the appearance of supernatural works.

I get the impression that the blessing of the Lord was poured forth because of His good pleasure in the proclamation of the record He had given of His Son. He had exalted the Lord Jesus, and His messengers received the word with joy, quickly proclaiming it. He was also pleased with those who had embraced the Son, and were fleeing to Him for refuge, to lay hold on the hope that was being set before them (Heb 8:18). These were the kind of people that could be multiplied to the glory of God.

Under such conditions, there is no need to try and produce additions. The “truth of the Gospel,” when proclaimed, will produce fruit, for it is undergirded by Divine power. As it is written, “. . . the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit , as it doth also in you” (Col 1:5-6). Those who believe the Gospel know this to be true. Such have every right to expect the Lord to work where faith and truth are found.

Jesus once taught His disciples, “the seed is the word of God” (Lk 8:11). That, according to His own word, was a facet of “the mysteries of the kingdom of God” (Lk 8:10). The “word of God” has particular reference to the Good News – “the Gospel of the Kingdom” that Jesus heralded among men (Matt 4:23; Matt 9:35). After His resurrection, when Jesus spent forty days with His disciples, He spoke to them “of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3). When Philip preached in Samaria, he spoke of “things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). When Paul preached in Ephesus, for three months he disputed and persuaded men “concerning the Kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). When he left that area he confessed he had gone among them “preaching the Kingdom of God” (Acts 20:25). When he was in his own hired house in Rome, held as a prisoner, a day was appointed to him for the people to come into his lodging. It is written that “he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus” (Acts 28:23). The last verse in the book of Acts tells us that Paul dwelt two years in that house, receiving all who

came to him, “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31).

Should the time come when the church returns to the emphasis that is clearly seen in this record of the activities of the people of God, it may very well be that the Lord will work as He did in the book of Acts. However, as long as the professing church is content to dabble in political, domestic and social issues, it will remain fundamentally powerless, for such words are in no sense “the seed of the Kingdom.” The Gospel is not A power, but is THE power of God!

It is not right for men to make a business out of religion, building financial empires, and institutions that bear their own names, and glorify their own persons and objectives. Attempting to sanctify such things as fund-raising and expertise in organization are nothing more than an exercise in vanity. There is a reason why a record of such efforts is not found in the Word of God. They have no spiritual power. The fact that such entities are characterized by spiritual impotence confirms this to be the case. It is ever true that Divine power can only be employed for holy purposes. It is not possible for a holy God to dispatch His power for unholy purposes. Heavenly gifts cannot be used in the fulfillment of purely earthly objectives. The Kingdom of God is one that is strictly governed by the exalted Christ (Isa 9:6-7), so that Divine resources are always matched with Divine purposes. Not only for the King determine what is to be done, but also how it will be done, as well as who does it. The book of Acts – in particular the text we have just covered – is a confirmation of this unvarying reality. These realities are being lived out in the text.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #23

THE APOSTLES ARRESTED

INTRODUCTION

This text records the third time the apostles have confronted irate Jewish authorities – men who were disturbed by the message and works of the ambassadors of Jesus. Further, they boldly confronted and opposed the apostles, even doing so openly.

• (1) – “And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide” (Acts 4:1-3).

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(2) – “And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this?” (Acts 4:6-7).

• (3) – “Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison” (Acts 5:17-18).

The truth of the Gospel disrupted the manner of thinking of these leaders, and conflicted with their emphasis – an emphasis they thought perfectly comported with the Law. Although a highway had been raised up by God to escape the condemnation of the law, the world, and all of its misconceptions, these men stand up in defiance against the messengers of the Gospel – the good news that announced and facilitated spiritual liberty. This highway had been prophesied by Isaiah: “And an highway shall

be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein ” (Isa 35:8). However, these opposing leaders saw no correlation between the prophecies of holy prophets and the Lord Jesus Christ and His ambassadors. They could not make the connection between the Person and accomplishments of Jesus and the testimony of the law and the prophets. Speaking of this inability Paul wrote, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew : for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8).

The thrust of modern religion makes too much room for boasting, and too little for faith. There is a lot of disinterest, casualness, and downright carnality.

These men had dominated the Jewish scene, so that few people dared to oppose them, or conduct their lives in a manner that was not approved by them. Some had even shunned to confess Christ before men because of the stilted requirements imposed upon them by this motley group of pretenders. On one occasion during Christ’s ministry, He healed a man who was born blind. The miracle was very disconcerting to the religious leaders, and thus they questioned the man’s parents to confirm how he was healed. His parents declined to answer, saying their son could answer for himself. John provides an explanation for that refusal. “These words spake his parents, because they feared the Jews : for the Jews had agreed already, that if any man did confess that he was Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue. Therefore said his parents, He is of age; ask him” (John 9:23).

Not long before He was betrayed into the hands of wicked men, there were a number of “chief rulers” who believed in Jesus. Yet, they would not acknowledge that fact, but concealed it from the people, not confessing Jesus. John again gives the reason for their conduct. “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him , lest they should be put out of the synagogue: for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:42-43).

Now, however, these pretentious men will confront liberated souls who are walking with Christ and filled with the Spirit. These holy men will not be intimidated by these false leaders. They know “the fear of man bringeth a snare” (Prov 29:25). They are also keenly aware of the One they are serving: “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15). They had personally heard the risen Christ say, “All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth” (Matt 28:18). With them, this was not merely a religious view, or the official position of the newly formed church. This was something that was alive in their spirits.

There are a number of things in contemporary Christianity that are outside the perimeter of God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11). However, at the head of the list is the promotion of a teaching that does not leave people with an acute awareness of the living God and His Christ. The members of the churches in our land are not being brought to a place where they live by faith and walk in the Spirit. A flood of human wisdom is poured over them that is quenching the Spirit and promoting fame for men. The average American congregation is not walking in the light as the Lord is in the light (1 John 1:7), and most everyone knows it. There is no spiritual cognizance of the presence of the Lord, and their best services are something like a high school pep rally that produces effects that soon wear off. The thrust of modern religion makes too much room for boasting, and too little for faith. There is a lot of disinterest, casualness, and downright carnality.

Notwithstanding these conditions, our text is delivering an arresting message to the modern church. Here we are reading of a different breed of teachers. They are absorbed with the message Christ, and are totally unimpressed by the threats of men. The people who hear them are forward to come together, submitting themselves to the Word of the Lord, and doing so with one accord and joy. When they are opposed by the highest ranking religious officials in their nation, they ignore their threats. When they are visited by messengers from heaven, they instantly obey. Their message has moral and

spiritual power, and it produces satisfying effects in those who receive it. Make no mistake about this, we are being exposed to real spiritual life – the life Jesus being lived out in those who are living by faith.

THOSE WHO WERE FILLED WITH INDIGNATION

“ 5:17 Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation”

Remember, the apostles are teaching in the Temple, and multitudes of people are hearing and giving heed to them. They have been preaching good news. Allow me refresh your minds about the good things that have been declared from the day of Pentecost to this time.

- The prophecy of Joel concerning the pouring forth of the Spirit upon “all flesh” has been declared as taking place (2:15-18).
- Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved (2:21).
- Jesus had worked among the people, being “approved of God” among them “by miracles and wonders and signs ” (2:22).

When men and women are first born again, it is difficult for them to of conceive others not wanting what they have. They know what the truth has done for them, and they are sure that everyone else will be happy with truth of Christ also. However, it is not long before they find out this is not the case.

Although Jesus had been “delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” God had raised Him from the dead (2:23-32).

- It was impossible for death to maintain its hold on Jesus (2:24b).
- Jesus, being exalted to the right hand of God, had shed forth the Holy Spirit (2:33).
- God had made Jesus “both Lord and Christ” (2:35).
- Those who repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, for the remission of sins, would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (2:38).
- The promised Spirit was for all who heard the Gospel, their children, and even those who were afar off (2:39).
- Men were told to “repent and be converted” in order that their sins might be “blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (3:19).
- God would “send Jesus” to the people, which was before preached to them (3:20).
- To the Jews first, God raised up Jesus, and sent Him to bless them, in “turning away” every one of them from their iniquities (3:26).
- Jesus was the Stone whom the builders rejected. Yet, God made Him the Head of the corner (4:11).
- There is no salvation in any other, “for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- Peter and John boldly affirmed they could not “but speak the things which” they had “seen and heard” (4:20).
- With great power the apostles had given “witness to the resurrection of Christ” (4:33).

The apostles had also spoken frankly about sin, refusing to gloss it (2:23; 3:13-15,17; 4:11,19; 5:3-

4,9).

Behold the candidness with which they spoke, and the unquestionable focus of their preaching. They did not address the state of the nation as such. Modern day domestic, social, and political issues were not addressed. Although they were Jews like Barabbas, they were not insurrectionists like him. They were not seeking political freedom or financial security. They were not preaching about the blessing of abundant wealth, financial security, and the health of the body. Every emphasis of this kind was introduced by other men. The apostles had no part in such preaching and teaching – and they are the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20).

Lest men become naive, thinking that such a good message will surely be received by all, our text will confirm this is not the case. When men and women are first born again, it is difficult for them to conceive others not wanting what they have. They know what the truth has done for them, and they are sure that everyone else will be happy with truth of Christ also. However, it is not long before they find out this is not the case.

Those Who Opposed the Apostles

When those who are obviously caught up in the ways of the world reject the truth of God, it is not so surprising – although even that is disappointing to the tender of heart. However, when those who profess to be followers of God and devoted to His word reject the truth, that is another matter. That is the kind of thing that we find in our text. Here is opposition from the religious sector! Further, this was no ordinary religious sector. These were leaders among the people of whom it is said, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). Let me again emphasize, it is the LEADERS among the chosen people that will take an aggressive stand against the apostles.

Already these leaders have opposed Peter and John (Acts 4:1). Now they come against the apostles as a whole.

THE HIGH PRIEST AND ALL THAT WERE WITH HIM

“Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) . . .” Other versions read, “the high priest and all his associates , who were members of the part of the Sadducees” NIV “the high priest took action ; he and all who were with him (that is, the sect of the Sadducees),” NRSV “Then the high priest intervened with all his supporters from the party of the Sadducees,” NJB “The High Priest and his relatives and friends among the Sadducees reacted ,” LIVING “This roused the High Priest. He and all his party - the sect of the Sadducees,” WEYMOUTH “Now the high priest took a stand , and all his friends, the party of the Sadducees,” WILLIAMS and “But the high priest rose up and all who were his supporters, that is, the party of the Sadducees.” AMPLIFIED

The high priest of reference was Caiaphas, who held that office throughout Christ’s ministry, consistently opposing the Lord, and even seeking his death. He was not a high priest after the order of Aaron, but, according to history, was appointed to his office by the procurator Valerius Gratus, under Tiberius. He continued in office from A.D. 26 to 37. FAUSSET’S BIBLE DICTIONARY It appears from Acts 5:17 that he himself was of the sect of the Sadducees. In reality, he was nothing more than a political pawn, appointed by the Roman government to assist in keeping the Jews in subjection to the government.

The high priest had a number of people who were aligned with him, and no doubt chosen by him. They are called his “associates,” NIV “his supporters,” NJB “his relatives and friends,” LIVING

“All his part,” WEYMOUTH and “all his friends.” WILLIAMS They are further described as “the sect of the Sadducees.” Keep in mind that this sect, gathered by the high priest, was noted for their spiritual obtuseness. They said “there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8; Matt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27). That contradicted the clear affirmations of both Moses and the prophets (Gen 16:7; Ex 3:2; 14:19; 33:2; Judges 6:11; Psa 91:11; Dan 3:28; Zech 1:9; Job 14:12; Isa 26:19). Yet, an alliance with these heretics suited the objectives of the high priest, and thus the Sadducees held a prominent part in the Jewish culture.

This is one of the plagues of institutionalized religion: it allows the for people with seriously contradicting views to be joined together in the name of the Lord. In such a case, the touchstone of acceptance has very little to do with God or Christ. God’s “eternal purpose,” though it has been revealed and expounded, has no place in such alliances. Therefore there is no necessity for men to subscribe to the revealed details of that purpose.

A God-Ordained Office

The “high priest” was a God-ordained office (Lev 21:10). Further, the high priest was a representative of the people, not a tyrant placed over them (Heb 9:7). Their duties had to do with Divine service, not public authority. Some of the ordained duties included the following.

- Had charge of the sanctuary and the altar (Num 18:2 – Aaron and sons).
- Offered sacrifices (Heb 5:1; 8:3).
- Designated subordinate priests for various duties (Num 4:19).
- Officiated at the consecration of the Levites (Num 8:11-21).
- Had charge of the treasury (2 Kgs 12:10).
- Lit the lamps in the Tabernacle, and the Temple (Ex 27:20-21).
- Burned incense (Ex 30:7).
- Placed showbread on the table (Lev 24:2,8).
- Offered sacrifices for his own sins and that of the people (Lev 4:3-12; Heb 5:1).
- Had special duties on the day of atonement (Ex 30:10; Lev 16:1-34; Heb 9:7).
- Took count of the people (Num 1:3).
- Officiated at the appointment of a ruler (Num 27:18-21 – Eleazar, Aaron’s oldest son, and his successor as high priest)
- Distributed spoils of war (Num 31:26-29 – Eleazar).

This is not intended to be an exhaustive list, but it does provide a sort of index concerning the duties of a high priest. He was more of a representative, than a ruler of the people. When he was involved with the people themselves, it was in order to bring the mind of the Lord to bear upon the matter.

In our text, there had been a departure from the real ministry of the high priest. Now he was viewed more as an authoritarian among his peers – almost like a king. In Jesus’ day, he dwelt in a “palace” (Matt 26:3; mk 14:54). When Jesus was arrested in the Garden a military band was sent from the high priest to lay hold on Him (Mk 14:47,53). Any likeness between the high priests of that day and the time of Aaron was purely coincidental. The office itself had become corrupted.

In the days of king Jehoash, the high priest Jehoiada was charged with repairing the house of the Lord (2 Kgs 12:7-12). In the days of king Josiah, Hilkiah the high priest also worked on the house of the Lord. He is the one who found the book of the Law in the house of God. He also removed from God’s house the vessels made for Baal (2 Kgs 22:4,8; 23:4). In the days of Nehemiah, Eliashib the

high priest “rose up with his brethren, and they built the sheep gate and sanctified it” (Neh 3:1). In the days of Haggai, Joshua the high priest also engaged in rebuilding the house of the Lord (Hag 1:12-14). Zechariah had a vision of Joshua the high priest standing before the Lord receiving a change of raiment and deliverance from the power of Satan. He was also given a word about the coming Messiah (Zech 3:1-8).

However, in the time of our text, with all of that sacred history, the high priesthood was not noted for the work of the Lord. Rather, it is noted for opposing the work of the Lord. In the Gospels, the high priests are renowned for being against, arresting, trying, and condemning the Son of God (Matt 26:3,57-65; Mk 14:47-66; Lk 22:50; John 11:49-51; 18:13-26). Now, in the book of Acts, they are also noted for fighting the work of the Lord, as done through the apostles (Acts 4:6; 5:17,21,24,27; 7:1; 9:1; 22:5; 23:2,4,5; 24:1; 25:2).

What a remarkable degeneration had taken place in this ordained office! Instead of being servants of God, the high priest and council were fighting against Him, rejecting His Son, and opposing the apostles of the Lamb!

What a remarkable degeneration had taken place in this ordained office! Instead of being servants of God, the high priest and council were fighting against Him, rejecting His Son, and opposing the apostles of the Lamb!

Now, upon seeing all of the activity within the Temple, and particularly in the large area of Solomon’s porch, the high priest and those with him “rose up.” That is, they “rose up” in defiance and opposition. They pushed themselves into the holy assembly, and “intervened” NJB in those sacred gatherings. They “took action” NRSV against the apostles, and were “roused” WEYMOUTH to a state of hostility against the truth of God.

Godly Jewish Leaders of the Past

In the Jewish history, godly leaders called for scribes and knowledgeable men to obtain Divine wisdom when needed.

- Under the Law, the dedication of leaders involved asking counsel of the Lord concerning them (Num 27:21).
- Of old time, when men set out to inquire of the Lord, they sought out a prophet, who was then called a “seer” (1 Sam 9:9).
- Jehoshaphat sought a prophet of the Lord who might inquire of the Lord for him (1 Kgs 22:5; ,7; 2 Kgs 3:11).
- When he fell ill, Benhadad, king of Syria, sent a man to inquire of Elisha if he would recover from the disease (2 Kgs 8:8).
- Hezekiah prayed to the Lord with the prophet Isaiah (2 Chron 32:20).
- Zedekiah sent messengers to Jeremiah, asking the prophet to pray for him (Jer 37:3).
- King Jeroboam, when judged by God, asked a man of God to pray for him (1 Kgs 13:6).
- When David confronted the Philistines, he inquired of the Lord concerning what he should do (1 Sam 23:2,4).
- When convicted that the nation was headed in the wrong direction, Josiah commanded a priest, a scribe, and other key men, to inquire of the Lord for him and all the people (2 Kgs 22:12-13).

For any informed Israelite, there was sufficient in the Law and the history of their nation to provoke

them to ask of the Lord concerning something they not understand. Of all people, the high priest should have been most aware of this, for he was “ordained for men in things pertaining to God” (Heb 5:1).

However, in the text before us, the high priest did not inquire of the Lord concerning the activities of the apostles. Their religion had crystalized around their own traditions, so that holy procedures were altogether forgotten. They will proceed in their own worldly perspective, not seeking wisdom from the Lord. This contradicted the nature of their office, and confirmed how far the Jewish system had drifted from its ancient moorings.

The Danger of a Traditional Religion

By a traditional religion, I mean one that is anchored in human interpretation rather than Divine utterance. In a traditional religion, the Scriptures, if they are used at all, are employed to buttress the tradition, which is perceived as the main thing. If the Scriptures appear to contradict the tradition, an effort is made to explain away the obvious meaning of them. The attempted explanation may be based on history, etymology, historic manuscripts, contextual relevance, or some other expression of human wisdom.

Because of the nature of tradition, the strongest appeal is not to spiritual understanding, but to scholarship, hermeneutics, language studies, church authority, and the likes.

This is done because of the nature of the Scriptures themselves. They are fundamentally the revelation of the mind of the Lord, with absolutely no regard for the establishment of the wisdom or positions of men. Their design is to make the man of God mature in the presence of the Lord, and equip him to do the works of God that have been ordained for him (2 Tim 3:17). Their aim is not to make the world a better place to live, or to improve the social involvements of humanity. Rather, they are written to inform man of his real condition, together with the appointed demise of this world, and the appearing of the world to come. They also provide the means of preparing for these inevitabilities, so that one may enter into the joy of the Lord.

In our text, although the apostles have expounded the Scriptures, and confirmed Jesus of Nazareth to be the One of whom they spoke, the Jewish authorities are not at all pleased – particularly since the people have given heed to them. The words delivered by the apostles have contradicted the teaching of these leaders.

THEY WERE FILLED WITH INDIGNATION

“ . . . and were filled with indignation.” Other versions read, “filled with jealousy,” NASB “were full of envy,” BBE “filled with wrath,” DARBY “were extremely jealous,” GWN “filled with zeal,” YLT “reacted with violent jealousy,” LIVING “filled with angry jealousy,” WEYMOUTH “This aroused bitter indignation,” MONTGOMERY “filled with jealousy and indignation and rage,” AMPLIFIED and “in a fury of jealousy.” PHILLIPS

Make no mistake about this, the truth has an adverse effect upon those who have not received a love for it (2 Thess 2:10). During the time of our text, when the truth of God is being powerfully proclaimed, it has been like a disrupting storm falling upon the ears of the high priest and his cohorts. It has pierced their ears and hearts causing inward pain, for there is no way it can fit together with their ideas and words.

The opponents are “filled with indignation.” That is, their response was anything but casual. Their wicked hearts would not let them be tolerant of the apostles’ contradicting words.

The word “indignation” is very strong, just as it sounds. The word speaks of a volatile emotion. Its

root lexical meaning is, “excitement of mind, ardor, fervor of spirit.” As used in this text it speaks of a “an envious and contentious rivalry, and jealousy,” and carries the idea of malicious outbursts of anger. THAYER Other meanings include, “jealousy, envy,” FRIBERG and “factionalism, and party strife.” GINGRICH

The indignation of these men was aroused because of the contradicting and competing nature of the apostles’ doctrine. It contradicted what the high priest and his associates were teaching, and competed with their objectives. The world, whether religious in nature, or otherwise, can easily abide things that do not compete with its own interests or contradict its priorities. Like the Athenians, purely worldly minds often delight to hear some new thing (Acts 17:21), as long as there is no moral obligation in it. Such minds delight to be in the marketplace of thought, just as long as they are not move out of their comfort zone, or challenged to think differently.

The Truth

In every way, the truth is unique. One ought to expect this to be the case since the knowledge of the truth makes men free (John 8:32), and the love of the truth is a primary means by which we can be saved (2 Thess 2:10). The truth is a large word that speaks of a vast body of interrelated realities. Truth has a single emphasis, and a solitary direction. Among other things, it consists of affirmations – a declaration of unchangeable facts or realities. It also involves exhortations, in which the individuals hearing the facts are urged to live in comportment with them. There are also corrections which inform wayward individuals that they are on the wrong course, and calls upon them to correct it lest they be destroyed. Truth also involves instruction that clarifies how the truth is actually lived out.

There is a perfect harmony in all such things. The facts never contradict themselves. Exhortations, correction, and instruction are always in view of the facts and never in competition with them. For example, if it is true that men will all die, and the present heavens and earth will pass away, truth will never move a person to exhort others to become more attached to the world. If truth has an eternal emphasis, those who embrace it will not accent temporal things.

In Our Text

In this text, the high priest and his colleagues are moved to indignation by the teaching of the apostles because it contradicts what they have embraced and teach. If what the apostles are saying is true, then it is obvious that what they have been saying is false – accenting the wrong things and headed in the wrong direction.

On a more practical level, the religion of these opponents was a haven in which they were able to maintain a distance from God, all the while assuming the reins of religious leadership. They did not have to know God, be conversant with His purpose, or have an understanding of His ways. Their position could be maintained independently of such knowledge. They were not required to be assured of the blessing of the Lord, or be personally conscious of His approval. That was not required for the work in which they were engaged. Neither, indeed, was it essential that they heartily embrace the will of God, submitting wholly to it, and living their lives within its perimeter. The type of activities in which they were engaged did not demand such submission.

They could be religious and maintain their own agenda – the one they themselves had either developed or embraced. The sanctity of their religion was not found in Divine associations, but in the traditions and wisdom of men. Further, the Scriptures were essential only to the degree that they supported their own objectives. That is why the high priest could work side by side with the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, the existence of angels, and the reality of spirit. Although these were all gross deficiencies, the system in which these men operated allowed them to rise to places of prominence and authority. They proudly declared they were part of a system that was of

Divine origin, and they were being honored by the premier people in the world. They boasted of having Abraham as their father (John 8:39), and declared themselves to be ardent disciples of Moses (John 9:28).

These men had credentials, and were not among those whom they referred to as “having never learned” (John 7:15), or being “unlearned and ignorant” (Acts 4:13). Of course, the criterion they used to determine these classifications was their own creation. They did not look at teachers from the standpoint of truth, or judge them according to their understanding of the things of God. They considered themselves authorities in matters of religion, yet their only credentials were the ones they had given themselves. For them, the touchstone of theological validity was their own positions or the traditions they had embraced.

However, now they are faced with men who have not been trained in, or authorized by, their religious system. These men – the apostles – are, by their estimation, inferior. Yet, they are speaking and working with obvious authority, and are capturing the attention of the people. The whole thing was irritating to these men, and therefore they arose and intervened in the affairs that were going on in the Temple complex. Prior to this they had been against Jesus, and now they assert themselves against His servants.

Our Times

In a way, our times are very much like those during which our text took place. There are at least four components, or factors, in this comparison: The leaders, the teaching, the people, and the environment or place.

The leaders are those exercising influence over the people in matters pertaining to God. The teaching is the message that is presented, including its content and thrust. The people are those subject to the teaching of the teachers. The environs are where the people are gathered together for religious purposes.

With these in mind, men of God were found to be in contradiction to the religious leaders of the time. Their message, the Gospel, conflicted sharply with the teaching of those leaders, which was firmly anchored in the traditions of men. The people who were of one accord in Christ are to be compared with a people whose distinction was their identity with God by antiquity, yet whose nature had not been changed. The environment was a place devoted to the worship and service of God.

Who is not able to see the parallel in our own time. Here and there men of spiritual understanding are raised up who are sent by God to the people. Yet, when they come, they are largely rejected by the Christian institutions of the times. If they do not come with official credentials, they are not considered seriously. They are not perceived as Scriptural scholars if they did not receive training in officially recognized places. If they are perceived as knowing anything at all, or speaking with any particular power, their judges marvel that they have attained such wisdom outside of the sanctioned religious institutions. Their message bears no resemblance to the religious fads of the day, and they do not appear to be in tune with the current issues. If they are found speaking in the places reserved for Christians they are viewed as peculiar, too strong, or altogether irrelevant.

This passage will confirm to us the boldness of the flesh against those who speak in the behalf of Christ. It will also substantiate the manner in which the threats of men are viewed by those who are abiding in Christ and bringing forth fruit. They will not be intimidated by those who oppose the truth of God, for they trust in God.

ARRESTED AGAIN, AND PUT IN THE COMMON PRISON

“ 18 And laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.”

The saints of God cannot afford to be naive about life in this world. It is possible to entertain a view of Divine protection that contradicts both the record of valid experiences and the doctrine of Christ.

There are certain promises in Scripture concerning the safety of the saints. When understood properly, our text will not be perceived as contradicting them. Permit me to give you a few of these Divine commitments.

- “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:7).

- “For He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Psa 91:11-12).

- “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19).

- “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish” (Luke 21:17-18).

- “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6).

This is not all that the Lord has said about opposition. He also said the following to His disciples.

- “Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city” (Matt 23:34).

- “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for My name's sake” (Matt 24:9).

- “But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues” (Matt 10:17).

- “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute” (Luke 11:49).

The saints of God cannot afford to be naive about life in this world. It is possible to entertain a view of Divine protection that contradicts both the record of valid experiences and the doctrine of Christ.

“But before all these, they shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake” (Luke 21:12).

- “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20).

- “They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service” (John 16:2).

All of the apostles were persecuted, and all of them were martyred, with the exception of John the beloved. History attests that his persecutors did try to kill him, but could not do it. Paul provides a brief listing of his trials and persecutions, which listing itself is staggering to consider (2 Cor 6:4-10; 11:23-28).

Add to this what the apostles taught the church concerning persecution.

- “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that

we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17).

- “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Thy sake we are killed all the day long ; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom 8:36).

- “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now ” (Gal 4:29).

- “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto ” (1 Thess 3:3).

- “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution ” (2 Tim 3:12).

- “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you ” (1 Pet 4:12).

- “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf ” (1 Pet 4:16).

- “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4:19).

One of the serious weaknesses of the average American Christian is the inability to endure suffering. When it comes to personal sufferings like illness and severe disadvantages, there are some who actually become angry with God, as though suffering was, in fact, a “strange thing”

Let those who imagine that in Jesus we are insulated against opposition and persecution abandon their simplistic way of thinking. Persecution has been the ordinary lot of the people of God from Abel until this day. The prophets were persecuted (Matt 5:12; Acts 7:52; James 5:10). The Lord Jesus Himself was persecuted (John 5:16; 15:20). The apostles were persecuted (Acts 5:40; 1 Cor 4:9). The church was persecuted (Acts 8:1; 12:1).

When, therefore, we read of the apostles being arrested, we certainly are not happy. However, we are not surprised. These are by rank “first” within the church (1 Cor 12:28), and yet they were not shielded from persecution.

It ought to be noted, however, that persecution did not terminate their work prematurely. They were kept until their work was done. When that point came, like Paul, they willingly laid down their lives, just as their Lord. Satan cannot overturn the work of the Lord!

THEY LAID THEIR HANDS ON THE APOSTLES

“And laid their hands on the apostles, . . .” Other versions read, “arrested the apostles,” NIV “took the apostles,” BBE “grabbed the apostles,” IE “had the apostles arrested,” WILLIAMS “apprehended the apostles,” MONTGOMERY and “seized and arrested the apostles (special messengers).” AMPLIFIED

Mark well that this apprehension took place while they were engaged in the work of the Lord – a work to which they had been appointed. If you think the hosts of hell tremble before the saints, think again! There is not a single account of any of Satan’s hosts trembling, falling down before, or petitioning anyone but Jesus Himself (Matt 8:29; Mk 5:6-7; Lk 8:28; Mk 5:10). Satan has neither respect nor fear for believers. If it was not for the Savior Himself and his absolute submission to Him, he would have devoured them long ago.

It breaks my heart to read of these wicked men laying their hands on the “holy apostles” (Eph 3:5; Rev 18:20). However, fellowship with Christ includes the “fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil 3:10),

and a measure of them have been left behind to be “filled up” by His disciples (Col 1:24).

One of the serious weaknesses of the average American Christian is the inability to endure suffering. When it comes to personal sufferings like illness and severe disadvantages, there are some who actually become angry with God, as though suffering was, in fact, a “strange thing” (1 Pet 4:12). Others compromise their faith and adopt the manners of the world in order to avoid opposition, bartering their souls for temporary relief. I have long been chagrined at many reports of persecution which are often viewed as a violation of civil rights. It is not unusual for some to make appeals to the government to protect Christians in the name of civil liberty. It is not that such appeals are of themselves wrong. However, it seems to me that men ought to seek help from their God.

Paul asked the church to pray that he and those with him would be “delivered from unreasonable and wicked men” (2 Thess 3:2). He was not praying for personal comfort, but for the dissemination of the “word of the Lord,” that is might “have free course, and be glorified” (2 Thess 3:2).

Thus the apostles, while engaged in the work of the Lord, fulfilled the word of Isaiah: “Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey : and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:15). If they had not stayed in Jerusalem, perhaps this would not have happened. But the Lord had commanded them to “preach in His name . . . beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). They are obeying His word regardless of the consequences.

THEY PUT THEM IN THE COMMON PRISON

“ . . . and put them in the common prison.” Other versions read, “public jail,” NASB “public prison,” NRSV “public ward,” ASV “the city jail,” CSB and “public custody.” ALT

The apostles were dignitaries in the Kingdom of God – princes among men. Yet, they were not afforded any dignity by this motley group of Jewish leaders. The “common prison” was a public one, so that the prisoners were “in full view of all,” THAYER “publicly, openly before the people.” FRIBERG This would be a source of great shame to the timorous, and would serve as a solemn warning to the people not to follow these apostles – at least that is what the high priest and his conspiratorial Sanhedrin thought. This is now the second time this group of wicked men has incarcerated Christ’s apostles. The first time, it was Peter and John (4:3). They were not able to remove them from preaching at that time, and they will not be able to do so now.

HEAVEN RESPONDS TO THE CIRCUMSTANCE

“ 19 But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, 20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life. 21a And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.”

So far as we know, all of heaven is involved in the salvation of God.

- **THE FATHER.** The purpose that is being fulfilled in salvation is that of the Father Himself. It is He that sent the Son (1 John 4:14), delivered Him up (Rom 8:32), raised Him from the dead (Acts 4:10), and exalted Him to his own right hand (Eph 1:20-21). He is still imminent in every facet of salvation.

- **THE SON.** The Son came to the earth to do the will of the Father. He put away sin (Heb 9:26), reconciled the world to God (Col 1:21-22), brought an end to the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), and spoiled adversarial principalities and power (Col 2:15). He is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18, and intercedes for the saved (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

- **THE HOLY SPIRIT.** The Holy Spirit convinces the world of sin, righteousness

and judgment (John 16:8-11). He is the one who sets the people apart to God (2 Thess 2:13), facilitates the new birth (John 3:8), intercedes for the saints from within (Rom 8:26-27), and leads the saints in the mortification of the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13-14).

• **THE HOLY ANGELS.** The angels are “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:13-14). They desire to look into the things contained in the Gospel (1 Pet 1:12), are fellow servants with the saints (Rev 19:10; 22:9), and are among those to whom believers “are come” (Heb 12:22).

The word of God makes clear that those in Christ come into fellowship with the Father (the Judge of all—Heb 12:23), the Son (Jesus the Mediator – Heb 12:24), the Holy Spirit (Phil 2:1), and the holy angels (an innumerable company of them – Heb 12:11).

It should not surprise us, therefore, that an angel becomes involved in the affairs of our text. Through holy commissioned involvements, they are integral to the experiences related to this salvation.

In view of heaven’s commitment to the salvation of the elect, you can see how utterly absurd it is for men to have no interest in it. When those who profess to be in Christ are slothful in things pertaining to God, attempting to coast through life with the imagination that God has received them, they are at variance with heaven, not in harmony with it. Such people are tottering on the brink of eternal ruin, and do not know it.

BUT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

“But the angel of the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “messenger of the Lord.” YLT

When those who profess to be in Christ are slothful in things pertaining to God, attempting to coast through life with the imagination that God has received them, they are at variance with heaven, not in harmony with it. Such people are tottering on the brink of eternal ruin, and do not know it.

The expression “the angel of the Lord” is mentioned fifty-eight times in Scripture: fifty times from Genesis through Malachi, and nine times in Matthew through revelation. Aside from the angels Michael and Gabriel, these servants remain anonymous, even though they are of a high order, possessing greater wisdom (2 Sam 14:20), and are “greater in power and might” (2 Pet 2:11) than men. Unlike Jesus, they are not noted for who they are, but for what they do. Jesus holds the distinction of being noted for both who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. Angels are noted for their instant obedience, quickly doing the will of God and returning to the One who commissions them (Psa 103:20).

Now, in fulfillment of their mission as ministers to the heirs of salvation, one of their number is dispatched to bring help to the imprisoned apostles.

BY NIGHT OPENED THE PRISON DOORS

“ . . . by night opened the prison doors . . .” Other versions read, “at night opened the prison doors,” NKJV “during the night opened the gates of the prison ,” NASB “during the night opened the doors of the jail ,” NIV “ opening the doors of the prison,” BBE “Opened the gates of the jail ,” LIVING “ threw open the jail doors,” WILLIAMS and “opened the doors to their cell .” GW

Your perusal of Scripture should confirm that angels never have any difficulty with earthly circumstances – no matter what they are. Earth and its inhabitants in no way challenge holy angels. People to whom angels have appeared include the following.

- Abraham (Gen 22:11).
- Hagar (Gen 16:7).
- Lot (Gen 19:1).
- Jacob (Gen 28:12; 31:11).
- Moses (Ex 3:2).
- The Israelites (Ex 14:19).
- Balaam (Num 22:31).
- Joshua (Josh 5:15).
- Gideon (Judges 6:11).
- Moanoah (Judges 13:6,15).
- David (1 Chron 21:15-16).
- Elijah (1 Kgs 19:5).
- Elisha (2 Kgs 6:17).
- Daniel (Dan 6:22).

Angels have been known to fight in the heavenly realms . . . However, no angel or group of angels ever fought a war among men, or in this world. This domain is vastly inferior to them, and instantly yields to their authority.

- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:25).
- Zechariah (Zech 2:3).
- Joseph (Matt 1:20).
- Mary (Lk 1:26).
- Zecharias (Lk 1:11).
- The shepherds (Lk 2:9).
- Jesus (Lk 4:11; Lk 22:43).
- The women at the tomb of Jesus (Matt 28:2-6).
- The disciples when Jesus ascended (Acts 1:10-11).
- The apostles (Acts 5:19).
- Philip (Acts 8:26).
- Cornelius (Acts 10:3).
- Peter in prison (Acts 12:7).
- Paul (Acts 27:23).
- John (Rev 1:1).

Ponder some of the remarkable things angels have done on earth without any extended effort or apparent difficulty.

- Guard the way to the tree of life so no one can approach it (Gen 3:24).
- Smote the men of Sodom with blindness (Gen 19:11).
- Destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1,13-14).

- Stood between Israel and the Egyptian army, so that they could not approach Israel (Ex 14:19).
- Saved Israel from destruction (Isa 63:9).
- Destroyed the entire army of Sennacherib in a single night – an army numbering 185,000 (2 Kgs 19:35).
- Struck 70,000 Israelites dead with a pestilence, and would have destroyed Jerusalem if God had not stayed his hand (2 Sam 24:15-17).
- Struck king Herod dead (Acts 12:11).
- They are depicted as causing destructive judgments and plagues upon the earth with which men could not contend (Rev 8:5-21).
- An angel will “gather the vine of the earth” and hurl it into the winepress of the wrath of God (Rev 14:19).
- Angels will gather out of God’s kingdom everything that offends and all them that do iniquity (Matt 13:41).
- Angels will gather together the elect from the uttermost part of earth to the uttermost part of heaven (Mk 13:27).

Angels have been known to fight in the heavenly realms. One angel fought against “the prince of Persia” for twenty-one days, even requiring the assistance of the mighty angel Michael (Dan 10:13). Michael and his angels fought against the devil and his angels soundly defeating them, and thrusting them out of the heavenly domain (Rev 12:7-9). However, no angel or group of angels ever fought a war among men, or in this world. This domain is vastly inferior to them, and instantly yields to their authority.

In Consideration of Jesus’ Return

This is something that has not been duly considered by those who believe Jesus is going to come to earth and fight against the wicked. He Himself declared that when He returns, he will be accompanied by “all the holy angels” – not a representative number of them, but all of them (Matt 25:31). The idea that any form of resistance against them will be realized is an utter absurdity – and angels do not have the authority that Jesus has. They are rather His servants, and worship Him. One of their number has the power to bind Satan and throw him in a bottomless pit – and there is not a thing that Satan can do about it (Rev 20:1-3). Is there any person of sound mind who thinks the kings of the earth, to say nothing of those who are under them, could present the slightest challenge to these exalted creatures? And what of the One they obey – the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “Lord of all?”

The notion of a bloody battle with men, led by the Lord Jesus Christ who is accompanied by every single holy angel in existence is demeaning of Christ. It betrays an abysmal understanding of God and Christ, and it ranks high in the echelon of stupidity. Those who teach such things are in the class of people described by Paul, “understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).

This Has to Do With the Text?

The relevance of these cursory observations is seen in our text. An angel comes down from heaven to do something among men. When he arrives there is no resistance of any kind – not so much as a single syllable of speech, to say nothing of any hostility or aggression. He came “by night,” when the “rulers of the darkness of this world” (Eph 6:12) are especially active. He approaches a prison that had been secured, so that no man could escape from its confines. Without any apparent effort, and in an instant without having to work at it, he simply opens the doors of confinement. The opening of the

doors was not an exhibit of raw strength, but of heavenly authority – and earth always yields to the imposition of heavenly authority. This is true because “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26).

It is especially comforting to consider that the holy angels are our ministers (Heb 1:14). They can deliver us with very little effort – just by camping around us as they did around Israel (Psa 34:7). Jesus warned men not to harm one of His little ones, for “their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven” (Matt 18:10). Promoting great sobriety among those who fear God, Solomon once wrote, “Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?” (Eccl 5:6).

It also seems fitting that an angel should be dispatched to deliver those who had been incarcerated by the Sadducees, who officially professed that there was no such thing as an angel (Acts 23:8).

AND BROUGHT THEM FORTH

“ . . . and brought them forth . . .” Other versions read, “and brought them out,” NKJV “and taking them out,” NASB “and leading them out,” DARBY “and led them out,” GWN “let them out,” MRD “he led them out,” NJB “the angel led the apostles outside,” IE and “and having brought them out.” ALT

There you have it – one moment the apostles were in prison, and the next moment they were out. They themselves had to do nothing but walk through the open doors. The judgment of the council had been reversed by Divine edict, and there was absolutely nothing that could be done to resist that determination. Here we have lived out what Jesus declared to the church in Philadelphia: “I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” (Rev 3:8).

In our preaching and teaching, we must not leave people with the idea that they have been locked into a state of oppression and confinement. The door of hope must be left ajar by reporting the wonderful works of God. The record of them is not mere history, but is designed to acquaint us with the ways of the Lord.

I know of no word in Scripture that declares there is a time when angels will no longer minister in this way. I say this in full recognition of the fact that they did not always work in this manner. Here were times when the prison doors were not opened. Joseph was in prison for as long as thirteen years (Gen 37:2; 41:46). John the Baptist was left in prison, and finally beheaded there (Matt 14:3,10). On one occasion, Paul was in jail for two whole years (Acts 19:10; 28:30).

In our preaching and teaching, we must not leave people with the idea that they have been locked into a state of oppression and confinement. The door of hope must be left ajar by reporting the wonderful works of God. The record of them is not mere history, but is designed to acquaint us with the ways of the Lord. We must come to see that should our deliverance be conducive to the glory of God, and if it is suitable to the work that we have been assigned, that deliverance can be wrought very easily. A word from the Lord can cause it to happen, or an angel sent from God (Acts 12:11), or the changing of the king’s heart (Prov 21:1), or the death of our enemies (Matt 2:20). We have every reason not to despair when things are not going well for us!

AND SAID . . .

“ . . . and said . . .” Other versions read, “and said to them,” MRD “Then he told them,” NLT “The angel said,” CEV and “saying.” PHILLIPS

The Tongues of Angels

On one occasion, Paul referred to “the tongues . . . of angels” (1 Cor 13:1). Although certain men

have made much of this solitary reference, and even structured doctrines around it, this is all that is said of it in Scripture.

Perhaps this is the kind of speaking Paul heard when he was caught up into paradise. He said he heard words “which it is not lawful for a man to utter,” or “which a man is not permitted to speak,” NASB (2 Cor 12:4). The word “utter” comes from the Greek word **lalh/sai** (lal-es-ai), which lexically means, “to utter a sound . . . to utter or form words with the mouth,” THAYER “to give forth sounds, sound out,” FRIBERG and “to give forth sounds or tones.” GINGRICH

The reference is not speaking of a message being uttered, or a report being given, but of a sound being uttered with the human voice. Paul was saying that there was no human capacity for repeating what he heard. The human mouth and voice are not adapted to do so. The supposition, therefore, that men can say something with their voice that is in an angelic tongue cannot be supported by any Scriptural example.

In the text in the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, I do not know that it can be established that all of the things Paul mentioned were actually taking place among the Corinthians. He mentions several things (verses 1-3).

- Speaking with the tongues of men.
- Speaking with the tongues of angels.
- Having the gift of prophesy, understand ALL mysteries, and ALL knowledge.
- Have ALL faith, so that I could remove mountains.
- Bestow all my goods to feed the poor.
- Give my body to be burned.

Paul is teaching the necessity of charity, not the extent of abilities given to the saints. While some might make a case for being able to speak with the tongues of men, or giving all of one’s goods to the poor, or even giving one’s body to be burned, what of the other things. Where is the person who can boast of understanding ALL mysteries? Or possessing ALL understanding? Or removing (not moving) mountains? Let no man attempt to push into this text something that the Holy Spirit did not put there!

What We Do Know

We have no example – not so much as a single one – where an angel said something to men in words that could not be understood. Further, we have no example of any man speaking with an angel, employing “the tongues of angels.” Those are the facts in the case.

We do know that there are several instances in Scripture when angels were heard speaking directly to men, or within the range of their hearing. Here are a few of them.

- An angel spoke to Hagar, and she understood what he said (Gen 16:7-13).
- An angel called to Abraham, and he understood what was said (Gen 22:11-12, 15-18).
- An angel spoke to Moses out of a burning bush, and Moses understood what he said (Ex 3:2-4:17; Acts 7:30-35).
- An angel spoke with Balaam, and he knew what was said (Num 22:22).
- The angel of the Lord spoke to all of Israel, and they understood him (Judges 2:1-4).
- Gabriel, a significant angel, talked with Daniel, and he understood what was said

(Dan 9:22-27).

- A holy angel delivered a lengthy discourse to Daniel, who understood what he said (Dan 10:13-21).

- The angel Gabriel appeared to Zacharias, and when the angel spoke, he understood (Lk 1:11-20).

- The angel Gabriel was sent to the virgin Mary to announce the birth of Christ, and she understood all that he said (Lk 1:28-38).

- An angel appeared to some shepherds, announcing the birth of Christ. A heavenly host broke out in praise at that time. The shepherds understood what was said (Lk 2:10-14).

- An angel appeared to Cornelius, giving him instructions, and Cornelius understood him (Acts 10:22; 11:13).

- The voice of many angels was heard AND understood by John (Rev 5:11-12).

- John heard AND understood what one angel said to four other angels (Rev 7:2-4).

- John heard AND understood an angel pronouncing a woe to the inhabitants of the earth (Rev 8:13).

- John heard AND understood what one angel said to seven other angels (Rev 16:1).

This will suffice to make the point, although many other examples could be provided. We have no example – not so much as a single one – where an angel said something to men in words that could not be understood. Further, we have no example of any man speaking with an angel, employing “the tongues of angels.” Those are the facts in the case.

It should not surprise us, therefore, if this angel speaks to the apostles in words they can understand, and in words that they did, in fact, understand. Among other things, this confirms that angels minister to the heirs of salvation in ways that can, to some measurable degree, be understood. In other words, ministry is in the context of discernment, not mystery! To my knowledge, there is no example of a man beholding angels doing something that was not perceived, or saying something in words that could not be understood.

Those who tell us that they themselves, or someone they know, has delivered a word in an angelic tongue must provide more proof than their own testimony. If angels themselves do not speak to men in such a tongue, what kind of reasoning supports that God would move men to do so? For that matter, precisely what is the purpose of any word being delivered to men that cannot be understood? The fact that such a communication is useless is confirmed by the requirement that men must be brought to understand what was said, even if it was uttered in a tongue they did not understand (1 Cor 14:13-14). Whether we are speaking of angels or men, words that cannot be comprehended cannot deliver edification, rebuke, correction, exhortation, or instruction in righteousness. If angels adhere to this principle, what must be said of mere mortals who do not?

ALL THE WORDS OF THIS LIFE

“20 Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” Other versions read, “Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life,” NASB “Go, stand in the temple courts,” he said, “and tell the people the full message of this new life,” NIV “Go, take your place in the Temple and give the people all the teaching about this Life,” BBE “Go and stand in the temple complex, and tell the people all about this life,” CSB “Stand in the temple courtyard, and tell the people everything about life in Christ,” GWN “Go on, and standing, speak in the temple to the people all the sayings of this life,” YLT “Go over to the Temple and preach about this Life,” LIVING “Go and stand in the Temple, and go on proclaiming to the people all this Message of Life,” WEYMOUTH “Go and take your stand in the temple square and continue to tell

the people the message of this new life,” WILLIAMS and “Go, take your stand in the temple courts and declare to the people the whole doctrine concerning this Life (the eternal life which Christ revealed).” AMPLIFIED

The apostles had just been arrested in the Temple, and now the angel sends them back! They had not yet finished their testimony concerning the life that is in Christ Jesus. The angel has not the slightest sense of danger in this matter. He has just reversed the judgment of the high priest and his court, and he knows there is nothing to fear from them.

Speak In the Temple

The angel does not tell the apostles to stand in the street, but “in the Temple.” He does not send them to a synagogue, but to “the temple.” They are not to return to the house where they once prayed for power, but to “the Temple.” He does not tell them to break up into groups and go into the homes, but “in the Temple.” There is where the covenanted people will be gathered, and the words of this life was promised to them. The Gospel is God’s power unto salvation “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16), and the Temple was well suited for preaching that Gospel.

I do not know how those who are opposed to believers meeting in larger structures would have handled the word of the angel. It seems to me they ought to have the honesty to come to grips with it. However, the apostles had no difficulty with it at all, even though they had twice been arrested in that area. The flesh would reason that it was not wise to return to the Temple and resume preaching, particularly after they had already been arrested twice for doing that very thing. However, when the flesh is crucified, as it ought to be, such difficulties do not arise.

Speak All the Words of This Life

It is important to see what the apostles are told to speak: “all the words of this life.” He does not mean life in this world, but the life that is in Christ Jesus. These are the same kind of words Jesus spoke – words that are “spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). They are “the words of eternal life” (John 6:68), not words pertaining to worldly life. John referred to such words as “the record that God gave of His Son,” further defining that record in these words, “that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:10-11).

“The words of this life” are an objective message - one that lies outside of men themselves. Christ is the center, or heart and core, of the message. In it, man is incidental, and Christ is fundamental. By way of comparison, the traditions of men are subjective, having man and what he does, or is to do, as its center, or emphasis. An objective message brings something for men to obtain. A subjective message accents what men can achieve. The words of this life enable men to anchor their lives in eternity. The traditions of men are designed to optimize life in this world.

The core message of the church has never changed. The very nature of salvation, as well as the character of the Lord Himself, demands that it remain the same. When men begin to emphasize the peripheral matters, neglecting the heart of things, their message becomes powerless. This is because the power is in the Gospel itself (Rom 1:16), and not in humanly conceived priorities. If, for example, the family structure is being weakened, the key is not moving the emphasis from Christ to the family. The matter must be addressed from the perspective of life in Christ, not with a primary consideration for the family itself. A proper emphasis will yield exemplary families among all who embrace it. This should not be difficult to comprehend, because we are “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10). How absurd it is to emphasize the benefits rather than the One who gives them!

What Is Means By “Emphasis?”

As simplistic as it may seem, there is considerable confusion concerning the word “emphasis”

itself. Some conclude that if the emphasis is point A , there can never be mention made of point B. However, an emphasis is to teaching, what the melody is to a song. If some one was to play the song “Amazing Grace,” playing only the alto, tenor, and base notes, who would appreciate what was being played? Emphasis is to teaching what a hub is to a wheel. If you attempted to make a wheel without a centralized hub, it could not possibly fulfill the purpose of a wheel. Without a proper doctrinal emphasis, the doctrine itself loses its value, for it is the emphasis that gives it power and worth.

From the standpoint of its objective, the emphasis of apostolic teaching was “the words of this life.” Viewed from the standpoint of the key Person, it was “the Gospel of Christ.”

Real Life

This is life that has to do with being “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11). It is the “life” into which we pass as we exit from death in trespasses and sins (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14). It is the “newness of life” of which Paul wrote (Rom 6:4). It is the life in which we “reign” by Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17). It is elsewhere sated that this is the “life” that results from being “spiritually minded” (Rom 8:6). This is the “life of God” from which we were once alienated (Eph 4:18).

The angel does not send the apostles to the Temple to speak about national life, but “speak all the words of this life.” They are not to deliver stirring orations about family life, but “the words of this life.” They are not sent to tell the people about the acquisition of possessions and wealth, or about health and various foods. They are rather sent to declare “all the words of this life.” They were not sent to deliver a message concerning the younger generation, but were to “speak all the words of this life.” Their’s was not a message of Biblical interpretation, or hermeneutics, but was limited to “all the words of this life.”

Remember, this is the church in a pure state, with unquestionably faithful teachers. The substance of preaching and teaching was precisely summarized: “all the words of this life.” Nothing was to be withheld, but “all the counsel of God” was to be delivered (Acts 20:27).

Over the years, I have found that very little is being said about what ought to be taught. Every denomination has its emphasis – one that enables the sect to continue with its static message. Some make rather generic statements about what is to be preached and taught: i.e., “the Bible,” “the truth,” or “whatever is relevant.” And, indeed, there are instructions like this in Scripture: i.e., “preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2). However, there are also specific matters to be declared.

- “Preach the Gospel ” (1 Cor 1:17).
- “Preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead ” (Acts 4:2).
- “Preached unto him Jesus ” (Acts 8:35).
- “Preached unto you the forgiveness of sins ” (Acts 13:38).
- “Preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection ” (Acts 17:18).
- “Preached unto you the gospel of God ” (2 Cor 11:7).
- “ Repentance and remission of sins should be preached” (Lk 24:47).
- “Preaching the kingdom of God , and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31).

The substance of true preaching and teaching is objective reality. By that I mean realities that exist independently of men. Their cause is not traced to men, but to God. At the root of objective reality are the eternal God (Deut 33:27) and His eternal purpose (Eph 3:11). While men benefit from both, they are, by nature, separate from them.

By “human experience” I mean things related to life in this world, or in the body – things that are

temporal by nature, and cannot extend into the world to come. When preaching and teaching deals primarily with human experience, it is headed in the wrong direction.

Because the purpose of God has to do with removing us from this world, and uniting us with the world to come, it is in every sense wrong to make anything or any relationship in this world the axis upon which preaching and teaching turn. That ought to be evident enough to require no further explanation. The bald truth of the matter is that much of the preaching and teaching of our day not only lacks a Scriptural basis, but is actually contrary to the marked emphasis of the apostles doctrine.

THEY ENTERED THE TEMPLE EARLY AND TAUGHT

“ 21a And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught.” Other versions read, “And upon hearing this , they entered into the temple about daybreak , and began to ,” NASB “At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told , and began to teach the people,” NIV “When they heard this, they entered the temple at daybreak and went on with their teaching ,” NRSV “And hearing this, they went into the Temple at dawn , and were teaching,” BBE “In obedience to this , they entered the temple complex at daybreak and began to teach,” CSV “And when they heard it, they entered very early into the temple and taught,” DARBY “Early in the morning, after they had listened to the angel , the apostles went into the temple courtyard and began to teach,” GWN “They did as they were told ; they went into the Temple at dawn and began to preach,” NJB “So at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching ,” NLT “When the apostles heard this, they went into the temple courtyard. It was early in the morning . The apostles began to teach the people,” IE “Having received that command they went into the Temple, just before daybreak , and began to teach,” WEYMOUTH “So they obeyed , and about the break of day they went into the temple square and began to teach,” WILLIAMS “And when they heard this, they accordingly went into the temple about daybreak and began to teach,” AMPLIFIED and “After receiving these instructions they entered the Temple about daybreak, and began to teach.” PHILLIPS

There was no hesitancy to obey in the apostles – even if their well being appeared to be at stake. They had “learned obedience” in their time with Jesus, consistently doing what they were bidden to do. If Jesus told them to get in a boat and go to the other side of the sea, they did so without question (Matt 14:22). If they encountered a storm on the way that was contrary to them, they continued “toiling in rowing” (Mk 6:48). If the Lord told them to make a hungry multitude sit down in groups of fifties to eat, even if they saw no food with which to feed the, the disciples obeyed the Master (Lk 9:14-15). When He told two of His disciples to go into the city, locate a specific man, and inform him Jesus was going to eat the Passover in his guestchamber with His disciples, they instantly did what Jesus said (Mk 14:13-16). When the Master told Peter to throw a hook in the water, take up a fish, and take a piece of money out of its mouth, Peter did so without any question (Matt 17:27).

Obedience

Among other things, obedience reveals the condition of the heart. It is also one of the evidences of true understanding. As it is written, “a good understanding have all they that do His commandments: His praise endureth for ever” (Psa 111:10). Obedience is integral to following Jesus, and is characteristic of all of His people. The Lord said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). Moses prophesied, and Peter confirmed the truth of it, that the soul that did not hearken to Jesus would be cut off from the people. “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:23; Deut 18:19).

Scripture informs us that obedience is “unto righteousness,” or “leads to righteousness” NIV (Rom 6:16). That is, there is a sort of practical separation that takes place in obedience. In order to obey,

one must depart from the path of waywardness. The point to be seen in this text, is that obedience is characteristic of those who are living by faith, walking in the Spirit living “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15).

Behold how aggressive the apostles were to obey. They rose “entered into the Temple early in the morning, and taught” – just as the angel commanded them to do.

Ponder some things said of holy people who obeyed God, remembering that this is the manner of the New Covenant, and was the exception prior to and under the Old Covenant.

- **ABRAHAM.** “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went ” (Heb 11:8). “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice ” (Gen 22:18).

- **ZERUBBABEL, JOSHUA THE HIGH PRIEST, AND A HOLY REMNANT.** “Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God , and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD ” (Hag 1:12).

- **THOSE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST.** “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom 6:17).

- **THOSE IN CHRIST.** “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22).

Among other things, the response of the apostles to the word of the angel was in perfect keeping with the nature of the New Covenant. In the fulfillment of ancient prophecies, their stony hearts had been removed, and they had received hearts of flesh (Ezek 11:19). They were willing in the day of the exalted Christ’s power, just as the Psalmist prophesied (Psa 110:3). Just as Moses said the people would do, they hearkened to the voice of Jesus, the promised Prophet who had dispatched the angel to direct them (Deut 18:15).

STANDING BEFORE INFERIOR JUDGES

This is an aspect of the Kingdom that must be understood. True deliverance is from the aim of the devil, and not from all of his efforts. Until this is understood to some measurable degree, life will become confusing to the child of God.

“ 21b But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought. 22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within.”

Those who understand the received power of God as making men invincible and surrounding them with insulation against their enemies must consider this passage. It does not always serve the purpose of God to relieve men of trouble and make them superior to their enemies. If that was the case, there would never have been a single martyr who died in the name of Jesus. Persecution would then be impossible if the church was strong. Yet, throughout history, persecution has generally come when the people of God were strong – as in the eight chapter of Acts.

In this text we have Jewish authorities who deny Christ laying their hands on the very ambassadors

of Christ. They arrest them and will incarcerate them. Instead of delivering the apostles altogether from their enemies, the Lord will deliver them from the intention of their enemies. This is an aspect of the Kingdom that must be understood. True deliverance is from the aim of the devil, and not from all of his efforts. Until this is understood to some measurable degree, life will become confusing to the child of God. Unjust things will happen to the saints, as it has from the beginning, when Cain slew Abel. However, the wicked one has never been able to achieve his intentions. This is because he operates under the strict government of the enthroned Jesus – the “blessed and only Potentate” (1 Tim 6:15). The devil cannot cross a single line that has been drawn by the King of kings. He cannot scale any “hedge” of protection reared up by the Lord of lords, as confirmed in the case of Job (Job 1:10).

The wicked “gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous” (Psa 94:21), but they are impotent to carry out their malicious designs. Thus, in the 94 th Psalm, David continues, “But the LORD is my defence; and my God is the rock of my refuge. And He shall bring upon them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; yea, the LORD our God shall cut them off ” (Psa 94:23).

This is precisely why the righteous can boldly, or confidently, say, “The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me ” (Heb 13:6). The apostles will not cease to preach because they were ordered to do so by their enemies. They will rather declare all “the words of this life” as the holy angel has enjoined them to do. They know that the Divine agenda cannot be countermanded by the prince of the power of the air – even though they may experience some grievous opposition, which, for a season, may even appear to be successful.

Time would fail me to mention men that I have personally known who modified their message only because of the pressure of their religious peers. It may have been a school, a church board, a group of elders, some friends, or even some influential church members. Such men do well to sit at the feet of these apostles and learn how to conduct themselves before their enemies when they appear to have the upper hand.

THE HIGH PRIEST CAME AND CALLED A COUNCIL

“But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel.” Other versions read, “Now when the high priest and his associates had come, they called the Council together, even all the Senate of the sons of Israel,” NASB “. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin – the full assembly of the elders of Israel,” NIV “But the high priest and those who were with him got together the Sanhedrin and the representatives of the children of Israel,” BBE “And when the high priest was come, and they that were with him, they called together the council and all the elderhood of the sons of Israel,” DARBY “The chief priest and those who were with him called together the Jewish council , that is, all the leaders of Israel ,” GWN “When the high priest arrived, he and his supporters convened the Sanhedrin – this was the full Senate of Israel,” NJB and “When the high priest arrived, he and his supporters convened the Sanhedrin – this was the full Senate of Israel.” LIVING

Those commanding that the apostles be brought to them are a body of people, probably well over one hundred, who were poised to pronounce judgment on the men they had apprehended. It is clear that their word was considered to be with some authority, for they called for the apostles to be brought to them

It did not take the core of opponents long to convene together. They were anxious to bring to an end, what they considered to be a disruption in the Temple. Previously they had released Peter and John, threatening them with further reprisals if they continued to preach or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:21). Now, they imagined, they would fulfill those threats and bring this teaching to an

end once and for all.

“All the Senate of Israel”

These are said to be in addition to the Sanhedrin, which was the highest judicial branch of the Judaism of the day. It is said to have consisted of seventy-one members, patterned after the practice Moses instituted by the direction of the Lord, which consisted of seventy elders plus Moses (Ex 24:9; Num 11:25).

The “senate of Israel” appears to have been additional elders who were not a part of the Sanhedrin, yet were noted for their wisdom. They were no doubt brought in for counsel. Together with the high priest and the Sanhedrin they constituted a potentially intimidating body of critics. Now we will see how they fare in their opposition to the apostles.

THEY SENT TO THE PRISON

“ . . . and sent to the prison to have them brought .” Other versions read, “and sent orders to the prison house for them to be brought,” NASB “and sent to the jail for the apostles,” NIV “ and sent to the prison to get them .” BBE and “and sent to the gaol for them to be brought.” NJB

If “the common prison” was a public one, as the word suggests, then the incarceration of the apostles was also public. By the same token, getting them out of prison and bringing them to the council would also be known. This would apparently accent the authority of the council, and subject the apostles to further public humiliation. Those commanding that the apostles be brought to them are a body of people, probably well over one hundred, who were poised to pronounce judgment on the men they had apprehended. It is clear that their word was considered to be with some authority, for they called for the apostles to be brought to them. However, heaven did not honor their word, and that is what will be made apparent.

THEY FOUND THEM NOT IN PRISON

“ 22 But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23 Saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors: but when we had opened, we found no man within,” Other versions read, “But when the officers came and did not find them in the prison, they returned and reported, saying, Indeed we found the prison shut securely, and the guards standing outside before the doors ; but when we opened them, we found no one

As men view things, those kind of conditions make non-violent escape impossible. The gates were locked, and could not be opened without some form of noisy and apparent force. The guards were present to prevent a violent prison break, or a hostile takeover of the prison, resulting in the forced release of the prisoners.

inside!” NKJV “But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside .” NIV “But the men who were sent saw that they were not in the prison , and came back with the news, Saying, The doors of the prison were safely shut , and the keepers were at the doors, but when they were open, there was nobody inside,” BBE and “But when the attendants arrived there, they failed to find them in the jail ; so they came back and reported, We found the prison quite safely locked up and the guards were on duty outside the doors, but when we opened [it], we found no one on the inside.” AMPLIFIED

An angel from heaven had visited the scene during the night, and no one knew what had happened – even though the prison was public, and guards were stationed at the doors. Just as in the resurrection of Christ, the Lord can effectively work without men’s knowledge, and while little is going on among

them.

What was done by the angel contradicted the conditions: the doors were securely locked, and guards were positioned at the doors. As men view things, those kind of conditions make non-violent escape impossible. The gates were locked, and could not be opened without some form of noisy and apparent force. The guards were present to prevent a violent prison break, or a hostile takeover of the prison, resulting in the forced release of the prisoners. So far as the high priest and his colleagues were concerned, they had ensured the apostles would remain in the common prison until they were ready to try them.

Of course, none of these things were true, because heaven was also involved in this series of events. That changes the whole scenario. Men dare not allow their vision to rest on circumstance if God, Christ, and holy angels are in the picture – and when the saints are involved, heaven IS involved!

This puts a limit on what men can do. It is why every temptation comes with a special way of escape, that the believer may be able to bear it. The faithfulness of God is at stake here. As it is written, “For no temptation (no trial regarded as enticing to sin), [no matter how it comes or where it leads] has overtaken you and laid hold on you that is not common to man [that is, no temptation or trial has come to you that is beyond human resistance and that is not adjusted and adapted and belonging to human experience, and such as man can bear]. But God is faithful [to His Word and to His compassionate nature], and He [can be trusted] not to let you be tempted and tried and assayed beyond your ability and strength of resistance and power to endure, but with the temptation He will [always] also provide the way out (the means of escape to a landing place), that you may be capable and strong and powerful to bear up under it patiently.” AMPLIFIED (1 Cor 10:13). If someone responds that this is referring to committing sin, and not to trials such as the one in our text, consider this. If God is over all, then despairing is sinful, for it is an expression of unbelief.

Once again, in this text, the doctrine relating to Divine involvements with men is being lived out in valid and instructive human experience. The faithfulness of God, and the invincibility of faith are confirmed in this historic occurrence among men. Truth is being translated into life.

THE WAY THE FLESH THINKS

“24 Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.”

With such remarkable evidence staring them in the face, you might think the high priest, Sanhedrin, and Jewish elders would see the error of their way, yielding to the truth as the people did on the day of Pentecost (2:37). Perhaps they too will cry out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” After all, their judgment has been openly reversed. Surely they will be able to see it, perceiving they were wrong in their opposition to the apostles and determination to judge them.

However, this is not the way the flesh thinks. It “is not subject to the law of God,” neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). It can make no sense out of the truth. As it is written, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). Those who imagine that religion can be governed by cold and calculating logic fail to see this aspect of things. The things of God, whether heard with the ear or seen with the eye, extend beyond the border of human reasoning. In order to profit from them, the element of faith must be found. Where that faith is not present, the most profound works and words of God cannot possibly be understood. Those who have anchored the exegesis of Scripture to logic or various forms of interpretation have not seen this, and have brought a great disadvantages to the church.

WHEN THEY HEARD, THEY DOUBTED OF THEM

“Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things they doubted of them . . .” Other versions read, “Now when the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were greatly perplexed about them” NASB “ were greatly troubled,” BBE “As the captain of the temple police and the chief priests heard these things, they were baffled about them,” CSB “ they were astonished at them,” MRD “were at a loss about them” NAB “ they were frantic ,” NJB “The captain of the temple and the most important priests heard this, They were confused .” IE “ they were utterly at a loss with regard to it ,” WEYMOUTH “Now when the military leader of the temple area and the chief priests heard these facts, “they were much perplexed and thoroughly at a loss about them ,” AMPLIFIED and “they were completely mystified at the apostles' disappearance.” PHILLIPS

Something had happened that was completely outside the boundaries of nature. The fact and implications of the work extended beyond the perimeter of human wisdom. This was particularly difficult for the Sadducees, who did not believe in things outside the realm of human experience. They refused to acknowledge the resurrection and the existence of angels and spirits. To them, an unseen world, unseen personalities, and supernatural power were all foolish.

Even though there are involvements now between this present world and the one to come, they are not apparent. Therefore, those without faith cannot perceive them. It is impossible. Couple that with the theology of the Sadducees, who denied the resurrection and the existence of angels and spirits, and you account for the utter blindness of this court. It was, in fact, a blind judicial court, devoid of any understanding in the very matter they were judging.

Therefore, since what has happened cannot be accounted for within the framework of their wisdom, they “doubted” – that is, they were thrown into a state of consternation. The word translated “doubted” means, “to be entirely at a loss, to be in perplexity.” THAYER Their wisdom was like a withered hand that could not take hold of this fact. They could not even see it from afar, and were like blind men being told of something that could not be touched or sensed in any way other than that of sight.

In my judgment, a lot of wasted time is spent in the Christian world trying to convince such men of the truth. Of whatever worth the field of Apologetics may appear, in view of this text it certainly cannot be one of preeminent value. Precisely how would you go about convincing the court in this text of the real nature of the apostles' deliverance? How could you possibly substantiate that an angel delivered them, when the larger part of the court did not even believe angels existed? And how could you prove the gates were opened without a key, or any noise, or completely apart from the knowledge of those who were keeping them safe?

That is why these men were “greatly perplexed,” NASB “greatly troubled,” BBE “astonished,” MRD “at a loss,” NASB “frantic,” NJB “confused,” IE and “completely mystified.” PHILLIPS They were so hard of heart they would not admit they had sinned, or even that they had made a mistake in their judgment. That is simply not the way in which the flesh thinks. When it confronts the mind of God or the works of God, the flesh grows even more hostile, refusing to admit that it has been thoroughly frustrated. It rather chooses to believe it is just at a temporal loss for words. However, given due time, flesh imagines it will be able to figure it all out.

Fleshly thinking, in reality, is irrational rationality, foolish wisdom, and unreasonable reasoning. That is why it is ignorance gone to seed to reach into that domain to account for the things of God, explain them, or comprehend them.

WHEREUNTO THIS WOULD GROW

“ . . . whereunto this would grow.” Other versions read, “they wondered what the outcome would be ,” NKJV “as to what would come of this ,” NASB “wondering what might be going on ,” NRSV “about what might be the end of this business,” BBE “ “what this would come to ,” DARBY “about

what could have happened ,” GWN “and they studied what this could mean ,” MRD “they wondered what could be happening ,” NJB “wondering what would happen next and where all this would end ,” LIVING “They wondered, ‘What will happen because of this ?,” IE “wondering what would happen next ,” WEYMOUTH , wondering into what this might grow ,” AMPLIFIED and “and wondered what further developments there would be .” PHILLIPS

The idea here is that the court did not know what to do – what road to take from here. You could view them as thinking, “What can we do now, when even the attempt to incarcerate them has failed?” Herod had the same kind of response when He heard of the mighty deeds being done by Jesus. “Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was done by him: and he was perplexed , because that it was said of some, that John was risen from the dead” (Luke 9:7). There was no further basis for confidence – they could not think of anything else to do. Their wisdom had run out – or, to put it more accurately, the poverty of both their wisdom and their power had been confirmed and made known.

One might imagine that these men would now abandon their efforts to suppress the preaching of the apostles. Did it not make sense to now cease from such vain attempts? However, that is not the way the flesh thinks. It does not give up, call for a truce, or throw in the towel. Hard hearts do not yield. Whether it is the blinded sodomites of Sodom wearying themselves trying to find a door (Gen 19:11), or the frustrated Jewish council and elders trying to suppress the preaching of Jesus, flesh is relentless. That is why we cannot be casual or slothful in dealing with “the old man,” which is the flesh personalized. Our bodies, for example, which are the vehicle used for the ultimate expression of the flesh , must be forcibly subdued and brought into subjection (1 Cor 9:27). The body cannot be brought to the point where it volunteers to do what is good and acceptable in the eyes of the Lord. When it comes to the newness of life, everything about it is unreasonable and foolish to the natural man. There is no possible way of presenting the things of God so that they become appealing, sensible, and desired by those who remain in the flesh . Those who engage in such efforts are wasting all of the time. The fact that such an approach is currently fashionable does not change that reality. This text confirms that this is true. As it progresses this will become evident.

THEY ARE STILL PREACHING!

“ 25 Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.”

I do not doubt that the convened court thought the men had escaped and gone into hiding. That is probably what someone directed by human understanding would do. However, the apostles had been directed by a holy angel, and not by the will of the flesh . He had directed them to return to the Temple, and speak “to the people all the words of this life.” Consequently, because they walked by faith, that is precisely where they will be found, and what they will be found doing. May God cause a revival in our part of the world that yields this kind of obedience to the truth and boldness to declare it. How sorely it is needed!

THEY ARE STANDING IN THE TEMPLE AND TEACHING THE PEOPLE

“Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people.” Other versions read, “Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people,” NIV “Someone came and reported to them , ‘Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple complex and teaching the people,’” CSB “Then a man arrived with fresh news . ‘Look!’ he said, ‘the men you imprisoned are in the Temple. They are standing there preaching to the people ,” NJB and “But some man came and reported to them, saying, Listen! The men whom you put in jail are standing [right here] in the temple and teaching the people !” AMPLIFIED

How humiliating it must have been for the council to hear the report: “the men whom you put in

prison.” NKJV The men were in the Temple, doing precisely what they had done before, just as though nothing had happened to them. The implication is that the men were calm and reposed. It was a noble display of their hearts being ruled by the peace of God. As it is written, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Col 3:15). Here is an example of that being done. The condition was not produced by a promise of good things to come. Rather, it was the result of a great deliverance and the directions of the very angel who delivered them. The apostles were able to correlate the word of the Lord with circumstance. They could associate deliverance with duty, and therefore go about their ordained work in both peace and power, knowing the Lord was with them.

An Example of Perseverance

The apostles were able to correlate the word of the Lord with circumstance. They could associate deliverance with duty, and go about their ordained work in both peace and power.

Here is an example of perseverance of a different kind. Ordinarily we think of perseverance as uninterrupted continuance. In this regard, continuing in the faith would be a case in point (Acts 14:22; Col 1:23), or abiding in Christ (1 John 2:27-28), or not being moved away from the hope of the Gospel Col 1:23), or cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23) or running the race set before us (Heb 12:1). Also, there is standing fast in the liberty for which Christ has freed us (Gal 5:1), not being weary in well doing (Gal 6:9), and holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering (Heb 10:23). These are all wide areas of consideration that involve a number of details.

There are also focused activities in which believers are said to continue, or persevere. One such activity is prayer, which often calls for strong perseverance (Col 4:2; Eph 6:18). Another is taking heed to ourselves and to the doctrine (1 Tim 4:16). The early church continued steadfastly, or persevered, “in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). There is also the matter of enduring chastening (Heb 12:7). Whether we are speaking of the general focus of our lives, of the details of them, as just listed, they are all involved in being “faithful until death” (Rev 2:10), or being “steadfast and unmovable” (1 Cor 15:58).

In this text, the activity was preaching, or teaching. That is what the apostles had been doing prior to their arrest (Acts 4:2,18). Upon being released, they were commanded to reenter the Temple and commence preaching again, speaking “to the people all the words of this life” (5:20). Promptly, the apostles reentered the Temple early in the morning, and resumed their teaching (5:21). Now, it is reported that this is precisely what they were doing – “standing in the Temple, and teaching the people” (5:25).

This is an aspect of perseverance that has been largely lost in our day. This is a day of religious fads and trends – and they all tend to diminish preaching and teaching. Within the professed church, men of understanding and spiritual aptitude are not held in high regard. Preaching and teaching are low on the list of priorities, and are often even despised. An organizer, promoter, worship leader, or even youth leader, are often more prominent than someone who can handle aright the word of God (2 Tim 2:15). Of course, in the context of this passage, such exaltations would at once appear to be what they really are – a distraction.

When Jesus chose and ordained His apostles, He had a twofold purpose in mind: “that they should be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14). Now, these men are faithfully continuing in those activities – abiding in Christ by faith, and preaching, or declaring the words of “this life.”

Others Who Persevered

In accenting the preciousness of this kind of faithfulness, allow me to briefly mention three other

examples of perseverance in ordained activities . In each of these cases, a concerted effort was made by their enemies to bring a cessation to the faithfulness of the men of God. Those efforts, however, failed.

- **DANIEL.** Daniel was noted for his consistent periods of prayer. When a law was passed that forbade such prayers, he continued praying anyway (Dan 6:10).

- **SHADRACH, MESHACH, AND ABEDNEGO.** When they were commanded to bow before an idolatrous image set up by Nebuchadnezzar, these men refused to bow. When confronted with the threat of death if they did not bow, they continued in their refusal (Dan 3:17-18).

- **JEREMIAH.** When ignored and plotted against, he determined not to speak any more in the name of the Lord. Yet, God's word was like a fire burning in his bones, and he could not refrain from speaking, for he was "weary with forbearing" (Jer 20:8-9). He therefore continued to prophesy.

Once a person knows the will of the Lord, and is committed to the doing of it, the degree of their spiritual strength will be made known in how they respond to any opposition to their work. When they confront resistance, will they continue to do what they know to be right, or will they cease their efforts because of the fear of man? Those who trust God will continue.

THEY BROUGHT THEM BACK, BUT FEARED THE PEOPLE

" 26 Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned."

I must admit that it is heart-wrenching to read of godly men like the apostles being brought back to stand before those who are opposed to their work. They had been chosen, taught, and sent forth by the King of kings, and yet they appear to be in subjection to those who are, in every way, inferior to them. However, lest we moved into the corner of foolish speculation, there are some basic things to be considered.

First, the Kingdom of God is not about men, but about God. There are higher purposes being served than purely personal interests and comfort.

Second, this world is not the only world, and the injustices that take place here will not end here. There is a purpose being served that involves the revelation of the hearts of men. There is also an appointed day of judgment when all wrongs will be addressed, and the pure in heart will be fully exonerated before an assembled universe.

Third, it is not the nature of the faith-life to put us beyond the outward reach of our enemies. Abel was not beyond the reach of Cain. Isaac was subjected to the mocking of Ishmael. Jacob had to run from Esau. Joseph was thrown into a pit by his brothers, sold to a band of Ishmaelites, and cast into prison on a false charge. The prophets were persecuted by their peers. John the Baptist was beheaded by the despot Herod. All of the apostles save one were martyred. Precisely what is there about the faith-life that leads anyone to believe they ought to be exempted from opposition or suffering?

The thing that is to be underscored is that no amount of opposition, oppression, or even persecution can bring the work of the King to a grinding halt. The purposes of God are not overthrown, or even delayed, because of the work of His enemies. In their hearts, the apostles and those with them knew this to be true. That is why they immediately resorted to the Lord when they were first threatened. It is also why they returned to the Temple to teach when they were told to do so. They knew who was governing matters – and it was not the high priest, the Sanhedrin, the Sadducees, or the elders of the people. Those opponents were actually nothing more than pawns on the chessboard of Divine

purpose. God will use them for His own glory.

The Captain with the Officers

This was no doubt the same captain who first joined the opposition of Peter and John following the healing of the lame man (Acts 4:1). As is characteristic of those who live according to the flesh, and are consequently under the dominion of Satan, this “captain” learns nothing from his past experience. When told to bring the apostles to their critics, he did not remonstrate like Gamaliel would later: “And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought: But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God” (Acts 5:38-39).

THEY BROUGHT THEM WITHOUT VIOLENCE

“Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence . . .” Other versions read, “Then the captain went along with the officers and proceeded to bring them back without violence,” NASB “At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force,” NIV “Then the captain and some of the police went and took them, but not violently,” BBE and “Then the captain went out with his men and fetched them. They dared not use any violence however.” PHILLIPS

Although the precise manner in which they brought the apostles is not specified, the fact that it was “without violence,” or force, confirms that the apostles did not resist their arrest – just as they did not do previously. In them the word of Jesus was fulfilled, “But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil,” or “Do not make use of force against an evil man,” BBE or “offer no resistance to the wicked.” NJB To some, this does not seem like a proper response to those who would subject you to harm. However, in the work of the Lord, He Himself is supervising all occasions, and His servants are to trust that He will do so justly, with a due consideration of His people, and in strict adherence to the heavenly agenda. It is ever true, “They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be moved” (Psa 125:1).

While the Lord was doubtless in this situation, protecting the apostles from untimely danger, this was not known to the men who arrested them. Their motive for using no violence is specified.

To some, this does not seem like a proper response to those who would subject you to harm. However, in the work of the Lord, He Himself is supervising all occasions, and His servants are to trust that He will do so justly, with a due consideration of His people, and in strict adherence to the heavenly agenda.

THEY FEARED THE PEOPLE

“ . . . for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.” Other versions read, “because they feared that the people would stone them,” NIV “for they were afraid of being stoned by the people,” NRSV “After all, the officer and his guards were afraid that the people would stone them to death for using force,” GWN “for they were afraid the people would kill them if they roughed up the disciples) and brought them in before the Council,” LIVING and “for they dreaded the people lest they be stoned by them,” AMPLIFIED

This is the means through which the Lord protected the apostles – the favor of the people. Beginning with the day of Pentecost, believers were given “favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47). Shortly before the occasion of our text, “the people magnified” the apostles and those who were joined to them (5:13).

John the Baptist’s enemy, Herod encountered the same obstacle, being afraid to do him harm

because of the people. “And when he would have put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet” (Matt 14:5). When Jesus asked the chief priests and elders concerning the origin of the baptism of John, “they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet” (Matt 21:25-26).

Often the enemies of the Lord Jesus were put at this same disadvantage because of the people, fearing to do harm to the Lord. When they consulted among themselves about how they might kill Him, “But they said, Not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people” (Matt 26:5). Again it is written, “And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that he had spoken this parable against them” (Luke 20:19). And again, “And the chief priests and scribes sought how they might kill him; for they feared the people” (Luke 22:2).

This kind of favor among the people is not to be sought. It is the result of the grace of God, who gives such favor to His children as He deems best. There are numerous references to this gracious manner of the Lord.

- **THE NATION OF ISRAEL.** It is also said of Israel, “And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians” (Ex 11:3a).

- **MOSES.** It is also said of Moses, “Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people” (Ex 11:3).

- **JOSEPH.** Of Joseph it is written, “But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen 39:21). “And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house” (Acts 7:10).

Those who preach and teach must learn to trust God in this area. If they will devote themselves to preaching His truth, and as it is appropriate and in keeping with the will of God, He will give them favor with the people.

DANIEL. It is written of young Daniel, “Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs” (Dan 1:9).

- **PRAYED FOR.** When king Solomon prayed for the people at the dedication of the Temple, he asked the Lord to cause Israel's captors to have compassion on them. “And forgive thy people that have sinned against thee, and all their transgressions wherein they have transgressed against thee, and give them compassion before them who carried them captive, that they may have compassion on them” (1 Kgs 8:50). The Psalmist acknowledged that Solomon's prayer was answered. “He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives” (Psa 106:46).

- **EZRA.** Ezra confessed that God had given him favor with king Artaxerxes: “Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem: and hath extended mercy unto me before the king, and his counselors, and before all the king's mighty princes” (Ezra 7:27-28).

- **NEHEMIAH.** When Nehemiah was preparing to go before the king Artaxerxes concerning a trip to Jerusalem to restore its walls, he asked the Lord to give him favor with the king. He knew the extent of Divine power. “O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name: and prosper, I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this

man . For I was the king's cupbearer” (Neh 1:11). He was granted that favor (Neh 2:4-8).

• **THE REASON STATED.** Solomon traced such marvelous favor to a man’s ways pleasing the Lord. “When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him ” (Prov 16:7).

This is an aspect of God’s dealings with His people that must be faithfully declared. Too often it is hidden from the people because of an the vaunting of human wisdom. When men alter their conduct with a mind to obtain the approval of men, they abruptly cease to be servants of Christ. Therefore Paul, wrote, “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10).

As reported in this text, the approval of the people was the result of the apostles and their brethren pleasing God. It was God Himself who caused the people to approve of them and magnify them. He opened their eyes to see comely traits that could not even be seen by the high priest and those aligned with him.

Those who preach and teach must learn to trust God in this area. If they will devote themselves to preaching His truth, and as it is appropriate and in keeping with the will of God, He will give them favor with the people. This will not always be the case, and we ought not to be so naive as to think it is. However, when our ways , or manners, are pleasing to the Lord, and as we are involved in a labor “in the Lord, “ it is often God’s good pleasure to give us “favor with men.” Such times are to be received with thankfulness, and used for the glory of God. They are occasions of peace, when spiritual progress can be made. Of such circumstances it is written, “And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18). That is all in addition to times when we are protected from Satan’s malice.

CARNAL JUDGES FACE SPIRITUAL MEN

“ 27 And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us. ”

I have often pondered the relative absurdity of those who are “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:5-6), who have faithfully discharged their stewardship, being brought before the tribunals of men. It is one of the great paradoxes that accompanies our tenure in this present evil world. When the sons of God conduct themselves in this world as those who are “Wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt 10:16), this kind of circumstance confirms the hostility of the world against them. Even though there is “none occasion of stumbling” in them (1 John 2:10), and they have given “none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully” (1 Tim5 :14), yet they may be summoned before the judges of the earth as though they were evil doers. Such is the case in our text.

A word ought to be added about those who do wrong and suffer for it. Solemnly we are told, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet 4:15). If such an occasion should arise, and the professed Christian bears up under the punishment, that is of no account before God. As it is written, “For what glory is it , if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Pet 2:20). If a professing Christian has broken the laws, failed to pay his taxes, been slothful on the job, or been guilty of some form of immorality, there is no merit in taking the punishment patiently – as men would say, taking responsibility for their actions. This ought to be done, but there is no value in it.

It is the duty of transgressors to bear up under their punishment. If they do not care for such experiences, then let them “abstain from all appearance of evil,” as they are enjoined to do (1 Thess 5:22).

In our text, men are suffering “for righteousness’ sake” (Matt 5:10). The opposition is the result of the wicked plotting “against the just” (Psa 37:12). The “just” are doing “well,” and yet they are suffering for it (1 Pet 2:20).

All of this is strange to those who seek the approbation of men, and tailor their religion so that it is not abrasive to the flesh. Those who do such things are not serving the Lord, and they are not thinking about serving Him. With them, popularity in the world and the reception of men is all important. However, “newness of life” provides no place for such ambitions.

THEY SET THEM BEFORE THE COUNCIL

Many of God’s people have experienced standing before religious authorities to give an account for the manner in which they faithfully served Christ. Such a circumstance accents the boldness of religious flesh that will openly oppose the work of Christ, even though there has been abundant confirmation of its truth.

“And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them . . .” Other versions read, “And when they had brought them, they stood them before the Council . And the high priest questioned them,” NASB “Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest,” NIV “And they took them into the Sanhedrin , and the high priest said to them,” BBE “And when they had brought them, they placed them before the whole council ; and the high priest began to say to them,” MRD “Then they brought the apostles before the high council , where the high priest confronted them,” NLT “The soldiers brought the apostles to the Jewish Council and made them stand before their leaders . The high priest questioned the apostles,” IE “So they brought them and set them before the council (Sanhedrin). And the high priest examined them by questioning ,” AMPLIFIED and “So they brought them in and made them stand before the Sanhedrin. The High Priest called for an explanation .” PHILLIPS

Many of God’s people have experienced standing before religious authorities to give an account for the manner in which they faithfully served Christ. Such a circumstance accents the boldness of religious flesh that will openly oppose the work of Christ, even though there has been abundant confirmation of its truth. Consider the marvelous things that had been wrought in the case before us.

- A man who was lame from his mother’s womb had been healed (3:2).
- The healed man had gone through the Temple, leaping and praising God (3:8).
- Peter and John had preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead (4:2).
- The crucified, risen, and enthroned Jesus had been preached to the people (3:12-26; 4:8-13).
- 5,000 men had believed (4:4).
- A marvelous display of selflessness was taking place among the believers (4:32).
- A Divine judgment had occurred within the church, and had been made known (5:1-11).
- The people had magnified the believers, with no disruptive display or violence (5:13).
- The apostles had miraculously disappeared from the prison into which the council had thrown them (5:19,23).
- The apostles were found in the Temple teaching the people (5:25).

Although none of these things caused an insurrection among the people, or were directed against

the Temple authorities, the apostles were treated as though that was the case. And why was this so? Because truth is abrasive to those who refuse to embrace it. Good and honorable works appear quite differently to the institutions they do not promote. The apostles could say of this occasion what Paul said about one of his experiences: “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city” (Acts 24:12).

There were probably more people in the Temple than was ordinary, and none of them were causing any trouble. No one was attempting to stir up the people against the authorities. Yet, here the apostles stand before the Jewish council just as though they were violators of the Law of Moses, and had broken one of the commandments of God. This incident fulfills a word spoken by Isaiah: “That make a man an offender for a word, and lay a snare for him that reproveth in the gate, and turn aside the just for a thing of nought” (Isa 29:21).

DID NOT WE COMMAND YOU?

“ 28 Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?” Other versions read, “saying, “We gave you strict orders not to continue teaching in this name,” NASB “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” NIV “We gave you very clear orders not to give teaching in this name,” BBE “Did we not strictly charge you, to teach no person in this name ?” MRD “Didn’t we tell you never again to preach about this Jesus?,” LIVING “Did we not positively forbid you to teach anymore on this authority,” WILLIAMS “We strictly forbade you, did we not, to teach about this Name,” MONTGOMERY “We definitely commanded and strictly charged you not to teach in or about this Name,” AMPLIFIED and “We gave you the strictest possible orders,” he said to them, “not to give any teaching in this name (of Jesus).” PHILLIPS

This is the manner of the flesh – to absolutely miss the significance of words of truth. This is because the fleshly life is lived out in a low zone – in the dark, where things cannot be comprehended.

Those who have an inordinately high regard for human authority cannot understand why followers of the Lord do not have such a view. Such people attach great weight to their own words, which can be buttressed by nothing more than their position.

Now Caiaphas the high priest puts the all-important question to the apostles: “Saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?” Their reference is to the first time they arrested Peter and John, yet could find no justifiable reason to retain them in prison. Of that occasion it is written, “And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (4:18). At that time, without being intimidated at all by their word, Peter and John responded to the council, “ Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (4:19-20).

Now, the high priest speaks just as though the actions of Peter and the apostles make no sense at all – even though Peter and John had plainly said they were not going to honor the demands of the Temple authorities. This is the manner of the flesh – to absolutely miss the significance of words of truth. This is because the fleshly life is lived out in a low zone – in the dark, where things cannot be comprehended.

Do not be intimidated when the opponents of truth speak as though they have real authority. They do not! A case may have been made for the legitimacy of

high priest’s authority, but it would have fallen to the ground. The office of the high priest had to do with “things pertaining to God” (Heb 5:1). That was the purpose for the office, and Caiaphas should have known it. When he heard the words of the apostles, he should have stepped forward and commended them, giving thanks to God for the revelation of the truth. The fact that he did not put

the stamp of rejection upon his work.

Those who have sought to preach and teach in the name of Christ may very well face blustering church authorities who refuse to acknowledge the truth of what they are saying. Such men are not to be approached as though they had a single mote of authority. Anyone who opposes the truth is outside the boundary of legitimate authority. No obedience should be rendered to anyone who requires a compromise in, or cessation of, the declaration of the truth. Woe to that man who caves in to such carnal people!

YOU HAVE FILLED JERUSALEM WITH YOUR DOCTRINE

“ . . . and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine . . .” Other versions read, “and now Jerusalem is full of your teaching,” BBE “Yet, you've filled Jerusalem with your teachings ,” GWN “And instead you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching,” LIVING “yet here you have flooded Jerusalem with your doctrine,” AMPLIFIED “You have been teaching all over Jerusalem,” CEV and “but see what you have done! You have spread your teaching all over Jerusalem.” GNB

The authorities had told the apostles to stop preaching altogether. Instead, after they had prayed and been endued with power, they increased their preaching, doing so in the very place where they were commanded to cease teaching in the name of Jesus.

The record does not say the apostles went throughout the city preaching the Gospel, although I do not doubt that they declared the Good news wherever they went. Up to this point, the focal point of their proclamation was where the disciples were gathered (2:1,46), and in the Temple (Acts 2:46; 3:1-10; 4:1; 5:20).

Among other things, this confirms that the commission of Jesus was being carried out: “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47).

The spread of the Gospel throughout Jerusalem was probably owing to those who had heard, believed, and obeyed the Gospel. People from all parts of the city had heard the Gospel beginning at Pentecost, and during the days following. It is the nature of the Gospel to inflame the hearts of those who comprehend it, so moving them that they cannot help but speak. If, when David believed, it moved him to speak (:Psa 116:10), and if that same “spirit of faith” moved others to speak (2 Cor 4:13), why would the Gospel not continue to have the same effect upon believers? If the word of prophesy delivered to Jeremiah provoked him to speak (Jer 20:9), what can be said of those in whom the word of Christ is dwelling “richly” (Col 3:16).

The Spreading Nature of the Gospel

Those who embrace the Gospel, believing on the Lord Jesus, are prone to speak about it, and to testify of their deliverance. To put it another way, in the economy of redemption, it is possible for the word of the Gospel to have “free course,” spreading rapidly NASB and being glorified (2 Thess 3:1). This is elsewhere described as the word God being “increased” (Acts 6:7), or growing and being “multiplied” (Acts 12:24). Again, it is written of the preaching of the Gospel in Ephesus, “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (Acts 19:20). In his letter to the Colossians, Paul depicted this growth as the Word producing fruit. “. . . the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit , as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:5-6).

Isaiah prophesied of the remarkable productivity of God’s Word. “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth , and maketh it bring forth and bud , that it may give seed to the sower , and bread to the eater : so shall my word be that goeth

forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa 55:11). The accomplishments of the Word of God, particularly the Gospel of Christ, which is its nucleus, were encompassed in the cursory observation of the high priest: “ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine.”

Your Doctrine

Notice that with which Jerusalem, according to Caiaphas, had been filled: “your doctrine,” or “your teaching.” NASB

In some professed Christian circles, “doctrine” is despised. Some even affirm they have no doctrine – which is really not the truth. The word “doctrine” means “teaching” (noun), or the things that are being taught. Lexically, the word used here means “teaching, that which is taught.” THAYER

If you were to ask the average church member what their congregation teaches, you might be surprised at how they would stammer and stutter. I know a number of ministers, some of which are well known, yet I have no idea what they actually teach. They do not speak of their doctrine themselves, and those who sit under them never speak of it either. This was not the case with the apostles. Even their enemies knew their doctrine – what they taught.

“Sound doctrine” has a particular thrust. It is a message from another world that draws men out of this world. Referring to this doctrine as the Gospel, Peter wrote, “Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into” (1 Pet 1:12). The Holy Spirit came down from heaven with a message. When He filled Christ’s people, that is the message, or doctrine, they taught.

The message is of the Lord Jesus Christ, what He did, is doing, and will do. He is the heart and core of the doctrine, and without Him teaching falls dead to the ground. If men make the family, the nation, personal health and wealth, or the ability to do great things, the heart of their message, they are only handling a stinking corpse, and it will breed nothing but death. You cannot emphasize what is passing away and have the blessing of God upon it. Such a message cannot promote life, for life cannot be maintained by something that is itself dying, or passing away.

The true doctrine promotes and sustains faith and hope, both of which are essential to the maintenance of life. If men do not have faith, they cannot please God (Heb 11:6). If they do not have hope, they cannot be part of Christ’s house (Heb 3:6).

True doctrine points toward, and clarifies, God’s “eternal purpose” and “the world to come,” in which that purpose will be fully realized (Eph 3:11; Heb 6:5). Where these things are not becoming clearer and clearer, preaching and teaching is deficient, to say the least. It is quite possible that it could even be called “damnable doctrines” (2 Pet 2:1). Erroneous doctrine cannot clarify what God has determined, what He is doing, of what will occur after the world has passed away. That ought to be so evident that it requires no further explanation. Yet, there is an astounding volume of preaching that has no association with Divine determination or ultimate destiny.

The “apostles’ doctrine” has a center point – a hub upon which every facet of teaching turns. Regarded as a Person, that hub is Jesus Christ in whom “the fulness of the Godhead” dwells “bodily” (Col 1:19; 2:9). Every facet of the truth of God connects directly to Him. In Jesus alone the meaning is unlocked, and only in Him can the appointed benefits be effectively experienced, or realized. A few of the subjects of Divine exposition are included in the chart entitled, “The Pivotal Point.”

- Redemption has to do with the means through which men are brought back to God.

- Justification relates to the removal of guilt and the appropriation of righteousness.
- Sanctification is associated with being made suitable for Divine use.
- Forgiveness deals with the removal of the debt incurred by sin, and the cleansing of the conscience as well.
- Acceptance has to do with God receiving us freely, and doing so justly and to His own glory.
- Access to God relates to appropriating the resources required to come to Him through Christ.

Now, whimpering like little children, they are acting as though they had nothing at all to do with the death of Jesus. But they are completely wrong in their assessment of the apostles. These men were not stirring up the people to take revenge on the high priest and his ungodly court.

Peace with God is required if we are to have any profitable dealings with Him. It involves the removal of the barrier between God and man that was caused by sin, and the awareness of that removal within the renewed heart.

- An inheritance is associated with the things God has prepared for those who love Him. It is what the children of God will receive after the world has passed away, all enemies have been banished, and we are forever with the Lord.
- The role in the body of Christ relates to our ministry to the brethren of Christ now, and what we will be doing in the world to come.
- Eternal hope is what is given to those who are joined to the Lord. It is the stabilizing factor of life, being likened to an anchor. It involves a persuasion of our identity with Christ, a longing to be with Him, and the anticipation of His return.

While the details of all of these matters is not spelled out in our text, they are all resident in the doctrine the apostles preached – the doctrine that had pervaded the whole of Jerusalem.

While this doctrine may sound wonderful to you, this was not the case with the high priest, Temple guard, Sanhedrin, and the elders of the people. The reason for their discontent with what the apostles were teaching is that it did not promote their agenda. In fact, it posed a threat to them, as is evident in their next expression.

YOU INTEND TO BRING THIS MAN'S BLOOD ON OUR HEADS

“ . . . and intend to bring this Man's blood upon us.” Other versions read, “and are determined to make us guilty of this Man's blood,” NIV “and you are attempting to make us responsible for this man's death,” BBE “and purpose to bring upon us the blood of this Man,” DARBY “and you have a mind to bring the blood of this Man upon us,” DOUAY “You want to take revenge on us for putting that man to death,” GWN “and are determined to make us guilty of this Man's blood,” NIB “and seem determined to fix the guilt for this man's death on us,” NJB “and intend to bring the blame for this man's death on us,” LIVING “and now want to bring on us the people's vengeance for this man's death,” WILLIAMS and “and what is more you are determined to fasten the guilt of that man's death upon us !” PHILLIPS

The idea here expressed is that, by stirring up the people, and possibly even the Romans, the high priest and his group would be seen as crucifying the Lord of glory – the One who was presently blessing the people. Already they had feared the people might stone the arresting officers, and so they were cautious about the manner in which the apostles were apprehended and brought to the high priest and his court.

It appears that the guilty conscience of these men cringed at every word of the apostles, for they were pointed in their preaching. Remember the thundering words of Peter: “. . . ye have taken , and by wicked hands have crucified and slain . . . But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life . . . Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified . . . This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders , which is become the head of the corner” (Acts 2:23; 3:14-15; 4:10-11).

At the time of Jesus’ death, they thought nothing of their opposition to Him, and were aggressive to rid themselves of Him. When Jesus confessed to this very high priest that He was “the Christ, the Son of God,” he tore his clothes and said Jesus was guilty of blasphemy. When he asked the court what they had to say about it, they responded, “He is deserving of death” NKJV (Matt 26:64-66). At that time, they thought nothing of spitting in Christ’s face, pummeling him with their fists, and mocking Him (Matt 26:67-68). This is the group that bound Jesus, and delivered Him to Pilate (Matt 27:2). This is the group who persuaded the people to ask for the release of Barabbas and crucify Jesus (Matt 27:20). They cried out multiple times for Jesus to be crucified (Matt 27:22-23). When Pilate remonstrated, saying he could find no fault in the man, these were among those who cried out, “His blood be on us and all our children” (Matt 27:25).

Now, whimpering like little children, they are acting as though they had nothing at all to do with the death of Jesus. But they are completely wrong in their assessment of the apostles. These men were not stirring up the people to take revenge on the high priest and his ungodly court. Rather, they had apprised the people that they knew all of this was done in ignorance (Acts 3:17) . They had held out the scepter of Jesus, and declared that their sins could be “blotted out,” and then “times of refreshing” could come upon them “from the presence of the Lord” (3:19) . Satan, however, had “blinded” the minds of these leaders, “lest the light of the glorious light of the gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor 4:4). Therefore their hearts remained hard as adamant stone, and they continued in their opposition to the truth – even though this was “the day of salvation” and the “accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2) and a “new and living way” to God had been “consecrated” (Heb 10:20), by which men could come to God. Jesus had been exalted “to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). However, none of these realities can be seen by those who are deluded by the evil one. So far as they are concerned these things do not even exist, for they are outside of the flesh and the natural man, and thus beyond their reach. They are confined to the realm over which the prince of the power of the air presides.

Whatever men may postulate about the freedom of the human will, and the power of choice, there is no man who is free to choose what he himself cannot

Volitional capacities are of no consequence or value when the truth is not known, or cannot be seen. Such a soul is in a bondage of the worst sort. If the gospel is, as Scripture affirms, “hid to them that are lost, in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not,” precisely in what sense is the will free? God “hid” the truth from them, and Satan “blinded” their minds. Exactly what natural capacity is there that can overcome these monumental obstacles?

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CONCLUSION

Truth and the lie are inextricably locked in combat, opposing each other. Good and evil, and right and wrong are opposed to each other. What issues forth from Christ cannot be reconciled

to things coming from Satan. The temporal and the eternal cannot be merged. No person can set their affection on things above and maintain a primary interest in things on the earth.

In this text we have seen the hostility that is produced by a purely traditional religion. When men embrace a second-hand view of the truth – one that has been filtered through human understanding – it insulates the soul against truth's power. This bondage can only be broken by God commanding the light of the knowledge of the glory of God to shine into the heart (2 Cor 4:6). However, this marvelous command is coupled together with the Gospel, which is the vehicle through which the power is realized (Rom 1:16). If that Gospel is spurned, the Divine bondage-breaking commandment will not be uttered. In that case, the hostility of the unbeliever grows in direct proportion to one's exposure to the Gospel.

If it is countered that God struck down Saul of Tarsus with a blazing light, bringing him to acknowledge the truth of Jesus, it must be remembered that Saul had been wrestling with his own response to the Gospel preached by Stephen, and perhaps other things as well. Jesus plainly said to him, "It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks" (Acts 12:4). The Holy Spirit had been working in Saul, in some way convicting him of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). At the time Jesus encountered him on the road to Damascus, he was not in the same condition as the men of our text – Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, and the elders of Israel.

Throughout the book of Acts we will see this hostility surfacing again and again – particularly among the Jews. It will also be seen erupting in the idolaters of Ephesus (Acts 19:28-34). Truth and the lie are inextricably locked in combat, opposing each other. Good and evil, and right and wrong are opposed to each other. What issues forth from Christ cannot be reconciled to things coming from Satan. The temporal and the eternal cannot be merged. No person can set their affection on things above and maintain a primary interest in things on the earth.

All of that explains why the truth causes the outbreak of opposition among those who have not received a love for it, yet are devoted to some humanly-devised form of religion. There is a sense of the friction between revealed religion and traditional religion that goes beyond the perimeter of intelligence. It inflames the emotion, and causes those opposed to the truth to speak and act unreasonably. It may move them to cry out against Jesus "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" It may move them to ignore the fact that they cannot resist the wisdom of Stephen, and attempt to hire men to lie about him. Such hostility can move the Jews to have Paul beaten with forty stripes save one, five times. It can even move them to stone Paul, then drag his body out of the city as though it was a piece of garbage.

We cannot afford to allow ourselves to think that those who do not love the truth will respect us because we are harmless, or that they will listen politely to us because we come to help them. God can cause this to happen, to be sure. But it is also true that He does not always do so, as our text confirms. The record in Acts reflects the real situation.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #24

PETER AND THE APOSTLES ANSWER

INTRODUCTION

Having been commanded by the Jewish council to cease from speaking in the name of Jesus, and not even to mention His name anymore, the Apostles have chosen to obey an angelic messenger from heaven. This confirms where their hearts were tuned, as well as their priorities. The spiritual focus of an individual is made known in the times of stress, when pressure is exerted upon the mind and the soul to adjust life's course.

When men faint in the day of adversity, Solomon wrote, it is because their "strength is small" (Prov 24:10). As stated under the New Covenant, it is because their faith is "little" (Matt 6:30; 8:26; 14:31), or "weak" (Rom 4:19; 14:1). That is, they do not see the things of God clearly, and are therefore lacking in the vital areas of "substance" and "evidence" (Heb 11:1). Their vision is flawed, and therefore they do not know how to negotiate in the straits of difficulty.

During their time with Jesus prior to His ascension, these very same men encountered times when their faith was weak (Matt 8:26). Sometimes the Lord asked them where their faith was, for there was no evidence of it (Lk 8:26). Once they could not conceive of the Lord supplying a multitude of people with five loaves and two little fishes (John 6:9). Another time, when Jesus revealed that He was going to suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised again the third day, Peter responded, "Be it far from Thee,

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- **THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS (30a)**
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Lord: this shall not be unto Thee” (Matt 16:21-22). On another occasion, when the city of Samaria refused to receive the Lord, James and John asked Jesus, “Lord, wilt Thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?” (Luke 9:54). When Jesus was arrested, all of the disciples fled (Matt 26:56), and during that awful night, Peter denied Him three times (Matt 26:69-74).

Those were times when the disciples did not yet see clearly. The reason for Christ coming into the world was not yet perceived by them. Therefore, even though their hearts were pointed in the right direction, and they had left everything to follow Jesus, they often spoke and acted out of keeping the agenda within which Jesus was operating.

But these are not the kind of men of which we are now reading. They have been transformed by the exalted Christ, and filled with the Holy Spirit. Their thinking has been cleared, so that they are walking in the light “as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). When they speak, they are not talking in a trance, uttering things without their hearts and minds being engaged. Having been illuminated by the Holy Spirit, they actually know why Jesus came. They have detailed insight into matters relating to His death. They know what happened after He died, and that he has been exalted to the right hand of God. These are not facts they have learned like men becoming aware of history. These are things they comprehend through the Holy Spirit, and because they do, they are bold beyond the capacities of natural men. Peter, who was once intimidated by a “maid” is not moved one millimeter by the greatest religious men in the Jewish system – men who, according to appearance, had the power of life and death.

In these apostles we are witnessing what happens when the heart of stone is removed and a heart of flesh is given (Ezek 11:19). Here is how men react who have been filled with the Holy Spirit. When individuals have been shown the things of Christ by the Holy Spirit (John 16:13), this is what they do. When they know whom they have believed, and have been persuaded that He is able to keep what they have committed to Him unto the final day (2 Tim 1:12), they respond to adversity in the manner recorded in our text. This is how walking “in newness of life” (Rom 6:4) impacts upon men in the “day of adversity” (Eccl 7:14). When “the whole armor of God” that has been provided to the children of God is actually “put on” (Eph 6:10-18), men respond to trouble as the apostles do in this text.

Earlier they had prayed that God would grant them boldness to preach the Word by stretching forth His hand to heal, and that signs and wonders might be done in the name of His holy child Jesus. What we are witnessing is the answer to that prayer.

We are not reading about super-men, or individuals who have been pumped up in some kind of religious rally. These are men who are on “the way of holiness” (Isa 35:8), and know it. They are men who are doing what is right, and they are keenly aware, and fully persuaded of it.

It is imperative that we see these things because of the times in which we are living – “perilous times” (2 Tim 3:1). It is important that we comprehend that no spiritual supply has diminished in its strength. The same faith – a “like precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1) – that sustained the apostles, is the very same faith that will sustain you! Nothing in the New Covenant economy has changed in the nearly 2,000 intervening years between 2007 and the time of our text. All of the benefits are still in place. The same promises are all in tact. The message is the same, as well as the Intercessor and Comforter. If you are in a time of challenge, you can read this text and personally profit from it. All of the resources that sustained these holy men are still in place, and they will sustain you as well! You can believe that!

Here we have a record of the apostles who are in trouble with the religious authorities because they

have continued to preach in the name of Jesus, doing so in the Temple itself. Their message was at a variance with that of the teachers of the day. They have even been charged with trying to rally the people against the Jewish leaders who are opposing their good work. They are significantly outnumbered – at least according to appearance. However, there is more here than appearance. Already a holy angel had come down and released them from heaven, bringing them a message from the Throne: “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). Fearlessly, they have resumed teaching in the Temple with boldness and a total lack of fear. Earlier they had prayed that God would grant them boldness to preach the Word by stretching forth His hand to heal, and that signs and wonders might be done in the name of His holy child Jesus (4:29-30). What we are witnessing is the answer to that prayer.

Now, facing the questioning of the high priest, they are reminded they have been threatened and strictly commanded to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. With confidence, power, and insight, “Peter and the other apostles” do not hesitate to answer. Knowing they do not have a long period of time allotted to them, they deliver one of the most masterful summaries of Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation that is contained in Scripture. The scope of their answer is remarkable. It is a marvelous condensation of great bodies of reality, and is conducive to much profitable contemplation. Their answer declares the duty of men, Divine intervention, human depravity, Divine power, Divine purpose, the effects of the atonement, and the gift of God. Only the Spirit could move men to speak in such a marvelous manner.

It is important to comprehend the manner of the Holy Spirit here. These men are speaking in harmony with “the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27). While He was yet with them in the body, Jesus told them, “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt 10:19-20). In our text, they have been delivered up – brought before the religious authorities after being arrested in the Temple. They will be interrogated, and answers will be expected from them. However, they will not employ the wisdom of men in their answer. They will not reason as mere men, or present their case with their own interests being primary. Their focus will be concentrated on the propagation of the Gospel, and their reasoning for doing so will be clearly articulated.

What we will read does not reflect the manner in which a professional clergyman would answer the charges leveled against the apostles. It is not what you would expect to hear at a Christian convention, where the representative of a movement that had yielded well over 8,000 converts in a few days would be asked to speak. There is not an ounce of institutional fervor in the words of the apostles. There is no effort to promote a religious movement, or to draw attention to some special methodology. The personality and gifts of the apostles will not be mentioned. No school will be promoted. None of the elements of supposedly successful Christian movements will be presented. There will be no appeal for community involvements, or crusades to reach neglected people-groups. No Temple tours will be given, and no classes on successful evangelism will be held. There are also none of the workshops that are so prevalent in our time.

Notwithstanding the absence of such things, we are being faced with the real work of God. Jesus Himself is in this work. The Holy Spirit is illuminating and leading the speakers. The purpose of God is being fulfilled. The truth is being made known effectively. If there is a great difference between what is happening in this text, and the popular religion of our day, it is because our day is darker, and fewer genuine spiritual leaders are present. Jesus has not changed – He is “the same yesterday, and today, and for ever” (Heb 13:8).

WE OUGHT TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

“ 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.”

Remember the words of Caiaphas: “Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us” (Acts 5:28). Peter’s answer will go straight to the point. He will not resort to oratory, or some distracting form of reasoning. He will not plead like an oppressed man, or call for just treatment or the imposition of human rights.

PETER AND THE OTHER APOSTLES

“Then Peter and the other apostles answered . . .” Other versions read, “Peter and the apostles,” NASB and “But Peter answering, and the apostles,” DARBY

The idea here is that Peter is speaking for the rest of the apostles. They do not all speak at once, but Peter delivers the answer each one of them individually would have delivered. They are united in heart and soul, understanding and commitment. There is no variance among them.

Peter was not the only spiritually knowledgeable man among them, but had been given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:19). Paul referred to Peter’s appointed prominence in his letter to the Galatians. “But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter ; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision , the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles)” (Gal 2:7-8). This did not mean that Peter was like a boss for the rest of the apostles, for that is not the manner of the kingdom of God, being strictly forbidden by Christ (Matt 20:25-26). When writing to the Galatians, Paul also recognized James (the Lord’s brother) and John as leaders. “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars , perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision” (Gal 2:9).

However, in our text, when the answer was given, Peter spoke – not as the one with superior rank and authority, but as the spokesman for the united apostles. This is precisely what he did on the day of Pentecost as well (Acts 2:14).

Those who have been involved to any measurable degree in religious groups know how exceedingly rare it is to have one person who can speak for all. However, where people “speak the same thing,” and are actually “joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10), this can be done. For some churches – like the one in Corinth – such marvelous unity was an objective from which a departure had taken place. However, in our text, that unity was a reality.

WE OUGHT

Other versions read, “We must ,” NASB “We have to ” BBE “God must,” DARBY “ comes before,” NJB “We ought more ,” PNT “it behoveth ,” YLT “It is necessary ,” PHILLIPS “It is our duty ,” ALT and “It is right .” LITV

The word “ought” comes from a small, yet meaningful, Greek word – **dei** (die). The lexical meaning of the word is, “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper . . . suggestive of moral obligation, denoting especially that constraint which arises from divine appointment,” THAYER “expressing compulsion, necessity . . . compulsion of duty one ought, one should, one has to, one must,” FRIBERG “That which must necessarily take place,” LOUW-NIDA “it is binding on one to do a thing,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “it is needful to,” LEH and “necessary, one must, or has to,” GINGRICH

If obedience is not found, it is not owing to any deficiency in salvation, or any lack of needed resources. Peter and the apostles had simply tapped in to the rich resources that are made available in Christ Jesus.

Even though these definitions satisfy scholastic requirements, they do not fully convey the meaning of the word as used here. This is not the compulsion of law – obeying a commandment, or fulfilling a duty. Theoretically, that can be done without the involvement of the heart. The compulsion to which Peter refers is an inward one, where conduct is pushed forward by a driving inward obsession. It is the kind of drive to which Jeremiah referred when he said, “But His word was in my heart like a burning fire shut up in my bones ; I was weary of holding it back, And I could not” (Jer 20:9). Elihu expressed the compulsion in these words: “For I am full of matter, the spirit within me constraineth me . Behold, my belly is as wine which hath no vent; it is ready to burst like new bottles. I will speak, that I may be refreshed: I will open my lips and answer” (Job 32:20). David said it this way: “ My heart was hot within me , while I was musing the fire burned : then spake I with my tongue” (Psa 39:3).

These examples had to do with speaking. Our text refers to the same kind of drive in regards to obeying: “We must obey God rather than men!” AMPLIFIED It is true that they were responsible to do so, but that is not the point of the text. They also WANTED to do so, and that desire could not be dampened by the foolish mandate of the Jewish court.

When the laws of God are “put” into the heart and “written” in the mind (Heb 10:16) , they constrain the person from within. There is a hearty agreement with what God has declared and required. However, there is also a burning desire to do those things – a desire that cannot be stifled when it is heeded. That is the kind of thing that is declared in this text.

O for the day when the church of our time will be noted for such obedience – when no governmental mandate or inimical threat can stop them from rendering heartfelt obedience to the Lord. The New Covenant provides for such obedience. The Holy Spirit promotes such obedience. The Lord Jesus strengthens for such obedience. The Gospel contributes to such obedience. The new heart and new spirit are inclined to such obedience. If obedience is not found, it is not owing to any deficiency in salvation, or any lack of needed resources. Peter and the apostles had simply tapped in to the rich resources that are made available in Christ Jesus.

TO OBEY GOD RATHER THAN MEN

Other versions read, “obey God rather than men,” NASB “ do the orders of God , not of man,” BBE “ God must be obeyed rather than men,” DARBY “obey God rather than people ,” GWN “ Obedience to God comes before obedience to men,” NJB “obey God rather than any human authority ,” NLT “to obey God then men,” PNT “To obey God it behoveth , rather than men,” YLT “obey God, not men!” IE “to be obeying God rather than people! “to obey the orders of God rather than the orders of men ,” PHILLIPS ” ALT “ We don't obey people . We obey God,” CEV and “to obey God rather than man ,” LITV

There is, then, a sense in which God and men are at variance, else this statement would make no sense. This does not refer to godly men, or men through whom Jesus is speaking. Jesus Himself said to His disciples, “if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20). However, in such a case, the hearers would actually be obeying Christ, for the apostles spoke in his behalf, delivering His mind and purpose to the people.

Peter is saying that any requirement of men that contradicts the word of the King will be ignored by the apostles. They will not obey what men say at the expense of disobeying God. Their ear is pointed toward heaven, not earth. Their hearts desire is to obey the word of Jesus, not that of men.

“Obey”

What does it mean to “obey?” Lexically it means, “to obey a ruler or superior,” THAYER “obey one in authority,” FRIBERG “obey, listen to,” UBS and “to submit to authority or reason by obeying.

“ LOUW-NIDA It means to strictly comply with the requirements of one who rules. It is to conform one’s conduct to the demands of one who is greater. In true obedience, when self-will asserts itself, the one who obeys defers to the Lord, ignoring self-will. If one is asked to satisfy the demands of someone other than the Lord, he chooses to honor the demands of God. If there is some competing interest to be carried out, completed, or fulfilled, the person chooses to fulfill what God has specified. This is because one recognizes the true authority, and is able to distinguish it from feigned dominance.

This is obedience “from the heart” (Rom 6:17) – obedience that is willingly and gladly rendered in recognition of, and agreement with, the One who is over all. This is a way in which we honor the Lord, yielding to His will. When Israel did not obey the Lord, He said to them, “if then I be a Father, where is Mine honor? and if I be a Master, where is My fear? (Mal 1:6).

An example of someone obeying God rather than men is seen in Joseph. This particular example did not take place when he was old and seasoned in the faith, but when he was young, and subject to “youthful lusts” (2 Tim 2:22). When Potiphar’s wife, to whom Joseph was, in a sense, subject, demanded that he lie with her. He responded, “how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Gen 39:9). His heart would not let him do this. He knew he had to obey God rather than Potiphar’s wife, even if he had to suffer for doing so.

There is no substitute for obedience – for doing what the Lord requires. Satan will tempt men to offer God something in the place of obedience – perhaps even a sacrifice, as king Saul did. He refused to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions as the Lord commanded. He said the people took the best of “what should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the Lord thy God in Gilgal.” Upon uttering these words, he heard the thundering assessment of Samuel, the man of God. “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Sam 15:22-23).

God cannot be pleased with some convenient sacrifice that falls short of what He actually requires. Such a response is nothing less than rebellion, stubbornness, and rejecting the word of the Lord. Informed souls know that this kind of conduct is rampant in the professing church. Men are withholding from the Lord what he has required in deference to lesser requirements of men. It is not acceptable – not one whit of it.

Peter and the apostles refused to dishonor God by disobeying Him, and refused to honor the council by obeying them. Their love for and commitment to the Lord would not allow such deviate conduct. They knew what they “ought” to do, and they did it.

Trends and Fads

In our day, it has become fashionable to follow religious trends and fads. Is it right to do so? Is it really necessary to adapt our manners to a contemporary society? I am not speaking about “using the world” (1 Cor 7:31) taking advantage of amoral things in order to labor for the Lord – i.e., technology, travel, etc. Rather, this concerns compromising the truth in order to appease our critics, lessen the aggression of the enemy, or appeal to carnal minds. Truth is, by its very nature, static. That is, the realities affirmed in the truth, as it “is in Jesus” (Eph 4:21) , do not change. That is why there is saving efficacy in the death and resurrection of Jesus. While men’s perception and experience of the truth may change, the truth itself remains unchanged. That is why the message of the church has never been changed by God. The “record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-12) has never been updated, nor has any portion of it been rendered obsolete.

If the core message of the modern church differs from the one delivered in the book of Acts and the epistles, then the message is wrong. In that case, religious leaders have chosen to obey men rather

than God, for God has never delivered a different message, or one that contradicts the Gospel of Christ.

What I am saying is that a significant portion of the professing church has elected to hearken to men rather than God. Some of those to whom it is hearkening are not even Bible Students. They are students of trends, statistics, psychology, motivational vogues, and sociological principles. If men say the attention-span of the people is twenty minutes, they quickly adapt their messages to accommodate that assessment. If men say more stress needs to be placed on the principles adopted by their denomination, then they alter their message to accomplish that purpose. If some lone voice cries out that we have to reach a particular segment of society, they tailor their message to appeal to that sector, whether it is the youth or the senior citizens.

Try as you may, you never find anything remotely like this in the book of Acts. That is probably why the results that are recorded in this book are not commonly experienced in our day.

All wayward religious trends will end overnight if men conform to this statement of the case: "We ought to obey God rather than men!" In our text, the leaders told the apostles to stop preaching in Jesus' name. They refused to obey that mandate, and based their decision on the fact that no allowance is made in salvation for not obeying God.

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS

"30a The God of our fathers . . ." Other versions read, "The God of our ancestors," NRSV and "God of our forefathers." NET

This is a significant phrase in Scripture – one with which the saints of God do well to become familiar. It is used over seventy-five times in Scripture, and always applies to the progenitors of the Jewish nation, or to the generation that came out of Egypt. It is used in the book of Acts eighteen times (3:13,25; 5:30; 7:11,12,15,19,38,39,44; 13:17; 15:10; 22:14; 26:6; 28:17,25). Eight of those times, it is particularly associated with the working of God. A brief perusal of those times will confirm their grandness.

- **GLORIFICATION OF CHRIST.** The "God of our fathers hath glorified His Son Jesus" (3:13).
- **THE FIRST COVENANT.** ". . . the covenant which God made with our fathers" (3:25).
- **THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.** "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus" (5:30).
- **CONQUERING CANAAN.** "Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus [Joshua NKJV] into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David" (7:45).
- **THE EXALTATION AND DELIVERANCE OF ISRAEL.** "The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it" (13:17).
- **THE COVENANT OF LAW.** "Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" (Acts 15:10).
- **THE CALLING OF PAUL.** "And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth" (Acts 22:14).

The idea here is that of associating God with a special people – a people of His own choosing. How often this is affirmed in Scripture!

THE PROMISE OF GOD. “And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers ” (Acts 26:6).

The idea here is that of associating God with a special people – a people of His own choosing. How often this is affirmed in Scripture!

• **LOVING, CHOOSING, SAVING.** “And because He loved thy fathers, therefore He chose their seed after them, and brought thee out in His sight with His mighty power out of Egypt” (Deut 4:37).

• **SET HIS LOVE UPON THEM.** “The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because He would keep the oath which He had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut 7:7-8).

• **ABOVE ALL PEOPLE.** “Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day” (Deu 10:15).

• **MADE THEM HIS PEOPLE.** “For the LORD will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the LORD to make you his people” (1 Sam 12:22).

• **FAVORED THEM.** “For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor unto them” (Psa 44:3).

• **PRECIOUS AND HONORABLE IN HIS SIGHT.** “Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life” (Isa 43:4).

In the people of Israel God was making Himself more fully known, and also paving the way for the coming of the Redeemer through their lineage. God does not view all men alike, and He confirmed that in his choice of Israel as well as His work among them. He can set His love on some, while withholding it from others – and He did that with Israel. In Israel He revealed how He can set one body of people above all others. He can make one group of people His own, while rejecting others. He can show favor to some, making them precious and honorable in His right, while withholding such benefits from others.

In spite of His consistent dealings with Israel over a period of 1,500 years, not including 500 years of previously exclusive dealings with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed, these realities still elude many people. There remain significant numbers of professing Christians that affirm God loves everyone alike, even though He has revealed through writing and human circumstances that nothing could be further from the truth.

When Peter refers to “the God of our fathers,” he is connecting the God of Jesus with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as well as the nation that came out of Egypt. This was the very point that moved the council to condemn Jesus, for they totally rejected the fact that He was the Son of God. When Jesus made that affirmation, the very high priest before whom the apostles are now standing responded, “He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy” (Matt 26:65). The remainder of the council, also present at this time, responded, “He is guilty of death!” (Matt 26:66). They could not see any association between Jesus

of Nazareth and the “God of the fathers” – even though He was the very reason for the existence of “the fathers.”

Now, Peter will affirm that the very same God they profess to worship, is the One who has reversed their judgment against Jesus – His only begotten Son. Their decision had been rendered null and void by the God of heaven. This is also the same God who raised up their nation, nurtured them through hard times, delivered them from bondage, and made a covenant with them.

Lest any Gentile believer begin to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, let him remember that Abraham is “the father of us all” (Rom 4:16), and “the father of all them that believe” (Rom 4:11). As Gentiles, we have been grafted into Abraham’s tree, and are partakers of the root and fatness of its promises (Rom 11:17). It is his tree that is sustaining us all. As it is written, “Boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee” (Rom 11:18). The promise that is being fulfilled in the Gospel is the one that was given to Abraham, to whom the Gospel was “preached before.” Therefore, it is written, “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8).

At this time, the church may appear to be predominantly Gentile. Some even believe the Jews have been altogether cut off, even though God promised He would never make His commitment to them void, or nullify His promise to renew them (Jer 31:35-37). The loyalty just cited are the words immediately following the commitment to make “a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31-34).

What possible reason can there be for any Gentile believers boasting. They have been made partakers of a promise given to someone else, and have become a part of a tree of lineage that is traced back to Abraham. It is time for the church to honor “the God of the fathers.”

A Dreadful Tendency

There remains in religious men this dreadful tendency of not associating the Lord Jesus with the God of heaven. That is precisely why men refuse to preach the Gospel of Christ, choosing to dabble in social issues and institutional concerns – as though those were the primary matters with which God is conjoined. Through subtlety Satan has persuaded men that Jesus has somehow lessened the demands of God – that He has made it possible for God to receive vacillating men, tolerate inveterate waywardness in them, and casually become involved in their personal desires. His love is seen as so great that He now looks kindly upon the people just because they are His children by nature – even if they are disobedient ones.

Such views flagrantly contradict the very concept of salvation, in which the people are not only delivered from the confinements of nature, but changed as well. It is time for the church to rid itself of such views, and those who perpetrate them. The reason God gives people a new heart is because the old one is not acceptable. The reason we have “the Second Man” and the “Last Adam,” is because “the first man Adam” is no longer the appointed prototype. He and all of his progeny have been rejected, and are in a state of death and alienation (Rom 5:12-19; 1 Cor 15:45,47).

This is why it is sinful to teach followers of Christ as though their lives were strictly the result of some personal discipline or routine that did not involve heart, soul, mind, and strength.

In Christ, God makes individuals a new creation (2 Cor 5:17) because He cannot receive them as they are. A stony and a stubborn heart cannot be overlooked by God, as though they do not exist. If such a Divine response was possible, the Lord would have left us the way we were. In such a case, He would only be required to perfect what already existed within man. Spiritual and bodily resurrections (Rom 6:4; 1 Cor 15:52) would not be required, because only the dead are raised. You

cannot extract something living from the domain of corruption. Life – spiritual life – must be created within men, else they will never have it – and only God can create! That is why the true living ones – those who are in Christ Jesus – are said to have been “created in Christ Jesus,” and are “His workmanship” (Eph 2:10). The new nature, or “new man,” that is resident in them has been “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24).

This is why it is sinful to teach followers of Christ as though their lives were strictly the result of some personal discipline or routine that did not involve heart, soul, mind, and strength. Doling out little tips and routines that are supposedly the secrets to successful living is approaching life as though there were no God or Christ. It should not be surprising that such systems do not move men to affirm “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

DO NOT MAKE GOD TOO PERSONAL

A word ought to be said concerning making God too personal – i.e., of limiting our view of God to matters concerning ourselves, instead of centering our lives in Him. I must take great care here not to be misunderstood. It is true that every true disciple of Jesus can say, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved ME, and gave Himself for ME” (Gal 2:20). This, however, does not warrant living life as though we were the only ones so blessed. Paul knew this well, and therefore learned to be content in whatever state he was found – including beatings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, and perils of all sorts.

While Jesus may be said to be a “personal Savior” (although that phrase is not found in Scripture), He is more precisely “the Savior of the body” (Eph 5:23). There is a sense in which Jesus “loved the church and gave Himself for it” (Eph 5:25). It seems to me that it is on the part of wisdom to learn to reason and express ourselves with “the body of Christ” in mind. It will contribute to a more stable frame of mind during the times we are being tested, and make for more alertness during times of peace. Lest this be considered to be unreasonable, remember that Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father . . . Give us . . . forgive us . . . as we . . . our debtors . . . lead us not into temptation . . . deliver us from evil” (Matt 6:9-13). Self-centered religion is dangerous beyond all comprehension. Learn to detect it quickly and avoid it at all cost.

GOD RAISED UP JESUS

“30b . . . raised up Jesus . . .” Other versions read, “gave Jesus back to life,” BBE “has raised up Jesus,” DARBY “brought Him back to life,” GWN “raised Jesus from the dead,” NLT “did raise up Jesus,” YLT and “raised Jesus to life.” ISV

Thusfar, in every record of Peter speaking, he has made reference to the raising of Jesus from the dead.

- “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24).
- “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32).
- “And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15).
- “Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26).
- “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by Him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).

- “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus , whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30).

Later, Peter will make the same point at the house of Cornelius (10:40). Paul will also preached it in Antioch of Pisida (13:23,30,33,34, 37), and then in Athens as well (17:31). This is a pivotal line of spiritual reasoning.

THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE

The Epistles, written exclusively to the saints, contain repeated references to God raising Jesus from the dead. There are holy associations made with that resurrection.

- **RIGHTEOUSNESS.** The imputation of righteousness. “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead ” (Rom 4:24).

- **BAPTISM.** Our baptism into Christ. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4).

- **VICTORY.** Dominion over sin. “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him” (Rom 6:9).

- **OUR ASSOCIATION WITH CHRIST.** Being dead to the law and married to Christ. ”Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead , that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).

- **HOLINESS.** The Spirit dwelling in believers and quickening their mortal body, enabling them to be holy. “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom 8:11).

- **SALVATION.** Men being saved. “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead , thou shalt be saved” (Rom 10:9).

- **PROCLAMATION.** Preaching the Gospel. “Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ : whom He raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not” (1 Cor 15:15).

- **THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.** The resurrection of all the dead. “For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised ” (1 Cor 15:16).

- **APOSTLESHIP.** The apostleship of Paul. “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead)” (Gal 1:1).

- **EMPOWERMENT.** The power that is toward those who are in Christ Jesus. “Which he wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead , and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:20).

- **THE CIRCUMCISION OF CHRIST.** Being circumcised by Christ, and raised with Him in baptism through faith. “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead ” (Col 2:11-12).

- **CHRIST’S RETURN.** Waiting for Christ to return from heaven. “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead , even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).

• **THE GOSPEL.** The true Gospel. “Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Tim 2:8).

BELIEVING IN GOD. Believing in God through Jesus Christ. “Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Pet 1:21).

You see how the golden thread of the resurrection, together with the scarlet thread of His death, is woven throughout the entirety of redemption. Among other things, the resurrection of Christ is the ordained display of “the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe” (Eph 1:19-20). It is in “the power of His resurrection” (Phil 3:10) that we are enabled to “do all things” that are required of us and commissioned to us. Apart from this power we are spiritually powerless. No work can please God or be effective for His glory without it.

The resurrection of Christ confirmed several things.

- That Jesus was the Son of God, as He claimed (Rom 1:4).
- That Jesus has been given all power in heaven and earth (Rom 1:4).
- That He is the only one through whom men can be saved (Acts 4:12).
- That we will also be raised from the dead (1 Cor 6:14).
- That He is the One who will judge the world (Acts 17:31).
- That He has been exalted and is making intercession for us (Rom 8:34).
- That neither preaching Christ nor faith in Him is in vain (1 Cor 15:14).

How could a doctrine, so obviously emphatic in apostolic preaching and teaching, be so glaringly absent in the modern church scene? How can there be preachers and teachers who know more of the human psyche than they do of the risen Christ? Why did the ones who laid the foundation for the church view the resurrection of Christ with such cruciality, while men today consider it so infrequently, treating it as though it was a spiritual museum piece? Nothing has taken place in modern times what warrants a shift in our emphasis.

The answer is found in the different agenda the modern church has adopted. This has taken place because of its leaders and its professed educators. They are like blind men who, while they are leading, have fallen into the ditch with those who hearken to them. Concerning these leaders Jesus commissioned His disciples, “Leave them!” NIV (Matt 15:14). Because of the danger so described, that word cannot be ignored with impunity.

YOU SLEW HIM AND HANGED HIM ON A TREE

“30c . . . whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.” Other versions read, “whom you murdered by hanging on a tree,” NKJV “whom you had put to death by hanging Him on a cross,” NASB “whom you had killed by hanging Him on a tree,” NIV “who you killed by hanging Him on a tree.” RSV “after you had killed Him by hanging Him on a cross.” LIVING “He is the one you killed, having hung him upon wood.” IE “whom you crucified and put to death.” WEYMOUTH “after you hung him on a tree and killed him.” ISV “after you had hanged Him on a cross and killed Him.” WILLIAMS “Whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree (cross).” AMPLIFIED “whom you murdered by hanging him on a cross of wood.” PHILLIPS “You killed Jesus by nailing him to a cross,” CEV and “You murdered Jesus by hanging him on a cross.” GWN

This is now the fourth time Peter has charged the Jews and their leaders with the responsibility of rejecting and killing Jesus.

- “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye

have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain ” (Acts 2:23).

- “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life , whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:14-15).

- “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified , whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).

- “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree ” (Acts 5:30).

The carnal mind may reason that the Jews actually did not kill Jesus, but were only instrumental in delivering Him to the Gentiles, who were the ones who actually killed him. The theological mind might reason that the Jews did not kill Jesus because it was something that was appointed to be done. No one really took His life from Him, such a mind thinks, He laid down His life Himself (John 10:17-18).

All such reasoning is nothing more than an exercise in vanity and a display of gross carnality. Peter told the people the death of Jesus was according to “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God,” yet solemnly added that the people had “crucified and slain Jesus” (Acts 2:23). He told the people they had fulfilled the Scriptures in killing Jesus (Acts 3:18) – yet what they did was not righteous, but sinful, even though it was done in ignorance. They were required to “repent,” in order that their sins might be “blotted out” (Acts 3:19). The early disciples all knew that when the Jews delivered up Jesus they were doing “whatsoever” God’s “hand” and “counsel determined before to be done.” Yet, they also knew the people had themselves “gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ” (Acts 4:26).

It is not becoming for believers to adopt simplistic views about complex matters. This is particularly true of the death of Christ. Heaven, earth, and hell were involved in this matter – Divinity, humanity, and the power of darkness. Heaven drew up the plan, and God, man, and Satan were involved in its execution. All under the Sovereign rule of God. This death did not come short of its purpose in

any way. The will of men was not fulfilled as they intended, nor was Satan’s objectives accomplished. In Christ’s death, only God’s will was thoroughly achieved. Men fulfilled His will, even though that is not what they intended. Satan fulfilled God’s will, although that was not his aim. In laying down His life, Jesus willingly made His will subject to the Father’s will (Lk 22:42). Only God’s will was absolutely free and unhindered.

When men struggle with whether or not the human will is free, let them consider the death of Christ. Precisely who was free in that matter, and who was in bondage? Men were in bondage to Satan and his hosts, and Satan and his hosts were “bound” with chains of darkness (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6).

Here are personalities that did the will of God rather their own will. Yet, Satan is rejected, and men are condemned for doing so. Peter called upon men to repent because of what they did, even though they had “fulfilled” the Scriptures in condemning Jesus (Acts 2:38; 3:18; 13:27). Let us push from us naive and overly-simplistic views of the death of Christ!

Guilty of Christ’s Death

How is it that the Jews were guilty of Christ’s death, even though not one of their hands drove the nails into His body, or raised Him up on the tree? Yet, they had judged Him to be “guilty of death,” or “deserving of death” NKJV (Matt 26:66). It is written, “They all condemned Him to be guilty of death” (Mk 14:64). Again it is written that the chief priests and rulers of the Jews “delivered Him to

be condemned to death, and have crucified Him” (Lk 24:20). That decision made them responsible for the death of Christ, for, speaking as a man, the Roman authorities would not have crucified Jesus if the Jews had not insisted that they do so.

But there is something more to be seen here. It is still possible for a person to become personally guilty of Christ’s death. While it is an awesome consideration, we do well to ponder it. This view is stated at least two times in Scripture.

- “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord ” (1 Cor 11:27). Other versions read, “will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord,” NRSV “responsible for the body and blood of the Lord,” BBE “held responsible for the body and blood of the Lord,” GWN “will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord,” NAB and “guilty of [profaning and sinning against] the body and blood of the Lord.” AMPLIFIED

- “If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh , and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6). Other versions read , “crucify again for themselves,” NKJV “crucifying the Son of God all over again,” NIV “they are crucifying again the Son of God,” NRSV “crucify on their own account the Son of God,” RSV “put the Son of God on the cross again,” BBE “recrucifying the Son of God,” CSB “a second time crucify and insult the Son of God,” MRD “are nailing him to the cross once again’ NLT “repeatedly crucifying the Son of God afresh,” WEYMOUTH “continue to crucify the Son of God to their detriment,” WILLIAMS and “they nail upon the cross the Son of God afresh [as far as they are concerned].” AMPLIFIED

The same death – Christ’s death – will be either the basis for reconciliation or condemnation. Those who receive the atonement by faith, will enjoy its marvelous benefits (Rom 5:11). Their sins will be forgiven, they will be justified, and they will have peace with God. However, should they choose to refuse to have “faith in His blood,” (Rom 3:25), electing to remain in a state of alienation, the whole responsibility for Christ’s death will be laid upon them. Further, if a professing Christian returns to a life of sin, that person also becomes personally responsible for Christ’s death. Those who continue to wallow in sin cannot be profited by Christ’s death. What is more, it will not become a matter of indifference to them. In the day of judgment, the responsibility for the most unjust, foolish, hateful, and malicious crime of all time – the condemnation and death of Jesus Christ – will be laid to their account. They are “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”

The death which was provided for reconciliation will, in such a case, be the means of their condemnation. That is how serious God is about the work of His Son, particularly His death!

This is one reason why Peter speaks with such candidness to the council. He knows they are being weighed in the balances by the King of kings. The message of the apostles is bringing salvation within the reach of those before whom they are standing. This is, in a very real sense, the time of their visitation. Although they have been guilty of crucifying and killing the Prince of life , that death holds within it the means of their own reconciliation, and justification. The same offer is held out to them that was presented on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:38-39), and in Solomon’s porch (3:19-26).

A Challenge for Our Times

In my judgment, the preachers and teachers of our time could do a much more credible job of presenting the death and resurrection of Jesus. These are historical facts, but they are infinitely more than that! Of itself, history has no redeeming value. It cannot change a person, or move from one from a state of alienation to one of reconciliation. But this is not at all the case when it comes to the death and resurrection of Jesus. These are not merely facts to be believed. Men are not required to assent to them so they can be part of an organization. If it is true that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them,” then there is more substance in these

facts than any person dares to imagine. If more of God was in Christ than any other person – for in Him dwelt “the fulness of the Godhead bodily” – then there is nothing about Jesus that can be treated with indifference .

The facts of His death and resurrection must be taken into the heart and pondered, for there is sanctifying power in them. However, I fear that what is being said about Jesus from the average pulpit is not conducive to such cogitation. There is not enough substance to much of the preaching of our time. It is too frothy, even though the human condition is profoundly complex, and requires a marvelous remedy.

May men of spiritual understanding arise to declare the death and resurrection of Christ with insight and power. The salvation of men is at stake – yes, even the salvation of the church itself. If the fundamental message of the church is off-center, it will be sucked into the wicked vortex from which it was once delivered.

GOD EXALTED HIM WITH HIS RIGHT HAND

“ 31a Him hath God exalted with his right hand . . . ” Other versions read, “exalted to His right hand,” NKJV “exalted Him to His own right hand,” NIV “has put on high at his right hand,” BBE “exalted by his right hand,” DARBY “ at His right hand,” ESV “ used his power to give Jesus the highest position,” GWN “ By his own right hand God has now raised Him,” NJB “put him in the place of honor at his right hand,” NLT “lift up with His right hand,” PNT “ with mighty power . . . exalted Him,” LIVING “raised to His right side,” IE and “gave him a place at his right side.” CEV

As you can see, there are two differing thoughts found in the various translations. (1) Jesus was exalted by, or with , the right hand of God. (2) Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God. Doctrinally, both views are true. However, in this text, the emphasis is the exaltation of Christ itself , and not the place to which He was exalted.

This is now the second time Peter has made this point, the first time being on the day of Pentecost. “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted , and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). The phrase “by the right hand of God” means by means of God’s right hand. By way of comparison, the Jews “by wicked hands” had crucified and slain Jesus Christ (Acts 2:33). The council had “laid their hands on the apostles” (Acts 5:18). In both cases, their actions were negated and reversed by the right hand of God.

The exaltation of Christ is something worthy of extended consideration. It validates the acceptance of Christ’s sacrificial death, confirms the destruction of the devil, and is the means through which salvation in its entirety is being implemented.

It was the “right hand” of God that exalted Christ. In this case, the expression “right hand” is an anthropomorphism – an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics. MERRIAM-WEBSTER God’s “right hand” is His working power – what He accomplishes through His power and wisdom. Several Scriptural expressions will suffice to confirm this point.

“And he said, The LORD came from Sinai . . . from His right hand went a fiery law for them” (Deut 33:2).

- “And He brought them to the border of His sanctuary, even to this mountain, which His right hand had purchased” (Psa 78:54).
- “O sing unto the LORD a new song; for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand , and His holy arm, hath gotten him the victory” (Psa 98:1).

- “The LORD hath sworn by His right hand , and by the arm of His strength . . .” (Isa 62:8).

The exaltation of Christ was a Divine accomplishment. It was not the expression of impersonal laws, or raw and detached power. Concerning Christ, God Himself is said to have “highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name” (Phil 2:9). Jesus is “crowned with glory and honor” (Heb 2:9). He is “far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come,” and all things have been “put under His feet.” It is in that capacity that He has been given to the church as “Head over all things” (Eph 1:21-22). It is appropriately said of Him, “And ye are complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). In His ascension He “led captivity captive,” or “led captive a host of captives” (Eph 4:8). He has been “made higher than the heavens” (Heb 7:26), being seated at the right hand of God, with “angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:22).

DOMAINS IMPACTED BY HIS EXALTATION

There were at least five domains impacted by the exaltation of Christ. In some way, we are directly involved in all of them.

- **HADES.** Beginning at the lowest level, the abode of departed spirits – Hades – was affected by Christ’s exaltation. His “soul” was not left there, but He left that area under His own power.

- **THE GRAVE.** The grave, the abode of dead bodies, was also impacted by Christ’s exaltation, for it could not hold His body. He came forth from it, sealing His triumph over the full scope of death.

- **THE WORLD.** When Jesus rose from the dead, He walked among His disciples for forty days, teaching them concerning the Kingdom of God. During that time, He was not tempted. When finally a cloud “received Him” out of the sight of His disciples, He left the world taking “captivity itself a captive” NRSV (Eph 4:8).

- **THE HEAVENS.** These are the celestial heavens that surround the earth, where clouds reside. But that is not the only occupants of that realm. It is also occupied by “the prince of the power of the air,” or “the ruler of the kingdom of the air” NIV (Eph 2:2). Jesus passed through this realm without being detained or challenged for a moment. One time a holy angel fought with a wicked principality for twenty one days in this realm (Dan 10:13), but Jesus met no such challenge.

- **HEAVEN.** This is the “heaven of heavens” (Deut 10:14), or, more precisely, “heaven itself” (Heb 9:14). This is where the Almighty God is (Psa 115:3; Eccl 5:2; Matt 6:9). This is where the Throne of God is, from which His Kingdom is governed – which Kingdom is over all (Rev 4:2). When Jesus entered heaven with His blood, “the heavenly things themselves” were “purified” – that is, made suitable for redeemed men to handle (Heb 9:23). Those “things” were sanctified for the redeemed.

The salvation of men required that all of these realms be affected. Death had to be absolutely defeated, else the dead could not be raised. The world had to be conquered, else men would not be able to overcome it. The heavenly realms had to be soundly defeated, else Satan would have continued his ruthless rule over all humanity. Heaven itself had to be “prepared” for the reception of men, else they would remain in a state of ostracization.

In my own religious experience, I have not heard much about the exaltation of Christ. In the average church circles, it is largely an undeveloped area of thought – even though the entirety of our salvation hinges upon it. Our faith could neither be authored nor finished without the direct involvement of an

exalted Christ. That is where the power of “pure religion” resides (James 1:27).

When men are drawn aside to an application approach to Scripture, they walk away from the power of the truth. Busying themselves with how men act and react, professed leaders cause men to embrace a powerless religion. The approach of such teachers assumes that men are more capable than they really are. They assume their minds are more competent than they really are, and thus they imagine they can process facts with flawless precision. These assumptions, however, are nothing more than vain imaginations. If they were true, we would have no genuine need for the exalted Christ, or the Holy Spirit.

Now, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Peter will develop the implications of the exaltation of Christ. He will focus on some of the activity of the exalted Christ. This is not novel activity, but is absolutely essential to the salvation of mankind.

EXALTED TO BE A PRINCE AND A SAVIOR

“ 31b . . . to be a Prince and a Savior . . . ”

TO BE

“ . . to be. . . ” Other versions read, “as.” NASB That is, this is the reason why God exalted Christ with His right hand. There was a work to be done following Christ’s death and resurrection – a work that is essential to the salvation of men. A Savior who is not exalted cannot save – that confirms the monumental nature of God’s “so great salvation” (Heb 2:3). It is also why God is receiving, and will receive, unparalleled glory for what is accomplished in that salvation.

What is now before us is not something that Jesus WILL become. It is not a position to which He will be assigned. This is why He was exalted to the right hand of God – not why He died, but why He was exalted.

A PRINCE

“ . . . a Prince . . . ” Other versions read, “Leader,” NRSV “Ruler,” BBE “a Head,” MRD “Chief Leader,” WEYMOUTH and “Prince and Leader.” AMPLIFIED

The word “prince” is translated

from a very significant word. It is like a multi-faceted jewel, and has the following meaning, “leading, furnishing the first cause or occasion; the chief leader, prince,” THAYER “one who goes first on a path, hence a leader, prince, pioneer . . . one who causes something to begin, originate, founder, originator,” FRIBERG “leader, pioneer, founder, originator,” UBS “ . . . *to be* “beginning, originating a thing . . . founder . . . a prince, chief,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “chief, head, ruler, guide, beginning, origin.” LEH

The scope of this word confirms why Jesus, as a glorified Man, was “exalted.” As the “Captain of their salvation,” the saved required an enthroned Savior who possessed universal and unquestioned authority. That is how exceedingly difficult it is to save sinners. Those who depict salvation as simplistic betray their fundamental ignorance of its nature.

Permit me to briefly expound the significance of the term “Prince.” This is an unfolding of the present ministry of Jesus, as well as the present needs of the ones who are being saved.

• **PIONEER.** This is One who goes before: i.e., goes to the destination that has been appointed for the chosen ones. A twofold purpose is being accomplished by this Pioneer. First, to prepare the way to the destination, sanctifying it for those who follow. In this case,

Jesus has consecrated “a new and living way” in going before us (Heb 10:20). He is the One who has raised up a highway in the desert on which wayfaring men will not err (Isa 35:8). This Pioneer is, in fact, our “Forerunner,” which has entered heaven for us (Heb 6:20). His presence there is the guarantee that those who run the race with patience that is set before them, will arrive safely at the goal (Heb 12:1-2).

• **ORIGINATOR.** As the Divinely appointed and exalted Originator, Jesus is made both “the Author and the Finisher” [Perfecter] “of our faith” (Heb 12:2). In this case, “our faith” is not a body of doctrine, but “the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). This ‘faith’ comes “from God the Father” according to purpose, and from “the Lord Jesus Christ” as the One who confers it (Eph 6:23). As the Originator, Jesus is also building His church, as He said He would (Matt 16:18).

• **LEADER.** As the Leader, the enthroned Savior is leading His sheep out of the world (John 10:3), and bringing “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10). He is the One they are to “follow,” and in salvation, it is His voice that they come to know (John 10:16,27). In fact, Jesus said, “Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice” (John 18:37). This is how He leads them – with His voice. That is why we are admonished, “See that ye refuse not Him that speaketh . . . from heaven” (Heb 12:25).

• **CHIEF.** As Chief, Jesus is the highest ranking Man – the “Second Man,” who owns the generation of the godly. He is the “Firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29), and also is “the Firstborn of all creation,” whether of men, angels, cherubim, or seraphim (Col 1:15). The only One who is not subject to Him is God the Father Himself (1 Cor 15:27).

One of the great failings of the church of our time is its minuscule view – if, indeed, it can even qualify as a view – of the salvation of God. When men present this salvation in simplistic terms, and represent being “saved” as something that is very easy, they have not told the truth. They have forgotten the kind of Savior that was required to initiate, maintain, and consummate this salvation.

The “Make Him Your Lord” View

In our time it has become fashionable for men to speak of making Jesus your Lord. I suppose by this they mean that men are to submit to Christ. However, submitting to Jesus hath nothing whatsoever to be with Him being Lord – yours or anyone else! Jesus has been “made” Lord, and there really is no one who is not subject to Him. Often I have heard people testify that they were once Christians, being born again, and saved by the blood, but were just not subject to Jesus. He was, as they put it, “not the Lord of my life.” But that is nothing but foolishness and nonsense. It will only take a revelation of Jesus, whether through the Gospel, or when He comes again, to confirm that they really are subject to Him, whether they know it or not. Those who do not follow Him, obey Him, or hearken to Him, do not belong to Him. He is not their Shepherd, and they are not His sheep – even though He IS their Lord, for He is “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36). We know this is the case, because Jesus said His sheep not only know Him, but follow Him as well (John 10:4,10). He also said they would not follow a stranger (John 10:5). Solemnly He affirmed, “Every one who is of the truth heareth My voice” (John 18:37). Moses prophesied that this was going to be the case with the Messiah: “unto Him shall ye hearken . . . whosoever will not hearken unto My words which he shall speak in My name, I will require it of Him” (Deut 18:15,19). Peter proclaimed this very truth is fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth: “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that Prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:23).

Those who reject Christ experience Him being Lord in a different way. He is presiding over their condemnation – for it is He that will separate the sheep from the goats (Matt 25:32). He is even choosing their delusions for them, fulfilling the word of Isaiah: “I also will choose their delusions” (Isa 66:4), and also sending “strong delusion” on those who do not “receive the love of the truth” (2 Thess 2:10-11). In the last day, those who stand before Him, who have lived in practical alienation

from Him, and withheld their hearts from Him, will hear Him say, “I never knew you: depart from Me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt 7:23). They will find that He was their Lord all along.

TO BE A SAVIOR

“ . . . and a Savior . . . ” Other versions read, “ and Vivifier ,” MRD and “ Savior and Deliverer and Preserver. ” AMPLIFIED

What is “a Savior?” For the elect, the word itself has a most pleasant sound. The root lexical meaning of the word is, “savior, deliverer, preserver,” THAYER “deliverer, rescuer,” FRIBERG “Savior, Redeemer, Deliverer,” UBS “one who rescues or saved,” LOUW-NIDA “savior, deliverer, preserver . . . protecting.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

There are two primary perspectives of a Savior: one who delivers or rescues, and one who preserves . You might think of it as saving and keeping the saved from the condition in which they were found; delivering and keeping delivered from the enemy who held the persons captive, rescuing and keeping free from the environment from which the individuals were rescued. Salvation cannot be effective unless the One who saves us can maintain the salvation He initiated. A Savior, therefore, involves maintaining that “saved” condition.

Saved In a Hostile Realm

Of course none of this makes any sense if once a person is saved they are completely out of danger. Some do teach this, thereby leading the people astray. They conveniently forget that God, by design, has left us in the environment from which Jesus has delivered is – the world. We are “delivered from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), yet must journey through it as “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:13). We are given a remarkable treasure, yet must hold it in frail “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7).

There is a reason for this. In the salvation of men, God is making known the marvelous expanse and extent of His wisdom to heavenly personalities. As it is written, “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God ” (Eph 3:9-10). The Amplified Bible reads, “[The purpose is] that through the church the complicated, many-sided wisdom of God in all its infinite variety and innumerable aspects might now be made known to the angelic rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) in the heavenly sphere.” This being the case, salvation must be seen to be effective in a hostile realm, where all kinds of liabilities and foes are experienced.

Because of this situation, it is necessary for us to be “kept” in this world by the One who delivered us in the first place. This is done through our faith, which is the means by which we are saved initially, as well as during our tenure in this world.

Because of this situation, it is necessary for us to be “kept” in this world by the One who delivered us in the first place. This is done through our faith, which is the means by which we are saved initially, as well as during our tenure in this world. It is said of those who are in Christ Jesus, “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5). Again we read, “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling , and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24). And again, “Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand ” (Rom 14:4).

This is all the work of the Savior, and it is all realized through our faith. That is precisely why it is essential that we be “strong in faith” (Rom 4:20). If the Savior is maintaining us by his grace “through faith,” then how can one who is lacking in faith survive in this world?

Like Israel's Occupation of Canaan

We are like the Israelites when they came to occupy Canaan. Their enemies remained in the land, and had to be driven out: "Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places" (Num 33:52). This was true, even though God had said HE would drive out the wicked inhabitants of the land: ". . . behold, I drive out before thee the Amorite, and the Canaanite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, and the Hivite, and the Jebusite" (Ex 34:11). And again, "And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite" (Ex 33:2).

Israel's continuance in the promised land was contingent upon two things.

- First, they had to drive out the remnants of the enemy that remained in the land (Josh 3:10). Discerning Israelites knew that they needed help in this commission. Therefore, Caleb, standing on the threshold of his inheritance reasoned, "Now therefore give me this mountain, whereof the LORD spake in that day; for thou heardest in that day how the Anakims were there, and that the cities were great and fenced: if so be the LORD will be with me, then I shall be able to drive them out, as the LORD said" (Josh 14:12).

- Second, they had to keep themselves pure before the Lord. Otherwise, God would drive them from the land for committing the same sins the former inhabitants of the land committed. Therefore, Moses warned the people before they entered the land: "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes and my judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations; neither any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you: (For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;) That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you" (Lev 18:26-28).

These two requirements are connected. If Israel did not drive out the enemy, allowing them rather to cohabit with them, they would learn the way of the heathen. Once that happened, they would also do wickedly, and God would drive them out. Therefore, before they entered the land of Canaan, they were solemnly told, "When the LORD thy God shall cut off the nations from before thee, whither thou goest to possess them, and thou succeedest them, and dwellest in their land; Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou inquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise" (Deut 12:29-30). And again, "When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations" (Deut 18:9).

Christ, the Savior

Our Savior relates to both of these situations as foreshadowed in Israel. Initially, he drives out the enemy, freeing us from the clutches of Satan, purging our conscience, and purifying our hearts. However, being "saved" does not end there. That condition must be maintained as we "through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body" (Rom 8:13). Our spiritual life depends upon us doing this, for the text continues that if we actually do this, "ye shall live." Lest we be tempted to think this is really nothing more than an option, we are admonished, "For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live" (Rom 8:13). In this whole matter, Jesus works within us in the role of the Savior.

It is unfortunate that great numbers of professing believers are seriously lacking in this area. Hosts of them are living "after the flesh," imagining that, so doing, they will not die – even though God has said "Ye shall die!" They are not being taught of the necessity of the work of mortifying the deeds of the body, and therefore appear to have no heart for it. As a result, they are learning the ways of the

world – maybe even with a religious flavor to them. Let there be no mistake about this. There is no room in salvation for continuing in the sin from which we have been delivered! Jesus has been exalted to be a “Savior.” That means full provision has been made for being initially delivered, and remaining delivered. If that is not being experienced, then Jesus has, in fact, been denied, profession notwithstanding. If this is not the case, then Jesus has been recalcitrant in His role as Savior. He has, if such be the case, been exalted to be a Savior, yet is not faithful to do His work, keeping the saved ones clean and pure. Who is the blasphemer who would presume to say such a thing? Where is the individual who would dare to live in a slipshod manner, and yet claim Jesus as their Savior? Who is the one who remains dominated by sin, yet claims to be saved?

TO GIVE REPENTANCE AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“ 31c . . . for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.”

Here is why Jesus was exalted to be a Prince and a Savior. It is axiomatic, or taken for granted, that such an Individual is required for the specified benefits to be experienced – an enthroned and empowered Prince and Savior. These blessings cannot possibly be realized if Jesus Himself does not give, or grant, them. Technically speaking, these are not human achievements, but things to be received.

TO GIVE REPENTANCE

“ . . . for to give repentance. . . ” Other versions read, “to grant repentance,” NASB “to give . . . a change of heart,” BBE “to lead . . . to him, to change the way they think and act,” GWN “so the people . . . would repent of their sins,” NLT “to give reformation,” YLT “so . . . would have an . . . opportunity for repentance,” LIVING that Israel could have the opportunity to change their hearts,” IE “in order to give repentance,” ISV “in order to grant repentance,” AMPLIFIED “to bring repentance,” PHILLIPS “so that the people . . . would turn back to him,” CEV and “to give the people . . . the opportunity to repent.” GNB

Some translations completely misrepresent the thought, reading that Jesus was exalted so that an “opportunity” to repent could occur. LIVING/ IE/GNB This thought can in no way be derived from the language of the text. It is nothing more than the imposition of human understanding upon the text of Scripture.

“For to Give”

The word “give” comes from the Greek word **doûnai** which means, “of one’s own accord to give something to someone, to his advantage, to bestow, give as a gift, to grant,” THAYER and “to give, grant, allow, permit.” UBS

In this case, what is “given” is not an opportunity. The gift is specified in very particular language: **meta,noian** (meta-noi-an). There is no question about the meaning of this word. First, it is a noun, not a verb. The root meaning of the word is “a change of mind.” Lexically, as used here, it means “to give the ability to repent, or cause him to repent” THAYER Other lexical meanings include, “a change of mind leading to change of behavior,” FRIBERG “change of heart, turning from one’s sins, change of way,” UBS “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness,” LOUW-NIDA and “turning about, lit. ‘change of mind.’” GINGRICH

Repentance involves both an inward and outward change – a change of thought, and a change of conduct. This is not something that is achieved by the employment of natural aptitudes – discipline, diligence, effort, etc. This is associated with having a new heart. Under the Old Covenant the inspired prophet Ezekiel thundered this challenge: “Cast away from you all your transgressions,

whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit : for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 18:31). This is similar to a word Moses spoke to Israel during his valedictory address: “ Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart , and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut 10:16).

That these requirements could not be achieved in the energy of “the natural man” became evident, as both Moses and Ezekiel declared God would do these things. Moses promised, “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed , to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6). Ezekiel promised, “ A new heart also will I give you , and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26).

When the enthroned Savior gives repentance, it is the opening of the door for the accomplishing of the promises of both Moses and Ezekiel. Men can no more repent of themselves than they can circumcise their own hearts, or make a new heart for themselves. If men could do such things, this would contradict the word revealed in Job: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4). David knew this was the case, as evidenced by his penitential prayer: “ Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Psa 51:10).

Men can no more repent of themselves than they can circumcise their own hearts, or make a new heart for themselves. If men could do such things, this would contradict the word revealed in Job: “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one”

Now, Peter declares that Jesus has been exalted to be a Prince and a Savior in order to “give repentance.” Why could it not be given before? Why was it not enough to command that men repent. The answer ought to be obvious, yet it has been obscured by the vain reasoning of men.

Commands to Repent Were Rare Before Jesus, Even Though the Need to Repent Was Great

Let it be clear that before Jesus, the command to “repent” was given – although there are only few such commands in all of Moses and the Prophets.

- The King James Version contains two: “ Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Repent , and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations” (Ezek 14:6). “Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent , and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin” (Ezek 18:30).

- The New King James Version, in addition to the ones listed above, contains one more : “They said, ' Repent [‘turn again’ KJV] now everyone of his evil way and his evil doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD has given to you and your fathers forever and ever” (Jer 25:5).

- In addition to the first two mentioned, the New American Standard Bible and NIV adds the following: “‘For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone who dies,’ declares the Lord GOD. ‘Therefore, repent [‘turn’ KJV] and live’” (Ezek 18:32).

These examples are representative of the majority of Versions, both literal and paraphrased.

The Law Contained No Commandment to “Repent”

There was no commandment in the Law of Moses to “Repent” – not so much as one! Moses delivered two words concerning the people turning to the Lord; “When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee, even in the latter days, if thou turn to the LORD thy God, and shalt be obedient unto his voice” (Deut 4:30). “If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law , and if thou turn

unto the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul” (Deut 30:10).

Once Moses told the people, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut 10:16). That word, in fact, equated to repentance – yet no one fulfilled it. That is why Moses also promised the people God, in view of their inability to do this, would Himself circumcise their hearts. “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6).

A Defiled Heart Cannot Be Changed By the One Possessing It

Repentance fundamentally involves a change of heart and mind. Such a change, however, cannot be accomplished by the one requiring the change, for sin defiles the whole man. The prophet Jeremiah stated the case this way. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23). The Amplified Bible reads, “Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also can you do good who are accustomed and taught [even trained] to do evil.” The point is that man cannot change his own nature – and repentance requires such a change!

Doctrinally speaking, if men could have repented on their own, they could have circumcised their own hearts, and made themselves a new heart. The commands to do all three of them were, like the Law itself, intended to confirm man’s total and absolute spiritual impotence. When men sinned and fell into a state wherein they continually “come short of the glory of God,” they entered a condition where it was necessary to be “born again.” Now, they must be enabled from outside themselves to do what is required of them.

If there is any doubt about this 1,500 years of exacting Law under the Old Covenant confirmed that no man could rectify his own situation, redeem himself, or successfully rid himself of sin.

What Was Necessary?

In order for men to change or be changed, the matter of sin had to be satisfactorily addressed. Under the Law, or the Old Covenant, sin was never really addressed – it was only pointed out, but, nothing was ever really done about it. We know this is the case because of the effects of the Law. To name only one of them, consider the highest point of Jewish ceremony – the Day of Atonement. Here was an entire day devoted to the matter of sin. Multiple sacrifices were offered, the high priest was allowed to come into the Holy of Holies – or Most Holy Place – a single time in each year. In addition to the sacrifices, elaborate procedures were put into place. The sixteenth chapter of Leviticus provides us with the details of this day

- The high priest adorned himself with special clothes (v 4).
- The selection of a bullock, two goats, and a ram for sacrifices (vs 3,5).
- The high priest offered the bullock for a sin offering for himself, for an atonement for himself and his house (vs 6,11).
- By the casting of lots, a selection was made between the two goats – one would be presented as a sin offering, and one would be a scape goat, to bear the sins of the people (vs 8-10)
- This ceremony involved the burning of incense (vs 12-13).
- It required sprinkling of blood of the bullock on the mercy seat (v 14).
- There was a sacrifice of the goat selected for the sin offering (v 15a).
- The blood of the goat was sprinkled upon the mercy seat (v 15b).

- An atonement was made for the holy place and the tabernacle (vs 16-17).
- An atonement was made for the brazen altar, sprinkling the blood of the bullock and the goat upon it (v 18-20).
- The high priest confessed the sins over a living goat, then releasing it in a “land not inhabited” (vs 21-22).
- There were various washings (vs 23-24, 28).
- The high priest burned the fat of the sin offering upon the altar (v 25).
- The skins, flesh, and dung of the sacrifices were burned (V 27).
- The person burning the skins, flesh, and dung washed his clothes and bathed his flesh (v 28).
- There was a sanctification of the sanctuary, tabernacle, altar, priests, and people (v 30-33).

Would this elaborate procedure, ordained by God, have an affect upon the people? Would their sins be remitted, or their conscience be purged? The Scriptures leave no doubt about this matter. “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins . But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year” (Heb 10:1-3). Rather than removing sin, the day of atonement – Israel’s highest day – actually stirred up the recollection of sin , defiling the conscience: “But [as it is] these sacrifices annually bring a fresh remembrance of sins [to be atoned for].” AMPLIFIED

It was precisely for this reason that God could not, in the sense of the New Covenant provision, “give” men repentance. Sin had not really been dealt with. It had not actually been removed, and therefore the conscience could not be cleansed, or purged.

Sin In Its Entirety Done Away

First, sin in its entirety had to be “put away” (Heb 9:26) in order to make it right for men to be given repentance. God could not forgive what, in fact, still remained. This is why God provided His own Lamb, who would “ taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). In His death Jesus “ put away sin” (Heb 9:26), finishing transgression, and making an end of sin (Dan 9:24). He “destroyed the works of the devil” (1 John 3:5), thereby making it right for God to justify sinners. Therefore it is written, “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just , and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:25-26).

Now, the Exalted Christ Gives Repentance to the People

Now, because sin has been done away, and Jesus has been exalted to be “above all” (Eph 1:21), repentance can be given to men. Furthermore, Jesus Himself is the One who gives it. Peter boldly affirms that this is why Jesus has been exalted – “in order to grant repentance.” AMPLIFIED He declares that this is why Jesus is now “Prince and Savior” – “to grant repentance.” NAS

TO GIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“ . . . and forgiveness of sins.” Other versions read, “ remission of sins,” ASV “and to forgive their sins,” GWN “and be forgiven,” NLT “ to bestow forgiveness and release from sin ,” AMPLIFIED and “and be forgiven .” CEV

The word “forgiveness” comes from a word meaning, “release, as from bondage, forgiveness, pardon,” THAYER “captivity release, liberation, deliverance, debt cancellation, pardon, cancellation of guilt,” FRIBERG “to remove the guilt resulting from wrongdoing” LOUW-NIDA “discharge from a bond,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “cancellation of a punishment, or guilt.” GINGRICH

There is, in my judgement, an enormous amount of folklore these days concerning forgiveness . Perhaps you have heard someone speak of being forgiven by God, but not being able to forgive oneself. This is nothing more than psychological babble, and there is no place for it in the body of Christ – or anywhere else, for that matter.

Forgiveness must be seen against the backdrop of the effects of sin, for it deals directly with those effects. When sin is committed, God is offended, for sin contradicts His nature as well as His law.

- **REBELLION.** Iniquity is rebellion expressed, and stubbornness personified – and both expressions are hated by God.

- **INDEBTEDNESS.** Sin also creates a debt to God, for an attempt has been made to rob Him of His glory. The affection of the heart which belonged to Him was devoted to something else, and God was, in a sense robbed – although nothing was taken from His Person or character.

- **BONDAGE.** The sinner also enters into a state of bondage, from which it is impossible for him to extricate himself.

- **THE CONSCIENCE.** This also includes the defilement of the conscience of the sinner.

In fact, none of these conditions can be diminished, corrected, or removed by the transgressor.

In forgiveness, God remembers the sin no more (Heb 8:12). From the standpoint of the record, all indebtedness is removed and the bill is cancelled (1 Tim 2:6). The individual is consequently freed from both the guilt and the power of sin (Rom 6:18).

These realities have an impact upon the one who is actually forgiven.

- First, the conscience is purged, and no longer condemns the individual (Heb 9:14; 10:22).

- Second, there is also an access to God granted, which was formerly removed because of transgression (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12).

- Third, a condition is also introduced in which the person is no longer indebted to sin, and is under no irresistible compulsion to continue in it (Rom 6:6-7,12,14; 8:12).

The “remission of sin” (Acts 2:38; Rom 3:25) includes the purging, or cleansing, of the conscience. In fact, our baptism into Christ is referred to as the means through which a “good conscience” is appropriated (1 Pet 3:21). There really is no such thing as knowing you have been forgiven God, yet being unable to forgive yourself. A condemning conscience and the forgiveness of sins cannot be joined together. When Jesus gives “forgiveness of sins” the recipient, unlike those who labored under the Law and its inferior sacrifices, has “no more conscience of sins” (Heb 10:2).

This does not mean the forgiven one no longer recalls that he had sinned. Paul had a vivid memory of his past sin: “I persecuted this way unto the death. . . I persecuted them even unto strange cities . . . I persecuted the church of God . . . I persecuted the church of God and wasted it . . . And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22:4,20; 26:11; 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13). However, this was not the testimony of a defiled conscience, but was rather the expression of a purified heart.

Tie Remission to the Right Thing

There is something flawed in associating forgiveness only with doing something. To be sure, there are things to be done, and they cannot be ignored. After what is to be required is actually done, forgiveness still has to be given.

- Repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38).
- Baptism (Acts 22:16).
- Believing in Jesus (Acts 10:43; 13:39).
- Confessing our sins (1 John 1:9).

Notwithstanding the necessity of this obedience, these things cannot be the focus of our confidence. Our faith is in Jesus Christ, the One who GIVES forgiveness to the people!

Unfortunate Translations

Some Versions read that Jesus was exalted so that men could repent and be forgiven – that is, given the opportunity to do so. Here are some of those Versions.

- “. . . so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven.” NLT
- “. . . so that the people of Israel would have an opportunity for repentance, and for their sins to be forgiven.” LIVING
- “. . . so that Israel could have the opportunity to change their hearts. Then God could forgive their sins.” IE
- “. . . so that the people of Israel would turn back to him and be forgiven.” CEV

These are a total misrepresentation of the text and reflect the flawed theology of the compilers of the versions in question.

TO ISRAEL

“. . . to Israel . . .” Other versions read, “the people of Israel,” GWN

For those unacquainted with the New Covenant, it may sound peculiar that Jesus was exalted by God’s right hand to give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel . The benefits of Christ’s ministry are not intended to be limited to Israel, as Peter himself proclaimed on the day of Pentecost. “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off , even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). However, the promise of a Savior was given to Israel , and “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). A brief rehearsal of the divine reasoning on this matter will suffice to clarify it.

- The whole world is blessed through the Seed of Abraham (Gen 22:18; Acts 3:25).
- The promise of the Messiah was to come through Abraham , the progenitor of the Jewish race – “the father of circumcision” (Rom 4:9-12).
- Jesus is the “the Son of Abraham ” (Matt 1:1).
- In His incarnation, Jesus took upon Himself “the seed of Abraham ” (Heb 2:16).
- The New Covenant was made “with the house Israel and the house of Judah ” (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:8). It is also said to have been made “with the house of Israel” (Heb 8:10).
- All of the Messianic promises pertained to “the Israelites ” (Rom 9:4).
- The “ fathers ” (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), through whom the promise came, were

all Israelites (Rom 9:5).

It is to be understood that the Jewish tree is here considered with its subsidiary branches which are, by the grace of God, grafted in among the natural branches.

Salvation is “of the Jews ” (John 4:22).

- Israel is depicted as a natural olive tree into which the Gentiles, who are “wild by nature,” were grafted (Rom 11:24).

- The Israelites lineage is supporting the converted Gentiles, and they are partaking of the root and fatness of their tree , after they were “grafted in among them” (Rom 11:17).

- Prior to their conversion, Gentile believers were described as “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise ” (Eph 2:12-13). Now, however, these very people are “no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints” (Eph 2:19).

- In Christ, however, we have been brought near, and have been joined to the Israelites to make of the two “one new man” (Eph 2:14-17).

- Gentile believers are grafted in “ among them ,” and are partakers “ with them ” (Rom 11:17).

When Peter says that Jesus has been exalted to “give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins,” he is declaring the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah and the New Covenant – both of which were made to Israel. It is to be understood that the Jewish tree is here considered with its subsidiary branches which are, by the grace of God, grafted in among the natural branches.

Thu boasting is altogether excluded. The Jews cannot boast because they themselves crucified the “Prince of life.” The Gentiles cannot boast, because they have become a part of this marvelous salvation “contrary to nature” (Rom 11:24). Therefore we can say, “For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:32-33). Jew and Gentile owe it all to Jesus! Neither one was deserving of redemption. Both of them are recipients of mercy.

WE ARE HIS WITNESSES

“ 32a And we are His witnesses of these things . . . ”

Peter now appeals to two witnesses, for this is the Divine manner, for everything that has been revealed. The law established the principle, applying it to the enforcement of the death penalty. We find, however, that it was not limited to that application.

- **THE LAW.** “ At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses , shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death” (Deut 17:6).

- **THE LORD JESUS, #1.** “But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established ” (Matt 18:16).

- **THE LORD JESUS, #2.** “And yet if I judge, My judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me. It is also written in your law, that the testimony of two men is true. I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me” (John 8:16-18).

- **PAUL, #1.** “This is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three

witnesses shall every word be established ” (2 Cor 13:1).

• **PAUL, #2.** “Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses ” (1 Tim 5:19).

A Proper Use of Scripture

From the standpoint of revelation, they were having fellowship with both the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit was also directing them into all truth, recalling to their minds the words of Jesus, and showing them things to come. The great mysteries related to the salvation of God were revealed to them through the Holy Spirit, constituting them true witnesses.

Those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord are required to handle “accurately the word of truth” NASB (2 Tim 2:15). The matter of two or three witnesses is a case in point. The Law applied the rule to the enforcement of capital punishment. Jesus applied it to an approach to resolving a dispute between brethren. Jesus also applied it to the confirmation of His own Sonship. Paul applied it to dealing with a Corinthian situation on different occasion. He also applied it to the matter of receiving an accusation against an elder. In these you have classic examples of handling the Word of God correctly. Such handling requires that the basic intention of divine utterance be comprehended.

Peter now affirms that there are two witnesses to the truth of his word concerning Jesus Christ. First, the apostles themselves are witnesses – eye witnesses. Second, the Holy Spirit is the confirming witness that makes the Gospel irrefutable.

WE ARE HIS WITNESSES

“And we are His witnesses . . .” Other versions read, “we are witnesses,” NASB “we are the witnesses,” MRD “we are records,” PNT “we are His records,” TNT “We saw all of these things happen,” IE and “We are here to tell you about all this.” CEV

A witness is someone with firsthand knowledge of a matter, for so the word means: “as one who declares facts directly known to himself; (a) from firsthand knowledge or (b) from firsthand experience.” FRIBERG The knowledge acquired can be through revelation – i.e., independent of fleshly senses. It can also be something experienced through the senses of sight, touch, and hearing. In the case of the apostles, all of these apply.

From the standpoint of the senses, John confessed, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard , which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon , and our hands have handled , of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it , and bear witness, and show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:1-3).

From the standpoint of revelation, they were having fellowship with both the Father and the Son (1 John 1:3). The Holy Spirit was also directing them into all truth (John 16:13a), recalling to their minds the words of Jesus (John 14:26), and showing them things to come (John 16:13b). The great mysteries related to the salvation of God were revealed to them through the Holy Spirit, constituting them true witnesses. As it is written: “Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:4-5).

“We Are His Witnesses”

Peter had also affirmed this on the day of Pentecost: “This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we

all are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). He said it again at the house of Cornelius: “And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 10:39). He also told the household of Cornelius that the risen Christ appeared “Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us , who did eat and drink with Him after he rose from the dead” (Acts 10:41).

Before He returned to heaven, Jesus told these men they would be His witnesses. “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48). “And ye also shall bear witness , because ye have been with Me from the beginning” (John 15:27). “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Paul wrote that the message of God’s great salvation was first spoken by the Lord, then confirmed by those who had heard Him: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him ” (Heb 2:3).

We learn several things about these witnesses from these texts – witnesses that were appointed.

- They were Christ’s witnesses.
- They saw the risen Christ, and heard Him speak.
- They were witnesses of His ministry prior to His death.
- They were witnesses chosen by God.
- They ate and drank with Him after He had risen from the dead.
- They were witnesses because they had been with Jesus from the beginning.
- They were witnesses because the Holy Spirit had come upon them.
- They were confirming witnesses, attesting to the words that Jesus spoke.

These, then, were credible witnesses. They only said what they had seen and heard. They were chosen by God, commissioned by Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. They could not possibly have any greater credentials than these.

No one else in Christ is a witness in the sense of the apostles. They stand unique among men, having received firsthand knowledge of the things contained in the Gospel. In their understanding of Christ and the Gospel, all other members of Christ’s body must begin with the words of the apostles. No additional or higher view of Christ and redemption will be made known independently of them. That is why they are referred to as “the foundation” upon which the church is built (Eph 2:20).

The Implication of This Fact

If this view of the apostles is true – and it is a revealed view – then it is a transgression of unspeakable magnitude for an extended ignorance of apostolic doctrine to exist within the professed church. How is it possible to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and live unto Him while remaining willingly ignorant of the message of His ambassadors? Jesus Himself spoke of those who would believe on Him “through their word” (John 17:21). Jesus said to His disciples, “He that receiveth you receiveth Me ” (Matt 10:40). And again, “ He that heareth you heareth Me ; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me ; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16). And again, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me ; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (John 13:20).

What can be said of professing Christians who, after many years, are woefully ignorant of the teaching of Paul, Peter, and John? How is it that countless numbers of people within the professing church are unlearned in the epistles (Romans through Jude). Or, is there a person of sound mind who does not know that such ignorance so prevails within the professing church that is it mind boggling!

We are living in a generation that has rejected the witness of the apostles. It is accessible to them, but they have thrust it from them, just as surely as those in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:46). Churches are not demanding that their preachers deliver apostolic doctrine. In so doing, they are classing themselves with the Jewish council of our text, who were forbidding the apostles to bear witness. It is a situation of such magnitude that there are no words to adequately describe it. It is totally inexcusable, because the God of heaven has made a way for the witness to be given, yet men have refused it, and “accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires” NASB (2 Tim 4:3)

OF THESE THINGS

“ . . . of these things . . . ” Other versions read, “ to these things,” NKJV “ concerning these things,” GENEVA “of these events ,” NET “to this ,” NJB “ as to these things,” WEYMOUTH “to these matters ,” PHILLIPS “about all this ,” CEV and “of these words .” EMTV

The apostles were not social reformers. They were not dispensers of domestic answers. They were not political

reactionists. Whatever they said on such matters was certainly true, but it was always secondary, and they made sure the people knew that was the case. Their accent was not on life in this world, but on things directly related to Jesus Christ – who He is, what he had done, and what He is doing. That was the heart and core of their message. It is what they emphasized, and accounted for the vast majority of their words.

“These things” specifically pertain to Christ’s death, resurrection, and enthronement. At some point, all “sound doctrine” ties into “these things” (1 Tim 1:10; 2 Tim 4:3; Tit 1:9; 2:1). If there are points or issues that do not have an essential and obvious association with Christ’s death, resurrection, or enthronement, then such teachings are, by default, and at the best, incidental. They cannot be allowed to become an emphasis, point of stress, or accent – no matter how critical they may appear. God has placed the theological exclamation mark after Jesus – and Jesus alone. Everything else is, at the very best, secondary, and it is possible that they are even further down the doctrinal ladder than that.

It ought to be noted that it is questionable that there are any valid experts, or skillful teachers, in Christ’s body who are not well acquainted with the implications of Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation. I do not know how it is possible to establish that anyone in Christ has in any way excelled if these things are not known. If the catalyst to true excellence is absent, it is not possible for excellence to exist.

We know this is the case because growth – which is the path to real excellence – has directly to do with Jesus Himself. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ ” (Eph 4:15). This is also associated with the knowledge of Him, or acquaintance and familiarity with Him. As it is written, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ” (2 Pet 3:18). This “knowledge” has very much to do with the “apostles’ doctrine,” for therein is contained the required elements for spiritual growth. There is nothing – absolutely nothing – that can be known of Jesus independently of “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9). Properly perceived, “doctrine” is teaching, or the communication of the mind of the Lord in words. Doctrine cannot be perceived by the emotion, or intuition, or feeling. It also integrates with perception or understanding, which is the engine of effective motivation, being directly related to

faith – i.e., “by faith we understand” (Heb 11:3). Faith does come “by hearing” – the communication of the truth of God in words (Rom 10:17).

Satisfactory Resolutions

Furthermore, there are no satisfactory resolutions of any issue that do not directly relate to Christ’s death, resurrection, and enthronement – “these things.” Those who, in the name of Christ, are marketing tips, procedural secrets, and various fleshly routines, have no place in the body of Christ. They are spokesmen for the world, not for God, being imposters in the church. We know this is the case because God is speaking to us “by His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb 1:2). Whoever does not speak in concert with what Jesus said cannot be from Him. He cannot be represented by anyone who speaks differently than He did, or places the accent where He did not place it.

We have a remarkable record of the teachings of Jesus in the Gospels. That revelation contains no word from Jesus that addressed the issues of His day as men are prone to do today. That record, joined together with the personal presence and words of Jesus Himself, comprised “the things” of which the apostles were witnesses. Their teaching was within the perimeter of Jesus.

THE HOLY SPIRIT IS A WITNESS

“32b . . . and so is also the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “and so also is the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “and so is the Holy Spirit,” NASB “and the Holy Spirit also ,” DARBY “yea, and the Holy Ghost ,” GENEVA “as is the Holy Spirit,” NAB “The Holy Spirit has shown you that we are telling you the truth!” IE “and the Holy Spirit is also,” AMPLIFIED and “we and the Holy Spirit .” GNB

The rule for establishing testimony is “two or three witnesses.” Technically, the apostles themselves, twelve in number, exceeded this requirement. Yet, that was not adequate for the occasion. There needed to be a witness from heaven, as there was in Jesus’ ministry. The Lord said of the attestation of Himself, “But I have greater witness than that of John : for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me , that the Father hath sent me. And the Father Himself, which hath sent Me, hath borne witness of Me” (John 5:36-37). There were three witnesses: John, Jesus’ his works, and the Father Himself. Jesus narrowed it down even further. “ I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me” (John 8:18).

When we are speaking of the Gospel of Christ, witnesses from both heaven and earth must be found – and they must be in total agreement. If heaven does not support what a man says in Jesus’ name, then it is not to be received. In this day of salvation, this has specific reference to the Word of God, or the Scriptures – in particular “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10).

Under the Old Covenant, this principle was stated this way: “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them ” (Isa 8:20). Therefore, those whose message cannot be confirmed by Divine testimony are unilluminated people – “there is no light in them.” They are, by default, walking in darkness. That is why they have a misplaced emphasis. They are not to be heard, but are to be abandoned, or left (Matt 15:14; Rom 16:17; 2 Tim 3:5). So far as the body of Christ is concerned, they are not worthy of a hearing.

The Spirit only bears witness to the truth, for He is “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17); 15:26), and guides men “into all truth” (John 16:13). It is therefore Him that must validate the message. He will not corroborate a false message. Therefore, if His witness is missing, the message is not to be received.

Let me be clear on this matter. The message that the apostles were preaching, and the message of

which the Holy Spirit bore witness, were the same message. There was not a variance between the witness of the apostles and the witness of the Holy Spirit. That itself is a most remarkable circumstance, for, by nature, men and the Spirit are fundamentally disagreed. This is because “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). Furthermore, “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14).

Notwithstanding this impossible circumstance, if the Holy Spirit can be found within men, they will no longer be at enmity with God. They will be able to receive the things of the Spirit of God, and discern them. This is precisely what had happened to the apostles. They had been empowered by the Person of the Holy Spirit to speak in strict comportsment with His mind – just as Jesus had promised (Acts 1:8).

The apostles drew the same conclusion that the Spirit did, that men ought to repent and obtain the remission of sins. Knowing that these were absolutely essential, yet totally beyond the reach of the natural man, the apostles declared that Jesus had been exalted to give them both.

From this, we gain some understanding of the witness of the Holy Spirit – what He is testifying, or speaking about. Peter had been speaking about Jesus Christ, particularly of His death (Acts 2:23,36; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:20), resurrection (Acts 2:24,32; 3:15,26; 4:10; 5:30), and exaltation (Acts 2:30-31,33; 3:13; 4:11-12; 5:31).

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came, He would not speak concerning Himself, but would testify of the Christ. “But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me” (John 15:26). And again, “Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall he speak: and He will show you things to come. He shall glorify Me: for He shall receive of Mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are Mine: therefore said I, that He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:13-15).

Those, therefore, who preach a Gospel that emphasizes the Holy Spirit are preaching an erroneous Gospel – “another Gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). If the Holy Spirit, according to Christ’s own word, “will not speak on His own,” how could He possibly bless a Gospel that is primarily about Him instead of the One whom the Spirit is expounding? That is not even to mention the more absurd gospels that center in health, wealth, prosperity, successful living, dietary practices, various forms of philanthropy, etc. Such gospels may very well be supported by statistics, the writings of men, social analysts, and experts in human behavior. However, the Holy Spirit will not bear witness to them, confirm them, or persuade men that they are true.

In our text, however, the apostles and the Spirit were witnessing the same thing. The apostles drew the same conclusion that the Spirit did, that men ought to repent and obtain the remission of sins. Knowing that these were absolutely essential, yet totally beyond the reach of the natural man, the apostles declared that Jesus had been exalted to give them both. In this declaration they were fulfilling the word of the Lord Jesus, “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name” (Luke 24:47).

How is it that repentance and remission of sins can be preached? Ordinarily, men would think of these as things to be exhorted or commanded, not preached, proclaimed, heralded, or published. The answer is found in the preaching referenced in this text: “Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). That is the preaching to which Jesus referred. This does not mean men are not to be commanded to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). It does mean that the fact that Jesus has been exalted to give both of those to men provides the incentive to “call upon the name

of the Lord.”

The reality of repentance and the remission of sins is strictly owing to Jesus being exalted for the purpose giving them. Their origin, experience, and effectiveness cannot be ultimately traced to the human will. For those who experiencing repentance and forgiveness, the Spirit will confirm this is true.

THE SPIRIT IS GIVEN TO THOSE WHO OBEY JESUS

“ 32c . . . whom God hath given to them that obey Him.”

While there remains much confusion in our time concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit, those who are taught by the Spirit will not allow such ignorance to either rise or be sustained. In actuality, confusion concerning the Holy Spirit is either owing to His absence, or to Him being quenched or grieved.

Peter will now associate the witness of the Holy Spirit with His indwelling. That is, His testimony is realized from within. His testimony – the one of which Peter now speaks – is not an overt one. It is not one of sensation, sight, or feeling. The effectiveness of Christ’s death, the reality of His exaltation, and His post-exaltation activities be confirmed by neither sight nor touch. There is no fleshly sensation or feeling that can validate these realities. I say these things because Peter is declaring that the Holy Spirit also witnesses to the truth of what He has been affirming about Jesus.

I fear that very much of what is being said in our time about the Holy Spirit has little to do with Christ’s death and exaltation. However, the real ministry of the Spirit has everything to do with them. Now, inspired Peter will identify the Holy Spirit with people, and declare what preceded that identity.

WHOM GOD HATH GIVEN

“ . . . whom God hath given . . .” Other versions read, “whom God has given ,” NKJV “whom God giveth ,” MRD “whom God gave ,” YLT “who is given by God,” LIVING “Whom God has bestowed ,” AMPLIFIED “which God gives ,” PHILLIPS and “who is God's gift . CEV

The words “hath given” come from a single Greek word – **e;dwken** (ed-ok-ev). Etymologically, this word is defined as a “verb indicative aorist active 3rd person singular.” GINGRICH Broken down, that means the following.

- The giving of the Spirit is something that a Person does – it is not something that occurs automatically, or without some personal intervention (verb).
- It indicates a particular deed or denoted act – that is, this is not a general condition, but a specific one (indicative).
- It refers to something that actually takes place – an experience. This is not speaking of what can be given, but what IS given (aorist).
- It is something characterized by action, as compared to a mere contemplation or speculation. This is not an idea, but the declaration of a very real human experience (active).
- This truth is being spoken by someone other than the One giving the gift, and in reference to those who receive it, not in reference to himself alone (3 rd person).
- This also refers to something that takes place in individuals, as compared with groups (singular).

“Whom”

The word “Whom” further confirms that the Holy Spirit is a Person, not a mere force or form of

impersonal power – like gravity, centrifugal force, etc. The Holy Spirit is consistently portrayed in association with Personality and intelligence.;

- The Spirit can be “grieved” (Eph 4:30).
- The “mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27).
- He testifies (John 15:26).
- He reveals (Eph 1:17).
- He bears witness with our spirit (Rom 8:16).
- He intercedes for us (Rom 8:26-27).
- He speaks (Acts 13:2).
- He leads (Rom 8:13-14).
- He searches out the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10).
- He enables the redeemed to know the things God has prepared for those who love Him (1 Cor 2:12).
- He washes, sanctifies, and justifies (1 Cor 6:11).
- He gives the “word of wisdom” and “the word of knowledge” (1 Cor 12:8).
- He is characterized by “ministry” (2 Cor 3:8).
- He causes progressive change in those who are in Christ (2 Cor 3:18).
- He causes intelligent cries in the elect (Gal 4:6).
- He sheds the love of God abroad in our hearts (Rom 5:5).
- His power enables men to abound in hope (Rom 15:13).
- A person can lie to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3).
- The Holy Spirit evaluates what is good (Acts 15:28).

These will suffice to confirm the nature of the Spirit’s person, character and work within. They also confirm the matters with which the Spirit is concerned.

“Hath Given”

On the day of Pentecost, Peter spoke of the Holy Spirit as someone to be received: “ye SHALL receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (2:38). Now, however, he speaks of the Spirit as a gift that has already been given. This narrows down the persons to whom the confirming witness of the Spirit is given. Those who have received the Holy Spirit will know what he is talking about. Others will not.

TO THEM THAT OBEY HIM

“ . . . to them that obey Him.” Other versions read, “ those who obey Him,” NKJV “those who keep His laws,” BBE “them that believe in Him ,” MRD “those obeying Him,” YLT “those who obeyed Him,” IE “those who keep on obeying Him,” ISV “those who practice obedience ,” WILLIAMS “those who obey His commands ,” PHILLIPS “ the ones obeying Him,” ALT “everyone who obeys God ,” CEV and “ all that obey Him.” DOUAY

“Obey” is used here in the sense of the New Covenant – interpreted under grace, not law. Under the Law itself, obedience was not associated with faith, for “the law is not based on faith,” NIV or “the Law does not rest on faith [does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith]” AMPLIFIED (Gal 3:12).

In Christ, obedience has three notable qualities, clearly distinguishing it from the administration of the Law.

- In Christ, obedience proceeds from faith. Therefore it is called referred to as “the obedience to the faith,” or, “the obedience that comes from faith” NIV (Rom 16:26; 1:5). This kind of obedience was first found in Abraham, of who, it is written, “By faith Abraham . . . obeyed” (Heb 11:8).

- The obedience of the saints is traced to the influence of the Holy Spirit Himself. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22). And again, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Pet 1:2).

- Among the saints, obedience is also rendered from the heart, for the people have been made “willing” in the day of Christ’s power (Psa 110:3). As it is written, “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom 6:17).

Here, the word “obey” is very significant. The word itself is translated from the Greek word **peiqarcou/sin** (pie-tharx-oosin). Lexically, the word means, “to obey a ruler or authority . . . be obedient . . . hearken to one advising something,” THAYER “listen to,” UBS “to submit to authority or reason by obeying,” LOUW-NIDA and “be obedient.” GINGRICH The English word “obey” (which is assumed in the Greek definition) means “to follow commands or guidance; to conform to or comply with . . . to behave obediently.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

This kind of obedience is not attended with recalcitrance or a hesitancy to do what is commanded. It is not obeying with teeth and fist clinched, desiring to do otherwise. It is not yielding to the will of another simply to avoid pain and sorrow. This is obedience that gladly yields to the Lord. As it is written, “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41).

But there is something else about this word that is noteworthy. From the standpoint of the rules of language, this word is in the following mood: verb participle present active dative. That is, it is:

- Something that is done (verb).
- Obedience that is genuine, combining action with will (participle).
- Obedience that continues (present active).
- Obedience that is intentional and directed toward the Lord (dative).

The particular obedience of which Peter speaks is what attends coming into Christ in the first place – initial obedience. But that obedience does not end there. Rather, it commences when we are baptized into Christ, and continues throughout the life of the saved. Doctrinally it would be stated like this: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him” (Col 2:6). A description of this kind of obedience is provided in the book of Phillipians. “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).

Our text states that God has given the Holy Spirit to those who have obeyed HIM – not the church, but HIM ! This is the kind of obedience produced by faith. It is also the kind that continues on. It is not our business to determine all of the people who possess this kind of obedience – which is the ONLY kind God accepts. The point here is that the Lord knows who is in this category, and never fails to give them His Holy Spirit.

Knowing that this promise was true, Peter spoke to those who were convicted on the day of

Pentecost, promising that if they would obey God, they would receive the Holy Spirit. “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ” (Acts 2:38). He then testified that this was the same Spirit the disciples had received, which was also promised by Joel. “ For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off , even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). The promise, as I have said, was delivered by Joel : “I will pour out My Spirit” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:16-18).

What shall we say, then, of those who affirm one can be saved and yet not have the Holy Spirit? What of the doctrine that states that receiving the Holy Spirit is apart from salvation itself? Such teaching is simply not true. It is the result of a rather significant theological tapestry that has been woven completely with the reasoning of men.

Ponder how clearly God has spoken about the matter of giving His Holy Spirit to all of His children.

- “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us ” (Rom 5:5).

- “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts ” (2 Cor 1:22).

- “Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit ” (2 Cor 5:5).

- “ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts , crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

- “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit ” (1 Thess 4:8).

- “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us ” (1 John 3:24).

- “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

It is this Spirit that confirms what the Gospel declares concerning Christ’s death, resurrection, and exaltation. He powerfully applies the truth to our hearts so that we know our sins are forgiven. He persuades us that we have been raised together with Him, and enjoy “the power of His resurrection.” He convinces our hearts that Jesus is the head over all things, and that there is no need to fear man, whose breath is in his nostrils.

It is tragic beyond description that many believers have been robbed of this witness because they have heard and embraced “another gospel.” The real Gospel is the truth which, when known, makes men free.

THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART

“ 33 When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them. ”

Surely the wonderful thoughts expressed by Peter will melt the stony hearts of the Jewish council. He had spoken similarly to those on the day of Pentecost, and 3,000 “gladly received” the word. Earlier, in the Temple, he had again spoken such words, and 5,000 men believed. Surely the Gospel will also do a work on these men.

CUT TO THE HEART

“When they heard that, they were cut to the heart . . .” Other versions read, “When they heard this, they were furious ,” NKJV “But when they heard this, they were cut to the quick ,” NASB “When

they heard this, they were enraged ,” NRSV “And when they heard these things, they burned with indignation ,” MRD “they became infuriated ,” NAB “And when they heard that, they clave asunder ,” PNT “they became very angry ,” IE “ Infuriated at getting this answer ,” WEYMOUTH “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and infuriated ,” AMPLIFIED and “But hearing, they were cut through [fig., infuriated].” ALT

The same word that brings consolation to humble and contrite hearts – the very same word – is “like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” to hard-hearted people (Jer 23:29). Jesus is the Stone upon which men can fall and be broken, in order that God might recreate them. This same Jesus, however, is the Stone that will “grind. . . to powder” those who refuse to receive Him (Matt 21:44). True Gospel preachers are “a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved AND in them that perish.” In one they promote life, and in the other they promote death. As it is written, “To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:16).

For some, this is too difficult to assimilate. After all, they reason, God “is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9). Of course, they pass over the fact that Peter is speaking about God’s longsuffering toward His own people, for, says he, “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . . but is longsuffering to usward, not willing . . .” It is quite true that elsewhere it is written that God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). This is the motivation for the saints praying earnestly “for all that are in authority; that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (verse 2).

The point to be seen here is that while we desire the salvation of all men, we are naive about the matter. There are those who are perishing, whose situation is actually worsened when they hear the Gospel. In such cases, they go from “death unto death.” That is the kind of people that Peter is facing. Yet, he does not diminish the powerful Gospel he is preaching, or tailor it so it will not be offensive to these men. Instead, he lets the Gospel do its work, preaching it without compromise, while holding out the Gospel scepter to those with honest and good hearts.

It is this uncompromising approach that causes these wicked men to reveal their real character. Their response is pushed out of them by the words Peter has delivered.

Notice the difference between these men and those who gladly received the word on the day of Pentecost. These men were “cut to the heart.” On Pentecost, the people are “pricked in their heart” (2:37).

- The word “pricked” comes from a word meaning, “To prick, pierce; metaphorically, to pain the mind sharply, agitate it vehemently: used especially of the emotion of sorrow.” THAYER In this case, the meaning is that what the people heard produced great sorrow, regret, and grief over what they had done. Therefore, they aggressively sought a remedy: “What shall we do?”

- The word “cut,” as used in this text, comes from a word meaning, “to saw asunder or in twain, to divide by a saw,” THAYER and “strictly divide with a saw; hence cut to the quick, infuriate; only passive in the NT be infuriated, be enraged.” FRIBERG

Those who were “pricked in their hearts” became sorrowful over their transgression, called upon the name of the Lord, and experienced recovery and a new heart. The council heard of the same Jesus, were “cut to the heart,” became spiritually disoriented, and sought to kill the ones delivering the message. Like a two edged sword, the Word pierced into their inner most being, dividing asunder (Heb 4:12), or sawing in two their hearts, so that their corrupt thoughts spilled out to their own condemnation.

It is ever true that the same Gospel brings out the honesty and goodness of tender hearts, while it

also brings out the corruption and depravity of wicked hearts. There is not a special Gospel to be delivered to those who love darkness rather than light. It is the same Gospel that is delivered to them, causing their depravity to surface.

How wicked and malicious can men get who do not receive the Gospel? What kind of capacity is there in men to try and rid themselves of those who deliver a message that condemns sin, yet offers salvation in the name of Jesus?

In view of this circumstance, you can see the seriousness of toning down the Gospel, or ignoring it altogether, in order to avoid offending men. Such approaches deliberately avoid the divinely appointed means of distinguishing those with honest and good hearts from those who lack them.

Jesus taught that the means of distinguishing the conditions of the heart was the sowing of the Word – particularly the Gospel. The response of men to that Gospel tells what they really are, all appearance notwithstanding.

TOOK COUNSEL TO SLAY THEM

“ . . . and took counsel to slay them.” Other versions read, “and plotted to kill them,” NKJV “and were intending to slay them,” NASB “and wanted to put them to death,” NIV “and wanted to kill them,” NRSV “and minded to slay them,” ASV “and had a mind to put them to death,” BBE “and they thought to put them to death,” DOUAY “and thought of putting them to death,” MRD “and decided to kill them,” NLT “and sought means to slay them,” PNT “and were taking counsel to slay them,” YLT “They started to make plans to kill the apostles,” IE “they were disposed to kill the Apostles,” WEYMOUTH and “and began plotting to execute them.” ALT

How wicked and malicious can men get who do not receive the Gospel? What kind of capacity is there in men to try and rid themselves of those who deliver a message that condemns sin, yet offers salvation in the name of Jesus? Some might be disposed to think that a cultured people with good laws and a strong religious persuasion would be exempt from such malicious conduct toward the righteous.

There is no need to speculate about this matter, for we have an inspired historical record before us. Some of these very people had plotted and carried out the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, who was truth incarnate, and in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. Now they conspire to kill the apostles, seeking means to carry out that wicked desire.

These were not barbaric Romans, accustomed to the blood baths of the gladiators, beholding men being killed as a form of entertainment. They were not idolaters like the worshipers of the idol Molech (Lev 18:21). Instead, these were the people who had been chosen and cultured by God Himself. They had received a superior Law, yet had not learned from it. Of that law Moses said, “And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deut 4:8). Yet, at the announcement of the “wonderful works of God” – the very God who had given them their Law – their hearts had boiled over with anger, and they sought to put the messengers to death.

Jesus once told that generation of leaders, “Wherefore ye be witnesses unto yourselves, that ye are the children of them which killed the prophets” (Matt 23:31). Later, Stephen would say of them, “Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers” (Acts 7:52). Still later, Paul also said of them, “Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess 2:15).

Let no man question what sin does to the hearts of people, or the depths to which they can sink

when under the control of the wicked one. Jesus said to the leaders of His day, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). In that word we have a revelation of the “bottomless pit” of human nature. That is reason enough to crucify the flesh, with its affections and lusts, and put on the whole armor of God.

CONCLUSION

When the Holy Child Jesus was brought to the Temple, to be dedicated according to the Law, aged Simeon pronounced a prophesy over Him. It was a word that is not often heard to day, but it still holds true, for Simeon was moved by the Holy Spirit to speak it. “Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel ; and for a sign which shall be spoken against . . . that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Luke 2:34-35). Other versions read, “ appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed . . . that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed” NASB “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” NIV and “this child will be the cause of the downfall and the lifting up of great numbers of people in Israel, and he will be a sign against which hard words will be said . . . so that the secret thoughts of men may come to light” BBE

This passage is a sterling example of the fulfillment of this prophesy. To be sure, the Lord Jesus Christ is “the Savior of the world” (John 4:42; 1 John 4:14). However, in the process of being the Savior, another ministry was also fulfilled. He is the Point at which the destiny of men is determined. It is through Him that hearts are revealed and intentions are made known. Hard hearts are revealed through Him as well as tender ones. This is not something that simply occurred – it is an appointed ministry, and we should not be surprised to see it taking place. Jesus has been “set,” KJV “appointed,” NASB and “destined” BBE for both the rising and falling of many!

In our text, Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin, and the elders of Israel were made known through the preaching of Jesus. In order to find the contents of

Those who pretend to have professional understanding of men, woman, children, etc., are only guessing. They are attempting to diagnose life with tools that are themselves lifeless. Whatever seeming good they may appear to do is, at the best, short-lived, and has no relation whatsoever to the life that is in Christ Jesus.

their hearts, Peter and the apostles did not interrogate these men. They did not research their writings, if they had any, or survey the people concerning their thoughts about them. Rather, they preached Jesus, and the people who heard were made known. Those who believed were raised up. Those who did not were thrown down, falling as they were appointed to do (1 Pet 2:8).

The objection of the Jewish leaders to the preaching of Jesus was not merely the expression of a doctrinal preference. It was a revelation of corrupt and defiled hearts, and of minds that were hostile against the God of heaven.

When Jesus is not preached, the means by which the hearts of men are made known is withdrawn. What men really are cannot be deciphered by means of human wisdom. There are no worldly experts in human behavior, notwithstanding the claims of students of the human psyche. We know this is the case because of what has been confirmed on the subject: “what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him” (1 Cor 2:11). That text is not a probe of the human race to see if any experts in “the things of a man” are out there! It is a rhetorical question that confirms “the things of a man” cannot be known independently of God Himself. Therefore the reasoning continues, “even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:11). If it is possible for one man to know the thoughts of another man, then it is also possible for men to know “the things of

God” without them being revealed.

Those who pretend to have professional understanding of men, woman, children, etc., are only guessing. They are attempting to diagnose life with tools that are themselves lifeless. Whatever seeming good they may appear to do is, at the best, short-lived, and has no relation whatsoever to the life that is in Christ Jesus.

As we go through this marvelous book, you should pick up on the attitude of holy people toward the wisdom of this world. They never appeal to it, or draw from it in their proclamation of the truth of Christ. They are never depicted as trusting in it, nor do they ever recommend it to the people of God. Their reasoning never reflects worldly patterns of thought, nor do they ever attach significant value to the temporal things around which worldly wisdom revolves. The thrust of their message is clear, and its effects are evident.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #25

GAMALIEL GIVES HIS COUNSEL

INTRODUCTION

Because the work of the apostles had not yet been completed in Jerusalem, God will not allow it to be thwarted by their enemies. The Lord Jesus has been given the reins to the Kingdom, together will all power in heaven and earth. He is engaged in the building of His church, and will not allow that work to be thwarted by the devil, whom He soundly defeated in His death (Heb 2:14). The work is under way as His ambassadors are sounding forth the message, in which the power

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- **THEN GAMALIEL STOOD UP (5:34)**
- **TAKE HEED WHAT YOU INTEND YO DO (5:35)**
- **THINK ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED RECENTLY (5:36-37)**
- **LET THESE MEN ALONE (5:38)**
- **YOU CANNOT FIGHT AGAINST GOD (5:39)**
- **TO HIM THEY AGREED (5:40a)**
- **THEY BEAT THEM AND LET THEM DO (5:40b)**
- **THEY LEFT REJOICING (5:41)**
- **THEY CONTINUED TO TEACH AND PREACH (5:42)**
- **CONCLUSION**

given to Him has been invested. While the council was moved with envy, and could not reason in a sound manner, God will use a man with a greater degree of judgment than the high priest to bring some order to the trial. This will be a man who is acquainted with Scripture, and is an expert in the Law. He will also be a man of discernment, who has taken note of extraordinary events, and been able to correlate them with his knowledge of the ways of God.

Even though the high priest and Sadducees were wicked men, they will yield to the wisdom of the man who speaks to them. This is the working of the Lord, and must be perceived as such. This was not a matter of the council simply yielding to greater wisdom. It was rather the Lord overturning their intentions in His own inscrutable wisdom. Yet, it has every appearance of being the triumph of sound reasoning. There is much to be seen here that will encourage our hearts to trust the Lord in all kinds of circumstance.

THE PRECEDENT APPROACH

There are a number of things being revealed in the book of Acts. It is not a mere history book, or the establishment of a pattern to be emulated or followed. There are, to be sure, precedents in this record of events. A precedent is a certain order, arrangement, or significance that took place in previous times. However, it is essential to know the type, or kind, of those precedents. They are not to be viewed as primarily organizational or procedural. That is, the book of Acts is not fundamentally about the pattern or organization of the church. Neither is it intended to establish a single body of words through which men are told how to be saved. For example, there are a number of statements made concerning the appropriation of salvation and the remission of sins. All of them are harmonious, yet no single one of them is intended to be the official approach or nomenclature of the church. Here are some examples of what was said.

- “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21)
- “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).
- “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

What we have in these statements is a record of a living approach to salvation. Each of them addressed men in a certain state, and dealt with circumstances as they were. The speaker had to discern where the people stood – whether or not they had actually believed, or been convicted of sin, or repented.

“And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:36-37).

- “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).
- “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).
- “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).
- “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16).

None of these statements was intended to be an all-inclusive formula for salvation. Nor, indeed, are men to merge them all together and come up with a general statement that includes them all. What we have in these statements is a record of a living approach to salvation. Each of them addressed men in a certain state, and dealt with circumstances as they were. The speaker had to discern where the people stood – whether or not they had actually believed, or been convicted of sin, or repented. Words that were delivered had to be “fitly spoken,” or appropriate for the occasion. Having said this, no man has been authorized to develop his own approach to appropriating salvation, disregarding the words that have been revealed about it. The mythical “sinner’s prayer,” or various “repeat after me” prayers, are cases in point. All of them conveniently ignore an assessment of where the people are, and how they ought to be directed.

If there is no discernment, it is quite possible for any of us accept as saved people who have not really Rom 10:16). Perhaps they have never “turned” from sin, or been “baptized into Christ,” or “called upon the name of the Lord.”

So far as the involvement of men is concerned, the Kingdom of God is driven by understanding – spiritual understanding. This includes some measure of comprehension concerning God, Christ,

salvation itself, and mankind. Without this understanding men are trying to build a house without the Lord – and it is written, “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it” (Psa 127:1).

WHAT IS CONTAINED IN ACTS

Having said this, we ought to note some of the things that are being revealed in this volume. There is more being made known than what took place among men.

- **JESUS IS BUILDING HIS CHURCH.** If we have eyes to see it, we can behold in this book Jesus building His church. He is at work in activities that are recorded, not only putting members into his body, but excluding others. It is His administration that we are seeing as He governs the affairs of men in the interest of bringing many sons to glory.

- **THE MINISTRY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** The manner in which the Holy Spirit is now working is also revealed. He is the liaison of Jesus, revealing the truth to the preachers, convicting the sinners, and comforting the saints. He is the power behind the Truth, producing results that glorify both God and Christ.

- **GOD HIMSELF IS MADE KNOWN.** The God of Scripture is being made known. We are beholding the meaning of Him being intolerant of iniquity, and merciful to the broken-hearted. His reaction to liars in the church is made known, as well as His care for the faithful. What the Prophets said of Him is being displayed in the affairs of men.

- **FALLEN MAN.** The nature of fallen men is also being manifested. The extent to which a sinner will go to suppress the truth is seen. The callousness of an unbelieving heart, and the brashness with which it moves men against believers are also made known.

- **REGENERATED MEN.** The nature of those who are a “new creation” is chronicled. How “newness of life” reacts under stress, threats, and when favor is granted are displayed. We behold what the saints do when they are threatened, and how they answer when they are interrogated by those who reject their message. Their response to heavenly direction is also seen.

- **THE TRUE CHURCH.** The manner of the collective church is also put into words. Their unity in heart and soul is revealed. Their consistency is seen in their steadfastness, recourse to prayer, and fellowship with one another.

WE MUST BE ALERT

Because of the remarkable nature of many of the recorded incidents, the significance of these lofty revelations can be easily overlooked. Should this occur, we will view much of what is written as related solely to the beginning of the church. We will tend to marvel that such things ever took place, rather than perceive them as confirming expressions of Divine life.

Indeed, there are things in this book that are unique – like Pentecost and the conversion of the household of Cornelius, to name two. These were spiritual epoches that will never be precisely duplicated again, even though much of what took place is characteristic of the continued work of the Lord. The latter – characteristic things – must be discerned, else we will, at the best, lapse into lifeless traditionalism. For example, rather than seeing the detailed manner in which the prayer of the early church was answered (chapter 4) as a standard procedure, it is to be perceived as confirmation that the Lord does, in fact, empower His church for what they have been given to do. When they resort to Him in the hour of need, they will obtain mercy and find grace to help.

WHAT WE WILL SEE IN THIS TEXT

There are several kingdom principles that will be seen in this text. A listing of a few of them will

assist us to be spiritually alert and able to perceive them.

- Those who have an understanding of Scripture are more qualified to give advice (verse 34).
- It is good to consider what we propose should be done (verse 35).
- A spiritual perception of current events can assist us in making sound judgment (verses 36-37).
- What men originate will come to an end (verse 38).
- What God initiates cannot be overthrown (verse 39a).
- Those who oppose God are actually fighting against Him (verse 39b).
- Suffering for Christ is associated with worthiness (verse 41).
- Joyful insight enables men to do the work God has assigned to them (verse 42).

THEN GAMALIEL STOOD UP

“ 5:34 Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.”

Care must be taken not to view this text as a mere record of history – i.e., the activities of men. God is present in the affairs of men, orchestrating things for His own glory. The Scriptures have considerable to say about this matter, and it is particularly relevant when it comes to issues relating to His salvation. We must never allow an academic approach to Scripture to rob us of this perspective.

- **THE LORD IS GOVERNOR.** “For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28).
- **HE IS WORKING IN THE EARTH.** “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12).
- **THE EARTH IS FILLED WITH HIS GLORY.** “And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3).
- **HE RAISES UP AND DEPOSES RULERS.** “. . . Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: and he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Dan 2:20-21).

In bringing many sons to glory, it is essential that He be in absolute control of every circumstance. At no point does His salvation depend upon the whims of men, nor is it threatened by the most fierce of all adversaries.

HE GIVES AUTHORITY TO WHOMEVER HE WILLS. “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will, and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan 4:17).

- **EVERYTHING IN THE EARTH IS HIS.** “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all” (1 Chron 29:11-12).
- **EVERYTHING ALIVE HAS BEEN PRESERVED BY HIM.** “Thou, even thou,

art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all; and the host of heaven worshippeth thee” (Neh 9:6).

• **HE RULES BY HIS POWER WHILE BEHOLDING THE NATIONS.** “He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah” (Psa 66:7).

• **EVERYTHING IS NAKED AND OPEN BEFORE HIM.** “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do ” (Heb 4:13).

All of these matters are particularly involved in the finishing of the work of salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ. In bringing many sons to glory, it is essential that He be in absolute control of every circumstance. At no point does His salvation depend upon the whims of men, nor is it threatened by the most fierce of all adversaries. Whatever freedom men may be imagined to possess, they are not free to overturn the purpose of God, thwart the work of His servants, or obscure His great salvation. The only power they have is what God has given them – and God can withdraw that whenever He wills.

In the case before us, the Lord will use a respected man to bring a halt to the present harassment of the apostles. God did not use this method to protect Jesus when He was delivered up, for the purpose He was working forbade such an action.

A PHARISEE NAMED GAMALIEL

“Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law . . .” Other versions read, “The one of the council stood up, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law .,” NKJV “But a Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law,” NRSV “But one of the Sanhedrin , a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a man of learning in the law ,” BBE “A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law . . . stood up in the Sanhedrin ,” CSV “But a certain man, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law . . . rose up in the council ,” DARBY “But a Pharisee named Gamaliel stood up . . . expert in Moses' Teachings ,” GWN “But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law ,” NLT “But one of their members , a Pharisee named Gamaliel (an expert on religious law),” LIVING and “But someone in the High Council having gotten up, a Pharisee, by name Gamaliel, a teacher of the Law.” ALT Gamaliel was not a visitor in this gathering, but was himself a member of the council, or Sanhedrin. He was also a Pharisee. Yet, he had not thoroughly adopted the views of this council, nor of the Pharisees . He was, in a sense, among the council, yet separate from it. He saw and understood more than the others.

His field of expertise was not human behavior, politics, or social trends. He was “a doctor of the law,” or “expert in the law of Moses.” The expression “doctor of the Law” comes from a compound Greek word – **nomodida,skaloj** (nom-o-did-ask-olos). The word means “teacher and interpreter of the law,” THAYER and “teacher of the law, interpreter of (the Mosaic system of) law,” FRIBERG

INTERPRETING THE LAW

A facet of one being an expert in the Law is its interpretation. That word, however, requires some further explanation. It does not refer to attaching a private meaning to the Scripture. In the words of Nehemiah, interpreting the Law is giving its “sense,” or “meaning” NIV (Neh 8:8). Strictly speaking, there is only one valid interpretation, or meaning, of Scripture. That meaning, when handled with wisdom, can be applied to a variety of circumstances. That was what was involved in Moses and other chosen men judging the people. It is said of them, “And they judged the people at all seasons: the hard causes they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves” (Ex 18:26). Difficult matters were issues in which the proper answer was not obvious to the people. Such

occasions required the judgment of someone who had a working knowledge of the Law, and knew how to associate it properly with the situation.

The Nature of Scripture

Scripture has a certain nature that must be discerned. It is not primarily a handbook of conduct. God has not given it to men only to tell them how to conduct their lives. Both the Person and purpose of God are inherent in Scripture. That is, it reflects who He is and what He is doing. Like certain traits of a master painter are found in all of his paintings, so the character of God is found in all of His works and words. He never speaks or works independently of His own character, nor expresses Himself in a manner that is not perfectly harmonious with who He is. His “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11) is also reflected in all of His ways, words, and works. All of His expressions are in strict concert with the purpose. In some way they are always related to what God has purposed in Christ Jesus, even though it may not be apparent to finite minds.

Scripture contains a record of Divine expressions, particularly as taking place in this world, among men.

There are a few references to Divine activities that took place outside of the creation itself and worldly history.

- The status of Christ’s Person prior to Him coming into the world (John 1:1-2).
- A conflict between holy angels and the “prince of Persia” (Dan 10:13-20).
- Satan and His angels being cast out of heaven (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev 12:7-9).
- A council between the Father and the Word regarding Him coming into the world (Psa 40:6-8; Heb 10:5-9).
- The reception of Jesus into heaven following His ascension (Dan 7:13-14; Mk 16:19).
- The enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God (Heb 1:3; 10:12).

Even in these cases, however, they are all related to God’s working among men. In fact, their relevance is seen in that association.

One of the great weaknesses of our time is the general approach that is being taken by Christianity as a whole. Man himself has become the focal point in nearly all religion. His problems are perceived as the ultimate arena in which God is determined to be made known. The Bible is seen as a textbook for human conduct, and the church is perceived as something like a hospital for debilitated humanity.

Permit me to say it again: God’s Person and purpose are reflected in all of Scripture. Where some perception of this is not seen, it is not possible to handle the Scriptures correctly.

The Liability of Our Times

One of the great weaknesses of our time is the general approach that is being taken by Christianity as a whole. Man himself has become the focal point in nearly all religion. His problems are perceived as the ultimate arena in which God is determined to be made known. The Bible is seen as a textbook for human conduct, and the church is perceived as something like a hospital for debilitated humanity. But not one of these is true. The Bible is primarily a revelation of God, and the church has been established to be His dwelling place – the “house of God” (1 Tim 3:15) “the Temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16-17), and the “habitation of God” through the Spirit (Eph 2:22). If we approach religion with any other emphasis, we will be carried by the tides of distraction into a place where Satan is more free to work.

No person can handle the Word of God correctly whose vision is dominated by human considerations – whether it is in the area of needs or solutions. This observation will become more evident as we consider the counsel of Gamaliel. He did not see in Scripture a solution to an aggravating problem, but the presence of a Sovereign God and the invincibility of His purpose.

Doctor of the Law

This word translated “doctor of the law,” or “teacher of the Law,” NKJV is found three times in Scripture.

- **SOME OPPONENTS OF JESUS.** “Doctors of the Law.” It is first applied to some officials who, together with the Pharisees, came to see Jesus. The occasion was when Jesus healed the impotent man lowered from the roof to His feet. At that time, these experts in the Law challenged Jesus’ ability to forgive sins (Luke 5:17-21).

- **A PERCEPTIBLE MAN.** “A doctor of the Law.” In the text we are considering, it is applied to a single individual who excelled his peers in his understanding of the law (Acts 5:39).

- **PRETENTIOUS TEACHERS.** “Desiring to be teachers of the Law.” It is also used by Paul to describe those who had usurped the position of teacher – who possessed no real understanding of the Law at all (1 Tim 1:7).

Gamaliel was an expert in the Law of Moses. As will be seen in this text, his expertise was not merely that of knowing what the text said, but of being able to correlate it with both history and circumstance. In modern vernacular, he was able to read between the lines, seeing the significance of the Scriptural record. He could take statements concerning God, and relate them to events that were recorded in Scripture. Then, having made this correlation, he could reason upon a contemporary event with greater precision than others.

Other Experts

There are other Scriptural experts mentioned in Scripture. Those who could handle the Word of God with precision and power.

- **SAMUEL.** Samuel had an understanding of the ways of God, and could explain to the people “the manner of the kingdom,” even writing it down in a book (1 Sam 10:25).

- **LEVITES.** Certain Levites of Nehemiah’s day were able to give “the sense” of Scripture, and cause the people “to understand the reading” (Neh 8:8).

- **LUKE.** Luke received a “perfect understanding” of the Gospel “from the very first,” and was able to correlate it with Moses and the Prophets (Luke 1:3).

- **APOLLOS.** Apollos was a man described as “mighty in the Scriptures,” being “instructed in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:24).

- **THE TWELVE APOSTLES.** The twelve Apostles were guided into all truth, having “the mystery of Christ” revealed to them (John 16:14; Eph 3:5).

- **PAUL.** Paul received unparalleled knowledge of “the mystery of Christ,” being able to expound it from the Scriptures (Eph 3:2-5).

- **ELDERS.** The Scriptures refer to diligent elders who “labor in the Word and in the doctrine” (teaching) (1 Tim 5:17).

- **PREACHERS AND TEACHERS.** Those who speak to others in the name of the Lord are admonished to give diligence to be men who handle the word of God correctly (2 Tim 2:15).

It appears that such men, though sorely needed, have never been very plentiful. In our text, among the Sanhedrin, a true expert in the Scriptures narrowed down to one person – Gamaliel. As will be seen, this expertness was not limited to familiarity with the text of Scripture itself. That quality was, indeed, resident, for no person can be an expert in something with which he is not acquainted.

The Contemporary Rarity of This Quality

I have observed over the years how exceedingly rare it is to find a preacher or teacher who is expert in Scripture. For the most part, this is the weakness of many Christian leaders. They often have more understanding in human sciences than in the Word of God. I have personally spoken with many preachers and teachers who readily acknowledged their weakness in Scriptural knowledge. If you have ever attended a preachers meeting, or a gathering of Christian leaders, you have no doubt also found this to be the case.

Well known Christian conventions rarely feature speakers who are expert in Scripture, and can handle the Word of God to the profit of the hearers. Modern views of religious experts are those who can present a compendium of the comments men have made about Scripture. However, few of them have a personal understanding to present.

If someone was to ask you who in our time was an expert in Scripture, who would come to your mind? If you have trafficked among truly godly people, you may be able to identify a few. The point I am making, is that such men are not plentiful – and most people know that. That circumstance might be somewhat acceptable during the infant-days of the church. Even then, however, its leaders could not be spiritual toddlers, unable to handle the Word of God. The apostles were not “unskillful in the word of righteousness” (Heb 5:13). That is because they had been with Jesus, and were filled with the Holy Spirit. What would lead anyone to imagine that as the church advanced through time it was God’s will for its leaders to be ignorant and unlearned in His ways and Word? Such a condition is completely unacceptable in any time. If the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16), and the Scriptures are the means through which men are made “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17), exactly where can a place made for a leader who cannot handle Scripture? If “patience and comfort” are administered through the Scriptures (Rom 15:4), how can a person who lacks expertise in them be propelled into a position of leadership? If what God has revealed is made known “by the Scriptures” (Rom 16:26), and if the church has been put upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20), what kind of religious system produces leaders who are not experts in the Scriptures?

What Is Known of Gamaliel?

If the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation (Rom 1:16), and the Scriptures are the means through which men are made “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17), exactly where can a place made for a leader who cannot handle Scripture?

We know very little of this man. The Scriptures do not have much to say about him, and even history is largely silent about him. What is here said of him is all we need to know. What we know from Scripture is as follows – taken from only two verses.

- He was a member of the Jewish council, or Sanhedrin (Acts 5:34).
- He was a Pharisee (Acts 5:34).
- He was an expert in the Law (Acts 5:34).
- He was held in high regard by the people (Acts 5:34).
- He tutored Paul in “the perfect manner of the Law” (Acts 22:3).

One historical commentator says of him, “The Jews celebrated him as ‘the glory of the law,’ the

first designated Rabban ‘our master.’ Son of rabbi Simeon, and grandson of Hillel; president of the Sanhedrin under Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius; he died 18 years before the fall of Jerusalem.” LIGHTFOOT COMMENTARY, FAUSSET, EASTON, AND SMITH BIBLE DICTIONARIES It is also said of him, “Ecclesiastical tradition makes him become a Christian, and be baptized by Peter and Paul (Phot. Cod. 171, page 199), together with his son Gamaliel, and with Nicodemus; and the Clementine Recognitions (1:65) state that he was secretly a Christian at this time.” MCCLINTOK & STRONG’S All commentators concede that these statements are exceedingly difficult to confirm, and therefore give no weight to them. They should not be merged with what the Spirit has said about Gamaliel.

HAD IN REPUTATION

“ . . . had in reputation among all the people, . . .” Other versions read, “ held in respect ,” NKJB “respected,” NIV “who was honored ,” NIV “of whom all people had a high opinion ,” BBE “ highly respected ,” GWN “had in auctorite,” TNT “ very popular ,” LIVING “highly esteemed ,” AMPLIFIED “held in great respect ,” AMPLIFIED and “ honorable .” ALT

Notice the caliber of man that was held in reputation – “a teacher of the law.” NKJV This was not a view of him that was held only by the Sanhedrin, but was how “all the people” considered him. The words “had in reputation” mean that Gamaliel was perceived as “valuable, precious, costly, of great value, held in high honor, and respected.” GINGRICH

Notwithstanding, a man like Gamaliel would certainly not be featured at any of the Christian conventions with which I am familiar. Imagine, if you can, a man being held in high regard within the church because of his expertise in Scripture. Such a view is hardly apparent at all, if, indeed, it can be proved to even exist. “The people” of our time have vaulted the organizers, entertainers, church builders, and motivators to places of prominence.

In the first part of 2007, a godly man in this area went to be with the Lord. For over sixty years he had been prominent among those who had an appetite for the Word of God. At his funeral, the school in which he had played a prominent place for several decades spoke kindly of him. Yet, even though he had a prodigious mind, and was very articulate and robust when he was over ninety years old, he was retired from the scholastic community over twenty years earlier. The newer students did not hold him in high regard, and did not want to take his classes. Their teachers, whoever they were, had not taught them to place a high value on such people. The student and faculty administration did not hold him in high regard, for they did not insist that those coming to a Christian college sit under his teaching. Local churches rarely asked him to preach. For the most part, he was not asked to speak at the brotherhood conventions, or featured at key gatherings. In other words, he was not “had in reputation.”

He did not speak as a mere scholar, or one that had an academic familiarity with the Law. Rather, he spoke as one who knew the intent of the Law, having some understanding of its reflection of a holy God.

My own father, also now with the Lord, was also in that category. Even though he was an astute teacher of teachers, he was consistently asked to take a back seat behind the promoters, motivators, and scholastic dupes.

Of course, there have been numerous experts in Scripture who have also been pushed to the side in preference for the worldly-wise. This is not at all strange in the current church scene.

The point to be seen here is that, with all of their wretchedness, Israel was still, on this particular point, in better shape than the church of our day. It was not a mere nucleus of scholars that held Gamaliel in high regard, but “all of the people.”

COMMANDED TO PUT THE APOSTLES FORTH

“ . . . and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space.” Other versions read, “commanded them to put the apostles outside for a little while,” NKJV “gave orders to put the men outside for a short time ,” NASB “ ordered that the men should be put outside for a little while,” NIV “ made a suggestion for the men to be put outside for a little time,” BBE “ he directed them to put the legates aside for a short time,” MRD “and asked to have the men taken outside for a time ,” NJB “and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while,” NLT “requested that the apostles be sent outside the Council chamber while he talked ,” LIVING “ordered that the apostles be taken outside for a little while,” AMPLIFIED and “ gave orders for the apostles to be taken outside for a few minutes.” PHILLIPS

The word “commanded” is translated from a Greek word meaning, “to command, order,” THAYER “direct,” FRIBERG “to state with force and/or authority what others must do - 'to order, to command,” LOUW-NIDA “to state with force and/or authority what others must do - 'to order, to command,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “urge.” GINGRICH

Being wise, Gamaliel spoke with recognizable authority: i.e., he directed the people what they ought to do, commanding them with all the force of moral authority. As they proceeded with the hearing, he deemed it best to have the apostles removed from the place of judgment. It appears to me that there was a certain degree of shame associated with what they were doing, and Gamaliel knew it. He did not speak as a mere scholar, or one that had an academic familiarity with the Law. Rather, he spoke as one who knew the intent of the Law, having some understanding of its reflection of a holy God. He was no doubt aware of the many times God had upbraided Israel for lacking justice in their social affairs.

Once the prophet Isaiah thundered, “ None calleth for justice , nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity . . . And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off : for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:4, 14-15). Jeremiah also addressed the matter of the lack of justice: “They are waxen fat, they shine: yea, they overpass the deeds of the wicked: they judge not the cause , the cause of the fatherless, yet they prosper; and the right of the needy do they not judge” (Jer 5:28). Micah cried out as well: “Hear this, I pray you, ye heads of the house of Jacob, and princes of the house of Israel, that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity ” (Micah 3:9). Habakkuk also lifted up his voice, “Therefore the law is slacked, and judgment doth never go forth : for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth” (Hab 1:4).

Gamaliel knew well that the haste with which this council was proceeding was not good, and therefore he speaks out.

Some might wonder why he did not speak up at the trial of Christ. Speaking from the standpoint of legal adjudication, the council had proceeded in a strictly illegal manner. However, in the death of Jesus, the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” was being carried out (Acts 2:23). Therefore Gamaliel, by Divine intent, was not permitted to speak at that time. Prior to this, when Jesus began to enter into the final phase of His ministry, Nicodemus, himself a Pharisee, had raised a question about the way in which the leaders were judging Him. His efforts were summarily ignored. “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he

The wicked may prove to be a formidable challenge to us, but they are no challenge at all to the exalted Christ. He can use them, change them, or remove them according to His own will. He has that power. He can “make” a righteous man’s enemies be at peace with him.

doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of

Galilee ariseth no prophet. And every man went unto his own house” (John 7:53).

Now, however, we have a different case before us. The apostles’ work has not yet been completed, and therefore God has devised means for them to continue. As it is written, “For we must needs die, and are as water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth He devise means, that His banished be not expelled from Him ” (2 Sam 14:14). We are beholding the enthroned Savior, turning the hearts of men, and governing their affairs in the interest of His church. There is no circumstance or personality over which Jesus does not have absolute power. Personalities that are ultimately subject to Him include holy angels, evil angels, Satan, demons, wicked spirits, rulers, common people, evil men, and godly men. So far as men are concerned, they all fall into one of two categories: vessels that are “to honor,” and vessels that are “to dishonor.” From the higher vantage point of view, all of them are in Christ’s house – His “great house” (2 Tim 2:20). They are like “good” and “bad” fish in the net of His Kingdom (Matt 13:47-48) – like “wheat” and “tares” in “ His field” (Matt 13:24-25).

The wicked may prove to be a formidable challenge to us, but they are no challenge at all to the exalted Christ. He can use them, change them, or remove them according to His own will. He has that power. He can “make” a righteous man’s enemies be at peace with him (Prov 16:7). He can stir up an adversary against a king He Himself has put in place and endued with unparalleled wisdom (1 Kgs 11:14,23).

Thus, the exalted Christ will work in this situation, confirming that it is in His control. Ultimately, it is His purpose that will be served.

Private, Yet Known

Take note that this is private council, and yet it is recorded in Scripture! This fulfils a word written by Solomon. “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter ” (Eccl 10:20).

Jesus once said, “Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops” (Luke 12:3). He was teaching men to live in view of the imminence of the day of judgement, when all will be known.

All of this is a picture of that coming day of judgment when not only the words and deeds of all men will be made known, but “the counsels of the heart” as well (1 Cor 4:5). Men must conduct their lives with these things in mind. There are no secrets (Heb 4:13).

TAKE HEED WHAT YOU INTEND TO DO

“ 35 And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.”

We will now see why Gamaliel was held in such high regard. His words will be “fitly spoken” (Prov 25:11) and spoken in “due season” (Prov 15:23). That is a facet of wisdom that cannot be learned by rote. Men may be taught the answer to various questions, but they cannot be taught to answer in proper words and at appropriate times. That kind of answer is the result of discernment, not instruction.

TAKE HEED TO YOURSELVES

“And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves . . .” Other versions read, “ take care,” NASB “ consider carefully ,” NIV “ be careful ,” CSB “pay close attention to,” NET “be very careful ,” PHILLIPS and “be watching yourselves .” ALT

The word translated “take heed” is very precise. Its lexical meaning is “to bring to, bring near – like bringing a ship to land.” In its application it is used to denote “turning the mind to, attending to, be attentive . . . to attend to oneself; i.e. to give heed to oneself,” THAYER “to hold one’s mind to someone or something, give heed to, pay attention to,” FRIBERG “To be alert to, to be on guard against,” LOUW-NIDA “to bring a ship near a place, bring it to port . . . to turn one’s mind to a thing,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to be concerned about, care for, pay attention to.” GINGRICH

The need to “take heed to yourselves” is like getting a boat back where it belongs after it has been set adrift. Such a boat is not anchored, and is at the behest of the stormy sea. Being tossed about, it is in danger of being dashed to pieces.

So it is when men are pushed out upon the treacherous sea of life without being solidly anchored. Their corrupt emotions thrash them about like stormy waves toss a ship that is drifting.

Gamaliel is calling the Sanhedrin back to the shore of sobriety – summoning them to be anchored in the port of sound thought instead of being carried among by their soulish nature.

It ought to be noted that sin dulls the powers of perception and reason, causing men to move forward without proper consideration or honest assessment. Sin compels men to focus on the wrong thing, and forget about the main thing. At the time sin is dominating them, there is no thought of God, His manners, or the brevity of life. At such a time men are, in a very real sense, insane – without thoughtful moorings. In such a case, men are moved to act in flagrant contradiction of the Divine imagery they bear.

In the kind of society in which we find ourselves, there is every conceivable disadvantage. Basically, it is a hedonistic society, absorbed with all manner of pleasure and enjoyment. Leisure is exalted as a time when men can enjoy themselves, while work and productivity are seen as burdensome. We are not surprised to see the world taking hold of this concept. However, when it creeps into the church, we have a most serious circumstance on our hands. When the affairs of the church are tailored to make them enjoyable to the flesh, men have caved in to the times.

The Jewish council had vigorously opposed the apostles because they did not like what they were doing. Their manner and their message chafed against their flesh. Their religion was one of self-satisfaction, with little or no regard at all for the pleasure of the Lord.

There comes a time when men must stop thinking about pleasure and begin thinking about what is right: a time when self must be dethroned, and the Lord must be seen as the preeminent One to please. How do ones deeds fit into the truth – into the way things really are? That is what Gamaliel is calling upon the council to ponder – to consider themselves in view of what is good and right in the sight of God. To think in terms of who God is and what he has determined.

WHAT YE INTEND TO DO

“ . . . what ye intend to do as touching these men.” Other versions read, “what you propose to do with these men,” NASB “What you intend to do to these men,” NIV “what you do with these men,” RSV “as touching these men, what ye are about to do,” ASV “what ye do about these men,” BBE “what you are about to do with these men,” ESV “what you are planning to do to these men,” NLT “in regard to what you propose to do concerning these men,” AMPLIFIED and “what action you intend to take against these,” PHILLIPS

In order for man’s intentions to be valid, they must integrate with God’s Person and purpose. If they are pointed in any other direction, they are vain.

It is imperative that men be encouraged to consider what they “intend” – that is, what they have in their minds, and what they are thinking about. What a person intends is what they are working to

cause to come to pass. It is an objective they are intent upon fulfilling, a goal they are determined to reach. In the text before us, the intention of the Sanhedrin was to kill the apostles. They had no fleshly reason to question their ability to do this. After all, they had delivered Jesus to death – and He was the one of whom the apostles were preaching. Surely they would not prove to be more formidable than their Master! – at least that is how they were thinking. When the apostles had said they were a witness to the facts concerning Jesus, as well as the Holy Spirit whom God gives to those who obey Him, this group of men “took counsel to slay them” (verse 33). In fact, that was the reason for convening the very gathering Gamaliel is now addressing.

He calls upon them to ponder what they have purposed for these men – to kill them. They obviously felt they were thoroughly capable of doing this, thereby ridding themselves of their aggravating presence. However, they had not brought God and His purposes into their thinking. Nor, indeed, had they pondered the inability of men to, of themselves, carry out their own purposes.

Because truth can always be lived out in human experience, Gamaliel will draw their attention to some things that had recently taken place – things they had apparently passed over.

THINK ABOUT WHAT HAS HAPPENED RECENTLY

“ 36 For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought. 37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.”

The Lord has made clear how pride in created beings touches Him. He is said to “hate” a “proud look.” Those dominated by pride “will not seek after God.” In a definition of “the fear of the Lord,” Solomon says that it includes the hatred of pride. When pride comes, “then cometh shame.”

When men are fundamentally self-centered, they can learn nothing from the things that are taking place in their presence. This is a decided disadvantage, for if God is working salvation in the midst of the earth (Psa 74:12), and is the Governor among the nations (Psa 22:28), then there is something to be learned from what is taking place in this realm. This circumstance is also buttressed by several other considerations. Here are a few of them.

- Promotion comes from the Lord. He is the Judge who puts down one and raises up another (Psa 75:6-7).
- Kingdoms are assigned leaders according to God’s will (Dan 4:17).
- There is no such thing as a calamity that is not brought by God (Amos 3:6).
- In natural calamities, God has His own way (Nah 1:3).

Fundamental to a sound theology is the fact that God Himself is imminent in all of creation, including the machinations and activities of all humanity. He is not an absent God, but beholds all men, intervening in their affairs at will, and maintaining ultimate control over them. Gamaliel will cite two examples of Divine management.

THEUDAS

“For before these days rose up Theudas, boasting himself to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves: who was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.”

Very little is known of this man. Even history is largely silent concerning him. However, we need

nothing more than the testimony of Gamaliel to confirm the reality of Theudas – particularly since his testimony is confirmed by the Holy Spirit including it in the Scriptures. The lessons to be learned from this individual do not require a lengthy dissertation about his life. The point that is being made only requires the words that are provided concerning him.

Theudas Boasted

Other versions read, “ claiming to be somebody,” NKJV “ giving himself out to be somebody,” RSV “who said he was someone important,” BBE “ alleging himself to be somebody,” DARBY “ affirming himself to be somebody,” DOUAY “ He claimed that he was important,” GWN “and said of himself, that he was some great one,” MRD “who pretended to be someone great,” NLT “ professing to be a person of importance,” WEYMOUTH “ asserting himself to be a person of importance,” AMPLIFIED and “ made himself conspicuous by claiming to be someone or other.” PHILLIPS

Boasting of this sort is evidence of the presence of the tempter. It was Satan himself who first said, “ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High” (Isa 14:14). He pushed himself forward – even aspiring to be “like the most High.” Pride was Satan’s besetting sin, even though he once occupied a lofty position. It is said of him, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee” (Ezek 28:17). Although he occupied a high position and was given much glory, he was not satisfied, but aspired to exalt himself to the highest position. This is Satan’s nature, and he promotes this attitude among the sons of men.

The Lord has made clear how pride in created beings touches Him. He is said to “hate” a “proud look” (Prov 6:16). Those dominated by pride “will not seek after God” (Psa 10:4). In a definition of “the fear of the Lord,” Solomon says that it includes the hatred of pride (Prov 8:13). When pride comes, “then cometh shame” (Prov 11:2). Solemnly the Scriptures affirm, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18), and “a man’s pride shall bring him low” (Prov 29:23). Pride is the characteristic that causes a person to be “lifted up” in his own estimation, and thus “fall into the condemnation of the devil” who is the author of that trait (1 Tim 3:6).

Theudas “boasted himself to be somebody.” In this regard, he was like Simon the sorcery, a man from Samaria who is described as “giving out that he himself was some great one” (Acts 8:9). These are, in a way, like “false Christs” (Matt 24:24), professing to have the answers to the human dilemma. Peter identified this kind of person as those who promise men “liberty,” yet are themselves “servants of corruption” (2 Pet 2:18-19). In order to do this, they must speak much about themselves and what they have professedly discovered, or been given to see. This, of course, in stark contradiction of the manner in which the servants of God conduct themselves.

Four Hundred Men Joined Themselves to Him

Other versions read, “ joined up with him,” NASB “ rallied to him,” NIV “ gave their support,” BBE “to whom resorted,” GENEVA “ went after him,” MRD “ collected,” NJB “to whom resorted,” PNT “espoused his cause,” WILLIAMS “ allied themselves,” AMPLIFIED and “a following.” PHILLIPS

As men who have not received the love of the truth are prone to do, a number of men were convinced of the validity of Theudas’ cause, and joined up with him. They were deceived by his boasting, being devoid of the wisdom that can distinguish between truth and the lie. By nature, men do not possess the ability to properly evaluate self-professed leaders.

There is no historical writings that provide further information about this imposter. Such information is not required, for both himself and his cause failed. This is the precise point that

Gamaliel is making – the failure of ill-advised messengers and causes.

He Was Slain, and They Were Scattered

Other versions read, “He was slain, and all who obeyed him were scattered and came to nothing,” NKJV “And he was slain; and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing,” NASB “He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing,” NIV “but he was killed, and all who followed him were dispersed and disappeared,” NRSV “he was put to death, and his band was broken up and came to nothing,” BBE “He was killed, and all his followers were scattered. The whole movement was a failure,” GWN “but he was killed, and all those who were loyal to him were disbanded and came to nothing,” NAB “but when he was killed, all his followers scattered and that was the end of them,” NJB “but he was killed, and his followers were harmlessly dispersed,” LIVING “but he was killed. And all of the men who followed him were scattered. They were never able to do anything,” IE He was killed, and all his followers were dispersed and annihilated,” WEYMOUTH “but he was slain and all his followers were dispersed and as a party annihilated,” WILLIAMS and “but he was killed and all who had listened to and adhered to him were scattered and brought to nothing.” AMPLIFIED

The validity of something can be partially determined by its longevity – its ability to remain in place for some time. That this is true is confirmed by the Word of the Lord, which announces the appointed frustration of all merely human objectives.

- “He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise” (Job 5:12).
- “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect” (Psa 33:10).
- “For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the righteous” (Psa 37:17).
- “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD” (Prov 21:30).

I say this is incidental information, for it really adds nothing to the text. The point that is being made is not that Judas appeared, but that he, together with his cause and followers disappeared. That makes their objectives and the history of them meaningless.

“That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish” (Isa 44:25).

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the cause of Theudas was dashed upon the rocks of futility.

JUDAS OF GALILEE

“ 37 After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him: he also perished; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.”

Judas of Galilee

Other versions read, “After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census,” NKJV “After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census,” NIV “After this man, there was Judas of Galilee, at the time of the numbering,” BBE “After this man, rose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the enrolling,” DOUAY “After this man, arose up Judas of Galilee, in the days of the tribute,” GENEVA “After him, at the time of the taxation, there was Judas of Galilee,” LIVING and “And after this one rose up Judas the Galilean, [who led an uprising] during the time of the census.” AMPLIFIED

You may recall that Jesus was also born during a time of taxation, or census (Luke 2:1-5).

The Jewish historian Josephus provides some incidental information about this man. "A person surnamed " *the Galiloean* " (Acts 5:37), so called also by Josephus (*Ant . 18, 1, 6; 20, 5, 2; War , 2, 8, 1*), and likewise " *the Gaulonite* " (Ant. 18, 1, 1). He was born at Gamala, a fortified city on the Sea of Galilee, in Lower Gaulonitis; and after the deposition of Archelaus, during the thirty-seventh year after the battle of Actium (Josephus, *Ant. 18, 2, 1*), i.e. A.D. 6, he excited a violent insurrection among the Jews, in concert with a well known Pharisee named Sadok, against the Roman government exercised by the procurator Coponius, on occasion of a census levied by the emperor Augustus, asserting the popular doctrine that the Jews ought to acknowledge no dominion but that of God. He was destroyed, and his followers scattered by Cyrenius, then proconsul of Syria and Judaea. We also learn from Josephus that the scattered remnant of the party of Judas continued after his destruction to work on still in secret, and labored to maintain his free spirit and reckless principles among the people (Josephus, *War, 2 , 17, 7-19*)."

I say this is incidental information, for it really adds nothing to the text. The point that is being made is not that Judas appeared, but that he, together with his cause and followers disappeared. That makes their objectives and the history of them meaningless.

Drew Away Much People

Other versions read, "drew away many people after him," NKJV "led a band of people in revolt ." NIV "got people to follow him," NRSV "some of the people went after him ," BBE "attracted a following ," CSB "seduced much people after him," MRD "incited people to follow him," NET "attracted crowds of supporters," NJB "drew away some people as disciples ," LIVING "He also led a group of followers away ," IE "influenced people to desert and follow him," WILLIAMS "drew away a popular following after him," AMPLIFIED and "enticed many of the people to follow him." PHILLIPS

Rather, this is a statement of the real case, and whether or not men acknowledge it or yield to it has nothing whatever to do with it. How many Pharaohs, Nebuchadnezzars Belchazzars, Herod's, Pilates, etc. does it take to convince men of this?

Like all false leaders and prophets, this man beguiled "unstable souls" (2 Pet 2:14). He led them to believe that the affairs of this world are really governed by people, and that if they band together they can change the direction of history. Our society is also plagued by such leaders, and they continue to seduce the people into thinking they can, of themselves, change the landscape of history.

That whole approach, even though it may have a pleasant sound to it, it fraught with error. It assumes the world and its governments are actually controlled by men. However, we are categorically told this is not the case. "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psa 24:1). This is not merely a technical statement, to be followed by some thought like this: "And all men should acknowledge this and bow the knee to the Lord!" Rather, this is a statement of the real case, and whether or not men acknowledge it or yield to it has nothing whatever to do with it. How many Pharaohs, Nebuchadnezzars Belchazzars, Herod's, Pilates, etc. does it take to convince men of this?

He Also Perished

Other versions read, "he too perished, and all those who followed him were scattered," NASB "He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered," NIV "he was put to death, and all his supporters were put to flight ," BBE "he also perished; and all, even as many as consented to him, were dispersed ," DOUAY "He also perished: and all even as many as harkened to him are scattered a

brood,” TNT “and that one perished, and all, as many as were obeying him , were scattered,” YLT “but he was destroyed and all his followers were scattered,” IE “he also perished and all his adherents were scattered,” AMPLIFIED and “But he too died and his whole following melted away .” PHILLIPS

The labors of this Judas and his followers were also total vanity. Like the world around which they were centered, they “passed away,” leaving nothing but an unpleasant memory.

During the last century there have been some notable examples of human efforts that were vain. These include nations like Nazi Germany and Communist Russia. There have been religious movements that have been crushed openly: David Koresh and the Davidians, and Jim Jones and the People’s Temple. Other movements slated for ultimate demise include Joseph Smith and the Mormons, Reverend Moon and the Unification Church, and Ron Hubbard and his Scientology.

Many others could be named, but this will suffice to confirm that the same diversions are occurring in our time that did during the time of our text. They will be no more successful than the causes of Theudas and Judas the Galilean! That is because of nature everything that is driven by human initiative alone. Even Gamaliel saw that fact.

LET THESE MEN ALONE

“ 38 And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone: for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought.”

Now Gamaliel draws some conclusions concerning the facts he has just related. He will filter those facts through the word of God, which has made known the character of both the works of man and of God. This ability presumes a working knowledge of God’s word.

REFRAIN FROM THESE MEN

“And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone . . .” Other versions read, “ keep away from these men and let them alone,” NKJV “in this present case, stay away from these men and let them alone,” NIV “Leave these men alone! Let them go!” NIV “ Do nothing to these men, but let them be,” BBE “ Withdraw from these men and let them alone,” DARBY “We should keep away from these men for now,” GWN “ Desist from these men, and let them lone,” MRD “have nothing to do with these men, and let them go ,” NAB “ hold aloof from these men and leave them alone,” WEYMOUTH “ stand off (withdraw) from these men and let them alone,” AMPLIFIED “let these men alone; leave them to themselves .” PHILLIPS and “draw away from these men and permit them .” LITV

The counsel bears a faint resemblance to the word of Pilate’s wife to him concerning Jesus: “Have thou nothing to do with that just Man: for I have suffered many things this day in a dream because of Him” (Matt 27:19). With Pilate’s wife, the counsel was driven by the disconcerting effects of a dream. With Gamaliel, it was his perception of the working of God among men. In both cases, however, it was clear that it is dangerous to be aggressive against a person sent by God.

Now, Gamaliel will reason with them concerning this counsel, placing before them two incontrovertible facts. Both of them are based upon the revelations of both God and man that were given through the Law and the prophets. This is not a mere historical analysis, and must not be viewed in that manner. The fact that the statements are made by Gamaliel confirms that they were driven by an understanding of the Law of God rather than expertise in the manners of men. The second part of his counsel also confirms this is the case.

IF THIS COUNSEL OR WORK BE OF MEN

“ . . . for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought.” Other versions read, “for if this plan or this work is of men, it will come to nothing,” NKJV “if this plan or action should be of men, it will be overthrown,” NASB “if their purpose or activity is of human origin , it will fail,” NIV “for if this teaching or this work is of men , it will come to nothing,” BBE “for if this counsel or this work have its origin from men, it will be destroyed ,” DARBY “if this plan or this undertaking is of man, it will fail,” ESV “I can guarantee that if the plan they put into action is of human origin, it will fail,” GWN “For if this device and this work originate from men , they will dissolve and come to nothing,” MRD “For if this endeavor or this activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself ,” NAB “if this plan or this undertaking originates with people , it will come to nothing,” NET “If this enterprise, this movement of theirs , is of human origin it will break up of its own accord ,” NJB “If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own , it will soon be overthrown,” NLT “If what they teach and do is merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown,” LIVING “for if this scheme or work is of human origin, it will come to nothing,” WEYMOUTH “if this program or movement has its origin in men, it will go to pieces ,” WILLIAMS “if this doctrine or purpose or undertaking or movement is of human origin, it will fail (be overthrown and come to nothing),” AMPLIFIED and “if this teaching or movement is merely human it will collapse of its own accord .” PHILLIPS

“This Counsel”

Gamaliel perceives a kind of design in what the apostles are saying and doing. They are not merely engaging in emotional outbursts or acting irrationally. He refers to a “counsel,” KJV “plan,” NASB “purpose,” NIV “undertaking,” ESV “endeavor,” NAB “movement,” NJB “planning,” NLT “scheme,” WEYMOUTH and “program.” WILLIAMS

The Greek words translated “this counsel” are **h` boulh.** (ay bou-lay). The first word is a definite article: that is, it points to something specific; i.e. “THIS counsel,” or a specific and particular counsel. The word “counsel” comes from the next word which means, “purpose,” THAYER “a decision, deliberation . . . resolve, decision, purpose, plan,” FRIBERG “intention,” UBS “that which has been purposed and planned,” LOUW-NIDA “will, determination . . . advice, plan, design,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “resolution, decision.” GINGRICH

It was apparent to Gamaliel that there was a motive in what the apostles were doing. They were being driven by a purpose, or a cause – like Theudas and Judas had causes they had espoused, and purposes they intended to fulfill. Their plans called for obedience from the people in order that their objectives might be met. Now he perceives an intelligent design in what the apostles are doing – some kind of purpose that is being executed. He does not have a clear indication of its source, but he knows it is there.

Much of what parades itself under the banner of Christianity cannot be traced to a clear and intelligent objective . One often wonders precisely what the religious merchants are trying to do. They affirm they are trying to help the people, but that is not clear enough. I suppose that Theudas and Judas also represented themselves as doing something that would advantage the people. Otherwise, they could not have garnered a following.

There are certain causes that are being espoused by Christian leaders. They cover a range of things. Happy marriages, financial success, good health, making the world a better place to live, reaching the youth, relieving the poor, and a host of other things. First, let it be clear that no such objectives are ever one time stated in the Word of God. Nothing of this gender is ever held out as the aim for Christ coming into the world. In fact He once said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34). And again, “Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division” (Luke 12:51). As noble as making the world a better place to live may sound, whether on an individual or collective level, that is not why Jesus came. God can give a nation peace, cause their enemies to be at peace with them, and cause them to prosper –

and do so without Jesus Christ, redemption, or the hope of glory. The people do not require the Holy Spirit for these things to happen, nor do they need to have their names written in heaven. We know this is the case, because all of them happened to certain people before Jesus came into the world. No person of sound mind is against such things, or will declare them to be wrong. But those who associate them with the “eternal purpose” of God could not possibly be more wrong.

The Source Is the Issue

Being an expert in the Law, Gamaliel knows that the source of the objective is the critical issue. He will narrow it down to two sources: man or God; human or Divine.

His statement concerning the purposes of men – all of them – is startling to the spiritually lethargic soul. If it is “of men, it WILL come to nought,” or “be overthrown.” NASB There is not the slightest chance that this will not happen! In his record, Luke does not give an explanation for the statement, or make some modification to it. This further confirms that the statement was correct. With care, when required, the Spirit alerts us to why and what men said. For example, when Caiaphas said, “Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.” the Spirit added, “And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation” (John 11:50-51). On the mount of transfiguration, when Peter said, “And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias,” the Spirit added, “For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid ”” (Mark 9:5-6).

However, no such editorial remark is here provided by the Spirit. The statement is true, and can be fully supported by the Scripture.

The point is that if something is of human origin, the seeds of corruption are within it. This is why preaching cannot be flavored with human wisdom. It will cause the message to fail. It is precisely why Jesus said, “the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63). As soon as the thoughts and purposes of men make their way into their doctrine, it at once is determined that it will collapse. It cannot stand. The seeming nobility of the purpose is not the point, but its origin.

The Example of the early Church

The early church was keenly aware of these things. On one occasion, in their aggressiveness to preach the Gospel, they had saturated the area of “throughout Phygia and the region of Galatia” with the Gospel. They then were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia.” After they had come to Mysia, they determined to “go into Bythynia: but the Spirit suffered them not,” or “did not permit them” NKJV to do so (Acts 16:6-7).

Being sensitive to the Lord, and having some understanding of His ways, these brethren did not attempt to work around these imposed restraints. They were responsive enough to the Spirit that they did not press the issue beyond the point where they discerned His inhibition. While they were waiting, Paul had a vision in the night in which he saw a man of Macedonia standing and crying out, “Come over into Macedonia and help us!” As the brethren “immediately” considered the vision, they “endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering [‘concluding’ NKJV] that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:10). Their conduct confirms that they also knew the truth Gamaliel had articulated: “if this counsel or this work be of men, it WILL come to nought” (Acts 5:38).

It WILL Come to Nothing!

This is a failure that is imposed by God, and that imposition can in no way be neutralized. If the plans are being made by Saul of Tarsus, the Lord will bring them to an instant and grinding

halt by appearing to Him and changing him. If it is wicked Herod, plotting to kill the servants of God because it pleased Christ's enemies, he will simply be struck dead.

Because the intelligence and aptitude of men are currently overstated, it is necessary to confirm this statement. The affirmation has been made that if the source of a cause is men, the cause will fail , and there is no way to avoid that failure. It is not simply that the men do not have enough strength to bring it to pass – although that is true. This is a failure that is imposed by God, and that imposition can in no way be neutralized. If the plans are being made by Saul of Tarsus, the Lord will bring them to an instant and grinding halt by appearing to Him and changing him (Acts 9:3-6). If it is wicked Herod, plotting to kill the servants of God because it pleased Christ's enemies, he will simply be struck dead (Acts 12:23).

• **DAVID.** On one occasion, when Absalom, David's wayward son, was seeking to kill him and usurp the kingdom, some excellent counsel was given to him by Ahithophel, who had aligned himself with Absalom. Strategically Ahithophel's counsel was superb. We are told that all of his counseling was of a most excellent order. It was described as counsel that was "as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God" (2 Sam 16:23). When word of this counsel reached the ears of David, He prayed, "O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness" (2 Sam 15:31). Although Ahithophel's counsel was excellent, a certain man named Hushai, told Absalom, "The counsel that Ahithophel hath given thee is not good at this time" (2 Sam 17:7). Absalom chose to believe him, and reject Ahithophel's counsel. The explanation for his unreasonable response is described in these words: "For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel , to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom" (2 Sam 17:14).

• **NEHEMIAH.** In Nehemiah's day, the enemies outnumbered the Jewish builders. Their "counsel" was to overthrow the work. According to appearance, it looked like they were well able to do it. However, as time progressed, God Himself threw their counsel down to the ground. It is written, "And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought , that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work" (Neh 4:15).

• **SOLOMON.** Solomon stated the impossibility of human counsel offsetting Divine counsel. "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD " (Prov 21:30). And again, "Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it : except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Psa 127:1).

When it comes to the work of the Lord, whatever they put their hand to, must have its beginning with God. If it does not, it will fail, be destroyed, and thrown down.

ISAIAH. When certain enemies rose against Judah, and they were sorely outnumbered, The Lord spoke to the remnant of His people through Isaiah. "Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass. For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within threescore and five years shall Ephraim be broken, that it be not a people" (Isa 7:5-8).

• **JESUS.** "But He answered and said, Every plant, which My heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up " (Matt 15:13).

• **PAUL.** "For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor 1:19). And again, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God . For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness" (1 Cor 3:19).

These, and other, reasons are why whatever has its genesis with men will come short of its

objective. In the end, the only thing that will be finished is what God has started – and there will be no exceptions to that rule. There is no way to contradict this fact. To be even more precise, the government in its totality has been placed upon the shoulders of Jesus. ONLY what He Himself begins will be finished. That is precisely why He is called “ the Author and Finisher ,” “Alpha and Omega ,” “the First and the Last ,” and “the Beginning and the End ” (Heb 12:2; Rev 1:11; 22:13). Jesus does not finish what men conceive and initiate! Nor, indeed, do men finish what the Lord begins. What men begin, regardless of what it is, will come to an appointed end.

Now, the issue becomes whether or not men can see this, and submit themselves to it. When it comes to the work of the Lord, whatever they put their hand to, must have its beginning with God. If it does not, it will fail, be destroyed, and thrown down.

This, of course, has some arresting ramifications. Perhaps you have wondered why so many professed Christian enterprises are always begging for funds, marketing their goods, and urging people to assist them in getting out of debt. The reason can, in many cases, be traced to the truth that was uttered by Gamaliel. Whatever plans have their genesis in men alone will come to an end, and therefore they tend to deteriorate.

I am not naive about these matters. I realize that it is out of order to make laws about these things and impose them upon others. Every conscientious person must take this knowledge and learn to work with it – just like the apostles did.

The Complicating Factor

The complicating factor in all of these things is this: when the church has not developed a sensitivity to the Lord Himself, they are in a position where they cannot be profitably directed by Him. They are, in a sense, shut up to their own resources and imaginations – and that is a state of total vanity. Such may be described as having hope “ in this life only” (1 Cor 15:19).

YOU CANNOT FIGHT AGAINST GOD

“ 39 But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.”“ 40a And to him they agreed . . .”

Having stated that what is originated by men will, of necessity, fail, Gamaliel now establishes that what God initiates cannot fail. Once again, this is something that is fundamental to sound theology. This kind of thinking must be dominant in the minds of men to avoid errors in judgment.

IF IT BE OF GOD

“But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it . . .” Other versions read, “if it is from God,” NIV “if it does in fact come from God,” NJB “if it is really from God,,” WEYMOUTH “if it has its origin in God,” WILLIAMS and “if it should be from God .” PHILLIPS

Integral to this perception is the fact that God is at work in the earth, fulfilling His own purpose. There are causes that come from Him. There are men raised up to do His will, and fulfill His objectives. When it comes to delivering a message, there is such a thing as doing the will of God. There is a word that is coming from God, and there are a chosen people who are delivering it. The men themselves are not the point, but the mission on which they have been sent, and the message they are delivering. Therefore it is written, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?” (1 Cor 3:5).

How serious is it to oppose one of these ministers? Does a religious body of any kind have a right to do so? What if they are the Sanhedrin? Or the high priest? Of the elders of the people? Does their

position give them a right to attempt to stop men who are bringing a message from God?

What of our day? Is there a group of men – any men – who can actually attempt to impede the delivering of a word from God? Can they establish preaching or teaching priorities that have not been sanctioned by the Almighty? Are they free to adopt a new agenda, in hopes of building a more impressive organization? Gamaliel will not philosophize about this matter. His acquaintance with Scripture has already established his thoughts on the subject. He will go strait to the bottom line, and draw his conclusion after that.

YOU CANNOT OVERTHROW IT

“ . . . ye cannot overthrow it . . .” Other versions read, “you will not be able to overthrow it,” NASB “you will not be able to stop these men ,” NIV “you will not be able to overthrow them ,” NRSV “ ye will not be able to put them down ,” DARBY “ ye cannot destroy it,” GENEVA “you won't be able to stop them ,” GWN “it is not in your power to frustrate it ,” MRD “you will be powerless to put them down,” WEYMOUTH “You can never stop it,” WILLIAMS “you will not be able to stop or overthrow or destroy them ,” AMPLIFIED and “you cannot defeat them.” PHILLIPS

There is no ambiguity in what this expert in the Law says. A cause that comes from God CANNOT be deterred or nullified! Once again, the inclusion of his words by the Holy Spirit, without any editorial remark, confirms that they are true.

No one can restrain the work of God! Thus the prophet declares, “Indeed before the day was, I am He; And there is no one who can deliver out of My hand; I work, and who will reverse it? ” NKJV (Isa 43:13). And again, “Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10). And again, “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou ?” (Dan 4:35). And again, “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men ; and the weakness of God is stronger than men ” (1 Cor 1:25).

born – and he was given 4,000 years to do so. He could not remove Jesus when He was a helpless infant. He could not stop Him from growing in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man. He could not stop Him from rising from the dead.

If Satan himself cannot delay or abort the purposes of God, who is foolish enough to think there is any man or group of men that can do so – particularly when they are controlled by the wicked one? Satan could not stop Jesus from being born – and he was given 4,000 years to do so. He could not remove Jesus when He was a helpless infant. He could not stop Him from growing in wisdom, and stature, and in favor with God and man. He could not stop Him from rising from the dead. He could not stop Him from ascending into heaven. He could not stop Him from pouring forth His Spirit. And, He cannot stop Him building His church (Matt 16:18), or coming again (Acts 1:11). All of those things have to do with Divine purpose.

As depicted in the Revelation, the only time the world has any power over the servants of God is when they have “finished their testimony” (Rev 11:7). This was confirmed in the life of Jesus (John 17:4), Paul (2 Tim 4:7), and Peter (1 Pet 1:13-14).

They are also confirmed in the inspired history of the chosen people of God.

- When Israel entered into Canaan, Joshua reminded the people, “There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass ” (Josh 21:45).
- When he was getting ready to die, Joshua said to the people, “And, behold, this day

I am going the way of all the earth: and ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof ” (Josh 23:14).

- In Mary’s marvelous response to the announcement that she would bear the Son of God, she said , “He hath holpen His servant Israel, in remembrance of His mercy; as He spake to our fathers , to Abraham, and to his seed for ever” (Luke 1:54-55).

- In Zechariah’s praise following the birth of John the Baptist, he confessed, “ To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant; The oath which He sware to our father Abraham , that He would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve Him without fear” (Luke 1:74).

- At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon told the people, “Blessed be the LORD, that hath given rest unto His people Israel, according to all that He promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which He promised by the hand of Moses his servant ” (1 Kgs 8:56).

None of God’s intentions could be overthrown. No cause that has been initiated by Him has ever failed. This is involved in His faithfulness – doing what He has promised, and carrying forward every cause to completion. If any Divine objective falls short of fulfillment, then He will be proved unfaithful. In such a case, He will have encountered someone more powerful than Himself.

Some May Object

Some may object, saying this is too simplistic – even though God has emphatically declared this is the case. He has even challenged someone to interfere with what He purposes, or cause it to come short of fulfillment. He thunders from heaven, “The LORD of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand” (Isa 14:24). And again, “I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it ” (Isa 46:11). And again, “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Prov 19:21). And again, “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD” (Prov 21:30). And again, “Who is he that saith, and it cometh to pass, when the Lord commandeth it not?” (Lam 3:37).

Notwithstanding the strength of these affirmations, the simple think they see a hole in the reasoning. They point out that all of God’s purposes are not being fulfilled, for God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Thus, they reason, if all men are not saved, His purpose has been thwarted.

The reasoning of such men, however, is flawed. First, God provided for the salvation of all men, but is nowhere said to have purposed to save all men. He has promised salvation only to those who are in Christ Jesus, for “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

In his inspired synopsis of God’s great salvation, Paul outlines the purpose of God. “For whom he did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom 8:30).

This should not be difficult for men to perceive. Salvation involves the deliverance of people from this present evil world (Gal 1:4). It requires there separation from other people (Acts 15:14; 2 Cor 6:17-18). He has purposed to save no one else. He has never said He intends to save the ungodly, the worldly, the slothful, and the unfaithful. He is not committed to the salvation of those who do iniquity, and draw back from Him.

Adopting the Divine Agenda

All of this highlights the importance of adopting the Divine agenda, and delivering the ordained message. If men adopt some purpose that has not been revealed by God – for the Lord does nothing without revealing it to His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7) – they have entered into a futile work.

Because of the spiritual obtuseness of our times, it is necessary to elaborate on these words. Let us say that a person adopts the fundamental purpose of causing boys to be strong moral men. Another makes his purpose to make strong families. Still another chooses to emphasize being financially successful. Yet another makes his emphasis the health of the body. No one of sound mind is willing to affirm that any of these things is wrong. Yet, if they are adopted as an emphasis, or primary purpose, they are wrong.

All such emphases insinuate that there is some deficiency in Christ – that believers are not, in fact, “complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10). When it comes to matters of character, morality, satisfaction, and personal identity with God, other things are imagined to be required. That is precisely why men create special procedures, routines, and life-styles that are declared to assist in actually shaping and maturing the believer. You must buy their books or attend their seminars to obtain them, for there is not any revealed association of them with the Lord Jesus. They are an addendum, or supplement, to Him.

It is one thing when men teach methods and techniques related to life in this world alone. Never, however, can such things become the emphasis of ones’ life. Should that ever happen, the individual is no longer seeking “first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.” However, when they tie such things to life in Christ, and suggest that those skills or procedures improve one’s character and relationship to God, they are operating in the domain of the lie and are under Satan’s control.

Anything that is not authored by Jesus cannot possibly have anything whatsoever to do with pleasing God, serving God, or being more pleasing to Him. Men do not provoke God’s favorable attention by being involved in such things. We are specifically told that “the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him ” (2 Chron 16:9). It is also written that God said, “I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before Me for the land , that I should not destroy it: but I found none” (Ezek 22:30). Of the same type of quest Isaiah wrote, “And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor : therefore His arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him” (Isa 59:16). The Psalmist wrote, “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God ” (Psa 14:2).

Nowhere is the Lord ever represented as seeking for someone who is healthy, wealthy, or successful in business or some other earthly activity. Noah did not found grace in the eyes of the Lord because he was a disciplined and excellent ship builder. Moses did not find favor because he had several skills he learned in Egypt. Paul was not chosen because he was an expert in the Law of Moses. Those are not the kind of things God is looking for.

How, then, can it be possible for any emphasis on man-made routines to have the slightest bearing on a person’s standing with God. Are exceptionally healthy people more apt to take hold of the truth of God? Do people who live their lives by strict regimen have the advantage when it comes to being godly and discerning?

How, then, can it be possible for any emphasis on man-made routines to have the slightest bearing on a person’s standing with God. Are exceptionally healthy people more apt to take hold of the truth of God? Do people who live their lives by strict regimen have the advantage when it comes to being godly and discerning?

A Religion of the Body

For some people, the body, not the heart, is the core of religion. It is the secret to everything else. Their religion consists of external routines and disciplines, and have no real substance to them. Scripture refers to such an approach to religion as “bodily exercise.” It is written, “For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (1 Tim 4:8). He is not speaking of exercise as it is related to bodily health. It is not the manner of the Spirit to relate such things to life that is in Christ Jesus. This does not mean that such activities are wrong, or are to be shunned. It is rather that revelation does not deal with such things. They are in the area in which we have been given freedom, and are not to judge one another.

The text of reference has to with “bodily discipline” NASB that is related to religion. Some of the more liberal translations are wholly misleading at this point: i.e. “physical training,” NIV “training of the body,” CSV “training the body,” GWN “physical exercise,” NJB and “physical exercise.” ISV The “bodily exercise” to which the text refers relates to the subduing of the fleshly lusts by abstinence and disciplined routines. It also relates to penance, as practiced in some segments of Christendom. It can even include fasting, particularly if it is not accompanied by prayer. These routines parallel the various ceremonies under the Law, referred to as “carnal ordinances,” or “regulations for the body” NASB (Heb 9:10).

It is stated that external routine “is only of little profit” NASB – that is, as it relates to life in Christ Jesus. Even that profit is largely confined to those who are in a state of spiritual infancy.

My point here is that the religious creations of men all have to do with such things. None of them are really associated with spiritual improvement, growth into Christ, Christ being formed in them, or conformity to His image. All of the things they emphasize have to do with life in this earth alone. As such, they do not require Jesus and His present ministry. Hence, they are destined to fail.

This will suffice, as this subject tends to consume more time than can be justified. What I have said relates to anything and everything that originates with men coming to an abrupt halt.

FOUND TO FIGHT AGAINST GOD

“ . . . lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.” Other versions read, “lest you even be found to fight against God,” NKJV “or else you may even be found fighting against God,” NASB “you will only find yourselves fighting against God,” NIV “ in that case you may even be found fighting against God!” NRSV “you might even be found opposing God,” RSV “you are in danger of fighting against God,” BBE “lest ye be found also fighters against God,” DARBY “You may even discover that you're fighting against God,” GWN “that ye may not be found placing yourselves in opposition to God,” MRD “ Take care not to find yourselves fighting against God,” NJB “lest haply ye be found to strive against God,” PNT “You might even be fighting against God Himself !” IE “ It is to be feared that you may find yourselves fighting God,” WILLIAMS and “you might actually find yourselves to be fighting against God!” PHILLIPS

That is, if the cause being put forward by the apostles was initiated by God. In such a case, those who oppose the cause are, in fact, fighting against God Himself, for whoever in any way resists what God is doing has launched a war against Him. There is no question about the outcome of such an initiative.

Mark it well, this is an inspired interpretation of human conduct. Those who are actually fighting against God do not know that is what they are doing. The high priest, Sanhedrin, and elders of Israel thought they were opposing the apostles. They did not have it in their minds to attack God. Yet, what they were actually doing was waging a war against Jesus, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily. It was really Jesus that they were not receiving, as well as the Father who sent Him. As the

Lord Himself said, “He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me ; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me ” (Luke 10:16).

Fighting against God is described in several different ways in Scripture, and all of them sobering.

- **RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT.** “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51).

- **PERSECUTING JESUS.** “And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest : it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:5).

- **RESISTING THE WORDS OF AN INSPIRED MAN.** “And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God ” (Acts 23:9).

- **EXALTING THE HUMAN VOICE AGAINST GOD.** “Whom hast thou reproached and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice , and lifted up thine eyes on high? even against the Holy One of Israel” (2 Kgs 19:22).

- **STRIVING WITH THE MASTER.** “Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker ! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to him that fashioneth it, What makest thou? or thy work, He hath no hands?” (Isa 45:9).

- **PROVOKING THE LORD.** “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?” (1 Cor 10:22).

It took a Gamaliel, skilled in Scripture, to draw the conclusion for them. If, perchance, God was the one behind the work of the apostles, they would be fighting against Him if they sought to stop their efforts.

In all of their hatred and insolence, even the Egyptians knew it was pointless to fight against God. When they were pressing forward through the dried bed of the Red Sea in pursuit of Israel, God took off their chariot wheels. The Egyptians saw what was happening and cried out, “Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians ” (Ex 14:25). Notwithstanding, sin can so stupify the people that they cannot associate what has taken place with the hand of the Lord. Our text is a case in point. God has delivered the apostles from prison miraculously, so that there was no human explanation for it. Yet, these wicked Jewish leaders were so blinded by sin that they could not see it. It took a Gamaliel, skilled in Scripture, to draw the conclusion for them. If, perchance, God was the one behind the work of the apostles, they would be fighting against Him if they sought to stop their efforts.

Actually, the matter was more clear than even Gamaliel could see. It really was no perchance matter at all. These men were opposing God, fighting against Him, and guaranteeing their own downfall. The work of the apostles originated with God Himself. The work of the Jewish council originated with men. That, and that alone, would determine the ultimate outcome of these events.

ASSUMING IS OUT OF ORDER

Later in time, when Paul was converted and preaching the Gospel, he encountered a people described as “more noble.” Their nobility surfaced when they did not assume that the words spoken by Paul were true. Being able to handle the Scriptures, they checked to see if they said what Paul was saying. The account is given by Luke. “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). Their search confirmed that Paul was speaking the truth, and therefore “many of them believed” (Acts 17:12). He was declaring a Messiah that fulfilled what the Scriptures had said of the Messiah whom God would send.

Today there are gospels being preached that cannot be supported by the Scripture. Some resort to Moses to justify what they are saying believers should do – like the health and diet proclaimers. Others take us to Moses to confirm that God wants us to be healthy and wealthy, and to be leaders in business and government. However, they cannot show us where God said He was going to send a Messiah who would do such things. They cannot confirm from the Word of God that this is why Jesus died, rose again, ascended into heaven, and was seated at the right hand of God. If they use the Scriptures at all, they must create a sort of patchwork theology that allows them to blend Moses and Solomon with the worldly-wise men of the day.

However, there is no room in their systems for the words of Jesus, the Head of the church, and His apostles, who laid the appointed foundation. Such systems are all built upon the sand.

TO HIM THEY AGREED

“ 40a And to him they agreed . . .” Other versions read, “they agreed with him,” NKJV “they took his advice,” NASB “His speech persuaded them,” NIV “they were convinced by him,” NRSV “it seemed to them to be right,” BBE “they listened to his advice,” DARBY “they consented to him,” DOUAY “they assented to him,” MRD “his advice was accepted,” NJB “The Jewish leaders then agreed with what Gamaliel said,” IE “His advice carried conviction,” WEYMOUTH and “they gave in to him,” MONTGOMERY

How could this band of

What we are seeing in the book of Acts is the working of the Christ, not the working of men. In this text we have some vessels that were “to dishonor.” They are God’s enemies, and have taken upon themselves to shut down the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus, however, simply will not allow them to do so.

unreasonable men agree with sound counsel? Did their hearts suddenly become tender? Did they change their minds about the apostles? This was not a demonstration of the power of reason. Rather, this was the Lord intervening in the affairs of men. He overturned the intentions of the council like He overturned the counsel of Ahithophel. In the case of Absalom and David, the Lord overthrew good counsel that He “might bring evil upon Absalom” (2 Sam 17:14). In this case, He overthrew the wicked counsel of the Sanhedrin in order that the apostles might go on preaching. As it is written, “He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise . He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong ” (Job 5:12-13). Heaven had directed the apostles to preach. The council had directed them to cease from preaching. Indeed, as it is written, “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand ” (Prov 19:21).

If men are given leave to do their will, over and above that will, they will, as in the case of killing Jesus, do “whatsoever” His “hand” and “counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:28). Our great God can “put it” into men’s hearts “to agree” with someone else, as

- He did with the kings of the earth who agreed with spiritual Babylon. As it is written, “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Rev 17:17).

- When they are wayward, He can turn the hearts of people against His own people. Again it is written, “He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal subtly with His servants” (Psa 105:25).

- He can put His fear into men’s hearts. As it is written, “I will put my fear in their hearts , that they shall not depart from me” (Jer 32:40).

- God put “His wisdom” into the heart of Solomon (1 Kgs 10:24).

- He “put” it into the heart of Artaxerses – a Persian king – to “ beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 7:27).
- He “put” into Nehemiah’s heart to repair the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:12).
- He is a God described as one who “hath put wisdom in the inward parts ? or who hath given understanding to the heart?” (Job 38:36).
- He can “ put gladness ” into the heart (Psa 4:7), “give” people a “new heart” (Ezek 36:26), and put an “earnest care” for His people in the heart of His servants (2 Cor 8:16).
- The New Covenant itself involves God putting His law “in their inward parts,” and writing “it in their hearts” (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10; 10:16).

This is the true God, and it is how He works among the sons of men. If you, like myself, have come from a background that emphasized man’s free will , all of this may sound strange. However, if your mind has been shaped by the Word of God, an emphasis upon man’s imagined free will sounds strange. If this whole subject is confusing, you owe it to yourself to search the Scriptures and see whether what I have said is true. See if God ever uses the expression “freewill” KJV or “free will,” in reference changing the direction of anything – particularly in regards to salvation. Find if men outside of Christ are in any sense said to be “free.” Perceive if the Gospel is preached as though they were, what men call, free moral agents . And, if they are, why is the convicting power of the Holy Spirit necessary, or being born of God, or being illuminated, or delivered, and having Christ “formed” within.

What we are seeing in the book of Acts is the working of the Christ, not the working of men. In this text we have some vessels that were “to dishonor” (Rom 9:21). They are God’s enemies, and have taken upon themselves to shut down the preaching of the Gospel. Jesus, however, simply will not allow them to do so. He raises up a man they do respect, and bends their wills toward his counsel.

The action that follows will confirm that they did not do this with all of their hearts. While they did consent to let the apostles go for the time being, they did not consent to their continued preaching of the Gospel. Our text says “they agreed.” The Greek word from which “agreed” is translated is **Vepei,sqhsan** (e-pies-thas-an). The root meaning of the word is “persuasion, persuasive power,” THAYER “to convince someone to believe something, and to act on the basis of what is recommended,” LOUW-NIDA “To prevail upon, to win over,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “with persuasive words of wisdom . . . convince, persuade,” GINGRICH This is not a word that emphasizes the insight or understanding of the hearers – as though they responded, “Now we see the error of our ways.” Rather, the word emphasizes the skill of the persuader, who so skillfully presented his case that there was no immediate way of negating what he said. Solomon had this kind of thing in mind when he wrote, “he that winneth souls is wise” (Prov 11:30). This does not emphasize the wisdom of the hearer, but of the speaker. In our text, the idea is that the council could not think of a way to negate what Gamaliel said, and thus deferred to his judgment. That, of course, is not the most noble moral action. Far better to be able to perceive the wisdom of what is said, and understand the words that are spoken.

By way of illustration, Stephen also spoke words of unparalleled wisdom to the Jewish council. We are told, “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” However, rather than releasing Stephen, the council “secretly induced men to say, ‘We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and God.’” The people were thereby stirred up, and the outcome of it all was that Stephen was stoned to death (Acts 6:10-7:59). What was the difference in the account we are reading and that of Stephen? Was Gamaliel wiser than Stephen, and thus more capable of moving the people? Who could imagine such nonsense? God was at work in both instances. In the case with Stephen, his work was completed, and a young witness names Saul was there, who would be impacted by his God-glorifying death. In our text, the work of the apostles was not completed, and God would be more greatly glorified by them continuing to preach the Word, converting sinners and

establishing believers.

THEY BEAT THEM AND LET THEM GO

“40b . . . and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.”

Here the wickedness of men will be confirmed. This is primarily evidenced in their enmity against God Himself, secondarily, in the absence of a love of the truth, and third in their unjustified hatred of the apostles.

THEY CALLED AND BEAT THEM

“ . . . and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them . . .” Other versions read, “And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they flogged them,” NASB “They called the apostles in and had them flogged ,” NIV “and they sent for the Apostles, and, after having them whipped ,” BBE “And calling in the apostles, after they had scourged them ,” DOUAY and “and they had the apostles called in, gave orders for them to be flogged .” NJB

Flogging was no minor punishment. The word itself means, “to flay, skin . . .to beat, throb, smite . . . beat with many stripes,” THAYER “remove the skin, flay, bear, strike repeatedly, whip,” FRIBERG “to strike or beat repeatedly,” LOUW-NIDA and “to have one’s skin flayed off.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This is not merely the administering of severe bruises, but an act in which the skin is separated from the flesh, and often the flesh from the bone. It created deep lacerations, and was a prolonged activity. This was done with rods or sticks, and is also referred to as scourging. Under the Law of Moses, this manner of punishment was administered to those who broke the Law (Lev 19:20; Deut 22:18). It was generally administered to the back, as stated in Proverbs 10:13: “a rod is for the back of him who is void of understanding.” To this present day this remains a manner of punishment in the East. In China, the rod is applied to the soles of the feet in such punishment. In fact, historians have said that China was “governed by the stick” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S Egypt and Persia (now Iran/Iraq) also still practice this form of punishment.

The picture of Egyptian flogging is taken from some Egyptian art which depicted the use of rods for punishment on children, men, and women. Under the Law of Moses, this form of punishment, although not limited to rods, was administered while a man was lying down before the judge (Deut 25:3), as depicted in the graphic of Egyptian flogging. You may remember that Paul said he was beaten with rods on three separate occasions (2 Cor 11:25).

You can see that the Sanhedrin, while deferring to the counsel of Gamaliel, were by no means moved to be compassionate toward the apostles. Rather, they subjected them to a very severe form of punishment, even though they could find nothing worthy of punishment in them (Acts 4:21). They also proceed with this beating, even though they have been counseled by Gamaliel to leave them along.

This is the first time the apostles have endured bodily oppression. Their first opposition was incarceration and being threatened. Now, however, the opposition is increasing, and they are subjected to a harsh form of punishment. During His ministry, Jesus told them, “But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues” (Matt 10:17). While this scourging was not in a synagogue, it was done in the name of religion – particularly the activities of the Temple.

Thus we catch a glimpse of one of Satan’s main attacks against the servants of God. He launches an initiative against the body of Christ from a religious environment. The most serious of these environments is the one that comes in the name of God Himself. In our text, it is the God of Abraham

and of Israel. Later, persecution will be experienced from those who actually wear the name of Jesus.

THEY COMMANDED THEM THAT THEY SHOULD NOT SPEAK

“ . . . they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.” Other versions read, “ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them,” NASB “giving them orders to give no teaching in the name of Jesus, they let them go,” BBE “ enjoined them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and dismissed them,” DARBY “ordered them not to speak about the one named Jesus , and let them go,” GWN “Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go,” NLT “commanded them not to talk to the people ever again about the name of Jesus . After that they let them go free,” IE “charged them to stop speaking on the authority of Jesus , and then turned them loose,” WILLIAMS “released them, with instructions not to speak about the name of Jesus,” MONTGOMERY and “ sternly forbade them to speak in or about the name of Jesus, and allowed them to go.” AMPLIFIED

At once you see that these men completely missed the point of Gamaliel’s words, even though he had convinced them. Of what, then, did this expert in the Law convince them? It was that they should let the men go. They saw no correlation at all with letting them go and their cause being of the Lord. Gamaliel had told them not to oppose these men, lest they be found fighting against God. However, they are not only opposing the work of the apostles, but strictly charging them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, or say anything about Him. Their hearts were so hard they could not see that such an edict was really fighting against God.

The Tendency Remains Today

I fear that if the unvarnished truth of Christ was clearly declared in the average church, we would find the divisions among professing worshipers of God still as sharp as those that are revealed in our text.

There remains among religious men this inveterate tendency to look only on the surface of things, judging according to appearance, and in harmony with the flesh. There is now, however, a complicating factor. In our text, a pure message was being preached that gave little or no regard to the desires of men. It was the desire of the Lord that was fundamental, and the work of Jesus was the primary work. In our day, however, there is a strong appeal to the desires of the people – people who do not look deeply at things, or perceive the real “issues of life” (Prov 4:23). We are in a generation that is dominated by hedonism, or the quest for pleasure.

Thus, the people are already at a decided disadvantage, for God has no consoling word for such a people. There is no good message from heaven for those who are content with this world, and who seek primarily their own temporal interests. Those who deliver a Gospel that is tailored for casual and disinterested people have brought reproach upon the Savior. They have not accentuated the right things, and thus moved the Holy Spirit out of the picture, for He does not use convenient and false gospels to convince men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Now, the truth is not generally opposed by the ungodly simply because it is not being declared.

I fear that if the unvarnished truth of Christ was clearly declared in the average church, we would find the divisions among professing worshipers of God still as sharp as those that are revealed in our text.

After beating them, the council releases the apostles, delivering a sort of ultimatum to them. What will the apostles do? Will they stop preaching as they were commanded to do? How will they react to unjust treatment? Will they give up, or leave the area, choosing to preaching somewhere else? We will see.

THEY LEFT REJOICING

“ 41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.”

It is important to perceive that we are witnessing the expression of “newness of life.”

- We are beholding how it responds in times of popularity (Acts 2:47; 5:13).
- We are shown how true life responds when it is threatened (4:24-30).
- When it confronts hypocrisy in the church, life also has a response (5:3-11).
- Its response to the commands of the Lord is made known (2:41; 5:20-21).
- When standing before critics, we have also seen the expression of genuine life (4:20; 5:29).

Now, we will see how spiritual life responds to suffering.

- This is not the triumph of the human will, but the people being caused to triumph in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 2:14).
- This is reigning in life by Christ Jesus (Rom 5:17).
- It is having dominion over sin because men are “under grace” (Rom 6:14).
- We are witnessing an example of taking the kingdom by force (Matt 11:12; Lk 16:16).
- This is the victory that comes from believing Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).
- We are given to see what it means to press toward the mark (Phil 3:14).
- This is not being weary in well doing (2 Thess 3:13).
- It is believing to the saving of the soul (Heb 10:38).
- Here we behold disciples denying themselves, taking up their cross, and following Jesus (Matt 16:24).

This is something we must press to comprehend: the doctrine of the epistles is lived out in the book of Acts.

THEY DEPARTED FROM THE PRESENCE OF THE COUNCIL

“ 41 And they departed from the presence of the council . . . ” Other versions read, “So they went on their way from the presence of the Council,” NASB “ the apostles left the Sanhedrin,” NIV “So they went away from the Sanhedrin,” BBE “and they indeed went from the presence of the council,” DOUAY and “The apostles left the council room .” GWN

After being beaten, the apostles were not carried from the council chambers. They left under their own power. They further “went their own way.” They did not rush to a physician to treat their wounds. They did not seek legal counsel in order to press charges against their oppressors. They did not return to warn the other disciples of impending danger. They did not perceive what happened to them as being a contradiction to the prayer for God to behold the threatening of their enemies. They did not ask God why all of this was happening when they were trying to serve Him. Those kind of responses are the whimpers of the weak. The faith of these men had been strong.

When they left the council, they departed to resume their labors, knowing they would be required to ignore the mandate that was given to them.

REJOICED THAT THEY WERE COUNTED WORTHY

“ . . . rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” Other versions read, “rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name,” NASB “rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name,” NIV “they rejoiced that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name,” NRSV “happy to undergo shame for the Name,” BBE “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be dishonored on behalf of the name,” CSB “rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus,” DOUAY “rejoicing, that they were counted worthy to suffer rebuke for his Name,” GENEVA “They were happy to have been considered worthy to suffer dishonor for speaking about Jesus ,” GWN “rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus,” NLT “but they were happy, because they were given the honor of suffering dishonor for the name,” IE “rejoicing that they had been deemed worthy to suffer disgrace on behalf of the NAME ,” WEYMOUTH “rejoicing that they were being counted worthy [dignified by the indignity] to suffer shame and be exposed to disgrace for [the sake of] His name,” AMPLIFIED and “full of joy that they had been considered worthy to bear humiliation for the sake of the name.” PHILLIPS

How can the adversary ever hope to overcome holy men when they consider suffering for the name of Jesus an honor and a privilege? They did not delight in the suffering itself, but in the confirmation that it delivered to their hearts. Suffering feels no better to the body of a child of God than it does to anyone else. However, saints live according to a power that is greater than that of the flesh. They are able to reach higher, see further, and be aware of more than the limited senses of the body. Faith is in God and can therefore draw on resources that are external to the “natural man.”

In our life with Christ, this world is not the main place, and therefore the things that are experienced in it are not the primary things. Ultimately, all believers are being called out of the world in order to dwell with the Lord forever. Seen in its very best sense, life in this world is a time of preparation and orientation for glory. It is what we are , where we go , and what we do AFTER the present heavens and earth pass away that is of the most critical importance. No person who is cast into hell will think that his life on earth was in any sense worth the living. However, everyone in the glory will be thankful for every minute they lived for Jesus and without regard for their personal pleasure and comfort.

Suffering for the name of Jesus is the path that leads to glorification. That being the case, when men suffer for Jesus’ sake, they ought to contemplate the glory that is ahead. Then they will not only be tested with all suffering, but will thereby be inducted into the reign to which they were appointed, and for which they were duly prepared.

Scripture indicates that our role in heaven is an assignment. The saved will be told, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ” (Mat 25:34). When James and John asked that they might be seated on Christ’s right and left hand, He replied, “ But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared ” (Mark 10:40). While this is not the only view of our inheritance, it is an essential one. It is in view of this arrangement that great suffering can be perceived as indicative of a significant role in glory. It appears to me that this is how the apostles were viewing things.

When they said “counted worthy to suffer,” they were not speaking of the suffering itself, but concerning the cause that drove that suffering. In it, a certain worthiness was being cultured. Paul spoke more specifically of this line of thought to the Thessalonians. “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God , for which ye also suffer” (2 Thess 1:5).

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men suffer for Jesus' sake, they ought to contemplate the glory that is ahead. Then they will not only be tested with all suffering, but will thereby be inducted into the reign to which they were appointed, and for which they were duly prepared.

Suffering for the name of Christ cannot be done accidentally or inadvertently. Such suffering can only be experienced when the life of Christ is manifested through those who are walking by faith. That manifested life chafes against those who are of this world, and even threatens them. Those who see in this revelation a threat instead of an opportunity lash out against the vessels through whom Christ's life is being made known. While the opposition can take different forms, it always accomplishes a number of things in the one who is unwilling to walk in contradiction of Jesus.

- It confirms that the believer is not of this world.
- It ratifies his identity with Christ.
- It makes a further separation between the believer and the world.
- It brings a greater clarity to the nature of Christ Himself.
- It brightens the hope of glory.
- It drives the trusting to draw closer to the Lord.
- It provokes holy contemplation.

In all of this, the disciples are in fellowship with Jesus, who, “for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb 12:2). This is the same kind of rejoicing that Paul and Silas did when they were beaten and placed in prison, with their feet “fast in the stocks.” It was at that time that they “prayed and sang praises unto God” (Acts 16:23-25). They were fulfilling the word that Jesus gave to them early in His ministry: “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you” (Matt 5:10-12).

This kind of rejoicing is the result of spiritual discernment. A person cannot rejoice to be counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus out of a sense of obligation, or in obedience to a commandment. It is their insight and understanding that prompts such marvelous rejoicing.

By the same token, where the real cause of suffering is not known, or if the hope of glory is not present, it will become the point at which the soul will begin to draw back – as Peter did on the night of Christ's betrayal (Lk 22:57). In our text, Peter is facing a greater degree of suffering than He did on that night in the palace of the high priest. Yet, he does not draw back so much as a millimeter. The difference is that both his present ministry his eternal destiny were now clear to him. The “full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22) and “the full assurance of hope” (Heb 6:11) belonged to him. Unlike those early days, His perception of Jesus was now accompanied with “the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2). Those who are in possession of such benefits cannot be shaken by the opposition of mere mortals. Their faith makes them superior to circumstance, as well as their enemies.

THEY CONTINUED TO TEACH AND PREACH

“ 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. ”

Confirming the invincibility of faith, the apostles resume their heavenly-appointed mission. They have nurtured their faith, refusing to abandon it during times of difficulty. As a result, they have been “kept by the power of God through faith” (1 Pet 1:5). That is the factor that makes faith unvanquishable! It is, after all, “the victory that overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4-5). Where men

are overcome by the world, whether by threats or lures, it is always because of a fundamental deficiency in their faith.

DAILY IN THE TEMPLE, AND IN EVERY HOUSE

“And daily in the temple, and in every house . . .” Other versions read, “And every day , in the temple and from house to house,” NASB “ Day after day , in the temple courts and from house to house,” NIV “And every day in the temple and at home ,” NRSV “And every day, in the Temple and privately ,” BBE “Every day in the temple complex, and in various homes ,” CSB “And they ceased . . . daily, in the temple and at home,” MRD “and all day long , both at the temple and in the homes,” NAB “ Day after day , in the temple courts and from house to house,” NIB “And every day, in the Temple and in their home Bible classes ,” LIVING “every day, in the Temple or in private houses ,” WEYMOUTH “they never ceased for a single day , both in the temple area and at home,” AMPLIFIED and “Then day after day in the Temple and in people's houses .” PHILLIPS

Even as it was with their blessed Lord, the religion of the apostles was not seasonal. In “a great falling away,” when people find it difficult to devote two or three uninterrupted communal hours a week to their “Father’s business,” this kind of report sounds most strange.

There are precious few structures devoted to the Lord Jesus that are used daily for the preaching and teaching of the Word of God. They may be opened for exercise, public education, sundry community services, etc. Some may even provide some kind of counseling services every day in which they attempt to meet the needs of people with special problems. But who has heard of daily preaching and teaching?

Yet, God had cultured a people to whom this concept was not strange. Jesus Himself taught in the Temple every day (Matt 26:55; Mk 14:49; Lk 19:47; 22:53). Even the lame man who was healed by Peter and John was “laid daily at the gate of the Temple” where people were regularly moving in and out (Acts 3:2). There was even a daily “hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1). Even the First Covenant was, in a manner of speaking, one that included daily teaching and prayer.

This kind of conduct blends well with the nature of spiritual life, which must be sustained on a daily basis. It is exceedingly difficult to conceive of a modern preacher delivering the Word of God every day. Or, for that matter, where would he do so if he so desired? The point is that a sanctified place and form was in place that allowed for daily teaching in the things of God.

It is not surprising, therefore, that after the day of Pentecost, the early church “continued daily with one accord in the Temple” (Acts 2:46). And now, after they have been beaten, the apostles return to the Temple every day to teach and preach.

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Remember, the angel of the Lord had told the apostles , “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20). He did not say to do so every day. In the modern church scene, that word might have been interpreted to mean every Sunday . But that is not how the apostles viewed the word of the angel. Their hearts were not tuned to a weekly frequency. Even when they were severely beaten and strictly charged to stop preaching, they went back to the Temple every day and taught.

Even that was not the end of the matter. They also engaged in the same activity “in every house.”

When they were not in the Temple, they were in private dwellings. What a marvelous picture of their commitment to and love for the Lord Jesus, as well as their consistent interest in the people.

THEY CEASED NOT TO TEACH AND PREACH JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.” Other versions read, “they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ,” NASB “they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ,” NIV “they did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah,” NRSV “they went on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ,” BBE “they ceased not teaching and announcing the glad tidings that Jesus was the Christ,” DARBY “they refused to stop teaching and telling the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah,” GWN “they went on ceaselessly teaching and proclaiming the good news of Christ Jesus,” NJB “they continued to teach and preach this message : ‘Jesus is the Messiah.’” NLT “they were not ceasing teaching and proclaiming good news -- Jesus the Christ,” YLT “They kept on telling the people the Good News that Jesus is the Messiah,” IE “to teach and to proclaim the good news (Gospel) of Jesus [as] the Christ (the Messiah),” AMPLIFIED and “they continued to teach unceasingly and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ.” PHILLIPS

And what were the apostles doing in the Temple and from house to house? Were they listening to the problems of the people? Or simply engaging in some neutral kind of social activities? Or just, as some are wont to say, “hanging out?” Their activity was focused. They were “teaching and preaching.” That is, expounding and declaring, or opening and alleging, or announcing and elaborating, or making known and enlarging upon. The theme of these activities was “Jesus Christ.” That is, they declared and expounded His Person and His work; who He is, what He said, what He did, and what He is doing. He was presented as God’s solitary remedy for the human condition caused by sin. He was shown to be the only means of coming into the favor of God, or being accepted by Him. Only through Him could men be brought back and kept, or converted and sustained.

This is another way of expounding the fact that men are “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10). The Jewish leaders had convinced the people that Jesus was the problem, and therefore they crucified Him. By exalting Him and giving Him all power in heaven and earth, God had affirmed that He was the total answer – not just initially, but for all of life. Only Jesus can give eternal life (John 10:26; 17:2). He is the only one who can give us an understanding of God, which is essential to the maintenance of eternal life (1 John 5:20). He is the only One who can lead us, or feed us, or keep us. He is the only One to whom God ultimately listens, and therefore He is the Intercessor. No one else can bring us to God (1 Pet 3:18). He is the only One by whom we “do believe in God” (1 Pet 1:21). He is the “Head of the body” (Col 1:18). There is no authority or profitable power part from Him, for He has been given “all power in heaven and earth” (Matt 28:28). He is the One in whom we made a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10). He alone can keep us “from falling” (Jude 1:24). All of “the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). He is the only One in whom we can “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8). In Him alone do men “have boldness and access with confidence” (Eph 3:12). The love of God is realized only through Him (Rom 8:39).

How is it possible that other Gospels have arisen that move men to trust in other things? Why has Jesus been upstaged in modern preaching with a man-centered message? How can these things have happened within the church? A change of emphasis has occurred because, at some point, Jesus Christ Himself ceased to be the Subject of preaching and teaching. About this, there can be no question!

The preaching of Christ results in a certain non-worldly emphasis, for Jesus is in heaven, where our affections are to be placed (Col 3:1-2). Such preaching always yields good results in those who believe. Likewise, it stirs up those who have not received the love of the truth that they might be saved. All of these things are being lived out in the book of Acts.

CONCLUSION

Our text reveals the triumph of faith. The apostles had faith in Christ, knowing that He was the Son of God. This faith compelled them to do what the Lord had commanded them before He left the world – preach repentance and the remission of sins in Jesus’ name, “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47). When they encountered threats from the very people who had crucified the Son of God, they immediately prayed the Lord would behold the threatenings of their enemies, and grant them that with all boldness they might speak the word (Acts 4:29). Now, after being arrested and beaten, then commanded to speak no more in Jesus’ name, they return to the Temple every day preaching Jesus Christ, and doing so from house to house as well. How is it that they were able to be so consistent in their obedience and faithfulness – particularly when it involved suffering?

Many professing Christians compromise their faith under some mere social pressure from their peers. Some do so in order to be more popular, not wanting to be different from the crowd. Others buy into a compromising religion – a system of Christian thought that allows the individual to remain close to the world, and even maintain worldly preferences. What is the difference between the apostles and such people? Is it that the apostles were a kind of spiritual supermen who did things the rest of the body of Christ cannot do. Admittedly, there was such a thing as “the signs of an apostle” (2 Cor 12:12), and the “many signs and wonders” that were done by them (Acts 2:43; 5:12). Did they not pray for God to grant them boldness to speak His word by stretching forth His hand “to heal; and that sighs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:30)? Do those things account for their faithfulness? Indeed not!

First, they did not ask for signs and wonders to be done so they would keep the faith, or be consistent, or love God with all of their heart and soul. Rather, they had asked for these things in order that they might confidently preach in the face of adversity. The question is, what made them want to do this? Why were their hearts so insistent that they continue, and not relent?

The answer is found in the very nature of newness of life. The “new man,” we are told, “is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). He is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him who created him” (Col 3:10). This creation takes place when a person is born again – in fact, this is the result of the new birth. There is, however, one complicating factor. There can come a time when each child of God must “put on the new man,” as the Ephesians were admonished to do (Eph 4:24). This is true even though, in another sense, “the new man” was put on when they were baptized into Christ (Col 3:10; Gal 3:27).

When a person is really living by faith, the new man remains in dominance, the “old man” is “put off” (Col 3:9) and the flesh is “mortified,” or “crucified” (Rom 8:13; Gal 5:24). However, if men begin to “draw back” (Heb 10:39), and allow the entrance of “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb 3:12), the “old man” rises to prominence, and “the flesh” begins to dictate the manner of life. Faith will not allow such things to happen, but unbelief will cause them to take place.

What, then, is the distinction of the apostles, and of the record we are reading? It is that they were living by faith, and thus were able to fulfill their calling. Those who lack spiritual consistency, and are in a backward motion, are not living by faith, but are in the grip of unbelief.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #26

DISSENSION RISES, BUT IS OVERCOME

“ 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. 4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word. 5 And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch: 6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. 7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith. ” (Acts 6:1-7)

INTRODUCTION

Having been caught off guard, Satan has now regrouped, so to speak, and is assaulting the church as depicted in the twelfth chapter of the Revelation. “And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood . . . And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:15,17). The people of God cannot afford to be naive about Satan’s aggression. When approaching life, we are solemnly admonished, “ Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). The only way to effectively negate his initiative is by means of our faith. If our faith is small, or we have none at all, it is not possible to defeat this foe. Thus, Peter continues, “Whom resist steadfast

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in the faith . . .” (1 Pet 5:9). This being true, what we are witnessing in the book of Acts is the outworking of faith.

First Satan attacked the church without, through the Temple authorities and the Sanhedrin. That effort failed miserably, and the church increased . Then he attacked it from within, through Ananas and Sapphira, who had been living too close to his domain. Again, the effort failed abysmally, and the church kept on increasing. Then he attacked it once again from outside, through the Sanhedrin and elders of Israel. This time, he was given leave to inflict pain on the apostles. However, the effort again failed, and the number of disciples still continued to increase. Jesus was building His church, and no Satanic effort could thwart it or impede it. As long as the people kept the faith, their cause was invincible. Because Satan is unable to learn, he now attacks the church again from within. This time he will attempt to corrupt it with murmuring, as he did with Israel.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO BE SEEN

There are some important Kingdom principles to be seen throughout the book of Acts. Some of them have a particular bearing upon our text.

“Apostles”

First, there are repeated references to the “apostles” who are at the heart of our text. There are thirty

references to the “apostles” in the book of Acts. Most all of them refer to the “apostles of Christ” (1 Thess 2:6) – men sent forth personally by Jesus Christ (1:2,26; 2:37,42,43; 4:33,35,36,37; 5:2,12, 18,29,34, 40; 6:6; 8:1,14,18; 9:27; 11:1; 14:4; 15:33). Commencing with the fifteenth chapter, there are numerous references to these “apostles and elders” (15:2,4, 6,22,23,33; 16:4). There is one reference to the apostles sent forth by the Holy Spirit for a special work – “Barnabas and Paul” (14:4). With the exception of Barnabas, the “apostles” of reference are the “foundation” upon which the church is built (Eph 2:20). That is, they are the ones who put the Foundation, which is Christ, in place among men (Isa 28:16). They did this through the insightful preaching of the Gospel, as opened to them by the Holy Spirit.

In all of their recorded activities, they were functioning as the appointed representatives of the Lord Jesus Christ. Their power and authority was not in their position, but in their living association with the Head of all things. In other words, Christ was working through them to build His church. The apostles in no way represented a hierarchical system of authority, as is practiced by the Gentiles (Matt 20:25-27). Their mission was not to establish a certain pattern of organization. Rather, working through them, Jesus was building His church. If we lose sight of this, we will find ourselves drifting toward lifeless religion – form without power.

“Disciples”

Second, commencing with this text, the word “disciples” will be used throughout the book of Acts – at least twenty-eight times (6:1,2,7; 9:1,10,19,25, 26,36,38; 11:26,29; 13:52; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 16:1; 18:23,27; 19:1,9,30; 20:1,7; 21:4,16). The other prominent reference to these disciples is “believers,” or those who “believed.” Both of these terms (disciples and believers) are rather unique. Neither of them promote purely sectarian interests. Both of them convey the idea of personal involvement as opposed to a mere formal identity – like a member of a roster, or belonging to a particular group.

The word “disciple” means, “a learner, pupil . . . one who follows one’s teaching,” THAYER “one who directs his mind to something . . . apprentice . . . one who attached himself to a spiritual leader,” FRIBERG “follower,” UBS “a person who is a disciple or follower of someone,” LOUW-NIDA and “adherent.” GINGRICH

The word “disciple” does not represent a particular system of thought that has been embraced. It is not descriptive of membership in an organization, or confirmation of inclusion on a roster or listing. It rather speaks of a certain life-posture. Primarily, a “disciple” is a pupil, or learner. This does not speak of a self-taught person. A pupil learns from someone else. Thus, a “disciple” is someone who IS learning from someone else. In the sense in which our text is speaking, the Teacher is the Lord Jesus Christ. He uses means to accomplish this teaching. Inwardly, the Holy Spirit is the One who brings home the teaching to the individual. Outwardly, and in our text, He is employing the apostles, who were delivering the message through which life is realized. However, in both cases, it is still the Lord Jesus who is doing the teaching.

Jesus spoke directly to this matter of being a disciple, giving us a most vivid picture of its involvements.

- “Take My yoke upon you, and learn of [from] Me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt 11:29).
- “My sheep hear My voice , and I know them, and they follow Me” (John 10:27).
- “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep My words : and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23).

Paul also described the posture of a believer by saying they listened to, and learned from, Christ

Jesus. “But ye have not so learned Christ ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by Him , as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:20-21). This, of course, is in keeping with the mandate that was issued from the Throne of God: “Hear ye Him!” (Matt 17:5).

The word “disciple” also carries the idea of a follower – one who adheres to a specific Person, and refuses to depart from Him. Their interests lie in another – their Teacher. In this case, the Teacher, and the One who is eagerly pursued, is the Lord Jesus.

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Right here there is something important to note. There are restrictions on who is allowed to follow Jesus – particularly if they are to learn from Him. Jesus did not shroud these requirements with obscurity, but placed them squarely before the people.

- **DENY SELF.** “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me ” (Mark 8:34). Those who deny themselves refuse to allow personal fleshly and worldly interests to draw them away from Christ. This is an absolute requirement for following Jesus and gaining spiritual advantage from Him.

- **TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY.** “And He said to them all , If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me ” (Luke 9:23). This speaks of determination – taking up the cross, and being ready to accept the consequences of following Jesus in this represent evil world. Again, this is required to follow Jesus and learn from Him. It is not an option, or a status achieved after considerable tenure with the Savior. It is not a higher level of discipleship, but is found in every part of spiritual life.

- **NO COMPETITIVE ALLEGIANCE.** “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also , he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). At the point there is competition between one’s family and Jesus, the disciple must choose to follow Jesus. If this choice is not made, it is not possible to either follow or learn from Jesus.

- **BEARING THE CROSS.** “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me , cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27) – bearing up under the consequences of following Jesus. This is the life that follows taking up the cross of self-crucifixion. There will be repercussions to an individual insisting on following Jesus regardless of what it costs. If the person balks at this, and chooses a course of life that lessens the sufferings, he at once ceases to be a disciple. He can no longer follow or be taught by the Lord Jesus.

- **FORSAKING ALL.** “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath , he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33). Everything that a person possesses must be held lightly, knowing that it may be lost in a moment. To forsake all that one has is to acknowledge that it is temporal, and will not be allowed to dominate one’s thinking.

Jesus will receive no one who does not meet this criterion. In such a case, the person is disqualified from being taught or led by Jesus. That also means that no one who fails on these points can receive Christ, for it is not possible to receive Him, yet not be His disciple.

Applying This to Our Text

When our text refers to “the disciples,” it is speaking about this kind of people. They had forsaken all, and were following Jesus. They were taking up their cross daily, and were being taught by Jesus.

Our Present Circumstance

If you read the book of Acts with the church of today in your mind, it will look like a book of ideas. Or, perhaps, it will be perceived only as the record of beginnings. But you may be sure of one thing, it will bear absolutely no resemblance to the nominal church.

In our time, it is thought that there are two classes Christians: ordinary ones and committed ones. It is imagined that there are two kinds of saved people: those who only have accepted Jesus as their Savior, and others, more advanced, who have gone on to receive Him as Lord. It is also generally accepted that there are two kinds of Christians: spiritual Christians, and carnal Christians. These are commonly held views, and anyone who objects to them is considered to be too judgmental.

Every person who comes into Christ is freed from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2). That is how they all got started. If they come under the dominion of sin again, it is because they have drawn back (Heb 10:38-39). That is not the way they were “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). Everyone who is baptized into Christ puts on Christ (Gal 3:27). If they come to a point where they must be admonished to put Him on again (Rom 13:14), it is because they have put Him off in deference to the flesh. That is not the way they got started. All of the children of God began newness of life with their old man crucified (Rom 6:6). If they must admonished to “put off the old man” again (Eph 4:22), it is because they left him off the cross. That is not the way they got started.

We really do not need preachers and teachers giving us a palatable explanation why there is sin in the church. It is because those who are so described have ceased to Christ’s disciples – if they ever were in the first place. They have not resisted the devil, and thus have been overcome by him. They have not crucified the flesh, and are therefore dominated by it. To further complicate their situation, Jesus neither leads or teaches such people. If they are ever to recover from their plight, they must again become a disciple – a real one who forsakes everything to follow Jesus, and sits at His feet to learn from Him. That simply is what Jesus requires, and no honest person will balk at it.

IN THOSE DAYS

“ 6:1a And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied.”

The book of Acts is not a chronological journal in which every event is recorded. As was the manner with inspired men, they did not give a prolonged record of times in which a certain consistency existed – whether evil or good. The period of Adam to the flood (approximately 1,655 years) is covered by six chapters in the Scriptures (Gen 1-6). Three of those chapters are devoted to creation and the account of the fall of man. The events that are recorded include:

- The creation, including the naming of the animals and the creation of Eve (1:1-2:25 – 56 verses).
- The fall of man (3:1-24– 24 verses).
- The birth of Cain (4:1 – 1 verse).
- The birth of Abel (4:2 – 1 verse).
- The first offerings to God (4:3-4 – 2 verses).
- The murder of Abel ().
- Cain building a city (4:17).
- Lamech taking two wives (4:19).
- Lamech commits murder (4:23-24).
- Men beginning to call on the name of the Lord (4:26).
- The translation of Enoch (5:24).

- God’s revelation to Noah of the coming flood (6:8-7:5).

The point is that history can be measured by epochs – by things that occurred in a given period time. This is generally the way in which history is approached in Scripture. Our text is a sterling example of this.

IN THOSE DAYS

That Kingdom was set up in a hostile realm, and its constituents were surrounded by enemies. All manner of seeming disadvantage was found among those who had been joined to the King, but it presented no insurmountable difficulty.

“And in those days . . .” Other versions read, “Now at this time,” NASB “Now during those days,” NRSV “Now in these days,” RSV “But in those days,” DARBY “At that time,” GWN “About this time,” NJB and “during this same time.” IE

The time covered in this text was one in which the powers of darkness were doing their best to subvert the purpose of God. They were not in any way successful. In spite of the opposition the church encountered, it continued rolling forward like the stone in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2:34-35, 44-45). Having been seated at the right hand of God, Jesus had inaugurated the Kingdom that Daniel said God would “set up” (Dan 2:44-45). That Kingdom was set up in a hostile realm, and its constituents were surrounded by enemies. All manner of seeming disadvantage was found among those who had been joined to the King, but it presented no insurmountable difficulty. Ponder the marvelous things that had taken place from the day of Pentecost to this point.

- **DIVINE INTERVENTION.** The place where the disciples were seating was shaken, a rushing mighty wind was heard, and they were all filled with the Holy spirit (2:1-3).
- **MIRACULOUS SPEAKING.** The disciples declared “the wonderful works of God” in other languages (2:4,11).
- **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** Peter delivers an insightful account of the death, burial, resurrection, and exaltation of Christ (2:14-37).
- **GLAD OBEDIENCE.** Three thousand receive His word gladly, and are baptized (2:38-41).
- **STEADFASTNESS.** The disciples continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (2:42).
- **SELFLESSNESS.** In a display of total selflessness, the disciples had all things common (2:43-45).
- **CONTINUANCE.** They continued daily in the Temple and breaking bread from house to house (2:46).
- **DAILY INCREASE.** The Lord added daily to the church such as were being saved (2:47).
- **HEALING.** A man who was lame from birth is healed by Peter and John (3:1-8).
- **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** As the people rush to behold what had happened, Peter delivered another insightful proclamation of the exalted Christ (3:12-26).
- **LARGE NUMBERS BELIEVE.** Five thousand men believed the word Peter delivered (4:4).
- **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** Peter and John are arrested, and deliver a Word concerning the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus (4:1-3, 5-22).

• **FERVENT PRAYER.** Upon hearing of the threatenings of the Temple authorities, the disciples pray with one accord for boldness to speak the Word, and it is granted (4:24-33).

• **SHARING.** The disciples again had all things common, and no one among them lacked. Brethren began selling lands and houses in order to meet everyone's need (4:34-37).

• **PURGING.** The church is purged of moral pollution, as Ananas and Sapphira are struck dead by God (5:1-10).

• **SIGNS AND WONDERS.** Many signs and wonders were done by the apostles, and multitudes of believers were added to the Lord (5:11-14).

• **HEALING.** Multitudes came out of the surrounding cities, bringing their sick to be healed, and "every one of them" was healed (5:15-16).

• **DELIVERANCE.** The apostles are arrested, put into prison, and released by an angel during the night. The angel tells them to return to the Temple and declare all the words of this life (5:17-19).

• **PREACHING THE GOSPEL.** Upon returning to the Temple and resuming their preaching, the apostles are arrested and questioned. During that time, Peter again delivers a stirring declaration of the death, resurrection, exaltation, and present work of Jesus (5:26-32).

• **DELIVERANCE.** The council, being cut to the heart, determine to kill the apostles. However, providentially, Gamaliel is used by God to turn their hearts. After beating the apostles and charging them to preach no more in the name of Jesus, they are released (5:33-40).

• **PREACHING AND TEACHING.** The apostles return to their preaching and teaching, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus (5:40-42).

This is the context for the phrase "those days." As you can see, this was not an environment produced by human strategies or plans. It was not the result of an apostolic conference. This was the working of the Lord, and was wrought within the framework of faith and discipleship.

Some have affirmed that this is the way things were at the first, but is not the way things were intended to remain. The official position is that the miraculous was terminated with the death of the apostles. Then the church entered into a period of, what is viewed as, normalcy. By default, that gives a prominent place to natural aptitudes and the wisdom of men, even though that is not always acknowledged. Of course, this position is taken because of the vast chasm of difference that exists between the early church and the church of our time.

However, it is more likely that this difference can be accounted for by a departure from the faith, than a change in the Divine manner. Christ's Kingdom is an increasing one, not a diminishing one. In fact, it was prophesied there would be "no end" to its increase (Isa 9:7), and that before it is finished it will fill "the whole earth" (Dan 2:35,45).

It seems to me that a very limited purpose is served by confining events, such as those mentioned, with the beginning of an era. I suppose it could be affirmed that this establishes the legitimacy of the church. However, that is a very weak view, both intellectually and spiritually. It would be like saying the miraculous order revealed in the nation of Israel ended when they left Egypt, or when Moses died, or when Joshua died, or when David died . . . etc. None but a fool would be willing to confirm such a position.

Our text speaks of something that occurred "in those days." The point was not to limit the possibility of what follows to those days, and I do not believe anyone is willing to affirm such a

postulate. This will rather confirm to our hearts that when the Lord is working, that does not mean the devil ceases to work – at least while the world remains. It does not mean that when the disciples are of one heart and soul that disruptions will not occur. When there is peace, we are not to imagine that an encroachment cannot be made among the brethren.

The truth is that disruption, encroachment, and similar things, provide an occasion to prove the superiority of the wisdom that comes down from above. If the people are walking by faith, and if they and their teachers are abiding in Christ, imaginations will be cast down, and every thought taken captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5).

THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES WAS MULTIPLIED

“ . . . when the number of the disciples was multiplied . . . ” Other versions read, “when the number of disciples was multiplying ,” NKJV “the number of disciples was increasing ,” NIV “the disciples were increasing in number ,” NRSV “the number of disciples grew ,” GENEVA “the disciples had become numerous ,” MRD “the number of disciples continued to grow ,” NAB “as the believers rapidly multiplied ,” NLT “with the believers multiplying rapidly ,” LIVING “more and more people were becoming followers,” IE “the number of disciples was growing larger and larger ,” ISV “the number of disciples was greatly increasing ,” AMPLIFIED “the number of disciples was continually increasing ,” PHILLIPS “a lot of people were now becoming followers of the Lord,” CEV and “the number of disciples kept growing .” GNB

The teaching that was being done produced these kind of people – people who left all to take up their cross every day and follow Jesus, adhering to His teaching. In your judgment, is this the kind of people that are the products of modern evangelism?

We must not lose sight of what is being said here. This was not an increase in membership, as commonly conceived. There are numberless churches whose membership far exceeds their active people. A church with 1,000 members will probably have only about 500-600 active people – and that is a high estimate. It was the number of DISCIPLES that was increasing – people who were forsaking all, taking up their cross, and following Jesus. These were people who were sitting at the feet of Jesus and learning from Him as Mary did (Lk 10:39).

It was what was being preached that drew these disciples, for “faith cometh by hearing” (Rom 10:17). That preaching was absolutely Christ-centered. “Disciples” are not the result of a soul-winning campaign, as ordinarily conceived. Jesus had commanded His disciples, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, , baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” As they went forward with that work, He promised, “and lo, I am with you, alway even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:18-20). Mark gives the same perspective: “And He said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:15-16). That is the proper framework for the making of “disciples,” or learners, or pupils– between “teaching” and “teaching.” In the place of “teaching all nations,” more recent versions read “make disciples.” NKJV/NASB/ NIV/NRSV The Greek word from which “teaching” (in both verses nineteen and twenty of Matthew twenty-eight) is translated is **maqhteusate** (math-ayt-yoo-say-tay). The lexical meaning of this word, in this tense, is, “to make a disciple, to teach, instruct,” THAYER “make a disciple of someone, instruct, cause someone to become a follower,” FRIBERG and to make “make a disciple of someone, instruct, cause someone to become a follower.” LOUW-NIDA

The teaching that was being done produced these kind of people – people who left all to take up their cross every day and follow Jesus, adhering to His teaching. In your judgment, is this the kind of people that are the products of modern evangelism? Is this what is being produced on the average mission field? Is this the description of the average Bible College or Seminary student? Few people

will have the courage to say it is. Such people are an aberration in the average church. In fact, proportionately few Christians have any significant perception of what Jesus taught – particularly about being His disciple .

Over the past fifty-five years, I have preached in hundreds of churches. The relative rarity of real disciples has been a consistent perception that registered upon my spirit. The same has been true of my travels abroad, with the single difference that people in those countries were generally more eager to become disciples . There are countless multitudes who say they are Christians who have no appetite for the Word of God – even though it is the means of sustaining newness of life (Lk 4:4). They are not following Jesus wherever He goes, abiding in Him, or cleaving to Him with purpose of heart. They entertain only a casual interest in Him, and are not seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Such people are not disciples! Either they have not heard the kind of preaching and teaching that makes disciples , or they have heard it and lingered on in the church with their fingers in their ears.

If this is a proper assessment of the conditions among professed believers, why does it exist? One of the reasons is that too much emphasis is put on recruitment for the institution. There is also the uncomely aggressiveness to baptize people who have not yet given any indication they want to be a disciple of Jesus. This is one reason why Paul affirmed, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor 1:17). This does not minimize the importance of baptism. It does, however, suggest that we had better be sure our teaching has produced genuine disciples – the kind of disciples that will be of “one accord,” “one heart and soul,” and steadfast continuance in the “apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers.” If that is not the kind of people who are being produced, they have not been added to Christ’s church, and remain “dead in trespasses and sins.” If this is not true, then the New Covenant is no better than the Old Covenant, which left men unchanged.

From a practical point of view, the TEACHING is what makes the difference. That is what produces good disciples, for a disciple is a learner.

This is clearly what Jesus had said to his disciples: “preach the Gospel . . . teach all nations . . . teaching them.” That is what will yield real disciples – disciples who will not balk at any commandment delivered to them by the Master.

THERE AROSE A MURMURING

“ 1b . . . there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.”

This is the sixth attack of the body of believers.

- From without, the Temple authorities confronted and incarcerated Peter and John (4:1-3).
- From without, Peter and John and examined by the council and threatened (4:5-21).
- From within, Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Holy Spirit (5:1-10).
- From without, The council arrests the apostles, putting them in the common prison (5:17-18).
- After an angel released them, the apostles are again arrested, beaten, and released with the command to speak no more in the name of Jesus (5:26-40).
- From within, murmuring arises among the disciples (6:1-7).

After these attacks there was an significant increase in the number of disciples.

- Five thousand men believe (4:4).
- Multitudes of men and women were added to the Lord (5:14).
- The disciples were multiplied (6:1).

Now, amidst the swelling multitudes of disciples, a potentially dreadful thing occurs.

A MURMURING OF THE GRECIANS

“ . . . there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews . . .” Other versions read, “there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists,” NKJV “a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews,” NASB “the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews,” NIV “the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews,” NRSV “there arose a murmuring of the Grecian Jews against the Hebrews,” ASV “protest s were made by the Greek Jews against the Hebrews,” BBE “Greek-speaking Jews complained about the Hebrew-speaking Jews,” GWN “the Grecian disciples murmured against the Hebrew,” MRD “there were rumblings of discontent . Those who spoke Greek complained against those who spoke Hebrew,” NLT “there arose a grudge among the Greeks against the Hebrews,” PNT “Those who spoke only Greek complained,” LIVING “the Greek-speaking Jewish followers had an argument with the Aramaic-speaking followers,” IE and “complaint was made by the Hellenists (the Greek-speaking Jews) against the [native] Hebrews.” AMPLIFIED

Murmuring was the downfall of over half-a-million Israelites. The occasion of record was when the ten spies brought back a false report of the land of Canaan, and the people believed them. That was a sad day for Israel, for their sin had escalated out of control. At that time the Lord said, “Your carcasses shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have murmured against me. “ (Num 14:29). At the time of the evil report, Moses told Israel, “ye murmured in your tents” (Deut 1:27). Hundreds of years later, David also made reference to the occasion: “Yea, they despised the pleasant land, they believed not his word: but murmured in their tents, and hearkened not unto the voice of the LORD” (Psa 106:24-25). Now, murmuring has arisen among the disciples of Christ. Will that murmuring spread as it did in Israel, or within the framework of the New Covenant, will there be a more God-honoring response? In this case, we will see the superiority of the New Covenant lived out in a very dangerous circumstance.

The Grecians

These were not Gentile Grecians, but Jews who were there from other parts of the world. Prior to the dominion of Rome, and in strict accord with the prophecy of Daniel concerning the succession of world empires (Dan 2:31-35), the Greeks had conquered the world under the leadership of Alexander the Great, which had previously been conquered by the Persians. Alexander was the “rough goat” of Daniel’s prophecy (Dan 8:21). He headed up the empire depicted as a “kingdom of brass,” and was third in the succession of world empires that began with Babylon (Dan 2:39). The Grecian kingdom was also depicted as a swift leopard which had dominion given to it by God (Dan 7:6). Because he ruled over all the world, Alexander the Great launched into a campaign to bring all the world to speak the Greek language. In history, the period of time during which the Greek language dominated the world is referred to as the Hellenistic Age. It spanned a period of over six hundred years. It is for that reason that the Gentile world is often referred to as “Greeks” (Acts 19:10,17; 20:21; 21:28; Rom 1:14,16; 10:12; 1 Cor 1:22,23,24; Gal 3:26; Col 3:11).

At the tower of Babel, the language of the people was confounded, and they were dispersed throughout the world. A little over three hundred and fifty years before Pentecost, although driven by ignoble motives, an effort was launched to unite the language of the world. Providentially, this was in order that all the world would be able to receive the Word of God, and hear and read the Gospel of

Christ.

In all of this the peculiar Jewish language – Hebrew – was still spoken in the “land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39). Yet, at the time of our text, there were “devout Jews” from other nations visiting the city for the Passover Feast. While there, many of them – perhaps thousands – heard the Gospel, believed, and had become disciples of Jesus. Now, in an effort to disrupt and even remove the body of Christ, Satan foments a set of circumstances that causes murmuring to erupt. Within the church, the Greek speaking Jews complained against “the native Hebrews.”

THEIR WIDOWS WERE NEGLECTED

“ . . . because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.” Other versions read, “because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution ,” NKJV “because their widows were being overlooked in the daily servicing of food ,” NASB “because their widows were not taken care of in the distribution of food every day ,” BBE “claimed that the widows among them were neglected every day when food and other assistance was distributed ,” GWN “saying that their widows were being discriminated against in the daily

However, in due time, the flesh was allowed to enter by means of some form of indiscretion. Whether it was owing to something intentional, as the complaint affirmed, or simply unintentionally because of a lack of wisdom, we do not know.

distribution of food,” NLT “because their widows were despised in the daily ministrations,” TNT “that their widows were being discriminated against, that they were not being given as much food , in the daily distribution, as the widows who spoke Hebrew,” LIVING “They claimed that their widows were not getting their share of the things which the widows received each day,” IE “because their widows were habitually overlooked in the distribution of alms,” MONTGOMERY “because their widows were being overlooked and neglected in the daily ministrations (distribution of relief),” AMPLIFIED and “complained that in the daily distribution of food the Hebrew widows were being given preferential treatment .” PHILLIPS

Here we have a glimpse of what was involved in the sharing of goods among the disciples. Previously, there have been at least three references to this practice.

- “And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need ” (Acts 2:44-45).
- “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common ” (Acts 4:32).
- “Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need ” (Acts 4:34-35).

Here it is apparent that distribution was not made on a crisis basis. There was a “daily ministrations,” or “distribution.” NKJV Food and other necessities were distributed in the same manner as God gave Israel manna during their wilderness journeying – “daily” (Ex 16:5). In this way the hoarding of food, or the temptation to have more than others, was neutralized.

Keep in mind that until this time, apart from the twelve apostles, there was no manager of this daily distribution. It was done within a context of unity and accord, because the people “were of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32). The storehouse of resources was managed by the apostles, for the money obtained from the sale of properties and goods was brought to them (4:35,37; 5:2).

However, in due time, the flesh was allowed to enter by means of some form of indiscretion. Whether it was owing to something intentional, as the complaint affirmed, or simply unintentionally because of a lack of wisdom, we do not know.

Historians position the events commencing with the apostles imprisonment and beating as much as two years after the day of Pentecost. A considerable amount of time had elapsed without any significant disruption among the disciples themselves. However, alas, now there is a small breach, and it can become potentially large, threatening to spread and hinder the propagation of the Gospel. How did such a thing occur?

Apart from the complaint registered by the Greek-speaking Jews, we are not told the specific weakness that allowed for potentially contaminating influences. However, we do know from Scripture that someone had made a place for the devil, whether on purpose or because of ignorance. This is why we are warned to be “sober” and “vigilant,” for the devil is prowling about, “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). It is not without reason that believers are admonished, “Neither give place to the devil,” or “do not give the devil an opportunity” NASB (Eph 4:27). If we are ignorant of Satan’s devices, he will gain “get an advantage over us” (2 Cor 2:11).

The people of God must not be overly simplistic in their relationships with one another. It is, for example, possible for believers to develop a carnal familiarity with one another so that they fail to “put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). He is looking for an entrance point, and the people of God must take care not to provide him with one. An “occasion to the flesh,” or “opportunity for the flesh” NASB (Gal 5:13), is not necessarily equivalent to the indulgence of the flesh. It is rather a circumstance that leads to the indulgence of the flesh. Perhaps it is an unguarded moment, a lack of wisdom, a thoughtless word, or some naive deed that has not taken results into consideration.

The manner in which the apostles address this situation confirms that it did not result from some deliberate sin – like the pride and covetousness of Ananias and Sapphira. They will therefore labor to avoid it leading to a sin which requires repentance. A congregation is blessed that can foresee evil and hide themselves from its encroachment (Prov 22:3; 27:12).

THEY CALLED THE MULTITUDE OF THE DISCIPLES

“ 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.”

At this time, there is an obvious submission to the apostles, whom Jesus placed “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). With gracious authority, they summoned the whole body of believers together. This is itself a staggering thing to consider. In fact, if “the unity of the Spirit” was not present, it could not have been done.

THE TWELVE CALLED THE DISCIPLES

“Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said . . .” Other versions read, “ summoned the multitude of disciples,” NKJV “summoned the congregation of disciples,” NASB “ gathered all the disciples together,” NIV “called together the whole community of the disciples ,” NRSV “summoned the body of disciples ,” RSV “ sent for all the disciples,” BBE “summoned the full number of the disciples,” ESV “ convoked the whole company of the disciples,” MRD “gathered all the disciples together ,” NIB “called a full meeting of the disciples,” NJB “having called near the multitude of the disciples,” YLT “called the whole group of followers together,” LIVING “called together the general body of the disciples,” WEYMOUTH and “ convened the multitude of the disciples.” AMPLIFIED

At this time, there is an obvious submission to the apostles, whom Jesus placed “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). With gracious authority, they summoned the whole body of believers together. This is itself a staggering thing to consider. In fact, if “the unity of the Spirit” was not present, it could not have been done. We do not know the number involved in this gathering, but it would be large, even in today’s mega-church environment. In general terms, we can get some idea of the magnitude of this group. First, things began with a least one hundred and twenty (1:15). Then, three thousand were added, bringing the minimum number to three thousand, one hundred, and twenty. After that, “the Lord added daily to the church such as should be saved” (2:47). Then five thousand men believed (4:4), bringing the number to well over eight thousand, one hundred and twenty. As long as two years later, “multitude of both men and women” were added to the group (5:14), besides the multitudes added between the healing of the lame man and then. It seems to me that an ultra-conservative number can be estimated to be at ten thousand minimum, and as high as fifteen or twenty thousand. There were a lot of people, and the records confirm that to have been the case.

Can you imagine convening a multitude of that size? Better yet, can you fathom such a mass of people being managed by twelve men? I know of congregations with barely over 1,500 members who have a paid staff of fifteen or twenty, with scores of other leaders and committees. However, there is no indication in the record that gathering this multitude together was attended by any great difficulty. This is the effect of regeneration upon the individuals, and the unity of the Spirit collectively.

SOMETHING UNREASONABLE

“ . . . It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.” Other versions read, “ It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables,” NKJV “It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables,” NASB “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables,” NIV “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables ,” RSV “ It is not fit that we should f orsake the word of God, and serve tables,” ASV “It would not be right for us to give up preaching about God to wait on tables,” CSV “It's not right for us to give up God's word in order to distribute food ,” GWN “We apostles should spend our time teaching the word of God, not running a food program,” NLT “ It is wrong for us to quit teaching God's message to serve tables instead,” IE “It is not seemly or desirable or right that we should have to give up or neglect [preaching] the Word of God in order to attend to serving at tables and superintending the distribution of food,” AMPLIFIED and “It is not right that we should have to neglect preaching the Word of God in order to look after the accounts .” PHILLIPS

Although popular modern preachers are known for their administration, this was not the way of the apostles of Christ. Here was something that had to be done, but it was out of order for the apostles to do it. Jesus had not called them to be business managers, or to superintend special programs of the early church. It is not that such things did not need to be done. Rather, it is that the apostles were not the ones to do it.

When men are asked to leave laboring in the Word and the doctrine to administer food programs, it is wrong, for it is against sound reasoning. However one may choose to view ministries pertaining to our bodies, they come “AFTER” the teaching gifts (1 Cor 12:28). That is the order in which God placed them in the church, and they must not be allowed to be given the chief place, or require the extensive involvement of those who are teachers of the Word of God. I once knew a very gifted man who had a fair grasp of the Word of God and the ability to communicate it. Because his brethren did not prefer that kind of labor, he ended his life handing out food and clothing at a rescue center. It is not that assisting the poor was wrong, it was that it was wrong for him to be required to do it. It was not sound reasoning on his part to leave teaching the Word to engage in that work, and it was wrong for anyone to expect him to do so.

The fact that the work about to be addressed was important is confirmed in the qualifications for those who would be chosen to do it. Spiritual Babylon is widely noted for its faulty allocation of Kingdom people. It is not unusual to find them assigning a genuine teacher to janitorial work, or some other service duty. It is equally as normal to find those who ought to be serving tables occupying the role of a teacher.

The apostles knew where Jesus had placed them, had a hearty appetite for the Word of God, and refused to be moved from giving themselves to it.

It is always wrong to expect someone to do something for which they have not been duly gifted by the Lord. It is also wrong to not ignore the ministry for which one has been suited by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Head of the body (Col 1:18), and the Holy Spirit is Administrator of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:4,7-11). When men refuse to honor the choice of Jesus and the governance of the Holy Spirit, it is a serious matter.

The Priority of the Word of God

The words of the apostles confirm the absolute priority of the understanding and preaching of the Word of God. At this point, the burden of the preaching was directed to the disciples themselves, who were continuing steadfastly in “apostles doctrine” (2:42). They were living out what Paul would articulate with unusual clarity some years later. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16). The development of maturity among the brethren, resulting from the preaching of the Word, will be confirmed in this very text.

- The ability of the congregated disciples to select spiritually qualified men.
- The presence of several competent men into whose hands an essential ministry could be placed.

When a person has spiritual insights, and the ability to communicate them, it is not right for them spend their time in servile functions of the body of Christ. That involves unfaithfulness to the stewardship of the truth. Notwithstanding this circumstance, the modern church is intent upon hiring professional clergyman who carry out the religious requirements of congregational leaders who frequently present no evidence of spiritual maturity. The actual grasp and preaching of the Word of God is not very high on their religious agenda. Further, congregations as a whole provide very little time for hearing the Word of the Lord. The result of this distorted sense of values is so evident that only the disinterested fail to see it.

The apostles knew where Jesus had placed them, had a hearty appetite for the Word of God, and refused to be moved from giving themselves to it. God hasten the day when preachers and teachers within the professed church will see the need for such commitment, and refuse to submit to the stunted desires of those who have no understanding of these things. It simply is neither right nor reasonable to submit to people who have no understanding of this.

The Matter of Missions

A word needs to be said about the matter of missions. In recent decades, an immature church has produced missionaries and missionary programs that are largely given over to relief work.

Although I have not traveled extensively throughout the world, I have noted with remarkable consistency the absence of spiritual maturity and knowledge in foreign missions. Rarely will you find a gathering of believers among whom the people are being changed from glory unto

glory.

There remains a remnant of faithful workers who see the priority of preaching the Word of God. However, they are in a decided minority. Although I have not traveled extensively throughout the world, I have noted with remarkable consistency the absence of spiritual maturity and knowledge in foreign missions. Rarely will you find a gathering of believers among whom the people are being changed from glory unto glory. It is true that many have left idolatry and reprehensible personal and social practices. However, they are often not adept at handling the Word of God, comprehending the mysteries of the Kingdom, or being able to admonish and edify one another. This is not an acceptable situation – particularly when it has continued for many years. It exists because someone has left the Word of God to serve tables, and it is not right. God does not have a separate standard for third world countries.

The Priority of Prayer

Lest the uniformed imagine that the apostles are speaking about the development of spiritual bookworms, there is also the consideration of prayer – of leaders giving themselves to prayer. This is not a morning or evening prayer, but a manner of life in which there is total dependence upon the Lord of glory. The apostles were men who were keenly aware of the necessity of Divine leadership.

Jesus Himself is the example of being given to prayer. Throughout His prodigious ministry, He would withdraw for prayer (Matt 14:23; Mk 6:46; Lk 6:12; 9:18,18; 11:1; John 17). We know that these occasions were not infrequent, for it is said that he “oftimes resorted” to prayer in Gethsemane “with His disciples” (John 18:2). Since “the servant is not greater than his master” (John 13:16), the apostles would not be turned aside from prayer in order to meet the temporal needs of the people. However, this did not mean they were willing to ignore them. They would, in godly wisdom, provide for that ministry to continue to the glory of God.

The Serving of Tables

What does it mean to “serve tables?” The word “serve” means to “minister to one . . . supply the necessities of life, relieve one’s necessities, provide care for, distribute, etc ” STRONG’S ” As it is used here, the word “tables” means “a table on which food is placed, an eating table,” THAYER “a place for spreading out meals,” FRIBERG “a dining table,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “a meal, food.” GINGRICH Here, then, the apostles are referring to the distribution of food to those who were lacking. Widows were the particular focus of the complaints, but others might very well have been included who were remaining in Jerusalem, although they were from other countries.

A WORK THAT REQUIRED INSIGHT AND SPIRITUALITY

“ 3 Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.”

What kind of men are required to administer the procurement and distribution of food among believers? Remember, this was not a food program for the poor people of Jerusalem and the surrounding cities. It was not a program to which the multitudes of beggars might repair, finding their daily needs. No man of sound mind will frown on such a work, but that is not the focus of this text. Here we are speaking about providing the needs of the brethren.

CHOSEN FROM AMONG YOURSELVES

“Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men . . .” Other versions read, “seek out from among you seven men,” NKJV “choose seven men from among you ,” NIV “ select from among yourselves,” NRSV “ pick out from among you seven men,” RSV “ Take then from among you seven

men,” BBE “ search out, and elect from among you, seven men,” MRD “ Now look around among yourselves , dear brothers, and select seven men,” LIVING “find from among your own number seven men,” MONTGOMERY “ select out from among yourselves , brethren, seven men,” AMPLIFIED and “You, our brothers, must look round and pick out from your number seven men.” PHILLIPS

At this time, and in keeping with the nature of the Kingdom, there was not an organization that specialized in the training of special servants. There was not religious school to which they could appeal, or any training institute. They were not to import someone from another place who had success in this type of work. The resource pool was the congregation itself. Being a healthy body, they could find the needed people “among” themselves. There are countless congregations that would disappear from society if they were limited to their own number for people to administer valid works – particularly if they had to meet the qualifications laid down by the apostles, who had the mind of Christ on the matter.

Seven Men

There is no indication of the magnitude of this work. However, the total number of this congregation could well have been between fifteen and twenty thousand. If only one percent of them required aid, that would be between 150-200. Five percent would be 750-1000. Without indulging in distracting speculation, it is evident that this was a sizeable work. How many men will be required? Some rather small churches have 6-8 deacons, whose only job is to pass the communion and collection trays. Surely this work will require a fairly good number of men.

Endued with the wisdom that comes down from above, the apostles specify “seven men.” Proportionately, this would be similar to the “seventy” men provided to Moses for judging of Israel – dealing with their complaints (Num 11:16). That was a situation involving a traveling city of, conservatively speaking, two to five million people.

As you can see, in the cases of both Moses and the apostles, the number of administrating men differed significantly from the thinking of the church of our day. After Moses, and prior to the Kings, Judges were given to Israel one at a time. When Jesus chose men to reach the entire world, He selected twelve, who gave particular attention to the Jews (Gal 2:7-8). When He chose a man to reach the entire Gentile world, He chose one single man – Paul. This conflicts with the world’s notion about organization, responsibility, and management. You would be hard pressed to find any local congregation who operates with this kind of wisdom.

Something About the Early Church

The church to which we are now being exposed had not yet been corrupted. Therefore, things can be seen in it that attest to the nature of spiritual life. Here was a significantly large body of people who were decidedly familiar with one another. Although they numbered in the thousands, they would be asked to select seven of their number who met particular qualifications. There are still those who insist that believers can get “lost in the crowd,” and so they prefer small congregations, where everyone knows each other. If that is really sound reasoning, how do we account for this text? How was it possible for them to have the kind of familiarity that will be necessary for this assignment?

Remember, this was a church that was continuing “steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). They met together “daily” in the temple, and from house to house (Acts 2:46,47; 5:42). They were “of one accord” (2:46; 5:12), and “were of one heart and of one soul” (4:32).

It is within the context of frequent gatherings and singleness of heart that they became familiar with those among them who were unusual or gifted. They came to know each other as brethren within the framework of consistent devotion and expression. This was also the environment in which

spiritual gifts were cultured, so that those possessing them could confirm their reality through insightful expression. This will be apparent in the words of instructions that follow.

CHOOSE A CERTAIN KIND OF MEN

“ . . . of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom . . .” Other versions read, “of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” NKJV “ who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom,” NIV “ of good standing , full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” NRSV “ of good repute , full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” RSV “ of good name , full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” BBE “ well reported of , full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” DARBY “whom the people know are spiritually wise ,” GWN “of whom there is good testimony , men full of the Spirit of the Lord, and of wisdom,” MRD “who are well-attested , full of the Spirit and of wisdom,” NET “who are well respected and are full of the Spirit and wisdom,” NLT “who are well testified of , full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom,” YLT “wise and full of the Holy Spirit, who are well thought of by everyone ,” LIVING “of good and attested character and repute , full of the [Holy] Spirit and wisdom,” AMPLIFIED and “of good reputation who are both practical and spiritually-minded .” PHILLIPS

The seven men to be chosen had to meet a certain standard. Three qualifications were specified. Remember, the distribution of food was the responsibility, together with the various details associated with it.

Men of Honest Report

These had to be men who were highly regarded by the Christian community. The words “honest report” have to do with spiritual qualities – things related to faith and one’s association with the Lord and His people. Cornelius had a “good report” among the Jews (Acts 10:22). Ananias, called of God to set Saul of Tarsus aside for the apostleship had “a good report of all the Jews” who knew him (Acts 22:12). Through faith, “the elders” among Israel “obtained a good report” (Heb 11:2). All of the saints of past ages, because they lived by faith, “obtained a good report” (Heb 11:39). John the beloved spoke of one Demetrius, who “had good report of all men and of the truth itself” (3 John 1:12). Young Timothy was “well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:2). A widow who was being supported by the local congregation was required to be “well reported of for good works” (1 Tim 5:10).

This would be a godly person whose commitment to the Lord was beyond all question. When the brethren gathered together, this is a man who would be there, not forsaking the assembling of himself with the saints (Heb 10:25). He was active in holy expressions, with “good and attested character and repute.” AMPLIFIED

How many men do you know like this? If you do know of any, it is because of the acquaintance you developed with them in the work of the Lord. This qualification does not have to do with mere human kindness and domestic integrity. Such qualities, while not to be despised, can be obtained independently of faith and commitment to Christ.

There are vast numbers of churches who never meet often enough for a person to obtain a good report. Even when they do meet, the structure of their gatherings does not allow for the surfacing of godly qualities. Holy assemblies, when brethren dwell together in unity, are times when each individual becomes like a city “that is set on a hill” (Matt 5:14) – like a candle that is put on a stand shedding light throughout the whole house (Matt 5:15). I do not know if it would be possible to obtain the “honest report” required by these instructions independently of meeting with the saints.

“Full of the Holy Spirit”

Once again, keep in mind that we are speaking of distributing supplies to those with need. Those

selected for this work were required to be full of the Holy Spirit.

This is not a wisdom that is acquired through schooling, but has more to do with discernment, which enables the individual to use knowledge in such a manner as will glorify God and assist His people. The area of distribution had already become a troublesome one, and the early church could ill afford for that condition to continue.

The language here is precise, and must be grasped – particularly in view of much contemporary teaching about the Holy Spirit. The qualification does not say, “one who was filled with the Holy Spirit” – pointing a particular time in the past. Warped sectarian theology has taught people to view being filled with the Spirit as a particular point in time, so that it is seen as a solitary, or perhaps infrequent, experience. But that is not the kind of thing referenced here.

The word “full” refers to a present condition. It is one in which the whole person – heart, soul, mind, and strength – is being influenced by the Holy Spirit. This describes a person who is not a surface Christian – a member of the Sunday-morning-only crowd. It is a person who has a love for the truth and is culturing it. This is the person described by Jesus: “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him . . . If a man love me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:21,23).

This is a person who neither grieves nor quenches the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). He is walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25), and being “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14). Through the Spirit he is mortifying “the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13), and is abounding in hope “through the power of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Rom 5:13). The “fruit of the Spirit” is evident in him (Eph 5:9), and he is waiting for “the hope of righteousness” through the Spirit (Gal 5:5). To be “full of the Holy Spirit” is to be filled with the things He does.

“Full of Wisdom”

It ought to be readily apparent why those responsible for distributing food were required to be filled with wisdom. Again, this is a present condition: “full of wisdom.” Wisdom involves “broad and full intelligence,” and here means “skill in the management of affairs.” THAYER Other lexical meanings are, “the ability to use knowledge for correct behavior, insight, understanding,” FRIBERG “to act wisely – to be prudent,” LOUW-NIDA and “sound judgment, intelligence, practical wisdom.” LIDDELL-SCOTT Wisdom would be required to make an equitable division of supplies among the people receiving support – particularly the widows, so that none would be neglected.

This is not a wisdom that is acquired through schooling, but has more to do with discernment, which enables the individual to use knowledge in such a manner as will glorify God and assist His people. The area of distribution had already become a troublesome one, and the early church could ill afford for that condition to continue.

A Question

How do you suppose the average American church would respond to a directive like this? Would they know what it meant? Keep in mind that the church was under two years old at this time. Many of the believers had been added well after the day of Pentecost. The apostles, who had the edge over the others in experience as well as giftedness, had just been subjected to an additional three years with the Lord Jesus Himself. Yet, behold what things are being done by these believers!

Some might object, saying they had access to supernatural insight and wisdom, and therefore cannot be compared with our time. Is this a proper assessment of the case? Is the era of the New Covenant stronger at its beginning, having benefits that were not provided to later generations? Is

there anything foretold about the New Covenant, or any exposition of it after its inauguration that suggests this kind of thing? Did the early church have spiritual resources that were unique to them – things not included in “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3), and “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3)? Is such a view ever prophesied or proclaimed?

If such a view cannot be substantiated, then the early church had nothing more to work with than we do. Their faith could not access more Divine resources than the faith that is obtained today. Of course, that is the precise point that Peter makes in his Second Epistle. “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1). Other versions read, “a faith of the same kind as ours,” NASB “a faith as precious as ours,” NIV “a faith of equal standing with ours,” RSV and “(obtained an equal privilege of) like precious faith with ourselves” AMPLIFIED There is, after all, only “one faith” (Eph 4:5), and it is “the faith of God’s elect,” not the faith of the apostles (Tit 1:1).

This is why the apostles could charge the whole congregation of disciples as they did. As the children of God, they had access to all of the resources required to select men who were filled with the Holy Spirit and with wisdom. That condition – being filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom – was not unique to the first century. Nor, indeed, were men of this caliber only available at that time.

Let it be clear, this was not the operation of a democratic process, where people voted their preferences. Rather, this involve the exercise of discernment. It was a process through which God’s own choice was implemented. In a sense, their responsibility was to concur with Divine judgment by recognizing the qualities that were necessary for the work – a daily work.

APPOINTED OVER THE BUSINESS

“ . . . whom we may appoint over this business.” Other versions read, “ put in charge of this task,” NASB “We will turn this responsibility over to them,” NIV “appoint to this duty,” RSV “ give control of this business,” BBE “ establish over this business,” DARBY “put them in charge of this problem,” GWN “ place them over this business,” MRD “appoint to this needful business,” TNT “set over this necessity,” YLT “confirm them to be over the work,” IE “appoint them to undertake this duty,” WEYMOUTH “assign to look after this business and duty,” AMPLIFIED and “put them in charge of this matter.” PHILLIPS

The teaching, therefore, is that believers are to learn to engage in honest and honorable employment in order that they might obtain the necessities of their life in this world, and assist in meeting the needs of their brethren as well. In this way, they will not be drawn aside into vain and worldly living that stops the bearing of fruit unto God.

Here is an exercise that involved the use of “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:19). The apostles knew what had to be done, informed the disciples what was required, and prepared to ordain the men to the work.

There is no responsibility within the body of Christ that does not require a good and godly reputation, wisdom, and being filled with the Spirit – even food distribution! This would, if known, revolutionize the choice of leaders and servants within modern churches. It would also emphasize the necessity of spiritual maturity – growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15) – as well as inducting massive changes.

“This Business”

The average American associates the word “business” with making money. But that is not how the word is used here. This term is translated from the Greek word **crei,aj** (cry-as), which means

“necessity, need . . . necessary uses,” THAYER “necessity . . . needful,” FRIBERG “that which is lacking, and is particularly needed,” LOUW-NIDA and “use, advantage, service.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

In this sense, therefore, “business” is an orderly and godly approach to meeting some necessity. We know from the creation itself that God does things in an orderly manner. Experience will tell you that randomness cannot yield consistent profit, because it has no arrangement to it. The human body is another example of orderliness. As soon as something becomes random, it does not function correctly. The door is then opened to weakness and infirmity. In the necessity being addressed in this text, a daily distribution could not be properly accomplished by sporadic and undisciplined means.

The teaching of Scripture also accents this aspect of necessity, as compared with luxury, and a quest for things that are really not needed. In Paul’s letter to Titus, he spoke to this issue. “And let ours also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses , that they be not unfruitful” (Titus 3:14). The word “ours” means “our people,” NKJV or we Christians . The “good works” of reference are “honest labor and honorable employment.” AMPLIFIED “Necessary uses” refers to the necessities of life, as compared with its luxuries. It can also refer to the rising of critical needs among those around us, as in this text. The word “unfruitful” refers to a state of non-productivity, where life becomes vain and pointless – bearing no fruit unto God. The teaching, therefore, is that believers are to learn to engage in honest and honorable employment in order that they might obtain the necessities of their life in this world, and assist in meeting the needs of their brethren as well. In this way, they will not be drawn aside into vain and worldly living that stops the bearing of fruit unto God. It ought to be apparent that laboring for this world’s luxuries has an inhibiting effect upon spiritual life.

This must not be interpreted as making a law concerning why we are employed or how others are to spend their money. However, in each believer’s thinking, the priority must be given to a quest for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. We must maintain a tenacious grasp on the fact that “the fashion of this world passeth away” (1 Cor 7:31), and “all that is in the world... is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:15). That perspective will enable us to make a proper assessment of what is “necessary.”

GIVING THEMSELVES TO PRAYER AND MINISTERING THE WORD

“ 4 But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.”

At this point we are confronted with the priorities of the apostles – and spiritual leaders must have the proper priorities. It is further apparent that men cannot establish what takes the precedence in matters pertaining to the work of the Lord. If this was not the case, the murmurers would have moved the apostles from prayer and the word to waiting on tables. I fear that this is exactly what has happened in a significant portion of Christendom.

GIVE OURSELVES CONTINUALLY

“But we will give ourselves continually . . .” Other versions read, “devote ourselves.” NASB “give our attention to,” NIV “continue steadfastly in,” ASV “give ourselves up to,” DARBY “spend our time in,” NLT “use all of time to,” IE “continue to devote ourselves steadfastly to,” AMPLIFIED and “devote ourselves whole-heartedly to.” PHILLIPS

One of the strategies of the devil is to get believers to fritter away their time by doing much and only accomplishing a little. In our text, this would happen if the apostles spent their time distributing food rather than in the task for which Jesus had chosen them. Let it be clear that God is not glorified by primarily serving people. As simplistic as it may sound, the Lord is served directly , not indirectly, by doing His will, pleasing Him, and accomplishing what He has sent men to do. Jesus, for example, did not spend all of His time washing the disciples feet. We know this was not a constant activity of

His, because when He did do it, it was a surprise to them. In fact, Peter responded, “Thou shalt never wash my feet” (John 13:8). On another occasion, when the people were pressing Jesus to such an extent that He could not leave them, he responded, “I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent ” (Luke 4:43).

Men cannot serve God in any meaningful capacity without becoming expert in His Word, by which they live. I do not believe there is any spiritual gift, or aptitude, that can be effectively ministered independently of the Word of God and prayer. Notwithstanding that perception, spiritual Babylon has carved out a number of professions and areas of service in which a person can remain miserably ignorant and unacquainted with God’s word. Unless God has changed His manner, such activity is really a waste of time. I seriously doubt that the blessing of God can even be upon it. If men “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), how is it possible for them to ignore it and still serve God? If the Scriptures have been given “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17), what work is there within the body of Christ that can be done to God’s glory while a person remains unlearned in Scripture?

When servants of God are required to devote their attention to doing the will of men, they are being asked to leave the path of discipleship. This will be clear in what the apostles here affirm.

Those who labor for the Lord must give themselves to it. That is, they must invest of themselves in their work, pouring their hearts, souls, minds, and strength into it. Peter referred to this when he wrote, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ , to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:11).

The circumference of our activity within the body of Christ is determined by the ministry in which God has placed us. It is written, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). This is the area in which special grace will be ministered to each person, and is the domain in which individual labors are to be expended.

A Word Concerning Discovering Your Place Within the Body of Christ

First of all, it is important to note that the nominal church suppresses the very idea of members being in a “body.” Members are rather viewed as being part of an institution, whose purpose they are expected to serve. Within that context, the various spiritual gifts that are mentioned in Scripture have little meaning. These gifts include the following.

- Apostles (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:28)
- Prophets (Eph 4:11; Rom 12:6; 1 Cor 12:10,28)
- Evangelists (Eph 4:11)
- Pastor/Teachers (Eph 4:11)
- Ministry, or service (Rom 12:7; 1 Pet 4:11)
- Teaching (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28)
- Exhorting (Rom 12:8)
- Giving (Rom 12:9)
- Ruling (Rom 12:8)
- Showing mercy (Rom 12:8)
- Word of wisdom (1 Cor 12:8)
- Word of knowledge (1 Cor 12:8)

- Faith (1 Cor 12:9)
- Gifts of healing (1 Cor 12:9,28)
- Discerning of spirits (1 Cor 12:10)
- Speaking differing languages (1 Cor 12:10,28)
- Interpreting different languages (1 Cor 12:10)
- Working of miracles (1 Cor 12:10,28)
- Helps (1 Cor 12:28)
- Governments (1 Cor 12:28)
- General speaking gifts (1 Pet 4:11)

The question here is not whether or not all of these gifts are still valid. They are Divinely placed in the church – the real church – and men have no power at all over their placement. Further, their role is to fulfill the will of God. The variety of gifts will perfectly accord with the work God has laid out for the congregation and the area in which they reside. We should not expect the gifts that were found in the Jerusalem church to be found in every church. That is why the gifts mentioned in Ephesians differ from those mentioned in Romans and Corinthians.

As with every facet of spiritual life, the individual finds their role within the framework of the life of the body. Further, the purpose of the teaching and leadership gifts is to mature the body, so that each individual part can effectively function. This is the perspective that is developed in both Ephesians and Colossians.

Ephesians outlines the purpose of the four proclamation and teaching ministries (Eph 4:11-16): apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers. The latter gift emphasizes the leadership and care (pastor), and is the means through which it is accomplished (teacher).

- These gifts are designed for the “perfecting,” or maturing, “of the saints” (v 12a).
- That maturity has to do with fulfilling their role in the body: “the work of the ministry” (v 12b).
- The aim of that work is “the edifying of the body” (v 12c).
- Edification is intended to bring the brethren into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God (v 13a).
- The unity of reference targets spiritual maturity, with each member fulfilling their role in the body, functioning in that role as Jesus Himself (v 13b).
- The intent of maturity is that the people no longer be tossed to and fro by the winds of false doctrine (v 14).
- That stability enables them to speak the truth in love (v 15a).
- Speaking the truth in love enables the members to grow up into Christ in all things (v 15b).
- Growing up into Christ brings the people to a point where Jesus can minister to His body through the individual (v 16a).
- That mutual ministry causes the body to increase in the image of Christ (v 16b).
- That increase brings the body to a point where it can edify, or build up, itself in love (4:16c).

The point of this rather lengthy section is to confirm that you will find your role in the body of Christ in the valid activities of that body – just as surely as the seven men mentioned in this text

found theirs. They did not find it on a mountain, in isolation from the rest of the body, but in the steadfast involvements of that body.

It is apparent that this objective is like a lost jewel in the modern church. Yet, this is precisely what we see being lived out in the book of Acts. The apostles knew the Lord's objective, as well as their role in it. Their awareness of these things was cultured in the presence of Jesus, and with their fellow disciples. That is the spiritual environment in which they were nurtured. This is all involved in the apostles refusal to leave their role to serve tables. They will so direct the brethren as to enable both their maturity and their increased involvement, which is the result of their maturity.

Much of the history of the church, and even the world, will depend on the stability and mutual ministry of the church in Jerusalem. It must be strong, with all of the members growing up into Christ, and thus becoming equipped to fulfill the role in which God had placed them.

PRAYER AND THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

“ . . . to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.” Other versions read, “prayer and servicing the word,” NRSV “prayer and the teaching of the word ,” BBE “praying and to servicing in ways that are related to the word ,” GWN “spend our time in prayer, preaching, and teaching ,” LIVING “pray and to teach the message of God ,” IE ‘prayer and to the delivery of the Message ,” WEYMOUTH “prayer and the word of God ,” WILLIAMS and “ whole-heartedly to prayer and the ministry of the Word.” PHILLIPS

As was taught under the Law, the priority of their activity related first to God, then to men: prayer (God), and the ministry of the Word (men). This priority is reflected throughout Scripture. Here are a few examples.

- “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt 22:37-39).
- “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Mat 6:33).
- “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men ” (Rom 14:17-18).
- “And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also ” (1 John 4:21).
- “Submit yourselves therefore to God . Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Men must grow accustomed to the presence of the Lord before they can profitably engage in His work. There is no valid ministry that does not require an acute consciousness of God and His will. No person can properly expound the Word of God who is not in active fellowship with Him through Christ Jesus.

The Reasoning

The reasoning here is this: if it is God to whom we are reconciled in Christ, there is no legitimate activity that requires Him to take second place. If Jesus is bringing us to God (1 Pet 3:18), then anything that draws our primary attention from Him cannot possibly be right. There is no way to justify involvement in anything that tends to lessen the importance of the One who saved us and our relationship to Him. Although this represents rudimentary Kingdom thinking, we are living in a time when the message and activities of the professed church have obscured this truth. Those who teach

distorted religious emphases in the name of Christ are much like the Philistines who filled the wells dug by Abraham with “earth” (Gen 26:15,18). This is a very serious infraction, and the results it has yielded confirm it.

Prayer

The apostles affirm that they will continue to give themselves to prayer. That is, they will yield themselves to this priority. The point here is not the nature or subject of their prayers. Prayer can take many forms: Thanksgiving, praise, supplication, intercession, etc. The point here is that prayer was a means of withdrawing from the world and culturing the soul in the presence of the Lord – as Jesus did (Matt 14:23; Mk 1:35; 6:46; Lk 5:16; 6:12; John 6:15).

Even David, living in the time of lesser revelation, knew the significant role prayer plays in the life of faith. “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa 84:10). Men must grow accustomed to the presence of the Lord before they can profitably engage in His work. There is no valid ministry that does not require an acute consciousness of God and His will. No person can properly expound the Word of God who is not in active fellowship with Him through Christ Jesus.

Therefore, the apostles will give themselves to prayer, wherein their spirits will be cultured, and through which Divine direction will be realized. This is in keeping with the nature of salvation and the spiritual fabric of the New Covenant. In prayer, a certain awareness of God and His will is developed that is essential to life.

The Ministry of the Word

The apostles declared that the selection of seven spiritually competent men to oversee the daily distribution was in order that they might give themselves to “the ministry of the Word.” What does this mean? As used here, the expression “ministry” means “service, ministering, especially of those who execute the commands of others,” THAYER “arrangement for provision, serving, preparation,” FRIBERG “contribution, support, help,” UBS and “distribution.” GINGRICH

The person who ministers the Word brings the Word of God to the table of thought. He has an understanding of the objective of Scripture, and is able to correlate it with circumstance. Those who receive the ministry of the Word become more God-conscious, and advance in their understanding of Christ’s Person and work, and the Divine intent behind God’s “so great salvation” (Heb 2:3).

The effective minister of the Word is approved of God, and is able to correctly handle that Word (2 Tim 2:15). He is acutely aware of the fact that he will give an account to God for the manner in which he handles Scripture. Because this kind of minister plows in the field of Scripture, and not in the nettle-strewn fields of human wisdom, he can preach the Word, being instant, or ready, in season and out of season (2 Tim 4:2). That is involved in ministering the word of God.

In our time, the ministry of the Word does not rank very high in the church world. Preaching and teaching the Word of God is given very little time, and during very few occasions. Under the leadership of low-ranking novices, men are being taught that praising God takes the precedence, and therefore more time is given to it in the contemporary churches. That is, people are actually being taught that what they say to God is more important than what He says to them. We now have youth groups that emphasize games, videos, music, and the likes, with little or no subjection to the Word. It is not unusual to have senior citizen groups in the church that go on pleasure outings regularly, yet remain fundamentally ignorant of the word.

It all may sound innocent, but it is not. Somewhere along the line, the Word of the living God is not being given the priority, and the results tell the story. The apostles refused to adjust to such a

posture and perspective, and we must refuse to do so also.

THE SAYING PLEASED THE MULTITUDE

“ 5a And the saying pleased the whole multitude.” Other versions read, “the statement found approval with the whole congregation,” NASB “This proposal pleased the whole group,” NIV “what they said pleased the whole community,” NRSV “his saying was pleasing to all of them,” BBE “what they said pleased the whole gathering,” ESV “The suggestion pleased the whole group,” GWN “this proposal was acceptable before all the people,” MRD “Everyone liked this idea,” NLT “the thing was pleasing before all the multitude,” YLT “This sounded reasonable to the whole assembly,” LIVING “The suggestion met with general approval,” WEYMOUTH “This plan commended itself to the whole body,” MONTGOMERY and “This brief speech met with unanimous approval.” PHILLIPS

You can see from some of the versions of Scripture that the translators (if they can be so called) had their sectarian glasses on when they put the text into English. “The twelve” did not deliver a “suggestion” GWN to the people. Their words were not a “proposal,” MRD nor were they the expression of an “idea” NLT – something they had conceived.

THE SAYING

“And the saying . . .” The word “saying” comes from the Greek word **ὁ λόγος** (the log-os). That is, this was a succinct and cogent thought, delivered through the power of the Holy Spirit from Jesus Himself. In one sense, it was an answer delivered from heaven. In another sense it was a directive to take proper action. It was wisdom from above compressed into a message. The article “the” is in both the Greek and the English. That indicates it was not a general word, but a specific word, pointed and complete in all aspects.

This was a word spoken from the Head through the key members of His body. That is how the Lord ministers to the church. Therefore it is written, “And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19). The point of this word is that some men came to the church with “beguiling words” – words that were nothing more than their own carnal perceptions. In their case, handling the Scriptures was nothing more than them “intruding into those things which” they “had not seen, vainly puffed up with” their “fleshly mind” (Col 2:18). They were trying to direct the church independently of the Head of the church! The church, therefore, was to pay no attention to them. They were only cluttering the landscape of life with foolish notions.

This is not a display of successful salesmanship, or even of powerful persuasion. The word was brief, yet all of the people – “the whole multitude” were in thorough agreement with it. They saw the sense of it, and were therefore not opposed to it. In fact, they immediately embraced the word and set out to obey it.

It is Jesus who nourishes the church (Eph 5:29). It is the “Great Shepherd of the sheep” who directs them (Heb 13:20). In this text, He is doing it through the twelve apostles.

PLEASED THE WHOLE MULTITUDE

“ . . . pleased the whole multitude.” Even though murmuring had arisen among the believers, men had not yet become divided. They were still able to take hold of the truth, and recognize wisdom when they heard it. In other words, the Holy Spirit so orchestrated these sensitive brethren that Satan’s objective was thwarted. When men are “slow of heart to believe” (Lk 24:25), the devil can more readily gain a foothold, causing division in the church. If this same circumstance had taken place today, leaders would probably have pioneered a Greek-speaking church and a Hebrew-speaking

church, separating the disciples to avoid contention. In contradiction of an expression of worldly wisdom, the apostles deliver a word that will allow for the correction of the problem that has arisen. Their word also provides for the ongoing of their work, which will result in the establishment of the church as well as the spread of the Gospel and the conversion of sinners.

There is no record of a single dissenting word. Rather, the whole multitude of people are “pleased” with the word delivered by the apostles. The word translated “pleased” does not indicate a mere emotion. It rather means the people adjusted their thinking, coming into agreement with the apostles. The word from which “pleased” is translated means, “to accommodate oneself to the opinions, desires, and interests of others,” THAYER to be “won over” to the thinking of another,” FRIBERG to “accept” what is said, UBS “to feel good about,” LOUW-NIDA “to satisfy,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and for something to be seen as “good.” LEH

This is not a display of successful salesmanship, or even of powerful persuasion. The word was brief, yet all of the people – “the whole multitude” were in thorough agreement with it. They saw the sense of it, and were therefore not opposed to it. In fact, they immediately embraced the word and set out to obey it.

This would be considered a kind of epoch if all that was involved was the average church board or group of elders. Few people would consider this possible for any size congregation. Normally churchmen operate on the majority rules. But here everyone agreed and was pleased – everyone . Let us not forget that we are not considering a small group of people. Prior to Jesus’ exaltation, there were times when the apostles were not agreed among themselves (Matt 20:24). Here, by way of comparison, we are speaking of thousands of people – as many as 15,000-20,000! How is it that such a marvelous unity could be found among them?

This is owing to several key circumstances.

- These were real converts, having believed, obeyed, and become disciples of Jesus.
- They had been taught properly , following “the apostles’ doctrine.”
- They had brother love , continuing in fellowship and prayer with one accord.
- They had a proper sense of values , continuing daily in the Temple and from house to house in their quest for the things of God.
- They had been in a deeply spiritual environment, where the Word and work of God were prominent.

Here is an example of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:1). There was no more murmuring, for the issue that caused it was brought to an abrupt conclusion. This is also an example of “the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God ” (Eph 4:13), for the brethren all saw the issue alike, and were pleased with what they now saw. It is possible to have a view of unity that is nothing more than patiently putting up with one another, or not condemning one another over lesser matters. In some circles – particularly the one from which I came – this was considered to be a gigantic stride forward. However, how do such achievements appear next to this text? Is it really a giant leap forward when we can talk without fighting, or meet together without condemning one another? Is that really spiritual growth?

It seems to me to be on the part of wisdom to cease from holding forth baby-steps as through they were broad-jumps. Better to set forth noble examples of real unity, like that of our text – where one word is received from one source, and everyone sees the sense of it, are pleased with it, and instantly obey it.

THEY CHOSE THE MEN

These people were the fruit of apostolic preaching and teaching. They had continued steadfastly “in the apostles’ doctrine,” and this is some of the fruit realized from it – the ability to comprehend the truth, Take hold of, and do it.

“ 5b . . . and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch.” Other versions read, “they made selection,” BBE “they elected,” MRD and “they selected.”

WEYMOUTH

THEY CHOSE

“ . . . and they chose . . . ” The method of choosing is not specified. Considering the vastness of the multitude, it may not have been by means of casting lots. It appears to me that there is a reason for not spelling out the details of the choosing, Men would have cast it in religious stone and made it a law for choosing servants.

Here, the point is not the procedure but the accomplishment. These were people who had the same life, purpose, and perspective. They had been instructed to choose men who were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (verse 3). The people did not ask what that meant, but simply proceeded to do it. Ponder what a state of confusion would be caused if that qualification were declared in a straightforward manner today. Each denomination would have their own idea of what being “full of the Holy spirit” meant. A significant percentage of Christendom would have no idea what it meant. Imagine selecting five different professing Christians and asking what was meant by “full of the Spirit.” Presume you asked a Baptist, a Presyterian, a Pentecostal, a Methodist, and a member of the Christian Church. Can you even imagine all of them giving the same answer – and there are literally hundreds of additional sects in Christendom! The people in our text, however, all agreed, having the same understanding and making the same choices.

How do you suppose the various church bodies would interpret “full of wisdom?” Some would consider it to be equal to a college education, others to seminary training, and still others to having experience in social work. Again, these believers knew what to do, which is a revelation of their perception and commitment.

These people were the fruit of apostolic preaching and teaching. They had continued steadfastly “in the apostles’ doctrine,” and this is some of the fruit realized from it – the ability to comprehend the truth, Take hold of, and do it.

STEPHEN

“ . . . Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost . . . ” Other versions read, “a man unusually full of faith and the Holy Spirit,” LIVING “a man of great faith and full of the Holy Spirit,” IE “a man full of faith (a strong and welcome belief that Jesus is the Messiah) and full of and controlled by the Holy Spirit,” AMPLIFIED and “He had great faith and was filled with the Holy Spirit.” CEV

Here is a most unique man. He is the subject of the next seventy verses (6:5-8:2). Several things are said of him.

- He was full of faith and of the Holy Spirit (6:5).
- He was full of faith and power (6:8).
- His presence in the synagogue was so significant that certain from the synagogue of the Libertines, together with others outside of Judea, disputed with him (6:9).
- He spoke with a wisdom and power that could not be resisted (6:10).
- He was full of the Holy Spirit (7:55).

- He was the first one of record who saw Christ after He was enthroned (7:55).
- He was the first Christian martyr (7:59-60).

The record of the message he delivered covers fifty-one verses comprised of 1,268 words (7:2-53). So far as the record is concerned, that is exceeded in length only by the sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). By way of comparison, the record of other messages and teachings after Jesus' exaltation are as follows.

- Peter on the day of Pentecost – twenty-four verses (Acts 2:14-37).
- Peter in Solomon's porch – fifteen verses (Acts 3:12-26).
- Peter at the Jerusalem conference concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles – five verses (Acts 15:7-11).
- James at the Jerusalem conference – nine verses (Acts 15:13-21).
- Paul in Antioch of Pisida – thirty-two verses comprised of 782 words (Acts 13:16-47).
- Paul in Athens – ten verses (Acts 17:22-31).
- Paul's defense – twenty-one verses (Acts 22:1-21)
- Paul's defense before king Agrippa – twenty-seven verses comprised of 660 words (Acts 26:2-23, 25-27,29).

Of course, this does not mean Stephen was more prominent than Peter and Paul. It does, however, substantiate that much faith does much. The eighth verse of this same chapter affirms that Stephen was “ full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.” So far as the Scriptural record is concerned, this is first mentioning of any person who was not an apostle being so distinguished.

Full of Faith

What a marvelous description of a man! In all, of the Bible, the only two men said to have been “full of faith” are Stephen and Barnabas. Stephen is twice said to have been “full of faith” (Acts 6:5,8). Barnabas is said to have been “full of the Holy Ghost and faith” (Acts 11:24).

Elsewhere the Scriptures affirm that Abraham was “ strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20). Those who were commended to God prior to Jesus “ obtained a good report through faith” (Heb 11:39). The apostolic doctrine also speaks of us drawing near to God “in full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22). Paul commended the Thessalonians because their faith “ grows exceedingly ” NKJV (2 Thess 1:3). The faith of the saints in Rome was being “ spoken of throughout the world” (Rom 1:8).

Throughout the years, I have been impressed with the seeming unimportance of faith in the professed Christian community. There is little talk of it, and even less evidence of it. I do not hear people being commended for their faith, and there is little being said that is calculated to strength or increase faith. Yet, where faith is “little” (Matt 6:30), “weak” (Rom 14:1) or not at all apparent (Mk 4:40), spiritual growth is, at the very best, very slow. Those in Christ are admonished, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on YOUR most holy faith , praying in the Holy Ghost” (Jude 1:20). Some versions read, “IN your most holy faith.” NASB/NIV Faith is the practical foundation upon which spiritual lives are built. Those lives can extend no further than the foundation upon which they are built. Little faith – little life. Small faith – small life.

Technically, being “full of faith” was not a qualification for the servants that were to be chosen. The precise specifications were:

- Of honest report.

- Full of the Holy Spirit.
- Full of wisdom.

However, all three of the specified requirements are based upon faith, which is the engine of spiritual life. We are children of God “by faith” (Gal 3:26). We live “by faith” (Rom 1:17). We stand “by faith” (2 Cor 1:24). We walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7). We receive the promised Spirit “through faith” (Gal 3:14). We wait for the hope of righteousness “by faith” (Gal 5:5). Christ dwells in our hearts “by faith” (Eph 3:17). The righteousness of God is obtained by faith (Phil 3:9). We obtain the promises of God “through faith” (Heb 6:12). We are kept by the power of God “through faith” (1 Pet 1:5).

In the matter of salvation, everything we obtain from God is held by faith.

It is not possible to be “full of faith,” and yet not be full of the Holy Spirit. Nor, indeed, can one be “full of faith” and be dominated by ignorance, or not filled with wisdom. Faith is the cognitive principle of the Kingdom of God. It is what enables the individual to traffic in heavenly realms. It neutralizes the attractiveness of this present evil world, and causes one to “taste of the powers of the world to come” (Heb 6:5).

An Important Thing to See

Thus, he did not have the advantages of the twelve, the seventy, or many other disciples who followed Jesus closely – like Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and others. Yet, he excelled to a remarkable degree.

Stephen is an example of what a member of the body of Christ can be. He was not an apostle, and was apparently not from Jerusalem. The name Stephen indicates that he was one of the Hellenistic Jews – perhaps among those classed as “devout men, out of every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). This is further confirmed by the fact that he was teaching in the “synagogue of the Libertines,” or “Freedmen, as it was called” NIV (6:9). The narrative states that the people meeting in this synagogue were “Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia” (Acts 6:9). That means they were from North Africa, Alexandria, and Asia Minor. History confirms that Jews coming to Jerusalem from other countries had synagogues in which their own language was spoken.

If, as it appears, Stephen was one of these people, he had probably been converted on the day of Pentecost, or perhaps later in Solomon’s porch. He had likely not have been a follower of Jesus during our Lord’s ministry, unless he had come to one of the feasts where Jesus taught. In my judgment, he could not have been among “the seventy,” whom Jesus chose and sent out to preach midway through His ministry. Thus, he did not have the advantages of the twelve, the seventy, or many other disciples who followed Jesus closely – like Mary, Martha, Lazarus, and others. Yet, he excelled to a remarkable degree.

- He excelled the others who were chosen.
- He excelled other Hellenistic Jews.
- His labors excelled the office for which he was chosen.

It is the nature of salvation to promote spiritual growth and excellence. Once a person commences living by faith and walking in the Spirit, there is no known limit of what that person can do. The only true boundary is determined by the will of God as reflected in “the measure of faith” given to the individual (Rom 12:3). That “measure” is what determines the role of the individual in the body of Christ (Rom 12:4). In no way, however, is it to be thought of as a limitation.

Take, for example, the office of a deacon, or servant. This is the kind of role we are seeing in our text. A person can be faithful in this office and use it as a means to obtaining an even more extensive

ministry. Thus it is written, “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless . . . For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 3:10,13). Stephen is a perfect example. First, he was “proved,” or tested, being found full of faith, the Spirit, and wisdom. Second. He used the office well moving on to a “good degree,” or higher standing. NASB

These principles, as well as a host of others, are being lived out in the book of Acts. Let them be an encouragement to your heart.

PHILIP

“ . . . and Philip . . .” Philip is also a distinguished man in this group. Having used the office of a deacon well, he later went down to Samaria “and preached Christ unto them” (8:5). He was also a prodigious miracle worker, for it is written, “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:6-8). Philip’s ministry in Samaria was of such magnitude that a well known sorcerer in that city, Simon by name, “believed also, and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip” (8:13). Philip was not an apostle, and thus these converts eventually required the key men to come and minister to them. When the church in Jerusalem “heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they had come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost” (8:14-15).

Following the conversion of Samaria “the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert” (Acts 8:26). Upon arriving at the designated place, “behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship” (Acts 8:27). The angel told Philip to go near and make contact with the man. He did, and the result was that this man from the African quadrant of the world believed, was baptized into Christ, and went on his way rejoicing to Ethiopia (8:28-39). Philip was then “found at Azotus, and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:40).

Much later in this book, Paul and his companions stayed Philip’s home. It is written of that occasion, “And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy” (Acts 21:8-9).

Thus, we have another marvelous example of how a person can excel in the body of Christ.

THE OTHERS

“ . . . and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch ..”

This is the only time these five brethren are mentioned in Scripture. The only things we know about these particular men are as follows.

- They were men of honest report.

The very mention of such men brings an honor and dignity to them that cannot be otherwise be realized in this world. We have here a sort of miniature picture of the day of judgment, when those who have excelled in Christ Jesus will be praised by God Himself.

They were full of the Holy Spirit.

- They were full of wisdom.

- They were chosen and set before the apostles.
- The apostles laid their hands on them,” appointing them over the business of food distribution.

One of them, Nicolas , was a convert to Judaism from the Gentiles – “a proselyte of Antioch.” A “proselyte” was “one who has come over from a Gentile religion to Judaism,” THAYER “one who has come over into Judaism from another religion, becoming a full Jew by being circumcised and by accepting the obligation of observing Jewish laws,” FRIBERG and “a convert to Judaism.” UBS Here, then, was a man who had rapidly advanced in the faith. Originally from a heathen background, this man had embraced Judaism, and obviously moved forward in the ranks. He heard the Gospel, perhaps on the day of Pentecost, believed on the Lord Jesus, and grew quickly to a man of note among the disciples.

If you wonder how significant it is for an individual to be mentioned only briefly in Scripture, consider how you would feel if it was your name in the text. The very mention of such men brings an honor and dignity to them that cannot be otherwise be realized in this world. We have here a sort of miniature picture of the day of judgment, when those who have excelled in Christ Jesus will be praised by God Himself. If we are not drawing much attention in this world, let us seek to obtain the spirit of these seven men.

Then, with determination, and putting your hand to the plow, recall the marvelous words of First Corinthians 4:5: “Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God ” (1 Cor 4:5). God be praised for the rich heritage of those who put their trust in God!

THEY SET THEM BEFORE THE APOSTLES

“ 6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.”

In our day, there is considerable confusion about who are premier people in the church. Today is a time when motivators, life-coaches, counselors, organizers, administrators, and the like, are being given the preeminence. However, this was not the manner of the early disciples. They did not put a value on those who were expert in the ways of the world, or were especially trained in special schools to do religious work. The early church listened to the apostles, continuing in their doctrine, even though they were totally lacking in worldly credentials. Their total upbringing was within the context of Jewish life. The same was true of the apostle Paul, who obtained his learning at the feet of an esteemed Jewish leader who was an expert in the law of Moses.

Ancient philosophy had been in vogue for over six hundred years, beginning in the Grecian culture around 585 B.C. Socrates, credited with laying the foundation for Western philosophy, was born in 470 B.C., and died in 399 B.C. His greatest student was the Greek philosopher Plato. He lived from 428 B.C. to 348 B.C. Great Jewish leaders, members of God’s chosen race, who lived during the time of Socrates and Plato include the following: Malachi, Ezra, Joel, and Nehemiah. Most of the time of the philosopher’s influence fell in the inter-testamental time between Malachi and John the Baptist.

Yet, with all of that ancient prominence, their wisdom did not creep into either Judaism or the early church. The believers during the time of our text gave no indication whatsoever of any reliance on, or high regard for, worldly wisdom. They rather relied on holy men who had been with Jesus, who Himself totally rejected the wisdom of this world. This is confirmed in the record before us.

Something to Note

These servants were only chosen when there was a work for them to do. They were not filling an

office, but a function in which it was necessary to be filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom. When the organization of the local assembly includes the creation of offices that are not dictated by need, the church has started to drift on vanity's ocean. No office should be appointed and filled unless there is a genuine need for it. Furthermore, no one should be appointed to a formal function in the body of Christ who does not have a good report, and is not full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom.

Therefore, having selected suitable men for a necessary function, the men are placed before the apostles.

THEY SET THEM BEFORE THE APOSTLES

“Whom they set before the apostles . . .” Other versions read, “brought them before the apostles,” NASB “presented these men to the apostles,” NIV “had these men stand before the apostles,” NIV “they took to the apostles,” BBE and “they put these men before the apostles.” IE

I understand this to have been a committing of the men to the work to which they were appointed, calling upon the Lord to sustain them with appropriate gifts and abilities. It is always a solemn occasion when someone is set apart for the work of the Lord.

These were the primary people in the body of Christ, placed there “first” by God Himself (1 Cor 12:28). However, it brought great glory to Christ when the people recognized this and submitted their choice to the apostles for validation and dedication.

The choice of the people was subject to the assessment of those who were skillful “in the word of righteousness” (Heb 5:13). This confirms that the church is not a democracy.

WHEN THEY HAD PRAYED

“ . . . and when they had prayed.” Other versions read, “after praying,” NASB “who prayed,” NIV “they praying ,” DOUAY and “prayed for them .” NLT

It is appropriate that the men who gave themselves to prayer would do so as certain men were set apart for the work of the Lord. I understand this to have been a committing of the men to the work to which they were appointed, calling upon the Lord to sustain them with appropriate gifts and abilities. It is always a solemn occasion when someone is set apart for the work of the Lord.

THEY LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM

“ . . . they laid their hands on them.” Other versions read, “they imposed hands upon them,” DOUAY “and placed their hands upon these ,” GWN and “as they laid their hands on them .” NLT

Throughout the history of God's people, the laying on of hands has been a formality that has been honored. It is even listed as part of the elemental principles of the doctrine of Christ: “. . . the principles of the doctrine of Christ . . . of laying on of hands . . .” (Heb 6:1-2).

- Early, before the giving of the Law, Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph, laying his hands upon them (Gen 48:14).
- In the tabernacle sacrificial service, the high priest laid his hands upon the sacrifices (Ex 29:10,15,19; Lev 1:4; 3:2,9,13).
- If the whole congregation of Israel sinned a sin through ignorance, not knowing what they really did, the elders were to lay their hands upon a bullock before the Lord, then sacrifice it (Lev 4:15).
- When the Levites were set apart for the Lord, the children of Israel were directed to lay their hands upon them (Num 8:10).

- When Moses set Joshua apart to take his place, God told him to lay his hand upon Joshua, set him before the priest, and “give him a charge in their sight” (Num 27:18). Moses did so, laying his hands upon Joshua (Num 27:23).

- Later Joshua is said to have been “full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him” (Deut 34:9).

- When Saul of Tarsus was set apart to the apostleship, Ananias “laid his hands upon him” (Acts 9:17).

- When Barnabas and Saul were set apart for a particular work, according to the direction of the Holy Spirit, the leaders in Antioch “fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on them, and sent them away” (Acts 13:3).

- Timothy was set apart for the work of the Lord by means of a gift given to him “by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery,” or “body of elders” NIV (1 Tim 4:14). Again Paul wrote of his own involvement in Timothy being set apart. “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6).

This is the act of a mature believer who validates the qualification of the person being blessed. It is a symbolic way of conferring the blessing of the Lord upon the individual for a God-sanctioned work. In the act, a certain consciousness of the gravity of the work to which the people are dedicated is created in them, as well as those who witness it. It is also a means of calling the Lord to bless the work and empower the workers in order that His name might be glorified. It is an occasion attended by great sobriety.

THE RESULTS OF SOUND JUDGMENT

“7 And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

Now that the murmuring has been addressed, has the solution been a sound one, and will it yield good fruit. That is the acid test of any decision made in the name of the Lord. As stated before, looking behind the scenes, this was an attempt of the devil to penetrate the church and introduce corruption, as he did with Israel. We will find that the New Covenant is superior to the Old one in every way. It has a greater glory, and it will be seen, in part, by the effects of the decisions of godly men among a godly assembly.

THE WORD OF GOD INCREASED

“And the word of God increased . . .” Other versions read, “the word of God spread,” NKJV “the word of God kept on spreading,” NASB “the word of God was increasing in power,” BBE “the preaching about God flourished,” CSB “the word of God kept on spreading,” NAS “God's message was preached in ever-widening circles,” LIVING “God's message was influencing more and more people,” IE “And the message of God kept on spreading,” AMPLIFIED “So the Word of God gained more and more ground,” PHILLIPS and “the word of God was growing.” EMTV

This is a most marvelous expression, and is totally foreign to modern concepts of church growth. It is an locution inspired by the Holy Spirit, who searches the deep things of God (1 Cor 2:10). It is therefore stated most precisely, reflecting exactly what took place.

The word of God did not increase in its volume, but in its effectiveness. It filled and satisfied more and more hearts, and more of it was being fulfilled. In its wake unbelief was conquered and imaginations were cast down. Satan had thrown up obstacles, and not only had they been cast down, there was an increase in the effectiveness of the Word.

There are other expressions of this kind of growth.

- “But the word of God grew and multiplied ” (Acts 12:24).
- “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed ” (Acts 19:20).
- “For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit , as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:5-6).
- “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified , even as it is with you” (2 Thess 3:1).
- “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound ” (2 Tim 2:9).

In this text we have a fulfillment of something God said of His word through the prophet Isaiah. “So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it ” (Isa 55:11).

A QUESTION

Is this how men would describe a growing church today? Is there a church growth program in all the world that yields results like this? People think of the number of people growing, but what of the Word of God multiplying and increasing? Can it be said of our time that the Word of Christ is dwelling in men richly? Or that it is producing fruit? Or that it is not bound? Do we not have men and circumstances that “suppress the truth by their wickedness” NIV (Rom 1:16). Is this not a time like that of Isaiah, when it was said, “. . . for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth” (Isa 59:14-15).

This circumstance is not owing to any reduction in the power of the truth itself. Whenever truth is known, regardless of the circumstances, it makes men free (John 8:32). Truth is “fallen” and “fails” when it is not proclaimed . It will not stand independently of proclamation. If men do not take the Word into their mouths and speak it from their hearts, it will not do its work. Faith always comes by hearing – but if the Word, particularly the Gospel, is not heard, faith will not come, and the Word will not increase.

What we have in our text is the effect of Gospel preaching and believing, coupled with pure hearts and the power of the Holy Spirit. There was no strategy developed by men in order to produce these results. It requires committed and insightful men to proclaim the truth, and tender hearts to take it in. Those are the kind of circumstances in which the Holy Spirit convicts sinners, and comforts and strengthens saints. That is the framework within which the Word of God will be increased.

When the Word is increased it is dominant in the hearts and minds of the people. Every other form of speaking or thinking takes a back seat, if, indeed, it is given any seat at all. Methods, techniques, humanly conceived programs and strategies all appear for what they really are in the light of Divine glory. It is then that they will properly be assigned to the dung heap, to be carried out with the rest of the trash.

DISCIPLES MULTIPLIED IN JERUSALEM

“ . . . and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly . . . ” Other versions read, “and the number of the disciples continued to increase greatly in Jerusalem,” NKJV “The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly ,” NIV “and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem exceedingly ,” ASV “and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem became very great ,” BBE “and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was very greatly multiplied ,” DARBY “and the

number of disciples in Jerusalem grew very large ,” GWN “The number of believers greatly increased in Jerusalem,” NLT “and the number of disciples increased vastly in Jerusalem,” LIVING “The group of followers in Jerusalem became larger and larger ,” IE “and the number of the disciples in Jerusalem was increasing exceedingly ,” MONTGOMERY and “and many more people in Jerusalem became followers.” CEV

Carefully note how the Holy Spirit states this case. He does not say the number of church members was multiplied. He does not say the number of Christians was increased. He does not say the congregation in Jerusalem grew larger. All of those descriptions could include people whom the Lord Himself had not received. Such descriptions are too generic, and in the current Christian climate do not mean much.

The kind of people that were being multiplied were “disciples.” These were people who were learning from Christ (Matt 11:28), for Jesus came to give men “an understanding” (1 John 5:20). They had forsaken all to follow Jesus (Lk 14:33). They had refused to allow any other relationships to get between them and Christ (Lk 14:26). They were taking up their cross every day and following Jesus, for that is what a person must do to be a disciple (Lk 9:23). Does anyone imagine that Jesus was not serious when He defined the requirements of a disciple? Is there a person among us who imagines that those qualifications can be ignored, and yet the person maintain an identity with Jesus and profit from His presence?

Prior to this, when the council had arrested the apostles, they said, “ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine” (5:28). They did not fill Jerusalem with their praises, but with their doctrine! The city was not filled with their programs, but with the doctrine – their teaching! Do you know of a city or a town anywhere or of any size that is being filled with the apostles doctrine? That is what the council called “your doctrine.” It was “the apostles’ doctrine” – the same doctrine in which the whole church was continuing steadfastly (2:42). If they thought the teaching of the apostles had pervaded Jerusalem before this, one can only imagine what they thought now.

The Head of the church plainly said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mat 28:19-20). The words are clear, and there is no ambiguity about them. Yet teaching is the weak point of the modern church. Its constituents are not learned in the ways of God. They do not know what Jesus and apostles taught. It is for this reason that the results of Acts are not witnessed in our day. You cannot have the right results without the right means.

A GREAT NUMBER OF PRIESTS WERE OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH

“ . . . and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.” Other versions read, “and a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith,” NKJV “and a great many of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith ,” NASB “and a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith ,” NRSV “and a great number of priests were in agreement with the faith ,” BBE “and a great crowd of the priests obeyed the faith ,” DARBY “large number of priests accepted the faith ,” GWN “and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith ,” NJB “and many of the Jewish priests were converted , too,” NLT “a large number, even of priests, continued to surrender to the faith ,” WILLIAMS “and [besides] a large number of the priests were obedient to the faith [in Jesus as the Messiah, through Whom is obtained eternal salvation in the kingdom of God] ,” AMPLIFIED “Even a large number of priests put their faith in the Lord ,” CEV “Even a great crowd of the priests were attending to the faith ,” LITV and “while a considerable proportion of the priesthood accepted the faith .” PHILLIPS

As you can see, the various translators had a difficult time with the expression “obedient to the

faith.” This phrase speaks of a response to the faith that God gives. Keep in mind that the qualities and aptitude of faith require that its Source be outside of ourselves. Those who have faith can see “Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). By means of that faith, the individual has “access with confidence” to God (Eph 3:12). Precisely what is there in the human constitution that can produce these results? Further, if fallen man cannot produce this kind of sight and access, then how is it that faith can be found in them? What did Adam give us that enables us to see Him who is invisible? What resource came from him that moves us to have access to God with confidence? These are just two of the marvelous qualities of faith that transcend all human aptitude.

Of course, it is foolish to engage in argument about this subject, for God has spoken directly to it. It is written that faith is “from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23). I do not believe there is a single translation that does not clearly say this. A few of the versions read that God will “give” or “grant” faith, instead of saying it is “from God” – but the meaning is the same. Of the forty-four versions I have, there is no exception to this observation. Among other things, that means that the language is so absolutely clear that no one could miss it. It is also stated that it has been “given” to us “to believe” (Phil 1:29).

On the human side of things the faith that is given by God, or comes from God, is “obtained” by men. Thus it is written, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our

It is a sad day when men who profess to be from God fail to preach a Gospel that has a strong appeal to devout people. When Jesus chose His apostles, they were all in this category. When God chose the prophets, they also were all in this category. The mother and father of John the Baptist were also devout, as well as Mary the ,mother of our Lord.

Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1). In our text, obedience to the faith is another way of saying it was “obtained,” or “received.” NASB Some of the versions convey this idea more precisely: “were in agreement with the faith,” BBE “accepted the faith,” GWN/PHILLIPS “made their submission to the faith,” NJB “surrender to the faith,” WILLIAMS

These priests, therefore, did not “resist the Spirit,” as the council had done, and will do when they put Stephen on trial (Acts 7:51). They did not “quench” or “grieve” the Spirit of God. From another point of view, the Lord opened their hearts so they could attend, or “respond to the things that were spoken” NASB (Acts 16:14). Behold what marvelous workings were taking place as the Word of God “increased,” and “kept on spreading.” NASB

One More Thing

Observe the kind of people that are identified as being “obedient to the faith.” It was not a group of publicans or harlots, although I do not doubt that many such people were also being obedient. However, the Spirit takes the time to specify another kind of people. He does not say it was a large number of young people or old people. Rather, he specifies a “great company of priests.” This is not the first time we have read something like this. On the day of Pentecost the kind of people who responded were identified as “devout men” (2:5). Cornelius is also described as a “devout man” prior to his new birth (10:2). In Thessalonica a great multitude of “devout Greeks, and of the chief women not a few” believed and “consorted with Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4). When Paul was in Athens, the Spirit makes a point of him disputing “with the devout persons in the market place daily” (Acts 17:17). Of course, nearly every time Paul went into a city, he went to the synagogues, where such people were more apt to be found (9:20; 13:5,14-15; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8).

It is a sad day when men who profess to be from God fail to preach a Gospel that has a strong appeal to devout people. When Jesus chose His apostles, they were all in this category. When God chose the prophets, they also were all in this category. The mother and father of John the Baptist were

also devout, as well as Mary the ,mother of our Lord. What is the source of the teaching that represents Jesus spending the majority of his time with the more unseemly segment of society? Why did the apostles preach in the Temple and in the houses of the disciples? What is more,. How can people be familiar with the Word of God and miss this aspect of preaching.

The Gospel is certainly intended for all men, even those with extremely uncomely backgrounds. But they were never intended to be the sole focus of the Gospel.

The real Gospel can have a strong appeal to “devout” people – those who take life seriously, and have a respect for more noble things. It is time to stop filling up the churches with disinterested people who need to be entertained, and bring in some people who delight in sober and holy thoughts.

I seriously question that a fun and games approach can be called a ministry. There certainly is not anything like this in Scripture. If someone imagines there are such approaches in the word of God, they need to ferret them out and share it with us. If it such cannot be found, then they owe the church an explanation for their preference of such an approach. Until they give a satisfactory one, they ought to be relieved of all of their duties.

CONCLUSION

It is important to again emphasize that we are reading the account of Jesus building His church. It is also an account of the administration of the Holy Spirit, dispensing gifts within the body. This is also an account of what was involved preaching the Gospel, and how it was appropriately received. There are no hirelings, no schools of high learning, and no self-help manuals. There are no youth ministries, recovery ministries, or organized efforts to reach society. At the time of our text there was no orchestrated efforts to change the laws in the land, put new people in the senate, or teach people how to be good financial managers. All of that comes much later – and it came when the church was dead.

Only when we have a rooted and grounded church will we really know the power of the Gospel, and the effectiveness of faith. Until that time, anyone, except those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit, are only speculating about religion, or needs, or priorities. People are prone to speak about what the world needs. One of the things that can be put on the list is a strong church that is being kept from evil. How sorely that witness is needed in our world. It is doubtful that much will be accomplished until that happens.

When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, before He prayed for those who would believe on Him through the apostles’ word, He said to God, “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given Me; for they are Thine. And all Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, as We are . . . I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:9-11,15). What we are seeing in the book of Acts is the answer to our Lord’s prayer. We do well to join Him in it.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #27

STEPHEN IS OPPOSED

“ 6:8 And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. 9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake. 11 Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. 12 And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, 13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: 14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. 15 And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel. ” (Acts 6:8-15)

INTRODUCTION

Satan now picks up the pace of his aggression against the church. He is depicted as walking about, stalking, as it were, and “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). He is not merely attempting to pull men into the quagmire of immorality. That has never been his focus. His very first effort to seduce mankind was on an intellectual level, not a sensual one. His efforts are directed toward driving a wedge between God and man – to cause men to loosen their hold on eternal life. Even the devil knows that those who are not devoted to the Lord will be available to him for all manner of diabolical deeds.

WHEN MEN CORRUPT RELIGION, IT LEADS TO DEEP MORAL CORRUPTION

Men have often marveled that prominent religious figures have fallen into deep immorality. Some have adopted a spurious theology that allows them to easily explain these

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- **HE DID GREAT SIGNS AND WONDERS (6:8b)**
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- **THEY SAW HIS FACE (6:15)**
- **CONCLUSION**

moral plummets. They tell us that we are all weak, and thus such occurrences are readily understandable. I suggest to you that this is not a spiritually rational assessment. In such cases, the religion that a person has embraced is largely responsible for moral failure. Perhaps it would be better said, the manner in which the religion has been embraced has been fundamentally flawed.

In the case of “pure religion and undefiled before the Father” (James 12:27), faith is the compelling factor in life, for “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38). Where that faith is not found, there is a certain distance that forms between the individual and the God of heaven. This is because “without faith, it is impossible to please Him” (Heb 11:6). In fact, the absence of faith is what causes one to “draw back,” increasing the distance between him and God. In such a case, God has no pleasure in that person. As it is written, “but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him” (Heb 10:38). God once said to wayward Israel, “I have no pleasure in you” (Mal 1:10). The insightful Psalmist wrote, “For thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee” (Psa 5:4).

It is possible for the sophist to present all manner of explanation about how God loves the individual, desires the best for them, and will patiently endure their folly. However, they will find it exceedingly difficult to establish that persuasion with the Word of God – particularly when it concerns someone professing the name of Christ..

THE CASE WITH THE GENTILES

Deep immorality is more a sign of Divine abandonment than it is of Satanic ensnarement. This is how the Spirit accounts for the deep moral degradation that pervaded the Gentile world. When men became corrupt in their religion, God gave them over to uncleanness, or moral corruption. Here is how it is stated in Scripture. “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (Rom 1:22-24). To clarify the matter, He continues, “Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 1:25).

Where that faith is not found, there is a certain distance that forms between the individual and the God of heaven. This is because “without faith, it is impossible to please Him”

This, then, became the justification for Divine abandonment, so that men lost their power to avoid the expressions of profound corruption. Therefore it is written, “ For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet. and even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind , to do those things which are not convenient; being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful” (Rom 1:26-31).

The eruption of especially reprehensible conduct among the Gentiles is therefore traced back to the Lord’s attitude toward them. He removed restraining influences, like pulling the moral floor out from under them. When He did this, they plummeted into the bottomless pit of moral corruption.

THE CASE OF THE JEWS

God did the same thing after He had revealed certain aspects of Himself in the Law, making a covenant with Israel. When they corrupted an even more extensive revelation than nature, He also gave them over to do things they would not ordinarily have done. The Psalmist refers to this Divine abandonment. “But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust : and they walked in their own counsels” (Psa 81:11-12). Stephen also covers this in his convicting testimony to the Jewish counsel, accounting for the historical propensity of Israel to idolatry. “And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven ; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?” (Acts 7:42).

In the book of Acts, to this point, all of opposition has been directed toward those who have spoken – who have declared the Gospel and expounded it with power. No one has come against the church because of its manner of life.

Lest men be driven to erroneous conclusions, the magnitude of this circumstance is succinctly expressed in Scripture. “Therefore was the wrath of the LORD kindled against His people, insomuch that He abhorred His own inheritance ” (Psa 106:40). Early in their history, God warned them that it was entirely possible for Him to view them as He did the heathen who occupied the land of Canaan before them. “And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them” (Lev 20:23).

In his valedictory address to Israel, Moses rehearsed the affect that their iniquity had upon their God. “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. And when the LORD saw it, He abhorred them , because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters” (Deut 32:18-19). That abhorrence aggravated their fallen condition.

When men persist in not taking their relationship to God seriously, and when they consistently ignore His Word, all the while choosing to still retain His name, God will deliver them over to reprehensible conduct which they cannot imagine themselves doing. In the case of the Jews, Paul said, they “both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess 2:15).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS

It is necessary to say these things because of the nature of our text. In it we find religious men of high rank increasing their opposition to Christ and His spokesmen. They have a growing hostility

toward the church – the body of Christ. This is especially true of those who speak publicly. There is no end to which the religiously corrupt will not go to suppress the preaching of the Gospel. The only restraint upon them will be civil law, and they will do everything in their power to work around that.

This is a direct result of God’s withdrawal from them. While that situation can be remedied by repentance and conversion (Acts 3:19), it cannot be done as long as they continue their moral plummet. Because God is not in it, their religion has allowed them to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think – a condition against which the saints are solemnly warned (Rom 12:3).

SATAN CONTINUES TO WORK IN THIS MANNER

Satan continues to work through established and dead religion. Where men have only a form of godliness, they become tools through which Satan can oppose Christ, the truth, and those who speak it.

TO THIS POINT

In the book of Acts, to this point, all of opposition has been directed toward those who have spoken – who have declared the Gospel and expounded it with power. No one has come against the church because of its manner of life.

Now, those who can declare the Gospel with competency and power begin to increase. A relatively new believer surfaces who has an excellent grasp of the Scriptures, and is able to correlate them with the salvation of God wrought in Christ. This circumstance propels him into the limelight, for he cannot keep silent. His influence is so significant that it strikes into the hearts of those who only have the letter of the Law. The result is that they also cannot keep quiet. They must oppose what is being said, for it contradicts what they have embraced.

FULL OF FAITH AND POWER

“ 6:8a And Stephen, full of faith and power . . .” Other versions read, “full of grace and power,” NASB “full of God’s grace and power,” NIV “filled with God’s favor and power,” GWN “the man so full of faith and the Holy Spirit’s power,” LIVING “ full of grace (divine blessing and favor) and power (strength and ability),” AMPLIFIED “full of grace and spiritual power,” PHILLIPS “full of grace and fortitude,” DARBY and “a man richly blessed by God and full of power.” GNB

The different translations are based on differing manuscripts. Those that read “faith and power” include the following: KJV, NKJV, GENEVA, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, YLT, LIVING, ALT, BISHOPS, EMTV, KJVR, LITV, MKJV .

Those that read “grace and power” include the following: ASV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, BBE, CSB, DARBY, ERV, ESV, MRD, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NJB, NLT, WEYMOUTH, ISV, MONTGOMERY, AMPLIFIED, PHILLIPS.

Actually, both statements are correct, and in no way contradict each other. One emphasizes the BASIS – grace. The other accents the MEANS – faith. In my judgment, the expression “faith and power” most precisely conforms to the revealed manner of speaking of Kingdom realities. It emphasizes the means through which Stephen appropriated the grace that accompanied his power, or ability. In all of its various involvements, salvation is always “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). Grace accents God as the Source, and faith punctuates the experiential quality that takes hold of grace.

There is no need to further address this matter as it is not really an issue. I will proceed with a preference for the reading “faith and power.”

FULL OF FAITH

What does it mean to be “full of faith?” It is certainly an intriguing expression. As I have mentioned before, only Stephen and Barnabas are expressly said to have been “full of faith” (Acts 6:5,8; 11:24).

As used here, the word “full” means “filled up, as opposed to empty . . . covered in every part . . . thoroughly permeated with . . . complete, lacking nothing,” THAYER “space fully occupied . . . rich or abounding in,” FRIBERG “complete, full grown,” UBS and “abundant.” LEH

There are a number of perspectives seen in this word, and all of them provide us with some very challenging concepts.

- “Full” in the sense of a glass of water being filled to the top. In this perspective, the flesh is crucified, self is denied, and the devil is being resisted.
- “Full” in the sense of maturity – being fully grown. Here faith would be accompanied by mature understanding and insight.
- “Full” in the sense of covering every aspect of life, like a roof covers a house. In this case, the person would be wholly devoted to Lord, living unto Him and reckoning himself to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God.
- “Full” in the sense of occupying every facet of life, or thoroughly permeating every aspect of life. Here, whatsoever if done in word or in deed is deliberately and consciously done for the glory of God.
- “Full” in the sense of abundant, like a full harvest. In this view, the realities that are obtained by faith would be found in abundance in the individual.

There is more to being “full of faith” than this, but this will suffice to confirm the nature of such a condition. To be “full of faith” means that the things that are appropriated by faith were found in abundance in Stephen. The following, though not a thorough listing, are included in the things faith brings to the individual.

- A purified heart (Acts 15:9).
- The living of new life (Rom 1:17).
- The righteousness of God (Rom 3:22).
- Access to the grace of God (Rom 5:2).
- Standing firm (Rom 11:20).
- Waiting for the hope of righteousness (Gal 5:5).
- Christ dwelling in the heart (Eph 3:17).
- Understanding (Heb 11:3).
- Being kept by God.

When one is “full of faith,” these qualities are flourishing within him . Such a person is “rich in faith” (James 2:5), and “strong in faith” (Rom 4:20). This is an individual that trusts in the Lord with all of his heart, and does not lean to his own understanding (Prov 3:5). Such people are doing what others are admonished to do. They are walking where others are exhorted to walk. They are spiritually intelligent, and can handle the Word aright, for “faith cometh by hearing,” and they have leaned their ear toward the Word of God.

Stephen was such a man – even though he was a relatively new Christian – two years of at the most. He had made rapid progress because he had availed himself of the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” that are hidden in Christ, and are available to all believers (Col 2:3). He had seen in the Gospel something of the magnitude of salvation, and, like Joshua and Caleb, had eagerly possessed

the land. That, of course, is one of the distinct advantages of hearing a clear and undiluted proclamation of the Gospel of Christ.

FULL OF POWER

The word “power” comes from a word meaning, “strength, power, ability,” THAYER “able to produce a strong effect,” FRIBERG “supernatural power,” UBS “the ability to perform a particular activity or to undergo some experience - 'ability, capability' ,” LOUW-NIDA and “authority.” LEH

In a nutshell, “power,” as used in this text, is the ability to do something that cannot be achieved through natural aptitude. This kind of power cannot be learned in the schools of men. It is not the result of personal discipline. It is not an ability that is the result of a disciplined approach to development. No person is born of a woman with this kind of power. Furthermore, it has to do wholly with the work of the Kingdom, and matters pertaining to life and godliness.

There is a lower form of “power” that comes from God, yet is limited to the affairs of life in this world. That power brings no eternal advantage. Thus Samson could defeat a thousand Philistines, yet fall prey to the subtlety of a dishonest woman (Judges 15:16; 16:20). Solomon was expert in all manner of earthly wisdom, yet was led astray into idolatry by his wives (1 Kgs 4:29-30; 11:7-9). God can give people “power to get wealth,” yet a quest for that wealth can lead them astray so that they “fall into

The cause of such growth is directly owing to the Gospel that is being declared. It is the truth that, when known, brings men such marvelous liberty (John 8:32). It is the truth that sanctifies the people, equipping them to do the work of the Lord (John 17:17). It is the Gospel that is the assigned domain in which men “stand”

temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts” (Deut 8:18; 1 Tim 6:9). The kind of power that is realized “in the flesh” – even though it comes from God – gives a person no Kingdom advantage. God gave Nehuchadnezzar a kingdom (Dan 5:18-19), yet he was judged for his pride (Dan 4:30-32; 5:20).

Stephen was not “full” of that kind of power. This was power of a higher order, that is directly related to the “great salvation” being implemented by the exalted Christ. The exploits that are accomplished through this power cannot be replicated by those who are not reconciled to God. In fact, we have an example in Scripture of a man who sought to purchase the ability to confer the gift of the Spirit on other people. It is written, “And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:18-19). The nature of his person and request are seen in the answer of Peter: “But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God ” (Acts 8:20-21). He was a vessel into which the power of reference could be placed.

There are certain moral and spiritual boundaries within which Divine power is given. Those who are outside of those boundaries are wrong in seeking such power. Their attention must rather be given to the appropriation of grace and truth.

All of this means that Stephen’s heart was right. His thoughts were acceptable. He was, in fact, “a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

A Word About Unusual Response

In the modern church scene, those with an usually good response to preaching are very unusual. Stephen stood out among a group of fervent and consistent disciples – even among seven of them who were publicly noted for being “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). How is it that such a response is possible? For some, this is possible only when there are a set of strictly enforced rules, together with a rigorous form of accountability. The leader of the people is perceived as a demanding one, who imposes his own will upon the people. This, in fact, is how our own fellowship is perceived by many. Seeing that we have a core of young men and women who are able to express themselves intelligently and engage in many Kingdom activities, some have imagined that it is owing to my own demanding and imposing nature.

However, such a fleshly trait is not capable of sustaining steady growth up into Christ in all things. The cause of such growth is directly owing to the Gospel that is being declared. It is the truth that, when known, brings men such marvelous liberty (John 8:32). It is the truth that sanctifies the people, equipping them to do the work of the Lord (John 17:17). It is the Gospel that is the assigned domain in which men “stand” (1 Cor 15:1). There are no exceptions to these things.

Stephen’s excellence can be traced back to the message he had embraced – the preaching of insightful and spirit-filled men. That preaching, coupled with his faith, is what discovered the particular gifts that He was given, enabling him to fulfill a specific role in the body of Christ.

HE DID GREAT SIGNS AND WONDERS

GREAT SIGNS AND WONDERS

The power with which Stephen was endued was made known in “great signs and wonders.” He was able to extend his works beyond the circumference of nature.

“ : 8b . . . did great wonders and miracles . . . ” Other versions read, “ performing great wonders and signs,” NASB “did great wonders and miraculous signs ,” NIV “ wrought great wonders and signs,” ASV “ was doing great wonders and signs,” ESV “He did amazing things and performed miracles,” GWN “ as working great wonders and signs,” NAB “ began to work miracles and great signs,” NJB “did spectacular miracles,” LIVING “he was working miracles,” IE “performed great marvels and signs,” WEYMOUTH “ went on performing great signs and wonders,” WILLIAMS and “ continued to perform miracles and remarkable signs” PHILLIPS

Prior to this, on the day of Pentecost, Peter had associated the working of miracles, signs, and wonders, with the approval of God – particularly as related to Jesus Christ. “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs , which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22). He had also declared that when the Spirit was poured forth “upon all flesh,” there would be “signs in the earth” (Acts 2:19). In other words, these would be wrought in Divine discretion, and not indiscriminately.

Up to this point in the book of Acts, only the apostles are said to have worked signs, wonders, and miracles.

- “And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles” (Acts 2:43).
- “Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength . . . For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was showed” (Acts 3:6-7; 4:22).
- “And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the

people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch" (Acts 5:12).

Now, for the first time since Jesus ascended into heaven, someone other than an Apostle is working "great signs and wonders." Immediately following the first opposition faced by Peter and John, the church had asked God to grant "that with all boldness" they might speak His word, by stretching forth His hand "to heal; and that signs and wonders" would be "done by the name" of His "Holy Child Jesus" (Acts 4:30). That did, in fact happen, as recorded in Acts 5:12. Now, the answer to that prayer is extended beyond the apostles to another member of the body of Christ.

In Stephen we see the word fulfilled that was later given by Paul concerning the gifts God places in the body: "To another . . . the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; to another the working of miracles . . ." (1 Cor 12:9-10). The church in Galatia is also reported to have had miracle workers among them. "He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?" (Gal 3:5).

These gifts, of course, were given at the discretion of the Lord Himself, and are driven by Divine purpose. That discretion was confirmed in the aptitude, ability, and appropriateness of the one receiving a gift, as well as the particular work the Lord was doing among the people. That is, what Stephen did was a revelation of the ability God had given to him through the Spirit. It was an example of "the manifestation of the Spirit," which "is given to every man to profit withal" (1 Cor 12:7). As is made known in Scripture, the Spirit is "distributing to each individual as He wills" (1 Cor 12:11). In strict accord with the nature of the Kingdom of God, this involves the recipient having faith, which is the means of appropriation. It also requires pureness of heart in the individual, and a humble and contrite spirit. If a person is going to be used by God, he must have separated from defiling influences, thus being made "meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim 2:19-21).

An Illustration of Appropriate Gifts

Men often dispute about whether or not gifts of this sort are even intended for our day. All of this is like beating the air, for it involves nothing more than human speculation. It is more wise for men to devote themselves to being ready to be used by God, instead of hypothecating about the manner in which they can be used, or what gifts may be available to them. The Head of the church will see to it that the gifts are in strict accord with His own purpose, and what is needed at that particular time. When, for example, a man was sent to prepare the way of the Lord, it proved to be a man of great holiness and sobriety. In fact, he was a ascetic man who received the word of the Lord while He was "in the wilderness" (Lk 3:2). His parents were strictly charged by a holy angel to raise him in the strictest manner: "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb" (Luke 1:15). When his ministry began, it is written that he came "neither eating bread nor drinking wine" (Lk 7:33). This was John the Baptist, and indicates that he was a Nazarite, raised in the strictest fashion. The law provided more details concerning how such a man was to spend his life. "*Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite, to separate themselves unto the LORD: he shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk. All the days of the vow of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in the which he separateth himself unto the LORD, he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow. All the days that he separateth himself unto the LORD he shall come at no dead body. He shall not make himself unclean for his father, or for his mother, for his brother, or for his sister, when they die: because the consecration of his God is upon his head. All the days of his separation he is holy unto the LORD"* (Num 6:2-8).

Yet, of John the Baptist it is written, “John did no miracle” (John 10:41). This was certainly not owing to any lack of qualification on John’s part, for Jesus said of him, “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Mat 11:11).

John the Baptists’ gifts were adapted to his ministry, and were appropriate for the times during which he ministered. They had nothing to do with what was possible, but rather dealt with what God willed. It was not that the time of the miraculous had ceased, for his own birth was of a miraculous order, his parents being “well stricken in years,” and the woman who bore him being “barren” prior to conceiving John (Lk 1:7). His ministry did not require working miracles.

At this position in time, and in strict accord with the purpose of God, Stephen was granted to be “full of power.” In him we have an example of the fulfillment of a statement made by Hanai the seer. “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him ” (2 Chron 16:9). God found such a man in Stephen, who had also “used the office of a deacon well,” and therefore obtained “a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” NKJV (1 Tim 3:13).

AMONG THE PEOPLE

However, no preaching of Scriptural reference began or concentrated on those who were in total darkness. However noble such an approach may appear to be, one will have a difficult time supporting it with the Word of God.

“ . . . among the people.” Every version reads the same, except the God’s Word Translation, GWN which omits the phrase.

A Principle to be Seen

When we read the words “among the people,” we must understand that they are not equivalent to “among society in general.” As used in this text, this phrase is often equated with speaking to those with no acquaintance of God, those who had plummeted into deep sin, or are generally unacquainted with the Bible. This is such a common perception that people often refer to Jesus Himself as always being around sinners – publicans, harlots, and the more degraded members of society. “That,” they ignorantly affirm, “is where you would find the Lord today.” This stems from a completely erroneous view of the manner in which truth is disseminated.

To be sure, our Lord commanded that the Gospel is to be “preached to every creature,” as the disciples were sent “into all the world” (Mk 16:15). However, no preaching of Scriptural reference began or concentrated on those who were in total darkness. However noble such an approach may appear to be, one will have a difficult time supporting it with the Word of God.

First, we are categorically told that “the Gospel of Christ” is “the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first ” (Rom 1:16). That does not mean first in time alone, but first in order as well. When instructing His disciples to preach the Gospel throughout the world, He said, “beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47) – which is the location of activity in our text. Just before He ascended into heaven Jesus said to His disciples, “ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

In the record of the spread of the Gospel, Christ’s ambassadors were most particular in following this approach, and it is duly noted in the book of Acts.

- After being converted, Paul began preaching “in the synagogues” (Acts 9:20).
- Following the Holy Spirit’s call of Barnabas and Saul, they “preached the word of

God in the synagogues” (Acts 13:5).

- When they went into Antioch of Pisidia in Asia Minor, they “went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day” (Acts 13:14-15).

- The Gentiles that were reached in that area were also in the synagogue (Acts 13:42).

- When they went into Iconium, they “went into the synagogue of the Jews,” and there “a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).

- When Paul was called by the Lord into Macedonia, the first thing he did was go out on the Sabbath day to a river side, where certain devout women met for prayer. It was there that he confronted Lydia (Acts 16:13-14). In that area, when Paul and Silas had been released from prison, they first went to Lydia’s house, and met with the brethren there (Acts 16:40).

- When entering into Thessalonica, Paul first “reasoned” with the Jews in the synagogue for three Sabbath days (Acts 17:1).

- When they came into Berea, they “went into the synagogue of the Jews” (Acts 17:10).

- When Paul came into Athens, he “disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him ” (Acts 17:17).

- After coming to Corinth, he “reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and Greeks” (Acts 18:4).

- When he entered Macedonia, Paul first “testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:5).

- After being rejected by the Jews there, he went into the home of devout Jew named Justus, who lived next door to the synagogue. There “Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:7-8).

- When Paul came to Ephesus, he “entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews” (Acts 18:19).

- When Apollos came into Ephesus, he also “began to speak boldly in the synagogue.” Although he “knew only the baptism of John,” it was there in the synagogue that he met Aquila and Priscilla, who “expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly” (Acts 18:24-26).

- Paul remained for three months in Ephesus, “disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom” in the synagogue, also ministering to the Gentiles there (Acts 19:8).

- When the door of faith was opened to the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, the Spirit makes note of the fact that he was “a devout man, and one that feared God with his house” (Acts 10:2).

- In Thessalonica, certain “devout Greeks” and some “chief” women were the recipients of Paul’s ministry (Acts 17:4).

- In Athens Paul reasoned disputed with “devout persons” (Acts 17:17).

There should be no need to recount these instances, for they are a matter of Scriptural record – and they are not at all ambiguous. However amidst a staggering ignorance of the word of God, erroneous conceptions and emphases are being pawned off on the people of God. Statements are regularly made concerning Christ and the obligations of believers that have their genesis in the minds of men who are unlearned in the things of God. Furthermore, men are being judged, evaluated, and commended

or condemned upon the basis of these erroneous suppositions.

With remarkable consistency, the Scriptures confirm that the spreading of the Gospel consistently started among those with some knowledge of God, yet who were not cognizant of the truth of Christ. Truth was first anchored in the minds of devout and stable people, and it spread from there. This was also true of the ministry of the Prophets, John the Baptist, and our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. If a people will simply subject their minds to the Scriptures, it will not be possible to miss this emphasis.

The strategy of the modern church is partly responsible for its deplorable condition. It has majored preeminently on reaching what it calls “the lost,” giving little or no heed to devout people who have an imperfect knowledge of the Lord. As a result, the church is filled with novices who have no working knowledge of Scripture.

The strategy of the modern church is partly responsible for its deplorable condition. It has majored preeminently on reaching what it calls “the lost,” giving little or no heed to devout people who have an imperfect knowledge of the Lord. As a result, the church is filled with novices who have no working knowledge of Scripture. Consequently, owing to their supposed sincerity, certain things have crept into the church that are fundamentally of this world. This is because the larger part of the professing church is enveloped with spiritual ignorance. There are few converts of the caliber of Cornelius, or Lydia, or other Jews and devout people. In other words, the nucleus of the church is weak, and that is a near-hopeless condition. The fact that the professed leaders have allowed this to happen reveals the unacceptable level of their understanding.

The Gospel is called “glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15). But why is this so? Do not imagine that this suggests the message of the Gospel is primarily good news to the immoral, those enslaved by drugs, strong drink, and the likes. This is not “good news” to those whose marriages are falling apart, or whose children have gone astray, or who have lost all of their financial resources. That is not the emphasis of the words “good news,” and men do are wrong in suggesting that it is. Paul said it most precisely when he announced in Antioch, “And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee” (Acts 13:31-32). The “good news” is not that you can be saved – although, for the humble and contrite soul, that is a refreshing announcement!

The good news is what God has done, not what you can be! That is precisely what Paul said. This presumes some familiarity with what God has promised, as well as a longing for its fulfillment. In the case of devout people, it presumes they have come to see their need of the Lord, and long to be accepted by Him. I do not believe you can establish that the Gospel can possibly be “glad tidings of good things” to anyone else. This is why Paul preached as He did in Athens (Acts 17:22-31). He brought the people to a point where they saw their need of the Lord by reminding them they were made by God, were responsible to Him, and were going to be judged by his Son.

When the fundamental objective of men is to rescue others from bad life-styles, and to correct their behavior, they must, of necessity, turn their attention from Christ Jesus. This is because Christ’s primary work was to do the will of God. It is within the framework of that will that true human need is addressed.

Why Say These Things?

It may appear on the surface as though all of this is nothing more than a distraction from the text. However, this is not the case at all. Our text is a sterling example of the very thing I have just sought to establish. When it is written that Stephen “did great wonders and miracles among the people,” the Jews are the people of reference. These were the people who had been cultured by Moses to have some acquaintance with the God of might. They had been cultures for the day of salvation, with ALL

Divine benefits being given to them (Rom 9:4-5). Their history had been filled with examples of the signs and wonders that had been wrought in their behalf. No heathen God had ever worked in such a manner, or been represented as working in such a way.

This was not a way Stephen had of simply getting the attention of the people. Rather it was attesting that he was a man sent by God. These “great wonders and miracles” were not mere displays of raw power. They doubtless brought some kind of benefit to the people, like the healing of the lame man (3:1-6), and the many healings that had been wrought by the apostles (5:16). He was not like a magician, performing feats of wonder before the people. That is not the nature of salvation, nor is it the manner of those who bring the good news of that salvation.

You see also in this that Stephen’s ministry was of a public nature, confirming that he was not ashamed of the Gospel, and that the ability he had been given was genuine. What now follows confirms that what Stephen said was the primary thing, not what he did. The “great wonders and miracles” that he “did among the people” confirmed that what he was saying was the truth – and that was the critical factor. In the Divine economy, there is no point to a wonder-worker who does not have a unique and beneficial message. Stephen was not simply ministering to the people, he was primarily representing the living God.

THE FIRST CASE OF DISPUTATION

“ 9 Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen.”

In the Jewish economy, and by Divine design, their religion was the heart of their culture. Family life, as fundamental as it was, was not the heart of their acculturation. The very existence of the synagogue was confirmation of this fact. The synagogue largely represented the religious life of the people.

Following Christ’s ascension, and up to this point, no one speaking for the Lord had encountered an argument against the truth. A debate had never ensued that sought to disprove the truth of the Gospel. Peter and John faced opposition, but not disputation (4:1-2). Later, the apostles were incarcerated, threatened, and beaten – but no one argued with them. Now, quite possibly as long as two years after Pentecost, a man full the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, and power, faces disputation. This is the first instance. In fact, this is the first time the word “dispute” in any of its varied forms, occurs in the book of Acts. Among other things, this confirms the powerful reasoning that is contained in the Gospel. When it is preached in purity and power, it is most difficult for those who do not receive it to contend with it.

THE SYNAGOGUE – THE PLACE OF DISPUTATION

“Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines . . .” Other versions read, “synagogue of the Freedmen ,” NKJV “Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called) ,” NIV “the Synagogue named that of the Libertines ,” BBE “called the Freedmen's Synagogue ,” DARBY “a synagogue called Freedmen's Synagogue ,” GWN “the Synagogue of Freed Slaves ,” NLT “the Jewish cult of ‘The Freedmen ,” LIVING “the synagogue of the Freedmen (freed Jewish slaves), as it was called,” AMPLIFIED and “the synagogue, the ones being called Freed Slaves . ALT

Once again, behold the locus, or locale, of Stephen’s ministry – the synagogue , where devout men were gathered. This was a particular synagogue within Jerusalem – “the synagogue of the Libertines.”

In the Jewish economy, and by Divine design, their religion was the heart of their culture. Family life, as fundamental as it was, was not the heart of their acculturation. The very existence of the

synagogue was confirmation of this fact. The synagogue largely represented the religious life of the people. It was not a family center, entertainment center, or place of leisurely activity. Much of Christ's ministry, as well of many of His great miracles, were performed in the synagogues (Matt 12:9; Mk 1:23; Lk 13:11). Some of his most marvelous words, concerning eating His flesh and drinking His blood, were spoken in the synagogue (John 6:44-59). This is where early believers frequently met, as confirmed by Saul of Tarsus seeking Christians there (Acts 9:2; 22:19; 26:11).

The origin of the Synagogue

The word "synagogue" means "a bringing together, gathering . . . an assembling together." THAYER It is a parallel of the Greek word *ekklēsia*, which is translated "church." Although Jewish tradition states that synagogues were among the Jews from of old, there are no direct references of them in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. Jewish tradition affirms that when Nebuchadnezzar burned "all the houses of Jerusalem," the reference was to 480 synagogues that existed in the city. Jerusalem Megillah, 3, 1 This cannot be satisfactorily proved, but it does confirm how the synagogue came to be central in Jewish life.

It is generally understood that the synagogues arose during the exile, when the mass of Jews were no longer located in their own land. The Assyrians had captured the Israelites (2 Kgs 18:9-11), and the Babylonians had enslaved Judah (2 Kgs 14:11-16). Both captivities removed the people from their Temple and homeland. However, it did not remove their Temple and homeland from their hearts. We know that during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah there were solemn gatherings of the Jews (Ezra 8:15; Neh 8:2; 9:1; Zech 7:5). Furthermore, these became the occasion for instructing the people concerning the Law of God, and exhorting them to keep the laws of the Lord (Ezra 10:1-9; Neh 8:1; 9:1-3; 13:1-3). Jewish history affirms that these circumstances formed the beginning of the concept of a synagogue – a gathering place where the people of God were subjected to the scriptures and taught.

Thus the nature of true religion is unveiled by the people who were cultured by exposure to God's law and will. They saw a need to come together and expose their hearts and minds to what was available to them from God. This was before the coming of Christ. It was, however, a frame of mind that must be possessed if any advantage from Christ is to be realized. At some point, men must regard the company of the godly and the word of God to be worthy of extended effort, regardless of whether of not it is convenient. The men who pioneered this effort were consistently godly men – generally prophets or priests. They were men who had seen the implication of God speaking to and directing men. Those experiences imply that the emphasis of life lies outside of mere human experience. Oh, that men were more able to see this in our time!

The Synagogue Firmly Established

One further observation: the synagogue was not something God commanded, yet it was something He received and honored. His Son honored it, and so did the apostles and the early church. Those who "forsake the assembling" of themselves together have fallen beneath the level of the ancient Jews, to say nothing of their Lord and Savior.

By the time of Jesus' birth, the synagogue was established as an integral part of Jewish life. Jesus Himself regularly attended the synagogue (Luke 4:16). It was wholly related to religious life, reflecting the nature of God's dealings with them. Among serious Jews, there was no thought of religious life being in subordination to social life. It was central. If they had a special "hour," it was for prayer, not for lunch or extracurricular activities (Acts 3:1). Now, in our time, under the domination of the Gentile church, this concept has all but been destroyed. It is no wonder that their predominance in this age of grace has an appointed conclusion, being called "the times of the Gentiles" (Lk 21:24). Under their regime, religious buildings are largely devoted to secular

purposes, entertainment, etc.

One further observation: the synagogue was not something God commanded, yet it was something He received and honored. His Son honored it, and so did the apostles and the early church. Those who “forsake the assembling” of themselves together have fallen beneath the level of the ancient Jews, to say nothing of their Lord and Savior. Such a miserable practice is indefensible. It contradicts both reason and revelation.

Stephen Speaks in the Synagogue

Here is a man filled with faith, wisdom, the Spirit, and power. Where will a man like this go? What kind of people will he address? Believe it or not, he took his message inside the four walls – where devout religious people were gathered! The account that follows took place in the synagogue.

Godly men must have contact with devout people in order to maintain their spiritual advancement, whether in defense of the truth, or in the matter of edification. The newness of life, as experienced in this world, is calculated to develop in the midst of competing influences. In this way it is confirmed to the hearts of those possessing the life that God is “greater than all” (John 10:29). Until a person experiences the victory that comes from faith (1 John 5:4-5), his religion is largely philosophical. Faith, by its very nature, compels the individual to express that faith, even in a hostile arena. This is what we see taking place in this text.

The Libertines

The word “libertine” means “one who has been liberated from slavery, a freedman.” THAYER “a designation for a Jew who had gained freedom from slavery.” FRIBERG

These were people who had been slaves, but were freed. It is quite possible that they spoke in different languages because of their circumstance. However, they had not lost their interest in the Lord, and upon their freedom had either formed a synagogue, or one was formed for them while they were in Jerusalem.

This also confirms the centrality of religious life to the Jews. That centrality was not the result of their own emphasis, but was rather traced to the manner in which God Himself had cultured them. It is a national example of the domestic circumstance of raising a child “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph 6:4). It is inconceivable that the highest expression of the involvement of Deity with humanity – the New Covenant – would relegate spiritual activity to a lesser role than was inculcated under the Old Covenant.

THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE DISPUTATION

“ . . . and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia . . .” Other translations read, “including both Cyrenians and Alexandrians, and some from Cilicia and Asia,” NASB “Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia,” NIV “Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria in Egypt, and the Turkish provinces of Cilicia, and Asia Minor ,” LIVING “(This synagogue was also for Jews from the cities of Cyrene and Alexandria.) Jews from Cilicia and Asia were with them .” IE “Cyrenaeans, Alexandrians, Cilicians and men from Roman Asia ,” WEYMOUTH and “ Cyrenians and of the Alexandrians and of those from Cilicia and [the province of] Asia,” AMPLIFIED

These people were all Jews, but were from other countries, and spoke different languages because of that circumstance.

It ought to be noted that at this time, even though a considerable number of Jews were living in the promised land, most of them remained in a state of dispersion. From an historical point of view, that

dispersion was the result of the Assyrians and Chaldeans conquering them. As it is written, "Israel is a scattered sheep; the lions have driven him away: first the king of Assyria hath devoured him ; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones " (Jer 50:17). However, from the higher and more precise viewpoint, God Himself had scattered them because of their waywardness. There are a number of references made to this scattering in the Prophets.

- "For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished" (Jer 30:11).

ON LIBERTINES

The earliest explanation of the word (Chrysostom) is also that which has been adopted by the most recent authorities. The *Libertini* are Jews who, having been taken prisoners by Pompey and other Roman generals in the Syrian wars, had been reduced to slavery, and had afterwards been emancipated, and returned, permanently or for a time, to the country of their fathers. Of the existence of a large body of Jews in this position at Rome we have abundant evidence. Under Tiberius, the *Senatus-Consultum* for the suppression of Egyptian and Jewish mysteries led to the banishment of 4000 "libertini generis" to Sardinia, under the pretense of military or police duty, but really in the hope that the malaria of the island might be fatal to them. Others were to leave Italy unless they abandoned their religion (Tacitus, *Anal.* 2:85; comp. Sueton. *Tiber.* c. 36). Josephus (*Ant.* 18:3, 5), narrating the same fact, speaks of the 4000 who were sent to Sardinia as Jews, and thus identifies them with the "libertinum genus" of Tacitus. Philo (*Legat. ad Caium*, page 1014, C) in like manner says that the greater part of the Jews of Rome were in the position of freedmen and had been allowed by Augustus to settle in the Trans-Tiberine part of the city, and to follow their own religious customs unmolested (comp. Horace, *Sat.* 1:4, 143; 1:9, 70).

- "Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock" (Jer 31:10).
- "Therefore say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Although I have cast them far off among the heathen, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them as a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come" (Ezek 11:16).
- "And I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them" (Ezek 36:19).
- "But I scattered them with a whirlwind among all the nations whom they knew not. Thus the land was desolate after them, that no man passed through nor returned: for they laid the pleasant land desolate" (Zech 7:14).

Now we are provided with a prelude to what God promised the whole of the people He would do – gather them again. As it is written, "Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and declare it in the isles afar off, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock:" (Jer 31:10). And again, "And I will bring you out from the people, and will gather you out of the countries wherein ye are scattered, with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out" (Ezek 20:34).

To this very day, Israel remains scattered, with only a remnant dwelling in the promised land. The nation never did recover from the scattering facilitated by the king of Assyria and Nebuchadnezzar of the Chaldeans. If anyone doubts that they can be gathered, the book of Acts begins with a first fruit offering of this very nation to the Lord.

We are also reading of the Lord saving people while they are in a scattered state. He has drawn a number of them to Jerusalem in order to enlighten their eyes and confirm His promises to them. This

ought to be of special comfort to those who are aware of the present scattered state of the church. While it is not a pleasant circumstance, it is not a hopeless one.

The Kind of People Before Us

In our text we are provided a picture of how seriously a people cultured by God can take their religion – something provided them for understanding. It is important to note how vastly different that culture is from the present culture of the America church in particular, and the whole country in general. There are proportionately few of this kind of people in our quadrant of the world. However, this IS how people who have been exposed to the real God, and have taken it seriously, react. Even though these were not ideal people, they were a zealous people.

They Came From various Areas

These freed slaves had come from various areas, but had gravitated back to Jerusalem, no doubt to attend the feasts that were at hand. They may well have been in that number of “devout Jews out of every nation under heaven,” that are mentioned in Acts 2:5. The number included the following.

- CYRENIANS. These were freed Jewish slaves from Cyrene, which was the chief city in North Africa .

- ALEXANDRIANS. These were freed Jewish slaves from Alexandria in Egypt .

CILICIA. These were freed Jewish slaves from Cilicia, a province in Asia Minor , that was on the seacoast north of Cyprus.

- ASIA. These were freed Jewish slaves from Asia Minor, an area that embraced Mysia (Acts 16:7-8), Aeolis, Ionia, Caria, and Lydia (Ezek 30:5). This was also the area in which the seven churches of Revelation were located (Rev 1:4).

We are told in the book of Acts that during Paul’s two year stay in Ephesus, “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). Much of this was accomplished by Paul himself, as his enemies confirmed: “Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands” (Acts 19:26). That section of the world was noted for the worship of “Diana of the Ephesians” (Acts 19:27). Later Paul wrote to Timothy about the time he was in Asia, confessing that at that time “all they which are of Asia turned away from me” (2 Tim 1:15).

Now, in our text, a number of former Jewish slaves from that region will engage Paul in disputation. How will these former slaves react to the preaching of Stephen. Will we find them to be basically untaught because they were slaves?

THE DISPUTATION

“ . . . disputing with Stephen.” Other versions read, “rose up and argued with Stephen,” NASB “These began to argue with Stephen,” NIV “had arguments with Stephen,” BBE “ came forward and disputed with Stephen,” CSB “started an argument with Stephen,” GWN “came forward and debated with Stephen,” NAB “ They all came and argued with Stephen,” IE “ were roused to encounter Stephen in debate,” WEYMOUTH “ got to debating with Stephen,” WILLIAMS “arose [and undertook] to debate and dispute with Stephen,” AMPLIFIED and “ tried debating with Stephen.” PHILLIPS

We know from other Scriptures that it was the custom of Jewish people to have others speak in their synagogues – particularly if they were obviously devout people. Thus, without personally knowing Paul, the rulers of a synagogue in Antioch of Pisida “after the reading of the law and the

prophets . . . sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on” (Acts 13:15). In some way, this had occurred in the synagogue of the Libertines, and Stephen, conducting himself in decency and order, had been speaking. We are not told of his specific words, but they were doubtless in strict harmony with the words through which he himself had been converted since the day of Pentecost. They obviously centered in the Lord Jesus Christ, whom the Jews had crucified, and whom God had raised from the dead and exalted to His right hand. I do not doubt that his words were parallel with those that Peter and the apostles had been speaking (Acts 2:14-27; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32).

Disputing

Our text says these men “arose.” That is, the “rose up,” NASB “stood up,” NRSV or “came forward.” CSB It was the manner for the persons speaking to come forward and stand before the people to speak. That is what Jesus did (Lk 4:16). It is also what Paul did in Antioch (Acts 13:16). Now, being no longer able to endure what Stephen was saying, these men come forward to began disputing with him, attempting to disprove what he was saying.

At once you see that the synagogue was not only a place for formal teaching, but for examining an issue more closely that was not seen alike by all of the people. This practice would frighten many would-be preachers from the pulpit. However, it did not have that effect upon Stephen.

To “dispute” means “to seek to examine together . . .to discuss, dispute, or question,” THAYER “debate, argue with,” FRIBERG “to express forceful differences of opinion without necessarily having a presumed goal of seeking a solution.” LOUW-NIDA In other words, in such a discussion, the aim of the ones initiating the dispute is not to arrive at the truth. It is rather an attempt to justify a view that is already held, yet contradicts what the speaker has been saying.

These were religious men, and they took their religion seriously – a religion that had been revealed by God himself. Their presence in Jerusalem at this time confirms this to be true Yet, they were not like the devout men on the day of Pentecost who cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Instead they begin to argue with Stephen, disputing what he has said, seeking to undermine it, and establish their own way of thinking. How will this two-yea-old disciple of Jesus be able to handle their disputation? Or will he shrink back from it, avoiding all controversy, as some are wont to do?

In a sense, these are Stephen’s Jewish fellows, coming from the same background as himself. It is assumed that because he was in this synagogue for freed slaves, that he himself was in that category. If this assumption is true, what marvelous progress this man had made. A foreign-born slave, or son of a slave, who held on to “the Jew’s religion” (Gal 1:13,14), taking the time to travel to Jerusalem for the Passover. During that time he must have heard and believed the Gospel, and heartily embraced the truth. He rose above his peers, being recognized as an unusual man in both knowledge and commitment. Now he is in the synagogue of the Libertines so powerfully proclaiming the Gospel of Christ that some have stood up and began to oppose him, disputing with him. Apparently, he was speaking extensively.

How will this young man fare among these zealous Jewish brethren? Will his boldness wither, or will it increase?

THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO RESIST

“ 10 And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”

Stephen does not back down from these men. He does not extend the scepter of peace and give them some time to catch up to him in their understanding. He does not tell them he is willing to

consider their view of whatever they were disputing. He had been where they were, and already knew the ins and outs of their position. He had, like all believers, been “illuminated” (Heb 10:32). Like Caleb of old, he had “another spirit” (Num 14:24), and, for all practical purposes, that set him apart..

It appears from the text that Stephen waxed even more bold, and accelerated in his proclamation of the truth of Christ. In fact, as this account progresses it becomes very evident that this is precisely what happened. Some time later Paul will write to Timothy that those who “use the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves . . . great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 3:13). This is precisely what is being seen in Stephen. He began as a deacon, serving tables. Now we find him boldly declaring the word of the Lord in the face of contradiction and disputation.

The Sacred Art of Holy Disputation

There is a sense in which the servants of God are in the marketplace of ideas. There comes a time when it is not enough to simply say, “Well, that is what I believe, and that is all there is to it.” At some point, the professing church must come to grips with erroneous ideas, dismantle them, and hold forth the truth of God as superior in every way.

There is a place for proper disputation in the Kingdom of God. There are strong arguments that must be “cast down” (2 Cor 10:5), and mouths of gainsayers that are to be “stopped” (Tit 1:11). One of the requirements of an elder is that he “may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9). It was said of Apollos that he “mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ” (Acts 18:28). In a church world that is grasping after fame and records, this is certainly not the fashionable thing to do. But it is the godly thing to do!

When Paul was first converted, “he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him” (Acts 9:29). Over ten years after the day of Pentecost, when the apostles and elders met to consider the acceptance of the Gentiles, there was “much disputing.” Because of the hearts of the people, and the strong arguments that were presented, they concluded in perfect accord (Acts 15:7-7-22). In Athens, Paul “disputed . . . in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him” (Acts 17:17). In Ephesus Paul “went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). When some of the people were hardened “he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9).

There is a sense in which the servants of God are in the marketplace of ideas. There comes a time when it is not enough to simply say, “Well, that is what I believe, and that is all there is to it.” At some point, the professing church must come to grips with erroneous ideas, dismantle them, and hold forth the truth of God as superior in every way. It is to be understood that everyone cannot do this with the same effectiveness. However, there is a place for being ready to give an answer to every man that asks a reason for the hope that is in you (1 Pet 3:15).

Let it be clear, God is not honored by human stupidity, flawed words, and simplistic speech. Those who speak for the Lord are to be men in understanding, and not speak as a child. Even though men try to dignify childish talk, they cannot be successful in their attempts.

In my judgment there are too many incapable and unlearned men in religious leadership. They have not gained “excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus” NIV (1 Tim 3:13). This is one of the reasons for the proliferation of error within the Christian community. It lacks competent men who can effectively dispute with these charlatans. This is something that cannot be taught. It is learned in the crucible of service in which one keeps the faith and presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

It is good to keep in mind that Stephen was not an apostle, yet here he is, himself doing some of the things that the apostles also did. Some might conjecture that this was possible because the apostles had laid hands on him (Acts 6;16). I prefer to trace his effectiveness to his own faithfulness in serving tables, through which he obtained “great boldness in the faith,” just as Paul said.

THEY WERE NOT ABLE TO RESIST

”And they were not able to resist . . .” Other versions read, “they were unable to cope,” NASB “they could not stand up against,” NIV “they could not withstand,” NRSV “they were not able to get the better of him,” BBE “they couldn’t argue,” GWN “the Jews could not argue with him,” IE “found themselves quite unable to stand up against,” PHILLIPS “they were no match for Stephen,” CEV “they could not refute him,” GNB and “they had no strength to stand against.” LITV

Stephen was not simply an overpowering personality. He was a man “full of faith and power,” and the Holy spirit and wisdom as well. The point here is that these men could not answer Stephen’s arguments. He left them speechless. Peter would say he put them “to silence” (1 Pet 2:15). Paul would say he “stopped” their mouths (Tit 1:11). As Gamaliel would say, they “could not overthrow it” (Acts 5:39). As Isaiah said, every tongue that rose up against Stephen was “condemned” (Isa 54:17).

In Stephen the promise of Jesus was fulfilled, “For I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist” (Luke 21:15). Although that word was spoken to only four men during the Olivet discourse, yet it was fulfilled in a man who was not even there – Stephen.

God Is To Be Honored in Our Presentations

Our God is to be honored by what we say in His name. Our presentations should solicit the attention of holy angels as well as men of humble and hungry hearts, and inquisitive spirits. Let it be clear, God is not honored by human stupidity, flawed words, and simplistic speech. Those who speak for the Lord are to be men in understanding, and not speak as a child (1 Cor 13:11; 14:20). Even though men try to dignify childish talk, they cannot be successful in their attempts. Those who say that public speaking and writing should be delivered so six year-olds can understand, betray a level of ignorance that is inexcusable. Christian writers are regularly told to dumb down their writings to a sixth-to-eighth grade level. What will they do if they encounter someone like the Libertines, the Pharisees, the scribes, or the lawyers? How would they speak if they stood before Athenian philosophers who had imbibed the high-sounding teaching of Socrates and Plato? What will they present to the aggressive atheists and evolutionists? It is time to get childishness out of the pulpit, libraries, and bookstores. Men of God are to be able to silence those who oppose the truth, not simply turn and walk away, leaving them to confuse other people.

The truth of God is the highest and most stable substance of communication. It challenges the mind more than any other message – although you would never know from many of the messages that are being delivered in Jesus’ name. When men heard the Lord Jesus speak, they said “Never man spake like this man.” Many of the men we hear today remind us of the way the world speaks. They use the jargon of the world, and use words and concepts that the world employs. They say they are trying to reach the world, but they are lying. They are trying to impress men, not reach them, for God has given us the message that will reach into the recesses of the heart. Stephen employed Divine reasoning, and put it into inspired language. He spoke of incontestable realities, and delivered the message in words that drove the point home to the heart. He did this wisely, not accommodatingly.

THE WISDOM AND SPIRIT BY WHICH HE SPAKE

“ . . . the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” Other versions read, “his wisdom or the Spirit by which he spoke,” NIV “the wisdom and the Spirit with which he spoke,” NRSV “for his words

were full of wisdom and of the Spirit,” BBE “because he spoke with the wisdom that the Spirit had given him ,” GWN “because of his wisdom, and the Spirit that prompted what he said ,” NJB “but the Spirit was helping Stephen speak with wisdom,” IE “the wisdom and the Spirit by which he kept speaking ,” ISV “with his good practical sense and the spiritual power with which he usually spoke,” WILLIAMS “the intelligence and the wisdom and [the inspiration of] the Spirit with which and by Whom he spoke ,” AMPLIFIED “either his practical wisdom or the spiritual force with which he spoke,” PHILLIPS and “who spoke with the great wisdom that the Spirit gave him .” CEV

Two things are noted concerning Stephen. They are things that were revealed in his speaking. This is important to note. His dominant traits were not made known in his deeds, but in his speech. Although he was a faithful man, full of faith and power, together wisdom and the Holy Spirit, it was what he said that became the ultimate attestation of the presence of those qualities. This is in sharp conflict with the manner in which religious men are assessed in our time. Generally, with several exceptions, leading figures in the contemporary Christian community are not noted for what they actually teach or preach. Some are renowned for the institution they have built, or the organization they have spawned. Some may even be known for the acts of mercy in which they are involved. It is not that any of these things are wrong of themselves. Rather, it is important to know that foundational figures within the body of Christ are to be noted for what they teach and preach. This is because God placed “first” in the body of Christ apostles, prophets, and teachers. It is only “after that” that other ministries become valid and effective (1 Cor 12:28).

“Wisdom”

Stephen “spoke” with wisdom. That is, he was able to handle the truth in such a manner as to bring it to bear upon the conscience of the people. Wisdom is the ability to handle words like David handled a sling, and Samson handled the jawbone of an ass. It is the ability to speak the truth in a constructive manner, so that the purpose of God is implemented.

In Christ, when men speak “with wisdom,” their teaching is impregnable, and cannot be torn down. It is the sort of teaching that is buttressed by the Holy Spirit, and through which He works upon the hearts of men, convincing them of sin, righteousness and judgment (John 16:8-11). This is a different order of wisdom, and is a higher kind of wisdom than that which was given to Solomon. This is a wisdom that has more to do with eternal matters than temporal circumstances. It is a wisdom flowing from Christ, who is “great than Solomon” (Matt 12:42). This kind of wisdom is described as “the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). In other words, it has to do with insight into the “eternal purpose” of God, and the ability to expound the Scriptures in view of that immutable purpose.

Those who are recognized as especially wise men in matters pertaining to marriage, finance, motivation, organization, problem resolution, and the likes, possess a wisdom that is more of the Solomonic order than of Christ. Those with the higher order of wisdom are not ignorant in these areas. They do, however, approach them at a more foundational level, having a more thorough perception of earthly circumstances.

Stephen, of course, was not discoursing concerning the various nuances of synagogue life. He was not addressing the matter of having more stable finances, integrating with society, or other such matters. He certainly was not delivering teaching on how to have better health and obtain much wealth. Such teaching would probably have been tolerated by the people of this synagogue. It ought to be obvious that a man “full of faith and power,” who is doing “great wonders and miracles among the people,” would not be inclined to speak at length about such matters.

The wisdom with which Stephen spoke did not convince the people of the truth of what he said, as the sequence of events that followed confirm. However, the people could not tear his arguments apart. They could not effectively contend with him, or present arguments that neutralized even the smallest

part of what he was proclaiming.

“The Spirit”

Here, the reference is not to Stephen’s spirit, but to the Holy Spirit. This is seen in the very words of the text: “the Spirit BY which he spake” – not , in which he spake. Stephen’s spirit was indeed strong, and it was projected in both the content of what he said, as well as the fervency and force of it. However, it was the Holy Spirit who strengthened his inner man, thereby fortifying both his reasoning and his words. Rather than the disputers putting Stephen to silence with their rebuttals, he silenced them. It ought to be obvious that this was not primarily the accomplishment of his human spirit. This is an explanation of the “power” with which Stephen had been filled, and therefore cannot possibly refer to any natural aptitude or fervency within him.

Stephen’s wisdom was the result of His faith. He was walking in the Spirit and in the light, and was thus illuminated. His mind attained to a state that was not possible through any man-conceived means. He saw things flesh cannot see. Therefore, his words were like festering arrows that frustrated those who sought to contend with him.

What a difference there is between “spiritually minded” (Rom 8:6) and “the carnal mind” (Rom 8:7); between natural aptitude (Matt 10:28) and spiritual aptitude (1 Pet 4:11); between “spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9) and worldly understanding (1 Tim 1:7); between the “wisdom that is from above” (James 3:17) and the “wisdom of this world” (James 3:15). Those who reason in the Spirit soar beyond the capabilities of the flesh, or natural aptitude. They can see things that cannot be accessed by the human eye, and sense things that cannot be ascertained by the natural senses. Faith can mount up with the wings of the eagle, while flesh must burrow in the ground of sense and time.

The truth itself is impervious to error. When men attempt to distort it, their efforts fail. Although it may appear men have thrust the truth out of sight, as it appeared to be during The Dark Ages, yet all it takes is a an honest and good heart mingled with faith, and it can be seen so clearly it seems inconceivable that it was ever hidden.

Although it has become fashionable for men to attempt to join the wisdom of the world with the wisdom that comes down from above, their efforts have not yielded satisfactory results. For example, in the area of logic, men attempt to prove the Scripture by human reasoning, or certain laws of hermeneutics. Yet, all they do is throw the veil of obscurity over the truth, both for themselves and those who hear them. The linguists make a hearty effort to support the Scripture with Greek and Hebrew expertise. Yet, all they manage to do is create variant ways of thinking, and throw doubt upon the Scriptures that are in the hands of the people. The scientist tries to open up the truth by paralleling it with nature, yet finds that nature’s bag is too small to contain the truth of God. What can be “understood by the things that are made” (Rom 1:20) is not enough to justify a man, or enable him to stand acceptably before the Lord of the creation. The archaeologist makes an earnest effort to prove the Scripture by various historical finds, unearthing ancient cities and artifacts. Yet, there is not a grain of faith that can be produced by all of their accumulative efforts, for faith comes by hearing what the Lord has said, not what they have found. The apologists imagine they can send the skeptics scurrying to the holes of despair by their ontological arguments for the existence of God, but the Holy Spirit does not work through their arguments to convince the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

Stephen’s wisdom was the result of His faith. He was walking in the Spirit and in the light, and was thus illuminated. His mind attained to a state that was not possible through any man-conceived means. He saw things flesh cannot see. Therefore, his words were like festering arrows that frustrated those who sought to contend with him. They simply could not stand against the wisdom with which he spoke. The gale of his words was too strong for them. Thus they fell backward, so to speak, like those who came to arrest Jesus in the Garden (John 18:6).

There is no justifiable reason for such men to be so glaringly absent from the church of our time.

THEY SUBORNED MEN

“ 11a Then they suborned men which said. . .” Other versions read, “They secretly induced men to say,” NKJV “they secretly persuaded some men to say,” NIV “they secretly instigated some men to say,” NRSV “The they got men to say,” BBE “Then they bribed some men to lie,” GWN “Then they sent men, and instructed them to say,” MRD “So they procured some men to say,” NJB “Then they privily prepared men, which said,” PNT “So they brought in some men to lie about him,” LIVING “So they secretly paid some men to say,” IE “So they [secretly] instigated and instructed men to say,” AMPLIFIED “ In desperation they bribed men to allege,” PHILLIPS and “So they talked some men into saying,” CEV

What will these religious men do when they are faced with words they cannot overthrow. Will they be like those on the day of Pentecost who cried out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). Will they be like the five thousand men who believed after hearing Peter preach on the same Jesus Stephen proclaimed? (Acts 4:4). Stricken with a sense of their folly, will they cry out like the Philippian jailor, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:31).

Indeed, they will not! Even though they have heard a reasonable message, and have not been able to find a single flaw in it, yet their hearts are so corrupt, they cannot accept it. They were like certain Jews who heard Jesus, of whom it is written, “Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12:39-40). They will not yield to the truth, but will accelerate their efforts to oppose it.

THE REASON FOR SPIRITUAL DECLINE

There are two primary reasons for their response, and they are joined with one another. First, their hearts were “stony” (Ezek 11:19), and thus their “mind and conscience” were defiled (Tit 1:15). Second, God had blinded their eyes so they could not believe (Isaiah 29:10).

The Way Delineated

There is a certain sequence that led those disputing with Stephen into this condition, and it is revealed in God’s dealings with wayward Israel. The Lord speaks quite candidly on this matter. The twenty-ninth chapter of Isaiah plots the downward path of Israel, and Jesus uses the passage to explain why the Jews He confronted could not believe.

- The people had lapsed into a state where they honored God with the lips, while their hearts were far from Him. Their fear of Him was taught by the precept of man, and there was neither heart nor conscience in it (Isa 29:13). This took place even though God had sent them holy prophets, commissioning them “early,” in order to turn the hearts of the people back to Him. Yet, they did not hear (Jer 7:13,25; 26:5,19; 32:33; 35:15).

- Therefore, the Lord “poured out” upon them “the spirit of deep sleep,” closing their eyes, and covering the eyes of the prophets so they could not prophesy (Isa 29:10). John said He “blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts” (John 12:39a).

- The result of this was that the Scriptures became a sealed book, and none of the people could understand them (Isa 29:11). John said that the consequence was they “could not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted” (John 12:40). John provides this scenario as the reason “they could not believe” (John 12:39).

- As a result of this inability to believe, Satan gains the absolute dominance over such

individuals, “who are taken captive by him at his will” (1 Tim 2:26). They now enter into a totally irrational life in which the truth is stifled at any cost, as they become nothing more than vassals in the hands of the devil.

This is why the Jews killed their prophets who came to rescue them from the ravages of sin. This is why Judas betrayed Jesus, and it is also why their leaders promoted and facilitated the death of Christ, even though He had gone about “doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:39).

Now, this same process of degradation moves the men in the synagogue of the Libertines to take matters into their own hands. They cannot resist what Stephen has said, so they will engage in an effort to misrepresent him before the people. The “chief priests and elders” engaged in the same activity as they plotted the death of Jesus. They “sought false witnesses against Jesus, to put Him to death” (Matt 26:59).

SUBORNING FALSE WITNESSES

In this effort, not being able to find fault with Stephen, or to overthrow his words, they will “suborn” men. The word “suborn” means “to instruct privately, instigate, to bribe or induce (someone) unlawfully or secretly to perform some misdeed or commit a crime; to induce (a person) to give false testimony,” THAYER and “hiring someone to do something illegal.” FRIBERG

The truth is so invasive to the mind of the flesh, that it will go to any length to escape the Word’s hammering blows. Like Judas, they are now in the grip of Satan. Their disdain for the truth as it is in Jesus has compelled God to give them over to the arch-foe, and he goes to work in them immediately, seeking to stop the spread of the truth.

PSALMIC REPRESENTATIONS

This manner of the wicked is frequently mentioned in the Psalms. We find there most vivid representations of the aggression of those who hate the truth and those who speak it. These texts are being lived out in the opposition that is now being fomented against Stephen.

- “The wicked . . . He sitteth in the lurking places of the villages: in the secret places doth he murder the innocent: his eyes are privily set against the poor ” (Psa 10:8).

- “For, lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart ” (Psa 11:2).

- “Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me : for thou art my strength” (Psa 31:4).

- “The wicked plotteth against the just , and gnasheth upon him with his teeth” (Psa 37:12).

- “They only consult to cast him down from his excellency: they delight in lies : they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly. Selah” (Psa 62:4).

- “They encourage themselves in an evil matter: they commune of laying snares privily ; they say, Who shall see them?” (Psa 64:5).

- “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me ” (Psa 142:3).

This is the extent to which one will go who has consistently resisted the truth, and is finally faced with a deluge of it that he cannot bear. Under the domination of Satan he will resort of fabrication and deceit in order to bring down the righteous.

The godly should not be surprised when men resort to lying to misrepresent them. In so doing, they are nothing more than vassals of the devil, who “abode not in the truth,” and vigorously promotes the lie (John 8:44).

WE HEARD HIM SPEAK

“ 11b . . . We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.” Other versions read, “He has said evil against Moses and against God, in our hearing,” BBE “We heard him slander Moses and God ,” GWN “We heard him using blasphemous language against Moses and against God ,” NJB “We have heard him speaking evil sayings in regard to Moses and God ,” YLT “claiming they had heard Stephen curse Moses, and even God ,” LIVING “We have heard him speaking abusive words against Moses and God ,” WILLIAMS “We have heard this man speak, using slanderous and abusive and blasphemous language against Moses and God ,” AMPLIFIED and “We have heard this man making blasphemous statements against Moses and against God .” PHILLIPS

What they said they heard is not what came out of Stephen’s mouth, but were the conclusions that they reached about what he said. At the very best it was an erroneous interpretation, and yet it was every whit a lie. And, like the soldiers who kept the vigil at Jesus’ tomb, they were paid to deliver their lying words. Thus it is written, “And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day” (Matt 28:12-15). The witnesses against Stephen also took their place with those who bore false witness against Jesus saying, “We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands” (Mark 14:58).

Later, Paul experienced the same kind of slanderous report. “And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just” (Rom 3:8). Jude also spoke of those who misrepresented the Gospel, making it a justification for further involvement in sin: “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness , and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).

It should not surprise us that those under the domination of the devil would resort to lies to justify their opposition to the truth. Jesus said to certain hard-hearted Jews, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it ” (John 8:44).

Suffice it to say, those who are overcome by the devil assume his attributes, and conduct themselves after his despicable manner.

THEY STIRRED UP THE PEOPLE

“ 12a And they stirred up the people . . . ” Other versions read, “and the people . . . were moved against him,” BBE “And they roused the people,” DARBY “Thus they moved the people ,” GENEVA “The liars stirred up trouble among the people,” GWN “And they excited the people,” MRD “They incited the people,” NET “Having turned the people against him ,” NJB “This accusation roused the crowds to fury against Stephen,” LIVING and “At the same time they worked upon the feelings of the people.” PHILLIPS

The “they” refers to the men who had been secretly bribed and instructed to bare false witness against Stephen. Now, armed with false report, they began circulating among the people and stirring

them up – agitating them with their lies about the man of God. This is the same thing the leaders of the people did when they delivered Jesus to be crucified. Those being stirred up were the ordinary people, who could be easily swayed and provoked when they thought someone was tampering with their religious customs. When Jesus was before Pilate, “chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus” (Matt 27:20). Mark says “the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them” (Mark 15:11).

This tactic was also used by the Jews against Paul in Antioch. “But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts” (Acts 13:50). The same thing happened in Iconium: “But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren” (Acts 14:2). Even in Thessalonica, the Jews were forward to stir up the people against Paul: “But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people” (Acts 17:5). Again it is written, “But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people” (Acts 17:13). Jews from Asia even pursued Paul to Jerusalem and stirred up the people against him. “And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him” (Acts 21:27). Concerning Stephen, this whole matter was instigated by Satan who is ‘the accuser of the brethren’ (Rev 12:10). He consistently seeks to stir up trouble in the area where the truth of God is being effectively proclaimed.

Korah aroused two hundred and fifty men against Moses (Num 16:1-3). The ten spies fomented a rebellion among the people that resulted in well over half-a-million people being excluded from the promised land (Num 32:9-11).

The Lord leaves no doubt concerning the state of a person who sows seeds of discord – particularly when they are against those who are speaking the truth. Among the “seven things” that the Lord “hates,” Solomon lists “A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov 6:19). So far as men were concerned, this opposition was caused by a party spirit in which the organization is valued above the truth itself. Those possessing this spirit are more readily used by Satan.

THEY CAME, CAUGHT, AND BROUGHT

“12b . . . and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council.” Other versions read, “came upon him and seized him,” NKJV “came upon him and dragged him away,” NASB “they seized Stephen,” NIV “then they suddenly confronted him , seized him, and brought him,” NRSV “the Jewish leaders arrested him and brought him,.” LIVING “They became so angry that they came and grabbed Stephen. Then they took him to the Jewish council,” IE “At length they came upon him, seized him with violence , and took him,” WEYMOUTH “Then they rushed at him , grabbed him, and brought him” ISV and “Then they suddenly confronted Stephen, seized him and marched him off before the Sanhedrin .” PHILLIPS

It had not been long since the Jewish authorities had arrested the apostles “without violence, for they feared the people” (5:26). Things had escalated since then, and such a fear is not present among these Libertines. There is no reservation within them. Therefore, being unable to resist the wisdom and Spirit by whom Stephen spoke, they rush upon him, and seizing him with violence, “brought him to the council.” They are doing this to put him on trial.

This is now the fifth time “the council” and Jewish authorities have been found involved in opposition to the truth of Christ (Acts 4:6,15,23; 5:21-41). Although they have already been exposed

to a considerable amount of Gospel from Peter and the apostles, it has not lessened their spiritual obtuseness. As evil men and seducers are wont to do, they are growing “worse and worse” (2 Tim 3:13).

Things were so corrupt among the Jewish leaders that the word of Issiah was being fulfilled among them. “Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey : and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:15). Let it be clear that when men begin to reject the truth, there is no way of knowing how low they will stoop to get their own way. There is no known limit to the wickedness they are capable of doing.

THEY SET UP THE FALSE WITNESSES

“ 13 And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law . . . ” Other versions read, “This man incessantly speaks against this holy place, and the Law,” NASB “fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law,” NIV “This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law,” RSV “This man never stops saying bad things about the holy place and Moses' Teachings,” GWN “This man ceaseth not to utter words contrary to the law , and against this holy place,” MRD “This man is always speaking against the holy Temple and against the law of Moses,” NLT “This one doth not cease to speak evil sayings against this holy place and the law,” YLT “Stephen was constantly speaking against the Temple and against the laws of Moses,” LIVING “This man never stops making statements against this sacred place and the Law [of Moses],” AMPLIFIED and “This man's speeches are one long attack against this holy place and the Law.” PHILLIPS

The words “this holy place” refer to the Temple itself. “The law” refers more to the customs and ceremonial law than to the Ten Commandments.

These words are calculated to stir up people who take pride in their nation, and tend to think of themselves as being singularly blessed by having the Temple and a moral and ceremonial code. They do not rejoice in the Lord, or take delight in the truth. It is tradition and empty ceremonialism that satisfies these men. They have not received the love of the truth, but are quite willing to coast along in the frail vessel of man’s tradition.

Religious persecutors are the most serious of all, for they have associated their opposition to men and women of God with their own imagined devotion to the Lord. When there is any suggestion, whether by express statement or by insinuation, that there is something more to be seen than what is embraced by their institution, they at once oppose it. That is the nature of sectarianism

In this case, they had been disputing with Stephen. Even though they could not refute what he was saying, they proceeded as though he was wrong and they were right. Since they could not punch holes in what he said, they concocted false charges against him, saying that he was opposed to Moses and the customs of the law. They make no accurate reference to the words he spoke about Jesus, but represented him as merely disrupting their customs and degrading Moses – neither of which was true. They were, in every sense of the word, “false witnesses.” That is how hard and insensitive false religion can make a person! It stops the ears, blinds the eyes, callouses the heart, and dulls the conscience.

By making these charges, they were fulfilling their own Scriptures. “Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies: for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty” (Psa 27:12). “False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not” (Psa 35:11) . “Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil” (Psa 56:5).

THE WITNESS AGAINST STEPHEN

“ 14 For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.” Other versions read, “for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us .” NASB “For he has said in our hearing that this Jesus of Nazareth will put this place to destruction and make changes in the rules which were handed down to us by Moses ,” BBE “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the traditions which Moses delivered unto us,” DARBY “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the ordinances , which Moses gave us,” GENEVA “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus the Nazarean will destroy this place, and will change the rites which Moses delivered to you,” MRD “We have heard him say that this fellow Jesus of Nazareth will destroy the Temple, and throw out all of Moses' laws ,” LIVING and “For we have heard him say that this Jesus the Nazarene will tear down and destroy this place, and will alter the institutions and usages which Moses transmitted to us .” AMPLIFIED

Because of the hardness of the heart of the people, Jesus spoke in such a manner as to bring out their wickedness. He so veiled the truth that it would sound foolish to the carnally minded, and they would lash out against it – even scoffing at it.

The false witnesses that testified at the trial of Jesus said they had heard Him say, “I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to build it in three days” (Matt 26:61). When Jesus was hanging on the cross, the people hurled this same accusation at Him. “And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross” (Matt 27:39-40). What Jesus had actually said, as well as its meaning, is recorded in John 2:18-21. “Then answered the Jews and said unto Him, What sign showest Thou unto us, seeing that Thou doest these things? Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body” (John 2:18-21).

One might wonder why Jesus did not clarify this to the people. There is a reason for Him not doing this. Because of the hardness of the heart of the people, Jesus spoke in such a manner as to bring out their wickedness. He so veiled the truth that it would sound foolish to the carnally minded, and they would lash out against it – even scoffing at it. This Divine manner was revealed through Isaiah the prophet. “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken ” (Isa 28:13). This is another reason why “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

There is a certain hostility that exists between the people of God and those who have adopted false and sterile religion. It is our business not to be naive about these things.

Now these false witnesses say that Stephen is preaching the very same thing they said Jesus affirmed. This saying did occur early in His ministry, and the people never got over it. Three years after He said it, speaking of His own resurrection from the dead, they hurled it in His teeth as he hung upon the cross, suspended between heaven and earth. Now, they falsely accuse Stephen of declaring the same message.

SOMETHING TO BE LEARNED

Here is a case where a false accusation is raised against a man of God, and it appears as though the accusers will win. We should learn from this not to be naive about the opposition we face from the world. It is not wise to represent Scripture as saying all of our enemies will obviously fail in their opposition to us, and we will always apparently defeat them. When the Scriptures declare, “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt

condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD” (Isa 54:17) , it is referring to ultimate outcomes. Cain killed righteous Abel (Gen 4:25). Zachariah the prophet was slain between the Temple and the altar (2 Chron 24:20-22; Matt 23:35). Jezebel killed the prophets of the Lord (1 Kgs 18:13). Herod killed James the brother of John with the sword (Acts 12:2). A whole host of saints “were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb 11:37). One of the members of the church in Pergamos is described by Jesus as “Antipas . . . my faithful martyr” (Rev 2:13). Jesus candidly told His disciples, “And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death” (Luke 21:16). Paul spoke for the apostles when he wrote, “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men ” (1 Cor 4:9). Quoting from Psa 44:22, Paul also said, “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom 8:36).

There is a certain hostility that exists between the people of God and those who have adopted false and sterile religion. It is our business not to be naive about these things.

Those who handle the Word of God must not leave the people with the impression that their enemies will never give them trouble, or that they will openly triumph over every foe while they remain in this world. This is emphatically not true.

THEY SAW HIS FACE

“ 15 And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” Other versions read, “his face looked like the face of an angel,” BBE “his face appeared to them like the face of an angel,” NJB “his face became as bright as an angel's,” NLT “saw Stephen's face become as radiant as an angel's ,” LIVING “they saw his face looking just like the face of an angel ,” WEYMOUTH and “his face had the appearance of the face of an angel,” AMPLIFIED

LOOKING STEADFASTLY ON HIM

“And all that sat in the council, looking steadfastly on him . . .” Other versions read, “fixing their gaze upon him,” NASB “looked intently at Stephen,” NIV “gazing at him,,” RSV “fastening their eyes upon him,” ASV “stared at him,” GWN and “glared at him.” ISV As Stephen stood before this wicked council, they fixed their eyes upon him. Their gaze was not one of inquiry, but of hatred and malice. They saw him as a threat to their religious system, and did not have the slightest regard for him personally, or the Jesus that he preached. They were not looking with sympathy upon him, or with a mind to consider what he might say. This was the look of contempt. In his own measure, Stephen was experiencing what prophesied of, and endured by, the Lord Jesus: “they look and stare upon me” (Psa 22:17).

AS THE FACE OF AN ANGEL

“ . . . saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.” Other versions read, “his face looked like the face of an angel,” BBE “his face appeared to them like the face of an angel,” NJB “his face became as bright as an angel's ,” NLT “saw Stephen's face become as radiant as an angel's ,” LIVING “they saw his face looking just like the face of an angel ,” WEYMOUTH and “his face had the appearance of the face of an angel,” AMPLIFIED

As they stared at Stephen they saw a physical token of his innocence. There was no look of guilt upon him, as there was upon Peter the night he denied Jesus three times. Stephen’s face was a testimony that the council would have done well to heed.

And how does an angel's face appear? We have some examples in Scripture. Once, when an angel appeared to Daniel, it is written "his face" was "as the appearance of lightning" (Dan 10:6). When a holy angel came down to the tomb from which Jesus had risen, he rolled away the stone and sat upon it. It is said of that angel, "his countenance was like lightning" (Matt 28:3). When John received the vision of the Revelation on the Isle of Patmos, he saw an angel, "and his face was as it were the sun" (Rev 10:1). This denoted both the purity and the glory of the holy angels. I gather that the face of Stephen being as that of an angel also spoke of his purity and glory, of his holiness, and power.

This was an evidence that the council was witnessing a man who was full of the Holy Spirit. The witness of his face was evidence that they were wrong and Stephen as right. They should have called an abrupt conclusion to their wicked assembly. However, they could not do so, for they were "in the bond of iniquity" (Acts 8:23).

At this point, Stephen was like a city set on a hill, and a candle placed on a candlestick so all could see (Matt 5:14-15). Now, the examination of Stephen will begin. However, we will find that Stephen himself will examine them.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to the aggressiveness of the flesh, and the unbridled hostility of lifeless religion. When people think they are of God, yet really are not, they become a weapon in the hand of the devil. There is no way to adequately portray the seriousness of a "form of godliness" that "denies the power thereof." It is what moved Cain to kill Abel, and the Jews to kill their prophets, murder Jesus, and oppose the twelve apostles and Paul. Let every person who confesses Christ declare war on any approach to religion that causes people to reject the truth and oppose those who declare it. Too, let no follower of Christ stand in amazement that they are opposed by religious peers.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #28

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #1

“ 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so? 2 And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, 3 and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. 4 Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. 5 And he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child. 6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years. 7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place. 8 And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs. ” (Acts 7:1-8)

INTRODUCTION

Stephen has been falsely charged, and now appears before the Jewish council to be tried. He has been arraigned as one who has spoken against both God and Moses, thus disrupting the religious life of the community, and blaspheming God in the process. Blasphemy was a capital offence, as defined by the law of Moses. “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death ” (Lev 24:16). This was based on one of the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain;

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- **WE HEARD HIM SPEAK (6:11b)**
- **THEY STIRRED UP THE PEOPLE (6:12a)**
- **THEY CAME, CAUGHT, AND BROUGHT (6:12b)**
- **THEY SET UP FALSE WITNESSES (6:13)**
- **THE WITNESS AGAINST STEPHEN (6:14)**
- **THEY SAW HIS FACE (6:15)**
- **CONCLUSION**

for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Ex 20:7). An actual example of the sentence being carried out by Divine direction is provided in Leviticus 24:11-24. There, the son of an Israelitish woman, whose husband was an Egyptian, fought with a man of Israel. In the process, the son “blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed.” They incarcerated the boy, as Moses waited for a word from the Lord. God spoke to Moses, “Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death” (Lev 24:14-16). Moses delivered the word to the people, “And the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses” (Lev 24:23).

Furthermore, offenses worthy of death required more than one witness. One witness was not enough. As it is written, “At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death” (Deut 17:6).

CAPITAL OFFENSES

It might be profitable to briefly mention capital crimes, or crimes that were punishable by death. The Law was “the ministration of death” (2 Cor 3:7), as is confirmed in these laws. Deeds that incurred the death penalty included:

- Murder (Num 35:16-21; Lev 24:17).
- Adultery (Lev 20:10).
- Incest (Lev 20:11,12,14).
- Bestiality (Ex 22:19; Lev 20:15-16).
- Sodomy (Lev 20:13).
- Incontinence (Deut 22:21-24).
- Rape (Deut 22:25).
- Kidnapping (Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7).

- A priest's daughter committing fornication (Lev 21:9).
- Witchcraft (Ex 22:18).
- Offering human sacrifice (Lev 20:2-5),
- Striking or cursing mother or father (Ex 21:15).

It ought to be noted that those who are in Christ Jesus have undergone a fundamental change. They are no longer what they once were. Their character has been so impacted that their loves and hates have been transformed, as well as their desires and ambitions.

Disobedience to parents (Deut 21:18-21).

- Blasphemy (Lev 24:11-23).
- Sabbath desecration (Ex 31:14-15; 35:2).
- Prophesying falsely, or propagating false doctrines (Deut 13:1-10).
- Anyone offering their children to the false God Molech (Lev 20:2)
- A man or woman with a familiar spirit, or who was a wizard (Lev 20:27).
- Sacrificing to false gods (Ex 22:20).
- Refusing to abide by the decision of the court (Deut 17:12).

AN OBSERVATION

Here are twenty offenses that were capital crimes, resulting in the death of the individual. Remember, that blasphemy was the same charge that was leveled against the Lord Jesus Himself (Mk 14:64), and that under the Law of Moses, this death was the punishment for the offense. This meant that two or three witnesses were required to validate the charges against Stephen.

In order to ensure that this requirement is met, some “men” – more than one – are bribed to bear false witness against Stephen. Before Stephen is brought before the council, these witnesses have stirred up the people with their lies, thereby stacking things in their favor.

The point to be seen is that none of the other capital offenses were charged against Stephen – even by false witnesses. His life was so exemplary that even his enemies knew charges of immorality could not be substantiated against him – not even by lying.

It ought to be noted that those who are in Christ Jesus have undergone a fundamental change. They are no longer what they once were. Their character has been so impacted that their loves and hates have been transformed, as well as their desires and ambitions. Some of the affirmations of this change are as follows.

- “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).
- “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).
- “And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness ” (Eph 4:24).
- “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord : walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8).
- “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him ” (Col 3:10).

- “ Being born again , not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23).

It is inconceivable that such language could be applied to a people who did not undergo a fundamental change. It is equally unimaginable that those who experienced such a change would show no evidence of it. The evidence of the change is the confirmation that it has, in fact, taken place. The lack of evidence throws the whole matter of identity with Christ into question. Thus those lacking satisfactory evidence of the work of God within are admonished, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5).

Actually, no one lacking the evidence of real change should be in a place of prominence or responsibility within the church. That, of course, is precisely why the apostles told the early church to choose men who were “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). The only possible way to substantiate the existence of those traits is by means of outward expression that can be perceived by others.

CONFIRMED IN STEPHEN

All of this is confirmed in the approach of the council to Stephen. It is obvious they knew gross immorality could be neither found nor successfully fabricated against this man of God. He was “blameless” – a quality that must be found in those holding prominent places in the body of Christ (1 Tim 3:2,10; Tit 1:6-7). In fact, this is the state in which all believers are to be found (1 Cor 1:8; Phil 2:15; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 3:14). Nothing is to be found in the people of God that promotes suspicion, or suggests they are no different than unregenerate men.

THE TRIAL PROCEEDS

Now, that the charges have been officially made, an opportunity will be given to Stephen to defend himself. His defense will testify to his character. It will also reveal how he thought about the workings of the Lord. His wisdom will glow brightly as he is able to correlate the history of the Jews with the present circumstance, and draw a telling conclusion. In this, we are witnessing a sanctified mind and mouth that bring glory to the Lord.

Remember, Stephen has been charged with speaking against both Moses and the Lord. His defense will be a magnificent refutation of those charges.

A KINGDOM MANNER

Scriptural accounts such as this reveal the manner in which God works among men. They confirm how He reveals Himself, and carries out His purpose. This is because the manner of His Kingdom permeates all of God’s dealings with men. That is why the Scriptures – all of them – are relevant to us. Men often fasten upon the experiences of men in Scriptural accounts, without giving due regard to what is made known of God and His Kingdom in those records. One of the chief reasons seeking first the Kingdom of God is so pertinent is that so much of its manner is revealed in inspired history. Some of the more evident things include the following.

- God’s hatred of sin (the world of Noah’s day, Sodom and Gomorrah,. Israel).
- The Divine manner of judging sin (Israel, Belshazzar, Herod. Ananias and Sapphira).
- The Lord’s inclination to those who have humble and contrite hearts (David, John).
- His longsuffering (David).
- God’s preference for mercy (Israel).

- How He allows sin to go on for a seemingly long time, then breaks forth against it when there is no repentance (The world of Noah’s day).
- How He can be turned against those with whom he has worked extensively (Israel).
- How the Lord honors faith (Abraham).
- How He can shape circumstances to favor those who trust in Him (Joseph).
- How He raises up wicked men through whom He obtains glory (Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar).
- His propensity to bless people upon the basis of another (Abraham, David, and now Jesus).

In addition to these, we are given to see several things regarding men. Here is a small sampling.

- The unimaginable capacity of men without faith to do wickedness.
- The invincibility of faith.
- The blinding effect of unbelief.
- The impact of the Gospel upon the hearts of men – both the believing and the unbelieving.
- How men speak who are filled with the Holy Spirit.

Scriptural history is not a series of accounts related to, and reflecting the impact of human culture. Rather, its purpose is for us to become familiar with the outworking of Divine purpose . You may be sure Scriptural records are not given to buttress the movements of men, but rather to instruct us more perfectly in the ways of the Lord. If we fail to see this, historical books like Genesis through Second Chronicles, Job, Esther, Nehemiah, Jonah, the Gospels, and the book of Acts, will soon become monotonous to us.

This is because they will not appear to have much to do with us. Because they are relating to us the experience of other people, the carnal mind soon tires of them, and comes to view them as relatively worthless. At the very best, the static religious mind will see them as something like spiritual museum pieces – epitaphs to those of the past.

The people of God must zealously avoid this tawdry view of things. Such a view is the result of the proliferation of the wisdom of the world within the professed church. It has now carved out rooms of considerable size for psychiatrists, dieticians, motivators, statisticians, and cunning administrators. In all of Divine history, God has never replied on the world’s wisdom to do His work – never!

The incident before us is a case in point. God will use a man full of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, faith, and spiritual power, to deliver His message to the religious leaders. Stephen will further make no attempt to covert them, but rather to convict them. Much will be revealed through all of this.

ARE THESE THINGS SO?

“ 7:1 Then said the high priest, Are these things so?” Other versions read, “Are these charges true?” NIV “Is this so?” RSV “Are these accusations true?” CJB “Is this true?” GWN “Is it even so?” TNT “Are these statements true?” WEYMOUTH “Do you so hold these [things]?” ALT “Are they telling the truth about you?” CEV “Tell me then if you thus hold these things?” LITV “Then do you so hold these things?” MKJV and “Is this statement true?” PHILLIPS

THE ORDAINED MINISTRY OF THE HIGH PRIEST

Like Jesus was, Stephen is now in court, and the high priest is presiding over it. In this we see that

a marked deterioration had occurred in the office of the high priest. As ordained by God, this office had to do with the things relating to God and offerings for sin. Thus it is written, “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins” (Heb 5:1-3).

When this office was put into place, the Lord told Moses the purpose of the high priest was “that he may minister unto Me in the priest’s office” (Ex 28:3). This statement is made no less than eight times in the instructions concerning the priests (Ex 28:1,3,4,41; 29:1; 30:30; 40:13,15).

Our situation is very similar to that of our text. Religious leaders have managed to carve out little empires for themselves. Like Caiaphas, they have palaces and large staffs, all of which are devoted to things other than the Kingdom of God.

The high priests were never intended to become involved in all the affairs of the people. Special judges were chosen for that purpose (Ex 21:6,22; 22:8,9; Num 25:5; Deut 1:15; 16:18; 19:18; 21:2; 15:1). When settling the differences among the people became too burdensome for Moses, the Lord instructed him to select seventy men who were “elders of the people” and bring them to the tabernacle. God then took “of the Spirit” which was upon Moses, and put it upon these men so they could “bear the burden of the people” with Moses (Num 11:16-17, 24-25). These men were not priests, for God never intended the priests to become involved in such matters, even though they were necessary. When offenders stood before priests and judges, it was the judges that inquired of the circumstances, not the priests (Deut 19:17-18).

We have no examples of a God-ordained high priest holding a court, or engaging in the judgment of the people. That was not included in the scope of his responsibility. His role was to represent the people before the Lord as he ministered unto the Lord.

THE DETERIORATION OF THE OFFICE

Now, however, the high priest has left off ministering unto the Lord, and is holding a court like the judges were to do. In fact, during this time the high priest, and the “chief priests” even had an army. The soldiers – “a great multitude” – that came to arrest Jesus in the garden were “from the chief priests and elders of the people” (Matt 26:17). The high priest, Caiaphas, also was dwelling in a “palace,” or mansion (for so the word “palace” means (Matt 26:3,57). It was also the high priest that examined Jesus (Matt 26:63-65). Already, the high priest has opposed Peter and John in a legal setting (Acts 4:6), did the same with the apostles, even incarcerating them (Acts 5:17,21,24,27). Now the high priest initiates an examination of Stephen, after he has been forcefully taken and brought before him.

THE DAYS ARE EVIL

Believers are solemnly admonished, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:15-17). A major contribution to the wickedness of the days is that “evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim 3:13). Our situation is very similar to that of our text. Religious leaders have managed to carve out little empires for themselves. Like Caiaphas, they have palaces and large staffs, all of which are devoted to things other than the Kingdom of God.

It should not be difficult to see that when men do not live by faith, their religion inevitably deteriorates. By “religion,” I mean one’s piety, or the expression of one’s spiritual persuasion. The word “religion” is used in this manner in Scripture (Acts 13:43; 26:5; Gal 1:13-14; James 1:26-27).

In our text, the high priest, occupying an office that was devoted to things “pertaining to God,” is now judging a man because he is contradicting their traditions, and adhering to Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had summarily rejected.

ARE THESE THINGS SO?

Now, in an open court, the high priest asks Stephen if what the witnesses have testified against him is true. The events that follow will confirm that this was not an inquiry into the truth of the matter. It was a formal question, but not an honest one. Yet, even though ignoble motives drove this request, Stephen seizes the opportunity, taking the kingdom by violence.

Being filled with the Spirit, faith, wisdom, and power he turns the occasion to his advantage. He will so preach as to make known the counsels of the hearts of his listeners.

MEN, BRETHREN, AND FATHERS, HEARKEN

“ 2a And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken . . . ”

In his answer, Stephen will confirm that he is not an opponent of the Jews, set out to destroy the customs delivered to them by Moses – something with which he has been charged. He will also confirm that he was not preaching a Jesus that had been noted for doing these things (Acts 6:14). He will speak with respect, candidness, and an insight that was more characteristic of someone who was a caring father among them.

MEN, BRETHREN, AND FATHERS

“And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers . . .” Other versions read, “Brethren and fathers” NKJV “Hear me,” NASB “Brothers and fathers ,” NIV “My brothers and fathers ,” BBE “Ye men , brethren, and fathers ,” DOUAY “Men, brethren, and our fathers ,” MRD “My brothers, my fathers ,” NJB “This was Stephen’s lengthy reply ,” LIVING “Sirs - brethren and fathers,” WEYMOUTH “ and “Men, brothers and fathers.” ALT

One of the principles of sound interpretation is that none of the words spoken or written by Spirit-filled men are useless, or redundant, and mere space-fillers. Those are characteristics of rhetoric and oratory, but not of inspiration.

Although several translations do not use the three terms – “men, brethren, and fathers” – they are in all of the accepted Greek manuscripts, and thus ought to have been duly translated. One of the principles of sound interpretation is that none of the words spoken or written by Spirit-filled men are useless, or redundant, and mere space-fillers. Those are characteristics of rhetoric and oratory, but not of inspiration. It is necessary to make this observation because of what Jesus promised concerning speaking in His name. “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt 10:20).

Being filled with the Spirit, the words that now proceed out of Stephens mouth have been given to him from heaven. The Holy Spirit is speaking through him. As his words will confirm, however, he was not speaking as a mere robot, or channel. His understanding was woven into the fabric of his words. In other words, he was truly “a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21).

Men

Stephen addresses the council as “men” – taken from the Greek word **Andrej** . The word means “men” in general, particularly as the offspring of Adam. This distinguishes them from angels and

higher orders of created personalities. In the flesh, Stephen is speaking to them as his peers, not his superiors. In saying this, Stephen is also drawing attention away from his person to his words. It is something like Peter saying to Cornelius, “I myself also am a man” (Acts 10:36).

Brethren

He also speaks to them as fellow Israelites – offspring of Abraham, and of the nation to whom God has revealed Himself. In this he is confirming that he has not renounced his natural lineage, just as Paul did not renounce his when he said, “I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham” (Rom 11:1). While he had “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3), he did acknowledge that the uniqueness of the Jewish people was owing to God’s deliberate choice of, and involvement with, them.

Fathers

Here Stephen spoke with respect for the “elders” among the council, who had a better understanding of the Scriptures, being more familiar with them. In doing this, he is summoning them to give the more attention to what he is saying. As he speaks, they should be able to see that the charges leveled against him are totally false.

In using these three terms, Stephen is handling the people gently. It is equivalent to “a soft answer” that is designed to “turn away wrath” (Prov 15:1). As he progresses through this speech, their hardheartedness will become more evident, and he will speak more sternly. However, he does not begin that way, but employs wisdom, so as to give every advantage to his hearers to perceive the truth of his words.

HEARKEN

“ . . . hearken . . . ” Other versions read, “ listen ,” NKJV “ Hear me ,” NASB “ listen to me ,” NIV “ give hearing ,” BBE “ hear ye ,” MRD “ listen to what I have to say ,” listen to me,” WEYMOUTH and “pay attention !” ALT

The word “hearken” is a strong one. First, it implies the ability to understand, and second, the necessity of doing so. The word used here has a lexical meaning of, “to attend to, consider what is being said . . . to understand, perceive the sense of what is being said,” THAYER “to pay attention to,” FRIBERG “to give a judicial hearing” (as in drawing a valid conclusion from what is said).” UBS

Thus Stephen summons his hearers to employ their hearts and minds and understand what he is saying. He is not speaking as an entertainer, or as one who displaying oratorical skills. There is a message in his words – they are not simply an historical review.

A Particularly Relevant Word

In a hedonistic society such as ours, this kind of exhortation is particularly in order. Whole generations have been cultured to be entertained by what they hear instead of gain an understanding – particularly when it comes to the “things of the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:5; 1 Cor 2:14). When the words appear to be too challenging for them, they simply dismiss them by saying they are too deep, or are not relevant , or that they are not yet ready to receive them. The number of church people who dismiss truth because it is not easily discerned is staggering. It has come to the point where the status quo in the professing church marvels that the Bible is discerned by anyone. Rather than being challenged to apprehend the truth, they assume that only a few especially gifted and wise people can do so.

But all of this is so much nonsense. Man has been created in the image of God, and consequently possesses a capacity to understand. Even though the Divine image has been marred, men are still

responsible to employ the capability of understanding – to “hearken” – just as surely as the council in our text was obligated to do so. Salvation is an economy of knowledge, for within the New Covenant, which is the context of salvation, God says, “they shall all know Me.” In fact, that “knowledge” is the means through which we receive all things pertaining to life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3). Grace and peace, so sorely required by those en route to heaven, are also acquired “ through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet 1:2).

Stephen will therefore speak in such a way as to promote spiritual understanding and insight. Therefore he tells his listeners to “hearken,” listening carefully to what he says. He is not entertaining them but instructing them.

An Observation

Over the years, I have noticed a marked tendency in Christian preachers and teachers to avoid speaking to be understood. There is a very evident inclination toward entertaining the people and offering juvenile solutions to cursory difficulties. One senses that often such men really have nothing to say, and thus they preach to please and speak to entertain. This climate has invited everyone from economists and motivators, to psychologists and organizers into the Christian community.

Every person who speaks in the behalf of the Lord should make it an aim to advance the understanding of the people – to enable them to obtain a better grasp of the things of God, and to see the spiritual sense of it all. Sometimes, as in the case of Stephen, this involves calling upon the people to “hearken” – to listen intently to understand.

THE GOD OF GLORY APPEARED TO ABRAHAM

“ 2a The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran . . . ”

A review of the various speeches of Scriptural record will confirm the remarkable absence of elaborate introductions, or the employment of attention-getting verbal mechanisms. That is a tactic that is being taught to speakers today. It is an attempt to reach a distracted society, whose weakest point is their thought-life. I am not sure that such attempts are actually fruitful. The people to whom Stephen was speaking were, in a sense, distracted by hatred, prejudice, and an acute sense that Stephen was disrupting their whole manner of thought. Yet, Stephen employs three terms of identity – “Men, brethren, and fathers” – and one word of challenge – “hearken” – to commence his defense.

THE GOD OF GLORY

“The God of glory . . . ” Other versions read, “The God who reveals his glory,” GWN “ That God of glory,” GENEVA “Our glorious God ,” NLT “ The glorious God,” LIVING “ Our glorious God,” IE and “God Most Glorious .” WEYMOUTH

The employment of the article “the” is important: “ the God.” This is the true God, totally unlike “the gods of Egypt” (Ex 12:12) , “gods of silver . . . and of gold” (Ex 20:23), “the gods of these nations” (Deut 29:18), “the gods of the Amorites” (Josh 24:15), and “the gods of Syria” (Judges 10:6). There were “the gods of Edom” (2 Chron 25:20), “the gods of Damascus” (2 Chron 28:23), and “the gods of the earth” (Zeph 2:11). These were all “no gods” (2 Kgs 19:18; 2 Chron 13:9), “but were the works of men’s hands” (Isa 37:19). It can be said of them all, “They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: they have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not; they have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat” (Psa 115:7).

By way of contrast, the true God is “the God of glory” – that is, the God of self-expression,

revelation, and of manifestation. False gods are the creation of men, and thus have nothing to communicate. The true God is known because – and only because – He has made Himself known. He is “the God of glory.”

What Is Glory?

The glory of a thing is what can be seen, or perceived, of it. It is what makes the thing unique or discernible – what can be seen of it. Therefore, we read of “terrestrial” bodies having a differing “glory” from “celestial” bodies. As it is written, “There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory” (1 Cor 15:40-41). All of these bodies look different because they are different. They have unique properties that are made evident when they are seen.

Something that is itself glorious has qualities of its own that can be displayed, and thus perceived by others. These qualities can be observed when they are displayed, and lend themselves to a better understanding of the thing possessing the glory. In nature, something glorious is a sunrise, or a sunset. They have a nature of their own, and therefore can be studied, analyzed, and discerned.

With God, “glory” obtains a whole new dimension. With Him, the only “glory” that can be beheld is what He Himself makes known. If He does not reveal an aspect of Himself, it can never be known. Therefore, when we speak of the glory of God, we are speaking of something He has done – some aspect of His Person or purpose that He has deliberately made known. It is only when God in some way makes Himself known that an individual is aware of His presence. Thus, after he had dreamed of a ladder set up upon earth, whose top reached into heaven, Jacob awoke and confessed, “Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not” (Gen 28:16). That dream, together with the words spoken by the Lord to Him during it, was a portion of Divine glory. It provided some insight to Jacob concerning God’s Person and purpose.

The expression “the God of glory” emphasizes that it is God’s nature to make Himself known. For example, even in the creation of the worlds He revealed some of His glory – “His eternal power and Godhead” (Rom 1:20). When He speaks, God is showing His glory. As it is written, “The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty” (Psa 29:3-4). In such things, He is making Himself known in what He accomplishes.

To put it another way, “glory” is not associated with mystery, but with revelation. It deals with what can be known of God, not what cannot be known. An approach to the Lord that mystifies what He does, and fails to promote profitable understanding, cannot possibly glorify God. Furthermore, the word “manifestation” has to do with understanding – when something is “made known” (Mk 4:22). A manifestation is not a mere appearance. For example, when Jesus turned water into wine, it is said that He “manifested forth His glory” (John 2:11). He was the better understood. Throughout the Gospels, Acts, and the epistles, the concept of manifestation always has to do with understanding (John 1:31; 3:21; 9:3; 14:21-22; 17:6; Acts 4:16; Rom 1:19; 3:21; 8:19; 10:20; 16:26; 1 Cor 3:13; 4:5; 11:19; 12:7; 14:25; 15:27; 2 Cor 2:14; 4:2,10-11; 5:11; 11:6; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:13; Phil 1:13; Col 1:26; 4:4; 2 Thess 1:5; 1 Tim 3:16; 5:25; 2 Tim 1:10; 3:9; Tit 1:3; Heb 4:13; Heb 9:8; 1 Pet 1:20; 1 John 1:2; 2:19; 3:5,8,10; 4:9; Rev 15:4).

The point here is that it is God’s nature to manifest Himself, or make Himself known. That manifestation is what constitutes His glory.

No other purported gods are on the initiative to make themselves known. They are always surrounded by secrecy, whereas “the God of glory” dwells in the light (1 Tim 6:16), so that the more men are exposed to Him, the more they know of Him. In fact, “God is light” – the epitome of

revelation. Not only does He reveal Himself, but in His presence everything else is illuminated for what it really is.

Jewish history contains many revelations of Divine glory. Here are a few of them, well known to Stephen's audience.

- “And in the morning, then ye shall see the glory of the LORD ; for that he heareth your murmurings against the LORD: and what are we, that ye murmur against us?” (Ex 16:7).

- “And it came to pass, as Aaron spake unto the whole congregation of the children of Israel, that they looked toward the wilderness, and, behold, the glory of the LORD appeared in the cloud ” (Ex 16:10).

- “And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people ” (Lev 9:23).

- “But all the congregation bade stone them with stones. And the glory of the LORD appeared in the tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel” (Num 14:10).

- “And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath showed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth” (Deut 5:24).

Now, after mentioning “the God of glory,” Stephen will recount what God revealed to Abraham, and how He was on the initiative to do so.

APPEARED TO OUR FATHER ABRAHAM

“ . . . appeared unto our father Abraham . . . ” Other versions read, “appeared to our ancestor Abraham,” NRSV “ came to our father Abraham,” BBE and “appeared to our forefather Abraham,” PHILLIPS

Notice how the God of glory “appeared,” or was made apparent. Remember, we are speaking of a God who is “invisible,” or cannot be perceived with any natural sense or aptitude (Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; Heb 11:27). In fact, all of His qualities are “invisible” (Rom 1:20). That is, they are of a transcendent nature, so that men cannot behold them unless they are unveiled by the Lord Himself.

By saying God “appeared” unto Abraham, Stephen means that the patriarch, owing strictly to Divine initiative, became aware of the presence of the Lord . This was not the result of Abraham searching after God, God cannot be found “by searching” (Job 11:7). This inaccessible and indiscernible aspect of God is declared by the Psalmist: “Thy way is in the sea, and thy path in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known” (Psa 77:19). Even when God is within the proximity of men, they must still “seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:27). Here the word “haply” does not mean that, perchance, the seeker may stumble upon God through His research. It rather means God may very well make Himself known to the earnest seeker. In fact, it is God's nature to do such a thing, for He is “the God of glory.”

The phrase “the Lord appeared” occurs nineteen times in the Old Covenant Scriptures. Those vouchsafed such Divine accommodations include Abraham, Isaac, Israel, Moses and Aaron, Samuel, Solomon, and David (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2,24; Ex 3:2; 16:10; Lev 9:23; Num 14:10; 16:19,42; 20:6; Deut 31:15; 1 Sam 3:21; 1 Kgs 3:5; 9:2; 2 Chron 3:1; 7:12).

In all of these cases, and especially with Abraham, God initiated the contact. None of the revelations were the result of human inquiry – unless it be time the time when Moses asked, “Show

me thy glory” (Ex 33:18). Even then, however, the request was driven by the revelation of Himself that God had already given (Ex 24-32). Comprehending something of the nature of God in that revelation, Moses concluded there was more to be known of Him. Therefore, knowing he could not determine such things through human analysis, He asked God to show him his “glory.” When God did reveal His glory to Moses, He actually defined His character more fully to Him (Ex 34:6-7).

When “the God of glory” appeared to Abraham, He made certain Divine determinations known to him. He did not offer prognostications like a diviner, but revealed what He Himself had determined, and would cause to come to pass.

What Stephen Is Doing

Stephen is providing an assessment of the children of Israel. In this he is confirming why they should have received the Messiah, and embraced the Gospel that proclaimed Him. He knew that the way of assessing a people is by tracing them back to their source. The human race, for example, can be traced back to Adam. That is reason enough to know their propensity is to sin, and that they require a Savior. The church is traceable back to Christ Jesus. That is reason enough to expect it to be holy, walking in the light and living by faith. Now Stephen will set the progenitor of the Jewish people before them, showing that they should have followed him and reflected his manners. The fact that they did not will confirm they have resisted the Holy Spirit.

WHEN HE WAS IN MESOPOTAMIA

“ . . . when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran . . . ” Other versions read, “And he said, “when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran ,” NKJV “And he said, “he was in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran,” NASB “while he was still in Mesopotamia , before he lived in Haran,” NIV “when he was between the rivers , before he came to reside in Charran,” MRD “while he was in Mesopotamia, before he had settled in Haran ,” NAB “ while he was yet in Mesopotamia before he dwelt in Charran,” TNT “ in Iraq before he moved to Syria ,” LIVING and “in Mesopotamia. This happened before Abraham lived in Haran .” GW

Mesopotamia was designated as the land “between the rivers” – the rivers being the Tigris and Euphrates. The Euphrates river is mentioned twenty-one times in Scripture, and was the fourth branch, or tributary, of the “river that went out of Eden to water the garden” (Gen 2:14). This river formed one of the boundaries of the land God promised to Abraham and his descendants, the other boundary being “the river of Egypt,” which is the Nile river (Gen 15:18). “Tigris” is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew “Hiddekel,” which was the third river branching off from the river flowing through Eden. It flowed “toward the east of Assyria” (Gen 2:14). Later versions read “Tigris.” NASB/NIV/NRSV The area between the rivers was unusually fertile.

The strange prophet Balaam was also from Mesopotamia (Deut 23:4). On one occasion, when God was angered with Israel, “He sold them into the hand of Chushanrishathaim king of Mesopotamia: and the children of Israel served Chushanrishathaim eight years” (Judges 3:8). On the day of Pentecost, there were devout Jews from Mesopotamia present when Peter preached (Acts 2:9).

Stephen says that God “appeared” to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia. The Genesis record says Abraham was in “Ur of the Chaldees” (Gen 11:31). That period of time was prior to the area being called “Mesopotamia” (Gen 24:10). Stephen is pointing out what they already knew, that Abraham was in the place that was later called Mesopotamia. Ur of the Chaldees was a place within the larger region of Mesopotamia. The Chaldeans were the people with whom Nebuchadnezzar was identified (2 Kings 25:10-11). Today, Mesopotamia is called Iraq.

Before He Dwelt In Charran

The appearance of God to the patriarch Abraham took place “before he dwelt in Charran.” which is a form of the word Haran, as used in Genesis 11:12-32. Abraham moved there upon leaving Mesopotamia.

A Picture of Our Own Calling

The calling of Abraham was similar to our own calling. He was called out of one place to go to another. He was summoned from a foreign land to the land of promise, to be reached by Divine direction. He was made conscious of God and his will before he was blessed by him. Thus we see the Divine manner in dealing with humanity. He prepares men for involvement with himself.

GET THEE OUT OF THY COUNTRY, AND COME INTO THE LAND!

“ 3 . . . and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee.”

The call of God involves two things – leaving and entering; going from one place to another. This will be lived out in the experience of Abraham. We will also learn from this that the appearing of the Lord is the prelude to change. The Lord makes Himself known in order to bring something about that is of His own origin.

A Technicality

Stephen states that the Lord appeared to Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia, and before he came into Haran. The language of Genesis is very precise at this point. The text from which Stephen now quotes is found in Genesis 12:1-3. Following that record, the text says Abram departed out of Haran (Gen 12:4), which may seem as though he was in Haran when the Lord appeared to him, thus contradicting what Stephen says. However, Genesis 12:1 speaks in the past tense: “Now the Lord HAD said to Abram . . .” That is, He had spoken to Abram prior to the time when he actually left Haran. Stephen therefore speaks with clarity and understanding, pinpointing that the time of the appearance was before he left Mesopotamia.

The Genesis record provides some additional details about Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia.

- Terah, in the lineage of Shem (Gen 11:11), begat three sons after he was seventy years of age: Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Gen 11:26).
- Abraham’s original name was “Abram,” which means “high father.” Later, after he had received the promise that he would be the father of many nations (Gen 17:5-6), his name was changed by God to “Abraham,” (which means “father of a multitude”): “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee” (Gen 17:5).
- Abraham’s brother Haran died before his father while the clan remained in Mesopotamia, or Ur of the Chaldees (Gen 11:28).
- Abram took “Sarai” (which means “my princess”) as his wife while in their native land, and she was found to be barren, and therefore could have no child (Gen 11:29-30). Later, after the promise made to Abraham, God also changed her name to “Sarah” (which means “princess of the multitude”): “And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be. And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her” (Gen 17:15-16).
- We then read that Terah took Abram and his wife, and Lot, and left Ur to go to Canaan. Upon arriving in Haran, they settled there. “And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot

the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there" (Gen 11:31).

- We learn from Scripture that Terah was an idolater. This was revealed through Joshua. "And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods " (Josh 24:2).

When the call of God came to Abraham, it appears that was the incentive for Terah gathering the clan and heading for Canaan. The details of why Terah took Abram and Lot, with Sarai, and did not take Nahor Abram's brother, are not provided. Later, we know that Isaac's wife, Rebecca, was the daughter of Nahor (Gen 24:24), and was found in Mesopotamia (Gen 24:10). Furthermore, Rachel, who would be married to Jacob, was the daughter Laban, who was one of Nahor's sons, and Rebecca's brother (Gen 24:29; 29:29-30). She also was found in Haran (Gen 29:4).

Thus we see the providence of God at work in this whole matter, setting the stage for events that would take place years later.

GET THEE OUT

" . . . and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred . . ." Other versions read, "get out of your country and from your relatives ," NKJV " Depart from your country and your relatives," NASB "Leave your country and your people ," NIV "Depart from your land and from your kindred ," RSV "Go out of your land, and away from your family ," BBE " Leave your land and your family," CJB " Come out of thy country, and from thy kindred," GENEVA " Go forth from your land and (from) your kinsfolk," NAB "Leave your country, your kindred and your father's house ," NJB "Leave your native land and your relatives," NLT and "leave his native land, to say good-bye to hisrelatives ." LIVING

Here was a two-fold command. Abraham was to leave the land in which he was living, and his kindred, or relatives, as well. He was to leave the environment and its associations.

Here was a two-fold command. Abraham was to leave the land in which he was living, and his kindred, or relatives, as well. He was to leave the environment and its associations. Some have speculated as to why Abraham's relatives came with him. Why did he not leave them as he was told. First, the ones intended to be left – Nahor and his family – were left behind. Secondly, He did get out of the country, and eventually did leave all of his kindred. The fact that he did not leave them instantly does not mean he would not eventually move a way from them – which the record confirms he did.

Before men stand in criticism of Abraham, it is well to see how God viewed the situation. Later in Abraham's life, God refers to the time he left Ur of the Chaldees, or Mesopotamia. After He had reaffirmed His promise to Abram, it is written, "And He said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees , to give thee this land to inherit it" (Gen 15:7). God, therefore, considered Abram's coming out to be His own doing, and not an act characterized by some form of disobedience. That is also how Stephen will view it, and it is comely that we do so as well.

The point of emphasis is that his kindred would not inherit the land of promise. The promise would be through Isaac and Jacob his own sons, and not his father or brothers. As a matter of fact, the Moabites and Ammonites, consistent enemies of Israel, were the descendants of the sons of Lot through his daughters (Gen 19:36-38) – and Lot was the son of Haran, Abraham's brother. Of the whole family of Terah, therefore, only Abraham

was intended to inherit the promised land. That is why he had to leave them.

INTO A LAND

“ . . . and come into the land which I shall show thee.” Other versions read, “and go to the land I will show you,” NIV “and come into the land to which I will be your guide,” BBE “to start out for a country that God would direct him to,” LIVING “Go to another country. I will show you where to go,” IE “and go into whatever land I point out to you,” WEYMOUTH “and come to Whatever country I may show you,” WILLIAMS and “and come into the land (region) that I will point out to you.” AMPLIFIED

The Significance of the Land

This “land” will become an important consideration throughout the Scriptures. Names ascribed to it are as follows.

- “The land of Canaan” (Gen 11:31; 17:8; 23:2).
- “The sanctuary” (Ex 15:17)
- “The land of Israel” (1 Sam 13:19).
- “The land of the Hebrews” (Gen 40:15).
- “The land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39).
- “The land of promise” (Heb 11:9).
- “The holy land” (Zech 2:12).
- “The Lord’s land” (Hos 9:3).
- “Immanuel’s” land (Isa 8:8).
- “Beulah” (Isa 62:4).
- God referred to it as “My land” (2 Chron 7:20; Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7; 16:18; Ezek 36:5; 38:16; Joel 1:6; 3:2).
- Referring to the Lord, it is called “His land” (Deut 32:43; Job 37:13; Psa 10:16; Ezek 36:20; Joel 2:18; Zech 9:16).

This land was not merely a personal possession of Abraham. Rather, it was the place in which God would localize His works. Here is where He would culture a people to bring forth the Messiah. It is where the Messiah would be born, raised, minister, die, be raised from the dead, and from which He would ascend into heaven. It would also be a land for which His people would be accountable. They were not to pollute the land by learning the way of the heathen, lapsing into idolatry, or living in a state of moral and spiritual defilement. If they defiled the land, God said He would judge them for doing so (Lev 18:25,28; Num 35:33; Deut 21:23; 24:4; Jer 2:7; 3:9; Jer 16:18; Ezek 36:17). The heathen were to be driven out of this land (Ex 23:30,31; Num 22:6; 33:52; Deut 4:38; 9:4-5; Josh 17:12; ; 23:5). If the heathen were not driven out of the land, the Lord said they would become a source of vexation and stumbling (Num 33:55; Josh 23:13).

Abraham Had to Leave His homeland

Abraham, then, was required to leave his homeland and sever his ties with his family, yet had no idea where he was going. God simply told him “I will show thee” the land. The book of Hebrews makes a point of this: “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went ” (Heb 11:8).

Keep in mind that Abraham had come from an idolatrous background, and had extremely limited exposure to the true God. Many years later, it appears that Nahor was still worshiping another God,

as we read of “the God of Nahor,” as well as “the God of their father,” Terah (Gen 31:53). These were the words of Laban to Jacob, but Jacob did not honor such a description of God, but rather “swear by the fear of his father Isaac” (Gen 31:54), thereby rejecting Laban’s oath, which represented the natural heritage of Abraham.

Yet, with only a single word from God, and that very limited, it was sufficient to move Abraham out of his homeland and away from his family to an unseen and unknown land.

It is apparent that a person does not require an abundance of revelation to believe and trust in the Lord. An extensive understanding is not required when there has been limited revelation, and yet there is enough understanding to compel thorough submission to the word of the Lord.

Among other things, we see in this that the Kingdom of God is not driven by an academic approach to the word of the Lord. Such an approach was not possible in this case. The carnal mind would reason adequate preparation could not be made if Abraham did not know where he was going, or how long it would take to get there. The flesh would respond that this was an unreasonable request, and that more needed to be understood concerning the whole matter. The carnal mind, however, is enmity against God, and is always wrong. Even during the spiritually primitive times of Abraham, he knew enough to subordinate any doubts that may have come to his mind. What possible excuse can be offered for men hesitating to obey the Lord during this time when the Sun of righteousness has risen, and we are standing in the greater glory of the New Covenant?

The Principle of Divine Guidance

The words “I will show thee” indicate the manner in which Divine guidance is realized. God did not provide Abraham with a map and a precisely designated place on the map. That is not the manner in which the Lord directs the steps of a man – by giving all of the answers up front, so to speak. To be sure, the Lord does direct His people. It is written, “He shall direct thy paths” (Psa 3:6). Again it is written, “the Lord directeth his steps” (Prov 16:9). And again, “as for the upright, He directeth his way” (Prov 21:29). The prophets also spoke of this direction: “I will direct all of his ways” (Isa 45:13), “I will direct their work in truth” (Isa 61:8), and “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). The Lord is said to “lead” people (Isa 48:17), and to “order” their steps (Psa 37:23). But how does the Lord direct or lead the individual? What is the manner of that leading?

It was in the process of Abraham’s journey that he was directed. When he left his homeland, the direction began. It is after we trust in the Lord and lean not to our own understanding that he directs our paths (Prov 3:5-6). It is the “upright” that are directed by God (Prov 21:29), and the “steps of a good man” that are “ordered” by Him (Psa 37:23). It is within the context of “righteousness” that heavenly guidance is realized (Isa 45:13). Those whose lives are directed in truth are those who are not displeasing Him in their conduct or manners (Isa 61:8).

It is necessary that the appointed journey be commenced before the direction will be given. Those who refuse to walk in the ways of the Lord forfeit the privilege of being directed by God. Oh, men may philosophize about this matter, and say that God in love has a plan for every life, and earnestly wants to lead them into it. But the truth of the matter is that all people, like Abraham, must cut loose from the domain in which they cannot remain! If God is going to direct a person’s path to heaven, it is imperative that they be on their way there – obviously disconnected from a world that is perishing.

Those who attempt to cling to their old ways, yet thinking they are on the way to the promised land, are only deceived. That would be like Abraham staying with his brother Nahor, who chose to live in Mesopotamia, all the while thinking God was going to give him an inheritance there. Today, people who glibly preach a health and wealth gospel are asking people to stay in Mesopotamia, promising that God is going to give them the inheritance there. There is no possible way to overstate the seriousness of such a perverted gospel. It causes people to never start out on the journey, entering the

strait gate, and choosing the narrow way. That very circumstance means that Divine direction is shut off, for such leading only occurs when men have left the world and are walking on the “highway” that has been raised up for sojourners (Isa 35:8).

If Abraham, so far removed from the day of salvation, saw the necessity of moving toward the promised land instead of settling down in the present land, what possible justification can there be for neglecting to see that truth today? More light demands a greater and more extensive response!

ABRAHAM CAME OUT

“ 4a Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran . . . ” Other versions read, “Then he came out of the land of the Chaldeans and dwelt in Haran.” NKJV “Then he departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and settled in Haran,” NASB “ So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran,” NIV “So he left the land of the Chaldeans and lived in Haran, in Syria ,” LIVING “ Thereupon he left Chaldaeia and settled in Haran,” WEYMOUTH “So he left the country of the Chaldeans and for a time made his home in Haran ,” WILLIAMS and “ That was how he came to leave the land of the Chaldeans and settle in Haran.” PHILLIPS

Here Stephen is given some additional insight concerning the exodus of Abraham from Mesopotamia. The Genesis record states that “Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there” (Gen 11:31). For whatever reason Terah may have appeared to make this move, Stephen says it was really Abraham who “came out.” It is possible that Terah had some other motive. However, the promise was given to Abraham, not to Terah, and thus the whole matter is credited to him. If Terah did have some other motive, Abraham would have seen it as an open door to do what God had required of him.

We know that the move described in Genesis 11:31 is the one to which Stephen refers, for both records say the move resulted in the pilgrims settling down in Haran.

Some have the audacity to say that Abraham was disobedient at this point – that God had not told him to settle in Haran, but to go to the land to which God would direct him. In such a statement they betray their own carnality. They imagine that God had directed Abraham to move forward, but instead he settled down. As the text progresses, we will find how false such a view is, and how it reproaches both God and Abraham.

AN INTERESTING POINT

In leaving Ur of the Chaldees, Abraham was leaving the land in which Nebuchadnezzar would be raised up to chasten his own disobedient offspring. The twenty-fifth chapter of Second Kings records the plundering of Judah and the city of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, referring to “the Chaldees” seven times (2 Kgs 25:4,5,10, 13,24,25,26). Isaiah refers to the city of Babylon as the “beauty of the Chaldees” (Isa 13:19). He also states the land of the Chaldees was “founded” by an Assyrian (Isa 23:13). Long before that history, Abraham dwelt in that land.

WHEN HIS FATHER DIED, HE CAME INTO THIS LAND

“ 4a . . . and from thence, when his father was dead, He removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.”

Stephen is tracing the working of the Lord through Abraham, confirming that he is an Israelite indeed, and is not seeking to disrupt the people. He has stated that Abraham has left Ur of the Chaldees as commanded, and is now residing in Haran. Terah, his father, is with him and Sarai, as well as Lot, his nephew.

WHEN HIS FATHER WAS DEAD

“ . . . and from thence, when his father was dead . . . ” Other versions read, “and from there, when his father was dead ,” NKJV “and from there, after his father died,” NASB “and from thence, after the death of his father ,” YLT “until his father died,” LIVING and “After Abraham's father died.” IE

The record in Genesis reads, “And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran” (Gen 11:32). We do not know how old Terah was when the clan left Ur. We do know that his three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran were born after he was seventy years old. We also know that Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran. That means that 135 years passed between the birth of Terah’s three sons and the departure of Abraham from Haran. Although the details are not specified, this should confirm that we are speaking of a significant period of time the clan spent in Haran. According to Divine purpose, they were awaiting the death of Terah, who himself had no part in the promise. The rest of the verse will confirm that this was all by God’s intent.

HE REMOVED HIM INTO THIS LAND

“ . . . He removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.” Other versions read, “ He moved him to this land in which you now dwell,” NKJV “ God removed him into this country in which you are now living,” NASB “ God sent him to this land where you are now living,” NIV “ God had him move from there to this country in which you are now living,” NRSV “he was guided by God into this land, where you are living now,” BBE “ God made him move to this land where you are living now,” CJB “ God removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell,” ERV “God brought him from thence into this land, wherein ye now dwell,” GENEVA “ He made him migrate to this land where you now dwell,” NAB “Then God brought him here to the land where you now live ,” NLT “Then God brought him here to the land of Israel ,” LIVING “ God caused him to remove into this country where you now live,” WEYMOUTH “[God] transferred him to this country in which you are now dwelling.” AMPLIFIED and “God moved him into this very land where you are living today.” PHILLIPS

God promised He would show Abram the land, directing him to it, and that is precisely what He is doing. In all of this, there is also the matter of timeliness, for all of this must allow for God’s predetermined timetable. Coming into the land of Canaan must be synchronized with the following events that will take place by Divine appointment.

It is apparent that a person does not require an abundance of revelation to believe and trust in the Lord. An extensive understanding is not required when there has been limited revelation, and yet there is enough understanding to compel thorough submission to the word of the Lord.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, with which Lot was associated.

- The birth of Joseph, youngest son of Jacob, who will become the ruler of Egypt.
- The selling of Joseph as a slave, which would bring him into Egypt at the proper time.
- Joseph arriving in Egypt at the time of Potiphar who would make him the head of his house.
- Joseph must be in Potiphar’s house while his wife was there, who would be the occasion of him going into prison, from which he would be exalted.
- Joseph had to be in prison at the same time as Pharaoh’s butler and baker, who would inform Pharaoh of Joseph’s ability to interpret dreams.
- The coming of seven years of plenty, and seven years of famine, that would pave the way for Joseph’s exaltation.

- Consideration must be given to the time Israel would be oppressed by the Egyptians, after a Pharaoh arose who had no regard for Joseph.

- There was also the deliverance of Israel from Egypt that would take place on the fourteenth day of the month of Abib, around B.C. 1500.

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ABRAHAM CAME INTO THE LAND

Stephen affirms that God moved Abraham “into the land,” thus confirming that he finally arrived there. The exact distance to the land is not known, nor whether the route was straight there. Judging from the map, it was several hundred miles – probably a minimum of three hundred. Genesis 12:5 gives the account of their arrival: “And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran ; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came” (Gen 12:5).

At that time, Abraham passed through the land, as though surveying it. We are told that “the Canaanite was in the land” (Gen 12:6). We are also told “there was a famine in the land” at that time (Ex 12:10). Years later, when Isaac was in the land, there was also a famine there (Gen 26:1). Years after that, when Jacob was in the land, there was yet another famine (Gen 42:1-5). For a long time, the land did not seem to be a good place to live.

GOD DID NOT GIVE ABRAHAM ANY INHERITANCE IN THE LAND

“ 5a And He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on . . . ”

Here again we are exposed to the ways of the Lord. They are not like the ways of men, and do not at all conform to human standards. Those who view the Scriptures with a carnal mind will be in a constant state of confusion.

Here again we are exposed to the ways of the Lord. They are not like the ways of men, and do not at all conform to human standards. Those who view the Scriptures with a carnal mind will be in a constant state of confusion.

In the original promise given to Abram, there was no mention of God giving Abram the land to which he was journeying. At that time, the Lord promised, “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: and I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3). At that time, the Lord promised Abram the following.

- God would make a great nation of Abram.
- He would make his name great.
- Abram would be a blessing.
- Those who blessed Abram would be blessed, and those who cursed him would be cursed.
- In him, all nations of the earth would be blessed.

However, there was no promise at that time of inheriting the land, or of it becoming his own.

After arriving in the land, the Lord appeared unto Abram again and said, “And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land ” (Gen 12:7). Shortly after that, Abram and Lot separated, with Lot choosing the area near Sodom, and Abram choosing to dwell “in the land of Canaan” (Gen 13:12). At that time, the Lord again spoke to Abram, “after that Lot was separated from him” (Gen 13:14a). “Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it , and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee ” (Gen 14b:15-17)

Some years later, “the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.” In that word God said, “I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it ” (Gen 15:7). It was at this time that God revealed several things to Abraham.

- His seed would “be a stranger in a land that is not theirs” (Gen 15:13a).
- That nation would afflict them for four hundred years (Gen 15:13b).
- God would judge the nation that afflicted them (Gen 15:14a).
- Abram’s seed would come out of the nation that afflicted them “with great substance” (Gen 15:14b).
- Abram would die in peace, and be buried in a “good old age” (Gen 15:15).
- In the fourth generation, Abram’s seed would enter the promised land again, ‘for the iniquity of the Amorities’ was “not yet full” (Gen 15:16).
- That same day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land , from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites” (Gen 15:18-21). As you can see, the land would be occupied by ten different nations, seven of which were greater and mightier than Israel (Deut 7:1).
- Still without any offspring from Sarah, who remained barren, Abram, following the advice of Sarah, had a son through Hagar, Sarai’s handmaid. That son, Ishmael, was born when Abraham was eighty-six years old (Gen 16:16).
- When Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God again appeared to him and said, “I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan , for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen 17:7-8).

NONE INHERITANCE

“And He gave him none inheritance in it, no . . .” Other versions read, “gave him no inheritance here,” NIV “did not give him any of it as a heritage,” NRSV “God didn't give Abraham anything in this land to call his own,” GWN “God did not give him any property in this land,” NJB “God did not give Abraham any of this land,” IE “He gave him no inheritable property in it,” AMPLIFIED and “God gave him no part of it as an inheritance.” PHILLIPS

Even though God gave Abram promise after promise that this land would be given to him, while he was in the world, Abraham did not receive any portion of it. Here again, we are being introduced

to a Divine manner that is reflected in the salvation that is in Christ Jesus.

NOT SO MUCH AS TO SET HIS FOOT ON

“ . . . not so much as to set his foot on . . . ” Other versions read, “not even enough to set his foot one,” NKJV “not even a foot of ground ,” NASB “not even a foot’s length ,” NRSV “not even enough to put his foot on ,” BBE “not even space for one foot ,” CSV “not even what his foot could stand on ,” DARBY “not the breadth of a foot ,” GENEVA “not even a place to rest his feet ,” GWN “or even a foothold ,” NJB “not even one square foot of land ,” NLT “not even a footstep,” YLT “not one little tract of land ,” LIVING “not a single square yard of ground,” WEYMOUTH and “not a foot that he could call his own .” PHILLIPS

The land given to Abraham was extensive. That is why this verse is of such importance. The extent and borders of the land are specified several times.

The extent and boundaries of Canaan are given with tolerable exactness in the Bible. On the west the sea was its border from Sidon to Gaza (Genesis 10:19). On the south it was bounded by a line running from Gaza to the southern end of the Dead Sea, including the Judaeen hills, but excluding the country of the Amalekites (Genesis 10:19; Numbers 13:29). The Jordan was the eastern boundary; no part of Canaan lay beyond that river (Numbers 33:51; Exodus 16:35, with Reland, *Palest.* p. 3 sq.). On the north, Canaan extended as far as Hamath, which was also the utmost boundary of the “land of promise” (Genesis 17:8; Numbers 34:8). The coast from Sidon northward to Arvad, and’ the ridge of Lebanon, were inhabited by Canaanites, though they do not appear to have been included in Canaan proper (Genesis 10:15-19). McCLINTOK STRONG

- Genesis 15:18-21: “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates : the Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”

- Exodus 23:31: “And I will set thy bounds from the Red sea even unto the sea of the Philistines, and from the desert unto the river : for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee.”

- Deuteronomy 11:24: “Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be.”

- Joshua 1:2-4: “Moses my servant is dead; now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon even unto the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and unto the great sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your coast .”

When Israel entered the land, this territory was divided by Lot to them by their tribes. The allotment is specified in the fifteenth through seventeenth chapters of Joshua.

The Scriptures make a point of the fact that Abraham, together with Isaac and Jacob, were actually strangers in the land that was promised to them. “By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country , dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise” (Heb 11:9).

When Abraham arrived in the land, God told him he was a “stranger” in it, yet would it would be given to him as an “everlasting possession” : “And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee,

the land wherein thou art a stranger , all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen 17:8).

When Sarah died at 127 years of age in Hebron, which was in the land of Canaan (Gen 23:2), Abraham stood up “from before the dead” and confessed, “ I am a stranger and a sojourner with you:

give me a possession of a burying place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight” (Gen 23:4). He did not even own a plot of land large enough to bury his wife. It was at that time that he refused to take the land for nothing, but insisted before Ephron the Hittite, “I will give thee money for the field” (Gen 23:13). He then gave the amount of money the land was worth – “four hundred shekels of silver, current money with the merchant” (Gen 23:16). In so doing, he confessed he was a “stranger and pilgrim in the earth” (Heb 11:13), and even in the land that was promised to Him by the Creator. Scripture goes on to say that Abraham was actually looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10).

Thus, even though he did not receive any land, not even a square foot, so to speak, he sojourned in it “by faith,” seeking the fulfillment of the promise, which he sensed, involved much more than the real estate in which was walking.

It was Abraham’s exposure to God, even though that exposure was limited, that compelled him to live in such a manner. He did not seek more of this world, because He had been with the Lord who had made the world. I conclude, therefore, that those who attach the New Covenant to health and wealth have not actually seen the Lord or had extensive dealings with him. I know this is the case, because Abraham is “the father of all them that believe” (Rom 4:11). It is not possible that any of his true progeny possesses a faith that is opposed to his own.

THE PARALLEL WITH BELIEVERS

Because Abraham is “the father of us all” (Rom 4:16), there is a parallel between his experience and our own. Jesus said of those who partook of His own nature – the meek – “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth ” (Matt 5:5). The Psalmist also prophesied, “But the meek shall inherit the earth ; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace” (Psa 37:11). He also said of the seed of the man who is taught by God, “his seed shall inherit the earth ” (Psa 25:12). Again, he said of those who wait upon the Lord, “they shall inherit the earth ” (Psa 37:9). And again he said, “For such as be blessed of Him shall inherit the earth ” (Psa 37:22). Isaiah prophesied, “Thy people also shall be all righteous: they shall inherit the land for ever , the branch of my planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified” (Isa 60:21). When speaking of the promise made to Abraham, Paul said, “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world , was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom 4:13).

We also know that “the world to come,” involving “a new heavens and a new earth” (2 Pet 3:13), will be put into the charge of redeemed men. In some extensive reasoning about this matter, the Spirit establishes that the co-regents of the world to come will not be angels, but men. “For it was not to angels that God subjected the habitable world of the future, of which we are speaking. It has been solemnly and earnestly said in a certain place, What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You graciously and helpfully care for and visit and look after him? For some little time You have ranked him lower than and inferior to the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor and set him over the works of Your hands, For You have put everything in subjection under his feet. Now in putting everything in subjection to man, He left nothing outside [of man’s] control. But at present we do not yet see all things subjected to him [man]. But we are able to see Jesus, Who was ranked lower than the angels for a little while, crowned with glory and honor because of His having suffered death, in order that by the grace (unmerited favor) of God [to us sinners] He might experience death for every individual person. For it was an act worthy [of God] and fitting [to the Divine nature] that He, for Whose sake and by Whom all things have their existence, in bringing

many sons into glory, should make the Pioneer of their salvation perfect [should bring to maturity the human experience necessary to be perfectly equipped for His office as High Priest] through suffering” AMPLIFIED (Heb 2:5-10).

In this text, several considerations are articulated.

- The angels will not be in charge of the world to come – the “new earth .”
- The subject of apostolic proclamation, from this point of view, was the world that is coming, not the world that now is.
- It is man that was created to have the dominion of “the world to come.”
- For a while, redeemed humanity remains in a state that is “a little lower than the angels” – a state in which, rather than ruling, they require continual care and sustenance.
- It has been determined that everything will be in redeemed man’s control.
- In this world, however, that control is not yet being realized. That is why it is not yet seen.

Those who preach that the inheritance of the saints of God has to do with worldly possessions and status are not only in error, they are at a fundamental variance with the Scriptures in general, and the salvation of God in particular. It is not possible for them to be more wrong.

- There is, however, a key Man, who also, for a time, was made a little lower than the angels. Unlike the rest of humanity, who were made a little lower because of sin, He was made a little lower for the suffering of death – a death that was in the behalf of the appointed joint-heirs.

- As the Representative of redeemed humanity, everything is presently under the control of the Man Christ Jesus. This is a confirmation that the world to come will also be in the control of the heirs of the promise.

An inheritance, as used in this reasoning, is something that will be kept, and will never be forfeited. Thus God promised Abraham, “For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever ” (Gen 13:15). Therefore, while he was increasing in age and decreasing in the span of life, Abraham knew the inheritance could not be worldly real estate. He knew that the inheritance would only be realized after he died, and not before.

It is the same with us, who are his children. God does not give Abraham’s children a different kind of faith and a different kind of inheritance than He promised him. We know this is the case, for it is written, “And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise ” (Gal 3:29).

THIS EXPOSES A MODERN ERROR

Those who preach that the inheritance of the saints of God has to do with worldly possessions and status are not only in error, they are at a fundamental variance with the Scriptures in general, and the salvation of God in particular. It is not possible for them to be more wrong. When they set before us their resources and possessions, they must at the same time confess they will have to give them up. They cannot be transported to the other side of death. In fact, such possessions cannot even exist in the presence of the Lord, from before whose face “the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them” (Rev 20:11).

What these lying prophets have actually acknowledged is that they are driven by lust – the lust that will pass away with its object. As it is written, “And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:17). It simply is not possible to integrate

worldly possessions and health with “for ever.” These men – false prophets – are drawing people into their lucrative empires with covetousness, just as the Scriptures affirm. Like it or not, the word of God says they are appointed to damnation. “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet 2:3).

There is no room for the slightest bit of tolerance of an emphasis of life in this present evil world. The justified ones live in prospect of the coming world, in which all things will be made new. Like Abraham, they are looking for something that will survive the fiery conclusion of this world, and everything that is in it.

YET HE PROMISED THE LAND TO ABRAHAM AND HIS SEED, WHEN HE HAD NO CHILD

“ 5b . . . yet He promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.”

The Holy Spirit makes a point of the fact that the promise was given to Abraham before he had any offspring. Scripture confirms that at that time Abram’s wife, Sarai, through whom the offspring would come, was barren. “But Sarai was barren; she had no child”

Stephen now accents the time in which the promise was made, accenting that Abraham’s seed, or offspring, would also inherit the land. Again, the promise was that God would give the land to Abraham and his offspring “for a possession” – a land that he would occupy as its owner.

YET HE PROMISED

“ . . . yet he promised that He would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him . . .” Other versions read, “and to his descendants after him,” NKJV “and to his offspring after him,” NASB “ he and his descendants after him would possess the land,” NIV “and to his posterity after him,” RSV “ but He gave him an undertaking that he would give it to him and to his children after him,” BBE “He promised that He would give it him, as an inheritance to him and to his seed ,” MRD “God did promise, however, that eventually the whole land would belong to Abraham and his descendants,” NLT “God promised that eventually the whole country would belong to him and his descendants,” LIVING “He promised to bestow the land as a permanent possession on him and his posterity after him,” WEYMOUTH and “promised that it should eventually belong to him and his descendants.” PHILLIPS

The promise to which Stephen refers was stated several times.

- **WHEN NAMED ABRAM** – “And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land. . .” (Gen 12:7).
- **WHEN NAMED ABRAM** – “For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever” (Gen 13:15).
- **WHEN NAMED ABRAM** – “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land . . .” (Gen 15:18).
- **AFTER NAMED ABRAHAM** – “And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen 17:8).

• **TO ISAAC** – “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries , and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father” (Gen 26:3).

• **TO JACOB** – “And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ” (Gen 28:13).

Notice that the promise was that the land would be given to Abraham AND his seed, or offspring. The promise was renewed to the other part of this sanctified trio: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. This is why God is frequently referred to as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex. 3:6,15,16; 4:5; Matt 22:32; Mk 12:26; Lk 20:37; Acts 3:13; 7:32). It was with them that this covenant was made. Israel was, therefore, blessed because of their association with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It was God’s covenant with them, and their faith in Him that often proved to be the cause for Israel being blessed (Gen 26:5; Lev 26:42; 2 Kgs 13:23; Mic 7:20; Lk 1:54-55,72-73).

WHEN AS YET HE HAD NO CHILD

“ . . . when as yet he had no child.” Other versions read, “when Abraham had no child,” NKJV “though at the time Abraham had no child,” NIV “even though he was childless,” CSB “when as yet he had no son,” MRD “ childless though he was,” NJB “even though he had no children yet,” NLT “This was before Abraham had any children,” IE and “even though at the time he had no descendant at all.” PHILLIPS

The Holy Spirit makes a point of the fact that the promise was given to Abraham before he had any offspring. Scripture confirms that at that time Abram’s wife, Sarai, through whom the offspring would come, was barren. “But Sarai was barren; she had no child” (Gen 11:30). At the time of the original promise, Abraham was seventy-five years old, and Sarah was sixty-six. Twenty-four years later, God appeared to Abram when he was ninety-nine years old (Gen 17:1). It was at that time that he changed Abram’s name to Abraham, and Sarai’s name to Sarah (Gen 17:5,15-16). At that time, not only was Sarah still barren, but Abraham was past the age of getting children. He therefore, “said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an

Thus the triumph of faith is demonstrated in both Abraham and Sarah. We conclude, therefore, that the promises of God are to be believed, even when they contradict the full scope of human knowledge.

hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?” (Gen 17:17). He then asked the Lord for Ishmael to qualify to be the promised seed (Gen 17:18). At that time, the Lord confirmed, “ Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed ; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him” (Gen 17:19).

Reasoning on the birth of Isaac, the book of Hebrews says, “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age , because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead , so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable” (Heb 11:11-12). Also, commenting on the occasion when God announced the “seed” would come through Sarah, Paul writes, “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb : he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God ” (Rom 4:20).

Thus the triumph of faith is demonstrated in both Abraham and Sarah. We conclude, therefore, that the promises of God are to be believed, even when they contradict the full scope of human knowledge.

HIS SEED WOULD SOJOURN IN A STRANGE LAND

“ 6 And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.”

God divulged to Abraham that the possession of the promised land would be preceded by a period of sorrow and hardship. In Christ we are enabled to see with even greater clarity that suffering precedes the fulfillment of the promise, and that obtaining the inheritance follows the testing of one's faith. While the fulness of this circumstance was not revealed to Abraham, the kernel of it was given to him, and was substantiated by his own experience.

GOD SPAKE ON THIS WISE

“And God spake on this wise . . .” Other versions read, “God spoke in this way,” NKJV “God spoke to this effect,” NASB “God spoke in these terms ,” NRSV “God spoke thus ,” DARBY “ God conversed with Him,” MRD “God spoke as follows ,” NET “The actual words God used when He spoke to him,” NJB “God also told him ,” NLT “God verily spake on this wise,” TNT “This is what God said to him,” IE “God declared ,” WEYMOUTH “This is what God promised ,” WILLIAMS “ this is [in effect] what God told him,” AMPLIFIED and “this is the way in which God spoke to him .” PHILLIPS

Those who choose to make their personal lives the center of their existence must pay close heed to this text. The Lord speaks to Abraham about something that does not concern him personally – at least, not as an occupant of this world. Rather than divulging what was going to happen to Abraham, God reveals what will happen to His progeny. He even speaks of something that will take place several generations in the future. That is the way, or manner, in which He communicated with the patriarch.

An Application

Fellowship with the Father does not focus on the human designs and objectives, but on Divine objectives. While this may appear something very obvious, men have a great deal of difficulty accepting it. Sin has made men self-centered, for sin is always about self. Temptation has to do with self. Unlawful lusts center in the one possessing them. However, if a person desires companionship with God, it must be recognized that the person will not be the focus of the fellowship. If this is too difficult to bear, there simply will be no fellowship, for God does not conduct business with men upon the basis of their agenda. He rather moves and speaks to bring men into involvement in what He is doing. This is seen in Abraham, through whom an intentional example is being set before us.

HIS SEED SHOULD SOJOURN IN A STRANGE LAND

“ . . . That his seed should sojourn in a strange land . . .” Other versions read, “that his descendants would dwell in a foreign land,” NKJV “his offspring would be aliens in a foreign land,” NASB “his descendants would be strangers in a country no their own ,” NIV “residents aliens in a country belonging to others ,” NRSV “his seed would be living in a strange land ,” BBE “his descendants would be foreigners living in another country ,” GWN “his descendants would be exiles in a land not their own ,” NJB “descendants of his would leave the land and live in a foreign country .” LIVING and “his descendants would be aliens (strangers) in a land belonging to other people .” AMPLIFIED

To the carnal mind, this makes no sense. First, God promises Abraham he and his offspring would inherit a land. Then He tells them his offspring would leave the land of promise, and dwell in a foreign land that belonged to others, and not to themselves. However, we are witnessing the ways of the Lord here, and we do well to exercise ourselves to discern what He is doing.

To the carnal mind, this makes no sense. First, God promises Abraham he and his offspring would inherit a land. Then He tells them his offspring would leave the land of promise, and

dwell in a foreign land that belonged to others, and not to themselves.

First, God is stripping away anything and everything that would suggest this was going to be a human achievement. We know from later revelations that it is God's nature to "destroy the wisdom of the wise, and [He] will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent" (1 Cor 1:19). By Divine intent, He has "made foolish the wisdom of this world" (1 Cor 1:20). He chooses rather to use "the foolish things to confound the wise," and "the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised," and "things which are not, to bring to nought things that are" (1 Cor 1:27-28). He does this so that "no flesh should glory in His presence" (1 Cor 1:29).

God begins to build this race, through whom the Deliverer will come – the race that will give us the Scriptures, and all of the prophets, and all of the apostles – with a man that is incapable of begetting a child, and a woman who is old and barren. He then gives a land to this man and his offspring that is occupied by other inhabitants who are greater in number and power than the people whom God has chosen to drive them out. As if that was not enough, He leads Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to sojourn in the land He has given them, and do so as strangers and pilgrims. Then he takes the chosen race, and causes them, through a famine, to go into a foreign land that belongs to others, and will never belong to them. It is in that land that God will prepare the people to inhabit the land He has promised them.

Now, that is the manner in which God works! He does not take those who are apparently significant and unusually gifted, and employ them for His purposes. Rather, he takes those who are old, barren, few, and without a land of their own, and with them cultures a people for Himself.

The land in which Abraham's offspring would sojourn is Egypt. When they went into the land their entire nation was only seventy in number. Sixty-six came with Jacob into the land, and three (Joseph and his two sons) were already there. That made seventy altogether (Gen 46:26-27).

THEY SHOULD BRING THEM INTO BONDAGE

" . . . and that they should bring them into bondage . . ." Other versions read, "they would be enslaved ," NASB "they will be enslaved ," NIV "who would enslave them," NRSV "they would make them servants ," BBE "they will be in slavery ," CJB "the people there would make them slaves," GWN "they will reduce them to servitude ," MRD and "they would be oppressed as slaves ." NLT

When the small company first went into Egypt, they did so because there was a famine in the land. Joseph had been placed in charge of the land, and therefore the Israelites were treated kindly. They were given their own section of the land – Goshen – and they fared well. This proved to be "the best of the land." Pharaoh even told Joseph "if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle" (Gen 47:1-6). They certainly got off to a good start. However, it did not stay that way.

Eventually, Moses records, "there arose a new king over Egypt which knew not Joseph" (Ex 1:8). The outcome of it all was that Israel entered into a period of oppression and bondage. During the time that followed harsh taskmasters were set over them, "to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses" (Ex 1:11).

AND ENTREAT THEM EVIL

" . . . and entreat them evil four hundred years." Other versions read, "oppress ," NKJV "mistreated ," NASB "ill-treat them," RSV "be cruel to them," BBE "oppressed," CJB "afflict them," ESV "do it evil ," YLT and "do evil things to them." IE

The accent of the oppression is on the state of the Israelites when they came out of Egypt. From the very first, they were not liked by the Egyptians because they were shepherds (Gen 46:32; 47:3), and “every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians” (Gen46:34). However, as time progressed they were afflicted more and more, with their lives “being made bitter with hard bondage” (Ex 1:14). The circumstance was so grievous that the children of Israel “cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage” (Ex 2:23).

God told Abraham his seed would be afflicted for “four hundred years” in this strange land (Gen 15:13). Moses says they sojourned in the land for “four hundred and thirty years” (Ex 12:40-41). Paul says that the time from the covenant made with Abraham to the giving of the Law was “four hundred and thirty years” (Gal 3:17). Some have struggled with this seeming disparity, but there is no need to do so.

First, they were afflicted for four hundred years – but they were not afflicted for all of the time they were in the land. The four hundred and thirty years are calculated from the time the covenant was made with Abraham, as Paul affirms in Galatians 3:17. Exodus also cites this number, stating that the “sojourning of the children of Israel” was “four hundred and thirty years.” The point being made there is that from the promise to the Jews becoming a people and headed for the promised land, was four hundred and thirty years. The “four hundred years” are from the perspective of their suffering. The “four hundred and thirty years” are from the perspective of the promise.

During their stay in Egypt they were never truly received. As time progressed, things got worse and worse, until they could bear it no longer. In all of this they were being weaned, as it were, from Egypt. Their souls were being cultured to long for the land that had been promised to Abraham four centuries before. Such are the ways of the Lord, to make the foreign land intolerable in order that the home land be appreciated. As is apparent, the Lord is still doing this. Through life’s experiences. He is teaching us this world is not our home. It is to us what the wilderness was to Israel. We are, in fact, sojourners.

GOD WOULD JUDGE THEIR OPPRESSORS

“ 7 And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.”

Four centuries of suffering, with the least being at the beginning, and the worst being at the conclusion! Someone from the twentieth century might have concluded God had “forgotten to be gracious” (Psa 77:9). It certainly appeared that way. Imagine people coming to America like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, living all their lives here without possessing any part of it, yet claiming it had been given to them and their offspring by God. Then their offspring spend 400 years in another country as abject slaves. Would it not appear as though they were mistaken about being led to the land? How could such a people claim that God was their God.

Now that religious charlatans have become popular (2007), it is being preached through the media that prosperity is a sign of being the real people of God. It is, they say, the evidence of the blessing. What shall we say of our text, where the real people of God are being oppressed for four hundred years, with no apparent intervention by God. Their oppressors dominate them, and make lives miserable for them. Further, there is no particular sin registered against them, unless it be that during the latter time, when they were ignorant of the fact that God was going to deliver them through Moses (Acts 7:25).

Behind the scenes, the oppression of His people had been duly noted by the Lord, and He will not let Egypt continue their oppressiveness. They will pay the penalty for the maltreatment of the offspring of Abraham.

A genuine fellowship with the Lord involves Him divulging what He was going to do, thereby establishing that He is a God who cannot lie, and is thoroughly capable of fulfilling His promises to the most exacting degree. No one can stop Him from doing this.

THIS NATION I WILL JUDGE

“And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge . . .” Other versions read, “I Myself will judge,” NASB “I will punish,” NIV “I will bring judgment on,” NAB and “I will pass sentence on.” WILLIAMS

God revealed Himself to Moses, declaring some of His attributes. One of them is that He will “by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and fourth generation” (Ex 34:7). Thus God told Abraham He was going to judge Egypt for what they would do after Abraham himself had died in a good old age.

The judgment took place as a prelude to the deliverance of Israel, and when they crossed the Red Sea to commence their journey to the promised land. Not only did God judge the Egyptians themselves, but he executed judgment “against all the gods of Egypt” (Ex 12:12). Those false gods were unable to protect the Egyptians as the Lord judged them with ten grievous plagues.

- Their water was turned to blood (Ex 7:14-25).
- Frogs filled the land (Ex 8:1-15).
- The dust was turned into lice that plagued all the land (Ex 8:16-19).
- Flies filled the land (Ex 8:20-22).
- A grievous plague came on all of their cattle (Ex 9:1-7).
- The people were stricken with festering and spreading boils (Ex 9:8-12).
- A plague of hail came, pounding down all of their crops (Ex 9:18-34).
- A horde of locusts invaded the land, consuming every bit of vegetation that had not been destroyed by the hail (Ex 10:1-20).
- Gross darkness fell upon the land, being so thick that it could be “felt” (Ex 10:21-23).
- The first born every house, including both man and beast, were stricken dead (Ex 11:4-7; 12:29-30).
- Pharaoh and his armies were uttering destroyed, being drowned in the Red Sea (Ex 15:4).

Suffice it to say, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

THEY SHALL COME FORTH AND SERVE ME

“ . . . said God: and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place .” Other versions read, “worship Me in this place,” NIV “worship Me in this land,” MRD “do me service in this place,” YLT and “worship Me on this very spot .” WILLIAMS

God revealed to Abraham that his offspring would come out of Egypt – but they would do so to serve Him , not merely to get away from their oppressors. When God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, telling him he was being called to deliver Israel, this is what He told him. “When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain” (Ex 3:12).

God told Moses he was to appear before Pharaoh, giving him this message: “Thus saith the LORD, Israel is My son, even My firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let My son go, that he may serve Me : and

if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn” (Ex 4:23). When Moses prepared to turn the water into blood, God told him to say: “The LORD God of the Hebrews hath sent me unto thee, saying, Let my people go, that they may serve Me in the wilderness” (Ex 7:16). Six more times, Moses told Pharaoh God said to let His people go, “that they may serve Me” (Ex 8:1,20; 9:1,13; 10:3,7). When the hour of deliverance arrived, “He called for Moses and Aaron by night, and said, Rise up, and get you forth from among my people, both ye and the children of Israel; and go, serve the LORD , as ye have said” (Ex 12:31).

Thus Israel was released from serving the Egyptians in order that they might serve the Lord. That was the reason for their deliverance. That was the reason for God choosing them – “to be a peculiar people unto Himself , above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut 14:2). Once again, it is made clear that the Lord is not working to simply make human conditions more pleasant.

These insights were delivered to Abraham in order to fuel his faith, and cause his hope to flourish. It also served the purpose of confirming to later generations that God is faithful to His word, and cannot lie.

A genuine fellowship with the Lord involves Him divulging what He was going to do, thereby establishing that He is a God who cannot lie, and is thoroughly capable of fulfilling His promises to the most exacting degree. No one can stop Him from doing this.

HE GAVE ABRAHAM THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

“ 8a And He gave him the covenant of circumcision . . .” Other versions read, “ agreement of which circumcision was the sign,” BBE “circumcision to confirm his promise,” GWN “ the ceremony of circumcision at that time, as evidence of the covenant between God and the people of Abraham,” LIVING “an agreement with Abraham ; was circumcision,” IE “the sacred compact of circumcision,” WILLIAMS “a covenant of circumcision, and under this covenant ,” MONTGOMERY and “a covenant (an agreement to be religiously observed) 24of which circumcision was the seal.” AMPLIFIED

Here again is a working of the Lord that reveals something of His nature. First, He does not forget His covenant, because He “cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:13) – and His covenants are an expression of His Person.

The account of the giving of this covenant is found in Genesis 17:9-14. “And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations. This is My covenant , which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed. He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised : and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant .”

This, Stephen declares, was “the covenant of circumcision.” Paul declares that this was a sign of the righteousness Abraham had prior to his circumcision: “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised : that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also” (Rom 4:11).

Thus we have three perspectives of the circumcision of which Stephen spoke.

- It was a “token of the covenant” that God made between Abraham and Himself (Gen 17:11).

- Because it is a “token of the covenant,” it is, in a sense, equated with the covenant itself. It therefore becomes the evidence of the covenant, and a means of assuring the heart that it will be fulfilled (Acts 7:8).

- Because Abraham had believed God, the covenant was also a pledge that he had been made righteous, for God cannot make a covenant with unrighteous people (Rom 4:11).

The covenant itself, of which circumcision was the token, is spelled out in Genesis 17:2-8. Remember, this covenant was made before Abraham had any offspring. The following promises are made in the covenant.

- He would multiply Abraham “exceedingly” (verse 2),
- Abraham would be the “father of many nations” (verse 4-5).
- God would make him “exceedingly fruitful” (verse 6a).
- He would make nations of him (verse 6b).
- Kings would come out of him (verse 6c).
- He would establish His covenant with Abraham’s offspring after him (verse 7a).
- It would be an “everlasting covenant,” that is, it would not fail of fulfillment (verse 7b).
- He would give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed (verse 8a).

And what proof does Abraham carry with him confirming that this remarkable covenant is valid, and will surely come to pass? Perhaps it will be some miraculous sign he works, as Moses did with he put his hand in his bosom, pulled it out, and it was leprous – then put his hand again into his bosom and removed it, and it was “turned again as the other flesh”

- The land would be for an “everlasting possession,” that is, it would never cease to be identified with them (verse 8b).

- God would be the God of Abraham’s seed (verse 8c).

Those words were spoken to Abraham when he was ninety-nine years old (Gen 17:1), was impotent because of his age (Heb 11:12), and was “childless” (Gen 15:2). To further complicate things, his wife was ninety years old (Gen 17:17), had always been barren (Gen 11:30), and it had ceased to be with her after the manner of women – that is, giving birth was a biological impossibility (Gen 18:11).

And what proof does Abraham carry with him confirming that this remarkable covenant is valid, and will surely come to pass? Perhaps it will be some miraculous sign he works, as Moses did with he put his hand in his bosom, pulled it out, and it was leprous – then put his hand again into his bosom and removed it, and it was “turned again as the other flesh” (Ex 4:6). Surely something like that would be a great confidence-booster! But, alas, in this matter, the “token” must be more personal than that.

The token was Abraham’s circumcision – something that was done when he was “ninety years old and nine” (Gen 17:24). How do you boast about something like that? Who would believe you if you said that was the token, or confirmation of a covenant God had made with you. You are ninety-nine years old, and you say a lot of nations are going to come from you – that even kings will come from your loins. Your offspring will become a great multitude, and they will be given a special land by God himself. Furthermore, your circumcision is the proof of it all - but it is proof to Abraham, not to the world. He is the one who needed the confidence, not those who were living around him.

There are several things that can be noted about circumcision, and they all have some significance

to those who are in Christ Jesus.

- There is some discomfort associated with it (Gen 34:24-25).
- It involves the removal of something (Ex 4:25).
- It produces sensitivity.
- It is something that is permanent.
- It is something that is personal and private.
- It is not something in which men can boast.
- It has a humbling effect upon the individual.
- It is something that is always with the individual.

THE PARALLEL

Thus you have a picture of the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11), in which the foreskin of the heart is removed (Deut 10:16). There is a part of humanity that cannot remain if Christ is to be embraced. This speaks of the removal of “body of the sins of the flesh” (Col 2:11). That is, the totality of what made us unacceptable to God, and fully justified our condemnation, has been completely disassociated from “the new man” (Eph 4:24), or the “new creature” (2 Cor 5:17). It is said of the new man, “which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). He is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10). The “flesh” has no part whatsoever with him. It has been “circumcised with the circumcision of Christ.”

Allow me to translate this glorious circumstance into something that makes for confidence and assurance. The incompatibility of the old with the new is your token of the covenant, as affirmed in Romans seven. The fact that the flesh is an offense to you, and cannot blend with your renewed heart, is your proof that you have been born of God. Do not doubt this for a moment. This is the exact point that Paul makes in the seventh and eighth chapters of Romans. In Romans seven, he establishes the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, confirming the circumcision of Christ has, in fact, taken place. He affirms that sinful inclinations are temptations, not the expressions of the real child of God. “It is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me . . . I find then a law, that when I would do good, evil is present with me . . . I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind . . . who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:14-25).

That is the painfulness of “the circumcision of Christ.” However, that is not the end of the matter. That very condition is the token that we have, in fact, been justified. It is the confirmation that, in Christ Jesus, we are not condemned. We have been liberated from condemnation, as well as the defilement that caused it.

That is why Paul draws a grand conclusion from this experience. “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:1). No one but a child of God can appreciate such a marvelous token – and it is all pictured in Abraham.

AND THUS THE NATION WAS BORN

“ 8a . . . and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.”

AND SO

“ . . . and so . . .” That is, according to the promise of God, and in justification of the faith of

Abraham, God began building a nation using a man and a woman who were naturally impotent. Neither of them could bring anything to the table – no ability, no wisdom, no input whatsoever. Their inability, however, had nothing to do with the fulfillment of God’s promise. It was His covenant. He made it, and He is the One who caused it to come to pass.

ABRAHAM BEGAT ISAAC

“ . . . Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day . . .” Abraham begat Isaac when he was one hundred years old. The lad was born at the exact time God had specified – at “the set time in the next year” (Gen 17:21). God had told Abraham to circumcise every male child when it was “eight days old” (Gen 17:12). Abraham did precisely what the Lord commanded, at the specified time. As it is written, “And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac being eight days old, as God had commanded him. And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him” (Gen 21:4-5).

ISAAC BEGAT JACOB

“ . . . Isaac begat Jacob . . .” The lineage continues, as Isaac begets Jacob, being sixty years old when he was Jacob with his twin, Esau (Gen 25:26). Isaac’s birth was also miraculous, as his mother Rebekah was also barren. As it is written, “And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padanaram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. And Isaac entreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was entreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived” (Gen 25:21).

JACOB BEGAT THE TWELVE PATRIARCHS

“ . . . and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.” With Jacob, the offspring begins to spread exponentially. Abraham had one son through whom the nation came, and Isaac had one as well. Jacob, however, had twelve sons. Coincidentally, his favored wife, Rachel, was also barren (Gen 29:31). Jacob’s sons are called “the twelve patriarchs” because they were the heads of “the twelve tribes of Israel” (Gen 49:26). The sons through whom the tribes came were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin.

When it came to an inheritance, Levi was omitted because that tribe belonged to the Lord Himself (Num 3:12,45; 8:14; 18:13,24). To fill his place, Joseph received a double portion, which was divided between his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48:20,22).

Thus the stage has been set for the multiplication of many people from an impossible circumstance, with absolutely no fleshly advantages. This is the people from whom the promised Messiah will come. The very nation is like a sign and a wonder, the result of Divine initiative and power. Truly their presence is the working of the Lord!

CONCLUSION

In his defense, Stephen will show the prevalence of God throughout the history of Israel. A valid people must have a valid beginning – and Israel is confirmation of that. There is no way to account for their origin or presence upon the basis of human wisdom or aptitude. We also see that valid beginnings are brought about through faith, not human works. There is no basis for worldly boasting in any work of Divine origin. All such boasting “is excluded” (Rom 3:27).

We will find through Stephen’s defense a marvelous example of handling the Word of God aright (2 Tim 2:15). Of course, such a use of the Word can be expected when one is filled with the Spirit, wisdom, power, and faith.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #29

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #2

“ 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him, 10 And delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house. 11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance. 12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13 And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh. 14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls. 15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, 16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem. ” (Acts 7:9-16)

INTRODUCTION

Our text begins with the sons of Jacob being moved with envy against their younger brother Joseph, and selling him into Egypt. Genesis 37:28 pinpoints the time when Joseph was sold into Egypt: “Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.” Genesis 37:29-41:44 covers the time from Joseph’s beginning in Egypt until his exaltation – thirteen years later. Genesis 41:45 through the conclusion of Genesis covers the time from Joseph’s exaltation through his death. Within that section, 42:1-47:27 covers the events associated with Jacob and his clan coming into Egypt. The next seventeen years, until the time of Jacob’s death, are covered in 47:28-48:22. The record of Jacob blessing his sons is found in 49:1-33. The burial of Jacob, and the events attending it, is covered from 50:1-50:15. The rest of the book of Genesis (50:16-26) covers the remainder of Joseph’s life and the interment of his body.

That means that we have hardly any information at all concerning the

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experience of the Israelites during the vast majority of the 430 years they sojourned in Egypt – and precious little concerning their oppression for four hundred years.

If men were writing the book, the burden of emphasis would have been placed upon the time of Israel's oppression. Instead of doing this, the Spirit moves Moses to emphasize their providential beginning, and the purpose for which they went down into Egypt. The reason for this unique emphasis is that the Scriptures were not written merely to provide us with historical accounts. Rather, the working of God himself is embedded in the record. In this we are being exposed to HOW all things are worked together for the good of those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose.

Think, for example, of the circumstances that seemed to forbid the rising of a nation from whom the Messiah would be manifested.

- The family from which Abraham was chosen was idolaters.
- The call of God came to a man who was thoroughly unacquainted with the Lord.
- Abraham's participation in the purpose of God involved separating from his kindred and homeland.
- Abraham had no idea where he was going – only that God would show him the land to which he was being called.
- From the beginning of their marriage, Abraham's wife was barren.
- After twenty-four years, Abraham still had no offspring.
- When it was confirmed to Abraham that the promised offspring would come from Sarah, he was ninety-nine, and she was ninety – still barren.
- At the time scheduled for the birth, it was biologically impossible for Abraham and Sarah to have a son.
- When Abraham arrived in the promised land, it was being ravaged by a famine.
- When Isaac married Rebekah, she was barren.
- When Isaac came to the promised land, there was a famine in the land.

- When Jacob married Rachel, she was barren.
- Jacob’s favored son, Joseph, through whom the fledgling nation would be sustained, was hated by his brothers, and sold into Egypt as a slave.
- When Jacob was in the promised land, there was a famine, and he had to go down into Egypt.
- All three of the fathers of the Jewish nation – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob – were not given any of the promised land, but sojourned in it as strangers and pilgrims.
- Jacob and all of his sons – the fathers of the twelve tribes – died in Egypt, never inheriting the promised land.
- The only piece of real estate that was owned by any Israelite up to the time of its occupation by Joshua, was purchased by Abraham – even though God said He would give him and his seed the land as an inheritance.

These are the circumstances Stephen is declaring in his defense. They provide a sort of context in which the Lord is working out his purpose – a context filled with impossible circumstances. One can only imagine how modern-day counselors would have spoken to the fathers concerning their experiences.

What we have here is a historical dialog that confirms the manner in which God works. That manner is declared by Paul, and must be seen by all who possess faith. “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence” (1 Cor 1:27-29).

In every bonafide work of God, the door is shut to any human boasting. As Paul would say, “It is excluded” (Rom 3:27) – i.e. there is no place made for it. There is nothing about the work of God – absolutely nothing – that allows for the exaltation of flesh, or for boasting in its accomplishments. It is not that a legitimate work of God can take place, and yet men can boast in it. This is an impossibility, for God works in such a manner as excludes the very possibility of boasting. It is not that such glorying ought not to be done – it cannot be done! What God is doing does not make any provision for it. If, therefore, there is a purported Christian work that allows for

the flesh to boast, it cannot be from God. Such works have their genesis in the mind of man, not “the mind of the Lord” (1 Cor 2:16).

THE PATRIARCH’S MOVED WITH ENVY

“ 7:9a And the patriarchs, moved with envy . . .”

“The lot,” as Solomon put it, was “cast into” their “lap,” creating a circumstance where they appeared to be able to do whatever they wanted. However, the outworking of the whole affair was strictly in the hands of the Lord. As Solomon elaborated on the lot being cast into the lap, he added, “but the

Stephen now accounts for Joseph getting down into Egypt. Men were involved in the matter, but their will was not what drove the incidents that followed. “The lot,” as Solomon put it, was “cast into” their “lap,” creating a circumstance where they appeared to be able to do whatever they wanted. However, the outworking of the whole affair was strictly in the hands of the Lord. As Solomon elaborated on the lot being cast into the lap, he added, “but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov 16:33). That is the unwavering manner of the Kingdom. It is also one of the reasons why we are not to “judge according to the appearance” (John 7:24). Appearance lends itself

to an overestimation of the power and influence of men. Those who are unduly drawn to appearance will always end up being deceived concerning the real situation.

THE PATRIARCHS

“And the patriarchs . . .” Other versions read, “the brothers,” BBE “Jacob’s sons,” GWN “our fathers,” MRD “these men,” LIVING “these fathers,” IE “the patriarchs [Jacob’s sons],” AMPLIFIED and “these men were our ancestors.” CEV

I have observed that there is a marked tendency in modern translators to ignore the reality of a Divine vocabulary. In their supposed eagerness to make the text plain, they often remove key words that aid us in comprehending the working of the Lord. The word “patriarch” is a case in point. It is a good word, and ought to be added to the vocabulary of the people of God. In the text before us, some versions use other words in the place of “patriarch.” Among them are “brothers,” BBE “men,” LIVING “sons” AMPLIFIED and “ancestors.” CEV

The word “patriarch” comes from the Greek word **patria,rcai** (pat-ri-arx-ai). It is a transliteration of the word, translating the letters instead of the word. This is because there is no English word that precisely parallels the original word – which is the whole reason for transliteration. The word means, “founder of a tribe, progenitor,” THAYER “Chief father . . . father of a tribe or nation, progenitor, chief of a family,” FRIBERG and “the father, or chief of a race,” LIDDELL-SCOTT That meaning, as you can see, is a far cry from the translations I have cited.

There are fourteen men to whom the term “patriarch” is applied: Abraham, the twelve sons of Jacob, and David.

- **ABRAHAM.** “Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils” (Heb 7:4). Abraham is viewed as “father,” or progenitor, in three senses. He is the one from whom the Jews themselves came. He is also the father of many nations, including Israel, but not limited to them (Gen 17:4). He is also the father of all who believe in Christ (Rom 4:11).

- **JACOB’S TWELVE SONS.** “And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs” (Acts 7:8). Jacobs twelve sons are the progenitors of the twelve tribes of Israel.

- **DAVID.** “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day” (Acts 2:29). David is of the tribe of Judah, and is the progenitor of Christ as the King. It is David’s throne upon which Jesus presently sits (Acts 2:30-36).

Each of these individuals are also referred to as fathers.

- **ABRAHAM.** “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee” (Gen 17:5). “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all ” (Rom 4:16).

- **JACOB’S TWELVE SONS.** “But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first” (Acts 7:12). “So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers ” (Acts 7:15).

- **DAVID.** “Blessed be the kingdom of our father David , that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest” (Mark 11:10).

In our society, lineage is not considered to be of any major importance. This is because our nation is actually a conglomeration of peoples from various heritages. However, this was not the case with Israel. First, the chief purpose of the nation was to bring forth the Messiah. For this reason, the lineage had to be kept pure. Mingling with other nations and/or learning their ways was strictly forbidden (Ex 34:12-16; Deut 7:1-6), and whenever Israel violated this command, they always got into trouble (1 Kgs 11:4; Ezra 10:2-3,10-19; Neh 13:23-27).

The term “patriarchs,” therefore, is important to the understanding of the Jewish race. This is particularly true in the account that Stephen is giving, for in it all manner of difficulties existed for this small and fledgling group. Even though eleven of the twelve patriarchs were themselves very flawed, yet because of the God of heaven, the race was protected, and the Messiah was born of pure lineage at the appointed time – “made of a woman, made under the Law” (Gal 4:4). This is one of the points that is accentuated in the two genealogies of Jesus (Matt 1:1-16; Lk 3:23-38). Jesus, for example, had to be from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10; Micah 5:2; Heb 7:14; Rev 5:5). He also had to be from the lineage of David, who was himself from the tribe of Judah (Matt 1:1). That means that Mary also had to be from the tribe of Judah and the house of David (Lk 1:27). While Joseph was not the father of Jesus, because he was charged the responsibility of raising Him, and because Mary married him, he also had to be from the lineage of Judah and the house of David (Matt 1:20).

Ponder also, that the priesthood, both the Aaronic and Levitical, had to be from the lineage of Levi (Num 3:6; 8:19; 17:8; 18:2; Josh 21:10).

In a fleshly covenant, pedigree was all-important. During Nehemiah’s day, the people had departed from this, and the priesthood had become defiled. Nehemiah re-established the priesthood after the proper lineage (Neh 7:64).

The Reason for the Rule

All of this prepared the way for the New Covenant. In Jesus, a new genealogy is reckoned, for the fleshly line ended with Him. That is why Isaiah cried, “who shall declare His generation? for He was cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa 53:8). Now, although He had no fleshly offspring, His name is still “the Everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6). He has been given “children” (Heb 2:13), and they are numerous beyond number. In Him the promise is fulfilled, “for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD” (Isa 54:1).

The genealogy of Jesus is even more precise than that of the Israelites. There must be a paternal connection with Jesus before any individual will be accepted by God. His Seed must be in the person (1 John 3:9), and he must be a partaker of His nature (2 Pet 1:4). The absence of these things absolutely negates any profession of identity with the Lord. Under the Old Covenant, institutional connection was basic. Under the New Covenant, it carries no weight at all. This is absolutely decimating to the sectarian approach to truth, and the vaunting of denominations. Lifeless religion was common under the Old Covenant. It is unlawful under the New.

MOVED WITH ENVY

Other versions read, “becoming envious,” NKJV “became jealous,” NASB “having indignation,” TNT and “boiling with envy and hatred and anger.” AMPLIFIED

Scriptural Reports of Men

The Scriptures do not varnish or gloss the human condition. God respects no man’s person – that is He never interacts with men in disassociation from what they really are. This is not commonly perceived. Some see God’s grace as having a loving and beneficial association with men regardless of what they really are. This is not a God-glorifying view, and approaches the subject of Divine favor

as though Jesus did not even exist, and the new birth was not a reality. The truth of the matter is that in Christ men are changed, or transformed, in order that they might have fellowship with the Father, and remain in his favor.

The Account of the Patriarchs

With these things in mind, we return to Stephen's account of Joseph's brothers rising up against him without cause. They thought nothing of the fact that Joseph was their own brother, in the lineage of Abraham, and among the chosen people. They dishonored their father Jacob, by viewing his preference of Joseph as uncomely, and even wrong. They would have preferred that Jacob honor them above Joseph. Therefore, envy entered their hearts. Here, the word

“envy” connotes “to be heated or to boil with envy, hatred, and anger.” THAYER “hostile emotion based on resentment.” FRIBERG

Envy eats at the vitals of soul, and is described as causing rottenness to the bones: “envy the rottenness of the bones” (Prov 14:30). That is, it causes the basic human constitution to break down. It breaks down all barriers to doing evil, so that Solomon declared, “who is able to stand before envy?” (Prov 27:4). This is also the sin that drove the Jews and their leaders to deliver Jesus to Pilate for the sentencing of death (Matt 27:18). When God gave the Gentiles “over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not convenient,” envy was one of the transgressions that broke out (Rom 1:29).

Thus, this uncomely trait broke out among the eleven brothers of Joseph. Envy will prove to be the kind of trait that compels them to do something. It will powerfully constrain them to go to whatever lengths they think is necessary to rid themselves of the influence of Joseph. We will find that envy has no moral boundaries. It is limitless in its capacity to remove what is conceived to be a threat.

Years later, among their progeny, the trait of envy would erupt against Moses. The insurrection was led by Korah, and is described in Psalm 106:16; “They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron the saint of the LORD. The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. And a fire was kindled in their company; the flame burned up the wicked” (Psa 106:16-18). Thus we see what folly envy provokes in men. We also see how the God of heaven reacts to envy.

The Absence of Such A Trait Among New Covenant Leaders

It ought to be noted that, following the ascension of Jesus into heaven, this trait was never found among the twelve apostles. None of them envied Peter for being given the keys to the Kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19). They did not envy Peter, James, and John, for being the inner circle (Matt 17:1), or John for being the disciple whom Jesus loved (John 21:20). Following Christ's enthronement there was never any manifestation of envy among “the apostles” (Rev 21:14), who are the New Covenant parallel of the “twelve patriarchs” (Acts 7:8). Even before His enthronement, envy was not found among them.

The absence of this sort of reaction among the twelve apostles confirms the superiority of the New Covenant, in which the nature of the constituents of the covenant is changed by means of transformation. It is not that they had mastered inappropriate human emotions through discipline. Rather, they had become partakers of the Divine nature, and were in the process of being conformed to the image of God's dear Son. Because the New Covenant is “a better covenant established upon better promises” (Heb 8:6), it produces better qualities within its constituents. This, coupled with their deliverance from the power of darkness, accounts for the superior character of those who are truly in Christ Jesus. Rather than “the works of the flesh” being prominent within them, through their faith it is “the fruit of the Spirit” that now characterizes their lives (Gal 5:19-25).

THEY SOLD JOSEPH INTO EGYPT

“ 9b . . . sold Joseph into Egypt . . .” Other versions read, “sold him as a slave into Egypt,” NIV “gave him to the Egyptians for money,” BBE “sold him away into Egypt,” DARBY “sold him into slavery, and he was taken into Egypt,” GWN and “sold him to be a slave in Egypt.” NLT

This is one of the sad accounts of pre-Messianic history. This is only the fourth generation from the call of God, and already there has been a significant decline in the chosen race. This confirms the absolute necessity of the new birth. The creation of a “new man” (Eph 4:24) is not a mere luxury, but is necessary for the conformity of men to the image of Christ. Men can be given every possible advantage, and surrounded with Divine intervention and miracles, and yet fail miserably because they are driven by selfish ambition, which is inherent in the human constitution. At the time of the account being given by Stephen, the envious ones are the best of the human race – not the dregs of it.

Further, the conduct we are

These observations do not make what the brothers did either right or acceptable. It only shows why a Savior was needed to take away sin, in order that man’s nature could be changed. That change had to be done by God in all righteousness.

witnessing did not occur in Egypt, but in the promised land, while the patriarchs were sojourning there. Additionally, it did not occur during the famine that would come upon the land, but in a time of plenty, when their flocks could be fed, and food was in apparent abundance. Thus, their envy was not driven by dire circumstances, or some unusual external situation. It revealed a fundamental flaw within the human nature.

These observations do not make what the brothers did either right or acceptable. It only shows why a Savior was needed to take away sin, in order that man’s nature could be changed. That change had to be done by God in all righteousness. However, as long as sin remained, that could not be done. Again, let me emphasize that this does not lessen the wrongness of what the twelve patriarchs did. The fact that men were under the domination of a fallen nature did not make sin less reprehensible. Neither, indeed, did it allow for the excusing of it.

There were at least two reasons why God was longsuffering with such conduct. First, it was because He was working through it to create circumstances by which the race appointed to bring forth the Messiah would be sustained. This was being done in a manner that could only yield glory to Himself. He did not take what men did and convert it to His advantage. Rather, He created the circumstances, down to the finest detail, to confirm the whole of the matter was dictated by Him. Second, his longsuffering was specifically in prospect of the coming Savior, who would bear both the substance and the penalty of all sin. It is necessary to see these things if we are going to give God due glory.

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THEY SOLD JOSEPH INTO EGYPT

Stephen gives an abbreviated statement concerning a rather drawn out affair. In the process of teaching, that is the nature Divine summation. Of course, it assumes that the details of the affair are already known. If that is not true, the summation carries no weight. It will therefore be of profit to briefly outline what led to the sale of Joseph.

- The patriarchs has been provoked to hate their younger brother Joseph because of their father’s preference of him (Gen 27:3-4).
- Joseph related his first dream to his brothers, in which he saw all twelve of them binding sheaves of grain. His sheaf stood upright, and their sheaves of grain “made

obedience,” or bowed down, to his sheaf (Gen 37:5-7).

- His brothers “hated him the more for his words” (Gen 37:8).
- Joseph related a second dream to his father and his brothers in which the sun and moon and the eleven stars “made obeisance to him” (Gen 37:9-10).
- His brothers envied him, but his father Jacob “observed the saying,” or “kept the matter in mind” NKJV (Gen 37:11).
- While his brothers were feeding Jacob’s flocks in Shechem, he sent Joseph to check on them to see if it was well with them and the flocks (Gen 37:12-14).
- After finding Joseph wandering about unable to find his brothers, a man asked him what he was seeking. Upon telling the man he was seeking his brothers, Joseph asked him if he might know where they were. The man said he seen them, and heard them say they were going to Dothan. Joseph headed there immediately to find his brothers (Gen 37:15-17).
- While he was yet “afar off,” his brothers saw him coming. Conspiring to slay him, they said, “ Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams” (Gen 37:18-20).
- The older brother, Reuben, heard the plot and delivered Joseph out of their hands, saying “Let us not kill him” (Gen 37:21).
- Reuben then suggested, “Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again” (Gen 37:22). At this point, Joseph had not come to them
- When Joseph finally arrived, they stripped him of his coat of many colors – a sign of his father’s favor – and threw him into an empty pit where there was no water (Gen 37:23-24).
- The scheming brothers then calmly sat down to eat (Gen 37:25).
- While eating, the brothers looked up and saw “a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt” (Gen 37:25).
- Judah tells the other brothers, “Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh” (Gen 37:27a).
- His brothers are content with the suggestion (Gen 37:27b).
- At that time, “there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver” (Gen 37:28a).
- Shortly after this, Reuben returns, and finds Joseph missing from the pit. Because he had intended to deliver him back to Jacob, he cries out, “The child is not; and I, whither shall I go?” (Gen 37:30).
- The brothers then “took Joseph's coat, and killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood; And they sent the coat of many colors, and they brought it to their father; and said, This have we found: know now whether it be thy son's coat or no” (Gen 37:32).
- Having received the coat, Jacob recognized it and said, “It is my son's coat; an evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces” (Gen 37:33).
- The Midianite merchantmen then brought Joseph into Egypt, and “sold him into Egypt unto Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh's, and captain of the guard” (Gen 37:28b, 36).

All of those remarkable details are summed up in Stephen's words, "And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt" (Acts 7:9). Stephen, speaking through the Spirit of God, will develop the thought that God was in all of this, giving Joseph protection and favor, and using him to deliver his people. He will speak with understanding, as well as with power. It was previously stated that he was filled with wisdom. Now he will evidence that wisdom in his summation of the Jewish people, and their development as a nation.

Thus far, with two hundred and twenty-nine words he has covered more than 250 years of Divine involvements with men. He has included the accomplishment of impossible things, unveiled the impotence of nature, and exposed the hardness of the human heart. The power of faith has also been declared, as well as the reality of Divine direction. Such wonderful things could not possibly be drawn from the wellspring of nature. They deal with matters that are outside of the perimeter of human assessment and wisdom.

WHAT WE ARE BEHOLDING

It is imperative that we have some understanding of the magnitude of the things Stephen is declaring. He is confirming that God was actually the One who was in control of situation the brothers thought they were orchestrating. The world belongs to Him, as well as everything and everyone within it. As it is written, "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Psa 24:1). This is most precisely stated under the New Covenant, where men are granted a broader perspective of the Lord and the things that he is working in the midst of the earth. Here is how Paul said it: "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36).

Now we are told this, and it is our responsibility to receive it and conduct our lives accordingly. In the end, when the distracting elements of the present heavens and earth have passed away, it will all be made plain – crystal clear. Until that time, we are to live with the revelation of these things in mind. By so doing, we will be able to maintain our lives "in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim 2:2), thereby bringing glory to God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

BUT GOD WAS WITH HIM

"9c . . . but God was with him." Other versions read, "yet God was with him," NASB and "But God was with Joseph." GWN

At this point, it appeared as though everything was against Joseph. He was powerless to stop his brothers from despising him. He was unable to restrain them from throwing him into a pit. He was helpless to thwart them selling him to a band of Midianite slave-traders. It appeared as though Joseph could have said the same thing his father affirmed: "all these things are against me" (Gen 42:36). According to appearance, he could have cried out in the words of the Psalmist, "Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round" (Psa 22:12). So far as experience in the body was concerned, Joseph could have said with Paul that he was, "pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life" (2 Cor 1:8).

At this point, his real circumstance – the one that had to do with his identity with God, was hidden from view. Scripture apprizes us that Joseph was "seventeen" at this time (Gen 37:2), and already it appears as though his world has fallen apart. He was the favored son of his father, and yet upon being sent on a mission to his brethren, he had fallen on hard times, becoming subject to the venomous hatred of his own brothers. He had been raised among a covenanted people, and now he is in the midst of heathens, and headed for a heathen country. The whole affair would have been greatly compounded if he had been taught some of the doctrines that have been loosed during our time.

However, here is a fact that was not so apparent – nevertheless, it was absolutely true: "God was

with Him.” He was with him when Joseph was hated by his brothers. He was with him when they threw Him into the waterless pit. He was with him when they sold him to the Midianite merchants. And, He was with Him when he entered into Egypt – a foreign land where the people spoke in a language he did not understand (Psa 81:5). God was with Joseph when he was away from his homeland. He was with him in all of His power, thoughtfully monitoring all of his affairs and controlling his circumstances – grievous though they were. True to His nature, the Lord would not allow Joseph to be tested above what he was able to bear, but would always provide a way of escape, that he might be able to bear it (1 Cor 10:13). Sometimes that door would be one out of which he would have to run, knowing that false charges would be leveled against him. Other times, it would be a door of special favor during adverse circumstances. However you choose to view it, “God was with him.”

In the narrative of the historical events - from the time he was thrown into the pit until he was imprisoned in Egypt (Gen 37:4-39:21) – there are a few references to the Lord being with him. All of them are Divine explanations, and none of them are observations made by Joseph – although I do not doubt that he was aware to a significant degree of their reality.

- **IN POTIPHAR’S HOUSE.** “And the LORD was with Joseph , and he was a prosperous man ; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian” (Gen 39:2). Keep in mind that Joseph may very well have still been a teenager. He was seventeen when he came into Egypt, and we have no idea how long he was in Potiphar’s house, or how long it was before Potiphar had him imprisoned.

- **POTIPHAR SAW IT.** “And his master saw that the LORD was with him , and that the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand ” (Gen 39:3).

- **POTIPHAR BLESSED FOR JOSEPH’S SAKE.** “And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake ; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field” (Gen 39:5).

- **IN PRISON.** “But the LORD was with Joseph , and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen 39:21).

None of these texts had to do with a contemporary verbal articulation of the facts. All of them were after-the-fact, and had to do with assessment. They were more of a Divine commentary on the circumstances. Potiphar, for example, knew that Joseph prospered in everything he did, but could not trace it back to Jehovah – the God of the Hebrews. If he could have done this he never would have believed his wife’s allegation against Joseph, or had him incarcerated. It was the same with the prison-keeper. His assessment of Joseph was driven by God giving Joseph favor in his sight – not by insight.

In the case of Joseph, God being “with him” translated into the following:

- His enemies could not fully implement their will against him (his brothers, Potiphar’s wife, and Potiphar himself).

- He was given favor in the eyes of certain key people, when it was sorely needed (Potiphar during the beginning of his stay in Egypt).

- He was given favor in the eyes of the keeper of the prison. This was not traced to any extensive assessment of the prison keeper, but to the fact that God was showing Joseph mercy.

These represent at least the majority of the texts that affirmed Divine accompaniment. Of course, all of them were actually written long after the time of Joseph. At the very best, they were known because those who had the experience spoke of them to their peers. The point to be seen is that the experience of God’s presence was very rare, and the knowledge of such times

were even more unusual.

All of this confirms that Divine consideration cannot always be deduced from circumstance. It is something that becomes cognitive through the peculiar prerogative of faith.

OUR TIME

The present time is far superior to the times during which Joseph lived. He had no Scripture – we do. So far as the Scriptural record of the times prior to Joseph, there had never been an uttered commitment stating that God would be with any individual. In his communication with Noah God said, “with thee will I establish My covenant” (Gen 6:18). God had told Abraham, “Behold, My covenant is with thee” (Gen 17:4). As Esau was growing up, it is written, “And God was with the lad” (Gen 21:20). At one point in Isaac’s life, Abimelech confessed, “We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee” (Gen 26:28). Earlier, Jacob had said of his life, “God, who answered me in the day of my distress, was with me in the way that I went” (Gen 35:3). These represent at least the majority of the texts that affirmed Divine accompaniment. Of course, all of them were actually written long after the time of Joseph. At the very best, they were known because those who had the experience spoke of them to their peers. The point to be seen is that the experience of God’s presence was very rare, and the knowledge of such times were even more unusual.

Now, however, in the day of the open heavens, and access to God, we have certain promises of the presence of the Lord that, in number and nature, have no parallel in antiquity.

- “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him ” (John 14:21).
- “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him ” (John 14:23).
- “ I am with you alway , even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:20).
- “ Abide in Me, and I in you . As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me ” (John 15:4).
- “For I am with thee , and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:10).
- “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9).
- “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you , He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you ” (Rom 8:11).
- “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord ” (1 Cor 1:9).
- “And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth ” (1 Cor 14:25).
- “And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (2 Cor 6:16).
- “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you , except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5).
- “My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you ”

(Gal 4:19).

- “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all ” (Eph 4:6).

- “Being confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

- “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

- “To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you , the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).

- “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee ” (Heb 13:5).

- “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:20-21).

- “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you , than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

The point to be seen is that a much higher level of confidence is expected from those who are in Christ Jesus than all of the godly who went before them. It is said of the most noble of all the ancients, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us , that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:39-40). It is unconscionable for those to whom superior benefits have been vouchsafed to display results vastly inferior to those to whom less was given.

These are things that do need to be spoken to those who are engaged in “the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12). The fierceness of the battle in which we are engaged requires that good soldiers (2 Tim 2:3) be apprised of the presence of their Lord. To deprive them of this witness is to make them vulnerable to the foe, and thus cause them to fight uncertainly. God will not excuse such behavior! Divine commitments are to be declared to each generation.

GOD DELIVERED HIM OUT OF ALL HIS AFFLICTIONS

“ 10a And delivered him out of all his afflictions . . .” Other versions read, “delivered him out of all his troubles ,” NKJV “ rescued him from all his afflictions,” NASB “rescued him from all of his troubles,” NIV “delivered him out of all of his anguish ” LIVING “Joseph had many troubles there, but God rescued him from them all ,” IE “delivered him from all his distressing afflictions ,” AMPLIFIED “ saved him from all his troubles,” PHILLIPS “delivered him out of all his adversities ,” BISHOPS “delivered him out of all his tribulations ,” DARBY and “rescued him from all of his suffering .” GWN

Here the language is very definitive. The King James Version reads precisely correct – “out of.” Some versions read “from,” but this is not exact enough. The words “out of” are translated from the Greek word **evk** (ek). Lexically, the word denotes the area from which the specified action takes place. In this case, Joseph’s “afflictions” were the locus out of which God delivered him. The word “from” could mean God delivered from the circumstance itself, so that Joseph would not have experienced the affliction at all. That God can, and sometimes does, in fact, do this, cannot be denied. But that is certainly not the point Stephen is emphasizing here. Here, the point is that Joseph was in the affliction , and God extracted him from it, so that he was not overcome. In this way, the purpose of God could not be overthrown, but was actually worked out in the midst of adversity. This, of course, accrued to the glory of God, which is the dominant trait in everything that He does.

THE NATURE OF DELIVERANCE

It is the manner of God to deliver out from an adverse condition. Take, for example, the deliverance of the entire natural order that has been scheduled on the Divine calendar. Of the creation Paul writes that it will be “delivered from the bondage of corruption” (Rom 8:21). Already, for at least 6,000 years, creation has been dominated by corruption, and is enslaved to it. Yet, that domination is scheduled to terminate at the word of the Lord, and creation will make a complete exit from corruption and degeneration.

Paul spoke of deliverance as occurring in three dimensions – past, present, and future. “Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us” (2 Cor 1:10). All of this postulates that the circumstances from which deliverance takes place cannot be broken by the wisdom of men, or any form of human initiative. The rescue has to come from God, and it has to come in His own time. Until that deliverance comes, the Lord will so sustain the individual that he will not be overcome by the circumstances, and the foe will not be able to rejoice in triumph.

Deliverance is like this in order that God might receive the glory.

JOSEPH’S DELIVERANCE

The nature of Joseph’s “afflictions” is spelled out in several places.

- **HIS BROTHERS INTENT TO KILL HIM.** “Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams” (Gen 37:20).

- **FILLED WITH ANGUISH.** Prior to being thrown into a pit, Joseph suffered anguish and pled for his brothers not to do this. “We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us” (Gen 42:21).

- **THROWN INTO A PIT.** “And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it” (Gen 37:24).

- **SOLD TO MERCHANTS.** “Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt” (Gen 37:28).

- **A LANGUAGE HE DID NOT UNDERSTAND.** “This he ordained in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out through the land of Egypt: where I heard a language that I understood not” (Psa 81:5).

- **IMPRISONED.** “And Joseph's master took him, and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound: and he was there in the prison” (Gen 39:20).

- **FORGOTTEN.** “Yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him” (Gen 40:23).

- **IN PRISON TWO MORE YEARS.** “And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed: and, behold, he stood by the river” (Gen 41:1).

- **FEET HURT WITH FETTERS.** “He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free” (Psa 105:17-20).

Although all of these circumstances were grievous, the perpetrators never realized their objectives.

God delivered Joseph “out of all his afflictions.” He did not deliver him from the initial experience of the afflictions, but from their dominancy and duration. From the devil’s point of view, the purpose of affliction is to make an end of the afflicted one. From God’s point of view, it is to test and prepare the suffering one, and to bring glory to Himself. Because God is, in fact, “above all,” it is His will that is ultimately realized. All other intentions finally fall to the ground in absolute defeat.

There is a lesson to be learned here concerning Kingdom manners. It at once becomes evident that well being in this world does not equate to the Lord being with the individual. If that was the case, it might be argued that God was with Joseph’s brothers, for they managed to rid themselves of his influence – at least for a season. It might also be supposed that the Lord was with Potiphar’s wife, for she had her will – at least for a season.

Joseph himself, speaking from an illuminated point of view, assessed the difficulties from which he had been delivered. “. . . God did send me before you to preserve life . . . God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth , and to save your lives by a great deliverance . So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God : and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh , and lord of all his house , and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt ” (Gen 45:8). Again he said, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good , to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive ” (Gen 50:20).

Behold what marvelous things God accomplished.

- He sent Joseph into Egypt to preserve life.
- He sent Joseph into Egypt to preserve a posterity in the earth – the lineage though which the Messiah would come.
- He sent Joseph into Egypt to accomplish a great deliverance – when a great host of people would be delivered at the time of the exodus.
- God made Joseph an advising father to Pharaoh.
- God made Joseph the lord over all of Pharaoh’s house.
- God made Joseph a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.
- Through Joseph God saved much people alive.

And how were all of these things accomplished? It was by means of hatred, envy, enslavement, false accusation, imprisonment, and being forgotten. This by no means sanctified the malicious treatment of Joseph. However, it did confirm that the work was wholly wrought by God. It was not the result of human strategizing.

A LESSON TO BE LEARNED

There is a lesson to be learned here concerning Kingdom manners. It at once becomes evident that well being in this world does not equate to the Lord being with the individual. If that was the case, it might be argued that God was with Joseph’s brothers, for they managed to rid themselves of his influence – at least for a season. It might also be supposed that the Lord was with Potiphar’s wife, for she had her will – at least for a season. Of course, all of that is obviously foolish, because we have been given the record of the outcome of the events. However, God has not changed, and His Kingdom still functions in this way. The people of God are still experiencing oppression, and doing so unjustly, Yet, in it all the Lord is working out His purpose, preparing His people to rein with Christ, and publicly showing the ultimate futility of opposing those upon whom the favor of God rests.

Those who equate outward well being with the care of the Lord are not thinking properly. Their thinking has been skewed by covetousness. Sometimes well being and prosperity are nothing more than confirmations that the people have been set in “slippery places” (Psa 73:18), and will soon come

tumbling down.

GOD GAVE JOSEPH FAVOR AND WISDOM IN PHARAOH'S SIGHT

“ 10b . . . and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.”

Stephen is careful to point out that it was God who was at work behind the scenes. He was, in fact, working all things together for His own glory, for the good of Joseph, and the preservation Abraham's seed. However, deliverance is not the only thing that was accomplished. With God, deliverance is not an end of itself, but is a means to a higher end, or purpose.

GAVE HIM FAVOR AND WISDOM

“ . . . and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt . . .” Other versions read, “gave him wisdom and favor in the presence of Pharaoh,” NKJV “gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt,” NIV “gave him wisdom and the approval of Pharaoh , king of Egypt,” BBE “When Joseph stood in the presence of Pharaoh (the king of Egypt), God gave Joseph Divine favor and wisdom,” GWN “ granted him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, the king of Egypt,” NAB “ making him so wise that he won the favor of Pharaoh king of Egypt,” NJB “God gave him favor before Pharaoh, king of Egypt. God also gave Joseph unusual wisdom ,” NLT “Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, liked Joseph and respected him , because of the wisdom which God gave Joseph,” IE “ He allowed him to win favor and show wisdom before Pharaoh,” ISV “gave him grace and wisdom, when he stood before Pharaoh , king of Egypt,” MONTGOMERY “and won him goodwill and favor and wisdom and understanding in the sight of Pharaoh, king of Egypt,” AMPLIFIED “God made him so wise that the Egyptian king Pharaoh thought highly of him ,” CEV and “When Joseph appeared before the king of Egypt, God gave him a pleasing manner and wisdom .” GNB

The idea here is that God determined how Pharaoh thought of Joseph. The relationship between Pharaoh and Joseph was dictated by the Lord Himself. This was because the outcome of that association would save alive a people, preserve a godly posterity, and lead to a great deliverance – all of which would accrue to the long-lasting glory of the God of heaven. In this word from Stephen, a statement will be confirmed that would be made hundreds of years later: i.e. “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). As Nebuchadnezzar can confirm, there is no question about the earth being in ultimate subjection to the heavens. The government of all things is located in the dwelling place of God, not man. The history of Joseph confirms this,

Centuries after the statement in Daniel, another affirmation would be made that is confirmed by Stephen's words: “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). This is a more extensive view of the heavens ruling, and is spoken in view of the removal of sin and the enthronement of the Lord Jesus. The ultimate Source or Cause of all things is declared to be God. He is also the means through which all things are being done. That is, His hand is involved in the affairs of men, thereby ensuring that everything will accrue to His glory. That too is confirmed in Joseph's impressive life.

Whatever people may think of the volitional capacities of man, their thoughts must take into consideration that God can cause one man to be favored by another. He can cause wisdom to so abound in one man, that another man can marvel, and be inclined to submit to that wisdom. It is wholly improper to maintain any view of man that rejects or modifies the clear declaration that the Source, Means, and Objective of all things is God Himself .

It is not possible that Stephen is speaking the truth if these things are not so. I hardly see how there is allowance for a theological millimeter, or for even the slightest departure from this truth.

“Favor”

By “favor,” the text means that Pharaoh was glad to see Joseph, and was very pleased with his presence. He was inclined toward Joseph, and saw no threat of competition in him. There was a wholesome attractiveness in Joseph that was perceived to a measurable extent by Pharaoh. It brought to the king the comfortableness with Joseph that would ordinarily have been developed over a period of time in which the virtues of Joseph would have been established through extended association with him. Although he was brought straight from the prison, Joseph was received without hesitation by Pharaoh, just as though he was the king’s own well beloved son – and all upon the basis of the testimony of another former prisoner. Speaking as a man, this is a most remarkable circumstance. Speaking as one who believes on Christ, knowing that the heavens do rule, it is what we should expect.

This favor was not the result of any solicitation of consideration by Joseph. It was a gift from God. This postulates that the Lord has control over the hearts of men, and can, at will, turn them as the rivers of water (Prov 21:1). Already, the Lord had given Joseph “favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen 39:21). You may recall that, many years later, when Israel would come out of Egyptian bondage, the Lord “gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians” (Ex 11:3; 12:36). Solomon once said, “When a man’s ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov 16:7). I have found this to be an elixir of comfort in circumstances that could prove to be disconcerting.

“Wisdom”

By “wisdom,” the text means Pharaoh was very impressed with Joseph’s understanding – the broad range of his knowledge in various subjects. This particularly included the interpretation of Pharaoh’s dreams (Gen 41:1-7; 15-32), and Joseph’s word on addressing the dilemma that would be created by a prolonged famine that would be preceded by seven years of extraordinary harvest (Gen 41:33-37). It is equally plain that Joseph must have spoken with obvious confidence and without hesitating or flawed speech. His words must have appeared as though they had been well studied and organized, even though they were spoken with apparent immediacy. It appears to me that discernment and aptitude were mingled effectively on an almost instant basis – as Joseph spoke. Jesus indicated that such a thing was the manner of inspiration: “it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak” (Matt 10:19). Thus a grasp of the situation, discernment of the circumstantial details, and a thorough understanding of what to do, were given to Joseph all at once – probably as Pharaoh related his dreams to Joseph.

The interpretation of the dream, then, was a display of immediate wisdom. God gave him the ability to interpret the dream, versus an angel telling him the meaning, as with Daniel (Dan 8:15-27), and Zechariah (Zech 1:9-21; 4:5-14). I gather this means the meaning of the dream became very clear to Joseph, as well as how to respond to it. His directions to Pharaoh flowed from understanding. That is, he actually comprehended what he was saying. We know this is the case, else he could not have been the administrator of the affairs in Egypt.

The Details of Joseph’s Understanding

Pharaoh made known the two dreams that he had.

- First, Pharaoh dreamed that as he stood by the river, seven fine looking and fat cows came up out of the river and fed in a meadow. Then seven ugly and gaunt cows came out of the river and ate up the seven fine looking and fat cows.
- Second, he dreamed that seven heads of grain came up on one stalk, being plump and good. Then seven thin heads, blighted by the east wind sprang up after them. The seven

thin heads devoured the seven plump and full heads.

Speaking as a man, this is what Joseph had to work with. Here is the expression of the wisdom that was given to him.

- The two dreams had one meaning (41:25a).
- The dreams informed Pharaoh of what God was going to do (41:25b).
- The seven good cows and the seven full ears were seven years of plenty, and meant the same thing (41:26).
- The seven thin cows and seven empty ears were seven years of famine (41:27).
- Again, Joseph emphasized that this spoke of “What God was about to do” (41:28).
- Seven years of plenty would come throughout all the land of Egypt (41:29).
- After those plenteous years, seven years of famine would come in which “all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine shall consume the land” (41:30).
- The plenty would not be known in the land by reason of the famine, for it would be very grievous (41:31).
- The dream had been doubled, Joseph said, “because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (Gen 41:32a).
- The dream would “shortly come to pass” (41:32b).
- Joseph told Pharaoh to find a man “discreet and wise, and set him over all the land of Egypt” (41:33).
- Officers were to be appointed over the land, and charged with gathering 20% of the harvest during the seven plenteous years (41:34).
- The food that was gathered was to be laid up in store under Pharaoh and kept in the cities (41:35).
- The food that was stored would be used to sustain the land through the famine (41:36).

Behold the nature of the wisdom that was given to Joseph.

- He defined the source of the dream.
- He interpreted why Pharaoh was given two dreams.
- He identified the dreams had to do with what God was going to do.
- He defined the time in which the commencement of the dreams would take place.
- He defined what to do during the time of plenty.
- He defined how to go about the activities during the years of plenty.
- He defined how to sustain the people during the famine.

It is remarkable to consider the details of the wisdom given to Joseph. His answer concerning Pharaoh’s dreams was a thorough answer, with no part of the dream remaining mysterious. The appropriate reaction to the dream was also specified.

In all of this we see the nature of “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). It is not a mere routine, nor is it a kind of quick-fix. Rather, true wisdom leads a person into harmony with what the Lord is doing, so that even the grievous circumstances do not cause ultimate harm to the wise one.

MADE HIM GOVERNOR OVER EGYPT

“ . . .and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.” Other versions read, “governor over Egypt and all his household,” NASB “ ruler over Egypt and all his palace ,” NIV “ chief administrator over Egypt and over all his household,” CJB “governor over all of Egypt and put him in charge of the palace,” NLT “governor over all Egypt, as well as putting him in charge of all the affairs of the palace,” LIVING “the job of being governor of Egypt. He even allowed Joseph to rule over all the people in Pharaoh's house ,” IE “Governor over Egypt, and over all the royal household ,” MONTGOMERY and “governor of Egypt and put him in charge of his own entire household .” PHILLIPS

The sequence of the times and events that brought Joseph to this point accent Divine preparation.

- His first responsibility at around the age of seventeen – to find his brothers and report to his father as to the well being of them and the flocks they were feeding (Gen 37:13-14).
- At a young age, probably within proximity of his seventeenth year, he was made responsible for the affairs of the household of Potiphar, the captain of the king’s guard (Gen 37:36; 39:1-4) .
- When imprisoned with the king’s prisoners, all of the prisoners were committed into his hand so that whatever they did became the execution of his will (Gen 39:20-23).
- He becomes the governor over all the land of Egypt, with only the Pharaoh himself not being subject to him (Gen 41:40-44; 42:6).

It becomes apparent that in all of his experiences, Joseph was being

That, among many other things, is what makes spiritual Babylon so damning. It robs God of His glory, gives the advantage to the devil, and corrupts the minds of men. Those are ultimate disadvantages!

groomed for the ultimate position to which he was assigned – the governor of Egypt. In fact, Scripture affirms that he was “sent” by God into the land of Egypt to preserve the life of Abraham’s seed (Gen 45:5,7,8; 50:20; Psa 105:17).

A Good Steward

As we might expect, Joseph proved to be a faithful steward, thus confirming that he was, in fact, chosen by God and placed in the positions that he occupied. He was intended to fulfill the work that he accomplished, and was gifted and strengthened to that end.

The extent of Joseph’s faithfulness in this stewardship is most arresting to consider. He handled what was given to him to the glory of God, and never sought to exploit his stewardship for personal advantage. Here are a few of the things he handled so well.

- His father’s love and favor.
- His father’s will, faithfully obeying him in his commissions.
- His brother’s rejection.
- The responsibility of Potiphar’s household and affairs.
- The responsibility to remain morally pure.
- Extraordinary suffering that extended over a considerable period of time.
- Being away from home, and being answerable to no member of his father’s

household.

- The care and commission of the prisoners over whom he was made a steward,
- Opportunities that were vouchsafed to him, such as befriending the baker and the butler and interpreting their dreams.
- The wisdom that was given to him – employing it at the appropriate times, before the proper people, and by giving appropriate directions.
- The handling of special favor, namely that of Potiphar, the prison keeper, and Pharaoh.
- Being prosperous.
- The gathering of provisions at the appointed time.
- The distribution of required resources at the proper time, to the proper people, and in the appropriate manner.

In all of these things, Joseph proved to be a most excellent and detailed type of the Lord Jesus Himself. His exemplary life also confirms that being given a work from God involves infinitely more than an exalted position and personal advantage. It also involves faithfulness, giving the proper glory to

the one making the assignment, maintaining moral and spiritual integrity, and being quick to recognize the appropriate response, and then execute it. All of these varied responsibilities are accentuated and made possible by faith.

However, when religion becomes codified and institutionalized, these things are all blurred, and “sinful flesh” is given the advantage. You might say that it is always wrong to institutionalize what God has personalized. It is equally never appropriate to seek to gain personal advantage from something that has been expressly designed to bring glory to God and sustain His initiatives. Over the years, I have witnessed a near-total obscuring of these things. That, among many other things, is what makes spiritual Babylon so damning. It robs God of His glory, gives the advantage to the devil, and corrupts the minds of men. Those are ultimate disadvantages!

THERE CAME A DEARTH

“ 11 Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.”

Confirming that a word purporting to be from God is of no value if it does not come to pass, a time of famine came, just as Joseph said. He was a true prophet.

THERE CAME A GREAT DEARTH

“Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan . . .” Other versions read, “Now a famine came,” NASB “a famine struck ,” NIV “there came a famine throughout ,” “there was no food to be had ,” BBE “a famine developed ,” LIVING “the whole land of Egypt and the land of Canaan became dry, so that crops couldn’t grow there ” IE and “a famine spread all over .” WILLIAMS

The word “dearth” means “deprivation of food, hunger, the failure of grain harvests, famine,” FRIBERG and “a widespread lack of food over a considerable period of time, resulting in hunger for many people.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Genesis refers to this period as “seven years of dearth” (Gen 41:54). It is also written that it was “in all lands” (Gen 41:56), that “all the land was famished” (Gen 41:55), and that “the famine was

over all the face of the earth ” (Gen 41:56). As the famine extended itself, it “was sore” [severe] “in all the land ” (Gen 43:1). During the famine there was “neither earing nor harvest,” or plowing or harvesting. That is, the fields were not planted, cultivated, or reaped (Gen 45:6). The famine is said to have affected “all counties” (Gen 41:57).

The Psalmist accounts for this very famine: “Moreover HE called for a famine upon the land: HE brake the whole staff of bread” (Psa 105:16). When Joseph prophesied of the famine he told Pharaoh that God was showing him “what HE is about to do” (Gen 41:25,28). This was not a singular incident of such a work from God. In the days of the prophet Elisha God also “called for a famine” – and it was also for “seven years” (2 Kgs 8:1).

Simplistic Theology

It is not good for men to adopt overly simplistic and intellectually inferior views of God. For some, God is seen as never generating harm, affliction, or other such things. Such views are entertained even though a clear record has been given of God sending a world-destroying flood (2 Pet 2:5), and burning up multiple cities that were densely populated (Gen 13:10; Lk 17:29). This is not to mention the Lord plaguing Pharaoh and his house in the days of Abraham (Gen 12:17), making plagues and sicknesses come upon wayward Israel (Deut 28:59; 29:22), sending poisonous snakes among the people (Num 21:6), and sending pestilences upon Israel (1 Chron 21:14).

Those, therefore, who affirm that nothing grievous comes from the Lord, are wholly wrong. They are also intellectually and spiritually dishonest, for the Lord has revealed too much on this matter to warrant any ignorance concerning it. God Himself challenges such sophists: “shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6). Again the Lord declares, “I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity ; I, the LORD, do all these things” NKJV (Isa 45:7). Rather than such things never coming from God, they are never generated independently of Him. Satan cannot will calamity, trouble, and sorrow into existence. As wicked and diabolical as he is, he cannot operate independently of God. Technically speaking, he is not engaged in a struggle with God, for God cannot be challenged, by any created personalities. The very concept of God requires this postulate. When, for example, Satan was expelled from heaven, it was accomplished by angels, though mandated by Deity (Rev 12:7-9). When he is depicted as being thrown into the bottomless pit, or being locked up, it is an angel that does it (Rev 20:1-3).

Distorted views of God are lethal to the soul, for they constrain people to speak and live foolishly – without being conscious of facts of the matter.

AND GREAT AFFLICTION

There really is no such thing as a pleasant and convenient famine, or one in which men do not suffer. This is because a famine – particularly in this case – becomes the context in which the Lord Himself works for His own glory.

“ . . . and great affliction . . . ” Other versions read, “great trouble ,” NKJV “great affliction with it ,” NASB “bring great suffering ,” NIV “and great distress ,” DARBY “There was great misery ,” NLT “great tribulation ,” YLT and “This made people suffer miserably .” IE

There really is no such thing as a pleasant and convenient famine, or one in which men do not suffer. This is because a famine – particularly in this case – becomes the context in which the Lord Himself works for His own glory.

Words describing the affliction experienced during this famine include the following:

- “And when all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for

bread” (Gen 41:55).

- “And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands” (Gen 41:57).

- “Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die ” (Gen 42:1-2).

- “. . . all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth” (Gen 47:15).

- “Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate ” (Gen 47:19).

- “Moreover He called for a famine upon the land: he brake the whole staff of bread” (Psa 105:16).

We are apparently spared many of the details of the suffering attending this famine. From other accounts, we do know that famines can be so grievous that people resort to cannibalism, even eating their own children (Deut 28:53; 2 Kgs 6:28).

When, therefore, the text states, “and great affliction,” we may be sure that this was not an overstatement of the situation, or an exaggeration.

OUR FATHERS FOUND NO SUSTENANCE

“. . . and our fathers found no sustenance.” Other versions read, “our fathers could find no food,” NASB “our fathers were not able to get food,” BBE “our fathers lacked food,” MRD “our ancestors could find nothing to eat,” NJB “our ancestors ran out of food,” NLT their food was gone,” LIVING “our fathers could not find the simplest food,” WILLIAMS and “our forefathers could find no fodder [for the cattle] or vegetable sustenance [for their households].” AMPLIFIED

In this a Kingdom principle is seen. Men will not seek “the true riches” until they see the poverty of what the world has to offer. As long as the world is perceived as a valid resource, Divine benefits will not be sought with any fervency or consistency.

Although “all lands” were impacted by the famine, the Scriptures focus on Egypt and Canaan.

- “And there was no bread in all the land; for the famine was very sore, so that the land of Egypt and all the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine” (Gen 47:13).

- “And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan , for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house” (Gen 47:14)

- “And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan , all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth” (Gen 47:15).

The reason for this focus ought to be plain. These were the two countries in which Abraham’s seed were found at the time. Jacob and sixty-six of his family were in Canaan (Gen 46:26), and Joseph and his sons were in Egypt (Gen 46:27). All other nations, regardless of the grief experienced in them because of the famine, were incidental. The whole world was being governed by God in view of Abraham’s seed. That, of course, is why all things are worked together for the good of those who love God and are the called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). Such purposeful working would not be possible if God was not governing the affairs of men.

The real issue here was the purposed expansion of Abraham's seed. That would require them multiplying in another land until they were of sufficient size to occupy the land of promise. In fact, even when they had grown to a significant size, and entered the promised land, God enabled them to take the land a little at a time, lest it be overrun with wild beasts because of the relative fewness of Israel. Therefore, before they entered into the land, Moses told them, "And the LORD thy God will put out those nations before thee by little and little: thou mayest not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase upon thee" (Deut 7:22). Seven of the nations that were occupying the land were larger than Israel (Deut 7:1). Yet, Israel was to drive them out and occupy their place. They would therefore have to grow in number to fully occupy the land. These conditions are precisely why all of the things mentioned in our text took place – the selling of Joseph into Egypt, his exaltation, and the famine. It was a set of Divinely orchestrated circumstances to get the fledgling band of Israelites – seventy in number from the standpoint of Joseph, and seventy-five from the viewpoint of the division of the land – where they would multiply until there were sufficient Israelites to manage the land of promise.

THE FOOD RAN OUT

During the famine, all of the food resources ran out – in both Egypt and Canaan. They ran out in Egypt in order to prepare the way for the exaltation of Joseph, who would give preference to the Hebrews. They ran out in Canaan in order that they might eventually migrate into Egypt where their appointed multiplication would take place.

Even though the people in both Egypt and Canaan still had some money with which they could buy grain, the money of those in Canaan meant nothing in their own land, for money cannot create resources. Now, they must use their money to buy corn, even until their money runs out. The money of the Egyptians ran out in order that they might become Pharaoh's servants, and thus be congenial toward Israel while they were multiplying. The money ran out in for the Israelites in order that they might be sustained in Egypt by Joseph while they were multiplying.

Here we note that purchasing corn in Egypt never entered the minds of Abraham's seed UNTIL all of their corn was consumed. In this a Kingdom principle is seen. Men will not seek "the true riches" until they see the poverty of what the world has to offer. As long as the world is perceived as a valid resource, Divine benefits will not be sought with any fervency or consistency.

JACOB HEARD THERE WAS CORN IN EGYPT

" 12 But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first."

Here we will see how the Lord gives supplies to His people. He brings them within their reach, or makes them aware of the supplies. Then, they must gather them in. This is how the Lord provides for the animal kingdom. Thus the Psalmist wrote, "So is this great and wide sea, wherein are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts . There go the ships: there is that leviathan, whom thou hast made to play therein. These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good" (Psa 104:25-28). Thus from the small to the great of the animal kingdom, all are dependent upon the Lord for their sustenance, and they wait for His provisions. God faithfully delivers the supplies, but they must gather them, and often with considerable effort.

This principle was lived out as Israel journeyed through the wilderness. They were wholly dependent upon the Lord for their sustenance, and He delivered it to them every day in the form of manna. However, they had to go out and gather it, bringing it into their home where it could be prepared (Ex 16:15-18).

The parallel in spiritual life is obvious. Divine provisions for the heart, and soul, and mind are

provided. But they must be gathered with deliberation and intention. The person who does not extend himself to appropriate what God has provided will eventually succumb.

WHEN JACOB HEARD

“But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt . . .” Other versions read, “heard that there was grain in Egypt,” NKJV “hearing that there was grain in Egypt,” BBE “having heard of there being corn in Egypt,” DARBY “heard that Egypt had food,” GWN “heard that there were supplies in Egypt,” NJB “heard that there was still grain in Egypt,” LIVING “heard that there was wheat in Egypt,” IE and “heard that there was wheat to be had.” WEYMOUTH

Jacob was alert. Although there was a grievous famine all around him, and supplies were dwindling, he did not despair. He was listening for some good word, and finally he heard it: “there was corn in Egypt.” The text does not mean that he merely heard the Egyptians had food, but that there was food in Egypt that he could appropriate for his family – there was available food.

In this a Kingdom principle is seen. Men will not seek “the true riches” until they see the poverty of what the world has to offer. As long as the world is perceived as a valid resource, Divine benefits will not be sought with any fervency or consistency.

The historical account to which Stephen refers is found in Genesis. “Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die ” (Gen 42:1-2).

We see in this how faith keeps hope alive, so that the heart remains alert and able to detect any door opened by the Sovereign God. It is one thing for the body to grow faint, but it is quite another thing for the human spirit to do so. Thus Solomon wrote, “The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity; but a wounded spirit who can bear?” (Prov 18:14). Faith gives the individual the advantage during such occasions, so that a word of hope can be heard and appropriate action taken.

God’s Way Not Man’s Way

God’s ways and thoughts are not like those of mere men. Thus God said to wayward Israel, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD” (Isa 55:8). When considering the natural man, so far as the heavens are concerned, “The way of man is froward and strange” (Prov 21:8). Further, Jeremiah well said, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23).

All of this is confirmed in the text before us. The manner in which God provided for Jacob and his family does not conform to man’s way of doing things. This is not how worldly wisdom would have done it. Mere men would have had the corn in Canaan – perhaps caused a bumper crop there, so corn could have been stored there as it was in Egypt. However, heaven’s purpose was not merely to sustain the people, but to prepare them for their inheritance. That is still the revealed heavenly agenda.

Hearing Before the Need Arises

In this a Kingdom principle is seen. Men will not seek “the true riches” until they see the poverty of what the world has to offer. As long as the world is perceived as a valid resource, Divine benefits will not be sought with any fervency or consistency.

The Individual Is Not The Main Thing

We can also see in this record that God did not cater to the individual needs. He rather harmonized His works with His purpose. Because of this, those who were involved in that purpose received the

primary advantage.

The Supply Was Located Elsewhere

It also ought to be noted that the supply of food was positioned away from where Jacob and his progeny found themselves. The food was in Egypt, and they were in Canaan.

My Own Experience

I have seen some of these principles played out in my own experience. I had identified myself with a people whose vision and scope of spiritual understanding was very limited. My early ministry was among a people who spoke more about the great commission than about Jesus. The autonomy of the local congregation and the authority of the elders ranked higher than the gift of the Holy Spirit and everlasting consolation and good hope. Our literature rarely contained any information about an eternal inheritance, being conformed to the image of God's Son, or the nature of the New Covenant. A virtual theological desert was created in which the nourishing fruit of justification, sanctification, a living hope, and a robust faith were rarely, if ever, pointed out. There were vast segments of Scripture that were regularly neglected. Such things as God's eternal purpose, election, and His government over all were not the subjects of exposition. Every serious believer within this group was aware of the inward struggle of the flesh and Spirit, but I knew of no one who talked about it or understood it. Few people had any idea concerning the purging of the conscience, the strengthening of the inner man, or Christ dwelling in our hearts by faith. These were simply not things that were subjects of preaching or exposition. Such things as Divine guidance, enablement, and sustenance were also neglected.

There was very little for the heart. Few things were said that could be pondered. As a result, things became rather monotonous. I was slowly starving to death, but did not recognize the symptoms of it. All of this was happening while I was ranked among the more zealous and informed of the group.

In the midst these experiences, I heard that there was, so to speak, corn in the Egypt of my religious world. There were certain religious persuasions that we had been told to avoid, for they were denominational in nature, and could very well overthrow our faith. And, indeed, much of this was true. However, it was not the whole truth. Devoting myself to the reading of spiritual men of the past, I found things that were nourishing to my soul. My faith was strengthened when I read expositions of God's absolute control over the affairs of men. My heart leaped for joy when I was made aware of the cleansing of the conscience, freedom from condemnation even though I was experiencing inward struggle, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the subduing of the flesh. When I saw that the work of the Lord is driven by the will of the Lord, and that the Lord finished what He started, hope was awakened, and comfort came to stay.

I had found corn in Egypt – in the very place I had avoided. Oh, I knew I could not stay in Egypt – just as surely as Jacob and his family could not remain there. But God had arranged for a food supply for His people that transcended their circumstances. I know it was exceedingly difficult to survive the assaults of the devil while limiting my spiritual diet to the great commission, the plan of salvation, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and church government. That was surely corn, but it was not the whole supply. So, when I heard of more food, I did like Jacob, and determined to obtain some of it. I had the same reasons Jacob had – “that we may live and not die.”

Like Jacob, I was not limited to Egypt. My life would not be continually sustained by that means. I planted some of the corn I obtained, and eventually received a crop of my own. The seed I had received in the institution did not grow plenteous or nourishing crops. How I thank God that He got the word through to me that there was more food than what existed in my religious homeland!

HE SENT OUR FATHERS FIRST

“ . . . he sent out our fathers first.” Other versions read, “he sent out fathers there the first time,” NASB “he sent our fathers on their first visit,” NIV “he sent our ancestors there on their first visit,” NRSV “so he sent his sons – our ancestors– to buy some ,” NLT “So he sent our ancestors there. (This was their first trip to Egypt,” IE “he sent our forefathers into Egypt; that was the first time,” WEYMOUTH “sent our forefathers on their first visit down there,” WILLIAMS “he sent forth our forefathers [to go there on their] first trip ,” AMPLIFIED and “Egypt he sent our forefathers out of their own country for the first time .” PHILLIPS

By saying Jacob sent the fathers [his sons], “first,” the text means he sent them for the first time . It does not mean he sent them first, planning to go there later himself. In fact, he had no plans of moving there, or even going there. His sole purpose was to obtain food so they would not die. However, God was at work in all of this, fulfilling the dreams that had been given to Joseph when he was seventeen (Gen 37:5-10), providing for the small but elect nation of Israel (Gen 45:5), and orchestrating history so that a great body of people would be delivered by His high hand from Egypt (Gen 45:7). Of course, none of these things would be known if they had not been revealed by the Lord. Providence cannot be detected, analyzed, or diagnosed by human wisdom or logic.

The account of this first trip is recorded in Genesis 42:3-38. It proved to be a very eventful journey, as we might expect. The following events took place at that time.

- Ten brothers went down to Egypt, leaving Benjamin, the youngest brother, at home (Gen 42:3-4).
- When the brothers came to buy corn in Egypt, Joseph was the governor over the land, although they did not know it. Fulfilling the dreams of Joseph, they bowed down before him (Gen 42:6).
- Upon seeing them, Joseph recognized them, but concealed his identity from them, and spoke harshly to them, asking why they had come. The brothers did not recognize him (Gen 42:7-8).

In this, we see something of the Divine manner of reviewing history. Purposes and objectives are expounded, and are not mere human experience. If the purpose of God was not being revealed in this entire scenario, it would not have been mentioned.

Joseph, now about twenty-two years later, recalled the dreams he had. Testing them, he then charged them with being spies. When they remonstrated, saying that they had come to buy corn, and were all one man’s sons, he again charged them with being spies, saying they had come to see if the land was unprotected (Gen 42:9-14).

- Joseph then told them the only way they could preserve their lives was to bring their younger brother, Benjamin, back to Egypt. He then put them together in prison to think about all of this (Gen 42:15-17).

The Egyptian steward replied, “Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them.” He then brought them into Joseph’s house, gave them water, washed their feet, and fed their animals

On the third day, Joseph came to them and confessed he feared God. Yet, if they did not bring their younger brother to him, they would all die (Gen 42:18-20).

- The brothers then discussed among themselves how that this had come upon them because of their treatment of Joseph when they sold him. They saw the anguish of his soul, and heard him plead with them, yet they hardened their hearts against him. Reuben then reminded them that at that time he had told them not to sin against Joseph, yet they would not listen to him. At this time, they did not recognize Joseph, and were unaware that he was

understanding everything they said. Previously, he had spoken to them through an interpreter (Gen 42:21-23).

- Joseph turned away from them and wept. He then returned to them and took Simeon and bound him before their eyes, setting him forth as a hostage until they returned with Benjamin (Gen 42:24).

- Joseph then commanded his servants to fill their sacks with corn, to restore to every man the money paid for the corn, and to give them extra provisions for the trip home. The remaining brothers then returned home (Gen 42:25-26).

- When they stopped along the way home, one of them opened his sack to give his donkey some food. When he did so, he saw his money in the mouth of the sack. When he told his brothers, they all were afraid and said, “What is this that God hath done unto us?” (Gen 42:27-28).

- When they arrived home, they told their father Jacob everything that had happened to them, and how the ruler had charged them with being spies, and told them to return the next time with their younger brother. They then emptied their sacks, and discovered that “every man’s bundle of money was in his sack.” They were all afraid (Gen 42:29-35).

- Jacob then erupted in a lament: “Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me .” Reuben stepped forward and said Jacob could kill his two sons if he did not bring back Benjamin. Jacob said he would not consent to the matter for fear that Benjamin would be harmed along the way (Gen 42:36).

Stephen’s Summation

Stephen summarized all of those things with the words, “But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first” (Acts 7:12) – sixteen words! In this, we see something of the Divine manner of reviewing history. Purposes and objectives are expounded, and are not mere human experience. If the purpose of God was not being revealed in this entire scenario, it would not have been mentioned.

In other words, if God cannot be seen in a thing, there really is no purpose for talking about it. Such talk is like men expecting to fly by flapping their arms. If men can see this, it will revolutionize the giving of personal testimonies and reports of religious activity.

THE SECOND TRIP TO EGYPT

“ 13a And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren . . .” Other versions read, “On the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers,” NASB “On their second visit Joseph told his brothers who he was,” NIV “And the second time his brothers had a meeting with Joseph,” BBE “The second time, Yosef revealed his identity to his brothers,” CJB “The second time, Joseph was revealed to his brothers,” CSB “And at the second time, Joseph was known by his brethren,” DARBY “And at the second time , Joseph was known by his brethren,” DOUAY and “Then they went there a second time. On this visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was .” IE

As Stephen continues, he is very precise, revealing that he had a firm grasp of the facts in the case. We learn from this that it is essential that when we speak about Scriptural records we should have our facts straight. Truth is never carried in bags that are filled with the holes of ignorance.

The record of this “second” visit is found in Genesis 43:1-45:18. The following took place at that time.

- As the famine increased, Jacob finally consumed all of the corn they had purchased

in Egypt. He then told his sons to return to Egypt and “buy us a little food” (Gen 43:1-2).

- Judah then reminded Jacob that the ruler of the land of Egypt had told them to return with their younger brother. He then said if Jacob sent Benjamin with them, they would go. But if he refused to send him, they would not go. After some extended reasoning, Judah told Jacob to send Benjamin with them, and he would be surety for him. He also said they should hurry and obtain supplies so they and their little ones could live (Gen 43:3-10).

- Jacob consents to the arrangement, saying, “If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds: and take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: and God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved” (Gen 43:11-14).

A spiritual environment in which advancement in the faith is not likely is one in which spiritual resources continue to be diminished until at last a spiritual famine takes place, and no food can be found.

When the brothers arrived in Egypt and stood before Joseph, he saw Benjamin with them. He commanded the ruler of his house to bring the men to his own house, and prepare a special meal for them all. The man did so, bringing the brothers to Joseph’s house (Gen 43:15-17).

- When they all arrived, the men were all afraid, reasoning that they were being brought there because of the money that was in their sacks. They reasoned that the ruler was going to make slaves of them. They then approached the steward of Joseph’s house, speaking with him at the door. They told him they had discovered their money in their sacks on the first trip, and had brought it back, together with additional money for more food. The Egyptian steward replied, “Peace be to you, fear not: your God, and the God of your father, hath given you treasure in your sacks: I had your money. And he brought Simeon out unto them.” He then brought them into Joseph’s house, gave them water, washed their feet, and fed their animals (Gen 43:23-24).

- The brothers then prepared the gifts they had brought for presentation to Joseph, “for they heard that they should eat bread there.” When Joseph came home, they brought their gifts to him and “bowed themselves to him to the earth.” Joseph then asked them concerning their welfare inquiring if their father was still alive. The brothers replied that he was still alive and in good health, and then bowed down their heads and prostrated themselves before Joseph (Gen 43:26).

- Joseph then saw his younger brother Benjamin and said to him, “God be gracious unto thee, my son.” No longer able to contain himself, Joseph sought a place where he could weep privately. After entering his chamber and weeping, he washed his face and went out to his brothers, controlling his emotions. He then commanded them to put the food on the table. Joseph ate by himself, and his brothers ate by themselves. As well, the Egyptians ate by themselves because it was considered an abomination for the Egyptians to eat “with the Hebrews” (Gen 43:27-32)

- The brothers all sat in order, the firstborn being first, and the younger being last, with the men all looking at one another in astonishment. Special portions of food were then sent to the brothers, with Benjamin receiving five times more than anyone else. So they feasted and drank freely with Joseph (Gen 43:33-34).

- Joseph then commanded the steward of the house to fill the men’s sacks with food, “as much as the could carry,” putting “every man’s money in his sack’s mouth.” Additionally, Joseph told the steward to put his own “silver cup in the sack’s mouth of the

youngest,” together with his “corn money.” The men were then sent away early the next morning, as soon as it was light (Gen 44:1-3).

- As soon as the men had left, Joseph called his steward and told him to follow the men. When he caught up with them, he was to say to them, “Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good? Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing” (Gen 44:5). The steward caught up with the brothers, did as he was told, and found the cup in Benjamin’s sack. The brothers tore their clothes in grief, got on their donkeys, and returned to the city (Gen 44:4-12).

- Upon return to Joseph’s house, they found him there and fell down before him. Joseph asked, “What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?” Judah quickly responded, asking Joseph what they could do to clear themselves. Then he confessed, “God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants; behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we and he also with whom the cup is found.” (Gen 44:15). Joseph said he could not receive them all as servants, declaring that only the one who had the cup – Benjamin – would be his servant. (Gen 44:16-17).

- Judah then came close and told Joseph of how their father was an old man, and Benjamin was the child of his old age, was the last child of his mother, and that his father loved him dearly. If the lad left his father, Judah said, the father would die. He then told of Jacob’s consent to let Benjamin go, asking that he be sent back to his father, and Judah become servant to Joseph (Gen 44:18-34). He pled earnestly and effectively.

- It was at this point that Joseph could no longer restrain himself. He said everyone was to be removed from the room except he and his brothers. It was then that he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard him. He then told his brothers, “I am Joseph, doth my father yet live?” His brothers could not answer him, for they were afraid. Joseph then asked them to come close, and he said, “I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt . Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life . . . And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance . So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt ” (Gen 45:4-8).

Stephen summed up all of those remarkable details with these words: “And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren . . .” – twelve words! Joseph “was made known” in such a manner as to remind the brothers of what they had done. The revelation also glorified God because Joseph knew what had actually happened. This was all the Lord’s doing, and it was marvelous in Joseph’s eyes.

He rather used a young man who would maintain his integrity in the foreign land, and give God the glory for what was done. This is how God chose to sustain His people – not by giving them everything, but by taking it from them, in order that He might sustain them.

It also ought to be noted that God used Joseph, not Reuben the firstborn. He did not use Judah, although he had more wisdom than most of the others. He rather used a young man who would maintain his integrity in the foreign land, and give God the glory for what was done. This is how God chose to sustain His people – not by giving them everything, but by taking it from them, in order that He might sustain them.

A PRINCIPLE REVEALED

There is a Kingdom principle revealed in this text. It might be called “the principle of the second time.” Joseph was made known to his brethren “the second time” – the second time they were exposed to him. This principle was enunciated by the Psalmist: “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard

this; that power belongeth unto God” (Psa 62:11). The second time is the truth of the saying he had heard registering upon his spirit.

- Referring to this principle Peter wrote, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts ” (2 Pet 1:19). The dawning of the day and the rising of the Day Star in the heart is “the second time” in spiritual experience. It is the time when the magnitude of the Gospel dawns upon the soul, and confidence grows into maturity.

- This might also be viewed as the time when one becomes conscious of “the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10),

- This is also when the Spirit is said to bear witness with our Spirit “that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16).

- From yet another perspective, this is the time when the “eyes of our understanding” are enlightened to “know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph 1:18-19).

- It is when we are enabled to “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19).

- This is also described as being “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:9-11).

One of the great penalties for not growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18), is that “the second time” never occurs. Confidence never blooms in the heart, which makes retrogression inevitable. The necessity of the confidence that comes with spiritual maturity is confirmed by a most arresting word that is delivered in the book of Hebrews. “But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end ” (Heb 3:6).

It is possible for a person to never be hungry and thirsty enough for the day to dawn. Such people expend all of their

It is possible for a person to never be hungry and thirsty enough for the day to dawn. Such people expend all of their energies on things that bring no spiritual advantage. When “the evil day” comes, and the devil assaults them with all manner of temptation, they simply collapse, because they have no spiritual power.

energies on things that bring no spiritual advantage. When “the evil day” comes, and the devil assaults them with all manner of temptation, they simply collapse, because they have no spiritual power. They have not been able to put on the whole armor of God, because they have lived without realizing there is such a provision. Such a state is like Jacob living in a famine without knowing there was corn in Egypt. A spiritual environment in which advancement in the faith is not likely is one in which spiritual resources continue to be diminished until at last a spiritual famine takes place, and no food can be found. That would be like Jacob depleting his supply of corn, and never finding out there was a supply in Egypt that could be obtained. The frequency of such a spiritual condition is mind-boggling.

JOSEPH’S KINDRED WERE MADE KNOWN TO PHARAOH

“ 13b . . . and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.” Other versions read, “ Joseph's family became known to the Pharaoh,” NKJV “Joseph's family was disclosed to Pharaoh,” NASB “ Pharaoh learned about Joseph's family,” NIV “ Joseph's race became manifest to Pharaoh,” ASV “ Pharaoh had knowledge of Joseph's family,” BBE “Pharaoh came to know his origin ,” NJB “and they [his brothers] were introduced to Pharaoh,” NLT “Pharaoh was informed of Joseph's parentage ,” WEYMOUTH “thus Joseph's race was revealed to Pharaoh ,” WILLIAMS “the family of Joseph became known to Pharaoh and his origin and race ,” AMPLIFIED and “and his ancestry became plain to Pharaoh.” PHILLIPS

In order for the Israelites to be sustained in Egypt, where their appointed multiplication would take place, it was necessary that Pharaoh be favorably inclined to them. The account of Pharaoh's introduction to Joseph's brethren is recorded in Genesis.

• “And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh's house, saying, Joseph's brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well , and his servants. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph , Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan; and take your father and your households, and come unto me : and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat the fat of the land . Now thou art commanded, this do ye; take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours ” (Gen 45:16-20).

In this case, the key association was being made with Joseph, not Abraham. Ordinarily, that was not the manner in which Jacob's progeny were considered. However, at this time, a man who was respected by Pharaoh was required. According to God's purpose, he sent Joseph into Egypt to be the one Pharaoh would favor. The purpose for this was not to establish a career for Joseph, but to provide for the sustenance of the race through whom the Messiah would come.

We are catching a glimpse of the Divine manner here, and how God brings glory to himself. Self-centered men see God as supplying everything they want, making life comfortable for them , and fulfilling all of their desires. In this case, the comfort of Joseph was not the point. Rather, the maintenance of the chosen race under impossible circumstances was the point. God would raise up a nation among a people who considered them an abomination – so much so, they would not even eat with them (Gen 43:32; 46:34).

This people would bring their flocks into Egypt, and they would be given the very best of the land – during a time of famine. The sophist would prefer that a blessing be poured out upon Canaan, and it become the best of the world. However, that did not happen until the people of God were occupying the land.

It is important to note that there is such a thing as associations that are blessed by God in order to the maintenance of His people. It is the principle of the earth helping the woman, that is declared in Revelation 12:16.

ANOTHER PRINCIPLE

In this text we see another precious principle – namely that of Jesus bringing us to the Father in order that we might obtain favor in his sight. Believers are to Jesus what Joseph's brethren were to him. They are brought to God for acceptance (1 Pet 3:18), like Joseph brought his brothers to Pharaoh for his acceptance. Because of Jesus, they receive the best of the spiritual land, like Joseph's brethren were given the best of the land of Egypt. They are also sustained by Him, and brought into the favor of God by Him.

JOSEPH CALLED FOR HIS FATHER AND ALL HIS KINDRED

“ 14 Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.” Other versions read, “Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people,” NKJV “And Joseph sent word and invited Jacob his father and all his relatives to come to him, seventy-five persons in all,” NASB “After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all,” NIV “Then Joseph sent for Jacob his father and all his family, seventy-five persons,” BBE “and Joseph having sent, did call for his father Jacob, and all his kindred -- with seventy and five souls,” YLT “Then Joseph sent for his father Jacob and all his brothers' families to come to Egypt, seventy-five persons in all,” LIVING “Then Joseph sent some men to invite Jacob, his father, to come to Egypt. He also invited all of his relatives (75 persons altogether),” IE “Then Joseph sent and invited his father Jacob and all his family, numbering seventy-five persons, to come to him,” WEYMOUTH “and Joseph sent an invitation calling to himself Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all,” AMPLIFIED and “Then Joseph sent and invited to come and live with him his father and all his kinsmen, seventy-five people in all.” PHILLIPS

The account of Joseph sending for his father and all his kindred is found Genesis 45:9-13. “Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not: and thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children's children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast: and there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty. And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you. And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither.”

At this point, Joseph speaks with the utmost confidence, even though the land of Goshen had not yet been assigned to Israel. It will not be until Jacob and his kindred arrive that the official assignment of the land will be made. However, as stated in Genesis 45:17-20, Pharaoh himself issued a personal invitation to the Israelites, underwriting the entire trip from Canaan to Egypt.

SEVENTY-FIVE SOULS

Stephen states that seventy-five souls came into Egypt. This appears to be a discrepancy to the sophist, for elsewhere the Scriptures clearly say there were seventy souls.

- “And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten ” (Gen 46:27).
- “And all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob were seventy souls : for Joseph was in Egypt already” (Ex 1:5).
- “ Thy fathers went down into Egypt with threescore and ten persons ; and now the LORD thy God hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude” (Deut 10:22).

Stephen is quoting from the Septuagint version (Gen 46:27 and Exodus 1:5), which reads “seventy-five” instead of “seventy.” The Septuagint Version is the Hebrew Scriptures translated into Greek. “And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in the land of Egypt, were nine souls; all the souls of the house of Jacob who came with Joseph into Egypt, were seventy-five souls ” (Gen 46:27, LXX, SEPTUAGINT). “But Joseph was in Egypt. And all the souls born of Jacob were seventy-five ” (Ex 1:5, LXX SEPTUAGINT). However, in the Septuagint version, the Deuteronomy text does read ”seventy.” “With seventy souls your fathers went down into Egypt; but the Lord thy God has made thee as the stars of heaven in multitude” (Deut 10:22, LXX SEPTUAGINT). How do we account for this difference – or is it even important that we do account for it?

There is a precise reason for the difference, and, from the perspective of Scripture, there is no contradiction in the differing numbers. Stephen is quoting a figure that reflects the number of people for whom the distribution of Canaan was determined. While it is a technical point, it is

helpful to know the reasoning reflected in the Septuagint. The number “seventy” reflects the genealogy with Joseph in mind. The number “seventy-five” reflects it from the standpoint of Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

The “names” of the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh are recorded in 1Chronicles 7:14-21. Their names were Ashriel, Machir, Zelophehad, Peresh, sons of Manasseh; and Shuthelah, son of Ephraim. In the First Chronicles text, the inheritance was reckoned upon the basis of Joseph’s inheritance being doubled, and divided between the sons born to him in Egypt – Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus, when coming to Joseph, the inheritance was reckoned from the sons begotten by his sons, rather than the ones begotten by Jacob. The extensive genealogy of this section (2 Chron 2:1-12:15) explains who inherited the land of Canaan. When recounting the offspring of Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, a special explanation was given. “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel : and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph’s)” (1 Chron 5:1-2). The genealogy, reckoned by the strongest, commenced with Judah (1 Chron 2:3). Joseph is not mentioned as the progenitor of sons, but his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are listed instead (7:14-21). Their sons totaled five, and are added to the seventy, accounting for Stephen’s record of the people entering into the land of Canaan. All of them dwelt in Egypt, but none of them came out of it.

Because Stephen is emphasizing the land of Israel itself, he mentions the Septuagint which gives a number reflecting the inheritance of the land rather than the direct offspring of Jacob. While this is not a point that merits contention and extended debate, it is important to see that sound reasoning is behind it all. Skeptics are never right in questioning the integrity of Scripture, or causing men to doubt its accuracy. We owe such men absolutely no respect.

JACOB AND OUR FATHERS WENT DOWN INTO EGYPT AND DIED

“ 15 So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers.” Other versions read, “And Jacob went down to Egypt and there passed away , he and our fathers,” NASB “Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our fathers died ,” NIV “so Jacob went down to Egypt. He himself died there as well as our ancestors ,” NRSV “And Jacob went down to Egypt, and came to his end there , and so did our fathers,” BBE “Jacob went down to Egypt. He and our forefathers died there,” CSB “So Jacob came to Egypt, where he died, and all his sons ,” LIVING “And Jacob went down into Egypt, where he himself died, as did [also] our forefathers ,” AMPLIFIED and “So Jacob came down to Egypt and both he and our fathers ended their days there .” PHILLIPS

It was a glad day for Jacob, to know his son was alive and calling for him. He was skeptical at first, doubtful that he had really been told the truth. However, when he heard the report of Joseph’s words and saw the evidence of blessing, his heart was refreshed.

The Scriptures record Jacob and his clan going down into Egypt, taking advantage of the wagons that Pharaoh sent for their transport. “And Jacob rose up from Beersheba: and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him ” (Gen 46:5). However, before Jacob went down into Egypt, God spoke to him in visions of the night. The record of the visitation is in Genesis 46:2-4, and is a wonderful report of Divine commitment. “And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob . And he said, Here am I. And He said, I am God , the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation : I will go down with thee into Egypt ; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes ” (Gen 46:2-4).

It was a glad day for Jacob, to know his son was alive and calling for him. He was skeptical at first, doubtful that he had really been told the truth. However, when he heard the report of Joseph’s words

and saw the evidence of blessing, his heart was refreshed. Here is how the Scriptures state the case. “And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him , the spirit of Jacob their father revived” (Gen 45:27).

Once they arrived in Egypt, Joseph prompted them on what to say when Pharaoh asked about their occupation. He had already promised them the land of Goshen, now he would take measures to ensure that is where they would live. “And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father's house, I will go up, and show Pharaoh , and say unto him, My brethren, and my father's house, which were in the land of Canaan, are come unto me; and the men are shepherds, for their trade hath been to feed cattle; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have. And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? That ye shall say, Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers: that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen ; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians” (Gen 46:31-34).

Having duly instructed his father and brethren, Joseph now told Pharaoh of their presence, and prepared to carry out the plan he had outlined. “Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh , and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen. And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh . And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers. They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen . And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell : and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle . And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh . And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou? And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. And Jacob blessed Pharaoh , and went out from before Pharaoh. And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land , in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded ” (Gen 47:1-11).

How marvelously it all concluded, for the hand of the Lord was with them, causing Pharaoh's heart to be turned toward them, and inclining him to give His people the very best of the land of Egypt. Even though God had promised Abraham, then Isaac, then Jacob, that they would inherit the land of Canaan, none of them ever did. They all sojourned in the land of promise as though it was a strange land. It is written that they dwelt in tabernacles, though they were heirs of the land (Heb 11:9). It was their progeny who would actually possess the land, and they would do so because of the promise of God to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their belief of that promise.

All of the people who came down into Egypt from Canaan died there. None of them ever returned to Canaan to dwell. Jacob died when he was 147 years old, having spent seventeen years in Egypt (Gen 47:26). Joseph commanded his physicians to embalm the body of Jacob, a process that required forty days (Gen 50:3). The Egyptians “mourned for him” seventy-five days (Gen 50:3). All of the “fathers” – his sons – died there also – outside of the promised land, without receiving any of it for their own.

THEY WERE BURIED IN THE PLOT OF LAND ABRAHAM PURCHASED

“ 16 And were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum

of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.”

Neither the bodies of Jacob nor his sons were left in Egypt. Joseph was buried there, but his bones were dug up and carried out with Israel when they left Egypt to go to Canaan. This was done according to his own commandment, as he held on to the promise of God (Gen 50:24-25). He was 110 years old when he died (Gen 50:26), having spent 93 years in Egypt (from 17 to 110). An exceedingly long time away from home!

AND WERE CARRIED OVER INTO SYCHEM

“And were carried over into Sychem . . .” Other versions read, “And they were carried back to Shechem,” NKJV “And from there they were removed to Shechem,” NASB “Their bodies were brought back to Shechem,” NIV “and they were carried over unto Shechem,” ASV “and their bones were later moved to Shechem,” NIB “All of them were taken to Shechem,” LIVING and “And their 25bodies [Jacob’s and Joseph’s] were taken back to Shechem.” AMPLIFIED

We have some details about the burial of Jacob, and it is representative of all of the fathers of the Israelites. After the days of mourning for Jacob were completed, Joseph went to Pharaoh and told him Jacob had left a commandment that he be buried in the land of Canaan in a grave he himself had dug. He asked for permission to bury him, and then return again to Egypt. Pharaoh consented to this, telling Joseph, “Go up and bury thy father as he made thee swear” (Gen 50:4-6).. Once again, we see the Lord turning the king’s heart.

When he went to bury his father, the Scriptures record that “with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father's house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company ” (Gen 50:7-9).

AND LAID IN THE SEPULCHER THAT ABRAHAM BOUGHT

“ . . . and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.” Other versions read, “and laid in the tomb that Abraham bought for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem,” NKJV “and laid in the tomb which Abraham had purchased for a sum of money from the sons of Hamor in Shechem,” NASB “and laid in the tomb that Abraham had bought for a sum of silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem,” NRSV “and put to rest in the place which Abraham got for a price in silver from the sons of Hamor in Shechem,” BBE “for burial in the tomb that Abraham purchased in Shechem from Hamor's sons,” GWN and “They were placed in a grave there. (It was the same grave in Shechem that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor . He paid them with silver).” IE

After arriving in Canaan, the multitude came to “the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan.” There they mourned for Jacob for seven more days “with a great and a very sore lamentation.” The mourning was so profound that when the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land, heard it, they said, “This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abelmizraim, which is beyond Jordan” (Gen 50:11).

From that point, Jacob’s sons “carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre” (Gen 50:13). The record of the purchase of the land is in Genesis 23:16-20. It was procured originally for the burial of Sarah (Gen 24:19) – the only part of Canaan that he owned, and he had to buy it. Abraham was buried there later (Gen 25:9-10). It is assumed that Isaac was also buried there, for he spent his final days in Mamre, which was close at hand (Gen 25:9). Now, Jacob’s sons bury him there as well.

Thus the lives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ended in the prospect of inhabiting the promised land. Egypt was not their home, and that is why they insisted on their bodies not remaining there. They lived and died with the promised land in view, thereby providing us an example of the posture that is to be maintained by all who have faith. Faith roots us in another land – another world – for which we groan as long as we are remain in this vile body.

CONCLUSION

This masterful presentation of the past is intended to confirm Stephen was not guilty of the charges brought against him. No man could speak with such heart who hated the Israelites, or was intent upon disrupting their lives. In this word we find a sterling example of someone who had a grasp of the truth, and was able to handle aright the Word of God. The glory of God is wrapped up in Stephen's words, and His purpose is revealed in them. The history he expounds confirms what is involved in God causing all things to work together for the good of those who love Him. The effect of faith upon those who possess it is declared, as well as the power of God who gives people favor, and exalts them even while they are in a foreign land. God is greatly to be praised for the productive qualities of this passage!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #30

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #3

“ 7:17 But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, 18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. 19 The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live. 20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: 21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son. 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds. 23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel. 24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian: 25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they understood not. 26 And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? 27 But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday? 29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons. ” (Acts 7:17-29)

INTRODUCTION

Just as Moses did, Stephen leaps over a significant period of history, and focuses on the approach of God's appointed time – the time of Israel's exodus from Egypt. This was the time “which God had sworn to Abraham.” This is the manner of true exposition – to focus on the objective rather than a mere chronology of the details. True teaching, edification, and exhortation consists of making a point, not merely relating the facts.

Details assist our thinking only when they are associated with a purpose.

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- **THE PEOPLE GREW AND MULTIPLIED (7:17b)**
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- **THE PEOPLE WERE OPPRESSED EVEN MORE (7:19)**
- **IN WHICH TIME MOSES WAS BORN (7:20)**
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This is one of the unique properties of Scripture – it is always related to Divine purpose. That is the reason it has been written. It is also the reason for its profitability for “doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). God’s dealings with men are always objective , and that objective has to do with His eternal purpose.

DIVINE INVOLVEMENTS

Divine involvements never center in, or are driven by, worldly circumstances. If that was the manner of the working of the Lord, Joseph would never have been thrown in a pit, sold as a slave, and finally placed in shackles. Nor, indeed, would Israel ever have experienced hard bondage at the very threshold of their history. There are more important matters than what is happening to men and women – even holy men and women. If this was not true, how would men account for hardship, persecution, and the likes? If God’s primary aim is the comfort, prosperity, and success of humanity, life will yield little more than perplexity for the majority of our race. Furthermore, it is highly unlikely, if not altogether impossible, that God will work for good within a person or an environment where a fundamental love for this world exists. If Jesus gave Himself for our sins in order that “He might deliver us from this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4), how likely is it that He will justify, sanctify, and glorify those who remain firmly attached to it?

ISRAEL COMES INTO EGYPT

The people had been brought down into Egypt, which became the incubator in which the nation grew numerically, and wherein they developed a longing for the land of promise. That preparation accelerated as the time for their removal drew near. Their numerical growth developed without severe opposition. However, when another king arose “which knew not Joseph,” a hostile environment was developed. There was a concerted effort to stop the nation from growing, and make their lives most bitter with hard and difficult bondage.

It was during this time of adversity that Moses was born – the one who was elected to lead Israel out of Egypt. According to appearance, all of the advantages belonged to Egypt, and yet that was not really the case at all. God was going to work in such a manner as to leave no doubt about the Source of Israel’s deliverance. That is God’s way of working – so that no flesh can glory in His presence (1 Cor 1:29,31; Jer 9:23-24; Rom 3:27; 4:2; Eph 2:9). If, therefore, a work can be found in which men

can boast, that condition confirms the work was not from God. If men represent it as coming from God, or being wrought in His power, they are simply wrong, for such a thing is not even possible, much less probable.

MOSES IS NOT RECEIVED

In keeping with the principle that no flesh can boast in God's presence, Moses will fall on hard times. He will not be received by his brethren. This confirms that his distinction from the rest of the people was, in a sense, not discerned by the people. Although he was one of them, there was a very real separation between Moses and the people, and it was detected.

A CONSISTENT PRINCIPLE

The separation of God's people from the world, and their rejection by the world, is a consistent principle throughout God's dealings with men. Although he was a brother to Cain, Abel was distinct from him, and was hated by him. Enoch walked with God, and was so different from the world that he was translated out of it. Noah was uniquely separated from the world by a Divine call, and was noticeably different from it. Abraham was called by God into a state of separateness. The same was true of Isaac and Jacob. They were so distinct from the world that they were even strangers in the land that was given to them by the Creator himself. The nation of Israel was called apart to God from all other peoples, being separated from the world and reserved unto God.

This has always been God's manner. Those he drew to Himself were, by that very act, separated from the world. This was because the world is already cursed – designated for destruction. Through the Holy Spirit, Peter said it this way: "But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (2 Pet 3:7). Those who "are of the world" are wedded to the cursed order, and therefore partake of its curse. They are at home in the world, and consider life in that domain to be the primary life.

It is that circumstance – the passing order of this world and those who are married to it – that causes hostility to rise against the chosen ones. Their distinction is a very real one, so that their identity with the Living God causes friction to rise between them and other people. They have been joined to an eternal order – a Kingdom that has no end. In Christ, and by virtue of their knowledge of, and involvement with, the Living God, they have eternal life.

A vast gulf exists between heaven and earth – even though the Lord rules over both domains. One is temporal, and one is eternal. The devil exercises prominence in one realm, yet has been expelled from the other. Enslavement exists in one of these realms, while liberty is found in the other. Death rules one while life rules the other. One is blessed, and the other is cursed.

For this reason, in every sense it is true, "that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). That is, in order to profitably participate in the outworking of Divine purpose, we must experience the abrasiveness of this present evil world. We cannot benefit from the Sovereign rule of God if the world and the flesh, which are at enmity with God, loves and receives us. Jesus plainly said, "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

OUR TEXT

In our text, these things are presented in type, or shadow. The enmity that is recorded was very real. Yet, it was not to the measure that would be realized in Jesus Himself, and in all who embrace Him by faith. As Moses advanced, he was not received by his own brethren, and eventually had to leave Egypt because of this condition. It is this point that Stephen now develops, confirming the manner in which the Lord worked, and how the people responded to that work.

THE TIME OF THE PROMISE DREW NIGH

“ 7:17a But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham. . .”

God’s Kingdom cannot be the dominant one if He does not control the times. Neither, indeed, can prophecies be reliable if the times cannot be appointed, controlled, and caused to come to pass. This necessarily requires the ultimate control of humanity.

Like all who were acquainted with God, Stephen knew that times and seasons are strictly in the hands of the Lord. This is why, when His disciples asked Jesus concerning certain times, He replied, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power” (Acts 1:7). God’s Kingdom cannot be the dominant one if He does not control the times. Neither, indeed, can prophecies be reliable if the times cannot be appointed, controlled, and caused to come to pass. This necessarily requires the ultimate control of humanity. Whatever freedom men may be supposed to possess, it is not possible for it to encroach upon Divine appointments, causing them to be delayed or aborted. Neither, indeed, are men capable of stopping the prophetic clock so that Divine determinations are put on hold. Such views border on blasphemy, and are neither intellectually nor spiritually honest. Those who affirm Jesus cannot come until men do this or that, or that God cannot work unless men ask Him to do so, cannot possibly be more wrong. Our text will explode their mythological reasoning, confirming that Divine appointments are always precisely on time. If this is not the case, then it is not possible for anyone to possess “the full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22).

THE TIME OF THE PROMISE

But when the time of the promise drew nigh . . .” Other versions read, “as the time of the promise was approaching,” NASB “As the time drew near for God to fulfill His promise,” NIV “as the time drew near for the fulfillment of the promise,” NRSV “But when the time was near for putting into effect the undertaking,” BBE “when the time arrived for that which God had promised ,” MRD and “As the time approached for realizing the promise ,” WILLIAMS

As used in this text, Divine promises are associated certain times. This, of course, is one of the marks of Deity, and is frequently so proclaimed.

- “The counsel of the LORD standeth for ever , the thoughts of His heart to all generations” (Psa 33:11).
- “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places ” (Psa 135:6).
- “For I will at this time send all My plagues upon thine heart, and upon thy servants, and upon thy people; that thou mayest know that there is none like Me in all the earth . For now I will stretch out My hand, that I may smite thee and thy people with pestilence; and thou shalt be cut off from the earth” (Ex 9:14-15).
- “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning , and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure : calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it ” (Isa 46:9-11).
- “ To whom will ye liken Me, and make Me equal , and compare Me, that we may be like?” (Isa 46:5).
- “Yea, before the day was I am He; and there is none that can deliver out of My hand: I will work, and who shall let [reverse NKJV] it ?” (Isa 43:13).

• “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35).

WHICH GOD SWORE TO ABRAHAM

“ . . .which God had sworn to Abraham. . .” Other versions read, “which God had assured to Abraham,” NASB “His promise to Abraham,” NIV “which God had granted to Abraham,” RSV “which God vouchsafed unto Abraham,” ASV “He had declared to Abraham,” NET and “He had solemnly made to Abraham. NJB

The particular promise of which Stephen speaks is the one declaring that Israel would come out of Egypt. It is stated in Genesis 15:14: “And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance .” Before he died, Joseph put the people in remembrance of this promise: “And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you , and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (Gen 50:25). Joseph’s father, Jacob, had also commanded his sons to bury him in Canaan, and not in Egypt: “bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace” (Gen 47:29-30). When God appeared to Moses in the bush, He announced that the time had come for the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Ex 3:8).

As this appointed time approached, activities related to the preparation of Israel for that deliverance began to accelerate. This was not only according to Divine purpose, God was in the matter, bringing everything to pass. None of this was apparent to the people, as Stephen will confirm. Yet, the Sovereign God was at work, bringing His own purpose to its culmination in the midst of adversity, and enemies who grew more and more hostile.

THE NUMBER OF YEARS

As this appointed time approached, activities related to the preparation of Israel for that deliverance began to accelerate. This was not only according to Divine purpose, God was in the matter, bringing everything to pass. None of this was apparent to the people, as Stephen will confirm.

There are some difficulties associated with the number of years that Israel was in Egypt. All of them are on the surface, yet, cannot be resolved without considerable effort. Because much has been said on the subject, I will take the time to share my own persuasion on the matter. While I do not wish to be contentious about this issue, I have a certain eagerness to see that God is seen correctly, and that the Scriptures themselves are not seen as being in any way deficient, or misrepresenting the situation.

There are six texts of Scripture that specifically refer to this period.

• **AFFLICTED 400 YEARS.** “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years ” (Gen 15:13). Notice, the affliction is said to be four hundred years, not Israel’s sojourn. The land in which they sojourned is said to be “not theirs,” confirming it was Egypt, not Canaan.

• **FOUR GENERATIONS.** “But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full” (Gen 15:16). After four generations, they would come out of Egypt, for the iniquity of the Amorites did not yet justify purging them from the land. It is assumed here that a generation is one hundred years, as people lived longer during that time. I understand this to be four generations after Jacob’s entry into Egypt – or approximately four hundred years. Caleb was the fourth generation from Judah,

and Moses was the fourth generation from Levi.

• **SOJOURNING IN EGYPT.** “Now the sojourning of the children of Israel , who dwelt in Egypt, was four hundred and thirty years ” (Ex 12:40). The sojourning, not the affliction, was said to be 430 years. The place of the sojourning was Egypt, not Canaan. Thus other versions read, “Now the time that the sons of Israel lived in Egypt was four hundred and thirty years” (Ex 12:40). “Now the length of time the Israelite people lived in Egypt was 430 years” (Ex 12:40).

• **DELIVERED AFTER 430 YEARS.** “And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years , even the selfsame day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt” (Ex 12:41).

• **TREATED IN AN EVIL MANNER FOR FOUR HUNDRED YEARS.** “And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years” (Acts 7:6).

• **THE LAW GIVEN 430 YEARS LATER.** “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after , cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal 3:17).

Two of the texts refer to four hundred years, both of them identifying the period with the affliction of the Israelites. Three of the texts mention four hundred and thirty years. They have to do with the duration of the time the children of Israel were in Egypt. It is understood that their initial time in Egypt was not a time of affliction, this being for Joseph’s sake, who had found favor with Pharaoh.

There would be no difficulty with the time period if we were not confronted with Paul’s statement. On the surface, it appears that he pinpoints the giving of the Law (which occurred only briefly after the exodus) as taking place four hundred and thirty years after the covenant was promised to Abraham. The calculation of the four hundred and thirty years is somewhat strained. The chart below shows how it has been calculated by certain commentators, most of whom are held in high regard.

The difficulty with the calculation lies in the time period from Joseph’s death until Moses. That is an arbitrary figure, and cannot be supported by any clear statement or genealogy in Scripture. It also has the children of Israel being in Egypt for only two hundred and fifteen years. This period began with Jacob’s entry into Egypt at the age of one hundred and thirty. He spent seventeen years in Egypt. Add to that the number of years until the death of Joseph (53), the time until the birth of Moses (65), and the eighty years of Moses life prior to the exodus (80), and you arrive at two hundred and fifteen. All of this may appear quite satisfactory to the casual student. However, it casts a bad light on the statements made concerning those four hundred, and four hundred and thirty, years.

- Israel was afflicted four hundred years.
- The children of Israel (Jacob, not Abraham) sojourned in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years.

There are some time periods of which we are certain, and they are reflected in the following graphic.

We can identify the beginning eighty-eight years of the period (Jacob’s seventeen years, and Joseph’s seventy-one years). We can also identify the concluding eighty-three years (Aaron’s birth three years prior to Moses’ birth, and Moses first eighty years). It is the two hundred and fifty-nine years between Joseph’s death and the births of Aaron and Moses that are uncertain.

I am going to proceed on the assumption that the children of Israel were actually afflicted in Egypt for four hundred years, and that they sojourned in Egypt for four hundred and thirty years. I am also going to assume that Paul is not identifying that period as beginning when God made the original

promise to Abraham. He states it was when the covenant was confirmed by God in Christ. I will identify when I see that taking place.

FACTS TO WORK WITH

There are some general facts with which we have to work. They are as follows. I am including the incidents that are used by others to substantiate a two hundred and fifteen year period of sojourning Egypt – which position I reject.

- Abraham departs from Haran at 75 (Gen 12:4).
- Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was Born (Gen 16:16).
- Abraham was 99 when God confirmed the covenant with him, changing his name, and giving him the covenant of circumcision (Gen 17:14).
- Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born (Gen 21:5).
- At the birth of Jacob, Isaac was 60 (Gen 26:26).
- Joseph was 17 when entering Egypt (Gen 37:2).
- Joseph was 30 when elevated to the throne of Egypt (Gen 41:46).
- Jacob was 130 when entered Egypt (Gen 47:9).
- Jacob was in Egypt 17 years (Gen 47:9,28),
- Joseph died at 110 in Egypt, being there for 93 years (Gen 50:26).
- Moses was 80, and Aaron was 83 at the time of the Exodus (Ex 7:7).

There is also the matter of generations that were present in Egypt. Reckoning from the standpoint of Christ's genealogy, as recorded in both Matthew and Luke, there were six generations after Jacob that were in the land of Egypt during the time of their sojourning. These included the following progenitors and their offspring: Jacob, Judah, Pharez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, and Nahshon.

Keep in mind that this is reckoning the generations from the standpoint of Jesus' genealogy. That reckons Jacob's offspring only from his fourth-born son, Judah. This does not include Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher. The point is that a significant number of their generations were born while Israel was in Egypt. When they entered into Egypt, there were seventy of them. When they came out, there were millions of them. Among those coming out of Egypt, the number of footmen, not counting women and children was "about six hundred thousand" (Ex 12:37). In Exodus 38:26, the number of these men was 603,550. The total number of Israelites that came out of Egypt is not specified in Scripture. Conservative estimates range from 2,000,000 to 4,000,000. The point here is that it stretches the imagination to establish that kind of exponential growth during a time span of two hundred and fifteen years. It is not that it is impossible. However, considering that our text states the multiplication increased as the time of the promise grew near, we are under no logical or knowledgeable obligation to accept the shorter period of two hundred and fifteen years in Egypt.

THE MATTER OF GENEALOGIES

Scriptural genealogies are not always thorough from a human point of view. They are intended to include only those relevant to the purposes of God. However, in the case of the lineage of Joshua, descended from Ephraim, Joseph's son, we have a key ingredient. Ten generations are said to have been born after Ephraim. Using the standard of forty years per generation at that time (Num 32:13), that would account for 400 years of Israel being in Egypt.

Paul's Comment (Gal 3:17)

“And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect” (Gal 3:17).

Paul states the four hundred and thirty years begins with the ratified or confirmed covenant. The account of the first reference to a covenant with Abraham is found in Genesis 15:18. This is also the time when Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness (Gen 15:6), and consequently is a pivotal point. This is also the general time when, at the suggestion of Sarah, Abraham took Hagar to raise up seed, not knowing yet that the promised “seed” would be conceived by and born to Sarah.

I am not sure that Paul is referencing the time of Genesis 15:16. His language suggests a broader context of thought: “the covenant confirmed before of God in Christ” – not “before of God to Abraham,” but “before of God in Christ.” This has eternal ramifications, and could well refer to God’s “eternal purpose” rather than the time when He confirmed the covenant to Abraham. Also, rather than the phrase “four hundred and thirty years after” referring to the number of years that followed the confirming of the covenant, it could very well mean “the four hundred and thirty years” that were mentioned in Exodus 12:40 – a period that occurred after the covenant relating to the coming was Christ had been determined. It was after that period that God actually made the first covenant with Israel. Paul’s point is that the covenant made with Israel, after their deliverance from Egypt, could in no way nullify the determination that had been made before in Christ Jesus. I do not believe his point was the actual duration of time between the promise to Abraham and the giving of the Law. Rather, he was pointing out that the Law was not given until after Israel’s deliverance from Egypt – when the people had been multiplied. The covenant of blessing, however, had nothing to do with the number of the people, or whether they were delivered or not, or whether they agreed to the covenant or not. In that context, it seems to me to bend and twist the Scripture around Paul’s statement, as though he was interpreting the precise time when the Law was given, is a flawed approach, to say the least. God spoke with clarity about the four hundred and thirty years – that it related to the Israelite sojourn in Egypt. We should be content to let those more precise statements define the duration of their stay.

THE TIME DREW NIGH

“But when the time of the promise drew nigh.” That is, as the appointed time approached, or was coming near. The expression “drew nigh” is in the imperfect active tense. That is, the appointed time had not yet arrived, but was getting closer and closer. From the Scriptural standpoint, everything was advancing toward the fulfillment of the Divine counsel. In other words, what God had decreed was driving history, as it moved steadily toward an event decreed in heaven.

The point here is that certain preparations had also been decreed relating to the appointed event. Up to this time, circumstances might not have justified hope in the promise. Now, however, the circumstances would be adjusted to adapt to the appointed event.

In Daniel’s time, a similar event took place. God had decreed the duration of the Babylonian captivity – seventy years (2 Chron 36:21; Jer 25:11,12; 29:10). As the conclusion of that period approached, Daniel became quite aware of it. This was owing to his familiarity with the prophecies of Jeremiah. Thus it is written, “In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem . And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes: and I prayed unto the LORD my God, and made my confession, and said, O Lord, the great and dreadful God, keeping the covenant and mercy to them that love him, and to them that keep his commandments ” (Dan 9:2-4). Daniel knew that appointed epochs are preceded by times of preparation. That is the Divine manner. Godly men do not simply sit and wait for the fulfillment of the promises. When they are made more aware of them

approaching, they more earnestly prepare themselves, as did Daniel.

When the time for the showing of the Messiah to Israel came, it was preceded by a time of appointed preparation. God sent John the Baptist to prepare “the way of the Lord, and make His paths straight” (Matt 3:3). That is in keeping with the manner of the Kingdom of God.

Now, in our text, Stephen will confirm this to be in strict conformity with the way in which the Lord works. As His appointment drew closer, a time of preparation was put into place. God would intervene in the affairs of men in order to more precisely fulfil His own determination. His promise will be fulfilled in a most precise manner, confirming His absolute faithfulness.

THE PEOPLE GREW AND MULTIPLIED

“17b . . . the people grew and multiplied in Egypt.” Other versions read, “the people increased and multiplies in Egypt,” NASB “the number of the people in Egypt greatly increased,” NIV “our people in Egypt increased and multiplied,” NRSV “the people were increasing in Egypt,” BBE “the people flourished and multiplied in Egypt,” CSB “the number of our people in Egypt had grown very large,” GWN “the people had multiplied and become strong , in Egypt,” MRD “the people increased greatly in number in Egypt,” NIB “our nation in Egypt became very powerful and numerous ,” NJB “There were more and more of our people in Egypt,” IE “the people became many times more numerous in Egypt,” WEYMOUTH “the people multiplied and grew more numerous in Egypt,” WILLIAMS and “the [Hebrew] people increased and multiplied in Egypt,” AMPLIFIED

The record of Israel’s growth is found in Exodus 1:7 “And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.” This, we are apprised, followed the death of Joseph and “all that generation” (Ex 1:6). Even when they were oppressed, “the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty” (Ex 1:20). Of this period, the Psalmist wrote, “And He increased His people greatly ; and made them stronger than their enemies” (Psa 105:24). This was the increase of God, not of human ingenuity or productivity. Under the circumstances, the multiplication of the people was like the birth of Isaac to Abraham and Sarah – it was of a miraculous nature. God Himself “increased His people!”

In his valedictory address, Moses referred to this miraculous increase. “And thou shalt speak and say before the LORD thy God, A Syrian ready to perish was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there with a few, and became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous ” (Deut 26:5).

This multiplication was necessary for the fulfillment of the promise. First, God had promised Abraham He would make of him “a great nation” (Gen 12:2). Again He promised Abraham. “And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth : so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered” (Gen 13:16). And again He promised, “And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be ” (Gen 15:5). God said of Abraham, “Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation ,” (Gen 18:18). Again, he promised the patriarch, “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Gen 22:17).

This promise was also extended to Jacob. “And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee , and kings shall come out of thy loins” (Gen 35:11). Just before Jacob went down into Egypt, God appeared to him. He made the same commitment to Jacob that He had made to Abraham. This time, however, He specified where the multiplication would take place. “I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will THERE make of thee a great nation ” (Gen 46:3).

THE PLACE OF GROWTH

The realm in which the people would increase would not be a peaceful one, but one of ultimate oppression. The time during which they would increase would not be a peaceful one, but one in which great duress would be experienced. Therefore, in order to the fulfillment of these promises, the people began to increase exponentially. They were going to be brought out of Egypt to inherit a great land, and there must be a sufficient number of them to possess the land, and dispossess it of its inhabitants. Their numerical growth, however, would take place in a way that would glorify God. Apart from His working, there will be no way to account for such an increase.

AN OBVIOUS PARALLEL

The parallel between Abraham's fleshly offspring, and those who are his children through faith, ought to be obvious. Even as with the children of Israel, those who are in Christ Jesus experience oppression in the land of the enemy. The world "cannot receive" the Spirit they possess (John 14:17), or bring itself to love them (John 15:19). Yet, in a hostile world, they are being changed into the image of Jesus individually (2 Cor 3:18), and being made a habitation for God collectively (Eph 2:22). Like Israel, we are being readied for our inheritance in a most unlikely place. Indeed, often it does not even appear this is what is really happening – but it is!

TILL ANOTHER KING AROSE

“ 18 Till another king arose, which knew not Joseph.” Other versions read, “until there arose another king over Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph ” NASB “until another king who had not known Joseph ruled over Egypt,” NRSV “Till another king came to power, who had no knowledge of Joseph,” BBE “there came to power in Egypt a new king who had never heard of Joseph,” NJB and “Until [the time when] there arose over Egypt another and a different king who did not know Joseph [neither knowing his history and services nor recognizing his merits] .” AMPLIFIED

When that appointed time had been fulfilled, Joseph faded from the memory of the people in order that the purpose of God might be brought to its culmination. If the purpose of God was to bring the people into Canaan, He will not allow circumstances to develop that would make those

This is all necessary to the fulfillment of the purpose of God. God had told Abraham, “Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years” (Gen 15:13). When they first entered, this was not the case, for Pharaoh was inclined to the Israelites (Gen 45:16), because of his respect for Joseph – which respect was also the result of Divine working (Acts 7:10).

As with the Pharaoh with whom Joseph found favor, the identity of this ruler is not provided in Scripture. It is apparent that a very long time had elapsed since the death of Joseph, for his acts had been forgotten – and that by Divine providence. Also, the Israelites, although they had been in Egypt for a time longer than the United States has been a political entity, were still considered foreigners. They had not been assimilated into the culture, thereby losing their identity. This also was of the Lord, who had made them distinct from all other people. This is the real reason why an Israelite like Joseph, who had gained unparalleled fame, soon was forgotten. His favor was intended for a certain period of time. When that appointed time had been fulfilled, Joseph faded from the memory of the people in order that the purpose of God might be brought to its culmination. If the purpose of God was to bring the people into Canaan, He will not allow circumstances to develop that would make those people perpetually welcomed in Egypt.

The record of the rise of this king is found in Exodus 1:8. Regarding how he came into power, his ancestry, and the likes, the record is without any kind of explanation. “Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph” (Ex 1:8). Some suggest that this was probably Rameses Miamum, or possibly his son Amenophis. ADAM CLARKE The language used here (“another king

arose”) suggests this king was not in an ordinary line of succession. It probably speaks of a change of dynasty, where one group overpowered another. If this is the case, it would appear this was Amosis I, the head of the 18 th dynasty. ALBERT BARNES This would account for him not knowing of Joseph. However, this matter is unworthy of any further attention, for we are shut up to speculation, and that must not be permitted a place in our thinking. Suffice it to say, in strict accordance with the purpose of God, Israel’s tenure in Egypt will now become uncomfortable, so that they will no longer feel comfortable there. It will become apparent that they do not belong there.

THE REASONING OF THE NEW KING

Upon taking the rule, and because of the dramatic increase of the Israelites, the new king gathered his subordinates together. He said to them, “Behold, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we.” the New International version conveys the idea even more precisely: “the Israelites have become much too numerous for us.” The idea is not that the Hebrews were a militia that had greater military strength than Egypt, for at this point they were not a fighting people. This is why, after they left Egypt, God did not immediately lead them into military conflicts. Therefore it is written that “God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war, and they return to Egypt” (Ex 13:17-18). Therefore, the new king was not speaking of Israel fomenting an insurrection at this time. Rather, he meant the people were so significant in number that they could not be controlled.

With the control of the people in mind, the new king put a new policy into force. The Israelites would not be given any preferential treatment. His counsel was this: “Come on, let us deal wisely with them; lest they multiply, and it come to pass, that, when there falleth out any war, they join also unto our enemies, and fight against us, and so get them up out of the land” (Ex 1:10). At this point, and in strict accord with the purpose of God, the Pharaoh had no intention of expelling the people from the land. He rather sought to keep them there and exploit them for the advantage of Egypt.

Because God is controlling the situation, the strategy of Pharaoh does not work. Instead of stopping the multiplication of the Israelites, it appeared to cause it to increase even more.

The plan was put into force. As it is written, “Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens . And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses” (Ex 1:11). The Egyptians thus afflicted the Israelites with forced and difficult work. Life now became a burden for them in the land of plenty! Surely this will bring their growth to an end. After all, this would not be a good time to be having children!

THE STRATEGY DOES NOT WORK

Because God is controlling the situation, the strategy of Pharaoh does not work. Instead of stopping the multiplication of the Israelites, it appeared to cause it to increase even more. Thus it is written, “But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew . And they were grieved because of the children of Israel” (Ex 1:12). This increased growth brought great grief upon the Egyptians, even accenting their fears: “so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites.” NIV

THE AFFLICTION IS INCREASED

As a result of the continued increase in the number of Israelites, the Egyptians made their lives even more bitter. “And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with rigor: and they made their lives bitter with hard bondage, in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field: all their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor” (Ex 1:13-14).

Now the Egyptians increase the burden in every aspect of their work: in “all their service,” or work, to “serve with rigor,” or severity and cruelty, thereby making “their lives bitter,” or grievous and

miserable. There was no aspect of their daily activity that was pleasant or rewarding.

- Bitter and grievous in making mortar, which became difficult and tedious to produce.
- Bitter and grievous in making and laying brick, which became demanding and arduous to put in place.
- Bitter and grievous in laboring in the fields, with nothing being able to be done easily or perfunctorily.

Surely this will slow down the continual growth in the number of Israelites. Perhaps they will be so beat down they will give up all hopes of surviving. That is the aim of the Pharaoh. However, he is not dealing with ordinary people. The Israelites have been selected by God for a glorious destiny, and many of them know this to be the case. They will cry out, but they will not give in!

THE PEOPLE WERE OPPRESSED EVEN MORE

“ 19 The same dealt subtly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.”

Those who oppose the people of God are not easily discouraged. Often they are more intent on suppressing the truth than those who possess it are in making it known. Keep in mind, these people had once enjoyed the favor of another Pharaoh. They had been given the best of the land, and treated with dignity. But those days are now gone. A generation was now in place that never had experienced such favor. Their only recollection was the growing hostility of the Egyptians. Joseph had died a long time ago. Jacob and all of the fathers had passed on. There is no evidence that any significant number of people existed among them who could recall the glorious past – when they survived a famine, and were given the best of the land of Egypt. But those days really did exist, and I do not doubt that a remnant of people remained who could speak intelligently about those times. That is why the people continued to survive. It is why they thought in terms of future generations, not falling into a state of hopelessness.

THEY DEALT SUBTLY

“The same dealt subtly with our kindred . . .” Other versions read, “dealt treacherously,” NKJV “took shrewd advantage,” NASB “dealt craftily,” NIV “having evil designs,” BBE “with cruel cunning,” CJB “dealt deceitfully,” CSB “exploited,” NET “took precautions,” NJB “plotted against,” LIVING “cheated,” IE “adopted a crafty policy,” WEYMOUTH “by shrewdly scheming,” ISV “dealt treacherously with and defrauded,” AMPLIFIED “Taking cunning advantage,” ISV “tricked,” CEV “dealing slyly,” LITV and “cleverly victimized.” PHILLIPS

Those who imagine that being favored by God means you are on the top of every circumstance, and always in a favorable stance need to consider the children of Israel at this time.

This was certainly not a time when the chosen people were “the head.” In every apparent way, they were “the tail,” being the brunt of all manner of cruelty from the Egyptian taskmasters. Those who imagine that being favored by God means you are on the top of every circumstance, and always in a favorable stance need to consider the children of Israel at this time. There is no evidence that they had adopted the idolatrous manners of the Egyptians, or that they had, as a nation, grown calloused toward the Lord. Even though there had been a considerable amount of time during which they had received no immediate word from the Lord, nothing in Scripture suggests that they stopped trusting in what they did know about Him.

Notwithstanding, there they were, being taken advantage of by a heathen culture, who served other gods. The entirety of their lives had become so bitter they could not escape from it. It was difficult to

do their work, hard to mix mortar, and painful to lay bricks. If they were sent into the fields, it was most difficult to do their labors – painstakingly grueling and backbreaking.

In addition to these grievous circumstances, the Egyptian taskmasters became creative in their hostility. They exploited the Israelites getting the most out of them with the least possible investment by the Egyptians. They became shrewd and calculating in their harsh and inconsiderate demands. They cheated, defrauded, victimized, and tricked the Israelites, having not the slightest bit of sympathy for them. Will this inconsideration wear down the Israelites? Or, will they be sustained by the God of promise?

EVIL ENTREATED OUR FATHERS

“ . . . and evil entreated our fathers . . . ” Other versions read, “ oppressed ,” NKJV “ mistreated ,” NASB “forced,” NRSV “ill-treated,” ASV “was cruel,” BBE “ afflicted ,” DOUAY “ did evil ,” YLT “ persecuted ,” IE “ abused and oppressed,” AMPLIFIED and “treated . . . abominably .” PHILLIPS

The evil treatment of the children of Israel continued to accelerate. Heartless cruelty abounded. In speaking of this circumstance, the Psalmist reveals a most interesting fact. He says of Israel during the time covered by our text, “And He increased His people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal subtly with His servants ” (Psa 105:25). Now, there is a God with whom many professing believers have no acquaintance!

Keep in mind that all of this occurs over a significant period of time. We are not speaking about a brief tribulation, or a time of oppression that passed quickly. This is an extended period, and it is traced back to a judgment of God Himself. It is not a judgment provoked by God’s displeasure with Israel. Rather it is one that will make it right for God to judge Egypt harshly. It is also one in which the true temperament of the Egyptians is brought out, for they were purposeful and creative in their antagonism against God’s people.

All of this is causing Israel to have a growing distaste for Egypt. When the appointed time for their deliverance comes, they will certainly be ready to go!

We may conclude from this that it is the manner of the Kingdom to bring those who belong to the Lord to a state where they experience a growing discontent with their earthly environment. If God has called them to another place, then the place they presently occupy cannot remain fundamental to them – not as long as they are contemplating where God is bringing them.

CAST OUT THEIR YOUNG CHILDREN

“ . . .so that they cast out their young children . . . ” Other versions read, “making them expose their babies,” NKJV “forcing them to throw out their newborn babies,” NIV “forced . . . to abandon their infants,” NRSV “to put their newborn babies outside their homes ,” CJB “making them leave their infants outside ,” CSB “forcing parents to abandon their children in the fields,” LIVING and “he forced them to put their babies outdoors .” IE

The assault against the infants came in two separate initiatives – both of them intended to be aggressive.

Initiative #1

The first initiative is recorded in Exodus 1:15-21. At this point, Pharaoh charged the Hebrew midwives as follows: “When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools; if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but if it be a daughter, then she shall live” (Ex 1:16). Midwives attended mothers at childbirth. Rachel had a midwife “when she was in hard labor.” The

midwife comforted Rachel, who died during the birth, saying, “Fear not; thou shalt have this son also” (Gen 35:17-18). When Tamar gave birth to twins, she was also attended by a midwife. Seeing that she was giving birth to twins, the midwife tied a scarlet thread around the hand of the infant that put its hand out first, thus providing a means for identifying the firstborn son. The infant pulled his hand back, and the other twin came out first. When the second twin came forth, it had the scarlet thread on its hand, establishing that it was the firstborn (Gen 38:28). From these incidents we can see the ministry of midwives extended beyond the technicalities and practicalities of the birth itself.

It is not certain if these women were Egyptians or Hebrews. Some allege that the names are Semitic, and thus indicate they were probably Egyptian, while others say they are Hebrew. We know from later texts that a number of Egyptians were attracted to the Hebrews, and actually left with them in the exodus (Ex 12:38) – even though they particularly grew discontent when all they had to eat was manna. They eventually corrupted the Hebrews themselves (Num 11:4-15).

I am inclined to think these were Hebrew women. First, the Hebrews dwelt in a special part of Egypt – the land of Goshen. That favors the women being Hebrew, as they were more readily available to the expectant mothers. Also, it is later said that these women “feared God,” which also lends itself to the view that they were Hebrews. Additionally, they spoke of the Hebrew women being different than the Egyptian women, which appears to be more the language of Hebrew women than of women from Egypt. The matter of the origin of these women, however, is not worthy of further pursuit.

Two of the women are named in Exodus – Shiprah and Puah (Ex 1:15). It is thought they are not identified as the only midwives, but as leaders in this area. It is possible that they were Egyptians who had charge of a great number of Hebrew midwives. This is reasonable to assume, considering the vastness of the number of Israelites, and that this was a period of time in which they were rapidly multiplying.

The Response of the Midwives

It ought to be noted that God’s people are admonished to conduct themselves wisely before the world (Col 4:5). It is not comely for them to be naive like little children, divulging unnecessary details about their lives. While this is an intensely personal matter, we should be challenged by these midwives to learn to be discreet in the manner in which we speak before those who are without.

Even though the Pharaoh himself had given these women orders, it is written, “But the midwives feared God, and did not as the king of Egypt commanded them, but saved the men children alive” (Ex 1:17). Stephen says that the people were commanded to abandon their newborn children, leaving them unattended: i.e. “so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.” That is, the edict was not to murder them, but to simply leave them unattended so they would die. If this is true (and the meaning of the words used do indicate this to be the case), the Egyptians were less ruthless in getting rid of newborns than those who practice partial-birth abortion. Such hardened souls do not advocate abandoning the infants so they will die. Rather, they take aggressive measures, to murder the infants. In so doing, they stoop beneath the idolaters of Egypt.

When it became apparent that the birth of male infants was growing rapidly, and that his edict was not being carried out, Pharaoh called for the midwives. He asked, “Why have ye done this thing, and have saved the men children alive?” (Ex 1:18). These midwives had apparently anticipated being called before Pharaoh, and were ready with an answer. “Because the Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are lively, and are delivered ere the midwives come in unto them” (Ex 1:19). The word “lively” means “vigorous,” NASB “strong,” BBE and “robust.” NAB Their strong constitution was no doubt accentuated by the fact that they were slaves in Egypt, often working under harsh taskmasters. The women no doubt worked “in the field,” while the men built the treasure cities

for Pharaoh (Ex 1:11-14).

Some have suggested that this was nothing more than a lie, and a deliberate misrepresentation. That there is some truth to this seems apparent. Yet, their response must be considered more on the part of wisdom. It does not mean that the Jewish women were not robust, or did not give birth more rapidly than the Egyptian women. It could also mean that the midwives deliberately tarried, giving the mothers opportunity to hide their children.

Thus, the midwives told the truth, but not all of it. It is similar to the time when Samuel was commanded by God to anoint David king – and to do so while Saul was still on the throne. When Samuel responded that Saul would kill him if he heard of what he was doing, the Lord told him, “Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD” (1 Sam 16:2). The whole truth was that Samuel was going to anoint David. But Samuel did not lie when he said he had come to sacrifice to the Lord.

It ought to be noted that God’s people are admonished to conduct themselves wisely before the world (Col 4:5). It is not comely for them to be naive like little children, divulging unnecessary details about their lives. While this is an intensely personal matter, we should be challenged by these midwives to learn to be discreet in the manner in which we speak before those who are without.

Behold the aggressiveness of Pharaoh. His effort to make life miserable for the Israelites did not work. His mandate to not allow the male children to live also fell to the ground. Yet, he is undaunted, and now turns to his own people to aggressively seek out any male children, and throw them into the river – no doubt the Nile River, which was one of their gods.

It is apparent that the response of the midwives was an honorable one, for heaven responded to it. It is written, “Therefore God dealt well with the midwives: and the people multiplied, and waxed very mighty. And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He made them houses” (Exodus 1:20-21). Thus the exponential growth of God’s people continued. In addition, the midwives were given households, which would impact on the distribution of the promised land at the appointed time.

Initiative #2

The second initiative is recorded in Exodus 1:22. To this point, all of the efforts of Egypt had failed. They first sought to diminish the multiplication of the people by making all of their work burdensome. They then sought to thwart the increase by forcing the mothers to abandon their children. Now, another edict is issued by Pharaoh.

This time, Pharaoh will not speak to the midwives. That had proved to be a futile effort. This time he will give the orders to his own people – probably the armed forces. “And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river, and every daughter ye shall save alive” (Ex 1:22).

Behold the aggressiveness of Pharaoh. His effort to make life miserable for the Israelites did not work. His mandate to not allow the male children to live also fell to the ground. Yet, he is undaunted, and now turns to his own people to aggressively seek out any male children, and throw them into the river – no doubt the Nile River, which was one of their gods.

The people of God would do well to consider the lengths to which the world goes to realize its corrupted objectives. They are not easily discouraged, but are creative in their wicked intentions. Let no person professing faith lapse into as condition that is inferior, even by worldly standards.

TO THEY END THEY MIGHT NOT LIVE

“ . . .to the end they might not live.” Other versions read, “so that they would not survive,” NASB “so that they would die,” NIV “might not be kept alive,” RSV “might not go on living,” BBE “might not be permitted to live,” WEYMOUTH and “so that the race should die out .” PHILLIPS

The aim of Pharaoh was not merely to rid the country of the male children, but to cause the race itself to fade out of existence. If there were no progenitors – or at least not many of them – the number of Hebrews could only diminish.

However, it is God that is the Governor among the nations, and not Pharaoh (Psa 22:28)! Although the circumstances were very grievous for the Israelites, they were in no way a challenge for the God of the Israelites. These are the kind of circumstances in which His power is made known. He is disposed to bring His good pleasure to pass under such circumstances, confirming that his arm is not short, and He is in no way hindered by the will and machinations of men.

Everything is actually being worked together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).

IN WHICH TIME MOSES WAS BORN

“ 20 In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months.”

As men view things, this was not the time for a deliverer to be born. The very target of the foe is the population of infants, so that this time is the ultimate disadvantage for the flesh. It is the time when the baby is actually more apt to be discovered. It is the time when the deliverer is most vulnerable. It is the time when fleshly affection is most vulnerable, and godly thought and creativity is at its lowest point. Of course, none of this is of any consequence to the Lord. It is ever true, “there is no restraint with the Lord” – not so much as an infinitesimal particle (1 Sam 14:6)! As was revealed to Nebuchadnezzar, “none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35).

IN WHICH TIME MOSES WAS BORN

“In which time Moses was born . . .” Other versions read, “ At this time Moses was born,” NKJV “At which season Moses was born,” ASV “ It was then that Moses was born,” CJB “ The same times Moses was born,” GENEVA “ About that time Moses was born,” LIVING “ During this time, Moses was born,” IE “At this juncture Moses was born,” AMPLIFIED and “It was at this very time that Moses was born.” PHILLIPS

This was not happenstance. God Himself caused Moses to be born at this time – when the enemy appeared to be at his strongest point, and the chosen people seemed to be at their weakest. Of all times, that is when Moses was born!

The account of Moses’ birth is found in the second chapter of Exodus. A certain man of the tribe of Levi took a daughter of Levi to wife (Ex 2:1). We know that his name was Amram, and his wife’s name was Jochebed (Ex 6:20). The record in the second chapter of Exodus leaps right to the birth of Moses. But he was the second son born to this couple, and not the first. We know from the sixth chapter that Aaron was born first (Ex 6:20). We also know that there were three years between the birth of the boys, for when Israel came out of Egypt, Moses was eighty, and Aaron was eighty-three (Ex 7:7). We also know that Miriam, Moses’ sister, had already been born, for she would have charge of the baby Moses.

All of this means that Amram and Jochebed were not frightened because of the tumultuous and treacherous times. They did not put their family on hold because of the circumstances.

The point of the record in the second chapter of Exodus is that Moses was born about the time Pharaoh had commissioned that male babies be thrown into the river. This means that Aaron had probably been born at the time the midwives were supposed to see to it that the male babies were abandoned. It also means that Aaron was three years old at this time, and could very well have been subject to Pharaoh's mandate that "Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river."

EXCEEDING FAIR

" . . . and was exceeding fair . . ." Other versions read, "and was well pleasing to God ," NKJV "he was lovely in the sight of God ," NASB "he was no ordinary child ," NIV "he was beautiful before God ," NRSV "he was very beautiful ," BBE " exceedingly lovely ," DARBY " acceptable to God ," DOUAY " extremely beautiful ," NAB "a fine child before God ," NJB "a proper child in the sight of God ," TNT "fair to God ," YLT "a child of Divine beauty ," LIVING " divinely beautiful ," WILLIAMS "exceedingly beautiful in God's sight ," AMPLIFIED and "a child of remarkable beauty ." PHILLIPS

The record in Exodus states that when Moses' mother gave birth to Moses, she "saw that he was a goodly child" (Ex 2:2). Other versions read, "a beautiful child," NKJV and "a fine child." NIV

The point is that Moses' parents made an association of the baby Moses with the work of the Lord. They perceived he was not an ordinary child, but one with the blessing of God upon him. I do not doubt that they were also aware of the times – that the conclusion of the four hundred years of affliction, mentioned to Abraham, was rapidly approaching.

Stephen uses a most interesting expression to describe the infant Moses. The Authorized Version reads "exceeding fair." The Greek words employed here are pregnant with meaning. For those who are interested, the Greek expression is **h=n avstei/oj tw/l qew/l** . Literally translated, the phrase reads "in whom existed a comeliness like unto Deity." A number of literal translations reflect this meaning. "He was beautiful to God," ALT/LITV/MKJV "was acceptable unto God," BISHOPS "well pleasing to God." EMTV

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews also refers to this appraisal: "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child ; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Heb 11:23). Other versions read, "no ordinary child, and were not afraid of the king's edict," NIV and "they saw ho comely the child was, and they were not overawed and terrified by the king's decree." AMPLIFIED

The point is that Moses' parents made an association of the baby Moses with the work of the Lord. They perceived he was not an ordinary child, but one with the blessing of God upon him. I do not doubt that they were also aware of the times – that the conclusion of the four hundred years of affliction, mentioned to Abraham (Gen 15:13), was rapidly approaching. If Daniel understood by books that the Babylonian captivity was coming to an end (Dan 9:2), why could not Amram and Jochebed have known of the approaching consummation of the time promised to the father of their nation?

Something is to be said for the recognition of comely traits in babies – particularly when they are born in very difficult times. These are traits that a person can associate with the Lord. Believers must not allow a worldly way of thinking to determine how they view their children. Nor, indeed, should they go about planning for their future only so they will have economic advantages that may not have been enjoyed by themselves. Our times call for more godly assessments and direction of the children. There simply is too much flesh extant in the church of our time. To say it another way, unusually beautiful and talented children are for the Lord, and ought to be so regarded.

Also, keep in mind that at this time, Amram and Jochebed already had Aaron and Miriam, who

were no ordinary children themselves. I know of no other parents of Scriptural record who had more impressive children. It is said of them:

- “And the name of Amram's wife was Jochebed, the daughter of Levi, whom her mother bare to Levi in Egypt: and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister ” (Num 26:59).
- “And the children of Amram; Aaron, and Moses, and Miriam ” (1 Chron 6:3).
- “For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam ” (Micah 6:4).

All three of them were prophets (Deut 34:10 MOSES ; Ex 7:1 AARON ; 15:20 MIRIAM). How remarkable that Moses was even unique among that holy circle – and it was detected by his parents, and his mother in particular! Later, the Scriptures will affirm that Moses was, indeed, unusually precious to God. The Lord declared Moses to have been “faithful in all Mine house” (Num 12:7). A point is also made of this in the book of Hebrews (Heb 3:2). God also said He spoke with Moses “mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches.” He also declared Moses would behold “the similitude of the Lord” (Num 12:8).

In some way, Amram and Jochebed detected some of these things, and therefore took special measures to protect this child.

NOURISHED FOR THREE MONTHS

“ . . . and nourished up in his father's house three months.” Other versions read, “ brought up ,” NKJV “nurtured,” NASB “ cared for ,” NIV “ kept ,” BBE “ reared ,” CJB “ nursed ,” CSB “ took care of ,” GWN “ looked after ,” NJB and “ hid him.” LIVING

There are three Scriptural references to this three-month period. Exodus says of his mother, “she hid him three months” (Ex 2:2). The Epistle to the Hebrews reads, “when he was born, he was hid three months” (Heb 11:23). Stephen said Moses “was nourished up in his father’s house three months.”

This hiding was done when a kingly edict was in place: “Every son that is born ye shall cast into the rover!” But this did not deter holy couple. The book of Hebrews tells us “they were not afraid of the king’s commandment” (Heb 11:23). They would take pains to spare the child Pharaoh said to destroy. Jochebed would keep Moses safe during the day, while Amram was toiling, and the soldiers were looking. There may also have been fellow Israelites who had lost their children, and would disclose the presence of little Moses. However, faith will overcome Egypt, just as surely as it overcomes the world today (1 John 5:4). It makes the one who possesses it equal to any of the challenges of life in this world – particularly in Jesus Christ.

WHEN HE WAS CAST OUT

“ 21 And when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.”

However, as long as there was a way to hide him, she did. Although it must have been difficult, she found a way to do it. Her faith enabled her to overcome the circumstance. If anyone suspected the presence of this infant, they were not able to find him. She hid him, and did so very well.

The time came when the child could no longer be hid. The book of Exodus reads, “and when she could not longer hide him” (Ex 2:3). However, as long as there was a way to hide him, she did. Although it must have been difficult, she found a way to do it. Her faith enabled her to overcome

the circumstance. If anyone suspected the presence of this infant, they were not able to find him. She hid him, and did so very well. She was not afraid of the king's commandment, even though, according to appearance, the power of life and death was in his hand. Keep in mind, her action was prompted by insight : she saw Moses "was exceeding fair."

There certainly is something to be learned in this marvelous account. Our society has produced parents that are too afraid of king's edicts, and who have too little faith in God. They have not done well in protecting their children from the ravages of those who buy and sell the souls of men (Rev 18:13). Many professed Christian parents wait too long to have a godly interest in their children. They make them available too quickly to the ways of the world. May God raise up parents like Amram and Jochebed, who are not afraid of the commandments, requirements, and pressures of men – parents who are bold to hide their children as long as they can, keeping them out of reach of the devil's crowd.

WHEN HE WAS CAST OUT

"And when he was cast out . . ." Other versions read, "set out," NKJV "exposed," NASB "placed outside," NIV "abandoned," NRSV "put out," BBE "put out of his home," CJB "left outside," CSB "abandoned outdoors," GWN "set outside," NAU "and had to abandon him," LIVING and "when the time came for him to be abandoned." PHILLIPS

Pharaoh had commanded that the children be "cast out," abandoned, and even thrown into the river. We do not know if there was some kind of time limit for this to be accomplished. However, there did come a time when it was apparent to the parents of Moses that they would have to, so to speak, cast their bread upon the waters. They had to believe that the God who enabled them to successfully hide him for three months, would provide for him to be sustained away from them.

So, they will put Moses outside – out of the house, and away from their protection. But this will be done with godly discretion. There will be an element of hope in this, as faith is put into action.

Exodus provides some of the details, as Moses, moved by the Spirit of God, writes of his own history. Behold the creativity of Jochebed! She is not helpless, but is like the virtuous woman who provides for her household (Prov 31:15,21,27). She works with her hands, taking some bulrushes from the riverside – papyrus reeds about six feet in length. "She made a little boat from papyrus reeds, waterproofed it with tar." LIVING Then, taking three-month-old Moses, she put him in the little ark, "and set it among the reeds by the bank of the Nile" NASB (Ex 2:3). She then dispatched her daughter Miriam, obviously older than Aaron, who, at the time, was only three. His sister "stood afar off, to see what would happen to him" NIV (Ex 2:4).

Those who desire easy solutions for everything need to peruse this text with genuine interest. There are times when you have to do the best you can, then wait and see how things will turn out. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to be able to do this. Here is an example of the lot being cast into the lap, but the whole disposing of the matter being of the Lord (Prov 16:33).

If you imagine that God will always make things clear to you before you act, you will face the heartache of continual frustration. It is God's manner to call people to a land that He will define later (Heb 11:8). He will call men to leave their fishing trade to follow Him, even though He had no place to lay his head (Matt 4:19-20; 8:20). He may send an Apostle and co-laborer to Macedonia without telling him that he will be beaten and imprisoned there (Acts 16:9,23-24). It may not be until the middle of a life-threatening storm that He tells His servant no life will be lost (Acts 27:23-31). Walking by faith involves not having all of the answers – often having to put the ark containing a proper child in the water, not knowing how it will all end.

PHARAOH'S DAUGHTER TOOK HIM UP

“Pharaoh's daughter took him up . . .” Other versions read, “Pharaoh’s daughter took him away,” NKJV “adopted him,” NRSV “the daughter of Pharaoh found him ,” MRD “ took him in ,” IE and “rescued him.” AMPLIFIED

The hand of the Lord was in all of this, orchestrating the events in order to prepare for the deliverance of His people. It was the Lord who was working things together for the good of Moses – and for the good of Israel as well.

Knowing the gravity of what was ahead, the Lord moves Pharaoh’s daughter to have the baby returned to be nursed among the Hebrews. Even a brief time in that environment will play a role in shaping the understanding and inclinations of this babe

The book of Exodus provides some of the details of this summation. It came to pass that Pharaoh’s daughter came to the precise place on the river where the baby Moses had been placed. She came down, we are told, “to wash herself at the river.” As she walked along the river, with her maidens walking “by the river’s side,” she caught a glimpse of the strategically placed ark in the waters. Just as surely as God opened Hagar’s eyes to see a well of water (Gen 21:19), so he opened the eyes of Pharaoh’s daughter to see that little ark. She sent her personal maid to bring the ark to her.

Upon opening the ark, “behold, the babe wept.” At once the sight gripped the heart of this young lady. Remember, this was a lovely child, comely to look upon, and that comeliness will prove to be a blessing at this time. At once she recognizes the nationality of the child: “This is one of the Hebrews’ children.” This could certainly be a liability, for in Egypt they considered it an abomination to even eat with a Hebrew (Gen 43:32), and they held their occupation in disdain also (Gen 46:34). Add to this that her father had decreed the destruction of all Hebrew sons. Had this been a soldier, or Pharaoh himself, Moses would have been thrown into the river right there. Perhaps many other Egyptians, anxious to please their Pharaoh, would have done the same.

Jochebed knew this child was special – a “proper child” – and the daughter of Pharaoh seemed to sense it as well. Her heart goes out to the infant.

Standing afar off, Miriam beholds all of this. She does not shake in fear for being in the presence of royalty, but immediately acts upon what she sees. I do not doubt that she had been duely instructed by her mother. Seizing the moment, she said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and call to thee a nurse of the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for thee?” (Ex 2:7). Pharaoh’s daughter said, “Go,” and Miriam went and brought back Moses’ mother. Obviously pleased with the arrangement, for God was turning her heart, the daughter told Moses’ mother, “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages” (Exodus 2:9). Moses mother took her own son, returning to nurse him.

Knowing the gravity of what was ahead, the Lord moves Pharaoh’s daughter to have the baby returned to be nursed among the Hebrews. Even a brief time in that environment will play a role in shaping the understanding and inclinations of this babe.

Scripture apprises us that “the child grew.” We do not know how long this was. Some have surmised it to be around two years, or until the child was weaned. Others say this would have been around three years old. However you view it, it was long enough to grow deeply attached to the babe.

And now, Jochebed must return the young child to Pharaoh’s daughter, for that was the arrangement, and in faith she acquiesces to it. This does not mean that the task was easy. The Scripture tells us, “she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses: and she said, Because I drew him out of the water” (Ex 2:10).

AND NOURISHED HIM

“ . . . and nourished him for her own son.” Other versions read, “brought him up as her own son,” NKJV “nurtured him,” NASB “kept him,” BBE “brought him up for herself,” DARBY “raised him,” GWN and “did rear him to herself.” YLT

Pharaoh’s daughter did not raise Moses as an Israelite, but as an Egyptian. She had no idea she was raising the one appointed by heaven to deliver Israel from the oppression of her own countrymen. However, during his formative years, she was the one assigned by God to protect Moses until he came to the time when he must leave Egypt for a season.

MOSES WAS LEARNED IN ALL THE WISDOM OF EGYPT

“ 22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.”

Egypt was the premier nation of that age. Much of the wisdom of its time is still a marvel to students of culture. This is the place where Moses was reared, and it is quite arresting to consider.

MOSES WAS LEARNED

“And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians . . .” Other versions read, “educated in all the learning,” NASB “educated in all the wisdom,” NIV “instructed,” NRSV “t rained,” BBE “taught,” NLT “The Egyptians taught Moses everything they knew,” LIVING “educated in all the culture of the Egyptians,” WILLIAMS and “educated in all the wisdom and culture of the Egyptians.” AMPLIFIED

This is quite an expression: “all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” This was no doubt reserved for the elite of the nation, or for those who were identified as especially expert in learning, as were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Dan 1:17-20). It is generally understood by historians that the scope of Egyptian wisdom was remarkably broad. A good education is said to have included orthography (the art of precise writing), grammar, history, theology, medicine, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and engineering. Most of these areas of knowledge, apart from the Egyptian concept of theology, were bodies of exact or precise knowledge. I do not doubt that these honed the mental capabilities of Moses to a fine edge, so that sound analysis, good logic, and the likes were part of his thoughtful manner. All of this was no doubt sanctified by his faith, which he kept in tact.

It ought to be noted that there is no wrong in learning or education itself. However, throughout God’s dealings with men, there have openly been a few souls who could use knowledge properly, tending to be original in their thinking, rather than becoming mere clones of predigested thoughts.

It ought to be noted that there is no wrong in learning or education itself. However, throughout God’s dealings with men, there have openly been a few souls who could use knowledge properly, tending to be original in their thinking, rather than becoming mere clones of predigested thoughts.

Moses would be a man who trafficked in thoughts. He would be required to resolve disputes, reason through thorny issues, and at last even reason with Almighty God. While there is a certain danger in taking this matter too far, it seems to me that the period of time Moses spent in Egypt was a sort of protection to him, keeping him busy with things that were not morally depraved.

MIGHT IN WORDS AND IN DEEDS

“ . . . and was mighty in words and in deeds.” Other versions read, “a man of power in words and deeds,” NASB “powerful in speech and action,” NIV “great in words and works,” BBE “a powerful speaker and a man of action,” CJB “a great man in what he said and did,” GWN “a mighty prince and orator,” LIVING “possessed great influence through his eloquence and his achievements,”

WEYMOUTH and “became not only an excellent speaker but a man of action as well.” PHILLIPS

Those who imagine that Moses was a stuttering speaker will need to rethink their position after reading these words. It is true that, when called by God, Moses replied, “O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue” (Ex 4:10). However, it must be remembered that, at that time, Moses had been on the back side of the desert for forty years, keeping sheep (Eph 3:1). As I have said, his training was a form of protection for him during his first forty years, so that he was not vigorously opposed, or put to any distracting disadvantage.

None of this is covered in the book of Exodus. I gather than these details were revealed to Stephen through the Spirit. Moses did spend his time in Egypt productively, not being as the sloth, who, by his conduct, locks the door of wisdom and understanding.

The fact that his time in Egypt did not corrupt his mind is seen in the faithfulness for which Moses is noted. He endured as seeing Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27). This confirms that while Moses was in Egypt, he lived by faith, like Daniel did in Babylon. The relative rarity of such a person is confirmed by Paul’s arresting words: “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Cor 1:26). He does not say “not any,” but “not many.” This is owing to the fact that few men can handle a wide scope of knowledge without being distracted by it. Such abilities are also attended by a tendency to boast. Moses was among the very few individuals in that number.

WHEN MOSES WAS FORTY YEARS OLD

“ 23 And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.”

We know very little concerning Moses from the time of his birth until the time he was forty years of age.

- He was born during dangerous times.
- He was an unusual child, and his parents recognized it.
- He was hidden for the first three months of his life.

The world teaches people to think in terms of an event-driven life. That is, exhilarating experiences and outstanding achievements are sought with great energy. These also become the means by which success is largely determined. Recognition by one’s peers is given too much attention, and little thought is given to faithfulness, stewardship, the culturing of faith, and the posture of readiness.

He was providentially found by Pharaoh’s daughter after being strategically placed in a small ark.

- His mother nursed him until he was weaned.
- Pharaoh’s daughter raised him as her own son.
- He was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.
- He was an eloquent man, and noted for his deeds.

As you can see, all of this is very general in nature. The reason for this is the manner in which Divine history is recorded. The Lord does not provide human curiosity with a lot of details that are not obviously related to His purpose. His history is not a chronological listing of all the details of life. Through doctrine, the Lord informs us that He is in the details of life, manipulating both men and circumstances in order to the fulfillment of His purpose. However, he only puts into writing the matters that are obviously associated with His glory and the fulfillment of His purpose. Thus he passes

over the first forty years of Moses' life with fewer details than were related to a single day of Jesus' life.

A FULL FORTY

“And when he was full forty years old . . .” Other versions read, “approaching the age of forty,” NASB “well-nigh forty years old,” ASV “almost forty years old,” BBE “when a period of forty years was fulfilled to him,” DARBY “at the age of forty,” NJB “nearing his fortieth birthday,” LIVING “just forty years old,” WEYMOUTH “rounding out his fortieth year,” WILLIAMS “in his fortieth year,” AMPLIFIED and “when he was turned forty.” PHILLIPS

One third of Moses' life was spent in Egypt – apparently away from his kindred, yet not without the awareness of them. The reason for this circumstance is not declared, but it ought to be obvious. His time had not yet come!

In the Kingdom of God, times and seasons are in the hand of God. They are established in strict accord with the established purpose of the Almighty. There is a fixed agenda that drives time itself, as well as the events that occur within its borders. Thus it is written, “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Pet 3:7).

Until these times and seasons arrive, everything else is really incidental. That is not to say they are unimportant. However, they are preparatory, and not formative. That is, from the highest point of view, men are not shaping history, but participating in it. This is precisely why the Spirit moved Stephen to pass over forty years of Moses' outwardly significant life and say, “And when he was fully forty years old.” What is going to take place at this time has something to do with the purpose for which Moses was born. The event is therefore mentioned. It will be followed by another forty-year period of relative silence.

A Principle to Be Seen

The world teaches people to think in terms of an event-driven life. That is, exhilarating experiences and outstanding achievements are sought with great energy. These also become the means by which success is largely determined. Recognition by one's peers is given too much attention, and little thought is given to faithfulness, stewardship, the culturing of faith, and the posture of readiness. It is disastrous to get caught up in this kind of mentality, for it is predominantly artificial. Such things require neither morality nor spirituality.

Sensing the true nature of things, David assessed that time with God outweighed every kind of worldly advantage and experience. He said, “Blessed is the man whom Thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto Thee, that he may dwell in Thy courts : we shall be satisfied with the goodness of Thy house, even of Thy holy temple” (Psa 65:4). And again, “For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa 84:10). Forty days on the mountain with God more than compensates for forty long years in the wilderness with a wicked and gainsaying people.

Stephen now covers an event in Moses' life that confirms the first forty years of his life were not spent apart from the knowledge of his origin. Although, according to appearance, he had been immersed in the Egyptian culture, becoming learned in all of their multifaceted wisdom, he had not forgotten who he really was, and why he was in Egypt.

IT CAME INTO HIS HEART

“ . . . it came into his heart . . .” Other versions read, “it entered his mind ,” NASB “he decided ,”

NIV “the thought came to him ,” CJB “he thought it would be good ,” IE “it occurred to him,” WEYMOUTH and “the thought came into his mind .” PHILLIPS

In the ordinary course of his life, a thought suddenly occurred to Moses. What was the origin of this thought? If it “came into his heart,” from whence did it come? Was it nothing more than a casual recollection of his relatives by blood? Had he seen or heard something that moved him to recall the Israelites, offspring of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob? Joseph had died a long time before this, so there was nothing in the government structure that would provoke such a thought.

Those who are familiar with the working of the Lord know that He puts thoughts into the minds of those He employs. Having access to their hearts, he can stir them up by means of thoughts to do this or that. There are many statements

Those who are familiar with the working of the Lord know that He puts thoughts into the minds of those He employs. Having access to their hearts, he can stir them up by means of thoughts to do this or that. There are many statements in Scripture that confirm this to be true.

- **GOD’S REVELATION TO JOB.** “ Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?” (Job 38:36)

- **IN BUILDING THE TABERNACLE.** “ And Moses called Bezaleel and Aholiab, and every wise hearted man, in whose heart the LORD had put wisdom , even every one whose heart stirred him up to come unto the work to do it” (Ex 36:2).

- **DAVID’S EXPERIENCE.** “ Thou hast put gladness in my heart , more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased” (Psa 4:7).

- **PREPARING FOR THE TEMPLE.** “O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people , and prepare their heart unto thee” (1 Chron 29:18).

- **THE CASE OF SOLOMON .** “And all the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, that God had put in his heart ” (2 Chron 9:23).

- **THE REVIVAL OF JUDAH.** “ Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD” (2 Chron 30:12).

- **CYRUS THE PERSIAN.** “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia , that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying” (Ezra 1:1).

- **EZRA, AFTER THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY.** “Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised , to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:5).

- **EZRA’S INSIGHT.** “Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart , to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 7:27).

- **NEHEMIAH GOES TO JERUSALEM.** “And I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem : neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon” (Neh 2:12).

- **NEHEMIAH’S GENEALOGY.** “And my God put into mine heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. And I found a register of the genealogy of them which came up at the first, and

found written therein” (Neh 7:5).

• **A DIVINE MANNER.** “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will ” (Prov 21:1).

• **AFTER CHRIST’S EXALTATION.** “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened , that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14).

• **THE CASE OF TITUS.** “But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you” (2 Cor 8:16).

• **THE DOCTRINE OF PAUL.** “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

• **THE MANNER OF THE NEW COVENANT.** “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts : and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people” (Heb 8:10).

Having said these things, I must also acknowledge that during the early years of my consideration of the things of God, I rarely heard anyone speak of such things. The subject of Divine access to the minds of men was certainly never a prominent consideration.

THE PROPHECY OF THE REVELATION. “For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil His will , and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled” (Rev 17:17).

In order to confirm that this is God’s manner, I have given examples of God accessing the hearts and minds of men that span well over 2,000 years – from the time of Job through John’s exile on Patmos. On this matter there are examples, insightful testimonies, doctrinal statements, and pointed prophecies. There can be no doubt about this facet of God’s dealings with men.

Having said these things, I must also acknowledge that during the early years of my consideration of the things of God, I rarely heard anyone speak of such things. The subject of Divine access to the minds of men was certainly never a prominent consideration. Often there was even an aversion to such teaching, which was brushed aside with statements concerning the reality of man’s free will. Notwithstanding, I give thanks to God that, working through the naked statements of Scripture, He caused me to behold what is now glaringly obvious to my mind and spirit.

TO VISIT HIS BRETHREN

“ . . . to visit his brethren the children of Israel.” Other versions read, “to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel,” NASB “to visit his fellow Israelites ,” NIV “to visit his relatives , the Israelites,” NRSV “to go and see his brothers, the children of Israel,” BBE “to look upon his brethren , the sons of Israel,” DARBY “to visit his own people , the Israelites,” MRD “to visit his fellow countrymen the Israelites,” NET “to visit his brethren the descendants of Israel ,” WEYMOUTH “to visit his kinsmen the children of Israel [to help them and to care for them],” AMPLIFIED and “visit his own brothers , the sons of Israel.” PHILLIPS

The word “visit” is here used much in the same manner as is employed in the book of James: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction , and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). That is, he went to see if he could do something that would assist their condition. He knew they were an oppressed people, and it came to him to see what he could do about their circumstance. God put it in his mind to do this, and he promptly acted upon the thought. This also confirms that all the while Moses had been living in Egypt, acquiring the various facets of their wisdom, he had really been living by faith. We know this

is the case because after he left Egypt He “endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). That spiritual vision did not commence in the desert of Midian!

The account in Exodus reads, “And it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out unto his brethren ” (Ex 2:11). He possessed a lively sense of his relation to these people, even though he had been separated from them since he was weaned from his mother.

He partook of the same spirit owned by his predecessor Joseph, who also maintained a lively sense of his heritage while he was away from his kindred. When he renewed association with his people, it was also a period in the vicinity of forty years. Joseph was seventeen when he entered Egypt (Gen 37:2).” He was thirty when elevated to the throne (Gen 41:46). When he first saw his brethren there had been seven years of plenty, and two years of famine (Gen 45:6). Yet, those years had not erased the recollection of the rock from whence he had been hewn.

This was also the experience of Daniel, who after seventy years vividly recalled his heritage, and reasoned with God concerning the conclusion of the Babylonian captivity (Dan 9:2-4).

Faith sustains the soul with holy recollections. In the times of Joseph and Moses, it did so without Scripture, for none had been given as yet. In the time of Daniel, it did so through the Scriptures that had been recorded by the inspiration and providence of God. Ponder how the believer is sustained today, when such an abundance of Scripture has been given. God has divulged His eternal purpose in remarkable detail, expounding it and reasoning upon it in the apostolic doctrine. It is appalling that in times such as these, so rich with spiritual resources, that many have departed from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1).

MOSES DEFENDS ONE OF HIS PEOPLE

“ 24 And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian.” Other versions read, “And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian,” NKJV “And when he saw one of them being treated unjustly, he defended him and took vengeance for the oppressed by striking down the Egyptian,” NASB “He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian , so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian,” NIV “And seeing one of them being attacked , he went to his help and gave the Egyptian a death-blow,” BBE “When he saw one of them being mistreated, he came to his rescue and avenged the oppressed man by striking down the Egyptian,” CSB “And when he saw one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged his quarrel that had the harm done to him , and smote the Egyptian,” GENEVA “And he saw one of the race of his kindred treated with violence; and he avenged him, and did him justice, and killed the Egyptian who had abused him,” MRD “and having seen a certain one suffering injustice, he did defend, and did justice to the oppressed, having smitten the Egyptian,” YLT “During this visit he saw an Egyptian mistreating a man of Israel. So Moses killed the Egyptian ,” LIVING “Moses saw an

A person with no care for the people of God has no part with them, for “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). There is no possibility that this is not precisely the way things are.

Egyptian man doing wrong to a Hebrew brother . So, he defended him. Moses punished the Egyptian for hurting that brother. Moses hit the Egyptian so hard that the man died.” IE “Seeing one of them wrongfully treated he took his part, and secured justice for the ill-treated man by striking down the Egyptian,” WEYMOUTH and “He saw one of them being unjustly treated, went to the rescue and paid rough justice for the man who had been ill-treated by striking down the Egyptian.” PHILLIPS

The account of this is found in Exodus 2:11-12. It is written that Moses “looked on” the “burdens”

of his people. That is, he gave particular attention to their hard labors, and how they were being abused. One versions says, “he watched them at their hard labor.” NIV As he beheld them, working with brick and building, he spied an Egyptian “beating a Hebrew.” NKJV We are not told why this was being done, but it was obviously without warrant, for, Stephen says, “he defended him, and avenged him.”

The Exodus record provides the details, with which those listening to Stephen were very familiar. “And he looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he slew the Egyptian, and hid him in the sand” (Ex 2:12). Moses took care not to compound the problem by drawing the attention of other Egyptian taskmasters. Then he buried the dead Egyptian out of sight.

So far as the record in Exodus is concerned, there are no further details of the incident itself.

AN EXAMPLE OF LOVING THE BRETHREN

Here is an excellent example of what is involved in loving the brethren. There is the matter of coming to their aid, defending them, and taking up their cause whenever it is possible. Thus Barnabas took up the cause of Saul, when the disciples were suspicious that he had not really been converted (Acts 9:27). Paul also gave diligence to gather offerings for the poor saints of Jerusalem, who were suffering in the aftermath of a grievous famine (Rom 15:26-27). This is not to mention his tireless labors in correcting the churches when they had been assaulted with false teaches, who were diverting them from the strait and narrow way that leads to life.

A person with no care for the people of God has no part with them , for “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love” (1 John 4:8). There is no possibility that this is not precisely the way things are.

HE THOUGHT THEY WOULD KNOW

“ 25 For he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them: but they

If all of this is true, then Moses went out to look upon his people with more in mind than simply assessing their situation. He had a heart for them that pondered the promise. Stephen’s words fully justify this conclusion.

understood not.” Other versions read, “And he supposed that his brethren understood that God was granting them deliverance through him ; but they did not understand,” NASB “Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them , but they did not,” NIV “He supposed that his kinsfolk would understand that God through him was rescuing them , but they did not understand,” NRSV “And he was hoping that his brothers would see that God had sent him to be their savior ; but they did not see,” BBE “And he thought that his brethren understood that God by his hand would save them ; but they understood it not,” DOUAY “Moses thought his own people would understand that God was going to use him to give them freedom . But they didn't understand,” GWN “He thought his brothers would realize that through him God would liberate them , but they did not,” NJB “and he was supposing his brethren to understand that God through his hand doth give salvation; and they did not understand,” YLT “Moses supposed his brothers would realize that God had sent him to help them , but they didn't,” LIVING “He supposed that his brothers would understand that God through his instrumentality was going to deliver them , but they did not,” WILLIAMS “He expected his brethren to understand that God was granting them deliverance by his hand [taking it for granted that they would accept him]; but they did not understand,” AMPLIFIED and “He fully imagined that his brothers would understand that God was using him to rescue them. But they did not understand .” PHILLIPS

Being full of the Holy Spirit, Stephen provides a critical fact that would not otherwise be known. Moses was motivated by a certain consideration – that his brethren would comprehend that God was using him to deliver them.

While the details of this matter are very sparse, there are some things that are apparent. First, Moses had an understanding of the promise that had been given to Abraham. That promise was very precise in its details.

- That the Israelites would spend four hundred years experiencing affliction in a strange land (Gen 15:13).
- That God would judge that nation for their abuse of His people (Gen 15:14a).
- That Israel would come out of Egypt with great substance (Gen 15:14b).
- That in the fourth generation, the children of Israel would return to the land of promise (Gen 15:16).

True to God’s assessment of Abraham, he passed these promises along to the next generation. The Lord had said of him, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the LORD, to do righteousness and justice, that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him ” NKJV (Gen 18:19).

We know that Jacob also passed this information along, as confirmed in the words of Joseph: “God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (Gen 50:25).

Now, Moses takes up the cause of his brethren, thinking that they will know he is being moved to do so by the Lord. The deliverance of which he spoke was the one wrought when he avenged the Israelite who was being wronged. He thought his kindred would see that as a pledge of a greater deliverance, and that they would receive him, even though he had been long separated from them.

Apart from a revelation from God, we are not sure how Moses arrived at this knowledge. However, in my opinion, Amram and Jochebed had sensed this in some way when Moses was born. That is inherent in the words, “they saw he was a proper child” (Heb 11:23). This is also why Stephen said Moses was “exceeding fair” (Acts 7:20), and the historical account of his birth reads, “he was a goodly child” (Ex 2:2). More was involved here than the mere appearance of Moses. His parents did not go to such measures to spare him simply because of his physical features. They had apparently seen him in view of the promised deliverance of Israel. If that assumption is true, they no doubt communicated that in some way to Moses.

If all of this is true, then Moses went out to look upon his people with more in mind than simply assessing their situation, or casually perusing their circumstance. He had a heart for them that pondered the promise. Stephen’s words fully justify this conclusion.

THE REACTION OF THE PEOPLE TO MOSES

“ 26 And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another? 27 But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?”

Intent upon his mission, Moses returns to his people the very next day. This time, he will confront dissension in the ranks, and will set out to reason with the offenders about it. Remember, he is acting while persuaded his people will see that God Himself is in the matter.

HE SHOWED HIMSELF UNTO THEM

“And the next day he showed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren; why do ye wrong one to another?” Other versions read, “ And the next day he appeared to two of them as they were fighting, and tried to reconcile them , saying, 'Men, you are brethren; why do you wrong one another?'” NKJV ““And on the following day he appeared to them as they were fighting together, and he tried to reconcile them in peace , saying, 'Men, you are brethren, why do you injure one another?’” NASB “The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other ?’” NIV “The next day he came to some of them as they were quarreling and tried to reconcile them, saying, 'Men, you are brothers; why do you wrong each other?’” NRSV “When he appeared the next day, as they were fighting, and tried to make peace between them by saying, 'Men, you are brothers! Why do you want to hurt each other?’” CJB “And on another day, he appeared to them, as they were quarrelling one with another. And he exhorted them to become reconciled , saying: Men, ye are brethren; why do ye seek to harm each other?’” MRD “The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker . 'Men,' he said, 'you are brothers. Why are you fighting each other?’” NLT “On the succeeding day, also, he shewed himself to them as they are striving, and urged them to peace, saying, Men, brethren are ye, wherefore do ye injustice to one another ?” YLT and “The next day he visited them again and saw two men of Israel fighting. He tried to be a peacemaker. `Gentlemen,' he said, `you are brothers and shouldn't be fighting like this! It is wrong !’” LIVING

The account of this altercation is found in Exodus 2:13-14. There we are told that Moses went out “the second day” – that is, the second consecutive day. He came upon two Hebrews who were striving with one another. They had even come to blows, with one person clearly being in the wrong. “And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together: and he said to him that did the wrong, Wherefore smitest thou thy fellow?” or, “why are you hitting your fellow Hebrew?” NIV (Ex 2:13).

There are Cain’s, Ishmael’s, and brothers like those of Joseph who will press their issue, refusing to back away from peaceful souls like Abel, Isaac, and Joseph. Men should discipline themselves to avoid overly-simplistic sayings that tend to cloud sound reasoning.

It is obvious that not all people see that “it is wrong” for brethren to quarrel. However, Moses saw it, and therefore sought to right this wrong, appealing to the hearts and minds of the men who were quarreling. His reasoning was certainly flawless. They were related to one another, and therefore should be assisting one another, not compounding their situation by striving with one another. Moses addressed his remarks to the one committing the offense: “him that did the wrong.” He did not say “It takes two to argue.” That is a trite saying that cannot be supported by either fact or reasoning. There are Cain’s, Ishmael’s, and brothers like those of Joseph who will press their issue, refusing to back away from peaceful souls like Abel, Isaac, and Joseph. Men should discipline themselves to avoid overly-simplistic sayings that tend to cloud sound reasoning. They really have no place among “the elect of God” (Col 3:12).

An Example of a Peacemaker

Moses is an excellent example of a peacemaker. In fact some of the more liberal translations say that is what he was doing in our text (New Living Translation and Living Bible). Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt 5:9).

A “peacemaker,” like Moses, makes an attempt to reconcile brethren, doing so with sound reasoning. There is no way to force brethren who are against each other to be reconciled, for that is a matter of the heart. For Moses the reasoning consisted of a reminder that they were brethren – of the same origin, and belonging to the same unique and chosen people. Behind that morsel of reasoning is the fact that those of common origin ought not to be divided among themselves. Paul reasoned “That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for

another” (1 Cor 12:25). That is something that is abundantly clear to those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit. However, for those in the flesh, it is as impossible to see as it was for the offending Hebrew who heard the precisely true statement made by Moses.

Speaking to the New Man

Flesh will not yield to reason – particularly spiritual reasoning – and the person who imagines that it will, is sure to be utterly frustrated with people. For this reason, Apostolic reasoning is always addressed to the “new man,” and never to the “old man” – to “the spirit,” and not to “the flesh.” Thus we read statements like the following.

- “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13).
- “Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph 6:6).
- “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11).
- “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Col 3:12).
- “As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God” (1 Pet 2:16).

I account that God was in this matter in order to get Moses out of Egypt, and begin his focused preparation for leading the children out of Egypt at the appointed time. The time had come for him to leave the hostile land.

This kind of appeal is made because of the very nature of the New Covenant. Inherent in this covenant is knowledge that has a constraining element in it. Once the reality of our situation in Christ is clearly seen, righteousness becomes perfectly reasonable, being preferred and earnestly desired. Of course, if appeals are made only upon the basis of law and obligation, much of this will be hidden to the hearers. In such a case, the advantage is actually given to the flesh.

THE RESPONSE TO MOSES

“ 27 But he that did his neighbor wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us? 28 Wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday?” Other versions read, “But he who did his neighbor wrong pushed him away, saying, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge over us? 'Do you want to kill me as you did the Egyptian yesterday'” NKJV

This account is found in Exodus 2:13-14. Behold the obstinance of the natural man. This abrasive remark was said by the person who “did his neighbor wrong.” It was not said out of any interest in the truth, or a desire to do what was right. It was spoken out of a total interest in self. That is the manner of the natural man, or the flesh. Sin draws the attention of its victim inward, with no regard for the will of God and what is right.

Moses had hoped the people would see the hand of God in his activity. However, rather than seeing God in it all, this man challenged Moses by asking who had appointed him over them. In other words, he rejected both the words and the actions of Moses. He saw Moses as being out of order intruding into his affairs, even though he had done “wrong” to his brother. Therefore he violently pushed Moses away, seeking to rid himself of the influence of the one who was calling for righteousness, and showing the unreasonableness of unrighteousness.

It is not certain how this man knew that Moses had killed the offending Egyptian on the previous day. The account in Exodus indicates that he had slain the man secretly, and privately hid him in the sand. "So he looked this way and that, and when he saw there was no one around, he struck down the Egyptian and hid him in the sand" NASB (Ex 2:12). We also know from the historical account that Moses was surprised that the matter was known.

I account that God was in this matter in order to get Moses out of Egypt, and begin his focused preparation for leading the children out of Egypt at the appointed time. The time had come for him to leave the hostile land. He must now be more precisely readied for the time and work for which he was born.

MOSES GOES INTO THE LAND OF MIDIAN

"29 Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Madian, where he begat two sons." Other versions read, "Then, at this saying, Moses fled and became a dweller in the land of Midian, where he had two sons," NKJV "And at this remark Moses fled, and became an alien in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons," NASB "When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons," NIV "When he heard this, Moses fled and became a resident alien in the land of Midian. There he became the father of two sons," NRSV "And at these words, Moses went in flight to the land of Midian, and was living there for a time, and had two sons," BBE "When Moses heard him say this, he ran away from Egypt. He went to live in the land of Midian where he was a stranger. While he lived there he had two sons," IE "At that reply Moses sought safety by flight and he was an exile and an alien in the country of Midian, where he became the father of two sons," AMPLIFIED and "At that retort Moses fled and lived as an exile in the land of Midian, where he became the father of two sons." PHILLIPS

In speaking of the flight of Moses from Egypt, the book of Hebrews said, "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb 11:27). The account in Exodus seems to indicate that Moses did fear the wrath of the king. "Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian: and he sat down by a well" (Ex 2:15). The answer is found in Stephen's account of the matter. Moses did not leave Egypt because of Pharaoh's anger, but because of the saying of the Jewish man he had admonished. The account in Exodus says that Moses reasoned, "Surely this thing is known." Stephen now elaborates on this by saying this was the reason for him leaving Egypt – the fact that his deed was known among the Israelites. To him, they were a greater threat than Pharaoh. He was not indifferent to the threat of Pharaoh, but that is not what caused him to leave Egypt. From his point of view, Israel was not yet ready for him. From heaven's point of view, he must now enter into the last phase of his training, which would have to do with desert survival and managing a flock in that environ.

In this new and desert, even as Joseph in Egypt, Moses beget two sons. These were born to him by Zipporah, daughter of Jethro, the priest of Midian. The record of their birth and the naming of them is found in Exodus 18:3-4. "And her two sons; of which the name of the one was Gershom; for he said, I have been an alien in a strange land: and the name of the other was Eliezer; for the God of my father, said he, was mine help, and delivered me from the sword of Pharaoh."

In this we behold the wonderful character of this man! In these two expressions we have a revelation of what it meant to endure "as seeing Him who is invisible."

A TENDENCY TO BE AVOIDED

Because the church has been invaded with sophistry, there is a marked tendency among professing Christians to assign ignoble motives to great men of the faith. Thus unthinking men are quick to refer to men like Abraham and Isaac as liars, Jacob as a deceiver, David as an adulterer, Peter for speaking

rashly , and Paul as murderer . However, these are not wise ascriptions. The fact that these men sinned cannot be denied. In fact, their offenses are recorded. However, the record does not call them by these degenerative terms, and neither should we. They became known for their faith, and men do not do well by seeking to make them known for their deficiencies. Whatever may be said of the flaws recorded against them, they were not repetitive in nature, and men are out of order in representing them as though they were.

I deplore this increasingly popular way of referring to men who were clearly favored and commended by God. It is nothing less than a dishonest effort to justify the absence of virtue in those who profess the name of Christ. This they imagine to do by dragging down the most noble of our race to the obtuse level of contemporary Christendom. In thus doing, the seriousness of the condition of the modern church is veiled, and it is not seen as a serious one. This is a practice that is nowhere set forth in the Word of God. Its origins are found in the vanity of sinful men.

CONCLUSION

In our text, Stephen is confirming Israel's consistent rejection of the good word of the Lord. It was seen early on in the brothers of Joseph rejecting his word, and treating him with contempt. It was also seen later on in the failure of the Hebrews to see in Moses something more than one of their peers. He is also unveiling the presence and work of God throughout their history – something culminating in the coming of Jesus.

Stephen's expert defense confirms the need of the new birth and justification by faith. The deficiencies that the man of God is chronicling were found in the premier race of all time. Yet, after enjoying the focused attention of the God of heaven for fifteen hundred years, the world still needed a Savior. That confirmed the extent of the fall of man.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #31

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #4

“ 7:30 And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush. 31 When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, 32 Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold. 33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground. 34 I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt .” (Acts 7:30-34)

INTRODUCTION

For forty long years Moses had been in a wilderness – in “the backside of the desert” in the land of Midian. It was certainly a far cry from being in the house of Pharaoh’s daughter, and being called her son. Now, he is in the land of the Midianites, the progeny of the fourth son of Abraham through Keturah (Gen 25:2; 1 Chron 1:32). This was not the promised land, and it was not noted for the richness that characterized Egypt. According to appearance, it looked as though Moses had taken a step backward. Actually, however, he was moving forward – into a deeper involvement in the purpose of God.

Now, he is in the land occupied by the people to whom Joseph was sold by his brothers. That was the means through which Joseph was sent by God into Egypt (Gen 37:28; Psa 105:17). After spending his first forty years within Pharaoh’s household and all of the opulence of Egypt, and being cultured in all of their wisdom, Moses now finds himself in a totally different environment, looking after the sheep of his father-in-law (Ex 3:1). This was an occupation for which the Egyptians had a total disdain. It is written, “for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians” (Gen 46:34). However, after having spent forty years among the Egyptians, Moses had still not become one of them. He was an Israelite in heart,

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and had “endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). The occupation the Egyptians considered to be abominable was no abomination to Moses. Although, from the standpoint of appearance, he had been one of the Egyptians, educated and cultured by them, yet he remained separate from them, being an Israelite in heart, and not an Egyptian.

The affirmation of Moses’ endurance by means of seeing Him who is invisible, is a commentary on Moses’ life from his tenure in Egypt until he was sent back to lead the people out of bondage. It is written that he forsook, Egypt by faith, and that he endured by means of his perception of God. This is how he survived in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Midian as well.

In this regard, Moses is much like Joseph, who preceded him in the land of Egypt.

- Both of them were removed from their families.
- Both of them were located in Egypt while young.
- Both of them found favor with Pharaoh.
- Both of them were aware of their heritage.
- Both of them maintained their faith.
- Both of them were rejected by their brethren.
- Both of them were persuaded of the truth of God’s promise to deliver Israel.
- Both of them preferred the association with the children of Israel to their connection with Pharaoh.
- Both of them experienced exile.
- Both of them kept the faith during their exile.

Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah had much the same experience in Babylon. They too were removed from their families when they were young, brought into a strange country, achieved status in that county, and were subjected to suffering while there. Yet, they also kept the faith, and chose identity with the people of God over identity with the Babylonians.

A PRINCIPLE TO BE SEEN

It is apparent that we are being exposed to the way the people of God approach life in this world.

When the Living God interfaces with a person or persons, they at once assume a different posture in this world. They may be in the world, but they are not of the world – just as Joseph and Moses were in Egypt, but was not of Egypt, and Daniel and his associates were in Babylon, yet were not of Babylon. This is why Jesus said to His disciples, “ye are not of the world” (John 15:19). It is why Peter addressed the saints “as strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet 2:11). It is why the believers prior to Christ “confessed they were strangers and pilgrims in the earth” (Heb 11:13).

This principle, while consistent throughout Scripture, has been so obscured by institutional religion that is scarcely known. The modern church has settled down in this world, and feels at home in it, oblivious of the fact that such a posture constitutes one to be “the enemy of God” (James 4:4). No individual or group of individuals can immerse themselves in the affairs of this world, being joined to it in their hearts, without forfeiting Divine acceptance. It is not possible to be “the enemy of God,” and be blessed by Him while so characterized. Nor, indeed, is it possible, to have a carnal mind, or worldly mindset, and profit from the Word of God, or maintain any association with God that is beneficial. Enmity and reconciliation are opposites, and cannot be joined together. Where there is hostility against God, prayer is pointless, and blessing becomes impossible. There can be no understanding of the Word of God in such a case, and there is no promise of blessing to such an individual.

Just as surely as Moses could not be an integral part of the Egyptian culture and still be used by God for blessing, so the person who is a part of the world system, thinking and acting in harmony with the world, cannot be instrumental in the body of Christ. As soon as a person becomes one with the world, they are severed from the Lord. This is not a matter for speculation. If salvation is extrication from the world, then being one with the world cannot possibly be allowed in Christ Jesus. If, when we were a part of the world, we were the enemies of God, how is it possible to once again be joined to the world without again becoming God’s enemy?

Salvation separates people from the world, like Moses was separated from Egypt. He was separate in his perceptions, his desires, and his focus. He saw what the Egyptians could not see, and longed for what they did not understand. This is why he was able to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. An endurance of this sort is not possible when one is at home in the world. Had Moses been at home in Egypt, he would have had no interest in a God who could not be seen. It was his lack of at-homeness in Egypt, as well as in the desert, that required him to live by faith. There is no need for faith when what is satisfied with what can be seen.

This is precisely why believers are admonished, “Wherefore, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord” (2 Cor 6:17). It is only then that the promise will be realized: “and I will receive you.” It is not possible that God would conduct Himself toward person in violation of this statement. A person who is not “separate” in the sense of this text cannot, in that state, experience Divine acceptance. If such poor souls imagine God has received them, they have only been deceived by the devil. God would not call upon people to separate in order that He might receive them, if He had received them already. It seems to me that it does not require any extraordinary insight to perceive this. Yet, if we look at professing Christendom, and weigh its general teachings, it actually appears as though God has lied in this statement, and has thoroughly misrepresented Himself. What, pray tell, will be the lot of a person who imagines that this is the case? Is it not written, “For what if some did not believe? Will their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? Certainly not! Indeed, let God be true but every man a liar. As it is written: ‘That You may be justified in Your words, And may overcome when You are judged’ ” NKJV (Rom 3:3-4).

Rest assured, God will be justified in ALL of His sayings – and “Be ye separate and I will receive you,” is one of His sayings. He will overcome all who have conducted their lives as though this was not true. Before an assembled universe, and before the angels of God, they will be shown to be liars.

MOSES INVOLVED IN PURPOSE

In our text, God is preparing Moses for a forty-year-long circuitous journey through the wilderness. It is one in which Moses would manage the wayward house of Israel, which was God's own household. As our text opens, Moses has already spent forty years in this area. You might call it a period of wilderness training.

There is no evidence that he received any word from God during that time. Yet, his faith was kept in tact, even though it was not supported by an abundance of Divine communication. In fact, we have no example of God ever speaking directly to Moses until the event chronicled in our text – when he was eighty years old! However, he had kept the faith that he had, and now God will call upon Moses to focus on a work of gargantuan proportions. This confirms that faith can be kept under the most severe testing, and over a long period of time. Failing is always wrong.

WHEN FORTY YEARS WERE EXPIRED

“ 7:30a And when forty years were expired . . . ” Other versions read, “when forty years had passed,” NKJV “ after forty years had passed,” NASB “when forty years were fulfilled,” ASV “At the end of forty years,” BBE “forty years having been fulfilled,” YLT and “when forty years had gone by.” AMPLIFIED

Often it is a long time before God speaks to His chosen ones. There have been times when He dealt with His people at a very young age. Joseph was seventeen when he began having dreams from God, and went down into Egypt (Gen 37:2). Samuel was a very young boy when God began using him (1 Sam 3:7-8). David was still a young boy when the Lord called him (1 Sam 16:12-13). Josiah was eight years old when he became king (1 Kgs 22:1). Jehoiachin was also eight years old when he began to reign (2 Chron 36:9). Jehoash was seven years old when he began to reign (2 Kgs 11:121). Jehoahaz became king when he was sixteen years old (2 Kgs 13:10). Azariah was also made king when he was sixteen (2 Kgs 14:21). Uzziah was twenty-five years old when he became king (2 Kgs 15:33). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were also very young when carried into Babylon (Dan 1:3-6). John the Baptist was filled with the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb (Lk 1:15,41), and began his ministry at thirty (Lk 1:13 & 3:23). However, not every great man was called in his youth!

Noah was nearly five hundred old when he started building the ark, entering into it when he was six hundred years old (Gen 5:32; 7:6). Abraham was seventy-five years old when he left Haran and started for the promised land (Gen 12:4). Now, Moses is eighty when he is called by God. As is apparent, age is no factor when it comes to Divine workings – whether old or young.

The language here is very precise: “when forty years were expired.” The word “expired” is translated from the Greek word **plhrwqe,ntwn** (play-roth-en-ton). The root meaning of the word is “to make full, to fill, to fill up,” THAYER “to make full, fill completely,” FRIBERG “fulfill, make come true, bring about . . . accomplish,” UBS “to cause something to become full,” LOUW-NIDA “to fulfill, to perform . . . to complete a period of time” LEH and “complete, reach its end . . . bring to completion, finish something already begun.” GINGRICH

As the above word is used in scripture, it accents purpose rather than mere duration. That is why its definitions include fulfilling, making come true, and bringing to completion. This kind of term is not used to merely denote living out life without due regard to an established purpose. Here is a sampling of the use of this word, found ninety-two times in Matthew through Revelation. The words translated from this Greek word are in bold type.

- “Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying” (Matt 1:22).
- “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which

standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled ” (John 3:29).

- “But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled ” (Acts 3:18).

- “And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark” (Acts 12:25).

- “And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose” (Acts 13:25).

- “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:4).

- “Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law” (Rom 13:8).

- “And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled ” (2 Cor 10:6).

- “Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23).

- “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19).

- “He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things” (Eph 4:10).

- “And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10).

- “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col 4:12).

- “And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it” (Col 4:17).

- “Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God” (Rev 3:2).

- “And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled ” (Rev 6:11).

Our text is dealing with Divine purpose, not mere happenstance. Stephen has traced the working of God through Abraham, Joseph, and now Moses.

THE INVOLVEMENT OF GOD IN THE AFFAIRS OF HUMANITY

David once confessed, “My times are in Thy hand ” (Psa 31:15). He also said, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD : and he delighteth in His way” (Psa 37:23). Solomon observed, “Man's goings are of the LORD ; how can a man then understand his own way?” (Prov 20:24). Jeremiah acknowledged, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). Daniel reminded wicked Belshazzar, “But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven . . . and the God in whose hand thy breath is , and whose are all thy ways , hast thou not glorified” (Dan 5:23). All of this is involved in something Paul told the Athenian philosophers: “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation . . . For in him we

live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring” (Acts 17:26,28).

There are affirmations of Scripture that confirm that no man lives independently of God – free will not withstanding. We already know that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord. However, that does not mean that the Lord has nothing to do with other people. Paul declared that God had strategically placed all men in both time and location. This was done to give them the advantage in seeking the Lord. “God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” NIV (Acts 17:27).

The fact that men do not choose to have any dealings with God does not mean that He has no dealings with them. They are not favorable dealings, but He still impacts upon their lives. Once, when Israel was unresponsive to God, He spoke to them through Isaiah, saying what He would impose, upon them. “ I also will choose their delusions , and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not” (Isa 66:4). To the church, He speaks of this kind of judgment, confirming how disastrous it is to not hearken to the Lord: “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie” (2 Thess 2:11). Not only would delusion be imposed upon the people, but the Lord would also choose the kind of delusion – so strong that the people would believe a lie. Add to this the fact that God can render people incapable of understanding His Word (Isa 6:9). He sometimes chooses to actually deceive certain false prophets in order that He might justly destroy them: “And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet , and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel” (Ezek 14:9).

The point to be seen is that God is involved in the affairs of men, whether for blessing or cursing. Ultimately, it is God Himself “with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). Lives commence by His power, are sustained according to His purpose, and are terminated at his will. Even if it is Joseph being hated, sold, enslaved, and imprisoned in a foreign land, from the higher vantage point it can be said to the perpetrators of the crime, “So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God” (Gen 45:8). Further, Joseph was kept in chains for a specified amount of time: “Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him” (Psa 105:19).

SO IT WAS WITH MOSES

So it was with Moses. The purpose of God was being served by his tenure in the wilderness of Midian.

- The time of his birth was precisely timed (Ex 2:2; Acts 7:20).
- The duration of. His protection by his parents was precise (Ex 2:2; Acts 7:20).
- His placement in the river in a basket, and his discovery by Pharaoh’s daughter was orchestrated from heaven (Ex 2:3-10; Acts 7:21).
- Moses visited his people at the age of forty, when it was the right time to heighten his readiness for the appointed work (Ex 2:11; 7:23).
- He left Egypt at the right time, when his brethren did not yet realize his Divine placement (Ex 2:14-15; Acts 7:25-29).

Stephen is showing the insolence of humanity in resisting God. The hardness of the unregenerate heart is seen in its rebellion against the will of a Sovereign God – the Creator and Sustainer of the people themselves.

He went to the right geographical area at the right time, to meet the right people, stay with the right

family, and culture the right relationships (Ex 2:16-22; Acts 7:29).

Thus Moses' birth, his time in Egypt, and his time in the desert were all under Divine control, and were fulfilled according to God's appointment. His time in the desert was sufficient to acquaint him with desert life – in a sense it might be called desert survival training . When the time of the appointed deliverance came, Moses would not be unfamiliar with the kind of terrain through which he would lead the children of Israel.

His time in the desert allowed for a Pharaoh to be raised up by God who would occasion great glory being brought to God (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17). It lasted long enough for the Israelites to be fully ready to leave the land of Egypt.

Also, during this time Moses' brother Aaron and his sister Miriam were sustained in Egypt, their faith being kept in tact. They would be brought along side Moses to effect God's deliverance of the people from Egypt. As it is written in Micah, "For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam " (Micah 6:4). The Lord "sent" Moses from Midian, and Aaron and Miriam from within the confines of Egypt itself – and all at the appointed time for the appointed work.

Thus it is again confirmed that preparations belong to the Lord: "The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD " (Prov 16:1). The "times" of men are in the hand of the Lord (Psa 31:15). All things are "of Him, and through Him, and to Him" (Rom 11:36). This is why insightful men can give "thanks always for all things" (Eph 5:20) – something that would not be possible if God was not involved in "all things." This is why enlightened people can "bless the Lord at all times" (Psa 34:1). Although the Lord does not always provide us with the details, we can live believing that He is, in fact, working all things together for our good (Rom 8:27). That kind of working would not be possible if there were circumstances or seasons that were not under His control.

The Point Being Made

Stephen is building a case that will confirm the continued obstinance of Israel. By establishing the purpose of God, and confirming His orchestration of the events associated with His development of a nation from which the Messiah would come, Stephen is showing the insolence of humanity in resisting God. The hardness of the unregenerate heart is seen in its rebellion against the will of a Sovereign God – the Creator and Sustainer of the people themselves. There is no greater revelation of the stupidity into which sin has cast our race than to resist the wisdom and revealed purpose of God. The ultimate foolishness is for the created ones to choose their own will over the manifested will of their Creator. This is what Paul refers to as not liking to "retain God in their knowledge" (Rom 1:28).

Although men have found convenient ways of explaining this glaring human trait, there is no way to dignify it. If not corrected, it is a manner that will eventually lead men into "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess 1:9). God will not accept those who are fundamentally unlike Himself. His nature will not allow Him to do so. Hence, the necessity of redemption and a new creation.

The dreadful impact of erroneous theology upon the hearts and minds of people is confirmed by the length of time that has consistently been required for even devoted people to comprehend these facts. Under the dominance of a fundamentally flawed way of thinking, men have tended to reason more in terms of duty and requirements than of grace and truth.

The dreadful impact of erroneous theology upon the hearts and minds of people is confirmed by the length of time that has consistently been required for even devoted people to comprehend these facts. Under the dominance of a fundamentally flawed way of thinking, men have tended to reason

more in terms of duty and requirements than of grace and truth. The religious mind gravitates to Law, imagining that this is the appointed means of governing and correcting wayward humanity. But this is not the case. The Law was never designed to correct the human condition, but rather identify it. In this way, the necessity of Jesus and the value of faith would become more readily apparent.

The Law mentality is a more difficult mindset to overcome than appears evident. The Colossian church was being pulled aside to this way of thinking (Col 2:20-23). This was also true of the church of the Galatians (Gal 1:6-9; 3:16-25). The epistle to Hebrew believers also addressed this way of thinking, because it had obscured the essentiality, ministry, and effectiveness of Jesus Himself (Heb 8:1-10:39). Although somewhat advanced, the church in Rome also required extensive instruction on this matter of inherent human weakness and the nature of justification by faith (Rom 2:17-5:9).

Even though, once the completeness of human corruption and the necessity of Jesus are seen, they are perfectly clear and reasonable, many of us had to wade through some very murky waters before we saw their wonderful necessity. In fact, one might say these are really elementary matters – matters related to the necessity of salvation, and the requirement for a new birth, or regeneration. One might imagine that their glory will cause them to shine forth, instantly removing the darkness created by aberrant religious thinking. However, this is not the case. The persuasion of these things requires an aggressive posture. It is one in which the Kingdom is seized with violence, and taken by force “as a precious prize” AMPLIFIED (Matt 11:12).

The continued veneration of the wisdom of men within the professed Christian community, and the exaltation of human wisdom, confirms these two things have not been discerned (the necessity of salvation, and the requirement of the new birth). The successful hawking of religious routine, the commandments and ordinances of men, and various systems of law and tradition, unveils that men remain fundamentally ignorant of the revealed rationale behind salvation. In spite of the fact that faith is plainly declared to be the means of acquiring both Divine favor and a proper understanding, men continue to peddle other means through which discernment may be obtained. Some say the secret is a working knowledge of the Greek and the Hebrew. Others postulate that a certain hermeneutic, or science of interpretation, is required. Still others write their own summation of imagined liberating secrets, encapsulating them in a creed that becomes the key to comprehending the truth. However, none of these approaches properly account for sin and all of its dreadful effects. Those who develop them are unable to see the degenerate state of Adam’s entire race, else they would not hold human wisdom in such high regard. Such men continue to imagine that if men can only be given enough information, they will be able to work through their problems, make themselves acceptable to God, and control the outbreak of sin.

This mindset, flawed to the core, is the mother of all multi-step plans that are purported to control human behavior. It is what gives birth to human strategies designed to accomplish what God is perceived to have commanded or commissioned – whether it is spiritual growth, church planting, church growth, or mission outreach. This is the way of thinking that spawned the concept of accountability to our peers as a means to spiritual stability. It has produced all manner of self-help programs that profess to produce stable families, good husbands, good wives, and commendable young people. It is not that it is wrong to desire stability within the Christian community. Rather, it is wrong to seek such a thing independently of grace and faith – neither of which give any weight to the wisdom of men.

Getting to the Point

Permit me to get more to the point behind these observations. Stephen is addressing a people who have been cultured by God. Their origin was traced back to God himself, being a miraculous one. Their growth into a nation could not be accounted for independently of God Himself. Their concept of God was a revealed one. The Law which formed a covenant between them and God was given by

the Lord – every syllable of it, with every jot and tittle. They had been recovered and delivered from impossible circumstances. They were provided with faithful prophets who delivered to them the Divine assessment of their condition, and offered specific remedies for it. The Lord delivered to them special customs and observances that were designed to highlight their God-blessed condition. There was a Divine commitment given to them of blessing – thorough blessing – if they would keep and do everything required of them.

These people could not possibly have been given greater promises pertaining to life in this world. Nor, indeed, could there have been curses relative to life in the flesh that were any stronger. So far as life in this world is concerned, no people were ever given any great advantages or incentives. No people had ever been so blessed. This is why Moses reminded them, “For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deut 4:7-8). God Himself challenged these people to consider their advantages: “What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isa 5:4). He assessed their wayward condition with startling words: “Why should ye be stricken any more? ye will revolt more and more: the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint” (Isa 1:5). Hear Him lament through Jeremiah: “In vain have I smitten your children; they received no correction” (Jer 2:30).

These people – the Israelites – confirmed that men cannot correct their wayward condition, even when they are given all of the information and tools to do so. If ever a people should have known their need of a Savior, it should have been this people. Yet, the only people who rose above their peers were those who lived by faith.

Why were these things said? If men can be altered by advantage, why did that not happen to these people? If reformation is possible by routine, and correction can be made by information and rules, then why were these people not reformed? They had an excellent beginning. Their circumstances were Divinely created, altered, and maintained. Right and wrong were clearly delineated and expounded to them. Required information was delivered to them in a timely manner. They had the best land, the best law, and the best promises. They were provided with details required to approach to the Lord in such a way as would keep them from being destroyed.

Why were they not changed by these things? Is it because they were the worst of all people? Indeed not! They were the most favored of all people. They were a cultured people – and over an extended period of time.

These people – the Israelites – confirmed that men cannot correct their wayward condition, even when they are given all of the information and tools to do so. If ever a people should have known their need of a Savior, it should have been this people. Yet, the only people who rose above their peers were those who lived by faith. Because they believed, those people loved the Law, and sought to fulfill it. Yet, even they found they could not do so on their own – even though they had the promises, faith, and a profound desire to please God.

Of such people it is written, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb 11:13). It is therefore a reproach for those living in the blazing glory of the New Covenant to have less faith and less persuasion than those who did not receive the promises. That is a completely intolerable condition.

Do men imagine that they can reform people with their routines, when such a reformation did not take place under Divine administration. Satan has deceived men into thinking this is possible. All of the “_____ anonymous” programs, however good they may appear, assume that this can be done – that men can be changed by procedure. Yet, these rules cannot go far enough, and the persons who

develop them know it. They cannot get a person beyond the point of acknowledging that he is still the same as he has always been. Only now, they allege, he is able to control the condition.

But this is not satisfactory before God. It is not enough to control our downward bent. There must be something in men that glories in the presence and blessing of the Lord, and seeks it so zealously that all competing interests are discarded in life's garbage can. Only the salvation of God can accomplish this. In view of this circumstance, woe to that person who seeks a resolution to the human circumstance from mere men, who themselves must be saved.

In his expert defense, Stephen is confirming Israel's need of a Savior. He is showing how unreasonable they have been in their consistent rejection of those who were sent by God. This will confirm their fundamental corruption – something they held in common with all men. However, he himself is a sterling example of how that condition is corrected in Christ Jesus. This is his conduct under extreme duress, and it brings glory to the Lord.

AN ANGEL APPEARED TO MOSES

“30b . . . there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.”

The book of Exodus provides a few details concerning the forty years Moses spent in Egypt. They are enough to reveal the nature of Moses, and how he was a man of faith during that time.

From one perspective, grievous experiences and isolation are really incidental. That is, they are really not the focus of life, but are the means through which the people of God are prepared for Divine appointments. That is why Paul could speak so matter-of-factly concerning his staggering sufferings, which were both numerous and severe.

Sometime after Moses arrived in Midian, he sat down by a well. The timing was precise, when the seven daughters of the priest of Midian came to draw water for their father's flocks (Ex 2:15-16).

- At that precise time, certain shepherds came and drove the daughters away from the well (Ex 2:17a).
- Moses, being providentially at the well at that time, arose, helping the daughters, and watering their flocks (Ex 2:17b).
- When the daughters returned to their father, upon being asked why they returned so early, they told him how an Egyptian, Moses, had helped them and drew water “enough” for them, and “watered the flock” (Ex 2:18-19).
- Their father asked why they had left the man, and told them to call him to their home to “eat bread” with them (Ex 2:10).
- The man and his daughters were so gracious, that Moses “was content to dwell with the man” (Ex 2:21a).
- The man “gave Moses Zipporah his daughter” as his wife (Ex 2:21a).
- Zipporah gave birth to Moses' first son, Gershom (Ex 2:21b). Some time latter, she also gave birth to another son, Eliezer, not mentioned until after she returned to her father's house from Egypt, where she had gone with Moses (Ex 18:4; 4:24-26).
- From there, the record in Exodus leaps forward to the time when the Pharaoh died who was reigning when Moses fled from Egypt. It was at that time that Israel's bondage was nearly unbearable, and their cries came up into the ears of Almighty God (Ex 2:23-25).

A Certain Perspective

There is a certain perspective of life that is seen in this text. From one perspective, grievous experiences and isolation are really incidental. That is, they are really not the focus of life, but are the means through which the people of God are prepared for Divine appointments. That is why Paul could speak so matter-of-factly concerning his staggering sufferings, which were both numerous and severe (1 Cor 4:10-13; 2 Cor 4:7-12; 6:4-5,8-10; 11:23-27). He knew that the true measure of life is not in the area of suffering and hardship, but in Divine employment and blessing.

This is why it is wrong to probe life's difficulties, attempting to find their source, and arrive at satisfactory explanations for them. When things are not clear, pondering why difficult experiences happen is not wise. It is enough to know and believe that all of our trials are managed, and that they will not exceed the strength of those who trust in the Lord (1 Cor 10:13). It is also a sweet elixir for the soul to consider how God is, in fact, working all things together for our good – whether we are able to see it or not.

The church of our day has not done well with its stewardship of the truth. Its slothfulness in this regard has given occasion for opportunists to rise within the professing church who exploit the people, pretending that they are experts in human behavior and problem resolution. These pretenders trace difficulty to heredity, genetic makeup, social environment, family curses, and the likes. They do not explain to the people why they have survived – even though it may have been in a desert like Moses, a prison like Joseph, or a dungeon like Paul. All of this is a very serious matter because it has produced a religious environment in which self-seeking charlatans can flourish, while the people remain oppressed by ignorance.

Stephen's review of the life of Moses is not a mere recap of history. It is not an attempt to show the glory of national heritage. Stephen is declaring the presence of God in the affairs of men, and the manner in which He works out His purpose in hostile environs. He is also showing the effects of a strong faith, as well as spiritual obtuseness.

THERE APPEARED TO HIM IN THE WILDERNESS OF SINAI

“ . . . there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai . . .” Other versions read, “in the desert near Mount Sinai,” NIV “in the waste land of Sinai,” BBE and “ in the wilderness (desert) of Mount Sinai” AMPLIFIED

After forty years in Midian, we now find Moses in the desert that was near to Mount Sinai. The record of this event is found in the third chapter of Exodus. There we are told that Moses was keeping the flock of his father in law, Jethro. At that time, he had spent as much time in Midian as he had in Egypt – forty years. We are also told that he was on the “backside of the desert,” and that he had “led the flock” there. Other versions say this was on the “west side of the wilderness,” NASB or “the far side of the desert.” NIV The precise point, according to the record in Exodus, was “to the mountain of God, even Horeb” (Ex 3:1). Stephen identifies this mountain as “Mount Sinai,” from which the Law was given.

Thus, we have these four designations of the mountain from which the Law was given, and a covenant made with Israel: “the mountain of God,” or “the mount of God,” “Horeb,” and “Mount Sinai.”

The frequent references to this place, and what is said about it, are worthy of notation.

- “The mountain of God.” This is where Moses received his calling to lead Israel out of Egypt to the promised land (Ex 3:1).
- “Mount of God.” This is where God told Aaron to go, out of Egypt to meet with Moses (Ex 4:27). It is where Jethro brought Zipporah and Moses' sons to him after the exodus (Ex 18:5). It is where Moses spent time with God following the giving of the Law

(Ex 24:13). It is where Elijah journeyed for forty days to meet with the Lord (1 Kgs 19:8).

- “Horeb.” This is where Moses brought water out of a rock (Ex 17:6). It is where Israel “stripped themselves of their ornaments” (Ex 33:6). Deuteronomy refers to this mount as the place where God spoke to Israel and revealed the Law (1:2,6,19; 4:10,15; 5:2; 9:8; 18;16; 29:1). It is where God made the covenant with Israel (1 Kgs 8:9; 2 Chron 5:10). It is also identified as the place where Elijah met with God (1 Kgs 19:8). It is where Israel worshiped a golden calf (Psa 105:19). It is where God commanded the Law “with its statutes and judgments” (Mal 4:4).

- “Sinai.” This was located in the wilderness through which God led Israel out of Egypt (Ex 19:1-2). God came down in the sight of the people in this place (Ex 19:11). Sinai was enveloped with fire and smoke, and quaked greatly when God descended upon it (Ex 19:18). God called Moses to the top of this mount, to give him the Law (Ex 19:20). God forbade the people to go up into this mount (Ex 19:23). The glory of God remained upon this mount for over forty days (Ex 24:16-18). This is where Moses received the tables of the covenant (Ex 31:18). It is where Moses received the second set of tables after he had broken the first in his anger toward the people (Ex 34:2-4). It is where Moses delivered the law verbally to the people (Ex 34:32). The details of keeping the Law were revealed from Sinai (Lev 7:38; 25:1; 26:46; 27:34; Num 28:6). Thousands of angels came to this mount at the giving of the Law (Deut 33:2). Mount Sinai is an allegory of the First Covenant (Gal 4:24-25).

Here is a geographical location identified with God Himself – and the Holy Spirit makes the association. God has made such associations frequently in Scripture, and we cannot afford to ignore them. They confirm the effect of Divine influences.

- Abraham returned to a place where he had built an altar, and there “called upon the name of the Lord” (Gen 13:4).
- Jacob referred to a specific plot of land as “the house of God” (Gen 28:17).
- During the times of the Judges, the children of Israel went to a specific place to seek Divine counsel – “the house of God” (Judges 20:18).
- God hallowed the Temple, and declared He had “put” His name there (1 Kgs 9:3).
- God chose Jerusalem as a place to “put” His name, associating it with himself (1 Kgs 11:36).
- The place in which the Levites served is referred to as “the tabernacle of the house of God” (1 Chron 6:45).
- Jesus referred to the Temple as “My Father’s house” (John 2:16).
- God referred to the land of Canaan as “My land” (Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7).
- Jesus frequently “resorted” to a specific garden for prayer with His disciples (John 18:2).

The point here is not the inordinate veneration of buildings and places. However, wherever men are vouchsafed extraordinary visitations and spiritual insights, holy men have maintained a special view of such places.

AN ANGEL OF THE LORD IN FLAME OF FIRE IN A BUSH

“ . . . an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.” Other versions read, “an angel . . . in the flame of a burning thorn bush,” NASB “a messenger . . . in the flames of a burning bush,” GWN “the angel of the Lord . . . in a fire that burned in a bush,” MRD “an angel . . . in a flame blazing from a bush that was on fire,” NJB “an angel in the middle of a flame of fire in a bush,” WEYMOUTH and

“an angel, in the flame of a burning bramblebush .” AMPLIFIED

This account is record in Exodus 3:2: “And the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush: and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” (Ex 3:2). The Exodus account reveals that the fire was not a consuming fire. It did not diminish the properties of the bush, or cause it to change its appearance. Remember, this was in a desert, which makes the phenomenon all the more remarkable.

When referring to this incident, Jesus said that “in the bush God spake unto him” (Mk 12:26).

Angelic Involvements

In Christ, we are told that angels are “all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb 1:14). In this case, an angel will bring a message from God to Moses. There are frequent references to messages delivered by holy angels. Several of them spoke for God in the first person.

- “The angel of the Lord” gave extensive instruction to Hagar, Sarai’s handmaid declaring, “I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude” (Gen 16:7-12).
- “The angel of the Lord” appeared to Abraham saying, “By Myself I have sworn saith the Lord . . . I will bless thee . . . I will multiply the seed . . . thou hast obeyed My voice” (Gen 22:15-18).
- When Jacob was with Laban, “the angel of God” appeared to him in a dream, instructing him to return to the land of his kindred. In his message the angel said, “I am the God of Bethel” (Gen 31:11-13).
- “The angel of the Lord” appeared to Gideon, calling him to be a deliverer. In the dialog of the angel it is written, “And the Lord said unto him” (Judges 6:12-23).

There are numerous incidents like this, but these will suffice to establish a certain facet of Divine workings. Some have read such texts and concluded that “the angel of the Lord” was a pre-

The answer to this seeming dilemma is really quite simple. These messengers spoke the word of God. They delivered the precise message that God sent them to deliver. They did not have to precede their message by saying, “The Lord told me to say,” or something similar. Real messengers are not required to speak in such a manner.

incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus. This is a prominent view among several conservative theologians. However, it is a view that is seriously flawed. It represents the pre-incarnate Word as a Messenger prior to His humiliation – for an angel is a messenger, and even has the “form” of a servant, although it is a form superior to that of man. However, Jesus is pointedly declared to have taken upon Himself “the form of a servant” when He entered into the world in a body that had been prepared for Him (Phil 2:7; Heb 10:5-9). It is also stated that, in redemption, Jesus “took not on Him the nature of angels” (Heb 2:17). Further, there is not the slightest doctrinal hint that he took upon Himself such a nature prior to coming into the world. The first, and only, time that Jesus is said to have laid aside Divine prerogatives is when He was sent by the Father “to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). Then, and only then, did He make Himself “of no reputation,” or is said to have “emptied Himself” (Phil 2:7).

In order for “the Word, who was with God and was God” (John 1:1) , to come into the world in any form, would have required some form of condescension. We know this is the case because God is said to humble Himself “to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth” (Psa 113:6).

Why Did These Angels Speak in the First Person?

If these angelic appearances were not really the Lord Jesus Himself, prior to the Word becoming flesh, why did they speak as though they were God Himself? This is the very point over which some students of Scripture have stumbled, thereby concluding that “the angel of the Lord” was really the Lord Himself – which appears to me to be a glaring paradox.

The answer to this seeming dilemma is really quite simple. These messengers spoke the word of God. They delivered the precise message that God sent them to deliver. They did not have to precede their message by saying, “The Lord told me to say,” or something similar. Real messengers are not required to speak in such a manner. A “thus saith the Lord” is precisely that – what the Lord has said. The fact that the word was delivered by a heavenly messenger does not diminish in the slightest the fact that God had said it.

An Example in the Giving of the Law

We have a sterling example of this in the giving of the Law from Sinai. In the account of the giving of the Law, the people are said to have heard “the voice of God” (Deut 4:33). In recounting how they received the covenant, Moses said, “And the LORD spake unto you out of the midst of the fire: ye heard the voice of the words, but saw no similitude; only ye heard a voice. And He declared unto you His covenant, which He commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and He wrote them upon two tables of stone” (Deut 4:13). Repeatedly this experience is referred to as hearing “the voice of the Lord” (Deut 5:25; 8:20; 13:18; 15:5; 18:16; 27:10; 28:1).

Yet, in the apostolic exposition of the giving of the Law, the law is said to have been spoken by angels. “For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward” (Heb 2:2). In this very passage, Stephen says the Law was received “by the disposition of angels,” or “by the direction of angels” (Acts 7:53). Paul says the Law, or the First Covenant, was “ordained by angels” (Gal 3:19). Yet, even though it was spoken by angels, it carried all of the force of a direct word from God, as though spoken without a mediator.

We have yet another example of a word delivered by an angel who also spoke in the first person. It was the angel who delivered the Revelation to John on the Isle of Patmos. John begins the Revelation with these words: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to show unto His servants things which must shortly come to pass; and He sent and signified it by His angel unto His servant John” (Rev 1:1). The message was then delivered by John to the messengers of the churches, who were, in turn, to deliver it to the churches (Rev 1:11; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14).

The message originated with God, and was ultimately delivered to “the churches.” Between God and the churches there were four messengers: Jesus, an angel, John, and the messenger to each church. Is there any honest soul who imagines that the message was any less from God when it was delivered to the churches than it was when it was given to Jesus? Is there the slightest possibility that the message lost significance, power, or any jot of tittle of content as it passed from Jesus to the angel, to John, to the messenger of each church?

Notice how the angel spoke to John, for the message was delivered to him by an angel that was sent by Jesus. “I will come unto thee quickly . . . I will give thee a crown of life . . . I will cast her into bed . . . I will kill her children with death . . . I will not blot his name out of the book of life . . . I will confess his name before My Father, and before His angels . . . I will write upon him My new name . . . I will spue thee out of My mouth . . . Behold, I stand at the door and knock . . . I am Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the end . . . I will be his God, and he shall be My son” (2:5, 10,22,23, 3:5,12,16; 21:6,7). Jesus Himself confirms that these words were delivered by His angel: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” (Rev 22:16).

What Shall We Say to These Things?

Thus, even though an angel spoke to Moses at the bush, it was also God speaking to him, calling him, and informing of His own purpose. The words spoken to Moses did not lose their full force because they were conveyed to him by an angel. It would have been out of order for Moses to insist that God speak directly with him on these matters, so he would know for sure that they were coming from him. It was this sort of response that caused Zecharias to be struck dumb for a season. When a chief angel, even Gabriel, delivered a word to him concerning the imminent birth of John the Baptist, Zecharias replied, “Whereby shall I know this? for I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years” (Luke 1:18). The response of the angel fortifies the observations I have just made. “I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to show thee these glad tidings. And, behold, thou shalt be dumb, and not able to speak, until the day that these things shall be performed, because thou believest not my words, which shall be fulfilled in their season” (Luke 1:20).

There is something more to be noted here than mere academics, and we do well do be able to reason with these things in mind. What shall we say of, what has been falsely termed, higher criticism, where men with the vastly inferior tools of human wisdom, assess the Word of God, imagining to determine what is valid and what is spurious? Precisely how does this fit into what is known of God and His revealed manners, particularly regarding getting messages to men? Following the defeat of the Amalekites, when Israel triumphed because Moses’ hands were held up by Aaron and Hur, God commanded Moses, “ Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven” (Ex 17:14). Was that commandment attended by any jeopardy that the truth of the incident would be subjected to corruption? When Moses wrote, was there any chance that his record would be distorted, slanted, or subject to error? When God had finished revealing the entirety of the First Covenant, together with its attending ordinances, He commanded Moses, “ Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel” (Ex 34:27). Was there any possibility that Moses’ words could be flawed, partial, or exaggerated? Would he leave something out, or add something? We know this is not the case, because hundreds of years later, the Lord Jesus referred to Moses’ words as authoritative, having lost no power whatsoever (Matt 8:4; 19:8; Mk 7:10; 10:3; 12:26; John 5:46).

When men have difficulty understanding the Scriptures, it is questionable that it is order to look for a better translation, or one that is more easily understand. Men may sanction such an approach, but it is not a wise one, for it thrusts the soul upon the shaky foundation of human judgment. It is better for men to seek understanding from God, as did holy men before us (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169). Even after Paul had written to Timothy with clarity, he admonished the young evangelist, “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things” (2 Tim 2:7).

Of course, the circumstances men are facing today, concerning the validity of Scripture, is a relatively new phenomenon. Of old time, holy men and women were more inclined to associate Scripture with God Himself. However, God has become so obscure to the professing church that this is no longer the norm. More and more the Scriptures themselves are being questioned and critiqued. God is greatly to be praised that Moses was not such a man. When he heard from God he knew it, and he submitted to the Divine call. That has always been the response of holy people – those who possessed faith. The other kind of people simply did not hear from the Lord, and were not called into holy involvement in what He was doing. If people balk at the Word of God, the possibility of them being involved with Him, or blessed by Him, is, to say the least, significantly reduced, if not altogether eliminated.

A WONDERMENT THAT CAUSES MOSES TO DRAW NEAR

“ 31a When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight: and as he drew near to behold it . . . ”

One of the marks of a godly man, and a consistent trait of faith, is a holy curiosity. I say holy curiosity, for such people are not driven by a mere interest in novelty. Rather, there is an underlying thrust for the living God that drives their interest in the unusual. Within the fabric of faith there is the thread of expectation. This is manifested when one peruses the Word of God and comes across some challenging statement of arresting promise. Whereas the carnal mind views this as something beyond reach, the spiritual mind sees it as something within reach, yet requiring extended effort and Divine assistance. While this kind of response cannot be codified or diagnosed after the manner of men, its presence will be readily acknowledged by all who are of tender heart. This text provides us with an illustration of the compelling nature of this intuitive quality.

WHEN MOSES SAW IT

“When Moses saw it . . .” Other versions read, “When he saw this,” NIV “And Moses, seeing it,” BBE and “Moses having seen.” YLT

At once we see the alertness of Moses. Although he was involved in an activity that could become a mere routine, disengaging the mind and attention, it did not have this effect upon Moses. Something unusual occurred in his vicinity, and he saw it. There are many poor souls who are in the presence of extraordinary things, yet are blissfully unaware that they are even there. When it comes to dealings with the Living God, this is a dreadful condition of mind. Yet, we live in a society that actually cultures disinterest in anything outside of the circumference of purely selfish and fleshly interests.

Concerning the sight of the burning bush, Moses perceived it, discerned it, or saw beyond the surface of the matter. The words of Exodus 3:2 are, “and he looked.” The idea is that he fastened his eyes upon the sight, gazing intently upon it. Whatever duties were associated with keeping these sheep, this sight took hold of his attention. This, of course, is often the manner in which the Lord works – getting out attention by some out-of-the-ordinary means.

HE WONDERED AT THE SIGHT

“ . . . he wondered at the sight . . . ” Other versions read “he began to marvel at the sight,” NASB “he was amazed,” NIV “He was full of wonder,” BBE “Moses was surprised when he saw this,” GWN “Moses was amazed by what he saw,” NJB “he was astonished and marveled at the sight,” AMPLIFIED and “the sight filled Moses with wonder.” PHILLIPS

The word “wonder” is an expression of intelligence, analysis, and astute observation. It means more than merely being shocked, or arrested with the sensational nature of a sight. There is a wonder that provokes fear. In this case, wonder provoked inquiry. It ought to be noted that Divine workings have this quality. Where there are sensitive hearts, the working of the Lord compels an intense interest that forbids the person to ignore what is seen.

The account in Exodus reveals what there was about this sight that captured the attention of Moses: “he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” (Ex 3:2). This could never have been detected by a fleeting glance. Moses had to keep his attention on the bush for some time to draw this conclusion. The bush was not smoldering, it was aflame with fire – a fire that was a blaze. In the desert, this bramble bush would have ordinarily been quickly consumed by such a fire. Yet, this fire had no destructive effect upon the bush.

There are at least five references to this “bush” in Scripture.

- “And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of Him that dwelt in the bush : let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the

top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren” (Deut 33:16).

- “And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?” (Mark 12:26).

- “Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Luke 20:37).

- “And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sinai an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush” (Acts 7:30).

- “This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush” (Acts 7:35).

This event will prove to be a pivot upon which the history of the children of Israel will turn. It will be the beginning of something that will be told to countless generations – something through which the Lord will receive great glory.

AS HE DREW NEAR

TO BEHOLD IT

“ . . . and as he drew near to behold it . . .” Other versions read, “and he drew near to observe,” NKJV “and as he approached to look more closely,” NASB “he went over to look more closely,” NIV “as he approached to look,” NRSV “as he went up to consider it,” DARBY “as he drew near to view it,” DOUAY “when he approached to investigate,” NET “as he ran to see,” LIVING and “on his going up to look further,” WEYMOUTH

The picture is one of Moses making haste to get to the burning bush and see it more closely. The record in Exodus reads that Moses reasoned within himself, “I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt” (Ex 3:3). Moses now comes closer to consider this sight more intently, seeking to find a reason for this unusual phenomenon.

This kind of response is always the prelude to understanding – particularly in matters pertaining to life and godliness. One does not come upon truth accidentally, or stumble on to great insights. The man who found a treasure in the field was engaged in some activity in that field, whether digging or perusing the ground (Matt 13:44). The man who found the pearl of great price was engaged in a quest for “goodly pearls” (Matt 13:45). That is the nature of spiritual advancement – first obtaining an interest in Kingdom realities, turning aside from the normalities of life to pursue them, and then receiving them.

Truth cannot be obtained apart from a dominating interest in it. It can never be known, and its liberating effects realized, apart from pursuing it – turning aside like Moses to consider it. This accounts for the rarity of real participation in the things of God by great masses of professing Christians. It is not that the things of God are not accessible. Rather, it is because of a lack of interest in them. It is not because they are too profound, but because they are not pursued, being intently sought. There is no reluctance on God’s part to unveil truth to those who seek it. Jesus will not withhold things pertaining to life and godliness from those who earnestly desire them. It is an affront to God to even suggest that such restraint exists with the Him. Neither God nor Christ ever responds to genuine interest by obscuring the things offered to men.

Many a soul has confronted their own burning bush – like a call from God to draw near and receive the good things of God – things that are in Christ Jesus. That call, however, can be ignored, and the lesser things of life in this world preferred. No person making such a choice can expect to be blessed by either Divine calling or spiritual insight.

Of course, if a person embraces a concept of religion that does not allow for the involvement of the Lord with His people, they will never even see a burning bush. When men do not answer the call of God, the person cannot count on God simply calling on another occasion. I will not presume to say that could not happen – but no soul is wise in counting on that taking place. God once said to Israel, “Therefore will I number you to the sword, and ye shall all bow down to the slaughter: because when I called, ye did not answer ; when I spake, ye did not hear; but did evil before mine eyes, and did choose that wherein I delighted not” (Isa 65:12). Again He said, “I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears upon them; because when I called, none did answer ; when I spake, they did not hear: but they did evil before mine eyes, and chose that in which I delighted not” (Isa 66:4).

Believers are admonished to draw near to the Lord – like Moses drew near to that burning bush. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). And again, “ Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded” (James 4:8). In fact, the New Covenant economy is one of drawing near to God. As it is written, “For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did; by the which we draw nigh unto God ” (Heb 7:19).

If, under the Old Covenant, David could say, “it is good for me to draw near to God” (Psa 73:28), what can be said by those who have been delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the Kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:13)? How much there is to be learned from this text, pregnant with meaning!

A point of Concern

In our day there has been a revival of drawing near to God with the mouth, while allowing the heart to remain at a distance from Him. Because this is a point of condemnation, something needs to be said about it.

In our day there has been a revival of drawing near to God with the mouth , while allowing the heart to remain at a distance from Him. Because this is a point of condemnation, something needs to be said about it. Through Isaiah, God rebuked the children of Israel for this manner. “Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me , and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men” (Isa 29:13). Because of the presence of this manner, God imposed spiritual ignorance upon the people. “Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isa 29:14). The people of Ezekiel’s times were rebuked for the same thing. “And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness ” (Ezek 33:31).

During Jesus’ ministry, He also rebuked that generation for this sin. “This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth, and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me” (Matt 15:8). He announced that as a consequence of this conduct, their religion was nothing more than an exercise in vanity. “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:9).

Hebrew believers were warned not to allow such a heart to enter into them. “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God ” (Heb 3:12). Their religion was not to be on a cyclical basis, but on a daily basis . “But exhort one another daily , while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). It is clear, therefore, that drawing near to God with the mouth, while the heart remains aloof from Him, is not a condition to be taken lightly. If not corrected, it will end with God rejecting and blinding the

individual.

In our time, as I have said, this sin has grown into great prominence. It has been encapsulated in the modern praise movement, which, while not totally wrong, is certainly not the epitome of spiritual maturity. This movement is not in any way noted for its depth, understanding, or soundness of doctrine. It is more comfortable with Old Covenant perceptions and expressions than those of the New Covenant. Its adherents are largely ignorant of the Scriptures, the purpose of God, and the ministry of Jesus. There is too much of the world in their words, appearance, and manners. There is untold trouble in their ranks with moral weakness. No one familiar with this movement will doubt these things. It is a movement that is largely composed of novices who have imposed their ways upon older believers, and have actually reshaped the way people think about God, praise, the gathering of saints, the preaching of the Word, and other things. The reshaping has not been for the better, and has not yielded good fruit.

Whatever may be said of this movement, it is one of the mouth more than of the heart. The people are not noted for purity, sacrifice, or a zeal for the house of the Lord. They are not a people of the book. They have not produced great preachers of the Gospels, or expounders of the apostles doctrine. They are more expert in things relating to this world, than in things having to do with the world to come. They speak more of man-to-man relationships than of those having to do with man and God.

The Relevance of These Observations

These observations are not a mere tirade against the introduction of something new. Those in Christ Jesus delight in “newness of life.” However, they do not delight when old ways and concepts are dressed up with new attire and treated as though they belonged to the category of “newness of life.”

Our text is defining a moment during which the direction of the nation of Israel was turned. They were getting ready for a period of time that would commence with an unparalleled deliverance, include the giving of the Law, miraculous sustenance through a desert, and the entrance into a promised land. It would include the bringing forth of a Messiah, who would take away the sins of the world, be enthroned in glory, and commence the orchestration of the affairs of this world with the intent of bringing many sons to glory.

And how will this period begin? It will have its start when Moses sees something caused by God, and turns aside to consider it. That is the beginning of this period. God will not utter a syllable until He has the attention of Moses. Yet, when He does have it, He will speak through a holy angel, outlining a grand work that transcended anything Moses had ever heard before.

As long as men are attracted to “other things” (Mk 4:19), they will not be receiving from God the things that are necessary to enter and remain in the Kingdom of God. Divine direction is not given to those whose hearts are fundamentally turned away from God. I do understand that this condition is not determined by men. It is, however, a determination that God will make, and He will respond accordingly, in strict congruity with both His nature and His revelation, which are perfectly harmonious. In the meantime, as “the pillar and ground of the truth,” it is the responsibility of the church to apprise men of what the Lord requires of them, making known the manner of His Kingdom.

THE VOICE OF THE LORD CAME TO HIM

“31b . . . the voice of the Lord came unto him . . .” Other versions read, “there came the voice of the Lord,” NASB “he heard the Lord’s voice,” NIV “there came the voice of ADONAI,” CJB “the Lord said to him, audibly,” MRD “the voice of the Lord called out to him,” NLT “He heard a Voice; it was the Lord's,” IE and “the voice of the Lord was heard , saying.” WEYMOUTH

THE VOICE OF THE LORD

As Moses drew near to the bush – and only as he did so – the voice of the Lord was directed specifically to him. This was not a general word, like what the Spirit says “to the churches” (Rev 3:22). It was not a global word, as when it was said, “O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD” (Jer 22:29). It was not a national word, like the one He delivered to Israel (Lev 2:20). It was not even a word to a specific church, like the one Jesus delivered to Ephesus: “Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent” (Rev 2:5). This was a personalized word, tailored for one man – Moses.

Several things are said of “the voice of the Lord” in Scripture. It is “powerful,” and “full of majesty” (Psa 29:4). It breaks cedars, divides flames of fire, sending it where He wills, shakes the wilderness, makes the deer to calve, and discovers the forests (Psa 29:3-9). The voice of the Lord is said to have beaten down the Assyrian (Isa 30:31).

Here, however, “the voice of the Lord” is personal. He not only “humbleth Himself to behold the things that are in heaven, and in the earth” (Psa 113:6), but deigns to speak to man, involving Him in His purposes. Once God is comprehended, this becomes a most marvelous thing to consider.

THE ACCOUNT IN EXODUS

It is a remarkable evidence of progress when men are able to detect the note of urgency in Divine callings. That awareness assists them in mortifying procrastination and delay, which have caused so many to miss the blessing.

The record in Exodus provides a detail worthy of note: “And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses . And he said, Here am I” (Ex 3:4). The Lord observes the reactions of men to communications and circumstances that are designed to get their attention. This is an aspect of the Divine nature that must be seen. In this case, the burning bush was Divinely designed to get the attention of Moses – and it did. Further, the Lord saw that Moses “turned aside to see” – that is, He took special note of it, and paid close attention to it.

When God is said to see something, it is always a prelude to Him doing something. I will make some extensive remarks concerning this Divine trait when we cover verse thirty-four. It is enough here to note that no voice was heard until Moses “turned aside to see.”

HIS NAME WAS CALLED TWICE

The record in Exodus says “God called unto him out of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses !” A call of this sort denotes urgency, special significance, and a matter requiring immediate attention.

- **ABRAHAM.** Thus, when the angel of the Lord halted Abraham in the sacrifice of Isaac, he called out, “Abraham, Abraham” (Gen 22:11).

- **JACOB.** When God spoke to Jacob in a confirming word just prior to him going to Joseph in Egypt, He said, “Jacob, Jacob” (Gen 46:2).

- **SAMUEL.** When God called young Samuel, He said, “Samuel, Samuel” (1 Sam 3:10).

- **PETER.** When Jesus revealed Satan’s request to sift Peter, He preceded the revelation by saying “Simon, Simon” (Lk 22:31).

- **SAUL OF TARSUS.** When Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, to call Him to be an apostle, he said, “Saul, Saul” (Acts 9:4).

It is a remarkable evidence of progress when men are able to detect the note of urgency in Divine

callings. That awareness assists them in mortifying procrastination and delay, which have caused so many to miss the blessing. Even under the Law, when speaking to the people concerning offering the first of their ripe fruits to the Lord, it was said, “Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto Me ” (Ex 22:29). Solomon warned men not

Although resources have been given to the church that far transcend those that were given to Moses, the vast number of professing Christians are not turning aside to see what the Lord has to say. It is a condition that parallels the obtuseness that characterized Israel – and they were excluded from the promised land because of

to take tomorrow granted, imagining it would be accessible to them (Prov 27:1). God spoke through Ezekiel of impending danger, yet some who heard him said, “It is not near; let us build houses” (Ezek 11:2-3). There were even some people who reasoned they had a lot of time to do this or that. Thus God said to the prophet, “Son of man, what is that proverb that ye have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every vision faileth?” (Ezek 12:22).

When Jesus dwelt among men, there were some who saw the necessity of following Jesus, yet requested of Him, “Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.” He was not given the time he requested (Matt 8:21-22). It is an “evil servant” who imagines the Lord will not come at any moment (Matt 24:48). And who can forget the foolish virgins who delayed buying the required oil for their lamps until the last moment? It cost them their souls (Matt 25:1-13).

It is this sense of urgency that moved Paul to reason with Felix “of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.” This moved Felix to tremble, but he responded that he would send for Paul when he had a “convenient season” (Acts 24:25). There is no record that it every came.

Paul reminded the believers in Thessalonica that the Lord’s return would catch the ungodly unawares and unprepared. “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thess 5:3). The Hebrew believers were exhorted to respond to the voice of the Lord when they heard it, and not to delay. “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest)” (Heb 3:7-11).

Candidly, I am concerned that the American church as a whole is not producing this kind of sensitivity. There is a level of sluggishness extant within the church that is staggering. Judging from the level of aggressiveness to gather together, hear the Word of the Lord speak to one another of heavenly realities, and be preparing to meet the Lord, you would never expect that it was possible that the Lord of glory could burst upon the scene at any time. Although resources have been given to the church that far transcend those that were given to Moses, the vast number of professing Christians are not turning aside to see what the Lord has to say. It is a condition that parallels the obtuseness that characterized Israel – and they were excluded from the promised land because of it. In fact, that exclusion is declared in jarring language. “So I sware in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest ” (Heb 3:11). Moses, was in better shape after forty years in the desert, without a Bible and without Divine communication, than multitudes of people who say they are Christians. Such a condition should not exist.

If some kind of dominant spiritual awakening does not take place soon in our nation, judgment will surely be poured out upon it. There is no acceptable excuse for the condition of the American church.

HOW GOD IDENTIFIES HIMSELF

“ 32a Saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.”

When God appeared to Isaac He said, “I am the God of Abraham thy father” (Gen 26:24). When He appeared to Jacob He said “I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac” (Gen 28:13). Jacob referred to the Lord as, “the God of my father, the God of Abraham, and the fear of Isaac” (Gen 31:42). In the event covered by our text, when the Lord spoke to Moses, He referred to Himself no less than four times as “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Ex 3:6,15,16;4:5). When Elijah had his contest with the prophets of Baal, he addressed God as “LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel” (1 Kgs 18:36). When David thanked God for the abundant offering for the building of the Temple, that was willingly offered by the people, he prayed, “O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, our fathers, keep this for ever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of thy people, and prepare their heart unto thee” (1 Chron 29:18). In the days of Hezekiah, when there was a revival toward God, messengers were sent throughout “all Israel and Judah,” with letters from the king. Those letters included these words: “Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you” (2 Chron 30:6). When Peter addressed the Jews concerning the Lord, he referred to God as “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob” (Acts 3:13).

Note that God is not referred to as the God of Adam, or the God of Abel, or the God of Noah. These were all men of faith, but God did not later refer to Himself in connection with His association with them. Lot was a righteous man (2 Pet 2:8), but God did not refer to Himself as the God of Lot. This is not a reproach to these men, but introduces us to the manner in which God has chosen to be known, and the relationships that most precisely reveal Him.

There are several associations that are accented in the various references to God.

- “The God of Bethel,” where Jacob made a vow to God (Gen 31:13).
- The Egyptians referred to Him as “the God of the Hebrews” (Ex 5:3).
- “The God of Israel” (Ex 24:10; 34:23; Num 16:9; Josh 2:16; 1 Sam 1:17; 5:7,8,10,11; 6:3,5; 2 Sam 23:3; 1 Kgs 11:31; 1 Chron 4:10; Isa 29:23; Jer 7:21) – 90 references).
- In pleading with God for Israel Moses referred to “The God of the spirits of all flesh” (Num 16:22; 27:16).
- “The God of Jeshurun,” an alternate name for Israel (Deut 33:26).
- “The God of the armies of Israel” (1 Sam 17:45).
- “The God of Jacob” (2 Sam 23:1; Psa 20:1; 46:7,11; 75:9; 81:1,4; 94:7; 114:7; 146:5; Isa 2:3) – 25 references.
- “The God of the land” [of Israel] (2 Kgs 17:27)
- “The God of David” (2 Kgs 20:5; Isa 38:5).
- “The God of their fathers” (1 Chron 5:25).
- “The God of Hezkiah” (2 Chron 32:17).
- “The God of Jerusalem” (2 Chron 32:19).
- “The God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” (Dan 3:26,29).
- “The God of Daniel” (Dan 6:26).
- “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 1:17).
- “The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 11:31; Eph 1:3; 4:6; 1 Pet

2:3).

For men of God, and messengers sent from God, there was no generic God – like the supreme power, or “the unknown God,” as the Athenians affirmed, who even built an idol to such a god (Acts 17:23). The general descriptions of God that are found in Scripture, are, in a sense, specific. Here are some of them.

- “The God of heaven” (Gen 24:3).

“The God of heaven and earth” (Ezra 5:11).

- “The God of the whole earth” (Psa 54:5).
- “The God of hosts” (Jer 38:17).
- “The God of the earth” (Rev 11:4).
- “The God of all comfort” (2 Cor 1:3).
- “The God of all grace” (1 Pet 5:10).

As God revealed Himself more and more, the references to Him became more and more personal and specific.

- “The God of my rock” (2 Sam 22:3).
- “God of my righteousness” (Psa 4:1).
- “God of my salvation” (Psa 18:46).
- “The God of my life” (Psa 42:8).
- “The God of my strength” (Psa 43:2).
- “The God of my mercy” (Psa 59:10).

In these somewhat scattered remarks, I am establishing that proper references to God are made within the context of knowledge, insight, and specificity. The more generic the references are to God, the more unprofitable they are. Statements like, “God understands,” “He is there for you,” “God has a plan for your life,” etc. may have an element of truth in them, but they are more philosophical than profitable. Such references tend to encourage men to form their own concept God rather than acquiring an understanding based upon God’s revelation of Himself.

Think, for example, of testimonies that have referred to the manner in which men called upon the Lord. Some have said a dramatic change occurred in their life when they cried out, “Oh God, if there is a God, show Yourself to me.” To say the very least, this is not a wise approach to a God that has revealed Himself in nature (Rom 1:20), the conscience (Rom 2:15), the Law (Rom 2:20), the Person of Jesus Christ (Heb 1:3), the Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16-17), and the doctrine of the apostles (Eph 3:4-5). These more discerning languages.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

All of this highlights the sin of a vague theology – one that leaves the people fundamentally ignorant of God, and wandering through life in a sort of spiritual stupor. It is a grievous transgression to concoct a God whose activities center in the people who are said to need Him.

By drawing attention to the Divinely uttered expression, “I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,” Stephen has associated God with revelation and objective.

This is the God who has made Himself known to each of the individuals referenced: Abraham (Gen 12:7; 17:1; 26:24), Isaac (Gen 26:1-5), and Jacob (Gen 28:13; 35:9). God personally confirmed His covenant with each of these men: Abraham (Gen 15:1-21; 17:1-22), Isaac (Gen 26:2-5), and Jacob

(Gen 28:13-22; 35:9-15). The details in these revelations were remarkable.

- Abraham's promised offspring would be begotten by Abraham himself, even in his old age (Gen 15:4).
- His progeny would be numerous beyond imagination (Gen 15:5).
- His progeny would be strangers in a land that did not belong to them (Gen 15:13a).
- They would serve these people, and be afflicted by them for four hundred years (Gen 15:13b).
- God would judge the nation who oppressed the people of Abraham (Gen 15:14a).
- They would be delivered from that nation, coming out with great substance (Gen 15:14b).
- In the fourth generation the people would be delivered (Gen 15:16a).
- The deliverance would come four generations later because the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet in full measure (Gen 15:16b).
- The borders of the promised land were specified in detail (Gen 15:18-21).
- God declared He would make a covenant with Abraham, to multiply him exceedingly, making him a father of many nations (Gen 17:2,4).
- Kings would proceed from his loins (Gen 17:6).
- God would be a God unto Abraham and to his seed (Gen 17:7).
- The land of Canaan would be given to Abraham and his seed for an everlasting possession (Gen 17:8).
- God gave the covenant of circumcision to Abraham, instructing him how to carry it out (Gen 17:10-14).
- Sarah's name would be changed, she would be fruitful, be a mother of nations, and kings of people would come from her (Gen 17:15-16).
- God told Isaac to go down into Egypt and sojourn there (Gen 26:1-3a).
- God would give Isaac all the countries of which he spoke, fulfilling His promise to Abraham (Gen 26:3b).
- Isaac's offspring would be multiplied, and through his seed all nations of the earth would be blessed (Gen 26:4).
- God would do this because Abraham had obeyed His voice (Gen 26:5).
- God promised to give the land of Canaan to Jacob (Gen 28:13).
- Jacob's offspring would be numerous, be blessed, and all the families of the earth would be blessed through them (Gen 28:14).
- God would bless Jacob, and keep him wherever he went, never leaving him, and doing everything He had promised him (Gen 28:15).
- God changed Jacob's Isaac name to Isaac, and told him why he did so (Gen 35:9-10).
- A nation, a company of nations, and kings would come forth from Jacob (Gen 35:11).
- The land promised to Abraham and Isaac would be given to Jacob and his seed (Gen 35:12).

There are twenty-five arresting details that were revealed to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were details that spoke extensively of God, His nature, and His purpose. The revelations vouchsafed to these patriarchs were not shrouded in mystery or couched in ambiguity. They were definitive in the most precise sense of the word. This was the God who had revealed Himself – the God who had said something, and even made a covenant.

All of this highlights the sin of a vague theology – one that leaves the people fundamentally ignorant of God, and wandering through life in a sort of spiritual stupor. It is a grievous transgression to concoct a God whose activities center in the people who are said to need Him. In matters relating God, human need is defined by what God has determined, and what he has declared Himself to be doing. Those are the realities that drive all of His revelations, and without which, there would be no cause for Him to manifest Himself to humanity.

In referring to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Stephen is not merely drawing attention to them. Rather, He is calling the people to consider the God who revealed Himself to them. That is what makes them significant. In this approach, Stephen is leading the people into a consideration of the ultimate Man – “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5). The Lord’s Christ is the fundamental revelation of God, and is the only One through whom God can be known as He desires to be known. In order to see this most clearly, even Paul does not speak of the creation of the world, or the various principles of nature. Instead, he speaks of the rationale of God as it was revealed in his dealings with those who bore His image and likeness (Acts 17:24-31). This is the manner in which men are to be brought to consider the Lord.

THE AFFECT OF THE AWARENESS OF GOD

“ 32b Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.” Other versions read, “Moses trembled and dared not look,” NKJV “Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look,” NASB “Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look,” NIV “Moses, shaking with fear, kept his eyes from looking at it,” BBE “Moses being terrified , durst not behold,” DOUAY “Moses trembled and was afraid to look ,” NJB “Moses began to shake with fear. He was afraid to look,” IE “Quaking with fear Moses did not dare gaze ,” WEYMOUTH “Moses trembled and was so terrified that he did not venture to look ,” AMPLIFIED and “Moses trembled and was afraid to look any more .” PHILLIPS

When Moses saw the bush ablaze, he was not afraid to look. When he noted how the bush was burning, yet was not consumed, he did not fear to look or to draw close to it. Even when “the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a flame of fire out of the midst of the bush,” Moses still “looked” (Ex 3:2). Here was something that defied the laws of nature. Yet, it did not appear to be physically dangerous, or threatening to the life of Moses – so he drew near to investigate it further.

When, however, “God called unto him out of the midst of the bush,” it had an immediate impact upon Moses. He trembled with fear, was terrified, and began to shake. His curiosity was no longer compelling him, so he did not dare to look any more at the arresting sight. He lost his interest in obtaining a closer look at this strange sight.

When Moses heard the voice of the Lord, he at once ceased looking at the burning bush. He was in the presence of the Lord, and he knew it. That single morsel of knowledge – knowing one is in the presence of Almighty God – has a corrective quality about it. Admittedly, it is not something that resolves waywardness, and it certainly does not have any transforming power. It does, however, make for sobriety and discerning caution. Duly heeded, such fear will move one in the right direction, minimizing fleshly influences.

When Moses heard the voice of the Lord, he at once ceased looking at the burning bush. He was in the presence of the Lord, and he knew it. That single morsel of knowledge – knowing one is in the presence of Almighty God – has a corrective quality about it.

This kind of encounter is frequently found in Scripture – times when people confronted the Lord, or a messenger from the Lord, and it took hold of them, causing fear.

- When Joseph’s brothers connected their seeming misfortune with the action of God, “their heart failed them, and they were afraid” (Gen 42:28).

- When the people of Israel saw Moses coming down from the mount, with “the skin of his face” aglow with the glory of God, “they were afraid to come nigh him” (Ex 34:30).

- When the Philistines heard Israel shouting, “they understood that the ark of the Lord was come into the camp.” It is written that “they were afraid, for they said, God is come into the camp” (1 Sam 4:7).

- When the people of Gadara came to see Jesus, and saw the former wild man who was possessed by a legion of demons, sitting, clothed, and in his right mind, “they were afraid” (Mk 5:15).

- Paul said that if a man who did not believe was to enter an assembly in which God was working, and heard the people speaking a consistent and inspired message, the “secrets of his heart” would be revealed. In such a case, he would fall down “on his face,” “worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth” (1 Cor 14:25).

The church has a stewardship of the knowledge of God, and of their fellowship with the Son. It is the business of the redeemed to bring an awareness of the Living God to all who have sensitive hearts and spirits. The church will be held in strict account for failing to do this.

These are only representative of a host of Scriptural examples in which people feared, trembled, fell down, shook, became weak, and dared not raise their head or voice. They include the heathen – like Abimelech (Gen 20:3-18), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:34-37), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:29), and Felix (Acts 24:25). They included holy men prior to Christ like David (2 Sam 6:9), Job (Job 3:25), Daniel (Dan 8:17), and Habakkuk (Hab 3:2). They include followers of Jesus – like the twelve in general (Mk 4:41), and Simon Peter in particular (Lk 5:8). They include those who were being called – Cornelius (Acts 10:4), and Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:6). They included those who were already converted – like the early church when Ananias and Sapphira were judged (Acts 5:5,11).

The thing that all of these incidents have in common – including our text – is that they were either knowingly in the presence of the Lord, or were confronting a work that came from Him. They could not ignore the confrontation, and their flesh was unable to be calm under that condition.

Many people have never knowingly confronted the living God, or been aware of His presence. That is why they are so casual about spiritual matters. They have never made a connection between unsettling circumstances or strange phenomenon and the God of heaven. They have been unable to connect the Scripture in general, and the Gospel in particular, with God Himself. That is why they are able to ignore the Word, or even speak against it.

There is an appointed day when God will force Himself and His Son upon all humanity. At that time, men will have no opportunity to ignore Him, turn from Him, or offer even the slightest resistance. The only reason such responses are even possible now, is the presence of ignorance and insensitivity. However, all of that will be removed when the heavens and the earth pass away. In fact, the presence of the natural order is all that keeps the people from seeing the Lord as He is. Once removed from the temporal domain, men no longer have any difficulty with being aware of the Lord and His thoughts concerning their persons.

It is in view of this that it is affirmed when Jesus returns, “all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him” (Rev 1:7). At that time, there will be a profound regret for having neglected, or even repudiated, the Lord’s Christ. Yet there will be no opportunity to correct the situation. It will become apparent that it is a fearful thing to fall into hands of a living God (Heb 10:31). Preparation for that

time begins now.

THE CHURCH HAS A STEWARDSHIP

The church has a stewardship of the knowledge of God, and of their fellowship with the Son. It is the business of the redeemed to bring an awareness of the Living God to all who have sensitive hearts and spirits. The church will be held in strict account for failing to do this. If they have presented a doctrinally flawed view of God, they will be judged for it. If, by their lives, they have led people to believe salvation does not involve a very real moral and spiritual change, they will give an account for that failure.

If the presence of the Lord is arresting, then the more evident He is within His people, the more impact they will have on those about them. Thus Jesus said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt 5:16).

If it is countered that men may know the Lord is in front of them, yet oppose Him anyway, we must see that this is not at all the case. It is said of those who crucified Christ, “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory ” (1 Cor 2:7-8). When addressing some of the very people who were guilty of this crime, Peter said, “And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers” (Acts 3:17). Paul told the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia that they had condemned Jesus “because they knew Him not ” (Acts 13:27).

The redeemed of the Lord – the church – are “a royal diadem in the hand of the Lord” (Isa 62:3). They are a means through which even angelic hosts are tutored in “the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10). When these people avail themselves of the provisions of redemption, an awareness of the Lord is produced that is most unique and effective. However, should they choose to quench and grieve the Spirit, and draw back from Him because of an “evil heart of unbelief” (Heb 3:12), all evangelistic and missionary activity found among them is nothing more than an exercise in vanity. Such will yield no fruit for it lacks power. In such a case, people will not be able to make any association between the pretending ones and the Living God, and God will receive neither fruit nor glory.

STANDING ON HOLY GROUND

“ 33 Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet: for the place where thou standest is holy ground.”

Is there such a thing as a holy place, or a location that is more blessed than others? Or, is there a certain neutrality found in all places, so that no Divine association can be made with them? This text confirms that such places do, in fact, exist. It further substantiates that men are required to recognize it, and conduct themselves accordingly.

PUT OFF THY SHOES

“Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet . . .” Other versions read, “ Take your sandals off your feet,” NKJV “Take off your sandals,” NIV “ Loose the shoes from thy feet,” ASV and “ Remove the sandals from your feet.” NAB

This is a word spoken by the Lord, who cannot change. Whatever significance is given to this word, no person can afford to view it as anything other than a word from God Himself. Of old time, there was a place where wearing shoes was out of order. This text cites the place where God called Moses from the bush as one of them. When Joshua confronted a messenger from heaven – the “captain of the host of the Lord” (Josh 5:14) – he also was required to remove his shoes. “And the captain of the

LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot ; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so” (Josh 5:15).

This was a token of humility, a show of obedience, and a display of reverence. To this very day, eastern cultures remove their shoes in places of respect and honor. Our Western culture does not have such a custom. It seems to me that this is one of the fruits of an emphasis upon the individual, and a near-total disregard for things identified with God. I remember the diligence of my own parents to teach me a respect for places that had been given to the Lord, and in which holy teaching and sacred remembrances were cultured. In view of our text, such customs cannot be viewed as foolish. Men have a difficult enough time making an association of God with certain times and places, without reducing every thing and every place to the category of “common.”

In view of our text, such customs cannot be viewed as foolish. Men have a difficult enough time making an association of God with certain times and places, without reducing every thing and every place to the category of “common.”

There are some places where the ordinary is out of order. You may recall that our blessed Lord twice drove moneychangers, and those who sold merchandise from the Temple (John 2:14-16; Matt 21:12-13). He also would not allow any person to carry merchandise or a burden through the Temple (Mk 11:16).

We are careful to avoid drawing up a set of rules concerning apparel in places that are devoted to the Lord. However, we will not shun to emphasize that each individual is responsible for their appearance in such places. The Scriptures refer to “modest apparel” (1 Tim 2:9), and even having a visible manifestation of God-ordained submission (1 Cor 11:4-10). You may also recall that the first issue God had with humanity regarded their attire (Gen 3:7,21). Let all men make this a matter of consideration, then conduct themselves in a way that defers to God.

HOLY GROUND

“ . . . for the place where thou standest is holy ground.” Other versions read, “for the place where you are is holy,” BBE “ sacred ground,” WILLIAMS and “holy ground and worthy of veneration .”
AMPLIFIED

This was also the declaration of the captain of the Lord’s host to Joshua: “And the captain of the LORD'S host said unto Joshua, Loose thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy . And Joshua did so” (Josh 5:15). I understand that this can be a sensitive subject, and that care must be taken not to legislate where God has not legislated. However, equal care must be taken not to ignore Divine utterances, even if they appear to be disassociated from ourselves.

The place where God makes Himself known, or where He is served, is not to be regarded as common. For example, under the Lord the Lord said, “And when a man shall sanctify his house to be holy unto the LORD , then the priest shall estimate it, whether it be good or bad: as the priest shall estimate it, so shall it stand” (Lev 27:14). This was speaking of a house that was dedicated to the Lord, and the manner in which its value was to be determined.

There was also the matter of certain vessels that were dedicated to the Lord, for use in the tabernacle, and later in the Temple. Although those vessels did not have Divine qualities, they were to be considered “holy vessels.” “Now set your heart and your soul to seek the LORD your God; arise therefore, and build ye the sanctuary of the LORD God, to bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and the holy vessels of God , into the house that is to be built to the name of the LORD” (1 Chron 22:19).

Solomon warned the people to watch their conduct when they went into the house of God, and be

more prone to hear, being spiritually alert. “ Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God , and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil” (Eccl 5:1).

Under the Law, there were places that were, because of their employment in the service of God, more holy than other places. “And thou shalt hang up the veil under the taches, that thou mayest bring in thither within the veil the ark of the testimony: and the veil shall divide unto you between the holy place and the most holy . And thou shalt put the mercy seat upon the ark of the testimony in the most holy place ” (Ex 26:33-34).

There were also holy utensils that were to be taken, together with certain vows that were made before God, to a specific location that was identified by God. “Only thy holy things which thou hast, and thy vows, thou shalt take, and go unto the place which the LORD shall choose ” (Deut 12:26). That place was not to be considered the same as other places.

It is expressly taught by some, that as men praise, the Lord gravitates to their assembly – that He has an attraction to such activity, and always draws near to it. This is taught even though God has expressly revealed His absolute disdain for some gatherings that profess to be in His name

When Jesus was among men, and particularly during the close of His ministry, there were two particular places in which He was found. Both of them were obviously sacred. “And in the day time He was teaching in the temple ; and at night He went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives ” (Luke 21:37). How do you suppose the Lord would have responded to the statement that there is no distinction of places, or that nothing is sacred or holy about any location of place? He confirmed by His actions that such a view is wholly spurious, to say nothing of it being damaging to both the heart and mind.

When Peter recapped his own involvement with the Christ, he referred to the time Jesus was transfigured before himself, James, and John. Although he wrote this several decades after the ascension of Jesus, note what he said. “And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount” (2 Pet 1:18).

The thing that is common in all of these texts is that Divine contact and direction was associated with them. That is what made them sacred. In other words, no time or place is common that has been particularly influenced by God! If there was a time, for example, when we were illuminated, it is good for us to remember that specific time (Heb 10:32; Eph 1:13).

ABUSING THE TERM

The expression “holy ground” cannot be applied to a place of man’s choosing. Nor, indeed, is such a place created by human intention. One of the fashionable choruses of our day is, “We Are Standing on Holy Ground.” There are some good expressions in the song, and it is not my intent to speak disparagingly of it. However, owing to the juvenile influences within the professed church, some have come to believe they can cause the ground to be holy by meeting together and engaging in what they call “praise.” It is expressly taught by some, that as men praise, the Lord gravitates to their assembly – that He has an attraction to such activity, and always draws near to it. This is taught even though God has expressly revealed His absolute disdain for some gatherings that profess to be in His name (Isa 1:11-15; Amos 5:21-23; 6:5; 8:2-3,10). This was so because the heart of the people was far from Him, thus making all of the worship vain, and nothing more than abominable pretension.

When Jacob sanctified the plot of ground on which he heard from God, he did so because of what took place there. He did not set the ground apart in hopes that Divine visitation would take place. Thus is it written, “Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not” (Gen 28:16-19). He called

the name of that place “Bethel,” which means house of God. Later, when God appeared again to Jacob, He referred to Himself as “the God of Bethel,” where Jacob anointed the pillar and made a vow to Him (Gen 31:13).

On another occasion, God appeared to Isaac, and confirmed the covenant with him that He had made with his father Abraham. Because of this appearance Isaac “built an altar there, and called upon the name of the LORD, and pitched his tent there” (Gen 26:25). It was a sacred place because the Lord visited him there. God did not visit Isaac because he had consecrated the place.

Religious men wrestle with the tendency to think God will honor their efforts to make something holy – or that a place or thing is holy because of what men have done. This, however, is not the manner of the kingdom. Something becomes holy because of what the Lord has done – whether it be a place or a person. This is a manner of thinking that differs significantly from the modern Christian mind-set.

Any place where we become more aware of the Lord, or where greater measures of truth are vouchsafed to us, is anything but ordinary, and we dare not regard them as such! Places where special deliverances have been realized, or special insights have been ministered, are not to be regarded as mundane. It should be apparent to us all that Divine fellowship, spiritual insight, and the experience of refreshment and strengthening, are to be considered holy and precious in our sight.

THE PRINCIPLE OF DIVINE REPETITION

“34a I have seen, I have seen . . .” Other versions read, “I have surely seen,” NKJV “I have certainly seen,” NASB “I have indeed seen,” NIV “Truly, I have seen,” BBE “I have clearly seen,” CJB “Seeing I have seen,” DOUAY “I have attentively seen,” MRD “I have witnessed,” NAB “I have perfectly seen,” TNT “I have seen, yes, I have seen,” WEYMOUTH “I have most assuredly seen,” AMPLIFIED “with My own eyes I have seen,” CEV and “I’ve seen how.” GW

This is a most unique phrase – “I have seen, I have seen.” The account in Exodus reads, “I have surely seen” (Ex 3:7). There, the meaning of the Hebrew word that is employed is “look at, inspect, perceive, consider . . . regard . . . give attention to . . . gaze at.” STRONG’S The idea is that of lingering on what is seen, perusing it with care, and beholding all of the details. As will be confirmed by the text, here it means that God had viewed the circumstances of His people with the intention of doing something about them.

It also ought to be noted that in Divine communication, repetition, among other things, signifies certainty. Therefore, when Joseph interpreted the two dreams of Pharaoh he said, “And for that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice; it is because the thing is established by God, and God will shortly bring it to pass” (Gen 41:32). Joseph himself experienced the same thing when, at an early age, he had two dreams that revealed the same thing – that his family would eventually bow before him (Gen 37:7-9). The book of Job also alludes to this kind of communication, upbraiding men for not paying attention to it. “For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not” (Job 33:14).

There are grievous matters that continue on, even though they are known by the Lord. That is, He does not do something about everything He sees – at least not immediately. Not knowing this, wicked men stumble on in their sin, interpreting what appears to be delay as indifference. Thus Solomon wrote, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl 8:11). This very reaction would be found in Pharaoh during the execution of the plagues. As soon as there was some relief, he forgot the God with whom he was dealing. “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not heed them, as the LORD had said” NKJV (Ex 8:15). That proved to be a very foolish reaction.

There are frequent references to the Lord beholding something – looking intently upon it – then

doing something about it – even though the condition may have existed for a considerable amount of time.

There are frequent references to the Lord beholding something, then doing something about it – even though the condition may have existed for a considerable amount of time.

THE BUILDING OF THE TOWER OF BABEL. “And the LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded. And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city” (Gen 11:5-8).

- **THE SIN OF SODOM AND GOMORRAH.** “And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know” (Gen 18:20-21).

- **THE CASE OF LEAH.** “And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren” (Gen 29:31).

- **THE PROVOCATIVE MANNER OF ISRAEL.** “And when the LORD saw it, he abhorred them, because of the provoking of his sons, and of his daughters” (Deut 32:19).

- **WHEN ISRAEL HUMBLLED THEMSELVES.** “Whereupon the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, The LORD is righteous. And when the LORD saw that they humbled themselves, the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves; therefore I will not destroy them, but I will grant them some deliverance; and my wrath shall not be poured out upon Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak” (2 Chron 12:7).

- **IN THE MATTER OF THE NEED FOR A SAVIOR.** “Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto Him; and His righteousness, it sustained Him” (Isa 59:15-16).

In each of these cases, the Lord focused on the situation. It is not that He had never seen it before or that any aspect of those circumstances had escaped His attention. I am careful to note this does not mean God ignores people or circumstances, treating them with indifference. This involves more than mere Divine tolerance. The longsuffering of God is a trait that moves the Lord to act in strict accord with His purpose, rather than with a preeminent regard for the circumstance. Thus He is said to wait in order than He might be gracious. Therefore Isaiah declared, “And therefore will the LORD wait, that he may be gracious unto you, and therefore will he be exalted, that he may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him” (Isa 30:18). This means that God always works in a timely manner, and with strict regard for His purpose.

HOLY MEN HAVE APPEALED TO THIS DIVINE QUALITY

Knowing that God cannot behold a circumstance in a focused manner without doing something about it, holy men have appealed to Him to behold themselves or their enemies.

- “Look upon mine affliction and my pain; and forgive all my sins” (Psa 25:18).

- “Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psa 84:9-10).

- “Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation” (Psa 5:1).
- “Consider mine enemies; for they are many; and they hate me with cruel hatred” (Psa 25:19).
- “Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people” (Neh 5:19).
- “So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not” (Jonah 1:6).

Therefore, when the Lord tells Moses He has seen the circumstances of His people, He is, in fact, declaring that He is going to do something about it. That is the purpose of the revelation given to Moses.

WHEN AFFLICTION IS SEEN

“34b . . . the affliction of my people which is in Egypt . . .” Other versions read, “the oppression,” NKJV “the mistreatment,” NRSV “the ill-treatment,” RSV “the sorrows,” BBE “how my people are being oppressed,” CJB “the suffering,” NET “the misery,” NJB “the anguish,” LIVING “My people suffer much,” IE and “the abuse and oppression.” AMPLIFIED

This account perfectly parallels our situation. The saints of God are in a hostile world, rejected and maligned for righteousness’ sake. They also join with nature in sighing under the weight of mortality, groaning within themselves while they wait for the redemption of their body

The people had been oppressed for four centuries, as God had declared they would be (Gen 15:13). Had God not seen their affliction? Indeed He had. That is why they had been sustained. It is why Moses was born at the proper time, after the iniquity of the Amorites became full (Gen 15:16). Now, however, the time had come for the purpose of God to be fulfilled, and therefore He would work.

During the years – as many as thirteen – that Joseph was afflicted, and the fetters hurt his feet, God had seen him also. Yet, of that time of affliction it is written, “Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him” (Psa 105:19). So it was with the children of Israel. The word of the Lord was trying, or testing, them. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had been faithful stewards of the promise of God – that their offspring would be delivered from oppressing Egypt, and inherit a land. Joseph had kept the promise in his heart, and reminded his brethren of it before he died, taking an oath from them that they would not leave his bones in Egypt.

During their time of their affliction, the people had to keep the promise alive, looking for the time when it would be fulfilled. Amram and Jochebed kept it alive, and were therefore able to associate the birth of Moses with the working of the Lord. Aaron also kept it alive, so that he was able to instantly respond to the Lord when He called him to meet Moses at the holy mount (Ex 4:27).

THE RELEVANCE OF THE ACCOUNT FOR US

This account perfectly parallels our situation. The saints of God are in a hostile world, rejected and maligned for righteousness’ sake. They also join with nature in sighing under the weight of mortality, groaning within themselves while they wait for the redemption of their body (Rom 8:23). They cry out with Paul, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24). Sometimes they seem to be pushed to the edge, so that they even “despair of life,” being asked to endure all manner of injustice and affliction (2 Cor 1:8-9). They are “troubled on every side,” “fightings” without, and “fears” within (2 Cor 7:5).

From time to time they cry out with the sweet psalmist of Israel, “My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O LORD, how long?” (Psa 6:3). Amidst especially trying times they may even cry out in their immaturity, “How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?” (Psa 13:1). When sorely oppressed by enemies that seem invincible, the cry may come forth from them, “O God, how long shall the adversary reproach? shall the enemy blaspheme thy name for ever?” (Psa 74:10).

Yet, God is not slumbering or sleeping while our sufferings seem to be mounting higher and higher. He has not forgotten to be gracious, nor is He unmindful of our condition. If we are sensitive enough in our spirits we will hear Him say, “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Heb 10:36). “You are not mature enough! You have are too easily exasperated! You need more strength! You have not run long enough or far enough! You are not ready to come home yet, there is more work for you to do! There is a gallery of witnesses that is watching, beholding what a great prize awaits you, and urging you to continue to run the race with patience that has been set before you. Wait on the Lord, and thus your strength will renewed! Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. You are being readied for the greatest deliverance of all, and when it comes, you

will have no regrets that you continued to run in the midst of storms, when the heat beat upon you, and when the waves of trial swept over your head!” Have you sensed Him speaking in this way?

WHEN GROANING IS HEARD

“ 34c . . . and I have heard their groaning . . . ” Other versions read, “their groans ,” NASB “their cries ,” BBE “their cry,” CJB “them crying for help ,” NJB “ moaning ,” IE and “ signing and groaning .” AMPLIFIED

There is an approach to living that leaves people confused about “groaning.” Such an approach leads people to believe trouble and sorrow are a sign of Divine rejection, and that peace and prosperity are the primary indicators of Divine approval. Those who imbibe this nonsense do everything in their power to avoid sorrow, and strive for acceptance by their peers and success in this world. But they are deluded, and this way of thinking is a misconception.

The word “groaning” comes from a word meaning “to groan or sigh as the result of deep concern or stress,” LOUW-NIDA and “to sigh often, sigh deeply.” LIDDELL-SCOTT Therefore, we are not speaking of a response caused by a single circumstance, but of a cry brought on by sustained suffering – a cry that continues over a considerable period time. In this case, it was four hundred years. That means there were several generations – as many as ten – that had only known suffering, with little or no respite or reprieve. Of course, all of this was making the people discontent to remain in Egypt. They certainly were not desiring to become absorbed into the culture, but were being made painfully aware that they did not belong in Egypt. Insightful people knew that God had formed and cultured them to inhabit another land. That fact is what drove the experience they had in Egypt.

As used here, and in strict accord with the purpose of God, groaning is not mere griping or complaining. It is more related to the groans of travail than the suffering of unnatural pain. In other words, there is expectation in “groaning,” whereas there is only discomfort, and often hopelessness in bitter complaining.

The weight of the suffering of Israel in Egypt was felt deeply, and caused painful sighs to erupt from them. The effect of those sighs upon the Lord is recorded in Exodus 2:24-25: “And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob . And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them” (Ex 2:24-25). Some time after God had called Moses from the burning bush, He again spoke to him about this matter. “And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I

have remembered My covenant ” (Ex 6:5).

Here we have an index to the Divine nature. As is pointedly declared in apostolic doctrine, God is primarily moved by His own will. He is described as working “according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will ” (Eph 1:11). There was no doubt other people groaning in Egypt – like those who were once fellow prisoners of Joseph, other slaves, etc. But it was the prayers of the offspring of Abraham that God heard, or upon whom He focused His attention.

THE LOGIC OF GROANING

As used here, and in strict accord with the purpose of God, groaning is not mere griping or complaining. It is more related to the groans of travail than the suffering of unnatural pain. In other words, there is expectation in “groaning,” whereas there is only discomfort, and

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often hopelessness in bitter complaining. Seen from the high vantage point. “groaning” is the result of involvement in the purpose of God, and it is so described in the apostolic doctrine.

Under the weight of mortality, which includes temptation, the good fight of faith, and the subduing of the flesh, we come to long for deliverance from the body of this flesh, which is the locus of the moral contradiction. Thus it is written, “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23). Realizing the liberty and glory associated with resurrection body, we “groan , earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven” (2 Cor 5:2). Again it is written, “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan , being burdened : not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Cor 5:4).

Just as surely as there was an appointed deliverance for Israel, so there is one for those who are in Christ Jesus, living by faith and in the Spirit. As that time draws near, the groaning of the elect will become more pronounced in the ears of the Lord. Then the saying of Job 14:15 will realize ultimate fulfillment for every person in Christ: “Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (Job 14:15). If we will address life in the stance of faith, our sufferings will work “for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17).

GOD COMES DOWN TO DELIVER

“ 34d . . . and am come down to deliver them.” Other versions read, “come down to set them free ,” NIV “come down to rescue them ,” NRSV “come down to make them free ,” BBE “come down to take them out of it ,” DARBY and “come down to pluck them out .” LITV

The words “come down” refer to Divine intervention. God was going to suddenly and effectively interrupt the suffering of Israel. He would intervene in the affairs of men, causing things to take place that fulfilled the will of the Israelites and contradicted the will of Pharaoh.

God does not always “come down” to deliver. In “the plain of the land of Shinar” he “came down” to abruptly conclude the project conceived by the people there, and to scatter them (Gen 11:2-8). Concerning Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain, He came down to behold the extent of their iniquity, and to ultimately destroy them (Gen 18:20-21; 19:13).

But in the case of Israel in Egypt, he came down to “deliver them.” As is always the case, the Lord could say of this revealed intention, “I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa 46:11).

The word “deliver” is an interesting one. Its lexical meaning is, “to take out . . . to pluck out, draw out, choose out, select,” THAYER “tear out, remove,” FRIBERG “to take out for oneself.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The deliverance would be abrupt, swift, effective, and with violence. It would be forced, or caused to happen. The Lord would not simply set the people free to go their own way, but was taking them out for Himself. Therefore God said of the deliverance, “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto Myself ” (Ex 19:4). It is said of that unparalleled deliverance, “the children of Israel went out with an high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians” (Num 33:3). The deliverance was attended with such Divine force that it is also written in the Psalms, “Egypt was glad when they departed: for the fear of them fell upon them” (Psa 105:38). The Lord came to deliver them, and deliver them he did!

OUR COMING DELIVERANCE

Those who are in Christ Jesus are also anticipating a deliverance, and it will far exceed that which was experienced by Israel. It will also be an imposed deliverance, and will include the destruction of death itself, the demise of the devil, and the passing of the present heavens and earth. That is the “salvation” that is “ready to be revealed” (1 Pet 1:5). The time is drawing nearer and nearer. As it is written, “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed ” (Rom 13:11). At this time, the thing that protects our minds is nothing less than “the hope of salvation” (1 Thess 5:8).

The coming deliverance is sure, and it will bring all groaning to an abrupt halt. While we “wait for the hope of righteousness” through faith (Gal 5:5), we do so in the joyful confidence that our God is working all things together for our good (Rom 8:28). We also know that as the sufferings abound in us, even so Divine consolation will also abound – the first fruits now, and the full harvest then (2 Cor 1:5). The understanding of this brings great strength to the believer.

COME, AND I WILL SEND THEE

“ 34e And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.”

Moses had been in the desert for forty years. Life had, in a sense, become monotonous, with few refreshing things taking place. A man without faith could have grown accustomed to such an uneventful life, and forgotten all about the Lord, making shipwreck of the faith and throwing all hope away. But now, in a moment of time, everything will change. Moses’ present occupation will become obsolete, and he will be sent on a mission that no other man begotten of a man, before or since, has ever equaled.

COME!

“And now come . . .” Other versions read, “Come now,” NASB “So come here,” NJB “Now go,” NLT “Come,” LIVING “Now , Moses,” IE and “So come.” WILLIAMS

Since God had spoken, Moses had been afraid to even look at the burning bush, much less draw close to it. An intriguing sight had not become the occasion of great fear and trepidation. Now, however, the heavenly summons is heard, “COME!” The account in Exodus reads, “Come now, therefore” (Ex 3:10). That is, in view of the fact that God had heard the groaning of Israel and remembered His covenant with Abraham, this was the time for Moses to come close, or draw nigh. The summons was “Come! And come now!” Moses was to make no delay, for God was about to commence the fulfillment of His purpose, and He had chosen Moses to be involved.

Another thing to be seen here is that receiving from God requires that men draw close to Him. The blessing of the Lord, and involvement in His purpose, cannot be done at a distance. That is why the Lord said to wayward Israel; “Come now, let us reason together” (Isa 1:18). There is

a sense of urgency in the Divine summons. It is something that must not be ignored.

Another thing to be seen here is that receiving from God requires that men draw close to Him. The blessing of the Lord, and involvement in His purpose, cannot be done at a distance. That is why the Lord said to wayward Israel; “Come now, let us reason together” (Isa 1:18). There is a sense of urgency in the Divine summons. It is something that must not be ignored.

I WILL SEND THEE

“ . . . I will send thee into Egypt.” Other versions read, “I will send you to Egypt,” NKJV “I will send you back to Egypt,” NIV “ I’m sending you to Egypt,” GWN “And now I will send you to Egypt,” WEYMOUTH “I will send you back to Egypt as my messenger,” WILLIAMS and “I will send you back to Egypt [as My messenger.]” AMPLIFIED

Notice the sureness with which the Lord speaks. Men cannot speak in this manner, for neither the present nor the future is governed by them. However, this is not the case with God. He is the Governor (Psa 22:28), is above all (Eph 4:6), and the entirety of the kingdom belongs to Him (Matt 6:13). No one can stay or restrain His hand (Dan 4:35b), and He does according to His will among the army of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth as well (Dan 4:35). He is the absolute and only Lord.

Now, God is going to send Moses back to Egypt. There he will again identify with the people, and become better acquainted with them. In doing this, he will foreshadow the Lord Jesus, who would come into the world around 1,500 years later, to dwell among men and become fitted to be touched with the feeling of their infirmities and lead them to glory.

Those who are sent by God – truly sent by Him – can “go in the strength of the Lord” (Psa 71:16). In fact, that is the only way they can carry out their commission. All of their resources must come from the one who is sending them, and their sole objective is to do His will. Imagined success in any other matter is only a delusion, and counts for nothing. Their credential is their calling, and their authority is their commission. Also, the commission is defined by God, not by man. He determines who is to be sent, not man. The work is His, and therefore it is ordered by Him. Those who are involved in His work have occasion to thank and praise the Lord that this is the case. That circumstance is the guarantee of success.

CONCLUSION

The nature and the content of Stephen’s defense is edifying and instructive to consider. You will notice a total absence of any reference to himself, or the injustice that has characterized this entire affair. There is a distinctly superior purpose that is driving this man of God. He is not building a case for himself, but is rather justifying God in all of His sayings. He is not an institution builder, or the promoter of strange and novel doctrines.

In this, Stephen sets the tone for all who speak in the name of the Lord. Their role is not to promote an organization, make a career for themselves, or engage in an effort to please the people. When you speak for God, His will is the primary will, and His cause is the only cause. This is the aim of those who are called to “endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim 2:3). The faithful laborer is not to entangle “himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim 2:4).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #32

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #5

“ 7:35 This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. 36 He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years. 37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. 38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: 39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, 40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. 42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?” (Acts 7:35-42)

INTRODUCTION

Stephen points out that Moses returned to Egypt – and he was the very one the Israelites had before rejected. Therein we perceive the contrary way of the natural mind. God chose the man Moses, and the people to whom he was sent rejected him. In this, Moses was a type of Christ, of whom it is written, “He came unto His own, and His own received Him not” (John 1:11). Thus we have Moses, at the forefront of God’s dealings with a body of people, and Jesus as the last Man sent to deliver men from the power of darkness – and both of them were initially rejected.

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- **MOSES SENT TO BE A RULER AND DELIVERER (7:35b)**
- **BY THE HAND OF AN ANGEL (7:35c)**
- **HE BROUGHT THEM OUT AFTER HE HAD SHOWED WONDERS AND SIGNS (7:36)**
- **THIS IS THE MOSES WHO PROPHESED OF CHRIST (7:37)**
- **MOSES DID IT WITH AN ANGEL (7:38)**
- **THEY WENT BACK IN THEIR HEARTS (7:39)**
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- **THEY MADE A CALF, SACRIFICED TO IT, AND REJOICED IN IT (7:41)**
- **GOD GAVE THEM UP TO WORSHIP THE HOST OF HEAVEN (7:42)**
- **CONCLUSION**

CONFIRMATION OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

For centuries men have debated over the extent of human depravity. Entire bodies of theology have been developed on this subject. However, after all is said and done, our text provides evidence that is beyond all question. Here we are not dealing with humanity in general, but with a special segment of the race that were set apart for God. Anything that was known of God at that time had been given to them. They were the people with whom God was working, and to whom he had made unalterable commitments. Yet, Stephen points out that they rejected His choice of a ruler. There is no more proof required to establish that “there is none righteous, no not one” (Rom 3:10), for there is no more clear proof of this condition than when people are at a variance with God in their thoughts and assessments.

There is no way to dignify thinking that contradicts the mind of the Lord. It cannot be excused or overlooked as though it did not exist. Woe to the people who invent a theology that allows for human opinion in matters on which God has spoken. In so doing they actually make a way for men to excuse being at variance with God, dignifying the absurd position by affirming men have a right to have their own opinion. That is the initial evidence that “the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). It is the condition creates enmity, and that requires reconciliation. When God allows for men to entertain contradicting views on matters concerning Him – like being persuaded they can or cannot eat meat – it is not that they have a right to think differently. It is rather that He is longsuffering, and is allowing time for them to mature in their perceptions. I do not think you could establish that men have a right to be at variance in their thinking.

As a whole, the matter of it being wrong to disagree with God is glossed in our time. Even though men are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (Eph 4:18), many continue to view men as having the right to opinions in matters pertaining to life and godliness. In our text, Stephen will make no such allowance, but will hold the Jews responsible for their rejection of both Moses and Christ.

GOD WORKED ANYWAY, FULFILLING HIS OWN WILL

There should have been no question in the mind of the people concerning the Divine placement of Moses. Yet, ignoring all of the indisputable evidence, they murmured against Moses, and challenged his leadership.

Notwithstanding his former rejection by the people, Stephen categorically states that Moses “brought them out.” This confirms that the will of the Lord ultimately prevails. Moses had been chosen for the task, yet Israel at first refused to receive him in the capacity of a deliverer – even in a matter involving only two people, to say nothing of the rescue of a nation. Yet, in due time, and according to the Divine appointment, Moses returned in the full capacity for which he was chosen. This time he did not appear as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, or a member of the Egyptian dynasty. In fact, those who had formerly rejected him may very well have died off, like those who would later fall in the wilderness because of their unbelief (1 Cor 10:5; Heb 3:17; Jude 1:5).

A CONSIDERATION OF THE END

In the final analysis, men will have no choice about submitting to the will of the Lord. When Jesus comes, those who have lived by faith, availing themselves of the reconciliation wrought by Christ will not be required to make a choice. Having submitted themselves “to the righteousness of God” while in the body (Rom 10:3), they will enter into life, fully receiving that for which they have longed, and for which they have been adapted. Those who have refused to receive the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10), the atonement (Rom 5:11), and the remission of sins (Acts 10:43), will be cast out of the presence of the Lord, having absolutely no choice in the matter. Condemnation will be imposed upon them, and their destiny will be sealed and irreversible.

IN THE TEXT

In this text, Stephen draws attention to Moses showing signs in Egypt, in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. This confirmed that he was, in fact, sent by God, for God Himself worked through Moses. God confirmed Moses was sent when he first arrived in Egypt, and set the stage for the deliverance of Israel. He again confirmed His choice of Moses when they confronted the great dividing line – the Red Sea. Once again, He confirmed His choice throughout the wilderness wandering by working through Moses in most extraordinary ways. There should have been no question in the mind of the people concerning the Divine placement of Moses. Yet, ignoring all of the indisputable evidence, they murmured against Moses, and challenged his leadership.

Men must be brought to the point where they comprehend that sin is always wrong, regardless of the feeble explanations that are offered for it. The declaration of man’s natural state is not intended to provide a convenient explanation for sin, but to confirm that all men must, in fact, be born again.

Surface thinkers may reply that this is just the way people are, and therefore we should not be surprised at the conduct of Israel, and even overlook it. These days there are a battery of professionals in human conduct who teach men to be tolerant of things for which God condemns them. Where God requires repentance and faith, these men require only outward reform and a minimal effort. However, the response of the Lord to man’s rebellion, particularly as demonstrated in His dealings with wayward Israel, confirms that it was not as simplistic as some imagine.

The fact that mankind has fallen in Adam accounts for their waywardness, but it does not excuse it. God will not receive the excuse that sin could not be avoided because of man’s wayward nature. In assessing his own sin, David acknowledged that he had a sinful nature from the very beginning. Here are his words: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). Other version read, “Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me,” NRSV and “Behold, I was brought forth in [a state of] iniquity; my mother was sinful who conceived me [and I too am sinful].” AMPLIFIED Yet, David did not offer this as an alibi for his sin – and the fact that the Spirit inspired it to be written confirms that it was an acknowledgment of the truth. In fact, David preceded this statement by saying, “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight: that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest” (Psa 51:4).

THE NECESSITY OF SEEING THIS

When men – particularly professed Christian leaders – lead men to believe that they sinned because of some generational curse, genetic deficiency, chemical imbalance, or environmental limitations, they have contradicted God. Further, their teaching is like a stone, blocking the entrance to the Kingdom of God. Men must be brought to the point where they comprehend that sin is always wrong, regardless of the feeble explanations that are offered for it. The declaration of man’s natural state is not intended to provide a convenient explanation for sin, but to confirm that all men must, in fact, be born again. God will not accept men as they are, all humanly devised theology notwithstanding. That is precisely why Peter demanded repentance and conversion before sins could be remitted (Acts 3:19).

All of this will be confirmed in Stephen’s approach to the recalcitrant manners of the Jews – in their reaction to Moses, and also to Jesus Christ.

A WISE STRATEGY

Knowing the people before him professed to hold Moses in high regard, Stephen points to Moses’ prophecy concerning a coming Messiah. He affirmed that Christ would be a Prophet, whom the people would hear. Moses was also the one through whom the Law was given, which Stephen referred to as “living oracles.” The circumstances surrounding the giving of the Law confirmed that God Himself had given it. Yet, the Jewish fathers would not obey it, but during that very time Israel thrust both God and Moses from themselves, and in their hearts turned back to Egypt.

Thus, with a wisdom that comes from above, Stephen paints a picture of the corruption of the human nature, and the absolute need for a Savior who would not only deliver, but transform as well. He will also speak in perfect harmony with the Scriptures, providing some insightful summations of clear and precise revelation. Notwithstanding, in confirmation of the truth of his insightful diagnosis, his hearers will summarily reject his word, finally murdering him.

GOD SENT THE ONE THEY HAD REFUSED

“ 7:35a This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? . . . ”

Some of the people to whom Stephen was speaking may very well have been among those who said who said to a man healed of blindness, “We are Moses’ disciples” (John 9:28). Jesus told the Jewish leaders, “Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust ” (John 5:45). Now Stephen fastens on Moses, leading the people to ponder him. He does this because he is going to point out that Moses had foretold the coming of Christ, yet they had missed what he said – just as surely as the people of Moses’ day failed to recognize him.

THIS MOSES

:This Moses . . .” Other versions read, “the same Moses,” NIV “it was this Moses,” NRSV “That very Moses,” WILLIAMS and “It was this very Moses.” AMPLIFIED

Moses is a key figure in Scripture, being mentioned no less than 848 times. He is the prominent figure in Exodus through Deuteronomy, being mentioned 648 times. By way of comparison, Aaron is mentioned 272 times. In the Gospels, Moses is mentioned by name 38 times, 18 times in Acts, and 22 times in the Epistles. To my knowledge, the only man begotten by a man that is mentioned more times than Moses is David, who is mentioned 1,085 times in Scripture. It ought to be noted that there are 1,208 references to “Jesus” or “Christ” in Scripture. That is not to mention other terms by which He is known: i.e. Savior, Lord, Son of God, and His various titles and appellations.

If men will subject themselves to the Word of the Lord, becoming acquainted with the Scriptures

as Timothy (2 Tim 3:15), they will be drawn to certain key men – the greatest of which is the Lord Jesus Christ. After Jesus, one of those men is Moses. He was held in high regard by the Jews in a formal or creedal sense. The saved of all ages old him in honor because of the abundance of revelation and wisdom that was vouchsafed to him. The Law came to men through Moses (John 1:17). The pattern of the Tabernacle was given to him in very precise detail (Ex 25:9; Num 8:4). All of the ceremonial laws were given to him – procedures regarding sacrifice, cleansing, sanctification, feasts, etc (Lev 10:11; Lev 23:37-44; Num 29:39). He was also given extraordinary wisdom to judge the people, hearing and settling all of their disputes, and meeting out justice. Even though there were people in the millions, he did this alone for some time (Ex 18:15-23). Moses also foretold the acceptance of the Gentiles, and how that acceptance would provoke the Jews to jealousy (Deut 32:21; Rom 10:19). The Lord also made a point of saying that Moses was “faithful” in taking care of all His house, which was His people (Num 12:7; Heb 3:2).

God Himself declared the uniqueness of Moses, saying there was no other prophet like him “My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Num 12:7-8). And again, “And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (Ex 33:11).

Confirming the singularity of this man, he is the only man to whom the coming Savior was likened (Deut 18:15,18; Acts 3:22; 7:37). Jesus is declared to be a High Priest “after the order of Melchisedec” (Psa 110:4; Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17,21). He is declared to be seated on “the throne of David” (Isa 9:7; Acts 2:30). He was “called of God, as was Aaron” (Heb 5:4). But when it comes to the function of Jesus as a Prophet, He was “like unto,” or “like” NKJV Moses. Surely, then, Moses can be trusted to speak the truth.

Stephen will affirm that the Jews thought nothing of despising Moses when he did not conform with their own way of thinking. This was owing to the fact that the distinction of Moses was not apparent to them in the flesh.

“This Moses” is the one single man through whom the history of the Jews was altered. Stephen refers to him nine times in this defense (7:20,22,29,31, 32,35,,37,40,44). He was born at the appointed time, called by God, and sent by God to deliver the people. It is not possible for any mortal to obtain more significance than that. Yet, note what Stephen says of the response of the people.

Stephen will affirm that the Jews thought nothing of despising Moses when he did not conform with their own way of thinking. This was owing to the fact that the distinction of Moses was not apparent to them in the flesh. However, that was no excuse. His parents recognized his distinction when he was born (Heb 11:23). Pharaoh’s daughter saw him when he was three months old, and was drawn to him. The house of Pharaoh saw enough potential in him to ensure that he was “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22). What possible excuse can be given for the people to whom he was sent failing to recognize he was no ordinary man?

REFUSED

“ . . . whom they refused, . . .” Other versions read, “ rejected ,” NKJV “ disowned ,” NASB “ would not have ,” BBE “ Forsook ,” GENEVA and “denied (disowned and rejected).” AMPLIFIED

The word “refused” is especially strong. Its lexical meaning is, “renounce,” FRIBERG “to deny” being “in any way related to,” LOUW-NIDA , “deny, disown . . . refuse,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “forsake,” LEH

God Sent Moses to Egypt to deliver His people from Egypt. There was enough evidence in even

Moses' appearance to have provoked serious thought about him, as confirmed in his parents, Pharaoh's daughter, the house of Pharaoh. However, because they preferred their own views, the Jews refused to receive him. Both the word "refused," and the teaching concerning it indicates that this involved stubbornness and obstinance.

WHO MADE THEE

" . . . saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? . . ." Other versions read, "prince and judge," GENEVA "leader and judge," NJB "magistrate and judge," WEYMOUTH "ruler and referee ," WILLIAMS and "ruler (referee) and judge." AMPLIFIED

This refers to the occasion when Moses attempted to reconcile two Jews who were in a dispute, with one of them striking the other. This was the second appearance of Moses to his brethren after he was forty years old, and took place the day after he delivered one of them from an oppressing Egyptian. At that time, the offending party said to Moses, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian" (Ex 2:14). Although only one man said this one time, Stephen affirms that all of the people were responsible, citing it as evidence that they rejected Moses.

Some might object, saying all of the people were not guilty of this sin. However, the one who knows the hearts of men (Acts 15:8), declares " they refused" Moses. They did not come to the defense of Moses, or rebuke the man for speaking in such a manner. When the matter was told of Moses slaying the Egyptian, there is no record that any gave thanks for the deliverance, or honored Moses for risking his own life to save just one of them. They did not ponder the occasion with a mind to understand it, nor did they associate it at all with the God of their fathers.

Although men may not be able to perceive it, it is not strange for a group of people to bear the responsibility of a single transgressor. The entire human race bore the results of Adam's sin (Rom 5:12-19). All of Israel suffered because of the sin of Achan. It is said of that occasion, "But the children of Israel committed a trespass in the accursed thing: for Achan, the son of Carmi, the son of Zabdi, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took of the accursed thing: and the anger of the LORD was kindled against the children of Israel" (Josh 7:1). The entire church in Corinth was judged because of a single fornicator who was among them (1 Cor 5:1-5).

The absolute righteousness of this judgment justifies God, and can be seen from at least three perspectives. It is necessary that we see these things.

- First, the Divine assessment cannot possibly be wrong, for it is made by the One who beholds all things, and knows the thoughts and intents of the heart.
- Second, as regarding man's natural state before God, they are all the same.
- Third, none of the Jews sided with Moses, or rebuked the one who spoke against him.

SOMETHING TO PONDER

The contaminating effects of sin cannot be underestimated, nor can transgression be addressed with the human intellect alone. Nor, indeed, can such an activity be driven only by mercy. As Jude states, mercy must be mixed with a holy fear because of the dangerous spiritual terrain on which the worker is treading.

This incident underscores the seriousness of willing sin within the church. Now that psychiatrists, and other worldly-wise men, have gained a prominent place among professing believers, there is a tolerance of sin that is wholly unjustified. The imagined reclamation of transgressors has actually

upstaged the purity of the body of Christ. After all of the arguments have been presented, the sobriety of the work of restoration is seen in the wise counsel of both Paul and Jude.

- Even though restoration is a noble and needful work, Paul says that only those who are “spiritual” should attempt such a work. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). The Amplified Bible reads, “you who are spiritual [who are responsive to and controlled by the Spirit] . . . keeping an attentive eye on yourself, lest you should be tempted also.”

- Jude says much the same thing, accenting the attitude that one must have when engaging in such a work. “And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:22-23). Jude does not say to “have mercy” on all who fall, but “on some.” NASB There are others who must be approached with a mind to the possibility of being defiled by them. Some are to be saved quickly and forthrightly, “pulling them out of the fire,” NKJV “hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.” NIV This is to be done by showing “mercy mixed with fear” NIV – that is, “fear” on the part of the one that is pulling the person out of the fire, lest they themselves be burned in the process. The Amplified Bible reads, “on others take pity [but] with fear, loathing even the garment spotted by the flesh and polluted by their sensuality.”

While I personally laud those who engage in recovery ministries, it also is quite clear that the percentage of actual successes is very low – and that is generally freely acknowledged to be the case. This does not suggest that the work itself is not noble. It does confirm that it must be done with great wisdom and fear. The contaminating effects of sin cannot be underestimated, nor can transgression be addressed with the human intellect alone. Nor, indeed, can such an activity be driven only by mercy. As Jude states, mercy must be mixed with a holy fear because of the dangerous spiritual terrain on which the worker is treading.

The account before us confirms the wisdom of the words of both Paul and James. It also accounts for the lack of emphasis on recovering fallen Christians. Such a work is reserved for those who are sober, wise, and cognizant of the seriousness of sin, together with its defiling effects. The body of Christ must not be thoughtless in this area.

MOSES SENT TO BE A RULER AND A DELIVERER

“ 35b . . . the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer . . . ”

The same Moses the Jews “refused” was the very one the Lord sent. This confirms that the heavens do not rule according to the fickle will of men. It also substantiates that there is a time and place where God performs His will whether the people initially consent to it or not. Additionally, we see in this text that rulers and deliverers are set up by God – whether they are Pharaoh (Ex 9:16) or Moses (Acts 7:35), or David (2 Sam 23:1) or Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 27:6).

TO BE A RULER

“ . . . the same did God send to be a ruler . . . ” Other versions read, “the one God sent to be a ruler ,” NKJV “He was sent to be their ruler . . . by God Himself,” NIV “whom God now sent as . . . ruler,” NRSV “him God sent to be prince ,” DARBY “God sent to . . . rule them ,” GWN “God . . . send to them to be their captain ,” MRD “God sent to be . . . leader ,” NJB and “God sending as a magistrate .” WEYMOUTH

When one ponders the magnitude of the deliverance to be accomplished, the appointment of a single man through whom it would be carried out is most arresting. Of course, He will not be

without heavenly empowerment and assistance, for God does not send anyone to do a work without providing everything that is necessary to accomplish it.

Those accustomed to a democratic approach to things find it difficult to even think in terms of a “ruler.” A ruler is a “commander and leader,” THAYER “one exercising authority” and “invested with power and dignity,” FRIBERG “a judge,” UBS and one who “governs.” LOUW-NIDA Speaking with wisdom concerning things “under the son,” Solomon said, “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14). But when it comes to the things of God, or the handling of the people of God, this is emphatically not the case. There came a time when seventy judges assisted Moses in judging the people (Num 11:25). But Moses never held a session with these men to determine what ought to be done. He was the one who was sent to be the “ruler,” and the spirit that was given to those seventy men was a portion of the spirit that had been given to Moses himself. The people, speaking through a single man, had challenged Moses, saying, “who made thee a ruler or a judge over us.” Now, Stephen answers the question. God had done this.

This was not a token appointment – in name only, or without accompanying authority. God also gave Moses the power and wisdom that was required to be a “ruler.” As with all God-ordained offices, the confirmation of a person being sent by God in any given capacity is his possession of the gifts and abilities required for the execution of that office. This perception will revolutionize the consideration of preachers, teachers, elders, deacons, and the likes.

TO BE A DELIVERER

“ . . . and a deliverer . . .” Other versions read, “liberator,” NRSV “savior,” BBE “redeemer,” CSB “to free them,” GWN “deliverer and redeemer,” AMPLIFIED “to rescue the people,” CEV and “God sent . . . to set them free .” GNB

A “deliverer” is “a redeemer . . . liberator,” THAYER “one who frees slaves,” FRIBERG “a person who releases others,” LOUW-NIDA and “a ransom” LIDDELL-SCOTT Interestingly, the Greek lexicographer Thayer observes that this word is “not found in secular authors.” It is a word uniquely associated with God’s dealings with men.

When one ponders the magnitude of the deliverance to be accomplished, the appointment of a single man through whom it would be carried out is most arresting. Of course, He will not be without heavenly empowerment and assistance, for God does not send anyone to do a work without providing everything that is necessary to accomplish it.

Remember, this is a deliverance that involves a nation that has been in bondage for four hundred years. There had been numerous generations of Israelites that had never experienced liberty, and had only known bondage. If time can erase the promises of God, surely that is sufficient time for it to have happened – particularly in a strange land. However, even if the people that are to be delivered are wayward and stubborn, God knows how to prepare them so they will be ready and anxious to leave the land at the appointed time.

WHAT STEPHEN IS DOING

With spiritual skill Stephen is showing the people that they are really no different than their predecessors. God called and commissioned Moses to effect a deliverance – the very men whom those he was sent to deliver had despised and rejected. Now, the people before Stephen had done precisely the same thing with Jesus, a greater Deliverer sent to accomplish a greater deliverance. It ought to be apparent that such a marvelous liberation is more than a mere accomplishment of men. It is rather the carrying out of a purpose that was conceived by God alone. He implement it through a man of His choosing.

BY THE HAND OF THE ANGEL

“ 35c . . . by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.” Other versions read “ with the help of the angel who appeared to him in the thorn bush,” NKJV “ by means of the angel that appeared to him in the thorn bush,” CJB “with the help of an angel. This was the angel that Moses saw in the bush.” IE and “with the [protecting and helping] hand of the Angel that appeared to him in the bramblebush.” AMPLIFIED

Here is a most arresting consideration! The deliverance of Israel is frequently said to have been accomplished by Moses himself.

MOSES BROUGHT THEM OUT

- God to Moses: “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt” (Ex 3:10).
- “And Samuel said unto the people, It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt ” (1 Sam 12:6).
- “Thou leddest thy people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron ” (Psa 77:20).
- “That led them by the right hand of Moses with his glorious arm, dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name” (Isa 63:12).
- “And by a prophet the LORD brought Israel out of Egypt , and by a prophet was he preserved” (Hosea 12:13).

•

GOD BROUGHT THEM OUT

Yet, the very same deliverance is said to have been accomplished by God Himself.

- “And Moses said unto the people, Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for by strength of hand the LORD brought you out from this place : there shall no leavened bread be eaten” (Ex 13:3).

“And Moses and Aaron said unto all the children of Israel, At even, then ye shall know that the LORD hath brought you out from the land of Egypt ” (Ex 16:6).

- “Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt ” (Lev 19:36; 22:33; Num 15:41).
- “But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand , and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut 7:8).
- “I sent Moses also and Aaron, and I plagued Egypt, according to that which I did among them: and afterward I brought you out ” (Josh 24:5).

BY AN ANGEL

Additionally, here the deliverance is said to be “by the hand” of an angel – a specific angel, even the one who appeared to him in the bush at Sinai. You see what holy involvement are wrought by the hand of the Lord. In the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, God, who determined and accomplished the deliverance, brought a holy angel and the man Moses into the work.

There is frequent reference to this angel, particularly in regard to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

• **AT THE RED SEA.** “And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: and it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night” (Ex 14:19-20).

• **IN LEADING THEM THROUGH THE WILDERNESS.** “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared . Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for my name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off” (Ex 23:20-23).

• **IN MOSES LEADING THE PEOPLE.** “Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, Mine Angel shall go before thee : nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them” (Ex 32:34).

• **PREPARING CANAAN FOR THEIR OCCUPATION.** “And I will send an angel before thee ; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite” (Ex 33:2).

• **LEADING THEM OUT OF EGYPT.** “And when we cried unto the LORD, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt : and, behold, we are in Kadesh, a city in the uttermost of thy border” (Num 20:16).

• **ISAIAH’S REVELATION.** “In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them : in his love and in his pity He redeemed them; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (Isa 63:9).

Now, speaking through the Holy Spirit, Stephen states that God sent Moses to be a ruler and deliver “by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush.”

THE DIVINE MANNER

In this we behold the manner of God’s workings. Because of the sinfulness of man, God Himself does not have immediate, or direct dealings with them. In the text before us, there was an angel and a man of faith between the people and God. It was the presence of these personalities that enabled God to work with the people without destroying them in the process. Even though God “set” His love upon this people, choosing them and preferring them above all other people (Deut 7:7), yet His nature did not allow Him to directly confront the people. This is why the vast hosts of angels are so active, “sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14). It is the reason for the presences of Moses, Aaron, the priests, and the prophets. Without these intermediaries God could not draw near to the people without His glory consuming them – for glory cannot dwell with corruption.

There is a tendency in our society that greatly concerns me – a disposition that has been produced by spiritual ignorance and a lack of familiarity with God and His great salvation. God is being presented in a manner that actually conflicts with His nature.

Even in this day of salvation, when Jesus has put away sin, men have been reconciled to God, and peace has been made and preached, someone must be between God and man, else they will be consumed. This is the reason for “the Man Christ Jesus,” who mediates between God and man (1 Tim 2:5). It is why whatever comes to us from God comes “through Christ” and “by Christ” (Rom

6:11,23; Gal 3:14; Eph 2:7; Phil 4:7; 4:19; Tit 3:6; Heb 13:21). It is why what we give to God must come to Him through Christ (Rom 7:25; 16:27; 2 Cor 3:4; Eph 3:21; 1 Pet 2:5; 4:11). This is also why there are apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers who deliver the Word of God to men – as opposed to the Lord speaking directly with them.

No man is so close to God that Jesus is no longer required – or the ministers whom He has “given to every man” (1 Cor 3:5). It is not possible to have a profitable association with God without a Intercessor in heaven (Heb 7:25), an Intercessor within (Rom 8:26-27), and informed messengers (Eph 4:11).

There is a tendency in our society that greatly concerns me – a disposition that has been produced by spiritual ignorance and a lack of familiarity with God and His great salvation. God is being presented in a manner that actually conflicts with His nature. As good as it may sound to consider God as a close friend and companion who understands the difficulties we experience, that is not a fair representation of God at all. There have been, and presently are, people whose miserable condition has actually been brought on by the Lord whom they have offended. Additionally, there is a moral and spiritual condition in which sins are said to “have withholden good things from you” (Jer 5:25). There is also the fact that the Lord is addressed as “a God that hidest Thysself” (Isa 45:15). We are also told of times when the Lord looks for someone to stand in the gap for men (Ezek 22:30), and searches for an intercessor (Isa 59:16). Even then, when His “own arm” brought salvation, it was through a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. There are people who are not invited into the presence of the Lord, and He challenges them when they attempt to enter into His courts (Isa 1:12).

These manners do not reflect a heartless God, but a holy one, whose nature is truthfully described in this way: “A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about” (Psa 97:3). It is in consideration of this, coupled with a desire for “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4), that God works among men through appointed means, and not directly .

When preaching and teaching leave people thinking of God as a kind of tender and sympathetic man, the people are put in a position of jeopardy. Lest men fall asleep, we are reminded that His wrath will be revealed “against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold [back] the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom 1:18). There are people who will be raised from the dead to be damned (John 5:29). There are people who will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev 20:15). This will take place because they are incompatible with God, and thus cannot dwell in His presence.

The purpose of salvation is to address and resolve this condition, so that men will not be condemned, and will be able to dwell in the house of the Lord forever. This is why there is a new birth (John 3:3,7; 1 Pet 1:23), transformation (Rom 12:2), and a moral and spiritual change (2 Cor 3:18). It is why men receive a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). It is why spiritual growth is required (Eph 4:15; 2 Pet 3:18). This is the reason for “the new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:9), a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10), and deliverance from the power of darkness and translation into the Kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13).

All of this is precisely because God not simply a companion of troubled people, and One deeply concerned about the welfare of men in this world. It is why He is not presented as a mere problem solver, and a solution to difficulties that are common to all men. Even His love for us is “ in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:37).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

It is necessary to say these things because of the nature of Scriptural history. When recounting historical events, the Spirit is doing more than simply relating what took place. Particular with regards to Israel, we are told that what “happened” to them was “for our ensamples,” or examples (1 Cor 10:11). That is, these were events that were Divinely orchestrated in order to teach us of critical

matters. In those events we are not only apprised of the human nature, but of the Divine nature as well. Lest we become presumptuous in our approach to the Lord, it is important to recognize that, by His nature, He has specific response to both good and evil, righteousness and unrighteousness, holiness and iniquity.

There is a sense in which Scriptural history is the doctrine of God lived out. The affirmation is that the Lord tries, or tests, the righteous, and hates “the wicked and him that loveth violence” (Psa 11:5). That statement is confirmed in the historical accounts of Scripture. The doctrine is that God will visit iniquity with the rod, or chastens those who insist on sinning (Psa 89:32). Divine history confirms that statement. The doctrine is that God is “nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth” (Psa 145:18). Scriptural accounts confirm this to be true. The doctrine is that God devises means so that His banished will not be expelled from Him (2 Sam 14:14; Ex 21:13; Isa 50:2). The Scriptural records of the Lord’s dealing with people are the proof of these. In conformity with the Divine manner, they are established in the mouth of at least two witnesses.

HE BROUGHT THEM OUT AFTER HE HAD SHOWED WONDERS AND SIGNS

“ 36 He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.”

HE BROUGHT THEM OUT

“He brought them out . . .” Other versions read, “ This man led them out,” NASB “He led them out of Egypt,” NIV “This man led them forth,” ASV “This man took them out,” BBE “This is the man who led our ancestors out of Egypt,” GWN “ He it was that brought them out,” MRD “ So , Moses led the people out,” IE and “Moses rescued the people.” CEV

The “he” of the text is Moses, whom God sent to be a ruler and deliverer. He brought them out, not by means of warfare, but by leading the people to obey God, who then cleared the way for their exodus. From the standpoint of SOURCE, it was the Lord who brought them out. That is stated in Exodus 12:42: “It is a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.” From the standpoint of MEANS, the Lord used Moses to bring them out, as He Himself declared: “And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt , unto the land which I sware unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it” (Ex 33:1).

The people of God must learn to speak in a precise and correct manner. There was a sense in which God alone brought Israel out of Egypt. Therefore God said, “ I brought your armies out of the land of Egypt.” Yet there was a sense in which Moses himself brought them out. Therefore God said to Moses, “Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt ” (Ex 3:10,12). From yet another point of view, they were thrust out of Egypt. As it is written, “And they baked unleavened cakes of the dough which they brought forth out of Egypt, for it was not leavened; because they were thrust out of Egypt , and could not tarry, neither had they prepared for themselves any victual” (Ex 12:39). That is, the Egyptians urged them to leave, sending them out of the land. From yet another view, the children of Israel “went out from the land of Egypt” (Ex 12:41). From still another point of view , their deliverance was “by the hand of the angel” (Acts 7:35).

Here again we see the nature of God’s working. Effective works that regard men are accomplished by means of heaven and earth working together. In the flood, it was the Lord and Noah. In the generation of Isaac, it was the Lord, angels, Abraham, and Sarah. In the expansion of Israel in Egypt, it was the Lord, Joseph, Jacob, and his progeny. Now, in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, it is the Lord, an angel, Moses, and the people themselves, and even the Egyptians who urged them to go.

Even in redemption, it was :”the Man Christ Jesus:” whop carried out the will of God while being supported by God.

If you were to have assessed this deliverance while fastening your eyes on the people, it looked as though they merely walked out, being urged on their way by the Egyptians. If you had been carefully watching Moses, it would have appeared as though he was the driving force behind it all. If you could see behind the scenes, you would see that God determined the whole matter, and an angel facilitated His will. But actually, there was a marvelous harmony in the work, with heaven and earth working together. This was made possible because the Lord can turn hearts, raise the spirits of the people, and give them courage to move out. Working effectively, He can make the people want to come out, and cause the Egyptians to want them to leave.

In Salvation

In salvation, we have a similar situation – except it is on a much larger scale. God, the Lord Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are all engaged in the work. The opening of the hearts of men, conviction, willingness, repentance and faith, and much more, are all traced to them. An enumerable company of Holy angels are also involved in the work. Working behind the scenes, they impact upon circumstance, are instrumental in leading, and a host of other ministries. There are special people like apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, who are charged with implementing the purpose of God, informing, and leading the people. These teach, expound, exhort, instruct, clarifying the truth to the people. Then, there are the people themselves, who are made willing in the day of His power, and willingly forsake the world, and love and embrace the truth. It is all marvelous when perceived, exhilarating the soul, and bringing joy and confidence to the heart.

WONDERS AND SIGNS IN EGYPT

“ . . . after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt . . .” Other versions read, “ performing wonders and signs,” “ did wonders and miraculous signs,” NIV “ having wrought wonders and signs,” ASV doing wonders and signs,” DOUAY “ Did amazing things and worked miracles,” GWN “ by means of many wonders and miraculous signs,” NLT “by means of many remarkable miracles,” LIVING “He did powerful things and miracles,” IE and “performing marvels and signs.” WEYMOUTH

Before Israel left Egypt, Moses worked signs and wonders, confirming that he was sent from God. Initially, he was given four signs to perform.

- Throwing his rod down, and it becoming a serpent (Ex 4:3; 7:10).
- Picking up the serpent by the tail, and it became a rod (Ex 4:4).
- Putting his hand into his bosom, withdrawing it, and it was leprous (Ex 4:6).
- Putting his hand again into his bosom, withdrawing it, and turned back again as his other flesh (Ex 4:7).

Following this, he worked ten miracles of staggering proportions – the ten plagues of Egypt.

- Water turned to blood (Ex 7:14-25).
- The plague of the frogs (Ex 8:1-15).
- The plague of the lice (Ex 8:16-19).
- The plague of the flies (Ex 8:20-24).
- The plague on the cattle (Ex 9:1-7).
- The plague of boils and blains, or running sores (Ex 9:8-12).

- The plague of hail, with fire running along the ground (Ex 9:15-34).
- The plague of locusts (Ex 10:1-20).
- The plague of thick darkness (Ex 10:21-23).
- The plague of the death of all the firstborn in Egypt (Ex 11:4-7; 12:29-30).

In these miracles, Moses used his rod, now referred to as “the rod of God” (Ex 4:17; 8:5,16,17; 9:23; 10:13).

WONDERS AND SIGNS IN THE RED SEA

“ . . . and in the Red sea . . .” Other versions read, “ at the Red Sea,” NRSV and “ through the Red Sea.” NLT

Having left Egypt, Israel first came to the Red Sea, which was impassable. It was there that Moses, using his rod, also worked signs and wonders.

- He stretched forth his rod and divided the sea, and Israel walked across no dry ground (Ex 14:16).
- Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the waters returned to the natural state, drowning all of Egyptian army in the process (Ex 14:26-27).

WONDERS AND SIGNS IN THE WILDERNESS

“ . . . and in the wilderness forty years.” Other versions read, “and for forty years in the desert,” NIV “and in the waste land for forty years,” BBE “and through the wilderness for forty years,” NLT and “ during the forty years in the wilderness (desert).” AMPLIFIED

During the sojourn through the wilderness, several miracles were wrought by the hand of Moses – sometimes with the involvement of Aaron.

The listing I am providing of miracles done by Moses does not include the following, even though I have no doubt Stephen had them in mind as well.

- The pillar of cloud and fiery pillar that led Israel (Ex 13:21)
- The miraculous supply of daily manna (Ex 16:4).
- The miraculous supply of quail (Ex 16:13).
- The revelation of God at Mount Sinai (Ex 19:16-20; 24:10–17).
- The fire of God that fell upon the murmuring Israelites (Num 11:1-3).
- The judgment of Miriam’s leprosy (Num 12:10-15).
- The ground opening up and swallowing Korah and his cohorts (Num 16:31-35).
- The budding of Aaron’s rod (Num 17:1-9).
- The fiery (poisonous) serpents (Num 21:6-9).
- The destruction of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2).

The following are the signs and wonders that involved Moses more directly.

- Sweetening of the waters of Marah by means of casting a tree into them (Ex 15:25).
- Miraculous defeat of the army of Amalek while Moses hands were held up (Ex 17:9-13).

- The face of Moses glows when he came forth from being with God (Ex 34:29-35).
- Brings water out of the rock by striking it with his rod (Ex 17:5-7).
- Prays for Miriam and she is healed of leprosy (Num 12:10-15).
- Prayed to God and a fire sent to consume the people was stopped (Num 11:1-3).
- Brings water again from a rock (Num 20:8-11)
- Prays for the people among whom God had sent poisonous snakes, and was directed to construct a brazen serpent which, when looked upon, brought healing to those who looked (Num 21:6-8).

THE POINT TO BE SEEN

The point to be seen is that the unbelief of the people could in no way be said to have resulted from them not seeing the works of God. It was not owing to any lack of ratification that Moses was, indeed, selected, sent, and empowered by God. As you might expect, Stephen will show that the same reasoning pertains to the Jew's rejection of Jesus Christ. He was also "a Man approved of God . . . by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of" the Jews (Acts 2:22).

THE PRINCIPLE OF HOLY REFERENCE

Throughout Scripture, there is the employment of, what I will call, holy reference. By this I mean that the account of Divine workings were first chronicled, or reported. Then, those events were recalled in total by the wise selection of just a few words. Thus a base of knowledge became a virtual well of thought from which profitable recollections could be gathered. Of course, where there is an ignorance of the occurrences of reference, no significant profit can be gained when hearing a summation of them. However, if there is a knowledge of the factual details of Divine history, a brief reference to an entire period of time will produce a plethora of refreshing and profitable thought. Let me give you a few examples of the kind of summary statements to which I refer.

If the individual hearing these statements does not have a working knowledge of the details to which they refer, the statements themselves will exert minimal influence upon both heart and mind. They all presume an acquaintance with the details.

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS. "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38).

- **THE BEGINNING OF THE GOSPEL.** "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will?" (Heb 2:3-4).

- **THE MINISTRY OF THE HIGH PRIEST UNDER THE OLD COVENANT.** "Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God" (Heb 9:6).

If the individual hearing these statements does not have a working knowledge of the details to which they refer, the statements themselves will exert minimal influence upon both heart and mind. They all presume an acquaintance with the details.

Where this Kingdom manner is not known, very foolish decisions can be made concerning the Scriptures. For example, because one reads that the Old Covenant and its attending ordinances are no longer in force, an erroneous conclusion may be reached. The person may see the Old Covenant Scriptures as entirely unnecessary, and therefore neglect them. Such a person may even choose to

ignore them altogether, carrying about what men refer to as “A New Testament.” There are, in fact, a number of people with whom I am personally acquainted, who have adopted and promote this view. They conveniently overlook that these are the Scriptures to which Paul referred when he wrote to Timothy, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness : that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:15-17).

In Our Text

Previously, I listed twenty-four miracles that were wrought by the hand of Moses, as well as several that were related to his ministry. All of the events that I listed were brought to mind with this sentence: “He brought them out, after that he had showed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years” (Acts 7:36). This statement of Stephen would mean very little to someone who had no knowledge of those details. That condition would cause his words to be profitless to the hearers.

Without lingering on this particular consideration, this explains why much of the modern church is not able to get much out of solid Scriptural preaching and teaching. Such communication, to them, concerns a book with which they are not familiar. Until they gain the needed familiarity, it is not likely that they will grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. Such growth presumes one has a knowledge of the Scriptures. That is precisely why Peter wrote, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby ” (1 Pet 2:2). Professing believers cannot ignore this admonition without suffering disastrous results. Where “spiritual understanding” is not found, falling away from the faith is imminent. Men cannot remain ignorant, and yet remain safe and “kept by the power of God” (1 Pet 1:5). There appears to be a prevailing lack of consciousness of this altogether unacceptable circumstance. If men are to be saved, deliverance from this state must be experienced. Salvation is realized in the context of understanding.

THIS IS THE MOSES WHO PROPHESED OF CHRIST

“ 37 This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear.”

Stephen’s reference to Moses no doubt stirred the hearts of the people – particularly their leaders, who freely declared, “we are Moses’ disciples” (John 9:26). Boldly they said, “We know that God spake unto Moses,” while saying of Jesus, “as for this fellow, we know not from whence He is” (John 9:29). Now Stephen elaborates, aiming at the exaltation of the Lord Jesus Christ whom he is serving.

THIS IS THAT MOSES

“This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel . . .” To these people, there was no question about what Moses had done. It was part of their history, and they tended to glory in it. They had handily forgotten how Moses was treated by their predecessors, but Stephen has clearly stated how Moses was received in his day, even though the generation of Stephen’s time held him in high regard. They referred to his writings as binding upon the people (Matt 19:7; 22:24; John 8:5).

Now Stephen prepares for his proclamation of Jesus by drawing attention to what Moses said – the man they held in veneration. His words be like a penetrating sword that will search out the thoughts and intents of their hearts.

A PROPHET TO BE RAISED UP

“ . . . A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me . . .”

These words were spoken by Moses at the end of his life – after he had led the people through a terrible wilderness, and they were on the borders of the promised land. At this time, the unbelieving generation had died off, and Moses reminded them of the forty years they had spent wandering in the wilderness (Deut 2:7; 8:2,4; 29:5). What a circuitous journey it had been! Deuteronomy 1:1-2 affirms that at this time they were only eleven days from Horeb, where they had received the Law. It is generally considered that a days journey was approximately fifteen miles. If this is so, they were about 165 miles from where they started – and it took forty years to get there! Now, at the time of the Deuteronomy discourse given by Moses, they were on the banks of the Jordan River, with Canaan on the other side (Josh 1:1-2).

The people listening to Stephen were no doubt fully aware of the last words of the book of Deuteronomy. They were a tribute to Moses, the servant of God. “And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, in all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land, and in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses showed in the sight of all Israel” (Deut 34:10-12). This being true, as it surely is, the words of Moses should be held in the highest regard, for they were nothing less than the words of God.

Another Prophet

Thus, during this valedictory address, Moses foretold the coming of a greater prophet. “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deut 18:15). Not only had God raised up Moses, He was going to raise another Prophet – one that would prove to be even greater than Moses. The people would listen to this prophet, giving heed to His words.

By Way of Contrast

These words were spoken by Moses at the end of his life – after he had led the people through a terrible wilderness, and they were on the borders of the promised land. At this time, the unbelieving generation had died off, and Moses reminded them of the forty years they had spent wandering in the wilderness

By way of contrast, Moses reminded the people that they had requested that God no longer speak directly to them. “According to all that thou desiredst of the LORD thy God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, neither let me see this great fire any more, that I die not. And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken” (Deut 18:16-17). This was done shortly after their deliverance, when they received the Law at Mount Sinai (Ex 20:19). In response to their request, Moses related what God has personally told Moses: “And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken” (Deut 18:17). That is, their decision was a wise one, for if God had come close to them or spoken to them, they would have indeed died, for their hearts were corrupt, and they were a stubborn and stiffnecked people.

It Would Not Always Be This Way

Then Moses reaffirmed that God was going to raise up another Prophet from that nation. That Prophet would speak to the people in words that were given to Him by God Himself. It is in this sense that He would be a Prophet like Moses. His message would be superior, but the Source of it, and the means through which it was given to him, would be the same. “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put My words in His mouth; and He shall speak unto them all that I shall command Him” (Deut 18:18).

Failing to Hear Him Would Be Fatal

Moses then told the people that their continuance would hinge on whether or not they received what this Prophet said. “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto My words which He shall speak in My name, I will require it of him” (Deut 18:19). On the day of Pentecost, some time before the period covered in our text, Peter also referred to this word. Through the Holy Spirit he made the strength of this saying quite clear. “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people ” (Acts 3:23). Even as it was with the council before whom Stephen was standing, it seems to me that this truth is scarcely known in the contemporary church. There is altogether too much casualness concerning the words of Christ, not to mention the gross ignorance of them, and prevailing lack of interest in, or a quest for, them.

Men do well to carefully weigh the liberties men take upon themselves to alter the text of Scripture in such a way as to put it at a variance with godly scholars, other texts of Scripture, and the words of God Himself.

HIM YE SHALL HEAR

“ . . . Him shall ye hear.” Stephen accents this promise – for it is a promise, and not a mere commandment. Later versions of Scripture eliminate this phrase (NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, NLT, etc). Nearly all older versions of Scripture (prior to 1900), contain the words (DARBY, DOUAY, GENEVA, MRD, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, YLT, LITV). Some later translations also include the words, including Phillips Translation of the New Testament. Whatever technical justification may be offered for this exclusion, it is wholly unacceptable. It actually deprives the text of strength. It also overlooks the presence of the words in the Deuteronomy text, and the affirmation given by God Himself when Jesus was transfigured (“hear ye Him” – Matt 17:5). There are also sufficient language scholars and students of ancient manuscripts that include it, thus confirming that the case against their inclusion is by no means beyond all question. Men do well to carefully weigh the liberties men take upon themselves to alter the text of Scripture in such a way as to put it at a variance with godly scholars, other texts of Scripture, and the words of God Himself. Both then Head and the body must be considered.

The Significance of These Words

The significance of these words is found in the fact that God makes absolutely no provision for not hearkening to the words of Jesus. There is not the slightest Divine tolerance or longsuffering with those who ignore or reject the words of Jesus. As I have said, this view contradicts the burden of contemporary Christianity, as well as a considerable measure of historical Christendom.

Stephen’s inclusion of Moses’ prophecy is designed to place the weight of conviction upon the conscience of his hearers. He will force them to deal with what they have ignored, even though it will result in his own martyrdom.

One of the great needs of our time is for godly men who have a grasp of the truth to powerfully bring it to bear upon the hearts and consciences of men – particularly religious men. There is far too much indifference and ignorance in the professed church to allow for any other posture. Part of this condition has been caused by a lack of genuine leaders.

MOSES DID IT WITH THE ANGEL

“ 38 This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us.”

Having drawn the attention of his listeners to Moses’ prophecy of Israel, Stephen continues to elaborate on Moses himself – a man chosen, sent, and empowered by God, yet rejected by the people.

THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS

“ This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness . . .” Other versions read, “ congregation in the wilderness,” NKJV “ assembly in the desert,” NIV “church in the wasteland,” BBE “the assembly of God’s people in the wilderness,” NLT “congregation in the desert,” WEYMOUTH and “assembly in the wilderness (desert).” AMPLIFIED

What an intriguing way to describe the children of Israel in the wilderness: “the church in the wilderness.” This word “church” is translated from the regular Greek word to which that term is applied – **evkklhsi,a** (Eck-la-see-a). For many years, a considerable amount of needless controversy has raged around the English word “church.” It is often stated that it is an improper translation, and does not reflect the proper meaning of the word. In confirmation of the controversy that has raged over this word, **THE COMPACT EDITION OF THE OXFORD ENGLISH DICTIONARY** (which I have in my possession), contains over seven full pages of information under the heading “church.” The usage of the word ranges from applying it to a building, the purported clergy, and specific denominations, to the entire body of Christians. Most of this accents usage, which highlights the existing confusion.

As used in Scripture, the word “church” (**evkklhsi,a**) is both general and specific.

- **IT’S BUILDER.** Jesus said He would build His “church” (Matt 16:18).
- **AN AUDIENCE TO WHICH THINGS ARE TOLD.** Jesus said that after personal offenses had been addressed personally, and before two or three witnesses, and yet remained unresolved, they were to be told “to the church” (Matt 18:17).
- **GOD ADDS TO.** God is said to have added people “to the church” (Acts 2:47).
- **FEAR CAME ON.** Following the deaths of Ananas and Sapphira, “great fear came upon all the church” (Acts 5:11).
- **ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS.** Stephen referred to the nomadic Israelites as “the church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38).
- **PERSECUTED.** Early in the history of the church, a persecution was leveled “against the church” (Acts 8:1,3).
- **HAD A PERIOD OF REST.** Following the cessation of the persecution, “the churches” had rest throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria” (acts 9:31).
- **HEARD OF GENTILE CONVERSIONS.** The conversion of the Gentiles “as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, came into the ears of the church in Jerusalem” (Acts 11:22).
- **PEOPLE ASSEMBLED WITH IT.** Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, where for “a whole year they assembled themselves with the church” (Acts 11:26).
- **WAS VEXED.** Herod “stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church” (Acts 12:1).
- **MADE PRAYERS.** When the target was Peter, “the church” made prayer for him without ceasing (Acts 12:5).
- **BY LOCATION.** The church was identified with locations – Antioch, Cenchrea, Corinth, Galatia, Laodicea, Thessalonica., Babylon, Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, Asia (Acts 13:1; Rom 16:1; 2 Cor 1:1, Gal 1:2; Col 4:16; 1 Thess 1:1; 1 Pet 5:13; Rev 2:1; 2:8,12,18; 3:1,7; 1 Cor 16:19).
- **PRIVATE HOMES.** There are churches in houses, or private homes (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phile 1:2).

• **KNOWN BY THIS OWNER.** The word “church ” is used with reference to its Owner or Founder – “church of God,” and “church of the living God,” “church of the Firstborn” (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 12:23).

• **CHRIST’S BODY.** There are texts that specifically define the church – Christ’s “body,” “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all,” “the house of God,” and “the pillar and ground of the truth,” (Eph 1:22-23; 5:23; Col 1:18,24; 1 Tim 3:15).

• **AN ASSEMBLY.** In Acts 19:32,30, and 41, a mob of irate Ephesians who were opposed to Paul were called an “assembly” – translated from the word **evkkllhsi,a** .

• **PLACE WHERE GIFTS PLACED.** Spiritual gifts are said to have been placed by God “in the church” (1 Cor 12:28).

• **MEANS THROUGH WHICH GOD’S WISDOM IS BEING MADE KNOWN.** The “church” is the means through which God is displaying His manifold wisdom to heavenly principalities and powers (Eph 3:10).

• **GLORY BROUGHT TO GOD THROUGH.** Glory is said to be brought to God through the church “throughout all ages” (Eph 3:21).

• **JESUS WILL PRESENT IT TO HIMSELF.** Jesus will present to Himself “a glorious church, . . . Not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph 5:27).

• **JESUS SINGS PRAISE IN.** The Psalmist foretold a Messiah who would “sing praise” in the midst of “the church” (Psa 22:22,25; Heb 2:12).

• **NAMES WRITTEN IN HEAVEN.** The names of those in “the church of the Firstborn” are “written in heaven” (Heb 12:23).

What is there that all of these uses have in common? It is obvious that the word does not refer to lifeless edifice or structure. It is equally clear that it speaks of people – functioning people. Often, the word emphasizes the people being assembled, or gathered together – although sometimes it refers to them while in state of dispersion.

Stephen Sheds Light on the Subject

Right here, in Stephen’s defense, he sheds light on the real meaning of this word – particularly as it applies to the body of Christ. He refers to “the church in the wilderness.” There are at least two things that distinguished these desert nomads. First, they had been delivered – called out of Egypt. Second, they were pilgrims and strangers in the wilderness, in quest of the land that God had promised to them.

“The church in the wilderness” had been called out of one country, and were in the process of journeying to another country. They were called together for a purpose – an objective. There was a particular purpose for this body of people, one into which they had been called.

It is not by coincidence that the root meaning of the Greek word **evkkllhsi,a,l** perfectly coincides with the picture presented by Stephen. “Called out or forth . . . properly a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly,” THAYER “a gathering of citizens,” FRIBERG “an assembly of citizens regularly summoned,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “assembly of people.” LEH

“The church in the wilderness” was not merely a congregation. It was not a group of people who simply got together. This was a body of people who were in a foreign and hostile land. God had determined a better place for them, and therefore orchestrated circumstances so they would not feel at home in that land. In due time He called them out of that land, in order that they might occupy a better land – one of their own. He delivered them, led them, and sustained them along the way, doing so through a leader – Moses.

All the way to the promised land they experienced trials and challenges. Some of them who refused to believe dropped off along the way. In fact one of the reasons for their forty year journey was in order that the unacceptable ones would expire in the wilderness.

The parallel with the church is obvious, and does not require extensive explanation. The similarities between Israel and the church are not coincidental or incidental; they are deliberate, planned and orchestrated by God. This is the teaching of the first twelve verses of the tenth chapter of First Corinthians. Our leader and sustained is the Lord Jesus Christ. However, He only fulfills this role for those who have been called out of the world, have come out of it in their hearts, and are journeying as strangers and pilgrims in this world to better country.

Any perception of the church that has them settling down in this world cannot possible be true. God has called them out of the world. This is such a critical matter that “whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.” How this needs to be known!

Any perception of the church that has them settling down in this world cannot possible be true. God has called them out of the world. This is such a critical matter that “whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God” NKJV (James 4:4). How this needs to be known!

WITH THE ANGEL

“ . . . with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers . . .” Other versions read, “ accompanied by the angel,” CJB “together with the angel,” CSB “with the messenger,” YLT “went between the angel,” WILLIAMS “was the go-between for the Angel,” AMPLIFIED and “was the mediator between the angel who used to talk with him on Mount Sinai and our father.” PHILLIPS

The angel who spoke with Moses in Mount Sinai was the one at the bush, not one of the angels that delivered the Law. The angel to which Stephen referred appeared to Moses “in the wilderness of Mount Sinai” (Acts 7:30). The very angel that was sent to deliver the call to Moses was the same one who accompanied him in his work. This was the angel to which Isaiah referred when he wrote, “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them : in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old” (Isa 63:9).

In my judgment, this was none other than Michael, “one of the chief princes” in the angelic order (Dan 10:13). Once, when another angel had been dispatched to answer Daniel’s prayer, he encountered “the prince of Persia,” some great and hostile spiritual power. This “prince” proved too formidable for the angel, but Michael came to “help” him (Dan 10:13). While speaking with Daniel, this angel referred to Michael as “Michael your prince” (Dan 10:21). Later, in the twelfth chapter of Daniel, that same angel (delivering a message that covered Daniel 10:19-12-4), spoke of a time of great adversity for the children of Israel. However, he opened the door of hope when he said, “And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people . . .” (Dan 12:1). While I will not be contentious about it, it appears to me that this was the angel that assisted Moses.

That same angel was apparently instrumental in the giving of the law as well, for Stephen adds that he also spoke “with our fathers.” This being the case, Michael would have been joined by his angels. We know that he was in charge of some angels, for they were instrumental in the overthrow of Satan. It is written, “And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels” (Rev 12:7).

The view of Michael and his angels being involved with Moses further explains Paul’s allusion in his letter to the Galatians. “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand

of a mediator” (Gal 3:19).

The point to be seen here is that Moses did not do the work himself. There is an extensive word given about this angel in the twenty-third chapter of Exodus. It is a most intriguing word. “Behold, I send an Angel before thee, to keep thee in the way, and to bring thee into the place which I have prepared. Beware of him, and obey his voice, provoke him not; for he will not pardon your transgressions: for My name is in him. But if thou shalt indeed obey his voice, and do all that I speak; then I will be an enemy unto thine enemies, and an adversary unto thine adversaries. For mine Angel shall go before thee, and bring thee in unto the Amorites, and the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites: and I will cut them off” (Ex 23:20-23). Observe the extensive work of this angel, and the promises and warnings issued concerning him.

- Hew would keep the people in the way, ensuring they did not get lost.
- He would bring them to the place God prepared for them. I take this to ultimately be the promised land, and immediately to Mount Sinai where they received the Law.
- The people were to beware of him.
- The people were to obey him.
- The people were not to, provoke him to anger, for he would not pardon their transgressions.
- God’s name was in him.
- If the people would obey the voice of the angel, and do everything he said, God would be an enemy to their enemies.
- He would bring the people to the nations then occupying Canaan, and would drive out those nations from the land.

A Type of the Holy Spirit

In his association with Moses, this angel was a type of the Holy Spirit. It is “through the Spirit” that we also are successful in our journey to the world to come. Ponder what is said of this.

- “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5).
- “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13).
- “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” Rom 8:14).
- “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ” (Rom 14:17).
- “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).
- “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal 5:5).
- “In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit ” (Eph 2:22).
- “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (2 Tim 1:14).

• “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22).

We are also warned against provoking this heavenly Companion. “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30). And again, “Quench not the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19).

HE RECEIVED THE LIVELY ORACLES

The idea here is that “the living oracles,” or the Law, was not a form of reasoning, with extensive explanatory sentences. While much of the ceremonial was of this nature, the Law itself was not. It was a kind of summation of moral goodness – the kind that reflects the nature of God Himself. It was concise and to the point.

“ . . .who received the lively oracles to give unto us.” Other versions read, “living oracles,” NKJV “living words,” NIV “living words of God,” BBE “words of life,” DOUAY “life-giving messages,” GWN “living utterances,” NAB “life-giving words,” NLT “the living Word,” LIVING “commands that still live,” IE “ever-living utterances,” WEYMOUTH “living truths,” ISV “utterances that still live,” WILLIAMS and “living oracles (words that still live).” AMPLIFIED

Lively

This refers to the giving of the Law, and parallels John’s words, “the Law was given by Moses” (John 1:17). The word “lively” means these words were associated with life, and by their very nature could not die . A living God cannot speak dead words. These were words that could prick the conscience, provoke inquiry, and reveal aspects of God. It is because they were “lively” that over fifteen hundred years after they were given Paul confessed, “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died” (Rom 7:9). Again, in defining the ordained impact of the law upon sinners, Paul said of his life prior to regeneration, “Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom 7:13). It was the lively quality of the law that wrought these results.

Inherent in the word “lively” is the idea of longevity, or living on. Today, more than 3,500 years after the law was given, it still defines sin (Rom 3:20), and sounds the guilty verdict over sinners (Rom 3:19). We are not justified by it, to be sure, but we are certainly convicted by it. While the Law cannot confer life, it remains very much alive in its ministry. Wherever sin has not been washed away, the finger of the Law finds it and points it out with telling accuracy.

Oracles

The word “oracles” means a “brief utterance.” Translated from the Greek word **logion** (log-ion), which has the following lexical meaning: “a little word, brief utterance,” THAYER “sayings originating from God,” FRIBERG “convincing speech,” LOUA-NIDA “an announcement.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The idea here is that “the living oracles,” or the Law, was not a form of reasoning, with extensive explanatory sentences. While much of the ceremonial was of this nature, the Law itself was not. It was a kind of summation of moral goodness – the kind that reflects the nature of God Himself. It was concise and to the point.

In the English language, the King James Version, the Ten Commandments contain 297 words (Ex 20:3-17). In the New International Version they contain 300 words. The Amplified Bible, with all of its embellishments, only contains 333 words. By way of comparison, the Declaration of Independence

has 4,543 words, and the United States Constitution has about 7,000 words. The code of Hammurabi, written when the Babylonian empire was at its peak, contains 297 different laws (originally it was 282), with each of them containing considerable text because they were the record of several legal cases – law stated largely by example.

The Law given to Israel was a superior Law. Moses reminded the people that it was unique among the nations. “And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?” (Deut 4:8). Yet, it was so brief by way of comparison – “oracles.” Each commandment was like a container filled with an abundance. Each was conducive to extensive thought, meditation, and contemplation. The Law was “lively” like a small concentrated and potent dose of vaccine, or even of poison. It did its work, small though it was in volume. The ceremonial laws pertaining to sacrifices, cleansing, feasts, social conduct, and other forms of behavior were an elaboration of the “lively oracles.”

As one spends time in Scripture it will be increasingly apparent that this is the manner which God speaks with men. His Word is the “Seed” of the Kingdom (Lk 8:11). Those who have a penchant for pre-digested religion will find themselves reading after men. However, in that approach, they will miss the very essence of spiritual life, which is Divine fellowship

As one spends time in Scripture it will be increasingly apparent that this is the manner which God speaks with men. His Word is the “Seed” of the Kingdom (Lk 8:11). Those who have a penchant for pre-digested religion will find themselves reading after men. However, in that approach, they will miss the very essence of spiritual life, which is Divine fellowship (John 17:3; 1 Cor 1:9). This also accounts for the popularity of Christian fiction. It is still true that men are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). That is one reason why God gave “oracles” – sayings, as compared to oratory, rhetoric, and elaborate forms of human logic. This is something that few souls perceive. However, those who do, find a spiritual joy in understanding that is beyond the reach of the flesh.

THEY WENT BACK IN THEIR HEARTS

“ 39 To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.”

Stephen is preaching powerfully, uncovering the gross inconsistency of the flesh, and its nature to withdraw from God. Israel was given every conceivable advantage. They were delivered in a most extraordinary way. A powerful angel from heaven was dispatched to lead them on their way. They were given a good law, accompanied by appropriate promises and curses. God supplied their food. He supplied their water. Their clothing and shoes did not wear out, and their feet did not swell, even though they journeyed without interruption for forty years in a desert. They had a leader who possessed a heart for them. He interceded for them, and the wrath of God was turned from them – more than once. If treating people well, providing their needs, and faithfully representing them will change them, or make them thankful, surely this is what will happen to Israel. But behold what happened!

OUR FATHERS WOULD NOT OBEY

“To whom our fathers would not obey . . .” Other versions read, “ unwilling to be obedient to him,” NASB “ refused to obey him,” NIV “unwilling to obey him,” NRSV “ would not be obedient,” ASV “by whom our fathers would not be controlled ,” BBE “would not be subject ,” DARBY “would not hearken to him,” MRD “refused to listen to,” NJB “ did not wish to become obedient,” YLT “ rejected Moses,” LIVING “ would not submit to him,” WEYMOUTH “ determined not to be subject to him [refusing to listen to or obey him],” AMPLIFIED and “this was the man to whom our forefathers turned a deaf ear !” PHILLIPS

Someone might say that Israel was really rejecting God. And, indeed, that is the truth. Yet, here they are accounted as refusing to obey Moses – the man to whom God gave His Word, in order that He might give it to them. The reason God did this is so Israel would not die when He spoke to them. They even knew that would happen when they dealt directly with God (Ex 20:19).

In Nehemiah's day, the refusal of Israel to obey was confessed by insightful souls. Here is what they prayed. "But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments, and refused to obey, neither were mindful of thy wonders that thou didst among them" (Neh 9:17).

Stephen boldly declares that the Jewish fathers "would not obey him." This reaction first took place when Moses was in the mount with God. It is written, "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him" (Ex 32:1). And that was only the beginning.

It is inexcusable for those living in "the day of salvation" and "the accepted time" (2 Cor 6:2-3) to react to the apostles like Israel reacted to Moses! There is no satisfactory excuse for it, and those who attempt to explain it greatly err. Solemnly believers are told, "Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?"

Five times it is written that "the people murmured against Moses." They murmured when they had no water (Ex 15:24). They murmured when they had no bread (Ex 16:2). They murmured the second time they could find no water (Ex 17:3). They murmured when they spied out the promised land and found giants living there (Num 14:2). They murmured when the ground opened up and swallowed Korah and his rebels (Num 16:41). Another time when they could not find water that gathered together against Moses and Aaron (Num 20:2). It is written that they "spake against God and Moses" (Num 21:5). Stephen summarizes their conduct against Moses: "To whom our fathers would not obey." Keep in mind that God sent Moses to be "a ruler" over them (Acts 7:35). It is the manner of God to take it personally when the people reject the one He sends. This was preeminently true of Jesus, and of those whom He sent as well. Therefore Jesus said, "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me" (Lk 10:16).

If you imagine that this is not an issue in our day, ponder how many apostolic words are not being heeded today by those who profess to be Christians. Here are a few to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

- "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor 1:10).
- "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you" (2 Cor 6:17).
- "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor 7:1).
- "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" (1 Pet 1:15).
- "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Heb 12:1).
- "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the

world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

It is inexcusable for those living in “the day of salvation” and “the accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2-3) to react to the apostles like Israel reacted to Moses! There is no satisfactory excuse for it, and those who attempt to explain it greatly err. Solemnly believers are told, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor 10:22). What would lead anyone to imagine that it is all right for men to ignore the ones God has sent to us, while it was wrong for Israel to do so?

THEY THRUST HIM FROM THEM

“ . . . but thrust him from them . . .” Other versions read, “ rejected ,” NKJV “ repudiated him,” NASB “ pushed him aside ,” NRSV “thrust him aside ,” RSV “put him on one side,” BBE “ forsook him,” MRD “ cast it from them,” TNT “ spurned his authority,” WEYMOUTH “thrusting him aside they rejected him,” AMPLIFIED and “ disregarded him.” PHILLIPS

The rejection of Moses was neither polite nor casual. They repudiated him openly, murmuring against him, and refusing to obey him or be led by him. They never really associated him with the Living God, but only thought of him as one of their peers – one they could criticize and against whom they could murmur. And, that was after he had worked wonders in signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness!

The people did not capture Moses and excommunicate him. Nor, indeed, did they persecute him or stone him. Oh, they would have done these things if they could, but he was working with an angel, and the angel would not allow Moses to be hurt by these wayward people. They “thrust” Moses away in their hearts and minds. They chose to ignore his words and not attach any real significance to his presence and leadership. He simply was not the kind of leader they would have chosen – and that is why God did not allow them to do so. God talked with Moses “face to face,” or directly (Ex 33:11; Deut 34:10). How could one possibly ignore such a man with impunity.

An Application for Our Time

In this great day of salvation, how does God react to those who reject His messengers? It is written that every person who has believed on Christ did so because a minister had been given to him. Here is how Paul stated it. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ?” (1 Cor 3:5). No person should have to speak at length on the reaction of God to those who spurn the messengers or ministers that are sent to them. It is one thing to read, “How shall they preach except they be sent” (Rom 10:15). It is quite another for them to be sent, and then rejected.

IN THEIR HEARTS THEY TURNED BACK

“ . . . and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt.” Other versions read, “went back to Egypt in their thoughts .” NJB “ wanted to return to Egypt,” NLT “they hankered after Egypt,” WILLIAMS and “ yearned for and turned back to Egypt.” AMPLIFIED

This inclination started at the Red Sea – the first obstacle they faced after being delivered from Egypt by the mighty hand of God. Standing on the banks of that sea, after beheld the decimation of the Egyptians by ten plagues, hearing their enemies plead with them to leave, and having the Egyptians give their goods to them, this is what they said, “Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? Is not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness” (Exodus 14:11-12).

Wherever there is spiritual retrogression or backsliding, the person has gone back to the world in their heart! Though God strictly forbids it, a love for the world was again awakened in their hearts. Perhaps it was owing to some hardship or difficulty. It may well have been the renewing of some worldly acquaintance, visiting some place filled with unholy memories.

Hardly any time had passed until they spouted off about Egypt again – and they were not yet at Mount Sinai. When it seemed like there was no food, here is what they said, “Would to God we had died by the hand of the LORD in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full ; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Ex 16:3).

And then there was the time when the people began lusting, and in their hearts went back to Egypt. They lamented, “We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (Num 11:5-6).

Later they again recalled Egypt, thinking they had it better when they were there. “And wherefore hath the LORD brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt ?” (Num 14:3). At that time, things got so bad the people determined, “Let us make a captain, and let us return into Egypt” (Num 14:4). In Nehemiah’s day, this was also recalled in their confession to God, and it was stated with the characteristic precision of faith. “. . . but hardened their necks, and in their rebellion appointed a captain to return to their bondage : but thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and forsookest them not” (Neh 9:17b).

Application

Wherever there is spiritual retrogression or backsliding, the person has gone back to the world in their heart! Though God strictly forbids it, a love for the world was again awakened in their hearts. Perhaps it was owing to some hardship or difficulty. It may well have been the renewing of some worldly acquaintance, visiting some place filled with unholy memories. You may be sure of this, that Satan cannot lure a person back into the world without them thinking about it, and wanting to return.

The solution to this temptation is to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” – refuse them a place in your thoughts. Pull down imaginations and every high thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:3-5). Let the people of God learn from Israel not to make a place for the devil (Eph 4:27). For he will always seize it for his advantage.

THE PROPENSITY TO IDOLATRY – MAKE US GODS!

“ 40 Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.”

Unbelief is not content to merely malign the servant of God, and even God Himself. It will aggressively pursue someone else to serve. That is the nature of the flesh, or human nature.

MAKE US GODS

“Saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us . . .” Other versions read, “Make us gods who will lead the way for us,” NRSV “Make us gods who will be our leaders,” NAB “Make us a god to go at our head,” NJB “Make us some gods who can lead us,” NLT “Make idols for us, so that we will have gods to lead us back,” LIVING “Make gods for us, to march in front of us,” WEYMOUTH and “Make us gods who shall [be our leaders and] go before us.” AMPLIFIED

I have already alluded to historical record of this occasion. The words of the people are most

arresting. They demanded of Aaron, Moses' own brother, "Up, Make us gods to go before us!" (Ex 32:1). When they were groaning under the harshness of the Egyptian taskmasters, this is not what they said! At that time they rather "cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage" (Ex 2:23). They groaned, and God "heard their groaning." Now, at the base of Mount Sinai, and in less than three short months, all of this has been forgotten (Ex 19:1). They have determined to head back to Egypt, and they want gods made for them to lead them back. They were not requesting god's to lead them to Canaan, for their hearts had returned to Egypt. Even though the children of Israel had lived for five hundreds years with the promise of Canaan in their hearts, the trial of the desert had washed it all away.

There is no record of Israel having any inclination to idolatry in Egypt, but they certainly had one in the desert of Sinai, even though it was totally irrational for them to do so! Sin is not reasonable, even though it parades itself as being so.

There is no record of Israel having any inclination to idolatry in Egypt, but they certainly had one in the desert of Sinai, even though it was totally irrational for them to do so! Sin is not reasonable, even though it parades itself as being so. Think what Israel had experienced from the night of the Passover to this day – in less than three months.

- The Egyptians, their former taskmasters, had urged them to leave the land with great haste (Ex 12:32).
- God gave Israel favor in the eyes of the Egyptians, so that they "lent unto them such things as they required" – and that included "jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment" (Ex 12:35-36).
- In a single night, the entire nation of Israel exited Egypt, with not one animal hoof was left behind, and not one Egyptian dog barking at them (Ex 10:26; 11:7; 12:51).
- The Lord led them miraculously with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, never taking them away (Ex 14:21-22).
- Every single Israelite – as high as several million – crossed the Red Sea on dry ground, with not a single person failing to do so, and none of their possessions being lost (Ex 14:22,29).
- When Pharaoh and his armies pursued them, the sea closed upon them, and all of Israel saw their carcasses "dead upon the sea shore" (Ex 14:30).
- Israel saw what the Lord had done, "feared the Lord, and believed the Lord, and His servant Moses" (Ex 14:31).
- They witnessed the healing of bitter waters at Marah (Ex 15:23-24).
- They found an oasis in the desert with twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees (Ex 16:27).
- They were given manna at a certain rate every day, and it supplied the complete need of every person in Israel, young and old (Ex 16:4-12).
- They saw a miraculous supply of quail to be eaten in the evening, while manna was eaten in the morning (Ex 16:12-13).
- They were given miraculous water through Moses striking a rock with his rod. The Psalmist says that rivers of water gushed from the rock (Ex 17:5-6; Psa 78:15).
- They miraculously defeated the armies of Amalek while Moses hands were upheld by Aaron and Hur (Ex 17:10-13).
- The people saw Sinai when God came down on it. ". . . there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud;

so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.” The mountain was “altogether on a smoke , and the whole mountain “quaked greatly” (Ex 19:16).

- At Sinai, the people “saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die” (Ex 20:18-19).

- Moses had told the people all of the judgments of the Lord, and the people had responded, “All the words which the Lord hath said, we will do” (Ex 24:3).

- Moses read the book of the covenant to the people, and sprinkled both the book and the people with sanctifying blood (Ex 24:7-8).

- The nobles of Israel “saw God” (Ex 24:11).

- They saw a cloud of Divine glory upon Mount Sinai, that was “like devouring fire,” witnessing the event for seven days (Ex 25:16-17).

Within less than twelve weeks, Israel had seen all of these things, and possibly more. Yet all of this has been forgotten, they have determined to return to Egypt, and now they demand that gods be made that can be carried before them.

Application

Do you wonder at the capacity of the flesh to forget, blaspheme, and love and cling to the world? Woe to that person who remains naive about the human capacity to sin after reading the account of Israel! How must it sound to heavenly hosts when men banter back and forth about human freedom, volitional capacities, and the likes. It is as though men have never read the record of what “happened” to the Israelites for examples, and has been written for our admonition (12 Cor 10:11).

AS FOR THIS MOSES

“ . . . for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.” Other versions read, “ we do not know what has become of him ,” NKJV “we do not know what happened to him ,” NASB “we have no idea what has become of him,” BBE and “we have no knowledge of what has happened to him,” AMPLIFIED

Moses had been absent from them for forty days (Ex 24:18). During that time he had received all of the details for the construction of the tabernacle and all of its furnishings (Ex 25:1-27:21). He had

If it were possible to frighten people into a state of prolonged sobriety, surely Israel’s experience would have confirmed its possibility. If men can be brought to a sound mind by heaping benefits – miraculous benefits – upon them, surely it will be true with Israel.

received all of the detailed instructions concerning the high priest, priests, their garments, how to make them, who was going to make them, how they were to be set apart, and what they would do (Ex 28:1-29:46). Instructions concerning making the remaining furniture, anointing oil, oil for the lamp, and incense were given (Ex 30:1-38). The Lord told Moses He had endowed Bezaleel and Aholiab with special wisdom required for the construction of the tabernacle, together with the various oils and incense associated with the tabernacle service (Ex 31:1-17). At the conclusion of the forty days and forty nights, the Lord gave Moses two tables of stone on which were written the words of the covenant – and they were written “with the finger of God” (Ex 31:18).

Before Moses went up into the mountain, he had told the elders what he was going to do, instructing them to wait for him. He added, “and, behold, Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them” (Ex 24:14). However, now the people say they do not know

what has become of Moses. He has been gone for over a month, it is true. However, the events that attended their arrival at Sinai were sufficient to have caused them to be sober, and to wait in patience. But they did not do so, for they did not have a heart for waiting for a word from the Lord.

Application

Here is another occasion that confirms that each person “must be born again” (John 3:7). There should be no doubt in the mind of anyone concerning the necessity of a new heart and a new spirit. I doubt that it is possible for any people to endure more sensual exposure to the presence of the Lord. Daniel fainted and lost all of his strength upon receiving a word from an angel (Dan 8:27). It was not attended by a mountain on fire, the quaking of the earth, lightning, thundering, and the likes. No storm or tempest was present as at Sinai.

If it were possible to frighten people into a state of prolonged sobriety, surely Israel’s experience would have confirmed its possibility. If men can be brought to a sound mind by heaping benefits – miraculous benefits – upon them, surely it will be true with Israel. There have never before nor since been miracles of the magnitude of those wrought by the hand of Moses, and experienced at Sinai. Yet, they had no power to alter the thoughts of the people, and were not intended to do so.

Stephen will show this to be the case with great spiritual power and wisdom. He himself will become an oracle of God, with precise and concise sayings flowing out from his mouth. They will also accomplish something

THEY MADE A CALF, SACRIFICED TO IT, AND REJOICED IN IT

“ 41 And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.”

We come now to one of the most sorrowful passages in Scripture. It seems to me that, because of the number of the people involved, and complete irrationality of their conduct, this is only eclipsed by the death of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is such foolishness associated with this entire event that it the consideration of it staggers the mind. It confirms what can happen when unbelief and stubbornness are married, and a hard heart rules the human personality.

THEY MADE A CALF

“And they made a calf in those days . . .” Other versions read, “ At that time they made a calf,” NASB “That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf,” NIV “ they made the image of a young ox in those day,” BBE “they made the statue of a calf,” NJB and “In those days they even made a calf.” ISV

The record of this horrendous event is found in Exodus 32:2-8. Stephen has pointed out that the people made this request of Aaron, which Exodus 32:1 records. Aaron responded in a peculiar way to their request. “And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me” (Ex 32:2). It has been suggested that Aaron did not desire to go along with their request, and therefore told them to give up something they might be hesitant to do. In deference to Aaron, I am inclined to agree with this, even though it by no means excuses what he did. The reason it seems right to take this view is that Stephen, speaking while filled with the Holy Spirit, affirms that the people made the calf, thereby imputing the case to them, and not to Aaron. The Psalmist makes the same observation in Psalm 106:19-20. Nehemiah also affirmed this view of things in Nehemiah 9:18, thus confirming that this is heaven’s view of the situation. It is similar to the time Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it, because he became incensed with the people, and therefore acted in unbelief. It is said of that occasion, “They angered him also at the waters of strife, so that it went ill with Moses for their sakes ” (Psa 106:32).

Whereas Stephen says the people made the calf, the Exodus record, written by Moses, says that Aaron made it. After the people broke off their earrings and gave them to Aaron, “he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf :” (Ex 32:4). After fashioning it, Aaron further “built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, To morrow is a feast to the LORD” (Ex 32:5). The desire belonged to Israel, the work was done by Aaron. He never would have made the calf, except for the people, who apparently pressured him to do it. However, as will be confirmed, he was wrong in doing it, even though the people originated the idea.

The Scriptures provide us with a holy assessment of this occasion.

- God said of the event: They “have corrupted themselves . . . they have turned aside quickly out of the way . . . I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiffnecked people ” (Ex 32:8-9; Deut 9:12-13).
- Moses said to Israel, “I looked, and, behold, ye had sinned against the Lord ” (Deut 9:16).
- Nehemiah said, “they had made them a molten calf . . . and had wrought great provocations ” (Neh 9:18).
- The Psalmist said, “Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. They forgot God their Savior , which had done great things in Egypt” (Psa 106:20-21).

Application

The parallel to this event that is being experienced in our day was declared by Paul. It is a greater sin, because it is being committed in a greater light. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ” (2 Tim 4:3). That is a precise equivalent to Israel saying to Aaron, “Up, make us gods!”

Additional Observation

You may recall that, while Moses was in the mount, God told him precisely what the people had done (Ex 32:7-8). Upon going down the mountain, Moses “saw the calf, and the dancing,” and his anger “waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hand, and brake them beneath the mount.” He then “took the calf which they had made, and burnt it in the fire, and ground it into powder, and strowed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink it.” Then, turning his attention to his older brother Aaron he said, “What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them?” (Ex 32:21). Aaron replied, pointing out that Moses well knew the kind of people they were, “prone to evil.” NASB He then recounted how the people had asked him to make them gods, for they did not know what had happened to Moses. After telling Moses that he made them break off their gold and give it to him, he added, “So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf ” (Ex 32:22-24).

It appears from the text in Exodus 32, that Moses turned his attention away from Aaron. It was not until forty years later that Moses brought this incident up to another generation. He revealed something that was only hinted at before. In Exodus 32:35 we read, “And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made ” (Ex 32:35). It appears clear, then, that Aaron was associated with the sin in the mind of God. Now, at one hundred and twenty years of age, Moses makes known something that apparently was not known before, for it occurred in a time of privacy between the Lord and Moses. “And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I prayed for Aaron also the same time ” (Deu 9:20). Thus, God was justified in all of His sayings!

THEY OFFERED SACRIFICED UNTO THE IDOL

“ . . . and offered sacrifice unto the idol . . .” Other versions read, “offered sacrifices to the idol ,” NKJV “brought a sacrifice to the idol,” NASB “made an offering to it,” BBE and “offered a sacrifice to that false god.” GWN

Actually, a lot of this kind of thing takes place today, with men celebrating their own achievements with special gatherings and feasts. While such things are not necessarily wrong, they represent an area of human indulgence that is slanted toward the pride of life.

What a lamentable text to read! Sin does have the tendency of getting worse and worse. That is the nature of iniquity. The record in Exodus reads, “And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings” (Ex 32:6). In order to do

this, the Psalmist said they had to “change THEIR glory into the similitude of an ox,” and forget “God their Savior, which had done great things in Egypt” (Psa 106:20). What a day of infamy it was!

THEY REJOICED IN THE WORK OF THEIR HANDS

“ . . . and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.” Other versions read, “held a celebration in honor of what their hands had made,” NIV “reveled in the works of their hands,” NRSV “had joy in the work of their hands,” BBE “were celebrating what their hands had made,” CSB “delighted in what they had made,” GWN “and were voluptuous with the work of their hands,” MRD “They were perfectly happy with something they had made for themselves,” NJB “celebrated over this thing they had made,” NLT “kept rejoicing in the gods which their own hands had made,” WEYMOUTH and “made merry and exulted in the work of their [own] hands.” AMPLIFIED

The Exodus record says the people “sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play ” (Ex 32:6). Paul also refers to this in First Corinthians: “Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play ” (1 Cor 10:7).

The word “play” is an especially reprehensible one. It does not refer to playing games, as ordinarily perceived. It refers to the kind of raucous laughter that is associated with drunkenness and sensuality. It is generally understood to have been associated with idolatrous feasts in which the lusts of the people were especially indulged. At the time this took place, Moses had observed that the people were “naked, for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies” (Ex 32:25). The word naked here refers to a display in which they cast off all restraint, engaging in revelry and debauchery.

Here Stephen accounts for their indulgent manner by saying they were rejoicing in the work of their own hands. This is his summation of what Exodus refers to as the worship of the golden calf (Ex 32:8), when they brought burnt offerings and peace offerings to the calf , and then rose up to play (Ex 32:6). This was certainly a far cry from the shouts of rejoicing that had taken place a few weeks earlier on the banks of the Red Sea.

In scripture, rejoicing in the works of ones hands is associated with idolatry. Isaiah wrote, “Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made” (Isa 2:8). Actually, a lot of this kind of thing takes place today, with men celebrating their own achievements with special gatherings and feasts. While such things are not necessarily wrong, they represent an area of human indulgence that is slanted toward the pride of life. They also tend to promote vanity. Should a person choose to indulge in such things, it ought to be done with sobriety, wisdom, and in a state of unusual spiritual alertness.

A Similar Thing Today

In my judgment, something similar to making other gods is occurring in our day. Some within the professing church have hewed them out intellectual gods that will do what they desire. They have then heaped to themselves teachers who will speak of these gods – gods of health, wealth, worldly success, etc. They are gods that allow them to maintain their perverse desires, and to be at home in this present evil world, even though it is passing away. Because of the superiority of the New Covenant, the abundance of truth that has been revealed, together with the reality of regeneration and reconciliation, this tendency is even more reprehensible than the sin of Israel.

GOD GAVE THEM UP TO WORSHIP THE HOST OF HEAVEN

“42 Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?”

Stephen becomes more strong in his statements, underscoring the gravity of anyone experiencing the work of God going backward. Here is an aspect of the Divine nature that is not being presented with much clarity in our time. We do well to give due heed to it.

GOD TURNED

“Then God turned . . .” Other versions read, “God turned away,” NASB “God was turned from them,” BBE “God turned away from them,” CSB “God turned Himself away,” GENEVA and “God turned against them.” IE

Here it is important to remember that we are considering a special people.

- They were a people upon whom God had set His love (Deut 7:7a).
- They were a chosen people (Deut 7:6a).
- They were a special people unto God above all people that were upon the face of the earth (Deut 7:6b; 14:2).
- They were a covenanted people (Ex 6:4).
- They were a delivered people (Ex 18:8).
- They were a saved people (Deut 33:29).

Yet, Stephen declares that God “turned” – that is turned away from them, and against them. His posture toward them was changed, and it was not for the better. Instead of being for them, He was now opposed to them. The word “turned” has a lexical meaning of, “turn the back to one, used of one who no longer cares for another,” THAYER It is similar to God repenting that He had made man (Gen 6:6). For some, this is too difficult to consider, but this should not be the case. It is the very nature of God that compels Him to react in this manner. He loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Because of this, He can no more ignore an ungodly person than He can a godly one. God is not indifferent to the state in which men remain. When they choose to abandon Him, change His glory, and give to another what rightfully belongs to Him, He cannot look favorably upon the person. To be sure, He is longsuffering, yet his Spirit will not always strive with man (Gen 6:3), and our text is a case in point.

GOD GAVE THEM UP TO WORSHIP THE HOST OF HEAVEN

“ . . . and gave them up to worship the host of heaven . . .” Other versions read, “delivered them up to serve the host of heaven,” NASB “gave them over to the worship of heavenly bodies,” NIV “handed them over to worship the host of heaven,” NRSV “and let them give worship to the stars of heaven,” BBE “let them worship the sun, moon, and stars,” GWN “gave them over to the worship

of the heavenly bodies,” NIB “abandoned them to the worship of the army of heaven,” NJB “abandoned them to serve the stars of heaven as their gods !,” NLT “gave them up that they should worship the stars of the sky,” TNT “He stopped trying to change their hearts. They were worshipping the sun, the moon, and the stars,” IE “gave them over to worship the starry host,” WILLIAMS and “delivered them up to worship and serve the host (stars) of heaven.” AMPLIFIED

It seems to me that when certain doctrines are frequently found to be at variance with straightforward proclamations of the works of God, they ought to be zealously and instantly cast from us.

Here Stephen briefly expounds what is involved in God turning away from someone. Whatever preservation and protection that is associated with longsuffering and mercy are withdrawn from the person from whom God turns away. Such a person or people are then made the vassals of the devil in the fullest sense of the word. It ought to be evident that this does not fit into the common notion of the freedom of the will, and the unrestrained volitional capacities of men. It seems to me that when certain doctrines are frequently found to be at variance with straightforward proclamations of the works of God, they ought to be zealously and instantly cast from us. If we read that the Lord will never leave us or forsake us (Heb 13:5), the text is obviously not speaking of people like Israel as they were in our text. That saying does not apply to everyone, and the church ought not present it as though it did.

There is some question concerning the identity of “the host of heaven.” Is it referring to the heavenly, or celestial, bodies, or to spiritual powers in the domain of darkness. The expression is used both ways in the Word of God. It is used of the heavenly bodies (Deut 4:19; 17:3; Isa 34:4; Jer 8:2), and of personalities (1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chron 18:18; Neh 9:6; Dan 8:10; Lk 2:13). It does appear as though the heavenly bodies are the point here. That kind of worship repeatedly cropped up in Israel’s history.

- Israel worshiped them (2 Kgs 17:16; 2 Kgs 23:4-5; Jer 19:13; Zeph 1:5).
- Manasseh instituted the worship of them (2 Kgs 21:3,5).

The Word of God refers to God giving people up – a most arresting consideration! This perspective conflicts sharply with much of the contemporary Christian view of the Lord.

• **ISRAEL.** “But My people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of Me. So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels” (Psa 81:11-12)

• **ALL NATIONS.** “Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16).

• **GENTILE WORLD.** “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (Rom 1:24).

• **GENTILE WORLD.** “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet” (Rom 1:26-27).

• **THOSE WHO DO NOT RECEIVE THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH.** “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:9-12).

The idea here is that the sacrifices that were offered “by the space of forty years in the wilderness” were not really offered to God! The Lord considered them to have been offered to other gods. The Jews did keep up the form of their religion in the wilderness, but were more noted for their departures and murmuring than for any earnest commitment to the Lord.

There is no question, therefore, about these two facts.

- There are people God has not given up, abandoned, or forsaken.
- There are people whom God has given up, forsaken, and from whom He has withdrawn.

AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE PROPHETS

“ . . . as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?” Other versions read, “Did you offer Me,” NKJV “It was not to Me,” NASB “Did you bring Me,” NIV “Did ye . . . present to Me,” MRD “Was it to Me,” NLT “these sacrifices were not for Me,” IE “you didn’t offer Me,” ISV and “Did you [really] offer to Me.” AMPLIFIED

What an arresting statement! The idea here is that the sacrifices that were offered “by the space of forty years in the wilderness” were not really offered to God! The Lord considered them to have been offered to other gods. The Jews did keep up the form of their religion in the wilderness, but were more noted for their departures and murmuring than for any earnest commitment to the Lord.

Moses also referred to this time in the wilderness, and with words that were very pointed and convicting. “He made him ride on the high places of the earth, that he might eat the increase of the fields; and he made him to suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock; butter of kine, and milk of sheep, with fat of lambs, and rams of the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the fat of kidneys of wheat; and thou didst drink the pure blood of the grape. But Jeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook God which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not ” (Deut 32:13-17).

Stephen quotes from Amos 5:25: “Have ye offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel?” (Amos 5:25). The idea is that God did not receive their sacrifices, for their hearts were in the wrong place.

Amos further testifies to this: “ I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies . Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts . Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols ” (Amos 5:21-23). And again, “The Lord GOD hath sworn by himself, saith the LORD the God of hosts, I abhor the excellency of Jacob, and hate his palaces : therefore will I deliver up the city with all that is therein” (Amos 6:8). In other words, in the days of Amos, hundreds of years after Israel’s wandering in the wilderness, the people had restored the dreadful spirit that Israel had in the wilderness – even after all of the holy prophets had ministered regularly to them.

Isaiah also chides the people for their sins, telling them they were not welcome in the courts of the Lord. “To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons

and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting” (Isa 1:11-13).

Jeremiah joins in the diatribe against a people whose hearts were defiled. “To what purpose cometh there to me incense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices sweet unto Me ” (Jer 6:20).

Hosea also joins in the rebuke of such people. “They sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of Mine offerings, and eat it; but the LORD accepteth them not ; now will He remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt” (Hosea 8:13).

Well, it is to be admitted that this is largely a strange God to this present generation – probably just as strange as He was to the Jewish council before whom Stephen is speaking. However, this is the true God, and we are to be acquainted with Him. It is His mind to which we are being exposed. Should a people – any people – chose to ignore God, he will react to that rejection.

CONCLUSION

Stephen has spoken with keen insight, and with power as well. God, by means of the Holy Spirit, is speaking through Stephen, delivering a scathing message to those who not only rejected and crucified His Son, but have also opposed His Apostles, and now another messenger who is filled with the Spirit, faith, and wisdom. In this passage we see that discerning messages address the condition of the people, for that is one of the fundamental objectives of preaching. I am careful to distinguish preaching in view of the condition of the people as compared with preaching to meet the needs of the people. The latter objective is to be questioned. It smacks more of philosophy and human diagnosis than of a very real spiritual condition. The salvation of God is so ordered that those who participate in it are enabled to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling. The notion of someone else working out your salvation is really foreign to the objectives God has revealed.

A modern preacher might very well have stood before that Jewish council and talked about things that had nothing to do with their hard and calloused heart. Speaking to such a crowd is not a work for which every person is suited, to be sure. Yet, it is one that has to be addressed – even if it is at the expense of personal jeopardy. And why is this so? Simply because it is God that is working all in all, and that working is always by means of the truth, and in strict accord with His eternal purpose.

Stephen will continue his defense, increasing the intensity and pointedness of his message. What he is doing is expounding the reason for the Jew’s rejection of the Gospel – particularly among their leaders. It is because they have rejected the Christ of the Gospel. Their rejection is compounded by the fact that Jesus was sent specifically to them. It is made more complex by the fact that Moses and the Prophets testified of the Jesus that Stephen has been preaching.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #33

STEPHEN'S DEFENSE, #6

“ 7:43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon. 44 Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen. 45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drave out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David; 46 Who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob. 47 But Solomon built him an house. 48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, 49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? 50 Hath not my hand made all these things? 51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. 52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: 53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it. ” (Acts 7:43-53)

INTRODUCTION

Stephen escalates his charges against the Jews, pointing out that they continued their idolatrous practices following their calf-worshipping debacle at Sinai – one in which three thousand were slain by the Lord (Ex 32:28). That compares with the three thousand that were quickened – made alive from death in trespasses and sins – on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41). That was a most vivid enactment of the nature of the Old Covenant, which is termed as “the ministration of death” (2 Cor 3:7). Elsewhere, Paul affirmed that sin was awakened by the Law, driving inherent lusts to the surface where they are expressed. How insightfully he states the case, doing so from the illuminated side of the cross: “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the

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commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom 7:9-11). Thus it was proved to be true, “the strength of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56). That is, the holy Law of God gives strength to sin because of man’s very real corruption. There is such a variance between God and the natural man, that the good, just, holy, and spiritual Law of God awakens sin (Rom 7:12,14). It forces the contradiction of the human nature into the open by demanding that human conduct conform to the nature of God. This is the manner in which it “brings” (not beckons) us to Christ, that we might be “justified by faith” (Gal 3:24-25).

THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR SIN

Accounting for sin is not offering an excuse for it. The reason the Law points out sin is not to provide men with a handy alibi for its presence. Rather, the law is showing that God is just in condemning sin, and thrusting the sinner from His presence. It also provides insight into why He provided a Redeemer – something that humanity was not able to do. Well did the Lord speak through the prophet Isaiah: “And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore Mine own arm brought salvation unto Me; and my fury, it upheld Me” (Isa 63:5). Note, God’s arm did not bring salvation to men, but to Himself. That is, He provided a means through which His own righteous character could be satisfied, and thus mercy be extended to fallen humanity.

Notwithstanding this ministry of the Law, and the gracious provision of redemption, no excuse for sin is acceptable with God – i.e., like men saying the devil made them sin, or they could not help it. Flesh will rationalize in this way, citing all of the imagined reasons why sin cannot be helped. Some of them include the following.

- The devil is too strong.
- The flesh is too weak.
- I was born this way.
- Unless the Lord helps me, I cannot stop sinning.
- A generational curse is upon me.

Notwithstanding this ministry of the Law, and the gracious provision of redemption, no excuse

for sin is acceptable with God – i.e., like men saying the devil made them sin, or they could not help it.

To confirm the unacceptable nature of these alibis, consider how David spoke when he was convicted of sin. He sighted reasons, but they were not excuses. Rather, they shed light on his dreadful condition, and why he needed mercy from the Lord. His confession is found in Psalm 51:5. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5). This was a confession, not an excuse.

“I Was Shapen in Iniquity”

That is, from his very birth, he had a propensity to sin, and now he saw it. Other versions read as follows.

- “I was brought forth in iniquity.” NKJV
- “I was sinful at birth.” NIV
- “I was born guilty.” NRSV
- “I was brought forth in iniquity.” RSV
- “I was formed in evil.” BBE
- “I was guilty when I was born.” CSB
- “In iniquity I was brought forth.” DARBY
- “I was guilty of sin from birth.” NET
- “I was brought forth in [a state of] iniquity.” AMPLIFIED
- “I was ingendered in iniquity.” BISHOPS
- “I have sinned and done wrong since the day I was born.” CEV
- “I have been evil from the day I was born.” GNB
- “I was born guilty.” GW

It is quite obvious that David’s statement is marked with such clarity that even the translators could not avoid what he was saying.

“In Sin Did My Mother Conceive Me”

That is, my mother was a sinner, and therefore, by nature, so am I, for “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one” (Job 14:4). Other versions read as follows.

- “. . . sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” NIV
- “. . . a sinner when my mother conceived me.” NRSV
- “. . . in sin did my mother give me birth.” BBE
- “. . . sinner from the moment my mother conceived me.” CSB
- “. . . in sins did my mother conceive me.” DOUAY
- “. . . a sinner from the moment of conception.” NJB
- “. . . my mother was sinful who conceived me [and I too am sinful].” AMPLIFIED
- “I have sinned and done wrong since the day I was born.” CEV

I have taken the time to provide these various translations to confirm their consistency. While this is not of itself proof of the meaning of the text, there is something it does confirm. The intellectual

message of the text is quite clear, and no textual analyst has even questioned its meaning.

The truth of the matter is that sin is integral to the basic human nature. The capacity to sin is in every person who is in Adam's lineage. – and that is what constitutes them “sinners.” This is expressly stated in apostolic doctrine. “by one man's disobedience many were made sinners ” (Rom 5:19). From the perspective of the fifty-first Psalm, and from Romans 5:19, men are not sinners because they commit sin, but they commit sin because they are sinners. That is precisely what David confessed.

This circumstance does not make sin any less repulsive or more tolerable to God. It does not lessen guilt, as both the tone and the words of the 51ST Psalm confirm. Admittedly, this is a spiritual technicality – but so is salvation. In fact, that is the point made in the fifth chapter of Romans. If the reason for the presence of sin somehow reduces its nature, then the reason for salvation correspondingly reduces its magnitude.

The fact of the matter is that both sin and righteousness are traced to one man – one source.

Through a single act – the eating of a piece of forbidden fruit – sin and death entered the world, and death was passed upon all men. Judgment was passed unto condemnation, and all men were made sinners. That is the revealed situation.

These things were known among early believers because they were proclaimed and expounded. The flawed doctrines of professing Christian men had not yet been developed, although they would begin to surface early. However, during the time of our text, the condition of men and their absolute need for salvation was generally known among believers.

Prior to the Giving of the Law

Even prior to the giving of the Law, the basic sinfulness of man was generally known among those who worshiped God. Following the flood, God Himself observed, “the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth ” (Gen 8:21). Although they did not know how to handle such knowledge, Job's friends also knew of man's inherent corruption. “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one . . . How much more abominable and filthy is man, which drinketh iniquity like water ?” (Job 14:4; 15:16). The fact that these texts are contained in Scripture without any disclaimer confirms their validity.

After the Giving of the Law

Following the giving of the Law, Solomon observed, “there is no man which sinneth not” (2 Chron 6:36). David knew this also: “They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Psa 14:3). Jeremiah testified to the unchangeable nature of men. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23). And again he said, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer 17:9). Hosea traced the transgression of the covenanted people to the fact that they were men – the progeny of Adam. “But they like men have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me” (Hosea 6:7). The prophet Micah observed, “The good man is perished out of the earth: and there is none upright among men” (Micah 7:2). These will suffice to confirm that the fact of man's natural inclination to sin was not questioned by early believers.

THE POINT OF THIS

The point of this is to see that Stephen was preaching with a grasp of the situation. Yet, he makes clear that this did not relieve men of the responsibility of their sin. None of them claim, as some sinners do today, “I was born this way.” David said he was born with a corrupt nature also, yet he did

not use that circumstance to excuse what he had done. Instead, in the fifty-first Psalm, he made certain requests of God that indicated he was not content with his situation.

- “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (7a).
- “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (7b).
- “Make me to hear joy and gladness” (8)
- “Hide Thy face from my sins” (9a).
- “Blot out mine iniquities” (9b).
- “Create in my a clean heart, O God” (10a).
- “Renew a right spirit with me ” (10b).
- “Cast me not away from Thy presence” (11a).
- “Take not Thy Holy Spirit from me” 11b).
- “ Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation” (12a).
- “Uphold me with Thy free Spirit” (12b).

Stephen knows all of this, and is preaching with that in mind. He will confirm to them that there was no essential difference between them and their fathers who fell in the wilderness. He will not present this as excusing what they are doing. He will rather point out that their obstinance has compounded their situation.

All of this was before Jesus took away the sin of the world. It was before He crushed the serpent’s head, spoiled principalities and powers, and led captivity captive. It was before men could be born again, or could be raised up and made to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places. And what can said of those who continue in sin today? How much weight can be assigned to any claim of being unable to stop, or incapable of resisting powerful temptations? What of those who trace their sin to their fleshly lineage, or to some chemical imbalance, or some hereditary disease? Do you not see that once sin is recognized to be what it is, men should at least come up to the level of David, who was among those who “were not made perfect without us, God having provided some better thing for us” (Heb 11:40). God did not ignore the pleas of David, nor will He stop His ears to the cries of those who long to be pure in His sight. That is just Theology 101!

THE SITUATION BEFORE STEPHEN

However, the people before whom Stephen is standing have not delivered any evidence of even being serious. They have not correlated their actions with the statement made by God after the flood. They have not associated it with the observations concerning men contained in the book of Job. They have seen no relationship of their miserable condition with that of David, crushed with the weight of guilt.

Stephen knows all of this, and is preaching with that in mind. He will confirm to them that there was no essential difference between them and their fathers who fell in the wilderness. He will not present this as excusing what they are doing. He will rather point out that their obstinance has compounded their situation. They have absolutely no excuse for their condition.

Now Stephen will show that even though God had provided in the Tabernacle a visible means of identity with Himself, yet they fashioned idols, and even worshiped heavenly bodies. They sought for other visible associations with Deity. Being moved by the Spirit, Stephen is speaking in strict accord with the heavenly assessment of the people. He is also addressing them in view of their own hearts and wicked propensities. Judging from the manner in which Stephen concludes, the countenance of his audience must have been in perfect accord with their hearts. Their condition was

absolutely inexcusable. They had been privy to the ministry of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, the Apostles, and now Stephen. Yet they remained in the grip of unbelief. This confirms the nature of unbelief, and the influence it exerts upon both heart and mind. It cannot be dignified by assigning intellectual and philosophical terms to it. There is no extent to which unbelief will not go to suppress the truth and justify self. It is the essence of all sin, as is confirmed in the rejection of Christ.

THEY TOOK UP THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH AND THE STAR OF REMPHAN

“ 7:43 Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.”

Stephen continues to quote from the book of Amos, confirming the idolatrous tendencies of Israel, even though God had gone to great length to give them visible means that could be associated with His Presence. Not only did they have a seeable pillar of cloud by day, and a perceptible pillar of fire by night, they also had the Tabernacle, erected in the middle of their camp, and upon which the glory of God rested.

THEY TOOK UP

“Yea, ye took up . . .” Other versions read, “ took along,” NASB “ lifted up,” NIV “ carried ,” BBE “ took unto you,” DARBY “ carried along ,” GWN “ also took along,” NAB “carried,” NJB “your real interest was in,” LIVING “you even took along,” ISV “you offered Me ,” WILLIAMS and “No! You took.” AMPLIFIED

God had clearly demonstrated that He was among the Israelites, leaving no question about it. It was confirmed with all manner of evidence.

- They came out of \$Egypt by His mighty hand, which deliverance was attended by ten unparalleled signs, and the favor of all the Egyptians.
- On the first leg of their journey, en route to Sinai, “ the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night” (Ex 3:21). He faithfully kept those visible signs of leadership never taking them away (Ex 3:22).
- He brought them through the Red Sea on dry ground – all of them, their children, their flocks, and their possessions (Ex 14:22).
- He fought for them, overthrowing the Egyptians army in the Red Sea, then washing their carcasses up on the shore so Israel could see them (Ex 14:28,30-31).
- He provided manna for them – miraculous bread that was “light” and adapted for their journey (Ex 16:15-18).
- He provided them quails for meat in the evening (Ex 16:13; Psa 105:40).
- The Lord gave them water from a rock, that gushed out like a river (Ex 17:6; Psa 78:15-16).
- Although they were not fighting men, He enabled Israel to miraculously overcome the army of Amalek (Ex 13:17; 17:8-13).

Yet, this was not enough for them. They carried among with them things related to other god’s, ignoring all of the evidence of Divine sufficiency that had been given to them.

THE TABERNACLE OF MOLOCH

“ . . . the tabernacle of Moloch . . .” Other versions read, “the shrine of Molech,” NIV “the tent of Molech,” NRSV “ Moloch’s tent ,” WEYMOUTH and “the tent (the portable temple) of Moloch.” AMPLIFIED

Moloch, or Molech, is known as the fire god. This false god was referred to as “the abomination of the Ammonites”

(1 Kgs 11:7). This idol had the head of an ox and the body of a man. Molech was especially noted because the worshipers of it offered their children in sacrifice to it. Early in His dealings with Israel, God warned them not to have anyone among them who did this. “And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD” (Lev 18:21). This was mentioned four other times in the Levitical law (Lev 20:2,3,4,5). In his later years, because some of his wives worshiped this god, Solomon did “build an high place for Chemosh, the abomination of Moab, in the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech, the abomination of the children of Ammon ” (1 Kgs 11:7). Manasseh offered his children to this god, causing them to pass through the fire (2 Chron 33:6). In Jeremiah’s day, the people built places for Molech, and offered their children to that false god (Jer 32:36; 7:31; 19:5-10). The Psalmist also mentions this practice, declaring that the people “sacrificed their sons and daughters to demons” NKJV (Psa 106:37). Isaiah alludes to the practice also (Isa 57:5). Ezekiel does the same (Ezek 16:20-21; 23:37).

In this text, Stephen traces these dreadful tendencies to their origin, which took place in Israel when they were in the wilderness. They carried the tabernacle of Molech with them, choosing to give that Ammonite abomination honor while seeking to maintain an association with God.

It is not clear whether they had a separate tabernacle for Molech, as well as one for God, or if they gave their hearts to Molech while maintaining the tabernacle services. I am personally inclined to the latter because of the nature of Amos’ prophecy. This is also underscored by the fact that Amos thunders to the people that God cannot bear their religious activities. “I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs; for I will not hear the melody of thy viols” (Amos 5:21-23). And again, “That chant to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of music, like David; that drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments: but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph” (Amos 6:5-6).

If it is correct that Amos is upbraiding the people for having hearts filled with idolatry, yet continuing to go through the mechanics of religion, then God is not only saying He will not receive their service. He is also declaring that what they were doing was, in fact, toward Molech, and thus was considered to be nothing more than idolatrous practices. All of this was much like the defection that took place at the base of Mount Sinai when they credited the golden calf with bringing them out of Egypt.

The Parallel of Our Time

There is a remarkable parallel to Israel’s idolatrous manners that is happening in our own time. Allow me to cite just one example. Today music has become an American idol. One can scarcely go for a single hour without hearing a sacrifice of corrupt music being offered to the god of music. The world’s music has even been brought into the church, just as Israel brought it into the Temple service during Amos’ time. There is a claim that it is being offered to God Himself, but God is not in all of their thoughts, and it is not likely that He Himself is the real Object of their professed praise. The fact that these people have little appetite for the things of God, are Scripturally illiterate, and are not at all noted for being in way godly, confirms that their worship is not real. For the most part, if not altogether, they have carried the tabernacle of Molech into the house of God. Like the idol Molech, this god is having the children sacrificed to it.

If this appears to be a bit strong, consider how the prophecy of Amos must have appeared in his day – or Stephen’s recounting of it in his day. The act of trying to adapt a purely man-made religion to some form of sanctioned worship or service is an exercise in vanity. Jesus made this crystal clear when He said, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:9).

God has never allowed such a practice, and He does not today. In the New Covenant men are not allowed to bring their old ways into the newness of life. This became apparent in the ministry of Jesus. He forced the issue of hypocrisy to the surface, not allowing it to remain in the background under the mantel of religious professionalism. Stephen, being filled with the Spirit of Christ, will not allow it either. He brings up Amos’ prophecy to confirm that reprehensible religious was still extant in the Jewish community.

THE STAR OF YOUR GOD REMPHAM

“ . . . and the star of your god Remphan . . .” Other versions read, “the star of the god Rompha,” NASB “the star of your god Rephan,” NIV “the star of your god Reifan,” CJB “the star of your god Rempham,” DOUAY “the star god Kaiway,” LIVING and “the star-symbol of the god Rempha.” MONTGOMERY

Of this star Amos said, “But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves ” (Amos 5:26). Although I have researched this text extensively, I am not at all satisfied with the level of understanding I have obtained. I will therefore draw some general conclusions, and then give what I feel to be the crux of Stephen’s reference to the words of Amos.

In general, the names of the idols of reference purport to refer to Saturn, McCLINTOK-STRONG Stephen refers to Remphan EGYPTIAN (Acts 7:43), also called Rephan NIV (Acts 7:43), and Chiun HEBREW (Amos 5:26). It appears that this god was also related to Moloch. In addition, Scriptures relate this with Baal, who appears to have been a chief god, with which these others were associated (Jer 32:35). All of this refers to “the host of heaven” to which God had given Israel up – to worship and serve them (Acts 7:42).

The crux of the matter is that Israel’s wickedness is seen in the fact that even though God had provided them visible and sanctioned means assuring them of His presence, they deliberately chose to ignore them and adapt to the religion of the heathen.

IMAGES YOU MADE

“ . . . figures which ye made to worship them . . .” Other versions read, “images you made to worship,” NKJV “the idols you made to worship,” NIV “the forms which ye made to do homage to them,” DARBY “the statues you made for yourselves to worship,” GWN and “and in all the images you made.” LIVING

It appears these idols were not large and imposing figures, like the golden calf. Notwithstanding, the Israelites did honor them, and even made images of them, which they apparently brought out of Egypt with them. Joshua alludes to the gods the people served in Egypt. He called upon them to make a decision on who they were going to serve. “Now therefore fear the LORD, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt ; and serve ye the LORD. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh 24:14-15).

Ezekiel also refers to this idolatry. “Then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. But they rebelled against me, and would not hearken unto me: they did not every man cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt : then I said, I will pour out my fury upon them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt” (Ezek 20:7-8).

There is also the possibility that the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt with Israel (Ex 12:38) promoted these gods. These were the people who started the murmuring over having only manna to eat. “And the mixed multitude that was among them fell a lusting : and the children of Israel also wept again, and said, Who shall give us flesh to eat? We remember the fish, which we did eat in Egypt freely; the cucumbers, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic: but now our soul is dried away: there is nothing at all, beside this manna, before our eyes” (Num 11:4-6).

If it is true that this mixed multitude in any way contributed to this idolatry, it shows the extreme danger of not completely coming out from defiling influences, and being separate. This, of course, is something that is required in Christ Jesus for God to even receive us (2 Cor 6:17-18).

THE POINT STEPHEN IS MAKING

The point Stephen is making is that the generation standing before him was no different than their fathers. They had maintained the formalities of their revealed religion, yet really were not honoring the Lord. While they had not made images, they had erected an intellectual facsimile of God that reflected their own perceptions, while ignoring the truth of God. As I have already mentioned, today the same circumstance exists in the Christian community. Ornate buildings, social programs, entertainment, music of the world, etc. are being carried about and given the honor that is due to God alone.

I WILL CARRY YOU AWAY BEYOND BABYLON

“ . . . and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.” Other versions read, “I also will remove you beyond Babylon,” NASB “Therefore, I will send you into exile beyond Babylon,” NIV “I will carry you away beyond Babylon,” ASV “ I will take you away , farther than Babylon,” BBE “So I will deport you beyond Babylon!” CSB “I will transport you beyond Babylon,” DARBY “I am about to drive you into captivity beyond Babylon,” NJB “I will remove your dwelling beyond Babylon,” YLT and “I will remove you [carrying you away into exile] beyond Babylon,” AMPLIFIED

Stephen is still quoting from Amos, where it is written, “Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, saith the LORD, whose name is The God of hosts” (Amos 5:27).

Amos prophesied before the Babylonian captivity, during the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, and Jeroboam king of Israel (Amos 1:1). He prophesied that God would carry the people beyond Damascus, which had particular regard to the captivity and dispersion of Israel (2 Kgs 15:29; 17:6). Stephen refers to Babylon, which applied specifically to Judah, who was carried to the remote regions of the Chaldean empire.

The thought delivered by this prophecy was that the gods in whom they were trusting could not stop their captivity, even though the real God told them it was coming – challenging them to do try and stop it.

Here we see the righteous judgment of God, First, He gives them over to their own desires, so that they cannot help but do them. Then, He judges them for doing what He allowed them to do. He did the same with the Gentile world, and He will do the same with spiritual Babylon as well. Men do well give heed to the apostolic word: “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?” (1

Cor 10:22). That is the extended exposition of the word delivered to Israel when they stood on the border of the promised land: “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Deut 6:16). This was a word that Jesus delivered to the devil when he sought to move Jesus to act rashly (Matt 4:7).

Now, as Stephen stands before this hard-hearted audience, he will remind them that although their history had been written with an iron pen, yet they had learned nothing from it. They were using the Temple to carry out their own will, like Israel used the tabernacle to carry out their corrupted wills. The words of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Himself, the apostles, and now Stephen, had made them ever more calloused. In Stephen the prophecy of Isaiah will again be fulfilled: “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken ” (Isa 28:13). This is the Divine way of bringing a collapse to corrupt religion, and is most profitable to ponder. It is the unrelenting declaring of the truth of God.

THEY BROUGHT IT INTO THEIR POSSESSION

“ 45 Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers.”

Stephen now addresses the period after the Israelites’ sojourn in the wilderness. This is after an entire generation had died off in the wilderness because of unbelief (Num 14:23; 26:65; 1 Cor 10:5; Heb 3:17-18).

OUR FATHERS BROUGHT IT IN

“Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles . . .” Other versions read, “which our fathers, having received it in turn, also brought with Joshua,” NKJV “Having received the tabernacle, our fathers under Joshua brought it in with them,” NIV “in their turn, took with them when, with Joshua, they came into the heritage,” BBE “this same tabernacle, our fathers, with Joshua, actually brought into the land which God gave to them,” MRD “Years later, when Joshua led the battles against the Gentile nations, this Tabernacle was taken with them into their new territory,” LIVING “That Tent was bequeathed to the next generation of our forefathers . Under Joshua they brought it with them when they were taking possession of the land,” WEYMOUTH “Our forefathers in turn brought it [this tent of witness] in [with them into the land] with Joshua when they dispossessed the nations,” AMPLIFIED and “This Tabernacle was handed down to our forefathers, and they brought it here when the Gentiles were defeated under Joshua.” PHILLIPS

When they entered into Canaan, Israel carried the chief article of furniture – the ark of the covenant – before them (Josh 3:11-14).

The record of setting up the Tabernacle is provided, having taken place in Shiloh, when the people were gathered together. “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them” (Josh 18:1).

WITH JESUS

This is a reference to Joshua, which is “Jesus” in the Hebrew form. In the King James Bible, there are two references to Joshua in which he is called “Jesus” (Acts 7:45; Heb 4:8). Although the other versions use “Joshua,” the term “Jesus” is technically correct, being translated from the Greek word **Vihsou/** (ie-sous), which is the identical word used for our Lord “Jesus.” The name means “Jehovah is salvation,” “Savior,” and “deliverer” – and Joshua is a type of Jesus as a Deliverer, or Savior.

GOD DROVE THE GENTILES OUT

“ . . .whom God drove out before the face of our fathers . . .” Other versions read, “God drove out before ancestors,” NRSV “God thrust out ,” RSV “God was driving out ,” BBE “God forced out ,” GWN and “which were driven out by God .” NJB

The Scriptures associate the driving out of the heathen with the placement of the tabernacle. “And the whole congregation of the children of Israel assembled together at Shiloh, and set up the tabernacle of the congregation there. And the land was subdued before them ” (Josh 18:1). When Israel overthrew Jericho, they first compassed the city several times. Each time the priests went before them, carrying the ark of the covenant, which belonged to the Tabernacle (Josh 6:4).

After their entrance into Canaan, when the covenant was read anew to the people, their elders, officers, and judges stood on either side of the ark of the covenant as the reading took place. Joshua then read the entirety of the covenant to the people, with all of its blessings and curses (Josh 8:33-35).

All of this is involved in the people bringing the Tabernacle into the land of promise, together with everything that was associated with it. Once they arrived in Canaan, they did not dispense with the Tabernacle as though it was only intended to accompany them in their wilderness wanderings.

UNTIL THE DAYS OF DAVID

“ 46 . . . unto the days of David, 46 Who found favor before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.”

UNTIL THE DAYS OF DAVID

“ . . . unto the days of David. . .” Other versions read, “until the days of David,” NKJV “until the time of David,” NASB “up to the time of David,” NAB “until the time of King David,” LIVING and “till David’s time.” WEYMOUTH

It seems to me that the history of the world has often been turned on the pivot of a spiritual giant. Such were men of tender heart who saw more than the others because they wanted more. They were more devoted, and more earnest in their quest for the living God.

The Tabernacle remained as it was for around four hundred years – “ until the days of David.” During that interim, after being set up in Shiloh, there are a number of references to it. During the time of the Judges it was referred to as “the house of God” (Judges 18:31; 20:18,26,27). This is where Eli ministered, and where Hannah went each year (1 Sam 1:9; 2:14,22). It is where God first revealed Himself to young Samuel (1 Sam 3:3). In times of trouble, the people would get the ark from the Tabernacle in Shiloh in hopes of obtaining victory (1 Sam 4:3-4). This is also where David came when he ate the showbread (1 Sam 21:1-6).

In a sense, it is quite remarkable that the Tabernacle and the ark of the Covenant were maintained for so many years – particularly in view of the waywardness of the hearts of Israel. Yet, behind all of this, the Sovereign God was waiting for a man who would be precious in His sight – a man who would make a more permanent arrangement for the ark of the covenant.

A Line of Demarcation

Here, then, is a spiritual line of demarcation – a time when the things of God would be made more clear – “the days of David.” His tenderness toward the Lord, His many Psalms, as well as his exploits, would testify to a living God. It seems to me that the history of the world has often been turned on the pivot of a spiritual giant. Such were men of tender heart who saw more than the others because they wanted more. They were more devoted, and more earnest in their quest for the living God.

These are the kind of men who cannot be trained or produced by an institution. They cannot be cloned or mass produced. We know that the eyes of the Lord are ranging throughout the whole world, looking for men of this caliber. Thus it is written, “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him ” (2 Chron 16:9). Such men are not, nor have they ever been, in abundance. However, when they are found, they will be used. Ezekiel revealed that had sought for a man who “stand in the gap” before the Lord “for the land” (Ezek 22:30). God is even said to have been “appalled that there was no one to intervene” NIV (Isa 59:16). Again the Lord said, “ I looked and there was none to help , and I wondered that there was none to uphold” (Isa 63:1). Once the Lord challenged Jeremiah, “Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth ; and I will pardon it” (Jer 5:1).

Whatever you may think of these passages, they cannot be conveniently pushed away. They reveal an aspect of God that must be known. However, I fear this is another spiritual morsel that has been buried by the modern church. Yet, we live in the prospect that it will again be discovered by a person who is especially tender and precious in the eyes of the Lord.

DAVID FOUND FAVOR

“ Who found favor before God . . .” Other versions read, “who enjoyed God’s favor,” NIV “found favor in the sight of God,” RSV “was pleasing to God,” BBE “ won God’s favor,” GWN “God blessed David greatly,” LIVING “God was very pleased with David,” IE “ obtained favor with God,” WEYMOUTH “found grace (favor and spiritual blessing),” AMPLIFIED and “ won the approval of God.” PHILLIPS

I want to point out that this is the man whom modern preachers and teachers are often found deprecating. Ignorantly, men refer to him as a murderer and an adulterer – although God never refers to him in that manner, even though he did commit adultery, and did set Uriah up to be killed. Still others, attempting to promote their own ideas of family life, say that David was a bad father. They say this because his children went astray. Conveniently, they forget that God’s first created “offspring” did also – to say nothing of every single one of his progeny. When Stephen spoke of David, this is what he said: he “found favor before God.” When Paul referred to him, he said God “gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will” (Acts 13:22).

Confirming that David did find favor in the eyes of the Lord, his name is mentioned in Scripture no less than 1,085 times. Jesus is referred to as “the son of David” sixteen times. I do not know how it will fare on the day of judgment with those who have maligned David, and referred to him in such a way as to bring him down to their level. Candidly, however, I would not want to be in their shoes at that time, considering how God has spoken of him.

Keep in mind that Stephen was well acquainted with the whole life of David – and this is how he chose to speak of him. The same may be said of Paul. It seems to me that in a day that is noted for immorality and promiscuity, it is completely out of order to be emphasizing an unfortunate event in David’s life for which he repented and was forgiven. This in no way minimizes what he did. It does accent that he was a man of tender heart, precisely as God had said.

HE DESIRED TO FIND A TABERNACLE

Notice that David did not take it upon himself to do this. He asked permission to do it, laying his desire before the Lord. That is what a tender hearted man would do. What is more, the Lord commended him for his desire.

“ . . . and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.” Other versions read, “asked to find a dwelling place,” NKJV “asked that he might provide a dwelling place,” NIV “asked leave to find a habitation ,” RSV “had a desire to make a holy tent ,” BBE “asked that he might provide a permanent place ,” GWN “asked for the privilege of building a permanent Temple,” NLT “David asked God to allow him to build a house for Him ,” IE “asked to design a dwelling for the house of Jacob ,” ISV “ asked permission to find a dwelling-place,” MONTGOMERY and “prayed that he might be allowed to find a dwelling place.” AMPLIFIED

Notice that David did not take it upon himself to do this. He asked permission to do it, laying his desire before the Lord. That is what a tender hearted man would do. What is more, the Lord commended him for his desire. Solomon related what God has said to his father David. “And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto My name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart ” (1 Kgs 8:18; 2 Chron 6:8). The project, then, was right, even if it was not commanded. The circumstance is highly unsettling to a legalistic approach to life in Christ.

The record of this occasion is found in First Samuel. The setting was David’s experience of “rest round about from all his enemies.” He was sitting in his own house, which was rather elaborate. Hiram, king of Tyre, had sent expensive “cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons” to David, “and they built David an house” (2 Sam 5:2). In all of this, “David perceived that the LORD had confirmed him king over Israel, for his kingdom was lifted up on high, because of his people Israel” (2 Sam 5:12).

As he sat in his house, Nathan the prophet was with him. David said to him, “See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains” (2 Sam 7:2). How unlike those Israelites of succeeding generations who had to be rebuked because they refurbished and enhanced their own houses while letting the house of God lie in ruins (Hag 1:4). Nathan responded, “Go, do all that is in thine heart, for the Lord is with thee.”

That night, the word of the Lord came to Nathan. His words are recorded in Second Samuel 7:5-13. “Go and tell My servant David , Thus says the Lord: Shall you build Me a house in which to dwell? For I have not dwelt in a house since I

God asks David if He had ever asked anyone, whom He had appointed, to build a house for Him? Yet, he does not rebuke David for asking to do such a thing. He even honored his request, although He would not allow David to build the house.

brought the Israelites out of Egypt to this day, but have moved about with a tent for My dwelling . In all the places where I have moved with all the Israelites, did I speak a word to any from the tribes of Israel whom I commanded to be shepherd of My people Israel, asking, Why do you not build Me a house of cedar? So now say this to My servant David, Thus says the Lord of hosts: I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be prince over My people Israel. And I was with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like [that] of the great men of the earth. And I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and be moved no more. And wicked men shall afflict them no more, as formerly and as from the time that I appointed judges over My people Israel; and I will cause you to rest from all your enemies. Also the Lord declares to you that He will make for you a house : And when your days are fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I will set up after you your offspring who shall be born to you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My Name [and My Presence], and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.” AMPLIFIED

A Most Remarkable Word

This is a remarkable word that provides some insights into the Divine nature. God asks David if He had ever asked anyone, whom He had appointed, to build a house for Him? Yet, he does not rebuke David for asking to do such a thing. He even honored his request, although He would not allow David to build the house (which proved to be a Temple). David explained that God had told him why he could not build the house. “But God said unto me, Thou shalt not build an house for My name, because thou hast been a man of war, and hast shed blood” (1 Chron 28:3).

Here we see at least two things worthy of note. First, God honored a request He had not directed to be asked. Second, the person in charge of doing the work could not be known as a man of blood.

What Was David Asking?

Why did David make this request? Was it simply that he wanted to update the Tabernacle, or replace it with a more modern version – if that kind thinking even existed? Indeed, this was not the case. David realized that, according to appearance, he had a more comely place in which to dwell than the very ark of the covenant. To David, it did not seem right for him to have a better place in which to live than the place with which the presence of the Lord was associated. After all, God had said of the Tabernacle, “And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them ” (Exo 25:8). David’s thoughts, then, were not wholly divorced from what God had revealed about Himself

David’s primary consideration was not to simply have a religious structure. It was specifically to provide a place in which the ark could be housed (2 Sam 7:2). He felt this could not be a housing that was inferior to his own dwelling place. And how does God regard David’s request? David found favor in the sight of the Lord! Those are words that are worthy of consideration, reflecting the nature of godly men and God himself.

SOLOMON BUILT THE HOUSE

“ 47 But Solomon built Him an house.” Other versions read, “But it was Solomon,” NASB “But Solomon was the builder,” BBE and “But it was Solomon who actually built it .” NLT God had revealed to David that his hands should not construct the house because he was a man of war, and had shed much blood. He designated that David’s son, Solomon, would build the house, being a man associated with peace (2 Sam 7:12-14).

The place for the building of the Temple was selected by David as the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite, where the Lord appeared unto David, confirming this was to be the place (1 Chron 21:28-2:1). This was located in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, the place where God had commanded Abraham to offer Isaac. Therefore it is said of the commencement of the building of the Temple, “Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father , in the place that David had prepared in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite” (2 Chron 3:1).

In keeping with the pattern which David apparently drew up, he gathered all of the materials that would be required. He did the following, as specified in 1 Chronicles 22:1-19. Behold the extensive nature of the preparation.

- Appointed masons to cut hewn stones.
- Prepared an abundance of iron for nails for the doors of the gates and for joining pieces together.
- Gathered an abundance of brass that could not be weighed.
- Procured cedar trees in abundance from Zidon and Tyre.
- Amassed one hundred thousand talents of gold (about 3,750 tons).

- Gathered one million talents of silver (37,500 tons).
- Brought together brass and iron too great to be weighed.
- Prepared and fashioned timber and stone.
- David added from his own personal treasury, over and above all that was prepared, three thousand talents of fine gold of Ophir (110 tons), and seven thousand talents of refined silver (260 tons) to overlay the walls (1 Chron 29:3-5).

The chief of the fathers and the princes of the tribes of Israel, and the captains and rulers of the king's work, also gave willingly to the project. Their gifts included five thousand talents and ten thousand drama of gold (190 tons and 185 pounds, ten thousand talents of silver (375 tons), nineteen thousand talents of brass (675 tons), one hundred thousand talents of iron (3,750 tons) (1 Chron 29:6-7)..

- Those who had precious stones also gave them to the work (1 Chron 29:8).

The Temple structure itself was ninety feet long, and forty-five feet high - equivalent to a 4 ½ story building, and as long as six Cadillacs placed end to end (ninety feet). This does not include the porch (1 Kgs 6:3), chambers (1 Kgs 6:5-6, 10), massive stones (1 Kgs 6:7), and winding staircase (1 Kgs 6:8).

Solomon forced 30,000 men of Israel to labor on the Temple, sending them to Lebanon in shifts of 10,000 a month. They would spend one month in Lebanon, and two months at home (1 Kgs 5:13-14). He also had 70,000 who carried burdens, and 80,000 stonecutters in the mountains (1 Kgs 5:15). He appointed 330 foremen, who supervised the workers – a crew of 180,000 men. That would mean each foremen supervised about 550 men.

The Temple took seven years to build (1 Kgs 6:38). By way of comparison, Scripture notes that it took Solomon thirteen years to build his own house (1 Kgs 7:1).

A Point to be Made

Once again, I want to draw attention to, what I have called, the principle of reference. The remarkable level of details associated with planning and building the Temple is staggering. Yet, Stephen does not mention a single one of them. He only says that David found favor in the sight of the Lord, desired to find a tabernacle for God, and that Solomon built the Temple itself.

Stephen's reference would have no significance whatsoever to anyone who lacked a knowledge of the facts in the case. It is the awareness and accurate knowledge of the facts that allows for the correct profitable and processing of Stephen's words. This remains true even though the Jewish council refused to profit from this knowledge. The fact of the matter is that right here the door was being opened for them to turn from their wicked ways. A due consideration of the thought and effort that went into the building of the Temple would have pointed them in the right direction.

An Observation

If this assessment is correct, the present level of ignorance that exists in the professing church concerning the details of Scripture, has far-reaching implications. It suggests that the better part of the modern church cannot profit from insightful preaching. For example, what possible meaning does Stephen's sermon have to such people? That is not to mention the preaching of Jesus and the apostles. I do not believe too much can be said about this circumstance. Until it is corrected to some measurable degree, it is doubtful that the contemporary church is even capable of doing the work of the Lord. In my judgement, the lack of productive Kingdom work is owing more to the cannot principle than the will not one.

The modern church sorely stands in need of a significant work to be done within itself. It is too carnal – too worldly. I am persuaded that these observations can be easily substantiated, and that opposing views can be cast down with very little effort. This is a matter that calls for God to raise up men of spiritual power and insight – men who, like David, find favor in His sight. Without such men, the church will remain spiritually sterile.

THE MOST HIGH DOES NOT DWELL IN TEMPLES MADE WITH HANDS

“48 Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet.” Other versions read, “does not dwell in houses made by human hands,” NASB “does not live in houses made by men,” NIV “has not His resting-place in houses made with hands,” BBE “does not dwell in sanctuaries made with hands,” CSB “doesn't live in a house built by humans,” GWN “does not dwell in buildings erected by men's hands,” WEYMOUTH and “does not live in man-made houses .” PHILLIPS

This is Stephen’s answer to the charges that he had spoken blasphemous words against the Temple. The Jews had set up false witnesses who said, “This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:13-14).

Not only were these charges false, they were also to be considered in view of the fact that God does not dwell in houses constructed by men. When David inquired of Nathan concerning building the Temple, God instructed Nathan to say this to David: “Go and tell my servant David, Thus saith the LORD, Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in? Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle. In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not Me an house of cedar?” (2 Sam 7:5-7).

Inspired to reason upon these words, and before building the Temple, Solomon said, “And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build Him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build Him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before Him?” (2 Chron 2:6). After he had completed the building of the Temple he reasoned, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kgs 8:27). Therefore, the Temple was constructed with an acute awareness of the fact that God does not live in a building – yet the work was fully sanctioned and directed by God.

Isaiah also refers to this fact in his prophecy. “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that ye build unto Me? and where is the place of My rest?” (Isa 66:1). Paul also referred to the Divine trait of not living in a building, in his address to the philosophers in Athens. “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).

Jeremiah delivered the true sense of these words when he upbraided the people for trusting in the Temple instead of the God of the Temple. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these” (Jer 7:3-4).

Further, the Tabernacle and Temple were not to be considered holy in the sense of a shrine, as those which contained idols. It was rather because of the Divine communication that took place there. That was true of every place that was particularly hallowed – places where altars were built, pillars anointed, and special names given

Men may conclude from this that it is wrong to construct a house that is dedicated to the Lord. This is not, however, the manner in which David and Solomon thought. Nor, indeed, was it the way Jesus thought, who referred to the Temple as “My Father’s house” (John 2:16).

The Scriptures Are Particular

The Scriptures are very particular concerning the manner in which God was associated with the Tabernacle and Temple. Neither of them were areas to which God was confined. When the Lord said Israel made a “sanctuary” for Him (Ex 25:8), and that he “walked in a tent and in a Tabernacle” (2 Sam 7:6), He did not mean He lived there as a man lives in an abode. Rather, this was a place where He revealed Himself, communing with them. This was done over the ark of the covenant, and particularly from between the cherubim that adorned its cover. The Scriptures spoke of His dwelling in this manner: “the Lord of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims ” (1 Sam 4:4; 6:2), and “God the Lord that dwelleth between the cherubims ” (1 Chron 13:6). When Hezekiah prayed, he addressed the Lord as the “Lord God of Israel which dwellest between the cherubims ” (2 Kgs 19:15). In one of his psalms, Asaph addressed God as “Thou that dwellest between the cherubims ” (Psa 80:1). The ninety-ninth Psalm says that God “sitteth between the cherubims ” (Psa 99:1). Isaiah addressed the Lord as the One who “ dwellest between the cherubims ” (Isa 37:16).

The Basis of the Expression

All of this was based on the statement of God concerning how He would commune with Israel – a statement relating to the building of the Tabernacle. “And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel” (Ex 25:22).

This expression, then, was based upon God’s covenantal dealings with Israel. It was never designed to suggest that God was confined to the Tabernacle or Temple. Further, the Tabernacle and Temple were not to be considered holy in the sense of a shrine, as those which contained idols. It was rather because of the Divine communication that took place there. That was true of every place that was particularly hallowed – places where altars were built, pillars anointed, and special names given (Gen 12:7; 26:24-25; 28:16; 32:30; 35:3,15). It was because of the revelation of God in those places. This was also the reason Jesus resorted often to the garden – because of communication with God (John 18:2).

Having said all of this, there is no way the flesh can capitalize on this situation, causing ones name to become great, and gaining worldly advantage. The fact that the Tabernacle was among the Israelites did not reduce the magnitude of their transgression. Instead, the mechanics of their ceremonies were attributed to idols, even though they appeared outwardly to be serving the Lord.

HEAVEN IS HIS THRONE, AND THE EARTH IS HIS FOOTSTOOL

“ 49 Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? 50 Hath not my hand made all these things?”

Stephen continues drawing the attention of the council to the words the Lord spoke to David.

HEAVEN IS MY THRONE

“Heaven is My throne . . .” Other versions read, “Heaven is the seat of My power .” BBE and “Heaven is My seat .” PNT

The throne of God was not within the Tabernacle, or upon the ark of the covenant. The government of God did not issue forth from a structure – even one that God had ordained and

commanded to be built. The communications that took place there were “settled in the heaven”

The place of communication was “between the cherubims,” but that was not the seat of the power. The throne of God was not within the Tabernacle, or upon the ark of the covenant. The government of God did not issue forth from a structure – even one that God had ordained and commanded to be built. The communications that took place there were “settled in the heaven” (Psa 119:89).

The words “heaven is My throne” were not included in the words God spoke to David, as recorded in the seventh chapter of Second Samuel. The Psalmist did declare, “The Lord’s throne is in heaven” (Psa 11:4). Through Isaiah God also said, “The heaven is My throne” (Isa 66:1). Jesus said of heaven, “it is God’s throne” (Matt 5:34), and that those who swore by heaven “swaereth by the throne of God” (Matt 23:22). The expression “heaven is My throne” is therefore a revelation spoken at other times that Stephen wisely correlated with what God had said to David.

Inter-relational Words

In the Kingdom of God, truth is inter-relational. That is, words concerning fixed realities harmonize with each other, and blend together. Of course, it requires a person who is skillful in “the word of righteousness” to do this (Heb 5:13), and Stephen is well qualified.

What do these words mean: “heaven is My throne” ? It means that the origin of Divine rule is in heaven. That is where the seat of government is located. That is where the full glory of the King is displayed. That is where all decisions relating to the Kingdom are made. The court is held there, as confirmed in Job 1:6 and 2:1, Isaiah 6:1-1-8, and Second Kings 22:19-22. Those whose minds are fixed upon the earth cannot possibly be correct in their views of Divine judgment and will. As soon as one’s mind is fixed on this present evil world, all sense of right and wrong become distorted. This is because the throne is in heaven, and “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26).

THE EARTH IS MY FOOTSTOOL

“ . . . and earth is My footstool . . .” Other versions read, “footstool of My feet,” NASB “ a resting-place for My feet,” BBE :the footstool under My feet,” MRD and “ a place to rest My feet.” LIVING

Whatever one may choose to think about the earth, allowance must be made for this statement of God: “earth is My footstool!” In this text, Stephen again integrates Scripture. The statement concerning the earth being God’s footstool is found in Isaiah 66:1. Lamentations 2:1 also alludes to the earth being “His footstool.” Jesus also referred to this in Matthew 5:35.

David declared what he had on his mind. “Then David the king stood up upon his feet, and said, Hear me, my brethren, and my people: “As for me, I had it in mine heart to build an house of rest for the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and for the footstool of our God , and had made ready for the building” (1 Chron 28:2). The 99 th Psalm also refers to the Temple being the footstool of God. “Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at His footstool ; for he is holy” (Psa 99:5). The 132 nd Psalm does the same thing. “We will go into his tabernacles: we will worship at His footstool ” (Psa 132:7).

The idea here is that the earth, together with all of its inhabitants, are subject to the Lord, and are at His disposal to use as he sees fit. That is, God cannot be contained by anything He has made – much less what man has made. In a figure of speech, the earth is a place where God rests His feet. It is not a place where He dwells, or lives. In view of that, how would it be possible for a building to contain Him, if the earth itself cannot.

Something Else to Be Seen

But, there is something else to be seen in the earth being God’s “footstool.” In all of God’s vast creation, His present activity is focused upon the earth. This is confirmed in the 24 th Psalm where

the Lord further defines the earth. “The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein ” (Psa 24:1). This is the arena in which the Lord is working, fulfilling a purpose that is designed to bring special glory to Him. As great as the sun is, it is not the focus of Divine attention. Nor, indeed is the moon, the stars, or the many galaxies that have been created in our solar system. The ONLY real significance of the earth is that God is fulfilling His purpose in it. Apart from that, it has no revealed utility. Now, with that in mind, God asks a further question.

WHAT HOUSE WILL YE BUILD ME?

“ . . . what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest?” Other versions read, “what place is there for My repose,” NASB “ what kind of house,” NIV “what manner of house,” ASV “ What sort of house,” BBE “What kind of house could you build for Me,” CJB and “There is no place where I need to rest.” LIVING

This is a reference to the words of the Lord to David: “Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in?” (2 Sam 7:5). That is, Are you capable of constructing a place that can contain Me? At this point, it is interesting to observe that all sectarianism presumes that this can be done – that God can be contained. For them, God is contained in a creed or a dogma. Nevertheless, they have made an attempt to contain God, and it simply cannot be done!

There is something important to note here. Technically speaking, David did not say he wanted to build a house for God, but for “the ark of God” (2 Sam 7:2). When God said that David’s son would build the house, He referred to it as “an house for My name ” (2 Sam 7:13). Solomon said the house was to be built “ unto the name of the Lord his (David’s) God” (1 Kgs 5:3), and that he would build it “ unto the name of the Lord my God” (1 Kgs 5:5). Yet, when He started the project, it is written that he “began to build the house of the Lord ” (1 Kgs 6:1).

In this we note that things related to God, the name of the Lord, and the Lord Himself are all woven together, like a threefold chord.

This is precisely why Jesus declared the merchants and moneychangers had made the house of prayer “a den of thieves” (Matt 21:13). It is why those who either assist or neglect the people of God have done it unto Jesus Himself (Matt 25:40,45). Nothing that is associated with God, either by intention of by Divine mandate, can be disassociated from Him. If, for example, people go through the mechanics of praising the Lord, yet their hearts are not in it, they have actually blasphemed God , and will be held accountable for it. This is precisely the point the Lord made through Amos concerning the children of Israel (Isa 1:13; Amos 5:23).

An Application

When this truth registers upon tender hearts, our current religious scene becomes most alarming. We are living in a generation when the merchants of the world have become fat because of Christian fads. Industries that have been financially advantaged because of this include structural engineering, construction, sound systems, video presentation, overhead projection, music industry, book publishing, clothiers, jewelers, and many more. It parallels the vivid description given in the book of the Revelation concerning the false church. When the whole system is brought down by God, the merchants are depicted as lamenting. “And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men” (Rev 18:11-13).

The lament continues, accenting that earthly lusts and appetites were impacted by the fall of false religion. “And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all. The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, And saying, Alas, alas, that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls! For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, And cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city!” (Rev 18:14-18).

Stephen is speaking to a group of people who have gained fleshly advantages from their involvement in religion – a revealed religion. One of the reasons these very people had opposed Jesus is because they viewed him as a threat to their prominent positions in religion. “If we let Him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:48). However, Stephen has no regard for their position, He is rather showing that they, like their predecessors, had consistently refused the men who had been placed in their position by God.

The Proper Use of Scripture

In this verse, Stephen also combines the thoughts expressed in the 132nd Psalm with His words to David. “For the LORD hath chosen Zion; He hath desired it for His habitation. This is My rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it” (Psa 132:13-14).

Behold the expertise with which Stephen handles Scripture. He correlates it with Divine purpose, always keeping in mind what the Lord was doing, and never attempting to justify a private view or an institutional emphasis. This is the kind of person to which Paul referred in his letter to Timothy: “Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth ” (2 Tim 2:15). “Rightly dividing” refers to the proper use of Scripture. Other versions render the phrase, “handling accurately,” NASB “correctly handles,” NIV “rightly explaining.” NRSV This is not referring to the proper scholastic handling of Scripture – although that is certainly included. It rather means using Scripture within the context of the revealed purpose of God, and with an understanding of the circumstance in which the truth is being spoken. Those who do not use Scripture in this manner have every reason to be ashamed, for they have corrupted the use of the word of God.

Think of it this way. When you read Stephen’s defense, do you get the idea he is trying to clear himself of all false charges? It is apparent that he is rather using the Scripture to make known the purpose and perspective of the Living God? His grasp of truth enabled him to reason in a profitable manner.

SOUND REASONING

In order for men to reason properly, certain things must be known or comprehended. First, a person is required to have a working knowledge of the text of Scripture itself. Scripture contains the expressive components of sound reasoning – the nomenclature through which foundational aspects of reasoning are expressed.

There must also be an understanding of the nature of God as it has been revealed. Everything God says and does is within the context of His nature. Things like His hatred of evil, love of good, inclination toward those tender heart, and intolerance of hypocrisy, must be seen to some measurable degree.

A grasp of the revealed purpose of God must also be possessed. What is He doing among the sons

of men, and why is He doing it? This has to do with His “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11).

Finally, the absolute centrality of Christ must be seen. That is, His centrality to the realization of the purpose of God. If a person reasons as though the individual is the main thing, or the family, or the church, or a nation – reasoning will be skewed in the wrong direction. It is inevitable that such reasoning will lead to the wrong conclusions, give birth to erroneous ideas, and actually obscure the truth of God.

We see all of this and more in the speech being given by Stephen. As you read and ponder it, you become acutely aware that he is thinking on a different level. He is extolling the Lord and His gracious works. All is leading to the conclusion that the most grievous sin of the people was the rejection, betrayal, and murdering of Jesus. This is so because Jesus is the premier Man, sent to do the premier work, and is related to the premier purpose. Stephen sees it, and delivers his insight with great power.

The widespread practice of sectarian reasoning has impacted Christendom in a way that is nearly impossible to assess. It is my persuasion that very few weighty conclusions are being reached, and very few noble causes are being embraced. Minuscule thinking always breeds purposes that are destined to fail.

HATH NOT MY HANDS MADE THESE THINGS?

“ 50 Hath not my hand made all these things?” Other versions read, “ Did not my hand make all these things,” NRSV “Didn't I myself make all these things?” CJB “when all these things were made by Me ?” NJB “ Didn't I make both heaven and earth?” LIVING “ Remember , I made all these things!” IE “It was my hand that made all these things, wasn't it ?” ISV and “Did not my hand make this universe ?” MONTGOMERY

“These things” refers to the heaven the earth – God’s throne and footstool. “ ALL these times” refers to everything that populates these two realms. In view of the vastness of God’s throne and footstool, what house could you make for Him? Would it not have to be large enough to contain at least His throne and footstool – to say nothing of Himself?

As noble as the desire of David was, it still reflected a very limited view of God. This is not said to demean David, but to accent how comparatively very little of God had actually been made known at that time.

Even though much has been revealed about the Lord since the time of Job, there is still a lot of truth to be seen in his words: “Lo, these are parts of His ways: but how little a portion is heard of Him? but the thunder of His power who can understand?” (Job 26:14).

David, who had been given to see more than Job, said of the Lord, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it” (Psa 139:6).

Isaiah, who was also given to see a larger measure of the Lord declared, “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding ” (Isa 40:28).

Paul, who perhaps saw more than any person other than the Lord Jess Himself, confessed, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! ” (Rom 11:33).

The reasoning of this verse is as follows. After looking at what the hands of God has made, what could men possibly make that would be appropriate for Him?

It is because David “found favor” with the Lord that He was allowed to build a house for Him. It was not because God required one to be built. True religion does not necessitate such a house, although, especially under the Old Covenant, it was allowed and blessed because of the nature of the covenant. However, just as surely as God found no delight in the burnt offerings and sacrifices that He Himself ordained (Psa 51:16; Mic 6:7; Heb 10:6), so there was no delight in the Temple itself, even though it was called by Jesus “My Father’s house” and “a house of prayer for all nations” (John 2:16; Matt 21:16).

During the days of Jesus, the Temple was viewed by many as an end of itself – a beautiful and ornate structure – without regard to the activities that were to take place within it. Jesus said to some of these people, “Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!” (Matt 23:16).

In our own time, there is an inordinate accent on religious structures. While this is not an area in which laws are to be drawn up and imposed upon men, care must be taken not to allow the realm of the seen to dictate how, when, and the extent of our thoughts about the Lord.

This inordinate view of the Temple also surfaced once when Jesus had commended a poor widow for placing two mites in the Temple treasury. He had declared her gift was more than all of the others, among whom were gifts given by the rich. At that time “His disciples came to Him for to show Him the buildings of the temple” (Mat 24:1). Luke says that some had noted “how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts” (Luke 21:5). It was at that time that Jesus foretold the destruction of the Temple that would take place when Jerusalem would be judged for its rejection of Jesus (Lk 21:6).

The people were prone to think of the Temple in disassociation from God Himself. For some, it was a place of business, where animals used in sacrifice could be sold at a profit, being easily obtained by those who heartlessly met the requirements for sacrifice – or at least imagined that they did so. For others, the Temple was a place of employment – like the Temple guard (Acts 4:1; 5:24). For still others, it was a place of religious status – as with the chief priests, scribes, and Sadducees.

The Lord’s statement concerning the heaven being His throne and the earth His footstool, was designed to discourage this kind of thinking. They were to ponder the Lord within a larger context that things that can be seen, or things that had been fashioned by men.

In Our Time

In our own time, there is an inordinate accent on religious structures. While this is not an area in which laws are to be drawn up and imposed upon men, care must be taken not to allow the realm of the seen to dictate how, when, and the extent of our thoughts about the Lord. Throughout history, there have been godly men who saw this propensity and sounded a warning about it. One such man was W.B. Godbey, who lived from 1833 to 1920. He wrote the following on this subject. “An awful tide of idolatry is at the present day running in the line of church edifices. If the house should burn down and the preacher backslide a whole modern congregation would collapse spiritually in twenty-four hours and conclude they hadn’t a bit of religion . . . How will we ever get the heathen saved if we do not quit sacrificing the Lord’s money to that hellish goddess, Pride, in needless expenditure on church edifices, thus using God’s money ‘to sacrifice to devils’” W.B. GODBEY (1880-1920)

Suffice it to say, it is not my purpose to deliver a diatribe against structures devoted to the service of the Lord. However, such are acceptable only to the degree that those who plan, build, as use them are wholly devoted to the Lord – as David was. God accepted David’s plan because HE found favor with God, not merely because of the plan.

Buildings are also proper only when the activities within them are themselves pleasing to the Lord.

Men are to remember that God has no need for what men possess. If He was hungry, he said, He would not tell them (Psa 50:12). That does not mean that they are to give no gifts. It does mean that they are to give them for the right reasons, and in a manner that honors and pleases the Lord.

STIFFNECKED AND UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART AND EARS

“ 51 Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.”

It ought to be noted that those who teach that the church is just like Israel have said something of great magnitude. If what they say is true, then the church to which they refer is, at the very best, in a fallen state. Those who are in Christ Jesus are a new creation, and can in no wise be properly described as stiffnecked or rebellious.

It is apparent that as Stephen was speaking, he perceived the hardness of the people. He had spoken for some time, confining himself to a God-honoring assessment of the history of children of Israel. He had spoken in the language of Scripture, and had wisely correlated various texts with understanding and wisdom that ought to have been obvious. Now it has become evident that these people are not like those who believed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), nor are they similar to the great multitude who believed in Solomon’s porch (Acts 4:4). These were members of the brood of vipers to which John the Baptist referred (Matt 3:7). They belonged to the order of “hypocrites” to which Jesus referred (Matt 23:13).

Stephen has been patient, however he knows that the Spirit of God “shall not always strive with men” (Gen 6:3). Therefore he will bring things to a head, and draw their venom out so that their wickedness will be known. This is the manner of the Lord. If men refuse to believe Him, He will draw that wickedness out, so that all may see it.

STIFFNECKED

“Ye stiffnecked . . .” Other versions read, “how stubborn can you be?” GWN “stiff of neck,” MRD “You stubborn people,” NLT “You stiffnecked heathen !” LIVING “You stubborn leaders !” IE “stubborn in will,” WILLIAMS “You stubborn and stiff-necked people ,” AMPLIFIED and “You obstinate people,” PHILLIPS

The word “stiffnecked” refers to an obstinate spirit – one in which the person refuses to turn toward the Lord. It comes from a word meaning “stubborn, headstrong, obstinate,” THAYER “resistance against changing ones behavior,” FRIBERG “hardened,” UBS and “completely unyielding.” LOUW-NIDA

This is the only place this word is used in the New Covenant Scriptures. It is used seven times in the writings of Moses, and once in the Chronicles.

- God said of Israel, “it is a stiffnecked people” (Ex 32:9).
- Moses said “thou art a stiffnecked people” (Ex 33:3)
- God told Moses to say to the people, “Thou art a stiffnecked people” (Ex 3:5).
- Moses said to God, “for it is a stiffnecked people” (Ex 34:9).
- At the close of his life, Moses said to Israel, “thou art a stiffnecked people” (Deut 9:6).
- At that time, Moses also repeated that God had said of them, “it is a stiffnecked people” (Deut 9:13).
- God commanded Israel, “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no

more stiffnecked ” (Deut 10:16).

• Hezekiah sent messengers throughout all Israel and Judah saying, “Now, be ye not stiffnecked as your fathers were” (2 Chron 30:8).

Stephen charges the Jewish council with being stubborn, unyielding, and unwilling to turn to the Lord. He uses the exact language that both God and Moses used when Israel refused to hear God, and instead chose to make their own gods. This was not an out-of-character occurrence, but was a display of who they really were – a “stiffnecked people.”

It appears from the text that there may very well have been angry outbursts and interruptions going on as Stephen spoke. If this is so, it would account for the change in tone that takes place in this verse. Suddenly Stephen leaps from the consideration of Israel of old to the people who were standing before him. They were, as he will strongly affirm, from the same generation of the wayward ones in the past – noted for being obstinate, disobedient, and rebellious. It ought to be noted that those who teach that the church is just like Israel have said something of great magnitude. If what they say is true, then the church to which they refer is, at the very best, in a fallen state. Those who are in Christ Jesus are a new creation, and can in no wise be properly described as stiffnecked or rebellious. They are new creatures in Christ Jesus, old things have passed away, and all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17). If they are stubborn, it is only because they are walking in the flesh.

Such a condition cannot be brushed aside by saying they are like Israel. If they continue to remain in such a state, they will also be like Israel in failing to enter the promised land. Therefore the church receives this solemn warning, “Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.) Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God ” (Heb 3:10-12). And again it is written, “ Let us therefore fear , lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it ” (Heb 4:1).

Some might object, saying that “seem” means the people addressed really do not fail to enter the rest. However, if that is the case, the sentence of nonsensical, having no meaning whatsoever. What purpose is there in fearing if the condition against which we are warned is not even real. Here, the word “seemed” accents judgment – to be thus judged as questionable, or not seen as a legitimate entrance into the rest. In other words, the door is left open to avoid the condition. However, it was against a legitimate, delivered, and on-their-way-to-Canaan people that God’s wrath welled up, and in it He swore they would not enter.

That is the ultimate end of being stiffnecked, obstinate, and stubborn. Therefore it is written, “He, that being often reprov’d hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy ” (Prov 29:1). Another version reads, “A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed--without remedy” (Prov 29:1). NIV

UNCIRCUMCISED IN HEART AND EARS

“ . . . and uncircumcised in heart and ears. . . ” Other versions read, “ with uncircumcised hearts and ears,” NIV “whose hearts and ears are shut to Me,” BBE “How can you be so heartless and disobedient ?” GWN “You are heathen 1 at heart and deaf to the truth,” NLT “Your hearts are not circumcised! You won't listen to God!” LIVING “ heathen ish in hearts and ears,” WILLIAMS “ still heathen and uncircumcised in heart and ears,” AMPLIFIED “ heathen in your thinking , heathen in the way you are listening to me now!” PHILLIPS “ hardhearted people,” CEV and “ How heathen your hearts, how deaf you are to God's message!” GNB

To be uncircumcised in heart and ears is to be insensitive, with no conscience, and incapable of hearing. The picture is of a growth that restricts both the heart and the ears – a growth of flesh. This inner growth inhibits the truth from getting through the ear and into the heart. Sin has rendered the

person incapable of either hearing or responding to the Lord.

This is a picture of the unregenerate state, and of the necessity for the new birth. That is why Moses told the people their hearts had to be circumcised. “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut 10:16). Centuries later, Jeremiah again challenged the people to circumcise their hearts. “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings” (Jer 4:4). He declared, “all the house of Israel are uncircumcised of heart” (Jer 9:16). Jeremiah also traced the inability of the people to hear to their ear problem. “To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken : behold, the word of the LORD is unto them a reproach; they have no delight in it” (Jer 6:10).

Ezekiel twice referred to strangers who were “uncircumcised in heart” (Ezek 44:7,9). The only remedy for the situation, was for the Lord to circumcise their hearts, which Moses promised He would do in the future. “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6).

What an indictment to make after all of this had been said about the condition in which these people were found! Here were people who had received every advantage. It is said of them, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). How could any people receive more advantages in the flesh, or as men? Yet, to the very message that declared the fulfillment of the promises made to their fathers, their reaction was like the heathen – just as though they had never heard from God, never experienced His benefits, never had any promises, and were never given any prophet.

In Our Time

Much of the obstinance we see today – if not all of it – is directly traceable to this condition : uncircumcised hearts and ears. It is time for those who teach the people to call the condition what it is – like Stephen is doing in our text. It is not proper to allow those who are wise in the ways of the world, like psychologists and sociologists, to explain a condition that has already been defined by the living God.

RESISTING THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . ye do always resist the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “You always resist the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “are always resisting the Holy Spirit,” NASB “you are forever opposing the Holy Spirit,” NRSV “you are ever working against the Holy Spirit,” BBE “you continally oppose ,” CJB “ye do always set yourselves against the Holy Spirit,” MRD “Must you forever resist the Holy Spirit?” NLT “you have always resisted the Holy Ghost,” TNT “You are always against what the Holy Spirit is trying to tell you,” IE “you also are continually at strife with the Holy Spirit,” WEYMOUTH “you are always actively resisting the Holy Spirit,” AMPLIFIED “It is always the same - you never fail to resist the Holy Spirit!” PHILLIPS “You are always fighting against the Holy Spirit,” CEV “ and “You always fell against the Holy Spirit.” LITV

The word “resist” comes from a Greek word with the following lexical meaning. “To be adverse, oppose, strive against,” THAYER “rush against,” FRIBERG “fight against,” UBS and “to resist by actively opposing pressure of power,” LOUW-NIDA

In this case, the Holy Spirit is exerting influence upon Stephen’s hearers – convincing of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). Working through the words of Stephen, He was pricking

their conscience, and goading them within. But they threw up a wall of resistance, refusing to yield to His tender influences.

An indication of what is involved in resisting the Holy Spirit is seen in the depiction of the Spirit's activity prior to the flood. Of that time the Lord declared, "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man" (Gen 6:3). As Stephen uses the word "resist," the picture is not one of merely raising up a wall, and refusing to welcome the Holy Spirit. There is a note of hostility in the word, so that the one who bears the words being used by the Holy Spirit is actually attacked, either verbally or bodily. At this point, the attack of Stephen is in word, but it is picking up its intensity.

Notice how gentle Stephen started his discourse: "Men, brethren, and fathers" (Acts 7:2). He was mannerly and respectful, giving no cause in himself for the Word of God to be blasphemed. He carried out what Paul said to Timothy, "And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth" (2 Tim 2:24-25). However, those who are "in the flesh" cannot be appeased, and their anger cannot be assuaged. The more insightful words are spoken, the more the hostility increases, until it finally boils over in the harshest expressions.

By resisting the Holy Spirit these men confirmed they did not have a spiritual religion – for one cannot be spiritual while resisting the Holy Spirit.

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AS YOUR FATHERS DID

" . . . as your fathers did, so do ye." Other versions read, "you are doing just as your fathers did," NASB "You are just like your fathers," NIV "just as your ancestors used to do," NRSV "You do the same things your fathers did!" CJB "Your ancestors did this, and you are just like them!" IE and "Just as your fathers did so are you doing now ." PHILLIPS

There Is A Generation

There is the generation of the ungodly. John the Baptist called them a " generation of vipers" (Matt 3:7). Jesus called them the same (Matt 12:34; 23:33). God referred to "the generation of them that hate Me" (Ex 20:5). Asaph referred to " a stubborn and rebellion generation " (Psa 78:8). Jesus spoke of an "adulterous and sinful generation " (Mk 8:38). Solomon said, "There is a generation that curseth their father, and doth not bless their mother. There is a generation that are pure in their own eyes, and yet is not washed from their filthiness. There is a generation , O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation , whose teeth are as swords, and their jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men" (Prov 30:11-14). Such a generation is not always contiguous, but can spring up from time to time.

And what has been said about this generation – particularly the one Stephen identified as "your fathers" ? The sweet Psalmist of Israel testified, "How oft did they provoke Him in the wilderness, and grieve Him in the desert! Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel " (Psa 78:40-41). In Nehemiah's day, this is what was said of them: "Yet many years didst Thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by Thy Spirit in Thy prophets: yet would they not give ear : therefore gavest Thou them into the hand of the people of the lands" (Neh 9:30). Isaiah said this of them: "But they rebelled, and vexed His holy Spirit : therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them" (Isa 63:10).

Therefore, rather than choosing to identify with father Abraham through faith, they chose to link themselves with those who resisted the Holy Spirit of God. In them was confirmed the saying of Paul,

“For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom 9:6). Just so, all that are of the church, are not of the church.

THEY PERSECUTED AND KILLED THE PROPHETS, AND THE JUST ONE AS WELL

“ 52 Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers . . .”

Behold the change in the tone of Stephen’s words. He has now reached the point that Paul and Barnabas reached in the synagogue of Antioch Pisidia. After delivering a message much like Stephen is delivering to the Jewish council, it is written, “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46).

It is glaringly evident that this is the kind of circumstance Stephen now faces. Therefore, he will continue speaking with both candor and power, accelerating in his fervor and the charges that he levels against them.

PERSECUTING THE PROPHETS

“ Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? . . .” Other versions read, “ Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?” NIV “Which of the prophets was not cruelly attacked by your fathers ?” BBE “ Can you name a single prophet your ancestors never persecuted?” NJB “ Name one prophet your ancestors didn’t persecute!” LIVING and “Your ancestors persecuted every prophet who ever lived .” IE

Do not fail to notice who he identifies as their fathers. It was not Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! He connects them with their proper ancestors, even as Jesus did when speaking to those who opposed Him. Our Lord said – perhaps to some of the very people standing before Stephen – “ye are the children of them which killed the prophets”

Do not fail to notice who he identifies as their fathers. It was not Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! He connects them with their proper ancestors, even as Jesus did when speaking to those who opposed Him. Our Lord said – perhaps to some of the very people standing before Stephen – “ye are the children of them which killed the prophets” (Matt 23:31).

The prophets certainly received their share of persecution – and it came from their own people. Permit me to cite a few of them.

- Moses (Ex 17:4).
- David (Psa 31:13).
- Gideon (Judges 6:28-32).
- Elijah (1 Kgs 19:1-21).
- Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:26;27).
- Elisha (2 Kgs 6:31).
- Hanani (2 Chron 16:10).
- Jeremiah (Jer 15:10,15).

Jesus said the prophets were noted for being persecuted (Matt 5:12). And now Stephen says that generation of persecutors lives on. Such people may have been able to trace their lineage back to Abraham, but they were not of his lineage. They belonged to the generation that rejected Moses,

tempted God and persecuted the prophets. In this text, we are beholding how God reckons guilt, and it is a fearful thing to consider.

KILLING THE PROPHETS THAT SHOWED THEM

“ . . . and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One . . .” Other versions read, “And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One,” NKJV “And they killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One ,” “They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One ,” NIV “and they put to death those who gave them the news of the coming of the Upright One ,” BBE “and they killed them which showed before of the coming of the Righteous One,” ERV and “They killed those who predicted that a man with God's approval would come .” GWN

There are several prophets whose martyrdom is recorded. Here are some of them.

- The prophets during the time of Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4,13).
- Zechariah (2 Chron 24:21).
- Urijah (Jer 26:23).
- Jesus told the people their fathers killed the prophets (Lk 11:47; 13:34).
- Paul also referred to this, stating specifically that the prophets were slain by their own people, the Jews (1 Thess 2:15).
- There is also a well known Jewish tradition that says Isaiah is the prophet who was “sawn asunder” (Heb 11:37), having suffered martyrdom under Manasseh. As a point of interest, I provide the following. “Calmet, writing above a hundred years ago, says, ‘I am assured that the punishment of the saw is still in use among the Switzers, and that they put it in practice not many years ago upon one of their countrymen, guilty of a great crime, in the plain of Grenelles, near Paris. They put him into a kind of coffin, and sawed him lengthwise, beginning at the head, as a piece of wood is sawn; ‘Pict. Bib.’ It was not an unusual mode of punishment to cut a person asunder, and to suspend the different parts of the body to walls and towers, as a warning to the living; see 1Samuel 31:10, and Morier’s Second Journey to Persia, p. 96.” ALBERT BARNES

While the martyrdom of prophets who particularly chronicled the coming Messiah is not provided in detail, the Spirit does say that the foretelling of Christ was the heart and core of the message of the Prophets (Lk 24:25,27,44; John 1:45; Acts 3:18,24; 10:43; 26:22; 28:23; Rom 1:2; Eph 2:20; 1 Pet 1:10).

The link was so close between these people and the generation that slew the prophets, that Jesus said the blood of all of the holy prophets would be charged to the generation that was living then. “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute: that the blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias, which perished between the altar and the temple : verily I say unto you, It shall be required of this generation ” (Luke 11:49-51).

This is the manner of Divine reckoning. When people set themselves against God, and even opposes those who He sends, and to whom He has given insight and power, the credit for sins committed by such men as Cain, and even the Jews that stoned Stephen, will be credited against them. This is because they were animated by the same spirit, partaking of the same attitude and demeanor. Truly, “It is a fearful things to fall into he hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

YOU BETRAYED AND MURDERED THE JUST ONE

“ . . . of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers . . .” Other versions read, “whose betrayers and murderers you have now become,” NASB “And now you have betrayed and murdered Him,” NIV “whom you have now given up and put to death,” BBE “You have now become the people who betrayed and murdered that Man,” GWN “the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered,” LIVING “And now, you have turned against this righteous One and murdered Him,” IE and “now in our own day you have become betrayers and his murderers,” PHILLIPS

This very point has now been made in nearly every sermon preached thus far in the book of Acts.

• **PENTECOST.** “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:36).

How foolish it must sound before heavenly intelligences, and the cloud of surrounding witnesses, to hear men arguing about whether or not the Jews killed Jesus!

SOLOMON’S PORCH. “And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15).

• **PETER AND JOHN BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN.** “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).

• **PETER TO THE COUNCIL AND THE HIGH PRIEST.** “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30).

How foolish it must sound before heavenly intelligences, and the cloud of surrounding witnesses, to hear men arguing about whether or not the Jews killed Jesus!

The irony is that the hardness of these people occurred when the door of salvation had been opened, a highway raised up for travel to glory, and a time of Divine acceptance was available. They were living in the day of salvation and the acceptable year.

I do not know that it is possible to accurately describe the wickedness of a generation, living during the zenith of the Sun of righteousness, who insist on living for themselves, and rejecting those who herald the glad tidings of good things. What can be said of a generation that is lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God, yet choose to wear the name of Jesus, and claim identity with His church? This is a day that cries out for godly and bold men like Stephen – men who will not hold their peace!

THEY RECEIVED THE LAW BY THE DISPOSITION OF ANGELS, YET DID NOT KEEP IT

“ 53 Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”

Stephen further identifies the wicked generation of which those standing before him are members. He is speaking in the power of the Spirit, and he is saying the kind of words the Lord speaks to such people. In fact, before this is over, Jesus will stand up in recognition of this faithful man of God. I am sure that in a generation that has an appetite for trivia, and is noted for glossing the truth, there really is no place for men like Stephen.

RECEIVED THE LAW BY THE DISPOSITION OF ANGELS

“Who have received the law by the disposition of angels . . .” Other versions read, “You have received the Law by the direction of angels,” NKJV “as ordained by angels,” NASB “that was put

into effect through angels,” NIV “as delivered by angels ,” RSV “as it was ordered by angels ,” BBE “by the ordinance of angels ,” GENEVA “as transmitted by angels ,” NAB “by decrees given by angels ,” NET “by arrangement of messengers ,” YLT “received them by the hands of angels ,” LIVING “the commands God gave through angels ,” IE “as it was ordained and set in order and delivered by angels ,” AMPLIFIED and “miraculously, by the hand of angels .” PHILLIPS

The phrase “disposition of angels” means “by the ministration of angels.” That is, they delivered it and put it into effect. It was transmitted by them – carried from heaven to earth for the people. Elsewhere Paul refers to the Law as “the word spoken by angels ” (Heb 2:2). Moses said that God came from Sinai with ten thousands of saints, which we judge to have been angels. “And he said, The LORD came from Sinai , and rose up from Seir unto them; He shined forth from mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints : from His right hand went a fiery law for them” (Deut 33:2). The Psalmist pictured the giving of the Law as taking place at Sinai, with God among thousands and thousands of angels: “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai , in the holy place” (Psa 68:17). The Psalmist also alluded to Sinai in the eighteenth Psalm, and to the violent disruptions that took place there. In his description he wrote, “And He rode upon a cherub , and did fly: yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind” (Psa 18:10). Paul says of the Law, “it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal 3:19).

We have, then, the following Scriptural statements regarding the giving of the Law and angels.

- God came to Sinai with ten thousands of his saints, or angels.
- At Sinai God rode upon a cherub, or cherubim.

**No one had charged Stephen with not keeping the Law, or being a transgressor of the Law . . .
No moral infraction! No defilement of the Temple! No failure to keep the commandments**

At Sinai God was among twenty thousand, even thousands of angels.

- The Law was given by the disposition of angels.
- The Law was ordained by angels.
- The Law was spoken by angels.

All of this indicates that the voice the people heard when the Law was delivered was actually that of an angel, speaking for God. Because what was spoken was, in fact, the mind of the Lord, it is viewed as having been directly from Him – even though it was by means of a messenger. This perfectly accords with the manner through which John received the Revelation. It was given by God, yet when it was delivered to John, it came by means of an angel (Rev 1:1).

Something To Be Seen

Right here, the importance of sound doctrine can be seen. Once men perceive the remarkable clash of the Divine nature with the human nature, it will be easy to see why angels spoke the Law. Men could not have survived a direct confrontation with God. When men have a demeaning and common view of God, it tends to distort everything in Scripture, putting it out of their reach, so that it cannot be properly understood. That is why Jesus said to His critics, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:39-40). It is also why He said to the Sadducees, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matt 22:29). Their view of God Himself was skewed, and this tended to blind them to the truth of Scripture.

Stephen’s Point

The point being made is that this group of men had charged Stephen with speaking against the

Temple and against the Law (Acts 6:13). Yet, they were part of a generation that had received the Law by the hands of angels – not a man – and had not kept it. No one had charged Stephen with not keeping the Law, or being a transgressor of the Law. The best charge they could trump up against him was as follows: “This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:14). No moral infraction! No defilement of the Temple! No failure to keep the commandments! No! Just as Paul pointed out later, the righteousness of the Law was being fulfilled in Stephen, just as it is in all who believe (Rom 8:4).

But what could be said of his accusers, and of the generation to which they belonged? None of them had ever charged an angel with unfaithfulness. In all of their history, there had never been a person bold enough to say that an angel told a lie, or was not faithful in the message he delivered. There was a general consent throughout their history that angels were, in fact, greatly to be feared. Yet, even though angels had delivered the Law, yet they had not kept it, disregarding their words as though it was nothing more than the prattling of a man.

AND HAVE NOT KEPT IT

“ . . . and have not kept it.” Other versions read, “have not obeyed it .;” NIV “ do not keep it ,” CJB “haven’t obeyed those teachings ,” GWN “did not observe it ,” NAB “ deliberately disobeyed ,” NLT “deliberately destroyed ,” LIVING and “you are the men who have disobeyed it !” PHILLIPS

I am alarmed that so many versions of Scripture misrepresent this text. The expression “kept it” and “obeyed it” are not at all synonymous. The Greek word for “obeyed” is **u`phkou,sate** (hoop-ak-oo-sa-te), and means “to hearken to a command, to obey, be obedient unto, submit to.” THAYER The Greek word translated “kept” is **evfula,xate** (e-foo-la-ska-te), and means “to guard, watch, have an eye upon, to protect, and care for.” THAYER

So far as Scripture is concerned, keeping the Word precedes obeying it. Therefore Moses told the people to “keep his commandments, and obey His voice” (Deut 13:4). Again it is written, “ye shall keep My statutes, and do them” (Lev 20:8). Again we read, “that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them” (Deut 5:1). Again, and with even more specificity, it is written, “to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them,” or in order to do them (Deut 17:19).

When Stephen said they had received the Law by the disposition of angels and had not kept it, he meant precisely what the word means. They had not maintained that Law with care. Rather, they had mixed it with their own traditions, and diluted it with the doctrines of men. They had not done like David, who hid the Word in his heart, that he might not sin against God (Psa 119:11). It was not their meditation night and day. They did not live by every word of God. Unlike Jeremiah, What God said was not the “joy and rejoicing” of their hearts (Jer 15:16). That is precisely why they were disobedient.

We do well to learn from this text, as well as others, the extreme jeopardy of not maintaining a firm grasp on the word of the Lord. Our security in Jesus is directly proportionate to how we maintain a hold on the Word – particularly the Gospel. This is the very point that is being established in Hebrews 2:2; “For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him.”

Stephen was speaking to a people who were exposed to the Scriptures but did not have a heart-grasp of them. It was therefore easy for them to think in contradiction of the Law, all the while claiming to believe it.

A Similar Situation

I cannot help but observe that we are faced with a generation that is even inferior to the one to whom Stephen was speaking. We live in a time when, within the nominal church, the level of knowledge concerning the Word of God is appalling. This is in spite of the fact that we have a “more sure word of prophecy” – one that has been accomplished, declared, and expounded. Additionally, in the New Covenant, we have the administration of the Holy Spirit who strengthens, imparts, guides, and illuminates the Word in the hearts of God’s people. To be so ignorant in this day of salvation is a transgression of such magnitude, it causes my heart to tremble. There is no excuse for it, and God will not hold such a people guiltless.

CONCLUSION

The courage of Stephen is marvelous. Yet, we cannot stand in awe of it, or be moved to imagine that he was a kind of superman. His courage and insight were the products of his faith. Faith clarifies our vision and strengthens our heart, thereby producing a bold confidence. It also brings discernment, so that the person possessing faith comes to a point where he can distinguish between good and evil. He needs no list of rules to do so, but has a character that is repulsed by sin and drawn to righteousness. It seems to me that in our time, there is a crying need for people of great faith. Good and profitable leaders will come from such a pool of people, just as surely as Stephen surfaced from a group strong believers in his day.

As long as the professing church continues to attempt to produce spiritual leaders by means of academics and institutionalism, it will remain in an impoverished and emaciated state, for neither of those can produce what is required. Our churches must be the kind that bring people to faith, and then nourishes them in the faith, seeing to it that they grow up into Christ in all things. When this happens, men like Stephen will surface again, just as surely as he did in the early church, when the sense of truth was more acute and prevalent. May you be one of those who are noted for the love of the truth.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #34

THE STONING OF STEPHEN

“ 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. 55 But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God. 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58 And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. 60 And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:54-60)

INTRODUCTION

Having delivered an insightful summation of Israel's history, confirming they had always been obstinate, Stephen has forthrightly charged the Council with having the same spirit as their fathers. They belonged to a generation noted for its unbelief, yet who presented themselves as being righteous. This is the generation of Satan's seed, as Jesus said to certain of that day, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it” (John 8:44). As God said in the first prophecy of Scripture, “enmity” is prevalent between the “seed” of the woman, and the “seed” of the serpent (Gen 3:15). That enmity, or aggressive hostility is found between the “children of the wicked one” Matt 13:38), and those who are joined to Christ (1 Cor 6:17), as well as between Him and Satan.

Stephen has declared that their part in the generation of the wicked is confirmed by their uncircumcised hearts and ears. This also accounted for the fact that they were as he declared, continually resisting the Holy Spirit, stubbornly refusing to yield to His holy influences.

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- **STEPHEN'S LAST SUPPLICATION (7:60a)**
- **HE FELL ASLEEP (7:60b)**
- **CONCLUSION**

In his harsh denunciation Stephen is not speaking hastily or rashly. He was not a man “hasty in words,” whom Solomon said was a fool (Prov 29:20). He was a man whom James described as being “swift to hear, slow to speak,” and “slow to wrath” (James 1:19). Some, not having cultured their spirits with the word of the Lord, consider any words like those spoken by Stephen to be spoken swiftly and in sudden wrath. However, this is not at all the case. Stephen has been patient, holding back harsh words until the time was appropriate to speak them.

This is not an outburst of fleshly anger. Nor, indeed, is it driven by a kind of carnal disappointment. This is not only a discerning response to the hard-heartedness of the people before him, it is one that is being prompted and directed by the Holy Spirit. Here is an exhibit of “the mind of the Spirit” (Rom 8:27), as well as “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). It is an expression of “the mind of the Lord” (Rom 11:34), and is the result of Stephen’s fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9). It is a confirmation that He is partaking of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4. That is, he is experiencing and expressing oneness with the God of heaven, through Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit. Because of this, there can be no question about the absolute validity and appropriateness of his words.

WHAT STEPHEN HAS SAID

In order to confirm the hardness of the hearts of these people, a brief review of what Stephen has said will be in order. It should also be noted that all of his words were based solidly upon Scripture, and did not reflect a perspective that originated with him. His words are found in Acts 7:2-53.

- He addressed them as “Men, brethren, and fathers” (7:2a).
- He called upon them to “hearken,” listening carefully to what he said, and weighing it thoughtfully (7:2b).
- He reminded them that “the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham” (7:2c). The record of this appearance is found in Genesis 12:1. Nehemiah also referred to this record (Neh 9:7). Isaiah also referred to this as a calling (Isa 51:2).
- God appeared to Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Ur of the Chaldees (7:2d). The fact that God appeared to Abraham before he was in Ur of the Chaldees is confirmed in Genesis 11:31-12:1.
- God told Abraham to leave his country, and his kindred, and “come into the land” that He would show him (7:3). This record is found in Genesis 12:1.

This is not an outburst of fleshly anger. Nor, indeed, is it driven by a kind of carnal disappointment. This is not only a discerning response to the hard-heartedness of the people before him, it is one that is being prompted and directed by the Holy Spirit.

- Abraham did come out of the land of the Chaldeans, dwelling in Haran until his father Terah died. He then removed from Haran and headed for the land of promise (7:4). This record is found in Genesis 11:31-32 and 12:4.

- Stephen reminded the people that Abraham himself had no inheritance in Canaan, not so much as a place to put his foot (7:5a). This is confirmed by Abraham's testimony to the children of Heth, as recorded in Genesis 23:4).

- He also recalled that God told Abraham that He would give the land to him and his seed after him, even though at the time he had no child (7:5b). This is confirmed in Genesis 12:7; 13:15; 15:3,18; and 17:8.

- He reminded his audience that God had told Abraham his progeny would journey in a strange land, and that the people there would treat them evil for four hundred years (7:6). This is confirmed in Genesis 15:13,16, and Exodus 12:40-41, which recorded their deliverance.

- Stephen declared that God had promised Abraham He would judge the nation who oppressed his seed (7:7a). This is confirmed in Genesis 15:14 and Exodus 7:1-14:31.

- God also told Abraham He would deliver the people from the nation who oppressed them, and whom He would judge (7:7b). This is confirmed in Genesis 15:16; Exodus 12:36-14:31).

- God told Abraham the people would come forth to serve Him (7:7c). This was the revealed purpose of the deliverance as declared in Exodus 3:12.

- Stephen testified to the covenant of circumcision (7:8a). This is confirmed in Genesis 17:9-14).

- He reminded them that Isaac was circumcised on the eighth day (7:8b). This is confirmed in Genesis 17:12 and 21:1-4.

- Stephen also declared that Isaac begat Jacob, and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs (7:8c). This is confirmed in Genesis 25:21-26 and 29:31-35; 30:1-24; and 35:16,23-26.

- He rehearsed how the patriarchs were moved with envy, and sold Joseph into Egypt (7:9a). This is confirmed in Genesis 37:4-11.

- He then reminded them that God was with Joseph (7:9b). This is confirmed in Genesis 39:2,5, and 21-23).

- God delivered Joseph out of all his afflictions, and gave him favor in the eyes of Pharaoh (7:10a). This is confirmed in Genesis 41:12-46.

- Stephen testified that Joseph became the governor over all of Egypt (7:10b). This is confirmed in Genesis 41:6.

- He recalled how a dearth came over all of the land of Egypt and Canaan (7:11a). This is confirmed in Genesis 41:54-5; 43:1 and Psalm 105:16.

- During this time the Jewish fathers found no sustenance in their own land (7:11b). This is confirmed in 42:1-43:1 and Genesis 47:13

Stephen then pointed out that as the time of the promised deliverance drew near, the people began to multiply in Egypt (7:17). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:7-12,20, and Psalm 105:24-25.

He referred to the first time Jacob obtained corn from Egypt (7:12). This is confirmed in Genesis 42:1-24).

- He referred to the second time Jacob send the patriarchs to Egypt for food (7:13). This is confirmed in Genesis 43:2-3.

- Stephen recalled how Joseph made himself known to his brethren during the second time (7:13a). This is confirmed in Genesis 45:1-18.

- He told how Joseph's brethren were then made known to Pharaoh (7:13b). This is confirmed in Genesis 46:31-34 and 47:1-10.

- Stephen then related how Joseph called for Jacob and all his kindred to come to Egypt (7:14a). This is confirmed in Genesis 45:9-11 and Psalm 105:23.

- He mentioned that 75 souls were brought into Egypt (7:14b). This is confirmed in Genesis 46:26-27 and Deuteronomy 10:22. There only seventy souls are mentioned. Stephen's count includes the number of the sons of Ephraim and Manasseh, who were the sons born to Joseph in Egypt. They were the ones among whom the inheritance of Joseph was divided (Num 26:35; 27:1).

- Jacob went down into Egypt and died there (7:15a). This confirmed in Genesis 49:33).

- All of the twelve patriarchs also died in Egypt (7:15b). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:6.

- Jacob and his sons were buried in Shechem, on a piece of land that Abraham had bought (7:16a). This is confirmed in Genesis 49:29-32; Exodus 13:19; and Josh 24:32.

- He mentions that Abraham bought the parcel of land from the sons of Emmor, the father of Shechem (7:16b). This is confirmed in Genesis 23:16; 49:30; and 50:13.

- Stephen then pointed out that as the time of the promised deliverance drew near, the people began to multiply in Egypt (7:17). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:7-12,20, and Psalm 105:24-25.

- This growth continued until a king rose who did not know Joseph (7:18). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:18.

- This king dealt subtly with the Jews commanding that they not permit the male children to live (7:19). This is confirmed in Exodus 1:9-22 and Psalm 105:25.

- It was during this time of jeopardy that Moses was born, and found to be a most unusual child (7:20). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:2a.

- Moses was kept in his father's house, being nourished up for three months (7:20b). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:2b).

- When Moses was put outside of the house, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and raised him as her own son (7:21). The details of this are provided in Exodus 2:3-10.

- Stephen recalls that Moses was learned in all of the wisdom and ways of Egypt (7:22). This is a detail that is not provided in the Exodus record, but is concluded from the fact that Pharaoh's daughter raised him as her own son (Exodus 2:10).

- At forty years of age, Moses visited his brethren, during which time, he avenged one of his brethren that was being oppressed by an Egyptian. The whole matter was not understood by his brethren (7:23-25). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:11-12.

- Stephen recounts how Moses visited his brethren again the next day. Upon finding two of them fighting, he tried to make peace between them, only to be rejected (7:26-28). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:13-15.

- Moses then fled from Egypt because of that saying, and came into Midian, where he beget two sons (7:29). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:15-22 and 4:20; 18:3-4.

- After forty years had expired, God called Moses through an angel who spoke in a burning bush. When Moses saw the burning bush, he turned aside to consider it (7:30-31a).

The is confirmed in Exodus 3:1-3.

- The voice of the Lord then came to Moses, declaring all of the details of the coming deliverance that would be wrought by his hand (7:31b-34). This is confirmed in Exodus 3:4-4:19.

- Although Moses was sent by God, the people did not initially receive him (7:35a). This is confirmed in Exodus 2:14.

- God sent Moses to be a ruler and deliverer, providing an accompanying angel, even the one who had spoken to him in the bush (7:35b). This is confirmed in Exodus 14:19,24; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2, 12-15.

- Stephen reminds the people how God had brought the Israelites out of Egypt with all manner of signs and wonders, continuing to show them wonders throughout their forty years in the wilderness (7:36). This is confirmed in Exodus 12:41; 14:21-27; 33:1; Numbers 9:15-23; 11:1-35; 14:1-45; 16:1-17:13; Deuteronomy 4:33-37; 6:21,22; Nehemiah 9:10; Psalm 78:12-13; 105:27-36, etc.

- Stephen declared that Moses had foretold a coming Prophet, to whom the people would hearken (7:37). This is confirmed in Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

- It was through Moses that the law was given to Israel (7:38). This is confirmed in Exodus 19:3-17; 20:19-20.

- Stephen reminded the council how the people did not obey Moses, but turned back to Egypt in their hearts (7:39). This is confirmed in Exodus 14:11-12; 16:3; 17:3; Numbers 11:5; 14:3-4; 21:5; Psalm 106:16-,32,33; Nehemiah 9:16-17.

- He then told them of that shameful occasion when they made the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai (7:40-41). This is confirmed in Exodus 32:1-8, 17-20; Deuteronomy 9:12-18; Nehemiah 9:18; Psalm 106:19-21.

- God then gave them up to worship the host of heaven, giving them over to their own lusts (7:42). This is confirmed in Psalm 81:11-12 and Second Kings 17:16-17.

- Stephen declares how they took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and practiced idolatry (7:43). This is confirmed in Second Kings 17:16-18; 21:6; and Amos 5:25-27.

- God had given to them a visible testimony of His presence in the Tabernacle, which was made according to as revealed pattern (7:44). This is confirmed in Exodus 38:21; Numbers 1:50-53; Exodus 25:40; 26:30.

- The fathers brought the Tabernacle into the land of Canaan, and set it up (7:45a). This is confirmed in Joshua 18:1.

- Following the setting up of the Tabernacle, the land was subdued before the Israelites (7:45b). This is confirmed in Nehemiah 9:24; Psalm 44:2 and 78:55.

Now, it is important to note that holy men in the past have been driven to repentance when hearing of the sordid past of Israel. For some, it has been forgotten, but the reminder of the waywardness of their fathers had moved them to godly sorrow and repentance.

The Tabernacle remained for over four hundred years, until the time of David, who found favor with the Lord. He desired to build a house for the ark of the covenant (7:45c-46). This is confirmed in Second Samuel 7:1-5; First Kings 8:17-19; First Chronicles 17:1-4, etc.

- However, Solomon was the one commissioned to actually build the Temple that David conceived (7:47). This is confirmed in 2 Samuel 7:13; First Kings 5:1-18; Second Chronicles 2:1-4:22.

- Stephen finally affirmed that God does not dwell in temples made with hands,

seeing he has made the heaven and the earth and all things in them (7:49-50). This is confirmed in First Kings 8:27; Second Chronicles 2:5-6; and 6:18.

I have taken the time to briefly outline the message of Stephen in order to emphasize several things.

- First, he started by identifying them as “brethren” and “fathers.”
- Second, up to this point he has not upbraided the council.
- Third, he has said nothing that any informed Israelite did not know.
- Fourth, he has made no personal assessment of the Israelites in the past, but has confined his remarks to what Moses and the Prophets have said. Every remark has been buttressed with the Word of God.

Now, it is important to note that holy men in the past have been driven to repentance when hearing of the sordid past of Israel. For some, it has been forgotten, but the reminder of the waywardness of their fathers had moved them to godly sorrow and repentance. Here are some examples.

• **THE PSALMIST:** “We have sinned with our fathers, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedly. Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked Him at the sea, even at the Red sea” (Psa 106:6-7).

• **JOSIAH:** “Go ye, inquire of the LORD for me, and for the people, and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that is found: for great is the wrath of the LORD that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not hearkened unto the words of this book, to do according unto all that which is written concerning us” (2 Kgs 22:13).

• **HEZEKIAH:** “For our fathers have trespassed, and done that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD our God, and have forsaken Him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of the LORD, and turned their backs” (2 Chron 29:6).

He had further preached extensively in the synagogue, displaying a “wisdom and spirit” that those who disputed with him were not able to resist. There was no need to again deliver the message of Christ to these men. They had already received abundant testimony.

EZRA: “And said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens. Since the days of our fathers have we been in a great trespass unto this day; and for our iniquities have we, our kings, and our priests, been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, and to a spoil, and to confusion of face, as it is this day” (Ezra 9:6-7).

• **JEREMIAH:** “We lie down in our shame, and our confusion covereth us: for we have sinned against the LORD our God, we and our fathers, from our youth even unto this day, and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God” (Jer 3:25). “We acknowledge, O LORD, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers: for we have sinned against Thee” (Jer 14:20). “Our fathers have sinned, and are not; and we have borne their iniquities” (Lam 5:7).

• **DANIEL:** “O Lord, to us belongeth confusion of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against thee” (Dan 9:8).

STEPHEN’S REFERENCE TO CHRIST

Stephen’s solitary reference to Jesus Christ was this: “This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; Him shall ye hear” (Acts 7:37). That is it! Not one single word more. And why was this? Why did he not deliver more positive preaching about the Messiah?

The answer ought to be obvious. He had been arrested for preaching about Christ! Not only was he “full of faith and power,” he had done “great wonders and miracles among the people,” confirming that he was a man of God – just as Moses confirmed he was from God with various signs and wonders (6:8). He had further preached extensively in the synagogue, displaying a “wisdom and spirit” that those who disputed with him were not able to resist (6:9; 7:83). There was no need to again deliver the message of Christ to these men. They had already received abundant testimony.

- They had the Law, which was designed to prepare men for Christ (Gal 3:24-25).
- They knew of the promise God made to Abraham, which was sufficient to provoke hope, as it did in the progenitor of their nation (Gen 22:18).
- They had the Scriptures, which testified of Christ (John 5:39).
- They had been subjected to the preaching of John the Baptist, who specifically came to prepare the way of the Lord (Matt 3:3,7).
- They had been subjected to the ministry of the Christ Himself (Matt 16:1; 22:23).
- They had been directly subjected to the preaching of Peter and the Apostles (Acts 4:13-20).
- The chief priest and this very council had admitted that Jerusalem had been filled with the doctrine of Christ (Acts 5:27-29).

There was no excuse for the obstinance of these people, or for their pretentious request that Stephen defend himself. They knew very well what he had been preaching, for it had been done publicly, and even amidst much dispute.

Stephen had told them what the patriarch’s knew, and that was sufficient to have prepared them for the Christ, and draw them away from idolatry. That record was also sufficient to have induced earnest inquiry among the members of the council before whom Stephen stood.

STEPHEN’ WORDS WERE ENOUGH TO INDUCE REPENTANCE

I have given these examples to confirm that a recollection of the sins of the Israelites consistently moved those of honest and good hearts to a lamentation of the past, an association of that past with their present circumstances, and to repentance. The reports themselves moved sincere men to call upon the name of the Lord, and to revenge the disobedience that had cluttered their past.

The fact that this is not happening in the council being addressed by Stephen has verified they are still in the grips of sin, and that no repentance is found in them. They are nothing at all like the people who were moved to fear when they heard of Ananias and Sapphira being judged by God. It is in view of this circumstance that Stephen now speaks concerning the audience itself. There is no need to speak any longer about their past, and how such remarkable propensities to sin had been among them. Now, Stephen will force their iniquitous hearts to overflow. He will reflect the same intolerance for sin that Moses had when he came down the mount, and which Jesus had when He cleansed the Temple.

THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART

“ 7:54 When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.”

Here we will be subjected to the wickedness of the flesh, the sinful nature. Not only does it lash out against the Law of God, it also stubbornly rejects the promises of God and the Gospel of Christ. The more spiritual information that is heaped upon the flesh, the more hostile it becomes. The more the truth in any of its many facets is presented to it, the more it aggravates the whole situation. That

is the nature of the carnal mind – “it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). It is not possible to educate “the natural man” into a state of submission to God, for he “receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). He cannot be trained, schooled, or cultured in the things of God. No amount of patience and longsuffering will knock the edge off of his hostility. Reducing the things of God to childish babble will not help the situation of the person denominated a “natural man,” or who is ruled by “the carnal mind.”

If we entertain any doubts about this, the text before us will confirm this is the case. There is no way to account for the response of this council other than the fact that they were at enmity with God – and God has been the subject of Stephen’s words. He has mentioned “God” not less than seventeen times in thirteen verses (7:2,6,7,9,17,25,32,35,37, 42,43,45,46). He mentioned “the Lord” five times (7:30,31,33,37,49). The word he has delivered concerned what God had said and done, and what He had promised and delivered. He has not yet referred to anything that the council has done. In fact, he has not referred to them personally a single time. Yet they will respond just as though he has spoken about them personally.

THEY WERE CUT TO THE HEART

The meaning is that the words of Stephen were like a saw, moving back and forth through the hearts of his audience, ripping them open so their inward thoughts would be exposed. The religious mantel they had thrown over themselves in a kind of feigned dignity would be exposed as nothing more than empty appearance.

“When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, . . .” Other versions read, “they were cut to the quick,” NASB “they were furious,” NIV “they became enraged,” NRSV “they were moved with wrath,” BBE “they were enraged in their hearts,” CSB “their hearts burst with anger,” GENEVA “they became noticeably furious,” GWN “they were filled with rage in their souls,” MRD “they were infuriated,” NLT “their hearts clave asunder,” PNT “the Jewish leaders were stung with fury,” LIVING “they became very angry,” IE “they became more and more furious,” ISV “these words stung them with fury,” PHILLIPS and “they were cut through to their hearts.” ALT

The word “cut” is translated from an unusually strong word. It is a spiritual way of referring to a conviction that incenses instead of producing godly sorrow. Taken from the Greek word **diepri,onto** (dee-ep-rion-to), this word has the following lexical meaning: “to saw asunder, or in twain, to divide by a saw, to be sawn through mentally,” THAYER “to divide with a saw, hence cut to the quick, infuriate,” FRIBERG and “to saw quite through.” LIDDELL-SCOTT Robertson says of this word, “Here Stephen had sent a saw through the hearts of the Pharisees that rasped them to the bone.”

WORD STUDIES

The meaning is that the words of Stephen were like a saw, moving back and forth through the hearts of his audience, ripping them open so their inward thoughts would be exposed. The religious mantel they had thrown over themselves in a kind of feigned dignity would be exposed as nothing more than empty appearance. Their religion did not expose who they really were, but was more the mask of an actor, who pretends to be someone else.

Although I have alluded to this before, it is appropriate that I do so again. It is God’s manner to expose the hypocrisy of those who feign an association with Him. As it is written, “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken ” (Isa 28:13).

This also is fulfilled in the words God told Isaiah to speak to a hard-hearted people: “And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not.

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes ; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed” (Isa 6:9-10).

This is also what is involved in Jesus being a Stumblingstone. “And He shall be for a Sanctuary; but for a Stone of stumbling and for a Rock of offence to both the houses of Israel, for a Gin and for a Snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (Isa 8:14; 1 Pet 2:8).

Sound preaching produces effects in both the save and the lost – appropriate effects. Paul stated this in an usually strong manner in Second Corinthians 2:15-17. In this text he also confirms the seriousness of seeking to avoid this manner.

Now, observe the sharp contradiction that exists between this revealed manner of God and that of the modern church. Today we are faced with vast numbers of professing Christians who have little or no appetite for the things of God. In substance, they differ nothing from the audience to whom Stephen is preaching. And what course of action are the church leaders taking? They actually reduce the people’s exposure to the Word of God. They shorten their church gatherings. They invent all manner of novel activities. They reduce the frequency of the gatherings. They engage in activities that do not require a proclamation of the truth of the Gospel. They create other ministries that have to do with problem resolution or some form of entertainment.

In all of this, they are totally unlike Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus, the Apostles, and Stephen. They have created a compromising form of religion that cannot possibly be a stumbling stone. It cannot unveil what is really in the hearts of the people. It brings no honor to Jesus, and opens the door for the subtle working of the evil one.

These modern-day methods and techniques would never have produced the results Stephen’s words had on the council. Modern leadership-gurus would probably have made friends of the council, and heralded them as noble people who simply lacked an understanding of the deeper things. They would have chosen a course that would have lessened the opposition of wicked men, who are “destitute of the truth” (1 Tim 6:5). It is not possible to adequately state the reprehensible nature of this kind of approach. It not only reveals a state of spiritual ignorance, but also one that is at sharp variance with “the mind of the Lord.” It confirms the individual is not operating in accordance with the Divine agenda. That is the reason for the variant approach. I will further affirm that it is not possible for the blessing of God to be upon a method or technique that is at variance with his nature.

However, confirming that he had no part with such an approach, Stephen has spoken as the Spirit has directed him, and not as the carnal mind would have preferred.

In Them that are Saved, and In Them that are Perishing

Sound preaching produces effects in both the save and the lost – appropriate effects. Paul stated this in an usually strong manner in Second Corinthians 2:15-17. In this text he also confirms the seriousness of seeking to avoid this manner. “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” NKJV This is precisely what Stephen has done, and it has brought out the perishing state of the men before him. He has sawn through their hearts with the their own Scriptures.

THEY GNASHED ON HIM

“ . . . and they gnashed on him with their teeth.” Other versions read, “gnashed at him with their teeth,” NKJV “began gnashing their teeth at him,” NASB “ground their teeth at him,” NRSV

“ ground their teeth against him,” RSV “ shook their fists at him in rage,” NLT and “ground their teeth in rage .” LIVING

The language is most vivid, and takes hold of our attention. What does “gnashing” mean? Lexically, the word means “to grind,” THAYER “making sounds by striking the teeth together . . . grate, grind,” FRIBERG This is an extreme expression of anger that seems to be involuntary when either rage or pain dominates a person, and they are under the control of emotion, as opposed to the their rational capacities.

Many people have experienced extreme frustration of some sort that has caused them grit their teeth with all of their strength – almost to the point of breaking their teeth. There is even a medical disorder called bruxism in which people clench and grind their teeth in their sleep, often causing jaw disorders, headaches, and damaged teeth. MAYO CLINIC

However, in this text the grinding or gnashing of the teeth is a conscious response to a circumstance. Stephen has sawn through the hearts of the council, and in doing so has exposed what was in their hearts. Remember his charge?

- They were stiff-necked.
- They were uncircumcised in heart and ears.
- They always resisted the Holy Spirit, just as their fathers did.
- They were the betrayers and murderers of Jesus.

Until this point, Stephen had not said a solitary word about them personally. However, it had become apparent that they were thrusting his words from them – even though they were a precise rehearsal of Jewish history from the Scriptures. Their rejection of this word, and their refusal to associate it with themselves, made it necessary for Stephen to expose their gross hypocrisy.

This exposure was something with which their rationality could not contend. The uncovering has thrown them into a irrational rage. Now, under the total control of the wicked one, there is no extent to which they will not go to rid themselves of this preacher.

At this point, they speak no words. Their minds are no longer capable of either processing or expressing thought. Now the flesh, with all of its dreadful propensities was operating beyond any boundary of moral restraint. There was now little difference between this council and the wild man of Gadera.

Keep in mind that this condition has not been brought on by severe pain. It is rather the result of hearing a spiritual assessment of their condition. They could have received this assessment and repented – as those on the day of Pentecost and in Solomon’s porch. However, they resisted the word instead.

While those who preach and teach must take care to “not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves,” there is a boundary to that manner. Such conduct is in hopes that God will “give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth, and that they may recover themselves from the snare of the devil” (2 Tim 2:24-25). When, however, it is evident that the people continue to thrust the word from themselves, there comes a time when they must be exposed for what they really are. Jesus did this with the Scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:13-33). Paul and Barnabas did this in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisida (Acts 13:46). Paul also did this in the synagogue of Corinth when he first went there (Acts 18:6).

Paul also instructed Timothy not to receive an accusation against an elder, except on the basis of two or three witnesses. However, should the charge against an elder be substantiated, he told the

young evangelist, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim 5:20).

The point to be seen here is that the wicked are thoroughly exposed by godly assessment and denunciation. Yet the servant of God must not shun to upbraid those who stubbornly continue in unbelief. We have godly Stephen as an example of this, as well as Jesus Himself and those He commissioned to preach.

BEING FULL OF THE SPIRIT

“ 55a But he, being full of the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “being full of the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “filled with the Holy Spirit,” NRSV “full of faith and of the Holy Spirit,” MRD “full of the Holy Spirit and controlled by Him,” AMPLIFIED and “filled through all his being with the Holy Spirit.” PHILLIPS

“BUT”

The word “but” is significant. It comes from the small Greek word **de**. (deh) which means “but, or moreover, and is used universally, by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement,” THAYER “used to emphasize contrast.” FRIBERG

Here Stephen is contrasted with the council – one man with a whole body of men. They are all in the same place at the same time. Their minds have been directed to the same subject – the rehearsal of the inspired history of the Jewish people. Yet, their responses are as different as day from night. Here we have a child of God and the children of the wicked one in juxtaposition, or opposite of one another. They have two different natures, so we should expect them to react differently to the unvarnished truth. In this case, the saying of Paul is fulfilled: “But all things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light” (Eph 5:13).

The light has illuminated the condition of both parties – Stephen, and the council. Jesus said this would be the effect of light, particularly as shining forth from His own person. “But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:21).

BEING FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The text does not say that at this time Stephen was filled with the Spirit, but that this was His condition – “being full.” There two words, “being full,” are a translation of two individual Greek words (**Upa,rcwn** – being, and **plh,rhj** – full, and **pneu,matoj** – Spirit). The word translated “being” has the following lexical meaning: “to be there, ready, at hand,” THAYER “exist, be present, be at hand,” FRIBERG “be at one’s disposal,” UBS “to be in a state,” LOUW-NIDA and “really exist, be present.” GINGRICH

Therefore, this text is not saying that as they began to gnash their teeth upon Stephen, he was suddenly filled with the Spirit, or experienced the Spirit coming upon him. This is an example of a state into which all believers are called: “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). That is, this is not a mere experience, as some allege, but is a condition or state of being.

Full of the Spirit

And, what does it mean to be “full of the Spirit”? Technically it means to be filled up, with no room for anything else. It involves being “controlled by the Spirit,” and is so translated in the Amplified Bible. In representing a passage in Romans 8:6-8 that concerns being “spiritual minded,” the New International version uses the word “controlled” twice: “The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:6), and “Those controlled by the sinful nature

cannot please God. You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (Rom 8:8-9).

Men may choose to philosophize about the matter of being “controlled” by an influence outside of themselves. However, all such reasoning is nothing more than an exercise in vanity. It is written that there are people who are taken captive by Satan “at his will” (2 Tim 2:26). Jesus also told His disciples that there would be times that their speaking would actually be directed by the Holy Spirit: “For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you” (Matt 10:20).

There is also a condition that has been revealed as the Divine objective for the body of Christ: “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). This is associated with salvation itself, and not with a particular office like that of an apostle or prophet. The ultimate objective of the salvation of God is to conform those who are justified to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). That involves the transformation of the body, which is described the “purchased possession” (Eph 1:14). However, it is not limited to that “change,” which will take place at the appearing of Christ (Phil 3:20-21).

While we await the time when we will put on immortality, our spirits are being cultured to be compatible with the bodily “house” that is reserved for us in heaven (2 Cor 5:1-5). This transformation is fundamentally within our basic nature, which, in turn, brings about a change in our conduct. It therefore includes our heart, which is the seat of our affections, and the fountain from which all of our expression flows.

Our perception is also being refined, as well as our purpose for living, and our capacity for expression. This all occurs when the individual is “filled with the Spirit,” or “filled with all the fulness of God.” It is in this condition that one is said to be walking “in the Spirit” (Gal 5:16,25). This is the state in which “the deeds of the body” are “mortified” (Rom 8:13), and the individual has a mind that is “controlled by the Spirit” NIV (Rom 8:6).

All of this is done without any element of coercion. It is not necessary for the Holy Spirit to subdue men, or throw them down to the ground in order for this to be accomplished. Salvation makes men malleable in the hand of the Lord, and fillable, if I may coin a word.

Therefore, when Stephen is said to be “full of the Spirit,” a state is being described in which his mind – thoughts, affections, and expressions – are being controlled by the Spirit. This is not “control” in the sense of coercive domination. The Spirit is not acting as a conqueror of the human will, but as the Director and Leader of the one who has chosen to follow Jesus. Strictly speaking, although it is outside the realm of nature, being filled with the Spirit is not a miracle. It is rather the manner of the Kingdom in which one is consciously and cognitively walking in heavenly places. There is a keen awareness of what is going on, a glad participation in it, and the ability to correlate it with truth.

These days, a lot of what is represented as being “filled with the Spirit” is a kind of subduing of the recalcitrant will and ways of the people. It is something like God putting a halter on the people and making them do what they would not otherwise consent to do. But this is not at all the manner of the Kingdom. In Christ, as prophesied by the Psalmist, the people are “willing in the day of His power” (Psa 110:3). They are willing because of preference, not force. The laws of God has been put into their minds and written upon their hearts (Heb 10:16), and their fundamental inclination is to the Lord. That is the nature of regeneration. A person who has to be forced like Balaam to do the will of God has not been regenerated – or has departed from the living God through unbelief. That is a sign of unregeneracy.

HE SAW THE GLORY OF GOD

“ 55b . . . looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.”

Stephen had been addressing the council and was therefore looking at them. Now, however, having finished the word he was given to say to them, he fixes his gaze upward – he “looked up.” The posture of looking up was also assumed by the Lord Jesus, confirming His constant awareness of the heavenly realm and the Father’s residence there. When He blessed the five loaves and two fishes, He “looked up to heaven” (Mk 6:41). When He healed a deaf man with an impediment of speech it is said of him, “and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and saith unto him, Ephphatha, that is, ‘Be opened’” (Mk 7:34). On the night in which He was betrayed, when He poured out His soul in a powerful intercessory prayer, it is written, “ These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven” (John 17:1).

And what is the significance of this? It is simply this, Jesus and those who walk with Him are more conscious of heaven than of earth! Those who are walking in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 John 1:7) are keenly aware that “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26), and therefore they are not subject to happenstance. They resort to the Lord in their time of trouble – often even in their physical posture. They bring their bodies into subjection, governing them with a mind to the Kingdom of God rather than the circumstances of life.

HE LOOKED UP STEADFASTLY

“ . . . looked up steadfastly into heaven . . .” Other versions read, “ gazed into heaven,” NKJV “ gazed intently into heaven,” NASB “looked up to heaven,” NIV

The fact that Stephen looked into heaven accents the expectant nature of faith. He did not look with a questioning stare, but with a confident gaze. He was, in a very practical sense, being “saved by hope.” I can tell you that at this time, Stephen is not thinking about possessions, or houses, or lands. He is not pondering treasures laid up upon the earth, or a career, or his status within the church.

“having fixed his eyes on heaven,” DARBY “looked towards heaven,” MRD “ looked up intently to heaven,” NAB “gazed steadily upward into heaven,” LIVING “looked straight into heaven,” ISV “he looked right into heaven,” WILLIAMS and “ looked steadily up into Heaven.” PHILLIPS

His heart was “fixed,” and his eyes were riveted on the heavenly realm. The eagle eye of his faith pierced through the the domain of nature, reaching into the unseen realms. Like Moses, he was seeing Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27). He had a concentrated and extended gaze, focusing on the domain to which he was about to be carried by angelic hosts.

The fact that Stephen looked into heaven accents the expectant nature of faith. He did not look with a questioning stare, but with a confident gaze. He was, in a very practical sense, being “saved by hope.” I can tell you that at this time, Stephen is not thinking about possessions, or houses, or lands. He is not pondering treasures laid up upon the earth, or a career, or his status within the church. There comes a time when all such things are removed from the mind, and blessed is the person who prepares for it!

Here Stephen lives out in a visible manner that was happening in his heart. He was “looking unto Jesus,” and doing so at the completion of his race. He was able to do this because he had run the race in this posture, and therefore for him it was, so to speak, natural to gaze even more intently at this time. This is, after all, one of the great benefits of living by faith. This enables the individual to also die by faith, as he fights the last and greatest battle of life. The gaze that enabled Stephen to overcome in life, will also cause him to conquer in death.

Here Stephen fulfills a wonderful word delivered by Solomon: “The name of the LORD is a strong

tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe” (Prov 18:10). Stephen is running into the tower, and will thus find safety during his closing hours. Oh, the stones will still pummel his body, finally crushing the life from it. However, I do not doubt that he was given such grace as made him superior to pain, if not altogether oblivious of it. There is great power in heavenly distraction from this world.

HE SAW THE GLORY

“ . . . and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God.” Other versions read, “He saw God’s glory, with Jesus standing at the right hand of God,” CSB “saw God’s glory, and Jesus in the position of authority that God gives,” GWN “saw the glory (the splendor and majesty) of God, and Jesus standing at God’s right hand,” AMPLIFIED and “he saw our glorious God and Jesus standing at his right side.” CEV

From these, and other texts, it is apparent that the glory of God is a central consideration. It therefore behooves us to obtain some intelligent concept of what it is.

What a marvelous statement! After leaving Egypt, Israel saw “the glory of the Lord” as it appeared in a cloud (Ex 16:10). They also saw “the glory of the Lord . . . like a devouring fire on the top of the mount” (Ex 24:17). When the Temple was dedicated, Israel saw “the glory of God” (2 Chron 7:3). Three different times Ezekiel said he “saw . . . the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God” (Ezek 1:28; 3:23; 9:4). Isaiah saw “the glory” of the Lord (Isa 6:1-3; John 12:41).

What Is The Glory of God?

The phrase “the glory of God” occurs fourteen times in Scripture (Psa 19:1; Prov 25:2; John 11:4,40; Acts 7:55; Rom 3:23; 5:2; 15:7; 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 1:20; 2 Cor 4:6,15; Phil 2:11; Rev 15:8; 21:11,23). Referring to the Lord, “His glory” is mentioned thirty-four times (i.g. Deut 5:24; 1 Chron 16:24; Psa 78:61; Isa 60:2; Hab 3:3; Heb 1:3). There are several intriguing phrases used in connection with the glory of God. They provide a sense of its marvelous scope.

- “ . . . everyone shall speak of His glory” (Psa 29:9).
- “ . . . the eyes of His glory” (Isa 3:6).
- “ . . . the throne of His glory” (Matt 19:28).
- “ . . . the riches of His glory” (Rom 9:23; Eph 3:16).
- “ . . . the praise of His glory” (Eph 1:12,14).
- “ . . . the brightness of His glory” (Heb 1:3).
- “ . . . the presence of His glory” (Jude 1:24).

From these, and other texts, it is apparent that the glory of God is a central consideration. It therefore behooves us to obtain some intelligent concept of what it is.

There is no Scriptural definition of the glory of God – like there is of faith (Heb 11:1), hope (Rom 8:24-25), love (1 Cor 13), and God’s longsuffering (2 Pet 3:15). Most of the references to the glory of God have to do with manifestations or expressions of the Lord – something that could be seen, either by faith or, as at Sinai, a visible appearance of His glory.

These references indicate something of what is meant by the glory of God. His glory is what can be seen or discerned of Him – and that is always something that He Himself makes known, for the characteristics of God’s Person cannot be seen with the naked eye. Thus God’s glory has been made seen in a cloud (Ex 16:10), fire (Ex 24:17), and visions (Ezek 8:4), etc.

However the most precise and thorough manifestation of the glory of God is found in Jesus Christ,

His only begotten Son. This is experienced in regeneration, and the spiritual growth that results from it. As it is written, “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ ” (2 Cor 4:6). This glory has transforming power, changing the spirit of man like the visible glory of God changed the skin of Moses face, causing it to glow as the sun (Ex 34:29-30). Therefore it is written, “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

The glory of God is what He is pleased to reveal about Himself. At its apex, this glory has to do with salvation, which is nothing less than the execution of the eternal purpose of God. Therefore, when Stephen saw the glory of God, it is most appropriate that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God – the place reserved for carrying the salvation of God to its completion.

By its very nature, the glory of God involves His expression of Himself, whether in the confirmation of His presence, words that make His mind known, or works that reveal some aspect of His Person or purpose. In regard to what Stephen saw, the glory of God consisted of a revelation of what is taking place in heaven regarding the salvation of men. For Stephen, this will prove to be a confirming sight, and will assist in preparing Him for his departure – kind of departure that requires much grace.

STEPHEN REPORTS WHAT HE SEES

“ 56 And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”

As anyone who has knowingly been exposed to the glory of God , Stephen will tell us what he saw. For those of tender heart, this is standard procedure. Isaiah “saw the Lord” in the year that king Uzziah died – and he testified about it (Isa 6:1). Ezekiel “saw visions of God,” and he told about it (Ezek 1:1-28; 3:23-24; 8:4-18; 10:15–22). This has been a consistent practice of holy men. When they saw or heard from God, they related the occasion to the people. Moses did this, together with all of the prophets. The pinnacle of this manner is found in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Savior said that He spoke what He had heard from the Father (John 8:26,40; 15:15). He declared that the works He was showing were “from” His Father (John 10:32). In fact, He referred to His works as “the works of My Father” (John 10:37). He told His disciples that both His words and His works were directly related to the Father (John 14:10).

This is a Kingdom manner that is sorely needed in our day – speaking that have been “seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). There is far too much second-hand religion in our day. Many who come in the name of the Lord rarely make known something that they have seen, perceived, or comprehended of the Kingdom of God. This is why there are so many professed experts in family life, raising children, governing finances, starting churches, and other interpersonal human relationships. You will search the Scriptures in vain to find ministries of this sort. They are all of human origin.

I SEE THE HEAVENS OPENED

“And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened . . .” Other versions read, “I see heaven open,” NIV “Look , I see the heavens opened,” LIVING “I can see Heaven wide open ,” WEYMOUTH and ““Look!” he exclaimed, " the heavens are opened .” PHILLIPS

Prior to Christ, the only person who ever said he saw the heavens opened was Ezekiel: “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God ” (Ezek 1:1). The only other reference to either heaven or the heavens being perceived as being opened pertains to God sending rain (Gen 7:11; Psa 78:23; Isa 24:18. NIV Through Malachi, God told the

people if they would bring all of the tithes into the storehouse he would “open” the “windows of heaven” to them, and pour out a blessing “that there would not be room enough to receive it” (Mal 3:10).

Aside from these references, there are no other texts that directly say that heaven, or the heavens, were seen as open. Isaiah said he saw “the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (Isa 6:1). Micaiah the prophet said, “I saw the Lord sitting on His throne” (1 Kgs 22:19). Amos said, “I saw the Lord standing upon the altar” (Amos 9:1).

The heavens being opened is the direct result of Jesus taking away the sins of the world. That is precisely why, when he died, “the veil of the Temple was rent in twain,” signifying that “the way into the holiest” had been opened for the

But with the advent of Jesus, we are given to understand that the heavens have been opened in a new and fresh way! When Jesus was baptized “the heavens opened” (Mk 1:10). When He first met Nathanael, Jesus told him, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (John 1:51). In our text, Stephen said he saw “the heavens opened” (Acts 7:56). When Peter was on the rooftop of Simon the tanner’s house, he “saw heaven opened” (Acts 10:11). When John received the Revelation on the Isle of Patmos, he “looked, and behold, a door was opened in heaven” (Rev 4:1). He also “saw heaven opened” (Rev 19:11).

The heavens being opened is the direct result of Jesus taking away the sins of the world. That is precisely why, when he died, “the veil of the Temple was rent in twain” (Matt 27:51), signifying that “the way into the holiest” had been opened for the sons of men to come to God (Heb 9:8).

Heaven has been “opened” because a reconciliation between God and man has been accomplished by Jesus Christ (Col 1:21). He had “made peace through the blood of His cross” (Col 1:20), and now men can draw near to God “with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22). Now Jesus has consecrated “a new and living way,” by which we can come to God (Heb 10:20). Men are no longer held aloof from God, as they were under the Old Covenant. Now, through Jesus, they have “access” to God “with confidence” (Eph 3:12).

This is why Stephen could see the heavens opened – because a reconciliation had been effected by Christ, and he by faith had appropriated it. Now, as his life was being pounded out of his body, he is afforded a glimpse of the land toward which he was about to embark.

THE SON OF MAN STANDING

“ . . . and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.” Other versions read, “and the Son of man at the right hand of God,” BBE “the Son of Man in the position of authority that God has given him!” GWN “ and “and I can see the Son of Man standing at God's right hand!” PHILLIPS

Every other reference to Jesus’ posture in the heavens say He is seated.

- “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool” (Psa 110:1; Mk 12:35; Heb 1:13).
- “So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mark 16:19).
- “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3).

- “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” (Heb 10:12).

Stephen had this vision before they cast him out of the city. Having made his pronouncement of the depravity of this council, it is as though Jesus rose to give honor to Stephen, and to tell him it was now time for him to enter into the rest that remains for the people of God (Heb 4:9).

How did Stephen know it was Jesus, and not an angel, or cherubim, or seraphim? It is because Jesus cannot be seen as He is without instantly knowing Who He is! When He returns in all of His glory, and “every eye” sees Him, there will be no questions about who He is! God only has to “show” Him, as He has determined to do, and He will be at once recognized.

How did Stephen know it was Jesus, and not an angel, or cherubim, or seraphim? It is because Jesus cannot be seen as He is without instantly knowing Who He is! When He returns in all of His glory, and “every eye” sees Him (Rev 1:7), there will be no questions about who He is! God only has to “show” Him, as He has determined to do (1 Tim 6:15), and He will be at once recognized. For the damned, the horror and pain of that moment defies all description. They will at once see how foolish it was to neglect “the Man Christ Jesus,” choosing their own worldly interests over the Lord of glory.

But this is not how Stephen sees the glorified Christ! He does not shrink back in horror at the sight of the standing Jesus, as though he was going to be judged! Instead, this is his time of triumph!

A Word About Preaching Jesus

This is why pure Gospel preaching is so essential – preaching that clarifies the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is done throughout the Epistles, which contain the exposition of the Gospel. In fact, we would know very little about the nature and content of the Gospel if it was not for the Epistles – what was written to the body of Christ, which is the church. Ponder some of the aspects of the Gospel that are opened up in what the Spirit says to the churches.

- Christ is the end of the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).
- The Gospel declares that God is just in justifying those who believe in Jesus (Rom 3:26).
- Jesus was delivered for our offences, and raised for our justification (Rom 4:25).
- When we were enemies, we were reconciled by the death of God’s Son (Rom 5:9).
- By the obedience of Jesus, many are made righteous (Rom 5:19).
- The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus frees us from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2).
- God delivered Jesus up, and will much more freely give us all things through him (Rom 8:32).
- Jesus gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
- We have been made accepted in the Beloved (Eph 1:6).
- In Christ Jesus we are made nigh unto God through His blood (Eph 2:13).
- Through Christ’s death believers will be presented holy and unblameable and unprovable in His sight (Col 1:21).
- In His death Jesus spoiled principalities and powers (Col 2:15).
- Jesus died that we might live together with Him (1 Thess 5:10).
- Jesus gave Himself to redeem to Himself peculiar people, zealous of good works

(Tit 2:14).

- Through His death Jesus destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
- Jesus was raised from the dead in order that our faith and hope might be in God (1 Pet 1:21).
- Jesus suffered once for our sins in order that He might bring us to God (1 Pet 3:18).
- Jesus was manifested that He might destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).

These are just a few examples of the Gospel found in the Epistles. Those who affirm that the Gospel is only preached to those outside of Christ could not possibly be more wrong. The vast majority of what we know about Jesus has been addressed exclusively to the church. No person can afford to be ignorant of this fact.

When Jesus is seen as He really is, it brings enabling power to the discerning soul. This is precisely why Stephen was able to conduct himself as he did. He knew the Christ of the Gospel, otherwise he never would have been given to see Him standing at God's right hand. In my judgment, much of the modern church has been robbed of this blessed benefit – knowing Christ. The impact this has had upon Christendom as a whole, is so significant that it cannot even be estimated.

THEIR VOICE, THEIR EARS, AND THE ACTION

“ 57 Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord,” Other versions read, “But they cried out with a loud voice, and covered their ears , and they rushed upon him with one impulse ,” NKJV “At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices , they all rushed at him,” NIV “But they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him,” NRSV “But with loud cries, and stopping their ears, they made an attack on him all together,” BBE “At this, they began yelling at the top of their voices, so that they wouldn't have to hear him ; and with one accord, they rushed at him,” CJB “then they screamed at the top of their voices, stopped their ears, and rushed together against him,” CSB “But the council members shouted and refused to listen . Then they rushed at Stephen with one purpose in mind .” GWN “All the members of the council shouted out and stopped their ears with their hands; then they made a concerted rush at him ,” NJB “Then they mobbed him , putting their hands over their ears, and drowning out his voice with their shouts ,” LIVING “Upon this, with a loud outcry they stopped their ears, rushed upon Stephen in a body ,” WEYMOUTH “But they raised a loud shout, held their ears shut , and together they all rushed at him,” ISV “But they raised a great shout and put their hands over their ears and rushed together upon him,” AMPLIFIED and “At this they put their fingers in their ears . Yelling with fury, as one man they made a rush at him,” PHILLIPS

Do you wonder what unbelief can do to the hearts of men? Wherever the Word of God is not preached with discernment, no one will ever know what is in the hearts of men! It is the truth that exposes men for what they really are – whether they have honest and good hearts, or whether they have wicked hearts.

Paul was alluding to this when he spoke of the reputation he and his colleagues had gained through their preaching. “But IN all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honour and dishonour , by evil report and good report: as deceivers , and yet true; as unknown , and yet well known; as dying , and, behold, we live; as chastened , and not killed; as sorrowful , yet always rejoicing; as poor , yet making many rich; as having nothing , and yet possessing all things” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

It is in the crucible of conflict that the real ministers of God are approved. There is where both life

and death are made known – particularly when the conflict has been uncovered by the Word of God. The preaching of Stephen has drawn a line between himself and his audience. It has uncovered what they did not have, and what he did have.

Of course, when men compromise the truth, in the hopes of placating the people, they never really know whether they are dealing with wheat or tares, the children of the Kingdom or the children of the wicked one. When one caters to the whims of people with itching ears, he is always preaching in the dark, never knowing whether he is standing before goats of sheep, a generation of vipers or the generation of the godly.

In this text we have a sterling example of how our “members,” or capacities of expression, can be employed. The exhortation to those who are members of the household of faith is this: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13).

Stephen yielded his members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

- He preached the truth.
- He assessed the situation correctly.
- He looked steadfastly into heaven.
- He told what he had seen.
- He prayed for his murderers.

The council yielded their members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.

- They cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears.
- They ran upon Stephen.
- They dragged him out of the city.
- They stoned him.

In an outburst of rage, they screamed out, covering their ears so they could hear no other words from Stephen, and rushed upon him like a pack of mad dogs. That is the nature of the flesh. That is one reason for the rigid commandments under the Law against harming ones neighbor, or treating them unjustly. It was only under the threat of death that such outbursts could in any way be minimized.

Of course, when men compromise the truth, in the hopes of placating the people, they never really know whether they are dealing with wheat or tares, the children of the Kingdom or the children of the wicked one. When one caters to the whims of people with itching ears, he is always preaching in the dark, never knowing whether he is standing before goats of sheep, a generation of vipers or the generation of the godly.

However, when ones religion is used to justify their flesh to the fullest extent allowed by civil law, they attack the truth and those who speak it. But make no mistake about this, in order for outbursts like this to take place, the people must be uncircumcised in heart and ears, be stubborn and rebellious, and resist the Holy Spirit. Of course, that is precisely how Stephen described them. His description was marked by the precision of an inspired mind.

THEY CAST HIM OUT AND STONED HIM

“ 58a And cast him out of the city, and stoned him . . .” Other versions read, “And when they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him,” NASB “dragged him out of the city and began

to stone him ,” NIV “Driving him out of the town and stoning him ,” BBE “ threw him outside the city and began stoning him,” CJB “and after they had thrown him out of the city, they began to stone him to death ,” GWN “And they seized him , and hurried him out of the city , and stoned him,” MRD “ thrust him out of the city and stoned him,” NJB “and having cast him forth outside of the city, they were stoning him ,” YLT and “and hustled him out of the city and stoned him.” PHILLIPS

There was nothing gentle about their treatment of Stephen, and there were no laws in place to protect his “rights.” Here we are being exposed to raw religious flesh – which is the worst of all flesh. This very council, and probably many of the very same people, had opposed Jesus throughout His ministry, seeking ways to rid themselves of His influence (John 5:18; 7:1, 30; 11:6; Matt 21:46; 26:4; Mk 12:12; Lk 19:47; 20:19). They eagerly fulfilled the words of Jesus, “Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again” (Mark 10:33-34).

Now, after some time had passed, the hearts of these men have only grown more hard. At first, they were content to attempt a form of civil proceedings, asking Stephen to defend himself against the charges. However, as the mock trial had continued, they could conceal their hatred no longer. Now, it is too large to hide under the veneer of religion.

Now, after some time had passed, the hearts of these men have only grown more hard. At first, they were content to attempt a form of civil proceedings, asking Stephen to defend himself against the charges. However, as the mock trial had continued, they could conceal their hatred no longer. Now, it is too large to hide under the veneer of religion.

The picture is of the men dragging Stephen out of the city, and stoning him as they went . They did not even wait for the pronouncement of a sentence. At least with Jesus, there was the pronouncement of the final decision: “And they condemned Him to be guilty of death” (Mk14:64). But no such condemnation is pronounced against Stephen. They just proceed to execute him. When flesh is backed into a corner, it will not repent, but push forward with every ounce of energy it has. That is the nature of flesh. It cannot learn, reason, or back away from its desires.

To this point, the Jewish leaders have been absolutely consistent in their response to the truth.

- **JOHN THE BAPTIST.** When John the Baptist appeared on the scene, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, these leaders did not submit to it. It is written, “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:30). Yet, their opposition was somewhat subdued, because they feared the people, whom they knew took John to be a prophet (Mk 11:32).

- **JESUS CHRIST.** When Jesus came, the opposition of these men increased in its intensity. They repeatedly sought to trap Jesus in His words (Matt 16:1; 22:35; Mk 10:2; 12:13; John 8:3-6). From the first part of His ministry, they sought to kill Him (Matt 21:46; Mk 12:12; Lk 19:47; John 5:18; 7:1,25,30). Finally, they paid to have Him betrayed, hurried Him through a mock trial, and delivered Him to Pilate to be crucified (Matt 27:1-2; Mk 15:1).

- **PETER AND JOHN.** Early on, the Temple authorities opposed Peter and John as they taught in the Temple. They laid hold, of them, examined them, and told them not to preach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:1-1-3,17-18,21). Later they arrested them again, and put them in prison (Acts 5:17-18). After the angel of the Lord had released them, they found the apostles in the Temple preaching, and arrested them again. This time they had them beaten before they released them, again commanding them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, even though they had intended to kill them (Acts 5:26-28,33,40).

• **STEPHEN.** Now they have confronted Stephen, and their animosity has increased even more. They do not have Stephen beaten, but drag him out of the city, stoning him as they went. This time they will carry out their evil intent. They will not ask the Roman government to do their work, as they did with Jesus, but will do it themselves. After all, it was not a high day at this time as it was when Jesus was delivered up. They were therefore free from the restraints of the formalities of their religion.

SOMETHING TO BE NOTED

It ought to be noted that when the church allows the flesh to enter the assembly, it has embarked on a course they will not be able to control. The only way to overcome the flesh is to mortify or crucify it. God has passed the death sentence upon “the flesh,” and those who wear His name must do so also. The reason for this is owing to at least two things. First, the flesh cannot be tamed, and therefore increases in its wretched manners. Second, God cannot bear the flesh, having permanently excluded it from His Kingdom. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the church to keep “the flesh,” the “carnal mind,” and “the natural man” out of its assemblies. There is to be a zero tolerance for all fleshly expressions and exhibitions, for the carnal mind is enmity against God.

A YOUNG MAN NAMED SAUL

“ 58b . . . and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.”

We will behold here how the flesh can be meticulous in its ways, careful to fulfill some requirements, while it presses into forbidden areas with zeal. You may recall, they did not want to kill Jesus on “the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people” (Matt 26:5). That is another one of the unreasonable manners of the flesh .

THE WITNESSES LAID DOWN THEIR CLOTHES

“ . . . and the witnesses laid down their clothes . . .” Other versions read, “the witnesses laid their robes,” NASB “laid their coats,” NRSV “laid down their garments,” RSV “laid down their cloaks,” NAB “laid aside their robes,” NAS “His accusers took off their coats and laid them,” NJB “The official witnesses – the executioners – took off their coats and laid them,” LIVING “The men, who told lies against Stephen, gave their robes,” IE “the witnesses throwing off their outer garments and giving them,” WEYMOUTH “Meanwhile , the witnesses laid their coats at the feet,” ISV “in the meantime , laid their clothes at the feet,” WILLIAMS “placed their garments at the feet,” AMPLIFIED and “The witnesses of the execution flung their clothes at the feet.” PHILLIPS

The Law had addressed certain sins worthy of capital punishment, and had outlined how the sentence was to be carried out. Here is what it said.

• **SOMEONE GIVING THEIR CHILDREN TO MOLECH.** “Again, thou shalt say to the children of Israel, Whosoever he be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn in Israel, that giveth any of his seed unto Molech; he shall surely be put to death : the people of the land shall stone him with stones ” (Lev 20:2).

• **A PERSON WITH A FAMILIAR SPIRIT, OR A WIZARD.** “A man also or woman that hath a familiar spirit, or that is a wizard , shall surely be put to death: they shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them” (Lev 20:27).

• **SOMEONE SAYING THEY SHOULD WORSHIP OTHER GODS.** “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers ; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth

even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage” (Deut 13:6-10).

• **A PERSON FOUND SERVING AND WORSHIPING OTHER GODS.** “If there be found among you, within any of thy gates which the LORD thy God giveth thee, man or woman, that hath wrought wickedness in the sight of the LORD thy God, in transgressing his covenant, and hath gone and served other gods, and worshiped them, either the sun, or moon, or any of the host of heaven, which I have not commanded ; And it be told thee, and thou hast heard of it, and inquired diligently , and, behold, it be true, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought in Israel: Then shalt thou bring forth that man or that woman, which have committed that wicked thing, unto thy gates, even that man or that woman, and shalt stone them with stones, till they die . At the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses, shall he that is worthy of death be put to death ; but at the mouth of one witness he shall not be put to death. The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you” (Deut 17:2-7).

There are other capital offenses, but these represent the nature of them all. They involved either spiritual or moral corruption. I have mentioned them to point out that no such charges were even leveled against Stephen. The official charges were as follows: “And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: for we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:13-14). There was no charge of idolatry, being a false prophet, and indulging in immorality or curious arts!

The Law required that a careful examination of charges against the person take place. The judges were to hear the charges, examine them carefully, and determined if they were true (Deut 17:9). None of this had been done in the case of Stephen. We ought to learn from this not to be surprised if those who walk in the flesh are not just in their assessments, or are unreasonable in their opposition. The children of God cannot afford to be naive about the nature of the flesh – especially religious flesh.

The witnesses to which our text refers were those men who raised a false report against Stephen. They took off their outer garments, because stoning was a vigorous activity, and would not allow them to do so while wearing their coats. So they removed them.

You may remember the time

Yet these people have grown worse, not better. As children of the Kingdom, we make it our aim to get more of the Word into our society, and to proclaim the Gospel with insight and power. But we are not juvenile in our view of this. This could make things worse, not better.

when the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus who had been taken in the very act of adultery. Being sticklers for the letter of the law, and thinking that Jesus was not, they reminded the Lord concerning the requirements of the Law, then asked Him what He had to say about the matter. Jesus stooped down, “and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not” (John 8:6). When they continued asking Him what He had to say about the matter Jesus “lifted up Himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her” (John 8:7). He did not say for the witnesses to cast the first stone, but for the one who was without sin. All of them were apparently witnesses, for they said the woman had been taken in the very act of adultery. After saying these words, Jesus stooped down and continued writing on the ground.

Perhaps He was writing a list of names. At any rate, the men who had brought the woman to Jesus “being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst” (John 8:9).

But this is not what happens here. The witnesses are more bold – even though they were false witnesses. They did not find Stephen in any unlawful activity. Yet, they were bold and brash, and conducted themselves just as though the false charges were the truth. This is how sin can harden people, so that men actually become worse than their predecessors.

SOMETHING TO BE NOTED

There is something to be noted here. Some are of the opinion that if we could get prayer back in the schools, and better preaching in the churches, a recovery of the moral degradation of our country could be realized. That this is possible cannot be denied. That it is something the godly desire is certainly the truth. Yet, we cannot be overly simplistic in this matter. The people in our text lived in the time when John the Baptist prepared the people for the Messiah with powerful preaching. They had been exposed to the greatest Preacher of all, who had gone about their country doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil. They had often heard the powerful preaching of the Apostles, and witnessed their confirming miracles. Now they had heard the effective preaching of Stephen, who was himself a worker of signs of wonders.

Yet these people have grown worse, not better. As children of the Kingdom, we make it our aim to get more of the Word into our society, and to proclaim the Gospel with insight and power. But we are not juvenile in our view of this. This could make things worse, not better. Yet, just as surely as Stephen proceeded speaking insightfully, so must we. Our aim in all of this is to be men in understanding, and not children (1 Cor 14:20).

THE YOUNG MAN SAUL

“ . . . at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.” Other versions read, “ a certain young man who was called Saul,” MRD “A young man called Saul,” YLT “a young man named Paul,” LIVING “giving them into the care of a young man called Saul,” WEYMOUTH and “a young man by the name of Saul.” PHILLIPS

In a public display, the false witnesses laid their garments at the feet of a young man whose name was Saul.

- **A YOUNG MAN.** It is not certain what age is reflected in this term, Lexically, some say this is a “youth; (1) used of a man in the prime of life, between twenty-four and forty years” old. FRIBERG Others say “a young man beyond the age of puberty, but normally before marriage-’young man” LOUW-NIDA We do not know of the age of this young man, only that he was not a man of any significant age.

- **SAUL.** The name of the young man is given, and from this point on, he will be a prominent figure in the book of Acts. It might appear that being a young man, Saul had been exposed to the preaching of Jesus. We know, however that this was not the case, for Paul categorically says he was “born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8). He does not say he was born in the wrong place, but out of the time span in which the other apostles were born.

PAUL RECALLED THIS INCIDENT

Later, during his ministry, when he was in Jerusalem, Paul recalled this incident. During his defense before Jewish accusers, Paul recalled what he had said to the Lord Jesus Himself. When Christ commanded Paul, “get thee quickly out of Jerusalem.” he replied “And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them

that slew him” (Acts 22:20). This will prove to be a defining moment for Paul. He will never be able to forget what he saw and heard on this memorable day, when he kept the coats of those who lied against Stephen.

STEPHEN WAS CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

“ 59 And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”

Admittedly, this is one of the awful accounts of history, when the details of the murder of a man of God are recorded. There are not many detailed accounts of such deaths, but there are enough to establish the absolute hostility that exists between the flesh and the Spirit, unbelief and faith, and the children of God and the children of the wicked one. The detailed accounts of such murders are as follows.

- Cain killed Abel (Gen 4:3-6).
- Zechariah (2 Chron 24:21-22).
- John the Baptist (Mk 6:18-28).
- Stephen (Acts 7:58-60).
- Jesus Christ. The death spoken of the most in Scripture, and concerning which more details are provided, is that of the Lord Jesus Christ (Psa 22:1-18; 34:20; 69:21,25; 109:25; Isa 52:14; 53:7-12; Zech 13:6-7; Matt 27:1-53; Mk 15:1-38; Lk 22:64-23:46; John 18:28-19:37).

In these accounts the variance between man and God is brought out. With the single exception of Abel, all of them were carried out by a covenanted people – chosen and cultured by God. The death that was most driven by Divine purpose was that of Jesus, and it is the death which has accomplished the most. Furthermore, if it were not for the Person of Christ and His work, the other deaths would not have occurred.

It is good to maintain a profitable recollection of the details of these deaths – particularly that of our blessed Lord. It will serve to destroy any delusion that would lead us to imagine that the world is our friend, or that we can be friends of it without becoming the enemy of God (James 4:4).

THEY STONED STEPHEN

“And they stoned Stephen . . .” Other versions read, “ they went on stoning Stephen,” NASB “ While they were stoning Stephen,” NIV “ as they were stoning Stephen,” RSV “while he was being stoned,” BBE “While council members were executing Stephen,” GWN “They continued to stone Stephen,” NET and “And as the murderous stones came hurtling at him.” LIVING

In the stoning of Stephen they followed Scriptural procedures, but for the wrong reason. The people corrupted religion even further in what they had already done to justify their deeds. Sin, having slain the human race, has introduced this dreadful propensity to sin in the name of the Lord, attempting to justify what is done by asserting that the righteous have actually broken some law of God in fulfilling their ministry.

Here, by stoning Stephen, the people have put him in the class of the following people.

- One who has called for the people to worship false gods (Deut 13:6-10).
- One who has “gone and served other gods” (Deut 17:2-5).
- An adulteress (Deut 22:13-21).
- Achan, who coveted the forbidden things, and brought a curse upon Israel (Josh

7:19-26).

Thus we again see that corrupt human nature will go to any extent possible to justify one's own refusal to hear the Word of the Lord.

Stoning is not something that can take place accidentally. It requires the wholehearted involvement of those who do it. They must exert both their will and the body, and do so over an extended period of time. It is a work that men must be intent upon doing if they are to carry it to its intended conclusion. Oh, that men would be as intent upon knowing Christ and obtaining heaven as these men were upon Stephen dying!

CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

“ . . . calling upon God . . .” Other versions read, “ as he was calling upon God,” NKJV “ as he called upon the Lord,” NASB “Stephen prayed,” NIV “ made prayer to God,” BBE “ as he called out ,” CSB “ invoking ,” DOUAY “said in invocation ,” NJB “he kept praying ,” ISV and “as he continued praying.” WILLIAMS

However, true spiritual life requires that the individual be ready to sincerely and zealously say these words. If people – any people – find themselves reluctant and unable to speak in this manner, they are in a condition that requires immediate attention

Some versions say Stephen called “upon God” (KJV, NKJV). Others say that he called “upon the Lord” (ASV, NASB). If you have a Bible that uses italicized print to indicate words that are not in the original Greek text, you will note that “God” or “Lord” are italicized. They have been supplied to give the sense of the text, but are not in the text itself. Here, the One to whom the call is directed is associated with the content of Stephen's petition. Strictly speaking, rather than the sentence emphasizing the act of calling, the stress is placed on what was said in it. Some of the literal; translations provide this perspective: “calling and saying,” YLT and “invoking and saying.” LITV This does not change the meaning of the text, but moves us away from a mere consideration of grammar.

Having seen the heavens opened, the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, Stephen calls upon the name of the Lord – framing a petition as his life was being pounded out of his body. What a marvelous dispensation of grace must have been dispensed to him at this time to enable such a thing. Under ordinary circumstances, an experience like stoning would prove too painfully distracting to allow for sound thought and precise expression. Yet, at this very time, Stephen's rational powers elevate to a peek, and he calls upon God.

What does it mean to call “upon God” ?The very expression is intriguing to me. The words “calling upon” are translated from a single Greek word **evpikalou,menon** (ep-ee-kal-eh-ooen-on). As used here, the lexical meaning of the word is “to invoke, to call upon for oneself, in one's behalf anyone as a helper . . . to appeal to one, make an appeal unto,” THAYER “appeal, call or summon as a witness.” FRIBERG Still, these academic definitions do not satisfy my own heart as to what was involved here. Stephen is not calling for help. He is not supplicating for deliverance. He appears to be reconciled to his death, realizing that his work has now been concluded. He does not call out for retribution, or for judgment to be executed against his offenders. Nor, indeed, is he simplistic or naive in his assessment of the situation. For him, calling “unto God” evidences his trust and his discernment, his reliance and his readiness.

Although Stephen was a great miracle worker, he does not seek to advantage himself by means of a supernatural work. He does not strike down his enemies, as did Elijah (2 Kgs 1:10-12). He does not call for plagues upon the people, as did Moses (Ex 9:14). Stephen knows in his spirit that death belongs to him (1 Cor 3:21-22), and that it cannot separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus

Here is an example of someone keeping under their body in the most dire outward circumstance. He has the rule over his own soul, and has quieted it so he can consider the Lord and frame an intelligent petition to Him. From the human point of view, this is a most remarkable achievement.

Although Stephen was a great miracle worker, he does not seek to advantage himself by means of a supernatural work. He does not strike down his enemies, as did Elijah (2 Kgs 1:10-12). He does not call for plagues upon the people, as did Moses (Ex 9:14). Stephen knows in his spirit that death belongs to him (1 Cor 3:21-22), and that it cannot separate him from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38-39). It is one thing to know this intellectually, it is another thing to be persuaded of it. In Stephen we are beholding someone who has been “persuaded” of this reality.

The power of God is not devoted to the purely personal interests of the servants of God. Even the “signs of an Apostle” are not intended to keep Paul from being beaten, shipwrecked, in countless perils, and even stoned. Men should not be surprised if all of their earthly problems are not resolved by their godliness and commitment to Christ. They should not expect God to provide a smooth road for them in order that they might be more comfortable. Should this occur, and an angel supply a miraculous meal for weary Elijah (1 Kgs 19:5-8), that is good. But should the path to glory lead through the furnace and the flood, that is also good. There is more at stake in our spiritual lives than our earthly life and advantage. A religion of ease and convenience is lethal. It pushes a person further and further from the Lord, until they at last topple over the precipice of eternal ruin. Woe to that person who actually dares to promote such an approach to life in Christ Jesus.

And what ought men and women of God be able to do when they contend with experiences that are “footmen,” when Stephen so conducted himself when contending with “horsemen” (Jer 12:5)?

RECEIVE MY SPIRIT

“ . . . and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Other versions read, “Lord Jesus, take my spirit,” BBE “Lord Jesus, welcome my spirit,” GWN “Lord Jesus, receive and accept and welcome my spirit!,” AMPLIFIED “Jesus, Lord, receive my spirit!” PHILLIPS and “Lord Jesus, please welcome me!” CEV

Notice that Stephen calls upon the Lord Jesus Himself. This was not an ordinary approach to the Lord. In fact, this is the only occasion in the Bible where a prayer was addressed to Jesus Himself. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus told His disciples, “And in that day ye shall ask Me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you” (John 16:23). He also taught His disciples to address their prayers to the “Father” (Matt 6:9). That this is the ordinary posture of prayer cannot be denied. When Paul petitioned for the church to be strengthened with might, he said, “I bow my knees to the Father” (Eph 3:14). That is the ordinary manner.

Yet, this is not intended to be a lifeless and legalistic approach. All conditions are not normal. The situation before us is also made most unique by the fact that Stephen was seeing Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He therefore addresses his petition to Him, for it was apparent that Jesus was taking special notice of him in this difficult hour.

And what is Stephen’s petition to Jesus? He had the spirit of Jesus who, as He approached His final hour, said, “and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour” (John 12:27). Eventually, there will come a time when temporal deliverance must not be sought, and blessed is the person who knows when it arrives. There is that appointment when the person must say, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand ” (2 Tim 4:6). We have good reason to believe that when we live by faith, the Lord will alert us to the imminence of death. Peter said of his appointment, “knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me” NASB (2 Pet 1:14). While there is a certain element

of uncertainty associated with death, that appointment is not altogether uncertain. A focused awareness of that hour is really not necessary until it arrives. If you will live by faith and walk in the Spirit, you will be able to address death in a state of readiness and confidence – without fear.

Receive My Spirit

Stephen does not ask for Jesus to receive his body, for he knows that will not take place until the resurrection. He also is aware that his spirit and body will be separated at death – which contradicts the soul-sleeping heresy. Neither, indeed, does he speak as one who is going to be unconscious when he departs from the body, for what possible purpose would be achieved by Jesus receiving an inactive and unconscious spirit?

Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit, speaks almost identically as did Jesus when He died. Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Father, into thy hands I commend My spirit ” (Luke 23:46). Christ’s words differed in that no man was taking His life from Him. He was laying down His life of His own self, for He had the power to do so (John 10:17-18). Stephen’s life was being taken from him, and he did not have the power to dismiss his own spirit. Therefore, He asked Jesus to receive it. In this, Stephen would fulfill a statement that would later be made by the young man who was caring for the garments of the false witnesses who were stoning him: “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8). Stephen was also “confident” and “willing,” and therefore framed this petition.

It ought to be noted that Stephen had committed himself to the Lord in his life, and that is why he could make this request in his death. He had taken advantage of the fellowship of Jesus, into which he had been called (1 Cor 1:9). He had walked in the light as Jesus is in the light (1 John 1:7), and could therefore look forward to joining Him in the ultimate light.

It really is not possible to look forward to being forever with the Lord if one is not walking with Him in this world. In my judgment, there is a level of awareness of this that is reflected in the posture of much of the religion of our time. The removal of many of the hymns concerning heaven appear to justify this view. The accent upon life in this world also confirms this to be the case. A spirit of at-home-ness in this present evil world will not allow a person to even say the words, “Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit.”

However, true spiritual life requires that the individual be ready to sincerely and zealously say these words. If people – any people – find themselves reluctant and unable to speak in this manner, they are in a condition that requires immediate attention. The person who is not ready to die, is not ready to live, and is actually in an unacceptable state. Nothing must be allowed to upstage a proper preparation for departure from the world!

STEPHEN’S LAST SUPPLICATION

“ 60a And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.”

The fact that Stephen “kneeled down” suggests that he had remained on his feet as the stones were hurled at him, and began taking his life from him. The sight of Jesus standing at the right hand of God had strengthened him to stand up during his final trial. I do not question that angels had been dispatched to fortify this man of God, as they had strengthened his Lord before him (Lk 22:43). Those blessed ministering spirits who have been sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation will surely not abandon them in their final hour. So now, in a display of remarkable composure and deliberateness, Stephen bows the knee to the Father, kneeling down, accepting his appointed hour of departure.

CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE

“And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice. . .” Other versions read, “falling on his knees , he cried out with a loud voice,” NASB “he fell on his knees and cried out ,” NIV “he knelt down and shouted ,” GWN “he knelt down and said aloud ,” NJB “he fell to his knees shouting ,” NLT “Then, rising on his knees , he cried aloud,” WEYMOUTH “And falling on his knees, he cried out loudly ,” AMPLIFIED and “Then, on his knees, he cried in ringing tones .” PHILLIPS

As his life was ebbing from his body, Stephen musters the vestiges of his strength and focuses them on a single petition. He does not whisper it, but shouts it out so all could hear. He cries out in faith and hope. This is also the manner in which Jesus spoke when He died, crying out “with a loud voice” – so much so that even a centurion heard Him (Matt 27:50; Mk 15:37,39).

LORD, LAY NOT THIS SIN TO THEIR CHARGE

“Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” Other versions read, “Lord, do not charge them with this sin,” NKJV “Lord, do not hold this sin against them ,” NASB “Lord, do not make them responsible for this sin,” BBE “O Lord, establish not this sin against them ,” MRD “Lord, don't blame them for this sin!,” IE “Lord, do not reckon this sin against them,” WEYMOUTH “Lord, do not charge this sin on the book against them!,” WILLIAMS “Lord, fix not this sin upon them [lay it not to their charge]!” AMPLIFIED “Lord, forgive them for this sin,” PHILLIPS “Lord! Do not remember this sin against them!” GNB and “Lord, do not make stand this sin to them.” LITV

Again, having the Spirit of Jesus, Stephen’s final words were much like those of Jesus when He died. The Savior prayed, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Jesus’ prayer was answered fifty days later when three thousand souls received the remission of sin and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Yet, Stephen’s words are not identical to those of Jesus. I do not believe that “lay not this sin to their charge” is synonymous with “forgive them.” The idea here is that of holding sin against the people, or shutting the door to recovery. The prophets referred to condition this as sin being marked against the people. “For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before Me , saith the Lord GOD” (Jer 2:22). And again, “The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron” (Jer 17:1). Because of this condition, God instructed Jeremiah, “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me: for I will not hear thee” (Jer 7:16). Again He said to the prophet, “Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble” (Jer 11:14). And again He said, “Then said the LORD unto Me, Pray not for this people for their good” (Jer 14:11).

There is a condition in which God turns the people over to their own wickedness, removing all restraints and rendering them hopeless (2 Chron 30:7; Psa 81:12; Acts 7:42; Rom 1:24,25,28). There is a sin from which people cannot recover – like that committed by the Israelites who refused to possess the promised land. God consigned them to die in the wilderness, and there was no door opened for that sentence to be reversed. In fact it is written, “So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into My rest” (Heb 3:11) – and they did not!

Knowing this aspect of the Divine nature, David prayed, “If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?” (Psa 130:3).

This was not an emotional plea for God to forget about what was happening, and to overlook the fact that the council was stoning Stephen to death. Even on the other side, after that have finished their lives on earth, martyrs do not think in this manner. John saw a group of them “under the altar,” and in their purified state they asked the Lord, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10). They were not rebuked, but were given white robes and told to wait for a season, until further blood would be shed (Rev 6:10-11). The

modern church is being submitted to a lot of inaccurate and corrupt teaching on this subject. The forgiveness of offending parties is actually being approached from a psychological point view rather than a spiritual one.

Stephen did have a regard for the salvation of these people. He knew that Jesus had died for them, and that He had been sent to bless them in turning them away from their iniquities (Acts 3:26). What he was asking is that the Lord not consign them to a state of reprobacy, or swear in His wrath that they would be shut out of eternal rest. He was praying that they would be kept from “the great transgression” (Psa 19:13), which ushers men in a condition that cannot be remedied. He was pleading that this sin would not be the last one written in the record books, and that the door of salvation would be left open.

Jesus declared that there was a sin that “hath never forgiveness” (Mk 3:29). A person can commit a sin that “shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come” (Matt 12:32). Stephen is praying that this dreadful deed – one in which the people were resisting the Holy Spirit – would not be so considered.

While this may introduce some questions in the minds of some, all do well to take them to heart. There is an aspect to the Divine nature that is being concealed in our time by frothy preaching and teaching that has no substance. There is too much of the carnal mind in it, and it is far removed from reality. It disarms the soul, moving it into a state that will not hold up the individual in the hour of need. The mouths of those who deliver such a message must be stopped, and the imaginations fostered by their words must be thrown down. This is not a day for Christians to be simplistic in their views of God, sin, and salvation. After all, eternal life is knowing God!

HE FELL ASLEEP

“ 60b And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” Other versions read, “he died,” NRSV “he went to his rest,” BBE and “he fell asleep in the Lord,” DOUAY “he slept,” GENEVA “he fell asleep in death,” WILLIAMS and “he fell into the sleep of death.” PHILLIPS

This confirms that the words of Stephen were said at the very threshold of his departure, thus emphasizing his strong and confident faith. The same faith that sustains men in life, will also sustain them in death, and all of the circumstances that surround it.

Death is frequently associated with “sleep.”

- When God told Moses he was going to die, He said, “Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers” (Deut 31:16).
- Job spoke of death as sleeping “in the dust” (Job 7:21). He said that in the resurrection men would be “raised out of their sleep” (Job 14:12).
- Daniel also was told of a time when “many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan 12:2).
- When Lazarus died, and after waiting for two days, Jesus said to His disciples, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth ; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep ” (John 11:11).

Thus, when Stephen fell sleep, he did so because Jesus had received his spirit, leaving the body lifeless. He died in hope of the resurrection, however, his purchased possession, like ours, will be redeemed – ransomed from “the power of the grave”

The record of David’s death states that he “ slept with his fathers” (1 Kgs 2:10). Paul also said that when David died he “fell asleep ” (Acts 13:35).

- Speaking concerning being clothed with immortality, Paul said, “We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed” (1 Cor 15:51).

- Believers that had passed from this life are referred to as them “which sleep in Jesus” (1 Thess 4:15).

Some take the position that the totality of the man sleeps in death – the seen and unseen parts, the inward and the outward man. They have the same view of death that Solomon had – before life and immortality were brought to light by the Gospel (2 Tim 1:10). Solomon said, “the dead know not anything” (Eccl 9:5). However, that was not the ultimate word concerning the dead. We know, for example, that Moses came back to earth and appeared with Jesus in glory – after he had died (Lk 9:31). Jesus delivered the account three men after they had died. Two of them, Abraham and a rich man, spoke to one another in an extended dialog. Abraham spoke of things of which he knew nothing when he lived on the earth. The rich man was capable of feeling and reasoning. Lazarus was being comforted, and was not located in the grave, but in Abraham’s bosom. Those who embrace the soul-sleeping heresy say that this was only a parable, and not a factual account. There is no evidence for this view. It is only an attempt to stuff the word of God into the bag of human reason. Further, even if we pretend as though there is possibility that this is true, the explanation provides no haven for them, for a parable is a likeness to a very real condition. In it, a point is made by comparing a known condition with an unknown condition. Of course, if the dead are not conscious, there could not be any teaching based upon the supposition that they were conscious.

The employment of “sleep” in relation to death accents the fact that death is temporary – like sleep. It also views death from the standpoint of the resurrection of the dead, not of the present condition of the personality who has left this world. When Jesus comes again, He will not only raise the dead. God Himself will also “bring with Him” those who “sleep in Jesus” (1 Thess 4:14). The angels will not only gather together the saints on earth, but will also gather them “from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt 24:31). Mark says they will gather the elect “from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven” (Mark 13:27). This captures the idea of the seen and unseen parts of men being joined together as the essential part of man will be “clothed upon with our house from heaven” – the resurrection body (2 Cor 5:2-4).

Thus, when Stephen fell sleep, he did so because Jesus had received his spirit, leaving the body lifeless. He died in hope of the resurrection, however, his purchased possession, like ours, will be redeemed – ransomed from “the power of the grave” (Hos 13:14).

Thus ends the life of Stephen, the first person martyred for Jesus. He was not a martyr for the church but was Jesus’ martyr (Acts 22:20), dying for the sake of his Lord and Savior, who had given His life for the sake of Stephen. He is surely a noble example for us all!

CONCLUSION

The account of Stephen provides some essential insight into the nature of life in Christ Jesus. Stephen is first introduced in Acts 6:5, where he was chosen as one of those appointed over the daily distribution of food. From that introduction, Stephen is the focus of Scripture through Acts 8:1 – seventy-two verses, or just under 1,800 words. Of those verses fifty-three of them are Stephen’s message, and four of them inform us of what he said while he was being stoned. The passage covering Stephen contain two verses that say something about Stephen himself. He was a man full of faith, the Holy Spirit, and power (Acts 6:5,8). At one time, his face was seen “as it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). We know several things that he did. He did great wonders and miracles among the people (Acts 6:8). He disputed with certain Jews in the synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6:9). He delivered an insightful summation of Jewish history before the Jewish council (Acts 7:2-50). He sharply rebuked the hardhearted people to whom he spoke (Acts 7:51-54). He saw the heavens opened, the glory of God, and Jesus standing at His right hand (Acts 7:55-56). As he was being stoned,

He called upon Jesus to receive his spirit (Acts 7:59). He asked the Lord not to lay the sin of his murders against them (Acts 7:60). He was also stoned to death by his own countrymen (Acts 7:58-60).

While that may not appear to be very much, it is actually more than I personally know about a great many well known preachers and teachers. Also, everything we know about him pertains to his life in Christ Jesus. We do not know who his parents were, where he was raised, or if he had a former occupation. We do not know if he was married, or how old he was. We do not know of any education he may have received. We do not know where he lived, or how long he had been in Jerusalem. We know nothing of when he was converted, where he first heard the Gospel, or who it was that brought it to him. And keep in mind, that all of the information we do know about him came from the One who knew everything about him.

As impressive as this record of Stephen is, it would not be impressive if he was seeking entrance into a local Bible College. It would not qualify him to enter a contemporary seminary. He would forthrightly be rejected for any political office. Yet, he is written up by the Spirit as a special person in heaven's eyes. How does Stephen compare to modern preacher and teachers? How does he look next to the average church deacon? – because that is how he got his start. How does his manner of summarizing inspired history compare with a Bible College history course? What about the way he handled stubborn people? Or the manner in which he prayed as he was dying?

Oh, there is much profit, indeed, in perusing the record of Stephen, his preaching and his death. He was a man with a strong faith, and the impact of faith upon a person is seen in him!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #35

PERSECUTION and SCATTERING

“ 8:1 And Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. 4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. ” (Acts 8:1-4)

INTRODUCTION

With the stoning of Stephen the circumstance and environment of the early church were changed. In a sense, this was a kind of catalyst, designed by Satan to destroy the body of Christ, but used by God to promote an even more extensive preaching of the Gospel.

It is imperative that we remain aware of the fact that “the heavens do rule ” (Dan 4:26), “the Kingdom is the Lord’s,” and that God is “the Governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28). Jesus taught us to recognize this in all of our prayers: “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt 6:13). This is precisely why we not only ask for our daily bread, but also that we would not be led into temptation, and that we would be delivered from the evil one. If these things are not realized, Satanic initiatives like those of our text will throw us into confusion and cause our hearts to faint. It was Job’s understanding of God that sustained him during His trial, even though he did not comprehend the trial itself. I am becoming increasingly aware of the rarity of such an understanding in our time – even among the professed church. The utter irony of the situation is that this is the day when God has revealed the most about Himself through Jesus Christ. It is further declared that the hallmark of the New Covenant is that “they shall all know Me” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11). Notwithstanding this strong affirmation, we are faced with a professing church that has a remarkable ignorance of God – the very antithesis of promise of God. If it is true that God “cannot lie,” then we have a lying church on our hands. Its

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perpetual need for counseling and problem resolution, together with its abysmal ignorance of both the Person and the will of God, betrays its real condition. These things are not marks of the people of God. In the language of Scripture, “They have corrupted themselves, their spot is not the spot of His children : they are a perverse and crooked generation” (Deut 32:5).

The text before us confirms that godliness does not necessarily insulate us from the aggression of our enemies – even though God can make even our enemies to be at peace with us (Prov 16:7). Notwithstanding, we must not philosophize on the matter as though that was a promise. There are times when, in the mind of the Lord, it is not appropriate to cause our enemies to be at peace with us. While this ought to be so apparent that there is no need to say it, yet the church is being deluged with a soft and pliable theology that leads them away from such a conclusion.

The Lord has extended Himself to clarify the nature of the life of faith – that it often includes oppression from the ungodly. The case of Cain and Abel clarifies this to our hearts (Gen 4:8). Then there is Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37:4-5), Moses and the people he led (Ex 15:24; Num 26:9), David and Saul (1 Sam 23:25), the prophets and the people to whom they ministered (Matt 5:12), John the Baptist (Matt 14:10), the apostles (Acts 5:18; 1 Thess 2:14-15), and the Lord Jesus Himself (Matt 16:21). There is no reason for any informed believer to be confused by opposition, or by the aggressiveness and even seeming success of the enemies of the faith. There is altogether too much naivety in the church of our day on this matter.

In our text, the enemies of the faith, who sought to subdue the preaching of the Gospel, ended up causing it to be spread by even more proclaimers than those with whom they first contended. This was another evidence of the Lord’s management of the affairs of men. There is no possible way that our “adversary the devil” would consent to the spreading of the Word of God – particularly the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who had already bruised his head. In fact, his efforts were calculated to stop the Word from being preached. Yet, behold what his efforts so! They rather cause an extensive spread of the very word he was trying to subdue. I say the devil is the one who was ultimately frustrated, because he was the one animating the persecutors. Because they had rejected the Lord’s Christ, it is as though God handed them over to the devil to assist him in his diabolical work.

Yet, this body of people did not modify their message or change their spiritual stance. They made no special effort to please the people, and did not concoct a special message or methodology to reach more people.

The “great persecution” that was launched against the church managed to purge Jerusalem of multitudes of believers. Initially, that no doubt brought great relief to the Jewish council, for they were totally incapable of controlling those who had been preaching. They had commanded them to speak no longer in the name of Jesus. They had sequestered them, and even beaten them. They had exerted all of their ecclesiastical authority, but it was all to no avail. Now, they had even publically murdered one of the key proclaimers. Additionally a fierce and intrusive persecution will be unleashed against the church. Surely this will at last rid them of these aggressive proclaimers. And,

indeed, if Jesus was not ruling from the right hand of God, this may very well have been the case. However, he had been exalted, was on the throne, and was governing the affairs of men. Therefore, what they do will ultimately contribute to his purpose, not theirs.

In the scattering of the believers, apparently those who had gathered there “out of every nation under heaven,” now returned to their homelands or regions. This time, however, they went back with a fire burning in their bones, as the Word of God was effectively working within them. As it is written of that Word, “as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Th 2:13). Consequently, “they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the Word.”

Simultaneously, the young man Saul, who had kept the garments of the false witnesses as they stoned Stephen, “made havoc of the church, entering every house” and imprisoning the believers. However, he will not long remain in this posture.

SOMETHING THAT MUST BE SEEN

This is the real church in action – the body of Christ in whom He was living and active. These were people who had been reconciled to God, and who, as a group, were not being drawn aside by competing interests. They were really walking in “newness of life,” not just talking about it. At this point, divisive doctrines had not yet arisen, although they would come in due time.

How the Church Handled Popularity

We see it in see how it handles popularity – for in the beginning the church had “favor with all the people” (Acts 2:47), and “the people magnified them” (Acts 5:12). Yet, this body of people did not modify their message or change their spiritual stance. They made no special effort to please the people, and did not concoct a special message or methodology to reach more people. It was their pure devotion and faithfulness to the Lord that became the means of reaching the people – people who had known many of them, and had witnessed the obvious change in them. We are even told of the activities in which they were involved: “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Notice the total absence of the kinds of activities in which the nominal church involves itself.

This is a church that will not be turned from the Lord – not even by aggressive persecution. Quite to the contrary, it continues aggressive in its stance, earnestly in quest for a heavenly country, and a city whose Builder and Maker is God.

This is now the third glorious confirmation that the Gospel is basically compelling. If ever the true message is delivered by those who are themselves holy, there is something about it that tugs at the hearts of the people. John the Baptist experienced great popularity among the seeking and devout (Matt 3:5; Mk 1:5). The Lord Jesus attracted multitudes of people as well (Matt 4:25; 8:1,18; 9:36; 12:15; 13:2; 15:30; 19:2; 21:9). Now the Apostles and those who were continuing in their doctrine had done the same thing (Acts 4:21; 5:14-16).

The influence of that early church upon society had nothing whatsoever to do with a strategy developed by men. There is not so much as a single word recorded that indicates believers had been exhorted to be the salt of the earth, to seek to win others, or to reach out to the community. The reason for this glaring absence ought to be obvious. It is the nature of spiritual life to pervade the environment in which it is found (Matt 13:33). Wherever holy influences are not spreading, it is only because there is with no spiritual life at all, or it is being stifled by competitive influences.

The prominence of unbelief within the professing church is confirmed by its inveterate tendency to rely upon the wisdom of men. It is trying to duplicate the life the first church by rote, and that is something simply cannot be done.

The Response of the Church to Its Enemies

We also see it responding to its enemies as well as to its Lord. From the very beginning, when it was threatened, the church prayed, seeking boldness from the Lord – and it was granted (Acts 4:24-31). Opposition did not divide those early brethren. Instead, it is said of them during that time, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32). When they were told not to preach, they preached anyway (Acts 4:20; 5:25,29,42). Their tenacious and faithful preaching will continue in our text – even though the most aggressive persecution they have ever experienced was launched against them.

This is a church that will not be turned from the Lord – not even by aggressive persecution. Quite to the contrary, it continues aggressive in its stance, earnestly in quest for a heavenly country, and a city whose Builder and Maker is God. There was no special program or series of meetings launched by the church to address these persecutions. This was not a church directed by such activities. It was connected to the Head, having been “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), and was holding fast to its Head (Col 2:19).

There is every indication in the Scriptures that God will not bless a church that insists on living far from Jesus. That is precisely why spiritual deadness tends to spread – because Divine influences have been withdrawn. It is true that some have invented theologies that affirm that all alone God intended to bring an end any immediate workings within the church. Such men say that this kind of involvement was only intended to launch the church, not to maintain it. If this is the case, it was not announced by the Prophets. That would introduce a circumstance that contradicts express apostolic doctrine. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). Rather than declaring the coming of something temporal, the prophets foretold an era that eventually blend with eternity. In the book of Acts, we are witnessing the commencement of that kind of life. It was a life that was strictly managed by the exalted Christ by the Spirit, and through the faith of the members of the body of Christ.

While we are not to expect every detail of this grand book to be duplicated, we are to expect the kind of life that is reported to be among us today.

SAUL WAS CONSENTING TO HIS DEATH

“ 8:1a And Saul was consenting unto his death.” Other versions read, “in hearty agreement with putting him to death,” NASB “giving approval to his death,” NIV “approved of their killing him,” NRSV “gave his approval to his murder,” CJB “agreed with putting him to death,” CSB “approved of his execution,” ESV “consenting and participating in his death,” MRD “agreed completely with killing him,” NET “had pleasure in his death,” TNT “assenting to his death,” YLT “fully approved of his murder,” WEYMOUTH “[not only] consenting to [Stephen’s] death [he was pleased and entirely approving],” AMPLIFIED and “was agreeing with them in his murder” EMTV

When Stephen was being stoned, we are apprized, “the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul” (Acts 7:58). Now, the Spirit shines the spotlight upon this circumstance, shedding light upon it. This is an example of the light making a deed known, or manifest. As it is written, “But all things that are reprove are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light” (Eph 5:13).

There is no record of Saul lifting up his voice against Stephen, or casting a single stone at him. It may have appeared to those who were standing by that he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time. The text does not say that this young man volunteered to watch the garments of the witnesses as they stoned Stephen to death. Nor, indeed, do they say that he objected to do so.

More than twenty years later (about 58 A.D.), Paul himself – who was that young man Saul – confessed that this is an exact statement of what was taking place. In fact, he confessed it to the exalted Christ Himself. “And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him” (Acts 22:20). His involvement was no doubt a cause for the goading of his conscience for some time after that. Jesus confronted him with the fact that it had been difficult for him to deal with the goading of his conscience (Acts 9:5).

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “CONSENT”?

What does it mean to “consent” to a thing? Certainly, it must be an important response, for a special note is made of it by the Holy Spirit. The lexical meaning of “consenting” is, “to be pleased together with, to approve together (with others): absolutely . . . agree to,” THAYER “strictly approve along with another . . . be willing to, agree to,” FRIBERG “to decide with someone else that something is preferable or good – to agree to, to consent to.” LOUW-NIDA

To “consent” means to agree with, concur, and approve of the action being witnessed. It means to have the same view of the circumstance as those who are carrying it out. In his “consent,” Saul was approving of the stoning of Stephen, affirming that it was the right thing to do. He did this by watching over the garments of the ones who initiated the stoning, doing so according, they thought, to the Law of Moses. Saul’s deed, therefore, was not an innocent gesture. It was not the response of a neutral person. He may not have personally participated in the stoning, but he became one with the individuals who did so. He was participant by consent, approval, and personal sanction.

But there is more to this than the academic view. This stoning was not the expression of, what might be conceived to be, bloodthirsty men. I do not question that these men were not noted for going about and killing people at random. They were not driven by a lust for blood. It was actually their religion that compelled them to stone Stephen, and it was Saul’s religious persuasion that moved him to consent to it.

When truth is not perceived, yet a claim is made to embrace it, the individual is actually compelled to act in stark contradiction of the truth. This is because the carnal mind is enmity against God, and can neither think nor act in harmony with the truth. Where a love of the truth – particularly the truth of the Gospel – has not been received, it impacts directly upon a person’s thinking and demeanor. Thus the counsels of the heart are unveiled by the illuminating effects of the law.

The men who stoned Stephen, and Paul who heartily consented to their action, were not acting as people who were personally offended by Stephen – although that condition did exist. In their own minds, they were acting as the guardians of their religion. They were ridding themselves an influence they conceived to be defiling and reprehensible. Their delusion actually became the means through which the devil worked, for he always works within the context of the lie, delusion, and spiritual darkness.

In this case, delusion consisted of an erroneous view of the Scriptures themselves. I do not doubt that those who stoned Stephen, and Saul, who consented to their action, were convinced they were fulfilling the mandate of the Law of Moses: “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him; But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people” (Deut 13:6-8).

How serious is it when religious men do not perceive the truth – even though it is within their reach? What can be said of those to whom Divine providence has brought the truth, yet they have declined to receive it? What of those who are familiar with the Scriptures, yet, after long periods of time have not comprehended either their nature or their true message? What is the effect of maintaining a religious posture, yet refusing to submit the soul to the truth of God, or bathe ones mind in the Word of God?

Those dominated by such a mind will oppose the truth, whether by personally throwing stones like the Jewish council, or consenting to the deed like the young man Saul who watched over their garments.

When such souls are exposed to the real Gospel, and the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, they will become hostile toward God, for that is the nature of “the carnal mind.” As it is written, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7). Those dominated by such a mind will oppose the truth, whether by personally throwing stones like the Jewish council, or consenting to the deed like the young man Saul who watched over their garments.

One dare not compromise the truth to placate people who have had access to the it, yet have ignored it. That is a circumstance that has always been taken seriously by men of God – even though it is being glossed by many professing Christian leaders in this day. The surface treatment of this condition is the mother of religious compromise. It is what has birthed movements and efforts that have pretended as though not receiving the love of the truth is innocent.

Men are obligated by their very existence to seek after the Lord. As it is written, “And He made from one [common origin, one source, one blood] all nations of men to settle on the face of the earth, having definitely determined [their] allotted periods of time and the fixed boundaries of their habitation (their settlements, lands, and abodes), So that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him, although He is not far from each one of us” AMPLIFIED (Acts 17:26). Keep in mind that this is the determined pre-gospel posture of men, and it is by Divine intention. To fail to seek God after one has been exposed to the Gospel compounds the situation.

YOUNG SAUL IS AN EXAMPLE

Paul himself is a case in point. We are not left to conjecture concerning this matter. Paul testifies to his life prior to being justified by faith. Let us allow him to testify to us of his condition during the time of our text.

- He was an Israelite by blood: “of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1).
- He was raised in a devout family, being circumcised on the eighth day according to the law (Phil 3:5).
- Although born in Tarsus, a city of Cilicia, he was brought up in Jerusalem “at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught after the perfect manner of the Law” (Acts 22:3).
- The devoted manner of his life was known to all Jews from the time of his youth (Acts 26:4).
- At some point, Paul testified, “sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence” (Rom 7:7).
- Again he testified, “For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom 7:11).
- We are not sure of the precise time when Paul became a Pharisee, but he said of that

circumstance that he was “a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee” (Acts 23:6). It was no doubt in this capacity, or in anticipation of it, that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel.

- During his time as a Pharisee, living “after the most straitest sect of” the Jew’s religion (Acts 26:5), he “excelled above man” of his “equals,” “being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions” of the Jewish fathers (Gal 1:14).

Yet, in our text, this very man is said to be “consenting” unto the death of Stephen – all of his religious training notwithstanding. Keep in mind that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, who, we are told, had no mind for aggressive opposition to those who taught concerning Jesus (Acts 5:34-39).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

I have not said these things to in any way cast aspersions at the apostle Paul, for I have only the highest regard for him. Rather, this confirms to us the nature of the flesh and its hostility toward God. The fact that Saul could continue to live in “all good conscience” throughout his life (Acts 23:1), confirms the anesthetizing effects of an improper view of Scripture. It underscores what happens when there is a supposed blend of Scripture with human tradition.

Satan can gain the advantage among supposedly devout people when they are fundamentally ignorant of the revealed purpose of God? Both the Jewish council and young Saul are confirmations of this truth.

The fact that such violent opposition is not presently happening in our country does not negate these facts. Our present safety is only owing to “the earth” helping the woman (Rev 12:16). That is, the laws of the land will not allow the bloody attack of the body of Christ. However, the spirit of opposition exists, as “the mystery of iniquity doth now already work” (2 Thess 2:7). It is seen in the refusal of the professed church to demand that the word be preached to them. It is confirmed by the rise of frothy and fundamentally flawed views of key doctrines – like justification, the coming of the Lord, and the state of natural men. It is in the wake of religious pretension that a host of godly ministers have been opposed, fired, and even maligned. This is what has caused religious institutes to modify their curriculum to appeal to the passing fads of the day. It is why professed Christian men can be in the government, yet speak in the defense of transgressions like abortion and sodomy. It is why theological eyelids are lifted in skepticism at the report of any group of people who insist on going beyond the perimeter of the mediocre religion of the day.

Today, in our very country, the conditions of Isaiah’s time have surfaced again – only this time they many times worse because of the superiority of the truth that has been vouchsafed to us. Isaiah described the condition in this way: “Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey : and the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:15). Truth is failing – not because it has lost any of its inherent power, but because it has been abandoned in preference for fables (1 Tim 1:4; 2 Tim 4:4). As a result, proper and sound judgment has slumped to the ground as ignoble causes and assessments have been embraced. This is why iniquity is abounding, and, as a consequence, the love of many is waxing cold (Matt 24:12). This is the circumstance that sets the stage for aggressive opposition to the saints of the most high God.

Oh, the seeds of opposition are beginning to grow in our own country. It is a condition that cannot be glossed, any more than the situation that exists in our text. This is nothing less than the flesh waging a relentless war against the Spirit. This not only occurs in individual believers, it also exists within the confines of the church. We do well to be aware of it, and devote ourselves to an aggressive spiritual stance. Opposition like that of our text confirms that we are, in fact, in a war, battling against principalities and powers (Eph 6:12). They are relentless when given leave.

A GREAT PERSECUTION AGAINST THE CHURCH

“ 1b . . . And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem . . .”

Opposition continues to escalate. Satan is picking up the pace, becoming more and more aggressive. In other words, the nature of both truth and error are being made known. Truth has moved those who embrace it to be of “one accord” (Acts 2:42; 5:12). Those who have believed have been described as being “of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32). It has moved them to a life of total selflessness, for none of them said “that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common” (Acts 4:32). There is the incarnation of a word that was later written by James: “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy” (James 3:17).

However, in the midst of the outpouring of the Spirit, and the consistent proclamation of the truth, there was another kind of response. The

This is Satan’s attempt to stamp out the church – and it is all under the government of Christ. From his viewpoint, it is an effort to draw the woman, carrying her away with a flood of persecution). However, from heaven’s point of view, this is nothing less than a confirmation of the malignity of the world from which God has delivered the believers.

powers of darkness are not only being shaken, they are reacting to that shaking. They are increasing in their hostility, and becoming more aggressive in their opposition. Those who have not received the love of the truth are no longer willing to merely talk about it. They are not satisfied with making threats. Now they issue a call to arms, and come out with an aggressive attack upon the church. They do not focus upon the apostles, as they had before, but on the church. They do not single out certain proclaimers of the truth, as they did with Stephen, but openly oppose the church.

This is Satan’s attempt to stamp out the church – and it is all under the government of Christ. From his viewpoint, it is an effort to draw the woman, carrying her away with a flood of persecution (Rev 12:15). However, from heaven’s point of view, this is nothing less than a confirmation of the malignity of the world from which God has delivered the believers.

How the Opposition Grew

Beginning with John the Baptist, things began to change in the land of the Jews. Until that time, and for a long time, the people had been sitting in great darkness. When Jesus arrived on the scene, it is said of the region Zebulun, Nephtholim, Jordan, and Galilee, “The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up” (Matt 4:16). At the first, there was very little opposition, and the novelty of the new life seemed to catch the powers of darkness off guard. However, little by little, the face of the old serpent began to show, slowly escalating until the time of our text. Allow me to track that progress from John the Baptist until the time of our text.

- The Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God through John, not being baptized by him (Luke 7:30).
- Some people said John had a demon (Matt 11:18).
- Said He was “the carpenter’s son,” and were “offended in Him” (Matt 13:55-56).
- When Jesus began preaching, His enemies first sought to snare Him by means of questions and words (Mark 12:13; Lk 11:54).
- Some charged Jesus with having a demon and being “mad” (John 10:20).

Now, the stoning of Stephen by the council awakened a spirit in others that had been, in a manner of speaking, asleep. That is what happens when iniquity is eagerly expressed, and those

who have not received the love of the truth openly display their hostility against the ones who declare that truth.

After he preached in his home town, the people “thrust Him out of the city.” leading Him to the brow of a hill from which they intended to throw Him (Lk 4:29).

- Soon His enemies began to regularly plot how they might kill Jesus (John 5:18; 7:1).
- As the time of Jesus’ death drew near, His enemies became more aggressive in seeking a way to kill Him (Matt 26:4; Lk 22:2).
- Working with Judas, they finally arrested Jesus, tried Him, abuse him, and delivered Him to Pilate to be crucified, thus culminating their hatred of Him (Mk 15:1-22).
- Following Pentecost, the chief priests and Temple militia ordered Peter and John to stop preaching, threatening them with harm (Acts 4:21).
- The next time they arrested the apostles, they beat them before they let them go, again ordering them not to preach in Jesus’ name (Acts 5:40).
- Now, after feigning a trial, Stephen has been stoned in the ultimate act of hatred and rejection (Acts 7:58-60).

Thus the hostility of the flesh against the Spirit was beginning to grow. The enemies of God became more and more bold – increasing in their aggressiveness against those who proclaimed the truth. Their opposition will, in fact, explode in an enterprising and bold initiative against the church of the living God. From the standpoint of the enemy, it will look like they are gaining the advantage. They imagine that they had rid themselves of the Prophet from Nazareth, and now they think they have removed the influence of Stephen. They think that their seeming success confirms they are on the right track, so they will increase their efforts. Keep in mind that this is all being done in the name of the Lord, and a people who are supposedly protecting the truth.

AT THAT TIME

“. . . And at that time . . .” Other versions read, “on that day,” NASB “That day,” NRSV “starting with that day,” CJB “in that day,” MRD “began that day,” NLT “there came in that day,” YLT and “on this very day.” MONTGOMERY

As great a tragedy as the stoning of Stephen was, it was not the height of the opposition. Rather, it was the beginning. Now, in fulfillment of the word of Isaiah the prophet, “the enemy shall come in like a flood” (Isa 59:19). What was once done behind closed doors is now brought into the public arena. The leading Jews who once feared the people (Acts 5:26), now fear them no longer. The people who once magnified the disciples following the death of Ananias and Sapphira are not as bold in their support as they once were. Gamaliel does not rise in defense of the proclaimers as he once did. The whole environment of Jerusalem is changed from that in which the Gospel was being spread, to one in which the believers are fiercely opposed.

The words “at that time” mean the described action took place on that very day, when Stephen was stoned to death. The deed wrought against Stephen, though unspeakably cruel and heartless, became the catalyst for an outbreak of violent opposition to the church.

A Principle to be Seen

There are wicked deeds that do not stand by themselves, but give birth to wickedness that is more profound and extensive. There is a spirit to iniquity as well as personalities that commit it. Paul called referred to this nature as “the mystery of iniquity,” or “the secret power of lawlessness” NIV (2 Thess

2:7). The Basic Bible English version refers to this as “the secret of evil.” Sin and transgression are an expression of principle of iniquity, or “the law of sin” (Rom 7:23,25), or “the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). While this “law” is resident in “the flesh,” its source is the wicked one. When one or more people allow “the flesh” to express itself, it has a kind of domino affect upon all who are dominated by the flesh, or sinful nature. When, for example, the chief priests and rulers of the people launched an initiative against the Lord Jesus, “all the people” eventually became involved. When challenged by Pilate concerning the legitimacy of the trial of Jesus, “all the people . . . said, His blood be on us, and on our children” (Mat 27:25). When Pilate asked if the people would have him release Jesus to them, “the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them” (Mark 15:11).

Now, the stoning of Stephen by the council awakened a spirit in others that had been, in a manner of speaking, asleep. That is what happens when iniquity is eagerly expressed, and those who have not received the love of the truth openly display their hostility against the ones who declare that truth. Their sinful expression are like a trumpet call to those who are dominated by sin, summoning them into a wicked initiative against truth.

It is this principle that gives birth to wicked fads and trends. Such things do not rise of their own accord. Some evil person opens the floodgates of iniquity, whether by a word or deed. Their personal objective may be to only satisfy their own lusts, but sin will not remain at that level. There is an evil synergy in sin that causes it to spread, with evil men and seducers waxing “worse and worse” (2 Tim 3:13). Just as surely as the truth spreads, causing a multiplication of believers (Acts 2:47; 5:14; 6:1,7), so iniquity spreads and increases, sending a wake of evil influence upon those whose hearts are hard and calloused.

If men are not sensitive to this nature of things, they will treat intrusions of sin as though were innocent, and will not deal with them properly. This is why Ananias and Sapphira were purged from the church, even though their transgression might not have appeared to be that serious. It is also why Paul commanded the Corinthian church to purge a certain fornicator from their assembly – and to do so immediately. He did not tell them to counsel that man or to attempt to restore him. The man who was living with his father’s wife was like a staph infection that had to be cut out of the assembly, lest the whole of it be further defiled. In order for that assembly to be restored to wholeness, the expulsion of the fornicator had to take place. That is precisely why Paul wrote, “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7).

The principle of the spreading of is also seen in another word of warning to the church . “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled” (Heb 12:15). In confirmation of this, Paul warned the Corinthians, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33).

The people of God cannot afford to be naive about such things. The aggressive nature of iniquity will not lie dormant while simplistic people address dangerous situations. In view of this circumstance, it is imperative that the professing church have the mind of Christ concerning both righteousness and iniquity.

It is also seen in the wicked king Jeroboam, “who did sin, and who made Israel to sin” (1 Kgs 14:16). On one occasion, an expression of the flesh broke out among the brethren, as Peter separated himself from certain Gentile believers because he feared the criticism certain Jews. It is written of that occasion, “And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him ; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation” (Gal 2:13). Paul also warned Timothy of certain corrupt teachings saying, “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness ” (2 Tim 2:16). Peter also spoke of false prophets who would privately bring

damnable heresies within the church. “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Pet 2:1-2). He also warned of those who “speak great swelling words of vanity,” and through them “allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error” (2 Pet 2:18).

There is a current mentality extant within the professed church that places an inordinate emphasis upon the individual. At the same time, there is an almost total absence of a concern for the body of Christ itself. All manner of reasoning is presented to support this approach, but it has not yielded good results.

Every tenderhearted person is concerned for the recovery of those who have been “overtaken in a fault.” However, great care must be taken in such a work, which must only be done by those who are “spiritual,” or mature in Christ. Here is how Paul stated the case. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). And why is it that such care must be taken? Why must the person who endeavors to restore a transgressor do so with meekness, carefully considering himself? It is because of the spreading nature of iniquity! It is like an uncontrollable substance that creeps into every nook and cranny.

The people of God cannot afford to be naive about such things. The aggressive nature of iniquity will not lie dormant while simplistic people address dangerous situations. In view of this circumstance, it is imperative that the professing church have the mind of Christ concerning both righteousness and iniquity. It is said of the Savior of the body, “Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Heb 1:9). There you have the mind of Christ delineated, and the response of the God of heaven to it. This is a matter that has been revealed, and it must not be ignored. Furthermore, this is something that has been known for centuries. The Psalmist expressed it well hundreds of years before Jesus entered the world. “Ye that love the LORD, hate evil” (Psa 97:10). Again he exhorted, “Depart from evil” (Psa 34:14). The Psalmist himself resolved, “I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me” (Psa 101:3). Again he said, “I hate every false way” (Psa 119:104). And again, “I hate and abhor lying” (Psa 119:163). Solomon said, “The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov 8:13). Amos admonished the people, “Hate the evil” (Amos 5:15). Paul confessed that he hated unwanted thoughts that were hurled at him like fiery darts from the devil (Rom 7:15,24). He admonished believers, “abhor that which is evil” (Rom 12:9).

It is because of the absence of the hatred of evil that Stephen was stoned. If the mindset of David had been owned by them, they would never have carried out their dastardly deed!

Our Time

Because of the spiritual state of the Jewish people at large, the death of Stephen was like an earthquake that produced a giant tsunami wave of persecution – violent and extensive oppression. It did not come from the political section, but from the religious segment of society!

I will tell you that the modern church does not hate iniquity as it should, else it would not be allowing the monumental intrusions of it that are taking place in our time. In fact, there does not appear to be a hatred of evil at any acceptable level. It has caused the nominal church to be gullible, so that he drinks in all kinds of false doctrine. It has caused it to be tolerant of those whom Jesus will not allow in his body, which is the church. There are churches without number who have active members whose names are not written in heaven, and who, by virtue of their friendship with the world, are actually the enemies of God (James 4:4).

What Does All of This Mean?

And what does all of this mean? It simply means that conditions are in place for the professing church to launch a persecution of those who have received the love of the truth. Institutionalism has birthed a church that is more like council who stoned Stephen than the church that endured persecution. It does not require an astute thinker to discern this. Already there are countless believers throughout the land who are sorrowful because they are not being fed, encouraged, nurtured, or strengthened during the church gatherings they attend. There are older and faithful ministers who are being placed on the inactive list, while unlearned novices are being exalted to places of organizational prominence. Stephen would have no more success in many of the churches of our land than he did before the council that stoned him.

Unless this situation is addressed and resolved, there is no hope for the American church. If it does not rid itself of those who insist on maintaining a worldly mindset further and extensive defilement cannot be avoided.

A GREAT PERSECUTION

“. . . there was a great persecution . . .” Other versions read, “a severe persecution,” NRSV “a violent attack,” BBE “i ntense persecution,” CJB “ widespread persecution,” GWN “ bitter persecution,” NJB “a great wave of persecution,” NLT “a great and severe persecution,” AMPLIFIED “the church . . . suffered terribly ,” CEV and “ cruel persecution.” GNB

Because of the spiritual state of the Jewish people at large, the death of Stephen was like an earthquake that produced a giant tsunami wave of persecution – violent and extensive oppression. It did not come from the political section, but from the religious segment of society!

This was actually the initiative of Satan, seeking to cause the church to be “carried away” in a floodtide of persecution (Rev 12:15). As “the kings of the earth and the rulers” were formerly “gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ” (Acts 4:26), now the Jewish rulers and people joined forces against the church. Like Pilate and Herod who, though formerly foes, were joined in their opposition to Christ (Lk 23:12), now the Pharisees and Sadducees who were theologically at variance (Acts 23:8), joined together to oppress the church.

POLITICAL OPPRESSION VERSUS PERSECUTION

What we are reading of is a “a great persecution against the church.” This was not a political initiative, as when the Roman ruler Claudius “commanded all Jews to depart from Rome” (Acts 18:2). This was not an issue of political rights, as when Paul appealed to his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25-28).

When there is political oppression, either a good law is not being honored, or a change in the law is required. That is why men call for equal rights and just treatment of the citizenry. However, this is not how persecution is handled, and we ought not allow unlearned leaders to direct our thinking as though that was the case.

Throughout our world, there are great numbers of believers who are being persecuted. The latest report of Voice of the Martyrs (8/2007) lists initiatives against believers in India, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Malaysia, Burma, Indonesia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Iraq, North Korea, China, etc. There is also the beginnings of persecution in our own country, as prayer and witnessing is being outlawed in public places. Iniquity is spreading!

A Complicating Factor

As if the persecutions that are being unleashed were not bad enough, the churches of our country are in a weakened and even emaciated state. That is why they are admonishing people to contact their congressmen and senators, seeking for equal rights for Christians. They have no power with God, and are this seeking help from Egypt. Now, when strong believers are needed to stem the tide of iniquity, we have a church on our hands that has “denied the power,” and thus has no basis for a powerful appeal to the Living God. In the early church, when threats broke out against the proclaimers, the body of Christ went to the Lord, pleading for boldness to preach the Word (Acts 4:24-30). They had an understanding of the situation, and therefore prayed with insight. Their prayer was answered, and the truth continued to spread.

However, when the church is like the world, it cannot be rallied to call upon the name of the Lord. We cannot depend upon flighty novices and entertainers to have power with both God and men. During the last few years we have had a number of professing Christian leaders who have called for boycotts, contacting political representatives, and all-out initiative to elect Christian politicians. It is as though the whole matter of the social conditions about us have been divorced from the Living God. The effects of all of these efforts have by no means stemmed the tide of iniquity, which continues to increase exponentially, both in and out of the church.

One of the effects of spiritual Babylon is the withering of the ability to properly assess opposition. In our text, the aggression against believers is described as “a great persecution against the church.” However, who is referring to the current initiatives against God’s people in such a manner? It is all being described in political language, with rights and political freedom at the forefront of the thought. We should not expect assessments like this to produce in form of spiritual power, whether expressed in Gospel initiatives, proper responses, or wise reactions.

AGAINST THE CHURCH

“ . . . against the church which was at Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “against the Messianic Community,” CJB “against the assembly,” DARBY “the church which was at Jerusalem,” PNT and “the congregation .” TNT

In order to better appreciate precisely what our text is saying, let us consider some synonyms for “the church.” These are the ones against whom this persecution was unleashed.

Note, the persecution was not leveled at A church, but “THE church which was at Jerusalem.” Spiritually speaking, this is very precise. Speaking in the flesh, it is very general. If, for example, our local newspaper said there was a persecution raised against the church in Joplin, which one would it be? Or, would it be all of them? When we speak about Jerusalem, there is no trouble in understanding what was intended, for at that time the believers were of “one accord” (2:46), and of “one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32).

Synonyms for the Church

In order to better appreciate precisely what our text is saying, let us consider some synonyms for “the church.” These are the ones against whom this persecution was unleashed.

- The disciples (Acts 6:1).
- The believers (Acts 5:14).
- All that believed (Acts 2:44).
- The body of Christ (Eph 4:12).
- Members of His body (Eph 5:30).
- The children of God (Gal 3:26).

- The sons of God (1 John 3:1).
- Those are born of God (1 John 3:9).
- Those who are in Christ (Rom 8:1).
- New creatures (2 Cor 5:17).
- The temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17).
- The fulness of Him that filleth all in
- all (Eph 1;23).
- The habitation of God (Eph 2:22).
- Those who have the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9).
- Those who have been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13).
- Those who are strangers and pilgrims in the world (1 Pet 2:11).
- The citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20).
- Those who are holding fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope (Heb 3:6).
- Those who are dead with Christ (Rom 6:8).
- Those who have been raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).
- Those who are walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7).
- Those who are being saved by hope (Rom 8:24-25).
- Those who have crucified the flesh (Gal 5:24).
- Those who have been circumcised by Christ (Col 2:12).
- Those who have been raised up and made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places (Eph 2:7).
- Those who know the Lord (Heb 8:11).
- Those who call upon the name of the Lord (1 Cor 1:2).
- Those who are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph 2:10).
- Those who have been baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27).
- Those who have been joined to the Lord and are of one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:17).
- Those who have passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14).
- Those who have been washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11).
- The righteous (1 Pet 3:12).
- Those who do not love the world or the things that are in the world (1 John 2:15-16).
- The salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13-14).
- Those into whose hearts God has shined with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6).
- Those who are being changed from one increasing stage of glory to another by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- Those who are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit (Rom 8:9).

- Those who hear the voice of Christ and follow Him (John 10:27).
- Those who have the law of God written upon the hearts and put into their minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16).
- Those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:2).
- Those are justified by faith and have peace with God (Rom 5:1).

These are only a sampling of the various statements concerning the identity of the people of God – the church, which is the body of Christ. There is no such thing as an acceptable person or group of persons that is not so characterized.

The fact that there is a kind of strange sound to these inspired descriptions is a commentary on the state of the modern church. However, we must not allow ourselves to be confused on this matter. When the Spirit says a “great persecution” was launched against the church, He is not speaking of opposition to Bible reading, providing a thorough review of State history, or taxing religious institutions. This was an initiative launched against people – people who were living by faith and walking in contradiction of this present evil world. These people were shining “as lights in the world,” and it was convicting to those who had settled down in the theological muck of the times.

On the very Stephen was stoned, the persecution was launched, applying pressure to the believers. It was all designed to purge Jerusalem of their influence, and to overthrow the obvious intentions of the disciples. Already they had been charged with filling Jerusalem with their teaching, or doctrine (Acts 5:26).

Now, we want to take care to observe the way in which the church responds to this persecution. This will be a revelation of what they really possess.

THEY WERE ALL SCATTERED

“ 1c . . . and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria . . . ” Other versions read, “ went away ,” BBE “ dispersed ,” DOUAY “” forced to scatter ,” NET and “ fled .” LIVING

This time, the disciples do not pray as they did when they were first threatened (Acts 4:24ff). There seemed to be an awareness among them that this was a different circumstance than they had first encountered. We know this was not a rash or thoughtless response because of what they did.

Owing to them living by faith and walking in the Spirit, it appears clear to me that they were able to correlate their experience with the words of the Lord Jesus. Those who had not personally heard them were no doubt apprised of them by those who knew them by experience. Here is what Jesus had told them. “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem , and in all Judaea , and in Samaria , and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Already they had “filled” Jerusalem with their doctrine, declaring what the Jews had done, what God the Father had done, and what Jesus had accomplished. He had also told them that “repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name beginning at Jerusalem” (Lk 24:47).

Some are of the opinion that the disciples had not one right in remaining in Jerusalem, and this were forced out of the city to do what Jesus had commanded them to do. This, however, is nothing more than institutional folklore imagined to support the view of some concerning the recruitment of souls for the institution. This will become increasingly apparent as we proceed through this text.

WHERE THE DISCIPLES DISPERSED

It is interesting to note where the disciples were scattered or dispersed: “throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria.” This precisely coincides with the word given to them by the Lord before He ascended into heaven: “ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samara.”

The land of Canaan was divided into three sections. The upper region was Galilee. The middle region was Samaria. The lower region was Judea, in which Jerusalem was located. Ultimately, there were churches in all three regions. Thus it is written in Acts 9:31, “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9:31). However, in Christ’s word to his disciples, He omitted Galilee. Also, when the disciples were dispersed, Galilee is not included in the regions into which they were dispersed.

There is a reason for this, and it is worthy of notation. During His earthly ministry, Jesus spent most His time in Galilee, with occasional visits to Samaria and Judaea. The Gospel tells us that as soon as John the Baptist was martyred, Jesus went into Galilee. At that time He left Nazareth (also in Galilee), where He was raised, and went into Galilee proper. Matthew records it in these words, “Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim” (Mat 4:12-13). This was done, we are told, “That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; (Mat 4:15)

The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up” (Matt 4:14-16).

However, Jesus was not well received in this region, thus confirming that it had been a kind of citadel of the powers of darkness. Although most of His mighty works were done in that region, yet He upbraided them because of the rampant unbelief in those parts. “Then began he to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not: Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee” (Mat 11:20-24).

You may also recall the unbelief that was found in Nazareth, where He was brought up, and where He regularly attended the local synagogue. That is the place where they gave a miserable response to Jesus, and where He could do no mighty works. “And when He was come into His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not His mother called Mary? and His brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in Him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in His own country, and in His own house. And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief ” (Matt 13:58; Mk 6:1-5). In Luke’s account of this time, he informs us of the reaction of the synagogue crowd to His words: “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong, But he passing through the midst of them went his way” (Luke 4:28-30).

Now, coincidentally, all of these cities were in Galilee: Bethsaida, Chorazin, Capernaum, and Nazareth. They had all been visited with light, and yet they spurned it, offering up such a wave of

unbelief that Jesus rebuked them. Then, as though underscoring that they had been the first to be subjected to the Gospel of the Kingdom, He leaves them out of the commission to preach in the land of the Jews. Later they would hear the Word, but in them the saying would be fulfilled, “So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen” (Matt 20:16).

God was in this whole matter, working out His will in a most precise manner. Jesus had told the disciples to begin preaching in Jerusalem – and that is precisely what they did. Because this was the “mother church,” as men would put it, it was essential that it be grounded and settled. Time was therefore allowed for this to happen – a time during which some powerful proclaimers of the Word would be raised up to carry the apostles doctrine elsewhere.

The Jerusalem church, like those that would spring up where Paul and his co-laborers ministered, would not be abandoned in the fledgling youth. That is something that is quite common in our time, but it is not the way the Holy Spirit leads the true servants of God. The Jerusalem church had been duly tutored in the ways of the Lord.

- They had learned by experience the value of ministering to and waiting upon the Lord (Acts 1:13-14).
- They had learned how to reason upon the basis of Scripture, particularly in the choosing of Matthias (Acts 1:15-26).
- They had experienced the illumination and empowerment of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).
- They knew how to handle sudden and significant increases in the number of disciples (Acts 2:41; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7).
- They knew the joy of the unity of the faith and the unity of the Spirit (Acts 1:14; 2:1,44,46; 4:24,32; 5:12).
- They had known the chaffing effects of opposition (Acts 4:1,18-21; 5:17-40; 7:58-60).
- They had learned the power of prayer (Acts 4:24-31).
- They proved faithful in serving the Lord, even when it involved imprisonment and beating (Acts 4:19-20; 5:20-29).
- They had witnessed the pruning of unproductive branches from the church (Acts 5:1-10).
- They were able to choose godly men to fulfill needed ministries (Acts 6:1-6).
- They knew the reality and effects of martyrdom among their number (Acts 7:58-60).

These people were well able to penetrate society with the Word of God, They had been walking in the light, experiencing Divine fellowship, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.

was directing a church that was walking in the newness of life. The fact that He did not direct them in the manner that is commonly taught among professed Christians is a matter worth pondering. I am afraid that the modern church has been inundated with the traditions men, just as the Jew of old.

They Go Into Familiar Territory

Now, the scattered disciples go into areas where extensive preaching had already been done. John the Baptist had preached in Judaea (Matt 2:1). people from Judaea had heard Jesus Himself (Matt 4:25). Jesus had gone into Judaea and preached to multitudes (Matt 19:1). Jesus had also preached in Samaria, and whole multitudes had believed on Him from there (Luke 17:11; John 4:4-42).

These disciplines were not being recalcitrant about fulfilling what men refer to as “the great commission,.” Jesus never did say that preaching to the lost took the precedence over nourishing believers. In fact He thrice told Peter to “feed” His people: “feed My lambs . . . feed My sheep . . . feed My sheep ” (John 21:15-17). Once, when He told Peter that Satan had desired him to sift Him as wheat, and after telling him He had prayed for him that his faith fail not, He added, “and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren ” (Luke 22:32).

The point to be seen here is that Jesus was directing a church that was walking in the newness of life. The fact that He did not direct them in the manner that is commonly taught among professed Christians is a matter worth pondering. I am afraid that the modern church has been inundated with the traditions men, just as the Jew of old.

EXCEPT THE APOSTLES

“ 1d . . . except the apostles.” Other versions read, “all but the apostles,” BBE and “only the apostles stayed there.” IE

Now is a circumstance that is worthy of contemplation. Since the apostles were the principle proclaimers of the Word, and the ones appointed over the work of the Lord, you might think the enemies would have driven them out of Jerusalem. They were the ones who had been charged with filling Jerusalem with their doctrine (Acts 5:28). However, they are not the ones who are scattered.

This confirms the aggression against the saints was being controlled from the heavens, for “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). It certainly was not that the enemies of faith were unconcerned about the apostles. They had twice set out to rid themselves of the influence of these twelve men, and were unable to do so. God had set up His Kingdom during the times of competitive kingdoms, just as Daniel said (Dan 2:44). It would break all opposing authority in pieces, but it would not be broken. Neither, indeed, could the enemies of the faith remove the principle leaders from the scene, which they would gladly have done if they could. What is more, they were not at peace with the apostles – at least not willingly.

While the church was being more firmly established, God caused the enemies of the apostles to be at peace with them, even though, through great persecution, they scattered the church.

The Lord has ordained that the church be placed the foundation set in place by the apostles (Eph 2:20). He would not allow any person to interfere with that work. God has consistently worked in this manner. When He sent Moses, the work assigned to him was completed (Deut 34:4-7). When he raised up Joshua, the work given to him was brought to completion (Josh 23:1). The prophets all delivered the messages they were given to proclaim (1 Pet 1:10-12). Solomon completed the building of the first Temple (1 Kgs 6:9), and Zerubbabel finished the building of the second (Zech 4:9). Daniel completed his prodigious ministry in Babylon (Dan 12:13). Nehemiah completed the wall he was raised to build (Neh 6:15). John the Baptist brought his work to a satisfactory conclusion (John 3:30). The Lord Jesus completed the redemptive assignment given to him – to lay down His life and take it up again (John 19:30). Paul finished the course that had been laid out before him (2 Tim 4:7).

Those who engage in the work of the Lord do well to first determine what God has given them to do. Once that has been found, then they are to labor with all their might in full confidence that God will enable them to finish their work.

DEVOUT MEN BURY STEPHEN

“ 2 And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.”

All believers were not scattered from Jerusalem, for here we find some men taking the time to bury

Stephen.

DEVOUT MEN

“And devout men . . .” Other versions read, “Godly men,” NIV “God-fearing men,” BBE “pious men,” DARBY and “believing men.” MRD

This is a day when we do well to consider devout men. This is word that is not common in our day, and devout men are themselves even less common than the word. The word “devout” is translated from the Greek word **euvlabei/j** (eula-beis). it has a very arresting lexical meaning: “taking hold well; carefully and surely, cautious . . . reverencing God, pious, religious,” THAYER “strictly taking hold of well, hence cautious, devout, pious, as a characteristic of one who carefully observes the law,” FRIBERG “reverent,” UBS “pertaining to being reverent toward God,” LOUW-NIDA “undertaking prudently, discreet, cautious, circumspect,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “keeping clean of, keeping from,” LEH “God-fearing.” GINGRICH

My purpose here is to confirm WHY burial is the historical practice of those who believe on Jesus. It is also to confirm the heathen origins and associations of cremation, which are of no small significance.

A devout person is a thinking person – and they are godly because of their thoughts. They are aggressive to take hold of, and carefully consider the truth of God, bringing their lives into conformity to it. By their very nature, they are selfless – that is why they are devoted to the Lord and to the due consideration of His truth.

Our day is not one that encouraged men to be devout. This is particularly true of the religious world. There is too much of self in the religion of our time. Men are prone to consider fleshly interests rather than spiritual ones. It is not likely that such people will be used by God – at least not for noble purposes.

The Scriptures speak of several “devout” men. Simeon, who was “just and devout,” and was called of God to bless the holy Jesus, together with Joseph and Mary (Lk 2:25). The Jews who were present on the day of Pentecost, and from among whom three thousand gladly received the word and were baptized (Acts 2:5). Cornelius, the first Gentile to officially hear the Gospel (Acts 10:2). A number of Greeks who joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17:4). A group of people with whom Paul met, proclaiming the Gospel (acts 17:17). Ananias, who was called of God to anoint Saul of Tarsus and set him aside for the apostleship (Acts 22:12).

Following Stephen;’s stoning, there was the matter of the disposal of his body. It was devout men who attended to this matter. These were men who took both life and death seriously, and sought to do the appropriate thing.

HIS BURIAL

“ . . . carried Stephen to his burial , . . .” Other versions read, “buried Stephen,” NASB “were careful together touching Stephen,” PNT “ dressed Stephen,” TNT and “helped to carry out and bury.” AMPLIFIED

Throughout Scripture, there is a consistent thread of burying people. There is absolutely no question about this being the manner of godly people. Yet, with all of these words there isn a growing number of people who prefer cremation to burial. It is with this in mind that I wish to say a few words in the defense of burial.

The Body, An Essential Part of Man

While the body is certainly not the totality of man, it is an essential part of the human makeup. Our text says devout man “carried Stephen to his burial” – not his body, but Stephen. When Jesus came to raise Lazarus from the dead, He asked his sisters, “Where have ye laid him ?” (John 11:34). When a holy angel met the women who came to anoint the body of Jesus, He said to them, “behold the place where they laid Him ” (Mk 16:6). When Paul accounted for the death of Christ, he said, “And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulcher” (Acts 13:29).

My purpose here is to confirm WHY burial is the historical practice of those who believe on Jesus. It is also to confirm the heathen origins and associations of cremation, which are of no small significance. This is NOT intended to be the cause of division in the body of Christ, or a means of enforcing something upon the consciences of those who fail to see this reasoning, even though it is the responsibility of every professing Christ to have and maintain a pure conscience (1 Tim 3:9; 2 Tim 1:3) . Rather, it is to show that there is sound logic for rejecting the practice of cremation, and unsound reasoning for accepting it.

Here is a matter where the Apostolic injunction applies: “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom 14:5). As in all other areas of life, faith, not doubt, must reign over our reasoning. Is it not written, “But those who have doubts are condemned if they eat, because they do not act from faith; for whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” NRSV (Rom 14:23). If anyone has doubts on this subject, it is their responsibility to settle doubts by means of their faith, knowledge of God, and fellowship with Christ. Those who practice cremation MUST do so because they are motivated by faith. That is how those in Christ live – “by faith” (Rom 1:17; Heb 10:38). I am challenging the notion that this is even possible – that is, that a person can practice cremation by faith.

The Burial of Jesus

The “burial” of Christ is part of the Gospel. That situation requires some elaboration on the matter of burial. Today, in the Western world, burial is being abandoned in favor of cremation – even among professed believers in Christ. Reasons for the preference of burning to burial are offered. Some of them include, “It makes no difference what we do with the body after the spirit has departed from it.” “It is more economical to cremate the body.” “Why should we make a big thing out of how we handle a dead body?” These are nothing more than the flesh blurting out its way of thinking.

All of these remarks melt in the light of God’s Word. They are wholly the product of fleshly reasoning, with not a spark of the life of the Spirit in them. When it comes to how we speak of the body, words defending cremation are not “words which the Holy Spirit teaches” (1 Cor 2:13) — and He has spoken about the body.

One of the things declared wherever the Gospel is preached, is the account of a woman who anointed Jesus, by His own word, for His “burial.” Believers should ponder the propriety of anointing a body for cremation, and how such a thought blends with the Gospel of Christ.

If we had no other Scriptural insight than the fact of Jesus being “buried,” that should settle the matter for us. Not only is His burial a vital part of the Gospel, it is something in which we participate when we are baptized into Christ — “buried with Him . . . ” (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12). Thus Christ’s burial has a twofold significance. If it is countered that Christ’s body was going to be raised from the dead, therefore necessitating His burial, it must be remembered that we too will be raised from the dead. But there is more.

One of the things declared wherever the Gospel is preached, is the account of a woman who anointed Jesus, by His own word, for His “burial” (Matt 26:12). Believers should ponder the propriety of anointing a body for cremation, and how such a thought blends with the Gospel of Christ.

The Case of Abraham

Abraham was called “the friend of God” (James 2:23). It is of interest to note how the Lord spoke to Abraham of his impending death. “And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be BURIED in a good old age” (Gen 15:15). One might choose to believe the language is inconsequential. We will find, however, absolute consistency in Scripture in the matter of the death of the righteous.

Prior to his own death, Abraham’s wife Sarah died. Even though godless societies (from which he himself had been extricated) practiced cremation, Abraham buried Sarah’s body. “And after this, Abraham BURIED Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan” (Gen 23:19).

In fulfillment of the Word of the Lord, Abraham was buried. “And his sons Isaac and Ishmael BURIED him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre” (Gen 25:9).

God Buried Moses

How did the Lord handle the death of His faithful servant, Moses? He certainly had a variety of options open to Him. He had burned up the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19). He had also consumed the wayward sons of Aaron – Nadab and Abihu – with fire (Lev 10:1ff). However, these were judgments, not to be compared with the Lord’s disposition toward Moses. “And He [God] BURIED him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor: but no man knoweth of his sepulcher unto this day” (Deut 34:6). How will men account for the practice of cremation when they stand before God. Or do men imagine that a practice that contradicted what God Himself did is of no consequence?

Ruth

One of the telling things said by Ruth, when she chose to stay with Naomi and be identified with her God, was “Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried” (Ruth 1:17). How is it that she associated burial with God, but some professing Christian’s cannot do so today?

Saul and Jonathan

When the Philistines found Saul and Jonathan dead they stripped Saul, cut off his head and taking his armor. They “put his armor in the house of their gods, and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon” (2 Sam 21:8-10). They even “fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan” (1 Sam 31:10). Certain valiant men took the bodies of Saul and his son from the wall of Bethshan, “and burnt them there.” They then took their bones and “buried them under a tree in Jabesh” (1 Sam 31:12-13).

How could such an impressive number of references be made to something inconsequential? Is this God’s manner, to clutter the minds of men with accounts that have no relevance, minister no understanding, and through which we do not learn of Divine manners?

The advocates of cremation would reason that it made no difference what happened to those bodies, or to the bones that remained. After all, there was no spirit in them, so what difference did it make. There was, however, a man after God’s own heart who did not think in this manner. When David was made king, mention was made of the men that buried Saul. It is written that David sent a special message to those men. “And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabeshgilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the LORD, that ye have showed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him” (2 Sam 2:4-5). Why did David think in this way, considering a burial to be showing kindness?

An Accented Point

The Spirit makes a point of mentioning the burial of God's people. I have already mentioned Abraham, Sarah, and Moses. The following is a small sampling of additional references. They include Deborah, Rebekah's nurse (Gen 35:8), Rachel (Gen 35:19), Isaac (Gen 35:29), Jacob (buried in Canaan, Gen 50:13-14), Miriam (Num 20:1), Aaron (Deut 10:6), Joshua (Josh 24:30), the bones of Joseph (Gen 24:32), Eleazar (son of Aaron, Josh 24:33), Gideon (Judges 8:32), Samson (Judges 16:31), Samuel (1 Sam 25:1), the bones of Saul and Jonathan (1 Sam 31:13), Abner (2 Sam 3:32), David (1 Kings 2:10; Acts 2:29), Solomon (1 Kings 11:43), Jehoshaphat (1 Kgs 22:50), John the Baptist (Matt 14:12), and Stephen (Acts 8:2). There are over thirty other Scriptural references to specific people who were "buried."

Before he died, Jacob told Joseph, "bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt" (Gen 47:29). Under the law, a criminal who was hanged was commanded to be "buried" (Deut 21:23). A special curse mentioned by David was that in the time of severe judgment, "there was none to bury them" (Psa 79:3). Solomon said it would be better for a man to have an "untimely birth" (miscarriage) than to "have no burial" (Eccl 6:3). It is expressly said that following Jesus' death Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus "took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury" (John 19:40).

How could such an impressive number of references be made to something inconsequential? Is this God's manner, to clutter the minds of men with accounts that have no relevance, minister no understanding, and through which we do not learn of Divine manners? The interment of the body was so important to Joseph, that he instructed the children of Israel not to leave his bones in Egypt, but to carry them out with them when they left the land of bondage (Gen 50:25). No person favoring cremation would have made such a request. However, many years later, when Israel came out of Egypt, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him" (Ex 13:19). Furthermore, when Israel arrived in Canaan forty years later, "the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph" (Josh 24:32).

Those supposing that the manner in which we handle the bodies of those who have passed on is inconsequential, need to consider what God Himself did with Moses' body – something that has been revealed in Holy Scripture. In fact, the devil disputed with Michael the archangel about the BODY of Moses – something he apparently did not do concerning Nadab and Abihu, whom God cremated. Also ponder that a critical aspect of the Gospel itself is the BURIAL of Jesus. I hardly see how something could be unimportant that is directly related to Jesus, the Gospel, and our own identify with Him.

For some, this is a sensitive subject – particularly because of current trends favoring cremation. While it is not my intention to cause offense, or to impose rules upon people God has not imposed, it IS my intention to declare what has been said on this subject. Your view of the matter is your own responsibility. I am endeavoring to provide a Scriptural context in which personal decisions on the subject can be reached. However, the decision you embrace is your business, not mine. I am not sitting in judgment, but declaring what is written.

Examples of Cremation

Achan and his family (Josh 7:25). They were stoned and "cremated." This is certainly not a suitable precedent for believers to follow! Achan was judged for breaking the commandment of the Lord.

Saul and his sons (1 Sam 31:12-13). Technically, this was not a cremation. The bones were preserved (something not always done in cremation) and buried in keeping with the manner of the people of God.

The Priests of the high places (2 Kgs 23:20). Again, this cannot be adduced as a precedent for those who have embraced the Lord by faith. This action was related to cursing, not blessing. It also was completely dissociated from hope.

The burning of the bones of the king of Edom (Amos 2:1). The Lord denounced Moab because they burned the bones of the king of Edom. “Thus saith the LORD; For three transgressions of Moab, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime ” (Amos 2:1). Something of the Divine mind is certainly revealed in this word. It ought not be ignored. Not a single person favoring cremation would have viewed the action of the Moabites as God did.

A Great Burning for Asa

When Asa died, Scripture says “a very great burning” was made for him. However, this was not a cremation, but a burning of spices, for Asa’s body was “buried in his own sepulcher” (2 Chron 16:14).

Paul’s Allusion to Burning the Body

As to Paul speaking of giving his body to be burned (1 Cor 13:3), he was referring to submitting to martyrdom, not to consenting to the burning of his tabernacle after he was absent from it.

A Consistent Manner

Throughout Scripture, burial is always the norm – and there are no exceptions. Historically, wherever the Gospel has been received, the people chose to bury their dead rather than cremate them. During the first century, under the powerful influence of the Gospel of Christ, Rome abandoned cremation in favor of burial. The same thing happened in Scandinavia during the eleventh century. In cultures where God is not known, cremation is common. In our own country, the practice arose only when the knowledge of God became sparse and fragmented. That is because the truth of the resurrection is not adequately known among the people. Like the Athenians and Stoics, the “resurrection of the dead” is counted as a strange thing among them (Acts 17:32).

Suffice it to say, no person, however astute can defend the act of cremation from the Word of God. Any and every person seeking to defend this practice resorts to human reasoning. Such logic is wholly inappropriate for the believer! Such wisdom is earthly, and causes dissension and confusion (James 3:15-16). In my judgment, a person cannot request cremation in the name of the Lord, giving thanks to God for it (Col 3:17).

Under no circumstances may our bodies be used as though they did not belong to God, or were in consequential. Our bodies do not belong to us — they have been purchased by God

While the manner in which the disposition of the body is handled is not the determining factor in obtaining eternal life, it does reveal a type of thinking totally unknown in Scripture. No patriarch, Moses, nor any prophet – not Jesus, nor any Apostle – every provided the slightest hint that cremation was, or ever would be, practiced among those embracing the hope of the resurrection. This is an observation that simply cannot be contested.

Scriptures represent burial as an act of faith. It is done in hope of the resurrection. “So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body” (1 Cor 15:42-44). Just as Christ’s mission was not completed until He rose from the dead, so our salvation is not complete until we too rise from the dead. As it is written, “Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies”

(Rom 8:23, NIV). How marvelous! Our “adoption” is here equated with the resurrection, or redemption, of our bodies!

We are composed of “spirit, soul, and body” (1 Thess 5:23). Salvation addresses us in our totality – spirit, soul, and body. The experience of salvation is not complete until we are raised from the dead. Until that time, we have “the firstfruits of the Spirit.” In that condition, we yearn for the completion of our adoption. The burial of the body blends with this stance. Cremation does not.

At the time of its origin, cremation was an act of hopelessness, not hope. Believers throughout the ages, however, have “planted” the bodies of their generation in hope of the resurrection. It makes as much sense to burn seed corn in hopes of a harvest as to burn a body in hope of the resurrection!

Your thoughts, which are between you and your Lord, should be as much in harmony with the Word of God as possible. Even in your death, you should seek a view that is compatible with the ancients, who enjoyed Divine visitations and looked forward to the resurrection. Whatever reasons may be offered for cremation, not a single one of them comes from the Word of God. They are, without exception, founded upon human reason. There is not a syllable in the entirety of Scripture that will in any way support them – not a word that would lead one to embrace them.

All of the arguments about the insignificance of the body fall to the ground in the blaze of the Word of God. The Scriptures are clear on this subject. “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! (God forbid, KJV)” - 1 Cor 6:15. Under no circumstances may our bodies be used as though they did not belong to God, or were in consequential. Our bodies do not belong to us — they have been purchased by God (1 Cor 6:19). While they are by no means the primary part of our constitution, they have been purchased by Christ, and will yet be redeemed by Him in the resurrection.

The death of Stephen, while the gateway through which he passed into the presence of the Lord, was a great loss to the church. A man who is filled with faith, the Holy Spirit, and wisdom, is no small deprivation when taken from the portion

The resurrection of Jesus confirmed His Sonship (Rom 1:4). It also confirms the resurrection of believers when He returns. In the above text, Paul argues this point forcefully. “Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Cor 6:13-14). Again, it is written, “Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:14). If our bodies are “the members of Christ,” and if God is going to raise them “up,” we have no right to disregard the Lord in the disposition of them. While this is not to become a point of contention among believers, it is to be laid upon the conscience of us all.

As insignificant as it may appear, burial stands in stark contrast to cremation in Scripture. Apart from the clear teaching of the Word of God on this subject, the burial of the body of Jesus sanctifies the thought for His disciples. If that were all we knew about the interment of the body, it should be enough to constrain us to view it with the utmost respect. God saw fit to record the intentions of holy women of old who had regard for the buried body of Jesus, themselves not realizing He was to rise from the dead (Luke 24:1). We are even told that Jesus was buried “as the manner of the Jews is to bury” (John 19:40). Rest assured, the Holy Spirit is not commenting on social customs, or fading practices. No word of God is void of power or without profit.

For those having difficulty with this rather elementary subject, the question is not whether God is able to raise a body from the sea, the grave, or a pile of ashes. The question is whether God’s people can justify the deliberate choice of a practice that does not blend with the manner of God’s people through the ages, nor harmonize with the hope of the resurrection. The very subject of cremation has

the taint of the world upon it. The fragrance of the heathen penetrates every aspect of it. Only the wisdom of the world can make an attempt to justify it. There is neither honor nor hope in it. Faith cannot justify it, and a “pure conscience” will question it. Yet today, it is becoming increasingly popular within the church.

MADE GREAT LAMENTATION

“ . . . and made great lamentation over him.” Other versions read, “loud lamentation,” NASB “mourned deeply ,” NIV “made great weeping ,” BBE “made great mourning over him,” DOUAY “lamented over him greatly,” MRD “with great sorrow ,” LIVING “made loud wailing ,” ALT and “mourning for him with loud cries .” GNB

The death of Stephen, while the gateway through which he passed into the presence of the Lord, was a great loss to the church. A man who is filled with faith, the Holy Spirit, and wisdom, is no small deprivation when taken from the portion of God’s family that is upon the earth. That is why the people lamented.

Throughout history, people have mourned the passing of great men.

- When Sarah died, Abraham wept for her (Gen 23:2).
- When Jacob died, the Egyptians mourned for him for seventy days (Gen 50:3).
- When Jacob was buried in Canaan, they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation (Gen 50:10).
- When Aaron died, Israel mourned for thirty days (Num 20:29).
- When Moses died, Israel wept for thirty days (Deut 34:6).
- When Samuel died, Israel lamented over him (1 Sam 28:3).
- When Saul and Jonathan were slain, David lamented over them (2 Sam 1:19-27).
- David mourned over the death of Abner (2 Sam 3:31).
- When Hezekiah died, Israel honored him in his death (2 Chron 32:33).
- When king Josiah died, Jeremiah lamented for him (2 Chron 35:25).

Particularly when great and godly men pass from this world, it leaves a gaping hole in the wall of Kingdom labors. There have been whole generations, and lengthy periods of time when there was not a single man of the caliber of Stephen. He was a rare spiritual giant who achieved much for the Lord in a relatively short period of time.

Also, in those days there was a closeness within the body of Christ that is scarcely known in our day. There are churches without number in which a godly conversation can scarcely be heard, and few put their hands to the work of the Lord. But it was not so in the days of Stephen. At that time the people were of one accord, one soul, one heart, and one mind. They were frequently together, continuing steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42). That is why they lamented the death of Stephen. It was not because of mere friendship in the flesh.

I have lived long enough to become acutely aware and sensitive of the passing of godly men. I have also seen

A new generation of Christian leaders is rising to prominence in which the virtues of assurance, faith, and hope are, at the very best, in the background. Were Stephen to have lived in our fair city, and died here, I fear that the reaction of the Christian community would be far different

than that of the brethren in our text.

a shift in the nature of funerals with miserable messages, the introduction of humor, and a near-total absence of the proclamation of the hope of glory. Something is happening in our time that is not good. They is a diminishment of sensitivity and tenderness, and a waning sense of spiritual values. Men have become fond of referring to funeral services as celebrations, but it is really nothing more than a fad, for you rarely hear anyone celebrating hope, the completion of the good fight of faith, or finishing the course set before them. I believe I know what people are trying to say when they use language like this, but it has the foam of carnality upon it. Then again, in all of Scripture there really is no representation of that kind of public reaction to the death of godly people. It is all very troubling to me. In fact, the only death I know of that is really celebrated is the death of Jesus. A new generation of Christian leaders is rising to prominence in which the virtues of assurance, faith, and hope are, at the very best, in the background. Were Stephen to have lived in our fair city, and died here, I fear that the reaction of the Christian community would be far different than that of the brethren in our text.

Spiritual Robbery

There is a reason for these conditions, as difficult as it is to speak about them. Spiritual Babylon, by making the institution central, has robbed the people of a deep affiliation with one another. Interpersonal associations are too shallow, and do not go deep enough into the heart. Too man are living on the surface of life's sea.

Being workers together with God is not common, and godly discussions and fellowship are become more rare. In such a setting, death cannot possibly be treated as it is in this text.

AS FOR SAUL . . .

“ 3 As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”

From this point on, the thrust of the book of Acts changes. We now are introduced more fully to a man who will dominate this book from chapter thirteen to the conclusion of the book. Our introduction to him is vastly different than what we know about any other kingdom laborer. I do not recall any other man being called to serve the Lord who came from a background of oppressing the people of God.

AS FOR SAUL

“As for Saul . . .” Other versions read, “ But Saul,” NASB “Saul, however ,” CSB “Saul, meanwhile ,” NAB “Saul then ,” NJB and “Paul was like a wild man .” LIVING

Here we have an index to the venomous hatred of Saul of Tarsus for the disciples of Jesus. The stoning of Stephen. Which occasioned great lamentation within the church, had somehow ignited the wrath of Saul. Although a young man, he appeared determined to stamp out what he considered to be a blasphemous movement.

We are not sure of the precise time period covered in this text. Traditional views put it around two years after Pentecost, although some are of the opinion that is the longest possible period of time. The early life of Saul is also a bit sketchy regarding periods of time. We know he was a Pharisee, and that he was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel. However, precisely when this took place, we do not know. It does appear that he was not in Jerusalem when Jesus was there, but arrived in the area after He had been crucified. He was from “Tarsus, a city in Cilicia” (Acts 21:39), that was approximately 400-500 miles from Jerusalem. Paul himself described the city as “no ordinary city,” NIV or “an important city.” NRSV

Although described as a “young man,” he was very aggressive, and now launches a personal campaign against the followers of Christ

MADE HAVOC OF THE CHURCH

“ . . . he made havock of the church . . .” Other versions read, “began ravaging the church,” NASB :”began to destroy the church,” NIV “was ravaging the church,” NRSV “ laid waste the church,” ASV “ burning with hate against the church,” BBE “ tried to destroy the church,” GWN “ persecuted the church,” MRD “began doing great harm to the church,” NJB “going everywhere to destroy the church,” NLT “going everywhere to devastate the believers,” LIVING “ cruelly harassed the church,” WEYMOUTH “kept trying to destroy the church,” ISV “ continued to harass the church,” WILLIAMS “ laid waste the church continuously [with cruelty and violence],” AMPLIFIED “ making a lot of trouble for the church,” CEV and “was doing injury to the church.” EMTV

The word “havoc” speaks of a wicked initiative with the determination to get rid of what is being opposed. The meaning of the word from which it is derived is, “irrational and relentless persecution; devastate, destroy, do harm, severely injure,” FRIBERG and “to affix a stigma to, to dishonor, spot, defile, to treat shamefully or with injury, to ravage, devastate, ruin.” STRONG’S

Saul’s aim was apparently twofold. First, to inflict pain upon the church, causing its members to suffer. Second, to make such an example of the believers that people would not be prone to join their number, and the movement would cease its rapid growth. He was, of course, convinced that they were wrong in their doctrine, and thus treated them like Canaanites to be driven out of the land.

It ought to be noted that just as there are mighty individual godly warriors, so there are mighty individual ungodly aggressors. At this Point, Paul was in the latter group. It will not be long until he will be an aggressor for the Lord Jesus, launching initiatives against the powers of darkness.

ENTERING EVERY HOUSE

“ . . . entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.” Other versions read, “ dragging off men and women, committing them to prison,” NKJV “ drew out both men and women and put them in prison,” GENEVA “ arresting both men and women and sending them to prison,” NJB and “ hauling men and woman committed them to prison.” WEB “ and “ dragging out men and women alike and jailing them,” LIVING

Saul even waged a house-to-house campaign in an effort to stamp out the church. He did this without any respect of persons, dragging both men and women into prison.

The word “haling” comes from a word meaning, “to draw, to drag on before the judge, to prison, or to punishment,” THAYER “moving some along by force,” FRIBERG “drag away,” UBS and “to pull or drag because of the inertia of the object being dragged.” LOUW-NIDA Saul’s action, then, was a violent one in which he forced the people against their will, dragging them out of their homes to a place of judgment, punishment, and sometimes even death.

Thus, in a relatively short time, the new church went from having favor with all the people and the people magnifying them , to being hounded by a fierce persecutor. He entered into their houses, found them in their synagogues, and pursued them into foreign countries. All of this was not punishment for wrong doing on the part of the body of Christ, for they had been faithful.

Years after he was converted, Paul confessed what he had done during the time of our text. “And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As

also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished” (Acts 22:4-5). Later, he testified again before king Agrippa. “Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities” (Acts 26:10-11).

Ponder the aggressiveness of Saul’s campaign against believers.

- He went from house to house, dragging off men and women (8:3).
- He committed men and women to prison (8:3; 22:4).
- He persecuted them unto the death, binding and delivering them into prison (22:4).
- He shut many of the saints in Jerusalem in prison (26:10).
- He obtained letters from the high priest authorizing him to go into Damascus, and bring believers bound to Jerusalem to be punished (22:5; 26:10).
- When the believers were put to death, he gave his voice against them (26:10).
- He punished believers often in every synagogue (26:11).
- He compelled some of them to blaspheme (26:11).
- He even went into “strange,” or foreign cities – cities outside the perimeter of Canaan (26:11).

Thus, in a relatively short time, the new church went from having favor with all the people (Acts 2:47) and the people magnifying them (Acts 5:13), to being hounded by a fierce persecutor. He entered into their houses, found them in their synagogues, and pursued them into foreign countries. All of this was not punishment for wrong doing on the part of the body of Christ, for they had been faithful.

This opposition can be seen from two perspectives, and both of them are valid.

- The faith of the young church was being tested. In the test, their hearts would be confirmed as to the reality of what they possessed.
- Angelic hosts would witness the magnitude of the work that had been done in the people, beholding the manifold wisdom of God confirmed in them (Eph 3:10).

Those who are quick to define the main purpose of the church rarely take into consideration its role in the tutelage of angelic hosts. It is an objective that is expressly stated in Scripture, so there is no justified reason for remaining ignorant of it. “And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:9-10). That very purpose is being lived out in our text.

THEY WENT EVERYWHERE PREACHING THE WORD

“ 4 Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word. ”

THEREFORE

“Therefore . . .” Other versions read, “Now,” NRSV “But,” BBE “However,” CJB “So,” CSB “and,” MRD and “then, indeed.” YLT

The persecution was calculated to stop the spreading of the Gospel . . . However, their tactic did not work. Instead, the Land was filled all the more with the Gospel.

Grammatically, this word means that what follows was the result of the preceding condition, which was a great persecution launched against the church. Spiritually it provides insight into how newness of life responds to opposition.

THEY THAT WERE SCATTERED

“ . . . they that were scattered abroad . . .” Other versions read, “those who has been scattered,” NASB “those who had gone in flight,” BBE “they . . . that were dispersed,” DOUAY and “the believers who had fled Jerusalem.” IE

Notice the inferior translations: i.e. “Fled” versus “scattered.” You can get God into “scattered” and “dispersed,” but it is more difficult to get Him into “fled.” The fact that these people were productive following their scattering signifies they were not fleeing for fear. These were noble souls, filled with faith, and living in the hope of glory.

WENT EVERYWHERE PREACHING

“ . . . went every where preaching the word.” Other versions read, “proclaiming the word,” NRSV “announced the good news,” CJB “proclaiming the message of good news,” CSB “announcing the glad tidings of the word,” DARBY “spread the word,” GWN “preached the good news about Jesus ,” NLT “preaching the word of God ,” PNT “proclaiming the good news – the word,” YLT “They told the people the good news,” IE “spreading the good news of God’s message,” WEYMOUTH and “went about [through the land from place to place] preaching the glad tidings, the Word [the doctrine concerning the attainment through Christ of salvation in the kingdom of God],” AMPLIFIED

The persecution was calculated to stop the spreading of the Gospel. From the very first opposition raised against the believers, that was the aim. “What shall we do to these men? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem; and we cannot deny it. But that it spread no further among the people , let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name” (Acts 4:16-17).

However, their tactic did not work. Instead, the Land was filled all the more with the Gospel. At first they were only dealing with two witnesses – Peter and John (Acts 4:13). Then, after the opposition of the religious leaders, all of the apostles became more public and prominent (Acts 5:12-14). Now, they still have all of the apostles in Jerusalem, and allo who were scattered throughout Judaea and Samaria also preaching the Word! Now, instead of Jerusalem being filled with the apostles’ doctrine (Acts 5:28), the whole land was being filled with it! You can see that the devil is fighting a losing battle. He cannot win, and Jesus cannot lose!

Persecution assumes that the ones being persecuted are basically self-centered. Just as Satan did with Job, it presumes “Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life” (Job 2:4). The flesh cannot conceive of a person being willing to live for someone else – not loving their own lives, even unto the death. But that is precisely the kind of people that are produced by regeneration. They receive a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). They become a new creation in Christ Jesus, with old things passing away and all things becoming new (2 Cor 5:17). They Are actually “zealous of good works,” persecuted or not (Tit 2:14). The law of God is written upon their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 8:10:16). God has shined into their hearts with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and they have been regenerated and refreshed by it (2 Cor 4:6). When you turn these people loose, they go everywhere preaching the word, proclaiming the good things they have heard and experienced.

WHAT IF THIS HAPPENED TODAY?

Keep in mind that the people in our text had heard the truth as it is in Jesus. Corrupt doctrine had not yet crept into the church, even though would not be long until it would. When it says they went everywhere “preaching the word,” it means they were speaking “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:5,14; Col 1:5).

If the modern church was scattered today and went every preaching, I can hardly imagine what they would be saying. If the media ministries are an index to what is being preached – and it appears that this is generally true – all manner of distortions would be proclaimed. One group would be going everywhere preaching about the centrality of the home and marriage. Others would set up workshops to assist the people in dealing with various domestic and social problems. Still others would declare the Gospel of health and wealth for everyone. There would be those who declared the power of positive

See, in this text we are witnessing the outworking of the real life of God. This is not simulated life, but is the real thing. This is how the life of Christ reacts in persecution. It has taught people to live for Christ, not for self. Thus, persecution does not have the power over them that it does to those whose conscience is defiled, and who are lacking in spiritual understanding.

thinking, and how you can frame your future your own words. There would be a cluster of people declaring a Gospel of the Spirit, providing people with an easy routine that would guarantee the reception of the Spirit with attending signs. There would also be the church planters, praise and worship advocates, and those who marketed higher Christian education. Soul winning experts would be out there, together with financial advisers, and experts in child rearing and how reach various people groups. I am sure it would be much like the scattering of the people at Babel with no one understanding what the others were saying.

However, this whole scenario breaks down, because it is nothing more than an imagination. The truth of the matter is that persecution dries up such emphases, because they are totally lacking of Divine power. That is why men have to have routines, procedures, and rules to carry them out. There is no life in them. Such people have to be told to spread their doctrine. The people in our text did not have to be told. The true Word burns in the hearts of men, the doctrines of men do not.

See, in this text we are witnessing the outworking of the real life of God. This is not simulated life, but is the real thing. This is how the life of Christ reacts in persecution. It has taught people to live for Christ, not for self. Thus, persecution does not have the power over them that it does to those whose conscience is defiled, and who are lacking in spiritual understanding.

What we have here is a parallel to Israel’s experience in Egypt. When persecution was experienced, the people started to multiply (Ex 1:7,12,20; Acts 7:17). Rest assured that what we receive in Christ Jesus is far superior to the best that Israel experienced. The covenant under which they operated was an inferior one. Its glory was a lesser and fading glory (2 Cor 3:7-10).

CONCLUSION

Much, if not the majority, of the need for fleshly discipline and organization is refreshingly and effectively resolved when men live by faith and walk in the Spirit. Newness of life, and the hope it spawns, is actually a better disciplinarian than the accumulated wisdom of men.

The book of Acts is precisely that – a book of ACTS, activity, and action. It is a book in which the government of Jesus is seen, as He sits upon the throne of David, orchestrating the affairs of the world with the intent of bringing many sons to glory. It is a book in which the working of the Holy Spirit is seen, convicting, leading, directing, illuminating, inspiring, and comforting. In it we behold how newness of life reacts in both peaceful and troubled environs, when the people are received, and when they are persecuted. We witness the impact of Christ's intercession in heaven (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), and the intercession of the Holy Spirit from within the believers (Rom 8:26-27). Wherever there is legitimate spiritual life, there will be similarities to what we are beholding in this book. If no such similarities are witnessed, we have good reason to question the presence of genuine spiritual life. In such a case, there must be a hearty and thorough examination of self to see if Christ is in us or not (2 Cor 13:5).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #36

PHILIP PREACHES IN SAMARIA

“ 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. 8 And there was great joy in that city. 9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. 11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.” (Acts 8:5-13)

INTRODUCTION

The church in Jerusalem has been scattered because of a fierce persecution unleashed against it. The increased preaching of the Gospel had served to further define the hostility that existed between formalized religion and true spirituality. Lifeless religious leaders had gone largely undetected for years – perhaps centuries. However, when the light was introduced into the region in the Person of Jesus (Matt 4:16), and confirmed by the powerful preaching of those who heard Him (Heb 2:3), it shed light on the condition of Judaism, which at the time was nothing more than lifeless tradition. In Jesus we find the ultimate fulfillment of One who is “the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life” (2 Cor 2:15-16). He drew out those who had honest and good hearts, and who come to the light in order that their deeds might be made manifest. He also exposed those who refused to come to the light, “lest their deeds should be reprov’d” (John 3:19-21).

Now, because Jesus is dwelling in the early church, and they are insightfully proclaiming the truth concerning Him and His salvation, the same things are happening as did in the ministry of Jesus. The believers are being opposed by the same people who rejected

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Jesus, and they are drawing the same people whose hearts were drawn toward the Savior – people who were being drawn to Jesus by God the Father, according to Christ’s own word. “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day” (John 6:44).

SOMETHING TO BE LEARNED

There is surely something to be learned in all of this. Wherever there is an environment in which the Gospel is not being insightfully preached and expounded, it is not possible to know who has an honest and good heart, and those who do not. It also is not possible to attract anyone to the Person of Christ or to induce faith, for that comes by means of the Gospel. It is not possible for people to make an association of any person or group of persons with a Christ of whom they know nothing. A church, for example, that immerses itself in doing good deeds, yet does not proclaim the good news of Christ, has left no telling witness in the community. People do not default to associating goodness with God and the Lord Jesus whom He has sent. To hear people talk about seeing sermons, and providing their explanation of letting your light shine, you might be tempted to think that this kind of association could be made. However, if it is true that faith comes by hearing, not seeing, then such a thought is nothing more than an imagination that needs to be cast down.

Believers should be suspicious of any approach to reaching the lost that minimizes the proclamation of the Gospel. We have no record in Scripture of anyone being converted who was not exposed to the Gospel – who did not have a word delivered to them at some time.

Someone might cite Peter’s comment about the unbelieving husband being won “without the word.” His statement is found in 1 Peter 3:1: “Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives” (1 Pet 3:1). However, that is speaking of a man who has been subjected to the word, for one who “obeys not the word” is one that has, in fact heard the word. The picture is of a couple being exposed to the Gospel: the wife believing it, and the husband not doing so. The point Peter is making is that the conversion of the husband does not require that his wife also proclaim the word. Rather, as she lives out the Gospel to which her husband had already been exposed, he could be won over to the truth.

Believers should be suspicious of any approach to reaching the lost that minimizes the proclamation of the Gospel. We have no record in Scripture of anyone being converted who was not exposed to the

Gospel – who did not have a word delivered to them at some time. Even if we did not know this, the Scriptures make clear that it is not possible to believe without hearing, and it is not possible to hear “without a preacher” (Rom 10:14). These proclaimers are the means through which men believe, and everyone who has believed has been exposed to one or more of them. As it is written, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ?” (1 Cor 3:5).

The church to which we are being exposed in the book of Acts is one that preached the Gospel. That preaching not only was the means through which faith came to those inclined to it, but was also the means of exposing those who were the enemies of God, even though they were disguised as being devoted to Him. While it may have a bit of a negative overtone to some, what appears to be the majority of the evangelistic and missionary strategies that are being used these days are nothing more than the inventions of institutional devotees. I am aware that this is not true of everyone. However, those who do not subscribe to such stratagems are surely the exception, and have separated from the rank and file of the professing church. If there is an honest soul who has a burden to reach people with the Gospel, he should first become thoroughly acquainted with the book of Acts in which the genuine outworking of Divine life is recorded. Then, it is essential to saturate the mind with the epistles, which are the expression of Jesus to the saved, teaching them of Divine priorities and objectives.

SCATTERED BELIEVERS ARE PREACHING EVERYWHERE

Dispersed throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, scattered believers are preaching the Word everywhere. Ordinarily, the sure way to diffuse a movement is to divide the people within it. This, of course, is what the Lord did in “a plain in the land of Shinar” where a totally united people had determined to build themselves “a city and a tower.” The Lord, seeing their prideful ambition, imposed a diversity of language upon the people so they could not understand one another. As soon as that happened, “they left off to build the city” (Gen 11:2-6). In this case, the people were divided among themselves – that is, the division was internal, not merely external. This is the kind of division of which Jesus spoke when He said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand” (Matt 12:25).

The Scattering Was Not Division

Although the scattering of the believers divided them one from another, it was not the division of which Jesus spoke. The brethren were not divided within – against themselves – like the people in the land of Shinar. This is the kind of division Satan sought to induce, but he was not able to do it. Those who were scattered maintained “the unity of the Spirit” and “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:3,13). That is precisely why the work of the Lord continued with the blessing of the Lord upon it.

In our Time

Theologically speaking, the work related to the New Covenant that came to an end was the work Jesus accomplished while upon earth. In summation, it was His death, burial, and resurrection.

In our time, the professing church is divided against itself, like the builders of Shinar. The Christian community has factions, or heresies, within it, and cannot properly be called “the body of Christ.” Yet, even though God does not work in such an environment, many of the people work at being united, while maintaining their theological differences. All, of this is being done in spite of the fact that the Head of the church has delivered a clear message through a chosen ambassador: “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). That is not a goal, but a mandate. Yet, the professing church has

chosen to ignore it, maintaining different mind-sets and judgments. They imagine that the blessing of the Lord will be found among their personally preferred divisions, which the Lord forbids, and with people not speaking the same thing, which He commands.

Some resolve this dilemma by saying that those who profess allegiance to Christ, yet violate His Word, are really not a church at all. For them, that solves the difficulty. But this does not mesh with the mind of Christ who spoke to churches who were living in violation of the truth. Among them were the following.

- Ephesus, which had left its first love (Rev 2:4).
- Pergamos, which had some who held to the doctrine of Balaam, and some who embraced the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which doctrine Jesus Himself hated (Rev 2:14-15).
- Thyatira, which tolerated a false prophetess in their presence who taught Jesus' servants to "commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols" (Rev 2:20).
- Sardis, which Jesus described as having a name that they were alive, but they were really "dead." They had virtues that needed to be strengthened, which were "ready to die." Jesus said their works were not "perfect before God," and that only a few among them had "not defiled their garments" (Rev 3:1-4).
- Laodicea, which was lukewarm, and described by Jesus as "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked." He was ready to spew them out of His mouth, disowning them altogether. In fact, He was standing on the outside of that church, seeking admittance into it (Rev 3:15-17,20).

Jesus depicted Himself as standing in the middle of these churches, and having their ministers in His hand (Rev 1:12-16, 20). Although those churches were on the verge of ruin, He called them to repentance. There is no reason to doubt that He is doing the same today – that is, if the churches have not passed beyond the opportunity to the point where Jesus has already removed them from His presence (Rev 2:5), is now fighting against them (Rev 2:16), killing them with death (Rev 2:23), and spewing them out of His mouth (Rev 3:16).

I do not wish to spend more time on this, for I feel it would not be profitable. However, it is necessary to speak briefly about our circumstances so we can better understand the staggering zeal and growth of the early church. It was uncontaminated, and it's messengers and message were pure. This is the kind of thing that takes place when people are vessels "unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work" (2 Tim 2:21).

I know of no clear word in Scripture that will lead us to the conclusion that there was a point in time when the kind of power and growth declared in the book of Acts was, by Divine intention, brought to a conclusion. I know there are those who take this position, but, at the very best, they must distort Scripture to justify that view. Neither the prophets, Jesus, nor the Apostles spoke of any aspect of New Covenant life that would, after a period of time, be rendered obsolete and unnecessary. It is not possible for the covenant of a greater and increasing glory (2 Cor 3:9,10) to contain things that diminish, or are confined to a certain period of time.

Theologically speaking, the work related to the New Covenant that came to an end was the work Jesus accomplished while upon earth. In summation, it was His death, burial, and resurrection. In detail, it was the putting away of sin (Heb 9:26), the destroying of the devil (Heb 2:14), the plundering of principalities and powers (Col 2:15), making peace (Col 1:20), and ending the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4). Now that He is seated at the right hand of "the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:3), the work that He is doing is depicted as an ongoing one. That work will not conclude until He leaves heaven to bring an end to the temporal order, gather His own, and punish the wicked.

As we go through the book of Acts, it is wise to keep these considerations in our mind. If we fail to do this, we will develop a lifeless view of this book, and end up making an attempt to stuff it into the old wineskin of Law.

OUR ATTENTION IS NOW SHIFTED

Now the Spirit focuses our attention upon a single individual – Philip, one of the seven deacons chosen in chapter six, and second in prominence among them. Nearly the entire eighth chapter is devoted to a record of this man’s activities. In a grand display of what the Lord can do through a devoted person, Philip goes down to Samaria and preaches the Gospel. Although he had apparently been driven out of Jerusalem through the persecution mentioned in verse one, this city received him gladly, giving heed to his word. This was a remarkable contrast with the holy city, where God had been pleased to place His name. There Philip had been expelled, and here, where the name of the Lord had not been placed, he was received. This remarkable circumstance can only be accounted for by seeing it as another one of “the wonderful works of God,” attesting to the reign of the Lord Jesus and the power of the Gospel.

PHILIP PREACHES IN THE CITY OF SAMARIA

“ 8:5 Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.”

PHILIP

“Then Philip . . .” This is not the apostle Philip, who was the fifth apostle by rank, whom Jesus also chose in that order (Matt 10:3; Lk 6:14; Acts 1:13). Philip the apostle was from the city of Bethsaida, and was called by Jesus the day after Peter was brought to the Lord, who renamed him Cephas (John 1:43-44). We know the Philip of our text was not the apostle Philip because the apostles remained in Jerusalem while the other believers were dispersed (Acts 8:1).

This is Philip the deacon – one of the seven who were chosen to administrate the food distribution (Acts 6:5). He was chosen because he met the requirement of being “full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3). This was a description of him before he was set aside to the distribution work through the laying on of the hands of the apostles (Acts 6:6).

We do not know how long the daily distribution continued in Jerusalem, but it appears to have terminated with the persecution or before. It is generally agreed among Bible scholars that the dispersion of Acts eight took place five to six years after Pentecost. If this is so – and there is no apparent reason to doubt it – the text of Scripture leaps over the period of time from the stoning of Stephen and the consequent scattering of the church, to the time when Philip went down to Samaria.

I have made a diligent effort to show that the manner in which inspired history is recorded differs from the way men assess and report history. The only reason for Biblical history is seen in at least five points.

- It reveals the working out of Divine purpose.
- It reveals certain aspects of the Divine nature.
- It manifests the true nature of fallen man, his spiritual obtuseness, and his fundamental tendency downward.
- It confirms that Satan’s head has indeed been bruised.
- It makes known the effects of faith in those who possess it.

The record we will now review will provide us with insights in all of these areas. For that reason alone, we ought to pay careful attention to it.

DOWN TO THE CITY OF SAMARIA

“ . . . went down to the city of Samaria . . . ”

Although the city of Samaria was North of Jerusalem, in the region of Samaria, our text says Philip went “down” to it.

Reasoning From Jerusalem

There is a reason for speaking in this manner rather than in strict accord with geographical location. Jerusalem was the heart of Canaan, and stood for the sanctification of the whole land. Similarly, that small country gave God a reason to be longsuffering with the rest of the world. In my own judgment, were it not for sanctified places and environments in which the Lord worked, the earth would not have been able to stand under the burden of mortality.

The phrase “up to Jerusalem” occurs twenty-five times in Scripture (1 Kgs 12:28; 2 Kgs 12:17; 16:5; 2 Chron 2:16; Ezra 1:3; 7:13; Matt 20:17,18; Mk 10:32,33; Lk 2:42; 18:31; 19:28; John 2:13; 5:1; 11:55; Acts 11:2; 15:2; 21:4,12,15; 24:11; 25:9; Gal 1:17,18). Most of these references involve a Southward direction, yet the journey was said to be “up.” When, for example, Jesus journeyed from northern Galilee to Jerusalem, which was in southern Judea, it is written that He went “ up to Jerusalem” (Matt 20:17,18; Mk 10:32-33). When Jesus was twelve years old, He went with His parents from Nazareth, in northern Galilee, to Jerusalem, which was in southern Judah. Yet, it is written that they went “ up to Jerusalem” (Lk 2:42). In John 2:13, Jesus is said to go from Capernaum, far North of Jerusalem in Galilee, “ up to Jerusalem.” Later, when again in Galilee, He journeyed southward “ up to Jerusalem” (John 5:1). The same language is used for another trip from Galilee in John 11:55. Again, in Acts 15:2, Paul and Barnabas were sent from Antioch, which was in Syria, North of the promised land, to “go up to Jerusalem.” Another time, when Paul was in Tyre, which is also in Syria, he was told by certain disciples not to “go up to Jerusalem” because of certain dangers he would face there (Acts 21:4). When Paul confronted Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was far North of Jerusalem. Yet, of that occasion Paul said he did not go from there “ up to Jerusalem” (Gal 1:17). He did “ go up to Jerusalem” from Damascus three years later (Gal 1:18).

In distinction to an economy of law, spiritual life functions with the context of priorities, preferences, and lofty considerations. Wherever men make an attempt to serve God by routine, rules, procedures, and the likes, they have gone down from Jerusalem into the lower regions.

We read the phrase “ down from Jerusalem” four times (Mk 3:22; Lk 10:30; Acts 8:26; 25:7). Jesus spoke of a certain man who went “ down from Jerusalem to Jericho,” which was actually North of Jerusalem (Lk 10:30). Later in this chapter Philip will be sent “ down from Jerusalem unto Gaza,” which was South of Jerusalem (Acts 8:26). In Acts 25:7, it is said that certain Jews came “ down from Jerusalem” to Caesarea, which was Northwest of Jerusalem in Samaria.

From an outward point of view, Jerusalem was located in the high places. The Mountain of Moriah on which the Temple was built, was in Jerusalem, indicating that it was situated in lofty places (2 Chron 3:1). This is supposed to be the very place on which Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to God (Gen 22:1). Mount Zion was on the North side of the city (Psa 48:2; Isa 10:12; 24:23; Joel 2:32). The place in which the Temple was situated is referred to as “the mountain of the Lord’s house” (Isa 2:3). Jerusalem itself is referred to as “My holy mountain Jerusalem” (Isa 66:20), “Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain” (Dan 9:16), “the mountain of the Lord” (Micah 4:2), and “the hill of Jerusalem” (Isa 10:32). It was in a high place, so that to go to Jerusalem you had to go up, and to leave Jerusalem, you had to go down. Jerusalem was literally a “city set on a hill” that could not be hid (Matt 5:14).

Thus, Jerusalem, because of the Temple, was the CENTER of attention in “the land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39). Also, because of its location it defaulted to a place of preeminence.

Developing A Kingdom Perspective

In all of this the Lord was developing a Kingdom manner – a particular way of thinking and a perspective of life. Seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33), could well be likened to going up to Jerusalem. Setting our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-2) is also like going “up to Jerusalem.”

In distinction to an economy of law, spiritual life functions with the context of priorities, preferences, and lofty considerations. Wherever men make an attempt to serve God by routine, rules, procedures, and the likes, they have gone down from Jerusalem into the lower regions. Just as surely as there were valleys around Jerusalem in which vulnerability existed, so there are spiritual valleys – low places – where men become conquerable. In order for a person to yield to temptation, or fall into sin, they must leave the high places and traffic in the low places. They have to cease being “spiritually minded” (Rom 8:6). They must stop seeking those things that are above, “where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:2).

What Does This Have to do with

Our Text?

It might appear as though all of this has nothing to do with our text – but it does. The conduct of the early church confirms where its affection had been placed, and what it was seeking. It was not a church directed by a kind of written code. To be sure, it did not ignore the Scriptures nor the apostles’ doctrine in which the matter of human conduct was addressed. However, the driving force of these people was their faith – and faith has a center point, or a focal point. Faith does not bring us to the plain, but to the mountain.

If men desire the power of the early church, they must own its focus and have its power. They must get out of the domain of mere talk, and into the realm of power, “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power” NIV (1 Cor 4:20). I find myself experiencing a growing discontent with, and disdain for, lifeless religion. It is the antithesis of life, and that is why nothing similar to our text ever occurs within it.

PREACHED CHRIST UNTO THEM

“ . . . and preached Christ unto them.” Other versions read, “began “ proclaiming Christ unto them,” NASB “proclaimed the Christ there,” NIV “proclaimed the Messiah to them,” NRSV “ teaching them about Christ,” BBE and “ told the people there about the Messiah.” NLT

The word “preached” is a unique word, and very focused in its definition. It comes from the Greek word **evkh,russen** (e-ka-rus-sen). From the standpoint of grammar, it is a verb indicative imperfect active 3rd person singular. As a verb , it describes an action, or something that is done. The indicative mood indicates it was focused speaking, as compared to random talking. The imperfect mood highlights that this speaking was continuous – a subject being developed, as compared to reading a brief announcement. The active mood emphasizes that the actual act of preaching was being accomplished, as compared with merely thinking about a matter. The linguistic form 3 rd person singular describes an emphasis that is neither placed on the speaker (Philip) nor the one who is writing about the speaking (Luke). The point is what was preached, not who preached it, or who wrote about it.

The act of preaching itself is to proclaim as a herald, or someone who is making an announcement, or giving a report. Preaching is not telling people what they should do. It is not the relating of a procedure. By its very nature, it is the proclamation of something that IS, or has already been accomplished – not something to be done, or that ought to be accomplished. It is not the relating of a

law, or even a set of commandments, for that is something to be done, not something that has been done. The difference between preaching and providing a course of action is the difference between reading a newspaper and a book of rules or list of procedures. It is the difference between giving a report of what has happened, and telling people what ought to happen.

I am becoming more and more impressed with how very little many preachers actually have to say. Many of them are like messengers without a message, or reporters without a report. In order to come up with something to say, they must first put their ear to the ground to pick up on the issues of the day, or the problems that the people are facing. Once they get that knowledge, then they will set out to say something they judge to be pertinent to the situation. All of this nonsense is being done under the banner of relevancy, and is billed as being concerned for the people and desirous of helping them in all of their difficulties. But that is nothing more than marketing talk.

At some point sincere people must come to understand that the salvation of God DOES address all legitimate need. It is in no way insufficient. It stands in need of no additive, social update, or human fortification. If people see no need for it, it is because they are blind, and there is no nice way to describe their situation.

Imagine Philip going down to Samaria and inquiring what particular problems they were experiencing at that time. Perhaps family life stood in need of improvement, or they were having trouble with the youth, or the senior citizens were being neglected. It is no doubt true that such things did exist, but they were certainly not a suitable subject for preaching – and neither are they today! At some point sincere people must come to understand that the salvation of God DOES address all legitimate need. It is in no way insufficient. It stands in need of no additive, social update, or human fortification. If people see no need for it, it is because they are blind, and there is no nice way to describe their situation. True preaching, however, will promote a proper focus, introspection, and the whetting of godly desire.

The region of Samaria had been exposed to the preaching of Jesus – even an extended exposure. Early in His ministry, Jesus had passed through this region. At the time, He knew how the Pharisees had “heard that He made and baptized more disciples than John.” Because the time had not yet come for His enemies to raise focused opposition against Him, He left Judaea and headed for Galilee. In the process, He had to pass through Samaria, which was the region between Judaea and Samaria. It was there that He came a parcel of ground that Jacob had given to Joseph – a place where Jacob himself had dug a well many years earlier. As Jesus sat there, he encountered a certain woman out of the city, and spoke most remarkable words to her concerning the nature of true worship, and the water of life that He Himself would dispense to those who desired it. As a result of that occasion, the woman went into the city and testified, “Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29). They of the city then went out to see Jesus, and heard Him for themselves. As the massive crowd made their way to Jesus, He told His disciples, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together” (John 4:35-36).

That very day “many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did” (John 4:39). After others had heard Jesus for themselves, and asked Him to stay with them for two more days (which He did), “many more believed because of His own word.” There testimony is one of insight: “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

It is further inconceivable that the word of Christ’s teaching there did not spread throughout those regions of Samaria, just as surely as His reputation quickly spread wherever He went (Matt 4:24; 9:26,31; 14:1; Lk 4:14,37; 5:15). If it is true that “a city set on a hill cannot be hid” (Matt 5:14), how

much less than the Light of the world Himself be hidden.

The “believing” that took place in Samaria when they heard Jesus, was much like the believing that took place during Jesus’ ministry (John 2:11,23; 7:48; 8:30-31; 10:42; 11:45; 12:11; 12:42). This was not believing “unto the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39), but was a kind of elemental or preparatory believing that saw Jesus as being sent from God, but did not see clearly perceive Him in His redemptive role. Thus we read of some who believed on Him, “And many of the people believed on Him, and said, When Christ cometh, will He do more miracles than these which this man hath done?” (John 7:31). This was a legitimate believing, yet was not sufficient to in duct one into the Kingdom of God. This was not the kind of faith that causes people to become the children of God (Gal 3:26).

I have often pondered the possibility of much of the believing of our day being of that introductory order – not sufficient to bring about the new birth and justification, but being nothing more than acknowledging the legitimacy of Christ and His doctrine.

I say these things because Philip now goes down into this very region, and something will take place that was new, and more in keeping with the New Covenant and the work of the glorified Christ. Now, more had been given, and therefore men were expected to receive more. It is not comely in this great day of salvation for people to be believing like those who saw Jesus’ miracles and heard His introductory teaching about what was going to come following His exaltation. I do not wish to spend more time here, but I am of the settled persuasion that the preponderance of the Christianity of our day bears more of a likeness to Old Covenant religion and the results of Christ’s introductory ministry than to the economy of the New Covenant, which excels in glory.

He Preached Christ

The subject of Philip’s proclamation is specified: Christ! The content of his report is declared: Christ! Christ was both the sum and the substance of what Philip had to say. He was a member of the real church, but the church is not what he preached. He was a man full of the Spirit, but the Spirit is not what he proclaimed. He was also full of wisdom, but his message did not focus on having wisdom. Philip had been, and perhaps still was, a deacon, but he did not proclaim a message about offices in the body of Christ. He knew what it was like to provide food for widows, but he did not set up a work shop on meeting the needs of widows. He had been chosen to be a deacon according to apostolic directive, but he did not tell the people how to go about choosing deacons. He “preached Christ unto them.”

And, what does it mean to preach Christ? First, Jesus Christ is the subject of the preaching. He is not a means to get to the message of preaching, but is Himself the message. Preaching Christ involves acquainting people with Him, raising their awareness of Him, and informing them of what He has accomplished and is presently doing. Preaching Christ assumes His priority. He is to preaching what the headlines and to news are to a newspaper.

His Identity

Preaching Christ declares His identity – who Jesus is. That involves at least two things. First, His Person, including His character or nature. Fundamentally He IS “the Son of God” (John 1:34; John 4:15). That is, He is came forth from God, represents Him, and is the primary focus of God. When addressing the matter of His Person, it is written, “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens” (Heb 7:26). In His exalted capacity He has been seated at God’s “ own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:20-22).

Functionally, He is “the Christ” (Matt 16:16; John 20:31; 1 John 5:1). This regards the purpose for which He was sent into the world. He came to do God’s will – a will that had to be done if men were going to be saved. The primary context in which Jesus is to be considered is the will of God, not the need of men. Jesus did not come primarily to meet man’s need, but to do the will of His Father. The purpose of God is expressed in these words: “ For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Again John wrote, “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world” (1 John 4:14). Jesus said it this was, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37).

The Necessity of Christ-Centeredness

It is not possible to have a proper view of Christ if who He IS has been clouded or obscured by some earthly consideration or emphasis. The real Christ cannot be seen in the darkness. He can only be seen in the light – and the preaching of Christ produces an environment of light. It is wrong – thoroughly wrong – for any individual to be a professing Christian for years, yet have very little understanding about the identity of Jesus Christ. Such a person may have been the victim of a distorted emphasis and paltry preaching – but that does not reduce the wrongness of the condition. I personally know both the immediate and the lingering effects of a system of religious thought that does not have Christ Jesus at its center. I was part of a city that was not set on the hill of Zion, but was rather in the “plain of Ono” (Neh 6:2-3). I cannot begin to tell you what was involved in being freed from the grip this system had upon my soul. I was not a casual disciple, else I would not have had such difficulty. Unwittingly, I had embraced a system of law, and the emphasis was consequently placed upon what men did. It all sounded reasonable enough, and the Scriptures were dutifully used to buttress everything that was said. But in the end, who Jesus really was and why He really came were not seen with sufficient clarity. Further, that lack of clarity was not viewed as a serious circumstance.

His Accomplished Works

Salvation is of such a nature that it could not be realized if Jesus was not presently doing something – something essential to salvation itself. This is an aspect of Jesus that has been remarkably neglected in post apostolic times.

The works of Christ include what He has done and what He is doing. What He has already accomplished has to do with establishing a basis for salvation, and a foundation for God to deal graciously with men. In other words, it was not enough that men SHOULD be saved, there had to be a just means through which that salvation could be accomplished. That foundation involved the following.

- Bearing our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).
- Being made sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- Being made a curse for us (Gal 3:13).
- Putting away sin (Heb 9:26).
- Destroying the devil (Heb 2:14).
- Spoiling, or plundering principalities and powers (Col 2:15).
- Making peace (Col 1:20).
- Making his soul an offering for sin, and thereby satisfying God (Isa 53:11).
- Reconciling the world (2 Cor 5:18).
- Ending the Law as a means of becoming righteous (Rom 10:4).

- Consecrating a new and living way to God (Heb 10:20).
- Raising from the dead, thereby becoming the firstfruits of them that slept (1 Cor 15:20).
- Being exalted above all, and given all power in heaven and earth (Eph 4:10; 1 Pet 3:22).

Until these things were accomplished to the satisfaction of God, no person could be born again. No sin could be remitted as God desired, and no one could be perfected. All of these accomplishments are of such a nature that they are powerless when viewed as mere history. They must be seen within the framework of Divine purpose, and preaching plays a significant role in this being realized.

His Present Working

Salvation is of such a nature that it could not be realized if Jesus was not presently doing something – something essential to salvation itself. This is an aspect of Jesus that has been remarkably neglected in post apostolic times. A failure to see this properly gave rise to an inordinate emphasis upon men, and the development of an institutional emphasis. Neither of these make any sense at all when men discern an active and reigning Christ. If He was the center of attention in a humbled state, how much more is He now that He has been glorified, magnified, and exalted above all. A sampling of what He is doing now is provided below. This is intended to emphasize how critical Christ is to the entirety of salvation.

- He is making intercession for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25).
- He is mediating the New Covenant, fulfilling the Divine commitments that are made therein (Heb 9:15; 12:24).
- He is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).
- He is loving and nourishing the church (Eph 5:29).
- He is speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25).
- He is authoring the finishing our faith (Heb 12:2).
- He is shepherding the sheep (Heb 13:21).
- He is fellowshiping with the children of God (1 Cor 1:9).
- He is preparing a place for us (John 14:2-3).
- He is causing the consolation of His people to abound (2 Cor 1:5).
- He is causing grace to reign through righteousness unto eternal life (Rom 5:21).
- He is producing fruits of righteous in the saints (Phil 1:11).
- He is making our spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God (1 Pet 2:5).
- He is strengthening His people to do all things (Phil 4:13).
- He is teaching the people of God (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 5:20).
- He is giving eternal life to those the Father has given to Him (John 17:3).

Let no person imagine for a moment that “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9) is possible without these activities – all of them!

When Philip went down to Samaria, he preached Christ to them. His perception of Christ was large enough to fill his preaching. I do not know that he articulated all of the things that I have mentioned – but he could have, and much more as well.

Preaching Christ is not stating what men call “the plan of salvation.” It is not telling people what they must do to be saved. Rather, it is declaring to them what Jesus has and is doing in order that they might be saved “to the uttermost” (Heb 7:25). Following the belief of that message, there are certainly precise words given that instruct people on how to be saved (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:37; 16:31; 22:16). But you will not find such words incorporated in the preaching itself. Neither, in deed, is it in order to go about always telling people what they must do to be saved only to offset the false teaching of men on the subject. So far as the record is concerned, the precise delineation of how to be saved is always reserved for those who have made known their desire to be saved (Acts 2:37; 8:36; 16:30).

Something to Remember

It is also important to remember that being “saved” is not limited to entering into the Kingdom (John 3:5), being added to the church (Acts 2:47), or being baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27). That is the start, not the finish. There is a very real sense in which the person is not saved until he stands faultless before the presence of Christ’s glory. Until that time, salvation is a work-in-progress. It is a time during which a predetermined conformity to the image of Christ is taking place (Rom 8:29). It is a time of change, from glory unto glory (2 Cor 3:18). It is the time of growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). Those processes all require the continual preaching of Christ. The truth of this is confirmed throughout the epistles, all of which are addressed to those whose who have already been justified by faith.

WITH ONE ACCORD, THE PEOPLE GIVE HEED

“ 6 And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did.”

Up to this time, the powerful effects of preaching and teaching have been confirmed.

- Sinners have been converted through this means (Acts 2:41,47; 4:4; 5:14).
- Enemies have been exposed through this means (Acts 4:1-2; 5:40; 6:12-15' 8:1).
- Disciples have been nurtured by this means (Acts 2:42,46; 431-33).
- God has been glorified by this means (Acts 4:21).

There were no soup kitchen programs, poor-assistance strategies, youth programs, senior outings, counseling services, marriage seminars, and such like. The success of the early church was not owing to its involvement in community affairs, or penetration into various social and political activities. It was rather the straightforward preaching and teaching of the Word of God, supported by godly demeanor, that caused their remarkable effectiveness. As simple as that may seem, it is something that cannot be institutionalized, or encapsulated in a educational strategy. The reason for such effectiveness is the embrace of the truth itself by those who are of an honest and good heart. So far as the social strata of life is concerned, or the values of this world, none of these people could be said to have been impressive or noteworthy.

This is remarkably demonstrated in Philip. Enough is not known of him to prepare even an acceptable resume. Imagine a local church receiving the resume of Philip in response to their request for a new minister.

There were no soup kitchen programs, poor-assistance strategies, youth programs, senior outings, counseling services, marriage seminars, and such like. The success of the early church was not owing to its involvement in community affairs, or penetration into various social and political activities.

- One of several men who were full of faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6:5).

- One of seven men who were in charge of a food distribution program (Acts 6:3,6).

At the time Philip went down to the city of Samaria, this is all the record has said about him. But this will be sufficient for the Samaritans, who probably did not even know those two things about him. They will do with Philip as certain people from their region did with Jesus: they will judge him by what he says!

Something to Note

I have observed over the years how little emphasis is put on what preachers and teachers actually say. Some of them are evaluated upon the basis of their credentials. Others upon the basis of what they have themselves reported to have accomplished. Many are evaluated by the institutional growth they have caused. But precious few of them are held in high regard for what they actually say. I personally know of a great number of ministers concerning whom I do not have the remotest idea concerning their preaching and teaching. When I am with them, they never speak of their insights, and they are not disposed to hold conversations concerning the Word of God, or to share their perceptions of Scriptural statements.

Philip was not giving heed to the people, but the people were giving heed to him! He was bringing what they needed to them! He had not taken a poll first to get the pulse of the community.

But here, in our text, what Philip says is the heart of the matter. What He does supports what He says. He does not come in the name of an institution – not even as an official representative of the mother church in Jerusalem. It is essential that we pick up on this circumstance. There are people who tell us they must have this professional training or certain credentials in order to be effective. Men like Stephen and Philip stand as a living contradiction to this view – and that is not to mention the Lord Jesus Himself, and all of His apostles. I am of the growing opinion that a church that demands credentials that, in their minds, have a greater weight than the ability to proclaim and expound the Gospel, is unworthy of having a man of God in their pulpit. Further, I cannot conceive of the reigning Christ sending one of His servants to such an organization.

THEY GAVE HEED WITH ONE ACCORD

“And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake . . .” Other versions read, “with one accord heeded,” NKJV “with one accord were giving attention,” “they all paid close attention,” NIV “with one accord listened eagerly,” NRSV “the people gave attention,” BBE “paid attention with one mind,” CSB “they gave ear to him and acquiesced in all that he said,” MRD “unanimously welcomed the message,” NJB “with a single purpose, they listened very carefully,” IE and “they became interested in what was said.” WILLIAMS

There are at least two philosophies to preaching. First, know the people and what is important to them, then speak on those things. Second, know the Lord and what is important to Him, and speak those things. Modern preaching is driven by the former – meeting people where they are. That is why we now have Bibles that are tailored for particular people, and in which certain texts are highlighted for certain kinds of people. The preaching is being adapted to the people, and we are told this is a good and noble thing.

However, notice the difference in what is reported as taking place in Samaria. Philip was not giving heed to the people, but the people were giving heed to him! He was bringing what they needed to them! He had not taken a poll first to get the pulse of the community. No survey had been taken to determine if any of the people remembered when Jesus was in the region., There had not been a lengthy period preceding his presence there that was allotted to gain an acquaintance of the region and the circumstances that existed there. He did not engage in an effort to gain knowledge of the prevailing religious persuasions, or the degree of interest in a new church that was present in the

community. See, those are tactics that men use today for their own programs. But this is not the nature of the reports in the book of Acts.

With One Accord

What does “with one accord” mean? This expression comes from a single Greek word, **ὁμοθυμαδον** (hom-oth-oo-made-on). Its lexical meaning is, “with one mind,” THAYER “agreed on unanimously . . . with one purpose,” FRIBERG “common consent,” UBS “together,” LEH and “with one mind or purpose of impulse.” GINGRICH The idea of the word is that of a body of people, not of individuals here and there.

Among other things, this reveals that Philip was speaking to groups – just as John the Baptist and Jesus did. Individual discussions were the exception, not the rule. Philip was not going from house to house, or making friends with individuals, but was himself the focus of attention. Those who are averse to being in crowds would have simply missed the ministry of John the Baptist, and would have been zealous like Nicodemus to obtain an advantage to hear Jesus.

What Philip was saying was the focus. It did not need to be supported by video presentations, lighting effects, and the likes. It was his message that was the point, not various ploys to get the attention of the people. The response of the people was united – “with one accord.” Among other things, that means the message was not adapted to various people groups: i.e. young, old, singles, married, etc. One man, one message, and those who received gave one response.

Gave Heed

The words “gave heed” also come from a single Greek word: **προσεικο** (pros-sei-khov). In the construction of the Greek sentence, this is the first word: i.e. “Heeded yet the throngs to the things being said by Philip.” Greek Interlinear, Scripture4All The construction of the sentence actually provides a proper intellectual perspective. In order of importance, this is what we see.

- The things being said.
- The person who was saying them.
- The manner in which they were heard.
- The people who were hearing them.

This order contradicts the whole concept of religious entertainment, accommodating to the people, and trying to meet them where they are. The postulate of sound preaching is that God has provided us with a message that is, by its very nature, relevant, meeting people where they are. It really does not have to be adapted to the people, because it is a living word. As it is written, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe ” (1 Thess 2:13). If this truth were to be apprehended by the preachers and teachers of our day, it would revolutionize what is being said in the churches. It would also expose the fatal flaw that is found in homiletics (the art of preaching) and hermeneutics (the study of methodological principles of Biblical interpretation) – neither of which take into consideration the working of the Holy Spirit.

If modern preaching differs conceptually and in content from the preaching of men like Philip, it should not come as surprise that it does not produce the same kind of results.

The response of the people in Samaria was not one that was orchestrated by Philip. It was not a response that he made a concerted effort to produce. This was the result of the working of the Lord, and the means through it was accomplished were the words and works of Philip. As simplistic as all

of that may appear, it is not possible for the mind of the flesh to take hold it. To such a mind it makes no sense that a man of Philip's background could go down to Samaria alone, and preach with such power and effectiveness. However, to the mind that is "controlled by the Spirit" NIV (Rom 8:6), it is very reasonable, and refreshing to the soul as well.

HEARING AND SEEING

" . . . hearing and seeing the miracles which he did." Other versions read, "they heard and saw the miracles he was performing," NASB " heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did," NIV "hearing and seeing the signs that he did," NRSV " because they had heard of the miracles he worked and because they saw them for themselves," NJB " continued to see his wonder-works which he was performing," WILLIAMS and "as they heard him and watched the miracles and wonders which he kept performing [from time to time]." AMPLIFIED

As you can see, some of the versions place the emphasis on the people hearing about the miracles (New Jerusalem Bible, Basic Bible English). The actual construction of the sentence requires that the word "hearing" be applied to the words that Philip was speaking: the words "being said by Philip" – not the report of miracles that had been, and were being, done by him. We ought to know this, for faith comes by hearing the Gospel, not by hearing a report of miracles (Rom 10:14,17). These words are accounting for why the people were listening intently to what Philip was saying.

Seeing the Miracles

The miracles that were being wrought by Philip coincided with the message that he was preaching. Those mighty works were not a foundation for faith, but an evidence of Philip's legitimacy – particularly in view of the presence of Simon, who will be introduced to us in the succeeding verses. The response of the Samaritans confirmed those mighty works substantiated what he was saying, which was the reason for their presence. It was not enough that they were supernatural, or wrought outside the boundaries of natural aptitude or the ordinary workings of nature. They specifically supported what Philip was saying, and he was preaching Christ unto them.

The Theology of Miracles

I have never been satisfied with the explanation for miracles to which I have been subjected within an institutional framework.

View #1. On the one hand, there were those who said God always works miracles, and we should expect Him to do so. That view, however, does not match up with Divine history which recorded long periods of time in which there was no miracle among His own people – as in the time of Gideon (Judges 6:13). There was also the time when many widows existed in Israel, yet none of them were miraculously sustained as was the widow from Zaraphath (Lk 4:25; 1 Kgs 17:9-24). There were also many lepers in Israel, yet they were not healed as was the Syrian Naaman (Lk 4:27; 1 Kgs 19:-21).

View #2. Then, there was the view embraced by those with whom I was most familiar. It stated that miracles were only intended to confirm the word of the apostles in the beginning. That was based upon Hebrews (Heb 2:3). It was also stated that when the fulness of Scripture was accomplished, the need for miracles passed away, because the word had already been confirmed. This, they alleged, is what was meant by the Pauline expression, "But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Cor 13:10). There were difficulties with this also, because the Scriptures do not clearly declare that position. It is a derived position, not a revealed one, and the purpose for which it is embraced is opened to question – which is to negate untenable doctrines concerning the miraculous.

We also have miracle workers that were not apostles – like Stephen and Philip. Although the

apostles did lay hands upon them to set them apart for the work, nothing suggests that miraculous powers were passed on to them by this means. I do not know of an incident where miraculous powers were conferred upon others by the apostles. We do know that Timothy received a spiritual gift “with the laying on hands of the presbytery,” or elders (1 Tim 4:14). At any rate, the doctrine to which I was subjected was too weak in its foundation, produced too many questions, and failed to provide clear answers. Nor, indeed, was it supported by a noble cause.

A Better Explanation

We have in our text a better and more satisfactory explanation for the miracles wrought by Philip. Here is a case where the people believed because of what they heard and saw. These were two independent witnesses, yet they bore testimony to the same thing. The words of Philip made Jesus known, and so did the miracles he wrought. That means they provided men with a sight that perfectly harmonized with the message. If this was not the case, the text would not say they believed “hearing and seeing.”

This was not a matter of Philip being able to do something supernatural. The point of attraction was the doctrine that he preached, and the works he wrought were actually a display of the doctrine. Permit me to illustrate this point by drawing your attention to some things prophesied of Christ Jesus and the day of salvation.

In order for miracles to confirm what is being said, they must be more than a mere demonstration of supernatural power. They must be harmonious with the doctrine itself, else their effects will not last. In such a case, they would only astound, entertain, or provide some satisfaction to curious souls.

Seeing and Hearing. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (Isa 35:5). Those with understanding know that this had to do with more than the reclamation of the health of the body. Of old time, God opened the eyes of Elisha’s servant so he could see the angelic hosts that surrounded the enemies that were threatening them (2 Kgs 6:17). Jesus, however, came to open the spiritual eyes of the people, and give them ears to hear. He Himself wrought miracles of healing that externalized those inward conditions, curing men of blindness and deafness (Matt 9:27-31; Mk 7:31-37; 8:22-26; John 9:9-41). Those miracles confirmed what He said about Himself: “I am come into the world, that they which see not might see” (John 9:39). He came to give men “ears to hear” (Mk 7:16).

• **Walking and Speaking.** “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert” (Isa 35:6). Sin had debilitated men, making them spiritually crippled so they could not navigate in heavenly realms. Jesus to bring spiritual dexterity, so men could walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7), run the race set before them (Heb 12:1), and leap for joy (Lk 6:23). When He healed the lame and the dumb, those objectives were lived out before the people, confirming the truth of His Person and message (Matt 9:1-8; Mk 7:31-37).

• **Giving Life from the Dead.** “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isa 55:3). Sin had left men dead – “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). Jesus came to give them life, quickening them, and raising the from the state of spiritual death (John 5:25; 10:10). In His miracles Jesus confirmed the truth of this aspect of His ministry by raising the dead (Matt 11:5; Lk 7:11-16; Matt 9:18-26; John 11:1-46).

• **Curing the Malignancy of Sin.** “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26). Sin is a moral corruption that eats away at the vitals of the soul, spreading and consuming with no mercy. Apart from Jesus, men not only sin

because of their preference for it, but because of their nature, which is been corrupted by sin from the mother's womb. In Jesus miracles, He healed some from leprosy, which has a remarkable resemblance to the nature of sin (Matt 8:1-4; Lk 17:11-19). These also confirmed the reality of His ministry.

Much more could be said on this matter, showing the exacting parallel between the miracles of our Lord and the reason for His Saviorhood. Let me name just a few more to establish this point.

- Turning the ordinary into the extraordinary , as confirmed by turning water into wine (John 2:1-11).
- Giving men the ability to obtain many blessings , as confirmed in the miraculous catches of fish (Lk 5:1-11).
- Freeing men from bondage to sin and the devil , as confirmed in the casting out of demons (Mk 1:23-26).
- Raising men from a state of weakness, as confirmed in healing Peter's mother-in-law of a debilitating fever (Mk 8:14-17).
- Enabling men to take hold of the truth, as confirmed by healing the man with the withered hand (Matt 12:9-13).
- Freeing men from the threat of circumstance, as confirmed by the stilling of the tempest (Matt 8:23-27).
- Freeing men from ongoing infirmities that sap their strength, as confirmed in the healing of the woman with an issue of blood (Mk 5:25-34).
- Providing nourishment when no one else is able to do so, as confirmed in the feeding of the five thousand (Matt 13:15-21).

In order for miracles to confirm what is being said, they must be more than a mere demonstration of supernatural power. They must be harmonious with the doctrine itself, else their effects will not last. In such a case, they would only astound, entertain, or provide some satisfaction to curious souls. However, if an association can be made between them and the Lord Jesus, it will encourage faith and awaken hope.

This, in my judgment, is what occurred in the city of Samaria. The miracles that were wrought by Philip confirmed the truth of what he was preaching. This will be clarified in the verses that follow.

A Word to the Wise

It is not wise for men to engage in speculation concerning what the Lord does or does not do. There has never been an age in which men could perfectly identify on their own what Divine work could or could not be done, and it is certain that we are not living in such a time now. Arguments concerning miracles and spiritual gifts are nothing more than sectarian skirmishes, and they all take place in the lowlands of Ono.

It seems to me that it is far wiser to be diligent to proclaim a message that can be confirmed if God sees fit to do so. We are living in a time when there is such a diversity of things being said in the name of the Lord, that it is well-nigh impossible to establish the reality of truth by pedantries alone. If it is true that the kingdom of God "depends not on talk but on power" NRSV (1 Cor 4:20), then we ought not seek to establish the truth by such things as logic, the original language, sentence structure, context, and the likes. Whatever may be found in such approaches, it certainly does not justify resting your soul upon them. All of them have more of men in them than they do of God. Furthermore, Scriptures leaves us without a solitary example of an person establishing the truth in such a manner. Perhaps if there were more men like Stephen and Philip – men filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom

– heaven would demonstrate more of an interest in what they said.

It seems to me that it is far wiser to be diligent to proclaim a message that can be confirmed if God sees fit to do so. We are living in a time when there is such a diversity of things being said in the name of the Lord, that it is well-nigh impossible to establish the reality of truth by pedantries alone.

I certainly do not wish to awaken an inordinate desire for the miraculous – not when the Lord has been so gracious to reveal such an abundance to us. I must, however, confess my growing intolerance of powerless and lifeless religion. It chafes upon my soul and agitates my spirit. It is so completely out of harmony with the Gospel that it makes perfect sense to withdraw from those who insist on perpetrating it. That is why we read admonitions like the following.

- “Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim 6:5).
- “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:5).
- “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:20-21).
- “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17).
- “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev 18:4).

I do not know how any person can justify ignoring these admonitions. People of honest and good hearts are obligated to consider them and see to it that they are fulfilled in their lives. No person can make the decision for them, or impose their own perceptions upon them. However, they must be duly considered, wisdom sought, and their demand heeded. It is entirely possible that the predominate absence of men like Philip in the Christian world is one of the reasons for its obvious impotence.

THE POWERS OF DARKNESS ARE SHAKEN

“7 For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.”

Powerful and insightful preaching has a threefold impact. It has effects on earth, in heaven, and in the kingdom of darkness.

In Heaven

In heaven, preaching is part of the “sweet savor of Christ” that is found in those laboring with Him (2 Cor 2:15). Holy angels, who “desire to look into” the things that are being preached (1 Pet 1:12) no doubt are intrigued by the proclamation of the record God has given of His Son. The “preaching” is the means by which those who believe are saved (1 Cor 1:21), and if God’s word is “manifested . . . through preaching” (Tit 1:3), then heaven is active in the process itself.

In Earth

In earth, preaching is the appointed means through which faith, which comes by hearing, is eventually dispensed (Rom 10:14-17). This is the means through which the saints are established. As it is written, “Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching

of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began” (Rom 16:25). The “preaching of the cross” is, to them that believe, “the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18).

Among Satan’s Hosts

Preaching also has an impact on the powers of darkness. As the truth goes out and spiritual light is dispersed, the powers of darkness are shaken. Truth confronts the lie, and light pervades the darkness. Because Christ and Satan and antithetical anything coming from either of them are in active conflict. This is not a conflict involving those of equal strength. While Satan is strong, Christ is more strong. It is Satan that, not Jesus, that has received the mortal bruise! It is Jesus, not Satan, that has been triumphant, and has been given all power and all dominion. For this reason, what comes from Satan cannot survive a confrontation of that which comes from Christ. This is evident in our text.

UNCLEAN SPIRITS CAME OUT

“For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them . . .” Other versions read, “shouting with a loud voice,” NASB “with shrieks evil spirits came out,” NIV “crying out with loud shrieks,” NRSV “evil spirits screamed,” GWN “screaming as they left their victims,” NLT and “screaming and shouting with a loud voice.” AMPLIFIED

Who Are Unclean Spirits?

Unclean spirits are wicked personalities that cause defilement. There are various effects that have been traced to their influence.

- The man from Gadara in whom a legion of demons dwelt is said to have had an “unclean spirit” (Mk 5:2; Lk 8:29). When, with Jesus’ approval, the demons went into the swine, Mark says “the unclean spirits went out” (Mark 5:13).
- The daughter of the Syrophenician woman, who was “grievously vexed with a demon” (Matt 15:22), is said to have had “an unclean spirit” (Mk 7:25).
- The young boy who had a demon that caused him to wallow on the ground and foam at the mouth, even casting him into fire and into water in an attempt to destroy him (Mk 9:20-22), is said to have had an “unclean spirit” (Lk 9:42).

Jesus Confronted Unclean Spirits

When Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil, His power over “unclean spirits” was especially noted. People noted, “with authority commandeth He even the unclean spirits, and they obey Him” (Mk 1:27). It is written that “unclean spirits, when they saw Him, fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God” (Mark 3:11).

Jesus had such power over this body of personalities that He could give His disciples power over them (Matt 10:1; Mk 6:7).

A Category of Demons

Unclean spirits are a category of demons, and sometimes the terms are used interchangeably by the Gospel writers (Mk 1:26/Lk 9:42; Mk 3:30/John 10:20; Mk 5:2/Lk 8:27; Mk 7:25/Matt 15:22).

The Nature of These Spirits

These are particularly dangerous because of their nature. Intelligence and will is ascribed to them (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; James 2:19; 3:14-15). They have great power (Matt 8:28-32; Mk 9:26; Eph 6:12).

They are capable of seducing men, so that they leave following Christ and tumble into sin (1 Tim 4:1). They even formulate and perpetrate false doctrines that lead men to perdition (1 Tim 4:1). Paul wrote that, in some cunning way, they prepare a table at which men can sit, imbibing their wickedness, and thus excluding them from participation with Christ (1 Cor 10:21).

They Are Behind Idolatry

There is some way in these spirits move men to worship them, for, we are told, all idolatry is actually the worship of demons (Lev 17:7; Deut 21:17; 2 Chron 11:15; 1 Cor 10:20; Rev 9:20).

This vast spiritual underworld would no doubt stagger us completely were we made fully aware of it. Various doctrines have been contrived by men that suggest these personalities either no longer exist, or that they are no longer active. Such teachings are dangerous beyond description, for believers of all ages are expressly told that they are grappling with spiritual powers and authorities (Eph 6:12). To go about life as though the problems and challenges of humanity were the only things we face is a posture of life that will mandate falling, stumbling, and vulnerability. One of the descriptions of Babylon the Great, the simulated church of Satan, is that she has become the “habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird” (Rev 18:2). It is quite possible that the outbreak of immorality within the churches, together with the flood of false teaching, is nothing less than confirmation that they have become the dwelling place of unclean spirits and demons. In fact, Paul suggested that some of the unacceptable conduct found among the Corinthians was owing to them eating and drinking at the table of demons (1 Cor 10:21).

This is a unique kind of rejoicing. It is rooted in insight, not emotion. It proceeds from a genuine experience, not some form of entertainment. It is not the result of distraction, but of attraction to the Lord. It goes deeper than the pleasure of which nature is capable.

While Jesus did, indeed, deliver a crushing blow to the power of darkness, spoiling principalities and powers and triumphing over them in His cross (Col 2:15), He did not exterminate them. Their continued activity is much like that of the devil, who was also “destroyed” by means of Christ’s death (Heb 2:14). These powers continue to operate, but are vulnerable to truth and the power of the Holy Spirit within the saints. However, those who are not in Christ do not have an ounce of power against these forces.

Philip’s Ministry

Now, Philip comes into the city of Samaria – a place in which these spirits had apparently operated for some time with little, if any, restraint. The time is roughly two to three years after Christ’s exaltation, and demons are still active in the region. Now, however their domain is invaded by a man who has both the Holy Spirit and wisdom. He comes with a message that throws a profound ray of light into a region dominated by darkness. That light has a staggering impact upon the powers of darkness. With shrieks and cries of utter frustration unclean spirits “came out of many that were possessed with them,” being no longer able to maintain their hold upon those poor souls. This man was an apostle, nor is there any evidence that he was one of the seventy. Nothing in Scripture clearly states that he had this gift imparted to him. He was, however, “full of the Holy Spirit” – even before the apostles laid their hands upon him (Acts 6:3). These were not “the signs of an apostle,” which were unique (1 Cor 12:12).

Of course, it is a mistake to labor at explaining why these things happened. It is enough to note that they did happen, that they were done by a man who was not an apostle, and that they accompanied the preaching of Christ. As to the why of such things, it is enough to note that they were done under the administration of the Head of the church.

MANY PALSIED AND LAME WERE HEALED

“ . . . and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.” Other versions read, “paralyzed and lame,” NKJV “paralytics and crippled,” NIV “ill and broken in body,” BBE and “many taken with palsies, and many that halted.” PNT

The language is intriguing: “taken with palsies . . .” That phrase is translated a single Greek word **paralelume,noi** (para-llelu-me-noi). It is in the perfect passive tense that means something that happened at a fixed point in time, as compared to a condition of gradual deterioration. A literal translation would be, “having been made paralyzed.” In other words, these were victims. The fact that there were many of these people suggests this condition was not owing to an accident or some debilitating disease. This kind of language is not the same as used in the expression “and that were lame.” The technical aspect of language is simply pointing out that this lameness was their present condition. However, with the cluster of people who were palsied, or paralyzed, the linguistic stress is placed on the fact that they were made that way at some fixed point in time. We have, therefore, a diversity of diseases that were healed – some ordinary, some extraordinary; some with a sudden cause, and some with a gradual one.

From a medical viewpoint, some of these may have appeared to be a more profound disorder. However, in the blazing light of the truth of Christ, and in the presence of Divine power, no such distinctions existed. There is a certain leveling of all difficulty in the presence of the King.

THERE WAS GREAT JOY IN THAT CITY

“ 8 And there was great joy in that city.” Other versions read, “much rejoicing,” NASB “ much joy,” RSV “ extremely happy,” GWN “v ery happy,” IE and “great rejoicing .” AMPLIFIED

This is a unique kind of rejoicing. It is rooted in insight, not emotion. It proceeds from a genuine experience, not some form of entertainment. It is not the result of distraction, but of attraction to the Lord. It goes deeper than the pleasure of which nature is capable.

The word “joy” means “gladness,” or having a cheerful disposition in which no rational powers are diminished or placed to the side. By way of contrast, there are the “pleasures of sin” that wane because they are rooted in sensuality and fleshly emotion, both of which exclude rationality, reasonableness, and tenability (Heb 11:25). That is why such pleasures quickly dissipate, because they are part and parcel of the flesh, which is in a dying state. There is, however, a higher order of pleasure that is not subject to the erosion of time. David speaks of this order when he refers to “pleasures for evermore,” which are at the right hand of God (Psa 16:11). That kind of pleasure results from perception, not mere feeling.

This is the kind of joy that was experienced in the city of Samaria. It was the kind of joy that resulted from making an association with what was happening among them, and the Christ whom Philip was preaching. They were witnessing and experiencing the effects of the Christ who was being preached.

There is only three accounts of Jesus going through the area of Samaria during His ministry.

- The first was when He was en route to Jerusalem, during which He confronted the woman at the well (John 4:4-40). During that occasion, He remained for two days, teaching the people (John 4:40,43).
- The second was when He had again set His face steadfastly to go to Jerusalem. At that time He sent out messengers into a village of the Samaritans “to make ready for Him.” However, the Samaritans refused to receive Him at that time, because they discerned He was headed for Jerusalem, and would not stay among them. This was a response that angered the disciples, and was the occasion when James and John asked Jesus if He wanted them to call

down fire on the city “and consume them as Elijah did” (Luke 9:52-56).

- The third time Jesus went through the region was also when He was headed for Jerusalem. No details are provided of that event – simply that “He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee” (Lk 17:11). This was the occasion where Jesus met ten lepers, healing them all, with only one leper, “a Samaritan,” returning to give Him thanks (17:12-19). We are not sure if the city where this occurred was in Galilee or Samaria. In my opinion, it was probably in Galilee, as the verse suggests. It states that Jesus, in going to Jerusalem, passed through “Samaria and Galilee.” However, the geographical area covered would have Galilee as first area, and Samaria as the second, which was in between Galilee and Judaea, in which Jerusalem was located. The way in which the trip is expressed suggests the city was in Galilee.

There is no record of any miraculous works ever being done in the region of Samaria prior to our text! When Jesus spent two days there, it was lone of the very few times when Jesus did no miracle among them.

- During His ministry, Jesus sent His Apostles out to preach. During that time, they were told, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8). However, they were forbidden to do into any city of the Samaritans. “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not” (Matt 10:5).

My point in bringing up these things is simply this: there is no record of any miraculous works ever being done in the region of Samaria prior to our text! When Jesus spent two days there, it was lone of the very few times when Jesus did no miracle among them. Those who believed on Him did so “because of His own word,” and confessed “Now we believe, not because of thy saying: for we have heard Him ourselves , and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

During Christ’s ministry, there is no record of any Samaritans every coming to hear Him. People came from “cities and villages” (Matt 9:35), but there is no mention of any that were in Samaria. The only Samaritans that are mentioned in connection with the ministry of Jesus are the woman at the well (John 4:9), the group that came out of the city to hear Jesus at the well (John 4:39-40), and one of the ten lepers that were healed (Lk 17:16).

The point here is that this was apparently the first time such mighty works had been seen by these people. I do not doubt they had heard of Jesus, for He had been in their region for two days. Further, because the Jews had “no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9), it is not likely that those exposed to the ministry of Jesus had testified to them.

Philip, in a sense, blazed the Gospel trail in this city, exposing them to things with which they had no familiarity. Yet, God worked powerfully through Him, and the whole city believed. Now, the city is filled with gladness because of the “wonderful works of God” that were wrought within it (Acts 2:11). There had been no revealed preparation made for the arrival of Philip. He had not established a presence there, first becoming familiar with the people, and then gradually exposing them to the Gospel, so as not to offend them. He had not led them in some preparatory Bible course, designed to acquaint them with what would be required of them. He simply “went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ into them.” It was the Lord’s good pleasure to work with them as He did also with the apostles: “the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (Mark 16:20). I must admit that I do not want any part of a theology that makes it difficult to receive this words concerning a former deacon of the church, who was not accompanied by an apostle, or sent forth by them.

SIMON THE SORCERER

“ 9 But there was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.”

It should not surprise us that one of Satan’s servants now surfaces – now that the kingdom of darkness has been jarred from its confident hold on the region! One of the characteristics of the Gospel is that it reveals a power that is superior to that of the devil. Here we are presented with a sterling example of that fact.

A CERTAIN MAN

“ 9a But there was a certain man, called Simon . . . ”

Just as surely as there are primary people in the Kingdom of God, so there are significant individuals in the kingdom of darkness. Early in human history there was Nimrod. The Philistines had Goliath. Now we are introduced to a “certain man” who was especially used by the devil.

THE PEOPLE WERE BEWITCHED

“ 9b . . . which beforetime in the same city used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria . . . ” Other versions read, “practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people,” NKJV “ practicing magic in the city and astonishing the people,” NASB “practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people,” NIV “been a wonder-worker and a cause of surprise,” BBE “had been a magician in that city, seducing the people,” DOUAY “ used witchcraft , and bewitched the people,” GENEVA “ seduced the people by his sorceries,” MRD and “ practiced magic arts in the city to the utter amazement of the Samaritan nation.” AMPLIFIED

This is the first of two sorcerers to whom we are introduced in the book of Acts. The other is Elymas, who confronted the Apostle Paul (Acts 13:6-8). By definition, a sorcerer is “one who practices magical arts,” THAYER and “one who practices sorcery, magic, or uses witchcraft” FRIBERG This work falls under the general classification of divination, and is soundly condemned throughout Scripture. The Law addressed such sins in this manner: “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a

Just as surely as there are primary people in the Kingdom of God, so there are significant individuals in the kingdom of darkness. Early in human history there was Nimrod. The Philistines had Goliath.

charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer” (Deut 18:10-11). The Amplified Bible uses the words “divination, or is a soothsayer, or an augur, or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or a medium, or a wizard, or a necromancer.” At one time, when Israel left the ways of the Lord, they “used divination and enchantments” (2 Kgs 17:17). It came to the point where their prophets even used “divination” (Jer 14:14). This was particularly reprehensible because it was the result of abandoning the Lord and relying on other sources for power and information. The fact that these arts were not merely slight of hand or human deception is suggested by the fact that God frustrated diviners (Mich 3:6-7,11).

One of the classic examples of one of these practitioners of curious arts is the witch of Endor to which king Saul resorted after the Lord had departed from him. The account is quite challenging, and filled with things that are difficult for some to receive. Saul asked this woman to bring Samuel up from the dead. The woman proceeded to do this and “saw Samuel.” When she did she cried with a loud voice shouted that Saul had deceived her, and now she knew who he was, even though he had disguised himself. After Saul told her not be afraid, and tell him what she had seen, she said, “I saw gods

ascending out of the earth.” Saul asked her what the form of the one looked like. She replied, “An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantel.” The text states that Saul “perceived it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.” It was at that point that the Scriptures say Samuel talked to Saul asking him why he disquieted him to bring him up. After Saul replied that God had departed from him, and would not speak to him through prophets or by dreams, Samuel said the following words to Saul. “Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbor, even to David: Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines” (1 Sam 28:6-19).

Notice what Samuel is declared to have said.

- The Lord had departed from him.
- The Lord had become his enemy.
- The Lord had done what Samuel had previously told Saul, wresting the kingdom from his hand. The record of this word is found in First Samuel 13:13.
- He said the Lord had given the kingdom to Saul’s neighbor David. The record of this word is found in First Samuel 13:14.
- He told Saul this was specifically because he had failed to obey the voice of the Lord by not executing his wrath upon Amalek. The record of this word is recorded in First Samuel 15:18-23).
- He said the Lord would deliver the host of Israel, and Saul as well, into the hands of the Philistines the next day. The record of the fulfillment of those words is found in First Samuel 31:1-3.
- He said that Saul and his sons would be with him the next day. The record of the fulfillment of that word is found in First Samuel 31:4-6.

I have taken the time to ;provide this account because there is a view that says the witch of Endor did not really bring up Samuel. – that is was actually a demon or an evil spirit impersonating Samuel. If that is so, we are face with a number of very difficult things. Not the least of these is the remarkable accuracy of the words delivered by the personality that was brought up.

- There was an accurate testimony of the past.

Unless Satan and his hosts are nothing more than men, it is out of order to treat their works as though they were in the class of human activity, chance, and time.

A precise accounting why God had forsaken Saul, and the precise event that occasioned it.

- The successor of Saul was precisely identified as David,
- The dominance of the Philistines over Israel was foretold.
- The death of Saul and his sons was announced, together with the precise time when it would occur.

For me, it is exceedingly difficult to accept those things as being said by the a demon or evil spirit. The witch of Endor herself thought it was Samuel. Saul said he knew it was Samuel. Additionally, the Word of God says it was Samuel, and provides not one syllable of suggestion that it was not. Some may counter that a woman with a spirit of divination precisely described Paul and those with him as “the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

This is, indeed, what that woman said. However, we are also told that she was possessed of a spirit of divination, and that it was unlawful for that spirit to so speak – even though what he said was technically true. Paul commanded that spirit to come out of the woman (Acts 16:17-18).

When, therefore, we read that Simon “used sorcery,” there is nothing inherent in the text that requires we dismiss what he was doing as nothing more than pretension – like a magician making a coin disappear, or a bird come out of a handkerchief. Unless Satan and his hosts are nothing more than men, it is out of order to treat their works as though they were in the class of human activity, chance, and time.

GIVING OUT THAT HIMSELF WAS SOME GREAT ONE

“ . . . giving out that himself was some great one . . .” Other versions read, “ a great man ,” BBE saying, I am a great person ,” MRD “someone momentous ,” NJB “a man who could do great things ,” PNT “pretending that he was more than human ,” WEYMOUTH and “an extraordinary and distinguished person.” AMPLIFIED

Stephen was like a many of the religious merchants of our time. He talked a lot about himself. He was a person who no doubt had a lot of, what psychiatrists call, self esteem . He presented himself as though he was the Messiah, and had the answer the ails of the community.

TO WHOM THEY ALL GAVE HEED

“ 10 To whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.” Other versions read, “is the Divine power known as the Great power,” NIV “the power of God that is called Great ,” NRSV “ the mighty power of God ,” MRD “the Great One – the power of God,” NLT and “an extraordinary and distinguished person.” AMPLIFIED

Here as a mortal that was receiving the glory that properly belong to Jesus. The people of the city – they all – acquiesced to his claims and were in some way subject to him. The city of Samaria was like his own kingdom, and the citizens like Israel when they gladly received the false prophets “ loved to have it so” (Jer 5:31). How Simon must have basked in all of this glory – until Philip came to town! Now, with the arrival of a man of God, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, Simon’s rule is interrupted.

A CITY UNDER THE SPELL OF SIMON

“ 11 And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.”

Those who have no regard for the supernatural, or for things and influences that operate outside the confines of the laws of nature, must account for a whole city being under the spell of a man. A person of such influence has not been common in any age. They have always been extraordinary. I do not know how any person could establish the possibility of rising above the norm by self-strength alone. I realize that the claim that such a thing is possible is regularly made. However, I have never heard a convincing argument that confirms it. It seems to me that extraordinary persons are most generally traced to the one to whom they have submitted themselves, whether intentionally or unintentionally. They are not “great” of themselves. At any rate, I am saying that this text reveals a clash of spiritual kingdoms, and that the greater one will prevail.

TO HIM THEY HAD REGARD

“And to him they had regard . . .” Other versions read, “they heeded him ,” NKJV “they were giving him attention ,” NASB “they followed him ,” NIV “they listened eagerly to him,” NRSV “were attentive to him,” CSB “ acquiesced in him,” MRD “set much by,” PNT “ paid careful attention to him,” ISV “kept running after him ,” WILLIAMS and “were attentive to him and made much of him.”

AMPLIFIED

Here was a man that was not only well known, but well liked as well. The people held him in very high regard, giving credence to his claims.

Simon was serving the wicked master – the devil. Those who regarded him were indirectly honoring the devil. They were opening themselves to the working of the devil, and to the ruthless dominance he holds over the people.

There is a sense in which every man is following someone. Ultimately, they are either people in whom “the prince of the power of the air” works (Eph 2:2), or those in whom God works “both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). There is no neutral ground, where “self” is everything. From the high vantage point, there are only two masters, and every mortal is serving one of them, while no one is serving both of them.

Simon was serving the wicked master – the devil. Those who regarded him were indirectly honoring the devil. They were opening themselves to the working of the devil, and to the ruthless dominance he holds over the people.

HE HAD BEWITCHED THEM

“ . . . because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries.” Other versions read, “he had astonished them,” NKJV “amazed them,” NIV “kept them under his control,” BBE “astounded them,” CSB “mocked them,” TNT “bewildered them,” ISV “thrilled them,” WILLIAMS and “amazed, and bewildered, and amazed them.” AMPLIFIED

The dominance of this man over the people had continued for a “long time.” If there was anything fake about him, the people were not able to perceive it. It does not say they were deceived by Simon, but that they were “BEWITCHED” by his sorceries. The word “bewitched” means to “throw out of position, throw one out of his mind, drive one out of his senses, and hence to amaze, astonish, and throw into wonderment,” THAYER “to remove something from a place, change, cause someone to be amazed beyond comprehension, confuse, astound,” FRIBERG and “cause someone to be so astounded as to be practically overwhelmed.” LOUW-NIDA

There is a slight technicality here that ought to be noted. Bewitching is the means, and astonishment is the result. Bewitching is a forceful activity, even though subtle means are employed. It is a form of spiritual captivity or bondage, as when Satan takes someone “captive at his will,” or when people are “held captive by him to do his will” NASB (2 Tim 2:26).

There are various forms of captivity. Demons captured and held captive that poor man from Gadara, driving him to run shrieking through the mountains, live among the tombs, cut himself with stones, and break chains and fetters (Mark 5:4-5; Luke 8:29). A demon captured a young boy, throwing him to the ground and will, and causing him to jump into both fire and water in an effort to kill him (Matt 17:15; Lk 9:39-40). Another evil spirit bound poor woman for eighteen years, so that she was bowed over, and could in no wise lift herself up (Lk 13:11,16).

Bewitching is bondage of another order – a bondage of the mind in which a person is thrown off course, and into the path in which lies dominate. That is the kind of activity that was in the city of Samaria. The people had been thrown into a state of mind in which they could not properly assess things. They were enslaved, although I do not doubt that they were totally unaware of that fact.

This is the work of “the rulers of the darkness of this world,” against whom we are called to wrestle (Eph 6:12). These are forces that maintain carnal consternation, erroneous emphases, and distracting curiosity. I do not doubt that they are the perpetrators of fads and fashion that grip the hearts and

minds of men, turning them from the truth.

The only remedy for such a condition is to receive the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10). Apart from this, the only other alternative is “strong delusion.” By “strong delusion,” the Spirit means a delusion that can neither be detected nor overcome outside the perimeter of the truth of God.

A MAN OF GOD ARRIVES ON THE SCENE

Now, amidst all of this delusion and the powers of darkness, a man of God arrives. He is filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom, and has a grasp of the truth. He begins preaching Christ among the people, and doing signs and wonders that confirm what he is saying is the truth. He has not been there as long as Simon. Will he be able to turn the people from devotion to that sorcerer? Luke will provide us with the answer?

THE PEOPLE BELIEVED AND WERE BAPTIZED

“ 12 But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.”

The Kingdom is coming to the city of Samaria! It is a superior kingdom with a powerful message, and is fully supported by the One who rules over all. We should expect something to happen in this clash of kingdoms. When Stephen preached in Jerusalem, he was stoned to death. What will happen when Philip preaches in Samaria? Jerusalem had been filled with the apostles doctrine, and they rejected one of Philip’s co-laborers. Samaria has never been subjected to the apostles’ doctrine. What will they do when they hear the same message from a close ally of the martyr Stephen?

BUT WHEN THEY BELIEVED

“ But when they believed Philip . . .” Other versions read, “had faith in the good news given by Philip,” BBE “came to believe Philip,” CJB “gave credence to Philip,” MRD “began to believe,” NAB “came to accept,” NJB and “they embraced the faith.” WEYMOUTH

How long does it take a person to believe? If we are speaking about a mythical academic believing, it may require a lengthy period of time. There may be a need to present proofs that the Gospel is really true. Of course, that is exceedingly difficult when all of the evidence has been withdraw, leaving only witnesses and participants. Some may also perceive a need for some scientific proofs of God, and various forms of, what they consider to be, logical proofs. However, Philip not only sees no need for this, none of these things are available to him. Not long ago, he was a beginner himself. He has not been a believer long enough to have graduated from one of the rabbinical schools, or to acquire a lot of extraneous facts concerning the origin of the Scriptures, their integrity. Of course, the Holy Spirit works with none of those things in the first place. He uses the Word of God, which is His sword, and Philip has a working knowledge of that, and a strong faith as well. So, when Philip starts preaching Christ, the Spirit goes to work convincing the people of sin, righteousness and judgment: “Of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:9-11).

And what happens? The people “believed Philip!” Like the Thessalonians, they received the Word preached by Philip, “not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). Like the Philippians, it was “given” to them “to believe” (Phil 1:29). As with Lydia, the Lord “opened” their hearts (Acts 16:14). Like other Gentiles they “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27), and were “granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). The “door of faith” was opened to them, as it would be later among other Gentiles (Acts 14:27). A preacher was sent. He brought glad tidings of good things. They heard. They came. They believed. They obeyed (Rom 10:14-17). There you have the doctrine lived out in exacting detail.

PREACHING THE THINGS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

With over one hundred and twenty references to the Kingdom in letters addressed to the churches, one wonders why more of the Kingdom is not being said these days. Could it be that Christ is really not being preached?

“ . . . preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God . . .” Other versions read, “ good news about the kingdom of God,” NASB “ good tidings concerning the kingdom of God,” ASV “preaching of the kingdom of God,” DOUAY and “proclaiming the good news, the things concerning the reign of God .” YLT

Now here is a most interesting thing. Verse five states that Philip “went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them.” However, in this text it states that Philip preaching “the things concerning the Kingdom of God.” Of course there is no contradiction here. Preaching Christ involves declaring matters concerning God’s kingdom. The Kingdom of God speaks of the administration of the Sovereignty of God. It relates to the outworking of His eternal purpose. Strictly speaking, the Kingdom of God is the fulfillment of a purpose conceived by God, initiated by Him, and carried forward to its completion. At this time the chief exhibition of Divine power and wisdom is the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Tim 2:10). Three of the primary areas in which this Kingdom is being revealed are calling, justification, and glorification (Rom 8:30). The aim of the project is to confirm those who were foreknown by God to the image of His Son, that He might be “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:30).

“The Kingdom of God” is mentioned fifty-four times in the Gospels. Matthew refers to the same kingdom as “the Kingdom of heaven,” making mention of it thirty-two times. “The Kingdom” is mentioned in the Gospels fourteen times. This, the record of the ministry of Jesus on earth included one hundred references to the Kingdom. The book of Acts contains seven references to “the Kingdom of God,” and one reference to “the Kingdom.” The epistles contain eight references to “the Kingdom of God,” one to “the Kingdom of Christ and of God,” one to “the Kingdom of His dear Son,” one to “His heavenly kingdom,” one to “the Kingdom of our God,” one to “the Kingdom and patience of Jesus,” one to “the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” one to “the Kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him” once to “a Kingdom which cannot be moved,” once God spoke to the Son about “Thy Kingdom,” once to “the Kingdom,” and twice to “His Kingdom.”

With over one hundred and twenty references to the Kingdom in letters addressed to the churches, one wonders why more of the Kingdom is not being said these days. Could it be that Christ is really not being preached? The fact of the matter is that the people in Samaria believed what Philip was saying about “the Kingdom of God,” and that this was involved in preaching Christ.

We are obliged to consider the preaching Christ within the context of the Kingdom of God, versus preaching Him within the context of the needs of humanity. I fear that the latter method is being employed in our time, and there is no possible way to justify it.

AND THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . and the name of Jesus Christ . . .” Other versions read, “and the One named Jesus Christ,” GWN “message that Jesus was the Messiah,” LIVING “the authority of Jesus the Messiah,” IE “and the name of Jesus Christ [the Messiah],” AMPLIFIED and “and about Jesus Christ.” GNB

The name of Jesus has to do with His Person and work. It is who He is, and the manner in which God has revealed Him. It is how God desires Him to be known. The real point of Jesus is not how He relates to the desires of men, but how He relates to the will and purpose of God. Preaching in the name of Jesus is, in fact, the same as preaching Christ. In this verse it is more particularly related to the Kingdom of God, or the carrying out of the purpose of God. You might say that preaching the

Kingdom of God is declaring what God has purposed to do, and how He is thoroughly capable of carrying that purpose out to its fullest extent. Preaching the name of Jesus is declaring the means through which that purpose is being accomplished, which is encapsulated in the Person of Jesus.

THEY WERE BAPTIZED

“ . . . they were baptized, both men and women.” Other versions read, “they were being baptized , men and women alike.” NASB “a number of men and women had baptism ,” BBE “they were immersed , both men and women,” CJB “ men and women alike were baptized,” NAB “they began to be baptized , both men and women,” NET “many men and women were baptized,” LIVING “men and women believed Philip and were immersed ,” IE “both men and women were constantly baptized ,” WILLIAMS and “they were all baptized.” CEV

Everyone who believed what Philip preached were baptized – both men and women. This is the same thing that happened on the day of Pentecost, being done at the direction of Peter following the inquiry of those who heard him

Everyone who believed what Philip preached were baptized – both men and women. This is the same thing that happened on the day of Pentecost, being done at the direction of Peter following the inquiry of those who heard him (Acts 2:38-41). There is no reason to question that the same procedure took place here. Preaching, believing, inquiry, and direction be baptized.

This fulfilled the word delivered by Jesus to His disciples – a word that was obviously passed along. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). This is baptism in water that is performed by a fellow believer. No person was ever commanded to be baptized in or with the Holy Spirit. Further, the words “were baptized” are never used to describe those baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit.

The words of our text have to do with baptism in water – being “ . . . saved by water,” and fulfilling the words of Peter, “ . . . while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us . . .” (1 Pet 3:20-21). This is the baptism referred to in Hebrews 10:22 where the Spirit speaks of our bodies being “washed with pure water.”

No person of Scriptural record ever refused to be, or questioned the requirement of being, baptized into Christ. No one represented God ever presented baptism as an option, or gave the people any reason to believe their response to the God was satisfactory if it came short of being baptized. All of the arguments that have been raised about baptism have had their genesis in the minds of men. None of these questions were ever raised in Scripture, and none of them should be raised now.

I will not leave this rather elementary subject without pointing out the associations that the Holy Spirit has made with baptism. I do not believe it is possible to embrace these statements and then question that baptism is, in fact, related to salvation.

THINGS ASSOCIATED WITH BAPTISM

- Repentance (Acts 2:38).
- The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).
- Salvation, or being "saved" (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
- Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).

- In baptism we were raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- Being identified with Christ's death (Rom 6:3).
- Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
- Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
- The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
- Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
- Coming into Christ (Gal 3:27).
- Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).
- A commandment (Acts 10:48).
- The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
- Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
- Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).
- Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- Something that is done "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).

SIMON HIMSELF BELIEVES AND IS BAPTIZED

“ 13 Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.”

If the Holy Spirit moved Luke to say Simon believed and was baptized, without adding any explanatory note, how can anyone be justifying in adding their own note to the text? Let us take it for what it says and work through the text with an honest and good heart.

Apparently, for the first time Simon confronts a man he knows has more power than himself. When the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness collide, there is never a question about which one is superior. Ultimately, the truth of this will be confirmed at the appearing of Jesus, which His Kingdom shall appear as well. Paul wrote Timothy, admonishing Him labor faithfully with this in mind. “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim 4:1).

SIMON HIMSELF BELIEVED ALSO

“Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized . . .” Other versions read, “Simon himself had faith and, having had baptism,” BBE “Simon himself came to believe ; and after being immersed,” CJB “ Even Simon believed , and after he was baptized,” GWN “even Simon himself became a believer . After his baptism Simon,” NJB and “Even Simon himself believed [he adhered to, trusted in, and relied on the teaching of Philip], and after being baptized.” AMPLIFIED

This is significant because of the claims that Simon had been making – “giving out himself to be some great one” (v 9). However, in the presence of Philip, and within the sound of his powerful preaching, Simon no longer appeared to be any great one. The powerful effects of Philip’s preaching was perceived as eclipsing his own. Furthermore, all of was accomplished within a relatively short period of time, even though Simon had dominated that area for a long time.

Some have doubted the sincerity of Simon, declaring him to be nothing but a pretender. Nothing in these verses will lead us to that conclusion, It seems to me that such statements reflect an inordinate

affection for the doctrines of men. If the Holy Spirit moved Luke to say Simon believed and was baptized, without adding any explanatory note, how can anyone be justifying in adding their own note to the text? Let us take it for what it says and work through the text with an honest and good heart.

HE CONTINUED WITH PHILIP

“ . . . he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.” Other versions read, “he continued with Philip and was amazed,” NKJV “he was constantly amazed,” NASB “he followed Philip everywhere, astonished,” NIV “he was full of surprise,” BBE and “he was astounded.” CSB

Once Simon believed and was baptized, he continued with Philip, not leaving his side. The text confirms that Philip continued to do many miracles and signs, working without restraint in the name of the Lord Jesus. These were not a display for the sake of Simon, but were mighty works that confirmed what Philip was saying. As I have already suggested, it is my persuasion that these miracles and signs were not merely a validation of Philip himself, but were confirmatory of the word he was delivering. If this is true, it means that there was some obvious correlation between those works and what Philip was preaching.

Here is a most interesting thing! Precisely the same word is used for Simon wondering at the miracles of Philip as was employed in describing him bewitching the people of Samaria with his sorcery. The Greek word is **evxistw/n** . As I have already indicated in commenting on verse nine, the word is a forceful one that means “to throw out of position or displace; to throw one out of his mind, drive one out of his senses.” THAYER It is to be faced with something that cannot be explained. Regarding the Samaritans, Simon had been doing things that could not be explained. They were things that transcended their own experience and knowledge. Now, Simon himself is confounded, forced out of his normal train of thought. He has seen something he cannot explain, and it is superior to any of his own experience or knowledge.

If the Gospel is truly a superior message, then there must be some way in which that superiority can be confirmed. This is not limited to signs and wonders, but also includes adorning the doctrine with godly works (Tit 2:10). That is, what the doctrine states is lived out before men. That is letting your light shine, when what the doctrine declares takes place in men becomes visible in those who embrace the doctrine.

This is an area of especial weakness in the modern church, and is a great deterrent to the work of the Lord. There is no way to estimate the damage that has been caused by professing Christians whose lives contradict the doctrine of Christ.

No effort should be expended to explain the situation, for there is no satisfactory explanation. The church will not effectively do the work of the Lord until this uncomely circumstance is removed from it.

CONCLUSION

Thus we have been exposed to a relatively unknown man upending the long-time influence of a man given to curious arts. In a single visit, he has invaded a city that sat in darkness, shining the light of the Gospel within it, and causing many to awake from the slumber that had been induced by a certain sorcerer.

This record confirms that the true power is not in human aptitude, but in the faith, understanding and purity of the laborer. It is not possible to come up with a method of training men to duplicate Philip’s achievements, He is an example of a person holding to the Head of the body, who, in turn,

works effectively through that member. This is a heritage of all of the people of God. It only takes a person who is willing to forsake all, take up his cross, and follow Christ, and the door of Kingdom opportunity swings open!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #37

THE SAMARITANS RECEIVE THE SPIRIT

“ 8:14 Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16 (For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. ”
(Acts 8:14-17)

INTRODUCTION

There are Scriptural passages that confirm the inherent weakness of man-made patterned theological thought, otherwise known as systematic or systematized theology. This represents the attempt of men to gather together various teachings of Scripture in a more organized manner. It is supposed that this is more conducive to learning. Of course, the primary objective in such an approach to Scripture is to promote a particular view of scripture, and not the knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures themselves.

WHY THE SCRIPTURES WERE GIVEN TO US

It is essential to know why the Scriptures have been inspired and given to men. We are categorically told that they are written for our profit or benefit. This is stated in differing ways.

- **TO MAKE US WISE UNTO SALVATION** . “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).

- **TO MAKE THE GODLY PERFECT, THOROUGHLY FURNISHED UNTO ALL GOOD WORKS**. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

- **THAT WE MIGHT HAVE HOPE**. “For whatsoever things were written

aforetime were written for our **CONTENTS**

WHEN THE APOSTLES HEARD (8:14a)

THEY SENT UNTO THEM PETER AND JOHN (8:14b)

THEY PRAYED FOR THEM (8:15)

HE WAS FALLEN UPON NONE OF THEM (8:16a)

THEY WERE ONLY BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS (8:16b)

THEY LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM AND THEY RECEIVED (8:17)

CONCLUSION

•

learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

• **FOR OUR ADMONITION, LEST WE BECOME PRESUMPTUOUS.** “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11).

• **THE RECORD OF JESUS’ LIFE IS WRITTEN THAT WE MIGHT BELIEVE.** “But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name” (John 20:31).

In view of these revealed objectives, it is disastrous to approach the Scriptures as a mere compilation historical facts, or a manual of conduct. Further, there is no place for these texts in a an opinionated view of Scripture, for man’s opinion will inevitably dictate that they either be ignored altogether, or at least minimized.

THE TENDENCY TO CODIFY

Throughout history the tendency to develop and rely on humanly-codified religious thought has been apparent. This is so prominent that major divisions exist in the professed Christian community that rely solely upon the human perspective (as compared with the “hearing of faith” – Gal 3:2,5) of the doctrine of Scripture. Terms are developed that allow for a ready classification of people, as well as the understanding of Scripture – i.e., Protestant, Catholic, Calvinistic, Armenian, Reformation, Restoration, Full Gospel, various Millennial views (Pre-millennial, Post-Millennial, Amillennial, Preterist), etc.

Each of these have boundaries of thought that have been created by men. Those constricted views are then equated with Scripture itself, and considered to justify hard and fast divisions among believers. This practice is so common, men have come to think little of it. Thus they compare one pattern of thought with another, rather than with both the content and thrust of Scripture. They assemble Biblical texts rather than embracing truth itself, reading the Scripture with a mind to support their view rather than to discern the mind of the Lord.

As one might suppose, the receiving of the Holy Spirit is a matter that has been especially subject to such codification. When the Spirit is received, how He is conferred, and what occurs when He comes to dwell within the believer, are all areas in which there are sharp divisions within the professed church.

As one might suppose, the receiving of the Holy Spirit is a matter that has been especially subject to such codification. When the Spirit is received, how He is conferred, and what occurs when He comes to dwell within the believer, are all areas in which there are sharp divisions within the professed church. Each of these divisions are very dogmatic in their view. However, when all is

said and done, the views consist largely of talk – which is precisely why there can be no fair assessment of their content. The Kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power (1 Cor 4:20).

Rarely are these divisions ever perpetrated or addressed with honesty and integrity. Those who adhere to them assume they are true, largely because of the arguments men use to support them. Owing to the handy theological systems that have been developed by men, these are superimposed on the Scriptures like a template that sifts out texts that contradict the particular view. There is no moral or spiritual pressure on the individual to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1), for all of the testing has supposedly been done by those who codified the teaching.

Like all Scripture, the text before us is not intended to be stuffed into a theological container that is theoretically designed to simplify our understanding of Divine involvements with men. Those acquainted with Scripture soon find out that the works of God are not marked by discernible outward patterns and circumstances. They reflect the character and purpose of God, not the conclusions of men. This is why, for example, Christ’s healings were not characterized by a pattern, or stereotyped approach.

THE DOCTRINE IS LIVED OUT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

Men have this propensity to build and support a religious institution. The Word of God, however, will not give aid to such an enterprise. If men, because they are “unlearned” in the ways of the Lord, do not accept the Divinely appointed reason for the Scriptures, they will inevitably wrest them “unto their own destruction” (2 Pet 3:16). It is necessary to say these things because men tend to approach books like Luke’s account of the activities of the apostles and the early church (the book of Acts), with more liberty than is appropriate. This is owing to the lack of a doctrinal emphasis in his record. In his writing, Luke is not establishing a particular teaching, as Paul, Peter, and John do in their epistles. He is giving a record of what happened. Following are some examples of the writing of “apostles’ doctrine.”

- **Romans** – Justification by Faith.
- **First Corinthians** – Spiritual gifts, Love, and The Resurrection of the Dead.
- **Second Corinthians** – The New Covenant and the Resurrection Body.
- **Galatians** – Justification by Faith, as opposed to by the works of the Law.
- **Ephesians** – The Eternal Purpose of God, and the Divine objective for the Church.
- **Philippians** – The Involvements of the Incarnation, and the Mind-set of the Kingdom.
- **Colossians** – The Completeness that Is Realized in Christ, and the Unreasonableness of a Religion of mere Procedure.
- **First and Second Thessalonians** – The Second Coming of Christ and its Various Associations.
- **Hebrews** – The High Priesthood of Jesus and the Superiority of the New Covenant.
- **James** – The true Nature of Faith.
- **First Peter** – The Role of Suffering in the Divine Economy.
- **Second Peter** – The Coming of the Lord and its Impact upon our Manner of Life.
- **First John** – The Association of all Human Conduct with one of Two Sources: Jesus of the Wicked One.
- **The Revelation** – The Inevitabilities of Satan’s Demise, the Fall of False Religion, and the Public and Unquestionable Triumph of Jesus.

DOCTRINE IS STATED, BUT NOT DEVELOPED

You will not find the doctrinal development in the book of Acts. That is because this is not the purpose of the book. It is a record of the impact of the doctrine upon the lives of those who embrace it. That record places before the doctrine lived out.

There are doctrinal statements made in this book, but they are not developed in words. Rather, they are explicated in the record of the lives of believers. Permit me to point out some of the doctrinal statements that are made in Acts, yet which are not developed as they are in the Epistles.

- “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ” (Acts 2:38).

There are doctrinal statements made in this book, but they are not developed in words. Rather, they are explicated in the record of the lives of believers.

“For the promise is unto you , and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call ” (Acts 2:39).

- “And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead ” (Acts 10:42).
- “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins ” (Acts 10:43).
- “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things , from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).
- “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved , even as they” (Acts 15:11).
- “Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead ” (Acts 17:31).

These few samples contain statements that expose our minds to doctrines that are developed elsewhere. But they are not developed in the record Luke wrote. It appears clear that at the time it was assumed that those who read this book were familiar with the doctrine, else I hardly see how the optimum benefit could be realized from the record. For example, Luke wrote this book to Theophilus as a kind of follow-up to the Gospel of Luke, which was also written to him (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The book of Acts was written around 63 A.D., about thirty years after Pentecost. It was not written to introduce men to “the doctrine of Christ,” but to report its effectiveness in them that believe. Neither, indeed was it intended to provide an explanation for the working of the Lord in specific periods of time, or establish certain unique Divine activities that were unique. I understand that there are record like this in the book of Acts, but they are not the reason for its presence.

As difficult as it may be for some to receive it, this book was not written to codify the plan of salvation (which is a man-made expression). It does not provide us with doctrinal formulae that are to be repeated each time we preach. This ought to be clear by the various replies and instructions that are given to those being told how to be saved.

- “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21).
- “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38).
- “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves

from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40).

- “Repent and be converted” (Acts 3:19).
- “If thou believest, thou mayest” (be baptized) (Acts 8:37).
- “Who can forbid water that these should be baptized . . . and he commanded them to be baptized” (Acts 10:47-48).
- “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11).
- “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 16:31).
- “. . . believe on Him which should come . . . on Jesus Christ” – Acts 19:4

These seemingly differing statements by no means suggest different ways to be saved. Furthermore, they are not given to be compiled into a convenient plan. They are not intended to be doctrinal statements of how to be saved. That is why each one is not as thorough as some would prefer. These are reports that are perfectly consistent with the doctrine. However, they themselves are not the doctrine, and must not be approached as though they were.

This does not give men license to ignore any of these statements as though they were nothing more than history, or to develop a plan of salvation that omits any of them.

THE RELATION OF THIS EXPLANATION TO OUR TEXT

In this text it will be affirmed that the Holy Spirit had not yet “fallen” on those who had believed and been baptized. The language itself is peculiar, but it must not be brushed aside as though the expression is identical with other accounts of men receiving the Holy Spirit. This is an inspired record, and it is precise, being in strict harmony with the Divine nature and Scripture. If approach it as though the book of Acts was a book of doctrine, or the exact record of the apostles’ doctrine, we will find it to be somewhat confusing. Certain sectarians will rejoice to read this passage because it will appear to justify their doctrinal stance. Others will see it as a threat to their doctrinal position, and will therefore set out to show it is not relevant to us today. It is that intellectual confusion that constrains men to either make what is recorded a pattern to be followed, or to assign a meaning to it that has no significance for our time. These extreme reactions must be avoided, for they are not right. It is not possible that God would inspire Scripture with a mind to support doctrines invented by men. Neither, indeed, is it possible that He would provide Scripture that has no relevance to any generation that is exposed to it. God has His own agenda, and operates according to His own purpose – always working “all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:9).

Men must come up in their thinking, seeking to know the mind of the Lord rather than to justify the view they have embraced. If they do, in fact, receive the love of the truth, they will find this to be a very satisfying pursuit. However, if they have not received the love of the truth, but choose to be followers of men than of the Lord, they will not be able to escape distorting the Word of the Lord, and seeking to conform it to their own way of thinking.

If men are to profit from the Word of God, at some point, rationality must be governed by faith. They must “live by every Word of God” (Lk 4:4), recognizing that life can be sustained in no other way. If they allow the process of thinking to be regulated by the traditions of men, their religion will be tedious and tasteless. They will find themselves growing cold and calloused, and more susceptible to the adversary of their souls.

It is the nature of human wisdom draw a veil over the truth of God so that it cannot be seen. Correspondingly, it is the nature of the truth to show the futility and jeopardy of man’s wisdom.

WHEN THE APOSTLES HEARD

“ 8:14a Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God...”

Because this is a record of the working of the Lord and the administration of the Christ of God, no account stands on its own. This is the body of Christ in action, and not the mere activities of individuals. There is a harmony in the works that impacts upon the whole church, and the members as God has placed them in the body. If, for example, God has “set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18), and if “God hath set some in the church, first the apostles” (1 Cor 12:28), then we should expect an event of the magnitude of the whole city of Samaria believing, to be brought to their attention. If the church is “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20), and is intended to continue steadfastly “in the apostles doctrine” (Acts 2:42), then they will surely become involved in this marvelous working of the Lord. You may be sure that Jesus will not ignore the ones appointed to put down the foundation, ensuring that disciples grow up into Christ in all things.

THE APOSTLES WHICH WERE AT JERUSALEM

“Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “the apostles in Jerusalem,” NASB “the apostles in Jerusalem,” GWN “the apostles back in Jerusalem,” LIVING “apostles were still in Jerusalem,” IE and “ yet in Jerusalem.” INTERLINEAR

The Word of God never suggests that the Apostles were in any way slothful in carrying out the word of the Lord. That idea had its genesis in the minds of men, and, for that reason alone, it is to be summarily rejected.

You may recall that Jesus had told the disciples to go into “all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). Now, somewhere between two to six years after Pentecost, they are still in Jerusalem. Some have considered them to be recalcitrant in this matter, not doing what they were commanded to do. These people choose this view because the continued presence Apostles in Jerusalem does not mesh with perception of Jesus’ words. The Word of God never suggests that the Apostles were in any way slothful in carrying out the word of the Lord. That idea had its genesis in the minds of men, and, for that reason alone, it is to be summarily rejected.

Jerusalem remained the hub of Kingdom activity throughout the book of Acts, being mentioned no less than sixty times in the book. This reflected the fulfillment of many prophecies of old.

- For the first seven chapters, this was the area of all Christian activity.
- Much of the persecution that Saul unleashed was against saints there (9:13,21).
- Even following the conversion of Saul, the apostles were described as “coming in and going out of Jerusalem” (9:27).
- Major gatherings were held there in which key matters pertaining to the Kingdom were discussed (11:2; 15:2).
- When a number of people believed in Antioch, the church in Jerusalem dispatched Barnabas to review the matter (11:22).
- Prophets came from Jerusalem to new believers in Antioch, resulting in the disciples determining to send relief to the brethren in Judaea that were impacted by a famine (11:27).
- Upon completing a mission, Barnabas and Saul returned to Jerusalem (12:25).
- Decrees for Gentile converts that were made by the apostles, were sent out of Jerusalem, resulting in the churches being established in the faith (16:4-5).
- Paul had a deep respect for Jerusalem, associating it with holy beginnings (19:21;

20:16,22; 21:13; 24:11).

- James, the brother of our Lord, and the elders remained in Jerusalem where they told Paul “many thousands” of Jews believed (21:17).

The apostles did travel out from Jerusalem, as this very text will confirm. However, it appears that some of them did remain there, together with other spiritually stable souls like James, the elders, and certain prophets. This provided early believers with an immediate means of obtaining the teaching required for spiritual maturity.

Something to be Seen

There is something of particular interest to be seen here. A high priority was placed on the establishment of early believers, particularly when there were clusters of them, or churches. The thinking at that time provoked the disciples to make sure people grew up into Christ, and were not left to flounder in the polls of spiritual juvenility.

- When, for example, the number of disciples began to spread into Gentile territories, “they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch” (Acts 11:22). When he came, Barnabas assessed the situation. Seeing the grace of God evident in the people, he “was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

- There came a time when Paul said to Barnabas, which whom he had been laboring, “Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (Acts 15:36).

- Later, because Barnabas determined to go in another direction (to Cyprus, taking John Mark), Paul and Silas went throughout Syria and Cilicia “confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41).

- Paul spend a year and “a year and six months” in Corinth, building up the brethren (Acts 18:11).

- During his labors, and while he was in prison, Paul wrote seven epistles to specific churches, grounding them more solidly in the Lord (Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians). He also wrote four personal letters of instruction (First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon). There was also the book of Hebrews which contained extensive teaching concerning High Priest of Christ and the New Covenant. Note: Although many say that Paul did not write the book of Hebrews, we do not have a solid example of any other person speaking or writing so extensively concerning the nature of the New Covenant – not so much as a syllable. It is inconceivable that a non-apostle had such wisdom,

- Peter also wrote two epistles to believers, grounding them in the faith.

- James, the brother of our Lord wrote an epistle to believers, correcting them concerning the inconsistency of their claims with their lives.

- John wrote three epistles and the book of the Revelation – all addressed to believers, and with the intention aiding them in their growth and understanding.

These circumstances stand in stark contrast to the gross neglect of the church that is common in our time. I personally know of no prominent Christian preacher or teacher that is noted for having a burden for the maturity of the churches. The Christian educational institutions do not have such a burden, regularly producing workers who have little concept of the nature of the New Covenant and the necessity of spiritual growth. The situation is so deplorable that it is tantamount to a miracle to find a single person who in whom the prayer of Paul is being fulfilled: i.e. “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the

riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power” (Eph 1:18-19). While such people do, indeed, exist, they are rarely found in clusters of any significant size.

This condition is the direct result of the general lack of interest in among religious leaders in the matter of feeding and nourishing the flock of God – even though God commands them to do so (1 Pet 5:2). However, this condition did not exist at the time of our text. Instead, there was an immediate interest in those who had believed and been baptized. The apostles, who were really spiritual leaders, took action to ensure the believers in Samaria were properly equipped.

HEARD THAT SAMARIA HAD RECEIVED THE WORD

“ . . . heard that Samaria had received the Word of God . . .” Other versions read, “ accepted the Word of God,” NIV “taken the Word of God into their hearts ,” BBE “ welcomed God’s message,” CSB “ accepted and welcomed the Word of God,” AMPLIFIED and “has-received the saying of God .” INTERLINEAR

Here we are introduced to the versatility of the vocabulary of the Spirit – “combining and interpreting spiritual truths with spiritual language” AMPLIFIED (1 Cor 2:13). The response of the Samaritans to the preaching of Philip is stated in a number of ways.

- **GAVE HEED.** They “gave heed to those things which Philip spoke” (Acts 8:6).
- **BELIEVED THE PREACHING.** They “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus” (Acts 8:12a).
- **WERE BAPTIZED.** They “were baptized, both men and woman” (Acts 8:12b).
- **RECEIVED THE WORD.** The report was that they “had received the Word of God” (Acts 8:14).

Those four things do not stand independently from one another. They are all involved in believing the Gospel, and are all associated with being saved. Who would venture to say that any of these responses had nothing to do with salvation, or that one could be saved without any of them? Where is the person presumptuous enough to say the Samaritans were saved prior to any of these responses?

- Giving heed involves attentiveness, interest, and focusing both heart and mind on the message of the Gospel. This is certainly not something optional, nor is salvation ever depicted as being accomplished in those who do not give heed to the preaching of the Gospel.

- Believing involves acquiesce with the nature and content of the message, and a hearty embrace of the same. Those who believe are persuaded of the truth of the Gospel, are willing to act upon their embrace of it, doing whatever the Lord requires of them.

- Being baptized is the appointed means of identifying with Christ’s death, from which God raises men to walk in the newness of life. Here is the initial experience of bringing the body into subjection to the Word of the Lord (1 Cor 9:27). Baptism is associated with the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), and washing away sin (Acts 22:16). What would move any person to say that, under ordinary conditions, you could be saved without being baptized?

- Receiving the Word of God involves taking hold of it and refusing to let it go. There is determination in receiving Word, and the putting down of any and all inhibiting thoughts and declination toward the world. There is a very real sense in which the person who receives the Word has, in fact, overcome the devil, for he seeks to blind the minds of men to the truth of the Gospel (2 Cor 4:4).

More Than A Routine

This differs vastly from merely submitting to a routine, imagining that salvation is experienced by rote, without the involvement of the whole person. God forbid that anyone would ever embrace a view of salvation that caused any of the statements of our text to sound strange, incomplete, or even unacceptable. It ought to be obvious that there is a certain purity in the expressions of this text that provides a frame work for sound theological thought.

The words that men employ, and the doctrines that are built by them, shape the way people think about Scriptural themes or subjects. If a person embraces a doctrine that has been constructed with special words that reflect human understanding, they will not be able to reason in a sound manner concerning Scriptural matters. For example, if a person accepts the validity of expressions like “eternal security,” “unconditional love,” “limited atonement,” “irresistible grace,” or “the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit,” it will impact directly upon their understanding of Scripture. Sectarianism relies on a distorted spiritual vocabulary, for “wholesome words” (1 Tim 6:3) and “sound doctrine” (Tit 2:1) will not support misconceptions. In order to embrace a false doctrine, the Divine vocabulary in some way be distorted. Explanatory phrases or modifying words have to be added in order to develop an erroneous doctrine of concept, and that is not an acceptable activity.

At the point of our text, and in strict speaking with the manner in which the Holy Spirit teaches (1 Cor 2:13), a pure vocabulary is being used – one that precisely reflects the nature of what is being reported. That is why it is imperative that we strictly abstain from any temptation modify what is being said, or make an attempt to blend texts so that they more readily support a sectarian stance.

Appropriate Words

This text also puts into words what takes place when men who are “dead in trespasses and sins” do not obey the Gospel. Some may tell us that a failure to respond to the Gospel means the person was just not ready at the time. Others might say they needed time to think, of what they wanted to be sure they were doing the right thing. All of that is nothing more than the flesh trying to justify itself. When people do not obey the Gospel, it is because they have not “received the Word of God.” They have, as Paul said it, “put” KJV the word of God from themselves, rejecting it, NKJV “repudiating it,” NASB and thrusting it RSV from themselves (Acts 13:46). If that condition persists, it will be clear, as Paul also said, that they have judged themselves “unworthy of everlasting life” (Acts 13:46b). Paul’s word was spoken on the Sabbath day in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14). That day, when the Jews “left the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath day” (Acts 13:42). The next Sabbath day “came almost the whole city together to hear the Word of God.” Seeing this large group of people, the Jews “were filled with envy, and spake against the things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming,” (Acts 13:45). It was at that time, after those Jews had heard Paul preach two times, that he said the words to which I have referred.

I do not say these things to encourage harsh judgment and a lack of godly forbearance. However, having said that, it appears to me that a spirit of ungodly toleration exists in our day – one that is fostered by inappropriate value being assigned to the wisdom of men, particularly as it pertains to the human psyche, proper motivation, and the exercise of influence. It is unspeakably serious to reject what God has said, and fail to respond appropriately to it. It is equally true that nothing can be allowed to diminish the essentiality of receiving the truth and heartily embracing it.

The Apostles saw the significance and value of what had taken place in Samaria. They knew that God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit had been at work there. It was therefore necessary to nurture the new life that had sprung up out of the dry ground of that region, and the apostles knew it. These people must have a thorough beginning.

THEY SENT UNTO THEM PETER AND JOHN

“ 14b . . . they sent unto them Peter and John . . .” Other versions read, “sent to them Peter and John,” DOUAY “they sent down Peter and John,” LIVING “sent Peter and John to the people in Samaria,” IE “sent Peter and John to visit them,” WEYMOUTH “sent Peter and John there ,” WILLIAMS and “ commissioned toward them Peter and John.” INTERLINEAR

The “they” of reference is the apostles – the “apostles of the Lamb” (Rev 21:14), or “the apostles of Christ” (2 Pet 3:2), “the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:17), or “the twelve apostles” (Rev 21:14). They are also referred to as “the twelve” (Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5), and “the apostles” (Acts 1:2; 2:37,42,43; 4:33,35,36,37; 5:2,12,18,34,40; 6:6; 8:1,14,18; 9:27; 11:1; 14:4; 15:2,4,6, 22,23,33; 16:4). These were specifically the twelve men Jesus chose and “named apostles” (Lk 6:13). These did not include other apostles who were sent out by the church, and at the direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2) – like Barnabas, who was also called an “apostle” (Acts 14:4,14). These are the premier men in the body of Christ, being “first” in rank, as well as in actual participation (1 Cor 12:28).

In some religious bodies, there are some who refer to themselves as “apostles.” None of these men represent themselves as being sent forth by the church, as Barnabas was. They always arrogate to themselves the office of one who was sent forth as an apostle by Christ Himself. They base their claim on Ephesians 4:11, which declares that Jesus gave “gifts” to the church, among whom were “apostles.” However, there is no teaching in Scripture that supports that supposition.

This text is clearly referring to the twelve men who shaped the doctrinal content and stance of the church (Acts 2:42; 2 Pet 3:2). No other men of record were ever given revelations that were equal to the ones vouchsafed to the apostles. Paul himself, though not numbered with the twelve, was personally called and appointed to the office of “apostle” by Jesus Christ (Rom 1:1) – particularly “the apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13).

ONLY ONE LORD

Here we have the “apostles” sending out Peter and John. That means that while Peter had been given the keys of the Kingdom (Matt 16:19), and was generally the spokesman for them, he was not the head of them, or the chief administrator. This, of course, flies right in the face of the principle of Roman Catholicism which teaches that Peter was, in fact, the head over them, and over the church as well. Nothing could be further from the truth.

When Jesus was with His disciples in the flesh, He told them t church would not operate on the principle of lordship. “And Jesus called them to Him and said, You know that the rulers

The church does not have bosses like the business world, and kings or presidents like governments do. That is not the manner of the Kingdom, and those who attempt to govern the church as though it was are not only in error, they have revealed their ignorance of God.

of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men hold them in subjection [tyrannizing over them]. Not so shall it be among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever desires to be first among you must be your slave” AMPLIFIED (Matt 20:25-26). Here were the men placed “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28), but they were not put there to govern it like those who know not God govern men. The church does not have bosses like the business world, and kings or presidents like governments do. That is not the manner of the Kingdom, and those who attempt to govern the church as though it was are not only in error, they have revealed their ignorance of God. The church already has a Head, and only those who are sent forth by Him are proper leaders of His people. Even then, they lead by their teaching and example, and not by dictums and mandates.

Thus, Peter and John, both of them from the original inner circle of disciples, are sent forth to Samaria by the other apostles. They gladly acquiesce to the decision, knowing that this is the way the Lord works among His people. The fact that the others sent them confirms they had recognized the advanced insight that they possessed, for from the beginning, they had been key spokesmen and workers.

KNOWING THE APOSTLE'S ROLE

It is important to know the pivotal ministry of the apostles of Christ – the twelve plus Paul. There are other New Covenant writers who were not apostles. Mark, Luke, James, and Jude. It is generally understood that Mark wrote his Gospel under the direction of Peter. Luke, while possessing “a perfect understanding” (Lk 1:3) of the facts of the Gospel, did not set forth so much as a syllable of doctrine that was given uniquely to him. The same is true of both James and Jude, who wrote corrective epistles. Neither of them declared or expounded any point that had not already been made by Jesus or the apostles. However, this was not the case with the apostles. They declared matters that were never before proclaimed – such as Peter’s exposition of Joel, the promise of God to David, and certain prophetic statements made by David (Acts 2:14-36). Paul expounded justification, the nature of spiritual life, the New Covenant, and the high priesthood of Christ in ways never before heard. This kind of proclamation was characteristic of the apostolic office. It makes perfect sense, therefore, that they become involved in the conversion of the Samaritans.

To this point in the book of Acts, the twelve apostles have been mentioned seventeen times (1:2,26; 2:37,42,43; 4:33, 35,36,37; 5:2,12,18,29,34,40; 6:6; 8:1). This confirms the critical role they played in the formation and development of the church, which is the body of Christ.

The necessity of the apostles’ involvement includes at least two things.

- First, to bind non-Jewish believers together with the church in Jerusalem, for this is the first example of a group of believers outside of Jerusalem. Doctrinally Paul develops the joining of the Jews and Gentiles into “one body” (Eph 2:12-22). Without apostolic involvement in this matter, I do not doubt that a Samaritan branch of the church might very well have developed. Care is thus taken to avoid this kind of division.

- Second, because they must be placed upon the foundation laid by the apostles, and continue in their doctrine. Philip was a relatively new believer himself, and the church could not be founded upon his foundation. Unlike Paul and the other apostles, he was not a “wise masterbuilder” who put down what other men build upon (1 Cor 3:10-12).

AN APOSTLE-LESS CHURCH

Today, when men go about to plant or start churches, they do well to build upon the foundation that has been set down by the apostles. When they take it upon themselves to develop new kinds of congregations upon media presentation, entertainment, community involvement, and the likes, they are departing from the ways of God. A church that is not built upon the foundation the apostles put down, and nourished up in their doctrine, is no church at all!

The absence of the knowledge of apostolic doctrine in the average American church is appalling. One can scarcely find a person who has an intelligent grasp of the Person and accomplishments of Jesus, the grace of God, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Subjects like justification, sanctification, redemption, holiness, the resurrection of the dead, and the world to come are altogether avoided. The necessity of holiness and the means through which it is realized are largely unknown. Rarely will you find anyone who has an intelligent grasp of the purpose of God, or what His objective is for the church.

All of these things are included in apostolic doctrine. These are matters they wrote about, delivering

their message to the churches. Yet we have a church on our hand that has little or no idea what the apostles taught on subjects like a falling away, inner conflict, the danger of submitting to the commandments of men, and how to successfully resist the devil.

See, our text stands in stark contrast to the church methodologies of our day, and we do well to take note of it. This is the real church, and it is being directed by its Head. What you are beholding is Jesus building His church in great wisdom and effectiveness. He employs holy and enlightened men whom He has chosen to direct His people. Those who have no spiritual understanding and cannot be associated with Jesus by observing their conduct and hearing their message, have no legitimate role in church leadership. Men may adopt rules and by-laws that place men in leadership who lack these qualities, but heaven will not honor them, and neither should we. The church is not a democracy that is licensed to choose its own leaders and make its own rules. It is a body who are individually connected to and holding to its Head, Jesus Christ.

THEY PRAYED FOR THEM

“ 15 Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost”

Although Peter and John had been accustomed to operating in leading roles in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1-4; 4:14,19), they consented to being sent down to Samaria. They lived out the admonition that Peter would give several years later: “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility” (1 Pet 5:5). They did not do this out mere human respect, although that was no doubt involved. Rather, they were aware of the nature of life in the body of Christ. They knew that Jesus is “the Head of the body” (Col 1:18), “from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19).

No one can minister to the body of Christ who is not first ministered to by Christ Himself. It is in holding to the Head, or maintaining “connection” NIV with Him that the individual is enabled to feed the flock of God. This is not a mere idea, or even a noble goal. This is the manner of the Kingdom, and the sheep cannot be fed, nourished, or profited in any other way. Jesus will not exclude Himself from the care of His own church, leaving the matter solely in the hands of men. He does, however work through the members that He has placed in His body, which is “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). That is, His body, the church, is vessel into which He pours or deposits Himself. Where there is a body of people who are not themselves holding to Christ, maintaining faith in Him, and living “unto Him” (2 Cor 5:15) we have a situation that will not long continue. Like the Laodiceans, such are on the verge of being spewed out of Christ’s mouth (Rev 3:16). By living at a distance from Him, and being unaware of Him, they have shut themselves off from all nourishment and direction.

If what I have said is true, then we have churches on our hand that cannot be nourished or directed by Christ because their spiritual nerve center has either been severed or seriously infected.

When one ponders the condition of the churches of our time, this is a staggering consideration, serious beyond measure. If what I have said is true, then we have churches on our hand that cannot be nourished or directed by Christ because their spiritual nerve center has either been severed or seriously infected.

By comparison, we have the church of our text that has maintained spiritual health, and is holding to the Head. In the case of the believers in Samaria, they know what to do. This is not owing to a vast reservoir of knowledge and church expertise, but to the fact that they are holding to the Head, and thus can be the more easily directed by Him.

WHEN THEY WERE COME DOWN

“Who, when they were come down . . .” Other versions read, “when they arrived,” NIV “when they came there,” BBE “having come down,” DOUAY “these two went down,” NET “as soon as they arrived,” NLT “when Peter and John arrived.” IE

They came “down” to Samaria from the higher region of Jerusalem. It is by the direction of the Head through the through the apostles that Peter and John go down to Samaria. They go from the highest place to the lowest place, from the mountain to the valley, from the sanctuary to the work.

This also is the manner of the Kingdom. Those who would minister to the people of God must go to them from the presence of the Lord. Today, it is fashionable for men first to acquaint themselves with the region in which they plan to do a work for the Lord, and become acquainted with the people, forming some amiable associations with them. Then, within the context of their friendship, they plan to introduce Christ, or minister to the people. That whole concept is flawed to the core. That is not the way true ministry is accomplished, and men must not allow themselves to be

duped into believing that it is.

The text before us is ample proof of this. Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ. When the Apostles heard of the response of the people, they went down to Samaria to minister. They did not do it within the framework of friendship or worldly acquaintance, because these men had not trafficked in Samaria. Aside from the two-day stay of Jesus there, they had not even been allowed to go into that region (Matt 10:5). On the single occasion when they were sent to a “village of the Samaritans” to prepare the way as Jesus passed through there en route to Jerusalem, the Samaritans “did not receive Him” (Luke 9:52). Yet, neither Philip nor Peter and John spent any known period of time getting acquainted with the people, or forming lasting friendships. That simple is not the manner of the Kingdom.

PRAYED FOR THEM

“ . . . prayed for them . . .” Other versions read, “made prayer for them,” BBE “prayed over them,” MRD “prayed for these new believers,” NLT “did pray concerning them,” YLT “began praying for these new Christians,” LIVING and “prayed for the Samaritan believers.” IE

The first thing Peter and John did was pray for the new believers in Samaria. They called upon the name of the Lord, to Whom these believers belonged. Whatever we see here must include a care for the flock of God. Notice the sequence of things that have taken place in the city of Samaria.

- Philip “preached Christ” unto them.
- With one accord, the people gave heed to him, hearing and seeing the miracles that he did.
- Satan’s kingdom was disrupted, and consequently unclean spirits came out of many that were possessed by them.
- Many that had been taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.
- There was great joy in the city.
- The people believed Philip preaching the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ.
- Those who believed were baptized, both men and women.
- Simon, a sorcerer who had bewitched the people for a long time with his sorceries, also believed and was baptized.

Now, there is a state that would have been heralded in all of the brotherhood journals as a notable achievement! What more could possibly be done. The devil’s hold on people had been loosed, the

long time bewitchment of a local sorcerer overthrown, and people believed and were baptized, including Simon the sorcerer. What more could possibly be required? – at least, that is the way in which modern churchmen would think.

But remember, this is the real church of which we are reading, and the Lord Jesus building His own church. The apostles, place “first” in the church, and particularly directed by the Holy Spirit, hear of the events, and send Peter and John there. Upon their arrival, they do not hold a celebration for the successful launching of the first church in Samaria. Rather, they pray for those who had believed and been baptized.

At once it becomes apparent that spiritual life involves more than some have been led to believe! The apostles knew that something was missing in Samaria, and our text will precisely define that missing element. Their response was a manifestation the direction of the Holy Spirit, as well as spiritual discernment and wisdom.

THAT THEY MIGHT RECEIVE THE SPIRIT

“ . . . that they might receive the Holy Ghost.” Other versions read, “receive the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “that the Holy Spirit might be given to them,” BBE “ would be given the Holy Spirit,” CEV and “may be getting the Spirit Holy .” INTERLINEAR

The Apostles knew the necessity of receiving the Holy Spirit. They were keenly aware of the fact that spiritual life cannot be lived without Him. Men may debate about the Holy Spirit, but these men knew the absolute necessity of Him being received by the people of God.

Much of the contention over the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit has not been preceded by a due consideration of the essentiality of His presence in the believer. I come from a background in which the indispensability of the Spirit was rarely mentioned. The subject was nearly always approached with a mind to disprove those who had false conceptions of the Spirit and His ministry.

Ponder what the Spirit does in the children of God. This will confirm the requisiteness of His Presence.

- The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts “by the Holy Spirit” (Rom 5:5).
- Through Him “the deeds of the body” are mortified (Rom 8:13).
- The saints are “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14).
- We are “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” “by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- We are changed from one increasing stage of glory to another “by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

The Apostles were acting within a full awareness of the absolute necessity of believers having the Holy Spirit, and knowing that they did. Their aim was not for the believing Samaritans to merely have an exhilarating experience, or for the events that took place on the day of Pentecost to be duplicated in Samaria. Such are reflections of a sectarian posture, and did not exist at the time of our text.

We are waiting for the hope of righteousness “through the Spirit” (Gal 5:5).

- The people of are “builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).
- We keep what has been given to us by God “by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us” NKJV (2 Tim 1:14).

- We have obeyed the truth “through the Spirit” (1 Pet 1:22).
- We know that Christ abides in us “by the Spirit which He hath given us” (1 John 3:24).

An approach to life in Christ Jesus that leaves the people fundamentally unaware of these things cannot possibly be of God. Whatever a person may think about the Holy Spirit and His role in salvation, it is certain that no person who lacks the Holy Spirit can live acceptably before God, or make the claim of belong to Christ. One of the telling marks of false prophets is that they are “having not the Spirit” (Jude 1:19). There is a statement concerning this dreadful condition in the eighth chapter of Romans. There, the Holy Spirit is referred in three different expressions: “But ye are not in the flesh, but in 1 the Spirit , if so be that 2 the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not 3 the Spirit of Christ , he is none of His” (Rom 8:9).

The Apostles were acting within a full awareness of the absolute necessity of believers having the Holy Spirit, and knowing that they did. Their aim was not for the believing Samaritans to merely have an exhilarating experience, or for the events that took place on the day of Pentecost to be duplicated in Samaria. Such are reflections of a sectarian posture, and did not exist at the time of our text.

Needful Considerations

In approaching this subject our aim must not be to establish hard and fast rules about the Spirit and His role in salvation. Our beginning point must be the persuasion that He is essential to spiritual life. That thought will dictate how we approach the subject, and leave us more open to the word of the Lord.

I understand that as soon as we speak in this way some will consider is to be leaning in the wrong direction. However, that supposition is the direct result of embracing the doctrines of men, and we will not subject ourselves to such opinions. Such inclinations would not allow us to approach this text with integrity. The way people reason, particular concerning things pertaining to life and godliness, is determined by their perception. In turn, that perception has been shaped by the religious environment to which they have been subjected. If they have been taught in

Further, the very fact of inspiration postulates the use of particular words and expressions, for the objective of inspiration is the intelligent communication of reality. My aim will not be to integrate this text with a theological persuasion of system that has had its genesis with men.

words that the Holy Spirit teaches – sound doctrine expressed in wholesome words – they will reason with God and His purpose in mind. However, if the surroundings in which they have been brought to consider Scripture has been one in which false doctrine was perpetrated in vain words, their thinking and reasoning will be skewed toward earth and sectarian positions. Such people will perceive this text as either confirming their preconceived notion, or else being opposed to it. If the latter is true, they must think of some way to neutralize the text. This may be done in a variety of ways. Considering the extremities of these approaches, they will range from saying the text is corrupt, being inserted by some thoughtless scribe, to saying it belonged to a period of time, or dispensation, that has been defined by men.

The Approach I Will Take

I will approach this text in the awareness that the apprehension of the truth must begin with a firm persuasion that truth is best stated in “words that Holy Spirit teaches.” Further, the very fact of inspiration postulates the use of particular words and expressions, for the objective of inspiration is the intelligent communication of reality. My aim will not be to integrate this text with a theological persuasion of system that has had its genesis with men. The aim will be to see how the Spirit expresses

what took place in this text. I will then integrate this text with other texts that affirm the same experience occurring elsewhere. I will also examine how godly people referred to this event, and to others that are declared to have been of the same order. We will then make an effort to harmonize all of this with the revealed objectives of God Himself. If I am unable to harmonize the text to my own satisfaction, I will let it go for the time being. Note the type of harmony that I seek. It is not making an attempt harmonizing the text with other texts that appear to be contradictory. Such an effort is nothing more than a ploy of the devil to throw us off course. Every statement of Scripture is already in harmony, for they were given by the same Spirit.

The harmony must be seen with the “eternal purpose” of God. Once that is seen, it alters the way we approach the text, providing a broader peripheral view of things.

HE WAS FALLEN UPON NONE OF THEM

“ 16a For as yet He was fallen upon none of them . . . ”

Here is a text that will not fit into a view of God and the truth as it is in Christ that has been formed by men. Whatever man forms is subject to the limitations that are imposed upon men. It is therefore vain to make any attempt to stuff truth into an intellectual mold that has been formed by man. This being true, we are obliged to take these words precisely as they are stated, and seek to understand them as they are intended to be understood. Remember that heaven has no interest in buttressing human concepts. It is the purpose of God and His will to be known that is primary,

FOR AS YET

“For as yet . . .” Other versions read, “ not yet,” NIV “ up to that time ,” BBE “ until then,” CJB and “ before this.” GWN

First, speaking through the Holy Spirit, and with “perfect understanding,” Luke identifies the period time during which the desired effect had not yet taken place. Permit me to once again establish that had taken place during that time.

- Philip had “preached Christ” in the city of Samaria (8:5).
- The people “with one accord gave heed” to the things that Philip spoke, hearing his words, and seeing the miracles that he did (8:6).
- A disruption of Satan’s dominion took place, with unclean spirits coming out of man, and many palsied and lame people being healed (8:7).
- There was “great joy in the city” (8:8).
- Those who believed what Philip preached concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus, “were baptized, both men and women” (8:12).
- Simon, who had bewitched the Samaritans for a long time with his sorceries, also believed “and was baptized” (8:13).
- The report came to the apostles that Samaria had “received the Word of God” (8:14).

Things Related to Salvation

Things related to being saved had taken place among the Samaritans.

- **THEY HAD BELIEVED.** Jesus said, “He that believeth on Him is not condemned” (John 3:18). Peter said, “whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Paul said, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one

that believeth” (Rom 10:4). John said, “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10).

• **THEY HAD BEEN BAPTIZED.** Jesus said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mark 16:16). Peter said, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Paul said, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).

Yet, the apostles come down to Samaria and pray that those who had believed and been baptized “might receive the Holy Spirit.” They do not pray that they will receive the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but that they might “receive the Holy Spirit.” On the day of Pentecost, Peter told those who were believing his word to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, and they would “receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). The Samaritans had believed and been baptized, and now AFTER their obedience, Peter himself, together with John, are praying that they might “receive the Holy Spirit.” These are just the facts in the case.

HE WAS FALLEN UPON

NONE OF THEM

“ . . . He was fallen upon none of them . . .” Other versions read, “come upon,” NIV “come down on,” CSB “not been given,” CEV and “not yet having on fallen.” INTERLINEAR

Now the reason for the prayer of the apostles is given: the Spirit, we yet, “was fallen upon NONE of them” – not so much as one. And the whole city had believed! Let me remind you of the precision of the language employed here. The apostles prayed that these people might “RECEIVE” the Holy Spirit, because, as yet, He had not “FALLEN” upon any of them. They did not pray the Spirit would fall on them, but that they would receive Him. It is therefore clear that whatever “fallen” on them means, it is synonymous with receiving the Spirit, for that was the what the apostles sought for the Samaritans.

The word “fallen” is correctly translated from the Greek word **evpipeptwko,j** (epi-pep-tokos). The lexical meaning of the word is, “to fall upon, to rush or press upon,” THAYER “come down upon,” FRIBERG “to press against,” LOUA-NIDA and “come upon.” GINGRICH

This same word is used in the account of the household of Cornelius receiving the Holy Spirit. Luke gives the account in these words: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). When Peter recounted that occurrence in Jerusalem, he said thus: “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them , as on us at the beginning” (Acts 11:15). He also added that this is what happened on the day of Pentecost – “as on us at the beginning.” Peter further explained what had happened at the house of Cornelius in these words: “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us , who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17). The experience to which Peter referred is recorded in these words: “they were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:4). Upon hearing these words, those who heard Peter “glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Some time later, Peter again reported this event saying, “And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost , even as He did unto us” (Acts 15:8). Upon hearing this testimony, James, a pillar in the church at Jerusalem concluded, “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). He also concluded that this was confirmation that the Lord had accepted the Gentiles, in confirmation of the words of the prophets (Acts 15:17).

Speaking of this experience, Jesus had told His disciples, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you ” (Acts 1:8).

Statements Concerning the Experience

Now, in order to further develop our perspective of this circumstance, let me remind you of how this kind of experience has been described, and of the conclusions that were drawn concerning it by those with understanding.

- The Holy Spirit fell on them.
- The apostles therefore prayed that they would receive the Spirit.
- God gave them the gift of the Spirit.
- The people were filled with the Spirit.
- God granted them repentance .
- God gave them the Holy Spirit.
- God took out a people for His name.
- The people had been accepted .
- The Spirit came upon the people.

Thus God has spoken of the same experience from a variety of different perspectives. As compared to acquiring the Spirit by means human effort, He came upon the people. From the standpoint of faith, He was received . Viewed from the vantage of the grace of God, He was a given as a Gift . Seen from the view the effect, the people were filled . Concerning impact, the people were given repentance . Considering what was received, it was the Spirit Himself , and not a mere ability. Seen as what God was actually doing, He was taking out a people for Himself. The confirmation was that the people had been accepted . Viewed from the standpoint of the Spirit Himself, He came upon the people.

God does not have a particle of interest in fortifying thoughts that have not originated with Him. When it comes to the thoughts of men that have not been directed by Him, it is written, “The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity”

If we think of the Holy Spirit as being “sent forth” by God into our hearts (Gal 4:6), or being “sent down from heaven” (1 Pet 1:12), or being “shed on us abundantly” (Tit 3:5), to say that He has “fallen upon” people makes perfect sense. Of course, this is precisely the manner in which the gift of the Holy Spirit is spoken of elsewhere. However, if we read this text with the teaching of those who bring a Gospel of the Spirit instead of the Gospel of Christ, we will see the text in a quite different way.

All of these texts to which referred (under the heading “**Statements Concerning the Experience**”) are speaking of the Spirit falling on the people. I will tell you that within the Christian community, those who are bold enough to speak of the Spirit falling on people do not make these insightful associations. They rather speak of such things as the people falling under the power of the Spirit, whereas the text speaks of the Spirit falling. Others say that the Spirit only fell upon the apostles, while the Scriptures expressly associate the falling of the Spirit with the disciples, the Samaritans, and the household of Cornelius.

In view of these things, we do well to proceed with this text with a determination to confine ourselves to what is actually said, and to reason within the framework of revelation, not sectarian dogma. We have nothing to fear by taking such an approach, for revealed words will never lead us to an erroneous conclusion. It cannot be wrong to reason concerning statements that have been inspired by God. However, the soul who dares to do so only with a mind to establish that what he has already embraced is the whole of the matter is treading on dangerous ground. God does not have a particle of interest in fortifying thoughts that have not originated with Him. When it comes to the thoughts of men that have not been directed by Him, it is written, “The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that

they are vanity” (Psa 94:11). As simplistic as it may appear, believers must reason within the framework of revelation, not allowing their thinking to drift into the realm from which God has delivered them. This is one of the great curse of spiritual Babylon, Satan’s fabrication of the church that Jesus alone can build. It teaches men to think wrongly, within the wrong context which drives them to a wrong conclusion. There is no such thing as a wrong road that leads to the truth, or a skewed thought that will hit the target of a godly conclusion.

A WORD ABOUT PHILIP’S HUMILITY

It is certainly appropriate here to draw attention to the humility of Philip. He is the one who went down to Samaria, preached to them, worked among them, and reaped a great harvest, with the whole city being filled with joy. One might imagine that he might object to Peter and John coming down to reap where they had bestowed no labor. However, this is not the case. Not only had the apostles been placed first in the church, Philip recognized that fact and gladly acquiesced to it. When the members of the body hold fast the Head, and conduct themselves as a part of the whole, a grand harmony is found that brings glory to God. These men did not duplicate one another’s efforts, but did what they had been appointed by Jesus to do. Philip was an evangelist (Acts 21:8), not an apostle, who ranked ahead of him (Eph 4:11).

Because they were placed in their respective position by the Head of the church, and knew that to be the case, they could work harmoniously. This they fulfilled the 133rd Psalm in their labors, confirming that it is “good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity.” In that environment, God commands a blessing (Psa 133:3).

THEY WERE ONLY BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

“ 16b . . . only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Other versions read, “ had only been,” NKJV “had simply been,” NASB “they were only,” DOUAY “they had . . . merely,” WILLIAMS and “They were living simply as men and women who had been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” PHILLIPS

Here is an expression that, if taken seriously, forces men to think outside the confines of tradition religion. This statement is in the Scripture – in every translation. Although it is of no consequence, the higher critics could not find any reason to question its authenticity. We should have no trouble receiving it either.

Here is an inspired explanation for why the Holy Spirit had not fallen upon these believer. It certainly was not because they lacked any faith: they had “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ.” It was not because they had failed to be obedient: they were all “baptized , both men and women” – or, as this text states, “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” The explanation this gives is arresting: “ONLY they were baptized . . .” The word “only” is translated from the Greek word *monon*, (moh-non), which has the following lexical meaning: “alone, only, merely,” THAYER “without accompaniment, alone.” FRIBERG

First, let me say that if we approach this text as though it was written establish a precedent that was to be followed, or that it revealed the proper sequence of events in being saved or obtaining the Holy Spirit, we will only fall upon the rocks of confusion.

Here is an instance where people were baptized in the name of Jesus, yet had not received the Holy Spirit. We know this is the case because Peter and John prayed “that they might receive the Holy Spirit” NKJV (8:15). They did not pray that these believers would receive various gifts conferred by the Holy Spirit, but that they would receive the Holy Spirit. That is what the text says. They did not pray that they would receive special miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but they might receive the Holy Spirit Himself. The text does not say they did this because the Scriptures had not yet been

written, and they needed special gifts to support them until the Scriptures were written. That is what some men have said, but that it not what the text says. John Gill of the eighteenth century wrote that this text , “they were baptized believers, and no more; as yet, none of them had gifts qualifying them for the ministry; and still less could any of them speak with tongues, or prophecy, or work miracles; the Holy Ghost had not yet descended on them for such purposes.” JOHN GILL ON ACTS John W. McGarvey refers to the objective of this prayer as “the miraculous gift of the Spirit,” stating that it was “bestowed by no human hands except those of the apostles.” In presenting the reasoning supposed to support this view, brother Garvey spoke

However, neither the prophets nor the apostles ever represented the giving of the Holy Spirit to be in any sense reserved for part of the part of Christ and not the whole of it. The Spirit is represented as dispensing various abilities, but they are not to a choice few.

for a number of commentators. Here is what he said, “We notice, then, first, That the Samaritans had believed the gospel, and been immersed. They were, then, according to the commission, and according to Peter's answer on Pentecost, pardoned, and in possession of that ‘gift of the Holy Spirit,’ which was promised on condition of repentance and immersion. Second, After they had been in possession of this gift, for a period sufficient for the news to reach Jerusalem, the whole body of the apostles united in sending to them Peter and John. Third, Previous to the arrival of Peter and John, none of them had received the miraculous gift of the Spirit. Fourth, Upon the imposition of hands by the two apostles, accompanied with prayers, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, conferring miraculous gifts.” McGARVEY’S COMMENTARY ON ACTS

As I have said, this same position is taken by a number of historically prominent teachers. The only difficulty with the position is that this not what the text says. The following are my own observations.

- Peter’s words, “and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38) do not necessarily mean He would be received immediately – although it is generally held that this is the case.
- The above commentator says the Samaritans had “been in possession” of the gift of the Spirit for a “period sufficient for the news to reach Jerusalem.” Yet the text states that Peter and John prayed that “they” – the ones who had “received the Word of God” – might “receive the Holy Spirit” (8:15).
- Brother McGarvey says “none of them had received the miraculous gift of the Spirit.” The phrase “the miraculous gift of the Spirit” does not occur in Scripture. Yet, our good brother proceeds to reason just as though those were words given by the Spirit Himself. How are we to tell whether or not that is not the gift of which Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost? At that time, the people who heard Peter speak had only been exposed to what they saw and heard on that day?
- Then, brother McGarvey boldly says that upon the imposition of the hands of the apostles, together with their prayers, “ the Holy Spirit fell upon them, conferring miraculous gifts .” The text does not say this, nor give the slightest hint that any miraculous gifts were expressed at that time through the Samaritans.

I have taken the time to relate this explanation because of my own familiarity with it. I was tutored in this position, with all of its attending arguments and proofs.

The summation of this argument is that the gift of the Spirit here was discretionary – not for all of the Samaritans, but only for some of them. However, neither the prophets nor the apostles ever represented the giving of the Holy Spirit to be in any sense reserved for part of the part of Christ and not the whole of it. The Spirit is represented as dispensing various abilities, but they are not to a choice few. Concerning the various edifying aptitudes dispensed by the Spirit it is written, “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Cor

12:11). The same chapter declares that “the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (12:7). In commenting on these various aptitudes it also says, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Cor 12:18). There are no pointless members, which is the precise point Paul is expounding in His delineation of the various spiritual gifts. He does not say that some of them are miraculous and some are ordinary. In the first place, if the Spirit gives and administers them, how can many of them be ordinary? Gifts like “helps,” “governments” (1 Cor 12:28), not to mention “ministering,” teaching,” exhorting,” “giving,” and “showing mercy” – all given in Paul’s catalog of gifts to the church in Rome (Rom 12:7-8).

This is an excellent example of, what I call, template theology . A view is developed that is the result of human conclusion rather than Divine affirmation of statement. The view is based upon a compilation of various texts that are thought to support it. Then, the view is laid like a pattern on the Word of God – superimposed, as it were, upon the text of Scripture. Convinced of the truth of the view, they can simply trim away thorny texts of Scripture by shaping the text to their pattern. However, in the process, there is a significant loss – not to mention Divine indignation, for God has summarily cursed anyone who adds to or take from, His Word (Duet 4:2; 12:32; Prov 30:6; Rev 22:18-19).

It is clear that there was no evidence that the Holy Spirit had come upon these people – even though they had been baptized in the name of Jesus.

WHO WERE THE SAMARITANS?

In addressing this subject, it is important to establish the identity and origin of the Samaritans. They were in the land of promise, but they were not Jews, who had “no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9). The origin of these people is traced back to the captivity of Israel by the Assyrians. As retribution for her sins, in the ninth year of Hoshea, “the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away into Assyria, and placed them in Halah and in Habor by the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes” (2 Kgs 17:6). In doing this, the word of the Lord was fulfilled, and Israel was carried out of His sight. Thus the onslaught of Samaria continued “Until the LORD removed Israel out of his sight, as he had said by all his servants the prophets. So was Israel carried away out of their own land to Assyria unto this day” (2 Kgs 17:23). The king of Assyria then “brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof” (2 Kgs 17:24).

Some of these people probably intermarried with the Jews, although a point is not made of this in Scripture. At any rate, these were not the chosen people. Jesus said of them , “Ye worship ye know not what” (John 4:22). Apart from the two-day teaching of Jesus (John 4:40), and the apparently short-term preaching of Philip, they had not been exposed to the kind of Scriptural knowledge that was extant among the Jews. Even when Jesus had sent out the twelve about mid-way through His ministry, He strictly charged them, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not” (Matt 10:5). Their exposure to the Word of God, then, had been very limited. This is fortified by the suggestion that the priests had been removed from the land when Israel was taken captive. The Scriptures apprise us that the king of Assyria sent “one of the priests” that had been taken captive from the land to teach the transplanted people in Samaria “the manner of the God of the land” (2 Kgs 17:27). This confirms that, at the very least, there was not any extensive knowledge of God in the land.

All of this means that these people were not to be compared to those who were familiar with the prophecies of Joel, who spoke of the pouring forth of the Spirit of God upon all flesh. Further, we do not know how much had been communicated Philip on this subject. To assume that they had an understanding of spiritual gifts and were prepared for inspired direction from among their peers seems to me to be a wholly unwarranted assumption. I rather see these people as those who had limited

understanding. They had not been told to tarry until they were endued with power from on high as Jesus' disciples. It further does not appear that they had been given the promise of receiving the Spirit as those on the day of Pentecost.

Because of the role of the Apostles, and the inferior background of the Samaritans, it was imperative that they become involved with the Samaritans. The fact that they had not yet received the Holy Spirit was a determination that was made in heaven. While men assume that immediately upon our baptism we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, nothing in the Word of God actually makes such a statement. I must acknowledge that I am inclined in that direction. This is based upon my perception of Galatians 4:6: "And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." However, if pressed on the matter, I do not know how I could substantiate the notion that the Spirit is automatically conferred instantly upon our baptism.

The language of the text also suggests the conferment of the Holy Spirit was not an automatic process: "for AS YET He had fallen on NONE of them." I have already shown that whatever significance men may choose to attach to the word "fallen," the apostles prayed that the Samaritans might "RECEIVE" the Holy Spirit – not that they might receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but that they might receive the Spirit Himself. Also, later, when Simon observed what had taken place, it is said that he saw that "through the laying on of the apostles' hands, the Holy Spirit was given. He then sought power so that

I suggest that the case of the Samaritans is not far removed from the situation of many believers in our time – those who have believed and been baptized in Jesus name, yet who give no evidence of ever having received the Holy Spirit. Who has not been troubled by this well known circumstance?

on whomsoever he laid his hands, they might "receive the Holy Spirit" (8:18-19). That is not the kind of language that is used for the conferment of miraculous powers. In fact, I cannot find a single text where it is stated that miraculous powers were ever specifically conferred by the laying on of hands – particularly spiritual gifts required for the sustaining of the body of Christ.

I will proceed with the exposition of this text viewing the receiving of the Holy Spirit to refer to the gift of the Spirit that is intended for all of the children of God. The following represent the words of Jesus and the Apostles concerning receiving the Holy Spirit.

- "But this spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on Him should receive : for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified" (John 7:39).
- "Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive , because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:17).
- "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).
- "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith" (Gal 3:14).
- "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father" (Rom 8:15).
- "Now we have received , not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God" (1 Cor 2:12).
- "For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received , or another gospel, which ye have not

accepted, ye might well bear with him” (2 Cor 11:4).

• “This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?” (Gal 3:2).

The essentiality of the Holy Spirit is consistently related to the “common salvation” (Rom 5:5; 8:13,14; 15:16; 1 Cor 6:11; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:5; 2 Tim 1:14; 1 Pet 1:22).

IS IT POSSIBLE?

Is it possible that in our time there are people like the Samaritans who have believed and been baptized, but have not yet received the Holy Spirit. Many of us know by experience that we knew little of the Holy Spirit of His pivotal role in salvation for a considerable period of time. If it is alleged that the Lord gives the Holy Spirit to people independently of their knowledge of Him, then we are cast upon the horns of a dilemma. Our participation in the good things of God is specially said to be “through the knowledge of Him” (2 Pet 1:3). We do know that certain disciples in Ephesus had to be re-baptized in Jesus’ name because of a deficiency in their knowledge, for they only knew of the baptism of John the Baptist (Acts 19:3-5). Their case differed from that of the Samaritans because they were unaware of Jesus Christ, who was the Object of John the Baptist’s preaching. The inadequacy of their knowledge proved to be a barrier to their experience.

I suggest that the case of the Samaritans is not far removed from the situation of many believers in our time – those who have believed and been baptized in Jesus name, yet who give no evidence of ever having received the Holy Spirit. Who has not been troubled by this well known circumstance? Yet, we dare not attempt to resolve the problem by leaping beyond the boundaries of revelation, or going about to develop an explanation of the situation that has not been spelled out in Scripture.

It seems to me that we have violated no revealed doctrine or circumstance by taking this text for what it says, refusing to attach a meaning to it that cannot be justified.

THEY LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM, AND THEY RECEIVED

“ 17 Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost. ”

This must not be taken to be the report of a mere procedure or ritual. The fact that they prayed shows that this was not the employment of a power that had been conferred upon them. Peter and John did not merely speak to these people as they did to the lame man at the gate Beautiful (Acts 3)

THEY LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM

“Then laid they their hands on them . . .” Other versions read, “began laying,” NASB “placed their hands,” NIV “put their hands,” BBE and “laid their hands on them one by one.” AMPLIFIED

I do not know what rule of interpretation allows a person to equate receiving the Holy Spirit with the conferment of miraculous gifts designed for the establishment of the church. That doctrine is not taught in Scripture, but is the result of human reasoning

This is something that was not recorded as having taken place on the day of Pentecost. It also is not said to have taken place at the house of Cornelius. This cannot, therefore, be a pattern. The laying on of the apostles hands stands between their prayer that these people would “receive the Holy Spirit,” and the affirmation that they “received the Holy Spirit.”

I do not know what rule of interpretation allows a person to equate receiving the Holy Spirit with the conferment of miraculous gifts designed for the establishment of the church. That doctrine is not taught in Scripture, but is the result of human reasoning. It seems to me that we are obligated to simply take the text as it stands, without attempting to fit it into a doctrinal mold of human origin.

There are several instances of the laying on of hands in Acts and the Epistles, although there are not many.

- There are several instances of miracles being done “by the hands” of the apostles and (on one occasion) Barnabas (Acts 5:12; 11:30; 14:3; 19:11; 28:8). There is no instance of the impartation of miraculous ministries by this means.

- The apostles laid their hands on the seven who were chosen to administer the distribution of food. “Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6). There no statement about the impartation of special powers through this means.

- Our text, where the apostles laid hands on the Samaritans and they received the Holy Spirit. “Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:17). There is no record of any extraordinary that occurred at this time. Of this occasion it is later stated that by this means “the Holy Spirit was given” (Acts 8:18).

- When Ananias laid his hands on Saul of Tarsus, telling him he had been sent that Saul might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17). Jesus sent a man that was not an Apostle to Saul that he might be filled with the Spirit. We are given no details about what occurred at that time.

- Certain prophets in Antioch, upon being directed by the Holy Spirit, laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul, sending them away to the work given them by the Spirit. “And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away” (Acts 13:3). There is no record of any spiritual aptitudes that were given at this time.

- Paul laid his hands on the disciples from Ephesus following their baptism into in the name of Jesus, and the Holy Spirit came on them. “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). There is no hint that this was a gift that continued after this occasion.

- Timothy was given a gift by the laying on hands of the presbytery, or elders. “Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery” (1 Tim 4:14). There is no record of the identity of this gift, unless it be that of an evangelist, which 2 Timothy 4:5 suggests. Paul also said Timothy had received a gift by the disposition of his hands. “Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim 1:6).

- Paul told Timothy not to lay hands suddenly on any man. “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim 5:22). It is assumed this had to do with the ordination of elders (Tit 1:5), although that is not expressly stated.

- The “laying of hands” is listed as one of the principles of “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:2).

The extraordinary nature of this incident, and the uniqueness of the people involved seems to me to forbid viewing it as a standard approach. This was an epoch of a sort, with people being converted for the first time who were not in Jerusalem. They were also fundamentally uninformed people in a group of considerable number. It was necessary that they be put on the foundation laid down by the apostles, and a tie be formed with them – particularly in view of their recent deception by Simon the sorcerer. Thjis was not the time for division among the brethren.

AND THEY RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . and they received the Holy Ghost.” Other versions read, “they were receiving ,” NASB “ came on them,” BBE “ one by one they received,” WILLIAMS “they were given ,” CEV and “they obtained .” INTERLINEAR

The text does not say they received various gifts, but that they received the Holy Spirit. The word “received” is translated from the Greek word **evla,mbanon** (e-lam-ban-on). The lexical meaning of the word emphasizes the receiving itself, and not the effect of the receiving or what accompanied the reception of the Holy Spirit. The lexical meaning of the word is as follows: “to take . . . take hold of . . . to take to one’s self,” THAYER and “take for oneself, take into possession . . . receive, accept.” FRIBERG

I have already cited the various passages that affirm those in Christ have received the Holy Spirit. If we will permit the words of the Spirit to shape our understanding, I do not see how receiving the Spirit can be perceived as obtaining miraculous gifts through the imposition of apostolic hands.

In my judgment, it was necessary for the Samaritans to have an association with the apostles. This was necessary because of their background, which involved a corruption of Judaism. It also was required because they had been bewitched by the sorceries of Simon. Additionally, there is no evidence that they had any teaching concerning the Holy Spirit.

This is not something we should be contentious about, but if we are going to speak about what took place in Samaria, we are obliged to speak of it in the words used by the Holy Spirit to describe the events. If they do not fit into the way we have been thinking, then we simply must at least abandon sectarian jargon in favor of Scriptural expression.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to Jesus building His church as He said He would. The apostles were working at His direction, and Philip was at well. What took place in Samaria must be seen as the will of God, and not as a pattern. It is not possible that what took place there departed from the prophecy of Joel or what took place on the day of Pentecost. If we can see that with any degree of clarity, we will be satisfied with Luke’s report just as it stands.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #38

SIMON THE SORCERER

“ 8:18 And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. 21 Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity. 24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me. 25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. ”
(Acts 8:18-25)

INTRODUCTION

In the inspired record of the advancement of the truth and the growth of the body of Christ, we are also given a glimpse of “the flesh,” and the activity of the wicked one. From the Garden of Eden until this very day, wherever God has worked upon the earth, the “old serpent” has injected his presence, working to the fullest extent that has been allowed by the God of heaven. Whether it was keeping the Garden, a nation journeying through the wilderness to Canaan, or a specially chosen king standing in

the privacy of his palace, the devil has been there. He was there when the “King of the Jews” was born, making every effort to slay the young child. He reared his ugly head during Jesus’ ministry, a moving his children to attempt lay traps and snares for the Master. When a man was chosen to be an Apostle, and even given the keys to the Kingdom, Satan asked God for permission to sift him as wheat. Now, we are seeing evidence of his working during the infancy of the church. He raised up opponents to the truth from among the Jewish leaders. He put it into

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the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira to tempt God by lying. He fomented murmuring among the early disciples over the distribution being made to the widows of the assembly. He raised up the Jewish council and moved them to oppose, and finally stone Stephen.

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

This confirms that salvation is being worked out in an arena of conflict and competition. It is not accomplished in a spiritual vacuum where there are no opposing forces. That is why it is so foolish to embrace the notion that once a person has believed and obeyed the Gospel there is no further jeopardy or danger of falling away. In fact, the very passage we are going to receive violently throws that misconception down to the ground where it belongs. The embrace of this bit of theological nonsense is the direct result of an academic understanding of the Gospel, as compared with “spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). The purpose of God, and the nature of His salvation, have, in such a case, not been comprehended.

The salvation of God is intended to be initiated and brought to maturity in a volatile arena – where forces are at work that are transcendent to human wisdom and strength. It is in this kind of environment that the necessity of faith can be most clearly seen – for from beginning to end, salvation is “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). Because faith is the substance of things “not seen,” and the evidence of things that are not present – “things hoped for” – it must get past the seen in order to take hold of the unseen. Herein is the jeopardy of our situation. If faith is “little” or “weak,” the unseen realities so sorely needed for survival become less and less apparent, until they finally fade from view. When this happens, all stability goes away, for we “stand by faith,” and are “kept by the power of God by faith” (2 Cor 1:24; 1 Pet 1:5). Religion without faith is nothing more than idolatry.

It is essential to comprehend that as long as men are in this world, “the flesh” is the Achilles heel of all believers. This is because they are “in the body,” (Heb 13:3) – which is appropriately referred to as “the body of this death.” This is why insightful souls long for deliverance from the body (Rom 7:24-25). It is also why the prospect of a glorified body is so precious to them (Phil 3:20-21; 2 Cor 5:2). Until our appointed deliverance from our present bodies, we must bring them

under subjection, for they, and the life that is connected with them, are fundamentally recalcitrant (1 Cor 9:27). They remain a part of the world, which has been cursed, and therefore, as it is written, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Cor 15:50). In such a case, to boast some form of automatic security nothing more than folly. The very idea of such an existence puts faith to sleep, for faith moves about with the full awareness of danger, pitfalls, snares, and delusion.

This will be our first exposure to the sin of emulation, which is covetousness in a different garb. The sin will be precisely defined and assessed by Peter.

This circumstance confirms the foolishness of living as though there was no jeopardy while we remain in the world. That imagine is disarming, which causes the danger to be all the greater, for Satan and his hosts always capitalize on the presence of unbelief or waning faith.

Already these things have been revealed in the surfacing of Ananias and Sapphira. Having made a place for Satan, he put something into their hearts, and they gave expression to it. When the judgment of God came upon Ananias and Sapphira, the working of the wicked one was dealt a devastating blow, and “great fear came upon all the church” (Acts 5:11). Now, however, another hub of kingdom activity has developed elsewhere, and a mighty move of God is being made known. As though privy to this circumstance, the head of the old serpent raises up in Samaria – this time with a corruption even greater than the one of Ananias and Sapphira. This time there is a graduation in the seriousness of the incident. There is also a different kind of judgment administered. This confirms the living nature of Divine dealings, as opposed to the cold and lifeless working of a mere system.

THE ABSENCE OF A PATTERN

In all of this, we behold the nature of Divine workings among men. Sin is not always judged in the same way, for men attempt to capitalize on fixed patterns. Therefore Solomon said of Divine judgments, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl 8:11).

Our text also confirms there are different nuances, motives, and appearances of sin, making it imperative that those who confront it have a strong faith and a spiritually cultured wisdom. This will be our first exposure to the sin of emulation, which is covetousness in a different garb. The sin will be precisely defined and assessed by Peter. As we would expect from a discerning man, the proper response to the sin will be expressed, as well as the only acceptable action of the transgressor.

Peter will deal with the matter without having to wade through a cesspool of doctrinal corruption. We do well to pay careful attention to what he says, for we are being exposed to the straightforward confrontation of sin.

More of the manner of Christ’s rule is made known in this text. We will find that the recovery of the sinner is not the primary thing. In fact, in this case, the possibility of recovery is not guaranteed, although there is a slight glimmer of hope. We will find that the God of heaven does not respond to all sin in the same manner. As revealed in Jesus, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily, the transgression of the scribes and Pharisees was not approached in the same manner as the sin of a woman caught in the act of adultery, or a palsied man who had unforgiven sins. This is a hard lesson for some to learn, but it is a needful one, lest men become complacent in their attitude toward sin. Jesus said there was such a thing a sinner who “hath never forgiveness” (Mk 3:29). Whether or not men understand all of the implications of that text, it ought to be crystal clear that all sin is not alike. John also spoke of a sin that was “unto death,” as well as a sin that was “not unto death” (1 John 5:16). David spoke of “presumptuous sins” that led to “the great transgression” (Psa 19:13) Jesus spoke of those who committed “the greater sin” (John 19:11). Paul wrote of “the sin which doth so easily beset us” (Heb 12:1). Thus, there has been enough said on this subject to justify removing from our vocabulary any expressions that leads people to believe there all sin is alike.

Of course, at the time of our text, much of the confusion that exists in our day concerning sin had not yet been brought into the church. Peter will deal with the matter without having to wade through a cesspool of doctrinal corruption. We do well to pay careful attention to what he says, for we are being exposed to the straightforward confrontation of sin. There are no explanations for why this or that is or is not said. There is no explanation of what this does not mean, or how it does not conflict with some other statement of truth. Such explanations have become necessary because of doctrinal error. If, therefore, what Peter has to say is difficult to receive, it is certainly not because of any ambiguity or confusion in his words. Luke, the writer of Acts had no difficulty with the words. Philip asked no question about them. Even the transgressor clearly understood them.

WHAT SIMON SAW

“ 8:18a And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given . . .”

Simon, having believed and been baptized, has been following Philip, wondering, and “beholding the miracles and signs which were done.” These were apparently out of the domain in which he had been operating, with the many sorcerers with which he had deceived the people. It is my judgment that he should have been occupying himself with the message that Philip was preaching, more than with the works he was doing – although the works were legitimate, giving witness to the truth of what Philip was p-reaching. Here, however, for the first time in the book of Acts, we are confronted with a man who put the teaching after the works, and was enamored of the works more than the doctrine. Keep in mind, this is a man that believed and was baptized. However you wish to classify those who believe and are baptized, here was a man who, by the Holy Spirit, was thus classified. If it is true that such people are insulated against error, that will surely be fulfilled in Simon – for “Simon himself also believed” and “was baptized” (Acts 8:13). If such a person cannot fall away, then Simon will not do so. If he cannot lose what is possessed in Christ, then He will lose nothing. If forgiveness is guaranteed, then he will be guaranteed forgiveness.

In this case, as with all Scriptural accounts, the doctrines of men are put to the fire-test. If they are true, inspired accounts will support them. If they are not true, those accounts will contradict them and expose them.

SIMON SAW

“And when Simon saw . . .” Other versions read, “But Simon having seen,” DARBY “Simon, having beheld,” YLT and “when Simon perceived.” MONTGOMERY

We do not know how long it took the word of the Samaritans receiving the Word of God to get to Jerusalem. But, however long it took, Simon was still following along with Philip, for when Peter and John had arrived, and through them the Holy Spirit was given, Simon saw it.

What men see reveals who they are, and does make a difference. This will be confirmed in Simon. What Simon saw was the events related to the preceding verse. It is said of Peter and John, “Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:17). This action was prompted by the fact that the Samaritans, although they had believed and were baptized, had not yet received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John discerned this, and had “prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Spirit” NKJV (v 15). Because the apostles were the ones appointed to lay the foundation for the church (Eph 2:20), it was apparently necessary for this gift to be associated with them. This, in my judgment, was required because of the limited exposure of the Samaritans to the ministry of John the Baptist or Jesus, and the fact that when Jesus sent out the twelve, they were not permitted to enter into any Samaritan cities (Matt 10:5). This was, then, a kind of spiritual epoch – the establishment of the Kingdom of God in new territory. Care was therefore taken to avoid the forming of an church that was independent from the apostles, for it was their doctrine in which the

believers were to continue (John 17:20; Acts 2:42).

THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS GIVEN

“ . . . that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given . . .” Other versions read, “was bestowed,” NASB “was conferred,” NAB “was imparted,” AMPLIFIED and “is being given.” INTERLINEAR

Whether or not Simon received the Holy Spirit is not stated. Some have surmised that he did not, but I do not know how that supposition can be established. It seems to me that if this was the case, he would have asked to receive the Spirit. Notwithstanding, it is not profitable to delve into this matter, for God has not provided an answer concerning it. Some say the gift was conferred upon selective Samaritans – but the text does not say that, and we must confine ourselves to the text.

Note what Simon “saw” – “that the Holy Spirit was given.” NKJV And how did Simon know this? There was obviously some outward indication that the people had received the Holy Spirit. Some commentators have the answer for us. John Gill says, “he saw, that upon this men began to prophesy, and to speak with divers tongues they had never learned, and to work miracles, cure men of their diseases, and the like: and when he observed this.” COMMENTARY ON ACTS Albert Barnes says, “he witnessed the extraordinary effects, the power of speaking in a miraculous manner, etc.” NOTES ON THE BIBLE Adam Clarke says, “By hearing these speak with different tongues and work miracles.” ACTS OF THE APOSTLES Matthew Henry says, “that the gift of the Holy Ghost was conferred upon them; for, upon the use of this sign, they received the Holy Ghost, and spoke with tongues.” COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE However, after all us said and done, this is not what the text says. That something was surely seen by Simon cannot be denied, but that such a sight is the point of the text, I emphatically deny. If that was intended to be the case, the Spirit would have spoken precisely, as he did of Paul’s experience with the Ephesians disciples (Acts 19:6).

The fact of the matter is that there are two records – and only two – of the giving of the Holy Spirit being associated with the laying on of hands. In both cases, the hands were those of an apostle or apostles. Ananias did put his hands on Saul, saying, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17). However, no details are given about Saul receiving the Holy Spirit.

In this text, the point being drawn out is the corruption that was in the heart of Simon, and how the Lord responds to carnal assessments. The way in which heaven responds to an incorrect analysis of Divine working, is reason enough for us to zealously avoid falling into such a trap.

THE POINT OF THIS TEXT

The point of this text is not to establish that a certain procedure was followed by the apostles for the conferment of the Holy Spirit. That is error that Simon made, and it is certainly not fitting for us to make the same error. While the giving of the Spirit is a common experience for all believers, it is not always reported in the same manner. Nowhere is the receiving of the Holy Spirit confined to the reception of miraculous powers – nowhere. Nowhere is it taught that the apostles had power to transmit miraculous abilities and gifts by the laying on of hands. In His commission to His disciples, Jesus told them they would “lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mk 16:18). He never told them they would confer either the Holy Spirit or spiritual powers by this means. My point in saying this is to draw attention to the manner in which Jesus shaped the thoughts of the apostles, and how the Holy Spirit shapes our thoughts in the various reports of Scripture.

In this text, the point being drawn out is the corruption that was in the heart of Simon, and how the Lord responds to carnal assessments. The way in which heaven responds to an incorrect analysis of Divine working, is reason enough for us to zealously avoid falling into such a trap. No religious

doctrine of tradition is valuable enough to risk the reproach, and possible rejection of the Almighty.

Suffice it to say, when God actually works within an individual, there will be some outward indication of that work. The form that the indication takes is determined by heaven, not men. That it is not always the same is confirmed in the reports of the various conversions in the book of Acts. Scarcely any two of them are identically the same.

- The day of Pentecost, when the people “gladly received the Word”, and “were baptized.” 3,000 souls “were added” to the disciples. There is no record of them receiving the Spirit (Acts 2:37-42).

- At Solomon’s porch, when the number of men who believed “was about five thousand.” There is no record of them receiving the Spirit (Acts 3:19; 4:4).

- After Ananias and Sapphira were judged, when “believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.” There is no record of them receiving the Spirit (Acts 5:14).

- At Samaria, where the people “believed Philip preaching,” and “were baptized, both men and women.” In this case they are said to have received the Spirit after they were baptized (Acts 8:5-17).

- The Ethiopian eunuch, believed, confessed Jesus was “the Son of God,” and was baptized. There is no record of him receiving the Spirit (Acts 8:27-39).

- Saul of Tarsus, who arose, and was baptized, washing away his sins, and calling upon the name of the Lord. No account is given of him receiving the Spirit (Acts 9:16-18; 22:16).

- The household of Cornelius, who received the Holy Spirit, and was commanded to be baptized with water. Here they received the Spirit, before they were baptized (Acts 10:44-48).

The only thing consistent in them all is the preaching of the Word of God, the believing of the recipients, and their willingness to do what was required of them, including being baptized.

When Peter reported the conversion of the household of Cornelius, he said that God “gave them the like gift as He did unto us, “who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 11:17). The people hearing the report concluded that “God also hath granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

- Results of the preaching of Barnabas, and “much people was added unto the Lord.” There is no mention of them being baptized or receiving the Spirit (Acts 11:24).

- The deputy of the Isle of Pathos, who “believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” There is no mention of him being baptized or receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:6-12).

- Those who believed in Iconium, where “a great multitude of Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” There is no mention of them receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 14:1-3).

- In Antioch of Pisidia, after hearing the preaching of Paul, it is written that “when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” There is no record of them being baptized or receiving the Spirit (Acts 13:48).

- The household of Lydia, “whose heart the Lord opened,” resulting in her attending to the word of Paul and being baptized, There is no mention of her and her household receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:14-15).

- The Philippi an jailor, who was told to “believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” heard the word of the Lord preached, and “was baptized the same hour of the night.” There is no mention of him receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 16:30-34).

- In a synagogue of Thessalonica, “some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas, including a “great multitude” of “devout Greeks,” and “of the chief women not a few.” There is no record of them believing or being baptized (Acts 17:4).

- In a Berean synagogue, the people were “more noble than those of Thessalonica,” receiving the word “with all readiness of mind,” and searching the Scriptures “daily, whether those things were so.” Many of them “believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, nor a few.” There is no record of them being baptized or receiving the Spirit (Acts 17:11-12).

- In Athens, after hearing Paul, “certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” There is no record of them being baptized or receiving the Spirit (Acts 17:34)

- In Corinth, “Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.” There is no record of them receiving the Spirit (Acts 18:8).

- The disciples at Ephesus, who were told they were to believe on Christ Jesus, , and were “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Paul then laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they “spoke with tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:1-7).

- The book of Acts concludes by reporting that Paul, while a prisoner, was appointed a day when many came to his lodging. He “expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.” There is no record of them being baptized or receiving the Spirit (Acts 28:23-24).

If the purpose of the inspired record is to provide a crystallized view of the working of the Lord, these accounts would all have been similar. The only thing consistent in them all is the preaching of the Word of God, the believing of the recipients, and their willingness to do what was required of them, including being baptized.

However, if you were to take these reports and seek to develop a doctrine concerning receiving the Holy Spirit, you would have a great deal of difficulty. The reason for this circumstance is that they were not written for that purpose. If you want to know the doctrine concerning receiving the Spirit, you must turn to the apostolic doctrine. There, with remarkable consistency, HOW to receive the Spirit is not the point. The teaching is that those in Christ HAVE the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:9,15,23; 1 Cor 2:12; 6:19; Gal 3:14; Heb 6:4), and that they have Him because He was “given” to them (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). The emphasis is then placed on His function within the individual believer, and the body of Christ as well (Rom 8:13-14, 26-27; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:7; 2 Cor 3:18; Gal 5:5,18,22; 6:8; Eph 2:22; 4:3; 5:9;

Sometimes, when it serves His purpose, that cause is expounded. Other times, we are not provided such details. Precisely why the apostles prayed that these believers might receive the Holy Spirit simply narrows down to the fact that they had not yet received the Spirit.

6:17; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Pet 1:2,22).

SOMETHING WE MUST LEARN

It is imperative that the people of God learn to put their faith in God, who works all things after the counsel of His will (Eph 1:11). We know from revelation that the Lord does nothing without a cause

(Ezek 14:23). Sometimes, when it serves His purpose, that cause is expounded. Other times, we are not provided such details. Precisely why the apostles prayed that these believers might receive the Holy Spirit simply narrows down to the fact that they had not yet received the Spirit. We are not told why this circumstance existed, and for that reason we must walk softly through the text, gleaning what it is obvious is intended for us to learn.

If you can be content with this kind of approach, you will gain much from the text. If you are not content with it, you will come away with a lot of questions.

HE OFFERED THEM MONEY

“ 18b . . . he offered them money, 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.”

We are now introduced to a new Satanic initiative. In this, not only is the corruption of an individual seen, but there is also an attempt of the wicked one to corrupt the apostles themselves. He will hold before Peter and John the opportunity to gain wealth, which we already know they did not possess. It was at the Gate Beautiful that Peter plainly said to a man who was seeking alms, “Silver and gold have I none” (Acts 3:6). Now, some time has passed, and Peter and John are away from Jerusalem. We do not know what resources they had, or if they had any at all. Here, however, is a bold initiative by the wicked one to set the opportunity for wealth before them. The response will reveal who they are, as well as who Simon was.

HE OFFERED THEM MONEY

“ 18b . . . he offered them money . . .” Other versions read , “made them an offering of money,” BBE “he offered them money to buy the power,” NLT “ brought before them money,” YLT “he brought money and offered it to them,” AMPLIFIED and “he brought money .” CEV

Now Simon turns his attention from Philip, whom he had been following, to Peter and John. All three of these men – Peter, John, and Philip – represented and preached the same Christ. Simon, however, does not have Christ on his mind at this time. He has seen something that he wants, and he is willing to pay for it. He has also incorrectly assessed both the character and the motives of Peter and John.

The wording of the text indicates that he had money with him, and set it before Peter and John, strongly appealing to the lust he surmised they had. The word “offered” is translated from the Greek word **prosh,negken** (prosa-neg-ken), which lexically means, “to bring to,” THAYER “hand something to someone,” FRIBERG and “to bring something into the presence of someone.” LOUW-NIDA Simon did not simply say, “I will give you” this or that. Rather, he held the gift out before the faces of Peter and John, appealing to the covetousness he assumed they had.

This was the kind of offer Gehazi, the servant of Elijah could not resist. When Elijah refused a gift from Naaman the Syrian, Gehazi ran eagerly after it (2 Kgs 5:22-24). Likewise, Balaam chose to prophesy for wages, being eager to gain money for his services (Num 22:5-7; 2 Pet 2:15). Judas also “covenanted” with the enemies of Jesus to betray Him into their hands for “thirty pieces of silver” (Matt 26:15) – an agreement which he lived to sorely regret.

During the latter part of his life, Peter himself solemnly admonished elders to fulfill their ministry “not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind,” or with eagerness (1 Pet 5:2).

But Simon assumes that Peter and John are much like himself, and he approaches them as though that was true. In this, his own ignorance of the ways of God are made known, for he who employs improper means does because of an improper understanding.

GIVE ME THIS POWER

“ 19 Saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.” Other versions read, “ Give this authority to me as well, so that everyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit,” NASB “give me also this ability,” NIV “so that anyone ,” NRSV “when I put my hands on anyone he may get the Holy Spirit ,” BBE “whoever I place my hands on,” CJB and “so that when I lay my hands on people, they will receive the Holy Spirit .” LIVING

Here is the first revelation of the sin of emulation, which is one of “the works of the flesh” (Gal 5:22). By definition, “emulation” is “an envious or contentious rivalry, jealousy,” THAYER “set one’s heart on” – in this case, what is possessed by someone else, FRIBERG “have or show a great interest in . . . covet,” UBS and “eager rivalry, zealous imitation.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

We are not to associate the Holy Spirit only with particular aptitudes, but with the One who gives Him, and the basic reason for Him dwelling within us. When we allow our minds to be diverted from these fundamental considerations, we become more liable to error and distraction.

It is interesting to note that Simon does not ask the apostles to lay their hands on him, that he might receive the Holy Spirit. Thus, the holy and Divinely directed deeds of the apostles brought out the avarice, or covetousness, that was in Simon. What was a blessing to others, proved to be the means of discovering the corruption that was in this man.

Note also, that what is sought is to obtain the power to cause men to receive the Holy Spirit, not for men receive gifts conferred by the Holy Spirit. I do understand that men assume that is what Simon meant, but that is not what he is reported to have said – and we must confine the basis of our reasoning to the text itself.

Let me remind you once again, that this is the only account in all of Scripture where any of the twelve apostles prayed that men might receive the Holy Spirit, laying their hands on them to that end. The only other instance of the Holy Spirit being given to any persons in any sense is when Paul laid his hands on the Ephesians disciples, and they received the Holy Spirit (Acts 19:1-6). That is hardly enough Scriptural substance to formulate an elaborate doctrine concerning the conferment of miraculous gifts. We are categorically told that the Spirit confers gifts according to His own will (1 Cor 12:6-11). These gifts are not always the same. Those dispensed in the church in Rome were not identical with those dispensed in Corinth (Rom 12:1-6 and 1 Cor 12 and 14). The ones mentioned in Ephesus were not the same as those mentioned in Rome (Rom 12:1-6 and Eph 4:8-11). The ones in Galatia were not the same as the ones in Ephesus (Eph 4:8-11 and Gal 3:1-3). Peter’s approach to such gifts stands in a category by itself (1 Pet 4:10-11). These observations should free men from the tendency to codify the working of the Lord.

Suffice it to say, the Lord is the Head of the church, and the Holy Spirit is the Administrator of the gifts Jesus determines for it. We are not to associate the Holy Spirit only with particular aptitudes, but with the One who gives Him, and the basic reason for Him dwelling within us. When we allow our minds to be diverted from these fundamental considerations, we become more liable to error and distraction.

The manner in which Peter responds to the offer of Simon should contribute significantly to how we think about this subject. It should be obvious that speculation and human opinion concerning the working of the Holy Spirit is extremely dangerous ground.

The room of supposition is a place where men can be excluded from the benefits of the Lord. Care must be taken not to occupy such a place. This will be clearly confirmed in Peter’s inspired and instant response to Simon.

A DISCERNMENT OF THE MANNER OF THE KINGDOM

“ 20 But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.”

Some things are wrong simply because they conflict with the manner of the Kingdom. There does not need to be any other reason. If anything is not according to the ways of the Lord, that makes the thing wrong. Thus God pronounced judgment upon Israel simply because their thoughts and ways were not like His (Isa 55:8-9). In our day, this way of thinking is foreign within the professed church. Ordinarily, wrong thinking is associated with the violation of a specific word or commandment from the Lord. There is, however, a manner, or approach, that is unlike that of God, and for that reason alone, the manner is wrong. This is why we are admonished to be “followers of God as dear children” (Eph 5:2). This involves more than being obedient to commandments. It also involves the putting on of “the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10), as well as putting off “the old man,” which is thoroughly corrupt.

This also includes loving righteousness and hating iniquity, as well as keeping and obeying the commandments and fulfilling the righteousness of the Law.

THY MONEY PERISH WITH THEE!

“But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee . . .” Other versions read, “May your silver perish with you,” NASB “May your money come to destruction with you ,” BBE “Your silver go to ruin – and you with it,” CJB “Keep thy money to thyself, to perish with thee,” DOUAY “Thy money go with thee to perdition ,” MRD “May your silver be lost forever , and you with it,” NJB “Thy silver with thee – may it be to destruction ,” YLT “You and your money should both be destroyed ,” IE “Your money go to perdition with you,” WILLIAMS “Destruction overtake your money and you,” AMPLIFIED “ To hell with you and your money ! PHILLIPS “May your silver be with you in perdition ,” ALT “You and your money will both end up in hell ,” CEV and “May you and your money both go to hell .” GNB

This is one of the strong responses of the Spirit to people with ignoble motives. Peter’s response is instant, straight to the point, and without any ambiguity. He does not separate the sin from the sinner, or the material from the immaterial, but consigns both the man and his money to perish – or to perdition. The word “perish” is translated from a word meaning “utter destruction,” THAYER “utter ruin, complete loss,” FRIBERG “hell,” UBS “annihilation,” LEH and “eternal destruction.” GINGRICH It employed several times in Scripture.

- Matthew 7:13 – The “broad” way that leads “to destruction .”
- Romans 9:22 – Vessels of wrath “fitted to destruction .”
- 1 Timothy 6:9 – The rich who fall into many “foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in perdition .”
- Hebrews 10:39 – Drawing back to “ perdition .”
- 2 Peter 2:1 – False prophets who deny the Lord, bringing upon themselves “swift destruction .”
- 2 Peter 3:16 – Those who are unstable, wresting the Scriptures “unto their own destruction .”
- Revelation 17:8,11 – A foe of the Christ described as “the beast,” who is destined to “go into perdition .”

There can be no doubt that Peter’s words are referring to a state of condemnation, not merely one

of temporal judgment or chastisement. Knowing nothing of the imagination that sin is separated from the sinner, Peter joins Simon's vice with his person. Both his silver and his person would be consigned to destruction, unless he repented of his wickedness. Being filled with the Spirit, Peter responds instantly and without any question about the transgression that Simon has committed. His aim at this point was not to recover Simon, but to soundly rebuke him. If he was to be recovered, his sin cannot be addressed incorrectly, but with words that can be employed by the Holy Spirit.

Such sins are not innocent, and must not be treated as though they were nothing more than a hasty word or thoughtless deed. They represent the flesh in an aggressive stance, and reveal that the individual is in the grip of the wicked one.

There are some sins that are so serious they cannot be addressed gently. Not only do they reveal the depths into which the transgressor has sunk, they are also especially contaminating. There can be no doubt concerning their seriousness. In them the truth has been maligned, and God Himself has been reproached. Such sins are not innocent, and must not be treated as though they were nothing more than a hasty word or thoughtless deed. They represent the flesh in an aggressive stance, and reveal that the individual is in the grip of the wicked one. Furthermore, those who deal with such transgressions must have spiritual insight. They cannot come against such Satanic initiatives with some form of procedures or lifeless methodology.

Other Examples

This is not the only place where such harsh denunciations have been recorded. There are several of them in Scripture, Perhaps recalling a few of them will confirm the Divine nature toward those who are driven by base motives. This is something that has been greatly obscured by the preoccupation of the modern church with lesser things.

- **JESUS TO THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES.** "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" (Matt 23:33).

- **PAUL, CONCERNING THOSE WHO MISRPRESENTED HIM.** "And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just" (Rom 3:8).

- **CONCERNING THOSE WHO FORSOOK CHRIST FOR PERSONAL GRATIFICATION.** "Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith" (1 Tim 5:12).

- **RELIGIOUS CHARLATANS.** "And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (2 Pet 2:3).

- **TO THOSE WHO REJECTED AND BLASPHEMED AGAINST THE GOSPEL.** "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46).

- **TO PROFESSING BELIEVERS WHO WERE IN LOVE WITH THE WORLD.** "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

From the text with which we are dealing (Acts 8:20), together with the other texts I have cited, several things are confirmed.

- It is serious beyond description to be driven by the flesh.
- Sin in any form has the potential of damning the soul.

The thought process of men must be sanctified with the truth, else they will tend in the wrong direction.

Within the body of Christ, there is to be zero-tolerance of sin.

- Transgression must always be approached in a state of utmost sobriety.
- When dealing with sinners who have made a profession of faith, the approach must be accompanied by an absolute hatred of sin – “hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23).
- There is no satisfactory explanation for sin, and therefore no accounting for it is to be sought.

How Sin Has Been Dealt With Thusfar

Thus far in the book of Acts, a certain approach to sin has been made known. It reflects a Kingdom manner than is worthy of note. Notice how specifically sin has been identified.

- **Judas:** “Guide to them that took Jesus” (1:16); “by transgression fell that he might go to his own place” (1:25).
- **Crucifixion of Jesus:** “ye have taken and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (2:23); “this same Jesus whom ye have crucified” (2:36); “His Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go” (3:13); “But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the prince of life” (Acts 3:14-15); “Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified” (4:10); “ye slew and hanged on a tree” (5:30).
- **The rejection of Jesus by the leaders of the people:** “This is the Stone which was set at nought of you builders” (4:11); “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together” (4:27).
- **The Sin of Ananias and Sapphira:** “Satan filled thy heart to lie to the Holy Ghost” (5:3); “thou hast not lied unto men but unto God” (5:4); “How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord?” (5:9).
- **The Jewish Council for Rejecting the Gospel:** “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost” (7:51).

Now, Peter will again speak with unquestionable specificity concerning the sin of Simon.

BECAUSE

“ . . . because thou hast thought . . .” Other versions read, “you thought,” NIV “you had the idea,” BBE “for thinking,” CJB “hast supposed,” MRD “you have imagined,” WEYMOUTH and “for even dreaming.” WILLIAMS

Sin is not committed out of a mere impulse – something that is irrational and independent of thought. Before a sin can be committed, some thought must be devoted to what is to be done. The thought is not necessarily an extended one, but what is done is first, in some way, brought to mind. This is done to justify the deed before it is committed – whether it is Eve considering the forbidden fruit (Gen 3:6), or Uzzah putting forth his hand to stop the ark of the covenant from falling to the ground (2 Sam 6:6).

Therefore, Peter goes to the root of the sin of Simon. It was not what he said that is first rebuked, but what he thought.

THE ROLE OF THOUGHTS

The thought process of men must be sanctified with the truth, else they will tend in the wrong direction. Thoughts accounted for the condition of humanity during the days of Noah, when God determined to destroy all flesh, except for Noah and those who were with him. “And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). David also traced the unacceptability of the wicked to their thoughts: “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts ” (Psa 10:4). When God denounced Israel for their waywardness, he brought up the matter of their thoughts. “For my thoughts are not your thoughts , neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD” (Isa 55:8).

This is involved in the Solomonic expression, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established ” (Prov 16:3). This is why David prayed, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my Strength, and my Redeemer” (Psa 19:14).

When the professing church “turns away their ears from the truth” (2 Tim 4:4), there is no way to avoid corrupt and degenerate thinking. This is precisely what has given rise to the groundswell of iniquity within the Christian community. We do not need a battery of counselors, motivators, and psychological diagnosticians to correct this condition. In fact, such an approach will only exacerbate the situation. The truth must be made to shine upon the situation. In so doing, it will be properly defined, and a godly manner of thinking will be promoted. That is what we are seeing lived out in this text.

THE GIFT OF GOD MAY BE PURCHASED

“ . . . that the gift of God may be purchased with money .” Other versions read, “could obtain ,” NASB “could buy ,” NIV “got for a price ,” BBE “can be bought ,” CJB “could acquire ,” NET “to possess ,” YLT and “to get .” LITV

Here “the gift of God” is the Spirit Himself, and not the ability to bring down the Spirit upon an individual by means of the laying on of hands. Peter was rebuking the thinking of Simon in two ways. First, the Spirit came upon the Samaritans because the apostles laid their hands upon them. The Spirit came from God, not from their hands. They were, in a sense, intermediaries in the matter, but the cause could not be traced to them, and Peter knew it. Simon had sought to purchase the power that would cause anyone on whom he laid his hands would receive the Holy Spirit. I do not think this is even the kind of power the apostles themselves had – that anyone on whom they placed their hands would receive the Holy Spirit. The authority given to them did not extend that far. Jesus was the Head, not them. Their will was subject to His will.

Nowhere is the cause for the gift of the Spirit traced to the apostles. The household of Cornelius received the Holy

When once it is recognized that the gift itself came from God, the means through which it was given becomes incidental. In this case, Peter and John were simply in accord with the Divine agenda and manner of working.

Spirit without the imposition of apostolic hands. That case alone confirms what I have said. It was not received from apostolic hands, but from God. The Spirit is categorically said to be “from God” (1 Cor 2:12). He is the One who “sent” the Spirit into our hearts (Gal 4:6). He is the One who has “given unto us His Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:8). The Spirit is described as He whom God “hath given us” (1 John 3:24; 4:13; Acts 5:32; 2 Cor 5:5).

Even if we direct our thinking to the matter of spiritual gifts (which is not the subject of our text), their source is Deity, not humanity – not even empowered humanity (1 Cor 12:4-11,18,28).

In their zeal to establish that the uniqueness of what took place in Samaria, and in Aphasis (Acts 19), some have introduced a foreign mode of reasoning. By tracing the source of the of these unusual occurrences to the hands of the apostles, they have actually led men into a wrong way of thinking. Whatever they may conceive to have been conferred on the Samaritans, they have exalted the means above the Source and cause. When once it is recognized that the gift itself came from God, the means through which it was given becomes incidental. In this case, Peter and John were simply in accord with the Divine agenda and manner of working. They did not decide to do this on their own. It was rather the result of where Jesus had placed them in the body, and what He was doing in Samaria. Although it may be difficult for some to let the matter rest there, it seems to me that we are obliged to do so for the sake of God's glory.

Now, Simon has attempted to wedge “the flesh” into the working of the Lord. Peter knew this was altogether wrong, and was actually nothing more than an expression of wickedness. It was not simply an error in judgment, but was rather the result of being at variance with the Lord.

Here is a classic example of someone whose thoughts and ways were not those of the Lord (Isa 55:8-9). This accounts for the unusual strength with which Peter now speaks.

THE EXCLUSION OF SIMON

“ 21a Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter”

Remember, these words are being said to a person who has believed and been baptized. Nothing thus far has suggested that Simon was not sincere at the time. If it is true that the report of Simon obeying the Gospel was genuine, then Peter will address him as someone who has fallen, rather than one who never was identified with Christ. The fact that Peter has told Simon to pray to God concerning what he has done confirms that this is, in fact, the case. There is no record of anyone outside of Christ being counseled to pray for forgiveness.

HAVING NO PART NOR LOT

“Thou hast neither part nor lot. . .” Other versions read, “ no part,” NASB and “ any share .” GWN

This is the language of Divine distribution – as when Canaan was divided “b y lot.” Each of the twelve tribes were given a portion of the land. As it is written, “Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit” (Num 26:55). This corresponds with the kind of spiritual allotments that take place within the body of Christ. Concerning the various roles that are found in the church, the allotment is described in these words: “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). Viewed from the standpoint of HOW this ministry is carried out, it is described in these words: “God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office” (Rom 12:3-4). If we consider this distribution from the standpoint of responsibility, the members are said to be “stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 4:10).

What Peter is saying is that Simon is asking for something that does not belong to him. Christ, the Head of the body, has made no provision for him to function in the capacity it imagines he can purchase with money.

What Peter is saying is that Simon is asking for something that does not belong to him. Christ, the Head of the body, has made no provision for him to function in the capacity it imagines he can

purchase with money. Simon has done the very thing Paul warned against: “not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom 12:3).

Simon has sought to occupy a place in the body of Christ for which he is not qualified. His thinking has extended into an area not intended for him. Heaven has made no provision for him to even think in this manner. Various ministries or offices within the body of Christ are not available to all people, and they are not to be approached as though they were. When asked to position some of His disciples at His right and left hand, Jesus Himself once told His disciples, “to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father” (Matt 20:23).

THIS MATTER

“ . . . in this matter” Other versions read, “this ministry ,” NIV “in this,” NRSV “this business ,” BBE “this faith ,” MRD “this thing ,” YLT “in this work ,” IE and “in this word .” EMTV

In the “matter” of being used as an intermediary for the conference of the Holy Spirit, no place had been made for Simon. One might ask how it was that Simon did not know this. We know from Simon’s request that it was not driven by an honest quest to be used by God. He was driven by the unlawful spirit of emulation, and was seeking to intrude into an area from which he had been excluded. His request would be on the same par as asking for authority to be an apostle – number thirteen, so to speak. This simply could not be, for such positions could only be occupied by those who were chosen and ordained by Jesus for those offices.

Professional Religion

Since the dawn of “The Age of Enlightenment” (1793), and with the consequent inordinate exaltation of human reason, the church itself was inundated with a flood of carnal reasoning. Textual Criticism was dignified in this new environment, and approaches to various ministries were modified. They were now linked more with education than with Divine placement, and with training as opposed to being a steward of the manifold grace of God. Commensurate with this religious shift, the knowledge of Scripture itself began to wane, being displaced by a form of thinking that was in consonance with worldly patterns of thought. As one might expect, it was not long until the idea of religious careers gained a foothold in the professing church. All manner of ministries were developed that conformed to this new way of thinking. Instead of considering these professional activities within the context of the revealed purpose of God, they were placed within the setting of man-made agendas. Now, in distinction to ministering to the “body” of Christ, specialized ministries became prominent. In our time, men have become accustomed to hearing about “Youth Ministers,” “Singles’ Ministry,” “Senior’s Minister,” “Family Life Minister,” “Worship Minister,” and a host of others. Thus men have developed ministries that are not “for the profit of all,” as ALL of the ministries that Jesus has placed in His church (1 Cor 12:7). Most, if not all, of these functions are not intended to perfect the saints “for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12).

The sin of Simon has been duplicated in our day – people are pressing to do a work for which no Divine allotment has been made.

Is this a serious matter, or has provision been made in the Divine economy for men to conceive and develop positions and activities within the body of Christ for which there are no revealed provision? While this is not something worthy of much contention, it seems to me that the fruit that has been produced by this initiative is reason enough to suspect it is antithetical to what the Lord is revealed to be doing in His church. I do not know that any person, however astute their powers of reason, can justify an activity that consistently tends downward, leaving in its wake an ignorance of both the Lord and His purpose. The condition of the modern church certainly justifies some serious

SOMETHING TO PONDER

“And yet there are many who seek to ‘purchase’ the favor of God. Some do it by alms and prayers; some by penance and fasting; some by attempting to make their own hearts better, and by self-righteousness; and some by penitence and tears. All these will not ‘purchase’ his favor.” ALBERT BARNES: NOTES ON THE BIBLE

thought on these matters. To be it very mildly, things are not ideal.

If it is countered that conditions have never been ideal, then the question must be asked if there is anything at all about salvation that tends downward, or allows for perpetual deficiency in those who are walking by faith. Is there anything about the redemption that is in Christ Jesus that tends downward, or is not fundamentally toward?

Is it possible that a departure from the faith has, in fact, occurred, and that men are really giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1)? Has a form of godliness replaced godliness itself? I mean, have such things taken place in those who once embraced the faith, only to later depart from it? The nature of spiritual life demand that we consider such possibilities.

A HEART THAT WAS NOT RIGHT

“ 21b . . . for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.”

Peter gets straight to the heart of the matter, so to speak. Simon’s request has revealed a fundamental flaw – one that was at the very core of his being. He was not right in the very area where regeneration does its primary work – in the heart. Moses foresaw that this was the area where God would especially work: “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6). Ezekiel was given to see the heart as a place where significant change would take place. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Ezek 36:26). Simon had been baptized, and baptism involves the heart. “But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom 6:17). Simon had also believed, and believing involves the heart: “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10).

If the statement made concerning Simon’s response to the preaching of Christ is to be taken as it stands – “Simon himself believed also and he was baptized” – then what is said of such people must also be true of him. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22). If what is said of Simon is intended to only refer to an outward and simulated response, then it casts a shadow of doubt on the statements concerning others believing and being baptized. This includes the rest of the Samaritans who are said to have believed and been baptized (8:12). These are also the two responses that will be found in the Ethiopian eunuch (8:37-38). These are the two responses attributed to the Philippian jailer (16:31-34). The same things are said of the Corinthians (18:8). Additionally, it would also mean that the words of Jesus Himself mean something other than what they affirm: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved” (Mk 16:16).

It seems to me, therefore, that to say Luke’s report concerning Simon believing and being baptized meant nothing more than what he did was pretentious, cannot be supported. It would mean that Simon was said to believe when he really did not believe.

It seems to me, therefore, that to say Luke’s report concerning Simon believing and being baptized meant nothing more than what he did was pretentious, cannot be supported. It would mean that

Simon was said to believe when he really did not believe.

Because I am not able to receive such an assessment, I will proceed under the assumption that Simon really did believe, and that his baptism was valid.

Something to be Seen

Considering that the report of Simon exactly represents his response to Philip's preaching, the seriousness of the charge leveled at Simon is accentuated. This would mean that he quenched the Spirit, hardened his heart, and did not resist the devil. He yielded to temptation after making a place for the devil to work. He did what Romans six commands the believers not to do. "Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin : but yield yourselves unto God , as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God . . . I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness " (Rom 6:13,19).

Notice the detailed admonition to those who have been baptized into Christ.

- Do not yield your capacities as instruments of unrighteousness.
- Yield yourself unto God.
- Yield your capacities to righteousness.

In Simon we have a sterling example of someone who failed in these areas. This is important to note, because Peter is providing us an assessment of the condition. It is not necessary to say that such a person was never converted in the first place. Peter did not say that, but rather judged the circumstance at hand. He accounted for the sin by pointing out Simon's present condition. This is precisely how sin is to be assessed – in view of what took place. I will tell that such an approach would significantly alter how sin is being addressed in our time.

WHEN THE HEART IS NOT RIGHT

" . . . for thy heart is not right . . ." Other versions read, "your heart is crooked." CJB "heart is not upright ," DARBY " twisted in your thinking," GWN "your heart is warped ," NJB "your heart is not sincere ," WILLIAMS "your heart is all wrong . . . [it is not straightforward or right or true," AMPLIFIED and "your heart is not honest ." PHILLIPS

Solomon wisely said, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov 4:23). In Simon we have an example of someone who failed to do this. As a result, there was a decline in Simon's character. Because life is not lived in a vacuum, and there are opposing forces at work all around us, no one can afford to neglect keep their heart – keeping it in focus, and strengthening it with the good word of the Lord and prayer. The best of men need Divine assistance in this regard. David said it well when he prayed, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts" (Psa 139:23).

The Complexity of Spiritual Life

At this point, come of the complexities of spiritual life surface. One might reason that because we receive a new heart, and the stony heart is removed, that the condition here described can only be said of someone who is not born again. However, the matter is not that simple. Consider the following, that was addressed to those who were in Christ.

- Some who were among the brethren in Rome were warned about having an unrepentant heart. "But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself

wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:5).

- Members of the body of Christ were admonished , “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief , in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

With an awareness of the danger

of either over-simplifying or over- complicating the nature of spiritual life, I will endeavor to account for the possibility of falling away, as well as the necessity of keeping the faith.

A New Principle of Life

When we are born again, there is a very real newness of life that is introduced into our persons. This is a new principle of life , referred to as “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2). Considered from the standpoint of the human personality, it is “the new man, which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness” (Eph 4:24). This nature is incapable of sin (1 John 3:9, and the wicked one has no access to it (1 John 5:18). This is the part of the person that is “in Christ,” and in which Christ Himself is resident (2 Cor 5:18; Eph 3:17).

The New Creation

The “new creation” is a whole person in purpose, though while we are in this world, he is only partial. The fact that the body has not yet been redeemed is what makes the creation partial. When it is written that “old things have passed away” (2 Cor 5:17), it is evident that it does not mean that our bodies have passed away. It does mean that “the new man” places no value on the former things, nor does he desire them. It also means that the guilt for sins has passed away, and the conscience has been purged from dead works to serve the living God (Heb 9:14). The fact that believers are told the blood of Christ purged the conscience from dead works confirms that the conscience can still be polluted with the – even in those who have been born again. This pollution emits from “the old man,” who is very real, though not a part of the believer’s essential nature.

The Stony Heart

Similarly, when God is said to remove the “stony heart,” He does not mean there is no longer any liability of such a heart being found in us. Believers are solemnly warned, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). This liability is fostered by the presence of “the old man” which is very mucin active, even though he is crucified (Rom 6:6). Like the impenitent thief, he cries out from the cross, asking to be delivered from the restriction of the cross, which is intended to be the place where he dies (Lk 23:39). Simon let “the old man” off the cross, and he immediately went to work.

A Treasure In An Earthen Vessel

It is in this sense that we are said to have the “treasure” of the Divine nature in an “earthen vessel” (2 Cor 4:7). This is all by design, in order that to confirm that the “excellency of the power” is really of God.

We Remain in a Vile Body

The fact that we remain in a “vile body” (Phil 3:21), also referred to as “the body of this dead” (Rom 7:24), is what complicates our situation. There is also a mind and a heart that go with the body, and they are, in every sense, corrupt in the eyes of God. We are saddled with the presence of these degenerate parts of our makeup until we are liberated from the body. This circumstance is what produces the disconcerted inward war that is described in Romans 7:14-25.

Yield Your Members

The solemn commission given to every believer is to yield their “members,” or means of expression, to righteousness, and not to iniquity

The solemn commission given to every believer is to yield their “members,” or means of expression, to righteousness, and not to iniquity (Rom 6:13.16.19). In this case, both righteousness and iniquity have a voice that calls for our attention, and seeks the dominance. We can only yield to one of them at a time, and when we yield, they rule, compelling us to act in accordance with their nature.

An Evil Heart of Unbelief

It is precisely this condition that makes it possible for an “evil heart of unbelief” to enter into the a person who has believed and obeyed the Gospel (Heb 3:12). When the individual yields to the cries of “the law of sin and death” that is in his human constitution, an evil heart of unbelief is, as it were, loosed to enter and dominate the person so yielding.

The Solemn Exhortation

If the individual takes the warnings of the Spirit seriously, and does not quench or grieve that spirit, he will be able to resist these encroachments. This the admonition will be fulfilled, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world” (1 Pet 5:8-9).

In the case of Simon, he failed to yield his members to righteousness, quenched the Spirit, and therefore did not resist the devil. As a result, his heart was not right, but became corrupt because he gave heed to the wrong voice.

It was not even a matter of if he could fall or not. That is never really the issue, and men do greatly err in speaking as though it was. As long as we dwell in an unregenerate body, and possess within our human constitution the inveterate capacity to sin, it is insane to wonder whether or not we can fall. The very presence of an enemy or of an inimical nature confirms the possibility of such a thing. This is accented all the more when we perceive that faith is the only means by which we overcome the world, or are enabled to resist the devil (1 John 5:45; 1 Pet 2:9).

It should be so clear that no explanation is required, that the very presence of weakness removes any question about whether or not the believer is vulnerable. Admittedly, the vulnerability is not in “the new man,” or in the faith. However, it is in the part of our makeup that is united with our bodies – and that part remains with us as long as we are “in the body” (Heb 13:3).

An Absurdity to be Shunned

In view of this circumstance, it ought to be very clear to all of us how absurd it is to embrace a religion that places the emphasis upon the body – which is the very point of our vulnerability. When health, wealth, feelings, and appearances become the fundamental things, we are standing in the enemy’s camp, surrounded with foes we cannot possible overcome. There simply is no weaponry available to us to do battle in such an arena.

IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

“ . . . in the sight of God.” Other versions read, “ before God,” NASB “in the eyes of God,” CJB “God can see,” GWN and “ with God.” NLT

The phrase “in the sight of God” is a synonym for the way things really are. This is not a way of comparing what men think versus what God thinks. Rather, this is the way of arriving at the truthful

conclusion. A heart, therefore, that is not right “in the sight of God” is a heart that is not right – period. It is a heart that is wrong in every sense of the word, and there is no chance that it is proper or will escape the judgment of God.

Peter knows Simon’s heart is not right in the sight of God because He knows God and has the mind of Christ. Peter himself has yielded properly, and therefore he thinks properly.

IS FALLING AWAY NECESSARILY PRECEDED BY A LONG PERIOD OF TIME?

Perhaps without intended to do so, men have thought that falling away, or departing from the faith, is preceded by a lengthy period of time. However this is not necessarily the case. In His parable concerning the sower, Jesus spoke of some seed that immediately sprouted, and broke through the soil. Yet, it did not bring forth the intended fruit. There were two different descriptions of such seed. Here is how he described it. “And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it” (Luke 8:6-7). Unlike the seed that fell on the wayside, this seed actually sprouted, with genuine life showing itself. However, it was short-lived, because the conditions required for growth were not present. In His explanation of this parable, Jesus accounted for what happened. “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy ; and these have no root, which for a while believe , and in time of temptation fall away . And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection” (Luke 8:14).

Unlike the tares, who had no capacity to bring forth fruit, these people had a genuine beginning. Yet, because of a lack of depth, and the presence of competitive desires to which they yielded, they were not brought to a state of maturity, in which fruit could be produced for God (Rom 7:4).

Simon was in this category of people – particularly those who “in the time of temptation fall away.” Both the parable of Jesus and the incident of Simon confirm that newborn babes are not guaranteed protection from the wicked one. They are expected to grow, gaining spiritual depth, and resisting the temptations that they encounter. Simon failed in this regard.

One of the reasons for Simon’s failure was the extent of his former involvements with the wicked one. He was a sorcerer, who engaged in what might be called “the depths of Satan” (Rev 2:14). Because of this, he should have given all the more attentiveness to advancing in the faith, and growing up into Christ in all things. This was owing to the depth of his former involvement in sin. Instead, he was taken up in a quest for the miraculous, and a desire to emulate those who had been given a higher place in the Kingdom. These propensities actually allowed “the old man” to be removed from the cross, so to speak. It loosed the part of him that we intended to be controlled.

Those in Christ are to yield themselves to the Lord in the same measure as they formerly yielded themselves to the wicked one. Here is how it is stated in Scripture. “I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness ” (Rom 6:19). A person who came from a life of moral depravity cannot enter into Christ casually. One who gave himself wholeheartedly to sin cannot give himself halfheartedly to the Lord.

If one’s religion is less demanding than sin, there is no hope that a person can survive. That is why it is imperative that people live by faith, walking in the Spirit and in fellowship with Christ. If they allow the entrance of competitive desires, however noble they may appear, the devil will gain a foothold in their lives. This can take place early in the life of the believer, as it did with Simon. For him, however, it was not being involved in a weak religion. Rather, it was obtaining a carnal view of true religion.

WHAT TO DO WHEN WICKED SURFACES

“ 22 Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.”

When unusual wickedness surfaces in a believer, how is it to be addressed? Paul says, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted ” (Gal 6:1). Jude gives a similar warning. “And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23). The “fear” of reference is found in the one pulling the transgressor out of the fire. The point is that this is not a work for novices and the naive. There is a certain liability attached to the rescue of those who are especially deep in sin. This will be detected in the manner in which Peter speaks, as well as the words he employs. He will place the responsibility for recovery squarely upon the shoulders of the transgressor. There will be grace to do what is said, to be sure. However, a hearty effort will be required from those who did not think enough of Jesus to abide in him.

REPENTING OF WICKEDNESS

“Repent therefore of this thy wickedness . . .” Other versions read, “Let your heart be changed ,” BBE “Do penance,” DOUAY “ change your wicked thoughts,” GWN “reform,” YLT “ turn from this,” LIVING “ change your heart,” IE “Repent of this depravity and wickedness ,” AMPLIFIED and “ get rid of these evil thoughts.” CEV

The word “repent” is very strong. It speaks of something that must be achieved. Grace will be required to do it, but it must be done. Coming from the Greek word **Metano,hsion** (meta-no-a-son), the word has this meaning: “to change one’s mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one’s past sins,” THAYER “change one’s mind, be converted,” FRIBERG “have a change of heart, turn from one’s sins, change one’s ways,” UBS “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness,” LOUA-NIDA and “to change one’s mind or purpose.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Repentance is something that must be done. It is not an option that can be ignored with impunity. Two times Jesus said, “Except ye repent, ye shall all, likewise perish” (Luke 13:3,5).

There is no room for opinion here, and there is absolutely no leniency in the matter. This is the reason for the new birth, or new creation, or being made new. It is to remove one from the category of people for whom there is no hope.

Here is the situation. The unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God. The people of God are to be made aware of this unalterable circumstance. As it is written, “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God ? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10). Lest there be any doubt about this, it is stated that those who continue to engage in such activities will, in fact, be finally excluded from the Kingdom of God. “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience ” (Col 3:5-6). There is no room for opinion here, and there is absolutely no leniency in the matter. This is the reason for the new birth, or new creation, or being made new. It is to remove one from the category of people for whom there is no hope. That is the first circumstance of which all men are to be made aware: the unrighteous are altogether excluded, whoever they are. They must be removed from that category so that they can no longer be described as such.

Secondly, holiness is an unalterable requirement. As it is written, “Follow peace with all men, and

holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord ” (Heb 12:14). Holiness is a quality or trait that must permeate the whole of life. Again it is written, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; because it is written, Be ye holy ; for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16). Again, this is not a suggestion, or a goal toward which we are to work. I do not believe this has registered upon the conscience of the modern church. This is largely owing to the absence of solid teaching on this subject. These days, sin is too easily excused, and a sort of carnal sympathy is being generated for those who have offended God, transgressed His Law, and chosen their own way over His.

By the grace of God, provision has been made for these requirements to be fully met by those who believe. The grace of God tutors us in both of these areas – no longer being unrighteous, and being holy. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:11-14).

There is a grand overview of God’s “so great salvation” (Heb 2:3).

- The grace of God brings salvation to us, putting it within the reach of faith.
- This salvation is made available to all men.
- Grace effectively teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, so that we can avoid being unrighteous.
- Grace also effectively instructs us how to love in a state of spiritual alertness, being righteous in our manner of life, and godlike in our persons.
- All of this enables us to please God while we are in this present world.
- Grace also teaches us to maintain a posture of life in which we are constantly anticipating the coming of the Lord.
- The Lord for whom grace teaches us to look, is the One who redeemed us from all iniquity, purifying us for Himself, in order that He might have a people for Himself who are zealous to do good works. In other words, they are no longer unrighteous, but are holy.

These blessed provisions are what sin among the people of God so serious. In His loving mercy, the Lord has provided a way to “sin not” (1 John 2:1). After all of the explanations have been given for committing sin, a sense of remorse must grip the heart. This is because the individual has trampled over Jesus to sin, and despised the blood of the covenant. He has resisted the Holy Spirit who devoted to enabling us to mortify the deeds of the body as He leads us into holiness (Rom 8:13-14).

Peter will now address Simon in strict keeping with the nature of his sin, as well as the provisions that were made available to him when he believed and was baptized. He has called upon him to repent of his “wickedness” – to see it for what it is, and to have a sense of deep remorse and regret that he has ever made such a request. But that is just a beginning. He must then petition God for forgiveness.

PRAY TO GOD

“ . . . and pray God . . . ” Other versions read, “pray God,” NKJV “pray the Lord,” NASB “pray to the Lord ,” NIV “ make prayer to God,” BBE “ supplicate the Lord,” DARBY “pray God,” GENEVA “ ask the Lord,” GWN “ entreat of God,” MRD “ beseech God,” YLT “ pray earnestly to God,” PHILLIPS “ implore God,” ALT “ask God,” CEV and “ make petition to God.” EMTV

There are several different words from which the word “pray” is translated in Scripture.

- Colossians 1:9 (**proseuco,menoi** – pros-ux-omen-oi). The lexical meaning of this word is “to offer prayers,” THAYER , or “speak to God.” FRIBERG This is used for general petitions – like seeking benefits for others, of the giving of thanks.

- 2 Corinthians 13:7 (**Euvco,mai** – eux-o-mai). Its lexical meaning is to “desire” something from God that is strongly desired. THAYER/FRIBERG

- 1 John 5:16 (**evrwth,sh** l – ero-taa-saa). The lexical meaning of this word is to “request, entreat, beg, of beseech.” THAYER “ask, inquire, question.” FRIBERG

Here the word is different. The Greek word is **deh,qhti** (dea-tha-ti). Its lexical meaning is especially strong: “to want, or lack something that is strongly desired; to ask, bed,” THAYER “to ask urgently, seek . . . plead, ask in prayer,” FRIBERG “implore,” UBS “to ask with urgency, with the implication of presumed need.” LOUW-NIDA

As used in this text, “pray” means to earnestly seek for something that is not presently possessed, yet which the petitioner knows must be owned. In other words, sin has ruptured the individuals relationship to God, and they are fervently seeking to restore that relationship. This can only be accomplished if offended party, the Living God, remits the sin, and the offending party, Simon, is made conscious of that forgiveness.

An example of this kind of prayer is found in the fifty-first Psalm. This is David’s prayer following his sin with Bathsheba – a transgression that greatly displeased the Lord. As it is written, “But the thing that David had done displeased the Lord” (2 Sam 11:27). When David was made aware of his, his heart smote him, and he prayed the words contained in the fifty-first Psalm. They provide a sort of index into what is involved in seeking forgiveness from the Lord.

- A plea for the Lord to have mercy: “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Thy lovingkindness” (51:1a).

- Remove the sin: “According to Thy tender mercies, blot out my transgressions” (51:1b).

- A complete cleaning: “Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (51:2).

- An acknowledgment of the offence: “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me” (Psa 51:3).

In other words, sin has ruptured the individuals relationship to God, and they are fervently seeking to restore that relationship.

An admission that the sin was against God Himself: “Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight” (51:4a).

- A confession that God would, in fact, be vindicated: “that Thou mightest be justified when Thou speakest, and be clear when Thou judgest” (51:4b).

- An admission of a natural bent to sin: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psa 51:5).

- The confession that God desires truth to be found in the inner part of men: “Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part Thou shalt make me to know wisdom” (51:6).

- Another petition to be made completely clean: “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (51:7).

- A restoration to Divine favor: “Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which Thou hast broken may rejoice” (51:8).

- A third petition for thorough cleansing: “Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities” (51:9).
- That God would create a clean heart, and renew a right spirit in him: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (51:10).
- That God would not cast him away: “Cast me not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me” (51:11).
- That God would restore joy to him, and hold him up : “Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold me with Thy free spirit” (51:12).
- A promise to teach transgressors when forgiveness is obtained: “Then will I teach transgressors Thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto Thee” (Psa 51:13).
- A fourth petition for cleansing: “Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God, Thou God of my salvation: and my tongue shall sing aloud of Thy righteousness” (51:14).
- A petition for God to open his mouth so he could praise Him: “O Lord, open Thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth Thy praise” (Psa 51:15).
- A confession that God values a broken and contrite heart: “For Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: Thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise” (51:16-17).
- A petition for God to do good to His people: “Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion: build Thou the walls of Jerusalem” (51:18).

I have taken the time to detail the prayer of the patriarch David because it confirms the seriousness of sin. In our time a sense of the enormity of transgression is exceedingly rare. Even profoundly deep moral transgressions like that of David are treated as though they were only a mistake, or a case of wrong judgment, or the expression of some troublesome trait with which one has grappled for a long time. Such views are not only unwise, they are damaging to the soul, contributing to a seared conscience, and the development of hostility toward the Lord.

The reason for the presence of these loose views is the prominence of a professional approach to moral weakness – i.e. counseling and psychiatry. As ordinarily practiced, both of these approach sin with God in mind, and the offense that sin is against Him. They also consider acceptable behavior to be the goal rather than reconciliation to God.

Peter’s words will underscore the seriousness of Simon’s transgression. As difficult as it may seem for some to receive, he will not be able to guarantee God will forgive Simon. He is not speaking of Divine ability, but of Divine character, and of the immensity of the transgression Simon committed.

PERHAPS

“ . . . if perhaps . . .” Other versions read, “if possible,” NASB “if indeed,” DARBY “if He will,” GWN “in the hope,” WEYMOUTH “to see if,” WILLIAMS and “if consequently.” INTERLINEAR

Peter does not say, “God can forgive anyone at anytime.” Or, “If you can repent, forgiveness is guaranteed.” Whatever arguments may be presented in favor of such views, they were not delivered by Peter. This is a man full of the Holy Spirit and in possession of the keys of the Kingdom. We do well to give due heed to what he says.

The expression “if perhaps” is translated from two small Greek words: **ei v a;ra** (ei ara). The first word is a conditional particle meaning “if.” The second word is an inferential participle that describes a consequence; i.e. perhaps, it may be, or it may be possible. In other words, Peter is saying, “It is possible that, as a consequence of your prayer, you just might be forgiven.” He does not shut the door

of hope, but he leaves only a crack there, in order that Simon's prayer might be all the more instant and fervent.

There are some transgressions that put forgiveness in the "perhaps," or "if" category. It is possible that Simon's sin was bordering on the blasphemy of the Spirit, which sin Jesus said "hath never forgiveness" (Mk 3:29). He said that sin "shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt 12:32).

The matter of is to be taken seriously, as evidenced by Peter's response. That is not to mention the enormous price that was paid because of sin – transgressions that ranged from eating a piece of fruit and stopping the ark of the covenant from falling, to offering children to the idol Molech and crucifying the Lord of glory.

THE THOUGHT OF THINE HEART

"... the thought of thine heart..." Other versions read, "the intention of your heart," NASB "having such a thought in your heart," NIV "the intent of your heart," NRSV "for thinking like this," GWN "the guile of thy heart," MRD "this scheme of yours," NJB "your evil thoughts," NLT "the purpose of thy heart," YLT "this contriving thought and purpose of your heart," AMPLIFIED " evil intention of your heart," PHILLIPS and "the on-mind of-the-heart ." INTERLINEAR

Peter does not tell Simon to pray the Lord will forgive him for what he said, but for the "thought," or intention of his heart. An evil heart of unbelief had entered into Simon's thought processes, and he had welcomed it. Rather than casting down imaginations, he entertained them, and did what they suggested. His "thoughts" were not God's thoughts (Isa 55:8-9), but like the evil tongue were "set on fire of hell" (James 3:6). Men may glibly say, "You cannot go to hell for what you are thinking." But Peter plainly said Simon was on his way to hell if he did not repent. He had jumped off the strait way that leads to life, and willingly landed on the broad road that leads to destruction.

There Are Thoughts That Do Not Have to Be Forgiven

There are thoughts – evil thoughts – that do not have to be forgiven. They are thoughts that are not wanted – intrusions hurled by the devil like poisoned arrows into the mind. These may take the form of "worldly lusts," that, by the grace of God, are denied entrance into the heart (Tit 2:11). They are thoughts that are contrary to the thinking of those who are "strangers and pilgrims" in the world, and consequently they "abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul" (1 Pet 2:11). These are imaginations that are cast down with the spiritual weaponry God has given us, and thoughts that are taken captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:4-5). When they come to the person who is living by faith, bidding entrance into their heart and mind, they are recognized as issuing from "the law of sin" that is in our members" (Rom 7:23). In Christ we have been liberated from "the law of sin and death," and are not debtors to it, to obey its lusts (Rom 8:2,12). This is the heritage of everyone who believes and is baptized!

My Own Experience

I well remember my own awakening to the warfare within, and the necessity of tracing thoughts to their source – then denying or embracing them. I was made painfully aware of how very little was being said about this within the professed church, and how I desired that I could have known it earlier. Every sincere believer has learned by bitter experience the impairing effects of flawed and incomplete teaching.

Simon's Deed Involved His Will

But Simon paid no heed to the Spirit lusting against the flesh, and to the cries of the new man, who

loves righteousness and hates iniquity. Instead, he made a place for the devil, and the devil threw him down, causing him to speak and act foolishly. His will was influenced from the wrong source, and thus it compelled him to do the wrong thing. This same thing happens to everyone who falls into sin, refusing to deny worldly lusts and yield their members as instruments of righteousness.

Noting the Reaction of Peter

Notice that Peter does not take up Simon's case, and wrestle for him against the devil's devices. Here is a case where it would have been out of order to bear one another's burden. The Scriptures do say, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ" (Gal 6:2). But that is not all they say! Three verses later they also say, "For every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal 6:5). This was such a case.

There is a sense in which the person who sins against God must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling. He must pray, seeking forgiveness, and not attempt to have others do his work for him. I realize that this might sound cruel and heartless, but we are dealing with a text that lives out this truth. No person has a right to attempt to diminish the seriousness of sin, or the obligations that it places on those who commit it.

The possibility that Peter hold's out to Simon, is that the wicked thought and intention of his heart might be forgiven. Recovery was not the point, but forgiveness. Once a person is forgiven, recovery can take place, and appropriate amends made – but first things must be first!

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MAY BE FORGIVEN

“ . . . may be forgiven thee. ” Other versions read, “will forgive you,” NIV “that you may have forgiveness,” BBE “will yet be forgiven,” CJB and “ may be removed and disregarded and forgiven you.” AMPLIFIED

Think of sin as being logged in the heavenly record books, with a corresponding debt to God incurred for robbing Him of His glory. Forgiveness is removing the sin from the record book, and liquidating the debt that it created. But that is not all. It also involves the purging of the conscience, so that the one who has sinned comes to know he is forgiven. Forgiveness really has no personal value if it is not known.

Peter does not promise that the thought of Simon's heart will be forgiven, but he holds out the possibility, and that should be enough to compel Simon to seek forgiveness with great fervor.

Notice that the forgiveness that is held out as a possibility has to do with the root of sin, and not only the fruit of it. Simon has to be forgiven for thinking wrongly. Involved in that forgiveness would be the stabilizing of his heart, so that it would not be inclined to such folly again. This is involved in the statement of John concerning the confession of sin. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The cleansing from all unrighteousness involves being freed from the propensity to the sin, as well as being forgiven for committing it. Those who have “the knowledge of salvation . . . by the remission of their sins” know very well what I mean (Lk 1:77). There is a certain strength that is imparted in the forgiveness of sins that enables a person to go their way and “sin no more” (John 5:14; 8:11). That is the sort of thing Peter says might “perhaps” happen when Simon prays.

DISCERNING THE INDIVIDUAL

“ 23 For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.”

Peter is not conducting himself as a fleshly professional, approaching Simon with a kind of indifference to his situation. When men, in the name of Jesus, render help for payment, it is all the more difficult for them to be truly concerned about the one with whom they are dealing. I am aware that some few noble souls can overcome this circumstance, but they are few and far between.

I PERCEIVE

“For I perceive that . . .” Other versions read, “I see,” NKJV “it is plain to me,” NJB and “I see inside you.” PHILLIPS

The word perceive speaks of an understanding that extends beyond the surface. Perception is not second-hand knowledge – like memorizing a set of mathematical tables. Here, the word “perceive” means “to see with the mind, to perceive, know absolutely,” THAYER “understand, recognize,” UBS and “mentally and spiritually see, perceive, look at.” GINGRICH

This is a special kind of understanding. It does not come by comparing what is seen with a code of conduct, or a manual of definition. It rather results from being able to identify the source of the word or activity. In a sense, Peter looked inside the heart and mind of Simon, seeing the root of the tree instead of its leaves. There is no doubt that he did this in the power of the Holy Spirit. This was by no means the result of developing a natural aptitude. Peter perceives what made Simon offer money to purchase the ability to confer the Holy Spirit on anyone of his choice by the laying on of his hands.

THE GALL OF BITTERNESS

“ . . . thou art in the gall of bitterness . . .” Other versions read, “ poisoned by bitterness,” NKJB “ full of bitterness,” NIV “prisoned in bitter envy ,” BBE “ extremely bitter,” CJB “bitter with jealousy ,” GWN “in the bitter gall ,” MRD “bitterly envious,” NET “full of bitter jealousy ,” NLT “turning into bitter poison ,” ISV and “a bitter weed .” WILLIAMS

Gall

The word “gall” is translated from the Greek word **colh.n** (khol-aan), which has the following lexical meaning: “a yellowish-green substance called bile,” THAYER “(1) as a bitter digestive fluid stored in the gall bladder in the body gall, bile; (2) as a bitter substance made from wormwood, a plant yielding a bitter-tasting dark-green oil that is alcoholic in its effect gall,” FRIBERG “something bitter,” UBS and “the bitter yellowish liquid secreted by the liver and stored in the gall bladder.” LOUW-NIDA In the English language, and as used in our text, the word “gall” means, “brazen boldness coupled with impudent assurance and insolence.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

In the Scriptures, the word is used to denote being “full of bitter poison, be very jealous, be bitterly envious” FRIBERG and “bitter anger, wrath.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This is the only place in Scripture that the word is used in this way. The same word is used in Matthew 27:34 to describe what was given Jesus to drink – “vinegar mingled with gall.”

Bitterness

Bitterness is translated from the Greek word **pikri,aj** (pik-ree-ahs). The lexical meaning of this word is “bitterness,” THAYER “inedible or poisonous.” FRIBERG As used in our text, the word means “extreme wickedness,” THAYER “particularly envious or resentful of someone,” LOUW-NIDA and “animosity and anger.” GINGRICH In English, the word means “marked by intensity or severity.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

What Is Peter Saying?

Peter is saying that what Simon has offered is like the emission of a bitter poison from within him, and that it is extremely distasteful to Peter himself. Not only was the thought like a noxious and bitter substance, it was also poisonous – lethal in its effects upon the soul. We might liken this verbal eruption to an appendicitis that resulted in the rupturing of the organ. Poison is thus spewed out into the vital parts of the body, transmitting its effects throughout the entire physiological makeup of the individual. Unless some way is found to get the poison out of the body, the person will die from its effects.

Because of the dichotomy of natures found in the believer, he must contend with variant influences from within. Boiled down to its essence, these influences are the flesh and the Spirit. This it is written, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17). These competitive desires are bidding for expression – to be taken into the heart and mind and then expressed in willing thoughts, as well as words and deeds. Both the Spirit and the flesh are aggressive in their attempts. Speaking of the Holy Spirit, James wrote, “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”, or “The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us and He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] with a jealous love?” AMPLIFIED (James 4:5).

When an believer gives heed to the desires of the flesh, welcoming them into his mind for contemplation, it is like turning on a picket which begins dumping all of the desires of the flesh, or corruption of “the old man” into our soul – the part of us that is the appointed means of expression. What happens when a believer commits sin is this. Satan has hurled a fiery dart into the thought processes, as vividly described in Romans 7:14-25. Rather than throwing the thought down with the spiritual weaponry that is provided in Christ Jesus, the thought is entertained like a welcomed guest. The thought then draws upon all of the corruption of “the old man, which is “corrupt according to deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22). The result is that the “old man” gains control of the individual, spreading his venom throughout the unseen human makeup. Sin then erupts – a process James referred to as “the superfluity of naughtiness,” or “overflow of wickedness ” NKJV (James 1:21).

This is what happened in Simon, and it filled with moral poison. He was like a man swimming in a cesspool of iniquity – “in the gall of bitterness.”

THE BOND OF INIQUITY

“ . . . and in the bond of iniquity.” Other versions read, “bondage of iniquity,” NASB “ captive to sin,” NIV “the chains of wickedness,” NRSV “under the control of sin,” CJB “ bound by iniquity,” CSB “ bonds of iniquity,” DOUAY “ wrapped up in your evil ways,” GWN “ chains of sin,” NJB “bond of unrighteousness,” YLT “bound by sin,” IE “ chained by wickedness,” ISV “a bundle of crookedness,” WILLIAMS “a bond forged by iniquity [to fetter souls],” AMPLIFIED “bound with his own sin,” PHILLIPS and “ prisoner of sin.” GNB

Simon had become a slave to sin – just by uttering a foolish word. It was a word that had been fostered by carnality, because he did not take his thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. He was not in a position where he could not simply back away from the situation. He was chained to his sin, like Samson was bound with fetters of brass to a grinding mill (Judges 16:21).

Sin Has Enslaving Power

The fact that sin is treated so lightly in our time is confirmation that the people are not aware of the enslaving power of sin. It is too late to for a back to walk away from iniquity when it has been committed. Now repentance and remission is required, for the person has been chained to his sin.

In our time, there is a certain approach to, what is called ministry, that specializes in deliverance. They refer to their work as a deliverance ministry, and affirm that they are able to free men from enslavement to all manner of sin.

Jesus taught this little known fact, and did so with characteristic certitude. His word is preceded by a declaration of that certitude: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin” (John 8:34). Now, that is a precise statement of the case. Paul developed this in his exposition of baptism into Christ and its effects. “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). That is, if the “old man” is not kept on the cross, being crucified, we will, in fact, “serve sin,” for that is the nature of the sinful nature, or the “natural man.” Sin has the power to “reign in our mortal bodies” after we have been baptized into Christ. Therefore, believers are admonished, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom 6:12). Paul also declares the same thing as Jesus regarding enslavement to sin resulting from the committing of it. “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom 6:16). When speaking of certain false teachers who were exploiting the people of God, Peter said it this way in his second epistle to scattered believers: “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage” (2 Pet 2:19).

Thus, Peter has clearly declared Simon’s condition. He has been captured by sin, and is bound with the chains of iniquity. His inner person has been filled with filled with bitter poison, and he is in a condition where the best that can be promised is that if he repents and prays God, “perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven” him (Acts 8:22).

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER

Peter does not lay hands on Simon and deliver him from the bond of iniquity. He offers no assistance, other than the instruction to repent and pray. Now, this is real case of dealing with real sin, and there is no chance that it is in some way flawed.

In our time, there is a certain approach to, what is called ministry , that specializes in deliverance. They refer to their work as a deliverance ministry, and affirm that they are able to free men from enslavement to all manner of sin. Meetings of significant size are held for purposes of deliverance, and the work is spoken of as though it was founded on revelation.

First, let it be clear that Jesus did come “to preach DELIVERANCE to the captives” (Lk 4:18). He also taught us to pray that God would “DELIVER us from evil” (Lk 11:4). That the sum total of the Savior’s use of the word deliver.

There are some other statements concerning deliverance.

- Zechariah prophesied that the effect of the Savior would be the people being “DELIVERED out of the land of their enemies” (Lk 1:74).
- In Christ, we are “DELIVERED from the Law” (Rom 7:6).
- Paul spoke for all who are aware of the struggle against the flesh when he said, “O wretched man that I am! who shall DELIVER me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24).
- The “DELIVERER will come out of Zion, and turn away ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom 11:26).
- Paul asked for prayer that he might be “DELIVERED from them that do not believe in Judea” (Rom 15:31), and “from unreasonable and wicked men” (2 Thess 3:2).
- Paul said God had DELIVERED him from a great death, was delivering him, and

would yet deliver him (2 Cor 1:10).

- Jesus died to “DELIVER us from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).
- God “DELIVERED us from this present evil world” (Col 1:13).
- Jesus “DELIVERED us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).
- Paul said he was “DELIVERED out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim 4:17).
- Paul said the Lord would DELIVER him “out of every evil work” (2 Tim 4:18).
- In Jesus’ death He “destroyed the devil,” and DELIVERED “them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:15).
- God knows “how to DELIVER the godly out of temptation” (2 Pet 2:9).

Now, I am wandering about in the field of speculation, or pummeling a straw man. I am questioning the validity of, what is purported to be a deliverance ministry, and I am doing so upon the basis of this text. Here was a man who was in bondage – “the bond of iniquity.” He was standing before a man who was filled with the Spirit, had the keys to the Kingdom of heaven, and had wrought all manner of mighty works. If the way for a believer to overcome sin is to be delivered from it by some godly person, surely this will be the occasion for that to happen. If the only way to recover from sin is for a second party to knowingly enter into the matter with you, then this is an excellent time for that to happen.

I understand that there is such a thing as an effective through which life can be given to those who do not sin a sin unto death. Thus it is written, “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death” (1 John 5:16). In this case, spiritual life is given to a sinner upon the basis of someone who is in favor with God. This is similar to James’ word

There are sins from which there is no simple means of recovery. These are sins that are of an intrusive nature, causing men to become enslaved to iniquity. When this occurs, the person himself must engage in an earnest quest of forgiveness – like David did

concerning the same type of situation. “Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). These are not words delivered to especially gifted people, but to those who are walking in the light, and therefore can be employed in restoring fallen souls to the fold. But that is quite different from the case that is before us.

There are sins from which there is no simple means of recovery. These are sins that are of an intrusive nature, causing men to become enslaved to iniquity. When this occurs, the person himself must engage in an earnest quest of forgiveness – like David did (Psa 51). In order for such sins to be committed, a number of things must first be done.

- A place must be made for Satan.
- The warning conscience must be ignored.
- The striving Spirit must be resisted, quenched, and grieved.
- The word of God must be thrust from the mind.
- Life in this world must become prominent.
- Time must outweigh eternity.
- Self must be exalted to the place of preeminence.
- The body must be considered more important than the soul.

- This world must be seen as more important than the world to come.
- The inevitability of death, the coming of the Lord, the end of the world, and the day of judgment must be thrust from the mind.

These are just a few of the conditions that must precede the committing of sin. I give them to confirm how serious it is when men sin – particularly when sins like that of Simon are committed. They involve a wrong assessment of God, Christ, their purpose, and the nature of salvation. In my judgment it is time for the professing church to fervently seek a sensitivity to God and His will that will direct a more acceptable manner of life. Spiritual obtuseness is never right.

A REQUEST THAT WAS NOT APPARENTLY ANSWERED

“ 24 Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.”

There was nothing about Peter’s words that were not perfectly clear. Simon himself was to repent, changing his mind and ceasing his wicked ways. If it appears as though that was impossible, there is something made known in Christ’s ministry that must be seen. In a number of His wonderful works He told people to do something they were not personally able to do. Here are some of His commands.

- To a man with a withered hand: “stretch forth thy hand” (Lk 6:10).
- To a paralyzed man: “Arise, take up thy bed and walk” (Matt 9:6).
- To an impotent man lying on the porch of a pool: “Rise, take up thy bed and walk” (John 5:8).
- To a man who requested to come to Jesus, walking on the water: “Come” (Matt 14:28).

In each of these cases, there was no outward indication that what was commanded was even remotely possible. The people obvious were not able in themselves to do what Jesus said. However, more was involved in those cases than the ability of the people. There was also the element of faith. It is as the people., my faith, made a hearty effort to do what Jesus said, that grace and strength was imparted to them to do it.

That is still the manner of the Kingdom. Believers are not to look at their own aptitude in order to assess whether or not they are able to do the will of the Lord. Instead, they are to step out upon the circumstance believing that the Lord will support their effort to do His will. This is, in fact, what it means tom “live by faith” (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).

On a personal note, if there are areas of life in which you appear to be especially lacking in spiritual aptitude, extend yourself to have faith in God. You may recall that when Jesus cursed the fig tree, His disciples were astounded at how rapidly it died. Jesus responded to the expression of their surprise, “Have faith in God!” (Mk 11:21-22). That is still His answer to many of the responses and attitudes of His people.

Now we will behold unbelief in action. What Peter has said was clear, and Simon understood him. Yet, his next words are not addressed to God, but to Peter. They may appear to be quite innocent, but they are not.

PRAY FOR ME

“Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me . . .” Other versions read, “Pray to the Lord for me,” NKJV “pray for me to the Lord ,” RSV “ Make prayer for me to the Lord,” BBE “ Please pray to the Lord for me,” CSB “ Supplicate ye for me to the Lord,” DARBY “ Intercede ye

with God for me,” MRD “You pray to the Lord for me,” NET “Pray for me to the Lord yourselves ,” NJB “Beseech ye for me unto the Lord,” YLT “Both of you pray to the Lord for me,” IE “Pray, both of you , to the Lord for me,” WEYMOUTH “Both of you beg the Lord for me,” WILLIAMS “Pray for me [beseech the Lord, both of you],” AMPLIFIED “Implore to the Lord on my behalf,” ALT and “You petition to the Lord for me.” LITV

Does this appear to be an honest appear – one of a poor sinner who is weighed down with guilt? Not at all! This a disobedient man expressing his unbelief. Peter told him to pray, and the man, in effect, responded, “No, you do the praying!”

Simon is obviously frightened by what Peter has said, but it is not a fright caused by the fear of the Lord. This is a carnal fear which caused Simon to cower in a corner, unconvinced that he could repent and seek forgiveness from the Lord for the thought of his heart.

In a lot of respects, Simon’s request was similar to several requests that Pharaoh made of Moses. “Entreat the Lord for me . . . entreat for me . . . Entreat the Lord for me . . . Now therefore forgive, I pray thee, my sin only this once, and entreat the LORD your God, that he may take away from me this death only” (Exodus 8:8, 28; 9:28; 10:16, 17). The complicating factor with Simon is that he had believed and been baptized. That made his sin worse than the sin of Pharaoh,

NONE OF THESE THINGS

“ . . . that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.” Others version read, “that nothing of what you have said may happen to me,” NIV “so that these things which you have said may not come on me,” BBE “that these terrible things won't happen to me,” LIVING “that nothing of what you have said may befall me !,” AMPLIFIED and “that none of these things which ye have spoke fall on me .” BISHOPS

“The things” of reference was his money perishing with him in perdition, or he perishing with his money, however

Early Church historians depict him as the pertinacious foe of the apostle Peter, whose movements he followed for the purpose of seeking encounters, in which he was signally defeated. In his journeys he was accompanied by a female named Helena, who had previously been a prostitute at Tyre, but who was now elevated to the position of his e]nnoia , or divine intelligence (Justin Mart. *Apol.* 1, 26; Euseb. *H.E.* 2, 13). In the e]nnoia , as embodied in Helena’s person, we recognize the dualistic element of Gnosticism derived from the Manichaeic system. The Gnostics appear to have recognized the du>namiv and the e]nnoia as the two original principles from whose junction all beings emanated. Simon and Helena were the incarnations in which these principles resided. Simon’s first encounter with Peter took place at Caesarea Stratonis (according to the *Const. Apost.* 6, 8), whence he followed the apostle to Rome. Eusebius makes no mention of this first encounter, but represents Simon’s journey to Rome as following immediately after the interview recorded in Scripture (*H.E.* 2, 14); but his chronological statements are evidently confused, for in the very same chapter he states that the meeting between the two at Rome took place in the reign of Claudius, some ten years after the events in Samaria. Justin Martyr, with greater consistency, represents Simon as having visited Rome in the reign of Claudius, and omits all notice of an encounter with Peter. His success there was so great that he was deified, and a statue was erected in his honor with the inscription “Simoni Deo Sancto” (*Apol.* 1, 26, 56). Justin’s authority has been impugned in respect to this statement on the ground that a tablet was discovered in 1574 on the *Tiberina insula*, which answers to the locality described by Justin (ejn tw~| Ti>beri potamw~| metaxw~| tw~n du>o gefurw~n) , and bearing an inscription, the first words of which are “Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio.” This inscription, which really applies to the Sabine Hercules (*Sancus Semo*) , is generally supposed to have been mistaken by Justin in his ignorance of Latin, for one in honor of Simon. Yet the inscription goes on to state the name of the giver and other particulars. “Semoni Sanco Deo Fidio sacrum Sex. Pompeius, Sp. F. Col. Mussianus Quinquennalis decus Bidentalibus donum dedit.” That Justin, a man of literary acquirements, should be unable to translate such an inscription that he should misquote it in an *Apology* duly prepared at Rome for the eye of a Roman emperor and that the, mistake should be repeated by other early writers whose knowledge

of Latin is unquestioned (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haeres.* 1, 20; Tertullian, *Apol.* 13) — these assumptions form a series of difficulties in the way of the theory (Salmasius, *Ad Spartianum*, p. 38; Van Dale, *De Oraculis*, p. 579; Burton, *Heresies of the Apostolic Age*, p. 374, etc.). The above statements can be reconciled only by assuming that Simon made two expeditions to Rome the first in the reign of Claudius; the second, in which he encountered Peter, in the reign of Nero about the year 68 (Burton, *Lectures*, 1, 233, 318); and even this takes for granted the disputed fact of Peter's visit to Rome. *SEE PETER*. This later date is to a certain extent confirmed by the account of Simon's death preserved by Hippolytus (*Adv. Haeres.* 6, 20); for the event is stated to have occurred while Peter and Paul (the term *apostolo* evidently implying the presence of the latter) were together at Rome. Simon's death is associated with the meeting in question. According to Hippolytus, the earliest authority on the subject, Simon was buried alive at his own request, in the confident assurance that he would rise again on the third day (*ibid.* 6, 20). According to another account, he attempted to fly, in proof of his supernatural power, in answer to the prayers of Peter, he fell and sustained a fracture of his thigh and ankle bones (*Const. Apost.* 2, 14; 6, 9); overcome with vexation, he committed suicide (Arnob. *Adv. Gent.* 2, 7). Whether this statement is confirmed, or, on the other hand, weakened, by the account of a similar attempt to fly recorded by heathen writers (Sueton. *Nero*, 12; Juven. *Sat.* 3, 79), is uncertain. Simon's attempt may have supplied the basis for this report, or this report may have been erroneously placed to his credit. Burton (*Lectures*, 1, 295) rather favors the former alternative. Simon is generally pronounced by early writers to have been the founder of heresy. It is difficult to understand how he was guilty of heresy in the proper sense of the term, inasmuch as he was not a Christian. Perhaps it refers to his attempt to combine Christianity with Gnosticism. He is also reported to have forged works professing to emanate from Christ and his disciples (*Const. Apost.* 6, 16). See Tillemont *Memoires*, 1, 158 sq.; Beausobre, *Hist. du Manicheisme*, vol. 1; Ittigius, *Hist. Eccles. Selecta Capita*, 5, 16, etc.; Mosheim, *History of the Church*, cent. 2, 5, 12; *De Rebus Christianorum*, etc., p. 190 sq.; Burton, *Heresies of the Apostolic Age*, lect. 4; Milman, *Hist. of Christianity*, 2, 96 sq., etc.

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you want to view it. It is interesting that he did not think in terms of being forgiven by God – that is the possibility that Peter held out to him: “if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee.” But, alas, someone who is “in the bond of iniquity” finds it

The record of Simon is a case in point. Here, the curtain falls on the incident of Simon, and we hard of him no more. We do not know if he ever repented and prayed for himself, or if he died in the gall of bitterness.

exceedingly difficult to think in such a manner. That is why recovery from sin is not a simplistic or easy matter. As soon as a person is made aware of their, and convicted of it, they must immediately seek the remedy by confessing their sin to God (1 John 1:7). The reason for this is that sin has a hardening effect upon the transgressor. That is why we are warned, “But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). It is also why those who dabble in the world, making no association of life with God, tend to become more and more dull of hearing. Oh, that professing believers were made more aware of this. There is a type of Christianity in the land that courts the favor and things of this world, attempting to sanctify its manners. But this cannot be done. If Jesus died to deliver us from “this present evil world according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4), we cannot afford to look back to the world like Lot's wife looked back on Sodom. That is precisely why the Lord said, “Remember Lot's wife!” (Lk 17:32).

This is another reason why it is so dangerous for the church to adopt the manners and customs of the world, bring its music and manners of presentation and motivation among believers. Such things are like an open door to the devil, as has been confirmed in so many instances of immorality and indiscretion among Christians. Not only were such people living apart from the awareness faith brings to the heart, their religion actually set them up for a fall by making them comfortable with worldly manners and appearances.

SOME THINGS DO NOT MERIT YOUR INVOLVEMENT

There are some situations in which it simply is not wise to become involved. Of course, there must be godly wisdom in deciphering such cases, lest weak believer be wounded and cause to fall. Flagrant sins like that of Simon, are themselves evidence of hardness and rebellion. There are some sins that cannot be committed unless the callousness of sin has already enveloped the soul. In such a case, straightforward and insight responses and exhortations are in order. However, to be sucked into involvement with such people is not wise.

The record of Simon is a case in point. Here, the curtain falls on the incident of Simon, and we hard of him no more. We do not know if he ever repented and prayed for himself, or if he died in the gall of bitterness. Of course, the purpose of the record is not to provide us with firm answers for every situation. Like all Scripture, they have been “written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11). Thus, the record precisely matches the counsel Peter delivered to Simon. He did not know if Simon could be forgiven, and now, neither do we. That confirms that God does not desire His people to speculate about the possibilities of being forgiven. They are rather to seek grace to “sin not.”

THE APOSTLES TESTIFY AND PREACH

“ 25 And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.”

So far as the record is concerned, Simon is now forgotten, and we return to the work of the apostles. What a solemn warning for us to be sober and vigilant is found in this account.

THEY TESTIFIED AND PREACHED THE WORD

“And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, . . .” Other versions read, “when they had solemnly testified and spoken,” NASB “testified and proclaimed,” NIV “given their witness and made clear,” BBE “giving a thorough witness and speaking,” CJB “having testified and preached,” DARBY “boldly spoken . . . they spread the Good News,” GWN “Testified and had taught ,” MRD “testifying and preaching,” NLT “having testified fully and spoken,” YLT “told the people the things which they had seen . . . preached the message ,” IE “borne their testimony and preached the message,” AMPLIFIED and given their clear witness and spoken.” PHILLIPS

The preaching of Peter and John fortified what had been declared by Philip, for these brethren were united in the faith. I do not doubt that they had a fuller knowledge of the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus, which things Philip had also declared.

They Testified

The word “testified” carries the idea of confirming something by testimony, this causing it to be believed. When Peter stood before the Jewish council, he said they could not help but speak the things they had “seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). I gather that this is the type of word that was delivered in Samaria. The extent of that testimony was also confirmed in the qualification for the filling of the bishopric vacated by Judas. It had to be a person who “Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John , unto that same day that He was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of His resurrection ” (Acts 1:21-22).

Add to this the ministry of the Holy Spirit who “brought all things” to their remembrance, whatsoever Jesus had said unto them (John 16:26). Also, consider how He must have shed light on the many words of Jesus, guiding them into all truth, illuminating the implications of the death, burial,

resurrection, and enthronement of Christ Jesus. In the earlier chapters of Acts, you have a sampling of the expertise with which Peter handled the prophecies of Scripture, integrating them with the facts of the Gospel.

- Joel's prophecy of the pouring forth of the Spirit (Acts 2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32).
- The association of the death of Christ with the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (Acts 2:23),
- The opening of prophecies of Jesus' resurrection in the Psalms (Acts 2:24-28; Psa 16:8-11; 49:15; 86:13).
- The exposition of the promise God made to David concerning a king to sit on his throne (Acts 2:29-33; 2 Sam 7:16; Psa 89:35-36).
- The opening of the 110th Psalm (Acts 2:34-36; Psa 110:1; 2:8-9).
- The glorification of Jesus (Acts 3:13).
- The exposition of the suffering of Christ as declared by the prophets (Acts 3:18).
- Defining the duration of Christ remaining in heaven (Acts 3:21).
- Expounding Moses' promise of the coming Prophet, who was Jesus (Acts 3:22-23; Deut 18:15,18).
- Expounding the promise made to Abraham (Acts 3:25-26; Gen 22:18).
- The exposition of the 118th Psalm regarding the rejection of the Corner Stone (Acts 4:11; Psa 118:22,23; Isa 28:16).

All of these things involved eye witness accounts of the Christ, His words, miracles, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension. This is not doubt the type of things concerning which they testified. One can only imagine what a rich table of rich things they spread for the Samaritans, and how it must have compared with bewitching work of Simon under which they had been deluded for so long.

They Preached the Word

These days, there is altogether too little of the preaching of the Word, apprising the people of the rich promises and commitments of the Lord to those who believe.

The testimony of Peter and John was integrated with Scriptural proclamations, as confirmed in former accounts of Peter's preaching. By preaching the Word, a proclamation of it is meant, as compared with what is commonly called an application. They were anchoring the faith of the Samaritans in solid declarations by the Almighty God, like affirmations concerning the Lord Jesus, and the exceeding great and precious promises through which believers become "partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:4).

These days, there is altogether too little of the preaching of the Word, apprising the people of the rich promises and commitments of the Lord to those who believe. More and more I am seeing that a significant number of professing preachers and teachers really have no message, but spend their time attempting to resolve surface problems.

THEY RETURNED TO JERUSALEM

" . . . returned to Jerusalem . . ." Other versions read, "Started back to Jerusalem," NASB "went back to Jerusalem," BBE "traveled back to Jerusalem," CSB "on their way back to Jerusalem," GWN and "returned toward Jerusalem." PNT

Having completed their mission, and anchoring the Samaritans more firmly in the Word, Peter and

John return to their home base. That was the center out of which they would operate, and was the place to which those with serious issues would resort. After this verse, there are forty-five references to Jerusalem in the book of Acts. It remained the hub of Kingdom activity to which inquirers resorted, and from which holy men were dispatched.

THEY PREACHED IN SAMARITAN VILLAGES

“ . . . and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” Other versions read, “proclaiming the good news in many Samaritan villages,” NRSV “in a number of small towns in Samaria,” BBE “evangelizing many villages of the Samaritans,” CSB “announced the glad tidings,” DARBY “to many countries of the Samaritans,” DOUAY “proclaiming the good news to many Samaritan villages as they went,” NET “they stopped in many Samaritan villages along the way to preach the Good News,” NLT and “proclaiming the glad tidings (Gospel) to many villages of the Samaritans [on the way].” AMPLIFIED

On the day of Pentecost, Peter had announced that the promise was not only to the Jews and their children, but to those who were afar off as well (Acts 2:39). While the Samaritans were geographically near, they spiritually afar off, and now they were privileged to hear the Gospel that first promised to Abraham.

The incident with Simon the spirits of Peter and John, confirming that a day in the courts of the Lord is better than a thousand elsewhere (Psa 84:10). The reception of the Gospel by the faithful offset experiences like that of Simon. That is why it is not wise to get caught up in the trying to resolve difficulties that spring from hardness.

CONCLUSION

This passage of Scripture confirms two vital points. First, the role of Apostle doctrine, with its unique and foundational knowledge. Second, it provides a sterling example of the seriousness of misconceptions of the nature of the Kingdom of God. These are lessons all men do well to take in, digesting and adapting them to their own labors in the Kingdom. These are accounts of genuine Kingdom labors, and are worthy of special notation.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #39

PHILIP IS SENT TO THE DESERT

“ 8:26 And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert. 27 And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28 Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet. 29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. 30 And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? 31 And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him. ” (Acts 8:26-31)

INTRODUCTION

Confirming the rapidity with which the Gospel can spread, the city of Samaria, as well as numerous villages in the region of Samaria, has now been saturated with the Gospel. This has been accomplished without the launching of an expansion program, or the development of a man-made strategy. We are witnessing the expression of “newness of life.” This is something that cannot be confined to a system. True Christian growth, whether on an individual or corporate level, is the result of “holding to the Head,” Jesus Christ (Col 2:19). The purpose of salvation involves joining the saved to the Lord (1 Cor 6:17), being one with Him, even as He is one with the Father (John 17:21-22), and experiencing fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9). This being the case, it is not possible that any valid work can be accomplished independently of that conscious and productive union with Deity. All other professed Christian work, regardless of its successful appearance, is spurious in every sense of the word. It is

not possible for any valid work to be done within the church without the One who Himself is building it (Matt 16:18).

One of the serious deficiencies of the American church is its insistence upon working independently of the Person of Christ, the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and the awareness of the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Considering that this is the day of the open heavens, access to God and the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and

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the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, this is a totally unacceptable condition. When prevailing disinterest and its consequent ignorance persist within the professing church, it is evidence that the “great salvation” of God has been neglected.

By way of contrast, the once spiritually barren region of Samaria has become a fertile field, and streams have broken out in a spiritual desert. The prophecy of Isaiah has been fulfilled in that region. “Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes” (Isa 35:6-7). There has also been a liberation from a longtime bewitchment under which the Samaritan people had been held.

All of this was initiated through a single disciple who was filled with the Spirit and wisdom, and was tutored in the apostles’ doctrine. The apostles themselves followed up his effective ministry, confirming the Gospel he had preached, and establishing the people more firmly in the truth. Thus, what had happened in Jerusalem has now taken place in Samaria – and that in strict accordance with the word of the King: “and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria” (Acts 1:8).

NOT A HUMAN STRATEGY

This was not the result of a human strategy. It rather was the result of souls being yielded to the Lord, and therefore they could be directed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus set the tone for the workings of God among men by Himself being “led by the Spirit” (Luke 4:1). When He assaulted the kingdom of darkness, casting out demons, He said He did so “by the Spirit of God” (Matt 12:28).

As Jesus began building His church, He did so through the Holy Spirit. After all, the intention of God is for the church to become His own habitation “through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). When the time arrived for the Gospel to be preached to the Gentiles, it was the Holy Spirit who directed Peter in what to do (Acts 10:19). When a Divine work was purposed for men of God to perform, it was the Holy Spirit who said, “Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2). Later when the disciples were spreading the Word everywhere, “they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word on Asia” NKJV (Acts 16:6). Again, “they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them” NKJV (Acts 16:7).

It ought to be clear that Jesus is not the Head Emeritus of the church – like a retired corporate president that is called in from time to time to give advice. Judging from the amount of time that the contemporary church gives to planning, strategizing, and hawking canned plans and procedures, one might imagine that Jesus was like the idol Baal. When the devotees of Baal got no answer from him, Elijah taunted them saying, “Cry aloud, for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked” (1 Kgs 18:27). The church has, indeed, fallen on hard times when it must caucus with consultants, advisors, coaches, financial analysts, motivators, psychologists, and the likes. Such activities are a reproach to Jesus, evidence of resisting the Spirit, and a denial of the truth. They are not innocent, and must not be approached as though they were. The Lord has given us a record of the manner in which the church of the living God conducts itself. He has provided records confirming how He regards the church directing itself and plotting out its own course. As well, He has made clear that there is no place – absolutely no place – for worldly wisdom among His people.

In fact, when professing believers depend upon the wisdom of the world, it is evidence that they are, in fact, friends with the world, adopting its way. As such, they become enemies of God. As it is written, “friendship with the world is enmity with God . . . whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world IS the enemy of God” – or, “whoever chooses to be a friend of the world takes his stand as an enemy of God” AMPLIFIED (James 4:4).

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

The relevance of all of this is seen in the fact that the early church knew nothing of all of the organizational and strategical procedures that have been adopted by the modern church. Yet, the results that it realized so dwarf that of today that a connection can scarcely be made between the churches of the first and twenty-first century. Of course, it is quite possible that there is no real association – that they represent two mindsets that are at variance with one another.

While some find it difficult to comprehend, the condition of the church is always the result of what it is doing. This is true when the church is stable and growing up into Christ in all things, or when it is declining and getting further and further from the Lord. It is as though the soul has only one hand. If it takes hold of the things of God, it has to let go of the world. If it chooses to take hold of the world, it must, of necessity, let go of the Lord. Both cannot be held simultaneously. A penchant for the truth causes the lie to become loathsome. The same is true of a predilection for the lie. It makes the truth obnoxious. It is no wonder that men are admonished, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life” (Prov 4:23).

The bottom line here is that the Lord is prominent in our text. He is building His church, and directing His servants through His Holy Spirit. The means through which this is being done is the faith of the people. That faith has been confirmed in their abandonment of the world and pursuit of the Lord Jesus. Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). That is what is taking place in our text: it is actually happening among the people. In our time, this is more like a goal to be realized than an experience that is taking place.

PHILIP IS SENT TO A NEW PLACE

Now, Philip is sent from a teeming environment of many people in a city, to a single man in the desert – a key man, who himself was journeying through a natural desert to the spiritual desert of Ethiopia. He had been drawn out of Ethiopia through some unknown, yet faithful, Jewish influence. Now, his quest for the truth will be rewarded by insights he had never before experienced, and he would gladly receive the word, and be added to the church. In this man it will be confirmed that those who seek do, indeed, find (Matt 7:7-8)!

DIRECTED BY A HOLY ANGEL

“ 8:26a And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying . . . ” Other versions read, “But as for Philip,” LIVING “Now and angel of the Lord said to Philip,” WILLIAMS “ But an angel of the Lord said to Philip,” AMPLIFIED “ The Lord’s angel said to Philip,” CEV and “Messenger yet of Master talks toward Philip .” INTERLINEAR

It is good for us to be faithfully reminded of this circumstance. I am persuaded that the awareness of this sacred society would significantly alter what goes on in the churches of the land.

Here the direction of Philip is distinguished from that of Peter and John. They returned to Jerusalem, but he did not return with them. The Lord had another work for him to do. He had been faithful, and now he will be given more to do. That is the manner of the Kingdom (Matt 13:12; 25:29). This is not the kind of work men can take upon themselves. It involves reaching a man of whom Philip probably knew nothing. Nor, indeed, was the church in Jerusalem apparently aware of him. But such a lack of awareness did not exist in heaven, and “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26).

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD

It is good that we consider the angels and their involvement in redemption. They are integral to spiritual life, and to the various activities of the body of Christ. In revealing the vast society into whose company salvation has brought us, the holy angels are mentioned. “But ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels , to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24). It is good for us to be faithfully reminded of this circumstance. I am persuaded that the awareness of this sacred society would significantly alter what goes on in the churches of the land. You can rest assured that many of the things that appear so impressive to men have absolutely no such impact on these heavenly hosts.

So far as the inspired record is concerned, the angels are regularly involved with the elect. It is revealed that they are “ALL ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14). That means that an unfathomable number of these mighty and wise hosts are at work for the saints of God. The extent of their involvement has not been revealed. However, from time to time the word of the Lord informs us of things they have done in the behalf of the “heirs of salvation.” In these accounts, we are provided some insight into the manner of their activities.

- Already in the book of Acts, “the angel of the Lord” opened the prison doors where the apostles were being held, brought them out, and told them “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20).
- Stephen told the council that an angel appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Acts 7:30).

- The ministry of Moses, sent “to be a ruler and a deliverer,” was carried out “by the hand of the angel” (Acts 7:35).

- The angel of the Lord accompanied Israel to Mount Sinai and through the wilderness (Acts 7:38).

- The Law of God was given to Israel “by the disposition of angels” (Acts **In these few instances, we catch a glimpse of the involvement of heaven with the saints on earth. We cannot speculate about the extensiveness of this involvement, but it certainly is not**

7:53).

- A holy angel spoke to the Gentile Cornelius, instructing him how to contact Peter (Acts 10:3-7,22; 11:13).

- “The angel of the Lord” released Peter from prison, causing him to rise up and the chains to fall off of his hands. He instructed Peter to follow him, and the gates of the prison opened of their own accord by his leadership; (Acts 12:7-10).

In these few instances, we catch a glimpse of the involvement of heaven with the saints on earth. We cannot speculate about the extensiveness of this involvement, but it certainly is not a temporary arrangement, intended only for first century believers. The word of the Lord is that angels ARE ministering spirits, and that they ARE sent forth to minister to those “who shall be heirs of salvation.” As long as such souls exist, therefore, we can depend upon this faithful mass of spirits.

From Romans through the Revelation, there are one hundred references to angels. With very few exceptions the references pertain to holy angels. There are eight references to unholy angels (1 Cor 6:3; 2 Cor 11:14; Gal 1:6; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6; Rev 9:11; 12:7,9). The messengers of the seven churches are referred to as angels (Rev 2:1,12,18; 3:1,7,14). That leaves eighty-five references to the holy angels from Romans through the Revelation. That certainly is significant enough to get our attention. You will notice that with remarkable consistency, an increase in Divine activity was always matched by increased activity among the angelic hosts. The pinnacle of this activity will occur when Jesus comes again, being unveiled by the Father in all of His glory. At that time, He will be accompanied by “all the holy angels” (Matt 25:31).

But angels not only work on a large scale. In our text, a holy angel focuses on a single man, being sent to a solitary traveler. As with all of God’s servants, both seen and unseen, the number of people involved is not what drives their activity. It is the significance of what men are doing, and how it relates to God’s eternal purpose. Once a person sees this with some degree of discernment, it alters all of life.

THE PRECISION, YET GENERALITY, OF THE DIRECTION

“ 26b Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.” Other versions read, “Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is desert ,” NKJV “the road that descends from Jerusalem to Gaza .” (This is a desert road),” NASB “the road – the desert road – that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza,” NIV “This is a wilderness road ,” NRSV “through the waste land ,” BBE “the same is desert,” ERV “take the desert road that goes south from Jerusalem to Gaza,” GWN “ the desert route .” NAB “the road that isn't used much now ,” IE and “ out in the desert ,” PHILIPS

Those who have a love for convenience will find the work of the Lord very tedious and difficult. “Ease,” as the world defines it, is not in the believer’s vocabulary. By experience they find that the way that leads to life is “narrow” and difficult for the flesh, and is entered through a gate that is “strait,” small and confining (Matt 7:13). Sometimes the path of holy duty leads through perils: i.e. “in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen,

in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Cor 11:26). The illustrious Christian career was unknown in the church for a considerable period of time. Oh, there have always been men who sought to exploit religion for strictly personal purposes, but they were not common at the first.

Philip does not balk at this calling. The angel of the Lord directs him to a desert – a wasteland, a wilderness road. It was a way of getting from Jerusalem to Gaza, but it certainly was not a sightseeing route, and one that was conducive to pleasure. The stretch of road from Jerusalem to Gaza was in the vicinity of fifteen miles. Yet, the angel of the Lord does not pinpoint exactly where Philip is to go, or what his business is going to be. He only tells the evangelist to “go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” NKJV Yet, that is sufficient to get Philip started on his way, and therefore he will ask for no further directions. He does not know precisely where he is headed, or why he is going there.

Something to be Learned

Something of the Divine manner is to be learned from this text. Those who want all of the details spelled out will have a difficult time obeying the Lord. His instructions are not always as detailed as men desire.

- Abram was told to leave his country and his fathers house and go to a country God would later identify (Gen 12:1).
- When the Lord commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering, He told the patriarch “upon one of the mountains” in “the land of Moriah,” saying He would tell him which one later (Gen 22:2).
- When the Lord led Israel out of Egypt, it was in a general direction at the first – “through the way of the wilderness of the Red sea” (Ex 13:18).
- When the Lord called Paul and Silas into a new region, it was through a dream in which Paul saw a man in Macedonia saying, “Come over into Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). This was not a city, but a region, or country, even having its own race.

Historically, Divine direction generally came in stages. That is, it was along the way, as the people traveled, that more specific directions were received. This was a marvelous depiction of the nature of spiritual life. The Lord guides His people as they walk with Him. Doctrinally, it is through the knowledge of God, or in the process of Divine fellowship with the Lord, that supplies and instruction are received. This it is written, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet 1:2). And again, “His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him” (2 Pet 1:3). This is one of the reasons God has called us “unto the fellowship of His Son” (1 Cor 1:9). It is in the process of that “fellowship” that required resources and direction are ministered from heaven. This is being lived out in our text, as Philip heads down to the desert road leading to Gaza.

GAZA

Gaza was an historical city in Canaan, and was formerly a principle stronghold of the Philistines. When entering the promised land, “Joshua Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua smote them from Kadeshbarnea even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even unto Gibeon” (Josh 10:40-41). However, he spared some of the Anakims (giants), allowing them to live in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (Josh 11:21). Years later, “Goliath of Gath” was among those coming from these giants who were permitted to stay in the land. Gaza was the city where Samson “took the doors of the gate of the city, and the two posts, and went away with them, bar and all, and put them upon his

shoulders, and carried them up to the top of an hill that is before Hebron” (Judges 16:3). It is also the city where they took Samson after Delilah had betrayed him, put out his eyes, and caused him to be chained to a grinding mill. It is also the place where he pulled down the pillars of the Temple of Dagon, killing “about three thousand men and women” (Judges 16:21-31). Now, in the time of Philip, the city was a familiar place on the landscape of the promised land. Every place it is mentioned in Scripture, although it was in the promised land, and given to the tribe of Judah (Josh 15:21,47), it is associated with the Philistines – not the Jews (Judges 16:21; 1 Sam 6:17; 2 Kgs 18:8; Jer 47:1).

The “desert road” to which our text refers is said to be a road favored by those with carriages, as compared to a walking. “Besides the ordinary road from Jerusalem by Ramleh to Gaza, there was another, more favorable for carriages (Acts 8:28), further to the south, through Hebron, and thence through a district comparatively without towns, and much exposed to the incursions of people from the desert.” McCLINTOK STRONG’S

LEARNING ABOUT SERVING THE LORD

There is much to be learned in this text about serving the Lord. First, the notion of convenience and ease is obviously lacking. Philip is sent to a lonely road in the desert with a minimal amount of initial information. In fact, he is not even told why he was to go “toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” NKJV He is not told if this is for personal prayer and meditation, preaching, or some other holy activity. He does not know what awaits him there, if he is on a specific mission, or if further directions will be delivered.

Notwithstanding these rather ambiguous circumstances, Philip knows that “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD” (Psa 37:23). Faith does teach the ones possessing it to “commit” their “way into the Lord,” trusting in Him (Psa 37:5). It is a blessed day, indeed, when the trusting one can discerningly say, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23). In Philip’s case, I suppose he could have reasoned that there might very well be perils associated with his journey. Then, there was the matter of provisions, etc. However, the person who lives by faith also obtains wisdom from above.

Steps that are “ordered” by the Lord are not characterized by foolishness, rashness, or ignorance. It is an aspect of faith to depend upon being directed in a manner that is wise as well as effective. Faith is willing to trust God in this way.

THE INSTANT OBEDIENCE OF PHILIP

“27a And he arose and went . . .” Other versions read, “So he started out,” NIV “So he got up and went,” NRSV “rising up, he went,” DOUAY “So Philip went,” GWN “He got up and set out,” and “Philip arose and began his journey.” PHILLIPS

As soon as the angel told Philip what to do, he immediately set out on the required journey. This is a vivid picture of the nature of obedience. It is instant, willing, and thorough.

As soon as the angel told Philip what to do, he immediately set out on the required journey. This is a vivid picture of the nature of obedience. It is instant, willing, and thorough.

Philip had been intensely active in Samaria, moving about, working great signs and wonders, and preaching the Gospel. He had also been with Peter and John as they prayed that the people would receive the Spirit, laying their hands upon them. They also preached to the people, confirming them in the Lord. Now, without much lapse in time, and without the benefit of advanced modes of travel, Philip is directed to take a significant journey of somewhere between fifteen and thirty miles. His instructions are sparse, to say the least. The only point of specificity pertained to a “way,” or road,

that went from Jerusalem to Gaza. Bringing this scenario into our own day, that would be something like telling a person in Joplin Missouri to go toward the West to the road that led from Tulsa Oklahoma to Bartlesville, Oklahoma – without any word about anything that might happen there, or whether or not the journey would continue on from there.

While this would present some difficulties for the flesh, it is perfectly reasonable to faith. Faith is sustained by an immediate connection with the living God. It also comes with an inner awareness that the Lord directs our steps – one at a time. That is, we are provided details when we need them. Even then, they might not be specific. For example, in the broad spectrum of life, we might simply be told that we will receive a “crown of life” (James 1:12). The extent and implications of that crown are not provided, but the fact of that promise is sufficient to keep us in the path of obedience.

The Time In Which We Live

The time in which we are living, now 2007, is one in which there is a remarkable penchant for the details of life. This is the time of short-range and long-range planning. People are eager to plan the details of their careers, retirement, and even their death. While there is nothing particularly wrong in such things, those in Christ must be careful not to carry this mode of thinking into their life with God. When we live by faith, there are opportunities set before us that require an immediate response – one that is wholly independent of planning, as ordinarily perceived. The objective of the believer is to keep spiritually tuned to heaven, maintaining a robust faith, a confident hope, and sensitive heart. When these conditions are found, obedience will always be instant and complete.

Obedience Unto Righteousness

Lest we be led to think of obedience as something optional, or that is unrelated to our standing with the Lord, the apostle informs us that it is “unto righteousness.” As it is written, “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom 6:16). Other versions read, “obedience leading to righteousness,” NKJV and “obedience resulting in righteousness.” NASB The basic meaning of the word “obedience” includes the ideas of listening to, submitting to, being subject to, yielding to, surrendering to, and hearkening to, and to allow oneself to be governed by. THAYER By its very nature, obedience is a response, or reaction of the heart that dictates what a person does. As used in Scripture, it presumes the presence and dominance of faith, and unquestionable submission to the Lord. Obedience cannot be successfully feigned – it is either real, or the person who pretends to obey is a hypocrite, or mere actor.

The fact that Philip instantly responded to the word of the angel confirms the strength of his faith. It also reveals the tenderness of his heart, and the willingness that dominated his spirit.

OBEDIENCE IN SCRIPTURE

Philip’s response was in strict accord with other records of obedient souls.

The Scriptures contain a considerable number of records of the obedience of people to God. These include references to those who are expressly said to have been obedient – such as Abraham (Gen 22:18; Heb 11:8), Israel (2 Chron 11:4), Zerubbabel and his workers (Hag 1:2), a company of priests (Acts 6:7), believers in Rome (Rom 6:17; 16:19), and Philemon (Phile 1:21). There are numerous indirect references to the obedience of people, where they are said to have responded in faith to what they were commanded to do. These include Noah (Gen 6:22; 7:5; Heb 11:7), Jacob (Gen 35:1,7), Moses (Num 27:22), Caleb (Deut 1:36), Joshua (Josh 11:15), Gideon (Judges 6:25-28), David (1 Kgs 15:5), Hezekiah (2 Kgs 18:6), Josiah (2 Kgs 22:2), Asa (2 Chron 14:2), Jehosaphat (2 Chron 20:32), Ezra (Ezra 7:10), Hanani (Neh 7:2), Job (Job 1:8), Jonah (Jon 3:3), Joseph, Mary’s husband (Matt 1:24; 2:14), James and John (Matt 1:19-20), Matthew (Matt 9:9), Simon and Andrew (Mk 1:16-18),

and a host of others.

The “How-To” Mentality

Whatever may be said of such a thrust, it seems to me that it comes short of the revealed Divine objective, which is to change men “from glory to glory,” advancing them forward to their appointed conformity to the image of God’s Son

Without laboring this to the point of distraction, I again want to briefly note the absence of “how-to” details in the words of heaven’s messenger. Philip is not told how to get down to the road. I am sure there were several possible routes. It seems to me that he would have chosen the quickest route, as compared to the most scenic or enjoyable one. He is not told what he is going to do when he arrives, how long to stay, or what to do if he has to wait.

If you were to remove the “how-to” materials and activities from the contemporary church scene, it seems to me that very little would remain. There would definitely be a significant reduction in all Christian communication media, including visual, audio, and literary.

The massive presence of these things is a kind of epitaph to the level of spiritual ignorance that presently exists in the professed Christian community. It also accounts for the absence of kingdom initiatives in which there is a bold proclamation of the truth – independent of perceived domestic and social needs. It is something like a society in which little that makes for growth and advancement is ever introduced. The burden of the time is spent attempting to recover those who were once better off than they are now. Whatever may be said of such a thrust, it seems to me that it comes short of the revealed Divine objective, which is to change men “from glory to glory,” advancing them forward to their appointed conformity to the image of God’s Son (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). Where this type of advancement is not being realized, obedience will not be found to any measurable degree. Consequently, men like Philip will be exceedingly rare, and therefore great works are not apt to be done. Spiritual insight will also be at a low level. That is the penalty for a lack of spiritual growth.

THE MAN THAT PHILIP CONFRONTED

“ 27b . . . and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship . . .”

We have no idea how long it took Philip to get to this desert road, or the means through which he arrived there. While such details might be interesting to the flesh, they would only prove to be a distraction to the new man. Knowing the flesh as I do, it would have viewed such details as some form of code, standardizing it as a precedent for getting where God wants you to be.

In the book of Acts, we are assisted in thinking objectively – with a mind to what is being accomplished, rather than how it is being done. This is the kind of approach upon which flesh cannot capitalize. This is because such an approach is driven by the Divine agenda, into which human wisdom has no input whatsoever.

Something to be Noted

Remember the activities that had taken place in Jerusalem.

- The ministry of John the Baptist, announcing the presence of the promised Messiah, had been known in that city (John 1:19).
- Jerusalem had been exposed several times to the aggressive ministry of Jesus (Matt 15:1; 20:17; Mk 10:32; 11:11,15; John 5:1; 12:12; Matt 26:55).
- On the day of Pentecost, when the Gospel was preached, a great harvest of souls

was reaped in Jerusalem (Acts 2:5,14,41).

- Multitudes of sick people had been healed by the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 5:16).
- The apostles were charged with filling Jerusalem with their doctrine (Acts 5:28).
- Following the ordaining of the first deacons, the Word of God increased, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem were multiplied (Acts 6:7).
- A great persecution had been launched against the “church which was at Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1).

One might imagine that it would be impossible for anyone to come into Jerusalem – particularly to worship the God of the Jews – without being made privy of the marvelous things that had been taking place there. As Paul told Fetus, “this thing was not done in a corner” (Acts 26:26). Yet, Philip will now confront a man who was apparently not privy to what had taken place – including the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, together with the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, powerful preaching, and numerous signs and wonders.

Although the Gospel had filled Jerusalem at the first (5:28), by this time it does not appear to have permeated Jewish activities. In fact, with the passage of time and the persecution of the church, the awareness of the burst of newness of life had apparently faded from both the thoughts and conversations of the people. This clearly appears to be the case in the narrative that follows.

A MAN OF ETHIOPIA

“. . . and, behold, a man of Ethiopia . . .” Other versions read, “an Ethiopian,” NASB “who had come from Cush,” MRD and “a man from the country of Ethiopia.” IE

Now that Philip has arrived on “the desert road” leading from Jerusalem to Gaza, our attention is turned to someone who is traveling on that road. Circumstances are being orchestrated so that Philip’s attention will be turned from a city to a solitary man.

He Was from Ethiopia

Ethiopia is a land of Scriptural significance. It is located in the upper Nile region in the African quadrant of the world. This was the land of Cush, and is mentioned in Genesis 2:13 as a land compassed by one of the rivers flowing out of the garden of Eden. Moses married an Ethiopian woman (Num 12:1). On one occasion, one million Ethiopians (a “thousand thousand”) fought against king Asa and Judah, and were soundly defeated by the Lord (2 Chron. 14:9-12). During the days of Esther, Ahasuerus, her husband, reigned over Ethiopia (Esth 1:1). The book of Job mentions that topaz came from that country (Job 28:19). The Psalmist foretold a time when Ethiopia would “stretch out her hands unto God” (Psa 68:31). When Isaiah “walked naked and barefoot for three years,” it was a “sign and wonder upon Egypt and Ethiopia” (Isa 20:3). Ethiopia is mentioned along with Egypt and Seba as being given by God as a ransom for Israel (Isa 43:3). When Jeremiah was thrown into prison, it was an Ethiopian that interceded for him, leading to the prophet’s deliverance from the pit (Jer 38:7-10).

Now, a man from this part of the world is found on a desert road in the land of the Jews.

A EUNUCH OF GREAT AUTHORITY

“. . . an eunuch of great authority . . .” Other versions read, “a court official,” NASB “an important official,” NRSV “a minister of the candace,” RSV “who was minister in charge,” CJB “high official,” CSB “a man in power,” DARBY “chief Governor,” GENEVA “high ranking official,” GWN “chamberlain of great authority,” TNT “man of rank,” YLT “important officer,” IE “in a position of high authority,” WEYMOUTH and “potentate.” INTERLINEAR

A Eunuch

A eunuch was a man who was not married, and did not have children. Among ancient civilizations, some men in the royal courts were emasculated in order to ensure no improprieties took place, and they could be wholly given to their duties. We do not know if this was the case with this man – only that he was called a eunuch. It is quite probable that condition was imposed upon him.

Jesus spoke of eunuchs, declaring that there were several different kinds of them. “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother's womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it” (Matt 19:12).

- Those who were born eunuchs were, by nature, incapable of begetting children.
- Those who were “made eunuchs of men” had the condition forced upon them, so that they could not beget children.
- Those who “made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake” are those who voluntarily abstained from marriage in order to serve the Lord. There is no indication that this involved physical alteration. Paul is an example of such a man. He said that such a condition was a “gift” (1 Cor 7:7).

A Man of Great Authority

This man was an officer of the court, a high ranking official in the government of Ethiopia. Thus, Philip is being directed to a single political dignitary after he had ministered to, what Jews considered to be, lowly Samaritans.

You see how this contradicts the notion of specialists in the ministry – i.e., those who specialize in youth, married, singles, and special segments of society. Some feel they are called to minister to athletes, entertainers, business men, etc. Whatever may be said of such an approach, how does it look when compared with the text before us? The truth of the matter is that there is no sense in which the Gospel is tailored for a particular segment of society. Fleshly distinctions have nothing whatsoever to do with the manner in which the Good News is presented. The present trends of speciality Bibles (Men's, Women's, Youth, etc) is not good. It leads men to approach the Word of God with themselves in mind rather than God, His Son, and His great salvation.

In view of the fact that God does not call many from among the wise, mighty, and noble, it ought to be apparent that such status' cannot be dignified by faith. Those individuals who can maintain faith in God while remaining in those domains are exceedingly rare, as confirmed by Scriptural history.

Those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord must eventually get to the point where they are persuaded the Gospel addresses men precisely as they are. It does not have to be tailored for the people, adapted to their circumstances, and made relevant to their situation. All of that is inherent in the Gospel itself. In order to make some sort of adaptation to a special person or group of persons, one must step away from the Gospel and present it differently than God intends. If that happens, what is presented no longer has any “power unto salvation.”

We will find that Philip will not present a special Gospel for political dignitaries. He will preach the same Christ He declared to the Samaritans.

HIS OFFICE

“ . . .under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, . . .” Other versions read, “in charge of the entire treasury,” NRSV “controller of all her property,” BBE “had

charge over all her treasures,” DOUAY “had the rule over all her treasure,” GENEVA “her chief treasurer ,” NJB “ the treasurer of Ethiopia,” NLT and “ responsible for taking care of all her money.” IE

The term “Candace” was a common name for queens in Ethiopia, like “Pharaoh” was of rulers in Egypt, and “Caesar” of Roman rulers. The historian Pliny speaks of this custom: “The edifices of the city were few; a woman reigned there of the name of Candace, which name had been transmitted to these queens for many years.” NAT HISTORY 7:29

This man would be considered roughly equivalent to the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States – although he no doubt had more authority than that position. He had charge of the collection and distribution of the Queen’s treasury.

Here is an fulfillment of the word spoken by Paul: “For ye see your calling , brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called ” (1 Cor 1:26). The Scriptures do not say that the “wise,” “mighty,” and “noble,” are neglected people groups – groups that ought to be targeted by the church. It says that not many are “called” from those groups – heaven does not call them. It is not that it unlawful for such to be called. Rather, they are more firmly nailed to this world, and therefore have no fundamental interest in the things pertaining to “the world to come.” But here and there, a person will surface from among these categories of people who is discontent with this world, and engages in a fervent quest for the Lord. Philip is about to confront such a man.

In view of the fact that God does not call many from among the wise, mighty, and noble, it ought to be apparant that such status’ cannot be dignified by faith. Those individuals who can maintain faith in God while remaining in those domains are exceedingly rare, as confirmed by Scriptural history. Even then, men like Joseph, Moses, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were not called while occupying such position. Instead, they were exalted there to fulfill certain Divine objectives.

HE HAD COME TO JERUSALEM TO WORSHIP

“ . . . and had come to Jerusalem for to worship . . .” Other versions read, “had been to Jerusalem to worship,” CJB “had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem ,” NJB “ had gone to Jerusalem to worship,” NLT “came to Jerusalem for to worship,” PNT “came to Jerusalem to pray ,” TNT “had visited Jerusalem to worship there ,” WEYMOUTH and “had come worshipping to Jerusalem.” INTERLINEAR

This political dignitary, a man of great authority, had come to Jerusalem – the center of Judaism – to worship. The Queen whose treasures he managed, had apparently been congenial toward him, as Artaxerxes was toward Nehemiah (Neh 2:5-8). Thus, because of her kindness, the eunuch had made the lengthy pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

His position and responsibility did not interfere with his commitment to the Lord. He rather gave way to the preeminence of the faith that he had, not allowing his devotion to God to be neutralized by his responsibilities to the Queen.

Although we do not know the name of this man, we learn very much concerning him by this brief account.

With the technical exceptions of Nicolas the Proselyte (Acts 6:5), and the Samaritans converted through Philip’s ministry (some of whom were probably not pure Jews), here is the first example of a pure Gentile being exposed to the Gospel of Christ. In a sense, he was much like Nicolas, himself being a proselyte. The journey from Ethiopia to Jerusalem is estimated to have been around 1,500 miles – a staggering distance when you consider the mode of travel. It was a journey much like that

of the wise men who came from the East to see the infant Jesus. (Assuming they commenced their journey as soon as the Holy Child was born, it probably took them around two years to get to Bethlehem – Matt 2:16). That is why one version of Scripture refers to the eunuch's journey as a "pilgrimage" NJB – the word "pilgrimage" meaning "a journey of a pilgrim," MERRIAM-WEBSTER going through whole regions to which he does not belong.

The Influence of Jewry

The fact that this man was worshiping the God of the Jews confirms their influence in their dispersion. God had told the Israelites He would scatter them because of their waywardness (Jer 9:16; Ezek 4:13; 5:10; 20:23; Dan 9:7; Hos 9:17; Amos 9:9). Even in Jesus' day, the Jews were in a state of dispersion. Once, when Jesus told the Jews He was going where they could not come, they replied, "Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? will he go unto the dispersed among the Gentiles, and teach the Gentiles?" (John 7:35). On the day of Pentecost, "devout" Jews "out of every nation under heaven" had assembled in Jerusalem, confirming they were still in a state of dispersion (Acts 2:5).

While scattered, the Jews still maintained their identity, not being absorbed by the cultures into which they were dispersed. There were people who took the counsel of the Lord seriously: "And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace" (Jer 29:7). Here is a case of a man who was reached by the faithfulness of Jews in his native region. As a result, he had come to worship "the God of the Jews" (Rom 3:29). In him the Psalm was fulfilled, "Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" (Psa 68:31). And again, "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there" (Psa 87:4). This was also a pledge to the greater fulfillment of the prophesy of Zechariah: "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech 8:23).

This is a marvelous depiction of the potency of a godly witness, and of maintaining the ordinances that God has set in place. Faithfulness to God is a telling witness to those beholding it.

COMING BACK FROM A HOLY GATHERING

"28 . . . Was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet."

WAS RETURNING

". . . Was returning . . ." Other versions read, "on his way home," NIV "returning home," NRSV and "going back." BBE Having spent time in Jerusalem in worship – for that was his reason for going there – we are confronted with this man as he was returning to Ethiopia. We are not told what he heard when he was in the holy city. It is assumed that he spent considerable time in the Temple complex. Again, there is something to be said for the faithful observance of the ordinances of the Lord. Although the Jews had been widely dispersed, and their Temple twice destroyed, yet when someone came to Jerusalem, the feasts of the Lord were still being observed, the Temple was open, and some commitment to the Lord was evident. All of this was not maintained in a perfect manner, to be sure, and there was gross hypocrisy present among the leaders. Yet, the ceremonies of the Law had been given by

All of this was not maintained in a perfect manner, to be sure, and there was gross hypocrisy present among the leaders. Yet, the ceremonies of the Law had been given by God Almighty, and there was a valid association that could be made with Him through them.

God Almighty, and there was a valid association that could be made with Him through them. Thus, after Jesus had died, been raised, and returned to heaven – after He had been enthroned and the New Covenant inaugurated – the Law and its attending ceremonies still had a ministry. It is true that this situation gradually faded from the picture. The ceremonies were not intended to be perpetual, or to be the continual means of readying people for salvation. Yet, during the infancy of the church, gracious provision was made for sincere souls to gain advantages from the details of the Old Covenant which was, as the book Hebrews affirms, “ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13).

Here we have a man returning from a time of worship in Jerusalem. It will be interesting to see how he returns, and what activities his visit to the holy city has provoked.

READING ISAIAH THE PROPHET

“ . . .and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.” Other versions read, “ reading the book of Isaiah the prophet,” NIV “reading the prophet Isaiah aloud,” CSB “reading the prophet Isaiah out loud,” GWN “as reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah,” NLT and “reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah .” LIVING

A Minor Point

Although the Scriptures do not make a point of which version of Scripture the eunuch was reading, it is generally assumed that it was the Septuagint Version. The Hellenization of the world under Alexander the Great no doubt contributed to this. This was a project of the Grecian monarch in which the whole world was brought to speak Greek. The Septuagint Version was the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, and was widely distributed in the world.

All of this being true, here is an instance of Divine providence shaping the culture of the world with a mind to give the advantage to those who were seeking Him. While this is not a doctrinal point over which men should contend, it does provide a profitable perspective for those who are able to receive it.

So, what does a man do who is returning from a time of worship – real worship? In our country, men can go straight to an athletic event, or some form of entertainment, or some other casual affair. The very concept of worship has been so dumbed down that it is scarcely associated with a serious quest for God. Here, however, there is no need to indulge in speculation. Here is a man who had been to Jerusalem to worship. He is returning home, and we are expressly told what he was doing.

Not only did this man have a copy of the Scriptures, he was reading from them. In some way stimulated by his time in Jerusalem, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah, applying his mind to the Word of God. Enough cannot be said about the Word itself, and its centrality in the use and shaping of the mind. Those who have been deprived of Scripture have been robbed of nearly everything of lasting value. The Scriptures are able to make men “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15), and then equip them to be “thoroughly furnished unto every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). A person or a group of persons who are fundamentally ignorant of the Word, or are guilty of neglecting it, will inevitably decline spiritually.

CONCERNING THE SEPTUAGINT

“Among the Greek Church fathers Irenaeus (lib. 3, c. 24) relates that Ptolemy Lagi, wishing to adorn his Alexandrian library with the writings of all nations, requested from the Jews of Jerusalem a Greek version of their Scriptures; that they sent seventy elders well skilled in the Scriptures and in later languages; that the king separated them from one another and bade them all translate the several books. When they came together before Ptolemy and showed their versions, God was glorified, for they all agreed exactly, from beginning to end, in every phrase and word, so that all men may know

that the Scriptures are translated by the inspiration of God. Justin Martyr (Cohort. ad Groecos, p. 34) gives the same account, and adds that he was taken to see the cells in which the interpreters worked. Epiphanius says that the translators were divided into pairs, in thirty-six cells, each pair being provided with two scribes; and that thirty-six versions agreeing in every point were produced, by the gift of the Holy Spirit (DePond. et Mens. c. 3-6). McCLINTOK STRONG'S CYCLOPEDIA

At any rate, the eunuch's time in Jerusalem had provoked him to read the Scriptures. He did not do this to impress anyone, or out of a sense of duty. He was on his own time, so to speak, and chose to consider the Word of God. That was the effect worship had upon him. One wonders why the current worship-fads have not produced similar results.

Another Point

Also, note the inclination of the Lord toward a devout person – one who worshiped God, and was engaged in a serious quest for the truth. While this is not the only kind of people who were given to hear the Gospel, it is arresting to consider how such individuals were the target of Gospel labors.

- On the day of Pentecost “devout men” were subjected to the Gospel (Acts 2:5).
- The Apostles preached and wrought many signs and wonders in Solomon's porch, a structure within the Temple complex (Acts 5:12).
- After releasing the apostles from prison, an angel from heaven instructed them to go and preach “in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20).
- The Lord made special provisions for Cornelius to hear the God, who was “A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway” (Acts 10:2).
- Paul and Silas gained a following of “Devout Greeks” in Thessalonica (Acts 17:4).
- Paul spoke with Jews and “devout persons” in Athens (Acts 17:17).
- The book of Acts contains sixteen references to the outreach activities of believers in the synagogues (6:9; 9:2,20; 13:5,14,15,42;14:1; 17:1-2,10, 17; 18:4,19,26; 19:8).

The Blight of Sectarianism

One of the spreading blights of sectarianism is its tendency to attach little or no worth to an earnest quest for God – particularly among those who have little or no knowledge of the truth, and are not acquainted with either the scope or the details of the truth. Thus far in the book of Acts, there has been a total absence of this way of thinking. All of this has taken place without any tolerance for doctrinal corruption. Neither has there has been any excusing of ignorance.

Yet, there has been a longsuffering and tenderness evidenced in the teaching of uninformed souls. That same marvelous quality will be seen in this passage. It is good that we make a special note of this, and determine to participate in such an life-sapping approach. The Scriptures are consistent in their representation of sincere souls getting the attention of God, and being sent faithful laborers to assist them in apprehending the truth more fully. We must not allow any sectarian corruption to rob us of having the mind of Christ toward such people. Such an attitude will put us at variance with God.

THE SPIRIT SPEAKS A WORD OF DIRECTION

“ 29 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.”

In keeping with the manner of the Kingdom, further direction will be given to Philip while he is obeying – living by faith and walking in the Spirit. Within the framework of fellowship with Christ, he will be told what to do. Within the perimeter of the knowledge of the Lord he will become

cognizant of the proper thing to do.

My Own Experience

It seems to me that enough cannot be said about this principle. I know how long it was before I had any cogent thought concerning this Divine manner. I had unwittingly adopted an approach to life in Christ that did not require closeness to the Lord, and a lively fellowship with Him. In all honesty, I was not averse to this thought, but did not perceive how central it was to spiritual life. In personal experience, I found that my most productive thoughts were realized when I felt the closest to the Lord, and was most aware of Him. During those times, the world had no attraction to me, I had a voracious appetite for Scripture, and I was eager to please the Lord in all things. Yet, I had not yet put it all together, making the vital association between my own growth and those times of closeness to the Lord.

It was not until some years later that the phrases “knowledge of God” (Col 1:10; 2 Pet 1:2), “knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17; 2 Pet 1:3) “knowledge of the Lord” (Isa 11:9; 2 Pet 2:20), “knowledge of Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:8), “knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:8; 2 Pet 3:18,) and “know Me” (Heb 8:11), arrested my attention. It was absolutely revolutionary when it burst upon my soul that eternal life is knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20).

What had happened was that I had unwittingly bought into a religious system that actually obscured the truth, even though it boasted of having a kind of monopoly on the truth. I was not coerced into this position, but was greatly handicapped by my ignorance of the purpose of God and the nature of salvation. The “tradition of men” casts a cloud of obscurity over the entirety of the revelation (Col 2:8). Once accepted, it forces men to consider Scripture in view of the tradition. This is owing to the fact that men tend to ascribe to their own tradition the traits that belong to the Word of God. Their view is thus equated with Divine utterance. All of this is done without ever plainly declaring that is what has taken place. The one who has embraced the tradition of men will adamantly declare that this has not taken place. However, once freed from the clutches of human wisdom, it all becomes so apparent that the liberated soul marvels he was ever seduced.

The Reason for Saying These Things

My point in drawing attention to my personal experience is simply this: the conditions that hindered my own progress were not present during the time of our text – at least not to the degree that they exist now. The great falling away that Jesus and the Apostles foretold has, however, come to pass (Matt 24:12; 2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 2 Pet 2:1-3). The liabilities that have been introduced by this departure are staggering – so much so that it is nearly impossible to delineate it.

The purity of motive, earnest inquiry, and instant obedience of which we are reading are all standard in the Kingdom. However, they appear extraordinary because of their clash with present-day religious manners. My prayer is that the record itself will awaken a fervent desire for doctrinal purity and thoroughness of commitment within the hearts of everyone hearing these words.

THE SPIRIT SAID

“Then the Spirit said unto Philip . . .” Other versions read, “The Spirit told Philip,” NIV and “The Holy Spirit said to Philip.” LIVING

Notice the progression in Philip’s life. It speaks to us of the nature of living by faith.

- He was noted for being full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3-5).
- He faithfully joined in the administration of food to the needy within the community of believers (Acts 6:6).

- Upon the raising of a persecution of the church, he was forced out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:1).
- He went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ to them (Acts 8:5).
- An angel directed him to go down to the desert road that led from Jerusalem to Gaza.
- Now, the Holy Spirit directs him to an even more specific action.

It is evident that being “led by the Spirit” (Lk 4:1; Rom 8:14) is not a sporadic event. There are some who consider the Spirit moving, directing, or leading the individual to be something unexpected, sudden, and much like an interruption to the normal course of life. However, this is not how the working of the Spirit is depicted in Scripture. A few examples will suffice to buttress this point.

- When the Holy Spirit came upon the early disciples, it was while they were all together with one accord and in one place, waiting as the Lord had commanded them (Acts 1:4; 2:1).
- When the disciples were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and great grace came upon them all, it was after they prayed together with one accord for boldness to preach the Word (Acts 4:31).

I am persuaded that many people are not directed by the Spirit of God, whether being steered away from danger, or brought into holy involvements, because they are not walking in the Spirit. Their lives are being lived outside the perimeter of Divine fellowship.

When Peter and John prayed that the Samaritans would receive the Holy Spirit, it was after they had received the Word of God, believed, and been baptized (Acts 8:15-17).

- When the Spirit directed Peter to go with the men sent to him by Cornelius, it was while Peter was thinking on a vision that had been given to him from heaven (Acts 10:19).
- When the Holy Spirit came upon Cornelius and his household, it was after they had gathered to hear words whereby they might be saved (Acts 11:14-15).
- When the Holy Spirit told the brethren in Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul to the work to which He had called them, it was after they had been ministering to the Lord and fasting (Acts 13:2).

Now, Philip is directed by the Holy Spirit while he is engaged in doing the revealed will of God.

I am persuaded that many people are not directed by the Spirit of God, whether being steered away from danger, or brought into holy involvements, because they are not walking in the Spirit. Their lives are being lived outside the perimeter of Divine fellowship. It ought to be obvious that this greatly complicates life, putting one in a state in which deception is more liable to occur, and Satan’s devices will not be readily perceived.

GO NEAR AND JOIN

“ . . . Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.” Other versions read, “Go near and overtake this chariot,” NKJV “Go up and join this chariot,” NASB “Go to that chariot and stay near it,” NIV “Go over to this chariot and join it,” NRSV “Go near, and get on his carriage,” BBE “ Approach and join this chariot,” DARBY “Go over and walk along beside the carriage,” NLT “Go up and join him in his chariot,” WILLIAMS “Go forward and join yourself to this chariot,” AMPLIFIED “ catch up with the chariot.” CEV

Once again, note that the Spirit does not think in terms of convenience and ease. Philip has been traveling, and he is in a desert. A man riding in a chariot is within sight, and the Spirit tells Philip to

join himself to the chariot. The language is very precise. The expression “join thyself to” is translated from a single Greek word – **kollh,qhti** (kol-lath-a-ti). The word means “to glue, to glue together, cement, fasten together to join or fasten firmly together.” THAYER There was no question concerning what Philip was to do. He was not sent to survey the situation, evaluate the circumstances, or consider the possibilities. His mission was straightforward: connect with that chariot, and do not leave it.

We observe here the nature of spiritual life – a step at a time. The flesh would rather have an elaborate plan developed, laid out upon the table, and all of the details spelled out up front. However, this is not the manner of the Kingdom. In Christ Jesus direction springs from fellowship, and guidance is the fruit of familiarity. In view of this, it is apparent that a deliberate aloofness from the Lord involves a forfeiture of participation in His will — and that is the very reason we are a new creation in Christ Jesus. We have been “created in Christ Jesus unto good works , which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Walking “in” these good works involves living by faith, relinquishing self-centeredness.

THE TYPE OF OBEDIENCE RENDERED BY PHILIP

“ 30a And Philip ran thither to him . . . ” Other versions read, “So Philip ran to him,” NKJV “Philip ran up to the chariot ,” NIV “ running up to him,” BBE “when he came near ,” MRD “ having run near,” PHILLIPS and “ ran up close .” CEV

I have noticed over the years the manner in which professed believers are generally addressed from the pulpit. They are regularly told how they balk at the word of the Lord, are slow to learn, and are generally in disagreement with the Lord. I cannot begin to tell you of the times I have heard preachers and teachers confess after reading some Divine utterance, that they would not have said it that way. Others, relating the aggressiveness of some personality of Scripture, might point out how that is certainly not what they would have done. All of this is covered over with a psychological shroud that represents the people of God as fundamentally wayward, bucking against the will of the Lord, and pretty much in a state of ignorance when it comes to the things of the Lord. They want things conveniently packaged for them, steer away from any demands upon their lives, and want to take the easy course. At least this is how they are being represented.

However, this is not the way believers are exemplified in Scripture. Disobedience and recalcitrance are always presented as departures that are totally unacceptable to God. Rather than explaining how this is the manner of those in Christ, the Spirit testifies that we are to rid ourselves of such tendencies, mortifying the deeds of the body, and cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit (Col 3:5; 2 Cor 7:1). In fact, it is plainly stated, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24).

Rather than treating dullness of hearing and slowness of response as a characteristically human trait of Christians, such things are held out as putting one in eternal jeopardy (Heb 3:12; 6:4-8; 10:38-39).

By way of comparison, behold the type of obedience found in Philip. Upon being told by the Spirit to catch up with the chariot ahead of him, he instantly runs to it. His spiritual senses are honed, as it were to a fine edge, so that he knows when the Spirit is speaking to him, and is ready to leap into action immediately.

Rather than treating dullness of hearing and slowness of response as a characteristically human trait of Christians, such things are held out as putting one in eternal jeopardy

How blessed are those whose response to the Lord is immediate! When Jesus called James and John, they “ immediately left the ship, and their father, and followed Him” (Matt 4:22). When Jesus

told the palsied man who had been lowered through a roof to His feet, “Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house,” it is written, “And immediately he arose, took up his bed, and went forth before them all” (Mk 2:11-12). Once Jesus told an impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk.” It is written, “And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked” (John 5:9). When Peter confronted Aeneas, a man who was bedridden for eight years, he said, “arise and make thy bed.” Upon hearing him, Aeneas “arose immediately ” (Acts 9:33-34).

When Paul was called into the ministry by Jesus Himself, he testified, “ immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood” (Gal 1:16). When the Lord sent Paul a vision in the night of a man in Macedonia saying, “Come over into Macedonia and help us,” it is written, “ immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia” (Acts 16:9-10). On the Isle of Patmos, when a holy angel said to John “Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter,” John said, “And immediately I was in the Spirit” (Rev 4:2).

Jesus admonished His disciples, “And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately ” (Luke 12:36).

I am confirming that Philip’s response was not an unusual one – even though it might be so considered today. This was the Kingdom norm. It is the way faith moves a person to respond, as the eleventh chapter of Hebrews confirms. Jesus called those who were “slow of heart to believe” fools (Lk 24:25). He asked those who were surprised when He calmed the storm in which they found themselves, “Where is your faith” (Lk 8:25). When His disciples did not believe the testimony of His resurrection, delivered to them by some women, and two who had been blessed with His presence, He “upbraided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart” (Mk 16:14). When Paul confronted those who were slow to understand he wrote, “ ye are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb 5:12).

Philip’s response is one of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17). It depicts the character of “the new man” who is “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). No other kind of response is acceptable.

THE IMPACT OF THE JERUSALEM TRIP UPON THE EUNUCH

“ 30b . . . and heard him read the prophet Esaias . . . ” Other versions read, “heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet,” NIV “could hear the official reading the prophet Isaiah out loud,” GWN “he heard the man reading aloud . He was reading from the prophet Isaiah,” IE and “ listened to him reading the prophet Isaiah.” WILLIAMS

Although I have already made a point of this, it seems me that the circumstance here described justifies further comments. We are not provided the details of the eunuch’s visit to Jerusalem. However, his activity on his return signifies the impact of his time in Jerusalem. It also reveals something of what took place during Jewish gatherings. Keep in mind, that this man did not know about the Lord Jesus Christ. His exposure had only been to the Jewish people and their activities under the Law. Yet, he had made an association of the worship of God with the reading of the Scriptures. Later in this book, Paul will deliver a stirring recap of Jewish history in Antioch of Pisidia. During that message he referred to “ the prophets which are read every sabbath day . . . ” in Jerusalem (Acts 13:27). Here was a man who had taken the reading seriously, and, as a consequence, he was reading the Scriptures on the way back home. His heart and mind had apparently been stirred, and thus he was drawn to the Word of God.

Not only was he reading, he was reading out loud, for Philip heard him. Many, myself included,

have found that reading Scripture aloud has an undeniable impact upon the soul, moving one to have extended thoughts on the text being read.

We see in this passage the working of the Lord. Philip is led by God to meet a man who has been led to read the Scriptures. None of this is mere

There is no hint that the eunuch was reading in a section of Scripture with which Philip was not familiar. Philip appears to have instantly recognized the passage, and therefore confidently asks if the man understood what he was reading.

coincidence. This is a sterling example of those who seek finding, and those who ask receiving (Matt 7:7-8). It is also an example of someone being drawn to Jesus by God (John 6:44,65). The role of the Scriptures in all of this is very apparent, and is to be duly noted by all. A person or a church that neglects the Word of God is not apt to be drawn to the Lord Jesus, much less receive salvation through Him.

A WISE AND APPROPRIATE QUESTION

“ 30c . . . and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?” Other versions read, “ Do you understand what you are reading?” NKJV “Is the sense of what you are reading clear to you ?” BBE “ Dost thou then know what thou art reading of ?” DARBY “ Thinkest thou that thou understandest what thou readest?” DOUAY “Do you understand it?” LIVING and “Do you really understand what you are reading?” AMPLIFIED

Philip knew that before God understanding is a critical matter. Jesus spoke of those who could not profit from Him or His words as not understanding (Matt 13:13-15). Furthermore, He said that when a person did not understand the Word, “then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away what which was sown in his heart” (Matt 13:19). Conversely, the one who understands the Word is the one who brings forth fruit (Matt 13:23). When explaining why some people “could not believe,” John said it was because God blinded their eyes and hardened their heart so they could not understand (John 12:39-40).

In accounting for the reprobacy of the Gentile world, Paul said they were “without understanding” (Rom 1:31). The fallenness of the human race is accounted for in these words : “there is none that understandeth” (Rom 3:11).

Believers are admonished to “be men” in understanding (1 Cor 14:20). Again Paul admonished them to “understand what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17). Paul prayed for the churches that then “eyes of their understanding” might be opened so they could know essential matters (Eph 1:15-19), and that they might be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). John declared that Jesus “is come, and hath given us an understanding” of God Himself (1 John 5:20).

These things were to some significant degree known by Philip. This is why he asked if the eunuch understood what he was reading. He knew that Scripture has no favorable effect upon person unless he understands it.

There is no hint that the eunuch was reading in a section of Scripture with which Philip was not familiar. Philip appears to have instantly recognized the passage, and therefore confidently asks if the man understood what he was reading. One can only imagine how this whole event would have fared if an average twentieth-century deacon had been dispatched to that chariot.

Here we are introduced to the thoroughness of sincere Jewish teaching, and the caliber of disciples that were developed under the apostles’ doctrine. While we are not sure of the precise time frame

involved in this text, it could not have been too long after Pentecost. Yet, here was a man that was grounded in the truth and could handle aright the Word of God. Surely, Philip was a diligent workman that had no need to be ashamed (2 Tim 2:15).

A MAN OF INTEGRITY AND WISDOM

“ 31a And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?” Other versions read, “ explains it to me,” NIV “ How is that possible when I have no guide?” BBE “unless some man shew me?” DOUAY “How can I understand, unless some one instruct me ?” MRD “Why, how am I able , if some one may not guide me?” YLT “How in the world could I, unless someone teaches me ?” WILLIAMS “Why, how can I unless someone shall show me the way ?” MONTGOMERY and “How is it possible for me to do so unless someone explains it to me and guides me [in the right way] ?” AMPLIFIED

There is altogether too much naivety in the professing church on this subject. I am not sure of the value of holding up signs at a public event reading John 3:16, or dropping copies of Scripture, or sections of Scripture in populated areas.

We immediately learn that the man had been seriously considering what he was reading. His thoughts were wrapped up in the text so that he instantly responded to Philip’s inquiry.

JUST READ THE BIBLE

Perhaps you have heard people say to the spiritually unlearned, “Just read the Bible.” Also, it is possible for a person to read the Scriptures naively, thinking that repeated exposure to them will somehow cause the meaning of them to come through. Well, we have before us a man who was exposing his mind to the Scriptures – a choice section of them at that. If a person can really study themselves into an initial grasp of the truth, then surely this man will be able to do it. Apollos is another case in point. He was a man who was “mighty in the Scriptures.” He was also “instructed in the way of the Lord, being fervent in spirit,” He even “taught diligently the things of the Lord.” Yet, he had this dark spot in his understanding. He knew “only the baptism of John.” This was at least twenty-four years after Pentecost. However, notwithstanding, the path of Apollos was crossed with two who knew the way of the Lord more perfectly, just as the account of our text (Acts 18:24-26).

HOW CAN I

I am impressed with the guileless manner of this unnamed man. To him, arriving at an understanding on his own simply was not possible. He seemed to sense that repeated exposure to the text would not magically clear it up. Now, all of this reflects the manner of the Kingdom, and the ordained way of learning. Initially, a person cannot read their way into Jesus. In this case, we have a man who was obviously learned and in possession of a disciplined mind. Yet, as it is written, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:14-15). That is the Divine arrangement. Paul confirmed this when he said to the Corinthians, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ?” (1 Cor 3:5).

There is altogether too much naivety in the professing church on this subject. I am not sure of the value of holding up signs at a public event reading John 3:16, or dropping copies of Scripture, or sections of Scripture in populated areas. I would certainly not be so foolish as to set myself against such a work. However, at some point, a person who actually knows the truth must deliver it to the people. That is one reason for Christ’s injunction, “Preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15).

THE INTERDEPENDENCE OF THE BODY OF CHRIST

There is something also to be learned here regarding the interdependency within the body of Christ. No member of the body of Christ can stand on their own, for we are “every one members one of another” (Rom 12:5). No one can say of other members of the body, “I have no need of thee” (1 Cor 12:21). God has placed all believers “in the body as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). That placement is in order that mutual edification may take place. Furthermore, “the body” is certainly not limited to a specific congregation, or even to those who remain alive in the world.

It is possible to read the Scriptures with minimal benefit, simply because the mind is not exposed to the insights of other members of the body of Christ. Permit to cite a few examples.

- David, for example, was a man with understanding far beyond his peers. He had a working knowledge of the Law, and frequently asked the Lord for understanding (Psa 119:34,73, 125,144,169). Yet, he also had his own seer, or prophet. It is written, “For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying” (2 Sam 24:11). Note, God did not speak to David, but to David's “seer” – a name formerly applied to a prophet (1 Sam 9:9).

- The example of young Jesus who asked questions. Although He was the Son of God, yet, when young, He availed Himself of known teachers. “And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers” (Lk 2:46-47). We know that Jesus did not always have all knowledge and understanding, for as He grew, He is said to have increased in wisdom (Lk 2:52).

- Take the proclamation of the mystery, kept secret from the beginning of the world. Although it was hidden in the text of Moses and the prophets, God did not reveal it to everyone. He made it known to Paul, and Paul proclaimed it to the people. “If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:5). Paul correlated this teaching with Scripture, but apparently everyone could not do this.

A Modern Circumstance

In our times there is a circumstance similar to that of Apollos. In his case, he had been subjected to the teaching of those with limited understanding. The effects of that lingered with him for some time, until Aquila and Priscilla discerned the situation, and gave him the advantage of more advanced understanding. I am persuaded there are great numbers of believers in our day who have also been limited by the understanding of those who have taught them. The impact of a great falling away cannot be understated. This can prove to be an excellent opportunity for those with understanding to bring desired advantages to hungry souls. It will require, however, that they be discerning, and themselves free from sectarian tendencies. There is a great need for insightful proclamation.

SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

“ 31b And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.” Other versions read, “he asked ,” NKJV “ invited ,” NASB “ besought ,” ASV “he made ,” BBE “ begged ,” DARBY “ requested ,” MRD “ urged ,” NJB “ earnestly invited,” WEYMOUTH “ earnestly requested ,” AMPLIFIED “ called Philip near,” LITV and “asked.” MKJV

Here we behold the Lord working in the human heart. Here is a dignitary traveling on a desert road reading the Bible. A man appears out of nowhere, and asks him if he understands what he is reading. The man does not ask the eunuch what text he is reading, but gave him reason to believe he could assist him. Some men might have considered this to be a robber, or someone bent on doing mischief. But this is not the attitude of the eunuch.

The word “desired” is a strong one. Coming from the Greek word **Pareka,lese,n** (para-ka-le-sen), it has a lexical meaning of “to call to one’s side, call for, summon.” As used here it means “to beg, entreat, beseech,” THAYER “earnestly ask for, implore, beg,” FRIBERG “request, ask, appeal to,” UBS and “To ask for earnestly, to request, to plead for.” LOUW-NIDA

It is apparent that this man would not take “No” for an answer. His appetite had been whetted for the word of the Lord, and he seized upon the opportunity to know it more fully.

- Here is an excellent example of seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33).
- It also lives out hungering and thirsting after righteousness (Matt 5:6).
- There is also a sense in which this is calling upon the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21).
- This is how “the love of the truth” impacts upon the heart 2 Thess 2:10).

“The written Word stands immovable, the touchstone of truth, the standard of doctrine, the referee in doubt, the pattern and model, the crucible of error, the court of final appeal in all controversies of faith.” PULPIT COMMENTARY

This man not only confessed his ignorance, and his understanding of how to address it, but was eager to do something about it. Such a strong desire will be answered to his thorough satisfaction.

I know by experience how satisfying this response was to Philip. Having himself seen the truth, his love for it was accompanied by a burning desire to speak it. That is how “the spirit of faith” affects a person (2 Cor 4:13). Young Elihu was not the last man who determined, “I will speak, that I may be refreshed” (Job 32:20).

We have no lived in this area for fifteen years (1992-2007). During that time there have been two things that have greatly impacted my life. First, the disappointment at the relative rarity of the love of the truth in this area, coupled with a fervent pressing toward the mark. During our first years here, this condition proved to be very disconcerting. However, it was wonderfully offset by the presence of a very commendable spirit in these meetings, and the spiritual quality of the people who attend them. In fact, it is of a caliber that I have rarely witnessed anywhere else.

Much of my own advance in the faith is owing to the presence of such souls. I know they are of great price in the heavenly realms, and that a book of remembrance has no doubt been written of these very gatherings. They have also been a source of strength to many people who are not able to attend them.

CONCLUSION

Thus far in the book of Acts great things have been done. The day of Pentecost, the preaching in Solomon’s porch, and the marvelous prayer of the brethren when they were threatened. There have been remarkable preaching and defenses of the faith before the Jewish leaders, and a host of signs and wonders as well. Stephen has confounded those who refused to believe on Jesus, and has nobly laid down His life for the sake of Christ, bearing a strong testimony in the doing of it. When the church was scattered by persecution, it did not faint, but the disciples went everywhere preaching the Word. Philip took up the cause following the death of Stephen, and powerfully preached Christ in the

city of Samaria, working signs and wonders among them as well. The entire city believed, and was freed from influence of Simon the Sorcerer. Now, a dignitary from Ethiopia is going to be subjected to the preaching of the Gospel, and will carry the truth into that barren region. All of this is the marvelous working of the Lord.

The particular thing to be seen here is that all of this was done by grace through faith. Those involved in the work were not recognized leaders, and there were no strategy meetings to orchestrate the events that took place. This was simply God working among a people whose faith was unqualifiedly in Him.

This is the newness of life being displayed before us. It is the New Covenant in operation, and the Holy Spirit working in an environment where He is neither quenched nor grieved. The truth has sway because of the purity and fervency of the preaching. This is not a first century phenomenon but Jesus at work, building His church, sending out preachers, confronting unbelief, and giving repentance and forgiveness of sins.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #40

THE CONVERSION OF THE EUNUCH

“ 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth. 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus. 36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea. ” (Acts 7:32-40)

INTRODUCTION

Having been directed by a holy angel to go to a certain place, and then by the Holy Spirit to join himself to a certain chariot, Philip now finds himself sitting in that chariot with a dignitary from Ethiopia who is reading the Scriptures. The direction, though given supernaturally, and outside of the realm of nature, was nevertheless discerned and effective. There is something to be seen here That is of especial value. In Christ Jesus, we not only are reconciled to God, we are placed in the heavenly places with Christ Jesus (Eph 2:6). There, we are brought to a place where

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- **WHERE THE EUNUCH WAS READING (8:32-33)**
- **WHO IS ISAIAH SPEAKING ABOUT (8:34)**
- **HE PREACHED UNTO HIM JESUS (8:35)**
- **WHAT DOTH HINDER ME? (8:36)**
- **IF THOU BELIEVEST (8:37a)**
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- **HE BAPTIZED HIM (8:38)**
- **HE WENT ON HIS WAY REJOICING (8:39)**
- **PHILIP WAS FOUND IN AZOTUS (8:40)**
- **CONCLUSION**

we are more aware of the things of God, and of the Lord Himself. Having been cleansed from sin, and with our conscience purged from dead works, the reluctance that sometimes characterized those of earlier times is not found. A few examples of previous responses of holy men will suffice to confirm this point.

- **MOSES.** When Moses was called of God, he responded, “And Moses said unto the LORD, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue . . . O Lord, please send someone else to do it NIV ” (Ex 4:10).

- **JEREMIAH.** When the Lord called Jeremiah to be a prophet unto the nations, he responded, “Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child” (Jer 1:6).

- **SOLOMON.** Following David’s death, when Solomon took the office of king, he said to the Lord, “And now, O LORD my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in” (1 Kgs 3:7).

- **ISAIAH.** In a vision, when Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up, he responded, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5).

I am careful not to stand in criticism of these men of God, and that is not the point of making this observation. It is rather to confirm the superiority of the New Covenant and its impact upon the people. Previous saints had not yet received the promise that is fulfilled only in Christ – even though they “died in faith.” As it is written, “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb 11:13), And again, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise : God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect ” (Heb 11:39-40).

Those who sit in judgment on these saints of old do well to remember the spiritually primitive nature of the times in which they lived. Their seeming slowness was not owing to any dulness of hearing or hardness of heart. It was not because they did not have faith in God, or desire to be in His presence. It was rather the effects of a defiled conscience, which the blood of bulls and goats could not purge (Heb 10:1-4). The sin of the world had not yet been taken away, and the reconciliation of men to God had not yet been effected. It simply was not possible for them to respond to God as though all of those blessed New Covenant realities had taken place. They were hindered because the time of liberty had not yet come. However, it is here now!

A lot of the religion of our time dignifies similar responses to the Lord today, as though the conditions that existed during the time of the patriarchs still prevailed. But they do not. This is the day when a removal of sin and consequent reconciliation to God has taken place. Furthermore, God has been satisfied with what has been accomplished, and has consequently exalted His Son to the place of absolute and total preeminence. The Son is now effectively bringing many sons to glory, and all of the promised benefits of the New Covenant are in place.

THE MARVEL OF IT ALL

If Philip had told anyone but believers how his connection with the Ethiopian eunuch had come to pass, they probably would not have believed him. Even in our time, there are some who pay little attention to the glorious manner in which Philip was directed, and how quickly he assessed and responded to that direction. The years of the reign of the great harlot (Rev 17:1,15,16; 19:2) have served to dull the minds of men to the “wonderful works of God.” Earlier in the history of the world, there was a keen awareness of a dimension of working that extended outside the confines of nature. Even the heathen were aware of these such transcendent occurrences, as confirmed in Pharaoh (Ex 8:8), the inhabitants of Jericho (Josh 2:10-11), Balak (Num 22:4-6), the sailors on Jonah’s vessel (Jonah 1:10-11), and others. When Gideon encountered a holy angel who was calling him to a work, the thought did not occur to him that it was no longer possible for miracles to be wrought. Instead, he inquired concerning the absence of them (Judges 6:13). When Zacharias came out of the Temple after confronting an angel, the people “perceived that he had seen a vision” (Lk 1:21). Also, when Jesus walked among men, there was a sense of powers outside the boundary of nature. People knew about demons (Lk 9:39; John 10:21). When the disciples saw Jesus walking on the water, they thought it was a spirit (Matt 14:26).

This is by no means intended to encourage a quest for the miraculous. I am rather pointing out that the conception men have of God and the unseen realm has been significantly altered by the promotion of human wisdom. In such a context, there is a natural tendency to underplay the necessity and power of faith. There is also a corresponding disposition to accent the wisdom and works of men. In my judgment, there is far more danger in these earthy views than men dare to imagine. They tend to form a spiritual crust over the hearts of men, confine their minds to the domain of nature, and render them obtuse concerning the things of God.

My point here is that such an environment was not present during the time of our text. It remained for men to build such an environ with the blocks of human wisdom and hardness of heart toward the Lord. All of this means that if we read the book of Acts with a mind to justify a religious institution of support a theological position, we are off on the wrong foot. To put it more succinctly, we are pointed in the wrong direction, and cannot possibly arrive at a proper conclusion.

SOMETHING TO NOTE

Keep in mind, in the account of Philip we are not speaking of an Apostle, or even one of the “elders” with whom they frequently met (Acts 15:2,4,6; 15:22,23; 16:4). He did not have the powers of an apostle, as confirmed in the sending of Peter and John to pray that the Samaritans might receive the Holy Spirit. Yet, this man was dispatched by an angel from God, and directed by the Holy Spirit. The

Lord did not lead him to remain with Peter and John, who were of higher rank in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28). Philip had advanced in the Lord and, like Timothy, could be trusted to work independently. He did not do the work of an apostle, but the work of an evangelist. In fact, he is later referred to as “Philip the evangelist” (Acts 21:8). His work complemented that of the apostles, and did not conflict with it. That, of course, is the manner of valid Kingdom endeavors. It is also what makes division and sectarianism wrong. When the things that professing Christ’s do cause conflict among those who are living by faith, they cannot be right.

PHILIP WILL TAKE CHARGE

Now, Philip will take charge of the situation, assuming the leadership of this man of great authority. Suddenly, and without any objection on his part, this man is the student and Philip is the teacher; he is the learned and Philip is the instructor. Philip, who, so far as the record is concerned, had never instructed a man of this intellectual and social caliber, has no difficulty with the task. He will know how to answer the eunuch’s questions, and what to do when the time comes that requires a decision on his part. All of this is a wonderful example of the newness of life being lived out in a production manner. It is a glimpse of the impact faith has upon the one possessing it, and the wisdom that accompanies it.

WHERE THE EUNUCH WAS READING

“ 8:32 The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33 In his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.”

Here we have a wonderful example of God working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. In this case, the working is taking place before the person is baptized into Christ. As with Cornelius, who will surface later, this man was a worshiper of God, and a devout man. His actions testify to his quest for the Lord and his desire to please Him. Jude refers to this kind of Divine activity as individuals being “kept for Jesus Christ,” NASB or “preserved in Jesus Christ, and called” (Jude 1:1). In nature, there is life prior to birth – so much so that the unborn are referred to as persons (Gen 25:23; Rom 9:11-13; Jer 1:5; Lk 1:44; Gal 1:15). Even so, in the Spirit there is also life prior to being born again. It is nature, it is preliminary life, and is not intended to be an end of itself. However, it is very real, and is part of the process of being saved. From one point of view, it is evidenced in the individual being drawn to Jesus (John 6:44). From another point of view, it is the presence of faith, the expression of repentance, and the making of confession. On the day of Pentecost it was confirmed when men called upon the name of the Lord, asking what they should do (Acts 2:37). In Cornelius, it was his prayers being heard and his alms being recognized in heaven (Acts 10:4). In our text, it is a man going to Jerusalem to worship, then devoting himself to reading the Scriptures and seeking to understand them. The orchestration of the events is so precise, that the place in Scripture in which the man is reading is most exact.

THE PLACE OF THE SCRIPTURE

“The place of the scripture which he read was this . . .” Other versions read, “the passage of Scripture,” NASB “the place in the book,” BBE “the portion,” CJB and “the contents of the writing.” YLT

Just as in the Tabernacle and Temple, there are places in Scripture that are more sacred than others. This does not mean they are less inspired, or any less the Word of God – any more than the outer court and holy place were not a very real part of the Tabernacle and the Temple. However, the Holy of Holies was the most important. This was not owing to the way it was built, or the materials used to construct that places or the articles of furniture in them. Rather, it was because the Most Holy Place had more directly to do with the Lord Himself. His presence was more immediate there, and there is

where He communed with the ordained representatives from “between the cherubim” that were part of the Mercy Seat, situated on top of the ark of the covenant (Ex 25:22).

The Greek word translated “place” is **perioch** . (peri-ox-ay). Its lexical meaning is, “an encompassing, that which is contained,” THAYER and “passage or portion, content or wording.” FRIBERG

The Scriptures are an expressed intellectual structure in which the truth is housed – a treasure house for the heart and mind. There are various rooms in this house that contain bodies of Divine rationale. Technically, the Scriptures, or inspired writings, are a container in which truth is deposited. Peter referred to them in this manner when he wrote, “Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded” (1 Pet 2:6). The Greek word translated “contained” is **perie,cei** (peri-ox-ei), the verb form of the very word used in this text (“place”). The use of this word confirms the importance of the Scriptures themselves – the writings. Loose translations that reflect an inordinate attempt to accommodate a given generation are not always good. It is possible for a language to lack a words that precisely parallel the Scriptural text.

Transliteration

This is what gave rise to the transliteration of Scriptural words that “contained” more than another language was capable of containing. In transliteration, each letter of the original language is translated into a corresponding English letter. This is done because there is not a parallel English word that conveys the idea of the original language. Here is a sampling of transliterated Bible words.

GREEK ENGLISH

Allhlou,i?a Allelujah

bapti,zw Baptize

cristou/ Christ

Satana/ Satan

a;ggeloj Angel

diakonw Deacon

avpo,stolj Apostle

evxorkistw/n Exorcist

Containers of Scripture

Extending the thought of Scripture being a container, some of these containers pertain to right and wrong, as defined by the Divine nature , for “the law” contains “the form of knowledge and of the truth” (Rom 2:20). While this law was the framework of the First Covenant, made with Israel, it is not the framework of Scripture itself. This has to do with the duty of man, and, as such, is not the heart and soul of Scripture. There is also a room, so to speak, that deals with domestic life and interpersonal relationships . Expressions of this kind are found in the Law, Proverbs, the Prophets, and within the apostolic writings. There is also a room that might be defined as History . This relates the working of God among the sons of men. Of particular note is His dealings with Israel, as noted in the Law and the Prophets, and the church, as noted in Acts and portions of the Epistles and the Revelation.

THE HEART OF SCRIPTURE

However, the largest, and key, room of Scripture concerns the great salvation of God, as revealed in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. As it is written, “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). These sections are precisely expressed in the various prophecies relating to the Messiah, the record of His life and words when He walked among men, and the expositions of the Gospel as related in the apostles’ doctrine. This room is the heartbeat of Scripture. Life is initiated and sustained from this room. Apart from the things it contains spiritual growth is not possible. In the grand work of conforming people to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), participating in the Divine nature (2 Cor 3:18), and being changed “from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18), the minds of men must be subjected to Scriptures that focus upon the Person, accomplishments, and ministry of Jesus Christ.

Those who preach through the Bible have done a good thing in acquainting people with the text of scripture. However, unless they have related the Scriptures to the Christ, they have brought no lasting value to the people. They have only given them an academic advantage, not a spiritual one. This is why Jesus said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life” (John 5:39-40).

There are still men who approach the Word of God like the Pharisees, not making an association of all Scripture with Jesus Christ. It is this required association that enables the Scriptures to make one “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15). Those who fail to make this association have the tendency to superimpose their own perceived agenda on the Scriptures. Furthermore, the Scriptures have been given to us in a form that makes them appear to justify preconceived notions of their emphasis. This is because the erroneous view of Scripture blocks out its real meaning, so that it cannot be seen by the reader. This is precisely why the Sadducees, thinking themselves to be experts in the text of scripture, were told by Jesus, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Mat 22:29). It is also why it is necessary for human understanding to be opened to the meaning of the Scriptures. Therefore it is said of Jesus, “Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

No understanding is valid that allows for Jesus to be upstaged, overshadowed, or relegated to a secondary position. This is why religious specialists who focus on particular people groups, unique human associations, or the moral obligations of men, invariably neglect Jesus. The people who follow them always have a small and undetailed view of the Christ. Their understanding of the salvation of God is never adequate. Whatever apparent good is realized from their efforts, it does not have to do with clarifying the nature and content of the Gospel. I am going to wax bold and say there are not exceptions to this rule. Even if a person fastens upon the church itself, and makes it his aim to purify it, restore it, or make it more effective, he will eventually end up diminishing the worth of the Son in the minds of the people.

The reason for this circumstance is obvious. God will not allow any person or group of persons to arrive at a valid view of the truth independently of His Son. Matters relating to morality are only as clear as one’s perception of Jesus. Confidence and assurance, so essential to the life of faith, cannot extend beyond the boundary of one’s understanding of Jesus. People who boast of being happy and confident in Jesus, yet who are fundamentally lacking in their understanding of Him, are not what they imagine themselves to be. They are like little children who run and play with glee, thinking all is well while storm clouds hang over their heads.

WHY IS ALL OF THIS NECESSARY

It might not be apparent why I have spent so much time on this subject. There is a reason for it. When Philip found the eunuch, he was feeding in the right room. He was reading from a proper “place,” of area in which truth was contained. For those who are expert in Scripture, knowing how to

handle it aright (2 Tim 2:15), it is possible to begin at any text and advance toward the Christ – for He is in every text. However, there are texts that are more easily seen as being focused upon Christ, and thus can be more readily expounded in relation to Him. This is the eunuch was not found reading from Proverbs or Ecclesiastes. The distance between the point of Scripture in which he was reading and the Lord Jesus Christ was shorter than it could have been from other texts.

It is not wise to attempt to formulate a static approach to the handling of Scripture, and that is not my intention. However, it is imperative to understand that a proper understanding of Scripture is directly related with its correlation to the Lord Jesus Christ and the reason for His being sent into the world, dying, rising from the dead, and returning to heaven. Where this correlation cannot be made, it is not possible to have a proper understanding of Scripture.

It is for this reason that the text that was being read by the eunuch was of preeminent importance. It was not dealing with the duties of men, but with the atoning death of the Lamb of God. It was not primarily a commentary on the wickedness of men – although that could certainly be seen in what is there declared. However, it was even more a commentary on both God and His Son – God for making such an investment, and the Son for carrying it out so willingly. Truth can be seen more precisely in the clear waters of Divinity. It cannot be so seen in the murky waters of humanity, whether in the area of duty or potential. How marvelously this is confirmed in this passage.

The text from which the eunuch was reading was Isaiah 53:7-8. This is a portion of a large section devoted to a prophecy of the coming Messiah. In the 52nd chapter, the Lord declared that His people would come to know Him, even though they would first be taken away and their enemies rule over them “Now therefore, what have I here, saith the LORD, that my people is taken away for nought? they that rule over them make them to howl, saith the LORD; and my name continually every day is blasphemed. Therefore my people shall know my name: therefore they shall know in that day that I am he that doth speak: behold, it is I” (Isa 52:5-6). The people are presented as being in exile, when a good word is sent to them by God Himself. “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!” (Isa 52:7). Those “good tidings” would prove to be the Gospel of Christ, as Romans 10:12-15 confirms. The glorious message would prove to be a uniting factor, bring the people to “see eye to eye” (Isa 52:8). That message would have directly to do with salvation – a salvation in which God would make Himself known: “The LORD hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God” (Isa 52:10). It would also have a compelling influence upon the people who received it, moving them to “touch no unclean thing,” and to keep themselves clean (Isa 52:11). The message would also be associated with deliverance, with the Lord going before the people, and coming after them as well (Isa 52:12).

Isaiah declares that all of this will be accomplished by a single Person, referred to as God’s “Servant.” Although He would be exceedingly wise, He would be rejected, and His appearance disfigured by His enemies. Notwithstanding His maltreatment, He would be finally exalted and extolled. “Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently, He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at Thee; His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men” (Isa 52:10-14). In His enthronement He would sprinkle “many nations,” raising up a saved people within them, and thereby bring glory to His name. His exaltation would be so thorough, that it would shut the mouths of kings when they eventually see Him as He is: “So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider” (Isa 52:15).

Now, this is the “place” in Scripture in which the eunuch was plowing, considering the Servant of whom Isaiah spoke. As our text opens, the man has progressed to the middle of the fifty-third chapter – a text that is opening up what was involved in the “visage” of God’s Servant being marred more

than any of the sons of men.

LED AS A SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER

“ . . . He was led as a sheep to the slaughter . . .” Other versions read, “to be put to death,” BBE “to be slaughtered,” CJB and “taken away to be killed.”

Although Himself prophesied to be “a leader and commander to the people,” the prelude to the accomplishment of redemption required Him to be “led” by His enemies. He was

“led as a sheep to the slaughter,” but unlike the unsuspecting sheep, Jesus knew what was happening. From one point of view, He knew His captors were going to have Him killed. From the higher point of view, He knew that this was the reason for which He came into

He did not defend Himself or answer the false charges that were leveled against Him. This was because He was fulfilling the will of His Father. From one point of view, that made all of the attending circumstances incidental.

the world – “to give His life, a ransom for many” (Matt 20:28). In the giving of His life, or laying it down (John 10:15,17), He submitted to His enemies – at least, that is the way it appeared. Actually, He was submitting to the will of God, which He agreed to fulfill before He came into the world (Heb 10:7-8). The fortieth Psalm, which is quoted in the ten chapter of Hebrews, says of the coming Messiah, “I delight to do Thy will, O My God” (Psa 40:8).

Thus the text says that Jesus was led “ AS a sheep to the slaughter.” That is, this is the way it appeared. In actuality, the “determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” was being worked out, and the people were carrying out what God’s “counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 2:23; 4:28). At this time, Jesus appeared helpless, but it was only because He humbled Himself, becoming “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:8). Although He was, in truth, “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev 5:5), as He was led away, He appeared as an innocent and unsuspecting lamb.

LIKE A LAMB DUMB BEFORE HIS SHEARER

“ . . . and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth . . .” Other versions read, “He made no sound,” BBE and “He did not say a word.” CEV

As a sheep remains docile and silent while its ,wool is sheared from it, so the Lord Jesus humbler submitted to His enemies, who attempted to remains His dignity, and deprive Him of all rights. Lest we forget what they did to Jesus, recall His shearing.

- When before the high priest, they spit in His face, pummeled Him with their fists, slapped Him, and challenged Him, “Prophecy unto us, Thou Christ, Who is he that smote Thee?” (Matt 26:67).
- The soldiers of the governor (Pilate) “stripped Him” of His own garment, and, in mockery, placed upon Him a scarlet robe” (Matt 27:28).
- They wove a crown of thorns, put it on His head, and a reed in His hand, bowing before Him and mockingly saying, “Hail, King of the Jews” (Matt 27:29).
- They spit on Him, taking a staff and beating Him on the head (Matt 27:30).

And what was the response of the Lord to all of this? When before the high priest, “Jesus held His peace ” (Matt 26:63). When before Pilate, “He answered him to never a word ; insomuch that the governor marveled greatly” (Mat 27:14). He did not defend Himself or answer the false charges that were leveled against Him. This was because He was fulfilling the will of His Father. From one point of view, that made all of the attending circumstances incidental. However, you may rest assured that

there is coming a day when those who treated Jesus in such a manner will give an account of themselves to God.

IN HIS HUMILIATION

“ 33 In His humiliation . . .” Other versions read, “Being of low degree,” BBE “in humility,” DOUAY “when He humbled Himself,” GWN “He was humiliated,” NLT “because of His humbleness,” TNT “He was shamed,” IE and “He was treated like a nobody.” CEV

According to appearance, it looked as though men were humiliating Jesus. However, in actuality, He was humbling Himself (Phil 2:8). He did not go through the series of events leading to and consummating in His death with bitterness of heart, or a vindictive spirit. Instead, He set His face toward the joy that was set before Him. As it is written, “who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2). The shame of Hebrews twelve is the humiliation of Acts 8:33.

In Christ’s “humiliation” every advantage was taken away from Him. There was nor justice given to Him by men – no fairness, equity, legal propriety. In His trial by the Jewish council, false witnesses presented the charges for which He was tried

The precise words of our text – “in His humiliation” – are not found in the Hebrews version of Isaiah 53:7-8. However, the English translation of Septuagint Version reads, “in His humiliation His judgment was taken away.” It is apparent, therefore, that the eunuch was reading from the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Hebrews Scriptures read, “He was taken from prison” (Isa 53:8). Other English versions read, “by oppression,” NIV “by a perversion,” NRSV “they took away from Him help,” BBE “forcibly, after sentence, He was taken,” NJB and “by restraint.” YLT

This is a commentary on the occasion when the Jews finished their sentence upon Jesus, and led Him away bound, to Pilate the Governor. Thus it is written, “And when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor” (Matt 27:2). They led Him “from prison” in the sense of Him being bound and confined to the palace of Caiaphas until led to Pilate.

En route to the cross, there are three occasions in which Jesus was “led.”

- **WHEN ARRESTED IN THE GARDEN.** “And they that had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high priest, where the scribes and the elders were assembled” (Matt 26:57).

- **WHEN TAKEN FROM CAIAPHAS TO PILATE.** “And when they had bound Him, they led Him away, and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor” (Matt 27:2).

- **WHEN TAKEN TO BE CRUCIFIED.** “And after that they had mocked Him, they took the robe off from Him, and put His own raiment on Him, and led Him away to crucify Him” (Matt 27:31).

In all of this, the word “humiliation” proves to be a most adequate description – and Jesus voluntarily submitted to it all. As used in this text, the meaning of “humiliation” is, “spiritual abasement,” THAYER “the experience of being abased,” FRIBERG “low condition,” LEH and “humble station.” GINGRICH

HIS JUDGMENT WAS TAKEN AWAY

“ . . . His judgment was taken away . . .” Other versions read, “His justice was taken away,” NKJV “He was deprived of justice,” NIV “justice was denied Him,” NIV “ His cause was not given a hearing,” BBE and “and did not have a fair trial.” CEV

In Christ's "humiliation" every advantage was taken away from Him. There was nor justice given to Him by men – no fairness, equity, legal propriety. In His trial by the Jewish council, false witnesses presented the charges for which He was tried (Matt 26:60). Even Pilate, himself anything but a paragon of virtue, "knew that for envy they had delivered Him" (Matt 27:18).

When the appointed time arrived – "the hour" (Matt 26:45; Mk 14:35,41; John 17:1) – there was absolutely no justice extended to Jesus. All judicature was "taken away."

So far as the record is concerned, no one rose in His defense at this time. Earlier, shortly after Jesus had fed the five thousand, Nicodemus rose to His defense before the Pharisees who were plotting against Christ (John 7:50-51). But his voice was not heard after Jesus was arrested in the garden. During the time of Isaiah, Israel was rebuked for the absence of judgment in the land (Isa 59:8,15). But never was judgment so lacking as when they were granted license from God Almighty to judge the Son of man!

If there was any doubt about what sin had done to the human race, it was abundantly demonstrated in the trial of the Lord Jesus. Here was the chosen race, which had been given a superior Law (Deut. 4:8), and yet when they sat in judgment upon the Christ of God, all sound judgment was abandoned. This highlighted the depravity of the fallen human nature. And the injustice of it all did not stop with the Jews, but extended into Gentile domain, and included the political world as well. The Roman Empire boasted of its legal system, and yet that very system was employed to condemn Jesus. The early church summarized it well in their prayer to God when they were threatened by the Jewish council. "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together" (Acts 4:26-27).

WHO SHALL DECLARE HIS GENERATION

" . . . and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth." Other versions read, "who shall relate His generation," NASB "who can speak of His descendants," NIV "who can describe His generation," NRSV "who has knowledge of His family," BBE "who will tell of his posterity," NAB "there will be no story about his descendants," IE

Some of the versions completely miss the point in this text – namely God's Word, GWN The Living Bible, LIVING and The Amplified Bible. AMPLIFIED They render the verse as follows: "who from His generation will talk about His life," GWN "and who can express the wickedness of the people of His generation?" LIVING and "Who can describe or relate in full the wickedness of His contemporaries (generation)?" AMPLIFIED The error of these liberal translations – and it is serious – is that they describe the wicked people of that age as Christ's generation. Nothing could be further from the truth. The point of the text is that Jesus had no fleshly generation.

Throughout revealed history, the generations of people were declared. We read of "the generations of Adam" (Gen 5:1), "the generations of Noah" (Gen 6:9), "the generations of the sons of Noah" (Gen 10:1), and "the generations of Terah" (Gen 11:27). There are also "the generations of" Abraham (Gen 17:9), Ishmael (Gen 25:12), Isaac (Gen 25:19), Esau (Gen 36:1), Jacob (Gen 37:1), and Aaron and Moses (Num 3:1).

The phrase "the children of . . ." – which is generational language – is mentioned 1,355 times in Scripture. The phrase "the children of Israel" accounts for 635 of those occurrences, which accents the fact that they descended from Jacob. Genealogies were a large part of Jewish history (1 Chron 4:33; 5:1; 5:7; 7:9,40; 9:22; 2 Chron 31:16; ,17,18; Ezra 2:62; ; 8:1,3; Neh 7:5,64). Priests were reckoned by their genealogy (2 Chron 31:17). The various ministers of the Temple were also reckoned by genealogy (1 Chron 9:22). Christ's entrance into the world was according to a very strict

genealogy. In fact, the Spirit makes a special point of this in both Matthew (Matt 1:1-17) and Luke (Lk 3:23-38).

Yet, when it came to Jesus Himself, He had no fleshly offspring. The bloodline ended with Him. Yet, He did have a generation – but it was not after the Adamic order. In fact, Jesus was the “Last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45). In a very real sense, in Him, the race of Adam was terminated. That is why Jesus is also called “the Second Man” (1 Cor 15:47). That is, in Jesus a new race was started that would be called “the sons of God” (1 John 3:1). All of these would be a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10), “Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23). This is the generation of Jesus, and one of His names is “Everlasting Father” (Isa 9:6). From another point of view, these are “the children” the Father has given to Him (Heb 2:13).

A POINT TO BE CLARIFIED

Many believers are being addressed and treated without regard to them being of a different generation – the generation of Jesus. This is a very real generation! Rather than being seen in relation to Christ, they are being seen as primarily to Adam. When men speak to the children of God, this is a fundamentally flawed approach, and no lasting good can come from it.

Right here we depart from conventional Christianity. Much of what flies under that banner approaches life as though those in Christ were “only human.” The strengths and failings of professing Christians are approached as though they were nothing more than cultured or neglected human traits. But this is not at all the case. There is a race of people who have been “begotten of God,” and they are not of the Adamic order. When it comes to acceptance with God, Adam and all of his progeny have been written off. That is precisely why men “must be born again” (John 3:7). It is why there is such a thing as “the washing of regeneration” (Tit 3:5), the “new creature” (2 Cor 5:17), and “the new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). It is why believers are referred to as “strangers and pilgrims” in the world (1 Pet 2:11), and those who have been “delivered from this present evil world” Gal 1:4). It is why Jesus said His disciples were “not of the world” (John 15:19; 17:14,16). In Christ they are of another family (Eph 3:15), whose primary citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20-21).

It is a matter of deep concern to me that so much preaching, teaching, and religious activity appears to ignore this circumstance – the circumstance of the new creation. The preponderance of preaching and teaching appears to what men should do, or possibly can do. I understand that men tend to gravitate to the view that the Scriptures are primarily a guideline for conduct. Human conduct is, indeed, addressed in Scripture, and without any compromise whatsoever. However, that is not the thrust of Scripture. “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy,” not the manner in which men are to live (Rev 19:10). The fundamental testimony of Scripture relates to Jesus, not to mankind (John 5:39). Acquaintance with Deity is the main point, not familiarity with duty. Of course, that is expressly stated in First John 5:20: “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” Seeing this, Paul articulated the aim of His life – which was not to know what he was to do, but the One for whom He would do all things: “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings . . .” (Phil 3:10).

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generation! Rather than being seen in relation to Christ, they are being seen as primarily to Adam. When men speak to the children of God, this is a fundamentally flawed approach, and no lasting good can come from it.

Preaching to Produce Responses

There is a philosophy of preaching that I once embraced. It is this: that we preach to produce a response. This objective is stated in a number of ways: to win souls, to save souls, to bring people to Christ, etc. It is certainly not that this is an unlawful aim, and therefore there must be taken in expressing personal views on the subject. The aim of preaching is to make the Son of God known, and to announce that Divine provisions have been made for the human dilemma of sin. When the Gospel is preached, it is accompanied with Divine power – power that includes convicting men of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). It also makes known the wrath of God against all unrighteousness, and the righteousness of God that is given to men through Jesus Christ by faith (Rom 1:16-18).

The message itself is calculated to produce a response in men. It does not need assistance from men. This is the precise point Paul was making when he declared, “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor 1:17). He certainly did not mean that baptism was not necessary, or that it was a kind of option available to those who desired it. Nor, indeed, was he suggesting that baptism was unrelated to salvation. Paul himself related baptism to salvation in a most extensive manner (Rom 6:1-23; Col 2:11-15). Those who responded to his message were, in fact, baptized (Acts 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:5). But it was primarily the message of the Gospel itself that produced that response. The message of the Gospel, when believed, will move men to inquire what they ought to do (Acts 2:37).

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THE RELEVANCY OF THIS

The relevancy of these remarks will be confirmed in the text before us. Philip will preach Christ (the sum and substance of the Gospel) to this man, and a God-honoring response will be produced by the Spirit. The message itself will illicit a that response, thus confirming that it is, in fact, “the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

WHO IS ISAIAH SPEAKING ABOUT?

“ 34 And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?”

The eunuch at once sees Philip as a man of spiritual understanding – a man that can clarify the Scriptures.

THE EUNUCH ANSWERED PHILIP

“And the eunuch answered Philip . . .” Other versions read, “the eunuch asked Philip,” NIV “the eunuch said to Philip,” RSV “The eunuch replied to Philip,” CSB “the eunuch addressed Philip,” NJB “ inquired the eunuch,” WEYMOUTH and “The eunuch turned to Philip and said .” PHILLIPS

Even though there is no record of Philip saying something after he had entered the chariot, the text says the eunuch “answered Philip.” The word “answered” means “to respond to something that has been said or done.” THAYER In this case, the only thing Philip had said was, “Understandest thou what thou readest?” (8:30). Now he had entered into the chariot, and is apparently seated by the

eunuch. By saying the eunuch “answered,” two things are meant. First, he was continuing to respond to Philip’s question. Secondly, now he was responding to Philip’s presence.

The Manner of the Kingdom

In this text, we are seeing the manner of the Kingdom lived out. When the truth is brought within range of the individual, it is that person’s responsibility to pursue it. When knowledge of the wisdom of Solomon came to the attention of the Queen of Sheba, she went to him, and did not call for him to come to her (1 Kgs 10:1-10). Jesus drew the attention of the people to her action, saying that the response of the people should be even more strong to Him (Matt 12:42).

If John the Baptist was preaching in the vicinity, it is the duty to go to him – which they did (Matt 3:5; Mk 1:5). When Jesus came preaching, the people came to Him (Matt 4:25; 8:1; 12:15; 13:2; 15:30; 19:2; Mk 6:33; 9:25; Lk 4:42; 5:1,15; 6:17; 9:37; 14:25; 21:38; John 6:24; 8:2). This does not mean that Jesus never went to the people. He did go to the helpless Gadarene demoniac (Mk 5:1-2), the poor widow of Nain who had lost her son (Lk 7:11-14), and the Syrophenician woman whose daughter was vexed with a demon (Mk 7:24-26). But most of the time, the people came to Him. They came to Him in the Temple (Matt 21:14; Lk 21:38), the mountain (Matt 15:29-30), the desert (Mk 1:45; Lk 4:42), in the plain (Lk 6:17) and the seashore (Matt 13:1-2; Mk 2:13). He came within their reach, being made accessible to them. Those who were wise then availed themselves of His presence.

This is the principle involved in the saying, “Seek ye the LORD while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near” (Isa 55:6). It is not that the LORD has what might be likened to office hours. Rather, it is that when He “visits” the people, they are to take advantage of the opportunity that has been afforded to them. When Jesus entered the world, it is said that He “visited and redeemed His people” (Lk 1:68), and that “the Dayspring from on high hath visited us” (Lk 1:78). Those who heard Jesus with some degree of discernment responded, “God hath visited His people” (Lk 7:16). At that time, if you lived in Syria (a region in Asia), it was your responsibility to go where Jesus was – and that is precisely what they did (Matt 4:24). The ten-city complex called Decapolis was in Syria, and people from that region came to Jesus (Matt 4:25).

Jesus did send His disciples to preach the Gospel to every creature. The record of their going, however, confirms that it involved the people coming to where they were.

I do not know that there are words precise enough to state the seriousness of people not availing themselves of the truth when it is made available to them. Who is able to adequately assess the opportunities to know the truth that have been vouchsafed to men – even men in this very area. Jesus has given us to understand that time will be spent in the day of judgment pointing out squandered opportunities, and the penalties for ignoring them (Matt 12:41-42). For that matter, the unparalleled judgment against Jerusalem that took place in 70 A.D. was, Jesus said, “because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation” (Lk 19:44).

OH WHOM SPEAKETH THE PROPHET?

“ . . . and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man?” Other versions read, “ Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” NIV “ Here's my question to you- is the prophet talking about himself or someone else?” CJB and “I beg of you .” AMPLIFIED

ON THE MARTYRDOM OF ISAIAH

It is held traditionally that Isaiah suffered martyrdom under the wicked Manasseh, by being sawn in two under a memorable tree long said to have stood in the vicinity of Jerusalem (*Gemara, Jeban. 4, 13; compare Sanhedr. f. 103 b, and the Targumites, in Assemani, Catalog. Bibl. 'Vat. 1, 452; Trypho,*

p. 349; Jerome, in Jes. 57; Origen, in Psalm. 27 in Matthew 23; Tertullian, Patient. 14; Augustine, Civ. Dei, 18, 24; Chronic. Pasch. p. 155). The traditional spot of the martyrdom is a very old mulberry-tree which stands near the Pool of Siloam, on the slopes of Ophel, below the south-east wall of Jerusalem. A similar account of his death is contained in the Ascension of the Prophet Isaiah, an apocryphal work, the Greek original of which was known to the early Church (*Epiphan. licer. 40, 2; Jerome, in les. 44, 4, p. 761, etc.*), and of which only recently an Ethiopia version has been found and translated by Dr. Laurence, Oxford, 1819 (*see Nitzsch, in the Studien und Krit. 1830, 2, 209; Engelhardt, Kirchengesch. Abhandl. 207 sq.*). The same fate of Isaiah appears to be alluded to by Josephus (*Ant. 10:3, 1*). EXCERPT FROM McCLINTOK and STRONG'S

Keep in mind, the eunuch's mind has been stirred by statements made concerning the Lord's "Servant." He has not been reading a record of the Ten Commandments, of the details of what was required in keeping the various feast days. He has been digging in a fertile field, and has uncovered a treasure, although he does not yet know the greatness of its value. Nevertheless, he seems to sense that more is here than has met his eye.

Although an obviously intelligent man, the eunuch had not been able to determine from the statement of its context whether the prophet Isaiah was speaking of himself or some other man. Some could have supposed Isaiah was speaking of himself, for he suffered significantly at the hands of Manasseh, as is recorded in uninspired history.

I do not doubt that this man, being a proselyte, was familiar with the traditions of the Jews concerning Isaiah. From a purely academic point of view, they had more of an interest in the Scriptures and various writings related to them, that is common in our society. Of course, they had been a specially cultured society, deliberately associated with words and manners that were God-centered in nature. It is therefore inconceivable that this man could have been a proselyte, and yet unfamiliar with the records that were of value to the Jews.

This is something worthy of consideration, for a departure from the truth has occurred in our time that has stooped beneath the elementary status of those under the Old Covenant. Today it is not at all unusual to find a professing Christian who lacks even a very elementary understanding of the Word of God and the observations that insightful men have made concerning it. People can be affiliated with the church for years, and yet remain deplorably infantile in their understanding. Intellectually transplanting out situation into the time of our text, the eunuch would not have been aware that Jerusalem was city associated with God, or that the book of Isaiah even existed. Further, it would be highly unlikely that there be a deacon available who was obviously conversant with the Scriptures and competently deliver an understanding of them.

DISCONTENT WITH IGNORANCE

Here was a man that was discontent with being ignorant about Scripture. He had done what he could to obtain an understanding – going to Jerusalem to worship, reading the Scripture, and perhaps in other ways seeking an understanding. He had not concluded that the text was simply beyond him, but was pressing to obtain an understanding of it. Here is an example of a man that was seeking, and He will "find," just as Jesus said. In fulfillment of the promise of Jesus, he will ask, and will receive (Matt 7:7-8).

Unless Jesus was not telling the truth, those who remain in a state of perpetual ignorance, even though they have access to the Scriptures, have not sought. That is why they have not found, They have not asked, and that is the reason they have not received. The Good Shepherd will not allow a seeker to ultimately fail to find. In the text before us, somewhere between Jerusalem and Gaza, a man that was earnestly seeking found, and one that asked received. While engaged in a quest for an understanding, the Lord intervened in the situation, sending a member of the body of Christ to clarify the Word of God, and bring an understanding of Jesus.

HE PREACHED UNTO HIM JESUS

“ 35 Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.”

Philip had apparently not taken a course on soul-winning, or attended a local workshop on personal evangelism. The approach he took could not possibly be taught. He did not subject this man to a system or plan, but adapted himself to the circumstance confronting him. That is an approach that cannot be learned by rote, or fulfilled by following a procedural manual.

HE BEGAN AT THE SAME SCRIPTURE

“Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture . . .” Other versions read, “beginning from this scripture,” NASB “began with this very passage,” NIV “starting with this scripture,” NRSV “commencing with that same portion of Scripture,” WEYMOUTH and “using this scripture as a starting point.” PHILLIPS

Oh, the blessedness of being filled with “wisdom and spiritual understanding.” It is no wonder that Paul prayed for this blessing to be realized by all believers (Col 1:9-11). Attesting to the fact that the testimony of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy (Rev 19:10), and that the Scriptures fundamentally testify of Jesus (John 5:39), Philip begins the very text the eunuch has been reading. While I am sure the Holy Spirit was active in this matter, Philip has also familiarized himself with the text of Scripture. He apparently did not have to pray for direction at the time. He certainly did not have to ask this official to go to a text with which he was more familiar. Whatever one may think about Bible knowledge, or an understanding of Scripture, there is more to be seen that the facts that are declared therein. Factual knowledge is essential, to be sure, but it is a beginning, and not an end. A person will not be “taught of God” independently of a knowledge of the text of Scripture. That is why Peter wrote, “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet 2:1-2). The truth of God is, so to speak, encapsulated in Scripture. Thus Jesus said in His prayer to the Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

The Role of Scripture

I know that some with a cursory knowledge of the Lord point to the fact that Jesus is pointedly called “the Word of God” (Rev 19:13). He is thus referred to by some as “the Living Word” – even though that expression is found nowhere in any standard version of Scripture. It is not possible for a person to have a cogent and productive thought about Jesus apart from Scripture. Great care must be taken not to present Jesus as though that was not the case. When we talk about “fellowship” with Jesus (1 Cor 1:9), we are by no means suggesting that this is accomplished independently of the Word of God. When we refer to every man being taught by God (John 6:45), we do not suggest that this is realized without the Scriptures. The fact that there is such a thing as “the communion of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (2 Cor 13:14) does not mean that there is a valid spiritual experience that is not linked with the Word of God.

When Israel was faced with those who claimed to have appropriated knowledge from questionable resources, they were told to validate what they said by comparing it with the Scriptures. This Isaiah wrote, “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:19-20). While we may not be exposed to those who have familiar spirits, and wizards that peep and mutter, we do frequently hear citations of authorities extraneous to the Scriptures. It is not uncommon to hear the principles of psychology and sociology cited as though they carried all of the weight of Scripture. Who has not heard statements made upon the basis of statistics, which are compiled upon the basis of random sampling, telling us of how unlikely it is for people of a certain

age to learn, or change their views? And, how about those who spout concocted information about the basic emotional and intellectual makeup of men and women, trying to frame how we think of their capabilities, or accounting for their conduct? Oh, we still have those who “peep and mutter,” and we do well to go to the Law and the testimony of Scripture to validate what they say. If they are not speaking according to “this word,” it is because there is “no light in them.” Their self-acclaimed intellectual expertise is nothing more than pretension, and no thinking person should allow them to shape their thinking.

There Is A Direction In Scripture

There is an intention in Scripture – an objective, and a direction toward which all Scripture points. If this was not the case, Philip could not have started at the Scripture being read the eunuch, and proceed where he did.

It ought to also be noted that you cannot begin with something originated by men, and proceed to a Divine conclusion. It is not possible to begin with some world religion and end up at the feet of Jesus – much less with some “science falsely so called.” Jesus cannot be found in something unrelated to the Living God.

HE PREACHED UNTO HIM JESUS

“ . . . and preached unto him Jesus.” Other versions read, “ told him the good news about Jesus,” NIV “ proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus,” NRSV “ gave him the good news about Jesus,” BBE “ announced the glad tidings of Jesus,” DARBY “ began to preach to him concerning our Lord Jesus,” MRD “then used many others to tell him about Jesus,” LIVING and “he announced to him the glad tidings (Gospel) of Jesus and about Him.” AMPLIFIED

Philip took the text that was being read by the dignitary from Ethiopia and made a bee-line for Jesus! He “preached” Jesus. Although I have made a point of this before, it seems to me that it must be made again. Preaching is not instruction, but proclamation. It is the means by which God has chosen to save those who believe. As it is written, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching A NOUN, NOT A VERB to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21). There is a certain message that must be proclaimed if men are to be saved, and it centers in the person of Jesus. Men cannot be saved through a message that declares moral duty, or that promotes a religious institution. Philip will not preach the church at Jerusalem, or the conversion of the Samaritans. He will “preach” Jesus!

The word “preached” is translated from the Greek word **eu^hggeli^sato** (eu-ang-le-isa-to). The word has the following lexical meaning: “to bring good news, to announce glad tidings,” THAYER “to make known God’s message of salvation with authority and power,” FRIBERG “to communicate the good news concerning something,” LOUW-NIDA and “to bring or announce good news.” GINGRICH

When preaching, proclaiming, or reporting Christ, the Savior Himself is the subject being delineated. The objective of such preaching is to acquaint the hearer with the Lord Jesus Christ. That acquaintance is from the Divine perspective – the records God has given of His Son

In all of the world, the those in Christ Jesus are the only ones with a message of good news to proclaim. The word “news” speaks of a report of things that have already taken place, or are about to take place. In this case, the “news” is good, or is “glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15). Philip’s preaching is not the proclamation of a system, a procedure, or an organization. It is not the declaration of what men can be, or what they can possess. It is not the announcement that all will be well with them if they do this or that. It is not relating probabilities that could take place if certain conditions are met. At its core, Philip’s preaching is a report of what has already been done, and of

its relevance to the human race.

In the case of Gospel preaching, it is in view of the message that is proclaimed that a call is made for a response from the hearers. The news itself becomes the incentive for that response. Therefore, when Jesus began to preach, it is written that He said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17). The good news was that the long awaited kingdom that God had promised was about to appear, and in view of that, men ought to repent. We may expect that when Philip preaches, a kind of pressure will be exerted on the eunuch to respond, for that is the nature of the Gospel.

Preaching Christ

What does it mean to “preach Christ” ? It should not surprise you that this kind of preaching is rather uncommon in our time. The matter of preaching Christ is mentioned six times in Scripture.

- “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).
- “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5).
- “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).
- “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23).
- “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will” (Phil 1:15).
- “The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds” (Phil 1:16).

When preaching, proclaiming, or reporting Christ, the Savior Himself is the subject being delineated. The objective of such preaching is to acquaint the hearer with the Lord Jesus Christ. That acquaintance is from the Divine perspective – the records God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). Strictly speaking, preaching Christ is not relating what He has done for the speaker – although there is certainly a place for declaring such a testimony. However, Jesus is not to be defined by the narrow perimeter of personal experience. What God has inspired to be said of Jesus is of the highest priority when it comes to declaring Jesus. In fact, that is all we know concerning Jesus. Our personal experience of Him is defined by what God has revealed concerning Him. Apart from that, we have no way of identifying any valid experience of Jesus. The book of Acts provides us several examples of what was proclaimed about Jesus.

- He was a Man approved of God by miracles, and signs, and wonders (2:21).
- He was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (2:23a; 13:29).
- The Jews, by wicked hands, crucified and slew Him (2:23b; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:28).
- God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death NASB (2:24,32; 10:40; 13:30,33,37; 17:31).
- He fulfilled David’s prophecy in Psalm 16:8-11, 49:15, and 86:13 and (2:25-26).
- He is the One God raised up to sit on David’s throne (2:29-30; 5:30).
- He has been exalted to the right hand of God (2:33a; 5:31a).
- He has received the promise of the Spirit from the Father, and has poured Him forth

upon men (2:33b).

- He will remain seated at the Father's right hand until His enemies are made His footstool, fulfilling the prophecy of Psalm 2:8-12 (2:34-35; 13:33).
- God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (2:36).
- God has glorified Jesus (3:13).
- Jesus is the Holy and Just One (3:14).
- He is the Prince of life (3:15).
- In His suffering, Jesus fulfilled the words of the prophets (3:18).
- Jesus will remain in heaven until the restoration of all things about which Jesus spoke through the holy prophets (3:21).
- Jesus is the Prophet foretold by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:15-18 (3:22).
- Whoever does not give heed to Jesus will be cut off from the people (3:23).
- All the prophets from Samuel foretold the days of Christ (3:24).
- God first sent Jesus to the Jews to turn them away from their iniquity (3:26).
- Jesus is the Stone rejected by the builders, who has become the Head of the corner of God's building, as prophesied in Psalm 118:22 (4:11).
- There is salvation only in Jesus, and in none other name (4:12).
- Jesus has been exalted to give repentance and remission of sins (5:31b).
- He is the Son of God (9:20).
- He is the very Christ, or One chosen and anointed by God (9:22; 18:5,28).
- Peace is by Jesus Christ (10:36a).
- He is Lord of all (10:36b).
- God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power (10:38a).
- Jesus went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (10:38b).
- God showed the risen Christ to chosen witnesses (10:40-41).
- He is ordained of God to be the Judge of the living and the dead (10:42).
- The Prophets give witness that whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins (10:43).
- Jesus was raised up of David's seed as a Savior (13:23).
- Following His resurrection He was seen many days of those who came to Galilee from Jerusalem (13:31).
- In Jesus God is fulfilling His promise to David concerning the giving of sure, or certain, mercy (13:34).
- Through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is preached (13:38).
- Those who believe on Him are justified from all things (13:39).
- Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved (15:11).
- Those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved (16:31).
- Christ needed to suffer and be raised from the dead the third day (17:3).

- The resurrection of the dead is associated with Jesus (17:18).
- God will judge the world in righteousness through Jesus (17:31).
- They testified of repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ (20:21).
- Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that it is more blessed to give than to receive (20:35).
- Jesus should suffer, be the first to rise from the dead, and should show light unto both the Jews and the Gentiles (26:23).

It is apparent that there is considerable to be declared about Jesus – and I have not even touched the epistles that contain an abundance of details not mentioned in the book of Acts. It seems to me that if men would occupy themselves with preaching Christ, it would significantly alter the thrust of their message. I do not doubt that, under such circumstances, many denominations and specialized groups would actually cease to exist, for they depend upon another kind of message.

PREACHING CHRIST GLORIFIES GOD, REVEALS HIS GREAT SALVATION, AND BRINGS THE SPIRIT.

WHAT DOTH HINDER ME?

“ 36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”

The details of what Philip preached are not provided – only that he “preached Christ” to the eunuch, beginning with the Isaiah text that he was reading. It is evident that Luke assumes his readers will know what he means, and what is involved in preaching Christ. Those are the kind of times that existed then, quite unlike the ones in which we live. Thoughtful believers were able to express things more precisely, and would give a more accurate appraisal of things occurring when Christ was preached. I do not want to linger long on this point, but feel as though it is necessary to make a few cursory observations.

Up to this time, the way of the chariot belonged to the eunuch himself. Now, however, it was the way of both the eunuch and Philip – “their way.” There was an accord between these men that developed as Philip preached Christ. Two that are agreed can ride together as well as walk together

Think, for example, of some of the phrases found in Acts. Luke apparently knew they would be discerned by Theophilus, for he did not accompany them with any extensive explanation. Yet, these phrases are not at all common in the church environment of our time. These are phrases used up to this point in this book.

- “They were pricked in their hearts” (2:37).
- “Gladly received his word” (2:41).
- “The apostles’ doctrine” (2:42).
- “Gladness and singleness of heart” (2:46).
- “The Lord added to the church” (2:47).
- “The God of our fathers hath glorified His Son Jesus” (3:13).
- “Faith in His name” (3:15).
- “Repent ye therefore, and be converted” (3:19).

- “God, having raised up Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (3:26).
- “Great grace was upon them all” (4:33).
- “Why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost?” (5:3).
- “Great fear came on all them that heard these things” (5:5).
- “Tempt the Spirit of the Lord” (5:9).
- “Great fear came upon all the church” (5:11).
- “We ought to obey God rather than men” (5:29).
- “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (5:31).
- “The Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey Him” (5:32).
- “Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the name of Jesus” (5:40).
- “Full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” (6:3).
- “Stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears” (7:51).
- “Had received the word of God” (8:14).

These expressions, and many others like them, are not at all common among twentieth century Christians. In some circles their use would have to be attended with an extensive explanation. They would even be found dividing the people. With the great falling away, coupled with the flood of new translations of Scripture, an institutional vocabulary has taken the place of Scriptural phraseology. There has been a dramatic shift of emphasis from Christ and the salvation He brings so that it is exceedingly rare for men to associate what is passed off as Christian with Jesus Christ, the great salvation of God, or the New Covenant that He has sanctified by which we “draw nigh unto God” (Heb 7:19).

For those whose minds have been shaped by Scripture, the incident that follows will make perfect sense – just as it doubtless did to Theophilus. To some whose minds have been shaped by a humanly devised systematic theology, unwarranted conclusions will be drawn.

Let Me Be Clear About This

Let me be clear about where I am going on this matter. Our text does not say that Philip preached how to get into Christ. It says he “preached Christ” unto the eunuch. I have already commented extensively on precisely what was said about Christ in the apostle’s doctrine, citing no less than forty-four things that was “preached” (Under HE PREACHED UNTO HIM JESUS/Preached Christ). It is that kind of preaching that provoked the response of this text.

THEIR WAY

“And as they went on their way . . .” Other versions read, “as they went down the road,” NKJV “as they were going along,” NRSV “while they were going on their way,” BBE “as they proceeded on the way,” MRD “as they rode along,” NLT and “as they continued along on the way.” AMPLIFIED

Up to this time, the way of the chariot belonged to the eunuch himself. Now, however, it was the way of both the eunuch and Philip – “their way.” There was an accord between these men that developed as Philip preached Christ. Two that are agreed can ride together as well as walk together (Amos 3:3). Where hearts are honest and good, the preaching of Christ has a uniting effect.

A CERTAIN WATER

“ . . . they came unto a certain water . . .” Other versions read, “some water,” NKJV “a small body of water,” LIVING and “a place where there was some water .” CEV

This is worthy of note, as the road on which they were traveling was called “the desert road” NIV (8:26). Ordinarily, you would not expect water to be found in such a place. As I understand the case, this was not an miraculous phenomenon, suddenly created at that time. It is well known that such a body of water was along this road, and, indeed, exists to this very day (2007). It was, however, unusual, with no other such body of water along the road. It has been confirmed that there is no large body of water in this vicinity, such as a river, brook, or large standing body of water like a lake.

A COMMENT ON THIS PHENOMENON

“When we were at Tell-el-Hasy, and saw the water standing along the bottom of the adjacent wady, we could not but remark the coincidence of several circumstances with the account of the eunuch’s baptism. This water is on the most direct road from Belt Fibrin (Eleutheroplis) to Gaza, on the most southern road from Jerusalem, and in the midst of a country now ‘desert,’ *i.e.* without villages or fixed habitations. There is no other similar water on this road” (Robinson, ‘Bibl. Res.,’ vol. it. p. 345). There were three roads from Jerusalem to Gaza, of which the one above described still exists, “ *and actually passes through the desert*” (ibid. p. 514). PULPIT COMMENTARY

This being the case, we have in this record an instance of the providential working of the Lord. Here is an example of the steps of a good man being “ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23). He directed the eunuch concerning the route he was taking to Gaza, and then directed Philip to join him at the proper time and in the correct place. The book that the eunuch was reading was directed by the Lord, as well, as the place of the book that he was reading when Philip caught up with him. Everything was Divinely orchestrated so that at the right time, they came to this body of water. Now, we will see if the eunuch is able to associate this “certain water” with what Philip has been preaching, or if he will only connect it with refreshment and convenience.

HERE IS WATER!

“ . . . and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” Other versions read, “What prevents me?” NASB “ Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” NIV “What is to prevent me?” NRSV “ Why may I not have baptism?” BBE “ Is there any reason why I shouldn’t be baptized?” CJB “ What would keep me from?” CSB “ What can keep me from?” GWN “ What doth forbid that I?” MRD “ What is to stop ?” NET “Is there anything to prevent?” NJB “ Why can’t I be baptized?” NLT “What is stopping me from being immersed,” IE and “ is there any reason why I should not be baptized now ?” PHILLIPS

Noting the rarity of water along the way, the eunuch is unwilling to pass by this “certain water” without inquiring concerning himself being baptized. There was some way in which preaching Christ brought this man to think in such a manner. Without commenting extensively on the matter, it is obvious that much of the preaching of our day would never produce such a response. However, here is an inspired record of what preaching Christ can provoke, and we do well to consider it with great sobriety.

Now, the question arises why such a question was provoked. It is the only question of its kind in all of Scripture, and it was provoked by associating a “certain water” with what had been preached. Adam Clarke, well known commentator, observes, “By this we may see that Philip had explained the whole of the Christian faith to him, and the way by which believers were brought into the Christian Church.” If this was the case, the eunuch probably had asked what he ought to do prior to this time, and would have been directed to repent and be baptized as those on the day of Pentecost (2:38).

However, there is no indication that there was extensive dialog between the eunuch and Philip after he started preaching Christ. So far as the record is concerned, this is the initial response of the eunuch to Philip's preaching.

We do have the record of several instances where Christ was preached to those who themselves were not reconciled to God. Prior to this we have those on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), those in Solomon's porch (Acts 5), those in Samaria (Acts 8), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9), the household of Cornelius (Acts 10), the household of Lydia (Acts 16), the Philippian jailor (Acts 16), and those in Athens (Acts 17).

To my knowledge, there is no record of any person delivering a word concerning baptism to those who had not made some kind of inquiry concerning what they ought to do. As I have already stated, the message of the Gospel is calculated to produce a response in those who hear it. The question is whether or not preaching Christ necessarily includes declaring the means by which men are to be saved. There is no question that there is a proclamation that regards what men are to do. Before He ascended to heaven, Jesus told His disciples "And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47).

While I do not mean to be contentious on this point, it is my persuasion that the preaching of Christ itself led the eunuch to make this inquiry – not the recitation of the means through which men are brought into Christ. This whole matter has been greatly complicated by an institutional approach to the Gospel that makes recruitment the primary point rather than the preaching of Christ. For this reason, I want to show how that preaching Christ will produce an inquiry into the matter of baptism. I will further affirm that the announcement of how men are brought into identity with Christ is premature until an inquiry is made into the matter.

When the record of Jesus was given, it is referred to as "the beginning of the Gospel of Christ" (Mk 1:1). Note what is included in that record.

- Jesus was introduced by John the Baptist (Baptizer), who was noted for baptizing the people "for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4). This was the manner in which the people were prepared for the Messiah.
- Jesus Himself was baptized by John. When John balked at baptizing Him, knowing that He was a righteous Man, Jesus said that it was becoming that "all righteousness" be fulfilled by Him being baptized (Matt 3:15).
- It was when Jesus was baptized that the Father spoke out of heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt 3:17).
- The ministry of Jesus was defined as "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22).
- Before Jesus returned to heaven, He commanded His disciples to baptize those whom they discipled. "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt 28:19).
- Jesus also told them that believing and being baptized were associated with being saved: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

It simply is not possible to preach Christ without declaring these things. They are part and parcel of the Gospel itself. It is further inconceivable that any

I am saying that if men will devote themselves to preaching Christ, those who believe the message will be unable to avoid the consideration of baptism. The challenge men face is not

that of convincing men that they ought to be baptized, but that they must believe Jesus and follow Him.

person of integrity could hear or read those words and conclude that baptism was incidental, or that there was no reason to think it was necessary. Who is the person who would dare to affirm that following Jesus would exclude baptism – for He Himself was baptized! Who would venture to say it was incidental, when Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize the disciples into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? What kind of mentality would move a person to say that salvation had nothing to do with being saved, when Jesus said the one who believed and was baptized would be saved? He did not say the one who believed and was saved should be baptized. How could it possible be right for men to say so?

I am saying that if men will devote themselves to preaching Christ, those who believe the message will be unable to avoid the consideration of baptism. The challenge men face is not that of convincing men that they ought to be baptized, but that they must believe Jesus and follow Him.

The Household of Cornelius

If it is countered that the household of Cornelius was saved, then were baptized, I must object. That is not what the text says. Here is the record of that event. “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God ” (Acts 10:44-46).

After witnessing this phenomenon, Peter concluded that the Gentiles were also included in the salvation of God. It is then that he said, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” – just as Jesus had told him to do (Acts 10:47-48; Matt 28:18-19). I do not know how any honest person could read that passage and say that baptism had nothing to do with being saved.

Putting aside for the moment the fact that this was an epoch and not a precedent, the record does not say that these people were “born again” at that time (1 Pet 1:23), or that they were added to the church (Acts 2:47), or that they become one spirit with Christ (1 Cor 12:17). There is no question but that these people had life – but life must be birthed, and baptism mis associated with birth (John 3:5; Tit 3:5).

The Disciples at Ephesus

Another epoch took place when Paul was in Ephesus. While there he encountered “certain disciples.” They were obviously sincere people, and yet Paul sensed something was missing. He asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” They responded, “We have not so much as heard whether there is a Holy Spirit” (Acts 19:2). Paul immediately associated the gift of the Spirit with baptism. He asked them, “Into what, then, were you baptized?” They replied, “Into John’s baptism” – which was for the remission of sins (Mk 1:4). Paul then told them, “John indeed baptized with a baptism of repentance, saying to the people that they should believe on Him who would come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4). Upon hearing about Christ Jesus, these disciples were “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” NKJV (Acts 19:4-5). Thus we see that baptism is not a mere option, and is associated with believing and receiving the Holy Spirit.

Something to Consider

If, after relatively brief instruction, Ethiopian eunuch inquired concerning baptism, how, then, do we account for people who have been supposedly been subjected to the Gospel for lengthy periods

of time, and remain among the unbaptized? How is it that any person claiming to represent Christ would make a point of diminishing the importance of baptism? How is it even possible to do such a thing, seeing that Jesus was introduced to the world by a baptizer, was Himself baptized to fulfill all righteousness, and was confessed by the Father to be His beloved Son at His baptism. His ministry had its beginning with the baptism of John, He told His disciples to baptize those who were disciples, and said that those believing and being baptized would be saved.

All of this is in the Gospel of Christ. It therefore makes perfect sense that upon hearing Christ preached, the eunuch would inquire concerning himself being baptized. The example and words of Jesus leads to such an inquiry.

IF THOU BELIEVEST

“ 37a And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.”

The eunuch has asked if there is anything that would prohibit him from being baptized. He is not speaking philosophically, but with a mind to take advantage of the water that was before him. Philip will answer him with a keen awareness of the urgency of the request.

IF THOU BELIEVEST

“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart . . .” This verse is omitted by New International Version, New Revised Standard Version, Revised Standard Version , Basic Bible English, Complete Jewish Bible, The English Darby Bible, English Revised Version, English Standard Version, God’s Word Translation, New American Bible, The Net Bible, New Jerusalem Bible, New Living Translation, Weymouth’s New Testament, William’s New Testament, Montgomery New Testament, and J. B. Phillips New Testament. The explanation given is as follows: “Verse 37 is lacking in the earliest manuscripts,” MONTGOMERY and “Many manuscripts do not contain this verse.” AMPLIFIED

We have today in our possession 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, another 10,000 Latin Vulgates, and 9,300 other early versions (MSS), giving us more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today! (taken from "McDowell's Evidence That demands a Verdict," vol.1, 1972 pgs.40-48; and Time, January 23, 1995, pg.57).

TEXT DATE MANUSCRIPT

(Matthew 26) 50-60 AD Magdalene MS

(John) 130 AD John Rylands

(John) 150-200 AD Bodmer Papyrus

(New Testament) 200 AD Beatty Papyri

(Gospels) 200 AD Diatessaron

(Bible) 325-350 AD Codex Vaticanus

(Bible) 350 AD Codex Sinaiticus

(Bible) 400 AD C. Alexandrinus

(Taken from "Bible Manuscript Evidence, Muslim-Christianity Debate Website")

“The best and most important New Testament manuscripts go back to somewhere about AD 350, the two most important being the Codex Vaticanus, the chief treasure of the Vatican Library in Rome, and the well-known Codex Sinaiticus.” (Taken from "Exploring Christianity")

ABOUT THE OMISSION OF THE VERSE

It's Omission Is Not A Cut and Dried Matter

“The whole of ver. 37 of the A.V. is omitted in the R.T., on the authority of the best existing manuscripts. But on the other hand, Irenaeus, in the third book against Heresies, Acts 12:8, distinctly quotes a portion of this verse. The eunuch, he says, when he asked to be baptized said, Pisteu>w to<n uiJo<n tou~ Qeou~ ei]nai to<n Ihsou~n Cristo>n : and Cyprian, in his third book of Testimonies, 43., quotes the other part of the verse. In proof of the thesis that “whoever believes may be immediately baptized,” he *says*, “*In the Acts of the Apostles [when the eunuch said], Behold water, what doth hinder me to be baptized? Philip answered, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest.*” So that in the second and third centuries, long anterior to the oldest existing manuscripts, this entire verse must have been found in the codices both of the Greek and Latin Churches.” PULPIT COMMENTARY

“This whole verse is wanting in the Alexandrian copy, and in five of Beza’s copies, and in the Syriac and Ethiopic versions; but stands in the Vulgate Latin and Arabic versions, and in the Complutensian edition; and, as Beza observes, ought by no means to be expunged, since it contains so clear a confession of faith required of persons to be baptized, which was used in the truly apostolic times.” JOHN GILL

Other versions read, “If you believe with all your heart,” NKJV “If thou dost believe out of all the heart,” YLT and “If you believe with all your heart [if you have a conviction, full of joyful trust, that Jesus is the Messiah and accept Him as the Author of your salvation in the kingdom of God, giving Him your obedience, then] you may.” AMPLIFIED

The priority of faith, or of believing the record God has given of His Son, cannot be overstated. The statements that are made concerning those who believe confirm both its necessity and scope.

- “Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth ” (Mark 9:23).
- “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39)
- “Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe : for there is no difference” (Rom 3:22).
- “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe , though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also” (Rom 4:11).
- “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe ” (Gal 3:22).
- “When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day” (2 Th 1:10).
- “For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, specially of those that believe ” (1 Tim 4:10).

Believe What?

One can only imagine how a person in our time and country would respond to Philip's word. Precisely what is it that is to be believed? If Philip has been preaching Christ to the man, then obviously what is to be believed pertains to Him. Jesus said the one who believes and is baptized shall be saved. He did not specify what was to be believed either – yet it did pertain to the Gospel being preached (Mk 16:15-16). As we expect, Philip will respond with perfect accord with what Jesus said.

THOU MAYEST

“ . . . thou gayest.” Other versions read, “it is allowable,” MRD and “it is lawful.” YLT

Unlike some of our day, Philip does not lead the eunuch in the mythical “sinner's prayer.” He does not tell the man he needs to be saved first, then he can be baptized. He knows that all that stands between this man and baptism is the confirmation that he believes. This amounts to a confession of Jesus. He does not tell the man to repent, for it is obvious that he has already done that. Nor, in fact, does he recite a series of steps that lead up to baptism. He simply says if the man believes, he can, in fact, be baptized – and he does not even tell the man what it is that is to be believed!

I BELIEVE

“ 37b And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

The Ethiopian eunuch does not hesitate to respond to Philip's word. It will be obvious that he has discerned what has been preached, has garnered the proper focus, and is in possession of a confidence that is only experienced by faith.

I BELIEVE

“And he answered and said, I believe . . .” Other versions read, “I do believe.” AMPLIFIED

What does this man mean when he says, “I believe” ? From the lexical point of view, the expression “I believe” is an interesting one. Perhaps it will be a good beginning point to provide those technical meanings.

- “To think to be true; to be persuaded of; to credit, place confidence in; a. universally . . . the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul,” THAYER “as primarily an intellectual evaluation believe; (a) with what one is convinced of added as an object believe (in), be convinced of,” FRIBERG “as primarily an intellectual evaluation believe; (a) with what one is convinced of added as an object believe (in), be convinced of,” LOUW-NIDA “to trust, trust to or in, put faith in, rely on, believe in a person or thing . . . to believe that, feel sure or confident that a thing is, will be, has been,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to trust, to put faith in, to believe in . . . to admit the reality of,” LEH “believe, believe in, be convinced of, give credence to . . . believe (in), trust in a special sense . . . have confidence.” GINGRICH

Take note of the words that are related to believing. Because these are all English words, I will give the English definition of each word.

- Persuasion: something held with complete assurance.
- Confidence: the quality or state of being certain.
- Conviction: a strong persuasion; the state of being convinced.
- Trust: assured reliance . . . dependence on.
- Evaluation: establish the value of by careful appraisal and study.
- Sure: admitting to no doubt . . . sure knowledge.

- Reality: the quality or state of being real . . . an actual fact.
- Credence: a mental acceptance as true or real.

The extent of believing confirms that it is, indeed, “with the heart” that en “believe unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10).

The eunuch was not speaking of mere intellectual assent or acquiescence. To acquiesce is to submit passively, or agree without any real persuasion. It is like agreeing with a statement just to keep the peace, or avoid an altercation – perhaps just be to part of the group, which is perceived as holding some temporary advantage.

What is the matter of which the treasurer of the Queen of Candace has been convinced? What kind of persuasion did the preaching of Philip produce? That is the point that will not be made.

JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

“ . . . that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.” Other versions read, “Jesus Messiah is the Son of God.”
MRD

Philip’s preaching obviously emphasized the Person of Christ – who He was versus what He did during His earthly ministry. His deeds were seen as a confirmation of who He was. Peter had said on the day of Pentecost that Jesus of Nazareth was “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs” (Acts 2:22). That message had obvious come home to the heart of this man from Ethiopia.

The fact of Jesus being the Son of God is depicted as being a critical one.

Philip’s preaching obviously emphasized the Person of Christ – who He was versus what He did during His earthly ministry. His deeds were seen as a confirmation of who He was. Peter had said on the day of Pentecost that Jesus of Nazareth was “a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs.” That message had obvious come home to the heart of this man from Ethiopia.

- This was the fact that Satan sought to obscure, challenging Jesus in the temptation, “If Thou be the Son of God ” (Matt 4:3,6).

- This is precisely what the demons recognized when they confronted Him: “they cried out, saying, What have we to do with Thee, Jesus, Thou Son of God ? art Thou come hither to torment us before the time?” (Matt 8:29).

- This is what the Father twice confessed, once at His baptism, and again at His transfiguration: “This is My Beloved Son ” (Matt 3:17; 17:5).

- This was the word that Peter recalled when He spoke of Jesus many years after He had returned to heaven: “For He received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is My beloved Son , in whom I am well pleased” (2 Pet 1:17).

- When Jesus died, a centurion that took note of the events said, “Truly this man was the Son of God ” (Mark 15:39).

- John the Baptist bore record to this when He saw the Holy Spirit descending in the form of a dove, and resting upon Jesus: “And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God ” (John 1:34).

- Nathaniel confessed to Jesus , “Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God ; Thou art the King of Israel” (John 1:49).

- John wrote His Gospel that we might believe that “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31).
- After Saul of Tarsus was converted. He preached in the synagogues that Jesus Christ “is the Son of God ” (Acts 9:20).
- Paul wrote that Jesus was “ declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4).
- John wrote that the person who overcomes the world is the one who believes that “Jesus is the Son of God ” (1 John 5:5).
- The person who believes Jesus is the Son of God “hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10).
- John confirmed, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:12).
- It is “ the Son of God ” who is come and “hath given us an understanding” (1 John 5:20).

As “the Son of God,” Jesus is the “Heir of all things,” and the One through whom God is speaking to men (Heb 1:2). He is the One in whom all; “the fulness of the Godhead” dwells “bodily” (Col 1:19; 2:9). His ranking is so high that the Father Himself says “unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God , is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom” (Heb 1:8). Nothing – absolutely nothing – comes from God to men except through the Son. God has even committed “all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22).

Much of this had obviously come across to the eunuch in the preaching of Philip. When given the opportunity to make a statement concerning what he believed, he immediately said that he believed Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

That is what Peter confessed in Matthews 16:16: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” Jesus told Peter that flesh and blood had not revealed this to him, but the Father had revealed it. It is doubtless true that He had done the same for the man from Ethiopia. Thus we see that the preaching of Christ produced the same effects as the presence of Jesus.

HE BAPTIZED HIM

“ 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.”

We will see that faith provokes action – immediate action. Retarded responses and delays in obedience are evidences of unbelief, not faith.

HE COMMANDED THE CHARIOT TO STAND STILL

“And he commanded the chariot to stand still . . .” Other versions read, “He ordered the chariot to stop,” NASB “ gave orders to stop the chariot,” NIV “ The official ordered the carriage to stop,” GWN “So he commanded the chariot to stand still,” NRS “he stopped the chariot,” LIVING and “the officer gave the command for the chariot to stop.” IE

Although a dignitary, and no doubt accustomed to some degree of convenience, this man was intent upon obeying the Lord immediately. Of course, if Philip had told him of the baptism of Jesus, which he doubtless did, he knew that Jesus did not delay his baptism, even though John at the first recoiled at the thought of baptizing someone more righteous than himself. The entire ministry of John the Baptist was also marked with immediacy. When he preached, he did so near a body of “much water” in order to baptize the people right away. Thus it is written, “And John also was baptizing in Aenon

near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized” (John 3:23).

Therefore the eunuch stops the chariot and interrupts his journey back to Ethiopia. He knew he was dealing with something that was of greater importance than the trip he was taking. This, of course, is the nature of obedience. It always adjusts the circumstances to the response that is being rendered to God.

THEY WENT DOWN BOTH INTO THE WATER

“ . . . and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch . . .” The greater percentage of all English versions read “went down into the water.” Some variant versions read, “to the water.” DARBY/MRD/YLT/PHILLIPS

If you have been involved with the church for some time, you know that the “mode” of baptism is often a source of controversy. Although this may be a technical point, yet it ought to be made to confirm the nature of and requirement of a “form.” Whenever God ordains a “form,” it is always in perfect accord with the truth. In fact, there is no purpose for form if it does not parallel the reality of which it speaks.

In Romans 6:17, baptism is referred to as “the form of the doctrine.” As used in that text, the word “form” refers to “print . . . a figure formed by a blow or impression . . . the teaching which embodies the sum and substance of religion, and represents it to the mind,” THAYER “model,” FRIBERG and “a pattern, example, model, standard.” UBS

In baptism, the form perfectly confirms to the doctrine. The doctrine is the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Baptism depicts precisely that in a burial and resurrection, which incorporates the idea of dying and being raised to walk in newness of life.

Baptize or Immerse

Owing to the corruption that is extant in the various man-made doctrines concerning baptism, some have preferred the use of the word “immerse.” However, this is not a good word, for it does not embody the doctrine. The word “immerse” means to “dunk, submerge, or submerge.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER However, the point of baptism is not the burial but the resurrection that follows. We do not remain “buried with Christ,” but are “raised up from the dead” like Jesus, to “walk in newness of life.”

It is also incorrect to refer to modes of baptism. Baptism itself is the mode, or manner. It is depicted as a burial (Rom 6:3-4) and a planting (Rom 6:4).

I want to underscore that the only reason for any “form” is that it agrees with the substance that it represents. This is the reason for the pattern given of the tabernacle, which was “the example and shadow of heavenly things” (Heb 8:5). This is also the reasoning behind the unleavened bread used at the table of the Lord and the “fruit of the vine.” Both required crushing and bruising, and perfectly depict Christ’s flesh and blood which are said to be “meat indeed” and “drink indeed” (John 6:55).

HE BAPTIZED HIM

“ . . . and he baptized him.” Other versions read, “Philip baptized him,” NIV Philip gave him baptism,” BBE “Philip immersed him,” CSB/IE and “Philip baptized the eunuch.” MRD

When ever one person baptizes another, it always “with water.” No mere man is ever said to have baptized another in the Holy Spirit. That is something that Jesus alone can do (Matt 3:11; Acts 1:5).

I say this because there are some who read the various texts on baptism and say they refer to a spiritual

baptism, having nothing to do with water. Peter, however, specifically associates baptism with water (1 Pet 3:21).

In baptism, more takes place than what is seen – but that does remove the necessity of what is seen, for that is the reference point of the doctrine. The entire sixth chapter of Romans is devoted to the exposition of baptism. Apart from a baptism like that of the eunuch, which baptism is referred to as the washing of our bodies with pure water, I do not know how you could identify the time of your baptism, or even the fact of it. Nor, indeed can an invisible baptism is associated with obedience.

All of the things that are said of baptism took place when the eunuch was baptized.

- Receive remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
- Receive the gift of the Holy Spirit⁵ (Acts 2:38).
- Baptized into Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3a; Gal 3:27).
- Put on Christ (Gal 3:27).
- Baptized into His death (Rom 6:3b).
- Buried with Christ (Rom 6:4a).
- Raised like Christ to walk in newness of life 6:4b).
- Planted together in the likeness of His death (Rom 6:5a).
- Being in the likeness of His resurrection (Rom 6:5b).
- The old man crucified with Him (Rom 6:6).
- Freed from sin (Rom 6:7).
- Circumcised with the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:12).
- Putting off the body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:12b).
- Born of the water and of the Spirit (John 3:5).
- By the Spirit baptized into one body (1 Cor 12:13).

None of these things can be seen, nor can any of them be performed by a man. Yet, all of them are identified with the time we obeyed from the heart the form of the doctrine delivered to us. Baptism involves being buried in water and raised from it – but that is not all that is involved, nor is it the heart of the matter. It is what the Lord does at that time that makes the event significant. However, the outward form is the very thing to which all of these things have been tied, and which enables us properly diagnose our situation.

All of these happened when Philip baptized the eunuch. That is why he was able to go on his way rejoicing.

HE WENT ON HIS WAY REJOICING

“ 39 And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more: and he went on his way rejoicing.”

THEY CAME UP OUT OF THE WATER

“And when they were come up out of the water . . .” Other versions read, “stepped out of the water,” GWN and “come out of the water.” TNT With only three or four exceptions, all versions read “up out of the water.”

Confirming that the form of the doctrine was carried out, Phil and the eunuch emerged from the

body of water, into which they had both gone. The eunuch came out with a conscience that had been purged from dead works, and his name being written in heaven. The life that was begotten through the preaching of Christ was birth in joyful obedience.

PHILIP IS CAUGHT AWAY

: . . . the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more . . . ” Other versions read, “snatched Philip away,” NASB “suddenly took Philip away,” NIV “caught up Philip,” RSV “took Philip away,” BBE “carried Philip away,” CSB “was taken away,” NJB “[suddenly] caught away Philip,” AMPLIFIED and “took Philip away suddenly.” PHILLIPS

You cannot read the book of acts without being made acutely aware of the supernatural. Whatever you may choose to think about it, you do not want to adopt a view of Scripture that ignores such realities, or fails to take them into account in such a way as promotes praise to God. Thus far we have been confronted with the following:

- The ascension of Jesus (1:9-10).
- A sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind (2:2).
- The appearance of cloven tongues of fire sitting upon each of the disciples (2:3).
- The disciples speaking with other languages as the Spirit gave them utterance (2:4).
- Many wonders and signs were done by the apostles (2:43).
- The healing of the lame man at the Temple gate Beautiful (3:1-6).
- Ananias and Sapphira and stricken dead (5:1-10).
- Signs and wonders were wrought by the apostles in Solomon’s porch (5:12).
- Multitudes come from other cities, bring their sick, and they are healed (5:15-16).
- The angel of the Lord delivers the apostles from prison (5:19).
- Stephen does great wonders and miracles among the people (6:8).
- Phil works miracles in Samaria (8:6).
- The Samaritans receive the Holy Spirit through the laying on hands of Peter and John (8:17).
- The angel of the Lord directs Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch (8: 26).
- Now, Philip is caught away by the Spirit of the Lord (8:39).

Although some theology does so, the Scriptures do not foster doubts concerning the possibility of works outside the confines of natural power or ability. It is certainly not right to develop an inordinate appetite for the miraculous, but neither is it proper to culture a disdain for it.

HE WENT ON HIS WAY REJOICING

“ . . . and he went on his way rejoicing.” Other versions read, “went on his way full of joy,” BBE “continued on his way – full of joy,” CJB “joyfully continued on his way,” GWN “continued on his way home. He was very happy,” LIVING “With a glad heart he resumed his journey,” WEYMOUTH “he went on home rejoicing,” WILLIAMS “proceeded on his journey with a heart full of joy,” PHILLIPS “began going his way rejoicing,” ALT and “he was very happy as he went on his way.” CEV

Like Abraham coming down from that mountain in Moriah, the eunuch went on his way rejoicing. He had the joy of sins forgiven, a purged conscience, a sense of reconciliation, and the knowledge of

God. The law was written on his heart, his old man was crucified, and he was walking in the newness of life. He certainly did have a right to go on his way rejoicing.

PHILIP WAS FOUND AT AZOTUS

“40 But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.”

It had been a busy day for Philip – at least if men were prone to look at it after the flesh. But the work of the Kingdom is accompanied by a certain refreshment that only those who labor with the Lord know.

PHILIP WAS FOUND ON AZOTUS

“But Philip was found at Azotus . . .” Other versions read, “Philip found himself in Azotus,” NASB “appeared in Azotus,” NIV “came to Azotus,” BBE “showed up at Ashdod,” CJB “found himself in the city of Azotus,” GWN “found himself farther north at the town of Azotus,” NLT “was found ion Ashdod,” WILLIAMS and “found himself in Ashdod.” MONTGOMERY

The city of Azotus was the ancient city of Ashdod (Azwtov). This was the Graecized form of the name of the city Ashdod, and owed its change to the Hellenizing of world by Alexander the Great (Acts 8:40; so 1 Maccabees 4:15; 5:68; 10:77, 78, 83; 11:4; 13:34; 16:10)

HE PREACHED IN ALL THE CITIES

“ . . . and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea.”

Other versions read, “kept preaching the gospel to all the cities, until he came

AZOTUS – THE CITY OF ASHDOD

(Heb: 'ashdodh; Grk: Azotos; modern Esdud): One of the five chief cities of the Philistines. The name means stronghold or fortress, and its strength may be inferred by the fact that Psammetik I, of Egypt, besieged it for many years (Herodotus says 29). Some of the Anakim were found there in the days of Joshua (Josh 11:22), and the inhabitants were too strong for the Israelites at that time. It was among the towns assigned to Judah, but was not occupied by her (Josh 13:3; 15:46,47). It was still independent in the days of Samuel, when, after the defeat of the Israelites, the ark was taken to the house of Dagon in Ashdod (1 Sam 5:1,2). We have no account of its being occupied even by David, although he defeated the Philistines many times, and we have no definite knowledge of its coming into the hands of Judah until the time of Uzziah (2 Ch 26:6). Ashdod, like the other Philistine towns, came under the authority of the Assyrian monarchs, and we have mention of it in their records. It revolted against Sargon in 711 BC, and deposed the Assyrian governor, Akhimiti, who had been appointed by him in 720. Sargon at once dispatched a force to subdue the rebels and the city was severely punished. This is referred to by Isaiah (Isa 20:1). Amos had prophesied such a calamity some years before (1:8), and Jeremiah refers to "the remnant of Ashdod" as though it had continued weak until his day (Jer 25:20). Zephaniah (Zeph 2:4) refers to the desolation of Ashdod and Zechariah to its degraded condition (Zec 9:6). It continued to be inhabited, however, for we find the Jews intermarried with them after the return from Babylon (Neh 13:23,24). In the Maccabean period we are told that Judas and Jonathan both took it and purified it of idolatry (1 Macc 5:68; 10:84). In these passages it is called Azotus, as it is also in the New Testament (Acts 8:40). In the 4th century AD it became the seat of a bishopric. It had been restored in the time of Herod, by the Roman general Gabinius, and was presented to Salome, the sister of Herod, by the emperor Augustus. It is now a small village about 18 miles Northeast of Gaza.

to Caesarea,” NASB “traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea,” NIV “passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea,” NRSV “went through all the towns, preaching the good news, till he came to Caesarea,” BBE “passing through, he was evangelizing all the towns until he came to Caesarea,” CSB “he walked to and from preaching in all the cities, till he came to Cesarea,” GENEVA “continued his journey, proclaiming the good news in every town as far as Caesarea,” NJB “ He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea,” NLT “he walked through out the country preaching in their cities till he came to Cesarea,” TNT “He preached the Good News there and in every city along the way, as he traveled to Caesarea,” LIVING “He was preaching the Good News in all the towns along the way from Azotus to Caesarea,” IE “visiting town after town he everywhere made known the Good News until he reached Caesarea,” WEYMOUTH and “as he passed through the countryside he went on telling the good news in all the cities until he came to Caesarea.” PHILLIPS

The idea is that everywhere Philip went,. He kept preaching the word, all along the Mediterranean coast, and covering a considerable distance.

What constrained such aggressive labors? It is quite frankly staggering to consider how much this man did – at least if you look at it with current-day efforts in mind. However, we are being exposed to real spiritual life, and real Kingdom laborers.

This is something that could not possibly be taught, or learned by routine. There was something inside Philip that was moving him. He was like Jeremiah in whose heart the word was like a burning fire (Jer 20:9). The conversion of the city of Samaria, and now the Ethiopian eunuch, had only served to put more fuel on the fire within him, and he could not keep silence.

CONCLUSION

We have witnessed the spreading of the Gospel through men whose hearts were tender and supple in the hands of the Lord. Surely you have noticed how instantly these men obeyed, and how easily they were directed. This is the manner of the kingdom, and it is glorious to consider.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #41

SAUL OF TARSUS CONFRONT'S JESUS

“ 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem. 3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? 5 And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 6 And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. 7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. 8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. ” (Acts 9:1-8)

INTRODUCTION

Luke's record now focuses on Saul of Tarsus, introduced to us in the report of Stephen's martyrdom (7:48), and when a great persecution was unleashed against the church in Jerusalem (8:1-3). At this point, this man is opposed to Jesus, and is aggressive against His people. After consenting to the death of Stephen, he is described as "making havoc of the church, entering every house, and dragging off

men and women, committing them to prison” (8:3). It is this man’s single initiative that caused the scattering of the believers in Jerusalem. Of his initiative it is written, “Therefore they were scattered abroad.” (8:4). By his own testimony, Paul’s aggression led to the death of many believers and “binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (22:4). When the believers were executed by the authority of the high priest, Paul said, “I gave my voice against

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them” (26:10). He even said, “I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities.” NKJV (26:11). After he became an apostle he said of this initiative, “I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9), doing so “beyond measure,” or pressing the matter beyond all reason (Gal 1:13). He said of that period of his life, I “was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious:” adding that he “obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

This is the height of opposition to Christ – persecuting His people. There is no more clear indication of opposition to Jesus than this. This is why Paul said he was “not meet” (worthy) “to be called an apostle” (1 Cor 15:9). This is why he referred to himself as “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8), and “chief” of sinners (1 Tim 1:15). Jesus said that men’s eternal destiny will, in part, be directly related to how they treated His people (Matt 25:32-46). The separation of the sheep from the goats is, in this regard, said to primarily revealed in these two circumstances: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me,” and “Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me” (Mat 25:40,45). Jesus also said that His people were chiefly made known in the love they had for one another: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35). John said that the love of the brethren one for another was the evidence that they had passed from death to life: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).

Saul of Tarsus was the direct antithesis of this. He had an absolute hatred of the people of God, and consequently of Jesus Himself. It appears as though Satan had control of him, and that he is beyond all help. If it is true that there is no Divine initiative toward men until they want it, the future looks very gloomy for Saul of Tarsus. If it is only those who seek that find, then there are no good prospects of him coming to know Christ and enjoy the benefits of His atonement and present reign.

PAUL IS A CASE-STUDY

On the surface, it appears as though the turning of Saul was the exception, or very unusual, to say the least. Yet, there is something here that reveals the manner in which Jesus apprehends people.

It is important that we consider these things, for Saul of Tarsus is something of a case-study, showing things about God that it are essential to know. Later, Paul referred to himself as a “pattern” or example of those who come to believe. Here is what he said: “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting” (1 Tim 1:16). The words “in me first” do not refer to chronology, but to priority – like saying “in me as the foremost one,” or “as the primary example.” On the surface, it appears as though the turning of Saul was the exception, or very unusual, to say the least. Yet, there is something here that reveals the manner in which Jesus apprehends people. We must take care not to adopt a theology that causes us to be blinded to the “pattern” of which Paul spoke. There is something in his conversion that relates to those “who are going to believe on him for everlasting life.” NKJV One of the tasks to be accomplished in our review of this passage is to uncover that pattern, that example, that something that is common to all those who are brought to believe on the Lord Jesus.

CONSIDERING JESUS

It is declared in Scripture that God gives repentance. Those, for example, who instruct those who “oppose themselves” by persistence in sin, are to do so in hopes that God will “give them repentance” (2 Tim 2:25). This repentance is specifically administered by the Lord Jesus Himself. Peter has already declared that Christ has been exalted “for to give repentance ” (Acts 5:31) – and He is fully able to do it.

Repentance is also described as being turned away from one’s iniquities. Peter affirmed that God sent Jesus to do this. “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities ” (Acts 3:26). Paul also alludes to this work when referring to the restoration of Israel to Divine favor. “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob ” (Rom 11:26). While this turning does involve remission – something like detaching sin and its guilt from the individual – that does not exhaust the meaning of the phrase “turn away ungodliness.” When this turning takes place, sin becomes repulsive to the one who has committed it, paining the conscience and stabbing deep into the heart. The nature of sin is seen, that it is against God, and God only (Psa 51:4). No sin will ever be forgiven that is not first hated with a “perfect hatred” (Psa 139:22). This aspect of repentance puts it beyond the reach of “the natural man” – it is outside the perimeter of natural abilities. Rarely will you hear the necessity to repent accompanied with an adequate explanation of the sin from which repentance is required. Just prior to our text, Peter admonished Simon the sorcerer to repent of his “wickedness” (8:22). Paul said that men should “repent and turn to God ” – which means sin results in turning from God (Acts 26:20). Hebrews 6:1 refers to “repentance from dead works” – that is, works that are expressions of death, alienation from, and enmity toward God.

While there were occasions prior to His enthronement of men deploring the fact that they had sinned, and of them turning away from iniquity, they were few and far between.

Later in this book, we will read how “God also granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life” (11:18). We know from Peter’s word that God granted it through the Lord Jesus Christ, who actually carried out the doing of it. He is the Prince and Savior who has been exalted to “give repentance.”

The Rarity of Repentance Prior to Jesus

The rarity of any direct references to men repenting prior to Christ is startling to the mind. While there are some expressions of repentance, sorrow for sin, and deep regret, the use of the word “repent” in its varied forms is exceedingly rare (repent, repentance, repenting, repented, etc).

- From Genesis 1:1 through Esther 10:3 (seventeen books), there is a single reference to any person repenting from sin – and even then it is not something that had taken place, but something that God desired to take place: “Yet if they shall bethink themselves in the land whither they were carried captives, and repent, and make supplication unto thee in the land of them that carried them captives, saying, We have sinned, and have done perversely, we have committed wickedness” (1 Kgs 8:47).

- Job once said, “Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes” (Job 42:6) – although he had not sinned (Job 2:1).

- The entire book of Psalms does not contain the word “repent” in any of its forms concerning the sin of men. It only mentions God repenting, or men not repenting (90:13; 106:45; 110:4; 135:14). The Psalms contain frequent penitential expressions, but they are never called repentance or repenting (Psa 32:5; 38:3,4,18; 40:12; 41:4; 51:1-16; 69:5,10; 73:21, 22; 106:6; 119:176).

- Jeremiah referred to men who did not repent (Jer 8:6). He referred to Israel repenting (Jer 31:19).

- Through Ezekiel God told Israel to “Repent, and turn yourselves from your idols” (Ezek 14:6) – something they had not done to that point.

It is certainly out of order to develop a teaching concerning repentance that is founded on human analysis – and that is not my intention. Rather, I seek to accent the marvelous effects of the sin of the world being taken away by Jesus Christ. It was this marvelous accomplishment that led to His exaltation and His consequent empowerment to “give repentance and remission of sins.” While there were occasions prior to His enthronement of men deploring the fact that they had sinned, and of them turning away from iniquity, they were few and far between. Their repentance was also not of the same order as that which is now given by Jesus, “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:40).

Without being overly systematic in this matter, here are some of the things that are involved in repenting from sin.

- Associating sin with offending God (Psa 51:4).
- A hatred of sin itself (Psa 97:10).
- Conversion, or change (Acts 3:19).
- Turning to God (Acts 26:20).
- The awareness of God’s goodness (Rom 2:4).
- A sense of helplessness (Psa 38:4)
- Self abasement (Job 42:6; Ezek 20:43).
- The fear of God (Prov 16:6; Jer 32:40).
- A strong desire for forgiveness (Psa 51:9).
- A fervent desire for purity (Psa 51:10).
- A submissive spirit (Acts 2:41; 9:6).
- A profound sorrow (2 Cor 7:9-10).
- Acknowledging the truth (2 Tim 2:26).

- Mourning (James 4:9).

The objective of these observations is not merely to compile a listing. It is rather to confirm the complexities of repentance that require Divine involvement. When the Scriptures declare that Jesus has been exalted to “give repentance,” an abundance is being said. Now, we will behold the doctrine being lived out when Saul confronts the Christ.

SAUL IS NOT SEEKING JESUS

Saul of Tarsus is not seeking for Jesus, but he will find that Jesus is seeking for him. In fact, it is at the point of our text that Jesus apprehends Saul – a work to which Paul referred in his letter to the Philippians (Phil 3:12). There is no record of anyone praying for Saul, or any focused effort among the saints devoted to bringing him to Christ. Here, however, is a case where Jesus inserted Himself into Saul’s life, forcing him to confront and consider Him. Were this text not in Scripture, some would argue that such a thing is not possible – that it is interfering with man’s free will. Notwithstanding this theoretical objection, here is a revelation of a way in

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which the exalted Christ worked. He forced Himself into Saul’s life, arresting his attention, engaging his mind, and eliciting a response from him. This was a confrontation Saul could not ignore. In this regard, it was unlike the visitation of the Savior to Jerusalem, of which visitation they had not absolutely no effective knowledge (Lk 19:44).

When Jacob wrestled with an angel, he acknowledged after the fact, “Surely the Lord was in this place; and I knew it not” (Gen 28:16). After an angel had appeared to Menoah and his wife (soon-to-be parents of Samson), he said: “We shall surely die, because we have seen God” (Judges 13:22). In former times, and with few exceptions, the revelation of God was generally subdued, thus making it more tolerable. That is why assessments were often made after the fact. But this will not be the experience of Saul of Tarsus. Before the experience is finished, Saul will have a most precise knowledge of who he is confronting. He was living in a the day of the opened heavens, even though he was not at all aware of it. When the glorified Christ appears to him, he will know he is not confronting a man, or even an angel. He will immediately recognize that this is someone who can be appropriately referred to as “Lord,” and he will inquire concerning what he should do, being perfectly submissive.

BACK TO SAUL OF TARSUS

“ 9:1 And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord . . . ”

The church had found an aggressive foe in Saul of Tarsus. Prior to this, the opponents of the Gospel, waited until the preachers and teachers came into their court , so to speak. The initial opposition came from the Temple authorities, when Peter and John were preaching in Solomon’s court (Acts 4:1-2). They did not, however, hunt them down initially. The times following that initial confrontation, when the religious leaders opposed the apostles, they were “in the Temple” (Acts 5:20). Now, however, there arises an opponent who will pursue the saints, engaging in an effort to discover them wherever they are. Owing to His ignorance and unbelief 1 Tim 1:13), Satan has found someone through whom he can “make war” against those who “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17). Saul of Tarsus is not a moral wretch, nor is he a political zealot. He is a devout Jew, serious about keeping the Law and maintaining a good conscience (Phil 3:6; Acts 23:1). Yet, because he did not know Christ or believe the Gospel of Christ, he became a vessel through whom the devil could work. All of this was under the government of Jesus, to be sure. However, it does provide us an example of the impact of a lack of spiritual understanding. It also confirms the

inadequacy of the human intellect – even a devoted and disciplined intellect – to arrive at an accurate knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This fact was also confirmed in the Ethiopian eunuch.

THREATENING AND SLAUGHTER

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter . . .” Other versions read, “breathing threats and murder,” NKJV “murderous threats,” NIV “bringing with desire to put to death,” BBE “full of threats and deadly hatred,” MRD “uttering threats with every breath, and was eager to kill,” NLT “threatening with every breath and eager to destroy,” LIVING “trying to scare . . . threatening to kill them,” IE “still drawing his breath hard from threatening and murderous desire,” AMPLIFIED and “kept up his violent threats of murder.” GNB

Breathing

The words “breathing out” are translated from a single word meaning, “to breathe, inhale,” THAYER and “to blow or breathe upon.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The word can mean both inhale and exhale – as though what Saul had breathed in, he now breathed out. That is, he had breathed in the death of Stephen, consenting to his death, and now he was breathing out the murder of the other disciples. He was like a snorting warhorse wading into the thick of the battle against the Lord Jesus Christ. He was determined, aggressive, and consistent. Paul himself said of his former aggression against the saints that he was “exceedingly mad against them” (Acts 26:11).

Threatening s

By “threatenings,” the text means that Saul declared he would do harm to anyone devoted to Jesus. He spoke against them, opposed them, and declared himself to be their enemy.

“Slaughter”

This word means “murder,” THAYER “killing,” FRIBERG “to deprive a person of life by illegal, intentional killing,” LOUW-NIDA and “massacre.” LEH

Of this part of his life Paul said, “And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4). He stated, “and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them” (Acts 26:10).

Saul’s Rationale

The reason for Saul’s aggression against the believers was his ignorance of Christ. He thought incorrectly about Jesus, and was thus moved against Him and those who followed Him. Wrong thinking still moves people to do wrong things – particularly when it involves incorrect views of Jesus Christ. Men do not have the option of being incorrect about Jesus.

Saul engaged in this aggression against the followers of Jesus, thinking that he was serving God in the process. He said to Agrippa, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). Once he was standing in the fuller light of the knowledge of the glory of God, he assessed himself during that time as being “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (Acts 26:9).

Because Saul considered the message of Christ to be blasphemy, and nothing more than a delusion, he felt those who were of that way to be worthy of death. With him this was more than personal hatred. He no doubt saw such people as corrupting the Jewish people, classing them among those whom the Law declared to be worthy of death.

The Law said, “And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD , he shall surely be put to death,

and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death” (Lev 24:16). And again, “And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; because he hath spoken to turn you away from the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage, to thrust thee out of the way which the LORD thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put the evil away from the midst of thee” (Deut 13:5).

Later, after entering the promised land under the leadership of Joshua, the officers of the people told Joshua, “Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment, and will not hearken unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death: only be strong and of a good courage” (Josh 1:18).

Something to Be Seen

The reason for Saul’s aggression against the believers was his ignorance of Christ. He thought incorrectly about Jesus, and was thus moved against Him and those who followed Him. Wrong thinking still moves people to do wrong things – particularly when it involves incorrect views of Jesus Christ. Men do not have the option of being incorrect about Jesus. If it is true that the Gospel is the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11), then men do not have the right to be wrong about Him. It is never innocent to be exposed to the truth, and yet maintain a distorted view of it. Even if the individual acts within the framework of a good conscience, thinking himself to be the servant of God, it does not change the fact that he is wrong. Saul was acting in a good conscience, fully persuaded that he “ought” to do what he could to stamp out the influence of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet, the truth of the matter was that in his very deeds he was “a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious” (1 Tim 1:13). Until the day he died, he carried a sense of profound shame for what he did against the church. He wrote to the Corinthians, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9). He wrote to the Ephesians that he was “less than the least of all saints” (Eph 3:8). He wrote to Timothy, “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief” (1 Tim 1:15).

Profound sin, although graciously forgiven, has grievous after-effects. This is confirmation of its seriousness. It also accents the greatness of Divine mercy.

THE DISCIPLES OF THE LORD

“ . . . against the disciples of the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “the Lord’s disciples,” NIV “the Lord’s followers,” NLT “every Christian,” LIVING “learners of the Master,” INTERLINEAR and “followers of the Lord,” GNB

As used in Scripture, a “disciple” is “a learner, pupil,” THAYER “one who directs his mind to something, learner; in a technical sense, apprentice,” FRIBERG “follower,” UBS “a person who is a disciple or follower of someone,” LOUW-NIDA “adherent.” GINGRICH

There are two facets of life that are involved in being a disciple: the mind (learning), and conduct (following). No person is a disciple of Jesus who is not in the process of learning from Him. Neither, in deed, is it possible to be a disciple of Jesus if one is not following Him, shaping his life according to his exposure to Jesus.

Not only were the twelve disciples unique men in the body of Christ, they are premier examples of a real disciple. They were always with Jesus, and they were always learning from Him. They further shaped their lives around Jesus, going where He went, saying what He said, and doing what He did. When they went out, they went in His name and preached His message. They always did what He told them to do – whether it was rowing a boat to the other side of the sea, feeding the multitude,

catching fish, or going out to preach.

Now, if this is the definition of a disciple, the modern church is presenting a distorted and confusing picture. As a whole, it is not doing good in either learning or following. This is a most serious condition, and is not to be taken lightly. Jesus faced a generation of Jews that were similar to this – claiming to be followers of Moses, yet neither learning from him nor doing what he said. Jesus called their leaders “blind guides” and “hypocrites” (Matt 23:15-16). With great sternness He told them, “But in vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:9). He told that generation they would be condemned because they had not taken advantage of what God had sent to them (Matt 12:41-42). And why did He speak in such a manner? It was because they were not what they said they were. They said they were Jews, but “inwardly” they were not (Rom 2:29). They said they were

The manner in which the Luke refers to the people of God continues to intrigue me. It is not at all the way in which our peers refer to them.

disciples of Moses, but they were not learning from him or following him (John 9:28). They said they were the children of Abraham, yet they did not have the traits of Abraham (John 8:39).

And, what will Jesus say of this generation, who say they are Christians, and yet have the traits of the world. What will be said of those who say they are followers of Jesus, yet they do not take up their cross daily and follow Him? And how will it go for those who say they are students of Jesus, yet are not learning from Him, remaining in a state of perpetual ignorance? I do not doubt that, were He here in the body, He would employ the word “hypocrites” quite often.

In my judgment, this is one reason why the name “Christian” is preferred by many. While, of itself, it is a good word, meaning “of or pertaining to Christ,” it has been watered down so that it has no longer has any arresting meaning in the minds of the people. The association with Christ Himself has been stripped from the modern perception of the word. If overnight God changed the language of the people so that they said “disciples of the Lord,” or “followers of Christ” in the place of “Christian,” it would introduce mass confusion.

Luke’s Manner

The manner in which the Luke refers to the people of God continues to intrigue me. It is not at all the way in which our peers refer to them.

- “The church” (2:47; 5:11; 8:1,3; 11:22,26; 12:1,5; 13:1; 14:27; 15:3,4; 18:22; 20:17,28).

- “Disciples” (Acts 6:1,2,7; 9:1,19,25,26, 38; 11:26,29; 13:52; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 18:23; ,27; 19:9,30; 20:1,7; 21:4,16).

- “Believers” (5:14).

- Those who “believed” (2:44; 4:32; 19:18; 22:19).

- Those who were of “the way” (9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14).

- “Christian” (11:26; 26:28) – what they were called by outsiders.

When referring to those in Christ, the term “disciples” is the one most frequently used in this book. It is strange that it is used so infrequently in our day.

SAUL’S AGGRESSIVENESS

“ 1b . . . went unto the high priest. 2 And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto

Jerusalem.”

Some details concerning Saul’s aggression against the disciples of the Lord will now be provided. This will set the stage for his apprehension by Jesus. He will not be found praying, or seeking the Lord, or asking for more information about Jesus of Nazareth. He will rather be found while engaged in an inital and aggressive initiative against the Lord Jesus Himself.

WENT UNTO THE HIGH PRIEST

“ . . . went unto the high priest . . .” Other versions read, “went to the high priest in Jerusalem.”
LIVING

Under the Law, the high priest held the highest office. His responsibilities included the following.

- Offer sacrifices (Lev 4:4-17; 2:2,16).
- Designate subordinate priests (Num 4:19).
- Set the showbread on the table within the Holy Place (Lev 24:8).
- Offer the first fruits to the Lord (Lev 23:10-11 Deut 26:3-4).
- Pronounce holy benedictions on the people (Num 6:22-27).
- Teach the Law (Lev 10:8-11).
- Light the lamp in the Holy Place (Ex 28:20-21; Lev 24:3-4).
- Keep the sacred fire from the altar burning (Lev 6:12-13).
- Responsible for the care of the sanctuary (Num 4:5-15; 18:1,5).
- Count the people (Num 1:3).

This is not intended to be a thorough listing. My objective is to point out the thrust of the high priest’s ministry – a thrust that was mandated by God Himself.

In drawing a parallel between the office of the high priest and the work of the exalted Christ, the book of Hebrews provides an overview of the office of the high priest under the Law. This narrows down the focus of the ministry of the high priest defining it as relating to “things pertaining to God.”

• **MATTERS HAVING TO DO WITH GOD.** “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God , that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Heb 5:1). “For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices ” (Heb 8:3). The high priest was never intended to be a civil authority – that was the role of Moses, and later of the kings. He was never intended to be a military leader – that was originally the role of Joshua, and later of other special men. The high priesthood was an office that had exclusively to do with matters pertaining to God – that is, with the relationship of the people with God.

• **ABLE TO HAVE COMPASSION ON THE PEOPLE, AND THUS EFFECTIVELY INTERCEDE FOR THEM.** “Who can have compassion on the ignorant , and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity” (Heb 5:2). Being taken from the people themselves, the high priest could enter more fully into his intercessions and representations of them before the Lord. His role was not to represent them to the governor or king, but before the Lord Himself.

• **DIVINELY APPOINTED.** “And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Heb 5:4). This was not a political office, nor was it one that was managed by the people. It was strictly controlled by the Lord. At the first, God

chose who would be high priest – Aaron. The high priesthood was then maintained through his bloodline.

• **MAKE ATONEMENT.** “Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others” (Heb 9:25). The matter of sin had to be regularly addressed, because God cannot countenance iniquity. No other work or ministry was allowed to upstage the work of dealing with sin, offering the gifts and sacrifices ordained by God to keep a lively consciousness in both the high priest and the people concerning sin.

By the time Jesus came into the world, and throughout the record of the apostles’ activities, the office of the high priest had been greatly corrupted. It bore little resemblance to its intended objective.

- The high priest had a palace (Matt 26:3; Mk 14:54; John 18:15).
- The high priest had a militia (Matt 26:47; Mk 14:43-47; John 18:6).
- The high priest had maids (Mk 14:66).
- The high priest had servants (John 18:26).
- With scribes and elders, held legal proceedings against Jesus (Matt 26:57-66; Mk 14:53-64; John 18:13-26).
- Opposed and took action against the apostles (Acts 4:6, 5:17, 21, 24, 27; 23:2; 24:1-2)
- Opposed Stephen (Acts 7:1).

When there is an environment of carnality and spiritual artificiality the effects are two-fold. First, the truth is blocked so that it cannot be perceived or understood. This is precisely why Jesus told such people they could not hear His word. “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word” (John 8:43). A worldly mindset causes a growth to form over the spiritual ears and heart of the individual. It creates a condition referred to as being “uncircumcised in heart and ears” (Acts 7:51). There is no resource found in the human nature than can correct this condition. No amount of scholarship, study, or other forms of intellectual discipline can resolve the dilemma created by carnality – being fleshly, or worldly-minded.

The religious leaders among the Jews had created an environment in which iniquity could flourish because it was sanctioned by their approach to the Law. Jesus referred to their approach as:

- “Your tradition” – something that transgressed the commandment of God (Matt 15:3), and “made the commandment of God of none effect” (Matt 15:6; Mk 7:13).
- “The tradition of men,” by which they laid “aside the commandment of God” (Mk 7:8).
- “Your own tradition,” which required that they “reject the commandment of God” (Mk 7:9).
- “The commandments of men,” which voided their worship of God, causing it to be “vain” (Matt 15:9; Mk 7:7).

Jesus spoke harshly concerning the religious leaders, rarely displaying the slightest bit of tolerance for them. He:

- Declared that they said, but “do not” (Matt 23:3).
- Called them “blind guides” (Matt 23:16, 24).
- Said they bound “heavy burdens” on people, yet would not lift a finger to move them (Matt 23:4).

- Did “all their works” to be “seen of men” (Matt 23:5).
- Loved the main places, where they were more conspicuous (Matt 23:6).
- Called them “hypocrites” (Matt 23:13,14,15,23,27).
- Affirmed that they “shut off the kingdom of heaven from men” NASB (Matt 23:13).
- “Devoured widows houses” (Matt 23:14a).
- For pretense made long prayers (Matt 23:14).
- Compassed sea and land to make a single proselyte, then made him twice the child of hell that they were (Matt 23:15).
- Called them “fools and blind” (Matt 23:17,18, 24).
- They omitted the weightier matters of the Law, namely “judgment, mercy, and faith” (Matt 23;23).
- Were like whitewashed tombs that appeared beautiful outwardly, but were filled with “dead men’s bones and all uncleanness” (Matt 23:27).
- Were filled with “hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt 23:28).
- Were the children of those who killed the prophets (Matt 23:31).
- Were “serpents” and a “generation of vipers” that could not escape “the damnation of hell” (Matt 23:33).
- Warned His disciples to “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” referring to their teaching (Matt 23:6,12).
- Warned His disciples to “Beware of the scribes,” who liked the main places (Lk 20:46).

The conduct of these men was mandated by their religion. Because the truth of God is calculated to impact upon the entirety of life, the corruption of it in the minds of men also causes thorough corruption. There is no more potentially dangerous or corrupt person than the one who is in bondage to perverted religion. This is because their religion sanctions what they do, therein searing their conscience.

The religion of the Jewish leaders, compiled by mixing the traditions of men with corrupted views of Scripture, produced groups like the Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and the Council (Sanhedrin). These groups working together with the high priest, were instrumental in the death of Jesus, the arrest of the apostles and the attempt to quiet them, and the stoning of Stephen. Now the office of the high priest will issue letters authorizing the arrest, incarceration, and death of the followers of Jesus.

WICKED COMMUNICATION

“ . . . And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues . . .” Other versions read, “letters of authorization.” GWN

The journey to Damascus from Jerusalem was about one hundred miles, and involved crossing the Jordan River.

The Authority of the High Priest

Observe how the high priest, located in Jerusalem, exercised authority over the synagogues of that area. Although the high priest was to major on “things pertaining to God,” the office had been become so corrupted that it was now more related to government, and authority over men. The high priest did have some judicial duties, but they related more to the settling of personal disputes and the

administration of any required punishment (Deut 17:8-13). The office was never intended to be what it had become during the time of our text.

I have observed over the years a marked predilection among men to use religion as a means of gaining authority over the people. This was not confined to Judaism, but found its way into Christianity as well. The Roman church pioneered this kind of approach, and it has now proliferated into nearly the whole of Christendom. All of this contradicts a specific word that was given by Jesus to His apostles – those who were placed “first” in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28). Jesus said, “But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matt 20:25-28).

Damascus

No reason is provided for Saul singling out the city of Damascus. It is clear from verses ten and thirteen of this chapter that there was a group of believers in that area. In fact, word had already reached the brethren there concerning the havoc that Saul had wreaked against the saints in Jerusalem (9:13).

Although Damascus is mentioned forty-five times from Genesis through Zechariah, this is the first mention of it in the New Covenant Scriptures. It is the most ancient city of Syria, and is first mentioned in Genesis 14:15, and was the city from which Abraham’s steward, Eliezer, came (Gen 15:2). Syria, in which it was located, was a land long noted for opposition to the children of Israel.

THE WAY

“ . . . that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women.”

It is apparent from the above texts that “the way” includes both a manner of life and the doctrine that has been embraced – which doctrine compels one to live in a certain manner and with a specific objective.

Nearly all other versions read, “ the Way.” NKJV Other variations read “that way,” GENEVA “this course,” MRD “the Way [of life as determined by faith in Jesus Christ],” AMPLIFIED “the Lord’s Way,” CEV “the Way of the Lord,” GNB and “the way of Christ.” GW

The words “this way” come from the Greek expression **th/j o` dou/** . As used in this text, it has the following lexical meaning. “A course of conduct, a way (i.e. manner) of thinking, feeling, deciding,” THAYER “a manner of living and acting, way of life, type of conduct,” FRIBERG “a way of doing, speaking,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “way of life or acting, conduct.” GINGRICH Robertson says of this word, “A common method in the Acts for describing Christianity as the Way of life.” ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

This expression is also found in the following texts.

- “But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9).
- “And the same time there arose no small stir about that way ” (Acts 19:23).
- “And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women” (Acts 22:4).

- “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14).

- “And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter” (Acts 24:22).

It is apparent from the above texts that “the way” includes both a manner of life and the doctrine that has been embraced – which doctrine compels one to live in a certain manner and with a specific objective.

This way of describing how a person lives is seen throughout Scripture. Life is perceived as traveling on a thoroughfare that leads to a particular destination. Some of the expressions that shape our thinking on this matter are as follows.

- “The WAY of the Lord” (Gen 18:19; Judges 2:22).
- “The WAY of the earth” (Josh 23:14).
- “The WAY of his father” (1 Kgs 22:52).
- “The WAY of sinners” (Psa 1:1).
- “The WAY of the righteous” (Psa 1:6).
- “The WAY of the ungodly” (Psa 1:6).
- “The WAY of Thy testimonies” (Psa 119:14).
- “The WAY of lying” (Psa 119:29).
- “The WAY of truth” (Psa 119:30).
- “The WAY of His saints” (Prov 2:8).
- “The WAY of the evil man” (Prov 2:12).
- “The WAY of good men” (Prov 2:20).
- “The WAY of the wicked” (Prov 4:19).
- “The WAY of life” (Prov 6:23).
- “The WAY of righteousness” (Prov 8:20).
- “The WAY of understanding” (Prov 9:6).
- “The WAY of a fool” (Prov 12:15).
- “The WAY of transgressors” (Prov 13:15).
- “The WAY of the slothful man” (Prov 15:19).
- “The WAY of man” (Prov 21:8).
- “The WAY of the just” (Isa 26:7).
- “The WAY of holiness” (Isa 35:8).
- “The WAY of peace” (Isa 59:8).
- “The WAY of the heathen” (Jer 10:2).
- “The WAY of life, and the WAY of death” (Jer 21:8).
- “The WAY of the meek” (Amos 2:17).
- “The WAY of God” (Matt 22:16).

- “The WAY of salvation” (Acts 16:17).
- “The WAY of truth” (2 Pet 2:2).
- “The WAY of Balaam” (2 Pet 2:15).
- “The WAY of Cain” (Jude 1:11).

There are thirty-one expressions that confirm that what one thinks dictates the way that they live. No person lives out of harmony with the perspective of life they have adopted.

We are living in a time when this fact has been blurred. There are even some who deride living in a strict manner, saying that we should adapt to our environment in order to reach it. This is in sharp conflict with prophecy, the words of Jesus, and apostolic doctrine.

- Prophetically, Isaiah foretold the time of salvation as one in which people would live in a certain manner. He depicted that life as sojourning on a highway that was raised up by God Himself. “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there” (Isa 35:8-9).

- **In our time, an approach to Christianity has been taken that makes it nearly impossible to distinguish professing Christians. Often they speak and act like the world – which, according to the Scriptures, would mean that they were, in fact, worldly. Those**

Jesus spoke of both life and death as a way. “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Mat 7:13-14).

- The apostolic doctrine speaks of a new and living way. “By a new and living way, which He hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh” (Heb 10:20). They also spoke of the danger of getting off of “the way.” “And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed” (Heb 12:13), and of those who have “forsaken the right way” (2 Pet 2:15).

The Implications of the Text

The fact that Saul of Tarsus sought authority to arrest and incarcerate those who were of “the way” confirmed that there were ways in which they could be identified. The text does not suggest that he would make his determinations by interrogation. When he went into the synagogues of Damascus, there was some way in which followers of Christ would be evident or apparent. Their speech and manner would in some way distinguish them. Their preferences and love for one another must also have been glaringly apparent. How else could they be known?

In our time, an approach to Christianity has been taken that makes it nearly impossible to distinguish professing Christians. Often they speak and act like the world – which, according to the Scriptures, would mean that they were, in fact, worldly. Those who walk in a certain way are considered to be of that way, belonging to it.

Under the First Covenant the people were strictly charged concerning their manners, “And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them” (Lev 20:23). “Learn not the way of the heathen” (Jer 10:2). Again, they were warned not to get into a state of mind where they would say “We will be as the heathen” (Ezek 20:32).

In Christ we are solemnly admonished, “ Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor 6:14). And again, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate , saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). It is an absurdity unworthy of embracing that after Jesus delivered us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4), and chose us out of it (John 15:19), that He would think nothing of us retaining its manners. Those who make an effort to justify adopting the ways of the world are only betraying their oneness with it.

THE AUTHORITY OF CORRUPT RELIGION

“ . . . he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”

The authority by which Saul set out to arrest, incarcerate, and put to death those who were following Christ, was religious authority – corrupt religious authority. The power of such a religion is seen in the fact that Saul did this in all good conscience, thinking he was serving God – when nothing could possibly have been further from the truth (Acts 26:9-10).

Those who exalt the right to human opinion in matters of religion overlook the bondage that is fostered by error. They also fail to consider the power of a personal persuasion, and what it can move a person to do – as seen in Saul of Tarsus. All of this accents the need to embrace the truth alone. Both truth and error have a staggering impact upon the mind and heart. When exposed to either of them, we cannot remain neutral.

DIVINE INTERVENTION

“ 3 And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven . . .”

In this text we are going to be exposed to a heavenly manner that is not commonly acknowledged. Perhaps you have heard it said that God will never force himself upon a person. Whatever is intended by that expression, it certainly is contradicted in this text. Here, that is precisely what the Lord does, intruding into the life of Saul of Tarsus without any invitation whatsoever. Saul is not seeking Christ – in fact, he is dominated by a hatred of Him and those who follow Him. Jesus will now make Saul consider Him. He will not let him get to Damascus to persecute His people. He will stop his evil intention, and even smite him down to the ground. However, the Lord will not bring him to desolation, as He did Sodom and Gommorrah (Gen 19:25), Pharaoh and his army (Ex 14:28; 15:4), Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2), Uzzah (2 Sam 6:6-7), Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:5,10), and others. He will rather change the course of the life of Saul as he did those who were building a city and a tower in the plain of Shinar (Gen 11:7-8), or Israel, when He “sold them into the hands of their enemies” (Judges 2:14).

God can give life, take life, or change the course of ones life – and do so at will, without the consent of men, and in spite of all of their intentions and activities. This is the God to whom Nebuchadnezzar was introduced when it was confirmed to Him by experience that before God “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35).

The exalted Christ, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, conducts Himself in the same manner. The borders of possibility are defined by His will, not His power – for there is nothing He wills that is beyond His power to accomplish. He makes alive whomever He wills, for He has power to do so. That is why He said, “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom he will” (John 5:21). Our text provides a sterling example of that very thing.

SUDDENLY

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly . . .” Other versions read, “suddenly a light from heaven shone around him,”: NKJV “flashed around him,” NASB “flashed all around him,” CJB “there was poured upon him light from heaven,” MRD “a brilliant light from heaven spotted down on him,” LIVING “suddenly lazed around him,” PHILLIPS and “about-gleam-flings light out of the heaven.” INTERLINEAR

Paul refers to this incident in Acts 22:6 before the Jewish council: “And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me ” (Acts 22:6). He also referred to it before king Agrippa: “At midday , O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me” (Acts 26:13). There we learn that this happened at Noon – when the sun was at its zenith. When, therefore, the light of nature was at its peak, there came a light from heaven that was exceedingly bright, reducing nature’s light to insignificance.

“Suddenly”

The word “suddenly” means “unexpectedly,” THAYER “immediately . . . pertaining to an extremely short period of time between the precious state or event and a subsequent state or event,” LOUW-NIDA and “in an instant.” LEH Here is something that only can be induced by Deity: something, sudden, unexpected, totally altering the condition, and focused.

Among men, for something productive to take place, considerable preparation is required. Things that are sudden and unexpected are not generally productive, but are disruptive in nature, and often even destructive. But it is not always this way regarding things that issue from heaven.

While Saul was not reckoning on anything like this suddenly occurring, those who are in Christ Jesus can live with this in mind, and even derive great consolation and hope from it. The second appearing of our Lord will be in this manner. Jesus said of His return, “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch” (Mark 13:35-37). Speaking of the way in which He will return Jesus said, “I come quickly” (Rev 3:11; 22:12,20). By faith the saints live in the hope of a sudden, climactic, and glorious interruption in the affairs of men. It will be a time when all wickedness will come to a grinding halt, and “the righteous will shine forth in the Kingdom of their Father” (Matt 13:43).

A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

“ . . . there shined round about him a light from heaven . . .”

Heaven is larger than earth, and is vastly superior to it. Yet, an overpowering light is issued from heaven, and focused on a single geographical location, at a specific point in time, and on a singular individual. That is how exacting and precise heaven’s involvement with men can be!

It seems to me that it is order for believers to live out their lives with a keen awareness of the suddenness with which everything can be altered, and the abruptness with which natural intentions can be ended.

“Shined Round About Him”

Jesus did not allow Saul to even get to Damascus – much less fulfill what he had determined to do there. By saying the light “shined round about him,” the text means it was focused upon him. He had become the object of Divine attention, and there was not a thing he could do about it.

The words “shined round about” are translated from a single Greek word – **perih, strayen** . The word means, “to flash around,” THAYER “giving out light with lightening quality . . . shine around someone,” FRIBERG and “shine very brightly on an area surrounding an object – to shine brightly around, to flash around.” LOUW-NIDA

As in the natural creation, light, or illumination, precedes all work in the new creation. Here there is an outward circumstance that will precisely parallel what will take place within Saul of Tarsus.

Satan Is Repelled

The prince of the power of the air had blinded Saul’s mind concerning Jesus Christ, and was compelling him to carry out a malicious intent against the believers. Yet, just as suddenly as this light flashed upon and around Saul, so it brought an abrupt conclusion to Satan’s delusion. This occasion was so significant, that it caused the mission in which Saul was engaged to be suddenly terminated. Something was taking place that overshadowed Saul’s intention, and he knew it.

It seems to me that it is order for believers to live out their lives with a keen awareness of the suddenness with which everything can be altered, and the abruptness with which natural intentions can be ended. It is no wonder that James counseled those who lived as though they were guaranteed long and tranquil lives, “Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (James 4:15). This is too difficult for those who are not living by faith. It is, however, something that is not only imperative for those who are strangers and pilgrims in this present evil world, but pleasant as well. Such people live with Divine workings in mind.

SAUL IS APPREHENDED WITHOUT SEEKING

“ 4 And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”

In his letter to the Philippi an church, Paul referred to the time when he was “apprehended of Christ Jesus,” or when Christ “laid hold of,” NIJV or “took hold of” NIV him (Phil 3:12). Other versions read, “taken possession of,” DARBY “Jesus the Messiah took me,” MRD “first possessed me,” NLT “made me His own,” RSV “I have been embraced by Christ Jesus,” ISV “I was captured by Christ Jesus,” WILLIAMS and “Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own.” AMPLIFIED

The phrase used in Philippians 3:12 is admittedly a strong one, and contradicts a lot of notions concerning the role of volition and seeking in the obtaining of salvation. The word “apprehended” is translated from the Greek word **katelth, fqh** (kat-elaf-tha). This word has the following lexical meaning. “To lay hold of so as to make one’s own, to obtain, attain . . . to take into oneself, to appropriate . . . to seize upon, take possession of,” THAYER “to seize, grasp with force; overpower, gain control over,” FRIBERG and “to acquire, to attain, to obtain, to take.” LOUW-NIDA

However this definition may impact upon one’s theology, there is absolutely no question about the meaning of the word. It is used in the same sense several times in Scripture. I have highlighted the words that are translated from the Greek word used in Philippians 2:13.

• “And wheresoever he taketh him , he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not” (Mark 9:18).

- “And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst. They say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act” (John 8:3,4).

- “Then Jesus said unto them, Yet a little while is the light with you. Walk while ye have the light, lest darkness come upon you : for he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth” (John 12:35).

- “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain ” (1 Cor 9:24).

- “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thess 5:4).

There are also texts in which the apprehension has to do with understanding, attaining, or comprehending (John 1:5; Acts 4:13; 10:34; Rom 9:30; Eph 3:18). However, all of those texts have to do with men taking hold of, or comprehending, the truth or righteousness of God. When speaking of Deity, however, this is not the sense of the word, as though God was comprehending or discerning something. If there is any question about this in the minds of men, the text before us will confirm precisely how Jesus took hold of Saul of Tarsus. It certainly was not merely by comprehending him. He did not pummel him into subjection – Divine power does not need to do that. There is a sense in which Divine power dries up natural strength, rendering the individual physically helpless.

SUBDUED IN AN INSTANT

“And he fell to the earth . . .” Other versions read, “and he fell to the ground,” NKJV “and he went down on the earth,” BBE “and falling on the ground,” DARBY “having falling upon the earth,” YLT and “He dropped to the ground.” ISV

There are a few souls in history who have confronted the Lord in a more direct manner, without the buffer of human intervention. One time when an angry God spoke to Moses and Aaron saying He was going to consume the people “in a moment,” they “fell upon their faces” (Num 16:43) – and they knew who He was! Another time, when a group of soldiers from the high priest came to arrest Jesus, “they went backward, and fell to the ground” when He identified Himself (John 18:6). Once, when an angel from heaven spoke to Daniel he “fainted, and was sick certain days” (Dan 8:27). Another time when Daniel saw a great vision, “there remained no strength” in him, and he “retained no strength” (Dan 10:8). When the glorified Christ appeared to John the beloved, who was living in favor with Him, John testified, “I fell at His feet as dead” (Rev 1:12).

All of these appearances, including the one of our text, were only attended by a partial glory. The fulness of Divine glory did not burst upon any of these people, else they would not have survived. When Jesus returns in all of His glory, His enemies will make an attempt to flee, not to fight (Rev 6:16-17). No mortal can stand before the fulness of Divine glory. Indeed, not even the massive and complex creation can do so (Rev 20:11).

In Our Time

Whether men wish to acknowledge it or not, there is such a thing as a confrontation with Christ Jesus that cannot be ignored. The ultimate example of this will be when He returns again, and “every eye shall see Him”

The point here is that in our time there has been a significant loss of the knowledge of the glory of God within the modern church – if, indeed, there has ever been any awareness of it there. Conversion is pointedly described as “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). That knowledge has a calculated effect upon those who receive it, just as surely as that light from heaven had an effect upon Saul of Tarsus. Saul did not lift up a sword,

make effort to walk bravely into the light, or even to run from it. Whether men wish to acknowledge it or not, there is such a thing as a confrontation with Christ Jesus that cannot be ignored. The ultimate example of this will be when He returns again, and “every eye shall see Him” (Rev 1:7). If men will be sensitive to it, and not be ignorant of their visitation as Jerusalem was (Lk 19:44), the Gospel of Christ will bring them face to face with the Lord’s Christ, just as surely as it did on the day of Pentecost, in Solomon’s porch, in the city of Samaria, and with the Ethiopian eunuch. It is in this sense that the Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16).

A VOICE

“ . . . and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?” Other versions read, “why are you persecuting Me?” NKJV “why are you attacking me so cruelly?” BBE and are you persecuting Me [harassing, troubling, and molesting Me]?” AMPLIFIED

Following His enthronement there were not many occasions when Jesus appeared, or spoke to, those upon earth.

- **STEPHEN.** He appeared to Stephen when he was about to be stoned to death. “But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55-56).

- **SAUL OF TARSUS.** To Saul while he was en route to arrest and imprison believers in Damascus. “And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:4-5).

- **PAUL.** To Paul in Corinth, when it appeared as though his labors there were vain. “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10).

- **PAUL.** To Paul in Jerusalem, while he was in the Temple in a trance. “And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles ” (Acts 22:19-21).

Paul referred to this occasion as him seeing Jesus Christ: “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?” Ananias told Saul he had been chosen to, among other things, “see that Just One.”

PAUL. To Paul when being tried in Jerusalem. “And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11).

- **JOHN.** To John, on the Isle of Patmos. “I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea” (Rev 1:10-11).

This is the only known occasion when the glorified Christ appeared to someone who was not born again. However, this is a most unique instance, classed along with the appearances of the risen Christ

to chosen witnesses prior to His ascension. As it is written, “And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that He was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:4-9).

Paul referred to this occasion as him seeing Jesus Christ: “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1). Ananias told Saul he had been chosen to, among other things, “see that Just One” (Acts 22:14).

The Voice

The “voice” that Saul heard was that of the Lord Jesus Himself, as is made clear in what was said by that voice. Later, in a more extended report of what took place in our text, Paul declared that Jesus said, “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee” (Acts 26:16). This was the call of Saul to the apostleship, and was most unique. Peter, Andrew, James, and John were called when they were engaged in fishing duties (Matt 4:18-19, 21-22). Matthew was called when he was sitting at the seat of customs (Matt 9:9). Saul was called when he was on his way to persecute the disciples of Jesus.

“Why Persecutes Thou Me?”

At this point, Jesus does not identify Himself clearly, stating that He is the one Saul is persecuting. His penetrating question emphasizes how unreasonable it was to be against those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Saul’s actions had been duly noted by the Lord of glory. Now, heaven will mandate the abrupt halt of Saul’s initiative against the saints. On that very day, Saul’s oppression of the people of God will stop, and he will embark on a new course of life. In this case, Jesus will first make Himself known as the Lord who has the government upon His shoulder (Isa 9:6). In that capacity it will be evident that He is in absolute control.

THE SENSITIVITY OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE

“ 5a And he said, Who art Thou, Lord?”

Saul responds, “Who are You, Lord?” NKJV He does not ask “Sir, who are you?” as the Complete Jewish Bible, Literal Translation of the Holy Bible read; or “Who are you, Sir?” as the God’s Word Version, the New American Bible, Williams New Testament read; or “Who are you?” as the Contemporary English Version reads; or “Who is speaking, sir?” as the Living Bible reads. How miserably all of those versions represent Saul’s answer, as though he was responding to an ordinary man! When translators allow etymological interpretations to upstage the knowledge of Divine manners, they have ceased to serve the people of God. The rendering of “sir” is wholly unjustified. The consistent word in the Greek manuscripts is **ku,rioj** (kur-is), which lexically means “one having power or authority, he to whom a person or things belongs, about which he has the power of deciding; master, lord . . . universally of the possessor and disposer of a thing, the owner.” THAYER

There is no possible way that this word can be rendered “sir.” It is true that around the thirteenth century the title “sir” was conferred on knights, barons, and sometimes priests – or some other man of rank of position. MERRIAM-WEBSTER However, such a title does not match the nature of this revelation – a light from heaven smiting Saul the ground, and an arresting voice speaking that demanded the attention and instant respect and submission of Saul.

When the Lord asserts His power, it cannot be resisted. This pertains to an initiative to curse, as with Pharaoh and his armies. There is also the initiative to change a man's mind, as in the case of king Nebuchadnezzar. It also pertains to an initiative to bless, as in the case of Jesus being sent into the world.

These lesser translations are often the means of introducing weakness into the thinking capacity of men. They do not maintain the solidity and power of the Word of God. In fact, they are much like a bag with holes (Hab 1:6), or a broken cistern that can hold no water (Jer 2:13). Men do well to be deliberate in their choice of a Bible for their primary reference. In my judgment, when dealing with the Word of God, it is far better to begin with weighty archaic words, than with small and frail contemporary ones.

When Saul responded, "Who art Thou Lord?" he was not only acknowledging the superiority of the One speaking to him, but expressing his subjection to him as well. He did not know who the Person was, but he did know He was greater than himself. Here was a case where Jesus fulfilled a word from Isaiah the prophet: "He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth" (Isa 11:4). All Jesus did was direct his attention to Saul of Tarsus, and say a word to him, and all of his hostility melted like wax!

Notice that Saul sought to know the identity of the one speaking to him. In a way, this required some boldness. Yet, that is not the way it is best viewed. This is rather evidence of the effect of a Divine initiative of the sort made known in this text. When the Lord asserts His power, it cannot be resisted. This pertains to an initiative to curse, as with Pharaoh and his armies (Ex 9:16; Ex 14:27). There is also the initiative to change a man's mind, as in the case of king Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:32; 5:21). It also pertains to an initiative to bless, as in the case of Jesus being sent into the world (Acts 3:26; 4:4). In this text, it pertains to someone being called into the ministry. Paul testifies of the process that began to be fulfilled in our text, "But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Gal 1:15-17).

In our day, pseudo-intellectualism has robbed men of natural sensitivity to Divine workings. I question that the average American Christian would have responded in the way Saul of Tarsus did. Some would simply have died of fright. Others would probably say it thundered, like those some who heard the voice of God speaking from heaven in the days of Jesus (John 12:29).

The point is that there is a moral and spiritual condition in which men are more apt to respond to the Lord. In the case of Saul of Tarsus, that condition was one where a consciousness of God was prominent. That consciousness was, in a sense, crude and lacking God-glorifying clarity. Yet, because it was based upon his understanding of Scripture, it caused Saul to be sensitive enough to respond to the revelation of Jesus in an appropriate manner.

JESUS IDENTIFIES HIMSELF

"5b And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest . . ."

Jesus, like the Father, does not desire to remain unknown or mysterious. He desires to be known! In fact, that is the objective that drives Divine involvements with men. Eternal life, by definition, is knowing God – knowing His identity, manners, and purpose. In this respect, the "true God" and "His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 5:20) differ from all other gods. No other religion can boast of knowing and understanding their god (Jer 9:23-24), or of dwelling in Him, and He in them. There is an element of mystery concerning all false god's, with whom no personal affiliation and experience is affirmed. However, this is not true of God the Father or the exalted Christ. Therefore, when Paul asks who this

superior One is, to whom he admits he is subject, Jesus will reply with great specificity.

“I AM JESUS”

When men referred to Jesus they said, “Jesus of Galilee” (Matt 26:69), “Jesus of Nazareth” (Matt 26:71), “Jesus the prophet of Nazareth” (Matt 21:11), or “Jesus the son of Joseph” (John 6:42). Here, the Lord simply referred to himself as “Jesus,” and stated that He was the One whom Saul was persecuting.

Paul knew very well who “Jesus” was – at least in His human form. At this time he was thinking within himself that he “ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” – something he acknowledged to Agrippa when describing his life during the time of our text. It is true that there were other men named “Jesus.”

- This was the Greek form of “Joshua,” to which both Stephen and Paul referred by the name “Jesus” – **Ίησους** (Acts 7:45; Heb 4:8).
- There was also “Jesus, whose surname was Justus” (Col 4:11).

In addition to the above, and according to the Jewish historian Josephus, there were at least nine other men from the time of Christ who were named “Jesus.”

CONTEMPORARY MEN NAMED “JESUS”

- 1 A high priest displaced by Antiochus Epiphanes to make room for Onias (Antiquities 12, 5, 1; 15, 3, 1).
2. The son of Phabet, deprived by Herod of the high priesthood in order to make way for his own father-in-law Simon (Antiquities 15, 9,4).
- 3 Son of Sie, successor of Eleazar (Antiquities 17, 13, 1).
- 4 The son of Damnaeus, made high priest by Agrippa in place of Ananus (Antiquities 20, 9, 1).
- 5 The son of Gamaliel, and successor of the preceding in the high priesthood (Antiquities 20, 9, 4; compare War, 4, 4,3).
- 6 Son of Ananus, a plebeian, and the utterer of the remarkable doom against Jerusalem, which was fulfilled during the last siege simultaneously with his own death (War, 6, 5, 3).
- 7 A priest, son of Thebuthus, who surrendered to Titus the sacred utensils of the Temple (War, 6, 8, 3).
- 8 Son of Sepphas, one of the chief priests and governor of Tiberias (War, 2, 20, 4).
- 9 Son of Saphat, a ringleader of the Sicarii during the last war with the Romans (War, 3, 9, 7).

From the writings of Josephus

However, Jesus had so distinguished the name given to Him, that He was at once the person they thought of when they heard that name. To others, it was but a name, and was identified by purely earthly distinction. Joshua, for example, is referred to as “the son of Nun” (Ex 33:11). Another Jew named “Jesus” was “called Justus,” as affirmed in Colossians 4:11.

However, when it came to the “Jesus” who appeared to Saul Tarsus, there were distinctions owned by no other person. He is known as:

- “Jesus the Christ” (Matt 16:20).
- “Jesus the prophet of Galilee” (Matt 21:11).
- “Jesus the King of the Jews” (Matt 27:37).
- “Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor 4:5).
- “Jesus the Son of God” (Heb 4:14).
- “Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2).
- “Jesus the Mediator of the New Covenant” (Heb 12:24).

There were affirmations of Him, such as:

- “Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God” (John 20:31).
- “Jesus is the Lord” (1 Cor 12:3).
- “Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 4:15).
- “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil 2:10).

All of these expressions precisely reflect who Jesus is. They are not mere terms. When Jesus speaks, He speaks in those capacities, because they declare who He really is. That means that the statement “I am Jesus” was accompanied with all of the power and majesty of His Person. Saul knew he was not confronting any ordinary man. I long for the time when this impression will register upon the hearts of the people of our time, and they will be freed from the blight of normalcy and ordinariness.

WHOM THOU PERSECUTEST

Other versions read, “whom you are persecuting,” NKJV “are chasing,” INTERLINEAR and “are so cruel to,” CEV The prevailing translation in all versions is “persecuting.”

The word persecute has the following lexical meaning: “To make to run or flee, pout to flight, drive away; to run swiftly in order to catch some person; to harass, trouble, molest one; to persecute,” THAYER “hostile pursuit,” FRIBERG and “to prosecute or bring action against.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

It is evident that the word “persecute” is a very large one. There is intensity and aggressiveness in the action, together with an intention to cause trouble, and even do harm. There is an effort to demonstrate that the one being persecuted is wrong, and worthy of any disadvantage that can be brought to bear upon them. All, of this is seen in the most vivid description of the intentions of Saul of Tarsus.

- Consented to the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1).
- Made havoc of the church (Acts 8:3a).
- Entered from house to house, dragging both men and women to prison (Acts 8:3b).
- Breathed out threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord (Acts 9:1).
- Obtained letters to enter synagogues in Damascus, and bring believing men and women bound to Jerusalem (Acts 9:2).
- Persecuted believers, both men and women, unto the death (Acts 22:4).
- Brought believers bound to Jerusalem to be punished (Acts 22:5).
- Received authority to bind all the saints of the Lord (Acts 9:14).
- Destroyed them that called upon the name of the Lord (Acts 9:21).

- Shut up many saints in prison (Acts 26:10).
- When saints were put to death, gave his consent (Acts 26:10).
- Punished believers in the synagogues often (Acts 26:11a).
- Compelled some believers to blaspheme (Acts 26:11b).
- Was furiously engaged against believers, even pursuing them into foreign cities (Acts 26:11c).
- Wasted, or tried to destroy, the church of God (Gal 1:13).

We do not know how long this aggression continued. It was of sufficient duration for Saul to develop a reputation for his initiative against the followers of Jesus Christ (Acts 9:14,21,26). Conservative estimates are one to two years (35/36 A.D. – 37 A.D.), with two years being the more probable.

The Spirit reasons with us concerning the impact of faith upon those possessing it. He testifies of the great victories that were wrought by faith, mighty deliverances, and the subduing of inimical forces. But that is not all that faith does!

Now Jesus informs this persecutor that He is actually the One he has been oppressing. During His ministry, Jesus told Peter, Andrew, James, and John that when He comes again, He will separate the sheep from the goats. At that time He will make public the fact that the precise manner in which every individual responded to His people will be a key factor in the determination of their eternal destiny. Allow me to repeat the words of Jesus to which I referred at the beginning of this lesson – this time from The Amplified Bible. To the saved He will say, “Truly I tell you, in so far as you did it for one of the least in the estimation of men] of these My brethren, you did it for Me .” To the lost He will say, “ Solemnly I declare to you, in so far as you failed to do it for the least [in the estimation of men] of these, you failed to do it for Me .” (Mat 25:40,45). The gravity of this statement is confirmed in our text, leaving no doubt that this is precisely how the response of men to the people of God is viewed in heaven. With that in mind, the confrontation of Saul with the living Christ on the road to Damascus was a singular blessing!

Why Do Such Things Occur?

Those who entertain simplistic views of Divine protection and aid may wonder why such an initiative was allowed to continue. The church was not weak at this point, and there appeared to be no need for severe chastening. Why didn't the angel of the Lord camp round about those believers to protect them, as Psalm 34:7 states? Why were they not the head instead of the tail, as Deuteronomy 28:44 had promised? Or – could it be that such assessments come short of a good understanding?

The saints in question were subjected to the seeming superiority of their enemy for the same reason that Abel was killed by Cain (Gen 4:8), holy prophets were killed by Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4,13), Zechariah the prophet was stoned in the court of the house of the Lord (2 Chron 24:21-22), and Stephen was stoned by the Jewish council (Acts 7:58-60).

The Spirit reasons with us concerning the impact of faith upon those possessing it. He testifies of the great victories that were wrought by faith, mighty deliverances, and the subduing of inimical forces. But that is not all that faith does! There is also the record of others who “were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb 11:35-38).

There is an evil spirit that moves men to equate well being with blessing, and trouble with punishment, or even Divine abandonment. But such views are not comely for the people of God, and they ought to be abandoned with haste. Even Job, who did not have a Bible, knew that it was not right to expect only good from the Lord and not evil (Job 2:10). What is the source of the modern faddish Christian view of prosperity? Precisely how would you explain it to those saints who were put to death during the aggression of Saul of Tarsus? For that matter, how would you explain it to Paul himself who said of the apostles, “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Cor 4:9).

If they do not already do so, believers must learn to avoid assessing life according to circumstance. The Kingdom of God does not revolve around people, but around God’s eternal purpose as it is being carried out by the exalted Jesus. There are several objectives that are being accomplished in the government of Jesus.

- God Himself is being glorified (Eph 3:21).
- The greatness of His grace is being confirmed (Eph 2:7-8).
- The saints are being matured, thereby being prepared for glory (Acts 15:14).
- Heavenly citizens are being perfected in a hostile realm (2 Tim 2:21; 1 Pet 5:10).
- Believers are being changed from one degree of glory to another by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- Through the church, heavenly principalities and powers are being tutored in the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10).
- The extent of the fall of man is being confirmed (John 6:63; Rom 7:18; 8:7-8;).
- The superiority of the new creation is being demonstrated (2 Cor 4:16).
- The transcendence of our spiritual weaponry is being confirmed in battle (2 Cor 10:3-5).
- God is showing unto the heirs of the promise the immutability of His counsel (Heb 6:17).

These, and similar, objectives often require the sifting and trial of those who are in Christ Jesus. Sometimes, as confirmed in Job, trials really have nothing to do with what is taking place on earth, but owe their origin to confrontations that take place outside of the world (Job 1:8-12; 2:3-6).

This is why an earth-centered view of life in Christ is so wrong, and therefore thoroughly unprofitable. In fact, it is very damaging. It moves people to think as though they were the only persons, and this world was the only place – and both conclusions are glaringly incorrect!

SOMETHING THAT IS DIFFICULT TO DO

“ 5c . . . it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

This entire statement, together with the first part of verse six, are omitted from the majority of later versions. In fact, of the forty-four versions I possess, the ONLY ones that include these words are the King James Version, New King James, Douay-Rheims (1899), Geneva (1599), Bishop’s New Testament (1565), Webster and Revised Webster’s (1833), Tyndale (1534), Young’s Literal (1862), Amplified Bible (1954), Bishop’s Bible (1568), and the Literal Translation of the Holy Bible.

The irony of this circumstance is that this phrase is precisely repeated in Paul’s recounting of this event before King Agrippa: “And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto

me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks ” (Acts 26:14). All of the versions that omit the phrase in Acts 9:5 include it in 26:14. I will therefore proceed with the persuasion that it is a precise statement of what was said by Jesus to Paul.

IT IS HARD

“ . . . it is hard for thee . . . ” Other versions read (from 22:14), “it hurts you ,” NRSV “It’s hard for a mortal like you ,” GWN “You are hurting yourself ,” NET “it is useless,” NLT “you are only hurting yourself ,” LIVING “You are finding it painful ,” WEYMOUTH “It is dangerous and turns out badly for you,” AMPLIFIED “It is not for you ,” PHILLIPS “It is difficult for you ,” ALT “It is foolish ,” CEV and “You are hurting yourself .” GNB

Considering these words to be said by Jesus, as I have already confirmed, we have here a rare interpretation of the effect of Divine influences upon the conscience.

Jesus says the activity He will describe was “hard” for Saul. This word means “hard, harsh, rough . . . offensive and intolerable,” THAYER “unpleasant, hard to take,” FRIBERG “difficult . . . terrible,” UBS “pertaining to being harsh and violent,” LOUW-NIDA and “severe.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The word “hard” not only implies great difficulty, but something that produces mental pain and anguish. It is something that becomes intolerable, and unable to bear.

What we have here is a Governing Savior who has allowed Saul of Tarsus to live with a most difficult circumstance, and do so to the point where it is no longer bearable. Then, at the precisely proper time, He appears to this persecutor of the church of God, facing him with the extreme difficulty he has had living with the situation.

KICK AGAINST THE PRICKS

“ . . . to kick against the pricks.” Other versions read, “the goads,” NKJV “go against the impulse that is driving you,” BBE “kicking against the ox-goads ,” CJB “to resist God,” GWN “fight against My will,” NLT “by fighting Me,” IE “keep on kicking against the goads,” ISV “keep kicking against the goad [to offer vain and perilous resistance],” AMPLIFIED to kick against your own conscience ,” PHILLIPS to fight , CEV by hitting back , like an ox kicking against its owner's stick . GNB

The “pricks” to which Jesus refers are the goads, or prodding, of his conscience. The lexical meaning of the

SUGGESTED CAUSES FOR GOADS

- (1) By violating plain laws of God.
- (2) By attempting to resist His claims.
- (3) By refusing to do what the conscience requires.
- (4) By attempting to free one’s self from serious impressions and alarms.
- (5) By pursuing a course of vice and wickedness against what they know to be right.
- (6) By refusing to submit to the dealings of Providence.
- (7) In any way by opposing God, and refusing to submit to his authority, and to do what is right.

word is, “a sting, as that of bees, locusts; an iron goad for urging on oxen, horses, and other beasts of burden,” THAYER “literally of insects with a poisonous tip stinger; of prodding instruments,” FRIBERG “sharp pointed projection used in stinging,” LOUW-NIDA “a horsegoad,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “the sting of an animal; goad, a pointed stick.” GINGRICH

In my judgment, the goading of the conscience is an experience in which Divine influences are present. I do not know that it can be established that any portion of the human constitution functions independently. The God who can cleanse the conscience can surely convict it.

An ox goad was a very large, and fully adequate for the task of moving a stubborn animal along. You may recall that Shamgar, a judge of Israel, killed six hundred Philistines with an ox goad (Judges 3:31). In my judgment, the goading of the conscience is an experience in which Divine influences are present. I do not know that it can be established that any portion of the human constitution functions independently. The God who can cleanse the conscience can surely convict it. In fact, I do not doubt that being convicted of sin – a work of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-9) – is involved in the goading of an individual.

Under the Law God revealed that a troubled spirit came from him: “the LORD shall give thee there a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind” (Deut 28:65). David said of the experience of goading, “For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore” (Psa 38:2). Referring to complex inner experiences, David spoke of the bones that God had broken (Psa 51:8).

Jesus was telling Saul that it was difficult and painful to contend with such feelings.

Kicking against the pricks is an act of stubbornness and rebellion. It is a refusal to yield to the pangs of the conscience. Saul did this, but it was difficult for him to do. Perhaps he could not forget that awful day when he consented to the stoning to Stephen, whose voice rang out in prayer petitioning for those who slew him. It could have been those he dragged off to prison, and to the sentence of death – many of whom were women. And what of those whom he compelled to blaspheme? What could possibly drown out the word by which they blasphemed that worthy name by which they had been called. Ponder the disruption that was caused in the synagogues he entered, as well as the homes, when he went from house to house, making havoc of the church. Oh, there was a lot that could have pricked the conscience of a man who was serious about serving God! No one had imagined that Saul was being jabbed with the goads of a wounded conscience – but he was, and Jesus knew it.

To make this matter even more personal, Paul confessed to something else that happened on this occasion that is not mentioned in this text. When testifying before king Agrippa, Paul told him, “And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 26:14). None but the Jews spoke in that language – it was peculiar to them. That added all the more weight to the words of Christ, for it identified Him as someone having to do with the Jewish people.

Peter indicated that the saints are to reckon on their lives and testimony being like goads to the conscience of those who oppose them. In order for this to happen, they must set their hearts apart to the Lord and maintain a good conscience. That will have a calculated effect on those who oppose them. “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet 3:15-16).

This is no doubt the reason why Saul of Tarsus had to contend with a stinging conscience, and goads to the soul. Those whom he was persecuting had maintained their lives, and responded to initiatives against them, in an exemplary manner. In so doing Saul no doubt had to wrestle with some

sense of shame, just as Peter said.

INSTANT RECOGNITION AND SUBMISSION

“6a And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”

How will Saul respond to the words of the Lord? Would he resist the Lord's Christ as he had done to this point? Indeed, that will not be the case!

TREMBLING AND ASTONISHED

“And he trembling and astonished . . .” Again, these words omitted in most of the later translations. Such translation procedures give no advantage to the people of God, and even introduce an element of confusion. In Paul's recounting of this event before a Jewish assembly, he referred to his response to Jesus. “And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutes . . . And I said, What shall I do, Lord . . .” (Acts 22:10). All of the versions contain these words. Other than a miserable academic explanation, what possible reason can be given for omitting what really happened from the account as stated in the ninth chapter of Acts? Precisely how is that handling aright the word of truth? If it is said that it was omitted from several of the other manuscripts – none of which are the actual originals – what difference does that make? It is the solemn responsibility of translators to arrive at the truth of the matter, not by consensus, or the tallying up of the worth of manuscripts (the value of which they themselves have established). I am developing a growing disdain for those who handle the translation of Scripture as though they were dealing with the words of men. It is the business of both translators, preachers, and even those who procure the finished work, to give themselves the greatest advantage. This will require that they know the truth. As in this text, further accounts establish that what is actually represented in the Authorized Version is a precise account. There can be no satisfactory reason given for its omission. The purported scholarship of men is not weighty enough to justify such a sloppy handling of Scripture. I will proceed with this text in the persuasion that it does portray with exactly precision the response of Saul.

Other versions read, “trembling and astonished,” DOUAY/AMPLIFIED “trembling and astonished,” GENEVA/RWB “and he both trembling and astonished,” PNT/TNT/BISHOPS “trembling also and astonished,” YLT and “both trembling and being astonished.” LITV

The word “trembling” speaks of “being afraid,” THAYER “quiver,” FRIBERG and “shake or tremble, often with the implication of fear and/or consternation.” LOUW-NIDA

This is the response of someone in the flesh confronting Deity, or being made acutely aware that they are in the presence of the Lord. David, a man after God's own heart, once said, “My flesh trembleth for fear of Thee; and I am afraid of Thy judgments” (Psa 119:120). When but an angel spoke directly to Daniel he reported, “And when He had spoken this word unto me, I stood trembling” (Dan 10:11). When the Philippian jailer sensed something supernatural was happening he “came trembling” (Acts 16:29). The newly-found casualness that attends many who say they are coming into the presence of the Lord is really nothing more than a confirmation that they only imagine they are in His presence. No one of Scriptural note was ever knowingly in the presence of the Lord, yet conducted themselves as though He was one of their peers.

The word “astonished,” means to be “astonished, terrified, and amazed; to be frightened,” THAYER “startled,” FRIBERG “a state of astonishment due to both the suddenness and the unusualness of the phenomenon,” LOUW-NIDA “to be astounded,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to be terror-struck.” LEH

There is such a contradiction between the Lord and mankind that a sudden revelation of Him in His fulness would cause the people to succumb because of that variance. This is why “every

eye shall see” the glorified Christ only when their present bodies have been discarded, and the resurrection body is possessed.

Again, this is the effect of the revelation of Deity upon someone who is in the body. It is all the more highlighted when the person has been opposed to the Lord Jesus Christ. This circumstance is why the Lord told Moses, “Thou canst not see My face: for there shall no man see Me, and live” (Ex 33:20). There is such a contradiction between the Lord and mankind that a sudden revelation of Him in His fulness would cause the people to succumb because of that variance. This is why “every eye shall see” the glorified Christ only when their present bodies have been discarded, and the resurrection body is possessed.

And, what kind of response will be found in the opponents of Jesus when He comes in all, of His glory, and the glory of the Father, and that of all the holy angels (Lk 9:26)! The revelation of the glorified Christ to Saul of Tarsus was only partial. It was not the full glory, for that will cause the entire natural creation to “flee” (Rev 20:11). Just as surely as Saul of Tarsus did not oppose Jesus that day, or marshal the men with him to fight against Him, so it simply is not possible that such an action will take place when Jesus is revealed in all of His glory. Any view to the contrary is to be thrown on the trash-heap of useless theology.

WHAT WILT THOU HAVE ME TO DO

“ . . . said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” Other versions read, “What do You want me to do?” NKJV what dost Thou wish me to do?” YLT and “what do You desire me to do?” AMPLIFIED Paul’s testimony in Acts 22:10 reads, “What shall I do, Lord?” Other versions read, “What am I to do, Lord?” NRSV “What should I do, Lord?” CJB and “What do You want me to do, Lord?” GWN

Once Saul knew who was speaking to him, he also knew there was something he should do. Not knowing what it was, he at once asked for direction. I conclude that a person who is not interested in what the Lord wants him to do is simply not aware that he is living before Him. We know this is the case from the recorded responses of those who were persuaded they were in some way dealing with the Lord.

- **THE PEOPLE’S RESPONSE TO JOHN THE BAPTIST.** “And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?” (Luke 3:10).

- **THE RICH YOUNG RULER.** “And when he was gone forth into the way, there came one running, and kneeled to him, and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17).

There is only one way to avoid this response, and that is to be reconciled to God, being justified from all things. Until that takes place, even the intellectual awareness of the Lord is a rather frightening experience. With that awareness comes a certain insight into the human nature and its fallenness.

- **A CERTAIN LAWYER.** “And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Luke 10:25).

- **ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do ?” (Acts 2:37).

- **THE PHILIPPI AN JAILER.** “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

The general absence of this posture in the professing church is a sad commentary on its condition. The apparent penitent people have to do the minimum, say the minimal, and give the least required, betrays a state that is even beneath that of an inquirer – like the rich young ruler and the certain

lawyer.

Those who knowingly confront Jesus Christ at once know that He is Lord – just as Saul of Tarsus did. That is why they inquire concerning what they are to do, for the will of the One who is Lord supercedes the will of all others.

When self-will dominates individuals, it is confirmation that they are unaware of the Lord, and are living at an experiential distance from Him. It is not simply that it is wrong not to be humble and obedient. The very presence of self-centeredness means the person is actually a reject – for “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psa 34:18). And again, “The LORD is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth” (Psa 145:18). Note, it is “THE LORD” that is near to them – not their Friend! This is the reason professing believers are required to examine themselves to determine if they are in the faith. The reason cited is that Christ is in a person unless he is a reprobate (2 Cor 13:5). When the human spirit becomes conscious of God – the “true God” (1 John 5:20) – a low estimation of the natural self at once envelopes in the individual. That is what happened to Isaiah when He saw “THE LORD high and lifted up.” He instantly responded, “Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips” (Isa 6:5). There is only one way to avoid this response, and that is to be reconciled to God, being justified from all things. Until that takes place, even the intellectual awareness of the Lord is a rather frightening experience. With that awareness comes a certain insight into the human nature and its absolute corruption. The need for a new heart becomes evident.

JESUS WORKS THROUGH THE MEMBERS OF HIS BODY

“ 6b And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.”

Here we are introduced to the manner of the Kingdom. When it comes to what men are to do in order to appropriate His salvation, it must come from lips of one of His servants. I have often heard of people who were said to have read the Bible and arrived at the knowledge of Jesus and what is required to be saved – independently of any human involvement. While I am not prepared to say that such a thing is impossible, I unqualifiedly say it is improbable. Paul said that a person cannot believe on the One of whom He has not heard, and that he cannot hear without a preacher that has been “sent” (Rom 10:14). If this was true of Paul, who was “separated” from his “mother’s womb,” was an ardent student of Scripture, and was called directly by Jesus Christ Himself (Gal 1:15-16), it appears to me that it will be exceedingly difficult to support the notion that a person can read their way into Jesus. Notwithstanding, not willing to be contentious about the matter, we will proceed with the record, and let it speak for itself.

GO INTO THE CITY

“And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city . . .” Other versions read, “rise and enter the city,” NASB “get up and go into the city,” NIV and “stand up and enter the city.” NET Paul’s account in Acts 22:10 identifies the city: “Arise, and go into Damascus.”

Thus, Saul is commanded to enter the very city from which he had determined to haul men and women out of the synagogues and bring them bound to Jerusalem (9:2). His itinerary was instantly changed! He was now going to the very place he had originally intended, but this time for a different reason.

Keep in mind that at this time Saul was laying on the ground where he had fallen when this blinding light focused upon him. You might say this was a brief interruption in his journey, designed to bring him into accord with the purpose of the Lord. He will go to the same city, but for reasons defined by

Jesus, and not himself.

IT SHALL BE TOLD THEE

“ . . . and it shall be told thee what thou must do.” Other versions read, “you will be told what you must do,” NKJV “you will be told what you are to do,” RSV “it will be made clear to you what you have to do,” BBE “it will be told thee what thou oughtest to do,” MRD “it shall be told thee what it behoveth thee to do,” YLT “and await my further instructions,” LIVING “Someone there will tell you what you must do,” IE and “it will be told to you what it is necessary [for] you to be doing.” ALT Notice the stress that is placed on necessity: “ must do,” “ are to do,” “ have to do,” “ oughtest to do,” behoveth [necessary , fit, and proper] thee to do,” and “ necessary for you to be doing.”

Acts 22:10 reads, “. . . there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do ” (Acts 22:10). In

However, in the aftermath of it all, their minds were incapable of forming a cogent thought about this experience, and their mouth could frame no words concerning it. They had just experienced something transcendent to the natural, and did not have the faintest idea what it was. They were, in a very real sense, struck dumb.

Acts 26:14-18 Paul relates more extensively what Jesus said to him on the road to Damascus. He outlined WHY He had appeared to Saul. “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:14-18). There would, then, be future appearances of Jesus to Saul. However, at this time, he must receive directions from one who is himself acquainted with, and employed by, the Lord Jesus Christ. His induction into Christ will come from his exposure to one of Christ’s disciples – just as it was with those on the day of Pentecost, those in Solomon’s porch, the Samaritans, and the Ethiopian eunuch. The same pattern will follow with the household of Cornelius, Lydia, the Philippi an jailor, the Corinthians, and others. The future appearances of Jesus will come only after Saul has been baptized into Him.

THE OBTUSENESS OF THE FLESH

“ 7 And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.”

Prior to Him being revealed in all of glory, the fact that Jesus appears and speaks does not mean that everyone in His presence realizes it. There is a certain obtuseness in unregenerate men that makes them incapable of recognizing Jesus unless He enables them to do so. This is what He does in our text. He opens the heart of Saul, and leaves the other hearts closed. He enables Saul to hear and understand what He says, but withholds that ability from those who are with him. It certainly should not surprise us that when the Gospel is preached some understand and some do not. Such a distinction cannot be traced to the human will, for Saul and those who were with him were all in the same category, headed for the same place, and with the same intent. There should be no question about them all being Jews, for Saul was on a Jewish mission, authorized by the Jewish high priest. Him being a zealous for the Law, it is not likely that he hired some mercenaries from the Gentile sector. All of the men were opposed to Jesus, as confirmed by their initiative against His people. Yet, only one of them is singled out and addressed by Jesus. Only one of them is told what they are really doing. Only one of them is told who is speaking. Only one of them is diagnosed by Jesus. And, only one of them is told what to do. Apart from the will of Jesus, exactly how do you explain those distinctions?

In Acts 22:9 Paul reported, “they that were with me saw indeed the light .” In his testimony about

this very event to Agrippa, he made a point of saying that up to the time when Jesus spoke, the whole group was involved in what was taking place “At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me . . . And when we were all fallen to the earth , I heard a voice speaking unto me . . .” Acts 26:14). I do not know how any person can escape the conclusion that this is a display of Divine discretion.

STOOD SPEECHLESS

“And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless . . .” Other versions read, “were not able to say anything,” BBE and “stood amazed,” GENEVA

What was taking place was of such magnitude that it rendered those who were accompanying Saul “speechless.” Notice, even though Paul said all of them were “fallen to the earth” (26:14), now they are said to be standing. I assume that they had risen and attempted to gather their senses after the appearance of this blinding light. As noted before, the light is thought to have been flashing like lightening. Apparently it had stopped, or at the very least was not as bright as it was at first. However, in the aftermath of it all, their minds were incapable of forming a cogent thought about this experience, and their mouth could frame no words concerning it. They had just experienced something transcendent to the natural, and did not have the faintest idea what it was. They were, in a very real sense, struck dumb.

HEARING BUT NOT SEEING

“ . . . hearing a voice, but seeing no man.” Other versions read, “they heard the sound, but did not see anyone,” NIV “hearing his voice, but seeing no man,” GENEVA “they heard merely the voice, and no one was visible to them,” MRD and “they heard the sound of someone's voice but saw no one.” NLT

There is one other possibility. The voice that they heard may have been that of Saul himself, speaking to, and responding to, the Lord Jesus. In such a case, Saul would have appeared to them as speaking to someone that could not be seen or heard.

In Acts 22:9 Paul said of this event, “And they that were with me... were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me ” (Acts 22:9). They did not know what Jesus said to Saul. When it says they “heard a voice,” it means they only heard the sound of a voice, yet could not distinguish what was being said. Some have alleged this was because Jesus spoke to Saul in the Hebrew tongue (26:14). However, this is as unlikely as Paul accumulating some Gentiles to carry out his mission. They did not hear what was being said because Jesus did not want them to hear. For this occasion, He did not give them ears to hear. Like the multitudes to whom Jesus spoke in parables, it was “not given” to them to hear (Matt 13:11). Thus they only heard a noise, like those who heard God speak to Jesus, and thought that it had thundered (John 12:28-29).

There is one other possibility. The voice that they heard may have been that of Saul himself, speaking to, and responding to, the Lord Jesus. In such a case, Saul would have appeared to them as speaking to someone that could not be seen or heard. This, in my judgment, is what the text probably means. That allows for the precise accuracy of both texts. This seems clear because in Paul's witness to the Jewish council he precisely said the men did not hear the voice that directed to him (Acts 22:9).

Throughout Christ's earthly ministry this kind of discretion is made known. The truth was withheld from some people, yet revealed to others.

- “At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes . Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in Thy sight” (Mat 11:25-26).

- “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given ” (Mat 13:11).

- “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven ” (Mat 16:17).

- “ If any man will do His will , he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of Myself” (John 7:17).

This circumstance is why David prayed, “Give me understanding” (Psa 119:34,73,,125,144,,169). It is why God alone can give ears to hear (Deut 29:4; Rom 11:8). It is why Paul prayed that God would enlighten the saints, and open the eyes of their understanding (Eph 1:15-19). It is why He prayed that the church might be “filled with all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9-10). It is why Jesus called out, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Mat 11:15). It is why the Lord says, “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches” (Rev 2:7).

INSTANT AND UNQUESTIONED OBEDIENCE

“ 8 And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.”

For the time being, Jesus has completed His word to Saul. Now Saul must go into the city as Jesus has commanded him. He will find, however, that the vision has left him with a decided handicap, or inability.

SAUL ROSE FROM THE EARTH

“And Saul arose from the earth...” Other versions read, “Saul got up from the ground,” NIV “They helped Saul get up off the ground,” CJB “Saul was helped up from the ground,” GWN “Saul picked himself up off the ground,” NLT and “ Saul was lifted up from the earth.” LITV

The word translated “arose” can mean “to arouse, or cause to rise,” THAYER as one that has been acted upon, or caused to get up by someone else. This is why some versions read that Saul was “helped” up.

Throughout Christ’s communication with Saul, he had remained on the ground. He later referred to the episode as “the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19). It appears as though he was in a kind of trance, like Peter was on the housetop (Acts 10:10). This is apparently a condition in which the mind is active independently of the body – a state where men become aware of realities that cannot be accessed by the human senses. Balaam is said to have fallen into a trance “having his eyes open” (Num 24:4).

Now Saul regains his normal composure and rises to his feet, probably being helped up those who were with him.

WHEN HIS EYES WERE OPENED

“ . . . and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man . . .” This refers to the physical opening of the eyelids, not to him being able to see. The text does not mean that Saul looked around but could not see Jesus. It rather means that he was blind, and could not see anyone. He explained this in his defenses before the Jewish council. Speaking of this very occasion he said, “And when I could not see for the glory of that light ” (Acts 22:11). Other versions read, “because of the brightness of that light,” NASB “because the brilliance of the light had blinded me,” NIV “because the light had been so bright,” GWN “Since the light had been so dazzling that I was blind,” NJB “I was blinded by the intense light,” NLT “I saw nothing for the brightness of the light,” PNT “he found that he was blind,” LIVING “he couldn’t see anything, even though his eyes were open,” ISV and “but although his eyes were open, he continued to perceive nothing.” MONTGOMERY

Saul's encounter with the glorified Christ brought something to him.

There is a very real sense in which great blessings from the Lord are coupled with certain fleshly debilities. This has been the portion of many saints in an overt manner, and with remarkable consistency in a spiritual way. Those who traffic in heavenly realms will soon know what it means to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3), and to confess “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing”

However, it also took something from him – at least for a while. It is quite possible that the eye trouble Paul had (Gal 4:15; 6:11) was traced back to this very event. Such a condition would certainly fit in with other heavenly visitations. Jacob received a blessing, and a hip that was out of joint as well (Gen 32:25). Daniel received a revelation, and he fainted and was sick for “certain days” (Dan 8:27). Again, he received message from heaven, and there remained no strength in him (Dan 10:8,16,17). Habakkuk heard from the Lord and confessed, “When I heard, my belly trembled; my lips quivered at the voice: rottenness entered into my bones, and I trembled in myself” (Hab 3:16). The glorified Christ appeared to John the apostle and he “fell at His feet as dead” (Rev 1:17).

There is a very real sense in which great blessings from the Lord are coupled with certain fleshly debilities. This has been the portion of many saints in an overt manner, and with remarkable consistency in a spiritual way. Those who traffic in heavenly realms will soon know what it means to have “no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3), and to confess “I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing” (Rom 7:18).

THEY LED HIM BY THE HAND

“ . . . but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus.”

Saul was blind, but he did not think to wait until he could see to make his way into Damascus. Those who were with him assisted him, leading him into the city. In Acts 22:11 Paul testified, “And when I could not see for the glory of that light , being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus” (Acts 22:11). Speaking of his trek into the city, and the rest of his life, he confessed to Agrippa, “Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision” (Acts 26:19).

Saul did precisely what Jesus told him to do: he went into the city and waited. He also did it immediately, not waiting to recuperate from his blindness. Jesus did not tell Saul he was going to be blind, but when he discovered that he was, it did not deter him from obeying Jesus. Like the blind man made his way to the pool of Siloam, so blind Saul made his way into the city of Damascus. Obedience is like that: through faith it gets to the place to which the person has been sent by Jesus.

CONCLUSION

We have been introduced to the apprehension of Saul by Jesus. In that apprehension the Divine nature as revealed through the prophet Ezekiel has been confirmed. Through that prophet God Almighty said, “For thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep, and seek them out . As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep , and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day” (Ezek 34:11-12). Again He said, “I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick; but I will destroy the fat and the strong; I will feed them with judgment” (Ezek 34:16). Through Isaiah He said, “The Lord GOD which gathereth the outcasts of Israel saith, Yet will I gather others to him, beside those that are gathered unto him” (Isa 56:8).

Thus Paul was “put into the ministry” by the Lord Jesus Himself, as he declared to Timothy: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry ” (1 Tim 1:12). He was “made a minister according to the dispensation of God” (Col 1:25).

Each believer experiences the same sort of thing in their measure, being placed in the body where it has pleased God (1 Cor 12:18). All members of the body have been given a “measure of faith” that enables them to be contributors in Christ’s body, which is the church (Rom 12:6-10). Just as surely as Paul was called into His work according to God’s purpose, so it is with all of the members of the body. Therefore it is written, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9). May you be faithful to your calling as Paul, was to his. Then you too will receive the crown.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #42

“ 9:9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” (Acts 9:9)

ANANIAS SENT TO SAUL, Part One

INTRODUCTION

The narrative of our text begins with Saul in Damascus, having entered the city as he was instructed. He was instantly obedient, and was in no way hesitant to do as he was commanded. As soon as Jesus said, “Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do,” “Saul arose from the earth” and “they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus” (Acts 9:6,8). No exhortation was required, and no further instruction was given at this point. If Saul was to find out what he was to do, he had to go into the city – and he knew it. It only took one revelation for Saul to be convinced of the Source of the message: “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:5). At that instant Jesus revealed both Himself and the pangs of conscience that Saul of Tarsus was experiencing with great difficulty.

However, Saul learned there is no stereotyped manner in which the Lord makes Himself known. For example, Jesus did not make Himself known to Saul of Tarsus as He did to Mary when she came to the tomb, speaking tenderly to her and telling her to tell His brethren that He was going to ascend to His Father and their Father, and to His God and their God (John 20:16-17).

The Savior did not speak to Saul as He did to the two on the road to Emmaus, “beginning at Moses and all the prophets,” and expounding “unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). Later He revealed Himself to them “in breaking of bread,” at which time they recalled how their hearts “burned within” them as He talked with them and opened to them the Scriptures (Lk 24:32,35).

Jesus did not show Saul His hands and feet, as He did the other disciples (Lk 24:40), nor did He eat bread with him as He did with the other apostles and disciples (Lk 24:40-43). He did not expound the Scriptures to him, or open his understanding as He did to the others following His resurrection from the dead (Lk 24:44-45). Nor, indeed, did He prepare Saul a meal, as He did His disciples during His third appearance to them (John 21:9-13).

Those were all appearances that took place prior to Christ’s ascension and enthronement – something that had taken place approximately seven-years before our text. Thus Saul experienced a special visitation, for he was one “born

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- **I HAVE HEARD OF THIS MAN (9:13)**
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out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8). The revelation of Christ to Saul will take the form of “visions and revelations” (2 Cor 12:1), not with Jesus appearing with a body of “flesh and bones” (Lk 24:39).

Yet, in this initial revelation of Jesus, the theology of Saul was instantly changed. It obtained a new and different focus, and he threw overboard erroneous conceptions that he had held for some time. He required no orientation course, and it did not necessitate a lengthy period of time to unlearn the misconceptions he had adopted. This is a marvelous thing to consider, and I want to dwell longer upon it.

ENLIGHTENMENT

Enlightenment is a subject not often addressed by many of my professional teachers. While my father, unlearned in the religious schools of men, spoke often and with insight on this matter, I do not recall a single discourse, or period of time, in which the teachers to whom I was subjected spent time on this theme. Mind you, the Word of God speaks on the subject, but the scope of theological knowledge to which I was subjected in my educational experience was not large enough to take in enlightenment or illumination. Mind you, there was no denial of the reality of such an experience. Rather, it was limited to a certain cluster of men and a specific period of time. Nearly one thousand years before Christ David said, “the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness” (Psa 128:28). He also confessed that “the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes” (Psa 19:8). In Christ, conversion is associated with being “once enlightened” (Heb 6:4). The experience itself is described as light shining into the hearts of those who are thus born again: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6).

In the case of Saul of Tarsus, the disclosure of the Person of Christ was the revelation, not the direction given to him by Ananias. The comprehension of duty is a kind of lesser light that is seen more clearly in the greater light of the Lord’s Person and purpose

There is a body of knowledge that cannot be fully grasped by the unaided intellect of humanity. It pertains to realities that lie outside the scope of natural sense and aptitude – the human intellect being included. This is why it is written, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). It is a serious error to overstate the capacity of the human intellect, viewing the Word of God as little more than a text book. The Word of God is the “seed” of the Kingdom (Luke 8:11). That is, the Word is what God uses to make men aware of His Person, purpose, will, and ways. However, without Divine involvement, men are not capable of deciphering the true contents of Scripture.

The Spirit also refers to our conversion as a time of illumination. “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions” (Heb 10:32).

Other versions read “after being enlightened,” NASB and “had received the light.” NIV The world is a domain of darkness that must be penetrated by light from heaven. If that light is not given, the soul remains in darkness, ignorant of eternal realities.

This is precisely why Jesus opened up the understanding of the disciples concerning the Scriptures (Lk 24:45). It is why David prayed for understanding to be given to Him concerning the Law (Psa 119:34,73, 125,144,169). It is why Paul told Timothy to “consider” what he had written to him, and then prayed, “and the Lord give thee understanding in all things” (2 Tim 2:7).

There is also the matter of further enlightenment that is related to spiritual maturity (Eph 1:18). Peter referred to this expanded spiritual understanding in these words, which were delivered to those who are in Christ Jesus: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Pet 1:19). Paul also referred to this when he prayed for the enlightenment of the eyes of our understanding, in order that we might perceive the magnitude of what is found in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:15-19).

A HIGHER FORM OF KNOWLEDGE

At this point, we are not speaking of mere moral obligations, such as were initially made known in the Law and its attending ordinances. At its heart, enlightenment, or illumination, does not have to do with human responsibility. That area of knowledge has certainly been made known from heaven, but that is not the point of enlightenment. The day dawning is not descriptive of a time when it registers upon us what we are supposed to do. This has more to do with Divine intent than human obligation.

In the case of Saul of Tarsus, the disclosure of the Person of Christ was the revelation, not the direction given to him by Ananias. The comprehension of duty is a kind of lesser light that is seen more clearly in the greater light of the Lord’s Person and purpose. That is why we read, “For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light” (Psa 36:9). Once Saul of Tarsus was persuaded of the reality of Christ, he would be on the initiative to know what he himself was to do. And, indeed that is precisely what took place in our text.

A BESETTING SIN

However, in this day of salvation, there is no acceptable reason for not pursuing the will of the Lord with unparalleled aggressiveness. When other things are allowed to upstage doing the will of the Lord, a most serious deficiency has been revealed.

It seems to me that the besetting sin of the American church is its lack of understanding concerning both the Person and purpose of God. Aside from the relatively few exceptions, the professing church is guilty of the sin of the Athenians – worshiping an unknown God (Acts 17:23).

If knowing God is, in fact, “eternal life” (John 17:3), what can possibly be said in defense of a people who are ignorant of God – particularly since He has now been revealed in the Person of Christ (2 Cor 4:6)? Should not those who are unacquainted with the Lord tremble when they read that all who “know not God” will experience the “vengeance” of “flaming fire” (2 Thess 1:6).

NECESSARY OBSERVATIONS

Our text makes these observations necessary. Here we are faced with an aggressive adversary of the Lord Jesus. Like a warhorse, he has been breathing out “threatenings and slaughter” against the saints of the Lord. In fact, he is en route to Damascus to arrest and incarcerate any who are followers of Christ. Yet, in a moment of time, his entire perspective is altered, and his intentions are brought to

a grinding halt. The single thing that caused this to happen was that he found out the truth about Christ's Person, and the evil of what he himself had been doing. That moment of illumination moved him to ask, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6).

Now, my point for bringing this up is that many professing Christians have not yet come to this place – a place where they are not willing to do anything else until what Jesus desires is fulfilled. When Saul of Tarsus asked, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" it is to be understood that the will of Christ had become his preeminent consideration. As soon as he knew who Jesus was, he scrapped his intentions to arrest the followers of Jesus in Damascus. Now his compelling desire was to do what Jesus wanted. He knew nothing of receiving Jesus as Savior, but not as Lord!

In our time, all manner of explanations are offered for the absence of this compelling attitude. Some point to their background, some form of what men call addiction, or another reason they consider to be an adequate explanation for their lack of inquiry into the will of the Lord. However, in this day of salvation, there is no acceptable reason for not pursuing the will of the Lord with unparalleled aggressiveness. When other things are allowed to upstage doing the will of the Lord, a most serious deficiency has been revealed.

THE POWER OF THE TRUTH

There is a power inherent in the truth itself. Jesus referred to this when He said, "If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31-32).

No person is truly "free" who is not a disciple, and no person is a "disciple indeed" who fails to continue in the Word of truth. It is in that continuance that true discipleship is made known. Further, it is the acquaintance, or practical familiarity with the truth that liberates one from the enslaving properties of sin, enabling the individual to draw near to the Lord, obtaining mercy and finding grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16; 10:22).

Men resort to other helpers because they have not continued in the Word, and thus have not experienced the liberty for which they have been made free. Freedom from guilt is not the ultimate freedom, but is the prelude to freedom from the power of sin, and the consequent liberty to draw nigh unto God. All of this is being lived out in this text, and all within a relatively brief period of time.

It is good that we take due note of Saul's response, for it is the unvarying characteristic of faith to obey. In fact, faith never disobeys. Disobedience is always the manifestation of unbelief, for which the Lord has an absolute and unvarying intolerance. No person who has been properly instructed what to do, yet fails to obey, is accepted by the Lord.

THE BANE OF DISOBEDIENCE

Although professing Christians have grown accustomed to disobedience within the professing church, there really is no place for it. Salvation makes no provision for disobedience. It is a sin that must be confessed, forgiven, and abandoned. If it is not, there is no hope of being saved, all profession notwithstanding. "Children of disobedience" are those in whom Satan himself is at work (Eph 2:2). It is further written that the wrath of God will come upon such (Eph 5:6; Col 3:6). Paul affirms that "the law" is made for the "disobedient" (1 Tim 1:9). He also classifies the "disobedient" as those to whom "nothing" is pure (Tit 1:16). Prior to the newness of life, we were referred to as being "disobedient" (Tit 3:3). Peter declares that Jesus is made a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offence" to those "which be disobedient" (1 Pet 2:7-8).

I am drawing attention to the seriousness of disobedience because of the obvious clash of such a response with our text. Saul's obedient response came after a single appearance of Jesus, and one

word from Him. Jesus did not appear to Saul several times, giving incremental revelations that led to a moment of conviction. This is in keeping with the nature of the responses that have been recorded in this book up to chapter nine – all exhibits of faith.

- The disciples were to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5,14-2:1).
- On the day of Pentecost convicted inquirers immediately obeyed the word delivered to them (2:38,41).
- The apostles, when told to preach all the words of life in the Temple, immediately obeyed (Acts 5:20-21).
- The Samaritans obeyed, when Philip preached the Gospel to them (Acts 8:12).
- Philip, when told to go to the desert road leading to Gaza (Acts 8:26-26).
- Philip, when told to join himself to a certain chariot (Acts 8:29-30).
- The Ethiopian eunuch, when Philip preached Christ to him (Acts 8:36-38).
- Saul of Tarsus, when told to go into the city of Damascus and await word concerning what he was to do (Acts 9:6-8).
- Now, we will be confronted with a certain disciple who responded to Divine direction to go to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10-17).
- Upon hearing what he was to do, Saul of Tarsus was obedient (Acts 9:18; 22:16).

This is the manner of New Covenant life, fulfilling the 110th Psalm, which describes life under the Messiah: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power. It is the result of the law of God being written upon their hearts and mind, knowing the Lord, being devoted to God, and God to them, and having their sins remitted.

This is the manner of New Covenant life, fulfilling the 110 th Psalm, which describes life under the Messiah: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psa 110:1-3). It is the result of the law of God being written upon their hearts and mind, knowing the Lord, being devoted to God, and God to them, and having their sins remitted (Jer 31:33-34; Heb 8:10-12; 10:16-17). There is no such thing as a Christian or a church that perpetually lacks the characteristic of obedience. In fact, any professing believer who is disobedient cannot possibly substantiate any claim to being a child of God, saved by grace, or justified by faith. While we are not licensed to sit in judgment upon others, it is the business of every individual claiming identity with Jesus to examine themselves to see whether or not they are in the faith, and Christ is in them (2 Cor 13:5).

EXAMPLES OF HESITANCY

It is true that there are at least three examples of hesitancy to respond immediately to the Lord. These are not intended to be standards, and were each characterized by unique circumstances. Yet, because men may tend to hold them forth as justifying the lack of an immediate response to the Lord, I consider it needful to make a few brief remarks concerning them.

- **GIDEON.** When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, announcing that he had been chosen to deliver Israel, he asked for a sign of the truth of the message. Gideon asked the Lord to confirm that He would save Israel by his hand. (1) He would put a fleece of wool on the ground. If the dew was on the fleece only, and the ground remained dry, he would know it was the Lord. (2) This having taken place, Gideon then asked that the Lord not be angry with him. One more time he would put down the fleece. If the fleece was dry, and the dew was upon all the ground, then he would be assured deliverance would come from his hand. This being done, Gideon was convinced he had been called to deliver Israel from the

Midianites (Judges 6:36-40). Aside from the fact that those were spiritually primitive times, God had delivered Israel into the hands of the Midianites, and there had been a long time since He had communicated with Israel. Such circumstances are not to be compared with this day of salvation in which the presence of the Lord has not only been vouchsafed to His people, but extensive revelation has been given to them.

• **JONAH.** When Jonah was commanded to go to Nineveh and preach “against it,” he fled “unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord” (John 1:1-2). After his experience in the belly of a great fish, “the Lord came to Jonah the second time,” telling him to go to Nineveh and deliver the “preaching” that would be given to him. This time Jonah did go, preaching that the city would be overthrown in forty days. Later, when the Lord interrogated him concerning his actions and attitude, he replied, “I knew that Thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest Thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2). While there is no way to sanctify Jonah’s response, the times in which he lived, together with his elementary reasoning concerning Divine intent put him at a decided distance from the time of the New Covenant. He is among those who were not made perfect without us (Heb 11:40).

• **PETER.** When the Lord sent Peter to deliver the Gospel to the Gentile household of Cornelius, He first gave him a vision of a net let down from heaven containing “all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air” (Acts 10:12). The command was given, “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” Peter responded, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14). This was done three times, with no explanation being given. Eventually, the Lord directed Peter to go with three men who came to him from the household of Cornelius. As Peter talked with Cornelius, he acknowledged he had now seen the significance of the vision. The Gentiles, who were technically “unclean,” were no longer to be viewed in such a manner – now that Jesus had put away sin and reconciled the world to God. Peter’s initial response is to be understood in view of the transition that was being made from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant. By “transition,” I do not mean to include the ineffectiveness of the Old or the effectiveness of the New. It was the transition of understanding that was taking place (Heb 8:13). That period of time is not to be compared with this day, when the “more sure word of prophecy” has been declared and delineated with power.

None of the above responses were indicative of the New Covenant era. They were not the norm, or standard, and are not to be considered as though they were. The obedience reported in the book of Acts is the standard, and represents the normal response to Divine direction. I do not consider it necessary to further establish this truth (although that is certainly possible).

THE EXPERIENCE OF SAUL OF TARSUS

The impact of Saul’s experience on the road is confirmed in his body and in his spirit. He has been “apprehended,” and he knows it (Phil 3:12). Now, he is waiting for appropriate instruction, and he does not have any idea as to its source – only that someone will tell him what he “must do.” He is not on a research mission, nor is he to launch into a scholastic quest for answers. He is to wait, and that is precisely what he does. He has no idea how long he is to wait, yet does so with patient determination.

This will be the first test of his faith. Jesus has given no indication of how quickly the required instruction will come – only that it surely will come. In the meantime, Luke turns our attention to the individual whom heaven has chosen to tell Saul what he “must do.” He is not one of the apostles, or even Philip, who has had excellent success delivering the message of Jesus. In fact, this is the very first time we read of this disciple – and the last as well.

It is obvious that he is a faithful person, and himself instructed in the ways of the Lord. At the first,

however, after hearing the name of the one to whom, he is sent, he will be a bit hesitant. His hesitancy is not the result of unbelief. Rather, it is the result of ignorance. However, the Lord will clarify the mission, and Ananias will quickly go, doubting nothing. Once again, willingness is seen as the standard.

THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS

“ 9 :9 And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.” Other versions read, “For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything,” NIV and “for three days he was not able to see, and he took no food or drink.” BBE

What thoughts must have been coursing through the mind of Saul! No doubt the recollections of Stephen and his stoning must have been summoned from his memory for profound consideration. After all, Saul had “consented” unto his death (Acts 8:1; 22:20). Indications are that he was not able to dismiss this experience from his thinking.

I do not doubt that his prodigious mind walked too and fro through the Scriptures, considering them with Jesus of Nazareth in mind. It seems to me that his first preaching confirms that his thinking had been solidly focused upon Jesus Christ and the prophecies of Him in the Scriptures. His very first activity is described in these words: “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20). What exhilarating insights he must have had – and they all were the result of the revelation of Jesus Christ!

Perhaps Saul recalled with repentance and tears those into whose houses he had entered, binding both men and women and taking them off to prison (Acts 8:3). Then there were the times when he had testified against those who believed in Jesus, and gave his consent to their death (Acts 26:10). And what of the times he entered into their synagogues, compelling disciples to blaspheme (Acts 26:11). Surely Saul of Tarsus found out that “the way of transgressors is hard” (Prov 13:15).

It ought to be noted that blindness is ordinarily a very disconcerting experience. Yet, in this case, Saul’s mind was active as he waited, tarrying for further instruction from the Lord. It would be good if such traits were common in the Western church.

For Saul, eating and drinking were not in his thoughts – not now that he had seen the Lord’s Christ and been made aware of his own wayward conduct. He thought that he was serving the Lord, but he was actually the enemy of the Lord. Now, eating and drinking were easily forgotten. His mind was focused, and his heart was supple.

There are very real spiritual experiences that dwarf the compelling appetites of the flesh. Job once said, “Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). I will go so far as to say that until this is experienced to some significant measure, spiritual growth and further illumination are not possible. This accounts for the condition of many emaciated and malnourished souls.

CONCLUSION

This brief lesson provides an introduction to the text that follows. It brings lucidity to the account, explaining why Saul eagerly did everything he was told, and set out immediately to declare Christ in the very city in which he sought to arrest believers. It provides us with a rich commentary on the effectiveness of “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8).

ANANIAS SENT TO SAUL, Part Two

“ 9:10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias;

and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. 11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, 12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight. 13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: 14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. 15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: 16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake. 17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost. 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. 19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.” (Acts 9:9-19)

INTRODUCTION

Having testified to the instant obedience of Saul, and to his undistracted devotion to waiting on the Lord, the narrative now turns to the one chosen by God to restore Saul’s sight, usher him into Christ, and be the one through whom Saul will be filled with the Holy Spirit. It is evident that the Lord is orchestrating this entire set of events. There is not so much as a minuscule thought originating with men that enters into the procedures that are reported in this text. So far as we know, there was not even a prayer raised up to God for which this record could be considered an answer. The apostles as a group, nor Peter who had been given the keys to the Kingdom were in any way instrumental in the events that are now reported. They were not the result of prayers offered by Saul himself, for the arrangements had

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• CONCLUSION

already been made by the Lord, as He had announced to Saul: “it shall be told thee what thou must do” (Acts 9:6).

All of this is another confirmation that it is ever true, “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). Those who are currently propagating the heresy that God cannot do anything until men ask Him to do so, could not possibly be more wrong. This should not be difficult for any professing Christian to accept. Jesus taught us to acknowledge the superiority of Divine rule in our prayers: “For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt 6:13).

While men often make an issue out of human choice, the Scriptures make an issue out of Divine choice and the implementation of God’s purpose. Without fear of contradiction God declares, “I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure ” (Isa 46:10). The best of men, and even the generally acknowledged most advanced person among the saved, Paul the apostle, confessed, “to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not” (Rom 7:18). However, you will never hear of the God of heaven being frustrated in His revealed purpose, or coming short of what He has determined to do.

WHAT ABOUT LIMITING GOD AND QUENCHING THE SPIRIT?

Those who are lacking in their acquaintance with Divine manners draw our attention to the fact that Israel “limited” the Lord by their recalcitrance. And, indeed, this is revealed to have been so. “Yea, they turned back and tempted God, and limited the Holy One of Israel” (Psa 78:41). The idea is not that a restriction was placed upon God Himself, but that the benefits flowing to the generation of unbelievers was restricted. God did not remove or void His promise to give Israel the land of Canaan, but excluded the ones who “believed not” from entering into it. They, and they alone, are the ones who “could not enter” (Heb 3:19). Their children entered (Deut 29:22), but those who refused to believe expired in the wilderness – even though their children had to wander for forty years in the same wilderness until they did so (Num 14:33).

In the record of Israel, we see the principle of Divine intent carried out in meticulous detail.

PURPOSE OR INTENT. First, God’s purposes are conceived independently of any human involvement. His purposes – particularly as they regard His multi-faceted salvation, are conceived “in Himself.” As it is written, “Having made known unto us the mystery of His will , according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Himself ” (Eph 1:9). And again, “According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). God’s purposes are not reactions to human circumstances. They are not a response to conditions perceived by prescience, or seeing what was going to happen. Divine purposes are not driven by human need or desires. They are conceived within the circumference of God’s Person – “according to His good pleasure,” and “in Himself.” That is why His purpose is referred to as being “eternal” (Eph 3:11), conceived “before the foundation of the world,” or before its “creation” NIV (Eph 1:4). It was actually put into motion “before the world began” (1 Tim 1:9), being “promised before the world began” (Tit 1:2). An understanding of this is fundamental to sound theology. A proper understanding must both commence and conclude with God and Christ. It is not possible to arrive at a correct conclusion concerning the things of God apart from this manner of thinking.

IMPLEMENTATION. The revealed purpose of God, which finds its ultimate expression in the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, is implemented within an arena of competition. This is in order to the glory of God, for there is no Divine purpose that is not driven by the objective to glorify God. The fact that Divine intention is carried out within the framework of competition has no ultimate bearing on the fulfillment of that purpose. God does what He intends, and does not fail to fulfill His

good pleasure. Thus He declares, “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure ” (Isa 46:9-10). In this case God’s “counsel” equates to what He has purposed. It simply is not possible for God to purpose something and it fail to be fulfilled. Such a circumstance would cause His Godhood to come into question. Thus He declares, “I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa 46:11). He hurls the challenge into the domain of conflicting personalities, “I work, and who will reverse it?” NKJV (Isa 43:13). Again, the Psalmist affirms, “The counsel of the Lord standeth forever” (Psa 33:11). If this was not true, His promises could not be trusted, and thus could never be guaranteed as the means of becoming a partaker of the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). That is why it is affirmed without qualification, “Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did He in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places” (Psa 135:6). Even though men contradict the counsel of the Lord, oppose it, and doubt it, “the counsel of the Lord, that shall stand” (Prov 19:21). Should men choose to oppose the Lord, they must know, “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD” (Prov 21:30).

FULFILLMENT. There is a level at which it is not possible for the purpose of God to fail. As it is written, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure” (Isa 46:10), and “I have purposed it and I will do it” (Isa 46:11). This is precisely why the “purpose of God” stands “according to election,” or what He has determined (Rom 9:11). Examples of the fulfillment of Divine determinations are the flood (Gen 7:11-24), Abraham and Sarah having Isaac (Gen 12:3; 18:14), the deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Gen 15:14; Ex 12:41,51), the birth of Jesus (Gen 3:15; Isa 7:14; 9:6; Matt 1:22-25), and the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 13:33; 17:3). It simply is not possible for purposes such as these to come short of fulfillment. Furthermore, the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God are in this category of Divine intention. This is confirmed by the fact that they are the appointed means through which we become partakers of the Divine nature (2 Pet 14). If there was the slightest chance that they could fail, it would not be possible to have such a guarantee.

PARTICIPATION. The variable factor has to do with the level of participation. Even then, the Divine purpose itself will not fail. Only those who fail to believe will be excluded. For example, the commitment of God to give Canaan to the Israelites did not fail of fulfillment. It was those who did not believe that were excluded – but that had no effect upon the promise itself. The same is true of the commitment of God to turn away ungodliness from Jacob. Contrary to the teaching that God has abandoned Israel, thereby voiding His commitment to them, “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (Rom 11:5). Only “some of the branches” were removed from the natural olive tree (Rom 11:17). The tree itself remains, together with its root and its fatness. In fact, the Gentiles are presently being sustained by “the root and fatness of the olive tree” of Israel (Rom 11:17). Salvation is still “of the Jews,” just as Jesus announced (John 4:22). At no point has it become “of the Gentiles.” That fact alone confirms that God’s promise concerning Israel has not been voided. If that was the case, a new olive tree would have been required.

WHAT BEARING DOES THIS HAVE UPON OUR TEXT?

It might appear as though we have journeyed down an unrelated tributary – but that is not the case at all. The apprehension of Saul of Tarsus was not a response to his quest for God – regardless of how ardent it may have been. Saul was an enemy of Jesus, not a seeker of Him. He had no notions of Him being the Messiah, but eagerly sought to do everything he could “contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” , all the while maintaining a good conscience toward God (Acts 26:3; 23:1). Notwithstanding, the very fact that Saul was breathing threatening and slaughter against the church of Jesus Christ confirms that he felt he had found the truth pertaining to God. There is no evidence that he was seeking further enlightenment as David did (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169).

In Saul of Tarsus we have a fulfillment of the remarkable affirmation, “So then it is not of him that

willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy” (Rom 9:16). How else can you possibly account for the apprehension of Saul?

A CERTAIN DISCIPLE NAMED ANANIAS

“ 10 And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.”

THE DIVINE MANNER

It is arresting to consider the way of the Lord in this matter. He does not choose an apostle to perform this ministry – not even the one who had been given the keys to the Kingdom. He does not choose a significant disciple like James, the Lord’s brother, or Barnabas, who will be instrumental in promoting the acceptance of Saul and his initial involvement in preaching Christ. Choosing to ignore more prominent leaders in the church, the Lord sends “a certain disciple at Damascus” – not from the hub of Kingdom activity, Jerusalem, but from Damascus. This was a city that is not mentioned in the New Covenant Scriptures until Acts 9:2, where it is identified as the target for Saul’s initiative against the church.

A CERTAIN DISCIPLE

“And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias . . .” Several later versions eliminate the word “certain” (NIV, NRSV, RSV, Amplified, etc.). All of the accepted Greek manuscripts contain this indefinite pronoun (Greek, **τις**), that means “ a certain one.” THAYER The point here is that there was not only a Divine appointment of the one to be an apostle, but of the one who would be used to initiate his entrance into the Kingdom as well. All of this was under strict heavenly supervision. Nothing was left to human discretion. This has been a pattern throughout the book of Acts.

- The choice of the apostles by Jesus (Acts 1:2).
- The selection of one to fill the office vacated by Judas (Acts 1:24).
- The one who spoke on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14).

Those who are enamored with career building will find no fuel for their lusts in the record of Ananias. The work to which he was called ushered another person into prominence. Such is often the Lord’s manner.

The one who delivered the Gospel to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26,29).

- The choosing and calling of Saul of Tarsus (9:4).
- The one who through whom Saul was officially called into the apostleship (Acts 9:10).
- The separation of Barnabas and Saul to a special work (Acts 13:2).
- The choice of who first delivered the Gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 15:7).

The prophet Isaiah affirmed that the government would rest upon the shoulders of the Messiah, and that He would administrate it in an ever increasing manner. The record of the book of Acts confirms that this is precisely what took place, and that it was characteristic of the Lord’s manner of ruling,

In our time there has been an alarming distortion of Kingdom manners presented and embraced. Jesus is no longer perceived as the Head of His church. Instead key people and institutions imagine themselves to have seized control. However, they are not governing the Kingdom of God, but are only administering their own private agenda – and it will be short-lived. Of old time the Lord revealed

that every competing kingdom would be decimated by the Kingdom of the Lord's Christ, and no place will be found for them (Dan 2:35). Jesus Himself spoke of those on whom He would fall, saying they would be "ground to powder" (Matt 21:44).

Within an institutional setting, it is generally known that those with a spiritual mind and understanding are not accepted. This has been the case throughout history, and sadly continues until this very day. It can be said of the Gentile church just as it was said of the institutionalized Judaism: "Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted?" (Acts 7:52). Jesus said of Jerusalem, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34). It is the manner of religious organization to eventually come against those who carry the message of the Lord. This tendency reached its apex in the rejection of the Lord Jesus Himself.

This is why the government has been placed upon the shoulders of the Lord Jesus, and not upon the church itself. Jesus told those holding the highest position in His church that they would not exercise authority over the other people, like the kings of the Gentiles (Lk 22:25-26).

Thus Ananias is summoned by the Lord to the work of informing Saul of his role in the Kingdom. It is clear from the record that Saul would never have been set apart to the apostleship, had it been left up to men to do so.

The First and the Last

This is also the first and last mentioning of this "certain disciple." Yet, in all the world there is not an informed believer in Jesus who does not know of this man. How marvelous to consider the works of God! Those who are enamored with career building will find no fuel for their lusts in the record of Ananias. The work to which he was called ushered another person into prominence. Such is often the Lord's manner.

THE LORD CALLED AND ANANIAS ANSWERED

" . . . and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord."

We learn a lot about Ananias from his response to the Lord. Like all people of faith, it was an instant response, for faith puts one in a ready and waiting posture.

- When Abraham was about to offer Isaac, an angel called to him and he answered, "Here am I" (Gen 22:11),
- When an angel called to Jacob, he answered, "Here am I" (Gen 31:11).
- When God spoke to Jacob he replied, "Here am I" (Gen 46:2).
- When the Lord called to Moses from the burning bush he replied, "Here am I" (Ex 3:4).
- When the Lord called to young Samuel, he responded "Here am I," thinking that Eli had called him (1 Sam 3:4,5,6,8). When Samuel perceived it was the Lord, he instructed Samuel to reply, "Speak, Lord; for Thy servant heareth" (1 Sam 3:9).
- When the Spirit told the brethren at Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul to the work to which He had called them, they did so immediately (Acts 13:2-3).
- When a directive vision was given to Paul instructing him to go into Macedonia, he, and those with him, immediately "endeavored to go into Macedonia" (Acts 16:9-10).

Particularly in Christ, this confirmed the nature of the New Covenant. A marvelous accord is

wrought between the Lord and His people that makes for an acute sensitivity to Divine direction. This is seen in makeup of the covenant: “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb 8:10-11). The absence of an keen sensitivity to the Lord belies, or contradicts, any profession of identity with God through Christ Jesus. It simply is not possible for a person to be a part of the New Covenant while lacking its essential elements. We are under no obligation to receive anyone in Jesus’ name in whom they are not found.

INQUIRE FOR ONE CALLED SAUL OF TARSUS

“ 11 And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, 12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”

The specificity of this word is most remarkable.

- A specific street: “Straight.”
- A specific house: “the house of Judas.”
- A specific man: “Saul of Tarsus.”
- A specific activity in which the man is engaged: “he prayeth.”
- A specific vision given to the man naming the one who would come to him: “a man named Ananias.”
- Precisely what this man would do when he came to Saul: “putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”

Those who tend to think only in broad generalities do well to take note of this direction. It teaches us that there is such a thing as Divine instruction that is complete in all of its details. Other remarkably detailed instructions were given for the observance of the first Passover, that would conclude with Israel being delivered from Egypt (Ex 12), and the day of atonement (Lev 16). Although some affirm that God leaves matters in the hand of men, instances such as the one before us confirms that this not the case – particularly in matters relating to the salvation of God and its implementation among men. When it is stated that the government is upon the

Those who tend to think only in broad generalities do well to take note of this direction. It teaches us that there is such a thing as Divine instruction that is complete in all of its details.

shoulder of Jesus (Isa 9:6), and that He has all power in heaven and earth, it is to be understood that the rule is both precise and total. There is a level of Divine involvement among the sons of men in which the human will and choice are not revealed factors. In such cases we do well to avoid making any attempt to blend the text with our perception of the Lord and His ways. Suffice it to say, our text is dealing with a man who was separated unto the Lord before he was born (Gal 1:15). Further, he will be “called” in strict conformity with that Divine appointment.

A SPECIFIC STREET AND HOUSE

“And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus...”

The directions are certainly specific, yet general enough to require diligence and inquiry. I do not know the size of the city of Damascus at the time of our text. However, it is one of the most ancient and important cities in the world. Located in Syria, it was an established city during the time of

Abraham (Gen 14:15; 15:2) – that was more than 3,000 years before our text. Confirming it was a significant city, David put military garrisons there (2 Sam 8:6). From ancient times it was a city of remarkable commerce (Ezek 27:18). Therefore, finding a street named “Straight” was no small task, to say nothing of finding “the house of Judas” that was located on it.

The point to be seen here is that Divine direction and involvement in the will of God does not eliminate the need for deliberate and thoughtful activity. The Lord did not say He would tell Ananias when he had come to the designated street and arrived at the specified house. He would even have to “inquire in the house of Judas,” asking for “a man from Tarsus named Saul.” NIV

In Romans 12:1-2, a salient point is made of being usable to God. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” We may safely assume that Ananias had done what Romans twelve admonishes. This is, in fact, what made him usable in this critical situation. There also can be no doubt that he had separated himself from defiling influences, as Paul enjoined Timothy to do: “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:19-21).

Within a lifeless institutionalized setting, where the wisdom of men and their strategies are exalted, there is a necessary loss of this perspective. An overestimation of the human intellect and reasoning aptitude causes Divine requirements to recede into the background. They actually become inaccessible to the mind that is shackled to the institutions of men.

I am saying that it is highly unlikely that a suitable man could be found within the average church of our land who could have been directed as Ananias – “a certain disciple” who resided in the Syrian city of Damascus. To me, if this assessment is correct, it reveals a most deplorable situation. God has revealed that it is the nature of the Kingdom into which we have been translated to grow, increase, and mature. The prophets declared that the Kingdom administered by Jesus would be one of unending increase (Isa 9:7). Jesus revealed that the Kingdom of God was like a mustard seed, beginning small, and eventually outgrowing all other kingdoms (Matt 13:31-32). Daniel also declared this to be a characteristic of the kingdom over which Jesus presides (Dan 2:44). Additionally, the Lord has so equipped the church as to promote its edification and maturity (Eph 4:8-16). Also, the Scriptures themselves are deigned to make “the man of God perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). This is in perfect keeping with the nature of the new birth itself. As it is written, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

In today’s Christian setting Ananias would be an unusual disciple. However, in our text he is appropriately described as “a certain disciple” – not a certain leader, but a “certain disciple!” He was representative of the common believer – for “disciple” is a common designation, not a unique one like “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11). He was not described as one of those placed “first,” second or third in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28). He is not described as an elder who had “labored in the word and in the doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17), but simply as “a certain disciple.”

We hear no more of him as we do of Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, Titus, Luke, and others. Precisely

how would someone like Ananias fit into the patterned structure of the institutionalized church. How would he fit into the average Bible College or Seminary? Precisely what would be his role in the average Christian convention, or television ministry, or missionary organization? Is Ananias the kind of man that the average pulpit committee, missionary board, or religious conference would have sent to usher the premier apostle into his work?

Precisely what is the difference between the church of Ananias' day and the one of our time? Surely you can see that there is a significant difference – so much so that we appear to be reading about a church that is altogether different than what is paraded as “the church” today. Indeed, it is my studied opinion that the church of the book of Acts is radically different from the professed church of our time. The difference can be traced to the variance existing between life and death, and reconciliation and alienation. It can be accounted for by the difference between being alive unto God and dead to sin, and being free from righteousness and dead toward God. Jesus does not have two bodies, or two churches. There are not differing branches of His church that have contradicting characteristics. All of this is involved in the expression, “there is one body” (Eph 4:4). It is Christ's “body” because it is the intended recipient of His “fulness” (John 1:16; Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). Just as “all the fulness of God” dwells in Jesus (Col 1:19; 2:9), so all the fulness of Christ dwells within His church. Just as Jesus bears the traits of God, so the church possesses the traits of Jesus. I know of no way to successfully contradict these statements.

If the professed church is fundamentally unlike Jesus, then, if it is to be accepted, it has no alternative but to change. That is precisely why Jesus solemnly warned the wayward churches of Asia to “repent” (Rev 2:5,16,21,22; 3:3,19), “do the first works” (Rev 2:5), and “buy” from Him things that would make them acceptable to Him (Rev 3:18). Things like leaving one's “first love” (Rev 2:4), tolerating members that hold to erroneous doctrines (Rev 2:14-15), allowing the propagation of damaging teaching (Rev 2:20), and having a name of being alive when actually death reigns (Rev 3:1) are intolerable circumstances. The presence of such qualities thrusts the church into a spiritually backward motion. They are why the professing church is so unlike the church reported in the book of Acts. They are conditions that cause men like Ananias to appear dominant and in the minority, while, in truth, he was appropriately described as “a certain disciple.”

BEHOLD, HE PRAYS

“ . . . for, behold, he prayeth . . .” Up to this time, we have not been told what Saul of Tarsus was actually doing – only that he was blind and was neither eating nor drinking. Now, however, the Lord tells Ananias that Saul “is praying.” NKJV On one occasion Jesus said to a woman from the city of Samaria, “If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of Him, and He would have given thee living water” (John 4:10). Now, Saul knows the One he has met, and there is no doubt that he has correlated that experience with the Scriptures concerning the Messiah. There is no question in my mind that Saul was experiencing an extraordinary measure of the godly sorrow that “worketh repentance,” or that “produces repentance” NKJV (2 Cor 7:10). If David's sin with Bathsheba, and treachery that led to her husband's death produced the expressions of the fifty-first Psalm, one can scarcely imagine what the knowledge that one had been persecuting the Son of God must have produced. Behind the scenes, it was the goodness of God that was leading Saul to repentance (Rom 2:4) – Divine forbearance was productive.

This street (“Straight”) extends now from the eastern to the western gate, about three miles, crossing the whole city and suburbs in a direct line. Near the eastern gate is a house, said to be that of Judah, in which Paul lodged. There is in it a very small closet, where tradition reports that the apostle passed three days without food, until Ananias restored him to sight. Tradition also says that he had here the vision recorded in 2 Corinthians 12:2. There is also in this street a fountain whose water is drunk by Christians, in remembrance of what, they suppose, the same fountain produced for the baptism of Paul.

(Robinson, Calmet, reported by Albert Barnes)

Praying is set forth as a point of change. The captivity of Job was “turned” when he “prayed for his friends” (Job 2:10). Jesus Himself was transfigured while He was praying (Luke 9:29). Christ’s great triumph over the temptation to draw back from drinking the bitter cup appointed to Him took place while He prayed (Luke 22:44). The powerful prayers of Elijah caused the rain to cease for three and a half years, and to rain again after the famine that was imposed upon the land (James 5:17-18). In seasons of prayer such as the one described in our text, there is a clarity of understanding ministered that cannot be otherwise obtained. It is as though the individual was being exposed to Divine light – the light in which “all things are naked and opened,” not only to God Himself, but to those who are lingering in His presence (Heb 4:13).

SAUL ALSO HAD A VISION

“12 And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”

We are being exposed to Divine manners, and we do well to take note of it. Not only is the Lord preparing Ananias to confront Saul, He is also preparing Saul to confront Ananias. We have already been exposed to this manner in the book of Acts.

- Devout men were present in Jerusalem, focusing their thoughts on the things of God (Acts 2:5). It was then that the Spirit filled Peter to deliver an exegesis of Christ’s death, and the Divine intent that caused it to happen (Acts 2:14-36). The outcome was that three souls were added to the church.

- The Ethiopian eunuch was being prepared to hear the Gospel while reading the prophecy of Isaiah (Acts 8:32). Philip was being prepared to preach to him by means of angelic direction and the Spirit’s guidance (Acts 8:26,29). The outcome was that the eunuch was baptized into Christ and went on his way rejoicing.

- In the next chapter, the Lord will give coordinated visions to both Cornelius and Peter, preparing the way for Cornelius and his household to be added to the church (Acts 10:3-23). The outcome was that Cornelius and his household were “saved.”

- Later, some women in Macedonia will be drawn to a riverside where they will pray. Just prior to this, Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia who said, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (Acts 16:9-15). The outcome was that Lydia and her household were baptized, and a church was launched in that area.

The Reign of Jesus

In this text we are being exposed to the reign of the Lord Jesus and its manner. Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah, “Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness” (Isa 32:1). He further declared that from the throne of David the Messiah would establish the kingdom “with judgment and with justice” (Isa 9:6). Peter boldly proclaimed that the prophecy of Jesus sitting upon David’s throne was fulfilled when Jesus was raised from the dead. Now, enthroned in the heavens, God has made Him to be both “Lord and Christ,” fulfilling His promise to David (Acts 2:30-36). Now, we are being exposed to the way in which Jesus is ruling.

The book of Acts provides several behind-the-scene glimpses of the work of the Lord. These are introducing us to the government of Jesus which is active at all times, though it is not always apparent. There is no valid Kingdom activity in which Jesus Himself is not active, else He could not be appropriately called “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

In our text, King Jesus arrested a persecutor of the church, forcing Himself into his life, and

choosing to elevate him to the highest office in His body – an apostle (1 Cor 12:28). He then chooses to induct him into Christ by means of a “certain disciple” who does not have the slightest idea that Saul of Tarsus has been chosen for this office. In the whole arrangement Jesus coordinates two preparatory visions that were not sought, and came to the men completely independently of their wills. All of this was done in strict comportment with righteousness – for that is the kind of rule Jesus is executing. The whole matter also confirms that man’s goings are, indeed, “of the Lord” (Prov 20:25), and that “it is not in man that walketh to dirt his steps” (Jer 10:23).

This is the only reference to this vision – the knowledge of which was vouchsafed to Ananias, and to Luke, the writer of this book. Paul refers to Ananias and his role in his calling, but makes no reference to the vision to which our text refers (Acts 22:12-16). In the account he delivered to Agrippa, Paul made no reference to Ananias, only mentioning the commission of Jesus (Acts 26:13-18). It appears as though, before Agrippa, Paul puts together the words of Jesus on the road to Damascus with the words delivered to him by Ananias, who probably elaborated on the commission Jesus had delivered to Saul (Acts 9:3-6,17;18; 22:6-16; 26:13-18). We should have no difficulty with this, for Ananias delivered the word of Jesus to Saul, calling him into the office of an apostle. He was not speaking for himself, but for the One who sent him.

A Needed Perspective

In this regard Paul embraced the same perspective for which he commended those who heard him. He received the word delivered by a messenger of the Lord as the word of the Lord Himself. Thus he wrote to the Thessalonians, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to react in this manner to the word of God. Whether the commission delivered to Saul came from Jesus Himself on the road to Damascus, or through the lips of Ananias, a “certain disciple,” it was accompanied with Divine certitude, and was to be received as being from heaven. The Word of God is not diluted by the fact that a messenger brings it.

I HAVE HEARD OF THIS MAN

“ 13 Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: 14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.”

The response of Ananias to the Lord may appear to the novice to be a form of rebellion, stubbornness, or unbelief. This, however, is emphatically not the case. It is not unusual for pretentious preachers and teachers to attempt to parallel those of Scriptural record with the shallow professing Christians of our time.

It is important that we approach this text with sobriety and without unbecoming simplicity. The response of Ananias to the Lord may appear to the novice to be a form of rebellion, stubbornness, or unbelief. This, however, is emphatically not the case. It is not unusual for pretentious preachers and teachers to attempt to parallel those of Scriptural record with the shallow professing Christians of our time. This is not a wise practice, for it presumes levels of similarity between the people and circumstances of these differing then-and-now ages that are quite unreal. These observations will become apparent as we proceed through this text.

I HAVE HEARD OF THIS MAN

“Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man . . .’ Other versions read, “I have heard many reports about this man,” NIV “I have had accounts of this man from a number of people,” BBE “I have heard from many sources about this man,” NAB and “ many people have told me about

this man Saul.” IE

At this point, the Lord has not provided many details concerning Saul of Tarsus. He has revealed that Saul is in Damascus, on a street called “Straight,” and in the house of a person named “Judas.” He has also told him that Saul is praying. He has simply told Ananias to “inquire” at the house of Simon for “one called Saul of Tarsus” (9:11). He has also told Ananias that Saul has “seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight” (9:12). So far as the record is concerned, Ananias has not been told why Saul’s sight was lost in the first place. Nor has the Lord divulged to him anything pertaining to Saul confronting Christ and fasting for three days. With the sparse amount of information that he has received, Ananias begins to reason with the Lord.

This “certain disciple” admits that he has some knowledge about the man to whom he is being sent. He has been the subject of many reports. In fact, the followers of Jesus had been speaking considerably about him – and the reports were not encouraging ones.

HOW MUCH EVIL HE HAS DONE

“ . . . how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “all the harm he has done to your saints in Jerusalem,” NIV “what evil things he has done to your holy ones in Jerusalem,” NAB “the terrible things this man has done to the believers in Jerusalem,” NLT “especially the great sufferings he has brought on your people in Jerusalem,” WILLIAMS and “especially how much evil and what great suffering he has brought on Your saints at Jerusalem.” AMPLIFIED

Word had gotten all the way to Damascus about what Saul had been doing to the Lord’s “saints” in Jerusalem. Notice how Ananias refers to the people of God: “Thy saints,” or “Your holy ones,” NAB for that is the meaning of the word “saints.” The word “saints” is translated from the Greek word **ἅγιοι**, which has the following lexical meaning: “set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively His . . . pure, upright, holy,” THAYER “holy, pure, consecrated to God,” FRIBERG “holy, morally pure, upright,” UBS and “pure, upright, worthy of God.” GINGRICH Therefore, Ananias confesses that he had heard from various sources about Saul of Tarsus, how he had been on the initiative to do evil and harm to God’s holy, pure, and upright ones in Jerusalem – people who were dedicated to God, living lives that were worthy of God (as all believers are enjoined to do (1 Thess 2:12). These were not a special category of believers, but was a spiritually generic way of referring to them all. Saul had not targeted a segment of the Christian community, like the radical points. It was the community itself that was being attacked.

Of course, it is one thing to read this account concerning God’s holy ones in Jerusalem. It is quite another to conceive of such a report being delivered in our time and place. What if the report was circulated in your home town that God’s holy ones in Chicago were being oppressed? Or His saints in Joplin? Or His dedicated ones in London? Precisely how would such a report be viewed? I can even conceive of a considerable amount of confusion following such a report – particularly in our country where professing Christians are not noted for being dedicated to God, holy, pure, or upright. It is exceedingly rare to find a professing Christian that equates the words “Christian” and “saint,” or “church” and “holy ones.”

Men may attempt to build a case for people being saved, yet unholy; or being Christians, yet not being pure. But how will they substantiate their case. It is said of everyone who is in the New Covenant: “I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb 8:11).

In this text, we are reading about the real church, not one of man's creation.

Is there any person of sound mind who can imagine any church creed or humanly-devised theological position being the foundation of the day of judgment? And if such will not be case then, what will be the Divine pronouncement toward those who have made such things the basis of judgment, acceptance, and rejection in this world?

HE HAS AUTHORITY

“ 14 And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all . . .” Other versions read, “And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all,” NIV “He has come here with a warrant from the chief priests to arrest everybody,” NJB and “Now he is here and has authority from the high priests to put in chains all .” AMPLIFIED

Saul has been in Damascus no more than three days, and word of his presence has already circulated among the disciples: “he has come here !” NJB The word had apparently quickly spread from the moment Saul had received letters of authority to put believers in chains and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment. He was not seeking selected people within the body of believers, but had come to “bind all ,” “arrest all ,” NIV and “put in chains all .” AMPLIFIED

The self-created religious authorities had given official authority for the synagogues to be invaded by Saul, and every person following Christ to be bound and brought to Jerusalem. Like Satan himself, who was animating these religious leaders, they had arrogated to themselves authority that did not belong to them. That, of course, is the manner of religious bigotry.

WHO CALL ON YOUR NAME

“ . . . that call on thy name.” Other versions read, “ invoke Your name,” NRSV “who give worship to Your name,” BBE and “who trust in Your name.” IE

And, how does Ananias describe these people. Does he refer to them as “Christians,” or “church members,” or “people from our movement?” Exactly how do you describe those who are the brunt of an aggressive persecution? Do you refer to them by a denominational name? Is it possible to describe them by some theological persuasion? How would it appear if the text said the persecution had been launched against Catholics, or Protestants, or Fundamentalists, or Conservatives? How would it sound to hear such people described as members of the Reformed Movement, the Restoration Movement, or the Charismatic Movement? What if they were described as Lutherans, or Methodists, or Baptists, or Episcopalians, or Quakers? How would you react to them being called Pre-millennialists, or Post-millennia lists, or Amillennia lists? What would such terms do for the text? You already know that they would pull the power out of the text. And why is this so? Because none of those terms, or any others similar to them, have anything at all to do with God, Christ, or the Gospel. They all have to do with identity with human conceptions and perceptions – all of which are worthless before the Lord of heaven and earth.

Is there any person of sound mind who can imagine any church creed or humanly-devised theological position being the foundation of the day of judgment? And if such will not be case then, what will be the Divine pronouncement toward those who have made such things the basis of judgment, acceptance, and rejection in this world?

Something to See

There is something else to be seen here. The church to which we are being exposed in the book of Acts consisted of people who were selfless. They were frequently described as being “with one accord ” (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24; 5:12), and “of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32).

The community of selfless saints. When something happened, the word was spread among the disciples (Acts 4:24; 5:5,11; 8:14).

Now, in our text, the believers in Damascus have heard of an initiative launched against them from Jerusalem. They knew who authorized it, and the name of the one who was carrying it out. They also knew that he had arrived in their city.

This kind of communication is virtually unknown in our time. Even though there are several aggressive attacks being made against believers throughout the world, it is not common knowledge among the churches. In fact, those who are reporting such things have formed an organization that is devoted to delivering such reports. It is not something the church itself is doing. Within any given city, if anything of significance is taking place in another body of believers, it is not commonly known. What we have on our hands is a religious environment that promotes self-interest, not body-interests. There is a spirit extant in the professing Christian community that has led the people to arrange their priorities something like this: (1) Self. (2) One's own family/ relatives. (3) One's private circle of friends. (4) Those with similar worldly interests. (5) Interests pertaining to one's place of employment/education. (6) Certain community interests. (7) Possibly matters relating to one's preferred local congregation.

Oh, the blight of a Christianity that leaves people satisfied to be uninformed, and unaware of what is happening around them. It is not likely that such people will ever enjoy Divine employment, for that is not the kind of people God uses. They are not "prepared unto every good work," nor are they "meet for the Master's use." That simply is not the kind of society from which laborers are chosen.

HE IS A CHOSEN VESSEL

" 15 But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: 16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."

He has a mind that will not discard revelation, but will rather throw aside misconceptions as soon as the light of the Lord shines upon them. Once the mind of the Lord is discerned concerning Saul of Tarsus, Ananias will proceed with no further concerns.

Because Ananias' heart was right, and his priorities were proper, the Lord will provide a further explanation. He has a mind that will not discard revelation, but will rather throw aside misconceptions as soon as the light of the Lord shines upon them. Once the mind of the Lord is discerned concerning Saul of Tarsus, Ananias will proceed with no further concerns. That is the way a "disciple" thinks. Such people are described by Isaiah: "For he said, Surely they are My people, children that will not lie: so He was their Savior" (Isa 63:8). These are the kind of people that can be trusted with the truth, else it would be hidden from them (Matt 13:11). It is still true that there are certain people who are never able to perceive the truth because they do not have a heart for it. Ananias was not such a person!

HE IS A CHOSEN VESSEL

"But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto Me . . ." Other versions read, "chosen vessel of Mine," NKJV "chosen instrument of Mine," NASB " My chosen instrument," NIV "an instrument whom I have chosen ," NRSV "a special vessel for Me," BBE "an elect vessel to Me," DARBY and " I've chosen this man." GWN

What Jesus had told the other apostles was true for Saul also: "Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you , and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain" (John 15:16). It is also the Divine manner to select who is to work in His behalf, and labor

in His vineyard. Men may, while basking in His glory, say “Here am I, send me” (Isa 6:8). Yet, every spiritually educated person knows that only those whom the Lord sends are approved to labor in His vineyard. As it is written, “how shall they preach, except they be sent ?” (Rom 10:15).

With such a plethora of evidence on this subject, it is difficult to believe how any one could not see it. Yet, the traditions of men blind men to things that are otherwise quite obvious. Ponder the men that were chosen by God.

- Noah – Gen 6:8
- Abraham – Neh 9:7
- Isaac – Gen 26:2-5
- Jacob – Rom 9:11-13
- Joseph – Psa 105:17
- Moses – Ex 3:7-10
- Aaron the high priest – Num 16:7
- Israel – Deut 7:7
- David – Psa 78:70
- Solomon – 1 Chron 28:6.
- Jeremiah – Jer 1:5
- Zerubbabel – Hag 2:23
- The twelve apostles – Luke 6:13
- The seventy disciples that were sent out – Luke 10:1
- Matthias to replace Judas – Acts 1:24
- Barnabas and Saul – Acts 13:2

This is the manner in which the Lord governs His kingdom. He is not looking for volunteers! His eyes are rather ranging throughout the whole earth, looking for a man “whose heart is perfect before him” (2 Chron 16:9). Even then, however, that is a secondary activity. There are Divine choices that were made “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4), and before the person chosen was born (Jer 1:5; Rom 9:11; Gal 1:15).

In his letter to the Galatians Paul reveals that he had been chosen to be an apostle from the moment of conception. “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace” (Gal 1:15). The “call” which to which he refers commenced on the road to Damascus when Jesus “apprehended” Saul. Here the NIV totally misrepresents the text, stating “God, who set me apart from birth.” However, Paul is saying that he was set apart before he was born, as the New Revised Standard Version states: “But when God, who had set me apart before I was born.” The point that Paul is making is that he was born to be an apostle – set apart as was Jeremiah. God said to the prophet, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer 1:5). I realize that this encroaches on certain theological views However, the texts are plainly stated, and are to be believed.

Paul also reveals another factor that pertained to his appointment. This related to the Lord viewing him as faithful – one that could be trusted with

There could hardly be any people more varied in their natures than Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Yet, Paul was called to minister to all three of them. He did not have a special

Gospel for each of them. Nor, indeed, did he sift the Gospel through some special intellectual filter when he declared it to these different audiences.

the remarkable revelations that would be given to him. “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12). The Amplified Bible reads, “because He has judged and counted me faithful and trustworthy, appointing me to [this stewardship of] the ministry.”

THE ASSIGNMENT GIVEN TO HIM

“ . . . to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel . . . ”

The scope of Paul’s ministry is most arresting to consider. It strikes a decisive blow against the very concept of specialized ministries – a modern-day fabrication. There could hardly be any people more varied in their natures than Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. Yet, Paul was called to minister to all three of them. He did not have a special Gospel for each of them. Nor, indeed, did he sift the Gospel through some special intellectual filter when he declared it to these different audiences. The message of the Gospel is itself adapted to all people , dealing with them at the point of their commonality: “for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).

TO BEAR MY NAME BEFORE GENTILES. Paul was, in fact, “the apostle of the Gentiles,” or “apostle to the Gentiles” NKJV (Rom 11:13). He also described himself as “an apostle . . . and teacher of the Gentiles” (1 Tim 2:7). Too, he is described as “a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim 1:11). In this capacity, men often think of Paul as being sent only to the Gentiles who had never heard the Gospel. However, this is a complete misrepresentation. The truth of the matter is that his primary ministry was to the Gentile church. He wrote to the believers in Rome, “So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also . . . For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office ” (Rom 1:15; 11:13). He also wrote to the Colossian brethren (whom he had never seen), “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you , to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints” (Col 1:25-26).

The fact that the majority of the New Covenant Scriptures were written by Paul to the churches confirms that his primary ministry was to the body of Christ. This is why he chose to correct the Corinthian church rather than enter an open door to preach to others at Troaz (2 Cor 2:12-13). The mystery that was opened to him was intended to be expounded to those who believed – to the “saints.” Thus it is written, “ Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you , to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints : to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:25-27).

The irony of the situation is that of all the writings of Scripture, the professed church is most uninformed concerning the writings of Paul. In view of the pivotal role assigned to Paul to “make all men see,” this is a transgression of monumental proportions.

Paul also clarified this aspect of his ministry to the Ephesians, testifying that God’s purpose involved making known His diverse wisdom to heavenly principalities through the church. “Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery , which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:8)

The irony of the situation is that of all the writings of Scripture, the professed church is most uninformed concerning the writings of Paul. In view of the pivotal role assigned to Paul to “make all men see,” this is a transgression of monumental proportions. Paul is not being duly honored and heeded by the Gentile church. He is being treated with the same practical contempt that he received from the Corinthian church, and from others who maligned his name (Rom 3:8).

If the message delivered by Paul is intended for the church, in order that principalities and powers might become more thoroughly acquainted with the “manifold wisdom” of God, then we have a most serious problem on our hand. What will be said on the day of judgment to those who have redirected the attention of the church to their own agenda. Some examples follow.

- That reaching the lost and increasing the numbers of the church is the fundamental work of the body of Christ.
- That the stabilization of the family unit is the primary work of the church.
- That ministering to the needy is the preeminent work of believers.
- That reaching the youth as the church of tomorrow is the main work.
- That becoming involved in politics and various social issues is to be the thrust of spiritual activity.
- That majoring on the signs of the last times is the emphasis for today.

All of these may appear quite innocent, and even noble. However, if what Paul said is true concerning the revelation given to him, and if this is what God intends for the saints to know, then why are His people so ignorant of the thrust of Paul’s message? If Paul was, in fact, appointed by Jesus to bear His name to the Gentiles, then it is time for the Gentiles to start paying attention to him.

TO BEAR MY NAME BEFORE KINGS. Paul was chosen to testify of the Lord and His purpose before kings – rulers of the Gentiles. He testified before king Agrippa, speaking the following.

- The promise made by God unto the fathers: “And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers” (Acts 26:6).
- Living by hope: “Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come” (Acts 26:7)
- The resurrection of Jesus Christ: “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).
- Announcing why Jesus had chosen him: “To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18).
- That men should repent and turn to God: “that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).
- That Christ should suffer, and be the first to rise from the dead: “That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23).

Jesus also told Paul; he would be brought before Caesar (Acts 27:24). The effectiveness of his witness is confirmed in his writings. He wrote to the Philippians concerning certain brethren who were in “Caesar’s household” (Phil 4:22). It is also generally understood that Paul referred to his appearance before Nero in 2 Timothy 4:16-17: “At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”

TO BEAR MY NAME BEFORE THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. Paul's primary ministry was to the Gentiles. However, this did not exclude a ministry to the Jewish people. He was also sent to testify of the name of Jesus to them. This is why Paul, when entering a city, went first to the local synagogue, testifying of the Gospel of Christ (Acts 9:20; 13:5,14-15,42; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4, 8; 18:19; 19:8; 24:12).

Paul himself confessed that the Gospel of Christ is "the power of God unto salvation, to the Jew first" (Rom 1:16). He also acknowledged that his ministry to the Gentiles was actually the appointed means of reaching the Jews. "For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them" (Rom 11:13-14). This, Paul affirms, was according to Divine purpose: "I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy" (Rom 11:11). Through Moses, God said this is what He was going to do. Paul refers to that word in Romans 10:19: "But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you" (Rom 10:19). This prophesy is found in Deuteronomy 32:21: "They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation."

This confirms the utter foolishness of those who teach that Israel has been altogether abandoned by God.

I WILL SHOW HIM

"16 For I will show him how great things he must suffer . . ." Other versions read, "how many things he must suffer," NKJV "how much he must suffer," NASB "what troubles he will have to undergo," BBE "the great sufferings he must pass through," WEYMOUTH "how great are the sufferings he must endure," WILLIAMS "how much he will be afflicted and must endure and suffer," AMPLIFIED and "how many [things] it is necessary [for] him to suffer." ALT

The word "show" is an interesting one. As used here, it means "to show by placing under (i.e. before) the eyes," THAYER "give a glimpse of," FRIBERG "Make known," UBS "to make known,, to demonstrate." LOUW-NIDA This does not refer to speech, but to experience. Jesus would make known the matter revealed – that he must suffer – through Saul personally undergoing certain things. This is not a generic statement, suggesting that some suffering may take place, or that it can be averted by taking certain actions. Jesus will lead Paul through the desert if trial, and it will be extraordinary. In his own writings Paul explains WHY this suffering was required. It was because of "the abundance of the revelations" that were vouchsafed to him (2 Cor 12:7).

It is a principle that when a lot is received from heaven, a corresponding sacrifice concerning the things of this world is experienced.

It is a principle that when a lot is received from heaven, a corresponding sacrifice concerning the things of this world is experienced. Any deviation from this norm is the exception to the rule, and is not to be considered normal. One might cite Moses, Joseph, and Daniel as exceptions to the rule. However, all three of those men endured sufferings while they were in land of their exaltation.

The word "must" is also significant. Jesus is not simply revealing what he sees ahead in Saul's life – for foretelling the future, so to speak. As used here, the word "must" means "is necessary, there is need of, behooves, is right and proper," THAYER "inevitability of an event," FRIBERG "must necessarily take place," LOUW-NIDA "it is binding on one to do a thing, one must, one ought," LIDDELL-SCOTT "it is needful to," LEH and "one must, or has to." GINGRICH These sufferings were an appointment, and were the designated accompaniments of his apostleship. All of them would

be experienced while Paul was engaged in the ministry to which he was appointed. They would not be a prelude to his work, but experienced during which he would fulfill his work.

Paul wrote of his sufferings. Though there was a certain generality that characterized his descriptions, there is a staggering amount of specificity in them.

- Was troubled on every side (2 Cor 4:8a).
- Experienced perplexity (2 Cor 4:8b).
- Was persecuted (2 Cor 4:9a).
- Was cast down, or thrown down (2 Cor 4:9b).
- Fought with beasts in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32).
- Alexander the coppersmith did him much evil (2 Tim 4:14).
- Forsaken by all men when called to defend himself before his enemies (2 Tim 4:16).
- Experienced afflictions, necessities, and distresses (2 Cor 6:4).
- Experienced stripes, imprisonments, and tumults (2 Cor 6:4).
- Called to strenuous labors, watching, and fastings (2 Cor 6:6).
- Experienced dishonor, had evil reports circulated about him, was reported to have been a deceiver (2 Cor 6:8).
- Although a spiritual prince, endured being unknown, was sorrowful, was subjected to death, and had nothing (2 Cor 6:9-10).
- Had stripes laid upon him above measure (2 Cor 11:23a).
- Was frequently imprisoned (2 Cor 11:23b).
- Was repeatedly subjected to death (2 Cor 11:23c).
- Was beaten five times by the Jews with forty stripes save one (2 Cor 11:24).
- Was beaten with rods three times (2 Cor 11:25a).
- Was stoned once (2 Cor 11:15b).
- Experienced at least three shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:15c).
- Spent a day and night abandoned in the sea (2 Cor 11:15d).
- Made frequent difficult journeys (2 Cor 11:16a).
- Experienced perils of robbers, from his own countrymen, by the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren (2 Cor 11:26).
- Experienced weariness and painfulness in frequent watching, hunger and thirst, fastings, cold, and nakedness (2 Cor 11:27).
- Was given a grievous thorn in the flesh, from which he sought deliverance, yet was denied his request (2 Cor 12:1-9).

Valid suffering is not an end of itself. The fact that people endure all manner of hardship may awaken sympathy within the tender of heart, but of itself, such suffering does not make one better, nor is it a reason for Divine commendation. It is the cause for the suffering that makes it commendable, and worthy of being logged in the books of heaven.

Child of God, do you want a lot from God? An abundance of understanding, spiritual insight, and the privilege to communicate the truth effectively? Do you imagine that such an honor comes without price? It does not appear that it is possible to flourish in the knowledge of God and in this

present evil world simultaneously. Some will sight Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and Daniel as examples of the faithful flourishing in this world. But how will they compare them with Paul, or those who traffic in the knowledge of the Lord? Are not all of those men among those who died “not having received the promise?” Is it pointedly stated that God has “provided some better thing” for us,” and “that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:39-40). And, where in all of the Scripture are these men said to be examples of worldly wealth for us? Is not their faith that is their consistent treasure? And was not their standing with God set forth as their premier possession? Where is there a person of understanding who does not know this?

If men want to know how those in Christ are blessed, then let them sit at the feet of those who are expert in life in the Son. Such men did not exist prior to Christ’s exaltation! The Holy Spirit who confers such understanding was not given to men in that capacity until Jesus was glorified (John 7:37-39). We do not have a single example of someone noted for the understanding of God’s eternal purpose who was also noted for having an abundance of this world’s goods. That does not mean that such a condition is sinful or wrong. However, it does mean there is nothing particular noteworthy about it, nor is it something that is to be pursued. Instead of Paul boasting in wealth, he preferred to glory in his “infirmities,” stating that in such a circumstance “the power of Christ” would rest upon him. We conclude, therefore, that not only did the Lord “show” him “what great things” he must suffer for the sake of Jesus, but Paul acquiesced with that Divine arrangement. It is obvious that the revelations he received from the Lord were considered of greater worth. That evaluation perfectly comported with the truth.

FOR MY NAME’S SAKE

“ . . . for My name's sake.” Other versions read , “for My name,” NIV “for the sake of My name,” NRSV “for Me,” BBE “on account of My name,” CJB “for My sake,” WEYMOUTH and “for worshiping in My name.” CEV

Valid suffering is not an end of itself. The fact that people endure all manner of hardship may awaken sympathy within the tender of heart, but of itself, such suffering does not make one better, nor is it a reason for Divine commendation. It is the cause for the suffering that makes it commendable, and worthy of being logged in the books of heaven. Some people, for example, suffer because they have conducted their lives foolishly. Thus Peter writes, “For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?” (1 Pet 2:20). And again, “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet 4:15). There is also a suffering that is experienced through the chastening of the Lord (Heb 12:11). That is a suffering that can be avoided, for, as it is written, “For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor 11:31-32).

The suffering to which Saul would be subjected was an appointed suffering. Peter referred to this kind of suffering as suffering “according to the will of God” (1 Pet 4:19). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about afflictions that were appointed: “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1 Thess 3:3). There are some sufferings through which greater and more effective measures of grace are dispensed – sufferings that actually enhance an ordained ministry. Paul refers to his own sufferings as being in this category, stating that when he was weak (through sufferings), he was actually made more strong (2 Cor 12:10).

Here, Jesus states that Saul’s sufferings would be for His own “name’s sake,” or because of Saul’s identity with Christ. This kind of suffering goes beyond merely enduring insults because of a religious stance. This is suffering that reflects the hatred of the world for Christ, and the fact that the suffering one is clearly associated with Christ. It is also referred to as suffering “for righteousness sake” (Matt 5:10; 1 Pet 3:14). Peter referred to this as something that is “thank worthy,” when “a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully” (1 Pet 2:19).

In the case of Saul, Jesus was going to reveal more of Himself and His purpose to him, which, in turn, would provoke more enmity from men. This is owing to the hostility of the carnal mind against the things of God (Rom 8:7). The mind and ways of Christ are not in harmony with the ways of the world.

There is an unbecoming naivete extant in the professing church about suffering for Jesus. Simply claiming to love Jesus, have traditional moral values, and be devoted to the family structure can easily be tolerated by the world. It is not unusual for such words to be perceived as just a different way of looking at things.

They rather represent the pinnacle of opposition to the ways of the world.

There is an obvious comparison made here between the coming experiences of Saul and the suffering that he caused among believers. While there is a sense in which he would be reaping what he sowed, it seems to me that this is not the specific point that is being made here. The believers that were persecuted by Saul had exhibited an obvious association with Jesus, and for that reason Saul had vigorously opposed them. However, Jesus was now going to divulge greater measures of truth to Saul than He had to others before him. He would later refer to a unique knowledge that he possessed – “my knowledge in the mystery of Christ.” declaring that God had, “by revelation . . . made known” to him “the mystery” (Eph 3:3-4). It was this unique understanding, that would be vouchsafed to Saul, that would awaken the activity of the devil among his children. Because of this understanding, more of the effect of Christ would be registered upon the kingdom of darkness, thereby provoking more hostility against Saul.

There is an unbecoming naivete extant in the professing church about suffering for Jesus. Simply claiming to love Jesus, have traditional moral values, and be devoted to the family structure can easily be tolerated by the world. It is not unusual for such words to be perceived as just a different way of looking at things. No real threat is perceived in such a stance. However, Jesus made clear what actually awakens the opposition. He once said to His half-brothers, “The world cannot hate you; but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil ” (John 7:7). Jesus elsewhere said that the condemnation was that “light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19). That light exposed what the people opposed to Jesus really were. He did not leave the matter to be concluded by His enemies, but spoke plainly to them about their condition. “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will it” (John 8:44). He referred to them as “a generation of vipers” (Matt 12:34), “blind guides” (Matt 23:16), “hypocrites” (Matt 15:7), and “ye are as graves which appear not” (Matt 11:44).

The sufferings of Saul would also come because of His testimony of the truth. He would identify both errors and hypocrites, powerfully and clearly. He would give no allowance to flesh. Suffering would come from the Jews, and even from some churches who doubted the authenticity of his message. Saul would learn by experience how to suffer.

THE LORD, EVEN JESUS, HATH SENT ME

“ 17 And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.”

Once again, I want to draw your attention to the response of Ananias to the word of Jesus. Although the circumstance with which he was confronted was, according to appearance, a life-threatening situation, yet a word from Jesus was sufficient to bolster his confidence and move him to instant obedience. Once the explanation was given – and only once – all fears were removed.

AND ANANIAS WENT HIS WAY

“And Ananias went his way and entered into the house. . .” Other versions read, “Ananias departed and entered into the house,” NIV “Ananias went and entered the house,” NRSV “Ananias went out and came to the house,” BBE and “Ananias set out and went to the house.” PHILLIPS

I prefer the rendering “went his way,” as compared with “departed,” NIV “went,” NRSV and “went out.” BBE The expression “went his way” is translated from a single Greek word – **Vaph/lqen** . There is intention in this word – in this case, intention to do precisely what Jesus had said. Lexically, and as used in this text, the word means “to go away in order to follow anyone, go after him figuratively, I. e. to follow his party, follow him as a leader,” THAYER “of discipleship go after, follow, go with,” FRIBERG “departure from one place and arrival at another is implied,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “go in search of.” GINGRICH This rather complex meaning is accurately conveyed in the translation, “went his way.” Several versions translate the phrase in this way (King James Version, New King James Version, Douay-Rheims, Geneva, Bishop’s New Testament, Tyndale).

Prior to Jesus’ explanation, this was not the way of Ananias. Now, however, his faith embraced the word of the Word, and the way of Jesus became the way of Ananias. This is the manner of a “disciple” – to willingly and eagerly follow the direction of his Master. Therefore, Ananias departed with the determination to find the house to which he was sent, and perform the work for which he was Divinely dispatched.

Many professing believers have never participated in such a response. Their hearts have never really acquiesced with the will of the Lord. At the very best, their feigned obedience is to avoid punishment, or to fulfill a rather grievous obligation – but their hearts are not in the matter. Let it be clear that such responses are not acceptable to God. In fact, they are a cause for His judgment. Jesus spoke of this kind of thing in these words: “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matt 15:8-9).

When it is the manner of people to withdraw from the Lord in their hearts, unwilling to pursue His will and gladly receive what He says, it voids any religious claim they have.

When it is the manner of people to withdraw from the Lord in their hearts, unwilling to pursue His will and gladly receive what He says, it voids any religious claim they have. Psychologists and motivators may make a valiant effort to defend such a posture, saying it is “just the way we are,” but their efforts are in vain. A denial of the Lord in one’s manners is a very real denial, and is so recognized in heaven. Therefore it is written, “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate ” (Titus 1:16). In other words, such people are incapable of doing anything “good,” as defined by the Lord, for that is the meaning of “reprobate” – “disqualified for any good work,” NKJV “worthless for any good deed,” NASB and “unfit for doing anything good,” NIV This is an alarmingly strong statement.

This throws to the ground the modern heresy that says praise ushers us into the presence of the Lord. People are being left with the impression that “praise and worship” is a kind of end of itself, divorced from the way in which men live and the manner in which they respond to the Lord. Those who are not duly “prepared unto every good work” will not be employed in the doing of such (2 Tim 2:21). Those whose hearts are “far from” the Lord, immersed in the affairs of this present evil world, are not capable of worshiping the Lord. Their status voids their pretentious worship, so that it becomes nothing more than “noise” (Amos 5:23).

Ananias was a man of faith, and that is why he was employed for this work. He was not living at a distance from the Lord, and his will gravitated to conformity with the good and acceptable, and perfect will of God. Some time later, when Paul stood before a Jewish council, he referred to Ananias as “a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there” (Acts 22:12). This did not make Ananias unusual among other Christians – although that would surely be

the way he would be viewed today. This man was representative of the body of believers. He was one of the many – “a certain disciple.”

JESUS SENT ME

“ . . . and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me . . . ”

Our text does not tell us how long it took Ananias to find the house of Judas. Perhaps he knew the man already, we do not know. The point to be seen here is that he arrived where he was sent. That arrival was owing to the determination of faith, which never comes short of its intended objective.

Putting His Hands on Saul

The Lord had already shown Saul a vision in which he saw “a man named Ananias coming in and putting his hand upon him” (9:12). Now, that is precisely what happens, confirming the authenticity of Saul’s vision.

In the book of Acts, the first example of the laying on of hands is Acts 6:6, where the first deacons were set aside to their work by the laying on of the apostles’ hands. There is an allusion to this kind of action in Acts 5:12, where it is written, “by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people.” In Acts 8:17 Peter and John laid their hands on the Samaritan believers, “and they received the Holy Spirit.” NKJV Now, for only the third time, this practice is mentioned – and it does not concern the “hands” of an apostle. What is more, this text will also state by this means Saul was “filled with the Holy Spirit” – by the laying on of non-apostolic hands. Apostolic hands were required when the Samaritans turned to the Lord, but not when Saul of Tarsus was being inducted into Christ. Those with a penchant for patterns will find this most confusing.

Brother Saul

Of the sixty times the word “brother” is used in Acts through Jude, fifty-five of them apply to a “brother” in Christ – as compared to a flesh-and-blood relation (as in Acts 1:13; 12:2; Gal 1:19; 1 John 3:12; Jude 1:1). The remaining references (used in the singular) always refer to an individual in Christ (Acts 9:17; 21:20; 22:13; Rom 14:10,15,21; 16:23; 1 Cor 1:1; 5:11; 6:6; 7:12,15; 8:11, 13; 16:12; 2 Cor 1:1; 2:13; 8:18,22; 12:18; Eph 6:21; Phil 2:25; Col 1:1; 4:7,9; 1 Thess 3:2; 4:6; 1 Thess 3:6,15; Phile 1:1, 7,16,20; Heb 8:11; 13:23; James 1:9; 2:15; 4:11; 1 Pet 5:12; 3:15; 1 John 2:9,10,11; 3:10,14,16,17; 4:20,21; 5:16).

There is no reason to think this is not the way in which Ananias used the word here. While Saul had not yet obeyed the Gospel, the Lord had already revealed that he was a “chosen vessel” unto the Lord. That was reason enough to refer to him as a member of the household of faith. Of course, this does not comport with the view that one is technically not to be viewed as “saved” until they have met all of the requirements for entry into Christ. Discerning souls should be able to perceive the proximity of a person to an entrance into the Kingdom, and when all that is required is for them to be told what they are to do. For those who are not able to perceive such things, they should step back from the controversy and deal with matters concerning which they have more understanding.

Saul recounts the words of Ananias in his defense before the Jewish council: “And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul” (Acts 22:12-13).

Jesus Hath Sent Me

The precise manner in which Ananias speaks of Jesus was confirming to Saul: “the Lord, even

Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest.” The record of Jesus’ words to Ananias does not include an account of the Lord’s appearance to Saul. These words surely stirred Saul deep within, for Jesus had appeared to him on the road as the One whom he was persecuting.

Jesus had told Saul that when he was located in Damascus, someone would tell him what he “must do.” Now Saul knows that Ananias has been chosen for that task. I do not doubt that all of his senses were elevated to their highest level as he awaited the directive word.

TO RECEIVE SIGHT AND BE FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

“ . . . that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.”

Jesus told Ananias that Saul had a vision of him coming in and putting his hand on Saul “that he might receive his sight” (9:12). Paul also recounted this in his defense before the Jewish council (Acts 22:13). Paul did not recount this part of his experience before king Agrippa (Acts 26:12-19).

This is the only one of the three accounts that mentions that say Ananias was also sent in order that Saul might be “filled with the Holy Spirit.” I gather that this was a filling after the order Jesus promised to the disciples – an endowment with power from on high (Lk 24:69). This was the “promise of the Father,” conferred on Saul to empower him for the work he was being sent to do.

There is no such thing as a valid work for the Lord Jesus in which the influence of Divinity is not present. Any work that is governed by mankind is destined to failure, for the work of the Lord demands more resources than men possess by nature.

In his testimony before Agrippa, Paul provided more details concerning the objective of his calling. He represents these words as being spoken to him on the road to Damascus: “Choosing you out [selecting you for Myself] and delivering you from among this [Jewish] people and the Gentiles to whom I am sending you. To open their eyes that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may thus receive forgiveness and release from their sins and a place and portion among those who are consecrated and purified by faith in Me.” AMPLIFIED
What a remarkable commission! : “To open their eyes that they may:”

- **Turn from darkness to light.** Turn their attention from the domain of darkness to the domain of light. This involved delivering them from the power of darkness, so that they were no longer dominated by a fundamental ignorance of God and His will.

- **Turn from the power of Satan to God.** This is release from the dominion of sin. In this, they were no longer debtors to the flesh, to live after the flesh. They would be able to resist the devil and draw close to God. Now, being alive unto God, they could walk in the light as He is in the light.

- **Turn so they may receive forgiveness, being released from the guilt and power of sin.** They would no longer be bludgeoned with the guilt of sin, for their conscience would be purged from dead works to serve the living God.

- **Receive an inheritance among all who are sanctified by faith in Christ.** Now, being delivered from this present evil world, they would be saved by their hope – the expectation of an eternal inheritance that is reserved in heaven for them.

All of these benefits would result from the opening of their eyes – the “eyes of their understanding” (Eph 1:18).

Such as ministry could only be fulfilled under the influence and direction of the Holy Spirit. This is why Jesus, prior to His ascension, told His disciples “not to depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4).

There is no such thing as a valid work for the Lord Jesus in which the influence of Divinity is not present. Any work that is governed by mankind is destined to failure, for the work of the Lord demands more resources than men possess by nature. Those who deny this are simply wrong, and there is no need to hold dialog with them about the matter.

Because Saul could embark on a life of service, he had to be filled with the Holy Spirit, so that no vestiges of the fallen nature were resident in the work. This, of course, is a requirement for all of the people of Gold. Solemnly we are admonished, “Be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18).

This exhortation has never been withdrawn, and is to be taken seriously. The context in which this word was delivered had to do with intelligent communication that yielded edification and profit – teaching and admonishing. Oh, that there was a more lively awareness of these things today!

HE RECEIVED HIS SIGHT, AND WAS BAPTIZED

“ 18 And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.”

Although he was appointed to the greatest office in the body of Christ, and was given a commission that is unmatched, yet he entered the Kingdom like everyone does, being born of “water and of the Spirit”

I find it difficult to leave this section without once again drawing your attention to the person through whom, all of this was taking place. It was Ananias, “a certain disciple” from Damascus. Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit through his instrumentality – through the laying on of his hands. Not only is the incident itself most remarkable, but the person who is the object of the benefit is probably the premier preacher and teacher of all time. At least, he is the one through whom we have received the greatest amount of insight concerning the objectives and accomplishments of God’s great salvation. And, there was not so much as one apostle that had anything to do with Saul’s initiation into the Kingdom, him being filled with the Spirit, or him being tutored in the wisdom of God and the realities of redemption. I had to ask myself how this meshed with what I had been taught about the exclusiveness of the twelve apostles. I will tell you candidly, that the record to which we are now being exposed contradicts that entire mindset – and it was all orchestrated by the Head of the church Himself. Admittedly, this is an exceptional incident, and there is nothing about it that is common. However, that is the whole point behind the government of King Jesus. He operates according to His will, not our perception of how He works.

IMMEDIATELY

“ And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith . . .”

Upon the word of Ananias, “something like scales” NKJV fell from the eyes of Saul. Speaking physiologically, in the brightness of the light that flashed around and upon Saul, the structure of the eyeball had probably been severely damaged, for nature cannot stand the sight of glory.

However, having made these observations, there was more to the restoration of Saul’s sight than the removing of some covering or growth that had formed upon his eyes. Later, Paul described the experience in these words: “And the same hour, I looked upon him” (Ananias) – Acts 22:13. When he was on the road, he opened his eyes “and saw no man.” This time he opened them and saw Ananias, “a certain disciple” who had been sent that he might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

HE WAS BAPTIZED

“ . . . and arose, and was baptized.” Other versions read, “he got up and was baptized,” NIV and

“he got up and was immersed.” CJB

Although he was appointed to the greatest office in the body of Christ, and was given a commission that is unmatched, yet he entered the Kingdom like everyone does, being born of “water and of the Spirit” (John 3:5). There was no question about whether or not he should be baptized, or if it was optional. In his account to the Jewish council he stated that his action was a response to clear word from Ananias – who was sent by Jesus to him, “And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). This was not a spiritual baptism, for that is not something a man does. It does not refer to being baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit, for that is not something that men are commanded to do. This is baptism in water, just as occurred shortly after this at the house of Cornelius. It was there that Peter said, “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days” (Acts 10:47-48).

This is now the seventh time we have read about baptism in the book of Acts.

- Peter told the penitential inquirers, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).
- On the day of Pentecost, “they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).
- Those who believed in Samaria “were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).
- Simon and sorcerer “believed also,” and was “baptized” (Acts 8:13).
- The Ethiopian eunuch asked what hindered him from being baptized, and was told if he believed with all of his heart, he could be baptized (Acts 8:36).
- Upon his confession that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him (Acts 8:38).
- Now Saul, upon receiving his sight, and in response to the direction of Ananias, is “baptized” (Acts 9:18; 22:16).

It is difficult to comprehend how anyone could read texts such as these and make statements concerning baptism not being necessary, or having nothing to do with salvation. That such statements are frequently made, I do not deny. However, they are not made by those with honest and good hearts. Else, they would not speak in contradiction of revelation. God has inspired these words, and we are to receive them as such. If we cannot speak about baptism as the Scriptures do, we ought not speak at all.

HE WAS STRENGTHENED AND WAS WITH THE DISCIPLES

“ 19 And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.”

Having obeyed from the heart the form of the doctrine delivered to him (Rom 6: 17), Saul is ready to resume his life. Now, however, he will not continue where he left off. His conscience has been purged (Heb 9:14), his stony heart has been removed, and he has received a new heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26). He has been reconciled to God (Col 1:20-21), and the law of God has been written upon his heart and mind (Heb 10:16). He is a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17), and is God’s own workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works (Eph 2:10). He has been delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). He is dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 6:11). He was not the same man,

for old things had passed away and all things had become new (2 Cor 5:17). We will certainly not expect someone experiencing such changes to conduct his life in the same way he did before.

HE WAS STRENGTHENED

“And when he had received meat, he was strengthened.” Having been weakened by three days and nights without taking food or water, Saul now ate something. He had no mind for eating during those three days. Something more important had been occupying his mind.

But now, he has obtained a good conscience, seeking one from God in obeying the form of the doctrine, and being baptized (1 Pet 3:21). He has received the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10), and has been taught by God to love the brethren (1 Thess 4:9). Now, therefore, he receives food and is strengthened in the body.

What does a person do when he has been joined to the Lord, becoming “one spirit” with Him. We will behold a response in Saul that is perfectly consistent with the nature of “newness of life.” He will “walk” in the newness of life, just as those who have been buried with Christ by baptism into death do.

What does a person do when he has been joined to the Lord, becoming “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17). We will behold a response in Saul that is perfectly consistent with the nature of “newness of life.” He will “walk” in the newness of life, just as those who have been buried with Christ by baptism into death do (Rom 6:4).

HE WAS WITH THE DISCIPLES

“Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.” Other versions read, “Now for several days he was with the disciples who were at Damascus,” NASB “And for some days he kept with the disciples who were in Damascus,” BBE “Saul stayed with the believers in Damascus for a few days,” NLT and “For several days [afterward] he remained with the disciples at Damascus.”
AMPLIFIED

What marvelous fellowship must have taken place during those few days! Saul had come to drag these brethren off to prison, but now he was remaining with them rather than taking them bound with him. How drastically his life had changed! Not only had scales fallen from his natural eyes, but a crust of stone had fallen from his heart. He did not have to grow accustomed to these people, but was at once one with them, remaining with them as their brother in Christ. What lofty conversations they must have enjoyed!

Keep in kind that we are being exposed to the working of the Lord. Here is what really happens when a person is saved “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). This is a report of someone who really died with Christ, being planted together with Him, and raised up by God the Father to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:3-5). He was placed within the body of Christ precisely where God wanted him – just like every other believer. As it is written, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Cor 12:18).

No believer is an island unto himself. He is part of a family – “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph 3:15). Now, Saul was at home among those whom he was seeking to persecute just a few days earlier – “the disciples.” That is, the ones who were taking up their cross, following Christ, and learning from Him. Saul did not identify with a mere institution – as when he was a Pharisee, but with the true saints of God.

CONCLUSION

We have read the account of a man who personally experienced what Jesus was sending him out to do: “turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them are sanctified by faith” in Christ (Acts 26:18). His change was not one of habit – learning to do things differently than he had before. His change was the result of a new creation. God had shined into his heart with “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus” (2 Cor 4:6). He had a new heart and a new spirit, being dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6:11).

Of course, there is no other kind of conversion. Where these kind of changes do not occur, men have simply subscribed to a lifeless routine. It is most unfortunate that the Christian community is regularly subjected to a form of religion in which change is not required. Now, instead of being born again, receiving a new heart and a new spirit, the professed church has a battery of psychological experts to assist people with working out their problems. Nearly every city has a number of counselors, ready to teach people new habits, and talk with them about weaknesses with which they were born. When religion comes wrapped in such an absurd package, a great falling away has taken place. The truth of the matter is that the contemporary church at large sees no need for Christ, for His presence would render obsolete much of what they are doing.

I do not mean to be overly critical, but it appears to me that someone has to come to grips with the glaring absence of the kind of conversion and life to which we are exposed in the book of Acts. We are faced with a situation where the profession of Simon the Sorcery is more common than that of the Samaritans. Peter told him, “Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:21-23). In my judgment, that is the kind of judgment that needs to be articulated against those professing Christians who are conducting their lives in practical alienation from God. It is time to stop treating people who are carnal as they as though they are accepted. They are not, regardless of their profession. Carnality and friendship with the world puts one at variance with God (Rom 8:7; James 4:4). There is provision for forgiveness and renewal, both of which are effective. However, men must be apprised of their absolute necessity. Where this is not done, the professing church has failed.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #43

SAUL'S CONVERSION AND INITIAL WORK

“ 9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God. 21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? 22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ. 23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: 24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him. 25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket. 26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple. 27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. 29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. 30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. 31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied. ” (Acts 9:20-31)

INTRODUCTION

Having confronted Jesus, obeyed His word to wait in Damascus for further word on what he must

do, hearing Ananias and being baptized into Christ, Saul continued for several days with the disciples. These were now his people of preference – the very people against whom he launched an aggressive persecution. It is evident that, having passed from death unto life, he had received the love of the brethren, which is a revealed confirmation of regeneration (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14). You will notice that there is a total absence of philosophizing in Luke’s account. He does not teach that believers ought to love one another, or report that they were exhorted to do so. Instead, he records the undeniable presence of this quality among the disciples. They preferred one another, and therefore spent quality time

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together (Acts 1:14; 2:1,46; 4:24,31,32; 5:12; 9:19). Within an institutional setting, assembling together and working together is an objective. Within a spiritual environment it becomes a reality. The case before us is a powerful confirmation of that fact.

Saul also immediately began to preach Christ in the synagogues, a place where it was customary to allow devoted visitors to speak. This practice is confirmed by the record of “Paul and his company” attending a synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia. Of that occasion it is written, “And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on” (Acts 13:15).

A NOTEWORTHY CIRCUMSTANCE

“The order of the synagogue service was first the prayers, read by the *Sheliach*, or angel of the synagogue, the people standing. Then came the reading of the Law in Hebrew by the reader, and the interpretation by the interpreter, who, outside of Judaea, generally used the version of the LXX (Septuagint). This reading, or lesson, was called the *Parashah*. Next came the reading and interpreting of the prophets, called the *Haphtorah*, either by the regular reader or by anyone invited by the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 4:16,17). Then came the *Midrash*, the exposition or sermon, which Paul undertook at the invitation of the ruler of the synagogue. Our Lord at Nazareth seems to have delivered the *Midrash* sitting (Luke 4:20); here St. Paul stands (ver. 16).” PULPIT COMMENTARY

“The rulers of the synagogue: Those were persons who had the general charge of the synagogue and its service, to keep everything in order, and to direct the affairs of public worship. They designated the individuals who were to read the Law; and called on those whom they pleased to address the people, and had the power also of inflicting punishment, and of excommunicating, etc.” (Schleusner),

Mark 5:22,35,36,38; Luke

8:49; 13:14; Acts 18:8,17. ALBERT BARNES

COMMENTS ON ACTS 13:15

I mention this circumstance to emphasize the significant changes that have taken place in the normal Christian gathering. Under the administration of God Himself, and within the framework of His commandments and ordinances, gatherings were structured around prayer and teaching. There was a commitment to the Scriptures themselves – a practice to which Acts 15:21 refers: “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” (Acts 15:21). This was the kind of gathering in which Jesus first preached to the people, reading and expounding Isaiah’s prophecy of the Messiah (Luke 4:16–27). That text also informs us that Jesus did this “as His custom was” (Lk 4:16).

The critical distinction of those early gatherings, as compared to the average church gathering of our time is that learning and familiarity with the Word of God were fundamental, having the priority. In our day, there is more of a bent to entertainment and things that center in the people themselves. Those with insight, or who have a word to deliver, are of relatively little or no significance, and no place is made for them to speak. Without laboring the matter to the point of distraction, I will say that it is not likely that any significant move of God will ever occur in such a setting. Wherever there is a gravitation to any form of spiritual lifelessness – whether it is in the form of flesh-pleasing entertainment, or religious tradition – there is a corresponding forfeiture of Divine power and revelation. I do not believe it is possible to avoid this consequence. It is certain that wherever the love of the truth is absent, it is not possible for the truth to be known (2 Thess 2:10-12); and where the truth is not known, it is not possible to be made free (John 8:32,36).

Once again, I am drawing attention to these things to emphasize why the truth of Christ spread so rapidly and effectively during the early days of the church. The remarkable dissemination and embrace of the Gospel, as recorded in the book of Acts, was not owing to a unique impartation of power intended only for the launching of the Kingdom of God. Rather, the purity of the message, and the holiness of the people provided the environment in which the Lord distributed the blessing. This is something that cannot be achieved by education, organization, or institutionalism. It is still true, as the Lord declared to Zerubbabel the builder, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the LORD of hosts” (Zech 4:6).

A PROPER ENVIRONMENT IS REQUIRED

Anywhere and everywhere some form of revelation or spiritual renewal took place in Scripture, both the hearts and the minds of the people were engaged, being focused on what was being said. This is precisely why the church is solemnly admonished, “Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26). Edification is the appointed process through which spiritual solidity and maturity are developed. It is a means through which both the hearts and minds of the people are cultured spiritually, so that they can both think and feel in concert with Deity. Wherever this is not taking place, there really is no purpose for calling for a gathering of the people of God. What is more, there is no place among the saints for religious professionals, or men whose minds are saturated with the wisdom of this world. A setting that allows for the entrance of such imposters would be more suitable for Saul the Pharisee, than for Saul the disciple. In the average church setting of our time, I seriously doubt that Saul would be asked to speak.

In this text, Paul’s preaching also inflamed the anger of the Jews, who set out to kill him, who prior to this was held in high esteem among them. The disciples, however, came to Saul’s aid, providing a most ingenious way of escape. Now, when he attempted to join the disciples in Jerusalem, they hesitated to receive him, requiring that Barnabas come to his aid, assuring the brethren there of the

legitimacy of Saul's conversion.

Keep in mind that we are being exposed to real spiritual life, and of its impact upon both those who believe and those who do not. This is not the outworking of a humanly-devised strategy, but is the expression of the "newness of life" common to all believers. This is the newness of life into which every believer is raised, and is intended to be the environment of life.

SAUL IMMEDIATELY PREACHED THAT JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD

"9:20 And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God."

When once the life of Jesus is within a person, it will be made manifest in their "mortal flesh." As it is written, "For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4:11). It is true that there is a certain obligation placed upon those with spiritual life to express it. This is seen in exhortations such as the following:

- "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Mat 5:16).

It is possible for preaching to be much like a blind man wandering about in a field, stumbling here and there in a vain attempt to find something. In Saul's case, it was a continual focus, and the proclamation of what already existed, which is a definition of truth, or reality.

"And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph 4:30).

- "Quench not the Spirit" (1 Thess 5:19).
- "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col 4:17).
- "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Col 4:6).

Valid and profitable spiritual expression springs from one's faith. As it is written, "We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor 4:13). Now, having believed, Saul begins to "preach." It will be interesting to learn about his focus.

HE PREACHED CHRIST IN THE SYNAGOGUES

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues . . ." Other versions read, "immediately he began to proclaim," NASB "immediately he proclaimed," NRSV "immediately began to spread the word," GWN "forthwith he announced Jesus," MRD and "Without delay he proclaimed Jesus." PHILLIPS

There are several significant things to note in this text.

- **The Immediacy of Saul's Action** – "straightway," or immediately. The nature of the responses recorded in Acts, whether from God for judgment or blessing, or from men themselves, is encapsulated in words like "straightway" (5:10; 9:20; 16:33), and "immediately" (3:7; 5:10; 9:18,34; 10:33; 11:11; 12:23; 13:11; 16:10,26 17:10). Saul wasted no time in expressing his faith. This is the manner in which faith responds. It is fear, doubt, and unbelief that cause men to be retarded in their responses – and none of those conditions is acceptable before the Lord.

• **His Activity** – “he preached.” To “preach” is to proclaim, declare, announce, publish, or herald. The Greek word employed here is **evkh,russen** which is the indicative imperfect active 3rd person singular form of the verb form of **khru,ssw** , which is used to express a public proclamation of an existing person, or event that has occurred. The language structure, or tense, of the term means the following:

- 1– **“Indicative”** – pointing to a specific matter in an exact manner.
- 2– **“Imperfect”** – a continual proclamation, as compared to making a single statement.
- 3– **“Active”** – that the action described is one in which Saul was continually engaged.
- 4– **“3 rd person”** – Saul was preaching about another person, not himself or his own experience.
- 5– **“Singular”** – The Person Saul preached was the sole object of his exposition. He did not start with this subject to launch himself into a theme perceived to be more relevant.

While this is admittedly a technicality, it does serve to accent that proper preaching must have an undeniable focus. It is possible for preaching to be much like a blind man wandering about in a field, stumbling here and there in a vain attempt to find something. In Saul’s case, it was a continual focus, and the proclamation of what already existed, which is a definition of truth, or reality.

• **The Subject of Proclamation** – “Christ.” Saul was proclaiming a Person. Already in the book of Acts the apostles are described as ceasing not to “teach and preach Jesus Christ ” (Acts 5:42). Philip is said to have gone down to the city of Samaria “and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). Now, Saul is said to have “preached Christ .” The people to whom he preached was not his theme, and their needs were not the subject of his exposition. It is ever true that until a person can truly “preach Christ,” he is not, by scriptural definition, a “preacher” (Rom 10:14).

• **The Place of Proclamation** – “the synagogues.” It is good to consider where Saul carried out his preaching. It was “in the synagogues.” The Savior Himself was noted for teaching and preaching in the synagogues (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; Mk 1:21,39; 3:1; 6:2; Lk 4:15,16,33,38,44; 6:6; 13:10; John 6:59; 18:20). The apostles and others also were noted for preaching in the synagogues (Acts 6:9; 9:20; 13:5,14-15,42; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19,26; 19:8). Frequently those who believed on Jesus were also said to have been associated with the synagogues (Acts 9:2; 18:26; 22:19; 26:11). Here was a place where those of sober mind were apt to be found. It was a place where the Scriptures were read and expounded, and where devotion was more common. It really is no marvel that Saul began preaching in the synagogues of the city.

HE IS THE SON OF GOD

“ . . . that He is the Son of God.”

Other versions read, “preaching Jesus as the Son of God,” BBE and “saying, He is indeed the Son of God! ” NLT

The primary association of Jesus Christ is the Father Himself – not humanity. He is the Savior of men, to be sure. However He is primarily the Son of God. It is what He is to God that makes Him effective in what He is to men.

The idea is that Saul preached Jesus as the Son of God. He did not proclaim Him as the answer to the perceived needs of men, or the means of realizing personal ambitions. He did not deliver a message that represented Jesus Christ as sanctioning a specific organization, or the way to recover from personal and social setbacks. The primary association of Jesus Christ is the Father Himself –

not humanity. He is the Savior of men, to be sure. However He is primarily the Son of God. It is what He is to God that makes Him effective in what He is to men.

- He is “the Son of God ” (Matt 8:29; Rom 1:4; Eph 4:13; Heb 4:14; John 3:8; 5:5,10,12,13,20; Rev 2:18).
- He is “the Son of the living God ” (Matt 16:16).
- He is the “Son of the Most High God” (Mk 5:7).
- He is “the Christ of God ” (Lk 9:20).
- He is “the Son of the Blessed ” (Mk 14:61).
- He is “the Lamb of God ” (John 1:29,36).
- He is “the wisdom of God ” (1 Cor 1:24).
- He is “the power of God ” (1 Cor 1:24).
- He is “the Holy One of God ” (Mk 1:24).
- He is “the Chosen of God ” (Lk 23:35; 1 Pet 2:4).
- He is “the Bread of God” (John 6:33).
- He is “He which is of God ” (John 6:46).
- He is “the Image of God ” (2 Cor 4:4).
- He is “Word of God ” (Rev 19:13)
- The “only Begotten of the Father ” (John 1:14; 3:16,18).
- He is described as One who is “in the bosom of the Father ” (John 1:18).
- He is “the Son of the Father ” (2 John 1:3).
- Concerning His relationship to God the Father, He is referred to as “ His Son” (Acts 3:13,26; Rom 1:3,9; 5:10; 8:29; 1 Cor 1:9; Gal 1:16; 4:4; 1 Thess 1:10; Heb 1:2; 1 John 1:3,7; 3:23; 4:10; 5:9,10,11,20).
- He is referred to as God’s “Beloved Son” (Matt 3:17; 17:5; Mk 1:11; Lk 9:35).
- It is affirmed that only the Father knows the identity of the Son, and only the Son knows the identity of the Father. Any knowledge of God that is realized by men comes through the Son alone (Matt 11:27).
- The Father “loves the Son,” and has given all things into His hand (John 3:35).
- Jesus did not work independently of God, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do : for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

It is obvious that when Jesus is preached as the Son of God, the relation of the Son to the Father is primary. The private concerns of humanity, however significant they may appear, are not what the work of Jesus is about. The professed church has not done well in making this clear to the people – something for which it is responsible, seeing it is the “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

Saul preached the very thing that he had vociferously denied just a few days earlier – namely that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. This sudden shift in his thinking was not the result of a lengthy period of training. Rather, his knowledge of the Scriptures had now been augmented, as it were, with spiritual understanding, as the light of God shined upon them from within his new heart and spirit. He now perceived that Jesus is really the Subject of Scripture (John 5:39), and that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10).

A NOTICEABLE CHANGE

“ 21 But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”

This is the manner of Divine working. Men are not able to account for it by natural reasoning, or by comparing it to the wisdom and ways of this world. It is not that God merely does things on a grand scale, so that it is remarkable, yet can be explained by appealing to the laws of nature and the natural aptitudes of men. Apart from Divine power, there is no explanation for what the Lord does.

It is to be understood that a moral change that is not confirmed by appearance is really no change at all. In our time, when a hearty effort is being made to blend Christianity with “this present evil world” (Gal 1:5), the necessity for such a change is not being proclaimed. However, Jesus clarified the absolute necessity of change when He said to Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God,” and “Ye must be born again” (John 3:3,7). The use of the expression “born again” confirms that the mere adoption of new habits is not intended. The requirement of a new birth establishes that a fundamental change in the character of the individual is required. That is something that can only be accomplished through the Holy Spirit. Therefore, those who are “born again” are said to have been “born of the Spirit” (John 3:6,8), and born of “incorruptible seed” (1 Pet 1:23).

ALL THAT HEARD HIM WERE AMAZED

“But all that heard him were amazed . . .” Other versions read, “continued to be amazed,” NASB “astonished,” NIV “full of wonder,” BBE “astounded,” CSB and “surprised.” IE

The word “amazed” is translated from a word that means “to throw out of position . . . throw one out of his mind, drive one out of his senses,” THAYER “to be amazed beyond comprehension confuse, astound, amaze,” FRIBERG and “to be amazed beyond comprehension confuse, astound, amaze.” LOUW-NIDA The idea is that those who heard Saul could in no way account for the drastic change that had taken place in him. There simply was no natural explanation for the radical alteration of his speech and manners. Here is a classic example of the fulfillment of this word: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent” (1 Cor 1:19; Isa 29:14). This is the manner of Divine working. Men are not able to account for it by natural reasoning, or by comparing it to the wisdom and ways of this world. It is not that God merely does things on a grand scale, so that it is remarkable, yet can be explained by appealing to the laws of nature and the natural aptitudes of men. Apart from Divine power, there is no explanation for what the Lord does.

Right here we must come to grips with the kind of things for which God is given purported praise in our day. Too often men give credit to God for things the world can account for using mundane explanations. God is not truly exalted by crediting Him for things that are perceived as quite doable apart from Him. It is not that God is never in such things – like gradual recoveries from debilitating illnesses, changes in weather patterns, financial well-being, etc. The point is that the saints, when giving public praise to God, ought to draw attention to things that cannot be accounted for on a worldly level. That is a matter of conducting ourselves wisely before men.

IS NOT THIS HE?

“ . . . and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?”

Saul’s powerful presentation caused amazement in all who heard him, for they knew of his prior

life. They even knew why he had planned to come to that area. They did not know what had happened to him on the way, or of the ordained encounter he had with Ananias. However, it was clear that the man speaking in their synagogue differed radically from the one who was reported to be coming to their city and synagogues to arrest and bind both men and women who were believers in Christ.

There is something else here that is noteworthy. It was apparently not unusual for believers to be among those meeting regularly in the Jewish synagogue on the Sabbath day. It also appears that they were not always expelled from the synagogue. Neither is there any suggestion that the believers in any way compromised their faith, as some had done in Jerusalem during the ministry of Jesus (John 9:22; 12:42-43).

HE CONFOUNDED THE JEWS, PROVING THAT JESUS IS VERY CHRIST

“ 22 But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.”

BUT

“But . . .” Other versions read, “Yet,” NIV “And,” YLT and “however.” WEYMOUTH This word is translated from the Greek conjunction **de** , which has the following lexical meaning: “universally, by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement,” THAYER and “to emphasize contrast.” FRIBERG

This small word introduces the next clause, which contrasts sharply with what has just been said. Those who heard Saul speak were thrown out of their wits by the stark contrast between who Saul was prior to this, and what he now appeared to be. However, what they were beholding was a beginning of an continual change. The fact of the matter was that the alteration in Saul of Tarsus was an ongoing one. Furthermore, that uninterrupted change was not impacted at all by their response.

SAUL INCREASED IN STRENGTH

“ . . . Saul increased the more in strength . . .” Other versions read, “increased all the more in strength,” NKJV “kept increasing in strength,” NASB “grew more and more powerful,” NIV “become increasingly more powerful,” NRSV “went on increasing in power,” BBE “was being filled more and more with power,” CJB “grew more capable,” CSB “was the more strengthened,” MRD “Saul’s power increased steadily,” NJB “Saul’s preaching became more and more powerful,” NLT “was still more strengthened,” YLT “became more and more fervent in preaching,” LIVING “gained more and more influence,” WEYMOUTH “grew stronger and stronger,” WILLIAMS “went on from strength to strength,” PHILLIPS “All the more was being empowered,” ALT and “was more filled with power.” LITV

While those who heard Saul were confounded at the remarkable change in him, he himself was increasing in strength more and more.

Once again, we are being exposed to the manner of the Kingdom. Isaiah prophesied that the kingdom placed upon the shoulder of the Messiah would be noted for an “increase” that would never end (Isa 9:6-7). Daniel also prophesied of this Kingdom trait (Dan 2:44-45).

The Scriptures accent at least three areas in which continual change is realized by those who are living by faith.

- **FAITH.** The word of the Gospel announces that faith is progressive in nature, advancing on and on as the justified ones live by it. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith : as

it is written, "The just shall live by faith" (Rom 1:16-17). The phrase "from faith to faith" indicates that it is the nature of spiritual life to promote an increase in faith itself, which is the means through which all spiritual growth is realized. That is why it is written that "the just shall live by faith." There is no such thing as a static, inactive, or non-growing faith. When faith does not increase (Lk 17:5) or grow (2 Thess 1:3), it at once begins to wane. Those in such a condition are said to believe only "for a while" (Lk 8:13). Those who keep the faith, on the other hand, experience the advancement of faith to a greater degree or measure.

• **STRENGTH.** The Psalmist also declared increase to be the nature of those who, in redemption, would appear before God. "They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God" (Psa 84:7). Again, this progression is from one degree of strength to a greater degree of strength.

• **GLORY.** The transformation of the individual takes place in stages. In these stages, the Holy Spirit changes the believer from one increasing stage of glory to another. This is done as we behold the glory of the Lord. "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). Here, "glory" refers to the image of Christ into which believers are being transformed. This is done by means of spiritual growth in which they are being more and more conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).

The fact that Saul continued to increase in strength confirms that the processes to which I have just referred were taking place within him. This is the Kingdom norm – and it was all taking place within the arena of conflict and opposition.

HE CONFOUNDED THE JEWS

" . . . and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus . . ." Other versions read, "baffled the Jews," NIV "the Jews . . . were not able to give answers to the arguments," BBE "creating an uproar among the Jews," CJB "confused the Jews," GWN "causing consternation among the Jews," NET "couldn't refute his proofs," NLT "couldn't withstand his proofs," LIVING "didn't know how to answer him," IE "bewildered them," WEYMOUTH "continued to confound and put to confusion," AMPLIFIED and "reducing to confusion." PHILLIPS

Saul was not spouting philosophy, or resorting to mere human logic. He was reasoning out of the Scriptures – the writings of Moses and the Prophets. As an excelling young Pharisee, who was the "son of a Pharisee," He had been a student of the Scriptures (Acts 23:6; 26:5; Gal 1:14; Phil 3:5-6). Neither, indeed, was he merely relating his experience on the road to Damascus. We know from the words that follow that he was mightily wielding the "sword of the Spirit" (Eph 6:17).

There is no substitute for a knowledge of the Scriptures. Those who have little knowledge and understanding of Scripture are, by virtue of that ignorance, disqualified from any extensive involvement in preaching or teaching. Those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord are described as workman who are "handling accurately the word of truth" NASB (2 Tim 2:15). In his various admonitions to Timothy, Paul mentioned that he had known the Scriptures "from childhood" NKJV (2 Tim 3:15). It was no doubt the same with Saul, who was the "son of a Pharisee" (Acts 23:6).

The point is that when light flooded the heart of Saul, it sanctified the knowledge of the Scriptures that he already possessed. That is why he was able to confound the Jews with irrefutable arguments concerning Christ Jesus – something that could not have been done by a person lacking an extensive knowledge of the Word of God.

PROVING THAT JESUS WAS VERY CHRIST

" . . . proving that this is very Christ." Other versions read, " proving that this Jesus is the Christ,"

NIV “proving that Jesus was the Messiah,” NRSV “he made it clear,” BBE “with his proofs,” CJB “he demonstrated,” MRD and “by comparing and examining evidence and proving.” AMPLIFIED

The word “proving” comes from the Greek word **sumbibazwn** which has the following lexical meaning: “to cause to coalesce, to join together, put together . . . to put together in one’s mind,” THAYER “strictly cause to stand together . . . intellectually prove conclusively,” FRIBERG and “to bring together, to cause to be a unit.” LOUW-NIDA

Saul’s proofs were developed by correlating what Jesus did and taught with what the Scriptures had foretold of the coming Messiah. That is the only way

Jesus could be confirmed to be “very Christ,” or “THE Christ.” Saul brought the Scriptures and revealed Person of Jesus together, confirming they were perfectly correlated with one another. Jesus Himself said of the Scriptures, “they are they which testify of Me ” (John 5:39). When Philip found Nathanael, he said of Jesus, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). When Luke introduced this book to Theophilus, he said of his Gospel, “The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach” (Acts 1:1). That record of what Jesus did and taught was in unwavering agreement with what Moses and the prophets said of the coming Messiah.

Now, Saul of Tarsus, by the grace of God (1 Cor 15:10), has seen this also. He therefore takes the Jewish Scriptures (Moses and the Prophets), and matches them perfectly with what Jesus did and taught.

This is also how Jesus began His own ministry among men. In His hometown synagogue, He read a Messianic prophecy from the book of Isaiah, declaring that it was fulfilled that day in the ears of those who heard Him (Lk 4:16-21). Peter also did the same on the day of Pentecost, citing Jesus’ fulfillment of the prophecies of Moses, Joel and David, as well as the promise God made to David (Acts 2:16-21,25-36). Later Peter told the people that “all the prophets from Samuel” had foretold the days of Jesus (Acts 3:24), and that Jesus was the Seed God promised to Abraham (Acts 3:25-26). Peter also told the household of Cornelius that “all the prophets” gave witness to Jesus Christ (Acts 10:43). Later, Paul would confess that in preaching Christ he said “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). And, when he was incarcerated in the Gentile city of Rome, it is written that he “expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

Paul also wrote to the Romans, testifying to the manner in which he established them by “the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets , according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:25-26).

The modern Gentile church has, for the most part, obscured the writings of Moses and the Prophets concerning “the Christ.” It has substituted “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4) of whom Moses and the prophets did not write. Now Jesus is associated with the needs and desires of the people as they are defined by men. Now he is perceived as a marriage-mender, drug-deliverer, prosperity-provider, career-conferrer , and success-supplier. He is being presented as the answer to self-perceived problems, and the means through which one’s dreams are brought to fruition. However, this is not the kind of “Christ,” or Messiah, that was foretold in the Scriptures. Therefore, it is not even remotely possible that such is the Savior of the world (1 John 4:14).

THE JEWS TAKE COUNSEL TO KILL PAUL

“ 23 And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: 24 But their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.”

The extent and duration of Saul’s teaching confirms how much he had been given to see – and there would be much more revelation given to him.

We are not sure of the precise time that this circumstance took place.

On the surface, it appears to have taken place within several days from the commencement of his preaching in the synagogue. However, the expression “many days” might very well refer to a rather lengthy period. If this is the case, it could refer to the second time he went to Damascus, after he had spent an unspecified period of time in Arabia. Paul refers to this time in his letter to the Galatians. Following the revelation of Jesus to him, he states, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days” (Gal 1:15-18).

Luke omits the time Saul spent in Arabia, saying only that it was after he first entered Damascus. It was also before he went to Jerusalem. He also states that he returned to Damascus after spending an unspecified period of time in Arabia. Then, after three years, he went up to Jerusalem. Some assume that Saul went to Arabia after the events of our text. Others are convinced that the events of our text took place after he had returned from Arabia. I am placing all of these events prior to the time Saul spent in Arabia. It seems to me that this best suits the record Luke is delivering, which has primarily to do with the events immediately following Saul’s apprehension by Jesus. However, this is not something concerning which I will be contentious.

THE JEWS TOOK COUNSEL

“And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him . . .” Other versions read, “after some time had passed,” NRSV “after some days,” BBE “later,” GWN “after a long time,” NAB “after a good while,” TNT “at length,” WEYMOUTH “after several days,” WILLIAMS and “after considerable time had lapsed.” AMPLIFIED

The expression “many days” lends itself to the notion that Luke is speaking of a period of twenty-four hour days, not a small cluster of years, or even months. The word “many” is translated from the Greek word **ἵκαναι**, which means “Reaching to, attaining to, and sufficient,” THAYER and “an implied measurement that reaches a certain stage.” FRIBERG The word “days” is translated from the Greek word **ἡμέραι**, which means “the natural day, between sunrise and sunset . . . and the civil day, or space of twenty-four hours.” THAYER The emphasis, therefore, is not placed on a specific number of days. Rather, it highlights an unspecified number of days during which the patience of the Jews ran out. While it is conceivable that this could include the period of time Saul spent in Arabia, I do not consider it likely. The initial time Saul spent in the synagogues, immediately following his time with Ananias, was given to confounding the Jews. It is this bewilderment that provoked the Jews to take counsel to kill Saul.

This is precisely the same response that the Jews in the synagogue of the Libertines had toward Stephen. They “were unable to resist the wisdom and spirit by which he spake.” They therefore took counsel to kill him also, and did the same after a brief period of time (Acts 7:8-15, 58-59). Add to this the fact that the Jews reacted similarly to the Lord Jesus Himself after His very first sermon among them (Lk 4:28-29). Unbelieving Jews were not noted for their tolerance of the proclamation of Jesus. I do not know what would lead a person to believe they endured two extended sessions of Saul’s preaching – one before he went into Arabia, and one afterward. I therefore choose to believe

that this record precedes Saul's trip into Arabia.

It ought to be noted that time was given for these Jews to receive the love of the truth. However, they did not receive it, but chose rather to hold on to their cherished traditions.

IT WAS KNOWN OF SAUL

“ 24 But their laying await was known of Saul . . .” Other versions read, “their plot became known to Saul,” NKJV “Saul learned of their plan,” NIV “Saul got knowledge of their design,” BBE “Saul was told about their plot,” GWN “but news of it reached Saul,” NJB “but information of their intention was given to him,” WEYMOUTH and “the knowledge of] their plot was made known to Saul.” AMPLIFIED

Here again we see the closeness of the disciples, as well as their alertness to the circumstances. People who are all wrapped up in themselves are not aware of imminent danger, but blunder through life like brute beasts, falling needlessly into pits they could have avoided.

This is the kind of thing that was taking place in our text. While some might well conjecture that certain members of the synagogue overheard the plans of Saul's enemies, that does not get to the source of the matter. This was actually the reigning Christ delivering Saul from the people, just as He promised He would do

But it was not so among the disciples in Damascus. Even though Saul was a new convert, yet the believers were drawn to him, quickly recognizing the grace that had been given to him. Consequently, they apprised him of the plots that were being made against him.

THEY WATCHED THE GATES

“And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.” Other versions read, “they kept close watch on the city gates in order to kill him,” NIV “And they kept watch day and night on the roads out of the town, so that they might put him to death,” BBE “they carefully watched the gates both by day and by night so as to do away with him,” LITV and “Although in their murderous scheme the Jews watched the gates day and night for him.” PHILLIPS

The determination of the Jews appeared to guarantee they would be successful – at least that is what they were thinking. However, because Saul was a chosen vessel unto the Lord, their plans would not succeed. As it is written, “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Prov 19:21). God is noted for causing the purposes of the ungodly to fail. As it is written, “That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish” (Isa 44:25).

It is not by coincidence that the plans of his enemies were “known of Saul.” This is an example of the working of the Lord Jesus, upon whose shoulder the government has been placed (Isa 9:6). He carries out the meticulous and mysterious workings to which Solomon alluded when he wrote, “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” (Eccl 10:20). An example of this kind of Divine working is seen in an account of the king of Syria. When his plots against the king of Israel were continually foiled, he called his servants and inquired if one of them was a friend to the king of Israel, and was divulging his plans to him. It was then that one of his servants replied, stating that none of them were providing the king of Israel with information. He said, “None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber” (2 Kgs 6:12).

This is the kind of thing that was taking place in our text. While some might well conjecture that

certain members of the synagogue overheard the plans of Saul's enemies, that does not get to the source of the matter. This was actually the reigning Christ delivering Saul from the people, just as He promised He would do: "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee" (Acts 26:16-17). Our text is an example of such a deliverance, and is evidence of a ruling Christ.

DELIVERED BY THE DISCIPLES

"25 Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket." Other versions read, "but his disciples took him by night, and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a large basket," NASB "But his followers took him by night and lowered him in a basket through an opening in the wall," NIV "But his disciples took him at night and let him down through the [city's] wall, lowering him in a basket or hamper," AMPLIFIED and " Saul's disciples took him one night and let him down through an opening in the wall by lowering him in a basket." PHILLIPS

Paul recounts this incident in his letter to the Corinthians, providing some additional details. "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands" (2 Cor 11:32-33). There is nothing more in Scripture concerning this governor or the king under which he exercised his authority. There is some reference to him in secular history (Pollock [Specimen Hist. Arab. p. 76, 77, 78], The book of 2 Maccabees 5:8, and Josephus [Antiqu. 50:14. c. 1. sect. 4. de Bello Jud. 50:1. c. 6. sect. 2]). However, it is enough to know no more than our text declares, for Saul is the subject, and not the Jews or those with whom they had aligned themselves. As is abundantly confirmed in Scripture, the Holy Spirit does not make a practice of informing men of historical persons and facts that have no immediately connection with Divine intent. It is for this reason that students of the Word must discipline themselves not to be unduly distracted by history, culture, and matters that are extraneous to the text of Scripture itself.

Humiliating to the Flesh

Paul places this incident among the things classified as his "infirmities" (2 Cor 11:30). There was a sense in which it was a humiliating deliverance – at least in the flesh. It displayed weakness – particularly when compared with deliverances like that of Israel from Pharaoh and his armies (Ex 14:29-30), David from Goliath (1 Sam 17:49-50), Samson's defeat of a thousand philistines (Judges 15:15), and Shamgar's defeat of six hundred philistines (Judges 3:31). However, God has not always delivered His people in such a manner, and we do well to take note of it, lest we formulate a faulty view of deliverance and Divine protection. Elijah not only slew 850 prophets of Baal (450 +400), he also fled from before the face of Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:19,40; 19:3-4). Jeremiah was temporarily subjected to the will of his enemies (Jer 38:6). Zechariah was killed by his enemies in the Temple court (2 Chron 24:20-21). James was killed by Herod (Acts 12:2). There were also numerous faithful saints who suffered unspeakable atrocities at the hands of their enemies (Heb 11:35-38). We do well not to develop a naive and juvenile view of Divine protection and deliverance.

Ungodly Collusion

The Jews had apparently obtained the approval of the governor of the city to carry out their intended treachery. It is the invariable nature of the flesh to appeal to the world for help – never to the living God. This is what the Jews did in carrying out their intentions against the Lord's. They employed "wicked hands" (Acts 2:23), not only appealing to evil Pilate to assist them, but insisting that he do so after he had desired to release Jesus (Acts 3:13).

Saul's Disciples

Note that it was Saul's own "disciples" who assisted his escape from the Jews. When he presented his proofs of Jesus being the Christ, there were apparently some who saw the truth of what he said. The literal rendering of the expression is "the learners of him," INTERLINEAR with the "him" referring to Saul himself.

Thus Saul escapes by means of creativity and stealth, the disciples lowering him over the wall in a basket. They also did this at an expeditious time, accomplishing the escape during the night. All of this required diligence and perception on their part. In a sense, they were risking their own lives in this matter. However, the love of the brethren places one's personal interests in the background, seeking to bring the greatest advantage to the saints – especially when such advantages have been brought through them.

The incident is reminiscent of the escape of the Israelite spies from Jericho – when Rahab "let them down by a cord through the window; for her house was upon the town wall, and she dwelt upon the wall" (Josh 2:15). Something similar occurred when David was aided in his escape from the designs of king Saul. His wife Michal (who was the daughter of Saul), "let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped" (1 Sam 19:12).

Was It Right to Do This?

A novice might question whether or not it was proper to flee from the Jews. Is not persecution part and parcel of the life of faith, and is it not proper for men to submit to such maltreatment in faith? The unlearned might cite the words of Jesus in justification of this erroneous view: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it" (Matt 16:25). Such reasoning might appear flawless to some. However, it is a spiritually juvenile way of thinking. The saving of one's life speaks of the abandonment of Divine interests in a preference for personal ones. That is not the kind of thing we are confronting in this text. This was an exercise of wisdom, not the expression of selfish interests or a love for self.

Speaking of the persecution they would face, Jesus once said to His disciples, "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matt 10:23). For that matter, it is said of Jesus Himself, "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for He would not walk in Jewry (Judea), because the Jews sought to kill Him" (John 7:1).

Another Principle

Another principle that is unveiled here is that the Gospel is withdrawn from those who persistently reject it. This was lived out when Jesus wept over Jerusalem, citing their rejection of Him as a just reason for withdrawal from them. At that time He said, "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23:38-39).

Jesus also taught His disciples this when He first sent them out. "And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet" (Matt 10:14). When He sent out the seventy, the Lord told them the same thing. "But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you" (Luke 10:10-11).

When Paul and the company with him were rejected in Antioch of Pisidia, they frankly told the people, "It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). It was then that they "shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium" (Acts 13:51).

In all of these cases, there was a remnant of people who accepted the Gospel. Yet, a judgment was rendered against the general environment because of their obtuseness.

A Kind of Judgment

The escape of Saul was, in a sense, a judgment against those Jews that sought to kill him. The Lord could easily have eliminated them, or even enabled Saul to continue among them, refuting their arguments and frustrating their desires. However, that is not what He chose to do, and His action is in perfect agreement with a number of similar incidents in Scripture (Acts 13:50-51; 14:6,19-20; 16:19-23; 17:10,13-15,32-33; 18:12-18; 20:1; 23:16-22; 23-33,35; 24:27; 27:1-5; 2 Cor 1:8-9). Sometimes the witness is withdrawn by means of martyrdom (Gen 4:3-8; 2 Chron 24:21-22; Acts 7:58-60). Sometimes there is a relatively peaceful departure.

There are also times when an escape is accomplished by means of stealth, as in our text. However, whatever means are employed, it is always a circumstance of greatest gravity when the Gospel of Christ is withdrawn from a people or a region.

THE JERUSALEM DISCIPLES ARE AFRAID OF HIM

“ 26 And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”

There is a gap of time between this verse and the previous one – we do not know its precise length. Some are of the persuasion that it was a relatively lengthy period of time, with his escape taking place after he had been in Arabia. I am of the persuasion that the trip into Arabia followed this escape. However, this is not a critical matter, and there is no benefit in pursuing it any further.

WHEN SAUL WAS COME TO JERUSALEM

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem . . .”

We know from Paul’s letter to the Galatians, that, from one point of view, this was not the same Saul that initially preached in Damascus. By this time, he had been briefly tutored by Jesus, choosing not to “confer with flesh and blood” following his conversion. He therefore did not go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him. As it is written, “To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus” (Gal 1:16-17). After “three years” he “went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter, and stayed with him fifteen days” NIV (Gal 1:18). It is difficult to correlate the testimony of Paul to the Galatians with the record provided in the book of Acts. I have not been satisfied with my own understanding of the timing of these events. Nor, indeed, does it appear worthy of extensive pursuit. I will simply say that, following his departure to persecute the saints, it appears that the first time Saul returned to Jerusalem is the reference of both our text and the first chapter of Galatians. This appears to harmonize well with an additional account Paul gave of this occasion before the Jewish council. In that account he did not refer to his trip to Arabia, but spoke of his journey to Jerusalem as taking place shortly after his conversion. Here is the record. I will commence with the words Ananias delivered to Saul. “For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: and when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles” (Acts 22:15-21).

The phrase “come again to Jerusalem” refers to his initial return. This passage corresponds to the passage we are reviewing (9:28-30).

Paul also gave a brief summation of his initial experiences in Christ when he testified before Agrippa. “Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: but showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:19-20).

The parallel accounts are as follows, and confirm the number of things that probably took place during this period of time. I gather they are all referring to the same visit to Jerusalem, with each accenting something different.

Acts 9:26-27

- Saul come to Jerusalem following his escape from Damascus.
- Saul attempts to join the disciples in Jerusalem, but they are afraid of him.
- Barnabas intercedes for him, bringing him to the apostles and testifying of his encounter with Christ.
- Saul is with the apostles, going in and out of Jerusalem, yet there is no record of him being specifically taught by them.
- He speaks to the Jews boldly, who take counsel to kill him.
- The brethren send him to Tarsus, which is next to Syria.

Acts 22:17-21

- When returning to Jerusalem, Saul receives a vision while in the Temple, in which Jesus reveals that he must leave the city.

Acts 26:20

- Saul preaches Christ when at Jerusalem, declaring to the Jews that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting of repentance.

Gal 1:18-23

- Saul returned to Jerusalem three years after his initial departure to persecute the church.
- During that time he conferred with Peter, but did not see any of the other apostles.
- Following that visit he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

HE ASSAYED TO JOIN HIMSELF TO THE DISCIPLES

“ . . . he assayed to join himself to the disciples . . . ” Other versions read, “tried to join,” NKJV “trying to associate,” NASB “attempted to join,” NRSV “tried to meet with,” NLT “assayed to couple himself to,” PNT and “made several attempts to associate with.” WEYMOUTH

While it is true that Saul had been known for persecuting the church in Jerusalem three years earlier, there is more to this matter than this. There is an underlying suggestion that things went on in the assembly that were not designed for those who were not disciples – things that set the people apart from all non-disciples, making them a peculiar people.

The words translated “join himself” are translated from a single word that has the following

meaning: “to glue together, cement, fasten together . . .to join oneself as an associate,” THAYER “Adhere to, cleave to . . . unite with,” FRIBERG “to put together, build,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to enter into close relation with,” LEH and “join closely together, cling to, associate with.” GINGRICH

Right here we confront something that differs radically from the church situation in our country. First, the word “join,” when associated with identity with a body of people, is not considered to mean cleave to, have close association with, enter into close relation, or engage in building together. It generally is associated with mere formality, and perhaps the adoption of a given set of religious traditions. Here, however, the word has everything to do with being knit together in a common cause, and partaking of a common life.

Secondly, there is obviously some kind of formality associated with Saul’s effort. He was surely not merely attempting to attend the meetings of the disciples in an informal sort of way. There was some sense in which he sought to be a part of the disciples in Jerusalem. Without pursuing this matter into the region of futility, there is a tendency among many people to actually avoid some form of formal identity. This would involve some kind of positive action that made clear they wanted to be associated with a given body of believers. While it is not my purpose to set forth unwarranted requirements, it does seem to me that it is in order for some action to be taken by believers that clearly states their intention to be more than an occasional visitor. None of us should take for granted that our desires are understood without some clear form of expression.

THEY WERE ALL AFRAID OF HIM

“ . . . but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.”

The contention of the brethren was not that they refused to have Saul among them – at least that is not what the text says. It is rather that they were “afraid of him not believing that he was a disciple.” NASB They were not convinced that he was a follower of Jesus Christ.

This is a most arresting consideration! While it is true that Saul had been known for persecuting the church in Jerusalem three years earlier, there is more to this matter than this. There is an underlying suggestion that things went on in the assembly that were not designed for those who were not disciples – things that set the people apart from all non-disciples, making them a peculiar people. In Saul’s case, this variance was perceived as something that could provoke him to aggression against the disciples.

There is no suggestion in the text that the disciples tailored their gatherings to convince Saul, or that some special initiative was launched to ensure that he would become a disciple. I will not carry this reasoning any further. However, it ought to be abundantly apparent that there was vast difference between those early disciples and those who profess to be disciples today.

Those early disciples were not naive or simplistic in their reasoning. They were not right about Saul at first, but they would yield to sound reasoning when it is presented to them, thus confirming their fundamental sincerity.

BARNABAS PERCEIVES AND TAKES UP SAUL’S CASE

“ 27 But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how He had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. 28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem.”

Now, for the first time since Acts 4:36, Barnabas surfaces again. Until this time, all we know about him is the following.

- He was a man named Joses (Joseph) – Acts 4:36a
- He was called “Barnabas” by the apostles, which means “The son of consolation,” or “the son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36b).

It ought to be noted that one of the required traits of a true spiritual leader is that of spiritual discernment. A person cannot lead the flock of God if he is not able to distinguish between sheep and wolves, and truth and error.

He was from the country of Cyprus (Acts 4:36c).

- When the distribution of goods was being made, he sold a piece of property, and laid the funds at the feet of the apostles (Acts 4:37).

From this we learn that he was a Jew, for so his name indicates. He was from Cyprus, an island in the Mediterranean Sea. He was obviously active among the believers in the ministry of encouragement and comfort. This means that he was noted for his love of the brethren, which confirms that he had passed from death unto life. He was also an unselfish man, devoted to the work of the Lord. Those are certainly comely qualities that will surely erupt in other notable deeds, one of which will now be chronicled.

BUT BARNABAS TOOK HIM

“But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”

It is clear from this text that Saul had testified of his experience when he “tried to join the disciples” in Jerusalem (v 26). Barnabas was evidently there, and believed what Saul had testified. Not only, therefore, was Barnabas a comforter, or encourager, he was also a discerning man, being able to decipher the truth when he heard it.

Barnabas Took Him

We learn from Acts 13:1 that Barnabas was also a prophet. Paul once said that a prophet was capable of discerning when the truth had been spoken by someone else. As it is written, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Cor 14:37). Falling into that category, Barnabas at once takes up the case of Saul, pressing for his acceptance by the brethren. He there aligns himself with Saul, taking him unto himself.

Brought Him to the Apostles

Barnabas knows that the leaders and principle men of the church are the apostles. Their word will be the final word to the rest of the brethren. He therefore brings Saul to the apostles to present his case, subjecting it to their discernment. He knows they will be able to recognize the truth, just as they did with the penitential people at Pentecost, Ananias and Sapphira, the seven deacons of the sixth chapter, Simon the Sorcerer, and others.

It ought to be noted that one of the required traits of a true spiritual leader is that of spiritual discernment. A person cannot lead the flock of God if he is not able to distinguish between sheep and wolves, and truth and error.

He Declared Unto Them

Here we are exposed to the nature of Saul’s testimony, which is doubtless the outward source of

the information Barnabas relates. It is important to note the kind of things he cites as qualifying Saul for acceptance.

- Saul had seen Jesus in the way, or on the road to Damascus.
- Jesus Himself had spoken to Saul.
- Saul had preached boldly in the name of Jesus at Damascus.

There are at least two notable things to consider here. First, nothing is directly said about Saul's character, or that he had changed, so that he no longer persecuted the church. Those things will become evident, however, in what is said. Second, the primary evidence that confirmed Saul's acceptance was that Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him. It was the response of Saul to that appearance and instruction that once and for all confirmed his acceptance: he preached in Jesus' name in the very city and synagogue where he had originally planned to arrest and incarcerate believers. Later, Paul himself would summarize his response in his testimony to Agrippa: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

It is still true that those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord are to be noted for these two principle things.

- They must have seen and heard something, being cognizant of the truth itself.
- They must be obedient to the truth to which they have been exposed.

Where these qualities are not found, men must not be permitted to do service in the body of Christ. These virtues equate to the requirements for the first deacons: "men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom" NKJV (Acts 6:3).

AND HE WAS WITH THEM

"28 And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem." Other versions read, "he was with them moving about freely in Jerusalem," NASB "Saul stayed with them and moved about freely," NIV "So he remained with them and went all over Jerusalem," CJB "he was conversant with them," GENEVA "So he was staying with them, associating openly with them," NET "he had his conversation with them at Jerusalem," TNT "Then they accepted him, and after that he was constantly with the believers," LIVING "Henceforth Saul was one of them, going in and out of the city," WEYMOUTH "So he went in and out [as one] among them," AMPLIFIED and "Saul joined with them in all their activities in Jerusalem." PHILLIPS

From this we learn of effectiveness of Barnabas' efforts.

- The apostles at once recognized the situation and received Saul into their fellowship – "then they accepted him." LIVING
- The brethren also concurred, receiving Saul into their fellowship – "he was constantly with the believers." LIVING
- Saul became obviously one with the apostles and the brethren – "Henceforth Saul was one of them." WEYMOUTH
- Saul stayed with the apostles and the brethren, moving everywhere with them – "he was with them coming in and going out."
- Saul's manner of life was identified by his identity with the saints – "he had his conversation with them." TNT
- Saul participated in the activities of the brethren – he "joined with them in all their activities." PHILLIPS

• None of them doubted Saul's acceptance in Christ, or opposed him in any way –
“moving about freely.” NASB

There we have an example of what it means to be “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), of believers being “the more added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14), and of the Lord setting the members in the body “as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). In our time, being a “member” of the church is generally not perceived as being involved with the members, or continuing together. That, however, is the kind of association that is consistently represented in the book of Acts, and we do well to duly note it.

SAUL SPEAKS BOLDLY AND DISPUTES AGAINST THE GRECIANS

“ 29 And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. 30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.”

Just as Saul had done in Damascus, he now declares Christ in Jerusalem among the Jews. Although the text does not say so, it is assumed that he was preaching in the synagogues, a place where he would be found preaching in virtually every city he entered.

HE SPAKE BOLDLY IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

“And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus . . .” Other versions read, “speaking in the name of the Lord without fear,” BBE “speaking confidently in name of the Lord,” DOUAY “with the power and authority of the Lords,” GWN “he spoke openly,” MRD “preaching fearlessly,” NJB “continued to speak courageously,” WILLIAMS and “Preaching freely and confidently and boldly.”
AMPLIFIED

Saul's preaching was not mere blustering, and it was not the relating of his personal experience. He spoke confidently, freely, and with an obvious assurance, for such is the meaning of “boldly.” One might be inclined to think this lends itself to the thought that Saul spoke more about what had happened to him, and what a change had been made in him. While I do not doubt that he made mention of these things, the text clearly confirms that this was not his focus. He spoke confidently and publically “in the name of the Lord Jesus.” He did not speak in the name of the church, or in his own name, or in the name of some other man. He rather spoke in the name of the One who had appeared to Him, called him into the apostleship, and taught him.

I have not found the few explanations that have been offered for speaking “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” to be in way satisfying. The view that says this means speaking by the authority of Jesus appears to me to come far short of the intended meaning, and seems to me to be nothing more than a lifeless and mechanical explanation.

Preaching in the name of Jesus speaks of the circumference of preaching – the intellectual and spiritual border within which preaching is done, and beyond which one refuses to go.

If it is true that the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God” is seen “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6), how is it remotely possible for valid preaching to focus on something else? If it is true that God Himself can be understood only by seeing Jesus Christ, how can it be possible for man and his obligation to be perceived by looking at someone or something else?

The truth of the matter is that the heart of Saul's preaching was Jesus Christ Himself. He did not set out to reform the Jewish nation, but to proclaim the Lord's Christ. By speaking “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” he presented a circumstance in which Jesus Christ overshadowed everything and everyone else. If Jesus is the key Man – “THE man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5), how is it possible for anyone else to be correctly perceived by men as more important than Jesus, or more to be emphasized

than Jesus?

I will say plainly that too much preaching leaves people thinking too little about the Lord Jesus. Such preaching is not “in the name of the Lord Jesus,” for it does not leave men thinking about Jesus, pursuing Him, or engaging in a fervent and unrelenting quest to “know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (Phil 3:10). Neither is such preaching by Jesus’ authority.

When Saul preached in Damascus he proved that Jesus was “very Christ.” I do not doubt that this is also a fair summation of what he preached in Jerusalem, perhaps elaborating on the implications of Him being “very Christ.”

AND DISPUTED AGAINST THE GRECIANS

“ . . . and disputed against the Grecians . . .” Other versions read, “disputed against the Hellenists,” NKJV “talking and arguing with the hellenistic Jews,” NASB “talked and debated with the Grecian Jews,” NIV “spoke and argued with the Hellenists,” NRSV and “talked and debated with the Greek-speaking Jews.” CJB

The “Grecians” were not Gentiles, but were Greek-speaking Jews – probably from other countries. The word translated “Grecians” is **~Ellhnista,j** (hel-lay-nis-tace). The word “hellenist” is a transliteration – letter-for-letter translation instead of a meaning. By definition, the word means “to copy the manners . . . of the Greeks or to use the Greek language; one who uses the Greek tongue, employed in the N.T. of Jews born in foreign lands and speaking Greek (Grecian Jews),” THAYER “a Greek-speaking Jew in contrast to one speaking a Semitic language a Greek-speaking Jew in contrast to one speaking a Semitic language,” FRIBERG It is used three times in the book of Acts (6:1; 9:29; 11:20)a, always referring to Jews from outside the perimeter of the land of Israel, who spoke the Greek language. The practice of speaking the Greek language universally was established by Alexander the Great when he ruled the world.

It is generally understood that this was also an appropriate description for the Jews who opposed Stephen. These were referred to as “libertines,” who were Jewish slaves who had been freed. It is quite possible that their Grecian culture had robbed them of much of their Jewish heritage, making it more difficult to take hold of the truth.

These Grecian Jews could not receive the truth about Jesus Christ, and thus disputation rose when Saul preached “in the name of Jesus.” Later, Paul would “dispute” in the synagogue of the Jews in Athens, arguing the case for Jesus. In this activity, both in Jerusalem and Athens, he was throwing down opposing arguments – “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God” (2 Cor 10:5). This is the same thing Stephen did so powerfully, so that his opponents “were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit with which he spoke” (Acts 6:10).

THEY WENT ABOUT TO SLAY HIM

“ . . . but they went about to slay him.” Just as with Stephen, the opponents of Saul, not being able to confute him, determined to kill him. This does not highlight how bad they were, but rather displays the hostility between the thinking of unregenerate men and the truth of Christ. The carnal mind is “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7), and the preaching of the cross is “foolishness” to such a mind (1 Cor 1:18). Because preaching that is focused upon Christ necessarily exposes men to more of God Himself, this hostility is magnified.

Saul made no effort to neutralize this hostility by weakening his message. Instead, he disputed with the Grecians, arguing against their foolish thinking. He did not seek to develop a relationship with

them, or tone down his words to make them more palatable. This brought out their hostility all the more, so that killing Saul became their quest.

This is the same response he received from the Jews in Damascus, where he had to escape their aggression, being let down over the wall in a basket.

This incident exposes the fallacy of trying to make friends with the ungodly before delivering the Gospel to them – although I am being extremely charitable in suggesting that what such people deliver is even the Gospel.

Holy men in the past used no compromising technique, seeking to endear the people to themselves before delivering their message. Moses did not (Deut 9:6). The prophets certainly made no such effort (2 Chron 24:19). Nor, indeed, did John the Baptist (Matt 3:7), or the Lord Jesus Himself (Matt 12:41-42). Whence, then, is the origin of this dreadful practice that is being hawked in our time? Rest assured, it has not come from God or any godly person. Ultimately, this practice has its origin with Satan, who demonstrated it in his approach to Eve.

It is not the aim of any godly person to intentionally offend people, or to start arguments about tangential issues. It is written that “the servant of God must not strive, but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves” (2 Tim 2:24). This, however, has more to do with manners than with the message itself. When there are ideas expressed that are opposed to the truth of Jesus Christ, they are to be cast down, not tolerated. When men assert their thoughts against the Lord, it is no time for the man of God to practice tolerance. When the Lord sends a man to preach the Gospel (Rom 10:15), he had better deliver the record God has given of His Son. If that record agitates the people, the issue is to be pressed until they either yield or their carnality erupts. Search the Scriptures and see that this has been the consistent response of men of God to aggressive reasoning against the Lord.

One of the chief difficulties of our time is that many professed preachers and teachers are not able to “defend” the Gospel (Phil 1:17). Such men are not to be in the front lines of spiritual battle. This is why James wrote, “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (James 3:1). The idea is that offenses are caused by the words of those who preach truth – not wrongful offenses, but those which are caused because the truth grates against the thinking of worldly minded people. Those who cannot endure and address such conflicts needs to find another occupation.

WHEN THE BRETHERN KNEW

“ 30 Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.”

Just as the brethren in Damascus, the believers in Jerusalem were selfless and alert. They were aware of the plot against Saul, not being wrapped up in their own personal lives. Therefore, they took appropriate measures to deliver Saul from the hand of his enemies. Apparently, they did not take into account any personal jeopardy that might be involved.

The trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea (as distinguished from Caesarea Philippi) was about fifty miles. It was a sea port, which apparently provided for Saul to sail to Tarsus, which was about four hundred miles North. In the region of Cilicia. It is apparent that these brethren were not seeking a convenient, quick and easy way, to deliver Saul. They entertained a genuine concern for him, and therefore took whatever measures were necessary to see to it that he was safe.

Here is the love of the brethren being lived out, lifted from the realm of mere philosophy and religious talk. This is the real thing.

A PERIOD OF REST FOR THE CHURCHES

“ 31 Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.”

It is important to note that thus far, throughout the book of Acts, the attention has been upon the church – the believers, or disciples. Other people were involved, but the focus was not upon

Edification is the process through which this building process is accomplished. God does not come to dwell among His people because they praise Him, but because they are built up in Christ! I realize that such a statement is tantamount to heresy among some people.

them. People who became significant did so when they were added to the church, or were numbered with the believers. If we were to confine ourselves to Scripture, we know very little of the social conditions of that time in the land of promise – Judea (South), Galilee (North), and Samaria (middle section). The recollection of the working of the Lord rarely includes any extensive details of anything unrelated to that work. I say this because of the remarkable diversion to “other things” (Mk 4:19) that have penetrated the Christian society of our day. As is always the case, whatever is allowed to compete with the truth always upstages it. It is good to take special note of the manner in which Luke, being moved along by the Holy Spirit, is relating the events of that time. He consistently writes in such a manner as to move Jesus Christ into the forefront, representing the church as the environment in which He is working out His purpose.

THEN HAD THE CHURCHES REST

“Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria . . .” Other versions read that the churches “had peace,” NKJV “enjoyed peace,” NASB “enjoyed a time of peace,” NIV and “experienced peace.” NET

There was a different climate in those early days – before factions and divisions flooded the landscape. What do you suppose people would think you meant if you spoke of “the churches” in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas having “rest?” It seems to me that all manner of confusion would break out as people would ask, “What churches?” “Which ones?” However, there is no question here concerning the identity of the people. These were those who had been “added to the church” by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:47). These were groups of disciples, who had left all to follow Jesus. This is speaking of those who were of one heart and soul, and were of the same mind.

Prior to this, the chief priests and Jewish leaders had come against the apostles (4:1-3; 5:40). The church had been disrupted by the dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:10-10). The Jewish council had stoned Stephen (Acts 7:58-60). The church in Jerusalem had been persecuted, and the believers scattered (Acts 8:1-3; 9:21). There was even an initiative against the brethren in Damascus (Acts 9:2). All of this had stretched over a period of seven to ten years (30-33 A.D. until 40 A.D.).

Now, however, the powers of darkness are stopped by the King, and the church is given a time of “rest” – peace, quietness, and expansion without continual resistance. The word “rest” comes from a word with the following lexical meaning: “exemption from the rage and havoc of war . . . free from persecution,” THAYER “a state of peace,” FRIBERG “favorable circumstances involving peace and tranquility,” LOUW-NIDA and “peace, harmony, tranquility.” GINGRICH

Do not suppose for a moment that Satan gave up, or was chased away by the believers. This was a peace that came down from above – it was an imposed peace, if you please, were the powers of darkness were not permitted to agitate the enemies of the Lord against His people. While these powers were permitted to rage against the saints, there was a certain sifting that took place. As it is written, “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest

among you” (1 Cor 11:19). It is only those who have “no root in themselves” who are “offended” by persecution and consequently “fall away” (Mk 4:17; Lk 8:134). These having been removed from the church, they now enjoyed a period of rest – a time without persecution, undue disputation, liars within, and intruders like Simon the Sorcerer.

AND WERE EDIFIED

“ . . . and were edified . . .” Other versions read, “being built up,” NASB “strengthened,” NIV “was built up,” NRSV and “was made strong.” BBE

This is the grand objective for the body of Christ – “the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). The idea of edification parallels the idea of strengthening an edifice, fortifying it so it can endure all manner of testing, and is adequate to house its intended contents. In the case of the church, it is intended grow “into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:21). That is, it is spiritually fortified in order that the Lord Himself might dwell in it. The Amplified Bible reads, “continues to rise (grow, increase) into a holy temple in the Lord [a sanctuary dedicated, consecrated, and sacred to the presence of the Lord].”

Perhaps you have noted that it is now a sign of professed worship to invite the Lord to come into the assembly. Men also speak of standing on holy ground, as though they had come into a place external to themselves where God met with them. I realized there are some elements of truth in such expressions, and that men often are not aware of what they are saying. However, it is important to know that God’s intention is not to visit the churches, but to dwell among them. That is the reason for the church in the first. Its purpose is to be “an habitation of God through the Spirit,” or “a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” NKJV (Eph 2:22).

Edification is the process through which this building process is accomplished. God does not come to dwell among His people because they praise Him, but because they are built up in Christ! I realize that such a statement is tantamount to heresy among some people. However, it is the view that allows for God to dwell among a weak and uninformed people that is the heresy – and it is a serious one. God has spoken clearly to this subject, for there is no need for any confusion concerning it. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 6:17-7:1). This condition will be realized when, and only when, the people are “edified.”

Some circumstances that are implied by edification are as follows.

- Moral strength, so that the devil can be resisted (James 4:7; Rev 12:11).
- Wisdom and spiritual understanding, so that the things of God are comprehended (Col 1:9; Eph 5:17).
- A growing sense of being a stranger and a pilgrim in this world, that causes one to “groan” under the weight of the bondage of corruption (1 Pet 2:11; Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:2).
- A corresponding longing for the coming of the Lord, and the donning of our house which is from heaven (2 or 2:5; Rom 8:23; Phil 3:20-21; Eph 1:14; 4:30).
- A knowledge and comprehension of the Scripture (2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19).
- Spiritual mastery in the matter of setting our affection on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-2).

The absence of these, and similar, spiritual qualities, confirms the corresponding absence of edification. Where believers are not going up into Christ (Eph 4:15), they have not been edified. This

can only be explained by the absence of proper teaching and/or impure hearts and carnal minds.

AND WALKING IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD

“ . . . and walking in the fear of the Lord, . . .” Other versions read, “going on in the fear of the Lord,” NASB “living in the fear of the Lord,” NIV and “walking in the respect and reverential fear of the Lord.” AMPLIFIED

Religious men have done their best to neutralize the impact of the word “fear” by using terms like respect, reverence, and awe. However, those words have more of a philosophical bent than one that pertains to God Almighty.

“Walking” has to do with the consistent manner of life, and includes focus as well as a hearty devotion. “The fear of the Lord” is by no means a casual expression. Religious men have done their best to neutralize the impact of the word “fear” by using terms like respect, reverence, and awe. However, those words have more of a philosophical bent than one that pertains to God Almighty. As used here, the words “the fear” come from the Greek word **tw/l fo,bw l** . The Greek word phobos, is the one from which we derive the word phobia, substantiating the strength of the word. The root meaning of this word is “terror,” and the elaboration of that meaning is as follows: “fear, dread, terror,” THAYER and “a state of severe distress, aroused by intense concern for impending pain, danger, etc,” LOUW-NIDA

The words “respect” and “reverence” are appropriate only to the degree that they reflect the idea of terror and dread. The difference here is that the fear, dead, or terror, does not cause one to run from the Lord, but to the Lord. However, and make no mistake about it, the terror that moves one to “flee” to the Lord for refuge is very real, and is not to be mitigated by the employment of watered down words that have no significant meaning to the hearers. Ponder these clarifying expressions:

- “And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake” (Heb 12:21).
- “My flesh trembleth for fear of thee; and I am afraid of thy judgments” (Psa 119:120).
- “Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts” (Isa 6:5).
- “And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last” (Rev 1:17).
- “Therefore I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me: for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength” (Dan 10:8).
- “Knowing therefore the terror [**fo,bon** , phobos, fear] “of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are made manifest unto God; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences” (2 Cor 5:11).
- “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling , in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ” (Eph 6:5).
- “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ” (Phil 2:12).
- “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).
- “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the

LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word ” (Isa 66:2).

No person of Scriptural reference has ever been knowledgeable in the presence of God or the glorified Christ and maintained an attitude of casualness. There is such an abrasiveness between the Divine nature and flesh that fear grips the heart of those in the body who know they are dealing with the God of heaven. This is the kind of fear that, mingled with faith, moves them to “mortify the deeds of the body” (Col 3:5), perfect holiness “in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1-2), and “love not the world, neither the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15). Where these things are not being done, God is not feared; and, where God is not feared, He is not known!

No congregation will be blessed by the Lord that does not fear Him. Jesus said to His disciples, “But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 12:5). Peter said, “Fear God!” (1 Pet 2:17). A mighty angel from heaven shouted to the inhabitants of the earth, “Fear God and give glory to Him!” (Rev 14:7). I see nothing in those expressions that suggests a kind of casual reverence that does not promote an aggressive stance against darkness and an earnest effort to walk in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7).

AND WALKING IN THE COMFORT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost . . . ” Other versions read, “encouraged by the Holy Spirit,” NIV “counsel of the Holy Spirit,” CJB “encouragement of the Holy Spirit,” CSB “consolation of the Holy Ghost,” DOUAY “the help of the Holy Spirit,” IE and “the consolation and exhortation of the Holy Spirit.” AMPLIFIED

The word “comfort” has more to do with rationality than feeling – with perception than emotion. It is given to men in words and thoughts rather than impulses. It has to do with an increased level of Kingdom intelligence, where eternal verity is more clearly perceived than the fleeting things of this present evil world. Much, if not all, of this is directly related to the Word of God, which is the expression of the mind of the Lord. Here, in our thinking, is where we have fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), and access unto the Father (Eph 2:18). As pleasant as feelings may be, they are not even in the same category as sanctified thought. It is said of the wicked that “God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4).

In our text, the fact that the churches were walking “in the comfort of the Holy Spirit” means that God was in all of their thoughts. They were comforted, consoled, encouraged, and helped by what they comprehended. All of this took place through the faculty of their faith, and because they were edified and walking in the fear of the Lord. In this day of salvation, that posture of life will still yield the same results.

WERE MULTIPLIED

“ . . . were multiplied.” Other versions read, “continued to increase,” NASB “grew in numbers,” NIV “was increased greatly,” BBE “their numbers kept multiplying,” CJB “continued to grow,” NJB and “the group of believers grew larger and larger.” IE

Here we are being exposed to a living church, not a strategizing one. It was its life, not its program, that caused this increase. It involved the power of the Spirit, not the wisdom of men. This was preceded by rest, edification, the fear of the Lord, and the comforting ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the book of Acts we have confronted this kind of growth – growth that was totally lacking of human wisdom and fleshly stratagem. “There were added to them . . . the Lord added to the church daily . . . believers were the more added . . . the number of disciples was multiplied . . . the word of God increased, and the number of disciples multiplied” (Acts 2:41,47; 5:14; 6:1,7).

As Isaiah prophesied, this is the nature of the Kingdom over which Jesus presides – to “increase” (Isa 9:6-7). Daniel also confirmed this Kingdom characteristic (Dan 2:35,44).

In my judgment, where this is not happening, there is some form of sifting taking place – sifting that is designed to remove “the old leaven” (1 Cor 5:7-8). That sifting can come through persecution and various forms of opposition from the world. It can also come through a deluge of erroneous teaching that attracts those with impure hearts. However, when the church has rest, and when it is being edified, the Holy Spirit will minister consolation, comfort, and encouragement, and the body of Christ will increase. Just as in nature, proper growth and advancement must be preceded by sound health. In the Spirit, the body of Christ must be spiritually healthy if it expects to make appropriate advancement in Christ Jesus. A sick church is a static one.

CONCLUSION

We have thus been introduced to the conversion of Saul of Tarsus – an epoch in the history of the church, His conversion had nothing whatsoever to do with the strategies of men. It was wholly initiated by the Lord Jesus Himself, and carried forward with the help and encouragement of those with pure hearts and a grasp of the truth. Jesus is still governing His Kingdom, and doing so with a strict regard for His body, which is the church. When His people are edified, walking in the fear of the Lord, and being comforted by the Holy Spirit, He is faithful to give the increase.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #44

PETER SPREADS THE WORD IN JOPPA

“ 9:32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda. 33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and wassick of the palsy. 34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately. 35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. 36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. 37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. 38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. 39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. 40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. 41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. 42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. 43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. ” (Acts 9:32-43)

INTRODUCTION

Having dealt with the conversion of Saul, the narrative now turns to Peter, the leading apostle of

“the twelve.” This is the one Saul went to see when he journeyed to Jerusalem, remaining with him for fifteen days (Gal :18). Peter was frequently the spokesman for “the twelve” (Matt 16:16; 17:4,24;. 18:21; 19:27; Acts 1:15; 2:14,37-38; 3:4; 4:8; 5:3,8-9). This confirms some of the involvements of the keys to the Kingdom of God being given to Peter (Matt 16:19). It was for this reason that Paul said of him, “the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter ” (Gal 2:7). Suffice it to say, all who are in Christ Jesus are not equal when it comes to ministry. While

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- **CONCLUSION**

there are no natural distinctions between them – like male and female, bond and free, or Jew and Greek (Gal 3:28) – there are distinction among them when it comes to ministries, or functions within the body (1 Cor 12:1-18). Even among the apostles there were some distinctions, as evidenced in Peter’s preeminence, and prominence in the Acts of the apostles. In this regard, it ought to be noted that this distinction was not given to lord it over the people of God – something for which there is no provision in Christ Jesus (Matt 20:25-27).

These principles, while not repeatedly declared doctrinally, are lived out in the book of Acts. Divine appointments, which are the means through which the will of the Lord is executed, are clarified in this book. No person is exalted by the institution, or attains to prominence through natural or cultured aptitude. While this admittedly conflicts sharply with the structure of the modern church, there is no question in this book about how and why men and women are brought into the effective and God-glorifying service of the King.

PETER GOES INTO LYDDA

There is a kind of liberty revealed in the book of Acts. While there is much specific direction that takes place, like Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, and Ananias and Saul of Tarsus, there are also activities that were birthed by the walk of faith – like Philip going into Samaria, the apostles sending Peter and John to Samaria, and Stephen preaching in the synagogue of the Libertines. There was also the judgment against Ananias and Sapphira, and the word delivered against Simon the Sorcerer. These do not appear to have been the response of to a direct word from the Lord. They rather reflect something of the impact of having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), and walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7). There is a certain awareness that

accompanies living in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9) that intuitively directs a person in the work of the Lord. I understand that this does require spiritual maturity and a strong faith, and that it is not to be taken for granted. However, it is possible to be directed by a pure heart, because such a condition brings one into accord with the Lord. This is surely a secondary way of being directed, but it is a valid one, and appears to surface quite frequently in the book of Acts,

Should the individual, in all good conscience, and with a mind to serve and glorify God, conceive of a purpose prematurely, or in an untimely manner, the Lord, working through their sensitivity, will in some way inform of the impropriety of their action.

Should the individual, in all good conscience, and with a mind to serve and glorify God, conceive of a purpose prematurely, or in an untimely manner, the Lord, working through their sensitivity, will in some way inform of the impropriety of their action. This is precisely the circumstance that is unveiled in the sixteenth chapter of this book. “Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, after they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (Acts 16:6-10).

From this we deduce that those who labor for the Lord are not simply to sit about idle until they perceive specific Divine direction. Rather, they are, in faith, to set out to do what they see as proper in the sight of the Lord. As in the text above, their timing may not be right, but if they are living by faith and walking in the Spirit, their lives will be Divinely directed, for “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23). The Word of God did, after all, and in God’s own time, finally get into Asia and Bithynia (Acts 19:26; 20:18; 1 Pet 1:1).

Peter now goes to into the region of Lydda, to minister to the saints. His ministry did not exclude the saints, but rather caused them to rank very high in his labors. The neglect of the saints is always a sign of apostasy, which has been brought on by the dominating presence of the devil. There is no legitimate office or ministry in the body of Christ that allows for the disregard of those who are in Christ Jesus. When the flock of God is not fed, it confirms that a departure from the Lord has already taken place, for Lord’s “body, which is the church” (Eph 1:23), is His own priority. It is not possible for the Lord of glory to dwell in a person who has no heart for His own people.

Arriving in Lydda, Peter finds a man who had been paralyzed for eight years, and heals him in the name of Jesus, and it was made known to all in the area. As a result, all who dwelt in Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord. The hand of the Lord is working mightily through Peter, who, like Paul, is faithful to his calling.

We ought to know that Scripture – any Scripture – is more than history or an historical perspective. The word of God is “living and powerful,” because of its nature. Scripture contains “the mind of the Lord,” and therefore cannot possibly be irrelevant.

In a neighboring city named Joppa, a godly woman named Dorcas became sick and died. After preparing her body and placing her in a chamber, the disciples, hearing that Peter was in the region, sent two men to him, desiring that he come to them without delay. Upon arriving, and learning of the spiritual nobility of this woman, Peter put all people from the room, prayed to God, and raised her from the dead. When this became known to the people “many believed in the Lord.” Thus the knowledge of God continued to spread throughout the region. What Jesus had begun to do and teach was being carried out by those maintaining fellowship with Him.

WHAT WE ARE BEHOLDING

We ought to know that Scripture – any Scripture – is more than history or an historical perspective. The word of God is “living and powerful” NKJV (Heb 4:12), because of its nature. Scripture contains “the mind of the Lord,” and therefore cannot possibly be irrelevant. Because of this, it not only specifies the purpose of God and the limitless extent of His reign, but provides snapshots of that purpose being worked out among the sons of men. We know very little of God’s working independent His activity among men. We know of the expulsion of Satan from heaven, as well as the reasons for it (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-19). Even in that matter, Satan’s ejection from heaven is also related to the ministry of Jesus and the salvation of men (Luke 10:18; Rev 12:9). However, if you were to be asked to note Divine activities that took place before the creation of the world, and that were independent of humanity, you would be hard pressed to find just one. Angels were present at the creation, and rejoiced at the display of God’s mighty power and extensive wisdom (Job 38:5-7). However, we do not have the faintest notion of their activities prior to creation.

In the book of Acts, we are beholding the following things. This is intended to be introductory, and is by no means as thorough as I would prefer. I am providing this only to enhance our perusal of the Acts, and not to give an exhaustive commentary on the subject.

- **Jesus governing the Kingdom.** Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be seated upon David’s throne and the government placed upon His shoulder (Isa 9:6-7). Peter referred to these prophecies on the day of Pentecost, saying they were fulfilled when Jesus was raised from the dead and “made both Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:29-36). The manner in which Jesus governs His kingdom, as well as the nature of its increase, is being chronicled in the book of Acts.

- **Jesus building His church.** From another perspective, we are being exposed to the way in which Jesus is building His church, as He said He would (Matt 16:18). The spiritual growth and solidity of the members of His body are confirmed by both their understanding and their ability to stand in the time of trial. Acts contains a record of this happening.

- **How the godly are employed.** In His Kingdom, Jesus employs those who are “prepared unto every good work” – those who have separated themselves from this present evil world (2 Tim 20-21; 2 Cor 6:15-7:1), and have an understanding of the things of the Spirit of God. The book of Acts provides us example after example of this principle.

- **The impact of honest and good hearts.** When the hearts of men are honest and good, they always respond favorably and consistently to the Lord and His Gospel. Such souls are aggressive to know what they ought to do, and are willing to do it, whatever it may require. The record of the conversion of the Jews on Pentecost, the city of Samaria, the Ethiopian eunuch, and Saul of Tarsus, are sterling examples of this.

- **The immediacy of faith’s response.** In Christ’s kingdom, the people are willing, because this is the day of His power (Psa 110:3). They do what they are told when they are told, and do not draw back from instant obedience. The responses of the people on the day of Pentecost, in Solomon’s porch, in the city of Samaria, and elsewhere confirm this also takes place on the group level. The Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, Ananias, Barnabas, and others verify that it also happens on the individual level.

- **The hostility of the carnal mind.** There is natural enmity against the Lord in those who do not believe. That is confirmed in the opposition of the high priest, the chief priests, the scribes, the pharisees, and the captain of the Temple. Before his conversion, this was also seen in Saul of Tarsus.

In order to profit from the book of Acts, a person must be able to detect these things to some measurable degree.

PETER COMES TO THE SAINTS IN LYDDA

“ 9:32 And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.”

The focus now shifts from Saul of Tarsus back to Peter. Although he was not instrumental in either the conversion or the tutoring of Saul, he was about the Lord’s business, for he had been appointed to a lofty work. While holy men of Scripture doubtless had personal lives, they are never the point of Scripture. The family life, extracurricular activities, etc., of these men are never the subject of revelation. Those who are fond of referring to men of Scripture as fathers, husbands, family men, etc., are not representing them in a heavenly manner. They are in the area of speculation when they speak of them in these capacities. Even though that aspect of their lives was very real, yet that is not how the Lord intends for them to be remembered, for such recollections detract from His purpose, and therefore diminish the level of individual spiritual understanding. When men say Divinely approached men were bad fathers, inconsiderate family men, or deficient in other areas of domestic and social life, they are giving us their own opinions, which are absolutely worthless in matters pertaining to life and godliness. It simply is not possible to make a valid comment on an aspect of the personal lives of God’s saints concerning which He Himself has provided no commentary. That ought to be plain enough to require no further explanation.

At any rate, the Spirit will now provide some insight into the activities of Peter – activities relating to the purposes of God in Christ Jesus.

PETER PASSED THROUGHOUT ALL QUARTERS

“And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters . . .” Other versions read, “all parts of the country,” NKJV “here and there among all believers,” NRSV “here and there among them all,” RSV “from place to place,” CSB “he passed through all, visiting all,” DOUAY “here and there among them all,” ESV “going around to all of God’s people,” GWN “through all of the towns,” IE “going around among all the disciples,” ISV and “in the course of traveling about among them all.” PHILLIPS

In this passage there is a spiritual nugget that has been covered up with the traditions of men. A surface reading of the passage might lead one to believe that Peter was on, what men call, an evangelistic tour – preaching the Gospel to those who had not yet believed. While some of that no doubt occurred, this is not the word delivered by this text. The passage reads in such a way as to confirm that Peter was visiting the saints – those who had believed. In the process of that visitation, he will come to the saints in Lydda.

The expression “all quarters” is translated from a single Greek word (**pa,ntwn**). The geographical area covered in these travels was the promised land itself – Judea, Samaria, and Galilee – the places mentioned in verse forty-one: “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria” (Acts 9:31). These were the “quarters” through which Peter traveled, and “the churches” were the people he visited. The grammar, context, and text itself substantiate this view.

The activity of Peter is against the background of the “rest” that the churches were enjoying following the conversion of Saul (Acts 9:31). It is my understanding that Peter’s activity is an explanation of one of the means through which the churches were edified and comforted (9:31). This is the same procedure that Paul will use as his ministry develops further – visiting the churches (Acts 11:28; 14:22,27-28; 15:36, 41; 16:5). This is not to mention Paul’s informative epistles, which were all addressed to believers. Nor, indeed, is there need to mention all of the spiritual gifts, which expressly pertain to the church itself (Eph 4:8-16; 1 Cor 12:1-11; Rom 12:3-6).

At this point it is worthy to note how very little of this is common in our time. While “the churches” were the object of much apostolic activity, they are largely neglected by the Christian community. What informed believer is there who is not keenly aware of this? The state of the modern church is

the very means through which false prophets and worldly religious trends are flourishing. If ever the church was to become spiritually knowledgeable and strong, countless numbers of religious professionals and businesses would at once become obsolete and useless.

HE CAME TO THE SAINTS IN LYDDA

“ . . . he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.” Other versions read, “he also came down to the saints,” NKJV “he went to visit the saints,” NRSV “ descended also to the saints,” DARBY “he went down to the holy ones,” NAB “ eventually came to God's holy people,” NJB “ he came down to visit the believers,” NLT “and in his travels came to the believers,” LIVING “he finally went down to God's people,” WILLIAMS and “he went down also to the saints.” AMPLIFIED

There is no indication that anyone was traveling with Peter, or that he had been sent on a special mission, as when John and himself were sent to Samaria. Acts 8:14 is the last text that mentions Peter and John – or any other person – traveling together. This appears to me to confirm that there was a kind of independency present among believers that cannot exist in an organizational environment. This is seen in the works of Stephen and Philip as well.

It is clear from the grammar of the text that Peter was traveling about, going here and there to the believers in the areas of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. They were the focus of his attention. The “saints which dwelt in Lydda” are an example of the kind of people to whom he was ministering.

This city bore the Hebrew name “Lod,” and is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 8:12, Ezra 2:33, Nehemiah 7:37, and Nehemiah 11:35. It was a town within the limits of the tribe of Ephraim, thirty-two miles from Jerusalem. It bore in Hebrew the name of LOD, and appears to have been first built by the Benjamites, although it lay beyond the limits of their territory (1 Chronicles 8:12); and we find it again inhabited by Benjamites after the exile (Ezra 2:33; Nehemiah 11:35).

The city of Lydda is also referred to as “Lod,” which is its Hebrew name. It was located within the area of Canaan that was given to the tribe of Ephraim, about thirty-two miles from Jerusalem .

Jesus had told His disciples to preach the Gospel “in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and in the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The book of acts provides a record of those sacred beginnings. It also confirms that the preaching involved the edification of the saints – strengthening and stabilizing them in the faith. Peter and John had done this in Samaria (Acts 8:25), and now Peter was doing it throughout the region, establishing the saints in the faith. There can be no question about the conformity of this practice to the will of the Lord. Both apostolic practice and doctrine confirm the priority of the edifying of the body of Christ. When this is not done, it has a erosive effect on all other labors in the name of the Lord.

ONE MORE THING

I cannot leave this section without once again drawing attention to the way in which those in Christ are mentioned in this book: “the saints,” or holy ones. The term is used four times in Acts (9:13,32,34; 26:10). This is a term that accents the character of the people – holy. It is used forty-three times in the epistles, confirming the very real change that takes place in those who are baptized into Christ Jesus.

In our day, it is exceedingly rare to hear anyone, anywhere refer favorably to the people of God – particularly in keeping with their character. The term “Christian” is quite common, although it has come to mean something very different from simply being “of Christ.” Nowadays, it is more common to refer to sectarian names or theological positions when attempting to distinguish the people of God. Thus men have fallen into the dreadful practice of “measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves” (2 Cor 10:12) – a practice that classifies people with the unwise.

A CERTAIN MAN NAMED AENEAS

“ 33 And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy.”

HE FOUND A CERTAIN MAN

“And there he found a certain man named Aeneas . . .” Upon arriving in Lydda Peter “found a certain man named Aeneas.” He was not looking for him, but was alert to the circumstances about him, and therefore saw him – just as he did the lame man who was positioned at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:1-4). While I do not wish to labor this point, it seems to me that faith sharpens the capacities of men to be alert to their surroundings, and to the opportunities that confront them that can bring glory to God and help to the believers.

The fact that Peter went to the saints in Lydda suggests that Aeneas was in that number, as well as Dorcas, whom he will later confront in Joppa.

The name Aeneas was a Greek name, even though the man was with the Jews. He probably was one of Jews elsewhere referred to as “Grecians,” or Greek speaking Jews (6:1; 9:29; 11:20).

As both Greek and Hebrew, or Syriac, were commonly spoken in Palestine, most persons had two names, one Greek and the other Hebrew. Thus Peter was called Cephas in Hebrew, and Petros in Greek. Paul was called Saul in Hebrew, and Paulos in Greek. The person in Acts 9:36, Tabitha in Hebrew, and Dorcas in Greek. And the paralytic person cured by Peter, Hananiah in Hebrew, and Aineas in Greek. So Thomas was the Hebrew name of the apostle who in Greek was called Didymus.

KEPT HIS BED

“ . . . which had kept his bed eight years . . .” Other versions read, “had been

The idea is that he had kept to his bed, lying prostrate upon it as though wedded to it, or one with it. He could not leave his bed, but kept on it, or remained upon it, all of the time. From the standpoint of the flesh, his case was hopeless, and had continued to be so for eight consecutive years.

bedridden eight years,” NKJV “who for eight years had been in bed,” BBE “who had been lying for eight years upon a couch,” DARBY “which had kept his couch eight years,” GENEVA “confined to a cot for eight years,” GWN “had not been able to leave his bed for the past eight years,” IE and “who had been bedfast for eight years.” AMPLIFIED

The word “kept” is translated from a word that means “to have lain down, to lie prostrate.” THAYER The idea is that he had kept to his bed, lying prostrate upon it as though wedded to it, or one with it. He could not leave his bed, but kept on it, or remained upon it, all of the time. From the standpoint of the flesh, his case was hopeless, and had continued to be so for eight consecutive years. However, the day Peter arrived, the life of Aeneas would take a sudden change for the better.

The word translated “bed” means “a pallet, camp bed (a rather simple bed holding only one person,” THAYER “cot, stretcher,” UBS “a relatively small and often temporary type of object on which a person may lie or recline,” LOUW-NIDA and “a mattress, a poor man’s bed.” GINGRICH A “camp bed” is a portable one on which the man was carried from place to place, probably to beg alms. The word “kept” is translated from a word that means “to have lain down, to lie prostrate.” THAYER

We conclude, therefore, that Aeneas was a poor man, yet was industrious, not remaining cut off from society, and dependent upon the charitable consideration of fellow Jews – like Lazarus who was placed daily at the gate of a rich man (Lk 16:20), or the lame man who was who was carried, and

daily placed at the Temple gate (Acts 3:2). On this day, however, as it was for the man at the gate called “Beautiful,” his entire life would change.

SICK OF THE PALSY

“ . . . and was sick of the palsy.” Other versions read, “paralyzed,” NKJV “paralytic,” NIV and “without power of moving.” BBE

The word translated “palsy” comes from a word meaning “to loose or part things side by side,” THAYER “to detach, or undo.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This is a most precise description of a physiological circumstance in which the nerves have no practical connection with the muscles. The individual suffering from the condition is thus paralyzed, and incapable of moving. By its very nature, the condition is one of continued deterioration, with no natural hope of recovery. Eight long years the man had been confined to his bed, confirming that his condition was not a temporary one. Men could not resolve his dilemma!

In Scripture, the employment of Divine power is never considered to be a mere alternative to be preferred over other means that are available. It is rather seen as accomplishing things that could not otherwise be done. Owing to the dominance of unbelief in our day, this kind of thinking has become rather rare.

CHRIST MAKETH THEE WHOLE

“ 34 And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.”

The details of how Peter came into contact with Aeneas are not provided. Either he was alert as he moved about, seeing the man and perceiving this to be an open door placed before him, or someone had informed him of this afflicted soul. In either case, the nature of Kingdom life is being made known. In the case of the former possibility, spiritual vigilance was involved. If the latter condition was true, the people lived making an association of human need with Divine power. In either case, life was being lived unto the Lord.

JESUS CHRIST TAKETH THEE WHOLE

“And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole . . .” Other versions read, “Jesus Christ heals you,” NKJV “Jesus Christ makes you well,” BBE “Yeshua the Messiah is healing you!” CJB “Jesus Christ cures you,” NJB “Jesus Christ has healed you!!” LIVING “Jesus Christ is healing you,” ISV “Jesus Christ now cures you !” WILLIAMS “Jesus Christ (the Messiah) [now] makes you whole,” AMPLIFIED and “Jesus Christ make thee whole.” BISHOPS

As you can see, the various translations present differing views. Some present the healing as taking place at that time (“is healing”). Others present it as something that is going to occur (“make thee whole”). Still others represent it as already having taken place (“has healed”). The tense of the word used here is Aoristic present middle indicative. Aoristic means the action is indefinite as to its point in time. Present middle indicative means here and now. The meaning, therefore, is that while Peter was speaking, Jesus Christ was in the process of healing Aeneas. Peter discerned it, and therefore proclaimed it.

Here again the manner of the Kingdom is seen. Strictly speaking, Peter did not make this happen, nor did Jesus heal Aeneas independently of Peter. This is a case of Peter being a laborer, or worker, together with God (1 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 6:1). To put it another way, the Lord was “working with” Peter, confirming the word that he was speaking (Mk 16:20). As elsewhere declared, the Lord was bearing witness with Peter, “both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy

Ghost, according to His own will?" (Heb 2:4).

At no point does Jesus relinquish the government of His kingdom to men. It is always "the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:11). However, there is such a thing as "reigning with Christ," being made "kings and priests unto God" through Him (Rev 1:5-6). While the participation of men is limited, being bounded by the will of God, yet it is very real, as confirmed in our text. That participation is defined by two principle things: the faith of the individual and the will of the Lord.

All of the spiritual gifts are strictly governed, being given and administered by the Holy Spirit, who is Christ's Vicar. This is expressly taught in the twelfth chapter of First Corinthians where the entire Godhead is declared to be involved in the gifts of reference. "Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord . And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all" (1 Cor 12:4-6). If this is not perceived, men will develop views of spiritual gifts that are damaging to the soul.

When Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, He declared that He only did what He saw the Father going. "Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do : for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise " (John 5:19). It goes without saying that no man is given leave from heaven to function in a manner differing from that exhibited by the Son.

ARISE AND MAKE THE BED

" . . . arise, and make thy bed." Other versions read, "take care of your mat," NIV "make your own bed," CSB "truss thy couch together," GENEVA "pick up your cot," GWN "spread thy bed," MRD "tidy up your mat," NIB "roll up your sleeping mat," NLT and "spread thy bed for thyself." ROBERTSON'S WORD PICTURES

Just as in the ministry of Jesus, those in whom Jesus works are to respond. It is in the process of that response that the work is done. Think of these powerful words:

- **To a paralyzed man:** "Arise and walk" (Matt 9:5).

The man was not to leave his cot lying on the ground, but to pick it up in an orderly manner, rolling it up and taking it with him. When healing impotent or paralyzed people, Jesus also told them to do this .

- **To a paralyzed man:** "Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house" (Mk 2:11).
- **To a dead girl:** "I say unto thee arise" (Mk 5:41).
- **To a man with a withered hand:** "Stretch forth thy hand" (Lk 6:10).
- **To a dead man:** "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise" (Lk 7:14).
- **To an impotent man:** "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk" (John 5:8).

Once, when the Lord confronted ten lepers, they cried out, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Jesus responded, "Go show yourselves unto the priests." It is written that " as they went , they were cleansed" (Lk 17:12-14).

It is still true that faith responds to the word of the Lord, and thus the benefit is realized.

Make Thy Bed

The man was not to leave his cot lying on the ground, but to pick it up in an orderly manner, rolling it up and taking it with him. When healing impotent or paralyzed people, Jesus also told then to do

this (Mk 2:11; John 5:8). The man was to pick up what had, in fact, been carrying him – the bed to which he had formerly been confined. Now, he was to exercise the mastery over it, instead of it having the domination over him.

This was a very precise picture of deliverance from sin. In that deliverance, the one who was once dominated by sin now gains the supremacy over it. Thus it is written, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: for which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: in the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth” (Col 3:5-8). Now, in Christ Jesus, the believer is required to “put off” the things that once controlled him.

A Consideration

One of the initial proofs that Jesus had risen from the dead was the grave clothes that He left behind. Jesus did not leave that clothing scattered about in the tomb. When Peter entered the tomb that morning, he saw “the linen clothes lie, and the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself” (John 20:5-7). The word “lying” is translated from the Greek word **kei,mena**, which means “of things put or set in any place,” THAYER and “to be placed, to be set.” LEH In other words, it means an orderly placement of things, not something that has been strewn about in a haphazard manner.

Thus Peter told Aeneas to gather up his bed in an orderly manner, rolling or folding it together and taking it with him. That is surely a depiction of the life of faith in which the individual keeps under his body, bringing it into subjection, and bearing about in it the life of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 9:27; 2 Cor 4:11).

HE AROSE IMMEDIATELY

“ And he arose immediately.”

As one should expect, Aeneas immediately responded, doing what Peter had commanded him to do. This too is the nature of faith, as the book of Acts has confirmed to this point.

- On the day of Pentecost, those convicted of their sins immediately received the word and were baptized (2:41).
- The lame man at the Gate Beautiful immediately got up when Peter healed him (3:7).
- When Ananias and Sapphira were judged for lying to the Holy Spirit, they died immediately (5:5,10).
- The Ethiopian eunuch responded immediately to Philip’s word concerning baptism (8:38).
- When Jesus sent Saul of Tarsus into Damascus to receive further instruction, he went immediately (9:8).
- When Ananias laid his hand upon Saul and spoke, his sight was immediately restored (9:18).
- Following his conversion, Saul immediately started preaching Christ in the synagogues (9:20).

Where people are not found responding in this manner to the Word of the Lord, they are being dominated by unbelief. Men may trace tardy responses to other imagined causes – like the people are thinking matters over, or being sure they are doing the right thing. However, this is not a proper

diagnosis of delayed responses.

Faith moves a person to act immediately because confidence is inherent in it. Faith involves persuasion and assurance, both of which provoke an immediate response. It is only when men do not believe that they fail to respond in such a manner.

THEY SAW AND TURNED TO THE LORD

“ 35 And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.”

We should expect the working of the Lord to yield results, for it is absolutely unique. The results can be favorable, as they were here, or unfavorable, as when the Jewish leaders took a stand against Peter and John when they had healed the lame man at the Temple gate. However, when the hand of the Lord is made manifest, there is never indifference. Just as with the Word of the Lord, the work of the Lord sheds light upon human hearts, exposing what is really in them.

THEY SAW HIM

“And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him . . .”

Saron is a region in which Lydda was located, bordering on the Mediterranean Sea, called “*the great sea*” in Scripture – a sea that formed one of the borders of the land (Num 34:6-7; Josh 1:4; 23:4).

The entire district, of which Lydda was a part, became keenly aware of this miracle, seeing Aeneas, who for eight years had been in an incapacitated state. They all “*saw him.*” It is evident that they had seen him before as well. Now, however, there was a stark contrast in Aeneas. He was no longer what he was before. There had not only been a change in him, it was an **evident** change.

“Saron, which is here joined to Lydda, is the name of a fruitful country on the borders of the Mediterranean sea, between Joppa and Caesarea, beginning at Lydda. There were two countries in the land of Israel called Saron, as Jerome observes; there was one between Mount Tabor, and the lake of Tiberias; and there was another which reached from Caesarea of Palestine, to the town of Joppa; the former was inhabited by the Gadites, and was beyond Jordan, (1 Chronicles 5:16) the other was on this side Jordan, near Lydda. And this is what is here meant.” JOHN GILL

Here was evidence of the power of the Lord working among them. This was not something done secretly. The work of the Lord is often made known by contrast. Examples include the following.

- The disciples before Pentecost and after Pentecost.
- Devout Jews before they heard the Gospel and after they heard it on the day of Pentecost.
- The lame man at the Gate Beautiful before his encounter with Peter and John, and afterward,
- Ananias and Sapphira before their deed was made known, and after it was known.
- The Samaritans before they heard the Gospel and after they heard it.
- The Ethiopian eunuch confused before he heard the Gospel, and rejoicing after he had heard and obeyed it.
- Saul of Tarsus before he confronted Jesus and after that experience.

It is the awareness of this change, and its association with the Lord, that brings glory to God. Like the Lord Himself, His works are unique. When, by faith, they are seen for what it truly are, men will give due glory to God. **On the other hand, where there is a profession of identity with the**

living God, yet there has been no corresponding change in the one making the professing, men will not be moved to give glory to God. Something of this is involved in Paul's statement to the Corinthians concerning what Christ had done in them. *"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men"* (2 Cor 3:2).

Now we will behold what took place in the region because the people saw Aeneas in a restored state – a state they knew could in no way be accomplished by men or nature.

THEY TURNED TO THE LORD

“. . . and turned to the Lord." Other versions read, "converted to the Lord," DOUAY "turned to the Lord in faith," GWN and "turned to God." MRD

The word "turned" is translated from the Greek word **evpe,streyan**. Its lexical meaning is, "to turn oneself," THAYER "to turn around," FRIBERG "to turn about," LIDDELL-SCOTT and "to be converted." GINGRICH The idea is that life had been lived in the wrong direction, and thus men were walking on the broad road that leads to destruction (Matt 7:13). In turning to the Lord, there is a sudden and effective change in the reason for living. Life is now lived with the Lord in mind. His will becomes the prominent will, and a deliberate and consistent commitment is made to Him.

Prior to this turn, the individuals were moving further and further from God, and closer and closer to final and total separation from Him. When their eyes were opened, and they saw their very real condition, they adjusted the course of their lives, and headed in a different moral and spiritual direction – toward the Lord. That is, their aim was to be accepted and directed by Him, and Him alone. They no longer lived for themselves, but for the Lord.

I have frequently pointed out the ways in which the Spirit described conversion. Because it is a much neglected perspective, and is so critical to a proper understanding, I take this occasion to once again draw your attention to this matter – the ways in which the Spirit refers to conversion.

- "They that gladly received the word were baptized" (Acts 2:41).
- They "heard the word and believed" (Acts 4:4).
- ". . . they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women" (Acts 8:12).
- Those who "believed on the name on the Lord" (Acts 11:17).
- "Turned unto the Lord" (Acts 11:21).
- "Believed on the name of the Lord," and "were baptized" (Acts 18:8).
- Came to the point where they "turned to God" (Acts 15:19).

Turning to the Lord involves determination and concentration. It includes a profound consideration of the Word that has been delivered, and a turning from sin as well as to God. In the commission delivered to Saul, a great emphasis was placed upon turning. "To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:18).

It is possible for a person to present a message that leaves people thinking that what they are delivered from is the most important thing. This is the result of associating salvation primarily with rescue, or deliverance. However, rescue is the part of salvation that is essential to the realization of the object of salvation, or what we are saved to. Israel was delivered from Egypt in order to enter and obtain Canaan. Saul was delivered from his former life in order that he might fill the role of an apostle.

Salvation consists of two parts: from and to. No person is truly saved who lacks one or both of

those parts.

- Salvation is deliverance from “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4) in order to the obtainment of “the world to come” (Heb 2:5).
- We are delivered from a life in which we yielded our members as “instruments of unrighteousness unto sin,” in order that we might yield them as “instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13).
- The Lord saves us from a life in which we “were darkness,” to one in which we “are light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8).
- We were saved from a state in which we were “not a people” to one in which we have become “the people of God” (1 Pet 2:10).
- Before, we “had not obtained mercy, but now we have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10b).
- Once we were “as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the chief Shepherd and Bishop of our souls” (1 Pet 2:25).
- Prior to being delivered, we were tainted with the guilt of sin, but now we are “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” (1 Cor 6:11).
- Once we were “dead in trespasses and sins,” but now we have been quickened, or made alive, unto God (Eph 1:1-4).
- Before we were delivered, we were “the servants of sin,” but now we are “the servants of righteousness” (Rom 6:17-18).
- Before we were saved we were “without Christ” and “without God,” but now we are “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:12-13).

All of the above, and more, are encapsulated in the words, “turned to the Lord.” In order to turn to Him, there must be a corresponding turning from something. The heart cannot fasten upon two contradicting things at the same time. No person is capable of serving two masters (Lk 16:13).

Herein lies the danger associated with distraction, or being turned aside to another focus or object of attention. As soon as one’s attention is drawn aside to lesser things, one’s faith begins to wane, for it can only be sustained by “looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2), beholding “the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). The distraction that captures one’s attention may not be wrong of itself. However, if it requires the inmost part of our persons, which is to be devoted to the Lord alone, a distance begins to form between the Lord and the one distracted. This also applies to novelty, humor, and undue references to worldly life from the pulpit. Such references are potentially dangerous distractions. It appears that this is not a common bit of knowledge, even though it is an essential one.

A DISCIPLE NAMED TABITHA

“ 36 Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.”

THERE WAS IN JOPPA

“Now there was at Joppa . . .”

Our attention is now turned to another city – Joppa. There are thirteen references to Joppa in Scriptures, a city located on the shores of the Mediterranean sea (2 Chron 2:16; Ezra 1:7; Jonah 1:3; Acts 9:36,38,42,43; 10:5,8,23,32; 11:5,13). This is the city from which Jonah disembarked in a ship as he fled “from the presence of the Lord” (John 1:3).

Joppa was located approximately 15-20 miles from Lydda, confirming the spiritual tenacity of Peter as he went about ministering to the saints. It also provides us with a kind of commentary on what is meant by the words, "Peter passed throughout all quarters." This is the record of a man who was living by faith, carrying out the Word of the Lord.

A CERTAIN DISCIPLE

" . . . a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas . . . "

Once again, I draw your attention to the manner in which reference is made to those in Christ Jesus: "a certain disciple." This is the same way Ananias was described (9:10), and will also be the way in which we first read of Timothy (16:1). A disciple is a learner, a pupil, a follower of Christ who gives heed to His words and has no other priorities before Him. Jesus Himself specified who would be received as His disciple.

- **SELF DENIAL.** "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me" (Matt 16:24).

- **AN ABSOLUTE PREFERENCE FOR JESUS.** "If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:26).

- **BEARING ONE'S CROSS.** "And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:27).

- **FORSAKING ALL.** "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

The expression "a certain disciple" means infinitely more than a church member, or some denominational name, or being identified with an historical religious movement or theological position. As important as those distinctions may appear, they terminate in men, not God. Their history does not go back far enough, and they have no value relating to making men righteous or giving them an eternal inheritance. By comparison, and as used in our text, the word "disciple" relates directly to Christ.

Tabitha

The name "Tabitha" is the Hebrew form of the Greek name "Dorcas." The name means Gazelle, which has the etymological meaning of, "the creature with the beautiful looks, or eyes."

ROBERTSON The Gazelle is frequently referred to in the Song of Solomon as a type of beauty (2:9,17; 4:3;7:3), NKJV and is of the genus antelope.

It appears that Dorcas was a beautiful woman, in appearance as well as in deeds. Her name indicates she may very well have been very elegant. However, her true beauty will be described as relating to her character, and the selfless life that she lived as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

FULL OF GOOD WORKS AND ALMS DEEDS

" . . . this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. " Other versions read, "full of good works and charitable deeds," NKJV "abounding with deeds of kindness and charity which she continually did," NASB "always doing good and helping the poor," NIV "devoted to good works and acts of charity," NRSV "given to good works and acts of mercy at all times," BBE "she was rich in good works, and in the alms which she did," MRD "wholly devoted to the good and charitable actions which she was constantly doing," WEYMOUTH and "whose whole life was full of good and kindly action." PHILLIPS

The language strongly suggests that this Dorcas was a woman of means, for such people are

admonished to be “rich in good works,” or “full of good works” (1 Tim 6:17-18). The fact that she was continually doing good works, and providing for the poor, also supports the idea that she was a woman of means. In this regard she was much like Joanna, Susanna, and others who ministered to the Lord out of their substance (Luke 8:3). She used her possessions for the good of others, thereby confirming that her goods did not control her. In the words of Scripture, she used the world, and did not abuse it (1 Cor 7:31).

DORCAS WAS SICK AND DIED

“ 37 And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.”

Now, while Peter was in the region, this beloved disciple became sick and died. As will be confirmed, this was a great loss to the brethren in that area. It is not coincidence that Peter happened to be in the vicinity at that time.

SHE WAS SICK AND DIED

“And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died . . .” Other versions read, “she fell sick and died,” NASB “became ill and died,” NRSV “got ill and came to her death,” BBE “having ailed, died,” YLT “was taken ill just at that time, and died,” MONTGOMERY and “became seriously ill and died.” PHILLIPS

Although it was grievous, this was not an unusual circumstance. The mighty prophet Elisha also fell sick, and died from the illness (2 Kgs 13:14). Jacob also became sick before he died (Gen 48:1). Lazarus, the friend of Jesus, also died of a sickness (John 11:3,14), although Jesus raised him from the dead.

Not all people of Scriptural record became sick and died from it. Hezekiah was “sick unto death,” but the Lord granted him fifteen more years in answer to his prayer (2 Kgs 20:1,6). Epaphroditus was also “sick nigh unto death,” but the Lord intervened, having mercy upon him, and prolonged his life (Phil 2:26-27).

The phrase “by whose stripes ye were healed” does not refer to bodily illnesses, and it is wrong for men to say that it does. Peter, speaking by the Holy Spirit, provides the meaning of the clause. “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.” The healing of reference is of the soul, not the body.

The point to be seen here is that healing is not in the atonement – illness is not ended as is sin. There is no question concerning the grace of God in healing, and that is not the issue here. When a person lives by faith, being godly, sin cannot take hold of him. It is written, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). That is because the complete remedy for sin is found in the atoning death of Jesus. However, the same person who cannot be dominated by sin may very well come to a point where he is dominated by illness – like Elisha the holy prophet, or Dorcas who was noted for being a disciple and a prodigious worker of good.

The phrase “by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet 2:24) does not refer to bodily illnesses, and it is wrong for men to say that it does. In fact, Peter, speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, provides the meaning of the clause that is stated in Isaiah 53:5. “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25). The healing of reference is of the soul, not the body. This is a healing from sin, and fulfills the prayer of the patriarch David: “I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul ; for I have sinned against thee” (Psa 41:4).

It is quite true that some illness is actually chastening from the Lord, as in the case of certain people

in the church at Corinth. They were stricken with sickness, and some of them even died because of their conduct at the Lord's table (1 Cor 11:29-32). Those are illnesses that can be avoided. However, there is no promise within the New Covenant that offers perfect health to those who walk by faith. Not only is Dorcas a confirmation of this, but so are Paul (2 Cor 12:7-10), Timothy (1 Tim 5:23), Trophimus (2 Tim 4:20), and Epaphroditus (Phil 2:26-27).

THEY WASHED HER AND LAID HER IN AN UPPER CHAMBER

“ . . . whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.”

The language used in this text also confirms that the body is considered part of the person. Dorcas died, and they washed “her” and placed “her” in an upper chamber. The same type of language is used when Jesus inquired concerning the place of Lazarus' burial: “Where have ye laid him?”

It is evident that these believers treated the human body with a certain sanctity. They knew that our “bodies are the members of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15), and as such are to be treated with respect. Through the Jewish people, God taught the world concerning the handling of the dead. The Jews were noted for burying their dead – a practice that was consistent among them. They also prepared the body before interring it. As it is written, “Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury ” (John 19:40).

It is a sign of degenerate thinking when professing believers condone the practice of burning the dead instead of burying them – something for which the heathen are noted. Cremation is a way of handling the dead which in no way relates to hope.

While this is not as matter to press to the point of distraction, it ought to be noted how the Jews handled their dead, and the manner in which that activity is reported in Scripture. The Jews were not only a chosen nation, they were also one that was cultured by God. The totality of the lives of the people revolved around their religion. Even “the Jew's language” (2 Kgs 18:18; Neh 13:24) was basically theological. Their customs, therefore, are not to be equated with the customs of other nations. In fact, God had told these people not to learn the customs and manners of the other nations (Deut 18:9; Lev 19:27-29).

Another Thing to be Seen

The language used in this text also confirms that the body is considered part of the person. Dorcas died, and they washed “her” and placed “her” in an upper chamber. The same type of language is used when Jesus inquired concerning the place of Lazarus' burial: “Where have ye laid him ?” (John 11:34). When Abraham died, they “buried him ” (Gen 25:9). The same is said of Isaac (Gen 35:29), Jacob (Gen 50:13), Moses (Deut 34:6), Joshua (Josh 24:30)Samson (Judges 16:31), Samuel (1 Sam 25:1), and a host of others.

Man is comprised of spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). Every part is to be sanctified to the Lord (1 Thess 5:23). Furthermore, salvation includes all of these parts – the body being the last part that will be redeemed (Rom 8:23). Until that redemption, which will take place at the resurrection of the dead, the body is a “purchased possession” (Eph 1:13). Although it is a house for us, it does not belong to us. As it is written, “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own ? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's ” NKJV (1 Cor 6:19-20).

All of this provides the rationale behind the preparation of the body for burial, and the burial itself. I understand that this must not be permitted to drive a wedge between believers. However, having said that, it does appear to me that believers ought to come to a point where no part of their being or

their lives is separated from their identity with God through Jesus Christ.

It is equally not proper to philosophize about dying than it is about living. The fact of the matter is that whether we live or whether we die, “we are the Lord’s” (Rom 14:8). That is something to be remembered.

THE DISCIPLES HEARD THAT PETER WAS NEAR, AND CALLED HIM

“ 38 And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.”

In the text that follows we will be exposed to the manner in which the Lord directs His people. We will also catch a glimpse of the way believers lived – within the context of the body of Christ (the church), as well as His Person.

THE DISCIPLES HEARD PETER WAS IN JOPPA

“And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there . . .”

Joppa is approximately fifteen miles from Lydda. Yet, without modern modes of travel and communication, the saints in Joppa had learned that Peter was in Lydda. There was a communication among believers that confirmed they were not living for themselves. When a significant man of God was in the area, the news got out.

It is a glad day when reports of the working of the Lord in one place can be an encouragement that He may very well work in another place as well.

The expression “noised abroad” speaks of this kind of communication (Luke 1:65; Acts 2:6). Other versions use the expression, “discussed throughout,” NKJV “were being talked about,” NASB “were talking about,” NIV and “there was much talk about.” BBE

If you have been around professed Christians for any length of time, you know that it is exceedingly rare to hear them speaking about anything relating to life in Christ. There might be talk about an athletic event, a political rally, the weather, or some other social matter. However, rarely will you hear anyone speaking about a man of God being in the vicinity, or about how a current crisis could be addressed by such a person.

However, in our text, this is precisely what was taking place. Furthermore, it is not depicted as anything unusual.

THEY SENT, DESIRING HIM TO COME WITHOUT DELAY

“ . . . they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.”

The disciples did not call for Peter when Dorcas grew sick, which leads me to believe either the illness was brief, quickly terminating in death, or that the disciples were not at first aware of Peter’s presence in the region. Of course, behind all of this are the inscrutable workings of the Lord. He is arranging things for a more significant work. The Divine agenda is setting up for the door of faith to be opened unto the Gentiles. Peter will be in the city of Joppa when he is dispatched to preach the Gospel to Cornelius. In the meantime, this event takes place to ensure that the believers in that area are also comforted and encouraged in the faith.

Notice the urgency of the message delivered to Peter: “that he would not delay to come to them.” The believers had not washed the body of Dorcas and placed it in an upper chamber merely to mourn for her – although they will do that. Neither, indeed, are they calling for Peter that he may come and

weep with them – urging him, as it were, to come quickly before the interment of the body. To me, there is no question that they had heard of the healing of Aeneas, and that all who dwelt in Lydda and Saron had turned to the Lord. It is a glad day when reports of the working of the Lord in one place can be an encouragement that He may very well work in another place as well.

We are witnessing the faith of God’s people in action. They were able to correlate the report of Divine working with a present need. They connected a man of God with the working of God. They associated the report of God working in a certain region with the distinct possibility that He was “near,” and could therefore be sought. They are fulfilling the text of Isaiah, “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near” (Isa 55:6).

THEY BROUGHT HIM INTO THE UPPER CHAMBER

“ 39 Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.”

PETER WENT WITH THEM

“Then Peter arose and went with them . . .”

Peter got up and went with the two men who had been sent to him. They asked him to come without delay, and he did so. We do not know what Peter was doing at the time, but the men did not require an appointment to see him. In a highly structured religious institution, I cannot conceive of this happening very often. Today men schedule the activities of their day, and have become enslaved to regime. I have often thought that it is the fewness of their activities that requires such a schedule, and not the abundance of them.

Here, the point to see is that faith can quickly adapt to the circumstances. This is no ordinary disciple, but is the leader among the twelve who has been given the keys to the Kingdom. Yet, he does not have a staff of subordinates around him, and the people have access to him. His life revolved around the work of the Lord, and here was an occasion involving the people of the Lord. There was no question in his mind about what he ought to do: “So Peter [immediately] rose and accompanied them.” AMPLIFIED

THEY BROUGHT HIM INTO THE UPPER CHAMBER

“When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber . . .” Other versions read, “when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room,” NIV and “as soon as he arrived, they took him upstairs.” LIVING

Keep in mind, we are speaking of a journey of about fifteen miles, and they probably walked that distance. It is generally understood that distances were walked at an average of three miles an hour, with a day’s journey being defined as twenty-four miles, requiring eight hours. ISBE This being the case, Peter and his companions walked for approximately five hours, with the men accompanying him doing so the second time.

A DAY’S JOURNEY

- 25-30 miles by camel or horse requiring 6-8 hours.
- 24 miles by foot, requiring 8 hours.
- Sabbath day’s journey = ½ mile.

The significance of this is that as soon as Peter arrived, “they brought him to the upper chamber” –

even though he had been traveling for as much as five hours, or if by horseback, at least 3-4 hours. Again, I draw your attention to the total lack of any reference to inconvenience. I get the idea that Peter's mind-set was much the same as that of David when he said to Ahimelech, "the king's business required haste" (1 Sam 21:8).

Our Present Religious Culture

I feel compelled to make a few remarks about our current religion culture. It is one that has been produced by modern day Christian emphases and trends. What is being preached and taught has shaped the way church members think. First, the Lord's "business," or, as Jesus said, "My Father's business" (Lk 2:49), is not ordinarily perceived as requiring haste, or immediate attention. People have no compunction about absenting themselves from the gathering of the saints for reasons they would never consider a justifiable ground for missing work, or school, or an business appointment, or even shopping for supplies. Secondly, it is not often that professing Christians resort to God or those who walk with Him for resolutions. It is not at all uncommon to hear their first resort being to doctors, lawyers, counselors, or other professionals. I am drawing attention to these conditions because of their stark contrast with the things recorded in the book of Acts. This is not a matter intended to be used to judge others, nor am I saying it is a condemning matter. Rather, I am drawing attention to the fruit that is being produced by the religious professional's of our day. It is very much like the "wild grapes" that Israel brought forth, after they had been given all manner of Divine advantage (Isa 5:2,4). The situation is so deplorable that the nominal church has produced offices and functions within itself to address difficulties among professing Christians with the wisdom of this world. Chief among these spurious offices are counselors, youth workers, financial advisors, and other consulting-type offices. There is nothing about these approaches that blends with the inspired record of those who lived by faith. That very circumstance ought to promote some holy initiatives to adjust the focus of the modern church.

THE WIDOWS STOOD BY HIM

"...and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them."

What a touching sight it was. There were a number of widows that were gathered around the body of Dorcas. When Peter came in, they gathered around him, showing him "the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them." NKJV Other versions read "robes and other clothing," NIV "coats and clothing," BBE "body-coats and garments," DARBY and "undershirts (tunics) and [other] garments." AMPLIFIED In this case, "tunics" were garments worn closest to the skin – like undergarments. "Garments" refers to outer clothing that could be seen.

The reference to the time that Dorcas was "with them" could mean that she was one of the widows. It could also mean while she was among the brethren. Either way, Dorcas was noted for being among the disciples, whether those who had been widowed, or the saints in general. This was not a reference to their assemblies in particular, but appears to refer to the general company she kept, for she made the clothing of reference while she was among them.

One thing that has been highlighted throughout the book of Acts is the preference of believers for the saints. They were not only of one mind, but they preferred the company of one another. This can be noted in the following sample texts.

- "And all that believed were together, and had all things common" (Acts 2:44).
- "And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46).
- "And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them" (Acts 4:23).

- “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).

- “And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple” (Acts 9:26).

- “And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12).

Dorcas was not noted for merely living in Lydda, but for being “with” the people of God – “a certain disciple” ! She was not known as a citizen of a province or country, but for being a member of the household of faith.

Some of God’s people have been criticized because of their preference for godly people. They have even been admonished to make more worldly friends. However, this attitude conflicts sharply with the Lord Himself, who prefers to be with His own people. He demonstrated this during His ministry, choosing twelve men to be “with Him” (Mk 3:14), then taking them everywhere He went. His choice time was spent with them. His extensive explanations were given to them. And before He was betrayed, He preferred to be with them, desiring to eat the Passover with them (Lk 22:15). He even declared that if He was to be found, it would be among those who met together in His name (Matt 18:20). Our text, then, perfectly coincides with the Divine manner.

HE PRAYED, AND THEN HE SPOKE

“ 40 But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”

PETER PUT THEM ALL FORTH

“But Peter put them all forth . . .” Other versions read, “put them all outside,” NKJV “putting them all out,” NASB “made them all go outside,” BBE “sent them all out of the room,” CSB and “asked them to leave the room.” NLT

Miracles of this sort were sometimes preceded by mere watchers being removed from the room. When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, he put most of the people out of the room (Mk 5:40; Lk 8:54). When Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath from the dead, he took the boy into a room alone (1 Kgs 17:17-23). When Elisha raised the Shunammite’s son from the dead, he also shut the door, with himself and the body being alone (2 Kgs 4:32-37).

There are some works of the Lord that are not intended to be done in public – some miracles that require the absence of inhibiting influences. In this case, Peter faces “the last enemy” – the most formidable one. He chooses to do it in privacy, apart from people standing about him “weeping.”

HE KNEELED DOWN AND PRAYED

“ . . . and kneeled down, and prayed . . . ” Other versions read, “he got down on his knees and prayed,” NIV “went down on his knees in prayer,” BBE “fell on his knees and prayed,” MRD and “bowed his knees and prayed.” YLT

People may imagine that posture has nothing to do with prayer, but that is apparently not the mind-set of all men. Men who are said to have knelt when they prayed include the following. David (Psa 109:24), Solomon (1 Kgs 8:54; 2 Chron 6:13), Elijah (1 Kgs 18:42), Daniel (Dan 6:10), Ezra (Ezra 9:5), Jesus Himself (Lk 22:41), Stephen (Acts 7:60), Paul (Acts 20:36; Eph 3:14), Paul and several disciples together (Acts 21:5).

Among other things, all of these instances involved an acute sensitivity of being in the presence of

the Lord. These were people who lived by faith and were keenly aware of what it means to petition the living God. In our time, there is a casualness that has crept into the church that has robbed the soul of this kind of cognizance. It appears to me that, in such cases, there is very little consciousness of the Lord's presence. This accounts for much of paltry pulpit presentations, retarded responses among the people, and lack of fervency. If the church expects to obtain benefits from the God of heaven, there must come a time when they leave the room of weeping and reminiscing, and enter into the room of faith and supplication. They must, in a sense, leave the trouble and go to Go0d.

HE TURNED TO THE BODY AND SAID

“ . . . and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise.” Other versions read, “turning to the dead woman,” NIV “turned to the corpse,” MRD “turned to her body,” NAB “towards the dead woman,” NIB “turned to Tabitha's body,” IE and “the body of Dorcas.” CEV

We do not know what Peter prayed, and it is just as well that we do not. Had it been known, hypocritical leaders would have developed a formula out of the approach Peter took, and then imposed it on the simple. Whatever Peter prayed, it is evident that he sensed that the prayer had been heard. Once that occurred, he ceased to pray, and turned toward the body, speaking to it as though it was not “dead, being alone” (James 2:17).

Tabitha, Arise!

Peter calls out the Hebrew name, addressing her as the seed of Abraham rather than a Greek-speaking Jew. Like Jesus, he sees what the Father is doing, and therefore speaks confidently (John 5:19). Nor, indeed, is this word spoken because Tabitha had faith, for she had left her body, and faith has to do with being in the body. This was a work that depended upon the faith of Peter, as well as the will of the Lord.

The raising of Tabitha did not depend upon a certain procedure, for there is no revealed procedure for raising the dead. This observation is highly disruptive to those who delight in procedures or routines. Think of the different ways in which the dead were raised.

- **THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH.** Elijah took the body of the dead boy, laid it upon his bed, and stretched himself upon the body three times crying, “O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again.” The Lord heard his prayer, and “the soul of the child came into him again” (1 Kgs 17:21-22).

- **THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON.** Elisha entered where the dead child had been placed on a bed. He lay upon the child, putting his mouth upon the child's mouth, his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands. When he did this, the flesh of the child became warm. He then walked back and forth in the house, and returned, stretching himself upon the child again. The child then “sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes” (2 Kgs 4:32-37).

Under the Law, there were procedures for the cleansing of lepers (Lev 14:8-9), those having an issue of blood (Lev 15:5-13), and those who had eaten an animal that died “of itself” (Lev 17:15). There was a procedure for the installation of priests (Lev 8:6-36), for a woman who had given birth (Lev 12:6-8), and one for those who, in war, had killed a person or touched a dead body (Num 31:19-24). But there was no procedure for raising the dead.

AN ANONYMOUS MAN. Some time following Elisha's sickness and consequent death, a group of men were in the process of burying a man – probably digging the grave. During that year, the Moabites were invading the land. Those who were burying the body saw a band of raiders coming their way. They quickly lowered the body into the open grave of Elisha. As soon as the body touched the bones of Elisha, “he revived, and stood upon his feet” (2 Kgs 13:21).

• **RAISING OF THE SON OF THE WIDOW OF NAIN.** Near the gate of the city of Nain, Jesus encountered a funeral procession. Jesus touched the “bier,” or open coffin, in which the body was lying. He then said, “Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.” The young man sat up and began to speak (Luke 7:12-15).

• **THE RAISING OF JAIRUS’ DAUGHTER.** Jesus went into the room in which the body had been placed, allowing only Peter, James, John, and the parents to be with Him. He took the maid by her hand and said, “Maid, arise.” Her “spirit came into her again, and she arose straightway” (Luke 8:49-55).

• **THE RAISING OF LAZARUS.** Lazarus had been dead for four days, and the body was in a sealed tomb. Jesus commanded the stone to be moved from the door. He then shouted, “Lazarus, come forth.” Lazarus came out of the tomb, wrapped about with grave clothes, with his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus commanded the people, “Loose him, and let him go.”

• **THE RAISING OF EUTYCHUS.** When Paul was in Troas, he preached long into the night, being in the third floor of the building. A young man named Eutychus lapsed into a deep sleep, and fell from the third story, and was “picked up dead.” Paul went down, threw himself on the young man, and embraced him. He then announced, “Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him” (Acts 20:9-10).

Under the Law, there were procedures for the cleansing of lepers (Lev 14:8-9), those having an issue of blood (Lev 15:5-13), and those who had eaten an animal that died “of itself” (Lev 17:15). There was a procedure for the installation of priests (Lev 8:6-36), for a woman who had given birth (Lev 12:6-8), and one for those who, in war, had killed a person or touched a dead body (Num 31:19-24). But there was no procedure for raising the dead. In fact, before Jesus, there were very few records of anyone being raised from the dead. Commencing with Jesus, however, the raising of the dead became more common. Jesus was noted for raising the dead (Matt 11:5). Three specific people whom Jesus raised from the dead are revealed: the son of the widow of Nain, Jairus’ daughter, and Lazarus – each one being in a different stage of death. In our text, Peter raises Tabitha from the dead. Paul raised Eutychus from the dead. It appears that Paul himself was even raised from the dead (Acts 14:19-20). However, in all of the records of the raising of the dead, no consistent procedure is employed.

In the case before us, Peter approaches the subject in a way that differs from all other recorded resurrections. He does not lay upon the body as Elijah did. He does not put his mouth, eyes, and hands on those of the body, then walk back and forth, and stretch himself upon the body again, as Elisha did. He does not touch the article on which the body was placed, as Jesus did when He raised the son of the widow of Nain. He does not take the body by the hand as Jesus did when He raised Jairus’ daughter. He does not raise her publically as Jesus did Lazarus. He does not fall on her and embrace her as Paul did when he raised Eutychus. Instead, he puts all of the people out, kneels down and prays, and then speaks to the body.

Now, all of this seem like nothing more than a series of interesting observations. However, in a day when work shops, seminars, week-end recovery retreats, and how-to books are in vogue, this text becomes very significant. We are reading of a man who was working with Jesus. He was living by faith, and had wisdom and spiritual understanding. He knew when to work, and when to let matters alone. Faith does not look for a certain way of doing things. The person who is working together with God is not doing so through a procedure, but through faith in, and fellowship with, the Lord Jesus Christ. If suddenly this manner was found within the professing church, there is no way to estimate how many lucrative religious corporations and businesses would immediately become obsolete.

SHE OPENED HER EYES AND SAT UP

“And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.”

Like the son of the widow of Zarephath, Tabitha’s soul came into her body again. As in the raising of Jairus’ daughter, her spirit came into her again. The essential parts of her person were once again united – spirit, soul, and body. Her body which had been “alone,” was no longer so. Like the son of the widow of Zarephath, she “revived.” Like the Shunammite’s son, she “opened her eyes.” Like the son of the widow of Nain and Jairus’ daughter, she “sat up.”

The raising of the dead is actually a departure from the normality of life. It is written that it is “it is appointed unto men once to die” (Heb 9:27). In this, they “put off” the earthly tabernacle, and are gathered to their own people (Gen 25:8). So far as life in this world, there is a certain finality in death – at least that is the norm. In the dimness of lesser revelation Job once said, “As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more” (Job 7:9-10). It is true that this is the ordinary lot of men – but it is not the only lot . Some few souls have been raised from the dead, re-entering their body of flesh and blood – a body which cannot enter into the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50).

In death, the soul departs, and in this kind of resurrection, it returns to the same body it had left. It returns from whence it had gone. What is more, when the soul returns, the body no longer has the infirmities that caused the death in the first place.

The raising of the dead, such as is revealed in the case before us, confirms that men do not cease to be when they die. In such a resurrection, the body is not merely resuscitated, but the soul or spirit comes into the body again, as it revealed in Scripture. In death, the soul departs (Gen 35:18), and in this kind of resurrection, it returns to the same body it had left (1 Kgs 17:21-22). It returns from whence it had gone. What is more, when the soul returns, the body no longer has the infirmities that caused the death in the first place. The son of the widow of Zarephath died of a sickness (1 Kgs 17:17). The Shunammite’s son died after having severe pains in his head (2 Kgs 4:19-20). Jairus’ daughter died from some illness, even though she was only twelve years of age (Mk 5:23,35). Lazarus died of an illness (John 11:3,14). In our text, Tabitha also died of an illness (Acts 9:37).

All of these illnesses were in the body alone . Yet, when these people were raised from the dead, there is nothing that remotely suggests their bodies remained infirm. Yet, because they were comprised of “flesh and blood,” they would have to die again, for they were still “earthen vessels,” requiring ordinary maintenance. Elijah delivered to the widow raised son, for care (1 Kgs her 17:23). The same was true of Elisha when he raise the Shunammite’s son (2 Kgs 4:37). Jesus delivered the resurrected son of the widow of Nain to her (Lk 7:15). When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter, He commanded them to give her something to eat (Lk 8:55). After Lazarus was raised from the dead, he ate with the other people (John 12:2). When Eutychus was raised from the dead, we assume he ate with the rest of the brethren as they continued with Paul (Acts 20:10-12).

The point that I am making here is that faith leads us into the realm of the extraordinary, not the ordinary. In this realm things are not accomplished by routine or rote. Everyone who died was not raised from the dead. Every time an apostle visited a place where some disciple had died, they did not raise them from the dead. This was a work directed by Divine will and discretion. Faith puts men into that blessed environment.

A GLIMPSE OF APOSTOLIC MINISTRY

It is written, “and many signs and wonders were done by the apostles . . . And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people” (Acts 2:43; 5:12). Our text provides us with an example of this kind of work. I do not doubt that this was one of the “signs of an apostle” to which Paul referred (2 Cor 12:12). All of the resurrections recorded in Scripture were

either accomplished by prophets (Elijah and Elisha), Jesus, or by apostles – either when Jesus first sent out the twelve (Matt 10:8), or following His enthronement in glory (Peter and Paul).

All of this confirms the uniqueness of the account before us. This, in turn, highlights the spiritual sensitivity of Peter, and the strength of his faith. The confidence with which he proceeded is refreshing to consider.

HE GAVE HER HIS HAND, AND LIFTED HER UP

“ 41 And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.”

A perusal of the miracles of Scripture with confirm how radically they differ from magic and Satanic power. There is a practicality in them that distinguishes them, confirming that God is working with the people in a manner that involves their very practical involvement. While there is certainly the presence of power from heaven, it is revealed with an amazing level of practicality. This is seen in both Elijah and Elisha stretching themselves upon the dead whom they raised, and in Paul embracing Eutychus as he raised him from the dead. We see it in Moses being told to throw a tree in some poisoned waters (Ex 15:26), and Isaiah taking “a lump of figs” and laying it upon a boil from which Hezekiah was dying (2 Kgs 20:7). There was also Moses’ use of his rod (Ex 14:15-16; 17:5), David’s use of a sling (1 Sam 17:50), Samson’s use of the jawbone of an ass (Judges 15:16), and Shamgar’s use of an ox goad (Judges 3:31). All of these instances were miraculous in nature, extending beyond human aptitude, yet involving human activity. We see something of this principle in our text – a principle that tends to personalize the working of the Lord, giving it an edifying quality rather than merely causing amazement.

HE GAVE HER HIS HAND AND LIFTED HER UP

“And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up . . .” Other versions read, “took her by the hand and helped her to her feet,” NIV “gave her his hand and helped her up,” NRSV “took her hand, lifting her up,” BBE “having given her his hand, he lifted her up,” YLT “took her by the hand, helped her to her feet,” PHILLIPS and “took her hand and helped her stand up.” GW

A similar action took place in other miracles, with personal involvement on the part of the worker.

- **WHEN JESUS HEALED PETER’S MOTHER IN LAW.** “And he came and took her by the hand, and lifted her up ; and immediately the fever left her, and she ministered unto them” (Mark 1:31).

- **WHEN JESUS RAISED JAIRUS’ DAUGHTER.** “But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand , and the maid arose” (Mat 9:25).

- **WHEN JESUS HEALED A BLIND MAN.** “And he took the blind man by the hand , and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought” (Mark 8:23).

- **WHEN JESUS HEALED A DEMON-POSSESSED BOY.** “But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up ; and he arose” (Mark 9:27)

- **WHEN JESUS HEALED A DEAF AND DUMB MAN.** “And he took him aside from the multitude, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spit, and touched his tongue” (Mark 7:33).

- **WHEN JESUS HEALED ANOTHER BLIND MAN.** “When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay” (John 9:6).

•
WHEN PETER HEALED THE LAME MAN. “And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up : and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” (Acts 3:7).

Let it be clear, there were no healing properties in the hands of Jesus, His spittle, His fingers, His tongue, clay, or the apostles hands. Those were points through which the power of the Lord was made known, but they were not themselves the residence of Divine power. These days there are media-ministers who speak about having the Divine anointing in their hands. However, even they acknowledge it is not resident there, but only comes occasionally – and they say they are even able to feel it. All such claims bear more resemblance to the power of darkness than to the Lord of glory.

Once, when Jesus was passing through various towns in Galilee, and Judea, and in Jerusalem as well, it is written, “the power of the Lord was present to heal them” (Lk 5:17). That evidences Divine discretion. Such power is not always present, but is strictly an expression of the will and purpose of God.

Miraculous power cannot be divorced from God Himself – and that includes His “eternal purpose,” which is His objective. It also involves His will, which is the means through which that purpose is realized. The Lord will never act in contradiction of His purpose or will, for that would require Him to be unfaithful , and “He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim 2:13). This means that miracles are not simply worked at will by those empowered to do them. Even the Lord Jesus, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, said He could “do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do” (John 5:19).

Peter, then, was in synch with the purpose of God. He was walking in the light as the Jesus Himself is in the light (1 John 1:7). That is why he knew what to do. It also why the circumstances were created for the work to be done. The outcome of this miracle will confirm the truth of these observations.

WHEN HE HAD CALLED THE SAINTS AND WIDOWS

“ . . . and when he had called the saints and widows . . . ” Other versions read, “the believers and the widows,” NIV “ the believers, especially the widows,” GWN “the widows and all the believers,” NLT “the holy ones and the widows,” NAB “the congregation and the widows,” NJB “God’s people and the widows,” WEYMOUTH and “the Lord’s people and the widows.” WILLIAMS

Having raised Tabitha from the dead, Peter presented her to the people with whom she had companied: “the

It is equally as absurd to refer to people who are living in sin, have no love for the truth, and have no knowledge of God as Christians, born again, and accepted in the Beloved.

saints and widows.” The Greek word translated “saints” is **ἅγιοι** , and so reads in all Greek texts. The meaning of this word is consistent throughout Scripture, and in the lexicons as well. It means “set apart unto God, to be, as it were exclusively His.” THAYER This is a invariable meaning.

God’s people are identified by expressions denoting what they are, or have become in Christ Jesus : i.e., disciples, believers, holy ones, new creation, sons of God, etc. This is to seen against the backdrop of terms that express institutional or traditional identity, like Fundamentalist, Baptist, Premillennialist, etc.

HE PRESENTED HER ALIVE

“ . . . presented her alive.” Other versions read, “presented her to them alive,” NIV “showed her to be alive,” NRSV “gave her to them, living,” BBE “restored her alive,” GENEVA “She was alive,”

GWN “showed them she was alive,” NJB “delivered her alive,” PNT and “gave her back to them alive.” ISV

The “good works” which are wrought in God (John 3:21) will hold up under scrutiny. When God has really done a work in the individual, whether it is in the spirit or in the body, that work can be verified in appearance. Just as surely as a person who has been raised from the dead can be verified to be alive by what is seen, in the same manner, the person in whom God has placed a new heart and spirit (Ezek 11:19) will be seen to be different than he was before – like Saul of Tarsus. This is precisely why Jesus said, “the tree is known by its fruit” (Matt 12:33).

It would have been a display of gross ignorance to have pointed to Tabitha lying dead on the bed and tell the people that she was alive. It is equally as absurd to refer to people who are living in sin, have no love for the truth, and have no knowledge of God as Christians, born again, and accepted in the Beloved.

Presenting such people as being alive in Christ is like Peter presenting a dead body to the saints and widows, telling them that it was really alive, and just looked dead.

MANY BELIEVED IN THE LORD

“ 42 And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.”

Here we once again see that the effects of the works of God confirm their Source. That is another way of saying, “wisdom is justified of her children,” or “wisdom is vindicated by her deeds” NASB (Matt 11:19). That is, the fruit that is produced by the tree identified its kind.

IT WAS KNOWN THROUGHOUT ALL JOPPA

“And it was known throughout all Joppa . . .” Other versions read, “became known throughout all Joppa,” NKJV “news of it went all through Joppa,” BBE “Spread throughout the city of Joppa,” GWN “The whole of Joppa heard about it,” NJB “the news raced through the town,” LIVING “People everywhere in Joppa learned about this,” IE and “This incident became known throughout Joppa.” WEYMOUTH

The news of this great work rapidly spread throughout the entire city. This was the case because of the absolute distinctiveness of the works of God. Whether people agree with what has been truly done in the name of the Lord or not, they will, in some way, talk about it. This is owing to its uniqueness. This is demonstrated during Old Covenant times as well as now that Jesus has been enthroned in heaven. A few examples will suffice to confirm this.

• **OF ISRAEL’S DELIVERANCE FROM EGYPT.** “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath” (Josh 2:10-11).

• **OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL.** “And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life” (1 Kgs 20:31).

• **OF GOD’S DEALINGS WITH ISRAEL.** “O LORD, there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears . . . And what one nation in the earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his

own people, to make thee a name of greatness and terribleness, by driving out nations from before thy people, whom thou hast redeemed out of Egypt?" (1 Chron 17:20-21).

- **THE SUCCESSES OF JOSHUA.** "So the LORD was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country" (Josh 6:27).

- **THE FAME OF SOLOMON.** "For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about" (1 Kgs 4:31).

- **WHEN JESUS WAS IN THE HOUSE.** "And again he entered into Capernaum after some days; and it was noised that he was in the house" (Mark 2:1).

- **WHEN THE TONGUE OF ZACHARIAS WAS LOOSED.** "And fear came on all that dwelt round about them: and all these sayings were noised abroad throughout all the hill country of Judaea" (Luke 1:65).

- **THE BIRTH OF JESUS.** "And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds" (Luke 2:17-18).

- **THE FAME OF JESUS.** "And His fame went throughout all Syria : and they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them" (Matt 4:24). "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard of the fame of Jesus " (Mat 14:1). "But so much the more went there a fame abroad of Him : and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by Him of their infirmities" (Luke 5:15).

- **THE EVENTS ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** "Now when this was noised abroad , the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language" (Acts 2:6).

- **THE REPORT OF ANANAS AND SAPPHIRA.** "And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things" (Acts 5:11).

All of this was in perfect accord with what had been declared concerning the wonderful works of God. "My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long . . . I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings . . . Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of thy wondrous works . . . They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power " (Psa 71:24; 77:12; 119:27; 145:11).

When once a work of God takes place among believers, they will speak about it. That is their nature, and it is the nature of the works of God to provoke such talking.

Today there are all manner of programs perpetrated within the Christian community that are designed to get people to witness, testify, and speak to others about the Lord. This is an admission that the modern church is weak in this area. However, should the Lord of glory begin working among the people, the tongues of the people would suddenly be loosed. This will not happen, however, as long as the religion of the people is confined to philosophy and institutional fervor. It is ever true, "A city set on a hill cannot be hid" (Matt 5:14). It must, however, be a "city."

MANY BELIEVED IN THE LORD

" . . . and many believed in the Lord." Other versions read, "many believed on the Lord," NKJV "had faith in the Lord," BBE "put their trust in the Lord," CJB "many came to believe in the Lord," WILLIAMS and "many came to believe on the Lord [to adhere to and trust in and rely on Him as the Christ and as their Savior]." AMPLIFIED

Here again, I want to draw attention to the way in which the results are described. This is not the way a great renewal would have been reported among the people with whom I was once identified. We did not use this kind of language for fear someone might think we belonged to a denominational church that was not particular about how they described being saved. However, this is the language of the Spirit, and it is both precise and broad in its meaning.

Prior to this, when Peter healed Aeneas, it is written that the people “turned to the Lord” (9:35). On the day of Pentecost, the people are said to have gladly received the word and been baptized (2:41). Later, we will read of people being granted repentance (11:18), turning to God (15:19), and believing and being baptized (18:8).

These do not represent different ways in which people are saved. Rather, they provide us with different perspectives of salvation, all of which are present in every instance of conversion. There is no such thing as a conversion in which a person does not repent, or does not believe, or is not baptized. No conversion occurs without a person being delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). No person is saved who is not added to the church (Acts 2:47), and placed in the body of Christ precisely where God intends (1 Cor 12:18). Everyone who is saved, with no exception, are quickened from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-4).

God has made absolutely no provision for a salvation in which men are not saved from sin, the guilt of sin, the power of sin, the devil, and this present evil world. There is no salvation in which men are not effectively raised, justified, accepted, delivered, and quickened (Eph 2:8; 1 Tim 1:9; Acts 13:39; Rom 5:1; Eph 1:6; 1 Thess 1:9; Heb 2:14; 9:14; Gal 1:4).

All of these experiences come together, and none are isolated from the rest. We do not receive the forgiveness of sins, only to be justified later. Nor, indeed are we accepted by God but not given His Holy Spirit. It is not possible to be reconciled to God and not be at peace with Him, or to be made alive in Christ Jesus, yet retain a preference for sin.

When we refer to any component or facet of salvation, we include the whole of it as well. Men cannot receive Christ as Savior, yet not as Lord, for the two always travel together (2 Pet 1:11; 2:20; 3:2,18). What is more, everyone begins the same way and with the same benefits in Christ Jesus. They have all been freed, have access to God, and possess a clean slate. There are not different ways to be born again, or different effects of the birth itself.

This is why men look in vain for patterns and systems in the book of Acts. It is not a book of procedures, but the record of the working of the Lord. That record looks at salvation much as a person beholds a rotating globe of the world. At any one time, a single part of the world may seem dominate, but it is only a part of the world, and not the world itself. Men do well to culture their souls to read the book of Acts in such a way as to never lose the sight of the magnificent entirety of God’s great salvation.

Such a perspective will serve to clarify the greatness of your own salvation, and will produce confidence and assurance within you, both of which will stand in the day of judgment.

HE TARRIED IN JOPPA MANY DAYS

“ 43 And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner. ” Other versions read, “he stayed many days,” NKJV “stayed in Joppa for some time,” NIV “abode many days,” ASV “stayed a long time,” NAB “remained for a considerable time,” WEYMOUTH “for several days,” WILLIAMS and “for considerable time.” AMPLIFIED

SPECIFIED PERIODS IN PAUL’S LIFE

3 years: Damascus and Arabia

1 Year: Antioch

1 ½ years: Corinth

3 years: Ephesus

2 years: prison (Caesarea)

3 months: Greece

3 months: Melita

2 years: Rome

13 YEARS

Now, Peter remains in Joppa for an unspecified period of time. It was not a lengthy period, like some identified with Paul. He said after his conversion it was “three years” before he went to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18). Paul spent “a whole year” in Antioch, meeting regularly with the church there (Acts 11:26). He spend “a year and six months” in Corinth (Acts 18:11). He disputed in a synagogue in Ephesus for “three months” (Acts 19:8), then remained in Ephesus for “two full years,” disputing in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9-10). He told the elders at Ephesus that he had spent “three years” among them, warning every man night and day with tears because of an imminent onslaught of self-centered teachers that he saw coming (Acts 20:30-31). Fetus left him in prison for “two years” in Caesarea (Acts 24:27). He remained in Greece for “three months” Acts 26:3), and “three months ” on the Isle of Melita (Acts 28:13). In Rome, Paul spent “two whole years in his own house” (Acts 28:30).

These specified periods account for thirteen years of Paul’s life. The duration of other imprisonments are not known (2 Tim 1:16; Eph 3:1; Phile 1:1).

I provide these facts to substantiate that lengthy periods of time are not stated in terms of days, but of months and years. The time, therefore, that Peter spent in Joppa does not appear to have been unusually lengthy, and is therefore stated in terms of days.

During this time, we assume that Peter continued to strengthen the saints, and declare the Gospel to those who had not yet believed. The fact that all of Joppa believed at the report of Tabitha being raised from the dead, confirms that the Gospel had been preached to them, for “how shall they believe on Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14).

The word “tarried” is translated from a word that means, “to remain, abide . . . not to depart.” THAYER It is as though Peter knew there was a work to be done in that area, and so he continued there, like Paul did in Antioch, Corinth, and Ephesus. Neither he nor Paul was idle when they remained in a place. For the saints in this area, the period of rest that was being enjoyed was augmented with sound doctrine. I do not doubt that the believers in that area continued to take advantage of this unique opportunity.

A TANNER

“This trade, on account of the bad smell connected with it (comp. Schol. on Aristoph. *Eq.* 44; Petron. *Sat.* 11), was despised among the Jews (*Kethuboth*, 7:10; *Megillah*, 3, 2; see Schöttgen, *Hor. Heb.* i, 447; Wettstein, *N.T.* 2, 516).” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S ENCYCLOPEDIA

“The Jews looked upon tanning as an undesirable occupation and well they might, for at best it was accompanied with unpleasant odors and unattractive lights, if not even ceremonially unclean. We can imagine that Simon the tanner found among the disciples of Jesus a fellowship which had been denied him before.” INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA

SIMON THE TANNER

Here is another man of whom we know very little. He was a “tanner,” Other versions read, “a leather tanner,” CJB “a leather worker,” GWN and “a tanner of hides.” NLT The word “tanner” refers to a person who worked with hides that had been “stripped from dead animals.” THAYER Other definition include the following: “a person who prepares animal skins for use tanner, leather dresser,” FRIBERG “a person who prepares animal skins for use tanner, leather dresser.” LOUW-NIDA

Historians tell us that the work of the tanner was despised by the Jews like the work of shepherding was by the Egyptians (Gen 46:34).

We are not told why Peter chose to stay with Simon. We assume that he was a member of the household of faith, and had opened his house to Peter. The apostle no doubt had recalled some of the words of Jesus, when He first sent out the disciples to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. “And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy ; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it : but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you” (Matt 10:11-13). Simon the tanner was obviously a man that was “worthy,” else Peter would not remained there. Further, Peter had no doubt let his peace be upon house, as Jesus had instructed them to do at the first.

The act of hospitality is frequently mentioned in relation to those who preached the Gospel. A man named Judas received Saul of Tarsus while he was waiting for further word from the Lord (Acts 9:11). Mary, the mother of John Mark, entertained many saints in her house as they gathered for prayer (Acts 12:12). Lydia twice received Paul and Silas into her house (Acts 16:15,40). After he was converted, the Philippian jailer received Paul and Silas into his house (Acts 16:34). Jason received Paul and Silas into his house at the jeopardy of his own life (Acts 17:7). A man named Justus received Paul into his house (Acts 18:8). Philip the evangelist received Paul and those with him into his house (Acts 21:8). Paul said a man named Onesiphorus often refreshed him, and prayed the Lord would bless his house because of it (2 Tim 1:6). John wrote a man named Gaius, commending him for frequently entertaining brethren and strangers (3 John 1:5-8). It is always good to remember the word of the Lord concerning the matter of hospitality: “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it” (Heb 13:2). That is what is being lived out in the book of Acts.

CONCLUSION

We have been provided a glimpse of the manner in which the Gospel was preached and people were brought to believe. In this text, it all began with giving attention to the saints , and building them up during a time of “rest” from persecution. When the people of God were strengthened, the Word spread, and people were turned to the Lord, and believed on Him. That continues to be a most excellent strategy, for when people are mature in Christ Jesus, He comes to dwell in their hearts y faith, as affirmed in Ephesians 3:16-17). A weak and vacillating church ought not engage in outreach ministries. They ought to rather heed the word of Jesus to such churches: “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see” NKJV (Rev 3:18). When churches become strong, Christ works within them, and when He works within them, word gets out.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #45

CORNELIUS HEARS FROM THE LORD

“ 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway. 3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius. 4 And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God. 5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do. 7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa. ” (Acts 10:1-8)

INTRODUCTION

Our attention is drawn to a Gentile who was a military man, head of a group of soldiers called “The Italian Regiment.” NKJV Here we note the propensity of the Lord to deal with specific people, noting their manner of life. It is possible to have a view of Divine dealings that is too general, accenting the provisions made for everyone, but overlooking the specific and discretionary dispensing of those provisions. God was not only the one who initiated the provision of salvation, He is also the One who originate the experience of it.

Even though Cornelius was a military man with considerable responsibility, this did not interfere with his life before God. While, in the capacity of a Roman Centurion, Cornelius had continued to

maintain a godly disposition, fearing God, giving alms liberally, and praying to God always. The Lord saw his devotion, and sent an angel to instruct him. He excelled in praying and giving, both of which require time, thought, and action.

In the event reported in our text, the stage is being set for one of the great epochs of Divine history. The river of the water of life will break out of Jewish boundaries, and begin to flow to the Gentiles. This was something promised to Abraham, announced by the prophets, and declared on the day of Pentecost. Yet,

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- **A CERTAIN MAN CALLED CORNELIUS (10:1-2)**
- **HE SAW A VISION (10:3)**
- **HE WAS AFRAID (10:4a)**
- **HIS PRAYERS WERE HEARD, AND HIS ALMS WERE NOTED (10:4b)**
- **DIRECTION FROM HEAVEN (10:5-6)**
- **THE RESPONSE OF CORNELIUS (10:7-8)**
- **CONCLUSION**

the time had not yet come for the fulfillment of those words. Now, however, the hour has arrived, and the Divine initiative is launched.

As with the Jews, the first to hear the Gospel will be devout people, who have been earnest in living up to what they already knew about the Lord (Acts 2:5). As I have mentioned in prior lessons, this is a facet of Divine working that is scarcely known. In fact, such an approach is often insinuated to be unacceptable. It is commonly perceived that the morally degenerate and spiritually ignorant are the ones that require the immediate attention. However, this is not how God carried out His purpose, and it is difficult, if not impossible, to support such a supposition.

This entire episode was without any original planning or initiative on the part of men. It was not the outcome of a plan or strategy that had been developed by men. Even the church did not come up with this approach. Neither, indeed, was it the result of a prayer for direction on what to do and how to preach and teach. Rather, it was what occurred when the Lord took note of the activities of a man – a man who was devout and gave much alms to “the people” – the Jewish people, who were the chosen nation.

Just as He did with Saul of Tarsus, the Lord will send Cornelius to a man who knows the truth and can effectively declare it. Paul refers to this Divine manner when he wrote, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man ?” (1 Cor 3:5). By saying the Lord “gives” these ministers, he means that they are sent out by Him, as affirmed in Romans 10:15: “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” Their feet are beautiful, not only because of the message they bring, but because of the One who sent them.

I have repeatedly drawn your attention to the fact that the book of Acts is a record of the Lord governing the Kingdom and building His church. The following references point out this undeniable activity.

- “ . . . the Lord added to the church . . . ” (Acts 2:47).
- “ . . . there shall come the presence of the Lord . . . ” (Acts 3:19).
- “The angel of the Lord opened the prison doors by night . . . ” (5:19).

- “And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip . . .” (Acts 8:26).
- “ . . .the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip . . .” (Acts 8:39)
- “And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice . . . I am Jesus whom thou persecutes . . .” (Acts 9:5).
- “ . . . and to him said the Lord in a vision . . .” (Acts 9:10).
- “And the Lord said unto him . . .” (Acts 9:11)

I have repeatedly drawn your attention to the fact that the book of Acts is a record of the Lord governing the Kingdom and building His church.

- “But the Lord said unto him . . .” (Acts 9:15).
- “ . . . an angel of God coming in to him . . .” (Acts 10:3).
- “And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed . . .” (Acts 10:7).
- “Cornelius . . . was warned from God by an holy angel . . .” (Acts 10:22).
- “And the hand of the Lord was with them . . .” (Acts 11:21).
- “ . . . the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison . . . forthwith the angel departed from him . . . the Lord hath sent His angel . . .” (12:7,10,11).
- “And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him . . .” (Herod) (Acts 12:23).
- “ . . . the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them” (Acts 13:2).
- “And a vision appeared to Paul in the night . . .” (Acts 16:9).
- “ . . . assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us . . .” (Acts 16:10).
- “ . . . whose heart the Lord opened...” (Acts 16:14).
- “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision . . .” (Acts 18:9).
- “And the night following the Lord stood by him . . .” (Acts 23:11).
- “ . . . I have appeared unto thee for this purpose . . . I will appear unto thee . . .” (Acts 26:16).
- “For there stood by me this night the angel of God . . .” (Acts 27:23).

The preaching and testimonies

However, conversion itself is what initiates accord between God and man, and faith is the means through which it is sustained. Once men commence to really live by faith (Heb 10:38) and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), cleansing themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1), an environment will be created that will serve to dispel erroneous views and restore power to the church.

recorded in Acts also contain numerous references to angels working in the past (7:30,35,38; 11:13), and the Lord speaking (2:34; 3:22; 7:31,33,37; 9:17,27; 11:16; 12:17; 13:47; 15:17; 20:35; 22:10).

All of this confirms the activity of all of heaven in the Kingdom and work of the Lord: the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, and angels. This provides some insight into the phrase, “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). A rule requires involvement with the domain and personalities over whom the rule is maintained. Thus it is written that the “most High ruleth IN the kingdom of men” (Dan 4:17,25). All of these personalities are represented as being involved in the work itself, revealing, directing, judging, and ruling. This view of the Kingdom is essential to a proper understanding of things

pertaining to life and godliness. The Scriptures, which are absolutely essential, are not to be considered an end of themselves. They are “given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16), but are the means to certain ordained objectives.

- They “testify” of Jesus Christ (John 5:19), which testimony is “the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10).
- They are given in order “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17).
- Through them the purpose of God, kept secret from the foundation of the world, is “made manifest” (Rom 16:26).
- They contain records of God’s dealings with men, and were written “that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4).

However, the Scriptures do not obtain their power independently of Divine involvement – and that involvement is realized through faith. The word of God is appropriately referred to as “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17), who is active in the dissemination and exposition of it. It is the involvement of Deity that causes the appointed results to take place in the people.

The point here is that the book of Acts not only contains the report of the working of the Lord, but of a people who were genuinely converted and were trusting in Him. Corrupt teaching, and consequent departures from the faith, were the exception, not the rule. The clash between the record and the contemporary experience of the church is so significant that men have concocted special theological views to account for the absence of Divine involvement. They have also developed schemes that they say will restore that involvement. However, conversion itself is what initiates accord between God and man, and faith is the means through which it is sustained. Once men commence to really live by faith (Heb 10:38) and walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), cleansing themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1), an environment will be created that will serve to dispel erroneous views and restore power to the church. We are reading of a people who have been joined to the Lord, and are one spirit with Him (1 Cor 6:17).

A CERTAIN MAN CALLED CORNELIUS

“ 10:1 There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2 A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”

We are again exposed to a heavenly initiative. Here was an outreach that was not planned or initiated by men. We will also see in this account the kind of men for whom God is seeking – and it will be in perfect accord with what has been revealed in Scripture concerning that matter. Permit me to remind you of some of the Divine initiatives we have confronted thus far in the book of Acts.

- Jesus poured forth the Spirit upon His disciples, giving them both insight and power to declare that insight in words (2:1-14).
- The angel of the Lord told the apostles to go to the Temple and speak all the words of this life (5:20).
- Philip is told to go down to the desert road leading to Gaza, and then join himself to a chariot on that road (8:26,29).
- Jesus appears to Saul of Tarsus, then sends Ananias to tell him what he must do (Acts 9:3-16).

Now one of the great epochs of Scripture will take place, and it will be strictly initiated,

orchestrated, and carried to its fruition by the Lord. This is another picture of Jesus governing the Kingdom and building His church.

A CERTAIN MAN

“There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius . . .”

When men go forth to minister the Word, they speak to men in general, for that is what they have been commissioned to do. However, there are individuals that God will not allow to wait until His people become aware of them, or see the necessity of delivering the Word to them. These are people who have been duly noted in heaven, even if men have not particularly considered them. I do understand that all men may not be in this category. However, I am equally persuaded that there are more such people than are ordinarily perceived. It is God who noted this “certain man,” and will now call him to Himself, using the means that He has ordained – a message and a messenger.

Caesarea

Caesarea was about thirty miles from Joppa, and was in the region of Samaria, the middle section of Canaan. Although this was in the promised land, this area was largely without the knowledge of God. Jesus spent very little time there, and there is no record of Him, doing any miracles there. Yet now, since He was enthroned, an extensive ministry is taking place there. First, Philip carried the Gospel to the city of Samaria (8:5). Then Peter and John preached throughout the region (8:14,25). Then Peter strengthens the disciples in Lydda, preaches in the region, and all of Lydda and Saron turn to the Lord (9:35). Then he ministers in Joppa, and throughout the whole city many believed in the Lord (9:42).

The manner in which the Word is being spread in this area follows no pattern according to man’s wisdom. First, Philip went North to Samaria. Then the Spirit moved him South to the desert to road leading to Gaza, and then to the southern region of Samaria, near the border of Judea, to Azotus. Then Peter goes from Jerusalem to Samaria, then moves South to Lydda, then West to Joppa, then North again to Caesarea. Philip went to Samaria and spoke to a city. Peter and John went to the people in Samaria, than passed through the regions between there and Jerusalem.

However, there were also individuals were also involved. We see, then, that the working of the Lord concerns both groups of people and individuals.

Thus we see Divine direction to:

- **CITIES** (Jerusalem–Acts 1:8), Samaria–8:14), Azotus–8:40).
- **REGIONS** (Judea, Samaria–1:8, a desert road near Gaza–8:26).
- **THE WHOLE EARTH** (uttermost part of the earth–1:8).
- **INDIVIDUALS** (an unnamed lame man in Jerusalem–3:1, the Ethiopian eunuch near Gaza– 8:29, “a certain man named Aeneas” in Lydda– 9:33, “a certain disciple named Tabitha” in Joppa–9:36, and now “a certain man named Cornelius in Caesarea” – 10:1. There were also specific people who were ungodly in their manners: “a certain man in Jerusalem named Ananias and his wife Sapphira” –5:1), and “a certain man called Simon” in Samaria–9:9).
- **CHURCHES** (In Judea, Galilee, and Samaria–9:31).

This same diversity will be seen throughout the book of Acts, and the epistles as well.

There is no way that mere men could have planned these incidents, their nature, and the way they were carried out. They all involved the hearts of men as well as their spiritual status. The fulfillment of them required the King of kings and Lord of lords. Not only were there natural circumstances to

be overcome, and distracting people like Simon the sorcerer, but there were also principalities and powers in higher realms who had governed this region (largely Samaria), for a long time. If we were able to see behind the scenes, we would behold a significant intrusion being made into the kingdom of darkness.

Now, our attention is focused on a particular man – a Gentile. His name is Cornelius – a Roman name, meaning “of a horn.” It is assumed by historians that he belonged to the Cornelii, “a noble and distinguished family in Rome.” He is reckoned by Julian the Apostate as one of the few distinguished people who embraced Christianity. MCLINTOK AND STRONG’S If this is true, it is another confirmation of a Divine manner declared by Paul: “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Cor 1:16-27). However, even then, when such people are called, it is not owing to their worldly distinction. The church has no need for such people, even though salvation is offered to them. However, when such are blessed to be called, they do not bring their worldly prestige into the church. What they are in this world does not contribute a thing to what they are in Christ Jesus. This is why it is wrong to give lofty religious titles to people because they have attained to worldly status. This includes those with academic credentials, who can fall under the category of “wise men,” should their wisdom extend beyond books. As will be noted in the case of Cornelius, he was noted in heaven for his moral and spiritual demeanor.

A CENTURION

“ . . . a centurion of the band called the Italian band . . . ”

The Roman army was made up of many legion, each one consisting of 6,000 troops. Each Legion consisted of ten cohorts, or regiments. Each cohort, or regiment, consisted of three bands, and each band consisted of two groups of one hundred troops each. Cornelius was the head over one of these groups, for the title “Centurion” means the captain of one hundred men. Thus we are introduced to a man from a noble family, who occupied a significant place in the army of Rome. This government was the fourth government of Daniel’s vision, and was described as a kingdom that was “strong as iron: forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things: and as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise” (Dan 2:40). It was also likened to a beast that was unique from other governments, “exceeding dreadful, whose teeth were of iron, and his nails of brass; which devoured, brake in pieces, and stamped the residue with his feet” (Dan 7:19). It was prophesied that it would be “diverse from all kingdoms, and shall devour the whole earth, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces” (Dan 7:23).

By the time of our text, Rome had accomplished all of those things, and had been ruling the world for many years. It was the kingdom during which the God of heaven set up His Kingdom which will, as it is affirmed, “break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan 2:44). Now, we find a man who is integral to this kingdom, and to its military branch that fulfilled the prophesy of a ruthless and powerful kingdom, crushing all other worldly empires. Speaking as a man, it is not likely that one would find a godly person in such surroundings. However, like Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord in an unlikely place, so will Cornelius also experience that marvelous grace.

Keep in mind that this man would never have been reached for Christ if the Lord Himself had not launched the initiative, just as He did with the Ethiopian eunuch and Saul of Tarsus.

A DEVOUT MAN

“ . . . A devout man . . . ” Other versions read, “serious-minded man,” BBE “pious,” DARBY “religious man,” DOUAY “righteous,” MRD “godly man,” LIVING “good man,” IE “very religious

man,” CEV and “deeply religious man.” PHILLIPS

Most all of the standard (non-interpretive and literal) versions of Scripture read “devout.” This word is translated from the Greek word **euvsbh.j** (yoo-seb-ace), which has the following lexical meaning: “pious, dutiful toward God,” THAYER “of a manner of life lived reverently and respectfully toward God,” FRIBERG “godly, religious,” UBS “of a manner of life lived reverently and respectfully toward God,” LOUW-NIDA “righteous in act,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “reverent.” GINGRICH

The word “devout” has to do with the outward life – with the expression of what is in the heart. It parallels the English word “religious,” which is also used in Scripture (Acts 13:43; James 1:26, Acts 17:22 NKJV/NASB/NIV). The noun form of that word (“religion”) is also used in Scripture (Acts 26:5; Gal 1:13-14; James 1:26-27). The word itself does not express emptiness or hypocrisy, although that is often a suitable description for a mere form of religion that is only in outward manners, and not within the heart and mind. However, no person is truly godly who is not outwardly so – devout, or religious.

Often people say they want nothing to do with “religion,” but this is an unthoughtful statement, and is by no means proper. James tells us that religion is vain if it is in any way inconsistent with the truth, or is self-centered (James 1:26-27). While it is possible to emulate a Christian profession through various outward forms, it is not possible to possess faith without it impacting one’s behavior.

The point being made about Cornelius is that he was outwardly pious, living in a manner that was consistent with a profession of being a worshiper of God. Those who live sloppy and inconsistent lives do err when they ask us not to judge them according to their appearance, claiming that they really do love the Lord, yet simply do not reflect so outwardly. That would be similar to God not acting like God, or Jesus not conducting Himself as Lord, or the Holy Spirit not being holy. A consistent conflict between one’s profession and manner of life constitutes one a hypocrite. Cornelius was not such a man, but was devout, pious, and reverent in his manner of life.

HE FEARED GOD WITH ALL OF THIS HOUSE

“ . . . and one that feared God with all his house . . . ” Other versions read, “God-fearing,” NIV “fearing God,” BBE “God-fearer,” CJB “respected God,” GWN “deeply reverent,” LIVING “worshiped God,” IE “revered God,” WILLIAMS “venerated God and treated Him with reverential obedience,” AMPLIFIED and “reverenced God.” PHILLIPS

Those who live unto the Lord are frequently said to “fear God” (Gen 42:18; Ex 1:17,21; 18:21; Neh 8:2; Job 1:1; Psa 66:16; Acts 13:15¹ Col 3:22). This is also an expression that is tied to one’s manner of life, as is confirmed in the texts I have cited. The idea is that the fear of God moves the individual to shape his life to please the Lord. Such a person, as Zacharias and Elizabeth, walks in all the “commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Lk 1:6). Whatever may be said about not being afraid of God, or not being controlled by fear, the truth of the matter is that those who know the Lord are afraid of the consequences of displeasing Him, not obeying Him, or in any way living as though He did not exist. In this day of India rubber theology that has no spiritual firmness, this kind of approach to life is virtually unknown.

The expression “with all his house” applies to both being devout and fearing God. It also includes servants, and is not confined to the family of Cornelius. The outward manner of the lives of all within his house were upright. While one’s relationship to God is certainly not wholly dependent upon outward conduct, it does involve it. In the Spirit’s citation of men and women who lived by faith (Hebrews 11), there is a consistent parallel between their faith and what they did . Those who attempt to draw a fine line between faith and conduct have neither spoken wisely or correctly.

HE GAVE MUCH ALMS

“ . . . which gave much alms to the people . . . ” Other versions read, “gave alms generously to the people,” NKJV “gave many alms to the Jewish people,” NASB “he gave generously to those in need,” NIV “gave much money to the poor,” BBE “gave generously to help the Jewish poor,” CJB “did many charitable deeds for the Jewish people,” CSB “gave generously to Jewish causes,” NJB “gave generously to charity,” LIVING and “was also liberal in his charities to the people.” WEYMOUTH

The words “ the people” are translated from the Greek expression *tw/l law/l* , which employs the definite article “the,” as opposed to a reference to people in general. As used here, the word translated “people” means “people, tribe, nation, all those who are of the same stock and language” THAYER and “as a religious technical term, of Israel as God's chosen people.” FRIBERG

Whatever may be said about not being afraid of God, or not being controlled by fear, the truth of the matter is that those who know the Lord are afraid of the consequences of displeasing Him, not obeying Him, or in any way living as though He did not exist.

Cornelius is depicted as giving to the poor among the Jewish people – “THE people.” As Peter says of the Gentiles, as compared to the Jews, they are “ not a people” (1 Pet 2:10; Deut 32:21; Isa 7:8). All other nations are gathered under the single appellation “Gentiles.” God recognized no national distinction other than that of Israel , the only conglomerate of individuals that He, outside of Christ, has consolidated under one name.

The text neither states or suggests that the Jewish poor were the only ones to which Cornelius gave alms. They were, however, the people who distinguished his gifts as being related to fearing God – and that is the whole point of the text. This specifically relates to the promise God made to Abraham: “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee” (Gen 12:3). Isaac also said these words to Jacob: “blessed be he that blesseth thee” (Gen 27:29-30). In his prophesy concerning Israel, Balaam said of them, “Blessed is he that blesseth thee, and cursed is he that curseth thee” (Num 24:9). You may recall that one thing that commended a certain centurion whose servant “was sick and ready to die” was spoken by the disciples to Jesus: “For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue” (Luke 7:5). Jesus did not rebuke their statement. Instead, “He went with them,” and healed the centurion’s servant (Lk 7:6-10). This was also the man of whom Jesus said, “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Luke 7:9) – something He said of no other person.

The view of “people” that considers those who are identified with the Lord perfectly coincides with the teaching of Jesus, who revealed that there is a sense in which the eternal destiny of people will depend upon how they responded to His “brethren” (Matt 25:40,45). In this day of generalities, this view has been so obscured it is scarcely known among professing Christians.

HE PRAYED ALWAYS

“ . . . and prayed to God alway.” Other versions read, “prayed continually,” NASB “prayed to regularly,” NIV “prayed constantly to God,” NRSV “supplicating God continually,” DARBY “was a man of prayer,” LIVING and “was a real man of prayer.” PHILLIPS

There are several different Greek words for praying.

Every person is expected to live up to the measure of truth they possess. Only then will more be given. This fact explains why many people have little . . . Cornelius was living up to the knowledge that he did have of God, and was doing so consistently and with integrity.

- *proseu,comai* (Matt 5:44) – to speak to or make requests of God. THAYER
- *parakale,w* (Matt 26:53) – to ask for something earnestly and with propriety .

LOUW-NIDA

- **de,omai** (Acts 8:22) – to ask for with urgency, with the implication of presumed need. LOUW-NIDA

- **de,hsij** (Rom 10:1) – that which is asked with urgency based on presumed need. LOUW-NIDA

- **eu;comai** (2 Cor 13:7) – petitionary pray, or appeal to God. FRIBERG

- **e;nteuxij** (1 Tim 4:5) – meeting with one, as a form of intercession. FRIBERG

- **euvch,** (James 5:15) – to speak to or make requests of God. LOUW-NIDA

- **evrwta,w** (1 John 5:16) – make a request of God. FRIBERG

The word used here is **deo,menoj**, which a form of **de,omai**, and means “to ask or beg,” THAYER “make petition, plead, ask,” FRIBERG “implore,” UBS and “to ask for with urgency, with the implication of presumed need - 'to plead, to beg.’” LOUW-NIDA The idea presented here is that of dependency upon God, as though to say Cornelius always depended, or relied, upon God by means prayer. This kind of attitude was found in David. “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice” (Psa 55:17). Cornelius articulated his desires to God. Prayers of this sort are found in the book of Psalms.

- “Lead me in Thy truth, and teach me: for Thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day” (Psa 25:5).

- “Be merciful unto me, O Lord: for I cry unto Thee daily” (Psa 86:3).

Also, prayer, by its very nature, is an expression of faith, for “he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him” (Heb 11:6).

A Technicality

On one occasion, after God had healed a blind man, the restored man was confronted by skeptics. They questioned the possibility of Jesus of Nazareth being heard by God. He replied, “Now we know that God heareth not sinners : but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth His will, him He heareth” (John 9:31). Some, seeking to capitalize on this verse, teach that unless a person is in Christ, their prayers will not be heard, because they are “sinners.” However, the case of Cornelius confirms that this is not an accurate statement. The idea of the statement made by the former blind man is that those devoted to sin, and who have no interest in being forgiven by God, will not be heard by Him. However, He will not turn a deaf ear to those who are seeking Him with their whole heart, are discontent with their sin, and are relying upon Him. He will not, however come to the aid of those who are living an enmity with Him, and turning away from what sparse knowledge they may have of Him. Thus it is written, “If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me” (Psa 66:18). “The LORD is far from the wicked: but He heareth the prayer of the righteous” (Prov 15:29). To a hypocritical nation the Lords said, “And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide Mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil” (Isa 1:15-16). Every person is expected to live up to the measure of truth they possess. Only then will more be given. This fact explains why many people have little.

I therefore conclude that Cornelius was living up to the knowledge that he did have of God, and was doing so consistently and with integrity. It is for this reason that the Lord, who have given attention to his demeanor, will now intervene, bringing further light to him.

HE SAW A VISION

“ 3 He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.”

This Divine initiative was toward a “devout man.” Although this approach conflicts with many contemporary views of evangelism and missions, we will find that it is a fairly consistent approach in the record of Divine initiatives. This was the approach on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5). Paul was noted for carrying the Gospel to “devout” people (Acts 13:50; 17:4,17). Everywhere he went, he first delivered the Gospel in the synagogues (Acts 9:20; 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4, 19; 19:8). It is the manner of the Lord to operate according to this revealed principle: “And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. For he that hath, to him shall be given : and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath” (Mark 4:25).

Jesus also revealed an aspect of the Kingdom that is interesting to consider. He portrayed outsiders as receiving the second invitation to the supper of salvation, not the first. When declaring the kingdom of heaven was likened to “a certain king which made a marriage for his son,” he said that those who had already been “bidden” were to come. When they did not come, he sent a second word, telling them that all things were ready – that they should come to the marriage. When they again declined, he judged them and told his servant, “Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage” (Matt 22:9; Lk 14:23).

In the case of Cornelius, he being a Gentile, fell into the second category who were offered salvation. As it is written, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek ” (Rom 1:16). Doctrinally, this was the result of “some” of the Jewish branches being broken off, and the branches from a wild olive tree being grafted into their tree (Rom 11:17-20).

In further confirmation of this principle, Jesus told His disciples “that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem ” (Luke 24:47). Additionally He told that they would be His witnesses “both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

When the apostles began preaching, they did precisely as Jesus had told them, first preaching the Gospel to those who had been cultured to receive it. Now, heaven moves to bring salvation to the Gentiles. This will be done in fulfillment of the prophets.

- “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious” (Isa 11:10).
- “Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles” (Isa 42:1).
- “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6).
- “And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

When the apostles began preaching, they did precisely as Jesus had told them, first preaching the Gospel to those who had been cultured to receive it. Now, heaven moves to bring salvation to the Gentiles. This will be done in fulfillment of the prophets.

“Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders” (Isa 49:22).

- “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa 60:3).

A VISION ABOUT THE NINTH HOUR

“He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day . . .” Other versions read, “about three in the afternoon he had a vision,” NIV “While wide awake one afternoon he had a vision – it was about three o'clock,” LIVING and “in a dream.” PHILLIPS

The word “evidently” means clearly. Other versions read, “clearly,” NKJV “distinctly,” NIV “openly,” ASV “plainly,” DARBY “manifestly.” DOUAY “plainly,” NAB “perfectly clearly,” PHILLIPS and “perceived in sight.” INTERLINEAR

Visions have been used by God to communicate with men through all ages.

Prior to the Law. God spoke to Abraham in a vision (Gen 15:1). He also spoke to Jacob in a vision (Gen 46:2).

After the giving of the Law. God spoke in visions to Samuel (1 Sam 3:15), Nathan (2 Sam 7:17), Iddo (2 Chron 9:29), Isaiah (2 Chron 32:32; Isa 1:1), Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1), Daniel (Dan 2:19; 4:5; 7:1; 8:1; 9:21; 10:1), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:28); Obadiah (Obad 1:1), Nahum (Nah 1:1), and Habakkuk (Hab 2:2).

After Jesus came into the world. God gave visions to Peter, James, and John (Matt 17:5), Zacharias (Luke 1:22), the women who came to the tomb of Jesus (Lk 24:23), Ananias (Acts 9:10), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:12), Cornelius (Acts 10:3), Peter (Acts 10:17; 11:5; 12:9), Paul the apostle (Acts 16:9; 18:9; 26:19; 2 Cor 12:1), and John the beloved (Rev 9:17).

Defined etymologically, a vision is “that which is seen, a sight, spectacle . . . a sight divinely granted in an ecstasy or in sleep” THAYER and “vision as opposed to figment of the imagination.” GINGRICH

Academically, a vision is defined as “a supernatural presentation of certain scenery or circumstances to the mind of a person while awake,” MCCLINTOK-STRONG’S and “a vivid apparition, not a dream.” EASTON

Doctrinally, valid visions are initiated by God (Num 12:8; Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). There are also vain visions, which are nothing more than the imagination of men (Ezek 12:24; 13:7). While there are valid and profitable visions, they are not the greatest means of Divine communication. This is confirmed by God’s own word to some of Moses’ critics: “Hear now my words: If there be a prophet among you, I the LORD will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so, who is faithful in all mine house. With him will I speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the LORD shall he behold: wherefore then were ye not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” (Num 12:6-8). This by no means justifies a demeaning view of visions, but rather gives us a proper perspective of them so we will not be prone to covet them or seek them.

Visions can be extensive. For example, the entire book of Isaiah was a vision (Isa 1:1). The same is true of the prophesy of Obadiah (Obad 1:1), Nahum (Nah 1:1), much of the book of Daniel (Dan 7:1,7,13; 8:1,17,26; 10:1,8,16), and at least great sections of the book of the Revelation (Rev 9:17).

A vision is distinguished from a dream (Num 12:6; Job 20:8; 33:15), although the distinction is not labored in Scripture. In both cases, however, something is both seen, and something is generally heard in words as well.

Cornelius Has A Vision

Thus, at three o'clock in the afternoon, Cornelius has a vision, being able to see things for which his natural eyes were not adapted. What he will see is not something that came into the circumference of his natural vision, but something God enabled him to see. It seems to me that it is comely to think of God as having both the ability and the inclination to cause men to see things that are otherwise unseeable.

AN ANGEL CAME IN TO HIM

“ . . . an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.” Every major version reads “angel of God,” emphasizing the one to whom the angel belonged, and for whom he spoke, An exception to this rule is found in a single version reading “from God.” GWN The literal rendering of the Greek words involved are “angel of the God.”

Angels are heavenly messengers that are sent out from God to deliver a word from Him, or work something He has purposed. They are wholly devoted to the execution of the Divine will, and never work according to the will of man. Men can neither summon them nor dispatch them. They are never depicted as asking men what they desire them to do. Speaking of both God and Christ, angels are referred to as “His angels” (Job 4:18; 91:11; 103:20; 104:4; 148:2; Matt 13:41; 16:27; Heb 1:7; Rev 3:5). They take orders from God (Psa 91:11), and they do His commandments and hearken to His voice (Psa 103:20). They are also described as ministering spirits who are charged with the care of the saints of God (Heb 1:13-14).

Now, one of these holy angels comes to Cornelius in a vision – that is, while he was awake, this centurion was given the ability to see an approaching angel – coming right straight toward him. What is more, the angel speaks to him, calling him by name – “Cornelius!” Now we will see how a devout man, who fears God, gives alms to the people of God, and always prays reacts to the sight of a holy angel coming toward him. We may be sure he will not be casual.

HE WAS AFRAID

“ 4a And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord?”

Of old time God has revealed there are certain types of people for which He is looking, and toward whom He is disposed to show favor. Because this is not the kind of God that is being declared in our time, it is good that we briefly consider this aspect of the Divine nature.

There is no record of a vision being given to someone who did not see it. The very word “vision” has two sides to it: something to be seen, and someone who sees it. There is no word in Scripture about a person refusing to look at what was made known in a vision. I do not believe there is any example in the Word of God of a person asking for a vision, or in any way seeking one. There is a sense in which the vision is imposed upon the individual. They are, therefore, given in strict accordance with Divine discretion. Here God gives a vision to a non-Jew, who is not in Christ, and, so far as we know, had not yet heard the Gospel of Christ. He is a member of a foreign government that God has already determined will fall, and that is exercising dominion over the chosen people of God. He is not a peaceful man, but is a military man. Yet, in spite of all those seeming restrictions, Cornelius had, without Christ, risen to more lofty spiritual heights than many professing Christians.

The point to see here is that God will not overlook such a person – one who is consistently devout. Of old time God has revealed there are certain types of people for which He is looking, and toward whom He is disposed to show favor. Because this is not the kind of God that is being declared in our time, it is good that we briefly consider this aspect of the Divine nature. I hardly see how person can advance very far in the faith until this perspective is obtained.

• **TENDER HEARTED AND HUMBLE.** “Because thine heart was tender , and thou hast humbled thyself before the LORD . . . I also have heard thee, saith the LORD” (2 Kgs 22:19).

• **A HEART THAT IS PERFECT TOWARD HIM.** “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him” (2 Chron 16:9).

• **A BROKEN HEART AND A CONTRITE SPIRIT.** “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psa 34:18). “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa 51:17).

• **THE LOWLY.** “Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off” (Psa 138:6).

• **THE CONTRITE AND HUMBLE.** “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa 57:15).

• **THE MEEK.** “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isa 61:1).

• **THOSE WHO TREMBLE AT HIS WORD.** “. . . to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa 66:2).

This very passage will confirm the truth of these affirmations.

WHEN HE LOOKED ON HIM

“And when he looked on him, he was afraid . . .” Other versions read, “when he observed him,” NKJV “fixing his gaze upon him,” NASB “stared at him,” NIV “stared at him,” NRSV “fastening his eyes upon him,” ASV “stared at the angel,” CJB “having fixed his eyes upon him,” DARBY “beholding him,” DOUAY “looked intently at him,” NAB “looked steadily at him,” WEYMOUTH and “having looked earnestly upon him.” YLT

Cornelius was terrified at the sight – not because he was purposefully living at a distance from the Lord, but because of the hostility of the flesh, and the stark contrast between a person from heaven and one upon the earth. It is this contrast that enables a person to properly evaluate the presence of the Lord.

Remember, Cornelius was not merely beholding an unusual sight. He was witnessing a holy angel advancing toward him – “coming in to him.”

HE WAS AFRAID

“. . . he was afraid . . .” Other versions read, “and being much alarmed” NASB “in fear,” NIV “in terror,” NRSV “and being affrightened,” ASV “terrified,” CJB “and become full of fear,” DARBY “being seized with fear,” DOUAY “being much alarmed,” NAU and “becoming greatly afraid.” NET

Cornelius was terrified at the sight – not because he was purposefully living at a distance from the Lord, but because of the hostility of the flesh, and the stark contrast between a person from heaven and one upon the earth. It is this contrast that enables a person to properly evaluate the presence of the Lord. As long as we remain in the body, we do well to thank God for the veil that obscures glory – even the glory of an angel. Whether Cornelius, Daniel, or John the beloved, the frightening

confrontation of a holy angel is still a significantly reduced appearance.

It is apparent that the appearance of an angel is not always like those who visited Abraham and Lot. Angels came “unawares,” and either man knew they were entertaining angels, who had the appearance of men (Heb 13:2; Gen 18:2-10; 19:1-3). The same experience happened to Manoah and his wife, to whom it was later revealed that they had, in fact, faced an angel (Judges 13:15-25). However, this was not always the manner in which angels appeared to men. Often the appearance of them caused great fear (Dan 10:7-12; Lk 2:9).

Such was the case with Cornelius. This was doubtless the result of discerning the obvious superiority of the angel, and the corresponding inferiority of Cornelius himself.

There is such a variance between heaven and earth, that when it is clear that some heavenly personality has intervened in the affairs of men, flesh and blood draws back in fear. One can only speculate what kind of fear and trembling will fall on all of the ungodly when Jesus appears in all of His glory with “all the holy angels” (Matt 25:31).

In a sense, the absence of a phenomenon of this sort is a test, to see whether or not we are willing to serve the Lord – like Israel in the wilderness. It is said of that trek, “And thou shalt remember all the way which the LORD thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no” (Deut 8:2). All of the time they were in that wilderness, there was a mighty angel accompanying them (Ex 23:20,23; 32:34). Yet, that angel was not apparent to them. Judging from outward appearance, it could not even be concluded that a mighty angel was with them – but he was.

When the presence of the Lord is not apparent, life is like an arid desert. Yet, the child of God must proceed on, believing that the Lord is not far from every one of us. Men who lived during such desolate times include Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Gideon, Daniel, the Prophets.

Those who fear God and are devout, are eager to know if there is something the Lord wants them to do – or if there is something unacceptable in their lives.

WHAT IS IT LORD?

“ . . .and said, What is it, Lord?” Every standard translation reads precisely the same: “What is it Lord?” Some of more liberal translations read, “What do you want, sir?” GWN a “What, my Lord?” MRD and “What is this all about?” CEV

According to John Gill, this interrogation might be phrased as follows: “What is the matter?” “What is to be said and done?” “What is the reason for this unusual appearance?” I would add that this response also reveals the character of Cornelius. He does not run in fear like Adam (Gen 3:8), but comes closer, as Moses did to the burning bush (Ex 3:3). Those who fear God and are devout, are eager to know if there is something the Lord wants them to do – or if there is something unacceptable in their lives. They want nothing between them and the Lord, and are eager to do His will. Even though they fear, yet they will draw near to hear and learn.

HIS PRAYERS WERE HEARD, AND HIS ALMS WERE NOTED

“ 4b And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.”

Being a messenger from God, the angel delivers a word to Cornelius. He does not come to smite him, as the angel of the Lord smote Herod (Acts 12:23). He rather comes to inform him of how the Lord has reacted to His life. Frequently messengers from heaven have informed people of how they are viewed in heaven. An angel told Jacob that he had power with God and man (Gen 32:26). An angel informed Gideon that he had been assessed as a “mighty man of valor” (Judges 6:12). The Lord

sent an angel to tell Hezekiah He had heard his prayers and seen his tears (2 Kgs 20:5). An angel told Daniel that he was “greatly beloved” in heaven (Dan 9:23; 10:11,19).

Not only does the Lord try , or test, the hearts of men (Prov 17:3), He responds to what He sees. Not only does He ponder the hearts of men, He is moved by what He sees. Our text will prove to be a sterling example of this.

It is interesting to ponder how we would react if a messenger was sent to us to reveal how heaven has viewed our own works – our prayers and our giving in particular. In the case of Cornelius, a good report will be given, together with instruction concerning the appropriation of salvation in Christ Jesus.

THY PRAYERS AND THINE ALMS

“And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms . . .” Other versions read, “prayers and gifts to the poor,” NIV “your prayers and your offerings,” BBE “prayers . . . and acts of charity,” CJB “prayers and almsgiving,” NAB and “thy prayers and thy kind acts.” YLT

It is arresting to consider just what had been noticed in heaven: the “prayers” and “alms” of Cornelius – what was spoken to God, and what was given to men.

Prayers

It is evident from what is said that the prayers of Cornelius were more than a mere formal repetition – something that was common among Jewish leaders (Matt 6:7). The text suggests his prayers were more in the order of supplications and petitions. The elements of seeking and asking were in them; the presence of inquiry and fervent desire. The response of the Lord strongly suggests that involved a quest for the salvation of God.

Alms

The word “alms” means “the benefaction itself, a donation to the poor,” THAYER “as benevolent activity toward the poor donation, almsgiving, charitable giving,” FRIBERG and “giving money to a needy person.” UBS As used here, “alms” refers to the actual gift itself, and not the pity and mercy that compelled Cornelius to give it. Just as the Lord observed the two mites that the widow cast into the Temple treasury, so the Lord had observed the amount of the gifts Cornelius had given to the poor. Once again, I want to emphasize that this particularly refers to the Jewish poor, and not merely the poor in general. Cornelius will learn first hand what it means for God to bless those who bless Israel (Gen 12:3; 27:29; Num 24:9).

A MEMORIAL BEFORE GOD

“ . . . are come up for a memorial before God.” Other versions read, “ascended as a memorial,” NASB “gone up for a memorial,” ASV ‘Have come up to God, and he has kept them in mind,’ BBE “have gone up into God's presence, so that he has you on his mind,” CJB “are come up into remembrance before God,” GENEVA “God is aware of your prayers and your gifts to the poor, and he has remembered you,” GWN “Your prayers and charitable gifts have been accepted by God,” NJB “have been received by God as an offering,” NLT “Your prayers and charities have not gone unnoticed by God!” LIVING “God has not forgotten the things you have done,” IE “have gone up and have been recorded before God,” WEYMOUTH “have gone up to Heaven and are remembered before God,” PHILLIPS and “God is pleased . . . and is ready to answer you.” GNB

Come up

The God of heaven had taken due note of both the prayers and alms of this man. This means these deeds were properly motivated, for “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name” (Heb 6:10). The prayers were toward God Himself, and the alms toward the people who belonged to Him.

The words “come up” suggest that the prayers and alms of Cornelius were consistent expressions, not sporadic ones. The picture is of them continually coming before the attention of God. There are people who pray and give occasionally, but it is not their manner of life. While I am not prepared to say that such activities are never noted by God, they are not the kind of activities to which our text refers. An example of a noble deed done occasionally is the account of the good Samaritan that Jesus gave (Lk 10:33). The deed the man was solitary, but addressed a specific situation at a particular time. Addressing an unusual crisis in the name of the Lord is good, and will be duly noted in heaven, as is confirmed in the account of the good Samaritan. However, in this text, the point is the continuity of Cornelius’ prayers to God and gifts to the poor. He had faithfully cast his bread upon the waters, and now it will come back to him (Eccl 11:1). This text will also speak of the fulfillment of one of Solomon’s proverbs: “He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth of his bread to the poor” (Prov 22:9).

Memorial

This is an intriguing word: “memorial.” It is translated from the Greek word **mnhmo,sunon** , which has the following meaning. “that by which the memory of any person or thing is preserved,” THAYER “what is done that causes someone not to be forgotten memorial, means of reminding,” FRIBERG “something done to arouse the memory of another,” UBS and “something done to arouse the memory of another.” LOUW-NIDA

A memorial is not the remembrance itself, but the thing that provokes the remembrance. It is what causes a person to think upon something in particular, whether a person or something the person has done. In this text, the prayers and alms of Cornelius were the things that moved God to think upon him. They were the “memorial.” The idea is that God was aware of the consistent prayers and alms of Cornelius, and therefore thought upon him, determined to do him good.

On the surface, this may appear to contradict the statement that salvation is “not of works.” However, we must not be infantile in our thinking. God will not save Cornelius because he did these things, but will open the door of faith to him because of his activity – and there is a significant difference between the two.

On the surface, this may appear to contradict the statement that salvation is “not of works.” However, we must not be infantile in our thinking. God will not save Cornelius because he did these things, but will open the door of faith to him because of his activity – and there is a significant difference between the two. Mind you, the door of faith is not opened ONLY to those who have done good. However, here is an example of God doing so. This confirms that God is not looking for a reason to condemn men , for those who do not believe on Jesus are “condemned already” (John 3:18).

The Lord is often said to have been favorably moved by the condition of people, or what they have done.

- **LEAH.** “And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren” (Gen 29:31).

- **MOSES.** “And when the LORD saw that he turned aside to see, God called unto him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I” (Ex 3:4).

- **ISRAEL.** “For the LORD saw the affliction of Israel, that it was very bitter: for

there was not any shut up, nor any left, nor any helper for Israel. And the LORD said not that he would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven: but he saved them by the hand of Jeroboam the son of Joash” (2 Kgs 14:26-27).

• **THE WIDOW OF NAIN.** “Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came and touched the bier: and they that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise” (Luke 7:12-14).

• **WANDERING MULTITUDES.** “And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things” (Mark 6:34).

In Scripture, God is said to have “remembered” several people. These include the following:

• **Noah** (Gen 8:1). Following the flood, every living thing, and all that was in the ark. He then made a wind to pass over the earth that caused the waters to recede.

• **Abraham** (Gen 19:29). Before destroying Sodom, God remembered Abraham, and because of it sent Lord “out of the midst of the overthrow.”

• **Rachel** (Gen 30:22). When the Lord remembered Rachel, who was barren, He “opened her womb.”

• **Hannah** (1 Sam 1:19). After Hannah had prayed for a child for some time, and was also provoked by her adversary, the Lord remembered her and she conceived.

• **Israel** (Psa 78:39; 136:23). Even though Israel had provoked Him many times, the Lord spared them because He remembered “they were but flesh.” He also remembered them “in their low estate,” and “redeemed them from their enemies.”

The Lord is also said to have “remembered” His covenant (Ex 2:24; 6:5; 105:8;). Once He even “remembered His covenant for” Israel (Psa 106:45). He also is said to have “remembered His mercy” (Psa 98:3).

In all of these cases, His remembrance was the prelude to His working – particularly the showing of great mercy. This is a Divine manner that we do well to know. It opens up something of what is involved in being “followers of God as dear children.” The recollection of such people may be the occasion for some special mercy during the time of need, as in the case of Noah. Such devotion and commitment may also be the reason for God sharing His “secret” and revealing aspects of “His covenant,” unveiling secrets that are unknown (Psa 25:14). Such remembrance may even prove to be the reason for delivering another person, as when the Lord delivered Lot because He remembered Abraham, or blessed Israel because He remembered His covenant.

DIRECTION FROM HEAVEN

“ 5 And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.”

The God who has heard Cornelius, and chosen to enlighten him, has also chosen the one who will deliver the word of the Lord to him.

Here again, we will see the manner in which God employs human instrumentality as well as the ministry of holy angels. God rarely deals directly with people – such as He did with Noah (Gen 6:3ff), Abraham (Gen 13:14), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:5), or John on the Isle of Patmos (Rev 1:13). Even in those cases, it is not certain the Lord did not speak through an angel, although, if that was the case, a point is not made of it. My point here particularly relates to human involvement – not by

the choice of men, but by the choice of God Himself. It is He who determines that “every” man is provided with a minister who will bring the word of salvation to them (Rom 10:15; 1 Cor 3:5).

SEND MEN

“And now send men to Joppa . . .” Other versions read, “dispatch men to Joppa,” NASB and “you must send some men to Joppa.” NJB

Here is the sanctified use of the authority of Cornelius, for he was a “centurion,” over one hundred men. He will now employ that authority for a holy purpose. It is to be assumed that the men he sends will be those who are under his authority. He will not hire a professional messenger, but will dispatch those over whom he has rule. He will, in other words, use what is in his hand – like Moses used his rod, and David used his sling. So Cornelius will use his men.

FOR ONE SIMON

“ . . . and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter . . .” Other versions read, “who is also called Peter,” NASB and “known as Peter.” NJB

“Simon ” was the name given to him by men. “Peter” was the name given to him by Jesus (Matt 10:2; 16:18; John 1:42). The word of the Lord is very specific. He does not tell Cornelius to go to Jerusalem and inquire if there is someone there who can speak to him. The God who has heard Cornelius, and chosen to enlighten him, has also chosen the one who will deliver the word of the Lord to him. His name is Simon – a common name. That is not the name that will distinguish him. The distinguishing name is “Peter,” which identified him as one whom Christ had chosen.

The choice of the messenger was strictly at the discretion of the Lord. He chose Philip to go to Ethiopian eunuch, Ananias to go to Saul of Tarsus, and now Simon Peter to go to Cornelius. Truly, the government has been placed upon the shoulder of the Lord Jesus Christ!

WHERE IS LODGES

“ 6 He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side...”

The “sea” of reference was the Mediterranean Sea on which the city of Joppa was situated. That is where we are informed Peter remained for “many days” (Acts 9:43). He was waiting in a specific house until the appointed time, like Saul of Tarsus waited in the house of one named Judas, which was located on a street “called Straight” (Acts 9:11). All of this involved the Lord positioning people for an assigned work.

HE WILL TELL THEE

“ . . . he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.” Other versions read, “what you must do.” NKJV This phrase is omitted from modern versions. Whatever may be said in justification of its omission is not acceptable. Later, when Peter gives a report of this incident he said Cornelius was told that Peter was the one, “Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). This verse is included in all of the versions that omit the expression of reference in verse six. The statement, then, is an accurate one, precisely stating what Cornelius would be directed to do.

There are requirements for those who desire the salvation of God, and they have not been established by men. Those who have been convicted by the Spirit (John 16:7-1) sense this, and it directs the manner in which they respond to the Gospel: i.e. “what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37); “what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6); “See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?” (Acts 8:36); “what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). Where this kind of inquiry is not found, or some positive indication of the presence of such a mind, there is probably some additional preaching to be

done. It certainly is not proper to suggest to non-inquiring people that they repeat a simple prayer – something for which there is not a solitary example in all of Scripture.

Heaven was involved in the matter we are reviewing, interacting with both men and angels. This is how the Kingdom of God functions. God does not merely give orders to men, leaving to their own selves to work out critical matters. The government of God includes the dispatching of holy angels by the Son of God, the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit, and precise directions for men. All of this is being lived out in our text. Men have not been left to themselves, and the world does not function on its own. We are being given a glimpse of behind-the-scenes activities involving both angels and men.

Now, the lot is cast into the lap of Cornelius, as stated in Proverbs 16:33. If what has been said of him is true, he will instantly respond to the glory of God, and wisdom will be justified of her children (Matt 11:19). Remember, the book of Acts contains the record of the working of the Lord, as well as the proper human responses to it.

THE RESPONSE OF CORNELIUS

“ 7 And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually; 8 And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.”

The “angel of God” had come and is now departed. What kind of impact will this visitation have? That is the question. Heavenly visitations, whatever form they may take, are not an end of themselves. It is the response of men that makes the visitation profitable. When, for example, Jerusalem was visited by “the Dayspring from on high,” it was a most marvelous circumstance. However, because the people did not respond properly, it actually became the basis for their judgment rather than their blessing. This is why Jesus lamented over the city saying, “Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation ” (Luke 19:42-44).

Many a soul has had the door of opportunity opened to them by heaven, yet have not responded to it in faith. Cain was in this category, for before he killed his brother, God told him if he did well, he would be accepted (Gen 4:7). Israel also had the opportunity to send spies into the land of Canaan to confirm that what God had said about it was true. However, they chose to believe the words of unbelievers, and were thus excluded from the land, not being able to enter into it because of their unbelief (Heb 3:19).

We will see in Cornelius the proper response to a Divine directive. It will be immediate and thorough, and nothing will be left undone.

HE CALLED HIS HOUSEHOLD SERVANTS AND A DEVOUT SOLDIER

“ And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually . . .”

Those who operate within the framework of the will of God do not waste time, nor are they slothful in executing the will of God. This is particularly true of angels, who are a kind of archetype of the servants of the Lord.

As is customary with heavenly messengers, this angel delivered the message he was given, and then

departed. It is said of the holy angels, “Bless the LORD, ye His angels, that excel in strength, that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word” (Psa 103:20). Their ministry is immediate and effective, like a flame of fire. As it is written, “Who maketh His angels spirits; His ministers a flaming fire” (Psa 104:4).

Those who operate within the framework of the will of God do not waste time, nor are they slothful in executing the will of God. This is particularly true of angels, who are a kind of archetype of the servants of the Lord. When an angel appeared to John, he identified himself as “thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 19:10). Furthermore, angels are among the fellowship into which we have come in Christ Jesus. As it is written, “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22).

Now, having delivered his message, the angel has left, and Cornelius enters into the work, doing the bidding of the Lord.

He Called Two Servants and a Devout Soldier

Immediately Cornelius calls two of his household servants – men who were not soldiers, but were part of his immediate household staff. He also called a devout soldier who served him continually – “of those who were in constant attendance upon him,” NASB or “at all times.” BBE

In our culture, such arrangements are not common – but they are in Scripture. Jesus Himself often spoke of the association of servants to their master, or householder (Matt 10:24-25; 18:23-34; 24:45-50; 25:14-30; Mk 12:1-11). The influence of Cornelius over those who served him is apparent. First, he feared God with all of his house (10:2), and second, one of the soldiers who accompanied the two servants was also “devout” (10:7).

This is a sterling example of someone letting their light shine. These men had no doubt seen Cornelius’ “good works,” and glorified God by also fearing Him and being devout.

It ought to be noted that there are many advantages to being “devout” – a condition in which the manner of one’s life is perfectly consistent with their profession of allegiance to the God of heaven. It is most unfortunate that the Christianity of our time, particularly in the United States of America, knows little of a genuine commitment to the Lord, or of being devout. The thrust of contemporary Christianity has placed the stress on the worldly circumstances of believers, thereby neutralizing the possibility of living solely for the Lord. The requirement for believers to crucify the flesh (Gal 5:24), live unto the Lord (2 Cor 5:15), take up their cross and follow Christ (Matt 16:24), and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1) are uncommon in the modern church. It is for this very reason that devoutness is rare.

HE DECLARED ALL THINGS TO THEM

“And when he had declared all these things unto them . . .” Other versions read, “and when he had explained,” NKJV “told them everything that had happened,” NIV “related everything to them,” RSV and “rehearsed all things unto them.” ASV

These were servants, yet Cornelius told them everything, bringing clarity to their mission. This was not the ordinary manner of masters with their servants. Jesus once said of ordinary servants, “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth : but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). I gather, therefore, that in this matter the men he called were not functioning as mere servants, but as kindred spirits – for it is said of Cornelius that he “feared God with all of his house” (household NKJV – 10:1).

Jesus sent His disciples out armed with the facts in the case. They knew why they were being sent, what they were to say, and how men would respond to them. True ministry cannot be accomplished while walking in the dark. Candidly, we are told that if we “walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Those who are in any proximity to Jesus tend to themselves walk in the light – knowing whom they have believed, understanding the will of the Lord, and knowing the destiny toward which they are journeying.

Now, Cornelius exhibits this trait, informing his servants of the vision that he has had, and the commission that he has been given. In this matter, he does not consider the servants unworthy of possessing this knowledge. He also confirms that he is not ashamed of the vision, nor does he entertain the notion that his servants might consider it foolish or far-fetched.

All of this indicates that there was a closeness in the household that was created by the fear of the Lord and devout conduct. There was an accord that transcended social convention, even though it did not interfere with it. There was a sense in which the men were subordinate to Cornelius. However, that was not their only relationship. There was a superior manner of life that allowed for a closeness that could not be had within the framework of human custom.

This principle can be seen today in various social and domestic associations. When interpersonal relationships are maintained at a higher level in which the fear of the Lord, and even faith in Christ, exist, there is a wider latitude in which men can operate. It is one in which there is more profitability.

HE SENT THEM TO JOPPA

“ . . . he sent them to Joppa.”

Thus the men are sent on their way knowing the WHY of their mission, as well as the basis of it. While they are obeying their master according to the flesh, they are also fulfilling a word that has come from heaven.

The people of God can learn from this example. It is better when the people of God know WHY they are fulfilling the word of the Lord. While it is true that obedience is required whether we understand the reasons or not, that is not the best way to live. It is far better to know the rationale that is behind spiritual life.

The people of God can learn from this example. It is better when the people of God know WHY they are fulfilling the word of the Lord. While it is true that obedience is required whether we understand the reasons or not, that is not the best way to live. It is far better to know the rationale that is behind spiritual life. That knowledge removes the tediousness that can otherwise be experienced. There is a stage in spiritual life that is much like that of an earthly child – one in which we do what we are told simply because we are told to do so. However, that is not a state in which we are to remain. We are candidly told, “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17). Again, we are admonished to so order our lives that we will come to know and understand the will of the Lord. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2).

A few of the reasons that undergird the necessity of being holy and making preparations for eternity are as follows. They provide a framework of reasonability within which we may live.

- Jesus gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
- It is appointed unto men to die once, and then to stand before God in judgment (Heb 9:27).

- We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain that we can take nothing out of it (1 Tim 6:7).

- We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ to receive the outcome of what we have done, whether it is good or evil (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10).

- Jesus died and rose again in order that we might no longer live for ourselves, but for Him (2 Cor 5:15).

There is a sense in which we have been sent on a mission, like the servants and soldier of our text. As sojourners, we are traveling to another country, which is a better one (1 Pet 2:11; Heb 11:16). As Cornelius did, our Lord has given us the facts in the case, and why the journey must be made. This world is destined for destruction – reserved unto fire (2 Pet 3:7), and we are preparing to leave it. In that context, a godly and separated life makes perfect sense.

CONCLUSION

The opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles is a significant event in Scripture. It does not chronicle the abandonment of Israel, but the inclusion of the Gentiles in the promises that were given to them. The Gentiles have been made partakers “with them” of “the root and fatness” of their heritage (Rom 11:17). Paul provides the rationale behind this Divine arrangement in a remarkable statement to the Ephesians. This gives us a picture of the greatness of salvation, as well as some of its intricacies. “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph 2:11-19). All of this is beginning to take shape in our text. The Lord is bringing His promise to pass in a most remarkable way.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #46

PETER IS GIVEN A VISION

“ 10:9 On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: 10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, 11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: 12 Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. 15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven. ” (Acts 10:9-16)

INTRODUCTION

The occurrences recorded in this section of the book of Acts are also rehearsed in 11:1-30. Upon hearing the report of what we are beginning to behold, the apostles and elders assessed what took place at the household of Cornelius in these words: “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). Additionally, these events are also referred to in Acts 15:6-9.

This is truly an epoch in the history of the church, and marked a kind of new beginning – one identified by a greater degree of spiritual understanding.

It is well, therefore, that we take note of the various things that are associated with, and integral to,

the singular event of which we are now reading. In the details of this report, we receive some insight into both the manner and extensiveness of Divine workings.

- Men are involved (10:1,9).
- An angel is involved (10:3,7,22).
- Two coordinated visions take place – the 9th hour on day one, and the 6th hour one day two (10:3,7).

CONTENTS

- **AS THEY WENT ON THEIR JOURNEY (10:9a)**
- **PETER WENT UP TO PRAY (10:9b)**
- **HE BECAME HUNGRY, AND WANTED TO EAT (10:10)**
- **HEAVEN WAS OPENED (10:11)**
- **A TEST OR A REVELATION? (10:12)**
- **HEAVENLY DIRECTION (10:13)**
- **THE DICTATES OF THE CONSCIENCE (10:14)**
- **THE SECOND TIME (10:15)**
- **THREE TIMES, THEN WITHDRAWAL (10:16)**
- **CONCLUSION**
- Divine instructions are given to both parties involved (10:5-6,19-10).
- A man will employ his servants to assist in fulfilling the command of the Lord (10:7).
- Before sending men to get Peter, Cornelius told them what he had experienced (10:8).
- The reactions to Divine direction will be immediate (10:9,24).
- Cornelius was fasting and praying when he received his vision (10:30).
- While Peter was involved in prayer his vision was received (10:9).
- The flow of normal life will be interrupted (10:3,11).
- Heaven was opened (10:11).
- A voice spoke from heaven (10:13-16).
- Only as Peter thinks upon the revelation is further instruction given (10:17).
- The Spirit spoke to Peter (10:19-20).
- The Spirit sends the men from Cornelius to Peter (10:20).
- In the process of obedience further direction is given (10:22).
- Certain brethren accompanied Peter to the house of Cornelius (10:23).
- Cornelius was waiting for Peter with his kinsmen and friends (10:24).
- Peter and Cornelius related to each other what they had experienced (10:28-33)
- A expansion of understanding takes place (10:28,34-35).
- The Lord will act in a unique manner among those of Cornelius' house (10:44).

While we should not endeavor to impose our own understanding upon the text of Scripture, we do

well to strain our spiritual vision to see what is happening behind the scenes. If it is true that God does nothing “without cause,” as He Himself has affirmed (Ezek 14:23), then something of that “cause” may be perceived in what He has done. Of course, all of that will be missed if the text is read simply as history, or events in which the prominent workers were only men.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE TEXT

Great spiritual epochs are not induced by men. They are always the result of Divine workings. Men who are involved in these works are themselves extraordinary, being men of faith and hope.

The day following the vision given to Cornelius, while the men sent to Peter were on their journey, and as they drew near to Joppa, Peter has gone up the rooftop to pray. When there, he became very hungry, and wanted something to eat. However, while something was being prepared for him to eat, he fell into a trance. He saw heaven opened, and a net lowered down to him by its four corners. In the net, all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as crawling creatures, and birds of the air were found. A voice from heaven commands Peter to “Rise, kill and eat.” Although hungry, Peter’s god is not his belly. He remonstrates, saying that he has never eaten anything that was unclean. The same voice that had told him to “Rise, kill, and eat,” spoke a second time saying that anything God had cleansed was not to be called unclean. The vision is repeated two more times, and the same words are delivered to him. The net is then withdrawn and taken back to heaven. No further explanation was given, and Peter was left alone to think upon what he had been given to see.

Great spiritual epochs are not induced by men. They are always the result of Divine workings. Men who are involved in these works are themselves extraordinary, being men of faith and hope. Ponder the individuals who have been used in the book of Acts to this point.

- **Peter** – On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-47).
- **Peter and John** – in the healing of the lame man and the preaching that followed (Acts 3:1-4:4).
- **Peter and John** – in confounding the Jewish leaders (Acts 4:8-13).
- **Stephen** – in the working of great wonders and miracles, and confounding the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:8-10).
- **Philip** – in reaching the city of Samaria (Acts 8:5-8).
- **Peter and John** – in the Samaritans receiving the Holy Spirit. And thwarting the influence of Simon the sorcerer (Acts 8:14-25).
- **Philip** – in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:28-39).
- **Ananias** – in the conversion of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10-17).
- **Saul, after converted** – in confounding Jewish leaders (Acts 9:20-22).
- **Barnabas** – presenting Saul to the apostles and confirming the genuineness of his conversion (Acts 9:27-28).
- **Peter** – In reaching the area of Lydda and Saran (Acts 9:33-35).
- **Peter** – in reaching people of Joppa (Acts 9:36-42).

None of the above activities were the outcome of the plans of men. None of them employed unholy people, or those who were unlearned in “the things of the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:5; 1 Cor 2:14). The Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit were active in them, and angels were often noted for their immediate involvement. The insightful preaching of Christ was also a key factor, and results, whether in healings or conversions, involved the exchange of one manner of life for another. None of the occasions

involved a return to normalcy. All of them involved believing. There is a remarkable consistency in this.

These are glimpses of Kingdom manners, and the way legitimate works are recognized. There is a total absence of institutionalism and all forms of lifeless religion, in all of them. There is no reliance on the world's wisdom, and few individuals of worldly prominence are said to have been involved in any of them (the Ethiopian eunuch is one).

AS THEY WENT ON THEIR JOURNEY

“ 10:9a On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city.”

Cornelius had his vision at “the ninth hour of the day” – around three o'clock in the afternoon (Acts 10:3). The “ninth hour” was also the time when Peter and John had gone up to the Temple, confronting and healing the impotent man at the gate Beautiful. This was also the hour that Jesus cried out upon the cross, “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me” (Mk 15:34).

ON THE MORROW

“On the morrow . . .” Other versions read, “on the next day,” NKJV and “the day after.” BBE

The vision and the instruction given to Cornelius probably took some time. Following the vision and the directions the angel provided, Cornelius had called two of his servants, and a soldier who was always with him. He had then related the entire episode to the men, then commissioning them to go to Joppa to bring Peter back. By this time it was probably well into the evening. It is not surprising, then, that they commenced their journey “on the morrow,” or “the next day.” NKJV

The distance was approximately 30-35 miles. The journey would be a long one by foot, and a good day's journey by horseback. It was therefore necessary that they prepare themselves for it. Their obedience must be seen as immediate, for as soon as the will of the Lord was known, the lives of those engaged in it were shaped around the word of the Lord. That is the nature of obedience. It is not something that can be carried out casually or with indifference. When a person obeys the Lord, or comes into accord with his will, their life commences to be lived for a different reason.

Neither Cornelius nor those who were to carry out his word returned to any other duty or activity. They immediately gave their attention to the matter at hand, making due preparations for the trip to get Peter.

THEIR JOURNEY

“ . . . as they went on their journey . . .” Other versions read, “as they were on their way,” NASB “while they were still on their way,” CJB “as these are proceeding on the way.” YLT

In what appears to be nothing more than an incidental phrase, we behold another manner of the kingdom. When an individual becomes involved in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, that will becomes his will. It is, so to speak, personalized. These men owned the way – it was now “their” journey and “their” way. These men, three of them, were technically on a missions for Cornelius, who had been given directions by an angel of God. Yet, after hearing the report of Cornelius and being commissioned by him, the journey now became their own .

These same words – “their journey” – was said of Israel's departure from Egypt (Ex 13:20; 16:1). While these men were doing what they were told, their hearts were in the matter, and the cause of Cornelius became their's.

DREW NIGH TO THE CITY

“ . . . and drew nigh unto the city.” Other versions read, “approaching the city,” NASB “coming near the city,” RSV “Drawing near to the city,” DARBY “coming close to Joppa,” GWN “had only a short distance to go,” NJB “were getting near the town,” WEYMOUTH and “not far from the town.” WILLIAMS

Further Divine activity took place while they were in the process of doing what they were told – as they were drawing near to their destination. This also is the general way in which the Lord directs His people – as they are living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It was after Abraham had left his home for an unidentified land that he received further instructions (Heb 11:8). The same thing took place when he headed for the “land of Moriah” to offer Isaac on an unidentified mountain (Gen 22:2-4). When Israel left Egypt and headed for the promised land, the Lord led them step by step with a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:17-18; 33:21-22). In all of these instances, it was while the people were engaged in the will of the Lord that further insight and direction were provided.

When it comes to matters pertaining to man’s association with the Lord, it has always proved to be accomplished within the framework of obedience and the pursuit of what has already been made known that more clarity is realized. This principle is being lived out in our text.

PETER WENT UP TO PRAY

“ 9b Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour.”

Here is another marvelous example of heavenly coordination. Because the government is upon the shoulder of Christ, and because principalities and powers have been made subject to Him, He can effectively orchestrate the affairs taking place in this world in order to the accomplishment of the will of God. He causes time, people, place, and circumstance to work together, doing so in the midst of adversarial powers.

There is no way that such precision could take place independently of Divine rule. Satan and his wicked hosts would certainly not allow it, if they could, in fact, stop it. Think of what we are beholding here. A number of people are involved, and they are in two different places – Caesarea and Joppa. Two different nationalities are involved – Jew and Gentile. Two different houses are in the scenario – the house of Cornelius and the house of Simon. Five different occupations are involved: a centurion, two servants, one soldier, a tanner, and an apostle. Two specific time periods are employed – the ninth hour and the sixth hour. An angel is employed, as well as the Holy Spirit. Two different visions are included – one is specific, and one is parabolic in nature. Both men are praying at the time heaven contacts them. One man is ignorant of the salvation of God, and the other is informed about it. One man knows Jesus, and the other does not. Devout men are involved – Peter, Cornelius, and a soldier are specifically identified. There is good reason to believe that the servants and Simon the tanner were also in that category.

How likely is it that such a set of circumstance could be marvelously blended together for the accomplishment of a marvelous purpose? Apart from King Jesus, what we are reading about could not possibly have taken place. This is an example of something of what is involved in the Lord directing an individual. Such direction is far more complex, and involves much more activity, than men are prone to think. Ponder what is said on this subject. Ponder the Word on this.

- “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov 3:6).
- “A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Prov 16:9).
- “A wicked man hardeneth his face: but as for the upright, He directeth his way” (Prov 21:29).
- “I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways : he shall build

my city, and he shall let go my captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts” (Isa 45:13).

- “For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will direct their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them” (Isa 61:8).

- “Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you” (1 Thess 3:11).

- “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ” (2 Thess 3:5).

- “Thou in thy mercy hast led forth the people which thou hast redeemed: Thou hast guided them in thy strength unto thy holy habitation” (Exodus 15:13).

- “Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side” (2 Chron 32:22).

- “The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way” (Psa 25:9).

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

- “They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them” (Isa 49:10).

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

- “To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

This kind of direction and guidance is chronicled in this text, and it is in staggering detail.

As the men from Cornelius come close to the city, Peter goes up to the housetop to pray. Thus he will be in a proper frame of mind when he is confronted with this opportunity that is being orchestrated from heaven. The hour is precise – the sixth hour, or at noon. Peter, who is living by faith and walking in the Spirit, is being positioned for Divine direction. It is taking place in a specific city, in a specific house, and at a particular time. It is also calculated to put Peter in a right frame of spirit for the arrival the entourage from Cornelius.

When it comes to Divine involvement, I am not able to say how detailed our own lives may prove to be managed from above. A lot depends on whether or not we are living unto the Lord, with our affection placed on things above, and our hearts and minds involved in sacred activity, all the while avoiding worldly contamination. However, I am persuaded that such involvements are much more detailed than men tend to think. Spiritual alertness will confirm this to be true.

HE BECAME HUNGRY AND WANTED TO EAT

“ 10 And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.”

The normalities of life can prove to be an occasion of unusual benefit, and even revelation and involvement in the will of the Lord. Such times, however, must be attended by a sensitive heart and an alert spirit. It is not often that God forces His way into wayward minds – although there have been

occasions when He has done so, as in the case of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:33) and Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:3-4). In cases such as these a third party was generally involved who has an understanding of the Divine manner and will. Here, however, that will not be the case.

HE BECAME HUNGRY, AND WOULD HAVE EATEN

“And he became very hungry, and would have eaten . . .” Other versions read, “and wanted to eat,” NKJV “was desiring to eat,” NASB “wanted something to eat,” NIV “was looking forward to his meal,” NJB “became unusually hungry and wished for food,” WEYMOUTH and “longed for something to eat.” PHILLIPS

The normalities of life can prove to be an occasion of unusual benefit, and even revelation and involvement in the will of the Lord. Such times, however, must be attended by a sensitive heart and an alert spirit.

The word translated “would have” has the following lexical meaning: “to be resolved, to purpose,” THAYER and “resolve, decision, or design will, intend, purpose, aim.” FRIBERG The idea is that Peter not only wanted to eat, but set out to do something about it. The next verse confirms that some preparations were set in motion. The wording of the verse strongly suggests that they were commenced at the request of Peter. There are some key matters here that are worthy of consideration.

- First, it was while Peter was praying that he became hungry. Among other things, these indicates that prayer does not always suppress natural appetites – even though there are times when it did – such as during the temptation of Jesus (Matt 4:2).
- Second, Peter will experience that war of the Spirit against the flesh. At the same time he is hungry, and had determined to eat something, a conflicting message will be received from heaven.

If what men affirm about Peter being weak, speaking hastily, and sinning a lot, are true, surely they will be accented in the many references to him. However, that is not what is accented, as those familiar with the Word of God know very well,

In this experience, we will be exposed to the strong side of Peter – something that thoughtless ministers often overlook. Religious men who attempt to justify the flesh are fond of pointing out what they feel to be the failures of Peter, even declaring that they were frequent and glaring. This, of course, is altogether wrong. If you were asked to point out five of Peter’s failings, you would have to engage in a concentrated effort to do so. This is particularly significant since so much is said about him. He is the only man named “Peter” in the English Bible – and that name is mentioned one hundred and fifty-eight times. “Cephas,” the Syriac form of “Peter,” is also unique, and is mentioned six times in Scripture. His natural name, “Simon” is mentioned in reference to him forty-six times. There are, then, two hundred and ten direct references to Peter in Scripture. By comparison, Adam is mentioned thirty times, Isaac is mentioned one hundred and twenty-eight times, Jacob is mentioned directly one hundred and sixty-seven times, and Noah fifty-one times. John is mentioned one hundred and thirty-one times, Silas thirteen times, Barnabas twenty-nine times, and Timothy seven times. If what men affirm about Peter being weak, speaking hastily, and sinning a lot, are true, surely they will be accented in the many references to him. However, that is not what is accented, as those familiar with the Word of God know very well,

This event will tell us a lot about Peter, his sensitivity, his devotion, and his readiness to obey the Lord. It will reveal more of his great heart, and of his consistent manner of life. In this verse we see that, so far as the body was concerned, Peter was hungry and desired to eat something immediately. However, an event took place that overrode his bodily appetite. The experience was so powerful that the desire to eat was apparently suspended. His thoughts were directed to other considerations and

activities. Although he had been hungry, eating is not the next thing Peter will do.

HE FELL INTO A TRANCE

“ . . . but while they made ready, he fell into a trance.” Other versions read, “a deep sleep came upon him,” BBE “he went into a visionary state,” CSB “an ecstasy came upon him,” DARBY “there came upon him an extacy of mind,” DOUAY “a trance came over him,” NET and “He fell sound asleep and had a vision,” CEV “he had a vision.” GNB

“ . . . but”

By saying “but,” the text means that instead of eating, Peter’s attention was turned to another consideration. His desire to eat, although strong, was trumped by a weightier matter.

Trance

The word “trance” is an intriguing one, indeed. It speaks of a state that transcends nature. The word from which “trance” is translated is the Greek word **e;kstasij** (ek-sta-sis). The transliteration of the word is “ecstasy,” which confirms that there is no exact English word that parallels it. The root meaning of the word is, “any casting down of a thing from its proper place or state; displacement.” THAYER With that in mind, the lexical meaning of this word is as follows: “a throwing of the mind out of its normal state,” THAYER “as an abnormal state of mind distraction, terror, amazement; (2) as a partially suspended consciousness ecstasy, trance.” FRIBERG

Bible Dictionaries

Various Bible Dictionaries define the word as follows: “a preternatural, absorbed state of mind preparing for the reception of the vision”, EASTON “overpowered by the divine inspiration,” FAUSSET and “The condition expressed by this word is a mental state in which the person affected is partially or wholly unconscious of objective sensations, but intensely alive to subjective impressions which, however they may be originated, are felt as if they were revelations from without.” INTL STD BIBLE ENCY

McClintok & Strong’s Encyclopedia quotes Philip Doddridge, noted theologian from the 1700's, who said the following in definition of a trance: “such a rapture of mind as gives the person who falls into it a look of astonishment, and renders him insensible of the external objects around him, while in the meantime his imagination is agitated in an extraordinary manner with some striking scenes which pass before it and take up all the attention.” A writer named Stockius defines it as, “a sacred ecstasy, or rapture of the mind out of itself, when, the use of the external senses being suspended, God reveals something in a peculiar manner to prophets and apostles, who are then taken or transported out of themselves.”

The English Dictionary

The dictionary definition of the English word “trance” is as follows: “a sleeplike state (as of deep hypnosis) usually characterized by partly suspended animation with diminished or absent sensory and motor activity.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

The Case of Balaam

A parallel word is found twice in the Hebrew Scriptures and is translated “trance.” – particularly in Numbers 24:4 and 16.

- Numbers 24:4: “He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open.”

• Numbers 24:16: “He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open .”

Later English versions translate this word “falls down,” NKJV “falling down,” NASB “falls prostrate.” NIV Other versions accent that the falling was owing to a trance: “falls into a trance,” CSB “falling in a trance,” GENEVA and “falls into a trance.” GWN The English translation of the Septuagint Version (the Greek translation of the Hebrew text) translates Numbers 24:4 as “who saw a vision of God in sleep; his eyes were opened” – almost an exact parallel with our text.

Nave’s Topical Bible

Nave’s Topical Bible lists three Scriptural instances of a trance:

- Balaam (Num 24:4,16)
- Peter (Acts 10:10).
- Paul: “And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance” (Acts 22:17).

The same Greek word is employed in the accounts of Peter and Paul, with most standard versions of Scripture translating it “trance.”

Why I Have Given These Definitions

I give these scholastic definitions to confirm the poverty of the English language to precisely define this word. Ordinarily, definitions assist men in arriving at an understanding. With this word, however, understanding aids in arriving at the definition of the word. The required understanding is not found in language expertise, but in the Word of God itself. Any satisfactory understanding of the word “trance” will only be obtained when there is some acquaintance with Divine manners as they are revealed in the Scriptures. In the definitions that I have provided, a knowledge of the Scriptures was the fundamental basis of the analysis of the word, rather than a knowledge of language itself.

A State of Mind

While the word translated “trance” includes the technical meaning of “falling,” it does not necessarily accent the falling of the body. It appears to have more to do with the falling of the mind into a state in which the things of this world are superseded with a message from above. That is, a “trance” is more a state of mind than it is a state of body. Note the things that are learned from the three instances of a trance that have been noted.

- **Balaam:** He saw a vision while falling into a trance, with his eyes wide open (Num 24:4,16). There was a particular message delivered to him in the vision (24:5-8, 17-24).
- **Peter:** He saw heaven opened, saw a great net let down from heaven, and was given instructions concerning what he was to do. Peter verbally responded to what he saw and heard (Acts 10:11-16). The text refers to what Peter saw and heard as a “vision” (Acts 10:17).
- **Paul:** He saw the Lord, and received specific instructions on what he was to do. Paul also responded verbally to the message (Acts 22:18-21).

The “mind,” which is an aspect of the human make-up that is to be engaged in loving God and doing His will, is not integral to the body itself. It is an aspect of the unseen part of man – the soul and the spirit. Those who equate thinking with the activity of the brain are not correct, and we do well not to refer to the brain as though it was the seat of thought. It is not. Man is not fundamentally physiological, but spiritual.

With these observations in mind, it is obvious to me that a “trance” is a preparatory state – one in which the individual is prepared for a vision, or some form of Divine communication. Some translations interpret the word to include the idea of falling into a sleep. However, what is occurring in a trance is not sleep after the ordinary manner. That is why Balaam referred to his eyes being wide open, even though what he saw was not seen with them. It is why Peter is depicted as praying, and Paul as being in the Temple. It was their mind that was altered, not their body. We know their minds were active, because all of them recounted what took place while they were in a trance – and in great detail. With these things in mind, allow me to make the following observations.

- The “mind,” which is an aspect of the human make-up that is to be engaged in loving God and doing His will, is not integral to the body itself. It is an aspect of the unseen part of man – the soul and the spirit. Those who equate thinking with the activity of the brain are not correct, and we do well not to refer to the brain as though it was the seat of thought. It is not. Man is not fundamentally physiological, but spiritual. When God created man, he became “a living soul,” not a living body! The heart, or center of men, is where thinking, cognition, analysis, and the will, take place (Prov 23:7). Thought and reason will continue after we have departed from the body.

- God has access to the mind apart from the will of man. Peter was praying, not seeking the vision and instruction that he was given. Paul was in the Temple praying when he fell into a trance. There is no indication that he was seeking counsel on whether or not to remain in Jerusalem, yet that is what he received. In both cases, the thoughts of man were governed by God, not the human will. In neither case were thoughts the result of human choice.

- There are some Divine communications that require a suspension of one’s consciousness of worldly surroundings. That is, there are times, strictly determined by God, when a consciousness of this world must be blotted out in order to hear from heaven – when one must be in another state of mind. I understand these to be an exception to the norm. Therefore, man cannot schedule or control them.

- God can profitably employ the mind while man is inactive bodily, and not aware of his worldly surroundings. The marvel is that such times have to do with cognition, and therefore have a direct impact upon human decision and conduct.

SOMETHING TO NOTE

There is something here of particular interest. Peter was engaged in two normalities – one spiritual, and one natural. He was praying, which was a spiritual, and he was hungry, which was natural. In the process of these normal activities, something abnormal, or extraordinary, took place. When it did, the occasion proved to be the means of altering the thrust of his thoughts. It was also the prelude to his involvement in a most extraordinary event.

While I would not pretend to suppose that we should expect such things to happen to us, it seems to me that living by faith and walking in the Spirit make us available for such involvements. When we are duly cultured in our spirits, and “prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21), we at once become candidates for Divine employment. Faith also brings the ability to recognize and respond to such opportunities. In the modern church, this appears to be a relatively unexplored facet of spiritual life.

HEAVEN WAS OPENED

“ 11 And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth . . . ”

What Peter is now given to see is outside of the realm of nature. There is no natural aptitude adapted

for such a sight. This confirms there is another very real kingdom that presently exists in our surroundings. When the Spirit speaks of the scheduled removal of the present heavens and earth, He refers to it as a shaking that will bring it all down, or removing it. He then makes a salient comment about things that cannot be shaken. “Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain ” (Heb 12:26-27). By saying “remain,” the Spirit has made clear that “those things” presently exist, even though the natural senses cannot detect or discern them. What Peter now beholds is taking place in that domain, which presently exists all around us.

We know from Scripture that this unseen domain is the superior one, for “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). Notwithstanding its superiority, sin has raised an impenetrable barrier between mankind and this dominating realm. There have been times, however, when God Almighty has given favored men the ability to see things for which the Adamic nature has not been adapted. This is one of those rare occasions.

HE SAW HEAVEN OPENED

“ And saw heaven opened . . .” Other versions read, “beheld the sky opened up,” NASB “saw the heavens opening,” BBE “the open sky,” IE and “observes heaven [or, the sky] having been opened.” ALT

The Greek word translated “heaven” is **ouvrano.n** , and it is in the single: “heaven,” not heavens. Literally, the word means “the heights above, the upper regions.” It is used in a way that means “the vaulted expanse of the Sky with all the things visible in it.” THAYER When used in this way, it is generally in the plural, not the singular (Heb 1:10; 2 Pet 3:5,10,12). It is also used to describe a division of nature, distinguishing between the celestial and the terrestrial – i.e. “heaven and earth” (Matt 5:18; 11:25; Lk 16:17; Acts 4:24; Rev 10:6). The word is also used to describe "the region above the sidereal heavens, the seat of an order of things eternal and consummately perfect, where God dwells and the other heavenly beings” (2 Cor 12:2; Eph 4:10; Acts 7:49; Matt 5:16). THAYER Jesus also used this word when He said He came “from heaven” (John 3:18; 6:38,41). Paul used it when He referred to Jesus as “the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor 15:47). This word is also used to describe the abode of angels (Matt 24:36; 22:30; Lk 2:15). This same word is employed to describe a domain in which certain “things” exist (Eph 1:10; Col 1:16,20). It is also used to identify the place where God’s will is done (Matt 6:10). When Jesus returns, He will “be revealed from heaven” (I Thess 1:7).

Add to this the fact that the definite article is used to identify what was opened (**to.n ouvrano.n** – THE heaven). It seems to me that this being a revelation from God to Peter, the “heaven” that was opened was the domain in which God, Christ, and the holy angels reside. While it may very well be clear that what was seen was perceived as being brought down through the heavens that are above the earth, that was not the source of the vision – and the source if the point.

When heaven is opened some settled reality is being revealed by God. This is something that only the Lord can do. Men cannot cause the heaven to be opened, or peer into Divine mysteries at will. Further, owing to the debilitating effects of sin, appointed epochs are generally attended by some sign or heavenly manifestation.

There are at least six times in Scripture when heaven, or the heavens, are said to have been opened. They are arresting to consider.

- **Ezekiel sees visions of God:** “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river of Chebar, that the heavens were opened , and I saw visions of God” (Ezek 1:1).

- **At Jesus’ baptism:** “And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of

the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Matt 3:16; Mk 1:10).

In each case, the things that were seen were revelations that in some way revealed God and His purpose. There is no way that the knowledge that was dispensed at that time could have been acquired by a scholastic discipline. In fact, the revelation contradicts man’s perception.

When Stephen was martyred: “And said, Behold, I see the heavens opened , and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God” (Acts 7:56).

• **Peter’s vision of the net:** “And saw heaven opened , and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth” (Acts 10:11).

• **John on Patmos:** “After this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven : and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me; which said, Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter” (Rev 4:1).

• **John on Patmos:** “And I saw heaven opened , and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war” (Rev 19:11).

There are some indirect references to heaven being opened – times when men were enabled to see what was taking place in that sacred domain.

• **Micaiah the Prophet:** “And he said, Hear thou therefore the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting on his throne, and all the host of heaven standing by him on his right hand and on his left” (1 Kgs 22:19).

• **Isaiah the Prophet:** “In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple” (Isa 6:1).

• **Daniel the Prophet:** “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him” (Dan 7:13).

• **Zechariah the Prophet:** “And He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him” (Zech 3:1).

This is not intended to be a complete list, but confirms that such occasions were not common. In each case, the things that were seen were revelations that in some way revealed God and His purpose. There is no way that the knowledge that was dispensed at that time could have been acquired by a scholastic discipline. In fact, the revelation contradicts man’s perception.

I am drawing attention to this fact to accent the rarity of what was happening. This was truly an epoch.

A CERTAIN VESSEL DESCENDING UNTO HIM

“ . . . and a certain vessel . . . as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners . . .” Other versions read, “an object like a great sheet,” NKJV and “something like a large sheet.” NIV

The word translated “vessel” is **skeu/o,j** , and it does mean “vessel.” It is also employed in a number of ways in Scripture.

- Mark 11:16 – Jesus would not allow anyone to carry a vessel through the Temple.
- Luke 8:16 – No man covers a candle with a vessel.
- John 19:29 – A vessel filled with vinegar from which they drew some with a sponge

to give to Jesus on the cross.

- Acts 10:11,16; 11:5 – The vessel let down to Peter
- Romans 9:21,22 and 2 Timothy 2:20 – People are referred to as vessels for either noble or ignoble purposes.
- 2 Corinthians 4:7 and 1 Thessalonians 4:4 – Our bodies are referred to as vessels.
- Hebrews 9:21 – Vessels used in the Tabernacle ministry.
- 1 Peter 3:7 – Wives are referred to as “weaker vessels.”
- Revelation 2:27 – The wicked that will be conquered by the righteous are referred to as vessels which will be broken to pieces.
- Revelation 18:12 – The merchandise in which spiritual Babylon traffics includes “vessels.”

In each of these cases the point is what was in the vessel, or the purpose for which the vessel was employed. It was not the vessel itself. So it is in this vision. Peter’s attention is not drawn to the container, but what is in the container. Thus Peter’s attention is drawn to something to consider, not merely something to see. He is being summoned into the arena of thought, not that of visual tantalization or some form of visible entertainment.

While it may appear a very incidental point, much of what is being parading today as coming from God is nothing more than a vessel with no profitable contents. In fact, the contents are often defiling, and no genuine spiritual point is delivered through them. As we should expect, this will not be the case with this vision. In fact, it is what is in the net that becomes the total object of consideration. Compare this to the contents of a modern song (which is a vessel), or the actual teaching in a sermon (which is also a vessel).

Emphasizing that this was a matter being controlled by the Lord, and supervised for His glory, the sheet was deliberately held together at the four corners. That is, there was no part of it that was not being managed from heaven. There was no randomness in the vision, for sober thought cannot be accomplished when there is not a certain symmetry in the presentation. That is, it is within the context of Divine order that illumination and learning are delivered. Those who insist on couching things purported to be of God, in mystery are like people trying to carry goods in a sheet that is not being held together by the corners. They only generate a lot of confusion, and what they bring is to be shunned by the saints (2 Tim 2: 16).

DESCENDING TO HIM

“ . . . descending unto him . . . ” Other versions read, “a great sheet coming down.” NASB

Here is a marvelous example of the precision associated with the revelation and works of God. As large as the natural heavens may appear to men, together with the vastness of the surface of the earth, they are impressive only to humanity. God can open heaven and deal with a single individual, on a specific rooftop, of a particular house, owned by a given person, on a distinct day, and at a certain point in time. Now, that kind of revelation requires a Lord who is in total control, and whose purposes cannot be thwarted.

Keep in mind that this sheet is being lowered through Satan’s domain, who is “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). Heaven’s rule of this world, and the manner in which Jesus is maintaining the government, is that precise! That is why “if God be for us, who can be against us” (Rom 8:31).

LET DOWN TO THE EARTH

“ . . . and let down to the earth. . . ” Other versions read, “lowered . . . to the ground,” NASB “being

let down to earth,” NIV “being lowered to the ground,” CSB and “It descended from heaven to the earth.” MRD

The sheet did not fall down to the earth, but was let down to it – an expression of Divine focus and control. This was something that was intentionally done, and was intended to accomplish a specific purpose. Nothing comes from heaven by happenstance, nor is revelation in any of its forms nothing more than a kind of spilling over of the truth. When it comes to the things of God, things “that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3), men understand what God gives them to know, and nothing more. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He explained why He taught the multitudes differently than He taught His disciples. “And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand” (Luke 8:10). Paul referred to the same principle when he explained why all of the Jews were not excluded from the salvation of God. “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Rom 11:7).

The point to be seen here is that any gracious activity of God toward man reveals His will. The Lord does not make Himself known to men merely to assist them in some temporal dilemma. Man is never at the heart of Divine intention. Rather, He makes Himself known to men in order to bring them into accord with Himself. There is something to be known at that time. It is not a mere experiment, but is more of a prelude to further involvement in His good, and acceptable, and perfect will. This text will confirm that this is the case. In it we will behold God working salvation in the midst of the earth (Psa 74:12).

A TEST OR A REVELATION?

“ 12 Wherein were all manner of four footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.” Other versions read, “all kinds of four-footed animals, as well as reptiles of the earth and birds of the air,” NIV “all sorts of animals, snakes and birds [forbidden to the Jews for food],” LIVING

We know from what follows that these were, according to the Law given to Israel, unclean animals. They came from three different groups: four-footed animals, creeping things (or reptiles), and the winged fowl. At this point, it will be profitable to list the animals that were unclean. All of the prohibited meats faintly reflected spiritual conditions. While this is a matter of personal observation, I will mention some of them for your consideration.

- **Flying insects than crawl on all fours** (Lev 11:20). Exceptions to this rule included those with jointed legs that could leap off of the earth, which were locusts and grasshoppers (Lev 11:21-23). The class of insect that was clean could leap off of the earth. This is also a reflection of the distinction between spiritual and unspiritual people. Those with the Spirit can get above the earth – the worldly order. Those who are not spiritual do not have this capacity.

- **Whatever crawled upon its belly** (Lev 11:42a). This includes snakes, who were cursed to navigate on their belly in the dust of earth (Gen 3:14). It also includes worms and maggots. These, like unspiritual people, stay close to the earth and multiply while they move about on it. On the other hand, those who are spiritual choose to avoid close contact with the world, preferring the posture of strangers and pilgrims in it.

- **Whatever crawled on all four on the earth, and those with multiple feet** (Lev 11:42b). This includes moles, rats, hedgehogs, centipedes, caterpillars, spiders, etc. These creatures are especially close to the earth, and burrow in it. They also portray the nature of the carnal which crawls about in worldly muck, and burrows in darkness.

- **Four footed beasts that did not chew the cud and have divided hoofs.** These

included the camel, the rabbit, the cony (rock badger), and the swine (Deut 14:7-9). Chewing the cud is similar to meditation – a process in which the things of God are brought up again and passed through the spiritual digestive system. The parted hoof was one that could not become clogged with the dirt and mire through which the animal traversed. Here again, the distinction between the godly and the ungodly is portrayed. The godly meditate and muse upon the things of God, also not allowing the world to stick, so to speak, upon them. Those who are carnal may make an effort to meditate, but do not separate from the world. Or, they may give an appearance of separation from the world, yet their minds are not processing the truth. The ungodly cannot do both of these simultaneously, and generally are not capable of either one of them in any measure.

• **water creatures that did not have both fins and scales** (Lev 11:9-10; Deut 14:10). Fins enabled the fish to move more rapidly in the waters, while scales prohibited vermin and other malignant growths from forming upon the fish. These also reflect the distinction between the carnal and the spiritual. The spiritual are able to move about in life more rapidly, thereby escaping many of its snares. They are also protected against the malignancies, of this world clinging to them. In these matters, the godly are not so.

• **Unclean birds** included eagles, buzzards, kites, falcons, ravens, owls, gulls, hawks, pelicans, cormorants, storks, herons, hoopoes, bats, and everything that crawled and flew (Deut 14:12-19). Many of these fowls tend to be scavengers, and are also creatures of the night. They too reflect the nature of both the old man. The old man loves the darkness, and feeds on things that are spiritually dead. However, the new man is a creature of the light, and feeds on things that make for life.

Whatever conclusions are delivered from heaven on this subject will be the final word concerning it. I say this because a great number of people say that this passage has nothing whatsoever to do with our view of clean and unclean foods. Such people teach that the distinctions in foods made within the Law was owing to their nature, and that the dietary practices and health of the people were the fundamental thing. However, this kind of reasoning is flawed to the core. That would mean that what was revealed to Peter about the Gentiles was actually founded on a vision that did not portray reality.

In Scripture a valid conclusion or teaching is never based upon a condition that does not exist. Notwithstanding the objections of those whose god is their belly, this passage will confirm that a distinction in foods no longer exists. Those who teach men to honor the Levitical laws concerning foods are not using the Scriptures properly. While there may be practical opinions concerning proper diets and the likes, they must not be imposed upon men as though they related to life before God. I will be dogmatic on this point as it is developed later.

Now, Peter is confronted with a sheet filled with animals that were forbidden to the Jews. Is it a test, or is it the prelude to Divine tutelage – or is it both? What will Peter be told to do, and how will he respond to the directive?

HEAVENLY DIRECTION

“ 13 And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.”

Peter was hungry, and now a voice from heaven gives him an opportunity to satisfy his hunger. The directions are clear, and while they are introductory to a more significant point, they must be taken seriously. Peter is to get up, kill some of the beasts in the lowered sheet, and eat, satisfying his hunger. The only complication is the nature of the foods within the sheet.

This word has come from heaven, from whence the clean and unclean distinctions of foods were given under the Law. On the surface, it will appear to be a contradictory word, which will dictate the

way in which Peter responds to it.

Right here we are being exposed to a Divine manner through which the truth is brought home to the heart with strength. Peter is given something to think about – something to assess. As a wise scribe, he must reach into the bag of human thought and perception and reason upon what he is being shown. As we will find, the purpose of this vision is not to establish what kind of food Peter is to eat. It is rather intended to pave the way for carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles. However, before that is done, Peter must first understand a condition that exists concerning which he is not yet clear – clean and unclean foods.

The reason for the necessity of this understanding is that the ceremonial law was never intended to be an end of itself. It foreshadowed reality, but was not the reality itself. It rather introduced spiritual verity that, when revealed, superseded the Law, or were characterized by a greater glory. This is involved in Paul's exposition of the great glory of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:7-11).

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

There is a principle of understanding that is integral to godly reasoning. First, consideration, or thoughtfulness, must begin with God's revelation – what He has made known. That is the subject of consideration. It is the matter that is to be comprehended. It is not proper to make it our primary aim to understand what men have said. Such an understanding will not enlarge the border of godly wisdom and spiritual understanding. Not knowing this, some sincere men have squandered a lot of their time with their primary objective being to understand men, or what men have said.

On one occasion, when Jesus was teaching His disciples, He likened the Kingdom of God to several different things: 1) A man who sowed wheat in his field, only to have an enemy come in while men slept, and sow tares in the same field (Matt 13:37-43). 2) A man who found a treasure in a field, and sold all that he had to buy the field (Matt 13:44). 3) A merchant man who was in quest of "goodly pearls, who, upon finding one pearl of great price, sold all that he had and bought that pearl (Matt 13:45-46). 4) A net that was cast into the sea, gathering fish of every kind. Upon being drawn to shore, the bad fish were thrown away, and the good fish were gathered into vessels (Matt 13:47-50). At the conclusion of His words He asked the disciples, "Have ye understood these things?" The disciples said, "Yea, Lord" (Matt 13:51). It is then that He delivered this word: "Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old" (Matt 13:52).

The "treasure" of which Jesus spoke was the individual's knowledge and recollection of certain things. These were resources for processing thoughts. New things would be things newly learned, or revealed. Old things would be things already known, or formerly revealed. An attempt to understand a matter often involves integrating what is known with what has been revealed, yet is not yet clearly discerned.

This is what is going to take place in our text. Something will be required of Peter that is, in a sense, new – to rise, kill an unclean animal, and eat it. Immediately he will reach into his intellectual treasury to find something pertaining to this matter. What he finds does not integrate with what he has heard, and he will express that to the Lord.

The outcome of it all will be good, but it did involve using the knowledge that was obtained, comparing it to what had been made known, and arriving at a new conclusion. That conclusion will be based upon the newest insight, and will replace an understanding that was but introductory.

I have observed that some people cannot reason properly because they have nothing of significance in their scribal treasury. Most of what they have is nothing more than the religious traditions of men – and the traditions themselves are fundamentally flawed. For this reason, statements of Scripture

are often confusing and difficult to understand. It was in this sense that Jesus charged the perpetrators of these traditions with shutting up the Kingdom of God so that none could enter (Matt 23:13), and taking away the key of knowledge (Lk 11:52).

It is difficult to estimate the spiritual damage that occurs when the religious mind feeds upon the traditions of men, and is not exposed regularly to the truth of God. The mind is thus being cluttered with all kinds of contaminating thoughts that are much like poison to the soul. Unlike Timothy, who “knew the Scriptures” from his childhood (2 Tim 3:15), these poor souls do not have good things in their treasury. That is why their reasoning is unacceptable.

THE DICTATES OF THE CONSCIENCE

“ 14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.”

It is important that we peruse this text properly, and not impose upon it the thinking of the corrupt theology of our time. Much is revealed in this passage concerning the impact of “an honest and good heart”

Here, we will be exposed to the power of the conscience. Heaven has contacted Peter, and he knows it. Yet, he will refuse to do what he is told. It is important that we peruse this text properly, and not impose upon it the thinking of the corrupt theology of our time. Much is revealed in this passage concerning the impact of “an honest and good heart” (Lk 8:15). Because of the wave of religious distractions, focused and sober thought is not common in our time. However, that circumstance is not a Kingdom normality, and ought not to be treated as though it was. For believers, contemporary standards are to be established according to Scripture, and in strict harmony with the pilgrimage-nature of spiritual life. Where this is not done, confusion and division are the inevitable results.

NOT SO, LORD

“But Peter said, Not so, Lord . . .” Other versions read, “By no means, Lord,” NASB “Surely not, Lord!” NIV “No, Lord,” RSV “in no wise, Lord,” DARBY “Far be it from me,” DOUAY “I can’t do that, Lord,” GWN “Certainly not, sir,” NAB “God forbid, Lord,” TNT “Never, Lord,” LIVING “I would never do that, Lord,” IE “Absolutely not, Lord,” ISV “Never by any means, sir,” WILLIAMS “No, by no means, Lord,” AMPLIFIED and “Most certainly not, Lord!” ALT

The words “Not so” are significant, and it is important that we understand them. They are translated from a single Greek word – **Mhdamw/j** (may-dam-occe). This word is used four times in the New Testament Scriptures – twice by Jesus, and in two accounts of the event we are considering (Acts 10:14; 11:8). The texts in which Jesus used this word are as follows. I have emphasized the word that is translated from the Greek word.

- “If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having NO part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light” (Luke 11:36).
- “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have NO more that they can do” (Luke 12:4).

It is apparent from the above texts that the word we are considering does not reflect a rebellious spirit. It is not a word of refusal, even though some of the versions of Scripture suggest this to be the case: “I can’t do that,” GWN “Certainly not,” NAB “I would never do that,” IE “Absolutely not,” ISV and “Most certainly not!” ALT I realize that many of the translators have the notion that we should bring the text closer to the people. However, I have a contention with that type of thinking. It seems to me that the aim of the preacher and teacher is to bring the people closer to the text.

Peter was not saying, I refuse to that! Or, I will not do that! He was rather reflecting his

understanding of the holy Law of God, which He perceived as forbidding such an action. It is what God had said that, in his understanding, forbade him to do what he was told to do. In other words, he could not violate his conscience – a conscience that had been formed by the Law to which he had been subjected. Technically, we will find that he was not correct in his assessment of the case. However, it was because he refused to violate his conscience, that he personally came to see the error in his thinking.

Paul had the same experience when he set out to persecute the church of God., He did not do this out of a personal hatred for believers, but because he saw them as violating the Law of God., He was also incorrect in his assessment, but he also refused to dishonor his conscience, which had also been formed by the Law. Like Peter, Paul refused to ignore his conscience. He confessed to the Jewish council, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). That is precisely what Peter is saying. Furthermore, like Peter, Paul’s conscience was made more perfect, and he too changed his mind.

Whether we are speaking of the Old Covenant or the New Covenant, “the end [purpose, NKJV goal, NASB] of the commandment is . . . a good conscience .” (1 Tim 1:5). In Christ, that objective is enlarged to include charity out of a pure heart, and faith that is not feigned or pretentious. A “good conscience” does not speak of a person who simply feels they ought to do this or that. Such feelings can be driven by fleshly lusts, and reflect a mindset that regards self above all else – God included. A person, for example, may say their conscience does not condemn them because they smoke, or drink, or gamble. However, such a conscience has not been formed by the Word of God – not even an incorrect understanding of the Word of God.

In the Scriptures, a person who is said to have been living with a good conscience is one who has been living to please the Lord. They may have been incorrect in their assessments of God, but that incorrectness was not owing to the preference of self. It was rather the result of an imperfect understanding – or a “weak conscience” (1 Cor 8:12).

This is a vital distinction, for no person has been granted license by the Creator to live for themselves, without regard to God Almighty. Even if they have a deficient understanding, they are to honor their conscience, and not smite it to the ground with the bludgeon of self-will. In due time, God will bring further light to such souls, even as he is doing in our text – both to Cornelius and to Peter.

I HAVE NEVER . . .

“ . . . for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.” Other versions read, “unholy and unclean,” NASB “impure or unclean,” NIV “profane or unclean,” NRSV “I have never taken food which is,” BBE “polluted or unclean,” GENEVA “defiled and ritually unclean,” NET “anything that our Jewish laws have declared impure and unclean,” NLT “at no time did I,” YLT “I have never in all my life eaten such creatures, for they are forbidden by our Jewish laws,” LIVING “I have never yet eaten anything . . .” WEYMOUTH “anything common, or not ceremonially cleansed,” WILLIAMS “anything that is common and unhallowed or [ceremonially] unclean,” AMPLIFIED “For not once in my life have I ever eaten anything . . .” PHILLIPS “anything] common [fig., ritually impure] or unclean [or, which defiles],” ALT and “anything that is unclean and not fit to eat.” CEV

This is a remarkable statement, and separates Peter from the masses of religious people in our time – even before He became a disciple of Jesus. I have already referred to the laws specifying clean and unclean meats. They were extensive, and required analysis and deliberate action. They did not allow for a change of the rules in a time of hardship, or an adjustment of the standards under unusual circumstances.

It is generally thought that Peter was one of the older disciples. If this was so, it accents all the more the manner of life that he lived. He states to the Lord that he had “ never eaten anything that is

common or unclean” – never! The word “never” is an especially strong one. It is translated from the Greek word **ouvde,pote** , and has the following lexical meaning. “Denying absolutely and objectively, not ever,” THAYER and “not at any time,” FRIBERG “not ever, at no time.” LOUW-NIDA The clear meaning is that in all of his life there was not a single time when Peter ate something forbidden by the Law – not so much as one time!

This kind of discipline is not common in the Western world – particular when it comes to food. Yet, this is how a noble Jew lived, of which Peter was surely one. Whatever people may think about any crudeness in Peter, or hastiness to do something that was not right, or to assert his own will, it is good to give due consideration to this text. At a mature age, he could say to the Lord Himself with all honesty that he had never allowed any food forbidden by the law to come into his mouth.

ABOUT “JEWISH LAWS”

Some of the Bible versions take the liberty of referring to “Jewish laws” (NLT–New Living Translation, YLT–Young’s Literal Translation, Living Bible), “ritually unclean” (NET–The Net Bible), “not ceremonially cleansed” (Williams), “ceremonially unclean” (Amplified), and “ritually impure” (CEV–Contemporary English Version).

In my judgment, these version have misrepresented the case, as though Peter was giving honor to a national law, or the Jewish way of doing things. This was emphatically not the case. He did this because of His devotion to God Himself. That is why he honored the Law, not simply because he was a Jew.

It is possible for a person to do the right thing for the wrong reason – like being baptized because the church requires it, or abstaining from fornication out of a fear of contacting a deadly disease, or keeping yourself pure in the prospect of marriage. However noble such causes may appear, they are not noble enough. At some point the individual must be moved by the fear of God and faith in Christ. The commandments of God are to honored because of Him, not because of some temporal advantage they are perceived as bringing to us. And, surely they are not to be kept to please a religious sect.

THE SECOND TIME

“ 15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

Heaven will reply to the response of Peter, confirming that his answer was not a rebellious one, and that he was being prepared for involvement in the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. This, of course, is an aspect of Divine fellowship. It is a two-way engagement. Here it in words. Such fellowship can also take place in musings and deep thought.

THE VOICE

“And the voice spake unto him again . . .” There have been dreams and visions in which nothing is recorded to have been said. These include Joseph’s dreams (Gen 37:5-10), the dreams of the baker and butler who were in prison with Joseph (Gen 40:5-13), Pharaoh’s dreams (Gen 41:1-7), Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2:29-45), and Daniel’s vision (Dan 8:1-12). These, however, were the exception to the rule. Visions were nearly always attended by intelligent words. Those involved in such communications include Abraham (Gen 15:1), Jacob (Gen 46:2), prophets (Num 12:6), Balaam (Num 24:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:4-14), Nathan (2 Sam 7:17), Daniel (Dan 2:19), Obadiah (Obad 1:1), Zecharias (Lk 1:11-22), the women who came to the tomb (Lk 24:23), Ananas (Acts 9:10), Cornelius (Acts 10:3), and Paul (Acts 16:9).

In all of these things, the significance and value of the dreams or visions was found in what was

said in or about them. An appeal was made to their minds.

This is what will take place in our text. There will be an appeal to Peter's mind. He will be required to review something he thinks is true, reassessing it in view of something God has done – something he had apparently not yet comprehended.

I fear that this is a facet of spiritual life that has been greatly minimized in our time. One of the great weaknesses of the modern church is its thoughts and perceptions. Comprehension is the revealed objective of God for His people (Eph 1:18-20; 3:18-19; Col 1:9). They are categorically told, "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is" (Eph 5:17). I acknowledge that the fulfillment of this objective would put a great host of religious professionals out of business. However, they need to be put out of business, because they have brought no spiritual advantage to the people of God.

These words accent that what was said this time differed from what was said the first time. A second oracle was delivered. The first one had to do with what Peter was to do. The second had to do with what God had already done. In the Scripture, "the second time" does not speak of mere repetition, but rather speaks of an advanced word or work.

Now we will see how God goes about promoting an increase in understanding in Peter, and how Peter himself responds to Divine overtures.

THE SECOND TIME

“. . . the second time”

These words accent that what was said this time differed from what was said the first time. A second oracle was delivered. The first one had to do with what Peter was to do. The second had to do with what God had already done. In the Scripture, "the second time" does not speak of mere repetition, but rather speaks of an advanced word or work. A few illustrations from Scripture will serve to substantiate this point.

- When Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to God, he headed for the designated place, and there commenced to complete the sacrifice as he was instructed. However, "the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven," instructing him not to do anything to Isaac. Now the angel knew that Abraham truly feared God. After Abraham had offered a ram in the place of Isaac, Abraham called the name of that place Jehovahjireh, which means "the Lord will see to it" (Gen 22:10-14). At that time "the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time." This time the angel promised the Lord would bless Abraham with blessing, multiply his seed, and blessing all nations of the earth because he obeyed the Lord (Gen 22:15-18).
- It was when Joseph's brothers had returned to Egypt "the second time" that he revealed himself to them (Acts 7:13; Gen 45:1-13).
- It was when the Lord appeared to Solomon "the second time" that He confirmed He had heard Solomon's prayer of consecration for the Temple, also promising that He would never allow David's throne to pass away, reserving it for the Christ (1 Kgs 9:2-5).
- When the angel of the Lord appeared to fleeing Elijah "again the second time," he provided a meal of rich fare for him that enabled him to go in the strength of it for forty days (1 Kgs 19:7-8).
- Through Isaiah God promised He would "set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from

the islands of the sea” (Isa 11:11).

- Three times Jeremiah said the word of the Lord came to him “the second time ” (Jer 1:13; 13:3;33:1).
- The hope of the church is the appearing of Christ “the second time ” (Heb 9:28).

In all of these instances, there was an extension of the involvement of men. They confirmed that the Lord finishes what He begins. It also goes without saying that this circumstance requires the increased awareness of the listener, and an alertness to perceive what is being said.

GOD HATH CLEANSED

“What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.” Other versions read, “What God hath cleansed no longer consider unholy,” NASB “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean,” NIV “What God has made clean, you must not call profane,” NRSV “Stop treating as unclean what God has made clean,” CJB “The things that God hath purified, pollute thou not,” GENEVA “Don't say that the things which God has made clean are impure,” GWN and “What God has made clean, you have no right to call profane.” NJB

At once we see that God will not allow for ideas to be entertained that are at variance with what He has said. Men may speak of having a right to their opinion, and the promotion of rights of free speech – but God does not. I understand there are certain political advantages to these things. Notwithstanding, such are never the focus of Divine communication.

Peter is looking at a sheet that contains all manner of living creatures. According to the Law, he sees them as falling into the category of “unclean.” That means that throughout his life he had made a point to know precisely what God had identified as unclean, and then to avoid contaminating himself by eating those creatures. Right there we find a startling difference between serious Jewish people and the Gentile church. They made it their business to understand the covenant that was given to them. In our time, we find multitudes of professing Christians that do not have the faintest idea of the nature of the New Covenant, and of the matters that are made known under the administration of Jesus.

“What God hath Cleansed”

Now a voice from heaven informs Peter that what he has seen as unclean has actually been cleansed by God, and is no longer unclean. In other words, the stipulations of the ceremonial law were no longer valid. They had been superceded by a greater glory.

The cleansing was very real, rendering the clean and unclean distinction in foods no longer valid. The Old Covenant “stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances,” (Heb 9:10), but that is not the manner of the New Covenant.

And, when did God “cleanse” these meats, making them fit for consumption? He did it through a word that was delivered by His only begotten Son. About midway through His ministry, Jesus confronted the Jewish leaders with the vanity of their religion. His words were occasioned by a question the Pharisees and scribes asked Him about His disciples. “Why walk not Thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?” (Mark 7:5). The Lord then launched into a scathing rebuke of these men for their hypocrisy, telling them they had made the Word of God “of none effect” through their tradition.

Jesus then turned called all of the people to Himself, and delivered an arresting word. Here is the record. “And when He had called all the people unto him, He said unto them, Hearken unto Me every one of you, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man. If any man have ears

to hear, let him hear” (Mark 7:14- 16). His disciples did not understand what He had said, Therefore, “when He was entered into the house from the people, His disciples asked Him concerning the parable” Mark 7:17). Jesus immediately responded saying, “Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?” (Mark 7:18-19).

The last expression in verse nineteen is an explanation of what Jesus had accomplished in these words: “purging all meats.” This is, in fact, a parenthetical statement – a saying that elaborated on His previous words. Other versions read, “This he said, making all meats clean,” ASV “thus purifying all foods,” NKJV “(Thus He declared all foods clean),” NASB (“In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean),” NIV “As a result, He made all foods clean,” CSB “By saying this, Jesus declared all foods acceptable,” GWN “by saying this, he declared that every kind of food is acceptable in God's eyes,” NLT and “Thus He was making and declaring all foods [ceremonially] clean [that is, abolishing the ceremonial distinctions of the Levitical Law].” AMPLIFIED This is the cleansing to which the heavenly voice referred.

The cleansing was very real, rendering the clean and unclean distinction in foods no longer valid. The Old Covenant “stood only in meats and drinks, and diverse washings, and carnal ordinances,” (Heb 9:10), but that is not the manner of the New Covenant. As Paul confirmed, those who command “to abstain from meats” are out of order, speaking lies out of their hypocrisy. Paul goes on to substantiate that all meats have, in fact been cleansed, are good for food, and are to be received with thanksgiving: “. . . meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:3-5).

Now, in our text, Peter is informed, and all other men as well, “What God has cleansed and pronounced clean, do not you defile and profane by regarding and calling common and unhallowed or unclean!” AMPLIFIED Add to that the words of Paul: “But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse” (1 Cor 8:8). Those, therefore, who would bind the Levitical laws concerning foods upon us ought to be dismissed from the church, for God has made no place for their words. They are more closely related to the Pharisees than Jesus, and their words are to be summarily rejected. They contradict the voice that spoke to Peter, the teaching of the Lord Jesus, and the exposition of Paul. No man is to attempt to speak in contradiction of God, for He will be justified in all of His sayings!

The importance of this saying will be confirmed by its contribution to the opening of Peter’s understanding concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles. This entire incident also shows the strength required to overturn wrong views – wrong, not because they are the outgrowth of rebellion, but because something God has done is not known.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN THE CLEANSING

It is necessary that we have an understanding of what was involved in the cleansing of all foods. This has to do with what is referred to as the ceremonial law. It is related to the Ten Commandments, which were the “words of the covenant” that God made with Israel. This is what Apostolic writings refer to as the “ordinances” that accompanied the Law: “Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace” (Eph 2:15). The book of Hebrews refers to these ceremonies as “carnal ordinances,” imposed upon the people until the time of the New Covenant, which was the time of reformation, or the “new order.” NIV “Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal

ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation,” or “of the complete new order when Christ, the Messiah, shall establish the reality of what these things foreshadow—a better covenant” AMPLIFIED (Heb 9:9-10).

These ordinances, ceremonies, feasts, and various washings, were the ordained means of Israel living within the parameters of the Old Covenant. The people were not made better in the fulfillment of them, nor did they obtain the remission of sins through them. That is why it is written that they were not made “perfect, as pertaining to the conscience.” Even after the highest ceremony of all – the day of atonement – the priest and the people went away with a reminder of their sins, not a sense of forgiveness (Heb 10:1-4). Nevertheless, the various washings and ceremonies were the appointed means of them living unto the Lord, or having the Lord at the center of their lives.

This approach was put in place because Israel did not have new hearts, and were therefore primarily directed by outward means. The distinction in foods, holy days, new moons, and Sabbath days were, in fact, “a shadow of things to come.” They were not the real thing, for “the substance is of Christ” (Col 2:17). They pointed to something else, and were not an end of themselves. That is, the real issue before God was not what the people did, but what they themselves were. They were a people whose thoughts were not in synch with those of God, and that was an unacceptable condition (Isa 55:8-9). The only way their works could in any way please God were for them to, through ordained procedures and ceremonies, reflect the spiritual substance that would be realized with the induction of the New Covenant. That was the intent of the ceremonial law – to provide a rational depiction of things to come. They had nothing whatsoever to do with sound agriculture, or the health of the body, or a Divinely approved pattern of behavior.

Therefore, when Christ brought the real bread (John 6:35,48), the living water (John 4:10-11; John 7:38), spiritual washing (1 Cor 6:11; Eph 5:26; Tit 3:5; Heb 10:22), and eternal rest (Heb 4:1-5, 8-11), the other things, contained in the ceremonial Law, ceased to have any validity, for they were only introductory. When what they introduced was given to the people, there was no further need for the introduction – just as when Jesus came, the introductory ministry of John the Baptist was no longer required. The shadow and the substance cannot continue simultaneously. This is because the substance has a greater glory that causes the glory of the shadow to diminish – like the light of the moon and the stars in the glory of the light of the sun.

This was the circumstance Paul delineated in the third chapter of Second Corinthians. “For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious” (2 Cor 3:9-11).

The New Covenant is like the sun, which sheds its greater light, dispelling the darkness, and outshining all lesser lights, so that they are no longer prominent. The Old Covenant itself, which rested upon the doing of man, is like the moon, which had a glory of its own, yet was inferior to the glory of the New Covenant. The ceremonial law was like the stars, numerous in number, yet which are even lesser lights than the moon. In nature, the inferior light of the moon and the stars are no longer visible when the sun has risen to its apex. So it is in the spiritual economy. When the New Covenant was inaugurated, it emitted a glory that caused the glory of the Old Covenant and its attending ordinances to fade away.

It is important to see that the New Covenant did not simply replace old laws with new ones. It is a superior covenant, and is the fulfillment of the promises of old, being what God had intended to do from before the foundation of the world. Questions regarding unclean foods and the Sabbath day cannot be answered on the basis of law. It is Divine glory that is the issue, not what men do. Under an economy of grace a system of works and routines makes no sense, because “better things” are now in place (Heb 11:40; 12:24). This is the very thing that is being confirmed to Peter.

Jesus is very pointed in identifying when “the time of reformation” commenced. The time was associated with His own coming into the world. That introduced a new period with a new thrust, and was a sort of interim between the old and new covenants. There had never been a time like it before, nor has there been one like it since. Here is how Jesus stated the case. “The law and the prophets were until John : since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16).

The distinction of foods belonged to the era of “the law and the prophets.” Therefore, during His ministry Jesus “declared all foods clean” NASB (Mk 7:19). In this He was preparing the way for the better covenant and its “better things.”

At the time of our text, this had not yet dawned upon the understanding of Peter. That is why he refused to kill and eat any of the creatures let down to him in the net. However, this occasion will prove to be the a prelude to the time when he will see matters more clearly – something essential to what he will be asked to do.

THREE TIMES, THEN WITHDRAWAL

“ 16 This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.”

There is a kind of heavenly tenacity revealed here that is most refreshing. It reveals the aggressiveness of the Lord to accomplish His work, and the extent to which He goes to bring a proper understanding to His servants. In view of this no child of God can be content to remain in ignorance concerning things on which the Lord has spoken. Just as the disciples inquired for the meaning of things Jesus said they did not understand (Matt 13:10,36; 15:15; Mk 7:17; John 16:18), so are we to be aggressive to do the same.

“This was done thrice . . .” Other versions read, “And this happened three times,” NASB “this was repeated three times,” NJB “the same vision was repeated three times,” NLT and “This occurred three times.” AMPLIFIED

There have not been many messages delivered by God three times. God delivered the Law one time. The penitent on the day of Pentecost were told what to do one time. Jesus died one time, rose again one time, ascended one time, and will return to earth one more time to gather His own. Paul was called into Macedonia one time.

Some understand the reference to three times to be applicable to the speaking of the words, “And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). However, I do not believe this is the meaning of the text. The language itself seems to me to forbid this interpretation. First, the word “This” is literally translated “This thing” THAYER – singular, as opposed to the plural “these words.” Second, this is something that was “done,” which term is translated from a word meaning “to come into being, or begin to be.” THAYER Translators use the following expressions to translate the word: “happened,” NASB “took place,” DARBY “was repeated,” NJB and “occurred.” AMPLIFIED Words are spoken. They are not said to happen, take place, or occur. Further, the expression “was repeated” refers to something that was single, not plural. I gather, then, that the entire vision with its accompanying words and Peter’s response took place three time.

Here, therefore, is a vision that occurred three times. Three times a net filled with all manner of unclean creatures was deliberately let down to Peter. Three times he was told to rise, kill, and eat. Three times he said he could not do this because he had never eaten anything unclean throughout his entire life. Three times he was told not to call anything that God created unclean.

That dark spot in his understanding is also reflected in his view of the Gentiles. For fifteen

hundred years, God had dealt exclusively with the Jews. All of the prophets came from them. Jesus was born out of their nation, and Jesus ministered primarily to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” to whom He was sent

It ought to be clear that a very major misconception is about to be cast down. It will be done indirectly, not directly. In a very rare case of Divine repetition, Peter will be forced to consider something that has already taken place, yet of which he has no cognitive awareness. Here is the man with the keys of the kingdom, who directed the early believers on why Judas was to be replaced, and how they ought to go about it. This is the man who opened the door of salvation to the Jews, and had exerted Divine power in the presence of many witnesses at the Gate called Beautiful. He had confounded religious authorities, boldly speaking to them and even causing them to marvel. He had discerned those who had repented and told them what to do. He had recognized someone who had lied to the Holy Spirit, and had responded appropriately. He had laid his hands on Samaritan believers, and they received the Holy Spirit. He had discerned the inward thoughts of Simon the Sorcerer. He has also spread the word powerfully in the region of Samaria and Saron, and multitudes in Joppa had believed because of what he has said and done. Yet, he is not yet aware of something that God has done – cleansed all meats.

That dark spot in his understanding is also reflected in his view of the Gentiles. For fifteen hundred years, God had dealt exclusively with the Jews. All of the prophets came from them. Jesus was born out of their nation, and Jesus ministered primarily to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” to whom He was sent (Matt 15:24).

THE VESSEL WAS RECEIVED UP AGAIN INTO HEAVEN

“ . . .and the vessel was received up again into heaven.” Other versions read, “taken up into heaven again,” NKJV “and immediately the object was taken up into the sky,” NASB “and immediately the sheet was taken back to heaven.” NIV

This terminated the vision, and concluded the words that were spoken to Peter concerning the matter. Now, the apostle is left to ponder what he has both seen and heard. What has taken place is that heaven has prepared him for the men sent to him by Cornelius, and for the events that will follow. To this point, the matter is not clear to Peter, but as he thinks upon it, clarity will come. That is the calculated effect that meditation is intended to have.

CONCLUSION

This account confirms the manner in which Gods works with men. Prior to involvement, there are generally preparations for that involvement. Sometimes they are immediately before the intended participation, while at other times there is a more lengthy preparation. Israel was prepared for deliverance by a lengthy period of bondage. Saul of Tarsus was prepared some time prior to his calling by the stoning of Stephen, to which he consented. The disciples were prepared for the coming of the Spirit by a period of prayer, waiting, and attending to some necessary things. The people on the day of Pentecost were prepared by the feast of the Passover, which they were observing. The Ethiopian eunuch was prepared by his reading of the prophet Isaiah. Solomon well said, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD” (Prov 16:1).

In all of these instances, and more, there was a certain mental disposition. Thoughts became more ordered and focused, and the things of God in some way became more prominent in the thoughts of the people. This circumstance is one of the primary reasons for edification, or the building up of the saints through rational and contemplative means. In edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor 11:3), more takes place in the heart of a believer than learning. A certain spiritual culture is developed in which advancement in the faith can take place, and Divine employment is more likely.

When professing Christians are not edified, and their thinking is not elevated and focused on eternal matters, they become less likely to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). Living by faith and walking in the Spirit involves thought, contemplation, meditation, and pondering. An unthinking Christian is a living contradiction, for there is nothing about Jesus, the Gospel, the New Covenant, or any facet of spiritual life, that is disassociated from thought. That is why an entertainment-based approach to reaching people for Christ is nothing more than an exercise of vanity. It simply is not possible to engage people in holy thought by appealing to their emotions or fleshly preferences. Such approaches do not prepare the heart, or ready the individual for Divine confrontation, revelation, or sanctioned areas of involvement.

In our text, Peter has been prepared by a vision from heaven, and words that forced him to think anew about something that he had already settled in his mind. From this point on, as he considers the vision, the way Peter is to take will become more clear. This is an example of someone having fellowship with Jesus, and of its powerful impact.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #47

PETER IS DIRECTED TO GO TO CORNELIUS

“ Acts 10:17 Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19 While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20 Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them. 21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come? 22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee. 23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him. ” (Acts 10:17-23)

INTRODUCTION

After receiving an arresting vision while in a trance, Peter was perplexed about its meaning – which was not given to him. He had been commanded to do something that contradicted a manner in which he had lived all of his life – a mode that involved living with a good conscience toward God. Not willing to dismiss the vision as though it was nothing more than an imagination, he thought upon it,

carefully considering and weighing it. Precisely at the time the vision concluded, the men from Cornelius arrived and were standing at the gate. They inquired if Simon, who was surnamed Peter, was there. Now, as Peter was thinking upon the vision, the Holy Spirit spoke to him, informing him that three men were seeking him. He told Peter to go down to them without any misgivings or confusion, for He Himself

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- **THE MEN FROM CORNELIUS ARRIVED (10:17b-18)**
- **PETER THOUGHT ON THE VISION (10:19a)**
- **THE SPIRIT SAID UNTO HIM (10:19b)**
- **THREE MEN SEEK YOU; GO WITH THEM (10:19c-20a)**
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- **PETER INQUIRES WHY THEY ARE SEEKING HIM (10:21)**
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- **HE CALLED THEM IN, LODGED THEM, AND WENT AWAY WITH THEM**
- **CONCLUSION**

had sent the men to Peter. The apostle immediately went down to the men, identified himself, and asked them the cause for which they sought him, which cause had not been told him by the Spirit. The men reported the cause, Peter lodged them, and they left in the morning for Caesarea.

The manner in which everything is being carried out is worthy of notation. This is God working all things together for good – something that those with faith know. As it is written, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28). Both Cornelius and Peter trusted God, as their lives testify – although the measures of their trust differed because of the measure of their understanding. Both men have also been called according to His purpose, as the recorded events confirm. Both men have been living within the awareness of what they do know, and both of them are responsive to Divine direction. Apparently neither of them are stunned that they have heard from heaven, and both of them respond immediately to what they have heard.

We must not allow the rarity of such people in our time to move us to imagine that men cannot be like this today. In fact, this is the Kingdom norm: living with a consciousness of what is known of God, and responding to Divine direction. This is confirmed over and over in Scripture. Special details are provided for such men. Prior to the Law, there was Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Following the giving of the Law there was Moses, David, and the holy Prophets. Commencing with the appearing of Jesus, there was John the Baptist, the twelve apostles, Stephen, Philip, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and others.

THE GENTILE WORLD DESCRIBED

The epochal nature of the door of faith being opened to the Gentiles is confirmed by the revealed description of their moral and spiritual condition. This was partly owing to the limited revelation given to them. However, it was primarily the result of the nature, or moral and spiritual makeup, of the people. They were wholly undeserving of any Divine preference and goodness. God clearly establishes this in the first chapter of Romans (1:19-32).

Thus, over and above the unacceptable traits of the Gentiles, God had NOT chosen them as He

had Israel. He had NOT shown favor to them as He did Israel. He had NOT provided them with revelations of Himself as He had Israel.

However, of themselves, Israel was no better than the heathen. God did not choose them because of any excellence or superiority in them. Rather, it was because of His promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore Moses said to Israel, “The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: But because the LORD loved you, and because He would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers , hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut 7:7-8).

Thus, over and above the unacceptable traits of the Gentiles, God had NOT chosen them as He had Israel. He had NOT shown favor to them as He did Israel. He had NOT provided them with revelations of Himself as He had Israel. Now, consider the Gentiles as they are presented in Scripture. This is the view of them according to their nature – their Agamic nature.

- **Israel was forbidden to learn their ways.** They were warned, “Learn not the way of the heathen . . . For the customs of the people are vain . . .” (Jer 10:2-3)
- **Jesus refers to Gentiles.** Jesus said of the Gentiles, “But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do : for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking” (Matt 6:7).
- **They walked in their own ways.** “. . . the Living God . . . Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways ” (Acts 14:16).
- **They sacrificed to demons.** “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God : and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils” (1 Cor 10:20).
- **They were carried away to lifeless idols.** “Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led” (1 Cor 12:2).
- **They were termed sinners.** “ We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles” (Gal 2:15).
- **They were without Christ, alienated, strangers, having no hope, and without God.** “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world ” (Eph 2:11-12).
- **They lived in the vanity of their mind.** “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind ” (Eph 4:17).

The inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s great salvation is a marvelous display of His mercy and grace. I fear that with the exaltation of human reason, and the vaunting of man’s wisdom, the true condition of the Gentile world has been greatly obscured. All of the bodies of corrupt knowledge and defiled wisdom have issued forth from the Gentile world.

- **They did not know God.** “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor; not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God ” (1 Thess 4:4-5).
- **They were not a people, and did not obtain mercy.** “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10).

• **They were noted for the immorality.** “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, ravelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries ” (1 Pet 4:3).

THE ACCEPTANCE OF THE GENTILES IS MARVELOUS THING

The inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s great salvation is a marvelous display of His mercy and grace. I fear that with the exaltation of human reason, and the vaunting of man’s wisdom, the true condition of the Gentile world has been greatly obscured. All of the bodies of corrupt knowledge and defiled wisdom have issued forth from the Gentile world. God Himself says of that aspect of the Gentiles, “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Rom 1:22).

The term “Gentiles” linguistically means “nations.” However, and this must be known, it means more than that in the Word of God. The word “nations” is intended to describe every group of people in the world, with the single exception of the Jews, or the fleshly offspring of Abraham. Although small, even minuscule, in number, it is said of the Israelites, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.” (Rom 9:4-5). Proportionate to the total population of the world, the Israelites are no where near a single digit on the left side of the decimal point. Yet, they were given the privilege of being “a peculiar treasure” to Him “above all people” (Ex 19:2). God said of them, “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth ” (Deut 7:6). Moses, the faithful servant of God said to them, “Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and he chose their seed after them, even you above all people, as it is this day” (Deut 10:15).

THE CHARACTERISTIC OF DIVINE PREFERENCE

This circumstance continued for fifteen hundred years. On rare occasions, some Divine consideration would be shown to the Gentiles, as with Nineveh , whom God spared when they repented (Jonah 3:10). However, the favor He showed toward Nineveh was nothing to compare with that which Israel received. God did not remain with Nineveh, vouchsafe a Law to it, or set up prophets within her walls. The privilege of serving God was not given to them, and they were not invited into His courts. Israel remained in His favor, even though they were frequently chastened for their rebellion and obstinance. When Israel was preparing to enter into the promised land, God said to them, “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth ” (Deut 7:6). Again, He told them He had chosen them “above all people ” (Deut 10:15). Again, Moses told them, “the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people” (Deut 26:18). And again he said, “For the LORD’S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance ” (Deut 32:9). Over six hundred and fifty years later He said to Israel through Amos, “ You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities” (Amos 3:2).

God’s preference for Israel was confirmed in His dealings with them. They are the ones who were associated with God through adoption. When God made Himself known, it was to them. When He made a covenant, it was with them. They are the ones who received His Law. They alone were given the privilege of serving and worshiping God. All of the promises were given to them. All of this is stated with remarkable precision in Romans 9:4-5: “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

God has always been known for His preference of people. He has never revealed Himself as having a preference for all people, or for favoring all people the same, or indiscriminately. Prior to His

selection of Israel, His favor was focused on certain individuals. These included Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. These few people lived during a period of time spanning two thousand, five hundred years! What is more, following the exaltation of Christ, this Divine manner was accented all the more. Now God receives only those who are in Christ Jesus. They are the only ones He accepts, and are the people He favors above all others. In confirmation of this, they are referred to as “the elect” (Col 3:12), “His elect” (Matt 24:31), “the children of God” (Rom 8:16), “the sons of God” (Rom 8:14), “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet 2:9), and those He has purified “unto Himself a peculiar people” (Tit 2:14).

Even within the body of Christ, all people are not considered to be the same. Although salvation is “common” (Jude 1:3), and faith is “common” (Tit 1:4), yet there are some people who are “first” within the church – “first” by Divine appointment and preference (1 Cor 12:28). Even among the “apostles,” there were some who were favored above others – like Peter, who was given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19), and Paul, to whom special mysteries were revealed (1 Cor 12:1-7). This perspective is in perfect harmony with what God has revealed of Himself throughout the ages.

In a way, it is astounding that in our time the God of heaven is being presented as though these things were not true. Professed Christian leaders and teachers have led men to believe that God being no respecter of persons means that he views every man alike. However, this is not so. The meaning of God being no respecter of persons is that He views every man as they really are, and will not be swayed in His view by some distortion of the truth, or by mere human accomplishments.

The extraordinary amount of revelation on this subject makes an ignorance of it totally unacceptable. If men do not know this, it is only because they have neglected the Word of God, which speaks so abundantly and clearly of it – a word by which spiritual life is both begotten and sustained (Luke 4:4). That Word cannot be neglected with impunity!

WHILE PETER DOUBTED IN HIMSELF

“ Acts 10:17a Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean . . .”

The vision being completed, and heaven being closed, Peter now returns to an ordinary environment. However, he will not be able to forget what he has supernaturally seen and heard.

HE DOUBTED IN HIMSELF

“Now while Peter doubted in himself . . .” Other versions read, “wondered within himself,” NKJV “was greatly perplexed in his mind,” NASB “was wondering,” NIV “was greatly puzzled,” NRSV “was inwardly perplexed,” RSV “at a loss,” NJB “mused in himself,” TNT “was still puzzling,” PHILLIPS “was thoroughly perplexed,” ALT and “in self was bewildered.” INTERLINEAR

The word “doubted” is translated from the Greek word **dihpo,rei**, which has the following lexical meaning: “to be entirely at a loss, to be in perplexity,” THAYER “of mental perplexity be utterly at a loss, be thoroughly perplexed, be bewildered,” FRIBERG “to be confused, wonder,” UBS “to be very confused,” LOUW-NIDA “to be a matter of doubt of question,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to be greatly perplexed, be at a loss.” GINGRICH

It is true that “doubt” sometimes involves unbelief, being the opposite of trust. When this kind of doubt is mentioned in Scripture, the English word is derived from a different Greek word. The Greek language being more precise, had more than one word for what we refer to as “doubt.” For example, when Peter’s attention was diverted when he was walking on the water to go to Jesus, he began to sink, and cried out for the Lord to save him.

• **Doubt, Meaning #1.** When Jesus rescued Peter, He said, “O thou of little faith, wherefore midst thou doubt?” (Matt 14:31). Here, a different Greek word is used: **evdi, stasaj** . This word means “waver,” THAYER “be of two minds about something,” FRIBERG “to think that something may not be true or certain,” LOUW-NIDA and “hesitate,” LIDDELL-SCOTT This kind of doubt involves wavering, vacillating, fluctuating, and being unstable. It includes the idea of wavering between two conflicting considerations, then defaulting to the thing that is not the primary consideration – like Peter seeing the boisterous wind, then assessing his situation as impossible.

• **Doubt, Meaning #2.** Jesus once said to His disciples, “Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matt 21:21). Here the word “doubt” is translated from the Greek word **diakriqh/te** . This word means, “to be at variance with oneself, hesitate,” THAYER and “being undecided in oneself, doubt, hesitate, waver.” FRIBERG Here, the idea is that of experiencing conflicting thoughts, as compared to beholding a troubling circumstance. In that case, doubting is deferring to the inferior and false notion of the circumstance itself.

In both of the above cases, doubting had to do with pondering two different things (thought or circumstance), and choosing what was not in conformity with the will of God. This kind of doubt is related to unbelief, and is not acceptable before God. It reveals a yielding to the powers of darkness, and a rejection of the light. This is not the kind of doubt that Peter had.

In view of the fact that no explanation was given to Peter concerning the vision he had just seen. He was left in a state of confusion. This matter had extended beyond the circumference of his understanding, and therefore he could not arrive at its meaning. He would have to become involved in what God was doing in order for the vision to be made more clear. It is as he walked in the light, participating in the will of God, that more clarity would be given to him. He was not required to make a choice between believing or not believing, or choosing a lie to the truth. Rather, this was a matter that he did not understand. Once the understanding of the situation was realized, then Peter would be required to make a choice. That is the manner of the Kingdom.

In view of this circumstance, some might conjecture that because they do not understand, they have no obligation to ponder the matter, or engage in a quest to obtain understanding. However, this is flawed thinking. God has enjoined obtainable understanding upon us: “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17). And again, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise ” (Eph 5:15). By obtainable understanding, I mean comprehending what God revealed or made known. The very fact that God exposes us to some facet of truth or expression of His mind, places a solemn obligation upon us to arrive at some understanding of what was made known. The fact that it may extend beyond the circumference of our understanding, or even beyond all natural ability, has no bearing whatsoever on the matter. What God makes known is intended to be understood – that is why He makes it known. If men do not pursue that understanding, God will not ignore it. He will, then, pour out a spirit of deep sleep upon the people, as He did with Israel, causing the truth to be closed to them, and then condemning them for that condition (Isa 29:10).

WHAT DID THE VISION MEAN?

“ . . . what this vision which he had seen should mean . . . ” Other versions say that Peter was wondering within himself “what this vision which he had seen meant,” NKJV “as to what the vision which he had seen might be,” NASB “about the meaning of the vision,” NIV “as to the purpose of this vision,” BBE “what the vision he had seen could denote,” MRD “what the vision he had seen could signify,” NET and “What could this vision mean?” LIVING

Peter cannot dismiss the vision from his mind. He knows that more is involved than clean and unclean meats, but has no idea what the vision has meant, or even implied. He does not turn from the consideration of the vision, but inquires within what it could possibly mean.

Here, we are being exposed to the thinking of a godly man. Such a person has an inquiring mind that becomes occupied with the things of the Spirit of God. As it is written, “For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace” (Rom 8:5-6).

We are to understand that the enlargement of our understanding often involves facing something that we cannot figure out or understand. The fact that what has been made known cannot be understood only means that we are being tested to confirm the validity of our profession. Genuine faith will pursue the truth, for it comes with a love for the truth. On one occasion, when John was receiving the Revelation on the Isle of Patmos, he saw the book of Divine Destiny being held by the One on the throne. The book was written inside and on the back side, yet was sealed with seven seals so that it could not be read. A strong angel cried out, “Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof?” It is written that there was “And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon” (Rev 5:2-3). A casual watcher might have concluded that God did not want anyone to read what was in the book, and thus let the matter go. However, John, even though advanced in years, did not think in this way. He himself acknowledged, “And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon” (Rev 5:4). He knew that what was made known from heaven was intended to be understood. His desires were met, and he was given to know what was in the book.

In like manner, the text suggests that Peter was not satisfied to remain in a state of ignorance concerning this vision. He desired an understanding of it.

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

There is a facet of the Kingdom of God confirmed here that must be seen. God’s Kingdom is not a static one. There are purposes that God is fulfilling in a timely and effective manner. One of them is the acceptance of the Gentiles, and the grafting of them into the Jewish tree (Rom 11:17,24). This engrafting did not take place during the time of Moses. That was not the time for it. It did not take place during the Babylonian captivity, when Judah was being punished for its neglect of the honoring of the sabbath years. This acceptance was intended to take place after Jesus had come into the world, and after “His own” had failed to receive Him (John 1:11). Now, while Peter is in Joppa, in the house of Simon the tanner, the time has arrived for the fulfillment of this Divine purpose.

Although Peter’s understanding is not yet in synch with God’s purpose, it is necessary that it be elevated. Just as surely as the Kingdom itself is not static, so the understanding of that kingdom must not remain unchanged. Here, we are not speaking of an understanding that is deficient because of a rebellious condition. This is a matter of growth, but that does not make it optional. Peter will be brought to comprehend what God is doing, and why He is doing it. This is essential, for men are, in fact, “workers together” with the Lord (1 Cor 6:1) and “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9).

The condition of the modern church is not good when it makes a place for workers without understanding and laborers without discernment. Yet, this condition is so prevalent that it is staggering. The work of the Lord is not being associated with spiritual understanding. In fact, there is a kind of disparagement of godly wisdom and spiritual understanding, as though it inhibited, what is conceived to be, the main work of the church.

Our text is the record of the work of the Lord being carried out – He is, under there watchful eyes of angelic hosts, “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12). As is apparent, those involved in the work will experience an enlargement of their understanding.

THE MEN FROM CORNELIUS ARRIVED

“ 17b . . . behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. ”

If it is true that God is “working salvation in the midst of the earth,” then He is doing so within a competitive environment, not a vacuum. The earth is an arena in which there are personalities working who are appropriately referred to as “principalities,” “powers,” “the rulers of the darkness of this world,” and “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). This is the domain in which the devil himself walks about “as a roaring lion . . . seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). He launches the arrows of poisoners thoughts – “fiery darts” – into the minds of men, to bring them down (Eph 6:16). There is also demonic activity, for they are perpetrators of “doctrines” that subvert the souls of men (1 Tim 4:1). These dark spirits are responsible for promoting “strongholds of thought” that take hold of unstable souls, and “imagination” and “every high thought” that are designed to throw men into a confused state, and ultimate condemnation (2 Cor 10:4-5). There are also “unreasonable and wicked men” from which even apostles have sought deliverance (2 Thess 3:2). This is not even to mention the allurements of “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), and “fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11). Of course, for the faithful, all of this is neutralized by the presence of an “innumerable company of angels,” who are “sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:13). There is also the Holy Spirit who is sent to convict the world “of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:11). Add to that “the powers of the world to come,” that are tasted by those who are “accepted in the Beloved” (Heb 6:5; Eph 1:6). The speaking Jesus is also brought into this scenario – the One who is speaking “from heaven” to men in the earth (Heb 12:25).

The will of God is being carried out in the midst of this remarkably teeming environment of activity. Holy and unholy influences. Righteous and unrighteous thoughts. The powers of the world to come, and the powers of the domain of darkness. Men have to do with

them all, whether they are aware of them or not.

This is the environment in which, by design, the will of the Lord is being carried out. Ultimately, it is this circumstance that will confirm God is over all. It will also confirm the truth that Jesus did, in fact, destroy the devil in His death, and plunder His principalities and powers.

Additionally, the understanding of this environment is what establishes to the heart that “it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Those who perceive this situation know that it is true, “salvation belongeth unto the Lord” (Psa 3:8). They begin now to cry out with discernment, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Rev 7:10). This is why repentance must be given by Christ (Acts 5:31), being a grant from heaven (Acts 11:18). This is why both faith and love have to come from “God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Eph 6:23). The environment in which we are working out our own salvation with fear and trembling requires that we be “taught of God to love one another” (1 Thess. 4:9).

What a marvelous commentary on the effectiveness of Divine direction, and the surety that attends those who set out to do what the Lord has required of them. When insightful men say, “The will of the Lord be done,” they speak truth.

This condition is why human wisdom is vain. It is why the will of man is not sufficient. It is why God has saved us and called us “not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace” (2 Tim 1:9). Of himself, man cannot navigate through this maze of competing powers and influences. Who does not know this?

THE MEN ARRIVED

“ 17b . . . behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate”

Now, when we read that the men from Cornelius arrived at the house of Simon the tanner, we must do so with the environment I have just mentioned in mind. You may be sure that the prince of the power of the air was aware of the mission on which these men were sent. He is not privy to the secret counsels of the Almighty, but he does know what men are saying and doing, else he would not seek to exploit those occasions for his own purposes.

Do you not know that Satan was as aware of Cornelius as he was of Job? He had been restrained in the case of this gentile centurion just as surely as he was in the case of Job. If he had been able to do so, he would have stopped these men from arriving at the destination, as he sought to do the three shipwrecks in which Paul was involved. He would have had some thieves waylay these men like he did the man who went down from Jerusalem to Jericho (Lk 10:30). He certainly had ample time to cause such a thing to happen, had he been able to do so. He could not even “hinder” them, so they would be required to make repeated efforts to get to the house of Simon the tanner – as he was given leave to do with Paul (1 Thess 2:18). The hook of God was in Satan’s nose, so that he could not interfere with the journey of these men.

God still works in this manner, directing the feet of the godly, restraining the wicked one, and seeing to it that we are not tempted above what we are able to bear. The only catch in it all is that we must be about our Father’s business, doing the will of God from the heart.

So now, the men have arrived in Joppa, made inquiry concerning where Simon’s house was located, identified the house, and are standing at the door – safe and sound! What a marvelous commentary on the effectiveness of Divine direction, and the surety that attends those who set out to do what the Lord has required of them. When insightful men say, “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:14), they speak truth.

THEY ASKED IF PETER LODGED THERE

“ 18 And called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there.” Other versions read, “and calling out,” NASB “They called out,” NIV and “they called out to inquire.” AMPLIFIED

A spiritually naive person might have sat down near the door and waited for God to prompt someone to bring Peter to them. There might even be some inclined to think God would have Peter standing at the door waiting for them. After finding the house of Simon the tanner, these men did what they could: they inquired if Peter was there.

Although it may appear incidental, these men were living out walking by faith. They knew who they were looking for, and where he was located. They did not rest when they had arrived, but pursued their mission with zeal. In was in the process of that pursuit that they realized their objective.

As seemingly simple as that may appear, this is the way men walk by faith. They do what they know to do, and go where they know to go. They do not lose sight of their objective, but always keep it before them, refusing to be content until it is realized. We know that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord (Psa 37:23). “The steps” of reference depict a person on the move. He is engaged in the fulfillment of the Lord’s mandate. If it is Abraham, he leaves his home and heads in the general direction of an unknown country. If it is Moses, he returns to Egypt to deliver the word of the Lord to Pharaoh. If it is Philip, he heads for the road that leads to Gaza. If it is Saul of Tarsus, he proceeds to the city to which he had been directed. If it is Ananias, he heads for a street called “Straight,” and the house of a man named Judas. These are the kind of steps that are ordered by the Lord. It is not the idleness of a person that is directed, but his steps. Many a poor soul has never made any significant

progress in the kingdom of God simply because they have not done what they already know to do. They have really never made a journey on the highway God has raised up (Isa 35:8). They have never engaged in the crucifying of the flesh, denying ungodliness, coming away from defiling influences, or perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. Their steps have never been in those ways, and that is why they have not been directed in areas of blessing. When you know what you are to do, get to the doing of it, and then you will be given further Divine direction. You will find what the Lord has for you when you pursue it – just as the men in our text.

PETER THOUGHT ON THE VISION

“ 19a While Peter thought on the vision . . .” Other versions read, “reflected on the vision,” NASB “was still thinking about the vision,” NIV “was pondering the vision,” RSV “was turning the vision over in his mind,” BBE “mind was still on the vision,” CJB “was still thinking seriously about the vision,” NET “was puzzling over the vision,” NLT “was still earnestly thinking over the vision,” WEYMOUTH “was meditating on the vision,” WILLIAMS “was earnestly revolving the vision in his mind and meditating on it,” AMPLIFIED “was still thinking deeply about the vision,” PHILLIPS and “trying to understand what the vision meant.” GNB

In order for the vision to be profitable, it must engage the mind of Peter. It was not enough for him to merely have the vision, then going about his way without understanding it. Carnal men are content to experience things they do not understand. In fact, at the low end of the moral ladder, men are provoked to engage in all manner of conduct that excuses the productive use of the mind. Those who resort to hard drink, drugs, and excessive forms of entertainment are engaged in activities that tend to dull the mind and make it useless. Euphoria in its varied states, which rest primarily upon the feelings or senses, are sought in an effort to get away from thinking.

It is most unfortunate that this tendency has also been brought into the church by men who have crept in unawares. They teach people that things like falling on the floor in a kind of unconscious state, speaking mysterious languages, and other forms of conduct that side-step the mind, are special blessings from the Holy Spirit. However, Jesus never promised His disciples a Spirit that would work in such a manner. Like it or not, the Holy Spirit administers a domain of spiritual intelligence. When He is said to moved holy men, they wrote the Scriptures, which employed their intelligence, and appealed to the intelligence of others (2 Pet 1:21).

If we are to love the Lord with our mind (Matt 22:37), and if we serve the Law of God with our mind (Rom 7:25), then it cannot be excluded in our involvements with the Lord. If we are transformed by the “renewing” of our minds (Rom 12:2), have they not been sanctified by God for sacred use? It is shameful when any professing Christian, who is in possession of all of their mental faculties, is weak in the area of thought. Those who are not thoughtful cannot possibly be godly, for thought and cognition are principle parts of godliness. When God diagnosed fallen humanity, He accounted for the wickedness in these words: “every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen 6:5). Again, He said of the wicked, “God is not in all his thoughts ” (Psa 10:43). David well observed that the Lord “knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity” (Psa 94:11). When God assessed wayward Israel He said, “For My thoughts are not your thoughts” (Isa 55:8).

It is for this reason that one of the fundamental changes that takes place in the believer is that he thinks differently. His thoughts begin with a different basis, and proceed to a different conclusion. The ministration of Divine favor actually takes place in one’s thoughts. David well said, “In the multitude of my thoughts within me Thy comforts delight my soul” (Psa 94:19). He even cried out to God, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts ” (Psa 139:23). Solomon once observed, “Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established” (Prov 16:3).

When Paul wrote the churches, he told them to “think soberly,” or with spiritual soundness of rectitude (Rom 12:3). That is, think in view of ultimate reality – reality that has been revealed in the Word of God. He admonished them to think upon things that are approved by God and eternally profitable to men: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8).

The church has fallen upon hard times when it is weak theologically – in the knowledge of God. The lack of sober thought accounts for the lack of understanding, for understanding is administered to men through the process of thinking. This principle is lived out in our text. When the church is inundated with frothy music and shallow and intellectually inferior preaching, it is in the process of spiritual decline. By intellectually inferior, I mean something that does not promote sound thought. It will do no good for men to speak of revival and renewal if, in matters pertaining to God, their understanding is paralyzed! Whatever may be said of falling down under the power, jumping, shouting, and various forms impromptu actions, they do not compensate for a lack of holy thought. Such things are not the means through which extended profitable thought are realized.

Sound thinking presumes a knowledge of God’s Word – just as in this very text. If people do not have a basic knowledge of the Word of God, their thoughts will tend to drift toward vanity and theological nonsense. It is no wonder that our adversary the devil is so aggressive to suppress the preaching and teaching of the Word of God itself. He does not object to men diagnosing humanity and making an effort to help them if their thoughts are not shaped by the Word of God. Wicked men can engage in charitable enterprises, but they cannot promote the knowledge of God and righteousness.

BACK TO OUR TEXT

Now, it is as Peter is thinking upon what has been shown to him from heaven that he will receive further direction. When the text says Peter thought upon the vision, it does not mean that he was absorbed with what he saw. It is what was said at that time that produced the perplexity, not what was seen. The sheet that was seen, together with what was in it, was the preparation for what was said – and that is what Peter was thinking about. What God has done through this vision has now engaged Peter’s mind, and therefore more will be given to him – matters that must be comprehended for what is ahead.

THE SPIRIT SAID UNTO HIM

“ 19b . . . the Spirit said unto him . . . ” All versions read fundamentally the same: i.e. “The Spirit said to him,” or “the Spirit told him.”

While Peter was thinking on the vision that had been given to him from heaven, the Holy Spirit of God addressed him directly. Precisely how this was accomplished is not made known, whether by means of an audible voice, or a kind of spiritual intuition. I can see the wisdom that has withheld the details from us. What very little we know about the Person of the Holy Spirit has provoked all kinds of speculation in the Christian community. Religious men who are not Christ-centered are easily drawn aside to profitless tangents, and tributaries of thought that do not empty in the sea of God’s will.

If men are going to “hear what the Spirit says” (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22), they must be in the proper frame of mind, and considering the truth of God. It was after an angel had directed Philip to go down to the desert road that led to Gaza, and while he was engaged in obeying that word, that “the Spirit said unto Philip . . . ” (Acts 8:29). I do not believe I am stretching the point when I say that if men do not act upon what they know, and ponder the truth to which they have been exposed, it is not likely that anything more will be given to them.

The Spirit speaks in much the same way as God spoke to Elijah the prophet. When he had arrived at “Horeb the mount of God,” from which the Law had been given (Mal 4:4), he went into a cave, and spent the night there. While there, the word of the Lord came to him, asking what he was doing there. Elijah replied that he had been very zealous for the Lord, yet the people had forsaken the covenant, thrown down His altars, and now the prophets of God were being slain with the sword. He said he was the only one that was left – at least that is what he thought. The Lord told Elijah to go and “stand upon the mount before the Lord” – the mount from which the Law was giving amidst a violent shaking, tempest, and fire (Heb 12:18). When Elijah stood upon the mountain, “behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind.” Immediately after that destructive wind, there occurred a violent “earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake.” Further, “after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire.” Thus the circumstances that had attended the giving of the Law were duplicated before Elijah. However the Lord Himself was not perceptible in any of them. Only after these things – “after the fire a still small voice” came to Elijah – and God was in it! (1 Kgs 19:11-12). One version reads that there was “a gentle whisper.” We are not told what was said, but it was at that point that Elijah returned to the cave. God then asked him again what he was doing there. After the prophet had rehearsed what he had said before, he was given specific direction. During the time he was standing on the mount of God, his attention had been turned to God Himself. At that point there was no thought of Jezebel and her threats, or of the decline of the people. It appears that the soul of the great prophet was quieted, and his thoughts more ordered. It was then that God told him what to do.

Most believers have learned of the value of thinking about right things. It does have a quieting effect upon the soul, so that the still small voice of the Lord can be discerned. One of the things that the modern Christian counselors have managed to do is turn the thoughts of the people toward their problems. This is because they really do not have any solutions. However, above that, they are thrusting the people into a state of mind in which it is not possible to hear from the Lord or be consciously directed by Him. When thinking centers on difficulties, we will find that God is not in the matter. Those difficulties are like the wind, earthquake, and fire to which Elijah was subjected. However, when our thinking fastens upon what God has said, then, like Peter, we are positioned for advancement and learning.

ONE MORE WORD

I cannot leave this section without observing that many people never experience Divine direction because they are not prepared to do so. They are occupied with things that have no spiritual relevance, and therefore cannot be taught. Or, they are engaged in things that have nothing to do with the maintenance of a good conscience before God, and thus are spiritually deaf.

Throughout my deliberate and concentrated involvement with the church, now over fifty-seven years, I have been chagrined with the caliber of most professing Christians. Within the circles in which I have walked, godly people were always the exception. Those who could handle the Word of God, and had some degree of spiritual understanding, were exceedingly rare. Among the leaders of the sect with which I was identified, there were constant efforts to get the people to read the Bible more, pray more, attend the assemblies, and “win souls.” There was an acute deficiency in the people, and the leaders knew it. Yet, nothing ever changed. The effects of revivals were dissipated in a very short time. Young people who were stirred Godward by their experience at a Christian service camp returned to face the indifference of their home church. Any person or group of persons who sought for more exposure to the Word of God faced apathy, and often outright opposition. These conditions continued year after year, and decade after decade.

Such circumstances were not unique to the group to which I belonged. When speaking with insightful leaders of other sects, they said they were facing the same situation. All of the groups could

only find solace in the beginnings of their movement – from the Reformation Movement in the 1500's to the Charismatic Renewal in the twentieth century. From time to time they would all bring relics out of the spiritual museums and parade them before the people in a vain attempt to get the fires burning again.

Precisely what caused these conditions – conditions that continue to this very day? It was, and still is, the lack of the occupation of the mind with what God has said – what He has revealed. Until men think upon what God has said, the heavens will remain as brass, just as they did for Israel (Deut 28:23). As long as professing believers tolerate songs and sermons to center in human experience instead of Divine revelation, their religion will be nothing more than vanity that actually provokes the God of heaven to anger. It is necessary to remember that it was Israel's religion that angered God. When they came into the courts of His house with their pretentious worship, He asked them who invited them to enter into His courts (Isa 1:12). He told them their songs was nothing more than "noise," and commanded them to take them away from Him (Amos 5:23). He told them that when they offered burnt offerings to Him, He would not receive them (Amos 5:21).

Why did the Lord speak to His own people in such a manner. It was because their hearts and minds were not involved in their religion. The most solemn of all religious activities were done perfunctorily, without the involvement of the mind. They talked a lot, but their hearts and minds were corrupt. God's own assessment of their condition tells the story. "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid" (Isa 29:13-14).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

These observations are not a mere hobbyhorse on which I delight to ride. Our text is in sharp contrast to those ancient conditions, and we need to consider why it is. Peter had come from the very heritage I have just mentioned. However, he had not stayed there. By the grace of God, he had been "redeemed from the empty way of life handed down" from his "forefathers" NIV (1 Pet 1:18). That is, the salvation of God, or the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, included deliverance from pointless and profitless religion. Those who remain in the grip of such a religion have good reason to question whether or not they are saved! I do not say this in a condemning way, as though consigning all such people to the lake of fire. That is not something that is lawful for any man to do. However, it is necessary to say these things in order to provoke self examination, and that is something that God Himself requires. As it is written to the church, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor 13:5).

Peter had made the transition from the old to the new (2 Cor 5:17), and from the darkness to the light (Acts 26:18). He had been translated out of the kingdom of darkness, and into the kingdom of God's dear Son. Any deficiency of knowledge in him was NOT owing to rebellion or hardheartedness. The lack of understanding in the matter at hand was owing to a need for further insight. Peter would be given that insight because, as one who had been born again, he chose to think about proper things. When he was exposed to something more advanced, he thought upon it.

THREE MEN SEEK YOU; GO WITH THEM

"19c . . . Behold, three men seek thee. 20a Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them . . ."

This is not an area of life in which men are authorized to legislate – whether it is by outlining suggested plans, or making hard and fast rules for other people. This is strictly a personal

matter, but it is something that requires our personal attention.

Behold the remarkable details. The number of men seeking him is specified, and why they are there. Peter is told to get up, go down to the men, and go with them. Remember, this communication is from the Holy Spirit. It comes to Peter while he is thinking about the vision vouchsafed to him, which thinking put him in a proper frame of mind for heavenly direction.

I suppose for some, this might appear to be nothing more than something incidental. However, here we are being exposed to the practicality of spiritual life. It is possible to adopt a form of religion that is intellectually nothing more than philosophical, and in activity mere lifeless routine. Our culture both subtly and apparently promotes this kind of religion. It is a form that is without power (2 Tim 3:5). There is really nothing practical about it, and therefore it is rarely, if ever, perceived as being related to life. It does not provoke people to get up and actually do something in response to the Lord.

Here was a circumstance where Peter was required to leave where he was. Remember, he had gone there to pray, and now he is required to leave that activity, as well as the place where it was being done. He had been hungry, and something was being prepared for him. Yet, he had to leave that activity as well, suppress his appetite, and engage in an activity that appeared to neither blend with prayer, nor provide the satisfaction of hunger.

INTERRUPTIONS

This incident confirms that the Divine agenda can interrupt both our religion and our appetite; our prayers and our meals; our plans and our routines. It is possible to live as a slave to routine and natural appetites, so that the individual is never turned aside from life's normalities to do the will of the Lord. Many a soul has fallen into this snare, and has therefore missed the blessing of the Lord.

Part of this circumstance is owing to the fact that people live their lives and make their plans without the Lord Himself in mind. When it comes to making personal plans, the word of James is most appropriate: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that" (James 4:14-15).

This is not an area of life in which men are authorized to legislate – whether it is by outlining suggested plans, or making hard and fast rules for other people. This is strictly a personal matter, but it is something that requires our personal attention. It is possible to pass by some great spiritual benefit while engaged in ordinary and lawful pursuits. Life can be lived so casually and routinely that we bring upon ourselves severe limitation.

The Incident of Elisha

Take, for example, one of the final words spoken by Elisha the prophet. When Elisha had fallen sick of a disease from which he would die, Joash the king of Israel came down to him, and wept over the prophet. He dreaded the thought of this man of God being removed from the nation. Perhaps thinking that Elisha would be translated into heaven like Elijah, Joash said, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof" (2 Kgs 13:14).

Elisha, unmoved by the lamentation of Joash told him to take to himself a bow and some arrows. When the king had done so, the prophet told him take the bow in his hands. When he did, Elisha put his hands on the king's hands and told him to open the window toward the East. He then said "Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the LORD'S deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them" (2 Kgs 13:17). This was not a mere target practice, for Elisha has associated what was happening with the Lord God of Israel. The prophet then told the king, "And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said

unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, and stayed” (2 Kgs 13:18). Elisha became angry that the king shot only three arrows. He said, “Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice” (2 Kgs

Many a soul has got caught up in the routines of life, being distracted by life rather than reigning in life, which is the intended result of salvation.

13:19).

The whole incident makes no sense to the flesh, but it makes a lot of sense to the mind controlled by the Spirit. Joash did not shoot his arrows with the Lord and his deliverance in mind. He lapsed into a kind of normal state – as one who was just shooting arrows in a routine manner. This casualness resulted in his victories being limited, whereas they could have been extensive.

Many a soul has got caught up in the routines of life, being distracted by life rather than reigning in life, which is the intended result of salvation (Rom 5:17). Such have forfeited long-term benefits and Divine employment for the normalities and routines of life. It all looks innocent enough, and it is not something about which beholders should rant and rave. However, it is possible to live in such a manner as to be alert to possibilities and opportunities that are superior, and are laden with Divine benefits – matters of true relevance. Such souls will never forfeit the blessing of the Lord for some temporary benefit – whether it is praying or eating.

All of this is involved in loving the Lord our God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength (Mk 12:20). It is part and parcel of being sanctified spirit, soul, and body (1 Thess 5:23). This is what is required when whether we eat or we drink, we “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). This is the core of living NOT unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us and rose again (2 Cor 5:15). See, this is actually being lived out in our text. Peter is not living for himself, and therefore can be called to a higher work.

DOUBTING NOTHING

“ 20b . . . doubting nothing: for I have sent them.”

The Spirit specifies the manner in which Peter is to receive these men, and explains why he should not hesitate to adapt that manner. This is an appeal to Peter’s faith and trust. If Peter was not a man of faith, these words would have no appeal. This is one of the advantages of living by faith, conducting our lives in the prevailing interest of God’s will. In such a case, when we become aware of the will of the Lord, we more readily obey. If, however, a person is not living by faith, obedience to the Lord becomes less likely, for obedience proceeds from faith (Rom 16:26; Heb 11:8).

DOUBTING NOTHING

“ . . . doubting nothing . . .” Other versions read, “without misgivings,” NASB do not hesitate,” NIV “without hesitation,” NRSV “with no doubts at all,” CSB “let not thy mind hesitate,” MRD “all is well,” LIVING “without any doubt [about its legality] or any discrimination or hesitation.” AMPLIFIED “with no wavering,” EMTV and “not discriminating.” LITV

Here, the word “doubting” is translated from the Greek word **diakrino,menoj** , which means to discriminate, as in differentiating between Jew and Gentile. THAYER It also carries the idea of hesitation and doubt because one is at variance with himself – caught, as it were, between two contradicting views, and unable to make up his mind, THAYER or being “undecided within oneself; doubt, hesitate, waver.” FRIBERG Peter was to go immediately, and not delay. The idea is also present that Peter was not to hesitate when he faced some Gentiles at the door, drawing back from

them as he did from the unclean animals that were in the sheet let down from heaven. He was not to weigh in his mind whether it was right or wrong to hearken to these men, or lawful or not lawful to company with them. If he did have any scruples, or difficulty in conscience about what he was going to face, he was to lay them all aside, and do so at once.

Now, the manner in which the word “doubt” is used by Jesus and the apostolic writers will serve to more precisely define the word. Remember, this is something that the Holy Spirit strictly charged Peter to do: “doubting nothing!”

- Jesus used this precise word when He spoke to His disciples about their faith: “Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done” (Matt 21:21).

- When referring to Abraham’s strong faith, Paul employed this word also. It is translated “staggered not” in the King James Version: “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20). Other versions read “did not waver.” NKJV

Every professing believer must address any such tendency, for it militates against faith, which always responds instantly. Howbeit, this is another thing that cannot be resolved by Law. It will be much easier to yield instant obedience when it is remembered that the Lord’s requirements are always right, and never wrong.

The same word is employed in Romans 14:23, where the person who has doubts about a matter, proceeds to do it anyway, in spite of the of pangs of conscience that he has. Such a person will be judged for his lack of concern. “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

- James also uses this word, contrasting it with faith. In his text the word is translated “wavering” in the King James version. Other versions translate the word “doubts.” “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6).

Peter was not to draw back or hesitate because of any preconceived notions he might have entertained. The men were at the door, and he was to go, receive them, and go with them without hesitation . The Spirit will proceed to elaborate on why his obedience must not be delayed.

A Divine Manner

This is also a Divine manner – the requirement for unhesitating responses to the directives of the Lord. Israel was tutored in this manner through the ceremonial Law. “Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me” (Ex 22:29). No person was permitted to think in terms of convenience, or to hesitate because they saw no sense in the requirement, or felt that they were incapable of carrying it out.

David saw the truth of this. When the commandments of the Lord were clear to him, he confessed, “I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments” (Psa 119:60).

When Lot’s family was delivered from Sodom, he almost lost his life while he delayed. The angels who were sent to deliverer him had to take hold of him to get him out of the city. “And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the LORD being merciful unto him : and they brought him forth, and set him without the city” (Gen 19:16). This has not always been the experience of people who were being delivered. However, the account is given to us to encourage us to stay close to the deliverer, and ponder the effects of not submitting immediately.

This too is a most sensitive subject for some. They have learned to live in slothful manner, so that they are “slow of heart to believe” (Lk 24:25). Every professing believer must address any such tendency, for it militates against faith, which always responds instantly. Howbeit, this is another thing that cannot be resolved by Law. It will be much easier to yield instant obedience when it is remembered that the Lord’s requirements are always right, and never wrong. They are also timely.

I HAVE SENT THEM

“ . . . for I have sent them.” Other versions read, “I have sent them Myself,” NASB “It was I who told them to come,” NJB and “it is I who have sent them to you.” WEYMOUTH All other versions read “I have sent them” or “I sent them.”

The Holy Spirit told Peter that He had sent the three men who were standing at the door.

- The record of that initiative states that an angel appeared to Cornelius. The angel told him, “And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: He lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do” (Acts 10:5-6). That angel was referred at as “an angel of God ” (Acts 10:3).
- When Cornelius rehearsed the experience to Peter, he said, “behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing” (Acts 10:30).
- When Peter gave an account of the event, he said that Cornelius had “seen an angel in his house” (Acts 11:15).
- Much later, when Peter referred to this incident, he said, “God made choice among us , that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe” (Acts 15:7).

No Contradiction

Once the manner of the kingdom is perceived, it is apparent that there is no contradiction in these accounts. God the Father is “above all” (Eph 4:6). He, in turn, has committed all authority in heaven and earth to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is carrying out His will (Matt 28:18. Jesus sends forth the Holy Spirit, who carries out His will (John 16:7). Angels are the next level of command, who come to men as representatives of Deity. From one point of view, they are “the angels of God” (Heb 1:6). From another point of view, because they are under the command of Jesus, they are referred to as “His angels” (Matt 13:41). From yet another perspective, our text associates the men sent from Cornelius at the word of an angel as being sent by the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:20). From yet another vantage point, and at the detailed level, it was Cornelius that sent the men. Yet, it was the men themselves that delivered the message as good stewards.

There we have some of the complexities of Divine government being lived out. While God is fully able to impose His own will upon the people, as He will do on the day of judgment, and as He has done with men like Pharaoh and Herod, His ordinary manner of working is through, what I will call, a chain of command. As I understand it, this method is required because of the contaminating effects that sin has had upon the human race. There is a sense in which God Himself will not be fully with us until we are divested of these bodies – these “earthen vessels” (2 Cor 4:7). When that is completed, it is said of the redeemed, “and God Himself shall be with them” (Rev 21:3).

This chain of command to which I refer is why it is imperative that men respond favorably when the message of God is brought to them. To reject the one who delivers the message is to reject the One who gave it. Jesus said to His disciples, “He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16).

In our text, the response of Peter will be to the men who will deliver the message to him. It will

also be to Cornelius, who sent the men to him. It will also be to the angel, who told Cornelius to send them. It will also be to the Spirit, and to Jesus who sent the angel. It will also be to God, who gave “the Man Christ Jesus” His authority.

This is why no room has been made in things pertaining to life and godliness for the opinions of men. In the Divine chain of commandment, they can only deliver what they have been given, or what they have received – and what is given must come from heaven.

Just how serious is it when the message that men deliver in the name of the Lord has its genesis with men? Be assured, that it is serious beyond measure. Men may have learned to live with such a condition, but heaven will have nothing to do with it. It is God who will be justified in “all” of His sayings (Rom 3:4) – whether they have been delivered by Jesus Himself, the Holy Spirit, an angel, or those who have received those words.

A Speaking Spirit

There are a number of texts in which it is said that the Holy Spirit spoke to people. They are not numerous, but they are all significant.

- “Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (Acts 8:29).
- “While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19-20).
- “And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me” NKJV (Acts 20:23).
- “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16).
- “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says : Today, if you will hear His voice, Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, In the day of trial in the wilderness” (Heb 3:7-8).
- “This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness , because the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6).
- “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God” (Rev 2:7).
- “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death” (Rev 2:11).
- “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it” (Rev 2:17).
- “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them” (Rev 14:13).

It is apparent from these texts that the Holy Spirit does not speak as an independent Agent. Jesus said of the Holy Spirit, “He shall not speak of Himself,” or “will not speak on His own authority,” NKJV or “will not speak on His own initiative,” NASB (John 16:13). Technically, He is the appointed

Spokesman for Jesus. Jesus said the Spirit would speak “whatsoever He shall hear” (John 16:13). Another place Jesus said “He will testify about Me” NIV (John 15:26).

Sometimes the Holy Spirit speaks through individuals.

- When Jesus was preparing His disciples for the time when they would speak for Him, He said, “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you ” (Mat 10:19-20). Mark’s Gospel reads, “But when they arrest you and deliver you up, do not worry beforehand, or premeditate what you will speak. But whatever is given you in that hour, speak that; for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit ” NKJV (Mark 13:11).

- On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in other languages. Their message concerned the things that God had done: “And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance . . . we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God ” NKJV (Acts 2:4,11).

- Paul referred to words that were taught by the Holy Spirit: “which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” NASB (1 Cor 2:13).

Words that the Spirit has delivered, however, maintain their primary association with Him, not the human agent.

An Intelligent Message

All of this confirms that the Holy Spirit speaks, or testifies, to men intelligently. He delivers a message that can be understood – indeed, a message that is intended to be understood. A religion that is void of understanding is also one that is void of the Holy Spirit.

This is not the only way He speaks, but, owing to their frailty and fleshly restrictions, it is the only way He speaks to men. We are also told that He speaks to God, making intercession for the saints. That, however, is an intercession that cannot be spoken in human words, therefore it is not spoken to them (Rom 8:26-27). It is spoken in groaning that cannot be uttered.

PETER INQUIRES WHY THEY ARE SEEKING HIM

“ 21 Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?”

The Holy Spirit had not told Peter who these men were, whom they represented, or why they were there. He had only told him they are three in number, that they were looking for him, and that he was to go with them. He did not even tell Peter they were going to ask him to come with them, or why their mission would require him to do so. It is now Peter’s responsibility to learn all of these things as he goes about to do what the Spirit has said. He will come to know what is intended as he proceeds.

I AM HE WHOM YE SEEK

“Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek . . .” Other versions read, “Yes, I am he whom ye seek,” NKJV “Behold, I am the one you are looking for,” NASB and “I am the Simon you are inquiring form.” WEYMOUTH

In order for Peter to learn of their mission, he must ask them personally. He cannot send a messenger, or a servant – as when Elijah send his servant to see if the clouds of rain were in the sky

(1 Kgs 18:43). Or, as Elisha did when a Shunnamite woman came to him for help (2 Kgs 4:12,36). He must go directly to the men and make himself known.

Peter must not think of himself as being in danger, even though he does not know these men, or why they are there. It is enough that the Spirit has sent them, and that is something he must believe and rest in without any reservation. Without fear, therefore he plainly identifies himself to some strangers who, he has been apprised, are seeking him: "Behold, three men seek thee." The number of the men will confirm the truth the Spirit has spoken.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE?

" . . . what is the cause wherefore ye are come?" Other versions read, "For what reason have you come?" NKJV "Why have you come?" NIV "what is the reason for your coming?" NRSV "Why are you here?" GWN "what is the cause for which you are present?" YLT "Now what is it that you want?" LIVING "what is the purpose of your coming?" AMPLIFIED and "what brings you here?" PHILLIPS

The Spirit did not tell Peter why these men were seeking him. That was something that would be made known in the process of doing what the Spirit had directed Peter to do. This is frequently the manner in which God deals with men – not divulging the whole of the directions at the first. This was the way in which God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, clarifying the call as the patriarch proceeded in his journey (Gen 15:7). He did the same when he tried Abraham, commanding him to offer Isaac on an unknown mountain (Gen 22:2).

In the case before us, Peter had to ask the men concerning the cause for which they sought him. This reminds me of the time a Shunammite woman came to the prophet Elisha concerning her son, who had just died. When she arrived, and had been greeted by Elisha's servant, she moved forward and took hold of the feet of the prophet. The servant, Gehazi stepped forward to push her away, thinking the action was inappropriate. The prophet could tell that the woman was distraught, but did not know why. He said to his servant, "Let her alone; for her soul is vexed within her: and the LORD hath hid it from me, and hath not told me " (2 Kgs 4:27).

When we say the Lord directs the steps of a good man (Isa 37:23), we do not mean that the one who is being directed has nothing for to do. Often there is searching, thinking, and even inquiry required, as in this case. The whole person, spirit, soul, and body, is engaged in the process.

Peter knows that there is a cause behind everything the Lord does. As He Himself has said, "I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek 14:23). The apostle, although he is in the highest ranking office in the church, knows he must ask the servants of another man the cause for which they are seeking him.

Pride would stop a worldly man from pursuing an understanding in such a way – but Peter is not a worldly man. Faith does produce a confidence in the one possessing it to make expectant inquiry into matters pertaining to the Lord. It is eager to pursue an available answer.

THEY TOLD HIM OF THEIR MISSION

" 22 And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee."

One of the marks of a good understanding is the ability to be able to state a matter in a few words, and to do so at the proper time. There is also a certain boldness, or confidence, that accompanies this kind of understanding – an understanding that comes from faith (Heb 11:3). There have been men who have seen something take place, but did not know how to report it. One such man was Ahimaaz,

an eager young man who had really seen something, but could not relate it appropriately to king David. He was a messenger – something like a postman. He came to bear news of a military conflict in which David’s son, Absalom, had been killed. When David asked this messenger, “Is the young man Absalom safe?” Ahimaaz replied, “When Joab sent the king’s servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was” (2 Sam 18:29). Of course, such an answer is not in order, so David replied, “Turn aside, and stand here” (2 Sam 18:30).

There is still no place for those who speak about things that concern the kingdom and people of God, yet have no understanding of them. Unfortunately, there is a host of people who are speaking about God, Christ, the Scriptures, and the will of God, who have nothing more than a borrowed knowledge of such things. They really do not comprehend spiritual matters, and therefore can only venture an opinion concerning them. This may appear quite innocent to naive souls. However, consider how inappropriate it would have been for these servants to report their private opinion about what Cornelius had experienced. Peter’s involvement required that a proper report be given to him concerning the cause.

When people go out in the name of the Lord, they must be prepared to give an accurate report of the cause for their mission. If they are speaking to unbelievers, they need to be able to state the cause for salvation, and why it is needful for the people to turn to the Lord – as Paul did to Felix, and the Athenians (Acts 17:17-31; 24:25). If they are engaged in building up the saints, it is essential that they confirm why this is being done – as the apostles did in their epistles

This kind of requirement still exists. When people go out in the name of the Lord, they must be prepared to give an accurate report of the cause for their mission. If they are speaking to unbelievers, they need to be able to state the cause for salvation, and why it is needful for the people to turn to the Lord – as Paul did to Felix, and the Athenians (Acts 17:17-31; 24:25). If they are engaged in building up the saints, it is essential that they confirm why this is being done – as the apostles did in their epistles (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 4:12-16; 2 Pet 3:10-13). In my judgment, much of the weakness of modern evangelism and missions is the absence of such reasoning.

Now, behold how precisely the servants replied, and with what few words they stated the case.

CORNELIUS THE CENTURION

“And they said, Cornelius the centurion . . .” Other versions read, “We have come from Cornelius the centurion,” NIV “Cornelius, a Roman army officer” GWN “A certain man whose name is Cornilus, a centurion,” MRD and “We were sent by Cornelius, A Roman officer.” NLT

While there is a sense in which individuals are incidental, this is not always the case. Here, the identity of the individual was important. The men standing before Peter were the incidental ones. The one whom they represented was the significant one. The Lord had not appeared to them, but to Cornelius. He had not directed them, but Cornelius. The details of their mission were not divulged to these men by the Lord, but by the one to whom a heavenly messenger had been sent. This was not a man Peter might suspect to have been directed by the Lord: “Cornelius,” a Gentile, as even his name indicated; and “a centurion,” an occupation that did not appear to qualify a man for the privilege Cornelius had enjoyed. Before this mission is completed, Peter will have a fresh view of how God regards men.

A JUST MAN

“ . . . a just man . . .” Other versions read, “righteous,” NASB “upright,” NRSV “a man who has God’s approval,” GWN “devout,” NLT “good,” LIVING “just and upright and in right standing with God,” AMPLIFIED and “good-living.” PHILLIPS

The Greek word from which “just” is translated is **di,kaioj** . The lexical meaning of the word is, “righteous, observing divine and human laws; one who is such as he ought to be,” THAYER “morally and ethically, of persons righteous, upright, just,” FRIBERG “conforming to the standard, will, or character of God; upright, righteous, good; just, right; proper; in a right relationship with God; fair, honest; innocent,” UBS “pertaining to being in accordance with what God requires - righteous, just.” LOUW-NIDA

This word is used nineteen times in the New Testament Scriptures, always being applied to individuals.

- **JOSEPH, MARY’S HUSBAND** – “Then Joseph her husband, being a just man . . .” (Matt 1:19).
- **SIMEON** – “And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just . . .” (Luke 2:25).
- **JESUS** – “Now when the centurion saw what was done, he glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous Man” (Luke 23:47). “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust . . .” (1 Pet 3:18).

While there is a sense in which individuals are incidental, this is not always the case. Here, the identity of the individual was important. The men standing before Peter were the incidental ones. The one whom they represented was the significant one.

JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA – “And, behold, there was a man named Joseph, a counsellor; and he was a good man, and a just ” (Luke 23:50).

- **CORNELIUS** – “And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man . . .” (Acts 10:22),
- **THOSE LIVING BY FAITH** – “ . . . The just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38).
- **NOT DESCRIPTIVE OF ANYONE BY NATURE** – “As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one” (Rom 3:10).
- **THE LORD** – “ . . . the Lord, the righteous judge . . .” (2 Tim 4:8)
- **ABEL** – “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous . . .” (Heb 11:4).
- **THE RIGHTEOUS, AS COMPARED WITH THE UNGODLY** – “And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear? ” (1 Pet 4:18). “...and he that is righteous , let him be righteous still . . .” (Rev 22:11).
- **LOT** – “For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds” (2 Pet 2:8).
- **GOD** – “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). “If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29). “And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous , O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because Thou hast judged thus” (Rev 16:5).”
- **THE ONE DOING RIGHTEOUSNESS** – “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous ” (1 John 3:7).

The reference to God and Christ being “just” or “righteous” is descriptive of an inherent characteristic, or one that is integral to their persons. There was not a point in time when They became righteous. That is what they are by nature.

However, when it comes to men, this is not the case. With men, there comes a time when they pass from being unjust to just, and from being unrighteous to being righteous.

As we should expect, this is not a simplistic accomplishment – going from being unjust to being just, or from being unrighteous to being righteous. Now, indeed is the process identical in every case.

- Some, like the Philippian jailer, pass from a totally uncultured spiritual state to one in which they are fully accepted in Christ Jesus. These are those who were found by God, even though they had not sought Him (Isa 65:1; Rom 10:20).
- Others pass from a state in which, as the seed of Abraham, they were cultured by the Law, and lived devoutly within the parameters of that Law – like those on the day of Pentecost, and Saul of Tarsus. These were brought to Christ by the Law, which was their schoolmaster (Gal 3:24,26).
- Still others are brought to Christ from a Gentile state, in which they had been exposed to the Jews, and consequently to the Law and the Prophets. They became proselytes, embracing the what had been made known under the Old Covenant, and living with a conscience toward God. The Ethiopian eunuch was an example of such a man, and now Cornelius is also found in that category.

A Technical Point

From a technical point of view, which is affirmed in Scripture, no one by nature is righteous, or just. It is pointedly affirmed that “There is none righteous” (Rom 3:10; Psa 14:2-3; 53:2-3)– and the word used there is precisely the same as the one used in our text (**di,kaioj**). This is a description of man according to his nature – what he is independent of Divine workings or immediate affiliation with God through Christ. That is, there is nothing within the natural man that qualifies him for Divine acceptance.

Those who are untutored in the ways of the Lord often take this fact and carry it further than God intended for it to be carried. While there is a sense in which a person is either in or out of Christ, saved or lost, and righteous or unrighteous, there is a process involved in passing from death unto live. I am not referring to a set of procedures, but to certain Divine involvements that are initiatory, or preparatory.

For example, between death and life there are such things as conviction, the development of conscience, a desire to be right with God, and a kind of moral rectitude that is provoked by an increasing awareness of God Almighty. These are all preparatory, yet they do involve the development of life within – like a babe is developed in the womb of its mother. It is spiritual life that is born, or birthed. That is, when a person is “born again,” very real life from God preceded that birth. That initial life was not sufficient of itself, any more than a babe in the mother’s womb has realized its purpose.

In the case of Cornelius, his conscience had been awakened Godward to such an extent that he altered his life, bringing forth “fruits meet for repentance” (Matt 3:8). This was the conversion to which Peter referred when he said, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). The objective of the conversion was in order that their sins might be blotted out, and the refreshment, or renewal, of the Holy Spirit might come to them (Tit 3:5). In other words, the people were to live up to the measure of knowledge that they had – and Peter had significant increased the perimeter of that knowledge.

Cornelius was “just” in the sense of ordering his life to conform to the understanding of God that he possessed. That knowledge was not sufficient to actually make him righteous, as occurs in Christ

Jesus (Rom 5:19). However, because he lived with a good conscience, and was supple in the hands of the Lord, he is called a “just” man. God had recognized his manner of life, particularly taking note of prayers and gifts to the poor among the Jews (Acts 10:4).

It is good that men temper their judgment of others with this knowledge of the ways of God. Peter will elaborate on this matter when he arrives at the house of Cornelius, declaring that God has shown that those who conscientiously love God are, indeed, recognized and received by Him. That reception is not in the same sense as when we are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). However, it is the kind of acceptance that will be honored by further revelation – revelation that will enable one to pass from death to life, be born again, and be justified from all things.

Therefore, we are introduced to Cornelius as a “just man,” but not yet a “justified” one. However, God does not condemn Cornelius for not being justified, but commends him for being just – living up to the measure of knowledge that he had received.

ONE THAT FEARS GOD

“...and one that feareth God . . .” Other versions read, “a God-fearing man,” NASB “a God-fearer,” CSB “respects God,” GWN “godly man,” LIVING “he worships God,” IE “one who reveres God,” WILLIAMS and “God-fearing and obedient.” AMPLIFIED

It is good to take special note of this expression, because it is uncommon in our time. Rarely will you hear anyone refer to a devout person as someone who fears God. It is almost as though this terminology has been stricken from the religious vocabulary.

This is an unusually strong word, and we do well not to attempt to neutralize it with powerless words like “reverence” and “respect.” The word “fear” is translated from the Greek word **fobou,menoj**. This is a verb participle of the word **fobe,w** from which we get the word phobia. The root meaning of the Greek word is “to terrify, frighten,” THAYER and “be afraid, become frightened; (a) absolutely be frightened, be alarmed, be afraid.” FRIBERG This is not a philosophical word, but one that stems from being exposed to the Lord, or some work that was obviously from him. The knowledge of God produces such fear. It is accurate knowledge, and moves the individual to dread the very thought of being displeasing to God, or being exposed to His anger or indignation. It is the sharp conflict of God with the flesh that causes this fear.

As in the case of Cornelius, although this can involve terror and dread, it is not the kind that moves a person to run from God. Instead, it compels to draw close to him, and live their lives in a deliberate and consistent manner to please the Lord. Such people “tremble” at the very thought of being displeasing to God. They even “tremble” at His word – which trembling is duly noted and honored by God Himself. As it is written, “but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word” (Isa 66:2).

THE FEAR OF GOD

There are people in Scripture who were noted for fearing God, and that trait was always commendable. Jacob confessed, “I fear God” (Gen 42:18). Those who are declared to have feared God include the following.

- Noah (Heb 11:7).
- Abraham (Gen 22:12).
- The midwives in Egypt (Ex 1:17,21).
- Certain Egyptians during the time of the plagues (Ex 9:20).

- Obadiah (1 Kgs 18:3-4).
- Jehosaphat (2 Chron 20:3).
- Nehemiah (Neh 5:15).
- Hanani, Nehemiah's brother (Neh 7:2).
- Job (Job 1:1,9).
- David (Psa 5:7; 119:38).
- Hezekiah (Jer 26:19).
- Jonah (Jonah 1:9).
- The Jews working with Zerubbabel (Hag 1:12).
- Those who witnessed the loosing of the tongue of Zacharias (Lk 1:64-65).
- The women who came to the tomb of Jesus (Matt 28:8).
- The disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:43).
- All who heard of the death of Ananias (Acts 5:5).
- The whole church when they heard of the death of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:11).

The knowledge of God produces such fear. It is accurate knowledge, and moves the individual to dread the very thought of being displeasing to God, or being exposed to His anger or indignation. It is the sharp conflict of God with the flesh that causes this fear.

- The churches throughout Judea and Galilee and Samaria (Acts 9:31).
- All who heard of a man dominated by an evil spirit who overcome and wounded the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:17).

One of the points that condemns all natural men is that “there is no fear of God before their eyes” (Rom 3:18). How frequently the apostolic writings bring up the matter of fearing the Lord.

- Those who are tempted to be complacent about their identity with God, and to assume their acceptance are told, “Be not highminded, but fear” (Rom 11:20).
- Paul said when he was among the Corinthians, he came “in much fear and trembling” – not in fear of them, but because of their tenuous spiritual condition (1 Cor 2:3).
- To the same people he said, “Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men” (2 Cor 5:11).
- Believers are told to cleanse themselves from all filthiness, perfecting holiness “in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1).
- The saints are told to submit themselves to one another “in the fear of God” (Eph 5:21).
- Believing servants are told to submit to their masters “with fear and trembling” (Eph 6:5). Peter wrote the same thing (1 Pet 2:18).
- Those in Christ are admonished to work out their own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).

Exactly how do you account for any professing Christian being lacking in this area – the area of fearing God? How is it that a Gentile like Cornelius, acquainted only with the Old Covenant, walked in the fear of God, yet those who are exposed to the New Covenant do not? How is it that any person, anywhere, who wears the name of Jesus is not afraid to sin.

Paul exhorted Timothy to publically rebuke those who sinned, including elders, “that others also may fear” (1 Tim 5:20).

- Those with a propensity to religious routine are told, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb 4:1).

- The redeemed are exhorted, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28).

- Peter admonished believers, “And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear” (1 Pet 1:17). Again he said, “Fear God!” (1 Pet 2:17).

- Not only are we told to be ready to give an answer to everyone who inquires about our hope, we are to give the answer “with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15).

- Jude referred to false prophets who, among other things, were characterized as “without fear” (Jude 1:12).

As you can see, the Spirit has spoken much on this subject. That is why it is inexcusable for the professing church to be so lacking in this area. It betrays a near-total lack of respect for the Word of God, by which we maintain spiritual life (Lk 4:4). Very rarely will you hear anyone in our time refer to a Christian or member of the body of Christ as one that “fears God.” However, this is the very way which the Holy Spirit wrote up the record of Cornelius – and it is most refreshing to hear it.

Something to Consider

Exactly how do you account for any professing Christian being lacking in this area – the area of fearing God? How is it that a Gentile like Cornelius, acquainted only with the Old Covenant, walked in the fear of God, yet those who are exposed to the New Covenant do not? How is it that any person, anywhere, who wears the name of Jesus is not afraid to sin. How can any one in fellowship with Jesus not be afraid to touch the unclean thing, be defiled, live aloof from God, or dabble in the world? How is such a thing possible? And, who would have the audacity to suggest that such a person is saved, walking in Divine favor, or accepted by God? Those whose theology allows for such a condition need to step forward and provide some explanations for why they are at variance with God, the Holy Spirit, the Lord Jesus, His Word, and the godly of all ages.

OF GOOD REPORT AMONG ALL THE NATION OF THE JEWS

“ . . . and of good report among all the nation of the Jews . . .” Other versions read, “has a good reputation among all the nation of the Jews,” NKJV “well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews,” NASB “respected by all the Jewish people,” NIV “highly regarded by the whole Jewish nation,” CJB “of whom all the people of the Jews bear good report,” MRD and “well thought of by the Jews.”
LIVING

You may remember that one of the promises given to Abraham was, “I will bless them that bless thee” (Gen 12:3). Knowing this, when Isaac blessed Jacob he said, “blessed be he that blesseth thee” (Gen 27:29). In Balaam’s prophecy, he also referred to this: “Blessed is he that blesseth thee” (Num 24:9). Cornelius is an example of someone who blessed the Israelites, particularly in his alms, or charitable gifts. They recognized it, and held him in high regard.

Cornelius’ respect for the Jewish people was a point of commendation – much like another Centurion who was commended to Jesus because “he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue” (Lk 7:5).

This kind of commendation is exceedingly rare in our day – one where all of the chosen people give their commendation. One of the curses of sectarianism is that the church is so divided that it is rarely, if ever, perceived as being united on anything, much less the commendation, of someone who loves the people of God and is inclined to them.

WAS WARNED BY GOD SEND FOR THEE

“ . . . was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house . . .” Other versions read, “was divinely instructed,” NKJV “was divinely directed” NASB “a holy angel told him,” NIV “directed by a holy angel,” NRSV “had word from God by an angel,” BBE “was warned from heaven by an holy angel,” GENEVA “was divinely warned by a holy messenger,” YLT and “was commanded by a holy angel.” PHILLIPS

The words “was warned from God” are translated from a single Greek word – **evcrhmati,sqh** . The lexical meaning of the word is “a divine response, an oracle,” THAYER “as the content of what God makes known answer, response from God, oracle,” FRIBERG “oracle, reply from God,” UBS “to make known a divine revelation,” LOUW-NIDA “an oracular response, divine warning,” LIDDELL SCOTT “oracular response, divine statement,” LEH and “a divine statement or answer.” GINGRICH As you can see, there is perfect accord among linguists as to the meaning of the word in this text.

The same word is used elsewhere in this way, and is appropriately translated.

- “And being warned of God (crhmatisqe,ntej) in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way” (Matt 2:12).
- “But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God (crhmatisqei,j) in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee” (Mat 2:22).
- “And it was revealed unto him (kecrhmatisme,non) by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ” (Luke 2:26).
- “Who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God (kecrhma,tistai) when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount” (Heb 8:5).
- “By faith Noah, being warned of God (crhmatisqei,j) of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith” (Heb 11:7).
- “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth (crhmati,zonta) , much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven” (Heb 12:25).

Everywhere in Scripture, those who do not hearken to the word of the Lord, or obey it, are summarily condemned – whether the word was spoken directly, or through a messenger

The report of the servants, together with the representation of it in the text, is altogether accurate. Ultimately, the word came to Cornelius from God, for the angel that delivered it was said to be “an angel of God” (10:3). Further, the angel reported that his prayers and alms had come up “for a memorial before God” (10:4). This was, then, a Divine directive – a word from God, delivered by an angel, instructing Cornelius what he was to do.

The word “warning” is also appropriate, although it is omitted in several translations. Several lexicographers say that this meaning is inherent in the word itself. However, even if this was not so, who is the person who does not see the absolute necessity of hearkening to a word sent to them by

God? Everywhere in Scripture, those who do not hearken to the word of the Lord, or obey it, are summarily condemned – whether the word was spoken directly, or through a messenger (Ex 6:9; 7:13; 8:15,19; 9:12; 16:20; Judges 11:28; 1 Sam 2:25; 2 Chron 35:22; Neh 9:16,29; Psa 106:25; Jer 7:24,26; 34:14; 36:31; 44:5).

The fact that Cornelius acted on the word of the angel immediately conformed that he took it seriously.

One of the great tragedies of our time is that multitudes of professing Christians do not take the word of God seriously. They do not see the warning aspect of the Scriptures. In stark contrast of this circumstance David said of the Word of God, “More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned : and in keeping of them there is great reward” (Psa 19:10-11). This is precisely why people neglect the Word of God, and even when they know portions of it, do not keep it.

AND TO HEAR WORDS FROM THEE

“ . . . and to hear words of thee.” Other versions read, “and hear a message from you,” NASB “hear what you have to say,” NIV “to give hearing to your words,” BBE “to listen to what you have to say,” CJB “hear discourse from thee,” MRD “to hear sayings from thee,” YLT “tell him what God wanted him to do,” LIVING and “to listen to and act upon what you have to say.” AMPLIFIED

The word that is translated “words” is **r`h,mata** . This is a unique word, and is not always the word translated “words.” For example, the term “words” that is found in Acts 2:22,40; 5:5; 7:22, and a number of other places is **lo,gouj**. The difference in these two words is technical, but significant. In the case of the latter meaning, the emphasis is placed on the words themselves, whether they are a statement, a question, or an answer. However, as used in our text, the term “words” denote a message – a compilation of words that are focused on something specific, and deliver a cogent thought or specific communication.

In this case there was a specific objective that would be served by Peter’s “words.” Acts 10:6 states that they were words that would tell Cornelius what he ought to do . When Cornelius rehearsed his vision to Peter, he said they were all there to hear “all things that are commanded thee of God ” (Acts 10:33). When Peter rehearsed this incident to the believing Jews in Jerusalem, he reported Cornelius showing them “how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved ” (Acts 11:14).

These were nor mere oratorical words, rhetoric, or a kind of speech with enticing words of men’s wisdom. There was an objective in them – a specific message that was calculated to clarify what Cornelius was to do.

If you have an ear for such things, you will detect the absence of a message in a lot of preaching and teaching. Much of what is said today lacks spiritual power, because it is in word only. That is, there is no meaningful content – nothing that faith can grasp, and nothing that can sustain the soul.

These will not be the kind of words that Peter brings to the household of Cornelius. He will deliver a word that clarifies the purpose of God, declares what Jesus has accomplished, and elucidates what is required of Cornelius and those who are with him. He does not have a lot of time to prepare for this occasion – and it is an epoch of major proportions. However, he has been living by faith and walking in the Spirit, and will therefore be easily directed. What he speaks will come from his heart, but that will not be the origin of his words. His mind will be fully engaged in what he says, but that will not be the fountain from which they spring. He will speak as an ambassador Christ, delivering His message, while understanding it and being in full accord with it. His mouth, his mind, and his heart

are coordinated.

HE CALLED THEM IN, LODGED THEM, AND WENT AWAY WITH THEM

“ 23 Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.”

Once the men have spoken, Peter needed no further word from them. He knows what he is to do, and immediately responds in an appropriate manner.

HE CALLED THEM IN

“Then called he them in . . .” Other versions read, “he invited them in,” NKJV “invited the men into the house,” NIV “called them in,” RSV “took them in,” BBE “bringing them in,” DOUAY “asked the men to come in,” GWN “led them in,” MRD and “Upon hearing this, Peter invited them in.” WEYMOUTH

This is a display of hospitality, which carries the idea of receiving a person who is away from home, and providing all of the necessities and amenities that are associated with one’s personal residence.

These brethren had traveled a considerable distance – about 30-35 miles, and probably on foot. Peter immediately invited them in so that they might be refreshed, and no doubt given something to eat. He himself was about to eat before they came. Now they could join him in the meal. By this time it was considerably after Noon. He had gone up to the roof to pray at Noon, had grown hungry and was having food prepared. He then had a vision that reoccurred three times, each time with some dialogue. He had then been thinking about the vision when the Holy Spirit spoke to him. Now he has met the men at the door and heard the cause for which they had come.

HE LODGED THEM

“ . . . and lodged them.” Other versions read, “gave them lodging,” NASB “to be his guests,” NIV “for the night,” BBE “gave them lodging,” CSB “had them stay overnight,” GWN “entertained them where he lodged,” MRD “showed them hospitality,” NAB “entertained them as guests,” NET “lodged them overnight,” LIVING “stay for the night,” IE and “they were his guests.” ISV

He invites them in as his guests, doing as the good Samaritan who left the man he had found wounded and half dead in an inn. He paid for the man’s keeping, and told the innkeeper “Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee” (Luke 10:35). I do not doubt that Peter did the same thing here. The word translated “lodged” is **evxe,nisen** , has the following lexical meaning: “to receive as a guest, to entertain hospitably,” THAYER and “entertain as a guest.” UBS

This is a display of hospitality, which carries the idea of receiving a person who is away from home, and providing all of the necessities and amenities that are associated with one’s personal residence. There are a number of instances of hospitality recorded in Scripture, and they are there for our learning.

- Pharaoh was hospitable to Abraham, even though it was for Sarah’s sake (Gen 12:16).
- Melchizedek was hospitable to Abraham (Gen 14:18).
- Abraham entertained angels unawares (Gen 18:1-8).
- Lot entertained angels unawares (Gen 19:1-11).

- Abimelech was hospitable to Abraham (Gen 20:14-15).
- The sons of Heth were hospitable to Abraham (Gen 23:6,11).
- Laban entertained Abraham's servant (Gen 24:31).
- Laban was hospitable to Jacob (Gen 29:13-14).
- Isaac entertained Abimelech (Gen 26:27-30).
- Joseph was hospitable to his brethren (Gen 43:31-34).
- Pharaoh was hospitable to Jacob (Gen 45:16-20; 47:7-12).
- Jethro was hospitable to Moses (Ex 2:20).
- Rahab entertained the spies from Israel (Josh 2:1-16).
- David was hospitable to Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son (2 Sam 9:7-13).
- The widow of Zaraphath was hospitable to Elijah (1 Kgs 17:10-24).
- The Shunammite woman entertained Elisha (2 Kgs 4:8).
- Job was hospitable to strangers (Job 31:32).
- Martha was hospitable to Jesus (Lk 10:38; John 12:1-2).
- Zaccheus entertained Jesus (Lk 19:1-10).
- Lydia was hospitable to Paul and Silas (Acts 16:15).
- Publius, a barbarian, was hospitable to Paul (Acts 28:7).
- Phebe was hospitable to Paul (Rom 16:2).
- Onesiphous cared for Paul (2 Tim 1:16).
- Gaius was faithful to entertain brethren and strangers (3 John 1:5-8).

It has always been the manner of holy people to be hospitable. Among the Gentile believers, hospitality was also urged. Paul admonishes brethren in Rome to be "given to hospitality," or to practice it (Rom 12:13). One of the qualifications of those who feed the flock of God is that he must be "given to hospitality" (1 Tim 3:2). Paul told Titus that an elder must be a "lover of hospitality" (Tit 1:8). Before a widow can qualify for being supported by the church, she must have "lodged strangers," "washed the saint's feet," and "relieved the afflicted" (1 Tim 5:10). Hebrews 13:2 admonishes us, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb 13:2). Peter exhorts us, "Be hospitable to one another without grumbling" NKJV (1 Pet 4:9).

This was not mere obedience to a commandment, for there was no specific commandment for Peter to do this. This was the expression of a person who was living toward the One who died and rose again for him

Well, there certainly is no lack of teaching or examples on this subject. However, my point is not simply to draw attention to the appropriateness, and even necessity, of hospitality. Rather it is to again confirm that true spiritual life is being lived out in the book of Acts. No one admonished Peter to take these men in. The Holy Spirit did not instruct him to care for these men, or to lodge them overnight. He only told him to go with them (Acts 10:19-20). However, because Jesus was dwelling in Peter's heart by faith, and he was engaged in fellowship with God's Son, this is what he did. This was not mere obedience to a commandment, for there was no specific commandment for Peter to do this. This was the expression of a person who was living toward the One who died and rose again for him (2 Cor 5:15).

HE WENT AWAY WITH THEM

“And on the morrow Peter went away with them . . .” Other versions read, “the next day Peter went away with them,” NKJV “he arose and went away with them,” NASB “started out with them,” NIV and “got up and went with them.” NRSV

Having obtained a night’s rest, Peter got up in the morning and went with the men, just as the Spirit had instructed him to do. He did not delay, but set out immediately on the mission. Here was a man who was “meet for the Master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). Peter was one of whom it could be said, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21).

I cannot emphasize enough that we are being exposed to what it means to live by faith (Heb 10:38), walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), be ready to give an answer (1 Pet 3:15), and work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

CERTAIN BRETHREN WENT WITH HIM

“ . . . and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.” Other versions read, “some of the brethren from Joppa accompanied him,” NASB “some of the brothers from Joppa sent along,” NIV “some of the believers from Joppa,” NRSV “some disciples from Joppa went along,” GWN and “Some of the Jewish brothers from Joppa went with Peter.” WEYMOUTH

There was communication and unanimity among believers in those days – a closeness that is rarely seen in an institutionalized setting. When the lives of professed believers revolve around the organization, this kind of unity is absent. Here we are seeing something of the impact of the 133 rd Psalm: “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore” (Psa 133:1-3).

We know from Peter’s report in Acts eleven, the number of brethren that accompanied him on the trip to Cornelius’ house. The men were with him when Peter reported, “And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house” (Acts 11:11-12).

I have often pondered the conversations that must have taken place during that journey. It was not until some time during the next day that they entered into Caesarea, where Cornelius was awaiting them.

The brethren who accompanied Peter would also be witnesses to the work of God – a work that was truly an epoch, long to be remembered. They will also be with Peter when he reports this event.

CONCLUSION

Things are now positioned for the Lord to work mightily. The one designated to receive the truth of the Gospel is ready. The one who has been chosen to declare the message is alert to the circumstance, and is now on his way to the appointed gathering. A body of people is being assembled at the house of Cornelius as the time has arrived when the door of faith will be opened to the Gentiles.

Both the chief recipient of the message, and the one who will deliver it, have been living with an acute consciousness of God Almighty. The message that is delivered will be a proper one, and the response to it will be a God glorifying one.

Ten men are journeying together back to the house of Cornelius: two household servants, one

soldier, six members of the body of Christ, and the apostle who has been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. What a marvelous example of holy diversity!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #48

PETER AND CORNELIUS GIVE THEIR EXPLANATIONS

“ 10:24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends. 25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. 26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man. 27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. 28 And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29 Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me? 30 And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31 And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee. 33 Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we

all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God. ” (Acts 10:24-33)

INTRODUCTION

Having been directed by the Holy Spirit to go with the men who have appeared at the house of Simon the tanner, Peter leaves the next morning with the men. Six brethren in Christ from Joppa join them. When the men came from Cornelius, he had a soldier join them. When Peter returned with them, six brethren join him. It is evident from the account that the soldier was more than a mere soldier. In fact, he is referred to as “a devout soldier” – the

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- **CONCLUSION**

word “devout” meaning godly, or pious. Behold how those with a reverence for God find themselves coming together – whether they are Jew or Gentile.

The whole account is refreshing in that it centers around the activities of devout people – in the case of Cornelius, a man who was obviously in quest of salvation; in Peter’s case, a man who was eager to proclaim the Gospel. Both men were intent upon serving God, and both men were experiencing the expansion of their understanding. Also, we will observe how devout people focus upon the Word of the Lord, and are intent upon knowing what the Lord has said, and what He requires. This is a common trait among those who fear the Lord. It is not found among those who lack this fear. The glaring absence of this attitude in our time is a cause for alarm.

Upon arriving at the house of Cornelius, Peter finds many people gathered together to hear the Word of the Lord. While they were called together by Cornelius himself, there was still a common interest in what was going to take place, else they would probably not have been there.

At once, he and Cornelius begin speaking with one another concerning the uniqueness of the situation, and how they had both been prepared by God for the occasion. Everything gravitated to the

heavenly agenda, which was the total reason for the involvement of both men.

In this passage, we are being exposed to the impact of revelation upon tender, honest, and good hearts. Both men report what they have learned from heaven, and how they have been directed. This has caused their thinking to come to a common point, where true spiritual advance is possible. It is as though they came from different countries, converging on the same island, or from different rooms of a house, arriving in the same room. This is precisely how a company of people come to comprehend the truth of God. Whether they are separated from one another, or are privileged to company with one another, they must arrive at the point of a “common salvation” (Jude 1:3), and a “common faith” (Tit 1:4).

ALL ROADS

DO NOT LEAD TO GOD

Contrary to some ideas, all roads do not lead to God. Jesus said there was a broad that leads to destruction, and He gave no indication that it is clearly marked so that casual travelers can detect and avoid it. He also said that there was a single “way” that leads to life, and a solitary and restrictive “gate” by which it is accessed (Matt 7:13-14).

There are various means that men employ in their quest to find Divinity, ultimate truth, or unshakable reality.

Philosophy

One of the premier methods involves philosophy. Analytical Philosophy involves an discriminating approach that employs worldly wisdom and natural aptitude. Moral philosophy involves a study of human conduct that employs the assignment of certain norms and definition based purely upon the psychoanalysis of men. Natural philosophy involves the analyzation of nature, and a consequent statement of various laws and characteristics that are based upon the wisdom of men. While there may be some place for this approach when dealing with things under the sun, they have no value in an effort to know God, arrive at an understanding of His will, or obtain His approval. It cannot penetrate the brick wall of the natural man and the ignorance produced by sin.

Nature

Some men have sought to find God by studying nature. Beholding in it some measure of order, they imagine that it will assist them in finding God, discerning His will, or gaining His acceptance. But nature does not deliver a message that is precise enough to provide a profitable perception of God. The best that it can do it testify of the reality of God and of His power (Rom 1:20). Even then, the affirmation of Scripture is that no man has ever formed an acceptable concept of God through nature. Instead, they concluded that they ought to worship nature in its varied forms (Rom 1:23,28).

Discipline

There have also been men who have imagined that God could be discovered by some form of bodily or mental discipline. In doing this, they think they can find Divine approval and strength. Thus some men have fasted for long periods, or stood in one position for a long time, or followed some form of transcendental meditation. But none of these attempts brought clarity of understanding concerning God or His ways. Nor, indeed, did they gain a sense of God’s acceptance of them.

Tradition

This, in my judgment, is the most difficult to overcome – the religious traditions of men. This

difficulty is owing to the feigned association of the traditions with the Lord Himself, as well as the access men have to Him. Let me define “tradition” as I am using the word. As used in Scripture this is more than a mere thought or opinion. When the Scriptures use this word in bad sense, they employ a term that means, “The body of precepts, esp. ritual, which in the opinion of the later Jews were orally delivered by Moses and orally transmitted in unbroken succession to subsequent generations, which precepts, both illustrating and expanding the written law, as they did were to be obeyed with equal reverence.” THAYER In other words, these represent the opinions of men concerning something that God has said. Those opinions are then encased in a precept, or requirement (like the washing of hands—Mark 7:5). This requirement is then bound upon men, carrying all of the force of a word that had been given directly from God. Stated yet another way, the tradition is equated with Scripture.

In other words, these represent the opinions of men concerning something that God has said. Those opinions are then encased in a precept, or requirement (like the washing of hands—Mark 7:5). This requirement is then bound upon men, carrying all of the force of a word that had been given directly from God. In other words, the tradition is equated with Scripture.

Jesus soundly denounced such traditions, affirming that they transgressed the commandment of God: “But He answered and said unto them, Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Mat 15:3). He also said those traditions “made the commandment of God of none effect,” removing its effectiveness (Matt 15:6), and rendering the Word of God itself as powerless (Mk 7:13). In fact, Jesus said that to take hold of “the tradition of men,” it was necessary to “lay aside the commandment of God” (Mk 7:8). It is difficult to conceive of anything being more serious than these effects!

Throughout the history of the church, it has struggled against the traditions of men – rules and precepts that have been bound upon men just as though they were given by God, and were stipulated in Scripture precisely as they are encased in the traditions. Permit me to name a few of the more apparent ones.

- That it is wrong for priests to marry, even though “it is better to marry than to burn” [with lust] (1 Cor 7:9).
- That it is wrong to eat certain meats, even though God says they are all to be received with thanksgiving (1 Tim 4:3-4).
- That the Lord’s Table is observed for the forgiveness of sins, when God says it is where we remember Jesus and proclaim His death (1 Cor 11:24-26).
- That it is sinful to use a musical instrument in expressing praise to God, even though the Scriptures speak of “the musical instruments of God” (1 Chron 16:42), and “the harps of God” (Rev 15:2).
- That men are saved through a five-step plan, even though no men inquiring about salvation were ever told such a thing (Acts 2:37-38; 16:30-31)..
- That men are saved by repeating a prayer, even though that is nowhere affirmed to be the means through which salvation is realized (Eph 2:8).
- That evangelizing the lost is the fundamental work of the church, when the edification of the body is said to be the objective (Eph 4:11-12).
- That elders are the administrators of the affairs of the church, when the Scriptures say they are to “feed the flock of God ” (1 Pet 5:2).
- That women are fundamentally inferior to men, even though the Spirit teaches there is not even a distinction of female in Christ (Gal 3:28), speaks of prominent women (Acts 17:4), and admonishes even men to assist holy women in certain ministries they have (Rom

16:2).

- That the man is the priest and manager of the household, and all decisions must go through him, even though children are told to honor their mother as well as their father (Lk 18:20), and hearken to the law of their mother (Prov 1:8; 6:20). Younger women are even admonished to marry, bear children, and guide, or manage the house (1 Tim 5:14).

There is a vast difference between a private view and the tradition of men. There is freedom to have private views, but they may not be bound men as a law from God – which is something that the traditions of men seek to do. I say this because it is not my intention to encroach on the right of any person to have views that spring from a good conscience. I am speaking of opinions that are employed to sit in judgment of others. Also, a person may unnecessarily constrict their own life by such perceptions when God makes no such demands of them. These areas will be addressed and settled as a person grows up into Christ. Those in Christ must be willing to allow such a process to take place in their peers as well, allowing the formation of a good conscience.

In view of these things, my own observation is that any response to the truth of God that is not in harmony with the reactions of Peter and Cornelius, is a kind of revelation of an “evil heart of unbelief” (Heb 3:12). Both of these men were faced with something that did not conform to their present perception. Both of them were being confronted by something that bore directly upon the conscience, and upon an extended practice in their lives. There were also some traditions held that complicated the whole matter. Yet, neither of them clung obstinately to their old way of thinking. The horizon of truth was being expanded, and both Cornelius and Peter responded to it in faith, together with a good conscience.

THE NEXT DAY THEY ARRIVE IN CAESAREA

“ 10:24 And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.”

Ten men had left Joppa, traveling northward to Caesarea – approximately thirty miles. The group consisted of two servants, one soldier, Peter the apostle, and twelve brethren – believers in Jesus – from Joppa. All of the men were devout, including the servants, who were members of a household “that feared God” (Acts 10:2). Two groups, both noted for being “devout,” yet one group was more advanced than the other, having heard and embraced the Gospel, which shed a greater light. One group of men were living within the framework of the Old Covenant. The other were joyously within the larger perimeter of the New Covenant. Both groups were in a favorable position with God, yet one was justified and one was not. One was illuminated and one was not. One had been reconciled to God, and the other had not. One had been born again, yet the other had not. Yet, both groups were in a state of advancing. One was moving toward birth, and the other we as moving toward glory. One was being prepared for justification, and the other was in a state of justification, yet still being changed by the Holy Spirit into the image of Jesus.

Within some of the constraints of certain sectarian stances, these men could never have traveled together – at least not without condemning one another. However, a single purpose and work was directing them, and when those are from heaven, they tend to unite those who would otherwise be divided.

THE MORROW AFTER

“And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea.” Other versions read, “the following day,” NKIV “the day after that,” BBE and “the next day.” MRD

A trip of this duration would compare to a trip of 500-700 miles in our time. Of course, such a trip would be spent in the relative ease of a vehicle of some sort, yet, the average person would

consider it tiring, and would not want to commence immediately with some kind of focused endeavor. However, no such circumstances are made known in our text.

After leaving the morning following the arrival of the three men, the entourage arrive at the city of Caesarea some time the next day, the trip lasting 1-1 1/2 days. Even in our time, a trip of that duration for purposes of delivering the truth to an inquiring soul is exceeding rare. A trip of this length would compare to one of 500-700 miles in our time. Of course, such a trip would be spent in the relative ease of a vehicle of some sort, yet, the average person would consider it tiring, and would not want to commence immediately with some kind of focused endeavor. However, no such circumstances are made known in our text. It reads as though they had, so to speak, walked across the street, beginning their communication without delay.

The Impact of Involvement with God

There is a certain enlivening impact that results from being involved in the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God – as all who have experienced it can attest. I do not doubt that these men all arrived in Caesarea with in a state of high spiritual exhilaration and anticipation. They were engaged in something that had been initiated by heavenly communication – both to Cornelius and to Peter.

- A vision appeared to Cornelius (10:5)
- An angel spoke to Cornelius (10:5b)
- Cornelius' actions had come up as a memorial before God (10:4)
- An angel told Cornelius what he was to do (10:5-6)
- Peter had seen heaven opened (10:11a)
- Peter saw a “certain vessel” descending out of heaven to him (10:11b-12)
- A voice from heaven spoke to Peter (10:13,15)
- The Holy Spirit directed Peter concerning what he was to do (10:19-20)

There had been more heavenly communication with these two men, within a period of two days, than entire generations of people had experienced. In addition to Peter having an understanding of this, He also knew the enthronement of Jesus had changed the degree of Divine involvements with men. It is difficult to comprehend how all of these things must have impacted upon what took place among these men as they made their way to Caesarea. I do not doubt that the trip seemed to pass very swiftly.

Until a person desires Divine approval more than anything else, and is ready to hear what God has commanded, without any reservations or preconceived notions, they are not ready to be instructed concerning the appropriation of salvation.

It is one thing to talk about what God is doing. It is quite another to become involved in it. In my understanding, no place has been made for an individual or a group to voice a view of something God is doing while they themselves are external to it. I do not know how the validity of such a procedure can be validated.

CORNELIUS WAITED FOR THEM

“ And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.” Other versions read that Cornelius “was waiting,” NJKV “was expecting,” NIV “was looking for them,” DARBY “was waiting anxiously for them,” NET and “was waiting for an expecting them.”
AMPLIFIED

Cornelius was not casual in his response to Divine direction. The words “waited for” are translated

from as single Greek word – **prosdokw/n** . This word “denotes mental direction,” THAYER and has the following root meaning: “to look for,” THAYER “expect, anticipate, with the added element of tension arising from hope or fear,” FRIBERG “live in suspense, wait or be on watch,” UBS “to wait with anxiety,” LOUW-NIDA and “to expect, wait for a person.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The words “waited for” contain the idea of fervency, waiting with anticipation, and being in a state of suspense, or excitement. Modern colloquialisms that express this attitude include, “I can hardly wait to meet him” or, “he was on pins and needles.”

The idea is that all of Cornelius’ thoughts were focused on the arrival of Peter. At this point, his entire life revolved around this anticipated event. And what was there about this occasion that elicited such a fervent desire and expectation in this centurion? Was it that he was going to meet a famous man? Indeed not! It was that he was going to be told what God wanted him to do! The servants told Peter Cornelius had sent for him so that he could “hear words” from him (Acts 10:22).

The record will confirm that the words would have to do with Cornelius and those with him being saved. In other words, the matter of salvation, or being delivered from sin and put in right relation with God now dominated the mind of this man. He anxiously awaited the arrival of a man who would tell him what God had commanded.

I will tell you that it is not likely that any person will ever be saved who does not obtain this mindset. Until a person desires Divine approval more than anything else, and is ready to hear what God has commanded, without any reservations or preconceived notions, they are not ready to be instructed concerning the appropriation of salvation. To my knowledge there are few examples in Scripture, if, indeed, there are any at all, of a person being told what to do to be saved who had no prevailing interest in salvation. I realize that this contrasts sharply with many notions of evangelizing and soul-winning. However, it is the preaching of the Gospel itself that arouses in men a desire to be saved, not relating a plan whereby they are to be saved.

So far as the involvement of men is concerned, instructions on how to be saved really mean very little to any person who does not desire to be saved. If there is not first evidence of some Divine work within, teaching men what they ought to do to be saved is premature, to say the least. Although this may appear to be very elementary, there is lot of confusion among professing believers on this matter. This is why the text before us is especially relevant.

HE HAD CALLED TOGETHER HIS RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

Other versions read that he had called “his relatives and close friends,” NKJV “all the kindred of his family, and also such intimate friends as he had,” MRD and “all his relations and intimate friends.” PHILLIPS

While salvation is, indeed, a personal matter, it is not a private one . As everyone who has had a prevailing interest in salvation knows, that interest is accompanied with a concern for others who are close to them. No person who believes has the faintest desire to be the only one who does so. It is the nature of faith, hope, and love, to spread, desiring that others participate in the blessing.

Even at the inception of spiritual life, before it is birthed, there is a kind of accord with the Divine nature that is developed. The Lord Himself desires that “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). Even so, those who are being drawn toward Him participate in that desire. This principle is being lived out in Cornelius, as well as in Peter, who is the one bringing the good news to him.

CORNELIUS WORSHIPS PETER

“ 25 And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him.” Other versions read, “fell at his feet in reverence,” NIV “worshiped him,” NRSV “gave him worship,” “did him homage,” DARBY “at his feet adored,” DOUAY “did him reverence,” NJB “did bow before him,” YLT and “paid worshipful reverence to him” AMPLIFIED

It is quite possible that Cornelius met Peter before he actually arrived at his home. Because he was anxiously awaiting the arrival of Peter, this is probably what took place.

Here, the word “worshiped” describes a physical activity, as compared to an inward expression of the heart. It comes from the Greek word **prosekunhsen**, which has the following lexical meaning: “to prostrate oneself . . . by kneeling or prostration to do homage (to one) or make obeisance,” THAYER “(fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to,” GINGRICH

Technically, what Cornelius did was not tantamount to the fear of God, or having another god before Him. However, even physically bowing down in homage and an attitude of submission to any created personality is forbidden by God. The Law said of idols, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them : for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me” (Ex 20:5). Physically bowing down or serving an inanimate object was strictly forbidden by the Law, which had “a form

Technically, what Cornelius did was not tantamount to the fear of God, or having another god before Him. However, even physically bowing down in homage and an attitude of submission to any created personality is forbidden by God.

of knowledge and of the truth” (Rom 2:20). Whether it was the brazen serpent Moses made (2 Kgs 18:4), or statute of Molech or Baal (2 Kgs 11:7), this was a forbidden practice. In our day, it is still wrong, whether it is an image of Buddha or of the virgin Mary. This is why the three Hebrew children refused to fall down before the giant image that Nebucahdnezzar had reared up in Babylon (Dan 3:5-18).

It is quite true that falling prostrate before a person in the expression of honor was practiced among oriental people. Abraham bowed himself to the children of Heth (Gen 23:7), and before the people of the land (Gen 23:12). Jacob bowed seven times before his brother Esau (Gen 33:3). His handmaidens and their children did the same (Gen 33:6). Leah and her children, together with Joseph [not Jacob’s son, who was not yet born] and Rachel did the same (Gen 33:7). When angels appeared as men before Abraham and Lot, they bowed down before them (Gen 18:2; 19:1). Ruth bowed down before Boaz (Ruth 2:10). There are a few other instances like this recorded in Scripture (1 Sam 20:41; 25:23; 28:14; 2 Sam 14:22,33; 24:20; 1 Kgs 1:23; 2:15; 1 Chron 21:20). However, those were times when less of God Himself was known, and little light had been shed on His Person. It appears from the record that this is why these actions, many of which were very much like the action described in our text, were tolerated. By tolerated, I mean by the person to whom the others bowed. Although some of them were holy men, yet their understanding of God Himself was vastly inferior to that which has now been made known. It was not, therefore, that men were willing to receive something God had forbidden, but because they did not yet possess a fully formed understanding of both the depravity of man and the absolute holiness of God. However, in our text, the conditions just described no longer existed – at least not among those who were reconciled to God.

When the devil tempted Jesus during those forty days following His baptism, he endeavored to induce Jesus to fall down before him. “Again, the devil taketh Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto Him, All these things will I give Thee, if Thou wilt fall down and worship me ” (Matt 4:9). The word

translated “worship” is a form of the same word used in our text: **proskunh,shlj** . This is also the word used to describe John falling down before an angel during the giving of the Revelation (Rev 19:10; 22:8). Both times John did this, the angel forbade his reaction, telling him to not do it. Remember, this was an overt activity that God had forbidden for anyone but Himself. The angel knew that this included even lofty heavenly personalities, and solemnly reminded John of that fact.

Most of the times this kind of bowing down is mentioned in the New Covenant Scriptures (sixty times), it refers to men either bowing before Jesus, or God the Father (Matt 2:2,8,11; 8:2; 9:18; 14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:9,17; Mk 5:6; Lk 24:52; John 4:23,24; 9:38; 12:20; Acts 8:27; 24:11; 1 Cor 14:25; Heb 1:6; Rev 4:10; 5:14; 7:11; 11:1,16; 14:7; 15:4; 19:4,10; 22:9).

Now, we will see how a man of God, who possesses a fuller knowledge of Him, is acquainted with His ways, and is not overcome by the circumstance, responds to this action of Cornelius. Behold how a true disciple thinks!

PETER REFUSES THE WORSHIP

“ 26 But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.” Other versions read, “Peter lifted him up, saying,” NKJV “I too am just a man,” NASB “I am only a man myself,” NIV “I am only a mortal,” NRSV “I myself am also a human being,” NAB “I’m a human being just like you!,” NLT “I’m not a God!” LIVING and “I am nothing more than a human.” CEV

Peter refuses to allow Cornelius to bow down to him. He has a more thorough understanding of both the nature of men and the nature of God. While Cornelius was not treating him as though he was God, or even some lesser god, yet Peter considers the action of Cornelius inappropriate. His reaction was similar to that of Paul and Barnabas when certain men in Lystra thought they were gods, and were going to make sacrifices to them. When the men of God heard of their intention, “they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein” (Acts 14:15). Even after some extensive reasoning on the matter, they “scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them” (Acts 14:18).

Within those insightful laborers of the first century, there was an acute sensitivity to proper manners and expressions. The thought of a man receiving admiration or recognition that was due only to God was repulsive, and they would not allow it.

Lest anyone imagine that this sort of activity has become obsolete in our time, the Roman Pope still receives such recognition, with men bowing before him, kissing his ring, and even his feet. The Roman church also still promotes and practices what it referred to as genuflection, which is to bow, bending the knee to certain images that are thought to be sacred. Other orthodox churches also practice the honoring of prelates in this manner.

It is important to note that there is a level at which all human distinctions are dissolved. As a general rule, the closer one is to the earth, the more prominent such distinction become. However, the closer one is to the Lord, and the more aware they are of heavenly things, the less likely it is for such distinctions to be entertained. In Christ, no individual is permitted to “think more highly of himself than he ought to think.” Rather, they are to think of themselves in direct relation with ‘the measure of faith’ that God has “dealt,” or dispensed to them (Rom 12:3). Also, when considering other men, believers are not to assign a greater worth to the individual than their words and deed support. Paul carefully stated the case in these words: “For if I do wish to boast I shall not be foolish, for I shall be speaking the truth; but I refrain from this, so that no one may credit me with more than he sees in me or hears from me ” (2 Cor 12:6).

In stark contradiction of these things, and especially within Christendom, there is a remarkable veneration of men who have little to say, and appear to do little that is declared to be valuable in the eyes of God. Too often religious leaders are abysm ally ignorant of the Word of God and the purpose of God – to say nothing of the Lord Himself and “His Christ.” If you were to remove their academic credentials, and refuse to fasten your attention on their outward accomplishments, there would be precious little that would distinguish them from other men. This is not an acceptable practice, even though it is quite common. In Christ Jesus, the mark of greatness has to do with serving, not ruling (Mark 9:35). This has particular regard to the distribution of spiritual nourishment that God provides in Christ and through His Word, and assisting men in things that pertain to life and godliness. No man is truly great who is deficient in these areas.

Even though Peter is anything but incompetent in matters pertaining to life and godliness, and the declaration of the mind of God, yet he refuses the honor Cornelius attempts to give him. He does not do so because of any disdain for Cornelius, or any feigned humility. Rather, as he is basking in the light of the knowledge of God, he perceived such honor as wholly unreasonable. He knew there was One greater than himself, and that it would be nothing more than a distraction to receive such honor.

PETER FINDS MANY WHO HAD COME TOGETHER

“ 27 And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together.”

AS HE TALKED WITH THEM

“And as he talked with him, he went in . . .” Other versions read, “And he went in, talking with him,” DARBY “While he conversed with him,” NAB “Peter continued talking with him as he went in,” NET “Talking together they went in,” NJB “So they talked together and went inside,” NLT “So he got up and they talked together for a while and then went in,” LIVING and “Then Peter went right into the house in deep conversation with Cornelius.” PHILLIPS

The very notion contradicts everything we know about the impact of Divine confrontation. And yet, across the length and breadth of this land, there are casual and quotidian conversations taking place among those who say they have come to worship the Lord or in some way honor His name.

And what do you suppose these two men were walking about, being instantly engaged in conversation? The weather? The trip from Joppa to Caesarea? Peter’s first impression of Cornelius’ dwelling? To even ask such questions appears rather foolish! Considering what had prompted Cornelius to call send for Peter, and what had moved Peter to come with the men without questioning their mission, should indicate this was no casual conversation. How can a man who has seen and been directed by an angel speak casually with the person of whom that angel spoke? And how can a man who has had a vision from heaven accompanied by a command and response, and repeated three times, additionally being specifically directed by the Holy Spirit, now engage in mundane conversation at his appointed destination? The very notion contradicts everything we know about the impact of Divine confrontation. And yet, across the length and breadth of this land, there are casual and quotidian conversations taking place among those who say they have come to worship the Lord or in some way honor His name.

Over the years I have observed, with some degree of sorrow, the great difficulty with which professing Christians attempt to make the transition from the carnal to the spiritual. I have especially noted that this trait is more prominent among professed church leaders, who are often quite uncomfortable with such a passage. They appear to be more comfortable with things that have to do with this world, though often making a valiant effort to connect them with the things of God.

You will find a remarkable consistency throughout this entire account. Everything will find its

center in the salvation of God as wrought out and revealed in Jesus Christ.

HE FOUND MANY THAT WERE COME TOGETHER

“ . . . and found many that were come together.” Other versions read, “found many people assembled,” NASB “found a large gathering of people,” NIV “found many persons gathered,” RSV “saw that a great number of people had come together,” BBE and “found a large group of persons assembled.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “many” has the following lexical meaning: “multitude, numerous, great . . . equivalent to abundant,” THAYER and “great crowds.” UBS A significant number of people were gathered together at the house of Cornelius – all being assembled within four days from the time he was notified from heaven to send for Peter. His family was there, together with those servants belonging to the household. In addition, he had called in relatives (“kinsmen”), and close friends.

You may recall that when Matthew prepared a feast for Jesus, there were a great number of people who were also there. During that occasion, Matthew says that “many publicans and sinners came and sat down with” Jesus “and His disciples” (Matt 9:10). Mark says of that group, “for there were many” (Mk 2:15).

It ought to be noted that those who have a genuine interest in the Savior are always forward to seek for others to join them in their quest to be taught by Him and about Him. What earnest disciple has not experienced a bit of frustration in attempting to gather a group of relatives and friends together for exposure to the things of God? Yet, Cornelius has managed to accomplish this, even further confirming the presence of the Lord in this entire experience.

There have been a few times when I have experience something like this – when a body of people came together for the express purpose of advancing their understanding of the Lord and His purpose. These very gatherings (A Ministry for Hungry Saints) are a sterling example of this phenomenon. There are precious few Kingdom laborers who have enjoyed the benefits of such gatherings, as countless faithful ministers of the Gospel can testify. One of the sure marks of the legitimacy of a gathering of believers is an unquenchable appetite for the things of God, and a prevailing interest in coming together hear the word of God

A PIECE OF COMMON, YET OBSOLETE, KNOWLEDGE

“ 28a And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation . . .”

YOU KNOW IT IS UNLAWFUL

“And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing . . .” Other versions read, “how unlawful it is,” NKJV “it is against our law,” NIV “it’s forbidden,” CSB “how abominable it is,” DOUAY “an unlawful thing,” ERV “how wrong it is,” GWN “against the Jewish laws,” LIVING “strictly forbidden,” ISV “it is illegal” MONTGOMERY and “is not lawful or permissible.” AMPLIFIED

Although the Law of Moses did not specifically forbid contact with the Gentiles, there were certain overtones in it that led conscientious men to this conclusion. Solemnly the Israelites were admonished not to learn the way of the heathen that initially occupied the promised land. Anyone who learned and practiced the ways of the heathen would “be cut off from among their people” (Lev 18:24-30). When Israel came into Canan, the Lord told them to cast out the heathen nations, and to make no covenant with them or show them mercy. “When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the

Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them ” (Deut 7:1-2).

The people were also told not to marry any of the heathen. “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deut 7:3). The reason for this prohibition was spelled out: “For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly” (Deut 7:4). It is obvious, therefore, that the notion that marriage can be the means of converting wayward souls did not originate with the Lord. It is a human imagination, and has brought great damage to the church of God. God told the people how to deal with the heathen, and it was most precise: “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6).

The practice of Jews having no official dealings with non-Jews was well known during the time of Jesus. This is precisely why the Samaritan woman was astounded that Jesus had asked her for a drink of water.

Some years later, during the renewal that took place in the days of Ezra, the people confessed they had not honored this Divine prohibition. “Which thou hast commanded by thy servants the prophets, saying, The land, unto which ye go to possess it, is an unclean land with the filthiness of the people of the lands, with their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their uncleanness. Now therefore give not your daughters unto their sons, neither take their daughters unto your sons, nor seek their peace or their wealth for ever: that ye may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children for ever” (Ezra 9:12).

The practice of Jews having no official dealings with non-Jews was well known during the time of Jesus. This is precisely why the Samaritan woman was astounded that Jesus had asked her for a drink of water. She responded to His request, “How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria? for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans” (John 4:9). Jesus did not tell her that this was not true, or that it was driven by a misconception of the nature of the Law. He rather spoke to her of the coming of a better day.

Peter had also spent three years with Jesus, during which He heard the Lord command the apostles, “Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not” (Matt 10:5). Although the Law did not expressly say the Jews could not enter into the dwelling of a Gentile, it is easy to see how men were led to that conclusion. If the jeopardy was as the Lord declared – that they could lean the way of the heathen – then thoughtful men surmised that they ought not choose to be among them. Further, if any Gentiles came among them, they were under obligation to keep the Jewish laws (Ex 12:49; 23:12; Lev 24:16,22; Num 1:51; 9:14; 15:15-16,26,29; 19:10; 35:15; Deut 1:16).

The restrictions were required because of the fundamental ignorance of the Gentiles who “know not God” (1 Thess 4:5). It is why they were described as “sinners of the Gentiles” (Gal 2:16).

By means of the Law, a very real “middle wall of partition” had been erected between the Jew and the Gentile (Eph 2:14). Peter knew this and had maintained his life within the framework of that perception. However, with the advent of Jesus something had occurred of which Peter was not yet aware. In his involvement with Cornelius, the Lord would show him what had happened.

Peter Said It to Them

The words that follow were spoken to all of the people who were gathered at the house of Cornelius: “He said unto THEM .” Further, these people were well aware of the circumstance. There was already an awareness of the mindset of God’s people, even though, at this time, there was more revelation on the subject will be discussed.

In our time, it is exceedingly difficult to establish the mindset of professing Christians – what the Christian community thinks of this or that. As has been confirmed by recent religious surveys, the average Christian knows very little about God, Christ, heaven, or hell – to say nothing about justification, sanctification, and the eternal purpose of God. The very foundations and basic elements of the doctrine are scarcely known among professing believers, as men have been led down bypaths that feed the worldly desires of the people.

In our text, there was a very keen awareness of what the people of God believed, and what they practiced. Oh, that such an awareness would be restored in our time! Today there are such divisions and fragmented knowledge that relatively few professing Christians have any accurate understanding concerning the nature and direction of spiritual life. Consequentially, there are only very general and crude notions concerning what they believe and practice.

Today there are such divisions and fragmented knowledge that relatively few professing Christians have any accurate understanding concerning the nature and direction of spiritual life. Consequentially, there are only very general and crude notions concerning what they believe and practice.

It seems to me that this circumstance contradicts the very idea of God having special people – a body of individuals described as having been purified “unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit 2:14), and those who are a “chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people,” who are to “show forth the praises of Him” who has called them “out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). How is it possible for such a people to not have distinctive manners and persuasions? How can a distinctive people be without observable distinctions? How can a special people have no special marks of identity? How can a chosen people have no indications in their manner of life that so identifies them? Of course, such circumstances are glaring contradictions. They simply are not even possible, for were they to exist, they would suggest a powerless God who separates a people who bear no signs of that separation.

FOR A MAN THAT IS A JEW

“ . . . for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation . . .” The term, “Jew” originally referred to someone from the tribe or country of Judah. Eventually, it came to refer to all of the people of the Hebrew language. This word is used thirty-two times in Scripture, first appearing in the book of Esther (Esth 2:5; 3:4; 5:13; 6:10; 8:7; 9:29,31; 10:3; Jer 34:9; Zech 8:23; John 4:9; 18:35; Acts 10:28; 13:6; 18:2,24; 19:14,34; 21:39; 22:3; Rom 1:16; 2:9,10,17,28,29; 3:1; 10:12; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 2:14; 3:28; Col 3:11). The word “Jews” occurs two hundred and fifty-seven times, with one hundred and seventy-five of them being in Matthew through Revelation. “Jewess,” a female Jew, occurs two times (Acts 16:1; 24:24). “Jewish” is found once, in Titus 1:14. “Jewry” is found twice (Luke 23:6 and John 7:1), being translated “Judea” in later versions. Thus, with nearly three hundred references to some form of this word, its distinction is clearly seen.

When Peter says, “a man that is a Jew,” he is speaking of infinitely more than nationality or ethnicity. “A Jew” was a member of a chosen race – a special group of people to whom God had vouchsafed the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law, the service of God, and the promises. They were the offspring of “the fathers,” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the body of people from which Jesus sprang forth (Rom 9:4-5).

It is, therefore, of great interest to know precisely what these people practiced, and why they did

so. For the perceptive among them, not mingling with the Gentiles was not a matter of carnal prejudice. It rather reflected a Divine choice, and one that could include Gentiles that were willing to acclimate to their Divinely directed manner of life. The provision of Jewish synagogues for Gentile proselytes (Acts 6:9), and presence of proselytes among them (Acts 6:5; 16:9) confirm this to be the case. This was a matter of conscience toward God.

GOD HAS SHOWN ME

“ 28b . . . but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”

Immediately Peter relates something that God has taught him – something critical to the situation.

GOD HAS SHOWN ME

“ . . . but God hath showed me. . . ” Most of the standard versions read “God has shown me.” Other versions read, “God has made it clear to me,” BBE “to me God did show,” YLT “God has taught me,” WEYMOUTH “God has shown and taught me by words,” AMPLIFIED and “God has shown me plainly.” PHILLIPS

The word “shown” is translated from a word that has the following lexical meaning: “to expose to the eyes; metaphorically to teach one what he ought to do . . . to give the evidence of proof of a thing,” THAYER and “to point out.” LEH

Some Examples

This same language is used elsewhere in Scripture, and is indicative of the kind of involvement God has with those with whom He is working. It is both personal and effective.

• **A HEATHEN KING – CONCERNING THE DREAM OF PHARAOH AND THE COMING FAMINE.** “And Joseph said unto Pharaoh, The dream of Pharaoh is one: God hath showed Pharaoh what he is about to do” (Gen 41:25). In this case the matter shown was not understood by Pharaoh, and therefore had to be interpreted by Joseph.

• **A CHOSEN PEOPLE – CONCERNING THE REVELATION AT SINAI.** “And ye said, Behold, the LORD our God hath showed us his glory and his greatness, and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth” (Deut 5:24). Here, what was made known included aspects of the Divine nature, as well as a definition of morality and detailed instructions concerning ordained routines.

• **CORRUPTED GENTILES – WHAT COULD BE KNOWN OF GOD FROM NATURE.** “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them” (Rom 1:19). In this case, what was shown was not comprehended. Further, there was no earnest inquiry into the matter, for which men were judged.

In Our Text

In this text, God had shown something to Peter, who had been reconciled to God and made a partaker of the Divine nature. Unlike Pharaoh, he will not have to call for another person to interpret what was shown to him. Unlike the Israelites, the matter will not have to be bound upon Him by reaffirmation. Quite different from the Gentile world, he will not ignore what has been shown or assign a corrupted meaning to it.

A Unique Trait of the New Covenant

The prophets foretold a time when men would, in a unique manner, be taught by God.

- “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:3).

- “And all Thy children shall be taught of the LORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children” (Isa 54:13).

- “And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:2).

Jesus referred to this teaching, declaring that those who came to Him had experienced such a blessing: “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45). Paul also confirmed that such teaching takes place among those who are in Christ Jesus. “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (1 Thess 4:9).

It is clear from the prophecies, the words of Jesus, and the writings of Paul, that this teaching involves more than the conveyance of mere factual information. The prophets indicated that Divine tutelage would bring a familiarity with God’s “ways.” Jesus indicated that it would result in people coming to Him to appropriate what He had been appointed to give. Paul informs us that this teaching results in believers having a love for one another.

We see, therefore, that in this text what is “shown” is not merely the relating of a commandment or precept. This is showing, or teaching, that is of a higher order – one that is more in keeping with the nature of the New Covenant, in which the laws of God are written upon the heart and put into the mind (Heb 8:10; 10:16). This will become apparent as we note what Peter was shown, or taught.

DO NOT CALL ANY MAN COMMON OR UNCLEAN!

“ . . . that I should not call any man common or unclean.” Other versions read, “unholy or unclean,” NASB “Impure or unclean,” NIV “profane or unclean,” NRSV “polluted or unclean,” GENEVA “defiled or unclean,” MRD “defiled or ritually unclean,” NET “think of anyone as inferior,” LIVING “vulgar or ceremonially unclean,” WILLIAMS “common or unhallowed or [ceremonially] unclean,” AMPLIFIED and “unclean or unfit.” CEV

If we review precisely what was shown to Peter and said to him while he was on the rooftop, here is what we find.

- He saw a sheet let down from heaven with all manner of four foot beasts, wild beasts, creeping things, and fowls in it.
- He was told get up, kill some of these creatures, and eat them.
- After responding that he had never eaten anything unclean, Peter was told not to call anything that God had cleansed “unclean” (Acts 10:11-16).

Following the vision, which was repeated three times, and upon the arrival of the three men from Cornelius, the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter: “While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19-20).

It is therefore evident that what was shown to Peter did not take place on the rooftop, but was actually accomplished as he considered the matter. The teaching that took place was within the context of Divine fellowship (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:3). In that fellowship, Peter took into his mind what

had been shown and said to him. Those things were “mixed with faith” (Heb 4:2). That is, his thinking began with the Person and will of God, and his unmitigated trust in the Lord. Into that scenario, Peter pondered what he had seen and heard, handling it as a kind of spiritual treasure box. In that process, God opened the treasure box, unveiling to the understanding of Peter something that he had never seen before.

What Peter had now seen – that he should refer to no man as being “common of unclean” – was not a conclusion that he reached through logical thinking. Also, it is not that he ignored logical thinking, and God forbid that anyone should exalt such a manner of thought. So far as logic is concerned, Peter’s reasoning was based on the fact that God is true, He does not lie, and He has a purpose that is to be comprehended. That was truly analytical thinking. However, what he came to see was what God “showed” him, not what he concluded – and there is a vast difference between the two.

As has been confirmed in the Christian community, men – even deeply religious men – have this inveterate tendency to rely upon “the wisdom of men.” This includes both manners of thinking and the means of ascertaining the meaning of the Word of God. Today there is a great body of both literary and verbal dialog that focuses on such things as hermeneutics (the science of interpretation), language expertise, and arriving at conclusions by means of consensus, historical analysis, and statistical analyzation. None of these approaches have any validity at all when it comes to understanding the things of God. This is because those are matters that are both governed and determined by God, and can only be discerned through a living identity with Him.

This is precisely why the Word of God can only be profitable to a people when it is mixed with faith – which is intensely personal (Heb 4:2).

An Erroneous View

This is also why men should question the validity of defining faith as a body of doctrine – something that is quite common among purported Christian scholars. McClinkok and Strong’s Cyclopedia refers to this approach in its definition of faith, adding a key observation. “An objective body of truth: ‘the faith;’ designated by the schoolmen as *fides quae creditur*, the faith which is believed. So the Augsburg Confession speaks of ‘our holy faith and Christian religion.’ (**This sense does not occur in N.T.**)” It also adds, “A rule of thought, the *fides penes quam creditur*: so the Roman Catholics say such a thing is “of faith” (**not found in N.T.**)”

Commentators have long taken the above view of the expression “the faith which was once for all delivered” (Jude 1:3). Here are some of the statements that have been written.

- “To the Church universal, the whole body of believers, has been committed, therefore, a sacred deposit of truth, **here called the faith**, embracing evangelical history, doctrine, and precept. This body of truth is a permanent trust.” PULPIT COMMENTARY

- “. . . by the ‘faith’ is meant the doctrine of faith, in which sense it is used whenever faith is said to be preached, obeyed, departed, or erred from, or denied, or made shipwreck of, or when exhortations are made to stand fast, and continue in it, or to strive and contend for it, as here; and which is sometimes called the word of faith, the faith of the Gospel, the mystery of faith, or most holy faith, the common faith . . .” JOHN GILL

- “The system of religion revealed in the gospel. It is called “faith,” because that is the cardinal virtue in the system, and because all depends on that. The rule here will require that we should contend in this manner for all “truth.” ALBERT BARNES

- “Dative of advantage. Here not in the sense of trust, but rather of the thing believed in as in verse 20; Ga 1:23; 3:23; Php 1:27.” ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

All of these views represent an interpretation of the text, and not the text itself. They suggest that faith is not an entity of itself. Yet, faith is declared to be something that “came” (Gal 3:23), is “obtained” (2 Pet 1:1), comes to us through grace (1 Tim 1:14), and is given by Christ (Eph 6:23). Faith, while possessed by the individual, is actually separate from him. He possesses faith, but it originated outside of himself. Further, the qualities ascribed to faith, and the things that are said to be accomplished through it, cannot be ascribed to a body of teaching.

The word from which “faith” is translated in Jude 1:3 is **πίστει**. This word is used fifty-eight times in Scripture (Acts 3:16; 6:7; 14:22; 15:9; 16:5; 26:18; Rom 3:28; 4:19,20; 5:2; 11:20; 14:1; 1 Cor 16:13; 2 Cor 2:4; 8:7; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 2:20; Phil 1:27; 3:9; Col 1:23; 2:7; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 1:2,4; 2:7,16; 3:13; 4:12; 2 Tim 1:13; 3:10; Tit 1:13; Tit 2:2; 3:15; Heb 4:2; 11:3,45,7,8,9,11,17,20,21,22,23,24,27,28,29,30,31; James 1:6; 2:5; 1 Pet 5:9; 2 Pet 1:5; Jude 1:3,20). It is interesting that the same word is used in Hebrews 4:2 that is used in Jude 1:3. There it states that “the word preached” was not “mixed with faith.” In the Greek, the article “the” precedes: i.e., “the faith.” Here, then, the body of the things to be believed, “the word preached,” is clearly distinguished from “the faith” itself. This means that, as used in Scripture, faith does not stand for what is believed, but for the actual apprehension of what is believed.

One of the rare departures from this scholastic view of Jude 1:3 was provided by John Calvin. He said of the text, “He says that faith had been once delivered, that they might know that they had obtained it for this end, that they might never fail or fall away.” CALVIN on JUDE

Why Say These Things?

It is necessary to say these things because of the impact of mere traditional approaches to the understanding of truth. When God “showed” Peter that he should not call any man common or unclean, it seems to me to be questionable that he did so through Peter analyzing a body of doctrine. It was rather the personal faith of the apostle that was used to bring him to a proper conclusion of the matter.

Call No Man Common or Unclean

So far as the record is concerned, this is not something God said, but something He “showed,” or revealed. It was something concealed within the Gospel – something that had to be unveiled. That is, there were effects wrought by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ that had not yet been comprehended by Peter – and this event took place an estimated ten years after the day of Pentecost (41 A.D.).

Prior to Christ’s death, a certain condition existed in the world that was owing to the dominance of sin. Sin had not been taken away, either in its entirety or partially. No sin – not so much as a single one – had actually been removed or blotted out. In preparation for the coming Savior, God created and selected a nation with whom He worked exclusively. Though small, they were isolated from all other families, or nations, of the earth. That separation was formalized by means of a covenant – the “first covenant” (Heb 8:7; 9:1). The covenant was a moral one, and was presented in the Ten Commandments, which are referred to as “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28).

From the standpoint of the identity of the people, this covenant became a “middle wall of partition” between the Jews and the Gentiles. Although both peoples were under the dominion of sin, Israel, because of its role in bringing forth the Savior, was given special privileges (Rom 9:3-5). As long as sin was not dealt with directly, this distinction remained, being required because of God’s righteousness. Further, God’s work was on their side of the wall.

However, when Jesus “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26), the whole situation changed. The “middle wall of partition” was removed, and a common basis for dealing with all men

was put into place. Paul referred to this when he said of Jesus, “For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (Eph 2:14). Now, no man could be viewed as “unclean” because of an outward distinction. That is, no man was excluded from Divine consideration purely upon the basis of their bloodline or being uncircumcised.

This is the truth that was opened to Peter. It is what God “showed” Him. However, He did not do this by simply saying the separation of Jew and Gentile no longer existed. Rather, he used the knowledge that he already had – the Law and its various requirements, the Scriptures, the words of Jesus, the Gospel, and the New Covenant. He then brought into the mixture the things that were new – the vision and the statements that attended it, and the words of the Holy Spirit. All of this was gathered together in, then mixed with faith. The shaking together of this mixture was accomplished in Peter’s thoughts – his reasoning and consideration. It was within this activity that the Lord drew near to him, as Jesus did to the two on the road to Emmaus. He then showed Peter a perspective that he had never seen before – yet it all made perfect sense to him because of his faith. It was something new, but it was not something strange, and thus he was able to embrace it immediately. He will now shape his life around what he has been shown.

A CONCLUSION

When the devil is successful in suppressing the truth, diverting the attention of men to religious tradition, and placing an emphasis on this present evil world, something of significance takes place. Men are brought to the point where they cannot reason properly. They do not possess the components required for sound thought, and therefore they arrive at erroneous conclusions. Just as you cannot build a stable house that can withstand storms out of newspapers and cardboard, so men cannot build good spiritual thoughts out of religious tradition and the wisdom of this world.

Many church people have arrived at completely inaccurate conclusions, and derived damaging opinions and views, because they have gone about the work of thinking with unacceptable components. Perhaps they have mingled together principles of psychiatry, statistical data from human research, and the observations of certain philosophers. Then they have brought into the mixture the religious persuasions of men and their undeveloped and juvenile opinions. The whole conglomeration is only capable of producing erroneous conclusions. God will not dignify such a procedure by drawing near to teach the individual caught up in it. Nor, indeed, can faith operate in such a surrounding, for there is no spiritual substance in it – nothing that faith can grasp.

It is essential that professing Christians extend themselves to have a working knowledge of the text of the Scriptures, for they alone are able to make men “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15). The Scriptures are also the appointed means of coming into spiritual maturity (2 Tim 3:17). In addition to this, it is imperative that believers be given a consistent and robust diet of the Word of God. All of this also requires a surrounding of godly souls, who themselves are also living by every word of God.

I CAME WITHOUT GAINSAING

“ 29a Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for . . .”

I CAME WITHOUT GAINSAING

“Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying . . .” Other versions read, “without objection,” NKJV “without even raising any objection,” NASB “without question,” BBE “without raising any questions,” CJB “without saying anything against it,” DARBY “without saying nay,” GENEVA “making no doubt,” DOUAY “I didn’t object,” GWN “without delay,” I came unto you willingly,” RWB “I didn’t argue,” IE “I didn’t hesitate,” ISV “without demur,” MONTGOMERY “without hesitation or objection or misgivings,” AMPLIFIED and “without complaint.” LITV

The word translated “without gainsaying” has the following lexical meaning: “without contradiction,” THAYER “without raising any question, without objection, without hesitation,” FRIBERG and “pertaining to what cannot be spoken against or objected to - 'cannot be denied, without opposition, without objection, indisputable.” LOUW-NIDA

Remember, we are being exposed to real spiritual life, not a theoretical scenario. It is quite common to hear preachers and teachers speak about how hesitate “we all are” to respond to Divine directives. These days, much is made out of how men argue with God, resist doing what they know it right, and entertain g personal views differing with those of the Lord. For some, this appears to address life right down where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. However, nothing could be further from the truth! It is the “carnal mind” that is “enmity against God,” not the spiritual mind (Rom 8:7). Jesus said His sheep know Him, hear His voice, follow Him, and refuse to follow a stranger (John 10:4-5,8,13). That is not the way they ought to be, but is rather the way they are. This is being lived out in our text.

Peter was asked to do something he had never done before – not in all of his life, and he was a mature man. He was faced with a fundamental change in how he was to view mankind. He was directed to go with some Gentiles to the house of a Gentile, which contradicted even his conscience. He was not told the nature of the mission. He was simply told to go with the men standing at the door, doing so “doubting nothing.”

Now, initially, that is what Peter had to work with. He asked no further questions. He made no objections. He did not attempt to justify his views at that time – views he had held for his entire life. He simply proceeded to do what the Spirit had instructed him to do. Like Abraham, he moved out “not knowing whether he went” (Heb 11:8). He also was “strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20).

Peter did not ask the men to wait while he sought an answer from the Lord. He did not ask them to pray with him about what he ought to do. He did not ask for time to think the matter out, weigh all of the options, and determine how best to meet their need. He did not quote Solomon’s words – “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” – then call some of the other apostles and ask their advice

That is the way faith responds. It never disobeys, never hesitates, and never doubts. Those are all traits of the flesh and of unbelief. You will never read in Scripture of someone who believed, and in that posture disobeyed; or, had faith and doubted what was believed, or believed what the Lord said, but argued with Him about what He had declared.

AS SOON AS I WAS SENT FOR

“ . . . as soon as I was sent for. . .” Other versions read, “when I was sent for,” NASB “when I was summoned,” CJB “as soon as I was sent for,” WEB and “when the men invited me to come.” IE

Peter did not ask the men to wait while he sought for an answer from the Lord. He did not ask them to pray with him about what he ought to do in response to their request. He did not ask for time to think the matter out, weigh all of the options, and determine how best to meet their need.

He did not quote Solomon’s words – “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” – then call some of the other apostles and ask their advice (Prov 11:14). Within the framework of the New Covenant, such an approach is not always appropriate.

WHY HAVE YOU SENT FOR ME?

“ 29b . . . I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?” Other versions read, “for what reason have you sent for me?” NKJV “May I ask why you sent for me?” NIV “What then is your purpose in

sending for me?” BBE “Why did you send for me?” CSB “I want to know why to sent for me?” GWN “May I ask, then, why you summoned me?” NAB and “I should like to know exactly why you sent for me,” NJB “Now tell me what you want,” LIVING and “Now I want to know what made you send for me.” PHILLIPS

At this point, all Peter knows is what the servants of Cornelius have told him. Cornelius was told by an angel to send for Peter “to hear words from” him (Acts 10:22).

One can only speculate the response of a modern preacher or teacher if he received a request like that. The specialist in marriage might imagine he was receiving a request to assist in the development of happy home conditions. The specialist in finances might think the inquirer was interested in learning how to set up a family budget. The specialist in youth activities might consider this to be an inquiry for assistance in handling a wayward child. Of course, all such tributaries of religious thought were not yet developed at that time. Also, Peter was versed enough in the things of God, and was living close enough to the Savior, to handle critical issues without advance preparation. He knew that the same Spirit who sent him could empower him.

There is something else that can be seen here. Those who are brought into the vineyard of the Lord will be required to fulfill their work by faith. There is no valid work in the Kingdom that can be done independently of a strong faith. Notwithstanding this circumstance, there is a phenomenal amount of Christian work being done that does not apparently require faith. However, the kind of work that the Lord honors, and does not forget, is referred to as a “work of faith, and labor of love” (1 Thess 1:3). Such efforts are also referred to as a “work and labor of love” (Heb 6:10). Paul further prayed that God would fulfill in His people the “work of faith with power” (2 Thess 1:11).

The kind of work to which I have just referred often involves being sent somewhere without any details concerning what the worker will find – like Paul’s vision of a man in Macedonia calling out, “Come over into Macedonia and help us” (Acts 16:9). Paul and Silas had no idea what they would find when they arrived in Macedonia. In fact, their first subject was not even a man, but a group of women who were praying by a riverside. Then there is the case of Philip who was told to “go South unto the way that leadeth down from Jerusalem to Gaza” (Acts 8:26). Even after Philip found the road, the Spirit told him catch up with a specified chariot, and join himself to it. Philip had no idea what he would find, or the nature of the opportunity that would be opened to him.

The same was true of the disciples, whom Jesus told to tarry in Jerusalem until they were endued with power from on high (Lk 24:49). He did not tell them the details of what would happen after that – only that they would be witnesses unto Him in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost part of the earth (Acts 1:8). The day of Pentecost, the confrontation of the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, and the opposition of the chief priests, captain of the Temple, and the Sadducees, were all unspecified ahead of time – as well as the handling or need to appoint men to oversee the daily distribution of food, and the handling of the case of Ananias and Sapphira. All these things had to be handled as they occurred. When they took place was no time to commence living by faith and walking in the Spirit. Neither was it possible to prepare the brethren for them by means of a work shop or a special series of studies on methods and techniques.

The weakness of teaching methods and techniques is found in the fact that they do not integrate with an unknown plan or circumstance. Nor, indeed, do they contribute to God-honoring participation and effectiveness in doing the will of the Lord. Once again, all of this is being lived out in our text. We are being exposed to a slice of Kingdom life, and the manner in which God calls His people into His own good work.

Satisfying and effective involvement with the living God depends on the faith of the participants, for “without faith, it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6). That is true whether we are speaking

of Cain or Abel, Noah or Abraham, or David or Paul. There is no place in Divine fellowship for unbelief of recalcitrance. Those are things that exclude men from blessing.

FOUR DAYS AGO I WAS FASTING

“30a And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour. . .” Cornelius does not launch into a lengthy dialog about how much he wants to know the will of the Lord. That desire was certainly present, but he first relates the real reason why he had sent for Peter. It was not that he had heard about Peter, and therefore thought his relative nearness to his home was an excellent opportunity to contact him. He had sent for Peter because a heavenly messenger had told him to do so. Peter, on the other hand, was there because the Holy Spirit had directed him to go with the men sent from Cornelius.

At this point we see the length of time required to get Peter to the house of Cornelius – four days! In a sense, those days were testing the faith of Cornelius, as well as the fervency of his desire and the degree of his obedience. A person with only a casual interest in the salvation of God could not have waited four days. Cornelius, on the other hand, not only waited, but took the opportunity to fill up his house with his own household, relatives, and close friends. It is still true that the measure of a person’s interest in the things of God is revealed in how much they are willing to do to obtain a spiritual understanding, and how long they can endure.

FOUR DAYS AGO I WAS FASTING

“And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour . . .” Other versions read, “Four days ago to this hour, I was praying,” NASB “Four days ago I was in my house praying at this very hour,” NIV “I was keeping the ninth hour of prayer,” RSV “This is now the fourth day since about this time I was observing the ninth hour (three o’clock in the afternoon) of prayer in my lodging place.” AMPLIFIED and “Three days.” PHILLIPS

The word used here is **proseuco,menoj** , , and means “offer prayers,” THAYER and “technical term for talking to a deity in order to ask for help, usually in the form of a request, vow, or wish pray, speak to (God), ask.” FRIBERG

The meaning of the text is somewhat garbled by some of the translations. Later versions, such as the NASB, NIV, and NRSV represent the text as saying Cornelius was praying four days ago about the same hour that Peter now has arrived at his home. This does

At this point we see the length of time required to get Peter to the house of Cornelius – four days! In a sense, those days were testing the faith of Cornelius, as well as the fervency of his desire and the degree of his obedience. A person with only a casual interest in the salvation of God could not have waited four days.

not appear to be the meaning. The word translated “unto” [this hour] does mean “up to a certain point in time.” THAYER The point in time is specified as “this hour” – that is, the hour that Peter had arrived. It therefore appears that Cornelius has been praying for four days, like Saul of Tarsus had prayed for three days (Acts 9:9,11). This is why the word “fasting” is employed in the KJV. This is also in keeping with the nature of spiritual life, which is not turned on and off, operating in cycles. While the early disciples waited in Jerusalem, they also prayed (Acts 1:14). Once they heard from Jesus, they continued in prayer until the appointed time. Once Saul heard from Jesus, he also continued in prayer until the appointed time, when he would be told what to do. It is therefore reasonable to consider that Cornelius did the same. Truth is always worth waiting for, doing so patiently and productively.

A MAN STOOD BEFORE ME

“ 30b . . . and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing . . .”

THE NINTH HOUR I PRAYED

“ . . . and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house . . .”

Cornelius states that he saw a man before him at the ninth hour, or three o'clock in the afternoon. This is, as we should expect, in strict accord with the report of Luke in Acts 10:1. The earlier account does not say that Cornelius was praying at the time – only that he saw a vision “evidently about the ninth hour.” Also, according to the record, the servants did not tell Peter that Cornelius was praying at the time of the vision. However, now our understanding is enlarged on the matter.

It appears that the vision was actually heaven's response to the particular prayer Cornelius was praying.

A MAN STOOD BEFORE ME

“ . . . and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing . . .” Other versions read, “shining garments,” NASB , “shining clothes,” NIV “dazzling clothes,” NRSV “bright apparel,” RSV “a dazzling robe,” CSB “white apparel,” DOUAY and “radiant clothes.” GWN

Acts 10:1 states that Cornelius “saw in a vision . . . an angel of God coming in to him.” There, the commissioning of the angel was the particular emphasis, and therefore he is said to have been coming in to Cornelius. Speaking of the same visitation, Cornelius emphasizes the arrival of the heavenly messenger, saying, “a man stood before me.”

Actually, this was not a man, but only had the appearance of a man. The clothing that he was wearing substantiated that this was actually a messenger from heaven – a holy angel. Acts 10:3 categorically says that: “an angel of God coming in to him.” The servants also reported to Peter that Cornelius was “warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee” (Acts 10:22). This confirms that Cornelius had reported to them that it was, in fact, an angel that had appeared to him.

HEAVEN VERSUS EARTH

There is such a stark contrast between heavenly personalities and those upon earth, that they are often seen as being associated with whiteness, light, and brightness. Men are never impressive to heavenly beings, nor are they ever seen in this world as arrayed in dazzling garments. Earth is the inferior realm, where corruption and defilement have cast a shadow upon humanity. But it is not so with those who are from heaven. Even when Moses and Elijah came back from the other side to speak with Jesus about the death He would accomplish, they “appeared in glory,” or “In glorious splendor” (Lk 9:30-31).

When Jesus was transfigured, “His raiment was white as light” (Matt 17:2), and “became shining” (Mk 9:3). When the women came to the tomb where Jesus had been buried, they were met by “two men . . . in shining garments,” indicating they were really angels (Lk 24:4). When Jesus ascended into glory, angels appeared to the disciples as “two men . . . in white apparel” (Acts 1:11). Redeemed souls that have been seen on the other side are said to be “arrayed in white robes” (Rev 6:11; 7:9,13). There is a certain purity and glory that pervade the heavenly realms. It causes personalities sent from there to earth to appear distinct from men, even though they take upon themselves in their likeness.

THY PRAYER IS HEARD

“ 31 . . . And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the

sight of God.”

Cornelius now gives a precise report of the words of the angel who came to him. Four days have passed, but he has not forgotten what was said.

YOUR PRAYER IS HEARD

“ . . . And said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard . . . ”

In Acts 10:4, the report was that Cornelius “prayers” had come up before God as a memorial, for it is said that he “prayed to God alway.” Here, however, some more details are provided. The angel states that a specific prayer had been heard: “thy prayer is heard.” With the exceptions of the Living Bible, and the Contemporary English Version, all forty-seven versions of Scripture that I have read the same. Cornelius’ “prayer” was heard.

It appears from this that Cornelius had been calling upon the name of the Lord, seeking more light, and making some petition relative to the appropriation of salvation. Here is an example of the Law, in the role of a schoolmaster, bringing a person to the point where they are ready for Christ (Gal 3:24-25). It is possible that the servants, according to the record, had not reported the matter of Cornelius’ prayers to Peter.

YOUR ALMS ARE REMEMBERED

“ . . . and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God.” Other versions read, “your alms are remembered in the sight of God,” NKJV “have been remembered before God,” NASB “remembered your gifts to the poor,” NIV “your offerings are kept in His memory,” BBE “remembered your acts of charity,” CJB “your charitable gifts have not been forgotten by God,” NJB “your gifts to the poor have been noticed by God!” NLT “your charities have been put on record before God,” WEYMOUTH and “your donations to the poor have been known and preserved before God [so that He heeds and is about to help you]!” AMPLIFIED

It is possible to be intimidated by the knowledge that God sees and knows everything – the words and deeds of men, and their thoughts as well. Some have presented this as though God is only searching for something that He cannot receive – looking for some flaw or deficiency in His creatures.

It is possible to be intimidated by the knowledge that God sees and knows everything – the words and deeds of men, and their thoughts as well. Some have presented this as though God is only searching for something that He cannot receive – looking for some flaw or deficiency in His creatures. There is no question that He does see such things, being fully aware of them. It is also true that those who are of tender heart want such things to be discovered by the Lord. Therefore they pray with David, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psa 139:23-24).

However, there are also things that God beholds in those with honest and good hearts that delight Him. He wants us to know that He is “not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward His name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister” (Heb 6:10).

For some, it might be difficult to reconcile this with the fact that “all of our righteousnesses are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). However, the meaning of that affirmation is that the best of our deeds cannot become a basis for our justification. They are not sufficient to pay the debt for any of our unrighteousnesses, and they cannot outweigh our past. But, this is not the kind of thing that is being declared in our text – that Cornelius was accepted by God upon the basis of his prayers and giving to

the people of God who had need. Rather, he had demonstrated a certain discontent with himself, and was in quest of Divine approval. This was doubtless the result of an honest and good heart.

Therefore, God will show him more, and give him more, because he has handled well the limited spiritual resources to which he had access. He has been faithful over a little, and will therefore be given more. He will no longer have to struggle with limitations in his understanding. God will send him to get a man who will know what he ought to do to avail himself of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He will speak to Cornelius through a man He has taught. Rest assured, this is still God's manner!

SEND FOR PETER

“ 32 Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.”

What kind of heavenly direction will Cornelius receive. To whom will he be sent? Will it be a young Christian, who does not yet have a grasp of the salvation of God? Will it be someone who has a good supply of tracts, like *The Four Spiritual Laws*, or *The Roman Road*? Will he send him to a Bible supplier? Will he be invited to a series of local meetings or workshops that outline how men are to be saved?

Our text will confirm the importance of this, for Peter will confront things he has never confronted before. In fact, he will behold something taking place that contradicts a vein of contemporary theology that remains prevalent to this day. If he lacked maturity, or was not conversant with the salvation of God, and acquainted with the Scriptures, he would not have been able to respond properly.

See, these are what men do, but why do they take such a course of action? Mind you, it is not that I stand in judgment of those who make a hearty effort to reach the lost. My question involves why God did not follow that kind of procedure.

CALL FOR PETER

“Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side . . .” This is exactly what Luke reports in Acts 10:5-6. It is also what the servants reported to Peter when he asked them why they had asked for him (Acts 10:22).

And why were they sent to Peter? Or, why was Philip sent to the Ethiopian? Or, why was Ananias sent to Saul of Tarsus? It is because they had an understanding of the salvation of God! They did not come to present an easy way to be saved, or recite a procedure that had been developed by the Jerusalem church. They were acquainted enough with the salvation of God to meet a person where they were, and open their eyes, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). The person who reaps the fields that are white unto the harvest must first have partaken of the fruit he is attempting to dispense. There must be some level of maturity present in the person so that they are capable of properly representing and presenting the Lord and His Christ.

Our text will confirm the importance of this, for Peter will confront things he has never confronted before. In fact, he will behold something taking place that contradicts a vein of contemporary theology that remains prevalent to this day. If he lacked maturity, or was not conversant with the salvation of God, and acquainted with the Scriptures, he would not have been able to respond properly.

HE WILL COME AND SPEAK TO YOU

“ . . . who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.” Later versions omit this expression, but they have served no noble purpose in doing so. When the servants told Peter why they were sent, they

reported the angel had said it was in order that Cornelius might “hear words of thee” (Acts 10:22). The next verse of our text states the people were all there “to hear all things that are commanded thee of God” (Acts 10:33). Later, when Peter reported the incident to the brethren in Jerusalem, he said the angel told Cornelius Peter “shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14).

Peter did not come to Cornelius’ house to sing a song, or give a personal testimony, or recite a creed of some sort. He came with message that would not only define what God is doing in Christ Jesus, but would enable Cornelius and those with him to obtain the blessing of salvation by grace through faith.

It ought to be noted that there is a sense in which Divine appointments are guaranteed to proceed according to Divine plan, being brought to their appointed conclusion. The reason for this includes God’s consistent employment of those who are knowledgeable of Him and His will, and are supple in His hands. Throughout Scripture, there is a remarkable consistency in this manner of the Lord. It is part of His “ways.”

A person who lives by every word of God, walking by faith, will eventually come to the point where they are “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” – “a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). Let it be clear that one of the functions of godly leaders is to see to it that such men are raised up under their ministry (2 Tim 2:2). Holy men consider succeeding generations, and do not limit themselves to their own.

IMMEDIATELY, I SENT FOR YOU

“ 33a Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come.”

IMMEDIATELY

“Immediately therefore I sent to thee . . .” Other versions read, “at once,” RSV “Forthwith,” ASV and “without delay.” MONTGOMERY

Here again we are confronted with an invariable trait of those who believe: they respond as soon as they can see or comprehend. Every response thus far has been on this wise – instant, and without delay. Those who were convicted on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:40). The response of the lame man to Peter’s word (Acts 3:6-7). The disciples when their prayer was answered concerning speaking with boldness (Acts 4:31). The Samaritans response to Philip (Acts 8:12). Philip’s direction to the eunuch (Acts 8:26,29). The eunuch’s response to the preaching of Christ (Acts 8:38). Saul’s response to Jesus (Acts 9:6-8). Ananias response to the call to go to Saul (Acts 9:13-17). The response of Saul to Ananias (Acts 9:17-18). The response of Aeneas to Peter’s command to pick up his bed and walk (Acts 9:34). Dorcas’ response to Peter’s call to sit up, though she was dead (Acts 9:40). Cornelius response to the angel (Acts 10:7-8). The servants response to Cornelius’ word, as directed by the angel (Acts 10:9). Peter’s response to the Spirit’s direction (Acts 10:23).

How do men explain the presence of lethargy and indolence within the professed church. Why are motivators and organizers in such demand among professing Christians? How can men be identified with the Lord Jesus, yet lack the very qualities that are found wherever He works? No explanations are required, for we already know. They are lacking in faith, and it is not possible to be deficient in a more critical area!

YOU HAVE DONE WELL TO COME

“ . . . and thou hast well done that thou art come.” Other versions read, “you have been kind enough to come,” NASB “if was good of you to come,” NIV “you did the right thing coming,” CSB “Thank

you for coming,” GWN “I thank you heartily for having come,” WEYMOUTH and “you [being a Jew] have done a kind and courteous and handsome thing in coming.” AMPLIFIED

In my judgment, some of the versions have wholly misrepresented the nature of Cornelius’ response, as though it was nothing more than an expression of politeness and congeniality – like thanking Peter for taking time out of his busy schedule to honor Cornelius’ request.

This not a proper reflection of what was taking place here. This is a matter over which heaven was presiding. It was an answer to prayer. An angel was involved in the matter. There were two visions given from heaven, one to Cornelius and one to Peter. The Holy Spirit was active in both speaking and directing. Words were going to be delivered that were commanded by God, and would tell men what to do to be saved. Within that context, I hardly see how Peter’s response could be viewed as anything but “the right thing,” and something that was “well done.” This involved infinitely more than being kind and courteous. Here is obedience to God!

WE ARE HERE TO HEAR EVERYTHING GOD COMMANDED YOU

“ 33b Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.”

These words from Cornelius will confirm that when he saw Peter he was not thinking of mere human kindness and consideration. I do not doubt that such thoughts were involved, but they were in the back seat of Cornelius’ thinking, not in the driver’s seat.

WE ARE ALL PRESENT

“Now therefore are we all here present before God . . .” Other versions read, “in the presence of God,” NIV “present in the sight of God,” RSV “waiting before God,” NLT “before God,” YLT and “in God’s presence.” WEYMOUTH

It is evident that God was dominant in their thinking, and was the ultimate reason for their gathering. This is the only acceptable frame of mind and spirit when we come together to hear what the Lord has said. It is a marvelous expression of spiritual insight and a desire to please and serve the Lord. This is the secret to the productive gathering of believers. Where this attitude is missing, there is no reason for professing Christians to come together. I do not believe a person could support the idea that coming together out of a sense of institutional obligation, and with no lively awareness of the Lord Himself, is in any way pleasing to God. Oh, that the “we are all here present before God” mentality was more obvious in the churches.

What a blessed gathering it is when people come together to hear what God has commanded to be both heard and done! And more blessed still is that audience who can find a man who will tell them what the Lord has commanded – who will deliver the Word that God has sent out into the world!

TO HEAR WHAT GOD HAS COMMANDED

“ . . . to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.” Other versions read, “everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us,” NIV “all the things which the Lord has given you to say,” BBE “everything the Lord has ordered you to say,” GWN “the message God has given you,” NLT and “all the instructions God has given you.” NJB

This is the attitude of faith! Faith will not settle for some of what God has commanded, or a portion of the message He has delivered. Faith wants to hear it all – “ everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us!” How do you account for people with honest and good hearts that have not been exposed to “all the counsel of God?” (Acts 20:27)? Some who have laborer for the Lord have actually

been told to withhold some of what God has said, and not to speak on it, lest the people be offended. How should a man of God respond to such requests? He should ignore them, and even rebuke the requesters before all, that others may fear (1 Tim 5:20).

Note that this sizeable gathering did not draw back from the idea of being commanded by God. Flesh does not like to think about God commanded people – but faith has no difficulty with it. It will shout out, “What wilt Thou have me to do?” The heart in which faith is welcomed is not content to remain ignorant concerning what God has commanded to be declared!

What a blessed gathering it is when people come together to hear what God has commanded to be both heard and done! And more blessed still is that audience who can find a man who will tell them what the Lord has commanded – who will deliver the Word that God has sent out into the world!

When Jeremiah was told of the fall of Babylon and the destruction of its false gods, God demanded that the news be published abroad. Here is what He said. “Declare ye among the nations, and publish, and set up a standard ; publish , and conceal not : say , Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces” (Jer 50:2). Now, if that was the word when God brought down Babylon, what do you suppose He will say about the message of salvation? What of the announcement of peace, reconciliation, and the ending of the Law as a means to righteousness? What of the exaltation of Jesus, the soon demise of the world, and the swallowing up of death? What of an eternal inheritance, and a house in heaven?

May there be a fresh awareness of these things when we gather together to hear everything that the Lord has commanded to be proclaimed! Faith delights in such proclamations.

CONCLUSION

Once again, we have seen the manner of the Kingdom. Those who engage in efforts to please and serve the Lord, honoring their conscience and seeking spiritual enlargement, will not be disappointed. Further, those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit, fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold in eternal life, will find themselves in the service of the King. The eyes of the Lord are still scanning the earth, running to and fro in quest of a man whose heart is perfect toward Him. He will show His covenant and divulge His secret to such souls, employing them in His good, and acceptable, and perfect will. May you be among that number, enjoying all of the benefits of being included in such a host!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #49

PETER PREACHES TO CORNELIUS

“ 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: 35 But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him. 36 The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (he is Lord of all:) 37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached; 38 How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. 39 And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree: 40 Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. 42 And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. 43 To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.”
(Acts 10:34-43)

INTRODUCTION

Peter is one of the very first apostles that Jesus chose. He had been tutored by Jesus for over three years, was prominent among the twelve, and had been given the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19). He is mentioned one hundred and eight times in the Gospels, and fifty-nine times in the book of Acts (thru chapter fifteen, after which he is not mentioned again). Peter had directed the disciples in the replacement of Judas (Acts 1:15-26), and was chosen to first deliver the Gospel to the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-40). Under His leadership the Gospel had spread throughout Jerusalem (Acts 5:28). People came to Jerusalem and sought for only his shadow to fall upon them, that they might be healed (Acts 5:15). He also managed the selection of seven men to oversee the daily distribution of food among the thousands of disciples – men who were of honest report, and filled with the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:1-6). He had dealt with the intrusion of hypocrisy into the church, and joined with John in being used of God to confer the Holy Spirit upon the Samaritans (Acts 8:1-11; 8:17-24). Through him many had believed in Lydda, Saron, and Joppa (Acts 9:32-42).

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- **THE PROPHETS BEAR WITNESS TO JESUS (10:43)**
- **CONCLUSION**

At the time of our text, approximately ten years have passed since Jesus has returned to heaven to be seated on the throne of David and commence the government of the Kingdom. Throughout that time, Peter has been consistently involved in the vineyard of the Lord, sowing, watering, and reaping.

- He has detected when men should be told what to do to be saved (Acts 2:38).
- He knew how to exhort those who were receiving the word (Acts 2:40).
- He knew when to raise a lame man, and how to go about doing it (Acts 3:1-6).
- He knew how to respond to those who were astounded at the above miracle (Acts 3:12-26).
- He knew how to answer the chief priests and Jewish leaders who questioned himself and John concerning their preaching (Acts 4:7-9).
- He also knew precisely what to declare to them about Jesus (Acts 4:10-26).
- He had perceived when Satan filled the heart of Ananias (Acts 5:3-5).
- He knew how to deal with Sapphira, who had conspired with her husband Ananias

(Acts 5:7-10).

- Together with John, he was aware of what was required for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, and how to go about that reception taking place (Acts 8:14-17).

- He at once recognized that the heart of Simon the sorcerer was not right in the sight of God (Acts 8:18-24).

- Peter knew what to do when he confronted Aeneas, a man who had kept his bed for seven years (Acts 9:32-35).

- He knew how to address the matter of Dorcas, who had died (Acts 9:36-42).

- Now, in our text, he knows what to ask Cornelius, and has the discernment to see what the Lord is doing.

The record confirms that the Lord had treated Peter the same way he did Paul – He counted him faithful, “putting” him into the ministry (1 Tim 1:12). He could be trusted with the Gospel, with difficult circumstances, and with Divine power. He will not allow Satan to fill his heart, or lie to the Holy Spirit – like Ananias did. He would not seek to prostitute the power of God – as Simon the sorcerer did. He will not seek a prominent place for himself – as the chief priests, elders, and Sadducees did.

PETER WILL SPEAK IN ORDER TO MAKE DISCIPLES

When this man speaks in the name of Jesus, He will certainly reflect the mind of Christ. It will be of interest to be subjected to how He presents Christ, and what he chooses to accent. It will be very apparent that he is not merely trying to gain converts – something Jesus never told His apostles to do. He is rather preaching Christ and making disciples, as Jesus commanded His followers to do: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Matt 28:19). The word “teach,” as used in the King James Version, means, “to make a disciple; to teach, instruct,” THAYER “make a disciple of someone, instruct, cause someone to become a follower,” FRIBERG and to make “a disciple of someone, in the sense of adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and in promoting the cause of such a leader,” LOUW-NIDA

If you are at all familiar with the landscape of Christendom, you know that it is not at all common for professing preachers and teachers to “make disciples” – that is, to so teach and instruct the people as to cause them to embrace Jesus, hear Him, adhere to Him, and follow Him. All of the moral lapses within the Christian community, the cooling of an affection for Christ, and failing to seek the things that are above are directly owing to the failure of the people to become disciples of Jesus. They have been lured into the church, so to speak, by the wisdom of men, and have not actually been attracted to the Person of Jesus Christ.

Now, let us be clear about this. When a person is not like Jesus, it is because he is not a disciple of Jesus. Further, if he is not a disciple of Jesus, either he has not been properly taught, or he has rejected the truth to which he has been subjected.

It must be admitted that Jesus is basically compelling, drawing men to Himself. That is why He is the subject of preaching, and is the theme of the Gospel (Rom 1:16). It is why the Scriptures in their entirety testify of Him (John 5:39), and the testimony of Jesus is the “spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). No one will follow Jesus if they do not know Him, and no one can know Him who is not taught about Him.

What we have today – at least in America – is a church that is fundamentally ingrown. That is, it has made itself the primary subject. It promotes itself, and seeks to enlarge itself. Its programs center in the institution, not in Jesus. As a result, disciples of Jesus are exceedingly rare. In fact, proportionately speaking, few people within the professing church are any more knowledgeable of

the Lord Jesus than the average person on the street. It is a most serious condition.

Jesus said, “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord” (Matt 10:25). And again, “every one that is perfect shall be as his master,” or “everyone, after he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher” (Luke 6:40). In fact, after men are taught by God fearing men, the Holy Spirit, working through the truth, changes the individual into image of Christ from one stage of glory to a greater one (2 Cor 3:18). If this is true – and it certainly is – then making a disciple is not something that occurs in an instant of time. The work of discipling is not complete until the disciple is like his Master. That is why early believers were referred to as “disciples” (Acts 1:15; 6:1,2,7; 9:1,19,25,26,38; 11:26,29; 13:52; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 18:23,27; 19:9,30; 20:17,30; 21:4,16).

I am particularly sensitive about this matter because of my own religious background. I was cultured in a background where the word “disciple” was viewed with some skepticism. This was because a certain denomination of which we did not approve had chosen that word as their term of identity: “Disciples of Christ.” The outcome of this distorted view was that few of my peers even considered the word “disciple.” If regarded at all, it was only brief and in a cursory manner. Rarely did anyone make an extended point of what Jesus said about disciples. I consider the time I spent under such influences to be a time of spiritual robbery.

Now, let us be clear about this. When a person is not like Jesus, it is because he is not a disciple of Jesus. Further, if he is not a disciple of Jesus, either he has not been properly taught, or he has rejected the truth to which he has been subjected.

Thinking On the Facts

Allow me to reason for a moment on this matter, for it is critical to an understanding of our text. In Scripture, those who were being subjected to the truth, yet did not have a heart for it, eventually were made known. Either they objected to the truth, like those in the Libertine synagogue who heard Stephen (Acts 6:9), or their hypocrisy was made known like that of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Perhaps their sinful hearts erupted in all manner of deviate conduct, like those in Corinth (1 Cor 1:10; 3:1-3; 5:1-5; 6:1-5; 15:12,34).

If those who have hard-hearts, no love for the truth, or are involved in sinful manners of life continue undetected for a long period of time, there is a flaw in the preaching and teaching. The truth itself, because the Holy Spirit works through it, promotes conviction (John 16:7-11), purifies (1 Pet 1:22), and sanctifies (John 17:19). It simply is not possible for the truth as it is in Jesus to be consistently preached without both believers and unbelievers surfacing. The truth is what actually discovers the heart. This is confirmed in the preaching and teaching of Jesus. It brought out those who were inclined to the truth, and those who were not. To put it in parabolic form, the message of Christ will confirm what kind of hearts the people possess – whether they are hard, like a path, impenetrable like the rocky soil, filled with distractions like the soil with thorns and thistles, or soft and free from contaminant like the good ground (Matt 13:19-23).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

Why take the time to say such things? – particularly when, to some, they seem to have negative overtones. Is this really nothing more than finding fault with professing Christians? Indeed not! In the account that we have before us, Peter is carrying out the mandate of Jesus to “make disciples.” He will speak with this in mind, which will compel him to always have Jesus at the center of what he says.

As you consider what Peter proclaims, regard what he does not say, as well as what he does say. Behold the focus of what he says, and ponder how different it is from what is often preached in Jesus’ name. The contrast will be obvious. We are being exposed to a real man of God, preaching the real

Gospel, to a really interested group of people. This circumstance is of such weight that heaven itself will respond favorably to what is taking place.

I PERCEIVE THAT GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

“ 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons . . .”

Jesus once said to Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness” (John 3:11). This is the manner of the Kingdom, employed and set in motion by the King Himself. There is no place in the work of the Lord for speaking what is not known, attempting to declare what has not been perceived. Religious mimicry is entirely out of order among those who wear the name of Jesus and attempt to speak in His name. To mimic is to closely imitate someone, simulate, or impersonate. In the manner in which I am using the term, it means to speak about something that is not really perceived just as though the speaker had a perfect understanding of it. Because such an one cannot draw anything out of his own spiritual treasury, he resorts to what other people have said, speaking it out as though it was the truth itself. While what is said may be true, yet because the person has not seen it, it is out of order to speak it as though he did see it. This is because his faith is not involved, for faith is the mother of understanding (Heb 11:3). Both David and Paul said they spoke because they had believed. “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak” (2 Cor 4:13; Psa 116:10).

In confirmation of this manner, Peter will declare what he has perceived, or what he has been brought to understand.

OF A TRUTH

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth . . .” Other versions read, “in truth,” NKJV “most certainly,” NASB “how true it is,” NIV “truly,” NRSV “in very deed,” DOUAY “most certainly and thoroughly,” AMPLIFIED and “in solemn truth.” PHILLIPS

The phrase “of a truth” reflects a degree of confidence that proceeds from faith and the insight that it brings. It means that what is said perfectly agrees with the way things really are. There is a very real way of looking at spiritual verity and speaking about it. That manner in no way obscures reality. This is the manner in which Peter will speak. He will not utter a private opinion that he has on the subject of reference. He will not speak about how he feels about this or that. Rather, he will testify to something that he has comprehended. Really, in the work of the Kingdom, this is the only way in which anyone should speak.

I PERCEIVE

“I perceive . . .” Other versions read, “understand,” NASB “realize,” NIV “see clearly,” BBE “discover,” MRD “see,” NAB “see very clearly,” NLT “clearly see,” WEYMOUTH “really see,” WILLIAMS “begin to see,” MONTGOMERY “perceive and understand,” AMPLIFIED “I can see now,” PHILLIPS “comprehend,” ALT “I am certain,” CEV and “realize.” GNB

Peter exclaims that he has taken hold of something: “I perceive.” The Greek word translated “perceive” is **katalamba,nomai** . As used in this text, the lexical meaning of this word is, “to lay hold of with the mind, to understand, perceive, learn, comprehend,” THAYER “realize,” UBS “to seize with the mind, apprehend, comprehend,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “grasp, find, understand.” GINGRICH Inherent in the root meaning of this word is the idea of seizing something that is elusive, battling through inhibiting factors and taking hold of something with the mind. Aggressiveness is in the word, honesty, and overcoming indifference.

Interestingly, when Paul said he was laboring to “apprehend” that for which Jesus had “apprehended” him, he used a different tense of the same word as used in this text – **katala,bw** .

Here, perceiving equates to knowing the truth, and therefore experiencing liberty from delusion and misconceptions. Jesus referred to this experience when He said, “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free ” (John 8:31-32). Knowing the truth, therefore, involves hearing Jesus, continuing to hear Him, pondering what He has said, and following Him wherever He goes. It is in that posture, and only in that posture that one can come to “know the truth.” When a person knows the truth, they are able to use it and profit from it. They will also conform their lives to what they have apprehended.

This is not an academic perceive, but a spiritual one. In such a perception not only are the facts seen, but the implications of them as well. What is perceived, therefore, makes perfect sense to the perceiving one, and thus he immediately adapts his life to what has been comprehended.

GOD IS NO RESPECTER OF PERSONS

“ . . . that God is no respecter of persons . . . ” Other versions read, “shows no partiality,” NKJV “not one to show partiality,” NASB “does not show favoritism,” NIV “does not play favorites,” CSB “no acceptor of persons,” GENEVA “show favoritism in dealing with people,” NET “hath no regard of persons,” PNT “God is not partial,” TNT “treats everyone the same,” IE “makes no distinctions between one man and another,” WEYMOUTH “ shows no partiality and is no respecter of persons,” AMPLIFIED “not one to accept faces,” ALT “treats everyone on the same basis,” GNB and “not a respecter of faces.” LITV

You will perceive in the various versions how that some of them wholly distort the meaning of the text. Treating people equally is not the point at all , as is stated in some of the versions: “treats everyone the same,” IE “makes no distinctions between one man and another,” WEYMOUTH “treats everyone on the same basis,” GNB and “does not show favoritism.” NIV

There is certainly a sense in which God does, in fact, show favoritism, although it is not according to the flesh, or the natural state of men.

- He accepted Abel and his offering, but He did not accept Cain and his offering (Gen 4:4-5).
- In all of the world of his time, only Noah “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8).
- God called Abraham His “friend” – not one of his friends (Isa 41:8).
- He chose Israel above all other nations (Deut 10:15).
- God “loved” Jacob and “hated” Esau (Mal 1:1-2; Rom 9:13).
- He vouchsafed special privileges to Peter, James, and John (Mk 5:37; 9:2; 14:33).
- John is described as “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20).
- He gave more visions and revelations to Paul (2 Cor 12:1; Eph 3:2-4).
- It is written that the Lord gave Joseph “favor” (Gen 39:21).
- Samuel grew in favor with God, as well as men (1 Sam 2:26).
- The Lord surrounds the righteous with “favor” (Psa 5:12).
- Mary, the mother of our Lord, was told that she was “highly favored” by God (Lk 1:28), and had “found favor” with Him (Lk 1:30).

• David “found favor” with the Lord (Acts 7:46), and is described as “a man after His own heart” (1 Sam 13:14).

If we fail to recognize this aspect of the Divine nature, certain pivotal texts will become meaningless to us. “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Eph 5:1). “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord” (Col 3:20). “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight” (1 John 3:22).

What Is the Meaning?

What, then, is the meaning of this affirmation of the character of God? – “God is no respecter of persons.” The phrase is not referring to the spiritual composition of the individual – what cannot be perceived with the natural senses. That would include a good conscience a pure heart, a love for God, tenderness toward God, a love for His word, etc. The expression “persons” refers to natural distinctions – what men are in Adam, so to speak. Especially now, that Jesus has put away sin and been seated at the right hand of God, God does not view people as men or women, Jew or Gentile, or bond or free. To be sure, He does not evaluate them on the basis of stature, talent, or any form of natural aptitude. At the bottom of evaluation totem-pole is the attainment of worldly status. None of these things determine what God thinks of a person!

When traced back to Adam, men are all reduced to the same level before God – and all natural distinctions can be traced back to Adam. Because of their relation to Adam, all men are condemned, for they are his progeny (Rom 5:16). Because of that relationship, death reigns over all of Adam’s offspring (Rom 5:17). Judgment came upon all men unto condemnation because of Adam (Rom 6:18). By virtue of their identity with Adam, all men were “made sinners” (Rom 6:19).

He will not treat a person who lives in stark contradiction of Him as though he was really one of His own. Nor, indeed, will He despise and turn away from a person who is conscientiously living in the awareness of His own Person, seeking to please Him and to do His will – even if he has no formal identity with the Lord.

In the text before us, Peter is particularly referring to the Jew/Gentile distinction that was maintained under the Law, or the first covenant. Now He perceives, or comprehends, that being a Jew or a Gentile does not alter the fundamental way in which God views men. The criterion by which the Lord favorably evaluates men is not determined by anything that can be traced back to Adam. Such things do rank high with professed Christian leaders and institutions – but not with God! It is the upward propensity of an honest and good heart that ranks high with the Lord. Such a person has been receptive to the truth God has vouchsafed to men. In the case of Cornelius, he had taken advantage of the introductory knowledge that was made known under the Old Covenant. He had extended himself beyond the perimeter of the Gentiles, who “know not God,” and had availed himself of what has been given to Abraham’s children. We do not know precisely how this took place, but we do know that it was duly noted in the heavenly chambers. The prayers and almsgiving of Cornelius were not the result of anything learned from the Gentile world. No worldly philosopher had taught him such things. They were rather appropriated from someone who was within the covenant God had made with Abraham, and God was now honoring Cornelius’ devotion.

If God were a respecter of persons, as used in our text, He would have rejected Cornelius upon the basis of his natural lineage. In such a case, he, by nature, was a stranger from the covenant. That is, he was not within the category of people with whom God had made a covenant.

However, traits were found in Cornelius that were godly, and were expected to be found in all Israelites. It is God’s nature to recognize and honor such traits, even when they are found in a person

who is technically unqualified to have them. Paul referred to this kind of condition when correcting some Jewish believers in Rome. He reasoned in this manner: “So if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the requirements of the Law, will not his uncircumcision be credited to him as [equivalent to] circumcision? Then those who are physically uncircumcised but keep the Law will condemn you who, although you have the code in writing and have circumcision, break the Law. For he is not a [real] Jew who is only one outwardly and publicly, nor is [true] circumcision something external and physical. But he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and [true] circumcision is of the heart, a spiritual and not a literal [matter]. His praise is not from men but from God” AMPLIFIED (Rom 2:26-29).

That is a classic example of reasoning upon the reality that God is “no respecter of persons.” Of course, the same logic applies to a situation in which a person is found who is outwardly identified with the covenant and wears the name of the Lord. If such a person is living as the those who do not know God, then, in the eyes of the Lord, their profession is negated, and they fall into the category of people against whom God has aligned Himself. This was demonstrated in Israel over and over. When they lived as their heathen, God abhorred them, conducting Himself toward them as if they were, in fact, Gentiles. The consistency of this Divine reaction is remarkable (Deut 32:19-20; 1 Kgs 11:25; Psa 78:59; 106:40; Lam 2:7).

This is what it means for God to be “no respecter of persons.” He will not treat a person who lives in stark contradiction of Him as though he was really one of His own. Nor, indeed, will He despise and turn away from a person who is conscientiously living in the awareness of His own Person, seeking to please Him and to do His will – even if he has no formal identity with the Lord.

The perception of this aspect of the Divine nature significantly alters the manner in which we view people. It also frees men from inhibiting traditions. Peter will now elaborate on this fact.

THOSE WHO ARE ACCEPTED WITH GOD

“ 35 But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.”

The global manner in which Peter now speaks contradicts a modern sectarian view, as well as the ancient Jewish view. It simply is not possible for a person to truthfully fear God, and yet be disdained by Him. Nor, indeed, is it possible for a person to not fear the Lord, and still be respected by Him because of some recognized formal identity with a professing church. God always acts in perfect alignment with His nature. There is no such thing as a person in a moral state that displeases the Lord, being an individual with whom God is pleased.

HE THAT FEARS HIM AND WORKS RIGHTEOUSNESS

“But in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness . . .” Other versions read, “fears Him and does what is right,” NASB “has a fear of Him and does righteousness,” CSB “feareth Him and worketh justice,” DOUAY “respects God and does what is right,” GWN “fears Him and acts uprightly,” NAB “worship Him and does good deeds,” LIVING “worships Him and does what is right,” IE “fear Him and live good lives,” WEYMOUTH “reveres God and practices doing right,” WILLIAMS and “venerates and has a reverential fear for God, treating Him with worshipful obedience and living uprightly.” AMPLIFIED

Fears Him

This is an expression that has nearly become extinct in modern Christendom. It is not heard very often, nor does it appear to be a key factor that shapes the way men are viewed.

A person who does not fear God is one who is not afraid to contradict Him, or do things that are clearly not accepted by the Lord. The Amalekites were an example of such a people. When Israel was

en route to Canaan, they attacked the feeble among the people, and those who lagged behind because they were faint and weary. God took note of their conduct, and blotted out their remembrance under heaven, removing their identity. Therefore it is written, “Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it” (Deut 25:17-19). And how is it that Amalek dared to attack the people of God? It was because he had no fear of God!

When Judah drifted from the Lord, He said the same thing of them –

Even though a life that is lived in ignorance is not commendable, to say the least, when a person is living up to the measure of knowledge they do have, they are not despised by God.

that they did not fear God. “And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also” (Jer 3:8). He is no respecter of persons!

Also, how is it that a person who claims to be a Christian lives in a manner that has actually been condemned by God, flirting with the world, even making friends of it, and living as though they had been freed to follow the dictates of the flesh? Why do professing Christians live in such a manner? It is because they do not fear God. Men may concoct various religious dogmas to make such people feel comfortable in their condition, telling them they cannot do anything to make God love them any less, or that it is not possible for them to be rejected by God. However, if that was true, God would be a respecter of persons!

Now, Peter refers to people, who DO fear God. They exercise themselves to avoid doing things they understand displease the Lord, and engage in activities they have been told please the Lord. For example, the Hebrew midwives refused to obey the edict of Pharaoh to kill the male Hebrew babies, because they “feared God” (Ex 1:17) – and God honored them for it, giving them families of their own (Ex 1:21). Nehemiah entrusted responsibilities to his brother Hanani because he “feared God above many” (Neh 7:2).

Peter is now standing before a man who had shaped his life around his understanding of God. Luke said he was “a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house” (Acts 10:2). Some of my own contemporaries would have viewed Cornelius as someone that was “sincerely wrong.” I know for a fact that some view Apollo as such a person prior to his baptism into Christ. Even though a life that is lived in ignorance is not commendable, to say the least, when a person is living up to the measure of knowledge they do have, they are not despised by God. Neither, indeed, should they be despised by men. Cornelius is a man with imperfect knowledge in matters pertaining to God. Yet, as evidenced in his prayers, he was not content with that condition. Therefore, God will enlarge his understanding, and direct him to the way that leads unto life.

The same may be noted of Peter himself. His understanding concerning the Gentiles had not been perfect, yet his heart had been purified by faith, and he was living in strict accord with what he did know. The Lord therefore is bringing him into a fuller understanding of Himself. Further, because both Peter and Cornelius have been living in accord with what they did know, they will have no difficulty embracing new and truthful insights given to them.

I am becoming increasingly aware of the need for believers to bring this sort of thinking into their assessment of professing Christians. I am not speaking of those who are dogmatic and insolent in their error, but of those whose knowledge is imperfect – yet who do exhibit the fear of the Lord. We must not speak of them as being “unclean” before God, for that contradicts the things that are being

revealed in this text.

A brief reflection upon “the fear of the Lord” will confirm why we ought to think in this manner. While such a “fear” is not an end of itself, it is pointed in the right direction, and is to be so regarded. It is never wrong to fear the Lord.

- “The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever . . .” (Psa 19:9).
- “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom . . .” (Psa 111:10).
- “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil . . .” (Prov 8:13).
- “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death” (Prov 14:27).
- “The fear of the LORD is the instruction of wisdom . . .” (Prov 15:33).

Works Righteousness

However, this does emphasize that God is not repulsed by such a person. That is, grace will be extended to an individual like this, rather than wrath. This is so because such people have extended themselves to shape their lives around what they do know about the Lord – even though that knowledge may be fragmentary. That person has made the most that he could out of what was relatively a little, and therefore the Lord will give them more.

From one perspective, it is true that “there is none righteous, no not one” (Rom 3:10), and “none that doth good, no, not one” (Rom 3:12). However, that is man’s state by nature, without due regard for the living God. In this text, “righteousness” is not speaking of a state through which Divine approval is realized. Rather, this is a condition in which a person does what is morally and religiously correct because they have a fear of God – like praying always, and giving alms to the needy among those who have been identified with God.

Such conduct is not enough of itself, but it catches the eye of God, and it ought to catch ours as well. Here, we are not speaking of notorious sinners who occasionally do something that is morally right – like a mobster giving to the poor, or a vile entertainer contributing to a worthy cause. In this text working righteousness is knit together with fearing God. Such a person does not do what is right to get the attention of men, or because of a kind of carnal sympathy. Rather, their works are driven by the fear of the God of heaven.

IS ACCEPTED WITH HIM

“ . . . is accepted with Him.” Other versions read, “is welcome to Him,” NASB “pleasing to Him,” BBE “welcomed before Him,” NET and “acceptable to Him and 23sure of being received and welcomed [by Him].” AMPLIFIED

As used here, the word “acceptable” means favorable, appropriate, and even pleasing. It is not the ultimate sense of acceptance – as “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). This is not acceptance in the sense of being “received” by Christ “to the glory of God” (Rom 15:7).

However, this does emphasize that God is not repulsed by such a person. That is, grace will be extended to an individual like this, rather than wrath. This is so because such people have extended themselves to shape their lives around what they do know about the Lord – even though that knowledge may be fragmentary. That person has made the most that he could out of what was relatively a little, and therefore the Lord will give them more. This kind of diligence is what prompted Jesus to say “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much” (Luke 16:10). While men are not given eternal life on this basis, they are afforded opportunities and privileges that will lead them to the obtaining of the ultimate blessing.

This will be confirmed in God's response to Cornelius. It will make more clear what it meant by Divine acceptance.

This kind of acceptance is the opposite of the experience of Cain, of whom it is written, "But unto Cain and to his offering He had not respect" (Gen 4:5). It is antithetical to the rejection and indignation to which Sodom and Gomorrah were subjected because "their sin was very grievous" (Gen 18:20). It is a Divine reaction that is the inverse of God's reaction to the people in "a plain in the land of Shinar," when they conspired to build a city and a tower (Gen 11:1-6).

It is the same kind of acceptance that is mentioned in the second chapter of Romans (to which I previously made reference). The acceptance of such a person is the prelude to additional revelation and direction. It suggests that the grace of God is generally preceded by some kind of conscious activity toward God – whether it is wise men following a star, or a centurion building the Jews a synagogue. Such activities are certainly not sufficient to justify a person before God. However, they will be honored by the extension of the hand of the Lord. In this case, Cornelius will be sent words through which he might be saved.

This kind of acceptance also parallels what Jesus referred to as being worthy. "And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you" (Mat 10:12-13). Let it be clear that this is not a worthiness like that which is identified with being in Christ Jesus: i.e. "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy" (Rev 3:4). That is a worthiness that is associated with remaining in the state of purity that is brought about by being justified from all things. However, there is a worthiness that has to do with one's state prior to being justified. It has to do with a proper and God-honoring response to what has been made known. When Jesus send out the twelve, a house that was "worthy" was one that received them in a hospitable manner, and was therefore granted the blessing of peace.

An understanding of this Divine manner will assist us in responding more honorably to people who do not have an extensive grasp of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Even though this is their condition, yet they are not hostile to the truth, and are eager to hear and take hold of more. It is not right to evaluate people solely upon the basis of their external associations. That would be like Peter continuing to hold Cornelius aloof from himself simply because he was a Gentile. However, Cornelius was not like other Gentiles. He was conducting his life in keeping with what had been revealed under the Old Covenant, living up to the measure of knowledge he had received. While that was not sufficient to justify him from sin, it was enough to prompt the God of heaven to provide him with a more thorough revelation of Himself.

In a sectarian surrounding, it is, at the very best, difficult to maintain a proper attitude about people like Cornelius. Some are simply confounded that there are actually people who do not see what they profess to see, yet are living in a manner that is obviously superior to their own. So far as the sectarian mindset is concerned, such people are lost, and that is pretty much the end of the matter. However, for the person who, like Peter, perceives that God is no respecter of persons, such a person is seen as one who "is not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk 12:34). Such people will respond to further light.

It seems to me that it is on the part of wisdom to heartily embrace this view of things, and to promote it among those who wear the name of Jesus. It might be viewed as holy leniency. This is more than a theological position – it is something that is lived out in our text, reflecting both the nature of God and those who are in Christ Jesus.

PREACHING PEACE BY JESUS CHRIST

“ 36a The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ . . . ”

The manner in which Peter proceeds to speak reflects several things.

- A grasp of what God has done in Christ Jesus.
- An understanding of the heart of the message of the Gospel.
- A discernment of the role of Jesus in the salvation of God.
- A comprehension of the present reign of Jesus.
- A perception of the marvelous extent of the Gospel.
- What God intends to be preached in the name of Jesus.

As we proceed through the words of Peter, it will become very apparent that they differ significantly from much of the preaching of our day. He will not present a “plan of salvation.” He will not lead them in a prayer. There will be no evidence of an effort to recruit people to an organization. However, Peter will deliver a message through which the Holy Spirit can work on the hearts of the hearers. He will give them something to believe that is of eternal consequence.

SENT UNTO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL

The redemptive value of Jesus is found in these three facts: His death, burial, and resurrection. It is in these deeds that sin was removed, reconciliation was made, and a just basis provided for men to be “made righteous”

“The word which God sent unto the children of Israel . . .” Other versions read, “sent to the sons of Israel,” NASB “send to the people of Israel,” NIV “sent to Israel,” RSV “sent to the Israelites,” NAB “descendants of Israel,” WEYMOUTH and “sons [and daughters] of Israel.” ALT

Here, the Gospel is described as “the word” that was sent by God “to the children of Israel.” The “word” refers to a message, or what was contained in what Peter said. It is the substance of what is said, or what is said boiled down to its essence. “The word” refers to WHAT is being said, not the way in which it is being said. This is something that cannot be taught by men, because it has to do with discernment and understanding. When God sends a word, He is delivering a message that is, when it is believed, calculated to produce a certain effect. The Psalmist wrote of this kind of word: “He sent His word , and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions” (Psa 107:20). He spoke similarly with he referred to God’s management of nature: “He sendeth forth His commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly” (Psa 147:15). In this same Psalm the sending forth of God’s word is described in these words: “He showeth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and his judgments unto Israel” (Psa 147:19). That is, God revealed or made known His mind in a matter – particular regarding morality and a properly ordered life.

When God sends a word, it is decidedly more than a mere announcement, or passing along a piece of information. It always has to do with something He Himself is doing or has done. That word, or message is intended to illuminate Divine workings, and is therefore attended by power that is designed to bring the hearer into harmony with what the Lord is doing.

In this text, “the word” is the Gospel itself – the announcement, or proclamation of the accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of their impact upon the condition created by sin. These accomplishments revolve around, and are resident in, the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Further, His resurrection was a kind of process that commenced with Him returning from the realm of the dead, involving His ascension into heaven, and enthronement at the right hand of God. The redemptive value of Jesus is found in these three facts: His death, burial, and resurrection. It is in these deeds that sin was removed, reconciliation was made, and a just basis provided for men to be “made righteous” (Rom 5:19).

For example, Jesus providing a pattern for living in this world is true, but it is not the Gospel! That is not the word that God sent! The word that God sent pertained to the remedy for unacceptable living, not an outline of how life ought to be lived.

Christ's prodigious ministry prior to His death was necessary, but it did not take away sin or justify sinners. It was preparatory, not redemptive in nature. The blood He may have shed prior to the cross, whether in Gethsemane or during the floggings He endured, did not take away sin. It was "the blood of His cross," on which He was cursed by God, that wrought redemption (Col 1:20; Gal 3:13). That is precisely why Paul preached "Christ crucified." No person of understanding eliminates the birth and ministry of Jesus in preaching the truth. However, they were the "beginning of the Gospel," and not the Gospel itself (Mk 1:1). For example, Jesus providing a pattern for living in this world is true, but it is not the Gospel! That is not the word that God sent! The word that God sent pertained to the remedy for unacceptable living, not an outline of how life ought to be lived. As gentle as I can, I will say that the perception of this fact would render many professing ministries immediately obsolete.

Unto the Children of Israel

The immediate target of the Gospel was, indeed, "the Jew first" (Rom 1:16) – not the Jew only, but "the Jew first." These are the people who were cultured to receive the Messiah. They are the ones who were given the promise of a Savior. Here are three of those promises.

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

- "Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee" (Isa 49:7).

- "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer 23:6).

When Peter preached to the Jews, he made quite clear that the resurrected Jesus was first sent to them. "Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities" (Acts 3:26). Paul and Barnabas also preached the same, affirming that it was essential that the Gospel first be preached to the Jews, because they were the ones who had received "the promises" (Rom 9:). "Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46). Because of the investment made in Israel, both blessing and cursing are "to the Jew first," for they had unspeakable advantages – "much every way" (Rom 3:1-2). "Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile; but glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Rom 2:9-10).

A Technical Point

Although the specific promise of a Savior and of salvation was given to the Jews, God revealed that it would extend to the Gentiles as well (Psa 72:17; Isa 11:10; 42:1,6; 45:22; 49:6,22; 52:10; 54:3; ; 60:3; Mal 1:11). However, as expounded by Paul, the door of salvation would not be opened unto them until the Jews had rejected the Messiah.

- "Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?" (Rom 11:12).

• “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” (Rom 11:15).

Through this means, God declared He would provoke the Jews to jealousy, so that they would desire to embrace the Savior they once rejected. “I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy” (Rom 11:11). In fact, Paul accounted for his ministry among the Gentiles, affirming that it was designed to provoke the Jews to this jealousy. “For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them” (Rom 11:13-14). Further, this provocation was even revealed to Moses. “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deut 32:21).

In proceeding in this remarkable manner, several things were, and would be, accomplished.

- God would keep the promise made to Abraham concerning the coming of the Savior.

- God would prove Himself to be faithful in keeping His word.

- God would confirm that He was righteous, in punishing Israel for the sin of rejecting their Savior.

- The door would be justly opened for the Gentiles to hear the Gospel, thus confirming that all the world would be blessed.

- A means would be put in place to recover the Israelites, thus enabling God to keep His word, while maintaining His righteous character.

- Thus, in all cases, whether concerning Jew or Gentile, God would be both just and the Justifier of the one believing in Jesus (Rom 3:26).

Now, to a significant measure, all of this has come together in the heart and mind of Peter. He knows that the word of salvation was sent to Israel, but it was not confined to them, nor was it ever intended to be. Thus the inscrutable wisdom of God is demonstrated in the provision of salvation itself, as well as its proclamation and implementation.

PREACHING PEACE

“ . . . preaching peace . . .” Other versions read, “telling the good news of peace,” NIV “preaching good news of peace,” RSV “preaching good tidings of peace,” ASV “announcing shalom,” CJB “proclaiming the good news of peace,” CSB “brought them the good news of peace,” GWN “announcing to them peace and rest,” MRD “the message . . . there is peace with God,” NLT “there is peace with God,” LIVING “peace has come,” IE “preached the gospel of peace,” MONTGOMERY and “announcing the good news (Gospel) of peace.” AMPLIFIED

There is a vast difference between preaching peace and offering peace! An offer of amnesty is not at all the same as a declaration of amnesty, or pardon. Peace between God and man has actually been accomplished. It is not something that is simply a potentiality, but something that is in place. The experience of that peace, however, is conditioned upon the persuasion that it already exists.

Following the second world war, it was reported that a cluster of Japanese soldiers were found on an island. They were not aware that the war was over, and thus were set to resist and fight to the death, any of the forces that had been aligned against them. It took a considerable effort to convince them that there had not only been a declaration of the end of the war, but that an amnesty was in place. They could return to their homes without being sent to prison. It was not until twenty-nine years later that their leader was convinced of what had really taken place.

A Sorrowful Experience

Many a poor soul is struggling under the weight and guilt of sin because they do not know that peace has already been made. It is to such souls that peace is “preached,” or announced. It is not held forth as a possibility, or even a probability, but something that is to be received. Strictly speaking, men do not make their peace with God, as some are prone to say.

It is for this reason that the Gospel is referred to as “the gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15; Eph 6:15). It is news – good news! It is not something forged by men, or negotiated with them. That is why it can be preached, announced, or reported.

BY JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . by Jesus Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “through Jesus Christ,” NKJV “through Yeshua the Messiah,” CJB “brought by Jesus Christ,” NJB “through Jesus, the Messiah,” LIVING and “when He sent Jesus Christ.” CEV

AMNESTY WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE

In 1944, Lt. Hiroo Onoda was sent by the Japanese army to the remote Philippine island of Lubang. His mission was to conduct guerrilla warfare during World War II. Unfortunately, he was never officially told the war had ended; so for 29 years, Onoda continued to live in the jungle, ready for when his country would again need his services and information. Eating coconuts and bananas and deftly evading searching parties he believed were enemy scouts, Onoda hid in the jungle until he finally emerged from the dark recesses of the island on March 19, 1972 . . . During the 30 years that Onoda had remain hidden on Lubang island, he and his men had killed at least 30 Filipinos and had wounded approximately 100 others. After formally surrendering to Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos, Marcos pardoned Onoda for his crimes while in hiding. When Onoda reached Japan, he was hailed a hero. Life in Japan was much different than when he had left it in 1944. Onoda bought a ranch and moved to Brazil. In May 1996, he returned to the Philippines to see once again the island on which he had hidden for 30 years.

20 th Century History

Jesus is the One who has actually forged this peace, and this also is why it can be preached. It is written that Jesus has “made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven” (Col 1:20). That has to do with God and man. It is also written that He has “abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace” (Eph 2:15). That has to do with men – Jew and Gentile.

There is no reason for men to remain at enmity with God – peace has been made. There is also no reason for those who wear the name of the Lord to be at variance with one another – peace has been made between Jew and Gentile.

The preaching of peace is the very thing that makes the feet of the herald beautiful. This why it is written, “And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace , and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:15). There is a whole host of difficulties that are resolved when the heart is persuaded of the peace to which our text refers.

You cannot exploit this message! It is simply impossible to do so. This is a message that proclaims the achievement of Another. The accomplishment itself involved only one Man – the Man Christ Jesus. There was absolutely nothing about the accomplishment of the peace that

involved any member of Adam's race – not so much as a single person.

It ought to be noted that there is no possible way to capitalize on this peace, or employ it for personal gain. Men can establish a business – even a religious business – on problem resolution. But they cannot establish one on causing peace to be realized. There are professional religious careers that allow men to accumulate wealth, make a name for themselves, and establish an ongoing organization. But no such things can be achieved by publishing or proclaiming peace! You cannot exploit this message! It is simply impossible to do so. This is a message that proclaims the achievement of Another. The accomplishment itself involved only one Man – the Man Christ Jesus. There was absolutely nothing about the accomplishment of the peace that involved any member of Adam's race – not so much as a single person.

This is not a peace that was started by Jesus and finished by men. It is not a partial peace that is mostly completed, but requires some additional work to finalize it. Nothing can be added to it to make it more effective. Its effectiveness is realized in its acceptance – an acceptance that is the peculiar prerogative of faith, and faith alone. Just as the faith of the woman with the issue of blood made her “whole” (Mk 5:34), so faith brings the realization of peace. Just as Jesus told the sinful woman who anointed His feet, “Thy faith hath saved thee” (Lk 7:50), so faith brings the experience of the peace Jesus made to the one who believes.

THE ESSENTIALITY OF PREACHING PEACE

It is essential that this peace – the peace that Jesus has made – be preached! The present state of Christendom is deplorable in this matter. Men are preaching a variety of other messages that have caused a cloud of confusion and obscurity to cover the people at large. Men are preaching self-improvement, better health, financial gain, and the way to be successful and happy in this world. Some are preaching how we ought to worship God, while others are laying before the people purported secrets to domestic happiness and marital stability. Some are propagating methodologies that can be used to start a church, or grow a church, or make one popular. Some have clinics on how to win souls, or how to handle your finances and plan for the future. All of this is being done in the name of the Lord, who is depicted as desirous that people have a happy experience while they are in this world. They can dream big things, and expect God to help them carry them out.

All of these approaches conveniently ignore the presence and effects of sin, as well as the provision God has made for sinners. Jesus came to “save sinners,” not business men. He came to “save sinners,” not marriages. It is written that He came to “save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15), not help people realize their ambitions in this world. God sent Jesus into the world to be the “propitiation for our sins,” or merciful covering, for our sin (1 John 4:10), not address the social and domestic ills of humanity.

Peace with God – that is the issue! It is so because God has appointed that every man will be judged, standing before the judgment seat of Christ, who will execute God's judgment. At that time, the preeminent issue will be whether or not men are experiencing peace with God. Are they drawn to Him, or are they repulsed by Him? When they see the glorified Christ and the Father, will they cry out to the mountains to hide them (Rev 6:16), or will they shout with joy, “Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa 25:9).

It is the awareness of this ultimate confrontation that makes the publishing of peace such a glad sound to its hearers, and the feet of those who declare it to be beautiful. There are souls like Cornelius who are ready to hear such a word, and will gladly receive it.

HE IS LORD OF ALL

“ 36b (He is Lord of all) . . .” Other versions read, “who is Lord of all,” NIV “who is Lord of

everything,” CJB “He is Lord of all things,” DARBY “is everyone’s Lord,” GWN “who is Lord of all creation,” LIVING “who is Lord of all men,” IE “He is the Lord of us all,” PHILLIPS “He being Lord of all,” EMTV and “Jesus Anointed, this One IS of all Master.” INTERLINEAR

He is “Lord of all” because the Savior of men must be such an One. Whatever is opposed to salvation must be controlled by Him, otherwise salvation cannot be sure. He must be able to deliver people from the power of darkness, and bring them to God, and keep them from falling. He must be, and He IS, “Lord of all.”

This is an explanation of the Jesus of whom Peter is speaking. Jesus said that other “Christ’s” would be proclaimed (Matt 24:23). He also said that “false Christs” would arise (Mk 13:22). Paul also declared that some were preaching “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4). Therefore, Peter defines the specific Jesus to whom he is referring. It is the One who is “Lord of all.” It is not one who will be Lord of all, but who IS Lord of all. In both the Greek and the English, the statement is very precise. Jesus “IS” (**evstin**) “the One” (**ou-to,j**) who is Lord, or Sovereign, “over all.” The word “all” is a very comprehensive one, being translated from the Greek word **pa,ntwn** . The word means every kind and in all ways. GINGRICH This includes all personalities and all impersonal things. It includes all men – both Jew and Gentiles, and all minds of men from princes to paupers. It includes celestial personalities, like angels, principalities, powers, and authorities. All of nature is held together by Him. Times and seasons are in His power. Circumstances are controlled by Him. Even the devil and his hosts are subject to Jesus Christ.

He is “Lord of all” because the Savior of men must be such an One. Whatever is opposed to salvation must be controlled by Him, otherwise salvation cannot be sure. He must be able to deliver people from the power of darkness, and bring them to God, and keep them from falling. He must be, and He IS , “ Lord of all.”

The Living Bible reads that Jesus is “Lord of all creation.” If this is seen as being over everything and everyone who is created, then the meaning is true.

The idea here is that Jesus could not have made peace if He was not, in fact, “over all.” If He was to bruise the head of the serpent, thus destroying him (Gen 3:15; Heb 2:14), and spoil principalities and powers, making a public display of them (Col 2:15), then He must be effectively and unquestionably “over them.” If He is to bring us to glory, He must be “over all.”

THAT WORD WAS PUBLISHED

“ 37 That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached . . .”

THAT WORD

“That word, I say . . .” Other versions read, “the thing which took place,” NASB “what has happened,” NIV “the message,” NRSV “the testimony,” DARBY “that saying,” ASV “the events,” CSB “the words which came,” GENEVA and “the same message.” AMPLIFIED

And what was “that word?” It is the word “which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ” (verse 36). “That word” is the message that is made known through the preaching of the Gospel.

YE KNOW

“ . . . ye know . . .” Other versions read, “you yourselves know,” NASB “you yourselves have knowledge of,” BBE “ye also know,” MRD “you surely know,” CEV and “you have perceived.” INTERLINEAR

Here, the word “know” means to be made aware of. It does not mean what was known was comprehended – only that the people to Peter was speaking were aware that a new message had been circulating among the people. That is, the preaching and teaching of Jesus Christ had become so prominent that it could not be hid. Even though the message had been opposed, and believers scattered try means of an aggressive persecution, it was common knowledge that the preaching of Jesus was taking place throughout the area.

In our time, there is another kind of preaching that has become prominent. The message that is generally being delivered is not embodied in the person of Jesus. It has rather become fashionable to deliver a kind of self-help message that accents what a person can do and be within the framework of this world. The accomplishments of Jesus, His present ministry, and the objective of God’s great salvation remain relatively unknown.

PUBLISHED

“ . . . which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee . . .” Other versions read, “proclaimed,” NKJV “the message spread,” NRSV “was made public,” BBE “was spread,” DARBY and “the words . . . which came.” GENEVA

The word “published” means “what began to be . . . what came to pass, or happened . . . what appeared in history, or came on the stage.” THAYER The idea is that the things that came into being through Jesus Christ were being proclaimed in the message of the Gospel. That included what Jesus did during His ministry, what He did in His death and resurrection, and what He is currently doing in heaven. For example:

- In His ministry he went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil.
- In His death He took away the sins of the world, laying down His life as a ransom.
- In His resurrection He triumphed over death.
- In His present ministry, He is giving repentance and remission of sins.

This was not a message of what could be or should be, but of what had been accomplished. It was not a word that centered in what men were obligated to do, but in what Jesus had already done.

This was not a message of what could be or should be, but of what had been accomplished. It was not a word that centered in what men were obligated to do, but in what Jesus had already done.

The declaration of this word has already been affirmed several times in this book.

- “And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead ” (Acts 4:1-2).
- “Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people ” (Acts 5:25).
- “And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ ” (Acts 5:42).
- “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word ” (Acts 8:4).
- “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5).

- “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).
- “And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans” (Acts 8:25).
- “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus” (Acts 8:35).
- “But Philip was found at Azotus: and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:40). Caesarea is the city in which Cornelius was located.
- “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).
- “But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27).

Throughout All Judaea

Judaea was the southern part of Canaan, in which Jerusalem was located. In addition to the personal ministry of Jesus (Matt 19:1; Mk 10:1; Lk 7:17), that area had been filled with the message of Christ (8:1,4; 9:31). This had been done as Jesus said: “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Beginning from Galilee

Galilee was the northern part of Canaan, and was not far from Caesarea, which was in northern Samaria. This is where Jesus began His preaching, declaring the kingdom of God (Matt 1:14). His fame had spread throughout that region, so that all of the people were made aware of Him (Mk 1:28). He had preached throughout the synagogues of that region (Mk 1:39). Matthew says that Christ’s ministry in Galilee and the surrounding regions fulfilled the word of Isaiah the prophet, “The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up” (Mat 4:15-16).

These are things Peter says his audience knew – even though he had not inquired concerning their knowledge of these things. However, he did know that the life of Jesus and the reports of the Gospel were very prominent, and that no one was totally ignorant of them. Peter had told the Jews on the day of Pentecost the same thing concerning the ministry of Jesus. “Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know” (Acts 2:22).

We are not told how or why the household of Cornelius could have known of the work and message of Christ, yet not acted upon it. Or, perhaps, in the prayers of Cornelius he was, in fact, acting upon the limited knowledge he had. The fact is that the phenomenon of knowing something about the Lord, yet not acting upon it, is not a strange circumstance.

- The people to whom Peter preached on the day of Pentecost knew about the ministry and death of Jesus, yet had not acted upon that knowledge (Acts 2:22).
- The number of believers in Jerusalem grew exponentially AFTER Jesus had returned to heaven – even though He had ministered extensively in that area, even on a daily basis (Lk 22:53; John 2:13-16; 5:1-14; 7:14; 8:2,20; 10:22-23; 12:20).
- The people in Samaria had been exposed to both the ministry of Jesus and the

testimony of the woman to whom He ministered at Jacob's well. Yet, the city had not reacted to that knowledge as they did when Philip preached to them (John 4:28-30,39-42).

The knowledge of Christ does not come from mere exposure to the Gospel – although that exposure is essential. However, until there is a quickening within the individual, no association is made between Jesus Christ and the condition of the person. Information about Him is only novel, perhaps even interesting, but there is no power in it until God gives “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). He who knows the hearts of men does this at the appropriate time, calling the individual into the fellowship of His dear Son (1 Cor 1:9).

In his hymn “How Can It Be,” Charles Wesley expressed this experience in the fourth of six verses.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

This is precisely the experience Paul declares in Second Corinthians 4:6, and it is also the one that will take place in the house of Cornelius.

AFTER THE BAPTISM OF JOHN

“ . . . after the baptism which John preached . . .” Other versions read, “after the baptism John proclaimed,” NASB “after the baptism that John announced,” NRSV and “after the baptism of which John was the preacher.” BBE

The “baptism of John” was associated with preparing people for the Messiah. The angel Gabriel told Zecharias, who was to beget John, that his ministry was “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk 1:17). Later Zecharias prophesied that John was to “prepare His ways” (Lk 1:76). John says it was to “make straight the way of the Lord” (John 1:23). Isaiah prophesied of the ministry of John the Baptist in these words: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Isa 40:4). Matthew says that John the Baptist fulfilled that word of Isaiah and he came preaching, “Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:1-3).

John's baptism is referred to as “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” – a baptism that John “preached” (Mk 1:4; Lk 3:3). Paul reminded the Jews that “John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel” (Acts 13:24). Paul later added that John had “verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4).

The preparation for Christ, therefore, consisted of a public renunciation of sin. Being baptized with the baptism of John confirmed this renunciation, and was in order to the remission of sins that would be realized in Christ Jesus. John refused to baptize those who did not give evidence of repentance,

choosing rather to cling to their old manners (Matt 3:7-8). That baptism also prepared them to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, whom, John said, would come after Him, yet was preferred before him (John 1:15,27,30).

We are living in a time when repentance is rarely proclaimed by those who represent Christ. Instead, sinners are being offered counseling and other man made remedies to address the matter of sin. They are being told to come to Jesus with all of their sins, as though they were not required to abandon them in order that they might embrace Jesus. It is to be acknowledged that the triumph over sin cannot be realized independently of being joined to the Lord. However, the determination to forsake sin must be made before a person can, in fact, come to Christ. People are not to come to Jesus to gain the victory over bad habits. Rather, they are to come to appropriate the remission sins, and to obtain eternal life. Neither of those benefits have any genuine appeal to the person who has not renounced sin.

Peter also preached the necessity of renouncing sin prior to receiving the forgiveness of sins. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). It appears to me that a better job can be done of making this clear to the people. If, when men are urged to come to Jesus, they are not also told of the necessity of repentance and being converted, they will be more liable to fall. The reason is that such people, from the very beginning, have not been impressed with the gravity of sin. Consequently, they have also been put into a position where they cannot see the magnitude of salvation.

The baptism of John was a spiritual line of demarcation – taking place at a transitional point in time. Jesus said of the ministry of John (for that is all that we know of him), “The law and the prophets were until John : since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16). The ministry of John the Baptist stood between the covenants. It was a time of preparation for the Messiah, when the hills of human tradition were brought down, and the valleys of human obtuseness were raised. Therefore Isaiah said of ministry of John, who would prepare the way of the Lord, “Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley” NASB (Isa 40:4).

Men became acutely conscious of the Lord and His working, and there was a sense that something great was on the horizon: “ And as the people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not” (Luke 3:15). For the first time in history, the kingdom of God was “preached,” and it whetted the appetite of the people. However imperfect the men’s understanding of God’s kingdom may have been, their attention had been turned toward it. They now saw it as something to be possessed. The expectation of the people was elevated, sin was seen as abhorrent, and the remission of sins as desirable. It was a time of significant change, indeed! All of this also confirmed the nature of salvation.

GOD ANOINTED JESUS WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT AND POWER

“ 38a How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power . . .”

Here Peter is continuing to comment on what his audience knew – the reports to which they had been subjected. Keep in mind that there had been no inspired record or report of a miracle-working prophet for centuries.

ANOINTED

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth . . .” Other versions read, “God gave,” BBE “God consecrated,” WILLIAMS “anointed and consecrated,” AMPLIFIED and “God poured out on him.” GNB

In anointing Jesus, God set Him apart to do His works. This was not something that was required for Him when He was in heaven! When He was “the Word,” and was “with God and was God” (John 1:1), there was no need to anoint Him.

Technically, the word “anoint” means “to touch with the hand, to besmear,” THAYER “to touch on the surface: to rub or anoint with scented unguents,” LIDDELL-SCOTT As used here, the word that is translated “anointed” has the following lexical meaning. “Of God, consecrating Jesus,” THAYER “appoint, assign, give a task” FRIBERG and “to assign a person to a task, with the implication of supernatural sanctions, blessing, and endowment - 'to anoint, to assign, to appoint, assignment, appointment.’” LOUW-NIDA

The point is not the act of anointing itself, but its purpose, or objective. It is a form of sanctification, or setting apart for a work specified and assigned by God Himself. Thus Aaron and his sons were “anointed” to function as priests, ministering to God Himself (Ex 28:41). The tabernacle and all of its furniture and vessels were also anointed – set apart to the work of the Lord (Ex 40:9). According to the command of the Lord, the kings of Israel were anointed, being set apart to their work (1 Sam 16:12; 1 Kgs 1:34; 19:16).

Having “made Himself of no reputation,” and come into the world, taking upon Himself “the form of a servant,” and appearing “in the likeness of men” (Phil 2:7), Jesus Himself was set apart for the work He would do. The works that He would do would be the ones He saw the Father doing (John 5:19). His works were the ones the Father had given Him “to finish” (John 5:36). Jesus said of His works, “the works that I do in My Father’s name, they bear witness of Me” (John 10:25).

In anointing Jesus, God set Him apart to do His works. This was not something that was required for Him when He was in heaven! When He was “the Word,” and was “with God and was God” (John 1:1), there was no need to anoint Him. Angels are never said to be anointed. However, when appearing in the likeness of men, even the Savior required anointing. He was being identified with a sinful race – not in His nature or character, but only in appearance and non-sinful experiences. He therefore had to be consecrated, and invested with power and ability as well. This is because, by entering into the world as a man, He was required to “empty Himself” of the prerogatives of Deity. That is, while He was in this world, He had to sheathe the sword of Divinity, and submit to receiving power and ability. That is not something required by Deity. It is, however a trait of humanity, and Jesus partook of that trait without His essential Person being changed.

This accents the degeneracy of the human race, corrupted by sin, and alienated from God. There is a sense in which even being in the likeness of men involved certain restrictions in the Son. He was hungry (Matt 4:2), thirsty (John 4:8; 19:28), and was weary (John 4:6). He was tempted (Matt 4:1; Heb 4:15), required sleep (Matt 8:24; Lk 8:23), and suffered (Heb 2:18; 1 Pet 2:11). These are the conditions that brought about the need to be anointed by God – consecrated and empowered for the work He was sent to do.

WITH THE SPIRIT

“ . . . with the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “with the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “gave the Holy Spirit to him BBE and “with the power of the Holy Spirit.” PHILLIPS

Prior to Jesus, I do not believe there is any record of someone being anointed with the Holy Spirit. In Second Corinthians Paul suggests that those in Christ are anointed with the Holy Spirit. “Now he which stablisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God; Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:22). John also says that believers have received an anointing, which is obviously the Holy Spirit. “But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things . . . But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and

is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him” (1 John 2:20,27). These references, however, do not reflect the fulness of the anointing Jesus received, for God did not give the Spirit “by measure” to Him (John 3:34).

Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be anointed by God (Isa 61:1). In the synagogue of His home town Nazareth, Jesus declared that He was the fulfillment of that prophecy (Lk 4:18,21). The early church confessed to God in their prayer that Jesus Christ had been “anointed” by Him (Acts 4:27).

Others were anointed with oil (Ex 29:7; Lev 8:12; 1 Sam 10:1; 16:3; 2 Sam 1:21; 1 Kgs 1:39; 2 Kgs 9:1). However, Jesus was anointed by God with the Holy Spirit who saturated His spirit as the anointing oil saturated Aaron’s beard and garments (Psa 133:2; Lev 8:12).

Now that Jesus had divested Himself of the privileges of Deity, He would do His work through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit – something He did not do when He was with the Father in glory. Before beginning His ministry, Jesus was “ led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil” (Lk 4:1-2). Jesus also told the people to whom He ministered that He “cast out demons by the Spirit of God ” NKJV (Matt 12:28). The condescension that is made known in those words is most remarkable.

A Word About the Word “Ghost”

The first meaning of the word “ghost” in the contemporary dictionary is, “the seat of life or intelligence.” The second meaning is, “a disembodied soul.” The third is “Spirit, demon.” The definition of “Holy Ghost” is “the third person of the Trinity: Holy Spirit.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER 2003 None of these definitions are identified as archaic.

While this is not the preferred way of referring to the Holy Spirit, I do wish to point out that the academic community does not object to its use, and even identifies it with the Scriptures. Any person confused about the terminology can readily become acquainted with its usage, just as they would with any other word with which they are not familiar.

Having said that, there is a reason why the word was used by linguists of old when referring to the Holy Spirit. The Greek word from which “Ghost,” or “Spirit,” is translated is **pneu,mati** . The lexical meaning of the word is, 1– “a movement of air (gentle) blast.” It is used in this manner in Second Thessalonians 2:8, where reference is made to the “spirit of His mouth.” It is also used in this way in Revelation 11:11, where “the breath of life from God” is said to have been given to the two slain witnesses. 2 – “the vital principle by which the body is animated.” It is used in this way in Luke 8:55 where the spirit of Jairus’ daughter returned to her and she was raised from the dead. It is used similarly in Acts 7:59, where Stephen called upon Jesus to receive his spirit. Apart from its technical definition, the word is also said to be applied to God Himself (John 4:24), to the “third person of the Trinity” (Acts 16:7), and even to demons (Matt 8:16) THAYER

The word “ghost” is more closely related to a personality than to something unseen, or impersonal power, like breath. Although I personally do not prefer this word because of the associations that are made with it, there is a certain manner of reasoning that is associated with its use. Once this is known, there will be no offense in the word itself, nor will be viewed with academic disdain.

AND WITH POWER

“ . . . and with power . . .” Other versions read, “and with strength and ability and power,” AMPLIFIED and “anointed him with the power of the Holy Spirit.” PHILLIPS

The word “power” is translated from the Greek word **duna,mei** . Technically, the word does mean “power, mighty, strength, and force.” GINGRICH Therefore, some have mistakenly paralleled the

word to dynamite, which they feel is a proper comparison of the word. However, nothing could be further from the truth. Dynamite is destructive, explosive, and devastating. This, however, is not an appropriate view of the “power” with which Jesus was anointed. Instead of the transliteration of this word being dynamite, it is more properly dynamo . A dynamo is a generator, or “a device for converting mechanical energy into electrical current.” OXFORD ENG DICTIONARY It is something with which production and accomplishment are associated.

This kind of “power” refers to holy aptitude, or the ability to carry out the mission on which Jesus had been sent. He not only was given a work to do, but the power, or ability, to do it well. When Jesus spoke of His mission in summation, He said that He had been given a commandment to “lay down” His life, then “take it again” – something no one had ever done before in the sense in which He would do it – dismissing His Spirit, then taking it back, returning from the region of the dead. Then, He told how He would accomplish this: “I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again” (John 10:17-18). This was the “power” with which the Father had anointed Him. It is what compensated for laying aside the right to employ His inherent Divinity to accomplish the mission on which He had been sent. He was given power from heaven to do it.

This also applied to all of the mighty deeds He did throughout His exceptional ministry. In fact, Peter will now make a special point of this very thing. Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power to DO something.

GOD WAS WITH JESUS

“ 38b . . . who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.”

Here is a marvelous summary of the ministry of Jesus while He walked among men.

DOING GOOD

Doing good involves bringing advantages or benefits to the people. It is more than giving to a good cause, casting a vote for the right person, or doing what you are supposed to do. Everything Jesus did – everything! – brought benefit, profit, and advantage.

“. . . who went about doing good...” Other versions read, “who went through all quarters doing good,” DARBY and “went everywhere and did good things.” GWN All other versions read that He went about “doing good.”

This was not a category of things that Jesus did, but was an appropriate description of everything He did. Adam sinned – but Jesus did good. All humanity was described as those whose thoughts were only evil “continually” (Gen 6:5) – but Jesus did good. He DID good, and did not merely speak about it. The word from which “good” is translated means “bestow benefits,” THAYER “show kindness to, benefit,” FRIBERG “to do that which is good and beneficial to someone,” LOUW-NIDA “to do good services or show kindness to one.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Doing good involves bringing advantages or benefits to the people. It is more than giving to a good cause, casting a vote for the right person, or doing what you are supposed to do. Everything Jesus did – everything! – brought benefit, profit, and advantage. This includes cleansing the Temple (John 2:14-17; Matt 21:12), as well as teaching in it (Mk 12:35; John 8:2,20). It included the rebuke of the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23), as well as teaching the people many things (Mk 4:2). People who gave heed to Jesus were the better for it.

Jesus said that those who came before Him were “thieves and robbers” (John 10:8), taking from the people, and even plundering widows houses (Matt 23:14). Jesus came, however, that men might

“have life, and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). He truly “went about doing good.” The words He spoke were good. The works He did were good. Peter now speaks specifically of some of the good things Jesus did.

HEALING ALL THAT WERE OPPRESSED OF THE DEVIL

“ . . . and healing all that were oppressed of the devil . . .” Other versions read, “healing all who were under the power of the devil,” NIV “making well all who were troubled by evil spirits,” BBE “healing all the people oppressed by the Adversary,” CJB “curing all who were under the tyranny of the Devil,” CSB “healing everyone who was under the devil's power,” GWN “healed those that were suffering from evil,” MRD “curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil,” NJB “healing all who were possessed by demons,” LIVING “healing all who were possessed by demons,” IE “healing all who were possessed by demons,” WEYMOUTH “curing all who were overpowered by the devil,” WILLIAMS and “in particular, curing all who were harassed and oppressed by [the power of] the devil.” AMPLIFIED

This is a most remarkable way of describing the works of Jesus. We have a picture here of Satan assaulting and dominating men – even those who were of the chosen race, and had been given all manner of Divine privileges. There are those who say the devil really has no power. I do not know how Peter could say what he did if that was true. If Satan really has no power, and can only deceive, why would a Deliverer be required who was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power? Why would Peter refer to people who were “oppressed by the devil,” if the devil was powerless, and could only tell lies.

The word “oppressed” is a very strong one. It is translated from a word that has the following lexical meaning. “To exercise harsh control over one, to use one’s powers against one,” THAYER “being under the devil’s tyrannical power,” FRIBERG “to cause serious trouble to, with the implication of dire consequences and probably a weakened state - 'to cause severe hardship, to oppress, to overwhelm,” LOUW-NIDA “to prevail against, to conquer, to be enslaved,” LEH and “exploit, dominate.” GINGRICH

We are not left to conjecture on this matter. Sufficient is said of the works of Jesus to underscore the truth of the statement Peter made.

- Jesus healed a man dominated by an unclean spirit, who shouted out to Jesus, asking Him to let them alone (Mk 1:23-25).
- Jesus healed a man who was made blind and dumb by a demon (Matt 12:22).
- Jesus healed a wild man who ran naked through the hills, cutting himself, and even breaking chains with which he had been bound. He was controlled by a legion of demons (Mk 5:1-10).
- He healed a man who had been made speechless by a demon (Matt 9:32-33).
- He healed a young girl who was grievously vexed by a demon (Matt 15:22-28).

It is no marvel, therefore, that when the Savior came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness, “God was with Him.”

- Jesus healed a young boy whom a demon caused to jump in fire and water, also causing him to have convulsions, and to wallow on the ground, foaming at the mouth (Matt 17:14-18).
- He healed a woman who had been bound by Satan for eighteen years, being bowed over, and unable to straighten up (Lk 13:11-16).

These were not cases of delusions, but of oppression, bondage, and captivity. Satan had been having his way among those in the promised land for some time – to say nothing of the rest of the world. However, when Jesus came, He invaded the kingdom of darkness, freeing those who had been dominated by the dark world of evil spirits. He truly went about “doing good.”

GOD WAS WITH HIM

“ . . . for God was with Him.”

The reason for Jesus’ effectiveness is that “God was with Him.” Even though He had come down from heaven, having humbled Himself, “God was with Him.” Because God Himself is “above all and through all” (Eph 4:6), and “all things are of Him and through Him, and to Him” (Rom 11:36), whoever God is “with” is superior to all circumstance. The truth of this was lived out in Jesus while He was in a humble condition, being subject to suffering and temptation. He did not cease to do the will of His Father, the Father was always with Him. That is what Jesus said: “And He that sent Me is with me: the Father hath not left Me alone; for I do always those things that please Him ” (John 8:29).

It should not surprise us that John built on this fact, telling us, “Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17). This is also why Jesus said, “It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord” (Matt 10:25).

When Solomon excelled, it was because “God was with him” (2 Chron 1:1). In his better days, when king Asa purged the land of idols, and was successful in gathering the people, it was because “God was with him” (2 Chron 15:9). Stephen testified that Joseph’s success, even though his brothers were moved with envy against him, was because “God was with him” (Acts 7:9; Gen 39:3,23). Samuel grew and advanced in the Lord, and none of his words fell to the ground because “the Lord was with Hm” (1 Sam 3:19). When king Saul opposed young David, he actually became afraid of him because he sensed “the Lord was with him” (1 San 18:12).

It is no marvel, therefore, that when the Savior came into the world to destroy the works of the devil, make an end of sin, and bring in everlasting righteousness, “God was with Him.”

The household of Cornelius had heard about the fame of Jesus. Now, however, Peter is accounting for the great ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. He was not simply a gifted man, capable of doing extraordinary things. God was with Him!

WE ARE WITNESSES OF ALL THINGS

“ 39a And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem . . . ”

The foundational preachers and teachers are those who personally saw and heard Jesus Christ, All other professing authorities must deliver the apostles’ doctrine, for no other message has been confirmed by God. This is all easy enough to say, but when you consider how much is being said today in the name of Christ that was never said or alluded to by apostles, it is rather startling. Think of the things the apostles did not speak or write about. What about the rights of citizens, or financial security, or how to win the lost. What of church planting, increasing the size of a congregation, or how to reach the youth of the community. What of missionary programs, or the election of church officials, of professional training. How about the procedures of good worship, or how to maintain a happy marriage. What of the role of the church in the community, or how the church can appeal to the community. Where did they ever address the matter of a counseling program, or how to address the outbreak of divorce.

Precisely why is so much being said of such things today, while there is a glaring absence of them in the apostles' doctrine? Who can be called forward to be a witness for Jesus in the areas that I have mentioned? Where did He address such matters?

If this all seems meaningless, consider how they sound in comparison with what Peter will say. How is it possible for any person to be preaching the truth if it is actually at variance with what the eye-witnesses of Jesus said? If our preaching and teaching does not reflect the priorities of apostolic doctrine, how can it be justified?

WE ARE HIS WITNESSES

“And we are witnesses of all things which he did . . .” Other versions read, “we can testify to every Jesus did,” GWN “we apostles are witnesses of all He did,” NLT “we saw all of the things,” IE “we are eye and ear witnesses of everything of everything He did,” AMPLIFIED “Now we are eye-witnesses of everything that he did,” PHILLIPS and “We saw what Jesus did.” CEV

It must be remembered these were appointed witnesses, not volunteers. Jesus told his disciples, “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things ” (Luke 24:46-48). Again He told them, “But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

Again and again, these men confessed, “we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:32); “we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15); “we are His witnesses of these things” (Acts 5:32). And now, Peter says it again: “we are witnesses of all things.”

What Is A Witness

Someone who was willingly involved in what was taking place, and are allied with the Worker. The word “witness” has an intriguing root meaning. “etymologically one who is mindful, heeds; probably allied with.” THAYER This does not refer to a passer-by who was simply there when a certain thing happened. Such a witness may have some value in a legal setting, but not in a spiritual one. In things pertaining to God, for example, Pharaoh, Sennacherib, Pilate, and Herod would not be acceptable witnesses – even though they had personally witnessed Divine workings. These witnesses were not mindful of what they saw, and certainly were not allied with the heavenly Worker.

A witness must also be faithful, reporting what had actually taken place, and not merely what was interpreted to have taken place. Thus when Isaiah was commanded by God to write on a large scroll, he chose “faithful witnesses” to do the recording (Isa 8:2).

There is also a sense in which witnesses are chosen by God, and not simply garnered by men. Thus God speaks of “My witnesses” (Isa 43:10,12; 44:8). Jesus referred to the apostles as “witnesses unto Me” (Acts 1:8). They are also described as “His witnesses unto the people” (Acts 13:31).

Valid witnesses are inspired by God. In the case of the apostles, they were not only eye-witnesses, but were given the Holy Spirit to enable them to recall and properly convey what they had seen and heard (Lk 24:48-49; John 14:26; Acts 1:8).

Willing to die, if required to do so, for delivering the witness. The Greek word from which “witness” is derived is **μαρτυρεῖν** (martyres), from which the word “martyr” comes. In Scripture it is used in the sense of one “who after his example have proved the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ by undergoing a violent death.” THAYER While martyrdom is not as requisite for

being a witness, it is imperative that there be a willingness to be one.

The Qualification of the Witness

The apostles, who were Christ's handpicked witnesses, had certain qualifications. When Jesus chose them, the fact that He did the choosing was sufficient. It is written that "He ordained twelve, that they should be with Him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14). They were not simply with Him during the day, as though they were employees. For the most part, if not totally, their personal lives ended when He chose them. Those who had been employed by others, or had a business "left all" and followed Him (Matt 4:20,22; Lk 5:11; Mk 10:28; Lk 18:18). Wherever Jesus went, they went – the only exception being when He went out alone to pray (Matt 14:23; Mk 6:47). Any occasion when the disciples were not with Jesus was exceedingly rare, and never lasted very long.

When Peter led the disciples in filling the office vacated by Judas, he, by inspiration, gave the qualifications that had to be met. "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22). Additionally, Jesus had told them on the eve of His betrayal, "And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning" (John 15:27).

From the Baptism of John

The "witnesses" chosen by Christ not only saw what He did and heard what He said, they were able to set it all within the context of His overall ministry and particular explanatory words He addressed to them. In addition, they were given the Holy Spirit to enable them to precisely recall relevant matters, and to also properly interpret them.

The stipulation "from the baptism of John" suggests that the chosen witnesses were also required to have been disciples of John. This is fitting, seeing that He was sent to prepare the way of the Lord. It would also suggest the witnesses were present at His baptism. We are given a record of two of John's disciples that heard what He said of Jesus, and immediately left him and followed Jesus. One of the two is identified as Andrew, Peter's brother. "And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother" (John 1:36-40).

The "witnesses" chosen by Christ not only saw what He did and heard what He said, they were able to set it all within the context of His overall ministry and particular explanatory words He addressed to them. In addition, they were given the Holy Spirit to enable them to precisely recall relevant matters, and to also properly interpret them. There have never been any other witnesses of this sort – the only exception being Paul the apostle, who was even given special insights and revelations.

THE REALM OF THE WORK

" . . . both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem . . ." Other versions read, "country of the Jews and Jerusalem," NIV "Judea and in Jerusalem," NRSV "Judean countryside and Jerusalem," CJB and "in all the region of Judaea and in Jerusalem," MRD and "throughout Israel and in Jerusalem."
LIVING

Jesus ministered in God's land (Deut 32:43; 2 Chron 7:20; Psa 10:16; Joel 2:18), in His Father's

house (John 2:16), and among the chosen people (Matt 15:24; John 1:11; Acts 3:25-26; 13:26). This was the land that God had chosen. Jerusalem was the city that He had chosen (1 Kgs 11:36). The Temple was the place where He “dwelt between the cherubims” (Ex 25:22; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Kgs 19:16; Psa 99:1; Isa 37:16). The Jews were the people to whom the promise of the Messiah was given (Isa 9:6). The sanctity of Israel, Jerusalem, and the Temple is underscored in the great prayer of Solomon at the dedication of the Temple. “When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name : "then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause” NKJV (1 Kgs 8:47-49). This saying was fulfilled in Daniel who, from the land of the enemy, faced Jerusalem and prayed (Dan 6:10).

When God visited His people through Jesus, He did so in His land, His city, and His house. As Peter will develop, the tragedy was that they did not know the time of their “visitation” (Lk 19:44).

Whatever you may personally think about the land of Israel, or the “land of the Jews,” or Canaan, there are some things that it is well to recall. All of the redemptive works that were done upon the earth were done in that land. Christ’s birth, dedication, and upbringing took place there. His ministry, death, burial, and resurrection took place in that land. All of the powerful things that He declared were said in that land. He even ascended back into glory from that land. This is where Moses and Elijah came to speak with Him about the death He was going to accomplish. His miracles were all done in this land. This is also the land where the Gospel, according to Jesus’ own commandment, was first preached. This was all according to Divine intention. It was not the mere response of God to circumstance.

THEY SLEW AND HANGED ON A TREE

“ 39b . . . whom they slew and hanged on a tree . . .” Other versions read, “they killed by hanging on a tree,” NKJV “put Him to death by hanging Him on a cross,” NASB “They did away with him by hanging him on a stake,” CJB “ People hung him on a cross and killed him,” GWN “This same person the Jews hanged on a tree, and slew him,” MRD “They put him to death by hanging him on a cross,” NLT “He was murdered on a cross,” LIVING “they put Him on a cross made of wood,” IE “They even put Him to death, by crucifixion,” WEYMOUTH “they murdered Him by hanging Him upon a tree,” WILLIAMS and “And [yet] they put Him out of the way (murdered Him) by hanging Him on a tree.” AMPLIFIED

This is now the fifth time Peter has laid the responsibility for the death of Jesus at the feet of the Jews (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10; 5:30). Stephen also charged them with murdering Jesus (Acts 7:52). Paul did the same (Acts 13:27-29; 1 Thess 2:14-15). Those who say the Jews did not kill Jesus are at variance with these inspired utterances. We have absolutely no interest in an explanation of their position. It is false to the core, and is unworthy of a hearing.

HANGED ON A TREE

Several versions substitute another word for “tree” – “cross,” NASB/NLT/LIVING “stake,” CJB “cross made of wood,” IE and “crucifixion,” WEYMOUTH Right here, certain language scholars have superimposed their own understanding on the text. It is true that the word translated “tree” (xu,lou) has a meaning of “wood,” “beam,” or “cross,” and is so used in many classical writings. THAYER This same word is used by both Paul and Peter to describe the instrument on which Jesus

was crucified. Galatians 3:13 reads, “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree .” First Peter 2:24 reads, “Who His own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree , that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet 2:24). Most versions use the word “tree” in Galatians 3:13. Exceptions are “stake” CJB and “wooden cross.” LIVING Variant readings of First Peter 2:24 include “cross,” NASB/NRSV/GWN/ MRD/NAS/NAU/NJB/NLT and “stake” CJB

The doctrinal point here is that the atoning death of Christ is not to be seen as taking place on a Roman cross. It is rather to be seen as being accomplished on a tree of Divine cursing – a place where Jesus was “made a curse for us.” Sin was not removed because of the sentencing of Pilate or the initiative of the Jews. It was rather removed when Jesus was made a curse for us on a tree, as foreshadowed under the Law.

Now, all of this may seem to be of little consequence. However, the instrument on which Jesus was crucified is tied back to a statement made under the Law: “ for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.” That statement is found in Deuteronomy 21:22-23, and it concerns the punishment of someone found worthy of death. “And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be to be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God ;) that thy land be not defiled, which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.” Most all of the versions read “tree” in this text. Exceptions read “impale him on a tree,” TNK “gibbet,” (upright post) DOUAY

We have in Scripture an example of capital punishment being executed in this manner. It took place when Joshua executed five kings that had fought against them. Joshua honored the law of Deuteronomy in carrying out that execution. “And afterward Joshua smote them, and slew them, and hanged them on five trees: and they were hanging upon the trees until the evening ” (Josh 10:26).

Now, the point here is that the curse of God was upon the one who was hanged on a tree. The body was not to remain on the tree over night, but was to be taken down and buried. This, of course, is precisely what was done with the body of Jesus.

The doctrinal point here is that the atoning death of Christ is not to be seen as taking place on a Roman cross . It is rather to be seen as being accomplished on a tree of Divine cursing – a place where Jesus was “made a curse for us.” Sin was not removed because of the sentencing of Pilate or the initiative of the Jews. It was rather removed when Jesus was made a curse for us on a tree, as foreshadowed under the Law .

Those who were familiar with the Law would recognize this fact. I do not believe it can be seen when alternative words are arbitrarily chosen by the linguists. This is why those who translate Scripture must have a grasp of the Scriptures themselves, and the purpose and manner of God. When there are alternative terms available, the default should be to one that has been sanctified by both Divine use and prophecy.

GOD RAISED JESUS AND SHOWED HIM OPENLY

“ 40 Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly; 41 Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.”

There is a remarkable consistency in the various messages that are recorded in the book of Acts. Those words are also quite unlike the presentations of Christ that have become common in our time. Men of honest heart are right in questioning why Christian leaders have taken upon themselves to speak differently about Jesus than those who were His appointed witnesses. Such men do owe us an

explanation, and until they provide us with a satisfactory one, they ought not to be given a hearing.

GOD RAISED HIM THE THIRD DAY

“Him God raised up the third day . . .” Other versions read, “God raised Him from the dead on the third day,” NIV “On the third day God gave Him back to life,” BBE “God raised up this man on the third day,” CSB “God brought him back to life on the third day,” GWN “God raised him to life on the third day,” NLT and “But God brought him back to life again three days later.” LIVING

This is now the eleventh time a point has been made of God raising Jesus from the dead (Acts 1:22; 2:24,31, 32; 3:15,26; 4:10,33; 5:30,31; 10:40).

Although Jesus was raised in a very real body, it was not one adapted to this world. In order for Him to be seen by mortals, God had make Jesus visible to them. From the subjective point of view, the eyes of those who saw Him were opened so they could see Him who was not suited for this world. From the objective point of view, God caused Jesus to be seen, for if He did not do this, no one could possibly have seen Him.

This is the first time that the record states He was raised “on the third day.” Of course, prior to His death, Jesus had told His disciples He would rise again on “the third day” (Matt 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mk 9:31; 10:34; Lk 9:22; 13:32; 18:33). After He rose again, Jesus reminded His disciples that He had said He would “rise again” on the third day (Lk 24:7-8,46). When Jesus appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus, it was still “the third day” (Lk 24:21). I hardly see how a point could be established with any more clarity.

Yet, there remain those who haggle about the day on which Jesus was crucified – whether it was Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday. They draw attention to the words of Jesus on the matter: “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mat 12:40). They reason that three full days and three full nights are meant, and therefore Jesus could not possibly have been crucified on Friday. The whole manner of reasoning has an intellectual sound to some. But what are they going to do with the eleven clear statements that affirm Jesus rose ON the third day? Such foolish excursions into the realm of philosophy are unwarranted and even disgraceful.

Here we also see involvement of the entire Godhead in the resurrection of Jesus. From one point of view, Jesus took His own life back again (John 10:17-18). From another point of view, God raised Him from the dead (Acts 13:30). From yet another point of view, He was raised from the dead “by the glory of the Father” (Rom 6:4). From still another perspective He was “quicken by the Spirit,” or “made alive by the Spirit” NIV (1 Pet 3:18).

These are not contradicting views, but make known to us something of the complexities of Divine working. The Godhead is united in their involvement in redemption. God is said to have raised Jesus from the dead because He is the One who sent Him, and it was His purpose that was being fulfilled. Jesus is said to have taken back His life because He had been given power to do so, working, as it were, in concert with the Father Himself. He was made alive by the Spirit because “it is the Spirit” that quickens or makes alive, and He is not excluded in any conferment of life. Among other things, this provides confirmation of the surety that is realized when faith takes hold of the truth of the Gospel.

AND SHOWED HIM OPENLY

“ . . . and showed him openly . . .” Other versions read, “granted that He should become visible,” NASB “caused Him to be seen,” NIV “allowed Him to appear,” NRSV “made Him manifest,” RSV “let Him be seen,” BBE “permitted Him to be seen,” CSB “gave Him to be openly seen,” DARBY

“gave Him to be made manifest,” DOUAY “made Him to appear,” ESV “caused Him to be seen with naked eyes,” MRD “granted that He be visible,” NAB “showed Him,” LIVING “permitted Him to appear unmistakably,” WEYMOUTH and “caused Him to be manifest (to be plainly seen),” AMPLIFIED

Although Jesus was raised in a very real body, it was not one adapted to this world. In order for Him to be seen by mortals, God had to make Jesus visible to them. From the subjective point of view, the eyes of those who saw Him were opened so they could see Him who was not suited for this world. From the objective point of view, God caused Jesus to be seen, for if He did not do this, no one could possibly have seen Him.

In Mark’s record concerning Jesus’ appearance to the two on the road to Emmaus, he says He appeared to them “in another form,” or a “different form” NASB (Mk 16:12). This was an example of God showing Jesus openly, enabling the two to behold Him as though He was still like them.

The reality of His body was confirmed when He appeared to His disciples and said, “Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have” (Luke 24:39). This was not a commentary on the constitution of His resurrected body, but was rather an evidence that God was showing His Son to them, confirming that He had risen from the dead. Without this revelation of God, Jesus could not possibly have been seen.

The second appearing of Jesus will also be on this order, when God will “show” Him as He is (1 Tim 6:15). Then, the difference will be twofold. First, He shall appear in all of His glory, and not simply “in another form.” Second, the dead will be “raised incorruptible,” and the living will be “changed,” having “put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:52). Also, then “every eye shall see Him,” and not only select witnesses, as in our text (Rev 1:7).

By saying that Jesus was shown “openly,” the text means it was a public showing. Yet, as Peter will affirm, the “public” was made up of people God Himself selected.

NOT TO ALL THE PEOPLE

“Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after He rose from the dead.” Other versions read, “witnesses who were chosen beforehand by God,” NASB “witnesses whom God had already chosen,” NIV “to us who were chosen by God as witnesses,” RSV “witnesses marked out before by God,” BBE “witnesses appointed beforehand by God,” CSB “witnesses preordained by God,” DOUAY “whom God had chosen in advance to be his witnesses,” NLT and “who were chosen (designated) beforehand by God as witnesses.” AMPLIFIED

Before Jesus died, He told His disciples that after that death, the world would see Him “no more” (John 16:10). Now, the only people who saw Him were those chosen by God. When Peter says “not to all the people,” He means not to all the Jewish people. He appeared only to special “witnesses” that God had chosen “before.” And who were these witnesses to whom God chose to reveal the risen Christ? We do not know them all by name, but we can compile quite an impressive list.

- He first appeared to Mary Magdalene. He spoke to her (Mk 16:9).

Now, the only people who saw Him were those chosen by God. When Peter says “not to all the people,” He means not to all the Jewish people. He appeared only to special “witnesses” that God had chosen “before.”

The women who came to the tomb, to whom Jesus also spoke (Matt 28:9-10).

- The two on the road to Emmaus, to whom He spoke (Mk 16:12; Lk 24:13-32).

- Matthias and Barnabas, who met the qualification of witnessing the risen and speaking Christ (Acts 1:22-23).

- Those who were “with the eleven” when Cleopas and his partner reported they had seen the Lord. During that time, Jesus appeared to that group also, and spoke (Lk 24:33-45).

- Those who witnessed Christ’s ascension, and returned to Jerusalem to wait for the promise of the Father (Lk 24:52). These included “the women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and Jesus’ brothers” Acts 1:14). At that time, we are told that one hundred and twenty were gathered together (Acts 1:15). Far less than the more than five hundred who seen the resurrected Jesus at the same time (1 Cor 15:6).

- When Jesus showed Himself to the disciples at the Sea of Tiberias, seven men were present: Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael of Cana, James and John, and two unnamed disciples. We do not know if they were among the eleven (John 21:3) There is no record of Nathanael being one of the apostles, and we know very little of him (John 1:47).

- A special appearance to Cephas, or Peter (1 Cor 15:5a).

- A special appearance to the twelve (1 Cor 15:5b).

- Over five hundred brethren during a single occasion (1 Cor 15:6).

- A special appearance to James, whom we understand to be the brother of our Lord (1 Cor 15:7).

- Last of all to Paul, as one who was born out of due season (1 Cor 15:8).

As you can see, there were a considerable number of witnesses chosen before hand. I do not doubt that someone from every group of people were present in that number. All of them are dignified by the fact they were chosen witnesses.

HE COMMANDED US TO PREACH TO THE PEOPLE

“ 42 And He commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.”

When we subject ourselves to the raw text of Scripture, refusing to run it through the filter of human wisdom and religious tradition, it will have a jarring effect upon our soul. Our minds will be agitated with new and fresh perspectives, and we will be shaken out of any complacency that has been caused by religious casualness.

HE COMMANDED US TO PREACH

“And He commanded us to preach unto the people . . .” Other versions read, “give news of this to the people,” BBE “proclaim and attest to the Jewish people,” CJB “ordered us to warn the people,” GWN “proclaim and testify to the people,” MRD “proclaim this to His people,” NJB and “preach the Good News everywhere.” LIVING

These are the people who had been schooled by Scriptures and hewn by the prophets. They had been taught how to think about God, and had some acquaintance with revelation. Now Peter will announce a word for which their own Scriptures had prepared them.

Precisely who is “the people?” While there is a sense in which this includes everyone, it is particularly focused on the people who have been made ready for the Lord – the Jewish people in particular. These are the people who had been schooled by Scriptures and hewn by the prophets. They had been taught how to think about God, and had some acquaintance with revelation. Now Peter will announce a word for which their own Scriptures had prepared them.

AND TO TESTIFY HE IS THE APPOINTED JUDGE

“ . . . and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.”

This verse is noteworthy. Here Peter will declare something Jesus commanded them to “preach” – the men who have been set “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). It will become apparent that this message is not one that is being preached in our time – at least not on any significance scale.

The Jews, and any proselytes who had joined them, were very much aware of the coming judgment. The Scriptures had spoken on this subject, and although it was not marked with the clarity of the Gospel, it was clear enough to reach the honest and good heart. Ponder what was written in the Jewish Scriptures.

- “Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD, because He cometh to judge the earth ” (1 Chron 16:33).
- “What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when He visiteth, what shall I answer him?” (Job 31:14).
- “But the LORD shall endure for ever: He hath prepared His throne for judgment ” (Psa 9:7).
- “Our God shall come , and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before Him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about Him” (Psa 50:3).
- “He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people ” (Psa 50:4).
- “Before the LORD: for He cometh, for He cometh to judge the earth: He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with His truth ” (Psa 96:13).
- “I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked ” (Eccl 3:17).
- “Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment ” (Eccl 11:9).
- “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl 12:14).
- “A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened ” (Dan 7:10).
- “Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God , O Israel” (Amos 4:12).

It is apparent that any Jew of sober mind was acutely aware that a time was coming when men would be called into account before God. There was some acquaintance with the fact that a kind of Divine review would be made of the lives of the people, and the books, or records, would be opened and made public. There was also a word from Amos that told people they should prepare to confront God. They were even told God would be on the initiative to judge the earth, not waiting for men to come to Him. He would, in fact, come to judge the earth, doing so with the utmost integrity and uprightness. However, the details of all of this were very sketchy.

Now, with a single sentence, Peter throws the floodlight of revelation on the day of judgment. God has ordained that a Man will judge men! That is something that had never been made clear by Moses or the Prophets. The judgment would also be thorough – of the living and the dead. That is, the God who had only been known for judging the living, would also take up the cases of the dead. All of this

would be done by the Lord Jesus Christ, who has been ordained for this time of review and accountability, of punishment and reward.

Jesus “commanded” that this word should be preached – even to those who believe on the name of Jesus Christ, it is Gospel, for their Savior is also their Judge. For those who have rejected Christ, and chosen to live without giving due regard to Him, the terror of this day defies all description. Before Jesus commences the judgment, He shall have removed the heavens and the earth, and all things in them. The things for which men have lusted will not be present in any form. Only eternal verity will be staring them in the face. Divested of flesh and blood, which cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50), and housed by a frame that is not subject to death and decay, the wicked will have a full recall of all of their unrighteous deeds. They will be able to access them while they stand before “God the Judge of all,” and “the Man Christ Jesus.” Nothing will be hidden, and nothing will be forgotten. No opportunity will be given to make amends, correct their thinking, or start again.

Should the professing church come to the point where this commandment of Jesus is obeyed, it will have a significant impact on society in general, and the church in particular. Let the message be faithfully declared!

It is no wonder that Jesus commanded this message to be preached, declared, announced, and affirmed to the people! While religious pretenders are busying themselves to correct the problems of humanity, Jesus commands that the people be told that He is going to judge the living and the dead.

When Jesus walked among men, He referred to “the day of judgment” (Matt 10:15; 11:22; 12:36), and “the judgment” (Matt 12:42; Lk 10:41; 11:31,32). He said that men would give an account for every “idle word” that they spoke (Matt 12:36). He said that those who rejected His words would be judged by them in the last day (John 12:48). He also said that no one who did a work in His name would lose their reward (Matt 10:41-42). The Lord Jesus Christ made the people acutely aware of the appointed day of judgment.

Should the professing church come to the point where this commandment of Jesus is obeyed, it will have a significant impact on society in general, and the church in particular. Let the message be faithfully declared!

THE PROPHETS BEAR WITNESS TO JESUS

“43 To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.”

Here again, something is said that differs significantly from the trend of modern preaching. It is good to remember that a man is speaking who has been chosen by Jesus, given special privileges by the Son of God, and is filled with the Spirit.

ALL THE PROPHETS WITNESS

“To Him give all the prophets witness . . .” Other versions read, “of Him all the prophets bear witness,” NASB “All of the prophets testify about Him,” NIV and “all of the prophets have written about Him.” LIVING

This agrees perfectly with what Jesus Himself said, “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me ” (John 5:39). An angel of God also confirmed this to John the beloved: “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10). Once, when John was recording Jesus quoting from the book of Isaiah, he added, “These things said Esaias, when he saw His glory, and spake of Him ” (John 12:41). Peter said of the testimony of the prophets, “Of

which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:10-11).

Jesus Christ is the theme of Scripture, the heart of its message, and the fulfillment of its prophecies. He is the consummate theme of the prophets, and all of their other messages revolve around Him. When he had found Jesus, Philip told Nathanael, “We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth” (John 1:45).

Now, if this is true, then why have professed Christian leaders allowed a prevailing ignorance of the prophets to be developed in the church? Why is it that what is being said about Jesus is often even at variance with what the prophets said about Him?

Let it be clear, the prophets spoke of Jesus Christ in order that men might be able to recognize Him. The Jews were cultured to think in terms of the Scriptures being fulfilled. Now, Peter affirms that this is precisely the case. Of course, if his hearers had no knowledge of the prophets, this word would have no meaning at all.

That condition may exist in the churches of our time, but it did not exist in the synagogues of Peter’s time. Jews and proselytes were acquainted with this custom: “For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him” (Acts 13:27). The ones who rejected Christ did not do so because

they had not been subjected to the testimony of the prophets. They heard them read “every sabbath day.”

WHOSOEVER BELIEVES

“ . . . that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins.”

And what is the testimony of the prophets concerning the Lord Jesus Christ? It is a message of not only the superiority of Jesus, and the greatness of His accomplishments, but of the effectiveness of embracing what is said of Him. “Through His name, everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins,” NASB “everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name,” NIV “through His name everyone who has faith in him will have forgiveness of sins,” BBE “Every person who commits himself to Jesus will be forgiven through the authority of Jesus,” IE and “everyone who believes in Him [who adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Him, giving himself up to Him] receives forgiveness of sins through His name,” AMPLIFIED

I have come from a background where believing was nearly, if not outrightly, demeaned. All kinds of arguments were regularly initiated that said it was not enough to believe. The reasoning presumed believing to be one of several steps that were of equal value, and obtained their power when they were all knit together. With such a perception we could not refer to this verse – even though it was in the book of Acts, which we contended, contained “the plan of salvation.” Alas, concerning this verse, we were like Ephraimites who, when asked to repeat the word “Shibboleth,” “could not frame to pronounce it right” (Judges 12:5-6).

But now, praise God, I can “pronounce it right,” and take great joy in doing so: “whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins!”

Why should any person be ashamed to repeat what Jesus said, or feel any need to modify it or apologize that it was in the Bible? What Peter said was the truth – not a portion of the truth,

but the truth! . . . What this means is that there is more to believing than I had thought. It is not a mere step, but is the house in which everything else was found.

Paul taught essentially the same thing when he said, “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). Jesus said such a person is “not condemned” (John 3:18). He also said the one who believes on Him has “everlasting life” (John 3:36; 6:47). Again He said that the one believing on Him would “never thirst” (John 6:35). The person who believes on Him, Jesus said, would experience the flow of “living waters” out of his inmost being. John said He was speaking about the Holy Spirit, whom those who believe would receive (John 7:38-39). Jesus told Martha that the one who believed in Him, though he was dead, he would live (John 11:25).

Peter said that the person who believed on Jesus would “not be confounded” (1 Pet 2:6). John said that the person who believed Jesus is the Son of God overcomes the world (1 John 5:5). He also said that such a person “hath the witness in himself” (1 John 5:10).

Why should any person be ashamed to repeat what Jesus said, or feel any need to modify it or apologize that it was in the Bible? What Peter said was the truth – not a portion of the truth, but the truth!

What this means is that there is more to believing than I had thought. It is not a mere step, but is the house in which everything else was found. If a person can believe, Jesus said, “all things are possible” (Mk 9:23). Such a person – one who believes in Jesus – will certainly have no trouble obeying Him, for faith always obeys, and never disobeys. That is the resounding testimony of the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

This verse also confirms the priority of remission. Until sins are forgiven, no other benefits will be realized. Believing in Jesus is directly associated with the remission of sins. That is what Peter said.

This in no way negates that men are to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). It does undergird WHY this is the case. It is one’s faith that validates their baptism, and not visa versa. When men have trouble with the requirement of baptism, it is because they do not believe. There is no record in Scripture of a believer who balked at the necessity of being baptized. When people stumble over that requirement, it is because they do not believe – and that failure excludes them from the privilege of experiencing the remission of sins.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to a remarkable presentation of Jesus Christ. It is one that was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and delivered by a man with spiritual understanding. It will now be interesting to learn how heaven will respond to such a message, and to the readiness of the household of Cornelius to embrace it.

Here is a classic example of someone who was prepared for Christ. The path had been cleared, and no further obstacles stood between the people and the Lord. Their hearts had been made ready, and thus the Word of Christ will in no way offend them. This is an example of “the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2,5).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #50

THE HOLY SPIRIT and CORNELIUS' HOUSE

“ 10:44 While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45 And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost. 46 For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47 Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48 And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. ” (Acts 10:44-48)

INTRODUCTION

In this text we are faced with a most remarkable phenomenon – a group of people receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, and in a most unusual way. In a sense, the whole event stands by itself, with unique spiritual properties. Yet, there are other ways in which it is representative of something that is common among believers – the receiving of the Holy Spirit. The experience itself is part of apostolic doctrine. The precise nature of the experience, however, is not inherent in apostolic doctrine.

There are recorded incidents of other groups of people receiving the Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost, the disciples “were all filled with the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Acts 2:4). In this text, Peter referred to that occasion as the disciples receiving the Holy Spirit, paralleling the

experience of Cornelius' household with that event (Acts 10:47). Later, the whole body of disciples were "filled with the Holy Spirit" following a prayer for boldness to speak the word of the Lord. It is written, "and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 4:31). The Samaritans also appear to have received the Spirit as a group, with Peter and John laying their hands upon them. It is written that "they received the Holy Spirit" NKJV (Acts 8:17). Certain disciples in Ephesus, who had been baptized with the baptism of John also received the

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- **WHILE PETER YET SPAKE THESE WORDS (10:44a)**
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT FELL ON THEM THAT HEARD (10:44b)**
- **THEY WHO WERE OF THE CIRCUMCISION WERE ASTONISHED (10:45a)**
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS Poured OUT UPON THE GENTILES (10:45b)**
- **THEY HEARD THEM SPEAK WITH TONGUES (10:46a)**
- **THEN ANSWERED PETER (10:46b)**
- **IS THERE ANY REASON WHY THESE CANNOT BE BAPTIZED? (10:47a)**
- **THEY RECEIVED THE SPIRIT AS WELL AS WE (10:47b)**
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- **CONCLUSION**

Spirit as a group when "the Holy Spirit came on them" NKJV after Paul had preached Christ to them and laid his hands upon them (Acts 19:6). In Scripture such occurrences are rare, and therefore worthy of serious consideration. The fact that they are rare means that they are not the kingdom norm. It also means they are strictly controlled by the King Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it is not on the part of wisdom to attempt to formulate a doctrine from such passages, or to fit them into a preconceived pattern of theology.

In view of these things, in handling this text, I will endeavor to show how it relates to the doctrine of the apostles, as well as the experience of all believers. The precise relationship will not be at the detailed, or evidential, level.

AN EXAMPLE OF CHRIST'S RULE

Our text records an example of the King, Jesus Christ, administering the Kingdom in a manner that cannot be codified – at least not at the experiential level. He is the one who orchestrated the events relating to Cornelius. They include the preparation of Cornelius, the preparation of Peter, and the gathering of the people to whom Peter is speaking. They also include getting Peter into the area, the inclination of Cornelius to the Lord and to His people, and the response of his household to the things of God – i.e. fearing God.

AN UNFORTUNATE TENDENCY

Throughout history, devout men have often struggled with how to handle the record of the experiences of godly people. This ranges from the working of the miraculous, to how men went about serving God, and even how they received the Holy Spirit of God. It has not been unusual for them to form doctrinal statements out of corrective teaching – such as Paul's correction of the Corinthian's desire for, and handling of, spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians, chapters 12-14). Such people speak of "the nine spiritual gifts" just as though it represented the manner in which the apostles taught. Others have

taken the record of what early disciples did, and shaped it into a hard and fast doctrine – such as gathering together on the first day of the week to break bread, or even gathering a collection at that time.

Mind you, there is profit in considering what the early believers actually did. However, when men attempt to shape that into a teaching, they have entered an activity in which human opinion will be inevitably mingled with Scripture. It is preferable to ponder WHY the believers did what did, considering the impact that the truth of the Gospel had upon them. I have found that when this is done, the people generally end up doing much the same things as the early disciples – such as meeting on the first day of the week to break bread. However, in such a case, their activity has not been determined by a commandment or a law – for no such commandment or law has been given. Rather, the understanding that results from believing the Gospel becomes the true motivation.

It seems to me that all of this reflects a certain Divine manner. It is KNOWING the truth that causes them to be free – free to conduct their lives in such a manner as to please God (John 8:32). When speaking of this, Jesus went on to say that the freedom of which He spoke was actually accomplished by Him personally: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). That is, He works in the individual to the degree that they have apprehended the truth. Further, while His commandments are true, truth itself has a wider circumference than commandments. It includes all of the commandments, yet is not confined to them.

A POINT ABOUT DOCTRINE

When speaking of the various ministries of the Scriptures, “doctrine” is one of four uses. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). These appear to be listed in order of their priority.

DOCTRINE. This is the objective teaching of Scripture, and pertains to reality – the way things are. Doctrine is not variable. There is not one doctrine for one person, and a different one for another. Doctrine can be summarized in a Person – Jesus Christ. Thus we read of “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9). It can be summed up in an objective – God’s eternal purpose. We therefore read of “the doctrine of God our Savior” (Tit 2:10), and God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11). It can also be gathered into an ordained “form” that depicts the doctrine – such a baptism, which is a form of the doctrine (the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ – Rom 6:17). The “doctrine” is what shapes our understanding concerning God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the execution of an eternal purpose. It is also what edifies, strengthens, and builds up.

- **REPROOF.** Reproof has to do with rebuking, or denouncing conduct or speech that is wrong. It deals with convicting one of sinfulness. Rebuke differs from doctrine in that its objective is to bring the person away from sin in order that a proper response may be given to the doctrine. Rebukes are also tailored for the individual, while doctrine is not. Reproof, or rebuke, does not edify or build up. It rather prepares the sinner so he can be edified.

The strengthening of a believer, or edification, is something that is accomplished by faith, which comes by means of hearing the Gospel of Christ and taking hold of the promises of God

CORRECTION. Correction differs from rebuke, because it is dealing with one who is headed in the wrong direction. Such a person may not require rebuke, yet must adjust his course, for he is headed in the wrong direction. This involves making a place for Satan, not being vigilant, or being slow and indolent in response to God. The person also may have already fallen into sin, requiring rebuke. In such a case, “correction” brings the person back to the narrow way that leads to life. Correction is also not in order to edification, and does not itself minister edification or up-building.

- **INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.** This has to do with training the young, whose understanding is not yet fully formed. Scriptural teaching concerning interpersonal

relationships and personal vigilance and consistency are examples of “instruction in righteousness.” This is also designed to get the person to a point where the doctrine can be comprehended. It is required because the doctrine cannot be seen when a person does not know what is involved in living unto the Lord. Instruction in righteousness is also something that prepares a person to be built up in the most holy faith. Men are not made stronger by knowing what they ought to do. Rather, such a ministry has to do with preparing one for the process of edification.

The strengthening of a believer, or edification, is something that is accomplished by faith, which comes by means of hearing the Gospel of Christ and taking hold of the promises of God (Rom 10:14-17; 2 Pet 1:4).

When men PREACH rebuke, correction, and instruction in righteousness, they are presenting an incorrect emphasis – for what is preached IS the emphasis. For example, it is not proper to take the text before us and preach the detailed experiences that it declares as a doctrine. The doctrine will pertain to the receiving of the Holy Spirit, and will be in strict accord with the promises of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In this text, the Holy Spirit is given in a procedural manner that differs from what occurred on the day of Pentecost. Neither, indeed, does it conform to what took place among the Samaritans. Yet it is the same Lord who poured out the Spirit.

PRONENESS TO CODIFY

Although men are very prone to codify the manner in which the Holy Spirit is received, this text suggests that they should refrain from such tendencies. To be sure, in matters pertaining to salvation and the receiving of the Holy Spirit, there is such a thing as the norm – what ordinarily takes place. However, that norm does not concern the manner in which the Spirit was perceived as being bestowed. Rather, it is seen in the FACT that He is bestowed, given, poured out, and received. It is that norm that is contained in the doctrine.

Concerning the phenomenon that attends the receiving of the Spirit, God is not locked into the evidences declared in our text – or any other isolated text. Those are matters that He determines according to His own discretion, and always comport with His eternal purpose. They are always in keeping with His objective, and not intended to be standards. He does have a right to do this because He is Lord. Men, however, do not have this right.

WHILE PETER YET SPAKE THESE WORDS

“ 10:44a While Peter yet spake these words . . . ” Other versions read, “while Peter was still speaking these words,” NKJV “while Peter was still saying this,” RSV and “while Peter was still speaking these truths.” WILLIAMS

This text is of particular significance because it records a heavenly response to the words of Peter. There is no doubt about the propriety of what Peter said. No one is in order to question either the content or the focus of Peter’s words, for the Divine approval of his words is seen in the heavenly response. The marvelous effect of these words upon the hearers will also be confirmed, for they are the ones who will be blessed. Therefore, it is in order to nail into our conscience precisely what Peter has said.

- God is no respecter of persons (10:34).
- In every nation, the one who fears God and works righteousness is accepted by Him (10:35).

- God sent the Gospel to the children of Israel (10:36a).
- Jesus is Lord of all (10:36b).
- The particular word that is said to have been declared is concerning things that occurred after the baptism that John preached (10:37).
- God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power (10:38a).
- Jesus went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil (10:38b).
- God was with Jesus (10:38c).
- The disciples of Jesus were witnesses of all that He did (10:39a).
- The Jews slew Jesus and hanged Him on a tree (10:39b).
- God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day (10:40a).
- God showed the risen Jesus openly (10:40b).
- God did not show Jesus to all of the people, but only to witnesses that He had chosen beforehand (10:41a).
- The chosen witnesses were those who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead (10:41b).
- Jesus commanded the disciples to preach to the people (10:42a).
- Jesus commanded them to testify that He is the one who has been ordained by God to be the Judge of the living and the dead (10:42b).
- All of the prophets gave witness to Jesus (10:43a).
- The witness of the prophets confirmed that through Jesus' name, all who believe on Him will receive remission of sins (10:43b).

Notice that everything that was declared had to do with God and Jesus Christ.

GOD THE FATHER

- God is no respecter of persons.
- God accepts every person in every nation that fears Him and works righteousness.
- God sent the Word of salvation to the Jews.
- God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power.
- God was with Jesus.
- God raised Jesus from the dead.
- God showed Jesus openly.
- God ordained the ones who would see the risen Christ.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

- Jesus is Lord of all.
- Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil.
- The word that was published concerned what Jesus did.
- Jesus was slain and hanged on a tree.
- Jesus was raised from the dead.

- Jesus commanded the disciples to preach to the people.
- Jesus commanded the disciples to testify that God had ordained Him to judge the living and the dead.

OTHERS MENTIONED

Others who were mentioned had some relationship with God or Christ, and that is the only reason they were mentioned.

- Those who fear God and work righteousness.
- The children of Israel to whom God sent the word.
- John the Baptist, whose baptism prepared the way for Jesus.
- The disciples who were witnesses of all that Jesus did.
- Witnesses that were ordained of God to see the risen Christ.
- The people, to whom the disciples were to preach of Christ.
- Those who ate and drank with the risen Christ.
- The prophets who gave witness to Jesus.
- Those who believe on the name of Jesus, who will receive remission of sin.

It is every evident that Deity was the focus of everything Peter said. There is an evident thrust in his words that is not common in our day. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are not merely mentioned, but are the axis around which Peter's word rotate. The fundamental work that was accomplished was clearly that of Deity. Furthermore, the responses of men, whether good or bad, were, strictly speaking, to what the Lord had done.

This message does not fit handily into a theological system, or an institutional mindset. Notwithstanding, that circumstance, which is a disconcerting condition to many, there is a sanctifying nobility in Peter's words that is most refreshing.

OTHER THINGS TO NOTICE

Peter did not set Jesus forth as the grand answer to humanities self-diagnosed needs. He did not represent Him as one who could help men reach their goals or realize their dreams. He made no connection of the Lord with political, social, or domestic circumstances. While the Lord Jesus does touch all of these facets of life, that is not the message of the Gospel itself. Jesus is simply not presented as panacea for the troubles of life in this world.

It also ought to be noted that Peter has not yet specified what is required of men. He has only presented the facts relating to Christ. He does present the general promise that all of the prophets give witness to the fact that whoever believes in Jesus will receive the remission of sins. That promise, of course, has a certain attraction that tugs at the soul of those who are seeking the Lord. In addition to that marvelous reality, he has also stated that those who fear God and work righteousness are accepted by Him, and that Jesus has been appointed to judge all men – the living and the dead. Of course, to someone who is fervently seeking the Lord, such declarations are of the highest relevance. You may rest assured that Peter has the attention of all who have gathered together to hear his words. Such attentiveness always attends an earnest quest for the Lord. I fear that the conditions I have just mentioned are not at all common in our time.

THE HOLY SPIRIT FELL ON THEM THAT HEARD

“ 10:44b . . . the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word.”

Let me emphasize that we are being exposed to the discretionary working of the God of heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not part of the Lord's nature to do something that is out of harmony with either His character or His purpose. The enthroned Jesus will not do something that conflicts with the Gospel, or that is contradictory to the salvation that it announces. If what takes place in this text is at variance with a theological system or way of thinking, then they are what is wrong, not what is now reported through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

THE SPIRIT FELL ON THEM

“ . . . the Holy Ghost fell on all them . . .” Other versions read, “the Holy Spirit fell upon all those,” NKJV :the Holy Spirit came on all who heard,” NIV “The Holy Spirit came upon all those who were hearing,” BBE “the Holy Spirit came down on all those who heard,” CSB the Holy Spirit came to everyone who heard his message,” GWN “the Holy Spirit overshadowed all them that were hearing the word,” MRD and “the Holy Spirit took control of everyone who was listening.” CEV

Let me emphasize that we are being exposed to the discretionary working of the God of heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not part of the Lord's nature to do something that is out of harmony with either His character or His purpose.

The Greek word from which “fell” is translated is *evpe,pesen* (e-pip-ip-to). Its lexical meaning is as follows: “to fall upon, to rush or press upon, to lie upon one,” THAYER “literally fall on someone, throw oneself on,” FRIBERG “press close on, embrace,” UBS and “approach eagerly . . . come upon, embrace.” GINGRICH In its various forms, this word is used fourteen times in the Scriptures. I will highlight the English word that is translated from the Greek word just mentioned.

- **PRESSING UPON.** “For He had healed many; insomuch that they pressed upon Him for to touch Him, as many as had plagues” (Mark 3:10).
- **FEAR COMING UPON.** “And when Zacharias saw him, he was troubled, and fear fell upon him” (Luke 1:12).
- **EMBRACING.** “And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).
- **LIE UPON.** “He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?” (John 13:25).
- **COMING UPON.** “For as yet He was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16).
- **OF A TRANCE.** “And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance” (Acts 10:10).
- **COMING UPON.** “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44).
- **COMING UPON.** “And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning” Acts 11:15).
- **RUSH OR PRESS UPON.** “And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand” (Acts 13:11).
- **FEAR COMING UPON.** “And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified” (Acts 19:17).
- **EMBRACE.** “And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said,

Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him” (Acts 20:10).

• **EMBRACE.** “And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him” (Acts 20:37).

• **REPROACHES COMING UPON.** “For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me” (Rom 15:3).

These texts confirm there are both an objective and a subjective sense in which this word is used. That is, it is used to denote something that a person does, and something that is experienced apart from his own volition.

Examples of something a person does are the people thronging and pressing Jesus, the father of the prodigal embracing him, John lying on Jesus’ bosom, Paul embracing Eutychus and raising him from the dead, and the disciples from Ephesus embracing Paul.

Examples of things occurring independent of human volition are fear coming upon people, falling into a trance, darkness falling upon a rebel, and the reproaches of sinners coming upon Jesus, being laid upon Him by the Father.

Unfortunately, some men have fastened on the expression “fallen upon” as though it spoke of an external phenomenon. Such men represent the Holy Spirit as violently seizing men, and throwing them into an unconscious state. However, as used in this text, the expression “fell upon” does not emphasize what happened to men. It rather described the activity of the Holy Spirit Himself. He came upon the people, embracing and, in a sense, taking control of them. There is such a tenderness in the experience, that the individuals maintained their rationality.

This is a view of men receiving the Holy Spirit, and will be so declared in this text. Peter will also affirm this to have been the reception of the gift of the Holy Spirit and in two later explanations of the event to others (Acts 11:18; 15:8). Included in the idea of “fell” is that the Holy Spirit came down from heaven to embrace and sanctify the people.

THAT HEARD THE WORD

“ . . . which heard the word.” Other versions read, “heard the message,” NIV “were hearing the word,” MRD and “were listening to the message.” AMPLIFIED

Although the experience of receiving the Holy Spirit is something that is common to all believers, here the manner in which that was accomplished is different. Thus far, we have several instances reported of people receiving the Holy Spirit.

• **THE DISCIPLES.** The disciples on the day of Pentecost. Then they were said to have been “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:3). Referring to that very experience, Jesus had told them they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). He also said the Holy Spirit would “come upon them” (Acts 1:8). Jesus referred to the giving of the Holy Spirit when He said, “Behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you” (Lk 24:49). He also referred to this as the Father giving them “another Comforter” (John 16:14).

• **PENITENT BELIEVERS.** On the day of Pentecost, those who were convicted of their sin, cried out inquiring what they ought to do. It is written, “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ” (Acts 2:38). He went on to say that the “promise” was also to them and their children (Acts 2:39). This promise pertained to the giving of the Holy Spirit – something that Joel had promised, and the disciples had experienced (Acts 2:17). Peter also said that Jesus had “shed forth” the Spirit upon them, as they were witnessing (Acts 2:33). The details of those who were baptized receiving the Holy

Spirit are not provided.

• **THE SAMARITANS.** The Samaritan believers were baptized, but they had not yet received the Holy Spirit. The description of that circumstance is the same as our text: “for as yet He was fallen upon none of them” (Acts 8:16). Peter and John went down to that “that they might receive the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Acts 8:15). When Peter and John laid their hands on them, they “received the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Acts 8:17,19). Luke says of the event that the Holy Spirit “was given” to them (Acts 8:18).

God also works with a consideration of those who are beholding His activity, as well as those toward whom it is focused. A point is made of this in this text. Some of the conceptions of the Gentiles that were promoted under the Law, and were obviated with the taking away of the sins of the world, were being corrected in this working

CORNELIUS’ HOUSEHOLD. Our text relates the Spirit of God falling upon everyone who was hearing, or listening to, Peter’s word. This is the first, and only, recorded occurrence of this kind. It is referred to in a number of ways.

- (1) **FELL ON THEM.** The Holy Spirit “fell on” them – 10:44.
- (2) **RECEIVED.** They “received the Holy Spirit” – 10:47.
- (3) **BAPTIZED WITH.** Upon witnessing this, Peter recalled the words of Jesus that the disciples would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit” – 11:16.
- (4) **GIFT OF THE SPIRIT.** God “gave them the like gift” as He did the disciples – 11:17.
- (5) **GRANTED REPENTANCE.** Upon hearing the report, the Jews in Jerusalem responded, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” – 11:18.
- (6) **SPIRIT GIVEN.** Peter also reported to the Jerusalem conference concerning this event that “God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us” – Acts 15:8.
- (7) **VISITED BY GOD.** James said of this event that God “did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14).

These inspired references confirm that the experience thus described was related to salvation itself and the initiation of newness of life. It also is said to be the same kind of experiences the disciples had on the day of Pentecost. Additionally, it is specifically said to be the gift of the Holy Spirit, as promised on the day of Pentecost. There is no need to attempt to provide additional explanations of this event.

God also works with a consideration of those who are beholding His activity, as well as those toward whom it is focused. A point is made of this in this text. Some of the conceptions of the Gentiles that were promoted under the Law, and were obviated with the taking away of the sins of the world, were being corrected in this working. Therefore an accent is placed on the fact of God’s approval and acceptance of Cornelius and his household – all that were hearing the word.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PREACHING THE WORD

There is also something else to be seen here: the importance of preaching the Word. We are living in a time when the Word itself is not the thrust of much of the preaching. There is an inordinate dependence on human experience, illustrations, and everyday life. It all may sound acceptable to a psychiatrist or sociologist. However, it is not acceptable to those who are acquainted with “the ways of the Lord” (Hos 14:9). Those who speak in the name of the Lord must remember that He is active

in the Kingdom, visiting people (Lk 7:16), taking a people out of the masses for Himself (Acts 15:14), directing the people (2 Thess 3:5), giving repentance (Acts 5:31) and much more. However, there is a context within which these things are realized. Generally, it includes the proclamation of the Word of God, which is the “sword of the Spirit,” used by Him to work among men (Eph 6:17).

Personal testimonies, which a means whereby men can labor together with God, obtain their power when they are associated with the Word of God. I do not know that it can be substantiated that a personal witness of what the Lord has done for as person has any power or effectiveness where there is an ignorance of what the Lord has said. It can whet the appetite of the hearer, and provoke an interest in further inquiry. However, until there is some cognizance of the Person and work of the Lord, declaring what He has done for us has little meaning to the hearer.

Therefore, in our text, while Peter was speaking the Word, heaven moved toward those who were taking in what he said. You may recall that this same man was vigorously opposed when he declared much the same thing to the chief priests and Jewish council. Upon hearing this, that group of people took counsel to kill the apostles (Acts 5:29-32). Whether the council or the household of Cornelius, the Word of God was the catalyst that brought the condition of the people to the surface.

When men refuse to deliver the Word of the Lord, tone down what the Lord has said, or attempt to modify its straightforward message, the sword of the Spirit is sheathed. God will not work in such a case, and therefore the real condition of the people will not, and cannot, be known. Only the Word of God can cut to the heart, exposing what is in it (Heb 4:12).

This is the precise reason for much of the condition of the modern church. Today, here simply is not enough being declared concerning the Person, mind, and purpose of the Lord to allow for Divine workings. Very often, a frothy message is being spewed out upon the people. In such a circumstance, all that will be apparent are differing shades of the flesh, or men in a natural state.

THEY WHO WERE OF THE CIRCUMCISION WERE ASTONISHED

“ 45a And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter . . . ”

Those who are sincere, having embraced the truth of God, yet being unaware of the new thing that He has accomplished in Christ, are astounded when the Lord works contrary to their perception.

THE CIRCUMCISION

“And they of the circumcision which believed . . .” Other versions read, “the circumcised believers,” NIV “the believers from among the circumcised,” RSV “the Jews who had faith,” BBE “the faithful of the circumcision,” DARBY “Jewish believers,” NLT “the Jews,” LIVING “the believers from among the circumcised [the Jews],” AMPLIFIED “the believing ones from the circumcision,” ALT and “some Jewish followers of the Lord.” CEV

Several versions do not refer to these men as being from “the circumcision.” The Greek expression is very precise: **οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς** (the out-of circumcision). This emphasizes the Jews as a covenanted people, and not merely an ethnic group. There is Greek word for “Jews” (Vioudai/oi), and it is used seventy-one times in the book of Acts. However, it is not used here. Here, the relationship to the first covenant is accented. This expression, “the circumcision,” is used fourteen times in Scripture in reference to the Jewish people (Acts 10:45; 11:2; Rom 3:30; 4:9,12; 15:8; Gal 2:7,8,9,12; Eph 2:11; Col 4:11; Tit 1:10). In every case, it accents their covenant relationship to God, not their ethnicity.

This is of significance because of what God is doing in salvation. In Christ He is merging together

two groups that were formerly separated by the First Covenant – which was a “middle wall of partition” between them (Eph 2:14). A new “people” were formed by putting “a people” together with those who were formerly “not a people.”

In order to have an appreciation of salvation that actually glorifies God, as opposed to glorifying self or an institution, it is imperative that we have some understanding of how God is working out His purpose. From the very beginning, God has intended to bless all of the families of the earth. This was not revealed to Adam, Enoch, or even Noah. The first indication of this was given to Abraham, to whom the revelation of salvation began to be unfolded. God told Abraham that in him, “all families of the earth” would be blessed (Gen 12:3). Later heavenly messengers observed, “Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him” (Gen 18:18). Still later, the Lord spoke with more specificity: “in thy SEED shall all nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen 22:18). God reminded Isaac that He had promised that “all nations of the earth” would be blessed in his “seed” (Gen 26:4). After Isaac, the Lord told Jacob, “and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 28:14).

After the mystery of God’s purpose had been revealed to Paul, he wrote that this promise to Abraham was nothing less than a declaration that God intended to justify the heathen through faith: “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8). He also revealed that the “Seed” of reference was Jesus Christ: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, which is Christ” (Gal 3:16). In further amplification of what would be realized in Christ, Paul was also given to see that the distinction of Jews and Gentiles are removed in Christ: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

Now, in Christ Jesus, His body, the church, is formed of both Jew and Gentile, with the only recognized distinction being now made between the saved and the lost, or those who are in Christ and those who are not. Jesus has, in fact, “broken down the middle wall of partition” that was between the Jews and the Gentiles – which wall was the Law (Eph 1:14). This was the outcome of Jesus taking away the sins of the world (John 1:29), and putting sin away by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb 9:26). This removed the law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4). The removal of this means was necessary for “the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor 15:56). Instead of freeing men from sin, once the Law came home the heart, it actually caused sin to break forth more aggressively. As Paul well said, “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom 7:8-11). This happened because the Law reflected the Divine nature, which conflicted sharply with fallen man. That conflict is what caused sin to break forth among those who were under the Law, while is spread among the Gentiles through their conscience.

Once sin was condemned in the flesh of Christ (Rom 8:3), righteousness could be imputed to both Jew and Gentile upon the basis of their faith (Rom 3:22,29; 4:5-13). This was not possible under the Law, for “the law is not of faith,” or “is not based upon faith,” NIV or “does not rest on faith [does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith]” AMPLIFIED (Gal 3:12).

Now, with liberating power converted Gentiles are told, “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God” (Eph 2:19). Peter reminds them, “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10). Now they are “fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph 3:6).

Why Say These Things?

Why spend time saying these things? To many they appear to have little to do with life. Such people would rather hear what they perceive to be relevant, having to do with life as it really is – down where the rubber meets the road, so to speak. However, we should not be turned aside by such foolish chatter. How can anything that God has done have nothing to do with life? How can any word spoken by the Almighty God be considered irrelevant, or disconnected from life as it really is.

The Point of It All

The point of all of this is that the text before us is accomplishing the very thing that God promises. It is what is actually realized in Christ Jesus. Jews and Gentiles are being joined together into one, by means of the faith and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This is what Paul described in Galatians 3:14: “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith ” (Gal 3:14). As to the reception of the Holy Spirit, Paul also wrote, “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, ” or “the promised Holy Spirit” NIV (Eph 1:13).

WERE ASTONISHED

“ . . . were astonished, as many as came with Peter . . . ” Other versions read, “were amazed,” NASB “were astounded,” NRSV “full of wonder,” BBE “astonied,” GENEVA “greatly astonished,” NET “surprised and amazed,” AMPLIFIED “absolutely amazed,” PHILLIPS and “were out stood.” INTERLINEAR

The word translated “astonished” is a strong one. Its root lexical meaning is, “to throw out of position, to displace . . . to throw into wonderment,” THAYER “To be out of one’s mind,” UBS and “to drive out of the senses, to amaze, to confound.” LEH

This is a word that shows the limitations of the human intellect, or the mind. The mind of “the natural man ” has certain boundaries beyond which it cannot reach. Those boundaries consist of knowledge and experience. As soon as the mind is confronted with things beyond those boundaries, the individual becomes astonished or amazed. This is because they are pulled beyond the limitations of natural aptitude. In order to comprehend such things, either their knowledge must be upgraded or their experience. If, as in the case of Peter and those with him, their experience can verify what they have witnessed, all will be well. However, until that takes place, confusion will dominate the mind. In our text, Peter will make the association between what he is witnessing and what he himself has personally experienced.

The text is stated very precisely. It was not Peter that was “astonished,” but those who had come with him. Peter will include them in the experience that he himself had – yet, at this point, these believers were not able to make that association. Peter’s comprehension has been preceded by insight into the fact that God is no respecter of persons, but accepts those who fear Him and work righteousness, regardless of whether they are Jews or not. He will therefore be able to make some sense out of what is happening before their very eyes.

IT IS STILL HAPPENING

Here is an experience that is still taking place in our time – and it is to a far greater extent that permits any degree of tolerance. There are at least two sets of people within the body of Christ. John identifies three: children, young men, and old men (1 John 2:13). I will here fasten on “little children” and “fathers” – the extremities of the members of the body. They are both legitimate believers, like Peter and the brethren who were with him. Though really in Christ, some of that number are unable

to account for what is taking place before them, while others know full well what is happening. The difference between these two groups of people is spiritual maturity – growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), or being “no more children” in their understanding (1 Cor 14:20).

Our text provides some insight into how to address this situation. It is NOT to let those who are “astonished” make an effort to describe what they have seen, or what they think an event or the Scriptures mean. It is those who DO understand that are to provide the required explanation – just as Peter does in our text. It is not appropriate for those without wisdom and spiritual understanding to provide explanations of texts and events that are “hard to be understood” (2 Pet 3:16). That is something reserved for the mature.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WAS Poured ON THE GENTILES

“ 45b . . . because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.”

The Spirit moved Luke to record why the brethren that came with Peter were astonished at what they saw and heard. It was the Source of the phenomenon, and not the phenomenon itself that resonated in their hearts. They also were taken with what had happened TO Cornelius household, not merely what they did. As the text will affirm, the extraordinary activity of the household indicated a Divine initiative.

This is a consistent pattern throughout the book of Acts. What actually took place is the primary point, and what it moved the people to do was the secondary point. This should move people to avoid seeking a recorded experience, rather than the benefit that caused it. Allow me to briefly dwell on this subject so that we may better appreciate the text before us. Here are some examples of the accent being placed on the cause of recorded experiences.

- On the day of Pentecost, the disciples “were all filled with the Holy Spirit.” That was the cause for them speaking with different languages (Acts 2:4).
- Following his stirring message, it was those who “gladly received the Word” who were baptized (2:40).
- When Peter and John were opposed by the Temple authorities, it was because Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit” that he was able to speak with such focus and clarity (4:8).
- When the early church prayed for boldness, and then actually did speak the Word of God with boldness, it was because they were “ were all filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:34).
- The selfless spirit of the early disciples, as evidenced by none of them saying the things they possessed were their own, was because they “believed,” and “were of one heart and one soul” (4:32).
- When the apostles were found ceasing not to teach and preach Christ daily in the Temple, and in every house, it was because they were “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (5:41-42).

That is why one segment of professing Christendom make it their aim to get people baptized. Another segment seeks to get people to speak in tongues. Still another makes it their aim to work miracles. Others make the unity of believers their goal.

When Stephen did “great wonders and miracles” among the people, and confounded those in the synagogue of the Libertines, it was because he was “full of faith and power” (6:8-9).

- When the people in the city of Samaria “were baptized, both men and women,” it was because they “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12).

- When the Ethiopian eunuch was baptized, it was because he believed “that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (8:37).

It is possible for men to fasten on the responses I have just mentioned, making them their objective. In fact, that is the manner in which those who are riveted to an institution tend to think. That is why one segment of professing Christendom make it their aim to get people baptized. Another segment seeks to get people to speak in tongues. Still another makes it their aim to work miracles. Others make the unity of believers their goal. As noble as such efforts may appear, they all fail to consider the revealed cause of such responses. As Solomon well said, “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psa 127:1). Let it be clear that when men make it their aim to produce certain responses, they have set sail on an uncharted sea. This is precisely why Paul gave this testimony, which is disconcerting to many: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor 1:17). He certainly was not deprecating baptism, for most of the teaching concerning its necessity and effectiveness comes from him (Rom 6:1-17; Col 2:11-12; Gal 3:27). He chose to focus on the activity through which men are brought to obedience from the heart – preaching the Gospel. Where that is faithfully done, and the Gospel is gladly received, the appointed responses will take place.

I will now approach this text with what I have just said in mind. The emphasis will be the cause. The effects of that cause are something determined by heaven, not men.

FELL ON THEM = POURED OUT

“ . . . because that on the Gentiles also was poured out . . .” Other versions read, “had been poured out,” NKJV “was also being poured out,” CSB “had been poured on,” GWN “was shed out,” PNT “had been showered upon,” WILLIAMS and “had been bestowed and poured out largely.” AMPLIFIED

The pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is not something that is only external. In our text, as well as in Acts the second chapter, there were external evidences, but the evidences were not the outpouring itself, which, as Paul affirms, is common to all believers.

Previously, the text states that the Holy Spirit “fell on all them that heard the word.” Now that same Holy Spirit moved Luke to describe what had taken place. It is vital to perceive this in order to avoid assigning some unique meaning to “fell on all them,” that is not intended by the text.

Here the same action is referred to as the Holy Spirit being “poured out” on the Gentiles in Cornelius’ house. That language perfectly comports with what Peter said took place on the day of Pentecost. At that time, he correlated what was happening with what had been prophesied by Joel. “But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days,

saith God, I will pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of My Spirit ; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:16-18). Using the same Greek word translated “pour out” (**evkcew** /), Peter also referred to what the people were seeing as them receiving what the exalted Christ had dispensed: “ He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33). Other versions read “poured out,” NKJV and “poured forth.” NASB

Joel is not the only prophet who spoke of this pouring. Through Isaiah the Lord also declared, “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed , and my blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3).

In addition to this, Paul speaks of the pouring out of the Spirit as an experience common to all believers. “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved

us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; which He shed on (*evxe,ceen*) us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” (Titus 3:5-6). Other versions read, “poured out” NKJV/NASB/NIV This is the same word used to described the love of God being poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, who Himself is poured lout upon us (Rom 5:5).

The pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, therefore, is not something that is only external. In our text, as well as in Acts the second chapter, there were external evidences, but the evidences were not the outpouring itself , which, as Paul affirms, is common to all believers.

I suppose that there may be some who wish to affirm that the testimony of Titus 3:6 refers only to the apostles. Such a view would rob the text of its edifying power. That particular text is not speaking of the empowerment of special messengers, but of the manner in which God has “ saved us” (Tit 3:5). I do not know that the apostles, or any other special group within the body of Christ, are ever the focus of a discourse or word concerning salvation.

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . the gift of the Holy Ghost.” The vast majority of all English versions read “the gift of . . .” Other versions read, “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “the Holy Spirit was given,” BBE “the grace of the Holy Ghost,” DOUAY “the Holy Spirit. . . given,” LIVING “the free gift of the Holy Spirit,” AMPLIFIED and “the gratuity of the Holy Spirit.” INTERLINEAR

This too is common language: i.e. “The gift of the Holy Spirit.” This is what Peter promised to those who inquired concerning what they should do: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost ” (Acts 2:38). That “gift” is what Peter declared they had been witnessing in the disciples. He went on to say that it was a promise to everyone the Lord called: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). The words “the promise” refer to the promise of God to give His Holy Spirit to the people. Paul refers to this promise in both Galatians and Ephesians. “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14). “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise ” (Eph 1:13).

The giving of the Holy Spirit of God is one of the unique qualities of the New Covenant, and is often mentioned in the Apostolic writings.

- “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9).
- “But if the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom 8:11).
- “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor 3:16).
- “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19).
- “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor 2:12).
- “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:22).

- “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit ” (2 Cor 5:5).

- “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His holy Spirit ” (1 Thess 4:8).

- “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us ” (1 John 3:24).

The pouring forth of the Holy Spirit is associated with salvation as well as empowerment. In the case of the household of Cornelius, that is the point that is being emphasized. What took place there was not an example of the bestowment of spiritual gifts, given

- “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of His Spirit ” (1 John 4:13).

The pouring forth of the Holy Spirit is associated with salvation as well as empowerment. In the case of the household of Cornelius, that is the point that is being emphasized. What took place there was not an example of the bestowment of spiritual gifts, given for the edification of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7). This was evidence given by God for the sake of Peter and the Jews who were with him. It chronicled a spiritual epoch in which the acceptance of the Gentiles by God took place. As would be opened up in other apostolic writings, they were being grafted into Israel, who is the natural olive tree (Rom 11:24). They were being made partakers of “the root and fatness of the olive tree” (Rom 11:17), which were the promises that had been vouchsafed to Israel, yet were never intended to be for them alone.

WHAT HAVE I SAID THESE THINGS

I have taken the time to say these things because of the confusion that covered this subject in my earlier days. I have been subjected to a doctrine that stated the Spirit was poured out only upon the apostles. That teaching confused the unique evidences of the gift with the gift itself. Even during those days, I found it most difficult to comprehend why, on the day of Pentecost, Peter referred to “the gift of the Holy Spirit,” paralleling it with what this hearers were witnessing. There was never a satisfactory explanation of Joel’s prophecy, which spoke of sons and daughters prophesying, and the participation of young men and old men, and servants and handmaidens in that outpouring. Nor, indeed, could I make any sense out of Peter saying “the promise” was to everyone called by God. The problem was compounded even more by the things recorded as taking place in the house of Cornelius.

Oh, there were attempts to explain all of these things. One particular body of thought said that the apostles received “the miraculous gift” of the Spirit, while the other believers received the “ordinary gift.” This seemed to meet their claim to exclusiveness. However, that proved to be nothing more than theological jargon, and could not be supported by Scripture.

It seems to me that it is far better to simply accept the events as they are recorded, and allow the words used to describe those events to shape our understanding of it. If that seems to impinge upon some cherished doctrines, so be it. Furthermore, such an approach will not automatically align the individual with corrupted doctrines that are extant in the Christian community. It is always safe to stick with the Word.

THEY HEARD THEM SPEAK WITH TONGUES

“ 46a For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God.”

I understand that the religious lives of some would be greatly simplified if these words were not in the text. However, what can be said of any approach to the truth that makes a Scriptural expression intrusive, or requiring some extensive modification? How can any view be right that tends to filter

out words that have been inspired by God, or makes them appear strange and out of harmony with what one perceives to be the truth? All of this is particularly accented when we consider that this is a record of something that God and the exalted Christ are doing. No man is at liberty to question what the Lord has done, or to doubt its authenticity or profitability.

THEY HEARD THEM SPEAK WITH TONGUES

“For they heard them speak with tongues . . .” Other versions read, “they were hearing them speaking with tongues,” NASB “speaking in other languages,” CSB “speak with diverse tongues,” MRD “speaking strange languages,” NJB “speaking different languages,” IE “speaking in foreign languages,” WILLIAMS “talking in [unknown] tongues (languages),” AMPLIFIED “speaking in foreign tongues,” PHILLIPS “speaking languages,” INTERLINEAR and “speaking in other languages.” GW

The word “tongues” is translated from the Greek word **glw,ssaij** . As used in this text, its lexical meaning is “the language used by a particular people in distinction from other nations (Acts 2:11; Isa 66:18; Dan 3:4; 5:19; Rev 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15) , THAYER “tongue; language; utterance,” UBS “a tongue, language,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “language,” LEH

Theologically, not etymologically, men have assigned the following meaning to the term: “as a religious technical term for glossalalia *tongues(-speaking)* , understood variously to be unintelligible ecstatic utterance (1Cor 14.2), heavenly language (1Cor 13.1),” FRIBERG and “The expressions *glw/ssai* , *ge,nh glwssw/n*, *evn g*) *lalei/n* etc. refer to the ecstatic speech of those overcome by strong emotion in a cultic context. The latter expression is usually rendered speak in tongues. Ac 19:6; 1 Cor 12:10; 13:1, 8; 14.” GINGRICH This definition has been driven by a theological persuasion, and does not reflect the root meaning of the word, or the intent of the Holy Spirit. It represents a human interpretation, not a Divine revelation. It is men’s explanation of how the term came to be used, without regard as to whether or not that use was proper.

I do not believe it can be substantiated that this is the intended meaning of the text before us. I will therefore proceed with the understanding that “tongues” refers to the utterance of a language – a human language. It does appear from the context that this parallels the experience that took place at Pentecost when men spoke in a language that was not their native tongue. Yet was understood.

As such, this record is much like that of the disciples on the day of Pentecost, who, when the Spirit was “shed forth” upon them, “began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). The word “utterance” has the following lexical meaning: “to speak out, speak forth, pronounce, not a word of everyday speech, but one “belonging to dignified and elevated discourse,” THAYER and “speak out (loudly and clearly), declare (emphatically).” FRIBERG This is a word that described an intelligent, well ordered, and discernible statement made with the voice. This is also the kind of utterance that is described in our text.

The verse says that Peter and the six men with him “ heard them speak with tongues.” As used here, the word “heard” means, “to attend to (use the faculty of hearing), consider what is or has been said . . . to understand, perceive the sense of what has been said,” THAYER “of inner comprehension understand, be aware of,” FRIBERG “to hear and understand,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to understand,” LEH and “heed, listen to, understand.” GINGRICH

From the standpoint of language itself, therefore, what Peter and those with him heard was not unintelligible. It was not a language that was strange or unknown to them – although it no doubt was formerly unknown to those who were speaking, else it would not have been attributed to the influence of the Holy Spirit. Again, it perfectly parallels what took place on the day of Pentecost. Men were speaking in a language they had not learned naturally, and it was understood by those who heard it.

I do not doubt that the people could have been speaking in Hebrew, the language of the Jews, or some other dialect that was common to them.

MAGNIFY GOD

“ . . . and magnify God.” Other versions read, “exalting God,” NASB praising God,” NIV “extolling God,” NRSV “giving glory to God,” BBE “declaring the greatness of God,” CSB “proclaiming the greatness of God,” NJB “extolling the majesty of God,” WEYMOUTH “telling of the greatness of God,” WILLIAMS “extolling and magnifying God,” AMPLIFIED “glorifying God,” PHILLIPS and “praising God’s greatness.” GNB

As used in this text, the word “magnify” has the following lexical meaning: “to make great . . . enlarge . . . to make conspicuous . . . to esteem highly, to extol, laud, celebrate,” THAYER “enlarge, extend,” UBS “to make big,” LOUW-NIDA and “to make great by word.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

To a Jew, magnifying God means something quite different than some of the representations that are being heard in our day. They had been tutored by the Psalms in praise, and knew well what God had said of Himself in the Scriptures. To magnify God means precisely what the term implies: to cause Him to appear larger. In this case, larger than all that competes with Him. In other words, they were affirming the truth about God, and Peter and his colleagues recognized it.

Here is the real situation: “the whole earth is full of His glory!” (Isa 6:3). God is imminent in all of creation, and is “not far from every one of us” (Acts 17:27). However, sin has rendered men obtuse to the Lord and His glory. As a consequence, apart from Christ Jesus, His Person and his works are hidden. There is an ignorance of God that dominates any realm permeated by sin. Now, what happens when the eyes of the understanding (Eph 1:18) are opened is that suddenly the individual becomes aware of the Lord. What may have been known intellectually is now realized in human experience. It is then that the Lord can, in fact, be “magnified.” God Himself is not made larger, but the understanding of Him is enlarged. What happens when people magnify the Lord is this – words are spoken that draw the attention of the hearers away from the things of this world . The prominence and preeminence of God are proclaimed in such a way as to dwarf everything else. Furthermore, the magnification of God can only be done by someone whose vision and heart have been captured by the Lord. No person can magnify the Lord who is fundamentally unacquainted with Him, or has not become acutely aware of who He is.

Much of what is referred to as “praise” in our time is not really the magnifying of God, but is done out of rote, or human orchestration. The element of spontaneity is often missing, and there is more mimicry than insightful expression. This kind of thing is not what took place at the house of Cornelius!

Furthermore, what Peter and those with him heard was not gibberish, or a language that could not be understood, therefore requiring an interpretation like the writing on the wall seen by Belshazzar. To be sure, it is not possible that it was the repetition of hackneyed religious phrases that were popular among the people.

THEN ANSWERED PETER

“ 46b Then answered Peter . . .” Other versions read, “Then Peter said,” NIV “The Peter declared,” RSV “Peter’s response was,” CJB “Then Peter responded,” CSV “Then Peter asked,” NLT “Then Peter exclaimed,” PHILLIPS and “Peter spoke up.” GNB

It is a sign of spiritual advancement when a person can recognize the exceptional working of the Lord. God is fully able to work within the parameters of the truth without being locked into a theological routine.

The word “answered” is translated from a word that means, “to answer . . . to begin to speak.” THAYER Of course, no question was asked Peter, so he is not responding to an interrogation. Instead, he is responding to a circumstance. Something has occurred that elicited a response from this man of God – and it is something that has been initiated by heaven. Peter, enjoying “the communion of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (2 Cor 13:14), will process what he has seen and heard. Mixing it with faith (Heb 4:2), and bringing out of his spiritual “treasure things new and old” (Matt 13:52), he will speak in concert with the truth. He will not be able to hold his peace. Peter correlates what he has witnessed with the manner of entrance into the Kingdom of God, putting forth a question that will reflect “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

One of the signs of a spirit-filled man is the ability to respond to things that are new in a manner that glorifies God. Those who are unlearned and undiscerning will not make sense out of what Peter says. His words will not blend with their perception, for it is immature.

This, of course, is one of the differences between Peter and the brethren who were with him. They were very real brethren in Christ, but the whole event had left them confounded and astonished. But it is not so with Peter. Our text does not say that he was astonished, but that those “who had come with” Him “were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.” NIV However, being more fully taught by the Lord, Peter can now see further and deeper, and knows how to respond to what has taken place. He is the leader, and they are the followers. He is the teacher, and they are the taught. For them, this is not necessarily a demeaning circumstance. However, from that point on, and since the record of these events has been made public, it is no longer acceptable for a state of ignorance to exist on this matter.

It is a sign of spiritual advancement when a person can recognize the exceptional working of the Lord. God is fully able to work within the parameters of the truth without being locked into a theological routine. He does not give men the liberty of developing unique approaches to the truth, and especially to men being saved. However, He Himself is not locked into a rigid procedure, as is confirmed in this text.

I am careful to point out that what occurred at the house of Cornelius was not intended to establish Kingdom standard. However, it does provide enough insight into the ways of the Lord to provoke discerning souls to cease from associating Divine acceptance with fixed outward procedures and sequences that have been compiled by men. What God did at the household of Cornelius did not obviate any revealed requirement for the appropriation of salvation, and it is wrong to so approach it. However, it certainly did reveal that our conclusions must be shaped by the proper assessment of what the Lord Himself has done.

IS THERE ANY REASON WHY THESE CANNOT BE BAPTIZED?

“ 47a Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized . . . ”

Peter appears to be asking a question, but he is not looking for an answer. He rather appeals to his audience in such a way as to promote holy conclusions.

CAN ANY MAN FORBID WATER

“Can any man forbid water . . .” Other versions read, “Surely no one can refuse water,” NASB “Can anyone keep these people from . . . water,” NIV “Can anyone withhold water,” NRSV “Is anyone prepared to prohibit these people from . . . water,” CJB “No one can refuse . . . water,” GWN “No one can withhold the water,” NET “Could anyone refuse the water,” NJB “Can anyone object to,” NLT “The water is any one able to forbid,” YLT “No one can stop us from using water,” ISV “No one can stop us from using water,” WILLIAMS “no any the water is able to forbid,” INTERLINEAR and “I am certain that no one would dare stop us.” CEV

Here the issue is birth, not life – for only life can be birthed. What has been made clear to Peter is that life has been granted to the household of Cornelius, for “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2) has been visibly attested. Now, however, that life must be birthed, so that the individual may be inducted into Christ, added to the church, and raised to sit in heavenly places.

The technical Greek expression **Mh,ti** (translated “can any”) is defined as follows: “an interrogative expecting a negative answer; in a direct question,” THAYER “used when expecting an emphatic negative answer,” FRIBERG “used in questions to indicate the expectations of a negative answer,” UBS and “used in questions to indicate the expectations of a negative answer.” LOUW-NIDA

The question is a rhetorical one. That is, an answer is not expected, because the answer to it is glaringly obvious. In this case, the question is asked with the expectation that it is apparent that water cannot be forbidden. Should there be any objection to a question like this, the objection would be evidence of ignorance, and would therefore be ignored.

THAT THESE SHOULD BE BAPTIZED

“ . . . that these should not be baptized . . .” Other versions read, “for these to be baptized,” NASB “being baptized with water,” NRSV “for baptizing these people,” RSV “have baptism,” BBE “from being immersed,” CJB and “to be immersed.” LIVING

Here we are introduced to a certain technicality that has eluded many. Baptism is associated with one’s initial acceptance by God. It is never represented as an option that can be accepted or rejected by the individual – never! Men have haggled over baptism to such an extent that some have been repulsed by a discussion of it. I wonder if many of the professing theologians and teachers of our time would have attempted to answer Peter’s rhetorical question.

Here the issue is birth, not life – for only life can be birthed. What has been made clear to Peter is that life has been granted to the household of Cornelius, for “the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2) has been visibly attested. Now, however, that life must be birthed, so that the individual may be inducted into Christ, added to the church, and raised to sit in heavenly places. The new birth, one which is “of water” as well as “of the Spirit” (John 3:5), is the point at which men are “delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of” God’s “dear Son” (Col 3:5). It is not the point at which the individual becomes alive. In spiritual birth as well as that of the flesh, life always precedes birth. Many who speak much concerning baptism have failed to make this distinction, which has moved them to reject some who have been made alive by God. Instead of responding to evident life by giving proper instruction, they are often rejected, just as though there was no life in them. Like life in the mother’s womb, spiritual life must be birthed, else it will not survive.

Keep in mind that the same man who is making this statement wrote the book of First Peter. There he said that the water through which Noah was “saved” “symbolizes baptism that now saves you also” (1 Pet 3:21). The sense in which baptism saves us is by moving us out of domain of darkness and into the kingdom of Christ – like water. It is also “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), which accents the appropriation of a purged, or “good,” conscience, as indicated in First Peter 3:21.

BAPTISM IS NOT A RITUAL

Baptism is not a ritual or mere technicality. This is also made clear in Peter’s statement, mentioned above. Some versions thoroughly confound the matter by incorrectly rendering the text. A classic example is the New International Version. “and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also--not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Removing dirt from the body, as in taking a bath, is not at all the point of the text. It is absurd to compare being baptized into Christ with taking an ordinary bath. The cleansing of the flesh has to do with the ceremonies that were put in place by the Law. In

particular it had to do with the procedures that ceremonially cleansed a person so he could traffic among the people of God. Scripture refers to this as “Sanctifying to the purifying of the flesh” (Heb 9:13). An example of this procedure are found in Leviticus 14:7-8

By way of contrast when our bodies are “washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22), it is not to allow the right to be among the people of God. Rather, it is to appropriate a cleansed conscience, which is a requisite for coming to the Lord – “having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience” (Heb 10:22). This cleansing is associated with being baptized “with water” into Christ. No amount of theological wrangling can drive a wedge between those sacred associations.

Now, Peter will reason on the baptism of the household of Cornelius. He will show that God has worked in a unique manner to confirm that the Gentiles have been accepted, and that there is nothing to hinder them from being joined with the Jewish believers as full citizens of the household of faith. In this case, God has given them the Holy Spirit BEFORE baptism, while Peter had previously promised the gift of the Spirit following baptism. This was not done because it was an alternative method of the Holy Spirit being given, but because this was a singular epoch that required Divine attestation. It was no ordinary occasion. Peter immediately sees this, and reasons as follows.

THEY RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT AS WELL AS WE

“ 47b . . . which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?”

Now Peter accounts for why no man can object to those before him being baptized – baptized with water. I will tell you that his response will not fit handily into the mold of systematized theology. He will assess what has happened, and the fact that Luke was moved to put it down in writing confirms that his assessment was precisely correct.

THEY RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . which have received the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “who have received the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “They have received the Holy Spirit,” NIV “who have been given the Holy Spirit,” BBE “who the Holy Spirit did receive,” YLT and “who the Holy Spirit got.” INTERLINEAR

Thus far, this event has been referred to in various ways. In addition, it will be referenced in a number of other ways – all speaking about the same event.

- **FELL ON THEM.** The Holy Spirit “fell on” them (10:44). This same terminology was used of the Samaritans, who also received the Spirit (Acts 8:16).

- **POURED OUT.** The Spirit was “poured out” upon them (10:45a). Peter referred to Joel’s prophecy, which foretold God would “pour out” His Spirit on “all flesh” as commencing on the day of Pentecost (Joel 2:17-18; Acts 2:33). The KJV refers to this as the Spirit being “shed forth.” Other versions read “poured out.” NKJV/NIV Paul said that **What we are confronted with in this text is the common experience of the Holy Spirit being given to the people of God. This is speaking of an initial experience that is associated**

the Spirit was “shed on us abundantly” (Tit 3:6). Other versions read “poured out.” NKJV/BASN/NIV/NRSV This confirms that what was accomplished is common to all believers, even though the means through which the Spirit was given differed.

- **THE GIFT.** This was the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (10:45b). Peter referred to the “gift of the Holy Spirit” as something that God promised to those who repented and were baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). He also said that gift was promised to “as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). Jesus promised that the

Holy Spirit would be “given” to those who believed on Him (John 7:39). Peter said the Holy Spirit has been “given to them that obey Him” (Acts 5:32). The Apostolic doctrine emphasizes that the Holy Spirit has been “given” to those in Christ (Rom 5:5; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). Our text, then, is speaking of a common gift.

• **RECEIVED.** They “received the Holy Spirit” (10:47). The Samaritan believers are said to have “received” the Holy Spirit when Peter and John laid their hands upon them (Acts 8:17). Apostolic doctrine states that those in Jesus have received the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 11:4; Gal 3:2,14). Once, when Paul confronted certain disciples in Ephesus, he asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit since they believed. When they said they had never heard about the Holy Spirit, he asked them about their baptism. When they said they were baptized with the baptism of John, he taught them more perfectly concerning John and baptism, then baptized them into Christ (Acts 19:2-5).

What we are confronted with in this text is the common experience of the Holy Spirit being given to the people of God. This is speaking of an initial experience that is associated with repentance and baptism. We must discipline ourselves not to be unduly attracted to the particular manner in which this gift impacted those in the house of Cornelius who heard Peter’s word. This will be made even more clear as the text continues. It will also be confirmed in the manner in which it was reported to the brethren in Jerusalem, and how they responded to the report.

AS WELL AS WE

“ . . . as well as we?” Other versions read, “just as we have,” NKJV “just as we did,” NASB “just as we have,” NIV “as we also did,” DARBY “the same way we did,” GWN and “just as we did ourselves.” PHILLIPS

The promise of Joel was certainly not one limited to the apostles, for it spoke of “all flesh,” and male and female as well. Peter said that the promise uttered by Joel was to everyone that the Lord called. Apostolic doctrine confirms that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is common to all who are in Christ Jesus.

When Peter reported this event to the brethren in Jerusalem he made a very specific correlation between what happened at the house of Cornelius, and what took place “at the beginning.” He even connects it with what Jesus had said about baptizing “with the Holy Spirit.” Here are the words of an enlightened man who had been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. “And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning. Then I remembered the word of the Lord, how He said, 'John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit. If therefore God gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand God?’” NKJV (Acts 11:15-17).

Some time later, Peter reported the same thing at the Jerusalem conference where the matter of the acceptance of the Gentiles was being considered. “And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us ; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith” (Acts 15:7-9). Notice that the gift is not associated with a special empowerment, but with hearing the word of God and believing. Also, confirming that this was not an experience disassociated from salvation, Peter stated that it was related to the purifying of the heart by faith.

Additionally, it is imperative that we consider that Peter was the only apostle that was present. It is not to be assumed that when he said “as well as we,” that he was referring to the apostles only, and excluding the six brethren that had accompanied him. I do not know how such a postulate could be supported. The promise of Joel was certainly not one limited to the apostles, for it spoke of “all flesh,”

and male and female as well. Peter said that the promise uttered by Joel was to everyone that the Lord called. Apostolic doctrine confirms that the receiving of the Holy Spirit is common to all who are in Christ Jesus.

I acknowledge that this sharply conflicts with what I had accepted earlier in my life. I was taught that Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit was an experience unique to the apostles. However, in the case of Cornelius Peter made a clear and unquestionable association between what took place there and the words of Jesus, who said men would be baptized with the Holy Spirit.

It is to be acknowledged that the outward phenomena that took place on the day of Pentecost and at the house of Cornelius do not occur every time someone receives the gift of the Holy Spirit – even though some affirm that it does. The rushing mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire that took place on the day of Pentecost apparently did not take place at the house of Cornelius. However, it was the same gift that was given, although the manner differed.

Men must resist any inclination to seek to duplicate the circumstances that attend the giving of the Holy Spirit. I do not know how you could select only some of the signs to be preferred. On the day of Pentecost, you had a rushing mighty wind, cloven tongues of fire, and a simultaneous filling. In the case of the Samaritans, it was necessary for Peter and John to lay their hands on the recipients. At the house of Cornelius, the Spirit was given while they were hearing the Word of God, and before they were baptized. It is possible for men to attempt to construct a system from that, but they will not be successful. Such an approach also betrays a hearts that is not right with God, just as surely as the heart of Simon the sorcerer was not right (Acts 8:21). In a sense, he was also seeking a procedure, and it was one in which he would be allowed some preeminence. He received a stern rebuke.

HE COMMANDED THEM TO BE BAPTIZED

“ 48a And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

Peter does not wait for some input from the audience, or the six brethren who are with him. He does not offer alternatives to the hearers, but uses the keys of the kingdom of heaven that have been given to him.

HE COMMANDED THEM

“And he commanded them . . .” Other versions read, “he ordered them,” NASB “he gave orders for them,” BBE “he ordered that,” CJB “gave orders,” NET and “he directed,” WEYMOUTH

As used here, the word “commanded” means “to enjoin, order, prescribe, command . . . to appoint, to define,” THAYER “to order, tell, instruct,” FRIBERG and “to give detailed instructions as to what must be done - 'to order, to instruct, to tell, to command.” LOUW-NIDA

In a sense this command was twofold. First to the hearers themselves who were to be baptized. Second, to the brethren who were standing by, who were to see to it that the baptism was carried out. Peter provides no option for the hearers to refuse to be baptized, or for the brethren to abstain from carrying it out.

It appears that Peter himself did not baptize these believers – just as Paul made it a practice not to baptize the people himself, lest they be unduly attached to him (1 Cor 1:13-17). The six brethren who were with him were doubtless the ones he ordered to baptize the hearers.

Peter knew that Jesus had commanded them to baptize the disciples they made through the preaching of the Gospel (Matt 28:19). He knew the Lord had promised that those who believed and were baptized would be saved (Mk 16:16). He had not been cultured in some of the theology that is

popular in our time.

BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD

“ . . . to be baptized in the name of the Lord.” They were not simply to be baptized, but to do so “in the name of the Lord” – that is, the Lord Jesus Christ. Baptism, is not an ordinance of the church. It is not the means by which a person becomes a member of a local congregation. Baptism is “into Christ” (Gal 3:27). It is “into His death ” (Rom 6:3-4). In baptism, “the circumcision of Christ” takes place, in which there is a severance of the fleshly nature from the essential person, or “new man” (Col 2:11-12). Further, it is by means of the resurrection of Christ that baptism saves us (1 Pet 3:21). When we are baptized, it is Christ that is “put on” (Gal 3:27). It is on the authority of Christ that believers are baptized. It is in obedience to Christ that this is done. All of this is wrapped up in the expression “be baptized in the name of the Lord.”

This is the same manner of instruction Peter gave on the day of Pentecost – namely, that the inquirers should be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). The Samaritans were also said to have been “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16). The Ephesians disciples were also “baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 19:5).

Notice the difference in the terminology.

- “Baptized in the name of the Lord ” (Acts 10:48).
- “Baptized in the name of Jesus Christ ” (Acts 2:38).
- “Baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus ” (Acts 8:16).

Any opposition to baptism, or denigration of its importance, is a direct attack on the Lord Jesus Christ, and is to be so regarded.

“Baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ ” (Acts 19:5).

Add to that the words of the Lord Jesus, “baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ” (Matt 28:19). These are all speaking of the “one baptism” that is common to all believers (Eph 4:5). None of them are speaking of the appellation “Jesus,” or of a formula that validates baptism. They are rather speaking of the Person of the Lord Jesus, and of the association that is made with Him through baptism.

Any opposition to baptism, or denigration of its importance, is a direct attack on the Lord Jesus Christ, and is to be so regarded.

The associations that are made with baptism confirm its necessity. I provide them here for your reference.

THINGS WITH WHICH BAPTISM IS ASSOCIATED

1. Repentance (Acts 2:38).
2. The remission of sins (Acts 2:38).
3. The gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
4. Believing (Mark 16:16; Acts 8:12; 18:8).
5. Salvation, or being "saved" (Mark 16:16; 1 Peter 3:21).
6. Being buried with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).

7. In baptism we were raised with Christ (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
8. Being identified with Christ's death (Rom 6:3).
9. Becoming dead to sin (Rom 6:2-3).
10. Becoming alive to God (Rom 6:3-11).
11. The circumcision of Christ, in which the whole body of sin is cut away (Col 2:11-12).
12. Faith in the operation, or working, of God (Col 2:12).
13. Coming into Christ (Gal 3:27).
14. Putting on Christ (Gal 3:27).
15. A commandment (Acts 10:48).
16. The confession of Christ (Acts 8:36-37).
17. Gladly receiving the Word of God (Acts 2:41).
18. Washing away our sins (Acts 22:16).
19. Coming into one body through the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
20. Something that is done "in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19).

All doubts concerning the necessity and effectiveness of baptism with water should forever be thrust from us. There is not so much as a syllable of Scripture that suggests baptism is optional, or is not immediately associated with salvation. There is even extended apostolic doctrine concerning baptism.

All doubts concerning the necessity and effectiveness of baptism with water should forever be thrust from us. There is not so much as a syllable of Scripture that suggests baptism is optional, or is not immediately associated with salvation. There is even extended apostolic doctrine concerning baptism. One segment of the doctrine consists of an entire chapter – the sixth chapter of the book of Romans. It places great stress on the importance of baptism, associating it with the following:

- Being put into the death of Christ (6:3).
- Being buried with Christ (6:4a).
- Walking in newness of life (6:4b).
- Being planted in the likeness of Christ's death (6:5a).
- Being in the likeness of Christ's resurrection (6:5b).
- The crucifixion of "old man" (6:6a).
- The destruction of the "body of sin" (6:6b).
- NOT serving sin (6:6c).
- Being dead, and consequently freed from sin (6:7).
- Being dead with Christ (6:8a).
- Believing that we will live with Christ (6:8b).
- Christ triumphing over death (6:9).

- Christ living unto God (6:10).
- Reckoning ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin (6:11a).
- Reckoning ourselves to be alive unto God through Jesus Christ (6:11b).
- Not allowing sin to reign in our mortal bodies (6:12).
- Not yielding our capacities as instruments of unrighteousness (6:13a).
- Yielding our capacities as instruments of righteousness unto God (6:13b).
- Sin not having dominion over us (6:14a).
- Being under grace and not under law (6:14b).
- The total unreasonableness of sin (6:15-16).
- Obeying the form of the doctrine delivered to us (6:17).
- Being made free from sin (6:18a).
- Becoming servants of righteousness (6:18b).
- Yielding our capacities as servants to righteousness unto holiness (6:19).
- Being ashamed of our former lives (6:20-21).
- Being made free from sin and becoming servants to God (6:22a).
- Having fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life (6:22b).
- The wages of sin and the gift of God (6:23).

All of that teaching is based upon the fact that we are baptized into Christ. It proclaims the implications of baptism, rather than stressing its necessity. However, if those implications are true, no one but a fool would engage in an effort to minimize the importance of baptism.

It simply is not possible for any ordained response to the Gospel to be neutral, non-essential, or optional, that has been associated with such things. Further, these are not associations made by men, but by the Holy Spirit of God. Men of spiritual integrity will simply not consent to any spiteful words concerning this ordinance.

A TRAGEDY

It is most tragic that many of those who declare the necessity of baptism to be saved fail to stress to the church what is to follow baptism. In fact, all of the doctrine concerning baptism is delivered to the church. I do not question that much of the opposition to baptism arises from the lack of spiritual life in those who stress it. Let it be clear that when the lives of believers do not “adorn the doctrine” in all things (Tit 2:10), the word of God will be blasphemed by others (Rom 2:24; 1 Tim 5:14; 1 Tim 6:1; Tit 2:5).

If a body of professing believers are not walking in the Spirit, living by faith, and generally characterized by unquestionable godliness, it is questionable whether or not they should be engaged in evangelistic efforts. Such people will fall into the same category as the scribes and pharisees of whom Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves” (Matt 23:15).

I do understand that withdrawing from purported evangelistic efforts would bring about a diminishment in the numbers of many churches. However, where the lives of people are unacceptable before God, the attention must be turned to them – just as Jesus did to the unacceptable churches in Asia (Rev 2:4,14,20; 3:1). When a church is packed with people who are not hungering and thirsting

for righteousness, and are not perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, its light is, to say the very least, beginning to dim. In such a case, something must be done to get leprous influence out of the church, and see to it that it is perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1). God will not receive people until that is done. That, of course, is His own statement: “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). It takes a hard and calloused heart to ignore that word!

Now we will behold the response of the newly baptized hearers of the Word of God. Remember that this is a response of faith, and is the expression of newness of life. This reveals some aspects of life in Christ Jesus, and is to be duly noted.

THEY ASKED PETER TO STAY FOR A WHILE

“ 48b Then prayed they him to tarry certain days. ”

What is the reaction of people who are really baptized into Christ? Do they consider baptism a kind of ultimate goal to be reached, or is it seen as a beginning? Indeed, baptism is the door through which we enter into “the newness of life” – a spiritual environment in which we move about with liberty and benefit (Rom 6:4). Our text will confirm that there is a kind of spiritual intuition that accompanies the new birth. When a person who is spiritually alive knows they are in the presence of someone who can bring profit and edification to them, they are eager to avail themselves of the fellowship of that person. That tendency is made known in this text.

THEY PRAYED HIM

“Then prayed they him . . .” Other versions read, “they asked him,” NKJV “they invited him,” NRSV “they kept him with them,” BBE “they begged him,” DARBY/NJB/LIVING/WEYMOUTH/WILLIAMS/MONTGOMERY/AMPLIFIED “they desired him,” DOUAY “they requested him,” MRD and “they besought him.” YLT

The word “prayed” is not a casual one, reflecting a polite, but not fervent, invitation. It appears to me that several versions, in attempting to use contemporary words, have managed to superimpose a certain culture upon the text that is not there. Even in the English language, the word “pray” has an urgent tone in it. Here is the primary modern definition of that English word: “entreat, implore,” MERRIAM-WEBSTER “wish or hope earnestly for a particular outcome,” OXFORD The Greek word from which “prayed” is translated is **hvrw,thsan** , which is the third person plural of the word **evrwta,w** . The “third person” means that what is reported was not said by the writer, nor was it addressed to the writer. This is a report of something that took place external to the one who is giving writing the record. In this case, the report is an inspired one, as the writer is being moved by the Holy Spirit. That fact alone makes it important that a proper English word be used to convey the activity of the ones who addressed Peter.

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As used here, the lexical meaning of the word “prayed” is “to ask I. e. to request, entreat, beg, beseech,” THAYER “as making a request ask, demand, beg someone to do something,” FRIBERG “request; beg, request urgently, ” UBS “to beg, to entreat.” LEH I do not want to overemphasize this point. However, there is a spirit in the text as well as words. It is reporting the expression of newness of life, and the outflow of the heart.

This same word is used elsewhere in the book of Acts. Its use will confirm the nature of the request.

• **THE LAME MAN ASKING ALMS.** “Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms” (Acts 3:3).

• **ENEMIES OF THE FAITH ASKING PAUL TO LEAVE THEIR AREA.** “And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city” (Acts 16:39).

• **BELIEVERS IN APHESIS BESEECHING PAUL TO STAY.** “When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not” (Acts 18:20).

• **PAUL REQUEST THAT HIS NEPHEW BE CONSULTED BY THE ROMAN GUARD.** “So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee” (Acts 23:18).

• **THE CHIEF CAPTAIN QUESTIONING PAUL’S NEPHEW.** “Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me?” (Acts 23:19).

• **THE JEWS REQUESTING THAT PAUL BE BROUGHT BEFORE THEM.** “And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly” (Acts 23:20).

My point here is that what was requested of Peter was in harmony with the nature of salvation, as well as the experience of it. This was not a request for time to exchange pleasantries. Rather, there was a distinct spiritual advantage seen in having Peter remain with them.

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TARRY CERTAIN DAYS

“ . . . to tarry certain days.” Other versions read, “stay a few days,” NKJV “stay on for a few days,” NASB “stay with them for a few days,” NIV “stay for several days,” NRSV “remain for some days,” RSV “kept him with them for some days,” BBE “remain with them for a time,” WEYMOUTH and “stay on there for some days.” AMPLIFIED

Having profited so much from the presence and words of Peter, the newly born believers urge him to stay on for several days. You may rest assured, it was not in order to engage in some leisurely activities. These people had experienced something from heaven, and knew it. They had received the word with gladness, and had been baptized into Christ. They had been raised up together with Christ, and made sit in “heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). It is a long plummet from there to the mundane! In fact, those

who are cognizant of where they are in Christ refuse to occupy the lower realms – like Nehemiah refused to come down from the wall to hold a caucus with Sanballat and Geshem (Neh 6:3).

In this text, Peter was with the converts like Nehemiah was with the builders. You may rest assured that they entertained no notions at that time of terminating their fellowship with the man of God. How could any sensible person entertain such thoughts after God Almighty had sent an angel instructing them to bring this man to the house in which they were sitting?

OTHERS HAVE MADE SIMILAR REQUESTS

This is not an isolated incident! Throughout the Scriptures, when a person of God was recognized

by someone who valued the things of God, there was a request for them to stay on.

- When the angels of the Lord visited Lot , preparing to destroy the city in which he lived, he constrained them, pressing them to “turn in,” and “tarry all night” in his house (Gen 19:2-3).

- Ruth refused to leave Naomi, affirming that she would live where she lived, make Naomi’s people her people, and make Naomi’s God her own (Ruth 1:16).

- Elisha refused to leave Elijah, declaring, “As the Lord giveth, and as thy soul giveth, I will not leave thee” (2 Kgs 2:2,4,6).

- When a certain Shunammite woman knew that a man of God, Elisha, frequently passed that way, she told her husband, “Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither” (2 Kgs 4:10).

- When the son of the Shunammite woman died, she went to the prophet Elisha. Having brought Elisha and his servant to her house, she said, “As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee” (2 Kgs 4:30).

- When Jesus spoke to “many of the Samaritans ” who had been brought to Him by the women at the well, it is reported that “they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days” (John 4:40).

- When Cleopas and his companion confronted the risen Christ, and hear Him speak marvelous words to them, they did not yet know who He was. Yet, knowing the impact of His words, they said to Him, “Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them” (Lk 24:29). It was during that occasion, when they asked Him to remain, that He was made known to them (Lk 24:30-31).

- Following the preaching of Paul, and after Lydia had been baptized, Luke reports, “she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:15).

- When Paul met with the elders of the church of Ephesus in Miletus, he told them he had to leave. And they wept. The chief reason is said to have been “that they should see his face no more” (Acts 20:38).

That should be sufficient to confirm that the request of those who heard Peter was not a strange one.

A UNIQUENESS OF OUR TIME

We live in a time when a significant number of people object to the extension of their exposure to a man of God – for only a few minutes! In fact, it is exceedingly rare in our nation for there to be a group of people who earnestly seek to personally be with an individual who only speaks the Word of the Lord. These days, wherever there is a person who has insight into the things of God, it is difficult to find some hearers. Occasionally some do surface who are not content with a brief exposure to the word of the Lord. However, they are rare, and are greatly to be treasured.

One of the most disconcerting experiences I have had is that of professing Christians who have little or no interest in the things of God. I have never been satisfied with the miserable explanations that are offered for their lack of hunger and thirst for righteousness. Even the attitude of primitive saints who did not have access to the abundance of truth that is realized in Christ Jesus outshine these souls without spiritual appetite. Ponder the following statements with those being said by people today.

• **JOB** . “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12).

• **DAVID** . “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psa 42:2; 63:1; 143:6).

“My soul breaketh for the longing that it hath unto thy judgments at all times” (Psa 119:20).

“I opened my mouth, and panted: for I longed for thy commandments” (Psa 119:131).

“ . . . the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Psa 19:10).

• **JEREMIAH** . “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer 15:16).

And what will those of meager appetites say on the day of judgment when these man stand up before them? How will they respond to those who had less than was offered to them, yet did more and went further with it? Believe me when I say they will not be in an enviable position!

CATERING TO THE DISINTERESTED

Furthermore, it is seriously wrong to cater to people like this, as though they could be wooed with compromise and awakened Godward with spiritual froth. Jesus did not stay with people who had no interest in what He said (Matt 16:4; 21:16; Mk 8:13). Paul responded in the same manner a lack of interest (Acts 13:46; 18:6-7; 19:9). Believers – all of them – are told to “turn away” from those who have a “form of godliness, but deny the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5). They are told to “withdraw” from professing believers who walk in a “disorderly,” or in an inconsistent manner (2 Thess 3:6). They are also admonished to note those who “cause divisions and offenses contrary top the doctrine,” and “avoid them” (Rom 16:17). After warning Timothy about teachers who did not consent to “wholesome words,” but chose to wrangle about words and engage in “perverse disputing,” Paul said, “from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim 6:5).

Even David knew the inappropriateness of unnecessarily maintaining company with people who were ungodly: “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But His delight is in the law of the LORD; and in His law doth he meditate day and night” (Psa 1:1-2).

The clear implication is that a compelling interest in the Lord and His word is neutralized by ungodly relationships.

AN ERRONEOUS APPROACH TO RELIGION

An approach to religion has been cunningly put in place that has caused people to be content with brevity and shallowness. They do not want brevity in their athletic events, movies, or concerts, but they are quite content for that arrangement in matters pertaining to life and godliness. These people are the product of church leaders and influences to whom they have subjected their minds. The fact that such people are unlike “newborn babes” – that are set before us in the Word of God – is a circumstance worthy of earnest inquiry. Unless the Gospel produces various kinds of Christians, just how can we account for such differences in the professing church? Every Lord’s day, there are gatherings in which the interested and disinterested sit together. Those with a love for the truth are found side by side with those who do not love the truth. People who are hungering and thirsting for righteousness occupy the same seat as those who have no interest in righteousness at all.

Who is able to justify such an admixture? Will they point us to the mingling of the tares and the

wheat? In that case, Jesus said the field was “the world,” not the church (Matt 13:38). If the church Jesus is building does not consist of those who are born again and those who are not, then exactly how can it be that any church can be so characterized?

The appointed means of deciphering those who will be accepted by the Lord and those who will not is the proclamation of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. The most general description of the subject declared is “the Word of God” (1 Thess 2:13; Heb 4:12). Considered from a more narrowed focus, it is “the Gospel of the Kingdom,” which particularly accents what God is doing

Those who withhold this preaching, or water it down to please the people, have withdrawn the means by which genuineness is perceived. If people do respond to such preaching, there is no way to know whether they are sincere or nothing more than hypocrites.

(Matt 24:14). In the most focused sense, it is “the Gospel of Christ,” which is the Means through which the purpose of God is being fulfilled – Jesus Christ being the One in whom men are made “complete” (Rom 1:16; 2 Cor 4:4; Col 2:10).

Those who withhold this preaching, or water it down to please the people, have withdrawn the means by which genuineness is perceived. If people do respond to such preaching, there is no way to know whether they are sincere or nothing more than hypocrites.

If it is countered that we are not to sit in judgment of other people, that is a proper view. However, there is an influence that does search out the difference, discovering the real nature of the people. That is the Seed of the Kingdom, the Word of God in general, and the Gospel of Christ in particular. That Word will uncover the hypocrites in the synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6:9), and the thirsty souls in Samaria (Acts 8:12). It will discover the tender souls in Solomon’s porch (Acts 4:4), and the arrogant religious leaders who cared nothing for the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 4:1-2).

I realize that all of this sounds a bit critical – and, indeed, there is some of that in my words. None of these things would be said if the people in question did not profess any identity with Christ. However, when such a profession is made, mild though it may appear to be, the name of the Lord is brought into the matter. His great salvation is also related, together with the “church of God” and “the Word of God.” Whoever the person is, when there is a claim to be connected with Jesus, or be saved, or be part of the church, or have faith, critical issues converge upon that testimony. Either Christ will be exalted or defamed by the professed association. The Word of God will either be praised or blasphemed. The salvation of God will be either magnified or diminished.

Let no person suggest to us that we ought to be tolerant of inconsistencies that are denounced by Lord. In this matter, we cannot draw up our own standards for conduct, but must confine ourselves to what the Lord Himself requires of His people. Whatever separates a person from the Lord, also separates the individual from His people. Such conditions are to be addressed by rebukes, corrections, and instructions in righteousness. Where there is no satisfactory response to these ordained approaches, the old leaven must be purged from the assembly (1 Cor 5:7-8).

Those who have comprehended the truth to some measurable degree long for their paths to cross with hungry souls. That is simply the manner of the Kingdom. They are also intolerant of religious pretension, novel presentations, and activities that are tainted by the flesh. That is just the way they are, and everyone in that category knows it.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to the working of the Lord. It has been confirmed in the interest of the Gentiles and the tenderness of Peter. It is made known in heaven’s approach to the seeker, and toward a person who is in Christ and living for Him.

CONFIRMATION

The responses of both Peter and the household of Cornelius substantiate how people respond to revelation when their hearts are tender. The eagerness with which obedient hearts proceed is seen in Cornelius sending for Peter, and Peter going with his servants to bring him the good news of the Gospel. The interest and spiritual camaraderie of kindred spirits are witnessed in the servants and soldier joining in the case, as well as the brethren from Joppa accompanying Peter in the trip to the home of Cornelius. The zealousness of a believer is seen in Cornelius gathering his family, friends, and relatives together to hear the Word of the Lord. It is also seen in Peter commencing his declaration as soon as he arrived, even though the journey was lengthy. The patience of believers is seen in the four day wait of Cornelius and those with him. The immediacy of the response of faith is seen in the reaction of both Cornelius and Peter to the visions given to them. The willingness to grow and take hold of things not seen before is seen in both the reaction both Peter and Cornelius to heavenly direction. The lingering effects of faith are seen in the request of the people for Peter to stay, and in his readiness to do so.

The kind of message to which heaven responds is seen in the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit while Peter was speaking. It seems to me that too often men are seeking a response from their peers, when they ought to be seeking one from heaven. There is no way to compensate for the absence of the response of heaven. Men may resort to appealing buildings, lighting effects, and visual presentations to elicit a response from the people. They may embellish their message with all manner of illustrations, scholarship, and humorous anecdotes. But if God does nothing through their message, of what worth is it? Should some small element of truth be found in what such people say, it is like a "jewel in a swines' snout" (Prov 11:22). By the time men finally get hold of it, they are so defiled they cannot maintain their grasp upon it. Far better to pursue the course of Peter. Let the preacher preach what he has seen and heard from heaven. We really have no time to listen to anything else.

See, all of these things are between the lines of our text. In it we are witnessing God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit at work. Furthermore, the degree and effectiveness of Their activity among the people are in direct proportion to the truth that is unveiled in what is being proclaimed in "spirit of faith" (2 Cor 4:13). If what God has said is not valued, there is no possible way to have a proper estimation of what He has done. That is simply the way it is!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #51

PETER REPORTS TO JERUSALEM

“ 11:1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. 2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. 4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying, 5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. 8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven. 11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. 12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house: 13 And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved. 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost. 17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God? 18 When they heard these things, they held their

peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. ” (Acts 11:1-18)

INTRODUCTION

A certain spiritual manner is being made known in the book of Acts: it is that of speaking of the wondrous works of God – in particular, reporting what the Lord has done. This is in fulfillment of David’s prophecy, “They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power ” (Psa 145:11). David also spoke of himself as engaged in this activity: “My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long” (Psa 71:24). And again, “I will . . . talk of thy

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- **PETER REPORTS HIS ARRIVAL AT CORNELIUS’ HOUSE (11:13-14)**
- **PETER REPORTS THE FALLING OF THE SPIRIT ON THOSE WHO HEARD (11:15-16)**
- **PETER REPORTS HIS RESPONSE (11:17)**
- **THE REACTION OF THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS TO THE REPORT (11:18)**
- **CONCLUSION**

doings” (Psa 77:12). The 105 th Psalm admonished the people of God, “talk ye of all His wondrous works ” (v 2). The “sweet Psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam 23:1) also said to the Lord, “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I talk of Thy wondrous works ” (Psa 119:27). In relation to the new and “better testament,” this is the result of all the people knowing the Lord. As it is written in prophecy, “for they shall all know Me” (Jer 31:34). The apostolic doctrine confirms that this, in fact, takes place in Christ (Heb 8:8-13).

Thus, the saints do not speak of the works of the Lord as casual bystanders, but as those who have seen and recognized the hand of the Lord. There is a certain insightful exhilaration detected in their reports, as the people “rejoice in His salvation” (Psa 35:9). Isaiah foretold the day of salvation as one in which the people would say, “Praise the LORD, call upon his name, declare His doings among the people, make mention that His name is exalted” (Isa 12:4). In this, the exhortation of the Psalmist actually comes to pass: “Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people His doings” (Psa 9:11).

This manner of speaking is not prominent in an institutional setting, nor, indeed, can it be. The reason for this circumstance is that the Person and works of the Lord will not contribute to the activities and aspirations of mere men. It is not possible for the working of God to promote a human agenda, or vault the institutions of men into prominence. That simply is not the way the Lord works,

for such an activity is counterproductive to the fulfillment of His own purpose. God has declared His agenda, and His blessing will not be given to any other order of business.

It is fashionable in our time for professing Christian leaders to point to their outward success as proof of the blessing of the Lord – much like that which was promised under the Old Covenant (Deut 6:3; 7:13). However, because of the recalcitrance of the people, those promises were not ultimately fulfilled. Instead, Israel was actually thrust out of their land, and experienced all manner of outward oppression, by both nature and their enemies.

Within the framework of the New Covenant, there is not a hint that it promises any form of earthly prosperity. That is not the manner of the covenant presently being mediating by Christ.

- **NOT ACCORDING TO THE MANNER OF THE OLD COVENANT.** The New Covenant is a different kind of covenant. Its blessings are different. Its promises are different. In its basis, objectives, and effects it is not to be compared with the Old Covenant. Unlike the Old Covenant, the New is realized in the Person of Christ, and by means of faith. The Old Covenant was based upon doing, and doing alone (Lev 18:5).

- **A COVENANT OF REGARD, NOT DISREGARD.** The New Covenant results in a consistent regard for those who are in Christ Jesus. The favor of God is guaranteed to those who abide in Christ.

- **HIS LAWS PUT INTO THE MIND.** In the New Covenant, the people are brought to think differently. Their thought processes are in concert with what God requires.

- **HIS LAWS WRITTEN IN THEIR HEART.** There is also a strong affection for the Lord – a preference for Him, a love of the truth, and a delight in the Lord. His laws are written upon their hearts.

- **GOD WOULD BE THEIR GOD.** That is, He would be the God of the preference, with no competitors.

- **THEY WOULD BE GOD'S PEOPLE.** God would not be ashamed to own the people in Christ, but would be pleased to call them His own.

- **THEY WOULD ALL KNOW THE LORD.** The people would not be ignorant of God or unacquainted with His ways. They would be familiar with Him.

- **GOD WOULD BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR UNRIGHTEOUSNESSES.** God would not speak of the sins of the people as He did with Israel. He would make gracious provision for the removal of sin, thereby permitting Him to be both just and Justifier.

- **THEIR SINS AND INIQUITIES WOULD BE REMEMBERED NO MORE.** Remission of sin is a hallmark of the New Covenant. In that remission, there is freedom from the power of sin as well as the guilt that results from it.

It is evident that these remarkable components of the New Covenant are not tailored for life in the flesh. They have to do with one's association with the living God, NOT their connection with this world – which is passing away. Precisely how can you use these benefits to build a religious institution, or accumulate wealth, or achieve recognition in the world. How do they contribute to such ambitions?

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

It is essential to perceive these things because of the nature of the reports provided in the book of Acts. There is a glaring absence of worldly values and status throughout the book. If you were to attempt to pattern a religious organization after the church in Jerusalem, precisely how would you go about it? How would you go about organizing a service, developing a youth program, or some form

of community outreach? What method is found that would provide a pattern for developing a missionary program, or any kind of a training program? See, there is nothing in the record of the early church that approaches newness of life in such a manner.

THE ABSENCE OF WORLDLY PROMOTION

In the accounting Peter will give, there is a total absence of any promotion of persons or groups. The attention is drawn to what the Lord has done through those who were walking with Him by faith, and to whom He had revealed the truth. There is not the slightest hint of an institutional agenda.

Further, the reports of Divine workings are faithful, and without the embellishment that often characterizes modern day reports of the purported work of the Lord. There are no exaggerations, and the observations of the work itself are insightful, consistently giving glory to God. This is an aspect of spiritual life that is worthy of note – i.e. being faithful in the stewardship of what we have been given to see and hear, whether in ourselves or others. The testimony given by Peter will reflect his personal humility, as well as his desire for the Lord to be glorified and His purposes declared.

THE BRETHERN IN JUDEA HEAR WHAT HAD HAPPENED

“ 11:1 And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.”

In the book of Acts, we frequently read of the reports of what was accomplished, as well as the accomplishments themselves. This has been characteristic of Divine workings throughout history.

- The manner in which the Lord delivered Israel from Egyptian bondage was “heard” in the city of Jericho (Josh 2:10).
- The Lord was with Joshua, and his fame was “noised throughout the country” (Josh 6:27).
- The Gibeonites “heard” of the “fame” of the Lord, and what He did in Egypt regarding Israel’s deliverance (Josh 9:9).
- The Syrians “heard” of the merciful manner of the kings of Israel (1 Kgs 20:31).
- The reports of the working of the Lord were passed down through the generations of Israel (Psa 44:1; 78:3).
- The fame of Solomon “concerning the name of the Lord” was “heard” in other lands (1 Kgs 10:1).
- The “fame” of Jesus “went throughout all Syria” (Matt 4:24).
- When Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, “the fame hereof went abroad into all the land” (Matt 9:26).
- Even Herod the tetrarch “heard of the fame of Jesus” (Matt 14:1).
- What took place among the disciples on the day of Pentecost was “noised abroad” (Acts 2:6).
- The apostles in Jerusalem “heard that Samaria had received the word of God” (Acts 8:14).

Preliminary Conclusions

There are some preliminary conclusions that are evident in the texts I have just cited.

- Divine workings cannot be concealed. If a city that is set on a hill “cannot be hid”

(Matt 5:14), you may be sure that the working of the Lord cannot remain under the shroud of concealment.

- Those who participate in the works of the Lord are prone to speak of them.
- The works of the Lord are not an end of themselves. They are rather an appointed means of making the Lord known, and thereby causing glory to be brought to His name.

THE APOSTLES AND BRETHREN

“And the apostles and brethren that were in Judea . . .” Other versions read “through Judea,” NIV “apostles and believers who were in Judea,” NRSV “throughout Judea,” ESV “apostles and other believers,” NLT and “apostles and the brothers [and sisters].” ALT

Behold the harmony in the body of Christ. Although the apostles were placed “first” in the body (1 Cor 12:28), yet they were in no way distinct from the body of Christ. Here they are joined together with other brethren, or believers, throughout the entire region of Judea.

Who Are “Brethren?”

It may seem rather juvenile to ask such a question. However, the modern church is not known for its use of this term, or that of “brothers.” Doctrinally, this is very important word that represents a pivotal kingdom concept. Ponder how it is used in the apostolic writings.

- We can “sin against the brethren” (1 Cor 8:12).
- Peace, together with faith and love, come from the Father and Jesus to “the brethren” (Eph 6:23).
- In obeying the truth “through the Spirit,” we do so “unto unfeigned love of the brethren” (1 Pet 1:22).
- We know we have passed from death unto life because we “love the brethren” (1 John 3:14).
- When we perceive the love of God, because He laid down His life for us, it is apparent that we “ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

The fundamental relationship between brethren is not their identity with one another. Rather, it is their identity with Christ that makes them “brethren.” This is so because Jesus is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Therefore, when He came into the world, and in prospect of the grand redemption He was going to accomplish, it is said that He was made “like unto His brethren” (Heb 2:17). Further, they were His “brethren” because they were begotten of God, having the same Father as He Himself had, in His redemptive role. A particular point is made of this in Hebrews 2:11-12. “For both He that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of One: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren. Saying, I will declare thy name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.” In this text “He that sanctifieth” is Jesus Himself, and “they who are sanctified” are the ones being saved. The expression “are all of One” refers to God the Father. Other versions read, “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father,” NASB “For He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin,” NRSV “For the One who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father,” CSB “Jesus, who makes people holy, and all those who are made holy have the same Father,” GWN and “For both He Who sanctifies [making men holy] and those who are sanctified all have one [Father].” AMPLIFIED

The term “brethren,” therefore, is not a mere institutional term, used to denote people of similar persuasion. This is one of those collective terms used to identify either the entire body of those in Christ, and those within a given area. Other collective terms are “the believers” (1 Tim 4:12), “disciples” (Acts 9:1), “them which are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1), “joint heirs with Christ” (Rom

8:17a), “heirs of God” (Rom 8:17b), “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27), “the household of faith” (Gal 6:10), “the house of God” (1 Tim 3:15; Heb 10:21), “the flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2), “the children of God” (Gal 3:26), “the whole family” (Eph 3:15), and “the sheep” (Heb 13:20).

In Christ, “brethren” is a word that speaks of those who are “born of God” (1 John 3:9; 4:7; 5:4,18). That birth connects them with Jesus, and consequently with one another.

As used here, we see the marvelous unity of the body of Christ. Those who are ranked “first” by Divine appointment (1 Cor 12:28) are linked together with the rest of the disciples. They do not stand by themselves, even though they are in a unique category. That uniqueness, however, is not owing to their personal achievement, or extraordinary natural abilities. It is rather owing to the role appointed to them by God.

Now, the apostles and brethren together hear the news of what took place in the house of Cornelius. It will be interesting to be exposed to the manner in which the Holy Spirit moved Luke to describe this event.

THEY ALSO RECEIVED THE WORD OF GOD

“ . . . heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.” Other versions read, “also accepted the word of God,” RSV “the word of God had been given to the Gentiles,” BBE “had welcomed God's message also,” CSB “also were being converted,” LIVING and “also had received and accepted and welcomed the Word of God [the doctrine concerning the attainment through Christ of salvation in the kingdom of God].” AMPLIFIED

Although it appears to be incidental, the word “also” is significant. The idea is that not only had the Jews received the Word (for it was “sent” unto them “first” – Acts 3:26), the Gentiles had “also” received it. Even though this had been in the purpose of God all along, it was largely hidden to the people during the early years of the church. Remember that God gave Peter a special revelation of the acceptance of the Gentiles, which he confessed to be an epoch in his life (Acts 10:28).

I am particularly interested in how this work was reported to “the apostles and brethren.” The news was that the Gentiles had “received the word of God.” Had this been reported by some groups of our time, the following might have been said.

- The household of Cornelius were baptized in the Holy Ghost with the evidence of speaking in tongues.
- They all spoke with tongues.
- They were all baptized into Christ.
- They received the anointing.
- They received Christ into their hearts.
- They were all saved.

None of those things are untrue. However, this is not the manner in which the report went forth. Note what they heard: “that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.”

By saying “also,” the report highlighted that what had taken place at the house of Cornelius was, at the foundational level, precisely the same thing that had taken place among the Jews. The details differed slightly, but the substance did not. The Jewish disciples, for example, “waited” until they were endued with power, tarrying in Jerusalem (Lk 24:49). At the house of Cornelius the Spirit was poured out while they were hearing the proclamation of the risen Christ. Also, when they received the Spirit, He was poured out in Jerusalem as the prophets had declared (Zech 12:10). In the case of Cornelius and those with him, the Spirit was poured out in another region.

However, with both the Jews and the Gentiles, receiving the Word of God was the foundation of what was experienced. In both cases, the Spirit of God was given to the people – a “gift” from God. In both cases, the people spoke in other languages of God Himself: the Jews spoke of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11), and in the case of the Gentiles “they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46).

When the people on the day of Pentecost were baptized and added to the church, it is said that they had “gladly received the word ” (acts 2:41). When the report of the marvelous conversion of the city of Samaria reached the apostles it is written that they “heard that Samaria had received the word of God ” (Acts 8:14). When the spiritual nobility of the Bereans was described, it is written, “they received the word of God with all readiness of mind” (Acts 17:11). In describing the conversion of the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Thess 1:6). And again he wrote, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). Even when addressing those in a backslidden and retrogressing state, James admonished them to “ receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls” (James 1:21).

Receiving the Word of God is pivotal to both the new birth and the maturing of spiritual life. That is because it is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” NKJV (Heb 4:12). The word of God’s grace “is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

However where the Word of God is not declared, the arm of God will not be revealed (Isa 53:1). When other messages upstage what God has declared, and human emphases supplant the report that God has sanctioned, the legitimacy of human response is open to question. When it becomes fashionable for the Bible to be used to buttress the ideas of men, all of the power is pulled out of it. I will go so far as to say that in the average religious setting of our day, where additions to the institution are taking place, it would be exceedingly difficult to determine if people are receiving the Word of God or not. There are too many human innovations and appeals being made to the people. They range from special seating arrangements, unique lighting effects and visual presentations, to non-threatening entertainment. Appeals are made that present Jesus as ready and willing to resolve unpleasant circumstances, mend marriages, and bring victory over unpleasant habits. Domestic issues are treated as though they superceded spiritual ones. Whether or not this is specifically said, this is the impression that is left with the people.

Now, I am saying that, in such circumstances, just saying the people have received the Word of God has a strange sound to it. What God has said is not the emphasis. Rather, what men need appears to be the stress. Further, unless that need has been defined by the Creator, and justifies a Savior being sent into the world, I do not know how it can be given any priority in preaching.

However, none of the unbecoming circumstances with which we are faced today existed during the time of our text. Such things were introduced when unperceptive men and opportunists were given a place in the professing church. Paul warned the elders from Ephesus that certain would rise from the ranks of church leadership, “speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:30). Following the fulfillment of that word, and in the minds of those falling prey to their emphasis, reporting that people had “received the word of God” would no longer be a satisfactory way of speaking.

But this is a proper way of speaking among “the elect of God” (Col 3:12), and the report resonates with truth and power to insightful souls. I am grateful for such words in Scripture, and for the effect

they have upon the heart.

THOSE OF THE CIRCUMCISION CONTEND WITH PETER

“ 2 And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3 Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.”

As soon as Peter returns to Jerusalem, it will become apparent that God had not yet taught them what He had “showed” to Peter. There was not a kind of theological time line when the understanding of all believers was up-graded. Spiritual advancement is not always synchronized among the saints. As long as we occupy the domain of time, there will be “little children,” “young men,” and “fathers” within the household of faith (1 John 2:13-14). However, even though there are certain distinctions in the spiritual attainments of the saints, there are “common” things that bind them together, and make them teachable. There are “the common faith” (Tit 1:4) and “the common salvation” (Jude 1:3). There are also the realities that produce “the unity of the Spirit”: one body, one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and One God and Father of all (Eph 4:4-5).

The effectiveness of these common realities will be confirmed in this text. Even though, at the first, there is a disparity in the understanding among the brethren, yet the faithful report of the working of the Lord will bring unity among them.

WHEN PETER WAS COME UP TO JERUSALEM

“And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem . . .”

It is approximately fifty direct miles from Caesarea to Jerusalem, perhaps decidedly more, considering the roads traveled. Already, Peter has remained for several days with the brethren who gathered at the house of Cornelius. The arrival of Peter in Jerusalem, therefore, could have been as much as two weeks later.

The centrality of Jerusalem during the life of the early church ought

In keeping with the way in which the Lord works among His people, some required insights can only be acquired by means of other members of the body of Christ. Those who insist that they cannot accept a truth unless Christ Himself shows it to them must deal with this text.

to be noted. This city is mentioned sixty times in the book of Acts. Even when early believers were scattered due to persecution, the apostles had remained in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1). Peter and John were sent from Jerusalem to Samaria (Acts 8:14), and after they had spent time preaching in Samaria, they returned to Jerusalem (Acts 8:25). This is where the newly converted Saul sought to join himself to the disciples (Acts 9:26). Later, when a question arose about the instruction of Gentile believers, Paul and Barnabas would go up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders “about this question” (Acts 15:2). Later they would deliver to the churches “the decrees” that were “ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem” (Acts 16:4).

Therefore, Jerusalem is to be seen as a kind of spiritual hub. Yet, perfect knowledge was not found there, as our text will confirm. In keeping with the way in which the Lord works among His people, some required insights can only be acquired by means of other members of the body of Christ. Those who insist that they cannot accept a truth unless Christ Himself shows it to them must deal with this text. It must be seen that Christ does, indeed, open the eyes of men’s understanding. Often, however, he does it through the words of fellow believers.

THE CIRCUMCISION CONTENDED WITH HIM

“ . . . they that were of the circumcision contended with him.” Other versions read, “took issue with

him,” NASB “criticized him,” NIV “had an argument with him,” BBE “began to argue with him,” GWN “protested to him,” NJB “contended against him,” PNT “found fault with him,” WEMOUTH “began to bring charges against him,” WILLIAMS “disputed with him,” MONTGOMERY “found fault with him [separating themselves from him in a hostile spirit, opposing and disputing and contending with him],” AMPLIFIED and “were full of criticism.” PHILLIPS

Considering that the church in Jerusalem was, at this time, almost totally Jewish, precisely who are those who were “of the circumcision?” It does not appear that it was any of the apostles, for they were very familiar with the conversion of the Samaritans, which strongly suggested salvation was not confined to “the circumcision.” I conclude that this refers to those Jews who were unusually zealous for the necessity of circumcision being continued in Christ Jesus. Perhaps they were representatives of the same group who later would go down to Antioch and tell Gentile believers “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

Although these people were unusually zealous concerning the appropriateness of fellowship with Gentiles, it must be remembered that prior to meeting Cornelius, Peter himself had entertained this view. He had said to those gathered in Cornelius’ house, “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). As of the time of our text, however, this revelation had not been made known to the Jews who were confronting Peter.

First, this confirms the seriousness with which early believers addressed matters regarding religion, or the outward display of faith. They did not address issues as mere matters of opinion, but heartily embraced what they perceived as truth.

I gather, therefore, that these men were in Christ Jesus, identified with His church, and yet were especially zealous for maintaining the view of the Gentiles that was held forth under the Old Covenant. The epochal nature of the conversion of those gathered together in the house of Cornelius is confirmed by the impact of the report of that event upon the men who contended with Peter, from the church in Jerusalem.

First, this confirms the seriousness with which early believers addressed matters regarding religion, or the outward display of faith. They did not address issues as mere matters of opinion, but heartily embraced what they perceived as truth. We know these men were not religious bigots, because they immediately yielded to the truth when exposed to it. We know from this that they were being governed by their conscience, and not a mere party spirit.

As well as having a love for the truth itself, Peter was held in high regard by these men. However, their regard for him was not sufficient to embrace something they had not yet seen. Remember, Peter has had the advantage of the Lord showing him the truth on this matter. Prior to that, he was of the same persuasion as these men.

The word “contended” is a strong one, and even sounds so. It comes from a root word that means, “to be separated.” THAYER and refers to “debating an issue dispute, contend, argue.” FRIBERG The picture is that of taking Peter to the side and taking serious issue with him on a matter.

I am from a generation that was characterized by strong disputation on religious matters. Frequently these jousts were considered to be among friends, but feelings and convictions were strong, and issues were openly discussed with much fervency. These discussions could degenerate into mere fleshly disputing, to be sure. However this was not always the case, and it certainly was not the case in this text. As will be seen, people of strong spiritual persuasion can be moved to change when they discern the will of the Lord.

YOU WENT IN TO UNCIRCUMCISED MEN

“Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.” Other versions read, “and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them,” NIV “You went to men without circumcision, and took food with them,” BBE “You fellowshiped with Gentiles and even ate with them,” LIVING “for having visited and eaten with men who were not Jews,” WILLIAMS “You actually went in and shared a meal with uncircumcised men!” PHILLIPS and “You stayed in the homes of Gentiles, and you even ate with them!” CEV

There is no record that Peter and those with him ate with those of the household of Cornelius. However, owing to him staying there for several days, and the fact that Peter does not contest this remark, it is almost certain that this was the case.

The persuasion of the wrongness of having extensive dialog with non-Jews is confirmed in the disciples thoughts about Jesus, concerning the dialog He had with the Samaritan woman at the well of Jacob. “And upon this came His disciples, and marveled that He talked with the woman : yet no man said, What seekest Thou? or, Why talkest Thou with her?” John 4:27). They did not take the Master to task on the matter, for they honored Him. However, the whole incident was confusing to them because of the attitude reflected in our text.

The Jewish Reasoning

As I have stated before, in the commentary on 10:28, the Law did not specifically prohibit the Jews from eating with Gentiles. However, it did strictly forbid intermarriage with them. Of the heathen nations it is written, “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son” (Deut 7:3). It also spoke of a familiarity with the heathen that could move the people to make a covenant with them, and even become idolatrous, worshipping their gods: “Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods” (Ex 34:15-16).

Following their entrance into Canaan, Joshua had also warned the people about alliances with the heathen. “Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, even these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out any of these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you” (Josh 23:12-13).

It is clear from these text that the original reasoning of devout Jews concerning refraining from intimacy with the heathen, was not prejudicial. It rather reflected a determination not to culture friendships that would lead them into the conditions concerning which God had warned them. Sound Jewish teachers knew that familiarity with the heathen would break down the resistance of the people to idolatry and other practices that would incur the indignation of God against the people.

A New Circumstance Had Arisen

Known to Peter, but unknown to those now contending with him, a new circumstance had come about since Jesus had died and risen again. The Gentiles, like the unclean meats, had been “cleansed.” The salvation of God now included them. The “middle wall of partition” had been “broken down,” and God was making “one new man,” or new generation, out of both Jew and Gentile. As it is written, “For He is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace” (Eph 2:14-15).

Something to Consider

There is still something to consider concerning relationships with other people. In our day, there is a looseness concerning such associations that is unbecoming of the people of God. There is still a danger of certain kinds of mingling that will bring about unequal yokes – believers marrying unbelievers. Paul speaks of this to the Corinthians, who had become lax in their social

I do not know how it is possible to defend a condition in which those under a superior covenant are characterized by reasoning that is more flawed than those who functioned under an inferior covenant.

conduct. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:14-17).

While God has cleansed the Gentiles, He has not cleansed unrighteousness, darkness, Belial, or infidels. Now, however, godly wisdom will be required in order to know where to set limits concerning contact with such people. This is why it is written, “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time” (Col 4:5). And again, “That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing” (1 Thess 4:12). And again, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33).

The Spirit also testifies concerning the conduct of believers toward those who claim identify with Christ, yet are living in contradiction of that claim. “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat ” (1 Cor 5:11).

It behooves every child of God to learn how to live wisely in this regard. There are countless professed believers who have drifted away from the Lord because they forged unequal yokes with those who are in darkness. They did not take seriously what the Lord has said on this matter, and thus have fallen into a state that is fraught with eternal jeopardy.

I do not know how it is possible to defend a condition in which those under a superior covenant are characterized by reasoning that is more flawed than those who functioned under an inferior covenant. I understand that it is wrong to impose laws and ordinances that move people to live artificially and without heart or understanding. However, it is equally wrong, if not more so, to so teach people that they conclude they can live in the midst of defilement without themselves becoming defiled, or imagine that evil communications do not corrupt good manners – a matter on which we are not to be deceived (1 Cor 15:34).

Once again, I emphasize that the result of Peter’s testimony confirms those who were contending with him were not factionists or sectarian in their manners. They were rather people whose understanding had not yet matured on the matter of the Gentiles. God will use this occasion to clarify the matter to them, and they will receive it.

HOW PETER GAVE THE REPORT

“ 4 But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying . . .”

It is important to note how Peter responds to the criticism leveled against him. It appears that he sensed the sincerity of the people, even though their conclusions were incorrect. He also doubtless

recalled that he had thought the same thing prior to his experience at Cornelius' house. Note the wisdom that is reflected in his answer. He will rehearse what the Lord did, and how He did it.

I am convinced that Peter's explanation is driven by the persuasion that the works of God are recognized by those who know Him.

REHEARSING

"But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning . . ." Other versions read, "explained it to them . . . from the beginning," NKJV "proceeded to explain to them," NASB "explained everything to them," NIV "began to explain to them," RSV "gave them an account of it all," BBE "set forth the matter to them," DARBY "expounded the thing . . . to them," GENEVA "began to address them," MRD "explained everything to them," NJB and "began [at the beginning] . AMPLIFIED

That is, there was a single work of God that was wrought at the house of Cornelius, and it was comprised of several different parts – like a building is made up of individual stones. What took place at that time was one of God's "wonderful works"

The words "rehearsed the matter from the beginning" are translated from a single Greek word (**avrxa,menoj**). The word means "to rehearse a thing from the beginning." STRONG'S That is, there was a single work of God that was wrought at the house of Cornelius, and it was comprised of several different parts – like a building is made up of individual stones. What took place at that time was one of God's "wonderful works" (Psa 40:5; 78:4; Acts 2:11). The fact that this was a single work required that it be rehearsed "from the beginning." This would bring out more clearly what the Lord was doing.

It is good to think of God's "wonderful works" in this way – of some objective that was completed in several stages, or by various means. Some of those single works with multiple facets include the following.

- **The creation:** there were six different days of creation, with various orders of creation.
- **The flood:** rain was sent, a flood covered the world, all flesh died, and Noah and his family were saved.
- **The selection of Abraham:** he was called to go to a certain country, was given the promise of being a blessing, and the source of blessing, that nations would come from him, and that the ultimate Seed, the Messiah would come from his lineage.
- **The deliverance of Israel from Egypt:** this involved ten plagues, the spoiling of the Egyptians, observing the Passover, coming out of Egypt at midnight, and crossing the Red Sea.
- **God sending His Son into the world:** a birth was involved, a flight into Egypt, growing up in Nazareth, being revealed at His baptism, being tempted, and ministering among the people.
- **The death of Jesus:** involved being rejected, tried, mocked, crucified dying, taking away the sins of the world, destroying the devil, plundering principalities and powers, reconciling the world, and making peace.
- **The resurrection of Jesus:** involved defeating death, overcoming the grave, His death being validated, ascending into heaven, being enthroned at God's right hand, and receiving all power in heaven and earth.
- **The inauguration of the New Covenant:** involved sending forth the Holy Spirit, inspiring His disciples, a rushing mighty wind, cloven tongues of fire, speaking in other

languages, proclaiming the Gospel, directing inquiring souls.

- **The Second coming of Christ:** when Jesus comes again, God will show Him in all of His glory, the heaven and the earth will pass away, the dead will be raised, the wicked will be gathered together for destruction, the righteous will be gathered to Christ, the day of judgment will occur, and Satan and his hosts will be forever banished from the Lord and those who have been gathered to Him.

- The conversion of the Gentiles: directing Cornelius, illuminating Peter, the gathering of a host to the house of Cornelius, the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit, the confirmation of the acceptance of the Gentiles, the granting of repentance, and the purifying of their hearts by faith.

A rehearsal of the acts of the Lord is a recounting of what actually took place in His works. In the song of Deborah, she made reference to the rehearsal of the righteous acts of the Lord: “. . . there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of His villages in Israel . . .” (Judg 5:11). David referred to such a rehearsal when he wrote, “They shall abundantly utter the memory of Thy great goodness, and shall sing of Thy righteousness” (Psa 145:7).

EXPOUNDING

“. . . and expounded it by order unto them, saying . . .” Other versions read, “explain to them in orderly sequence,” NASB “precisely as it had happened,” NIV “step by step,” RSV “in detail what had actually happened,” CJB “point by point what had happened,” GWN “methodically,” MRD “exactly what had happened,” NLT “narrated and explained to them step by step [the whole list of events],” and “how the situation had actually arisen.” PHILLIPS

To expound a matter is to set it before the people, exposing their minds to both the scope and the details of the matter being expounded. What is being set forth is presented in an orderly manner, so that the sense of it can be perceived. Conclusions will be drawn, and principles will be set forth. All of this means that the person delivering the word has an understanding of what actually took place in the events being described.

As will be seen in this very text, it is the implication of the facts that gives them their power. For example, a person could speak eloquently, affirming that Jesus died, was buried, and rose again. However, if what was accomplished in those realities is not made known, they have no power over the individual. Unless a person knows WHY Jesus died, and what took place at that time, the report is powerless. If men proclaim that He raised from the dead, yet are mute about what has resulted from that resurrection, and how He is alive with all power in heaven and earth, what good is the proclamation?

. The Divine economy makes no place for purported ministries that do not contribute to the edification and maturity of those who have been begotten by God.

If men declare with Paul that they are determined to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified, yet fail to expound that crucifixion as Paul did (Rom 3:24-25; 4:25; 5:9; 8:3 1 Cor 5:7; 6:20; 2 Cor 5:14-15,19,21; 8:9; Gal 1:4; 3:13; 4:4-5; Eph 1:6-7; 2:13-16; Col 2:14-15; Heb 2:149:14, etc), how will the message have a God-honoring impact upon the people?

The church of our day sorely requires deliverance from stifling academia. It is time to bring an end to the dominance of religious leaders who lack the understanding and aptitude required to perfect the saints and ready them for “the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Whatever has caused professing believers to remain in a spiritually juvenile state, that has deprived them of wisdom and spiritual understanding, needs to be purged from the church. It is time to “purge out . . . the old leaven,” as we are enjoined to do (1 Cor 5:7). The Divine economy makes no place for purported ministries that do not contribute to the edification and maturity of those who

have been begotten by God.

Our text provides a slice of genuine spiritual life, brought about when men are given “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus” (2 Cor 4:6). This is the vision without which the people will surely perish (Prov 29:18). In our text, the manner in which obstacles are overcome is lived out before us, and it is refreshing to consider.

PETER REPORTS HIS VISION

“ 5 I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.”

Peter does not argue with those who have raised an objection concerning what he is reported to have done. He makes no attempt to justify his action with human reasoning. Instead, he will simply rehearse in order the things that took place, and draw some conclusions that will be obvious to those with spiritual minds.

In my judgment, if God has not said or done something that bears directly on any subject of controversy, it is doubtful that any lasting good can come from pursuing it. If the only way we can defend our actions is by affirming they reflect our own preference, or that we are strongly persuaded of the propriety of such endeavors, then there is no need to engage in a heated controversy over it. Because they rest on the foundation of human reasoning, such contentions will awaken the flesh, and make a place for the entry and influence of the wicked one. This is always the case when human opinion and preference are placed upon the throne of the heart.

WHAT HE SAW

“I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me . . .”

There is exacting precision in everything Peter says. He does not embellish his report, as flesh is prone to do. He simply states the facts in the case.

- “I was in Joppa” (10:8-9).
- He was “praying” (10:9).
- He was “in a trance” (10:10).
- He saw a vision; “a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners” (10:11 does not call this a vision, but recounts the vision itself).
- The sheet “came even to me” (10:11 says it was “let down to the earth.” Later it is written that Peter pondered the meaning of “the vision” – 17,19).

WHAT HE DID

“ 6 Upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.”

Peter says he “fastened” his eyes on the contents of the sheet and “considered” considered what he saw. Peter rehearses the exact categories of animals mentioned in the tenth chapter: “fourfooted beats, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air” (10:12).

Here Peter reports that he fastened his eyes on the animals, and “considered” what he saw. This is not stated in the historical record of the event, which simply states the contents of the sheet. However, what followed substantiates that Peter did, in fact consider what he saw, for his response was one that could only follow a due consideration of what was set before him.

We know from the context and Peter’s response that he pondered the vision with the Law of God in mind, and its precise definition of “clean” and “unclean” meats. He did not think within the context of his natural appetite or mere personal preferences. His view was driven by what he had been taught through the Law.

Further, Peter will filter the opportunity set before him through his understanding of the will of the Lord. This provides us an index of what is involved in loving the Lord with all of our heart, soul, MIND, and strength. That spiritual posture constrains the individual to consider opportunities within the context of right and wrong, as perceived in one’s understanding of the Scriptures.

In our day, there has been such a significant departure from the truth that this type of thinking is virtually unknown among Christians. If it is countered that Peter’s thinking was wrong, it must be perceived that this is only true because his understanding was deficient at that point. The way in which he thought was correct, and the reason for his thinking was right. He only lacked enlightenment to arrive at a proper conclusion – and he received it.

PETER REPORTS THE HEAVENLY COMMUNICATION

“ 7 And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat. 8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.”

In the historical record of the event Peter is reporting, we are told that Peter was hungry at the time of the vision, and that some food was being prepared for him. He had gone “to the housetop to pray about the sixth hour: and he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance . . .” (10:9-10). Peter does not cite this detail here, because it is evident from the dialog that follows. The command that is given to Peter would have no significance if he had not been hungry.

It is a principle that teaching, such as that realized when Peter was on the housetop, has no impact if it is not within the context of perceived need or desire. Men cannot effectively be taught truth by mere rote. Peter’s natural hunger caused him to look with greater interest and discretion upon the living creatures that had been lowered from heaven and set before him in the vision of reference.

WHAT WAS SAID

“And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.” Other versions read, “kill and eat,” NKJV “take them for food,” BBE “slaughter and eat,” CJB “Kill these animals and eat them,” GWN “Kill and eat whatever you wish,” LIVING and “kill something and eat it.” WILLIAMS

This is a precise report of what was said when the voice from heaven spoke to Peter: “Rise, Peter, kill and eat” (Acts 10:13).

This voice came from heaven, and it is confirmed that it was not a temptation, or test, like the time Abraham was commanded to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to God (Gen 22:1-13). Among other things, this shows that those who command men “to abstain from meats” are not reflecting the mind of God (1 Tim 4:3). Whether this is done in the name of health or that of religion, it is nothing more than a human opinion – and it is at variance with what God has said about eating meat (and there were no vegetables in the sheet lowered from heaven). Without laboring this matter, God has addressed the subject with unusual clarity – even though, at the time he had the vision, Peter had not

yet seen it. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils ; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats , which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained” (1 Tim 4:3-6).

Now, whatever a person may personally think on this subject, whether Peter or someone of our generation, the strength of the above instruction is most arresting to consider. Keep in mind that this is a kind of commentary on “kill and eat.”

The sources of the teaching being exposed are those who have “departed from the faith,” are giving heed to “seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons,” NKJV speak lies in their hypocrisy, and have a seared conscience. Remember, what is being taught is that marriage is forbidden, and men ought to abstain from meats.

Such teaching directly contradicts both the creation and the intention of the Lord. First, God created the “meats” in question “to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth” – which, at the time of his vision, Peter did not know. Second, “every creature of God” is good, and is not to be refused, “if it be received with thanksgiving.” Third, such food is “sanctified by the word of God” (what God has said) and “ prayer” (in blessing and thanksgiving). It is this perspective that made it right for the voice from heaven to command Peter to “kill and eat” what he saw.

You may recall that Jesus was completely intolerant of those who lived contrary to what they professed. He solemnly warned His disciples of those who “say and do not” (Matt 23:3). Even under the Law, God upbraided those whose lives contradicted what they said with their lips (Isa 29:13-14), and Jesus confirmed that condition was condemned when He was on the earth (Matt 15:8-9).

Note that Paul also told Timothy that if he “put the brethren in remembrance of these things,” he would be a “good minister of Jesus Christ.” I do not dare to imagine how a “minister” is to be considered who does not do this!

These days, it has become fashionable for Christian dieticians to be given undue influence among believers. These men, for the most part, have taken God out of the consideration of foods. Whatever good they may be thought to have contributed to the household of faith, they cannot remove the words of the Spirit that food is “sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” If a person cannot put the health of their body in the hands of the Lord, I do not know how it can be substantiated that they can “commit the keeping of their souls” to the Lord (1 Pet 4:19).

If all of this seems irrelevant, remember that Peter’s experience appeared to be only related to matters of diet at the time, and how that bore upon his understanding of the Law of God. His understanding was enlarged only as he took seriously the words that were spoken to him.

HOW PETER RESPONDED

“ 8 But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.”

Again, Peter’s report is most precise. In the record of the actual event, Luke reports, “But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean” (Acts 10:14).

Peter's entire life had been ordered by his understanding of the word of the Lord. He had never allowed himself the luxury of ignoring the word of the Lord in order to gratify fleshly preferences. Again, I want to emphasize how unusual such a posture of life is in our time – even among professing believers in Christ! I do not know that it can be substantiated that a person will receive increased understanding if he has not lived up to what he already knows.

This is stated doctrinally in Galatians 6:15-16: “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature . And as many as walk according to this rule , peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.” The Amplified Bible reads, “Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule [who discipline themselves and regulate their lives by this principle], even upon the [true] Israel of God!” Walking according to the rule of new creatureship is the same as putting on the new man (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). It is the same as “not” living unto ourselves, but “unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). This is what is involved in reckoning ourselves to be “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).

You may recall that Jesus was completely intolerant of those who lived contrary to what they professed. He solemnly warned His disciples of those who “say and do not” (Matt 23:3). Even under the Law, God upbraided those whose lives contradicted what they said with their lips (Isa 29:13-14), and Jesus confirmed that condition was condemned when He was on the earth (Matt 15:8-9). Paul also taught that those who maintained a form of godliness, while rejecting the power of it, were not to be rejected by the people of God (2 Tim 3:5). The sudden influx of counselors and psychiatric specialists within the professing church as not changed this situation, even though they speak as though this is not the case.

My point in mentioning this is that, in Peter, we are being exposed to a man who lived within the parameters of his conviction and persuasion. That is the kind of man that will be given further light. Such fits within the parameters mentioned in Psalm 25:14: “The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him; and He will show them His covenant” (Psa 25:14). It is nothing more than an exercise in vanity for one lacking this quality to seek for understanding.

PETER REPORTS HIS RESPONSE TO THE WORDS FROM HEAVEN

“ 9 But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.”

Peter continues his detailed report of the epochal event, starting at the beginning and proceeding in an orderly manner to the conclusion.

HEAVENLY PERSISTENCE

“But the voice answered me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.”

Again, Peter is precise in his report. The historical record states that the heavenly voice said, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (Acts 10:15). Peter is told not to even SAY something is “common,” or polluted, that God has “cleansed,” or purified – whether he was convinced that what he said was right or not! Let it be clear that it is wrong to say anything that contradicts what God has said or done!

Here we are exposed to a certain heavenly manner. When men say something that contradicts the mind and word of the Lord, heaven is neither neutral nor tolerant. Men may be content when there is a variance between how men think and what God says, but this is not the case in heaven. One of the basic postulates in the salvation of God is that of a fundamental agreement between the saved and the Savior. Given due heed, salvation will lead men into this unanimity just as surely as is seen in the

case of Peter.

“What God hath cleansed” is not the statement of a hypothetical case. This is a revelation of something that has already occurred. The word translated “hath cleansed” speaks of an action that has already occurred, the effects of which are ongoing. In other words, the animals that Peter viewed were once “unclean,” but a Divine judgment had made that distinction obsolete. Their former uncleanness was only tentative in order to assist men to understand some higher principles – particularly regarding distinctions among men.

The same is true of the preaching of the Gospel, itself. The results that the Gospel are calculated to produce cannot be brought about by any other message of emphasis. A person cannot be begotten of God through a spurious message, for God does accomplish His work through lies. Neither, indeed, can a person be brought to spiritual maturity by means of another message.

The precise time when “all meats” were “purged,” or cleansed, is revealed to have been during Christ’s ministry. When speaking of what really polluted men, Jesus declared, “Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated? (Thus He declared all foods clean)” NASB (Mark 7:18-19).

No further explanation is provided. It was Peter’s responsibility to ponder what had been said, seeking to understand it – and that is precisely what he did.

THE END OF THE MATTER

“ 10 And this was done three times: and all were drawn up again into heaven.”

Three consecutive times Peter was commanded to “Rise, kill and eat,” and three times he responded, “Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth.” Again, this precisely accords with the historical record in the tenth chapter of Acts: “This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven” (Acts 10:16).

We must not assume that Peter was only reliant upon his memory in giving this report. His heart was right, and thus he was directed into the giving of a flawless report of what had taken place.

Also, we ought to note that valid observations can only be made when an accurate and faithful report is given. Those to whom Peter is bearing witness will draw a conclusion from what he reports. That conclusion will only be as valid as the report is accurate.

The same is true of the preaching of the Gospel, itself. The results that the Gospel are calculated to produce cannot be brought about by any other message of emphasis. A person cannot be begotten of God through a spurious message, for God does accomplish His work through lies. Neither, indeed, can a person be brought to spiritual maturity by means of another message. This can only be accomplished “according to” the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as affirmed in Rom 16:25. Within the professed Christian community there are a staggering number of attempts being made to convert people and to bring them to maturity that ignore the Divine means that have been appointed by the Lord Himself. All such efforts are labors that are in vain.

PETER REPORTS THE CONFRONTATION OF THE MESSENGERS FROM CORNELIUS

“ 11 And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. 12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house . . .”

I want to draw your attention to the total lack of any form of distortion in Peter's report. There is no exaggeration, no critical omission, and no carnal embellishment. One of the besetting sins of many religious leaders is their tendency to overstate things in their reports, or make things appear to be more remarkable than they really were. This is the result of the lingering effects of pride, against which all believers must exert themselves. Under the New Covenant pride is addressed more directly, revealing something of its nature.

One of the besetting sins of many religious leaders is their tendency to overstate things in their reports, or make things appear to be more remarkable than they really were. This is the result of the lingering effects of pride, against which all believers must exert themselves.

THINKING TOO HIGHLY OF ONESELF. "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think ; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith" (Rom 12:3).

- **MINDING HIGH THINGS.** "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things , but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits" (Rom 12:16).

- **BEING PUFFED UP.** "And ye are puffed up , and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Cor 5:2).

- **IMPROPER GLORYING.** "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?" (1 Cor 5:6).

- **OVERESTIMATING ONE'S STRENGTH.** "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor 10:12).

- **COMMENDING ONESELF.** "For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth" (2 Cor 10:18).

- **HAVING A LOFTY VIEW OF ONESELF.** "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Gal 6:3).

- **A QUEST FOR VAINGLORY.** "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory ; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Phil 2:3).

- **LIFTED UP FOR A FALL.** "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim 3:6).

- **NOT CONSENTING TO WHOLESOME WORDS, BUT TEACHING OTHER THINGS.** "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud , knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings" (1 Tim 6:5-4).

- **BEING HIGHMINDED.** "Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (1 Tim 6:17).

- **LOVING SELF AND BEING BOASTFUL.** "For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud , blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Tim 3:2).

- **NOT BEING CLOTHED WITH HUMILITY.** "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet 5:5).

I mention these traits because of their glaring absence from Peter's report. Although he is reporting an epoch – something that had never been reported before – yet he makes no effort to overstate the

case. He does not attempt to impress the people with his own accomplishment, but yields himself to the Lord – even in the reporting of things in which he has been involved.

LED BY THE SPIRIT

“And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Caesarea unto me. 12 And the Spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting . . .”

They Were Already There

Peter reports that three men had already come to the door – “immediately.” The historical account states that “while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made inquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there” (Acts 10:17-18). There is no contradiction in the account, for the historical record states they had already arrived, and had even inquired concerning his presence there.

I do not doubt that a Jewish mind, cultured in the Scriptures, and acquainted with the working of the Lord, immediately associated this report with Divine coordination. The accounts of Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, and others would have shaped the way they thought about such things. On the other hand, those who are not acquainted with Scripture are unable to correctly assess the report of Divine workings. They tend to think more of human initiative, coincidence, and happenstance.

Those who are acquainted with the Lord know that the Spirit stands behind, and is involved in, what He directs men to do. The fact that He told Peter to go with the men suggests that. Furthermore, the fact that the Spirit told him not to doubt makes the conclusion unavoidable that the Spirit had, in fact, directed the men to come to Peter.

The Spirit Bade Me

The record in the tenth chapter of Acts reads, “. . . the Spirit said unto him . . . go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them” (10:19-20). Those who are acquainted with the Lord know that the Spirit stands behind, and is involved in, what He directs men to do. The fact that He told Peter to go with the men suggests that. Furthermore, the fact that the Spirit told him not to doubt makes the conclusion unavoidable that the Spirit had, in fact, directed the men to come to Peter. It was not uncomfortable for Peter to speak in this manner, nor was it offensive to those who heard him speak. This would not be the case in some circles in which I have traveled.

HE DID WHAT HE WAS TOLD TO DO

“Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house . . .”

At this point, Peter does not recount what the men said to him when he confronted them. They had reported the character of Cornelius, the vision that he had received, and the commission they had been given. The fact that the Spirit had told Peter to go with the men “nothing doubting” made the appropriateness of his response clear. Further, the essentials concerning Cornelius will be covered by the report of his words to Peter.

The historical account does not specify the number of men that went with Peter. This is the first time that number is made known. Acts 10:23 states that “certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.” In the record of what took place at the house of Cornelius, they are referred to as “they of the circumcision which believed . . . as many as came with Peter” (10:45). These six men were apparently with Peter, and are substantiating witnesses to what Peter now testifies.

To this point, Peter's words confirm the seriousness of giving accurate testimony. Any testimony

that purports to have to do with the working of the Lord, or the experience of His great salvation, is to be delivered with absolute truthfulness. It is to contain no hidden agenda, or in any way misrepresent what took place.

PETER REPORTS HIS ARRIVAL AT CORNELIUS HOUSE

“ 13 And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter; 14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.”

It will become apparent that in his report Peter endeavors to show the involvement of God in this whole incident. The fact of the matter is that it is more important to know what the Lord has done than what has happened to men. When men make human experience the paramount matter, they have drifted away from the moorings of faith.

To this point, Peter has accented heaven's involvement.

- He saw a certain vision of a sheet “let down from heaven” (11:5; 10:11).
- He heard “a voice from heaven” commanding him to “Arise, kill, and eat” (11:7; 10:13).
- When Peter responded, “the voice” answered him again “from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (11:9; 10:15).
- Upon the arrival of the men from Cornelius' house, Peter reports that “the Spirit” told him to “go with them, nothing doubting” (11:12; 10:19-20).

To this point, these are the fundamental things that Peter has reported. All of his involvement, whether in word and deed, were driven by these realities. In fact, what Peter is really doing is rehearsing “the righteous acts of the Lord” (Judges 5:11). He is reporting what the Lord has done.

This is the same thing that took place on the day of Pentecost. The people heard the Spirit-filled disciples speaking “the wonderful works of God” (2:11). Peter also spoke in this manner as he addressed the people, declaring what the Lord had done.

- He reported Jesus as “a Man approved by God among you” (2:22).
- He spoke of “the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” that drove the death of Christ (2:23).
- He declared that God “raised up” Jesus from the dead, loosing the hold of death upon Him (2:24).
- He referred to the oath that God swore to David, affirming that He would “raise up Christ to sit on his throne” (2:30).
- He affirmed again that God “raised up” Jesus (2:32).
- He declared that Jesus had “received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (2:33).
- He announced that, in the capacity of the exalted One, Jesus had “shed forth” the Holy Spirit which the people then saw and heard (2:33).
- He proclaimed that God had made “that same Jesus whom, ye crucified, both Lord and Christ” (2:36).

Proper glory is brought to God when His doing is perceived as fundamental in the matter. This is even true when His chastening hand is being seen. Ezra recognized the hand of the Lord in the great

woes that had come upon Israel. “And after all that is come upon us for our evil deeds, and for our great trespass, seeing that thou our God hast punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and hast given us such deliverance as this” (Ezra 9:13).

I have taken the time to say these things because it is possible for a testimony to become an end of itself – simply to relate what has happened to the individual. Valid testimony, however, involves making known what “the Lord hath done” (Psa 126:2-3). Isaiah also declared that this principle that is woven throughout the record of Divine dealings: “That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the LORD hath done this , and the Holy One of Israel hath created it” (Isa 41:20).

HE SHOWED US

“And he showed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter . . .”

Immediately, Peter draws attention to the angel who was sent to the house of Cornelius. Devout Jews knew that angels do not roam about, going here and there at will. When they appear on earth, it is because they have been sent on a mission by God Himself. There are numerous records of angels being “sent” by the Lord (Gen 19:13; Num 20:16; 2 Chron 21:15; 32:21; Dan 3:28; 6:22; 10:11; Zech 1:10). They are described as God’s “ministers” (Psa 104:4), sent forth to “do His commandments” (Psa 103:20). Informed souls know that the presence of an angel indicates that God Himself is at work. Whatever the angel says or does is a revelation of the righteous decrees and acts of God.

Although the historical record includes the words of the angel concerning heaven’s recognition of Cornelius’ “prayers and alms,” Peter makes no reference to them here (Acts 10:4). The fact that God had sent an angel to speak to Cornelius confirmed that he was within the circumference of Divine favor. Nothing more needed to be said about that favor.

WORDS WHEREBY THEY WOULD BE SAVED

“ 14 Who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.” Other versions read, “words by which you and all your household will be saved,” NKJV “a message through which . . . will be saved,” NIV “words . . . through which . . . may get salvation,” BBE “message for you which will enable you and your whole household to be saved,” CSB “discourses, by which thou wilt live,” MRD “I you how you and everyone in your household can be saved,” NLT “sayings by which thou shalt be saved,” YLT “sayings by which thou shalt be saved,” WEYMOUTH and “He will give and explain to you a message by means of which you and all your household [as well] will be saved [from eternal death.” AMPLIFIED

This is evidently the more full, or complete, revelation of what the angel had said to Cornelius.

- In the historical record, Luke reported that the angel said concerning Peter, “he will tell thee what thou oughtest to do ” (Acts 10:6). **This emphasizes the purpose of the words – to direct Cornelius.**
- The men reported to Peter that the angel had told Cornelius to “send for thee into his house, to hear words of thee ” (Acts 10:22). **This accents the necessity of hearing a specific message, as compared to the mere conveyance of a plan or procedure.**
- When Peter arrived at his house, Cornelius told him the angel had said concerning Peter, “who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee ” (Acts 10:32). **This places the stress on the necessity of a person being confronted with a messenger that has been sent by God – for “how shall they preach except they be sent?” (Rom 10:15).**

• Later, at the Jerusalem conference concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles, Peter reported this incident in these words: “God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe ” (Acts 15:7). **This emphasizes the contents of the message, and the fundamental response of those hearing it.**

When a strictly academic approach is taken to Scripture, reports such as those given concerning this event can be confusing. If a person is looking for some kind of pattern, or procedural outline, either frustration will be experienced, or a distorted emphasis will be adopted. The truth of the matter is that more is being accomplished in the saving of men than is ordinarily perceived. When men make it their primary aim to “win souls,” “lead people to Christ,” or bring people to “accept Christ,” they stand in danger of adopting a method rather than delivering a message. There is a vast difference between seeking to garner results and being a faithful steward of the Gospel of Christ. In the record before us, the emphasis is placed upon what is said, not why it is said.

If it is true that the “words” delivered by Peter were intended to be ones by which Cornelius and those with him “shall be saved,” ought not the stress to be placed on the words themselves? If “the power of God unto salvation” is found in the message, precisely what kind of allowance is given to men to shape that message, structure it so that it is well pleasing, or present it in a way that is calculated to produce results?

The message itself is designed to produce results. It does not require the wisdom and strategies of men to do so! The power of God is in the Gospel – the record God has given of His Son. How could any man hope to add something to it to make it effective?

The message itself is designed to produce results. It does not require the wisdom and strategies of men to do so! The power of God is in the Gospel – the record God has given of His Son. How could any man hope to add something to it to make it effective?

In confirmation of this, let me remind you once again of what Peter actually declared to Cornelius and those assembled in his house.

- God is no respecter of persons (10:34).
- In every nation the one who fears God and works righteousness is accepted by Him (10:35).
- God sent the word of the Gospel to Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ (10:36a).
- Jesus Christ is Lord of all (10:36b).
- This word was published throughout all Judea, beginning at Galilee, after the baptism that John preached (10:37).
- God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power (10:38a).
- Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil (10:38b).
- Jesus was effective because God was with Him (10:38c).
- Peter and those with him were witnesses of what Jesus did in the land of the Jews and Jerusalem (10:39a).
- The Jews slew Jesus and hanged Him on a tree (10:39b).
- God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day (10:40a).
- God showed the risen Christ openly (10:40b).
- God did not show Jesus to all of the people, but only to witnesses that had been chosen beforehand (10:41a).

- The witnesses were those who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead (10:41b).
- Jesus commanded these witnesses to preach to the people (10:42a).
- Jesus commanded the witnesses to testify to the people that He had been ordained by God to judge the living and the dead (10:42b).
- All of the prophets witnessed that through Jesus' name, whoever believed in Him would receive remission of sins (10:43).

In his own words, Peter provides the reason why he was preaching the message. Jesus told him to preach to the people. Jesus told him to testify that He had been ordained to judge the living and the dead. That is why he was preaching. He knew that the Lord Jesus Himself accompanied the message. He knew that the Holy Spirit worked through that message, convincing men of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11). All of this is unquestionably confirmed by what happened while he was preaching.

UNGODLY DIVERSIONS

Since the professing church has fallen into the hands of opportunists, its entire thrust has been changed. The objective now is recruitment and the increase of numbers. Every effort is being made to justify this quest. The appeal is no longer the Gospel itself. Some of the tactics that are now employed are as follows.

- Special buildings that will appeal to the masses. These included everything from cathedrals and commodious auditoriums to gymnasiums and family centers.
- Special programs for special people groups. These include youth, senior citizens, singles, and married people.
- Special recovery groups for divorced people, those enslaved to chemical substances, pornography, and other sinful involvements.
- Special church staffs are developed to meet the needs of the people. These include counselors, family life ministers, youth ministers, children's ministers, etc.
- Special studies and courses are offered on the family life, managing finances, obtaining employment, world religions, etc.
- Special services are created to give the people what they prefer: contemporary worship services, traditional worship services, early worship service, brief gatherings, etc.
- Outreach efforts include making friends with those in the community, becoming involved in community projects, and being a general resource for various political involvements.

Someone might ask, "Is anything really wrong with these things?" That is not even a proper question! The issue is not if anything wrong can be found in them, but precisely what is it about them that fits into God's revealed priorities? Exactly what do they do that God's "power unto salvation" does not do? Precisely where is Jesus in such approaches, and what role does the Gospel have in them?

Why are such approaches not found in Scripture? Is it because they are areas in which God has made an allowance for the creativity and wisdom of men? Or, is it possible that they represent an understanding that is actually foreign to the Word of God?

It seems to me that when we read an account like the one before us with some degree of discretion, it is not possible to avoid making some comparison with modern religious trends.

PETER REPORTS THE HOLY SPIRIT FALLING ON THOSE WHO HEARD

“ 15 And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.”

This sheds great light on the manner in which the Word of God is to be delivered. Notice, there was no attempt to grab, so to speak, the attention of the hearers. Peter already had their attention! They had come together “to hear words” by which they would be saved. Thus he gave no elaborate introduction.

Peter now relates what happened as he was speaking. This will fully justify not only what he did, in going in to the Gentiles, but what he declared to them. This is the “fruit” by which the validity of his person, action, and words will be established – just as Jesus said when “His disciples came to Him” on “a mountain” (Matt 5:1). “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Mat 7:16-20).

Fruitless labors are never right, however men may seek to justify them! This is why Paul was “afraid” of the Galatians, standing in doubt of their legitimacy. They were not producing genuine fruit. “I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain” (Gal 4:11). And again, “for I stand in doubt of you” (Gal 4:20). Paul did not change his tactic toward the Galatians in order produce a more favorable result. Instead, he called them back to the message that he had originally proclaimed to them (Gal 1:8-12).

In my judgment this aspect of the kingdom of God has been greatly, if not altogether, obscured by the modern church.

WHEN I BEGAN TO SPEAK

“And as I began to speak . . .” Other versions read, “while I was talking,” BBE “I had hardly begun speaking,” CJB “when I there commenced speaking,” MRD “I had scarcely begun to speak,” NJB “in my beginning to speak,” YLT “so sooner had I begun to speak,” WEYMOUTH and “as soon as I began to speak.” MONTGOMERY

This sheds great light on the manner in which the Word of God is to be delivered. Notice, there was no attempt to grab, so to speak, the attention of the hearers. Peter already had their attention! They had come together “to hear words” by which they would be saved. Thus he gave no elaborate introduction. He did not give an extensive review of what had happened to him on the housetop. Whether men like to hear it or not, it is possible to deliver a message in such a way as to obscure the truth of God, throwing all manner of dust upon the subject and into the eyes of the hearers.

Peter obviously had much to say, but he was only able to begin saying it when heaven interrupted him, reacting to his message. He certainly must have been speaking “words . . . taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” NASB (1 Cor 2:13). There can be no question about the acceptability of Peter’s proclamation. The message he delivered was one conducive to the believing of the Word.

AS ON US AT THE BEGINNING

“ . . . the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning.” Other versions read, “the Holy Spirit fell upon them, as upon us at the beginning,” NKJV “the Holy Spirit fell upon them, just as He did

upon us at the beginning,” NASB “the Holy Spirit came on them as he had come on us at the beginning,” NIV “the Holy Spirit came on them, as on us at first,” BBE “the Holy Spirit came down on them, just as on us at the beginning,” CSB “the Holy Spirit came to these people. This was the same thing that happened to us in the beginning,” GWN and “the Holy Spirit fell on them, just as he fell on us at the beginning!” LIVING

This is also what the historical record declared: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). Those who were with Peter were astonished “because that on the Gentiles was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 10:45). It was then that Peter observed they had “received the Holy Ghost as well as we ” (Acts 10:47).

Therefore, what took place at the house of Cornelius was precisely the same thing that took place on the day of Pentecost to the disciples – “as on us at the beginning.” The experience of the disciples, therefore, was not an exclusive or unique one, else this observation could not have been made. Neither does Peter make any distinction between the manner in which the apostles received the Spirit, and that exhibited at the house of Cornelius. In fact, he makes a point of the similarity, not any disparity.

THEN I REMEMBERED

“ 16 Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.”

In order to remove all doubt concerning what was taking place, Peter correlates it with Christ’s own word concerning being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Those words were spoken after Jesus rose from the dead, and immediately prior to His ascension into heaven. They are found in Acts 1:5: “And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5).

For purposes of clarification, the following expressions are not found in any version of Scripture: “baptism of the Holy Ghost,” “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” and “baptism of the Spirit.” Nor, indeed, is the phrase, “baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of . . . ” expressed in Scripture. No standard version of Scripture speaks of being baptized “in water” or “in the Spirit.” Baptism is always said to be “with water” or “with the Holy Spirit”

John the Baptist also referred to this outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and he declared it to “the people,” who were considering in their hearts whether or not John was the Christ. To these people John said, “I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Luke 3:16; Matt 3:11). Mark omits the words “and with fire” : “I indeed have baptized you with water: but he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (Mark 1:8). John says of Jesus, “And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost” (John 1:33). Another version reads, “And I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, ‘He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the one who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.’” NASB

However, Peter does not recall the words of John the Baptist, but of the Lord Jesus, for whom John prepared the way. The point here is that John did not say this was an experience unique to a certain believers, nor is there any indication that Jesus intended to leave that impression. Now, Peter positively affirms that is not the case, for same gift was poured out upon Gentile believers.

This is doubtless the experience to which Peter referred on the day of Pentecost: “Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost,

he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear” (Acts 2:33).

The difficulty with this text comes when men assign a unique meaning to being “baptized with the Holy Spirit.” For purposes of clarification, the following expressions are not found in any version of Scripture: “baptism of the Holy Ghost,” “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” and “baptism of the Spirit.” Nor, indeed, is the phrase, “baptism of the Holy Ghost with the evidence of . . .” expressed in Scripture.

No standard version of Scripture speaks of being baptized “in water” or “in the Spirit.” Baptism is always said to be “with water” or “with the Holy Spirit” (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 1:5; 11:16).

With their theological jargon, unlearned men have thrown the blanket of obscurity over this text. They then use their own terminology to promote an experience they represent as being a second work of grace in which the individual is made more competent. We will see now if this reasoning will hold up under the assessment of Peter.

Will he speak about the experience of the hearers in Cornelius’ house as it is commonly spoken of in certain circles today? Or will he speak in a manner that is in perfect harmony with the ways of the Lord?

PETER REPORTS HIS RESPONSE

“ 17 Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?”

He did not fasten on what men did, but on what was done by the exalted Christ! This would allow for a proper and Christ-honoring conclusion to be reached by those hearing Peter’s explanation.

Note that in his explanation, Peter makes no reference to the recipients speaking in other languages and magnifying God. This was obviously not the primary thing on which he focused. That is, however, something that flesh would tend to do. He did not fasten on what men did, but on what was done by the exalted Christ! This would allow for a proper and Christ-honoring conclusion to be reached by those hearing Peter’s explanation.

THE LIKE GIFT

“Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us . . .” Other versions read, “the same gift as He gave us,” NKJV “the same grace, as to us also,” DOUAY “equally gave the gift to the Gentiles . . . as he did to us,” MRD “the identical gift he gave to us,” NJB “the equal gift God did give to them as also to us,” YLT and “gave them exactly the same gift as he gave to us.” PHILLIPS

The Greek word translated “like” is **i;shn** (ee-sos), and has the following lexical meaning: “of number, dimension, quantity equal, same,” FRIBERG “pertaining to that which is equal, either in number, size, quality, or characteristics - 'equal, equivalent, same,” LOUW-NIDA “equal portion,” LEH and “the same.” GINGRICH This word is also used in the following texts, which provide a perspective of its meaning. I have highlighted the English word used in the translation of **i;shn** .

- “Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day” (Mat 20:12).
- “For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together” (Mark 14:56).
- “And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for

sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again” (Luke 6:34).

- “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God” (John 5:18).

- “Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (Phil 2:6).

- “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1).

- “And the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal ” (Rev 21:16).

I come from a theological background in which considerable effort was expended to distinguish the manner and quantity of the Holy Spirit that was received by the apostles. Rather elaborate arguments were developed to diffuse any notion that all believers in any way received the Holy Spirit in the way realized by the apostles. In this text, however, we have one of the apostles – even the chief among the twelve – commenting on this very subject. Consider these facts.

- There can be no question about the validity of his observation. God had illuminated Peter, and the Holy Spirit had sent him to the house of Cornelius.

- Peter had delivered a word concerning the Lord Jesus that was honored in heaven.

- The historical record states that when the Spirit fell upon those who heard the Word at Cornelius’ house, Peter observed they had “received the Holy Spirit just as we have” NKJV (Acts 10:47).

- Luke was inspired to record the incident, together with two separate reports of it – all of which are perfectly consistent (Acts 10:47; 11:17; 15:8).

Rather than referring to any distinction between the manner or quantity of the Spirit given to the apostles and those gathered at Cornelius’ house, Peter cites their sameness. This, of course, is the very thing that caused those who were with him to be “astonished.” Peter does the same thing when referring to the faith that is obtained by all of the people of God, stating that it is “a faith of the same kind as ours,” or “a faith of equal standing as ours” NRSV (2 Pet 1:1). One has to wonder what kind of reasoning moves people to draw conclusions concerning the gift of the Holy Spirit that clashes with the revealed statements of Peter, who had the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt 16:19).

BELIEVED ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ . . . ” Other versions read, “when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ,” NKJV “after believing in the Lord Jesus Christ,” NASB “ had come to put our trust in the Lord Yeshua the Messiah,” CJB “when we came to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,” NAB “when we first believed on the Lord Jesus Christ,” WEYMOUTH and “when we believed in (adhered to, trusted in, and relied on) the Lord Jesus Christ.” AMPLIFIED

Here again, Peter speaks of the gift of the Holy Spirit in a manner quite different from many of our day. First, he has pointedly identified the gift of the Holy Spirit with the words of Jesus concerning being baptized with the Holy Spirit. Second, he has associated what was experienced by those of Cornelius’ house with the experience of the disciples “at the beginning.” Now, he identifies it with a condition found within the people who received the Holy Spirit: “who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.”

I understand that Peter told those on the day of Pentecost that they would “receive the gift of the

Holy Spirit” after they had repented and been baptized (Acts 2:38). Paul also taught that the Holy Spirit is given to us “because ye are sons” (Gal 4:6). Here, however, Peter goes down to the root of the matter – the great enabling factor – believing on the Lord Jesus Christ!

This is precisely the observation made by John concerning Jesus’ promise of the rivers of living water flowing out from the belly of the one who believed on Him. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified” NKJV (John 7:37-39). Paul also made this association in delineating the matter of the Ephesian brethren receiving the Holy Spirit. “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory” (Eph 1:14). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul also associated receiving the Holy Spirit with faith: “That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14).

In its entirety, and in all of its various aspects, the salvation of God is always “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). This does not exclude obedience, but is rather the foundation of all obedience, which is appropriately called “the obedience that comes from faith” NIV (Rom 1:5). It is most unfortunate that men have so confused the matter of salvation that they haggle about the gift of the Holy Spirit.

I want to again draw your attention to the manner in which reference is made to the Holy Spirit coming on those gathered with Cornelius.

- The Spirit “fell on all them which heard the Word” (10:44).
- On the Gentiles was “poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (10:45).

Here is an honest man – a person with spiritual integrity. God had acted in stark contradiction of the way Peter formerly viewed things, and he did not have to spend a lot of time thinking about it.

They “received the Holy Spirit just as” Peter and the disciples did (10:47).

- The Holy Spirit “fell” on them, as on the disciples at “the beginning” (11:15).
- Peter was moved to recall “the word of the Lord,” that they would be “baptized with the Holy Spirit” NKJV (11:16).
- God “gave them the same gift” as He did the disciples when they “believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (11:17).
- God “acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to” the disciples (15:8).

I do not know how the Spirit could have added more clarity to this event. It is as though He extended Himself to relate the giving of the Holy Spirit to the promise of Jesus, the hearing of the Word, the “gift of the Holy Spirit,” and believing on the name of Jesus. How tragic it is that it is possible for anyone to adopt a view that makes it difficult to receive these revelations. Yet, I am among those who struggled for many years with being able to simply receive and repeat what God had said on this subject. I am thankful for being freed from such inhibiting views. I also entertain a certain disdain for a theology that binds living men hand and foot, like Lazarus was when he exited from the tomb (John 11:44).

HE WOULD NOT WITHSTAND GOD

“ . . . what was I, that I could withstand God?” Other versions read, “who was I that I could stand in God’s way?” NASB “who was I to think that I could oppose God?” NIV “who was I that I could hinder God?” RSV “who was I to go against God?” BBE “who indeed was I to be able to forbid God?” DARBY “So who was I to interfere with God?” GWN “who was I to argue?” LIVING “So, could I stop God?” IE “who was I to be able to thwart God?” WEYMOUTH “who was I to try to stop God?” ISV “who was I and what power or authority had I to interfere or hinder or forbid or withstand God?” AMPLIFIED and “who was I to think that I could hinder the working of God?” PHILLIPS

Here is an honest man – a person with spiritual integrity. God had acted in stark contradiction of the way Peter formerly viewed things, and he did not have to spend a lot of time thinking about it. I suppose he could have stepped

Now, we will see how those who contended with Peter will respond to his report – a factual and straightforward recounting of what the Lord had done. Their conclusion will be startling to those who have confined themselves to the traditions of men, and are fundamentally ignorant of the word of the Lord.

forward and cited what was perceived to be the proper sequence of certain steps – but he did not. He might have suggested that this was quite different than what the disciples had experienced at the first – waiting for ten days to receive what these Gentiles received while he was still speaking – but he did not! He might have objected to such a rapid conferment of the Holy Spirit, while he and the disciples had spent over three years with Jesus before they received the blessing – but he did not!

Instead, Peter gives his assessment of the situation. He considered a failure to agree with what the Lord had done to be an attempt to “withstand” the God of heaven. Such a response on his part would have been nothing less than standing in the way, blocking the entrance into the kingdom like the scribes and Pharisees did (Matt 23:13). He saw resistance as nothing less than an effort to “oppose God,” NIV “hinder God,” RSV “go against God,” BBE “interfere with God,” GWN and try to “stop God.” IE

Thus, Peter has accounted for going in to the Gentiles and eating with them. He has made no effort to explain what HE did, but rather proclaimed what God did. He knows that whatever the Lord does is right, for “all of His works are done in truth” (Psa 33:4).

Just how can we characterize a person who objects to the way the Lord works? If, for example, the Lord cuts off some natural branches, and grafts some branches from a wild olive tree into their place (Rom 11:17), who is the person who will object? It is good to culture a spirit that enables one to receive what the Lord has obviously done, refusing to stand in way of His working. If God acts in a way that contradicts our theology, then we have no alternative but to abandon any and every view that competes against His righteous works.

Now, we will see how those who contended with Peter will respond to his report – a factual and straightforward recounting of what the Lord had done. Their conclusion will be startling to those who have confined themselves to the traditions of men, and are fundamentally ignorant of the word of the Lord.

THE REACTION OF THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS TO THE REPORT

“ 18 When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life. ”

The group with which Peter has shared these things is described as “they that were of the circumcision.” It is assumed that they were a part of the group who had heard the report of the Gentiles receiving the word of God – “the apostles and brethren that were in Judea” (11:1-2). These were

people who were in Christ Jesus. Will they be able to process what Peter has said, or will they call for a caucus to carefully examine his words?

WHEN THEY HEARD THESE THINGS

“When they heard these things...” Other versions read, “when they heard this,” NASB “when they heard these words,” MRD “this account,” NJB “when the group heard these things,” IE “this statement of Peter,” WEYMOUTH and “on hearing this.” MONTGOMERY

It appears there was not a long delay. Rather, a response was given immediately upon hearing Peter’s words – “when they heard.” This is the kind of response that is always produced when people receive the word of God.

THEY HELD THEIR PEACE

“ . . . they held their peace . . . ” Other versions read, “they became silent,” NKJV “they quieted down,” NASB “they had no further objections,” NKJV “they were silenced,” NRSV “they said nothing more,” BBE “they stopped objecting,” CJB “they fell silent,” ESV “they desisted,” MRD “This account satisfied them,” NJB “all their objections were answered,” LIVING “they stopped arguing,” IE “they had no answer to make,” WILLIAMS “they were quieted and made no further objection,” AMPLIFIED and “they had no further objection to raise.” PHILLIPS

Although there was some contention at the first, the rehearsing of the righteous acts of the Lord settled the matter. No further objections were raised, and Peter was not criticized any more. What was it that brought about such a change? When Stephen recounted the works of the Lord, the people soundly rejected him, and even stoned him to death (Acts 6-7). When Paul provided an extensive history of the works of the Lord, he was rejected by Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia, who chose to contradict and blaspheme what he had said (Acts 13:45-46). What made the difference in this case? Why were these Jews quieted by Peter’s report.

Among other things, it is because they knew the Lord – just as God had promised concerning all who enjoyed the New Covenant (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11). Upon hearing what the Lord had done, they were able to recognize His hand. Like Peter himself, they could not withstand God, and therefore yielded to His ways and wisdom. Although they had never before known God in the capacity of being no respecter of persons, Peter’s report of Him working in that manner was sufficient to convince them.

THEY GLORIFIED GOD

“ . . . and glorified God, saying...”

Other versions read, “praised God,” NIV “gave glory to God,” BBE “began to praise God,” CJB “extolled the goodness of God,” WEYMOUTH and “gave God the glory,” WILLIAMS

Interestingly, the words “praised” and “glorified” are not synonymous. In my judgment, certain translators did not do well in using the word “praised” in this text. There are at least two words used for “praise” in the New Covenant Scriptures. The first is **aivne,sewj** , which is primarily related with thanksgiving – a “thank offering” STRONG’S (Heb 13:15). The second is **e;painon** , which has to do with laudation, or extolling the virtues of God (1 Pet 4:11).

The word “glorified” is translated from a different word (**evdo,xasan**), which means “to extol, magnify . . . to cause the dignity and worth of some person to become manifest,” THAYER “enhancing the reputation of God. ” FRIBERG Here, the idea has more to do with speaking about God rather than speaking to Him. It is openly declaring what God has been seen to be doing. It is to

point out with insight what the Lord has done.

Now, this is precisely what these brethren will do. They will declare that they have seen the hand of the Lord in what Peter has testified. They will also be able to correlate that work with what is involved in being made alive unto God.

GRANTED REPENTANCE

“Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.” Other versions read, “repentance that leads to life,” NASB “a change of heart, so that they may have life,” BBE “resulting in life,” CSB “led people . . . to turn to him so that they can change the way they think and act and have eternal life,” GWN “granted life-giving repentance,” NAB “the privilege of turning to Him and receiving eternal life,” LIVING and “to change their hearts, and have life too.” IE

They observed that God had granted, or given, them repentance. With the single exception of this verse, the word repentance in any form is totally absent in the tenth and eleventh chapters of Acts.

These brethren did not conclude that Jesus had baptized the Gentiles with the Holy Spirit – although that is the word that Peter recalled. They did not draw attention to them speaking in tongues – although that is what they did. They observed that God had granted, or given, them repentance. With the single exception of this verse, the word repentance in any form is totally absent in the tenth and eleventh chapters of Acts. Yet, upon hearing Peter’s report, these brethren correlated what had happened with what Peter had announced in Jerusalem some time earlier: “Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31).

Although men are commanded to repent (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 8:22; 17:30; 26:20), yet it is still true that they must be “granted” to do so. The word “granted” is translated from the Greek word **e;dwken** which has the root meaning, “to give something, bestow . . . of one’s own accord to give something,” THAYER “appoint, assign,” FRIBERG “to give out,” LEH and “bring, grant, cause, produce,” GINGRICH In its varied forms, this word is used four hundred and fourteen times in Scripture. There is never any question about what it means. Particularly when referring to the Lord, it is translated with unwavering consistency.

- “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11).
- “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word” (Acts 4:29).
- “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus” (Rom 15:5).
- “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man” (Eph 3:16).
- “The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well” (2 Tim 1:18).
- “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne” (Rev 3:21).

Of all of the preaching and teaching acquaintances I have had over the last fifty-six years (2008), I can scarcely recall a single one that has expressed this view of what took place at the house of Cornelius – even though it is a revealed perspective! Among those acquaintances, this is not a way of speaking about God. This is owing to the pervasiveness of human opinion, and the undue exaltation of human wisdom and the institutions that it breeds.

However, here we have the observation of men with understanding – “spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). They hear what took place at the house of Cornelius and affirm that God had “granted them repentance unto life.”

Note, there is no record that Peter reported their baptism. At least Luke did not include such a report. His agenda was not to promote baptism, or to engage in a defense of it, for there had not yet been erroneous teaching on the subject. At the time of our text, there was no question concerning the necessity and ministry of baptism. There were doubts concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles and the propriety of being closely aligned with them. However, the faithful reporting of the works of God resolved the matter for the tender of heart.

CONCLUSION

When controversies among professing believers are perpetuated, it is because of a lack of familiarity with God Himself. Considering the nature of the New Covenant, it is not acceptable for this condition to remain for a long period of time. Divine activity, and the faithful report of it, will dispel many of these contentions, putting their perpetrators to silence. However, when theology is systematized, and positions become the treasure of the people rather than the Lord Himself, Divine working will not be found. Thus, when being confined to human opinion and the wisdom of men, division is actually cultured, and gaps between professing believers grow wider and wider. This is a transgression of such monumental proportions that is fearful to even consider it.

There is such a thing as “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). There is also the reality of “the unity of the faith” into which “we all” are to come (Eph 4:13). Where obvious progress is not being made in the matter of unity, a serious deficiency exists, and it must not be overlooked. Our text has proclaimed a unity between a host of people: Peter, the six brethren with him, Cornelius, his servants, one or more soldiers, his relatives, his friends, the apostles, and the brethren – some of whom were contentious at first.

Knowing this, precisely how would one go about justifying a lack of unity among those claiming identity with Jesus Christ? What form of reasoning can allow for the perpetual lack of harmony among those who wear Jesus’ name?

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #52

THE WORD OF GOD SPREADS

“ 11:19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only. 20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord. 22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch. 23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord 24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord. 25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 26 And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch. 27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. 28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. 29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: 30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” (Acts 11:19-30)

INTRODUCTION

Without any revealed plan or apostolic mandate, those who were scattered by the persecution that arose over Stephen continued to aggressively spread the Word of God. At the very first, this is what they did. As it is written, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). It is estimated that this took place approximately five years after the day of

Pentecost. Now, the events of our text took place around six years after that original scattering, or eleven years after the inauguration of the New Covenant.

The consistency and persistency of the early church stands in stark contrast to the static posture and vacillating nature of the modern church. Without any revealed strategies or known organized efforts, early disciples, though dispersed by antagonistic opposition, “went everywhere preaching the word.” They had something that is not at all common in the church of our time. They were driven from within –

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- **THE WORD CONTINUES TO BE PREACHED BY THOSE WHO WERE SCATTERED (11:19)**
- **SOME OF THEM PREACHED THE WORD TO THE GRECIANS IN ANTIOCH (11:20)**
- **THE HAND OF THE LORD WAS WITH THEM (11:21)**
- **THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM HEARD OF THE WORK (11:22)**
- **BARNABAS SAW THE GRACE OF GOD AND WAS GLAD (11:23)**
- **A GOOD MAN, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FAITH(11:24)**
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- **CONCLUSION**

even by the “newness of life” that is the habitat in which the person who is baptized into Christ walks (Rom 6:4). Also, they did not disperse among the peoples to meet their perceived worldly needs. Much of the modern missionary focus is totally missing in our text.

RECORDED ACTIVITIES

Thus far, there is no institutional thrust made known in the book of Acts. If one was to set out to examine the activities of the early church, what exactly would they find? And, how does it compare with the modern representation of the church? Here are some things that have been revealed to this point.

- They “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers ” (Acts 2:42).
- “All that believed were together, and had all things common” (Acts 2:44).
- They continued “daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house,” eating their food “with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:46).
- They reported threats and prayed about them (Acts 4:23-31).
- Those who believed “were of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32).
- No one among them lacked, and, when required, distribution was made to every person according to their need (4:34-35).
- When hypocrisy surfaced, it was dealt with immediately (Acts 5:1-10).

- In the Temple and in every house, they ceased not to “teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42).
- Scattered believers went everywhere “preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4).
- Upon hearing that the city of Samaria had heard the Word, Peter and John were sent to them in order that they might receive the Holy Spirit (8:14-15).
- The churches were “edified, and walking in the fear of the Lord and the comfort of the Holy Spirit were multiplied” (Acts 9:31).
- The apostles and brethren in Judea heard that the Gentiles had “received the word of God” (Acts 11:1).

When men attempt to duplicate the results recorded in this book, or to codify them so that they are robbed of their power, they are following the dictates of human wisdom. The result of such an approach is always downward, degenerative, and hence unprofitable.

Peter reported what took place at the house of Cornelius, and the church recognized the work of the Lord and gave Him glory.

- Now, in our text, the church in Jerusalem hears about the spread of the Word, and sends Barnabas to examine the work.

WHAT DO WE SEE?

Now, how does that kind of activity compare with the church work of our time? There is a two-fold thrust revealed that can scarcely be found in our time. First, there was a marked emphasis on declaring the Word of God. Second, the body of Christ was closely knit, and in a state of constant edification. They were motivated by a message, and urged to live in strict conformity with that message. Their allegiance to the body of Christ and soundness of doctrine is also evident.

The notation of the conduct and manners of the early disciples is essential to a good understanding. The reason for this is that in the record of their activities we are beholding two critical things. First, the nature and thrust of newness of life is being displayed. Second, the directing of the Holy Spirit is also perceived, which confirms Divine priorities. If these two things are not duly considered, men will become distracted to the recorded results without obtaining an understanding of why they were present. When men attempt to duplicate the results recorded in this book, or to codify them so that they are robbed of their power, they are following the dictates of human wisdom. The result of such an approach is always downward, degenerative, and hence unprofitable.

THE SCOPE OF THOSE EMPLOYED IN KINGDOM WORK

The scope of those who were employed in the work of the Lord is also worthy of note. Although the apostles were primary, they were not the solitary workers. Consider the laborers who have been mentioned by name through the verses covered in our text – people who were not apostles.

- Stephen (Acts 6:8-9).
- Non-apostles who were scattered abroad (Acts 8:1,4).
- Philip (Acts 8:5-6, 26-40).
- Ananias (Acts 9:10-17).
- Barnabas (Acts 9:27; 11:22,25-26).

In our text, the word of God spreads to other regions. Upon hearing this, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to examine the work. When he perceived the grace of God in the people, he exhorted them to purposefully cleave to the Lord.

- Men from Cyprus and Cyrene who preached in Antioch (Acts 11:20).
- Prophets from Jerusalem (Acts 11:27).
- Agabus (Acts 11:28).
- The elders of Jerusalem (Acts 11:30).

Following this text, there will be several other individuals mentioned – noted for their labors in the Lord, many of which were while they were with Paul.

•

Certain prophets in the church of Antioch: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen (Acts 13:1).

- The elders of Jerusalem (Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4; 21:18).
- James, the brother of the Lord (Acts 15:13; 21:18).
- The prophets Judas and Silas (Acts 15:27; 32).
- Silas with Paul (Acts 15:22,40; 16:19,25,29; 17:4,10).
- Timothy (Acts 16:1-3;
- Silas and Timothy (17:11,15; 18:5
- John Mark (Acts 15:39).
- Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).
- Aquilla and Priscilla (Acts 18:26).
- Timothy and Erastus (Acts 19:22).
- Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timotheus, Tychicus and Trophimus (Acts 20:4).
- The elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:17,28).
- Philip the evangelist (the same one mentioned in chapter 8 – Acts 21:8).
- The four daughters of who were prophetesses – Acts 21:8
- Agabus the prophet (Acts 21:10-11).
- Brethren from Puteoli who refreshed Paul for seven days (Acts 28:13-14).
- Brethren from Rome who came to meet Paul at Appii Forum to encourage him (Acts 28:15).

Throughout the book of Acts we are being subjected to the life of the body of Christ as well as the activities of the apostles Peter and Paul. The manner of the kingdom is being unveiled to us. In it there is not the slightest hint of institutionalism, or the establishment of a religious hierarchy, or the development of a national, state, or even city church.

AS THE WORD SPREADS

In our text, the word of God spreads to other regions. Upon hearing this, the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to examine the work. When he perceived the grace of God in the people, he exhorted them to purposefully cleave to the Lord. Following that, he searched for Saul, and upon finding him brought him to Antioch, where they remained for a whole year. It was here that the disciples were first called “Christians.” About this time, a prophet named Agabus prophesied of a coming pervasive famine. Upon hearing this, the disciples determined to send relief to the brethren in Judaea, which they did, sending it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

What a marvelous commentary on the effectiveness of the salvation that is “in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). Not only is the Word of God faithfully preached, there is also a favorable response to it. When a word is delivered that concerns the people of God, they immediately perceive the proper course of action and take it. These are all examples of how the word of God works effectively in those who believe. As it is written, “. . . the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). This is the record of the real church!

THE WORD CONTINUES TO BE PREACHED BY THOSE WHO WERE SCATTERED

“ 11:19 Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.”

It becomes very apparent in the book of Acts that the church is, in fact, “the body of Christ” – although the people of God are never referred to as Christ’s “body” in the book of Acts itself. In it, the collective saints are referred to as:

- “The church” (2:47; 8:1.3; 11:22; 13:1; 15:3,4; 18:22; 20:17,28).
- “The churches” (9:31; 15:41; 16:5).
- “Disciples” (6:2; 11:29; 15:10).
- “The brethren” (11:29; 15:1,3,22,23).
- “Them that believed” (4:32).

However, the nature of body-life is seen in the various things chronicled in this volume. Collectively, believers gave heed to the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, breaking bread together, praying together, and ministering to one another in meaningful ways. There was also a dissemination of the Word of God by various members of the body. Those members represented a kind of cross-cut of Christ’s body, as confirmed in the latter portion of the introduction to this lesson. Our text provides some more details on this aspect of the life of the early church.

THOSE WHO WERE SCATTERED ABROAD

“Now they which were scattered abroad . . .” Other versions read, “scattered after the persecution,” NKJV “scattered because of the persecution,” NASB “had been scattered by the persecution,” NIV “scattered abroad upon the tribulation,” ASV “who had gone away at the time of the trouble,” BBE “dispersed by,” DOUAY “dispersed, by the oppression,” MRD “who fled from Jerusalem,” LIVING “driven in various directions by,” WEYMOUTH “fugitives from the persecution,” WILLIAMS

The Greek words translated “scattered abroad” come from a single word: **diaspare,ntej** . The lexical meaning of the word is: “disperse, driven to different places,” THAYER and “to cause a group or gathering to disperse or scatter, with possible emphasis on the distributive nature of the scattering (that is to say, each going in a different direction).” LOUW-NIDA

The narrative of the text now returns, continuing from the eighth chapter (8:1-4). At that time “there was a great persecution against the church which is at Jerusalem,” resulting in the dispersion of nearly every one “except the apostles” (8:1). That is, according to appearance, circumstances drove most of the disciples out of Jerusalem. Those who imagine they can manage circumstances, or be taught how to control their environment must take special note of what is here described. There have been numerous records in Scripture that describe people being forced from their environment. Here are few of them.

The idea here is that there was a certain disdain for believers that pervaded the city of Jerusalem. There was apparently no end to which the people would not go to make it difficult

for those who were confessed disciples of Jesus.

COMPELLED BY THE LORD. Adam and Eve from Eden (Gen 3:24), the people who were building the tower of Babel and a city (Gen 11:8), and Lot from Sodom (Gen 19:16).

• **CONSTRAINED BY A DIRECT CALL FROM GOD.** Abraham from his homeland (Gen 12:1, Jacob from the land in which Laban lived (Gen 31:13), and Israel from Egypt (Ex 11:8).

• **COMPELLED BY CIRCUMSTANCES.** By famines (Abraham, Jacob's ten sons, Elimelech, Naomi, and their sons – Gen 12:10; 42:5; Ruth 1:1-2), and Claudia's expulsion of the Jews from Rome (Aquila and Priscilla – Acts 18:2).

It is good to be aware that there is an uncertainty that attends life in this world. Solomon well said, "Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth" (Prov 27:1). James also confirmed this to be the case: "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow" (James 4:14).

This circumstance is another reason why we, together with the ancients, confess that we are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11). In Christ, we are geared for heaven and eternity, so to speak, and thus at variance with the very nature of the world, which is passing away. "Newness of life" is contrary to the course of this world, and cannot fit handily into it. Add to that the aggressiveness of the children of darkness against the children of light, and you have the reason for believers being "scattered" as they were in Jerusalem.

The thing that we want to note in this passage is the manner in which the believers reacted to this dispersion.

THE PERSECUTION THAT ROSE ABOUT STEPHEN

" . . . upon the persecution that arose about Stephen . . ." Other versions read, "after the persecution," NKJV "because of the persecution," NASB "by the persecution," NIV "upon the tribulation," ASV "at the time of the trouble," BBE "as a result of the persecution," CSB "through the tribulation," DARBY "during the persecution," NLT "through the affliction." TNT

The Persecution

The idea put forth in this text is twofold: (1) That of believers fleeing from the persecution, and (2) That of the persecution driving, or forcing them out of Jerusalem. Life became intolerable for those wearing the name of Jesus. This suggests not only outright opposition, such as that launched against Stephen, but life becoming complicated by withholding social and economic privileges from the people – like being able to buy and sell.

The idea here is that there was a certain disdain for believers that pervaded the city of Jerusalem. There was apparently no end to which the people would not go to make it difficult for those who were confessed disciples of Jesus.

That Rose About Stephen

The persecution and death of Stephen was like a catalyst, igniting the hatred of the Jews for Christians. We know that this is what awakened the fierce hatred and aggression of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 8:1; 9:1-2). Hatred spreads like venom, and there is no known depths to which it cannot plummet. When a contempt for the truth and those who embrace and proclaim it is developed, hostility is born, and initiatives are launched against those who have embraced the truth. As Solomon well said, "hatred stirreth up strifes."

A Parallel in Spiritual Babylon

Although it often appears less hostile than the persecution to which our text refers, spiritual Babylon bears many similarities to the hostile Jews in Jerusalem. Anyone who insists that people must be born again, seek the things that are above, and grow up into Christ in all things, is immediately perceived as a threat. If they press the truth, engaging opponents of it in disputation as Stephen did, they will, face opposition. The pressure put upon such people is depicted in the parallelism of “the mark of the beast.” The Revelation tells us that the mark had to be received in one of two places – “in their right hand, or in their foreheads” (Rev 13:16). That is, the person had to consent to either work for the beast (right hand), or embrace his thoughts and agenda (forehead). Those who refused to subscribe to this arrangement could not “buy or sell.” For Stephen, that meant he could no longer minister in the synagogue. For many of our time, it has meant they could no longer preach in certain churches.

Like the persecution of Stephen, this Babylonish opposition to the truth has caused those who have received the love of the truth to appear strange. The individual who actually lives aggressively for God simply does not fit into the religious arrangements of the day. Such are, in a manner of speaking, driven out of the establishment.

True Believers Will Not Succumb

As our text confirms, true believers will not succumb to the pressure of unbelievers. Although they may be required to “flee,” they will not close their mouths or cease to declare what they have seen and heard. This is because of the compelling and satisfying nature of the truth itself. The truth has a sanctifying power about it (John 17:17). Not only does it produce an environment of clarity for those who receive it, it brings great satisfaction and enjoyment to the soul. What truth brings to the believer outweighs everything that is contrary to it. Now, the person does not testify or preach out of a sense of mere obligation, but because of “the spirit of faith,” which is produced by the truth itself. Now the believer confesses with David and Paul, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak ” (2 Cor 4:13; Psa 116:10). This is why persecuted believers “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4).

PREACHING TO JEWS ONLY

“ . . . traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.”

Phenice was a region, approximately 150-200 miles north of Jerusalem. It was a strip of coastline about one hundred and twenty miles long and twelve miles broad. Antioch was about one hundred and eighty miles north of the northern frontier of Phenice. and was the capital city of the Greek kingdom of Syria. McClintok Cyprus was an island in the Mediterranean Sea. It is currently about one hundred and forty miles long, and ranging from fifty to five miles in width. McClintok It was about one hundred miles off the coast of Phenice, fifty miles south of Asia, and about 185-200 north of Jerusalem. I give these approximate measurements to accent the aggressiveness of the dispersed believers. Considering the involvements of traveling by land and sea to these places, this is a most arresting account. Terrain maps indicate that the country was rugged, and occasionally even mountainous.

These brethren were not “preaching the word” simply because they were commanded to do so. There is no account of the apostles ever motivating early believers by, what men refer to as, the great commission. When Jesus spoke those words (Matt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16), He did not put them in the context of persecution. Neither, indeed, were they intended to be a law, like the Ten Commandments. This was rather the expression of how newness of life would react. It is reflected in the manner in which Luke refers to Christ’s words. “And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:46-47).

There is a sense in which the preaching of repentance and the remission of sins is in the same category as Christ suffering and rising from the dead the third day. It is a Divine appointment, and can be carried out only by those who have willingly embraced the word of the King.

This is what we are seeing in this text – people who are willingly carrying out the Word of the King, even though they have been forced out of Jerusalem by an aggressive persecution.

Preaching to Jews Only

Even though the Gospel had been taken to the Gentiles, these scattered believers preached the Word only to Jews. It might be thought that this was wholly inappropriate. After all, on the day of Pentecost Peter had declared that

To this very day there remain a significant number of Gentile believers who believe the Jews have been summarily rejected as a people, and that the church is, by Divine design, fundamentally Gentile.

the promise of the Holy Spirit was for those who are “afar off” as well as the Jews (Acts 2:39).

In addition to this, the city of Samaria had received both the Word of God and the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:14,17), and the Ethiopian eunuch had believed that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, and was baptized into Christ (Acts 8:36-38). Now, the household of Cornelius, together with his relatives and friends have also believed and received the Holy Spirit, being baptized into Christ (Acts 10:43-48).

Yet, in the early days of the church, there was little clarity concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles. In fact, this was a matter that required some special revelation, which was given to Paul. Here is how Paul referred to that remarkable revelation. “How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel : Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power” (Eph 3:3-7). Paul further expounded this reality in Ephesians 2:13-22.

It should not surprise us that it was difficult for the early Jews to perceive Jew and Gentile being joined together in one body. To this very day there remain a significant number of Gentile believers who believe the Jews have been summarily rejected as a people, and that the church is, by Divine design, fundamentally Gentile. Such poor souls have fallen into the same pattern of erroneous thinking as many of the early Jews. This manner of thinking is also seen in the rarity of any Gospel preaching being directed toward the Jews. While such preaching can be found, it is generally an exception to the rule.

The irony of the situation is that the mystery of Jew and Gentile being joined together has now been clarified through Paul, so that there ought to be no confusion on the matter.

SOME OF THEM PREACHED AMONG THE GRECIANS IN ANTIOCH

“ 20 And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.”

Acts 8:4 states that those who were scattered “went everywhere preaching the word.” Here is an example of one group of those people.

SOME OF THEM

And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene . . .” Cyprus was an Island North of Jerusalem, as I have already said. Cyrene was a region and city in Africa, which was nearly six hundred miles West of Jerusalem. Yet, these saints were together. Perhaps they were some of those who journeyed to Jerusalem for the day of Pentecost mentioned in the second chapter of Acts.

This very expression (“some of them”) confirms that the common activity of those who were scattered was preaching the word. Here the Holy Spirit places a magnifying glass over one part of them. It is interesting to observe that

When they were driven out of Jerusalem, therefore, they did not simply seek a place of safety in which they could settle down and enjoy peace. Their lives had been altered by Christ, and they were now living for a different reason.

“preaching” is not at all common in the modern church. In fact, it is even growing less and less common among the group referred to as “preachers.” The amount of actual time that they spend “preaching” is rather minimal. For some preachers, the time spent in preaching is less than one hour a week. The rest of the time is taken up with things other than proclaiming, declaring, and opening and alleging. However, in our text, “preaching” was the thing being done. In its various forms, “preaching” is mentioned thirty-six times in the book of Acts. It is referred to fifty-six times in the Epistles, which are addressed to the churches and individual believers.

- Paul was ready to preach the Gospel to the church in Rome (Rom 1:15).
- Paul said believers were established by the preaching of Jesus Christ (Rom 16:25).
- Preaching the cross is the power of God to those who believe (1 Cor 1:21).
- Paul preached in order to present every man perfect before Christ (Col 1:28).
- Timothy was exhorted to preach the Word with longsuffering and doctrine (2 Tim 4:2).
- God has manifested His Word in due times through preaching (Tit 1:3).
- Peter said the Gospel is purposely being preached to those who believe (1 Pet 1:25).

In this text, the preaching was apparently done to those who were not in Christ. However, preaching has never been confined to those who are alienated from God. Further, it has always been the propensity of those who embrace the Gospel to preach it, according to each one’s ability. A sad day has dawned upon the church when it loses its appetite for preaching, replacing it with a desire for singing and entertainment.

THEY SPAKE TO THE GRECIANS

“ . . . which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.” Other versions read, “the Hellenists,” NKJV “the Greeks,” NASB “THE Gentiles,” NLT “non-Jews,” IE “Hellenistic Jews,” ISV and “Greek-speaking Jews.” ALT

It was a long trip from Jerusalem to Antioch – approximately three hundred miles! McCLINTOK These scattered believers, however, made the trip and engaged in a holy activity – “preaching the Lord Jesus.” When they were driven out of Jerusalem, therefore, they did not simply seek a place of safety in which they could settle down and enjoy peace. Their lives had been altered by Christ, and they were now living for a different reason.

These spoke to “the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.” It is argued by some that those to whom these preached were not Jews, but were Gentiles. Those espousing this view state that their preaching thus differed from the preaching of the others who spoke “only to the Jews.” To me, this view is questionable, because the description of the activity of the entire group was that they preached “unto

the Jews only.” Now, our text affirms, “some of them ” made their way to Antioch and preached the Lord Jesus to “the Grecians.”

The Greek word from which “Grecians” is translated is **~Ellhnista,j** (hell-an-is-tas). The transliteration of the word (translation letter-by-letter instead of the translation of the word itself) is “hellenist), and it is so expressed in a number of versions (NKJV, RSV, CSB, ESV, YLT, LITV, MKJV, ISV). This word is used three times in the book of Acts (6:1; 9:29; 11:20). The first occasion is unquestionably a reference to Greek-speaking Jews, and there is no reason to question that this is its meaning in our text. The word “Gentiles” is the consistent word used to distinguish the Jewish people from the rest of the world. That is the ethnic designation of the non-Jewish humanity. The word Hellenist, or “Greek” is not an ethnic distinction, but one of speech, and is compared with those who spoke “the Jews’ language” (Neh 13:24), or “the Hebrew tongue” (Acts 21:40).

This circumstance must be seen with three facts in mind.

- That the text says the scattered believers preached “only to the Jews.”
- That the acceptance of the Gentiles as recipients of the Gospel began with the report of the conversion of the household of Cornelius.
- That well after the events of our text, a special caucus was called in Jerusalem to discuss the matter of Gentile acceptance (Acts 15:2,13).

In view of these considerations, I understand this text to be descriptive of a Gospel initiative primarily toward Greek-speaking Jews, although encompassing some of the Gentiles in Antioch.

The manner in which this preaching is described is also worthy of note: “preaching the Lord Jesus.” This blends perfectly with the manner in which preaching is described throughout the book of Acts.

- “Jesus Christ” was preached (3:20).
- They “preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (4:2).
- “Preaching the word” (8:4; 8:25; 11:20; 14:25).
- Men “preached Christ” (8:5; 9:20).
- Men “preached the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12).
- They “preached the Gospel” (8:25; 14:7,21).
- They preached “Jesus” (8:35).
- They preached “in the name of Jesus” (9:27).
- God is said to have sent the word to Israel “preaching peace by Jesus Christ” (10:36).
- Preaching “the Lord Jesus” (11:20).
- They “preached the word of God” (13:5; 15:35).
- Through Jesus “the forgiveness of sins” was preached (13:38).
- They “preached the word of the Lord” (15:36).
- They “preached Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18).
- They “preached the kingdom of God” (20:24; 28:31).

This is the kind of context within which the working of the Lord is being reported. There is no institutional emphasis, and there is no declared effort to swell the numbers of the church. Rather, there is a message being delivered that is associated with the power of God unto salvation. The

absence of this thrust in the church of our day is so obvious it is a wonder that any have missed it. Differing agendas have been adopted and are being perpetrated. All of this is not an innocent matter. Too much has been revealed to justify such action.

THE HAND OF THE LORD WAS WITH THEM

“ 21 And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.”

Even though those who were preaching were doing so “unto the Jews only,” the Lord still blessed their endeavors. Like Peter prior to being at the house of Cornelius, their understanding had not yet been perfected concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles. However they delivered a message with which the Lord of glory could work – and He did!

THE HAND OF THE LORD WAS WITH THEM

“And the hand of the Lord was with them . . .” Other versions read, “the power of the Lord,” BBE “the Lord helped them,” NJB “the Lord honored this effort,” LIVING “the presence of the Lord,” AMPLIFIED and “hand of the Master.” INTERLINEAR

The expression “hand of the Lord” is mentioned thirty-six times in Scripture. It is certainly worthy of our consideration.

Ponder the works that are attributed to “the hand of the Lord.”

- The destruction of the men of Ashdod (1 Sam 5:6).
- Turning the king’s heart (Prov 21:1).
- Causing those in Judah to have one heart (2 Chron 30:12).
- The dispensing of both good and evil, or calamity (Job 2:10).
- Fulfilling prophesy (1 Kgs 8:15).
- Upholding the righteous (Psa 37:24).
- The success of John the Baptist (Lk 1:66).

What God accomplishes among the sons of men is very real. It is not ethereal, or lacking material substance. His works are not mere visions or likenesses, or some form of a mere idea.

“The hand of the Lord” is a literary anthropomorphism: i.e., “an interpretation of what is not human or personal in terms of human or personal characteristics.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER In this case, it is ascribing human attributes to God to assist in comprehending what He does. Thus we read of the following:

- The “eyes of the Lord” (Gen 6:8; 1 Pet 3:12).
- The “ears of the Lord” (Num 11:18; James 5:4).
- The “mouth of the Lord” (Deut 8:3; Isas 40:6).
- The “arm of the Lord” (Isa 51:9; John 12:38).
- The “finger of God” (Ex 8:19; Lk 11:20).
- The “face of the Lord” (Gen 19:13; 1 Pet 3:12).
- God’s “feet” (Ex 24:10; Psa 18:9).
- His “tongue” (Isa 30:27).

The use of such terminology is not intended to leave the impression that God has a body, for He is “a Spirit” (John 4:24). However, by speaking in such a condescending manner, the Lord frees men from the tendency to philosophize about the working of the Lord, or assigning mystical meanings to His “wonderful works.”

The Reality of Divine Working

It is entirely possible that the reason for countless numbers of professing Christians being unable to live above the world is that they have embraced a false god.

What God accomplishes among the sons of men is very real. It is not ethereal, or lacking material substance. His works are not mere visions or likenesses, or some form of a mere idea. When the Lord caused Joseph to prosper, it was observable, and was apparent to all who saw him. When He healed people, they became whole, and no longer bore the marks or traits of their former illness. If he healed lepers, they simply were no longer lepers in any sense. “The hand of the Lord” is an accommodation to the Person of God Himself, but it does not diminish what He does.

It is necessary to say these things because of the impression that is being left on society by the nominal church. Although it may not be fashionable to make mention of these things, something must be said about them, for they are shaping the manner in which men think about God Himself.

The change that is wrought in regeneration is not at all apparent in our society. There is actually little difference between the average church member and the person of the world. Professing Christians are often noted for being slothful, dishonest, ignorant of God, and attached to the world – all of which are addressed in regeneration. The fact of sin has been so blurred that men scarcely know how to define it. What is even more serious, a mental idol has been erected and paraded before the masses. It is a god who loves everyone the same, and does so regardless of who they are or what they do. He can tolerate sin, and is even sympathetic toward it. He does not require holiness, nor is he insistent that men separate from the world. He allows duplicity in the people, and is pledged to work with people who insist on dwelling at a distance from him. He does not require the commitment of professing believers to himself or to one another, and is with them wherever they go, even if it is a place He has condemned.

This is the kind of god against which we are warned. John wrote, “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen ” (1 John 5:20-21). Any and every God who can be known or enjoyed independently of the direct ministry of Jesus is not the true God. It is an idol that cannot save or sanctify in any sense.

It is entirely possible that the reason for countless numbers of professing Christians being unable to live above the world is that they have embraced a false god. This is not something to be used in the judgment of others. However, it is incumbent upon everyone professing to be a Christian to know whether or not they have embraced the true God – and that will be determined by identifying the results that He produces. Just as surely as it is imperative that every person come to God through Christ, it is also necessary for them to keep themselves from idols.

God Was Active In Their Work

When our text says “the hand of the Lord was with them,” it means that the Lord Himself was active in what they were doing. He was blessing their works and causing them to prosper, producing results by His power, while being active in their activities. One commentator describes this use of the word “hand” as meaning, “by the help or agency of anyone.” LIGHTFOOT Lexically, as used in this text, the word means, “figuratively, as the expression of the activity of a supernatural or human being

control, power ; (a) of God's agency as creator.” FRIBERG

There is a marked tendency in the Christian world to overstate the capability of men and understate the role of God in holy accomplishments. This is precisely the reason for the current emphasis on methods and techniques, routines, and procedures. The modern church is producing a battery of religious professionals that are expert in producing impressive, yet ineffective results. They can launch initiatives to garner a lot of new church members, but they are not able to keep them. They can bring people to profess, but are impotent to enable them to possess. However, in our text we are reading of genuine believers preaching the authentic Gospel, and yielding God-glorifying results. All of this is because God was “working with them,” as He did with the apostles who had remained in Jerusalem (Mk 16:20).

A GREAT NUMBER BELIEVED, AND TURNED TO THE LORD

“ . . . and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.” Other versions read, “a large number who believed turned to the Lord,” NASB “a great number had faith and were turned to the Lord,” BBE “believing, were converted to the Lord,” DOUAY “became believers,” LIVING “[learned] to believe (to adhere to and trust in and rely on the Lord) and turned and surrendered themselves to Him,” AMPLIFIED and “put their faith in Him.” CEV

One of the edifying things about the book of Acts is the different ways in which it describes those who were initially saved. Some of the translations appear to make a studied habit of failing to project this intentional variety. The literal rendering of the text emphasizes the word “turned.” The Greek word used here is **evpe,streyaen** , and there is no question about its technical meaning as used in this verse: “to turn to, to turn oneself,” THAYER “to turn around, (turn about),” FRIBERG “turn to,” UBS “to turn about.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

What It Means to Turn to the Lord

To turn to the Lord is to cease traveling on the broad road that leads to destruction. It involves an abrupt alteration of ones conduct. Thus we read of turning “to God from idols” (1 Thess 1:9). The commission delivered to Saul of Tarsus involved turning men “from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18). The promised conversion of Israel is described as them being turned “to the Lord” (2 Cor 3:16). This involves beholding the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 4:6). It means the person begins “looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2). The person who “turns to God” is occupied with the Lord. This means that they are no longer attracted to the world and the things that are in it. There is a prevailing interest in the things of God, and the Word of God, the Son of God, and the promises of God.

No person is truly “saved” who has not turned to the Lord. There is no such thing as a salvation that leaves the individual enamored of the world.

Holy Variety

Through this chapter, the inspired record of people being saved includes a variety of statements describing the experience.

- **RECEIVED THE WORD AND WERE BAPTIZED.** “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized . . .” (Acts 2:41a).
- **THE LORD ADDED UNTO THEM.** “ . . .and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.” (Acts 2:41b).
- **THE LORD ADDED TO THE CHURCH.** “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

• **HEARD THE WORD AND BELIEVED.** “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).

• **BELIEVERS WERE ADDED.** “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

• **THE NUMBER OF DISCIPLES WAS MULTIPLIED.** “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied . . .” (Acts 6:1). “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly” (Acts 6:7a).

• **OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH.** “. . .and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7b).

Salvation is a large work, and may therefore be viewed from many different perspectives – all of which are inherent in salvation itself. The person who can employ such language will, in that very employment, distance himself from sectarianism, which demands some form of stereotyping.

BELIEVED AND WERE BAPTIZED. “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

• **RECEIVED THE WORD OF GOD.** “Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God . . .” (Acts 8:14).

• **TURNED TO THE LORD.** “And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:35).

• **BELIEVED IN THE LORD.** “And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42).

• **RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT.** “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?” (Acts 10:47).

• **RECEIVED THE WORD OF GOD.** “And the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God” (Acts 11:1).

• **GOD GAVE THEM THE GIFT.** “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17).

• **GOD GRANTED REPENTANCE UNTO LIFE.** “When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

• **BELIEVED AND TURNED TO THE LORD.** “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

• **ADDED TO THE LORD.** “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord” (Acts 11:24).

Salvation Is A Large Work

Salvation is a large work, and may therefore be viewed from many different perspectives – all of which are inherent in salvation itself. The person who can employ such language will, in that very employment, distance himself from sectarianism, which demands some form of stereotyping. To stereotype something is to make it conform to a fixed pattern, making it hackneyed, and robbing it of its power.

I understand that those who are dominated by the natural mind can make no sense out of this. They prefer to have a step-by-step plan that will fully describe how a person may appropriate salvation.

Such a plan can be readily codified and printed, thus making for the preferred consistency. However, no such approach is made in Scripture to the directing of a soul in what to do to be saved.

We have a number of statements in the book of Acts that relate to what people were to do in order to appropriate the salvation of God. Although there are not many of these statements, no person can afford to treat the subject as though these texts did not exist.

• **CALLING ON THE NAME OF THE LORD.** “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21; Rom 10:13).

The Gospel is calculated to direct the one who believes it into a path that will include all of these responses – and this does not even include the conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment

REPENT AND BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS . “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

• **REPENT AND BE CONVERTED.** “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

• **CONFESSING JESUS IS THE SON OF GOD.** “And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him” (Acts 8:38; Rom 10:9-10).

• **BELIEVING AND RECEIVING REMISSION.** “To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

• **BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

We can add to this the words of the Lord Jesus Himself: “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). And again, “I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9). Paul adds that salvation requires the hearing of the Gospel, delivered by a preacher who has been sent by God (Rom 10:14-17).

Now, all of these statements are true, and none are to be altered or rejected. Each of them reflect some discernment as to where the hearer is, and what he is to be told. Most, if not all, of them presume that some kind of inquiry has been made into the matter of salvation.

I do not know what valid purpose is served by crystalizing a plan of salvation – particularly sense such a plan is nowhere articulated in Scripture. We know that there are not multiple ways to be saved, for the gate of entrance to the road that leads to life is a single one.

I am suspicious of the integrity of any person who finds it easy to omit any requirement that has been stated in Scripture. Think of the marvelous scope of human response that has been covered in the statements just cited:

- Calling on the name of the Lord, and being saved.
- Repenting unto life.

- Being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.
- Being converted in order to have ones sins blotted out.
- Believing and confessing that Jesus is the Son of God in order to be baptized.
- Entering the sheepfold by means of Christ.
- Hearing the Gospel from the mouth of a God-sent person.

The Gospel is calculated to direct the one who believes it into a path that will include all of these responses – and this does not even include the conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8-11).

In my judgment, the tendency to codify the means of appropriating the salvation of God is driven by what I call a Great Commission mentality. That is the presumption that the most significant work of the church is to see to it that souls are initially converted – even though there is not a church of Scriptural record that was ever told such a thing. To take such a position is like saying that the most important thing in building the Temple was to get the work underway. Who does not know that the essential thing was to build the Temple, and to finish the work.

So it is in Christ Jesus. The most vital work has to do with conforming us to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29), Christ being “formed” in us (Gal 4:19), and growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). If believers are not “changed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18), what difference does it make whether they entered the fold or started the race? If men are “called” by God “into the fellowship” of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:9), what may be said of those who give no evidence of having such a fellowship? Although men are prone to do this, God does not dismiss the requirement for growing up into Christ because a person has been busy winning souls. Further, the one who is actually being conformed to the image of Christ will be up and about spreading the word, and shining as a light in the world. Of course, that is precisely what we see happening in our text. Even though the people were persecuted and forced out of Jerusalem, they still went everywhere preaching the Word, and God worked with them.

See, in the book of Acts the people were caught up in the Divinely appointed objective of becoming like Jesus. That is why they went everywhere preaching the Word, and that is why those who heard that word always were properly directed, and always obeyed what they were commanded – and there are no exceptions.

It would bring personal delight to my soul to hear of a body of people who “turned to the Lord.” I would know at once they had “turned from” every competing interest, and would be eager to obey the Lord. However, I greatly fear that a gospel is being preached these days that is not even presenting the view of turning to the Lord, or calling upon His name, or being converted.

THE CHURCH IN JERUSALEM HEARD OF THE WORK

“ 22 Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.”

I want to emphasize that we are being exposed to the manner of life in the body of Christ. There is a constant communication of the works of the Lord within that body. When the Lord worked, it was faithfully reported.

TIDINGS REACHED JERUSALEM

Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “news of these things,” NKJV “news of this,” NIV “the report concerning them,” ASV “the news about Antioch,” GWN “the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened,” NLT “the

account was heard in the ears of the assembly,” YLT “the congregation which was at Jerusalem heard about these new believers,” LIVING “the rumors of this came to their ears of the church (assembly) in Jerusalem,” AMPLIFIED and “the word about them was heard in the ears of the assembly.” ALT

There was a level of communication among early believers that is scarcely known in our time. It is evident that a priority was placed upon what the Lord was doing, and that was faithfully reported. Already the church in Jerusalem had heard of the conversion of the Gentiles in Caesarea. Now, another report reaches the church concerning many turning to the Lord in Antioch.

The language suggests that these were not merely person-to-person reports, but ones that were given in the assembly: “unto the ears of the church,” or “in the ears of the assembly.” YLT This being true, it tells us something concerning the nature of the assembly in Jerusalem. Their focus was obviously on what the Lord was doing, and they were interested in His working in places far removed from themselves. When the text says the assembly heard “these things,” it means they heard of “a great number” believing and turning “to the Lord.” Further, they would know that this was the result of “the hand of the Lord” being with them.

The first report delivered to Jerusalem was that of the city of Samaria believing. It is written that this report was heard by “the apostles” (8:14). The second report that was heard concerned the Gentiles in Caesarea believing. That report was heard by “the apostles and brethren in Judaea” (11:1). The third report concerned a great number of people in Antioch, a chief city, who had believed and turned to the Lord. This time, the report comes to “the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem” (11:22).

In this text we perceive a certain growth that is taking place in the church in Jerusalem. At first, the decisions were made solely by the “apostles.” Then, the “elders” are brought into the decision-making process. Now, the whole church becomes involved, selecting a representative that is neither an elder nor an apostle.

Here is an example of a body of believers maturing, coming into singleness of mind, and increasing with the increase of God. The revealed objective for the church is thus seen as taking place in a particular assembly. The following text confirm that objective.

- “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10).

- “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:11-13).

- “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16).

- “. . . the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19).

For the most part, in our time, these are distant goals that are rarely seen. In our text they are realities. They are characteristics that are employed in walking in the works for which the saved are ordained (Eph 2:10).

Now, it is their response to this report that is of particular importance. It will confirm how those

early brethren thought, and where they placed their priorities.

THEY SENT FORTH BARNABAS

“ . . . and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.” Other versions read, “they sent out,” NKJV “they sent Barnabas off to Antioch,” NASB “they sent Barnabas to Antioch,” NIV and “Barnabas was sent.” GWN

This is the third time Barnabas is mentioned in the book of Acts (4:36; 9:27; 11:22). Every time, there was an initiative associated with his name. First, he had a piece of land and sold it, bringing the proceeds and laying them at the feet of the apostles (4:36-37). Second, he took newly converted Saul to the apostles and declared how Jesus had appeared and spoken to him, and how he had “preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (9:27). Now, the assembly in Jerusalem sends him far North to Antioch to examine the work reported to have taken place there – three hundred miles away! Although, considering the modes of transportation, this was a considerable distance, there is not the slightest hint of any inconvenience.

SOME FACTS ABOUT ANTIOCH

A city on the banks of the Orontes, 300 miles north of Jerusalem, and about 30 from the Mediterranean. This metropolis was situated where the chain of Lebanon, running northward, and the chain of Taurus, running eastward, are brought to an abrupt meeting. Here the Orontes breaks through the mountains; and Antioch was placed at a bend of the river, partly on an island, partly on the level which forms the left bank, and partly on the steep and craggy ascent of Mount Silpius, which rose abruptly on the south. It was in the province of Seleucis, called Tetrapolis, from containing the four cities Antioch, Seleucia, Apamea, and Laodicea; of which the first was named after Antiochus, the father of the founder; the second after himself; the third after his wife Apama; and the fourth in honor of his mother . . . In the time of Chrysostom the population was computed at 200,000, of whom one half, or even a greater proportion, were professors of Christianity (Chrysos. *Adv. Jud.* 1, 588; *Hom. in Ignat.* 2, 597; *In Matthew Hon.* 85, 7:810). Chrysostom also states that the Church at Antioch maintained 3000 poor, besides occasionally relieving many more (*In Matthew Hom.* 7, 658).

McCLINTOK STRONG’S

By saying “as far as Antioch,” the text means Barnabas was to cover the territory all the way up to Antioch, which was North of Phenice. It is not clear whether he went to Cyrene and Cyprus – although the suggestion is that he did not. The fact that he remained in Antioch for some time suggests that it was the specific place to which Barnabas was sent.

Barnabas had distinguished himself in the faith, and it was duly noted by the assembly. Earlier, the apostles had “surnamed” him Barnabas, for his natural name was “Joses,” or Joseph (4:36). Now, however, he appears to be well known among all of the disciples for his spiritual qualities. Once again, I want to draw attention to the fact that he was not an apostle, and was not one of the seven who were chosen (Acts 6). Later, in chapter thirteen, he will be classed among the prophets and teachers in Antioch. However, at this time he was not counted among the prophets in Jerusalem. Yet, Barnabas had excelled to such an extent that he was sent to Antioch to examine the work that had been done there.

SOMETHING TO NOTE

It is arresting to see the interest that the early brethren had in others who had received the word of God. This interest will surface several times in the book of Acts (15:2-3,32,36,40-41; 16:4-5,40; 18:27).

In my own judgment, one of the besetting sins of the American church is its lack of interest in the saints of God. There is even a mindset afoot among professed believers that belittles the idea of ministering to the people of God, or devoting quality time to maturing them in the faith. The result of this tragic condition is that the churches are generally weak in the faith, with ignorance prevailing rather than the “wisdom and spiritual understanding” that was the focus of apostolic prayers and endeavors (Col 1:9).

Even though the Head of the church has provided it with remarkable teaching and revelation, multitude of people remain in abject ignorance concerning them. When you consider what has been delivered to the churches, this is mind-boggling! The list of writings specifically addressed to believers include Acts, Romans, First Corinthians, Second Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, First Thessalonians, Second Thessalonians, First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, First Peter, Second Peter, First John, Second John, Third John, Jude, and Revelation. Within the framework of these letters the following are contained.

- The exposition of the Person of Christ Jesus.
- The exposition of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.
- The exposition of the present mediatorial and intercessory ministry of Jesus.
- An exposition of the second coming of Christ.
- The eternal purpose of God, and how it is being accomplished through Jesus.
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit.
- The objective for the church.
- The resources available to the church.
- The nature and effects of regeneration.
- The pivotal nature, purpose, and effectiveness of the grace of God.
- The exposition of justification, how it is received by faith, and what it does.
- The combining of Jew and Gentile into one body.
- The complexities related to the old man and the new man.
- The presence and purpose of spiritual gifts.
- The danger of this world, and the necessity of being separate from it.
- How believers overcome the devil and the world.
- The definition and nature of the new covenant.

• What happens when a person is **What I am saying is that it is inexcusable for the church today to stand in stark contrast to the church of which we are reading. Unless there is something about salvation that makes for spiritual decline, and unless faith is really not the victory that overcomes the world, this current condition of the church is**

baptized into Christ.

- The necessity and role of hope in the life of faith.
- The reality of a falling away that would be found within the church, together with its nature and effects.
- The rise and fall of spiritual Babylon.
- The necessity of holiness, and the rationale that supports that necessity.

- Details concerning the end of the world and how that knowledge impacts upon life.

These are only representative of the content and nature of apostolic doctrine. So far as the record is concerned, this is the focus of all spiritual gifts and sound doctrine. Yet, there is such a level of ignorance on these matters that it defies all soundness of thought. Consider if a mandatory questionnaire on these matters were delivered to every church in our land, and a demand made for it to be answered and given to men of understanding to peruse. I do not doubt that it would be difficult to even support that the people had been born again, or had made any kind of genuine commitment to the Lord. If this assessment reflects any degree of accuracy, it should awaken a vigorous and sustained interest in maturing the body of Christ. There is no possible way that a people enveloped in perpetual ignorance, and remaining in a juvenile state can be described as making herself ready to be married to the Lord Jesus Christ – and that is precisely how the real church is described (Rev 19:7).

What I am saying is that it is inexcusable for the church today to stand in stark contrast to the church of which we are reading. Unless there is something about salvation that makes for spiritual decline, and unless faith is really not the victory that overcomes the world, this current condition of the church is like a trumpet blast of alarm.

May God raise up men who can recognize this situation that now confronts us – men of wisdom and understanding – who will lift up their voice like watchmen on the wall. It is time to make war on spiritual mediocrity, and thrust from our presence anyone and everyone that is promoting it. There is no place for such people in Christ's body.

BARNABAS SAW THE GRACE OF GOD, AND WAS GLAD

“ 23 Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.”

We know from this verse why Barnabas went to Antioch. It was to provide a sound assessment of the work there, and to respond accordingly to it. I must acknowledge that I know few men capable of such a diagnosis.

HE SAW THE GRACE OF GOD

“Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God . . .” Other versions read, “witnessed the grace of God,” NASB “saw the evidence of the grace of God,” NIV “seeing for himself the grace of God,” CJB “to see what God had done for them out of kindness,” GWN “saw this evidence of God's blessing,” NLT “saw the wonderful things God was doing,” LIVING “to see the grace which God had bestowed,” WEYMOUTH “saw the spiritual blessing God had given them,” WILLIAMS “saw what grace (favor) God was bestowing upon them,” AMPLIFIED “saw this working of God's grace,” PHILLIPS “perceiving the grace of the God,” INTERLINEAR and “saw what God had been kind enough to do for them.” CEV

Exactly how does one “see” the grace of God. Grace itself is not tangible, nor can its presence be substantiated by any natural senses. So far as human sight is concerned, “grace” itself is invisible, just as the God who gives it.

Grace brings spiritual stability, enabling the believer to stand amidst trials and in the face of ungodly trends and emphases. Where people are not standing firm, the presence of God's grace cannot be substantiated.

The Greek word translated “seen” is **ιδω.ν** . This word accents knowledge or awareness instead of the sight of the eye. As used in this text it means to “to perceive, notice, discern, discover,” THAYER “as having come to a perception or realization of something know, understand,

comprehend” FRIBERG and “understand, recognize, come to know ” GINGRICH This is seeing that is done with the mind , as compared with the eyes. It is perception of the same order as that expressed by Peter to Simon the sorcerer: “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity” (Acts 8:23). It is also akin to the perception he expressed in Acts 10:34: “For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.” Paul spoke in the same manner to the Athenians: “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious” (Acts 17:22).

In all of these texts, as well as the verse we are considering, something was seen with the eyes. But it is the deduction to which they refer – the truth that was ascertained by their hearts and minds.

Now, back to the question of how a person can see or perceive the grace of God. First of all, the language suggests an acquaintance with the grace of God, so that it can be recognized. A person who is not familiar with the grace of God has no way of recognizing it, even though strong evidence is place squarely before him. Once the grace of God is comprehended to some measurable degree, the evidence of it can be detected.

What, then, are some of the effects of the grace of God? What does it do that can be readily recognized by those familiar with it. Ponder some of the statements of the Spirit concerning the grace of God.

- **Men believe through grace.** “And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27). Grace is only as evident as one’s faith, and wherever faith can be confirmed, the presence of grace is also corroborated.

- **Men stand in the grace of God.** “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2; 1 Pet 5:12). Grace brings spiritual stability, enabling the believer to stand amidst trials and in the face of ungodly trends and emphases. Where people are not standing firm, the presence of God’s grace cannot be substantiated.

- **Grace reigns through righteousness.** “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2). This is righteousness that is expressed, or lived out. John refers to it as doing righteousness (1 John 2:29; 3:7,10). Where godly living is observed, grace is present. Where there are lapses into sin and friendship with the world, grace is absent.

- **Under grace, sin loses its dominion.** “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). Those who have tasted of the grace of God are not dominated by sin. Those who are ruled by sin have spurned God’s grace,

- **Grace causes spiritual productivity.** “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor 15:10). Those who are spending and being spent for the cause of the Lord are doing so because they have grace. Those who are living for self and uninvolved in the work of the Lord are in that condition because they do not have grace.

- **Grace brings sufficiency in everything.** “But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Cor 15:10). A personal sufficiency that is of such magnitude that it allows a person to abound to every good work exists because of the grace of God.

- **Grace brings consolation and hope.** “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and

God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace” (2 Thess 2:16). The presence of everlasting consolation and good hope is a confirmation of the presence of the grace of God. These twin qualities ensure that the person does not cast off their faith, or succumb in the time of trial. Those who are knocked down by trial and swept away by temptation lack the grace of God – and we are saved “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8).

• **Grace teaches men effectively.** “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:11-13). Those who know how to live godly and do so, have been effectively taught by the grace of God. They are able to reject the tug of temptation and yield to the impulses of the Spirit – and they do so. Ungodly people are always lacking in grace, if not devoid of it altogether, and that condition exists because they do not have faith.

• **Grace enables men to serve God acceptably.** “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28). There is a Divine standard for serving God. Men cannot serve God out of rote, or by mere routine. What is more, their service must be accompanied by reverence and godly fear. It is the presence of grace that causes this kind of service.

When Barnabas came to Antioch, he saw the evidences of grace, which were apparently abundant. I cannot help but consider how he would react to the average church of our day. What would he see, or perceive, that would cause him to see the grace of God in the people? That is, indeed, something to think about!

HE WAS GLAD

“ . . . was glad . . .” Other versions read, “he rejoiced,” NASB “he was pleased,” GWN “was filled with joy,” NLT “was filled with excitement and joy,” LIVING “made him very happy,” IE “he was delighted,” WEYMOUTH “he was full of joy,” AMPLIFIED and “was joyed.” INTERLINEAR .

The word from which “was glad” is translated means, “to rejoice, be glad, in a proper, and strict sense,” THAYER “be delighted,” FRIEBERG and “to enjoy a state of happiness.” LOUW-NIDA This word contains the ideas of gratification and extreme satisfaction. It also includes the idea of pleasure. All of this is in a “proper and strict sense,” as compared to sinful indulgence and the pleasures of sin for a season.

The unique thing about this is that Barnabas was not rejoicing in what he had personally experienced. Rather, it was in what he had beheld in others. He saw the grace of God in them, and “was glad.” This is an aspect of rejoicing in the truth (1 Cor 13:6), which is a display of the absolute absence of self-centeredness.

One of the indications of spiritual maturity is when the individual finds great joy and satisfaction when the grace of God is at work in other people.

HE EXHORTED THEM ALL

“ . . . and exhorted them all . . .” Other versions read, “encouraged them,” NKJV “he made clear to them the need of,” BBE “entreated them,” MRD “urged them all,” NJB “continuously encouraged,” ISV “continuously exhorted (warned, urged, and encouraged) them all,” AMPLIFIED “he begged them,” CEV and “urged them.” GNB

The word “exhorted” is an important one in our spiritual vocabulary. It means “to call for, summon . . . entreaty . . . admonish . . . beg, beseech,” THAYER “as speaking with persistence, earnestly ask for, implore, beg . . . urge, encourage,” FRIBERG “appeal to,” UBS “ask for earnestly,” LOUW-NIDA “to request, to plead for, to appeal to,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to persuade,” LEH and “implore.” GINGRICH

This is a word that has to do with persuasion – constraining people to do the will of the Lord, and engage themselves in what is right and needful. Exhorting is one of the spiritual gifts, or abilities, that the Lord has placed in the church. After telling the saints that they are to think soberly, and in accord with the measure of faith that has been dispensed to them, Paul mentions several gifts that were apparently functioning in the Roman church. Among them was exhortation. He admonishes the brethren to use their gift properly, doing what they have been placed in the body to do. In his admonition he says, “or he that exhorteth on exhortation” (Rom 12:3-8). “The exhorter,” RSV he says, is to give himself “in exhortation.”

The Distinction Between a Command and an Exhortation

An exhortation is more of an appeal than a demand. That does not mean that it is to be treated as optional, or that it does not really have to be done. This is an appeal to the heart as well as to the mind. It is not so much a statement of what is essential, as it is to what is reasonable. An exhortation presumes some life and desire, and is urging the person to act upon it, and enter wholeheartedly into the work. In an exhortation, the sense of the action to which men are called is made obvious, so that, if accepted, the exhortation will confirm that absolute unreasonableness of failing to respond in faith. For this reason, those who respond to exhortations are least apt to require chastening rebuke, reproof, and instruction in righteousness. Institutionalism has so hidden the value of exhortation that it is exceedingly difficult for some to make any sense out of it. Some would rather depend upon an authoritarian approach – a demand from the leaders of the church, a mandate from the elders, or a dictum from the mythical church board.

The necessity for exhortation is seen in that fact that we are engaged in a warfare – both without and within. Within, there is “a law,” that when we would do good, evil is present with us (Rom 7:21). Not only do we possess the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus, we also have “another law” that wages war against the law of our mind (Rom 7:23). Without, we are a declining world within which we are strangers. Yet, it calls to us through the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – all of which are “in the world” (1 John 2:15-17). In our time, there is also the influence of false religion that maintains a “form of godliness, but denies the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5). All of this requires the word of exhortation to encourage and move us forward in our progress to glory.

Exhortation is not common in the modern church, even though the gift of exhortation has been placed within the body of Christ. Religious men have chosen to yield to the masses, looking upon any summons higher to be putting undue pressure upon the people. It is imagined that they will move forward at their own pace without having to be stirred up. After all, it is assumed, they love the Lord, and therefore they will grow at their own pace, so to speak.

There are staggering numbers of professing Christians who have never been so addressed by any living person. Never have they been admonished to hold fast to the Lord with steadfast determination. They have never been challenged to cling to Jesus with a purposeful heart.

Any soul who is simple enough to accept such erroneous reasoning will have to remove a good part of the Scriptures, cutting out the many exhortations delivered to the people of God with Jehudi’s penknife (Jer 36:23). Any person who objects to being exhorted, pled with, appealed to, and asked to move forward in faith, is shortsighted, to say the least. It is wrong to yield to the juvenile whims of such people, and no person professing to be of God can afford to do so. There simply is too much at stake for those who have come into Christ to be left on their own. This is why Barnabas faithfully

and willingly exhorted the people.

Note that he did not do this because the people were lagging behind, or were spiritually indolent, neglecting so great salvation. He was moved to exhort the people because he had seen the grace of God in them. Due reflection on that perspective will yield a good harvest of holy thought.

CLEAVE WITH PURPOSE OF HEART

“ . . . that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord.” Other versions read, “with purpose of heart continue with the Lord,” NKJV “with resolute heart to remain true to the Lord,” NASB “remain true to the Lord with all of their hearts,” NIV “remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose,” NRSV “remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast devotion,” RSV “keeping near the Lord with all the strength of their hearts,” BBE “remain true to the Lord with their whole hearts,” CJB “remain solidly committed to the Lord,” GWN “with all their heart, they would adhere to our Lord,” MRD “remain faithful to the Lord in firmness of heart,” NAB “stay close to the Lord, whatever the cost,” LIVING “Never lose your faith. Always obey the Lord with all your heart,” IE “remain, with fixed resolve, faithful to the Lord,” WEYMOUTH “with hearty purpose to continue to be devoted to the Lord,” WILLIAMS “remain faithful to the Lord, with full purpose of heart,” MONTGOMERY “cleave unto and remain faithful to and devoted to the Lord with [resolute and steady] purpose of heart,” AMPLIFIED “be resolute in their faithfulness to the Lord,” PHILLIPS “with purpose of [or, a resolute] heart [fig., with steadfast devotion] to be continuing with [fig., remaining loyal to] the Lord,” ALT and “remain solidly committed to the Lord.” CEV

There are staggering numbers of professing Christians who have never been so addressed by any living person. Never have they been admonished to hold fast to the Lord with steadfast determination. They have never been challenged to cling to Jesus with a purposeful heart. Somehow they rarely, if ever, hear anything about their personal identity with God through Christ Jesus. They only hear of their lives in this world, resolving social and domestic difficulties, and doing their best to do what is right. However, the matter at hand – cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart – was the first thing that Barnabas said when he saw the grace of God in the those in Antioch who had “turned to the Lord.”

Let it be clear, therefore, that turning to the Lord is not the fundamental thing. It is rather the beginning that enables the primary thing to be done. You would never get this impression in the average church. Many of the sermons that are regularly delivered do not leave people with this thought. Much of the literature to which they subject their minds is devoid of this kind of admonition.

The exhortation of Barnabas perfectly agreed with the words of our Lord: “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in Me . . . If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:4,6). Is there any person of sound mind who will postulate that a person can be saved without abiding in Christ, or without cleaving to Him with purpose of heart?

Or, who will champion the cause that states our condition in Christ requires no vigilance, no commitment, and no steadfastness. Further, precisely why are many people apparently arriving at that conclusion? If such a spiritual posture is even remotely possible, why did Barnabas deliver such a stirring exhortation? What would possibly compel him to speak in such a manner?

A GOOD MAN, FULL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND FAITH

“ 24 For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.”

Now the text accounts for why Barnabas said what he did. I will tell you that this is a very revealing text – one that many poor souls will not be able to receive. Yet, this is the Holy Spirit, moving Luke to record not only what took place, but why it took place.

FOR

“For . . .” Other versions read, “because.” NET/YLT/ALT

The Greek word translated “for” is **ο[τι]**, and it is found in all of the standard manuscripts. As used in this text, its lexical meaning is, “the reason why anything is said to be or to be done, because, since, for that,” THAYER “because, for, since,” UBS and “as a causal conjunction because, since.” GINGRICH

It was for the reason that follows that Barnabas exhorted the people to cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart” – because, he as a “good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith.” NKJV That is why, when he perceived the grace in the people, he spoke as he did.

A PARTICULAR KIND OF MAN

“ . . . he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith . . .”

Luke now accounts for the action of Barnabas. It was not because he was obligated to do so. Nor, indeed, was it because he was talented, and was compelled to use that talent.

A Good Man

I have emphasized repeatedly that the book of Acts, among other things, confirms how life in Christ Jesus is lived. Barnabas is a case in point.

Forty-eight of the versions that I have read “good man.” Some variant versions read “dependable man,” GWN “kindly person,” LIVING “good man [good in himself and also at once for the good and the advantage of other people].” AMPLIFIED

The word “good” means, “of a good constitution or nature,” THAYER “of the moral character of persons good, upright, worthy,” FRIBERG “just, kind, generous,” UBS and “implies some type of activity involving others.” LOUW-NIDA

In other words, the life of Barnabas was in harmony with his profession. He “worked good,” as stated in Romans 2:10. He was among those who were overcoming evil “with good” (Rom 12:21). He was willing and able to please “his neighbor for his good unto edification” (Rom 15:2). He, like the brethren in Rome, was “full of goodness” (Rom 15:14), and was “wise unto that which is good” (Rom 16:19). As a “good man” Barnabas walked in the “good works” that had been ordained for him (Eph 2:10). He was no doubt “fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10), and was among those who followed “that which is good” (1 Thess 5:15). This was a man of God who had been “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” by the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:17).

In other words, Barnabas was walking in newness of life, and therefore was devoted to the betterment of the saints. His was not a philosophical religion, but one that was lived in the power of the truth of God.

I have emphasized repeatedly that the book of Acts, among other things, confirms how life in Christ Jesus is lived. Barnabas is a case in point.

Full of the Holy Spirit

The text does not say that Barnabas once was filled with the Holy Spirit – as some are wont to speak – but that he was “full of the Holy Spirit.” That is, this was the condition in which he was remaining. The Amplified Bible reads, “full of and controlled by the Holy Spirit.” This same thing was said of Stephen (Acts 6:5). When the apostles told the early church to select men to be placed over food distribution, they specified that the men must be “full of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Acts 6:3).

Believers are admonished, “be filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:18). Barnabas was fulfilling that word. This is the kind of person who is “spiritually minded,” or has a mind that is “controlled by the Spirit” NIV (Rom 8:6). This is the person who lives and walks “in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25). A person who is “full of the Holy Spirit” is the one who is “led by the Spirit” in putting to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13-14). This is the person who is “strengthened with might” by the Holy Spirit in the inner man (Eph 3:16), and in whom “the fruit of the Spirit” is being exhibited (Gal 5:22-24). It is a person who neither quenches nor grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19).

Full of Faith

This is also a most arresting phrase. This statement was also made concerning Stephen (Acts 6:5,8). This is synonymous with being “strong in faith,” and not wavering (Rom 4:20). The effect of such a state is that the believer comes to possess the “full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22). Being full of faith is equivalent to living by faith (Heb 10:38) and walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7). It means that faith is the basis of both reasoning and living. When we are full of faith, like Abraham, we “consider not” natural circumstances that contradict what faith apprehends (Rom 4:19). A person who is full of faith will “prepare an ark to the saving of his house,” even though there is no outward evidence or circumstance that justifies such an action (Heb 11:7).

What of Those Who Do Not Exhort the Saints?

If Barnabas exhorted those in whom the grace of God had been seen because he was a good man, and filled with the Holy Spirit and faith, what can be said of pretentious leaders who do not do as he did? What can be said of the preacher or teacher who does not admonish the people to cleave unto the Lord with purpose of heart? What of those who year after year omit such words from their preaching and teaching? What kind of men are they? I will leave the matter for you to consider. However, I am persuaded the omission of such exhortations is a far more serious condition than some think.

MUCH PEOPLE WERE ADDED TO THE LORD

“ . . . and much people was added unto the Lord.” Other versions read, “considerable numbers were brought to the Lord,” NASB “added to the Lord,” NRSV “were joined to the Lord,” BBE “joined them selves to the Lord,” GENEVA believed in the Lord,” GWN “won over to the Lord,” NJB “became followers of the Lord,” IE “the number of believers in the Lord greatly increased,” WEYMOUTH “were united to the Lord,” WILLIAMS “added to the Master.” INTERLINEAR “turned to the Lord,” CEV and “believed in the Lord.” GW

Linguistically, there is no question concerning the meaning of the word translated “added.” The Greek word is **prosete,qh** , and all of the accepted manuscripts contain it. The lexical meaning of the word is, “to put to . . . to add, join to, gather with,” THAYER “put to, add to,” FRIBERG “to add something.” LOUW-NIDA This word is used eighteen times in the Scriptures, Examples of its usage is as follows.

- “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matt 6:27).
- “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you” (Matt 6:33).

- “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

- “Praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47).

- “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

- “Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator” (Gal 3:19).

As you can see, the meaning is very apparent: something or someone was appended to what already existed. In the text before us, people were added, and “the Lord” is the existing Reality to whom they were added.

Here the uniqueness of life in Christ is brought to light. Under the Law the people were not added to the Lord. Nor, indeed, were they added to Moses, the Lord’s representative. But here, in our text, the people were actually added “to the Lord.” I am not sure what translators were thinking when they chose to translate the words “joined themselves to,” GENEVA “believed,” GWN “won over,” NJB “became followers of,” IE and “turned to.” CEV Whatever was in their minds, they failed to convey a very essential aspect of salvation.

Believers Are Joined to the Lord

In the New Covenant, believers are “joined unto the Lord,” becoming “one spirit” with Him. As it is written, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). This views conversion from the standpoint of being in Christ’s body, which is such an intimate association that it is said, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30). There is a sense in which we are actually “added to the Lord” when we become members of His body. This obviously does not mean that we are equal with the Lord. It does mean that we become “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). It does mean that those who are “added to the Lord” have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). It means that “the dying of the Lord Jesus” and “the life also of Jesus” is “made manifest in our body” (1 Cor 4:10-11).

This same language is employed in the fifth chapter of Acts, where another multitude of people are mentioned. “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14). The same Greek expression is used: **pisteu,ontej tw/l kuri,wl** (added, or joined to, the Lord).

This representation of things perfectly coincides with apostolic doctrine. This is a condition that is declared the following facts.

- Believers are “in Christ” (Rom 8:1).
- They have been “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27).
- Christ is in believers (Col 1:27).
- Christ dwells in their hearts by faith (Eph 3:17).
- Christ makes His abode in them (John 14:23).
- The response of people to those who are in Christ is said to be their response to Jesus Himself (Matt 25:40,45).
- The Spirit of Christ dwells in them (Rom 8:9).

In the salvation of God, a very real union is wrought between Jesus Christ and those who believe

on Him. There is a sense in which they become one with Him, and even with the Father as well (John 17:11,21,22).

In wonderful words, our text affirms that because Barnabas spoke comfortingly and with strong exhortation to those who had “turned to the Lord” in Antioch, “many people were added to the Lord.” NKJV So far as the record is concerned, that was not the result of an evangelistic campaign by Barnabas. Rather, it was the result of the saints of God being properly exhorted.

Who is able to estimate what glorious results would take place if professing believers were exhorted to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart, and actually did that by faith? This is certainly an area for sober and sustained thought.

BARNABAS SEEKS FOR SAUL

“ 25 Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 26a And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people.”

The text now provides some insight into how holy men responded to those who believed on Jesus, embracing His word and holding on to Him with strong determination. I will tell you that what we will now read will not blend with what is seen in professed men of God today. There is an inordinate emphasis being placed on recruitment, and a deploring and meager place being made for the building up of the saints – which is the revealed intention of the Head of the church (Eph 4:11-16).

BARNABAS SEEKS FOR SAUL

“Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul . . .” Other versions read, “to look for Saul,” NASB “to seek out Saul,” DARBY “to hunt for Paul,” LIVING “to try to find Saul,” WEYMOUTH and “to search out Saul.” WILLIAMS

A great spiritual harvest was being reaped in Antioch – similar to that which was going to be reaped in Samaria. That harvest was foretold by the Lord during His ministry in the flesh. At that time He told His disciples, “Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth. I sent you to reap that whereon ye bestowed no labor: other men labored, and ye are entered into their labors” (John 4:34-38). Now, in Antioch, the spiritual fields are ready to be reaped, and Barnabas senses there is need for another laborer – in informed and dedicated laborer. Therefore, he sets out to find Saul, who is in Tarsus – about 150 miles away.

Prior to this, the last word that is given concerning Saul of Tarsus is that when his life was endangered because of certain aggressive Jews, the brethren “brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus” (Acts 9:30). They took Saul to Caesarea from Jerusalem, where he had been with the apostles, and had been “coming in and going out of Jerusalem” (Acts 9:27-28). That was probably a little more than three years prior to this trip by Barnabas, Generally accepted chronology places the sending away of Saul to Tarsus around 40 A.D., and Barnabas’ departure to look for him around 43 A.D. So, it had been some time since Barnabas had seen Saul. However, he had not forgotten him, and now sets out to find him. We do not know what Saul had been doing during that interim.

Tarsus is referred to as “no mean city,” “no insignificant city,” NASB or “no ordinary city” NIV (Acts 21:39). Ancient historians refer to Tarsus as “the chief of cities,” SOLINUS a “very opulent” city, CURTIUS “the most famous of the cities of Gallacia.” JOSEPHUS (John Gill’s Commentary).

We do not know the size of the city of Tarsus during the time of our text, but it must have been significant. Scholars speak of it as “the chief city of Cilicia. It was distinguished for its wealth and for its schools of learning, in which it rivalled, nay, excelled even Athens and Alexandria, and hence was spoken of as ‘no mean city.’” EASTON The city still exists today, being largely in a ruined state, yet with still 30,000 occupants. McCLINTOK-STRONG’S

Now Barnabas goes to this significant city to find Saul. For some, this would be like looking for a needle in a haystack, so to speak. But holy minds do not view challenges in such a manner. In the very least, think of Barnabas’ search as looking for a specific person in Clearwater FL, South Bend IN, Independence MO, or Kansas City KS. That will give you a reasonable perspective of what was involved in looking for Saul. You also get a sense of the value these holy men placed on the work of the Lord. They did not think in terms of it interrupting the flow of their normal lives. They were holding to a principle that was later enunciated by Paul: “For me to live, is Christ” (Phil 1:21). That is a most precise picture of “the newness of life” (Rom 6:4), and what is involved in being “joined to the Lord.”

Over the years I have observed the rarity of people who were devoted to the Lord in this manner. It is most unusual to find a person purporting to be working for the Lord that is not driven by an institutional agenda. There is not the slightest hint of this kind of thing in our text. This is the record of men who were living by faith and walking in the light.

HE FINDS SAUL AND BRINGS HIM TO ANTIOCH

“And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch . . .”

I do not doubt that Saul was actually found in one of the synagogues, or with the brethren who had probably been converted in that region. From the very beginning, Saul was noted for being with the disciples and speaking to the Jews concerning Jesus (Acts 9:19-22).

Having found Saul, Barnabas brings him to Antioch. This indicates willingness on the part of Saul, as well as the heart of himself and Barnabas for the work of the Lord.

THEY ASSEMBLED WITH THE CHURCH FOR A WHOLE YEAR

“And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people.”

How will the Spirit describe the activities of Barnabas and Saul? What will be the thrust of their work? That will be something of interest, and will provide a perspective of the manner in which insightful laborers think.

They Assembled Themselves with the Church

Other versions read, “even for a whole year they were gathered together with the church,” ASV “for an entire year they met with the church,” NASB “they were with the church there for a year,” BBE “They met with the congregation there for a whole year,” CJB “for a whole year they were gathered together in the assembly,” DARBY “that a whole were they were conversant with the Church,” GENEVA “a whole year they assembled themselves with the church,” RWB “a whole year did assemble together in the assembly,” YLT and “For a whole year they assembled together with and were guests of the church.” AMPLIFIED

For an entire year, Barnabas and Saul gathered with “the church” in Antioch – the assembly of the saints in that city. That is where they concentrated their attention. During the time of Moses, his ministry was focused on the children of Israel – God’s chosen people. The prophets majored on

ministering to Israel. The ministry of John the Baptist concentrated on the Jews. When Jesus came, His ministry centered in the Jews. Throughout the book of Acts the bulk of the ministry of the apostles and other laborers was toward the churches. All of the epistles were written to the churches. Nearly every record we have of Paul speaking or writing is addressed to the churches, with very few exceptions. Leaders within the church were admonished to “Feed the flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2). The church itself is admonished to edify and build up one another (Rom 14:19; 15:2; 1 Cor 14:26; 1 Thess 5:11). Paul declared that he had been given power to edify (2 Cor 10:8; 13:10). The labors of holy men were not confined to the church, but that is where the stress was placed.

This has always been the manner of God. Judgment begins at the house of God because it has been given the most (1 Pet 4:17). This is where the vast majority of heavenly influence is poured out. These are the people to whom holy angels minister (Heb 1:13-14). They are the ones for whom Jesus intercedes (Heb 7:25), and the ones to whom God gives His Holy Spirit (1 Thess 4:8). These are the people upon whom God Almighty sets His eye, and toward whom His ear is bent (1 Pet 3:12). They alone are His “family” (Eph 3:15), and are the exclusive “body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27).

What kind of influence would move a person to neglect these people, abandon them, or fail to feed them? In view of the Divine attention that is given to this body of people, what would constrain a person to advocate an emphasis that is placed on someone else – whether the lost, the poor, the young, or anyone else? Mind you, it is not that there is a studied neglect of such people. Rather, it is that they are not the focus of Divine intention. Reaching them is a fruit of spiritual maturity. Further, if the church is not strong, it has no business attempting to expand. In such a case, it is only perpetuating mediocrity and producing deformed and uninformed disciples.

Apart from this kind of reasoning, I do not know how you could account for men of the caliber of Barnabas and Saul remaining in Antioch for a whole year.

And Taught Much People

Other versions read, “taught a great many people,” NKJV “taught considerable numbers,” NASB “taught great numbers of people,” NIV “taught a great company of people,” RSV “instructed a large number of people,” AMPLIFIED “instructed a large number of people,” IE and “taught a large crowd.” WEYMOUTH

The word translated “people” is **οχλον**, which has the following lexical meaning: “a multitude of men who have flocked together in some place, a throng,” THAYER “throng of people milling around or closely pressed together, crowd, multitude,” FRIBERG “crowd,” USB “group of people, fairly large in size and assembled for whatever purpose,” LOUW-NIDA and “crowd, host, multitude,” LEH This word is used 175 times in the Scriptures. It always speaks of a gathering of people, not of people who are divided or dispersed.

This means that Barnabas and Saul were not speaking one-on-one, or to different groups. So far as this text is concerned, they were not even going from house to house. They were teaching an assembly of people who had come together to hear the Word of the Lord.

This should not surprise anyone. This is how Jesus taught – the people came to Him, or He called them to Him, and He taught them collectively (Mk 2:13; 10:1; Lk 5:3; 20:1; John 8:2). Paul spoke of “the whole church” coming together “in one place” (1 Cor 14:23). The church of our time has allowed men to promote smaller gatherings and cell groups which, they say, are more conducive to learning. What is the source of this idea, and why has it not birthed a mature and informed people?

There is an underlying objective that has been revealed for the church. It is that the whole body be “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (Eph 4:16). It is that the saints be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). It may

be easy to say that this can best be accomplished by dividing the people into small discussion groups. However, it is not so easy to support that supposition, or to produce some fruit that justifies its embrace. This is not how Barnabas and Saul operated. In view of that, we require some extensive explanation from those who have chosen to conduct their supposed ministry in a different manner. How do you support the idea of a “body” being separated into different parts – particularly when the local congregation is referred to as a “body” ? (1 Cor 12:27).

I do not mean to be contentious about this, but neither will I yield to reasoning that has not been substantiated. When men take it upon themselves to go about the work of the Lord in a manner that differs from Scriptural representations, they do owe us an explanation.

THE DISCIPLES WERE FIRST CALLED “CHRISTIANS”

“ 26b And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” Other versions read, “in Antioch the disciples were for the first time called Christians,” NRSV “the disciples were first given the name of Christians in Antioch,” BBE “it was in Antioch that the talmidim for the first time were called ‘Messianic,’” CJB “at Antioch the disciples were first named Christians,” DOUAY “In Antioch, God called the followers ‘Christians’ for the first time,” IE “in Antioch that the disciples first received the name of ‘Christians,’” WEYMOUTH and “at Antioch too that the disciples first came to be known as ‘Christians.’” WILLIAMS

Note, the citizenry of Antioch did not refer to the disciples as good citizens, exemplary moral people, or those whose maintained the family structure. They made an association of these people with Christ – not with a movement, but with Christ!

This text has been used to promote the idea that “Christian” is the name of preference for those who are in Christ Jesus. This is based on the notion that the word “called” means called by God. For this reason, the International English version reads, “God called the followers ‘Christians.’” The Greek word translated “were called” is **crhmatisai** . This word is occasionally used to denote something that God has said. However, in each of those cases, there is a slightly different meaning to the word than the one projected in this text.

It is said to be a warning, and is translated “warned” (Matt 2:12,22;. Acts 10:22; Heb 8:5; 11:7). It is used do describe God revealing to Simeon that he would not see death until he had seen “the Lord’s Christ” (Lk 2:26). It is translated “admonished” in Hebrews 8:5 where God is said to have instructed Moses to build the tabernacle according to the pattern that had been shown to him. It is also used to describe Moses who “spoke” the Law “on earth” to the children of Israel (Heb 12:25). It is also used to describe a woman who was unlawfully married: “she shall be called an adulteress” (Rom 7:3). In none of these cases is the word employed to designate what God intended to be an appellation, and that is not its meaning here. It is unfortunate, to say the least, when men become so eager to support their own view that they endeavor to make the Word of God say what they have come to imagine.

CONCERNING THE WORD “CALLED”

“The name was evidently given to the followers of Christ by the Gentiles to distinguish them from the Jews since they were Greeks, not Grecian Jews. The Jews would not call them Christians because of their own use of *Christos* the Messiah. The Jews termed them Galileans or Nazarenes. The followers of Christ called themselves disciples (learners), believers, brethren, saints, those of the Way. The three uses of Christian in the N.T. are from the heathen standpoint (here), Ac 26:28 (a term of contempt in the mouth of Agrippa), and 1Pet 4:16 (persecution from the Roman government).” – *Robertson’s Word Pictures*

Until this time, the church was largely Jewish, and the Jews did not identify the people with Christ, for they did not consider Jesus to be the Messiah. In one place, the Jewish leaders referred Jesus’

followers as “the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). The above quotation is taken from Robertson’s Word Pictures and presents, what I consider to be, the proper view of this word.

“Christians” was a Gentile designation. The word itself (**Cristianou,j**)

means “a follower of Christ,” THAYER and “one who is identified as a believer in and follower of Christ.” LOUW-NIDA In other words, the lives of these people confirmed whom they were following, and whose word was being kept by them. What do you suppose professing Christians are called today by those who do not personally know the Lord? I would venture to say that enough is not being said about the Christ these days for this association to be made.

Among other things, this suggests the emphasis of the teaching of Barnabas and Saul. Just as the apostles had “filled Jerusalem” with the doctrine of Christ (Acts 5:28), so Barnabas and Saul must have filled Antioch with their teaching. I do not know how any Gentile could have associated the people of God with Christ without the awareness of what they had been taught.

The use of this term in Scripture confirms that “Christian” is not the Divinely preferred way of referring to His people. It emphatically is not the appellation that God has assigned to them. It is used only three times in Scripture.

- “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26).
- “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28).
- “ Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet 4:16).

It can be argued that all three of these expressions are from an outsider’s point of view. We do know that no church was ever addressed as “Christians.” There is no record of believers referring to one another in this manner. This certainly does not mean it is wrong to use the term. It DOES mean that it is not proper unless there is some evidence that the individual is really a follower of Christ. In our society, the very concept of a follower of Christ, or being one of His disciples, has little meaning. This is because there is a prevailing ignorance concerning both the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. His words are largely unknown, and His teaching has been withheld from the people. It is a tragic circumstance, indeed.

The Result of A Valid Ministry

It is not a coincidence that this Gentile area came to refer to the people of God as “Christians.” This was the result of the faithful ministry of Barnabas and Saul. They had brought a proper understanding of the Lord’s Christ, and made an obvious correlation between the manner of life of believers and the Savior of the world. Even though there is remission of sin in Christ Jesus, that is something that cannot be perceived by the world. The truth of remission must be evidenced through a life that is separate from sin, else the word is nothing more than jargon. The thought that those in Christ are sinners just like everyone else except that they are forgiven, is nothing more than the ranting of mad men who have no spiritual sense. Unless those outside of Christ can detect something obviously different in professed believers, it is open to question that there really is anything different about them. In such a case, claims of being of Christ bring reproach on Him.

PROPHETS CAME FROM JERUSALEM TO ANTIOCH

“ 27 And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. 28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.”

Continuing the accent on the body of Christ, Luke now reports that certain prophets from Jerusalem came down to Antioch.

PROPHETS CAME FROM JERUSALEM

“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.” Other versions read “at this time,” NASB “during this time,” NIV “at that time,” RSV “while they were there,” NJB “about that same time,” IE and “during this period,” PHILLIPS

The phrase “in these days,” refers to the year during which Barnabas and Saul remained in Antioch. Apparently word had reached Jerusalem of the multitudes that were being added to the Lord. It makes perfect sense that prophets came down to Antioch, for they are especially suited for the ministry to the body. It is written, “he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3).

Behold the interest in the church, which is the body of Christ, and the flock of God. These were not organizers or motivators, but prophets. They were not ministers for specialized groups, but prophets. During their stay in Antioch, the Lord will make provision for His people during a time of testing that will come.

THE PROPHECY OF AGABUS

Behold the interest in the church, which is the body of Christ, and the flock of God. These were not organizers or motivators, but prophets. They were not ministers for specialized groups, but prophets.

“ 28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world . . .”

Agabus the prophet is mentioned again in the twenty-first chapter, where he foretold the imprisonment of Paul, when he would be delivered “into the hands of the Gentiles” (21:10-11).

Other versions refer to this calamity as, “a great famine throughout all the world,” NKJV “a severe famine that would spread over the entire Roman world,” NIV “a great famine over all the world,” NRSV “serious need of food all over the earth,” BBE “a severe famine throughout the Roman Empire,” CJB “a severe famine throughout the Roman world,” CSB “a great famine over all the inhabited earth,” DARBY and “a great famine over the whole world.” DOUAY

Here, the Greek word from which “world” is translated is **oivkoume,nhn** . As used here, the word means “the inhabited earth,” THAYER “the inhabited part of the earth world.” FRIBERG The idea is that wherever men were found, food would become scarce. It would be a condition that could not be corrected by the governments of men, even the mighty Roman Empire.

IT CAME TO PASS

“ . . .which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar.”

The famine of reference came to pass, just as Agabus had said. Of course, that is the acid test of a true prophet – whether or not what he says actually comes to pass. When it comes to prophesying, the Lord makes no provision for mistakes or errors in judgment (Deut18:20-22). When a person declares God has revealed to him that He is going to do this or that, his word had better come to pass . If this does not take place, the person has spoken presumptuously, or brashly. Such should be confronted with the error of his way.

The following is a word concerning this famine. “ In point of fact, the predicted famine, which

began in the fourth year of Claudius Caesar (A.D. 44) and lasted till A.D. 48, fell upon Judea exclusively, as far as appears from Josephus ('Ant. Jud.,' lit. 15:3; 20. 2:5, 5:2), and was very severe there. Ishmael was high priest at the time; and Helena, Queen of Adiahene, fetched large supplies of corn from Egypt and of figs from Cyprus to Jerusalem, to supply the wants of the people. Eusebius ('Eccl. Hist.,' 2:8) speaks of this famine as having prevailed "over the world," and as being recorded by authors hostile to Christianity, but mentions no names and gives no particulars ('Eccl. Hist.,' 2:8), but in the twelfth chapter of the same book he limits it to th<n Ioudai>an , Judea" PULPIT COMMENTARY

THE DISCIPLES DETERMINE TO SEND RELIEF TO BELIEVERS IN JUDEA

“ 29 Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: 30 Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.”

This was the manner of the early church, and is the focus of philanthropy throughout Scripture. This does not suggest that it is wrong to assist the poor as we are able. It does, however, accent that while we are to “do good unto all men,” we are to do it “especially unto them that are of the household of faith”

The response of the disciples to this word is most arresting. The coming famine was declared to impact “all the world.” One might imagine that a good church would set up a world-wide relief fund. Perhaps some provision would be made for the starving children or some other global category of people. However men may choose to view it, this is not what the disciples determined to do – and there is no suggestion in the text that they were not correct in what they did chose to do.

THE DISCIPLES DETERMINE TO SEND RELIEF

Other versions read, “to send a contribution,” NASB “to provide help,” NIV “provide relief,” CJB “to minister to them,” DARBY and “send succor.” GENEVA

This relief was to be sent to the brethren in Judaea which, according to historians, was impacted greatly by this extensive famine. The collection of these resources, together with additional contributions, is mentioned frequently in Scripture (Rom 15:25-27; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8:1-5; 9:1-2).

These were apparently financial resources, and each person determined to do the best that he could, giving proportionately to their resources. Paul also admonished that manner of giving to this cause in First Corinthians 16:1-2.

The particular people for whom provisions were being made were “the brethren,” or those who are in Christ Jesus. These are the poor for whom the church in Jerusalem made provision during the early days of the church (Acts 6:1-6). This was the manner of the early church, and is the focus of philanthropy throughout Scripture. This does not suggest that it is wrong to assist the poor as we are able. It does, however, accent that while we are to “do good unto all men,” we are to do it “ especially unto them that are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). In my own judgment, this has not been made sufficiently clear to the modern church.

THEY SENT IT BY THE HANDS OF BARNABAS AND SAUL

Other versions read, “sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders,” NASB and “sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.” NIV Those who have been involved in the distribution of gifts for the poor and needy, or have been made aware of such a work, know that distribution is the weak point of such programs. In addition, the siphoning of funds for other purposes this is a very

troublesome reality.

One might question why they did not send the gift to the apostles, or to the deacons who had originally been appointed to the work of distribution to the needy. They did not send it to the apostles because it was not reasonable. Barnabas himself was there when “the twelve” told the people, “it is not reason that we should leave the word of God to serve tables” (Acts 6:2). Second, of the original seven who were appointed over the work of distribution, Stephen had been martyred, and Philip, driven out from Jerusalem by the persecution, was preaching abroad. It is reasonable to suppose that the other deacons had been involved in the dispersion as well. This was now 13-14 years after Pentecost, and the elders could best handle this situation – if not by direct involvement, by seeing to it that spiritually competent men were appointed over the work.

Notice how the believers in Antioch addressed this situation. First, they selected honorable men to be in charge of getting the contribution to Jerusalem – “Barnabas and Saul.” Second, they made sure that spiritually insightful and wise men were in charge of distributing the funds – “the elders.” Godly endeavors require godly men, who will conduct themselves in a godly manner. It appears that the church of our time could improve in this area. This is a time when waste is too common.

This, in a few verses, we have covered a period of more than one year.

CONCLUSION

Once again, I want to stress that we are being exposed to the expression of “newness of life.” This is the regenerated life in action. It is a display of how justification by faith impacts those who participate in it. The servants of whom we are reading are living by faith and walking in the Spirit. This is how people who have received the love of the truth conduct their lives. The priorities that are created by faith are made known in this book. Proper assessments are manifested, and how believers react to a word from God is made known. The level of interest that holy men had in the church of the living God is verified, and what believers think of one another is lived out.

Godly men and women should be profoundly concerned when these kinds of responses are not found in the church. Further, diligence must be exercised to avoid exalting traditions and customs that attempt to duplicate the results of which we are reading, while avoiding the appointed means through they are accomplished.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #53

JAMES IS KILLED and PETER ARRESTED

“ 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. 2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. 3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 4 And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. 5 Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. ” (Acts 12:1-5)

INTRODUCTION

While the Word of God is spreading, and multitudes are being “added to the Lord” north of Jerusalem, and in Gentile territory, a sudden turn of events takes place in Jerusalem. Life in Christ does not guarantee a life of ease and convenience in this world. While there are times when a season of tranquility is granted to the faithful, Jesus taught His disciples not to expect this to be the norm. His telling words are found in Matthew 10:34-36. “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.”

These words unveil the erroneous gospel that proclaims Christ always unites the family, and is the answer to every domestic dilemma. While every tender soul confesses this to be their desire, every honest person equally confesses the relative rarity of such an experience. Jesus did not mean He would invariably divide the family, or that this was a kind of litmus test of the legitimacy of one's faith. Rather, He was showing the effects of the embrace of a Gospel that anchors one in another world, constraining the individual to live for the time when the Lord gathers His people to Himself, so they can be where He is. The life of faith actually separates a person from the world, causing him to be a pilgrim and a stranger in it (Heb 13:14; 1 Pet 2:11). It simply is not possible for that fact to

blend with the psychological approach to life that is being hawked in the modern churches. That is why those who major on domestic

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and social harmony life are prone to a procedural approach to life. Living is presented as though the individual is the primary thing, and existence and circumstances in this world are fundamental.

Throughout history, there have been notable families that have been divided. The very first family found Cain and Abel in the same household (Gen 4:8-9). There was also Ishmael and Isaac in Abraham's house (Gen 21:9-10), and Jacob and Esau in the house of Isaac (Gen 25:23; 27:41). Then there was the hostility in Jacob's household between Joseph and his brothers (Gen 37:4-8). Who can forget the opposition of David's own son, Absalom, to himself (2 Sam 15:6).

LIFE IS TO BE LIVED FOR CHRIST

God has made clear that life is to be lived for Him, not for self. It is written that Jesus "died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor 5:15). Whatever the believer does, and however minuscule it may appear to be, it is to be done for the glory of God. As it is written, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31). And again, "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him" (Col 3:17).

This posture addresses the matter of our associations with other people, for God is able to make our enemies be at peace with us (Prov 16:7). Even the heart of the king is in His hand, so that He turns it whenever and however He desires (Prov 21:1). However, should the individual choose to modify his commitment to the Lord, or alter the stance of his life in life in order to produce tranquil surroundings, he at once begins to stand in a precarious place.

While believers are not to go out of their way to produce friction, neither are they to place an inordinate value on peaceful and convenient circumstances. If Jesus said we are not to think that He came to send peace on earth, how could such a view possibly be right? Having said that, any social or domestic disturbance that cannot be traced back to the lack of unity in the faith can be perceived by the believer as something to be resolved.

First, it is important to establish that the highest form of knowledge is the knowledge of God. Actually, the intent of all revelation is to bring men to the knowledge of God.

Having said all of this, let it be clear that any hostility toward the saints must be because of their faith and righteousness, not any transgression or obnoxious peculiarities found in them. Solemnly Peter admonished us, "But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as

a busybody in other men's matters" (1 Pet 4:15).

AN APOSTLE IS MARTYRED

In our text, a chief apostle, one of the inner circle of three (Peter, James, and John), is martyred by Herod. This was one of the twelve apostles, "set" first in the church and being charged with laying the foundation of that church. The apostles brought a certain indispensable lucidity to the people concerning Jesus Christ and the salvation that is in Him with eternal glory. Yet, even though his role was an essential one, James is removed from the world through an act of deliberate violence.

Then, because Herod saw that his despicable deed pleased the Jews, he set out to do the same thing to Peter, another of the chief apostles.

In the death of the one apostle, and in the arrest of the other, it appeared as though Herod was invincible, and could not be restrained. Yet, this report must be read within the concept of the Kingdom of God and the fact that "the heavens do rule" (Dan 4:26).

This is now the third initiative launched against the church. In the latter two, the people of God appeared to be powerless victims of oppression – at least to the eye of the flesh. In our text, the extraordinary power of oppression from religious quarters is also confirmed. We will also see how corrupt religion gets along well with this world's governments.

A REMINDER OF WHAT WE ARE BEHOLDING

In order to encourage a proper perspective of the Scriptures, it is needful to look at them from a higher vantage point – that of God's eternal purpose . An eternal objective drives all Divine dealings regarding the world and the human race. It is woven into the fabric of creation, the Law, the Person of Jesus Christ and the record God has given of Him, the book of Acts, the Epistles, and the Revelation. There is a certain progression in the sequence of these realities. It is not so much a progress that is quantitative as it is in the gradual unfolding of an enormous expanse.

First, it is important to establish that the highest form of knowledge is the knowledge of God. Actually, the intent of all revelation is to bring men to the knowledge of God. This is encapsulated in the insightful summation of the Law that was given by a certain scribe who had asked Jesus to identify "the first commandment of all." Jesus replied, "The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." The scribe replied, "And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbor as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. " Jesus saw that the scribe had answered "discreetly" and replied, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God" (Mk 12:28-33).

The point here is that man's identity with, perception of, and profound affection for the Living God is the most essential of all human involvements. The most important thing is NOT to know yourself, but to know God. It is NOT to resolve your particular problems, but to participate in what God is doing. The ultimate aim of God is not to get you to live correctly, and within the parameters of what is right. To be sure, that is involved, but it is by no means the sign of genuine achievement. Jesus revealed this to His disciples when He said, "So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do " (Luke 17:10). Before God, there is no virtue in doing what you are supposed to do – even though that is an absolute requirement. The thing that counts is what takes place AFTER you have been obedient. As a person who is in Christ Jesus, God Himself has called you "unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor 1:9). That "fellowship" is what make "the newness of life"

what it is. This is what is involved in the objective of God's "exceeding great and precious promises" (as compared with commandments). It is through them that we "participate in the Divine nature AND escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires" NIV (2 Pet 1:4).

This is why every form of revelation has been to enlarge our familiarity with, and understanding of, God Himself.

- **THE CREATION.** The creation presents a summary-type view of God. Although men did not perceive it on their own, God's word declares that "the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead ; so that they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). The testimony of nature is everywhere that men can be found. The Psalmist says of heavens and firmament, "There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard" (Psa 19:3). Although their testimony is rudimentary when compared with what has been made known in Christ, sin has so impacted man's thinking that it has never perceived this clear testimony this on his own.

- **THE LAW.** The Law provided a larger circumference of revelation. In it there is a "form of knowledge of the truth," or "the embodiment of knowledge and truth" RSV (Rom 2:20). The Law was to knowledge and truth what an impenetrable wall is to a treasure house. There was a lot of truth and knowledge in the Law, but it was not apprehended by the people. They handled the Law like the Gentiles did nature – without comprehending its contents. This is precisely why David asked God to give him an understanding of the Law (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169). He knew there were "wondrous things" in the Law, but also knew God had to open his eyes to see them (Psa 119:18). Now, in Christ, we can see the character of God in the Law.

- **JESUS CHRIST.** The Lord Jesus is the most precise embodiment of both God and the Truth that issues forth from Him. "The fulness of the Godhead" dwells in Him "bodily" (Col 1:19; 2:9). This means that there is nothing about God that can be known that is not revealed in Christ Jesus. He is the fullest revelation as well as the most precise exhibit of God. This is particularly relevant to us, because eternal life is knowing "the only true God" and "Jesus Christ" whom He has sent (John 17:3). If there is any professed teacher or preacher, or any religious system, that does not contribute to the understanding of Christ, the key of knowledge has been taken away and the entrance to the Kingdom of God has been blocked.

- **THE BOOK OF ACTS.** The book of Acts is not primarily a book of doctrine, or teaching, although much teaching is recorded there. Primarily, this book is an example of the newness of life being lived out. Here is how Jesus expressed Himself through men and women of faith. The book also contains examples of the reaction of the devil to truth as he works within simple souls. It is important to distinguish between an example of how men ought to live, and the actual record of how life in Christ IS lived. In the first case, we are speaking of an objective to be accomplished by men. In the second, we are provided an actual record of how Christ and the truth impact upon the human personality. The unavoidable conclusion is that if men do not react to the truth in the same manner as believers did in the book of Acts, then they do not possess what those people had. It is also significant to note that what they possessed is represented as common in the household of faith.

- **THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE.** The Apostles' doctrine is primarily the exposition of Christ Jesus and the salvation of God. They expatiate the implications of the Gospel, delineating what was accomplished by the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. They also open up how these realities affect men when they believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Their teaching is not merely to direct men in how they are to live – although they say considerable

on this subject. However, their primary testimony has to do with Jesus Himself and the great salvation that is in place because of Him. If it was possible to remove the exposition of Jesus and salvation from the epistles, nothing of lasting value would remain.

• **THE REVELATION.** The book of the Revelation presents the same thing – Jesus and His great salvation – from yet another perspective. Here the entire drama of redemption is presented as a vision. In a remarkable and grand summary form it presents the whole of salvation from beginning to end. It is done in pictorial form, many times using creatures, cities, and other natural phenomenon to depict how God is working salvation in the midst of the earth. The book confirms the unchangeable nature of both Satan and Deity. It also confirms that it is not possible for Satan to ultimately win, or for Jesus to lose. It affirms that those who place their faith in Christ and live for Him will survive the end of the world, the day of judgment, and demise of the devil. They will, in fact, be forever with the Lord.

With these things in mind, we will now launch into our text. We will see the nature of men who are vassals of Satan. We will also behold how those who are of God may appear to have been overcome, yet how God manages their lives. Religious flesh will also be held before us, with its depraved nature which takes pleasure in the suppression of truth and the opposition of the people of God. We will also see that deliverance is according to Divine discretion.

HEROD LAUNCHES AN INITIATIVE AGAINST CERTAIN OF THE CHURCH

“ 12:1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.”

There is a certain way in which history is recorded in Scripture. Among historians, history itself is often the point. Therefore precise sequence, dates, and surrounding circumstances are provided with great care. If the reader has understanding, there is measured value in such an approach. However, in the Word of God, there are often long periods of time that are omitted. For example, from Adam to Enoch was a period of over six hundred years. From Enoch to Noah was over four hundred years. The flood came six hundred years after Noah’s birth. From the flood to the call of Abraham was over three hundred and fifty years. From Abraham to the giving of the Law was around five hundred years, with considerably revelation being given concerning that period of time (Genesis 12:1-50:26 and Exodus 1:1-40:38). Israel’s forty-year trek in the wilderness is contained in Leviticus through Deuteronomy. The history of Israel following their entrance into Canaan through the time of Malachi the prophet was about 950 years, and is covered in the books Joshua through Malachi. The five hundred years between Malachi’s time and the birth of Jesus is not ordered in the historical record. Daniel’s prophecies relate largely to that period of time. From the birth of Jesus until the commencement of His ministry was thirty years, with only one incident, and the time related to John the Baptist’s birth (its announcement and a brief summation of John’s advancement to maturity), and his ministry (a period of six months) being very briefly referenced in Scripture.

All of this confirms that this world and what takes place in it is significant only if it has to do with the working out of the purpose of God. Apart from that, it is given no emphasis at all in the Word of God – and that is the proper perspective of the world and everything in it.

ABOUT THAT TIME

“Now about that time . . .” Other versions read, “It was about this time,” NIV “at the same time,” DOUAY “in that time,” TNT “during the same time,” IE and “it was at this time.” PHILLIPS

Ponder the things that were taking place at this time. The Word of God was spreading rapidly, reaching as far as the Island of Cyprus, the region of Phenice, and the central Syrian city of Antioch. At the arrival of Barnabas, “much people was added to the Lord” (11:24). Barnabas had brought Saul from Tarsus to Antioch, and they had spent a whole year, assembling with the church and had “taught much people” (11:26). It was there that the disciples were “first called Christians,” as their association

with Jesus Christ was very obvious. Prophets had come from Jerusalem to Antioch. One of them, Agabus, had prophesied of a coming famine. In a sterling display of the unity of the Spirit, the disciples determined to “send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judah.” They did this, sending it “by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (11:30).

Satan’s Head Is Bruised, Yet He Walks About As A Roaring Lion

One might imagine that during such a remarkable success of the Word of God, and with the hearts of people being so obviously changed that they were referred to as “Christians ” (followers of Christ), a devastating blow had been dealt to the kingdom of darkness. And, indeed, from one perspective this was true, for in His death Jesus had “destroyed the devil” and “spoiled principalities and powers” (Heb 2:14; Col 2:15). However, lest we forget, Satan is in the process of demise, and has not been annihilated, or exterminated. Jesus delivered a mortal bruise to Satan’s head, but he is still walking about “as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). He has no influence over Jesus, for He has triumphed gloriously over the old serpent. However, on earth, it is altogether a different matter. Therefore the word comes from heaven, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). Believers are reminded to “be sober” and “vigilant,” knowing that their “adversary” is on the prowl (1 Pet 5:8). Paul told the spiritually lethargic Christians in Corinth, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). James reminded men that the devil must be resisted, and they must draw close to God, else there was no hope of victory (James 4:7-8).

At the point the church loses the perspective of a fierce and relentless adversary, it stands in serious jeopardy. Satan cannot be overcome by steps, routines, procedures, or some form of personal discipline. He is too shrewd for such meager attempts to encroach upon his kingdom.

In confirmation of these things, the book of Acts reports several initiatives of Satan against the church – even though his head had been bruised. These aggressions took place while inroads were being made into his kingdom. For example, while the Gospel was being preached, and multitudes were being added to the Lord, a fierce persecution was launched against the church in Jerusalem, and all “except the apostles” were “scattered abroad” (Acts 8:1).

All of this confirms that God is not only “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12), He is doing so in the midst of a conflict that is too large and powerful for men themselves. This is a fact that has been hidden from those pretenders who teach men to overcome sin by routines, disciplines, and the recitation of canned prayers and formulae. Let these men attempt to neutralize persecution by their Christianized incantations! Although they pretend to be able to release men from demonic hold by their methodologies, none of them are so foolish as to attempt to use such an approach to bringing an end to persecution, which is also a Satanic initiative. Additionally, they do not come against false doctrines in such a way, which are often “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim 4:1). All of this confirms that their meager attempts really have no power in the kingdom of darkness.

The prowess of the wicked one is the reason why believers are told, “let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thess 5:6). “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:11-12).

In resisting the devil, we dare not depend upon the wisdom of men, which got us into sin in the first place. This will become apparent in this very text. This will not be an occasion for the church to gather together and form a strategy through which to neutralize Herod’s aggression. Nor, indeed, will they be able to outsmart him on a natural level. Further, God is going to allow something that will

make no sense to the worldly mind-set. Apart from faith and an unwavering hope, I do not know how you can account for the things that are now reported in the book of Acts.

It is wise to enter into this text with the words of the Lord Jesus in our minds: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). The peace of which Jesus speaks postulates the presence of tribulation, affliction, burden, and trouble. In our text two forms of trouble have been introduced: persecution and famine. From a human point of view, both of them are unmanageable. Also, both of them confirm that believers are, in fact, “strangers and pilgrims” in the earth (Heb 13:14; 1 Pet 2:11). Salvation is not an economy that suits us for this world. It rather orients us to “the world to come.” The aim of redemption is multifaceted, and it is glorious to consider. Without being exhaustive, and avoiding any tendency to systemize these things, here are a few of them.

- Rid us of the guilt and stain of sin, which alienated us from God.
- Deliver us from the power of sin, in order that we might live for Him who died for us and rose again.
- Introduce us to fellowship with Christ, into which we have been called.
- Begin the process of changing us from glory to glory until we are at last fully conformed to the image of God’s Son at His coming.
- Through the Spirit to experience God working in us both to will and do of His own good pleasure.
- To gain an acquaintance with God – the knowledge of God – through which all necessary resources are acquired.
- To disassociate us from this present evil world in order that we might fit into the world to come.

The truth of the matter is that “heaven and the earth shall pass away” (Matt 24:35). It is also that “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10). It is for this reason that Jesus “gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4). This makes perfect sense in view of the temporality of the world and life in the flesh.

The events of which we are reading are against the backdrop of these realities. What is even more, the apostles delivered a doctrine that, when received, caused men think this way. They made no effort to explain professed believers living in sin, nor did they represent life in Christ as being one of success and ease in this world. This is precisely why believers responded as they did to difficulties – whether famine or persecution.

HEROD THE KING

“ . . . Herod the king . . . ”

The name “Herod” was a family name, not a name specific to any single individual. The Herodians were “of Idumean descent (Josephus, Ant. 14:1, section 3). Fausset’s Bible Dictionary says of them, “The Idumeans were conquered and brought to Judaism by John Hyrcanus, 130 B.C. Thus the Herods, though aliens by birth, were Jews in faith. They made religion an engine of state policy.” The Idumeans were descendants of Esau, elsewhere referred to as Edomites, from which Idumea is derived. In fact, Scripture specifically states that Esau “is Edom” (Gen 36:1), and that he is the “father of the Edomites” (Gen 36:9,43).

Some are of the opinion that Herod had embraced the Jew's religion, but I personally doubt that to be the case. There is no firm statement in Scripture that reflects this understanding. Being a descendant of Esau, there is no doubt in my mind but that he maintained the primary traits of his progenitor. When Jacob and Esau were yet in the womb, the Lord said to their mother Rachel, "Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger" (Gen 25:23). In this text, James and Peter represented "the manner" of Jacob, while Herod stood for "the manner" of Esau.

This family made the Jewish law "a lever for elevating themselves and their secular kingdom. For this end Herod adorned gorgeously the temple with more than Solomonic splendor. Thus a descendant of Esau tried still to get from Jacob the forfeited blessing (Gen. 27:29,40), in vain setting up an earthly kingdom on a professed Jewish basis, to rival Messiah's spiritual kingdom, as it was then being fore-announced by John Baptist." FAUSSET

The Edomites frequently clashed with Israel. Once, while they were en route to Canaan, the Edomites refused to let Israel pass through their country (Num 20:18-21). King Saul made war against them (1 Sam 14:47). David made a conquest over them (1 Kgs 11:14-16; 1 Chron 18:11-13). Once they joined with Babylon against Israel (Obadiah 1:11-16). The Psalms mention how the "children of Edom" once called for Jerusalem to be razed (Psa 137:7). Ezekiel prophesied against Edom because they "dealt against the house of Judah" (Ezek 25:12-14). Here, in the book of Acts, one of Esau's descendants is ruling in the land of Israel, and will turn his hand against the saints of the most High God.

This group of people bore a remarkable similarity to spiritual Babylon, which also seeks to build worldly advantage on revealed truth – something that is really impossible to do. This impossibility is owing to the incompatibility of flesh with Spirit, and the wisdom of this world with the wisdom that comes down from above.

This group of people bore a remarkable similarity to spiritual Babylon, which also seeks to build worldly advantage on revealed truth – something that is really impossible to do. This impossibility is owing to the incompatibility of flesh with Spirit, and the wisdom of this world with the wisdom that comes down from above. Oh, what a lesson is to be learned concerning the Herodian family!

This is the grandson of Herod the great, who built the Temple of Jesus' time – a project that took forty-six years (John 2:20). Prior to him there was "Herod the king" who was ruling when Jesus was born (Matt 2:1). He is one who ordered the slaughter of "all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under" (Mat 2:16). Shortly after that, he died (Matt 2:19).

Early in Christ's ministry "Herod the tetrarch" (ruler of the fourth part of a county) arrested John the Baptist and had him beheaded at the behest of his wicked wife. John had formerly rebuked Herod for marrying his brother's wife, telling him it was "unlawful" for him to have her (Matt 14:4; Lk 3:19-20). Later, Herod heard of Jesus, about midway through His ministry, and thought that it was John the Baptist risen from the dead (Lk 9:7). This Herod is also the one who joined Pilate in coming against Jesus (Lk 3:1; 23:11-12; Acts 4:27). This is also the Herod whom Jesus referred to as a "fox" (Lk 13:32).

Now, at the point of our text, it is approximately fifteen years after Jesus was crucified, and another Herod has risen. This man is historically known as "Herod Agrippa I." Because he was driven by a strong desire to be popular he will now engage in an initiative against "certain of the church." He was truly a member of the generation of which Solomon spoke: "There is a generation, O how lofty are their eyes! and their eyelids are lifted up. There is a generation, whose teeth are as swords, and their

jaw teeth as knives, to devour the poor from off the earth, and the needy from among men” (Prov 30:13-14).

THE VEXING OF CERTAIN IN THE CHURCH

“ . . . stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.” Other versions read, “to harass some,” NKJV “laid hands on some . . . to mistreat them,” NASB “arrested some . . . intending to persecute them,” NIV “laid violent hands on some,” NRSV “to afflict certain,” ASV “made cruel attacks,” BBE “arresting and persecuting certain,” CJB “cruelly attacked,” CSB “devoted his attention to mistreating certain,” GWN “to harm them,” NAB “began to persecute some,” NLT “moved against,” LIVING “in order to ill-treat them,” WEYMOUTH “In order to do them violence,” WILLIAMS and “to afflict and oppress and torment some.” AMPLIFIED

The words “stretched forth his hands” describe a deliberate and focused objective. This is not something that was done casually, or on the spur of the moment. The words suggest a plan, as well as the target of specific people. Of course, that is characteristic of all persecution.

Satan Was at Work

Satan himself was behind Herod’s initiative against certain in the church. His activity is portrayed in a most vivid manner in the Revelation: “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). Again, this is said of the devil, “And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17). The persecution launched by Herod is one way in which Satan worked. Herod was his vassal, doing his will, coming against “certain” in the church, which is the body of Christ.

Principalities and Powers Were Working

From another point of view, this was the activity of the under-rulers of Satan’s kingdom: “principalities,” “powers,” “the rulers of the darkness of this world,” and “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). These, like Satan, had already been overthrown and plundered by Jesus (Col 2:15). Yet, they are still active, although they cannot touch what is born of God, or intrude into the heavenly realms to force men out of the place where God has placed them. They still work among men who, as Jesus said, are able “kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do” (Luke 12:4).

What Is Vexing?

Herod stretched forth his hand, engaging in an imitative to “vex” certain of the church. “Vex” is a good English word, meaning, “to bring trouble, distress, or agitation to . . . to bring physical distress . . . to irritate or annoy . . . harass.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER The meaning of the Greek word translated “vex” means, “to oppress, afflict, harm, maltreat,” THAYER “to physically harm, mistreat, ill-treat,” FRIBERG “treat badly, harm; be cruel,” FRIBERG and “treat badly, harm; be cruel.” LOUW-NIDA

The intention of Herod was not to merely make life difficult for “the church,” like imposing restrictions upon them, and complicating their lives. He set out to do harm to them, like Satan intended to do to Job. If unrestrained, the hatred of the people of God eventually leads to forceful aggression and ill-treatment. This is confirmed in Cain killing Abel, Joseph’s brother’s intending to slay him, Egypt’s treatment of Israel, and all of the opposition to the holy prophets.

It seems to me that the distinction between those who are reconciled to God and those who are not

is being blurred in our time. There are too many efforts being exerted to explain why Christians appear to be no different than those who make no such claim. When the same characteristics that identify the unsaved are found in those who profess to be saved, it is not possible for any valid distinction to be made between them. Professing Christians who are really no different than those who are “of the world,” cannot shine as lights in the world, and it is foolish to admonish them to do so.

An innate hostility exists between those who are in the flesh and those who are in the Spirit. It is of such magnitude that it can scarcely be put into words. It is only the hand of the Lord that restrains the continually outward oppression of the saints. The nature of the ungodly is hostile toward both God and His people. That is why compromise with the world is so wrong.

These distinctions do exist, and they cannot be blended together in one personality. For example, you cannot have a holy demon, a godly evil, or a righteous sinner. Neither can you have an unholy seraphim, an ungodly Savior, or a worldly Christian. Although it is quite common to hear people speak of carnal Christians, dead Christians, or Christians in bondage, the language is self contradictory. One is either “in the flesh” or “in the Spirit,” as expounded in Romans 8:4-13.

Certain of the Church Were Selected

From the text, it appears clear that the word “certain” refers primarily to the apostles. At the very least, it would refer to those within the church who especially had godly influence among the people. That would be from an outward point of view. Seen even more clearly, it would include those with a greater understanding, who had grown up into Christ more fully, and were able to delineate the truth with power. Stephen and Philip were among those who could be so described, even though they were not apostles. I gather from the text that these were the kind of people toward whom Herod directed his wicked endeavors, with the accent being placed on the apostles.

This is still the manner of the wicked one. First the wicked one will seek to cast aspersions upon the truth itself. Then he will target those who are declaring it. Finally, he focuses on those who have manifestly embraced it

They Belonged to the Church

Notice that those against whom Herod stretched forth his hand are described as “of the church,” or those who “belonged to the church.” NASB These were part of the larger body of people, and were not separate from it. One of the unfortunate results of a “falling away,” or a general departure from the truth among those professing allegiance with Christ (2 Thess 2:3; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5), is that insightful souls are no longer associated with “the church” in the minds of the enemies of Christ. It was the Roman Catholic church that first codified this separation, referring to the religious hierarchy as “the church,” and the members as “the children of the church.” This is reflected in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

131. "And such is the force and power of the Word of God that it can serve the Church as her support and vigor, and the children of the Church as strength for their faith, food for the soul, and a pure and lasting fount of spiritual life."

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Article 3, Sacred Scripture

Later, this philosophy spilled over into protestantism in which the leaders were designated “clergy,” and the people were called “laity.” This practice continues today in a less formal way, but with the maintenance of the concept firmly in place. The language of our text confirms that this notion was not entertained by the early church.

A Result of Falling Away

Right here, I must say something concerning the effects of “a falling away” – when the professing church loses its appetite for, and grip upon, the truth of God. When the professing church is weak and ignorant, truly insightful souls are seen by the world as renegades, and religious oddities. They are not perceived as members and representatives of “the church.” More than often, such a person is even perceived by the professing church as a kind of oddball – an eccentric. Their words are viewed as inconsequential, and thus they are generally ignored by the very church they are endeavoring to strengthen. Throughout history, this has proved to be true. The great Reformers were largely unappreciated during their lives, coming to be appreciated years after their sojourn was completed.

However, when the church is strong, and its faith robust, the presence of godly and insightful souls is viewed quite differently.

The Flickering Flame

When the church at large has only “a form of godliness,” but is “denying the power thereof,” there are certain results that take place in the world.

- The truth is not held forth as the Lord intended when He made the church “the pillar and ground of the church” (1 Tim 3:15).
- The amount of light that the church is intended to shine into the world is diminished, so that critical matters are not clearly seen (Matt 5:14,16; Phil 2:15). This invariably results in general social decline.
- Wickedness is not exposed as it should be (Eph 5:11). The conscience of the public is therefore dulled, so that there is less and less concern for immorality and spiritual ignorance.
- Because they are not found within the ones professing identity with Christ, the dying and life of Christ are greatly obscured (2 Cor 4:10-11). As a consequence, Christ Himself becomes more and more befogged, giving rise to all manner of erroneous conceptions concerning both His character and objectives.
- The capacity of “the church” to influence society is greatly diminished because there is a decided reduction of grace that flows from Jesus to the people, for it comes only through those who are holding to Him, and are connected to Him (Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19).

This Is Not the Time for Focusing on Individuals

When the church is in a weakened state, and its members are closer to the earth than to heaven, it is not the time to focus on individuals. This is not the time for the professing church to set out to resolve the difficulties of the world, or to concentrate on individual deficiencies. This does not mean individuals are ignored, but that they cannot become the center of attention. This is because their condition is largely owing to the deficiency of the church itself which has not held up the truth, both in word and in life. As a result, the consciousness, or awareness, of God has diminished, opening the door for the devil to enter.

This is a time when “the body” must be built up – when a collective growth must take place. This is growth that is marked by spiritual synergy, where the members complement one another through mutual ministry. This process, for want of a better term, is described in Colossians 2:19. There Jesus, who is “the Head,” is depicted as the Source “from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”

Ephesians 4:15-16 describes Jesus as the One into whom all believers are to “grow up,” and “from

whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

In both of these texts Jesus is depicted as ministering to the church through those members who have grown up into Him, or are matured in their faith. They are said to be holding to Him, which is another way of saying abiding in Him. As they remain connected to Him, He ministers nourishment, or life-sustaining grace, to them, making them capable of strengthening the other members of His body. It is at the point these members (who include every person in the body of Christ) touch, or have influence, with the other members, that the nourishment is “ministered” by Jesus through the individual. The collective saints are then “held together and compacted” by what Jesus ministers through them to one another. If this is not taking place, a strong church remains nothing more than an idea. No church, regardless of its size and perceived influence, can be said to be growing, united, or increasing, in which this ministry is not taking place.

Why Say These Things?

It is necessary to say these things because we are reading of the condition that prevailed in the early church – before “the falling away” NKJV (2 Thess 2:3). The church was mature and strong – that is why when it was scattered, the disciples “went everywhere preaching the word” (Acts 8:4). That maturity came about because they “continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). The believers were “continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” NASB

Reading With Perspective

We cannot read the book of Acts as though it reflected the condition of the modern church. Neither, indeed, can we read it as though it contained a depiction of the model church. This is the record of the real church, holding to its appointed Head, having nourishment ministered to it, and increasing with the increase of God. It is the report of what takes place when Jesus takes up residence in people. Here we are being exposed to what happens when the Holy Spirit is not quenched, and when sound doctrine is taught. It reveals what happens when that doctrine is embraced and people grow up into Christ Jesus. Here we are seeing people living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

The hostility against this church that is now reported is the direct result of the change in character that takes place in those who are joined to the Lord.

HEROD KILLS JAMES WITH THE SWORD

“2 And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” Other versions read, “And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword,” NKJV “He had James the brother of John beheaded,” NJB “He ordered that James be killed with a sword. (James was the brother of John),” IE and “He had James the brother of John murdered with a sword.” WILLIAMS

KILLED

The word translated “killed” is a very graphic one. As used here, the lexical meaning of the word is “to take away,” THAYER “do away with,” FRIBERG “to get rid of someone by execution,” LOUW-NIDA and “do away with, kill, murder.” GINGRICH This word accents the purpose – a purpose that was carried out by killing, or murder. The purpose was to get rid of someone that was standing, so to speak, in the way – someone that was being viewed as an obstacle.

The depiction is that of the Savior, restraining the expressions and manners of the hypocritical leaders. To them, getting rid of Jesus was like breaking the chains and cutting the ropes that

bound and straitened them because of Him.

James is the first apostle who was martyred, which took place around A.D. 44. McClintok and Strong's Cyclopedia says of his martyrdom, "Clement of Alexandria, in a fragment preserved by Eusebius (Hist. Eccles. 1, 9), reports that the officer who conducted James to the tribunal was so influenced by the bold declaration of his faith as to embrace the Gospel and avow himself also a Christian; in consequence of which, he was beheaded at the same time." Clement of Alexandria lived from A.D. 150-211/216, and is considered prominent among the early teachers in the church. I mention this only to accentuate that from early times, key believers have been mindful of James the apostle, and of his martyrdom.

RESTRAINING INFLUENCES

As illustrated in this text, the truth of the matter is that it is more difficult for sinners to sin and despots to rule when righteous people are present. Oh, they do not confess to this restriction, but it does exist. The fulness of this condition was exhibited in our Lord Jesus Christ. His very presence was a restraint upon the wicked and hypocritical. The Psalmist portrayed this condition when he prophesied the intent for which the Messiah was slain. "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us" (Psa 2:3). This was the Psalm that the early church rehearsed to God when they prayed for boldness in the wake of the opposition of the chief priests and Sadducees (Acts 4:5-8). The depiction is that of the Savior, restraining the expressions and manners of the hypocritical leaders. To them, getting rid of Jesus was like breaking the chains and cutting the ropes that bound and straitened them because of Him.

That is precisely what we have here –an attempt to break moral chains and cut ropes that were being imposed by the truth that was being disseminated in Jerusalem. It is also important to note that the Jews themselves were agitated by the presence of a proclaimer of the truth of Christ.

JAMES, THE BROTHER OF JOHN

Herod focuses on James, identified as "the brother of John." His position among the disciples, and influence in the city, was obviously one of prominence. He was one of the very first apostles who were called to follow Jesus, being preceded by Peter and Andrew (Matt 4:18-22). James, together with the other apostles, was among those who had "left all" and followed Jesus (Mk 10:28; Lk 18:28).

"James" is the Graecized form of Jacob (*Ija>kwbov*). Prior to being called by Jesus into the apostleship, he was a fisherman who worked with his brother John and their father Zebedee (Matt 4:21).

James and his brother, John, were called "Boanerges" by Jesus, "which is, The sons of thunder" (Mark 3:17). Lexically, this name "seems to denote fiery and destructive zeal that may be likened to a thunderstorm." THAYER This gives us an indication of the nature of James – zealous, and bursting with energy. He is an example of one whose energy was harnessed by the grace of God, and devoted to holy activities. In this regard, he appears to have been much like Elijah the Prophet and John the Baptist – noted for their uncompromising and focused zeal.

Although prominent among "the twelve," there is no mentioning of James between Acts 1:13, where he is listed second, and Acts 12:2. He is never again mentioned in the Scripture. He stands as an example of a significant person in the Kingdom of God who was not vaunted among men.

One Of Three Favored Apostles

James was one among three who were vouchsafed special favor from the Lord Jesus Himself. They formed the inner circle of "the twelve apostles" (Matt 10:2), and were granted some privileges others

did not receive.

- These three were the only men who accompanied Jesus to the mount in which He was transfigured (Matt 17:1).
- They are the only ones who saw Jesus transfigured (Matt 17:2).
- They were the only ones who saw Moses and Elijah in glory, speaking with Jesus about the death He was going to accomplish (Matt 17:3; Lk 9:30-31).
- They were the only ones to whom God Himself spoke on the mount of transfiguration (Matt 17:5).
- When going to the house of Jairus to raise his daughter from the dead, Jesus permitted only Peter, James, and John to follow Him (Mk 5:37).
- Jesus allowed only these three to enter the house of Jairus with Himself (Lk 8:51).
- The entire Olivet discourse was delivered to Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mk 13:3-37; Matt 24:3-25:46).
- On the night of His betrayal, Jesus permitted only Peter, James, and John to go further with Him in the garden (Mk 14:33).

The flesh might reason that privilege guarantees longevity, or that prominence always affords protection. However, let us consider this malicious deed that was wrought on James. Here was a wicked person – Herod – gaining the seeming advantage over a righteous person – James. Here was a child of the wicked one seemingly triumphing over a child of God. The ungodly killed the godly. The wicked apparently removed the holy. Someone who lacked faith opposed and removed someone who did have faith.

Now, this is not the first time such actions have been recorded.

Here was a child of the wicked one seemingly triumphing over a child of God. The ungodly killed the godly. The wicked apparently removed the holy. Someone who lacked faith opposed and removed someone who did have faith.

Cain killed Abel (Gen 4:3-8; 1 John 3:12).

- Pharaoh slew great numbers of innocent male children (Ex 1:16,22; Jer 19:4).
- Jezebel killed the prophets of God (1 Kgs 18:4,13).
- The Jews killed their own prophets (1 Thess 2:15).
- Zechariah the prophet was killed in the court of the house of God (2 Chron 24:21; Matt 23:35).
- Uriah the priest was killed by Jehoikim the king (Jer 26:23).
- Herod mandated the slaughter of innocent children (Matt 2:16; Jer 19:4).
- John the Baptist was beheaded by Herod (Matt 14:10; Mk 6:27-28).
- Stephen was stoned by the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:58-60).
- Holy people were “stoned” and even “sawn asunder” (Heb 11:37).

This is not to mention the extended suffering that many of the people of God have endured. Among the records are that of the incomparable sufferings of Job (Job 1-2), four hundred years of oppression for the Israelites (Gen 15:13; Acts 7:6), the extended persecution of the early church (Acts 8:1-4), and many others.

Such actions, if viewed from a lower vantage point, are difficult to comprehend. They appear to

contradict some of the great promises that have been given to the people of God.

- “For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him” (Psa 32:6)
- “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:7).
- “Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all ” (Psa 34:19).
- “ No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper ; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD” (Isa 54:17).
- “But there shall not an hair of your head perish ” (Luke 21:18).

Such texts are to be considered within the context of other words that Jesus delivered on the subject of opposition and even martyrdom.

- “Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake” (Matt 24:9).
- “Therefore also said the wisdom of God, I will send them prophets and apostles, and some of them they shall slay and persecute” (Luke 11:49).

Given due heed, all of these advantages work to produce a life that is acceptable to God. Even a persecutor of the church will stop that activity when he is joined to the Lord. A former thief, even though momentarily snared by the sin again, only needs to be told, “steal no more”

“Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also” (John 15:20).

- “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

You can add to this the words delivered by holy men after Jesus was enthroned in heaven.

- “. . . we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).
- “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17).
- “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1 Thess 3:3).
- “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Tim 2:12).

Life in This World Is

Not The Primary Life

All of this accents that life in this world is not the primary life. That is precisely why Jesus said, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25). It is not possible that there can be an exception to this rule.

In view of this clear statement by the Lord Jesus, I do not know how any person can justify an approach to life in Christ that majors on correcting human behavior. The salvation that is “in Christ

Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10), impacts directly upon the character of those receiving it. Their hearts are “purified” (Acts 15:9), their conscience is “purged” (Heb 10:22), they become a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), and receive the Holy Spirit of God (1 Thess 4:8). Their sins are forgiven (Col 2:13), they are “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), and the grace of God that brings salvation teaches them to effectively reject all ungodliness, and live righteously in this world (Tit 2:11-13). Every possible advantage has been given to the child of God, and that includes access into the grace wherein we stand (Rom 5:2).

Given due heed, all of these advantages work to produce a life that is acceptable to God. Even a persecutor of the church will stop that activity when he is joined to the Lord. A former thief, even though momentarily snared by the sin again, only needs to be told, “steal no more” (Eph 4:26). Of course, all of this is to no avail if life is addressed as though it was comprised of habits.

SEEING PERSECUTION FROM A HIGHER POINT OF VIEW

It is wrong to philosophize about why the people of God suffer. The Lord has made it clear that He is taking a people “out of” the masses for His own name (Acts 15:14). Jesus Himself made clear that those whom He chooses are chosen “out of the world,” and no longer belong to its order. He also affirmed that this why the world hates those whom He has chosen out of it (John 15:19).

Finishing the Course

Particularly when we are considering the death of a believer, like that of James, there is something to ponder. Just as surely as there is a race that is “set before” those called of God (Heb 12:1), so there is a point at which the servant of God can say, “I have finished my course” (2 Tim 4:7).

For some, the course is relatively short – like Abel, Enoch, Stephen, and James. For others, it is considerably long – like Abraham, Noah, Hosea, Daniel, John, Peter, and Paul. It is the work to which one has been appointed that determines their duration in the world. I say this in the awareness that a person, through foolish living, can die before their time (Eccl 7:17). From this point of view, protection is only as sure one’s assignment from the Lord.

A Confirmation of Revealed Truth

When the people of God are oppressed, and even slain, several statements of truth are confirmed. This confirmation is to heavenly principalities and powers as well as the saints on earth.

- The world does, indeed, hate those who have been chosen by Jesus (John 15:18-19; John 16:2,33; 17:14; 1 John 3:13).
- Jesus is, in fact, able to succor, or minister relief, to those who are tempted (Heb 2:18).
- No opposition or inconvenience, however severe it may be, can “separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:35-39).
- The opposition and persecution directed toward the people of God by the ungodly is a “token” of the justness of their punishment. Paul stated it in these words: “And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God” (Phil 1:28). And again, “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you” (2 Thess 1:4-6).
- In all of these things, the “manifold wisdom” of God is being made known to

“principalities and powers in heavenly places” through “the church” (Eph 3:10). The beheading of James will have no hindering effect upon the truth. It was the means through which James left this world to be “present with the Lord.” It also confirmed that Herod was wicked, that James was righteous, and that the truth is superior.

WHEN HE SAW THAT IT PLEASSED THE JEWS

“ 3 And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.)”

Herod was shrewd and calculating. He sought for the applause of men as well as other forms of personal advantage. This will all be confirmed in the manner in which he viewed this whole situation.

HE SAW THAT IT PLEASSED THE JEWS

“And because he saw it pleased the Jews . . .” Other versions read, “he saw that this was pleasing the Jews,” BBE “saw how much this pleased the Judaeans,” CJB “saw how much this pleased the Jewish leaders,” LIVING “saw that the Jewish leaders liked this,” IE “Finding that this gratified the Jews,” WEYMOUTH “saw how this was agreeable to the Jews,” ISV and “when he found this action pleased the Jews.” PHILLIPS

Josephus, the Jewish historian, says of Herod: “This king (Herod Agrippa) was by nature very beneficent, and liberal in his gifts, and very ambitious to please the people with such large donations; and he made himself very illustrious by the many expensive presents he made them. He took delight in giving, and rejoiced in living with good reputation.” Antiq., 19, chapter 8, section 3)

Commenting on the Divine objective of civil government, Paul wrote the following: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom 13:1-4).

The following is a brief summation of this passage.

- The words “power”

and “powers” are translated from the Greek word **evxousi,a**. . The meaning of this word is “the power of authority,” THAYER “ruling power, government, official. Jurisdiction,” USB and “right to control or govern over – authority to rule.” LOUW-NIDA

Herod was shrewd and calculating. He sought for the applause of men as well as other forms of personal advantage. This will all be confirmed in the manner in which he viewed this whole situation.

- “Every soul” is to be subject to civil authorities. As with all forms of power, both domestic and social, this applies only in matters that do not contradict the Lord of all.

- The reason for subjection to civil authorities is that they have received their power from God.

- Whoever resists, or rebels against due authority, is resisting or rebelling against what God has instituted.

- Those resisting the specified authority will bring judgment upon themselves.

- Rulers, as defined by God, are not a terror to those who do good.
- The same rulers are intended to strike terror in those who do evil, or wrong.
- Those who do good, of what is right, will receive commendation from properly functioning authorities.
- Civil authorities are God's ministers, or servants, for the good of society.
- Such authorities are also God's ministers, or servants, for the punishment of those who do evil.
- They do not bear the sword in vain, executing capital punishment where warranted.

All of this coincides with what is written elsewhere concerning civil authority.

- “He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory : for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and he hath set the world upon them” (1 Sam 2:8).
- “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God ” (Psa 62:11).
- “ By Me kings reign , and princes decree justice. By Me princes rule , and nobles, even all the judges of the earth” (Prov 8:15-16).
- “I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto Me ” (Jer 27:5).
- “And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings : he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Dan 2:21).
- “And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will ” (Dan 4:32).
- “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt 6:13).
- “Jesus answered” [Pilate], “Thou couldest have no power at all against Me, except it were given thee from above : therefore he that delivered Me unto thee hath the greater sin” (John 19:11).
- “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev 1:5).
- “And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS” (Rev 19:16).

Therefore, civil authorities are responsible to God for what they do – whether we are speaking of Pharaoh or Saul, Og and Sihon or Solomon and David. All of the kings of Israel and Judah were responsible to God. Heathen kings like Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus were as well. There are some notable examples of heathen kings who recognized this responsibility and yielded to it. Some of them are Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-11), Darius (Ezra 6:1-12), Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:1-28), and the King of Nineveh (Jonah 3:6-9).

Some of the wicked rulers who did not give honor to God included Pharaoh (Ex 1:10-22), Hanon the Ammonite (2 Sam 10:4), Ahab (1 Kgs 16:30-33), Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:1-17), and Pilate (Lk 13:1;

Matt 27:11-26).

This is the Way It Is

The Scriptures declare to us the precise manner in which worldly rulers obtain their power. Knowing this, or at least sensing it, godly people refused to yield to the mandates of any ruler whose authority was used in contradiction to the law of God. No insightful person has ever been represented as submitting to a ruler who required the people to contradict the nature or revelation of Almighty God.

- The Hebrew midwives refused to obey Pharaoh's command to kill the male Hebrews babies (Ex 1:15-21).
- Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah refused to obey the king's command to bow down to a golden image (Dan 3:16-18).
- Daniel refused to obey the edict to cease praying to the God of heaven (Dan 6:10).
- The three wise men from the East were told by an angel not to obey Herod, but to return home another way (Matt 2:8,12).
- When the religious leaders commanded the apostles to cease to teach and preach Jesus Christ, they refused to do so (Acts 4:19-20).

No person, whether king or vassal, has the right to disobey the God of heaven, or to act in contradiction of His will. Further, no commandment that is at variance with the revealed will of God is to be obeyed, regardless of its source.

If these things are not so, then Herod can be justified in the beheading of James. Such a thought is too absurd to be entertained for even a moment.

The truth of the matter is that Herod stepped beyond the boundary of his authority. He ventured into an area in which God had given him no authority.

This is a perspective that must not be lost by the professing church. Believers must posture themselves to obey God rather than men, never yielding to any requirement from men that obviates the necessity of yielding to the Lord.

What Their Religion Produced

Here was a wicked king who made a move against the church because it pleased religious people – even the leaders of the people who were chosen and cared for by Almighty God. This was the people of whom it was said, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5). All of this translated into a very definite advantage. It is written, “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God” (Rom 3:1-2).

The principle is that such an approach to acceptable living actually awakens and strengthens the sinful nature, rather than subduing it. From the heavenly vantage point, this is precisely what the Law was designed to do – to make sin break forth, in order that men might become more aware of their need for a Savior.

It is essential to see that “the Jews” were no ordinary people even though they were conducting their lives as though they were. Privileges had been vouchsafed to them that were absolutely unique. They had brought inconceivable advantages to the people. Yet, when those favors were

ignored, it caused them to plummet even deeper into sin. The truth of God has an unavoidable impact upon those who are subjected to it. It will either promote liberty or enforce bondage. When the truth is “known,” it makes men free (John 8:32). When it is ignored, disdained, and not believed, it nails them more firmly to this world and condemnation.

Although it is necessary, exposure to the truth by no means guarantees its acceptance. This puts the lie to the notion that hearing and repeating things eventually leads to the formation of better character. This erroneous notion is nothing more than imagination spawned in hell itself, and perpetrated by demons. Yet, it is the supposition upon which all procedural approaches to correct behavior are founded. If such a thought was true, the Jews would have been the most spiritually and morally improved people in the history of the world.

Paul elaborates on this principle in his letter to the Colossians. He did so because they were being corrupted by teaching that was philosophical, and recommended routines and disciplines through which wayward tendencies were addressed. In a sterling statement concerning the impotence of humanly devised “ordinances” designed for those who are “living in the world,” Paul wrote, “Which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honor to the satisfying of the flesh” (Col 2:23). Other versions say such rules are of no value in “in restraining sinful indulgence,” NIV “in checking the indulgence of the flesh,” NRSV “in restraining people from indulging their old nature,” CJB and “but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh (the lower nature). [Instead, they do not honor God but serve only to indulge the flesh].” AMPLIFIED

The principle is that such an approach to acceptable living actually awakens and strengthens the sinful nature, rather than subduing it. From the heavenly vantage point, this is precisely what the Law was designed to do – to make sin break forth, in order that men might become more aware of their need for a Savior. Paul stated it this way – and this is said of God’s holy, just, spiritual, and good law: “But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful” (Rom 7:13). The Amplified Bible reads, “It was sin, working death in me by using this good thing [as a weapon], in order that through the commandment sin might be shown up clearly to be sin, that the extreme malignity and immeasurable sinfulness of sin might plainly appear.”

Paul cites his own experience as proof of this. “For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me” (Rom 7:9-11). The idea here is that there is such a vast chasm between human nature and the Divine nature, that the very Law of God caused sin to break forth. Or, in the words of Paul, “But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence” (Rom 7:8).

Account for the Pleasing of the Jews

I am accounting for the fact that the Jews were “pleased” when Herod killed James. For sensitive souls, such a reaction defies all reason. Additionally, this account verifies the absolute need for a Savior, and the unwavering requirement of men to accept Him, yield to Him, and live no more for themselves.

Do not fail to get the picture. We are speaking of an initiative, and the commendation of it, that took place in Jerusalem – among the Jews. These are the people who not only had been subjected to the regular reading of the Law and the prophets, but were also exposed to the introductory ministry of John the Baptist. There was also the ministry of the Son of God Himself, extending over a period of more than three years. At the time of our text, they had also been exposed to the expensive ministry of the apostles and others for nearly fifteen years.

Shut Up to the Faith

Yet, these people preferred living under the contrived traditions of the Jewish leaders, who wrested the Scriptures, leaving the people thinking that they were serving God. In them a principle enunciated by Paul was lived out. “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” (Gal 3:23). Other versions read, “locked up until faith should be revealed,” NIV “kept under restraint until faith should be revealed,” NRSV “imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed,” RSV and “kept in custody in preparation for the faith.” AMPLIFIED

Elsewhere Paul announces that the Law had nothing whatsoever to do with faith. It was a system of doing, not believing. As it is written, “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal 3:12), or “But the Law does not rest on faith [does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith], for it itself says, He who does them [the things prescribed by the Law] shall live by them [not by faith]. [Lev. 18:5].” AMPLIFIED In other words, those who subscribe to a system of Law are actually kept from believing, for there is nothing in the Law that either requires or promotes faith. It leads men to Christ, but it does not give them to Him. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to do that.

Therefore, because of their penchant for Law, these people, like those who were subjected to Jesus, refused to embrace Him because they “could not believe” (John 12:48).

It ought to be noted that all who promote systems of law, routines, procedures, and the likes for the promotion of spiritual life, have actually made it more difficult for faith to enter. If the Law that was ordained of God shut men up to faith, you may be sure that the systems and laws created by men will do no better.

The Flesh Profits Nothing

All of this substantiates that the flesh profits nothing. “Flesh” speaks of the natural part of man – everything that can be traced back to Adam, for “ whatsoever is born of the flesh IS flesh” (John 3:6), and the entire human race is traced back to Adam (Acts 17:26) and to Eve, who is “the mother of all living” (Gen 3:28). In Adam “all die,” both spiritually and in the body (1 Cor 15:22).

Flesh cannot be educated or cultured out of its unacceptable condition. It cannot be trained in such a manner as to make men adequate for Divine acceptance. There is no procedure that can remove the past, grant repentance, create a new heart, or restructure man’s character. If the Law – the ultimate moral code – given by God Himself, could not accomplish such a change, you may be sure men cannot devise such a system.

It is important to remember that the Law was not a series of progressive steps – a procedure that men continually try to sanctify. The Ten Commandments in their entirety were to be kept all of the time. They were not a series of steps through which human behavior could be corrected. Rather, their purpose was to show that man’s basic nature cannot be changed by anything man himself does. To put it another way, the fundamental nature of Adam cannot be changed for the good. It is in this sense that Adam and Eve died, and the whole human race with them. It is written that men are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

Men left entirely to their own (barbarians) cannot change their nature. This is confirmed by the first chapter of Romans (1:19-32). Left to themselves, men degenerated, spiraling downward until they freely committed and condoned deeds that were beneath the temperament of the beasts of the earth (Rom 1:26-27). The change wrought in them was not upward, but downward.

Even when the flesh is cultured through all manner of natural wisdom and expertise, it has no

impact upon the character of men. This is seen in the Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Greeks, and the Romans. These were all noted for their cultural advancements, which are held in high regard to this very day. The Egyptians refused to acknowledge the God of heaven, even after He had made Himself known to them through ten awesome plagues. The Chaldeans, Greeks, and Romans were also exposed to Divine manners through the Jews, and the Romans in the Person of Christ – yet they took their stand against both God and His people. Their culture, with all of its wisdom, social expertise, and well-ordered society, could not change their character.

Even religious flesh cannot be sanctified. The primary evidence of this is the Jews themselves, who had a revealed religion. They were given a superior law (Deut 4:7), and statutes and ordinances that reflected the mind of the Lord. Although their origin was found in God Himself, they became “a degenerate plant and a strange vine” to Him (Jer 2:21). They killed the prophets that were sent to them, and finally, through the hands of wicked men, crucified and killed “the Prince of life” (Acts 3:15; 1 Thess 2:12). The strictest form of procedural religion – one given by God – did not and could not change them!

Even when men are granted authority, they cannot improve their fallen condition. World rulers like Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, Darius, Cyrus, Alexander the Great, and the Caesars, could not change their character. Their influence reached across the length and breadth of the world, and their innovations and accomplishments are burned into history. They could not change their character. Their authority did not reach that far! Add to these those leaders of lesser authority, who also exercised domination over men. Politically, these include both Pilate and Herod. Religiously they include the Jewish chief priests, the elders, the scribes, the Pharisees, and Sanhedrin, and the lawyers. All of them together did not bring about a single improvement in the character of men. What is even more, all of them opposed the Lord’s Christ, who was Truth incarnate.

I do not know how it is possible to present a more thorough testimony of the inability of man to change himself. Yet, to this very day, there are still men who are presenting procedures and disciplines that claim to change the individual. Some consist of seven steps, some of eight, and some even of twelve. But none of them can reach the heart or alter the character. None of them can transform or regenerate, or bring back from death in trespasses and sins, or produce a cleansed conscience before God. None of them require faith, and none of them can bestow the blessing that comes from Jesus alone.

See, these very things are being confirmed to us in our text. We are reading of Herod, who was noted for cultural advance, and keeping the people pleased. We are reading about religious leaders who were occupying offices instituted by God Himself. We are reading of people who had a revealed religion, and progenitors that walked in Divine favor. Yet, in spite of all of this, James, the brother of John, chosen by Jesus, and occupying a pivotal position in the body of Christ has been beheaded – and the wicked deed has pleased the Jews! Let those who champion the imagination that change comes through routine give us an explanation of this condition!

The Pervasive Nature of Unbelief

This also confirms the pervasive nature of unbelief, and the wickedness that is promoted when people who are exposed to the truth refuse to accept it. Unbelief has to do with the heart, not merely the mind. Therefore it is written, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12). Because of its association with the heart, unbelief is pervasive and invasive in nature. It contaminates everything it touches, making it unacceptable to God – and that includes the person and everything he does. As it is written, “unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled” (Titus 1:15).

Because of its rebellious nature, unbelief awakens “the flesh” to do remarkably absurd and unreasonable things. We see this in this very text. Herod had been exposed to enough of the truth to know who was chief within the church. There is no question concerning an association being made between James and Jesus of Nazareth, for that message is what gave identity to the early church. That is why they were referred to as “the sect of the Nazarene,” and someone of prominence among them was called “a ringleader,” as Paul was several years later (Acts 24:5).

The Flesh Cannot Be Reformed

“The flesh” cannot be reformed. That is because God has rejected it, and requires a new birth. Every effort to train the flesh is nothing more than vanity. Such cannot possibly yield the results that have been assigned to faith.

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If it can be traced back to Adam, there is no lasting value in it – it makes no difference what it is. In Jesus, there is a new generation. He is the only Progenitor that can beget acceptable children (Rom 5:12-19). As the “Last Adam,” He has brought the official conclusion to everything deriving its source from Adam (1 Cor 15:45). As “the Second Man,” He is the Beginning of a new generation – the only one that is, or ever will be, received by God (1 Cor 15:47; Heb 2:13).

The Myth of the Power of Habit

Worldly philosophers and heathen religions have heralded habit as the door that leads to character. As I am using the term, and as commonly accepted, “habit” means “a behavior pattern acquired by frequent repetition or physiologic exposure that shows itself in regularity or increased facility of performance b : an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

All recovery systems and procedural religion are based on this mythical approach. Here are some historical statements made concerning “habit.”

- “Sow an act...reap a habit; Sow a habit...reap a character; Sow a character...reap a destiny." *Attributed to George Dana Boardman*

Baptist Minister, 1801-1931

- “We sow our thoughts, and we reap our actions; we sow our actions, and we reap our habits; we sow our habits, and we reap our characters; we sow our characters, and we reap our destiny.”

Author: Desiderius-Gerhard- Erasmus

Dutch Humanist and Theologian, 1466-1536

- “I say that habit's but a long practice, friend, and this becomes men's nature in the end.”

“Men acquire a particular quality by constantly acting in a particular way.”

"Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit. We become just by doing just acts."

Aristotle

Greek Philosopher, 384-322 B.C.

- “Our character is basically a composite of our habits. Because they are consistent, often unconscious patterns, they constantly, daily, express our character.”

Steven Covey

Mormon, Born 1932

- “To learn new habits is everything, for it is to reach the substance of life. Life is but a tissue of habits.”

Henri-Frederic Amiel

Swiss Philosopher, 1821-1881

- “Thought moulds your character. If you entertain noble thoughts, you will develop a noble character; and if you entertain evil thoughts, you will develop a base character. This is the immutable Law of Nature. Therefore, you can deliberately shape your character by cultivating sublime thoughts. Thought materialises and becomes an action. If you allow the mind to dwell on good, elevating thoughts, you will do naturally good and laudable actions.”

Excerpt from All About Hinduism by Sri Swami Sivananda

Hindu spiritual teacher, 1887-1963

- "Men's natures are alike; it is their habits that separate them."

Confucius

Chinese thinker & social philosopher, 551-479 B.C.

In all of these groups, the participants confess that they are still really what they have always been. However, now the difference is that they have new habits, and are no longer indulging their old ones, even though they are going against their fundamental desires.

Thus, ranging from preachers to philosophers, and from Mormon’s to Hindus, it has been promulgated that character is, in fact, formed by repetitive expressions. Actually, actions flow from character. Character does not result from actions. What a person does is the expression of what they are. What they do cannot change what they are, anymore than a leopard can change its spots, or an Ethiopian the color of his skin. In fact, the Word of God makes a point of the fact that a person cannot change what they are by what they do. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil” (Jer 13:23). That is, any change of habit is only outward, and has no bearing at all upon what the person really is.

As I have said, this view drives all recovery routines. It is the foundation upon which all “anonymous” groups base their programs. Official groups following this approach include the following.

- **Adult Children of Alcoholics** = "<http://www.adultchildren.org/>"
- **Alcoholics Anonymous** = "<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org/index.html>"
- **Clutterers Anonymous** = "<http://www.clutterers-anonymous.net/>"
- **Cocaine Anonymous** = "<http://www.ca.org/>"
- **Co-Dependents Anonymous** = "<http://www.codependents.org/>"
- **Criminal and Gangs Anonymous** = "<http://www.angelfire.com/id/CGAnonymous/>"

- **Debtors Anonymous** = "http://www.debtors anonymous.org/"
- **Gamblers Anonymous** = "http://www.gamblers anonymous.org/"
- **Marijuana Anonymous** = "http://www.marijuana -anonymous.org/"
- **Methadone Anonymous** = "http://www. afirmfwc.org/methanon.htm"
- **Narcotics Anonymous** = "http://www.na.org/"
- **Nicotine Anonymous** = "http://www.nicotine -anonymous.org/"
- **Overeaters Anonymous** = "http://www.oa.org/"
- **Self Mutilators Anonymous** = "http://www. selfmutilatorsanonymous.org/"
- **Sex Addicts Anonymous** = "http://www.saa -recovery.org/"
- **Suicide Anonymous** = "http://www.geocities. com/samemphis/"

In all of these groups, the participants confess that they are still really what they have always been. However, now the difference is that they have new habits, and are no longer indulging their old ones, even though they are going against their fundamental desires.

Of course, it is one thing to speak of these as social ills, independent of the life that is in Christ Jesus. However, this approach has now been incorporated into church programs across the country. The number of these groups is so staggering it boggles the mind – and these are recovery groups for professing Christians. I have personally counted fifty of these groups, twenty-six recovery centers, and eleven Christian Counseling Associations. All of these are global, national, or regional and are not listed at the city, or community, or private level.

The Purpose for This

My purpose in bringing up this seemingly diversion is to accent the uniqueness of salvation – something in which neither Herod nor the consenting Jews had participated.

In Christ Jesus a point is established at which the individual ceases to be what they were before. The point is the new birth, or regeneration. It is the place in which the person is delivered from the kingdom of darkness, and translated into the Kingdom of God's dear Son (Col 1:13). At that point the person is turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18). Their "old man" is crucified, and they begin walking in the newness of life (Rom 6:4-6). They are no longer what they were before, even though some of them had been immersed in deviate and enslaving manners of life. Paul speaks of some in Corinth who could be so described, and he unequivocally proclaims their present state. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you : but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor 6:9-11). How frequently this manner of speaking is employed – not accented what the people did, but what they WERE.

- "But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom 6:17).
- "Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led" (1 Cor 12:2).
- "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph 2:12).

- “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light” (Eph 5:8).

- “For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25).

And what was it that changed what we “were” ? Was it a habit, or a new set of habits? Were we changed by a series of steps that we performed, or by some form of regimented repetition? Oh, the answer is obvious enough to those with eyes to see. We were changed by the working of the Lord! Our character was changed. Our minds were changed. Our basic persons – our hearts – were changed. We became a “new creation” in Christ Jesus. Old things – including what we were – passed away, and everything became new (2 Cor 5:17). As God’s own workmanship, we were “ created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). We were “ made righteous” (Rom 5:19), “ made free” (Rom 6:18,22), and “ made to drink into one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). We were “ made accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), and “ made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). Now, we are described as having been “ made partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14). The change wrought when men are born again is described in this manner: “enlightened . . . tasted of the heavenly gift . . . made partakers of the Holy Ghost . . . tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” (Heb 6:5).

The change itself is the result of God’s own work, and is so described. “For God , who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). The same kind of change took place within the believers as took place in the creation. Just as surely as chaos was dissipated and darkness dispersed, so we were moved from darkness into light, changing the entire landscape of lives. So far as the ongoing change that is taking place – which is always upwards and onwards – it too is traced to Divine working : “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18).

How do you describe a person who went through all of that, and now must go through some form of recovery? Is it that their real self reasserted itself? Is it that they really were never changed at all? Is that the explanation? Or, is it that they have “fallen” (Gal 5:4), or “turned back” (2 Pet 2:21), or made a place for Satan (Eph 4:27)? Could it be that they allowed an “evil heart of unbelief” to enter into them again (Heb 3:12)?

In the case of our text, the Jews were pleased because they chose to remain under the Law, which was “weak through the flesh” (Rom 8:3). The Law itself was not weak. It was the ones to whom it was addressed that were weak. It required more strength than those who were under it possessed.

By the time of our text, they had probably kept fourteen more Passovers, fourteen more Feast of the Tabernacles, and fourteen more Pentecosts. Seven hundred and twenty-eight Sabbaths were behind them. They had heard Moses and the prophets read at least that many times.

The religious rule-makers, however, do not deliver this message to the people. They lead them to believe that the strength is in the procedure – that if they will just do it long enough, it will transform them. But, what will they do with the Jews of our text. They certainly continued to do the procedures prescribed by the Law. In fact, they even performed them with care while they were delivering Jesus to be crucified (John 18:28). By the time of our text, they had probably kept fourteen more Passovers, fourteen more Feast of the Tabernacles, and fourteen more Pentecosts. Seven hundred and twenty-eight Sabbaths were behind them. They had heard Moses and the prophets read at least that many times. I know of no purported recovery program that requires that many repetitions. Some claim good results in forty days. Others say it will require a year. But what about the Jews of our text? Just how does that fit into that way of thinking? And if Divinely ordained routines did not change people, who is the person brash enough to say their rules will get

the work done?

We Are Being Exposed to the Real Thing

In our text, we are being exposed to the real thing. This is not the outworking of a theory, but the manifestation of the fact that men are unchanged until God Himself changes them. Herod killed James because he was alienated from God, and James was reconciled to God. He did so because he was not changed, and James was changed. He did not think about what God thought of his action, but took note of what the Jews thought. That was because he had more in common with them than with the Lord. On the other hand, the Jews were pleased with the death of James because they were alienated from the life of God. They did so because they could not see James as God saw him, and God could not see him as they saw him. The whole affair was a revelation of what the people were. In my judgment, that is one of the reasons God did not stop it from happening – in order, among other things, to stop the mouths of those who barter with the souls of men, leading people to think their plans are more effective than the salvation of God.

Rather than being changed by doing, we are changed by beholding – that is the express statement of Scripture (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). When at last we undergo the final change, our bodies being raised from the dead, the change will be wrought precisely the same way – by beholding Jesus, seeing Him as He is (1 John 3:1-2).

HE PROCEED TO TAKE PETER ALSO

“ . . . he proceeded further to take Peter also.” Other versions read, “to seize Peter,” NKJV “arrest Peter,” NASB “Take Peter also,” DARBY and “lay hold on Peter also.” YLT

How brash and bold was this wicked man. God had said, “Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm” (1 Chr 16:22; Psa 105:15). David dared not touch king Saul (1 Sam 24:6-7). Michael the archangel, when disputing with the devil, dared not cast a railing accusation at him (Jude 1:9). But Herod, like a stupid beast, apprehended and incarcerated the man who had been given “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:19).

That is how a person thinks when they are “dead in trespasses and sins,” “alienated from the life of God,” and taken captive by the devil “at his will” (Eph 2:1; Eph 4:18; 2 Tim 2:26). God does not interfere with Herod’s activity, for “it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble” His people (2 Thess 1:6). He will let them treasure up wrath for themselves (Rom 2:5). God is of such a nature as to store of His wrath for a great outpouring, by enduring with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath that were “prepared for destruction” (Rom 9:22). He will allow them to work their wills to remove all doubt about their reprehensible nature!

It is this fact that supports the statement, “For we know Him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto Me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge His people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). That text is based upon a statement God made concerning Himself in Deuteronomy 32:35. It is a most arresting text, and worthy of our consideration – particularly since an appeal is made for believers to consider it. “To Me belongeth vengeance, and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.” The idea is that all of their strength will eventually run out, because they are trusting in themselves. For Herod, he is basking in the strength of his throne, killing one apostle, and arresting another in hopes of doing the same thing. He sees himself as invincible, and Peter as vulnerable. Little does he know the future God has planned for him, as well as for His faithful servant Peter.

THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

“Then were the days of unleavened bread.” Other versions read, “Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread,” NKJV “This happened during the Feast of Unleavened Bread,” NIV and “This was during the days of Unleavened Bread [the Passover week].” AMPLIFIED

The “Feast of Unleavened Bread,” or “days of unleavened bread,” were the seven days following the Passover. The Law specified this in Leviticus 23:5-6: “In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread” (Lev 23:5-6). The Passover was on the fourteenth day, and the “days of unleavened bread” commenced on the fifteenth day. The whole period was not referred to as “the Passover,” as some allege. Luke 22:1 appears to refer to this feast as “The

This was the same season during which Jesus was crucified 14-15 years earlier. It was a holy time for the Jews – an extended period – yet they still were pleased when Herod rid them of one of the chief representatives of Jesus.

Passover.” “Now the feast of unleavened bread drew nigh, which is called the Passover” (Luke 22:1). However, the emphasis here was on the approach of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and not on the Feast itself – i.e. “The feast of unleavened bread drew nigh,” or was at hand. The particular day that marked that approach was the Passover, which was on the fourteenth day. The Passover and the Feast of unleavened bread were considered separately, even though they were consecutive (2 Chron 35:17; Mk 14:1). The word used in our text is plural (**h`me,rai**) – “days” – confirming that it was not speaking of the Passover itself, but of the week that followed. In other words, the “days of unleavened bread” were in process.

This was the same season during which Jesus was crucified 14-15 years earlier. It was a holy time for the Jews – an extended period – yet they still were pleased when Herod rid them of one of the chief representatives of Jesus. So far as these people were concerned, their hearts were still calloused, and no change had been wrought in them. This was true, even though they had just observed a feast that was an ordained depiction of the death of Christ, who is appropriately described as “our Passover” (1 Cor 5:7). However, as Paul says elsewhere, “their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart” (2 Cor 3:14-15). Because of the hardness of their heart, God had poured out the spirit of deep sleep upon them (Isa 6:9-10; 29:10-11; Matt 13:14-15), so they could make no association between the time of the Passover and “the Lamb of God,” of which John the Baptist had spoken (John 1:29,36).

PETER IS APPREHENDED

“4a And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him . . .”

Here we will confront the clear conflict of man's intentions with the purpose God. Herod desires one thing, and God desires another. Judging from the success that Herod had in killing James, it may appear that he is free to do whatever he desires. It will be interesting to see how all of this plays out. Keep in mind that Divine manners and power are being made known as well as the human purposes and abilities.

WHEN HE HAD APPREHENDED HIM

“And when he had apprehended him . . .” Other versions read, “arrested him,” NKJV “seized him,” NASB “taken him,” ASV “caught him,” GENEVA “capturing,” GWN and “taken into custody.” NAB

As used here, the word “apprehended” means, “to lay hold of, to take, capture,” THAYER “with hostile intent to seize, arrest, take hold of,” FRIBERG “to take hold of firmly and with a considerable measure of force - to take hold of, to seize,” LOUW-NIDA and “to take into custody.” GINGRICH

This word suggests launching a search for Peter, and engaging in a quest to capture him. Herod has no fear of Peter, just as he apparently had no fear of James. He thinks himself to be superior to the apostle, and feels as though he can have his way with Peter.

David spoke of the wicked plotting to apprehend the righteous. “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth” (Psa 37:12). “The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him” (Psa 37:32).

Jeremiah also lived in treacherous times, when the wicked were plotting against he godly. “For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him” (Jer 20:10).

What will be the outcome of Herod’s initiative? David said of the efforts of the wicked against the righteous, “The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged” (Psa 37:33). Alas, it seems as though God did leave James in Herod’s hand – but He did not. As Isaiah said, the death of James was actually a deliverance – it just came in a different manner. Here is what Isaiah said. “The righteous perisheth, and no man layeth it to heart: and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter into peace: they shall rest in their beds, each one walking in his uprightness” (Isa 57:1-2). As you can see, the will of the Lord is not always apparent, but it IS always superior, and cannot be frustrated by His enemies.

Juvenile and simplistic views of triumph are damaging to the people of God, and those who promote them do them no service. It is never an advantage to think like a child in kingdom matters. Solemnly we are told, “in understanding, be men ” (1 Cor 14:20). However we choose to think about opposition, conflict, and oppression, we must remember that Jesus is, in fact, “over all” (Rom 9:5). He

There appears to have been a kind of awareness in Herod that this man required special measures of security. It certainly was not that he was like Barabbas a “notable prisoner” (Matt 27:16). Peter was not a rabble rouser or insurrectionist. Yet, there was something about him that moved Herod to be cautious. This fact alone should have moved him to inquire further into the matter of Peter.

will not allow any of His disciples to be tempted above their ability, but will always provide a way of escape, that they may be able to bear it. That does not mean they will always escape from trouble, but from the objective of the temptation hurled at them by the wicked one. Their escape may be upward , and it may even appear as though no escape was provided. However, this very night James can tell you that he did in fact, escape from the hand of Herod.

HE PUT HIM IN PRISON

“ . . . he put him in prison . . . ” Other versions read, “threw him in prison,” CJB “cast him into prison,” DOUAY “had him thrown into prison,” GWN “imprisoned him,” NLT “put in jail,” IE and “lodged in jail.” WEYMOUTH

Herod forcibly laid hold on Peter and put him in prison. Peter no doubt remembered when he had been imprisoned by the Jews (Acts 5:18). There were no human rights groups, or advocacy professionals to champion the rights of Peter. And, you may be sure, Herod would not have honored

them if there had been any. Thus he first takes Peter out of activity, confining him in prison while he waited to fulfill his own will against him – like he thought he did with James.

DELIVERED TO FOUR QUATERNION OF SOLDIERS

“ . . . and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him . . . ” Other versions read, “four squads of soldiers,” NKJV “four squads of four soldiers,” NIV “four bands of armed men,” BBE “four files of soldiers,” DOUAY and “sixteen soldiers in squads of four.” GWN

A “quaternion” was four bands of four soldiers each, which guarded Peter in succession, or in rotations, throughout the four watches of the night. We do not know the limits of these watches, but there is an allusion to them in Matthew 14:25, the record of Jesus walking on the water to the disciples during “the fourth watch.” It is thought that the Roman watches were from 6-9 PM, 9-12 AM, 12-3 AM, and 3-6 AM. Others have considered the watches to be described as “even,” “midnight,” “cockcrowning,” and “morning.” These divisions of the night are mentioned in Mark 13:35: “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowning, or in the morning” (Mark 13:35).

During these four watches, four soldiers were guarding Peter at all times, supposedly ensuring that he would be present when the morning arrived.

There appears to have been a kind of awareness in Herod that this man required special measures of security. It certainly was not that he was like Barabbas a “notable prisoner” (Matt 27:16). Peter was not a rabble rouser or insurrectionist. Yet, there was something about him that moved Herod to be cautious. This fact alone should have moved him to inquire further into the matter of Peter. He did not, however yield to such an impulse, but boldly took measures that he thought were sufficient to ensure Peter would be there in the morning.

All of this confirms the hardness of heart that accompanies unbelief and the desire to please men. It is a consequence unbelievers cannot avoid, and is a state to be greatly feared.

AFTER EASTER

“ 4b . . . intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.”

Herod, who had already carried out his will concerning James with no apparent restriction, now incarcerates Peter.

INTENDING

“ . . . intending . . . ” Other versions read, “his purpose being,” BBE “with the intention,” CJB “purposing,” DARBY “Herod wanted,” GWN “that he might,” MRD “Herod planned,” NET and “meaning to try him in public.” NJB

Here we are confronted with the will of man – Herod’s intentions. The Scriptures do deal with human intentions or purposes. First, we are reminded that the Word of God is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart ” NKJV (Heb 4:12). Proverbs 12:2 affirms that God will condemn “a man of wicked intentions.” NKJV

You may remember a similar incident, when king Nebuchadnezzar decreed the death of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednigo in a fiery furnace. Before the whole matter was concluded, the king confessed that God sent His angel and “changed the king’s word,” or “frustrated the king’s word” (Dan 3:28). Isaiah said of the Lord: He “frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad;

that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish” (Isa 44:25). Nehemiah confessed that the Lord had brought the counsel of his enemies “to nought,” or “to nothing” NKJV (Neh 4:15).

It is also declared that God does what He wants to do, and that no one can hinder Him, or even ask Him what He is doing. The Living God is identified as the One with an “everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:34-35). Now, we will see if Herod’s purposes are in conflict with those of God. If they are, there is no question concerning whose will be done.

AFTER EASTER

“ . . . to bring him forth after Easter . . .” Other versions read, “after Passover.” NKJ/NASB/NIV/NRSV

Historically, this is one of the most controversial texts in the English Bible. A staggering number of articles have been written about the wrongness of translating the Greek word **pascha** “Easter,” instead of “Passover.” This same word is used twenty-nine times from Matthew through Hebrews, and, in the King James Version, is always translated “Passover” – except in this text. Not desiring to make an inappropriate issue over this matter, my aim here is only to confirm that there was some reasoning behind the choice to translate the word “Easter” at time of the compiling of the King James Version. For those who are interested, I have documented some of the opinions on this subject in the box titled, “Easter” As Used in This Text. I will briefly summarize the justification of its use here.

- First, two major translations that preceded the King James translation used the word “Easter” in Acts 4:12. These were Tyndall’s New Testament (1534), and The Bishop’s Bible (1595). The King James translators sought to retain the language of previous translators, particularly where it was unique, and gained wide acceptance.

- Until Tyndale, there was no English word into which the Greek word **pascha** could be translated. In the first English translation, Wycliffe transliterated the word “pask.” (4 “And whanne he hadde cauyte Petre, he sente hym in to prisoun; and bitook to foure quaternyouns of knytytis, to kepe hym, and wolde aftir **pask** bringe hym forth to the puple.”). It is generally understood that Tyndale invented The word is translated “Easter” in some of the translations preceding the King James Version – Tyndale (1534), Bishop’s Bible The word “Easter” is of Saxon origin, and is supposed to be derived from “Eostre,” the goddess of Love, or the Venus of the North, in honor of whom a festival was celebrated by our pagan ancestors in the month of April (Webster). Since this festival coincided with the Passover of the Jews, and with the feast observed by Christians in honor of the resurrection of Christ, the name came to be used to denote the latter. In the old Anglo-Saxon service-books the term “Easter” is used frequently to translate the word “Passover.” In the translation by Wycliffe, the word “paske,” that is, “Passover,” is used. But Tyndale and Coverdale used the word “Easter,” and hence, it has very improperly crept into our King The word "Easter" in Acts 12:4 of the King James Version is often seen as a mistranslation of the Greek word “pascha”. Even the well-known Barnes' Notes comments on this single occurrence of the word "Easter" in the King James Version, as follows, "There was never a But the truth is that the word "Easter" is the correct word and the KJV is the only version that gets it right! If you read in Exodus 12 and Numbers 28:16-17 it will be clear that the In fact, by translating the Greek word “pascha” as “passover" in Acts 12:4 modern bibles have inserted an error that displays not only their lack of knowledge of the Greek in context, Of a truth that person who invented the word "passover" - William Tyndale, did not use the word he invented (passover), in Acts 12:4. Why? Because the days of unleavened bread

come after Passover. That's one reason why Tyndale did not use the word passover in Acts 12:4. The second reason is because Herod was looking forward to the pagan feast of Ishtar, from which the word "Easter" is derived, and therefore Tyndale, did not use the word. The pagan festival of Astart or Ishtar ("Easter") was always held late in April to celebrate the To me there is no doubt that Herod wanted to kill Peter during his own pagan festival of The Greek word "pascha" is translated as Passover in the KJV with this one exception where it is translated as "Easter". Therefore, some point to this passage as a translation error on the KJV's part. However, earlier English translations such as Tyndale's NT, the Great Bible, and the Bishop's Bible also translated "pascha" as "Easter" in this verse, showing that the understanding here dealt with something other than the Jewish Passover. Also, the translation of "pascha" as Passover in Acts 12:4 was known to the king's translators since The use of the word "pascha" in early Christian writings dealt with the celebration of "Easter", and not just the Jewish Passover. Dr. G. W. H. Lampe has correctly stated that "pascha" came to mean "Easter" in the early Church. The ancient Christians did not keep the Jewish Passover. Instead they kept as holy a day to celebrate the resurrection of Christ near the time of both Passover and the pagan festival celebrating the goddess Ostara. Dr. Lampe lists several rules and observances by Christians in celebration of their "pascha" or "Easter". Lampe also points to various Greek words such as "pascha" and "paschalua" that came to mean celebrate "Easter" and "Eastertide." Likewise, Dr. Gerhard Kittel notes that "pascha" It should be noted that the English word "Easter" originally carried a meaning that would encompass the Jewish Passover. The Oxford English Dictionary states that "Easter" also means, "The Jewish passover" and cites examples dating to 971 A.D. Likewise, the Coverdale Bible often used the word "Easter" instead of Passover in its translation because the two had the same meaning to the English mind. Further, the Homilies of the Church of England (1563) refers to "Easter", a great, and solemn feast among the Jewes. Therefore, we see by definition, that the word "Easter" is correct in the understanding of the English. It is my position that "Easter" in Acts 12:4 in the KJV is not an error, if understood that from the early church until relatively recently "Passover" and "Easter" were basically synonyms

the English word "Passover," which is a kind of transliteration of the Greek word. However, he employed "Easter" in this text – and only in this text – because of the uniqueness of it.

- Our text states that Herod had determined to present Peter to the people "after" Easter. However, the text states that when Herod apprehended Peter, it was "the days of unleavened bread." The Lord specified that The Feast of Unleavened Bread commenced on the fifteenth day, lasting for seven days, while "The Passover" was held on the fourteenth day. "In the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the Lord's passover. And on the fifteenth day of the same month is the feast of unleavened bread unto the LORD: seven days ye must eat unleavened bread" (Lev 23:5-6).

I understand that there are varied opinions on this matter. My only purpose here is to confirm that there was solid reasoning behind the way in which the translators of the King James Version represented the word. It is my perception that at that time (1611), there was a general understanding of the people that "Easter" and "Passover" were synonymous. Because Christians did not observe the Passover, they chose the word "Easter" that denoted a simultaneous feast that took place at that time. The wisdom of their choice may be debated, but those appear to be the facts in the case. It is also open to question whether or not Herod was thinking of the period during which he arrested Peter as the Jewish Passover.

BRING HIM FORTH TO THE PEOPLE

" . . . to bring him forth to the people." Other versions read, "bring him before the people," NKJV "bring him out before the people," NASB "bring him out fore public trial," NIV "bring him to public

trial,” NLT and “deliver him to the Jews for execution.” LIVING

Just as Pilate had brought Jesus before the Jews (John 19:5), so Herod had determined to bring Peter before them. It appears that he did this in an effort to please the people, thus maintaining some semblance of order in Jerusalem. He no doubt sought to avoid the possibility of a charge being leveled at him like the Jews had hurled at Pilate: “And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (John 19:12). Just as Pilate sought to please the people to protect his own position, so Herod was motivated by purely self and political interests.

This text also reveals the public nature of the Jews opposition to the church and the spread of the Gospel. Those who had not believed had grown more obstinate. Their thirst for blood was not satisfied when Jesus was crucified, or when Stephen was stoned, or when James was executed. That is the nature of the flesh and of the world. Do not think that a compromise of the truth, or a diminishment of its proclamation will somehow reach those who have chosen to live in the flesh.

In His parable of the sower, Jesus taught that the truth of the Gospel is used to identify the condition of the people (Matt 13:18-23; Mark 4:14-20; Luke 8:11-15). It is the Gospel that brings out the kind of hearts and dispositions that they have. It reveals what is in them, how they reason, and what they value. This being the case, those who withhold that Word of truth, reducing the exposure of the people to it, have actually removed the means of knowing whether or not the people have an interest in the truth of God. Now, they can only speculate about their condition. To call such an approach wise seems to me to be the epitome of ignorance. As we peruse the accounts of Scripture, they must be seen within light of both nature and purpose of God. In them, we are not being exposed to mere history, but to the outworking and nature of an eternal purpose.

PETER WAS KEPT IN PRISON

“ 5 Peter therefore was kept in prison . . .” Other versions read, “being held under watch in prison,” CSB “was in custody in the prison,” MRD “was under guard,” NJB “was being kept in prison,” ISV and “closely guarded in the prison.” PHILLIPS

The church prayed earnestly and without ceasing TO God FOR Peter. They did not pray for Herod, but for Peter. I am sure they knew that it was proper to pray for those who are in authority, as Paul admonishes in 1 Timothy 2:2. But that is not what was appropriate on this occasion.

By saying that the killing of James “pleased the Jews,” we infer that there had been some kind of communication between Herod and the people. Perhaps they had conveyed to him how Peter and John had once been incarcerated by the high priest and those with him, and held in “the common prison.” During the night, they had disappeared from the jail, and were found the following day preaching in the Temple. What had actually happened was the Lord had sent an angel to open “the prison doors,” bring the apostles of the prison, and command them to return to the Temple and resume preaching “all the words of this life” (Acts 5:17-19).

At any rate, Herod took measure to ensure that Peter did not disappear during the night. He thought he was keeping Peter in prison by assigning a rotating guard of sixteen soldiers throughout the night – four for each watch. Like Pilate commissioned the Jewish leaders concerning the body of Jesus, he was making His prisoner “as secure” as he could (Matt 28:14).

The action of Herod will be as pointless as the binding of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednigo when they were thrown into the fiery furnace (Dan 3:21-24). It will be as pointless as the binding of Samson, when three thousand men of Judah turned him over to the Philistines (Judges 15:13). This is not to mention the binding of Jesus when they arrested Him in the garden (John 18:12), when Annas sent

Him “bound” to Caiaphas (John 18:24), when the chief priests and elders delivered Him “bound” to Pilate (Matt 27:2) – or when He was nailed to a tree (John 19:25; 20:25; Gal 3:13).

The world, whether in the form of corrupted religion, government, or particular individuals, has always taken measures to ensure that the truth is not declared. For a significant period of time, the Scriptures themselves were taken from the people. Bloody persecutions and executions have been employed to subdue the truth. There have been laws passed that were designed to suppress the expression of the truth of God. In even more subtle ways, those who have embraced the truth have been maligned, separated from the people, and treated with social disdain. All of this has been an attempt to keep the truth “in prison,” like Herod sought to keep Peter in prison.

There is a spirit that animates all of these efforts, and it emanates from hell itself, being authored and empowered by “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). Sometimes it takes dignified forms, like the Higher Criticism of the Scriptures, or the promotion of “Science [knowledge] falsely so called” (1 Tim 6:20), Gnosticism, or even Atheism. There are even efforts that involve a distortion of the truth, a misrepresentation of Jesus Christ, and the falsification of the Gospel of Christ.

Religious scholarship and purported practicality are even employed by the devil to neutralize the truth of God. All of these attempts – from bloody persecution to intellectual masquerades – are members of the same family, and have the same father. The devil is behind them all. They are his “flood,” designed to “carry away” the truth and the people of God who have embraced it (Rev 12:15-16). Satan’s initiative is relentless, for his nature cannot be changed, and he cannot be discouraged. Even when he was cast 3out of heaven, he entered the arena of “the earth” . . . having great wrath, because he knows HE has a short time” (Rev 12:12). He cannot learn, he is not discouraged, and he will not give up.

Nevertheless, our arch adversary will not succeed – and neither will his vassal Herod. His intentions against Peter will not be brought to fulfillment. Neither, indeed, will his purpose for other believers be realized.

PRAYER WAS MADE FOR HIM BY THE CHURCH

“ . . . but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. ”

Now, the scene shifts from Satan’s followers to the disciples of Jesus – the church, which is the body of Christ. We will see how they react to the news of Herod’s intentions. On the one hand we have Herod working under the immediate auspices of the devil, who is himself unwillingly subject to God and His will. On the other hand we are now given a glimpse of those who are obligingly subject to the “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

PRAYER WITHOUT CEASING

“ . . . but prayer was made without ceasing . . . ” Other versions read, “constant prayer,” NKJV “prayer . . . made fervently,” NASB “earnestly praying,” NIV “intense prayer,” BBE “unceasing prayer,” DARBY “praying very hard,” GWN “continual prayer,” MRD “prayed . . . unremittingly,” NJB “fervent prayer for him was persistently made,” AMPLIFIED “prayer . . . was outstretched,” INTERLINEAR and “never stopped praying.” CEV

First, observe that the believers were knowledgeable of the events pertaining to their number. I have emphasized that true spiritual life is selfless, and that Jesus died in order that “they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which

I have often pondered the matter of the prayers of collective believers. While it is not wise to seek to strictly order such occasions, due consideration should be given to the subject of such

prayers.

died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). The book of Acts lifts this fact out of the domain of philosophy, and puts it where it belongs – in the arena of life, or human expression. This verse is a case in point. Within the larger circumference of lives devoted to the Lord, their prayers were not shaped by the mundane. They knew where to focus their spiritual energy. They also knew the value of Peter, and the pivotal role he played in the spread of the truth and the stabilization and maturity of the body of Christ.

Prayer Was “Made”

The word “made” is in the Greek text, and is a significant one. Coming from the Greek word **ginome,nh** , and as used in this text, this word means, “to be made, done, finished,” THAYER and “be made, be done, be brought into existence.” FRIBERG In other words, these were intelligent prayers, as though fabricated with insightful words and covered with spiritual rationality. They were prayers with perspective, pieced together with wisdom and spiritual understanding.

These were not prayers of meaningless repetition. Nor, indeed, were they prayed as though the people would be heard because of their “much speaking” (Matt 6:7).

This is now the third time the disciples have been reported as praying collectively with specificity. The first time was when the bishopric of Judas was to be filled (Acts 1:24-25). The second was when the Jewish leaders sought to suppress the truth, commanding the apostles that they speak no more in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:24-31). Now, they join in accord once again about a critical Kingdom matter.

I have often pondered the matter of the prayers of collective believers. While it is not wise to seek to strictly order such occasions, due consideration should be given to the subject of such prayers.

“Without Ceasing”

The idea here is not that of one endless prayer meeting, but of a constant, fervent, and persistent presentation of matters pertaining to the arrest and imprisonment of Peter. Such an approach is the antithesis of casual and sporadic prayers. I envision the disciples addressing the matter from different perspectives, with new insights being ministered to them from heaven.

BY THE CHURCH

“ . . .of the church . . .” Other versions read, “by the Messianic community,” CJB “by the assembly,” DARBY and “of the congregation.” TNT

The idea here is that the disciples were assembled together when they prayed. The technical root meaning of “the church” is, “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place; an assembly.” THAYER From a spiritual perspective, this is the assembly called out of the world and into Jesus Christ. On a practical level, it is when the people of God “come together into one place” (1 Cor 11:20; 14:23).

In the book of Acts, “the church” is equated with “the disciples” (6:2; 9:1; 11:26), and “all that believed” (2:44). I cannot help but wonder how men think of “the church” in this day. What people would they be referring to if they used the language of this text.

MADE UNTO GOD FOR HIM

“ . . . unto God for him.” The church prayed earnestly and without ceasing TO God FOR Peter. They did not pray for Herod, but for Peter. I am sure they knew that it was proper to pray for those

who are in authority, as Paul admonishes in (1 Tim 2:2). But that is not what was appropriate on this occasion.

The text does not tell us what they prayed for Peter. Some have assumed they were praying for His release, but that is not what this passage says. It says they prayed for Peter, not for his release. They doubtless saw him as the one who needed to be strengthened, upheld, and holding to the faith. Herod had already killed James, and there was every indication that he was going to do the same to Peter.

Earlier, when the apostles had been threatened, they did not pray for the thwarting of the intentions of the Jewish council. They rather asked God to “ behold their threatenings: and grant unto Thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak Thy word, By stretching forth Thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30). The focus of that prayer gives us some idea of how those early disciples thought. They knew that God would work appropriately when He beheld what their enemies were doing. They did not presume to suggest to Him what He ought to do with those enemies. However, they did know what God was doing with regards to the truth, and therefore they asked for boldness to preach all the more fervently. They did not ask for signs and wonders so the Jewish leaders would see them and cease their threats. They rather sought for themselves to be granted boldness to preach the Word through such gracious confirmations.

It seems to me that their prayers were most probably of this nature when they prayed to God for Peter. Oh, I know that was a different day, but I candidly would like to see such a perspective find its way into the professing church once again. Perhaps then works of a more effective and noble nature would be found in the professing church, and some of its ancient glory would be restored.

CONCLUSION

Thus, our text has provided us with an update of the struggle between Jacob and Esau – a struggle of differing natures that commenced in Rachel’s womb, and continues to this day. The aggressiveness of the flesh has been seen, and how the devil can work through those who “have not faith” (2 Thess 3:2). We have seen an example of how government can set itself against the followers of Jesus and the spread of the Gospel. Our text has confirmed the consistent effect of the truth upon those who embrace it, and their refusal to yield to the threats of the world. The intelligent nature of faith, and how it compels those who possess it to engage in the initiative of prayer has been seen. The tendency of disciples to gather together for a noble cause as well as for edification has been confirmed. We have seen how the flesh is never satisfied with what it has done against the people of God, and how it seeks ways to please those who are not in Jesus. The Lord has shown us the ineffectiveness of dead religion and empty routine, and how the observance of times and seasons cannot change human nature. We have seen that an evil tree cannot produce good fruit, that a good tree cannot produce evil fruit, and that every tree is known by its fruit. A pregnant text, indeed!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #54

THE DELIVERANCE OF PETER

“ 12:6 And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. 7 And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. 8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. 9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision. 10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him. 11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews. 12 And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying. 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate. 15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel. 16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. 17 But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place. ” (Acts 12:6-17)

INTRODUCTION

In a continuing confirmation of the fact that those in Christ are not of the world, Herod proceeds to carry out his initiative against “certain of the church.” He does this because, to him, it appears as though it is within his power. Whatever privileges believers have are not apparent to him. Although great signs and wonders have been done throughout a period of at least fourteen years, and although the number of believers has swelled, and they have continued to hold on their way, Herod sees them as helpless vassals over whom he exercises political power. So far as

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- **PETER CONSIDERS WHAT HAS HAPPENED (12:12a)**
- **PETER HEADS FOR A PARTICULAR HOUSE (12:12b)**
- **RHODA RECOGNIZES PETER’S VOICE (12:13)**
- **THOSE WHO WERE PRAYING DO NOT BELIEVE HER (12:15)**
- **PETER CONTINUES KNOCKING (12:16-17a)**
- **SHOW THESE THINGS TO JAMES AND THE BRETHREN (17b)**
- **CONCLUSION**

Herod is concerned, his undertaking is just beginning, and his popularity with the Jews is increasing. He sees himself as being over the situation, fully able to carry out his own will.

SOMETHING TO BE NOTED

Now, there is something important that must be noted at this point. Remember, in this book we are confronted with the “newness of life” being lived out in the world. The impact of that life upon both believers and unbelievers is being revealed.

- A sterling example has been given us of how those who are alive to God view each other (2:44,46; 4:32; 5:12).
- The unity of the believers is apparent: they were “together” (2:44; 4:31).
- There has been a witness of the intrusive nature of hypocrisy and the quest for personal advantage (5:1-10; 8:18-24).
- We have been introduced to the manner in which those in the grip of a stereotyped religion react to this newness of life (4:1-3; 5:17-18; 7:57-60; 8:1; 9:1-2).
- We have seen how those who are inquiring into the truth of Scripture respond to it (4:4; 8:23-39; 10:44-48; 11:17).
- The manner in which those who have received the grace of God respond to sound

doctrine has been displayed (11:23-29).

- An example of the spiritual stamina and aggressiveness of believers who are being persecuted has been displayed (4:20,23-31; 5:29; 8:4; 11:19).

- The proneness of the disciples to rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord has been confirmed (5:10-11; 8:14; 9:38; 11:1,22).

- Now we are being exposed to the manner in which earthly government views those who believe (12:14).

If those in Christ were actually of this world, and life in Him was primarily intended to enhance their lives on earth, what we are reading in this text could not possibly have taken place.

In my judgment, the presence of the book of Acts, together with the apostles doctrine, makes it wrong to philosophize about spiritual life. Opportunists who present themselves as experts in life are intruders. While they appear to be within the body of Christ, identifying themselves as Christians, they are actually outside of the circumference of life. Satan is working through them to lure unstable souls into the arena of worldly wisdom, where they can be exploited. Oh, this is not the manner in which these intruders think. They have been deceived, and do not realize they are suggesting that men are really not complete in Christ, and that the grace of God does not address the difficulties with which they grapple.

It must be observed that men with recovery plans, steps to a better life, and the development of character-forming habits are not present in the church reported in the book of Acts. There is no mass recovery plan presented to the body of Christ. Those who are in Christ are never reminded that “we are all human,” or “we all struggle with this or that,” or “all of us are weak and need help.” No person is ever depicted as proclaiming a purpose that was not revealed by God, through Jesus, and by words of the apostles of Christ. It seems to me that it would be helpful to honestly consider if these observations are true, and if they are, why is it so?

BELIEVERS ARE NOT OF THIS WORLD

If those in Christ were actually of this world, and life in Him was primarily intended to enhance their lives on earth, what we are reading in this text could not possibly have taken place. If the purpose of redemption is primarily to bring a good life to us in this world, exactly how do you account for the chief priests, the elders, the Jewish council, Saul of Tarsus when he persecuted the church, and Herod the king? How is it that any of them could realize any measure of success in their attack of believers if this world is really the main one, and life in it is the primary life. Is it that they overturned the purpose of King Jesus? Did they thwart what He had designed for His people? And, why could there even be such a thing as a “great dearth” that brought tremendous inconvenience to the saints of God, if Jesus really has a preeminent desire for their welfare in this world. Why did the churches in surrounding areas have to send relief to the brethren in Judea if prosperity is really what God intends for His people?

The choosing and extrication of people from the world are in order to the obtainment of an eternal inheritance that is reserved for them in heaven. That is why grace teaches us to reject sinful impulses and live in a holy manner while we look for Jesus to return from heaven (Tit 2:11-12). This is why they run the race set before them “with patience,” or perseverance, “looking unto Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2). By its very nature, faith confirms that those who possess it do not belong to the order of “this present evil world” (Gal; 1:4). Unless it is “strong delusion” that is sent to those who refuse to receive the “love of the truth” (2 Thess 2:10), whatever tends to attach them more firmly to this world cannot possibly be from God. This is particularly heinous when it is presented in the name of Jesus.

A FUNCTION OF THE LIFE OF FAITH

As believers await their inheritance, living by faith is designed to enhance their appetite for it. In the crucible of conflict, their desires and preferences are enhanced as they learn by experience that the world is just as “evil” as God has said. Primarily, however, they also come to know experientially that Jesus and the benefits He brings are superior to anything and everything this world has to offer. The statement, “And ye are complete in Him, which is the head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10), is more than a mere platitude or religious slogan. It is “of His fulness” that we “receive” (John 1:16). Resources cannot possibly come from any other place.

I acknowledge that it appears as though I am spending an inordinate amount of time on this subject. However, the fact of the matter is that this is the very thing that is being hidden from our generation. It is not a circumstance unique to our times, but one that is characterized by greater degrees of obscurity. This has been largely caused by the crafty entrance of professionalism into the church. By professionalism I mean a career-centered activity that borrows its strength and imagined expertise from the world.

The entrance of this mode of thinking has moved men to approach perceived deficiencies in the professing Christians as though the people WERE victims of something they could not control. Therefore a new vocabulary has been hawked and adopted that allows for this kind of thinking. Sin is viewed as addiction, genetic makeup, hereditary tendencies, and sometimes even a disease. In order to address these conditions a system of law is employed. This, like all law, is based on the control of human conduct by outward means. Like all law, it is also a system that does not require faith (Gal 3:12). It also entertains the presupposition that those in Christ remain firmly connected to this present evil world – in character, as well as in outward presence. It is further surmised that one’s character can be altered by means of regimen.

The circumstances of our text make no sense in such a context. Conditions are introduced that could not possibly be altered by a routine, or a series of steps, or any other codified approach. There is no form of human wisdom that could have accomplished what is reported in this text, which includes peaceful rest, deliverance, and holy assessment.

We also are exposed to the will of man versus the will of God. As will be confirmed, such a confrontation never falls to the side of the human will. It is God’s will that prevails, for He alone has the right and the power to do what He wants. As it is written, “But our God is in the heavens: He hath done whatsoever he hath pleased ” (Psa 115:3). In considering this fact, it is important to remember that the will of God does not revolve around humanity. There are higher purposes being served that the personal interests of men and their welfare. Those purposes include, but are not confined to, the following.

- The ultimate glory of God (Isa 61:3).
- That He might be justified in all of His sayings (Rom 3:4).
- That principalities and powers in heavenly places may learn of His manifold wisdom through the church (Eph 3:10).
- To prepare a habitation for Himself (Eph 2:22)
- That men might know that He is the Lord (Ezek 20:12,26).
- That God might be “just” in the justification of men (Rom 3:26).
- That men would praise Him for His goodness (Psa 107:8,15,21,31).
- He has raised up men to show His power in them, like Pharaoh (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17).

It is sign of significant spiritual growth when the works of the Lord are seen as the execution of His will rather than ours. When we come to see that we are not the center of God’s universe, we have

come to see something very significant, and with great impact.

HEROD PREPARES TO IMPLEMENT HIS PURPOSE

“ 12:6a And when Herod would have brought him forth . . .” Other versions read, “was about to bring him forth,” NKJV “was about to bring him to trial,” NIV “was about to bring him out,” NRSV “was to bring him out for execution,” CSB “Herod was on the point of taking him out of prison,” WEYMOUTH and “Herod was planning to bring him out.” PHILLIPS

The word translated “would have” has the following lexical meaning. “to be about to do anything . . . to intend, have in mind, think to” THAYER “intend,” UBS and “to think of doing, intend to do, to be about to do.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

This is the language of purpose, determination, and objective. This is something Herod had determined to do, and he had no thought of his will not being carried out. He was going to bring Peter before the people in the morning, and no doubt condemn and execute him. This was a “king” that had made this decision – one of “the kings of the earth” (Psa 2:2), who are solemnly exhorted by the Psalmist to “praise the Lord from the earth” (Psa 148:7,11). This is one of the kings that had been “set up” by God Almighty, and was therefore responsible to Him (Dan 2:21; 4:17). Just as with Pilate, the power and authority that he had were given to him by God (John 19:11; Rom 13:1). Yet, just as the Herod of Jesus’ time, he was now coming against the Lord (Acts 4:26). This man occupies a throne, has civil authority, and has already executed the apostle James. Now, he fully intends to do to Peter what he had done to James. Will he be able to carry out his will? Judging according to appearance, it seems as though he will. However, that is not a valid way of judging (John 7:24).

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

There is a manner of preaching and teaching that manages to hide the fact that God is Sovereign: “above all” (4:6). This subtle form of teaching, although not always intentional, leads the individual to think in a non-theocentric manner: i.e. “God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4). Such a person, robbed of a proper perspective of God, vacillates between “the fear of man” which brings a snare (Prov 29:25), and putting “confidence in man,” which is antithetical to faith (Psa 118:8).

Entangled in this web of erroneous thought, men blurt out flawed statements like, “God will never violate the free will of man,” or “God will not force a person to do something against their will.” There is a sense in which this is true – such as the appropriation of His great salvation. In that case, willingness is essential. What is more, God is able work in such a way as to cause the people to be “willing in the day of His power” (Psa 110:3).

THE EXAMPLE OF JONAH

For example, if Jonah is not willing to go and preach to Nineveh as the Lord has commanded, there are options available to God that are not available to men. In that case God took measures that moved Jonah into a state of willingness, then taught him more perfectly in Divine manners.

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- While Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord, “the Lord sent out a great wind” that jeopardized the boat in which he was found (Jonah 1:4).
- When Jonah, at his own request, was about to be thrown overboard into the raging sea, the Lord “prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah” (Jonah 1:17).
- There, in the belly of the fish, with the water surrounding him, and the seaweeds

wrapped around his head, Jonah found the circumstance to be conducive to prayer. He “prayed out of the fish’s belly,” concluding his prayer with the promise that he would do what he had vowed, and the confession “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:1-9).

- Upon that confession, “the Lord spake unto the fish and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land” (Jonah 3:10).

- The word of the Lord then came to Jonah “the second time saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee ” (Jonah 3:1-2). This time, Jonah was willing – he was willing in the day of the Lord’s power!

- After declaring to the inhabitants of Nineveh that the city was going to be destroyed in forty days, “the people believed God,” proclaimed a fast, and “God repented of the evil that He had said He would do.”

- Their response greatly displeased Jonah, and he “prayed unto the Lord,” saying that he knew God was gracious, merciful, kind, and repented of the evil. After asking God to take his life, he went out of the city, made a booth, and sat under it to see what would happen to the city (Jonah 4:1-5).

- When the blazing sun rose in the sky, “ the Lord God prepared a gourd , and made it come up over Jonah , that it might be a shadow over his head” (Jonah 4:6).

- In order to teach Jonah more of Himself, “ God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered.” The heat was so severe that Jonah “fainted, and wished himself to die” (Jonah 4:7).

- It was at this point that the Lord told Jonah he had pity on a gourd for which he had not labored, and which he had not made to grow. God, however, confirmed the reasonableness of sparing a “great city” in which “120,000 persons not [yet old enough to] know their right hand from their left, and also many cattle [not accountable for sin]”

AMPLIFIED

Our text has to do with the same God – a God who is in control and is fully able to implement His will! He is also able to frustrate and bring to nought the counsels of men who seek to thwart or impede His purpose – whether they do it ignorantly or not.

Now, whose will was accomplished in this incident? Whose will prevailed? And, do you not see the way in which God did His will, maintaining absolute control of both nature and man, doing so in a remarkably wise and effective manner? In this account we find the wind, the sea, the fish, the gourd, and the worm serving the Lord. We see Jonah’s mind changed by a circumstance over which he had no power. We also see the mind of the people changed by a message.

Our text has to do with the same God – a God who is in control and is fully able to implement His will! He is also able to frustrate and bring to nought the counsels of men who seek to thwart or impede His purpose – whether they do it ignorantly or not.

DIVINE NEGATION

The Word of God declares that God negates the counsels of His enemies. He overturns their purpose, and thwarts their designs.

- “He shall break in pieces mighty men without number, and set others in their stead. Therefore he knoweth their works, and he overturneth them in the night, so that they are destroyed” (Job 34:24-25).

- “Thus saith the Lord, thy Redeemed . . . That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish” (Isa 44:25).

• “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: he maketh the devices of the people of none effect” (Psa 33:10).

• “Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up, and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee. Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: there shall not be a coal to warm at, nor fire to sit before it” (Isa 47:13-14).

• “Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counselors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? Where are they? where are thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt” (Isa 19:11-12).

• “Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isa 29:14).

• “And I will make drunk her princes, and her wise men, her captains, and her rulers, and her mighty men: and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith the King, whose name is the LORD of hosts” (Jer 51:57).

• “And thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him” (Ezek 21:25-27).

• “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?” (1 Cor 1:20).

• “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness” (1 Cor 3:19).

When the enemies of Nehemiah took counsel against him, God “brought their counsel to nought” (Neh 4:15). Israel could say to their enemies, “Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us” (Isa 8:10). It is not possible to oppose the Lord, His Son, His will, or His Gospel and ultimately succeed! Thus it is written, “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD” (Prov 21:30). Again it is written, “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Prov 19:21).

When enemies conspired against Judah, determining to trouble them and place their own king in the midst, the word of the Lord came to Isaiah. Here is what he said. “Because Syria, Ephraim, and the son of Remaliah, have taken evil counsel against thee, saying, Let us go up against Judah, and vex it, and let us make a breach therein for us, and set a king in the midst of it, even the son of Tabeal: Thus saith the Lord GOD, It shall not stand, neither shall it come to pass ” (Isa 7:5-7).

Oh, that this were seen more clearly by those who wear the name of Jesus, and that it was proclaimed with power by every professing servant of God! There is no cause to fear men, or to adjust your speech and manners to please or pacify them. It is far better to determine to please Him who possesses all power.

THE HOPELESS CIRCUMSTANCE

“ 6b . . . the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. . . ”

Fearful and unbelieving hearts are prone to consider the circumstances as though they were set in

stone. Without God at the center of our thinking, it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to think of circumstance as being changeable and transitory. There is also a tendency to resort to men for help – like Israel who went “down to Egypt for help,” trusting in horses and chariots (Isa 31:1).

Those who resort to men instead of to the Lord will eventually confront a situation where hope withers and dies, and the circumstances become impossible, at least from a human point of view. That is the kind of situation that is chronicled in our text. Not only does it appear hopeless, Herod has already killed James, which suggests to the simple and naive that God has given him leave to operate at will. Or, perhaps, for some it suggests that God is not governing the nations at all, but that they are free to function however they desire.

We must keep in mind that the Scriptures contain the record of the implementation of the will of God, and not a mere history of occurrences related to that purpose. While they contain human responses to the execution of that purpose, they are really incidental to the purpose itself. If we fail to recognize this reality, we will fall into all manner of intellection snares and traps.

PETER WAS SLEEPING

“ . . . the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers . . . ”

There are a significant number of professing Christians who seem to think they can possess what Jesus gives without following Him, as He requires. However, His blessings are simply not dispensed under those conditions, and it is essential that men understand this.

Having a restful night, and enjoying a peaceful sleep is not always the lot of men. What person is not familiar with restless nights, and concern about circumstances. Yet, here is Peter; James, his close companion for at least 17-18 years having been executed, himself apprehended, and now in prison. So far as appearances were concerned, the apparent expectation was to be martyred. Jesus had told Peter years earlier, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not” (John 21:18). Speaking through the Spirit, who brought the words of Jesus to his remembrance, John said of this saying, “This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow me” (John 21:19). Peter had heeded the word of Jesus, following Him from that time until the time of our text when he was behind prison doors.

There Is a Peace that Attends Following the Lord Jesus

There are benefits to be realized only when one is in the process of following Jesus – that is, of being with Jesus where He is, and doing what He is doing. When Jesus was upon earth, following Jesus involved being with Him when He was in the Temple, on a mountain, in the desert, or in a village. It required the person to be present when Jesus was speaking, and to be a witness to what He was doing. If He was feeding the multitudes, the ones who WERE following Him WERE there, and would be employed in the distribution of the food. If He was en route to raise Lazarus from the dead, His followers WERE with Him. Following Jesus involves being with Him by choice, and it requires that one remain or abide with Him as well.

There are a significant number of professing Christians who seem to think they can possess what Jesus gives without following Him, as He requires. However, His blessings are simply not dispensed under those conditions, and it is essential that men understand this.

Now Peter, who was, in fact, following Jesus as He was told, enjoys the benefits that result from that stance. In him, we see a fulfillment of Psalm 127:2: “for so He giveth His beloved sleep.” Again, Peter could say with David, “I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for Thou, LORD, only

makest me dwell in safety” (Psa 4:8). I am sure he could say with confidence, “I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me” (Psa 3:5). And again, he had the kind of assurance and confidence that could say with Jeremiah, “Upon this I awaked, and beheld; and my sleep was sweet unto me” (Jer 31:26).

The “peace of God” is like a sentinel that guards the heart and the mind, bringing quietness and stability to the soul. As it is written, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). This is a peace that is like a king, ruling in the heart and thrusting away invasive thoughts and imaginations that would trouble the soul and awaken fear. Thus we read, “And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful” (Col 3:15).

Therefore, Peter, on what appeared to be the evening before his martyrdom, “was sleeping between two soldiers.” What a testimony it must have been to those men! Perhaps they had also been present when James was beheaded.

PETER BOUND AND THE DOOR OF ENTRANCE GUARDED

“ . . . bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison. . .” Other versions read, “and the guards before the door were keeping the prison,” NKJV “guards in front of the door were watching the prison ,” NASB “sentries stood guard at the entrance,” NIV “guards in front of the door were keeping watch over the prison,” RSV and “guards maintained a strict watch in the doorway of the prison.” PHILLIPS

The circumstances in which Peter finds himself appear hopeless – at least so far as men are concerned.

- He has been arrested by a king.
- He is incarcerated behind closed doors.
- He is bound with two chains
- He is positioned between two guards
- Guards were at the door of the prison, prohibiting any unapproved entrance, and certainly forbidding any escape.

Peter, however, is sleeping peacefully, unagitated by the situation in which he found himself. Among other things, this is the result of assuming the posture of a stranger and pilgrim in the world. It is the outcome of being in the world, but not of the world. That stance, however, is meaningful and profitable only to the degree that men are in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the “Captain of their salvation” (Heb 2:10). This is something that cannot be delivered by theological systems, human methodologies, or the philosophies of men. It is rather the solitary prerogative of faith to bring the realization of these things. Peter is not a super-man, but a redeemed one. As he himself acknowledges, the faith that the children of God have “obtained” is “of the same kind” as that of the apostles themselves (2 Pet 1:1).

While the faith of Peter was designed to accomplish a different work (such as that of an apostle), it is of the same order or kind as ours, and is equally effective in the lives of all who possess it. It brings justification, peace with God, and gives access to the grace wherein we stand. It also brings certain enablements.

A MINISTER FROM HEAVEN ARRIVES ON THE SCENE

“ 7a . . . And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. . .”

There is every reason to believe that Peter anticipated his martyrdom. After all, his close companion and co-laborer, James, had recently been beheaded. Jesus had even told the twelve that some of them would be killed (Matt 24:9). Although it is said that the church “made” prayer for him (5:5), there is no indication that they were praying for his release. Further, the events of this text will strongly suggest that the deliverance of Peter from death was not the focus of their prayers.

There are some who are presently teaching that heaven does not, and cannot, move in favor toward men unless prayer is made for the Lord to work. I am not sure of the objective of such a teaching, or precisely what mind-set compels men to say such things. Apostolic doctrine informs us that there are occasions when the knowledge of the saved ones is insufficient to identify their need. In such a case, the Holy Spirit is their Intercessory, and God hears what He says (Rom 8:26-27). Additionally, Jesus is also interceding for the redeemed, and I do not know that His intercession is always driven by human petition, although I do not question that this is often the case (Heb 7:25).

I prefer to view this text as an example of the government of Jesus, and of the extent to which He will go to fulfill the will and purpose of God the Father.

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CAME UPON HIM

And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him . . .” Other versions read, “Stood by him,” NKJV “suddenly appeared,” NASB “appeared,” NIV “came to Peter,” BBE “came there,” DARBY “stood next to him,” ESV “stood over him,” MRD “stood there before Peter,” NLT and “was there present.” PNT

Angels are not normally visible to men, for they are “ministering spirits” (Heb 1:14). In Christ, we have come unto “an innumerable company of angels” (Heb 12:22). Though unseen, there is a sense in which they are all around the people of God. As it is written, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:7). This is what the angels are sent to do, and they are disposed to do it with zeal. However, it is the word of the Lord that sets them in motion, for they do not operate according to their own will. It is well said of them that they “do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of the Lord” (Psa 103:20). In this text we have a sterling example of an angel responding to the commandment of the Lord, and hearkening to His voice.

In Christ Jesus, enlightenment is a principle factor in deliverance from the power of darkness. Conversion itself involves being “enlightened” (Heb 6:4), or “illuminated.” Paul accounts for the new birth in this way: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”

The idea here is not that the angel appeared, or was made visible, for Peter was asleep. Rather, the point being made is that the angel came on the scene to do something. Thus the KJV reads, “came upon him” (Peter). The Greek word used here is **evpe,sth**, which means, “to stand by, be present . . . stand over one, place oneself above.” THAYER The idea is that the angel of the Lord identified himself with Peter, and will now take up his cause. Just as Daniel was told that Michael the great angel would “stand up” for the people of Israel (Dan 12:1), so an angel now stands up, as it were, for Peter. He focuses his attention upon Peter as the angel of the Lord did to Paul when he stood by him (Acts 27:23).

Angels do not come to visit or to merely spectate, but to work, for they are “sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14). You may be sure that there is no human opposition that is effective against even one angel. They are absolutely superior to humanity in its most impressive form. That is precisely why they are said to “excel in strength” (Psa 103:20).

A LIGHT SHINED IN THE PRISON

. . . and a light shined in the prison . . .” Other versions read, “shone in the cell,” NASB “a great light was shining in the room,” BBE “shined in the house,” GENEVA “his cell was filled with light,” GWN “light shone in all the building,” MRD “light shined in the habitation,” PNT “shined in the lodge,” TNT “shone in the buildings,” YLT and “a light shone in the place where he was.”
AMPLIFIED

Sometimes I marvel at the ambiguity that is promoted by some of the translators. It appears that at times their scholastic mind overshadows their spiritual aptitude: “cell,” “room,” “house,” “all the building,” “the lodge,” and “the buildings.” Well, where did the light shine? Was it in the whole complex of buildings, the prison house in general, or the place in which Peter was located? The stress of this text is that the angel came to Peter, and will deliver Peter alone. The light is, as the Amplified Bible well says, “where [Peter] he was.”

This was a discreet deliverance, designed only for Peter. Some time later, when Paul and Silas were in prison, there was a mighty earthquake, “all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed.” In that case, rather than leaving the prison, Paul and Silas remained, and all of the prisoners with them (Acts 16:26-27). During that occasion the jailor was made privy to what had occurred, and was “saved” with all of his house before the evening was over (Acts 16:30-34). But that is not what happened here. Only Peter will be delivered, and the prison keepers will not know what happened, nor will they be saved.

Angels are often associated with light, glory, or brilliance. When an angel announced the birth of Jesus to certain shepherds, “the glory of the Lord shone round about them” (Lk 2:9). John saw an angel who had great power, “and the earth was lightened with his glory” (Rev 18:1). In this text, the light that filled the place where Peter was being held no doubt emanated from the angel himself.

A Type Seen

There is a beautiful spiritual type seen here. Deliverance occurs in the environment of light, or illumination. When Israel went out of Egypt at midnight, they were accompanied by a cloud that gave them light (Ex 13:21). David spoke of the Word of God accompanying his progress: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Psa 119:105). Solomon declared much the same when he said, “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day” (Prov 4:18).

In Christ Jesus, enlightenment is a principle factor in deliverance from the power of darkness. Conversion itself involves being “enlightened” (Heb 6:4), or “illuminated” (Heb 10:32). Paul accounts for the new birth in this way: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Spiritual growth is depicted as walking “in the light” (1 John 1:7), and the “eyes of our understanding” being “enlightened” (Eph 1:17).

I find myself having an increasing disdain for spiritual ignorance within the Christian community. Preaching and teaching that promote such ignorance are an abomination, and there is no way to dignify the matter. There are also messages that represent themselves as being filled with wisdom and understanding, and yet they leave people in the dark concerning matters pertaining to life and godliness. These have not come from God. Instead, they are the words of Satan himself, who “is transformed into an angel of light.” He also enables his ministers to be “transformed into the ministers of righteousness,” promulgating methods and techniques that claim to liberate and assist ailing humanity (2 Cor 11:14). Yet, after men have embraced their words, they remain fundamentally ignorant of God, with affections that are firmly nailed to the earth.

Just as surely as Peter’s deliverance was accompanied by light, so those who are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son are accompanied by

spiritual illumination. Within the framework of that enlightenment, they see themselves, the world, God, and Christ is the freshness of a new dawn.

HE SMOTE PETER ON THE SIDE, AND RAISED HIM UP

“ . . . and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up . . .” Other versions read, “struck,” NKJV “tapped,” RSV “touching him,” BBE “striking,” CSB “having smitten,” DARBY “nudged,” GWN “pricked,” MRD “slapped,” LIVING and “gently smote.” AMPLIFIED

The word from which “smote” is translated is **pata,xaj** . As used here, it means “to strike gently” THAYER and “as giving a light or gentle blow touch, strike.” FRIBERG It is also used other places in the sense of “to strike, smite: absolutely,” THAYER and “inflicting a heavy or fatal blow strike (down)” – as when Peter “ struck a servant of the high priest, ” cutting off his ear (Matt 26:51).

For an angel, the blow was a very light one. However, it was sufficient to awaken Peter from a peaceful and sound sleep. In this way the angel “raised him up,” “roused him up,” NASB or “woke him up.” NIV The word translated “raised” means “to arouse from sleep, to awake.” THAYER

This also is a type of being awakened spiritually, when a person comes to himself like the prodigal did among the swine (Lk 15:17). This speaks of the time when the individual sees things more clearly, and leaving the world and fleeing to Christ make perfect sense. Any progress in spiritual life must be preceded by waking up, so to speak, and being aroused from slumber. Therefore it is written, “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep : for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom 13:11). Again, it is written, “ Awake to righteousness , and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor 15:34). And again, “Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest , and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light” (Eph 5:14). A slumbering church is in prison, just like Peter, except he knew it, and they do not.

ARISE UP QUICKLY

“ . . . saying, Arise up quickly. . .” Other versions read, “Get up quickly,” NASB Quick, get up!” NIV “Hurry! Get up!” CSB “Arise, instantly,” MRD and “Rise in haste.” YLT

Peter must not tarry, but respond instantly to the word of the delivering angel. There is a sense in which his deliverance depends upon his response, just the deliverance of Lot. The angels who delivered Lot said to him, “Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither” (Gen 19:22). In Peter’s case, the angel will lead him, make the way clear for him, and bring him out of confinement. However, he must respond immediately, making no delay. Even though roused from a deep sleep, he must get up immediately.

This too is the manner of the kingdom. Many a professing believer has been overcome by sin because they did not respond to the summons to get up quickly. They knew they should get up, preparing to leave the place in which they have been found – but they did not do so. They may have heard the voice of the Spirit saying, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). But they did not respond, imagining that God would give them more time to make up their mind. And what of the countless souls who remain in the confines of spiritual Babylon, noted for its whoredom and unfaithfulness to God. The word has gone forth, “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev 18:4). Refusing to heed the word, they sleep on in the cursed domain which God has destined for destruction (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 18:2,10,18-21). There is no way to justify delaying to obey the word of the Lord! Deliverance depends upon a response to His word!

HIS CHAINS FELL OFF

“ 7b . . . And his chains fell off from his hands.” Other versions read, “fell off Peter’s wrists,” NASB “came off his hands,” BBE “dropped from his wrists,” WEYMOUTH ‘At once the chains fell off his hands,’ WILLIAMS and “fell away from his hands.” PHILLIPS

It appears from the text that as soon as Peter commenced to get up, the means by which he was bound to the soldiers no longer held him. As Peter was getting up, the chains that confined him fell off! In this manner, the soldiers between whom he was positioned were not aroused. Additionally, all of the soldiers were probably in a state of stupefaction due to the presence of the angel – like the angels were at the tomb of Jesus (Matt 28:4).

There are several instances in which miracles were wrought while the people were responding to Jesus’ command. That is, Divine power was dispensed at the point when the individual responded in faith to the word of the Lord.

- **THE MAN LOWERED THROUGH THE ROOF.** “But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith He to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house ” (Matt 9:6-7).

- **THE IMPOTENT MAN AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA.** “Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked : and on the same day was the sabbath” (John 5:8-9).

- **THE MAN WITH HE WITHERED HAND.** “Then saith He to the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it forth; and it was restored whole, like as the other ” (Matt 12:13).

- **THE TEN LEPERS.** “And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go show yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed ” (Luke 17:14).

This is the nature of Divine working. It is at the point of the response of faith that freedom is experienced. At that point, whatever bound the person has no more power. It is precisely then that the individual experiences the reality spoken by Jesus: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). Ponder what a reproach it would be to Jesus if a man whom He had healed from blindness was

This is the nature of Divine working. It is at the point of the response of faith that freedom is experienced. At that point, whatever bound the person has no more power. It is precisely then that the individual experiences the reality spoken by Jesus: “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed”

found groping about the city a few days later. Or, what of the man with the withered hand finding that only a few days later his hand became useless. What if the impotent man who took up his bed and walked soon had to return to that same bed because his legs could no longer support him? Would this have brought glory to the Lord Jesus?

Even so in this text, as Peter made his exit from the prison, his chains were no longer on him, for they had no power to retain him. He was not dragging them as he commenced following the angel.

A DEPICTION OF LIBERTY IN CHRIST

Keep in mind that this is a depiction of what occurs in Jesus Christ. There is a very real spiritual liberty that corresponds to the liberation of Peter. Those who are freed from sin have this word

fulfilled in them: “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). Further, Jesus frees us to continue in a state of freedom. There is nothing about salvation that allows for the continuation of the domination from which we were freed. Therefore it is written, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage” (Gal 5:1). The Amplified Bible reads, “IN [this] freedom Christ has made us free [and completely liberated us]; stand fast then, and do not be hampered and held ensnared and submit again to a yoke of slavery [which you have once put off].”

It is at the point that sins are forgiven that we are freed from their power! To say it another way, freedom commences at the time of deliverance. Although the capacity to sin remains in us, it is confined to “the old man,” who is vastly inferior to “the new man.” The power of sin cannot exceed the degree to which sin is desired – and regeneration addresses that situation. As it is written, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts ,” or “ with its passions and desires” NKJV (Gal 5:24). In addition to this, when the “lusts” of desire surface through that “old man,” salvation fully provides for them to be denied, or rejected – i.e. for the person to absolutely refuse to yield to them. “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12).

In view of this revealed circumstance, what has really happened when a person who has been forgiven and is in Christ, does, in fact, sin? Here are some of the things that have taken place. They assist in providing a very needful perspective.

- They did not walk in the Spirit, for if they had, they would not have fulfilled the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:116).
- They did not receive the teaching of the very grace that brought salvation, or they would have rejected sinful desires (Tit 2:11).
- They provided a place in their lives in which Satan could work. That is why he gained the dominance over them (Eph 4:27).
- They did not resist the devil, and that is why he did not “flee” from them (James 4:7).
- They WERE not “steadfast in the faith,” and WERE therefore unable to resist the devil (1 Pet 5:7-8).
- They ignored the way of escape that came with the temptation (1 Cor 10:13).

None of these facts suggest that no believer can “sin” (1 John 2:1), or be “overtaken in a fault” (Gal 6:1). However, they do confirm that such things do not occur because the saved are helpless, or cannot manage their lives. Salvation – real salvation – introduces a condition defined as “reigning in life” (Rom 5:17), and being “ more than conquerors” (Rom8:37). Jesus described the condition as having life “more abundantly” – that is, it supercedes all of the things that are against it (John 10:10).

Precisely what kind of salvation is it that frees the person, yet leaves the chains on their hands? What kind of Divine work is it that forgives sin, yet leaves the person under its power? Who would dare preach a Gospel like that? Who is the imposter who would suggest that Jesus did, in fact, forgive us of “all trespasses,” yet leave us under the power of the sins of our ancestors, or helpless victims of personal proclivities and desires?

Does all of this seem foolish? Such a Gospel is being perpetrated by all who suggest that those in Christ have unmanageable lives, or are under the power of personal inclinations that must be dealt with by a procedure created by men. The word of God informs us that those who are living in the snare of the devil, being taken captive at his will, can “recover themselves out of the snare of the devil” by simply repenting and acknowledging the truth (2 Tim 2:25-26). John says it this way, “If

we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, AND to cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” or “[everything not in conformity to His will in purpose, thought, and action]” AMPLIFIED (1 John 1:9). Forgiveness deals with the propensity to sin as well as the act of sin itself.

When believers in Christ are taught to say their lives are not manageable, and that they are helpless, they have been taught a lie. There is no way to dignify such a heresy. How is it remotely possible for anyone who is joined to the Lord to be “helpless?” How can one who is joined to the Lord be said to have a life that is out of control? And, if such a condition can exist, then precisely what advantage is there to being “in Christ,” being a “believer in Christ,” or being one of His followers?

Those who embrace such nonsense might as well look for the chains to still be on Peter’s hands as he came out of the prison. Or, perhaps he might be pictured as still chained to the guards who walked along with him as he followed the angel. If such a thought sounds foolish, it is because it is!

THE ANGEL SAYS, “FOLLOW ME”

“ 8 And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.”

Having been freed from the shackles that held him, Peter is now ready for deliverance from the domain in which he had been held – the prison house itself. He was not made free to remain in the prison, but to leave it. Being made free did not allow for him to remain in the domain in which he was confined, but prepared him to make a “clean escape” from it.

GIRD THYSELF, AND BIND ON THY SANDALS

“And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did . . .” Other versions read, “put on your clothes and sandals,” NIV “Dress yourselves and put on your sandals,” NRSV “Fasten your belt and put on your sandals,” RSV “Put on your shows and get ready to go,” BBE “Fasten your girdle . . . and tie on your sandals,” WEYMOUTH Tuck in your shirt and put on your sandals,” ISV and “Tighten your belt and put on your shows. WILLIAMS

This was Peter’s preparation for escape. To “gird” himself was to prepare for travel – tucking his garments and tightening the belt that held his garments in place. His feet needed protection during the escape, and therefore he put on his shoes.

CAST THY GARMENT ABOUT THEE

“And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee . . .” Other versions read, “Put on your garment,” NKJV “Wrap your cloak around you,” NASB “Cast thine upper garment about thee,” DARBY and “Put your coat on.” GWN

Having attired himself with his regular clothing and shoes, the angel now tells Peter to put on his outer garment – his cloak, or coat. This would provide warmth during the night air and make his escape without unnecessary discomfort.

In effect, Peter was taking what belonged to him, and would assist him in his journey, not leaving it in the prison. He also left behind what no longer belonged to him – his shackles, or chains.

In this respect, he was much like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. When they left the fiery furnace, they were in their clothes, and their bonds were removed and left in the furnace (Dan 3:25-27). They even left the smell of the furnace behind them.

FOLLOW ME

“ . . . and follow me.” Other versions read, “come with me,” BBE and “come after me.” MRD

This part of the escape was imperative. It would have done Peter no good to gird himself, put on his sandals, and wrap his coat around him, if he did not follow the angel out of the prison house. There would have been no purpose to the chains falling off his hands if he did not “follow” the one who was freeing him. Peter was not freed from his chains in order to move about in the prison house with greater liberty. There really would be no deliverance at all if this word was not obeyed, and done do instantly, for the angel was on the move.

SALVATION PREFIGURED

In this account we have a marvelous picture of the liberty that is realized in Christ Jesus. It is revealed in remarkable detail, and is worthy of our consideration. This is not forcing something into the text, for all of God’s workings are with His eternal purpose mind. Thus we read of “Him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will” NIV (Eph 1:11).

Foregleams of salvation can be seen in the purposeful working of the Lord. Examples include the following:

- Creating man for the purpose of dominion. Man was placed in the garden, told what he could do and not do, and given dominion over the works of God’s hand.
- Having Noah build an ark for the purpose of saving his house. The Lord provided plans for the building, told him of the duration and the project, and kept him safe during the trial of the flood.
- Delivering Israel out of Egypt, in order to bring them into the promised land. He brought them out with power, sustained them in a wilderness, and enabled them to overcome their foes.
- The miracles of Jesus – a depiction of the what is involved in being delivered from sin: i.e. opening blinded eyes, opening deaf ears, causing one to walk, dispelling the powers of darkness, etc.

Now, a picture of the salvation is seen in the deliverance of Peter.

Awareness

Before any actual deliverance was realized, Peter was made aware of its nearness. He was awakened from his sleep, and became alert. This parallels the awakening that comes when a person is convicted by the Holy Spirit. That conviction involves an awareness of the sin of unbelief, which parallels being held in prison. It involves the conviction of righteousness – that only Jesus is righteous, and we must be brought into the condition that exists only in Him. The needed conviction also brings a persuasion that Satan had already been judged, and it is not possible to be aligned with Him without losing everything. Jesus said, “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:9-11).

No one is spiritually awake who is not keenly aware of these realities. Such are asleep in the prison house of sin, bound with the fetters of iniquity, and held fast by the wicked one.

Response

In order for an escape to be facilitated, the awakened soul must respond to the conviction that has been brought through the Holy Spirit. Just as Peter got up, so they must get up from the bed of

unbelief, and raise up from the posture of slumber. Even though their situation may appear hopeless, they must get themselves in a condition that will allow movement toward the Lord. This involves repentance and the heightening of the desire to be free. It also includes being baptized into Christ and acknowledging that He is the Son of God.

Freedom

When Peter got up, his chains fell off. So it is with those who repent and call upon the Lord – those who act upon the word of the King and set their face to dwell forever with the Lord. No person comes out of the waters of baptism with shackles – no one! There has never been a person who “obeyed the form of the doctrine” (Rom 6:17), yet remained a slave to sin. At the point a person comes into Christ, they are “made free from sin” (Rom 6:18,22). This involves not only being freed from the guilt of sin, but from its power as well. Those in Christ are no longer debtors to, or obligated to live after, “the flesh” (Rom 8:12).

Preparation

In order to enjoy freedom in Christ, people must prepare for it. This is done by:

- Girding the “loins of your mind” (1 Pet 1:13), and putting on proper frames of mind (Col 3:12).
- Putting on “the new man” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).
- Putting on “the armor of light” (Rom 13:12), and “the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11; 1 Thess 5:8).

It also involves bringing forth “fruits meet for repentance,” or “in keeping with repentance” (Matt 3:8). Paul taught people that in coming to Christ they were to “repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20). As Peter also confirmed, coming to Christ is to be preceded by a change in conduct that results from a change of mind. “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Note that the phrase “Repent and be converted” preceded the blotting out of sins, being a requisite to the reception of that blessing. This required change of conduct is much like a man with a withered hand stretching out his hand, or an impotent men picking up his bed and walking – it must be done! When the person exerts his will and effort to do it, power will be given for its accomplishment.

Journey

Once his shackles fell off, he was girded, his sandals on, and his coat wrapped around him, Peter was ready to make the journey. He was not freed to choose his own way of escape, but to follow the one who was delivering him.

Even when Jesus was on earth, He made clear what men were to do: “Follow me” (Matt 4:19; 8:22; 9:9; Matt 16:24; 19:21; Lk 9:23; John 1:43; 10:27; 12:26; 21:19). Our freedom initially and in its maintenance requires that we follow Jesus. That is, that we be where He is, remaining close to Him and abiding in Him.

It is a fundamental error when men depict escape from sin as a process requiring an extensive period of time and a regimented series of steps. The process is associated with transformation – something that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and through which we become more and more like Jesus.

There is one other thing that is important to note. The journey was not the escape itself, but the trip to the appointed destination. The point was where he was going!

So it was when Israel was delivered from Egypt. Technically, the deliverance was not realized in a journey. All of Israel made an exit from Egypt in a single night. It was the trip to the promised land that constituted the journey – and that journey could only be made when they were free from the encumbrances of Egypt.

It is a fundamental error when men depict escape from sin as a process requiring an extensive period of time and a regimented series of steps. The process is associated with transformation – something that is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, and through which we become more and more like Jesus. This is expressly stated in Second Corinthians 3:18, which describes our ongoing change. Of course, that is a process upon which men cannot capitalize. The truth of the matter is that men are delivered by Jesus in order for the Spirit to change them. That transformation is required to be forever with the Lord.

PETER FOLLOWS WITHOUT COGNITION

“9 And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.”

There is something to be seen here that is most precious. Even though Peter is not fully aware of what is happening, it is his nature to respond to the directive of the angel. The laws of God had been written upon his heart and put into his mind (Heb 8:10). His basic propensity was toward the Lord (Phil 3:7-15). He was fundamentally inclined to do the will of the Lord. He was living in the Spirit (Gal 5:25) and by faith (Gal 3:11). His nature was not to rebel, for he had been made a partaker of Christ (Heb 3:14; Isa 50:5). It was not to draw back (Heb 10:38), or even be tardy in his responses (Psa 119:60). He was forward to do the will of the Lord – even when he thought he was seeing a vision.

In our time, there are professed preachers and teachers who are constantly reminding the church of their recalcitrant nature. They speak of a natural disposition that recoils at Divine directives, is slow and obtuse, and basically unwilling to obey the Lord. They have said these things so often, and with such persuasiveness, that the very mind-set of the modern church is inclined in this direction. A host of specialized ministries have also been created to deal with the circumstance of rebellion against God. Oh, they do not call it rebellion. They choose to refer to the wayward condition as one in which the people are victimized by addiction, dysfunction, flawed habits, and a flawed family tree. You must know that salvation deals with waywardness.

In this text, however, we are being exposed to a real “Christian,” not one that is nothing more than the result of defective teaching. This is the account of a person who has been born again (1 Pet 1:23), created in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10), and cleansed by the washing of regeneration (Tit 3:5). This is a man who is walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7) and in the Spirit (Gal 5:16). His instant and thorough response is not a miracle, but is rather the result of being dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God (Rom 6:11).

AND HE WENT

Peter’s deliverance was miraculous, and there is no question about it. However, he himself was involved in the deliverance. He “went out,” first preparing to do so by readying himself, and then participating in the deliverance by following the angel out of the prison.

“And he went out, and followed him; . . .” Other versions read, “went out and continued to follow,” NASB “followed him out of the prison,” NIV “went out after him,” BBE “going forth he followed him,” DARBY “came out and followed him,” GENEVA “left the cell, following the angel,” NLT “having gone forth, he was following him,” YLT “the angel went out and Peter followed,” IE “went out and began to follow him,” ISV and “kept following him out.” WILLIAMS

Peter's deliverance was miraculous, and there is no question about it. However, he himself was involved in the deliverance. He "went out," first preparing to do so by readying himself, and then participating in the deliverance by following the angel out of the prison.

Here again we are exposed to the nature of salvation. The Lord works, and men participate!

This is how Noah was saved from the flood. He responded to the Divine warning, built an ark, gathered food to be eaten, and gathered a host of animals – clean animals in groups of seven, and unclean in pairs (Gen 6:13-7:3).

This is how Israel was delivered from Egypt. They prepared themselves to leave by observing the Passover, placing blood upon the entrance to their homes, packing their goods, gathering their flocks, obtaining goods from the Egyptians, and even preparing and baking bread for their preliminary journey (Ex 12:18-41).

This is how Israel was commanded to obtain the promised land. They had to conquer Jericho, enter the land, drive out its inhabitants, and faithfully keep the ordinances of the Lord (Josh 6; Num 33:54-55; Deut 28:9).

Our text, together with these accounts and a host of others, clarify what it meant by the apostolic injunction, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil 2:12).

HE WIST NOT THAT IT WAS TRUE

" . . . and wist not that it was true . . ." Other versions read, "did not know . . . was real," NKJV "had no idea . . . was really happening," NIV and "was not certain . . . was a fact." BBE

Although Peter was on his way out of the prison, he did not know if it was a real experience or not. At this point, his understanding was deficient, but his obedience was not.

DONE BY THE ANGEL

" . . . which was done by the angel . . ." Other versions read, "being done by the angel," NASB "what the angel was doing," NIV "with the angel's help," RSV "through the angel," CSB "by means of the angel," DARBY "what the angel was doing," GWN and "done through the messenger." YLT

All of the circumstances that attended this deliverance were "being done by the angel." NASB This includes the peaceful awakening of Peter, his chains falling from his hands, directions concerning proper preparations and total unawareness of all of the soldiers, both within and without the cell in which Peter was kept.

Behold how earthly circumstances whether personal or impersonal, yield to the angel of the Lord. What was a hopeless situation from the earthly point of view, was no challenge at all to a holy angel. This would be nothing more than an interesting fact if we were not given some additional information concerning angels that is pertinent to our circumstance. " . . . the angels . . . Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb 1:13-14). This gives us good reason to refuse to be cast down because of difficult circumstances!

HE THOUGHT HE SAW A VISION

" . . . but thought he saw a vision." Virtually all versions read "vision." Departures from this representation are found in The Living Bible ("a dream or vision"), Williams New Testament ("he thought he was dreaming it") , and Contemporary English Version ("only a dream") .

In the Scriptures, there is one word for "vision," and another for "dream." These words are used in

Acts 2:17, where Joel is quoted as prophesying that young men would “see visions,” and old men would “dream dreams.” The general distinction between the two words is that a “dream” occurs while one is asleep, while a “vision” is seen while one is awake. Both are given by God, and are revelatory in nature.

Peter knew that he was awake, and even moving about. Yet, he thought he was experiencing a vision – something like he did when on “the housetop” of the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:10-17). He was not yet aware of what was really taking place.

It ought to be noted that there are things that really do happen to us, even though there may be a period of time when we are not fully aware of them. Nevertheless, they are very real, and yield very real effects. An example of this is the new birth in which we become dead to sin and alive to God. Initially, such an experience may appear to be nothing more than an ideal view, or something toward which we are to progress. But this is not the case. Just as Peter’s deliverance was very real, so what takes place when we are baptized into Christ is very real. This is precisely why Paul reasoned with believers as he did concerning overcoming sin. “Are you ignorant of the fact that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? We were buried therefore with Him by the baptism into death, so that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious [power] of the Father, so we too might [habitually] live and behave in newness of life. For if we have become one with Him by sharing a death like His, we shall also be [one with Him in sharing] His resurrection [by a new life lived for God]. We know that our old (unrenewed) self was nailed to the cross with Him in order that [our] body [which is the instrument] of sin might be made ineffective and inactive for evil, that we might no longer be the slaves of sin. For when a man dies, he is freed (loosed, delivered) from [the power of] sin [among men]. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, Because we know that Christ (the Anointed One), being once raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has power over Him. For by the death He died, He died to sin [ending His relation to it] once for all; and the life that He lives, He is living to God [in unbroken fellowship with Him]. Even so consider yourselves also dead to sin and your relation to it broken, but alive to God [living in unbroken fellowship with Him] in Christ Jesus” AMPLIFIED (Rom 6:3-11).

Just as surely as Peter had to be brought to see that his deliverance was real, so we must see that our deliverance is also very real! Reigning in life will commence at point this is seen.

AS PETER FOLLOWS, CIRCUMSTANCE YIELDS TO HIM

“10 When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.”

The details of the deliverance are provided, for the details are the means by which the deliverance is more fully discerned. Both Peter’s deliverance from the prison and our deliverance from sin is presented in summary form. It is this summation that establishes the cause of the deliverance. The details are provided to confirm its effectiveness. However, the details have no impact upon the human spirit until the cause for the deliverance is established. This is a nugget of truth that brings great comfort to the believer.

THEY WERE PAST THE FIRST AND SECOND WARD

“When they were past the first and the second ward . . .” Other versions read, “the first and second guard posts,” NKJV “the first and second guards,” NASB “the first and second watchmen,” BBE “the first guard, then the second,” NAB “the first and second watch,” TNT and “first and second cell blocks.” LIVING

The word “ward” can refer to the post where the guard was stationed, or the guard himself.

STRONG’S Either meaning is acceptable here, for the point is that they passed the places where a guard or guards were found, stationed at their various posts to secure the prisoner. However, even though Herod had made provision to keep Peter in prison, the angel led him past those who were in charge of him, and they did not even know it.

Behold the comparative ease with which Peter’s deliverance was accomplished – even though the circumstances appeared to shout out that such a thing was altogether impossible. As the angel and Peter proceeded, they did not crouch down and attempt to hide themselves. They “past by” those who were charged with making sure their prisoner did not escape. Peter’s enemies were completely oblivious to what was going on. They could see neither the angel nor Peter, and their ears were closed to any sounds emitting from them.

When faith brings an understanding of this kind of deliverance, it becomes all the more reasonable to cast our care upon the Lord, as we are enjoined to do (1 Pet 5:7).

It seems to me that Scripture is written to bring great comfort to those who are living by faith, while, to others, it appears to be nothing more than a record of history and an outline for human conduct. The doctrine of Scripture declares the realities that are grasped by faith. The historic incidents of Scripture are a kind of exposition of the implications of the doctrine.

THEY CAME TO THE IRON GATE

“ . . . they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city . . .” I have forty-four versions of Scripture that all say precisely the same thing: “iron gate.” This was a formidable gate that separated the prison from the city. Iron is a processed metal, refined in a furnace, and noted for its great strength. When God spoke of heaven being impenetrable because of the wickedness of the people, He said, “I will make your heaven as iron” (Lev 26:19; Deut 28:23). In such a case, prayers could not go up, and rain could not come down. Referring to the captivity of Israel in Egypt, Moses said the Lord had taken them out of “the iron furnace” (Deut 4:20). When the people were judged, and put into the hands of their enemies, they were said to have a “yoke of iron” upon them (Deut 26:48). Formidable opponents were said to have

“chariots of iron” (Judges 1:19; 4:3,13). The head of Goliath’s spear was made of “iron,” and weighed fifteen pounds (1 Sam 17:7). Daniel was given a vision of a kingdom – the fourth kingdom – that was characterized by unusual strength. It is said to have been “strong as iron” (Dan 2:40).

When, therefore, we read of an “iron gate,” we are being introduced to something noted for stability. As men consider things, it was fully capable of keeping prisoners in, and intruders out. However, that is the view of mortals. In this text, an angel from heaven has appeared on the scene, and what is unconquerable to men, is not even a faint consideration to the angel.

IT OPENED ITS OWN ACCORD

“ . . . which opened to them of his own accord . . .” Other versions read, “by itself,” NASB “it opened for them,” ESV and “Of its own accord [the gate] swung open.” AMPLIFIED

The angel did not speak to the gate: it opened of its own accord. Peter did not push the Gate: it opened of its own accord. No special word from heaven was given that was to be spoken to the gate: it opened of its own accord. In other words, the gate yielded to a power greater than its own. That is true of all power, whether natural or spiritual. Winds, noted for their ferocity and power, yielded to Jesus (Mk 4:39a). A stormy

That is a vivid depiction of the life of faith. It is a life of progress, growth, increased fellowship, ongoing change, and incremental conformity to the image of Christ.

sea, noted for its destructive power, yielded to the Lord (Mk 4:39b). Demons, capable of captivating and dominating mortals who are not in communion with God, yielded to Jesus Christ (Mk 1:25; 9:25). A fever that was controlling Peter's mother-in-law, yielded to the rebuke of Jesus (Lk 4:39). Death, having held Lazarus in the tomb for four days, yielded to the word of Jesus (John 11:43). Even the devil himself, when confronting the Lord Jesus, could not resist the command of Christ, who said to him: "Get thee hence!" It is written that at that point, "the devil leaveth him" (Matt 4:11).

Thus, the restraining gate refused to stay closed as the angel of the Lord and the one being escorted by him approached: it opened "of its own accord." It ought to be noted that those who refuse to yield to the Lord have less sense than an iron gate.

THEY WENT OUT, PASSED THROUGH ONE STREET, AND THE ANGEL DEPARTED

"and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him."

Notice the progress that has taken place to this point. It is, in a sense, the depiction of the progress of faith.

- Peter awoke.
- Peter got up.
- Peter girded himself.
- Peter put on his sandals.
- Peter put in his cloak.
- Peter followed the angel out of the cell.
- Peter followed the angel past the first ward.
- Peter followed the angel past the second ward.
- Peter followed the angel through the iron gate.
- Peter passed on through one street.

Behold the progress! See how Peter moved steadily toward his destination. Perceive how he got further and further from the place of bondage. That is a vivid depiction of the life of faith. It is a life of progress, growth, increased fellowship, ongoing change, and incremental conformity to the image of Christ. Stagnation, retrogression, reversion, backsliding, lapse, and static conditions have no part in the life that is in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, there is no humanly-conceived program that can arrest a stance that is diminishing in nature. That is a condition that can only be addressed to Deity. Real spiritual life is noted for its progression, and is therefore paralleled with walking – not in circles, as Israel did in the wilderness, but toward a destination.

- **Walking** "in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham" (Rom 4:12).
- **Walking** "in newness of life" (Rom 6:4).
- **Walking** "in the Spirit" (Gal 5:16,25).
- **Walking** in "good works," that God has before ordained (Eph 2:10).
- **Walking** "in love" (Eph 5:2).
- **Walking** "in wisdom" (Col 4:5).
- **Walking** "in the light" (1 John 1:7).
- **Walking** "in the truth" (3 John 1:4).

How reasonable would it have been for Peter to have remained in prison after the angel had appeared to him? What if he had settled for a new set of clothes, and a course in acceptable prison behavior? What if he has reconciled himself to being chained to the guards, and simply decided to make the best of the situation – doing so AFTER the angel had appeared to him and instructed him. Is there a person in all of the world who would have applauded Peter for such a response? It would have been wrong to teach Peter how to survive in prison!

Yet we are living in a time referred to as “the day of salvation” and “the acceptable time” (2 Cor 6:2). A word has been sent from heaven that announces “deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind,” and the proclamation of liberty to “them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). Yet myriad professing Christians sit in prison as though nothing had really happened – just as though Jesus had really not accomplished anything. All kinds of programs are being marketed to the churches that teach them how to be acclimated to prison life, remaining the way they always were, yet developing some new habits that will help them think differently about themselves.

After all is said and done, it is good to know that there are still deliverances initiated from heaven that are just as effective, and even more so, than the one of which we are reading. People can leave the place of moral and spiritual confinement, walk right past the very things that kept them there, and experience the yielding of the inferior power of the wicked one to the Captain of our salvation. Praise God for that!

PETER COMES TO HIMSELF

“ 11 And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.”

We will see now that a person will take the proper action only when they have properly assessed the situation. Flawed living is always the result of flawed thinking, an incorrect analysis, and improper assessments. This is why godly men prayed for understanding, not desiring to proceed with a faulty understanding.

PETER WAS COME TO HIMSELF

We will see now that a person will take the proper action only when they have properly assessed the situation. Flawed living is always the result of flawed thinking, an incorrect analysis, and improper assessments. This is why godly men prayed for understanding, not desiring to proceed with a faulty understanding.

“And when Peter was come to himself . . .” Other versions read, “came to his senses,” BBE “recognized [where he was],” MRD “recovered his senses,” NAB and “finally realized what had happened.” LIVING

It is interesting to ponder the very concept of a person coming to himself, or coming to one’s senses. This is the same kind of language Jesus employed in his parable of younger son who asked for “the portion of goods” that had been allotted to him. His father distributed the goods to both of his sons, and the younger one straightway squandered it all in “riotous living,” “loose living,” NASB or “prodigal living” NKJV (Lk 15:11-13). The English word “prodigal,” means “characterized by profuse or wasteful expenditure.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER After the younger son had “spent all” – and only after he has spent all – “there arose a mighty famine in the land.” Jesus said the young man “joined himself to a citizen of that country, ” and was sent “into the fields to feed the swine.” He became so hungry that he gladly would have eaten what he was giving to the swine. It was at that point that Jesus said he “came to himself,” and begin thinking properly, in concert with reality (Lk 15:14-17).

In the case of the prodigal, he was, in a manner, insane when he was wasting his substance on dissolute, degenerate, or profligate living. When he came to himself, he saw things as they really were. He had wasted his substance, was no longer worthy to be called his father's son, and was worse off than his father's servants.

In Peter's case, coming to himself was not recovery from moral insanity. He was still thinking in a theocentric, or God-centered manner. However, he thought he was having a vision – perhaps one that would require some interpretation, like the one he had on the housetop some years earlier.

But now Peter sees the circumstance as it really is. With his mind he is able to properly assess what has happened, and to draw some valid conclusions. His proper reasoning will also enable him to know what to do.

I KNOW OF A SURETY

“he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel . . .” Other versions read, “I know for certain,” NKJV “I know for sure,” NASB “I know without a doubt,” NIV “I am sure,” NRSV “I know of a truth,” ASV “I am certain,” BBE “I know in very deed,” DOUAY “I know in reality,” MRD “It's really true,” LIVING and “I know that the Lord really did send his angel to me.”
IE

This is the expression of “the full assurance of faith” (Heb 10:22), and “the full assurance of understanding” (Col 2:2). This is an example of “confidence” (1 John 2:28), and of “certainty” (Lk 1:4). This is the kind of knowledge that brings boldness and certitude.

Peter now knew for certain that God Himself had determined his deliverance, and sent his angel to accomplish it. Also, like Jonathan, he knew that with the Lord “there is no restraint” (1 Sam 14:6).

It is a sign of marked progress when the person who has been delivered can trace that deliverance back to God Himself.

FROM HEROD AND FROM THE EXPECTATION OF THE JEWS

“ . . . and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.”

Thus Peter sees the scope of his deliverance. He was not merely rescued from inconvenience and hardship, but from the determination of Herod to take his life. His deliverance was not only from restriction and isolation, but from the cruel intentions of the Jews. He saw this, and saw it clearly.

Other versions read, “rescued,” NASB “taken me out,” BBE “save me,” NJB and “released me.”
MONTGOMERY

With men, circumstance can seem like everything. In heaven, it is nothing more than an opportunity through which God can receive glory. The angel had no difficulty with the circumstance. It was no challenge to him, and therefore deliverance was instant, thorough, and to the praise of God.

Now, being in his right mind, Peter gives the proper assessment of what he had just experienced. More was involved than simply getting out of prison.

Delivered Out of the Hand of Herod

Herod had made a determination, and he was confident he could carry it out with no difficulty at all. After all, he was the king of the territory. Beside that, he had dispensed with James the apostle,

and no doubt imagined that this was owing to his great power.

Now, however, his council is reversed, and his judgment nullified. His intentions are dashed to the ground, and he is not able to do what he had determined. And the deliverance was thoroughly accomplished without a war or conflict of any kind – even without a word being spoken. No court convened on earth, and no lawyer mounted the rostrum to speak in the behalf of Peter. The prison was not stormed by a troop, and no trumpet of warning was sounded. Instead, light filled the prison, the soldiers were rendered helpless, and Peter walked out, a free man!

Delivered from the Expectation of the Jews

But Peter was also delivered from the expectation of the Jews – which was of the same order as that of Herod. They appeared to be looking forward to ridding themselves of Peter, who had been a thorn in their sides for around fifteen years. How expectantly they must have awaited the morning, when Peter would be brought before them, and they could publically condemn him like they did Jesus. However, their expectation was thrown down without any kind of initiative against it. A Solomon well said, “the expectation of the wicked shall perish” (Prov 10:26).

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PETER CONSIDERS WHAT HAS HAPPENED

“ 12a And when he had considered the thing. . .” Other versions read, “when he realized this,” NASB “When this dawned upon him,” NIV “when he became clear about this,” BBE “having become clearly conscious in himself,” DARBY “after a little thought,” LIVING “after thinking things over,” WEYMOUTH “ When he became conscious of his situation,” WILLIAMS and “When he, at a glance, became aware of this [comprehending all the elements of the case].” AMPLIFIED

The word “considered” is translated from the Greek word **sunidw,n** . . . The lexical meaning of the word is, “to see (have seen) in one's mind, with oneself . . . to understand, perceive, comprehend.” THAYER This has to do with understanding what had happened – that is, the fulness of his deliverance burst upon him. He was free!

Once the reality of his deliverance registered upon his heart and mind, he proceeded to act upon it. That is, his actions were dictated by what he understood, or comprehended.

A PRINCIPLE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Right here we have the fountainhead of both proper conduct and stability – considering what happened when deliverance occurred. There is such a thing as “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2). That is, there are certain traits that characterize life in Christ Jesus. This involves choosing a course of life that is conducive to the end for which God has called us. It is what we know about life in Christ Jesus that directs what we do (Rom 5:3; 6:6,9; 13:11; 2 Cor 1:7; 4:14; 5:6; 5:11; Gal 2:16; Eph 6:8-9; 2 Tim 2:23; Heb 10:34; James 1:2; 1 Pet 3:9; 5:9).

Those who stumble, fail to grow, or fall away, do so because the life of faith has not made sense to them. The truth of what takes place in Christ Jesus has not registered on their minds.

Those who stumble, fail to grow, or fall away, do so because the life of faith has not made sense to them. The truth of what takes place in Christ Jesus has not registered on their minds. This is why

the apostles, and Paul in particular, labored to bring believers to a proper understanding of what is realized in Christ Jesus. The truth of the matter is that until this happens, living godly and productive lives at an acceptable level, simply is not possible.

The following expressions indicate the degree of dissatisfaction that was realized by godly teachers when the people remained in a state of ignorance.

- **CONCERNING SPIRITUAL GIFTS.** “Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant” (1 Cor 12:1).

- **CONCERNING ISRAEL’S BLINDNESS.** “For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in” (Rom 11:25).

- **CONCERNING ISRAEL’S DELIVERANCE.** “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea” (1 Cor 10:1).

- **CONCERNING THE COMING OF THE LORD.** “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13).

- **CONCERNING WHAT HAPPENED WHEN WE WERE BAPTIZED.** “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3).

- **CONCERNING THE NATURE OF SIN.** “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?” (Rom 6:16).

- **CONCERNING THE DOMINION OF LAW.** “Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?” (Rom 7:1).

- **CONCERNING THE CHURCH.** “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Cor 3:16).

- **CONCERNING THE PERVASIVE NATURE OF SIN.** “Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?” (1 Cor 5:6).

- **CONCERNING JUDGMENT.** “Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?” (1 Cor 6:3).

- **CONCERNING UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.** “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind” (1 Cor 6:9).

- **CONCERNING OUR BODIES.** “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid” (1 Cor 6:15).

- **CONCERNING THE USE OF OUR BODIES.** “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:19-20).

- **CONCERNING RUNNING THE RACE.** “Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain” (1 Cor 9:24).

- **CONCERNING WHETHER OR NOT CHRIST IS IN US.** “Examine

yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?" (2 Cor 13:5).

• **CONCERNING FRIENDSHIP WITH THE WORLD.** "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4).

A PARALLEL TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

Peter coming to a juncture where he had a fuller understanding of what had happened to him, parallels life in Christ Jesus. In his first epistle, Peter referred to a point in time when we come to see more clearly what is declared in the Gospel.

Having declared that we "have a more sure word of prophecy," or "the prophetic word confirmed," NKJV or fulfilled, we are reminded that we "do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts" (2 Pet 1:19). That is, as we ponder the Gospel of Christ, musing upon it, and probing into it, there will come a time when the day will dawn, and we will commence walking in the light as He is in the light. There will be illumination within, so that it will be reasonable to live unto the Lord, and totally unreasonable not to do so.

Those poor souls who never do see clearly will never be able to rise high enough to experience any degree of spiritual consistency. No one can "walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8) who remains ignorant of where the Lord has brought them, and how marvelously He has done so. One of the responsibilities of faithful ministers is to assist the people in obtaining clarity of vision.

PETER HEADS FOR A PARTICULAR HOUSE

"12b . . . he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying."

Here we are also exposed to the manner of spiritual life. Having been freed, Peter immediately goes to the brethren. This is what he and John did when they were released by the Jewish council. They "came to their own company, and reported . . ." (Acts 4:23). This is also what the disciples did following the ascension of Jesus, coming together to pray (Acts 1:12-13). Following the day of Pentecost, with three thousand being added to the church, the believers "were together" (Acts 2:44). Some time later, when Paul and Silas were released from the Philippian jail, they "entered into the house of Lydia," saw the brethren, comforted them, and departed (Acts 16:40). This is the manner of spiritual life. When professed believers have no heart to meet together, a very major deficiency exists.

HE CAME TO THE HOUSE OF MARY

" . . . he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark . . ."

This Mary was a sister to Barnabas. Paul refers to her in his letter to the Colossians, also saying that she was Mark's mother. "Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments: if he come unto you, receive him) (Col 4:10). Here was a woman who offered her home as a place for believers to gather. We do not know much about her, but what we do know is very commendable, and sets forth an excellent example for us all.

Here is a woman that is known because of her son – something like Lois and Eunice, who became well known because of Timothy (2 Tim 1:5). It is good for children to determine to bring honor to their parents by engaging in the work of the Lord.

This is the John that Barnabas and Saul took on a missionary journey (Acts 12:25). He is also the one who left them, not going "to the work," and causing a sharp contention between Barnabas and

Saul (Acts 15:37-38). Notwithstanding that dark spot in his life, John Mark recovered from his bout with instability, and came to be a great help to Paul (2 Tim 4:11).

In his First epistle, Peter refers to Mark (“Marcus”) as his “son,” indicating that he was converted under Peter’s ministry (1 Pet 5:13). Many are also of the opinion that Mark was the “young man” you followed Jesus when He was arrested in the garden, leaving his cloak in the hands of those who sought to apprehend him that night (Mk 14:51-52). He is also considered to be the one who wrote the Gospel of Mark at the dictation of Peter.

Here is a woman that is known because of her son – something like Lois and Eunice, who became well known because of Timothy (2 Tim 1:5). It is good for children to determine to bring honor to their parents by engaging in the work of the Lord. Texts mentioning Mark include Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5,13; 15:39; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Philemon 1:24.

MANY WERE GATHERED TOGETHER PRAYING

“ . . . where many were gathered together praying.”

The word “many” means a considerable number of people, without any specific number being given. Early in the book of Acts, we are told that the collective disciples continued steadfastly “in prayer” (Acts 2:42). On another occasion, when Peter and John had been threatened, the disciples came together to pray (Acts 4:23-24). In this, the accord and singleness of purpose is to be noted.

We assume the brethren were praying for Peter, and that this is a further explanation of the previous statement, “but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him” (Acts 12:5).

Here we see how tightly knit the brethren were – coming together in a house for the purpose of prayer. There is also a resounding testimony of their absolute reliance upon the Lord. Here we see the body of Christ, knit together in love, and praying to their Lord. Their lives were being lived unto the Lord, and they resorted to Him in the time of need, knowing they were complete in Him, and that God was for them.

RHODA RECOGNIZES PETER’S VOICE

“ 13 And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 14 And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.”

We are rarely exposed to their mundane activities, domestic circumstances, or other things pertaining to this life. It is characteristic of the Spirit to mention activities of life as they bore upon matters relating to the Lord and his purpose.

It is still during the night, perhaps toward the close of the darkness, as the day was about to dawn. Peter has arrived at the home of Mary, apparently a familiar gathering point for the disciples. I cannot help but observe how the early disciples are described in Scripture. We are rarely exposed to their mundane activities, domestic circumstances, or other things pertaining to this life. It is characteristic of the Spirit to mention activities of life as they bore upon matters relating to the Lord and his purpose. Thus, the hospitality of both Abraham and Lot are detailed when it had something to do with what the Lord was doing (Gen 18:1-8; 19:1-11). The same may be said of the occasion when Isaac asked for some venison to be brought to him, which occasioned the incident in which Esau sold his birthright to Jacob (Gen 27:3-33). There is such a consistency in this manner of reporting the activities of the disciples that it is arresting. Duly noted, it will assist us in adopting a proper emphasis in our own lives.

AS PETER KNOCKED

“And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate . . .” Other versions read, “the outer entrance,” NIV “the door of the gateway,” NASV “the outer gate,” RSV and “the door of entry.” DARBY This was not door of the house structure itself, but the one that led to the court around the house. The manner in which one gained access to a person’s house was much like that of the tabernacle. There was an outer court that was situated between the entrance to ones domain and the house occupied by them. The fact that the entry point was closed suggests that it was still night

The word “knock” means to “knock with a heavy blow,” THAYER and “to knock on a door, as a means of signaling one's presence to those inside.” LOUW-NIDA The point is that Peter was at the residence belonging to someone else, and had to be given permission to enter. We assume the “door of the gate” was secured, prohibiting any unapproved entrance.

Here we have an example of the involvements of seeking grace to help in the time of need – an activity Jesus described as knocking. As in the text before us, such a quest is guarantee an answer (Matt 7:7-8).

A DAMSEL NAMED RHODA

“a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda . . .” Other versions read, “a girl,” NKJV “a servant-girl,” NASB “a maid,” NRSV “a young girl,” BBE “a servant,” CJB “a slave girl,” NET “a maidservant,” WEYMOUTH As used in the Old Covenant Scriptures, the word “damsel” means a young woman, or young girl (Gen 24:14; Deut 22:15; 1 Kgs 1:3). In our text, the word “damsel” emphasizes that the young woman was a servant, for the word from which it is translated means “a maidservant, a young female slave.” THAYER

Here is the only place in Scripture where this young woman is mentioned. Behold how alert she was, hearing Peter knocking, and coming to the door – even while the brethren were praying. There is an example of a good and faithful servant – alert, diligent, and instant to respond.

SHE KNEW PETER’S VOICE

“ . . . And when she knew Peter's voice . . .” Other versions read, “recognized Peter’s voice.” NKJV

Here was an attentive servant who had, through much exposure, come to recognize the voice of Peter the apostle. Our text does not say that she heard Peter identify himself, but that she recognized his voice, being fully able to confirm that it really was him. In this text, she was to Peter what John the Baptist was to Jesus. After identifying Himself as the Good Shepherd, Jesus said of John, “To Him the porter openeth” (John 10:3). Jesus also likened Himself to master coming to His servants, declaring that they should watch for Him like diligent porters: “For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch” (Mark 13:34).

Rhoda was a faithful “porter,” acquainting herself with the voice of those who were welcomed to enter.

SHE OPENED NOT THE GATE FOR GLADNESS

“ . . . , she opened not the gate for gladness . . .” Other versions read, “because of her gladness,” NKJV “because of her joy,” NASB “she was overjoyed,” NIV and “in her joy.” NRSV

Here is a case where joy interfered with sound judgment – just as it did with the disciples when they first saw the risen Lord: “while they believed not for joy” (Lk 24:41). Such a joy is very real, but it is not deep. It is only on the surface.

Notwithstanding, there are some things of profit to be noted here. First, Rhoda was familiar enough with the situation to know that something of greatness had occurred. Though young, she was not uninformed. Although a servant, she had taken in what was going on around her. Rhoda knew about Peter

One of the benefits of acquaintance with the people of God and the things of God is this: at the time of visitation, you will be more apt to recognize what is taking place, and to give an accurate report. Disinterest robs the soul of these benefits, contributing to ignorance and slowness of heart.

and his incarceration – and she was a servant! She also was aware of the advantages that were available when Peter arrived.

Although our society does not have servants like the people of our text, there are people about us who are privy to the way we live and the conversations we have. What do you suppose they conclude about us? What kind of knowledge are they appropriating while in our company?

SHE TOLD HOW PETER STOOD AT THE GATE

“ . . . but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.”

That is, she ran from the gate of the courtyard back to the house, giving her glad report that Peter was standing at the gate. Unlike the messenger Ahimaaz, Rhoda did know what to say. Ahimaaz ran to give a report to David concerning the uprising of his own son, Absalom. Absalom had been slain during that conflict, and David did not know it. When he asked this messenger if Absalom was “safe,” Ahimaaz replied, “When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was” (2 Sam 18:29). He did not know what to say. Rhoda did know what to say!

One of the benefits of acquaintance with the people of God and the things of God is this: at the time of visitation, you will be more apt to recognize what is taking place, and to give an accurate report. Disinterest robs the soul of these benefits, contributing to ignorance and slowness of heart.

THOSE WHO ARE PRAYING DO NOT BELIEVE HER

“ 15 And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.”

Surely the response of the disciples will be one of gladness. After all, a faithful report has been given. However, this is not their initial reaction. This text has been the occasion for much criticism of the disciples involved. Throughout the years, I have heard men of note say the disciples had been praying for Peter's release. Yet, when the answer to their prayer was given, they did not believe it. This observation is then ported over to our generation to justify the unbelief resident among many professed Christians who find it surprising when their prayers are answered.

The flaw in this reasoning is that nothing in the text suggests the disciples were praying for Peter's release, or that there was any compulsion to believe that he was going to be released. Unlike those of our country, they were acquainted with martyrdom. Early on Stephen had been stoned to death (Acts 7:59-60). Under the persecution of Saul of Tarsus, believers were “put to death” (Acts 26:10). Jesus had told His disciples that some of them would be put to death (Luke 21:16). Jesus had personally told Peter of the manner in which he would glorify God in a martyr's death (John 21:19). On top of all of this, Herod has just “killed James the brother of John with the sword” (Acts 12:2).

These brethren had a different view of life in Christ and testifying for Him. They did not think in terms of being popular with the people, accepted by those who were prominent in the world, and a life free from threat. They looked at death as a time of “gain” (Phil 1:21). They were well acquainted

with the hostility of the world – particularly the religious world.

I find it difficult to conceive of brethren like this praying fervently for the release of Peter, then being stunned when their prayer was answered. It seems to me that this is a reproach cast upon our early brethren by those who lack what they possessed. While I do not question that prayers had been made for Peter to be spared, it is my persuasion that this was not the subject of their prayers at the time of our text. The text strongly suggests that this was not the case.

THOU ART MAD

“And they said unto her, Thou art mad.” Other versions read, “You are beside yourself,” NKJV “You are out of your mind,” NASB “You’re crazy,” CSB “Thou art delirious,” MRD and “Thou art insane.” WEB

There was no doubt in Rhoda’s mind about Peter being at the door of the gate. She knew this was the case, and kept on stating the fact – affirming that what she knew for sure was the truth, for she had recognized Peter’s voice.

The word “mad” is said “of one who so speaks that he seems not to be in his right mind.” THAYER This is the word used when the people said Jesus had “a demon and is mad” (John 10:20). It is also used when Fetus said to Paul, “much learning doth make thee mad” (Acts 26:24). Paul also used this word when describing a stranger coming into the assembly and hearing them all speak in other languages: “will they not say that thou art made?” (1 Cor 14:23). This does not refer to the ranting of a deranged person, but of someone who is perceived as speaking in an irrational manner. Such a person is not removed as one who gone berserk, but is simply treated as someone who is not speaking rationally.

The statement that Rhoda made was considered to be foolish and without foundation. It was perceived as unreasonable, and outside the boundary of rationality. Perhaps you have encountered people who felt that is the way you spoke when you delivered some word of truth that was precious to you.

SHE CONSTANTLY AFFIRMED

“But she constantly affirmed that it was even so.” Other versions read, “kept insisting,” NKJV “confidently affirmed,” ASV “said with decision,” BBE “insisting that it was true,” CSB “maintained,” “affirmed it constantly,” GENEVA “maintained that it was a fact,” MRD “strenuously maintained,” WEYMOUTH and “confidently insisted.” MONTGOMERY

Rhoda is not discouraged when her testimony is thrust aside as though it could not possibly be true. This, of course, is an aspect of knowing something is true: you cannot be dissuaded from it! This young lady not only kept affirming, or restating what she knew to be true, but did so with confidence. The words “constantly affirmed” are translated from the single Greek word **διισχυρίζομαι**. The lexical meaning of this word is, “to affirm stoutly, to assert confidently,” THAYER “insist, assert, firmly maintain,” FRIBERG “state something with firmness and certainty,” LOUW-NIDA and “to affirm confidently.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

There was no doubt in Rhoda’s mind about Peter being at the door of the gate. She knew this was the case, and kept on stating the fact – affirming that what she knew for sure was the truth, for she had recognized Peter’s voice.

In my own view, this kind of testimony is sorely needed in our day. A lot of what is being said these days has an unsure sound to it. The tone of assurance is often absent, and confidence is not apparent. This is largely owing to the propensity of men to settle for, what might be called, second

hand human knowledge.

While there is measured value in benefitting from the valid knowledge of others, in matters pertaining to life and godliness, a more immediate knowledge is required. This is acquired when a person is able to recognize the truth, like Rhoda was able to recognize the voice of Peter. Jesus referred to this kind of knowledge as His people knowing His voice (John 10:4,27). Those possessing such wonderful knowledge will not easily be turned from the way of truth, nor will their testimony be subdued without great difficulty.

IT IS HIS ANGEL

“Then said they, It is his angel.” Other versions read, “It must be his angel,” NIV “Perhaps it is his ghost,” MRD “It is his messenger,” YLT “It must be his angel. [They must have killed him.],” LIVING “ and "It is his guardian angel." WEYMOUTH

The word used here is not the word for spirit or ghost , but the word for messenger: “ his angel” (~O a;ggelo,j). To my knowledge, there are very few exceptions to this word referring to the holy angels, who are “ministering spirits” (Heb 1:13-14). It is used in reference to the spies entertained by Rahab (James 25). The messengers of the seven churches of Asia are also referred to as “angels” (Rev 1:20; 2:1,8,12,18; 3:1,7,14). There are also the “angels” who are aligned with the devil (Psa 78:49; Matt 25:41; 2 Cor 12:7; 2 Pet 2:4; Rev 12:7,9).

The text strongly suggests that they thought this was a heavenly messenger who had been assigned to Peter – like the angel Michael was assigned to Israel (Dan 12:2). In a statement that has long intrigued thoughtful believers Jesus said, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 18:10).

Whatever vagueness may be associated with this text, We do know that an angel was sent to release Peter, so it should not be difficult to conceive of such a being as “his angel.” Of course, during the earlier days of the church, it appears believers found less difficulty in acknowledging the reality of the angelic hosts, and of their operations among the sons of men.

Although we are given little information concerning this statement, it appears the disciples concluded that Peter had been killed like James, and his angel had come to inform them of the event, or the things related to it.

PETER CONTINUES KNOCKING

“ 16 But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. 17a But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. . .”

Here we have an excellent example of perseverance under seemingly discouraging circumstances. This is a very practical example of the spiritual posture that refuses to give up.

PETER CONTINUED KNOCKING

“But Peter continued knocking.. .” Other versions read, “kept on knocking,” NIV “Peter, meanwhile, was still knocking,” NJB and “went on knocking,” WEYMOUTH

What a marvelous example of persistence! Rhoda kept on affirming, and Peter kept on knocking. Rhoda saw the need for her word to be received, and Peter saw the need to bear witness of his deliverance.

I suppose it would have been theoretically possible for Rhoda to stop affirming, and Peter to cease knocking. However, they did not, because of the realities they had embraced. Rhoda knew Peter was really at the door, and Peter knew he had really been delivered.

It is good to take Peter's conduct as a pattern, so to speak, for our own. When we are knocking at the gate of heaven, seeking for the Divine door to be opened, let us see to it that we "continue knocking" when there seems to be a delay. Jesus said if we knock, the door will be opened (Matt 7:7-8). In another saying that addressed the same matter, Jesus spoke "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (Lk 18:1). Again, Jesus said, "pray always" (Lk 21:36). Paul said the same thing when he wrote, "continuing instant in prayer" (Rom 12:12), "praying always with all prayer," (Eph 6:17), and "pray without ceasing" (1 Thess 5:17). In other words, keep knocking!

THEY OPENED THE DOOR AND SAW HIM

" . . . and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished."

It requires understanding to explain HOW the deliverance of the Lord was wrought. Here Peter is not referring to the mere sequence of events, but to the obvious working of the Lord.

The persistence of Rhoda and Peter paid off, just as Jesus said it would. The door was finally opened because Rhoda kept insisting, and Peter kept knocking. If either one would have ceased their activity, the door would not have been opened. If Rhoda had kept on telling them that Peter was at the door, yet when they went to it, there was no knocking, her word would not have been believed. However, two constant efforts by two different people were worked together for good. God employed their efforts to change the minds of the doubters.

When they saw Peter, they reacted differently than Rhoda when she heard his voice. She was glad, and they were astonished, or "amazed." NASB That is, the deliverance of Peter had not been the resolution they had expected. Although I acknowledge it to be an opinion, I do heartily agree with John Gill who was also persuaded the brethren were praying that Peter "might be strengthened and made steadfast, and kept faithful to the last; and bear, by his sufferings and death, a glorious and honorable testimony for Christ." That seems to me to be more in keeping with the manner in which those early brethren thought – more to the foundation of things rather than simply on the surface.

HOLD YOUR PEACE!

"But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace . . ."

Evidently the disciples started speaking – perhaps in expressions of joy as well as astonishment – but it was not the time for them to speak. This was the time for Peter to speak. It was not the time for those who were "astonished," but for the one with understanding. This was the time to heed the admonition of James, which would be given many years later: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19).

Therefore, Peter is now "motioning to them with his hand to keep quiet and listen." AMPLIFIED He will now explain to them why he is there, and how he came to realize freedom from the hand of Herod and the will of the people.

HE DECLARED UNTO THEM

" . . .declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison..." Other versions read, "described to them how," NASB "gave them an account of how," BBE "told them how," CJB "related to them how," DARBY "explained to them how," NAB and "told them by what means." PNT

It requires understanding to explain HOW the deliverance of the Lord was wrought. Here Peter is

not referring to the mere sequence of events, but to the obvious working of the Lord. His chains fell off, he walked past the first and second wards, the gate opened of its own accord – and all of this was according to the direction and authority of an angel sent from heaven. Peter did not develop an escape strategy. The brethren had not mounted a rescue plan, storming the prison and saving Peter. This was the Lord's doing, and it was marvelous in the eyes of Peter and those who heard him (Psa 118:23). There is nothing about this deliverance that would lead anyone to question its Source.

Do not forget that young John Mark was probably there. This might have been his first exposure to a report of this sort. If this is true, what a pleasant experience for a young man to have – to hear someone rehearse “the righteous acts of the Lord” (Judges5:11). You may remember that Peter also “rehearsed” to the brethren in Jerusalem what God had done at the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:4). Later in this book, Paul and Barnabas “rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).

It is good to walk in the light as He is in the light in order that He might work in us that which is well pleasing in His sight I1 John 1:L7; Heb 13:20-21). Then, it is good to do like Peter, and faithfully rehearse what He has done.

SHOW THESE THINGS TO JAMES AND THE BRETHREN

“ 17b . . . And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.”

Having delivered his report, Peter gives some instructions and moves on. He is a man in the center of the will of God, and is progressing in that will. Although imprisoned, and probably unrested, he is operating according to another agenda, and it is one that imparts strength and encouragement to those who operate within it.

SHOW THESE THINGS TO JAMES

“And he said, Go show these things unto James, and to the brethren.” Other versions read, “tell these things,” NKJV “Report these things,” NASB “Tell . . . about this,” NIV “Tell this,” NRSV “Give the news,” BBE “Tell all this,” WEYMOUTH and “Report all this.” AMPLIFIED

The Greek word that is translated “show,” or “tell,” NKJV is **Vapaggei,late** . This word means, “to bring tidings (from a person or thing), bring word, report,” THAYER “as carrying back word from a happening report,” FRIBERG “tell, inform; proclaim,” UBS and “to announce or inform, with possible focus upon the source of information.” LOUW-NIDA

Now, there are several things to note in this word by Peter. First, what is shown told, or reported, is something factual – something that actually did take place. They were not to tell what they thought about Peter's report, but to give the report itself – the facts in the case. Second, the idea of good news is inherent in the report they will give. Third, the report concerned what God had done, not merely what happened to Peter: “he declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of prison .” There is a difference in giving this kind of report. A carnal report of the deliverance could have been phrased something like this. “I finally managed to get to sleep, chained between two soldiers. I was most uncomfortable, and hoped the Lord would deliver me. Finally my time came, and the chains that were hurting my wrists finally fell off. It surely did feel good to be freed from those. I did manage to get past all of the guards. When I arrived at the gate, you will never believe what happened. There must have been a defect in the locking mechanism. At any rate, the gate swung open, and I got out of that doleful prison. I sure was lucky.” Does that sound foolish? I have heard many testimonies of improvement and advantage that sounded much like that! However, as used in our text, that is not a report, but an interpretation of what happened. To show something is to tell what actually happened. In this case, it was to associate the occurrence with the God who wrought it.

Tell It to James

It should be apparent that this is not the apostle James, for he had been martyred. This is the “James” who became prominent in the early church, being one of its pillars (Gal 2:9). This is the James who declared the conversion of the Gentiles to be the fulfillment of prophecy. He gave council at that time, with which the “apostles and elders” agreed (Acts 15:13-22). This is also the James to whom Paul “declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry” (Acts 21:19). Paul further defined him as, “James, the Lord’s brother” (Gal 1:19; Matt 13:55), and states that Jesus made a special appearance to him after his resurrection (1 Cor 15:7). This James also sent people forth to adjudicate certain Kingdom matters (Gal 2:12). We understand him to be the author of the book of James, noted for his activity among the Jews (James 1:1).

At this time, therefore, James had risen prominence within the church. This was not a self-imposed prominence, as was confirmed by Christ’s special appearance to him. Although, well into the time of Jesus’ ministry, he (along with his other brothers) did not believe on Jesus (John 7:5), he obtained like precious faith, and became a pillar in the house of God.

Peter recognized this and gave word to report what the Lord had done to James. He would know what to do with the report. It is also probable that “the brethren” refers to the rest of the apostles primarily, and to those who were prominent among the saints.

HE WENT TO ANOTHER PLACE

“And he departed, and went into another place.”

Having reported what had happened, Peter now leaves. There is work to be done, and perhaps others to whom he desired to give this report. We do not know where he went, only that it was “another place.” You may rest assured it was not a place of mere leisure, or a place where he could take a rest or enjoy a sabbatical of some sort. Some feel that he went to another house where other saints may have been assembled together. Wherever he went, I am sure it was a place where kindred spirits could be found, and the work of the Lord could be reported and enjoyed.

CONCLUSION

Once again, the hand of God has been seen in the affairs of His people. When people are walking in the light as He is in the light, living by faith, and walking in the Spirit, the Lord works in them both to do and to will of His own good pleasure. Such people become involved in the outworking of the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. Such people are the recipients of angelic ministry and deliverance, whether they are aware of it or not.

Throughout this book, there is a total, and very apparent, absence of the wisdom and strategies of men. God works independently of such things, having declared the wisdom of this world to be “foolishness” with Him (1 Cor 3:19). Wherever the Scriptures record progress in the Lord, whether personal or collective, the Lord Himself is active in the matter. In fact, He is the preeminent One in all such things. If that one lesson can be learned, it will have a calculated impact upon everything the people of God set out to do.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #55

The Book of Acts

. Where this understanding is not present, we are shut up to scholasticism and conjecture, both of which are of the world, not of God.

THE INSOLENCES OF HEROD REWARDED

“ 12:18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter. 19 And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode. 20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country. 21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. 22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. 23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied. 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark. ” (Acts 12:18-25)

INTRODUCTION

The deliverance of Peter has taken place without any of the prison keepers knowing what had happened. It is not until morning that any apparent check is made, or any effort expended to account for Peter. There is a sense in which this is the way in which all who are of the world relate to the ways and works of God – they are unaware of them, like men who are sleeping in the night. Paul well wrote, “For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night” (1 Thess 5:7). This involves more than the time when there is no solar light. Sin causes men to become blind, so that everything around them is “night.” Even what they think they see does not appear to them as it really is. Men create their own form of artificial moral light that they imagine causes things to be seen more clearly. It may take the form of a system, or a philosophy, or a “science falsely so called” (1 Tim 6:20). They

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entertain erroneous ideas of men, thinking them to be a higher form of animal life rather than a reflection of Divine life. They may look at the world and everything in it as something that is evolving with neither management nor purpose. They may embrace the thought that only the worldly-fit survive, and those conceived by the world to be weak are destined to failure. But all of these are erroneous ideas that cannot emit light to the mind or hope to the heart. They are like Herod, his prison, and his prison keepers. They distort the vision of the people, bringing no clarity to life.

Everyone involved in the incarceration of Peter had complete trust in the system put in place by Herod. There was no thought of it being in any way deficient. The cell was secure. The restraining chains were in place. Peter had been placed between two guards. There were two other posts to guarantee no intruder could access the prisoner, and the prisoner himself could not escape. In addition, there was the large and formidable gate that isolated the prison complex from society. The security of the prisoner was unquestionably sure – at least that is what they thought.

However, their trust in the arm of the flesh will prove to be in vain. God has determined that those who trust in anything or anyone other than Himself WILL find that trust to be vain. “There is no king saved by the multitude of an host: a mighty man is not delivered by much strength. An horse is a vain thing for safety: neither shall he deliver any by his great strength” (Psa 33:16-17). “Lo, thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt; whereon if a man lean, it will go into his hand, and pierce it: so is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all that trust in him” (Isa 36:6). Insightful souls have confessed, “vain is the help of man” (Psa 60:11; 108:12). Jeremiah affirmed, “Truly in vain is salvation hoped for from the hills, and from the multitude of mountains” (Jer 3:23). This principle is true for all kinds of erroneous thought, whether it be humanly conceived religious systems, medical answers, political strategies, scientific discoveries, educational developments, or military strength. God will allow none of these things, or anything like them, to take His place!

On the other hand, Peter's trust in God will be fully justified. In him the saying will be fulfilled, "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him" (Psa 2:12). And again, "O Thou that savest by Thy right hand them which put their trust in Thee from those that rise up against them" (Psa 17:7). And again, "Every word of God is pure: He is a shield unto them that put their trust in Him." (Prov 30:5).

It is one thing to have such affirmations in your creed. It is quite another to have them dwelling "richly" in your heart (Col 3:16). Part of ingesting the Word of God is appropriating these affirmations of absolute Divine superiority.

The apostles confirm that this is especially true of those who put their trust in Christ. After identifying Christ as the stumbling stone to which Isaiah referred, Paul wrote "As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (Rom 9:33). Following his delineation of the role of the Gospel in our salvation he wrote, "For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed" (Rom 10:11). It is ever true, "But let all those that put their trust in Thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because Thou defendest them : let them also that love Thy name be joyful in Thee" (Psa 5:11),

There is a sense in which this text provides a sterling commentary on the two types of people who dwell in the earth: those who by Jesus "believe in God" (1 Pet 1:21), and those who "trust in chariots" and "in horses" (Psa 20:7) – wheat and tares, the godly and the ungodly, those who are reconciled to God and those who are alienated from the life of God, those who love God, and those who love the world. These live for different reasons, and are anticipating significantly different things. The godly think differently, and approach life differently. It is because they "know the Lord," and have been persuaded that He is "above all" (Eph 1:21; 4:6,10), and "over all" (Rom 9:5; Rom 10:12; Eph 1:22).

It is one thing to have such affirmations in your creed. It is quite another to have them dwelling "richly" in your heart (Col 3:16). Part of ingesting the Word of God is appropriating these affirmations of absolute Divine superiority. Jesus Christ, for example, is the "only Potentate" (1 Tim 6:15). At the level at which He reigns, there are no competitors – not even Satan, who is "the god of this world" (2 Cor 4:4). WE may be in a competitive arena, but the Father and the Son are not! Since Jesus has been enthroned, there are no battles in heaven! Furthermore, orders that are issued from there cannot be effectively contravened on earth. If the Lord commands deliverance from heaven (Isa 44:4), it cannot be hindered, postponed, or nullified upon earth. If God sends a "strong delusion" (2 Thess 2:11), it will be effective with no possibility of being deterred.

The truth of this is being lived out in our text. Peter trusts in the Lord, and he is delivered. Herod trusts in flesh, and his mandate is overthrown. The prison keepers trusted in the strength of chains, the superiority of militia, and the restraining power of iron – but it was all in vain.

THE VANITY OF HUMAN SYSTEMS

One of the tragic consequences of relying upon systems that have been contrived by men is that it removes the necessity of trusting in the Lord. I am painfully aware that it is not religiously correct to say such things, but they must be said. As Paul well stated, there is a "show of wisdom" in the strategies of men (Col 2:19). It seems to me that the time has come to emphasize that what cannot reconcile us to God, by that very circumstance, has no power to recover us from sin in any sense, or restore to us an imagined control of our lives. Whatever cannot take away sin, cannot keep sin away. If it cannot cleanse the conscience in the first place, it cannot restore one. If it cannot deliver us the power of the devil, it cannot save us from any of the powers he controls. That seems very elementary to me, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to make this point in the modern church. Through demonic doctrines, Satan has brought many professing believers to adopt, what I will call, a YABUT theology. That is a view that, after hearing of a Sovereign God, a Savior who is King of kings, and a power that is exceeding, responds by saying "Yea, but . . ." Perhaps it is "But there is some good in what they say." Or, "But, they use Scripture in their plans." Or "But, there is nothing wrong with

using a system that works.” Or, “But, they have done so much good.”

If men are to live in Divine favor, they must be brought to the point where what is said of the entire household of faith can be said of them: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). These are not goals, but are realities produced by salvation.

- **“The circumcision.”** Other versions read, “the true circumcision,” NASB “the real circumcision,” ESV and “true people of the circumcision.” NJB This refers to “the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11), in which the “body of the sins of the flesh” are cut away from our essential persons. That is, our basic propensity is now toward the Lord, and not our bodies and the nature associated with them.

“Worship God in the Spirit.” Our lives are now lived in service to God. We no longer live to please ourselves, but offer our bodies and lives to the Lord. This is done in the power of the Spirit, and is like the offering of life itself, as seen in the scapegoat and living bird that were not killed, yet were offered to the Lord (Lev 14:6-7, 51-53; 16:8,10,26).

- **“Rejoice in Christ Jesus.”** This is not something believers should do, but is the expression of their basic persons. Rejoicing in Jesus is the expression of their faith, and it is why they will not give their hearts to anything or anyone other than Him.

- **“Have no confidence in the flesh.”** Having been delivered from the dominion and contamination of “the flesh,” they have no intention of trusting it again. If it can be traced back to Adam, through which both sin and death entered into the world, they will not trust it – regardless of the form that it takes.

There is no possibility that someone lacking these things is a genuine Christian. It is possible for those who “are not far from the kingdom of God” (Mk 12:34) to aspire to have these qualities. However, they are not actually possessed until men are delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). When this condition is realized, the same thing that put them into Christ causes them to be characterized as this text affirms. This is not descriptive of a category believers, but of the body of Christ itself. These realities account for the calm of Peter, and for his deliverance as well. The lack of these things account for the frustration of Herod’s purpose, and the obtuseness of the soldiers.

ONE MORE AFFIRMATION

It is necessary to once again affirm the spiritual realities that have been lived out in the deliverance of Peter. The individual who has been saved, or delivered from the guilt and power of sin by the Lord Jesus Christ, is free to cease serving sin. Any failure to follow through by yielding oneself to God, and ceasing to serve sin, is owing to unbelief, and unbelief alone. Further, that failure is to be treated as unbelief, and not as some innocent error, or lingering dominion of sin that was not addressed by “*the Deliverer*” (Rom 11:26). That would be tantamount to Peter being delivered from prison, yet retaining the chains that had confined him there.

There is to be no tolerance of any teacher or teaching that leads people to believe that the sin from which they have been freed maintains its power over them. Nor are those who have been delivered from the power of darkness to retain thoughts of helplessness, as though they were not really delivered by Jesus. Such views negate any claim to faith, misrepresent both God and Christ, and demean the salvation that is in Him with eternal glory. Further, they are the result of embracing a lie. The lie is that they are still under the dominion of something that has been forgiven. The acceptance of the lie forbids the person to reckon himself to be “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11) – a posture that is required by the Lord. Those who perpetrate doctrines that produce such effects are to be soundly rebuked, and their teaching treated with absolute and total

disdain. Their error is the direct result of ignoring the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is corrupting.

THERE WAS NO SMALL STIR

“ 12:18 Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.”

A lot had happened during the night – things of which these people were totally unaware. Peter had been delivered. He had been with those who were praying at Mary’s house. He had reported the great deliverance that was wrought by God through a holy angel. A commission had even been delivered to report to James and the brethren the wonderful things that had happened. I can tell you that the things taking place in Mary’s home were quite different than the environment of which we will now read.

AS SOON AS IT WAS DAY

“ Now as soon as it was day . . . ”

This is how the flesh reacts to the working of the Lord. There are things with which the ungodly cannot contend – things that the devil, with all of his power, cannot reverse or modify. When any event or circumstance negates the power of the wicked one, it also voids every form of opposition and contradiction.

So far as Herod and his soldiers were concerned, the next significant event would occur in the morning. However, a great deliverance was wrought during the night. A similar deliverance took place when Israel walked out of Egypt during the night (Ex 11:4; 12:29-36), and when Paul and Silas were freed during the night (16:25-26). In all of these case, the words of young Elihu were fulfilled: “God . . . giveth songs in the night” (Job 35:10). David said the Lord’s “song” would be with him “in the night” (Psa 42:8). He also spoke of his “song in the night” (Psa 77:5). Sometimes that “song” is the result of the joyful recollection of Divine mercies and goodness in the past. It is also the result of deliverance that has been experienced during the night. If you have walked for any length of time with the Lord, you know what I am speaking about.

Now, a new day dawns, and Peter has already visited one location, and is in another, enjoying the freedom that only the Lord can create. But, alas, back at the prison, once occupied by Peter, all is not well. There is confusion among the hosts of the enemy! Those who are under the control of the wicked one are in a state of consternation.

WHAT WAS BECOME OF PETER

“ . . . there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.” Other versions read, “no small disturbance,” NASB “no small commotion,” NIV “were greatly troubled,” BBE “in an uproar,” GWN “a great dispute,” MRD “great consternation,” NET “no little ado,” PNT and “very upset.” IE

The word translated “stir” indicates a state of mind, and not a mere physical activity. The lexical meaning of the Greek word used here is “commotion, stir (of mind),” THAYER “mental agitation, extreme anxiety, confusion,” FRIBERG “serious disturbance, commotion, serious trouble,” LOUW-NIDA and “mental agitation, consternation.” GINGRICH

This is how the flesh reacts to the working of the Lord. There are things with which the ungodly cannot contend – things that the devil, with all of his power, cannot reverse or modify. When any event or circumstance negates the power of the wicked one, it also voids every form of opposition and contradiction. There are no adversarial human strategies that can be successful where Satan himself has been overthrown. Therefore, when confronted with the startling absence of Peter, there

was not a thing that the soldiers or Herod could do. That circumstance is the cause for “no small stir among the soldiers.” It was their helpless state that dictated their response.

THE MANNER OF THE KINGDOM

There have been numerous times when the Lord outwardly frustrated the enemies of the Lord.

- The drowning of Pharaoh and his hosts (Ex 14:9-10,25,28).
- When Gideon and his men stood around the camp of the Midianites, the Lord “set every man’s sword against his brother” (Judges 7:22).
- The Lord turned the worldly-wise counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness (2 Sam 15:31).
- The angel of the Lord slew 185,000 Sennacherib’s army during the night (2 Kgs 19:35).
- During the days of Jehosaphat, when the Ammonite and Moabites stood up against them, God told them, “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, and stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” The Lord then set abashments against these foes, and they helped to actually destroy one another (2 Chron 20:17-23).
- Through Isaiah, the Lord said He would set the Egyptians against the Egyptians, and cause the spirit of Egypt to fail (Isa 19:2-3).

This is not to mention the time the Jewish council incarcerated Peter and John, only to find them to disappear from jail, and were now preaching again in the Temple (Acts 5:19-25).

It is still true, “There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD” (Prov 21:30). And again, “There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand” (Prov 19:21). Those who are engaged in the good and acceptable will of the Lord can say to their foes, “Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us” (Isa 8:10). Is it not written, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).

These things are being lived out in our text: the foe is being frustrated, and the cause of the Lord is moving forward! Of course, when men adopt an agenda of their own, or fail to work in strict harmony with God’s revealed purpose, their efforts are all in vain.

THE REACTION OF HEROD

“ 19a And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death.”

The time now comes for Herod to carry out his intentions: to bring Peter before the people and let them do with him what they desire, just as they did with Jesus, nearly one-and-a-half decades ago.

HEROD COULD NOT FIND HIM

“And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not . . .”

The thought had not entered Herod’s mind that he was inferior to Peter, and that his will was not even a consideration within the framework of the will of God. He is familiar with the Jews, but he does not have a particle of understanding concerning the God of the Jews. He thinks that he is in charge of the situation, and that the best thing for his popularity and personal gratification is to please the Jews. In his thinking, he had carried out his intentions against James, and will also do the same with Peter. This how the flesh thinks: it sees itself as thoroughly capable of doing what it wants to

do.

Now, however, Herod comes up against something with which he cannot contend. He cannot even find Peter, much less carry out his intentions against him. He has soldiers and a militia at his command – but he still cannot find Peter. There were no doubt some who are quite willing to work with him to find Peter, but he still could not find him. I do not doubt that he consulted with certain Jewish leaders, like one of his predecessors did when the Christ was born (Matt 2:4).

When the text says Herod “sought for” Peter, it reflects a certain focus and intensity. There was nothing casual or indifferent about his quest. The Greek word translated “sought for,” is **evpizhth,saj** , and it means. “Seek diligently,” THAYER “as making an effort to get what one wants demand, strive for, require,” FRIBERG and “to try to learn the location of something by searching for it (presumably somewhat more emphatic or goal-directed than 'to try to learn where something is,,” LOUW-NIDA

We must learn from this the effectiveness of Divine hiding! When the Head of the church moves someone to a place of safety, there is no way that the enemies of the hidden one can find him! With all of their wisdom and resources, they cannot touch the one who is under Divine protection. It is said of whoever is born of God, “that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18). If the leader of the wicked ones cannot touch such a one, you may be sure that no one in his charge can do so!

It is not without cause that David prayed, “Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings” (Psa 17:8). Again, “ Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity” (Psa 64:2). And again, “Deliver me, O LORD, from mine enemies: I flee unto thee to hide me ” (Psa 143:9). Having experienced this benefit, David testified concerning the means through which this hiding is accomplished. “For in the time of trouble He shall hide me in His pavilion: in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide me ; He shall set me up upon a rock” (Psa 27:5). Behold how David besought the Lord with understanding: “Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in Thee: yea, in the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast” (Psa 57:1).

The real safety is found in one’s identity and fellowship with the Lord. It is there, in the “heavenly places,” that Satan and his foes have no access! Examples of safety being lived out, as in our text, include the following.

- The infant Moses was hidden from the eyes and intentions of Pharaoh for three months (Ex 2:2).
- Two spies from Israel were hid by Rahab in the city of Jericho (Josh 2:4,6).
- Obadiah hid “an hundred prophets” from rampaging Jezebel (1 Kgs 18:4).
- Young Josiah was hidden for six years from the wrath of Athalia, who killed the king’s sons (2 Kgs 11:2-3).

All of God’s deliverance are this way. When the truth of them is known, they defy carnal explanation. Yet, even though the world cannot comprehend them, they are thoroughly effective, and their results cannot be denied, even though they defy explanation.

The point here is that, for those living unto the Lord, when their activity for the Lord is threatened by inimical forces, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations” (2 Pet 2:9). That is another one of the marvelous benefits of loving the Lord with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and doing whatever we do with all of our might, as unto Him (Mk 12:30; Eccl 9:10). Of course, for those who do not live in this manner, no such deliverance and protection is promised. While this may not be a popular view, it is a truthful one. God has made no commitments for good to those who ignore His Son and live only for themselves.

HE EXAMINED THE KEEPERS

“ . . . he examined the keepers. . .” Other versions read, “cross-examined,” NIV “questioning,” BBE “interrogated,” CSB “arraigned,” MRD “asked the guards many questions,” IE “sharply questions,” MONTGOMERY and “placed the guards on trial.” AMPLIFIED

This was no casual questioning, but a strong and unrelenting interrogation. The word used here means “to investigate, examine, inquire into, scrutinize, sift, question.” THAYER The picture is of an aggressive lawyer, questioning thoroughly, probing, and seeking for a satisfactory explanation.

However, Herod will not be able to obtain a rational answer from the guards, for they had no idea what had happened. A great deliverance was wrought right under their nose, and completely without any awareness of it on their part.

This is a demonstration of how the Lord counts the wisdom of the world foolishness. He uses their own craftiness to snare them. As it is written, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain” (1 Cor 3:19-20).

All of God’s deliverance are this way. When the truth of them is known, they defy carnal explanation. Yet, even though the world cannot comprehend them, they are thoroughly effective, and their results cannot be denied, even though they defy explanation.

The soldiers did not see anything or hear anything. Peter’s chains fell off, and they did not see or hear them fall. Peter walked right past them, yet they were oblivious to that fact. The large iron gate swung open, and they neither saw it nor heard it. And now, under the strenuous examination of a despot, they had to admit all of this was true. Oh, it is true indeed, “the way of the transgressor is hard.”

HE COMMANDED THAT THEY SHOULD BE PUT TO DEATH

“ . . . and commanded that they should be put to death.” Other versions read, “Ordered that they be led away to execution,” NASB “ordered that they be executed,” NIV “commanded them to be led to be punished,” GENEVA “led away to punishment,” YLT “court-martialed and sentenced to death,” LIVING and “gave the order that the guards be killed.” IE

Some versions read “punished,” rather than “executed,” “killed,” or “put to death.” This is based on the general definition of the Greek used here (**avpacqh/nai**): “to lead away.” However, as used here, even the linguists conclude it means “Used of a way leading to a certain end.” THAYER “put to death,” UBS and “execute.” LOUW-NIDA Herod had already examined and tried the men. They were not led away to be tried in a court, but for the sentence to be carried out – in this case, death.

The Manner of Historical Rulers

It was the manner of historical rulers to put to death those who did not carry out their duty, or were in some other way found to be unacceptable.

- Abimelech charged all his people to “put to death” anyone who touched Isaac or his wife (Gen 26:11).
- Nebuchadnezzar decreed anyone speaking against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be cut in pieces (Dan 3:22).
- Darius commanded that the men who accused Daniel be thrown into the lion’s den, from which Daniel had been delivered (Dan 6:24).

Behold again that “the way of the transgressor is hard.” That is, it is hedged with thorns and

disadvantages.

Flesh Is Obstinate

When it comes to the flesh, it is obstinate and obtuse. It cannot learn anything from the workings of the Lord, for “the carnal mind is enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). The unspiritual, or “natural ” mind does not reason with God as its locus. It rather reasons as though “There is no God” (Psa 53:1). It does not assign causes to God Almighty, but is blind to His workings, and steeled against the messages they deliver. This is the manner of the flesh. It will move those who beheld Jesus “approved of God” among them by “miracles and signs and wonders,” and imagine that they can break loose from His binding influence by killing Him (Acts 2:22-23; Psa 2:2-3).

Thus Herod cannot even think with Divine working in mind. His mind is nailed to the earth, like everyone who is alienated from the life of God.

And what can be said of those who, in the name of Jesus, cater to the flesh, shaping their speech so as not to offend those who prefer and love the world? What can actually be gained by such an approach? Will compromise cause the truth to be more appealing to such people? Will the Holy Spirit, who uses the Word of God as His sword, be more inclined to use the approaches and routines of men to reach the hearts of those who are on the broad road that leads to destruction? The answer ought to be obvious, but in today’s church culture this is not well known. This is largely owing to the intrusion of false teachers.

Trust In God

When you experience difficulty in the world, or stand in need of some kind of deliverance, consider the God who works in this manner. Ponder how He knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation (2 Pet 2:9). Meditate on the fact that His eyes are always “upon the righteous, and His ears are open to their cries” (Psa 34:15; 1 Pet 3:12). Seek for grace for yourself to be described as “Casting all your care upon Him; for He careth for you” (1 Pet 5:7). Your faith will confirm the truth of these things.

A SLICE OF HERODIAN LIFE

“ 19b And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode. 20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon: but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.”

The text takes a sudden shift, reporting that Herod goes to another location for a while. All of this is done in order to confirm that he had not passed from under the scrutinizing eye of the Almighty God. We will now be briefly exposed to a slice of Herodian life.

HE ABODE IN CAESAREA – WHERE PETER HAD BEEN

“And he went down from Judaea to Caesarea, and there abode.”

Down from Judaea

Remember, Caesarea was actually north of Jerusalem. However this is not a directional statement, but one of perspective. It is the manner of historical accounts to reckon Jerusalem (which was in Judaea) as the center of Divine attention. It was located in a high region, so that wherever you went from there was actually a descent: “As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the LORD is round about his people from henceforth even for ever” (Psa 125:2).

- “ Go up to Jerusalem” (1 Kgs 12:28; 2 Kgs 12:17; 16:5; 2 Chron 2:16; Ezra 1:3;

7:13; Matt 20:17,18; Mk 10:32,33; Lk 2:42; 18:31; 19:28; John 2:13; 5:1; 11:55; Acts 11:2; 15:2; 21:4, 12,15; 24:11; 25:9; Gal 1:17-18).

- “Down from Jerusalem” (Mk 3:22; Lk 10:30' Acts 8:26; 25:7).

Additionally, the Lord's house, which was in Jerusalem, was on a mountain. This was reckoned as the place where blessing and spiritual renewal would take place.

The text takes a sudden shift, reporting that Herod goes to another location for a while. All of this is done in order to confirm that he had not passed from under the scrutinizing eye of the Almighty God.

- “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob ; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:3).

- “O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain ; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!” (Isa 40:9).

- “And they shall bring all your brethren for an offering unto the LORD out of all nations upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon swift beasts, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, saith the LORD, as the children of Israel bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the LORD” (Isa 66:20).

- “O Lord, according to all thy righteousness, I beseech thee, let thine anger and thy fury be turned away from Thy city Jerusalem, Thy holy mountain : because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Thy people are become a reproach to all that are about us” (Dan 9:16).

- “So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain : then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more” (Joel 3:17).

- “And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD , and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:2).

- “Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain ” (Zech 8:3).

A Point to Be Made

The geographical location and prominence of Judea and Jerusalem are a living figure of the nature of the Kingdom of God. The things that are immediately associated with the Living God are the highest and most relevant matters. The place of Divine fellowship is the preeminent place, and fellowship with God is the loftiest involvement. Anything and everything that have to do with other things is lesser, secondary, and subordinate.

Herod Goes down to Caesarea

At this point, and according to Scripture, we have no idea of the time frame in which Herod went down to Caesarea – precisely when he went to Caesarea, or how longed he stayed. “This journey of Herod is related by Josephus (Antiq., book 19, chapter 8, section 2). He says that it was after he had reigned over all Judea for three years.” ALBERT BARNES

You might recall that Peter had returned from this region some time earlier, after preaching and spending time with Cornelius (Acts 10:1,24; 11:11).

HIGHLY DISPLEASED WITH THEM OF TYRE AND SIDON

“20 And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon . . .” Other versions read, “very angry,” NKJV “had been quarreling,” NIV “was in bitter hostility,” DARBY “having an angry quarrel,” NET “on bad terms,” NJB “Had incurred Herod’s violent displeasure,” WEYMOUTH “cherished a bitter grudge,” WILLIAMS “violently displeased,” MONTGOMERY and “cherished bitter animosity and hostility.” AMPLIFIED

The word from which “highly displeased” is translated is very strong. It does not describe a passing emotion, but reflects aggressive and harmful intention. This is the only place the word is used in Scripture. As used here “It means to meditate war; to purpose war in the mind.” ALBERT BARNES As used by the Greeks, it meant “to carry on war with great animosity . . . to be very angry, be exasperated,” THAYER “to be extremely angry, with the implication of violence,” LOUW-NIDA and “to fight desperately.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The cause for Herod’s displeasure with Tyre and Sidon is not known, either from Scripture or from history. We do know that these cities were under Roman rule, but had been permitted some measure of liberty. There is no proof that they had been insubordinate to Rome. Some have conjectured the controversy was over the matter of commerce – perhaps having to do with taxation. However, all of this is nothing more than conjecture. In some way they had agitated this proud king, incurring his indignation. It appears as though he went to the region to settle their differences by diplomatic means rather than subduing them by war.

Why Do We Have This Record?

To some, this record appears to be a meaningless bit of trivia thrown in by Luke. However, I cannot believe this is the case. Such a procedure is by no means the manner of those who are writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

It seems to me that we are being further acquainted with the nature of Herod – a man driven by pride, and a quest for popularity. In him we will see the Scripture fulfilled: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov 16:18). This text is often quoted as saying pride goes “before a fall.” However, this is not correct. It goes “before destruction.” That is, God will not overlook the surfacing of this trait. Solomon said that of the seven things the Lord hated, “a proud look” was number one (Prov 6:16).

Jesus declared that pride issues forth “out of the heart of man,” and brings defilement with it (Mk 7:21-23). Paul reminded Timothy that pride causes self-exaltation which, in turn, leads to falling into “the condemnation of the devil” (1 Tim 3:5). This is one of the three things that are “in the world,” all of which are evidences of a love for the world. John tells us of the one possessing such things, “the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15-17).

Both Peter and James declare that God “resisteth the proud,” contrasting them with “the humble,” to whom He gives grace (1 Pet 5:5; James 4:6). In Mary’s prayer of magnification, she stated that God “hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts” (Lk 1:51). That is, He has not allowed their corrupt causes to be brought to fulfillment.

As confirmed in “Herod the king,” pride moves a person to have an inordinate view of himself. In such a case, “I” is at the center of one’s life, and God Himself is moved, at the very best, to the periphery of life. By its very nature, pride has to do with this world, and one’s status in it. It is an evidence of being attached to the world, for it is one third of “all that is in the world” (1 John 2:15).

Because God “knoweth the proud afar off” (Psa 138:6), they are fundamentally ignorant of God and His ways. This is compared with the Lord’s inclination toward the lowly, or those who have forfeited personal interests in favor of knowing God. The Spirit is very definitive on this matter, particularly when dealing with teachers who do not consent to sound doctrine, choosing to perpetrate spiritual confusion and error. Here is what He says of such spiritual rogues. “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim 6:3-5). It is the pride of such an individual that has hid the truth from him.

I say these things, because those who have a compelling love for the truth, and a corresponding disdain for doctrinal error are often charged with being haughty. However, it is the religious leader who is oblivious of truth and addicted to error that is the haughty one. His failure to apprehend the truth is confirmation of that condition.

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The Case of Herod

The case of Herod will confirm to our hearts the aggressiveness with which the Lord treats the proud. He was not a Jew, nor was he a religious leader. Yet, he provides us with an example of the Lord’s posture against the proud. His role as king confirmed that he was directly responsible to God, for “there is no power but of God” (Rom 13:1). Let us behold the account of Herod with godly discretion, for in it we are being exposed to Divine manners.

THEY DESIRED PEACE

“ . . . but they came with one accord to him, and, having made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace . . . ” Other versions refer to Blastus as “the king’s personal aide,” NKJV “a trusted personal servant,” NIV “The controller of the king’s house,” BBE “the king’s chief personal servant,” CJB “in charge of the king’s bedroom,” CSB “the king’s personal assistant,” NET “over the bed-chambers of the king,” YLT “the royal secretary,” LIVING and “his treasurer.” WEYMOUTH

Representatives from Tyre and Sidon came in a state of unity and accord, seeking to negotiate peace with Herod. They knew that an angry Herod would work to their decided disadvantage. Further, they did not approach him directly, but sought to gain access to him through their personal friend, Blastus, who, in his regular duties, was close to Herod. Behold how wise they were in their approach, driven a desire for peace.

Exactly what is a “chamberlain?” Judging from the various versions of Scripture, quite an array of possibilities are open to us: personal aide, personal servant, controller, in charge of the king’s bedroom, personal assistant, and royal secretary, and treasurer. The Greek word from which this word is translated is **koitw/noj**. This word does mean “the officer who is over the bed-chamber, the chamberlain.” THAYER The word is used elsewhere of one with decidedly more control – such as Erasmus, a saint who was “the chamberlain of the city” of Rome (Rom 16:28). The point here seems to be that Blastus was in charge of the personal affairs of king Herod, which would have included his bedchamber. Apparently the people came to him because he had the ear of Herod without being in the area of competition or kingly duties. It was certainly a shrewd action on the part of the people.

Sensing the gravity of their situation, they ignored protocol, and sought a more direct access to the king, in order to present their cause.

THEY WERE NOURISHED BY THE KING'S COUNTRY

“ . . . because their country was nourished by the king's country.” Other versions read, “supplied with food from the king’s country,” NKJV “fed by the king’s country,” NASB “depended on the king’s country for their food,” NRSV “depended on the king's lands for their food supply,” CJB “the supplies of their country were derived from the kingdom of Herod,” MRD “their cities were economically dependent upon trade with Herod's country,” LIVING and “They were forced to do this because their country's food supply was dependent on the king's dominions.” PHILLIPS

The reason for their quest for peace is now stated more precisely. They were not seeking peace for themselves alone, but for their country. Furthermore, they were not simply trying to avoid a military skirmish with Herod, although, if his anger continued, such a confrontation would no doubt have occurred. The reason for their mission of peace was that their country depended on Herod’s domain for food. The government of Rome, being universal in extent, oversaw the distribution of food and other necessities. No province could function in a strictly independent manner.

The “King’s Country”

The kingdom of Herod was Palestine, the land of the Jews, and it was rich with supplies. This is the very land described as “the sanctuary” (Ex 15:17), “the land of Israel” (1 Sam 13:19), “the land of the Hebrews” (Gen 40:15), “the land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39), “the holy land” (Zech 2:12), “the Lord’s land” (Hos 9:3), and the land belonging to “Immanuel” (Isa 8:8). God referred to it as “ My land” (2 Chron 7:20; Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7; Ezek 36:5; Joel 1:6), and the prophets referred to it as “ His land” (Deut 32:43; Psa 10:10; Ezek 36:20; Joel 2:18; Zech 9:16). But now, Tyre and Sidon refer to the same real estate as “the king’s land” –and the king to which they referred was Herod! Oh, what a penalty there is for defection from the Lord!

When described through Moses, the Lord said this land was “a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; a land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey; a land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass ” (Deut 8:7-9). Moses further said of the land, “But the land, whither ye go to possess it, is a land of hills and valleys, and drinketh water of the rain of heaven: a land which the LORD thy God careth for: the eyes of the LORD thy God are always upon it, from the beginning of the year even unto the end of the year” (Deut 11:11-12).

But now, alas, this rich and fertile land was being governed by Herod, not the Jews. The governing kingdom was Rome, not the Israelites. The rich resources that were intended for Israel were now out from under their control, and were being distributed at the whim of a political despot. He was managing what God had given to His people, and was doing so because the land had been filled with moral and spiritual darkness (Matt 4:16). The people who were living in it had killed the prince of life, martyred Stephen, and vigorously opposed the spreading of the Gospel.

Tyre and Sidon stood in sharp contrast with “the land of the Jews.” They were seaports, and were thus cities of commerce. However, located in a rocky area, they could not produce food. Their did business with the goods of others, but actually produced nothing of substance themselves.

Now, when Tyre and Sidon need food, they do not come to an Israelite king, as they did in the time of Solomon. During Solomon’s reign he struck a trade agreement with the area from which these messengers of peace were sent, exchanging wheat from Israel for choice timber from Sidon (1 Kgs 5:7-14). Ezekiel referred to these trade agreements, made by Judah with surrounding lands (Ezek

27:16-17).

A Spiritual Parallel

These two cities have a remarkable resemblance to spiritual Babylon. In a description of this monstrosity, John is shown the allegiance that it has to the world. She is seen as an entity with no resources herself. She only did business with what was supplied by the merchants of the world. It was revealed to John that when Babylon falls, it will cause great lament among the world's merchants, because she is like a great seaport through which the world peddles its goods. Having rejected the Lord's Christ, and disdained His great salvation, this whorish city is a trading point for the things of this world.

In picturesque language, the world is depicted as mourning her demise within but an hour of time. How grievously they cry out. "And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more : The merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men. And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all" (Rev 18:11-14).

Thus the worldly church is seen as being in league with the world, like Tyre and Sidon was with Herod and Rome. If you were to remove from the Christian world all worldly professionalism and business pursuits, the impact would be staggering. It would have a direct bearing upon education, entertainment, real estate, engineering, architecture, financial institutions, clothing distributors, electronic media, the music world, book publishers and distributors, dietary businesses, jewelry stores, the counseling world, and a host of other things. There are also a significant number of worldly organizations that market in "the souls of men," capitalizing on the constituency of the Christian world.

All of these circumstances belie any claim to identity with God through Christ Jesus. All of them are a source of shame and an evidence of unbelief.

A MARVELOUS TYPE OF THE LOGIC OF PEACE WITH GOD

In this text we have a remarkable parallel to certain spiritual realities. First, in Christ Jesus we are in a situation similar to that of Tyre and Sidon. Our lives are also being "nourished by the King's country." Instead of being supplied by a worldly king, these supplies are administered by the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. God has deposited "all spiritual blessings" in "heavenly places," which parallel "the Lord's land," and they are accessed through Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3).

All of the "treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid in Him" (Col 2:3). Furthermore, "all things that pertain to life and godliness" are provided to us "through the knowledge of Him" who has "called us" – and that circumstance requires peace between those receiving the supplies, and the One distributing them (2 Pet 1:3). Grace, mercy, and peace – so essential for the maintenance of the life that is in Christ Jesus, come "from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2; Tit 1:4; 2 John 1:3). "Love with faith" come "from God" (Eph 6:23). "Every "good gift and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from God" (James 1:17). Truly, in every sense of the word, the people of God are "nourished by the King's country."

This insidiously suggests that a person can be at peace with God, yet conduct their lives at a distance from the Lord. It suggests that the issue is really not alienation from God, or incurring the displeasure of the Lord, but just correcting a few unpleasant habits.

It is precisely for this reason that there must be “peace with God.” This peace, however requires an Intermediary – Jesus Christ, who was, in a sense, prefigured in Blastus. What is more, just as in the case of Tyre and Sidon, the peace must be maintained. Our spiritual citizenry must be maintained within the boundaries of Divine acceptance. This involves abiding in Christ (John 15:7), continuing in His Word (John 8:31), and what we have heard remaining in us (1 John 2:24). It requires walking as dear children (Eph 5:1), seeking the things that are above (Col 3:1-2), and working out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

There is also the matter of not provoking the Lord (1 Cor 10:22), giving no place to the devil (Eph 4:27), and not allowing the entrance of “an evil heart of unbelief” (Heb 3:12).

Many professing believers are conducting their lives just like those of Tyre and Sodom – they are provoking and displeasing the Lord who purchased them, and from whom all of their nourishment is obtained. Jesus can be “displeased” with His disciples (Mk 10:14). The church is solemnly reminded that God Almighty is said to have been “not pleased” with “many” of the very ones He delivered and maintained. Consequently, they were “overthrown” en route to the promised land (1 Cor 10:5). Believers are also reminded that God, “having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not” (Jude 1:5). Those in Christ are also reminded that there were those who came out of Egypt, received the promise of their own land, yet “could not enter in because of unbelief.” Then saints are admonished, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it” (Heb 3:19-4:1).

The Modern Day Dilemma

There is a certain dilemma that exists in the modern church. Countless numbers of people have fallen into a state that is even worse than that of Tyre and Sidon. They did know the source of their supplies and the need for peace between them and the king of that supplying country. However, this morsel of knowledge has been taken from the people by a host of professing teachers. Their attention has been turned to their “habits,” as though they were not personally responsible for their condition. They are being provided with recovery programs, and methodologies designed to help them get a handle on their lives again. It all sounds innocent, and even proper – at least to the naive and uninformed. They are taught to say they are followers of Jesus, and that they are saved – however, their lives are out of control. This insidiously suggests that a person can be at peace with God, yet conduct their lives at a distance from the Lord. It suggests that the issue is really not alienation from God, or incurring the displeasure of the Lord, but just correcting a few unpleasant habits.

As a result of this delusion, the people engage in a quest that is wholly centered in this world. A satisfying and productive life in this world captures the attention, and the world to come is conveniently forgotten. Death, the coming of the Lord, the passing of the heavens and the earth, and the day of judgment are placed on the shelf of neglect, and it is imagined that everything will be all right if life here and now can be supposedly controlled .

In order to sanctify this approach, God is acknowledge as having the power to help the people change their lives. However, the corruption of the heart is not acknowledged, nor is unbelief admitted. The whole approach fails to acknowledge that a person cannot walk in the light and stumble (John 11:9). It will not admit that one cannot walk in the Spirit and fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal 5:16). It ignores the fact that if the provided graces are added in their faith, they will “never fall” (2 Pet 1:10).

A “faithful” God has “called” us “into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). That fellowship is remarkably expansive, including “fellowship with the Father” (1 John 1:3), and the “fellowship of the Spirit” (Phil 2:1). Any postulate that suggests that a fellowship of that magnitude in any way allows for sin, betrays an ignorance of God, a lack of acquaintance with Jesus, and no familiarity with the Holy Spirit of God.

When the King of glory has a matter against a person, reconciliation is the principle thing to be addressed. That is precisely why Paul fairly shouted out to the wayward Corinthians, “Be ye reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:20). This is also involved in going on to perfection, refusing to remain in an spiritually infantile state (Heb 6:1-6).

Is This Being Too Critical?

Is this approach really too critical, as some have alleged? Well, one might ask the citizens of Tyre and Sidon how critical it was to seek peace between themselves and Herod, who was “highly displeased with them.”

God has gone to a great extent to save us. Our salvation involved the slaughter of innocent babies as well as the birth of a Savior, “which is Christ the Lord” (Matt 2:16; Lk 2:11). It required making Jesus “to be sin for us,” as well as being with Him during His earthly ministry (2 Cor 5:21; Acts 10:38). It necessitated the cursing of Jesus, as well as Him being “approved . . . by miracles and wonders and signs” (Gal 3:13; Acts 2:22). It was imperative that God “deliver” Jesus up to death “for us all,” “for our offenses,” as well as raising Him up for our justification (Rom 4:25; 8:32).

Is there really any person of sound mind who imagines that such a God is ever indifferent to sin? Is it possible that He can never be displeased with sin in you, when He was so displeased when that sin was laid upon Christ – which caused Him to turn His

I acknowledge that the matter of peace with God does not appear to be a weighty subject in our time. In preference for a self-centered life, it is something that has nearly been removed from human thinking.

face from His own Son? Is that really possible? And, what should we say of those who so represent the God of heaven, whether by outright statement, or by insinuation? Shall we ignore the influence they exert, and the confusion they cause within the body of Christ? Who is willing to step forward and defend such misrepresentations of God? – particularly since He has revealed so much about Himself, and provided such staggering details concerning the great salvation that is realized in His Son.

It is a shame and a disgrace when, as Jesus put it, “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8). What will be said on the day of judgment to those who were less zealous to obtain and maintain peace with God, than those of Tyre and Sidon were to be at peace with wicked Herod?

I acknowledge that the matter of peace with God does not appear to be a weighty subject in our time. In preference for a self-centered life, it is something that has nearly been removed from human thinking. However, it is everything in the matter of salvation. Further, it is not something to be taken for granted. After all, the God who saves is also the One who keeps (Jude 1:24-25). The One who lifted us up is also the One who causes us to stand. The One who rescued us also leads us.

IT IS THE VOICE OF A GOD, AND NOT OF A MAN

“ 21 And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. 22 And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.”

The scene now shifts, but refers to the time during which Herod was in Caesarea. The fact that this occurred in Caesarea accounts for the brief record of the citizens of that area engaging in an initiative to gain peaceful associations with Herod. The Jewish historian Josephus provides some details of this account, which are given in the box titled “**JOSEPHUS’ ACCOUNT OF HEROD.**”

In this account, we must see that God is dealing with the proud. It also confirms that God holds all

people responsible for what they do – whether that have a formal association with Him or not. Some have conjectured that if men are not in covenant with God, the laws of God do not apply to them. I was personally subjected to this teaching during my formal religious education. However, there is no truth to it – not so much as a particle. There have been numerous people, cities, and even nations, who were judged by God, even though they had no covenant with Him.

- The world of Noah’s day (Gen 6:3-7).
- The people in the plain of Shinar, who conspired to build a city and a tower (Gen 11:1-8).
- Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain (Gen 18:20-21,24-25).
- Abimelech, a Philistine king (Gen 20:3).
- The city of Nineveh (Jonah 1:2).
- Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:30-33).
- Belshazzar (Dan 5:22–30).
- Babylon (Jer 25:12).
- Tyre and Sidon (Isa 12:1-2).
- The nations who possessed Canan before Israel (Deut 9:4-5).
- The entire world (Isa 13:11).
- The inhabitants of the earth (Isa 26:21).

Those who imagine that civil authorities are not directly responsible to God do well to take note of this text. Also, it is a sign of unspeakable rebellion and ignorance when any nation opposes the laws of God, or imagines that they are separate from the state. There are too many records in Scripture that contradict that notion, to justify it ever being spoken or entertained. God is depicted as being “terrible to the kings of the earth” (Psa 76:12). The idea is that He is to be feared. Such a thought would be pointless if they were not responsible to Him. With great solemnity, “the kings of the earth,” together with “all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: both young men, and maidens; old men, and children,” are admonished to “praise the Lord from the earth” (Psa 148:7-12). No person is exempted from this responsibility.

We will now read the account of a king who refused to do this, and of the response of heaven to his conduct.

WHEN HEROD WAS ARRAYED IN ROYAL APPAREL

“And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne . . .”

Other versions read, “took his seat upon the rostrum,” NASB “on the platform,” RSV “in his place,” BBE “on the elevated seat of honor,” DARBY “in the judgment seat,” DOUAY “on a tribunal,” MRD “the royal seat,” ISV and “on the public throne.” PHILLIPS

The subject of this oration is not provided – either by Luke or Josephus the historian. Although it was obviously a moving oration, it was driven by ignoble motives, and therefore will therefore immediately gain the attention of heaven.

The idea here is not that this was Herod’s official and kingly throne. Rather, this was a place reserved for dignitaries that came to Caesarea. It could also have been a portable apparatus appropriate for the occasion. At any rate, it solemnized the affair during which Herod would speak in the capacity of a king. The word from which “throne” is translated suggests an elevated area from

which all of the people could be seen and addressed – like a stage.

We have such a custom in our country as well. When the president speaks in an official capacity, he is provided with a special platform and speaking stand. The official presidential seal is also displayed to confirm that he is speaking in an official capacity, and not merely providing some personal opinions of this or that.

Herod is, therefore, going to speak as the king – the one responsible for supplying this area with their needs. It is probably true, as some have surmised, that this occasion was largely owing to the quest of those from Tyre and Sidon, who were seeking peace with Herod.

HE MADE AN ORATION TO THEM

“ . . . and made an oration unto them . . . ” Other versions read, “gave an oration to them,” NKJV “delivering an address to them,” NASB “delivered a public address to the people,” NIV “made a public statement to them,” BBE “made a speech to them,” CJB “addressed them publicly,” NAB “and was haranguing them,” WEYMOUTH “made them a popular address,” WILLIAMS and “began to harangue them.” MONTGOMERY

Some versions use the word “harangue.” This English word has the meaning “Address forcefully.” The first meaning of the English word is, “a speech addressed to a public assembly.” The second meaning is “a ranting speech of writing.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER The meaning of the Greek word used here is, “to harangue the people; to address a public assembly, make a speech to the people,” THAYER and “to speak in a somewhat formal setting and probably implying a more formal use of language - 'to address, to make a speech.’” LOUW-NIDA

The subject of this oration is not provided – either by Luke or Josephus the historian. Although it was obviously a moving oration, it was driven by ignoble motives, and therefore will therefore immediately gain the attention of heaven.

THE PEOPLE GAVE HIM UNDUE VENERATION

“ . . . And the people gave a shout . . . ” Other versions read, “the people kept shouting,” NKJV “kept crying out,” NASB “with loud cries,” BBE “made acclamation,” DOUAY “started shouting,” GWN “acclaimed him,” NJB and “At its conclusion the people gave him a great ovation.” LIVING

The Living Bible presents the shouting of the people as taking place at the conclusion of Herod’s oration. I am not sure this is what took place. First, the word used here is in the imperfect active voice, which means it was repetitive shouting: i.e. “kept on shouting.” It is as though this was taking place as Herod was speaking, constituting an opportunity for him to stop them from speaking as they did. The text does not confirm whether Herod worked the people into a frenzy by his oratory, or if this was the people heaping praise upon him in order to obtain his favor. It was probably a mixture of both.

IT IS THE VOICE OF A GOD

“ . . . saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. ” Other versions read, “A god's voice and not a man,” DARBY “The voice of God, and not of man,” GENEVA “These are the utterances of a God, and not of a mortal,” MRD “It is a god speaking, not a man!” NJB and “This is a god speaking, not a mere man!” PHILLIPS

Some have conjectured that this was nothing more than an appeal the pride of Herod. However, the outcome of the whole event does not lend itself to such a conclusion. Others have suggested this was an example of emperor worship, which was common in Rome. Herod, however, was not an emperor, but was himself a subject of the emperor. It seems more likely to me that the people, inordinately

impressed by the oratory of Herod, thought that a god was speaking through him – or that one had come down to them in the form of Herod . A similar conclusion was made concerning Paul and Barnabas when they preached in Lystra. Witnessing the healing of a man who had been crippled from his mother’s womb, the people cried out, “The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men!” They called Barnabas Jupiter, otherwise known to the Greeks as as Zeus NKJV , and Paul Mercurius, known to the Greeks as Hermes, NKJV who was the messenger of Zeus, and duly represented, they thought, by Paul, “because he was the chief speaker” (Acts 14:11-12). Paul and Barnabas immediately tore their clothes and ran through the people rejecting such honor, for they were “men of like passions” as those who were setting out to worship them. Even with their zealous effort, “they could scarcely restrain the multitudes from sacrificing to them” (14:14-18).

This, in my judgment, is what is being reported in the text. The people felt that they were being addressed by one of the gods. Considering what follows, I do not see how this text can be considered in any other way.

A Principle to Be Seen

This is not the first or last time that a word has been delivered to the sons of men that was not from God, yet was regarded as coming from Him. It is one thing for something like this to occur in a political arena, or among heathen peoples. It is quite another for it to be found among those who profess to know God, or be followers of Christ.

Under the Law, God warned the people about prophets who “presumed to speak a word” in his name. Of such a person He said, “that prophet shall die” (Deut 18:20). Jeremiah spoke of such prophets in these words: “Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them , neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination, and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart. Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning the prophets that prophesy in my name, and I sent them not , yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land; By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed” (Jer 14:14-15).

In a telling word concerning the seriousness of misrepresenting the Lord, He spoke again through Jeremiah. “Behold, I am against them that prophesy false dreams , saith the LORD, and do tell them, and cause my people to err by their lies , and by their lightness ; yet I sent them not, nor commanded them : therefore they shall not profit this people at all, saith the LORD. And when this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD. And as for the prophet, and the priest, and the people, that shall say, The burden of the LORD, I will even punish that man and his house ” (Jer 23:32-34).

Notice the pointedness of the Lord’s denunciation of false prophets.

- They prophesied false dreams – dreams that did not have their origin in God.
- They caused the people to err by their lies.
- They caused the people to err by their “lightness,” or “reckless boasting.” NASB
- They misrepresented “the burden of the Lord,” or the preeminent message that was to be spoken at that time.

This involves more than testing whether men are speaking according to the Word of God – although that is imperative. It also involves identifying “the burden of the Lord,” or the word that God wants delivered at this time – i.e. the emphasis or thrust of what is to be said.

In our time, there are all manner of supposed Divine priorities being placed before the people. Some

are saying that this is the time for the nation to repent. Others are saying this is the time for men to take charge of their households. Still others are saying this is the time God is going to pour out His Spirit on all flesh. There are some who say this is the time for the churches to unite, and stand together. Still others say God is calling for a godly man to be our president, while others are urging a lukewarm and carnal church to go into all the world and preach the Gospel.

It is the business of those who are in Christ to “try the spirits, whether they are of God, because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1). This involves more than testing whether men are speaking according to the Word of God – although that is imperative. It also involves identifying “the burden of the Lord,” or the word that God wants delivered at this time – i.e. the emphasis or thrust of what is to be said. If you wonder how serious God is about this, He said through Jeremiah, “But since ye say, The burden of the LORD; therefore thus saith the LORD; Because ye say this word, The burden of the LORD, and I have sent unto you, saying, Ye shall not say, The burden of the LORD ; Therefore, behold, I, even I, will utterly forget you, and I will forsake you, and the city that I gave you and your fathers, and cast you out of My presence : and I will bring an everlasting reproach upon you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten” (Jer 23:38-40).

All of this provides a kind of explanation for the presence of this record of Herod’s speech. When, in the minds of the people, an individual is linked in any way with Deity, we have a serious circumstance on our hands. If the person is properly representing God, His Word, and His priorities, all is well. However, if that is not the case, judgment is just around the corner.

Being Unable to Distinguish God’s Word

It is important for people to comprehend when a word is from God and when it is not. This is especially critical in our day, when all kinds of media are placing religious ideas before the people. There are men who are promoting programs within the church of God that are, to say the least, unsubstantiated. Some of them purport to bring people closer to God, promote growth in Christ, and provide a way to gain the dominance over sin. Such claims are most serious, because those are matters in which Deity is revealed to be

There is something that is common in all of such messages and programs. Christ is not the prominent person in them. Rather the people themselves are the centerpiece, and their welfare is the main thing. But in the Divine economy, the Son of God is the fundamental Person, and the glory of God is the primary objective.

active. Some, reacting much like those who heard the oratory of Herod, are saying: “This is a word from God.” Or, “This is God’s answer to my problem!”

There is something that is common in all of such messages and programs. Christ is not the prominent person in them. Rather the people themselves are the centerpiece, and their welfare is the main thing. But in the Divine economy, the Son of God is the fundamental Person, and the glory of God is the primary objective.

Another common thread in these programs is the minuscule role that is given to faith – the means by which justification and triumph are realized (Rom5 :1; 1 John 5:4-5). Add to that the near-total absence of “the knowledge of God,” through which we are provided with everything having to do with life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3), and by which we escape the pollution of the world (2 Pet 2:20). Messages and programs that lack these things cannot possibly be from God, and it is certain they cannot accomplish what He requires.

Crediting to God What Came from Man

How serious is it when something that originated with men is credited to God? What of those who speak of spiritual advantages and benefits that have the well of human nature as their source? How

does heaven react to such circumstances? How serious is the Lord about glory being given to Him, and to Him alone? And, does it really make any difference to Him if men give Him glory for something that He did not do or say? Does God allow opinions in these things?

Our text will provide some insight into the matter. It will confirm that “The eyes of the LORD are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov 15:3), and that “the righteous God trieth the hearts and reins” (Psa 7:9). No person can afford to ignore this circumstance.

HEAVEN RESPONDS IMMEDIATELY

“ 23 And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.”

So far as the record is concerned, Herod has made no claim to being the oracle of God. While he was arrayed in gorgeous garments, he had made no claim to himself being God, or any form of Deity. The people, however, have repeatedly shouted, “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man!” The verb tense of the word translated “gave a shout” means they “kept shouting,” NKJV or “kept crying out.” NASB Whether during his oration or after it, there was ample time allotted to Herod to refuse to be seen in this manner. However, being filled with pride, he received the accolades of the people. He chose not to respond like Paul and Barnabas did later, refusing to be recognized in such a manner.

IMMEDIATELY

“And immediately . . .” Other versions read , “straight away,” BBE “At once,” NAB “at that moment,” NJB “Instantly,” NLT and “presently.” NLT

The word “immediately” is translated from the Greek word **paracrh/ma** , which has the following lexical meaning: “immediately, forthwith, instantly,” THAYER “immediately, at once, without delay,” FRIBERG “suddenly, at once, immediately' (in a number of contexts there is the implication of unexpectedness),” LOUW-NIDA and “on the spot, forthwith, straightway.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Some of the places where this word is used are listed below. I have highlighted the word translated from this particular Greek word.

- **THE CURSING OF THE FIG TREE.** “And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away” (Matt 21:19).

- **ZECHARIAS’ SPEECH RESTORED .** “And his mouth was opened immediately , and his tongue loosed, and he spake, and praised God” (Luke 1:64).

- **HEALING OF PETER’S MOTHBER-IN-LAW.** “And he stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them” (Luke 4:39).

- “ . . . I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God” (Luke 5:24-25).

- “And a woman having an issue of blood twelve years, which had spent all her living upon physicians, neither could be healed of any, Came behind Him, and touched the border of His garment: and immediately her issue of blood stanchd” (Luke 8:43-44).

- “And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway : and he commanded to give her meat ” (Luke 8:55).

- “And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God” (Luke 13:13).
- “And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew” (Luke 22:60).
- “And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength” (Acts 3:7).
- “Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband” (Acts 5:10).
- “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized” (Acts 9:18).
- “And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand” (Acts 13:11).
- “And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed” (Acts 16:26).

There are seventeen places where this word is used in the New Covenant Scriptures (Matt 21:19; Lk 1:64; 4:39; 5:25; 8:44,47,55; 13:13; 18:43; 19:11; 22:60; Acts 3:7; 5:10; 9:18; 12:23; 13:11; 16:26). In each of them, the occurrence described was initiated from heaven. Sometimes it was a blessing, and sometimes it was a judgment. However, it was caused by God, and took place upon earth without any form of effective opposition.

Keep in mind that Divine determinations are made in heaven, then executed on earth. Heavenly messengers pass through the domain of the “prince of the power of the air” en route to earth – and they now encounter no detaining power. Further, when that will is fulfilled on earth, there are times when it is completely independent of earthly circumstance and the human will – as in this text.

The absolute superiority of angels over men is confirmed in this passage. The angel of the Lord will act immediately, and in strict keeping with both the nature and will of the Lord. He is executing what the Lord has determined, and is not functioning on his own. Further, his action will provide confirmation of the manner in which God views men heaping praise upon men, and those upon whom the praise is heaped receiving it. It is imperative that we take due note of these things, for God is still beholding the sons of men and what they do. He is still beholding and trying “the children of men” (Psa 11:4).

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD RESPONDS

“ . . . the angel of the Lord smote him . . .” Other versions read, “struck him,” NKJV “sent a disease on him,” BBE “struck him down,” CJB “killed,” GWN “struck Herod with a sickness,” NLT “caused him to become sick,” IE and “smote him and cut him down.” AMPLIFIED

The root meaning of the word translated “smote” is “to beat.” As used here, the word means “to afflict; to visit with evils, etc.: as with a deadly disease,” THAYER “to strike down,” FRIBERG “to strike a heavy blow, implying severe damage,” LOUW-NIDA “a deadly blow,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “strike down, slay.” GINGRICH

This is a most sobering text to consider! It provides insight into the Person of God that is not often expounded. Some are even foolish enough to affirm that no disease or calamity actually comes from God – but here is a case where it did! The blow delivered by the angel was a mortal one, resulting in the death of Herod. There was no battle, simply the execution of the will of God without any kind of

hindrance or delay.

This is not the first person whom God slew because of their sin. Let me name a few of them to remind us that it truly is “a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

- All men, with the exception of in Noah and his family (Gen 7:21).
- The citizens of Sodom, Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain (Gen 19:24-25).
- The Lord slew Er, Judah’s firstborn son, because he was “wicked in the sight of the Lord” (Gen 38:7).
- Onan, for not raising up seed to his brother (Gen 38:9-10).
- All of the firstborn sons in Egypt (Ex 13:15).
- The entire Egyptian army and their horses who pursued Israel (Ex 14:24-28).
- Nadab and Abihu for offering strange fire to the Lord (Lev 10:1-2).
- “Much people” died of snake bites because they murmured (Num 21:6).
- 603,550 Israelite men for not believing they could take the promised land (Ex 38:26; Num 26:55; Deut 2:16-17).
- 14,700 who died of a plague because of the rebellion of Korah (Num 16:49).
- 24,000 who died of a plague because of mingling and committing fornication with the Moabites (Num 25:9).
- 250 men who died during Korah’s rebellion, the earth opening up and swallowing them (Num 26:10).
- Uzzah, for touching the ark of the covenant (2 Sam 6:6-7).
- 70,000 who died in a pestilence sent by the Lord because His anger was kindled against Israel (2 Sam 24:1,15).
- An angel killed 185,000 soldiers of Sennacherib’s Assyrian army (2 Kgs 19:35).
- Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:2-10).

These are only deaths that were accomplished by the Lord, without human instrumentality. Admittedly, they are quite challenging to consider.

Now, in our text, the angel of the Lord smites Herod with a lethal blow, and his life is brought to a conclusion. This whole matter is confusing to the flesh. Herod kills James, yet he himself remains alive. He arrests Peter, and determines to do away with him as well – yet, he is not smitten by the Lord. Now, when he is not engaged in an initiative against the church as a whole, or any particular believer, he is struck down while giving an oration amidst the praises of the people.

Whatever may be said of the reign of Herod, he, like all kings, obtained his power from God. It is God who sets up kings, and it is God who deposes them. As it is written, “And He changeth the times and the seasons: He removeth kings, and setteth up kings” (Dan 2:21).

Heaping Up Wrath

There is such a thing as storing up Divine wrath. Paul wrote that hardness of heart, and a lack of repentance, tends to store up wrath to be unleashed in a single outpouring: “But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom 2:5). As sin continues, wrath is accumulating. That is another reason why there is such

To “give God the glory” is to perceive Him as the Source, and give Him all the honor, and all the credit. It is to ascribe excellence, preeminence, dignity, and grace to Him. It is to recognize what He has done, and laud Him for it. The one who gives God the glory has recognized Him as the supreme ruler who possesses all power.

a thing as “ greater damnation” (Matt 23:14). That involves not only the nature of the sin, but its outworking tendency, as evidenced by the scribes and Pharisees robbing widows houses and being pretentious in their prayers. Both of those were ongoing activities.

BECAUSE HE GAVE NOT GOD THE GLORY

“ . . . because he gave not God the glory . . .” Other versions read, “did not give praise to God,” NIV “he did not give the glory to God,” CJB “had not given the honor to God,” DOUAY “did not ascribe the honor to God,” NAB “because he accepted the people's worship instead of giving the glory to God,” NLT “he did not give God the glory (the preeminence and kingly majesty that belong to Him as the supreme Ruler),” AMPLIFIED and “because he took the honor that belonged to God.” CEV

To “give God the glory” is to perceive Him as the Source, and give Him all the honor, and all the credit. It is to ascribe excellence, preeminence, dignity, and grace to Him. It is to recognize what He has done, and laud Him for it. The one who gives God the glory has recognized Him as the supreme ruler who possesses all power. Jesus taught us to do this in our prayers: “For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Matt 6:13). In a stirring Psalm David wrote, “Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (Psa 29:1-2). And again, “Give unto the LORD, O ye kindreds of the people, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come into his courts” (Psa 96:8).

With a note of urgency Jeremiah told the people, “Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the LORD hath spoken. Give glory to the LORD your God, before He cause darkness , and before your feet stumble upon the dark mountains, and, while ye look for light, He turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness” (Jer 13:15-16). Whatever your view of the patience and longsuffering of God may be, you must take words like this into account. Do not imagine for a moment that God is indifferent to the failure of men to give Him glory – even when they are heathens!

The Sin of Nebuchadnezzar

This was the sin that caused Nebuchadnezzar to enter into a seven year period of life that has no historic parallel. It was a period of time in which he lost his sanity, and roamed in the open field with the beasts of the earth, eating grass. In a single hour “he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws ” (Dan 4:33). At the conclusion of that seven year period, Nebuchadnezzar said, “And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honored Him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation: And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth : and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou? At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honor and brightness returned unto me; and my counselors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and His ways judgment: and those that walk in pride He is able to abase ” (Dan 4:34-37).

Whether it sounds religiously correct or not, these are all things that can only be wrought by

God through faith. It is as wrong to credit them to a plan as it was for Nebuchadnezzar to refer to Babylon as something he had built, or for Herod to accept the praise of those who said when they heard him speak, they had heard the voice of a god.

The thing that brought Nebuchadnezzar down was his assessment of the city in which he ruled his kingdom: “Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?” (Dan 4:30) It was “While the word was in the king's mouth,” that “there fell a voice from heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken; The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field: they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will” (Dan 4:31-32).

Not Far Removed From Our Time

This kind of failure to give God glory is not far removed from our time. When, for example, some improvement in life has been experienced, there has been a phenomenal increase of giving praise to methodologies rather than to God. Let me give you some quotations from a contemporary plan that has become quite popular. In order not to detract from the gravity of the claims, I am withholding the name of the plan. At the latest count, it has been adopted by over 15,000 churches, and is a plan developed for Christians.

- “**We open the door to recovery** by sharing our experience, strength, and hope with one another. **This leads us to a great capacity** for accepting God’s grace and movement in our lives as we are working through issues that have robbed us of all hope for a better future.”

- “The recovery process **enables us to move toward greater freedom** from addictive, compulsive, and dysfunctional behaviors. The freedom **creates a peace, serenity, joy, and most importantly a stronger relationship with God and others .**”

- “The purpose of . . . is to fellowship and celebrate God’s healing power in our lives **through the ‘8 Recovery Principles .** This experience allows us to ‘ **be changed .**’ By working and applying these Biblical principles, **we begin to grow spiritually** As we progress through the program **we discover our personal, loving, and forgiving High Power – Jesus Christ ,** the one and only true High Power.”

There is a sterling example of giving glory for spiritual improvement to something other than God Himself. If it is really true that “of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things” (Rom 11:36), then it cannot be right, in any sense of the word, to ascribe to a humanly-devised system or plan such things as the following:

- Opening of “the door to recovery”
- A “greater capacity to receive grace”
- The creation of “peace” and “joy”
- A “stronger relationship with God”
- “God’s healing power”
- Being “changed.”
- “Growing spiritually”
- “discovering . . . Jesus Christ.”

Whether it sounds religiously correct or not, these are all things that can only be wrought by God through faith. It is as wrong to credit them to a plan as it was for Nebuchadnezzar to refer to Babylon

as something he had built, or for Herod to accept the praise of those who said when they heard him speak, they had heard the voice of a god.

God Does Not Always Judge Immediately

Although God is always monitoring the affairs, words, and reactions of men, His judgments are not always immediate. For the sensitive of heart, this is indicative of “the longsuffering of God,” which is actually a “space to repent” (Rev 2:21) – a token of His goodness that leads to repentance (Rom 2:4).

However, it is said of those who yield to the cries of the flesh, “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl 8:11). For them, the absence of judgment is an indication of Divine tolerance – and that is a most critical error in assessment.

Cases like that of Herod and others have been written up to assist us to think more soundly concerning God’s attitude toward sin, the failure to obey Him, and the absence of giving Him glory. This is the real God of whom we are reading, and it is “the angel of the Lord” who is executing His judgment.

Sinners who are judged immediately are not to be considered the worst of sinners. They are examples, to be sure, but the discretionary judgment that was poured out upon them by no means indicated the approval of other sinners. Jesus pointed this out in two of His salient sayings.

- The first was occasioned by a report of a malicious deed of Pilate . “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:1-3).

- The second was his extended answer to the very same report. “Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:4-5).

The very same principle is related in Paul’s reference to the Israelites who fell in the wilderness. “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. but with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:1-11).

A point is made of all of the people participating in a genuine deliverance and very real sustenance.

- All were under the cloud of protection.
- All passed through the sea.
- All were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

- All ate the same spiritual meat.
- All drank the same spiritual drink.

However, with many of them, God was not well pleased. This was because of what they did.

- They lusted after evil things.
- Some of them were idolaters.
- They sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to “play,” or “indulge in pagan revelry.”

NIV

- They committed fornication.

As a result of God’s displeasure in those who sinned:

- They were overthrown in the wilderness.
- They were destroyed by serpents.
- They were destroyed of the destroyer.
- Three thousand were slain in one day.

Certain observations are made of this remarkably detailed record.

- These things are our examples.
- They are written that we “should not lust after evil things.”
- They are written that we should not be “idolaters.”
- They are written that we should not “commit fornication.”
- They are written that we should not “tempt Christ.
- They are written that we should not “murmur.”
- These things “happened to them as our examples.” NKJV
- They have been written “for our admonition.”

We Are Not the Standard of Evaluation

We are not to evaluate God’s response to sin by the way He has responded to our own conduct. We are rather to learn from the accounts of His reaction to sin that are recorded in the Scriptures. That is one of the grand functions of the historical records of Divine judgments.

The record of Herod’s death manifests how God regards those who are filled with pride, which is evidenced by failing to give God glory.

HE WAS EATEN OF WORMS

“ . . . and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.”

JOSEPHUS’ ACCOUNT OF HEROD

“Herod, having reigned three years over ALL Judea, (he had reigned over the tetrarchy of his brother Philip four years before this,) went down to Caesarea, and there exhibited shows and games in honor of Claudius, and made vows for his health. On the second day of these shows, he put on a garment made wholly of silver, and of a contexture most truly wonderful, and came into the theater early in the morning; at which time the silver of his garment, being illuminated by the first reflection of the sun’s rays, shone out after a surprising manner, and was so resplendent as to spread a horror over

those who looked intently upon him; and presently his flatterers cried out, one from one place, and another from another, 'He is a god:' and they added, 'Be thou merciful to us, for although we have hitherto revered thee only as a man, yet shall we henceforth own thee as superior to mortal nature.' Nor did the king rebuke them, nor reject their impious flattery. But, looking up, he saw an owl on a certain rope over his head, and immediately conceived that this bird was to him a messenger of ill tidings; and he fell into the deepest sorrow; a severe pain also arose in his bowels, and he died after five days' severe illness."

This is the sum of the account given by Josephus, Ant. lib. xix. cap. 8, sect. 2.

Other versions read, "his flesh was wasted away by worms, and he came to his end" BBE "He was eaten away by worms and died," CJB " became infected with worms and died," CSB "he was eaten by worms and breathed his last," ESV "was eaten by maggots, and he died," GWN "he was consumed with worms and died," NLT "having been eaten of worms, he expired," YLT "was filled with maggots and died," LIVING "He was soon eaten by worms inside him, and he died," IE and "And in fearful agony he died." PHILLIPS

As I have already mentioned, angels have often been dispatched to cause death among the sons of men (2 Sam 24:16; 1 Chron 21:12,15,20,27; 2 Chron 32:21). Well ought we to thank God that these powerful and superior servants of the Lord have also been sent forth "to minister for them who shall be the heirs of salvation" (Heb 1:14). In this case, the angel caused a grievous internal disease through which Herod was eaten by worms. The very occurrence is most offensive to the mind, and some cannot conceive of God doing such a thing – but He did! This is the God to whom we have been reconciled "by the death of His Son " (Rom 5:10). How will those who imagine God is kindly disposed toward everyone account for this harsh and painful death of Herod? Will they ascribe it to Satan, when God has said it was executed by "the angel of the Lord," who only does the will of God?

As I have suggested, the worms were evidently within Herod, not worms that covered his outward frame. Also, apparently Herod did not die instantly from this mortal blow – although the blow itself was instant. Josephus says he died "after five days." So far as being a historian is concerned, there is no reason to doubt what he has said. He also wrote of this occasion that Herod "did neither rebuke them [the people] nor reject their impious flattery. A severe pain arose in his belly, and began in a most violent manner. And when he was quite worn out by the pain in his belly for five days, he departed this life, in the 54th year of his age, and the 7th year of his reign." Once again we see that "the way of transgressors is hard" (Prov 13:15).

BUT – THE WORD OF GOD GREW AND MULTIPLIED

" 24 But the word of God grew and multiplied."

As with all inspired narration, activities are set within the context of the outworking of Divine purpose. That is the heart and core of Scripture – what the Lord is doing! Here, the Lord simply removes an obstacle after it has been duly confirmed that Herod was a wicked man. Like Pharaoh, he was "endured with much longsuffering," even though he as a "vessel of wrath, fitted for destruction" (Rom 9:22).

It is the Divine manner to bring our attention back to primary things. This text is an example of that characteristic.

BUT

"But . . ." Other versions read, "Then," CSB "and," GENEVA and "Meanwhile" NLT Though small, this is a significant word, being translated from the Greek word **de**. From the standpoint of language, this is a disjunctive – a word that stands between two contrasting statements. The lexical

meaning of the word is “by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement . . . it opposes persons to persons or things previously mentioned or thought of - either with strong emphasis.” THAYER

Here we have a vivid picture of the Lord governing His Kingdom, for “For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28). In our text, on the one hand, He removes Herod because he did not give God the glory – and that is why men are here. On the other hand, the advancement of God’s cause will be realized. It will not be hindered by enemies or by circumstance. In all of this God is showing that there is a level of His will that cannot be contravened. Nothing can deter it that will, alter it, or make it null and void. Some confirmations of this include the following:

- The flood.
- The development of Abraham’s seed.
- The deliverance of Israel from Egypt.
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.
- The birth of Jesus.
- The death of Jesus.
- The bruising of Satan’s head.
- The resurrection of Jesus.
- The ascension of Jesus.
- The enthronement of Jesus.
- The pouring out of the Holy Spirit.
- The destruction of Jerusalem.
- The appointment of death.
- The second coming of Christ.
- The glorification of those who are in Christ.
- The day of judgment.

These are matters in which there can be no alteration, negation, or effective negotiation. It is because they all have to do with the carrying out of a Divine initiative. Neither the will of man nor his natural aptitude play any role in these things.

THE WORD GREW

“ . . . the word of God grew . . .” Other versions read, “continued to grow,” NASB “continued to increase,” NIV “continued to advance,” RSV “went on increasing,” BBE “went on growing,” CJB “flourished,” CSB “was proclaimed,” MRD “kept on increasing,” NET “continued to spread,” NLT “was spreading rapidly,” LIVING “prospered,” WEYMOUTH and “continued to gain ground.” PHILLIPS

What does it mean for the Word of God to grow, increase, or advance? As used here, the word “grow” means “to cause to grow, to augment . . . to cause to grow, to augment” THAYER “become more important,” UBS “the message (about the good news) kept spreading and growing stronger.” LOUW-NIDA

When the Word of God grows, people become more aware of what God has said about a matter. They become more conscious about the Lord Jesus. A proper conception of sin is entertained,

and there is a prevailing interest in reconciliation to God and the obtaining of an eternal inheritance.

Later, after a great awakening in Ephesus, it is written “So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed” (Acts 19:20). This describes a circumstance in which the Word of God is more and more received, and opposing thoughts are thrown down to the ground. The Word becomes more dominant in the thinking of the people, and is dwelling richly in their hearts (Col 3:16). It is more prominent in speaking, and there is more of an appetite for it. When the Word of God “grows,” there is a more thorough declaration of what God has revealed. The “whole counsel of God” is made known. In such a circumstance, competing bodies of knowledge become less popular, and the Word of God is preferred.

In Ephesus, when the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified, “many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver” (Acts 19:19). It is after that, that the text affirms, “So mightily grew the Word of God and prevailed.”

In our society, if the Word of God was suddenly to “grow,” there would probably be a similar book burning. There would be an abandonment of writings and other forms of expression that are the fruit of man’s wisdom, and attention would be given the more to what God has declared. That is the kind of thing that happens when the Word of God grows. Today, there is a phenomenal amount of purported Christian activity that has little or nothing to do with the Word of God. These days there are other books – other religious books – that are more popular than the Word of God. By more popular, I mean they are read more, quoted more, and talked about more. There are other words that are growing – other messages, and other proclamations. I have heard many sermons that had made very few references to the Word of God, and some that have contained none at all. In such a case, the Word of God is not growing. The people are not being brought to think about what God has revealed, what He has spoken, and the things He has accented.

When the Word of God grows, people become more aware of what God has said about a matter. They become more conscious about the Lord Jesus. A proper conception of sin is entertained, and there is a prevailing interest in reconciliation to God and the obtaining of an eternal inheritance. All of this, and more, was taking place in our text.

The Time When Truth Fails

God described a time that existed in Isaiah’s day. It is worthy of note because it parallels the circumstances of our time. “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:14-15). It is not that truth itself lost any of its properties. It was rather than the religious leaders let it go in preference of other words. It did not fall in the street because it was weak, but it was no longer embraced. Truth did not fail because it became feeble, but because it was not proclaimed, and therefore could not do its work. This is the opposite of the Word growing.

Paul described this kind of situation more clearly. Here is what he said of such a time. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4). In such a circumstance, a person becomes an enemy because he tells the truth (Gal 4:16). That kind of response is antithetical to Word of God growing.

Jesus spoke to people who did not believe Him because He told them the truth (John 8:45). If He had told them what the scribes had said, He would have been readily received. If He had quoted the

traditions of the elders, those very people would have followed Him zealously. When people become prominent, there is a corresponding cessation of the growth of the Word.

THE WORD MULTIPLIED

“But the word of God . . . multiplied.” Other versions read, “spread,” NIV “gain adherents,” NRSV “spread itself,” DARBY “win many followers,” GWN “there were many new believers,” NLT “influencing more and more people. The group of believers became larger and larger,” IE “converts were multiplied,” WEYMOUTH and “increase its influence.” PHILLIPS

The Word of God is described as “quick and powerful,” or “living and active,” NIV Also, although those who declare it may be bound, “the Word of God is not bound” (1 Tim 2:9). It works within those who embrace it, and does so effectively, causing the will of God to be lived out. Therefore it is written, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe ” (1 Thess 2:13).

When men receive the word of God, it is not like receiving a creed, or a historical statement, or a position. The Word of God causes things to take place in those who believe it. It “effectively works in you who believe.” NKJV This is of such a dynamic nature that when these believers are persecuted, and even scattered abroad, they go “everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4). That is an example of the Word of God multiplying. It spreads within believers and through them to others. In this way, it grows exponentially – not in its content, but in its effectiveness. When freely declared, it accomplishes the purpose for which God sent it (Isa 55:11).

Thus, from a very broad point of view, our text proclaims the twofold work of the Lord. 1) The saving and establishment of believers (1 Tim 1:15; 2 Tim 3:16-17), and 2) Making the enemies of His Son His footstool (2 Cor 15:27-28; Heb 10:13). These processes are the Kingdom of God advancing.

BARNABAS AND SAUL FULFILLED THEIR MINISTRY

“ 25 And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark. ”

The narrative now returns to Barnabas and Saul. In fact, from this point through the conclusion of the book of Acts, the attention will be turned to the ministry of Paul.

BARNABAS AND SAUL RETURNED FROM JERUSALEM

“And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem . . .”

Following the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, certain prophets had come from Jerusalem to Antioch. During that time, “one of them named Agabus” had “signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world ” (Acts 11:28). Upon hearing this, and with the discernment that this was a word from God, and with an obvious immediacy that is birthed by faith, “the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea” (Acts 11:29). They were not like the Corinthians, who also determined to send relief to the “poor saints in Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26), yet tarried for more than a year without actually doing it (2 Cor 8:10; 9:2). These brethren gathered the monies immediately, and “sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:30). Now Barnabas and Saul return from that trip to Jerusalem to Antioch, from whence they had been sent (Acts 11:26-28).

WHEN THEY HAD FULFILLED THEIR MINISTRY

when they had fulfilled their ministry . . .” Other versions read, “finished their mission,” NIV “after completing their mission,” NRSV “when their work was ended,” BBE “having completed their errand,” CJB “had completed their relief mission,” CSB “fulfilled their ministrations,” ERV “completed their service,” ESV “delivered the contribution,” GWN “completed their task,” NJB “fulfilled their office,” PNT “finished their business,” LIVING “finished their work,” IE “having discharged their mission,” WEYMOUTH and “finished their helpful service.” WILLIAMS

In the kingdom of God, work is an activity in which something is accomplished, completed, finished, or fulfilled.

Barnabas and Saul delivered to the elders the offering that had been gathered for the poor saints in Jerusalem. The purpose for the offering was to bring relief to brethren in Judaea who suffered in the aftermath of the prophesied famine. Barnabas and Saul were chosen to deliver the relief to the elders in a timely manner, thereby exhibiting the love of the brethren and the faithfulness of God. They left Jerusalem only when that work had been completed.

Finishing the Work

The very concept of finishing or completing a ministry, or service, or commission, is refreshing to consider. This thought reflects the nature of the Kingdom of God, which involves doing good works that have been “ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). When the Scriptures speak of being “workers together with” God, or “laborers together with God,” it is not speaking of menial and meaningless activity or motion (1 Cor 3:9; 6:1). Working in God’s vineyard (Matt 20:1), or working in the harvesting of the fields (John 4:35) is not purposeless activity. In the kingdom of God, work is an activity in which something is accomplished, completed, finished, or fulfilled. Paul said that he did not run uncertainly, or beat the air. That is, he was not like a runner who simply frolicked about in the open spaces with no goal, or a boxer who shadow-boxed, never really facing an opponent (1 Cor 9:26).

In fact, Paul was deeply concerned about his labor being vain, never really yielding the intended results (Gal 4:11; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 3:5). There is a category of human effort that is pointless, wasted, and in vain: “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain” (Psa 127:1). This kind of work is one that is never brought to a conclusion. It is like the man who “began to build, and was not able to finish” (Lk 14:29-30).

One of the ways God is glorified is in a work that is finished – brought to its intended culmination. Zerubbabel was assured that the work he commenced would, in fact, be “finished.” Zechariah was told to say, “The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it; and thou shalt know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you” (Zech 4:9).

While I do not wish to dwell on this subject, it ought to be apparent that, in Scripture, the value of young believers is seen in their association with the tenured saints, not their work and influence among their peers.

Jesus Himself declared that His food was not only to do the Father’s will, but to complete His work. “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish His work” (John 4:34). In fact, the works were given to Him to finish. As He said, “the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me” (John 5:36). An unfinished work brings no glory to God! That is why failing to grow, backsliding, drawing back, and falling away are such despicable transgressions! The Lord is noted for finishing His work (Rom 9:28), and performing what He has begun “until the day of Christ” (Phil 1:6). If this does not happen, it is only because thoughtless men have departed “from the faith,” which is the appointed means through which the completion is wrought (1 Tim 4:1).

Unfortunately, owing to a great falling away, the landscape of Christianity is cluttered with unfinished works – people who started, but did not finish. They are like the 603,550 men of Israel who came out of Egypt, but fell in the wilderness, never entering the promised land for which they were delivered. They are like Israel, who, under the figure of Ephraim, was like a “cake not turned” – half-baked, and unsuitable for consumption (Hos 7:8).

Barnabas and Saul were not such men. They set out to do a holy work, and did not leave until it was accomplished.

THEY TOOK JOHN MARK WITH THEM

“ . . . and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.” Other versions read, “who was also called Mark,” NASB and “whose other name was Mark.” NRSV

This was the son of the woman at whose home the disciples were found praying when Peter was released (Acts 12:12). It is apparent that, to some extent, he was a spiritually distinctive young man in Jerusalem, as Timothy was in the area of Derby and Lystra (Acts 16:1). Barnabas and Saul took note of this young believer, and “took” him “with them.” Later, he will be described as their “minister,” or “helper” (Acts 13:5).

You may recall that Joshua was Moses’ “minister” (Ex 24:13; Josh 1:1). Elisha occupied a similar role toward Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19; 2 Kgs 2:1-9).

While I do not wish to dwell on this subject, it ought to be apparent that, in Scripture, the value of young believers is seen in their association with the tenured saints, not their work and influence among their peers. I do not believe you will find an exception to this rule. Some examples include the following.

- Moses’ sister Miriam, who watched her infant brother, and spoke to Pharaoh’s daughter concerning his care (Ex 2:4-9).
- Samuel, who ministered in the Tabernacle under the administration of Eli (1 Sam 2:18).
- The young Jewish maiden who informed Naaman of a prophet in Israel (2 Kgs 5:2-4).
- Jeremiah, who was set apart to God from his mother’s womb (Jer 1:5-7).
- John the Baptist, who “grew and waxed strong in spirit” (Luke 1:80).
- The Lord Jesus, who “increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man,” and, at twelve confounded the doctors of the Law (Luke 2:46-47,52).

The thing to be seen in this text is the manner in which godly men perceived spiritually unusual youth. With the contemporary penchant for sequestering young people, the kind of assessment made known in this text is most unusual. We have even come to the point where special ministers are being appointed for the youth. In this text, special youth were appointed to minister to Kingdom laborers. In this manner, they became more acquainted with the manner of the kingdom, as well as the focus and way of life of holy men. In my judgment, there is no way to effectively assess the damage that is being done to the body of Christ by the current manner in which young people are being cultured by the churches.

This young man, John Mark, is mentioned eight times in Scripture (Acts 12:12,25; 15:37,39; Col 4:10; 2 Tim 4:11; Phile 1:24; 1 Pet 5:13).

Others who are said to have been “surnamed,” or given another name, include the following.

- Jacob (supplanter), who was surnamed “Israel” (he will rule)– the name used to refer to God’s people – Isa 44:5; 45:4.
- Lebbaeus (a man of heart), an apostle “whose surname was Thaddeus” (large-hearted, courageous) – Matt 10:3.
- James (supplanter) and John (Jehovah is a gracious giver): Jesus “surnamed them Boanerges” (sons of thunder) – Mk 3:17.
- Judas (he shall be praised, “surnamed Iscariot” (inhabitant of Kerioth) – Lk 22:3.
- Joseph (let him add) called Barsabas (son of Sabas), “who was surnamed Matthias” (gift of God– Acts 1:23).
- Joses (exalted), “who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas” (son of consolation) – Acts 4:36).
- Simon (a hearing), “whose surname is Peter” (a rock, or stone) – Acts 10:5).
- Judas (he shall be praised), chief among the brethren in Jerusalem, “surnamed Barsabas” (son of Sabas) – Acts 15:22).
- Abram’s (exalted father) name was changed to Abraham (father of a multitude) – Gen 17:5
- Sarai’s (princess) name was changed to Sarah (noble woman, mother of nations – Gen 17:15-16).

In Scripture, names have a certain ministry. Even in their names, people were associated with their character, particularly as it related to the work of the Lord. This is a contribution that the Israelites, a Divinely cultured nation, has made to the world. It is good that believers carry it forward, as in this text. Too, it is good to see people as they relate to the work of the Lord.

In this text, “John” (Jehovah is a gracious giver) was renamed “Mark” (a defense). It appears as though they saw in this young man the potential of being a great defender of the faith. Ultimately, he did, in fact, measure up to the name, writing the Gospel of Mark, and serving the Lord in other lands. He certainly lived up to his surname. Historians say of him, “ Was born of Jewish parents of the tribe of Levi. He is supposed to have been converted to Christianity by Peter, whom he served as an amanuensis, and under whose inspection he wrote his Gospel in the Greek language. Mark was dragged to pieces by the people of Alexandria, at the great solemnity of Serapis their idol, ending his life under their merciless hands. ”

CONCLUSION

It should be apparent that there is character in Scripture as well as information. The nature of God is revealed in it as well as His will. The reports that are made are more than a historical statement. They reflect Divine priorities, the way in which the Lord works, and how people are impacted by both faith and unbelief.

It is the nature of truth to permeate the lives of those who love and believe it. It also sheds light on the environment into which it is introduced. Were it not for the truth of the Gospel, the true character of Herod could not have been truly seen. The caliber of men like Peter would also have been hidden. What kind of change would ever have been wrought in Saul of Tarsus if the truth of the Gospel had not been declared and lived out?

All of this confirms the necessity and priority of the continued declaration and exposition of the Gospel of Christ. It is a sin of unspeakable magnitude to exchange the emphasis of the Gospel for

some human accent. No person can expect the work of God to be done independently of the record He has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). The notion that the Gospel has only to do with the extrication of men from sin is an error that has staggering implications. First, it negates the great percentage of the epistles, which contain, in fact, a delineation of the Gospel. Little of the Gospel of Christ can even be known without the details of the epistles. When these writings are withheld from the people, the Gospel cannot be considered.

The book of Acts is a revelation of the government of Jesus being carried out among men. It has to do with the establishment of believers, and the overthrow of the wicked. Each is done in a timely and appropriate manner, bringing glory to God and edification to saints.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #56

THE CALLING OF BARNABAS and SAUL

“ 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. 4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister. 6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: 7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God. 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith. 9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10 And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. 12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. ” (Acts 13:1-12)

INTRODUCTION

We are now exposed to some details related to another church, or gathering of believers. Until Acts 11:22, the only other “church” specified in this book was the church at Jerusalem (2:47; 5:11;7:38;

8:1,3; 11:22). That was the hub of activity in the household of faith. This was in strict accord with the testimony of the prophets. Both Isaiah and Micah foretold that the word of the Lord would go forth “from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:3; Mic 4:2). That city was set forth as the one that would bring “good tidings” (Isa 40:9). Joel prophesied, “for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call” (Joel 2:32). Zechariah foretold “there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zech 13:1).

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- **AS THEY MINISTERED TO THE LORD AND FASTED (13:2)**
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- **THEY DEPARTED, BEING SENT FORTH BY THE HOLY SPIRIT (13:4)**
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Again he prophesied, “that living waters shall go forth out from Jerusalem” (Zech 14:8).

The centrality of Jerusalem was not the result of human strategies or mere carnal preferences. This city had been cultured for the Messiah, even though many of its inhabitants were not aware of it. Malachi alluded to this when he said, “Behold, I will send My messenger, and he shall prepare the way before Me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, He shall come, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal 3:1). This was the coming that was also foretold by Zechariah, and fulfilled in the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass” (Zech 9:9; Matt 21:4-5). It was during that time that Jesus “went into the temple of God,” purging it the second time from the defiling presence of merchandisers (Matt 21:12-15).

All of this, and more, brought a certain spiritual dignity to Jerusalem. This is where Jesus commanded His disciples to begin preaching repentance and remission of sins (Lk 24:47).

There were also a number of churches scattered throughout Judaea, Galilee, and Samaria, though not mentioned individually (9:31). Now, the Spirit focuses on a particular congregation other than the one in Jerusalem. It proves to be an extraordinary body of believers, and one from which two devoted and informed disciples are called by the Holy Spirit to a particular work. We will also be introduced to the context in which the call was made known, and the manner in which the brethren responded to that call.

The invariable rule of the Kingdom is, God first, man second – and there is never a deviation from it. Putting God first does not suggest the deliberate neglect of men. It does mean that God’s voice is to be perceived as outranking that of man. The will of God is superior to the will of man. Pleasing God trumps pleasing men.

Once again, we are being exposed to the manner of the Kingdom – the way in which the Lord works, the kind of individuals through whom He works, and the effectiveness of the works that He

has ordained, and in which the saved are to walk. The Scriptures confirm that God has, in fact, “ordained” works in which we are to walk: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). Some of these “works” are general in nature – such as doing “good unto all men, especially unto them who are the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). There are special opportunities, also called “good works,” in which God can enable us to liberally participate (2 Cor 9:8). There is also the perspective of “every good work” in which we can be “fruitful” (Col 1:10). These are the objective for every believer, and none are to be content coming short of them, or be satisfied to live within the narrow circle of their own interests. “Good works” are the expression of a heart that is not self-centered, but is living for the purpose of Another – namely, the One who died and rose again for them (2 Cor 5:15).

In this text we are exposed to an even higher form of “good work.” In this case, the work is defined by God, and the believer is called into it. The participant is actually carrying out a specific objective that serves Divine interests. It appears to me that this is the primary work of men, not the secondary one. It has to do with serving God, as compared with human interests. The first and second commandment provide us with a perspective concerning both attitude and living. Jesus said to an inquiring scribe, “And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

THE RULE OF THE KINGDOM

The invariable rule of the Kingdom is, God first, man second – and there is never a deviation from it. Putting God first does not suggest the deliberate neglect of men. It does mean that God’s voice is to be perceived as outranking that of man. The will of God is superior to the will of man. Pleasing God trumps pleasing men. When there is any kind of conflict between allegiance to God and allegiance to men, allegiance to God is mandated. The person who defers to men in neglect of God has transgressed the first and great commandment. To place the stress on the second commandment is an obvious error, and should require no further elaboration. When God is loved first and foremost, the proper adjudication of human interests will take place under His direction, for God is the Creator of men.

Our text is an excellent case in point. Two men of God are called into a work that has to do with bringing advantages to men – true advantages. Because the church to which the call came loved God first, they will immediately enter into the will of the Lord. Because the ones who are being called love God first, they will submit without any hesitation.

Rather than simply pointing out what are conceived to be the errors of the modern church, I am seeking to draw attention to the absence of similarities with the church/churches of Scripture through whom God worked.

This is the manner of the Kingdom. It is not the ideal, but is rather the norm. Wherever men are living by faith and walking in the Spirit, this is the way they react to a Divine summons. If this is not the way they are living, they do not receive a call into Divine service – for even if such a call could hypothetically occur, their hearts would not be tuned to hear it.

All of this sharply contrasts with the “church life” of our time. If you were to attempt to impose this text into our Christian culture, you would find it to be a near-total misfit. However, we are being exposed to a genuine church, and to bona fide spiritual life.

THE AVOIDANCE OF OVER-CRITICALITY

It is well to make a statement concerning the avoidance of being overly critical of the Christian representation of our day. Rather than simply pointing out what are conceived to be the errors of the modern church, I am seeking to draw attention to the absence of similarities with the church/churches of Scripture through whom God worked. While some of the things that took place in this text tended to be unique, the sensitivity of the people to the Lord and commitment to Him are not to be ignored.

As we go through this book, the direction of the Lord is becoming increasingly clear, as well as the saints submissiveness to it.

- The disciples waiting for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:13-14).
- The selection of the one to fill the bishopric vacated by Judas (Acts 1:15-26).
- The day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4, 14ff).
- The response of Peter and John to the mandate of the religious leaders to cease preaching Christ (Acts 4:19-20).
- The response of the church to the reports of threats against the apostles (Acts 4:23-32).
- The response of the church to the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:11-12).
- The direction of Peter and John to preach in the Temple, from which they had previously been removed and incarcerated (Acts 5:19-20).
- Stephen's boldness before the Jewish council, even though it led to his death (Acts 6:12-55).
- Philip's response to heavenly direction (Acts 8:25-30).
- The response of the apostles to the report of the Samaritans receiving the word of God (Acts 8:14).
- The response of Saul of Tarsus to the call of Jesus (Acts 9:6-9).
- The response of Ananias to the call of God to go to Saul (Acts 9:10-17).
- The response of Cornelius to Divine direction (Acts 10:1-8).
- The response of Peter to the call to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:9-23).
- The response of the early church to the report of Peter concerning the events related to Cornelius (Acts 11:18).
- The response of Peter to the delivering angel (Acts 12:7-11).

None of these could have taken place among a lethargic, indifferent, or insensitive people! It was their faith and commitment to the Lord that enabled them to react as they did. It was their profound love for God that moved them to respond instantly. It was their deep gratitude for the Savior that compelled them to enter joyfully into the work. That is the manner of the Kingdom.

It is a revelation of real spiritual life – life that is being lived “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). Where this kind of life is not apparent, at the very best, the Spirit is being grieved and quenched (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). At the worst, there may be no spiritual life at all, in which case, conversion itself becomes the requirement.

I say these things because it is a source of grief to my spirit that any Scriptural record of faithful and productive people could conflict with the personal views or representations of any professing believers of our time. No view of, or approach to, matters relating to the Kingdom of God can be at variance with the inspired record of the progress and effectiveness of that Kingdom.

If Divine power is absent from religion, there is no procedure that can restore it. The power is granted by Divine discretion within the context of fellowship with the Son, into which He has called us (1 Cor 1:9). Any renewal that is attempted must be aimed at restoring that required fellowship.

A PRODUCTIVE CHURCH

“ 13:1 Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.”

To this point, the book of Acts has referred to a number of unholy persons who, by virtue of some sinful deed, have been mentioned: These include the following:

1. Pilate - Acts 3:13; 4:27
2. Annas the high priest - Acts 4:6
3. Caiaphas the high priest - Acts 4:6
4. John , kindred of the high priest – Acts 4:6
5. Alexander , kindred of the high priest – Acts 4:6
6. Herod - Acts 4:27; 12:1,6,11,19,20,21
7. Ananias - Acts 5:1,3,5
8. Sapphira - Acts 5:1
9. Saul of Tarsus (before change) - Acts 7:58; 8:1,3; 9:1,4,9
10. Simon the sorcerer - Acts 8:9,13,18, 24

An additional wicked person will be mentioned in this text (Elymus, 13:8).

Just as there are key individuals in the body of Christ, so such are found in those who are dominated by Satan. These are always opposed to the work of Lord. During the beginning of the church, such men were not frequently confronted. However, as the Gospel began to spread, such individuals increased. This strongly suggests that during the initial establishment of the body of Christ Satan was, in a sense, caught off guard. It is evident that He did not know Jesus would rise from the dead, send His Holy Spirit, and transform and empower believers.

We have also been introduced to a number of holy people who were not apostles. Most of them are mentioned for the first time in the book of Acts, and a significant number of them were not apparently present on the day of Pentecost. Here are the ones that are mentioned from Acts 1 through our text (13:1-12).

1. Mary the mother of Jesus - Acts 1:14
2. Joseph called Barsabas, surnamed Justus - Acts 1:23
3. Mathias - Acts 1:23
4. Joses, surnamed Barnabas - Acts 5:36; 9:27; 11:22,25,30; 12:25; 13:1, 2,7
5. Stephen - Acts 6:5,8,9; 7:59; 8:2; 11:19
6. Philip (deacon) - Acts 6:5; 8:5,6,12,13, 26,29,34,35,37,38,39,40
7. Prochorus - Acts 6:5
8. Nicanor - Acts 6:5
9. Timon - Acts 6:5

10. Parmenas - Acts 6:5
11. Nicolas - Acts 6:5
12. Ananias - Acts 9:10,12,13,17
13. Aeneas - Acts 9:33,34
14. Tabitha (Dorcas) - Acts 9:36,39,40
15. Simon the tanner - Acts 9:48; 10:6, 17,32
16. Cornelius - Acts 10:1,3,7,17,21,22,24, 25,30,31
17. Agabus - Acts 11:28
18. Mary , the mother of John (Mark) - Acts 12:12
19. Mark - Acts 12:12,25; 13:5
20. Rhoda - Acts 12:13
21. James (the Lord's brother) - Acts 12:17
22. Simeon called Niger - Acts 13:1
23. Lucius of Cyrene - Acts 13:1
24. Manaen - Acts 13:1

In this, we are being exposed to the Lord working through His body, which is “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all”

In this, we are being exposed to the Lord working through His body, which is “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). Among those mentioned thus far are, two mothers (Mary the mother of Jesus, and Mary the mother of John Mark), two Jewish proselytes (Nicolas and Cornelius), a widow (Dorcas), a tanner (Simon), a young man (John Mark), a young maiden (Rhoda), and a brother of Jesus (James), deacons Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, Nicholas), and prophets and teachers (Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaean, Saul).

Notice the diversity of the people – not only in who they were, but what they did . This is the diversity of which Paul wrote to the Corinthians. He likened the church to a “body” with different parts, each one working for a common purpose, yet in different ways. “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Cor 12:4-7).

These are all dispensed by God (1 Cor 12:18), administered by Jesus (1 Cor 12:5), and managed by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4). They are operated through the faith of the individuals possessing them (Rom 12:5; Gal 3:5), and as those who minister them “hold” to the Head of the body, Jesus Christ (Col 2:19). These various “gifts,” or spiritual aptitudes, are the means through which Jesus ministers to His body, “which is the church” (Eph 4:15-16; Col 1:19,24).

These are referred to as “spiritual gifts” (1 Cor 12:1; 14:1,12), “the measure of faith,” “gifts,” an “office” (Rom 12:3), “gifts” (Eph 4:8), and “the gift” (1 Pet 4:10). Those possessing the gifts are admonished to be “good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Pet 4:10). We are also reminded that these are a “measure of faith,” and provide the spiritual boundaries within which we are to evaluate ourselves (Rom 12:3).

These gifts differ, depending on the work that is being accomplished through any given congregation. An example of this difference is found in several of the epistles. In these texts, there are often different spiritual gifts mentioned. These may not be found in every congregation, as some

falsely allege. Differences are determined by the Lord (1 Cor 12:18), and in strict accord with the spiritual status of that congregation, and the degree to which they are participating in the purpose of God. I understand the core, or common gifts, to be specified in Ephesians 4:11: “apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers.” The “apostles” have been given to the church through the Scriptures, and it is their doctrine that forms the substructure of all valid teaching. Apostles, prophets, and teachers are also mentioned Paul’s writings to the church in Corinth (1 Cor 12:28).

I do not know that this is intended to be a thorough representation of spiritual gifts, but it certainly does highlight their diversity. It seems to me that if these were not being given by the Lord and administered by the Holy Spirit, they would make for a chaotic condition.

Various specifications of spiritual gifts are found in the following texts. I am mentioning them because our text cites some of the gifts in the church in Antioch: namely prophets and teachers.

- **THE CHURCH IN ROME:** (7) Prophecy , ministry, teaching , exhorting, giving, ruling, showing mercy (Rom 12:3-8).

- **THE CHURCH IN CORINTH:** (13) Word of wisdom, word of knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, working of miracles , prophecy , discerning of spirits, speaking different languages, interpretation of different languages, apostles , teachers , helps, governments, (1 Cor 12:8-11,28).

- **THE CHURCH IN GALATIA:** (1) Jesus Himself is referred to as “He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you” NKJV (Gal 3:5).

- **THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS.** (4) Apostles , prophets , evangelists, and pastor-teachers (Eph 4:11).

- **SCATTERED BELIEVERS.** (2) Speaking, and ministering (1 Pet 4:11).

Taking the gifts that are duplicated in the various listings into consideration (apostles–2, prophecy–3, teaching–3, working miracles–2), there are twenty different gifts mentioned.

- Prophecy
- Ministry
- Teaching
- Exhorting
- Giving
- Ruling
- Showing mercy
- Word of wisdom
- Word of knowledge
- Faith (The inclusion of “faith” in the listing of spiritual gifts indicates that this refers to an extraordinary measure of faith, and not “the common faith” – Tit 1:4).
- Gifts of healing
- Working of miracles
- Discerning of spirits
- Speaking different languages
- Interpretation of different languages
- Helps

- Governments
- Evangelists
- Speaking as an oracle of God
- Pastor-teachers

I do not know that this is intended to be a thorough representation of spiritual gifts, but it certainly does highlight their diversity. It seems to me that if these were not being given by the Lord and administered by the Holy Spirit, they would make for a chaotic condition. All of them have a common objective – to profit the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7; Eph 4:12-16; Col 2:19).

Now, for the first time in Scripture, we will be exposed to a particular congregation, and specific individuals within it, whose spiritual gifts are specified.

CERTAIN PROPHETS AND TEACHERS

“Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers . . .” Other versions read, “prophets and doctors,” DOUAY and “prophets (inspired interpreters of the will and purposes of God) and teachers,” AMPLIFIED All other versions read “prophets and teachers.”

These are the second and third ranking offices in the body of Christ. All other offices, or spiritual gifts, come “after” these. “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers , after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28).

What are “prophets and teachers,” and how vital is their role in the body of Christ? First, if God has placed them in the body, Jesus is administering them, and the Spirit if making them operational, they cannot be incidental.

• **PROPHET.** From the standpoint of language, a prophet is “one who speaks forth . . . an interpreter or spokesman for God; one through whom God speaks,” THAYER “one who speaks for God, proclaiming what God wants to make known,” FRIBERG and “one who has insight into the Divine will.” UBS Doctrinally, the person who prophesies is said to speak “unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3). This is a person with spiritual insight and understanding who brings the truth to bear upon the hearts and conscience of men. Their words result in the strengthening of men, moving them forward in the will of God, and encouraging them in the good fight of faith. Their message is not man-centered, but is God-centered, and thus He works through their word.

• **TEACHER.** From the standpoint of language, a teacher is one who instructs men, delivering holy “doctrine” to them, THAYER or the body of teaching that pertains to life and godliness. A teacher is not a mimic, aping what other men have said. This is a person who has expertise in the Scriptures and the things of God, and has been made capable to communicate them to others. Nicodemus referred to Jesus as a “Teacher come down from God” (John 3:2). Paul referred to himself as a “teacher” as well as an apostle (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11).

It is interesting to observe the mentioning of these two gifts that were operating in the church in Antioch. Barnabas and Saul had remained there for “a whole year,” teaching “much people” (Acts 11:26). Now, as a result of their teaching, several prophets and teachers had risen among them. Saul and Barnabas are included in the number; Barnabas being mentioned first, and Saul last. They were like spiritual book-ends in this remarkable listing of holy men. You might also view this as the maturation of the church. Three other men are mentioned.

- **SIMEON THAT WAS CALLED NIGER.** We know nothing more of this brother

than is stated here. He was one of the prophets and teachers in the church in Antioch.

- **LUCIOUS OF CYRENE.** Cyrene was located in Africa. We assume this is the same person Paul mentioned in Romans 16:21. Nothing more is known of him.

- **MANAEN, BROUGHT UP WITH HEROD.** Manaen is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. The Herod mentioned here was “the tetrarch of Galilee” (Lk 3:1). Manaen was probably a man of rank and education.

The fact that these three men are mentioned in the same breath as Barnabas and Saul is worthy of note.

Now special privileges will be vouchsafed to this church. It has grown up into Christ, and can now be trusted with an expanded stewardship. The men who were used to stabilize the church Barnabas and Saul, will now be called to another work. The apostles will not need to send new leaders there, for they now have spiritually competent men among them

This by no means suggests they were all equals with Barnabas and Saul. However, they were all members of the same body, and partakers of the same “fulness” (Eph 1:23). The Lord was working through them in accordance with His will, and in the capacity in which He Himself had placed them.

Now special privileges will be vouchsafed to this church. It has grown up into Christ, and can now be trusted with an expanded stewardship. The men who were used to stabilize the church Barnabas and Saul, will now be called to another work. The apostles will not need to send new leaders there, for they now have spiritually competent men among them. We are beholding a real church – one that did not, it appears, require an epistle of correction, like Corinth, Galatia, or five of the seven churches in Asia. There are a few churches in Scripture who were commended. Here are some of them.

- Rome – Rom 1:8
- Ephesus – Eph 1:15
- Philippi – Phil 1:4-5
- Colossae – Col 1:4 ; 2:5
- Thessalonica – 1 Thess 1:8; 2 Thess 1:3
- Smyrna – Rev 2:8
- Philadelphia – Rev 3:7

These were bodies of believers who were living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and were known for their love for the brethren. It is for this reason that they were known outside the circumference of their immediate influence. While there are no list of qualifications for congregations who will be used by God for the execution of His purpose, there are certain indications of the type of people for whom He looks.

- “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way” (Psa 37:23).

- “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him ” (2 Chron 16:9).

- “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word ” (Isa 66:2).

- “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who

concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some . . . If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work ” (2 Tim 2:21).

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

These days, it has become fashionable to speak of certain bodies of people shaking the world for Christ – like a great host of “on-fire youth,” who are going to storm the bastions of wickedness and save souls. It all sounds good – at least to the uninitiated in the Kingdom. However, the issue is really not who is going to step up to the plate and do the work of the Lord. God is really not looking for volunteers. Instead, He is looking for people who are walking within the moral and spiritual boundaries He has established. These will be people who have a working knowledge of His Word – a knowledge that is confirmed by holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord (Heb 12:14). They are a people who do not love the world, and have separated themselves from contaminating influences. In the employment of individuals selected to work together with God, I do not know that it is possible to substantiate that God will use any other kind of people.

Our text is speaking of a body of people who were usable. They could discern both the voice and the will of the Lord. They had brethren among them who had something to say, and had been faithful in carrying out the word of the Lord delivered to them.

It is important that we see these brethren in this light, and that this understanding play a key role in the formation of our concept of the church, which is the body of Christ. Many churches are noted for little more than their size and community involvement – something that has more of an appeal to the flesh than to those living in the Spirit. It is wrong – thoroughly wrong – for any person to allow the impressions of overt sight to determine their estimation of the body of Christ or the work of the Lord. As in all critical matters, the Word of God provides the standard of measure.

AS THEY MINISTERED TO THE LORD AND FASTED

“ 2 As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.”

Here we are exposed to a productive spiritual environment – one in which the Lord calls men into further involvement in His good, and acceptable, and perfect will.

Here we are exposed to a productive spiritual environment – one in which the Lord calls men into further involvement in His good, and acceptable, and perfect will. That context involves the presentation of the body as a living sacrifice to God – a circumstance in which Jesus Christ Himself is perceived as the preeminent Person, and the will of God is seen as the fundamental activity.

AS THEY MINISTERED TO THE LORD

“As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted . . .” Other versions read, “were worshiping the Lord and fasting,” NIV “were doing the Lord's work, and going without food,” BBE “fasting and making supplication to God,” MRD “serving the Lord and fasting,” NET “offering worship to the Lord and keeping a fast,” NJB “doing service to the Lord and fasting,” LITV and “officiating to the Master and fasting.” INTERLINEAR

The word “ministering” is translated from the Greek word **leitourgou,ntwn** (li-toorg-oon-ton). The root meaning of this word is “to do service, to do a work . . . of the priests and Levites who were busied with the sacred rites in the tabernacle or the temple . . . of Christians serving Christ, whether,

by prayer, or by instructing others concerning the way of salvation, or in some other way (Acts 13:2),” THAYER “of a Christian's service to God through prayer, teaching, good works, etc.” FRIEBERG “serve, worship,” UBS “more generally, to serve a master,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “perform a (religious) service Heb 10:11; Tit 1:9 v.l. Ac 13:2.” GINGRICH

The Concept of Ministry or Worship

In Christ, the concepts of “service” and “worship” are blended together in the word “ministry.” It speaks of engaging in activity, or work, sorely because of the Lord – i.e. living unto the Lord. This is marvelously set forth in the apostolic exhortation to present our bodies to God as a “living sacrifice.” “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). Here, the word “service” parallels the activities of the Levitical priests of old. It describes a life that is lived “unto Him who died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). A “living sacrifice” was prefigured by the scape goat and the living bird of the Old Covenant. These were each one half of a sacrifice offered to God. The “scape goat” was allowed to live, while the other goat was killed, and its blood offered to the Lord (Lev 16:8,10,26). The living bird was let go into the air, to fly free, while the other bird was killed, and its blood used in a cleansing ceremony (Lev 14:6,7; 14:51-53).

In the matter of our redemption, Jesus Christ is the sacrifice that was offered, and whose blood was used for cleansing us “from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The resurrected Christ is the living sacrifice that is lived out in the redeemed ones by means of a consecrated and devoted life.

Foreshadowed in the Levitical Priesthood

This kind of life is foreshadowed in the lives of the Levites, who lived solely for the Lord, having no inheritance in the land of Canaan. Their lives were wrapped up in serving in the tabernacle. As it is written, “ But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation , and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they have no inheritance” (Num 18:23-26; Lev 3:12). They were the Lord’s “inheritance,” and were the ones chosen to do the Lord’s work: “The priests the Levites, and all the tribe of Levi, shall have no part nor inheritance with Israel: they shall eat the offerings of the LORD made by fire, and his inheritance” (Deut 18:1). When it came to the matters pertaining to God, they “did the service” of the Lord, (Heb 9:9), and were said to “execute the service of the Lord” (Num 8:11). This was wrapped in the daily “service of the tabernacle” (Num 18:23).

New Covenant Worship and Ministry

In the New Covenant, “worship” is not confined to a specific activity – like singing. It rather speaks of a wholly devoted life that is offered to God in service. This is the concept delivered in the twelfth chapter of Romans. Some versions accent this when rendering the phrase “reasonable service:” “your spiritual service of worship,” NASB “your spiritual; act of worship,” NIV “your spiritual worship,” NRSV “spiritual service,” ASV “the worship it is right for you to give Him,” BBE “This kind of worship is appropriate for you,” GWN “This is truly the way to worship him,” NLT “ your reasonable service (**th.n logikh.n latrei,an u`mw/n**). "Your rational (spiritual) service (worship) , ROBERTSON “This is true worship from you,” IE “this is the reasonable way for you to worship,” ISV and “which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship.” AMPLIFIED

This type of sacrificial life is the foundation upon which edification is accomplished: to bring the people to a point where their entire lives are a service, or ministry, to the Lord. This is the express teaching of the apostle Paul. In his reference to the “gifts” that were given to the church by the ascended and enthroned Christ (Eph 4:8-11), he expounded them by stating the objective for which they were given: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry , for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:12). All of the members of Christ’s body are prefigured by the various

vessels used in the tabernacle service. They were referred to as “the vessels of the ministry,” or “the vessels used in worship.” RSV

A Serious Error of Our Time

What is missed is the fact that ministry to the Lord is, in fact ministry to His people. This is specifically taught in an apostolic word concerning singing. While this is not the only means of ministering to the family of God,

In our time a serious error has surfaced, and it has been the cause of much disruption among professing believers. It is represented by the words “praise and worship,” which are now employed in religious vernacular as though they were actually found in the Bible – which they are not. As it is used in this purely sectarian view, “praise and worship” refers to words that are offered to God, particularly in song, as opposed to a LIFE that has been offered to Him, as in Romans 12:1.

What is missed is the fact that ministry to the Lord is, in fact ministry to His people. This is specifically taught in an apostolic word concerning singing. While this is not the only means of ministering to the family of God, it does serve to illustrate the objective. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord ” (Col 3:16). Ephesians says it this way, “And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit; speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord ” (Eph 5:19).

Jesus Himself made clear ministering to His people was, in fact, a ministry to Him: “And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt 25:40). This kind of action reaches its apex in the focused activities of a godly assembly. It is there that we “admonish one another” (Rom 15:14), teach “one another” (Col 3:16), “comfort one another” (1 Thess 4:18), and “edify one another” (1 Thess 5:11). All of these ministries are, in fact, to the Lord. They involve the strengthening of His body, which is a part of Himself, “of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30).

It is not possible to minister to the Lord while neglecting His people. Conversely, it is not possible to minister to His people without it bearing directly upon Him.

Who Was Ministering, and What Were They Doing?

It is generally understood that the “they” refers to the five prophets and teachers that have been mentioned: Barnabas, Simeon, Lucius, Manaen, and Saul. Because the word translated “ministered” carries the implication of a public service being performed (Thayer, Friberg, Robertson, and Calvin), we understand that they were ministering to the assembly of saints.

The fact that they were “fasting” suggests that this was some form of extended prophesying and teaching. Teaching and prayer, which often are accompanied by fasting (Psa 35:13; Dan 9:3; Matt 17:21; 1 Cor 7:5), were also joined together in apostolic activity. When the early church chose special servants to administer the daily distribution of food, the apostles said, “But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:4). It was a time when they had sacrificed the normalities of life in favor of “meat” that men “know not of.” You may recall that Jesus referred to the time He had spent speaking to the Samaritan woman as one of inner nourishment – nourishment that resulted from declaring the truth (John 4:32).

It is therefore my persuasion that as these men were devoting themselves to feeding the flock of God, using the power they had been given “for edification” (2 Cor 13:6,10) , the Holy Spirit spoke to them.

THE HOLY SPIRIT SAID

“ . . . the Holy Ghost said . . . ” Other versions read, “the Holy Spirit said,” NKJV “the Holy Ghost said to them,” DOUAY “the Holy Spirit said to them,” MRD and “the Holy Spirit spoke to them, saying.” PHILLIPS

All of this suggests that a quest for those who could be used had already been accomplished. The ranging eyes of the Lord had already found two men whose hearts were perfect toward the Lord, and who were ready for service. They were good men, and therefore their steps were being directed by the Lord.

In some way this was revealed directly to them – probably through the prophets. It seems clear that at some point this word was spoken through one of the prophets, in order that all might know. A prophet is noted for speaking as well as for receiving insight, for insight that is not articulated serves no purpose. Therefore it is said of the one who prophesies that he speaks “unto men to edification, exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3). In this case, it would be unto exhortation, moving the people to openly fulfill the will of the Lord.

Jesus once told His disciples that it was the nature of the Holy Spirit to speak through men (Matt 13:11). Such words can be classified as words “which the Holy Spirit teaches” (1 Cor 2:13).

At this point, although Saul had been called to be an apostle, he was not yet fully functioning in that office. Barnabas was the lead person between the two of them, being mentioned first up to this point (Acts 11:30; 12:25; 13:2,7). This being the case, there was no functioning apostle present, yet a directive came to them from the Holy Spirit. Here is an example of the Lord administering His Headship over the church through the operation of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3-11).

SEPARATE ME BARNABAS AND SAUL

“ . . . Separate Me Barnabas and Saul . . . ” Other versions read, “Separate to me,” NKJV “Set apart for Me,” NASB “Let . . . be given to Me,” BBE “Set aside for Me,” CJB “I want . . . set apart,” NJB “Dedicate,” LIVING “Appoint for My service,” IE “Set apart for Me, now at once,” WEYMOUTH and “Separate now for Me.” AMPLIFIED

Notice the imperative nature of this word. The Spirit does not ask Barnabas and Saul if they would like to work for Him. He does not send a word to their peers, inquiring if they thought it well for them to be separated unto the Holy Spirit. There is no free will in this. There is no plea for someone to volunteer. In this matter, the choice has already been made, and those with understanding are told to formalize the choice of the Holy Spirit.

All of this suggests that a quest for those who could be used had already been accomplished. The ranging eyes of the Lord had already found two men whose hearts were perfect toward the Lord, and who were ready for service. They were good men, and therefore their steps were being directed by the Lord.

I find it exceedingly difficult to imagine this kind of thing happening in the churches with which we are familiar. First, it is difficult to conceive of a congregation where men are present who would respond to such a mandate. However, Barnabas and Saul had already separated themselves from the world. They were already wholly devoted to the Lord, and had proved themselves in a solid year of diligent labor among the assembly in Antioch. They were “prepared unto every good work,” and possessed the qualities for which the Lord looks.

CALLED TO A SPECIFIC WORK

“ . . . for the work whereunto I have called them.” Other versions read, “the work to which I have

called,” NKJV “the special work for which they have been marked out by me,” BBE “the work whereunto I have taken them,” DOUAY “a special job I have for them,” LIVING “I have chosen them to do a special work,” IE and “for a task to which I have called them.” PHILLIPS

Here we have a special call to a special work! We will see throughout the book of Acts that the work of the Lord is not always left strictly to men. While Philip did go to Samaria apart from any revealed direction (Acts 8:5), he was especially sent to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26,29). Peter went down to the saints in Lydda (Acts 9:32), but was especially sent to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:19–24). Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, where they remained for “a whole year,” assembling with the church there (Acts 11:25–26). However, now they are called by the Holy Spirit to a special work for which they had been adapted, but concerning which they had not given previous thought.

Religious men often speak of strategies through which they hope to do the work of God. However, it seems to me that the stress ought to be placed on doing what our hands have already found to do, and developing spiritual sensitivity and readiness for Divine employment. It appears to me that these key factors are too often missing. It may very well be that the absence of Divine direction is the explanation for failed works and fruitless labors. At least, that is something to ponder. Holy men were concerned about laboring in vain (2 Cor 9:3; Gal 2:2; 1 4:11; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 3:5). A due concern on the part of the Lord’s laborers will induce them to look for, and be sensitive to, Divine direction.

How Can We Know When the Lord is Directing Us?

As to knowing how a person can be sure God is directing them, there is no canned procedure that can bring such an assurance. It is the peculiar prerogative of faith to produce this kind of awareness. Coupled with the knowledge of God, His Word, and the spiritual maturity they foster, the detection of a Divine calling is possible. The only exception to this rule would be some visible manifestation, such as that vouchsafed to Abraham, Jacob, Joshua, Cornelius, and others.

Under circumstances such as those of our text, when believers are separated to a special work, the call will come within the context of Divine fellowship and involvement in the work of the Lord.

Jesus taught His disciples that spiritual leadership is nothing like the world’s leadership. He told them that the Gentile notion of authority and rule would not be found among them. They would function according to a higher principle

As a general rule, I have found the following considerations helpful.

- The conscious possession of an spiritual aptitude.
- The fervent desire to engage in focused and holy activity.
- The unquestionable opportunity to engage in the activity for which one has an aptitude and desire.

When these three things are experienced simultaneously, it appears to me that a person is being called into the activity. All of this presupposes fellowship with Christ, holiness, and consistent involvement in the will of God. Where these factors are missing, no time is to be spent speculating about a call.

A Word of Caution

Natural aptitude and an outgoing personality are not indications that one is suited for Divine employment. Often people will assess such an individual as someone who should be a preacher, or one who assumes some form of spiritual leadership. However, this is not the criterion that fits a person for the work of the Lord. A person, for example, who is an excellent business manager and organizer might prove to be a miserable Kingdom worker. Herod was such a person. A person who has a way

with words, and can move people with them, might be the worst of all preachers. Hitler was such a person. The man who can lead great bodies of people, and marshal them for a certain cause may be altogether passed over by God. Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar were such men.

Jesus taught His disciples that spiritual leadership is nothing like the world's leadership. He told them that the Gentile notion of authority and rule would not be found among them. They would function according to a higher principle (Mark 10:42-45). Spiritual leadership has to do with serving – with discerning those with spiritual capacities, and, through edification and encouragement, enabling them to fill the role for which God has suited them. That is what Jesus did with His apostles.

THEY SENT THEM AWAY

“ 3 And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.”

The apparent response of the brethren to whom this word was delivered, was immediate. Their hearts and minds had been cultured to recognize not only the truth, but the direction Author of it as well. I have frequently heard self-acclaimed spiritual leaders quote Solomon in their effort to teach the people: “in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14; 24:6). And again, “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Prov 15:22). However, that does not apply in the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. On one occasion, many counselors advised Paul not to go to Jerusalem (Acts 21:12). However, Paul ignored their counsel, choosing to go to Jerusalem anyway. When the brethren saw his determination, they wisely said, “The will of the Lord be done” (Acts 21:13-14).

The only time counselors have any value is when the will of the Lord is not known – and even then, they are required to be godly. Even then, those who have access to God ought to first make inquiry of Him. There is far too much worldly wisdom being carried about and perpetrated within the professed church. We certainly need no more of it.

The point to be seen here is that these men recognized the validity of the call of the Spirit, and set out immediately to obey it. It goes without saying that there was no question concerning the abilities or commitment of Barnabas and Saul. They had demonstrated their devotion to the Lord among the saints, and their comprehension of the will of the Lord was unquestionable.

AND WHEN THEY HAD FASTED AND PRAYED

“And when they had fasted and prayed . . .” Other versions read, “having fasted and prayed,” NKJV “after they had fasted and prayed,” NIV “after prayer and going without food,” BBE “completing their fasting and prayer,” NAB “after more fasting and prayer,” NLT “the congregation fasted and prayed,” IE “after further fasting and prayer,” PHILLIPS and “Everyone prayed and went without eating for a while longer.” CEV

Some of the versions of Scripture introduce confusion into the text by putting their interpretation into it. One such misrepresentation is that the men in question continued on with the praying and fasting in which they were already engaged (NAB, CEV).

Consecration, dedication, and separation do have a certain formality embedded in them. In this the attention of the people is drawn toward the work at hand – a work set in motion by the Lord. The gravity of the situation is seen, and everything associated with the work is identified with the Lord who ordained it.

This season of fasting and prayer was in response to the Spirit's command to “separate” Barnabas and Saul to the work to which He had called them. This time was like a line of demarcation in the history of the church. It represented a special initiative toward the Gentile world, and introduces a

new thrust in the book of Acts. Through these two men, “the door of faith” would be opened to the Gentiles (Acts 14:27).

I see no reason to doubt the general consensus of godly men who have considered this text to be referring to a special period of time set aside for the separation of Barnabas and Saul to the work for which the Spirit had called them. We do not know the length of the period given to prayer and fasting. I assume that it was not a lengthy period, for the will of the Lord had already been revealed to them. This was the means through which they prepared themselves for joining in the work by undergirding it and seeking grace to help in the time of need. Others also made a practice of recommending, or committing, people “to the grace of God” (Acts 14:26; 15:40).

More Than A Mere Formality

The occasion was more than a mere formality, although it was certainly associated with formality. Consecration, dedication, and separation do have a certain formality embedded in them. In this the attention of the people is drawn toward the work at hand – a work set in motion by the Lord. The gravity of the situation is seen, and everything associated with the work is identified with the Lord who ordained it. I do not doubt that they asked the Lord to provide everything that was required for the mission of the Spirit to be fulfilled. It is certainly not the manner of the Kingdom to take such provisions for granted. Even our blessed Lord spent the night in prayer before He chose His twelve apostles. As it is written, “And it came to pass in those days, that He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called unto him his disciples: and of them He chose twelve, whom also He named apostles” (Luke 6:12-13).

Prefigured in The Tabernacle

Of old time, when Moses prepared the Tabernacle for use, he first sanctified all of the vessels that were to be used in its service. “And Moses took the anointing oil, and anointed the tabernacle and all that was therein, and sanctified them” (Lev 8:10). And again, “And it came to pass on the day that Moses had fully set up the tabernacle, and had anointed it, and sanctified it, and all the instruments thereof, both the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them, and sanctified them” (Num 7:1).

Further, God revealed to Moses that He had sanctified Aaron and his sons to minister to Him in the priest’s office: “And I will sanctify the tabernacle of the congregation, and the altar: I will sanctify also both Aaron and his sons, to minister to me in the priest’s office” (Ex 29:44). In a rather elaborate ceremony (Ex 29:1-44), Moses set Aaron and his sons apart to this ministry. During that ceremony Moses was commanded to “take of the blood that is upon the altar, and of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon the garments of his sons with him: and he shall be hallowed, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons’ garments with him” (Ex 29:21).

Moses was brought to a keen realization of the gravity of anything or anyone set apart to the service of God. Among the Jews, this recognition was fostered and developed.

- High priests were anointed (Num 35:25).
- Priests were anointed (Lev 4:3).
- Kings were anointed (Judges 9:8; 1 Sam 15:1; 2 Sam 2:4; 1 Kgs 1:39).
- Prophets were anointed (1 Kgs 19:16).

In a day of religious professionalism, there appears to be little awareness of the seriousness of being called into Divine service. These days it is not uncommon for men to be set apart by colleges, seminaries, and certificates. This text is in sharp contrast with actions fostered by such an impersonal

view of things.

AND LAID THEIR HANDS ON THEM

“ . . . and laid their hands on them . . .” Other versions read, “laid hands on them,” NKJV “placed their hands on them,” NIV “imposing their hands upon them,” DOUAY “Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul,” GWN “put their hands on them,” TNT and “and the laying on of hands.” WEYMOUTH

Sanctity

There is a certain sanctity and solemnity associated with “pure religion.” These qualities assist in freeing us from the dreaded effects of casualness and normality. There is something about informality and casualness that tend to erode spiritual sensitivity. If not carefully guarded, they are like doors through which carnality can enter.

We assume that Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen placed their hands on Barnabas and Saul, setting them apart for the work to which the Spirit had called them. In a sense, they were the lesser, for it was Barnabas and Saul who had taught them, and nurtured them in the Lord. Yet here we find an example of a principle Jesus declared: “But many that are first shall be last; and the last first” (Mark 10:31). That is a broad principle that is applied to many circumstances. Later Paul will say of the apostles, “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Cor 4:9). Yet, in reality, God has placed them, “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28).

So it is in our text, that those whom the Spirit had chosen for a special work were set apart by those who were not engaged directly in that mission. However, you will find no objections being registered by Barnabas and Saul. They do not ask for the church to send for the apostles to set them apart. Saul might well have recalled how he himself had been set apart to the apostleship by “a certain disciple” named Ananias (Acts 9:10-18). Now, in a spiritually formal setting, he is being readied to launch into his apostolic work by the laying on of the hands of certain prophets in Antioch, who were not themselves apostles.

Timothy was also set apart, receiving a spiritual gift “by prophecy, and by the laying on hands of the presbytery” (1 Tim 4:14).

The “laying on of hands” is one of the elemental principles of “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:2).

- Jesus laid His hands on little children and blessed them (Matt 19:13,15).
- Jesus was noted for laying hands on some He healed or raised from the dead (Mk 5:23; Matt 9:18).
- Jesus laid His hands on some who were sick and healed them (Mk 6:5).
- Paul laid hands on the Publius and healed him (Acts 28:8).
- Men were ordained to holy work by the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6; 1 Tim 5:22).
- The apostles, on occasion, imparted the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17,19; 19:6).

What is it that is common in all of these reports concerning the laying on of hands? It is this: that the benefit realized came from outside of the efforts of the individual themselves. Whether it was the sick, the dead, or the ones set apart for a particular office or work, they were parties who were acted upon.

I have never been satisfied with the standard commentaries on this subject. They seem to leave us with nothing more than a knowledge of the various occasions during which the laying on of hands took place. I have already mentioned the ones having to do with the time from Jesus forward. What is it that is common in all of these reports concerning the laying on of hands? It is this: that the benefit realized came from outside of the efforts of the individual themselves. Whether it was the sick, the dead, or the ones set apart for a particular office or work, they were parties who were acted upon .

No person of understanding will affirm that such a procedure has become obsolete – any more than baptism, faith toward God, repentance from dead works, etc. have been rendered out-of-date. However, spiritual maturity involves personally taking hold of the things of God, not always relying on another party bringing about the needed change. The laying on of hands has to do with initiating a work, not completing it. However, those in whom a work is begun are to “go on to perfection,” entering into the work, and growing up into Christ in all things. In this way, they are not lingering in the vestibule where the laying on of hands takes place.

Formalities Under the Law

Under the Law, God taught people about holy preparation. At Sinai, the Lord instructed Moses to tell the people to prepare themselves for the giving of the Law by washing their clothes (Ex 19:10). Men were admonished “do not come near your wives” NKJV (Ex 19:15).

Before entering into Canaan, when the blessings and cursings of the Law were read to the people, it was a formal occasion. Simeon, and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Joseph, and Benjamin stood on Mount Gerizim (Deut 27:12). Reuben, Gad, and Asher, and Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali stood on Mount Ebal (Deut 27:13). While they were there, the Levites solemnly read all of the blessings and cursing “with a loud voice.” All of the people were commanded to “answer, and say Amen” (Deut 27:14-15). There was certainly nothing casual about that occasion!

During the time of Nehemiah, the solemnity of holy occasions was restored after a long period of captivity. On a specific day, “the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers.” During that occasion the Levites “read in the book of the Law of the Lord their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed and worshiped the Lord

This being the case, it appears to me that the approaching “day” is actually the first day of the week, during which we enjoy communion with the body and blood of the Lord, and teach and admonish one another.

their God ” (Neh 9:1-3).

These occasions will suffice to illustrate how holy and sensitive people approached special words and special occasions. They would first free themselves from the formalities of life, then concentrate on the subject at hand.

Under the New Covenant

Under the New Covenant, holy preparations are elevated and intensified. The people are exhorted “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13). When they “come together,” they are to see to it that it is “for the better” and not “for the worse” (1 Cor 11:17). Paul spoke of an assembly, when “the whole church be come together into one place,” at which time they would “all prophesy” (1 Cor 14:23). In such an environment, no unintelligible utterances were permitted unless they had been interpreted (1 Cor 14:26). He allowed for no carnal disruption (1 Cor 14:34). It was an environment in which things could be revealed to key people (1 Cor 14:30), and where prophets were to speak

“one by one,” with no more than two or three speaking, while the other prophets “judged” what they said (1 Cor 14:29-31). I do not know how such things could possibly be accomplished in a casual atmosphere.

While no person of faith is inclined to mandate rules or decorum for the assembly of the righteous, it seems to me that it is more than appropriate for people to ready themselves for such occasions. It is a great disadvantage to venture unprepared into the assembly of the righteous. This is one of the reasons for the exhortation, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb 10:24-25). There have been a variety of views concerning “the day approaching” – which day is that? Some have considered it to be the second coming of Christ. Others have thought it so be the destruction of Jerusalem, which was imminent at the writing the epistle to the Hebrews. Still others consider it to be the day of death or the day of judgment.

However, none of these seem to fit well into the text, and appear to me to be forced interpretations. The reason for the exhortation is given in verse twenty-six: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins” (Heb 10:26). That is an ongoing jeopardy, as long as we are in the body. In view of this statement, it seems to me that the point of the exhortation is avail ourselves of the means through which we are brought to spiritual maturity. According apostolic doctrine, this is accomplished through the body of Christ, through which the Head ministers through various members. This being the case, it appears to me that the approaching “day” is actually the first day of the week, during which we enjoy communion with the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 10:16), and teach and admonish one another (Col 3:16). As that day approaches, it is in order to exhort one another to avail ourselves of the appointed advantages of that day.

THEY SENT THEM AWAY

“ . . . they sent them away.” Other versions read, “sent them off,” NIV “Sent them on their way,” NLT “let them go,” PNT “sent them out,” WEYMOUTH and “Set them free for this work.” PHILLIPS

That is, they sent Barnabas and Saul away to do the work to which the Spirit had called them. They recognized that these unusual men were not merely leaving them, but were going out to do the work of the Lord. This work was not defined by them, but by the Holy Spirit. In this case, it was not a burden that had been especially placed upon them, or upon which they had given considerable thought. This mission was a revelation.

THEY DEPARTED, BEING SENT FORTH BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ 4 So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”

The specific directions of the Spirit for this mission are not revealed to us – although they doubtless were the two. In some way Barnabas and Saul knew where to go, and thus they left Antioch, and set out to do the work for which they had been separated.

BEING SENT FORTH BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

“So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “being sent out by the Holy Spirit,” NKJV “Sent on their way by the Holy Spirit,” NIV “sent on their mission by the Holy Spirit,” NJB “directed by the Holy Spirit,” LIVING and “sent at the Holy Spirit’s command.” PHILLIPS

The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the body of Christ must not be understated. He is the One through whom the Head of the body directs its members. Thus far in the book of Acts attention has been drawn to His prodigious work.

- Prior to His ascension, Jesus gave commandments to the apostles through the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:2).
- Jesus said the disciples would receive power after the Holy Spirit had come upon them (Acts 1:8).
- The Spirit filled the disciples on the day of Pentecost, enabling them to speak the wonderful works of God in languages they had not learned (Acts 2:4,11).
- Those calling upon the name of the Lord were told that, upon their repentance and baptism, they would receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).
- The Spirit filled Peter, empowering him to respond powerfully and insightfully to the Jewish council (Acts 4:8).
- When the disciples assembled and prayed for power, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness (Acts 4:31).
- When Peter rebuked Ananias for misrepresenting the gift he had given, he said he had lied to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3).
- When Peter rebuked Sapphira for her role in the deception, he said she had tempted the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:9).
- Peter declared that God gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32).
- Those who were chosen to administer the food distribution were required to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom (Acts 6:3).
- Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 6:5).
- Stephen charged the unbelieving Jews with resisting the Holy Spirit (Acts 7:51).
- When Stephen was dying, he was full of the Holy Spirit, and saw heaven opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:55).
- Peter and John were sent to Samaria to ensure that the believers received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15-17).
- The Holy Spirit directed Philip to join himself to the chariot in which the eunuch was riding (Acts 8:29).
- The Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away following the baptism of the eunuch (Acts 8:39).
- Ananias came to Saul of Tarsus in order that he might be filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17).

These are records of the real church – the one that Jesus is building. As you can see, the Holy Spirit was prominent in the work from the very beginning. In view of these things, it is exceedingly difficult to understand why so little sound teaching is being given to the church

- The Holy Spirit comforted the churches in Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (Acts 9:31).
- The Holy Spirit directed Peter to go with the men sent to him by Cornelius (Acts 10:19; 11:12).
- The Holy Spirit fell on those in Cornelius house while Peter was preaching (Acts 10:44; 11:15).

- Peter declared that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out upon the Gentiles (Acts 10:16).
- Barnabas is described as a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith (Acts 11:24).
- The Holy Spirit moved Agabus to speak of a coming famine (Acts 11:26).
- The Holy Spirit commanded the brethren in Antioch to separate Barnabas and Saul for the work to which He had appointed them (Acts 13:2,4).

These are records of the real church – the one that Jesus is building. As you can see, the Holy Spirit was prominent in the work from the very beginning. In view of these things, it is exceedingly difficult to understand why so little sound teaching is being given to the church these days concerning the Holy Spirit. He is still prominent in spiritual life. That is precisely why we are warned not to quench or grieve Him (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19).

Ponder what the Spirit of God is represented as doing in those who are in Christ Jesus.

- The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5).
- Spiritual mindedness consists of minding the things of the Spirit (Rom 8:1,4).
- If a person does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His (Rom 8:9).
- We mortify the deeds of the body through the Spirit (Rom 8:13).
- We are led by the Spirit (Rom 8:14; Gal 5:18).
- The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God (Rom 8:16).
- The Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we do not know what we should pray for (Rom 8:26-27).
- We have joy through the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).
- We abound in hope through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:13).
- The offering up of the Gentiles was sanctified by the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:16).
- Collective believers are the temple of God, and the Holy Spirit dwells in them (1 Cor 3:16).
- We are washed, sanctified, and justified by the Spirit (1 Cor 6:11).
- Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19).
- We say that Jesus is the Lord by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:3).
- Spiritual gifts are given by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:8-11).
- The Holy Spirit has been given to us as an earnest of what is to come (2 Cor 1:22).
- Believers are the epistle of Christ, written with the Spirit of the living God (2 Cor 3:3).
- Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty (2 Cor 3:17).
- We are changed from one stage of glory to another by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- Spiritual life includes the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14).
- Because we are His sons, God has sent the Holy Spirit into our hearts (Gal 4:6).
- Through the Spirit we are waiting for the hope of righteousness (Gal 5:5).
- The Holy Spirit produces fruit in believers (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9).

- It is through the Spirit that we will reap eternal life (Gal 6:8).
- The Holy Spirit lusts against the flesh (Gal 5:17).
- We have access to the Father by the Spirit (Eph 2:18).
- We are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph 2:22).
- We are strengthened by the Holy Spirit in the inner man, so Christ can dwell in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:16).
- The Holy Spirit is the author of unity (Eph 4:3).
- Believers are admonished to be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18).
- The Word of God is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17).
- Prayer and supplication are made in the Spirit (Eph 6:18).
- Our fellowship is in the Spirit (Phil 2:1),
- Our love for one another is in the Spirit (Col 1:8).
- God chooses men to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth (2 Thess 2:13).
- The things that have been given to us are kept by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14).
- God saves us by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5).
- We obey the truth through the Spirit (1 Pet 1:22).
- We build ourselves up in the most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 1:20).

Not A Strange Thing

As ought to be abundantly apparent, the history recorded in the book of Acts perfectly accords with the declarations of the prophets, the promises of Jesus, and apostolic doctrine. It should not sound strange when we read of the Holy Spirit calling for people to do a work, and then sending them forth through the instrumentality of men.

By yielding to the Spirit, the brethren entered into the work of the Lord: the prophets by setting them apart, and Barnabas and Saul by submitting to His leadership.

A professed church in which the Holy Spirit is not active is really no church at all. I do not know that it can be established that a body of people in whom, over an extended period of time, little or no evidence is found of the Lord's presence can be appropriately called a "church." The degree of His activity is determined by the faith of the people – and the faith of the people is dependent upon the declaration of the Gospel through, which faith comes (Rom 10:17) and is sustained (Rom 16:26) . The implications of these realities are quite alarming.

THEY DEPARTED . . . AND SAILED

“ . . . departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus.”

Seleucia was located close to Antioch, and was a seaport city from which Barnabas and Saul could disembark. The text indicates that their departure took place within a short period of time, and with no extensive delays.

In this book, there is a consistent pattern of behavior seen in the responses of believers. As soon as the will of God was clear, those with faith acted upon that revelation. The insensitivity, obtuseness, and delays to which contemporary Christians have grown accustomed, are not found in this inspired

record of God working among His people. Obedience was the norm, and disobedience was the exception. Eagerness to do the will of God was the standard, and a lack of such avidness was unusual.

Thus, with holy dispatch, Barnabas and Saul set out for the island of Cyprus, approximately 150 miles from Antioch.

THEY PREACHED IN THE SYNAGOGUES

“ 5 And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.”

As you read this text you sense the presence of holy confidence. These two men do not grope about, attempting to determine what they ought to do. They get to the work of the Lord as soon as they arrive on Cyprus, making no delay.

SALAMIS

“And when they were at Salamis . . .” Other versions read, “arrived in Salamis,” NKJV “reached Salamis,” NASB “after landing in Salamis,” CJB “being in Salamis,” DARBY “when they were come to Salamis,” DOUAY “arriving in the city of Salamis,” NAB and “having come into Salamis.” YLT

As you read this text you sense the presence of holy confidence. These two men do not grope about, attempting to determine what they ought to do. They get to the work of the Lord as soon as they arrive on Cyprus, making no delay.

This was a city at the east end of Cyprus, and was apparently the sea port receiving the vessel on which Barnabas and Saul sailed. Cyprus was also the native country of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). Certain who had been scattered by “the persecution that arose about Stephen” had also been here, and preached the Word of God, doing so only to the Jews (Acts 11:19-20). History attests that there was a large Jewish constituency on this Island. This was a city of significant size, and was the place where great copper mines were located, and from which copper was sent to Herod the Great. McClintok-Strong’s

THEY PREACHED THE WORD OF GOD

“ . . . they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews . . .” Other versions read, “they began to proclaim,” NASB “they proclaimed,” NIV “They announced,” DARBY “began to spread,” GWN “they showed,” TNT and “they declared.” YLT

The Greek word translated “preached” is a significant one: **kath,ggellon** (kat-ang-gel-lov). The lexical definition of the word is, “to announce, declare, promulgate, make known; to proclaim publicly, publish,” THAYER “proclaim (solemnly), announce something (AC 4.2); (2) proclaim, tell about someone,” FRIBERG and “proclaim, make known, preach; teach, advocate.” UBS This word is used several times in Scripture. Here are some samples. The English word derived from this expression is highlighted.

- “ . . . they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. (Acts 4:2).
- “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins” (Acts 13:38).
- “Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3).
- “For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription,

TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you” (Acts 17:23).

- “That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23).

- “First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8).

- “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel” (1 Cor 9:14).

- “For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come” (1 Cor 11:26).

- “Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus” (Col 1:28).

The distinction in this word is found in the fact that it deals with the announcement, or proclamation, of existing realities – not something that can be, or ought to be, but IS! This is what might be called objective reality. It is not the proclamation of possibilities or probabilities, but of fixed and unwavering realities.

Barnabas and Saul were busy reporting “the wonderful works of God,” as did the disciples on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11). They did not bring a message of earthly solutions, but one of eternal relevance. Whether men were going to die on the day they heard their message, or live on for another hundred years, the message was still relevant. Whether they were experiencing domestic difficulties, or were experiencing domestic joy and tranquility, the message being delivered was critical, and was to be received.

The Gospel addresses the human circumstance as assessed by the Lord Himself, and needs no philosophical elaboration. The condition is appraised in no uncertain words. Here are some statements of the human situation.

- Men are in blind to spiritual realities (Acts 26:18a).
- Men are in moral and spiritual darkness (Acts 26:18b).
- Men are dominated by the power of Satan (Acts 26:18c).
- Men need the forgiveness of sins (Acts 26:18d).
- Men are dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).
- Men are alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them (Eph 4:18).
- Men are without God and without hope in the world (Eph 2:12).

Any ministry to lost men that ignores this situation, or presents some other scenario, is off-center, and will ultimately lead away from Christ. This is why there is such a thing as preaching, announcing, or proclaiming. That is delivering a word that has been mandated by God. It is a report of the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). The Holy Spirit did not separate Barnabas and Saul to give advice, deliver counsel, or resolve social and domestic dilemmas. They were not marital counselors or financial advisors. They were sent to proclaim a message that was encapsulated in the Person of Jesus.

It appears to me that the burden of modern day representations of preaching are largely pragmatic – i.e. dealing with practical matters or affairs rather than facts. Jesus is being presented a solution to temporal circumstances, rather than the Son of God who has accomplished the will of God. Listening

to some of the preaching of our day, one senses that the speaker really does not have anything to say – no message to proclaim. Preachers are rather being presented as diagnosticians who are marketing practical resolutions to every-day problems. Among them are gurus of marriage, finance, child-rearing, career development, church planting, missions, and the likes. Apart from the difficulties and vicissitudes of life, they really do not have much to say. If the people were actually to avail themselves of the salvation of God, and grow up into Christ, such men would have nothing left to do. Whatever may be said in defense of such activity, this is not the kind of thing that is reported in Scripture. When holy men of God dealt with problems and difficulties within the church, it was always because they impinged upon one's relationship with God through Christ. In our day, that relationship is taken for granted, and difficulties are being addressed as though their resolution was an end of themselves. If, in fact, there really was no heaven and no hell, these teachers would not need to change their message. They could continue on without any interruption.

The Synagogues

This is the second city that is declared to have had multiple synagogues – the city of Damascus being the other one (Acts 9:2,20). The presence of a multiplicity of synagogues suggests there was a large contingency of Jews in Salamis.

It is of interest that Jesus, the apostles, and other Divinely called preachers, consistently went into the synagogues to preach (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; Lk 4:15; 13:10; Acts 9:20; 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1-2,10,17; 18:4,19,26; 19:8). Following Jesus' enthronement in glory, the Gospel consistently went "to the Jew first" (Rom 1:16). Following that, there was also a presentation to "devout" people, who evidenced some propensity toward God (i.g. Acts 8:27; 10:2; 17:4,17).

My intention is not to codify the approach to preaching the Gospel. Rather, I only intend to show the manner in which Holy-Spirit-led preaching was carried out – and it is fairly consistent.

Current Evangelical Weaknesses

These days, we are faced with evangelical thrusts that come short of the objectives God has revealed. Such things as youth ministries, children's ministries, ministries to those enslaved to various forms of sin, and ministries to the poor and downtrodden, are certainly not wrong. However, they do have a down-side: namely that they tend to be circular in their results. That is, as new converts are made, old ones drop through the floor of neglect. The end result is that the purported minister never gets to the feeding and nurturing level. This is largely owing to the perpetual influx of those with little or no former commitment to the appropriation of the knowledge of God. The result is that co-laborers from among the ranks of those who are the focus of the ministry rarely occur. For this reason, continual calls to believers in other areas are made to come and assist in the work. Some ministries of this kind have continued in this mode for decades, and they are still viewed as a kind of normal and legitimate Kingdom activity.

However, in the book of Acts you will not find this kind of circumstance. Fellow laborers came from the ranks of the converts, whether in Jerusalem or other regions. The first reported laborers came from those who walked with Jesus during His prodigious ministry. The first official servants, appointed over the daily distribution of food, came from the Jerusalem church itself. In our text, those who were sent out were among the brethren in Antioch at that time. John Mark, who also attended Barnabas and Saul, was from the Jerusalem congregation. Barnabas was as well. Timothy was garnered from the brethren in Lystra and Iconium. The church at Jerusalem had "chief men" among them with Paul and Barnabas. Silas was one of them (Acts 15:22). Onesimus and Epaphras, productive laborers for the Lord, came from the Colossian church (Col 4:9,12). These, and similar, people were not hired by the church, but were produced by it!

The point here is that a Christian work or church that is not producing competent proclaimers

and leaders is a kind of spiritual aberration. There may be a lot of people associated with such a group, as well as an impressive outlay of finances for others. However, if competent and informed brethren are not being developed, something is seriously wrong.

The point here is that a Christian work or church that is not producing competent proclaimers and leaders is a kind of spiritual aberration. There may be a lot of people associated with such a group, as well as an impressive outlay of finances for others. However, if competent and informed brethren are not being developed, something is seriously wrong. The Word of God itself is designed to make the man of God “perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17). No amount of religious activity can compensate for the lack of such results.

As I perceive the situation, it is an understanding of these things that compelled the early preachers and teachers to conduct their minister as they did. Should a contemporary situation arise where the Lord opens doors of opportunity to labor in His Kingdom, it is the business of the church to be ready send forth the required workers. It is to be understood that they must have a thorough acquaintance with the Word of God, and possess an understanding of the purpose of God, and of God Himself.

What we are reading in this text is a sterling example of that kind of thing taking place.

THEY HAD ALSO JOHN AS THEIR MINISTER

“ . . . and they had also John to their minister.” Other versions read, “as their assistant,” NKJV “as their helper,” NASB “to assist them,” NRSV “as their attendant,” ASV “an attendant to assist them,” AMPLIFIED and “subservant,” INTERLINEAR

The word “minister” is translated from a unique Greek word: **u`phre,thn** (hoop-ay-ret-ain). The lexical meaning of the word is “an under rower, subordinate rower. b. anyone who serves with his hands; a servant,” THAYER and “one who acts under orders of another to carry out his will, assistant, helper.” FRIBERG As used in Scripture this kind of servant is carrying out the will of another – being employed as a servant of someone with greater authority, insight, and commission than themselves. Such service could range from menial, but necessary tasks, such as transporting goods and possessions, to delivering a word from the one they were serving, and sharing in some of the lesser responsibilities.

In the United States, we are not accustomed to such a role being played by the younger. However, this is a custom that still prevails in the eastern countries. As a point of interest, that is the part of the world in which every known Divine initiative took place. Samples include the following.

- The Garden of Eden.
- Noah, and the repopulation of the earth.
- The calling of Abraham.
- The establishment of the Jewish nation.
- The giving of the Law.
- The giving of the holy land to Israel.
- The ministry of the Prophets.
- The ministry of John the Baptist.
- The entrance of Jesus into the world, His ministry, His death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.
- The calling and commissioning of the apostles.
- The initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

- The establishment of the church.
- The inclusion of the Gentiles in the salvation of God.
- The calling of Paul the apostle.
- The launching of a Gospel initiative into all the world.

Awareness of this manner of Divine workings casts a different light on the manners and customs of people living in that part of the world. While this is not something of which an issue should be made, consider the following. It is possible that many of the unique customs of that part of the world are owing to the impact of Divine workings. Also, I do not know how an intelligent grasp of Jesus as the “Servant” of God (Isa 42:1; 49:6; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11) can be obtained within the framework of our culture,

Mark, the Servant

As the servant of Barnabas and Saul, John Mark was exposed to the focus and demeanor of godly workers. He witnessed their priorities, the sacrificial nature of their lives, and what is involved in serving the Lord. He was made privy to spiritual maturity, and no doubt felt a tug upward, while beholding the distance that existed between the world and those who are aligned with the God of heaven.

Specialized ministries that surround the immature with their peers forfeit all of these advantages. Furthermore, when the objective of any proposed ministry is to entertain, feed worldly interests, and the likes whatever is being served, it is not the revealed will of God. I realize this is not a popular view, but it is appropriate to draw our attention to these things.

A FALSE PROPHET IS ENCOUNTERED

“ 6 And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: 7 Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.”

Barnabas and Saul assaulted the Island of Cyprus, blitzing it with the Gospel, and with apparent aggressiveness. They had set out to do the work to which the Holy Spirit Himself had called them, and they were doing it with zeal.

THROUGH THE ISLE TO PAPHOS

“ And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos . . .” Other versions read, “gone through the whole island as far as Paphos,” NASB “traveled through the whole island until they came to Paphos,” NIV “made their way throughout the whole island. They ended up in Paphos,” CJB “They traveled the whole length of the island, and at Paphos,” NJB and “they preached from town to town across the entire island until finally they reached Paphos.” LIVING

This island was 140 miles long, and from 5-50 miles wide, the narrow width being on the east side.

This island was noted for its rich timber and other resources, and was a shipbuilding capital. It was a kind of crossroads for many merchants, which meant that any penetration by the Gospel would yield exponential results. “Its proximity to Asia Minor, Phoenicia, and Egypt, and its numerous havens, made it a general rendezvous for merchants . . . Among the mineral products were diamonds, emeralds, and other precious stones, alum, and asbestos; besides iron, lead, zinc, with a portion of silver, and, above all, copper, the farfamed *oes Cyprium* .” McCLINTOK STRONG’S

At that time, there were approximately 100 towns and villages on the island – at least fifty of them

being port cities. The text suggest tat Barnabas and Saul began at the east side of the island and worked their way through all of the cities, preaching the Word until they reached the far western port city of Paphos.

“At this time Cyprus was in a state of considerable prosperity; it possessed good roads, especially one running from east to west through the whole length of the island, from Salamis to Paphos, along which Paul and Barnabas traveled; an extensive commerce, and it was the resort of pilgrims to the Paphian shrine from all parts of the world (Fairbairn).” McCLINTOK STRONG’S

The aggressiveness and thoroughness of Barnabas and Saul are arresting to consider. As was also characteristic of Paul throughout his life, they threw themselves wholeheartedly into to the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them. This as the grace of God working in them (1 Cor 15:10). From another point of view, it was Jesus Christ Himself living in them (Gal 2:20), just as He did when He walked among men, being seen of them. This is a consistent trait among those who have yielded their bodies to God as a living sacrifice.

THEY FOUND A CERTAIN SORCERER

“ . . . they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar jesus . . .” Other versions read, “a certain magician, a Jewish false prophet,” NASB “a certain wonder-worker and false prophet, a Jew,” BBE “a Jewish sorcerer and pseudo-prophet,” CJB “a Jewish man. . . an astrologer who claimed to be a prophet,” GWN “a Jewish sorcerer, a fake prophet,” LIVING “a Jewish man who did tricks of magic,” IE “a Jewish occult practitioner and false prophet,” ISV and “a certain Jewish wizard or sorcerer, a false prophet.” AMPLIFIED

Sorcery was practiced by the Egyptians (Ex 7:11) and the Chaldeans (Dan 2:2). It was an occultic practice that employed unlawful means to obtain knowledge. It was soundly condemned under the Old Covenant (Jer 27:9). Sorcerers are identified as having a part in “the lake the burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev 21:8). God had declared He will come against sorcerers (Mal 3:5), and that they are forever outside, and excluded from, the city of God (Rev 22:15). This sin is associated with divination, which is “a general term descriptive of the various illusory arts anciently practiced for the discovery of things secret or future.” McCLINTOK-STRONG’S This involved a Satanic means of obtaining knowledge and understanding, and was soundly condemned by the Lord. “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee” (Deut 18:10-12).

I do understand that there is a notion afoot in the Christian community that views all such transgressions as nothing more than imaginations and tricks – like our modern magicians. While some of that may be involved, this is not always the case. It is difficult to conceive of God condemning something that really did not exist. The Lord did speak of communications from the dead, and of their unlawfulness. “And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead?” (Isa 8:19). This should not surprise us, for we are expressly taught that there are doctrines that are perpetrated by demons (1 Tim 4:1).

At any rate, we are here introduced to a man that trafficked in knowledge, but it was not lawful knowledge.

A Spiritual Invasion

It is evident that Barnabas and Saul had invaded a territory over which the powers of darkness were

exercising considerable power. Just as Philip, Peter, and John encountered an aggressive worker of occultic arts, so Barnabas and Saul confront one. In the first instance, the “sorcerer” had bewitched the people of Samaria, exercising great influence (Acts 8:9). Now another of these men, also a false prophet and a Jew, is confronted by Barnabas and Saul. Note that the text says they “found” the sorcerer. That does not mean they were looking for him. Rather, it means that in the process of their preaching, while they were proclaiming the Word, this man surfaced.

No person should be surprised that Satan’s ministers surface when the truth is being preached. Truth is always a threat to the kingdom of darkness.

WHICH WAS WITH THE DEPUTY

“ . . . which was with the deputy of the country . . .” Other versions read, “who was with the proconsul,” NKJV “who was an attendant of the proconsul,” NIV “who was with the ruler,” BBE “he had attached himself to the governor,” CJB “associated with . . . the governor of the island,” GWN “adhered to . . . the proconsul,” MRD “which was with . . . the ruler of the country,” TNT “always stayed close to . . . the governor,” IE “was a friend of the proconsul,” WEYMOUTH “an intimate friend of the governor,” WILLIAMS “belong to the suite of the proconsul,” MONTGOMERY and “was closely associated with the proconsul.” AMPLIFIED

Some versions suggest that this man imposed himself upon the “deputy” – “attached himself to.” CJB Others leave the impression that this was a personal association – “a friend,” WEYMOUTH and “an intimate friend.” WILLIAMS The word from which “with” is translated is used in a variety of ways: denoting togetherness, inner agreement, close association, and someone who attends another. THAYER/FRIBERG In this text, I am assuming the sorcerer was in an official capacity, in some way being an advisor to the “deputy.”

The word translated “deputy” denotes a head of government in a Roman senatorial province, FRIBERG that is, a province under the control of the Roman Senate. LOUW-NIDA This man was, therefore, the key governmental authority on the island of Paphos.

SERGIUS PAULUS, A PRUDENT MAN

“ . . . Sergius Paulus, a prudent man . . .” Other versions read, “an intelligent man,” NKJV “a man of intelligence,” NASB “a man of understanding,” ASV “a wise man,” MRD “an extremely intelligent man,” NJB “a man of keen intelligence,” WEYMOUTH and “an intelligent and sensible man of sound understanding.” AMPLIFIED

Those who drift away from God do so in their minds. Those in Christ are noted for the way in which they think: “the law of my mind.” The one who is living by faith confesses, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God.” There is such a thing as being “spiritually minded.” We are admonished to be “renewed in the spirit of your mind.” In fact, in Christ we are given “a sound mind.”

The lexical meaning of the word translated “prudent” is “intelligent, having understanding, wise, learned,” THAYER “having understanding, intelligent, wise,” FRIBERG “pertaining to being able to understand and evaluate - 'intelligent, insightful, understanding,” LOUW-NIDA and “intelligent, wise, with good sense.” GINGRICH

The idea is that this man had a keen and disciplined mind, able to perceive critical matters, and effective in applying his understanding to matters with which he was acquainted. The surfacing of this man, together with what is said of him, once again underscores the thrust of those early labors, which were toward devout and thoughtful people.

A good mind is not an end of itself, but it is not to be disdained. It yields optimum benefit when it is focused upon the things of God, for they have been revealed for thoughtful people. Paul once told the Philippians, “think on these things” (Phil 4:8). He told young Timothy, “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them” (1 Tim 4:15). The people of God must not content themselves with an approach to religion that does not challenge and engage the mind.

HE CALLED FOR BARNABAS AND SAUL

“ . . .who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.” Other versions read “summoned,” NASB “sent for,” NIV “invited,” NLT “asked,” LIVING and “summoned to him.” AMPLIFIED The Word translated “called” means “to call to oneself; to bid to come to oneself,” THAYER It has an official tone to it, and is not a casual word, like one neighbor inviting another one to come to his house. It was an official invitation that was not tendered in a spirit of casualness.

And why did this intelligent ruler call for Barnabas and Saul? You may rest assured, it was not obtain some counsel about the affairs of government. We are told that he “desired to hear the word of God.” Among other things, this confirms that the word of God appeals to those with intelligent and inquiring minds. If men are to love the Lord with all of their mind (Mk 12:30), then it follows that the Word of God has a fundamental appeal to the mind. That is, it calls for the involvement of the mind of the people.

Those who drift away from God do so in their minds (Rom 1:28). Those in Christ are noted for the way in which they think: “the law of my mind” (Rom 7:23). The one who is living by faith confesses, “with the mind I myself serve the law of God” (Rom 7:25). There is such a thing as being “spiritually minded” (Rom 8:6). We are admonished to be “renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Eph 4:23). In fact, in Christ we are given “a sound mind” (2 Tim 1:7).

There is a form of Christianity being perpetrated these days that has little or no appeal to devout and thoughtful people. There is too much childishness in such appeals. This is also true of the advancement of rules and procedures. Of course, such regulations are required when men are navigating in unknown waters, and are not sure of themselves.

Sergius Paulus did not inquire about some methodology that Paul and Barnabas were advancing. He was not looking for a way to be a better governor. He wanted to hear “the word of God.” we do not know how he came to know of Barnabas and Saul. However, we do know the associations he made with them. They were speaking “the Word of God” – that is, what the God of heaven had made known. The thing for which they were noted was preaching the Word of God. Oh, that more were like that.

HE SOUGHT TO TURN HIM FROM THE FAITH

“ 8 But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.”

Those who are dominated by the devil are not indifferent to the proclamation of the Word of the Lord. Whether such individuals surface in an intellectual environment, or one of pleasure or immorality, the Word of God awakens their hostility against the Lord. The carnal mind is “enmity against God” (Rom 8:7). It will break forth against what God has said, and do so aggressively. This is what will happen in our text.

He was dominated by the carnal mind, and the Word of God had awakened the hostility of that mind, for he was not subject to the law of God, neither was such a thing even possible.

It ought to be noted that any attempt to placate a carnal mind is nothing more than foolishness.

Those who make such attempts are forced to diminish the importance of and reference to the Word of God. They pretend as though this is done in the interest of influencing people for God. However, they forget that such approaches confirm their lack of allegiance to the Lord Himself. His mandate is “preach the Word,” being “instant in season, and out of season” – or being “persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable” NIV (2 Tim 4:2). The modern church, for the most part, has not done well in this matter. This is largely owing to the changing of its agenda. When the fundamental aim is to help people, as opposed to serving God, the soul is set adrift on the raging sea of error. This is why Paul strongly affirmed, “Now am I trying to win the favor of men, or of God? Do I seek to please men? If I were still seeking popularity with men, I should not be a bond servant of Christ (the Messiah)” AMPLIFIED (Gal 1:10).

HE WITHSTOOD BARNABAS AND SAUL

“But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them . . .” The name Barjesus means “son of Jesus,” which was a somewhat common name among the Jews (Col 4:11). This was the Greek form of Joshua (Heb 4:8). The name “Elymas” means “wise man.” He appears to have been noted for intelligent proclamations and insights – yet they were not lawful. His intelligence was found to be in conflict with the rationale that is made known in the Gospel.

Now, when Barnabas and Saul are declaring the Word of God to the governor, this man withstands them . Other versions read, “opposing them,” NASB “put himself against them,” BBE “tried to distort the meaning,” GWN “tried to stop them,” NJB and “interfered.” NLT To withstand or oppose means to set oneself against the individual, and to do so aggressively. What was declared by Barnabas and Saul contradicted what this “wise man” had been saying. Unwilling to consider what they were saying, he opposed it. He was dominated by the carnal mind, and the Word of God had awakened the hostility of that mind, for he was not subject to the law of God, neither was such a thing even possible (Rom 8:7).

SEEKING TO TURN THE DEPUTY FROM THE FAITH

“ . . . seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.” The Amplified Bible reads, “seeking to keep the proconsul from accepting the faith.” Here is a case where the heart of the governor was being drawn to Christ. God was giving him to believe (Phil 1:29), and faith was coming to him through the hearing of the Gospel (Rom 10:17).

Now this wicked man seeks to divert the attention of Sergius Paulus from the Word of God. There is a battle here, and the soul of a man is at stake. How will the men of God deal with this situation? Will they assume the sincerity of this opponent, and attempt to reason with him on the matter? Indeed, they do not!

Here is a child of the wicked one confronting sons of the Living God. Behold their reaction, and how they deal with such flagrant opposition.

SAUL CONFRONTS THE FALSE PROPHET

“ 9 Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10 And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? 11 And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.”

The decisiveness and immediacy of this response confirms the seriousness of opposing the truth of God. It also corroborates the statement of Paul to Titus that there are some “whose mouths must be stopped” (Tit 1:11). This is not a case that requires gentleness, for this man is not opposing himself

(2 Tim 2:24-26) , but the servants of the Lord – and that is a matter of the greatest gravity. When arguments are presented to those inclined to the Lord to turn them aside, it is not to be treated lightly as though it was nothing more than a clash of intellects.

SAUL, FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him . . .” Other versions read, “looked intently at him,” NKJV “fixed his gaze upon him,” NASB “looked straight at Elymas and said,” NIV “fastened his eyes on him,” ASV “looking hard at him,” BBE “stared straight at the sorcerer,” CSB “stared at Elymas,” GWN “glared angrily at the sorcerer and said,” LIVING “looked him straight in the eye,” ISV “gazed steadily at him,” MONTGOMERY and “looked steadily at [Elymas]” AMPLIFIED

While the devil was filling Elymas, the Holy Spirit was filling Paul,

The decisiveness and immediacy of this response confirms the seriousness of opposing the truth of God. It also corroborates the statement of Paul to Titus that there are some “whose mouths must be stopped.” This is not a case that requires gentleness, for this man is not opposing himself, but the servants of the Lord – and that is a matter of the greatest gravity.

and the battle was set in array. The words that will be spoken have come from the Holy Spirit, and reflect the attitude of the Lord toward those who would impede His Word.

This is the first time in all of the Bible that the name “Paul” is mentioned. Furthermore, apart from Paul recounting Jesus speaking to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 22:7,13; 26:14), this is the last time in the Bible he is referred to as “Saul.” Also, with the exceptions of Acts 14:12,14 and 15:12,25, from this point on, where Barnabas and Paul are referenced, Paul is mentioned before Barnabas (13:43,46,50; 15:2,22,35,36).

From this point on, the record in the book of Acts will focus on the activities and ministries of Paul.

THOU CHILD OF THE DEVIL

“And said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? “

What a bold and forthright declaration!

- Full of all subtlety. Other versions read “all deceit,” NKJV “all kinds of deceit,” NIV “all guile,” ASV :fraud,” CJB “utter fraud,” NJB and “master of every form deception and recklessness.” AMPLIFIED Here was a man Satan was holding captive (2 Tim 2:26), who was also “controlled by the sinful nature” NIV (Rom 8:7). Like the devil did with Eve, he was a master at making the lie attractive. There was no goodness or honesty in him, – not so much as a speck. He was “full of all subtlety,” misrepresentation, and deceit.

- Full of all mischief. Other versions read “fraud,” NKJV “trickery,” NIV “villainy,” NRSV “evil ways,” BBE “all craft,” DARBY schemes,” GWN “wrongdoing,” NET and “unscrupulousness, and wickedness.” AMPLIFIED The word from which “mischief” is translated means “1) ease in doing, faculty 2) levity or easiness in thinking or acting 2a) love of a lazy effeminate life 3) unscrupulous, cunning, mischief.” THAYER That is another way or referring to the “broad” way that “leadeth to destruction” (Matt 7:13). Sensing the aggressive nature of faith, Elymas sought to turn the governor to an easier and less difficult way – a way that allowed the flesh more leniency , and permitted the individual to maintain self interests above those of God. Such ways are still being pressed upon the people!

Notice the authority with which Paul speaks. This is something that proceeds from a profound

fellowship with Christ and a staggering scope of spiritual understanding. In his measure, as the Lord Jesus did, Paul was doing the works that he saw God doing.

Thou child of the devil. Other versions read “son of the devil,” NKJV and “son of Satan.” CJB What a staggering description! In the garden of Eden, God spoke to the devil referring to his “seed” (Gen 3:15) – Elymas was one of them. Jesus said the tares were “the children of the wicked one” (Matt 13:38). He also said to the religious leaders of His day, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do” (John 8:44). John wrote, “He that sinneth is of the devil” (1 John 3:8). In this text, Paul recognized one of Satan’s own offspring, and declares plainly that this is the case.

- Thou enemy of all righteousness. Other versions read, “enemy of everything that is right,” NIV “hating all righteousness,” BBE “enemy of everything good,” CJB “You hate everything that has God’s approval,” GWN and “enemy of everything that is upright and good.” AMPLIFIED Just as righteousness and unrighteousness cannot mingle, and Christ and Belial cannot be in accord, so a person cannot embrace some of the truth while hating another part.

- Cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord. Other versions read, “perverting the straight ways of the Lord,” NKJV “make crooked the straight ways of the Lord,” NASB “turning people from the right ways of the Lord,” BBE and “twisting the straight paths of the Lord.” NAB It is not that the ways of God themselves can be perverted or corrupted. It is rather that they are misrepresented. Peter referred to this kind of action as wresting the Scripture, twisting it to say something it does not. He also adds, that those who so such things will be destroyed because they did so (2 Pet 3:16).

It seems to me that the church of our day could use a good dose of this kind of thinking. There is too much tolerance of corruption, and too little awareness of the seriousness of it.

THE HAND OF THE LORD IS UPON THEE

“And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season . . .”

Notice the authority with which Paul speaks. This is something that proceeds from a profound fellowship with Christ and a staggering scope of spiritual understanding. In his measure, as the Lord Jesus did, Paul was doing the works that he saw God doing (John 5:19).

I am affirming that Divine power cannot be employed for personal purposes. That being true, and considering that Paul was, in fact, filled with the Spirit on the occasion, several conclusions are in order.

- First, we are being exposed to the Lord’s reaction to the imposition or corrupt and unlawful knowledge and wisdom. Elymas was noted for being a “wise man,” for that is the meaning of the name “Elymas.”

- Second, here is an example of heaven’s view of those who attempt to turn people away from the faith. If you imagine that this has no relevance in our day, consider the efforts of secular education, various cults, and deceived teachers within the Christian community. Add to that the growing prominence of heathen religions like Islam and Buddhism, and corrupt forms of Christianity, like Mormonism and the Jehovah’s Witnesses. All of these are engaged in a gargantuan effort to turn people the faith. Ponder government rules and regulations that are designed to stifle the quest for and expression of faith.

- There is also the matter of the judgment of the Lord, imposed upon sinners. This man will have a condition forced upon him from heaven. Other individuals who experienced

the imposition of judgment include Pharaoh, Uzzah, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Ananias, and Sapphira.

- Here we have the fulfilment of First Timothy 5:24: “Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment; and some men they follow after” (1 Tim 5:24). Such sins must be judged immediately, for the sake of others – and the offenders must still stand before the Lord on the day of judgment.

- A judgment was poured out upon Elymas that matched his spiritual condition. Her was blind within, and now, for a season, he would be blind without.

- The fact that this blindness was only for a time suggests that during that period he was being given “space to repent” (Rev 2:21). It is also quite possible that the period would confirm that this man had passed beyond the possibility of repentance. Such a condition is mentioned in the Revelation of those who “repented not” even though great judgments were poured out upon them (Rev 9:20; 16:9.11).

A MIST AND DARKNESS FELL ON HIM

“And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.” Other versions read, “a dark mist fell upon him,” NKJV “a mist and a darkness fell upon him,” NASB “mist and darkness overcame him,” NIV “a dark mist came down upon him,” BBE “everything quickly became dark,” IE and “a mist and utter blackness came over his eyes.” PHILLIPS

The word “mist” means “dimness,” THAYER and “darkness” means “blindness.” THAYER The picture here is that of an immediate obscurement of Elymas’ vision, followed by total blindness. It is as though his vision, over a brief period, faded out, so that the strength of this imposed judgment might register upon him. There are Divine judgments like that. They are toward the individual immediately, yet are carried out in stages – like Herod being smitten by an angel, then dying as worms consumed him from within (Acts 12:23). I gather that this judgment was also for the sake of the governor, to confirm the truth of what Barnabas and Paul were declaring. That is, this was a judgment that could be observed, for as soon as his vision had been removed, Elymas sought for someone to lead him about. Note that he did not repent. He did not ask Paul to pray for him as Simon did Peter (Acts 8:24). Of course, Paul did not admonish him to repent of his wickedness either, as Peter did Simon.

THE DEPUTY BELIEVED

“ 12 Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord. ”

The results that follow confirm that Paul had, in fact, thrown down a bastion of wicked thought, so that it could hold no sway over the governor of the island. This is an example of the use of spiritual weaponry against the assault of contradicting patterns of thought. As it is written, “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:3-5). In the case of the Corinthians, Paul’s employment of these weapons would be against the false teachers at Corinth who were promoting “another Jesus,” “another gospel,” and “another Spirit” (2 Cor 10:1-2; 11:3).

This kind of judgment is necessary because of the impact of false messages. In the case of Corinth, what the teachers delivered caused the people to drift away from Christ, which in turn produced the moral and spiritual lapses that were taking place there. In the case of Elymas, had he been allowed to continue, the governor would have rejected the Gospel in favor of what Elymas was saying.

The gravity of erroneous teaching, however innocent it may appear, cannot

Believing involves the absence of doubt, and the presence of persuasion, and trust. The believing one has been convinced of the truth, and has wholly embraced it. Believing is not an experiment – like trying out a new way of thinking.

be overstated. Where such teachings are found, the Spirit never elicits sympathy for the propagator. This is because their words “spread like cancer,” NKJV (2 Tim 2:17), “subverting the hearers” (2 Tim 2:14), and overthrowing their faith (2 Tim 2:18). This is not speaking of the words of those who have an incomplete knowledge, like Apollos, yet have a heart for the truth. This is rather speaking of competitive doctrines that assign Divine power and effectiveness to messages that God did not give.

For these, and other, reasons, a very apparent judgment has taken place upon Elymas. This has, in effect, confirmed what he was saying was not the truth, and that what Paul was saying was the truth.

HE SAW WHAT WAS DONE AND BELIEVED

“Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed . . .” Other versions read, “Then the proconsul believed, when he saw what had been done,” NKJV “Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened,” NASB and “When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed.” NIV

This confirms that the judgment upon Elymas was apparent, or visible. There was no doubt what had happened to him. Nor, indeed, was there any need to interpret it, for Paul had precisely declared what would happen – and his word came to pass. Now it had been established that Paul was the one who had the message of the Lord, not Elymas.

The word “believed” is not primarily expressive of the activity of the intellect or mind. Believing takes place within the heart, within the citadel of man’s nature. It is written, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10). The Amplified Bible reads, “For with the heart a person believes (adheres to, trusts in, and relies on Christ).

Believing involves the absence of doubt, and the presence of persuasion, and trust. The believing one has been convinced of the truth, and has wholly embraced it. Believing is not an experiment – like trying out a new way of thinking. The one who believes senses that everything rests on the message that has been heard, and thus discards all competing bodies of knowledge, and casts his soul wholly and solely upon the Lord.

BEING ASTONISHED AT THE DOCTRINE OF THE LORD

“ . . . being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.” Other versions read, “astonished at the teaching of the Lord,” NKJV “amazed at the teaching of the Lord,” NASB “full of wonder at the teaching of the Lord,” BBE “astounded by the teaching about the Lord,” CSB “admiring at the doctrine of the Lord,” DOUAY “being much struck by what he had learnt about the Lord,” NJB “astonished at the power of God’s message,” LIVING and “astonished and deeply touched at the teaching concerning the Lord and from Him.” AMPLIFIED

Notice that Sergius Paulus was not astonished at the miraculous judgment against Elymas, but at what had been taught concerning the Lord . It was the doctrine that moved him to believe, not the experience of Elymas.

What we have here is something similar to what occurred during the ministry of Jesus. What He did confirmed what He had taught. After hearing what Jesus said, and beholding His authority over demons, they said, “What thing is this? what new doctrine is this? for with authority commandeth he

even the unclean spirits, and they do obey him” (Mark 1:27). The uniqueness of Jesus was not in His authority over demons, but in the message that He brought. His disciples could cast out demons, but it was the message of the Lord Jesus Himself that they delivered.

The teaching of Christ that Paul delivered was of such magnitude that upon witnessing the imposed blindness of Elymas, the governor thought of the word that Paul had preached concerning the Lord. He turned his heart and mind to a consideration of what was said, not what was done. That word was not about the possibility of miracles, or the probability of social or financial advantages. It was a clear and powerful declamation of the Person of Christ Jesus – and it had captured the heart and attention this political official.

It is a matter of great concern when the church is not noted for its message – for what it is declaring or affirming! Let us learn from this text the value of a word that anchors the soul, exposes error, and validates to the soul the marvelous effects of the wonderful works of God, as wrought through Jesus.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to the effects of following the leading of the Holy Spirit. Those who do, in fact, live by faith, are effectively led by the Spirit because of their faith. They are sensitized to the will of the Lord, having been given ears to hear what the Spirit is saying. For them, it is no great thing to forfeit their own will, for faith has convinced them of the superiority and goodness of the will of the Lord. Jesus said, His sheep know His voice and follow Him (John 10:27). And, as the Revelation confirms, they follow Him wherever He goes (Rev 14:4). They perceive Him as their Leader.

These realities are being lived out in our text. Duly noted, this record will encourage our hearts and strengthen our hands in the Lord. Truly, our labor in the Lord is not vain’ (1 Cor 15:58).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #57

PAUL PREACHES IN ANTIOCH, #1

“ 13:13 Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem. 14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. 15 And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on. 16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience. 17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it. 18 And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness. 19 And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, He divided their land to them by lot. 20 And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet. 21 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years. 22 And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will. 23 Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus. ” (Acts 13:13-23)

INTRODUCTION

After concluding their ministry in Cyprus, filling the island with the Word of God, and subduing the influence of a prominent sorcerer, “Paul and his company” came to Perga in Pamphylia, where John Mark left them, returning to Jerusalem. Again, it is important to note the manner of the labors being described. There is a singularity of both objective and focus. Unlike the writings of mere men, there is an absence of details unrelated to the work at hand.

The text does not revolve around the people whose account is being written, but around the One they were serving. This is an invariable trait that is unique to the ministry of the Word of God. This is not a word that is generic, and to be adapted to the purposes of men. Although Scripture has been, and is often used in that manner by some men, this is not a Divine manner. Everything in Scripture derives its relevance through

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association with God and His purpose, particularly as it has been revealed in Christ Jesus. This is why a purported ministry that revolves around human conditions or perceived needs is, to say the least, inferior. You may rest assured that there were a variety of human needs in the areas in which the works being reported were done – and yet, we note that the Scriptures provide us with absolutely no details concerning them.

For example, the Roman emperor Caligula was assassinated in A.D. 41. In A.D. 43, the Romans invaded and conquered Britain, bringing it under their rule. London was founded that same year. However, political and social circumstances are mentioned in Scripture only as they are related to the working of the Lord. Otherwise, they are incidental. This does not mean that daily circumstance is to be altogether ignored, or that earthly needs are to be neglected. It rather means that neither our theology nor our labors for the Lord are to be structured around them as though they were preeminent. It should be obvious that faith and wisdom are required to properly assess and address such matters. However, as the first and second commands accentuate, God is always first, and man, in the most favorable posture, is always second. These realities are reflected throughout all inspired historical accounts.

After departing from Cyprus, Paul and those with him eventually “came to Antioch of Pisidia,” where they entered into a synagogue. Once again, the priority of preaching the Gospel to those with only a partial, or even a distorted acquaintance with God is seen. We will find this to be a consistent pattern throughout the book of Acts. The principle is also carried out in the epistles, which are written to those in Christ, who required a more extensive familiarity with the Lord and His objectives. Because this perspective has been nearly lost in our generation, I will make frequent reference to the

priorities of preaching and expounding the Gospel. This by no means suggests that the heathen are not to hear the Gospel. It does buttress the fact that they are to hear it from informed and stable souls, and that spiritual life, by its very nature, will provoke that to take place. If people do not speak because they believe – through the “spirit of faith” (2 Cor 4:13) – they ought not to speak for God at all. Further, if professed believers are not shining “as lights in the world,” they are actually contributing to the existing darkness. Such people are not commanded to shine. Rather, they are to obtain the light that characteristically shines forth, just as surely as it has been “shined into our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). Like Moses, those who are actually in the presence of the Lord do emit “the light of life” (Ex 34:29; John 8:12).

One of the most damaging circumstances within the Christian community is the practice of people with little or no spiritual light bearing supposed witness to others. I do not know that it is possible to obtain any accurate estimate of the degree to which this has loosed the powers of darkness upon our society. Limited, distorted, and even fabricated representations of the truth lend themselves to wickedness, not to righteousness. Satan always works through the lie, whether it is a deliberate expression or one born out of ignorance. This is why Jesus admonished His disciples to “pray” the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into “His harvest” (Matt 9:38). If the church is, in fact, the pillar and ground of the truth, then it must be a distributor of the light, which can only shine through those who are themselves walking “in the light” (1 John 1:7).

In our text, while Paul and company were in the synagogue, they were asked if they had a word of exhortation to give. Instantly responding, Paul delivered a powerful message in which he accented the necessity and priority of Jesus, placing it within the context of Divine initiatives toward Israel, and their responses to them. He makes no reference whatsoever to the personal lives of the Israelites, or to political or social cycles and trends about them. This is because it is not possible to reason toward Jesus when beginning with man’s condition. With unwavering consistency, when religious men begin with the self-perceived condition of humanity, they will develop methodologies to correct the condition. It is simply not possible to begin at that point, and arrive at Jesus as the total answer – one in whom the individual realizes total and uncompromising completeness (Col 2:10). The reason for this is that Jesus Christ is the provision of God for the condition that He saw, and the purpose that He conceived “before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9).

The salvation that is in Christ Jesus indirectly addresses life in this world. By that I mean life in the body is not the primary life, and the world is not the primary place. The matter of human conduct, although it is addressed indirectly, is effectly handled.

As soon as men begin to think of the salvation of God as the Divine response to a condition that was out of control, they step outside of the circumference of the Divine will. God’s purpose is not to simply reform men, but to raise them from death in trespasses and sins, and conform them to the image of His Son (Eph 2:1-2; Rom 8:29). It is not simply to enable them to live a controlled and successful life in this world, but to ready them to reign with Christ (2 Tim 2:12;), to take charge of the world to come (Heb 2:5-11), and, under the leadership of Jesus, take the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world (Dan 7:18,22,27).

Majoring on a regimented life in this world appears very small in view of grand objectives like this. If a person is prone to think that issues relating to human behavior are not addressed in this kind of approach, let him think again. The salvation that is in Christ Jesus indirectly addresses life in this world. By that I mean life in the body is not the primary life, and the world is not the primary place. The matter of human conduct, although it is addressed indirectly, is effectly handled. This is owing to the nature of salvation itself.

- In Christ, we are born again, becoming a new creation (1 Pet 1:23; 2 Cor 5:17). This involves receiving a new heart (Ezek 36:26), and a new man that is created in true holiness (Eph 4:24).

- The law of God is put into the heart and written upon the mind (Heb 10:16).
- Those in Christ receive the Holy Spirit who strengthens them within (Eph 3:16-17), produces Divine qualities with them (Gal 5:22-23), and leads them in the subduing of sinful inclinations (Rom 8:11-14).
- We are made partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14).
- Through God's exceeding great and precious promises, we become partakers of the Divine Nature (2 Pet 1:4).

These realities account for the absence in Scripture of a methodology for the correction of deviate behavior.

But all of this begins with a proper assessment of the human condition – a revealed assessment. Therefore, in our text, Paul's reasoning is erected upon the firm pillars of Divine initiatives and workings, as defined by His immutable, and consequently eternal, purpose. Human behavior particularly that of the Jews, will be assessed from that point of view – namely, how they did or did not respond to the working of the Lord. We must learn something from this.

PAUL AND HIS COMPANY

“ 13:13a Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia . . .”

Having completed their ministry on the island of Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas set sail for the area of, what is now called, Turkey.

PAUL AND HIS COMPANY

“Now when Paul and his company . . .” Other versions read, “Paul and his party,” NKJV “Paul and his companions,” NASB Paul and those who were with him,” BBE and “Paul and his men.” GWN

Those who were with Paul were probably Barnabas and John Mark. We are not certain if others were with them or not. The important thing to note is the new beginning here. Paul is the prominent figure, and the others are with him, being referred to his “ his company,” or “companions.” Prior to this, he was mentioned in reference to others.

- Barnabas took him and “brought him to the apostles” (Acts 9:26).
- Saul was “with” the apostles, coming in and going out at Jerusalem (Acts 9:29).
- Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul (Acts 11:26).
- Barnabas brought Saul to Antioch, where he remained for a year with Barnabas (Acts 11:26).
- The disciples sent an offering to the elders in Jerusalem, for the poor saints, by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30).
- Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, taking John Mark with them as their minister (Acts 12:25).
- Saul was among the prophets and teachers in Antioch (Acts 13:1).
- The Holy Spirit called for the separation of Barnabas and Saul to the work to which He had called them (Acts 13:2).
- The governor of the island of Cyprus called for Barnabas and Saul to hear the Word of God from them (Acts 13:7).

- When confronting Elymas the sorcerer, it was Saul who stepped forward to rebuke and judge him. It was at this point that he began to be called “Paul” (Acts 13:9).

Now, in confirmation that this was the commencement of his apostolic prominence, our text identifies him as the one in charge of the mission.

It ought to be noted that there was no contention on the part of Barnabas, who now reverted to a secondary position. This is another example of the selflessness of the early believers, a trait that accompanies every new birth, through which one comes into affiliation with the God who justifies the ungodly.

FROM PAPHOS TO PERGA

“ . . . loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia . . .” Other versions read, “set sail from Paphos,” NKJV ” put out to sea,” NASB “sailed to,” NIV “went by ship,” BBE and “departed by ship.” GENEVA

Sailing on the Mediterranean Sea, referred to as “the great sea” in Scripture (Num 34:6; Josh 1:4; 34:4), Paul and those with him journeyed approximately two hundred miles to the borders of, what was then known as, Asia. Now, this area of the world is Turkey. Perga was originally the capital city of Pamphylia, which made it a significant location. Pamphylia was the southern part of Asia, with the Mediterranean Sea on the south. Even so, this group will not stay in Perga, but will make their way up to Antioch of Pisidia, in which a significant Jewish constituency was located.

A Trip with a Special Plan

Keep in mind that this was not a trip that was planned as men would ordinarily think. This was a mission that was directed by the Spirit of God – a work to which He had called Barnabas and Saul, and a purpose that He had originated. It was also during this activity that Saul of Tarsus came to be known as Paul. He further assumed the leadership of this expedition. Any work that is directed by the Holy Spirit of necessity involves people who are sensitive to His direction, who also have a working knowledge of the Lord and His purpose.

If, for example, Paul and company had adopted the great commission mentality , as it is ordinarily perceived, they would probably have stayed a little longer in Cyprus, and settled for a while in Perga. One has only to become acquainted with the outworking of Divine purpose to see that a higher and more far-reaching agenda was being worked out. Jesus, for example, had His disciples begin where He Himself had spent over three years, ministering and “preaching the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23). Now, when Barnabas and Saul set out on a mission originated by the Holy Spirit, they first went to Cyprus where considerable preaching of the Word had already been done (Acts 11:19). Even though the Jews had already heard this preaching, Barnabas and Saul “preached the Word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” (13:4) – and this was a work to which the Holy Spirit Himself had called them.

There is a view of the preaching of the early disciples that sees them neglecting what Jesus had said when He told them to go into all the world (Matt 28:19), preaching the Gospel to every person (Mk 16:15). Yet, in this passage we have the Holy Spirit calling Barnabas and Saul to a special work while they were ministering to the church in Antioch. To me, this clashes with the mindset of many of our time. Add to this that in Paul’s later labors, he actually gave precedence to his ministry to the churches, foregoing preaching where God was not known until the church had been duly corrected and stabilized. He referred to this in his second letter to the Corinthians in which he spoke of “a door” that was “opened” to Him by Christ when he came to Troas “to preach Christ’s gospel.” Yet, because of his profound concern for the Corinthian church, which was being led astray, he went to Macedonia where he met Titus, who gave him a report of the affairs in Corinth. This occasioned the writing of his second epistle to them (2 Cor 2:12-13; 7:55-7). Paul also told the Corinthians that when they had

been sufficiently grounded, he would proceed to other regions. “Neither do we go beyond our limits by boasting of work done by others. Our hope is that, as your faith continues to grow, our area of activity among you will greatly expand, so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you. For we do not want to boast about work already done in another man's territory” (2 Cor 10:15-16).

I say these things to accentuate the necessity of maintaining a proper perspective of the work of the Lord. With staggering consistency, those with a faulty knowledge of God are the first to be exposed to the Gospel. This applies to both the churches, the Jews, and those who worship false gods. That order also appears to be consistent in the preaching of the Gospel. As long as professing churches are characterized by a fundamental ignorance of God and the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, attention must be given to the correction of that condition. Where sin and recovery from it are at inordinate levels within the church, something is seriously wrong, and requires immediate attention. If this is not done, the risk is that evangelistic and missionary efforts can result in the perpetuation of flawed views and spiritual mediocrity. Although I cannot fully substantiate this, I suspect that this condition accounts for much of the spiritual immaturity that exists in virtually all missionary enterprises.

The Manner of the Report

In my judgment, the report is given by Luke to accentuate the effectiveness of the leading of the Holy Spirit. Taken as it stands, it gives no emphasis to the decisions that were made by Paul and Barnabas, or exactly how they went about their work. There is no mention of human strategies or key decisions that were made – even though I do not doubt that such things were involved to some degree. However, one can only imagine how such plans would have been codified and bound on others had they been provided.

JOHN DEPARTED

“13b . . . and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.” Other versions read, “and John left them,” NASB “John, however, left them,” NRSV “and there John went away from them,” BBE “and John separated from them,” DARBY “John Mark deserted them there,” GWN “Here John quit them,” WILLIAMS “And separating from them,” LITV “separated himself from them,” AMPLIFIED and “yet from-spacing from them.” INTERLINEAR

The Greek word translated “departing” is **avpocwrh,saj** (ap-okh-a-reh-oas). The lexical meaning of this word is, “to go away, depart,” THAYER “desert, abandon,” FRIBERG “leave,” UBS “to move away from, with emphasis upon separation and possible lack of concern for what has been left - 'to go away, to depart, to leave,” LOUW-NIDA and “leave, desert.” GINGRICH

COMMENT ON JOHN DEPARTING

Act 13:13 - “Luke is silent on John's reasons for leaving Paul and Barnabas. He was the cousin of Barnabas and may not have relished the change in leadership. There may have been change in plans also now that Paul is in command. Barnabas had chosen Cyprus and Paul has led them to Perga in Pamphylia and means to go on into the highlands to Antioch in Pisidia. There were perils of many sorts around them and ahead (2Co 11:26), perils to which John Mark was unwilling to be exposed. Paul will specifically charge him at Antioch with desertion of his post (Ac 15:39). It is possible, as Ramsay suggests, that the mosquitoes at Perga gave John malaria. If so, they bit Paul and Barnabas also. He may not have liked Paul's aggressive attitude towards the heathen. At any rate he went home to Jerusalem instead of to Antioch, zu seiner Mutter (Holtzmann). It was a serious breach in the work, but Paul and Barnabas stuck to the work.”

ROBERTSON'S WORD PICTURES

This particular word is only used two other times in the Scriptures. First, as a departure that will be

imposed on the workers of iniquity: “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt 7:23). Second, of a wicked spirit that took hold of a young boy, and was reluctant to leave him: “And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him,” or “departs from him with great difficulty” NKJV (Luke 9:39).

The point is that this is not a casual word. It speaks of a deliberate separation or withdrawing, whether imposed or as an expression of willingness. In this case, the departure was a willing one – something that John Mark decided to do. This was not the impulse of the Spirit, but was clearly one that was of the flesh. Referring to this incident later the Spirit moved Luke to write, “And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work ” (Acts 15:37-38). The occasion was so serious that later, Paul was unwilling to have Mark accompany them, seeing he had vacillated in this initial trip.

It does appear from the later text, that the departure of John Mark did not cause such difficulty with Barnabas, who was John’s uncle (Col 4:10). Precisely why this was the case, we do not fully know. However, the remainder of the book of Acts does shed some light on the subject. Following the disputation that arose over Mark, Barnabas “took Mark and sailed unto Cyprus” (Acts 15:39). That is the last mention of Barnabas in the book of Acts. Paul does refer to him in First Corinthians 9:6 as an example of one who had power to “forbear working” to supply their own needs. He is also mentioned in Galatians 2:1 where he accompanied Paul and Titus to Jerusalem. During that occasion Barnabas was “carried away” with the dissimulation that took place when Peter withdrew from the Gentiles to appease his Jewish brothers (Gal 2:11-13).

The point here is not to demean Barnabas. Rather, it is to show that Paul’s view of the withdrawal of John Mark from the work was a justifiable one. Even though John Mark may not have been called directly by the Holy Spirit into the work, he was chosen by those in whom the Spirit was at work. That is the precise point that is made of this withdrawal in the fifteenth chapter: he “went not with them to the work .” or “had not continued with them in the work” NIV (Acts 15:38). Instead, as the word “departed” indicates, he “left them,” NRSV “ went away from them,” BBE “ separated from them,” DARBY “ deserted them there,” GWN “ quit them,” WILLIAMS and “ separated himself from them.” AMPLIFIED

The text strongly suggests that there are no good reasons for quitting, leaving the work, and separating yourself from a work of God in which you have been involved. It is always a bad sign when someone who have engaged in the good work of the Lord diminishes their activity, or withdraws from it altogether. Let no person attempt to explain such a withdrawal. I do understand that some, like Barnabas, will lean toward the quitter, as though there was some good and acceptable reason for them distancing themselves from the work in which they were once involved. However, no servant of God is free to ignore the summons of the Holy Spirit: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58).

This is an intensely personal matter, but each believer must see to it that they are in synch with the manner of the Kingdom. The working mode is always upward, onward, advancing, growing, and increasing. It always involves a distance increasing between the believer and the world, and the things that are integral to it. This is why Jesus demanded all competing associations and interests to be pushed into the background, and made subordinate to following Him (Lk 14:26,27,33). This is not an option, but is an unwavering requirement of the “Lord of all” (Acts 10:36).

THEY CAME TO ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA

“ 14 But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the

synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.”

Now, the work of the Lord goes on, as Paul and Barnabas continue in the labor to which the Holy Spirit had called them, and for which they had been separated.

THEY DEPARTED FROM PERGA

“But when they departed from Perga . . .”

This apparently took place after John Mark deserted them, returning to Jerusalem. Their action confirms the priority of their love for Christ and commitment to His calling. John was their minister, and thus his absence would probably increase the number of things they would be required to do – at least for a time. But this did not deter them from the work. Those who are squeamish about the amount of work they may be required to do in the vineyard of the Lord should either reconsider the propriety of their involvement, or come up high in their thinking. Those with a penchant for ease and convenience will find no functions in the body of Christ that lend themselves to such accommodations.

Too, some might consider that the departure of Mark might suggest that the decision to go to the next location was subject to reevaluation. This kind of thinking is characteristic of those who prefer ease and convenience, or are lacking in confidence and assurance. Although no one who lacks such qualities can see the sense of it, confidence and assurance resolve many dilemmas with which the unstable contend. “Patient continuance in well doing,” or “perseverance,” NASB while seeking for “glory, honor, and immortality,” is matched by an unequivocal promise: “ETERNAL LIFE” (Rom 2:7).

However, such a posture is exceedingly difficult, if not altogether impossible, where the assurance that one is doing the will of the Lord is absent. While engaged in the work of the Lord, that work must loom larger than any competing interest. That very circumstance requires that one know the One in whom he has believed, and be persuaded that He is able to keep anything and everything that has been committed to him, to be presented on the day of Christ, together with an appropriate reward (2 Tim 1:12).

THEY CAME TO ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA

“ . . . they came to Antioch in Pisidia . . .”

Antioch of Pisidia was approximately 100 miles northeast of Perga. This is not the Antioch in which Barnabas and Saul labored for a year with the church (Acts 11:26). That Antioch was in Syria. This one was in Asia, now called Turkey.

Because this mission was initiated by the Holy Spirit, and is referred to as “the work whereunto I have called them” (13:2), it seems obvious that the whole of it is being directed by the Holy Spirit. While the details of the direction are not specified both the nature of the mission and the manner in which it is being carried out strongly suggests this is the case. This is not a mere missionary experiment. Further, if, in fact, it was a specific work to which Barnabas and Saul were called, and if they were good men and full of faith, we have an example of what is stated in Psalm 37:23: “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way.”

Therefore, I will continue to view the report as one of Divine direction and preference. That requires that we see what follows as the execution of the will of the Lord. In it we will behold something of the Divine manner in determining the spread of the Gospel.

THEY WENT INTO THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE SABBATH DAY

“ . . . and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.”

Once again we see the consistency of those sent out by God entering into the Jewish synagogues. There are forty-one references to synagogues in the Gospels, and twenty-two in the book of Acts. We are told that one of the regular activities in these synagogues was the preaching of Moses and the reading of His writings. It was a consistent practice that had been in place for some time. “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day” (Acts 15:21).

These were also places in which vain religious men sought for preeminence among the people. Jesus said to His disciples, “Beware of the scribes, which desire to walk in long robes, and love greetings in the markets,

SYNAGOGUE ORDER

“The order of the synagogue service was first the **prayers** , read by the *Sheliach*, or angel of the synagogue, the people standing. Then came the **reading of the Law** in Hebrew by the reader, and **the interpretation** by the interpreter, who, outside of Judaea, generally used the version of the LXX (Septuagint). This reading, or lesson, was called the *Parashah*. Next came the **reading and interpreting of the prophets** , called the *Haphtorah*, either by the regular reader or by any one invited by the ruler of the synagogue (Luke 4:16, 17). Then came the *Midrash*, **the exposition** or sermon, which Paul undertook at the invitation of the ruler of the synagogue. Our Lord at Nazareth seems to have delivered the *Midrash* sitting (Luke 4:20); here St. Paul stands (ver. 16).”

PULPIT COMMENTARY, Acts 13:15

and the highest seats in the synagogues, and the chief rooms at feasts” (Luke 20:46). He also upbraided the Pharisees for their practice of the same. “Woe unto you, Pharisees! for ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets” (Luke 11:43). There were even some who blew a trumpet in the synagogues, drawing attention to what they put into the treasury (Matt 6:2). Others made pretentious prayers in the synagogues, drawing attention to themselves (Matt6:5). However, this deterred neither Jesus nor those He sent out from going into the synagogues. There were some people there who were sincere of heart.

Paul and those with him went into the synagogue and “sat down.” This suggests that there was some kind of formality present in the synagogue. In fact, there were rulers and chief rulers in the synagogues (Mk 5:36,38; Lk 8:41; 13:14; Acts 18:8,17). In this case, the “ruler” was the director – in fact, “ It was his duty to select the readers or teachers in the synagogue, to examine the discourses of the public speakers, and to see that all things were done with decency and in accordance with ancestral usage.” THAYER With all of their deficiencies, Jews had been cultured to associate sobriety, order, and propriety with the assembly of the people. Jesus Himself submitted to this arrangement. On one occasion, when He was in His home town synagogue, the book of Isaiah was given to Him by the “minister” of that synagogue. When the Lord had finished reading it, He gave it back to the attendant (Lk 4:17-20). Jairus, whose daughter Jesus raised from the dead, was a ruler of the synagogue (Mk 5:36). On one occasion, the ruler of a synagogue in which Jesus healed a women with a spirit of infirmity rebuked the Lord for doing so (Lk 13:14). My point here is draw attention to the manners that were associated with solemn assemblies – particularly in the synagogue. These were not frivolous occasions, or times when unbridled speech was permitted. Whether the people were always aware of it or not, things pertaining to God had come to be known as serious, requiring some kind of order in those participating in them. It was into such an environment that Paul and company entered. The fact that they chose to do this should be considered.

THE READING OF THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

“ 15a And after the reading of the law and the prophets . . .” Other versions read, “the Torah and from the prophets,” CSB “Moses’ teaching and the prophets,” GWN and “the books of Moses and the prophets.” NLT

Paul and Barnabas make no effort to interrupt the proceedings of the synagogue, deferring to “decently and in order,” which are incumbent upon every holy assembly, whether Jewish or in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 14:46).

SOMETHING TO NOTE

There is something of interest to note in the references to synagogue decorum, as referenced in Jewish history. I have found that there is a general consensus among Biblical scholars that this is an accurate portrayal of what took place in the synagogues, and is still the practiced among orthodox Jews.

The entire service centered in God and His word: i.e. men addressing God in prayer, and hearing Him speak to them through His Word. There was also an emphasis on understanding, with Moses and the prophets being interpreted, expounded, or clarified. Our text will also confirm there was exhortation in which the people were encouraged and moved to act upon the Word they had heard.

All of this would appear incidental were it not for the involvement of the Lord Jesus and the apostles in the synagogues. These were also the places where Gentiles went to obtain more knowledge concerning the Lord (Acts 13:42; 14:1; 17:4; 18:4). It was even where Christians were often found (Acts 9:2). Whatever abuses were associated with the synagogues, their service reflected the intentions of godly men who had been cultured under a covenant that had been made by God Himself. It seems to me that it is proper to assume that the priorities established in those synagogues were noble, providing a suitable framework within which the insightful preaching of the Gospel could take place.

It also ought to be noted that in Christ Jesus, and under the New Covenant, these priorities have been confirmed and enhanced. However, the fun-filled and casual environment that characterizes many professed Christian assemblies reflects a religious manner that has been historically absent from societies that have been impacted by the truth of God. It is a new order developed by those who merchandise the people and advance purely humanistic agendas. The fruit that these approaches have yielded confirms they are not of God.

Let it be clear that I am not advocating a resurrection of Jewish manners. Rather, it is the spiritual dignity that was found in those early environs, and fostered by Jesus and the apostles themselves, that is my intention.

THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS

Here is an inspired expression that is pivotal to our understanding of God and His purpose. An improper understanding of this language impacts directly on one’s understanding of God, Christ, the New Covenant, and salvation itself. Where there is a lack of discernment in this matter, corruption in doctrine is inevitable, and cannot be avoided. A demeaning view of Divine revelation itself also will ensue. Because this is an essential building block in spiritual understanding, it will be profitable to be more definitive about this matter.

Corrupt Views

Whether taught intentionally or by inference, a prevailing view of the Scriptures has been adopted by a significant percentage of believers that attaches little or no importance to the section of Scripture this phrase describes: “the law and the prophets,” or “Moses and the prophets.”

In efforts to delineate the “New Covenant” or “New Testament,” an approach is taken that suggests the Old Covenant was a system that did not work, and therefore had to be replaced. Further, an improper view of the covenants themselves is integral to this doctrinal corruption.

Briefly stated, this doctrinal aberration has two views. Both of these views have this in common: the covenants are equated with a compilation of Scriptural books.

The first view presents the Old Covenant, or Old Testament, as the totality of the books of Genesis through Malachi, and the New Covenant or Testament as the totality of the books of Matthew through Revelation. This view is also promoted by the uninspired assignment of those terms to those sections of the Bible. Technically, they are best viewed as the Old Covenant writings and the New Covenant writings. That is, what was written under the time period governed by those covenants.

The second view postulates that everything prior to the book of Acts was actually under the Old Covenant. Therefore, it represents that covenant as the totality of the books from Genesis through John, and the New Covenant as the totality of the books from Acts through the Revelation. If all of this sounds a bit strange, it is because that is precisely what it is.

Both views teach that the Old Testament, as comprehended in the above definitions, was obviated with the inauguration of the New Covenant, and contains nothing immediately pertinent to salvation. As a consequence of this, the first thirty-nine books of the Bible, and often the Gospels in addition, are studiously neglected. Neither of the corrupt views say that the books in question were not inspired, only that they have now been rendered obsolete in matters relating to salvation. Further, the exponents allege, only those commands and directives that were restated under the New Covenant have any validity for men today. Additionally, all of the prophecies contained in them are said to have been fulfilled.

Points of of Clarity

First, it is imperative to comprehend that God’s purpose is an “eternal” one (Eph 3:11), and nothing that He has ever said or done has been in contradiction of it. Although the purpose was “hidden” from the past ages and generations (Col 1:26), it was firmly in place. Once that purpose is perceived in Christ Jesus, it can be seen throughout Moses and the prophets, both in utterance, and in types and shadows.

Second, let us dispense with the notion that everything written in Moses and the prophets has been fulfilled, with no statement made in them remaining to be fulfilled. Ponder the following examples.

Second, let us dispense with the notion that everything written in Moses and the prophets has been fulfilled, with no statement made in them remaining to be fulfilled. Ponder the following examples.

- Prophecies of the resurrection of the dead: Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27; Psa 17:15; Psa 49:15; Isa 25:8; 26:19; Dan 12:2-3; 12:13; Hos 13:14
- Prophecies of the day of judgment: 1 Chron 16:33; Psa 9:7; 50:3-6; 96:13; 98:9; Eccl 3:17; 11:9; ; 12:14; Dan 7:9-10
- Prophecies of eternal punishment: Job 21:30; Psa 9:17; Isa 33:14; 34:8-10; Dan 12:2
- Prophecies of the receiving of Israel: Isa 1:25-27; 2:3-5; 4:2-6; 11:11-13; 27:16; 30:18-26; 37:31-32; 44:1-28; 49:15-16; 59:20-21; Jer 33:24-25; Ezek 36:23-26.

The Scriptural Concept the Law

and the Prophets

God has frequently paired the writings of Moses and the prophets.

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2 Kings 17:13: ‘Yet the LORD testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets , and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by My servants the prophets .’ This was not speaking of the covenant itself, but of the corrective ministry of the Lord toward His people.

- Nehemiah 9:26: “Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against thee, and cast Thy law behind their backs, and slew Thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations.”

- Lamentations 2:9 : “Her gates are sunk into the ground; He hath destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the LORD.”

- Zephaniah 3:4: “Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law .”

- Zechariah 7:12: “Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law , and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his spirit by the former prophets : therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of hosts.”

- Matthew 5:17: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law , or the prophets : I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

- Matthew 7:12: “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets .”

- Matthew 11:13: “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.”

- Matthew 22:40: “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets .”

- Luke 16:16,29,31: “The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it . . . Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them . . . And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets , neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.”

- Luke 24:27,44: “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets , he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself . . . And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses , and in the prophets , and in the psalms , concerning me.”

- John 1:45: “Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law , and the prophets , did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.”

- Acts 24:14; 26:22; 28:23: “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets . . . Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come . . . And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses , and out of the prophets , from morning till evening.”

- Rom 3:21: “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being

witnessed by the law and the prophets .”

All of the above references have to do with the ethical and prophetic ministry of Moses and the prophets, not to the Old Covenant itself.

Distinguishing the covenants

While this may appear rather technical, that is not the case at all. The covenants, both the Old and the New, were the compact, or agreement, that God made under them.

The Old Covenant

For example, the Law came by Moses, but the Law and the covenant are not synonymous. The Ten Commandments are referred to as “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28; Deut 4:13). The agreement that was based upon those commandments was this: “Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them : I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5). This is stated again in Ezekiel 20:11,13,21. Jesus referred to this covenant in Luke 10:28: “And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.” Paul referred to it as “the righteousness which is of the law” (Rom 10:5). He also refers to this Old Covenant in Galatians 3:12: “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.”

The Old Covenant was this: to do everything God commanded, without any deviation whatsoever. A single transgression voided the covenant, breaking it and rendering its promise of life void (Ex 3:22; Lev 26:14-15; Num 15:40; Deut 6:24-25; 11:32; 12:14; 15:5; 28:1,15,58; 29:29; 30:8; 31:12; 32:46; Josh 23:6). There was to be perfect compliance, at all times and in all ways. Obedience was to be accompanied with holiness, fear, observing, hearing, learning, and not turning to the right or the left. Referring to this aspect of the Old Covenant James said, “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all” (James 2:10).

The New Covenant

The Old Covenant was this: to do everything God commanded, without any deviation whatsoever. A single transgression voided the covenant, breaking it and rendering its promise of life void

The New Covenant is one that is of another order, or kind (Jer 31:32; Heb 8:9). It is not based upon doing, but upon believing. Paul makes this telling point in Romans 10:5-11. “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) Or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.”

The New Covenant is spelled out with remarkable specificity, leaving no question as to either its nature of content. Jeremiah foretold it: “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts ; and will be their God, and they shall be my people . And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother,

saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jer 31:31-34).

This passage is repeated in Hebrews 8:8-12 and 10:16-17. There it is firmly established that this is the covenant currently being mediated by Jesus, and that it is the only means through which acceptance with God can be realized.

The Reading of the Old Testament

Paul referred to the reading of the Old Testament by the Jews. “But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which veil is done away in Christ” (2 Cor 3:14). This passage is alleged to mean that they read from the first thirty-nine books of the Bible. However, this is not the intended meaning of the text. The very next verse clarifies that this refers to what Moses said: “But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart” (2 Cor 3:15). This referred to the Law, the unmitigated keeping of which was required for Divine acceptance. That was the covenant – the Law, not as mere information, but as the stipulations of the covenant that God “made with their fathers” in the day He “took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt” (Jer 31:32). That covenant was accepted by Israel when they said, “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do” (Eph 19:8). That is the “old testament” of reference in Second Corinthians 3:15 – it was the reading of the covenantal stipulations.

Paul’s point in that passage is simply this – that frequent exposure to the clear and concise covenant itself never did promote life, but only death. In our text, “the reading of the law and the prophets” accents the promissory note of those scriptures – particularly as they regarded the coming of the Savior. In the book of Acts, a point is frequently made of this (3:18,22,24-25; 7:52; 10:43; 13:27, 33; 15:15; 24:14; 28:33). Those synagogues, however deficient they may have been, provided a most excellent environment in which to present the truth of the Gospel to both Jews and inquiring Gentiles. I do not believe the average “church” provides such an environment.

IF YOU HAVE A WORD OF EXHORTATION

“ 15b . . . the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”

THE RULERS OF THE SYNAGOGUE SENT UNTO THEM

“ . . . the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them . . .” Other versions read, “the synagogues rulers sent word to them,” NIV and “the officials of the synagogue sent them a message.” NRSV

“It is defined as ‘the act of laying such motives before a person as may excite him to the performance of any duty. It differs only from suasion in that the latter principally endeavors to convince the understanding, and the former to work on the affections. It is considered as a great branch of preaching, though not confined to that, as a man may exhort, though he do not preach; though a man can hardly be said to preach if he do not exhort.’”

The idea here is that the synagogue officials sent someone to Paul and Barnabas as they were sitting in the audience – for they had entered into the synagogue “and sat down.” Here again, there is evidence of order, and a refusal to allow the gathering to be disrupted by outbursts. At this point, it is enough to take note of the care the leaders had for proper focus and procedure.

IF YE HAVE ANY WORD OF EXHORTATION

“ . . . saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.” Other versions read, “a message of encouragement,” NIV “a word of comfort for the people,” BBE

“if ye have any sermon to exhort,” TNT “any word of instruction,” LIVING “something to say which will help the people,” IE “any word of exhortation or consolation or encouragement,” AMPLIFIED and “message of encouragement.” PHILLIPS

The Meaning of the Word

As used in this text, the word “exhortation” means, “exhortation, admonition, encouragement,” THAYER The basic, or root, meaning of the word is “calling someone to oneself,” and is consequently “the presentation of privileges and requirements.” FRIBERG It is an effort to move the hearer to act upon the word that has been spoken.;

McClintok and Strong’s Cyclopaedia says of the term “exhortation,” “It is defined as ‘the act of laying such motives before a person as may excite him to the performance of any duty. It differs only from suasion in that the latter principally endeavors to convince the understanding, and the former to work on the affections. It is considered as a great branch of preaching, though not confined to that, as a man may exhort, though he do not preach; though a man can hardly be said to preach if he do not exhort.’ I have never been satisfied with lexical definitions that equate exhortation with encouragement and comfort. These do not appear to harmonize with the manner in which “exhort” is used in Scripture.

- “And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation ” (Acts 2:40).
- “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord ” (Acts 11:23).
- “And now I exhort you to be of good cheer : for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship” (Acts 27:22).
- “Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up before hand your bounty , whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness ” (2 Cor 9:5).
- “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more ” (1 Thess 4:1).
- “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men ” (1 Thess 5:14).”
- “Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread ” (2 Thess 3:12).
- “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ” (1 Tim 2:1).
- “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded ” (Titus 2:6).
- “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: feed the flock of God which is among you , taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet 5:1-2).

These examples suffice to confirm the nature of exhortation. They also show the kind of social environment that was cultured among those in covenant with God.

This is an area in which the Gentile church is particularly weak. There is a need to call men into the good fight of faith, and summon them to take hold of what has been declared to them. Keep in mind that there are other unseen influences attempting to draw the hearers away from has been said,

and engage them in mundane things. That circumstance requires strong exhortations, particularly when the people have been exposed to the mind of the Lord as revealed in Scripture.

Paul and Barnabas Invited to Exhort

Having taken note that Paul and Barnabas were Jews, the leaders of the synagogue took their devotion and integrity for granted. With all of their faults, there was an underlying assumption that serious Jews were informed, and could speak intelligently and effectively to the people. I do not know how you could account for this text any other way.

Even though this circumstance should be much more pronounced among professing Christians, this is generally not the case at all. In fact, even in the setting of our text, which was vastly inferior to an assembly of those who are in Christ Jesus, an example is set forth that is exceedingly rare in any average Christian congregation of our time. I have often been in assemblies where some great man of God was present, who was never asked to even pray, much less address the assembly. Among the spiritually informed, this is wholly inappropriate.

Noting the Context

The context within which this request was made was the reading – the faithful reading – of the Law and the prophets. That kind of environment will have a significant impact on how a person speaks. Consider this circumstance with the recollection that faith comes through hearing (Rom 10:17).

YE MEN OF ISRAEL, AND YE THAT FEAR GOD

“ 16 Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.”

I must continually keep before you that this is a work to which the Holy Spirit had called and separated both Paul and Barnabas. I have no doubt that this fact is dictating where they go as well as what they say.

PAUL STOOD UP

“Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said . . .” Other versions read, “motioning with his hand,” NKJV “with a gesture began to speak,” NRSV “making a sign with his hand,” BBE “with his hand bespeaking silence,” DARBY “raised his hand for silence and began to speak,” NJB and “lifted his hands to quiet them.” NLT

As always, those who spoke for the Lord, desired to be heard, and spoke in a manner befitting that desire. This involved quieting the people, drawing their attention to the speaker, and then speaking with sufficient volume and clarity to be heard. The message that is delivered by those who speak as oracles of God is befitting of such an approach. After all, they are speaking “all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20).

Paul, like all those sent forth by Jesus, had been bathed in the words spoken to the holy prophets. “Lift up thy voice . . . cause it to be heard” (Isa 10:30); “lift up thy voice with strength” (Isa 40:9); “the watchmen shall lift up the voice” (Isa 52:8); “Cry aloud, spare not [do not hold back], lift up thy voice like a trumpet” (Isa 58:1); “cry: and lift up thy voice” (Jer 22:20). There is no purpose to speaking unless it can be heard and comprehended. The man of God does not speak to merely get things off his chest. He is speaking “as an oracle of God,” and as such, the issues of life and death are associated with what he says. He is speaking with eternity in perspective, and in order to clarify the issues with which men must deal.

MEN OF ISRAEL AND YE THAT FEAR GOD

“ . . . Men of Israel, and ye that fear God. . .” Other versions read, “Gentiles who worship God,” NIV “Israelites and others who fear God,” NRSV “Men of Israel, and you who have the fear of God,” BBE “Men of Israel and God-fearers,” CJB “Men of Israel and converts to Judaism,” GWN “Men of Israel . . . God-fearing Gentiles,” NLT “Men of Israel . . . and all others here who reverence God,” LIVING “Men of Israel, and you other people who also worship the true God,” IE “Men of Israel and “who reverence and fear God.” AMPLIFIED

It is generally understood that this is a description of the Jews and Gentile proselytes that were present. I see no need to doubt that perception. The description “that fear God” was intended to be descriptive of both groups. This was a group of people who feared God, and it was composed of both Jews and Gentiles, who had apparently converted to Judaism, or were about to do so.

The thing that is arresting to me is the manner in which he refers to them: “them that fear God.” This expression was also used to describe those who gathered at the house of Cornelius to hear Peter’s words (Acts 10:2). Maturing churches were described as “walking in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31). In fact, throughout the history of Abraham’s seed, the concept of fearing God had been kept alive, and that phrase was used of those who revered and served the Lord (Gen 42:16; Ex 1:17,21; 18:21; Neh 7:2; Psa 66:16; Eccl 8:12; 12:13). Job also was noted for fearing God (Job 1:1,9). The absence of such fear was also used to distinguish the ungodly (Deut 25:28; Psa 55:19).

This equates to the phrase “devout men,” which described the audience to whom Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5). Cornelius was also a “devout” man (Acts 10:2). Later in this chapter we will read of “devout and honorable women” (Acts 13:50). In Thessalonica, several “devout Greeks,” believed and joined with Paul; and Silas (Acts 17:4). In Athens, Paul reasoned with certain “devout persons” (Acts 17:17).

If all of this seems inconsequential, consider how differently a person speaks when he is cognizant that those to whom he is speaking fear God. Such an awareness strips from human speech distracting humor, religious chatter, and frequent references to mere human relationships.

Within contemporary Christendom, such descriptions are not at all common. This is a way of speaking that has nearly faded from view, even though it was faithfully maintained for over three thousand years before Christ, and for hundreds of years following His enthronement. The early church walked in “the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31). Believers are admonished to “Fear God” (1 Pet 2:17). On the Isle of Patmos, John heard a voice from heaven with a message to “them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people.” The message was “ Fear God , and give glory to Him!” (Rev 14:5-6).

If all of this seems inconsequential, consider how differently a person speaks when he is cognizant that those to whom he is speaking fear God. Such an awareness strips from human speech distracting humor, religious chatter, and frequent references to mere human relationships. It seems to me that it is good to take note of such expressions, and see to it that they are common among us.

GIVE AUDIENCE

“ . . . give audience.” Other versions read, “listen,” NKJV “listen to me!” NIV “hearken,” ASV “give ear,” DOUAY and “pay attention to me.” WEYMOUTH

Those who speak for God must insist on being heard. This is not to be approached as a mere matter of procedure. It rather denotes the seriousness of what is being spoken. If it is true that Paul and Barnabas had been separated for a work assigned to them by the Holy Spirit, and if the word they spoke was really a word from, heaven, how could it possibly be in order to ignore them? Such words must be heard, and done so with focus and interest. This is the significance of the word “hearken”

(Acts 2:14; 4:19; 7:2; 12:13; 15:13). This word means “to receive into the ear,” THAYER “listen carefully to, pay attention to,” FRIBERG and “pay close attention to.” UBS

Thus the stage is set for the remarkable exposition that follows. Paul has quieted the people, focused their attention on him, and called them to serious listening. The Spirit also present, and ready to go to work.

GOD CHOSE THE FATHERS, EXALTED THE PEOPLE, AND BROUGHT THEM OUT

“ 17 The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought He them out of it.”

Paul will now embark on a God-honoring discourse. He will assess pertinent history in strict accord with what the Lord Himself did. The distinguishing feature of his word will not be what men did, or what men ought to have done, but what the mighty God of heaven did. In this manner, he will provide a proper context in which the Spirit can work, and the nature of the people will be revealed. Throughout the book of Acts, as well as his epistles, Paul will meet the people where they are – but he will consistently meet them with Divine workings in mind, not their achievements or circumstances. He will not diagnose the people until he has clearly proclaimed what the Lord had done. Any diagnosis of the people that is not within that context is nothing more than a human imagination.

THE GOD OF THIS PEOPLE

“The God of this people of Israel . . .” Other versions read, “The God of our nation Israel,” NJB and “The God of our people, Israel.” IE

If we were talking about any other nation but Israel, their god is the one that THEY chose. Such gods are theirs because of their choice. But this is not the case with Israel. It is God who chose them, and not vice versa. That is, it is His choice that made them His people. Any choice the nation of Israel made to serve God followed His choice of them. This is made abundantly clear in Scripture.

- “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6).

- “The LORD did not set His love upon you, nor choose you , because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people” (Deut 7:7).

- “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth” (Deut 14:2).

- “Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD; and the people whom He hath chosen for His own inheritance” (Psa 33:12).

- “O ye seed of Abraham his servant, ye children of Jacob His chosen ” (Psa 105:6).

- “And He brought forth His people with joy, and His chosen with gladness” (Psa 105:43).

- “For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure” (Psa 135:4).

- “Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen ” (Isa 44:1).

The reality of God being Israel’s God was not something that they determined. It was, however, something of which they were to become aware. Thus it is written, “And I will dwell among the

children of Israel, and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God , that brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them: I am the LORD their God ” (Exo 29:45-46).

Similar Language Concerning the Church

We also ought to note that the same type of language is employed when speaking of the church – those who are in Christ Jesus.

- “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you , and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:16).

- “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world , therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19).

- “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Eph 1:4).

- “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).

- “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?” (James 2:5).

- “But ye are a chosen generation , a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

- “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for He is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with Him are called, and chosen , and faithful” (Rev 17:14).

Thus Paul launches his discourse by drawing the attention of the people to a Divine determination. God having chosen them, there was a solemn obligation placed upon them to receive whatever was sent to them from Him, and to believe whatever He said to them.

CHOSE OUR FATHERS

“ . . . chose our fathers . . . ”

The choice of Israel was based upon the choice of “our fathers,” or progenitors. It is possible for the word “fathers” to refer to those who originated, revived, or proclaimed certain teachings – i.e. “the church fathers.” However, that the way in which this expression is used. This refers to the fleshly lineage of the nation of Israel.

Until Jesus Christ, fleshly lineage was a critical matter. This is because the real objective of Divine selection was not a nation, or any other select group of people. The real birth that was anticipated in heaven was that of the Messiah – the Lord Jesus Christ. Apart from that, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had no lasting significance. This is the circumstance that surrounds Paul’s marvelous dissertation. When He speaks of Israel and the staggering privileges that were vouchsafed to them, it is with Jesus Christ in mind. This will become very apparent as we proceed through this text. On the day of Pentecost, this same approach was taken by Peter (Acts 2:14-36). This very same approach was also taken by Stephen when he spoke to the Jewish council (Acts 7:2-54).

Paul also used a similar form of reasoning when speaking to Greeks in Athens. Because they were not a Divinely covenanted people, he started with God creating them and placing them in both time and place. He then reasoned forward to the day of judgment, at which time all men will be judged by Jesus (Acts 17:22-31).

The Point to Be Seen

The thing to be seen here is that sound preaching and reasoning begins and ends with the Lord. That is something of what is involved in Him being “the First and the Last” (Rev 1:17), the “Beginning and the Ending” (Rev 1:8), and the “Alpha and the Omega” (Rev 1:11). It is also reflected in this description of God Himself: “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). It is also seen in this statement concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: “For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him” (Col 1:16).

Too much – far too much – of the preaching of our time begins and ends with men. It starts with their troubles, and ends with the purposed solution to them. It begins with what men want, and concludes by offering it to them. This kind of preaching is so skewed in the wrong direction that if there were no death, no resurrection, and no judgment day, it would not materially change the way these people preach. If there were no world to come, no eternal inheritance, and no heaven or hell, a significant percentage of modern-day preaching and teaching would remain the same.

When the book of Acts is read with a mind to see Divine involvements, it will significantly alter how we view efforts that claim to be done in the name of, and for the glory of, the Lord.

EXALTED THE PEOPLE

“ . . . and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt. . . ” Other versions read, “made the people great,” NIV “lifting the people up from their low condition,” BBE “made them a strong nation,” GWN “raised them up and multiplied them,” MRD “made the people prosper,” NIB “made them multiply and grow strong,” NLT “honored them in Egypt by leading them out,” LIVING “made this people important,” WILLIAMS and “made this people great and important during their stay in the land of Egypt.” AMPLIFIED

Precisely how were the people exalted while they were strangers in the land of Egypt? Judging from some of the different versions, one might be led to believe they were exalted to social prominence, even gaining considerable substance while there. However, the inspired record of their sojourn in Egypt will not lead a person to that conclusion, and it appears wholly out of order for some translators of Scripture to leave us thinking in such a manner.

Moses makes this statement concerning Israel’s sojourn in Egypt, and it occurred prior to the rise of a Pharaoh “which knew not Joseph.” “And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them ” (Ex 1:7). Speaking of that time, the Psalmist wrote, “And He increased His people greatly; and made them stronger than their enemies ” (Psa 105:24). Stephen spoke of this Divine favor in his great sermon to the council: “But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt ” (Acts 7:17).

Precisely when the exponential increase began, we do not know. However, it does appear that it was quite early during their pilgrimage. God had told Abraham his offspring would suffer affliction for four hundred years (Gen 15:13). Stephen said they were treated “evil for four hundred years” (Acts 7:6).

These affirmations confirm that the people were exalted while they were being oppressed. They were not exalted to political prominence, nor were they elevated in the eyes of the general Egyptian populous. Egypt was an incubator in which the promise of a multitudinous offspring was fulfilled. While Israel was under the bludgeon of oppression, they were increasing in number in order that they might be able to occupy the promised land. They did get the attention of the ruler of Egypt. Beholding their remarkable increase, he reasoned, “come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land ” (Ex 1:10). At that time, taskmasters were appointed over the children of Israel, and they “afflicted them with burdens.” However, it is written, “the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel” (Ex 1:12). The Pharaoh even launched a focused effort to kill all of the male babies in the nation, thinking to stem the tide of the rapid increase of people (Ex 1:15-22).

There is no way to account for the explosion of Israel’s population apart from the initiative God. God was exalting them, even while they were being oppressed! Blessed is that person who does not measure the blessing of the Lord by tranquil circumstances and a lack of oppression!

HE BROUGHT THEM OUT

“ . . . and with an high arm brought He them out of it.” Other versions read, “with uplifted arm,” NKJV “with mighty power,” NIV “with a strong arm,” BBE “stretched out arm,” CJB “His powerful arm,” GWN “by Divine power,” NJB “with wondrous power,” WEYMOUTH and “Then He lifted up His arm.” PHILLIPS

The expression “uplifted arm” is most precise. The words “high arm” mean an arm that is lifted high. This is a phrase denoting the manifest, or obvious, display of Divine power. It also describes the kind of authority that is resident in the Person of God – as though the mere lifting of His arm causes the appointed work to be set in motion.

We do know that angels were instrumental in the deliverance of Israel; from Egypt (Ex 14:19; Num 20:16). It is as though they were summoned into activity by the uplifted arm of the Lord. We also know that the Egyptians begged them to leave, giving them a significant amount of riches (Ex 11:2-3; 12:33,36). It only took the raised arm of the Lord to move them to be so charitable.

Divine deliverances are not wrought by extensive Divine activity – struggling, fighting, etc. Men are frequently called into fierce conflicts where they must fight, resist, and struggle for the victory. However, no such activity is required by the Lord of glory. This is something to be perceived. In fact, in Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, they did not have to raise a hand, either to defend themselves, or to overthrow their enemies.

GOD SUFFERED THEIR MANNERS

While some manuscripts may support this reading, both the historical accounts and the doctrine of Scripture suggest God’s endurance of their provocative ways. In fact, the book of Hebrews makes a point of their manners, which were endured for the forty years, finally excluded them from the promised land

“ 18 And about the time of forty years suffered He their manners in the wilderness.” Other versions read, “He put up with their ways,” NKJV “He put up with them,” NASB “He endured their conduct,” NIV “He bore with them,” RSV “He endured their manners,” DOUAY and “endured their behavior.” AMPLIFIED

Several versions present the idea of Divine care and gentleness: “as a nursing-father bare He them,” ASV “He took care of them,” CJB “He nursed them,” DARBY “He fed them,” MRD “cared for

them,” NIB “nursed them,” LIVING “was patient with them,” IE and “like a fatherly nurse He cared for them in the wilderness.” AMPLIFIED Referring to this translation, the NIV provides the following footnote: “Some manuscripts <and cared for them>.”

The period of forty years refers to the wandering of the Israelites in the wilderness. Stephen said of this same period, “And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?” (Acts 7:41-42). Of that period Moses said, “Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not hearkened to my voice . . . And your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness . . . Remember, and forget not, how thou provokedst the LORD thy God to wrath in the wilderness: from the day that thou didst depart out of the land of Egypt, until ye came unto this place, ye have been rebellious against the LORD” (Num 14:22,22; Deut 9:7).

Other writers spoke after the same manner: “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways” (Psa 95:10).

There is no question concerning the Lord caring for the people while they journeyed through the wilderness, providing their needs. “Yet Thou in Thy manifold mercies forsookest them not in the wilderness . . .” (Neh 9:19). However, that is not the thrust of this passage. While some manuscripts may support this reading, both the historical accounts and the doctrine of Scripture suggest God’s endurance of their provocative ways. In fact, the book of Hebrews makes a point of their manners, which were endured for the forty years, finally excluded them from the promised land (Heb 3:16-4:2). While God’s care for them was evident, the point made in the apostles’ doctrine is to take due note of their manners, avoiding such miserable responses to God (1 Cor 10:1-11). We are taught that we are not to emulate their wilderness manners (1 Cor 10:1-11).

GOD DESTROYED SEVEN NATIONS, AND DIVIDED THEIR LAND

“ 19 And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, He divided their land to them by lot.”

Take note that thus far Paul is accenting what the Lord has done.

- The Lord was “the God of this people.”
- God chose the fathers.
- God exalted the people.
- God brought them out of Egypt with a high hand.
- God suffered their manners for forty years.

Now he will refer to two more things that God did. All of this will firmly establish that no one can ignore the working of the Lord with impunity. Whatever views a person or group may have about the longsuffering of God, His gentleness and kindness, and His unwillingness for anyone to perish, when God works in a persons behalf, He will not allow it to be perpetually ignored.

Something to Notice

Here is something important to notice. Throughout the book of Acts, preaching began with the proclamation of what the Lord had done. This is true of all of the messages covered thus far.

- Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36).
- Peter before the religious rulers (Acts 4:8-12).
- Stephen before the Jewish council (Acts 7:2-52).;
- Philip before the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:30-35).
- Peter at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:34-43).
- Paul in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:18-41).

There is such remarkable consistency in this matter that it is startling to consider how it has escaped anyone's attention. Holy men started by proclaiming what the Lord had done. They then declared the implications of those works, and followed by applying them to their audience. This is precisely what Paul is doing in our text.

Why Is This Rare Today?

Why is this approach so rare in our day. Without being unduly distracted, this is owing to a very fundamental ignorance of what God has actually done throughout history. There are vast segments of Scripture that are like portions men have hidden in the back part of a museum. Yet, in many of these very sections there are revelations of the Person, purpose, and manners of the God of heaven. Our text provides us with an excellent example of this. However, even though such things may appear very apparent to those who have an acquaintance with Divine manners, they are hidden to those who have embraced sectarian and institutionalized interests. For this reason I am going to extend myself to emphasize Paul's stress on the workings of the Lord.

WHEN HE HAD DESTROYED SEVEN NATIONS

“And when He had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan ...” Other versions read, “He overthrew seven nations,” NIV “put to destruction seven nations,” BBE and “extirpated seven nations.” MRD

The seven nations are identified in Deuteronomy 7:1: “ the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Deu 7:1). Each one of these nations was larger than Israel, to say nothing of them in the aggregate. They are described as “seven nations greater and mightier than thou” (Deut 7:1).

According to appearance, it was Israel that engaged in an initiative to drive the heathen nations out of the land God had given to them. God told them to “possess the land” (Deut 1:8,21; Josh 1:11). He told them to “drive out all the inhabitants of the land” (Num 33:62). Israel fought, (Josh 10:36), and they subdued the land (Josh 18:1). When they were slack to possess the land, Joshua challenged them: “How long are ye slack to go to possess the land, which the LORD God of your fathers hath given you?” (Josh 18:3).

However, when it got down to the root cause for the expulsion of the nations, it was actually God who drove them out and destroyed them. Repeatedly the Word of God makes a point of this.

- Moses told the people God would bring them into the land and “cast out many nations” before them (Deut 7:1; 4:38;).

- After Israel came into the land under Joshua, God told them, “And ye went over Jordan, and came unto Jericho: and the men of Jericho fought against you, the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Girgashites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and I delivered them into your hand ” (Josh 24:11).

- Jehosaphat confessed, “Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of

this land before thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?" (2 Chron 20:7).

- In Nehemiah's day the people confessed, "So the children went in and possessed the land, and Thou subduedst before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gavest them into their hands, with their kings, and the people of the land, that they might do with them as they would" (Neh 9:24).

- The Psalmist exclaimed, " He cast out the heathen also before them , and divided them an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents" (Psa 78:55).

- Stephen said, "Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus [Joshua] into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David" (Acts 7:45).

Little by Little

In accordance with the promise of the Lord, the inhabitants were driven out "little by little," giving the people time to increase, and thus fill the land. The people were told that God would not drive out the inhabitants in a single year, for there were not enough Israelites to fully occupy the land. If the land was emptied too quickly, wild beasts would fill the land, becoming foes and hindrances to the people. Therefore God said, "I will not drive them out from before thee in one year; lest the land become desolate, and the beast of the field multiply against thee. By little and little I will drive them out from before thee, until thou be increased, and inherit the land" (Ex 23:30).

A Divine Manner Seen

Although there are a few exceptions to this rule, God generally uses means to accomplish His deliverance. In the case of Israel driving out the nations, He did it through their efforts, empowering them and giving them wisdom. Often they had to use the sword, gathering together and going forth under a commander (Josh 10:29). In the beginning, they walked around Jericho, and its walls fell down – yet they had to gird on their swords, enter into the city, and subdue it (Josh 6:20).

God still works in this manner, calling upon His people to do the impossible, then giving them the power to do it.

Another One of God's Ways

Also, another "way" of God is made known in the manner in which they occupied the land – "little by little." Until teach tribe increased to the point where they could occupy the land, enemies remained in it. So it is in the life of faith. There are lingering remnants of of sin, called "the old man," that remain in the believer. The size and power of this remnant is directly proportionate to the degree to which individuals are living unto the Lord, having yielded their members to Him as instruments of righteousness. Those who are not advancing in their spiritual maturity will not be able to gain dominance over their "old man," putting him off, as they are enjoined to do (Eph 4:22; Col 3:9).

I do not believe this is generally known within the modern church. The fact that there are so many recovery programs in place is sufficient confirmation of this observation. When professing believers have unusual difficulty expelling sin from their lives, it is because they are not living wholly for the Lord. Just as with Israel possessing the promised land, until they can occupy the area of life in which the propensity to sin is particularly strong, they will not be able to thoroughly "put off the old man."

HE DIVIDED THEIR LAND

"He divided their land to them by lot." Other versions read, "He distributed their land by allotment," NKJV "He distributed their land as an inheritance," NASB "He gave their land to His

people as an inheritance,” NIV and “He gave them [the Hebrews] their land as an inheritance [distributing it to them by lot.” AMPLIFIED

Because the land of Canaan was actually God’s land, He took it from the nations that were possessing it when Israel arrived, and gave it to them. This was by Divine intention. However, all of its inhabitants did not simply leave, and Israel march in and take the land for themselves. The land was given to them “by lot,” with each of the tribes receiving a portion of it appropriate to their size. They were then responsible for driving out the inhabitants of their section of land.

The method of division is specified –namely, “by lot” – was ordered through Moses a considerable time before he died: “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Unto these the land shall be divided for an inheritance according to the number of names. To many thou shalt give the more inheritance, and to few thou shalt give the less inheritance : to every one shall his inheritance be given according to those that were numbered of him. Notwithstanding the land shall be divided by lot : according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot shall the possession thereof be divided between many and few” (Num 26:53-56). The specific borders of the land were also specified (Num 34:1-12).

One of the chief difficulties with preaching in our time is the lack of Scriptural knowledge that exists in the churches. There is hardly any aspect of God’s great salvation that does not require extensive explanation. This makes spiritual growth more difficult, because the people can rarely draw profitable conclusions from what is preached.

This was faithfully carried out by Joshua, confirming the faithfulness of this good man. Joshua 14:1-3: “And these are the countries which the children of Israel inherited in the land of Canaan, which Eleazar the priest, and Joshua the son of Nun, and the heads of the fathers of the tribes of the children of Israel, distributed for inheritance to them. By lot was their inheritance, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses, for the nine tribes, and for the half tribe. For Moses had given the inheritance of two tribes and an half tribe on the other side Jordan: but unto the Levites he gave none inheritance among them. (Josh 14:3) For the children of Joseph were two tribes, Manasseh and Ephraim: therefore they gave no part unto the Levites in the land, save cities to dwell in, with their suburbs for their cattle and for their substance. As the LORD commanded Moses, so the children of Israel did, and they divided the land” (Josh 14:1-5).

In conformity with the word of God through Moses (Num 34:13-14), and by Joshua, the tribes of Reuben and Gad were the ones who received their inheritance on the other side of Jordan, and not in Canaan itself. “With whom the Reubenites and the Gadites have received their inheritance, which Moses gave them, beyond Jordan eastward, even as Moses the servant of the LORD gave them” (Josh 13:8). The determination made through Moses is specified in Numbers 32:22: “And Moses gave unto them, even to the children of Gad, and to the children of Reuben, and unto half the tribe of Manasseh the son of Joseph, the kingdom of Sihon king of the Amorites, and the kingdom of Og king of Bashan, the land, with the cities thereof in the coasts, even the cities of the country round about.”

This record of the distribution of the land is recorded in Joshua 14:5-19:51 – 185 verses, Yet, Paul passes over this with a single sentence. This is because the people were familiar with their Scriptures, how their nation had arisen, and the working of the Lord throughout the entire process. Had they not been familiar with this history, he would have explained the matter more fully.

A Difficulty of Our Time

One of the chief difficulties with preaching in our time is the lack of Scriptural knowledge that exists in the churches. There is hardly any aspect of God’s great salvation that does not require extensive explanation. This makes spiritual growth more difficult, because the people can rarely draw profitable conclusions from what is preached. They have difficulty seeing the scope of the Lord’s

working because they are largely ignorant of what He has done. Unprofitable ministers are content to tell the people God loves them and wants to do them good. Yet, they have not expounded the great realities that comprise salvation – which exposition is essential because of the ignorance of the people. It is not possible for hearers to profit when men simply refer to what the Lord has done, if those realities are not actually known among the hearers. For example, simply saying Christ died is not sufficient if men do not know why He died – that would be like Paul referring to the possession of Canaan among an uninformed Gentile audience as he did to informed Jews in this text.

The present condition of the church has been in place for such a lengthy period of time that the very foundations of the faith no longer exist in the mind and conscience of the people. Therefore, the circumstance of which David warned has come to pass: “If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?” (Psa 11:3). In my judgment, it would be good to call a cessation to most, if not all, problem resolution, until such time as the foundations have again been established in the thinking of the people. That condition would probably bring about a resolution to the difficulties that are hindering the ignorant and the unlearned.

I understand that this would dissolve many careers and organizations. However, they have been imposed upon the church by men, and need to go.

GOD GAVE THEM JUDGES

“ 20 And after that He gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.” Other versions read, “. . . all of which took about four hundred and fifty years. And after these things He gave them judges until Samuel the prophet,” NASB and “All this took about 450 years. "After this, God gave them judges until the time of Samuel the prophet.” NIV

This has proved to be a thorny passage for some. Reasoning upon a statement made in First Kings, some say the 450 years is from the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt until David’s expulsion of the Jebusites from the strongholds of Zion (2 Sam 5:6-8). Most commentators reject the idea that the judges covered a period of 450 years, for adding up the specified durations of their rules only comes to 339. However, during that time, the Israelites were also delivered over to their enemies several times, which years are not included in the years during which the judges ruled. The following table provides a satisfactory explanation.

Thus, the period from the time of the judges until Samuel can be properly calculated to be 450 years. I do not wish to make an issue out of this – only to show that there is a sound basis for the way the text is stated.

The point to be seen is that the judges were given to the people by God. They were not the result of human ingenuity. It is also essential to see the kind of rulers that were established in the land: JUDGES. These were men of wisdom and discretion, as well as military leaders when required.

This was the kind of role Moses fulfilled during the forty years Israel wandered in the wilderness (Ex 18:13). When the burden became too heavy for him, the Lord took some of the spirit that was upon Moses, and placed it upon seventy holy men, appointed them to also be judges among the people (Num 11:16-25). Issues requiring a holy decision were then brought to the judges who had been given some of the spirit that was on

ACTIVITY YEARS

Served Chushanrishathaim (Judges 3:8) 8

JUDGE Othniel (Judges 3:10-11) 40

Served Eglon (Judges 3:14) 18

JUDGE Ehud (Judges 3:26-30) 80

Served Jabin, kiing of Canaan (Judges 4:2-3) 20

JUDGE Deborah (Judges 5:15-31) 40

Served Median (Judges 6:1) 7

JUDGE Gideon (Judges 8:28) 40

JUDGE Abimelech (Judges 9:23) 3

JUDGE Tolah (Judges 10:1-2) 23

JUDGE Jair (Judges (Judges 10:3) 22

Served Philistines/Ammonites (Judges 10:7-8) 18

JUDGE Jephthah (Judges 12:7) 6

JUDGE Ibizan (Judges 12:8-9) 7

JUDGE Elon (Judges 12:11) 10

JUDGE Aedon (Judges 12:13-14) 8

Served the Philistines (Judges 13:1) 40

JUDGE Samson (Judges 16:31) 20

JUDGE Eli (1 Samuel 4:18) 40

TOTAL YEARS 450

Moses (Ex 21:6,22). Moses also charged these men to “judge righteously” (Deut 1:16).

Now, after entering into Canaan, God gave the people special judges. Their role was not merely to settle disputes among the people, but to direct them in the ways of the Lord. They stemmed the spread of iniquity and maintained peace. They also initiated military exploits that were required.

Behold the priority of sound judgment and righteousness. God did not raise up leaders to be tyrants over the people. He did not institute an office intended to provide personal advantages for the ruler. The role of the judges had to do with the relation of the people to God Himself. They were required to be godly, exercise sound judgment, and see to it that the will of the Lord was done. That is Divinely sanctioned leadership, and it is still required among the people of God.

GOD GAVE ISRAEL A KING

“ 21 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.”

Paul is confirming the sovereignty of God and the fundamental corruption of the people. Even though He frequently intervened in the affairs of the people, showing them great kindness, yet they pursued their own wicked ways, thus confirming that they were dominated by sin, even though they had been given every conceivable advantage.

THEY DESIRED A KING

“And afterward they desired a king . . .” Other versions read, “they asked for a king,” NKJV “their request for a king,” BBE “the people demanded a king,” GWN “they asked for themselves a king,” MRD and “begged for a king.” NLT

God had established His power and faithfulness to these people. He brought them out of the land of Egypt, giving them favor in the eyes of the Egyptians. He brought them through the Red Sea on dry land, and destroyed the hosts of the Egyptians before their very eyes. He gave them miraculous bread every day, and brought a mighty river out of a rock. He kept their shoes and clothing from wear and tear as they journeyed through the wilderness. He subdued their enemies. He enabled them to take Jericho, and possess the promised land. He gave them judges who led them in victory over their foes, and delivered to them the word of the Lord that was appropriate for their situation. Surely they will be thankful for such favor, never before vouchsafed to any nation under the heavens!

Alas, however, when the last judge, Samuel, grew old, and they felt that his sons were not an adequate replacement for him, they came to Samuel with a petition. “Behold, thou art old, and thy sons walk not in thy ways: now make us a king to judge us like all the nations” (1 Sam 8:5). God had actually separated them, redeeming them “from Egypt, and from the nations and their gods” (2 Sam 7:23).

It is still true that when religious people insist on having leaders like like those who are of the world, it is because they have rejected the rule of God. There really is no way to sugarcoat this. If it is true that we are “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10), then seeking spiritual advantages and resources elsewhere constitute a rejection of the Lord.

For those with no heart for the Lord, this might have seemed like a reasonable request – but it was not. In fact, it greatly “displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us.” As a consequence “Samuel prayed unto the Lord” (2 Sam 13:6).

Like God did in the wilderness when He gave the people quail, then slew them when they ate the meat (Num 11:33), He would grant the people the desires of their heart. He will not do this because it is good for them, or because it is the best thing to do. Here is how the Lord answered the lamenting Samuel. “And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected Me , that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt even unto this day, wherewith they have forsaken Me , and served other gods, so do they also unto thee. Now therefore hearken unto their voice: howbeit yet protest solemnly unto them, and show them the manner of the king that shall reign over them” (1 Sam 8:7-9).

It is still true that when religious people insist on having leaders like like those who are of the world, it is because they have rejected the rule of God. There really is no way to sugarcoat this. If it is true that we are “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10), then seeking spiritual advantages and resources elsewhere constitute a rejection of the Lord.

GOD GAVE THEM SAUL

“ . . . and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.”

The people asked Samuel to give them a king, but God is the one him. The procedures God used are quite revealing. He told Samuel, “Torrow about this time I will send thee a man out of the land of Benjamin, and thou shalt anoint him to be captain over my people Israel, that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines : for I have looked upon My people, because their cry is come unto

me” (1 Sam 9:16). Not only did God bring Saul to Samuel, he did so in order to deliver His people from the Philistines – not merely to satisfy their thirst for a king. When Samuel saw Saul the Lord said to him, “Behold the man whom I spake to thee of! this same shall reign over My people” (1 Sam 9:17). In due time, and at an appointed place, “Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the LORD hath anointed thee to be captain over His inheritance ?” (1 Sam 10:1).

Later Samuel told Saul that God had chosen him when he was small in his own estimation: “When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?” (1 Sam 15:17). Alas, even though God made Saul king, He also removed him from that position.

GOD REMOVED SAUL AND RAISED UP DAVID

“22 And when He had removed him, He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also He gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will.”

Paul is working his way to the Lord Jesus Christ. He does not allow himself to be distracted by the many details associated with what he has said. He can do this because the people already have a knowledge of them. However, he is going to assist them in seeing that God was behind all of these things, and that He was fulfilling what He had already determined.

GOD REMOVED SAUL

“And when He had removed him . . .” Other versions read, “put him on one side,” BBE “taken him away,” GENEVA “deposed him,” NJB and “put him down.” WEB

The removal of king Saul was accomplished by God, with several things taking place. The removal was done justly, and for good cause, because Saul had refused to obey the Lord. The Lord had sent Saul on a mission to “utterly destroy the sinners the Amalekites, and fight against them until they be consumed” (1 Sam 15:18). This was mandated because God remembered “that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt” (1 Sam 15:2). However, Saul did not do this. It is written, “But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly” (1 Sam 15:9). Therefore God set out to remove him from the very office into which He had placed him.

- It repented the Lord that He had set up Saul to be king (1 Sam 15:11).
- Because Saul rejected the word of the Lord, the Lord rejected him from being king over Israel (1 Sam 15:25).
- God tore the kingdom from Saul and gave it to his neighbor, who was David, who was better than him (1 Sam 15:28).
- Although Samuel mourned over Saul, he never again spoke to him until the day of his death (1 Sam 15:35).
- The Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul (1 Sam 16:14).
- An evil spirit from the Lord came upon him (1 Sam 16:14).
- In a battle with the Philistines, Saul was “sorely wounded” (1 Sam 31:3).
- Saul committed suicide (1 Sam 31:4).

From his disobedience concerning the Amalekites until his death spanned a period of

approximately twenty-five years. Yet, it is briefly comprehended in the word, “He removed him.” It ought to be apparent, that once a person is rejected by God, nothing else is of any consequence. It is no wonder that the people of God are admonished, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5).

Why Did God Choose Saul in the First Place?

Some might wonder why God chose Saul in the first place. Did He make a mistake in doing so? Of course, such questions are foolish, and ought not to be entertained for a moment. We are told why He chose Saul – that he may save My people out of the hand of the Philistines ” (1 Sam 9:16). Having fulfilled that mission, he fell and was rejected.

HE RAISED UP DAVID

“ . . . He raised up unto them David to be their king. . . ” Other versions read, “He raised up for them David,” NKJV “He made David their king,” NIV “replaced him (Saul) with David,” NLT and “set up David to be their king.” TNT

This also was a process that extended over a period of time.

- As soon as Saul was rejected, God told Samuel he had chosen one of the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite (1 Sam 16:1).
- Samuel anointed David in the house of Jesse (1 Sam 16:13a).
- The Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward (1 Sam 16:13b).
- David became noted for his military exploits (1 Sam 18:7).

David remained a king incognito for twenty-five years, finally assuming the throne after the death of Saul (2 Sam 2:4). Yet, that period of time is covered by the words, “He raised up David to be their king.”

It ought to be apparent that the people of God should not get caught up in the details of life. They should be compelled by fundamental things, not incidentals.

A MAN AFTER MINE OWN HEART

“ . . . to whom also He gave testimony, and said I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after Mine own heart, which shall fulfil all My will.” Other versions read, “a man dear to My heart,” BBE “a man according to My own heart,” DOUAY and “the man I like.” IE

What does God mean by “a man after Mine own heart” ? First, it means that God does not view every person alike – not even those in a chosen nation, and in covenant with Him. If the love of God was indiscriminate, such a statement could not be made.

A person that is especially dear to God is identified in Scripture. The Lord speaks of such individuals, and our text states that David was such a person.

- **THOSE WHO TREMBLE AT HIS WORD.** “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word ” (Isa 66:2).
- **THOSE WITH HUMBLE AND CONTRITE HEARTS.** “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit , to revive the spirit of the humble,

and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa 57:15).

• **THE MEEK.** “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek . . .” (Isa 61:1).

• **BROKEN HEART AND CONTRITE SPIRIT.** “The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart ; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (Psa 34:18). “The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart , O God, thou wilt not despise” (Psa 51:17).

• **THE LOWLY.** “Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly . . .” (Psa 138:6).

• **THOSE WHO SIGH AND CRY BECAUSE OF SURROUNDING ABOMINATIONS.** “And the LORD said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof ” (Ezek 9:4).

Briefly stated, the person who is after God’s own heart is one who is tender toward Him, sensitive of His will, and discontent with any shortcomings. It is a person who laments personal sin, never seeking to justify it. It is the person who is instant in his response to God, not tarrying to obey or slow to discern.

The Lord described David as a man who “shall fulfill all My will.” Other versions read, “will do everything I want him to do,” NIV “will carry out my wishes,” NRSV “will do all things that I will,” GENEVA “will carry out my every wish,” NAB “will perform my entire will,” NJB and “who will do all My will and carry out My program fully.” AMPLIFIED

This description is reminiscent of what the Lord said about Abraham: “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen 18:19).

In both cases, the men were enabled by God to fulfill His will. However, that was not the point of emphasis. It was rather that Abraham and David were men who could be directed by God. Their hearts were tender, and they were not like the horse and mule “Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you” NKJV (Psa 32:9).

These days, this kind of teaching is not common – but it is sorely needed. There are many people in whom God is not working simply because their hearts are hard, and they are dominated by unbelief. I understand that this circumstance can be corrected, but it will require sensitivity on their part for this to happen.

FINAL THOUGHT

I want to again draw attention to the way in which Paul is accenting the working of the Lord. From the beginning of Paul’s message through this verse, the following is what the Lord is declared to have done. All of these things are affirmed in the power of the Spirit.

- The Lord was “the God of this people.”
- God chose the fathers.
- God exalted the people.
- God brought them out of Egypt with a high hand.
- God suffered their manners for forty years.

- God destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan.
- God divided the land to Israel by lot.
- God gave them judges.
- God gave them Saul to be to be their king for forty years,
- God removed Saul from being king.
- God raised up David to be their king.

GOD RAISED UP A SAVIOR FOR ISRAEL

“ 23 Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus. ” Other versions read, “from the offspring of this man,” NASB “From this man’s descendants,” NIV and “Of this man’s posterity.” NRSV

Now we come to the central point of Paul’s message – the Person of Jesus Christ. While the birth of Jesus is traced back to Abraham (Gal 3:16), and ultimately to Eve (Gal 3:15), the exalted and Kingly Christ is traced back to David (Acts 2:30,34-36; 2 Tim 2:6). Jesus is the real point! He is the reason for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He is the reason for Israel. He is the reason for David. These

Every involvement of God with men up to that point was preparatory for the Savior. It was designed to confirm the need of a Savior, and the nature of the One God would provide.

were all appointed vehicles through whom the Savior would come. The promises made to them were in order that the Christ might be recognized when He came.

During the time of Moses, God gave Israel a lawgiver. Later He gave them judges, and then kings. But those leaders were not the point. They were rather a preparation for the point. The real need of humanity was not a lawgiver. It was not a military captain, or a discreet judge. The need was not a mighty king, or a charismatic leader. What the race of Adam needed was a Savior, and that is what God ultimately raised up. Every involvement of God with men up to that point was preparatory for the Savior. It was designed to confirm the need of a Savior, and the nature of the One God would provide.

The Savior, Jesus Christ, was raised up according to God’s promise. If they were not being directed by the Scriptures, this was not the kind of Savior men would expect. Even today, where there is a fundamental ignorance of the Word of God in general, and the promises of God in particular, it is not possible for men to have a lucid conception of a Savior sent from God. Blessed is the person who sees this, and shapes his life around it.

CONCLUSION

Paul’s message in the Antioch synagogue is a display of spiritual understanding. In it, God is seen as the principle Person, and Christ as the One to carry out His objective of salvation. The world is seen as a stage on which the drama of redemption is being brought to its appointed conclusion. All of those who are involved in this purpose have been chosen by God, and He is the One who works in them. However, because this purpose is being worked out in a moral arena, amidst competing influences, man’s involvement must not be taken for granted. Already Paul has cited Saul as an example of one chosen by God, yet rejected because he failed to yield to Him. This kind of exposition will continue, ensuring that any person toward whom God shows favor is expected to be sensitive and responsive to that favor.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #58

PAUL PREACHES IN ANTIOCH, #2

“ 13:24 When John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. 25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not He. But, behold, there cometh One after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose. 26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. 27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28 And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain. 29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. 30 But God raised Him from the dead: 31 And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people. 32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, 33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. ” (Acts 13:24-33)

INTRODUCTION

Paul passes over 2,000 years of Divine workings – from Abraham through the raising up of Jesus – leaping over the period of the kings, the era of the Prophets, the Babylonian captivity, the return of Judah from that captivity, and the rebuilding of the Temple (a period of more than a thousand years). It ought to be obvious that there is objectivity in his preaching. He is not merely passing along information, or giving a chronological history lesson. In order to preach like this, God Himself, the Author of history, must be known. His objectives and priorities for mankind must be comprehended, and the indispensable role of Jesus discerned.

A PROPER VIEW IS IMPERATIVE

There have been men peruse the same era of time and see other things

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- **JOHN PREACHED BEFORE HIS COMING (13:24)**
- **WHEN JOHN FULFILLED HIS COURSE (13:25)**
- **TO YOU IS THE WORD OF THIS SALVATION SENT (13:26)**
- **THEY KNEW HIM NOT AND CONDEMNED HIM (13:27)**
- **THEY FOUND NO CAUSE OF DEATH IN HIM (13:28)**
- **WHEN THEY HAD FULFILLED ALL THAT WAS WRITTEN OF HIM (13:29)**
- **BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD (13:30)**
- **HE WAS SEEN MANY DAYS (13:31)**
- **WE DECLARE UNTO YOU GLAD TIDINGS (13:32)**
- **HE HATH FULFILLED THE SAME UNTO US THEIR CHILDREN (13:33)**
- **CONCLUSION**

with no obvious or immediate association with the purpose of God. Ponder the epochal historical events that occurred during the period time covered in our text.

- Babylon uses geometry in astronomic measurements. They also identify the signs of zodiac – 2000 B.C.,
- Four basic elements identified in India: earth, air, fire, and water – 2000 B.C.
- Indoor bathroom plumbing first used in Crete – 2000 B.C.
- Beginning of Semitic alphabet – 2000 B.C.
- Library in Hittite capital contains tablets in eight languages – 1500 B.C.
- Shipbuilding flourishes in Mediterranean and Scandinavian countries – 1500 B.C.
- Founding of the city of Corinth – 1500 B.C.
- Egyptian dynasties – 1570-1164 B.C.
- Philistines smelt iron – 1050 B.C.
- First recorded Olympic games – 776 B.C.
- Founding of Rome – 753 B.C.
- Nebuchadnezzar's Hanging Gardens – 575 B.C.
- Indian surgeon Susrata performs cataract operations – 500 B.C.
- Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle – 470-322 B.C.
- Archimedes, Greek mathematician and scientist – 287-212 B.C.
- Great wall of China built – 215 B.C.
- Ships from China reach India for the first time – 100 B.C.
- Roman Empire – 60 B.C.
- London founded – 43 A.D.

These are samples of unusual human productivity, ranging from language and literature. to philosophy and architecture; and from shipbuilding to the establishment of cities and empires.

Yet they are not significant within the framework of the purpose of Almighty God.

While, from the human point of view, these are representative of significant historic events, they are all incidental from the heavenly point of view. These are samples of unusual human productivity, ranging from language and literature, to philosophy and architecture; and from shipbuilding to the establishment of cities and empires. Yet they are not significant within the framework of the purpose of Almighty God. That is, they are given no emphasis, nor does the Lord use them as pillars of reason, or primary reference points. In fact, they are not even mentioned in the Word of God – not even in passing.

GODLY THINKING

We are living in a period of time in which professed Christian thinkers have been unduly influenced by worldly accomplishments. The realm of Christian scholarship has been penetrated by bodies of knowledge Scripture refers to as “science falsely so called,” or “false called knowledge” NKJV (1 Tim 6:20). Such things as psychiatry with its psycho-analysis, hermeneutics (methodological principles of interpretation), principles of statistics, logic (the science of the formal principles of reason), physical science, etc. have been merged with religious thought. This has yielded all kinds of erroneous doctrines, as well as the modern approaches to exposition.

As soon as men attempt to mingle human wisdom, however valid it may appear, with the revealed wisdom of God, the mind is diverted away from God. It is not possible for any form of the wisdom of man to assist one in understanding the revelation of either the Person or purpose of God Almighty. This is not a speculative statement, God has spoken on this matter. “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:19-21). With holy deliberation, Paul avoided any attempt to merge the wisdom of God and the wisdom of men. “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Paul provides enough of Israel's history to establish God's purposeful dealings with them, as well as their recalcitrant nature toward that Divine intent.

WHY MENTION THIS?

Because this is such a sensitive subject, it is necessary to affirm the relevance of its mention. It is because our text is exposing us to the preaching of one of the premier men in the body of Christ. He is on a mission originated the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2), and is speaking in view of the solemn commission that was delivered to him when he first was added to the church (Acts 26:18). His thinking and speaking are shaped by his faith. In addition to this, as he wrote some time later, Jesus had considered him “faithful, putting him into the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12). That is, like Abraham and David before him, he could be trusted to do what pleased the Lord (Gen 18:19; 1 Sam 13:14). For these reasons, it is vital that we note the manner in which Paul speaks. He does not rely on rabbinical interpretations or the traditions of the elders. There is no reference to the instruction of the scribes, or even to the sayings of Gamaliel. He relies wholly upon the Scriptures for the formulation of both reasoning and proclamation. This is not a common practice in our time, but there is good reason to believe it is a completely sound one.

SUFFICIENT INFORMATION FOR THE OCCASION

Paul provides enough of Israel's history to establish God's purposeful dealings with them, as well

as their recalcitrant nature toward that Divine intent. Now he shows that a kingly Messiah was promised through David, and that everything revolved around Him. Because of who He was, men were not given the option of rejecting, spurning, or refusing to hear Him. Often I hear men referring to others being free to reject Jesus. This is a clumsy saying, and is unworthy of repetition. I understand that men are capable of rejecting Christ, but they are not free to do so. In fact, they will be condemned for doing it (Mk 16:16). Too frequently, I fear, men are presented with the fact of Christ as though they had time to think about it, considering whether it was to their best advantage to believe on Him and act accordingly. In this message, Paul will give them a single opportunity to consider the matter, admonishing them to zealously avoid falling into the category of those who did not believe the faithful report of the Savior. He had no tolerance for unbelief.

In the case of king David, everything was not centered in him. He was the head of the nation, and the people looked to him. However, he only had power to govern the people, not to change them. He could defeat the enemies, but he could not utterly remove them. He was a man after God's own heart, but he was not the seed of the woman who would bruise the head of the serpent. Thus Paul reasons from the most outwardly productive king of Israel to the King of kings. He says only enough concerning the history of Israel to clearly establish the priority of Christ Jesus, and the necessity of responding to His Person and work.

JOHN PREACHED BEFORE HIS COMING

“ 13:24 When John had first preached before His coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.”

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Leaping from David to the raising up of Jesus, Paul commences his exposition of the Savior with the ministry of John the baptist. This is because Jesus cannot be properly understood independently of John's ministry. Here was a man who was the subject of prophetic utterances at least seven hundred years before the Word became flesh, and dwelt among men (John 1:14). Isaiah spoke of him in this manner: “The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Isaiah 40:1-4). Matthew states that John the Baptist particularly fulfilled this prophecy (Matt 3:1-3). While Matthew only refers to the first part of this prophecy, Luke includes the later part of the prophecy as well: “Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God” (Luke 3:4-6).

Following Christ's resurrection, the references to John the Baptist of significant.

- **JESUS SAID:** “For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5).

- **JESUS SAID:** “ For this is he , of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist : notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John ” (Matt 11:10-13).

- **ZECHARIAS SAID:** “And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest : for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways ; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins” (Luke 1:76-77).

• **PETER SAID:** “Beginning from the baptism of John , unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection” (Acts 1:22) .

• **PETER SAID:** “That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ” (Acts 10:37).

• **PETER SAID:** “Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 11:16).

• **PAUL SAID:** “Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance , saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus” (Acts 19:4).

John’s ministry was to “prepare” the people for the Christ (Isa 40:3; Matt 3:3; 11:10; Mk 1:2-3; Lk 1:76-77; 3:4; 7:27). This prophet acquaints us with what is required to receive Christ, and to be received by Him as well. He was appointed by God to do this work, and therefore no person can afford to ignore John the Baptist. In preaching the Gospel, John plays a significant role.

BEFORE HIS COMING

“When John . . . before His coming . . .” Other versions read, “before the coming of Jesus,” NIV “?or whose coming John made ready,” BBE “before He came to public attention,” CSB “before the face of His entry,” DARBY “before Jesus began His ministry,” GWN “heralded His coming,” NAB “before Jesus arrived,” NET and “whose coming was heralded.” NJB

The idea is that it is a baptism that is characterized by repentance. In other words, a person who had not repented, even though they may have gone through the external form of baptism, had not really been baptized. It was repentance that validated the baptism, and baptism that confirmed the actuality of repentance.

It is interesting to note how Paul refers to Christ’s coming. He does not refer to His birth, but to the commencement of His ministry. This took place after He was baptized by John (Matt 3:16-4:17). Like John the Baptist, that was the time of His “showing” (Lk 1:80). Even though, according to the flesh, people knew of Jesus prior to His baptism, technically speaking, He had not yet “come” – i.e. He had not yet entered into the work He was sent to accomplish. Prior to His baptism John the Baptist knew of Him, recognizing that He was a righteous man (Matt 3:13-14). He was also known in Nazareth, where He regularly attended the synagogue, and was a recognized reader and expounder of the Scriptures (Lk 4:16-17). The general populous considered him to be “the carpenter’s son,” knew Mary was His mother, and that He had brothers and sisters (Matt 13:55-56). Owing to His apparent occupation, they also knew of Jesus as “ the carpenter, the son of Mary” (Mk 6:3).

However, that is not how Jesus is to be known, and thus such knowledge gave no advantage. During the first thirty years of His life, He appeared to be nothing more than an extraordinary Jew. His primary associations were with Mary and Joseph, and their family.

John the Baptist was born six months before Jesus (Lk 1:24-26,36). Thus, when Jesus commenced His ministry at thirty years of age (Lk 3:23), assuming that John began his ministry at the same age, John had been preparing the way for the Lord for at least six months. Thirty years of age was the time when the priests began their ministry (Num 4:3,23,30,35,39,43,47; 1 Chron 23:3). Although not intended to be a point of controversy, this is the basis for considering John’s ministry to also have commenced when he was thirty years of age. David was also thirty years of age when he began to reign (2 Sam 5:4).

THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

“ . . . had first preached . . . the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.” Other versions read, “ Repentance and baptism,” NIV “the baptism which goes with a change of heart,” BBE “an immersion in connection with turning to God from sin,” CJB “the baptism of penance,” DOUAY “repent of their sins and turn to God and be baptized,” NLT “baptism of reformation,” YLT “the need for everyone in Israel to turn from sin to God,” LIVING “change their hearts and to be immersed,” IE and “baptism as an expression of repentance” WILLIAMS

In their somewhat feeble attempt to clarify the text, some of the English versions distort this verse. They treat the matter as though repentance and baptism were separate from one another, or, and John preached it, could be accomplished independently of one another. However, the expression “baptism of repentance” is a precise translation, reflecting exactly what the words say. It does not refer to two independent actions, but to one. The idea is that it is a baptism that is characterized by repentance. In other words, a person who had not repented, even though they may have gone through the external form of baptism, had not really been baptized. It was repentance that validated the baptism, and baptism that confirmed the actuality of repentance. This is why John refused to baptize certain Pharisees and Sadducees who came to his baptism. He said to them, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance : and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham” (Matt 3:7-9). Their fleshly lineage back to Abraham did not qualify them to be baptized. Rather, there had to be clear and unquestionable evidence that they had repented, else they could not be baptized.

The Word of Preparation

Whatever a person may think about the matter, repentance is a requisite for coming to Christ. It is an absolute requirement. This is how men were prepared for receiving the earthly ministry of Christ, and it is also required for eternally benefitting from His presence in heaven (Acts 2:38; 3:19; Acts 17:30; 26:20).

Following the enthronement of Christ in heaven, Peter also associated the evidence of repentance with repentance itself. In order for sins to be blotted out, he declared the person must first be converted: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted , that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). In this case, “repent” referred to a change of mind, and “convert” to a change of conduct. While a change in conduct cannot be sustained independently of being “in Christ,” it must be commenced prior to that experience. On his way to Jesus, Paul had to cease persecuting the church – and he did. When the Thessalonians turned to God, they ceased the worship of idols (1 Thess 1:9).

This was the point that caused John to refuse to baptize the Pharisees and Sadducees that came to his baptism. He told them, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,” or “in keeping with repentance,” NASB or “that befits repentance” RSV (Matt 3:8).

This is not a strange concept. Even under the Law, the Lord required Israel to amend their conduct, insisting that such an action must precede the experience of His favor. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings , and I will cause you to dwell in this place . . . For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings ; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor; if ye oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your hurt: then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever ” (Jer 7:3,5-7; 26:13; 35:15).

I do not believe it is possible to establish that a person can come to Christ without renouncing sin. Nor, indeed, is it possible to appropriate His great salvation without extending oneself to cease and desist from deviate conduct. Such determinations cannot be maintained without receiving the grace

of God. However, just as surely as the lame was told to pick up his bed and walk, so the sinner must determinedly embark on a new course of life if he expects to be blessed by Jesus. That determination will be empowered, and Divine enablement will be granted to the soul who comes to Jesus in such a manner. They have brought forth fruits worthy of repentance, and they will not be left to navigate in their own strength.

Much of the evangelism of our day does not insist on this approach to Jesus. It leaves people imagining that they can come to Jesus clinging to their old manner of life, thinking that their behavior will be addressed after they are in Christ. It is true that when we come to Christ we come stained with the guilt of sin, but we do not come with any allegiance to it! Repentance is a change of perspective and values that brings one to hate unrighteousness and resolve to have nothing more to do with it. Conversion is the outgrowth of that, and enables the person to throw off his deviate ways en route to the Savior.

This was the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist. He would not receive those who refused to change. You may be sure that less is not required today in coming to Jesus.

In his message, Paul will make perfectly clear that no person can come to Jesus who maintains a disdain for His Person or His word. That kind of manifestation must come to a grinding halt, else the person has judged themselves unworthy of eternal life.

Prior to John, washings were all ceremonial. They were not associated with any fundamental change in the people (Heb 9:10). However, John's baptism was not a mere ceremony. It was related with a very real change in the people. For the first time in history, men would acquire a knowledge of forgiveness – something that was never accomplished through the Law. In prophesying of this ministry, Zecharias being filled with the Holy Spirit, said of John: "And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; to give knowledge of salvation unto His people by the remission of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77).

The idea here is that of more precisely defining salvation in the minds of the people. Until this time, owing to the abbreviated revelation of God, and the limitations of the Old Covenant, salvation had been largely associated with outward deliverance. This, however, is not the nature of the salvation Jesus would bring. His would be a deliverance from the guilt and power of sin, this present evil world, and the devil – something never before realized to such an extent.

WHEN JOHN FULFILLED HIS COURSE

"25 And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not He. But, behold, there cometh One after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose."

John the Baptist ministered at a unique time. He stood between the covenants, as it were, preparing the people for the ending of the Old Covenant, and the beginning of the New – for that, among other things, is what would be accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Jesus said of John, "The law and the prophets were until John : since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16).

Jesus referred to "the law and the prophets" in respect to their purpose, or the role they played in the execution of God's eternal purpose. They were not an end of themselves, but were designed to acquaint men with God, and ready them for Christ by confirming the nature of fallen man. The Law presented the unalterable demands of God, which amounted to the necessity of men being like God before they could be fully approved by Him. In His acceptance of men, God would not compromise His own character. First, such a compromise is not even possible, for God "cannot deny Himself" (2 Tim 2:13). That is, He cannot speak or conduct Himself in contradiction of His own nature. This

meant that He could not receive men unless someone stepped into the defiled domain and acted in the behalf of men. This would require the expiation of their sins, the defeat of their foe, and the full satisfaction of God Himself. The Law confirmed that this did, in fact, have to be done. The Prophets spelled out the characteristics of the Savior, and how He would go about achieving this requirement. Neither the Law nor the Prophets were ultimately intended to spell out the manner in which men were to live. They did do this, but that was not their greater work.

When the Savior came, He would do a work that would fully meet the righteous requirements of the Law, and would also thoroughly fulfill the prophecies declared by the prophets. Once He came, the ministry of the Law and the Prophets would be reduced to a secondary position, being overshadowed by a greater glory.

John the Baptist occupied a transitory position in time – a time when the Lord was redirecting the way men thought. The emphasis of preaching, or inspired declaration would change.

JOHN FULFILLED HIS COURSE

“And as John fulfilled his course.” Other versions read, “was finishing his course,” NKJV “was completing his course,” NASB “was finishing his work,” NRSV “was ending his work,” CJB “was completing his life work,” CSB “was fulfilling his ministry,” MRD “completing his mission,” NET “towards the end of his career,” WEYMOUTH “was closing his career,” WILLIAMS “was finishing his race,” MONTGOMERY and “reached the end of his time.” PHILLIPS

The Greek words translated “his course” are **to.n dro,mon** , and have the following lexical meaning. “His course of life,” THAYER and “his racecourse, course, place for running.” FRIBERG Paul spoke of finishing his “course” (Acts 20:24), and when he came to the conclusion of his life he wrote, “I have finished my course” (2 Tim 4:7).

This statement is made against the backdrop of Divine assignment. In general, it is said of all men, “From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live” NIV (Acts 17:26). For believers, life is described a “the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1). That is, life is like a race with a particular course, or path, and a specified duration of time. Because it is possible to be on the wrong path, and squander the time that has been allotted to us, wise men have prayed, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psa 90:12).

For John the Baptist, his life’s work lasted for approximately six months. Shortly after Jesus began His ministry, John was imprisoned by Herod (Matt 4:12; Lk 3:20), and eventually beheaded (Matt 14:10). His was a brief, but aggressive, ministry – and he finished his course in good stride, having accomplished what God sent him to do – prepare the way of the Lord, and “make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Lk 1:17). He lived for thirty years, spending most, if not all, of his adult life “in the deserts until the day of his showing unto Israel” (Lk 1:80). That time came when “Annas and Caiaphas” were “high priests.” At that time “the word of God came unto John the son of Zecharias in the wilderness . . . he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Luke 3:3).

Commencing his ministry in the power of the Holy Spirit, this righteous man faithfully ran the course that was set before him, finishing it to the glory of God.

Our text states that the completion of his course involved a declaration. It was like a capstone on his work, enabling him to finish the race set before him in full vigor, while faithfully fulfilling what he had been sent to do.

I AM NOT HE

“ . . . he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not He.” John the Baptist was a different kind of minister and prophet – more after the New Covenant than the Old, yet standing between them. His ministry did not center in himself, but in the coming Christ. In such a case, I cannot imagine him referring to his work as “The John the Baptist Ministries” – a procedure that has become quite common in our day. The reason for this is that it is not possible to capitalize on the name of Jesus, or use it to bolster a particular work. It was not the name of John the Baptist, or baptizer, that brought the people to him, but what he said.

During his ministry, he had gotten the attention of the people. Confirming the validity of his ministry to prepare the way of the Lord, it is written of him, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt 3:6). The people “counted him as a prophet” (Matt 14:5). So powerful were His words that “all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not” (Luke 3:15). It was this latter consideration that moved John to declare “I am not He!”

Being filled with the Holy Spirit “even from his mother’s womb,” John knew who he was, and the mission on which he had been sent. On one occasion, when particularly questioned by the crowd, he did not hesitate to declare who he was. John provides the details of that conversation. “And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ . And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not . Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No . Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias” (John 1:19-23).

The impact of John upon the people can be measured by the associations that were made with him. They pondered the following possibilities.

- That he was the Christ (Anointed One) the prophets said would come (Isa 61:1-4). John said, “I Am not He.”
- That he was the Elijah that Malachi said would come (Mal 4:5-6). John responded, “I am not.”
- That he was the Prophet that Moses said would come (Deut 18:15,18). John responded, “No.”

As Jesus indicated, the prophecy of Malachi was not yet fulfilled, even after John had been beheaded. Jesus left the door open for the fulfillment of Elijah coming and restoring all things.

It may be countered that Jesus said John was Elijah, and therefore John was uninformed on that matter. Jesus’ words concerning this are given by Matthew: “And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come” (Matt 11:14). Mark records, “And they asked him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? And he answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things ; and how it is written of the Son of man, that he must suffer many things, and be set at nought. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him” (Mark 9:11-13). This question was asked by the disciples just after the transfiguration of Jesus, during which Elijah appeared in glory. At that time, John the Baptist had already been martyred (Matt 14:10). Yet, Jesus said, “Indeed, Elijah is coming first and restores all things” NKJV (Mark 9:12). He then added that the people did to John whatever they wished, referring to his death. Additionally, John did not “restore all things,” and was never intended to do so. His work was to prepare the way for the Lord, and that is what he did.

Clarifying the association of John with Elijah, the angel Gabriel announced to Zecharias that the

prayer of himself and his wife, Elizabeth, concerning having a child, had been heard. Their son would be John the Baptist. Of him Gabriel said, “And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias , to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (Luke 1:17).

From these I deduce the following.

- That John the Baptist was a type of the Elijah of whom Malachi prophesied, coming in his power and spirit.
- That his role was not to restore all things, but to turn “many” toward the Lord, preparing the way for Him. The conclusion of his ministry was not the restoring of the people, for the very people to whom he had ministered were guilty of delivering Jesus to Pilate to be crucified.
- As Jesus indicated, the prophecy of Malachi was not yet fulfilled, even after John had been beheaded. Jesus left the door open for the fulfillment of Elijah coming and restoring all things.

THERE COMES ONE AFTER ME

“But, behold, there cometh One after me, whose shoes of His feet I am not worthy to loose.”

John, though standing at the threshold of Christ’s earthly minister, was given to perceive His greatness. He saw himself as unworthy to even remove the shoes of Jesus from His feet. That would have been a servile task, to say the least. However, John saw such a humble task as so honorable he considered himself unworthy of such a privilege.

Jesus once testified to the greatness of John the Baptist when compared to other men: “But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet . For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist .” Then, confirming the greatness of the salvation He would effect, and the era of greatness that was upon them, He added, “notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Mat 11:9-11). That is, a man-to-man comparison with John would confirm that no man excelled him. However, when compared to the domain in which men stood, the Kingdom Jesus ushered in brought to men a greatness that excelled that of John the Baptist. The difference was where men stood, not who they were. John was like a giant standing in a valley, while those in Christ are like midgets standing on a mountain – small in personal comparison, but greater in privilege.

John, though standing at the threshold of Christ’s earthly minister, was given to perceive His greatness. He saw himself as unworthy to even remove the shoes of Jesus from His feet. That would have been a servile task, to say the least. However, John saw such a humble task as so honorable he considered himself unworthy of such a privilege.

I can only imagine the kind of response John the Baptist would have to the religious pride that exists in our time.

What Did John Say About Jesus?

The testimony of John concerning the Lord Jesus Christ is remarkably extensive – and it was all uttered in a relatively brief period of time. That was after Jesus was baptized, during the close of John’s ministry. Or, as our Paul said, “while John was completing his course.” NASB (Acts 13:25). The pertinence of his testimony is certified by the words of Jesus Himself: “he bare witness unto the

truth” (John 5:33). Here are the things he said.

- **MIGHTY.** John said Jesus was “mightier” than John (Matt 3:11a; Mk 1:7a; Lk 3:16a).

- **SUPERIOR.** John said he was not worthy to loose the sandals from His feet (Matt 3:11b; Mk 1:7b; Lk 3:16b).

- **A BAPTIZER.** John said Jesus would “baptize . . . with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:11c; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16).

- **A PURGER AND GATHERER.** John said Jesus would thoroughly purge His floor, gathering in the wheat, and burning up the chaff (Matt 3:12; Lk 3:17).

- **PREFERRED.** John said Jesus was preferred before him. (John 1:15,26a,30)

- **ETERNAL.** John said Jesus existed before him (even though He was born after John (John 1:15,26a,30).

- **UNKNOWN prior to his baptism.** John said that until His baptism, the Christ was not truly known (John 1:26,27).

- **THE LAMB OF GOD.** John identified Jesus as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29,36).

- **UNKNOWN UNTIL BAPTIZED.** John said he did not know who Jesus was unto he baptized Him (John 1:31).

- **TO BE REVEALED.** John said he came baptizing in order that the Christ might be revealed in being baptized (John 1:31).

- **SPIRIT REMAINED ON HIM.** John said he was given a sign: the One upon whom the Spirit descended and remained was the Christ, who would baptize with the Holy Spirit (John 1:32-33).

- **SON OF GOD.** John said he saw this happen, and bare record “that this is the Son of God” (John 1:34).

- **RECEIVED WHAT HE HAD FROM HEAVEN.** When John was told that Jesus was baptizing, he responded, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven” (John 3:27).

- **JOHN WAS SENT TO PRECEDE HIM.** John said he was “not the Christ,” but was “sent before Him” (John 3:28).

- **THE BRIDEGROOM.** John said Jesus was “the Bridegroom” and had “the bride,” while he was the “friend of the bridegroom” (John 3:29a).

- **REJOICED AT THE BRIDEGROOM’S VOICE.** John said he stood and heard, rejoicing greatly “because of the Bridegroom’s voice,” and in this his joy was fulfilled (John 3:29b).

- **MUST INCREASE.** John said that Jesus “must increase,” but he had to “decrease” (John 3:30).

- **CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN.** John said Jesus “came down from heaven . . .” (John 3:31).

- **IS ABOVE ALL.** John said Jesus “is above all” (John 3:31).

- **HIS TESTIMONY NOT RECEIVED.** John said Jesus testified what He had seen and heard, and “no man receiveth His testimony” (John 3:32).

- **THE MEANS OF CERTIFICIATION.** John said that the person who did receive

Christ's testimony "hath set to his seal that God is true," or "certified that God is true" NKJV (John 3:33).

- **SPOKE THE WORDS OF GOD.** John said of Jesus, "For He whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God. . ." (John 3:34a).

- **HAD THE SPIRIT WITHOUT MEASURE.** John said of Jesus, "God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him" (John 3:34b).

- **THE FATHER LOVED HIM.** John said, "The Father loveth the Son . . ." (John 3:35a).

- **THE FATHER GAVE ALL THINGS INTO HIS HAND.** John said, "The Father ... hath given all things into His hand" (John 3:35b).

- **WHOEVER BELIEVES ON HIM HAS EVERLASTING LIFE.** John said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life . . ." (John 3:36).

- **THE WRATH OF GOD ABIDES ON WHOEVER DOES NOT BELIEVE HIM.** John said, ". . . he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on Him" (John 3:36).

There is a hasty listing of twenty-seven things John the Baptist said concerning Jesus. Although it is a source of great shame, there are staggering numbers of professing Christians that have not yet heard this much information about Christ. Further, what they have heard does not blend with the nature of these revelations. Observe that in preparing people for the Lord, he made no reference to Jesus resolving personal problems, correcting social ills, assisting people to fulfill their dreams, and a host of similar things now being placed before the people. However, John was sent by God, filled with the Spirit, and commissioned to make the people ready for the Lord. Judge for yourself the source of much of what is being said about Jesus in our time.

Also note that what John said about Jesus is perfectly harmonious with what Jesus said about Himself, and how He was declared in the "apostles' doctrine." It is the nature of truth to always be symmetrical – all utterances blending with and complementing each other. Messages that are at a variance with the Person and purpose of God, as well as the declared objectives of Jesus, cannot possibly be true. A variance with God voids the message.

TO YOU IS THE WORD OF THIS SALVATION SENT

" 26 Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent."

Having delivered a stirring and insightful summation of about 2,500 years of history, Paul zeros in on the purpose of it all – salvation, deliverance, rescue, and preservation. This all has more to do with eternity than with time, and with the world to come rather than this present evil world. He is going to show that Jesus is pertinent to the salvation that God has promised. Jesus has no relevance apart from that promised salvation.

MEN AND BRETHREN

"Men and brethren . . ." Other versions read, "brethren," NASB "brothers," NIV "my brothers," NRSV "men, brethren," DOUAY/RWB/YLT and "ye men and brethren." GENEVA/PNT/TNT

The majority of later English

This all has more to do with eternity than with time, and with the world to come rather than this present evil world. He is going to show that Jesus is pertinent to the salvation that God has promised. Jesus has no relevance apart from that promised salvation.

versions omit the word “men,” employing only the word “brethren” or “brothers.” Both older and newer Greek manuscripts contain the two words translated “men” and “brethren” (**Andrej avdelfoi**). The first word (**Andrej**), as used in this text, has the following lexical meaning: “when persons of either sex are included,” THAYER and “person.” UBS

The second word (**avdelfoi**), as used in this text, has this lexical meaning: “having the same national ancestor, belong to the same people, countrymen.” THAYER

The first word – “men” – views the listeners as being traced back to Adam, the “one blood” from which God made all man (Acts 17:26). The second views their ethnic origin – from the standpoint of their progenitor being the same as that of Paul himself – hence he calls them “brethren,” as being members of the same family, as well as of the human race itself. As we will see, these distinctions are critical to the effective communication of the message Paul is delivering.

CHILDREN OF THE STOCK OF ABRAHAM

“ . . . children of the stock of Abraham . . .” Other versions read, “sons of the family of Abraham,” NKJV “children of Abraham,” NIV “descendants of Abraham’s family,” NRSV “sons of the family of Abraham,” RSV “descendant of Abraham,” GWN and “sons of the race of Abraham.” YLT

The word “stock” is a proper translation of the Greek word used here, although that term does require some interpretation. It is referring to the progenitor from which the people sprang. From the ethnic point of view it could be translated “family” or “race.” From a parabolic point of view, a “stock” would be like a trunk of a large tree that yielded all manner of branches and fruit. Here, it is descriptive of the fleshly progeny of Abraham – particularly the Jews which were traced backward from the sons to Jacob, through Jacob, through Isaac, and finally to Abraham.

WHOSOEVER AMONG YOU FEARETH GOD

“ . . . and whosoever among you feareth God . . .” Other versions read, “you God-fearing Gentiles,” NIV “others who fear God,” NRSV “converts to Judaism,” GWN and “all those others among you who reverence and fear God.” AMPLIFIED

This particularly refers to Gentile proselytes, but is by no means limited to them. It also includes the Jews who feared the Lord. Prior to the coming of Christ, and with very few exceptions, the Jews were the exclusive custodians of things pertaining to God. Here, however, the fear of the Lord is not perceived as a creed or an empty claim. Paul distinguishes those in his audience whose lives are being directed by their fear and consciousness of the living God. The message he will deliver is for those, and those alone.

A word also ought to be said about

Gentiles coming to the synagogue. During those early times, and prior to the establishment of independent congregations of believers, this was the place where devout Gentiles came to appropriate more of the knowledge of God. Such people were aware that the Jews had been blessed by God with a unique knowledge of God, and were in covenant with Him. Now Paul includes such people in the word he has to deliver.

Thus we have four different relationships delineated in this text. First, “men” deals with the lowest level of commonality – Adam. Second, “brethren” is the basis of personal identity, in this case, with Paul as a Jew. Third, there is the matter of those not related by blood, yet who have kindred interests – the Gentiles. Fourth, there is the highest level of commonality in a mixed audience – the fear of the Lord. Everyone in the synagogue could be included in “men” – identity with Adam.

TO YOU IS THE WORD OF THIS SALVATION SENT

“ . . . to you is the word of this salvation sent.” Other versions read, “the word of this salvation has been sent,” NKJV “the word of this salvation is sent out,” NASB “this message of salvation has been sent,” NIV “is the word of this salvation sent forth,” ASV “the message that God saves people,” GWN “is the word of this life sent,” MRD and “has been sent the message of this salvation [the salvation obtained through Jesus Christ].” AMPLIFIED

Precisely to whom is “the word of this salvation” sent? Technically, it is sent to “all men” – those who have come from Adam. Narrowing that down, it is “sent” first to the ones to whom it was promised – the Jews. Therefore Peter once told an audience of Jews, “Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). Later, speaking to those gathered at the house of Cornelius, he referred to the Gospel as “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel , preaching peace by Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36). However, in its most precise form, this word is “sent” to those who fear the Lord, are eager to please Him, and are devoted to Him. To those people, the Gospel is truly “the glad tidings” (Acts 13:32), and “glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15).

One of the great tragedies of our time is the near-total lack of the awareness of a need for a Savior from sin. The very concept of sin has been neutralized by references to genetic flaws, inherited tendencies, addictions, and unbecoming habits. Consequently, a Jesus is being preached that is rarely associated with deliverance from the guilt and power of sin (Rom 6:18) , or rescuing people from a state of condemnation (John 3:18) , or delivering them from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10). A Jesus whose fundamental work was to please God is virtually unknown. As a result of an erroneous emphasis, worship has been reduced to lip-service rather than serving God with all of the heart, soul, mind, and strength.

What Is Salvation?

Defined etymologically, salvation is deliverance, rescue, and preservation. While such a definition is technically correct, it lacks the substance that can be found only in the prophets. They are the ones who were used by God to define the work of the Savior. Here are some of their representations.

- Sins being made white as snow (Isa 1:18).
- Death swallowed up in victory, tears wiped away, and the rebuke of God’s people taken away (Isa 25:8).
- The deaf hearing the words of the Book, and the eyes of the blind seeing out of obscurity (Isa 29:18).
- The meek increasing their joy, and the poor rejoicing in the Holy One (Isa 29:19).
- Those who erred in spirit will come to understanding, and those who murmured learn doctrine (Isa 29:24).
- A King shall reign in righteousness (Isa 32:1).
- A Man shall be for a hiding place (Isa 32:2).
- Seeing and hearing shall be with consistent clarity (Isa 32:3).
- There will be an understanding of knowledge, and speaking will be with clarity (Isa 32:4).
- A highway of holiness will be provided for men, and those who walk on it will not err (Isa 35:8).
- Men will be saved with an everlasting salvation (Isa 45:17).
- Men will be turned from unrighteousness (Isa 59:20).

As long as men are the body, there are certain conditions that are not eliminated by the salvation of God. These includes tears, death, sorrow, crying, and pain. These will not be viewed as “former things” until the Lord comes, the present heavens and earth pass away, and we are forever with the Lord.

- Men will be brought out of the prison house (Isa 42:7).
- Bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison; proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord (Isa 61:1-2).
- Give beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, and the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness (Isa 61:3).
- Finish the transgression, make an end of sins, make reconciliation, and bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24).
- Open a fountain for sin and uncleanness (Zech 13:1).

Sickness, disease, poverty, and other forms of human suffering are grievous – but none of them separate men from God. Things of that order do not turn the face of God against us, or cause the wrath of God to come. They are all symptoms of the curse, but they are not the curse itself. Salvation is primarily, and consistently from sin, the world, and the devil. Jesus came into the world to “save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15). He came to deliver us “from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4). His purpose was to “reconcile us into God” (Col 1:20).

Nowhere is it proclaimed that the work of the Savior is to correct social and domestic ills, or assist men in forming new habits. Those who declare such a salvation cannot guarantee their product. They cannot ensure peace in the home, a state of physical wellness, and marital bliss. Such things are not encompassed in the salvation of God – at least, not while men are in this world. As long as men are the body, there are certain conditions that are not eliminated by the salvation of God. These includes tears, death, sorrow, crying, and pain. These will not be viewed as “former things” until the Lord comes, the present heavens and earth pass away, and we are forever with the Lord. That is the express teaching of Jesus Himself, and is addressed to the churches (Rev 21:4).

“The word of THIS salvation” is the word declaring that what the prophets promised is fulfilled in Christ Jesus – that is, that the salvation they foretold can now be realized. Those who deliver any other purported good news have only deceived the people. They have not been sent by God, and the Jesus they present is “another Jesus” who has no moral or spiritual power.

THEY KNEW HIM NOT, AND CONDEMNED HIM

“ 27 For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him.”

Paul now delivers a word concerning the Jew’s rejection of Jesus. He shows that while it can be explained, it can by no means be justified. It is good for those of our generation to give due heed to these words. When there is an undue exaltation of academics and human scholarship, men are satisfied with explanations – even though they are quite often shallow and conciliatory to the flesh. However, as Paul will confirm, explanations that overlook unbelief and hardness of heart are not acceptable. Neither, indeed, is it possible for any explanation to neutralize the fact that certain advantages had been given to the people, yet they did not capitalize upon them.

BECAUSE THEY KNEW HIM NOT

“For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not . . .” Other versions

read, “they did not know Him,” NKJV “recognizing neither Him,” NASB “did not recognize Jesus,” NIV “having no knowledge of Him,” BBE “not having known Him,” DARBY “did not apprehend it,” MRD “though they did not realize it,” NJB “not knowing who He was,” ISV “were ignorant of Him,” WILLIAMS “did not know or recognize Him,” AMPLIFIED and “refused to recognize Him.” PHILLIPS

And what can be said of the people of our time who do not have the faintest idea of what the prophets have said about the Savior? How will it be possible for them to recognize Him? Will they have to take the word of others, all the while ignoring what the prophets have said?

The rejection of Jesus was the result of the collaboration of the Jews: “they that dwell in Jerusalem AND their leaders.” In this, the people chose to follow the leaders, while the leaders refused to yield to the original reaction of the people to Jesus. The leaders determined the course of action, and the people followed them. However, the people were not innocent – neither is any group who follow false leaders. Jesus once said, “And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Matt 15:14).

Paul says this unholy alliance of people “knew Him not.” Precisely what does that mean? There are several possibilities.

- Were not personally acquainted with Him.
- Failed to pick up on the things that He said about Himself.
- Did not pay attention to those who were blessed by Him.
- Simply did not know about a Savior like this.
- Were not aware of what they were really doing.

As used here, the meaning of the phrase “did not know” involves more than simply being ignorant. There is also the element of disregard in the thoughtlessness, THAYER and oversight . FRIBERG Doctrinally, the intention of Paul is to point out that they did not recognize the One foretold by the prophets, and announced by John the Baptist. By intention, God had adequately prepared the Jews to receive the Christ as soon as they saw Him. Both His character and His work were spelled out by the prophets. John the Baptist specifically said that He was the Son of God, and had come down from heaven.

However, those who dwelt in Jerusalem, together with their rulers, could not make a correlation between Jesus of Nazareth and the Messiah foretold by the prophets and announced by John the Baptist. They “knew Him not,” or “did not know or recognize Him.” AMPLIFIED There was also the element of stubbornness in their ignorance, as indicated by Phillips’ translation: “they “refused to recognize Him.”

BECAUSE THEY KNEW NOT THE VOICES OF THE PROPHETS

“ . . . nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day . . . ”

Their ignorance was highlighted by the fact that the prophets were publically read every sabbath day. That is, they were regularly submitted to the promises of a coming Savior, and therefore should have recognized Him. There were some, of course, who did see in Jesus the fulfillment of the prophets. Philip told Nathanael, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). Alas, however, such people were in the vast minority. The majority of the people, together with their “rulers,” or religious leaders, could not associate Jesus of Nazareth with the promises delivered by the prophets, as record in the Scriptures. They were not able to recognize the One of whom they spake, even though He was enfleshed before their very eyes, and was “approved of God” among them “by miracles, signs, and wonders” (Acts

2:22).

Notice that the reading of the prophets is equated with hearing their voice: “the voices of the prophets which are read.” That phrase distinguishes a living word from a mere literary word. To hear the prophets read is the same as hearing their thundering announcements of a coming Savior. The same is true of the record of Jesus words, and the writings of the Apostles,

The Transgression of Ignorance

It is also important to note that spiritual ignorance leads to sin. John states that the “world” did not know Him when “the Word became flesh” (John 1:10). He also states that His own people did not receive Him in the capacity of a Savior (John 1:11). Peter traced the Jew’s rejection and crucifixion of Jesus to their ignorance of His identity (Acts 3:17). Paul does the same thing in this text, and in his epistle to the Corinthians (1 Cor 2:8). In fact, he accounted for his own former rejection of Christ by stating he was living “in ignorance and unbelief” (1 Tim 1:18).

What of Our Time?

And what can be said of the people of our time who do not have the faintest idea of what the prophets have said about the Savior? How will it be possible for them to recognize Him? Will they have to take the word of others, all the while ignoring what the prophets have said? What if they are not even aware that God prepared the people for the coming of Christ through Moses and the prophets? And what if they are ignorant of the preparatory ministry of John the Baptist, and of the critical role of repentance in the preparation he announced? Although it is grievous to acknowledge such a condition, I fear there are many professing preachers and teachers who do not even know these things.

This is complicated by the fact that the Scriptures themselves are not prominent in many assemblies. All of this is greatly compounded by the presentation of a Jesus who is nothing more than the creation of men, bearing little, if any, similarity to the Jesus who was prophesied by the holy prophets. Men are hearing of the kind of Jesus that sells books, promotes careers, builds large institutions, and produces a prosperous and trouble-free life. It is no wonder there is so much ignorance of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, where there is an ignorance of the real Jesus, there will eventually be hostility against Him.

THEY HAVE FULFILLED THEM

“ . . . they have fulfilled them in condemning Him.” Other versions read, “in condemning Him they fulfilled the words of the prophets,” NIV “gave effect to them by judging him, BBE “fulfilled that message by condemning him,” CJB “fulfilled also the voices of the prophets,” DARBY and “have actually fulfilled these very predictions by condemning and sentencing [Him].” AMPLIFIED

People who reject Jesus today are also fulfilling the prophecies that spoke of His rejection – and it is certainly no benefit to be guilty of such a thing. There really is no excuse for rejecting Jesus.

They did not fulfill the prophets by receiving Christ, and thus realizing the promised benefits that came through Him. Instead, they fulfilled the Scriptures that spoke of His rejection. Here are some examples of what the prophets said on this matter.

- “He is despised and rejected of men” (Isa 53:3).
- “I gave My back to the smiters, and My cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not My face from shame and spitting” (Isa 50:6).
- “All they that see Me laugh Me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that He would deliver Him: let Him deliver Him, seeing He

delighted in Him” (Psa 22:7-8).

- “Reproach hath broken My heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none. They gave Me also gall for My meat; and in My thirst they gave Me vinegar to drink” (Psa 69:20-21).

- “. . . shall smite the Judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek” (Micah 5:1).

- “. . . So they weighed for My price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD” (Zech 11:12-13).

People who reject Jesus today are also fulfilling the prophecies that spoke of His rejection – and it is certainly no benefit to be guilty of such a thing. There really is no excuse for rejecting Jesus. It amounts to condemning Him, and consenting to His death. This is what is intended by the expressions, “they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6), and “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27). As these texts indicate, such sins are also committed by those who fall away from the Lord. Their sin is greatly compounded by the fact that they once knew Him, but were brought to a place where they rejected Him in favor of the world and the gratification of the flesh. Those who postulate that such a condition is not possible overlook the fact that knowing Jesus involves intimacy with Him – abiding in Him, and walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 2:28; 1 John 1:7). None of those conditions are reflexive, or automatic. They evidence willing and deliberate involvement.

THEY FOUND NO CAUSE OF DEATH IN HIM

“ 28 And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain.”

Paul now confronts his audience with the deliberate manner of unbelief, and the stubbornness of heart that accompanies the rejection of Jesus Christ.

THEY FOUND NO CAUSE OF DEATH

“And though they found no cause of death in Him . . .” Other versions read, “no ground for putting Him to death,” NASB “no proper ground for the death sentence,” NIV “no cause for a sentence of death,” NSRV “could charge Him with nothing deserving death,” RSV “could not find any legitimate ground for a death sentence,” CJB “could not find any good reason to kill Him,” GWN “no basis for a death sentence,” NET “no legal reason to execute Him,” NLT “no just cause to execute Him,” LIVING “Couldn’t find any real reason for Him to die,” IE “Without having found Him guilty of any capital offense,” WEYMOUTH and “could find no cause deserving death with which to charge Him.” AMPLIFIED

In Paul’s statement, however, the point is not that Pilate and Herod could find no fault in Jesus, but that the Jews themselves, even though they aggressively sought for a reason to slay Him, could not find one. Their search was in the law of God, in which reasons for capital punishment were delineated.

Although, from the standpoint of Roman law, there was no civil infraction of which Jesus was guilty, that is not the point of the text. Jesus was not a political insurrectionist like Barabbas (Mk 15:7). He could not be charged with failing to pay taxes required by the Roman government (Matt 22:21). The Jews had attempted to present Jesus as a political rebel, telling Pilate that Jesus perverted the nation “forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a king” (Lk 23:2). However, even wicked Pilate refused to honor the charge, later saying two times, “I find no fault in this man” (Lk 23:4,14), and even declaring that Herod also found no “nothing worthy of death” in Him (Lk 23:15).

In Paul's statement, however, the point is not that Pilate and Herod could find no fault in Jesus, but that the Jews themselves, even though they aggressively sought for a reason to slay Him, could not find one. Their search was in the law of God, in which reasons for capital punishment were delineated. This included directions given to Noah concerning capital punishment. They were numerous, and dealt with a variety of issues. It is good for us to be acquainted with them. They all had to do with the person who was "worthy of death" (Deut 17:6).

- **MURDER.** Gen 9:5-6; Ex 21:12; Num 35:16-33.
- **ADULTERY.** Lev 20:10; Deut 22:24.
- **INCEST.** Lev 20:11,12,14.
- **BESTIALITY.** Ex 22:19; Lev 20:15-16.
- **SODOMY.** Lev 20:13.
- **INCONTINENCE.** Deut 22:21-24.
- **FORNICATION.** Lev 19:20.
- **RAPE.** Deut 22:25.
- **KIDNAPING.** Ex 21:16; Deut 24:7.
- **WHOREDOM.** Lev 21:9.
- **WITCHCRAFT.** Ex 22:18.
- **OFFERING HUMAN SACRIFICE.** Lev 20:2-5.
- **STRIKING OR CURSING MOTHER OR FATHER.** Ex 21:15,17; Lev 20:9
- **DISOBEDIENCE TO PARENTS.** Deut 21:18-21.
- **BLASPHEMY.** Lev 24:11-16,23.
- **SABBATH DESECRATION.** Ex 35:2; Num 15:32-36.
- **PROPHECYING FALSELY OR PROPAGATING FALSE DOCTRINES.** Deut 13:1-10.
- **SACRIFICING TO FALSE GODS.** Ex 22:20.
- **REFUSING TO ABIDE BY THE DECISION OF A COURT.** Deut 17:12.
- **A PERSON WHO HAD A DANGEROUS OX, AND DID NOT KEEP IT FROM KILLING A MAN.** Ex 21:29.
- **A STRANGER WHO ATTEMPTED TO TAKE DOWN OR SET UP THE TABERNACLE.** Num 1:51.
- **A STRANGER WHO ATTEMPTED TO PERFORM THE WORK OF THE PRIEST.** Num 3:10; 18:7.
- **ANYONE OTHER THAN MOSES AND THOSE MINISTERING IN THE TABERNACLE WHO CAMPED CLOSE TO IT.** Num 3:38.

I have listed some of the capital offenses that had to do with the tabernacle service, assuming that they also applied to the Temple service. In all of these offenses there are two prevailing causes for death: (1) Defilement of one's relationship to God. (2) The defilement of human associations. They were, in fact, sins that were an overt expression that contradicted the premier commandments. Jesus Himself magnified the Law by confirming the identity of these requirements: "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love

thy neighbor as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12:29-31).

Armed with a technical knowledge of the Law, and acquainted with the public and extended ministry of Jesus, His foes could not find a reason that would justify putting Jesus to death. In a wicked attempt to meet the requirement of the Law for two or more witnesses in the case of capital punishment (Deut 17:6), the leaders even sought for false witnesses to secure some agreeable testimony against Jesus (Matt 26:59-60). Even then, the only fabricated charge they could come up with was blasphemy (Mk 14:64) – and that was upon the basis of Jesus acknowledgment that He was “the Son of the Blessed” – which He was (Mk 14:61-62).

Jesus did just as the prophet said

Men ought to learn from this account not to allow an “evil heart of unbelief” to enter into them. There are no depths to which such a heart cannot sink!

He would: “magnify the law, and make it honorable” (Isa 42:21). He did so in such a manner that no one could convict Him of sin, or prove Him guilty of the slightest infraction of the Law (John 8:46).

YET THEY DESIRED HIM TO BE SLAIN

“ . . . yet desired they Pilate that He should be slain.” Other versions read, “they asked Pilate that he should put Him to death,” NKJV “asked . . . that He be executed,” NASB “asked . . . to have Him killed,” NRSV and “made a request . . . that He might be put to death.” BBE

Even though they could by no means substantiate a case against Jesus, yet those dwelling in Jerusalem “and their rulers” pressed Pilate to have Jesus put to death. Peter told the Jews in Jerusalem, “ye delivered up, and denied Him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let Him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you” (Acts 3:13-14). The Gospel accounts inform us that they repeatedly cried out “Crucify Him!” even after Pilate declared he could find “no fault” in Him (Matt 27:22-24). They even called down the responsibility for the blood of Jesus upon themselves and their children (Matt 27:25). In a remarkable display of the stubbornness of unbelief, “the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (John 19:12). Unbelief causes thos dominated by it to be creative in their opposition to Christ.

Men ought to learn from this account not to allow an “evil heart of unbelief” to enter into them (Heb 3:12). There are no depths to which such a heart cannot sink!

WHEN THEY HAD FULFILLED ALL THAT WAS WRITTEN OF HIM

“ 29 And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulcher.”

Thus far, in the book of Acts, holy men have accented that the death of Jesus, while carried out by wicked men, was according to the purpose of God. While it appeared on the surface that the will of men was the primary thing being accomplished, their will was actually secondary, and was subordinate to the will of God. Fundamentally, it was God’s purpose being carried out, even though men were totally unaware of it.

• **PETER ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God , ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

• **PETER IN SOLOMON’S PORCH.** “But those things, which God before had

showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled ” (Acts 3:18).

• **IN THE PRAYER OF THE EARLY CHURCH.** “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done ” (Acts 4:27-28).

• **PAUL IN THE ANTIOCH SYNAGOGUE.** “For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him ” (Acts 13:27).

The Words of Jesus

• **DOING THE WILL OF THE FATHER.** “Therefore doth My Father love me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17-18).

• **THE FULFILLMENT OF SCRIPTURE.** “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled , that thus it must be?” (Mat 26:53-54).

The Apostles Doctrine

Apostolic doctrine also makes a point of the purpose of God being fulfilled in the rejection, betrayal, and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

• **GOD DELIVERED HIM UP.** “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom 8:32).

• **SLAIN FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.** “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world ” (Rev 13:8).

• **FOREORDAINED.** “But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world , but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet 1:19-20).

• **THE SACRIFICE OF HIMSELF.** “For then must He often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself ” (Heb 9:26).

In this time of superior light, no believer should have to discover this truth later in his spiritual life. It should be proclaimed initially – as it was in this, and other, texts. Men should cease all melancholy proclamations of Christ that have more of an appeal to the flesh than to the Spirit.

WHEN THEY HAD FULFILLED ALL THAT WAS WRITTEN OF HIM

“And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him . . .”

While the death of Jesus does make known Christ’s great love (Gal 2:20), and the love of God as well (1 John 3:16), it is essential that we comprehend the necessity of sin being judged in the Son. This is why the very nature of God required His atoning death. God could not receive men in a sinful state.

As is apparent in the preaching of both Peter and Paul, this did not in any way minimize the wickedness of what the Jews did to Jesus. However, it does accent that if this had not been the will of God – the appointed means through which the sin of the world would be taken away – it could

not possibly have happened. Furthermore, their involvement in the death of Christ was not completed until everything written concerning Him, that was to be carried out by them, was completed. Take due note that it is what was “written of Him” that was the crucial matter, not what was written of them.

THEY TOOK HIM DOWN, AND LAID HIM IN A SEPULCHER

“ . . . they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulcher.”

Here, the point is that everything that was required to have been accomplished by His death was accomplished before He was removed from the tree of cursing (Gal 3:13). There were things that had to be accomplished in His death, and His body was not removed until they had been done.

- Jesus had to die, and there could be no question about it (Rom 8:34; 2 Cor 5:14).
- He had to be made sin for us, else the curse of God could not possibly have been upon Him (2 Cor 5:21).
- He had to be cursed by God, otherwise the penalty for sin would not have been paid (Gal 3:13).
- God had to be satisfied with the travail of His soul (Isa 53:11).
- Peace had to be made by the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- The devil had to be destroyed through His death (Heb 2:14).
- Principalities and powers had to be plundered in His cross (Col 2:15).
- The world had to be reconciled by His death (Rom 5:10).

The Necessity of Christ’s Death

The necessity of Christ’s death is properly traced to the requirement for the judgment of God against sin. It was in the flesh of Christ that sin was “condemned,” or judged once and for all (Rom 8:3). If this did not take place, God could not forgive sin. While the death of Jesus does make known Christ’s great love (Gal 2:20), and the love of God as well (1 John 3:16), it is essential that we comprehend the necessity of sin being judged in the Son. This is why the very nature of God required His atoning death. God could not receive men in a sinful state. They had to be brought to Him by a Savior who allowed God to fully deal with sin once for all. Had this not taken place, sin would have remained.

The Necessity of Christ’s Burial

The burial of Christ stood between Him being “delivered for our offenses” and being “raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25). His burial confirmed that He had, in fact, “died for our sins” (1 Cor 15:3), and prepared for Him to be “declared to be the Son of God with power” (Rom 1:4). John saw Jesus die, and bore witness to the truth of it (John 19:34-35). The burial of the Lord confirmed that death beyond all controversy. Before He was taken down from the cross, Pilate insisted that Jesus’ death be confirmed – and it was (Mk 15:44-45).

There was also the matter of fulfilled prophecy. Isaiah spoke of the burial of Christ, confirming that this was a part of His identity with the human race. “And He made His grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death; because He had done no violence, neither was any deceit in His mouth” (Isa 53:9). David also spoke of Christ’s burial, referring to His body not seeing corruption, OR His soul remaining in the region of the dead: “For thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psa 16:10).

Thus the body of Jesus was laid in a sepulcher and remained there for three days, setting the stage

for the fulfillment of “the sign of Jonah” . Jesus said of that sign, “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mat 12:40).

Although a very controversial passage, Peter declares that Jesus was busy while His body was in the grave. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Pet 3:18-20). Referring to how Jesus went and preached to these “spirits,” other versions read, “but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached,” NKJV “made alive in the Spirit in which also He went and preached,” NASB and “made alive by the Spirit through whom also He went and preached.” NIV

Later Peter said that the Gospel, “For this cause . . . was preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit” (1 Pet 4:6). The reference to “spirits” is to those who were living in the time of Noah, but died in the flood. Some are of the opinion that the preaching of reference is that of Noah. Noah’s preaching, however, was like that of Jonah. Neither had any gospel to preach, so this cannot refer to Noah. Further, the preaching of the Gospel to the living is never referred to as preaching to “spirits.”

All of this, although not satisfying to the intellect of man, confirms the necessity and role of the burial of Christ: they “laid Him in a sepulcher.” We will have to wait for the glory to receive a fuller explanation of this intriguing text.

BUT GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD

“ 30 But God raised Him from the dead . . . ” Other versions read, “But God gave Him back from the dead,” BBE “But God brought Him back to life,” GWN “But God raised Him again from the dead,” PNT “But God raised Him again from death,” TNT and “and God raised Him out of the dead.” YLT

THE STATE OF BEING DEAD

The state of being “dead” is one of the body being without the spirit (James 2:26). It is the condition of being without life, in which the body has no ability to respond or react. In the case of Jesus, He dismissed His spirit when He said, “into Thy hands I commend My spirit,” or “commit My spirit” NASB (Lk 23:46). Other versions read, “give My spirit,” BBE “entrust My spirit,” CSB “I put My spirit into Your hands,” IE and “commit My spirit to Your care.” WILLIAMS

SIMILAR TO STEPHEN’S DEATH

This appears to be quite similar to what Stephen said as He was being stoned to death: “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit” (Acts 7:69). However, in Stephen’s case, his life was taken from him. Admittedly, according to appearance, it looked as though that is what took place when Jesus died. However, an explanation is provided concerning the death of Christ that confirms His life was not taken from Him. Jesus said, “No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17-18). There are a number of ways in which this can be said, and I must confess that I am not completely satisfied with any of them.

- Jesus did not die by the constraint of others.
- His life was not taken from Him.

- His life was not placed into the hands of men – like that of the martyrs.
- He did not die because of sin, or because of identity with Adam.
- He did not die of natural causes – like heart failure, bleeding to death, or from the bruises of men.

• Viewed from the standpoint of possibilities, and apart from the commandment of the Father, He could have refused to die, and done it effectively. He referred to this when He said, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matt 26:53). He then added, “But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” (Matt 26:54).

• Jesus could not have died as other men, because He had no sin of His own, and the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23). The One individual who “had no sin” could not have the sentence of death imposed upon Him by men. If He had not consented to die, it would not have been possible for Him to do so.

There is an element of truth in all of these explanations. Yet there is something about Jesus laying down His life that goes beyond the circumference of human perception. It is something that can be received, imbibed, and made profitable to us by faith.

“BUT”

This is a word depicting Divine judgment and intervention. The decree of men was that Jesus was “worthy of death,” and that they should be rid of Him. God’s decree was that He was not worthy of death. His death was vicarious, or substitutionary. It was a death associated with accomplishment (Lk 9:31). Once the will of God that necessitated that death was accomplished, death could maintain no hold on Jesus (Acts 2:24).

Whatever men may think about the possibility of God infringing upon the will of men, or violating their purported free moral agency, a sober reflection upon this text is essential. The will of man was that Jesus should die. The will of man was that the presence of Jesus should be once and for all removed. What is more, they did everything within their power to ensure that this will was carried out. However, God, in a display of His Sovereignty, nullified their judgment. He imposed His will upon the situation, and brushed their will aside as nothing more than chaff.

The will of man comes into the picture in the matter of appropriating Divine benefits. Even then, in order for that will to be effective, it must be associated with the power of God, as stated in Psalms 110:1. Every person who is knowledgeable in holy Scripture knows that

The will of man comes into the picture in the matter of appropriating Divine benefits. Even then, in order for that will to be effective, it must be associated with the power of God, as stated in Psalms 110:1. Every person who is knowledgeable in holy Scripture knows that the preeminent will is the will of God. Men are at their best when they prefer that will over their own, and they are at their worst when they do not.

GOD RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD

There are several explanations in Scripture for the resurrection of Christ – and all of them are obviously true. It is necessary to spend some time on this, because Jesus expressly said He had received power to take back His life “again” (John 10:18). More was involved in the resurrection of Jesus is will be involved in the general resurrection.

- It is declared that God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:32; 4:10; 10:40; 13:30,37; 17:31; Rom 4:24; 10:9; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 1:21).
- Jesus Himself rose from the dead (Matt 20:19; 26:32; Lk 24:7; John 2:19-22; 10:18;

Acts 10:41; 17:3; 26:23; 1 Cor 15:12,20

- He was raised from the dead “by the glory of the Father” (Rom 6:4).
- The Holy Spirit was also involved in the resurrection of Christ (Rom 1:3; 8:11; 1 Pet 3:18).

Jesus took back His life because He was commissioned by the Father to do so. The Father had decreed that He would not let Him remain in the region of the dead (Acts 2:27). Further, the entire matter of redemption was the eternal purpose of God, and Jesus came to do His will (Heb 10:7,9). The Father raised the Son by decree, through the power of the Spirit, and by giving the Son authority to take back His life from the domain of death.

All of this was required because “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:13). They were part and parcel of the involvements of the circumstance of Christ’s humanity. Satisfactory explanations from the reservoir of the human intellect are not possible.

HE WAS SEEN MANY DAYS

“ 31 And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people.”

The attestation of the resurrection of Christ was vouchsafed to chosen witnesses, and extended over a period of time. It was sufficient to dissolve their doubts, and enable them to patiently wait for the promise of the Father that Jesus had delivered to them.

SEEN MANY DAYS

“And He was seen many days . . .” Other versions read, “for many days He appeared,” NASB “for a number of days He was seen,” BBE “over a period of many days He appeared,” NLT and “He was seen many times during the next few days.” LIVING

The period of time during which Jesus was seen is specified as “forty days” (Acts 1:3). These appearances took place first in Jerusalem, then in Galilee, then again in the environs of Jerusalem.

Initial Appearances In Judea After His Resurrection

- To Mary Magdalene at the tomb (Mk 16:9; John 20:14-17).
- To the women at the tomb (Matt 28:9-10).
- To the two on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-31).
- To Simon Peter (Lk 24:34).
- To the eleven and those with them, Thomas being absent (Lk 24:36-49; John 20:19-23).
- To the eleven and those with them, Thomas being present (John 20:26-29).
- To James (1 Cor 15:7).

Appearances in Galilee

- The disciples were instructed to meet Him in Galilee (Matt 28:7,10; Mk 16:7).
- To above five hundred (1 Cor 15:6).
- To the eleven in a mountain (Matt 28:16-17).
- To the disciples by the sea of Tiberias (John 21:2-22).

Appearances in Judea Just Before His Ascension

- To the disciples, consummating in His ascension (Matt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-19; Lk 24:30-51; Acts 1:4-9)

THEM WHICH CAME UP WITH HIM FROM GALILEE TO JERUSALEM

“ . . . of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “who had traveled with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem,” NIV and “who had accompanied him from Galilee to Jerusalem.” NET

Prior to Jesus’ death, and during His ministry, there were people who came from Galilee and followed Him (Matt 4:25; 19:1-2). During His ministry certain women from Galilee followed Him and ministered to Him (Matt 27:55). However, these are not the occasion to which our text refers. This refers to His post-resurrection appearances, and to the people who stayed with Him after His appearances in Galilee, following Him to Jerusalem.

It appears as though a great number of the people who witnessed Jesus in Galilee did not return with Him to the environs of Jerusalem. Assuming that the more than five hundred brethren that saw Him on a single occasion did so in Galilee, the vast majority of them appeared to have remained there after they witnessed the risen Christ. We know that the disciples who assembled, together with the eleven “were about an hundred and twenty” (Acts 1:15). That means at least three hundred and eighty (76%) who saw the risen Jesus did not return with Him to Jerusalem – and it is possible that the number was every greater.

The primary people who were with Him in Jerusalem were the apostles, who were His chosen messengers to humanity. They were the principle figures, even though they were not the only ones. They were the ones He chose to be with Him and to preach.

WHO ARE HIS WITNESSES TO THE PEOPLE

It appears as though a great number of the people who witnessed Jesus in Galilee did not return with Him to the environs of Jerusalem. Assuming that the more than five hundred brethren that saw Him on a single occasion did so in Galilee, the vast majority of them appeared to have remained there after they witnessed the risen Christ.

“ . . . who are His witnesses unto the people.” Other versions read, “to our people,” NRSV “to the Jewish people,” GWN “to the people of Israel,” NLT and “to the Jews.” WEYMOUTH

The Greek word translated “people” is **laos**, which has the following lexical meaning: “a people, tribe, nation, all those who are of the same stock and language,” THAYER “nationally, as people making up a nation,” FRIBERG and “the largest unit into which the people of the world are divided on the basis of their constituting a socio-political community - 'nation, people.” LOUW-NIDA This is not a reference to the general population of the world, but to a specific body of people – “THE people.”

In this case, “the people” is a reference to the Jews – the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These are particularly the apostles. While their primary ministry was to the Jews, that was not their only ministry. Just as Paul’s primary ministry was to the Gentiles, but that was not His only ministry. Paul makes mention of this distinction in his letter to the Galatians. “But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles)” (Gal 2:8). While He was ministering among them, Jesus also confirmed this primary ministry of the twelve apostles. “And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne

of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28).

Paul, therefore, is affirming that the risen Lord made special provisions for the Jewish people. The witnesses provided for them would deliver the Gospel to others as well, but the children of Israel would be their emphasis. As Paul will indicate in this message, this leaves the people without any valid excuse. Every advantage had been given to them, and they were responsible to give heed to what was said. As our Lord Himself affirmed, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48).

In our thinking, we must be able to make the transition to what has been declared to the Gentiles – particularly to the Gentile church. The apostle that has been given to the Gentiles, Paul himself, was given to see remarkable things, and he faithfully proclaimed them. There is an unwavering responsibility on the part of the Gentile church, as well as all believers, to receive what he has written, for it is intended for them.

WE DECLARE UNTO YOU GLAD TIDINGS

“ 32 And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers . . . ”

Although Paul is addressing the audience, he speaks for Barnabas as well, for they are united in what they declare. Those familiar with the current church scene are painfully aware of the exceeding rarity of this circumstance.

The real Gospel, because of its singularity of both focus and content, tends to bring the people together. That is why, in the beginning, “all that believed were together.” It is because they were hearing the same message.

The staggering number of divisions within the professed church is strictly owing to differing messages. When men do not “speak the same thing,” division is inevitable – and division is always the manifestation of a corrupt message. That is why, when Paul knew of the divisions within the Corinthian church, he knew that they had been subjected to “another Jesus,” “another Spirit,” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4). The real Gospel, because of its singularity of both focus and content, tends to bring the people together. That is why, in the beginning, “all that believed were together” (Acts 2:44). It is because they were hearing the same message. In fact, they all “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” – not doctrines (Acts 2:42).

WE DECLARE GLAD TIDINGS

“And we declare unto you glad tidings . . . ” Other versions read, “preach the good news,” NASB “tell the good news,” NIV “bring the good news,” NRSV “giving you the good news,” BBE “announce to you,” MRD and “proclaim to you.” NET

The words “declare unto you glad tidings” come from a single Greek word: **euvaggelizo, meqa** (yoo-ang-ghel’idz-ometha). Its lexical meaning is, “to bring good news, to announce glad tidings,” THAYER “bring or announce good news,” FRIBERG “communicate good news concerning something,” LOUW-NIDA and “to preach or to proclaim (as glad tidings).” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Paul and Barnabas did not come to address personal, domestic, social or political difficulties. They did not put their ears to the religious ground to see what the people were seeking. Their message was not tailored for circumstances as defined by men. The “glad tidings” they declared were Divinely adapted to the human situation as defined and declared by God. As such, it is not possible for that message to require frequent updating, or to be abandoned for a more relevant word. Sin has produced a common condition in all men, regardless of gender, race, nation, or social status. The message is

specifically adapted to that circumstance – and it is the good news of the Divine resolution to the sin problem. It is a predetermined message – and is not based upon the perceived needs of the people.

Another thing integral to “glad tidings” is the fact that they make known something that has already taken place – something that is pertinent to the condition of the people. This is not glad tidings, or good news, about what can be, or what should be, but what IS. Of course, this removes all possibility of the exploitation of the message for any form of personal gain. The very act of exploitation requires the existence of variables. That is why religious men who seek to gain from what they preach must depart from the preaching of the glad tidings. They must adopt a message that differs from the Gospel of Christ – the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). That record is a declaration of what Jesus has done and is doing.

What Christ Has Done

- He has put away sin (Heb 9:26).
- He has reconciled the world to God (2 Cor 5:80-20).
- He has made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- He has destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
- He has spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in His cross (Col 2:15).
- He has ended the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).
- He has redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13).
- He has tasted death for every man (Heb 2:9).
- He has been wounded for our transgressions (Isa 53:5a).
- He has been bruised for our iniquities (Isa 53:5b).
- He has risen from the dead, triumphing of both Hades and the grave (Rom 8:34).
- He has ascended into heaven, leading captivity captive and giving gifts to men (Eph 4:8).
- He has been given all power in heaven and earth (Matt 28:18).
- All things have been put under His feet, and He has been given to the church as Head over all things (Eph 1:22).
- He is Lord of all (Acts 10:34).
- God has highly exalted Him (Phil 2:9).

What Christ Is Doing

- Saving believers to the uttermost (Heb 7:25a).
- Ever living to make intercession for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25b).
- Bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).
- Shepherding the people of God (Heb 13:20).
- Mediating the New Covenant (Heb 8:6).
- He is the Head of the body, the church (Col 1:18).
- Provides nourishment through the individual members of His body, causing them to be fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies (Eph 4:16).

- Is dispensing grace and peace (1 Cor 1:3).
- Is dispensing love and faith (Eph 6:23).
- Is nourishing and cherishing the church (Eph 5:29).
- Is living out His life in those who are walking by faith (Gal 2:20).
- Is appearing in the presence of God “for us” (Heb 9:24).
- Is giving His people an understanding, that they might know God (1 John 5:20).
- Sheds forth the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33; Tit 3:5).

The declaration of such things is, indeed, “glad tidings!”

THE PROMISE MADE TO THE FATHERS

“ . . . how that the promise which was made unto the fathers . . . ” Other versions read, “What God promised,” NIV and “the undertaking made to the fathers.” BBE

Paul does not identify “the promise” because it was well known among devout Jews. In effect, he tells his audience that he is not bringing some new or strange word. He is chronicling the fulfillment of THE PROMISE made unto the fathers – particularly Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and then through Judah, from which tribe Jesus came.

The expression “the promise” is the broadest view of all that was encompassed in the “great salvation” of God.

- Concerning the One who would accomplish the salvation, it referred to the Lord Jesus Christ.
- As regards the effect of the promise upon men, it was a blessing.
- If we view it from the standpoint of accomplishment, it was the attainment of everything required to extricate men from the guilt and power of sin, and bring them into productive accord with the God from whom sin had alienated them.

The promise was not delivered to the father’s of the Jewish people in its fullest scope. The prophets would spell out many of the details. That would be after a proper concept of “blessing” had been formed in men through the tutelage of the Law, and the various experiences of benefit enjoyed by the Israelites. “The promise” was one of global proportions, as declared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

- **ABRAHAM.** “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed . . . (Gen 22:18).
- **ISAAC.** “ . . . in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ” (Gen 26:4).
- **JACOB.** “ . . . and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed ” (Gen 28:14).

The effectiveness of this blessing was seen in the word spoken regarding Judah, from whom Jesus came.

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

The words “ bless” and “blessing” are not as easy to define as one might think. However, if we are going to have an intelligent and productive view of salvation, we must have some cogent concept of what “bless” means. Lexically, the definitions do not extend beyond the term “bless.” In the Hebrew the lexical meaning is “to bless.” WTT BHS In the Greek it is “to cause to prosper, to make happy.” THAYER However, these do little more than confirm the frequent poverty of language and

scholarship. I find that a definition based on Scriptural usage and doctrine provides a more satisfactory view of what it means for God Almighty to bless. One worthy observation is found in McClintok and Strong's Cyclopedia (see "**A DEFINITION OF BLESSING**").

The salient remark concerning the productivity of the blessing of God is particularly noteworthy. Indeed, "the promise" of God not only involved God, through His grace, bestowing benefit upon men. It also involved God-honoring productivity, or fruit, in the ones being blessed. The eyes of the people would be opened, and they would be turned "from darkness to light." Not only would they be turned from the power of Satan; they would also be turned "unto God." They would, indeed, receive "forgiveness of sins," but an "inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith" in Christ as well (Acts 26:18).

A DEFINITION OF BLESSING

"When God blesses, he bestows that virtue, that efficacy, which' renders his blessing effectual, and which his blessing expresses. His blessings are either temporal or spiritual, bodily or mental; but in every thing they are productive of that which they import. God's blessings extend into the future life, as his people are made partakers of that blessedness which, in infinite fulness, dwells in himself (Genesis 1:22; 24:35; Job 42:12; Psalm 45:2; 104:24, 28; Luke 11:9-13; James 1:17)." McClintok & Strong's Cyclopedia

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The work accomplished by the Christ would be effective in the heavens, causing God to be pleased, and His requirements satisfied. But it would also result in effectiveness among all who received Him, believing on His name (John 1:12).

Let it be clear that there has been no fulfillment of the promised blessing unless its effects have been realized. Some of those effects include the following, and they are encompassed in the words "the promise." These effects were announced by the prophets, and were well known to devout Jews. Because of this circumstance, it is appropriate to mention a few of them, for they are encompassed in "the promise," and would be perceived in that manner by those who were anticipating the Messiah.

- **ACCORD WITH THE MIND OF THE LORD.** His Law would be written on their hearts and put into their minds (Jer 31: 33a).

- **THEY WOULD CHOOSE AND PREFER GOD.** God would be their God, and they would be His people (Jer 31:33b).

- **THEY WOULD KNOW AND UNDERSTAND GOD.** From the least to the greatest, all who were encompassed in the blessing would have a holy familiarity and appreciation of God (Jer 31:34).

- **THEY WOULD BE WILLING.** A characteristic of the reign of Christ is the willingness of the people in the day of His power (Psa 110:3).

- **THEY WOULD NO LONGER BE REBELLIOUS.** God promised He would remove the stony heart, and give the people a malleable heart of flesh (Ezek 36:26).

- **THEY WOULD CONSISTENTLY OBEY THE LORD.** The promise was, "And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My

judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).

- **THE PEOPLE WOULD SPEAK DIFFERENTLY.** God would restore to the people a pure language, purifying their lips (Zeph 3:9).

- **THE PEOPLE WOULD BE NOTED FOR MORAL AND SPIRITUAL STRENGTH.** Those who wait upon the Lord renew their strength, persevering under difficult circumstances (Isa 40:31).

Paul will now announce that the fulfillment of “the promise” regarding these, and other, benefits, has been taken place in Christ. That is, that the blessing announced to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is now made available to men.

THE HATH FULFILLED THE SAME UNTO US THEIR CHILDREN

“ 33 God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee. ”

Having provided a great salvation for all men, God will not tolerate those who give priorities to other things. He will give His marvelous provisions to those who are despised by the world, yet have a holy appetite for the feast of fat things that He has prepared for all people

Paul now gets to the matter at hand – the fact of blessing, and the responsibility of men to respond appropriately to it. It must be remembered that man are not allowed the luxury of refusing the Divine invitation. This is confirmed in Christ’s parable concerning a man who made a great feast. This saying was prompted by the statement of a person who was eating bread with Jesus in the home of a Pharisee on the Sabbath day. Jesus had spoken to them concerning making a feast without any selfish motives. Upon hearing what He said, “one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things,” and “said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God” (Luke 14:15). In response Jesus said, “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were invited, 'Come, for all things are now ready. But they all with one accord began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it. I ask you to have me excused. And another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them. I ask you to have me excused. Still another said, 'I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came and reported these things to his master. Then the master of the house, being angry , said to his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind. And the servant said, 'Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room. Then the master said to the servant, 'Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper ” NKJV (Luke 14:16-24).

For some, this is a hard saying, but it is one that must be duly considered. Having provided a great salvation for all men, God will not tolerate those who give priorities to other things. He will give His marvelous provisions to those who are despised by the world, yet have a holy appetite for the feast of fat things that He has prepared for all people (Isa 25:6).

I believe that some among our number have actually enjoyed feasting on things that many who appear superior to them have not been allowed to ingest. From an institutional point of view, these precious souls are seen as poor, maimed, lame and blind. They are perceived as dwelling in remote highways and hedges, far removed from highly structured religion and institutionalism. Yet, these despised people perceive things that cannot be seen or understood by those immersed in the traditions of men.

What has happened is this: because of their unacceptable priorities those who had first access to the salvation meal have been denied access to it. With many of them, their ignorance has not only

been willing, but has been ratified and imposed upon them by God – He simply will not let them sit at His table. I will not presume to identify such people, for that is not my prerogative. However, we are expressly told that God does do this: “For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered . . . Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isa 29:10,14). Jesus declared this had taken place among the generation to whom He spoke (John 12:39-40; Mk 4:11-13). Paul accounted for the obtuseness of certain Jews with this very text (Acts 28:25-27).

Others, who do not meet the qualifications of the institution have been brought into the feast, and are dining on the rich things of God. Those with some measure of insight will recognize this to be true. Though slightly different, this circumstance is of the same spiritual substance as a word delivered by Paul to Corinth. “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord. But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant” (1 Cor 14:37-38).

GOD HATH FULFILLED

“God hath fulfilled the same . . .” The promise God made to the fathers He Himself fulfilled. Divine intentions are brought to their appointed culmination by the One who made them. There are matters of Divine will that men are required to fulfill, “doing the will of God from the heart” (Eph 6:6), and doing it within the framework of perseverance (Heb 10:36). However, that is not the kind of thing that is being declared here. God Himself is the One who did what He said He would do – making the promise, then fulfilling it in the very arena over which Satan was the under-ruler.

God did it even though Satan opposed it. God did it even though the nation of Israel frequently walked in their own ways. Let it be clear that the coming of the Savior in no way depended upon men. That coming could not possibly be hastened or delayed by what men did. Jesus came “in the fulness of the time” – at the precise time, and in the precise place that were appointed (Gal 4:4; Micah 5:2). This confirms that at the root, salvation is wholly of the Lord – in intention, initiation, and culmination (2 Thess 2:13; Rev 7:10; 19:10). All valid human involvement is grounded upon that fact.

UNTO US THEIR CHILDREN

“ . . . unto us their children, . . .” Other versions read, “our children,” NASB/ASV “their descendants,” GWN “us [their] children,” LIVING “for us, their descendants.” ISV

There are two critical thoughts here.

The promise God made to the fathers He Himself fulfilled. Divine intentions are brought to their appointed culmination by the One who made them.

First, that what God had done in Christ was for the generation to whom Paul was speaking. He was announcing a current benefit that could be realized precisely as God intended.

- Second, and of primary importance, the blessing was available for Abraham’s sake.

It was His promise to Abraham that was being fulfilled.

As expounded here, the realization of the promised “blessing” – even to the entire world – was contingent upon the people’s association with Abraham. The promise was stated to Abraham in this manner: “And I will establish my covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen 17:7). There are three senses in which this text are to be taken. Each one of them is true, revealing different facets of the promise.

- First, in the most precise sense, Jesus Christ is Abraham's Seed, through whom all of the promised benefits are now realized. Thus, Paul writes, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal 3:16).

- Second, the fleshly offspring of Abraham were also included in the promise. This was strictly by virtue of their generational connection with Abraham. Thus the land of Canaan is said to have been given "to the seed of Abraham" (2 Chron 20:7). More specifically, the children of Jacob are referred to as "the seed of Abraham" (Psa 105:6). Israel is called "the seed of Abraham" (Isa 41:8). Paul said, according to the flesh, he was "an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham" (Rom 11:1). In this sense, the blessing was toward them "for Abraham's sake," not because of any personal worth on their part (Gen 26:24). God reasoned with Isaac on this wise: "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because that Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen 26:4-5).

When accounting for mercy extended to the Israelites, it is written, "And the LORD was gracious unto them, and had compassion on them, and had respect unto them, because of his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and would not destroy them, neither cast he them from his presence as yet" (2 Kgs 13:23). Thus God introduced the concept of many being blessed because of one.

The promise to Abraham was not fulfilled at Jesus birth. It was not fulfilled during Jesus' prodigious earthly ministry. Nor, indeed, was it fulfilled in His vicarious death. The promised blessing came only after He had risen from the dead and was seated at the right hand of God, exalted above all, and administering the New Covenant.

In the broadest application of this word, those who are related to Abraham by faith are eligible for the promise – that is, by virtue of their possession of the faith of Abraham. Thus it is written, "Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all" (Rom 4:16). The salvation of God is not even offered to those who do not have Abraham's kind of faith! Again Paul reasons, "Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham" (Gal 3:8-9). In an even more precise statement Paul writes, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:28-29).

In this text, Paul spreads the table of salvation for the fleshly seed of Abraham, and he does so by virtue of the fact that there were Abraham's descendants. Even so, however, the experience of salvation will be finally narrowed down to whether or not they have the faith of Abraham – whether or not they believe God after the Abrahamic manner. I will tell you that whatever you may think about the offer of salvation and whosoever will, no person who fails to believe like Abraham did, will ever participate in the salvation of God. The very occasion that Luke is reporting in this text will confirm this to be true.

IN THAT HE HATH RAISED UP JESUS AGAIN

" . . . in that He hath raised up Jesus again . . ."

Only the older versions of the English Scriptures say "raised up again" (Tyndale's New Testament – 1534, Bishop's Bible – 1595, Webster's Bible – 1833). In the first English translation, Wycliffe (1382) rendered the text, "again-raised Jesus."

There is a sense in which the entrance of Jesus into the world was a raising up of Jesus (Acts 13:23). However, in this text, the reference is to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, as confirmed by the next verse. This was the point at which the promise to Abraham realized its ultimate fulfillment – when Jesus was raised and exalted to the right hand of God. The blessing that was promised to Abraham was not realized until Jesus was raised from the dead, and ascended back to heaven. It was only then that the salvation of God was announced, and repentance and remission of sins were preached in the New Covenant sense.

The promise to Abraham was not fulfilled at Jesus birth. It was not fulfilled during Jesus' prodigious earthly ministry. Nor, indeed, was it fulfilled in His vicarious death. The promised blessing came only after He had risen from the dead and was seated at the right hand of God, exalted above all, and administering the New Covenant. This blessing is what Peter announced on the day of Pentecost, associating it with the resurrection of Jesus. "Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear" (Acts 2:33).

This confirms that New Covenant life is not a codified system, nor is it an attempt to emulate the life of Jesus. It is, in fact, the resurrected life of Jesus, lived out in those who have been joined to Him in His death, burial, and resurrection (Rom 6:1-11). Further, it is not possible to be joined to Jesus in His death and burial, and not to be joined to Him in his resurrection. This is the reasoning set forth in Romans 6:4-8: "Therefore we are buried with Him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life . For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection : Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin . For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him ." No person who is "dead with Christ" will remain in that condition. God, who "raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:9), will raise that person to walk in newness life. That life is not one of discipline or mere emulation. It is the resurrected Jesus living in them, as stated in Galatians 2:20. There is no possible way to confirm that a person has been freed from sin, or justified from all things, where walking "in newness of life" is not present. I realize that, for some, this is an exceedingly difficult thing to accept. However, this is the teaching of the sixth chapter of Romans. It is also why it is written, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb 12:14). Seen from this perspective, holiness is walking in newness of life.

AS IT IS WRITTEN IN THE SECOND PSALM

" . . . as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee."

Jesus was begotten twice: once in the womb of Mary through the Holy Spirit, and once from the region of the dead. This is why He is referred to as the "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev 1:5). The first begetting was in order to the second, and the second was in order to the ultimate fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. From the standpoint of Jesus and His generation, He was "the first that should rise from the dead" (Acts 26:23). From the standpoint of the covenant made with Abraham, He was "the firstborn from the dead." NKJV

Paul also refers to the second Psalm in this manner, associating it with the exaltation of Christ, as compared to Him humbling Himself to become a man. "Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee? And again, I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?" (Heb 1:4-5). And again, "So also Christ glorified not Himself to be made an high priest; but He that said unto Him, Thou art My Son, to day have I begotten Thee" (Heb 5:5).

It is imperative that men think of the Savior of the world in terms of His resurrection as well as of His death. It is not right to propagate a concept of Jesus that ignores His resurrection – when He was begotten by God to commence His ministry of liberation and preservation. It is what Jesus is presently doing now that brings the experience of salvation.

CONCLUSION

Here is a message that is comparatively brief, yet very precise. Paul sends forth words with the precision of a skilled archer who hits the bulls eye with his arrow. Much profitless preaching results from a lack of proper focus. The Divine intention behind preaching is never realized because the speaker has adopted an agenda that is antithetical to that of God. There is no record of such preaching in the Scriptures. There are references to such preaching and teaching, but they are never dignified with an historical account. It is also worthy to note the setting in which the jewel of redemption is placed. It is never set in the context of contemporary life. It is always presented within the framework of Divine intent and activity.

Paul referred to his refusal to present the Gospel, in any other manner when he wrote, “As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:9-10). The Amplified Bible reads, “As we said before, so I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel different from or contrary to that which you received [from us], let him be accursed (anathema, devoted to destruction, doomed to eternal punishment)! Now am I trying to win the favor of men, or of God? Do I seek to please men? If I were still seeking popularity with men, I should not be a bond servant of Christ (the Messiah).”

And precisely what does it mean to “seek to please men,” “win the favor of men,” or seek “popularity with men?” Unfortunately, this can appear very noble, taking the form of getting involved in their problems, addressing things that are considered by men to be “relevant,” and dealing with the everyday issues of life. Aside from matter of immorality, or things that impacted directly upon pleasing God, you will never find such an approach in Scripture, or in the ministry of Jesus. He nor His apostles became embroiled in the everyday affairs of life. It is not that they exempted themselves from them, but that they did not allow themselves to be pulled into them to the neglect of eternal matters. In Christ Jesus daily living is addressed, but not at the detailed level. That is the nature of spiritual life. Here are some statements that reflect how life is to be addressed.

- “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:1-2).
- “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31).
- “And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15).
- “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).
- “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25).
- “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him” (Col 2:6).
- “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col 3:17).
- “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”

(Heb 12:14).

Admonitions of this order require foundational teaching, else they really have little meaning. It is only against the backdrop of the purpose of God and the exalted Christ that they have significance. That is why such admonitions are never attended by a list of details.

We do well to take due heed to the way Paul is preaching, and then to endeavor to become masters in speaking in such a manner. This is something that cannot be taught in a classroom or learned by rote. It is the result of spiritual insight that has been birthed in the context of the knowledge of God.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #59

PAUL PREACHES IN ANTIOCH, #3

“ 13:34 And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 35 Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 36 For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37 But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. 38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39 And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. 40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; 41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you. ” (Acts 13:34-41)

INTRODUCTION

Paul continues to elaborate on the Person of Christ, accenting His resurrection from the dead, and confirming its uniqueness. In this, he is delivering “sound doctrine,” anchoring reasoning in Divine priorities, and building upon both the Person and accomplishments of Jesus Christ. In matters pertaining to life and godliness no word or concept is valid that is not founded, or based upon Christ Jesus. If the thought can subsist independently of the Son of God, it is purely of human origin, and is to be discarded as a filthy rag.

HUMAN ASSESSMENT

These days, there is an astounding amount of doctrinal presentation that centers in mankind, and not in Jesus. This is the direct result of men, “after their own lusts” heaping “to themselves teachers, having “itching ears” (2 Tim 4:3). The Amplified Bible reads, “having ears itching [for something pleasing and gratifying], they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold.” This accounts for much

of the popularity of

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- **CONCERNING THE ONE GOD RAISED UP FROM THE DEAD (13:34a)**
- **HE SPEAKS ON THIS WISE (13:34b)**
- **ANOTHER PSALM (13:35)**
- **A MAN WHO SERVED HIS GENERATION (13:36a)**
- **DAVID FELL ASLEEP AND SAW CORRUPTION (13:36b)**
- **AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE (13:37)**
- **SOMETHING TO BE KNOWN (13:38)**
- **A SWEEPING STATEMENT (13:39)**
- **A SOLEMN WARNING (13:40-41)**
- **CONCLUSION**

modern religious charlatans who major on well being in this world, without giving due regard to preparation for death, the coming of the Lord, the day of judgment, and the world to come. Those with “itching ears” like to hear about their advantage in this world, the issues that they have defined, and the worldly ambitions that they have embraced. But you will not find any man or woman of Scripture piping to such people. In fact, Jesus once spoke of this kind of people, explaining why they objected to much of what He said. “But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented” (Mat 11:16-17).

The messenger of God, however, does not put his ear to the ground to hear the desires of men, or to feel the modern pulse, what is popular, and what is trendy and novel. He comes from God, not from men, and his message reflects Divine priorities, not those of men. For him, God defines the situation, and that situation has to do with man’s association with the living God. Spiritual men will accept no other priority.

Paul wrote concerning his own motivation – one that was driven by the knowledge of God and the understanding of the “mystery of godliness” (1 Tim 3:16). “Now am I trying to win the favor of men, or of God? Do I seek to please men? If I were still seeking popularity with men, I should not be a bond servant of Christ (the Messiah)” AMPLIFIED (Gal 1:10). It is at the precise point that preachers and teachers seek to please men, that they abruptly cease to be the servants of Christ. That has a lot to do with seeking to make the things of God relevant and tailoring public gatherings to please the people. Just as surely as a man cannot serve two masters, he cannot seek to please men and seek to please God simultaneously.

Christ Jesus can be properly understood only within the context of Moses and the Prophets. They not only set the stage for the coming Savior, but identified both His nature and ministry.

Thus our text displays a man filled with the Spirit, speaking with a total disregard for what men think within themselves. He is clarifying what God has done in Christ Jesus without inordinate regard to human assessment or acceptance.

THE GOSPEL AND THE PROMISES

With the skill of a spiritual tactician, Paul weaves the Gospel proclamation with the promises delivered by the holy prophets, relating it to the forgiveness of sins.

Christ Jesus can be properly understood only within the context of Moses and the Prophets. They not only set the stage for the coming Savior, but identified both His nature and ministry. A Jesus that is at variance with what was prophesied concerning Him cannot possibly be the Son of the Living God. Men are not given the liberty of creating a Jesus that will meet their self-diagnosed needs. God has given a “record” concerning His Son that presents Him precisely as He is, and in the manner in which He is to be seen and received. That “record” consists of several perfectly harmonious and consistent parts.

- The initial declaration of the coming Savior that God made in the Garden.
- The promises that were made to Abraham concerning his Seed.
- The prophecies of Moses concerning a coming Prophet.
- The prophetic references of the Prophets to the coming Savior.
- The Gospel accounts of His ministry in the flesh, together with His death, burial, and resurrection.
- The exposition of Jesus’ Person, accomplishments, exaltation, ministry, and second appearing.

What Paul says about Jesus will in no way conflict with any of these representations of the Christ of God.

JUSTIFICATION INTRODUCED

For the first time in the book of Acts, there is a reference to justification, or being justified. In fact, this passage contains the only direct reference to justification in the entire book of Acts. This subject was one concerning which Paul was given considerable insight. In fact, the only other epistle that mentions the word “justify” in any of its varied forms is James (James 2:21,24,25). Paul’s letters contain 26 references to this subject, confirming the Lord had given him considerable revelation on the matter. In our text, during the beginning of Paul’s ministry, there is indication of his early perception of this subject.

The statement that Paul makes cannot be made by many of our time. It is a statement that covers more theological ground than they are able to cover. Nevertheless, it is the truth, and we do well to comprehend it, and include it in our doctrinal expressions. Here is the statement. See how you can handle it. “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

The text will also relate a solemn warning that is startling to the flesh. It will make no allowance for rejecting the work God has done in Jesus, and the proclamation of that work. It will confirm the solemnity that is associated with hearing the good news of Jesus Christ, and the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham.

CONCERNING THE ONE GOD RAISED UP FROM THE DEAD

“ 13:34a And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption . . . ”

There is power in affirming the truth – in declaring it confidently and with power. This is because “truth” is reality – it is what IS, and is therefore supported by the “God of truth”

Without laboring the point to the extreme, I want to again draw your attention to the manner in which Paul reasons. He does not base his remarks on the condition of men, but on the initiative of God. He is not promulgating what men can do, but what God has done. This is a manner of reasoning

upon which men in the flesh cannot capitalize. Men cannot make a name for themselves or amass wealth by means of declaring the truth about God. This is because the works of God are designed primarily to bring Him glory.

CONCERNING

“And as concerning that. . .” Other versions read, “and that,” NKJV “and as for the fact that,” NASB “the fact that,” NIV “as to His,” NRSV “and about,” BBE “and as for,” CJB “since,” CSB “but to show that,” DOUAY “God stated that,” GWN “but regarding the fact,” NET “for God had promised,” NLT “and as to,” WEYMOUTH and “Now as proof that.” WILLIAMS

The expression “as concerning” comes from two Greek words: **o[ti de.** . Here, their meaning is, “in further proof of this.” The fact that is being proved is the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the way Paul goes about it provides an excellent lesson on preaching the truth. Thus far Paul has adduced the following evidence that Jesus was, in fact, raised from the dead.

- **AFFIRMATION.** “God raised Him from the dead!” (13:30).
- **WITNESSES.** “He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem” (13:31).
- **PROMISE FULFILLED.** “. . . the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled . . .” (13:32).

These are not the kind of words men would use to buttress what they say. In fact, such a witness would be considered foolish by those who are of the world. However, the fact that the flesh cannot perceive is that the Holy Spirit works with the truth, clarifying it to the hearts of men. Through the gift of faith, what is so declared is substantiated to the soul, so that the believer has no doubts. However, for those who do not believe, such words appear to be nothing more than foolishness. Yet, Paul will not allow the thinking of carnal men to impact upon the way he proclaims the truth.

HE RAISED HIM UP FROM THE DEAD

“ . . . He raised Him up from the dead . . .”

This is now the third time Paul has affirmed that God raised Jesus from the dead:

- “But God raised Him from the dead ” (Acts 13:30).
- “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee ” (Acts 13:33).
- “And as concerning that He raised him up from the dead , now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David ” (Acts 13:34).

He will affirm it again later: “But He, whom God raised again , saw no corruption” (Acts 13:37).

Affirming the Truth

There is power in affirming the truth – in declaring it confidently and with power. This is because “truth” is reality – it is what IS, and is therefore supported by the “God of truth” (Deut 32:4; Psa 31:5; Isa 65:16). Although the truth that has been revealed to and for men, it stands separate and independent from them. The truth does not depend upon men, and does not center in them. Truth is essentially identified with God, and secondarily with man. The entire Godhead is identified with truth. God the Father is referred to as “the God of truth” (Deut 32:4). Jesus is referred to as “the Truth” (John 14:6). The Holy Spirit is identified as “the Spirit of truth” (John 16:13). Again, it is written,

“the Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6).

When men are taught the truth, it is defined “as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:21). Again, the Head of the church confessed to the Father in heaven, “Thy Word IS truth,” and declared that men were sanctified by it (John 17:17). The illuminating ministry of the Holy Spirit is referred to in this manner: “But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:27).

When the truth is spoken – truth as defined by God – it provides a context in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit work. When it is not spoken, it is only vain imagination that supposes They will work, or that the Lord will in any way be honored or glorified.

At times, truth may appear simplistic, but it is not. This is true because of its association with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Therefore, when Paul refers to the resurrection of Christ, he is not merely making a theological statement, or belching out a lifeless creed. He is declaring something that has impacted heaven, the earth, and the entire region of darkness. He is speaking of a work that confirms Jesus is the Son of God with power (Rom 1:4), causes men to be “begotten . . . again” (1 Pet 1:3), and validates our baptism into Christ (1 Pet 3:21).

When the apostles gave “witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus” to the assembled church, “great grace was upon them all” (Acts 4:33). It is evident that heaven responds to that annunciation. When the resurrection of Jesus is preached, infinitely more is taking place than the speaking of one person, and the hearing of a body of people. This is a reality that, when perceived and embraced, brings the influence of heaven to the hearers. It is my persuasion that once a person gets hold of this truth in his spirit a neutralization of adversarial powers is realized that is absolutely unparalleled.

Further, it was the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus that brought out the unbelief and hardness of heart in the Athenian philosophers (Acts 17:18,32). On the surface, it appeared as though they simply analyzed what was said, and considered it to be unreasonable and absurd – i.e. an intellectual observation. However, this is not a full explanation of the case. If that was all there was to it, Paul would have entered into a defense of the resurrection of Jesus, or an extensive elaboration of its details, or purported historical proofs. However, he did not do this, because a refusal to embrace and act upon the fact of Christ’s resurrection from the dead evidences a corrupt and unbelieving heart. When the fact of a risen Christ has been treated with disdain, there is no form of reason that can break through that condition.

The Churches Are to Hear This Word

The churches are not to be exempted from hearing the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a theme to be casually addressed once a year, or during some special occasion. This is a matter that is integral to sound doctrine. For example, the resurrection of Christ is mentioned fifty times in the letters to the churches .

The churches are not to be exempted from hearing the proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a theme to be casually addressed once a year, or during some special occasion. This is a matter that is integral to sound doctrine. For example, the resurrection of Christ is mentioned fifty times in the letters to the churches: Rom 1:4; 4:24-25; 5:10; 6:4-5,9-10; 8:11,34; 10:9; 1 Cor 6:14; 1 Cor 15:3-8,12-23; 2 Cor 4:10-11,14; 5:15; 13:4; Gal 1:1; Eph1:20; Phil 3:10; Col 1:18; 2:12; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:14; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 1:3,21; 3:18,21; Rev 1:5,18. It is part of the fabric of reason, and is associated with every facet of spiritual life, from the first (our baptism) unto we are raised from the dead to live and reign with Jesus, world without end. It is associated with the following.

- The declaration that Jesus is the Son of God with power (Rom 1:4).
- Justification (Rom 4:24-25).
- Reconciliation (Rom 5:10).
- Baptism into Christ and newness of life (Rom 6:4-5).
- Being dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God (Rom 6:9-11).
- Sanctification (Rom 8:11).
- The scope of salvation (Rom 8:34).
- Being saved (Rom 10:9).
- Abstinence from fornication (1 Cor 6:13-14).
- The Gospel (Cor 15:4).
- Confirming witnesses (1 Cor 15:5-8).
- The general resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12-23).
- The life of the believer (2 Cor 4:10-11).
- Living exclusively unto the Lord (2 Cor 5:15).
- Believers living with Christ (2 Cor 13:4).
- The apostleship of Paul (Gal 1:1).
- The power that is toward those who believe (Eph 1:19-20).
- The objective to experience spiritual power in life (Phil 3:10).
- Jesus being the Head of His body, which is the church (Col 1:18).
- Being raised with Jesus in baptism through faith in the operation of God (Col 2:12).
- Believers waiting for God's Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:10).
- Hope (1 Thess 4:14).
- Something to be remembered (2 Tim 2:8).
- Believers being made perfect in every good work (Heb 13:20-21).
- Being begotten to a living hope (1 Pet 1:3).

All of this postulates that the matters with which the resurrection of Christ is associated are preeminent in the minds of the people. Of course, if this is not the case, they Jesus' resurrection will not have a prominent role in preaching. Furthermore, no pretentious claim to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead can neutralize the absence of these associations in preaching.

By Jesus, believing in God (1 Pet 1:21).

- Suffering for well being according to the will of the Lord (1 Pet 3:18).
- Baptism saving us (1 Pet 3:21).
- Jesus being the "Faithful Witness" (Rev 1:5).
- Not fearing as we are consciously in the presence of Jesus (Rev 1:18).

All of this postulates that the matters with which the resurrection of Christ is associated are preeminent in the minds of the people. Of course, if this is not the case, then Jesus' resurrection will not have a prominent role in preaching. Furthermore, no pretentious claim to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead can neutralize the absence of these associations in preaching.

I am not inclined to further develop this matter at this time. However, it could very well be that the failure of the modern church to consistently and powerfully proclaim the risen Christ evidences a condition of heart that is of the utmost concern.

NO MORE TO RETURN TO CORRUPTION

“ . . . now no more to return to corruption . . . ” Other versions read, “return to decay,” NASB “never to decay,” NIV “never again to go to destruction,” BBE “never decayed,” GWN “never again to be in a state of decay,” NET “not leaving him to rot in the grave,” NLT “no more to die,” LIVING “will never go back to the grave and decay,” IE “never again to be in the position of one soon to return to decay,” WEYMOUTH “never to experience decay,” and “no more to return to [undergo] putrefaction and dissolution [of the grave].” AMPLIFIED

When Jesus was placed in the sepulcher, He was really dead – that is, His spirit had left its body, which state constituted being “dead” (James 2:26). When the “breath” of the body is taken away, death occurs, and, ordinarily, decay sets in. As the Psalmist said, “Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust ” (Psa 104:29). And again, “man . . . His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth” (Psa 146:3-4). That is the common experience when death takes place – death occurs when the life and person of the body are gone.

However, when Jesus died, His body did not decay or experience corruption. Therefore it is proclaimed, “neither [did] His flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31). This was in fulfillment of the prophecy of Psalm 16:10, to which Peter alluded (Acts 2:27). This is also the text to which Paul refers in this message, in which he mentions “another psalm” (13:35).

The words “no more to return to corruption,” do not suggest that Jesus did decay at one time, but will never again do so. Rather, there are at least two things that are intended.

- He will never again die, and be buried in the grave, in which decay ordinarily occurs.
- He will never again, in any way, occupy the domain in which the body rots and returns to the dust of the earth.

Both views are technically correct. However, it seems to me that the emphasis is that the body of Jesus will never again dwell in the domain of decay, or “return to” the realm of “corruption.” He will never again occupy the place of the dead. Of course, such a return would require another death – like that of every other person who had been raised from the dead. These resurrections were not a defeat of death itself. They include:

- The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17-23).
- The Shunammite’s son (2 Kgs 4:32-37).
- The young man let down into the sepulcher of Elisha (2 Kgs 13:21).
- The son of the widow of Nain, raised by Jesus (Lk 7:12-15).
- Jairus’ daughter, raised by Jesus (Lk 8:49-55).
- Lazarus, raised by Jesus (John 11:43-44).
- Dorcas, raised by Peter (Acts 9:37-40).
- Eutychus, raised by Paul (Acts 20:9-12).

Jesus Christ died “once” (Rom 6:10; Heb 7:27; 9:12,26,28; 10:10; 1 Pet 3:18), and, being raised from the dead, He is “alive for evermore” (Rev 1:18). His resurrection confirmed that everything that was intended to be accomplished by His death had, in fact, been achieved – and that God was satisfied

with the results. No further purpose could be served by Jesus remaining in the region of the dead, and so He was raised up out of it. In this, Jesus took back His life, which He was told to do (John 10:17-18).

HE SPEAKS ON THIS WISE

“ 34b . . . He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.”

Paul now proclaims the effects of Christ’s resurrection, confirming that it was not intended to be a mere display, for no one on earth actually saw Jesus raise from the dead. The evidence that He had risen was not the sight of the resurrection itself, but the presence and words of the One who had been raised. This substantiates that it is the reason for the resurrection of the Lord that must be comprehended, not merely the fact of it. The power is in the reason for it.

ON THIS WISE

“ . . . He said on this wise . . .” Other versions read, “He has spoken thus,” NKJV “He has spoken in this way,” NASB “is stated in these words,” NIV “He said these words,” BBE “He spoke thus,” DARBY “He declared in this way,” NAB “God has spoken in this way,” NET “is stated in these words,” NIB “is no more than what he had declared,” NJB “This is stated in the Scripture that says, LIVING and “And as for the fact of God's raising him from the dead, never to return to corruption, He has spoken in these words.” PHILLIPS

This is a marvelous example of apostolic reasoning. It substantiates the centrality of the Scriptures themselves in arriving at holy conclusions. The matter that Paul is addressing is that God “raised” Jesus “up from the dead.” The statement is, “And as for the fact that He raised Him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, He spoke in this way.” RSV And precisely how is it that Paul will establish the fact that God raised up Jesus from the dead, and He will never again go into the grave, where the body ultimately becomes corrupt? What kind of proof can be adduced for that statement? He cannot present the body of Jesus, for He is glorified in heaven, and can no longer be seen by mortal eyes. When Jesus returned to heaven, He left no tangible evidence in the hands of His disciples that would confirm, He had been with them – evidence they could submit to men.

What we will see here will not conform to human reasoning. However, it is representative of holy thought and inspired reasoning. It is the kind of rationality that only appeals to those with faith, and it is designedly that way.

THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID

This is a marvelous example of apostolic reasoning. It substantiates the centrality of the Scriptures themselves in arriving at holy conclusions.

“ . . . I will give you the sure mercies of David.” Other versions read, “sure blessings of David,” NASB “sure blessings promised to David,” NIV “the holy promises made to David” RSV “the holy and sure blessings of David,” ASV “the holy and certain mercies of David,” BBE “the holy and trustworthy things of David,” CJB “the faithful covenant blessings made to David,” CSB “the enduring love promised to David,” GWN “the sure grace of David,” MRD “the holy things promised to David which can be relied upon,” NJB “the faithful kindnesses of David,” YLT “the wonderful thing I promised David,” LIVING and “the holy and sure mercy and blessings [that were promised and assured] to David.” AMPLIFIED

The text to which Paul refers is a rather obscure one in the fifty-fifth chapter of Isaiah. “Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isa 55:3). This word reflects the promise of God to David:

“And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom, , , my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.” (2 Sam 7:12-16). In this promise, as stated in verses 13-14, there is an immediate reference to David’s son Solomon, who would build the temple of God. However, the indirect, yet more focused, promise was of the coming Savior, who would build an everlasting house, and occupy an everlasting throne. However, the eighty-ninth Psalm, written by a member of Solomon’s court, makes clear that the promise given to David strictly pertained to the coming Christ: “For I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations. Selah . . . Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. It shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven. Selah” (Psa 89:3-4 . . . 35-37). Peter also applied God’s promise to David to the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:30-31).

If this line of reasoning is true, then it throws to the ground the notion that men can be brought to see the truth through logical arguments, apologetics, archeological findings, etc. While it may not be popular to affirm this, those who insist that such proofs are possible, they are faced with the gargantuan task of explaining why the Word of God can have power or work effectively when it is relegated to a subordinate position.

Thus Paul presents proof of the resurrection of Christ: God had promised an “everlasting covenant” and “sure,” or unending mercies to David (Isa 55:3) – and God “cannot lie” (Tit 1:2).

Jesus was the promised “Seed of David” (Rom 1:3; 2 Tim 2:8), the “Son of David” (Matt 1:1). In fact, long after David had died, the prophets frequently referred to the coming Messiah as “David” (Jer 30:9; Ezek 34:23,24; 37:24,25; Hos 3:5). The prophets also declared that the Messiah would die, being “cut off out of the land of the living” (Isa 53:8), “made grave with the wicked, and with the rich in His death,” (Isa 53:9), and making His “soul an offering for sin” (Isa 53:10). Daniel declared He would be “cut off,” for no fault of his own, and without any progeny (Dan 9:26).

If, therefore, God affirmed that the Messiah, though He died, would be for an “everlasting covenant,” and that He would ever reign on the “throne of David,” then He would have to be raised from the dead – else God would have been represented as lying. However, such a thing is not possible, for, as God Himself declared, “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall My word be that goeth forth out of My mouth: it shall not return unto Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it,” or “it shall not return to Me void [without producing any effect, useless], but it shall accomplish that which I please and purpose, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it” (Isa 55:10-11).

The fact that God declared the Messiah would be everlasting, plus the fact that He said His body would not be left in the grave, confirms that Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead. That is Paul’s reasoning. This is not satisfactory to the flesh, but that is of no consequence. God has magnified His Word above all His name (Psa 138:2), so that the apprehension of everything He gives hangs upon the belief of that Word. If men do not believe what God has said, there is no corroborating witness that can be given to them. Were such a thing possible, then the purported witness would be exalted above God’s Word – and such an exaltation simply is not possible.

If this line of reasoning is true, then it throws to the ground the notion that men can be brought to see the truth through logical arguments, apologetics, archeological findings, etc. While it may not be popular to affirm this, those who insist that such proofs are possible are faced with the gargantuan

task of explaining how the Word of God can have power or work effectively when it is relegated to a subordinate position. If God has exalted His Word above all His name, how can it be possible to accomplish the task of promoting faith independently of that Word? That is a supposition that ought to be abandoned, with dispatch and determination! Men must take care that they do not exalt human reasoning above Scripture.

ANOTHER PSALM

“ 35 Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.”

Having cited a summation of what God had promised David, Paul continues to refer to the Word of God, for that is the appointed means by which spiritual life is sustained (Matt 4:4; Lk 4:4). First he has pointed out that God promised sure and everlasting mercies through the coming Christ – and that would not be possible if Jesus had not raised from the dead. Now he goes to the well of Scripture again, anchoring his affirmation in the written Word of God.

IN ANOTHER PSALM

“Wherefore he saith also in another psalm . . .” Other versions read, “Therefore He also says,” NKJV “So it is stated elsewhere,” NIV “Therefore He has also said,” NRSV “Because He saith also,” ASV “This is explained elsewhere,” CJB “And again He said,” MRD “This is why He also said,” NAB “another psalm explains it more fully,” NLT “in another place God says,” IE and “For this is the reason He says also.” AMPLIFIED

Notice again how Paul is extolling the Word of God: “HE saith,” for the pronoun “He” refers to God Himself – the same One who said through Isaiah, “I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David” (Isa 55:3).

Technically, as the following text will affirm, it is the Messiah Himself who is speaking. Yet, it is credited to God, for the Son always spoke in strict conformity with what the Father said (John 15:15).

There is something else to be seen here. Those who were hearing Paul were familiar with the Scriptures, for they were regularly read in their gatherings.

His situation was not like that which those who speak the Word often confront in our time. There is an unparalleled level of scriptural illiteracy among professing Christians. It is at such a pronounced level that the Word of God is rarely recognized. This circumstance greatly complicates the matter of effectively communicating the Word of God. I do not know that it is possible to estimate the level of spiritual poverty that is maintained by an ignorance of the Word of God. Keep in mind that we are not speaking of barbarians, but of professing Christians. Even though God has magnified His Word, it continues to occupy a low position in the average congregation. Of course, the people who are ignorant of the Scriptures are nothing more than the product of what they have been fed.

GOD WOULD NOT ALLOW IT

“ . . . Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.” Other versions read, “You will not allow,” NKJV “You will not let,” NIV “Thou wilt not give,” ASV “You will not permit,” NET and “Thou wilt not give up.” WEYMOUTH

This quotation is taken from Psalm 16:9-11: “Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” Peter also quoted this text on the

day of Pentecost (Acts 2:26-28). It represents the reasoning of the Christ while His body was in the grave.

Who but God is capable of not allowing a body to deteriorate in the grave? As an act of His Sovereign will, He would not permit the body of Christ to in any way decay. Corruption could not take hold of His body. In four days, corruption had already made significant advancement in the body of Lazarus (John 11:39), But it could not even begin its work in God's "Holy One!"

As it is written, God "raises the dead" (2 Cor 1:9), and thus particularly refused to leave Jesus in that domain. Ultimately, all of the dead will be raised, for, according to God's predetermination, "the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isa 26:19), and death will be "swallowed up I victory." Jesus, however, is "the firstfruits of them that slept" (2 Cor 15:20), and "the first begotten of the dead" (Rev 1:5). He is the first One of whom it could be said, "death hath no more dominion over Him" (Rom 6:9).

In order for the domain of death to be conquered, two things must take place. First, the grave must be overcome by the of the deceased coming out of it. When the body emerges from the grave, it must be inhabited by the soul of the one who possessed it. Therefore, that unseen part of man must emerge from the domain of death that it occupies. This is technically termed "Hades." In the King James Version, it is translated "hell." Other versions that also use "hell" in the place of "Hades" include the following: Basic Bible English (1949), Douay-Rheims (1899), Geneva (1599), Bishop's New Testament (1595), Revised Webster (1833). Tyndall's New Testament (1534), Living Bible (1971), and Wycliffe (1382).

Still other versions use the following words: "the grave," NIV "Sheol," CJB "The netherworld," NAB "among the dead," NLT "the unseen world," WEYMOUTH "Hades [the state of departed spirits]," AMPLIFIED "the unperceived," INTERLINEAR "the realm of the dead," ALT and "the world of the dead." GNB

The Greek word that is here translated "hell" is **al[dhj** (ha-daas). The word "Hades" is a transliteration of the Greek word. It is really not a translation, for there is no parallel English word that is suitable. The lexical meaning is, "literally unseen place, the place of the dead, underworld," FRIBERG "the world of the dead," UBS " a place or abode of the dead, including both the righteous and the unrighteous (in most contexts **al[dhj** is equivalent to the Hebrew term Sheol) - 'the world of the dead, Hades," LOUW-NIDA "Hades, the world below," LIDDELL-SCOTT "Hades, netherworld, hell," LEH and "(Heb. Sheol), *the underworld* as the place of the dead." GINGRICH

I have taken the time to give this brief review in order to confirm that the meaning of this word is determined by how it is used in Scripture – i.e. contextually. In the general sense of the word, it means an unseen domain – yet there are personalities in it. This, then, cannot be the grave, for no personalities are in it. Whatever Hades is, and wherever it is, it is the unseen part of man that resides there until the time the resurrection. Little additional information is given, for, it appears, we would gain no advantage from it.

Here, the word "soul" is used to denote the unseen part of man, and not in its most definitive sense. This is the sense in which the creation of man is explained: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen 2:7). And again, "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul" (1 Cor 15:45). This ("living soul") is the part of Lazarus that was in Abraham's bosom, and the part of the rich man who, after he died, lifted up his eyes in hell (Lk 16:22-23).

The point to be seen here is that for the dead be raised, both the seen and unseen, or material and immaterial, parts of men must be brought from the domain of the dead. This is what took place when Jesus was raised from the dead. God refused to allow either the seen or unseen parts of Jesus to remain

in the domain belonging to the dead. He thoroughly defeated death!

A MAN WHO SERVED HIS GENERATION

“ 36a For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God . . . ”

However, when it came to the body not seeing corruption, Paul will confirm this was not the experience of David, who particularly spoke of it, nor was it ever intended to be. For every person except Jesus, when the body is buried, it is “sown in corruption . . . dishonor . . . weakness,” and remains “a natural body” until the general resurrection

Paul will now elaborate on the uniqueness of Jesus’ resurrection. He will show that David, although he received the promises, and spoke in the first person concerning his soul not being left in Hades and his body not seeing corruption, the coming and suffering of Christ were really the subjects being addressed. Frequently David prophesied as though what he was the one who would experience what was declared: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption . . . My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me . . . I am a worm and no man . . . all that see me . . . saying, He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him: let Him, deliver him, seeing He delighted in him . . . they pierced my hands and feet , , , They part my garments among them . . . They gave me also gall for my meat: and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (Psa 16:10; 22:1,6-8,16,18; 69:26). Isaiah did the same: “ I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair: I hid not my face from shame and spitting” (Isa 50:6). However, in both cases, and more, it was “the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11).

In some decidedly diminished measure, the prophets, probably were introduced to some of these experiences, particularly those dealing with suffering. However, when it came to the body not seeing corruption, Paul will confirm this was not the experience of David, who particularly spoke of it, nor was it ever intended to be. For every person except Jesus, when the body is buried, it is “sown in corruption . . . dishonor . . . weakness,” and remains “a natural body” until the general resurrection (1 Cor 15:42-43).

DAVID SERVED HIS OWN GENERATION

“For David, after he had served his own generation . . . ” Other versions read, “having done . . . for his generation,” BBE “in his own generation ministered,” DARBY “serving the people of his time,” GWN “served in his lifetime,” NAB “had done,” NLT “served his time,” PNT and “having been useful to his own generation.” WEYMOUTH

There are two perspectives in this text, and both are important.

- First, in saying David served his generation, the intent is to show that the people of his time were truly advantaged by David’s life. He did not serve his generation by doing what they desired and meeting all of their demands. Rather, he served them by bringing certain advantages to them that others did not bring. This had chiefly to do with his relation to the Living God, and was reflected in the nature of his rule, the various revelations given to him, and the godly focus he established among the people.

- Second, “his own generation” was the environment in which he served the Lord, In this case, serving the Lord was the primary thing, and he did it in the midst of the people, as opposed to some form of isolation. That is, the priorities and reason for his entire life was found in the Lord.

While both of these are true, it appears to me that the accent is on the latter. This is accentuated by

the fact that the time of his service is not the point of the text, but what took place “after” David had served his own generation – when he died.

In this regard, and under normal circumstances, death is viewed as an appointment – the appointed Divinely designated conclusion to one’s life. In a generation sense, the duration of human life approximates seventy or eighty years. As it is written, “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (Psa 90:10). There are exceptions, just as there were during the time when men lived hundreds of years. At that time, there were a few who lived over nine hundred years – Adam (Gen 5:5); Seth (Gen 5:8), Enos (Gen 5:11), Cainan (Gen 5:14), Jared (Gen 5:20), Methuselah (Gen 5:27), and Noah (Gen 9:29). Even so, in our time, some live past 80, but they also are the exceptions. Thus, in this general sense, the length of life has been determined by God. Holy men, knowing this determination, have asked God to teach them how to number their days – that is, to have a sense of how long they will be in the world, that they may live properly. “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psa 90:12).

HE SERVED BY THE WILL OF GOD

“ . . . by the will of God . . . ” Other versions read, “served the purpose of God in his own generation,” NASB “served God’s purpose in his own generation,” NIV “served the counsel of God in his own generation,” RSV “having done God’s work for his generation,” BBE “serving his own generation in God’s plan,” CSB “in his own generation ministered to the will of God,” DARBY “served in his generation, according to the will of God,” DOUAY “served his time by the counsel of God,” GENEVA “doing God’s will by serving the people of his time,” GWN “served the will of God in his lifetime,” NAB “his own generation having served by the will of God,” YLT and “served God’s will and purpose and counsel in his own generation.” AMPLIFIED

There is a sense in which this text is like a three-sided prism – a reality that can be seen from three differing perspectives. Each side is valid, but one is more glorious in its appearance.

- David served, or brought, certain advantages to his generation.
- David served God during his generation.
- It was God’s will that David bring advantages to his generation by serving Him, doing His will, and obeying His directives.

All of these are true. However, it seems to me that the latter yields the greater glory to the Lord, for David was a “prophet” – a spokesman for God (Acts 2:29-30). So far as the written record is concerned, David’s prophecies related to the coming Messiah, and he brought certain advantages to those of his time by declaring them (Psa 2:1-2,6-9; 24:7-10; 22:1-18,22; 16:9-11; 21:5-7; 34:20; 40:6-10; 45:6-7; 68:18; 69:9,21,26; 80:17; 96:13; 109:25; 110:1,3-4; 118:22-23; 132:11,17). In fact, by writing them down, he brought advantages to succeeding generations as well.

It ought to be noted that no person can truly minister to, or serve, the people who is not himself doing the will of God. Those so living will be used by God to “shine as lights in the world,” even “in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Phil 2:15). Thus, serving the Lord is more than an obligation – although it is surely that, for we have all been “bought with a price” (1 Cor 6:20). However, in that service God is being honored, and those who take due heed to such a life are given opportunities and advantages.

AFTER

Paul draws particular attention to “after” David had “served his generation.” Although David did speak of himself being raised from the dead (Psa 49:15), he appeared to know through inspiration that this was not possible until the Messiah was raised from the dead (Psa 16:9-10). The general

resurrection, although it is appointed, must necessarily be preceded by the resurrection of Christ as “the first begotten of the dead,” or “the firstborn from the dead” NKJV (Rev 1:5).

This is a point of sound doctrine. “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power” (1 Cor 6:14). And again, “Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:14). This word is an essential part of preaching.

DAVID FELL ASLEEP AND SAW CORRUPTION

“36b . . . fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.” Paul is now elaborating on the fact that the body of Jesus was not subject to corruption – no decay ever was allowed to ravish the body of the Son of God. Not even when it lay for three days in the tomb.

DAVID FELL ON SLEEP

“ . . . fell on sleep . . .” Other versions read, “fell asleep,” NKJV “died,” NRSV “went to sleep,” BBE “slept,” DOUAY “was laid to rest,” GWN “went to rest,” MRD “fell asleep [in death],” AMPLIFIED and “was reposed.” INTERLINEAR

The words “fell on sleep” come from a single Greek word – **evkoimh,qh** . The lexical meaning of this word is: “to cause to sleep . . . metaphorically, and euphemistically equivalent to die,” THAYER “to fall asleep, to go to bed, to sleep . . . to remain somewhere during the night,” LEH and “fig., of death, fall asleep, die, pass away.” GINGRICH

In the Scriptures, death is frequently referred to as going to sleep (Deut 31:16; 1 Kgs 2:10; Job 3:13; 7:21; 14:12; Dan 12:2; Matt 27:52; John 11:11; Acts 13:36; 1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:14; 5:10).

David concluded his work and died, as Peter would say it, putting off his tabernacle (2 Pet 1:14). Or, as Paul would say it, he was “absent from the body” (2 Cor 5:8), or had “departed” from his mortal frame (Phil 1:23). His body was thus in lifeless repose, that is to say, was awaiting the resurrection from the dead,

Properly viewed, death is to be the conclusion of a fruitful and beneficial life. Such a life is one that has been lived unto God. David lived that kind of life, and we are obliged to do so also.

Soul Sleeping Theory

Soul sleeping is a view of death that is held by a significant number of professing Christians. The following is a definition of this term, provided by those who embrace the doctrine of soul sleeping.

"The grave is not a place of consciousness. Since death is a sleep, the dead remain in a state of unconsciousness in the grave until the resurrection, when the grave (Hades) gives up its dead (Rev. 20:13)." **SEVENTH DAY ADVENTIST, A BIBLICAL EXPOSITION OF 27 FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES**

A modern theologian defines soul sleeping in these words: “ Following death, the soul of an individual sleeps until the resurrection." EMERY NESTER, Ed.D., D.Min

The Britannica Encyclopedia, 2008, provides this entry. “A second view, therefore, also prevailed: the sleep of the soul—i.e., the soul of the dead person enters into a sleeping state that continues until the Last Judgment, which will occur after the general resurrection.”

This view directly contradicts the

Some dismiss this account, saying that it was a parable, and not an actual account. However, such a supposition can by no means be substantiated, and Jesus did not refer to people by name in parables. Also, a parable is a parallel of spiritual realities with very real temporal circumstances. A person who embraces the soul-sleeping theory could not even speak in the manner in which Jesus did.

account of Jesus concerning Lazarus, the rich man, and Abraham (Luke 16:19-31). Jesus represented all three of these men as conscious and perceptive after they had died. Abraham and the rich man held a dialog, and Lazarus was comforted. Furthermore, Abraham is said to have referred to Moses and the prophets, who did not come into existence until hundreds of years after Abraham had died. Yet, he was knowledgeable of them and what they said, as well as the brothers of the rich man who were still alive in the world. Some dismiss this account, saying that it was a parable, and not an actual occurrence. However, such a supposition can by no means be substantiated, and Jesus did not refer to people by name in parables. Also, a parable is a parallel of spiritual realities with very real temporal circumstances. A person who embraces the soul-sleeping theory could not even speak in the manner in which Jesus did.

Second, Jesus revealed to John the activity of certain souls who had been “Slain for the word of God.” They asked the Lord a question, were given appropriate attire, and told to “rest yet a little season until their fellow servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled” (Rev 6:9-11).

Third, when Jesus was transfigured, Moses and Elijah appeared in glory with Him. Both had left the world hundreds of years before – Moses by death, and Elijah by being taken up into heaven. They spoke with Jesus “of His decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:31). When upon the earth, neither of them are reported to said so much as a single word about the death of the coming Messiah. Elijah did not say anything at all about the Messiah. Both of these persons were conscious, and knowledge of things they did not know while they remained in this world.

The Soul Is Never Said to Sleep

The very term “soul sleeping” is contrived, for, as regarding death, the soul is never said to sleep. John saw departed souls “under the altar,” and they were not sleeping, but talking. He also “saw the souls of them, that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus,” and they lived and reigned with Jesus (Rev 20:4). Without probing further into this language, it does not appear likely to me that the truth of God could be delivered to men in an erroneous container – i.e. a depiction of something that was not possible – and the language to which I have just referred would be a total misrepresentation if soul-sleeping was a proper doctrine.

It Is the Body that Sleeps

This is resurrection language. The body is said to “sleep,” lying in peaceful repose, because it is going to be raised from the dead. At that time “this corruptible must put in incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:53-54). Further, the thing that is “corruptible” is sown, or planted, into the earth – a clear reference to the body. “It is sown in corruption . . . It is sown in dishonor . . . It is sown in weakness . . . It is sown a natural body” (1 Cor 15:43-44).

Nowhere is the soul, at death, said to be “sown.” Further, the body is put into the earth, for it came from there originally. The soulish part of man did not come from earth, but was breathed into the body after God had fashioned it. Paul makes a special point of this: “The first man is of the earth, earthy” (1 Cor 15:47). It is for this reason that, following the sin of man, God said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken : for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return ” (Gen 3:19).

Until that day, the body is “asleep” – without life and inactive. There is no spirit in the body when it is dead, for death is the result the absence of the human spirit. Thus the term “sleep” does not denote a mere unconscious state, but a lifeless one.

However, owing to the atoning death of Christ, death is viewed as a “sleep.” This is because even death is temporary. In Jesus, the body of every person, saved or lost, will be raised from the dead. Thus it is written, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor 15:22). For those in Christ, this will be the ultimate advantage. For those who are not in Christ, it will be the consummate disadvantage. Thus Jesus said of the resurrection, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:29).

Until that day, the body is “asleep” – without life and inactive. There is no spirit in the body when it is dead, for death is the result the absence of the human spirit (James 2:27). Thus the term “sleep” does not denote a mere unconscious state, but a lifeless one. This condition, however, is never ascribed to the souls of the dead. The greater light of the Gospel makes this more clear.

UNTO HIS FATHERS

“ . . . and was laid unto his fathers . . .” Other versions read, “buried with his fathers,” NKJV “laid among his fathers,” NASB “laid beside his ancestors,” NRSV “put with his fathers,” BBE “buried with his fathers,” CJB “laid to rest with his ancestors,” GWN “added to his fathers,” MRD “gathered to his ancestors,” NAB “gathered to his forefathers,” MONTGOMERY and “buried among his forefathers.” AMPLIFIED

The term “laid unto” or “laid beside,” enlarges on the concept of the body sleeping.

At the time David was granted his desire to prepare for the building of the Temple, God told him, “And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers , I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom” (2 Sam 7:12).

First Kings 2:10 says “So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David ” (1 Kgs2:10). This was not Bethlehem, which is also referred to as “the city of David” (Lk 2:4). Rather, it was Zion, in the southern part of Jerusalem, where a fortress of the Jebusites once stood, and was forcibly taken by Davod. The account of that quest is found in First Chronicles 11:5: “And the inhabitants of Jebus said to David, Thou shalt not come hither. Nevertheless David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David ” (1 Chron 11:5).

David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and died after reigning forty years (2 Sam 5:4), being seventy years of age. The account of David’s death and burial is found in First Kings 2:10 and First Chronicles 29:26-28.

Scriptures indicate that a special place was reserved for the burial of kings. “ And Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the chiefest of the sepulchres of the sons of David” (2 Chron 32:33). It appears that the burial of David was the point at which this custom commenced. The phrase “laid unto his fathers” does not refer to the precise place location – although it was in Canaan, the land of promise. “And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honor: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead” (1 Chr 29:27-28).

There are 105 accounts of, or statements made concerning David. His name is mentioned 1,085 times in Scripture: 1,027 from Ruth through Zechariah, and 58 times from Matthew through Revelation.

David's Last Words

The last words of David are recorded: "The spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place" (2 Sam 23:2-7).

On the day of Pentecost Peter confirmed that the sepulcher of David remained with them – at least one thousand years after he had died (Acts 2:29).

DAVID SAW CORRUPTION

" . . . and saw corruption." Other versions read, "underwent decay," NASB "his body decayed," NIV "experienced corruption," NRSV "his body came to destruction," BBE and "he did see corruption and undergo putrefaction and dissolution [of the grave]." AMPLIFIED

Reasoning on this fact, Peter concluded that when David spoke about his body not seeing corruption, he could not have been speaking of himself. He was rather prophesying of the coming Christ. It was the Spirit of Christ in David that moved him to so speak , as was the case with other prophets (1 Peter 1:11). It is that same point that Paul is making. He will now elaborate on that critical reality, confirming both its power and relevance.

AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE

" 37 But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption."

Paul will now confirm that the real point of all sound doctrine is Jesus, and what God did to and for Him. This is a distinction that is being greatly obscured in our day, when the inhabitants of the earth are being presented as fundamental. With spiritual expertise Paul speaks of the reality of Christ being the proper focus, not the condition of men. This does not mean that people are unimportant. However, it does mean that their importance is measured by the Person of Christ, what He did, and what God did to Him. Take Jesus out of the picture, and men no longer have any genuine importance. Their entire existence is reduced to vanity – just as Solomon observed when he wrote of things "under the sun" (Eccl 1:2,14; 2:1,11,15,17,19,21,23,26; 3:19; 4:4,7,8,16; 5:10; 6:2,4,9,11; 7:15; 8:10,14; 9:9; 11:8,10; 12:8). Keep in mind that those expressions were uttered by a man who had wisdom, wealth, position, and pleasure that were unexcelled among men in the flesh.

BUT HE

"But He, whom God raised again . . ." Other versions read, "raised up," NKJV and "raised from the dead." NIV

In other words, after Jesus died, God preempted the natural process that follows death – decay – not allowing the body of Jesus to go through that procedure. A body was prepared for Jesus. However, the purpose for the body is that He might "taste death for every man" – not that the body itself might undergo decay.

The point to be seen here is that Jesus is the theme of proper exposition. The psychiatrist studies the human psyche. The sociologist analyzes human society. The philosopher examines ideas and

possibilities. The scientist considers natural phenomenon. The mathematician peruses numbers, exponentiality, and how they bear upon problems and resolutions. But the spiritual thinker considers Jesus, what He did, what He experienced, what He is doing, and what He will do. That is the key of knowledge that allows for the proper assessment of all other things.

Paul is confirming that Jesus is the issue, not the human condition. His point is that what God did to Jesus in raising Him from the dead has immediate relevancy to all men. In fact, THE Person and work of Jesus Christ is the factor that makes things crucial, or of great importance.

SAW NO CORRUPTION

“ . . . saw no corruption.” Other versions read, “did not undergo decay,” NASB and “saw no corruption [did not experience putrefaction and dissolution of the grave].” AMPLIFIED

In other words, after Jesus died, God preempted the natural process that follows death – decay – not allowing the body of Jesus to go through that process. A body was prepared for Jesus (Heb 10:5). However, the purpose for the body is that He might “taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9) – not that the body itself might undergo decay.

Once Jesus bore our sins in His body on the tree, was cursed by God in the judgment of that sin, and buried, there was no further need for His body to undergo the curse. Thus, there was no requirement for decay to take place.

SOMETHING TO BE KNOWN

“ 38 Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins.” Having delineated the triumph of Jesus over “the last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26), Paul will declare the reality of remission. He will proclaim propitiation and announce amnesty. The resurrection of Christ announces that God received Christ’s “offering” (Eph 5:2; Heb 10:10,14). Now that Jesus has risen and is enthroned, remission can be proclaimed, for an acceptable sacrifice has been offered. Thus it is written, “And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin” (Heb 10:17-18).

BE IT KNOWN UNTO YOU

“Be it known unto you therefore . . .” Other versions read, “let it be known,” NKJV “I want you to know,” NIV “Let it be clear to you,” BBE “Know therefore,” MRD “I want you to realize,” NJB “Listen!” LIVING “you must understand,” IE “understand therefore,” WEYMOUTH “let it be clearly known and understood by you,” AMPLIFIED and “It is therefore imperative, men and

brothers, that every one of you should realize.” PHILLIPS

Translated from the Greek word **gnwsto.n** , the word “known” means “make known, disclose . . . that which may be known of God,” THAYER “something clearly recognizable known, made known . . . well-known; substantively . . . of what can be known intelligible, knowable.” FRIBERG

This rather complex word includes a lot of intellectual and intuitive territory: that is, something that both the heart and the mind can grasp.

- First, Paul is declaring that what He is about to say is from God, and has been made accessible to men.
- Second, in view of this fact, what he will say is knowable, and can be apprehended.
- Third, that Paul has comprehended what he will declare, and will therefore be able to make it plain to the people.

- Fourth, that men are obligated to receive this knowledge, for when God has made something known, then sent someone to declare it to men, it is wrong for the hearers to reject it, remaining in ignorance about it.

Now, this sets before us the very nature of the Kingdom of God. It does not thrive in a culture of spiritual ignorance. Divine privilege is enjoyed primarily through “spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9), for what cannot be discerned, cannot be truly apprehended, enhancing the individual. In all of this, faith is the enabling factor.

It seems to me that this perception is not common among the churches of our time. There is too much contentment with ignorance, and thus too little quest for the truth and pressing toward the mark. It is time for those who wear the name of Jesus to have a more sober and sustained view of the truth of God, thrusting from them the dreadful religious twins of ignorance and indifference.

THROUGH THIS MAN

“ . . . men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you . . . ” Other versions read, “is proclaimed to you,” NASB “is offered to you,” BBE “I’m telling you,” GWN “declared,” YLT “announced to you,” WEYMOUTH and “is being down-messaged.” INTERLINEAR

The word translated “preached,” or “proclaimed,” comes from a Greek word that means, “to announce, declare, promulgate, make known; to proclaim publicly, publish . . . with the included idea of celebrating, commending,” THAYER “proclaim (solemnly), announce something,” FRIBERG “proclaim, make known, preach; teach, advocate,” UBS and “proclaim, make known, preach; teach, advocate.” LOUW-NIDA This is not an exposition, but a proclamation.

By saying “through this Man,” Paul is not merely saying by His authority. Jesus Himself is prominent in the very administration of this message. He is the One who sent the message through the Spirit to Paul, and He is the One who has authorized and empowered him to declare it with understanding. This is the language of Divine government. The door of opportunity has been opened by the exalted Christ, and the message is being declared at His discretion. To reject this message in any way is unspeakably serious! This message is to be comprehended and embraced with both hands, immediately and eagerly.

THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“ . . . the forgiveness of sins.” Other versions read, “remission of sins,” ASV “your sins can be forgiven,” GWN “forgiveness for your sins,” NLT “there is forgiveness for your sins,” LIVING “removal of sins,” AMPLIFIED and “Jesus can forgive your sins.” CEV

This is a fulfillment of the word of Jesus, delivered to His disciples prior to His ascension: “And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). Here it is being preached in Asia, in the city of Antioch, already spreading “among all nations.”

Some of the versions do not present the case clearly enough. Paul is not preaching possibility (i.e. “can be,” “can forgive”) but is declaring a reality to be received. The truth of the matter is that Jesus “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself,” taking away “the sin of the world.” As Daniel said, He “finished” the transgression, and made “an end of sin” (Dan 9:24). The question is not whether or not God can forgive sin, and woe to the person who approaches the subject in such a frame of mind. Now the issue is whether or not men will receive what God has provided. Their ability to receive it is not even the issue, because enabling power accompanies the message. In order to reject this message, the individual must “put it” from them, “repudiate” NASB it, and “thrust it” RSV from themselves (Acts 13:46).

Technically speaking, the message is not an offer of salvation, but the declaration of it. The difference between an offer and a declaration is that a declaration emphasizes the necessity of faith – or believing the message. It is true that it must be received, and that is what faith will invariably do.

A SWEEPING STATEMENT

“ 39 And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

Paul now makes a statement of epochal proportions. It is a word that many cannot be taken into the mouth of those who attempt to live by law. I come from a religious background where, apart from my good father, I do not have a clear recollection of this word ever being proclaimed. It simply was not the message of choice. In fact, there was often a prevailing ignorance of its very presence in the Word of God. However, this word was spoken by a man chosen and empowered by Jesus and sent forth by the Holy Spirit. Men are obliged to comprehend this word and continue to faithfully sound it forth.

BY HIM ALL

“And by Him all . . .” Other versions read, “through Him everyone,” NASB “by this Jesus everyone,” “God clears everyone,” CJB “in Him everyone,” DARBY “by this one everyone,” NET “in this one everyone,” YLT “through union with Him everyone,” WILLIAMS and “in this one.” INTERLINEAR

Who is the “Him” to which Paul refers – “by Him?” The word translated “by” is a primary preposition, and can be translated “in, on, at, with, by, or among .” THAYER Summarized, it speaks of the means through which something is accomplished. In this case, blessing that is pronounced comes by the means of Christ – or more particularly, by the means of being in, or identified with, Christ. Objectively viewed, it is God Himself who puts us into Christ. This is succinctly stated in First Corinthians: “. . . hath God chosen . . . That no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:28-30). From this perspective, “by Him” can refer to God – the One who justifies. This is a proper view and can be seen in this text.

Viewed subjectively, it is by means of faith that we are brought into Christ. Because faith always expresses itself, we are also said to be “baptized into Christ.” Thus it is written, “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:26-27). From this view, Christ is the appointed means through which the promised blessing is realized. This also is a proper view, like the other side of a coin. It cannot be experienced apart from a very real identity with Jesus – an identity that is described as being put into Christ by God, and being baptized into Him. These actions are not mere formal routines.

THAT BELIEVE

“. . . all that believe . . .” Now that we have established that the locus of blessing is Christ Himself, we should have no difficulty with what is here stated: “all that believe.” Other versions read, “everyone who believes,” NKJV “everyone who has faith,” BBE “everyone who puts his trust in this Man,” CJB “everyone who believes in Him,” CSB “every believer,” NAB “everyone who is believing,” YLT “everyone who trusts in Him,” LIVING “every one of you who believes,” WILLIAMS and “everyone who believes [who acknowledges Jesus as his Savior and devotes himself to Him].” AMPLIFIED

This text cannot be altered to better fit into a preconceived theology: like saying, “all tho believe and . . .” Believing is the revealed stipulation, and the text must be taken as it stands for its intended

truth to be apprehended. This is not a partial proclamation, but is rather a thorough summation. Behind the statement is the supposal that “believing” necessarily includes all that believing compels a person to do, for believing cannot be separate from what it does. It is not possible to be disadvantaged by hearing these words stated in this precise manner.

The necessity of having a correct view of this statement is confirmed by the promise that is attached to it.

JUSTIFIED FROM ALL THINGS

“ . . . are justified from all things . . . ” Other versions read, “is justified from all things,” NKJV “is freed from all things,” NASB “is justified from everything,” NIV “is set free from all those sins,” NRSV “is freed from everything,” RSV “made free from all those things,” BBE “clears everyone,” CJB “is justified,” DARBY “receives God’s approval,” GWN “declared right with God,” NLT “is declared righteous,” YLT “freed from all guilt and declared righteous,” LIVING “have forgiveness of all your sins,” IE “absolved from all offences,” WEYMOUTH “justified and freed from everything,” ISV “given right standing with God and freed from every charge,” WILLIAMS and “is absolved (cleared and freed) from every charge.” AMPLIFIED

The expression “justified from all things” is not the whole of justification. It is that part of justification that deals with sin and guilt. However, as declared elsewhere in Scripture, justification also involves the imputation of the righteousness of God. I say this because of the way several versions have interpreted this verse: “is justified,” DARBY/GENEVA/NAB “receives God’s approval,” GWN “declared right with God,” NLT “is declared righteous.” YLT Although this may be viewed as a pointless technicality, care must be taken not to leave an erroneous view of the salvation of God, or the justification that is realized in Christ Jesus. In saying “justified from all things . . . ” Paul is referring to the sins he previous said were now forgiven (v 38). He is not here declaring justification in its entirety, but the part that deals with the remission of sins.

There are two things that must be accomplished before anyone can be acceptable to God – and they are both realized in justification.

- Sin must be remitted, the person cleansed, and guilt removed (1 Cor 6:11). This includes being freed from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:7,14; Gal 5:1) as well as from the guilt of it. In this, the transgressions committed are no longer associated with the individual (Heb 8:12). They are considered to have been imputed to Christ, who bore the curse for them (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13), taking them away (John 1:29).

- There must also be an imputation of the righteousness of God to the one being justified (Rom 4:6,23-24). This is the righteousness of God Himself, and is announced in the Gospel (Rom 1:16-17). Those to whom this righteousness is imputed are said to have been “made righteous” (Rom 5:19), and to have been “made the righteousness of God” in Christ (2 Cor 5:21).

By virtue of these two transactions, the person is made acceptable to God (Eph 1:6). The removal of sin and the imputation of righteousness constitute one a “new creature in Christ Jesus” (2 Cor 5:17). Being “made righteous” involves being created anew (Eph 2:10), or receiving a “new man,” which is to be “put on” (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

The remission of sins is in order to the imputation of righteousness, for righteousness cannot simply be placed over unrighteousness. While the forgiveness of sin includes the cleansing of the conscience – something that man must have in order to live acceptably before God – it also clears the way for man to be “made righteous.” Without that righteousness, man still cannot be accepted by God.

At this point, a lot of erroneous theology is exposed. There is an approach to Divine acceptance

that leads men to believe He accepts them just as they are, “warts and all,” as some are wont to say. However, this is, at the very best, a very clumsy statement. God declares that no one can walk with Him who is not in agreement with Him (Amos 3:2-3). This is why men must be “reconciled to God” (Col 1:20-21) – a state in which they obtain the righteousness of God. Such expressions as “ungodly Christians,” “carnal Christians,” people who “have received Christ, but have not accepted Him as Lord,” etc., reflect a state of gross ignorance. It has been revealed that a condition in which a person can maintain a form of godliness, yet reject its power, is a fallen state, and constitutes great peril (2 Tim 3:15). In such a state it is imagined that a person can conduct their lives just as the world, being fundamentally self centered, all the while claiming to be a follower of Jesus. Such claims are totally false. There is not so much as a grain of truth in them.

NOT JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW OF MOSES

“ . . . from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Other versions read, “from which you could not be freed,” NASB “could not be cleared,” CJB “could not be made just,” NAB “something the law of Moses could never do,” NLT “not able . . . to be declared righteous,” YLT “could not make you right,” IE “could not be absolved,” WEYMOUTH “kept you from being justified,” ISV and “could not be justified and freed . . . and given a right standing with God.”
AMPLIFIED

The law was never intended to free men from sin, or provide a means through which remission could be enjoyed. Thus, after the most solemn day in the Jewish calendar – the day of atonement – men were left with an acute consciousness of guilt, never with a sense of forgiveness! There is a marvelous statement of the case in Hebrews 10:1-4: “FOR SINCE the Law has merely a rude outline (foreshadowing) of the good things to come—instead of fully expressing those things— It can never by offering the same sacrifices continually year after year make perfect those who approach [its altars]. For if it were otherwise, would

When the conscience is not cleansed, sin remains dominant, wielding the dominion over the sinner. This is why it is written, “the strength of sin if the Law”

[these sacrifices] not have stopped being offered? Since the worshipers had once for all been cleansed, they would no longer have any guilt or consciousness of sin. But [as it is] these sacrifices annually bring a fresh remembrance of sins [to be atoned for]. Because the blood of bulls and goats is powerless to take sins away.” AMPLIFIED

When the conscience is not cleansed, sin remains superior, wielding the dominion over the sinner. This is why it is written, “the strength of sin is the Law” (1 Cor 15:56). It is the Law that bludgeons the conscience, for “what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God ” (Rom 3:19). Only when the conscience has been cleansed can men “serve the living God” (Heb 9:14). This is what the law of Moses could never do, nor, indeed, was it ever intended to do it.

Thus Paul announces what is found through Christ that cannot be obtained elsewhere – particularly in the law of Moses. That was the ultimate law – the fundamental routine or procedure. What that law “could not do” (Rom 8:3) , cannot be done by any law. Those who offer inward peace, cleansing, and victory over sin by means of a law, rule, procedure, or plan, have actually contradicted the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory – and that is a most serious matter. Others who teach people to confess what does not exist, repeating what God has said about the righteous as though it applies to them, have done much the same thing. This battery of false prophets tell the people they can call “those things that are not as though they were” (Rom 4:17). What they fail to tell the people is that this is a description of God, and is nowhere portrayed as something men do. The perpetrators of this doctrine say that faith can speak creative words, and cause things to happen. But which of these pretenders have ever commanded a purged conscience, or a strong heart, or made a person stand, as

God can do?

If men are ever to be justified, they will have to be “made righteous,” and that is something that God alone can do – and He does it through and in Jesus. There is no justification without Divine activity – men are “made righteous.”

A SOLEMN WARNING

“ 40 Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; 41 Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

Paul does not take for granted that his listeners will believe. If it was possible, this would have been an excellent time to speak of the people believing, even though they did not, thus creating faith in them – if such a thing was possible. But it is not, and that is why he speaks as he does.

BEWARE

“Beware therefore . . .” Other versions read, “Take heed therefore,” NASB “take care,” NIV “Watch out, then,” CJB “See therefore,” DARBY “So be careful,” NLT “see, therefore,” YLT “Oh, be careful,” LIVING “o ye beware,” INTERLINEAR “Therefore, be watching,” ALT and “Make sure that.” CEV

The word translated “beware” is **blepete** , and is a most solemn expression, in the imperative present active mode. In English,

- An “imperative” word denotes something that is an obligatory act or duty. It is some that is not to be avoided or evaded. MERRIAM-WEBSTER
- The “present” mode speaks of what is occurring in the present time and is used of what occurs or is true at the time of speaking, and is habitual or characteristic. MERRIAM-WEBSTER
- The “active” mode denotes express action that is ongoing. MERRIAM-WEBSTER

Whatever “beware” means, it is something that is indispensable and must be done. It is required at the time the word is heard, and is to be consistent. It is also to be on ongoing characteristic.

The Meaning of “Beware”

The lexical meaning of this word is, “to see, discern . . . to have the power of understanding . . . to turn the thoughts or direct the mind to a thing.” THAYER Here, then, is a word that denotes alertness and discernment, vigilance and understanding. Paul tells his listeners to comprehend their condition, ensuring that the circumstance he will mention is not found in them.

Other places where this precise word is used are as follows. They serve to confirm the weight of the word.

- “And He charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod” (Mark 8:15).
- “And He said unto them in his doctrine, Beware of the scribes, which love to go in long clothing, and love salutations in the marketplaces” (Mark 12:38).

Of course, for those who are unaware of what the prophets have said, they are put to a decided disadvantage. They could very well fall into the kind of state that God has revealed will be judged by Him.

“ Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision” (Phil 3:2).

• “ Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8).

Paul is now going to tell the people they do not have the luxury of ignoring the word he has delivered. He does not give them the option of treating that word with disdain or disinterest. This is a portion of the record God has given of His Son, and He holds men strictly accountable for their response to it. Let it be clear, men do not have the privilege of rejecting this message with impunity.

LEST THAT COME UPON YOU

“ . . . lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets . . .” Other versions read, “does not happen to you,” NIV “do not come true for you,” BBE “Don’t let . . . apply to you,” NLT “fall on you,” PNT “should come true of you,” WEYMOUTH “may be on-coming,” INTERLINEAR and “should come about.” ESV

Paul admonishes the listeners to avoid God saying of them what is written in the prophets – i.e. see to it that their condition does not parallel the circumstance described by the prophets.

The words of the prophets, then, are not mere history, and woe to that person who treats them as though they were. The prophets spoke of circumstances that could occur again and again. They described how God responded to such circumstances. Now, Paul tells the people that wherever those circumstances are found again, God will still respond in that manner. He lays the solemn responsibility upon the people to see to it that they avoid the category of people who are judged by God!

Of course, for those who are unaware of what the prophets have said, they are put to a decided disadvantage. They could very well fall into the kind of state that God has revealed will be judged by Him. It is a most pitiful condition when those who profess to know God are ignorant of what He has said. Unbeknown to them, they are walking in slippery place – in the devil’s domain without any good understanding of how God reacts to stubbornness and unbelief. However, their ignorance will not protect them, for God cannot deny Himself, or act in a manner that is inconsistent with His nature. This is precisely why historic records of Divine dealings are written. The incidents actually happened, or took place, for our learning. As it is written, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11).

BEHOLD YE DESPISERS

“ 41 Behold, ye despisers . . .” Other versions read, “you scoffers,” NASB “you doubters,” BBE “you mockers,” CJB “depisers [of the truth],” LIVING “you scoffers and scornors,” AMPLIFIED and “people who make fun of God.” CEV

Lexically, the word “despisers” means, “despiser,” THAYER “scoffer, despiser, scorner,” FRIBERG “one who customarily feels contempt for something or someone - 'one who feels contempt, scoffer,” LOUW-NIDA and “scornful men.” LEH

However, what do these English words mean? They are not common in our day.

• **DESPISER.** To look down on with disdain, or aversion. To regard as worthless or distasteful.

• **SCOFFER.** To show one’s contempt in derision or mockery; stresses insolence, disrespect, or incredulity.

- **SCORNER.** To dislike and disrespect or derision often mixed with indignation.

The Passage of Reference

The word to which Paul refers is an obscure one in the book of Habakkuk. “Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you” (Hab 1:5). Paul quotes from the Septuagint version (The Hebrew Scriptures translated into Greek), which, translated into the English reads, “Behold, ye despisers, and look, and wonder marvelously, and vanish: for I work a work in your days, which ye will in no wise believe, though a man declare it to you. ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF THE SAEPTUAGINT

Habakkuk was warning Israel of the coming Babylonian captivity. It was a time when “violence” would overcome the people, as God raised up “the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs” (Hab 1:6). He told the people, “They shall come all for violence: their faces shall sup up as the east wind, and they shall gather the captivity as the sand” (Hab 1:9). A wicked nation would come and overwhelm the nation that had been chosen and cultured by God! It all made no sense to the people, and they paid no heed to Habakkuk, even though he made the message “plain” (Hab 2:2).

The people mocked God, continuing on in their insolence and drunkenness (Hab 2:15-16). “Spoiling and violence” continued in the land (Hab 1:3). The law was slacked, and judgment was not being executed, for the wicked gathered about the righteous, and God said, “wrong judgment proceedeth” (Hab 1:4).

WONDER AND PERISH

“ . . . and wonder, and perish . . .” Other versions say, “wonder and come to your end,” BBE “marvel and die,” CJB “wonder and vanish away,” CSB “be amazed and disappear,” NAB and “marvel and perish and vanish away.” AMPLIFIED

They are hearing the word of God regarding His great salvation, and they are not to mock God by spurning it! By rejecting that word, they are, in fact, saying that God has not told the truth about man’s need for as Savior, and has wasted His time in providing the way of salvation.

Because “God is not mocked” (Gal 6:7), as Paul quoted Habakkuk, the people would “vanish” from their land, being uprooted from it even though they were duly warned.

Now Paul warns the people to see to it that a similar thing does not happen to them. They are hearing the word of God regarding His great salvation, and they are not to mock God by spurning it! By rejecting that word, they are, in fact, saying that God has not told the truth about man’s need for as Savior, and has wasted His time in providing the way of salvation.

I WORK A WORK IN YOUR DAYS

“ . . . for I work a work in your days . . .” Habakkuk prophesied of a day of judgment and Divine retribution, when the Chaldeans, under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar would devastate the land.

YE WILL IN NO WISE BELIEVE

“ . . . a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.”

The work was of such a magnitude that the person who brought the word of it was considered nothing more than a madman. The people did not believe what he had to say. However, Nebuchadnezzar did come, ravish the nation, carry away the best of the land, and induct the seventy-year Babylonian captivity. God was not mocked! His word could not be despised and ignored without

paying the price.

Now, Paul has declared that God has done a work, raising Jesus from the dead after the people had forthrightly rejected Him, and delivered him to death. He has associated Jesus with “the sure mercies of David,” and affirmed that now “the forgiveness of sins” is preached through Him. The work that has been accomplished is of such magnitude that “all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.”

What will the people do with this message? Will they treat it as the people of old treated the message of Habakkuk? Will they despise it, turning aside to their own way, and refusing to believe and embrace it? Paul warns them not to do this, for then judgment will come upon them which first came upon Israel of old. For Israel, it was a seventy-year captivity, but this message has eternal consequences. The person who does not believe this word concerning Jesus “shall be damned,” and the wrath of God is abiding upon them (Mk 16:16; John 3:36). How will these people respond? What will be their mind toward this word? Their response will dictate how Paul speaks.

CONCLUSION

This text confirms the seriousness of being exposed to the Gospel of Christ. The Word of the Gospel is so unique and powerful that an immediate response to it is expected from the people. In a day when religious entertainment and novelty are so prominent, such an expectation is not considered reasonable. Also, this is a time when great value has been placed upon human understanding and the right to opinion. However, when we stand before God, natural understanding has no value, and men have no right to entertain a private view of what the Lord has said.

There is something else to consider on this matter. If the Lord has placed such a high priority on the Gospel, and invested it with such power, how appropriate is it to introduce other emphases to the body of Christ? Will not those who spurn the central message in preference for a tangential one be considered “despisers” before God? For to prefer another message over the one He has delivered is, in fact, to reject the word of the Lord. That is really how God considers the matter, and that fact necessitates that we do so also.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #60

THE GENTILES AND THE JEWS RESPOND

“ 13:42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. 43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. 44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. 46 Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. 47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth. 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region. 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Conium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.” (Acts 13:42-52)

INTRODUCTION

As we should expect, the powerful message of Paul has an immediate influence upon the listeners, for the Gospel is associated with Divine power. As it is written, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). Again, it is said of the early church, “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all ” (Acts 4:33). Speaking of the response of the Thessalonians to the preaching of the Gospel Paul wrote, “For

our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye

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know what manner of men we were among you for your sake” (1 Thess 1:5). And again, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13).

Paul said of the believers in Colossae, “For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth” (Col 1:5-6).

In my judgment, the great power of the Gospel has been largely ignored in our day. This is evident by the remarkable lack of its proclamation – particularly in the church. Substitute messages are being offered to the churches that purport to show men how to live, resolve their difficulties, and recover from their failures.

THE GOSPEL IN THE EPISTLES

To confirm that an absence of the consistent proclamation of the Gospel within the church is the cause for spiritual debility and weakness, the following illustrates how much of the Gospel is actually found in what the Spirit says to the churches. In fact, the vast majority of what He says concerning the Gospel is, in fact, addressed to those who are in Christ Jesus. Those are the ones to whom the Gospel is expounded, with its details being opened up, together with the purpose that conceived it.

CHRIST DIED

Christ's death, necessitated because of "our sins," is the subject of Divine elaboration. All of the points shown below are inherent in that death, and are the subject of extensive Divine exposition

1. He bore, or carried, our sins in His body on the tree (1 Pet 2:24).
2. He was made to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
3. In His death, He was cursed by God (Gal 3:13).
4. He gave His life a ransom for many (Matt 20:28).
5. He took away the sins of the world (John 1:29).
6. He gave His life for the sheep (John 10:11).
7. No man took His life from Him, He laid it down that He might take it up again (John 10:17-18).
8. He purchased the church with His blood (Acts 20:28).
9. We are justified freely through the redemption of Christ (Rom 3:24).
10. God has set Jesus forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood (Rom 3:25).
11. God commended His love to us in the death of Jesus (Rom 5:8)
12. We are justified through His blood (Rom 5:9).
13. We are reconciled to God through the death of His son (Rom 5:10).
14. We are buried by baptism into Christ's death (Rom 6:3-4).
15. God condemned sin in the flesh of His Son (Rom 8:3).
16. God did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all (Rom 8:32).
17. In His death, Christ is our Passover, sacrificed for us (1 Cor 5:7).
18. We are bought with the price paid in Christ's death (1 Cor 6:20).
19. If One died for all, then all are dead (2 Cor 5:14).
20. He died that we might no longer live unto ourselves, but unto Him who died for us (2 Cor 5:15).
21. He gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
22. In His death, He redeemed us from the curse of the Law (Gal 3:13).
23. We have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins (Eph 1:7).
24. We are made nigh unto God by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13).
25. In His flesh, Jesus abolished the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances (Eph 2:15).
26. He gave Himself to sanctify and cleanse the church (Eph 5:26).
27. Christ died in order to present His church to Himself without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing (Eph 5:27).
28. He made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).

29. In the cross, He plundered principalities and powers, making a public display of them (Col 2:15).
30. In His death, he delivered us from the wrath to come (1 Thess 1:10).
31. He died for us that whether we wake or sleep, we might live together with Him (1 Thess 5:10).
32. He gave Himself to redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a special people, zealous of good works (Tit 2:14).
33. He tasted death for every man (Heb 2:9).
34. Through His death, He destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14).
35. He obtained eternal redemption for us (Heb 9:12).
36. Through Christ's blood, our conscience is cleansed, or purged, from dead works (Heb 9:14).
37. Through His death we receive the promise of an eternal inheritance (Heb 9:15).
38. The New Covenant, or "will," has been sanctified by the blood of Christ (Heb 10:10).
39. In offering Himself in death, Jesus has perfected forever all who are sanctified (Heb 10:14).
40. Through His blood, we enter into the holiest place-the very presence of God-Heb 10:19).
41. The way to God has been dedicated through Christ's death (Heb 10:20).
42. Through His blood, we are washed from our sins and made kings and priests unto God (Rev 1:5-6).

CHRIST WAS BURIED

The burial of Christ was not simply a technicality. He was active during the time He was buried. Too, it provided time to assure that He really did die, tasting death for every man in the fullest sense of the word. Here is also a point at which unity with Christ is realized.

9

1. In His burial He was "numbered with the transgressors" (Num 53:12).
2. While His body was in the tomb, He preached to the spirits that were disobedient in the days of Noah (1 Pet 3:18-20; 4:6).
3. In our baptism, we are "buried with Christ" (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
4. The burial of Christ was "the sign of the prophet Jonah" to an adulterous generation (Matt 12:39-40).
5. His grave was made with the wicked, and the rich as well (Isa 53:9).
6. The woman with the precious alabaster box of ointment anointed Jesus for His burial (Matt 26:7-12).
7. The grave was not capable of holding the body of Jesus (Acts 2:29-26-32).

I have provided these details because, in that Antioch synagogue, Paul preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. That is a message that is invested with Divine power. It is

not the Gospel in all of its marvelous details, but is rather like the three pillars upon which all valid doctrine is founded.

CHRIST ROSE AGAIN

The resurrection of Christ is the engine of our salvation – the source of its power. Over and over this is affirmed in Scripture.

9

1. In regeneration, we are united with Him "in His resurrection" (Rom 6:5).
2. The desire to know the power of His resurrection dominates those living by faith (Phil 3:10).
3. Jesus was declared to be "the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead"(Rom 1:4).
4. We are begotten again to a living hope "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet 1:3).
5. The resurrection of Christ is what validates our baptism (1 Pet 3:21).
6. The resurrection of Christ validated His death, and inducted Him into His intercessory ministry (Rom 8:34).
7. We are reconciled by His death, and saved by His (resurrection) life (Rom 5:10).
8. He is able to save us because, being raised from the dead, He "ever lives to make intercession" for us (Heb 7:25).
9. The blood of the cross obtained its effectiveness when, after His resurrection, Jesus entered into heaven with it (Heb 9:12).
10. The risen Christ, having entered into heaven, is now appearing in the presence of God "for us" (Heb 9:24).
11. The power employed to raise Jesus from the dead, is precisely the power that is now devoted to those in Christ (Eph 1:19-21).
12. Jesus was "raised for our justification" (Rom 4:25).
13. His resurrection is God's pledge that we will also be raised (1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14).
14. Jesus being raised from the dead, we can now be joined to Christ and bring forth fruit unto God (Rom 7:4).
15. The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, dwells in believers, giving life to their mortal bodies (Rom 8:11).
16. Confessing the Lord Jesus with our mouth, and believing in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, results in our salvation (Rom 10:9).
17. If Christ is not raised, our faith is vain (1 Cor 15:17).
18. Believers are raised up together with Christ and made to sit with Him in heavenly places (Eph 2:6).

19. In His resurrection, we were "delivered from the wrath to come" (1 Thess 1:10).

I have provided these details because, in that Antioch synagogue, Paul preached the death (13:27-28), burial (13:29,37), and resurrection of Christ (13:30-34,37). That is a message that is invested with Divine power. It is not the Gospel in all of its marvelous details, but is rather like the three pillars upon which all valid doctrine is founded. The Gospel was preached in order to provoke further inquiry – inquiry driven by belief.

THE GOSPEL CANNOT BE IGNORED

When men are confronted with the powerful Gospel of Christ, it cannot be ignored. The Gospel is of such a nature that it elicits a response from the hearers – it is that kind of message. In Antioch a wave of focused interest will be expressed by the Gentiles. They will implore Paul to speak more of these words the next Sabbath. Their appetites had been whetted, even though his message closed with a stern warning. It was Paul's preaching that attracted them, not his person. His strategy was not the means through which they were reached, but the sounding forth of the word through which the Spirit could work.

This Gospel will decipher the hearts of men, discovering whether they are like paths upon which self and worldly wisdom traverses, or honest and good. It will uncover the preferences of the people – whether they driven by the cares of the world and the lust of other things, or a quest to know the Lord. The Gospel probes the heart, finding whether it is stony or soft and pliable. However, if this Gospel is not preached, men can only speculate about these conditions, and they will never be able to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion.

READING OF RESULTS

In our text, many of the Jews and proselytes followed after Paul and Barnabas, not wanting to separate from them. They were drawn to these men because of what they said. Perceiving their eagerness, the men of God will deliver an appropriate word to them. It is of interest to note their persuasive words, which did not emphasize recruitment, but devotion.

Accenting the power of the Word of God when it is given due attention, the next Sabbath day a multitude was present to hear the Word of God. A forthright proclamation of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, together with a solemn word of warning stirred a multitude of people to hear more. Paul had delivered a message that could not be ignored. It was not spiced with things that appealed to the flesh. It was not aimed at the resolution of personal and social difficulties. Yet interest apparently surpassed any previous experience in that Jewish synagogue. Further, it will be confirmed that the better part of that city was keenly aware of that synagogue.

It was at this time that the unbelieving Jews launched their opposition. They did this because what was being heard conflicted with, and threatened, their approach to religion. A different approach to the Scriptures and the Messiah had been presented.

IN OUR TIME

In our time a new kind of message is being preached that is not critical or pivotal enough – that is, it is not crucial to the obtaining and maintenance of spiritual life. It allows for rejection, and permits disagreement. It does not have an urgent sound to it, and accentuates the human condition above Divine assessment and holy remedy.

THE RESPONSE OF THE GENTILES

“ 13:42 And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words

might be preached to them the next sabbath.”

We will now be exposed to the manner in which honest and good hearts respond to “the word of the Gospel” (Acts 15:7). This is a clear word that presents Jesus from God’s point of view, declaring Him to have risen from the dead, fulfilling the various prophecies concerning Him. That word was also attended by a most solemn warning to avoid falling into the category of those who do not believe what the Lord has done, even though it is clearly declared to them.

I also want to call your attention to the absence of modern approaches to the initial deliverance of the Gospel. I do not wish to make more of this than is appropriate, lest there be a temptation to develop a stereotyped approach to preaching the Gospel. Nevertheless, in all of the messages and proclamations of Christ presented thus far in the book of Acts (2:14-36,38-40; 3:12-26; 4:8-12,19-20; 5:29-32; 7:2-53; 8:5-6,12; 8:31-37; 9:20,22; 10:34-43,47-48; 13:16-41) , there has not been any mention of the following.

- That God loved the people.
- That Jesus died because of His love for the people.
- That Jesus died for the sins of the people.
- That Jesus cared for the people.
- That Jesus wanted the people to have the very best.
- That Jesus could resolve their personal, domestic, or social problems.
- That Jesus was able to heal their diseases.

It is certainly not wrong to declare the love of God, or the love and compassion of His Christ. What I am saying is that, so far as sinners are concerned, these are not the messages that are presented as drawing the people. The primary declarations had to do with establishing who Jesus was.

Now, I am careful to say that these are not unlawful views, or that Jesus does not minister grace to those under difficult circumstances. It is certainly not wrong to declare the love of God, or the love and compassion of His Christ. What I am saying is that, so far as sinners are concerned, these are not the messages that are presented as drawing the people. The primary declarations had to do with establishing who Jesus was. This was consistently presented from two perspectives:

- What the prophets had foretold of Him (Acts 2:25,29,34; 3:18,22,24,25; 10:43; 13:27,34).
- How God had confirmed He was the One approved by Him (Acts 2:22,24,32; 3:15,26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,33,34,37).

The truth of the matter is that the people, although many of them may have been exposed to Jesus personally, or heard extensive reports concerning Him, did not know who Jesus really was. At the worst, some thought He was nothing more than a blasphemer (Matt 9:3; John 10:33). At the best, some took Him for a prophet, and even considered the possibility that He was the promised Messiah (Lk 22:67; John 4:29,42; 7:41). However, it was His critical association with God Himself that had largely eluded them. Therefore that was the emphasis of the early proclamations of Jesus.

Even in Philip’s exposition of the 53 rd chapter of Isaiah, the relationship of the Christ to God Himself was the thrust of the prophecy.

- “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” (53:1).
- “. . . stricken, smitten of God , and afflicted. But He was wounded for our

transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (53:5).

- “ . . . the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (53:6).

- “ . . . for the transgression of My people was He stricken” (Isa 53:8).

- “Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief : when thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed , He shall prolong His days , and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand” (Isa 53:10).

- “ He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied : by his knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; for He shall bear their iniquities” (Isa 53:11).

- “Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors ” (Isa 53:12).

I do not believe a proper concept of Jesus can be obtained or maintained without some discernment of His relationship to the Father Himself. When He was upon earth the Son of God made clear that His primary association was with God the Father.

I do not believe a proper concept of Jesus can be obtained or maintained without some discernment of His relationship to the Father Himself. When He was upon earth the Son of God made clear that His primary association was with God the Father.

- “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed Me . . . ” (Luke 4:18).

- “ . . . My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work ” (John 4:34).

- “ . . . He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent Me , hath everlasting life . . . ” (John 5:24).

- “ . . . I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me ” (John 5:30).

- “But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which the Father hath given Me to finish , the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent Me ” (John 5:36).

- “For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent Me ” (John 6:38).

- “ . . . My doctrine is not mine, but His that sent Me ” (John 7:16).

- “ , , , Ye both know Me, and ye know whence I am: and I am not come of myself, but He that sent me is true , whom ye know not” (John 7:28).

- “And yet if I judge, my judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I and the Father that sent Me ” (John 8:16)

- “I am one that bear witness of Myself, and the Father that sent Me beareth witness of Me” (John 8:18).

- “For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me , He gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49).

- “Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17-18).

These could be multiplied many times, for Jesus spoke continually in this manner.

Ponder the doctrinal representations of His association with God. He is referred to as “the Son of God” (Matt 14:33), “Christ of God” (Lk 9:20), “chosen of God” (1 Pet 2:4), “Lamb of God” (John 1:36), “Bread of God” (John 6:33), “the Power of God” and “the Wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24), “the Image of God” (2 Cor 4:4), and “the Word of God” (Rev 19:13).

It is this very association that had been obscured to the people – and it is no different in our time. A purported gospel is being served up that makes Christ’s association to the people the primary one, rather than His association with God, whose purpose Jesus is fulfilling. Ponder how frequently salvation is associated with Jesus bringing us into a productive association with God.

- Jesus delivered us from this present evil world “according to the will of our God and Father” NKJV (Gal 1:4).
- Jesus Christ has “redeemed us to God” (Rev 5:9).
- We were “reconciled to God” (Rom 5:10).
- In salvation we are made “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11).
- Being made free from sin through Jesus, we have become “servants to God” (Rom 6:22).
- We have become “dead to the law through the body of Christ,” that we “should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).
- Christ’s offering of Himself was a “sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor” (Eph 5:2). He also offered Himself “without spot to God” (Heb 9:14).
- Salvation results in us to turning “to God” (1 Thess 1:9).
- Jesus is a “merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (Heb 2:17).
- We have even given a “better hope. . . by the which we draw nigh unto God” (Heb 7:19).
- Jesus is living to make intercession for “those that come unto God by Him” (Heb 7:25).
- Being reconciled to God, we “offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).
- Jesus suffered for our sins in order that He might “bring us to God” (1 Pet 3:18).
- In Christ we have been made “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:6).

I have labored this point because of its centrality in both the purpose of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. So far as the accomplishments of the Son of God, God Himself was at the heart of it all. Remove Him from the scene, and there is nothing for man at all.

To present Jesus Christ as though His primary objective was to satisfy the self-perceived needs of men is wholly wrong. He came to do the will of God. That is what He Himself affirmed again and again.

If you were asked to identify the personal needs or earthly circumstances of the people reported to have responded in faith to Gospel, precisely what would you say? How would you describe the personal, domestic, social, or political circumstances of the people who sought for Divine direction on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:36). What of those five thousand man who came to believe in Solomon’s porch (Acts 4:4). And, how would you describe the earthly lives of those in the city of Samaria, who believed what Philip preached, and were baptized (Acts 8:12). How would you describe

the life of the Ethiopian eunuch, and the things that were resolved when he believed and was baptized (Acts 8:36-38). What about those who gathered at the house of Cornelius who heard the insightful words of Peter (Acts 10:44,48)? What of those who believed in the city of Antioch? What dilemmas in their earthly lives were resolved (Acts 11:21). What personal, domestic, or social challenges were addressed when Barnabas and Saul spent a whole year with the church in Antioch (Acts 11:23)?

What was there in any recorded proclamation of the Gospel that centered in the personal lives of the people?

In this very text we have an example of how men were addressed when it came to the preaching of Jesus. The emphasis focused the attention of the people upon God, and what He had accomplished through Jesus Christ. There can be no conjecture about this matter.

I do not doubt that those who were reconciled to God realized many benefits in their earthly lives. However, such benefits were not held out as an incentive to come to Christ, believe on Him, or obey the Gospel! We have the written record of the spread of the Gospel – an inspired record. In this very text we have an example of how men were addressed when it came to the preaching of Jesus. The emphasis focused the attention of the people upon God, and what He had accomplished through Jesus Christ. There can be no conjecture about this matter. The record is abundantly clear – and it stands in stark contradiction of many of the approaches of our day.

Why Say These Things?

These things need to be said because we are reading of a people who sought for more to be said concerning Jesus Christ. We will be exposed to adversarial responses to that message as well. Those who sought more did NOT do so because a promise was given concerning their various problems and circumstances being resolved. There was absolutely no proclamation of Jesus being the resolution to earthly dilemmas – none at all. We do not have the faintest idea of the kind of circumstances those people faced, or what kind of difficulties they were experiencing in the circumstances of everyday life.

It may sound very helpful, and even compassionate, to present Jesus as the solution to life's problems. Those who make such presentations of Christ may be perceived as kind and compassionate – people who have captured the essence of religion. However, I am challenging that notion, and am doing so because it does not mesh with either the doctrine of historical examples of Scripture. This is not the kind of thing that draws men to Christ.

I understand that there are those who say we should become acquainted with people, becoming their friends and helpers, before we present the Gospel to them. Then, we are told, they will be more inclined to believe. And, precisely who is the author of that idea? What is its source? Where is there an example of such an approach in Scripture, or a single word that suggests this is proper?

See, when God Himself is at the heart of the proclamation, it changes everything. At the core of the matter, Jesus was pleasing God, doing His will and providing a just basis through which men could be justified. As for men, it is their alienation from God that is addressed in salvation. Once that is accomplished, every other legitimate activity is sanctified and set in motion.

WHEN THE JEWS WERE GONE OUT

“And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue . . .” Other versions read, “when the Jews went out,” NKJV “as Paul and Barnabas were going out,” NASB “as Paul and Barnabas were leaving,” NIV “as they went out,” RSV “as they left,” CJB “when they were come out,” TNT “as the people left,” LIVING and “As they [Paul and Barnabas] went out [of the synagogue].” AMPLIFIED

The general idea is that the gathering was over, but there were some who had been impressed with the message, while others simply went their way. I gather that “the Jews” refers to those who were not interested in any further word from Barnabas and Saul.

The various versions present two different pictures, reflecting the persuasion of the translators. While this is certainly not a critical matter, I will deal briefly with it. The two possible meanings are:

- That at the conclusion of Paul’s message, the Jews left the synagogue, the proceedings of the day being completed. The Gentiles remained, however, and requested that more be said to them on the next Sabbath.
- That as soon as Paul finished his message, Barnabas and himself got up and left the synagogue, the proceedings being ended. As they were leaving the Gentiles made their request known.

I am proceeding persuaded that the later explanation is correct. The verse that follows appears to me to justify this conclusion. However, the matter is not worthy of any contention.

The general idea is that the gathering was over, but there were some who had been impressed with the message, while others simply went their way. I gather that “the Jews” refers to those who were not interested in any further word from Barnabas and Saul.

THE GENTILES SOUGHT

“ . . . the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.” Other versions read, “the Gentiles begged,” NKJV “the people kept begging,” NASB “the people invited,” NIV “the people urged,” NRSV “they made a request,” BBE “were calling upon them,” YLT “they asked,” LIVING and “the people earnestly begged.” WEYMOUTH

Again, some versions read, “the people,” insinuating that it was the Jews who made the request. The Greek word translated “Gentiles” is **e;qnh** , which, as used here, has the following lexical meaning: “foreign nations not worshiping the true God, pagans, Gentiles,” THAYER and “Gentiles, nations, foreigners.” FRIBERG This word is used more than fifty times from Matthew through Revelation, and is consistently translated “Gentiles” (examples: Matt 6:32; Acts 10:46; Rom 2:14; 1 Cor 10:20; Gal 2:8; Eph 2:11; 1 Thess 4:5). I see no reason why it is not proper to view this text as a request from the Gentiles. This is buttressed by the fact that the same word is used in verse forty-six, when Paul said they were going to turn “to the Gentiles” (e;qnh).

This was not a mere academic request, or an effort to simply acquire some historical information. Rather, it was no doubt a response to Paul’s reference to the preaching of “the forgiveness of sins” and being “justified from all things” (vs 38-39). They were not seeking a history lesson, but the truth concerning the One God had raised from the dead. Their interest had no doubt peaked when Paul warned them concerning not believing his word (v 40).

MANY FOLLOWED PAUL AND BARNABAS

“ 43 Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.”

Paul had completed his exhortation, which was apparently the final formality of the gathering. What follows will provide a commentary on the immediate effectiveness of his words.

THE CONGREGATION WAS BROKEN UP

“Now when the congregation was broken up . . .” Other versions read, “when the meeting of the

synagogue had broken up,” NASB “when the congregation had been dismissed,” NIV “when the meeting had ended,” BBE “after the synagogue had been dismissed,” CSB “now when the congregation was dissolved,” GENEVA “After the congregation had dispersed,” NAB “the synagogue having been dismissed,” YLT “after the service,” CEV “after the people had left the meeting,” GNB and “being loosed.” INTERLINEAR

The words “broken up” are translated from the Greek word **luqei,shj**, which has the following lexical meaning: “to loose,” THAYER “free, release,” FRIBERG “to dissolve an assembly,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to bring to an end.” LEH

There is much to be learned from this incidental phrase – “when the congregation was broken up.”

- The people had come together for a purpose. This is depicted in the frequent references to believers coming together (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor 11:17-20,33; 14:23,26).
- Being together, they had been focused on a single matter – the Scriptures. First they were read, and then they were expounded (13:15).
- Such a gathering provided a fitting context in which the Gospel could be preached, and an appeal made to reason.
- When the purpose for gathering had been completed, the group was dispersed.

Paul had delivered the final exhortation, and the synagogue gathering had been brought to an end. The crowd broke up, each going their separate way.

In our time there is a withdrawing from this kind of assembly. The trend has been developing for some time, so that the Scriptures have gradually been thrust into the background, with an environment resembling entertainment being developed. With the advent of modern “praise and worship” a kind of artificial spirituality is encouraged that allows for the prominence of novices and the propagation of fundamentally flawed views of life in Christ Jesus. It is not the kind of environment that is depicted in our text.

MANY FOLLOWED PAUL AND BARNABAS

“ . . . many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas . . .” Other versions read, “Jews and devout proselytes,” NKJV “Jews and God-fearing proselytes,” NASB “Jews and devout converts to Judaism,” NIV “Jews and . . . God-fearing Gentiles,” BBE “Jews and . . . worshipping proselytes,” DARBY “Jews and strangers who served God,” DOUAY “Jews and devout converts,” NLT “Jews and virtuous proselytes,” PNT “Jews and virtuous converts,” TNT and “Jews and godly Gentiles.” LIVING

It is important to note the caliber of people who were attracted to Paul and Barnabas. The attraction of these people was owing to the message that was delivered to them. They wanted to hear more, which confirms that toning the message down or using the wisdom of men to adapt it to the people is a purely human innovation. I am not sure that God has ordained any message that is directed to those who have no interest in Deity – at least we have no examples of such presentations. Even in Athens, Paul launched his word upon the basis of their religion, appealing to their devotion, even though it was in the wrong direction.

With unwavering consistency, neither John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, nor others sent forth by the Holy Spirit ever preached a gospel that was structured around human need.

With unwavering consistency, neither John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, nor others sent forth by the Holy Spirit ever preached a gospel that was structured around human need. In those cases that appear to address men in such a manner, the assessment was Divine, not human: i.e. “weary and

heavy laden” (Matt 11:28), “the poor . . . the broken hearted . . . the captives . . . the blind . . . the bruised” (Lk 4:18). These conditions were addressed from the standpoint of a God-consciousness, not merely the resolution of human difficulties and challenges. If we fail to perceive this, we will be pushed in the wrong direction.

The words of Paul and Barnabas delivered to those who followed them confirms that the above assessment is correct.

THEY PERSUADED THEM

“ . . . who, speaking to them, persuaded them . . .” Other versions read, “urging them,” NASB “urged them,” NIV “put before them how important it was,” BBE “exhorted them,” GENEVA “begged them,” CEV and “encouraged them.” GNB

The Greek word translated “persuaded” is **επειγον** , and has the following lexical meaning: “persuasion,” THAYER “convince, persuade,” FRIBERG “to convince someone to believe something and to act on the basis of what is recommended - 'to persuade, to convince,” LOUW-NIDA and “prevail upon, win over, persuade.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The English word “persuade,” which is wholly appropriate here, means: “to move by argument, entreaty, or exhortation to a belief, position, or course of action.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER While the work of urging, encouraging, and exhorting is inherent in the word, the emphasis is more on the results than on the means through which the results were realized.

This was no doubt done “with many other words,” as Peter did on the day of Pentecost, after the people had confirmed their solid and sustained interest in what he had said (Acts 2:40).

Persuasion is a good work in which men and women of faith do well to become more expert. It has to do with reaching the hearts of the people, and moving them to act upon what they have heard. It includes the idea of clarification, so that the thing the people were persuaded to do makes sense to them, and to refuse to do it is unreasonable. Persuasion is being moved by perception, not emotion.

CONTINUE IN THE GRACE OF GOD

Other versions read, “keep on in the grace of God,” BBE “keep holding fast to the love and kindness of God,” CJB “continue in God’s good will,” GWN “adhere to the grace of God,” MRD “remain faithful to the grace of God,” NAB “continue to rely on the grace of God,” NLT “remain in the grace of God,” YLT “accept the mercies God was offering,” LIVING “continue living in the gracious love of God,” IE “hold fast to the grace of God,” WEYMOUTH “continue to rely on the unmerited favor of God;: WILLIAMS “continue [to trust themselves to and to stand fast] in the grace (the unmerited favor and blessing) of God,” AMPLIFIED “put their trust in the grace of God,” PHILLIPS and “to be toward remaining.” INTERLINEAR The majority of English translations preserve the expression, “continue in the grace of God” (KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, CSB, DARBY, DOUAY, ERV, GENEVA, NAS, NAU, NIB, PNT, RWEB, TNT, WEB, ISV, MONTGOMERY, ALT, EMTV, ESV, LITV).

Precisely what is it that Paul and Barnabas persuaded the people to do? So far as the record is concerned, there had not yet been an obedient response to the Gospel. Although Paul and Barnabas had been asked to come the next Sabbath and speak once again, these followers were unwilling to wait for another week. They received what had been spoken, and instantly pursued these two messengers, seeking for more. Their appetites had been whetted, but they had not been assuaged.

There are matters that are particularly profitable areas of thought. Because of their fallen nature, men are too often prone to think upon the morose, and to dwell upon possible dangers and calamities. While there are times when such matters must be considered, they are not where

we are to pitch the tent of contemplation.

It is challenging to consider what was intended by the persuasion to “continue in the grace of God?” As used here, the word “continue” means “to stay at or with, to tarry still, still to abide . . . persevere,” THAYER and “stay, remain . . . persist.” FRIBERG To “continue in the grace of God” is to remain focused upon it. It involves the thoughts being occupied with it. There is a difference between pondering what God has done, and what He can do. This has to do with a consideration of what God has done – in this case, His gracious dealings with Israel.

Grace in God’s Dealings with Israel

Consider the various things Paul said God did in regards to Israel.

- God “chose” the “fathers” of Israel (13:17a).
- God “exalted the people” when they were in Egypt (13:17b).
- God brought the people out of Egypt with a “high arm” (13:17c).
- God endured the wayward manners of Israel (13:18).
- God destroyed the seven nations that were occupying Canaan (13:19a).
- God divided the land of Canaan to Israel “by lot” (13:19b).
- God “gave” the people judges (13:20).
- God “gave” them Saul as their king, to rid them of the Philistines (13:21).
- God “raised up” David as their king (13:22).
- God “raised up” unto Israel a Savior (13:23).

All of these were expressions of God’s grace. God once said to Moses “I... will be gracious to whom I will be gracious” (Ex 33:19). That is, the expression of His grace will be according to His own will and purpose, and not merely the condition of the people. He was not gracious to the “seven nations” that occupied Canaan, but He was to Israel! He was not gracious to Sodom and Gomorrah, but He was to Israel!

Paul had avoided the expression of national pride, and had described Israel as a people blessed by a gracious God. Now, Paul and Barnabas persuade the people to continue in that line of thinking.

Grace Seen in the Savior

Ponder the presentation of the grace of God to which the people had been subjected – particularly as it regards the Lord Jesus Christ.

- **A SAVIOR RAISED UP.** “Of this man's seed hath God according to His promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus ” (Acts 13:23).
- **THE WORD OF SALVATION SENT.** “Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent ” (Acts 13:26).
- **THE PROMISE FULFILLED.** “And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again . . . ” (Acts 13:32-33).
- **SURE MERCIES.** “And as concerning that He raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David” (Acts 13:34).

• **THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.** “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins ” (Acts 13:38).

• **JUSTIFICATION.** “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things , from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

Here, to “continue in the grace of God” had to do with maintaining a focus upon the gracious words they had heard – seeking to comprehend and embrace them, and realize their fulfillment in themselves. What a marvelous depiction of the grace of God: **A Savior, salvation, a fulfilled promise, sure mercies, forgiveness, and thorough justification!** Those are all facets of the jewel of redemption, which is the ultimate expression of the grace of God.

When Thinking Is Most Profitable

There are matters that are particularly profitable areas of thought. Because of their fallen nature, men are too often prone to think upon the morose, and to dwell upon possible dangers and calamities. While there are times when such matters must be considered, they are not where we are to pitch the tent of contemplation.

Paul refers to the proper domain of extended thought in his epistle to the Philippians. “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8).

• **TRUE.**

• **HONEST.** Noble, NKJV honorable, NASB worthy of respect, NET grave, YLT and is worthy of reverence and is honorable and seemly.” AMPLIFIED

• **JUST.** Right, NASB upright, BBE and righteous. CJB

• **PURE.** Holy. BBE

• **LOVELY.** Pleasing, NRSV beautiful, BBE lovable, CJB amiable, DARBY worthy love, GENEVA we love and admire, NJB pertain to love, PNT and lovely and loveable. AMPLIFIED

• **GOOD REPORT.** Good repute, NASB admirable, NIV commendable, NRSV gracious, RSV are of value, BBE good fame, DARBY is gracious, NAB honest report, PNT and kind and winsome and gracious. AMPLIFIED

• **VIRTUE.** Excellence, NASB excellent, NIV moral excellence, CSB virtuous thing, TNT worthiness, YLT and virtue and excellence. AMPLIFIED

• **PRAISE .** Anything praiseworthy, NKJV worthy of praise, NASB praise and approbation, MRD and any laudable thing. TNT

• **THINK ON THESE THINGS.** Meditate on, NKJV let your mind dwell on, NASB think about, NIV give thought to, BBE focus your thoughts on , CJB dwell on, CSB keep your thoughts on, GWN let your minds be filled with, NJB those same have ye in your minds, TNT and think on and weigh and take account of these things [fix your minds on them]. AMPLIFIED

Continuing in the Grace of God

As used in this text, continuing in the grace of God involves dwelling on the things that He is declared to have done. For those in that Antioch synagogue, this involved two things. First, extended thought about God’s merciful choice and dealing with the nation of Israel. Second, and as a spiritually natural consequence of such thought, the contemplation of the position of Jesus in the Divine

economy was required.

It is obvious that all of this was characterized by truth, honesty, righteousness, virtue, praise, purity, loveliness, and good report. Further, it is as the hearts and minds of the people focused on these realities that they would truly profit from them.

In view of this, the seriousness of distraction can be seen. When the heart and mind are removed from what the Lord has done, particularly in Christ Jesus, all of the benefits derived from those “wonderful works” (Acts 2:11) are at once forfeited. This because the removal of the heart and mind from these considerations causes faith to wither, for it cannot be sustained by imaginations of self-centeredness.

The failure of professing Christians to “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15) is directly traceable to a deficiency in this area. Such people have been pulled aside to lesser things – temporal things – and the results have been spiritually catastrophic and devastating.

THE NEXT SABBATH

“ 44 And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.”

Although the text does not say so, it is quite probable that Paul and Barnabas were busy declaring and expounding the Gospel throughout the city. When Paul was in Athens, it is written that he “disputed,” or reasoned “in the market daily with them that met with him” (Acts 17:10). Later, in Ephesus, he was found “reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9). There is no reason to doubt that this was his manner in Antioch as well. That, coupled with the testimony of those who heard Paul easily accounts for the statement of this text.

ALMOST THE WHOLE CITY CAME TOGETHER

“And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together . . .” Other versions read, “nearly the whole city,” NASB “the whole city assembled,” MRD “almost all the people in the city,” IE “almost the whole population of the city,” WEYMOUTH “almost the entire city,” MONTGOMERY and “almost everyone in the town.” CEV

We do not know the size of this gathering, but it must have been significant. The population of Antioch during that period of time is conservatively reported to have been around 100,000. All of this takes place without the kind of promotional tactics that are used by the world. I do not know that any person could substantiate that there was a concerted effort on the part of Paul and Barnabas to rally the people of Antioch together. So far as their circumstances were concerned, they were dealing with a Jewish synagogue that was also attended by several Gentile proselytes. They no doubt concentrated on speaking to “the many Jews and religious proselytes” that were following them, eager to hear more of the Word. The affectation of the entire city was probably more owing to the testimony of those followers. You may recall that a similar thing happened in Samaria, after Jesus was spoken to the woman at the well. Upon hearing His gracious words, “The woman then left her waterpot, and went her way into the city, and saith to the men, Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did: is not this the Christ? Then they went out of the city, and came unto Him” (John 4:28-30). Jesus described the approaching multitudes as fields that were “white already unto harvest” (John 4:35). Those Samaritans also sought extended exposure to Christ’s word, asking Him to tarry with them (John 4:40).

TO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD

“ . . . to hear the word of God.” Other versions read, “to hear the word of the Lord,” NIV “to give hearing to the word of God,” BBE “to hear the message about the Lord,” CSB “to hear the Lord’s

Message,” WEYMOUTH “to hear God’s message,” WILLIAMS and “to hear the Word of God [concerning the attainment through Christ of salvation in the kingdom of God].” AMPLIFIED

So far as the record is concerned, Paul and Barnabas had worked no miracles at this time. Therefore, the people did not come to see some extraordinary phenomenon as they did elsewhere (John 6:2). They did not bring their sick to the these men, as was done elsewhere (Matt 4:24; Acts 5:15). Their objective was to hear the distinctive message of these men – a message that centered in God, proclaiming His choices, His activities, His promises, and His provisions. It was a word specifically directed to the Jews, yet which solicited the attention of Gentiles because it announced a general benefit.

The message delivered by Paul would not be accepted in our time as a proper means of drawing the people together. We know this is the case, because it is not being preached. Today, perceived relevancy is the drawing power – i.e. showing how God can help the people in their everyday lives. The reportedly successful church is meeting the people where they are at, so to speak, supplying all manner of personal, domestic, and social helps. They target the youth, those enslaved to various forms of spiritual bondage, and special groups of people who appear to be in a more serious condition. It all sounds good – at least to the uninformed! But where is that kind of thing in this text – or any other text?

Deity was at the heart of their message, and on the periphery as well.

Like the disciples on the day of Pentecost, these men had declared “the wonderful works of GOD.” There was no apparent adaptation to the circumstances of society. There was no appeal to any personal, domestic, or social conditions of the people. Yet, their message drew “almost the whole city” together in one place on the Sabbath day!

Paul spoke to those who feared GOD (13:16).

- Paul referred to “the GOD of this people” (13:17a).
- He referred to the choice of GOD (13:17b).
- He mentioned the response of GOD to the people (13:18).
- He spoke of the working of GOD in the behalf of the people (13:19).
- He said GOD provided judges for the people (13:20).
- He referred to GOD setting up king Saul and king David (13:21-22).
- He mentioned GOD removing king Saul (13:22).
- He declared that GOD raised up Jesus as a Savior (13:23).
- He said that GOD had sent the word of salvation to the people, declaring that this fulfilled the announcement of John the Baptist (13:26).
- He affirmed that after the people had crucified Jesus, GOD raised Him from the dead (13:27-30).
- He preached that GOD had fulfilled the promise HE made to the fathers (13:32-35).
- He reminded the people that David served his own generation by the will of GOD , then died and “saw corruption.” But GOD raised Jesus from the dead without Him seeing any corruption (13:36).
- He declared that through Jesus, GOD ’s Messiah, the forgiveness of sins was preached, and in Him justification from all, things was realized (13:35-36).
- He warned the people not to fall into the category of those who did not believe the

report of a word GOD had done (13:46-47).

- Paul and Barnabas persuaded those who followed them to “continue in the grace of GOD ” (13:43).

Like the disciples on the day of Pentecost, these men had declared “the wonderful works of GOD ” (Acts 2:11). There was no apparent adaptation to the circumstances of society. There was no appeal to any personal, domestic, or social conditions of the people. Yet , their message drew “almost the whole city” together in one place on the Sabbath day!

Note Where They Gathered

It is also important to note where the people gathered: a place that was identified with the worship of God, prayer, and the reading and exposition of the Word of God. I understand that it is important not to draw an improper conclusion about this circumstance. However, it is equally important to note that it is possible for such a place to be so identified. Further, this is where Paul and Barnabas returned to deliver the Word of God.

A lot of questions concerning any gathering of people are answered by simply noting what they do when they come together. Whether or not people agree with those activities really has no bearing on the subject. You may rest assured that the devout Jews and Gentile proselytes did not go to the synagogues to reach out. They rather came to appropriate. What outsiders thought of their activity was not what compelled them to come together.

Concerning Proselytes

The fact of proselytes in Gentile cities confirms the faithfulness of at least some of the Jews. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when men would inquire concerning the God of the Jews. “Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the LORD thy God , and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee” (Isa 55:5). And again, “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light , and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa 60:3). Zechariah did the same. “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you ” (Zech 8:23).

While the prophets were speaking of a time of greater glory, the existence of Gentile proselytes was a kind of first fruits of the fulfillment of that promise. They had not only received the truth, but were custodians of it. The Gentiles saw this. It is possible for a people to have an obvious association with God – one that is perceived by those around them.

THE JEWS WERE FILLED WITH ENVY

“ 45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.”

The impact of Paul and Barnabas was not only realized among devout and earnest inquirers. It also sent spiritual tremors into the domain of darkness. It awakened the hostility of those Jews who gloried in their heritage rather than in their God.

THE JEWS WERE FILLED WITH ENVY

It is not coincidental that many of God’s servants have been considered in this manner. Because their word and work is not devoted to perpetrating the organization of choice, they are seen as competing against it. However, any perception that what is declared is not in line with the institution is not owing to the ones proclaiming the message, but to the message itself.

“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy...” Other versions read, “saw the crowds they were filled with jealousy,” NASB “saw such a great number of people, they were full of envy,” BBE “saw the people, they were full of indignation,” PNT “having seen the multitudes, were filled with zeal,” YLT and “saw the crowds, they were completely overcome by their jealousy.” WILLIAMS

The synagogue belonged to the Jews, but those who did not believe could not rejoice in the presence of a multitude there. The message that Paul had preached did not mesh with the notions of these Jews. They were not among the ones who followed Paul and Barnabas. They had only endured what they said, no doubt hoping that any interest in their words would soon die out. Those who cannot sustain an interest in the Word of God are wholly intolerant of those who can. They are also opposed to any message that urges such commitment.

As used in this text, the word “envy” means, “an envious and contentious rivalry, jealousy” THAYER and “factionalism, party strife.” GINGRICH These men had no genuine interest in the truth, but were within the vise-like grip of sectarianism. Their own interests were primary, and they saw Paul and Barnabas as competitors, not servants of God.

It is not coincidental that many of God’s servants have been considered in this manner. Because their word and work is not devoted to perpetrating the organization of choice, they are seen as competing against it. However, any perception that what is declared is not in line with the institution is not owing to the ones proclaiming the message, but to the message itself. The truth of the matter is that Paul and Barnabas were delivering a message that was superior. However, these envious Jews could not see this, for their religion had blinded their hearts and minds.

THEY SPAKE AGAINST

“ . . . and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul . . . ” Other versions read, “opposing the things,” NKJV and “spoke up against what Paul was saying.” CJB

The words “spake against” mean to contradict, declare oneself to be against what the person is saying, and refuse to have anything to do with him . THAYER It includes the idea of disputation and the presentation of opposing arguments. This is the kind of resistance Stephen encountered in the synagogue of the Libertines (Acts 6:9-14). This was a public confrontation, and Paul will deal with it forthrightly and appropriately.

THEY CONTRADICTED AND BLASPHEMED

“ . . . contradicting and blaspheming.” Other versions read, “talked abusively against,” NIV “contradicted . . . and reviled him,” RSV “said evil words against,” BBE “spoke against what Paul was saying and insulted him,” CJB “contradicting and speaking injuriously,” DARBY “contrarying them, and railing on them,” GENEVA “slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said,” NLT and “they contradicted what was said by Paul and talked abusively [reviling and slandering him].” AMPLIFIED

This is the manner in which unbelievers oppose the truth of God. They not only reject what is actually being said, but seek to malign the one who is speaking it. This is the manner in which the critics of Jesus spoke when they said, “He has a demon and is mad. Why do you listen to Him?” NKJV (John 10:20). And again, “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” (John 8:48). The Jews also spoke against Stephen in this way: “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:14). In his epistle to the Romans, Paul referred to some who maligned him: “For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good

may come? whose damnation is just” (Rom 3:7-8).

When men who walk in the flesh – particularly religious men – cannot receive the Word of God, they not only are willing to openly oppose what is being declared, but are quite willing to cast aspersions on the proclaimers of truth. They misrepresent them in order to justify their own rejection of the truth.

When men who walk in the flesh – particularly religious men – cannot receive the Word of God, they not only are willing to openly oppose what is being declared, but are quite willing to cast aspersions on the proclaimers of truth. They misrepresent them in order to justify their own rejection of the truth. Oh, that is not how they view the matter They take a stand for the institution, representing the one they oppose as out of harmony with that institution. But all of that is nothing more than noxious smoke. The truth of the matter is that they do not have a love for the truth, and are angered when the pillars of their sect are shaken by it. The malignancy of their hearts is made known by their opposition of the truth.

PAUL AND BARNABAS WAXED BOLD

“ 46a Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you . . .”

The one who has discerned and embraced the truth does not back down when confronting the pressure of those who do not believe it.

PAUL AND BARNABAS WAXED BOLD

“Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold . . .” Other versions read, “grew bold,” NKJV “spoke out boldly,” NASB “answered them boldly,” NIV “without fear said,” BBE “said openly,” MRD “replied courageously,” NET “spoke out fearlessly,” NJB “became bold,” WEB “were very bold,” IE “throwing off all reserve,” WEYMOUTH “spoke out plainly and boldly.” AMPLIFIED “did not mince their words,” PHILLIPS “bravely said,” CEV “spoke out even more boldly,” GNB and “We felt it our duty to speak the message of God to you first.” PHILLIPS

The words “waxed bold” are translated from a single Greek word: **parrhsias,menoi** , . As used here, the lexical meaning of this word is “to use freedom in speaking, be free-spoken; to speak freely . . . to grow confident, have boldness, show assurance, assume a bold bearing,” THAYER “acting with an attitude of openness that comes from freedom and lack of fear,” FRIBERG “to speak openly about something and with complete confidence - 'to speak boldly,’” LOUW-NIDA

Rather than the public opposition causing Paul and Barnabas to shrink back in fear, it caused them to become more bold. The confrontation actually fueled their zeal, so that they became more bold and forthright. In some circles, this is not culturally acceptable. However, it is wholly a different matter when men are trafficking in the truth of Almighty God. This is why Paul asked the Ephesians brethren to pray for him: “And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, For which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak ” (Eph 6:19-20).

A bold and confident proclamation of the truth is honoring to God and intimidating to the powers of darkness. When faith and perception are dominant in a person’s life, the proclamation of the truth becomes necessity – a necessity that is driven from within. It is the kind of circumstance that Jeremiah described in his unforgettable testimony: “Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay. For I heard the defaming of many, fear on every side. Report, say they, and we will report it. All my familiars watched for my halting, saying, Peradventure

he will be enticed, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. But the LORD is with me as a mighty terrible one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten” (Jer 20:9-11). This is the kind of spirit that compelled Paul and Barnabas to boldly reply to those who contended with them.

IT WAS NECESSARY

“ . . . and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you . . .” Other versions read, “We have to speak the word of God to you first,” NIV “it behoved us first to speak the word of God,” DARBY “To you first, ought the word of God to be spoken,” MRD “We had to proclaim the word of God to you first,” NJB “It was meet that the word of God should first have been spoken to you,” PNT “We were bound to proclaim God's Message to you first.” WEYMOUTH and “It was necessary that God’s message [concerning salvation through Christ] should be spoken to you first.” AMPLIFIED

As used here, the word “necessary” means, “what one cannot do without, indispensable,” THAYER “pressing,” FRIBERG “urgent,” UBS “Under compulsion.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This necessity was driven by the fact that all of the promises had been given to the Jews (Rom 9:4). The Messiah was sent specifically to them, and generally to the world (John 1:11). He was a Son born to them, and a Child given to them (Isa 9:6). He was the Seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16), the Star of Jacob (Num 24:17), and the Son of David (Matt 1:1). This is why the Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first ” (Rom 1:16). For Paul and Barnabas, this was a compulsion driven by discernment, and came from their hearts. They could conduct themselves in no other way.

JUDGING THEMSELVES UNWORTHY OF EVERLASTING LIFE

“ 46b . . . but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”

The obligation to deliver the Gospel “to the Jew first” by no means indicates that it is exclusive to them. Nor, indeed, does it justify continuing to proclaim it to them if they are unwilling to receive it. Furthermore, there is sensitivity in heaven to the rejection of the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11). Men may be indifferent to such a reaction, and even be willing to tolerate it – but that is not a proper response. Paul and Barnabas will speak forthrightly to this situation.

SEEING YE PUT IT FROM YOU

“ . . . but seeing ye put it from you . . .” Other versions read, “since you reject it,” NKJV “since you repudiate it,” NASB “Since you thrust it from you,” RSV “because you will have nothing to do with it,” BBE “since you are rejecting it,” CJB “because you repel it from you,” MRD “since you have rejected it,” NLT “you won’t listen,” IE “since you spurn it,” WEYMOUTH and “since you push it away from you,” MONTGOMERY

This is a strong word, and describes a spiritually violent action. The powerful Word of God is proclaimed, and its begins at once to penetrate the heart, distinguishing between the soul and the spirit, and exposing thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12). Because the hearts of those who are addressed are hard and calloused, they thrust the Good News from them, refusing to give heed to it, or entertain it or willingly welcome it into their thought processes.

This is no innocent reaction, but is evidence of hostility against God, and the forthright rejection of His Christ. When preached in truth, the Gospel is forceful, pushing its way into the thought processes of men. It forces men to make a decision concerning whether or not they receive the message.

For these hearers, this is the second time they have been exposed to a declaration of the Gospel of Christ. Marshaling all of their inner resources, they “put,” or “thrust” the Gospel from themselves, treating as though it was poison. It was obnoxious to them, and they saw no lasting value in it. It concerned a Person they would not receive, and a message they would not believe. The word that Paul had spoken a week earlier had come upon them, even though he warned them not to allow such a thing to happen: “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you” (Acts 13:40-41).

It requires determination and aggressiveness to reject the Gospel, failing to believe and embrace it. This is not something that can be done casually, and Paul and Barnabas knew it.

It requires determination and aggressiveness to reject the Gospel, failing to believe and embrace it. This is not something that can be done casually, and Paul and Barnabas knew it. There are spiritual forces at work whenever “the truth of the Gospel” is declared (Col 1:5). It is a fundamentally good message, and is accompanied by all of the power required to believe, embrace, and respond to it. Those who spurn this Gospel have extended themselves to do so. It is for this reason that Paul and Barnabas will speak as they do. They will speak with both certitude and passion.

JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY

“ . . . and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life . . .” Other versions read, “do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life,” NIV “have no desire for eternal life,” BBE “are judging yourselves unworthy of eternal life,” CJB “decide, against yourselves, that ye are not worthy of life eternal,” MRD “do not think yourselves worthy of eternal life,” NJB “shown yourselves unworthy of eternal life,” LIVING “are deciding that you are unworthy of having eternal life,” IE “condemn yourselves as unworthy of eternal life,” NAB “show yourselves unworthy to receive eternal life,” WILLIAMS and “you pass this judgment on yourselves that you are unworthy of eternal life and out of your own mouth you will be judged.” AMPLIFIED

Some of the above versions are wholly misleading: i.e. “do not consider yourselves worthy,” NIV and “do not think yourselves worthy.” NJB While the translators may not have intended to convey this idea, they have left the reader with the impression that the hearers simply did not want eternal life. While there may be a grain of truth in that view, it is a very small one. The accent here is not on what the people thought about themselves. This is actually referring to them disqualifying themselves from obtaining eternal life. In other words, they pronounced their own condemnation. They were unfit to be saved, although they sorely needed salvation.

Thus Jesus, in His parable of the unfaithful steward, delineated what was involved in that man’s wrong assessment of his master. Upon being confronted by his master, and acknowledging that buried his master’s money in the ground, he said, “For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man: thou takest up that thou layedst not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow” (Luke 19:21). Clarifying the nature of stewardship, Jesus said the master replied, “And he saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury?” (Luke 19:23). Jesus was pointing out that the man had lied. Had he really considered the master to be an austere man, he would have given extra diligence to see to it that his master was pleased with the manner in which he handled his goods. Now, the master would judge him by his own assessment – even though it was an improper one.

The point here is that the reaction of the unbelieving Jews to the Gospel determined their judgment from God. They were a chosen people – chosen by God. A Savior had been promised to them, and now they are hearing a message that announces He has come. The forgiveness of sins and justification

from all things has been put before them, and it can be theirs for the taking. They have been given the privilege of being the first to hear the good news. Their choice has actually solidified their own judgment. They had treated Divine provisions as though they were unworthy of their embrace. Therefore, they will be disqualified from receiving them.

Salvation Is A Serious Matter

The salvation of God is, indeed, a serious matter. When the message of the Gospel announces it, the hearers are forthrightly told, “he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mk 16:16). Even those within the body of Christ are solemnly told, “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:7-8). We are also reminded that those who do not believe the Gospel have been blinded by the devil: “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them” (2 Cor 4:4). Satan can maintain no hold on those whose hearts are enthralled with the Gospel, which moves them to embrace it in faith. But for those who do not believe, his grip upon them becomes more strong, and they are plunged even deeper into the caldron of unbelief.

It is important to note that this pronouncement was made after two exposures to the Gospel of Christ. Let no one doubt for a moment that God Almighty expects the people to respond in faith to the record He has given of His Son. Should they choose not to do so, they have, in a sense, judged themselves unworthy of obtaining eternal life. I do not know how anything can be more serious than that!

WE TURN TO THE GENTILES

“ . . . lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” Other versions read, “we are turning to the Gentiles,” NASB “we now turn to the Gentiles,” NIV “it will now be offered to the Gentiles,” BBE “we are now going to turn to people of other nations,” GWN “we will offer it to the Gentiles,” NLT and “we turn to the heathen.” WILLIAMS

When the Divine commission was first delivered to Saul of Tarsus, he was told: “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). On recounting this event, Paul said, “And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles ” (Acts 22:21). The Gentiles were not the only ones to whom, he was commissioned to go. He was also to testify before “kings and the children of Israel.” Knowing that the Gospel must first be preached the Jews, to whom the promises had been made, Paul and Barnabas had done precisely that. However, now that their message had been rejected by those who were “a people,” now they would turn to those who were “not a people” (1 Pet 2:10). This would also be in fulfillment of a word delivered to the Israelites by Moses, just prior to his death. “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation ” (Deut 32:21). We see something of the character of God in this, and of His reaction rejecting His Word.

A LIGHT FOR THE GENTILES

“ 47 For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

To justify and buttress their statement about turning to the Gentiles, Paul and Barnabas appeal to the Scriptures. This was a consistent practice of John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus Christ, and those sent forth by Him. We do well to follow their example. It is never right to support a statement relating

to the work of the Lord by appealing to the wisdom of men. Myriad is the number of those appealing to psychologically-defined differences between men and women, statistical studies, the codified experiences of men, the purported attention spans of people, etc. to support their statements. There is a generation of preachers who appeal to the wisdom of men to buttress their message, even though Scripture clearly states, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours” (1 Cor 3:19-21).

THE LORD HAS COMMANDED US

The servants of the Lord make clear that they are operating under the authority of the Lord Himself. They have no regard for the contradicting requirements of men. Nor, indeed, will they spend time with Jewish leaders concerning the validity of their message.

“For so hath the Lord commanded us . . .” Other versions read, “this the Lord has commanded us,” NASB “this is what the Lord has commanded us,” NIV “so the Lord has given us orders,” BBE “For that is what Adonai has ordered us to do,” CJB “For thus has the Lord enjoined us,” DARBY “The Lord gave us the following order,” GWN “for such is the Lord’s command to us,” WEYMOUTH “here are the orders that the Lord has given us,” WILLIAMS “For so the Lord has charged us,” AMPLIFIED and “Indeed the Lord has commanded us to do so with the words.” PHILLIPS

The servants of the Lord make clear that they are operating under the authority of the Lord Himself. They have no regard for the contradicting requirements of men. Nor, indeed, will they spend time with Jewish leaders concerning the validity of their message. They have not been sent to form friendships, blend in with society, or in any way give dignity to the opposing opinions of men. They will preach to those who will hear and embrace their message.

SET TO BE A LIGHT

“ . . . saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”

Although Paul was called into the apostleship by the glorified Christ Himself (Acts 9:17; 26:16), and although he and Barnabas had been set apart to the work they were doing by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2), they appeal to the Scriptures – particularly to the word of Isaiah the prophet. Throwing contextual limitations down to the ground, they affirm that what Isaiah wrote constituted a commandment delivered to them by the Lord Himself.

The statement quoted is taken from Isaiah 49:6. In this passage God is depicted as speaking to the Messiah, long before “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:4). The text reads, “And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6). The passage from which this is taken is addressed to the nation of Israel: “And said unto me, Thou art My Servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified” (Isa 49:3).

Although it may appear on the surface that this prophecy pertains only to the nation of Israel, further perusal will confirm that it has a larger radius.

- God’s Servant is called from the womb (Isa 49:1a; Matt 1:20-21).
- His name is mentioned while He was yet in the womb (1b; Lk 1:31).
- His mouth was made like a sharp sword (49:2a; Rev 1:16).

- He was hidden in the shadow of the Lord's hand (49:2b; Lk 23:46).
- He was made like a polished shaft, or select arrow, and hidden in the quiver of the Lord (49:2c; Isa 50:4; John 7:15-17).
- The Servant was the One in whom God would be glorified (49:3; Matt 17:5; John 17:1,4).
- On the surface, it appeared as though the Servant had expended all of His strength, and had labored in vain (49:4a; Isa 53:1-3,8).
- Yet His judgment was with the Lord, and His work was with His God (49:4b; John 17:4; Phil 2:9-10).

He was formed in the womb to bring Jacob again to God (49:5a; Isa 56:8; Matt 15:24; Acts 10:36).

- Even if Israel was not totally gathered, yet the Servant would be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and God would be His strength (49:5b; Matt 23:37-39).
- It was “too small a thing” that the Servant should only raise up the tribes of Jacob. God would also give Him as a light to the Gentiles (49:6a; Isa 42:6; John 10:16).
- He would be God's salvation “unto the end of the earth” (49:6b; Isa 11:10; Lk 24:47-47).
- The Servant would be linked to “the Redeemer of Israel,” and kings and princes would worship Him (49:7; 1 Tim 6:15; Rev 11:15).
- The “acceptable time” and the “day of salvation” was linked to this Servant (49:8a; 2 Cor 6:2).
- God would preserve this Servant, and give Him for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth and cause to “inherit the desolate heritages” (49:8b; Isa 61:4; Lk 4:18-21).
- Through this servant the ultimate blessing would come to the people, and “all flesh” would come to know that God their “Savior,” “Redeemer,” and “the Mighty One of Jacob” (49:9-26; Isa 60:16; Rev 15:3-4).

There can be no doubt that the forty-ninth chapter of Isaiah refers to the time of the Savior, Jesus Christ – a time when the salvation of God would be carried out in the earth. The words of that chapter are a classic example of “the Spirit of Christ” being in the prophets and testifying of “the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11).

PAUL AND BARNABAS JOIN IN THE WORK

Because Paul and Barnabas have become “workers together with God” (2 Cor 6:2), and “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), they have identified with the work He is doing in Jesus Christ. They take the word concerning the spread of salvation to the Gentiles – addressed to the Savior – as applicable to them as well. So far as they are concerned, the word written in Isaiah 49:6 was God speaking to them. That was, of course, the result of the working of the Holy Spirit, who employs the Word of God, working through it to reach the hearts of men, exposing and convicting.

This is an excellent example of holy reasoning – the reasoning of faith. It is founded upon the word of God, is accompanied by an understanding of what the Lord is doing, and is blended with one's personal placement in the body. As is obvious, this is something that cannot be systematized.

THEY GLORIFIED THE WORD OF THE LORD

“ 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

We have here a sharp contrast between those who believe and those who do not. The Jews were expressly told that the word of salvation had been delivered to them first. The forgiveness of sins and being justified from all things was declared to be for them. Yet, they thrust that marvelous word from them, and spoke against what was declared, and maligned the messengers as well. Now, we are exposed to another group of people who had heard precisely the same words. Oh, how differently they respond.

They had been exposed to the same reading of Moses and the prophets. They have even heard the same men speak the same words that had incensed most of the Jews that were there. But their reaction was gloriously different!

WHEN THE GENTILES HEARD THIS

“And when the Gentiles heard this . . .”

And, what was the “this” that “the Gentiles heard”? It was this word: “I, we turn to the Gentiles . . . I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles.” That is the word that captured their attention!

When the Jews heard, “Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39), they thrust it from themselves, contradicting and blaspheming. That is the effect their religion had upon them! That is the harvest of the teachings and traditions they had embraced. They had in their hands Moses and the Prophets who had precisely prophesied concerning the coming Messiah. They had heard an inspired exposition of the death and resurrection of Christ, and how they could be forgiven of the atrocities they had committed against the Lord’s Christ. However, they were so calloused in their hearts and conscience, that it all meant nothing to them.

However, here have another group of people. They were Gen tiles, but they had been going to the same synagogue as the Jews. They had been exposed to the same reading of Moses and the prophets. They have even heard the same men speak the same words that had incensed most of the Jews that were there. But their reaction was gloriously different!

It should not surprise us that the same kind of reactions continue to this very day. There are groups of people who hear the same word, and yet their reaction to it is significantly different. The reason for this circumstance is this: some are believers, and some are unbelievers. Some are hardhearted, while others are tenderhearted. Some are eager to hear, and others are opposed to hearing. No matter how a person may choose to evaluate a group that is comprised of these two categories of people, it is not possible that they are “one body,” or are all “accepted,” or are all “approved of God.” Religious institutionalism makes a valiant effort to consider these two categories as one, but they are not able to do it. Some are reconciled to God, and some are not. Some are following Jesus, and others are not. Some are seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and some are not. That is simply the way things are, and Paul and Barnabas know it.

THEY WERE GLAD

“ . . . they were glad . . .” Other versions read, “they began rejoicing,” NASB “were very happy,” CJB “they rejoiced,” CSB “were pleased,” GWN “were delighted,” NAB “were very glad,” NLT and “listened with delight.” WEYMOUTH

The word translated “glad” is one of abundance, spiritual energy, and propriety. The lexical meaning of the original Greek word is, “to rejoice, be glad . . . in the properly, and strict sense,” THAYER – that is, as opposed to mere levity or light-heartedness; “be delighted.” FRIBERG It also includes the idea of happy acceptance , or receiving with joy what has been said. LIDDELL-SCOTT

In other words, this is a rational gladness that proceeds from the acceptance of a message that is perceived as bringing great advantages. When these proselytes heard that Paul and Barnabas were turning to the Gentiles, to deliver and expound this Gospel, they did not assume they meant only other Gentiles. They included themselves in that blessed number, concluding that the message was also intended for them, even though it was specially addressed to the Jews.

As illustrated in this text, there are times when assembling in the name of the Lord has special and unforeseen advantages for those who are present.

THEY GLORIFIED THE WORD OF THE LORD

“ . . . and glorified the word of the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “honored the word of the Lord,” NIV “praised the word of the Lord,” NRSV “gave glory to the word of God,” BBE “honored the message about the Lord,” CJB “praised the Lord’s word,” GWN “glorified God,” MRD “gave thanks to the Lord for His message,” NJB “thanked the Lord for His message,” NLT “rejoiced in Paul’s message,” LIVING “extolled the Lord’s message,” WEYMOUTH “giving the glory to God’s message,” WILLIAMS “glorified (praised and gave thanks for) the Word of God,” AMPLIFIED and “praised what they had heard about the Lord.” CEV

Those with even a casual acquaintance with religious gatherings will at once recognize the relative rarity of such a response. There are speakers who can raise the climate of a gathering to feverish pitch by their oratory. Some can move the audience to tears with their testimony, or some touching account. It is not unusual for contemporary musical concerts to produce an eruption of shouting and glee. But this is not the kind of thing recorded in this text.

These people did not glorify the messengers, but the message that they had delivered. That message was a rehearsal of something God Himself had spoken through the prophets: “I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47). Furthermore, they were able to correlate that word with the message they had heard seven days earlier concerning the forgiveness of sins and being justified from all things.

The message was not that they could have health or wealth. It was not that their domestic problems would be resolved. They were not told that soon they would no longer be subject to Roman rule. It concerned the remission of their sins and being put in an acceptable and righteous standing with God by being justified “from all things.” It related to illumination, or light, being shed on the matter of salvation and the Person of God. That is the kind of word they honored, glorified, and praised.

By glorifying the word of the Lord, they took the message as being about God and from God. They recognized it as a gracious word that reached into the inner recesses of the heart. Now, there is something important to note here. Technically, the word to which Paul and Barnabas referred came from God through the Holy Spirit, to Isaiah (Isa 1:1). Isaiah then wrote what was revealed to him in a book (Isa 30:8). It is generally agreed that “The quotation is from the LXX. (Cod. Alex.),” or Septuagint version, which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew text. PULPIT COMMENTARY That word had no doubt been read in the synagogue in the Greek language, to accommodate the Gentiles who gathered there. Now it was spoken by Paul and Barnabas. Yet, those who heard and believed the message did not credit it to Isaiah. They gave no glory to the translators who had put it into their language. They did not even give the glory to Paul and Barnabas, who had been sent out to them by the Holy Spirit of God. They rather glorified the message as “the word of the Lord.”

Although the message had come from God through the Spirit, through Isaiah, through his writings, and finally through Paul and Barnabas, it had lost none of its power. It was properly credited to the Lord. This, of course, casts a dark shadow upon the reasoning of those who do not equate Scripture with the Word of God, and those who claim something has been lost as soon as the Word translated.

In Our Time

In our time, it is exceedingly rare to hear of anyone glorifying the word of the Lord. Of course, much of that is owing to the lack of hearing the Word of God. However, it is not unusual to hear men giving glory to the writings of men, concerning which they are hearing very much. There is a glaring absence of foundational references to the Word of the living God.

AS MANY AS WERE ORDAINED TO ETERNAL LIFE BELIEVED

“ . . . and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.”

Here is a text that is highly disruptive of great bodies of theology. Some are so offended by it that they have extended themselves to corrupt the text so it will fit into their stilted theology. However, the text is present, and is, for those who deem it important, consistent in all Greek manuscripts. It is out of order to read this text through the spectacles of sectarian dogma, or mere human reasoning. The aim of the student of God's Word is not to fit what is written into a personal persuasion. Rather, it is to derive one's persuasion from the Scriptures themselves. Therefore, I will approach this text with a mind to know what it means, and not with a determination to see if it contradicts some cherished human opinion. If it is true that the Holy Spirit “searches all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10), we can trust that He will know how to precisely state them to those to whom truth is being revealed.

Therefore, what is said to have been “ordained” took place in time past, and is already accomplished. This does not refer to something that is being done. Second, this is something that has an effect upon the individuals described. It does not refer to something they have done, but to something that has been done in reference to them.

ORDAINED TO ETERNAL LIFE

“ . . . and as many as were ordained to eternal life . . .” Other versions read, “ordained to eternal life,” KJV/RSV/ASV/DARBY/DOUAY/ERV/GENEVA/PNT/RWB/TNT/WEB/MONTGOMERY “appointed to eternal life,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/ALT/ESV/LITV/CJB/MRD/NAU “appointed for eternal life,” NIV/NIB “appointed to life age-during,” YLT “destined for eternal life,” NRSV/NAB/PHILLIPS/NJB “marked out by God for eternal life,” BBE “prepared for everlasting life,” GWN “chosen for eternal life,” NLT/CEV/GNB/NLT “wanted eternal life,” LIVING “appointed to have eternal like,” IE “destined to eternal life,” WILLIAMS “pre-destined to the Life of the Ages,” WEYMOUTH “were having been set into life eternal.” INTERLINEAR “destined (appointed and ordained) to eternal life,” AMPLIFIED and “before-ordained to everlasting life.” WYCLIFFE

I have taken the time to cite forty different versions of Scripture to confirm the remarkable consistency in the translation of the Greek text. Of the texts that I have, only the LIVING BIBLE places the emphasis on the people who believed – reading “wanted eternal life.” All of the other texts present the cause for believing to a pre-existent determination: “ordained – appointed – destined – marked out – prepared – chosen – pre-destined – having been set – before ordained.” While this is certainly not sufficient to establish the meaning of the text, it does confirm that translators of the text had no difficulty with the words of the text itself. It is only when the words clashed with a theological position that they were distorted, as seen in the Living Bible – which, like other paraphrased versions, is really more of a commentary.

The Meaning of the Word Used

Although it is a secondary consideration, the meaning of the Greek word employed here also confirms the nature of the expression. The Greek word translated “ordained” is **tetagme, noi** , and is

consistent in all of the standard Greek texts. Linguistically, this word is a “verb participle perfect passive nominative masculine plural.” Of particular interest is the descriptions “perfect passive.” In both Greek and English these terms mean”

- “Perfect” – the action is completed.
- “Passive” – the subject is being acted upon.

Therefore, what is said to have been “ordained” took place in time past, and is already accomplished. This does not refer to something that is being done. Second, this is something that has an effect upon the individuals described. It does not refer to something they have done, but to something that has been done in reference to them.

As to the lexical meaning of the word translated “ordained,” it is as follows: “to put in place, to station . . . to arrange, to assign to a place, to appoint . . . to assign (appoint) a thing to one,” THAYER “assign to a place or task, appoint, decide,” FRIBERG “appoint, designate, set aside; command, order, direct,” UBS “to appoint, to designate, to assign, to give a task to . . . those who had been designated for eternal life became believers’ Ac 13.48,” LOUW-NIDA and “to be appointed to.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

This word is used eight times in Scripture. It will be profitable to see how the Holy Spirit uses it. I have highlighted the words translated from the Greek word used in our text. I have also underlined the ones upon whom the action was performed.

- “Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them” (Matt 28:16). Here, the eleven disciples met Jesus on a mountain that He had previously determined.

- “For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it” (Luke 7:8). Here, authority had been assigned to this centurion by his superior.

- “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

- “When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15:2). Here, the holy brethren made a determination that Paul and Silas should go to Jerusalem.

- “And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do” (Acts 22:10). Here, Jesus told Saul of Tarsus that a determination had already been made concerning what he was to do. When he went into the city, he would be told what had been determined.

- “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). Here, the assignment of a certain day was made during which people could come and be taught by Paul.

- “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (Rom 13:1). Here, civil government is depicted as having been put in place by God.

- “I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints)” (1 Cor 16:15).

Here the tense is active – that is, this was something the household of Stephan were doing owing to a decision that they themselves had made in the past – to always minister to the saints.

With the exception of the last text, the word is always used to an influence wrought upon someone from outside of themselves. The one exception is made clear by the context in which it occurs. There, the intention is to show that their ministrations to the saints was not owing to an immediate response, but to a decision made apart from the circumstance itself, and at a prior time.

What Some Dissenters Have Said

This passage has proved very troublesome to some. Those who cannot accept it as it stands, have suggested the following meanings.

"The original word rendered 'ordained' is not once used in the Scriptures to express eternal predestination of any kind. The sense is that those, and those only, now ordained, now believed. Not that God rejected the rest; it was his will that they also should be saved, but they thrust salvation from them. Nor were those who then believed 'forced' to believe. Grace was offered to them and they did not thrust it away." – John Wesley

"It is God's ordination that those of humble, teachable, honest hearts, seeking the truth and life, shall come to life when it is offered, and such accepted the gospel on this occasion." B.W. Johnson

"Those of them who had, either through previous religious instruction, or through the influence of Paul's preaching, heartily determined for eternal life, were in a better frame of mind to appreciate the evidence in favor of that Christ through whom alone it could be obtained, than the others who were so undetermined upon the subject that they appeared to judge themselves unworthy of such a destiny. Such was the difference between the two classes in the audience, and Luke's object is to declare the result of the difference in the fact that the one class 'believed,'/ and the other thrust the word of God from them. To say that the difference had been wrought in them exclusively by divine agency would be to rob them of responsibility. Or to say that the favorably-disposed party had become so exclusively by their own self-determining energy would be to deny the influence of divine truth. Neither of these positions can be true; but, while it was an act of their own minds to determine for eternal life, it was God who had induced them to do so; at the same time, the other party determined against eternal life, in despite of the same divine influence exerted upon them." – J.W. McGarvey

“ . . . as many as had become disposed toward eternal life (**possibly** Acts 13.48) or *all those who were appointed to eternal life* (**probably** Acts 13.48). LOUW-NIDA LEXICON

First, let us establish that the cause for believing is traced back to Divine influence. While men do themselves believe, they do not do so independently of influences outside of themselves.

Believing Is Traced to Divine Influence

First, let us establish that the cause for believing is traced back to Divine influence. While men do themselves believe, they do not do so independently of influences outside of themselves.

- **MEN ARE GRANTED TO BELIEVE.** “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ , not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29). Other versions read, “granted on behalf of Christ.” NKJV Not only were we granted to be able to believe, the grant was given upon the basis of Christ, not our personal inclination – although that was present.

- **THROUGH CHRIST WE BELIEVE IN GOD.** “ Who by Him do believe in God , that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might

be in God” (1 Pet 1:21). Other versions read, “through Him.” NKJV Thus, even our faith and trust in God is traceable to the work of Jesus.

• **THE PRESENCE OF THE HAND OF THE LORD ACCOUNTS FOR THOSE WHO BELIEVE.** “ And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

• **THE DOOR OF FAITH IS OPENED BY GOD.** “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles ” (Acts 14:27). Here the emphasis is on the Lord opening the means by which faith could come.

• **HEARTS ARE OPENED BY GOD.** “And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14). The response of Lydia to the Gospel is said to have been owing to as act of God.

It ought to be apparent that believing the Gospel and having faith in God requires something more than natural aptitude. First, the message of the Gospel speaks of things that have already been done, and can in no way be substantiated by sensual evidence. Man has no natural aptitude that is able to convince him of the truth of the Gospel – and believing does have to do with being convinced, persuaded, and being fully assured.

Men Are Drawn to Jesus

Jesus publically taught that men are drawn to Him by influences outside of themselves.

• “No man can come to Me, except the Father which hath sent Me draw him : and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God . Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto Me . . . Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto Me, except it were given unto him of My Father ” (John 6:44-45,65).

The point here is that the very desire to come to Jesus, or to believe in Him, has a Divine dimension to it. This does not take away from the fact that we ourselves do come to Jesus. Rather, it provides us an explanation of why we do.

The point of the word “reprove,” or “convict,” is that the Spirit will straighten out the thinking of men on these three critical matters – enabling submissive souls to see them correctly, which, in turn, moves them to believe the Gospel and come to Christ.

Men Are Begotten and Born Again by the Will of God

Scriptures apprise us of the fact that we were begotten and born again by God’s will, not our own. While it is important not to take this further than the Spirit takes it, it is equally important that we do not quench the Spirit by rejecting or modifying what He has said.

• “But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God ” (John 1:12-13).

• “ Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures” (James 1:18).

Even in nature, no person makes an effort to trace the cause of conception to the one who is conceived. What would motivate anyone to attempt such a thing when it comes to the superior birth?

Preparatory Works Are Traced to Divine Influences

There are certain persuasions that precede any decision to embrace the Gospel. These are necessary because of the condition that was induced by sin. Apart from influences outside of themselves, the things of God are foolish to the unregenerate, and they cannot know, or be persuaded of them (Rom 8:7; 1 Cor 2:14).

Jesus taught that the work of the Spirit precedes the decisions of men, moving them to think properly. “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you. And when He is come, He will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John 16:7-8). Other versions read, “He will convict,” NKJV “prove the world wrong,” NRSV “convince,” RSV “make the world conscious of,” BBE “bring demonstration to the world,” DARBY and “convict and convince the world and bring demonstration to it.” AMPLIFIED

The point of the word “reprove,” or “convict,” is that the Spirit will straighten out the thinking of men on these three critical matters – enabling submissive souls to see them correctly, which, in turn, moves them to believe the Gospel and come to Christ.

- **SIN.** “Of sin, because they believe not on me” (John 16:9). The Spirit gives a person to see that, in view of the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the paramount sin is not believing on Him – not trusting in, adhering to, and living for Him. The failure to believe on Jesus invalidates everything that a person thinks, says, and does, rendering them unacceptable to God.

- **RIGHTEOUSNESS.** “Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more” (John 16:10). The idea here is that Jesus Christ is Himself the embodiment and definition of righteousness. The world’s view of righteousness, or uprightness of thought and conduct, is totally wrong. In fact, it prohibits a person from seeking a righteousness that is from God, which Jesus demands that men do (John 6:33). By convincing the world of the real nature of righteousness, the Holy Spirit moves men into a quest for Divine approval, which is found in Jesus alone.

- **JUDGMENT.** “Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged” (John 16:11). Here “the prince of the power of the air,” and “the god of this world” (Eph 2:2; 2 Cor 4:4), is seen as being overthrown, and all of his manners and influences seen to be void and worthy of condemnation. This being true, the entire manner of this world must be abandoned, for the one who maintains it has been judged and consigned to perdition. It is axiomatic that if this is true, we must be delivered from this present evil world, otherwise we will be condemned with it. Those who do not quench the Spirit will come to a realization of this, and will flee to Jesus “for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18).

Divine Choice Is Involved in the Salvation of Men

We cannot leave this subject without confirming that Divine choice is involved in the salvation of men. Some may prefer to debate concerning the nature, extent, means, and time of the choice – but none can successfully contest its fact. This is a matter of revelation.

- **NOT EVERYONE WHO IS CALLED IS CHOSEN.** “For many are called, but few are chosen ” (Matt 22:14).

- **SPECIAL ACTIVITY IN VIEW OF THE CHOSEN ONES.** “And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom He hath chosen , he hath shortened the days” (Mark 13:20).

- **DIVINE CHOICE VERSUS HUMAN CHOICE.** “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you , and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it

you ” (John 15:16).

- **CHOSEN OUT OF THE WORLD.** “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world , therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19).

- **CHOSEN IN THE LORD.** “Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord , and his mother and mine” (Rom 16:13).

- **CHOSEN IN CHRIST.** “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Eph 1:4).

- **CHOSEN IN ORDER TO SALVATION.** “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).

- **CHOSEN TO BE A SOLDIER.** “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please Him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim 2:4).

- **THOSE RICH IN FAITH ARE CHOSEN.** “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5).

- **A CHOSEN GENERATION.** “But ye are a chosen generation , a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

There is also the matter of those who have been elected by God. Here I merely want to establish the fact of election without perusing all of its implications. At this point, I am merely showing the soundness of saying someone was ordained to eternal life.

THOSE WITH CHRIST ARE CHOSEN. “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen , and faithful” (Rev 17:14).

The Elect Ones

There is also the matter of those who have been elected by God. Here I merely want to establish the fact of election without perusing all of its implications. At this point, I am merely showing the soundness of saying someone was ordained to eternal life. Some versions use the word “chosen” or “choice.”

- **THE ELECT CANNOT ULTIMATELY BE DECEIVED.** “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect ” (Matt 24:24).

- **THE ELECT WILL BE FINALLY GATHERED TOGETHER.** “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other” (Matt 24:31).

- **GOD WILL AVENGE HIS ELECT.** “And shall not God avenge His own elect , which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them?” (Luke 18:7).

- **NO ONE CAN EFFECTIVELY CHARGE GOD’S ELECT.** “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect ? It is God that justifieth” (Rom 8:33).

- **THERE IS A PURPOSE IN ELECTION.** “For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth” (Rom 9:11).

• **THERE IS A REMNANT ACCORDING TO ELECTION.** “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace ” (Rom 11:5).

• **THE ELECTION OBTAINS, AND THE REST ARE BLINDED.** “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it , and the rest were blinded ” (Rom 11:7).

• **GOD’S ELECTION MAKES THE JEWS BELOVED FOR THE SAKE OF THEIR FATHERS.** “As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election , they are beloved for the fathers' sakes” (Rom 11:28).

• **THOSE IN CHRIST ARE “THE ELECT OF GOD.”** “Put on therefore, as the elect of God , holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Col 3:12).

• **THE ELECTION OF SOME CAN BE KNOWN.** “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God” (1 Thess 1:4).

• **ELECTION IS ACCORDING TO GOD’S FOREKNOWLEDGE.** “ Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied” (1 Pet 1:2).

• **ONE’S OWN ELECTION CAN BE MADE SURE.** “Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure : for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall” (2 Pet 1:10).

There Is Such a Thing as Predestination

Predestination is mentioned in Scripture, and it is our solemn obligation to have a working knowledge of what is meant by that term. All major versions use either the word “predestinated” “predestined,” or “destined.”

• **GOD HAS PREDESTINATED THE CONFORMITY OF THOSE HE FOREKNEW TO THE IMAGE OF HIS SON.** “For whom he did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

• **GOD CALLS THE ONES HE HAS PREDESTINATED.** “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called : and whom he called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom 8:30).

• **GOD HAS PREDESTINATED SOME TO BE ADOPTED.** “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will” (Eph 1:5).

• **OUR INHERITANCE IS TRACED TO GOD’S PREDESTINATION.** “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11).

I have taken the time to confirm the manner in which individuals are brought to salvation. While their wills are involved, they are the lesser part of the matter. They do make choices, but they are not the primary ones. If Jesus truly is “the Author and Finisher of our faith” (Heb 12:2), then there is a sense in which His activity, in regards to our believing, precedes ours.

It is to be admitted that everything about these matters has not be revealed. That circumstance must compel us to be content with what has been revealed, and to cease and desist from any efforts to view the Word of God through the interpretations of men. Let the text stand as it is stated: “As many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” If you have the full assurance of faith, rejoice at that

revelation. If you do not yet possess that precious gem, then give diligence to make your calling and election sure, as you are enjoined to do (2 Pet 1:10). When you have completed that mission, then come back and revisit this text. Then, and only then, will it make sense to you, and prove to be a sweet elixir of comfort.

BELIEVED

“ . . . believed.” Other versions read, “became believers,” NRSV “had faith,” BBE “came to trust,” CJB “did believe,” YLT “believed (adhered to, trusted in, and relied on Jesus as the Christ and their Savior),” AMPLIFIED and “put their faith in the Lord.” CEV

Although this has already been established, the meaning of “believed” needs to be firmly fixed in our minds, for it is a most marvelous accomplishment. Believing is the verb form of faith. Faith is what is possessed, and believing is what it does, or how it is expressed. The verb form (“believe,” “believed,” “believing”) has the following lexical meaning. “to think to be true; to be persuaded of; to credit, place confidence in . . . have confidence” . . . as used in the New Covenant Scripture it means, “the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul”; thus it stands a . absolutely *to trust* in Jesus or in God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something,” THAYER In the words of the Scriptures, believing is “being fully persuaded that, what He had promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom 4:21).

This kind of believing is done with the heart, not the mind. Therefore it is written, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10). This persuasion compels the individual to do whatever is required of him – no matter what it is. For this reason, the Scriptures do not always detail the obedience of those who “believed” (i.e. Acts 9:42; 11:21; 13:12,48; 14:1; 17:12,34). Some who are unlearned seize upon this language and teach that believing is an end of itself, with nothing more being required. What they do not understand is that having faith, or believing, is to the heart what the spirit is to the body. It is the Divinely ordained actuating principle. This is why “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23).

It is to be understood that when these souls believed, they followed through with any requirements delivered to them – such as surely as those on the day of Pentecost, the people in the city of Samaria, the Ethiopian eunuch, the household of Cornelius, and the household of Lydia.

What Did They Believe

These people had heard that Jesus was raised from the dead by God, that salvation was being brought through Him, and through Him the forgiveness of sins was preached, and that whoever believed in Him would be justified from all things. That is what they believed, and that is what they acted upon! They were not offered health or wealth, or ease in life. What they heard, they believed.

THE WORD OF THE LORD WAS PUBLISHED

“ 49 And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.”

What is the impact of believing the Gospel upon its spread throughout that region? We will see that it is significant.

The “publishing” of the Word presumes the involvement of men, laboring together with God. It is to be understood that this evoked various forms of godly creativity, zeal, commitment, and knowledge.

THE WORD OF THE LORD

“And the word of the Lord . . .”

This phrase can be viewed in two ways – and both are true. It was the word FROM the Lord, and was the word CONCERNING the Lord.

- It was from the Lord, being “sent” to the people, as was proclaimed (Acts 10:36; 13:26). A particular message was sent to a particular people – in this case, the Jews. This being the case, it was beyond all reason to reject or repudiate that word, being a sin of the greatest magnitude. The only obligation placed upon God to send this word was His own nature. He was moved from within Himself to send it. To spurn this gracious act reveals a hardness of heart that is beyond any form of sound reasoning.

- It was a word concerning the Lord – what He had done. In summary, it was the word concerning Jesus Christ – “preaching peace by Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36). This was nothing less than the “record” of His Son – a message of forgiveness and justification (Acts 13:38-39) and salvation (Acts 4:12).

PUBLISHED THROUGHOUT THE REGION

“ . . . was published throughout all the region.” Other versions read, “spread,” NKJV “went,” BBE “carried,” DARBY “talked of,” MRD “continued to spread,” NAB “was being spread,” NAS “proclaimed,” RWB “went far and wide,” MONTGOMERY and “scattered and spread.”
AMPLIFIED

The word “published” comes from a word that means, “to bear or carry through any place, to carry different ways,” THAYER and “tell everywhere.” FRIBERG A certain spiritual climate was created when a body of people believed. The region was like a citadel of Satan that had been invaded by Gospel proclaimers and pervaded by light from heaven. In the wake of the spreading word there was a dispersion of darkness and a certain freedom – at least for a season. The entire region was submitted to the proclamation of the word of God. It appears from what takes place later that this caught the children of the wicked one off guard.

The “publishing” of the Word presumes the involvement of men, laboring together with God. It is to be understood that this evoked various forms of godly creativity, zeal, commitment, and knowledge.

It ought to be noted that we are living in a time when something other than “the word of the Lord” is being spread about the Christian community. This is a time when philosophy and world wisdom have been elevated. However, the work of the Lord cannot be accomplished without the word of the Lord.

THE AGGRESSION OF THE JEWS

“ 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.”

The hardness of the hearts of “the Jews” is confirmed by their opposition of the rapid and effective spread of “the word of the Lord.” When the wicked one gains the dominance over someone, there is no extent to which they will not go to subdue holy influences. Cain will kill Abel, Ishmael will mock Isaac, and Esau will seek to kill Jacob. The ultimate example of this kind of opposition is the betrayal of Jesus, and the delivering of Him to be crucified.

THE JEWS STIRRED THEM UP

“But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city . . .”

Other versions read, “the unbelieving Jews,” CJB and “the Jewish leaders.” LIVING

These were obviously not the “many” Jews who “followed Paul and Barnabas,” and were “persuaded . . . to continue in the grace of God.” There is a sense in which those noble Jewish souls, by continuing the grace of God, distanced themselves from the rest of the Jewish people. They were being drawn into a spiritual environment where Jewish identity is absolved (Gal 3:28).

Those, however, who chose to rest in the fleshly Jewish identity had no recourse but to vigorously oppose the men who had interrupted their stilted and conventional religion.

Stirred Up

Other versions read, “aroused,” NASB “incited,” NIV “urged,” ASV “working up the feelings,” BBE “excited,” DARBY “worked on,” NJB “moved,” PNT and “influenced.” WEYMOUTH

At once, these opponents of the Gospel set out to create a troubled environment. No doubt they sought to convince the people that the community was at a great disadvantage by the presence and teaching of Paul and Barnabas. In the political environment in which they found themselves, agitation and social unrest were dangerous. Quite unlike some of the governments of our day, social unrest would not be tolerated. Thus they convinced influential people that this is what was happening.

The words “stirred up” are translated from a single Greek word meaning, “to incite, stir up,” THAYER “to arouse in a negative sense,” FRIBERG “to stir up hostility against,” LOUW-NIDA and “to urge.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The picture is that of appealing to the emotions by associating Paul and Barnabas with threatening and despised things.

The devout and Honorable Women

Other versions read, “devout and prominent women,” “devout women of prominence,” NASB “God-fearing women of high standing,” NIV “women of honorable estate,” ASV “God-fearing women of high position,” BBE “women God-fearers of high social standing,” CJB “women of the upper classes who were worshipers,” DARBY “the opulent women who with them feared God,” MRD “the influential religious women,” NLT “some of the important religious women,” IE “gentlewomen women of rank who worshiped with them,” ISV and “religious and respectable women.” PHILLIPS

These were women of social prominence, who were also proselytes. They may very well have been among the “religious proselytes” who had followed Paul and Barnabas (13:43). These women, apparently not yet stable in the faith, were stirred up the unbelieving Jews. In Athens the Gospel attracted some “chief women” (Acts 17:4). In Berea, some who believed were “honorable women which were Greeks” (Acts 17:12).

And Chief Men of the City

Other versions read, “leading men of the city,” NASB “first people of the city,” DARBY “the officials of the city,” GWN “prominent men of the city,” NET and “outstanding men of the town.” AMPLIFIED

These men were some kind of officials in the city of Antioch – key people in the social and political fabric of the city. The unbelieving Jews targeted them also, apparently having some kind of significant acquaintance with them.

Viewed As Troublemakers

The charges leveled against Paul and Barnabas were no doubt similar to those that were often

brought against believers. The charge of causing trouble was often raised against Gospel proclaimers.

The charges leveled against Paul and Barnabas were no doubt similar to those that were often brought against believers. The charge of causing trouble was often raised against Gospel proclaimers.

The Jews raised this charge against Jesus: “He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place” (Luke 23:5).

- False witnesses spoke against Stephen saying, “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us” (Acts 6:14).

- At Philippi the charge was raised against Paul and Silas, “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city” (Acts 16:20).

- In Thessalonica the Jews cried out against Paul and Silas, “These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also” (Acts 17:6).

- In Jerusalem the Jews said of Paul, “This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place” (Acts 21:28).

This tactic is employed to this very day – one which misrepresents faithful ministers as causing disruption, particularly within the religious community. Such teachers are represented as unconventional, and departing from traditional Christianity.

A PERSECUTION WAS RAISED AND PAUL AND BARNABAS WERE EXPELLED

“ . . . and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts.”

Just as in Jerusalem, the agitation of the Jews caused a persecution – but this time it was leveled at only two people – “against Paul and Barnabas.” The details of this persecution are not given, but the results of it are.

The agitated people “expelled them out of their coasts.” Other versions read, “expelled them from their region,” NKJV “drive them out of their district,” NASB “cast them out of their borders,” ASV “driving them out of those parts,” BBE “threw them out of their territory,” GWN “ran them out of town,” NLT and “put them out from their borders.” YLT

The expulsion of Paul and Barnabas was not merely from the immediate environs, but from the region itself. What they were preaching was so offensive to these Jews that they did not want any of it within the area. Their action was similar to the request the Gadarene’s made of Jesus: “they besought Him that He would depart out of their coasts” (Matt 8:34).

I suppose you could build a case for the rejection of Paul and Barnabas – at least from a fleshly point of view. The leading Jews were against them. The prominent women of the city were stirred up against them. Also, the chief men of the city were moved against them. Under such conditions, those who seek popularity among the people would probably have to reevaluate their message. Perhaps, they might reason, they had been too negative, or too insistent, or too intolerant of the opinions of others. Flesh can always find a reason.

However, it was opponents of Paul and Barnabas who were wrong. These two were men who had been called into the work by the Holy Spirit of God. Paul himself had been separated to preach the Gospel. The word they had delivered had been sent by the Lord Himself. When the people rejected that word, they excluded themselves from eternal life. I hardly see how any circumstance could be more serious than that!

THEY SHOOK THE DUST OF THE FEET AGAINST THEM

“ 51 But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.” Other versions read, “But they shook off the dust of their feet in protest against them,” NASB “shaking off the dust of that place from their feet,” BBE “In protest against these people, Paul and Barnabas shook the dust off their feet,” GWN “they shook the dust from their feet as a sign of rejection,” NLT and “they shook off the dust of their feet against the town.” LIVING

In a politically and religiously correct society, this kind of action is not acceptable. It is viewed as uncultured, burning your bridges behind you, and being impatient with the people. But after all of the objections to such an action have been registered, the voice of the Head of the church is heard above all such objections. When Jesus sent out the twelve He said, “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them . Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment, than for that city” (Mark 6:11). When He later sent out the seventy He told them, “But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you : notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. But I say unto you, that it shall be more tolerable in that day for Sodom, than for that city” (Luke 10:11-12). Is there really any question about how the Lord of glory feels about the rejection of the word He sends out and the messengers who carry it?

Some time later, when the Jews in Corinth opposed and blasphemed against Paul, “he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).

Let there be no mistake about this. Men may require preachers and teachers to either subdue their message, or be tolerant of the opposition of it. But this does not reflect the mind of the Lord.

THEY SHOOK OFF THE DUST

What is the significance of shaking the dust of the area off of one’s feet? This is an action that proclaims the defilement of the region, and an unwillingness to be associated with it any further. In doing this, Paul and Barnabas were affirming that the unbelieving Jews were worse than the Gentiles who did not know God. Even the soil of the region had been defiled by their unbelief, just as surely as the idolatry of both the Jews and the Gentiles of old had defiled God’s land (Lev 18:24-28).

The rejection of God’s word, and the raising of opposition against those who declare it remains a sin of staggering proportions. The tolerance level of such individuals is zero.

THEY CAME TO ICONIUM

Having been expelled from one region, and shaking the dust off of their feet as they left, Paul and Barnabas did not cease to preach. Nor, indeed, were they overcome with discouragement because they had not been received.

Although they were no doubt greatly pleased because of the hearty acceptance of their message by the Gentiles, and some of the Jews, they had not been preaching to please men, nor were they promoting their own popularity. Therefore, as they said they would do, they determined to take the message to those who would hear it. Therefore, they moved on to an adjacent location, Iconium, approximately seventy miles away.

This approach to preaching – going to those who will receive the message – transforms an individual’s thoughts about declaring the word of the Lord. First, this is how Jesus taught His disciples

to preach. “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet” (Matt 10:14). Later, when Paul would return to Jerusalem, Jesus would tell him to leave the city, because the people would not hear him: “And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; and saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me” (Acts 22:18).

On one occasion, as Jesus was en route to Jerusalem, he sent messengers into a village of the Samaritans, “to make ready for Him.” When “they did not receive Him,” “they went to another village” (Lk 9:53-56). This is how Jesus consistently conducted His work.

An approach to preaching the Gospel that has a person first establishing personal friendships, and then preaching within the context of personal acceptance, it, to say the least, open to question. In Scripture, the reason for either the acceptance or rejection of the messenger is the message that is brought, not personal acquaintance. A ministry that is founded upon the popularity of the individual will not be blessed by God, and any purported success that is claimed is to be ignored.

THE DISCIPLES WERE FILLED WITH JOY AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ 52 And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.” Other versions read, “continually filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit,” NASB “the disciples in Antioch continued to be full of joy and the Holy Spirit,” GWN “but the converts were filled with joy and the Holy Spirit,” NJB “the believers were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit,” NLT “their converts were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit,” LIVING “The followers were happy and full of the Holy Spirit,” IE “as for the disciples, they were more and more filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit,” WEYMOUTH and “the disciples were continually filled [throughout their souls] with joy and the Holy Spirit.” AMPLIFIED

“The disciples” refers to those in Antioch who had joyfully received the message delivered by Paul and Barnabas. Now, although the messengers that delivered the word were forced out of the region, these believers continued to be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. They had not been inordinately attached to the proclaimers, but had embraced the One who was preached. Although I do not doubt they were sad at the expulsion of Paul and Barnabas, they were able to continue in the faith because they had been built upon the rock. These believers were able to withstand the loss of their teachers because they had received the real thing.

Paul and Barnabas took heed how they built upon the foundation, carefully placing upon it “gold, silver, and precious stones” – people whose hearts had been touched by the Gospel, and had heartily embraced the Christ who was preached (1 Cor 3:10-12).

I know of no small number of professed Christian works that have not been able to stand after the ones who founded them were forced to leave. Let it be clear, that when it comes to the work of the Lord, the aim is to bring the people into close fellowship with the Lord . When, by the grace of God, this is accomplished, the people will be able to withstand occasions like that of our text.

You see that the joy of the Lord and the work of the Holy Spirit cannot be stifled in an environment of faith. When people are actually following the Lord – “disciples” – they will be sustained from heaven, even if outward circumstances are something less than ideal. This is a most blessed circumstance!

CONCLUSION

In the book of Acts, we are being exposed to the manner of the Kingdom. Primarily, we are seeing the advancement of the Word of God and the consistency of the followers of Jesus under all kinds of

circumstances. When the disciples found favor with all of the people (Acts 2:47), they grew and advanced in the Lord, capitalizing on the situation. There is a generation of people who are thrown off course by the acceptance of the people. Even when fierce persecution broke out, and the disciples were scattered abroad, it did not dampen the proclamation of the Gospel, for they went everywhere preaching the word (Acts 8:4). Now, when godly teachers were forced out of region, the disciples continued to be filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit. Their spiritual lives were not interrupted because they were founded upon the rock. When the winds of adversity and the storms of trial came upon them, they did not fall. This is a view of real spiritual life. We are not obliged to accept any other view of the work of the Lord.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #61

PREACHING IN ICONIUM, LYSTRA, and DERBE

“ 14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed. 2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. 3 Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. 5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, 6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: 7 And there they preached the gospel.” (Acts 14:1-7)

INTRODUCTION

Having been forced out of Antioch, and leaving the disciples anchored in the Lord and filled with joy and the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas come to Iconium. Although in a Antioch for a brief time, possible only a little over two weeks, yet the impact of their ministry was notable. Those who had believed their message were left filled with joy and the Holy Spirit. Although their obedience to the Gospel is not detailed, it is to be assumed, for God gives the Holy Spirit to those who “obey Him” (Acts 5:32), and Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him” (Heb 5:9). There is no salvation without obedience. Salvation is implemented “through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:2). The condition in which the disciples at Antioch were left confirms that all of this was wrought in them. That is why there was no need for the Spirit to move Luke to record all of the details of everyone’s obedience to the Gospel.

THE REPORT OF RESPONSES

Observe how the faithful responses to the Gospel are reported.

- **WERE BAPTIZED.** “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized ”

(Acts 2:41).

• **BELIEVED.** “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand ” (Acts 4:4).

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• **COMING TO ICONIUM, THEY “SO SPAKE” (14:1)**

• **THE UNBELIEVING JEWS (14:2)**

• **A LONG TIME THEY SPOKE BOLDLY IN THE LORD (14:3a)**

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• **THE CITY WAS DIVIDED (14:4)**

• **AN ASSAULT WAS MADE BY THE GENTILES, JEWS, AND RULERS (14:5)**

• **WHEN THEY WERE AWARE OF IT (14:6)**

• **THERE THEY PREACHED THE GOSPEL (14:7)**

• **CONCLUSION**

• **BELIEVERS ADDED TO THE LORD.** “And believers were the more added to the Lord , multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

• **NUMBER OF DISCIPLES MULTIPLIED.** “And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied ” (Acts 6:1).

• **OBEDIENT TO THE FAITH.** “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

• **WERE BAPTIZED.** “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women ” (Acts 8:12).

• **TURNED TO THE LORD.** “And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord ” (Acts 9:35)

• **BELIEVED IN THE LORD.** “And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord ” (Acts 9:42).

• **BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.** “Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord ” (Acts 10:47-48).

• **BELIEVED IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** “Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ ; what was I, that I could withstand God?” (Acts 11:17).

• **BELIEVED AND TURNED UNTO THE LORD.** “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord ” (Acts 11:21).

• **ADDED UNTO THE LORD.** “For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord ” (Acts 11:24).

• **BELIEVED.** “Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed , being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord” (Acts 13:12).

The salvation of God is large – a “so great salvation” (Heb 2:3). It is improper to perceive its appropriation from a single point of view, or to attempt to so present it so that it is perceived as

being simplistic and requiring only a minimal response from those who hear it.

• **BELIEVED.** “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed ” (Acts 13:48).

• **BELIEVED.** “ . . . a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed ” (Acts 14:1).

• **HEART OPENED, ATTENDED TO WHAT WAS SPOKEN, AND BAPTIZED.** “ . . . Lydia . . . whose heart the Lord opened , that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. And when she was baptized , and her household . . . ” (Acts 16:14-15).

• **FRUITS MEET FOR REPENTANCE, AND WAS BAPTIZED.** “And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:32-33).

• **BELIEVED.** “And some of them believed , and consorted with Paul and Silas . . . (Acts 17:4).

• **BELIEVED.** “Therefore many of them believed ; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:12).

• **BELIEVED.** “Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed . . . ” (Acts 17:34).

• **BELIEVED AND WERE BAPTIZED.** And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized ” (Acts 18:8).

• **WERE BAPTIZED.** “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

• **BELIEVED, SHOWED DEEDS MEET FOR REPENTANCE.** “And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds ” (Acts 19:18).

• **BELIEVED.** “And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not” (Acts 28:24).

One thing is glaringly apparent: the Spirit is not promoting a stereotyped manner of thinking. Be sure, neither is He opening the doors for the notion that salvation is appropriated in a variety of ways, for it is not. The salvation of God is large – a “so great salvation” (Heb 2:3). It is improper to perceive its appropriation from a single point of view, or to attempt to so present it so that it is perceived as being simplistic and requiring only a minimal response from those who hear it.

It ought to be apparent to every professed laborer with God that sin has made men self-centered. The fruit of a man-centered emphasis testifies to the folly of adopting it in the matter of reaching men for Christ.

Making Disciples

Those who “make disciples” must do at least two things. First, an obedience must be produced that leaves the individual conscious of the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Second, a mindset must be produced that ensures the disciple will continue in the faith. These will enable the Ethiopian eunuch to proceed to his native land without being accompanied by Philip (Acts 8:39). Philip, Peter, and John can, in such a case, move on from the city of Samaria after a brief period of time (Acts 8:25). It will allow Peter and those with him to leave the house of Cornelius after a few days (Acts 10:48).

THE IMPORTANCE OF A CORE MESSAGE

It is vitally important that those who represent the Lord deliver a message that is sound at its core. That means that God must be at the center of it, and not men. It is what God has done that is fundamental, not what man must do. It is God's view of Christ than enables men to have a profitable view of Him. This is also what allows for growth, expansion of the understanding, and rooting and grounding in the faith. If a person makes human need and response the primary thing, spiritual growth will be stifled, for such soil is too shallow. The message must be of the such a nature as promotes extended thought, which is at the center of the increase of both faith and commitment. I acknowledge that such an approach is not conducive to career development or the establishment of an institution. Those objectives require that humanity be central.

It ought to be apparent to every professed laborer with God that sin has made men self-centered. The fruit of a man-centered emphasis testifies to the folly of adopting it in the matter of reaching men for Christ.

AGAIN, THEY SEEK A RELIGIOUS AUDIENCE

Again Paul and Barnabas enter into the synagogue, and again they speak in the same manner as they had before. They do not reshape their message to avoid the hostility that was created in Antioch. They did not revise their approach because they encountered opposition in the precious city.

We will find that the message of the Gospel postulates that a certain effort is being exerted to find the Lord. It may take the form of idolatry, as in Athens (Acts 17:22-23), or devoutness as seen in the household of Cornelius (Acts 10:2), or devotion to prayer as seen in the household of Lydia (Acts 16:13). It may be disciples with imperfect knowledge, like those "certain disciples" in Ephesus (Acts 19:1-2).

This does not mean that those who are not engaged in any obvious quest to know God are excluded, for there are those like the Philippian jailor (Acts 16:29-31).

What I am saying is that there is an obvious emphasis on those with some kind of religious commitment. Actually, if one has some spiritual understanding, it will become apparent that there is more of this among the sons of men than is at first evident. One of the great distinctions of those early men who were working together with God was their ready perception of this circumstance. I find it to be a most refreshing thing to consider.

COMING TO ICONIUM, THEY "SO SPAKE"

"14:1 And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed."

As soon as Paul and Barnabas arrive at their destination, they seek out a place in which they can proclaim word of the Lord. They are tenacious in their commitment to this work, remaining undeterred in their mission, even after they have been driven out of the previous region. They had a keen awareness that they had been called by the Holy Spirit.

THEY WENT IN TOGETHER

"And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews . . ." Other versions read, "they went together to," NKJV "they entered . . . together," NASB "Paul and Barnabas went as usual into," NIV "Paul and Barnabas went into," NRSV "In Iconium the same thing happened- they went into the synagogue," CJB "it fortun'd in Iconium that they went both together into," TNT and "Much the same thing happened at Iconium. On their arrival they went to." PHILLIPS

Here, the meaning is that they did this in like manner as they did in Antioch. Therefore, some

versions read “as usual,” NIV “the same thing happened,” CJB and “Much the same thing happened.” PHILLIPS This was not lifeless repetition or habit. It was their objective that drove them. Technically, they were not trying to produce results, but were carrying out the work to which the Spirit had called them. They were planting and watering, knowing that it is the Lord who gives the increase (1 Cor 3:6-7).

Again, we see the men of God targeting those with a preliminary knowledge of God. While they will not limit themselves to such, that is where they will begin – “to the Jew first.” In that process, they will also have access to certain Gentiles who had left idolatry and converted to Judaism. It is interesting to observe the frequency of Greeks, or Gentiles, being said to be in the synagogues (Acts 13:42; 14:1; 18:4,17).

The fact that Paul and Barnabas “went in together” is also worthy of note. The Spirit had separated them together (ACTS 13:2). Paul is frequently said to have journeyed with kindred spirits. Thus we read of “Paul and his company” (Acts 13:13), “Paul and Silas” (Acts 16:19), “Paul and Timotheus” (Phil 1:1), “Paul and Silvanus and Timotheus” (1 Thess 1:1). In the ministry, as in life in general, “two are better than one” (Eccl 4:9). For example, when Jesus first sent out the twelve, He sent them “by two by two” NKJV (Mk 6:7). He did the same with the seventy, sending them out “two by two” NKJV (Lk 10:1). When the Lord send Moses to Egypt to deliver the people of Israel, He paired him with his brother Aaron (Ex 4:14-15,20). In this way there is mutual encouragement, and the suppression of any temptation to be self-centered.

AND SO SPAKE

“ . . . and so spake . . . ” Other versions read, “spoke in such a manner,” NASB “spoke so effectively,” NIV “spoke in such a way,” NRSV “gave such a teaching,” BBE “preached with such power,” NLT and “spoke with such conviction.” PHILLIPS

The two words “so spake” are precisely translated from the Greek words **lalh/sai ou[twj** , which can be translated “to talk thus.” INTERLINEAR Here, the idea is that they spoke in such a manner as to produce the results that are declared. That is, they spoke with power and persuasion. As with the Lord Jesus Himself, their “word was with power” (Lk 4:32). They delivered words the Holy Spirit could use in His work of conviction (John 16:9-11). They also spoke in such a manner as to induce faith in those with ears to hear – the kind of faith that is declared in Scripture. The words could also have a secondary meaning – that they were after the same manner as they had delivered in the synagogue in Antioch. Essentially, that is saying the same thing, for in both places what and how they preached brought heavenly influences to bear upon the people, producing hostility in stony hearts, and faith in tender ones.

To this point in this book, as concerning God and His great salvation, the message of the Gospel has not been addressed to the totally uninformed – search and see.

The fact that they were once again in a synagogue moves me to the consideration of another circumstance that is being uncovered in this book. To this point in this book, as concerning God and His great salvation, the message of the Gospel has not been addressed to the totally uninformed – search and see. By that I mean the word is consistently represented as being declared to those who acknowledged the reality of a God, and were involved in some kind of commitment to their idea, even though it may have been somewhat flawed..

We have some notable examples of the details of a messenger from God speaking to those who had a flawed and unacceptable view of God.

PAUL IN ATHENS

When certain Athenian philosophers brought Paul to the Areopagus to hear his doctrine, he spoke to them of the following.

- **GOD THE CREATOR.** God created the world and all things therein.
- **GOD THE LORD.** God is Lord of heaven and earth.
- **GOD IS NOT CONFINED TO A TEMPLE.** God does not dwell in temples made with hands.
- **GOD IS NOT WORSHIPED WITH MEN'S HANDS.** God is not worshiped with men's hands as though He needed anything.
- **GOD IS THE LIFE-GIVER.** God gives life and breath to all things.
- **GOD MADE ALL MEN.** God made all men from one man.
- **GOD PLACED ALL MEN.** God strategically placed all men in both time and location, that they might seek Him.
- **GOD OWNS ALL LIFE.** All men live and move and have their being in God.
- **MEN MUST THINK PROPERLY ABOUT GOD.** Because men are God's offspring, they should not think of Him in terms of things crafted by men's hands.
- **GOD HAS BEEN LONGSUFFERING, BUT NOW MEN MUST REPENT.** God has overlooked the times of men's ignorance, but now commands all men everywhere to repent.
- **GOD WILL JUDGE THE WORLD.** God has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man He has ordained.
- **GOD HAS APPROVED THE JUDGE.** God has assured humanity of the approval of that Man by raising Him from the dead (Acts 17:18-31).

Although not precisely the same kind of situation, Paul also reasoned with a certain governor named Felix, moving him to tremble, and call for the ending of the session.

PAUL'S REASONING WITH FELIX

Having heard of Paul's arrest and defense before Agrippa, Felix came down with his wife Drusilla to Caesarea, and called for Paul. Luke informs us that Felix was "well acquainted" NIV with "the Way," or manner and message of Christians (Acts 24:22). We do not know the extent of his familiarity, but it appears to be more with the manner of the new life rather than the details of the apostles' doctrine. When Paul came he reasoned with Felix on the following points, which caused Felix to tremble. The text is Acts 24:25.

- **RIGHTEOUSNESS** : God's approval, GWN uprightness, NJB morality, MONTGOMERY doing right, CEV and goodness. GNB The meaning of the word used here is "the state of him who is such as he ought to be . . . virtue, purity of life, uprightness, correctness in thinking, feeling, and acting," THAYER This does not refer to the righteousness that is imputed to men through their faith. It rather refers to the Divine requirement of an upright life (Micah 6:8). Once convinced of this absolute requirement, the need for the righteousness that comes through faith is seen and pursued (Matt 6:33).

As soon as men tailor this Gospel for those who have no fundamental knowledge of God, they will be forced to distort it. The fundamental error in such an approach is caused by the failure to understand that the message of the Gospel is calculated to appeal to those who are sober minded and have engaged in some kind of effort to seek the Lord.

TEMPERANCE : self control, NKJV holiness, MRD self restraint, NAB purity of life and (the

control of passions). AMPLIFIED God requires that men control their natural propensities. They are to have a high reason for living than fulfilling their own desires.

- **JUDGMENT TO COME** : future judgment, MRD and the coming day of judgment. NLT There is a day of ultimate accountability, and all men will be there. Men are to live with an acute awareness of this reality.

It is imperative that we carefully note the total absence of preaching a Gospel that is adapted to the circumstances. The message delivered in the synagogues, to the Athenian philosophers, and Felix, were not differing adaptations of the Gospel. All of them were designed to ready men for the Gospel, but differed significantly in the details that were delivered.

- **THE SYNAGOGUES.** When preaching to the Jews, Paul capitalized on the Scriptures of Moses and the prophets, confirming that God had readied them for the coming of the Savior.

- **THE ATHENIANS.** In addressing these philosophers, unlearned in the Scriptures, Paul did not appeal to Moses and the Prophets. He rather spoke from the perspective of the human conscience, and of certain realities that could be known through sound reasoning.

- **FELIX.** When speaking to Felix, Paul capitalized on his knowledge of “the way,” but stressed the necessity of living in a conscious effort to please God, and with an acute awareness of the day of judgment.

I realize that it has become quite fashionable in our time to present a “Christ” that is the resolution to personal, domestic, and social problems. However, this kind of presentation is not driven by spiritual understanding, nor is it in synch with the revealed will of God.

As soon as men tailor this Gospel for those who have no fundamental knowledge of God, they will be forced to distort it. The fundamental error in such an approach is caused by the failure to understand that the message of the Gospel is calculated to appeal to those who are sober minded and have engaged in some kind of effort to seek the Lord. It is addressed to those who have met with a certain frustration in their effort to do God’s will and realize His approval. This is precisely why Jesus said, “Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden , and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matt 11:28-29). His “yoke” is thus compared with that of the Law. Paul spoke in much the same manner in Antioch when he said, “And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39). When an appeal is made to men to receive Christ in order that their earthly circumstances can be improved, a distortion of the truth has taken place.

The reason for this is that the message of God is not one that is intended to be adapted to the circumstances. It is already adapted for men as they have been Divinely assessed. It offers an exchange of “beauty” for “ashes,” “the oil of joy” for “mourning,” and “the garment of praise” for “the spirit of heaviness” (Isa 61:3). It is tailored for “the poor,” “the brokenhearted,” “the captives,” and bruised” (Lk 4:18). Jesus associated His ministry with those who labored and were heavy laden (Matt 11:28). Elsewhere the Spirit speaks of those who have fled to Jesus fore refuge, to lay hold on the hope that has been set before them (Heb 6:18). The ongoing ministry of Jesus is said to be for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25).

Thus far in the book of Acts, the presentations of Jesus Christ declared Him as follows.

- A Man approved by God – Acts 2:22
- Delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God – Acts 2:23
- Raised from the dead by God – Acts 2:24-27; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30,33,37
- His body did not see corruption – Acts 2:24; 13:35-37

- Raised up to sit on David’s throne – Acts 2:30-31
- Exalted to the right hand of God – Acts 2:33-34
- Shedding forth the Holy Spirit – Acts 2:33
- Crucified by men – Acts 2:36; 3:15; 5:30; 7:52; 10:39; 13:28
- Made both Lord and Christ – Acts 2:36
- Glorified by God – Acts 3:13a
- Delivered up and denied by men – Acts 3:13b
- From heaven caused a lame man to walk – Acts 3:16
- Heaven will retain Him until the fulfillment of all the words of the prophets – Acts 3:21
- God sent Him to bless men, and turn them away from their iniquities – Acts 3:26
- Exalted to be a Prince and a Savior – Acts 5:31a
- Exalted to give repentance and forgiveness of sins – Acts 5:31b
- He is the Son of God – Acts 9:20
- He is Lord of all – Acts 10:36
- He was anointed with the Holy Spirit and power – Acts 10:38a
- Went about doing good , healing all who were oppressed of the devil – Acts 10:38
- After raised, he appeared to chosen witnesses – Acts 10:41; 13:31
- Commanded that He be preached to the people, that He will judge the living and the dead – Acts 10:41
- Prophets all give witness to Him, that whoever believes on Him will receive remission of sins – Acts 10:43
- Raised up among men according to God’s promise to David – Acts 13:23
- He was not known by those who knew the prophets – Acts 13:27
- Was laid in a sepulcher – Acts 13:29
- Forgiveness of sins is preached through Him – Acts 13:38
- All who believe on Him are justified from all things – Acts 13:39

How does this compare with the contemporary presentations of Jesus?

Then, there is the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit, who comes to convince men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He confirms to their hearts the nature and jeopardy of sin, the reality and availability of the righteousness of God, and the futility of any and all living that is prompted by Satan.

THAT A GREAT MULTITUDE BELIEVED

“ . . . that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” Other versions read, “a great number . . . believed,” NIV “became believers,” NRSV “a great company,” RSV “a large number,” CJB “a large crowd,” GWN “a great number . . . came to believe,” NJB and “many.”
LIVING

The words “great multitude” are translated from two Greek words (**polu. plh/qoj**). The first word means “much, many, numerous, great.” THAYER The second word means “a multitude, a great

number.” THAYER This is a kind of literary redundancy that accents a very large group that simultaneously believed. We might say a large crowd, or a very big group.

It is remarkable for a person to believe – like the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-37)), or Lydia (Acts 16:14), or Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:12). However, it is even more staggering to ponder a multitude of people believing simultaneously – like 3,000 on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:41), of 5,000 men in Solomon’s Porch (Acts 4:4), or the whole city of Samaria (Acts 8:12,14). Our text declares that “a great multitude believed.” Oh, it is marvelous to consider!

In this text, an impressive number of Jews and Greeks “believe” – grasping the truth of what had been declared, bring drawn to it, and eagerly embracing it. In the process of believing, they cast down any contradicting notions. They overcame the wicked one, who was seeking to blind their eyes. They abandoned any contradicting ways of thinking, and willingly stepped into an arena of thought that was new and fresh.

The Marvel of Believing

When we are aware of what is involved in believing, the greatness of the Gospel and of the Lord who sent it becomes very evident. When a lot of people believe, it is not the result of a human strategy, or a cunning presentation, or some humanly coordinated activity. I acknowledge that this is how it is often presented in the Christian world, but there is really nothing like that delivered to us in the Scriptures.

It is revealed that men are “given” to believe (Phil 1:29) – that is, without this Divine activity, believing is not even possible. Faith “comes,” it is not conjured up by men (Rom 10:17). Those who believe are said to have “believed through grace,” not through natural aptitude (Acts 18:27).

Then, there is the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit, who comes to convince men of sin, righteousness, and judgment. He confirms to their hearts the nature and jeopardy of sin, the reality and availability of the righteousness of God, and the futility of any and all living that is prompted by Satan.

Believing is the result of the heart being “opened” by God, so that the truth can be the more plainly seen, and a willingness and fervent desire are realized that moves the person to act upon what He has heard (Acts 16:14).

There is also the matter of repentance, in which the former way of life is renounced, and a determination is made to turn to and serve the Lord. There is a cessation of immoral expressions that is brought on by a hatred of sin, and a love for righteousness. This kind of repentance is consistently effective because it is given to the individual by the exalted Christ (Acts 5:31). From yet another point of view, it is “granted,” given, or caused to come to pass (Acts 5:31; 11:18).

If one looks back on believing, it ought to be apparent that it was because the Gospel came to the people “in power,” accompanied by the Holy Spirit, and with the kind of assurance that moves the people to act with confidence. That is why it is written, “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance” (1 Thess 1:5). It also ought to be apparent that believing is preceded by a persuasion that what was heard was the truth of God which effectively works in those who believe. Again it is written, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (2 Thess 2:13).

It is exercise in vanity to attempt to explain believing in any other way. Add to the perspective the fact that it took place in the world, which is under the power of the wicked one (1 John 5:19), and by

those who were under his dominion – “children of disobedience” and subject to the wrath of God (Eph 2:1-3). Those who were appropriately termed “servants of sin” (Rom 6:17,20), broke free from that servitude and yielded to a new Master. And how did all of that take place? They were MADE free by the Son of God, and were therefore “free indeed” (John 8:32,36).

The Environment of Truth

While it ought to be apparent, Divine workings require an environment of truth. God Himself is “a God of truth” (Deut 32:4), His works are “done in truth” (Psa 33:4), and His sanctifying power is realized by means of the truth (John 17:17,19). It is wrong to expect God to work where the truth is withheld from the people, distorted, or in some other way placed into the background. There are those who seek to work up an emotional state in the people, imagining that this is the kind of surrounding in which the God of heaven works. Others seek to produce a kind of scholastic environment, where the wisdom of men is set before the people, and all manner of worldly expertise is placed before the audience. There are even those who simply sit in silence, awaiting some illumination from above, postulating that God works in a kind of intellectual and spiritual vacuum.

If an effectual work is to be done in and among the people, the truth must be insightfully declared. It must be declared with discernment, and with a keen awareness that the individual is a steward, handling the truth, which belongs to the Lord (2 Tim 2:15).

The Presence of Greeks

Again, we find none-Jews in the synagogue. Here, they are referred to as “Greeks” in the sense of their language – not speaking Hebrew.

The fact that these Greeks were in the synagogue, confirmed they had some understanding of the Law and the Prophets, for they were regularly read in the synagogues (Acts 13:15,27; 15:21).

Here again, we see a people being targeted who had some acquaintance with Moses and the Prophets. These were not raw Gentiles who were totally uncultured in the ways of the Lord – although there are examples of such people being exposed to Gospel influences (Acts 28:4), and intellectuals who were totally unacquainted with the Scriptures (Acts 17:32).

The fact of the Gentiles being oriented for the Gospel through Jewish influences is reflected in the Epistles. There was a certain awareness of what was declared by Moses and the Prophets among converted Gentiles. What Paul could not say in Athens, he did say to churches that were largely Gentile.

With all of their deficiencies, the Jews had impressed those about them with the knowledge of God, which had been given exclusively to them (Rom 9:4-5). These proselytes were a kind of first fruits of a greater harvest of which the prophets spoke.

- “And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:2).

- “And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising” (Isa 60:3).

- “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech 8:23).

This Phenomenon Reflected in the Epistles

The fact of the Gentiles being oriented for the Gospel through Jewish influences is reflected in the Epistles. There was a certain awareness of what was declared by Moses and the Prophets among converted Gentiles. What Paul could not say in Athens, he did say to churches that were largely Gentile, with a proportionately smaller percentage of Jews. Following are examples of references to Moses, the Law, the Prophets, and the Scriptures (which at that time were Genesis through Malachi).

• **IN ROME, ITALY.** Rom 1:2; 2:12-20; 3:19-21,28,31; 4:13-16; 5:13-14,20; 6:14,15; 7:1-14; 8:3-7; 9:4-5,15,31,32; 10:4-5,19; 13:8,10; 15:4; 16:26.

• **IN CORINTH, GREECE.** 1 Cor 7:39; 9:8-9,20-21; 10:2-11; 14:21,34; 15:3,4,5,6; 2 Cor 3:7-15

• **IN GALATIA, ASIA.** Gal 2:16,19,21; 3:2,5,10-13,17-24; 4:4-5,21; 5:4,14,18.

• **IN EPHESUS, ASIA.** Eph 2:13-19.

• **PHILIPPI, ASIA.** Phil 3:5,6,9

I suppose that one could postulate that Moses and the Prophets were aggressively taught in the Gentile churches, in order to acquaint them with those writings. However, it seems more likely to me that they already had a familiarity with them, being subjected to them within the context of the synagogues. In our time, professing Christians are not generally acquainted with the writings of Moses and the prophets.

Because of this, much of the reasoning found in the Epistles is foreign to their thinking, and they cannot make proper sense of many pivotal points made to Gentile churches. Among them is the unacceptability of a rule-oriented approach to godliness (Col 2:20-23), and the uniqueness of being justified by faith, versus being justified by the works of the Law (Rom 2:13; 3:20,26,28; Gal 2:16; 3:11,24; 5:4).

We know Jews and Gentiles heard apostolic preaching in synagogues in Cyprus (Acts 13:5), Antioch (13:14), Iconium (14:1), Thessalonica (17:1), Athens (17:17), Corinth (18:4), and Ephesus (18:19; 19:6). On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached to proselytes (Acts 2:10). One of the seven men chosen to administer the daily food distribution in Jerusalem was a proselyte (Acts 6:5). The Ethiopian eunuch had embraced Judaism (Acts 8:27). Cornelius was a proselyte (10:2). Lydia, a Gentile, worshiped the God of the Jews (16:14).

All of this supports the precision of the statement made to a largely Gentile church: “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:24-26). Ignoring this circumstance, coupled with the prevailing ignorance of Moses and the Prophets, has compelled great numbers of professed preachers and evangelists to present Jesus within the context of contemporary human experience. From the standpoint of rightness, effectiveness, and Divine acceptance, I am not certain that this kind of representation is in any way acceptable with God. If this is true, then no acceptable results can be come from it.

THE UNBELIEVING JEWS

“2 But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.”

It is vitally important that we note what is here said, and how it is stated. This reflects a certain mindset that exists among those who have been reconciled to God, and have therefore rejected Christ.

THE UNBELIEVING JEWS

“But the unbelieving Jews . . .” Other versions read, “Jews who disbelieved,” NASB “Jews who

refused to believe,” NIV “Jews that were disobedient,” ASV “Jews who had not the faith,” BBE “Jews who would not be persuaded,” CJB “Jews of the class of unbelievers,” MRD “Jews . . . spurned God’s message,” NLT “Jews who had refused obedience,” WEYMOUTH “Jews who refused to accept their message,” WILLIAMS “the unbelieving Jews [who rejected their message],” AMPLIFIED “Jews who would not believe,” GNB and “being stubborn Jews.” INTERLINEAR

The various versions certainly depict something that was done willingly: “refused . . . would not be . . . spurned . . . rejected . . . stubborn.” This reflects the meaning of the Greek word translated “unbelieving” – **avpeiqh,santej** . The root lexical meaning of the word is, “not to allow oneself to be persuaded to comply with,” THAYER “disobey; be an unbeliever,” UBS “not to allow oneself to be persuaded; not to comply with,” LOUW-NIDA and “to be disobedient, refuse compliance.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Below I have listed the way in which this word is translated in other texts.

- “Believeth not” (John 3:36).
- “Unbelieving” (Acts 14:2).
- “Believed not” (Acts 17:5; 19:9; Heb 3:18; 11:31).
- “Not obey” (Rom 2:8).
- “Disobedient” (Rom 10:21; 1 Pet 2:7,8; 3:20).
- “Not believe” (Rom 11:30a; 15:31).
- “Unbelief” (Rom 11:30b).
- “Obey not” (1 Pet 3:1; 4:17).

This action is equivalent to the statement made concerning the “unbelieving Jews” in Antioch. Concerning their reaction to the proclamation of the Word, Paul said to them, “seeing ye put it from you,” KJV “since you reject it,” NKJV “since you repudiate it,” NASB and “since you thrust it from you.” RSV Unbelief is, in fact, a repudiation of the Gospel message.

Unbelief is an aggressive reaction to the truth. It is not the response of mere confusion, or not understanding what is said. It is evidence of the hostility that exists between the carnal mind and the Lord. As it is written, “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom 8:6-8).

As if this was not enough, the Spirit says of the unbelieving: “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev 21:8). Notice the sins that are classified with being unbelieving, not overlooking their appointed destiny.

Note how Luke does NOT refer to these “unbelieving Jews.” He does not call them legalistic Jews, or Jews with a differing opinion, or Jews that did not understand. He traces their response to the condition of their hearts. They refused to believe, choosing to align themselves against God’s messengers.

“Unbelief” prohibited Jesus from doing “many mighty works” in His own country (Matt 13:58). It caused the disciples to be powerless in dealing with a demon (Matt 17:20). Jesus upbraided His own disciples when “unbelief” was found in them (Mk 16:14). Unbelief causes a person to “stagger” at the promises of God (Rom 4:20). Some Israelites were “broken off” of the natural olive tree of Israel “because of unbelief” (Rom 11:20). An unbelieving heart is called “an evil heart of unbelief”

(Heb 3:12). Faithless Israelites could not enter the promised land “because of unbelief” (Heb 3:19; 4:6). Unbelief causes men to fall (Heb 4:11).

Note how Luke does NOT refer to these “unbelieving Jews.” He does not call them legalistic Jews, or Jews with a differing opinion, or Jews that did not understand. He traces their response to the condition of their hearts. They refused to believe, choosing to align themselves against God’s messengers.

STIRRED UP THE GENTILES

“ . . . stirred up the Gentiles . . .” Other versions read, “excited,” MRD “aroused,” WILLIAMS and “stirred up the feelings.” PHILLIPS

These Jews agitated the Gentiles – apparently those who were attending that synagogue. As Solomon well said, “a wrathful man stirreth up strife,” (Prov 15:18), and “a froward man soweth strife” (Prov 16:28). And again, “He loveth transgression that loveth strife” (Prov 17:19). James associated strife with lying “against the truth” (James 3:16). Unable to complete their sordid ambitions themselves, these “unbelieving Jews” agitate the Gentiles, therefore promoting their own sectarian stance, and depicting Paul and Barnabas as heretics. This is one of Satan’s most productive ploys.

MADE THEIR MINDS EVIL AFFECTED

“ . . . and made their minds evil affected . . .” Other versions read, “poisoned their minds,” NKJV “embittered them,” NASB “made the minds . . . bitter,” BBE “incensed their minds,” DOUAY “corrupted the minds,” GENEVA “embittered them,” NAU “unquieted the minds,” TNT “made evil the souls,” YLT “saying all sorts of evil things,” LIVING “made them persecute,” IE and “exasperated the minds.” WILLIAMS

The men caused the Gentiles to look disapprovingly upon Paul and Barnabas, painting them as corruptors, the cause for dissension, and perpetrators of lies. They moved these Gentiles to view those with a message of reconciliation as trouble-makers and intruders into their seemingly tranquil environment.

AGAINST THE BRETHREN

“ . . . against the brethren.” Other versions read, “against the brothers,” NIV “against the believers,” GWN and “against Paul and Barnabas.” NLT

This is an arresting statement, affirming that the “unbelieving Jews” stirred up the Gentiles against “the brethren.” The Greek word here leaves no doubt, being **avdelfw/n**, which is properly rendered “brothers.” THAYER Versions that have rendered it “Paul and Barnabas” (NLT, LIVING) have imposed their understanding on the text. The reaction of this agitation confirms that the fermentation did not focus on Paul and Barnabas alone, else they would have been forced out of the area as they were in Antioch.

Here the term refers to the believers, or the ones who had joined with Paul and Barnabas – “a great multitude of Jews and Greeks.” Thus, a kind of persecution was leveled at this body of disciples, as they were all painted as troubling influences. There seemed to be a sense in the “unbelieving Jews” that there were three groups present: the Jews, the Gentiles, and those who had embraced the Gospel, becoming disciples of Christ. Paul identifies these three groups in his letter to the Corinthians. “Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God” (1 Cor 10:32). It is true that there is a sense in which those in Christ are, in fact, another class of people. That is why they are referred to as “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye

should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). The unbelieving Jews and Gentiles in Iconium recognized this distinction, and aligned themselves against the saints.

A LONG TIME THEY SPOKE BOLDLY IN THE LORD

“ 3a Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord . . . ”

The reaction of Paul and Barnabas to this situation confirms that the hostility was mostly talk, with no immediate persecution being leveled at them. What we have here is the enemy being held in check by the Lord. Like Corinth, there were no doubt “much people” in this area, and the Lord dictated that His two servants remain until they had been brought into the fold (Acts 18:10).

The mighty God of heaven has no difficulty subduing the enemies of His people. In fact, if He so desires, He can simply remove them – as He did Herod. There are, however, higher interests being served than the welfare of His servants. Therefore, He moves against the foe with Divine discretion, ensuring that His purposes are carried out to the fullest.

THEY REMAINED A LONG TIME

“ . . . Long time therefore abode they . . . ” Other versions read, “stayed there a long time,” NKJV “spent a long time there,” NASB “spent considerable time there,” NIV “remained for a long time,” NRSV “long time . . . tarried there,” ASV “kept there for a long time,” BBE “stayed there for some time,” CSB “stayed therefore a good while,” DARBY “stayed for a considerable period,” NAB and “they stayed in Iconium a long time.” IE

Notice how different this is from previous encounters with the Jews.

- After Stephen was martyred, an aggressive persecution scattered believers, forcing them out of Jerusalem (Acts 8:4).
- Paul was forced to leave Damascus because of Jewish opposition, being lowered over the wall in a basket (Acts 9:25).
- Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the coasts of Antioch by opposing Jews, whereupon they shook the dust of that place from their feet (Acts 13:50).

Here, however, although there was a fomentation of evil feelings against them, Paul and Barnabas stayed on for a considerable time in Iconium. It appears that the opposition was not aggressive as it was at Antioch – that is, no outward measures were taken to thrust them from the region. This was nothing less Divine restraint, for the Jews from Jerusalem to Antioch had demonstrated their willingness to go to any length to rid themselves of Gospel messengers.

God Can Subdue the Enemy

The mighty God of heaven has no difficulty subduing the enemies of His people. In fact, if He so desires, He can simply remove them – as He did Herod. There are, however, higher interests being served than the welfare of His servants. Therefore, He moves against the foe with Divine discretion, ensuring that His purposes are carried out to the fullest. If it is the appropriate time and place, He will fulfill the saying of Solomon: “When a man's ways please the LORD, He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov 16:7). That means precisely what it says: “makes!”

In this case, the enemies were held at bay, able to do nothing more than hold Paul and Barnabas in disdain, and agitate other people to think ill of them. However, for the time being, they could go no further than that. They could hate the messengers, but God would like allow them to touch them – just as He initially kept Satan from touching Job (Job 1:12).

The Reason for Them Lingerin

In Iconium, a large number of people had come to believe – “a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks” (14:1). The Lord would not leave this flock to be ravished by the hateful Jews in those quarters. He rather provided for their spiritual sustenance and stability, leaving Paul and Barnabas in their midst, for they were faithful laborers. Thus, it was with an interest for the flock that the shepherds were allowed to remain among them.

This was much like the situation that would take place in Corinth some time later. There Paul also faced opposition from the Jews (Acts 18:5-6). After Paul had said that he was going to turn to the Gentiles, Jesus later appeared to him in a vision and said, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10).

That is precisely the kind of situation we find in this text.

The Priority of the Sheep

Unlike the hireling who flees at the presence of danger (John 10:12-13), and after the manner of Jesus, true shepherds remain with the sheep – even though their stay may be attended by forms of hostility. All of this confirms the priority of the sheep themselves – the people of God. Those who abandon the flock of God in preference for self interests have only betrayed their condition. Such are not shepherds at all. Wherever the people of God are not properly fed, or where they become malnourished, a most serious circumstance exists. Solemnly Jesus told the apostle to whom, He gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven, “Feed My lambs . . . Feed My sheep . . . Feed My sheep” (Matt 16:19; John 21:15-17). That very apostle wrote to the shepherds of the people of God, “Feed the flock of God which is among you” (1 Pet 5:2). Paul told the elders of Ephesus, “feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28).

This is a word that needs to be declared in our time. Where the flock is not being fed, the godly must rise up and insist that it be done faithfully and effectively. If there is a refusal to do it, they need to leave that place and go where they can be nourished. I do not know how any person could successfully defend a refusal to do this – particularly since it is a matter concerning which the King has spoken.

SPEAKING BOLDLY IN THE LORD

“ . . . speaking boldly in the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “speaking boldly with reliance upon the Lord,” NASB “speaking boldly for the Lord,” NIV “taking heart in the Lord,” BBE “speaking boldly about the Lord,” CJB “speaking boldly, confiding in the Lord,” DARBY “dealing confidently in the Lord,” DOUAY “spoke openly concerning the Lord,” MRD “speaking out courageously for the Lord,” NET “preaching fearlessly in the Lord,” NJB “preaching boldly about the grace of the Lord,” NLT “quit themselves boldly, with the help of the Lord,” PNT “speaking boldly with the help of the Lord,” TNT “speaking freely and relying on the Lord,” WEYMOUTH “continued to speak with courage from the Lord,” WILLIAMS “speaking fearlessly in the Lord,” MONTGOMERY and “speaking freely and fearlessly and boldly in the Lord.” AMPLIFIED

The word “boldly” is translated from a word having the root meaning “to bear oneself boldly or confidently.” As used in this text, it means “to use freedom in speaking, be free-spoken; to speak freely,” THAYER “acting with an attitude of openness that comes from freedom and lack of fear,” FRIBERG “speak boldly or freely; have courage,” UBS “speak boldly or freely; have courage,” LOUW-NIDA and “speak freely, openly, fearlessly; express oneself freely.” GINGRICH

This is a word that perfectly comports with the nature of life in Christ Jesus. It involves speaking

with the confidence that is gendered by faith and hope, and a freedom that has resulted from a purged conscience. There is an openness because of the absence of the fear of man, and a frankness that is driven by a persuasion of the truth and the support of the heaven.

This is not the kind of thing that can be taught, or learned from books and study. It is not characterized by the kind of confidence that comes from merely being acquainted with the subject being addressed – although that condition surely exists. Notwithstanding, a thorough familiarity with the matter being expounded cannot remove the fear of man, or enable one to confidently wade into the raging sea of opposition.

This kind of boldness comes from being more persuaded of the help that comes from heaven than the resistance that comes from men. It flows out of the persuasion that “the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD” (Psa 117:2). It also springs forth from a hope that anchors the soul, assuring the individual of the ultimate triumph of the truth and the reward of the Lord.

Here Paul and Barnabas continued to stabilize the saints in the face of growing opposition, not fearing the opposition of their enemies. It was as though the battle was set in array, and they took up the weapons of their warfare, putting on whole armor of God, and taking the sword of the Spirit, leading and encouraging the saints. They labored while they were in the furnace, and continued in the face of hostility.

THE LORD GAVE TESTIMONY

“ 3b . . . which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.”

The word of salvation is essentially a message of Divine beneficence. It is not the declaration of a new law, or a new way of life, as ordinarily perceived. He has made a way where there was no way (Heb 10:20). He has provided for raising people up from death in trespasses and sins

Paul and Barnabas were called and separated to a special work by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2). Owing their faithfulness to their mission, and the good handling of the Word of God, the Lord gave undeniable testimony to the reality of what they said.

THE LORD GAVE TESTIMONY TO HIS WORD

“ . . . which gave testimony unto the word of His grace . . . ”

Gave Testimony

Other versions read, “was bearing witness,” NKJV “confirmed,” NIV “attested,” NJB “proved,” NLT “kept affirming,” ISV “continued to bear testimony,” AMPLIFIED and “made it plain. PHILLIPS

The idea is that God established before the hearers that the message being preached by Paul and Barnabas was the truth. They had faithfully represented what God had said, and He buttressed it with visible confirmation.

Although it refers immediately to the twelve apostles, Mark 16:20 – the last verse of that book – refers to the same kind of testimony: “And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.” Keep in mind that in this instance, Barnabas was not an apostle of Christ, yet God confirmed his word.

The Word of His Grace

The description of the message being preached is worthy of extended consideration – “the word of His grace.” Other versions read, “the message of His grace,” NIV “the message of His love and kindness,” CJB “the message about His good will,” GWN “all they said about His gift of grace,” NJB “about the grace of the Lord,” NLT “about how God forgives sin,” IE and “His gracious message.”
WILLIAMS

The word of salvation is essentially a message of Divine beneficence. It is not the declaration of a new law, or a new way of life, as ordinarily perceived. He has made a way where there was no way (Heb 10:20). He has provided for raising people up from death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1-2). He has, through His own power, and by His own Son, “put away sin” (Heb 9:26). Through Christ Jesus He has “destroyed” the devil (Heb 2:14), and blotted out “the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us” (Col 2:14). A reconciliation between the world and God has taken place, and it only has to be received (2 Cor 5:18-10).

While it is true that, for those who are in Christ Jesus, there is “grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16), the phrase “the word of His grace” concentrates on “the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). While Jesus is certainly present to help His people in their difficulties, that is not the focus of His grace. There are higher purposes that are also being served. A few statements from Scripture will confirm that this is the case.

- **SAVED THROUGH GRACE.** “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved , even as they” (Acts 15:11).

- **JUSTIFIED BY GRACE.** “Being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).

- **STANDING BY GRACE.** “By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand , and rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (Rom 5:2).

- **THE GIFT OF RIGHTEOUSNESS BY GRACE.** “But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace , which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many . . . they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness . . .” (Rom 5:15,17).

- **MADE RICH BEFORE GOD.** “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, (2 Cor 8:9).

- **MADE ACCEPTED.** “To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6).

- **THE AGES TO COME TO TESTIFY OF THE GREATNESS OF SALVATION BY GRACE.** “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God ” (Eph 2:7-8).

- **EVERLASTING CONSOLATION AND GOOD HOPE.** “Now our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace” (2 Thess 2:16).

- **THE RECEPTION OF FAITH AND LOVE.** “And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 1:14).

- **MADE HEIRS,** “That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life” (Titus 3:7).

“The word of His grace” is a message that pertains to the extrication of men from bondage to sin, giving them a new nature, and preparing them for glory. If men choose to depart from this emphasis, they will at once distort the grace of God, either seeing no fundamental need for it, or majoring on things that are not related to the display of grace in the ages to come.

SIGNS AND WONDERS GRANTED BY THEIR HANDS

“ . . . and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.” Other versions read, “miraculous signs and wonders,” NIV “signs and miracles,” CJB Perform miracles and do amazing things,” GWN “do great miracles,” LIVING and “signs and marvels.” WEYMOUTH

Even those given the gift of “working miracles” (1 Cor 12:10), could not do them at will. Miracles have always been wrought according to Divine discretion. There have even been long periods during which godly men existed, yet no miracles were done (Judges 6:13). There have also been mighty men of God who “did no miracle,” like John the baptist (John 10:41). There were also places that were so permeated with unbelief, that Jesus Himself “could do no mighty work” (Mk 6:5). It is said of Christ’s work in His own country, “And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Mat 13:58). Accenting the use of Divine discretion, it was written of one occasion during which the Son of God Himself was ministering, “and the power of the Lord was present to heal them” (Lk 5:17). Also, when the apostles were gathered together with the disciples for prayer – men through whom great miracles had been done (Acts 2:43) – they prayed that God would “grant that signs and wonders may be done by the name of Thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:30).

Similarly, in the text before us, the accent is placed on God’s will. He “granted signs and wonders to be done.” Other versions read, “enabling,” NIV “causing,” BBE “giving,” DARBY “having them perform,” GWN “He wrought by their hands,” MRD “allowing,” NJB “He helped them,” IE and “permitting,” WEYMOUTH

The word “granted” is translated from a word meaning, “of one’s own accord to give one something,” THAYER “of what is given by a person in superior position to one in subordinate position,” FRIBERG and “allow, permit, place, put.” UBS

No individual is free to go about the work of the Lord while adopting principles that conflict with those by which the Head of the church operates.

Owing to the nature of their message, together with the circumstances in which they found themselves, the Lord granted, or permitted, Paul and Barnabas to do “signs and wonders” – things that were outside the realm of natural laws. Keep in mind that Barnabas was not an apostle, and yet signs and wonders were granted to be done through his hands as well. By saying “by their hands,” it is suggested that the imposition of their hands was involved, although that may not have been true in every case. The point is that they did the works, and it was very evident they did them, else there would be no point to saying God was giving testimony to the word of grace which they were preaching.

The obvious lack of power in the church of our day may very well be directly related to the spurious message that it is too often delivered to the people. By spurious message, I mean a message that has not been determined and sent forth by God Himself – a message that does not have Christ in His redemptive role at the heart of the proclamation. When the church is more noted for its political stance, social involvements, philanthropic works, etc., what need is there for any Divine testimony concerning their word?

The Kingdom of God, Driven by the Will of God

In the Kingdom of God, His will forms the circumference within which God works. In this day of salvation, He is working through Jesus Christ, who is administering the Kingdom, and by the Holy Spirit. Everything that is being done by the Lord is within the boundaries of God’s will, which is “good, and acceptable, and perfect” (Rom 12:2). This is why no member of the body of Christ, regardless how gifted they are, or what position they occupy within the body, can function strictly in accord with their own will. Jesus Himself removed all question about this when He said, “I can of

Mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and My judgment is just; because I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me” (John 5:30).

This means than any Divinely empowered work is preceded by:

- The understanding that the work cannot proceed from the self-will of the individual: “I can of Mine own self do nothing.”
- There must be discerning hearing: “as I hear.”
- Judgment, or discretion, is involved: “I judge.”
- Judgment must be right, or righteous: “My judgment is just.”
- The individual must not be seeking his own will: “I seek not Mine own will.”
- It is the will of the Father that is to be sought “but of the Father.”
- The worker must have sent where He seeking to work by God: “the Father which hath sent Me.”

No individual is free to go about the work of the Lord while adopting principles that conflict with those by which the Head of the church operates. The Holy Spirit intercedes for us “according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26). Christ died to deliver us from this present evil world “according to the will of God” (Gal 1:4). Our adoption as children to God by Jesus is “according to the will of God” (Eph 1:5). All of this has been revealed, and therefore ought to be abundantly apparent.

Yet we live in a religious society in which the church itself often has difficulty with God’s will being primary, and to which all other things are unqualifiedly subject. This is precisely what has given rise to questions like: “Why do good things happen to bad people?” “Why do bad things happen to good people?” and “Why doesn’t God answer my prayers?” It is why people say they are angry with God. Even more importantly, it is why the Christian community is riven with divisions – doctrinal divisions, for it is what they teach that divides them. This is in glaring contradiction of the solemn summons: “be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). And again, “Fulfil ye my joy, that ye . . . of one mind” (Phil 2:2). And again, “Finally, be ye all of one mind . . .” (1 Pet 3:8).

In our text, Paul and Barnabas were of one mind, and spoke the same thing. Not only were they of one mind with one another, but with the Lord also, which brought Him into the scenario.

THE CITY WAS DIVIDED

“ 4 But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.”

Although the truth unites those who believe it, it divides those believing ones from those ho do not believe. It is wrong to engage in any effort that is calculated to avoid the divisive nature of the truth – like compromising the message, or neutralizing it with words that appeal to those with no heart for the truth.

Jesus once said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household” (Matt 10:34-36). Solemnly Jesus told His disciples, “For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law” (Luke 12:51-53).

The division was not an end of itself, but was the appointed means of distinguishing between “the children of the kingdom” and “the children of the wicked one” (Matt 13:38). Jesus said His sheep hear His voice, and refuse to follow a stranger (John 10:5).

During Christ’s ministry, when He “dwelt among us” (John 1:14), he often caused division among the people.

- “So there was a division among the people because of Him ” (John 7:43).
- “Therefore said some of the Pharisees, This man is not of God, because he keepeth not the sabbath day. Others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles? And there was a division among them ” (John 9:16).
- “There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings ” (John 10:19).

It should not surprise us, therefore, when those whom He sent into the world also caused division by the word that they preached.

THE MULTITUDE OF THE CITY WERE DIVIDED

“But the multitude of the city was divided . . .” Other versions read, “the people of the city were divided,” NIV “the residents of the city were divided,” NRSV “the population of the city was divided,” NET “the mass of the city’s people was divided,” MONTGOMERY and “But the great mass of the people of the city were divided in their opinions.” PHILLIPS

Iconium was the capital city of Lycaonia, a region that was approximately twenty miles from east to west, and about thirteen miles from north to south. The population of the region, and of the city of Iconium in particular, is not known – at least I can find no figures. However, I assume that, because of Iconium’s status as capital of the region, a considerable number of people must have dwelt there. When, therefore, we read “the multitude of the city” being divided, we are to understand that an impressive number of people were involved. Keep in mind that from within the city, a “multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.”

It is apparent that Paul and Barnabas had been diligent to fill the city with their doctrine, like the early disciples filled Jerusalem with the same teaching (Acts 5:28). Behold the power of the truth of the Gospel, that an entire city was noted for being divided over its acceptance. Paul and Barnabas had become so prominent in the region that they were the men over which the entire city was divided.

Place this along side of the reputation of the average group of professing Christians in our time. Remember, that the uniqueness of Paul and Barnabas was the message that they were preaching. It was not their political stance, or stand on social issues, or some other means of distinguishing one body of people from another.

PART HELD WITH THE JEWS

“ . . . and part held with the Jews . . .” Other versions read, “sided with the Jews,” NKJV “on the side of the Jews,” BBE “sided with the unbelieving Jews,” CJB “indeed held with the Jews,” DOUAY “were for the Jews,” GWN “supported the Jews,” NJB and “agreed with the Jewish leaders.” LIVING

This is a remarkable statement, indicating that the Jews had spread their venom throughout the city, and that Paul and Barnabas, together with those who were following them, had spread the word extensively also.

I doubt that holding with the Jews involved a direct repudiation of the Gospel. It rather appears to me that they joined the Jews in tagging Paul and Barnabas as trouble makers who had brought

dissension into the city. We know from other accounts that this was the kind of report the Jews raised against those who were preaching the Gospel (Acts 16:20; 17:6; 28:22).

PART WITH THE APOSTLES

“ . . . and part with the apostles.” Other versions read, “the emissaries,” CJB “Paul and Barnabas.” IE Every other version that I have (forty) read “the apostles.”

It is certain that the reference is to Paul and Barnabas – and yet Barnabas was not an apostle, as ordinarily perceived. He was not an “apostle” in the sense of being placed as such in the church, for he, along with Saul, had been separated by the Holy Spirit for a special work (Acts 13:2). At this point, they were the apostles of the Holy Spirit, being sent forth by Him. This is confirmed by a later reference to them, with Barnabas’ being named first, as he was when the Spirit called them: “the apostles Barnabas and Paul” (Acts 14:14). These are the only two references to anyone other than the “twelve apostles” and Paul being referred to by that title. This indicates that Paul and Barnabas were still on the mission to which the Holy Spirit had called them, and for which they had been separated.

As a passing note, there is a line of reasoning that says signs and wonders were given to validate the words of the apostles of Christ alone. This is based on a statement made in Hebrews 2:3-4: “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to His own will ?” That this is not intended to mean that was the exclusive experience of the apostles of Christ is apparent from the examples of Stephen (Acts 6:8), Philip (Acts 8:6), and the chapter we are now reviewing, in which the words of both Paul and Barnabas were accompanied with signs and wonders of confirmation. Further, this latter evidence extended over a period of time. “ Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands ” (Acts 14:3).

While this may appear a relatively minor point, it is significant to me because of how I had been taught in the schools, and by the leaders of the movement to which I belonged. There was a very deliberate and strong teaching that represented God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, working exclusively through the apostles directly commissioned by Christ. This included a position concerning being baptized with the Holy Spirit, which experience was said to have been only for the apostles. Yet, in the tenth chapter of Acts, we have the testimony of Peter himself that this is what occurred at the house of Cornelius, causing him to recall what Jesus had said on the matter (Acts 11:16-17).

This erroneous view constrained some to say that God no longer worked in a miraculous manner – that this was something intended only for the beginning of the church. This was based on the words “at the first” in Hebrews 2:3. However, that text does not say only at the first ! Much of the teaching to which I refer was intended to confirm that those who emphasize miracles and being baptized in the Holy Spirit were wrong. That this emphasis is wrong cannot be denied. However, opposing arguments should be characterized by integrity and sound reasoning.

If it appears as though I have strong feelings on this matter, it is because that is precisely the case. I am offended that such an erroneous teaching penetrated so deeply into my reasoning.

My experience has confirmed to my spirit the absolute wrongness of a denominational approach to the truth, where official positions are developed and perpetrated just as though they were given by God. I am glad to maintain a hearty grasp of the truth, regardless of the messenger who brings it to me. I am also glad to abandon erroneous teaching with zeal, regardless of the individual who perpetrates that teaching. I find that many souls have had the same experience as myself, though it did not come in precisely the same form.

AN ASSAULT WAS MADE BY THE GENTILES, JEWS, AND RULERS

“ 5 And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them . . . ”

What is now described takes place after Paul and Barnabas had “spent a considerable time” NIV in Iconium. During that time they were “speaking boldly” of the grace of God, with the Lord confirming their words by granting “signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (4:3). We assume that the time was measured in terms of days, as opposed to “a whole year” Barnabas and Saul spent in Antioch (Acts 11:26), the “year and six months” Paul spent in Corinth (Acts 18:11), and two-to-three years he spent in Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 20:31). Our text suggests a somewhat shorter stay.

AN ASSAULT WAS MADE

“And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers . . .” Other versions read, “a violent attempt,” NKJV “an attempt was made,” NASB “there was a plot afoot,” NIV “there was made an onset,” ASV “made a move,” CJB “planned to attack,” NAB “decided to attack,” NLT “there was a purpose,” YLT “a plot to incite a mob,” LIVING “tried to hurt,” IE “a hostile movement was made,” WEYMOUTH “there was a movement,” WILLIAMS and “a hostile movement arose.” PHILLIPS

The hostility and aggressiveness of the enemies of God bears the characteristics of the devil himself, who motivates them. He is set to “make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17). He moves people to develop stratagem against the people of God.

After sufficient time was spent stabilizing the saints and filling the area with the knowledge of the Gospel, opposition against Paul and Barnabas became more formal and aggressive. A planned attack was developed that involved both the Gentiles and the Jews “with their rulers.” This was precisely the same thing that took place years before, and miles away, in the city of Jerusalem. That time it was against the Lord’s Christ Himself: “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together” (Acts 4:27). Now. The people from another area have the same response to the Christ’s messengers as men did to Him. That is because “as He is,” so were they “in the world” (1 John 4:17).

The hostility and aggressiveness of the enemies of God bears the characteristics of the devil himself, who motivates them. He is set to “make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17). He moves people to develop stratagem against the people of God. David expressed such opposition in the thirty-eighth Psalm: “They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long” (Psa 38:12). And again he wrote, “The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah” (Psa 140:5).

TO USE THEM DESPITEFULLY

“ . . . to use them despitefully.” Other versions read, “to abuse,” NKJV “to mistreat,” NASB “to maltreat,” NIV “to molest,” RSV “to treat them shamefully,” ASV “to make an attack on them,” BBE “to assault,” CSB “to use them contumeliously,” DOUAY “to do them violence,” GENEVA “to insult them,” MRD “to do them violence,” PNT “to put them to shame,” TNT “to use them despitefully,” YLT and “molest [Paul and Barnabas].” AMPLIFIED

This type of treatment covered everything from speaking against Paul and Barnabas,

misrepresenting them, withdrawing social privileges from them, and even beating and abusing them. The word suggests that these reproaches were planned, and specific strategies developed to carry them out.

The word “despitefully” is translated from a word meaning, “to be insolent; to behave insolently, wantonly, outrageously . . . to act insolently and shamefully toward one (so even Homer), to treat shamefully . . . of one who injures another by speaking evil of him,” THAYER “act to invade the sphere of another to his hurt,” FRIBERG “treat disgracefully, insult, mistreat,” UBS “to be abused, to be insulted, to suffer outrages,” LEH “treat in an arrogant or spiteful manner, mistreat, scoff at, insult.” GINGRICH

This type of treatment covered everything from speaking against Paul and Barnabas, misrepresenting them, withdrawing social privileges from them, and even beating and abusing them. The word suggests that these reproaches were planned, and specific strategies developed to carry them out. Like Pilate and Herod joined to conspired against Jesus (Lk 23:12) , so the Gentiles and the Jews joined in an aggressive opposition to Paul and Silas.

AND TO STONE THEM

“ . . . and to stone them . . . ”

The ultimate aim of these enemies was not merely to make life miserable for Paul and Barnabas, but to take their lives from them – “to stone them.”

Stoning was a form of capital punishment ordained under the Law of Moses. Those so punished included the following.

- Idolaters (Lev 20:2; Deut 17:2).
- Those who enticed others to idolatry (Deut 13:6).
- Blasphemers (Lev 24:10; 1 Kgs 21:10).
- Those who broke the Sabbath (Num 15:32).
- Fortune tellers and soothsayers (Lev 20:27).
- False prophets (Deut 13:6).
- Those who had shared in anything that had been cursed (Josh 7:25).
- Disobedient sons (Deut 21:18).
- A bride who was not a virgin (Deut 22:20-21).
- A man who seduced a bride-to-be (Deut 22:23).

Other nations also employed this method of capital punishment, including the Greeks, Spaniards, and Persians. During the Middle Ages, Germany practices stoning. McCLINTOK & STRONG’S With the Jews, this was the ordinary mode of execution (Ex 19:13; Lev 20:27; Josh 7:25; Lk 20:6; Acts 7:58; 14:5).

All of this confirms that the unbelieving Jews rallied the Gentiles together with them to do away with Paul and Barnabas. They did this because they were unable to negate what they were saying, or neutralize their influence in the city.

HATED BY THE WORLD

This is a classic example of the hatred the world has for the people of God – especially for those who declare the word of the Lord. There is a very real hostility of unbelievers against believers, and

only the Lord can subdue the outbreak of it. It is totally unreasonable, because believers are not seeking to do harm, or destroy, any other people. Yet, the unregenerate are threatened by the presence of the godly, and therefore seek to rid themselves of their influence.

God's people must not be ignorant of this hatred, or set out to reduce it by a compromising stance. Both Jesus and the apostles spoke of this hatred, telling the people it ought not cause them to marvel.

- “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved” (Mat 10:22).

- “Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake” (Luke 6:22).

- “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

- “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17:14).

- “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13).

This hatred will be proportionate to one's witness to the truth, and is owing to the hostility of the carnal mind against God Himself (Rom 8:7). Conversely, it is the result of being a friend of this present evil world (James 4:4).

WHEN THEY WERE AWARE OF IT

“ 6 They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about . . .”

Here we will behold how the Lord directs His people, and some of the involvements of one's steps being ordered of the Lord.

WHEN THEY WERE AWARE OF IT

“They were ware of it . . .” Other versions reads, “became aware of it,” NKJV “found out about it,” NIV “the apostles learned of it,” NRSV “got news of it,” BBE “understanding it,” DOUAY “knew it,” MRD “realized it,” NAB “apprised of it,” WEB “having become aware,” YLT “got wind of it,” MONTGOMERY “aware of the situation,” AMPLIFIED and “they got to know about it.” PHILLIPS

You may be sure that the enemies of Paul and Barnabas did not intend for them to know of their plotting, and their intention to put them to death. Notwithstanding, the Lord is “Head over all things to the church” (Eph 1:22), and manages the affairs of His people, working all things together for their good – both immediate and ultimate (Rom 8:28).

Speaking of the unveiling of evil intentions Solomon wrote, “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” (Eccl 10:20). That is, God will make known intentions as it is appropriate to His working. In this case, the news got to Paul and Barnabas that the Gentiles and Jews were involved in an aggressive conspiracy against them.

We have records of other plots that were made known to the people of God.

- “And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him” (Acts 9:23-24).

- “But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was

preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still” (Acts 17:13-14).

One of the jeopardies of the age in which we live is the staggering number of distractions that confront us. There are whole generations that live their lives in complete isolation from reality, spending all of their time indulging in various forms of entertainment and self-indulgence. If some great catastrophe was about to happen, they would never know it, for they have retreated into their own private world of fantasy and delusion.

“And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul . . . And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee” (Acts 23:12-18).

SAFETY OFTEN DEPENDS ON ALERTNESS

God’s people cannot afford to wander through life in a kind of spiritual stupor, unaware of what is happening around them. There are dangers and snares to be avoided, and we must be alert to them. We are therefore admonished, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Believers are also exhorted, “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thess 5:6). And again, “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:13).

One of the jeopardies of the age in which we live is the staggering number of distractions that confront us. There are whole generations that live their lives in complete isolation from reality, spending all of their time indulging in various forms of entertainment and self-indulgence. If some great catastrophe was about to happen, they would never know it, for they have retreated into their own private world of fantasy and delusion. This has also crept into the church. There is now a form of purported worship in which a person actually becomes insensitive to the realities of spiritual progress and warfare. In this religious delusion, the moment is everything, and eternity is nothing.

Unbeknown to the perpetrators of this spurious approach to religion, a certain naivete is being developed that makes the soul spiritually simple. People subjected to this kind of teaching begin to imagine that they live in a moral and spiritual vacuum, and thus become disarmed and vulnerable to the devices of the wicked one. They approach life in an overly-simplistic manner that diminishes the need for faith, and gives the advantage to the adversary.

There is a sense in which a person is not safe beyond the level of their own awareness. Had Paul and Barnabas been simplistic in their approach to life, they would probably never have known about the plots of their enemies. Enamored with what appeared to be institutional success, they would have fallen into the nets that were spread for them. However, praise the Lord, this was not their manner, and thus they were delivered from the plots that were against them.

THEY FLED

“ . . . and fled . . .” Other versions read, “went in flight,” BBE “escaped,” CJB “departed and fled,” MRD “went off for safety,” NJB and “left that town.” LIVING

The word “fled” is translated from the Greek word **katefugon** , which has the following lexical meaning: “flee away, flee for refuge,” THAYER and “to flee for safety,” LOUW-NIDA

We must not view this flight as a mere attempt to save their lives. It was rather an effort to further preach the Gospel, carrying out the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them.

We must not view this flight as a mere attempt to save their lives. It was rather an effort to further preach the Gospel, carrying out the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them. We know that it was not Paul's manner to count his life dear unto himself (Acts 20:24). It was his mission that compelled him, not longevity in this world. Of course, one of the requisites for serving the Lord is hating one's own life in this world (Lk 14:26). John saw a vision of those who "loved not their lives unto death" (Rev 12:11).

The Words and Example of Jesus

I do not doubt that they were aware of the words Jesus Himself delivered to His disciples where He first sent them out. "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another : for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord" (Mat 10:22-24). Confirming that the disciple is to conduct himself as his Master, Jesus departed from regions in which enemies sought to take His life. "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for He would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill Him" (John 7:1). Again it is written, "Therefore they sought again to take Him: but He escaped out of their hand, and went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there He abode" (John 10:40). And again, "Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put Him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with His disciples" (John 11:53-54).

However, when the time came for Christ's death, a time that had been appointed by God Himself, Jesus returned to Jerusalem, the citadel of Jewry (Matt 21). Commencing with the triumphal entry, Jesus was again in the presence of His enemies, and would remain there until His betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion. He did this because this was His enemies "hour" (Lk 22:53).

Until this time, two things took place.

- First, working through the circumstances, His enemies were frustrated in their attempts to take Him, because His hour had not yet come. It is written: "Then they sought to take him: but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come" (John 7:30). And again, "These words spake Jesus in the treasury, as he taught in the temple: and no man laid hands on him; for his hour was not yet come" (John 8:20).

- Second, because Jesus refused to "tempt" the Lord, He did not walk unwisely, putting Himself in circumstances that would provoke the enemy to be aggressive before the appointed time. He therefore withdrew when it was appropriate. This also displayed the Divine manner of not remaining where there is not a hunger and thirst for the Living God.

This same manner of thinking is seen in the conduct of Paul and Barnabas.

The Higher View

Viewed from the higher vantage point, the work of Paul and Barnabas in Iconium, at least for the time, had come to a close. That is the only reason their opponents were successful in marshaling the people against them. It is written in the Psalms, "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Psa 76:10). The idea is that God controls the wrath of men so that it cannot break out of its appointed bounds. The Lord uses the wrath of men to accomplish His own purposes – as in the cases of Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar. But when that wrath interferes with Divine objectives, it is subdued and controlled from heaven, so that the purposes of men cannot be

carried out as they desire.

For example, when the Jewish leaders opposed Christ, they were powerless to carry out their designs until the time appointed for Christ's death had arrived. Even then, they could not proceed one millimeter past the Divine appointment, but only fulfilled what was purposed in heaven (Acts 2:23; 4:26). The rest of their wrath was restrained. That is how the Lord works. It is why it is written, "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to Him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (1 Pet 4:19).

There are circumstances from which we must flee, or run. Lot escaped from Sodom (Gen 19:17-23). Jacob fled from Esau (Gen 35:7). Joseph had to flee from Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:7). David fled from Saul (Psa 57:1). Although he did not fear the wrath of the king, Moses wisely fled from Pharaoh (Ex 2:15; Heb 11:27). Joseph, Mary, and the Holy Child were forced to flee to Egypt (Matt 2:13). Jesus told His disciples when they were persecuted in one city, to flee to another (Matt 10:23). Saul was forced to leave Damascus (Acts 9:26). Paul and Barnabas were expelled the th coasts around Antioch (Acts 13:50). Certain Jesus, including Aquila and Priscilla, were forced to leave Rome (Acts 18:2).

There are times when the appropriate action is to flee, removing oneself from the area of harm. Blessed is that person who is able to recognize such times and take the appropriate action.

LYSTRA, DERBE, AND CITIES OF LYCAONIA

" . . . unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about . . ."

Lystra and Derbe were not as far from Iconium as Iconium was from Antioch. In fact, Lystra was only 5-8 miles from Iconium, while Iconium was about 75 miles from Antioch. From this we see that the hostility against Paul and Barnabas that was raised in Iconium did not spread far at the first. There were some sheaves of spiritual wheat to be reaped in that area, therefore Paul and Barnabas remained in the general territory.

This area, according to historians, was a physically dry and arid domain, without refreshing streams, and subject to cooler temperatures. But it was also a spiritually arid realm that required the refreshing rain of the Gospel. Undaunted by the opposition they had faced in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas continue in their preaching ministry. They had "the spirit of faith," and therefore speak. As it is written, "we also believe, and therefore speak" (2 Cor 4:13; Psa 116:10).

THERE THEY PREACHED THE GOSPEL

" 7 And there they preached the gospel." Other versions read, "they were preaching the Gospel," NKJV "they .continued to preach the Gospel," NASB "they continued to preach the good news," NIV "they continued proclaiming the good news," NRSV "went on preaching the good news there," BBE "they kept evangelizing," CSB "they were announcing the glad tidings," DARBY "Spread the good news there," GWN "told the Good News there," IE and "kept telling the good news." WILLIAMS

The word "preaching" is translated from the Greek word **euvaggelizo,menoi** , which means "to bring good news, to announce glad tidings." THAYER The tense of the verb indicates extensive and continual activity. Their message was news , as compared with procedures and methodologies. It was an announcement , as compared with a recommendation. It was something that was told , as compared with a response to various inquiries concerning life in this world. It was a proclamation , as compared to a formula. Paul and Barnabas did not come as problem-solvers, or consultants, or counselors. They came as proclaimers – those who had a message to affirm that was fundamentally good. They did not come to start a work for the needy. Their mission was not to get the children off the streets, or fight against social injustices. It is not that such things are wrong of themselves. Rather, they are not what

Jesus came to do, and they are not what was addressed in His atoning death and justifying resurrection. The Gospel is a message that will, if believed and obeyed, move men to be considerate and charitable among their peers. However, the issue in the message of the Gospel is the relation of men with God .

In our current Christian environment, the meaning of the word “Gospel” is scarcely known. Some imagine that it is the Scriptures themselves, so if a person preaches from the Bible, whether from Moses, Solomon, or other text, “the Gospel” is considered to have been preached. Others believe that the Gospel is the details of what is required for a person to be saved. Still others have heard the definition that was common among those with whom I companied. It was said, “The Gospel consists of facts to be believed, commands to be obeyed, and promised to be received.” All of those points are certainly true, but they emphatically do not comprise the Gospel.

In this day of salvation, it is the message itself that moves men to inquire about salvation, and to pursue those who have an understanding of it. The Holy Spirit uses the message to penetrate the hearts of men, exposing their thoughts and intents. It is the message through which the “door of faith” is opened (Acts 14:27), as well as “the door of hope” (Hos 2:15).

Although it is a bit cumbersome, it will be helpful to note what is said to have actually been preached to this point in the book of Acts. I provide this information in order that it can be compared with the ordinary concept of preaching. Keep in mind that this preaching produced the results recorded in this record. It was all centered outside of man himself, focusing on what the Lord had done and will do. Let it be clear that a man-centered gospel is “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). By “man-centered gospel,” I mean a message that makes humanity the heart of the matter. In such a case, the well being of men in this world is set forth as the fundamental advantage.

PETER

- The fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel (2:16-21; Joel 2:28-32).
- Jesus was a Man publically approved by God (2:22).
- Jesus was delivered up by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God (2:23a).
- The Jews crucified Jesus through wicked hands, but God nullified their judgment (2:23b).
- God raised Jesus from the dead, loosing Him from the pains of death (2:24a).
- It was not possible for Jesus to be held by death (2:24b).

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3The prophecy of David was fulfilled in Christ’s resurrection (2:25-31; Psa 16:8-11).

- God raised Jesus from the dead (2:32).
- Jesus shed forth the Holy Spirit (2:33).
- Jesus has fulfilled the prophecy of David concerning being seated at the right hand of God (2:33-35; Psa 110:1).
- God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ (2:36).
- The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob glorified His Son Jesus (3:13a).

- The Jews delivered up Jesus, denying Him when Pilate was determined to let Him go – yet God raised Him up (3:13-15).
- Faith in Jesus' name gave perfect soundness to a man who was lame from his mother's womb (3:16).
- In Jesus God fulfilled what He had foretold in the prophets (3:18).
- Sins can be blotted out, and times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord (3:19).
- God will send Jesus, whom the heavens will retain until all the words of the prophets have been fulfilled (3:20-21).
- In Jesus, God has fulfilled the prophecy of Moses concerning a coming prophet (3:22; Deut 18:15-18).
- Whoever does not hear Jesus will be destroyed from among the people (3:23; Deut 18:19).
- All the prophets from Samuel foretold the times of Christ (3:24).
- According to His promise to Abraham, God raised up Jesus and sent Him to bless the people in turning them away from their iniquities (3:25-26).
- Jesus is the Stone whom the builders rejected, yet God made Him the Head of the corner (4:11; Psa 118:22-23; Isa 28:16y).
- There is salvation in none other but Jesus (4:12).
- God raised up the Jesus the Jews hanged on a tree (5:30).
- God exalted Jesus to give repentance and the forgiveness of sins (5:31).
- In the Temple and from house to house, they preached Jesus Christ (5:42).
- Peter and John "preached the word of the Lord" to the Samaritans (8:25).
- God accepts those in every nation who fear Him and work righteousness (10:35).
- God sent the message of preaching peace by Jesus Christ (10:36a).
- Jesus is "Lord of all" (10:36b).
- God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power (10:38a).
- Jesus went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (10:38b).
- The Jews slew Jesus and hanged Him on a tree, but God raised Him from the dead (10:39-40a).
- Following His resurrection, God showed Jesus openly, but only to selected witnesses (10:40b-41).
- Jesus commanded His disciples to preach and to testify that He had been ordained by God to judge the living and the dead (10:42).
- The prophets gave witness that whoever believed in Jesus would receive remission of sins (10:43).

STEPHEN

- The God of glory appeared to Abraham, giving Him the promise or future blessing (6:2-8).
- The patriarchs sold Joseph into Egypt, but God was with him, giving him favor in

the eyes of Pharaoh, and raising him to prominence in the land, thereby providing for Israel's sustenance and development (6:9-16).

- When the time of the promise or Israel's deliverance drew nigh, the people began to grow and multiply, and were finally delivered from Egypt through the hand of Moses, who himself was raised in Egypt, and God sustained them in the wilderness for forty years (6:17-36).

- God promised Moses He would raise up a Prophet (6:37).

- God tolerated Israel's wayward ways in the wilderness, confirming they were fundamentally hard hearted (6:38-44).

- When Israel came into Canaan, God drove out the Gentiles before them, giving them the land (6:45).

- Solomon built a Temple for the Lord, even though it was not intended to be the permanent habitation of God (6:46-50).

- Israel continued to be stiff-necked, rejecting God's Savior (6:51-53).

THOSE SCATTERED BY PERSECUTION

- They went "everywhere, preaching the word" (8:4; 11:19).

- Preached the Lord Jesus (11:20).

PHILIP

- Philip "preached Christ" in the city of Samaria (8:5).

- Preached the things concerning the kingdom of God (8:12).

- Preached Jesus to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:35).

PAUL

- Preached that Christ was the Son of God (9:20).

- Proved that Jesus was "very Christ" (9:22).

- Paul, with Barnabas, preached the word of God (13:5).

- God chose Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, exalted the people who came from them, and delivered them from Egypt (13:17).

- God endured the wayward manner of the Israelites in the wilderness (13:18).

- God destroyed seven nations who occupied Canaan, and gave their land to Israel (13:19).

- God gave Israel Judges, King Saul, and King David 13:20-22).

- God raised up Jesus as David's promised Seed (13:23; 2 Sam 7:12-16).

- John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by preaching the baptism of repentance (13:24-25).

- Through Jesus, the word of salvation was sent to Israel (13:26).

- Even though the Scriptures were read every day in their synagogues, Israel rejected Jesus, fulfilling what was written of Him by hanging Him on a tree, and placing Him in a sepulcher (13:27-29).

- God raised Jesus from the dead, and He was seen by witnesses for many days, confirming He was alive (13:30-31).

- Declared glad tidings that the promise God made to the fathers was fulfilled in Jesus, guaranteeing that the sure mercies of David could be experienced (13:32-37).
- Through Jesus is preached the forgiveness of sins (13:38).
- By Jesus, all who believe on Him are justified from all things (13:39).
- It was necessary that the word of salvation first be preached to the Jews (13:46a).
- They turned to the Gentiles, because God commanded that the light of the Gospel be shined upon them (13:46b-47).
- The word of the Lord was published throughout the region of Antioch (14:49).
- Preached the word of God's grace in Iconium, with the Lord testifying to its truth by granting signs and wonders to be done through Paul and Barnabas (14:3).

BARNABAS

- Exhorted believers to cleave to the Lord with purpose of heart (11:23).

You will search in vain for a message that centered in the personal, domestic, social, or political problems of humanity. What God had done was consistently the heart of what was proclaimed.

AN EXCELLENT REPRESENTATION

The instances of preaching that have been reported thus far are an excellent representation. A variety of places, regions, and people, have been placed before us.

- **CITIES.** Jerusalem (5:28), Samaria (8:5), Damascus (9:27), Lydda (9:32), Caesarea (10:24), Joppa (9:42), Salamis (13:5), Paphos (13:6), Antioch (13:14), Iconium (14:1), Lystra (14:6), Derbe (14:6).
- **LOCATIONS.** Judaea, Samaria, and Galilee (9:31), cities (8:46), a desert (8:26; 14:6), Saron (9:35), Cyprus (13:4), Pisidia (13:14), Lycaonia (14:6).
- **PLACES.** The Temple (2:46; 5:20), synagogues (6:9; 9:20; 13:5; 14:1), houses (5:42; 10:22), a chariot (8:29-31), a deputies residence (13:7).
- **GROUPS OF PEOPLE.** Jews and Greeks (14:1), Gentiles (10:45; 13:42), Samaritans.

THINGS TO BE CONSIDERED

A careful perusal of these records will confirm the total absence of specialized ministries, social involvements, domestic solutions, and similar things, that are so common in our time. There is no involvement in the personal affairs or problems of the people. Aside from a daily ministration to believing widows (6:1), and the determination to send relief to the poor saints in Jerusalem (11:29), there is no strictly philanthropic work reported. It is certainly not that such activities are unlawful, nor do I suggest they were totally absent. However, they were not the focus of the spread of the Gospel. They were not set forth as a means of getting the people's attention, or breaking through to them. It is the priority and promotion of such activities that is questionable, not their existence. In other words, in our time, the preaching of the Gospel has actually been upstaged by activities that require no spiritual understanding or proclamation of "the glorious gospel of the blessed God" (1 Tim 1:11).

Furthermore, it ought to be abundantly evident that those who preached did not deliver a message that was conducive to exploitation. No one could build a career or institution on what was preached. No one promoted themselves, or even the body of believers they represented. It was spiritually unique, but did not have the traits required to promote purely fleshly interests. It is quite possible to

read this book, and yet miss all of this because of the acceptance of sectarian views – views that throw a veil over the heart.

CONCLUSION

The spread of the Gospel during the first half of the first century is remarkable – particularly when compared with the efforts of the twentieth century church. Assuming that the brethren from other nations who were converted on the day of Pentecost eventually returned to their native lands, and taking into consideration the scattering of believers during the persecution that arose because of Stephen, together with the ministry of the apostles and other prophets and evangelists, the Gospel was declared in a geographical area approximately 2,200 miles east to west, and 950 miles north to south.

All of this was done without the technologies and modes of travel that are available to the church today. There was obviously something about that early church that differed vastly from the highly structured religious organizations of our day. Here are several considerations that I have pondered concerning that difference.

- The people had been genuinely converted, and possessed new hearts and spirits.
- The believers were united, being joined together with the same mind and the same judgment.
- Their lives were less cumbered with the affairs of this world.
- To the point of our text, professional religious people, while dominant in Judaism, had not yet come into the church.
- There was a greater familiarity with the Scriptures.
- A pure Gospel was preached that was not tainted with the traditions of men.
- Those who preached the Word were sensitive to the Lord, and could be directed by Him.
- The preachers and teachers were not driven by a desire to correct society, but were rather motivated by the greatness of the message they had received.
- They were convinced of what men were by nature, and what they could be by the grace of God.
- There was a greater awareness of what took place when Jesus took away the sins of the world.
- They were persuaded that God was with them.
- They had a prevailing confidence and assurance of the presence and power of the Lord.
- They were not seeking a position in the church, but were keenly aware of the one that had been assigned to them.
- They were not seeking to be popular with men.
- They did not count their own lives dear to themselves, but willingly denied self.

There are other things to be considered, but this will suffice to confirm that something of staggering proportions has taken place within the church since the time of our text. Its lack of power and commitment stares us in the face, and cannot be denied. The professing church has grown accustomed to vacillating and uncommitted church members, mediocre preaching, Scriptural illiteracy, and unanswered prayers. It now leans heavily upon the wisdom of men, and takes pleasure in the approval and accolades of those who give no evidence of identity with God through Christ. Jesus has now been

upstaged by everything from scholarship to those who create the kind of programs and methodologies that please men.

What we are seeing in the book of Acts is the display of very real spiritual life. This is the kind of life that is produced when the Father and the Son take up Their abode in those who love Jesus and keep His words (John 14:21,23). There is no reason to imagine that the principles of spiritual life have changed, or that God now operates according to differing principles. This is life as it really is.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #62

EXPERIENCES IN LYSTRA

“ 14:8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: 9 The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, 10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked. 11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker. 13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. 14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: 16 Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 17 Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them. 19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. 20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” (Acts 14:8-20)

INTRODUCTION

Continuing in the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, Paul and Barnabas remain in the area of Asia Minor (southern part of modern Turkey), filling the area with the Word of God. We are being exposed to the faithfulness of those who are characterized by their “work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope” (1 Thess 1:5), with their “work of faith” being fulfilled “with power” (2 Thess 1: 1 1). Their efforts were not the result of human strategies or plans. They were rather the

direct result of a Divine calling, and the participation of the brethren in Antioch in that calling.

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- **THE IMPOTENT MAN AT LYSTRA (14:8-10)**
- **A SOCIETY THAT WAS AWARE OF DEITY (14:11)**
- **MISCONCEPTIONS OF BARNABAS AND PAUL (14:12)**
- **THE ATTEMPT TO WORSHIP PAUL AND BARNABAS, AND THEIR RESPONSE (14:13-15)**
- **DIVINE ALLOWANCES IN TIMES PAST (14:16)**
- **GOD DID NOT LEAVE HIMSELF WITHOUT WITNESS (14:17-18)**
- **JEWS FROM ANTIOCH AND ICONIUM PURSUE AND STONE PAUL (14:19)**
- **THE DISCIPLES GATHER AROUND PAUL, AND HE ROSE UP (14:20)**
- **CONCLUSION**

IMPORTANT THINGS TO NOTE

The record of the initiation of this work is important to note, for it provides us with a perspective of the manner in which the work of the Lord is carried out.

- The calling took place in a church where “certain prophets and teachers” were present (13:1).
- The calling was made known while the church “ministered to the Lord, and fasted” (13:2a).
- The calling, issued by the Holy Spirit, was specific, calling for the separation of Barnabas and Saul for the work unto which He had called them (13:2b).
- The church sent them forth to the work after they had fasted and prayed, laying their hands on them (13:3).

From this we learn several valuable lessons.

A SPIRITUAL ENVIRONMENT

The work of the Lord is done within a spiritually cultured environment, where some level of spiritual maturity exists, and insightful leaders are present. This is a surrounding in which there is an acute consciousness of God, as well as unquestioned commitment to Him. This is an environment in which the Lord can make Himself and His will known.

THE NECESSITY OF FAITHFULNESS

From the outset of the call of the Spirit, Paul and Barnabas proved themselves to be faithful ministers.

- Upon being called and set apart by the brethren in Antioch, they departed to the island of Cyprus (13:4).

Those who go about the ministry of the Word with a mind to please the people, or to build an institution, have been recalcitrant in their stewardship. They have failed to meet the requirement of a steward, which is absolute faithfulness to the Master who gave them their stewardship.

When they arrived on the island, they immediately began preaching the Gospel (13:5).

- They went throughout the island preaching the Word (13:6).
- Upon being called by the deputy of the island to hear the Word of God. They faithfully delivered it, even shutting down a certain sorcerer who sought turn away the deputy from the faith (13:12).
- Departing from Perga, Paul and Barnabas went to Antioch of Pisida, where they powerfully preached the Word (13:14-41).
- When certain Gentiles asked to hear more of the Word, these servants faithfully delivered it to them, exhorting them to continue in the grace of God. The word of God was published throughout the entire region (13:42-49).
- After being expelled from that region, Paul and Barnabas headed for Iconium, leaving the disciples in Antioch filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (13:50-52).
- Arriving in Iconium, they faithfully preached the word again. They remained in Iconium for a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord (14:1-3).
- When they were finally forced to leave the area, they went to Lystra, where they faithfully continued to minister the Word (14:4-7).

The Divine Requirement

Stewards are required to be faithful – and there are no exceptions. “Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2). Other versions read, “found trustworthy,” NASB “prove faithful,” NRSV “does just what his Master tells him to do,” LIVING “fidelity is what it required,” WEYMOUTH and “faithful [proving himself worthy of trust].” AMPLIFIED If the Lord grants insight to the steward, he must proclaim it. If he is commanded to feed the sheep, he must feed them. If he is required to preach the word instant in season and out of season, that is precisely what he must do.

In one of His parables, Jesus spoke of an unfaithful steward as someone who could “be no longer steward.” The knowledge of this inevitability moved the steward to take special measures to secure his position (Lk 16:2-8). In the end, unfaithful, slothful, and unprofitable servants will thrust from the presence of the Lord. The action is described in words that shake the lethargic soul. “And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 25:30). “But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; And shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; The lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mat 24:48-51). Unfaithful stewards are referred to as “wicked and slothful servants” (Matt 25:26).

Those who go about the ministry of the Word with a mind to please the people, or to build an institution, have been recalcitrant in their stewardship. They have failed to meet the requirement of a steward, which is absolute faithfulness to the Master who gave them their stewardship. That is not an excusable situation.

Paul and Barnabas are examples of faithful stewards – fulfilling their ministry in the face of opposition, always mindful of the One who commissioned them, and of the care of His people.

The point is that faithfulness is confirmed in the crucible of experience, whether favorable or unfavorable, pleasant or unpleasant. Men are not called to labor for the Lord in a kind of vacuum, where they are insulated from trouble and difficulty.

TOKENS OF APPROVAL

The faithfulness of a steward is demonstrable – i.e., it is seen in his response to the various circumstances confronted in his ministry. Paul cited several of these circumstances, showing that he had remained a faithful and approved steward through them. He referred to this as “approving ourselves as the ministers of God” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

- In much patience (endurance).
- During afflictions, or tribulations.
- In necessities, or times of need.
- In distresses, or calamities.
- When beaten with stripes.
- When imprisoned.
- During tumults, or commotion.
- In labors, or difficult work.
- During watching, or sleeplessness.
- During fastings, or times of hunger.
- By maintaining purity.
- By knowledge, or understanding.
- By longsuffering.
- By kindness, or gentleness.
- By submitting to the Spirit.
- By unfeigned, or unpretentious love.
- By speaking the truth.
- By laboring in the power of God.
- By being properly armed with righteousness.
- When honored or dishonored.
- When people spoke evil or well of him.
- When perceived as a deceiver by his enemies, or as true by the faithful.
- Whether he was unknown or well known.
- In dying to the world, yet living unto God.
- Enduring chastening, yet not killed.
- When sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.
- As being poor, yet making many rich.
- As having nothing, yet possessing all things.

Paul’s faithfulness as the steward of God was also seen in the following, as recorded in 2 Corinthians 4:2.

- Renouncing dishonest things.
- Not walking in craftiness.
- Not handling the Word of God deceitfully.
- Making the truth known.

- Commending himself to every man's conscience.

The point is that faithfulness is confirmed in the crucible of experience, whether favorable or unfavorable, pleasant or unpleasant. Men are not called to labor for the Lord in a kind of vacuum, where they are insulated from trouble and difficulty. That is not the circumstance under which our Lord ministered when He was among men, and it is not how His stewards are sent forth.

Oh, this is a matter that must be seen in our text. I have known many a person whom I felt was called to work for the Lord who fell beneath the weight of circumstance. They left the work like John Mark, when he departed from the mission, returning to Jerusalem from Perga – choosing to do so in the middle of the work (Acts 13:13). Like Demas, they forsook the work of the Lord because of their love for the world (2 Tim 4:10).

Not only are we being subjected to the history of the church, we are beholding how the work of the Lord is carried out by faithful stewards. We are witnessing the power of a devoted heart, and the stamina that is produced by cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart. May the record of your appetite to be found faithful!

My prayer is that the necessity of faithfulness and consistency will be perceived by you, and that you will set your face steadfastly toward the Jerusalem that is above. Even then, the course you are called to navigate will be difficult and challenging, requiring all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Without that spiritual posture, you will simply not be able to finish the course, and will be dashed upon the rocks of despair.

Oh, being a Christian is serious business, because when you are “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14), you are placed in His body, precisely where the Lord intends (1 Cor 12:18). You have been given something to do, and you are expected to do it. Further, just as in the case of Paul and Barnabas, you will be given everything that is required for the work – however, those supplies will be dispensed only within the context of absolute and unwavering faithfulness.

PAUL AND BARNABAS ENTER LYSTRA

In our text, Paul and Barnabas will enter Lystra. Upon entering Lystra, they confront a man cripple from his mother's womb, who listened to what Paul was saying. Paul, perceiving that the man had faith to be healed, shouted for him to stand on his feet. The man immediately leaped up and walked. This set in motion a series of circumstances that would confirm the character of both Paul and Barnabas. They would be put to the test concerning the receiving of undue honor, and the experience of hostile and aggressive opposition. In both cases, they will prove themselves to be men of God. They will not alter their message, nor will they cease to teach and preach.

This text confirms the management and control of the work of the Lord from heaven, and the inability of the foe to thwart Divine determinations. Of course, all of that is realized through faith. Furthermore, faith can only be maintained in an environment of faithful activity – fighting the good fight of faith, putting on the whole armor of God, and being “blameless as the steward of God” (Tit 1:7).

THE IMPOTENT MAN AT LYSTRA

“ 14:8 And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked: 9 The same heard Paul speak: who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed, 10 Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.”

As soon as Paul and Barnabas entered into Lystra, the text indicates they began preaching. This

time the details of what they said, and their specific location, are not provided. Rather, a specific incident is chronicled, together with the impact that it had upon the people of that region.

A CERTAIN MAN

“And there sat a certain man at Lystra . . .” The Greek word from which “man” is translated is **avnh.r**, and means “an adult male.” THAYER It is often used to denote a married man, emphasized someone of mature years. This accentuates what was involved in this man having never walked. His feet had been impotent for sufficient time for all of the muscles and ligaments to have deteriorated beyond repair.

HE HAD NEVER WALKED

“ . . . impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked . . .” Other versions read, “never having had the power of walking,” BBE “never been able to walk,” GWN and “never walked in his life.” NJB

The Scriptures contain a record of genuine miracles. They ought to play a prominent role in the formation of our ideas about miracles. To the point of our text, here is an overview of some of those miracles, particularly where specifics are given. There are also clusters of miracles where specifics are not given (2:43; 5:12; 6:8; 8:6; 14:3).

- Peter and John heal a man “lame from his mother’s womb” (3:1-8).
- Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead (5:5-10).
- People were brought to Peter on beds and couches, sick folks, and those vexed with unclean spirits, and they were all healed (5:15-16).
- The apostles are delivered from prison by an angel (5:19-23).
- Philip cast out evil spirits and healed the palsied and lame (8:7).
- Peter healed Aeneas, who had been bedfast for eight years (9:33-34).
- Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (9:39-41).
- Peter is delivered from prison by an angel (12:7-11).
- Paul strikes Elymas blind for a season (13:11).

With the exception of raising Dorcas from the dead and the apostles and Peter being delivered from prison, these were all public miracles. Even in the exceptions, confirmation of the unseen miracles was established among the people. In all of the instances, the cases were hopeless. It was not possible that what was wrought by God could have been accomplished in any other way, or by any other means. This is the case throughout the Scriptures.

Often, what is represented as the work of God Almighty is being represented as flawed, inefficient, and bearing a remarkable resemblance to the ordinary and the works of men.

A considerable amount of the modern day emphasis on the miraculous bears very little similarity to the signs and wonders recorded in Scripture. This by no means suggests a Divinely ordered cessation of miracles. It rather reveals the nature of the apostasy that exists in our time. Often, what is represented as the work of God Almighty is being represented as flawed, inefficient, and bearing a remarkable resemblance to the ordinary and the works of men.

HE HEARD PAUL SPEAK

“The same heard Paul speak . . .” Other versions read, “listened to Paul as he spoke,” NASB “listened to Paul as he was speaking,” NIV “giving ear to the preaching of Paul,” BBE “listened to

Paul preaching,” NJB “listening as Paul preached,” NLT “heard Paul preach,” TNT “listened to one of Paul’s sermons,” WEYMOUTH and “He was listening to Paul as he talked.” AMPLIFIED

The Greek word from which “speak” is translated is **lalou/ntoj**. The lexical meaning of the word is, “to emit a voice make oneself heard; hence to utter or form words with the mouth, to speak,” THAYER “to speak as with a message,” FRIBERG “preach, proclaim,” UBS “to proclaim.” GINGRICH

- The word is used of focused speaking – such as the teaching of our Lord (Matt 9:18; 12:46; 13:3,33; 23:1).
- The preaching of the apostles when first sent out by the Lord (Matt 10:19-20).
- The preaching of the apostles following Christ’s enthronement in heaven (Acts 4:1,20,29,31; 5:20).
- Stephen’s preaching (Acts 6:10), the preaching of Peter and John in villages of the Samaritans (Acts 8:25).
- The preaching of newly converted Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:19).
- Peter’s preaching at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:44).
- The request of the Gentiles in Antioch to have Paul preach the Gospel to them (Acts 13:42).

The word employed here does not emphasize the content of what was said, but the lifting up of the voice to make the message known. In other words, Paul was not holding a casual conversation with someone which this lame man overheard. Rather, Paul was engaged in the a public proclamation. The content of his message is not given, and there really is no need for us to have that information. We already know that Paul limited his speaking to matters pertaining to the salvation of God. He certainly was not delivering a political discourse, or rehearsing some of his personal experiences. Elsewhere he identified his preaching as consistently declaring “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), and “witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22).

Our text says the lame man “heard” Paul speaking. The word translated “heard” means “to attend to . . . consider what is or has been said . . . understand and perceive the sense of what is said.” THAYER This was not a casual hearing, but one in which what Paul was saying was actually being grasped by the man. We know this is the case by the words that follow.

Our times are marked by a decided reduction in the ability of people to hear the truth with interest and discernment. A kind of religion is being hawked that moves people to view the Word of God as either altogether irrelevant, or nothing more than something novel. This posture is what has enabled religious entertainers to make inroads into the professing church. It is what has given rise to the growing interest in, what is erroneously called, “praise and worship.” However, after all has been said and done, the surfacing of faith in the book of Acts is always the result of hearing insightful preaching (Acts 4:4; 8:12; 10:45; 11:20-21; 13:12,48; 14:1). And, as if the examples are not enough, we are categorically taught that faith comes by means of hearing the preaching of the Gospel by a person who has been sent by God (Rom 10:14-17).

PAUL PERCEIVED HE HAD FAITH TO BE HEALED

“ . . . who steadfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed . . . ”

As has already been confirmed, Paul was perceptive of his audience. Other preachers manifested this quality as well. This perception moved the speakers to speak in a certain manner, and with a

particular focus.

- Peter (Acts 2:23; 3:12; 4:11; 8:21).
- Stephen (Acts 7:51).
- Paul (Acts 13:46).

Now, Paul perceives this lame man, and focuses upon him.

“Steadfastly Beholding Him”

Other versions read, “observing him intently,” NKJV “fixed his gaze upon him,” NASB “looked directly at him,” NIV “observing him closely,” CSB “stared intently at him,” NET “looking straight at him,” NLT “looking steadily at him,” WEYMOUTH “watched him closely,” ISV and “looking him straight in the eye.” PHILLIPS

The attentiveness of this man caused him to stand out to Paul, and he focused upon him. Something of Paul is revealed in this action. First, it is obvious that he sought for indications of interest. Second, he was not seeking the approbation of men, else he would have given his attention to influential or leading people. This was a lame man, and probably without any social prominence. Yet, his interest in the Word of the Lord distinguished him to Paul. This is a consistent quality in those who have spiritual understanding and are motivated by “the spirit of faith.” When the preacher has insight into the things of God, and himself has imbibed and is living by the Word he preaches, he is at once drawn to those who have an interest in that word.

Religious opportunists have other priorities, and therefore frequently ignore those who have a compelling interest in and love for the truth. This is a most serious circumstance. I do not know if it is possible to give a satisfactory assessment of the spiritual retardation that is directly traceable to the failure of professed preachers and teachers to detect and focus upon those who desire the truth. I know that during my formative years, when I first saw the magnitude of the truth, it was exceedingly difficult to find a teacher who could assuage my thirst, or gave any evidence of wanting to do so. The truth of the matter is that I was among a body of people who had little or no interest in the truth, which made those whose hearts craved the truth appear to be nothing more than temporary and impractical zealots.

Those who are able to peruse the religious environment with some measure of discernment know that most church programs are not tailored for those who have a compelling interest in the truth, desire to perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord, or are seeking a city which has foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God.

However, this was not true of the proclaimers of truth who are mentioned in Scripture. Their message awakened a fervent quest in those who loved the truth, and the speakers had an intense interest in them.

We do not know the size of the audience to whom Paul was speaking. The fact that he fastened his eyes upon this lame man indicated that he was not the only one there.

“Perceiving He Had Faith”

Here is a most remarkable statement. As Paul steadfastly beheld this man, he perceived “he had faith to be healed.” Other versions read, “had seen that he had faith to be made well,” NASB “saw that he had faith to be healed,” NIV “seeing that he had faith to be made whole,” ASV “saw that the man believed he could be made well,” GWN “knew that he had faith to live,” MRD “saw that he had faith to be cured,” NJB “realized he had faith to be healed,” NLT and “saw that the man believed that God could heal him.” IE

This is another statement of Scripture that affirms the existence of certain factors are necessary healing: “he had faith to be healed.” Other qualifying statements pertain to the ultimate Worker, the Lord Jesus Christ.

- On one occasion, when Jesus was preaching in the wilderness, there was “a certain day” when “there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by” while He was teaching. They had come “from every village of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem.” It is said of that occasion, “and the power of the Lord was present to heal them” (Lk 5:17).

- The Spirit also mentions the inhibiting power of unbelief in the matter of miraculous works. “And He could there do no mighty work, save that He laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief . And He went round about the villages, teaching” (Mark 6:5-6). Matthew says of that occasion, “And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt 13:58).

Jesus frequently traced the healing of an individual to their faith.

- **THE WOMAN WITH AN ISSUE OF BLOOD.** “. . . Thy faith hath made thee whole” (Matt 9:22).

- **A WOMAN WITH A VEXED DAUGHTER.** “. . . O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour” (Matt 15:28).

- **BLIND BARTIMAEUS.** “And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way; thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way” (Mark 10:52).

- **A LEPER.** “And he said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole” (Luke 17:19).

- **THE WOMAN WHO ANOINTED HIM.** “And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace” (Luke 7:50).

This was not always the case with those who were healed. The impotent man who was healed at the pool of Bethesda was not told of his faith – Jesus simply healed him. The man did not know who Jesus was (John 5:5-11). The same was true of the blind man whose eyes were anointed with clay, and was told to wash in the pool of Siloam. He did not know who Jesus was, but believed after he was healed (John 9:35-38).

Circumstances like these accent the spiritual sensitivity of Paul in seeing this man had “faith to be healed.” The enablement to know this doubtless came from heaven, even though there might have been some outward indications of keen interest.

HE SAID IN A LOUD VOICE

“Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.”

Saying one has faith and acting upon it are two different things. Because real faith is “substance” and “evidence,” it can move a person to confidently act upon it. A person who merely thinks it possible that one believes this or that cannot do what Paul said. Doubt will keep a person from speaking in such a manner for fear of embarrassment.

A Loud Voice

Remember, this is in a public arena, not in private quarters where the outcome would not be known. Before the people, Paul shouts out “with a loud voice.” Other versions read “called out,” NIV “called out in a loud voice,” NAB “shouted,” IE and “shouted aloud,” WILLIAMS The language indicates

that the man was at a distance from him. Thus Paul lifts up his voice, and publicly calls out to the man. It was a shout of faith. It was a confident cry, and was in no sense an experiment.

Stand Upright

This man had been “cripple from his mother’s womb, who never had walked.” His feet were no doubt reduced in size, shriveled because of the atrophy of his muscles. However, Paul is speaking according to faith, not sight. He does not ask the man to stretch his feet out and attempt to move them. He calls for the totally unreasonable, the impossible – something beyond all reason. “Stand upright on thy feet!” Other versions read, “Stand up straight on your feet,” NKJV “Get up on your feet,” BBE “Get to your feet–stand up!” NJB “Get up on your feet and stand erect,” WILLIAMS and “Stand erect on your feet.” AMPLIFIED

This poor man’s feet had never had any power – he was “impotent in his feet,” without strength in his feet,” NKJV “could not use his feet,” NRSV and “had no power in his feet.” WEYMOUTH Yet, with a public shout, Paul commands him to get up on those powerless feet, and stand upright, with the weight of his body being supported by his feet. No one was asked to stand by to support him. Paul himself did not extend his hand to the man as Peter did to the crippled man at the Gate Beautiful (Acts 3:7). However, Paul had perceived that this man “had faith to be healed,” and faith never fails. In faith, as Jesus Himself said, “all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk 9:23). Now, we will see if the man has faith.

He Leaped and Walked

The man responds instantly, for that is what faith – real faith – does. “And he leaped and walked.” Other versions read, “leaped up and began to walk,” NASB “jumped up and began to walk,” NIV “sprang up and began to walk,” NRSV and “leaped to his feet and started walking.” LIVING

The word “leaped” is translated from a word meaning “to spring up,” THAYER “of quick movement,” FRIBERG and “to jump into the air.” LOUW-NIDA It indicates a rapid and energetic movement in which this man suddenly jumped to his feet, suggesting that he even jumped up and down on his formerly impotent feet. He did not get up gingerly, testing out the strength of his feet, nor did he call for some assistance. He did, indeed, have “faith to be healed,” just as Paul had perceived.

The text says that he also “walked” – a man who had never once walked in his entire life. The word “walked” indicates that the man moved about freely, with no inhibitions, and with perfect freedom. He did not limp, nor did he require something to assist him in his walking. Ordinarily, even if a person who was paralyzed for something less than a lifetime, some type of therapy would be required to teach the person how to walk. No such assistance was required for this man.

THE PARALLEL TO THE HEALING OF THE SOUL

There is a healing of the soul. David once cried out, “LORD, be merciful unto me: heal my soul ; for I have sinned against Thee” (Psa 41:4). Peter once referred to this healing, when commenting on the nature of salvation. “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls ” (1 Pet 2:24-25). It is not uncommon to hear men using this text to justify the view that bodily healing was in the atoning death of Christ. That view is wrong for several reasons.

- First, the healing of above reference is categorically said to relate to Christ bearing our sins in His body – not our diseases. Nowhere is it affirmed that Jesus died for our sicknesses. His death is consistently associated with our sins (Rom 5:8; 1 Cor 15:3), and that

He died “for the ungodly,” not the sick (Rom 5:6).

The individual whose soul is healed, or who is born again, regenerated, or made a new creation, is able to instantly do things that he could never do before. There is not so much as a syllable of Scripture that suggests those who are “joined unto the Lord” begin tapering off in the committing of sin.

- Second, disease and infirmity did not separate men from God, and hence did not require the atoning death of Christ. Isaiah’s reference to Jesus bearing our sicknesses is categorically said to have been fulfilled with Jesus healed the sick during His ministry. “When the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils: and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses” (Mat 8:16-17; Isa 53:4).

- Third, the redemptive accomplishments of Christ are not related to the beatings that He endured prior to the cross. Redemption relates exclusively to what took place when Jesus was on the cross (1 Cor 1:17-18; Eph 2:16; Phil 2:8; Col 1:20; 2:14; Heb 12:2).

The individual whose soul is healed, or who is born again, regenerated, or made a new creation, is able to instantly do things that he could never do before. There is not so much as a syllable of Scripture that suggests those who are “joined unto the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17) begin tapering off in the committing of sin. There is no gradual cessation of sin. Saul of Tarsus, for example, immediately ceased from persecuting the church. This contradicts the psychological approach to moral recovery that has become common in many churches, but it is nevertheless the truth.

Spiritual immaturity does not have to do with continuing to live in sin in a kind of declining stance. It rather refers to growing up into Christ, apprehending the truth, and bearing fruit unto God. This distinction has been successfully obscured by the unlawful marriage between religion and psychiatry – which marriage is a form of adultery and unfaithfulness to Jesus.

The doctrine of Scripture, if it is perceived, will lead people to this conclusion.

- **FREEDOM.** “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36). “Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness” (Rom 6:18).

- **SIN LOSES ITS DOMINION.** “For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14).

- **IN CHRIST, SIN IS UNREASONABLE.** “How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:2-4).

- **THE TUTELAGE OF GRACE.** “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Titus 2:11-12).

- **THE LEADING OF THE SPIRIT.** “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:13-14).

Just as surely as that lame man leaped and walked, so those who are in Christ Jesus can walk in newness of life – from the very moment of their new birth. Their growth will be seen in the scope of that walk, but at no point does newness of life leave the individual vulnerable to sin and the devil.

The church has fallen on hard times when it becomes convinced that being freed from the dominion of sin is a process that extends over a period of time. Those who lead people to believe that they must learn to manage sin are leading them astray. It is not sin that is managed, but the flesh, or the old man. From the very start, we are to keep under our body and bring it under subjection (1 Cor 9:27). As we grow in our apprehension of the truth, we will define sin more precisely, to be sure. However, once a thing is known to be sin, the person in Christ is free from its dominion, and is under no obligation to commit it. As it is written, "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh" (Rom 8:12).

No child of God can say they "have no sin" (1 John 1:8), or that they have no further need for an Advocate with the Father (1 John 2:1). However, those who confess their sin to God, as they are enjoined to do (1 John 1:9), will not say to God that they were powerless, and could not avoid committing sin. Woe to that person who teaches the people of God to be content to live with their sin, imagining that, through some form of regimentation, they will eventually gain the victory over their vices! That is not Gospel, but is delusion, and a most serious one at that!

A SOCIETY THAT WAS AWARE OF DEITY

" 11 And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men."

It is of interest to see how the people reacted to the healing of this crippled man. He was apparently known to the citizenry, like the man who was healed at the Temple gate (Acts 3). He was not a visitor in those parts, but someone who was well known to the inhabitants of Lystra.

WHEN THE PEOPLE SAW WHAT PAUL HAD DONE

"And when the people saw what Paul had done . . ." All of the versions read the same, affirming that the people "saw what Paul had done ," or "saw what Paul did." They did not see what Paul and Barnabas had done, but what Paul had done.

This was similar to what occurred on the day of Pentecost. When Peter stood up with the eleven, it was his voice that was lifted up as he delivered the word to the people. Also, when the multitude inquired of Peter "and the rest of the apostles" what they should do, it was Peter who delivered the word to them (Acts 2:14-40).

Again, when Peter and John went up to the Temple and confronted a lame man. Both Peter and John were present, but Peter was the one through whom the work was done (Acts 3:1-8). The healed man responded by clinging to both Peter and John, knowing the work involved them both, though it was wrought through Peter. Also, when the people took note of what had happened, Peter said "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us , as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" (Acts 3:12).

When Peter and John went down to Samaria in order that the people might receive the Holy Spirit, they laid "their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit." When Simon the sorcerer saw this, he sought to purchase the ability confer the Holy Spirit by the playing on of his hands, it was Peter who rebuked him, announcing that he had "neither part nor lot in this matter" (Acts 8:18-22).

The same type of response will be reported in this instance. Two men will be present, standing together, yet one will be the chief speaker or spokesman . This is a Kingdom manner that is worthy of note. There is a unity in the body of Christ that allows one person to speak for the whole, and to so with the complete and obvious support of the others.

THE GODS ARE COME DOWN

“ . . . they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men.”

In Greek mythology, a pious Phrygian couple (Philemon and Baucis) who hospitably received Zeus and Hermes when their richer neighbors turned away the two gods, who were disguised as wayfarers. As a reward, they were saved from a flood that drowned the rest of the country; their cottage was turned into a temple, and at their own request they became priest and priestess of it. Long after, they were granted their wish to die at the same moment, being turned into trees.

As with the rest of the world, this area no doubt understood Greek, which was the universal language. Yet, they also retained the use of their native language. This was a common practice, as is evidenced on the day of Pentecost. There were people then present who had native tongues in which they spoke, and they understood the Greek tongue as well, and possibly the Hebrew tongue also. It is assumed that Paul had spoken to the lame man in the Greek language. However, it is also possible that, through the Spirit, he had spoken to him in his own native tongue. When Paul said to the Corinthians, “I speak in tongues more than ye all,” it is assumed that he was referring to his public ministry outside of the gathering of believers, and not to a private practice. I do not doubt that in his travels he often spoke in the language of the people.

So, in this text, a body of heathen people concluded that the gods had come down to visit them. They knew that something had happened that could not be accounted for by any purported law of nature or aptitude of man.

They thought the gods had come down to them “in the likeness of men.” It is interesting that this is the precise way in which the entrance of Jesus into this world is described: “But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men ” (Phil 2:7). It is arresting to consider that this heathen culture saw one miraculous work and concluded they had been visited by “the gods,” while the Jews witnessed the multitudinous miracles of Jesus, and thought of Him as a fraud, delivering Him to be crucified. In fact, it was on His claim of being “the Son of the Blessed” that He was arraigned and found guilty of blasphemy (Mk 14:61-64). In this charge, the Jewish leaders stooped to a level beneath that of the heathen of our text.

A SIGNIFICANT TEXT

This is a significant passage that provides a kind of snapshot of the world. There was a general acceptance of the existence of Deity, and of visitations and even Divine retribution. During the time of Jonah, estimated to have been around 900 BC, there was an acute awareness of Deity. During Jonah’s attempt to run from the presence of the Lord in a ship, a storm arose on the sea. When the captain of the ship learned that Jonah was sleeping, he said to him, “What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not” (Jonah 1:6). All heathen nations had “gods,” persuaded of the existence of Deity. Foolishly, they fashioned their gods after their own conceptions (Rom 1:22-25).

Later, on a barbaric island, when Paul was bitten by a snake, the barbarians reasoned, “No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live” (Acts 28:4).

Western atheism has its roots in Pre-Socratic philosophy, but did not emerge as a distinct world-view until the late Enlightenment." The 5th-century BCE Greek philosopher Diagoras is known as the "first atheist" and strongly criticized religion and mysticism. Critics viewed religion as a human invention used to frighten people into following moral order. Democritus attempted to explain the world in a purely materialistic way, without reference to the spiritual or mystical. Euhemerus (c. 330-260 BCE) published his view that the gods were only the deified rulers, conquerors and founders of the past, and that their cults and religions were in essence the continuation of vanished kingdoms and earlier

political structures.

Though flawed in their concepts of God, the heathen were not atheists. They did not question the existence of God, or that He visited men. Their understanding was something less than perfect, to be sure, but they did confirm that man has a natural consciousness of God. Paul stated the case in this way: “For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: (Which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another)” (Rom 2:14-15).

The existence of the conscience confirms that men know they are answerable to someone higher than themselves, for there is no other explanation for its existence. If men judged themselves strictly by their own developed values, there would be no condemning or approving conscience, for all they would have to do is change their values, and their conscience would bother them no longer. The conscience is evidence of man’s creation by God.

The existence of fear is also the confession that there are things men cannot control. Before men sought to deify the human mind, these things moved men to think of Deity, even though their conclusions were flawed.

Formalized or codified atheism is something that came into being late in human history – as late as the fifth century. Of course, living as though there is no God – practical atheism – has been a blight upon humanity all along. David wrote, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psa 14:1; 53:1). Living as though there is no God is a state of mind that compels the sinner to impose his own wishes upon his heart, so that he lives in complete disregard of the awareness of God – an awareness that is resident in every man by nature. It is as though he attempts to deify himself, living as though no person existed but himself. This is the result of the remarkable aggressiveness of unbelief.

The impact of “the Enlightenment” upon our society is staggering to consider. Unlike the people of our text, a considerable percentage of modern society do not default in their thinking to a consideration of Deity. The tendency is so pronounced that even among professing Christians, men are sought in the hour of crisis instead of God. In fact, professional religion has made a practice of providing man-made solutions that are represented as doing things that Scripture affirms come only from God: i.e. a change of character, or making one closer to God. Also, there is a kind of derision registered when anyone suggests that calamities may be a token of Divine judgment, or times of benefit a blessing from God. Even many professing Christians recoil at the idea of Deity intruding into the affairs of men. This is a sad circumstance, and confirms a level of spiritual death that is staggering to consider.

However, this is not the place to dwell on such a morose subject. I must move on with the text.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF BARNABAS AND PAUL

“ 12 And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.” “Jupiter” and Mercurius” are the Latin forms of Greek terms “Zeus” and “Hermes.” These were the Roman names for Greek gods of reference, which they adopted as their own gods when they conquered Greece, as foretold by Daniel (Dan 2:31-40).

The significance of the work that was wrought by the hands of Paul is seen in the response of the people. They felt the gods had come down to them in the likeness of men – not just any god, but two of the most significant ones.

“Jupiter” was known to the Greeks as Zeus. This god is also mentioned in the nineteenth chapter, which records Paul’s experience in Ephesus. There the people referred to an “Image,” or statue, they

thought “fell down from Jupiter” (Acts 19:35). In the Greek religion, Zeus, was chief deity of the pantheon, a sky and weather god who was identical with the Roman god Jupiter. Zeus was regarded as the sender of thunder and lightning, rain, and winds, and his traditional weapon was the thunder-bolt. He was called the father (i.e., the ruler and protector) of both gods and men.

The statue of Zeus was one of the seven wonders of the world. According to accounts, the statue was located at the western end of the temple. It was 22 feet wide and some 40 feet tall . . . plated with gold and ivory, represented the god sitting on an elaborate cedarwood throne ornamented with ebony, ivory, gold, and precious stones . . . The figure's skin was composed of ivory and the beard, hair and robe of gold. Construction was by the use of gold and ivory plates attached to a wooden frame . . . the statue was moved by wealthy Greeks to the city of Constantinople where it survived until destroyed by fire in 462 A.D. BRITANNICA ENCYCLOPEDIA

Mercurius, or Hermes, was the herald, or messenger, of the olympian gods, and the son of Zeus. “In the Odyssey, however, he appears mainly as the messenger of the gods and the conductor of the dead to Hades. Hermes was also a dream god, and the Greeks offered to him the last libation before sleep. As a messenger, he may also have become the god of roads and doorways, and he was the protector of travelers.” BRITANNICA ENCYCLOPEDIA

THE CHIEF SPEAKER

The crowd called Paul Mercurius, or Hermes, because he was “the chief speaker.” Other versions read, “did most of the talking.” CJB “took the lead in speaking,” DARBY “the principal speaker,” NJB “the preacher,” TNT “the leader in speaking,” YLT “the main speaker,” IE and “led in the discourse.” AMPLIFIED

As used here, the word “to lead, I. e. a. *to go before* ; to be a leader; to rule, command; to have authority over.” THAYER Here, the leadership was in regard to speaking (“speaker”). That is, he was the primary spokesman. Because the people viewed him as Hermes, the messenger of Zeus, they were viewing Paul as the primary spokesman for Deity – not merely first in the matter of sequence.

This assists us in understanding some things that Paul said regarding his speaking, as well as what some of his critics said of him.

- “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words , lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect” (1 Cor 1:17).
- “And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom , declaring unto you the testimony of God” (1 Cor 2:1).
- “And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom , but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4).
- “For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible ” (2 Cor 10:10).

There are those who have represented Paul has being very clumsy in speech, perhaps even stuttering or stammering. Based upon this text, and his presentations before dignitaries such as Agrippa and Felix, I do not do not believe this was the case at all. Paul’s meaning is that he did not employ high sounding philosophical arguments and oratory – things greatly valued by the Greek and Roman world . In an obviously studied and disciplined effort, Paul employed reasoning that declared man to be a creation of God, and therefore accountable to God. He appealed to the cross of Christ, together with its various implications. He made no attempt to color the truth so as to make it more palatable, or diminish its weight to make it more attractive.

I seriously doubt that these Lycaonians would have associated Paul with the Hermes the chief

messenger of Zeus if his speech was halting and clumsy. Nor would they have thought of him as the “chief speaker.” Not even the heathen associate deity with fumbling speech and halting manners. Much less should this be the case with those whose understanding of God has been shaped by the true Son of God Himself.

Now, we will see how men of God react when undue honor is given to them – how seriously they regard such things. It will be very apparent that they are not seeking honor for themselves.

THE ATTEMPT TO WORSHIP PAUL AND BARNABAS, AND THEIR RESPONSE

“ 13 Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people. 14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein. . .”

When people are serious about their religion, whether deceived or illuminated, they act upon it. People who say they are serious about God, yet do not act upon what they profess, have misrepresented themselves. God has made men so the views they embrace constrain them do act in harmony with those views. If they fail to do this, their conscience becomes seared.

So it is in our text: those who were convinced of the deity of Jupiter and Mercurius, act upon that persuasion, convinced that the two men standing before them – Paul and Barnabas – are these gods, come down to them in the likeness of men.

THE PRIEST OF JUPITER BROUGHT OXEN AND GARLANDS

“Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates . . .” Other versions read, “whose temple was in front of their city,” NKJV “whose temple was just outside the city,” NIV and “Then Jupiter’s Priest which dwelt before their city.” TNT

Before the City

It is to be understood that the “priest of Jupiter” resided in the temple built for idol. It was that temple that was “before the city,” or at the entrance point. This suggests that Jupiter was the god that had been adopted by the city of Lystra, as Diana was the goddess embraced by the city of Ephesus (Acts 19:28). We do not know if this priest was actually present when the crippled man was healed through the hands of Paul. If the crippled man was positioned just inside the gate, then the priest was no doubt personally aware of what had taken place.

Brought Oxen and Garlands

Other versions read, “brought bulls and wreathes,” NIV “took oxen and flowers,” BBE “bulls with flowery wreathes around their necks,” GWN “brought them cartloads of flowers and prepared to sacrifice oxen,” LIVING and “brought garlanded oxen.” PHILLIPS

The plurality of the oxen suggests that the priest intended to offer one ox, or bull, to Paul, and the other to Barnabas. The historian Kuinoel states that it was the practice of these idolators to decorate the sacrifice with “ribbons and chaplets of flowers.” ALBERT BARNES

Unto the Gates

The fact that the priest brought the oxen to the gates suggests that is where Paul and Barnabas were speaking. Also, it probably was where the crippled man had been sitting. Some say there was a large

square just inside the gates where people would congregate. Others view these “gates” as around the house where Paul and Barnabas were dwelling.

I see this as being the gates of the city, which would have been close to the temple from which the priest came. That also would account for “the people” who witnessed the healing of the crippled man (v 11).

How must it appear in the heavenly places when people who profess to be in Christ suppress any public expression of their professed faith. What of those who are unwilling to separate from the world, or yield to the requirements of the true God?

HE WOULD HAVE MADE SACRIFICE

“ . . . and would have done sacrifice with the people. . . .” Other versions read, “intending to sacrifice with the multitudes,” NKJV “wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds,” NASB “he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them,” NIV “with the multitudes did wish to sacrifice,” YLT and “wanted to join the people in offering sacrifice.” AMPLIFIED

The picture is one of religious excitement, and not mere tumult. Convinced that Paul and Barnabas were the gods come down to them in the likeness of men, the people desired to sacrifice to them, and the priest of Jupiter brought oxen and prepared to join them.

All of this seems quite radical and superstition to a society that has no firm persuasion of Deity, or objects to any outward expression that acknowledges God. This certainly was an improper response, to state the case very mildly. However, there is something to be learned here. There really is no extent to which men will not go to serve a god they are persuaded exists. Their persuasion may be flawed to the core, and even worthy of condemnation, as in Romans 1:25. Their corrupted wills may have ignored the testimony of the true God in preference for their own ideas of Deity – ideas that allowed them to continue in their own willful ways. However, once persuaded of the reality of the imaginary deity, they acted in comportment with the deception they had embraced. The priests of Baal would publically leap on an altar and even cut themselves, crying out for some expression from their god (1 Kgs 18:28). The worshipers of Molech, contrary nature, would offer their children as a burnt offering to that false god (Lev 18:21; 2 Kgs 16:3). Some who worshiped Diana, goddess of the Ephesians, were unashamed to shout out for the space of two hours, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” (Acts 19:34). And, what of some of our day, who stop to pray five times a day in honor to Allah, who is really no god at all? Or those who strap bombs to their bodies and become the means of killing a host of people in the hope of gaining the approval of the false god they worship?

How must it appear in the heavenly places when people who profess to be in Christ suppress any public expression of their professed faith. What of those who are unwilling to separate from the world, or yield to the requirements of the true God? Such people have stooped beneath the posture of the heathen. I do not doubt that the day of judgment will include the comparison of those who gave their lives for a false god, with those who said they believed in the true God, yet refused to give themselves wholly to Him.

BARNABAS AND PAUL HEARD

“Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of . . .” Other versions read, “heard of this,” NIV “when this came to the ears of,” BBE “having heard it,” DARBY and “heard what was happening,” GWN

Note, this is the second time Paul and Barnabas are referred to as “apostles” (14:4,14). As noted before, they were apostles of the Holy Spirit, being send forth by Him (Acts 13:13:2). This does not exclude the fact that Jesus, as Head of the church, sent them out. However, the apostles of Jesus are

referred to as “the twelve apostles” (Matt 10:2; Lk 22:44; Rev 21:14), and “the twelve” (Acts 6:2; 1 Cor 15:5). Paul also, as one born out of due season, was an “apostle of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1, etc). Here, Paul, together with Barnabas, is on a special mission, sent forth by the Holy Spirit. Unlike his apostleship from Jesus, this mission will be a temporary one, devoted to a work that will come to an end long before his departure from this world (Acts 14:26).

Being alert to their surroundings, Paul and Barnabas heard of the purposed sacrifice. We are not told how they heard, whether from the people, or through the priest himself who may have summoned them to the intended sacrifice. However they heard, two factors were present. First, the Lord was in the matter, directing His servants, and ensuring that no honor was given to them that contradicted what they were preaching. Second, “the apostles” were also aware of these contradicting actions and influence, and of their total unacceptability.

I find that this kind of alertness is not at all common in our time. This is what has allowed all manner of corruption to enter into the professed church.

THEY RAN AMONG THE PEOPLE

“ . . . they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out, 15 And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things?”

Paul and Barnabas do not hesitate to interfere with the proceedings. They will not receive honor that is not due them, nor will they allow another god to be worshiped in their presence, or receive the credit for what the Lord Jesus Christ has done.

They Rent Their Clothes

Other versions read, “tore their clothes,” NKJV “tore their robes,” NASB “tore their garments,” RSV and “rending their clothes.” DOUAY

It is good to compare the reaction of Paul and Barnabas to being treated as though they were gods, to the reaction of Herod to the same. After hearing a stirring oration by Herod, “the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man” (Acts 12:22). Herod made no effort to deny the blasphemous statement, “And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (Acts 12:23).

Rejecting the sacrifice that was about to be made to them, Paul and Barnabas tore their clothing and ran into the crowd of people. The rending of the clothes can be an act fear, as Joseph’s brothers’ reaction to his silver cup being found in the sack of Benjamin, where Joseph had to placed (Gen 44:13). It can also be the response of revulsion at the actions of others, as when Joshua and Caleb tore their clothes when the Israelites believed the report of the ten faithless spies (Num 14:6). It also reflects great sadness and lamentation at bad news, as when Jacob rent his clothes when he thought Joseph had been killed (Gen 37:34). Others who tore their clothes at troubling news included Joshua (Josh 7:6), Jephthah (Judges 11:36), the king of Israel (1 Kgs 5:7), Hezekiah (2 Kgs 19:1), Josiah (2 Kgs 22:11), and Mordecai (Esth 4:1).

In this text, the rending of the clothes was an expression of outrage and holy fervor. Paul and Barnabas were repulsed by the very idea of people treating them as though they were god’s “come down in the likeness of men.” This revulsion was driven by the fact that they knew and were serving the true and living God. That is what made the proposed act of the priest reprehensible.

Why Do Ye These Things?

Other versions read, “why are you doing this?” NIV “what are you doing?” GWN and “what do you think you are doing?” NJB

This is drawing attention to the truly unreasonableness of what the people were doing – even though it was totally reasonable to them. What is wrong is never truly reasonable. That is, within the context of truth, as declared by God Almighty, nothing that contradicts the truth can possibly be proper. In his diabolical efforts to lure men into sin, Satan, through subtlety, leads the person to think that sin is reasonable, sensible, and to recommended.

The question “Why do ye these things?” was intended to interrupt the sacrificial proceedings, calling the people to soundness of thought. The people were profaning the name of the God of heaven, and did not know it. They were giving undue honor to men, and were unaware of it. Now Paul and Barnabas run among them, tearing their clothes and fervently calling upon them to consider that they were doing.

WE ARE MEN OF LIKE PASSIONS

“We also are men of like passions with you . . .” Other versions read, “men with the same natures,” NKJV “we too are only men, human like you” NIV “we are mortals must like you,” NRSV “men with the same feelings as you,” BBE “frail mortals like yourselves,” MRD “only human beings,” NLT “like-effected with you,” YLT “natures kindred top your own,” WEYMOUTH and “[only] human beings, of nature like your own.” AMPLIFIED

The phrase “of like passions” comes from a word with the following lexical meaning: “suffering the like with another, of like feelings or affections,” THAYER “of the same (human) nature, similar in experience, as opposed to having superhuman nature,” FRIBERG “like in every way,” UBS “pertaining to having the same kinds of feelings or desires - 'same kinds of feelings, same kinds of desires,” LOUW-NIDA and “with the same nature.” GINGRICH

Here, the meaning is not from the standpoint of sinfulness, but of human frailty – as compared to an eternal; and almighty God. Paul wrote to the Galatians concerning the frailty of his own flesh: “Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first” (Gal 4:13). The high priests of old were said to have been “compassed with infirmity,” or “subject to weakness,” NKJV or “beset with weakness” NASB (Heb 5:2). This is the kind of infirmity that causes us to be dependent upon God, who has no infirmity or weakness. There are areas in which all men are helpless and defenseless. Again, the point here is not morality, but mortality. Human weakness is evidenced by the experience of temptation, but it is not to be appealed to as an excuse for transgression. For believers, the time of temptation, while itself an evidence of weakness, can be successfully addressed by appealing to the Intercessor, who is able to be “touched with the feeling of our infirmities” (Heb 4:15-16).

One the marks of false gods is their impotence and powerlessness, as well as their likeness to the men who make them. “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not : eyes have they, but they see not : they have ears, but they hear not : noses have they, but they smell not : they have hands, but they handle not : feet have they, but they walk not : neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them” (Psa 115:4-8).

The point here is that Paul and Barnabas needed God, they were not His peers. Their human condition required help and sustenance from God, therefore it was not possible that they were Divine – Immutable, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, or Eternal – all of which are required in the very concept of “God.”

The point here is that Paul and Barnabas needed God, they were not His peers. Their human condition required help and sustenance from God, therefore it was not possible that they were Divine – Immutable, Omniscient, Omnipotent, Omnipresent, or Eternal – all of which are required in the very concept of “God.” Therefore these holy men refused to accept worship, sacrifice, or

anything that could properly be offered only to the true God Himself.

WE PREACH THAT YOU SHOULD TURN FROM VANITIES

“ . . . and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities . . .” Other versions read, “these useless things,” NKJV “these vain things,” NASB “these worthless things,” NIV “these vain things,” RSV “foolish things,” BBE “these idols,” NAB “these empty idols,” NJB “these unreal things,” WEYMOUTH “these foolish and vain things,” AMPLIFIED and “these meaningless things.” PHILLIPS

The word “vanities” comes from the Greek word **matai,wn** , which means: “devoid of force, truth, success, result . . . useless, to no purpose,” THAYER “empty, foolish . . . foolish, futile, useless, worthless,” FRIBERG “lacking in content,” LOUW-NIDA “trifling, frivolous,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “meaningless, worthless . . . vain, useless,” LEH and “empty.” GINGRICH

Paul and Barnabas apply the word “vanities” to the false gods of Jupiter and Mercurius. A statue of the false god Jupiter could no doubt be seen from where they were standing. Yet, as visible and imposing as that statue may have appeared, it was nothing more than vanity – powerless and worthless.

In Scripture idols are frequently referred to as “vanities” or “vanity.”

- “They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked Me to anger with their vanities . . .” (Deut 32:21).
- “For all the sins of Baasha, and the sins of Elah his son, by which they sinned, and by which they made Israel to sin, in provoking the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities ” (1 Kgs 16:13).
- “For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin, to provoke the LORD God of Israel to anger with their vanities ” (1 Kgs 16:26).
- “I have hated them that regard lying vanities : but I trust in the LORD” (Psa 31:6).
- “Behold the voice of the cry of the daughter of My people because of them that dwell in a far country: Is not the LORD in Zion? is not her king in her? Why have they provoked me to anger with their graven images, and with strange vanities ? “ (Jer 8:19).
- “But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities ” (Jer 10:8).
- “Are there any among the vanities of the Gentiles that can cause rain? or can the heavens give showers? art not Thou He, O LORD our God? therefore we will wait upon Thee: for thou hast made all these things” (Jer 14:22).
- “Because my people hath forgotten me, they have burned incense to vanity , and they have caused them to stumble in their ways from the ancient paths, to walk in paths, in a way not cast up” (Jer 18:15).
- “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy” (Jonah 2:8).

It is apparent that God is not indifferent to those who adopt “vanities” as their god.

- When those who wear His name adopt false gods, it provokes the true God to jealous and anger. DEUT 32:21
- All doctrine that is based upon a false god is itself vain teaching. JER 10:8
- God challenges all false gods to produce rain. JER 14:22

- Adopting a false god confirms the people have forgotten the true God. JER 18:15
- Those who worship “vanities” forsake mercy – it is no longer available to them.

JONAH 2:8

These conditions are why Paul and Barnabas preached that men ought to forsake serving false and powerless gods. This is not an option, but an absolute necessity.

The word used here for “preached” is the same as used in verse seven: “there they preached the Gospel.” The word means “to bring good news, to announce glad tidings.” THAYER The “good news” carries such an impact upon the heart of those who believe it that they will, in fact, turn “from idols to serve the living God” (1 Thess 1:9). Paul here declares, or preaches, that unequivocal requirement.

Paul reminded the Corinthians that in their past they were “carried away” to “dumb idols,” even as they were “led” by the demons who were behind those idols (1 Cor 10:20; 12:2).

Powerless Gods

A god who cannot do anything is a vanity. In view of this, it is arresting to consider how helpless many professing Christians appear to be – even by their own confession. Some are taught to say, after they have professedly embraced Christ, that their life is “out of control.” Others are taught that after they have come into Christ, they are still controlled by a generational curse, or some physiological deficiency – and some are even told they are being dominated by demons. Is it not possible that they have embraced a “vanity,” or have never even “turned from” the “vanities” they have served? Have they embraced a kind of scholastic religion, maintaining a form of godliness, yet denying its power, and thus dominated by the lusts of the flesh? We should not think of this as something that is impossible.

UNTO THE LIVING GOD

“ . . . unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein. . . ”

Turning to “the living God,” individuals are separated from death and impotence, or powerlessness. No longer do they serve a God that cannot hear, speak, or work. In Christ they have become aligned with the One who “created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:9). Now, by virtue of their union with Jesus, they have come into the realm of thorough adequacy. Not only are they not to serve other gods, there is no need to do so, for they are “complete in Him, which is the Head of all principality and power” (Col 2:10).

The fact that God “made heaven, and earth, and the sea, all things that are therein” makes humanity responsible to Him. Every man is, in a sense, living in property, and, by virtue of that fact alone, are obliged to submit themselves to Him. You can add to that, that all men are also God’s creation, for “it is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves” (Isa 100:3). On top of that, God “determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us” (Acts 17:26-27). It simply is not possible to escape the personal responsibility to turn from vanities to the living God!

It is a transgression of enormous magnitude for any professing believer to seek help from anyone but the One who saves and keeps them! If God chided the Israelites for going down to Egypt for help, what will He do with those who return to the world for help after having been delivered from it (Gal 1:4).

The True God

When writing to those who are in Christ Jesus, John the apostle declared that the Son of “is come” – that is, has come and remains – and has “given us an understanding, that we might know Him that is true.” He then adds, “and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ.” That is, in Jesus His own prayer is fulfilled: “That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us . . . I in them, and Thou in Me . . .” (John 17:23). This is the antithesis of a god that is properly referred to as a “vanity.”

The solemn obligation placed upon every offspring of Adam is to turn from “vanities” to the living God – from erroneous gods to the true One. No one is exempt from that requirement.

Keep Yourselves from Idols

After proclaiming the ministry of Jesus in bringing us to “know Him that is true,” John affirms, “This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20b). That is, the God that is revealed to us by Jesus is the real God. All other gods are “vanities.” Additionally, the knowledge of God that results from the teaching of Jesus is, in fact, “eternal life.” This perfectly correlates with Jesus definition of eternal life: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). This is the “eternal life” that John wanted believers to know they possess. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life . . .” (1 John 5:13).

John concludes his first letter by saying, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen” (1 John 5:21). His admonition to keep ourselves “from idols” is a solemn warning to refuse to embrace an idea of God that has not been generated by Christ Jesus. The Son of God is, after all, the Divinely appointed Expositor of God (Matt 11:27).

Shortly after the middle of the first century, barely twenty hearts after the day of Pentecost, there were already some who were proclaiming “another Jesus,” “another Spirit,” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). Let it be clear, it is not possible for the power of God unto salvation to be attached to “another gospel.” It is not possible to be saved by “another Jesus.” Neither, indeed is it possible to receive “another Spirit,” and yet experience all of the benefits that are affirmed to result from His presence.

During this time of a great falling away, it is necessary to say to the church what Paul and Barnabas said to the Lycaonians. It is time for professing Christians to turn away from misconceptions of both Jesus and God, for in embracing them, they have aligned themselves with “vanities.”

As I have already pointed out, God Himself identifies idols, or “vanities,” by saying they cannot see, hear, speak, or work. In other words, they cannot do anything that is characteristic of one that is alive. It is the business of every professing Christian to be sure that is not the kind of God they have embraced. Like it or not, a powerless religion suggests that a god has been embraced that is really no god at all.

This Is A Must

Let me underscore this again. The solemn obligation placed upon every offspring of Adam is to turn from “vanities” to the living God – from erroneous gods to the true One. No one is exempt from that requirement. Paul will now reason upon this truth confirming the reasonableness of this necessity – to turn to the living God.

IN TIMES PAST

“16 Who in times past . . .” Other versions read, “in bygone generations,” NKJV “in the generations

gone by,” NASB “in the past,” NIV “past generations,” NRSV and “in former ages.” MRD

The fact that there are “times past” means more than the reality of history. Paul and Barnabas will show that something has happened in time that has caused previous times to be “past” in a greater sense than simply not being present anymore. He will reason that something has occurred that requires that men separate themselves from their past.

Paul often uses the expression “times past” to make a comparison with the present condition.

- “For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief” (Rom 11:30).
- “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it” (Gal 1:13).
- “But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed” (Gal 1:23).
- “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2).
- “Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Eph 2:3).
- “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands” (Eph 2:11).
- “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds” (Heb 1:1-2).

Peter also spoke in this way. “Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10). And again, “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, ravelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries” (1 Pet 4:3).

All of these texts are stated with the reality of a change having taking place – a change that requires a decision on the part of men. It is possible for past and present generations to have the same deplorable characteristics. Thus Israel is depicted as having been fundamentally wayward for a great number of generations (Deut 9:7,24; Isa 65:2; Jer 25:4; 35:15). This, however, is not the kind of approach that is being taken in our text. This by no means justifies the past idolatry of the heathen or the complacency of the Jews. It does mean, however, that something has been wrought by God that makes failing to turn to God from vanities absolutely inexcusable. Since the enthronement of the Son of God, erroneous religion is more wrong than it has ever been before. Failing to turn to God is infinitely more serious now than it was in times past – and it was serious then.

It is imperative that we have a spiritually intelligent view of the nature of the times in which we are living. We must not allow ourselves to be deceived.

DIVINE ALLOWANCES

“ . . . suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.”

Paul and Barnabas will now explain why nations embracing false gods were not removed – like the Amalekites. Why did an all-powerful God allow nations of men to continue to walk in ignorance?

How can we account for a righteous God not dispersing them as He did those who dwelt in the plain of Shinar (Gen 11:8), or destroying them as He did those living in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:28-29)? There are some who have reasoned on such conditions and concluded, “The Lord hath forsaken the earth, and the Lord seeth not” (Ezek 9:9). Others have thought, “God hath forgotten: He hideth His face; He will never see it” (Psa 10:11). And again flesh reasons, “The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it” (Psa 94:7). Even of old time God pronounces a woe upon those who reasoned, “Who seeth us? and who knoweth us?” (Isa 29:15). This is very flawed reasoning, whether it concerns the presence of evil, and the imaginations of wicked men that moved them to think they are not seen by an infinite God.

SUFFERED ALL NATIONS

“ . . . suffered all nations . . .” Other versions read, “allowed,” NKJV “permitted,” NASB and “let.” NIV

This is the language of Divine control, or Sovereignty, and concerns “all

The emphasis here is not that God simply tolerated them, but that He allowed them to do something, taking into account what they were doing, yet withholding the righteous judgment that was due to them.

nations,” not some nations. The word “suffered” means “to allow, permit, let . . . to suffer one to do what he wishes, not to restrain, let alone,” THAYER and “allowing something to be done . . . leaving someone or something alone.” FRIBERG The point is that God was fully capable of bringing an end to the deviate ways of the heathen by removing them, as He did the seven nations that dwelt in Canaan before Israel (Acts 13:19). That is a prerogative of “the only true God” (John 17:3). The emphasis here is not that God simply tolerated them, but that He allowed them to do something, taking into account what they were doing, yet withholding the righteous judgment that was due to them.

Because He did not interfere with their general comportment, they grew even more wicked in their ways, for decline is in the very nature the flesh (2 Tim 3:13). He gave them no law, no prophet, or no promises for their own. During the “times past,” and prior to Moses, God focused His total attention upon the Jews, speaking to them “by the prophets” (Heb 1:1). So far as the other nations were concerned, He treated them as He did all nations prior to Moses – He “allowed them . . .”

This is why it is dangerous beyond description to assume that if God does not stop a person or persons from doing something, it must be all right, or it is safe to do it. Many a slumbering soul has mistakenly thought in the manner described by Solomon: “Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil” (Eccl 8:11).

Also, Divine allowance is not an appropriate explanation for what men call “freewill” – an expression that God never uses in the manner to which men are accustomed. In fact, the word “freewill,” as used in Scripture (KJV), exclusively refers to the giving of a certain category of offerings under the Law (Lev 22:18,23; 23:38; Num 15:3; 29:36; Deut 12:6;16:10; 17; 23:23; 2 Chron 31:14; Psa 119:108; Ezra 1:4; 3:5. 7:13,16; 8:28). The same is true of the New King James Version, and the New International Version, The New American Standard Bible uses the words “free will” rather than “willingly” in Philemon 1:14. The Revised Standard Version uses “free will” in the same manner in 2 Corinthians 8:3 and Philemon 1:14.

TO WALK IN THEIR OWN WAYS

“ . . . to walk in their own ways.” Other versions read, “to go their own ways,” NASB “go their

own way,” NIV “follow their own ways,” NRSV “go in the way which seemed good to them,” BBE “live as they pleased,” GWN “to go on in their ways,” YLT and “do what they wanted.” IE

When God permitted all nations to walk in their own ways, they lived according to their own perceptions and values. They formed their own objectives, and did what was right in their own eyes.

The word “ways” is translated from a word meaning, “a manner of thinking, feeling, deciding,” THAYER “a manner of living and acting: way of life,” FRIBERG “a way of doing, speaking,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “way of life, conduct.” LEH There are different “ways” mentioned in Scripture.

• “The way of the Lord” (Gen18:19; Judges 2:22; 2 Kgs 21:22; Prov 10:29; Isa 40:3; Jer 5:4,5; Ezek 18:25,29; 33:17,20; Matt 3:3; Mk 1:3; Lk 3:4; John 1:23; Acts 18:25).

- “The way of Jeroboam” (1 Kgs 15:34; 16:2,19,26).
- “The way of the house of Ahab” (2 Kgs 8:27).
- “The way of David” (2 Kgs 22:2; 2 Chron 11:17)
- “The way of Asa” (2 Chron 20:32).
- “The way of sinners” (Psa 1:1).
- “The way of the righteous” (Psa 1:6; Prov 8:20; 12:28; 16:31).
- “The way of His steps” (Psa 85:13).
- “The way of” God’s “testimonies” (Psa 119:14).
- “The way of” God’s “precepts” (Psa 119:27).
- “The way of lying” (Psa 119:29).
- “The way of truth” (Psa 119:30; 2 Pet 2:2).
- “The way of” God’s “commandments” (Psa 119:32).
- “The way of” God’s “statutes” (Psa 119:33).
- “The way of the wicked” (Psa 146:9).
- “The way of His saints” (Prov 2:8).
- “The way of the evil man” (Prov 2:12; 4:14).
- “The way of good men” (Prov 2:20).
- “The way of wisdom” (Prov 4:11).
- “The way of the wicked” (Prov 4:19; 12:26; 15:9; Jer 12:1).
- “The way of life” (Prov 6:23; 10:17; 15:24; Jer 21:8).
- “The way of understanding” (Prov 9:6; 21:16; Isa 40:14).
- “The way of a fool” (Prov 12:15).
- “The way of transgressors” (Prov 13:15).
- “The way of the slothful man” (Prov 15:19).
- “The way of a man” (Prov 21:2,8; Jer 10:23).
- “The way of the froward” (Prov 22:5).
- “The way of an adulterous woman” (Prov 30:20).
- “The way of the just” (Isa 26:7).

- “The way of” God’s “judgments” (Isa 26:8).
- “The way of holiness” (Isa 35:8).
- “The way of” man’s “heart” (Isa 57:17).
- “The way of peace” (Isa 59:8; Lk 1:79; Rom 3:17).
- “The way of the heathen” (Jer 10:2).
- “The way of death” (Jer 1:8).
- “The way of the meek” (Amos 2:7).
- “The way of the Gentiles” (Matt 10:5).
- “The way of righteousness” (Matt 21:32; 2 Pet 2:21).
- “The way of God” (Matt 22:16; Mk 12:14; Lk 20:21; Acts 18:26).
- “The way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).
- “The way of Cain” (Jude 1:11).

There is also mention of “the ways of the Lord” (2 Sam 22:22), “the ways of man” (Job 34:21), “the ways of God” (Job 40:19), “the ways of everyone that is greedy” (Prov 1:19), “the ways of darkness” (Prov 2:13), “the ways of pleasantness” (Prov 3:17), “the ways of death” (Prov 14:12), “the ways of judgment” (Prov 17:23), “the ways of the sons of men” (Jer 32:19), and “the ways of life” (Acts 2:26).

Solomon twice said, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death” (Prov 14:12; 16:25).

Their Own Ways

When God permitted all nations to walk in their own ways, they lived according to their own perceptions and values. They formed their own objectives, and did what was right in their own eyes. They had no mind to seek the Lord, even though that is the reason for the creation and placement of all men in both time and place (Acts 17:26). Even though there is, in fact, only one God, they chose their own gods, and willingly served them. Therefore we read of:

- “The gods of Egypt” (Ex 12:12).
- “The gods of the Amorites” (Josh 24:25).
- “The gods of Syria” (Judges 10:6).
- “Ashtgerpoth, the goddess of the Zikdonians” (1 Kgs 11:33a).
- “Chemosh, the god of the Moabites” (1 Kgs 11:33b).
- “Milcom the god of the children of Ammon” (1 Kgs 11:33c).
- “Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim.” (2 Kgs 17:31)
- “The gods of the nations” (2 Kgs 18:33).
- “. . . where are the gods of Hamath, and of Arpad? where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena, and Ivah” (2 Ki 18:34)
- “The gods of the countries” (2 Kgs 18:35).
- “The gods of the children of Seir” (2 Chron 25:14).
- “The gods of Edom” (2 Chron 20).
- “The gods of Damascus” (2 Chron 28:23).

- “The vanities of the Gentiles” (Jer 14:22).
- “. . . gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” (Dan 5:4).
- “The gods of the earth” (Zeph 2:11).
- There are also 63 references to the god Baal (ex: Num 22:41; Judges 2:13; 1 Kgs 16:31), and 8 references to Molech (ex: Lev 18:21; Lev 20:2; 1 Kgs 11:7; 23:10).
- Jupiter and Hermes are mentioned in our text.

All of these, and more were part of “the ways” of the nations. They developed the concept of their gods, then fashioned them according to their own desires. As it evidenced in our text, they also fashioned their lives around their gods, which were made according to their own lusts and fears.

The following page contains a listing of the gods of Greek and Roman mythology – 64 of them. These were prevalent at the time Paul was ministering, and were all included in the term “vanities.”

Viewed another way, God suffering, or permitting all nations to walk in their own ways is another way of saying He gave them over to their own desires. That He did, in fact, do this, is also affirmed in Scriptures.

In suffering, or allowing, all nations to walk in their own ways, the Lord confirmed the following to angelic hosts and the succeeding generations of men.

- The inadequacy of human understanding and wisdom (1 Cor 1:19-20).
- That it is not in man to direct his own steps (Jer 10:23).
- That the imaginations of the heart are only evil continually (Gen 8:21).
- That no man by searching can find God (Job 11:7; Psa 77:19; Eccl 3:11; Isa 40:26).
- That no man knows the Father except the Son (Matt 11:27).

VIEWED ANOTHER WAY

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- “So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels” (Psa 81:12) – of Israel.

- “Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness?” (Acts 7:42). – of Israel

- “Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves” (Rom 1:24).

- “For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature” (Rom 1:26).

- “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient” (Rom 1:28).

The above conditions are precisely why, apart from Christ, the Gentile world is described as having “no hope” (Eph 2:12). That was the result of being delivered over to their own will – which was certainly not free.

In referring to the former lives of converted Gentiles, Peter said they were formerly guilty of carrying out the “will of the Gentiles,” which involved idolatry. “For the time past of our life may

suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles , when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, ravelings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries ” (1 Pet 4:3). One might postulate that their will was free. However, Jesus affirmed “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin ” (John 8:34). Paul affirms the same of the past lives of believers: “ye were the servants of sin ” (Rom 6:17,10). However one may choose to describe the condition in which people exist outside of Christ, it is one from which they must be freed or liberated (Luke 4:18; John 8:36).

In the case of idolatry, such a state is also one referred to as “ carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led ” (1 Cor 12:2).

One complication of idolatry that alters the manner in which it is considered is the fact that idols are associated with demons. This was taught by Moses, inspired Jewish writers, the Psalmist, and the Apostles.

• **MOSES.** “They provoked him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they him to anger. They sacrificed unto devils (demons NKJV) , not to God; to gods whom they knew not , to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not” (Deut 32:16-17).

It is important to know the manner of the kingdom in such matters. Whether the commandment is to a man with a withered hand (“stretch forth thy hand”), an impotent man (“pick up thy bed and walk”), a dead man (“Lazarus, Come forth!”), or those who worship false gods (“turn from these vanities”), the Word is accompanied with power.

MOSES. “For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons had cast them off from executing the priest's office unto the LORD: and he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils (demons NKJV) , and for the calves which he had made.” (2 Chron 11:14-15).

• **PSALMIST.** “And they served their idols: which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils (demons NKJV) ” (Psa 106:36-37).

• **PAUL.** “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils (demons NKJV) , and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils (demons NKJV) ” (1 Cor 10:20).

• **JOHN.** “And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils (demons NKJV) , and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk” (Rev 9:20).

The complicating factor in this is that, apart from God, men are never depicted as being able to resist or control demons. That was a domination that could only be broken by Divine power.

WHAT DOES ALL OF THIS MEAN?

All of this means that the requirement to “turn from these vanities” was equivalent to being freed from demonic power. It is like Jesus freeing the woman who was bowed over for eighteen years. She had been dominated by “a spirit of infirmity” being “bound” by Satan (Lk 13:11-16). It is like telling an impotent man, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk” (John 5:8).

How the Lord Works

It is important to know the manner of the kingdom in such matters. Whether the commandment is to a man with a withered hand (“stretch forth thy hand”), an impotent man (“pick up thy bed and

walk”), a dead man (“Lazarus, Come forth!”), or those who worship false gods (“turn from these vanities”) , the Word is accompanied with power. Those who embrace that word will be enabled to fulfill its requirement, for it is God who works in the individual “both to will and to do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). Those who “gladly receive the Word” will be able to do what it demands of them. The duration of their bondage is of no consequence – whether from the mother’s womb (Acts 3:2), eighteen years (Lk 13:11), eight years (Acts 9:33), from a child (Mk 9:21), or a long time (Lk 8:27).

The Relevancy of This View

Those in Christ have embraced him even though “they “were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:15). The commandments that are delivered to the children of God come with all of the required power to do them – just as surely as the word delivered in our text: “ye should turn from these vanities.” Ponder some of those commandments and exhortations.

- “Awake to righteousness, and sin not!” (1 Cor 15:34).
- “Come out from among them, and be ye separate” (2 Cor 6:17).
- “Mortify your members that are upon the earth” (Col 3:5).
- “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17).
- “Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (Eph 6:10).
- “Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18).
- “Be not conformed to this world” (Rom 12:2).
- “Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal 5:1).
- “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Tim 6:12).
- “Keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).
- “Keep yourselves in the love of God” (Jude 1:21).

These are no less requirements than turning from false gods. Nor, indeed, are they lacking of the power required to fulfill them.

GREEK AND ROMAN MYTHOLOGICAL GODS

Greek Name

Roman Name

Description

Zeus

Jupiter, Jove

Lord of the Sky, Gods, and Thunder, also Rain-god, Cloud-gatherer

Hera

Juno

Protector of Marriage

Poseidon

Neptune

Ruler of the Sea

Hades, Polydectes

Pluto

God of the Underworld and Precious Metals

♀

Libitina

Goddess of the Underworld

Pallas Athena

Minerva

Goddess of the City, Education/Science, and War

Phoebus Apollo

Apollo

God of Sun, Truth, Music, Healing

Artemis, Orthia, Phoebe

Diana

Goddess of Wild Things, Hunter-in-Chief

Aphrodite, Anadyomene

Venus

Goddess of Love and Beauty

Hermes, Psychopompos

Mercury

God of Commerce and Market, Zeus' Messenger

Ares

Mars

God of War

Enyo

Bellona

Lesser Goddess of War

Hephaestus

Vulcan, Mulciber

God of the Forge and Fire, Workman to the immortals

Hestia

Vesta

Goddess of the Hearth and Home; also Fertility(Greek only)

♀

Priapus

God of Fertility

Eros

Cupid, Amor

God of Love

Hymen

♀

God of the Wedding Feast

Hebe

♀

Goddess of Youth

♀

Juventus

God of Youth

Iris

♀

Goddess of the Rainbow

Persephone, Kora

Persipina, Libera

Goddess of Spring [Season], Underworld through Hades

Demeter

Ceres

Goddess of the Corn, Earth, Harvest

Dionysus, Lycaeus

Bacchus, Liber

God of the Vine, Wine, Merriment

Pan

Inuus, Faunus

God of Flocks, Sheep

Selene

Luna

Goddess of the Moon

Helios

Sol

God of the Sun

☿

Terminus

Guardian of Boundaries

♃

Priapus

Cause of Fertility

♄

Pales

Strengtheners of Cattle

♁

Sylvanus

Helper of Plowmen and Woodcutters

Greek Name

Roman Name

Description

☽

Saturn

Protector of the Sowers and the Seed

☽

Janus

God of good beginnings

Eileithyia, Ilithyia

Lucina

Goddess of Childbirth

☽

Pomona & Vertumnus

Powers Protecting Orchards and Gardens

Aether

☽

God of Light

Eos

Aurora, Mater Matuta

Goddess of the Dawn

Asklepios

Aesculapius

God of Health and Medicine

Hygea

☽

Goddess of Health

Aeolus

☽

King of the Winds

Boreas

Aquilo

North Wind

Zephyr

Favonius

West Wind

Notus

Auster

South Wind

Eurus

Eurus

East Wind

Pontus

☯

God of the Deep Sea

Nereus

☯

"Old Man of the Sea"

Triton

☯

Trumpeter of the Sea

Ate

☯

Goddess of Mischief

Eris

Discordia

Goddess of Discord

Maia

Fauna, Bono Dea

Goddess of Fields, "Good Goddess"

☯

Flora

Goddess of Flowers

Hypnos

Somnus

God of Sleep

☽

Juturna

Goddess of Springs [Water]

Nike

Victoria

Goddess of Victory

Peitha

Suadela

Goddess of Persuasion

Hecate

Trivia

Goddess of the Crossways, the Dark Side of the Moon, and Magic

Tyche

Fortuna

Goddess of Fortune

☽

Voluptas

Goddess of Pleasure

Poena

☽

Goddess of Punishment

Nemesis

☽

Goddess of Revenge

Hespera

☽

Goddess of Dusk

Morpheus

☽

God of Dreams

Phosphor

Lucifer

Light-bearer, Star that brings in the day

Fama

☽

God of fame, rumor

GOD DID NOT LEAVE HIMSELF WITHOUT WITNESS

“ 17 Nevertheless He left not Himself without witness, in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness. 18 And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.”

Paul and Barnabas will now reason with the people concerning the necessity of turning from vain and powerless gods. They knew this was not something that could be ignored with impunity, for those who refuse to turn from what is false to the true God are standing on the precipice of eternal ruin.

NEVERTHELESS

“Nevertheless . . .” Other versions read, “and yet,” NASB “but,” BBE “although,” CSB “though indeed,” DARBY and “but even then.” NJB

The word “nevertheless” comes from a Greek word meaning, “and yet, although indeed,” FRIBERG “although and yet,” USB and “markers of concession, with the probable implication of an additional component of contrast - 'although, even though, and yet.” LOUW-NIDA

The idea here is that God has revealed something of His own nature – something that, if seen, will constrain the individual to turn from vanities to Him, from the false to the true. Even though He had allowed the nations to walk in their own imaginations, God was not idle or indifference to their condition. More is involved than the mere assessment of the condition. It is possible for something to be done about it.

This confirms God that takes no delight in the death of the wicked, nor is He seeking a reason to condemn. For this reason He said to Israel, who had drifted from Him, “As I live, saith the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 33:11).

HE LEFT NOT HIMSELF WITHOUT WITNESS

“ . . . He left not Himself without witness . . .” Other versions read, “has not left Himself without testimony,” NIV “did not leave Himself without evidence of His nature,” CSB “He has given evidence of His existence,” GWN “without evidence of Himself,” NJB “did things to prove He is real,” IE “has not left His existence unattested,” WEYMOUTH “did not fail to furnish evidences,” WILLIAMS “did not neglect to leave some witness of Himself,” AMPLIFIED

The Psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth his handiwork” (Psa 19:1) – EVIDENCE! Paul the apostle wrote that there was a kind of intuitive knowledge of God that makes men inexcusable: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them ; for God hath showed it unto them” (Rom 1:19) – EVIDENCE! He added that men live in a testifying creation as well: “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom 1:20) – EVIDENCE!

However, our text goes even further than that, making the matter of God’s revelation more personal. God has gone to great extent to confirm His willingness to save, even though men, apart from grace, remain miserably ignorant of it.

HE DID GOOD

“ . . . in that He did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons . . .” Other versions read, “has shown kindness,” NIV “He does good things,” CJB “doing good,” DOUAY “showed His benefits,” PNT “His reminders – the kind things,” LIVING “bestowing His goodness,” NA “His beneficence,” WEYMOUTH “constantly showing His kindness,” WILLIAMS “did you good and [showed you] kindness,” AMPLIFIED and “shown kindnesses.” PHILLIPS

Although God allowed the nations to walk in their own ways, serving “vanities,” and ascribing Divine qualities to lifeless idols, He showed kindness toward them. Those kindnesses were confirming evidence of both His existence and His nature.

The good things declared are what informed men consider ordinary things: “rain and fruitful seasons.” Other versions read, “rain and crops in their seasons,” NIV “rain from heaven and times of fruit,” BBE “sent down the rain and made the fruits to grow in their seasons,” MRD “rain from heaven and seasons of fruitfulness,” NJB “rain and good crops,” LIVING and “rain from the sky and good harvests at the right times.” IE

The reference to rain relates to the reaping of produce at appropriate time – “the time of harvest” (Josh 3:15; Prov 25:13). Timely rains are not the result of the laws of nature, but of the beneficence of a gracious God. Fruitful seasons, or the reaping of crops, are not to be taken lightly, as though they occurred automatically. They are the provisions of a good God.

Men are prone to complain when it does not rain, yet fail to give thanks when it does. They are offended by droughts and famines, yet do not praise the Lord for rain and harvest, even though those things are the testimony of a good and considerate God. Heathen nations, similar to Israel of old, did not know that God Himself gave them “corn, and wine, and oil,” while they gave the credit for them to other gods (Hosea 2:8) – “vanities,” from which Paul and Barnabas now urged them to turn.

Jesus also associated rain with the mercy of God: “for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:45). No person who is aware of light and rain has a right to withhold the glory for them from God. It is a grievous sin to give for credit for such things to idols – whether they are gods of wood, stone, silver, and gold, or, what men refer to as, mother nature .

FILLING OUR HEARTS

“ . . . filling our hearts with food and gladness.” Other versions read, “satisfying your hearts with food and gladness,” NASB “provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy,” NIV “filling you with food, and your hearts with joy,” NRSV “filling you with food and your hearts with happiness,” CJB “filled you with nourishment and gladness for your hearts,” NAS and “giving you food and happiness to your hearts' content.” PHILLIPS

This is the ordinary lot of humanity – food and gladness, or the absence of moroseness. This is not true in every case, and Paul and Barnabas do not insinuate that it is. There remain droughts, floods, famine, and other disturbances of the course of nature. While we are saddened by the existence of such things, we are also chagrined that in most all of the nations experiencing such things there is idol worship and the embrace of false gods and erroneous religion. Some of those nations are even noted for witchcraft and all manner of the occult. However, even in those cases, every such place does not have rain withheld from it, nor are they always in a miserable condition.

Whether they are cognitive of it

There are some times when stopping the further outbreak of sin becomes the most important thing. There are inspired records of such occasions.

or not, all men are obligated to recognize the Lord as the Giver of, what men think are, the normal amenities of life. They alone ought to be sufficient reason to turn from idols to serve the living God, giving Him thanks and displaying gratefulness.

In giving this word, Paul and Barnabas were showing how utterly unreasonable it was to serve idols, and even make an attempt to offer sacrifices to the men who wrought a miracle in their sight. Add to that the fact Paul and Barnabas had been preaching publically, and that the man that was healed had “faith to be healed.” This meant that sufficient had been said to induce faith in God. That means that the Gospel had been preached, for “faith” comes by hearing the word of the Gospel (Rom 19:14-17).

I do not believe enough is being made these days of the responsibility of men to seek the Lord and give Him glory.

SCARCELY RESTRAINED

“ And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.” Other versions read, “with difficulty restrained,” NASB “had difficulty keeping the crowd from,” NIV “it was hard for them to keep the people from,” BBE “barely stopped,” CSB “scarce appeased,” GENEVA “with difficulty prevented,” MRD “scarcely persuaded,” NET “just managed to prevent,” NJB “The people still wanted to offer sacrifices to them, but Paul and Barnabas stopped them,” IE “it was all they could do to keep the crowds from,” ISV and “only just succeeded in restraining the crowd. PHILLIPS

After tearing their clothes, running among the crowd, asking why they were doing such a thing, and reasoning with them about the true God, they barely managed to stop the people from offering sacrifices to them. Nor, indeed, does our text suggest that this was done quickly. However, the “apostles” did not cease their efforts until they had succeeded in stopping the Lycaonians from offering sacrifice to them.

There are some times when stopping the further outbreak of sin becomes the most important thing. There are inspired records of such occasions.

• **MOSES.** Moses stops the sinful expressions at the foot of mount Sinai, removing the golden calf they were worshiping, grinding it into powder, scattering it upon the water,

and making the children of Israel drink it (Ex 32:19-20). Before the day was over, 3,000 men died.

- **AARON.** Aaron runs through the Israelites with a censer, to stop a plague from the Lord. As he stood between the living and the dead, “the plague was stayed” (Num 16:46–48). Before he finished this work, 14,700 people died in the plague.

- **PHINEHAS.** Phinehas rose up from among the congregation, took his javelin, and pinned an adulterous couple to the floor of their tent, “so the plague was stayed from the children of Israel” 24,000 people died before he could do this (Num 25:7-8; Psa 106:30).

- **DAVID.** In a plague during which the angel of the Lord slew 70,000 men, David built an altar and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, “and the plague was stayed from Israel” (2 Sam 24:25).

My point here is that there are times when stopping a wayward action takes the precedence. During such times, there is no extent available to men that is not worthy of the effort. Sometimes this action can avert Divine judgment, as in the cases cited above.

Paul and Barnabas acted in accordance with this. They knew the enormity of the transgression of offering sacrifice to those who are not God.

JEWS FROM ANTIOCH AND ICONIUM PURSUE AND STONE PAUL

“ 19 And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.”

Confirming the malignancy that had corrupted the Jews, even though they had heard the glad tidings of good things, certain of them pursue Paul, catching up with him in Lystra.

JEWS FROM ANTIOCH AND ICONIUM

“And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium . . .” These were the two cities in which Paul and Barnabas had previous preached (Acts 13:14-41; 14:1-3). They had been in the synagogues of both cities, and had remained in Iconium for a “long time . . . speaking boldly in the Lord,” giving testimony to “the word of His grace,” with God confirming their word, granting “signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (14:3). They had been “expelled” from the coasts around Antioch, They were then “assaulted” by the Jews in Iconium, and fled to Lystra (14:5). Now the Jews come after them, pursuing them as though they were wild animals. The Jews of Thessalonica did the same thing later, when Paul was in Berea (17: 13).

WHO PERSUADED THE PEOPLE

“ . . . who persuaded the people...” Other versions read, “persuaded the multitudes,” NKJV “having won over the multitudes,” NASB “won the crowd over,” NIV “got control over the people,” BBE “excited the people against them,” MRD “turned the people against them,” NJB “obtained the peoples’ consent,” TNT “turned the crowds into a murderous mob,” LIVING and “turning the minds of the people against Paul.” PHILLIPS

Here we see the aggressiveness of the Jews, who could not receive what Paul and Barnabas were preaching. This is why Paul said of them, “ . . . the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men” (1 Thess 2:14-15). This is what unbelief does to people. It not only hardens the heart, but leads to beastly conduct as well. This is because unbelief throws the door of the heart open to Satan, dulling the conscience and steeling the mind against the truth. Unbelief is like a great room in which Satan works freely, moving people to do things they would never do if they were in their right mind. Such poor

souls are vassals of the devil, taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim 2:26).

Behold the fickleness of the citizens of Lystra. One moment they are attempting to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas, persuaded they are the gods come down to them in the likeness of men. Then, aroused by Jews from two other cities, they become a raging mob, prepared to kill Paul and Barnabas as though they were unworthy to live another moment.

How could such a dramatic change take place in these people? It is because of the fundamental inconsistency and instability of the flesh. When it comes to the things of God and the people of God, “the natural man” is not capable of sound judgment (1 Cor 2:14). Oh, that professed Christians were more aware of the danger of trafficking in the wisdom of men and the arena of unbelief!

THEY STONED PAUL

“ . . . and, having stoned Paul ..” Other versions read, “they stoned Paul,” NKJV “after stoning Paul,” BBE “they tried to stone Paul to death,” GWN and “the people stoned Paul.” IE

It is well noted by some that the process of stoning, or how people went about it, is not mentioned in Scripture. McCLINTOK STRONG’S The Word of God does not glamorize violence, as men are prone to do, drawing attention to its details. The Jewish Talmud (traditional Jewish law) says that before stoning the individual, he was “wholly divested of clothing.” ISBE I do not know if this is what took place in our text. The very notation, however, confirms that a humiliating death was intended – humiliating because public, and because of the condition of the victim.

Paul refers to this experience in a listing of some of the perils that he faced, writing, “once I was stoned” (2 Cor 11:25). So far as the Scriptural record is concerned, no one else survived being stoned, for it was intended to terminate the life of the one so judged – it was a form of capital punishment (Lev 20:2,27; 24:16; Num 15:35; 35:17).

Only Paul is said to have been stoned – not Barnabas, even though he was thought to have been Jupiter, or Zeus, who was the greater god, Hermes, or Mercurius, being his mythical offspring. Paul, however, was taken to be the “chief speaker,” and the contention the Jews had with Paul and Barnabas was the Gospel that they preached.

It also ought to be noted that Paul suffered the same treatment that Stephen experienced – stoning: something to which Paul, when known as Saul, had given his consent (Acts 22:20). I seriously doubt that this is nothing more than coincidence. Yet, care must be taken not to take the matter too far.

THEY DREW HIM OUT OF THE CITY

“ . . . drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.” Other versions read, “dragged him out fo the city, supposing him to be dead,” NKJV “dragged him outside the city,, thinking he was dead,” NIV “had him pulled out of town, supposing him to have died,” DARBY “dragged him out of the city, apparently dead,” LIVING and “The people thought they had killed him.” IE

The general consensus of the students of Scripture is that this is the incident to which Paul refers in Second Corinthians. If this is the case, and there is no strong reason to suppose that it is not, Paul himself was not sure whether he was dead or not. Here is his account from the Amplified Bible.

“TRUE, THERE is nothing to be gained by it, but [as I am obliged] to boast, I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows—was caught up to the third heaven. And I know that this man—whether in the body or away from the body I do not know, God knows Was caught up into paradise, and he heard utterances beyond the power of man to put into words, which man is not permitted to utter. Of this same [man’s experiences] I will boast, but of myself (personally) I will not

boast, except as regards my infirmities (my weaknesses)” (2 Cor 12:1-5).

The above text is a continuation of Paul’s defense of his apostleship. The previous chapter cited the sufferings and perils that he endured. In this text he deals with visions and revelations that he had received. Some have thought Paul was writing about some other person, but this is not a view that has been well thought out. In this passage, Paul is not writing about the experience of others, but of his own. He even says that he is himself boasting in “this same man’s experiences” – that is, they were his own. He then states that he was given a “thorn in the flesh” to keep him from “being puffed up and too elated by the exceeding greatness (preeminence) of these revelations” AMPLIFIED (2 Cor 12:7). There is no question, therefore, concerning Paul being the person of reference.

Paul states that he did not know whether he was “in the body” or “out of the body” – that is, whether he was dead or alive. A case may be built for him really being dead – namely, what reason would the people have had for ceasing the stoning if there was the slightest chance that he was not yet dead. However, all of that is nothing more than supposition, and it is not time well spent attempting to justify the conclusion.

I do not doubt that they pulled Paul outside of the city, leaving him to be consumed by vultures or other animals of prey. The heartlessness of the whole procedure is a striking demonstration of what unbelief can do to a person. There is a certain hardness and callousness that dominates the heart of the one who refuses to believe.

You may recall that the Jews twice “took up stones” to stone Jesus Himself, but could not carry it out (John 8:59; 10:31-39). Moses once cried out to the Lord, “What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me” (Ex 17:4). On another occasion, David’s own people sought to stone him (1 Sam 30:6). Truly, there are times when, as Jesus Himself said, a man’s foes are the ones closest to him (Matt 10:36).

It is no wonder we are told, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

THE DISCIPLES GATHER AROUND PAUL, AND HE ROSE UP

“ 20 Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.”

According to appearance, it surely looked as though the ministry of Paul was over. However, this was not the case. Only the Lord, who commissions the minister, can officially close his ministry.

THE DISCIPLES STOOD ROUND ABOUT HIM

“Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him . . .” Other versions read, “when the disciples gathered around him,” NKJV “while the disciples stood around him,” NASB “after the disciples had gathered around him,” NIV “when the disciples surrounded him,” NRSV “when the disciples came around him,” BBE “while the disciples encircled him,” DARBY “the disciples assembled around him,” GWN “the disciples came crowding round him,” NJB “the believers gathered around him,” RWB “the disciples, having surrounded him,” YLT “the disciples had collected round him,” WEYMOUTH “the disciples formed a circle around him,” ISV and “while the disciples were gathered in a circle round him.” PHILLIPS

It is of interest that there is a mention of “the disciples.” Who were they? Following their departure from Iconium, we are told that Paul and Barnabas “fled unto Lystra and Derbe,” preaching the Gospel there (14:6-7). There, in Lystra, Paul healed a cripple man who heard him speak, because he perceived the man “had faith to be healed.” Following that, the people of that region sought to offer sacrifices

to them. There is no record of others who believed, or of any disciples being in that region who had formerly believed. Some people from Iconium may have continued with Paul and Barnabas, but we are not told that this was the case.

Not knowing how long Paul and Barnabas had preached in this region, and lacking any evidence that believers already were found in Lystra, I conclude that these disciples were new believers – like the crippled man who was healed.

Behold the devotion of these disciples, as well as their boldness! According to the flesh, they stood the risk of being stoned also. Yet they are deeply committed to the “minister” through whom they had believed (1 Cor 3:5). This is the manner of the kingdom, and no one should be surprised when genuine converts remain close to the ones who declared the truth of God to them. This is because the new birth is accompanied with a hunger and thirst for righteousness, together with a love for the truth.

- After Peter and John had healed the lame man at the Gate Beautiful, he “held on” to them, refusing to leave them (Acts 3:8,11,14).
- Following his conversion, when Paul went to Jerusalem, he joined the apostles “coming in and going out” with them (Acts 9:28).
- When the Gentiles were converted at the house of Cornelius at Peter’s preaching, they “asked him to stay a few days” NKJV (Acts 10:48).
- When Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, “many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed them” (Acts 13:43).
- When Lydia was converted, she asked Paul and company to stay in her house (Acts 16:15).
- Later, when Paul would be in Athens, “certain men” would cleave to him (Acts 17:34).

This kind of attachment is common throughout the book of Acts. However, in our day there is a new kind of religion that does not require, or even encourage, extended exposure to holy men. In fact, within an institutional setting, there is often no convenient means through which new converts can be regularly around those who brought the word of the Lord to them,

In our text, not only were the disciples drawn to Paul, but surrounded him after he had been rejected, stoned, and pulled outside of the city. There is no evidence of any fear within them, but they are moved by the boldness of faith.

Some have conjectured that Paul was not really dead, and that these disciples gathered about him to pray for his healing. One commentator poses a most interesting situation, providing the view of others as well. “The probability is that he was stunned by a blow — perhaps a single blow and after a short time recovered from it. Nothing is more common than thus by a violent blow on the head to be rendered apparently lifeless, the effect of which soon is over, and the person restored to strength. Pricaeus and Wetstein suppose that Paul feigned himself to be dead, and when out of danger rose and returned to the city.” ALBERT BARNES Considering the reason for stoning – which was always to induce death – and the absolute and venomous hatred of the Jews, such an explanation is incredulous, and betrays a most uncomely manner of thinking. While it is remotely possible that Paul was not dead, as he himself appears to suggest in Second Corinthians, that could not have been the way he appeared, for the ones who stoned him were sure he was dead.

HE ROSE UP

“ . . . he rose up . . .” Other versions read, “he arose,” NASB “he got up,” NIV “as they did so he stood up” YLT and “Paul got up.” PHILLIPS

Whether Paul was dead or near death, this is a record of Divine intervention. It is inconceivable that someone who had just been stoned by a group of angry and aggressive Jews could, through natural means alone, get up on his feet and walk back to the city. I will, attribute this to the faith of these disciples who had gathered around him,

Whether Paul was dead or near death, this is a record of Divine intervention. It is inconceivable that someone who had just been stoned by a group of angry and aggressive Jews could, through natural means alone, get up on his feet and walk back to the city. I will, attribute this to the faith of these disciples who had gathered around him, and suggest that this is the reason they are referenced here, and never before or after mentioned.

AND CAME INTO THE CITY

“ . . . and came into the city . . .” Other versions read, “went into the city,” NKJV “entered the city,” NASB “went back into the city,” NIV “went into the town,” BBE and “went back into the town.” CJB

That is, Paul went back into Lystra, in which he had been stoned, and out of which he had been dragged. We are not told whether or not others saw him, but I do not doubt the possibility of such a thing. The fact that Paul did not immediately move on to another place suggests that he had no intention of hiding, or keeping aloof from those who had stoned him. It seems to me that we have every reason to believe that he

confirmed the faith of those new converts as he was always inclined to do.

In his return to Lystra, we are exposed to Paul’s faith, courage, and determination to serve the Lord – and such things are refreshing to ponder.

HE DEPARTED WITH BARNABAS

“ . . . and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” Viewed from the standpoint of nature, “the next day” would have found Paul with inflammation, soreness, and a stiffening of the muscles. After all, he had been “stoned.” I conclude, therefore, that he had been made whole. If the Hivites were so sore three days after they were circumcised that they were easily slain by the sons of Jacob (Gen 34:1-26), what would be the condition of a man who had been stoned, then dragged from the city and left for dead? At the least, he was on the verge of death.

We are not told how Barnabas escaped the stoning – or if it was even necessary for him to escape. I gather that Paul being the “chief speaker” accounted for his stoning, and for Barnabas not being stoned as well. At any rate, Paul and Barnabas resumed the mission to which they had been called, and went to Derbe to continue the work of the Lord. So far as their work for the Lord was concerned, it went forward just as though nothing of consequence had happened.

As is proved true throughout the book of Acts, our text has confirmed a number of things – things that must be perceived, and within the awareness of which the people of God are to conduct their lives. These realities do not center in humanity itself, but in the One who created it.

CONCLUSION

As is proved true throughout the book of Acts, our text has confirmed a number of things – things that must be perceived, and within the awareness of which the people of God are to conduct their lives. These realities do not center in humanity itself, but in the One who created it. The aim is primarily to bring glory to God, and secondarily to bring benefit to men.

- The power of the Gospel to save, and to discover the hearts of men.
- The effectiveness of faith.
- The nature of faith to obey.
- The impact of faith upon those who possess it.
- Faith in others can be perceived by those with spiritual insight.
- Spiritual misconceptions that lead people to improper action must be confronted and subdued.
- The impact of the faith of God's elect upon those who do not have it.
- The hostility of the flesh.
- The impotence of traditional religion.
- The power of the grace of God.
- The impact of unbelief on those dominated by it.
- The fickleness of the flesh.
- The tendency of men to be religious.
- The uncompromising responsibility of men to their Creator.
- The bond that forms between those who believe, and those who delivered the Word fo them.
- The power of God to sustain those who called into His work.
- The superiority of the work of the Lord.
- The uncompromising nature of faith.
- The compelling effect of the Holy Spirit upon those who do not quench or grieve Him.
- The seriousness of being wrong about the Living God and Jesus Christ.
- The persevering nature of faith.
- The effectiveness of the unity of the Spirit.
- Atheism is not natural.
- God has left abundant witness of His beneficence – enough that should move men to seek Him.
- The confirmation of believers is critical in the work of the Lord.

These observations confirm that the records in the book of Acts are the accounts of real spiritual life and its impact upon those who behold it. Luke does not give us philosophical views of life in Christ, but presents reality.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Ex 20:3-4)

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: (Exo 20:4)

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Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #63

THE WORD CONTINUES TO SPREAD

“ 14:21 And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, 22 Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. 23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed. 24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: 26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. 27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. 28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.” (Acts 14:21-28)

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the book of Acts there is a marked emphasis on preaching and teaching. Thirty-seven times the book of Acts refers to preaching (3:20; 4:2; 5:42; 8:4,5,12,25,35,40; 9:27; 10:36,37,42; 11:19,20; 13:5,24,38,42; 14:7,15,21,25; 15:21,35,36; 16:6,10; 17:3,13,18; 19:13; 20:7,9,25; 28:31). Nineteen times it refers to teaching (1:1; 4:2,18; 5:21,25,28,42; 11:26; 13:1; 14:21; 15:1,35; 16:21; 18:11,25; 20:20; 21:28; 22:3; 28:31). In addition, there are references to reasoning (Acts 6:2; 17:2; 18:4,14,19; 24:25; 28:29), persuasion (13:43; 14:19; 18:4; 19:8,26; 21:14; 26:26,28; 28:23), disputation (9:29; 15:2; 17:17), declaring (8:33; 9:27; 10:8; 12:17; 13:32,41; 15:2,4, 12,14; 17:23; 20:27; 21:19; 25:14),

CONTENTS

- **PREACHING AND TEACHING (14:21a)**
- **THEY RETURNED AND CONFIRMED THE DISCIPLES (14:21b-22a)**
- **THEY EXHORTED THEM TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH (14:22b)**
- **SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE (14:22c-)**
- **THEY ORDAINED ELDERS AND COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD (14:23)**
- **THEY CONTINUED UNTIL THE WORK WAS FULFILLED (14:24-26)**
- **THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE (14:27-28)**
- **CONCLUSION**

exhorting (2:40; 11:23; 13:15; 14:22; 15:32; 18:27; 20:2; 27:22), and speaking (1:3,9; 2:46,7,11,16,22,29; 3:21,24; 4:17,18,20,29; 5:20,40; 6:11,13; 7:44; 8:24,34; 9:27; 10:32,46; 11:15; 13:40,43, 45,46; 14:3,9,12; 16:14; 17:19; 18:9,26; 19:36,41; 20:30; 21:37,39; 23:5,9; 24:10; 16:1,14,25,26,30; 27:11,35; 28:20,22,24, 25).

There is no entertainment quotient in Kingdom labors. No inspired efforts are intended to bring momentary satisfaction, or appeal to the emotion alone. Everything is calculated to awaken the deepest and most profound capacities of men, motivating them through reason, as compared with raw emotion. This is only fitting in view of the fact that we are made in the image of God.

All of this confirms that the work of the Lord is carried out within the arena of thought, consideration, and decision. It is associated with purpose, objective, intention, and the weighing of circumstances and alternatives. There are unalterable facts to be perused, promises to be pondered, and warnings to be considered.

The work of the Lord has to do with people being added to the Lord, then being established in Him. As will be confirmed in this text, care was taken not to leave believers in an uninformed and vulnerable state. A certain priority was placed upon their growth in Christ Jesus. This is because the objective of salvation is not simply to get us out of sin, but into glory as well – and that involves sanctification, in which a progressive change is made from one increasing stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18). It is essential that the carrying out of this objective be seen in the various initiatives that are reported in the book of Acts. To this point, these include the following.

- The initial tarrying in Jerusalem until the disciples were endued with power through the Holy Spirit (1:12-26).
- The activities on the day of Pentecost (2:14-41).
- The activities following the day of Pentecost (2:42-47).
- The activities in Solomon's porch (3:12-26).
- Peter's word to the Jewish leaders (4:8-12).
- Stephen's word to the Sanhedrin (7:2-53).
- Philip's preaching in Samaria (8:5-12).
- Philip's preaching to the Ethiopian eunuch (8:37-40).
- Saul preaching in the synagogues (9:20).
- Peter preaching at the house of Cornelius (10:34-48).
- Paul preaching in Antioch of Pisidia (13:16-41).

- The appeal to the idolaters in Lystra (14:15-17).
- The confirming of the souls in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (14:22).

In all of these cases there was a strong appeal to reason – to both the heart and the mind. There was no appeal to matters that were of a strictly personal nature. Even when people were healed, no time was spent diagnosing the disease or infirmity, or developing the various difficulties associated with it. With unwavering consistency what people were called to was accented, not what they were saved or delivered from.

Throughout all of the reports, no person of God is ever depicted as exploiting the people. The one individual who sought to gain fleshly advantage from the things of God was Simon the sorcerer – and he was soundly rebuked for his effort (8:20-23). Later, Paul will declare that charlatans would arise, seeking to draw disciples to themselves. They would come from the ranks of the leaders of the church, and they are referred to as “grievous wolves” who would not “spare the flock” (Acts 20:29-30). Today, such men are rather common – but they are still “grievous wolves,” and they still do not “spare the flock,” harming it rather than building it up.

All of this confirms that a great “falling away” has taken place, just as the Spirit said (2 Thess 2:3). While it is not fashionable to speak of such things, it is necessary to draw attention to the apostolic warnings of conditions that have now become common.

• **DRAWING AWAY DISCIPLES.** “For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw **Think of it this way: the lofty examples that are chronicled in the book of Acts are conditions from which the modern church has fallen. The absence of the miraculous is not so much the point. As the absence of gladly**

away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30).

• **A FORM OF GODLINESS.** “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof : from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

• **NOT ENDURE SOUND DOCTRINE.** “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:4).

• **BRING IN DAMNABLE HERESIES.** “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies , even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Pet 2:1-2).

• **A FALLING AWAY.** “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thess 2:3).

Think of it this way: the lofty examples that are chronicled in the book of Acts represent conditions from which the modern church has fallen. The absence of the miraculous is not so much the point. As the absence of gladly receiving the word, unwavering persuasion, and a commitment of the whole of life to the Lord. The nominal church now occupies lower ground, where such marvelous things do not take place with any degree of consistency. The fervor that does exist is too often institutional

hype, and not that which is produced by faith – and even that is short-lived. It is a most tragic circumstance!

In this text, Paul and Barnabas continue spreading the Word in new regions. Then, they revisit the areas where there were disciples. Upon the completion of the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, they returned to Antioch to give a report of what the Lord had done with them, and how the door of faith had been opened to the Gentiles. Thus we are provided an overview of the completion of a specific mission. It was carried out faithfully and effectively in the midst of inimical forces.

PREACHING AND TEACHING

“ 14:21a And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many . . .”

This is an inspired description of the activities of Paul and Barnabas in Derbe. The words have no meaning whatsoever in an institutional setting. This is because men have assigned their own preconceived meanings to preaching and teaching. In so doing, they have obscured both the nature and the substance of the activity of these men of God. They did not become embroiled in community activities, social needs, or personal crises. Nor, indeed did they target special people groups – all of which are primary in contemporary Christian outreaches.

PREACHED THE GOSPEL

“And when they had preached the gospel to that city . . .” Other versions read, “proclaimed,” NRSV “evangelized,” CSB “told the good news.” WILLIAMS

The words “preached the gospel” are translated from a single Greek word: **Euvaggelisa,menoi**, . The word evangelized is a transliteration of this word, which means “to bring good news, to announce glad tidings,” THAYER This word is used to describe the proclaiming of various messages of good things or glad tidings.

- The birth of Jesus (Lk 1:19).
- The “kingdom of God” (Lk 4:43; Lk 8:1; 16:16).
- “Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42)
- “The word” (Acts 8:4).
- “The kingdom of God and the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:12).
- “Jesus” (Acts 8:35).
- “Peace by Jesus Christ” (Acts 10:36).
- “The Lord Jesus” (Acts 11:20).
- The fulfillment of “the promise which was made to the fathers” (Acts 13:32).
- That men should “turn from” idols “unto the living God” (Acts 14:15).
- “The word of the Lord” (Acts 15:35).
- “The gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15).
- “Of God” (2 Cor 11:7).
- “Him” (Jesus – Gal 1:16).
- “The faith” (Gal 1:23).
- “Peace” (Eph 2:17).
- “The unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8).

From the standpoint of translation and precise language, each of the above expressions can be preceded by the phrase, “announced the glad tidings concerning.” Where a specific message is not mentioned, the proper translation of the expression is, “preached the gospel” (ex – Acts 8:40; 14:7,21; 16:16; Rom 1:15; 15:20; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:16,18; 2 Cor 10:16; 1 Pet 1:12).

There is an objectivity in what is preached that transcends a mere human solution, moral code, or sectarian stance. The message itself is not man-centered, but brings good tidings of Divine activity that regards men.

In Christ and the New Covenant, the word that is declared – the essential message – is a good one that produces gladness. That gladness is expressed in faith, hope, and love – all of which are anchored in eternity. The “glad tidings” are not the proclamation of a new way of life, an effective discipline of life, or the secret to happiness in this world. Christ is at the heart of the message, which is the declaration of His Person, redemptive achievements, current ministry, and return in glory. Anything and everything that is included in the message of the Gospel has its roots in those realities. At the point Christ Himself and what He has done and is doing becomes secondary, the message at once becomes erroneous, and the blessing of God can no longer be upon it. If Jesus is presented as the means of realizing personal ambitions, then “another Jesus” is being preached (2 Cor 11:4). If life in this world is the focus of the message, then it cannot possibly be true, for Jesus came to deliver us from “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4). A high regard for one’s self is not the objective of the Gospel. Rather, it is a high regard for the God who created men, requires their repentance, and confers life upon them – all through Jesus Christ, by means of faith, and in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Throughout these lessons I have stressed the sad fact that much of the purported preaching of our time is not the proclamation of a message – a word that stands independently of human circumstance. Much of what is being said by Christian preachers and teachers is more akin to marketing than to proclamation. In the record before us, however, a message is being delivered that stands apart from human circumstance. It is not a word that is conveniently adapted to men, but an essentially good declaration to which men are to adapt their thoughts and lives.

TAUGHT MANY

“ . . . and had taught many . . .” Other versions read, “made many disciples,” NKJV “won a large number of disciples,” NIV “many people became followers,” IE “gaining a large number of converts,” WEYMOUTH and “winning many disciples.” WILLIAMS

The word “taught” is translated from the Greek word **maqhteu,santej** , which, as used here, has the following lexical meaning: “to make a disciple, to teach,” THAYER “make a disciple of someone, instruct, cause someone to become a follower,” FRIBERG and “to be a follower or a disciple of someone, in the sense of adhering to the teachings or instructions of a leader and in promoting the cause of such a leader - 'to follow, to be a disciple of.” LOUW-NIDA

Teaching has to do with instructing men in the implications of the Gospel. By implications, I mean the tone or spirit of the message, as compared with its content. Underlying the facts that are made known in the good news there are certain implications, or deductions. Some of the revealed implications are as follows.

- That the world is fundamentally evil, requiring that we be delivered from it (Gal 1:4).
- That, apart from Christ, the human condition is a hopeless one that cannot be corrected (Eph 2:12).
- That men, as the creation of God, are obligated to Him, and will be held in strict

accountability for how they have lived (Acts 17:26-28).

- That, while God takes no delight in the death of the wicked, there is such a thing as damnation, which is to be zealously avoided (John 5:29; Rom 13:2).
- That time will yield to eternity, during which men will continue to exist in a conscious state (Eph 2:7; 3:21; Rev 4:10).
- That the purpose for life is to please God, not self (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17,23).
- That what God has revealed is intended to be understood (Eph 3:4; 5:17; Col 1:9).
- That an appetite for the things of God, which is essential, is inhibited, and finally altogether removed, by worldly involvements (1 John 2:15-17).
- That man is not capable of correcting his own condition, or making himself suitable to God – which must be done (Rom 3:10-18; 5:6).
- That identity with God through Christ trumps all other relationships (John 17:3; 1 Thess 4:1; Phil 3:7-11).
- That our bodies do not belong to us, and are to be used for the glory of God (1 Cor 6:13-15).
- That God has, in salvation, brought thorough provision to men (Col 2:10; 1 Pet 1:3).
- That men are obligated to become prepared for the day of judgment and oriented for glory (Matt 24:44; Rom 13:11).
- That all human relationships must be conducted in view of one's identity with God through Christ (Eph 5:2,23,25; 1 John 4:11; James 3:9-10).

Valid teaching and holy reasoning grow out of a cognitive acquaintance with the Gospel of Christ. When men think in terms of ideals, the ideal must have its root in the Gospel of Christ. Men are not allowed the luxury of defining their own ideals. After all, they are the creation of God, and have been redeemed by Him as well. In their best state, they are the servants of God. When men present teachings that have basically to do with human relationships and aspirations, they are not speaking in the behalf of God Almighty. However impressive their message may sound, it is nothing more than a distraction in the arena of life.

Teaching and Making Disciples

Teaching is not lecturing, or merely passing along interesting information. If the ones who hear the teaching do not conform their lives to it, they have not been taught, and they do not possess the knowledge God requires. While preaching the Gospel has to do with transformation, or the change of ones essential character, teaching relates to conformation, in which the individual actually becomes a conscious participant in the eternal purpose of God. In Christ, a “disciple” is one who has not only embraced the Teacher Himself, but what the Teacher has said and is doing. That is, the disciple is a follower of Jesus, making it a point to be where the Teacher is, and to hear what He is saying.

All of this relates to perceiving the implications of the Gospel, or making sense out of what is declared in the good news. No person will ever be able to be truly holy until it makes perfect sense for him to be so. It is not possible be separate from the world if that is not seen as the reasonable thing to do. No person will prepare for the day of judgement unless they are convinced it is utter insanity not to do so. Abstaining from sin makes no sense at all unless the requirement of Christ's death for it is perceived.

Being a disciple is an ongoing activity. The measure of one's discipleship is determined by what he has been taught, and how he has received that teaching. If, for example, the disciple does not understand his life really does not belong to him, he will continue to pursue self-interests to some

extent, avoiding only those things that he is convinced are wrong. Such a person may seek for the Lord to help him realize his own objectives, thinking that redemption has basically to do with the Lord joining men in lawful pursuits.

An Example

Take, for example, the matter of fornication. Some heathen cultures practiced immorality as a matter of their religion. They actually considered fornication as an act of worship. In fact both the Greeks and the Romans worshiped a “goddess of love.” The Romans named this goddess “Venus,” and the Greeks called her “Aphrodite.” On the Greek mainland, Corinth was the chief center of her worship. History records that prostitutes considered this goddess to be their patron. BRITANNICA Above is a photo of a statue of Aphrodite with “cupid,” which is often depicted in American cartoons. The point is that the Greeks and Romans deified fleshly lust, thus giving dignity to the sin of fornication.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he dealt with the sin of fornication at length. This was doubtless owing to the prevalence of this sin in the city of Corinth, practiced in the name of a false god. Some of the people in Corinth were not reasoning in a godly manner concerning this sin, and therefore Paul came to grips with it. He was “teaching” them, enlarging upon the implications of the Gospel. First, in calling for the abrupt cessation of the transgression, he taught them that sins of this sort excluded people from the kingdom of God: “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9-10). However, the mere prohibition of sensual sins was not enough to guarantee their cessation. Paul therefore reasoned with them concerning this matter, using the Gospel of Christ as the basis of his reasoning. This was teaching.

- They had been washed from these sins, being sanctified and justified, which made those sins totally unreasonable: “ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

- The body is not intended for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body: “Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. (1 Cor 6:13).

Some warn the transgressors of the danger of contracting some disease. Others refer to psychological problems that can be caused. Others promote total abstinence as a way of avoiding unwanted pregnancies or some disease. Others encourage purity in anticipation of marriage, and problems that may be incurred because of premarital intimacy.

There is the prospect of the resurrection of the dead, which confirms the Lord’s identity with the body: “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Cor 6:14).

- Our bodies are the members of Christ, making it unreasonable to give them to a harlot: “Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid” (1 Cor 6:15).

- We have been joined to the Lord, making us “one spirit” with Him. Fornication, therefore, involves committing adultery against the Lord: “What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:16-17).

- In committing fornication, one sins against their own body, which belongs to the Lord: “Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that

committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18).

- In redemption, our bodies become the temple of the Holy Spirit, meaning that we are not our own. Therefore, fornication is a paramount sin against the Lord: “What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?” (1 Cor 6:19).

- In His death, Jesus purchased us, so that we are not our own. Therefore, God is to glorified in our bodies, making fornication unlawful: “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:20).

That is a classic example of making disciples, or teaching. The rarity of such an activity is confirmed by the outbreak of immorality, and the manner in which even religious men deal with it. Some warn the transgressors of the danger of contracting some disease. Others refer to psychological problems that can be caused. Others promote total abstinence as a way of avoiding unwanted pregnancies or some disease. Others encourage purity in anticipation of marriage, and problems that may be incurred because of premarital intimacy. Still others speak of fornication as a mere indiscretion, or a mistake made in the heat of passion. Some even warn of the addictive nature of such activity, which heightens the danger of ongoing health problems.

All of these approaches, however wise they may appear, are flawed, for they do not address the matter as God does. Those employing such methods avoid the use of words like “fornication,” “sin,” “wantonness,” and “lust.” In so doing, they have removed themselves from Christ, who died for “sin,” not for mere mistakes, or errors in judgment.

In my judgment, the modern church has done a miserable job of teaching. Of course, it has not done well in preaching either, which is probably the reason she is not teaching, or making disciples. Legion is the name of professed Christians who are following their own desires, and consequently are not following Christ. They are not “disciples,” and they are not being taught to be so.

Procedural Religion

Concerning life in Christ Jesus, the word of God is very pointed about a procedural religion. It is represented as totally unreasonable, for it presumes a person in Christ is still alive to sin. Thus Paul reasons, “Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances” (Col 2:20). The real posture of life in Christ is one on which they are to reckon, or reason: “For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11). The death of the believer to sin is just as real as Christ’s death for sin!

The purpose that drives all

There is no procedure, however meticulous it may be, that can accomplish these things. The best a fixed pattern of conduct can do is keep the person from expressing sin – and that is not enough.

procedural religion is to curb the outbreak of sin. This is conceptualized in the Law of Moses. It was to arrest the expression of particular weaknesses. As presented in our time, the aim is to try and make it through the day without caving in to some dominating weakness. Is this the purpose that drove the sending of Jesus into the world? Did He not come to “destroy the works of the devil?” (1 John 3:8). The aim of life is not to merely avoid living for self, but to engage in living “for Him who died for them and rose again” NKJV (2 Cor 5:15).

Where professing Christians are not living in such a manner, there is a requirement for teaching, or the making of disciples, as well as the response of faith to that teaching. The teaching is valid only

to the degree that it intersects with the Gospel of Christ. Let it be clear that no person with an honest and good heart will continue to have losing bouts with sin! No person who takes sin seriously, confessing it to God, will remain in a condition where sin has the upper hand. There are at least two reasons for this.

- First, Jesus will not cast away or abandon the person who comes to Him. He promised, “him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out” (John 6:37). That means the person is not alone, has access to everything required to overcome sin and apprehend the good things that accompany salvation.

- Second, the Lord has promised certain advantages to those who confess their sins. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The removal of the stain of sin has a direct bearing upon its power over us, for it deals with the conscience. Being cleansed “from all unrighteousness” has to do with the purging of the conscience (Heb 9:14). This involves the purification of the heart which frees men from the dominion of sin.

There is no procedure, however meticulous it may be, that can accomplish these things. The best a fixed pattern of conduct can do is keep the person from expressing sin – and that is not enough. Not only must sin be abandoned, but righteousness must be obtained, and God served. There is also the matter of fellowship with Christ.

THEY RETURNED AND CONFIRMED THE DISCIPLES

“ 21b . . . they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch. 22a Confirming the souls of the disciples. . . ”

Only after Paul and Barnabas had filled Derbe with the sound of the Gospel, and “taught many,” making disciples of them, did they leave. The region in which they had labored had been very hostile, but it did not impede the spread of the Gospel and the disciplining of those who heard it.

THEY RETURNED AGAIN

“ . . . they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch . . . ”

After leaving Cyprus, Paul and Barnabas had preached in Antioch (13:14), Iconium (13:51; 14:1), Lystra (14:6-7), and finally Derbe (14:20-21). They were “expelled out of” the coasts of Antioch due to the influence of hostile Jews, shaking the dust of that region from their feet as they left (13:50-51). After the Jews had stirred up the people in Iconium, Paul and Barnabas were forced to flee to the area in which Lystra and Derbe were located (14:5). In Lystra, certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium stirred to the people, and Paul was stoned, being dragged out of the city and left for dead (14:19). There is no record of them facing any hostilities in Derbe.

Now, however, Paul and Barnabas determine to return to the very cities in which they had faced unrelenting opposition: Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They will retrace their steps in the precise order in which their ministry had initially carried them. This time, however, they will have a different purpose. They will do in those cities what they had done in Derbe: teaching many, or making disciples.

This is what Jesus had instructed the twelve apostles to do: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them . . . ” or, as another version reads, “make disciples of all nations” NKJV (Matt 28:19). After preaching the Gospel, there is teaching to be done that leads to being baptized.

The process is described particularly in the second chapter of Acts: “Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and

ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:38-41). After declaring the Gospel (2:14-37), Peter taught the people, making disciples of them. Their response was to include repentance, being baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins, and receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. He buttressed his teaching by extensively testifying and exhorting the people, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (2:40). Only then did the people respond, conforming their lives to what Peter had declared. “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41). The people had been discipled, or taught!

This, however, was not the end of their discipleship, but was only the beginning. They continued to subject themselves to “the apostles’ doctrine,” enlarging the circumference of their discipleship (2:42). Now, Paul and Barnabas return to the disciples who had responded to the Gospel, to further teach them in the ways of the Lord.

Remember, this is the “work” to which the Holy Spirit had called them (13:2). The activities of which we now read is part of that work, and was integral to its fulfillment.

CONFIRMING THE SOULS OF THE DISCIPLES

“Confirming the souls of the disciples . . .” Other versions read, “strengthening the souls,” NKJV “making strong the souls,” BBE “strengthening the hearts,” CJB “establishing the souls,” DARBY “confirming the disciples’ hearts,” GENEVA “strengthening the spirits,” NAB “put fresh heart into the disciples,” NJB “helped the believers to grow in love for God and each other,” LIVING “made the followers stronger,” IE “establishing and strengthening the souls and the hearts,” AMPLIFIED and “put fresh heart into the disciples.” PHILLIPS

The word “confirmed” is translated from a word meaning, “to establish besides, strengthen more; to render more firm, confirm,” THAYER “cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief - 'to strengthen, to make more firm,” LOUW-NIDA and “to make to lean on.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The very concept of “confirm” establishes that spiritual life does not advance automatically. Once a person is born again, growth into Christ does not occur without the actual willing and insightful involvement of the individual. Spiritual maturity is not guaranteed if a person simply remains a Christian for a long time.

The very concept of “confirm” establishes that spiritual life does not advance automatically. Once a person is born again, growth into Christ does not occur without the actual willing and insightful involvement of the individual. Spiritual maturity is not guaranteed if a person simply remains a Christian for a long time. Newness of life is not advanced in a moral and spiritual vacuum. Rather it is matured in “this present evil world,” while being assaulted by wicked principalities and powers, and with “the old man” resident in the body of the believer. Abiding in Christ, which is imperative, involves saying “No” to adversarial influences. It requires not being ignorant of Satan’s devices, and resisting his deceptive influences. Additionally, there are gifts and graces to be appropriated, and spiritual realities to be perceived. All of this requires that believers be “confirmed” – strengthened, made stable, and brought to see something of “the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” of God’s “great salvation,” and to “know the love of Christ which passeth all knowledge.” This is in order that they might be “filled with all of the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19). I find that language is not sufficient to express the seriousness of neglecting such confirmation.

The Priority of the Church

Our text substantiates the priority of the church – that body of people that is intended to be “the habitation of God through the Spirit.” Throughout Scripture, whether we are considering Moses, the Prophets, John the Baptist, the Apostles, or other Divinely sanctioned preachers and teachers, the care of the people of God was preeminent.

I have observed over the years that institutionalized religion cannot maintain this perspective. In fact, it tends to deride any emphasis upon those who are said to be in Christ. The thought is entertained that outreach requires the neglect of the saints – at least that is how things are being played out. This circumstance attests to the spiritual lifelessness of mere organization, as compared to something that is an organism. An organism is a life form, while an organization has no life of its own. An organism is fed in order to stay alive. An organization is maintained through rules and human wisdom.

As long as the church is neglected, not being confirmed and nourished, any professed outreach is, at the very best, deficient, and at the worst it is total vanity.

Paul and Barnabas Confirm the Souls of the Disciples

While there is place for ministering to the bodily and material needs of the brethren, it does not take the place of confirming their “souls.” The soul is particularly distinguished from the body. It is an immaterial and unseen part, yet is very real. The soul involves the intellect, emotion, and will. It is where thoughts and purposes are developed. This is the expressive part of the human nature and is distinguished from the spirit, which is the essential person. To confirm souls involves providing insight, understanding, encouragement, and comfort. Teaching is addressed to the soul, in which thoughts are processed and reasoning occurs.

Paul and Barnabas revisited the disciples, ensuring that they would be made strong, and fit for the good fight of faith. Knowing that they would be required to maintain their faith in hostile environs, they set out to make them strong, and able to “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). This involved grounding them in the faith, strengthening their grasp of the truth, and encouraging them by firming up their hope. Unconfirmed disciples are vulnerable to the wicked one. Believers that are not established in the faith are prey for deceivers. Christians that are not grounded are not able to wrestle against the principalities and powers that are aligned against them.

Here is a work that is essential to spiritual life: confirming. This is what makes the difference between a bruised reed and a stable oak tree. It is the difference between a smoldering flax and a flaming bush. Confirmation moves a person from instability to stability, and from frailty to strength. The person who is confirmed will not be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14). He will be “able to stand” in the face of opposition and difficulty (Eph 6:11).

The person who is confirmed will be least apt to experience the entrance of an “evil heart of unbelief” (Heb 3:12). They will not be “overtaken in a fault” (Gal 6:1), or “faint in the day of adversity” (Prov 24:10). They will not be the ones who are said to have “gone astray” (2 Pet 2:15). Such, like Abraham, will give more glory to God because of the strength of their faith (Rom 4:20).

Confirming the souls of the disciples is like digging and dunging a tree in order that it may grow and bear fruit (Lk 13:8-9). A confirmed soul is like a ship that is securely anchored in a troubled sea (Heb 6:19). These are the people who “grow up into” Christ “in all things” (Eph 4:15). They can see “afar off,” and do not forget they were “purged from their old sins” (2 Pet 1:9).

Those who are not confirmed are like the man who is “unstable in all of his ways” (James 1:8). They are more easily “beguiled” (2 Pet 2:14), and tend to “wrest,” or twist, the Scriptures (2 Pet 3:16). Their weakness makes them vulnerable, and therefore they are “led away with the error of the wicked,” falling from their own steadfastness (2 Pet 3:17).

The Role of Freshness and Renewal

Spiritual life requires freshness and renewal, both of which are most fully realized when the believer is regularly confirmed or established. Unlike life in the flesh, spiritual maturity must be maintained. In the world a person cannot revert to childhood – unless, through some abnormality, it be in the mind. However, in spiritual life, a person can go back to a state of infancy. This is because newness of life is maintained by faith. As it is written, “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38). When faith is not maintained, or “kept,” a veil of obscurity falls over the heart, and the person begins to reason, at the very best, like a spiritual juvenile. If the condition remains unchecked, they will eventually begin to think like the world itself, and thus begin walking the course that leads to destruction.

This is why salvation includes the fact of continual renewal. This is reflected in the salient remark of Titus 3:5: “But when the kindness and the love of God our Savior toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior” NKJV (Titus 3:6).

We know from Second Corinthians 3:18 that the renewing, or “complete change for the better” THAYER that is wrought by Holy Spirit is one accomplished in stages. “And all of us, as with unveiled face, [because we] continued to behold [in the Word of God] as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit.” AMPLIFIED One of the means through which this constant transfiguration takes place is found in “confirming” the saints – through means of teaching stabilizing them in the faith and widening the circumference of their comprehension.

The American church has not done well in this ministry. It is rare, indeed, to find a significant number of confirmed and stable saints in any congregation. This has had a staggering impact on the rest of the world, for the type of deficient teaching taking place in American churches is being exported to the rest of the world. Should a kingdom laborer not fall in line with the stereotyped presentation so common in this country, he stands at risk of losing all of his support. I know of a few men that have actually experienced this.

Modern Day Blasphemy

There is a form of blasphemy that has become common in the nominal church. It has become quite fashionable to chide believers for meeting together often, admonishing them to take their religion “outside of the four walls” in which they meet. Sprinkled with a little carnal hype, it sounds like a good thing to some who hear it – but they are not thinking people. They do not realize that the implication of such a teaching is that real life can actually be contained. Ultimately, containment is evidence of death. Initially, it is revealed in an ebb, or decline, of life. Those who have been mesmerized by the deprecation of believers meeting together do not see a fundamental factor. People who have to be coerced to carry the Gospel outside of their own fellowship are the very people who should not do so. We do not need to perpetuate a religion that closes the mouths of the people, and makes them content to never rehearse the righteous acts of God outside the circle of their immediate friends. Such people need to

I am of the candid opinion that the prevailing ignorance of God, the failure to suppress immorality, and the staggering preponderance of false teaching among the churches is because those with a religion that is not “pure and undefiled” have, in fact, taken it “outside the four walls.”

be confirmed, not chided for failing to meet institutional objectives.

Those who search the letters written to the churches will find a glaring absence of exhortations to, as men say, “reach the world for Christ.” None were rebuked for not winning more souls, or failing to garner more numbers. None were upbraided for being small in number, or commended for having a great number of members. Those are just the facts in the case.

I am of the candid opinion that the prevailing ignorance of God, the failure to suppress immorality, and the staggering preponderance of false teaching among the churches is because those with a religion that is not “pure and undefiled” have, in fact, taken it “outside the four walls.” There is a spiritual mediocrity that is being perpetuated by the nominal church and its theological schools – and it is attracting fundamentally infantile and lethargic souls. It is wrong for professing Christians to remain incapable of deep, extensive, and productive thought.

People who are not established have no business launching preaching and teaching initiatives. It is just as true today as it was when Jesus walked among men: “And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Mat 15:14). I thank God for those with a heart to confirm those who are following Jesus!

THEY EXHORTED THEM TO CONTINUE IN THE FAITH

“ 22b . . . and exhorting them to continue in the faith . . . ”

Elaborating in the means through which the disciples were confirmed, the Spirit cites a specific activity, and the particular objective of that activity. The activity was “exhorting,” and the objective of it was for the disciples to “continue in the faith.” It is apparent that it is not enough to begin the race that is set before us. The full course of that race is to be completed, and done so in the stance of running, or making continual progress toward the goal (Heb 12:1-2). There is no point to a race that is not completed, for no “prize” will be dispensed to those coming short of the goal. Jesus will not pull us across the goal. Nor, indeed, will He continue to work in those who linger by the side of the road, or are turned aside to lesser things. The exhortation that follows is a needful one, else Paul and Barnabas would not have revisited the disciples who had embraced the glorious Gospel, they had preached to them.

EXHORTING THEM

“ . . . and exhorting them to continue in the faith . . . ” Other versions read, “encouraging them,” NASB “saying to them that they were to,” BBE “entreating them,” MRD “they helped them to,” IE “urging and warning and encouraging them,” AMPLIFIED “urging them,” PHILLIPS “admonishing them,” WYCLIFFE “begged them to,” CEV and “calling on them.” MKJV

As used here, the word “exhorting” is translated from a word that means, “to call for, summon . . . admonish, exhort . . . beg, entreat, beseech,” THAYER “speaking with persistence earnestly ask for, implore, beg,” FRIBERG and “to ask for something earnestly and with propriety – to ask for (earnestly), to request, to plead for, to appeal to, earnest request, appeal.” LOUW-NIDA

I prefer the word “exhort,” which has a stronger tone to it. To me, “encourage” is too weak to be used here, appearing to postulate discouragement or fatigue. The activity described here involves a kind of moral requirement – something that is pressed upon the people, though not in a legalistic or heartless way. It involves persuasion, imploration, and admonition.

The word from which “exhort” is translated is used several places in Scripture. The manner in which it is used will confirm its meaning involves moving the people to do something.

• **SAVE YOURSELVES.** “And with many other words did he testify and exhort , saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40).

• **CLEAVE UNTO THE LORD.** “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord ” (Acts 11:23).

• **GATHER THE OFFERING.** “Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up before hand your bounty , whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness” (2 Cor 9:5).

• **WALK AND PLEASE GOD.** “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more ” (1 Thess 4:1).

• **WARN, COMFORT, SUPPORT, AND BE PATIENT.** “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men ” (1 Thess 5:14).

• **WORK WITH QUIETNESS.** “Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread ” (2 Thess 3:12).

• **SUPPLICATIONS, PRAYERS AND, INTERCESSIONS.** “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ” (1 Tim 2:1).

• **SOBER MINDEDNESS.** “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded ” (Titus 2:6).

• **OBEDIENCE.** “ Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again ” (Titus 2:9).

• **DESPISE NOT CHASTENING.** “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord , nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (Heb 12:5).

• **FEED THE FLOCK OF GOD.** “The elders which are among you I exhort , who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you , taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet 5:2).

• **CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.** “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).

Because salvation involves bringing many sons from the world to glory, or from earth to heaven, progress is necessarily involved. This is because until we are actually liberated from the “body of this death” (Rom 7:24), being “absent” from it and “present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6,8), we are in a state of transition. This is depicted as running a race (Heb 12:1), wrestling against unseen adversaries (Eph 6:12), fighting a good fight and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12), and finishing the course (2 Tim 4:7). It is also described as being changed from one stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18), being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29), and growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). It is also seen as abiding in Christ (John 15:4,7), being steadfast and unmoveable (1 Cor 15:18), and growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). All of this activity is progressive. It involves advancement, and moving upward and onward. Because of the inimical influences within and without, exhortation is required to spur believers onward. They have not yet obtained the prize, or apprehended that for which they have been apprehended. Therefore, Paul and Barnabas return to those they had discipled, and exhorted them.

CONTINUE IN THE FAITH

“ . . . to continue in the faith.” Other versions read, “remain true to the faith,” NIV “keep the faith,” BBE “abide in the faith,” DARBY “remain faithful,” GWN “persevere in the faith,” PNT “remain in the faith,” YLT “stay in the faith,” IE “hold fast to the faith,” WEYMOUTH “hold to the faith,” MONTGOMERY “stand firm in the faith,” AMPLIFIED and “continuing firm in the faith.” ALT

To “continue” means, “to remain in... persevere in anything . . . be true to, abide in,” THAYER “stay in . . . continue firm in, persist in,” FRIBERG “to remain in the same place over a period of time,” LOUW-NIDA “remain fixed, stand fast,” LEH and “stay in, live in.” GINGRICH

Since “faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1), continuing in the faith involves remaining in a state where such things are perceived, and remain dominant in both heart and mind. As one continues in the faith, faith becomes stronger, enabling the individual to see more clearly and to understand more fully. One’s grasp upon the truth becomes more firm as progress is made toward the unveiling of eternity.

It is not to be assumed that everyone who obtains faith (2 Pet 1:1) remains in it. There is such a thing as departing from the faith (1 Tim 4:1), believing only “for a while” (Lk 8:13), and casting off one’s faith (1 Tim 5:12). The very possibility of such a departure is why Paul and Barnabas exhorted the disciples to “continue in the faith.” They knew that the very nature of spiritual life, and the arena in which it is being matured, requires a forward posture, consistent progress, and a growing apprehension of the truth.

Cyclical and seasonal faith brings no glory to God, for they are the antithesis of stability, establishment, steadfastness, and increasing conformity to the image of the Son of God. Nor, Indeed, can faith do its work within the person who does not continue in it. I do not believe it is possible to substantiate that faith can be maintained where confirmation and growth are not occurring. Faith is like a robust tree that must be cultivated and nourished. This is because, so far as life in this world is concerned, it is like a tree in a desert. It is fed with streams that issue from above, and nourished by the promises that have been given by God. It cannot live without these, and it is a gross distortion of thought to imagine that it can. The truth of the matter is that disciples that are not “confirmed” are more liable to fall, for they are weak because of a lack of understanding.

SOMETHING THAT MUST BE DONE

“ 22c . . . and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”

It is imperative that the children of God be taught what is involved in entering and progressing in the Kingdom of God. Theoretically, this should not have to be said – at least not if it was natural for people to immediately perceive the stark contrast between life prior to being born again, and life after being “joined to the Lord.”

It is imperative that the children of God be taught what is involved in entering and progressing in the Kingdom of God. Theoretically, this should not have to be said – at least not if it was natural for people to immediately perceive the stark contrast between life prior to being born again, and life after being “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17). A lot of confusion in this matter is owing to the remarkable percentage of preaching and teaching that is saturated with worldly concepts and perspectives. In our time, there is a marked emphasis on life in this world. It ranges from having health, wealth, and worldly success to happy homes, gainful employment, and be accepted by the general populous. Too much room is being made for personal opinion and liberty in the flesh. This is found in the domain of musical preferences, what is declared from the pulpit, and the focus of the local congregation. In other words, we are now in a generation that does not know the real nature of spiritual life. What further compounds the problem is that a message is being delivered to the

people that makes apostolic doctrine sound strange, and therefore appear undesirable.

WE MUST

“ . . . and that we must . . .” Other versions read, “we have to,” BBE “it is necessary,” CSB and “it behoveth us.” YLT The vast majority of the versions read “we must.”

The word “must” is translated from the Greek word **dei** / . As used here, this word means, “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper . . . necessity in reference to what is required to attain some end . . . denoting especially that constraint which arises from divine appointment,” THAYER “as expressing compulsion, necessity, or inevitability in an event it is necessary, one must, one has to,” FRIBERG and “to be that which must necessarily take place, often with the implication of inevitability.” LOUW-NIDA Etymologically, something that “must” is an essentiality that cannot be avoided without forfeiting the stated objective: “enter the kingdom of God.”

Doctrinally, this is a requirement that is established by the nature of the Kingdom of God, as well as His word. This an area in which no room is made for human opinion. It is simply impossible to accomplish the stated objective without going through the experience that is identified.

THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION

“ . . . through much tribulation . . .” Other versions read, “many tribulations,” NKJV “many hardships,” NIV “many persecutions,” NRSV “many troubles,” BBE “many afflictions,” GENEVA “suffer a lot,” GWN “suffer many things,” IE and “many hardships and tribulations.” AMPLIFIED

The word “much” means “many, numerous, and great.” THAYER It implies diversity as well as plentitude, as in “much people” (Acts 11:24). The word “tribulation” carries the idea of “pressure . . . oppression, affliction, tribulation, distress, straits,” THAYER and “difficult circumstances, trouble.” GINGRICH

From one point of view, this may not sound like a good message, but it is certainly a necessary one. Any believer who is not informed of this reality is surely at a disadvantage. We are not speaking of an occasional encounter of trouble and oppression, but of “much tribulation.”

This is the kind of “tribulation” that “works patience,” or “brings about perseverance” NASB (Rom 5:3). Although it is grievous – sometimes remarkably so – it is not capable of separating the believer from “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:35). This is something Jesus said His followers would endure: “In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Paul taught this to the churches : “For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation ; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thess 3:4).

Why are many professing believers thrown off course by tribulation, suffering, and trouble? Why do some get angry with God, or question His love and care, when difficulties come upon them? Much of these responses have occurred because people have not been taught what Paul and Barnabas told the disciples who had believed what they preached. It was something that Jesus said as well, and yet it is being withheld from the churches, just as though it had never been stated.

ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“ . . . enter into the kingdom of God.” Other versions read, “come into the kingdom of God,” BBE “our way into the kingdom of God,” CSB “enter the reign of God,” YLT “on our way into God’s kingdom,” IE and “get into the kingdom of God,” WILLIAMS

In today's church, the very idea of entering the Kingdom of God sounds strange. To many, it appears merely theoretical and without practicality. But such notions are Satanic imaginations. They are like a spiritual axe that chops at the foundations of the faith. Jesus said the Kingdom of God was to be the dominate pursuit of all men: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness" (Matt 6:33).

This is not speaking about general sufferings – the troubles that are associated with being in this world (Job 5:7; Eccl 1:8; 2:22; 5:15-17). The general hardships of life are part and parcel of the fall, and are directly related to the curse of death, for such sufferings could not exist if death was not a reality.

The "much tribulation" of reference has to do with one's quest for the Kingdom of God – seeking it first because of the high priority placed upon it. Where there is no interest in the Kingdom of God, there is no comfort promised in tribulation. In fact, in such a case, suffering is to be considered the normal lot of life. Let me emphasize that we are not speaking particularly of famine, disease, natural calamity, and the likes. Such things would be applicable only if instigated by Satan because of ones identity with the Lord, as in the case of Job (Job 1:8-22; 2:1-10).

The Reality of Entering the Kingdom

It is important to note that we are speaking of an "everlasting kingdom" (Psa 146:13; Dan 4:3; 7:27; 1 Pet 1:11). This does not have to do with temporal preferences and quests, however valid and precious they may appear.

Jesus spoke frequently of entering "the Kingdom of God," or, as Matthew refers to it, "the Kingdom of heaven" (Matt 5:20; 7:21; 18:3; 19:23-24; Mk 9:47; 10:15,23-25; Lk 18:17; ,24-25; John 3:5). He even referred to some who were in the process of entering the Kingdom, yet were being inhibited by religious leaders: "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matt 23:13). It is not possible to listen attentively to Jesus and come away thinking the Kingdom of God is of little or no consequence.

Ponder what Jesus said about entering the Kingdom of God.

- **AN EXCEEDING RIGHTEOUSNESS IS REQUIRED.** "For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven " (Matt 5:20).

- **DOING THE WILL OF GOD IS REQUIRED.** "Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven" (Matt 7:21).

- **A CHANGE OF LIFE AND BECOMING LIKE A LITTLE CHILD REQUIRED.** "And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven " (Matt 18:3).

Consider what is also said about this Kingdom in the apostles doctrine. It serves develop a sound view of what we are talking about – how critical the things are.

A RICH MAN CAN HARDLY ENTER IT. "Then said Jesus unto His disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven . And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mat 19:23-24).

- **IT IS NECESSARY TO BE BORN OF THE WATER AND OF THE SPIRIT.** "Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the

Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (John 3:5).

There must come a time when the individual takes the words of Jesus seriously. He said that His words would “never pass away” (Matt 24:35). He also said that the words He spoke “are spirit, and they are life” (John 6:63). That is, they are conducive to the creation and maintenance of spiritual life. Jesus’ words are to man’s spirit what God’s breath was to Adam’s body.

The Gospels refer to the Kingdom of God 119 times, underscoring the importance of thinking upon it. Examples include the following: “kingdom of heaven” (23 times), “kingdom of God” (54 times), “My kingdom” (3 times), “Father’s kingdom” (1 time), “The kingdom” (7 times), “His kingdom” (3 times), “kingdom of their Father” (1 time), “kingdom of our father David” (1 time).

Jesus also spoke of “the gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23), “ children of the kingdom” (Matt 8:12), “ mysteries of the kingdom” (Matt 13:11; “the word of the kingdom” (Matt 13:19), “the keys of the kingdom” (Matt 16:19), “the mystery of the kingdom” (Mk 4:11), and “ glad tidings of the kingdom” (Lk 8:1).

The book of Acts refers to “the kingdom of God” seven times. It refers to “the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3), “preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 8:12), entering “ the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22), “the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). “preaching the kingdom of God” (Acts 20:25; 28:31), and expounding and testifying “the kingdom of God” (Acts 28:23).

Consider what is also said about this Kingdom in the apostles doctrine – how pivotal the things are that are said of it.. It serves develop a sound view of what we are talking about.

- **ASSOCIATED WITH RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY.** “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17)

- **IT IS NOT IN TALK.** “For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power,” or “not a matter of talk” NIV (1 Cor 4:20).

- **THE UNRIGHTEOUS WILL NOT INHERIT IT.** “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?” (1 Cor 6:9).

- **FLESH AND BLOOD CANNOT NOT ENTER IT.** “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor 15:50).

- **WE ARE TRANSLATED INTO IT.** “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13).

- **IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH WORTHINESS.** “Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” (2 Thess 1:5).

- **IT IS INHERITED.** “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?” (James 2:5).

- **COMPANIONS ARE IN IT.** “I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 1:9).

- **IT IS ASSOCIATED WITH SALVATION.** “And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast **It also ought to be noted that entering the**

kingdom is not a single event that occurs at a single point in time. When we initially enter the kingdom, we are just inside the border of the promised land – as Israel was

down, which accused them before our God day and night” (Rev 12:10).

How much is required to be written about a matter before it is preached and expounded to the people? Why is it that so very little is being said about the kingdom of God these days? Can it be that the message God has ordained has been upstaged by other emphases?

In Order to Enter

In order to enter this Kingdom, one must be moved from a condemned environment (John 3:18) into one in which there is no condemnation (Rom 8:1). There is a transition from darkness (Col 1:13; 5:5) to light (1 Pet 2:9), from death to life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14), and the blindness (Eph 4:18) to sight (Eph 1:18). There are hostile forces that stand between these two circumstances, and personal impotence as well.

It is like passing through a time-warp when one enters into the Kingdom of God, passing, as it were from time to eternity. The devil is agitated by the experience, and “the flesh,” through which he works, is set against it. There are principalities and powers that are said to prohibit the transition as they work through the “children of the wicked one” (1 John 2:13).

These hostile forces contribute to the “much tribulation” endured by those who are entering the Kingdom. But there is more. There is also inward conflict that rises because of the incompatibility of the flesh and the Spirit (Gal 5:17), and the new man and the old man (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10). There is also “another law” at work in the “members” of the saved, “warring against” the law of their mind (Rom 7:23). Additionally, we presently occupy a body that is appropriately referred to as “the body of this death,” from which we long to be delivered (Rom 7:24). Also, ponder “our adversary,” who walks about as a roaring lion, “seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8-9). We also, of necessity, wrestle “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12).

These influences are like thorns on the narrow entrance and way that “leads to life” NKJV (Matt 7:14). Those who “strive to enter in at the strait gate,” and to walk on the way that is “narrow” will experience tribulation. It is something that cannot possibly be avoided when entering the kingdom of God.

It also ought to be noted that entering the kingdom is not a single event that occurs at a single point in time. When we initially enter the kingdom, we are just inside the border of the promised land – as Israel was when they overcame Jericho. Just as there was a central city in Israel – Jerusalem – so there is a central location in the kingdom of God. It is the place where Jesus is, and where we will eventually be.

There is a sense in which we will enter the kingdom when we are gathered to the Lord Jesus. Peter referred to this as an “entrance” that will “ministered” to us “abundantly” (2 Pet 1:11). While there is a sense in which we are now seated with Christ Jesus in heavenly places (Eph 2:6), there is another sense in which we are “absent from the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6). We are now with the Lord by faith, but we are advancing toward the time when we will “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). That advancement is, in a very real sense, a kind of entrance – and there are tribulations associated with it.

No one living in the world is far enough in their journey to glory, to turn their attention to the affairs of this world, or allow it to dominate the mind. The race that has been set before us can only be run while we are “looking to Jesus” (Heb 12:1-2). Our text reveals the alertness of Paul and Barnabas to this situation. That is why they exhorted the people, declaring to them that “we must through much

tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

THEY ORDAINED ELDERS AND COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD

“ 23 And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.”

How does one leave the disciples after they have been confirmed, and reminded that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God?” Is that sufficient? Will disciples automatically proceed to “grow up into Christ in all things,” as God intends (Eph 4:15). Does the fact that a local congregation is appropriately termed “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27) mean they have no spiritually prominent members? The action of Paul and Barnabas, engaged in a work to which the Holy Spirit had called them, will provide some insight into this matter.

THEY ORDAINED ELDERS IN EVERY CHURCH

“And when they had ordained them elders in every church . . .” Other versions read, “appointed elders,” NKJV “made selection of some to be rulers,” BBE “in every congregation,” CJB “chosen them elders in every assembly,” DARBY “had the disciples in each church choose spiritual leaders,” GWN “ordained to them priests in every church,” DOUAY “appointed presbyters for them,” NAB “selected elders by show of hands,” WEYMOUTH “helped them select elders,” WILLIAMS and “appointed and ordained elders.” AMPLIFIED

Here the various versions present quite different pictures.

- Paul and Barnabas “ordained them elders.” KJV
- Paul and Barnabas “appointed” elders.” NKJV
- Paul and Barnabas “selected” some to be rulers. BBE
- Paul and Barnabas “having chosen them elders.” DARBY
- Paul and Barnabas “ordained to them priests.” DOUAY
- Paul and Barnabas “had the disciples . . . choose spiritual leaders.” GWN
- Paul and Barnabas “appointed presbyters.” NAB
- Paul and Barnabas “selected elders by a show of hands.” WEYMOUTH
- Paul and Barnabas “helped them select elders.” WILLIAMS
- Paul and Barnabas “appointed and ordained elders for them.” AMPLIFIED

In order for scholarship to have any validity, it must provide for the clear practices and doctrinal implications of Scripture.

The word translated “ordained” can be used in a variety of ways. It’s lexical meaning is, “to vote by stretching out the hand . . . to appoint or create by vote . . . to elect, appoint, create,” (Acts 14:23)” THAYER “choose, elect by raising a hand to signify a vote, generally appoint, install in an office (Acts 14:23),” FRIBERG “appoint, choose,” UBS “to choose or select, presumably by a group and possibly by the actual raising of the hand - to choose, to elect, to select,” LOUW-NIDA “to stretch out the hand, for the purpose of voting . . . appointment by,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to choose or elect (by raising hands), appoint (Acts 14:23).” GINGRICH

Thus, two possibilities loom before us, and they are quite different in both statement and implication.

- First, the text can mean that Paul and Barnabas had the people select the elders by

voting, and then sanctioned their choice – something like the procedure employed in the selection of the first deacons (Acts 6:1-6). In this case the “they” would be the people in the churches, and not Paul and Barnabas. Also, the word “ordained” would refer only to the selection process, saying nothing about the actual appointment to the office – which appears to me to be the whole point of the text.

- Second, the text can mean that the choice was made by Paul and Barnabas, in the manner described in Paul’s instructions to Titus (Tit 1:5). In this case the “they” refers to Paul and Barnabas, not to the disciples. That concurs with the remainder of the text that states Paul and Barnabas (1) confirmed the souls of the disciples, (2) exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith, (3) informed the disciples that the kingdom of God is entered through much tribulation, (4) had prayer and fasting with them, and (5) commended them to the Lord (Acts 14:23). It seems to me that the flow of the text is interrupted if the process involved in the ordaining of elders was actually accomplished by the disciples themselves.

The Greek word used here (**ceirotonei**) is found only one other place in the Scriptures, and refers to the choosing of Titus to join in the gathering of an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem: “And not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind” (2 Cor 8:19). However, in that text, the choice is said to have been that of “the churches.” Our text traces the activity to Paul and Barnabas.

Doctrinally, we know that elders are “made overseers” by the Holy Spirit, not by the consensus of the people (Acts 20:28). These are the “pastors and teachers” (a single office) that are given to the church by the Head, not by the people (Eph 4:11). They are among the spiritual gifts that are placed in the church as God has pleased. And are among those who are third in rank in the body of Christ – “teachers” (1 Cor 12:4-5, 18, 28).

If it is countered that the disciples chose out the first deacons, and the apostles set them apart for the work, and that this is what happened in our text, there are certain things to consider. First, those seven men were not chosen to teach or lead the church, but to “serve tables.” Second, their office was driven by a kind of crisis, not an ongoing need – such as feeding the flock of God, and taking care of the house of God.

While I do not mean to be contentious on this matter, it seems to me that something more is required to establish the meaning of an activity mentioned in Scripture than a lexical meaning that can only be said to be possible, or be some kind of alternative. I am persuaded that the translators who gave this questionable meaning to the text were recreant to their solemn duty, deferring to linguistics rather than doctrinal implications. In order for scholarship to have any validity, it must provide for the clear practices and doctrinal implications of Scripture.

I concur with others who see our text as recording the activity of Paul and Barnabas in the choosing and ordaining of elders in all the churches. Even reliable lexicographers say this is the meaning of the text: i.e., that Paul and Barnabas appointed elders (Thayer, Friberg, Gingrich).

The Consideration of the Church Together

The existence of “elders” presumes the gathering together of the church. It does not postulate the feeding of a people who have gone their separate ways and do not come together. In the ministry of Jesus, there were individuals who were personally taught by Him, with no others being present: Nicodemus (John 3:1-21) and the woman at the well (John 4:7-25). Owing to the nature and extent of Paul’s apostleship, Jesus taught him personally (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 11:23). Once He taught four of His disciples: Peter, James, John, and Andrew (Mk 13:3-37). His extensive teaching was limited to the twelve apostles being together (ex: Matt 13:36-52; Mk 9:31; Lk 11:1; John 13:1-16:33). The

sermon on the mount was delivered to the broader number of “His disciples” (Matt 5:1). His dissertation concerning the necessity of imbibing His life was delivered to a gathering of His disciples in a synagogue in Capernaum (John 6:24-59).

While there is certainly nothing wrong with one-on-one instruction – as in the case of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39) – the ordinary environment of feeding is when they are together: “the flock of God.” Paul spoke of the church being “gathered together ” (1 Cor 5:4), and when they “come together ” (1 Cor 11:17,18,20,33; 14:23,26). The body of Christ is “tempered together ,” so that mutual benefits in the faith can be realized (1 Cor 12:24-27). The church, as a “building” placed upon the foundation of Christ, is “fitly framed together ,” and grows as a result (Eph 2:20-22). Further,

In the last analysis, the appointment of elders related directly to teaching the flock, or the assembly, of believers. Among other considerations, that is a primary reason for the necessity of their maturity in the faith, and grasp of the nature and content of the Gospel.

they are “fitly joined together ” by every part or function when they come together (Eph 4:16). It is inconceivable that a body of people who are “knit together in love” (Col 2:2) would not seek to come together in order to be “knit together ” by the various ministries of the body (Col 2:19). The very concept of “the body of Christ” assumes the members are together – not only in attitude or thought, but in practice as well. After all, the local congregations are admonished, “Wherefore comfort yourselves together , and edify one another, even as also ye do” (1 Thess 5:11). Believers are even admonished, “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together , as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching” (Heb 10:24-25).

Jesus promised His presence when His disciples were “gathered together ” (Matt 18:20). Even when addressing the crisis of opposition, the early church “assembled together ” (Acts 4:31). In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas “assembled themselves with the church” for “a while year,”: teaching “much people” (Acts 11:26). Certain men were chosen to accompany Paul and Barnabas, being selected when the disciples were “assembled with one accord” (Acts 15:26).

Why Mention This?

It is necessary to mention this because of the nature of the function elders. They are to “feed the flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2), and “feed the church of God” (Acts 20:28) – both of which postulate the assembly of the saints. It is particularly during the assembly of the saints that all things are to be “unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26). Even the Jews, the only nation in the history of the world that was cultured by God, had an office called “the ruler of the synagogue” (Mk 5:22,36,38; Lk 8:41; 13:14,15; Acts 13:15; 18:8,17). Neither Jesus nor the apostles questioned the validity of this office. The “synagogue,” while meeting in a structure, was not limited to the structure itself, but the people who gathered there.

The point is that from the beginning God has dealt with the aggregate of His people, not focusing on personal or family gatherings, even though some personal attention was given to them – as in the Passover (Ex 12:2-4). I do not know that it is possible to justify the existence of elders apart from the assembly of the saints.

In the last analysis, the appointment of elders related directly to teaching the flock, or the assembly, of believers. Among other considerations, that is a primary reason for the necessity of their maturity in the faith, and grasp of the nature and content of the Gospel. Due to the nature of their function, whatever they taught, if accepted, would tend to proliferate.

This perspective has nearly been altogether removed because of the thrust of the nominal church. It is becoming exceedingly rare to hear of a congregation that actually gathers to be taught, or of elders that really engage in the public feeding of the flock of God. Now we have a kind of entertaining

approach to praise in which the people are often said to “have fun.” Much of the public speaking, what little there is, is often given over to social and political concerns, just as though this world was the primary one, and there was no day of judgment on the horizon. In other words, people are being taught how to address life in this world rather than how prepare to live in “the world to come.” However, this kind of instruction does not promote spiritual growth, does not require the whole armor of God, or the ongoing sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit of God. The idea of feeding the flock of God has become very nebulous in the minds of the people. This is a serious circumstance, for it sharply conflicts with everything that is reported in the book of Acts – which is a record of Divine workings and spiritual advance.

THEY PRAYED WITH FASTING

“ . . . and had prayed with fasting . . .” Other versions read, “with prayer and fasting,” NIV “while they fasted with them and prayed,” MRD “prayed for them with fasting,” LIVING and “the believers fasted and prayed for these men.” IE

In the Scriptures there are frequent mentioning of prayer and fasting.

- When Nehemiah heard of the devastation of Jerusalem, he “ fasted and prayed before the God of heaven” (Neh 1:4).
- Daniel set his face to seek the Lord “by prayer and supplication, with fasting ” (Dan 9:3).
- Jesus told His disciples there were some demons that could only be expelled by “ prayer and fasting ” (Matt 17:21).
- When Barnabas and Paul were sent out by the church in Antioch, it was after they had “ fasted and prayed ” (Acts 13:3).
- The giving of the married to “ pray and fasting” is a reason for temporarily suspending marital intimacy (1 Cor 7:5).

The combination of prayer and fasting is intriguing to consider, and provides a most precise glimpse of the nature of spiritual life.

PRAYER

PRAYER has to do with the marshaling and focusing of all of one’s powers toward the Lord. In this case, it is associated with seeking the Lord, particularly in regards to blessing and sanctifying certain chosen servants. It is a way of setting the workers aside for the work, and calling upon the Lord to invest them with the resources required for the accomplishment of that work. There is a sense in which prayer is like the hand of faith reaching upward, seeking to know the Lord in a more effectual way. More Divine power is needed. A closer relationship with the Lord is necessary. The work is of such a nature that a more ready awareness of the Lord is imperative.

FASTING

FASTING has to do with abstinence from things associated with this world – things that tend to distract and draw the attention away from the Lord. There are matters that require the believer to withdraw from even the formalities of the world – things that, under ordinary circumstances, would be lawful and right. However, some matters pertaining to life and godliness do not allow for ordinary involvements with the world – such as eating and drinking, or maintaining lawful relationships.

Every activity related to living in this world tends to deplete spiritual resources. At this point I am not speaking of sinful activities, but of those that are technically lawful, yet spiritually impractical. There are some godly matters that require the total attention of the individual. They may have to do

with spiritual survival, advancement, or the fulfillment of an objective. Whatever they may be, there is no room for distraction, competition, or mediocrity in them. For example, before entering into His ministry among men, Jesus was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered” (Matt 4:1-2). Prior to the selection of His apostles, Jesus “went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Luke 6:12).

The activity associated with the prayer and fasting of Paul and Barnabas is stated in the next clause.

THEY COMMENDED THEM TO THE LORD

“ . . . they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.” Other versions read, “committed them to the Lord,” NIV “entrusted them to the Lord,” NRSV “put them into the care of the Lord,” BBE “turned the elders over to the care of the Lord,” NLT and “These men had put their trust in the Lord . So, Paul and Barnabas put them in the Lord's care.” LIVING

This kind of sensitivity to the Lord is greatly to be coveted. It is one of the factors that accounts for the consistency and productivity of the early church. It was their unwavering reliance upon the Lord that enabled them.

The word “commended” comes from a Greek word that, as used here, means, “to commend one to another for protection, safety, etc,” THAYER and “give over, entrust, commend.” GINGRICH

In Scripture, this word is used in a number of places.

- When Jesus said from the cross, “Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost” (Luke 23:46).
- Paul also used it in his last gathering with the elders from Ephesus: “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace” (Acts 20:32).
- Paul used it when speaking to Timothy concerning the charge delivered to him: “This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare” (1 Tim 1:18).
- He also used it when speaking of the responsibility of Timothy to see to it there others who could deliver the Word of God in the public arena: “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).
- Peter used this word in a word delivered to suffering believers: “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4:19).

In all of these either a person or a charge was delivered to someone else for thoughtful consideration and care. In our text, the ones who were ordained to be elders were “commended” to the Lord for protection, care, direction, and instruction. Paul and Barnabas were acutely aware of the Divine involvements in the care and feeding of His “heritage” (1 Pet 5:3). Therefore, they formally turned these elders over to the Lord Himself, that He might “think upon” them, as Nehemiah sought Him to do to himself (Neh 5:19). This is also the Divine consideration that David sought when he prayed, “Remember, O LORD, Thy tender mercies and Thy lovingkindnesses; for they have been ever of old” (Psa 25:6).

This kind of sensitivity to the Lord is greatly to be coveted. It is one of the factors that accounts for the consistency and productivity of the early church. It was their unwavering reliance upon the Lord that enabled them. That trust is what is interrupted, and finally removed, by the traditions of men.

THEY CONTINUED UNTIL THE WORK WAS FULFILLED

“ 24 And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: 26 And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.”

Following the confirming of the disciples, the ordaining of elders, and commending those of Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch to the Lord, Paul and Barnabas passed throughout the region of Pisidia, and came to Pamphylia.

THEY CAME TO PAMPHYLIA

“And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia . . .” Other versions read, “going through,” NIV “went through,” BBE “went throughout,” GENEVA “had gone through,” GWN “had traveled over,” MRD and “had gone throughout.” PNT

The idea here is that Paul and Barnabas went through the region to their destination. The word used here suggested that they walked through the region. Pisidia is the area in which Antioch was located, the last place they revisited before this report (13:14; 14:21). It was a mountainous region, desolate, and reported to have been “held by tribes of wild and warlike highlanders, who were the terror of the whole surrounding country.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S Some have conjecture that this may have been one of the places Paul was “in perils of robbers” (2 Cor 11:26). This was the same region through which Paul and Barnabas had passed when they journeyed from Perga, to which they are now returning (13:14).

THEY PREACHED THE WORD IN PERGA

25 And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia . . .” Perga was located in Pamphylia, and was one of its important cities. This was the place where John Mark had abandoned the work, returning from there to Jerusalem (13:13). There is no record of Paul and Barnabas preaching in Perga at that time. The record stated that they “departed from Perga” and “came to Antioch in Pisidia” (13:14).

Now, however, they preach the Word in Perga. I want to again draw to your attention to what Paul and Barnabas preached, declared, or announced.

- When they started this mission, they “preached the word of God” in Salamis (13:5).
- The “preached” through Jesus “ the forgiveness of sins ” in Antioch (13:38).
- The Gentiles in Antioch besought Paul and Barnabas to preach those words to them again the next Sabbath (13:42).
- They “preached the Gospel ” in “the cities of Lycaonia” (14:7).
- In Lystra they “preached” that they should “ turn from these vanities unto the living God ” (14:15).

Preaching the Word is not synonymous with simply preaching from the Scriptures. For example, as the term “word” is used in the book of Acts, it does not have reference to scattered texts in the Law of Moses, or the Proverbs of Solomon. As used in Luke’s report, the expression “word” refers to a message, not merely a text. Thus we read of “the word of this salvation ” (13:26), “the word of His grace ” (14:3; 20:32), “the word of the Gospel ” (15:7), and “the word of the Lord Jesus ” (19:10). When they “preached the word,” or “the word of the Lord” (8:25; 15:36), they particularly declared the words that had foretold a coming Savior, the remission of sins, and those things relating to salvation and the New Covenant. That was the thrust of their preaching.

It ought to be noted that Paul and Barnabas were doing the work to which the Holy Spirit had called them (13:2). They had, then, been called to the work of preaching. Not philanthropy, but preaching ! Not serving tables, but preaching ! Not to plant churches, but to preach ! All of their recognized successes could be traced directly to their preaching – not their organizational skills, but their preaching ! If the Holy Spirit, who was carrying out the will of the Head of the church, has such a high regard for preaching , what can be said of those who evidence a lack of regard for this holy activity?

Having preached the word in Perga, Paul and Barnabas went south to Attalia, “ a maritime city of Pamphylia,” which was used as a port, “useful for trade with Egypt and Syria.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S There is no record of them preaching in this city.

THEY RETURNED WHERE THEY HAD BEEN RECOMMENDED

“And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God . . .” Other versions read “commended to the grace of God,” NKJV “committed to the grace of God,” NIV “handed over to the grace of God,” BBE “handed over to the care of God,” CJB “entrusted to the grace of God,” CSB “delivered to the grace of God,” DOUAY “sent them out with God’s gracious love,” IE and “committed to God’s favor.” WILLIAMS

When they initially came to this area, they had landed in Perga, having sailed from Paphos, a city on the island of Cyprus. That was apparently the route take by the ships. However, in returning, they would disembark from Attalia, in Pamphylia which was located southwest of Perga. The reason for choosing this city is not made known. It could have been owing to the route taken by ships sailing to Antioch, or because of differing shipping schedules owing to the time of the year. For whatever reason, Paul and Barnabas were able to make the proper choice, being fully adapted for the work to which they had been called – even confidently knowing the proper port of exit.

Thus they began the last leg of their journey, returning to Antioch in Syria, from whence they had been sent by the Holy Spirit and the brethren who had submitted to Him. They had been commended to the grace of God – a grace that made them sufficient to do the work, empowering them to complete it, and protecting them from the devices of the devil. The Holy Spirit also works within the environment of the grace of God, guiding into the truth (John 16:13), strengthening them in the inner man (Eph 3:16), granting them righteousness, peace, and joy (Rom 14:17), and filling them with all joy and peace in believing (Rom 15:13).

It was the grace and favor of God that enabled the workers to know what to say, where to go, how to respond to rejection, how to deal with inquirers, and how to sustain the work – even though many times it looked as though that could not be done.

THE WORK WAS FULFILLED

“ . . . for the work which they fulfilled.” Other versions read, “which they had completed,” NKJV “that they had accomplished,” NASB “they had now completed,” NIV and “the work they had now finished.” GWN

When these two men were initially called, the Holy Spirit said, “Separate Me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them ” (Acts 13:2). It is estimated that they left Antioch during A.D. 45, and returned in A.D. 47. There is no way to fully substantiate this postulate. It does, however, give us an idea of the magnitude of this mission – one that required about two years. During that period, they went throughout the island of Cyprus (13:6), remained a “long time” in Iconium (14:3), and preached throughout the region of Lycaonia (14:6).

How did Paul and Barnabas know when they had completed the work? This is not something that

can be answered to the satisfaction of the flesh. However, in some way, the Spirit, who told them when to start the work, also made them aware of when it had been completed. All of this presumes these men were alive in the Spirit and walking in the Spirit as well (Gal 5:25), for those are the only people the Spirit directs. They were not men who quenched or grieved the Spirit. When the Spirit strove against the flesh, they consistently yielded to the Spirit. That is why they could be directed.

The work of God is not accomplished within the framework of humanly conceived strategies. It can neither be initiated nor maintained by means of the wisdom of men. Those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit sense the truth of this. For all others, it is nothing more than confusion. There is a certain enabling power in faith that cannot be codified or stated in a manner than makes sense to men. However, for those who are actually involved in the work of God, there is a knowledge similar to that experienced by those servants who filled the water pots with water during the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. After they did what Jesus said, filling the pots with water, and when that water was turned into wine, it confounded the ruler of the feast. However, “the servants which drew the water knew” (John 2:9). It was no mystery to them, for they were involved in the work itself. So it is with those who are serving the Lord Jesus Christ. It is in the work that they see many things.

THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE

“ 27 And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. 28 And there they abode long time with the disciples.”

It would be worthy of an extensive effort for noble souls to engage in a disciplined effort to compare the church revealed in the book of Acts to the one of our time.

As we proceed through the book of Acts, it becomes apparent that the lives of those early disciples revolved around the Lord and His work. They preferred one another in brotherly love, met often together, and centered their attention on the Word of God. The early church bore little, if any, similarity to modern representations of the church. Organized and stereotyped religion produced people who were irritated by that early church, and could not tolerate their message or their manners. However, those of tender heart were drawn to them. Those who had a mind for the Word wanted to be around them. It would be worthy of an extensive effort for noble souls to engage in a disciplined effort to compare the church revealed in the book of Acts to the one of our time.

THEY GATHER THE CHURCH TOGETHER

“And when they were come, and had gathered the church together . . .” Other versions read, “they called the church together,” NRSV “they got the church together,” BBE “brought together the assembly,” DARBY “collected together the whole church,” MRD and “assembled the church.” NJB

Keep in mind, this is as much as two years after they had left Antioch to do the work to which the Spirit had called them. It is evident that the brethren in Antioch had kept the faith, maintaining their association with the Lord and one another. Paul and Barnabas apparently had no difficulty calling them together, Nothing in the text suggests that only a handful of people turned out. Throughout the years, and with few exceptions, I have noted that few churches appear to be really interested in reports of the working of the Lord. I understand that not all reports are of the works of God. However, I have been present when some have been reported to rather large congregations –yet a meager group was present to hear it. That circumstance speaks of the caliber of Christians that are being cultured by the modern church.

There is a vast difference in the conduct and response of a people who are enthralled with the Lord and His great salvation, and are living unto Him as He has ordained (2 Cor 5:15).

THEY REHEARSED ALL THAT GOD HAD DONE WITH THEM

When the early church assembled, there was a lot of speaking. Here we read of rehearsing. Other forms of speaking were preaching (Rom 1:15), teaching (1 Cor 14:19), prophesying (1 Cor 14:24), exhorting (Rom 12:8), comforting (1 Thess 4:18), and admonishing (Col 3:16). All of this suggests that the assembly of the saints is one that is fundamentally rational, engaging both the heart and the mind. It is conducive to sound thought, weighing matters, perceiving, and determining. An assembly that is primarily one of entertainment and catering to the whims of the people is not one in which the work of the Lord is being done.

They Rehearsed

“ . . . they rehearsed . . .” Other versions read, “they reported,” NKJV “began to report,” NASB “related,” NRSV “declared,” RSV “gave them an account,” BBE and “narrated.” MRD

The word “rehearsed” comes from a word meaning, “to announce, to make known . . . to report, bring back tidings, rehearse,” THAYER “carrying back news of happenings report, inform,” FRIBERG “to provide information, with the possible implication of considerable detail - 'to announce, to inform, to tell,” LOUW-NIDA “to recount.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Again, note the effort to make things known to the people of God – to inform them of certain facts that provide a kind of index to both the nature and the will of the Lord.

There is also another thing to be seen here. Behold the absence of self-centeredness. The people come together to hear what someone else has done in another place. The ones who are reporting declare what the Lord has done, not drawing undue attention to themselves.

All That God Had Done With Them

“ . . . all that God had done with them . . .” Other versions read, “all things that God had done with them,” NASB “all that God had done through them,” NIV “everything God had done with them,” CSB “what great things God had done with them,” DOUAY “all that God had wrought with them,” MRD “reported on their trip,” LIVING “in detail all that God, working with them,” WEYMOUTH and “all that God had accomplished with them.” AMPLIFIED

Paul and Barnabas did not merely relate their personal experiences, but focused on what the Lord had done through them. This did not consist of developing a plan, then reporting how the Lord enabled them to carry it out. It rather dealt with a work to which they were called by the Holy Spirit, and how the Lord carried it out through them.

They provided the details of everything the Lord did. When Joshua, in the strength of the Lord “discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword,” the Lord called Moses to Himself. He told him to write the record of this triumph in a book and “rehearse it in the ears of Joshua” (Ex 17:14). Those who were delivered during the times of the judges were told to “rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord” (Judges 5:11). When Peter reported the events that took place at the house of Cornelius, he “rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order” to the brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 11:4).

All of this indicates that considerable detail is involved in a rehearsal of the works of the Lord. In that detail the Lord’s will and manners are made better known. If, as the Psalmist says, God has “made His wonderful works to be remembered” (Psa 111:4), then it is reasonably for godly people to rehearse them, as shown in our text.

It is also marvelous to consider how God works through His people. Some know only of God

working on His people, but know little of Him working through them. They think only in terms of personal deliverance or advantage. While God does work in this manner – such as Israel being delivered from Egypt – He also works through them – as when Israel subdued the enemies in Canaan. Perceiving the priority of the latter represents a fundamental change in the way of thinking.

HE HAD OPENED THE DOOR OF FAITH

“ . . . and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” Other versions read, “opened a door of faith to,” NASB “opened a door of faith for,” NRSV “made open a door of faith to,” BBE and “given . . . the opportunity to believe.” GWN

This is a most intriguing expression. It includes Divine activity: God “opened.” There is also something in particular that was opened, or made available: “door of faith.” There was even a particular society for which this door was opened (“the Gentiles”).

First, this was a particular kind of door, relating to “faith.” Paul referred to a “door of utterance,” or an opportunity to preach the Gospel (Col 4:3; 2 Cor 2:12). This “door” relates to an opportunity to believe. One might imagine that this door has always been open – available for everyone to enter. However, this was not at all the case. Previously, God focused on the Jews, giving them every revealed advantage (Rom 9:4-5), Paul refers to the door of faith being shut – even to them. “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed ” (Gal 3:23). Other versions read, “kept

under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed,” NKJV “held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed,” NIV “imprisoned and guarded by the law until faith would be revealed,” NRSV “confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed” RSV and “perpetually guarded under the Law, kept in custody in preparation for the faith that was destined to be revealed (unveiled, disclosed).” AMPLIFIED

Objectively speaking, the door of faith was closed, or not revealed – and unless God revealed it, it could not be known. Subjectively, the Law was a place of confinement in which they could not obtain the faith that justifies and sanctifies. No person, whether Jew or Gentile, that has a religion of law, is capable of believing, or having faith. If the primary moral code, “the Law,” was “not of faith,” neither gendering nor sustaining it, you may be sure no man can contrive a law that can do so. Law is antithetical to faith, for it does not have to do with believing, but rather confines one to doing (Gal 3:12).

However, the Jews were confined by the Law in prospect of the coming faith. That is, the Law kept them from descending too far into the quagmire of iniquity. It was not a willing confinement, but more like being imprisoned, forced to live in “the fear of death” if they disobeyed or displeased God. Speaking of this, the Scriptures say, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage ” (Heb 2:14-15). In this condition they were “shut up” to faith – that is, they could not obtain it. They were confined by the law itself.

This is a picture of “the door of faith” being shut – that is, there was not even an opportunity to believe, in the sense of being reconciled to God. The situation was this: until sin had been taken out of the way the door of faith remained closed, and humanity remained confined. The Jews were confined under the bondage of the Law. The Gentiles were confined by their fundamental ignorance of God. As it is written, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them , because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). Bondage under the Law shut the door of faith for the Jews, and the ignorance of God shut

it for the Gentiles.

Only God Could Open the Door

Only God could “open the door of faith” to the Gentiles. This means that the door was not automatically opened when Jesus died for the sins of the world, and was raised for our justification. The

time during which our text took place was nearly twenty years after the enthronement of Jesus at the right hand of God – and “the door of faith” had not yet been opened for the Gentiles to whom Paul and Barnabas were sent. If God had not addressed this circumstance, the door never would have been opened!

In Scripture, believers are frequently reminded of the Source of their faith. It is not merely an exercise of the intellect – like believing a history book or some mathematical theorem. In the text that spoke of the Jews being “shut up to the faith,” the Spirit continues by referring to the time “faith came .” “But before faith came , we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed” (Gal 3:23). And again, “But after that faith is come , we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:25). All versions project this before/after view. Some read slightly different, while maintaining the stated perspective: i.e. “Before this faith came . . . Now that faith has come.” NIV

The coming of faith is a line of demarcation between death and life, Law and grace, and spiritual impotence and power. It divides alienation from reconciliation, and being hostile against God from being at peace with Him. That kind of significance cannot possibly have its origin in man. The person who needs to be saved cannot effect that salvation himself.

This situation is precisely why those who believe are said to have “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27). It is why “the faith” is said to have been “delivered to the saints,” or “entrusted” to them (Jude 1:3). This is the faith that is to be “kept” (2 Tim 4:7). It is the faith that has been “obtained . . . through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1). This is also what it means to be “given to . . . believe” (Phil 1:29).

The opening of the door of faith has very much to do with the preaching of the Gospel. There is evidence in Scripture that suggests that this preaching is strictly managed in heaven. Take, for example, when Paul and Silas were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the Word in Asia” (Acts 16:6). Eager to preach the Gospel to every creature, as Jesus had commanded (Mk 16:15), they “assayed (or “tried” NKJV) to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not,” or “did not permit them” NKJV (Acts 16:7). No explanation for these prohibitions is given – but you may be sure there were holy reasons. The church is strictly governed by Jesus, who is appropriately called “the Head of the body, the church” (Col 1:16). Strictly speaking, the Holy Spirit is working for Him, not for men. That is why He is referred to as “the Spirit of Christ” (1 Pet 1:11), not “the Spirit of the church.” We are not told how Paul and Silas knew the Spirit did not permit them to preach in Asia or go into Bithynia – whether it was by a word, or through their own sensitivity to the circumstances. From a practical point of view, it seems to me that the absolute inability of a servant of God to carry out noble and godly ambitions is to be interpreted as the Spirit not allowing it.

The Role of Preaching

The opening of the door of faith was directly related to the preaching of the Gospel. It was not the result of seeing the excellent lives of Paul and Barnabas – although there is no question that they lived such lives. It was not the result of a philanthropic work they performed, like relieving the afflicted, or ministering to the needy. It is certainly not that such things are not good. Rather, it is that they do not open the door of faith.

I suggest that “hearing BY the word of” is equivalent to the opening of the door of faith in our text. That is, “the word” is the directive from God/Christ to deliver the Gospel, rather than the Gospel itself. It equates to the preacher being “sent,” and therefore bringing glad tidings from God Himself.

The old wives fable about “seeing a sermon” being better than hearing one, is nothing but a lot of nonsense. If it was possible for sermons to be seen, what can be said of the life of Jesus Christ? And what of holy lives like those of Moses, or Samuel, or all of the holy prophets. What of John the Baptist, and the holy apostles? Why did these men elicit such hostility from the very people who were subjected to their influence? Those who spout theological folklore really need to explain such phenomena, for it contradicts their foolish sayings.

When commenting on the presence of faith, or believing on Jesus, the Scriptures do not trace it back to influential lives or the presence of humanitarian works, however good they may have been. So far as the activity of men is concerning, the stimulus for faith is rather traced back to preaching. Thus it is written, “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom 10:17).

The seventeenth verse is often quoted as though it said, “faith comes by hearing, and hearing the Word of God.” However, that is not what the verse says. The word “by,” that follows the word hearing, is in the Greek text, and is the translation of the word **dia**. . . This word means, “through,” THAYER “through, by way of,” FRIBERG “on the account of, because of, by reason of,” LEH and “of means, instrument, agency by means of, through.” GINGRICH

The idea is that both faith and hearing “come.” Faith comes by means of hearing, and hearing comes by means of “the Word of God,” or “the Word of Christ.” ASV But what is “the word of God,” or “the word of Christ”? Is it the word about God, or the word about Christ?

I suggest that “hearing BY the word of” is equivalent to the opening of the door of faith in our text. That is, “the word” is the directive from God/Christ to deliver the Gospel, rather than the Gospel itself. It equates to the preacher being “sent,” and therefore bringing glad tidings from God Himself.

This explains why the Romans text continues, “But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world” (Rom 10:18). That is, the preaching of Gospel does not automatically produce the “hearing” of reference, which, in turn, is the means through which faith comes. Multitudes have heard the Gospel with the hearing of the ear, but not “the hearing of faith” (Gal 3:2,5). Why is this so? It cannot be because some sought the Lord and some did not, for the text adds, “But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me” (Rom 10:20). What made this difference? It is simply this, “God opened the door of faith” by sending messengers to proclaim His Gospel – just as He did Paul and Barnabas.

All of this makes perfect sense when we consider that it is God who gives “the hearing ear” (Prov 20:12). To put it another way, He circumcises the ear so the person can hear (Jer 6:10), or gives them ears to hear (Isa 50:4), while not giving that aptitude to others (Deut 29:4). Jesus said there are some to whom it is “given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” while there are others unto whom “it is not given” (Matt 13:11).

God has not revealed all that is involved in opening the door of faith, forbidding to allow some

regions to hear the Gospel, giving a hearing ear, and giving some to know, while withholding that privilege from others. However, these circumstances do exist, understood or not. Once they are received and mixed with faith, one will have no difficulty with hearing that the Lord opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.

THERE THEY ABODE LONG TIME

“And there they abode long time with the disciples.” Other versions read, “they spent a long time with the disciples,” NASB “And they stayed there with the disciples for some time,” NRSV “spent a considerable time with the disciples,” CSB “tarried no little time with the disciples,” ERV and “they stayed no little time with the disciples.” AMPLIFIED

The exact length of time Paul and Barnabas spent in Antioch is not made known. However, based on what is fairly clear, it was a considerable length of time. It is generally thought that the “work” they had just completed took place between A.D. 45-47. We hear no more of them until the time of the conference in Jerusalem, to which the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:1-2). It is estimated that this conference took place around A.D. 51-53. If these are reasonable dates, the “long time” of Acts 14:28 consisted of approximately 5-8 years. None of these can be fully substantiated, but they do, even if very general, confirm that a “long time” was, in fact, a “long time.”

It is evident that there was a profound love of the brethren in Antioch for Paul and Barnabas, and that it was reciprocated by them. Prior to going their mission, they spent “a whole year” in Antioch. As it is written, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa 133:1). This is evidence of genuine spiritual life, and how wonderfully it seen in this text.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to an account of a charge being carried out that was commissioned by the Holy Spirit. The servants were faithful, carrying our the work to its completion, or fulfillment. We have been made privy to the activities of faithful stewards, and to the kinds of experience they encountered in fulfilling their mission.

The accompanying chart shows the remarkable extent of the journey of Paul and Barnabas. I have marked the cities in which they preached, together with the sequence in which the visits occurred. Even in the context of our time, with all of its advancements in technology and travel, this would be a noteworthy work.

WHAT DID THEY DO?

- Preached the Word of God in the synagogue in Salamis (13:5).
- Went through the island of Cyprus preaching (13:6).
- Having been summoned by him, preached the Word to the proconsul of the island (13:7,12).
- Struck a sorcerer blind who was seeking to turn the proconsul from the faith (13:8-11).
- Preached the Word in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia (13:14-40).
- Warned the Jews in that synagogue to avoid unbelief (13:41).
- Persuaded inquiring Gentiles to continue in the grace of God (13:43).
- Preached the Word in that synagogue the next Sabbath (13:45).
- Rebuked contradicting Jews and announced they were turning to the Gentiles (13:46-47).

- Published the Word of God throughout the region (13:49).
- Preached the Word in the synagogue of Iconium (14:1).
- Remained a long time in Iconium, speaking boldly in the Lord (14:2).
- Preached the Word in the region around Lystra and Derbe (14:6-7).
- After perceiving he had faith to be healed, Paul healed a crippled man in Lystra (14:8-10).
- Stopped the Lycaonians from offering sacrifice to them, and declared the necessity of them turning from vain gods to the living God (14:15-18).
- Preached the Gospel in Derbe (14:20-21).
- Revisited Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples (14:21-22).
- Exhorted the disciples to continue in the faith, and declared that through much tribulation we enter into the kingdom of God (14:22).
- Ordained elders in every church (14:23a).
- Prayed with fasting, and commended the disciples to the Lord on whom, they had believed (14:23b).
- Preached the word of God in Perga (14:25).
- Returned to Antioch from which they were sent to the work, and rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles (14:27).

May God be praised for workers such as Paul and Barnabas, who carry out what they have been given to do, then faithfully report to the saints what God has done through them.

It seems to me that it is good to pursue such experiences, and to “seek first” the kingdom of God in the sense of being productively involved in its various workings. After all, believers are said to be “companions in the kingdom and patience of Christ” (Rev 1:9).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #64

DEALING WITH TEACHERS OF CIRCUMCISION, #1

“ 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. 3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. 5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. 12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.” (Acts 11:1-12)

INTRODUCTION

The practical transition from the Old Covenant to the New was not a simplistic one. Beyond all question, the accomplishments of Christ were thorough, pleasing to God, and completely effective. Salvation could never have been effected if this was not true. The extrication of men from the power of darkness, and their translation

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- **PAUL AND BARNABAS DISPUTED WITH THEM (15:2)**
- **THEY WERE BROUGHT ON THEIR WAY AND DECLARED THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES (15:3)**
- **THE BRETHREN IN JERUSALEM RECEIVED THEM(15:4)**
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- **THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS CAME TOGETHER TO CONSIDER THE MATTER (15:6)**
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into the Kingdom of Christ could not commence until all of the Divine requirements had been met. While the conformity of men to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29) was a process that required a continual change (2 Cor 3:18) , the basis of salvation could not be something that was gradually built over a period of time.

Even though the things that Jesus accomplished are known among us, it is essential that they be stated again and again. This is because there is nothing in human history that precisely parallels them. Their implications extend beyond the perimeter of the human intellect. Allow me to restate some of them in order that their magnitude can be again confirmed to your heart. All of these things were done in accordance with the Scriptures.

WHAT MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED

- Divinity must enter into the world clothed with human frailty, being made like unto the ones who would be saved (Isa 7:14; 9:6-7; John 1:14; Rom 8:3; Phil 2:6-7; Heb 2:16-17).
- Before His work as Captain of our salvation began, the Savior must have been tempted in all points like as we are, yet be without sin. This was in order that He might fulfill His ongoing intercession (Heb 2:18; 4:15).
- He must defeat the devil as a Man, overcoming the adversary in his own territory thoroughly and effectively. This He did by resisting the devil's temptations (Matt 4:1-11), casting demons out of those they victimized (Lk 11:20), as a man, exposing men to the pure glory of God (John 1:14; Matt 4:16; John 14:9), and living the entirety of His life in the

world without so much as a single sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 1 Pet 2:22; 1 John 3:5).

- He must confirm before the eyes of men that He was superior to nature, which can by no means be controlled by men (Matt 8:27; 14:25).

Even though the things that Jesus accomplished are known among us, it is essential that they be stated again and again. This is because there is nothing in human history that precisely parallels them. Their implications extend beyond the perimeter of the human intellect.

While in this world as a Man, He must confirm His authority over the powers of darkness (Mk 1:27; 9:25 Lk 13:11-12).

- The totality of sin – “the sins of the world” – must be taken away, made an end of, and destroyed (Dan 9:24; John 1:29; 1 John 3:5).

- In order for sin to be dealt with effectively, it had to be laid upon Jesus en mass, carried in His body, while He was, in reality, “made to be sin for us” (Isa 53:6; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 2:24).

- Sin must be cursed in the body of Jesus, with the full judgment of God against sin being experienced by Him (Rom 8:3; Gal 3:13).

- Satan had to be destroyed, so that he obtained no more power to retain men in bondage once they were united to Christ (Gen 3:15; Heb 2:14).

- Satan, as the accuser of the brethren, had to be expelled from the heavenly realms (Rev 12:9-10).

- The principalities and powers that held sway over the entirety of the mankind had to be plundered and their captives freed (Col 2:15).

- The demands of the Law had to be fully satisfied by a man, so that it was no longer the standard of righteousness, and thus could not condemn those received by God (Matt 5:17; Rom 10:4).

- Peace had to be made between God and man (Col 1:20).

- The handwriting of ordinances that was against us had to be blotted out, so that they condemned us no more (Col 2:4).

- The new and living way to God had to be raised up and sanctified for men (Heb 10:20).

- The Old Covenant had to be terminated, and a New Covenant instituted by which men could draw near to God (2 Cor 3:3-11; Heb 6:19; 8:1-13).

- A single Mediator had to be established in heaven through whom the New Covenant could be fully enacted (1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 12:24).

- An intercessor must be established in heaven that always lived to intercede for the redeemed (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).

- The Savior had to be invested with all power in heaven and earth, be seated in heaven, and be the effective Captain of our salvation (Acts 2:34-36; 10:36; Heb 2:10; 1 Pet 3:22).

- A work must be done prior to men being saved that is so thorough that it allows God to be “just” or righteous in justifying sinners (Rom 3:26).

In spiritual life, one can only know what is clearly seen by faith. Further, one’s faith cannot extend beyond their personal involvement in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. In other words, the knowledge of God is not like a sort of manual of facts that we memorize.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE THINGS

While the perfection of men extends over a lengthy period of time (2 Cor 3:18), the laying of the Foundation for their salvation cannot be done on that basis. Although numerous prophecies and preparatory works preceded the laying of the Foundation Stone, the placement of the Stone itself cannot be on that basis. Furthermore, the Foundation Stone could not be put into place until God had been fully satisfied regarding the matter of sin. Salvation could not be based upon Divine sympathy. The salvation itself must be an expression of the righteousness of God. Therefore Peter wrote, “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ ” (2 Pet 1:1). With God, an unjust “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9) is not possible. Should such a condition be possible, the devil could continue to accuse to God those who were saved, and could not have been justly expelled from heaven.

Both faith and hope require a satisfactorily completed foundation, or basis, for salvation. There can be no question about the provision of salvation, even though doubts may exist concerning one’s experience of it. Even in that theoretical case, the doubt must eventually be removed, for its very existence is a reproach to God and an evidence of unbelief.

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

Is all of this nothing more than a needless technicality? Indeed not! What we are seeing in the book of Acts is the working out of the purpose of God among those who had understanding of what had been accomplished by the Savior. That is why the messengers were so bold. It is why the Lord worked with them. It is why they were able to overturn erroneous ideas.

However, having said all of that, there is something else that is being made known in the record we are reviewing. In spiritual life, one can only know what is clearly seen by faith. Further, one’s faith cannot extend beyond their personal involvement in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. In other words, the knowledge of God is not like a sort of manual of facts that we memorize. There are aspects of the Kingdom of God that can only be fully known by arriving at proper conclusions. In fact, this is the very thing that will be confirmed in our text. While it is mandatory that men have a knowledge of the Scripture, their proper use of that knowledge is based upon their reasoning and perception, not their acquisition of the facts.

With men, extended research on a matter often uncovers flaws or imperfections. That is because whatever natural men do carries with it something of their own imperfections. However, this is not true of the Word of God. The more you consider the Word with a pure heart and in faith, the more you will see. Also, the more you integrate it with human experience, the more thoroughly life in Christ is understood.

AT THE TIME OF OUR TEXT

At the time of our text, it was approximately seventeen years after the New Covenant had been inaugurated, and Jesus began its mediation. Yet, there was such a marked contrast between the Old and the New that many did not perceive it as fully as possible.

These were people whose minds had been bathed in Scripture, and while there were many prophecies of the New Covenant, they lacked clarity until the time of their fulfillment arrived. Daniel was told of this Divine manner in Daniel 12:4. Throughout God’s dealings with men, this had been His style – to open up the understanding of certain prophecies during the time they are actually being fulfilled. Prior to their fulfillment, a limitation was placed on man’s understanding of those things. Their reality was not questioned, but the intricacies and manner of their outworking was not known. The uniqueness of the New Covenant message lies in the fact that it is a “more sure word of prophecy”

– i.e. “the prophetic word confirmed,” NKJV or fulfilled. The message of the New Covenant is not one of possibilities, but of accomplishments. It is one that promotes and maintains faith, not speculation.

In the text for this lesson, there will be sharp contention about circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses – particularly among Gentile converts. Holy men will meet and discuss this matter until it becomes clear to them. Such clarity is also the manner of the New Covenant.

It is important to note that the contention concerned religious matters, not domestic, social, or political issues. It further had to do with something that God Himself had originated and affirmed in the text of Scripture, not tradition.

Among other things, this will show us that early believers did not allow for contradicting views of the Scripture. They determined to settle issues regarding the will and commandments of God. In our time, such resolutions are rarely sought. Instead, men form a denomination around their crystalized views of Scripture, and begin to compete in the market of religious ideas. It is understood that every divergent view does not require extensive investigation. That is because the harmony or variance of some theological views are more pronounced than others. However, even in those cases, the truth of Scripture and the will of God must be firmly established.

BRETHREN TAUGHT THE WRONG THING

“ 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.”

Remember, Paul and Barnabas are in Antioch, and that is the city to which some now had come. There had doubtless been a report throughout Judaea of the marvelous works that issued forth from the church there. They not only had a number of teachers and prophets, but were involved in an extensive outreach that was directed by the Holy Spirit of God. That certainly was enough to get the attention of surrounding areas, particularly in Judea. Now, an entourage of men come “down” from the high country of Judea, endeavoring to instruct the brethren more perfectly in the ways of the Lord. It ought to be noted that those who are serious about their religion, whether right or wrong, tend to be aggressive about it.

AN AGGRESSIVE MANNER

“And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren...”

This group of men did not come to “evangelize,” but to teach “the brethren.” They felt there were some doctrinal and practical; deficiencies in Antioch, and therefore sought to correct them. Being Jews, they no doubt were persuaded they had a more thorough grasp of Kingdom matters than those from that area. Of course, they conveniently ignored the fact that there were prophets and teachers there, and that the Holy Spirit had used some of them in a rather extensive work in Gentile regions – a work that extended over about two years. Yet, these “men” felt it necessary to come from Judaea to deliver what they felt to be a critical point of teaching. We will find that it was not an illuminated view, but one that was driven by minds without spiritual understanding.

A MOSAIC REQUIREMENT

“ . . . and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Other versions read, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved,” NKJV and “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” NIV

The necessity for spiritual understanding, as opposed to a mere scholastic grasp of Scripture, can be seen in the matter before us: the binding of circumcision, as described by Moses, upon believers in Christ.

This is the first expression of an ongoing thorn in the side of the early church. Before beginning my remarks on this matter, it is necessary to say a few things about the religious environment of that time. It was vastly different from the church culture of our day.

- A certain seriousness existed in the converted Jewish community concerning Divine requirements.
- There was a level of Scriptural literacy among these people that is virtually unknown in our time.
- There was a commitment to doing what was perceived to be the will of God.

I say these things understanding that there was also a sectarian and factious spirit that existed among some. Whether or not that was the case with those to whom we are now introduced will be established by their response to the recorded discussions that follow. As we will see, however, this was not a mere religious haranguing over the personal opinions of people who has no commitment to the Lord.

The necessity for spiritual understanding, as opposed to a mere scholastic grasp of Scripture, can be seen in the matter before us: the binding of circumcision, as described by Moses, upon believers in Christ.

The Origin of the Circumcision of Reference

Established Initially with Abraham

God instituted circumcision when He made a covenant with Abraham – a covenant made with the future in mind: “As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations . . . And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gen 17:4,7-8). This covenant has to do with Abraham and his seed, or progeny. It consisted primarily of two things. First, that God would be “a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee” (Gen 17:7). Second, that He would give them “all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8).

Circumcision became the means of distinguishing the Jews from the Gentiles. The Jews were referred to as “the circumcision,” or those who were “circumcised”

Those Who Were not Circumcised Were Punished

In regards to this covenant, it was established by the rite of circumcision. “This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you. And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which is not of thy seed . . . And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant ” (Gen 17:10-14).

Codified and Bound Upon the People

by Moses

In the Law, circumcision was formally bound upon the people: “Speak unto the children of Israel, saying, If a woman have conceived seed, and born a man child: then she shall be unclean seven days; according to the days of the separation for her infirmity shall she be unclean. And in the eighth day the flesh of his foreskin shall be circumcised ” (Lev 12:3).

Circumcision Required to Eat the Passover

Circumcision was required for one to eat the Passover – even if he was a stranger in the land: “And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as one that is born in the land: for no uncircumcised person shall eat thereof ” (Ex 12:48).

Distinguished the Jews from

the Gentiles

Circumcision became the means of distinguishing the Jews from the Gentiles. The Jews were referred to as “the circumcision,” or those who were “circumcised” (Jer 9:25; Acts 10:45; 11:2; Rom 3:30; 4:9,12;. 15:8; Gal 2:7-9; Eph 2:11; Col 4:11; Tit 1:10), and the Gentiles as “the uncircumcision” or “uncircumcised” (Gen 34:14; Judges 14:3; 15:18; 1 Sam 17:26; 1 Sam 31:4; Jer 9:26; Rom 3:30; 4:9; Eph 2:11).

John the Baptist and Jesus

John the Baptist and Jesus Circumcised

John the Baptist was circumcised in strict accord with this law. “And it came to pass, that on the eighth day they came to circumcise the child ; and they called him Zacharias, after the name of his father. And his mother answered and said, Not so; but he shall be called John” (Luke 1:59-60). On the eighth day, he infant Jesus was circumcised according to this law: “And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child , his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb” (Luke 2:21).

Jesus Referred to Circumcision

Jesus referred to this rite: “Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man” (John 7:22).

Stephen Referred to Circumcision

Stephen referred to it when he addressed the Jewish council: “And he gave him the covenant of circumcision: and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs” (Acts 7:8).

Paul Referred to Circumcision

Paul also referred to it in his teaching: “And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also” (Rom 4:11).

Some Mitigating Factors

There was no specific word contained in Moses and the Prophets that said the rite of circumcision would become obsolete, or by a decree of God would no longer be required. There were some indirect

statements that spoke of another kind of circumcision.

- **UNCIRCUMCISED LIPS.** “And Moses spake before the LORD, saying, Behold, the children of Israel have not hearkened unto me; how then shall Pharaoh hear me, who am of uncircumcised lips ?” (Ex 6:12).

- **CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART.** “Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no more stiffnecked” (Deut 10:16). “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart . . .” (Deut 30:6). “Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart . . .” (Jer 4:4). “Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart ” (Jer 9:26).

- **UNCIRCUMCISED EARS.** “To whom shall I speak, and give warning, that they may hear? behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they cannot hearken . . .” (Jer 6:10).

Although these statements may be clear to those in Christ who have understanding, there was not a syllable of Scripture that suggested that a new circumcision would invalidate the old – just as the New Covenant made the first old, and ready to vanish away (Heb 8:13). That is something that would be made known in the crucible of disputation and reasoning. It would also be revealed more fully to Paul, who would enlarge upon the reason why circumcision could not be bound upon believers.

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

I have taken the time to point out these things to show the necessity of obtaining true wisdom and spiritual understanding. When these men came down from Judea and taught some that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses, their reasoning must have appeared to be very weighty. They could point out in Scripture that this is what God required. They could further have seemingly established that any Gentiles that were accepted by God had, in fact, become identified with the Jews, thus requiring their circumcision.

The prophets spoke of the coming identity of the Gentiles with the Jews .

- “And in that day there shall be a root **These men from Judea did not simply say the Gentiles ought to be circumcised – that would have been bad enough. Now, however, they extend their reasoning into the area of salvation, which is administered**

of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek : and His rest shall be glorious” (Isa 11:10).

- “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles ” (Isa 42:6).

- “Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders” (Isa 49:22).

- “The Gentiles shall come to thy light . . . the forces of the Gentiles shall come unto thee ” (Isa 60:3,5).

- “And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name” (Isa 62:2).

- “O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit” (Jer 16:19).

- “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you ” (Zech 8:23).

For that matter, the New Covenant was clearly prophesied as being made “with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31).

WHAT THESE MEN SAID

These men from Judea did not simply say the Gentiles ought to be circumcised – that would have been bad enough. Now, however, they extend their reasoning into the area of salvation, which is administered by the Lord Jesus – something that neither Moses nor the prophets associated with circumcision. Supposing that their reasoning was sound, and no doubt buttressing their word with all manner of Scripture, they affirmed, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved ” (Acts 15:1) – and they were talking about the salvation that is in Christ, for Moses promised no salvation under the Law. They said this in the presence of the brethren in Antioch, among whom were several teachers and prophets.

PAUL AND BARNABAS DISPUTED WITH THEM

“ 2 When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.”

Here we are exposed to the manner in which doctrinal controversy was addressed by the early church. First, what was said to be required was taken seriously. Further, it was not assumed that because a person or persons felt what they said was true, that they were at liberty to bind it upon others. What was preached was not left to human discretion. Further, what was questioned was not left in the domain of human opinion. We will see that an aggressive effort was made to suppress error, and to arrive at a sound expression of the truth.

This is not a common approach in our time. There are matters of religious controversy that have existed for centuries, never being hammered out to a satisfactory conclusion, as in this text. For example, in the movement with which I have been identified, there is a line of teaching that states singing to God cannot be accompanied by a musical instrument. The division is sharp, extending into the reasoning of our text – associating the matter with salvation. Yet, for at least one hundred and fifty years, the controversy has continued without an uninterrupted quest for the matter to be resolved. There have been debates – such as the one Paul and Barnabas will have with these men from Judea. However, there has not been a determination such as the one recorded in this text. I conclude that this record has to do with men who evidenced more interest in the truth, as opposed to maintaining a sectarian position.

NO SMALL DISSENSION AND DISPUTATION

“When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them . . .” Other versions read, “great dissension and debate,” NASB “sharp dispute and debate,” NIV “no small dissensions and questioning,” ASV “no little argument and discussion with them,” BBE “no small measure of discord and dispute,” CJB “engaged them in serious argument and debate,” CSB “great dissension, and disputation,” GWN “had a major argument and debate with them,” NET “sharp dispute and debate with them,” NIB “had a long argument with these men,” NJB “disagreed with them, arguing vehemently,” NLT “argued and discussed this with them at length,” LIVING “were very much opposed to this teaching. They argued with these men about it,” IE and “dire disturbance and a serious discussion had been created.” MONTGOMERY

The words “dissension” and “disputation” are strong words. They are certainly not associated with any casual or passive activity. Here, they speak of a holy aggression. “Dissension” has to do with strong disagreement. In this case, Paul and Barnabas not only were in disagreement concerning the teaching of circumcision brought down from Jerusalem, but refused to let it go unchallenged.

“Disputation” relates to the articulation of that disagreement, and the presentation of strong arguments against what was being taught: namely, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” This was an activity in which both sides presented justification for their view. It was apparently heated, though not driven by “the wrath of man,” which “worketh not the righteousness of God” (James 12:20). The prolonged and aggressive nature of this exchange is depicted by the words, “no small dissension and disputation.”

While disputation is not a preferred activity for men of God, it is often a necessary one. This is because of the nature of spiritual life. First, contradicting thoughts produce a kind of climate in which the fruit of righteousness is diminished – for “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace among those that make peace” (James 3:18). Second, where there is doctrinal conflict there is error, for “sound doctrine” is never self-contradictory. This is because it issues forth from God, “with whom is no variableness” (James 1:17). Third, anything declared to be related to salvation is a critical matter, for no subject is of any greater importance than “the salvation of God” (Psa 50:23; Lk 3:6; Acts 28:28).

- **RELATED TO GOD.** Anything and everything that relates to salvation also connects with God, who is appropriately described as “the God of salvation” (Psa 68:2).

- **RELATED TO JESUS.** It also is associated with Jesus, who is “the Captain” of “salvation” (Heb 2:10).

- **RELATED TO THE HOLY SPIRIT.** It also is united with the Holy Spirit, through whom salvation is implemented – through “the sanction of the Spirit” (1 Thess 2:13); and spiritual birth as well – being “born of the Spirit” (John 3:8).

- **RELATED TO THE HOLY ANGELS.** Additionally anything having to do with salvation involves the holy angels, who are ministers to those who are “the heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14).

- **RELATED TO THE GRACE OF GOD.** On top of all of that, whatever is affiliated with salvation has to do with “the grace of God,” which “brings salvation” NKJV (Tit 2:11).

- **RELATED TO THE GOSPEL.** It also directly relates to the Gospel, which is God’s “power unto salvation” (Rom 1:16), and is the “Gospel of your salvation” (Eph 1:13).

- **RELATED TO HOPE.** Things represented as being related to salvation also relate to hope, for saints possess “the hope of salvation” (1 Thess 5:8; Eph 6:17).

All of these relationships are critical to salvation itself. It is not possible that anything unrelated to them could be associated with salvation. As the Architect of salvation, anything connected with that salvation must, of

If all of heaven is involved in salvation, men do well to be sober and perceptive regarding anything they say pertains to that salvation. No person can afford to have distorted thoughts about the salvation of God.

necessity come from God the Father. As the Implementer of salvation, everything inherent in that salvation must be administered by Jesus Christ. I find it exceedingly difficult to imagine anything having greater implications than something said to be associated with salvation. In this matter we are not speaking of a novel religious idea, or a unique doctrine of a particular church. This is not something in which men are allowed latitude for opinion. If all of heaven is involved in salvation, men do well to be sober and perceptive regarding anything they say pertains to that salvation. No

person can afford to have distorted thoughts about the salvation of God. If salvation has to do with the extrication of men from sin, reconciling them to God, and making them suitable to obtain an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15), then our representations of it must be proper, reflecting “the mind of the Lord.”

Salvation must neither be oversimplified nor laden with requirements that did not originate with God. Ponder the things that have been associated with being “saved.”

- **ENDURING TO THE END.** “And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved .” (Matt 10:22). “But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved ” (Mat 24:13).

- **BELIEVING AND BEING BAPTIZED.** “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16).

- **ENTERING BY JESUS.** “I am the door: by Me if any man enter in, he shall be saved , and shall go in and out, and find pasture” (John 10:9).

- **THROUGH THE NAME OF JESUS.** “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved ” (Acts 4:12).

- **CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD.** “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved ” (Acts 2:21). “ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Rom 10:13).

- **THROUGH THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11). “ Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:5).

- **BELIEVING ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST.** “And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved , and thy house” (Acts 16:31).

- **BY THE PRESENT LIFE OF CHRIST.** “Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:9-10).

- **BY THE FIRE OF DIVINE JUDGMENT.** “If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire” (1 Cor 3:15).

- **BY HOPE.** “For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?” (Rom 8:24).

- **BY THE GOSPEL.** “By which also ye are saved , if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Cor 15:2).

- **BY BAPTISM.** “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21).

- **BY BELIEVING AND CONFESSION.** “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved ” (Rom 10:9).

- **BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH.** “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:8).

- **BY THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH.** “And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they

might be saved ” (2 Thess 2:10).

• **ACCORDING TO GOD’S MERCY, BY THE WASHING OF REGENERATION AND THE RENEWING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy He saved us , by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

You can look at these as a series of sequential steps – but it ought to be apparent that no such view is declaring concerning them in Scripture. They may also simply be viewed as requirements that must all be met – and there certainly is some element of truth to that. However, it seems to me that the point being revealed in these matters is the marvelous complexity of salvation, and the consequent necessity for Divine involvement. It would be a blasphemous addition to accept what was being taught by certain men from Jerusalem: “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Such a statement cannot be blended with the revelations stated above. However these men were considering salvation, it was wholly unacceptable. It clashed with both the nature and purpose of salvation, and therefore Paul and Barnabas refused to allow such statements to go unchallenged. The statement of these men from Galilee betrayed their ignorance of the salvation of God. Left unchallenged, it would drive a wedge between the people and God.

THEY DETERMINED TO

“ . . . they determined . . . ” Other versions read, “the brethren determined,” NASB “appointed,” NIV “made a decision to,” BBE “the congregation assigned,” CJB “they arranged,” CSB “they ordained,” GENEVA and “it was decided.” NAB

The word “determined” is translated from a word meaning, “to appoint, ordain, order,” THAYER “to assign to a place or task, to decide,” FRIBERG and “designate, set aside, command, order, direct.” UBS

Here is another example of the need for discernment. A decision had to be made that did not allow for the present situation to continue, and yet the matter could not be resolved by the wisdom and arguments of those present. However, that was not sufficient reason to table the discussion for another time. I get the distinct impression that the work of the Lord could not move forward until unanimity on this matter regarding appropriating salvation was accomplished.

Also, we see how entrenched these men from Jerusalem were in their persuasion. Even after Paul and Barnabas had engaged them in a lengthy disputation – men who were called and directed by the Holy Spirit of God – yet the issue they were professing was not resolved.

However, the matter could not simply be dropped, while brethren agreed to speak only of those things on which they agreed – something that is advocated today among some who are sharply divided in what they relate to salvation. Questionable teachings that are represented as being associated with salvation cannot be ignored, or left to the people to figure out. Everything about salvation is built upon a sure foundation – one that can be embraced by faith. Faith cannot take hold of doubt, for it is the antithesis of faith. Salvation by grace through faith cannot take place if faith is not grounded in Christ – and that grounding is wholly dependent upon the Word of God, particularly the Gospel.

One more thing about this: there appears to have been no threat to any of the brethren by the action that was taken. No one objected to sending Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem about this matter, as though it might uproot their tradition or void their preaching. Of course, when they obtained an answer, it would require the cessation of any teaching that contradicted it.

SEND PAUL AND BARNABAS TO JERUSALEM

“ ...that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them . . . ”

They did not call for some supposedly unbiased person from outside of their group. Instead, they chose Paul and Barnabas, who had initially been with them for a “whole year” (Acts 11:26), and had remained with them for a “long time” after completing the mission to which the Spirit had called them (Acts 14:28). In addition they sent specific men from their own number, or some of the others of the number.” AMPLIFIED

Here, we get a feel concerning the caliber of brethren in the Antioch church. Luke has already related there were certain teachers and prophets in that assembly. Among them were “Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1). It certainly is not a coincidence that “the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (11:26). They apparently projected a picture of total commitment to Christ, as well as thorough acquaintance with His teaching. Of course, it is not possible to firmly establish one’s identity with Christ if the people are neither committed to Him nor knowledgeable of His ways.

TO JERUSALEM

“ . . . should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders...”

There are sixty references to Jerusalem in the book of Acts (1:4, 8,12,19; 2:5,14; 4:6,16; 5:16,28; 6:7; 8:1, 14,25,26,27; 9:2,13,21,26,28; 10:39; 11:2, 22,27; 12:25; 13:13,27,31; 15:2,4; 16:4; 18:21; 19:21; 20:16,22; 21:4,11,12,13,5, 17,31; 22:5,17,18; 23:11; 24:11; 25:1,3,7, 9,15,20,24; 26:4,10,20; 28:17). There were a number of prophecies regarding the centrality of Jerusalem during the inauguration of the New Covenant.

- “And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isa 2:3).
- “For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and they that escape out of mount Zion: the zeal of the LORD of hosts shall do this” (Isa 37:32).
- “The first shall say to Zion, Behold, behold them: and I will give to Jerusalem one that bringeth good tidings” (Isa 41:27).
- “That confirmeth the word of His servant, and performeth the counsel of his messengers; that saith to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, Ye shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof” (Isa 44:26).
- “At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart” (Jer 3:17).
- “The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of His people, and the strength of the children of Israel” (Joel 3:16).
- “And he said, The LORD will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the habitations of the shepherds shall mourn, and the top of Carmel shall wither” (Amos 1:2).
- “And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem ” (Micah 4:2).
- “And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem ; half of

them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be” (Zech 14:8).

ABOUT THIS QUESTION

“ . . . about this question.” Other versions read, “concerning this issue,” NASB “to discuss this question,” NRSV “concerning this controversy,” CSB “about this claim,” GWN “about this point of disagreement,” NET and “on this matter.” WEYMOUTH

The question was whether or not a person could be saved without being circumcised “after the manner of Moses,” or in strict accord with the ordinance of the Law. According to that ordinance, male children within Israel, whether born of an Israelite or a stranger, were to be circumcised on the eighth day following their birth (Lev 12:3). Strangers sojourning with the Israelites had to be circumcised in order to partake of the Passover (Ex 12:48). So far as procedures are concerned, that is the extent of Moses’ instruction on circumcision.

- In all of the Law (Exodus through Deuteronomy), there are only six uses of the word circumcision in its various forms (circumcise—Deut 10:16; 30:6; circumcised – Ex 12:44,48; Lev 12:3; circumcision—Ex 4:26).

Without the further illumination that would accompany the day of salvation, these texts, combined with the few given by Moses, were all the people had. They all presumed the prominence of Abraham’s offspring, and the necessity of anyone seeking an association with God being identified with them.

- Circumcision is referenced fifteen times in Genesis (17:10,11,12,13,14, 23,24,25,26,27; 21:4; 34:15,17,22,24).

- It is mentioned five times from Joshua through the Song of Solomon (Josh 5:2,3,4,5,6,7,8).

- It is mentioned in the Prophets (Isaiah through Malachi) two times (Jer 4:4; 9:25).

- There are thirty-four references to “uncircumcised” and “circumcised” – thirty-four times from Genesis through Ezekiel (Gen 17:14; 34:14; Ex 6:12,30; 12:48; Lev 19:13; 26:41; Josh 5:7; Judges 14:3; 15:18; 1 Sam 14:6; 17:26,36; 31:4; 2 Sam 1:20; 1 Chron 10:4; Isa 52:1; Jer 6:10; 9:25,26; Ezek 28:10; 31:18; 32:19,21,24,25,26,27,28, 29,30,32; 44:7,9).

On the surface, that does not appear to be enough to formulate a teaching such as, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.” Yet, the strength of what was said is seen in words that God delivered to Abraham concerning this ordinance.

- **A COVENANT TO BE KEPT.** “ This is My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you and thy seed after thee ; Every man child among you shall be circumcised” (Gen 17:10).

- **A TOKEN OF THE COVENANT.** “And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you ” (Gen 17:11).

- **A COVENANT IN THEIR FLESH.** “He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant ” (Gen 17:13).

- **THE PENALTY FOR NOT BEING CIRCUMCISED.** “And the uncircumcised man child whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant ” (Gen 17:14).

Without the further illumination that would accompany the day of salvation, these texts, combined with the few given by Moses, were all the people had. They all presumed the prominence of

Abraham's offspring, and the necessity of anyone seeking an association with God being identified with them.

The "question" that had to be resolved was whether or not the Gentiles had to be circumcised to be saved. It could not be resolved with an existing text of Scripture. Further, they did not pray for an answer – at least there is no record of them doing so. The matter would have to be resolved through the consideration of men who had a fuller understanding of the nature of life in Christ Jesus, together with those who had been, according to His own selection, personally involved in the work of God. It appears that those who presented this teaching submitted to the determination to resolve the issue. Thus the stage is set for the determined resolution of this controversy about circumcision.

THEY WERE BROUGHT ON THEIR WAY AND DECLARED THE CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES

“ 3 And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.”

BROUGHT ON THEIR WAY

“And being brought on their way by the church . . .” Other versions read, “sent on their way,” NKJV “sent off by the congregation,” CJB “sent on their journey,” NAB “members of the church saw them off,” NJB “having been sent forward,” YLT “the entire congregation escorted them out of the city,” LIVING “helped the men with what they needed,” IE “accompanied for a short distance by some other members,” WEYMOUTH “they were endorsed and sent,” ISV and “being fitted out and sent on their way by the church.” AMPLIFIED

The words “brought on their way” are translated from a single Greek word (**propemfque,ntej**). This word has a complex meaning, portions of which are reflected in the various translations. Lexically the word can mean, “accompany, escort . . . help on one's journey, send on one's way,” THAYER and “as furnishing things necessary for someone's travel help on one's journey, send on one's way.” FRIBERG

The idea here is that the whole congregation was involved in this matter, confirming their interest in doctrinal purity and a proper representation of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. They all agreed concerning the ones who were selected for the journey. They no doubt supplied what was required to make the trip, which was by land, and would require some time. They also escorted them, probably to the outskirts of the city, perhaps accompanying them for a for a short while.

Here we see the unanimity that existed among the brethren at Antioch. One could hardly conceive of a contemporary church taking that much interest in the resolution of a doctrinal matter. Could you, for example, imagine staff members like youth ministers, senior ministers, family ministers, counselors, and praise team members being part of the activities of our text? Of course, those type of positions are not mentioned in the chronicles of the early church. Their interest was quite different than those that are fostered by the institutional church. I mention these things to accent the glaring difference between the church set forth in the book of Acts, and what has come to be known as “the church” of our time.

THEY PASSED THROUGH PHENICE AND SAMARIA

“ . . . they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles . . .”

“Phenice” is the same as Phoenicia, being an older way of English spelling. This was a region comprising parts of southern Syria and northern Palestine. Brethren who were scattered by “the

persecution that arose about Stephen” had traveled to this region “preaching the word to none but the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). The cities of Tyre and Sidon were in that region. Samaria was the central region of Canaan. Traveling by land, Paul, Barnabas, and company passed through these regions en route to Jerusalem – a trip of around three hundred miles.

Declaring the Conversion of the Gentiles

Other versions read, “describing the conversion,” NKJV “describing in detail the conversion,” NASB “how the Gentiles had been converted,” NIV “reported the conversion,” NRSV “giving news of the salvation of,” BBE “recounting in detail how the Gentiles had turned to God,” CJB “relating the conversion,” DARBY and “how non-Jewish people were turning to God.” GWN

Conversion has to do with turning from one manner of living to another, abandoning one kind of life in order to embrace another. To be converted means to “turn toward, turning about,” FRIBERG and “to come to believe, to come to accept.” LOUW-NIDA It speaks of change – a moral change that involves the heart, mind, words, and deeds. It is a thorough change that is bounded by death to sin on the one side and coming alive to God on the other. Going through Phenicia and Samaria, the travelers told of the conversion of the Gentiles, obviously reporting it to the believers in those areas.

Since the psychiatrists and psychologists, together with their band of counselors, have invaded the church, there are fewer reports of conversion. Now people are being taught to manage sin instead of turn from it and die to it. The are being led to struggle with sin by regimen, rather than gaining the victory over it by sinning “no more.”

Since the psychiatrists and psychologists, together with their band of counselors, have invaded the church, there are fewer reports of conversion. Now people are being taught to manage sin instead of turn from it and die to it. The are being led to struggle with sin by regimen, rather than gaining the victory over it by sinning “no more.” Group therapy and personal counseling have now upstaged preaching, admonition, exhortation, and edification. Such human impositions were not in place during the time of our text. Preaching and teaching was being done, and conversions were the result.

THEY CAUSED GREAT JOY

“ . . . and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” Other versions read, “were bringing joy,” NASB “this news made all the brothers glad,” NIV “created great joy,” CSB “this news was received with the great satisfaction,” NJB “This made all the brothers very happy,” IE “inspired all the brethren with great joy,” WEYMOUTH and “all the brothers were overjoyed to hear about it.” PHILLIPS

Passing through the areas of Phenice and Samaria, the company of travelers reported the works of the Lord to the people of God – “the brethren.” The text does not say they reported how they were on their way to Jerusalem to settle the question about circumcision. They would address that problem, to be sure, but it had not consumed their minds, nor was it something that would cause joy among the brethren.

The text affirms “they caused great joy unto all the brethren.” That is, they “caused” it by “declaring the conversion of the Gentiles” – how they had turned to the Lord. It was the posture of the Gentiles toward the Lord that constituted their conversion, and that is what caused all of the brethren to be glad. It is what they said, or reported, not what they did.

Behold the unity of the brethren in those areas. Truly, they were “of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32). They all rejoiced because they knew, “This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23). Here is an example of the brethren being “of one mind and of one judgment” (1 Cor 1:10), and dwelling “together in unity” (Psa 133:1-3). Of course, the implications of this must have had a powerful effect upon the travelers, for it related directly to the issue that mandated their

trip to Jerusalem. While some men were dickering about binding circumcision on Gentile converts, these brethren were reporting their conversion – which certainly implied their acceptance by God. One would have a great deal of difficulty supporting the notion that people could be converted, turning to the Lord, and yet fall short in meeting the requirements. The very posture of turning to the Lord puts the individual in a state in which a favorable response to the Lord is assured. Looking to the Lord brings spiritual aptitude.

There are no examples in Scripture of people who turned to the Lord, yet refused to do what He required of them. The other alternative would be that Paul; and Barnabas had not instructed them properly. Of course, if that was the case, how could they have been converted, for conversion does not come through a flawed presentation of the Gospel. The brethren who heard the report knew this, and so they had “great joy.” They did not inquire whether or not they had been circumcised, or if they knew they had to be circumcised to be saved. They were able to think more soundly.

THE BRETHREN IN JERUSALEM RECEIVED THEM

“ 4 And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.”

We do not know how long it took Paul, Barnabas, and those with them to get to Jerusalem – particularly since they reported to the brethren along the way. If they traveled by sea, there were coastal cities in Phenice and Samaria where they could have disembarked (Sodom, Tyre, Caesarea, and Joppa). The language “passed through Phenice and Samaria,” however, strongly suggests that they traveled on the land. Now, at length, they arrive. It is quite possible that no advance message was sent to the brethren in Jerusalem, notifying them that they were coming.

THEY WERE RECEIVED OF THE CHURCH, APOSTLES, AND ELDERS

“And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders. . .” Other versions read, “they were welcomed,” NIV “they had a meeting with,” BBE “they met with,” LIVING “were cordially received,” WEYMOUTH and “were heartily welcomed.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “received” has the following lexical meaning: “to grant one access to oneself in the capacity in which he wishes to be regarded, e. g. as the messenger of others.” THAYER and “as understanding and receiving a message favorably receive, accept.” FRIBERG The idea here is that they were received in the capacity in which they had been sent – to discuss the matter of whether or not circumcision was compulsory for one to be saved. In other words, the whole church generally, and the apostles and elders specifically, agreed to deal with this matter.

The picture here is not one of the whole church in Jerusalem, together with the apostles and elders and the brethren with Paul and Barnabas, meeting together to decide the matter at hand by consensus. This was not a subject for general discussion. The question of the necessity of circumcision in order to be saved was taken up with the “apostles and elders.” The principle contributors in the discussion from those in Antioch would come from Paul and Barnabas. It is possible that some of the prophets from Antioch participated also, although that is open to question. It is certain that the men who came from Judea and disseminated the doctrine in question were not with those coming from Antioch. Those accompanying Paul and Barnabas are said to have been of the number of brethren in Antioch (15:2).

Now we will have a circumstance described in First Corinthians. Things will be uttered by the few, yet all will learn. As it is written, “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the

prophets” (1 Cor 14:29-32). This is a matter that will impact directly on how brethren among the Gentiles will be taught. The issue must be decided by those with understanding, who have participated in the work of the Lord by Divine appointment.

The Elders

This is only the second time “the elders” at Jerusalem have been mentioned in the book of Acts. The first time we read of them is when the churches sent relief to the brethren in Jerusalem by the hands of Barnabas and Saul, sending it “to the elders” (11:30). Now, however, “the elders” in Jerusalem are joined with the apostles in the determination of a critical matter. Here we read that they joined in the welcoming of the group from Antioch in the capacity in which they had been sent. Verse six informs us that they came together with the apostles to consider the matter at hand. Verses twenty-two and twenty-three finds them joining with the apostles in sending letters of instruction to the Gentile churches.

We have very little information on “the elders” in Jerusalem – only that they were capable of dealing with critical issues, and were prominent in the church. I gather that they were, as indicated by the instructions concerning elders, competent spiritual men, noted for their understanding of the mysteries of the Kingdom, and able to exhort and convince the gainsayers (Acts 20:28; 1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:5-9; James 5:14-15; 1 Pet 5:1-5).

THEY DECLARED ALL THINGS

“ . . . and they declared all things” Other versions read, “reported all things,” NKJV “reported everything,” NIV “rehearsed all things,” ASV “related all,” DARBY “declaring how great things,” DOUAY “recounted all,” MRD “gave an account of all,” NJB and “told about all the things.” IE

The account was given by Paul and Barnabas, and related to the mission to which the Spirit had called them, and which they fulfilled (13:2; 14:26). It was the same report they had given to the brethren in Phenice and Samaria, except more in detail. They reported all of the particulars of their work, like Peter reported the events that took place at the house of Cornelius (11:4-17). I gather that they, like Peter, commenced with their calling, then related all that was involved in the fulfilling of that call.

GOD HAD DONE WITH THEM

“ . . . that God had done with them.” Other versions read, “that God had done through them,” NIV “that God had wrought with them,” DARBY “that God had wrought by them,” MRD “God had done by them,” TNT “as many things as God did with them,” YLT “what God had been doing through their ministry,” LIVING “all that God, working with them, had done,” WEYMOUTH “what God had done through them as instruments,” WILLIAMS “all that God had accomplished through them,” AMPLIFIED and “how greatly God had worked with them.” PHILLIPS

The nature of this report is to be duly noted. It was not a mere relating of chronological events, or the various experiences they had. The point of the account was not what they had done, but what God had done through them. Now, that does require some discernment. These days, there are a lot of things being reported as coming from God that, in fact, have had their origin with men. I do not doubt that those endued with understanding weighed what was being reported, as Paul enjoined the prophets to do in Corinth (1 Cor 14:29).

It is understood that God always acts in strict harmony with both His character and His Word. It is, however, necessary that such a correlation be discerned. Therefore, the report of things God had wrought, or accomplished, through Paul and Barnabas must yield apparent glory to God. This will be attested in the results that were yielded by what they did. The effects of the preaching of Paul and

Barnabas will be reported – effects that God alone could work. I do not doubt they were very conscious of how godly men would reason on their report, and whether or not they would conclude that God was at work.

THE ACCOUNT IN GALATIANS

Paul alludes to this gathering in his letter to the Galatians. He states there that he went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and that Titus went with him also. He also states this was “by revelation,” which confirms the determination of the brethren in Antioch was by the Lord, and not merely by men. Here is what Paul recorded. “Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Gal 2:1-2). It is evident that much took place during this epochal gathering. It is on the part of wisdom to carefully examine it.

CERTAIN SAID THEY SHOULD BE CIRCUMCISED AND KEEP THE LAW OF MOSES

“ 5 But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.”

During this report, “the whole church” NLT was in the assembly, together with the apostles and elders, and Paul, Barnabas, and certain brethren from Antioch who were with them. The conclusions of this assembly will have an effect on the entire body of Christ, both in Jerusalem and wherever the Gospel was believed and obeyed. Now we find that everyone in the assembly did not have the same understanding. However, it is imperative that they work toward this objective, which thing God requires (1 Cor 1:10).

CERTAIN OF THE SECT OF THE PHARISEES

“But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed . . .” Other versions read, “believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees,” NIV “believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees,” NRSV “some of the Pharisees, who were of the faith,” BBE “certain members of the Pharisees' party who had become believers objected,” NJB “some of the men who had been Pharisees before their conversion stood to their feet,” LIVING “Some of the believers had belonged to the Pharisee sect. They stood up and claimed, IE “certain men who had belonged to the sect of the Pharisees but were now believers,” WEYMOUTH and “some who believed [who acknowledged Jesus as their Savior and devoted themselves to Him] belonged to the sect of the Pharisees.”
AMPLIFIED

This phrase does not suggest that the men who objected were still

Here were men who came from the same background as Paul, yet had not made the same progress. Later we will find that these men “held their peace,” and were finally “pleased” with the decision of the apostles and elders (15:13,22). Yet, at the point of our text, these men still held on to views that truth would eventually show to be erroneous.

Pharisees, maintaining that position in the Jewish community. It rather is intended to identify their background. In the past they were “of the sect of the Pharisees.” Luke states that “the church” welcomed the group from Antioch. This was not a public gathering that could be attended by those who were not members of the body of Christ.

Here were men who came from the same background as Paul, yet had not made the same progress. Later we will find that these men “held their peace,” and were finally “pleased” with the decision of the apostles and elders (15:13,22). Yet, at the point of our text, these men still held on to views that

truth would eventually show to be erroneous. Those who have been under the grip of religious tradition often find it clinging to them. Paul is an example that confirms such restraint is not necessary. Of course, he also was characterized by driving compulsion to “forget” the things behind him, count everything loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus, and press toward the mark of the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus with everything that he had (Phil 3:7-14). That, of course, is a frame of mind that proves very difficult for many professed believers.

IT WAS NEEDFUL

“ . . . saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” Other versions read, “it is necessary . . . and to direct” NKJV “the Gentiles must be and required,” NIV “it is necessary . . . and ordered,” NRSV “it is necessary . . . and to charge,” RSV “they ought to . . . and enjoin them,” DARBY and “insisting that Gentiles should . . . and instructed to.” NJB

First, there are things that ARE “needful.” Speaking of giving attendance to what He Himself said, Jesus said “one thing is needful” (Lk 10:42). In view of the situation existing in his time, Jude said it was “needful” for him to exhort the brethren to “earnestly contend for the faith” (Jude 1:3). Paul and Barnabas said it was “necessary” to preach the word of God to the Jews first (Acts 13:46). In the very conference covered in this text, the apostles and elders will conclude that

It is as though these men were responding to the report of Paul and Barnabas, declaring that something more was required of those who had believed their message and obeyed the Gospel.

there were “necessary things” that must be followed by Gentile believers (15:28). There are also certain things that are to be “kept.” Among them are “the faith” (2 Tim 4:7), the memory of the Gospel (1 Cor 15:2), “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3), “purity” (1 Tim 5:22), a condition in which we are “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27), and “His commandments” (1 John 2:3; 3:22). However, none of the things that are to be “kept” or “commanded” can be originated by men. All such things must clearly be required by the Lord Himself, who is the “Head of the body, the church” (Col 1:18).

Now, these believers, who had come from “the sect of the Pharisees,” which was the most strict sect of all the Jews (Acts 26:5), affirmed that it was essential for Gentiles to be circumcised, and to keep the Law of Moses. It is as though these men were responding to the report of Paul and Barnabas, declaring that something more was required of those who had believed their message and obeyed the Gospel.

Now, we will see how the apostles and elders respond to the affirmation of these believers who had been Pharisees. Will they treat the matter casually, or allow for the brethren to hold various opinions of it? Will they break forth in argument, or will they “try the spirits” to see if they are of God?

THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS CAME TOGETHER TO CONSIDER THE MATTER

“ 6 And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.”

Immediately, the statement of those insisting that circumcision and keeping the law of Moses was required for the Gentiles, was put under scrutiny . The matter will not be left in a state of intellectual limbo, nor will every person be allowed the privilege of a private opinion on the matter, Things that are said to be “necessary,” and bound upon other believers must be examined, and a valid determination made concerning their propriety. No person, regardless of their acumen or devotion will be allowed to dictate to the body of Christ. Absolute requirements must be justified by both Scripture and sound reasoning. In this case, there will be an emphasis on reasoning, and arriving at a proper conclusion. That conclusion must also be perceived by those with discernment, and the

appropriate action be taken.

THE APOSTLES AND ELDERS

“And the apostles and elders came together . . .” Other versions read, “came together,” NASB “met,” “were gathered together,” RSV “came together,” BBE “assembled,” CSB “met together,” NLT “set a further meeting,” LIVING and “were assembled together.” AMPLIFIED

We know that the apostles and elders were not isolated in this meeting. Verse twelve states that a “multitude” was present. It is also written that this multitude listened to the testimony of Paul and Barnabas during the gathering (15:12). Verse twenty-two refers to those present as “the apostles and elders, with the whole church.” The focus of this gathering, however, were the apostles and elders.

TO CONSIDER THE MATTER

“ . . . for to consider of this matter.” Other versions read, “to look into this matter,” NASB “consider this question,” “to consider this matter,” RSV “gave thought to the question,” BBE “to resolve this issue,” NLT “to decide this question,” LIVING “to study this problem,” IE and “to look into and consider this matter.” AMPLIFIED

It is evident that there was a determination to resolve the issue, not merely review it with no decisive action. Was circumcision necessary for Gentile believers or not? Were they required to keep the Law of Moses or not? Some had said these things were necessary, and some disagreed. Now they will engage in an extensive dialog in the matter. They will bring things that are known to bear upon things that are not known. They will listen, weigh, and consider.

AFTER MUCH DISPUTING, PETER ROSE UP AND SPOKE

“ 7 And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.”

When men do not know one another after the flesh (2 Cor 5:16), and have a prevailing love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10), they can have profitable disputation. Such is the case in this text. It provides us a slice of life in Christ that is not the most pleasant, and yet yields great benefit.

MUCH DISPUTING

“And when there had been much disputing . . .” Other versions read, “much debate,” NASB “much discussion,” NIV “much questioning,” ASV “lengthy debate,” CJB “a long discussion,” NJB and “an exhaustive inquiry.” PHILLIPS

The word “disputing” is translated from a word meaning, “questioning, disputation, discussion,” THAYER “heated discussion, debate, dispute,” FRIBERG “argument,” UBS and “to express forceful differences of opinion without necessarily having a presumed goal of seeking a solution - to dispute, dispute.” LOUW-NIDA

The picture here is not that of two opposing parties trying to prove their preconceived notions. Rather, it is of men of understanding making an effort to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion concerning something considered to be critical. There is a difference in two contradicting parties trying to overturn the arguments of the other, and two parties of differing views attempting to arrive at the truth. The latter is what we have here. Where there are religious men who lack thoughtful convictions, such a discussion rarely takes place. In fact, some make every effort to avoid such an occasion, compromising their stance to avoid controversy. Under normal circumstances, and where there are

issues at stake that are matters of conscience, this might be appropriate. However, when it comes to matters related to being “saved,” to things that are “needful,” and to commandments that are to be kept, varying views cannot be maintained. Such issues must be settled in order that inappropriate demands are not placed upon the people of God.

Therefore, our text speaks of an extended period of disputation. Yet, some additional testimony was required from those who actually had been involved in the conversion of Gentiles. Now, our attention is turned to such people.

PETER RISES UP TO SPEAK

“Peter rose up, and said unto them . . .” Other versions read, “Peter stood up and said,” NASB and “Peter got up and addressed them.” NIV

This is the man to whom Jesus said, “And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matt 16:19). This means that in matters relating to salvation and entrance into the Kingdom of God, Peter had superior understanding, coupled with the ability to articulate Divine requirements.

However, when Peter speaks, he will not draw attention to his authority, but to what God did through him. He knows that God cannot conduct Himself in contradiction of His nature or His Word, and therefore he will report what the Lord did following Peter’s preaching.

However, when Peter speaks, he will not draw attention to his authority, but to what God did through him. He knows that God cannot conduct Himself in contradiction of His nature or His Word, and therefore he will report what the Lord did following Peter’s preaching.

GOD MADE CHOICE AMONG US

“ . . . Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us . . .” Other versions read, “God chose among us,” NKJV “God made a choice among you,” NASB “it was God’s pleasure,” BBE “among us God chose out,” GENEVA “God made His choice,” NAB and “God made a choice or selection.” AMPLIFIED

When it comes to the instruction or teaching of the people of God, the matter is not left to mere human choice. This is something that is very obvious in the Scriptural record.

- God chose Moses to be the man through whom He gave the Law (Ex 24:12; Deut 5:1-3; John 1:17).
- God chose the priesthood to teach the people to differentiate between good and evil (Lev 10:8-11).
- God raised up Judges to deliver and teach the people (Judges 2:16,18).
- All of the prophets were chosen by God, and given a message to proclaim (2 Chron 24:19; Jer 7:25; Zech 7:12; Heb 11:1).
- All of the apostles were chosen and sent by the Lord (Lk 6:13; Eph 3:5).
- The instructive ministries are set first in the church, as it has pleased God: apostles, prophets, and teachers (1 Cor 12:18,28).
- Those with teaching and declaring ministries are gifts given to the church by Jesus: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor/teachers (Eph 4:11).
- Elders are said to be made overseers by the Holy Spirit (Acts 20:28).

- Those who preach the Gospel are “sent” by the Lord (Rom 10:15).

Even within the framework of these called and appointed people, God decides which ones will be used for pivotal ministries. Generally speaking, the twelve apostles were sent, but not limited, to the circumcision, or the Jews (Matt 19:28; Gal 2:7). Now, Peter will declare that God had chosen him for a special task. Earlier in this book we learned that the Holy Spirit separated Barnabas and Saul for a special work (13:2).

THE GENTILES SHOULD HEAR AND BELIEVE

“ . . . that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.”

What is here referred to as hearing the word of the Gospel and believing is also referred to as God granting repentance unto life to the Gentiles (Acts 11:18).

The reference is to the house of Cornelius believing the Gospel as preached to them through Peter. Peter now states that this was the result of a Divine choice. First, the Lord directed the Gentile Cornelius to send for Peter, who would tell him words whereby he would be saved (Acts 10:1-6). Second, an angel was sent to Peter to instruct him of the correctness of preaching to the Gentiles, and to direct him to go with the men sent from Cornelius to his house (Acts 10:9-23). The desire to summon Peter to his house did not originate with Cornelius – it was a revelation. The desire to go with the messengers from Cornelius, and preach to his household did not originate with Peter – it was a revelation. Had the Lord not orchestrated that whole event, it is doubtful that either man would ever have been aware of the other one. Peter’s explanation of the whole incident was this: “God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.” NASB

Because this was an event managed from heaven, the outcome of it will be critical to beholding the will of the Lord concerning the Gentiles. Whatever Peter preached is what the Lord intended for him to say, for God spoke by his “mouth.” If circumcision is essential, Peter will say that it is, for he had the keys to the Kingdom.

Furthermore, his words were directly related to salvation itself – words, the angel told Cornelius, “whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved ” (Acts 11:14). Peter’s personal testimony, therefore, is pertinent to the discussion at hand, having to do with the appropriation of salvation.

THE GENTILES RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT EVEN AS THE DISCIPLES

“ 8 And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us.”

As confirmed in the actual account of the event, the rehearsal of it to the brethren in Jerusalem, and in our text, he said nothing concerning circumcision at that time. Yet, God Himself responded in a way that dissolves all doubt about whether or not a person is required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved.

Because the matter under consideration had to do with salvation, the work of God as well as the Word of God must be brought to bare upon it. Peter will relate an event common to the church in Jerusalem, for several years earlier he had reported it in detail to them – and it was then recognized to have been an example of God granting people repentance “unto life,” which equates to “repentance to salvation” (Acts 11:18; 2 Cor 7:10). Furthermore, the message that was delivered to the house of Cornelius is described as “words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved” (Acts 11:14). As confirmed in the actual account of the event, the rehearsal of it to the brethren in Jerusalem, and in our text, he said nothing concerning circumcision at that time. Yet, God Himself

responded in a way that dissolves all doubt about whether or not a person is required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses in order to be saved.

GOD, WHO KNOWS THE HEARTS

“ And God, which knoweth the hearts . . . ” Other versions read, “knows the heart,” NKJV “knows the human heart,” NRSV “the searcher of hearts,” BBE “the heart-knowing God,” DARBY “knows everyone’s thoughts,” GWN “ knoweth what is in hearts,” MRD “knows people’s hearts,” NLT and “Who is acquainted with and understands the heart.” AMPLIFIED

One of the invariable traits of the Lord is that He looks on the hearts of men – the citadel of their persons. Here, men are seen for what they are, and the eye of the Lord discovers it. How frequently the Holy Spirit makes a point of this.

- “ . . . for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart ” (1 Sam 16:7).

- “ . . . give to every man according to his ways, whose heart Thou knowest ; (for thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men)” (1 Kgs 8:39).

- “ . . . for the LORD searcheth all hearts , and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek Him, He will be found of thee; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever” (1 Chron 28:9).

- “I know also, my God, that Thou triest the heart , and hast pleasure in uprightness . . . ” (1 Chr 29:17).

- “Shall not God search this out? for He knoweth the secrets of the heart ” (Psa 44:21).

- “But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart . . . ” (Jer 11:20).

- “I the LORD search the heart , I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer 17:10).

- “But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart . . . ” (Jer 20:12).

- “ . . . Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13).

How will the God of heaven, who knows all things, and particular the heart of man, respond to people believing a message that does NOT impose circumcision upon them? There were some among the brethren in Jerusalem, formerly Pharisees, who declared it was necessary for believing Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Certain men from Judaea had gone to Antioch and confidently declared, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Will God confirm that this requirement reflects His mind? Will He stand behind such a declaration? Will He save a person who believes the Gospel, even though they are not circumcised? If He will, then the statement cannot possibly be true!

Now, the things that took place at the house of Cornelius have proved controversial in some circles, for it is most difficult to fit the Divine response into a stereotyped theology. However, we must not allow ourselves to be confused on the matter. This is an account that relates to salvation, for that was the subject under consideration – whether or not circumcision and the keeping of the Law of Moses was necessary to be saved.

GOD BARE THEM WITNESS

“bare them witness . . .” Other versions read, “God . . . acknowledging them,” NKJV “God . . . showed that He accepted them,” NIV “God . . . testified to them,” NRSV “God . . . gave testimony,” DOUAY “showed that He approved of people who aren’t Jewish,” GWN “showed His approval of them,” NJB “confirmed that He accepts Gentiles,” NLT “confirmed the fact that He accepts Gentiles,” LIVING “He accepted these non-Jewish people,” IE “showed them He approved,” ISV “gave this testimony in their behalf,” MONTGOMERY and “has plainly shown that this is so, for when He had cleansed their hearts though their faith.” PHILLIPS

The phrase “bare them witness,” means that God set His mark of approval upon those hearing the Word at Cornelius’ house. He confirmed their hearts were right, that they had unreservedly received the Gospel, and that He had received them. The confirmation was necessary for Peter and those who were with him, for this was the first group of pure Gentiles that were saved. Although the Samaritans had also believed the Gospel, they were a mixed race, and not Gentile proselytes like those present at Cornelius’ house.

These people were accepted, and that without being circumcised or keeping the Law of Moses.

HOW GOD BORE THEM WITNESS?

“ . . . giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us.”

Not a single one of these texts is referring to some miraculous enduement, or to an experience that is unique to only some of the saved. And, indeed, if that was the case, the whole incident would have had no relevance to the matter being disputed in Jerusalem.

Not only is Peter relating what God did at the house of Cornelius, he is showing its relevance to the matter of salvation. He will, by inspiration, interpret what took place there. He will not speak of the miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit, or the conferment of spiritual gifts. Rather, he will speak in language that relates to salvation itself, not some experience extraneous to it – for salvation is the whole point of the discussion at hand.

Giving Them The Holy Spirit

“ . . . giving them the Holy Ghost . . .” Other versions read, “giving the Holy Spirit to them,” NIV “gave the Holy Spirit to them,” MRD “granting them the Holy Spirit,” NAB “bestowing the Holy Spirit upon them,” WEYMOUTH and “He gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles.” PHILLIPS

This is language that is common to all who are in Christ Jesus – God gives them the Holy Spirit.

- “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5).
- “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:22).
- “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor 5:5).
- “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:8).
- “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us” (1 John 3:24).
- “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

Not a single one of these texts is referring to some miraculous enduement, or to an experience that

is unique to only some of the saved. And, indeed, if that was the case, the whole incident would have had no relevance to the matter being disputed in Jerusalem. They did not come together to discuss spiritual gifts, or the ability to work miracles, or what happened when the apostles laid their hands on people. It was the affirmation that circumcision was essential to salvation that caused this gathering to convene. It was also fueled by the statement that the law of Moses also had to be kept.

Men may make valiant attempts to distinguish the giving of the Spirit to those on the day of Pentecost from all other experiences. Peter, however, extends himself to show this was not the case – and his whole argument relates to salvation.

Now, Peter, who had the keys to the kingdom of heaven, felt the conversion (not the miraculous endowment) of those at the house of Cornelius was germane to this discussion. He states that God gave the Holy Spirit to those brethren, and that He did it as One who knew their hearts. Luke's account of the event reads, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word" (Acts 10:44). In his report of the event, Peter used the same terminology: "the Holy Ghost fell on them" (Acts 11:15). He added that when this happened he remembered what Jesus had said: "Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that He said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 11:16). He then concluded, "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?" (Acts 11:17). Those who heard his explanation, which included apostles (11:1), did not conclude from this that those gathered at the house of Cornelius had received miraculous gifts. Rather, this is their conclusion, and it is included in Scripture to attest to its truth: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11:18). Notice, their saying "glorified God." They said this was evidence that God had granted them "repentance unto life" – and that relates to salvation, not spiritual gifts. It also confirmed that Jesus had done what He was exalted to do, as Peter declared to the Jewish council: "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). The incident at Cornelius' house confirmed the giving of repentance was not ONLY to Israel. That is why this report was relevant to the discussion.

Even as He Did Unto Us

" . . . even as He did unto us." Other versions read, "just as He did to us," NKJV "just as He also did to us," NASB "as He gave the Holy Spirit to us," GWN and "exactly as He did to us." PHILLIPS

Men may make valiant attempts to distinguish the giving of the Spirit to those on the day of Pentecost from all other experiences. Peter, however, extends himself to show this was not the case – and his whole argument relates to salvation.

- When the event took place, Peter said, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" (Acts 10:47).
- When reporting the event, He said it moved him to recall the words of the King Himself, "John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost" (Acts 11:16; 1:5). John the Baptist also taught this to the multitudes (Mk 1:8).
- He also said, "God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 11:17).
- Now, years later, Peter again reports that God gave the people at Cornelius' house "the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us."

He makes no reference to those at Cornelius house speaking with tongues and magnifying God. The reason for this is that this testified to God's acceptance of them. It was more of a sign to Peter and those with him that God had received the Gentiles. The manner in which God did this confirmed

that circumcision and conformity to the law of Moses was NOT a requisite to salvation – which is Peter’s whole point.

Now, Peter will make a further observation – one that was not made when he was at the house of Cornelius, or when he originally reported the event to the brethren in Jerusalem. Also, the response of the brethren to his report did not include this observation. However, it is one worthy of much consideration.

THEIR HEARTS WERE PURIFIED BY FAITH

“ 9 And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

It is possible to read of the events that took place at the house of Cornelius, and suppose we are obligated to harmonize it with our own notions of salvation, or with our idea of what the Scriptures teach about being saved. Such an effort will yield certain frustration, moving one to take an extreme position that completely neuters the text, making it pointless. The same God who knows the hearts of men has no interest in how His actions or words fit into our ideas. The purpose of His Word is not to support the teachings or positions of men – whatever they are. It is the business of every believer to see to it that they receive the Word of God AS His Word, and not as a proof text to support what they are saying. You will detect immediately that Peter has no interest in defending a personal position. He is justifying God, and showing that what God did overthrew the error that was being perpetrated by certain from Judaea, and by believers who had been of “the sect of the Pharisees.”

PUT NO DIFFERENCE BETWEEN US AND THEM

“And put no difference between us and them . . .” Other versions read, “made no distinction between us and them,” NKJV “making no division between them and us,” BBE “God doesn’t discriminate between Jewish and non-Jewish people,” GWN and “God did the same thing for them that He did for us.” LIVING

Therefore, there is not one gospel for the Jews, and another for the Gentiles. There is not one gift of the Spirit for the apostles, and another for others – for the same word delivered to the apostles concerning the giving of the Spirit is applied to those of the house of Cornelius. Further, this whole matter has to do with the appropriation of salvation, which was the issue being discussed.

In all of this, the gift of the Spirit is the point, not the abilities that He confers at His will. The same Spirit who made the apostles apostles, enables others to fulfill their role in the body. The apostles were placed “first” in the body, but “the same Spirit” works differently in other members of the body (1 Cor 12:4,8,9). In the First Corinthians text, what the various members DID was the point. In our text, the Spirit Himself is the point – and He is not given independently of salvation.

Peter used a similar form of reasoning when accounting for the commonality of faith among all believers, including the apostles. “Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1). Other versions read, “a faith of the same kind as ours,” NASB and “a faith of equal standing with ours.” RSV That faith was not of the same “measure” – that is, it was not designed to do the same thing in everyone (Rom 12:3-6). However, it was a “common faith,” not differing in substance, but in function.

Although the salvation wrought at the house of Cornelius was a “common salvation” (Jude 1:3), the faith they enjoyed was a “common faith” (Tit 1:4), and the gift of the Spirit was “like” the one received “at the first” (Acts 11:15) this was an epoch of sorts. The tent of salvation was being “enlarged,” its curtains were being “stretched forth,” its “cords lengthened,” and its “stakes strengthened”

This is also true of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Peter told his hearers on the day of Pentecost that, upon repenting and being baptized, they would receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (Acts 2:38). It was the same Holy Spirit that had seen “shed forth” before their very eyes – a gift that was promised before (Acts 2:33). That gift of the Holy Spirit was the “promise” that was made to their children (Acts 2:39). Peter also said that what the hearers at the house of Cornelius received was this “gift” (Acts 10:46; 11:17).

To my knowledge, there is no place in Scripture that affirms there is more than one “gift of the Holy Spirit.” There are “gifts” imparted by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:4-11), but they are distinguished from the gift of the Holy Spirit Himself, which is common to all who are in Christ Jesus.

PURIFYING THEIR HEARTS BY FAITH

“ . . . purifying their hearts by faith.” Other versions read, “cleansing their hearts by faith,” NASB “making clean their hearts by faith,” BBE “cleansed non-Jewish people through faith,” GWN “cleansed their lives through faith,” LIVING “made their hearts pure,” IE and “cleansed their hearts by faith (by a strong and welcome conviction that Jesus is the Messiah, through Whom we obtain eternal salvation in the kingdom of God).” AMPLIFIED

What does it mean for the heart to be purified or cleansed? Here we deal with the root of cleansing, which is “faith in the operation of God” (Col 2:12). According to the Colossians text, this occurs when a person is buried with Christ in baptism. Yet, the Holy Spirit was given to those in Cornelius’ house before they were baptized. For some, this proves to be an insurmountable problem, but it need not be so.

There is no need to try and rid ourselves of the Cornelius factor. Peter is clearly associating this text with salvation. He does not do so by citing everything that took place at that time. He does not even mention his own preaching, or that the people had gathered to hear words whereby they would be saved. He is providing us an overview, not a detailed picture. He is speaking of causes, not the means through which the causes were made known to the recipients.

Although the salvation wrought at the house of Cornelius was a “common salvation” (Jude 1:3), the faith they enjoyed was a “common faith” (Tit 1:4), and the gift of the Spirit was “like” the one received “at the first” (Acts 11:15) this was an epoch of sorts. The tent of salvation was being “enlarged,” its curtains were being “stretched forth,” its “cords lengthened,” and its “stakes strengthened” (Isa 54:2). The Gentiles were being brought into the household according to the ancient promises (Isa 11:10; 42:6; 49:6,22; 60:3; 66:19; Mal 1:11). This rapid expansion of the church, although it was foretold centuries before, had not yet penetrated the hearts of even the apostles. God worked at the house of Cornelius to substantiate to Peter and

He does, and He cannot work in contradiction of what He says. It is impossible for Him to either speak or work in a manner that opposes His character.

his brethren what was happening before their eyes. Repentance was being granted, faith was in motion, hearts were being purified, and they were receiving the Holy Spirit. None of this was unique to the Gentiles. This was not a different salvation, nor had they heard a different Gospel. Their repentance was not unique, nor was their faith. Having witnessed all of this, Peter knew this was not intended to obviate the necessity of baptism. He therefore “commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48). It was no doubt at that time that those in the house of Cornelius became personally aware of their cleansing, for baptism is related to the obtaining of a pure conscience (1 Pet 3:21).

The Time Of Greater Demand

The time of the early church was one of greater demand. Commencing with John the Baptist, the

objective was never to merely baptize people. Those who were baptized had to be qualified. On the day of Pentecost, Peter told the people it had to be preceded by repentance (Acts 2:38). Philip told the Ethiopian eunuch that it was necessary for him first to believe with all of his heart (Acts 8:37). In our text, the point was Divine acceptance or approval, based upon God's survey of the heart. Peter would not have people baptized unless he was convinced it was appropriate – and these were Gentiles, whom he had formerly considered “unclean.” Now God confirmed to him and those with him that those Gentiles had been cleansed and made acceptable.

In all of this there were realities that are common to everyone who is saved: faith, cleansing, acceptance, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit – that is, it is a “common salvation.”

The Matter of Tongues

Those with inordinate affection for speaking in tongues, and those with a determination to oppose it, deal extensively with the fact that those at the house of Cornelius were heard to “speak in tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46). However, in his initial report of his experience at Cornelius' house, Peter did not even mention that they spoke “in tongues” (Acts 11:5-18). Now, in his second report of the event, he also fails to mention the Gentiles speaking in tongues. This certainly does not constitute a denial that they did, in fact, speak in tongues, for Peter and those with Him heard them so speaking. However, it does mean that this was not a pivotal point in the whole event. I question both the integrity and the motives of those who champion the necessity of speaking in tongues. To me, they are of the same order as those certain men who came down from Judaea, together with the former Pharisees, who said it was necessary to be circumcised.

For those who are simple enough to imagine that baptism is in the same category as circumcision, let them remember that Peter “commanded” those Gentiles to be “baptized in the name of the Lord” (Acts 10:48). Owing to the clear confirmation of Divine acceptance, however, he did not command them to be circumcised. Those who demand a strict sequence of procedure will simply have to wrestle with the text until they can see with greater clarity. Try as you may, you will not find the 1-2-3-4-5 approach to obtaining salvation in Scripture. It is therefore incumbent upon everyone who represents the Lord to see to it they do not violate any word or work of Almighty God – and that includes them all.

God cannot speak in contradiction of what He does, and He cannot work in contradiction of what He says. It is impossible for Him to either speak or work in a manner that opposes His character. Furthermore, there is no valid doctrine or doctrinal emphasis that remotely suggests those possibilities.

WHY DO YOU TEMPT GOD?

“ 10 Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?”

Peter will now reason on the facts of the case, showing the unreasonableness of the attempt to bind circumcision and the keeping of the law upon the Gentile converts. Unlike mere human ideas, the truth of God loses none of its potency when men reason upon it with pure hearts. In fact, the further you delve into the truth, the more, solid it becomes, supporting the soul, bringing confidence, and exposing the folly of error. I am greatly disappointed that so few leading people in Christian circles find joy in reasoning upon the truth. Too often the locus of their reasoning is the circumference of their own opinion.

There is something else to be seen here. Peter is basing his reasoning upon what God DID, not what He said. He can do this because God never works in contradiction of what He says. That is, in His working at the house of Cornelius He did what He had said He was committed to doing. He saved

those of humble and contrite spirit (Psa 34:18), focused on those who trembled at His word (Isa 66:2), and caused those who heard to live (Isa 55:3). It goes without saying that it is not wise to question the way God does about fulfilling His word.

WHY DO YOU TEMPT GOD?

“Now therefore why tempt ye God . . .” Other versions read, “why do you test God,” NKJV “put God to the test,” NASB “try to test God,” NIV “make trial of God,” RSV “challenging God,” NLT “going to correct God,” LIVING “try an experiment upon God,” WEYMOUTH and “strain the patience of God.” PHILLIPS

This is a most arresting text – both sobering and challenging. It must be remembered that it is written, “Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted Him in Massah” (Deut 6:16). The event of reference took place when Israel was journeying through the wilderness en route to Canaan. It is written that they pitched their tents in Rephidim, “and there was no water for the people to drink.” Discontent with the situation, “the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD ?” (Ex 17:2). They “murmured against Moses,” asking him why he brought them out of Egypt to kill them with thirst. Moses cried out to the Lord saying, “What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me” (Ex 17:4). It was there that Moses was directed by God to smite a rock with his rod. God promised him, “there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink” (Ex 17:7). It is written of that occasion, “And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD , saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?” (Ex 17:7). It was in view of this that Moses, prior to his death, said “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah” NASB (Deut 6:16).

What does it mean to “tempt God,” or put Him “to the test?” You may recall that Jesus quoted this text to the devil when he tempted the Lord to jump off the pinnacle the Temple, trusting that God would send His angels to rescue Him (Matt 4:6-7).

Behind this solemn warning is the fact that God has an absolute hatred for sin. This hatred is so pronounced that sin constitutes a testing of God’s longsuffering. It is like forcing Him to confront and deal with what is the very antithesis of His nature. His wrath is against “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men,” and there is absolutely no question about it. There has been measured and relatively minor outbreaks of this wrath throughout history. I say relatively as compared to the ultimate outpouring of His wrath, when Jesus returns in glory. Men were introduced to the wrath of God breaking out against sin in the flood of Noah’s day (Gen 7:21). It was seen in the destruction of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, sparing only Zoar, in which Lot sought refuge (Gen 19:23-24; 29:23).

There is such a thing as provoking God to anger – that is the result of tempting the Lord to the point of provocation. When Corinth was attempting to eat from the table of demons and the table of the Lord at the same time, Paul wrote to them, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?” (1 Cor 10:2). They were tempting God, and that was a very foolish thing to do!

In their attempts to bind circumcision and keeping the law of Moses upon the Gentile converts, the men who had caused this council were tempting God. They were seeking to impose things upon the Gentiles that God did not require. They were treating the household of God as though it was their own. They were conducting themselves as lord’s over the heritage of God – touching the apple of His eye (Zech 2:8). Consequently, they were in a most dangerous position.

A YOKE THEY COULD NOT BEAR

“ . . . to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to

bear?"

The people of God are already called to take up their cross daily, dying to self and the world (Lk 9:23). In addition they are to take Christ's yoke upon themselves, getting under it with Him, and engaging in His work. It is within this yoke that we are taught by Jesus, coming to know the Father and appropriating wisdom and spiritual understanding (Matt 11:29-30).

As if this was not enough, some were not attempting to put an additional yoke upon the neck of the disciples, increasing their load, and offering no corresponding relief. This was the yoke of Law – the Law that is appropriately called “the ministration of death” and “of condemnation” (2 Cor 3:7,9). It was a yoke of rules, laws, and ordinances –the yoke of DOING, that was not accompanied with the spirit of power, love, and a sound mind. It was a law that did not demand faith (Gal 3:12), did not clear the conscience (Heb 9:9), and gave no access to the grace of God.

It may be countered that these men were sincere, and were really attempting to do what was right. And, indeed, I do not doubt that this was the case. But that did not alter the fact that they were tempting God in seeking to impose an unbearable yoke upon His people. They were trying God's patience and longsuffering with their action – provoking Him.

By saying neither their fathers nor themselves were able to bear the yoke of the Law, Peter meant that they were unable to fulfill it. After they had extended their best and most consistent effort, the verdict was, “There is none righteous,

Such people are tempting God – provoking Him to anger because they have usurped His Son, who has all power in heaven and earth. Such teachers are to cease and desist from tempting God.

no, not one : There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one ” (Rom 3:10-12). Not only is the Law “not made for a righteous man” (1 Tim 1:9), it cannot produce a righteous man, “for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal 2:21). The truth of the matter is that the person who chooses to live by Law has no perceived need of Jesus – and Jesus' death is not effective for him as long as he chooses that course.

At least these men sought to impose the law of Moses upon believers – not “the tradition of the elders” (Matt 15:2). What can be said of those who seek to impose the rules of men upon believers today? They have stooped beneath the men of our text, choosing inferior laws. What may be said of those who recommend and promote rules arranged by men, yet which are guaranteed by them to resolve problems caused by sin? What can be said of them? What of those who impose concepts of praise and worship upon the church that God has not imposed. What may be said of those who bind their ideas of music, or singing, or other forms of expression upon the saints? Such people are tempting God – provoking Him to anger because they have usurped His Son, who has all power in heaven and earth. Such teachers are to cease and desist from tempting God. Provoking the Lord is certainly not wise. It is a betrayal of the worst kind of ignorance. As it is written, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?” (1 Cor 10:22).

SAVED THROUGH THE GRACE OF GOD

“ 11 But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Here Peter reasons in a most unusual way – at least to those who are not acquainted with Kingdom manners. Rather than seeking to correct the thinking of the new Gentile believers, he endeavors to correct the wayward thinking of some of the believers in the Jerusalem church.

WE BELIEVE

“But we believe . . .” Other versions read, “No! We believe,” NIV “On the contrary, we believe,” NRSV “But we have faith,” BBE “We certainly believe,” GWN “In fact, we believe,” WILLIAMS and “Surely the fact is that.” PHILLIPS

This is not the statement of a creedal persuasion; i.e. “Here is what our group believes.” This is the confession of an inner and solid persuasion. This is something buttressed by both “substance” and “evidence” (Heb 11:1). This is a conviction concerning which there is no question or doubt.

SAVED THROUGH THE GRACE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”

Under the circumstances, and considering that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation “to the Jew first, and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16), one might imagine that Peter would have said just the opposite – i.e. “THEY will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ even as WE .” However, this is not the manner of his reasoning. With the skill of a spiritual tactician, he raises the thinking of his hearers outside of the confinement of traditional Judaistic thinking. Peter knows that the propensity to think in terms of doing, as opposed to believing, is a fundamental weakness. Man’s doing caused the fall, but it is not the means of his recovery! Doing – man’s doing – is not the principle activity in New Covenant, although it is involved. In the matter of salvation, Christ’s doing is the fundamental activity, and believing is man’s fundamental responsibility. Rather than freeing man from the obligation of doing, believing raises both the possibility and quality of the doing of men. When “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” is fundamental, doing the will of God is not only possible, it becomes the preference and driving compulsion of men. When there is little understanding of the grace of God, doing is attended with a greater degree of difficulty, and sin is given an advantage.

Normally, we think of grace in association with God the Father (Lk 2:40; Acts 11:23; 13:43; 14:26; 15:40; 20:24; Rom 5:15; 1 Cor 1:4; 3:10; 15:10; 2 Cor 1:12; 2 Cor 6:1; 8:1; 2 Cor 9:14; Gal 2:21; Eph 3:2,7; Col 1:6; Tit 2:11; Heb 2:9; 12:15; 1 Pet 4:10; 5:12; Jude 1:4).

There is also reference to “the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:12).

However, there are also references to “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:20,24; 1 Cor 16:23; 2 Cor 8:9; 13:14; Gal 6:18; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18; Phile 1:25; Rev 22:21), and to the “grace of Christ” (Gal 1:5). This accents that, in redemption, Jesus is the Means through which the grace of God is realized, or experienced.

This is only the sixth time the word “grace” has been mentioned in the book of Acts. The first use of the word “grace” is specifically said to have been associated with obtaining salvation. It is apparent to me that there was a growing perception of the significance of the grace of God in redemption. Previous references to “grace” are as follows.

- “And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all ” (Acts 4:33).

- “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God , was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

- “Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God ” (Acts 13:43).

- “Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace , and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts

14:3).

- “And thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled” (Acts 14:26).

It seems to me that as the church progressed, there was a growing perception of the prominence of the grace of God in salvation. Acts 18:27 states that those who believed did so through grace: “And when he (Apollos) was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace .” Paul confessed to the elders of Ephesus that he had been directed by Jesus to preach “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). When he left them, he commended them “to God, and to the word of His grace” (Acts 20:32). Conceptually, there was a keen awareness of the grace of God, but the understanding of its prominence in the life of faith grew the more men were consciously involved in the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.

By comparison, the epistles contain one hundred and fourteen references to grace. James contains one reference to God giving “more grace” (4:6). Jude contains one reference to men corrupting “the grace of our God” (1:4). Second John contains one reference to “grace” (1:3). Peter’s epistles contain ten references to “grace,” excluding a reference to “the grace of life” in 1 Peter 3:7 (1 Pet 1:2,10,13; 4:10; 5:5,10,12; 2 Pet 1:2; 3:18). The epistles written by Paul contain ninety-nine references to “grace,” eleven of which are found in Hebrews (for those who doubt Hebrews was written by Paul). The book of the Revelation contains two references to “grace” – one being the last verse of the Bible (1:4; 22:21). The phrase “grace of God” is not mentioned in the Bible until Luke 2:40. Of the thirty-nine times “grace” is used from Genesis through Malachi, the burden of the references refer to finding favor with God in the normalities of life. There is no specified association of “grace” with being “saved” until our text, Acts 15:11.

The word “grace” is mentioned 131 times in the New Testament Scriptures – 128 are to God’s grace. Four of them are found in the Gospels, which all apply to Jesus Himself (Lk 2:40; John 1:14,16,16,17). It is mentioned ten times in the book of Acts (4:33; 11:23; 13:43; 14:3,26; 15:11,40; 18:27; 20:24,32). Including the book of Hebrews, 99 of the 128 references to “grace” are made by Paul. Excluding the book of Hebrews (8 times), the percentage is 71%.

“GRACE” ASSOCIATED WITH JESUS AND SALVATION

The Gospels 4 times

Acts 10 times

Paul’s writings 99 times

Peter’s writings 10 times

Jude 1 time

James 1 time

John’s writings 3 times

I have taken the time to give this brief review of the references to the grace of God to confirm the insight that was given to Peter at this time. This is the first time in the Scriptures that such a clear and succinct statement is made concerning salvation being by “grace” – and it is tied directly to “the Lord Jesus Christ.” This also confirms it was at a critical juncture in the history of the church, when

the nature and extensiveness of salvation was being opened more fully to the church. The acceptance of the Gentiles was an epoch in history, and its association with the grace of God was a critical matter. Peter's statement in this verse is the first clear and unquestionable association of the salvation of God with His grace. It is the first time anything is said to have been done "through" or "by" God's grace. To me, this underscores the remarkable things happening at this time.

It ought to be noted that to this very day there remains a veil over the hearts of men concerning the grace of God. Precious few people see it as a means through which God actually does something. Too often, it is not associated with Divine accomplishments, but is rather viewed as God overlooking the human condition. Grace has to do with changing the human condition, not tolerating or overlooking it. Paul accounted for the remarkable change he experienced when he said, "But by the grace of God I am what I am: and His grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all : yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Cor 15:10). People who remain under the grip of sin, or are unproductive in the Kingdom of God are out of order speaking about the grace of God. God's grace is always related to God doing something, not to Him tolerating or enduring something. It has to do with bringing people higher, not leaving them in a low estate, and enduring their deficiencies. Grace changes and empowers people, not leaving them as they were. Where there is no change, grace has not been received.

THEY KEPT SILENCE AND LISTENED TO BARNABAS AND PAUL

" 12 Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them."

It will be apparent that there was more influence among these people than that of Peter. He had, indeed, spoken truth, but the power of his words was not owing to his person, but to his Lord. God stands behind those who speak the truth insightfully, and are bold to stand in "the defense of the Gospel" (Phil 1:17). Where the speaking is discerning and the people possess honest and good hearts, controversy will be brought to an end. That such is the case is abundantly evident in this text.

There is something of importance to be seen here. The substance and manner of the teaching that had taken place to this time did not contain a lot of direct references to the grace of God. There is no record of any extensive exposition of the grace of God.

ALL THE MULTITUDE KEPT SILENCE

"Then all the multitude kept silence . . ." Other versions read, "the whole assembly became silent," NIV "all the people were quiet," BBE "the whole assembly kept still," CJB "the whole assembly fell, silent," CSB "all the multitude held their peace," DOUAY "Everyone listened quietly," NLT "there was no further discussion," LIVING "the whole assembly remained silent," WEYMOUTH and "by this he quieted the whole congregation." WILLIAMS

Until Peter had spoken, the whole assembly was anything but silent. Until that time there had been "much disputing," or "debate." NASB However, the hearts of the people were ahead of their minds, and their love for the Lord exceeded devotion to their tradition, which had not been clearly overturned by their view of the text of Scripture.

Even though Moses and the Prophets did not elucidate on the grace of God, John the Baptist said no word about it, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself made no direct reference to it, there appeared to be a prevailing sense of its reality among these people. Within the book of Acts, there has, to this point, been no record of delineation, or exposition, of God's grace. We read about God's grace being on the people (4:33), seeing the grace of God (11:23), an exhortation to continue in the grace of God (13:43), testimony being given to the "word of His grace" (14:3), and being recommended to the grace of God (14:26). Now, Peter has said for the first recorded time that we are "saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ."

There is something of importance to be seen here. The substance and manner of the teaching that had taken place to this time did not contain a lot of direct references to the grace of God. There is no record of any extensive exposition of the grace of God. Certainly, at the very best, Moses and the Prophets only provided veiled references to grace. John the Baptist, so far as the record is concerned did not even mention the word. The recorded words of Jesus contain not a single reference to “grace.” For those enamored of academia, such circumstances would introduce great difficulty for those hearing the words, “we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved.” However, this “multitude” was not stymied by the words of Peter, and no group rose up to dispute with him about that statement. Why was this so?

There are at least two factors that caused the flaming controversy that had been raging to cease with the words of Peter. One of them was NOT a profound academic understanding of the grace of God. Moses provided no such understanding nor did the prophets, nor John the Baptist. Jesus displayed the grace of God in His words and deeds, not by a scholastic definition or dissertation. However, the nature and effectiveness of grace is woven into the fabric of salvation. Divine favor and love are evident in the nature of salvation. Even though a person may not have heard much about “grace,” there is a sense of it that is integral to the Gospel itself, and to the experience of salvation.

Those who continue to argue concerning the necessity of the deeds of the Law after they have heard about the grace of God only confirm the hardness of their own hearts. When Peter clearly said we are “saved by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” it was a confirming word to those who had experienced salvation. That was the first time of Scriptural record that such words were ever uttered! The fact that they quelled the disputation among that vast body of people confirms that they had really tasted of the grace of God, even though it may not have been clear to them.

The words Peter were expertly spoken, reminding me of a statement

Much of the ongoing contention that exists in the professed Christian community is traceable to a fundamental ignorance of the Scriptures, and the questionable commitment of the people to the Lord. If there ever comes a time when those two mitigating factors are resolved, significant progress will be made in the arena of religious disputation and controversy.

made by Solomon: “The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd” (Eccl 12:11). The Amplified Bible reads, “The words of the wise are like prodding goads, and firmly fixed [in the mind] like nails are the collected sayings which are given [as proceeding] from one Shepherd.” In this text, the Lord was speaking to His people – and they quieted themselves to listen.

A Word About Our Times

Our times are not at all like those being chronicled in our text. Unlike those ancient days, our times are not marked by a clear proclamation of the truth – a proclamation that pointedly confronts religious error and the traditions of men. Also, there is a glaring absence of a strong devotion to the Lord and His Word, together with a staggering ignorance of the text of Scripture itself. Much of the ongoing contention that exists in the professed Christian community is traceable to a fundamental ignorance of the Scriptures, and the questionable commitment of the people to the Lord. If there ever comes a time when those two mitigating factors are resolved, significant progress will be made in the arena of religious disputation and controversy.

THEY GAVE AUDIENCE TO BARNABAS AND PAUL

“ . . . and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.” Other versions read, “and listened to,” NKJV “they were listening to,” NASB “they hearkened to,” ASV “they heard,” DOUAY “listened quietly,” NLT

“hearkened to,” RWB “were hearkening,” YLT and “they listened attentively.” AMPLIFIED

The word “gave audience” are translated from a single Greek word (ἡκούω) which means: “to attend to, consider what is or has been said . . . understand, perceive the sense of what is said,” THAYER and “heed, listen to, understand, learn of, give someone a hearing,” GINGRICH

The marvelous capacity to listen, weigh, and discern what is being said is fast becoming a lost art in our time. Our generation is largely a thoughtless one. This has given rise to much frivolity. Entertainment has now become so dominant in religious circles that there is scarcely anything said that requires concentrated hearing or understanding. This was not the case in our text. After hearing Peter’s insightful words concerning salvation by God’s grace being common to both the Gentile and the Jew, the minds of the people were settled down. The fire of controversy ceased to burn. The agitation of sectarianism and prejudice was no longer present. Now, the people were ready to hear the report of the working of the Lord – a working that would confirm that salvation is by grace, and that circumcision and the keeping of the Law are not requirements for salvation.

Barnabas and Paul Report

Now, with the hearts and minds focused on Barnabas and Paul, they declare “what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.” Other versions read, “how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles,” NKJV “relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles,” NASB “telling about the miraculous signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them,” NIV and “rehearsed what signs and wonders God had performed through them among the Gentiles.” AMPLIFIED

Notice the care with which this report is given. Barnabas and Paul did not report the miracles and wonders that they did, but the ones God had wrought through them. They did not shine the spotlight of attention upon their activity, but on what the Lord had done through them. They had already declared to the brethren at Antioch, “all that God had done with them” during the mission to which they were called from that very city (Acts 14:27). When they later arrived in Jerusalem they also “declared all things that God had done with them” to the church, the apostles, and the elders (Acts 15:4). Now, to the special assembly that had been convened to consider what was to be taught to the Gentiles, they provide even more details concerning the working of the Lord, “relating what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles.” NASB

“Oh how the soul hung upon the ear; how the countenances brightened, while they related their progress from city to city, from province to province; how the word of the Lord had been glorified, and how miracles had been effected by his arm. How princes and nobles, and multitudes of the people had been converted without either number or record; and how the unbelieving jews in all places had stirred up the misguided populace to outrage, imprison, and stone them for the sake of Christ. But in all storms and conflicts, they were more than conquerors through him that loved them. All this was a gentile glory, reflected back on the church of the firstborn.”

Joseph Sutcliffe, 1834

- On the island of Crete, Paul had struck a sorcerer blind who sought to turn a listener away from the faith (Acts 13:9-11).
- Paul and Barnabas had remained “a long time” in Iconium, “speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands” (Acts 14:3).
- In Lystra, Paul had healed a man who was “cripple from his mother’s womb” (Acts 14:9-10).

- When Paul was stoned and left for dead outside the city of Lystra, the disciples stood around him, and he rose up and went into the city (Acts 14:19-20).

Thus, the required testimonies have been given by those whom the Head of the church Himself had involved in the work. Peter, Barnabas, and Paul were all solicited and empowered for the work from heaven. Their work was not initiated by the church, but a special call was issued to Peter (Acts 10:9-20), as well as Barnabas and Paul (Acts 13:2). Both calls were to minister to the Gentiles. Both missions were blessed by the Lord with extensive results, being confirmed by the Head of the church Himself. Both were spiritual epochs. Now, all of the required facts are now in.

CONCLUSION

The book of Acts is a record of Kingdom epochs – events orchestrated from heaven that turned the history of the world. Consider them! They all postulate an exalted and reigning Christ, and a Divine purpose that is being executed with exacting precision. All of heaven is involved. God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the holy angels, and even a great cloud of witnesses who are referred to as “just men made perfect” (Heb 12:23). The work is being driven by an eternal purpose, conceived before the world began. And, everything is working together for the good of those who love God and are the called according to His purpose.

Ponder some of the epochal things that are recorded in this book. The consideration of them has a sanctifying effect upon the soul. They tug at the heart and challenge the mind, provoking one to introspection as well as contemplation. They all confirm that Christ is, indeed, reigning in glory, administering “the day of salvation,” and “bringing many sons to glory.”

- The ascension of Jesus (1:9-11).
- The choosing of an apostle to fill the bishopric vacated by Judas (1:15-26).
- The day of Pentecost, and 3,000 being added to the church (2:1-41).
- The garnering of 5,000 souls in Solomon’s porch (4:4).
- Great grace given to the church in the time of opposition (4:33).
- The intervention of heaven against corruption (5:1-11).
- The miraculous release of Peter and John from prison (5:18-20).
- The stoning of Stephen, and the consequent spread of the Word (7:54-8:4).
- The conversion of the city of Samaria (8:5-25).
- The conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch while en route to Ethiopia (8:26-38).
- The calling and conversion of Saul of Tarsus (9:3-20).
- The conversion of the household and others at the home of Cornelius 10:1-48).
- The miraculous release of Peter from prison (12:4-17).
- Herod is stricken dead after being lifted up with pride (12:21-24)
- Barnabas and Saul are called to a special mission, now being reported (13:1-2).

This is unquestionably a book that chronicles the work of the enthroned and empowered Christ from heaven. It is a record of Jesus working through those who have been reconciled to God and are living by faith. It also confirms the ultimate overthrow of inimical forces, corroborating the inferiority of the powers of darkness. There is, indeed, great consolation and encouragement to be had by ingesting and cogitating on the events that are reported in the Acts of the apostles – God working through them.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #65

DEALING WITH TEACHERS OF CIRCUMCISION, #2

THE RESPONSE OF JAMES

“ 15:13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: 14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. 19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.” (Acts 11:13-21)

INTRODUCTION

After hearing the reports of Peter and Paul and Barnabas, the matter is seen clearly by James, a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church – even though he was not an apostle. He correlates what the Lord had done with what the Lord had promised He would do through the prophets. Not only does he perceive the whole matter, but he is able to articulate it in a manner that will “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,” maintaining the proper focus, and yielding no ground to the flesh.

Right here is where the spiritually mature are separated from the novices and inexperienced in things pertaining to life and godliness. A satisfactory resolution of the problem taken up in Jerusalem could not be achieved by education, natural aptitude, a pooling of analytical skills, or some other form of “the wisdom of men.” Just as in the work of recovering those who have been overtaken in a fault, those involved in the solution must be “spiritual,” or acquainted with, and discerning of, spiritual realities. On this matter Paul wrought, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted”

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- **AFTER THEY HAD HELD THEIR PEACE, JAMES ANSWERED (15:13)**
- **GOD VISITED THE GENTILES (15:14)**
- **THIS AGREES WITH THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS(15:15-16)**
- **THAT THE RESIDUE OF MEN MIGHT SEEK AFTER THE LORD (15:17)**
- **KNOWN UNTO GOD ARE ALL OF HIS WORKS (15:18)**
- **TROUBLE THEM NOT (15:19)**
- **BUT THAT WE WRITE UNTO THEM (15:20-21)**
- **CONCLUSION**

versions read, “you who have received the Spirit,” NRSV “you who are of the Spirit,” and BBE “you who are godly.” NLT Most of the version s use the word “spiritual.” In this case, a “spiritual” person is one who thinks in concert with the Spirit, which thinking is directed by the Spirit. While the circumstances in our text differ slightly from those in Galatians, the principles remain the same. A position had been taken that stated circumcision and keeping the law of Moses was required for Gentile believers. However devoted those advocates were to that position, it was wholly wrong. Some had apparently sensed it, and therefore sought measures through which the facts of the matter could be discerned and substantiated.

This is a sterling example of how the Lord works in and through those who are yielded to Him. The disciples at Antioch did not pray for illumination. It appears as though they sensed that God had already spoken to this issue – it was just that they did not see it. They had the spiritual coinage required for the resolution of this challenge, and therefore they went about in a godly manner to find that coinage – like the woman who swept her house diligently for her lost coin (Lk 15:8). Many professing Christians remain in the dark about critical matters, unable to determine what is right, simply because they have not pursued the truth as they ought. That, of course, can very well be a symptom of not receiving a love for the truth – a condition that will eventually, if not corrected, lead to “strong delusion” and consequent damnation (2 Thess 2:10-11). In order to produce sobriety among the saints, the Spirit has made known the priority of spiritual understanding, comprehension, and sound doctrine.

- **THE TRANSFORMING EFFECTS OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE.** “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind , that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2).
- **THE MANDATE OF MATURE UNDERSTANDING.** “Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men ” (1 Cor 14:20).

If, prior to being in Christ, the state of alienation from God was produced BY being ignorant of Him, what can be said of extended and prolonged ignorance concerning His ways after we have come into Christ?

THE OBJECTIVE OF BEING ABLE TO COMPREHEND. “That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:16-19).

- **THE ALIENATING EFFECTS OF IGNORANCE.** “This I say therefore, and

testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:17-18).

• **THE DIVINE DEMAND TO HAVE UNDERSTANDING.** “Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17).

• **A REVEALED OBJECTIVE.** “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

THINGS TO BE PONDERED

If, prior to being in Christ, the state of alienation from God was produced BY being ignorant of Him, what can be said of extended and prolonged ignorance concerning His ways after we have come into Christ? What should be our view of preaching and teaching that does not produce spiritual understanding in those who receive it? What about theological schools that graduate people they say are to serve the Lord, yet remain in a state of fundamental ignorance concerning God, His will, and His great salvation? How are we to assess a theological system that can be embraced, yet must be overcome to obtain a mature understanding?

Precisely what can be said of a system of religious thought that causes the apostolic writings to actually sound strange? How does one go about justifying such a system? How can it be possible that a person can be converted by a doctrine that does not further a mature spiritual understanding? How can it be established that such a thing is even possible?

When Paul received news of the spiritual retrogression that was taking place in Corinth, he knew that something abnormal was taking place. He knew that neither Christ Himself nor the Gospel that makes Him known contributes to such a condition. He concluded that they had embraced “another Jesus,” “another gospel,” and “another Spirit” (2 Cor 11:4). When the Galatians began to embrace an erroneous view of salvation, Paul knew they had been taught something false, and that their teachers had bewitched them, turned them away from Christ, and induced a fall from grace (Gal 1:6-9; 3:1). When Jude wrote to the saints, he earnestly desired to speak of the “common salvation,” but he could not do so because of the teaching to which they were being subjected. Ungodly men had “crept in unawares” among them. They spoke of things concerning which they knew nothing, followed the way of Cain, ran after the way of Balaam who prophesied for gain, spoke arrogantly, and flattered people (Jude 1:4,10-16).

Because of the love of the truth and commitment to Jesus that was present in the church at Antioch, they were not thrown off course by the teachers from Judea. Because of the spirit that prevailed among the disciples in Jerusalem, the misconception that was voiced by some former Pharisees – themselves believers – did not cause the disciples there to be misdirected.

These very things could have taken place in the church at Antioch if they had responded to the Judaistic teachers as churches today respond to the erroneous doctrines to which they are subjected.

When those within the church give heed to what they are taught, yet remain in spiritual infancy, or regress to carnal ways of thinking, they have not been taught “the truth” as it “is in Jesus” (Eph 4:21). It simply is not possible to embrace the truth and find it failing to promote and maintain spiritual maturity. The truth is a sanctifying agent (John 17:17,19), and the love of it contributes to spiritual advancement (2 Thess 2:10-11).

THE IMPACT OF HERESIES

“Heresies” are more than wrong sayings or teachings – although they are surely that! “Heresies” are teachings that divide. The word “heresies” is a transliteration of the Greek word **ai`re,seij** (hair-

e-seis). The lexical meaning of the word is, “a body of men separating themselves from others and following their own tenets . . . dissensions arising from diversity of opinions and aims ” THAYER “of a separatist group characterized by loyalty to a certain school of thought and practice,” FRIBERG “religious party; division, faction; false party or teaching,” UBS and “division or group based upon different doctrinal opinions and/or loyalties and hence by implication in certain contexts an unjustified party or group.” LOUW-NIDA

Through the Spirit, Paul taught that there was an objective served by the introduction of heresies – a kind of appointed ministry that they have. “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor 11:19). The Amplified Bible reads, “ For doubtless there have to be factions or parties among you in order that they who are genuine and of approved fitness may become evident and plainly recognized among you.”

In our text, because of the love of the truth, purity of heart, and an acquaintance with Scripture, the heresy will be aborted, and all will come into accord. It ought to be obvious that where this does not happen, a different kind of people are present. In such a case, the heresies are embraced by those who are not genuine or approved. I realize this is a hard saying, but it is a revealed truth.

LIVED OUT IN OUR TEXT

These realities are being lived out in our text. Because of the love of the truth and commitment to Jesus that was present in the church at Antioch, they were not thrown off course by the teachers from Judea. Because of the spirit that prevailed among the disciples in Jerusalem, the misconception that was voiced by some former Pharisees – themselves believers – did not cause the disciples there to be misdirected. Nor, indeed, was it the occasion of starting a new group of disciples, or church, that championed the teaching of circumcision and the keeping of the Law.

What, then, has caused the staggering number of divisions within the professed church of our day? How can there be so many differing and contradicting schools of theological thought – bodies of teaching that are glaringly at odds with one another? How can these things be?

It is the direct result of spiritual infancy – and that is the most favorable view. One of the blessed conditions that is produced when men grow up into Christ is that they can no longer be pulled aside or caused to go astray by erroneous teachings. Paul said it this way: “. . . until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man , to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result , we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him , who is the head, even Christ” NASB (Eph 4:13-15).

Paul goes on to say that the growth of reference results in the whole body edifying itself in love: “from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). This “building up,” or “edifying,” KJV comes from the contribution of mature and insightful brethren. Jesus works through them to direct the thinking and reasoning of His people.

This process is being lived out in our text. Those who were more mature in Christ contributed their insights, bringing edification to the body, and enabling them to draw proper conclusions, thereby providing appropriate direction. First Peter spoke, then Paul and Barnabas spoke, and now James will speak. It is in this manner that the Lord directed the church.

AN ILLUMINATING TEXT

The text before us also, as light is designed to do, illuminates the religious pretension of our time, which leads men to continually live with division without addressing it with the mind of Christ. Even though the Divine mandate is, “that there be no divisions among you” (1 Cor 1:10), some have taken an approach to divisions that actually allows them to continue. They talk, but without any satisfactory resolution concerning what divides them. In this, they differ significantly from those in our text. Whatever they may have, it is not what the brethren in our text possessed.

There is much food for the soul in this report, and we all do well to take it into our hearts and muse upon the things that are made known, and the reasoning behind them. The manner of reasoning that is displayed by James gives us an index of what it means to “comprehend.” Comprehension does not always come by means of a special and independent revelation – as when Peter perceived Jesus was the Christ the Son of the Living God (Matt 16:16-17). Sometimes it is brought by means of a godly analysis, and the correlation of the reports of the works of God with what He has said.

This is the marvelous process that is reported in our text. It is obvious that this requires a submitted and godly mind and heart.

AFTER THEY HAD HELD THEIR PEACE, JAMES ANSWERED

“ 15:13 And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me . . .”

The entire tone of the Jerusalem assembly now changes. There “had been much disputing,” or “debate,” NASB with various statements apparently being made that were intended to buttress contradicting views. In due time, the audience listened to the report and reasoning of Peter, and then to the testimony of Paul and Barnabas. They had all been involved in the conversion of Gentiles, and their involvement had been directed by the Lord. They did not deliver a scholastic presentation of the various meanings of words, contextual studies, and the likes. The quality of their presentation, and the response of the hearers, speak of the nature of that solemn assembly.

AFTER THEY HAD HELD THEIR PEACE

“And after they had held their peace . . .” Other versions read, “after they had become silent,” NKJV “after they had stopped speaking,” NASB “when they had finished,” NIV “when they had come to an end,” BBE “after a time of silence,” IE and “silence again followed their words.” PHILLIPS

Notice the orderliness of the assembly, fulfilling the Pauline word, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40). All of the facts were in, and a time of weighing and

There was apparently nothing more that could profitably be said on either side of the question put before them: should the Gentiles be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? Those who are wise know when it is time to cease presenting arguments and begin to draw some sanctified conclusions.

deliberation now took place. Although the words were not actually said, the spirit of Paul’s admonition to Timothy was present: “Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things” (2 Tim 2:7).

There was apparently nothing more that could profitably be said on either side of the question put before them: should the Gentiles be circumcised and keep the law of Moses? Those who are wise know when it is time to cease presenting arguments and begin to draw some sanctified conclusions.

When theological issues remain unsettled for years, even centuries, someone that is involved does not have an honest and good heart. Someone is not seeking the truth. Someone is not interested in the

will of the Lord. Godly sincerity will not divide people. The love of the truth does not set men at variance with one another. The salvation of God does not promote contention among those who are participating in it.

What Has Been Said to This Point

What do the hearers have to work with? What words have they heard? Here are some of the things they will process in the realm of godly thought.

- They had heard “the things that God had done” through Paul and Barnabas (15:4).
- Certain former Pharisees had affirmed of the Gentiles, “That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5).
- Peter reminded them that God chose him to be the one through whom the Gentiles believed (15:7).
- Peter reported that God gave the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles who heard him speak (15:8).
- Peter said God purified the hearts of those Gentiles “by faith” (15:9).
- Peter challenged the notion that they should put a yoke upon the neck of the Gentiles that neither they nor their fathers were able to bear (15:10).
- Peter affirmed that the Jews would be saved “through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,” just as the Gentiles (15:11).
- Barnabas and Paul declared “what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (15:12).

After a period of silence, it was apparent that no one had any further input into the matter at hand. James will now present his reasoning on the matter, speaking as a master of the assembly (Eccl 12:11). It will be apparent that the Lord Jesus, the “Head of the body,” is speaking through James.

Now we have a critical issue being raised that pertains to the salvation of God. The apostles (we presume all of them) are present, and have heard the factual reports of the Lord’s working among the Gentiles. The report has not come from mere observers, but from those who were actually involved in the work.

JAMES ANSWERED

“James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me . . .” Other versions read, “listen to me,” NKJV “give ear to me,” BBE and “hear what I have to say.” CJB

James draws the attention of the brethren to what he is going to say. They have heard the view of those believers who were from the sect of the Pharisees. They have heard the testimony of Peter. They have also heard the report of Paul and Barnabas. Now, it is time for some godly conclusions to be drawn. There must be an exit from the room of controversy into the holy of holies, where sound conclusions can be reached.

The word “answered” is translated from the Greek word **avpekri,qh** . The word means “to give an answer to a question proposed, to answer.” THAYER James, after weighing what had been said, gives an assessment of the situation. Technically, he is not an apostle –not one of the original twelve. It is assumed that the other ten (not counting Peter), were present, excluding James the brother of John, who had been martyred (Acts 12:2). This being true, it means that 1 John, one of the inner circle of disciples, was present (Matt 17:1; Mk 5:37), together with 2 Andrew, 3 Philip, 4 Bartholomew, 5 Thomas, 6 Matthew, 7 James the son of Alpheus, 8 Lebbaeus [surnamed Thaddeus], 9 Simon the Canaanite, and 10 Matthias [who replaced Judas] (Matt 10:22-4; Acts 1:26). Of “the twelve apostles,”

only Peter, James, and John are mentioned in Scripture after Acts 1:13, where the eleven are named. James is mentioned once more in reference to his martyrdom by Herod (Acts 12:2). Prior to James' death, "the twelve" are mentioned in Acts 6:2 and 7:8. "The apostles" as a group, excluding Paul, are referenced in numerous texts (Acts 1:2,37,42,43; 4:33,35,36,37; 5:2,12, 18,34, 40; 6:6; 8:1,14, 18; 9:27; 11:1; 14:4, 4; 15:2, 4,6,22, 23,33; 16:4; Rom 16:7; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal 1:19; 1 Thess 2:6; 2 Pet 3:2; Jude 1:17). The expression "apostles," as including Paul, is also used (1 Cor 4:9; 15:9; Eph 2:20).

Following John 21:25, we do not have a single word spoken, or deed done of any individual apostle except Peter and John. There are references to their joint activity (Acts 2:37,42,43; 4:33,35,36, 37; 5:2,12,18,29,34,40; 6:6; 8:1,14; 9:27; 11:1; 15:2,4,6,22,23,33; 16:4).

Now we have a critical issue being raised that pertains to the salvation of God. The apostles (we presume all of them) are present, and have heard the factual reports of the Lord's working among the Gentiles. The report has not come from mere observers, but from those who were actually involved in the work. It is imperative that a decision be made concerning statements that had been made concerning salvation: "And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved," and "That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses" (Acts 15:1,5). To this point, the critical decisions have come from the apostles (Acts 4:35; 6:2; 8:14). Further, it was their "doctrine" in which the early disciples continued (Acts 2:42). Now, with such a critical matter at stake, one of the twelve does not step forth, but James.

JAMES

We know from Paul's letter to the Galatians that this was "James, the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:19), where Paul made some remarks about this conference. He was one of Jesus' four half-brothers (James, Joses [Joseph], Simon, and Judas (Matt 13:55)). He is the only one of them of whom specific things are reported, even though all of them eventually believed on Jesus (Acts 1:14), although well into His ministry, they did not (John 7:5). Paul states in his epistle to the Corinthians that the Lord's "brethren" journeyed in their labors for Christ with their wives (1 Cor 9:5).

Paul also reports that the resurrected Christ made a special appearance to James: "After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles" (1 Cor 15:6-7). This man was of such significance, that he is classed with Peter and John, long after James [the brother of John] had been martyred. Perhaps speaking of the very occasion chronicled in this text, Paul says of him, "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision" (Gal 2:9). James sent brethren to Antioch to settle the dispute concerning circumcision (Gal 2:12). Paul later went to him, reporting of his ministry among the Gentiles (Acts 21:18-19). James even counseled Paul concerning his conduct among the Jewish believers, which counsel Paul received (Acts 21:20-26).

This is also the James who wrote the letter bearing his name (James 1:1). In his epistle, as in the records of his personal counsel, he did not refer to his fleshly relation through Mary to Jesus. In other words, he did not know Jesus "after the flesh" (2 Cor 5:16).

When we expose our minds to the words of James, we must see them as being the result of Divine tutelage. The Head of the body delivered this pertinent word to the church through someone who was not one of the twelve apostles, nor, so far as the inspired record is concerned, was he called to be one as was Paul. There are some who feel that the other apostles chose James, the Lord's brother, to take the place of James the brother of John, who was martyred. This is based upon a statement Paul made in Galatians 1:19: "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Gal 1:19).

The arguments presented for this case are not weighty, and are too distracting to state at this time. That is because there is too much of man in them, and too little of God.

James here delivers a Divine

ASSESSING GOD'S WORK AT THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS

Assessments of this event: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. . . . For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter” (Acts 10:44,46)

- The Holy Spirit fell on them who heard the Word (10:44). – *Luke*
- They received the Holy Spirit as did the disciples on Pentecost (10:47). – *Peter*
- The Spirit fell on them as on the disciples at the beginning (11:15). – *Peter*
- Peter remembered the promise of Jesus that they would be baptized with the Holy Spirit (11:16). – *Peter*
- God gave them the same gift as He did the disciples (11:17a). – *Peter*
- They had believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (11:17b). – *Peter*
- God granted them repentance unto life (11:18). – *disciples*
- God gave them the Holy Spirit, as He did the disciples (15:7). – *Peter*
- God bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit as He did the disciples (15:8). – *Peter*
- God purified their hearts by faith (15:9). *Peter*
- They were saved by the grace of God (15:11). – *Peter*
- God visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (15:14). – *James*
- These were people, who from the Gentiles, are turned to God (15:19) – *James*

perspective that apparently was not clear until this time. We know it was not apparent to the prophets and teachers in Antioch, and even Barnabas and Paul are not reported as having made this association. Had this been clear to them, there would have been no need to bring the question under consideration to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem.

This is a circumstance that cannot be exploited by men who would have us believe they also have a word from the Lord – an additional word. This is a work of God, and will eventually be recognized as such by those who are present. This will. Now involve assessing what God has done, correlating it with what He has said. It is good for us to also recognize it in that way. In this text we have a confirmation that the Lord does not always work in a way that can be foreseen by men, or concluded from their awareness of the Scriptures.

Sometimes, the only way to obtain this kind of understanding is to be present when the facts are presented.

GOD VISITED THE GENTILES

“ 14 Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name.”

Throughout the years, I have both read and heard numerous explanations of what took place at the house of Cornelius. I must admit that most of them appear to have been biased, and few of them dealt with what has been said in Scripture of that occasion. For some, who are inclined toward an

institutional way of thinking, the whole text is very difficult. However, the Holy Spirit has provided several statements made concerning the reports that were given – statements that enable those with an honest and good heart to form a proper concept of what was done at that time. Of course, the Lord has no interest in buttressing the doctrines of men, and will not even provide information in the shadowy haze of the positions of men.

Here James, after hearing the reports of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, will assess the facts, then make a statement of the case. He will correlate it with the Word of God, and bring an abrupt end to the controversy. He will not reason as a man, but as one who thinks in concert with God. He has no mind to take sides on the issue, but rather to direct the brethren to think properly, and with due regard for what the Lord is doing through Jesus Christ.

GOD VISITED THE GENTILES

“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles . . .” Other versions read, “concerned Himself about . . . the Gentiles,” NASB “showed His concern by,” NIV “looked favorably upon the Gentiles,” NRSV “God was first pleased,” BBE “began to show His concern,” CJB “first intervened,” CSB “first visited,” DARBY “began to elect,” MRD “arranged to enlist,” NJB “did look after,” YLT “for the first time God accepted,” IE “first looked graciously on,” WEYMOUTH and “first graciously visited.” WILLIAMS

Some of the versions so dilute the text with scholasticism that one hardly knows what is being said. When we read “concerned Himself about,” showed His concern for,” and “looked favorably upon,” there is a kind of aloofness that is depicted with no aggressive corresponding action. The word from which “visit” is translated can have a variety of meanings depending the context. Lexically, and as used here, the word means, “to look upon or after, to inspect, examine with the eyes, in order to see how he is,” THAYER and “visit, come to help.” FRIBERG The Greek word can mean to look upon, examine, inspect, etc – but that is not its meaning here. Here, the point is not God merely looking or considering the Gentiles, but showing up among them. This was not an expression of concern, but of purpose and Divine determination. In other words, this text is describing what God did, not what He thought – even though what He did was driven by His thoughts.

Peter declared what God had done . Paul and Barnabas also affirmed what the Lord had done . Now James gives an obviously inspired and discerning assessment of what the Lord was doing at the house of Cornelius, and among the Gentiles to whom Paul and Barnabas had preached.

TO TAKE OUT OF THEM

“ . . . to take out of them . . .” Other versions read, “taking from among the Gentiles,” NASB “taking from the Gentiles,” NIV “take out of the nations,” DARBY “taking from non-Jewish people” GWN “to elect a people . . . from among the Gentiles,” MRD “acquiring from among the Gentiles,” NAB “select from among the Gentiles,” NET “to enlist a people . . . out of the Gentiles,” NJB and “receive of the Gentiles.” PNT

James will make an observation that has not been made to this point – God taking a people for Himself out of the masses of people. Peter alludes to this Divine activity in His first epistle: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9). Here, an even stronger word is spoken – as compared with “called out,” James says “take out.” The “call” is the means, and “take out” is the accomplished objective.

This activity is presented in other ways in Scripture – depicting salvation as something God Himself does. We are involved in the process, but only as recipients, and are in no way initiators.

• **WASHED, SANCTIFIED, AND JUSTIFIED.** “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).

• **QUICKENED, OR MADE ALIVE.** “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1).

• **SALVATION DEPICTED AS BEING APPREHENDED.** “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12).

• **MADE MEET, OR QUALIFIED.** “Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” (Col 1:12).

• **DELIVERED AND TRANSLATED.** “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13).

• **DELIVERED FROM THE WRATH TO COME.** “And to wait for His Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).

• **SAVED AND CALLED ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE.** “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9).

• **SAVED US.** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

• **BEGAT US WITH HIS WORD ACCORDING TO HIS OWN WILL.** “Of His own will begat He us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures” (James 1:18).

• **WASHED AND MADE KINGS AND PRIESTS.** “. . . Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6).

Try as you may, you cannot trace the initiation and accomplishment of these marvelous realities to the activities of men. They are too grand for men to achieve. They require power that men do not possess. They are eternal in nature, and thus absolutely beyond the scope of human aptitude. They require the overthrow of “the prince of this world,” who has victimized and dominated every person who has lived, with the solitary exception of Jesus of Nazareth.

You would think that this perspective of salvation would be constantly held before the saints, and always on the lips of those who speak in the name of Christ. However, who among us does not know that this is not the case at all. Nearly everyone I know that has come to perceive these things, including myself, had to overcome their former way of thinking to do so. However, this will not be the case in our text.

The World Is Not the Ultimate Place

It ought to be apparent that the world – “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4) – is not the ultimate place! Furthermore, being among the people is not the ultimate objective of redemption. Not only have we been delivered from the domain of the world, we have been delivered from its culture as well – “the Gentiles,” or “the nations.”

A PEOPLE FOR HIS NAME

“. . . a people for His name.” Other versions read, “a people for Himself,” NIV “a people to bear

His name,” CJB “a people unto His name,” GENEVA “those who would honor His name,” GWN “people His name,” TNT “a people to bring honor to His name,” LIVING “made them His own people,” IE “a People to be called by His name,” WEYMOUTH and “a people [to bear and honor] His name.” AMPLIFIED

For what purpose did the Lord take a people from among the Gentiles? What is He achieving by such a thing? Is mere separation the point – to make the people different from others, which is actually accomplished. It ought to be obvious that it is not to make the world a better place to live, because the deliverance is from the world itself.

James concludes, and rightly so, that the people are taken out of the peoples (nations or Gentiles) for God Himself . They are intended to be His habitation (Eph 2:22), as well as workers together with Him (2 Cor 6:1). He does not take the people out in order to identify with them in their objectives, but in order for them to become identified with His objective. While there is sense in which He is identifying with them (“I will be their God”) , the more fundamental identity is, “and they shall be My people” (Jer 31:33), or “shall be unto Me a people” (Heb 8:10). Their chief inheritance is God Himself. As it is written, “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God . . .” (Rom 8:17).

In one brief sentence, James encapsulated the very essence of salvation – man’s identity with the Living God! Ponder the many statements that are made concerning this matter.

In the last analysis, our relationship with one another either confirms or denies the validity of a claim to be associated with God, which is the primary relationship

RECONCILED TO GOD. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10).

- **ALIVE UNTO GOD.** “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom 6:11).
- **FRUIT UNTO GOD.** “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God ” (Rom 7:4).
- **BODIES PRESENTED TO GOD.** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God , which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1).
- **LIVING UNTO GOD.** “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God ” (Gal 2:19).
- **A HABITATION OF GOD.** “In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).
- **COMING TO GOD.** “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).
- **KINGS AND PRIESTS UNTO GOD.** “And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, And hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father ; to Him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen” (Rev 1:5-6).

While there are critical relationships to be maintained between the saved and their peers, they are not the fundamental ones, nor are they the emphasis. In the last analysis, our relationship with one another either confirms or denies the validity of a claim to be associated with God , which is the primary relationship (1 John 2:10; 1 John 4:8,20).

Today there are a staggering number of professed “ministries” that major on life in this world. Some make marriage and the home their emphasis. Others choose to focus on national or political identity. Still others throw all of their resources into the correction of social ills or circumstances. There are also those who major on the recovery of wayward youth, or the recovery of people from debilitating enslavement to sins of indulgence. None of these things are wrong of themselves. All of them are wrong as a spiritual focus.

I know of no text of Scripture, or doctrinal insinuation, that speaks of any revealed work of God focusing on a

Men have no right to shift the emphasis of salvation to something that makes identity with the Living God secondary. That ought to be abundantly apparent. However, all too often it is a rare consideration.

segment of society: married, widows, youth, drunkards, drug addicts, the homeless, ghettos, etc. This by no means suggests it is proper to neglect such people, or to engage in an effort to bring help and hope to them. I am speaking about Divine intention, and of the clear revelation of that intention. I am saying that if our primary objectives in matters pertaining the Christ differ from those that are of God, they cannot be proper. If our fundamental aim is to correct a temporal condition, we are missing the mark. There is nothing in the Scriptures, either by doctrine or example, concerning making such things primary, or neglecting the Word of God or the saints of God to accomplish them. Throughout Scriptural history, when the saints were strong, and people were living unto God, such things were addressed with God-glorifying wisdom (Acts 6:1-3; 11:29; Rom 15:26). However, they were never allowed to be the focus of attention.

Men have no right to shift the emphasis of salvation to something that makes identity with the Living God secondary. That ought to be abundantly apparent. However, all too often it is a rare consideration. This, of course, is why the modern church has become spiritually weak. It is its emphasis that has birthed its condition. That emphasis does not present identity with God as being primary.

God did not visit the nations to take out a people in order to reform the world. Rather, He did so to gather a people for Himself. He did not take them out to address the ills of a world, which is destined to be destroyed, or to resolve all of its problems. He took them out in order to walk and work with Himself – a condition extending into eternity, and “the ages to come.” It is serious beyond comprehension to adopt a view of the work of God that obscures this fact by fastening our attention on the here and now.

THIS AGREES WITH THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

“ 15 And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up . . . ”

James now fastens down securely what he has proclaimed. He is like a wise man who uses words as “nails,” “fastening” them like “masters of assemblies” (Eccl 12:11). He handles “aright” the word of God, confirming that it fully supports that what has been reported is nothing less than the work of God. It ought to here be stated that if what men teach concerning salvation is not supported by the prophets, it cannot possibly be true. Paul himself said of his preaching, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). Were this practice to be strictly followed in our time, it would eliminate a staggering percentage of what is being preached concerning the salvation of God.

TO THIS AGREE THE WORDS OF THE PROPHETS

“And to this agree the words of the prophets . . .” Other versions read, “with this the words of the prophets agree,” NKJV “the words of the prophets are in agreement with this,” NIV “the words of the Prophets are in complete harmony with this,” CJB “with this the words of the prophets accord,” MRD “is entirely in harmony with the words of the prophets,” NJB “agrees with what the prophets predicted,” LIVING “this is in harmony with the language of the Prophets,” WEYMOUTH “with this the predictions of the prophets agree,” AMPLIFIED and “This is in full agreement with what the prophets wrote.” PHILLIPS

And what is it that is in full accord with what the prophets said? It is this word: “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). Peter said that God put no difference between the Jew and the Gentile, “purifying their hearts by faith” (15:9).

It is evident in this text that, while the prophets did serve their generation, that is not all they did. They spoke and wrote in such a manner as to enable those in the ages that followed them to recognize the working of God in “the day of salvation.”

I WILL RETURN AND BUILD THE TABERNACLE OF DAVID

“ . . . as it is written, 16 After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David . . .” Other versions read, “return and rebuild the tabernacle of David,” NKJV “return and rebuild David’s . . . tent,” NIV “return and rebuild the dwelling of David,” NRSV “I will come back, and will put up the tent of David,” BBE “I will return. I will set up David's fallen tent again,” GWN “I shall return and rebuild the fallen hut of David,” NJB “I will return and renew the . . . contract with David,” LIVING “I will build David's house again,” IE and “I will come back, and will rebuild the house of David.” AMPLIFIED

The prophecy of reference is found in Amos 9:11-12: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by My name , saith the LORD that doeth this” (Amos 9:11-12).

The “tabernacle” of David, according to the promise delivered to Him, was actually a “house,” or family: “And as since the time that I commanded judges to be over my people Israel, and have caused thee to rest from all thine enemies. Also the LORD telleth thee that He will make thee an house ” (2 Sam 7:11). David said of that promise, “For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house : therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee” (2 Sam 7:27).

The promise God made to David, to build him a house, appeared to have been vacated. The last king in the Davidic lineage was Zedekiah, whose reign was interrupted by the commencement of the Babylonian captivity. From that time until this very day, no one has reigned as an earthly king upon David’s throne. His kingly progeny appears to have disappeared, and his tabernacle, or house, fallen down to the ground.

However, through Amos, the promise God had made to David was revived. Although it was stated in somewhat vague language, James was given to see what it meant. Amos said David’s lineage would possess “the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen which” were called by God’s name. Knowing that Jesus is the One who had been raised up to sit on David’s throne, as Peter declared on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:30-37), James reasons that the acceptance of the Gentiles, as reported by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, is actually the household of David being enlarged to include them. His house was being rebuilt, but would be significantly larger.

Through Isaiah, God declared that restoring Israel to Himself would be accomplished through Christ, but that this was too small to justify the atonement that was achieved by Jesus. Here is what he said, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also make You a light of the nations So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth” NASB (Isa 49:6). This word – a Divine word – is destructive of much erroneous theology. There is a strain of thinking afoot in the Christian world that states Jesus would have died for the sins of the world, even if only one person was saved as a result. This is not only pure folklore, but reproaches the God of heaven. It reflects upon His eternal purpose, His Divine power, and the effectiveness of Christ’s death. Those who speak so glibly cannot even conceive of the rebuilding of David’s house after it had fallen down.

I WILL BUILD THE RUINS AND SET IT UP

“ . . . which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up . . . ”

What looked like spiritual shambles would be rebuilt – and, as Hosea foretold, the latter house would have greater glory than the former one. “The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the LORD of hosts: and in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts” (Hag 2:9). Haggai was speaking of the rebuilding of the Temple by Zeubbabel, but his words contained more than that. Ultimately, this referred to the “greater glory” of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:9,10).

Which Is Fallen Down

This refers to David’s kingly lineage and the occupation of his throne. For nearly five hundred years it was vacant, and there appeared no hope on the horizon until Jesus appeared, who was the real “Son of David” (Matt 1:1). Clarifying the whole matter, the glorified Christ told John that He was not only the “Root,” or Source, of David, but His “Offspring,” or Son, as well: “I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star” (Rev 22:16).

Until Jesus was born, David’s Messianic house looked as though it could never be raised up again. Several generations passed without any significant person appearing in Israel who had an clear connection with David. His promised house appeared to have fallen down, never to be rebuilt.

I Will Build the Ruins Again

So far as David’s kingly lineage was concerned, it lay in “ruins,” like Jerusalem and its walls did during the days of Nehemiah (Neh 2:3,13). However, God is a great Builder and Restorer, and He committed Himself to the reestablishment of David’s throne, raising it up, so to speak, from the ashes of defeat and neglect.

I Will Set It Up

According to the prophecy of Amos, the rebuilt house would first involve the Jews themselves. Then they would possess “the remnant of the heathen.” In other words, the Jews would be the first to be blessed, and would extend the blessing out to the Gentiles.

This, of course, is precisely what happened. According to His promise, God extended His salvation “to the Jew first,” taking the first fruits from their field. The feast of Pentecost, on which the New Covenant was inaugurated, was a feast of first fruits, because the first loaves made from the new grain were offered unto the Lord at that time (Ex 23:16; Lev 23:16-20; Num 28:26-31). It only lasted for one day, as compared to the other main feasts, which lasted for several days.

The first fruits of the Jews – not the final harvest – were reaped on the day of Pentecost [the feast of first fruits], with three thousand souls gladly receiving the Word, being baptized, and added to the church by the Lord Himself (Acts 2:41). Thus the house of salvation had been raised up, and was initially inhabited and made ready for extensive occupancy. For some time the house continued to be populated with growing numbers of Jews (Acts 2:47; 4:4; 5:14; 6:7).

It was necessary for this to take place before salvation could be offered to the Gentiles. The Jews were like husbandmen who must first be partaker of the fruits (2 Tim 2:6). To them had been given the field of preparation: "to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 9:4-5). The "fountain" of salvation was thus "opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zech 13:1).

According to the promise, they must first have the promise fulfilled to them, for the promise was "also" [in addition to the Jews] to those who were afar off – the Gentiles (Acts 2:39). This postulated the initial priority of the Jews. The remaining harvest of the Jews has not yet taken place, but it is as sure as the harvesting of the first fruits, and the Gentiles as well (Isa 19:24-25; 54:4-19; 55:3; Jer 32:37-38; Ezek 37:21-28; Hos 2:14-19; Zech 12:10; Rom 11:18).

In salvation, the Gentiles are occupying a dwelling belonging to Israel. The Jews' abode has been enlarged for their occupancy, as declared in Isaiah 54:1-3. Paul referred to this as the Gentiles being grafted into the Jewish olive tree, among the Jewish branches (Rom 11:17-32). In that remarkable passage Paul reasons on the affiliation of Gentile believers with the Jews.

- Gentile believers were grafted in their tree "among them" (11:17a).

Those who teach that the Jews have been forever cast off contradict the very word of God. He has specifically addressed the matter of them being cut off, and of its duration.

- With the Jews, the Gentiles "partake of the root and fatness" of their "olive tree" (11:17b).
- It is the Jewish "root" that bears the Gentile believers (11:18).
- If the Jews do not abide in unbelief, they will be grafted in again, to their own tree – yes, God is able to do this (11:23).
- If, contrary to nature, the wild and uncultured Gentiles were grafted into the olive tree, God is able to again graft in its natural branches into their own olive tree (11:24)
- Israel's present blindness is only in part, and only unto "the fulness of the Gentiles be come in" (11:25).
- All Israel will be saved. "The Deliverer will come out of Zion and turn ungodliness from Jacob" – a term not applied to the church (11:26).
- God's covenant to Israel is to "take away their sins" (11:27).
- Presently, concerning the Gospel, the Jews are enemies for the sake of the Gentiles, thus giving them an opportunity to be saved. However, concerning God's election, they remain "beloved" for the sake of "the fathers," to whom the promises were made. This is because "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (11:28-29).
- Just as the Gentiles have obtained mercy through the unbelief of the Jews, so through the mercy extended to the Gentiles, the Jews will obtain mercy. This is all by Divine intent (11:30-32).

The salvation of the Gentiles is within the context of the salvation promised to the Jews. Their

salvation is not one that replaced the salvation promised to Jacob, but is an extension of it. The Gentiles have been added to the Jews, they do not replace them (Isa 2:2-5; 11:10; 42:1,6; 49:6,22-23; 54:3; 60:3,5,11; 66:12,19; Jer 16:19; Mal 1:11).

Even apostolic doctrine teaches that Gentile believers have been joined to the Jews, now forming “one body” and a “new man,” being built “together” for a “habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:13-22). Even the New Covenant, which is the basis of our salvation, was promised to be made “with the house of Israel” (Jer 31:31-34; Heb 8:10). The promise of the Holy Spirit that is offered to the Gentiles – “those who are afar off” – was given to the Jews (Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:39).

Those who teach that the Jews have been forever cast off contradict the very word of God. He has specifically addressed the matter of them being cut off, and of its duration.

- This statement was made immediately following the promise of the New Covenant (Jer 31:31-34) we enjoy in Christ. “Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the LORD ” (Jer 31:35-37).

- Based on a prophecy made by Isaiah (Isa 1:9), Paul reasons that Israel has NOT been altogether cut off, else they would have been like Sodom. “And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrah” (Rom 9:29).

- God promised Israel He would not made “a full end” of them (Jer 5:18; 46:28).

- Jesus said Jerusalem would be “trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24).

- Paul said the blindness of Israel, which is “in part,” would be “until the fulness of the Gentiles [the full number NIV] be come in” (Rom 11:25).

The Reasoning of James

James now reasons that the Gentiles’ conversion is in accordance with the promises of God and His declared purpose. His reasoning requires that the Jews be the ones to whom the promises were initially made, and that the Gentiles are partakers of their benefits. Such reasoning would be wholly erroneous if the promises were ever depicted as being withdrawn from the Israelites. If the promises no longer belong to them, they would also be withdrawn from the Gentiles as well, for they have been partakers with the Jews. If this is not the case, God’s gifts and callings are not without repentance.

THAT THE RESIDUE OF MEN MIGHT SEEK AFTER THE LORD

“ 17 That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”

James has seen the Divine rationale behind the acceptance of the Gentiles WITHOUT a requirement for them being circumcised. He sees that the issue is not what the Gentiles are supposed to do, but whether or not they have been accepted by God, or are included in the canopy of salvation. With the expertise of the master of an assembly, he is weaving a tapestry of truth with Scripture, rightly dividing it, or handling it aright (2 Tim 2:15). Keep in mind, he is not an apostle, and that the same Jesus who chose and commissioned the apostles is now speaking through him. His appointed prominence is confirmed by the risen Christ’s special appearance to him.

THE RESIDUE OF MEN

“That the residue of men might seek after the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “the rest of mankind,” NKJV “the remnant of men,” NIV “all other peoples,” NRSV “the rest of man,” RSV “those who are left of mankind,” BBE “the survivors of all the people,” GWN “Gentiles,” LIVING and “other men,” WYCLIFFE “the remaining peoples,” ALT “other nations,” CEV and “the rest of the human race.” GNB

The word “residue” is translated from a word that has the following lexical meaning: “left, remaining,” THAYER “the rest,” UBS “pertaining to the part of a whole which remains or continues, and thus constitutes the rest of the whole - rest, remaining, what remains,” LOUW-NIDA and “remnant, rest of the people.” LEH

Amos’ prophecy referred to “the remnant of Edom and of all the heathen ,” or, the offspring of Esau (who had some knowledge of God), and the rest of the world (Amos 9:11). Here we are provided with a Divine perspective of the human race. God gives it through Amos, His prophet, and James now ratifies it under the administration of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of God.

The Divine Perspective of Humanity

It deals a devastating blow to the philosophical notion that God sees everyone alike. The mass of mankind – the Gentiles, of non-Jews – are viewed as “the residue” of humanity; the remnant, the remaining part, the rest of the people, and everyone else.

Here, in both Amos and the words of James, we have the Divine perspective of humanity. It deals a devastating blow to the philosophical notion that God sees everyone alike. The mass of mankind – the Gentiles, of non-Jews – are viewed as “the residue” of humanity; the remnant, the remaining part, the rest of the people, and everyone else. They are not the main people, but the “ rest of the men.” RSV They are not the most important people but “ other peoples.” NRSV They are not the primary nations, but the “ other nations.” CEV

This should take no person by surprise, or be abrasive to their thinking. God has spoken concerning this matter – this matter of flesh-and-blood people.

- “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth ” (Deut 7:6).

- “Thou shalt be blessed above all people : there shall not be male or female barren among you, or among your cattle” (Deut 7:14).

- “Only the LORD had a delight in thy fathers to love them, and He chose their seed after them, even you above all people , as it is this day” (Deut 10:15).

- “For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God, and the LORD hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto Himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth ” (Deut 14:2).

- “And the LORD hath avouched thee this day to be His peculiar people , as He hath promised thee, and that thou shouldest keep all His commandments; and to make thee high above all nations which He hath made, in praise, and in name, and in honor; and that thou mayest be an holy people unto the LORD thy God, as he hath spoken ” (Deut 26:18-19).

- “For the LORD hath chosen Jacob unto Himself, and Israel for His peculiar treasure ” (Psa 135:4).

- “For I am the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Savior: I gave Egypt for

thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in My sight, thou hast been honorable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life” (Isa 43:3-4).

Paul describes the Jews as those “who are Israelites, to whom belongs the adoption as sons and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the temple service and the promises, whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen” NASB (Rom 9:4-5). Presently, he affirms, they are “enemies” for the sake of the Gentiles – that is, in order that he Gentiles may be included in their promises. However, when it comes to the determination God has made concerning them as a people, “they are beloved for the father’s sakes” (Rom 11:28).

Moses affirmed that the peoples of the world were divided and apportioned their inheritance in consideration of the children of Israel. During his valedictory address he said, “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will show thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, He set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD’S portion is His people; Jacob is the lot of His inheritance” (Deut 32:8-9). Other versions read, “He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel,” NKJV “He had the limits of the peoples marked out, keeping in mind the number of the children of Israel,” BBE “He assigned the boundaries of peoples according to Isra’el’s population,” CJB “He appointed the bounds of people according to the number of the children of Israel,” GENEVA and “He set the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the Israelites.” AMPLIFIED In other words, by Divine intention, the land of Israel was established as the crossroads of the world, and remains so to this very day.

Some versions, reflecting the spurious theology of their translators do not refer to “the children of Israel.” Instead, they read as follows: “according to the number of the gods,” NRSV “according to the number of the sons of God,” RSV “according to the number of the angels of God,” SEPTUAGINT “according to the number of the heavenly assembly,” NET “according to the number of the children of God,” NJB “He gave to each of them a supervising angel.” LIVING These all represent a departure from the standard translations, and totally ignore the verse that follows: “For the LORD’S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance” (Deut 32:9).

It is clear, therefore, that when it comes to the consideration of men as flesh and blood, all Gentiles are a remnant, even though they are the majority. This reflects the manner in which God assesses people. Those who belong to Him are reckoned as the majority, and the remaining as a remnant, or the residue. Employing this manner of reasoning, Paul wrote of the vast majority of Israelites who did not believe the Gospel. “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?” (Rom 3:1-3). Even though well into the first century, the majority of the Jews had not believed the Gospel, Paul said, “they have not all obeyed the Gospel” (Rom 10:16) – language that, to men, suggests that most did. Of those Jews who did not believe Paul said, “some of the branches were broken off” (Rom 11:17).

The point of the text is that those who embrace the truth of God are counted as the majority before Him. Everyone else falls into the category of “residue” or “remnant.” Of course, if God really does see all men alike, love them all the same, and regard them all as equals, this kind of language is foolish and grossly misleading.

THE GENTILES, UPON WHOM MY NAME IS CALLED

“... and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called...” Other versions read, “all the Gentiles

who are called by My name,” NKJV “all the Gentiles who bear My name,” NIV “over whom My name has been called,” NRSV “on whom My name is named,” BBE “on whom My name is invoked,” DARBY “over whom My name is spoken,” GWN “who are called by My name,” NAB “I have called to be My own,” NET “who bear My name,” NIB “once called Mine,” NJB “all those I have called to be Mine,” NLT “all those marked by My name,” LIVING “My name has been called upon them,” ALT “be My chosen ones,” CEV “over whom My name is spoken,” GW and “on whom has been on-called the name of Me on them.” INTERLINEAR

This text does not refer to the Gentiles who have called upon the name of the Lord. It rather refers to them – “the residue” – as those over whom the name of the Lord has been called or spoken . This is referring to something very unique. It does not say “among whom My name has been called upon,” but “ upon whom My name has been called.”

It was a Divine initiative that resulted in Cornelius and the Gentiles in Asia hearing the Gospel. Heaven directed Cornelius to call for Peter. It also instructed Peter to respond to the inspired directive of Cornelius. It also called for Barnabas and Saul to be separated for a work that involved preaching to the Gentiles.

The word “upon” is translated from the Greek word **εϋϋ** , which means “upon,” referring to “the Gentiles” – not to something they do, but to something that is done upon them. The phrase “whom my name is called” is translated from the Greek word **εϋπικε,κλῆται** , which, as used here, means “upon whom the name has been invoked (to indicate that the persons involved belong to the one named),” GINGRICH “to put a name upon, to surname.” THAYER

The refers to a Divine activity which is also spoken of in this way: “I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not: I said, Behold Me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by My name” (Isa 65:1). Paul referred to this very text in accounting for the inclusion of the Gentiles in salvation: “But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me ” (Rom 10:19-20).

Isaiah also spoke of the coming of the Gentiles independently of a diligent quest: “He will lift up a banner to the nations from afar, And will whistle to them from the end of the earth; Surely they shall come with speed, swiftly ” NKJV (Isa 5:26). This expression equates to the statements “ He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27), and “ God at the first did visit the Gentiles , to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14).

It was a Divine initiative that resulted in Cornelius and the Gentiles in Asia hearing the Gospel. Heaven directed Cornelius to call for Peter. It also instructed Peter to respond to the inspired directive of Cornelius. It also called for Barnabas and Saul to be separated for a work that involved preaching to the Gentiles.

God called His own name over the Gentiles, dispelling the powers of darkness so they could no longer hold them captive. That call is what loosed the angels for their work of intervention, and the Spirit for giving His direction.

WHO DOTH THESE THINGS

“ . . . , saith the Lord who doeth all these things.” Other versions read, “Says the Lord who does all these things,” NKJV “Thus says the Lord who accomplishes these things,” NAB “ saith the Lord, who is doing all these things,” YLT “And He is the One who does all these things,” IE and “He is the one who has been doing these things.” ISV

The point is that the things that have been reported are the works of the Lord, not merely human activity. That includes not only the response of the Gentiles to the Gospel, but the means by which that response was provoked. Jonah was precisely correct when he said, “Salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9).

- If men hear the Gospel, it is because God has “sent” a “preacher” to them (Rom 10:14).
- If they are convinced of the guilt of sin, of the righteousness of Christ, and of the judgment of Satan, it is because the Holy Spirit has convinced them (John 16:8-11).
- If their heart is receptive to the message, it is because God has “opened” their heart (Acts 16:14).
- If they repent, it is because God has “granted them repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18), because Jesus has been exalted to give repentance (Acts 5:31).
- If they believe, it is because it was “given” to them to do so (Phil 1:29).
- If they can insightfully “say that Jesus is Lord,” it is “by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3).

All of these things are evidence of Divine visitation: i.e. “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name” (Acts 15:14). This was a Divine initiative, not a human quest. James saw this clearly. Do you?

KNOWN UNTO GOD ARE ALL OF HIS WORKS

“ 18 Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Other versions read, “Known to God from eternity are all His works,” NKJV “says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old,” NASB “. . . the Lord who does these things that have been known for ages,” NIV “Thus says the Lord, who has been making these things known from long ago,” NRSV “says the Lord, who has made these things known from of old,” RSV “says the Lord, who has made these things clear from the earliest times,” BBE “All this has been known for ages,” CJB “known from eternity,” DARBY “To the Lord was his own work known from the beginning of the world,” DOUAY “who maketh these things known from the beginning of the world,” ERV “From the beginning of the world, God knoweth all his works,” GENEVA “He is the one who will do these things that have always been known!” GWN “known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,” PNT “Known from the ages to God are all His works,” YLT “Who reveals His plans made from the beginning,” LIVING “These things have been known from the beginning of time,” IE “who has been making these things known from ages long past,” WEYMOUTH “that have always been known,” ISV and “who has been making this known from the beginning of the world.” AMPLIFIED

As you can see, the various translations present two distinct thoughts – and they are contradictory of one another.

- The first is that the works of God have been known to Himself from the very beginning.
- The second is that He has been making them known from the very beginning.

The second thought presented by the various versions – namely that God has been making His works known from the beginning – is an inexcusable contradiction of several express statements of Scripture.

Here is a confirmation of the fact that those who handle the Word of God, particularly in the translation of it, must have an understanding of Scripture. The second thought presented by the various versions – namely that God has been making His works known from the beginning – is an

inexcusable contradiction of several express statements of Scripture. God has NOT been making known His works from the foundation of the works – particularly the ones regarding His great salvation, which is the point of pour text.

Paul states that God is now making known His purposes that were previously not made known:

- “Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God; even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations , but now is made manifest to His saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:25-27).

- “Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began , but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:25-26).

- “But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom , which God ordained before the world unto our glory” (1 Cor 2:7).

- “How that by revelation He made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ). Which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men , as it is now revealed unto His holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:3-5).

- “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ , who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Tim 1:9-10).

- “In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; but hath in due times manifested His word through preaching , which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Savior” (Titus 1:3).

Speaking of this salvation, Jesus Himself said, “For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them ” (Matt 13:17; Lk 10:24).

The point of the text is that God was doing was what He had always purposed to do, and that the purpose had not been revealed, as it is now that Christ is mediating the New Covenant. This, of course, in in strict keeping with God’s nature, for He “works all things according to the counsel of His will” NKJV (Eph 1:11).

The opening of the door of faith to the Gentiles was not God’s reaction to the Jews rejection of Christ. He provided some indication that He was going to lift up His hand to the Gentiles, accepting them as His own. However, this was not at all clear, or revealed, else it would not have been necessary to it known to the early church.

Even though Israel had been given all of the things related to identity with God (Rom 9:4-5), this did not mean that God would never look with favor upon the Gentiles, or call them to Himself. He had always purposed to bring them into His family. Provision for their inclusion was found in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Therefore, in the acceptance of the Gentiles, God was acting in perfect accord with both His character and His purpose.

This has been confirmed by the manner in which the Gentiles received the Gospel. It is also seen

in the signs that accompanied their acceptance. And to this, add the fact that there was no demand made for them to be circumcised. Although those who preached to them were filled with the Spirit, He did not direct them to say one syllable about the necessity of circumcision to the Gentiles.

Now, with James, as with Paul and Barnabas, this was clear proof that circumcision was not a requirement to be saved. Nor, indeed, was it necessary to keep the law of Moses in order to be saved. God's works proved this to be true, for He confirmed their acceptance without requiring them to be circumcised.

TROUBLE THEM NOT

“ 19 Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God...”

Now that James has assessed the situation, weighing the facts and correlating them with the Word of God, he provides a word of wisdom. Men are to act upon their decisions and not allow them to remain idle.

Now that James has assessed the situation, weighing the facts and correlating them with the Word of God, he provides a word of wisdom. Men are to act upon their decisions and not allow them to remain idle.

MY SENTENCE IS

“ Wherefore my sentence is . . .” Other versions read, “I judge that,” NKJV “it is my judgment,” NASB “I have reached the decision,” NRSV “for this reason my decision is,” BBE “my opinion is,” CJB “I judge,” DOUAY “I’ve decided,” GWN “I say unto you,” MRD “I conclude,” NET “my verdict is,” NJB “I think,” IE “I am firmly of the opinion,” PHILLIPS “I am judging,” INTERLINEAR and “I don’t think we should.” CEV

I must say that I have a growing disdain for dubbed down and simplistic language being imposed upon the text of Scripture. Our text is an occasion during which both the thrust and the view of the church will be altered, bringing it more into accord with the Lord. They are not dealing with matters of mere human opinion, but with an issue that has to do with what is required to be saved. Language like “my opinion is,” CJB “I’ve decided,” GWN “I think,” IE , and “I am firmly of the opinion,” PHILLIPS have too much of the flesh in them. They do not carry the message of our text to a generation that is weak on thinking in the first place. Any person who imagines that the Holy Spirit of God would allow human opinion to be recorded as a decisive and binding thought has really taken leave of their senses. There are versions of Scripture that culture a mind-set that is at variance with the Word and purpose of God. They tend to obscure pivotal matters, such as that which concerns our text. James was a manifest “pillar” of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9). You may be sure it was not because of his opinions!

The word that James delivers – his “sentence” – is an expression of his insight – insight that was the result of the illumination of the Spirit and consequent discernment. If this was not the case, the Spirit would have not have left the matter here, but would have produced a more credible witness. The men who came down from Judea gave their opinion – that men had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses to be saved (15:1). Their words were challenged. In Jerusalem, certain believers who were formerly Pharisees gave their opinion, that the Gentiles were required to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Their words were also challenged. The words of James were not challenged – and there were apostles and elders present.

Oh, the bane of weak language. Thinking does not necessarily involve a decision. The word “opinion” has too much flesh in it. There is a higher form of reasoning than mere opinion. As it is

used here, the Greek word translated “my sentence is” (**kri,nw**) means, “to determine, resolve, decree, to judge . . . of those who act the part of judges or arbiters in matters of common life, or pass judgment on the deeds and words of others, to rule, govern, to preside over with the power of giving judicial decisions,” THAYER and “to come to a conclusion in the process of thinking and thus to be in a position to make a decision - 'to come to a conclusion, to decide.” LOUW-NIDA

James does not bring the problem to himself, musing upon it as though it belonged to him, then rendering a personal opinion on the matter. He rather sheds the light of Scripture and spiritual understanding upon it. This meeting was not convened to obtain the opinion of certain dignitaries in Jerusalem. The brethren in Antioch were dealing with a problem that had to do with salvation – and that is not something concerning which opinions or private views are of value.

THAT WE TROUBLE NOT THEM

“ . . . that we trouble not them. . .” Other versions read, “not make it difficult,” NIV “put trouble in the way,” BBE “put obstacles in the way,” CJB “cause difficulties,” CSB “be disquieted,” DOUAY “crush those,” MRD “cause extra difficulty,” NET “making things more difficult,” NJB “inflicting unexpected annoyance,” WEYMOUTH and “put obstacles in the way of and annoy and disturb.” AMPLIFIED

Notice how James describes the teaching with which they are dealing – namely, that the Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. The imposition of this teaching was a troubling and inhibiting requirement placed on the Gentiles. It was an obstacle in their path, hindering them on their way to glory. It was a gigantic rock thrown into their course. It was of such magnitude, that they would not be able to get to their destination unless it was removed. It would not merely slow their progress, but stop it altogether.

Troubling Religion

There is a form of religion that is troubling to the soul. It is like an imposing obstacle on the path to glory, and a heavy yoke that makes travel difficult and life cumbersome. It appears innocent on the surface, and the proponents of the approach claim to be seeking the welfare of men in the name of the Lord. In our text, those who were seeking to impose the Law upon the Gentiles were not like the factionists of our day. We know this is the case because they were assuaged after the reasoning of James. However, had their heresy not been addressed, they probably would have hindered many souls, and become more firmly fixed in faulty their persuasion.

You see how the brethren contended with those who brought this teaching to Antioch from Judaea (15:2). Then, after an entourage from Antioch was sent to Jerusalem, others espoused the same view, and they too confronted opposition from the brethren (15:5-7). They were seeking to impose the burden of the Law upon the newly converted Gentiles. However, it was one that they themselves were unable to bear.

Many within the professed church are also imposing burdens of religious regimentation on the people. They do not impose the Law of Moses, which is really the only Law that could be imposed, were such an imposition required. These new merchants of law invent their own rules, then place them upon men, telling the people they are effective to restrain the flesh. Some even boast that they are in harmony with the Scriptures, even though they must admit they are not found in them. These human laws teach men to live artificially – contrary to their basic desires. What they do not see is that wayward men do not need more rules. What they need is a new heart – the kind on which the laws of God are written. Then a minimum of rules for living is required. This also is confirmed in our text.

WHICH FROM THE GENTILES HAVE TURNED TO GOD

“ . . . which from among the Gentiles are turned to God . . .” Other versions read, “are turning,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV and “are converted to God.” DOUAY

Previously, James said that God “did visit the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name” (15:14). Peter said that God had made a choice among them that through him the Gentiles “should hear the word of the Gospel and believe” (15:7). He also said that God put no difference between the Jews and the Gentiles, “purifying their hearts by faith” (15:9). All of these are referring to the same thing: the acceptance of the Gentiles – looking at it from differing perspectives.

• **Objective – DIVINE INITIATIVE :** God visiting the Gentiles. This was seen **The expression “turn to the Lord” denotes a condition in which the Lord captures the attention of the individual. It is accompanied by an unwavering desire to do the will of**

in the calling of Peter to go to Cornelius, and the calling of Barnabas and Saul to go to Asia.

• **Objective – DIVINE OBJECTIVE:** To take out a people for His name. The aim of God was not merely to present an opportunity, but to garner a people for Himself.

• **Objective – DIVINE ACCOMPLISHMENT:** Purifying their hearts by faith. More was involved that the preaching of the messengers and the hearing of their subjects.

• **Subjective – THEIR RESPONSE:** hear and believe the Gospel. Their unreserved and zealous response was owing to the presence of the Lord.

• **Subjective – THEIR FOCUS:** Turn to God. They turned to God because they were keenly aware of Him – and He is “invisible.” They experienced what insightful Jews prayed: “Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved” (Psa 80:3,7,18; 85:4). For the Jews, turning to the Lord was a restoration. For the Gentiles, it was an initial turning.

The expression “turn to the Lord” denotes a condition in which the Lord captures the attention of the individual. It is accompanied by an unwavering desire to do the will of the Lord, and is frequently accompanied by inquiries concerning what the people should do (Acts 2:37; 8:36; 9:6; 16:30).

This is the factor that is missing in much of the professed Christianity of our day. People have not turned to the Lord, and therefore are not on the initiative to please Him. To address this uncomely dilemma, pretentious preachers and teachers attempt to motivate the people to consider the Lord. Sometimes they resort to a kind of salesmanship that is designed to move the people to be a part of their church. Some more polished pretenders adjust the external environment, supposing to make it more conducive to thoughtful consideration – like lowering the lights, moving the little children to another area, and seeking to touch the hearts of the people with stories and various illustrations from contemporary life. However, notwithstanding the commonness of such approaches in our time, you will find nothing remotely resembling them in the book of Acts. That is an account of God working among men. It is an effectual work that finds the people heartily turning to the Lord.

BUT THAT WE WRITE UNTO THEM

“ 20 But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. 21 For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”

Being wise in the ways of the Lord, and a “pillar” in the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9), James knew that new converts cannot simply be left to themselves – particularly when they are in a heathen society. This is one reason why Paul and those with him made a practice of ordaining elders in the churches – men who would ensure the proper direction and nourishment of the saints (Acts 14:23; Tit 1:5). This is also why Paul wrote epistles to Gentile churches (Romans, Corinthians, Galatians,

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians). John did the same, as directed by Jesus, in writing to the churches in Asia (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea – Rev 1:11).

James gives his inspired counsel, understanding the nature of spiritual life in its beginning stages, and the corrupt environment in which believers are to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

WRITE TO THEM

“But that we write unto them . . .” Other versions read, “give them orders,” BBE “write them a letter,” CJB “send unto them,” GENEVA “let word be sent to them,” MRD “write and tell them,” NLT and “send word to them in writing.” AMPLIFIED

In addition to personal preaching and teaching, writing is a way in which the Lord has ordained that His will and works be made known to people.

- When Israel defeated the Amalekites, God told Moses, “ Write this for a memorial in a book” (Ex 17:14).

- After God had given the entirety of the Law, He told Moses, “ Write thou these words: for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel” (Ex 34:27).

- Because of the hardness of the hearts of the Israelites, God spoke of them writing His Law: “And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates” (Deut 6:9).

- In Nehemiah’s day, when the people made a covenant to serve the Lord, they wrote it down: “And because of all this we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, Levites, and priests, seal unto it” (Neh 9:38).

- When God gave revelations to Isaiah, He told him to “write” them down (Isa 8:1; 30:8).

- When God revealed things to Jeremiah, He told him, “ Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book” (Jer 30:2).

- After revealing the details of a temple, God told Ezekiel, “ write it in their sight, that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them” (Ezek 43:11).

- After giving a vision to Habbakuk the Lord said, “ Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it” (Hab 2:2).

- After John had been given the Revelation he was told, “ Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter” (Rev 1:19).

The Gospels report Jesus referring eighteen times to what was “written” (Matt 4:4,7,10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24,31; Mk 7:6; 9:12,13; 14:21,27; Lk 4:4,8; 7:27; 19:46; 24:46; John 6:45). The epistles contain the word “written” thirty-three times (Rom 1:15; 2:24; 3:4,10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13,33; 10:15; 11:8,26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3,9,21; 1 Cor 1:19,31; 2:9; 3:19; 9:9; 10:7; 14:21; 15:45; 2 Cor 4:13; 8:15; 9:9; Gal 3:10,13; 4:22,27; Heb 10:7; 1 Pet 1:16).

When a thought is “written,” it is, so to speak, embalmed in print. Because of this, among thoughtful men, extensive consideration precedes writing down a thought. Many words that are spoken freely would never be said if it was known that they were going to be written down. Of course, it is to be questioned if words that ought not be written should be spoken at all.

There is something else here that is of interest. It is that the Gentiles, particularly in Antioch, were far from being mere novices. When the apostles heard that the city of Samaria had turned to the Lord, they sent Peter and John there (Acts 8:14). When a large number of people first believed in Antioch, the brethren in Jerusalem “sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch” (Acts 11:22). This time, however, because of the controversy that had risen over circumcision and the keeping of the Law, they sent a letter with certain brethren.

What is false pollutes whatever is offered to it. That includes images, that are idols. It also includes ideas that are idolatrous – like covetousness, “which is idolatry” (Col 3:5). Just as the image of a god pollutes what is offered to it, so whatever is offered to the idol of self-gratification is polluted by that false idea.

Concerning the first people who came to Antioch, saying that the believers could not be saved unless they were circumcised, there is no record of whether or not they remained there. However, now some representatives from Jerusalem would accompany Paul, Barnabas, and those with them. They would be bringing a letter of instruction with them, with all of the ones returning being privy to the reports and discussion that preceded the writing of the letter. That circumstance confirms how seriously the early church took the dissemination of false doctrine.

ABSTAIN FROM POLLUTION

OF IDOLS

“ . . . that they abstain from pollutions of idols . . .” Other versions read, “things polluted by idols,” NKJV “contaminated by idols,” NASB “foods polluted by idols,” NIV “things offered to false gods,” BBE “filthiness of idols,” GENEVA “defilement of a sacrifice [to idols],” MRD “food offered to idols,” NLT “filthiness of images,” TNT “meat sacrificed to idols,” LIVING “things polluted by connection with idolatry,” WEYMOUTH “everything that is contaminated by idols,” WILLIAMS “anything that has been polluted by being offered to idols,” AMPLIFIED and “ceremonial pollution of the idols,” INTERLINEAR

While the versions vary widely in their representation of this verse, there is no need for such a circumstance. The meaning of the phrase is clearly stated in verse twenty-nine: “abstain from meats offered to idols.” Other versions read “things offered,” NKJV “things sacrificed,” NASB “food sacrificed,” NIV and “what has been sacrificed.” NRSV Verse twenty views the effect of the idol upon what was offered to it – pollution, or defilement. Verse twenty-nine stresses what was offered, or presented to the idol. It is understood that the reference is to animal sacrifices, as expressed in Exodus 34:15: “For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice” (Ex 34:14-15). When the children of Israel sinned with the Moabites, they became involved in eating what was offered to their false gods: “And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods” (Num 25:2).

The Fact of Pollution

What is false pollutes whatever is offered to it. That includes images, that are idols. It also includes ideas that are idolatrous – like covetousness, “which is idolatry” (Col 3:5). Just as the image of a god pollutes what is offered to it, so whatever is offered to the idol of self-gratification is polluted by that false idea. This approach has become very fashionable in our religious world – the appeal to self gratification, pleasure, security in this world, etc. Anything that is done with a preeminent regard for self becomes defiled by that aberrant desire.

Paul's Instruction to the Corinthians

This prohibition may appear to contradict the teaching of Paul to the Corinthians. "As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him" (1 Cor 8:6). He went on to say that the person eating meat that had been offered to idols was not necessarily defiled by it: "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse" (1 Cor 8:8). He even told the brethren to eat what was "sold in the shambles (meat market) , asking no question for conscience sake" (1 Cor 10:25).

However, more was involved in the matter than mere eating. In this, there was the matter of the conscience. In Corinth, for example, everyone in the church did not discern the fact of a single God – the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was, Paul said, shameful that such a condition could exist in the church – but it did exist, and the brethren were to be mindful of it.

However, more was involved in the matter than mere eating. In this, there was the matter of the conscience. In Corinth, for example, everyone in the church did not discern the fact of a single God – the true God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It was, Paul said, shameful that such a condition could exist in the church – but it did exist, and the brethren were to be mindful of it. "But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge : for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled . . . some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame" (1 Cor 8:6-7; 15:34). The same condition probably existed in other churches, where people had turned from idols to serve the living God, yet their conscience was not yet mature.

Two Circumstances Are Addressed

This requirement would address two circumstances.

- The new believer who did not yet know that idols were not really gods, but only images that could not see, speak, hear, smell, handle, or walk (Psa 115:4-7). Such a person was to avoid the ingestion of anything that was offered to idols, for it would awaken his conscience concerning that idol.

- There also were those who did possess the knowledge of God, and were fully aware that eating meat did not affect one's relationship to God. However, they were to be mindful of the brethren who lacked this knowledge. Paul spoke of this manner of life to the Corinthians: "For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; And through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend" (1 Cor 8:10-13). Eating in an idol's temple suggests that the "shambles," or meat market, was part of the idol's temple. The meat was sold in something similar to our restaurants.

This is an example of abstaining "from all appearance of evil" (1 Thess 5:22). In our text, the idea is not that the person who sees your action considers what you are doing to be evil. Rather, it is that the one who beholds your conduct personally has a corrupt view of what you are doing, thinking that you are serving someone other than the God and Father or our Lord Jesus Christ. The service of idols

may be evil to you, but it is not to him, and therefore he misinterprets what you do as being obeisance to another God.

ABSTAIN FROM FORNICATION

“and from fornication . . .” Other versions read, “sexual immorality,” NKJV “unchastity,” RSV “evil desires of the body,” BBE “sexual sins,” GWN “whoredom,” MRD “unlawful marriage,” NAB “illicit marriages,” NJB “lewdness,” WEB “any kind of sexual sin,” IE and “all sexual impurity.”
AMPLIFIED

The word “abstain” means to “go away from, depart.” THAYER It involves the personal responsibility to stay away from something. The reason for such a prohibition is that to follow some things, you must leave Jesus – leave His Person, His presence, and His protection. Fornication is such a transgression. A person must blot Christ from his/her mind, and place the flesh on the throne of the heart in order to commit it. It is never innocent, never inadvertent, and always with deliberate and aggressive intention.

It is unfortunate that the word “fornication” has lost much of its meaning in our time. Through his subtlety Satan has corrupted vocabulary to dull the seriousness of transgression. In my judgment, men should have left this word alone, and the preachers and teachers so defined it that whenever it was spoken Divine associations were summoned into the mind.

Fornication has to do with the gratification of fleshly lusts outside of the bounds of marriage. It involves the prostituting of the body, which is “for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body” (1 Cor 6:13). In the Grecian and Roman cultures, sins of this sort were committed in the name of religion. Now they are committed for purely self-interests and fleshly gratification. Speaking of this category of sins the Spirit says, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (Eph 5:3). Other versions read, “must not be even a hint,” NIV and “must not even be mentioned among you.” NRSV Yet, they have become quite common in church circles, even among professed Christian leaders. No person can afford to ignore this warning, for it is attended by eternal consequences. Ponder what is said of fornicators. “Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind” (1 Cor 6:9). “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication . . . they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19-21).

ABSTAIN FROM THINGS STRANGLLED AND FROM BLOOD

“ . . . and from things strangled, and from blood.” Other versions read, “the flesh of animals put to death in ways against the law,” BBE “unbled meat,” LIVING and “meat killed by strangling.”
WEYMOUTH

The word “strangled” is translated from a word meaning, “choked; of animals killed by strangling, so that the blood is not drained from them.” THAYER Prior to the Law, during the time commencing with Noah after the flood, God prohibited the eating of an animal whose blood had not been drained. “But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat” (Gen 9:4). The NIV reads, “But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it” (Gen 9:4). Jews, because they were a people illuminated by God, could not eat any animal that “died of itself” (Deut 14:21).

Both of the prohibitions concerning blood were enacted prior to the giving of the Law, and were therefore not confined to the Law.

Confirming that it was the blood that was not to be ingested, the prohibitions include the eating of blood. This ban also started with Noah (Gen 9:4). It was codified in the Law: “Moreover ye shall

eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings” (Lev 7:26). The reason this was personally offensive to God, is stated in Leviticus 17:10-11: “And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people. For the life of the flesh is in the blood : and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul ” (Lev 17:11).

The Law specified that when an animal was slain for food, its blood was to be poured out upon the ground: “Only ye shall not eat the blood; ye shall pour it upon the earth as water” (Deut 12:16).

Were These Instructions Compulsory?

Some are of the opinion that these prohibitions, particularly the last two, were given only with the intention of not offending Jewish believers. However, this clashes sharply with the whole intention of this conference, which was to deal with things said to be required for salvation. It is incredulous to imagine that these brethren wrote a letter to the Gentiles that really had nothing to do with salvation, but only reflected the necessity of being mindful of the Jewish brethren.

Under the Law, blood was not allowed to be ingested because it was associated with life and atonement (Lev 17:11). It seems to me that this is still the case – except the atoning blood is now that of Jesus Christ. This law assists in protecting men from developing casual and self-centered attitudes concerning the means by which they have been redeemed to God. If this is not the case, and the Gentile believers were merely being told to be mindful of their Jewish brethren, it seems to me that a different view would have been taken concerning circumcision. In such a case, they would have been admonished to honor the practice of circumcision to appease their Jewish brethren, yet know in their hearts that it was not related to their salvation.

Both of the prohibitions concerning blood were enacted prior to the giving of the Law, and were therefore not confined to the Law. Those who know that they have been redeemed “to God” with blood – even “the precious blood of Christ” (1 Pet 1:19; Rev 5:9) – should have no difficulty understanding this. Any practice that minimizes the significance of blood cannot be proper.

THERE ARE THOSE WHO PREACH MOSES

“ For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.”

Some have said this verse buttresses the supposition that the Gentiles were only being admonished in order that they might get along with the Jews. However, this conference was called in reference to the Jew’s attitude toward the Gentiles, and not vice versa. The sense of this text is that the Jews already knew of these prohibitions, for they were read regularly every Sabbath day. These were not rules that required special instruction to the Jews.

It is true that there is a sense in which the ceremonial law was not removed at once from the Jewish mind – at least that is what appears to be the case later, when James said to Paul, “many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law” (Acts 21:20). However, this conference was convened to determine the necessity of circumcision and the keeping of the Law to be saved – not how the Gentiles were to respond to Jewish believers. Besides this, the record of the church in Antioch suggests that they were meeting apart from the local synagogue (Acts 11:26; 13:1; 14:27; 15:3). I conclude, therefore, that this verse is referring to the Jews already being familiar with the restrictions that are now specified to the Gentiles. They required no further knowledge of these restrictions.

CONCLUSION

In this text, the priority of the church – those who are in Christ Jesus – is once again established. Incorrect doctrine among the saints – particularly as it regards the matter of salvation – cannot be tolerated. In our text, something was introduced to the brethren in Antioch that had not been included in the preaching they had heard, and to which they had responded. They were told that they could not be saved unless they were circumcised. Even though those who made this demand were from Judaea, their words were challenged by Paul and Barnabas. After extensive disputation, when it was apparent that the matter could not be settled in Antioch, some trusted brethren were sent with Paul and Barnabas to take up the matter with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

Even when they arrive in Jerusalem, some of the believers who were formerly Pharisees, and experts in Scripture, affirmed that it was necessary for the converted Gentiles to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. Now, that was two witnesses, and would have settled the matter for a novice. In our time, the leaders would have obliged the people by starting two groups – those who practiced circumcision and kept the law of Moses, and those who did not. After all, that would have allowed every person to honor their own conscience, keeping peace. However, this is not at all the way these men addressed the subject.

If Paul is referring to this occasion in the book of Galatians, there was pressure put on him to have Titus circumcised. He said of that occasion: “But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal 2:3-5).

The strength with which Paul writes of this occasion is most arresting.

- The circumcision of Titus was demanded by “false brethren unawares brought in.”
- Those “false brethren” came to “spy out” the liberty which the Gentile believers had experienced in Christ Jesus.
- Paul and company did not submit to these men for so much as a single hour.

I see a glaring absence in our day of this kind of commitment to doctrinal purity. Too many charlatans are being given access to the body of Christ. A kind of theology is being promoted that does not enable the people to sense the presence of error, and to question its promotion. In my judgment, this condition exists because a kind of marriage has been promoted between the nominal church and the world. It has adopted the world’s manners and preferences, and has allowed them to filter into their assemblies. This has caused the people to be anaesthetized, so that they cannot detect doctrinal error and propensities to legalism.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #66

A LETTER IS PREPARED AND DELIVERED

“ 15:22 “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: 24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: 25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well. 30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.” (Acts 15:22-31)

INTRODUCTION

Realizing the gravity of the situation the apostles and elders are confronting, and the seriousness of right doctrine, James has delivered a word that will result in protecting the Gentile believers against the encroachment of false teachers. Throughout the book of Acts, the church, or body of Christ, is consistently given high priority. There was an awareness that these people belong to God, having been purchased by Jesus' own blood (Acts 20:28). They were

CONTENTS

- **EVERYONE WAS PLEASED (15:22a)**
- **CHOSEN MEN WERE SENT (15:22b)**
- **THE MANNER OF THE LETTERS (15:23)**
- **THE IMPACT OF FALSE TEACHING (15:24)**
- **IT SEEMED GOOD TO US TO SEND CHOSEN MEN (15:25-27)**
- **IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT (15:28)**
- **IF YOU DO THIS, YOU WILL DO WELL (15:29)**
- **THEY REJOICED FOR CONSOLATION (15:30-31)**
- **CONCLUSION**

the “body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12; 5:30). These are the people who are being built together for a habitation of God, and are the repository into which the fulness of Christ is being poured. As it is written, “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all . . . Now therefore ye are . . . of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord : in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 1:22-23; 2:19-22).

GOD WILL NOT GIVE HIS GLORY TO ANOTHER

In order to maintain an institutional emphasis in which the organization is primary, the awareness of these blessed realities is necessarily forfeited. As He has declared, God will not share His glory with another (Isa 42:8; 48:11) – not even an institution that purports to wear His name.

By saying that He will not give His glory to another, God means, among other things, that His Divine attributes will not be devoted to something He did not originate. His power will not undergird an agenda or program that was not initiated by Him. He will not work salvation through something created by men. He will not give sanctifying power to a message that does not reflect His mind, or through which He is said to implement His purpose.

This is not a mere technicality. The God “who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11), does not depart from that manner in any aspect of salvation, whether it pertains to it initially, or in its ongoing perfection in this world. Those who say their methods bring one closer to God, or enable one to obtain more grace, have not told the truth. Permit me to give you a few statements from men who claim to have instituted a procedure through which things accredited to Divine power are claimed to be accomplished.

- **“ We open the door to recovery by sharing our experience, strength, and hope with one another. This leads to a greater capacity for accepting God’s grace and movement in our lives as we are working through issues that have robbed us of all hope for a better future.”**

My purpose is to show that the matter with which our text is dealing has not ceased to exist. There are still those who are not content for men to be complete in Christ. They offer additional means through which Divine objectives can be realized.

“The recovery process enables us to move toward greater freedom from addictive, compulsive and dysfunctional behaviors . The freedom creates a peace, serenity, joy, and most importantly, a stronger personal relationship with God and others.”

- **“The purpose of . . . is to fellowship and celebrate God’s healing power in our lives**

through **‘8 recovery principles.’ This experience allows us to ‘be changed.’** By working and applying these Biblical principles, **we begin to grow spiritually . . .** As we progress through the program **we discover our personal, loving and forgiving High Power – Jesus Christ , the only and only true High Power.”**

• **“Over the years I’ve witnessed how the Holy Spirit has used this program to transform literally thousands of lives . . .”**

• Of the Beatitudes: **"But when you fully understand what Jesus is saying, you’ll realize that these eight principles are God’s road to recovery, wholeness, growth, and spiritual maturity .”**

• **“Use of the CR Bible is strongly encouraged due to the fact that it is the only Bible that directly corresponds to the CR curriculum. The CR Bible has been designed to work with the resources developed and tested in the national and international ministry of CR .”**

• **“The answer to the way we are changed is by seeing that we continue to fall short of the glory of God - Rom. 3:23. The present tense of the verb there points to ongoing action. The humbling of confessing our sins works to conform us to be like Jesus who was humble and without sin.**

Currently, the above programs have been instituted in nearly every state of the USA, as well as numerous foreign countries with thousands of churches having adopted them. Is it really true that these programs, and others like them open the door to recovery, lead to a greater capacity for accepting God’s grace, and create peace? Is it possible for a program instituted by men to create a stronger relationship with God, cause one to “be changed,” and discover Christ? Can such a program really transform lives, and be the road to spiritual growth and maturity. Precisely what kind of program requires that a special Bible be “designed to work with the resources” provided in that program?

My purpose is to show that the matter with which our text is dealing has not ceased to exist. There are still those who are not content for men to be complete in Christ. They offer additional means through which Divine objectives can be realized. However, here is the caveat in the whole matter: they are not Divinely revealed means. If they are, in fact, valid, then God has given His glory to “another.” In such a case, achievements that are credited to faith in Christ can actually be accomplished by adherence to a humanly devised procedure – and it is an extended procedure in which it is best to use a special Bible. How true can that be?”

Exactly what is the substantive difference between that approach and requiring believers to “be circumcised, and keep the law of Moses”? How is it that what is said to be accomplished by faith, can also be accomplished by following a list of special rules, or being circumcised, or keeping the law of Moses? If we are really “complete” in Christ, as Colossians 2:10 affirms, then how is it possible for transformation, peace, spiritual growth, and a personal relationship with God to be achieved by any other means?

This is the matter that is being resolved in our text. Certain Jews had required more than Christ to be saved – and recovery, transformation, obtaining grace, finding peace, and coming into a relationship with God, are all facets of salvation.

In order for this text to be profitable to us, we must see the principles that are being addressed in it, and see their bearing on special burdens that are being imposed on believers in our time.

I want to again remind you of the associations that have been made to this point with the salvation of the Gentiles.

To this point, the only things the Gentiles themselves were said to have done were:

- Hear the Word (Acts 10:44).
- Believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17).
- Turned to God (Acts 15:19).

God is said to have given them the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:17; 15:7-8), granted them repentance (Acts 11:18), purified their hearts (Acts 15:9), was saving them by His grace (Acts 15:11), and had taken out of the Gentiles a people for His name (Acts 15:14).

ASSESSING GOD'S WORK AT THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS

Assessments of this event: “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. . . . For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter” (Acts 10:44,46)

- **The Holy Spirit fell on them** who heard the Word (10:44). – *Luke*
- They **received the Holy Spirit** as did the disciples on Pentecost (10:47). – *Peter*
- **The Spirit fell on them** as on the disciples at the beginning (11:15). – *Peter*
- Peter remembered the promise of Jesus that they would be **baptized with the Holy Spirit** (11:16). – *Peter*
- God **gave them the same gift** as He did the disciples (11:17a). – *Peter*
- They had **believed on the Lord Jesus Christ** (11:17b). – *Peter*
- God **granted them repentance** unto life (11:18). – *disciples*
- God **gave them the Holy Spirit**, as He did the disciples (15:7). – *Peter*
- God bare them witness, **giving them the Holy Spirit** as He did the disciples (15:8). – *Peter*
- God **purified their hearts by faith** (15:9). – *Peter*
- They were **saved by the grace of God** (15:11). – *Peter*
- God visited the Gentiles to **take out of them a people for His name** (15:14). – *James*
- These were people, who from the Gentiles, are **turned to God** (15:19) – *James*

Exactly where does being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses fit into that kind of description?

The point to be seen here is that theological difficulties, and issues pertaining to salvation, can only be resolved within the context of Divine working, and the understanding of what God is actually doing in salvation. All of that is set within the context of God's Word, which brings lucidity to the subject. This circumstance provides no room for men to receive glory, or for their wayward ideas to be dignified by being invested with Divine power.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LAW AND GRACE

The brethren in our text recognized the distinction between Law and grace, as well as what constitutes an unnecessary burden upon the believers. Peter boldly announced, “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11). He referred to the Law, as a means of salvation, in this way: “Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” (Acts 15:10).

James saw the imposition of Law upon the Gentile believers as a troubling influence: “Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God” (Acts 15:19).

Throughout the last 40-50 years, I have become increasingly aware of the obtuseness of the modern church concerning the distinction between Law and grace. There is a vast difference between being saved by doing and saved by believing. Those who are unlearned in this matter suggest that being saved by grace through faith eliminates doing, blissfully unaware of the fact that it is really the only means through which acceptable doing can be accomplished. At the summary level, salvation is “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). At the foundational level men are “justified by faith without the deeds of the law” (Rom 3:28). When it comes to what men “must” do, the commandments all relate to an appropriate response to the Gospel itself, not to humanly devised plans, or the deeds of the law. Thus we read of obeying “the Gospel” (Rom 10:16; 2 Thess 1:8), and obeying “the form of the doctrine of the Gospel” (Rom 6:17). Being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses does not fall into that category.

THE LESSER GLORY

The Old Covenant, that was based upon the Ten Commandments, which were “the words of the covenant” (Ex 34:28), did have a glory. That Old Covenant was, Paul said, “glorious” (2 Cor 3:7,9,10,11). However, it was an inferior glory that was caused to pass away by the greater glory of the New Covenant – like the light of the sun causes the moon to lose its glory. The New Covenant is said to be “rather glorious” (2 Cor 3:8), and to “exceed in glory” (2 Cor 3:9). It has a glory that remains, and cannot possibly be superseded by any covenant that has a greater glory (2 Cor 3:11). Something that has a lesser glory cannot possibly make a contribution to the effectiveness of what possesses the greater glory.

The Old Covenant was the ultimate moral code, and stands for all such law. It was the solitary example of what it means to live by rules, or codified law. It is not possible to come up with a better code of outward conduct that was provided in “the Law of Moses.” You may be sure that if it makes no contribution to salvation, no law originated by men can do so. If it cannot bring transformation, peace, and fellowship with God, precisely who is the man who would presume to introduce a law, principle, or rule, claiming that it is capable of doing so.

If men really prefer a procedurally driven religion, then they must adopt the Law of Moses, for that is the only ordained Law of that sort. In the keeping of it, nothing can ever be omitted. Absolute perfect and unwavering compliance is required (Ex 23:22; Lev 18:5; 20:22; 26:14-16; Num 15:40; Deut 6:24-25; 11:22,32; 13:18; 15:5; 19:9; 28:1). Of course, once a person engages in a conscientious effort to keep all of the commandments of the Law without any exception, and to do so in a consistent, perfect, and unwavering manner, he will come to the conclusion that he requires a Savior. Only a single infraction produces this condition, to say nothing of continuing to live in such a manner, coming short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23).

One of the characteristics of man-made programs is that they allow for infractions, even though they may not be condoned. The person is thought to be making progress if they do not fall as often, or may even be able to go for a considerable time without falling. The difficulty with such an arrangement is that the person never really sees the need for a Savior. They are taught to maintain the view that they will eventually be able to control, or manage, their flaws. As I am seeking not to be overly abrasive, this is an error of unspeakable magnitude, flying the face of the Divine assessment of humanity, as well as the message of the Gospel itself.

It is in its conviction of the absolute helplessness of the sinner that the Law “is our schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ” (Gal 3:24). Of course, once brought to Christ, when faith has come, “We are no

longer under a schoolmaster” (Gal 3:25). Those, therefore, who perpetrate “schoolmaster” type programs are reintroducing bondage to the people, not freedom. The perception of this circumstance is seen in this text.

Something to Be Seen

The response of Peter and James, together with the letters that are being sent out, postulates a keen awareness of the adverse impact of powerless rules and regulations upon the human spirit. This circumstance was one that could not be ignored, or tabled because of the imagined priority of saving lost souls. Souls that have been delivered, yet have returned to a code of law, are in a more serious condition than those who have never believed at all. Paul says that Christ has “become of no effect” to such people, and that they have “fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4). In such a case, he writes, “Christ will profit you nothing” (Gal 5:2).

Such statements have some alarming implications. The point here is that the people at this conference now saw it, and were prepared to do something decisive about it.

THEY WERE ALL TOGETHER

Here is an example of keeping “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). The Scriptural record of godly people is an example of the doctrine being lived out. The “doctrine of Christ” is not philosophical, but is the expression of truth that is accompanied with Divine power. If what men say they believe does not direct how they think and what they do, it is of no practical value, even though it may technically be called the truth. Salvation is not delivering men from the power of darkness and translating them into the kingdom of Christ in spite of their response to the Gospel. Their response, as constrained by faith and through the Spirit, is the appointed means of effecting the salvation of God.

In a grand display of keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, there is perfect accord among the apostles, elders, and the whole church in Jerusalem. Keeping in mind that the answer to the dilemma they were facing was not perceived immediately – either in Antioch or Jerusalem – we are being made privy to the marvelous working of the Lord among His people. It is all done with decency and order, all the while with the brethren maintaining sound minds and yielded hearts.

EVERYONE WAS PLEASED

“**15:22a** “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church . . .” Other versions read, “seemed good,” NASB “decided to choose,” NIV “with the consent of,” NRSV “decided to,” CJB “in agreement with,” NAB “with the whole congregation,” TNT “with the whole assembly,” YLT “voted to,” LIVING “wanted to,” IE “with the approval of,” WEYMOUTH “in cooperation with,” WILLIAMS and “together with the whole resolved.” AMPLIFIED “agreed to,” PHILLIPS “then it seemed to the,” INTERLINEAR and “seemed best to.” EMTV

The words “Then pleased it” are translated from the two Greek words **To,te e;doxe**. The first word means “Then, at that time,” THAYER and “thereupon,” FRIBERG. The second word means, “to think . . . to judge,” THAYER “to express one's will or pleasure it seems best or good, decide,” FRIBERG “be disposed,” UBS “to regard something as presumably true,” LOUW-NIDA and “to whom it may seem good, to whom it is a pleasure, to whom may be disposed in their heart.” LEH. What took place after the speech of James was a most marvelous work. There is no record of further dialog following the words of James. What he said was not thrown open to discussion. Instead, there was immediate and perfect accord among everyone present – the apostles, the elders, and the whole church. We know this included Paul and Barnabas, and those brethren who came with them from Antioch.

We do not know how many brethren constituted “the whole church” in Jerusalem. Indications are that there was a considerable number. Some time later, when Paul returned to Jerusalem, James referred to “many thousands of Jews” in Jerusalem, described as being believers – a term applied exclusively to those who were in Christ (Acts 21:20).

Not only were there probably a vast number of people present, there were also appointed and seasoned leaders: apostles and elders. Prophets were also present, Barnabas being one, and at least two more who will be named later. Yet, after a single statement made by James, there is perfect accord among these brethren – large in number, and broad in experience and insight.

There are a number of things that are made known in this circumstance – things that confirm the truth of the doctrine that was held by the brethren.

- **THE UNITY OF THE SPIRIT.** Here is an example of “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). Unity involves thinking alike as well as being together.

- **THE UNITY OF THE FAITH.** We also have an example of “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13). Faith enables the minds of those possessing it to focus on the same thing and arrive at the same conclusions.

- **THE SAME MIND AND THE SAME JUDGMENT.** Considering the number of the people and the scope of their experience, here is a marvelous example of the people of God having “the same mind and the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). This is what the prophet referred to when he said, “for they shall see eye to eye, when the LORD shall bring again Zion” (Isa 52:8).

- **ONE ACCORD AND ONE MIND.** This is an example of being “likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind” (Phil 2:2). Likemindedness is the result of having “the mind of the Lord” (Lev 24:12), or “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

- **ONE BODY.** This is also a wonderful commentary on what is meant by the expression “one body.” Not only is the body single, there is a harmony or accord, within it. Just as surely as there is a certain accord in a healthy human body, so there is harmony among those who comprise the body of Jesus Christ.

The absence of this kind of harmony in the modern church is largely owing to its diversion to the personal needs of individuals. While there is certainly nothing wrong with meeting the earthly and personal needs of individuals, that is not the thrust of the work of the ministry. We are not left to conjecture on this. God has revealed the proper objective, and it is the business of the professed church to embrace it. The aim of appointed gifts given to the church is, “for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body , being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part , causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love” NASB (Eph 4:12-16).

While all of this does involve each individual, it is **THE BODY** that is the point. It ought to be apparent why this is so. No individual is given everything belonging to the whole body. For one thing, no single person can contain the whole of the blessing. That is a capability belonging to Christ alone. Second, the Head of the body ministers to the individual parts in order that they might minister to the others. That is simply the way He works.

In this body of believers, three pivotal testimonies have been given by Peter, Paul, and Barnabas –

with Paul and Barnabas delivering a joint testimony. After due consideration and due illumination, a single conclusion was delivered by James. Yet, through the words of these men, the hearts and minds of the others were brought into perfect accord.

At the conclusion of James' word, there was not a single dissenting word! There you have evidence of the effectiveness of focusing on the salvation of God through faith, and the soundness of mind that it produces. In a very real way that is a protecting focus.

CHOSEN MEN SENT

“ **22b** . . . to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas . . . ”

With unregenerate men, or with the spiritually immature, the more people that deal with an issue, the more possibility there is for disagreement. However, no such threat is apparent in the handling of the case before us. First, the church in Antioch sent some of their number with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. Now, the brethren at Jerusalem will send some of their number with those from Antioch, as they return to deliver letters of instruction to the brethren.

MEN OF THEIR OWN COMPANY

Other versions read, “men from among them,” NASB “some of their own men,” NIV “men from among their members,” NRSV “men out of their company,” ASV “men from among themselves,” CJB “some of their men,” GWN “representatives,” NAB “delegates,” NLT and “some of their number.” MONTGOMERY

It is apparent that the early believers had congregations, as opposed to being a mass of people who did not meet together, or that only met in small groups. These brethren determined to send men from their own “company,” assembly, or congregation. They were men with whom the people were familiar, and who had ministered among them. This is not the first time a choice was made from within a known group of believers.

- Matthias was chosen from among the disciples who assembled together (Acts 1:23-26).
- Seven men were chosen from among the brethren to administer the daily distribution of food (Acts 6:3,5).
- Peter and John were sent by Jerusalem to Samaria (Acts 8:14).
- Barnabas was sent from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:22).

The brethren in Antioch send relief to the brethren in Judaea by the hands of Barnabas and Saul (Acts 11:30).

- Certain members of the Antioch church were sent with Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem concerning the question of the necessity of circumcision and keeping the Law (Acts 15:2).
- Now certain brethren are chosen to be sent back with the entourage from Antioch with letters for the brethren (Acts 15:22).

Note, there was perfect accord in each of these cases. No disruption or disagreement was found among the saints.

JUDAS AND SILAS

In being a “Servant” Jesus was not meeting the desires of the people, giving them what they preferred, and carrying out their will. He was fundamentally the Servant of God, doing His will

and promoting the Divinely revealed interests of the people.

“ . . . namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.” Other versions read, “leading men among the brethren,” NKJV “leaders among the brothers,” NIV “leading men in the brotherhood,” NJB “two of the church leaders.” NLT

“Chief Men”

There is such a thing as leading individuals – prominent for their work and insight. The Gentile world has “chief captains” (Gen 21:22), “chief of the butlers” (Gen 40:2), the “chief baker” (Gen 40:16)

Among the Jews there were “chief men” (Lev 21:4), “chief of the house” or “household” (Num 3:24), “chief over the Levites” (Num 3:32), “Moses and Aaron the chief of Israel” (Num 4:46), “chief fathers of the congregation” (Num 31:26), “chief of the tribes” (Deut 1:15), “chief rulers” (2 Sam 8:18), “chief among the captains” (2 Sam 23:8), “chief of Solomon’s officers” (1 Kgs 5:16), “chief of the guard” (1 Kgs 14:27), “chief porters” (1 Chron 9:26), “chief of the singers” (Neh 12:46), “the chief musician ” (Psa 4:1), and “the chief priest” (Jer 52:24).

Jesus spoke of those who would be “chief” among His disciples (Matt 20:27). Paul was perceived as a “chief speaker” (Acts 14:12). There were “chief women” in Athens who “believed and consorted with Paul and Silas” (Acts 17:4).

The technical definition of “chief” is “To lead, I. e. a. to go before; b. to be a leader; to rule, command; to have authority over,” THAYER “leading, governing,” FRIBERG and “to go before, lead the way.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Jesus defined the manner in which this word is used among those who fear the Lord: “And He said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve” (Luke 22:26).

A “chief” person is a servant – “he that doth serve.” The best way to more precisely define servant is to consider Jesus, who Himself is described as a “Servant” (Isa 42:1; 49:6; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11; Zech 3:8; Matt 12:18; Acts 3:13,26; 4:27,30). In being a “Servant” Jesus was not meeting the desires of the people, giving them what they preferred, and carrying out their will. He was fundamentally the Servant of God, doing His will and promoting the Divinely revealed interests of the people. He also pioneered the way to God, opening up a new and living way, and is leading the people in that proper way.

“Chief men” among the saints are those who lead the people in the ways of the Lord. They are the first to perceive the will and ways of God, then delivering them to the people. These are the people through whom the Lord speaks in new and spiritually refreshing ways. They are among those who perceive the will of the Lord more quickly. They can detect the encroachment of error in time to warn the people. Of themselves they are not better than the other people, but are more profitable to them. Their wisdom and insight does not promote their self interests, pride, or undue veneration.

“Judas Surnamed Barsabas”

“Judas” is the Greek form of Judah (Matt 1:2), and means “he shall be praised.” He is surnamed, a way of distinguishing him from other men with the same name. “Barsabas” means “son of [Bar] Sabas.” One of the men qualified to fill the place vacated by Judas was Joseph, also called “Barsabas,” or a son of Sabas (Acts 1:23). If this is the same Sabas, he certainly had two distinguished sons.

PEOPLE WITH THE NAME JUDAH/JUDAS

1. The patriarch Judah, son of Jacob – Gen 29:35; Matthew 1:2, 3.
2. One of the priests exiled to Babylon – Ezra 10:23.
3. Another priest during the time of Nehemiah – Neh 12:8.
4. A Benjamite, a ruler in Jerusalem during the time of Nehemiah – Neh 11:9.
5. A priest who assisted in the dedication of the rebuilt wall of Jerusalem – Neh 12:34,36
6. One of the Levites who renounced his Gentile wife after the Babylonian captivity – Ezra 10:23.
7. One of Jesus' brothers – Matt 13:55.
8. A person surnamed " *the Galilean* " – Acts 5:37
9. Son of Simon– John 6:71; 13:2, 26, surnamed (always in the other Gospels) ISCARIOT, to distinguish him from the other apostle of the same name.
10. The brother of James and an apostle– Lk 6:16; Acts 1:13
11. A disciple who entertained Paul – Acts 9:11

Other such designations include "Barjona" (son of Jonah – Matt 15:17), "Barabbas" (son of Abba – Matt 27:16), "Bartholomew" (son of Tolmai – Mk 3:18), "Bartimaeus" (son of Timaeus – Mk 10:46), and "Barnabas" (son of consolation – Acts 4:36).

"Silas"

This is the first reference to this man. He is mentioned thirteen times in the book of Acts (15:22,27,32,34,40; 16:19,25, 29; 17:4,10,14,15; 18:5). A considerable number of Scriptural and language scholars are of the opinion that "Silas" is a contraction of the name "Silvanus," who is identified as laboring with Paul (2 Cor 1:19; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Pet 5:12). To my knowledge, there has not been a satisfactory refutation of this view. "Silvanus" is considered to be the Latin form of "Silas." He was certainly a prominent figure in the labors of Paul.

A REMINDER

It is necessary to remember how the early church addressed the intrusion of questionable doctrine. It was treated in such a manner as to allow the discovery of the true nature of the doctrine. In other words, it was a way through which the Lord could make the truth known. The following reveals something of the nature of their approach.

- **THEY CONTENDED FOR THE TRUTH.** First, those with some understanding disputed against the statement that it was necessary to be circumcised to be saved (15:2a).
- **THEY SOUGHT FOR FURTHER UNDERSTANDING.** Second, with the absence of total agreement, the brethren determined to send Paul and Barnabas, with certain of their own number, to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem "about this question" (15:2b).
- **THEY REPORTED WHAT THE LORD HAD DONE.** On their way, they declared the conversion of the Gentiles, causing "great joy among the brethren" (15:3).
- **THEY DECLARED WHAT GOD HAD DONE THROUGH THEM.** When they arrived in Jerusalem, and were received by the church and the apostles and elders, they "declared all things that God had done with them" (15:4).
- **THEY CONSIDERED THE MATTER.** When some arose, affirming that circumcision and the keeping of "the law of Moses" were bound upon the Gentiles, "the apostles and elders came together for to consider this matter" (15:5-6).

• **THEY ENGAGED IN GODLY DISPUTATION.** Unwilling to accept this view, there was much disputation among the brethren over the matter, each presenting the opposing views (15:7).

• **PETER REPORTED WHAT GOD HAD DONE THROUGH HIM.** After the discussion was finished, Peter reminded them that God had chosen him to open the door of faith to the Gentiles, again reporting what had taken place at that time (15:7-11).

• **HOLY CONCLUSIONS WERE DRAWN.** Peter also presented some inspired conclusions:

- God gave the Gentiles the Holy Spirit as He did to the disciples (15:8).

- God purified their hearts by faith (15:9).

- That it would be tempting God to impose a yoke upon the Gentiles that the Jews themselves were “unable to bear” (15:10).

- The Jews would be saved “through the grace of God,” even as the Gentiles (15:11).

• **MORE REPORTS OF WHAT THE LORD HAD DONE AMONG THE GENTILES.** Paul and Barnabas declared “what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (15:12).

• **MORE GODLY CONCLUSIONS.** After every one had held their peace, James responded giving some more inspired conclusions.

- God had visited the Gentiles to “take out of them a people for His name” (15:14).

- This was in perfect accord with the declaration of the prophets (15:15-17).

- The works of God are known to Him “from the beginning” (15:18).

- They should not trouble those who had turned to God from among the Gentiles (15:19).

- It would be appropriate to send letters to the Gentiles clarifying what was really necessary (15:19-21).

What a marvelous example of arriving at a condition of both heart and mind where the people have the same mind and judgment! The natural man cannot do such things, for he is basically self-centered. Only those with honest and good hearts can do this.

THE MANNER OF THE LETTERS

“ 23 And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.”

Unlike many, these brethren carried out what they had determined to do. You may recall that the church in Corinth had to be admonished to actually take up the funds they had said they would give to the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor 8:10-11). No such admonition was required here. They did what they saw was right, not tarrying. Those who desire for God to “make no tarrying” (Psa 40:17; 70:5), should not themselves be noted for delaying and procrastinating. Even under the Law, the Lord told the people, “Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me” (Ex 22:29). Those who linger in a state of indecision or inactivity are not wise.

THEY WROTE LETTERS AFTER THIS MANNER

This reflects the nature of life in Christ Jesus, which desires the blessing and benefit of those who are in the Son. Even though there are times when believers must be corrected, there is an

overriding desire for their benefit and the increase of their joy.

“And they wrote letters by them after this manner . . .” Other versions read, “wrote this letter,” NKJV “sent this letter,” NASB “sent the following letter,” NIV and “wrote thus.” ASV

The words “after this manner” mean “as follows, or “thus,” THAYER and “this (one) here,” FRIBERG In other words, this is not an interpretation of what was said, or a certain view of what it might have meant. This is what was actually written with no modification.

THE APOSTLES, ELDERS, AND BRETHREN

“The apostles and elders and brethren . . .” Other versions read, “the apostles and the brethren who are elders,” NASB “the apostles and elders, your brothers,” NIV “the brothers, both the apostles and elders,” NRSV “apostles and the elders, brethren,” ASV “Apostles and the older brothers,” BBE “emissaries and the elders, your brothers,” CJB “apostles, and the elders, and the brethren,” DARBY “ APOSTLES , and the Elders, and the brethren,” GENEVA “from the apostles and elders, your brothers in Jerusalem,” NLT “apostles, and the elders, and the brethren,” YLT “The apostles, elders and brothers at Jerusalem,” LIVING and “The brethren, both the apostles and the elders.” AMPLIFIED

I do not concur with some of the translations that represent the word “brethren,” or “brothers,” as applying only to the apostles and elders, or even to only the elders. While the Greek grammar can be construed to mean this, it appears to me that it is not a fair representation of the case. First, it was the decision of “the apostles, and elders, with the whole church” to send the letter (15:22). They all participated in choosing and sending the men who were to deliver the letter. I do not know what purpose is served by suggesting the letter was only from the apostles and elders.

It is quite true that the brethren in Antioch had sent their inquiry to “the apostles and elders” at Jerusalem (15:2). However, it presents a more accurate picture of the body of Christ to affirm the unanimity of the brethren in Jerusalem on this matter. The Gentiles would not be asked to do something – namely, yield to the counsel of the apostles and elders – that the rest of the brethren in Jerusalem had not done themselves. The strength of the letter is not only in the fact that it involved the assessment of the apostles and elders. That assessment also resulted in a conclusion and response that reflected the mind-set of the entire church in Jerusalem. There we have the mind of Christ received by all.

GREETING

“ . . . send greeting . . .” Other versions read, “Greetings,” NKJV “may joy be with you,” BBE “Dear brothers and sisters,” GWN “Dear brothers,” IE and “send their greetings.” PHILLIPS

The Greek word translated “greeting” is **cairein** (khai-ee-ro), which means “*to rejoice, be glad in the proper and strict sense,*” THAYER “*be delighted,*” FRIBERG and “*to enjoy a state of happiness and well-being.*” LOUW-NIDA

This reflects the nature of life in Christ Jesus, which desires the blessing and benefit of those who are in the Son. Even though there are times when believers must be corrected, there is an overriding desire for their benefit and the increase of their joy. The fundamental trait of the New Covenant is not to uncover flaws and deficiencies, but to bring about blessing. That is what compelled holy men of God to deliver rebukes and administer correction when it was required.

There is an approach to life in Christ that only seeks to address trouble and eliminate error. While such things are necessary, they are the means to a higher and everlasting state of blessing. In light of this kind of approach error is seen as a hindrance to blessing, and not merely the path to cursing. This

by no means tones down the approach to correction – something that is taking place in this very text. Even under the Law this kind of desire was made known.

• **THE AARONIC BLESSING.** “The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num 6:24-26).

• **THE DAVIDIC BLESSING.** “The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel” (Psa 20:1-4).

Apostolic greetings in the epistles also reflect this profound desire for the welfare and spiritual advanced of the people of God.

• **A PAULINE GREETING.** “Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:7).

• **A GREETING FROM PETER.** “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord” (2 Pet 1:2).

Wherever there is an institutional spirit, such as that reflected in spiritual Babylon, there is a total absence of this kind of spirit. It is not unusual to find sensitive souls languishing for lack of spiritual nourishment amidst the teeming activity of a church that is off course. Such a condition is an affront to the truth of God, and the evidence of aloofness from Christ.

UNTO THE BRETHREN

“ . . . unto the brethren . . .” Other versions read, “the Gentile believers,” NIV “the believers of Gentile origin,” NRSV “the brothers from among the Gentiles,” CSB “their non-Jewish brothers and sisters,” GWN “Gentile brothers and sisters,” NET “the brothers of Gentile birth,” NJB “who are of the nations,” YLT and “the Gentile brotherhood.” MONTGOMERY

There is more in this recognition than lies on the surface of the text. When Peter went to the house of Cornelius, he spoke of his former mind-set – one from which he had then been delivered. “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28). In this letter, there is not the slightest evidence that this thought was now present in Jerusalem. Now, after much disputation, discussion, and testimony, the people had seen that God was at work among the Gentiles. That perception overthrew any imagination they may have had concerning the supposed inferiority of Gentile believers.

ANTIOCH, SYRIA, AND CILICIA

“ . . . which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia.”

Antioch was a city, and Syria and Cilicia were regions. Syria was a province and kingdom in Western Asia. When Jesus went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:36), “His fame went throughout all Syria” (Matt 4:24). Luke says that at the time of the birth of Jesus, “Cyrenius was the governor of Syria” (Lk 2:2). Later, Paul would go throughout Syria “confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41; Gal 1:21).

Syria was situated directly North of Galilee. It extended from the Mediterranean Sea to the Tigris River, and from Canaan to Mount Taurus. Some Biblical cities located in Syria include Laodicea, Sidon, Tyre, Damascus, Joppa, Ashdod, and Gaza. One of the better known mounts in that area is Mount Nebo from which Moses saw the promised land (Deut 32:49).

Cilicia was bounded on the West by Pamphylia, with the Cilicia Sea on the South (Acts 27:5). When Stephen disputed with those in the synagogue of the Libertines, some aligned against him were from Cilicia (Acts 6:9). Tarsus, the home city of the Apostle Paul, is described as “a city in Cilicia” (Acts 21:39; 22:3; 23:34).

Prior to His ascension, when Jesus spoke to His disciples, He told them to be “witnesses” unto Him in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Our text reveals the manner in which this commission was carried out. The disciples did not disperse in a disorderly manner, hopscotching, as it were, from place to place. They moved Northward into adjoining areas, saturating them with the Gospel. Then they moved Westward, covering every area with the good news of the Gospel. It was a kind of saturation of a vast segment of the world.

This was the manner in which Christ’s direction was fulfilled. It confirms that the Gospel was, indeed, for “every creature” (Matt 16:15). The only places they did not go is where the Spirit forbade them to go (Acts 6:6-7).

Knowledge of the Work of God

It is also important to note that the believers had extensive knowledge of the work of the Lord in other areas. They met together, but their groups were not self-centered or self-contained.

They Were Concerned About Believers

It is also evident the early church was concerned about believers in others areas, determined to assist them in the apprehension of the truth, and protect them against the intrusion of false doctrines. Of course, this type of concern has nearly been obliterated by sectarianism. As soon as the institutionalized church moves in, the concern for those outside of its own self-determined boundaries are forgotten. This is because a sectarian spirit is fundamentally carnal, or fleshly, and cannot think of the whole body – in synch with the Holy Spirit.

THE IMPACT OF FALSE TEACHING

“ 24 Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment . . . ”

How will the apostles, elders, and brethren in Jerusalem frame their response to the situation with the Gentiles. How will they refer to those who delivered an erroneous message? What will be the assessment of that message and its impact upon those who heard it? How will they describe their association with the propagators of the message that provoked the brethren in Antioch to send men to Jerusalem about the matter? The answers to these questions will provides us with a glimpse of true spiritual life, and of its regard for relationships with those who wear the name of Christ.

CERTAIN WENT OUT FROM US

“Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us . . .” Other versions read, “some of our number,” NASB “Some persons from us,” RSV “went out from amongst us,” DARBY “some individuals who came from us,” GWN “people coming from here,” NJB “which departed from us,” TNT and “having gone forth from us.” YLT

The record of those who delivered the initial message of issue said they “came down from Judaea” (15:1). That might lead to the conclusion that they were not actually a part of the Jerusalem church, but were isolated from it. However, James makes clear this was not the case. They were identified with the church, as were Ananias and Sapphira. And, like that pair who were judged of God, had been with them for some time with no apparent offense.

This is the first account of any doctrinal dissension in the early church, and even then, these men had not apparently expressed their erroneous view among the brethren. However, upon hearing that some Gentiles had turned to the Lord, their own faulty view surfaced, and they thought it expedient to make an effort to bind it upon, what they conceived to be, weaker brethren. Apparently, until this time, with the majority of the church being Jewish, there had been no issue raised about circumcision. That is, it had not been associated with the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. The greatness of the salvation itself had overshadowed any flawed views of these brethren. However now, according to what seems to me to be Divine providence, their defective understanding had surfaced.

A Principle to be Seen

Certain issues can be introduced that force faulty theology to be expressed. In this case, it was the conversion of the Gentiles – a fact that many had not comprehended was going to take place. This unexpected event caused the erroneous views of certain to rise to the surface.

In our day, a similar thing has taken place. God has called His people to be holy (1 Pet 1:15-16; 1 Thess 4:7). There has also been considerable instruction given concerning the necessity of holiness (Rom 6:19,22; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Thess 3:13; Heb 12:14). Yet, in spite of this clear emphasis, a staggering measure of unholiness has pervaded the professing church. As Jesus said it would, iniquity is abounding, and the love of many has waxed cold (Matt 24:12).

The rise of this condition has caused many who have embraced corrupt views to surface, and to peddle their theological wares. Those who have a twisted view of the security of the believer have stepped forward and are aggressive to teach that it is not possible to fall once a person professes faith. Others have been bold to offer solutions to a lack of holiness that are nothing more than expressions of the wisdom of men. It is now easier for them to sell their psychological ideas, procedural recovery plans, and the likes. Because the church is not growing as well as it could, some have also stepped forward to propagate their church growth and church planting programs, just as though they came from God. Others, seeing the fabric of the marriage and the family come apart, have risen to promote their ideas that life in this world is the primary life, and domestic life is the fundamental life.

Those who are marketing these approaches probably entertained flawed views all along. However, there came a time when circumstances were introduced within the professed church that allowed them to promote those views with ungodly aggression. What was formerly held as an opinion is now declared as a Divinely sanctioned methodology. It is not possible to overstate the seriousness of this situation.

TROUBLED YOU WITH WORDS

“ . . . have troubled you with words . . . ” Other versions read, “disturbed you,” NASB “upset you,” CJB “confused you,” GWN “disquieted you,” MRD and “unsettling your minds.” AMPLIFIED

Here, the impact of false teaching is stated: troubling, disturbing, agitating, upsetting, disquieting, unsettling, distracting! As it is used here, the word from which “troubled” is translated has the following lexical meaning: “to cause one inward commotion, take away his calmness of mind, disturb his equanimity; to disquiet, make restless.” THAYER and “cause mental or spiritual agitation, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion.” FRIBERG

If it is true that the peace of God will “keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ” (Phil 4:7), what can be said of the unsettling and agitation of the believer? Such troubling is an intrusion that causes peace to go away, and the heart and mind to become unstable. Do not doubt that such a thing can happen! There are difficult times through which faith will lead us, and peace will maintain its sensitive rule during such times. However, false teaching changes the spiritual environment from calmness to storm, and from tranquility to disruption. It is not of the same order as the winds of

adversity that blow upon us “for righteousness sake.” False doctrine is the breath of Satan blowing upon the people of God, unsettling the environment, and causing all manner of adverse reactions within the hearts and minds of the people. It causes a spiritual fog that blurs the vision, throwing things into a state of confusion.

The brethren in Jerusalem did not rush to the aid of the ones who taught the necessity of circumcision and keeping the law of Moses. They rather came to the assistance of those who were being impacted by what they taught. Here is an excellent example of not having respect of persons. Ordinarily, men think of such “respect” as not despising the lowly. But it also applies to not giving undue veneration to those who appear to have been exalted. The troubling effects of the teaching of these men who went out from the brethren in Jerusalem put their persons into the background, and brought the ones effected by their teaching into the foreground.

SUBVERTING YOUR SOULS

“ . . . subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law . . .” Other versions read, “unsettling your souls,” NKJV “troubling your minds,” NIV “unsettled your minds,” NRSV “putting your souls in doubt,” BBE “unsettled your hearts,” CSB “upsetting your souls,” DARBY “cumbered your minds,” GENEVA “disturbed your peace of mind,” NAB “questioned your salvation,” LIVING and “throwing you into confusion.” AMPLIFIED

The Greek word, from which “subverting” is translated. is different from the Greek word for “troubled.” It’s meaning is, “to turn away violently from a right state, to unsettle, subvert,” THAYER “tear down, upset, unsettle,” FRIBERG “to break up one's camp, march away.” LIDDELL-SCOTT In the English language, the word “subvert” means “to overturn or overthrow from the foundation: RUIN.” WEBSTER

Here we go beyond agitation and confusion. It is possible for a ship to maintain its course in a storm, even though it will done with considerable difficulty. A driver can get to his destination, even if his vehicle is faulty, requiring frequent stops and repairs. But when the person navigating the ship is on the course leading in the wrong direction, or the driver of a land vehicle is on the a road going in another direction, there is no hope of arriving at the desired destination. There are roads that, if traveled, guarantee you will not arrive at the proper destination. A person desiring to journey to a southern city can travel forever on an East-West road, rendering it impossible to ever arrive at a Southern goal. A ship master can have his boat placed in a body of water that does not even have a docking point where he desires to go. If he aims to sail to India, and places his ship in Lake Michigan, or even the Mediterranean Sea, there is no possible way to arrive at India on those bodies of water.

Even so, there are doctrines that, even though they may be apparently simplistic and uncomplicated, manage to get the person on the wrong doctrinal road, or place them in the wrong sea of teaching. They get the people off-course, so they begin to think differently. They will read the Bible differently, see God in a faulty way, and see salvation incorrectly.

Teaching that Gentile converts must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses did precisely that. Pursued to its logical conclusion that would lead to erroneous decisions. Here are some examples of such determinations.

- That the Old Covenant did not have a lesser glory, and was never intended to be overshadowed by a covenant of greater glory (2 Cor 3:6-18).
- That the New Covenant is really not new at all, but simply a kind of update of the Old Covenant (Heb 8:8-13).
- That what is outward supercedes what is inward (Rom 2:29).

- That faith does not accomplish what is declared of it (Acts 15:9; Rom 1:16; 5:1; 1 Pet 1:5).

In Our Time

Our time is marked by the dissemination of doctrines that throw the people of God off-course, heading them the wrong direction. Doctrines such as the teaching that we are locked into salvation, or that we can recover from sin procedurally, or that we remain fundamentally sinful after we are born again. Such doctrines are not innocent. They tend to move the one who receives them off the narrow road that leads to life. It does this by changing, or refocusing, their attention. In regeneration one's attention is fixed upon Christ. Working through the powerful Gospel, the Spirit shows the individual the Lord Jesus, who is the appointed means of obtaining remission and glory – and those two go together. Immediately, Satan goes to work to move the attention of the individual from Jesus to things, and other matters that center in self and this world. His effort is successful when the person is subverted, exiting the “highway of holiness” that leads to glory, to take a road that eventually merges with the broad road that leads to destruction (Matt 7:13).

WE GAVE NO SUCH COMMANDMENT

“ . . . to whom we gave no such commandment . . . ” Other versions read, “to whom we gave no instruction,” NASB “without our authorization,” NIV “with no instruction from us,” NRSV “we gave no such order,” BBE “we did not authorize these men to speak,” GWN “without any mandate from us,” NAB “acting without any authority from ourselves,” NJB “we did give no charge,” YLT “we didn't tell them to do this,” IE and “we gave them no express orders or instructions [on the points in question].” AMPLIFIED

At this point, the ones sending the letter make no apology for the expression of the troubling teachers who went out from them. Neither do they attempt to justify them or offer some kind of explanation that will reduce the seriousness of what they had taught. It was the souls of the Gentile brethren that were at stake here, and therefore they made clear that the teaching to which they had been subjected did not originate with them – and the apostles had been given special knowledge to lay the foundation. James had also been given special insight on the matter before them. This is of significance, because the church is built upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20). Any teaching that was at variance with theirs could not possibly have been proper. The church is built upon the foundation they have put in place. That is the point that is being made. This remains true in our generation. The men who had delivered the erroneous word had taken upon themselves to speak for God.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO US TO SEND CHOSEN MEN

“ 25 It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26 Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. 27 We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.”

The letter introduces the additional men who were being sent from Jerusalem. It will be interesting to take special note of their credentials. It reveals now the early brethren thought about Kingdom laborers.

IT SEEMED GOOD UNTO US

“ It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord . . . ” Other versions read, “it seemed good to us, having become of one mind,” “we all agreed,” NIV “we decided unanimously,” NRSV “it seemed good to us, having come to one accord,” RSV “we have unanimously decided,” CJB “we all have thought fit, when assembled,” MRD “we have with one accord decided,” NAB “So we

decided, having come to complete agreement,” NLT “it seemed to us a good thing, when we were come together with one accord,” PNT “we have passed a unanimous resolution,” WILLIAMS and “It has been resolved by us in assembly” AMPLIFIED

The words “seemed good” speaks of the conclusion of deliberation, or sober thought. After considering the matter there was perfect unanimity among the Jerusalem brethren. This was a choice that pleased them all, for “seemed good” means that what was decided satisfied all of the brethren. They saw the propriety of what was being done and all agreed that it was the best thing to do. This was done when they were all in assembly.

Thus, “the unity of the Spirit” is articulated, giving an example to the Gentile believers of being of the same mind and the same judgment. This was done after hearing all of the facts and issues involved and carefully weighing them in a public setting. Some church leaders have rarely, if even, been in a gathering with this kind of accord. This was not a miracle, but the result of people cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart, having a high regard for the will of God, and a profound love for the people of God.

SENDING CHOSEN MEN

“ . . . to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul . . .” Other versions read, “select men,” NASB “To choose some men,” NIV “choose representatives,” NRSV “official representatives,” NLT and “select certain men.” WILLIAMS

I suppose that no one is fully able to delineate the effect of unseasoned leaders in the church, or the practice of vaulting novices to offices of leadership. That is not something that was practiced by the early church, and it ought not to be practiced by the church of our time.

While there are not distinctions within the body of Christ such as Jew and Gentile, male and female, and bond and free (Gal 3:28), there are spiritual distinctions . John referred to “fathers,” “young men,” and “little children” (1 John 2:13-14). Paul distinguished those who were “spiritual,” as being able to restore one who had been “overtaken in a fault” (Gal 6:1). He also referred to those who were “perfect,” or mature (1 Cor 2:6; Phil 3:15), and those who “are strong,” as compared with “the weak” (Rom 15:1). A distinction is also made between those who are “teachers” and those who must be taught “the first principles of the oracles of God” – between those who “have need of milk,” and those who can subsist on “strong meat” (Heb 5:12).

These distinctions are not static, or ones into which believers is locked. They represent stages of development that are integral to growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), being changed from glory to glory by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18), or being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29). It is refreshing to read of a vast assembly of people who considered it “good” to select spiritually competent men for the work of the Lord.

The point here is that the church in Jerusalem did not send novices to accompany the brethren who came from Antioch. It was necessary that mature men be able to witness to the truth of the counsel that was being delivered, as well as the unanimity of the brethren in Jerusalem.

I suppose that no one is fully able to delineate the effect of unseasoned leaders in the church, or the practice of vaulting novices to offices of leadership. That is not something that was practiced by the early church, and it ought not to be practiced by the church of our time. It is good to consider that clarification and spiritual maturity are not necessarily united with advanced age. There are young men like Timothy who, taking

This kind of commitment is only possible when people give themselves wholly to the Lord, living “unto” Him who died for them and rose again.

advantage of the grace made available to all believers, advanced beyond the normal boundaries of his years. There are children like Samuel, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishel, and Azariah, whose spiritual advancement was unusual for their age. With all of the youth leaders and programs that are in place these days, you might think we would have a harvest of spiritually mature and informed young people. However, as a rule, there is little or no sign of such things. People have mistaken youthful zeal for spirituality, and they are not at all the same thing.

THEY HAZARDED THEIR LIVES

“Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Other versions read, “risked their lives,” NKJV “given up their lives,” BBE “dedicated their lives,” CJB “committed their lives,” NJB “jeoparded their lives,” TNT and “endangered their very lives,” WEYMOUTH

The word “hazarded” is translated from the Greek word **paradedwko,si**, which has the following lexical meaning: “to give over . . . properly, to give into the hands (of another) . . . to give over into (one's) power or use,” THAYER “of a self-sacrificial love give up, yield up, risk (one's life),” FRIBERG

This commendation pertains to Barnabas and Paul, who had subjected themselves to great danger for the name of Christ (Acts 13:50; 14:19). They were living examples of men who had given their lives to Christ, and were willing to go wherever they were sent, and deliver the words given to them to speak. Paul verbalized this attitude when he spoke to the elders from Ephesus: “neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). Again, he wrote To the Galatians, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

This kind of commitment is only possible when people give themselves wholly to the Lord, living “unto” Him who died for them and rose again (2 Cor 5:15). While this is the objective for all of those in Christ Jesus, those who have actually done this have always been distinguished for it. Particularly in our time, living solely for the Lord is an exceedingly rare phenomenon. For many, even the slightest inconvenience causes them to draw back, ceasing to press forward. It is a sad circumstance, and has brought the weight of sorrow upon many laborers who have sought to benefit the saints of God. As for myself, I have a growing disdain for any message, or approach to preaching and teaching, that contributes to such an attitude. There is a kind of casual spirit that is being cultured in our day that is of great concern to me. People are actually being led into mediocrity by the pied pipers of faddish religion.

JUDAS AND SILAS

“We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth.”

The intention was for Judas and Silas to bear personal testimony to the things that were written in the letters. There would be a perfect accord of their words with the instructions contained in the letters being delivered. This was because of their insight and spiritual understanding, not their mere familiarity with the letters.

I doubt that it was necessary for them to study the letters on the way to make sure they could rehearse them properly. Their attesting words were not intended to be a mere rehearsal of what was read. Rather, their independent comments on the subject would be in perfect accord with what was written. Should they be interrogated about the matter, there would be no conflict of their reply with the letters. That is because they were men of spiritual understanding.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ 28 For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things . . .”

In this text, we are being exposed to spiritual minds – the godly way of thinking. We will find that the spiritual mind is in perfect accord with the Spirit of God. A religion that permits men to maintain a mind that is at variance with the Word of God cannot be true. Redemption brings accords between God and men, dispelling the variance that exists by nature. This accord is spelled out in the New Covenant. “For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb 8:10-11).

- The mind is impacted: “ I will put My laws into their mind.”
- The heart is made new: “ I will...write them in their hearts.”
- God will be personalized to them, and be their preference: “ I will be to them a God.”
- God will be inclined to them: “ they shall be to Me a people.”
- There will be an experiential acquaintance with God: “they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest.”

These descriptions are not theoretical, or in the abstract. They actually take place in the new Covenant. What we will now read is the result of this declared unanimity between God and man through Jesus Christ.

IT SEEMED GOOD TO THE HOLY SPIRIT AND US

“For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us . . .” Other versions read, “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and unto us,” NASB “it was the Holy Spirit's decision—and ours—” CSB “The Holy Spirit and we have agreed,” GWN “it seemed best to the Holy Spirit and to us,” NET “It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves,” NJB “The Holy Spirit thinks you should have no more burdens. We agree,” LIVING and “it has seemed right to the Holy Spirit and to us.” PHILLIPS

Perhaps you have heard men say of some word from God, “That is not the way I would have said it.” Or, some have referred to a Divine requirement and added, “But you know how we are, we just do not want to do what God says.” Ignorant men have a way of saying such things and making them sound intelligent, or reflective of the Christian norm. It is staggering to consider how much of this kind of talk is being heard these days.

However, our text presents a true picture of the thinking of those who are in Christ Jesus. Keep in mind that the “us” of the letter are “the apostles and elders, with the whole church ” in Jerusalem (Acts 15:22). The group is described as “all the multitude” (Acts 15:12).

Here is an example of “one mind and one mouth” (Rom 15:6), and being “of one mind” (2 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8). When was it that the Spirit’s mind on this matter was made known? It was doubtless when James spoke, following the discussions and the reports of Peter, Paul, and Barnabas (15:13-21). It is written that following James’ words, “the apostles and elders, with the whole church,” were “pleased” to have the letters James recommended to be written and sent to “the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia” (15:22). Now, the letters confirm that the Jerusalem brethren had considered the words of James to be the expression of the Holy Spirit

Himself. Being themselves a spiritual people, they were in perfect agreement with the directive of the Holy Spirit. I acknowledge that this kind of accord makes no sense at all to an institutional mind-set. However, it makes perfect sense to those who have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16).

NO GREATER BURDEN

“ . . . to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things . . .” Other versions read, “no greater burden than these essentials,” NASB “not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements,” NIV “not to lay any heavier burden on you than the following requirements,” CJB “You only need to do these things,” IE and “not to lay upon you any greater burden than these indispensable requirements.” AMPLIFIED 0

This is not intended to encompass the totality of spiritual life, but only prohibitions spelled out by the Law. Note, there is no reference to living by faith (Heb 10:38), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25), resisting the devil (James 4:7), pursuing holiness (Heb 12:14), seeking the things that are above (Col 3:1-2), or working out ones own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). Nothing is said about fearing God (1 Pet 2:17), desiring the sincere milk of the word (1 Pet 2:2), or keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph 4:3). There is no reference to growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (2 Pet 3:18), or putting on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-17). They are not told of the necessity of loving God (1 John 5:2), or believing Him (Rom 15:13; 1 Pet 1:8), or watching for the coming of the Lord (James 5:7-8).

No one should suspect for a moment that if all one did was “abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication” (Acts 15:29), they would have fulfilled all that is required of believers, and be doing very well.

Keep in mind that the church in Antioch was an exemplary one. They had teachers and prophets (Acts 13:1). Barnabas and Paul had remained there for a whole year, teaching much people (Acts 11:26). This is the church from which Barnabas and Saul were called by the Holy Spirit whole the church was fasting and ministering to the Lord. After completing the mission to which they were called, and returning to Antioch, Paul and Barnabas remained “a long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:27) – possible 4-8 years.

However, something had occurred for the first time there. Jewish teachers from Judaea had come and taught them that they could not be saved without be circumcised after the manner of Moses. This was the first time such teaching had been confronted and weighed. Even though there were prophets and teachers there, not the least of which were Paul and Barnabas, the matter was not sufficiently clear to arrive at an acceptable conclusion. They did not have the epistles of Paul to consult. Further, heaven did not send them a special word on the matter through their prophets.

The nature of the association of the church with Judaism was not clearly seen at that time. In fact, it was not until some time later that special insight on this association was given to Paul for proclamation.

The nature of the association of the church with Judaism was not clearly seen at that time. In fact, it was not until some time later that special insight on this association was given to Paul for proclamation (Rom 11:17;18; Eph 2:12-22| 3:3-6; Col 1:26-27).

- In Christ, the Gentiles partake of the “root and fatness of the olive tree,” which is technically a Jewish tree. What is more, it is the “root” of that tree (the promises made to Abraham), that supports Gentile believers (Rom 11:17-18).

- Gentiles, formerly “without God in the world,” have been brought close to God by the blood of Christ (Eph 2:12-13).

- The Old Covenant, which was a wall separating Jew and Gentile, has been broken down in Christ (Eph 2:14-15).
- From the Jews and the Gentiles, and in Christ Jesus, God has made “one new man” – a new creation, and new generation, or family (Eph 2:15).
- Both Jews and Gentiles are “reconciled unto God in one body” (Eph 2:16).
- Together, as “one new man” and “one body” those in Christ have “access by one Spirit unto the Father” (Eph 2:18).
- In Christ Gentiles are “no more foreigners,” but are “fellow citizens with the saints and household of God,” which was formerly limited to the Jews (Eph 2:19).
- This means that all of the promises of newness that were given exclusively to the Jews, belong to the Gentiles who have lost their former identity, and, in Christ, have become “fellowheirs” (Eph 3:6).
- Now, even though Christ was promised to the Jews alone (Deut 18: Isa 9:6-7), in Him the Gentiles enjoy “the riches of the of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:26-27).

The word that was delivered to the Gentile brethren in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia was against the backdrop of this circumstance. Even the believers in Jerusalem had not seen the ramifications of this prior to this occasion. That is why some of them sought to impose the ceremonial law upon the Gentiles, rather than emphasizing the blessing that had been promised to Abraham and his seed (Gen 12:2; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Also, until the Lord clarified this matter through James, and later through Paul, early believers did not see it clearly – namely that it was “the blessing of Abraham” (Gen 28:4) that was realized in Christ, not the inclusion of the Gentiles under the regulations of the First Covenant. Later, Paul said it this way in his epistle to the Galatians: “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: that the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14). Notice that this “blessing,” which was not spelled out to Abraham, involves receiving the Holy Spirit – something that Peter had attested took place among the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius.

Continued Difficulty

To this day, professing Christians have considerable difficulty distinguishing precisely what it is that is realized in Christ Jesus. Men continue to approach the subject as though morality was the fundamental issue, and that morality is enforced by laws and ordinances. They fail to see that such an approach is precisely what was done under the Old Covenant. They also forget, if they have ever known, that the administration of the Law did not make a single soul better, stronger, or more capable of obeying the Law of God. Of course, that is not why it was given. It was rather given “that every mouth might be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God” (Rom 3:19). The Old Covenant identified the need, but did not supply the remedy. During the initial development of the church, this was not so apparent. However, because of the nature of spiritual life, and the revelation of God, some clarity finally was realized. However, even then, corrective teaching was required because of the difficulties associated with failing to see the superiority of living by faith (Rom 6-8; Gal 3:2-5). Extensive teaching was also delivered to Jewish believers concerning the superiority of Christ Jesus and His priesthood (the book of Hebrews).

Continued Confusion

Our own time is marked by a pronounced ignorance on this subject – namely, the merging of Jew and Gentile into “one new man” in Christ Jesus. There simply is not much teaching being done on this subject. This is particularly reflected in an expression that has become quite common in our time

– “Judeo-Christian.” Having been incorporated into politically-correct speech, this term is defined as follows: “Judeo-Christian: having historical roots in both Judaism and Christianity. ” MERRIAM-WEBSTER A further explanation is: "A term used to describe the body of concepts and values which are thought to be held in common by Judaism and Christianity . . . historians use the term Judeo-Christian to refer to the influence of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament on Protestant thought and values . . ." WIKIPEDIA

This is not a Scriptural view of the situation. The moral, or ethical principles revealed in Moses and the Prophets are not Jewish. They are Divine, and were given to the Jews. But they were not confined to them. They were required of all men prior to the giving of the Law (Gen 4:11-12; 9:6; 18:20; 20:3). During the administration of the Old Covenant, they were also required to the heathen (Isa 13:1; 15:1; 17:1; 19:1; 21:11; 23:1; Dan 4:32; 5:22-23; Nah 1:1; Zech 9:1). It promotes inaccurate understanding when men refer to the Law, or the Ten Commandments, as “Jewish.” Because it was given through Moses, it is referred to as “the law of Moses” (Mal 4:4; John 1:17). However, in the most precise sense, it is “the law of God” (Josh 24:26; Neh 8:8; Rom 7:25), or “the law of the Lord” (Psa 1:2); Amos 2:4). When used, the expression “the law of the Jews” refers to the ceremonial law, not the tables of the covenant.

The Scriptures do not approach ethics from the standpoint of the Jews and the Christians. Nor does it postulate that the Jews and the Christians hold the same moral values and worship the same God. That is not how these things are presented by revealed truth. When men associate ethics – matters dealing with good and bad, and moral duty – with the Jews and the Christians, they have failed to accentuate the God who alone defines morality. They have unwittingly cast the issue of morality into the caldron of human opinion.

It is quite true that Paul once said, “Is He the God of the Jews only? is He not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith” (Rom 3:29-30). This expression, however is not saying that the Jews and the Gentiles have the same moral values or spiritual principles. It is rather affirming that God justified them in the same manner – by faith. In order to do this, He had to show a new thing to the Gentiles, enabling them to find what they were not seeking (Isa 65:1; Rom 10:20). Further, He also justified the Jews by faith, which contradicted the folly of them seeking to obtain righteousness by their own works (Rom 9:31-32).

This unfortunate environment (ignorance of the relationship of Jews and Gentiles) has also produced a gross neglect of the writings of Moses and the Prophets. Whether by outright profession, or simply by practice, those writings (Genesis through Malachi) are imagined to have little to do with life in Christ. They are seen as pertaining to another time, and intended to be limited to the Jews. The effect of this misconception has yielded a distortion of God, His purpose, Christ Jesus, salvation, and the nature of life in Him. It has caused division in the body of God, blinded men’s eyes, and caused the simple to embrace doctrines that contradict the truth of God.

Had the early church not addressed this matter as they did, they would have put a yoke upon themselves that transcended anything they could have imagined. Yet, with the clear record of their insight, religious men have still stumbled into all manner of error. They have done it because a different mind-set is being promoted – one that does not have Christ at its center, heaven in its eye, of God’s Law in their heart.

IF YOU DO THIS, YOU WILL DO WELL

“ 29 That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.”

The brevity that characterizes these prohibitions is noteworthy. It confirms abstinence itself was

the point,

When the hearts of men are good and honest, they are in Christ, and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in them – in that context, teaching like that of our text can be followed with confidence and effectiveness.

not how it was carried out. The Ten commandments were characterized by this kind of transience. Like the directions that are given here, they were brief and to the point (Ex 20:3-17). For those who can receive it, there is a point at which extended explanations tend to obscure what is being said. This accounts for the relative impotence of the “how-to” books and methodologies that have flooded the American churches. With all of the professed expertise, explanations, and detailed procedures, sin is not diminishing in the churches. Marriage seminars ad infinitum have not diminished the growing number of divorces. Child-rearing techniques have not produced a generation of godly young people. And why is this so? Because there is too much of men in this type of teaching, and too little of God. God is not honoring these methodologies with Divine power, because they have not come from Him.

When the hearts of men are good and honest, they are in Christ, and the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in them – in that context, teaching like that of our text can be followed with confidence and effectiveness. However, if this is not true of the people, or they are addressed as though it is true, the human wisdom that is presented will overshadow the Word itself – and the Word is the means that is used by Spirit in dealing with the hearts of men (Eph 6:17). It must not be in the background!

THE PROHIBITIONS

“That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication. . .”

The determination that was made verbally, is the one that was written down: “ they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood” (Acts 15:20).

• **Religious Pollution:** “That ye abstain from meats offered to idols.” A proper concept of God Almighty is absolutely essential, for eternal life is knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He sent (John 17:3). If an essential aspect of the New Covenant is, “they shall all know Me” (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:11), the understanding of God cannot remain deficient, as though there were competing gods. The truth of the matter is that repeated willing exposure to something that was presented to another god tends to produce uncomely circumstances. Thus Paul reasoned with the Corinthians concerning the technicalities of being free to eat all meats: “Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake ; for ‘the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness’” NKJV (1 Cor 10:25-26). This was such a sensitive matter, that it even involved eating with an unbeliever: “If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. But if anyone says to you , ‘This was offered to idols,’ do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; for ‘the earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness’ NKJV (1 Cor 10:28). Although the believer was personally aware that an idol was nothing, and that he was receiving the meat in thanksgiving to God, yet the open acknowledgment that the meat was sacrificed to an idol altered the circumstance. The impression would be left that the believer was acknowledging the idol in eating the meat (1 Cor 10:29-33), and such an impression must not be left!.

I gather from this that the instruction to the Gentiles was not intended to provoke them to ask whether or not the meat was offered to idols. They were simply to eat the meat giving thanks to God for it. If they knew it was offered to a false God, they were to avoid it, for it would detract from giving glory to God (1 Cor 10:33).

• **Disdain for Life:** “ and from blood, and from things strangled . . .” Life comes from God (Acts 17:26). Although life is encapsulated in the word “breath” (Acts 17:26), physiologically “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17:11). Add to this the fact that redemption and atonement are associated with blood (Ex 30:10; Lev 17:11; Rev 5:9). In tutoring Israel under the Law, God taught them to maintain an absolute respect for blood. Nothing must be allowed to diminish that respect, or cause the people to look upon it as though it was common.

• **Moral Pollution:** “. . . and from fornication. . .” Although “all unrighteousness is sin,” fornication is among those sins that particularly live out self-love, as well as a disdain for others. Therefore, the child of God is told “Flee fornication,” for “Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18). The body is to be a vehicle for the glory of God, not fleshly gratification. In Christ, the body has been purchased (1 Cor 6:19), and is considered to be a “member of Christ” (1 Cor 6:15). In fact, we have been bought with a price, and do not belong to ourselves. Thus the Spirit reasons, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:20). All of this teaching is inherent in the words “abstain from fornication.” When the Gentiles take that admonition seriously, they will, through the Spirit, come to reason in this manner.

It is important to note that the apostles and elders did not go beyond the boundaries established by God's Word. Often, when professed Christian teachers direct people on how to live, details are provided that are not contained in Scripture. Of course, the strength and selling point of their systems are those details. Although they may profess they are founded on Scripture, they are not the Word of God itself. In this letter, the prohibitions were obviously based upon what the Lord had said.

- Abstain from meats offered to idols – Ex 34:15; Psa 106:28.
- Fornication – Ex 24:14; Lev 18:20-23; 20:13-16; Deut 23:17; 27:20-23;
- Abstaining from blood – Gen 9:4; Lev 3:17; 7:26; Deut 15:23.
- Things strangled – Lev 17:15; 22:8; Deut 14:21.

YE SHALL DO WELL

“. . . from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well.” Other versions read, “it shall be well with you,” ASV “you will be doing the right thing,” CJB “it shall be well with you,” ERV “you will prosper,” WILLIAMS and “you will make good progress.” PHILLIPS

The phrase “do well” means more than simply doing “the right thing,” as some versions read. Nor, indeed, does doing well speak of a manner of life in which one simply continues to keep the rules. The phrase used in this letter to the churches suggests growth and advancement in Christ – spiritual progression. Some versions pick up on this implication: “you will prosper,” WILLIAMS and “you will make good progress.” PHILLIPS

This by no means suggests that spiritual life allows for breaking the rules. Such a notion is too foolish to require any further explanation.

Of itself, there is no lasting value in rule-keeping. Jesus indicated this when He said, “ Will any man of you who has a servant plowing or tending sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, Come at once and take your place at the table? Will he not instead tell him, Get my supper ready and gird yourself and serve me while I eat and drink; then afterward you yourself shall eat and drink? Is he grateful and does he praise the servant because he did what he was ordered to do? Even so on your part, when you have done everything that was assigned and commanded you, say, We are unworthy servants [possessing no merit, for we have not gone beyond our obligation]; we have [merely] done what was our duty to do” (Lk 17:7-10).

This is such a different way of thinking, that Christians in our country might even object to what Jesus plainly declared. There are entire programs, that identify themselves with Christ, that teach people to be highly pleased with their conduct because they have managed to do what they were told. Thus a person who was in bondage to strong drink is praised because he has not taken a drink for a period of time. This kind of mentality is built into the very fabric of these programs. I was raised in a religious culture in which people were praised and awarded because they regularly attended the assembly – something that is required of every believer (Heb 10:25). Perspectives like this fail to consider spiritual growth. To those who advocate them, growing in Christ is being able to go a longer time without falling unto sin. But this is total nonsense, for it violates the words of the Lord and teaches men to attach worth to abstinence instead of attainment.

Spiritual growth involves the addition of spiritual qualities, not the subduing of ungodly ones (1 Pet 1:5-8). In Christ we “have escaped from the corruption that is in the world through lust,” in order that we might appropriate what is in the kingdom of God through grace (1 Pet 1:4). Where abstinence from sin is not matched by the apprehension of the truth and its associated benefits, no advancement has been made. Transformation does not consist of dropping old habits, but of being “changed into the same image” (2 Cor 3:18).

This whole matter is being greatly obscured by the modern thrust on recovery, abstinence, and self-discipline. It is an extremely serious situation, for it is impeding growth in Christ Jesus. The Savior has taught us that the absence of fruit precedes being removed from the Vine, which is Christ Himself. “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit . . . If a man abide not in Me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned . . . Herein is My Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples . . . Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:2,6,8,16).

Fruit is not the absence of blight or some other plant disease. Even so, spiritual fruit is not the absence of sin, or overcoming a bad habit. From the personal perspective, refraining from sin may appear to be a gigantic accomplishment, and worthy of all praise. But that is not at all the case. Not sinning is the ground level, not the structure. It is only to the degree that we do not sin that we can add spiritual qualities to our lives. It is only to the degree that we are not giving ourselves to the flesh that we can give ourselves to the Spirit.

Flesh and spirit cannot mingle. Sin and righteousness cannot merge. Carnality and holiness cannot combine. This is why Jesus said, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt 6:24). This is why Paul commanded the people to rid themselves of all filthiness and flesh and spirit, in order that they might perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 6:17-7:1).

Advancement in spiritual life postulates a corresponding lack of involvement in sin and distraction. Thus it is written, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:1-2). The person who imagines that they can fix their eyes on Jesus (for that is what looking to Him means), while they indulge in sin or continue to carry distracting weights,

has not thought correctly.

The Purpose of the Letters

The letters delivered to the Gentile believers were intended to assist them in ridding themselves of things that take away from spiritual life. Unholy involvements require God given capabilities – the heart, the mind, the body. They require thinking, purposing, devotion, and willingness. All of these are to be given to God, and when they are not, one's capacity for God is reduced. What is given to the flesh cannot be given to God, for we cannot serve two masters.

On the other hand, refraining from the matters that have been specified must be matched by giving themselves to the things God has provided “for life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). All of that is wrapped in the words, “ye shall do well.”

FARE YE WELL

“Fare ye well.” Other versions read, “Farewell,” NKJV “May you be happy,” BBE “Shalom,” CJB “Be ye steadfast in the Lord,” MRD “So fare well,” PNT “be strong,” YLT “Now we say good-bye,” LIVING “Goodbye,” ISV and “Farewell [be strong]! AMPLIFIED

The Greek word translated “fare ye well” is **Errwsqe** . As used here, its lexical meaning is, “to be strong, to thrive, prosper; hence, the second person (singular) imperative is the usual formula in closing a letter, e;rrwso , farewell,” THAYER

This final word had particular reference to the statement, “from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well .” The idea is that they would be strong and consistent in the fulfilling of the exhortation, for their growth in Christ depended on their success in that endeavor. The reason for this circumstance is that indulging in forbidden activity is not simply wrong. It takes something from the transgressor. In order to sin, the person has to let go of something, refocus his attention away from Christ, and allow his own interests to supercede those of the One who has purchased him.

The idea conveyed in this text is that the brethren in Jerusalem not only saw the necessity of delivering a protective word to the Gentiles. They also fervently desired that they do well in carrying out that word. In this, the real servants of God are distinguished from those who are little more than hirelings.

Some of the versions do a great injustice to the text by representing it as a kind of cultural saying – i.e. “Good-bye,” LIVING/IE and “be happy.” BBE Such representations are wholly inappropriate. The reason is that a Jewish “Farewell” differed from that of any other nation. This was a nation that had been Divinely cultured. By Divine decree and influence, their entire lives revolved around their association with God. Nothing was excluded. Some examples will suffice to establish this point.

- The Aaronic Blessing. “Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace” (Num 6:23-27).

- The Blessing of Melchisedec. “And he blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19).

- A Davidic Blessing. “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David. The LORD hear thee in the day of trouble; the name of the God of Jacob defend thee; Send thee help from the sanctuary, and strengthen thee out of Zion; Remember all thy offerings, and accept thy burnt sacrifice; Selah. Grant thee according to thine own heart, and fulfil all thy counsel” (Psa 20:1-4).

- A Psalmic Blessing. “The LORD that made heaven and earth bless thee out of Zion” (Psa 134:3).

- The Commendation of Paul. “And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

The idea conveyed in this text is that the brethren in Jerusalem not only saw the necessity of delivering a protective word to the Gentiles. They also fervently desired that they do well in carrying out that word. In this, the real servants of God are distinguished from those who are little more than hirelings. They possess a genuine interest in the people of God, desiring their maturity and stability. A person who does not possess this care cannot minister to the people of God.

A Crucial Perspective

There is another perspective here, and it has to do with conducting oneself wisely. When the people have demonstrated their commitment to the Lord, it is not wise to continue to labor and pray as though this was not the case. When people have left all to follow Jesus, it is not wise to continue to admonish them to forsake all, or to pray that God will lead them into a deeper level of commitment to Him. If people have an obvious commitment to holiness, and are clearly in the process of separating themselves from the world, that is not the time to speak to them of forming a wider gap between themselves and the world. It is far better to ask the Lord to bless the people in their manifested endeavors to please Him. People are to be encouraged to do well, or “fare well” in their efforts.

There is a good reason for proceeding in this manner. When people are living by faith, a certain culturing of the soul is taking place. Such a life is duly noted by the Lord of glory, for His eyes are “upon the righteous” (Psa 34:15). Holy angels are dispatched to minister to those who are the “heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit is leading them to mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13-14), and to cause them to abound in joy (Rom 15:13). Jesus is manifesting Himself to them, because they love Him and are keeping His word (John 14:21,23). Such people are to be urged to “continue in God’s goodness” (Rom 11:22), to “continue in the faith” (Col 1:23), and to “let brotherly love continue” (Heb 13:1).

This is the spirit in which this letter was written to the Gentiles, expressing the desire of the Jerusalem brethren to put no greater burden on the Gentile believers. This approach does require the wisdom that is from above, but that is available to all of the saints (James 1:25).

THEY REJOICED FOR CONSOLATION

“ 30 So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: 31 Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.”

The decision has been made concerning the inquiry from the church in Antioch. Letters have been written, and men have been chosen to accompany the entourage from Antioch.

WHEN THEY WERE DISMISSED

Note that they gathered all of the people together, not just the leaders or elders. The entire church convened to hear the word that was sent from Jerusalem. Similarly, the whole church had also convened in Jerusalem.

“So when they were dismissed. . .” Other versions read, “were sent off,” NKJV “sent away,” NASB “being let go,” DARBY “when they were departed,” GENEVA “sent on their way,” GWN “the party left,” NJB “the messengers went at once,” NLT “having been let go,” YLT “went at once,”

LIVING “having been solemnly sent,” WEYMOUTH and “when they had been dispatched.”
MONTGOMERY

The idea here is not that the meeting had concluded and every man went his own way. Neither is the text simply saying that the company left Jerusalem and headed for Antioch. Rather, these men left as representatives of the Jerusalem church. They left to bring the answer to the inquiry that was sent to Jerusalem by the brethren in Antioch. God had answered the matter through James, and had done so after all those present had heard the facts in the case – which facts consisted of what the Lord had done among the Gentiles.

THEY GATHERED THE MULTITUDE TOGETHER

“ . . . they came to Antioch: and when they had gathered the multitude together . . .” Other versions read, “having gathered the congregation together,” NASB “they gathered the church together,” NIV “having got the people together,” BBE “they gathered the group together,” CJB “After gathering the assembly,” CSB “assembled all the people,” MRD “after gathering the entire group together,” NET “they summoned the whole community,” NJB and “they called a general meeting of the believers.” NLT

Note that they gathered all of the people together, not just the leaders or elders. The entire church convened to hear the word that was sent from Jerusalem. Similarly, the whole church had also convened in Jerusalem. If you have ever been part of a conventional church, can you remember a single time when the entire church came together to hear a word? I have personally ministered to congregations who could not manage to do this on the Lord’s Day. Some places stand a slight chance of doing this on Christmas or Easter, or perhaps for some general church outing. Candidly, I cannot conceive of this event happening in the average church.

But it did take place in the Antioch church, and there was a reason for it. Things relating to salvation were taken seriously. When teaching was introduced that was different, yet claimed to be directly related to salvation, a satisfactory and authoritative answer was sought on the issue. They came together because they were accustomed to meeting together. They did not forsake the assembling of themselves together – and this was several years after that work was commenced under the ministry of Barnabas and Saul.

THEY DELIVERED THE EPISTLE

“ . . . they delivered the epistle...” Other versions read, “They delivered the letter,” NKJV “they gave them the letter,” BBE and “handed them the letter.” MONTGOMERY

The letter was delivered, as we will see, to be read by some one in the Antioch assembly. This was a common practice among the early churches. Paul charged the Colossian brethren to read his epistle to them, and then to see to it that it was “read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye read the epistle from Laodicea” (Col 4:16). He also spoke of the Ephesians reading his letter to them (Eph 3:4). That is, these letters were not mere reference manuals, like much of the churches treat the epistles.

Let me again underscore that the entire assembly came together for this reading. The truth of God applies to the whole body. I cannot conceive of the young people being excused from this gathering on the supposition that it would be over their head. Anyone who is old enough to believe and be baptized is old enough to listen to what is being said in the assembly. Those who had little ones no doubt had them there also, for that was the manner of the God-cultured Jews (Deut 29:10-11; 31:12; Josh 8:35; 2 Chron 20:13; Ezra 10:1) – and things got started in Antioch in a synagogue (Acts 13:14).

THEY REJOICED WITH CONSOLATION

This incident confirms the troubling effects of false teaching – even when it is delivered by seemingly sincere, yet uninformed, people. Those who taught the necessity of being circumcised after the manner of Moses brought a spiritual tempest upon the church in Antioch.

“Which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.” Other versions read, “they rejoiced over its encouragement,” NKJV “they rejoiced because of its encouragement,” NASB “they were glad over its encouraging message,” NIV “they rejoiced at the exhortation,” NRSV “were delighted with the encouragement it gave them,” NJB “there was great joy throughout the church that day as they read it,” LIVING “they were happy. It encouraged them,” IE “they were delighted with the exhortation,” NAB “were delighted with the comfort it brought them,” WEYMOUTH “they were pleased with the encouragement it brought them,” ISV and “the people rejoiced at the consolation and encouragement [it brought them]” AMPLIFIED

The response of these brethren to the letters read to them confirms several things.

- They delighted in the law of God after the inward man (Rom 7:11).
- With their minds they themselves served the law of God (Rom 7:25).
- They had received the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10-11).
- The law had been put into their hearts (Heb 10:16a).
- The Law had been written in their minds (Heb 10:16b).
- They did not refuse Him who was speaking from heaven (Heb 12:25).
- They desired the sincere milk of the Word, and were thus able to grow through it (1 Pet 2:2).
- They took heed unto the Word, and the day dawned, and the Day Star rose in their hearts – that is, they were able to see the truth of what was said (2 Pet 1:19). That is why they delighted in it.

This incident confirms the troubling effects of false teaching – even when it is delivered by seemingly sincere, yet uninformed, people. Those who taught the necessity of being circumcised after the manner of Moses brought a spiritual tempest upon the church in Antioch – like the storm that arose on Galilee when the disciples were going to the other side. They no doubt caused doubts and fears to arise. See, these were real converts, and the thought that they may not have done everything required to be initially saved was troubling to them. Yet, they were not gullible like some in Corinth, accepting what erroneous teachers delivered to them (2 Cor 11:4). The appointed objective “of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Tim 1:5). The possession of those benefits will protect the soul against the intrusion of error.

This account confirms the wonderful reality that the secret to profiting from the Word of God is to receive it, mixing it with faith (Heb 4:2). That is what the brethren in Antioch did when they heard the letters from Jerusalem read to them. They say the truth of them, and it relieved them of the burden cause by false teaching.

CONCLUSION

We have been given the record of how the early church handled a thorny problem – wrongly instructing Gentile converts. The intrusive teachers came down from Judea, and were associated with the church in Jerusalem. They no doubt came with noble intentions, but their teaching was wrong. Good intentions do not diminish the adverse impact of faulty doctrine.

The teaching in question was, was, “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). As soon as the teaching was heard, Paul and Barnabas sensed that it

was not true, and had “no small dissension and disputation” with the ones bringing the doctrine. Following this disputation, the matter had not been settled. The brethren in Antioch, however, were not willing to let the matter go. Something had been taught that pertained to salvation, and it had to be settled. That is a subject concerning which God has provided no margin for error. Salvation comes from God, and He is the One who determines the terms of its acceptance.

At this point we see the value of informed and mature believers – spiritual leaders. Knowing that such existed in Jerusalem, they send some brethren with Paul and Barnabas to inquire concerning this matter. They did not hold a vote among the brethren concerning the issue, with a majority vote determining what would be taught.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem and being received, it was discovered that several in that body of believers held to the same doctrine – namely that circumcision was required to be saved. These men, formerly from among the Pharisees, stepped forward and affirmed their position, adding that the Gentiles were also required “to keep the law of Moses” (15:5). Up to this time, this had not apparently been an issue. However, with the influx of Gentiles, the variance now surfaced.

I am persuaded if there was an environment of spiritual maturity and eagerness to obtain the truth in the church, we would find far less erroneous views surfacing. What took place in Antioch with the teachers from Judaea was not their normal experience.

However, when the church busies itself with resolving personal, domestic, and social issues, there will not be much talk about matters pertaining to the identity of the people with God – and that is the issue of salvation. When a problem-solving mentality grips the church, sound doctrine begins to fade away. This is because the purpose of salvation is not to rectify all of the problems associated with living in this world. The overriding objective of salvation of God is to prepare people for the passing of the heavens and the earth, the day of judgment, and eternity with the Lord. Where these things are not seen and practiced, the door is open to false teachers.

Allow me to underscore that the problem that was raised in Antioch, and then in Jerusalem, did not pertain to church order, domestic ideals, or social involvements. The type of difficulty the church confronted, together with their response to it, indicated the thrust of that fellowship. Also, the sincerity of their hearts is seen in their agreement concerning sending men to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.

The necessity of disputing against questionable teaching should also be noted. The perpetrators must be able to stand behind their teaching, and others must be called in when necessary. However, there is one complicating factor. If there are no mature brethren in the congregation, or those devoted enough to the Lord to refuse to accept something that has not been duly substantiated, error will have its own way with the people.

Allow me to once again rehearse the events associated with the resolution of this problem.

- The people in Antioch were devoted enough to the Lord to draw the attention of people who thought they knew the truth (15:1).
- When questionable teaching was introduced, Paul and Barnabas immediately contended with those delivering it (15:2a).
- The brethren determined to send some of their own number with Paul and Barnabas to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem “about this question” (15:2b).
- On their way to Jerusalem they declared the conversion of the Gentiles in Phenice and Samaria, causing “great joy among the brethren” (15:3).
- Having arrived in Jerusalem, and being received by the church, the apostles, and

elders, Paul and Barnabas “declared all things that God had done with them” (15:4).

- At this time certain believers of the sect of the Pharisees said “That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5).

- The apostles and elders then came together to “consider the matter ” (15:6).

- There was “much disputing” about this issue (15:7a).

- After the disputation, Peter got up and testified of how the Lord had called and used him in delivering the Gospel to the Gentiles, and how they had believed (15:7).

- He reported that God gave them the Holy Spirit, just as He did the disciples (15:8).

- He said God put no difference between the Jew and Gentile, purifying their hearts by faith (15:9).

- It declared it unreasonable to place a yoke upon the Gentiles that the Jews themselves were not able to bear (15:10).

- He affirmed that the Jews would be saved by the grace of God, just as the Gentiles were (15:11).

- This silenced the multitude (15:12a).

- Paul and Barnabas then rehearsed “what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them” (15:12).

- This again silenced the multitude, and they “held their peace” (15:13a).

- James then delivered a response to the people (15:13b).

- He said that God had visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (15:14).

- He declared that this was in agreement with the prophets, who spoke of God building again the tabernacle of David in order that the Gentiles might seek the Lord (15:15-17).

- He affirmed that what God is doing has been known to Him from the beginning of the world (15:18).

- His sentence was that the brethren not trouble the Gentiles who had “turned to God” (15:19).

- He determination was that letters be sent to the Gentiles declaring critical matters concerning abstinence (15:20-21).

- The saying of James pleased “the apostles and elders, with the whole church” (15:22).

- “Chief men” were chosen from Jerusalem, namely Judas and Silas, to accompany the brethren back to Antioch (15:22).

- The required letters were written, affirming that the men who had taught that circumcision was necessary had, indeed, come from their congregation. However they had received no authority from the leaders to speak as they did (15:23-14).

- The letters affirmed that everyone had agreed to say these things, and that their instructions were from the Holy Spirit (15:25-29a).

- They said that if the Gentiles fulfilled these instructions, they would be doing well (15:29b).

- The letters were delivered to the brethren in Antioch (15:30).

- The letters were read, and the brethren “rejoiced with consolation” (15:31).

There is a marvelous example of everything being worked together for good. Note the absence of anything that continued to divide the people. Observe how there was total agreement, and how that agreement required some to alter their thinking, which they willingly did. Behold how the brethren were profited by what as done.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #67

THE WORD SPREADS, BARNABAS AND SAUL DIVIDED

“ 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them. 33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still. 35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also. 36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do. 37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work. 39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus; 40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches. ” (Acts 15:32-41)

INTRODUCTION

Again, the priority of the body of Christ is confirmed. I will continue to draw your attention to this precedence throughout the book of Acts. This by no means suggests that the disciples failed to preach the Gospel to every creature. However, it does appear that they were specifically directed into this holy activity, and did not simply roam about at random. There were times when they purposed to go here and there, preaching the Word where Jesus had not been named. However, even in those purposes, a due regard was given to the churches.

As excellent example of this is found in the life of Paul – certainly one of the premier propagators of the Gospel to the whole world. Because of serious doctrinal and behavioral deficiencies in Corinth, Paul especially endeavored to establish them, holding his other plans in abeyance until this was accomplished. He wrote to them declaring he had, “hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you . . .” (2 Cor 10:15-16). Other versions read, “we have the hope and confident expectation that as

your faith continues to grow, our field among you may be greatly enlarged, still within the limits of our commission, So

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- **JUDAS AND SILAS EXHORT THE BRETHREN (15:32a)**
- **THEY TARRIED IN ANTIOCH FOR A TIME (15:33)**
- **SILAS DECIDED TO STAY FOR A WHILE (15:34)**
- **PAUL AND BARNABAS REMAIN IN ANTIOCH, TEACHING AND PREACHING THE WORD OF GOD (15:35)**
- **PAUL DETERMINES TO VISIT THE CHURCHES (15:36)**
- **BARNABAS WANTS TO TAKE MARK, BUT PAUL DID NOT THINK THAT WAS GOOD (15:37-38)**
- **A SHARP CONTENTION CAUSES PAUL AND BARNABAS TO SEPARATE (15:39)**
- **PAUL CHOOSES SILAS FOR THE DETERMINED WORK (15:40)**
- **PAUL AND SILAS GO THROUGHOUT SYRIA AND CILICIA CONFIRMING THE CHURCHES**
- **CONCLUSION**

that [we may even] preach the Gospel in lands [lying] beyond you, without making a boast of work already done in another [man's] sphere of activity [before we came on the scene],” AMPLIFIED “so that we can preach the gospel in the regions beyond you,” NIV “ so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you,” NRSV and “ Then we will be able to go and preach the Good News in other places far beyond you.” NLT

The reason for this priority should be very evident. The church is the depository for all the fulness of Christ – the place where He imparts both His nature and graces. As it is written, “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all ” (Eph 1:22-23). Jesus has, in fact, been made the head over all things “ for the church,” NIV/NRSV/RSV That is, He has been given “to the church” in the capacity of “Head over all,” in order that He might impart Himself to it. The reason for this is seen in the words of verse twenty-three, “Which is His body, the fullness of Him Who fills all in all [for in that body lives the full measure of Him Who makes everything complete, and Who fills everything everywhere with Himself].” AMPLIFIED

This church, which is Christ's body, is what every convert is “added to” (Acts 2:47). If that church is weak and emaciated, it is a living contradiction of the revealed purpose of God, to conform the people to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). Adding people to such a contradiction leads to the perpetuation of spiritual mediocrity, which is antithetical to the Divine Nature itself.

It is questionable whether or not it is even right for a weak and uninformed church to be engaged in any kind of outreach ministry. Precisely what is it that they have to offer? Such a group is like a half-baked cake (Hos 7:8), or a tree that requires urgent attention (Lk 13:7). I realize that such a view will be highly offensive to some. However, that does not change the facts in the case.

The objectives are progressive in nature, and are designed to bring the whole body into a stable and productive condition – one in which they are not tossed about by “every wind of doctrine,” and are capable of edifying one another.

The revealed objective for the church is as follows: “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of

the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:12-16).

The objectives are progressive in nature, and are designed to bring the whole body into a stable and productive condition – one in which they are not tossed about by “every wind of doctrine,” and are capable of edifying one another. Here is the Divine logic of the matter.

EPHESIANS 4:12-16

- The perfecting (maturing) of the saints (verse 12a).
- In order that they may engage in the work of the ministry (verse 12b).
- In order that the body may be edified (verse 12c).
- Until we all come into the unity of the faith (verse 13a).
- Until we all come into the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God (verse 13b).
- Until we collectively reflect the image of Christ (verse 13c).
- Until each individual is matured in their “measure” of the “fulness of Christ” (verse 13d).
- In order that no one remains childlike, and moved about by erroneous teaching (verse 14).
 - In order that the truth may be spoken in unmitigated love (verse 15a).
 - In order that all may grow up into Christ in all things (verse 15b).
 - In order that the body might be fitly joined together (verse 16a).
 - In order that the body may be compacted, or made solid, by what every “joint” supplies (verse 16b).
 - This is in strict accord with the effectual working of the Lord in every part of the body (verse 16c).
 - In order to the increase of the body.
 - In order to the edifying of itself in love (verse 16d).

Do you see any provision in that marvelous statement for prolonged juvenileness? Is there any room for perpetual mediocrity, or the continued lack of spiritual productivity. Does this statement of Divine purpose suggest that the objective for the church is to be a kind of spiritual hospital for correcting deviate behavior? Is there the slightest hint of this kind of emphasis?

The church is a place where souls are fed and cultured for glory. It is more of a place for transformation than recovery, and for advancement than reform – and those terms are not synonymous. Jesus is “bringing many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10), not merely resolving moral and spiritual difficulties in the people. To be sure, that sort of work is included, but it is not the thrust of Divine effort, and it certainly ought not to be ours. Even in nature, once a debilitating infection is arrested, it is necessary to build up and strengthen the individual. More precisely, when raising children, the most important thing is not to continue teaching them to stay out of the street and not put their hands in the fire – especially when they are forty years old. The children must be brought to

know how to be in the proper places, and to put their hands to noble and God-honoring works.

EXPANDING THE NUCLEUS

A proper view of “church growth,” if I may use that hackneyed term, involves the expansion of the nucleus, not the enlargement of the periphery. It is not simply to get larger crowds, or more names on the roll, but to rather prepare the people to serve the Lord here, and stand confidently before Him there. I do not know how it is possible to perceive Ephesians 4:11-16 in any other way.

LIVED OUT IN THE TEXT

The particular point here is that this what the workers in our text were doing. That is why they remained with the churches, then went out to visit other churches. They were not simply promoted camaraderie, but were seeking to promote spiritual advancement. That is what God has declared He is doing, and they were joining in the work.

Judas and Silas, prophets from Jerusalem exhorted and confirmed the Antioch brethren, attesting to both the nature and content of the letters sent from Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas also remained in Antioch, preaching the Word. Behold both their interest in the brethren in Antioch, as well as their obvious delight with their fellowship. Those who have enjoyed the richness and benefit of godly association can understand why these brethren wanted to be together. They were the better for it, and it tended to prepare them for the work into which they would be directed. Here we see “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16) at work, for He also preferred to be around His disciples (Matt 20:17; Mk 3:7; 8:10; 10:46; Lk 22:15; John 6:3; 11:54). All of His post-resurrection appearances were to His disciples (Mk 16:9; Matt 28:9; Lk 24:15; 24:36; Acts 1:3-8; 1 Cor 15:5-8).

Soon Paul determined to revisit the churches, seeing how they were doing. It was during this occasion that Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them. However, Paul recoiled at the suggestion, remembering the instability of John Mark when they first went into that region. The contention was so strong that the two men separated, Barnabas taking Mark with him to his home country of Cyprus. It was at this point that Paul chose Silas as a companion. They left for Syria and Cilicia with the commendation of the brethren – something not said of Barnabas and Mark. This is a remarkable and clear account of concern for the churches – a concern Paul would always maintain!

JUDAS AND SILAS EXHORT THE BRETHREN

“ 15:32 And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.”

After it was clear that the words sent from the apostles and elders had been gladly received, Judas and Silas spoke to the Antioch brethren. They spoke in their God-ordained capacity, and did so with purpose.

BEING PROPHETS

“And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves . . .” Other versions read “gifted speakers,” LIVING “prophets (inspired interpreters of the will and purposes of God),” AMPLIFIED

Due to the lack of sound doctrine, and the consequence of a church that is not established, both the concept and ministry of a prophet has been blurred. Even though God has clearly placed “prophets” in the church (1 Cor 12:28), there is little talk about them, and no apparent place made for them. This is a ministry fulfilled in the local assembly, or congregation of saints.

- “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether

prophecy , let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith” (Rom 12:6).

- “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy ” (1 Cor 14:1).

- “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by, let the first hold his peace. For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets ” (1 Cor 14:29-32).

- “Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy , and forbid not to speak with tongues” (1 Cor 14:39).

- “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets ; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11).

- “Despise not prophesyings ” (1 Thess 5:20),

The word “prophet” is a transliteration of the Greek word **profh,thj** (prof-ay-tas). That is, there was no precisely parallel English word that conveyed the Scriptural use of this Greek word.

Etymological Definitions

As defined by the English dictionary, it means the following.

Original use was during the twelfth century

1. “One who utters divinely inspired revelations:
 - a. As often capitalized, the writer of one of the books of the Bible.
 - b. One regarded by a group of followers as the final authoritative revealer of God's will; Muhammad, the Prophet of Allah.
2. One gifted with more than ordinary spiritual and moral insight ; especially an inspired poet.
3. One who foretells future events.
4. An effective or leading spokesman for a cause, doctrine, or group.
5. Christian Science
 - a. A spiritual seer
 - b. Disappearance of material sense before the conscious facts of spiritual Truth.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

However, this is not the lexical meaning of the word as used in Scripture. The root meaning of the Greek word is, “to speak forth, speak out; hence, one who speaks forth.” In the Septuagint version the root meaning is “to divulge, make known, announce . . . therefore properly, equivalent to interpreter.” As used in Scripture, the word is lexically understood to mean, “hence, an interpreter or spokesman for God; one through whom God speaks . . . one who speaks forth by divine inspiration.” THAYER “generally one who speaks for God, proclaiming what God wants to make known,” FRIBERG “of one who has insight into the divine will and possesses the power of inspired utterance,” UBS

The Louw-Nida Greek lexicon wisely adds, “ There is a tendency in a number of languages to translate **profh,thj** only in the sense of 'one who foretells the future,' but foretelling the future was only a relatively minor aspect of the prophet's function, though gradually it became more important.

Patristic authors [*post-apostolic church fathers*] defined the function of a prophet mainly in terms of foretelling the future. In New Testament times, however, the focus was upon the inspired utterance proclaimed on behalf of and on the authority of God.

Whatever value may be attached to etymological definitions, it cannot be allowed to be superior in nature. In the Word of God itself, although there were often people present to spoke in a differing languages, key words were never defined from the standpoint of mere language. They were rather expounded doctrinally.

The Source of the Prophet

The word of God informs us of the origin of the prophet. A prophet is not produced by education or natural giftedness. It is not someone who has been trained to be a prophet. In no sense is the prophet self-made.

It is of interest to note that much of the preaching of John the Baptist is referred to as “his exhortation” (Luke 3:18). That is, he pressed the people to do something about what he was preaching.

Particularly in this day of salvation, the administration of the New Covenant, the prophet is a gift from God. Thus it is written, Therefore He says: “When He ascended on high, He led captivity captive, And gave gifts to men... And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets , some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:9-11). NKJV

The book of First Corinthians views these gifts, as well as others, as Divine placements, ranking “prophets” as second, superceded only by the apostles. “And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers . . .” (1 Cor 12:28).

Ministry Associated with Faith

The epistle to the Romans also speaks of this gift. Rather than referring to the individual prophet himself, there what is said is emphasized: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith ” (Rom 12:6). Note that what is said by the prophet is directly related to his faith. That is, a New Covenant prophet does not speak without the engagement of his heart and mind. He has been enlightened, yet speaks from personal insight and understanding that have been acquired from God.

A More Particular Analysis

An even more particular analysis of the prophet is provided in the first epistle to the Corinthians. There the teaching is couched in a discourse that stresses the importance of understanding what is said in the assembly. The statement concerning prophesy relates to its effects, as compared to its source, and is quite revealing. “But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3). Other versions read, “ edification, and exhortation, and consolation ,” NASB “strengthening, encouragement and comfort,” NIV “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation,” NRSV and “upbuilding and constructive spiritual progress and encouragement and consolation.” AMPLIFIED

These effects are what made prophesying the superior gift. It is why Paul taught the Corinthians to prefer it above other gifts: “Follow after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy” (1 Cor 14:1). I have known several people who have expressed a fervent desire to speak in tongues. I do not know how it is possible to take hold of this text and engage in such a quest.

The use of the words “prophesy” or “prophecy” in Scripture is in perfect accord with the doctrine concerning prophets. The prophet, although he may foretell the future (Acts 11:28), is by no means

limited to that function in his work.

- The 31st chapter of Proverbs concerning a virtuous woman, is defined as “the prophecy” that Lemuel’s mother “taught him” (Prov 31:1).
- The “prophecy of Oded the prophet” was a word of encouragement and exhortation to king Asa (2 Chron 15:1-8).

Note the three principle effects of prophesying: edification, exhortation, and comfort.

- **Edification:** This has to do with building up and strengthening the understanding of the believers. In such a case, the truth is seen more clearly, and thus the truth sanctifies and stabilizes the people. Paul also associated edification with the power of God that was given (2 Cor 13:8,10).

- **Exhortation:** In this ministry the souls of the people are moved to do something that directly relates to their identity with the Lord.

- **Comfort:** This is a rational comfort, and does not refer to a mere feeling. It relates to encouragement that causes hope to flourish.

The “prophet,” being a speaker, is one in whom insight and the ability of precise spiritual expression have been merged. Where these effects have been realized, the people have heard a prophet.

Like all spiritual gifts, prophesy is the outworking of a member of the body holding to the Head, from whom all spiritual nourishment originates. As the prophet maintains the vital fellowship with the Son, into which he is called (1 Cor 1:9), his gift is made functional. He is given various insights into the truth, all of which are integral to God’s eternal purpose. This is all done in direct relation to his “proportion of faith” (Rom 12:6), or “measure of faith” (Rom 12:3). The “measure” is not a quantitative one, but one that is adapted for a particular role in the body of Christ. In accordance with that faith, the truth is not only perceived, but it is merged with the ability to articulate it. It is that expression, if delivered in strict accord with the “proportion of faith,” that causes the saints of God to be edified, exhorted, and comforted. The people of God are matured, motivated, and stilled within. They are made adequate to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12). Confidence and assurance are also realized in increasing measure.

That is what real prophets do. Now, we will see this lived out in our text. Judas and Silas, “being prophets,” will do what prophets are prone to do.

EXHORTED THE BRETHREN

“ , , , exhorted the brethren . . .” Other versions read, “encouraged,” NASB “gave teaching,” BBE “comforted,” DOUAY “strengthened,” MRD “preached,” LIVING and “urged and warned and consoled and encouraged.” AMPLIFIED

These men were prophets, and they “exhorted.” They did not foretell the future, or have a conference on last things. They “exhorted the people,” calling them into deeper and sustained involvement “with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

- Some years before, Barnabas had come to the church in Antioch, being sent from the church in Jerusalem. During that time, he “ exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23).

- On the day of Pentecost, following his response to their question, “What shall we do,” it is written that Peter “with many other words did he testify and exhort , saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40). It was after this exhortation that

those “that gladly received his word were baptized” (Acts 2:41).

- Paul reminded the Thessalonians how he had “ exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:11-12).

- Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “Furthermore .. We beseech you and exhort you by the Lord Jesus that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” (1 Thess 4:1).

- In a remarkably detailed exhortation, Paul told the Thessalonians, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men. See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess 5:22).

- Paul told Timothy, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Tim 2:3).

- Paul told Titus, “Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded” (Tit 2:6).

- Peter wrote to elders, “ . . . I exhort you . . . Feed the flock of God which is among you . . .” (1 Pet 5:1-2).

- Jude wrote to some sluggardly believers, “unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3).

A spirit of independence has arisen within the professed church that is offended by any demands being placed upon it. This condition is largely owing to inferior, and sometimes erroneous, preaching. A message is being preached that leaves the impression that response is not an urgent matter.

Behold the marvelous scope of exhortation – moving the people of God to do something. Allow me to briefly recap the reports I have just recounted. These were things the people of God were EXHORTED to do – for exhortation always relates to the people DOING something.

- Save yourselves from this untoward, perverse and corrupt, generation.
- Walk worthy of God.
- Walk and please God more and more.
- Warn them that are unruly (insubordinate).
- Comfort the feebleminded (fainthearted or timid).
- Support the weak.
- Be patient, or longsuffering with all men.
- Do not repay evil for evil to any man.
- Always rejoice.
- Pray without ceasing, or with perseverance, not fainting.
- In everything give thanks.
- Do not quench the Spirit.

- Do not despise prophecies.
- Test all things.
- Hold fast what is good.
- Abstain from all appearance of evil.
- Supplication, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be given for all men (1 Tim 2:1).
- That such prayers be made for kings and for those who are in authority (1 Tim 2:2).
- For young men to be sober.
- To feed the flock of God.
- To earnestly contend for the faith.

There are twenty-one facets of spiritual life in which the people of God are urged participate more fully. It should be apparent to you that there is a certain strangeness in the tone of such words – at least to those who have been unduly influenced by our generation. A spirit of independence has arisen within the professed church that is offended by any demands being placed upon it. This condition is largely owing to inferior, and sometimes erroneous, preaching. A message is being preached that leaves the impression that response is not an urgent matter. The impression is being left that men have a lot of time to sort things out, work on their deficiencies, and decide whether or not they want to give themselves wholly to the Lord. The very fact that God has placed the gift of exhortation in the church confirms that this is an erroneous impression. Unless men are rescued from it, there is no hope of them being saved. That is why it is written, “Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation” (Heb 3:15). And again, “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed” (Rom 13:11).

WITH MANY WORDS

“ . . . with many words . . .” Other versions read, “with a lengthy message,” NASB “said much,” NIV “with a long message,” CSB “much discourse,” DARBY “spoke a long time,” GWN “abundant discourse,” MRD “a long speech,” NET “spoke at length,” NLT “much preaching,” TNT “long sermons,” LIVING “a long . . . talk,” WEYMOUTH “many a good counsel,” MONTGOMERY and “many talks.” PHILLIPS

As Peter did, Judas and Silas exhorted “with many words” (Acts 2:40). Their words were not brief, as though they were not essential, or were already accepted by the audience. There are at least two reasons for this.

- First, the letter they brought dealt with matters pertaining to salvation, and nothing can be more important than that. If the matter of salvation is shrouded with mystery, or if its nature and scope do not have some clarity, the disciples will be thrown into a state of constant jeopardy.
- Second, as confirmed in the accounts of actual exhortations, there are many areas that are addressed by faith. Believers cannot remain in a state of inactivity, thinking that the benefits related to being in Christ will simply come to them. As with Paul, it is necessary to apprehend the things for which Christ has apprehended us (Phil 3:12-13). Exhortation has to do with compelling believers to do precisely that.

CONFIRMED THEM

“ . . . and confirmed them.” Other versions read, “strengthened,” NKJV “made them strong,” BBE “established,” MRD and “make them stronger.” IE

The word “confirmed” is translated from the Greek word **επιβεβαιωσις** (ep-ee-stay-rid). The word means, “to establish besides, strengthen more; to render more firm, confirm,” THAYER “cause to be firm,” FRIBERG and “to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief.” LOUW-NIDA In the English language, the word means “to make firm or firmer.”

In this sense, the word is used several times in the book of Acts.

- “. . . they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21-22).
- “And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them” (Acts 15:32).
- “And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41).
- The word is also translated “strengthening” – “And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).

The state of being “confirmed” is the opposite of being “unstable” (James 1:8; 2 Pet 2:13; 3:16). Those who are not “confirmed” are “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14). Unconfirmed disciples can be “drawn away” after false teachers (Acts 20:30) – like the teachers who came to Antioch from Judaea, teaching the believers that unless they were circumcised after the manner of Moses, they could not be saved. Such poor souls are susceptible to teachings that deal with “another Jesus,” “another gospel,” and “another Spirit” (2 Cor 11:4). Those who are not confirmed are like a tender sapling, as compared to a strong and mature tree. The winds of adversity and doctrinal error toss them about, and will eventually break them. These are the people who can be “beguiled with enticing words” (Col 2:4). Their love waxes cold when iniquity abounds (Matt 24:12). They have great difficulty holding their profession “without wavering” (Heb 10:23).

There is only one answer to a wavering and unstable state: confirmation, or being made “strong in faith” and “able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Rom 4:20; Eph 6:11). Such a state is the objective of the various gifts that have been given to the church. The aim of those gifts is to bring the people to a state “are no more children,” but “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15). This means more than a reduction in the frequency of sin. That kind of thing happens when a person begins to “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19). That, of course, is the direct result of God strengthening the saints with might by His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ can dwell in their hearts by faith. Then, being “rooted and grounded” in the love of God, they will realize what it means to be “confirmed.”

In an extended effort, and with many words, Judas and Silas spoke to the brethren in a manner that contributed to their stability and maturity in Christ. Giving heed to their words would ensure they would not have such difficulty if any other false teachers came among them. Being mature in Christ, they would be “filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). They would be confirmed, stable, strong in the faith, and able to stand against the various winds that would assault them.

I have noted over the years what a small percentage of professed preachers and teachers are concerned with confirming the saints. For many years, the situation has been very disconcerting to me. Very rarely does one confront a believer who has, in fact, been confirmed, and is strong in faith, giving glory to God. When such a soul is found, they have generally become firm in spite of the

teaching and fellowship to which they have been subjected. All who stand before the saints of God do well to take their confirmation and spiritual stability into consideration. This will not come by brief and shallow homilies. It will not be produced by purported praise and worship services that are little more than a folic in the fields lacking spiritual sustenance. In this text we are exposed to a very real and profitable ministry to the people of God.

THEY TARRIED IN ANTIOCH FOR A TIME

“ 33 And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.”

Here, we are being exposed to the manner of spiritual life. It is not a life of fits and starts, or the mingling of activity with inactivity. Wherever such a life is encouraged or promoted, the Lord is not the one who is at work.

Hungry souls are not content with teachers who remain for only a short time. They delight in continued exposure to the words and insights of such men. This spirit is revealed in the text before us, confirming the value that those who love the truth have for the ones who declare it.

THEY TARRIED THERE A SPACE

“And after they had tarried there a space . . .” Other versions read, “for a time,” NKJV “spent time there,” NASB “spending some time there,” NIV “passed some time there,” DARBY “stayed in Antioch for some time,” GWN “stayed for a while,” NLT “stayed several days,” LIVING and “continuing for a time.” LITV

As used here, the word “tarried” means more than simply lingering. It carries the idea of continuing to do something – in this case, delivering words of exhortation. Technically, the word translated “tarried” (**poih,santej**) carries the idea of productivity: “to produce, construct, form, fashion,” THAYER “a basic meaning make, do,” FRIBERG and “make, do, cause, effect, bring about, accomplish.” UBS The idea here is that Judas and Silas continued to confirm the disciples with many words.

There are instances in Scripture of those who desired the one ministering to remain with them. They did not simply enjoy the company of such people, but desired for them to continue what they were doing.

- The Samaritans asked Jesus to remain with them (John 4:40).
- After hearing the words of Jesus, the two on the road to Emmaus constrained Jesus saying, “Abide with us” (Lk 24:29).
- Those converted at the house of Cornelis asked Peter to “tarry certain days” with them (Acts 10:48).
- Lydia besought Paul and Silas, “come into my house and abide there” Acts 16:15).
- After the Philippi an jailor had been baptized, he brought Paul and Silas into his house, set food before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all of his house (Acts 16:34).
- When Paul left the elders from Ephesus, they fell on his neck and wept, because he had told them they would not see him again (Acts 20:37).

Here, we are being exposed to the manner of spiritual life. It is not a life of fits and starts, or the mingling of activity with inactivity. Wherever such a life is encouraged or promoted, the Lord is not the one who is at work.

THEY WERE LET GO IN PEACE

“ . . . they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles.” Other versions read, “they were sent back with greetings from the brethren to the apostles,” NKJV “they were sent off by the brothers with the blessing of peace to return to those who had sent them.” NIV

Here, the idea is that the brethren in Antioch recognized that the issue that had arisen there had now been resolved. That is why they dismissed the brethren after they had remained there for some time. They did not accept a correction of their challenge by stages or installments. The matter was too critical. When dealing with an issue that has to do with salvation, this is not a matter to be studied out over an extended period of time, or by a series of protracted courses. If such an approach had been taken, some might have been called away, or departed to another place in a state of delusion. They may even have spread the delusion, or even been so confused they cast the faith overboard.

Now, however, the issue had been resolved, and there was great jubilation among the disciples because of it. No follower of Jesus thrives on controversy, or delights to remain in the dark about the salvation of God. Therefore the brethren were released to return to Jerusalem and the apostles, with the blessing of peace upon them. Here are some examples of the conferment of peace upon the righteous.

- “For my brethren and companions' sakes, I will now say, Peace be within thee” (Psa 122:8).
- “ . . . peace shall be upon Israel” (Psa 125:5).
- “And said, O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong . . .” (Dan 10:19).
- “Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen” (Rom 15:33).
- “And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16).

In new covenant life, or “newness of life,” there is a keen interest in the welfare of the saints of God.

SILAS DECIDED TO STAY FOR A WHILE

“ 34 Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.”

This text marks a new epoch in the book of Acts – one that will involve the labors of Silas with the apostle Paul.

This verse is omitted in the following versions: NIV, NRSV, RSV, CJB, CSB, DARBY, ERV, GWN, NAB, NIB, NLT, and LIVING. The reason for this omission is that it is missing in the Syriac, Alexandrian, Arabic, and Coptic versions . PULPIT COMMENTARY/BARNES It is surmised that Silas returned with Judas, then came back later to Antioch, at which time Paul chose him. However, if this was the case, Paul would have made his choice of Silas based upon a relatively brief period of time with him. This interpretation also has to be forced into the text, causing it to read in a kind of random way. It simply does not blend with the nature of this whole passage. I will proceed with the assumption that this was a providential working of the Lord, in preparation for the works that follow. I see no value in adopting the variant view represented by the removal of this verse from the text. Further, where there is no genuine advantage to such an alteration, I find it difficult to justify taking such an action.

This is another example of God working all things together for the good of His people – not only for Silas himself, but for those in Antioch and the surrounding territories.

NOTWITHSTANDING

“Notwithstanding . . .” Other versions read, “However,” NKJV and “But.” NASB

The word “notwithstanding” marks a departure from the general course of action. Judas and Silas had been freed to return to Jerusalem, with the peace of God conferred upon them. However, Silas chose not to do so, preferring to take another course. There are times when what can be done is not always the best, or preferred thing to be done.

IT PLEASSED SILAS

“ . . . it pleased Silas to abide there still.” Other versions read, “it seemed good,” NKJV “thought good,” GENEVA “it was the pleasure of,” MRD and “decided to stay.” AMPLIFIED

It is obvious that, for Silas, it was “good and pleasant” to dwell among the Antioch brethren. In addition, he must have seen time spent with Paul an advantage as well. He did not stay out of a sense of obligation, for his mission there had been fulfilled. However, probably unknown to him at this time, there was future work to be done in which he would play a significant role. Therefore, it seems to me that God can be seen in this whole matter, orchestrating the affairs of His people for His own glory and the betterment of the body of Christ. This is another example of God working all things together for the good of His people – not only for Silas himself, but for those in Antioch and the surrounding territories. This is also a sterling commentary on the spiritual attractiveness and profitability of the brethren in Antioch.

PAUL AND BARNABAS REMAINED IN ANTIOCH, TEACHING AND PREACHING THE WORD

“ 35 Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.”

Many of the great works that are recorded in this book were preceded by an extended time, during which brethren were meeting together.

- The events of the day of Pentecost (Luke 24:53; Acts 1:14; 2:1-4).
- The rapid spread of the Word throughout Jerusalem and the surrounding areas (Acts 2:42,44,46; 4:31; 4:4; 5:14; 6:1,7).
- The scattering of the disciples, when they went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:1-4).
- The events that took place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 9:36-43; 10:1-48).
- Paul and Barnabas called to a special work by the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:26; 13:1-2).

The church is “the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23), and nourishment is ministered within that church while they are holding to the Head (Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19). It is also true that when they come together Christ said He was especially among them (Matt 18:20). These things being true, we should expect great things to take place within, and because of, the assembling of the saints. This manner is seen throughout the book of Acts, where newness of life is being lived out.

PAUL AND BARNABAS CONTINUED THERE ALSO

“Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch . . .”

Here again is a protracted stay of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch. It is the third such occasion.

- The first is when they spend “a whole year” there, assembling with the brethren, and teaching “much people” (11:26).

- The second is when they returned from the work to which the Spirit had called them – a time estimated to have been between four and eight years (14:28). It was the period of time between their return and the trip to Jerusalem that is covered in the fifteenth chapter.

- The third is the period described in our text, where they are said to have “continued in Antioch.”

- A fourth occasion took place when Paul left Ephesus, going to Caesarea, then going down to Antioch and spending “some time there” (18:22).

This was also the place where Peter came, when Paul withstood him to the face (Gal 2:11).

So far as the book of Acts is concerned, this church ranked second only to the church in Jerusalem, the general residence of the apostles themselves. Considering that this was a Gentile church, this is a most remarkable circumstance, confirming that wherever there is a love of the truth and faith in Christ, great progress can be made.

There are still congregations of believers that are particularly attractive to sensitive and informed souls. Those who are engaged in the good fight of faith and the work of the Lord, are willing to go out of their way to be with such people. They also will spend considerable time in such places. In my judgment, it is good for a congregation to determine to be this kind of fellowship. It seems to me that any other kind of congregation is deficient in many ways.

TIME SPENT WITH BELIEVERS

1. Saul spent time with the disciples in Damascus – 9:19
2. Peter tarried certain days with those who believed at the house of Cornelius – 10:48
3. Paul and Barnabas spend a whole year with the church in Antioch – 11:26
4. Paul visited the churches, confirming the souls of the disciples – 14:22
5. Paul and Barnabas spend a “*long time*” with the church in Antioch – 14:28
6. Judas and Silas confirmed the brethren in Antioch – 15:32
7. Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch teaching and preaching the Word – 15:35
8. Paul went throughout Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches – 15:41
9. Paul went throughout the cities, and the churches established in the faith – 16:5
10. Paul spent a year and six months teaching the brethren in Corinth – 18:11
11. Paul strengthened all the disciples in all the country of Galatia and Phrygia – 18:23
12. Apollos helped the disciples in Achai who had believed through grace – 18:27
13. Paul ministered to the disciples in Troaz – 20:7
14. Paul spent three years with the church in Ephesus, warning them with tears – 20:31

TEACHING AND PREACHING THE WORD

“ . . . teaching and preaching the word of the Lord . . . ”

Other versions read, “taught and proclaimed,” NRSV “teaching and announcing the glad tidings,” DARBY “taught people about the Lord's word and spread the Good News,” GWN “telling the Good

News and teaching the people the message of the Lord,” LIVING “continued to teach the Lord's message and to tell the good news,” WILLIAMS and “continued teaching and proclaiming the good news, the Word of the Lord [concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in God’s kingdom].” AMPLIFIED

What does it mean to preach and teach? For some, it means speaking to sinners (preach), and to saints (teach). Is this the case here? Remember, Paul and Barnabas had spent years in Antioch. Does this mean they had not preached throughout the city, or that the church in Antioch was fundamentally uninformed?

Preaching

Preaching is the means by which faith is both initiated and maintained. Faith comes by hearing – hearing a message, not a list of instructions. Faith rests on affirmations, not explanations, as Romans 10:14-17 affirms. No believer will reach a point in this world where there is no longer a need for affirmation, for preaching, and for announcement and proclamation. Gospel affirmations found in the epistles are staggering in number – declarations that have to do with:

- Who Jesus IS (Rom 10:4; Eph 5:23; Phil 2:11; Col 1:19; 2:9,10; 3:12; Heb 8:1; 1 John 4:5). None of these facts can be enhanced or enlarged. They do not have to do with Christ progressing or advancing. It is our apprehension of these facts that grows. That is why they are proclaimed, announced, and preached.

- What Jesus HAS ACCOMPLISHED (Rom 10:4; Gal 3:13; 5:1; Col 1:20; 2:15; Heb 2:14; 9:26; 1 Pet 4:1; Rev 1:5-6), and what He is doing (Heb 2:10; 7:25; 13:20; 1 Pet 3:22). None of these things can be improved. None of them are in the process of change. Again, it is our comprehension of them that expands, and that can only be done when they are declared.

- What He WILL DO (Matt 3:12; 10:32; 13:41; 25:31-33; Acts 17:31; Phil 3:20-21; Col 3:4; Heb 9:28; Rev 22:12). Again, none of these things are in a state of development. They are simply awaiting the time when they will be fulfilled. Their proclamation fuels hope and brings assurance to the hearts of the trusting ones. They are to be preached, or reported.

No believer will ever come to the point where both preaching and teaching cease to be required. There is no stage of spiritual life in which it is no longer necessary to hear the unchanging and unalterable facts pertaining to who Jesus is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. Equally true, there is no point where those facts no longer need to be expounded.

Again, these are the things that cause faith to come, then maintain and mature it.

Teaching

Strictly speaking, teaching, or doctrine, is the exposition of the facts regarding “the salvation that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 2:10). That is why it is often related to “wisdom” (1 Cor 2:13; Col 1:28; 3:16). The person who is “taught in the Word” (Gal 6:6) is not merely told what the Word says, but is brought to discern what is implied by the Word. That is, they come to the point where they can “handle” the Word of God, or correlate it with living in a manner that honors and pleases the Lord.

Jesus Himself is depicted as teaching the truth to us. “But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard Him, and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus” (Eph 4:20-21). What is “taught” is specified in the next three verses: “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:22-24). In other words, you might say that the written word is incarnated, or embodied, in the lives of those who are taught by Jesus. Teaching has to do with that kind of accomplishment.

Another example of the nature of teaching is found in First Thessalonians: “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (1 Thess 4:9). Again, the teaching has to do with apprehending the truth, and being able to live it out to the glory of God.

When it comes to the teaching of holy men, the same principle is made known. The people hear the exposition of the facts related to the Gospel in such a way as enables those who receive the teaching to live in a manner that adorns the doctrine. Several apostolic expressions highlight this.

- “Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught , abounding therein with thanksgiving” (Col 2:7).
- “Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught , that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Titus 1:9).
- “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught , whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thess 2:15).

No believer will ever come to the point where both preaching and teaching cease to be required. There is no stage of spiritual life in which it is no longer necessary to hear the unchanging and unalterable facts pertaining to who Jesus is, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do. Equally true, there is no point where those facts no longer need to be expounded. Furthermore, as soon as the message being delivered by those who preach and teach centers in the people themselves, it ceases to be profitable. That is, when life in this world is seen as the primary life, the way that leads to eternal life has been abandoned. I realize this has some alarming implications.

WITH MANY OTHERS ALSO

“ . . . with many others also.” Other versions read, “and many others also,” NASB “with a number of others,” BBE “along with many others,” CSB “in company with many others,” MONTGOMERY and “as did many others.” ISV

In preaching and teaching, Paul and Barnabas were joined by “many others.” The “others” were competent preachers and teachers. This does not refer to casual discussions.

It is to be understood that the assembly in Antioch was the locus of these extended activities of preaching and teaching – for these gifts have been given to the church and for the church. They are for the edifying of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-16; 1 Cor 12:7,28). While they are not confined to the church, that is where they yield their greatest benefit – as Jesus teaching His disciples was His most focused and productive teaching.

This is a commentary on the character of the congregation in Antioch. Our introduction to that church is found in these words: “Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Acts 13:1). It appears that this number of leaders had grown. Silas is now added to the number as well.

What a marvelous congregation to have such an appetite for the Word of the Lord! In this regard, it was much like the church in Jerusalem. Such assemblies are exceedingly rare, and apparently have been unusual throughout church history.

The Word of Truth Fellowship

It is a great source of blessing to me to see this kind of congregation being developed in The Word of Truth Fellowship in Joplin, Missouri. Frequent gatherings take place in which “many others” contribute to the edification of the saints through preaching and teaching. We even have additional

gatherings through the year during which preaching and teaching extend over several days. These annual gatherings include The Refreshing Waters Renewal, The Table In the Wilderness, and The Preaching Festival. All of these gatherings focus on the Gospel of Christ and its implications. They are held to nourish the saints because of their increased love and appetite for the truth of God.

In my judgment, what is occurring here is representative of what is possible wherever honest and good hearts are found. It confirms how the truth of God works within those who love it, and by faith subject themselves to it. It invariable produces fruit.

Currently, we have a number of competent teachers and prophets. These include Aaron Hutchcraft, Ricky Sims, Robert Cobb, Gene Hutchcraft, Jeremy Williams, Michael Blakely, Tony Parker, Jonathan Blakely, and Matthew Cobb. Additional teachers who speak with less frequency include LaVaine Murphy, Isaac Murphy, and Tobiah Murphy. There are also a number of insightful sisters who deliver words of benefit to the assembly: June Blakely, Barbara Hutchcraft, Tasha Sims, Nichole Williams, Amanda Miller, Nicole Cobb, Melissa Parker, Pat Jones, Mattie Blakely, Debbie Hutchcraft, Michele Blakely, Eva Blakely, and Logan Williams.

This is a most remarkable circumstance. It is worthy of note because it represents the kind of life that was found in the church in Antioch. For many of us, it has proved to be an environment in which spiritual growth, stability, and expression are being encouraged and cultured. The contributions of these saints is also heard throughout the world. In my judgment, what is occurring here is representative of what is possible wherever honest and good hearts are found. It confirms how the truth of God works within those who love it, and by faith subject themselves to it. It invariable produces fruit.

PAUL DETERMINES TO VISIT THE CHURCHES

“ 36 And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.”

One of the marks of a truly spiritual leader is a profound concern for the churches – for those who are “in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 1:30; Eph 1:1). Christ Himself “nourishes and cherishes” NKJV the church (Eph 5:29), being the “great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20). It is not surprising, therefore, that those who are “workers together with Him” (2 Cor 6:1) maintain an interest in His flock.

LET US GO AGAIN AND

VISIT OUR BRETHREN

“And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren. . .” Other versions read, “let us now go back,” NKJV “”Let us return,” NASB “we should go back,” IE and “let us go back and again visit and help and minister to the brethren.” AMPLIFIED

After spending “some days,” or “some time” NIV preaching and teaching in Antioch, Paul speaks to Barnabas about the places where they had preached during the fulfillment of the “work” to which the Spirit had formerly called them. They had “fulfilled” that work (Acts 14:25), and yet did not forget it.

Initially, they had proceeded throughout the island of Cyprus, and up into Asia, going into the regions of Pisidia, Lycaonia, and Cilicia (13:14-14:21a). Then they had returned through those regions from Derbe, ministering to all of the churches again (14:21b-25). Now, Paul determines to go the region a third time.

IN EVERY CITY

“ . . . in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord . . . ” Other versions read, “proclaimed the word of the Lord,” NASB “given the word of God,” BBE “proclaimed the message about the Lord,” CJB “announced the word of the Lord,” DARBY “spread the Lord’s word,” GWN “showed the words of the Lord,” TNT and “made known the Lord’s message.” WEYMOUTH

The cities in which they ministered that are specifically named include the following: Salamis (13:5), Paphos (13:6-12), Antioch of Pisidia (13:14), Iconium (13:51-14:3), Lystra and Derbe (14:6-23). It is also written that they preached “throughout all the region” surrounding Antioch (13:49), and the region of Lycaonia as well (14:6-7). They had also “ordained them elders in every church.” and commending “them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (14:25).

AND SEE HOW THEY DO

“ . . . and see how they do.” Other versions read, “see how they are doing,” NKJV “see how they are,” NASB “see how they are getting on,” DARBY “see how they fare,” ERV “getting along,” LIVING “whether they are prospering.” WEYMOUTH and “how they are having.” INTERLINEAR

If the individual can profit from the salvation of God apart from a very real association with Jesus, then exactly what is the purpose of that association?

This language suggests there are certain expectations concerning the progress of the churches. Ordinary men may settle for the churches simply remaining in a state of peace, or not falling into reprehensible conduct. But that is not enough for the man of God. You may be sure, Paul was not thinking about how many people were attending the churches in Asia, or the extensive nature of their mission program, youth ministry, or community outreach.

Jesus taught His disciples that both growth and fruit are expected of those who are in Him (John 15:1-11). He associated these conditions with the following:

- Either remaining in Him or being removed from Him (15:1).
- Bearing fruit (15:4-5).
- Being cast into the fire if not abiding in Him (15:6).
- Having prayers answered (15:7).
- Glorifying God (15:8a).
- Being His disciples (15:8b).
- Experiencing Jesus’ love (15:9a).
- Continuing in His love (15:9b).
- Keeping His commandments (15:10).
- His joy remaining in the disciple (15:11a).
- The joy of the disciple being full (15:11b).

If this is all we knew about this subject, it would be enough to promote sobriety and hearty effort. Nothing about Christ’s words suggest the acceptability of casualness or lack of advancement. Additionally, the very thought of abiding in Christ yet failing to grow is too absurd to be entertained for a moment. There is not the slightest hint in Scripture that so much as one benefit can pass from Christ to the person who remains at a distance from Him. Furthermore, once God puts the individual into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), he is expected to remain there, else all of the benefits realized through Christ will be forfeited. If this was not true, there would be no real purpose to being joined to the Lord in the first place. If the individual can profit from the salvation of God apart from a very real association with Jesus, then exactly what is the purpose of that association?

Ponder the revelation that has been given concerning the nature of spiritual life, and what is intended to take place within it. Here are a few of the expectations – things salvation is calculated to produce.

- “To be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ” (Eph 3:16-17).
- “That ye being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (Eph 3:17-18).
- “That ye might know the love of Christ , which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:19a).
- “That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God ” (Eph 3:19b).
- “The perfecting of the saints” (Eph 4:12a).
- “For the work of the ministry ” (Eph 4:12b).
- “Till we all come to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God ” (4:13a).
- “Unto a perfect man , unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13b).
- “That we be no more children ” (4:14).
- “ Grow up into Him in all things” (Eph 4:15).
- “The increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love ” (Eph 4:16).
- “That ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11).
- “To be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).
- “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10a).
- “Being fruitful in every good work , and increasing in the knowledge of God ” (Col 1:10b).
- “Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness ” (Col 1:11).

You might summarize these words, and more, by saying, “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son , that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

In rebuking some of the Jewish believers, the Holy Spirit addressed this matter of what is expected in believers. “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers , ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb 5:12).

IN THIS TEXT

Paul is not suggesting they ought to visit the churches to see if they have been overcome, or fallen into some deep sin, and in other ways were coming short of the glory of God. If those conditions did exist, they would be made known in a process described as “see how they do” – not “see how they are not doing.”

The word translated “do” is an interested one (**e;cousin**). Lexically the word means, “to have, or to hold . . . to be in such and such a condition,” THAYER and “literally and figuratively, as holding something safely keep, preserve.” FRIBERG Robertson’s Word Pictures says of this expression:

“How they fare (*pô's echousin*). Indirect question, "how they have it." The precariousness of the life of new converts in pagan lands is shown in all of Paul's Epistles (Furneaux).”

There are certain things in which the believer is to have marked growth and advancement. As in nature, spiritual life is expected to grow and mature. As it is used here, the expression “see how they do” means “see how they are progressing,” or “see if they are holding firmly to the things to which they were called.” Here are a few of the areas in which how we are doing is to be considered.

- Keeping the faith (1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7).
- Keep the rejoicing of the hope (Heb 3:6).
- Abiding in Christ (John 15:4,7; 1 John 2:27,28).
- Running the race with patience, or endurance (Heb 12:12).
- Growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15).
- Growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18).
- Being steadfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).
- Being strong 1 Cor 16:13. Eph 6:10).
- Putting on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:11).
- Adding to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (2 Pet 1:5-8).
- Setting your affection on things above, and not on things the earth (Col 3:1-2).

Thus Paul expresses his desire to see how the churches are progressing in the faith. It was this matter that was addressed on all of his letters to the churches – letters that contained many exhortations directly related to spiritual growth (Rom 6:12,17; 12:2; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; 14:20; 15:58; 2 Cor 6:14; 7:2; Gal 5:1-2, 19-25; Eph 4:22-24,26,32; 5:1,17; Phil 1:7,27; 2:2,12-15; Col 1:9-10; 3:5; 4:6; 1 Thess 4:1; 5:14-22; 2 Thess 3:12). Paul expressed this frame of mind when he said, “Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Cor 11:28).

Peter expressed this same concern in his letters to believers (1 Pet 1:22; 2:2,21; 3:9; 2 Pet 1:5-9; 3:2,14). John did the same as well (1 John 1:7; 2:6; 3:11,23; 4:7,11).

THE EMPHASIS IS ON THE BODY OF CHRIST

Although it is clear from both the doctrine and the historical record that the Divine emphasis has been placed upon the church, this point has been greatly obscured by the professing church itself. Ponder, for example, the ministry of the Lord Jesus Himself. The burden of His present ministry is represented as being toward His body.

- He is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).
- He is the Head of the body, which is the church (Col. 1:18).
- His body is the repository for all of His fulness (Eph 1:22-23).
- He is making intercession for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25).
- He is the Mediator of the New Covenant, which is the “better hope” by which we draw near to God (Heb 7:19; 12:25).

- He is loving and nourishing the church (Eph 5:29).
- He has been given to the church as Head over all things (Eph 1:20-22).
- He is the “great Shepherd of the sheep” (Heb 13:20).

Add to this the fact that all apostolic writing has been addressed to the saints. The Holy Spirit has been sent into the hearts of those who are now “sons” of God (Gal 4:6). The grace of God is engaged in tutoring those whom Jesus has redeemed from all iniquity to Himself, in order that they might be peculiarly His own (Tit 2:11-14).

How serious is it when there is not a prevailing interest in the body of Christ – not in assisting them in the resolution of their problems, but in their growth up into Christ? There are all kinds of religious professionals who specialize in improving interpersonal relationships, recovering from moral failure, and restructuring a dissembled life. However, you could take everything the Word of God has to say on these subjects, and the compilation of them all would barely qualify for a tract. Such problems are addressed in Scripture, to be sure. However, the manner in which they are handled is quite different than modern methodologies. A problem solving routine is absent in the doctrine. Allow me to give a few examples.

- “But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof ” (Rom 13:14).

- “Awake to righteousness, and sin not ; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor 15:34).

- “But ye have not so learned Christ; If so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts ; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man , which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:21-24).

- “Wherefore putting away lying , speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another” (Eph 4:25).

- “ Neither give place to the devil ” (Eph 4:27).

- “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you , as becometh saints” (Eph 5:3).

- “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you , with all malice” (Eph 4:31).

- “But now ye also put off all these ; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col 3:8-9).

- “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess 5:22).

- “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil , and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

- “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet 2:1-2).

- “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not . And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

The thrust of apostolic doctrine dealt with the clarification of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, together with the exposition of the circumstances that required it. Ponder some of these teachings that

dealt with matters that were greater in scope than the individuals to whom they were addressed. This is only a very general sampling of the teaching concerning objective realities. These were addressed to the churches.

- The condition of humanity that required a great salvation (Rom 1:19-3:10).
- The nature of justification (Rom 3:21-5:21; Gal 3:20-4:7).
- The implications of baptism into Christ (Rom 6:1-23).
- The reality of the inner conflict created by regeneration (Rom 7:1-25).

Teaching of this sort makes for spiritual maturity and stability. This is because it provides things that can be grasped by faith. Once apprehended to some measurable degree, these provide a context in which believers can work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

The extensive nature of a salvation that is ungirded by Divine power (Rom 8:1-39).

- Reasoning concerning Divine involvements with, and commitments to, the children of Israel (Rom 9-11).
- The nature and purpose of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12-14).
- The resurrection of the dead, and its association with the resurrection of Christ (1 Cor 15:1-58).
- The glory of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:1-23).
- The resurrection body (2 Cor 5:1-8).
- The logic of new creatureship, and what God has accomplished in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:14-21; Col 1:13-22).
- The nature of the freedom that is in Christ Jesus (Gal 5:1-26).
- The purpose of God (Eph 1:4-23).
- What God is doing in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:1-4:16).
- The nature of spiritual life (Rom 12:1-21; Eph 4:17-6:24; Phil 2:12-16; 3:3-16; 4:4-9; Col 1:9-12; 2:6-3:1-25; 1 Thess 5:14-28).
- What was involved in Jesus coming into the world (Phil 2:1-8).
- The fact and implications of the exaltation of Christ (Phil 2:9-11).
- The coming of the Lord (Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 4:13-5:11; 2 Thess 1:7-10; 2:1-9; 2 Pet 3:10-13).

Teaching of this sort makes for spiritual maturity and stability. This is because it provides things that can be grasped by faith. Once apprehended to some measurable degree, these provide a context in which believers can work out their own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). Such a requirement cannot be addressed by confining both teaching and effort to avoiding sin, or recovering from it. Whenever sin is defeated at the temptation level, or recovery is realized from the Satan's captivity, there must be a corresponding apprehension of the objective realities of the Kingdom.

I understand the phrase "see how they do" to refer to this apprehension. It has to do with progress in the matter of being conformed to the image of God's Son. As Paul said it, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:12). Other versions read, "in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus," NASB "to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me," NIV and "to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own." AMPLIFIED

Spiritual progress has to do with the apprehension, or taking hold of, the things for which Jesus has taken hold of us. That is the thing Paul is looking for in the churches where they have ministered.

A SOLEMN THOUGHT

In this case, neglecting the people of God would involve failing to see how they are progressing. The thought of neglecting the people upon whom so much Divine and commissioned interest is focused causes me to shudder. I recall the solemn words of the apostle Paul concerning defiling the body of people in whom God dwells . “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor 3:17).

This day is a time requiring a solemn emphasis of this reality!

BARNABAS WANTS TO TAKE MARK, BUT PAUL DID NOT THINK THAT WAS GOOD

“ 37 And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38 But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.”

This passage has been the subject of considerable controversy in the Christian community. Some have said that Barnabas made the right decision, and others affirm that Paul’s assessment of the situation was the correct one. I shall view this text within the context of how heaven reacted to the whole matter – whose work was chronicled after this event, and whose was not. I will also assess the purpose of the mission that was undertaken, and the bearing that had on this matter.

BARNABAS DETERMINED TO TAKE JOHN

“And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark.” Other versions read, “was desirous of taking John,” NASB “”wanted to take John,” NIV “was minded to take,” ASV “proposed to take,” DARBY “counseled to take,” GENEVA “suggested taking,” NJB “was bent on taking,” WEYMOUTH and “persisted in wanting.” ISV

The Greek word translated “determined” is **evbou,leto** . The lexical meaning of this word, as used here, is, “to deliberate with oneself consider . . . resolve,” THAYER “to resolve on, to determine with oneself.” LEH This was a personal decision on the part of Barnabas – something he himself had determined. Of itself, this does not make the decision wrong, for this word is used at least once of a proper decision resulting from personal consideration (2 Cor 1:17). However, most of the time it is used, it clearly reflects personal reasoning, as compared with Divine direction (Lk 14:31; John 12:10; Acts 5:33; 12:4).

It must be remembered that John was Barnabas’ nephew – the son of his own sister (Col 4:10). It appears as though Barnabas was moved by his personal relationship to Mark – at least that is the consensus of the commentators (Expositor’s Bible, Albert Barnes, Pulpit Commentary, John Gill, John Benson, Matthew Henry, John Calvin). Of itself, this is not enough to form a satisfactory view of the text. I only mention it to confirm there have been numerous godly men who have viewed this text in this manner.

I will proceed with the assumption that Barnabas was thinking primarily of his nephew, no doubt desiring to give him the opportunity to be more firmly established. Of itself, this was good. However, it is questionable in view of the work on which they were embarking.

PAUL THOUGHT IT NOT GOOD

“But Paul thought not good to take him with them . . .” Other versions read, “Paul insisted they

should not,” NKJV “did not think it wise,” NIV “decided not to,” NRSV “thought best not to,” RSV “did not think it appropriate,” CSB “thought it not meet,” GENEVA “didn’t think it was right,” GWN “was not willing,” MRD “insisted that they should not take” NAB “kept insisting,” NET “disagreed strongly,” NLT “would not take him,” PNT “didn’t like the idea at all,” LIVING “deemed it undesirable, ” WEYMOUTH “did not consider such a man fit,” WILLIAMS and “strongly disapproved.” PHILLIPS

Here we are not dealing with mere human opinions concerning an individual. Paul had shown a clear acceptance of John Mark in their initial journey into Asia (Acts 13:5). Here, however, a larger matter is under consideration than the recovery or training of John Mark. They will be going into a territory where considerable hostility had been experienced, with the aim to see how the churches are progressing. This mission will require focus and consistency. Therefore, the reason for Paul’s stance on this matter is given to us.

THE REASON FOR THE DISSENSION

“ . . . who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.” Other versions read, “deserted them,” NASB “withdrawn from them,” RSV “gone away from them,” BBE “gone off and left them,” CJB “abandoned them,” DARBY and “quit and deserted them.” AMPLIFIED

The word “departed” is a translation of the Greek word **avpostanta** . The root meaning of this word is “to go away, depart, from anyone . . . to desert, withdraw from, one,” THAYER and “go away, withdraw . . . desert someone” GINGRICH The ideas of revolt, quitting, discontinuing, defection, abandonment, and desertion are in this word. It is by no means mild in its implications. The uses of this term confirm its strength.

- Satan “ departed ” from Jesus after tempting Him for forty days and nights (Lk 4:13).

A.D. 37 – Barnabas takes newly converted Saul, bringing him to the apostles, and standing in his behalf (Acts 9:27-28).

A.D. 43 – After being sent to Antioch by the church in Jerusalem, Barnabas went to Tarsus, found Saul, and brought him to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26).

A.D. 44 – Barnabas and Saul remain in Antioch for a whole year (Acts 11:26).

A.D. 44 – Barnabas and Saul are sent to the elders of the Jerusalem church with relief gathered from the churches (Acts 12:29-30).

A.D. 44 – Barnabas and Saul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem, bringing back John Mark with them (Acts 12:25).

A.D. 45 – Barnabas and Saul are called to a special work by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2-3).

A.D. 46 – They went Cyprus, preaching in the synagogues, with John Mark as their helper (Acts 13:4-5).

A.D. 46 – They ministered together throughout Cyprus, and provinces in Asia (Acts 13:6-20).

A.D. 47 – They returned through the regions in which they had preached confirming the souls of the disciples (Acts 13:21-25).

A.D. 47 – They returned to Antioch reporting what God had done through them,

remaining there for a long time (Acts 14:26-28).

A.D. 50 – Some years later, they were sent to Jerusalem, together with others from Antioch, about the matter of circumcision and keeping the law being required of the Gentiles (Acts 15:1-21).

A.D. 50 – Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch from Jerusalem with letters of instruction for the Gentile churches (Acts 15:22-34).

A.D. 50 – Paul and Barnabas remain for some time in Antioch teaching and preaching the word of the Lord (Acts 15:35).

A.D. 50 – Paul then determines to revisit all the places there they have preached, to see how the believers have been progressing.

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It is translated “fall away” in the parable of those who received the Word like seed on rocky soil (Lk 8:13).

- This is word Jesus used when speaking to those making false claims of doing wonderful works: “Depart from Me . . .” Lk 13:27).

- Paul used it when speaking of an apostasy in which some would “depart from the faith” (1 Tim 4:1).

- It is used in the admonition “depart from iniquity” (2 Tim 2:19).

- It is also used to describe those who evidence unbelief, “in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

Ponder the things with which this word is associated – revealed in both the translations of this verse and the lexical meaning of the word: desertion, withdrawing, going away, abandoning, and quitting.

The account of John departing is found in Acts 13:13. “Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.” This was after Paul and Barnabas had passed through the island of Cyprus, and were on the way to Asia, to which the Spirit had called them. That is when John abandoned or deserted them. It was not merely that he left them, the text continues, but because “he went not with them to the work” – the work to which the Spirit had called Paul and Barnabas, and for which he had joined them as their “minister,” “assistant,” NKJV or “helper.” NASB

It must be remembered that “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2), whether the involvement is at the level of a leader of a helper.

Paul perceived “the work” of the Lord to be too important to involve those whose devotion was questionable. They would be journeying into places where they had faced hostility, and where he himself had been stoned. This was no time to institute a training program for the undependable. Although John Mark would avenge his condition later, proving himself to be trustworthy and profitable (2 Tim 4:11), that dependability had not yet been confirmed. However Barnabas may have considered John Mark, Paul did not regard him after the flesh – and that is the manner of the kingdom (2 Cor 5:16). In this case what was to be done was of greater consequence than focusing on a particular individual. The whole of the work must be considered.

In confirmation that this is, indeed, a proper way of thinking, consider the manner in which Paul dealt the infamous fornicator in Corinth. When confirming why he had spoken as he did, he made it clear that it was the whole church that concerned him. Here is what he said: “So although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender, nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your

earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God,” NASB or “to find out how loyal you are to us before God” IE (2 Cor 7:12). To be sure, the “offender” and “the one offended” profited from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. However, it was Paul’s labors with the entire congregation that was the real issue at stake.

So it is in this text. The work of visiting the churches to see how they were progressing was the greater work. In Paul’s estimation, John Mark came behind that work.

A SHARP CONTENTION CAUSES PAUL AND BARNABAS TO SEPARATE

“ 39 And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other: and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.”

There are some matters that cannot be settled – this was one of them. No counselors were called in to assist them, for that was apparently not appropriate. Behind the scenes, it seems to me that the Lord was now shifting the emphasis to Paul’s apostleship and leadership. So far as laboring with Paul, the work of Barnabas had apparently come to a conclusion, and he would be used in other ways. Considering that the report of Paul confronting Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:1-13) took place during the meeting recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts, this is the last record in the Bible of any activity of Barnabas. The only other mention of him is found in the epistles of First Corinthians and Colossians (1 Cor 9:6; Col 4:10). The Corinthian reference suggests that Barnabas did continue to work for the Lord. It is just that it is not reported.

Here we have an example of two men, both with noble motives – yet one was more interested in an individual, while the other was consumed with the work of the Lord itself.

SHARP CONTENTION

“And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other . . .” Other versions read, “such a sharp disagreement,” NASB “the disagreement became so sharp,” NRSV “a dissension,” DOUAY “so stirred,” GENEVA “this strife,” NAB “a sharp irritation,” MONTGOMERY and “a sharp clash of opinion.” PHILLIPS

Being in Christ does not dehumanize us, or cause us to be indifferent about matters that are of importance to us. Neither does it allow us to violate our conscience or indulge in activities we judge to be inappropriate. In this case, both men apparently presented their reasoning, and neither one of them would yield to the reasoning of the other. In this case, it appears that Paul had a more noble motive. The events that follow, together with the Divine record of Paul’s ministry seem to me to justify that conclusion.

BARNABAS TOOK MARK AND SAILED TO CYPRUS

“ . . . and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus.”

Cyprus, as you may recall, was the home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). The original mission trip of Barnabas and Saul took them through Cyprus (Acts 13:4-5). There were cities there where he and Paul had preached. Salamis and Paphos are particularly mentioned. In Salamis they are said to have “preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews” (13:5). Being an island with numerous cities, it is assumed that they preached in several of them as they went “through the isle unto Paphos” (13:6). However, on their return trip, they did not pass through the Isle of Cyprus, but sailed straight from Attalia to Antioch, bypassing Cyprus.

This indicates that Barnabas did not revisit the brethren as Paul had determined, seeing how they were doing, and delivering the letters sent by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. The purpose stated

by Paul, however, will not be neglected. It will be carried forward as he had determined. This leads me to believe the Lord was directing Paul.

PAUL CHOOSES SILAS FOR THE DETERMINED WORK

“ 40 And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.”

To me, this is a commentary on the effectiveness of the peace of God keeping one's heart and mind. As it is written, “And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:7). After a sharp, and apparently somewhat extended, conflict with Barnabas over taking John Mark with them, and their consequent separation, Paul's heart and mind were still on the work of the Lord. He did not abandon his plans to revisit the cities where they had preached, and see how the brethren were doing. A lesser man would have been distraught over the dispute of reference, and probably required time to be alone. The work may even have been altogether abandoned.

PAUL CHOSE SILAS

“And Paul chose Silas, and departed . . .” Other versions read, “and left,” NIV “and set out,” NRSV and “went forth.” DARBY

In other words, the brethren recognized what Paul was doing to be in harmony with the will and purpose of God. Therefore, they sought the Divine support of the work – that the Lord bless and sustain it.

Paul wasted no time, but chose Silas to take the place of Barnabas, and set out on his mission – to see how the brethren were doing in all of the cities where he and Barnabas had preached. An overly sensitive person might have been cast down because of being separated from a fellow-worker with whom he had spend quite a few years in close and productive labors.

Remember, that original mission was one to which they were called by the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, they had fulfilled that mission, completing it as the Spirit had directed them (Acts 14:26). Yet, the work of the Lord requires more than initiation – and Paul knew it. Every work that is commenced by God is like a plant that is to be tended and nurtured until it is mature.

We know this is the case because of the revealed purpose of God for the saved: to conform them to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). We know that this is accomplished through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, who changes the reconciled ones from glory unto glory (2 Cor 3:18). However, this is done, according to revelation, as they behold “the glory of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). That is where valid ministry comes into the picture, for it is through the exposition of the Gospel that what is seen of Christ is enlarged. Men do not grow by instruction, but by spiritual insight. Contrary to the suppositions of the self-help gurus, we are transformed or changed by what we SEE, not what we do (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6; 1 John 3:2).

BEING RECOMMENDED BY THE BRETHERN

“ . . . being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God.” Other versions read, “being commended by,” NKJV “being committed by,” NASB “commending him to,” NRSV “with the blessing of,” BBE “delivered . . . to,” DOUAY “entrusted him to,” GWN and “having been given up to.” YLT

This is not the first time the brethren commended someone to the grace of God. In their original mission, Barnabas and Saul had been “recommended to the grace of God” (Acts 14:26). This involves committing them into the care of the Lord for His blessing and support in the work. In other words,

the brethren recognized what Paul was doing to be in harmony with the will and purpose of God. Therefore, they sought the Divine support of the work – that the Lord bless and sustain it.

While care must be taken not to make more of this than is appropriate, the brethren are not said to have recommended Barnabas and Mark to the grace of God. This again suggests that Paul had the clearer perspective of the the work before him, and those who would be appropriate to participate in it. The considerations that compel me to view the matter in this way are as follows:

- Barnabas chose his nephew, who had not been proven to be reliable at that point.
- Barnabas took Mark to Cyprus.
- There is no further word concerning the ministry of Barnabas.
- Paul had a mind for the work itself, as opposed to an interest in an individual.
- Paul’s choice blends more perfectly with the kingdom trait of not knowing men after the flesh.
- Paul’s choice and destination met with the approval and blessing of the brethren.
- So far as the book of Acts is concerned, from this point on, the accent is on the labors of Paul.

This is not something of which I seek to make an issue. Rather, I intend to show that there are good reasons to consider Paul’s rejection of John Mark as one made with a sound mind, and with a settled interest in the churches.

PAUL AND SILAS GO THROUGHOUT SYRIA AND CILICIA CONFIRMING THE CHURCHES

“ 41 And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.”

We will find that Paul’s mission was in strict harmony with the focus of the letters prepared and sent out by the apostles and elders, with the whole church, in Jerusalem. Of that intent it is written, “And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia ” (Acts 15:23). This is the Antioch from which Barnabas and Saul had been sent out (13:1-3). Syria and Cilicia are the general areas where preaching had been done, with Antioch being a part of Syria, and the place where the matter of circumcision first became an issue.

THROUGH SYRIA AND CILICIA

“And he went through Syria and Cilicia . . .” Other versions read, “Paul went,” GWN “Paul and Silas went.” LIVING

Notice, the text reads, “ HE went.” All versions, with the exception of those noted, read “ he went” – i.e., Paul went. He was not traveling alone, but he was the leader of this expedition, God having put it into his heart. This manner of expression is frequently found in Scripture. Often it is written that Jesus went here or there, although His disciples were with Him (Matt 4:35; 9:35; 12:1; 14:14; 15:21; 21:12).

Note, there is no record of them going to Cyprus, where Barnabas took John Mark. After Acts 15:39, there is no record of any special trip being made to Cyprus. It is only mentioned in reference to trips that took vessels past Cyprus (Acts 21:3,16; 27:4). This does not appear to be of any special significance, as though it was wrong for Barnabas to have gone to Cyprus, or that in any way it was not a proper place to preach the Gospel. Those who had been scattered by the persecution that rose over Stephen had preached there (Acts 11:19). It appears, however, that the thrust of Divine activity

was in other regions.

Syria was a rather extensive territory, with numerous coastal cities, as the Mediterranean Sea was its Eastern boundary. Cities in that region included Damascus (now over 4,000 years old), Tyre, Sidon, and Laodicea.

CONFIRMING THE CHURCHES

“ . . . confirming the churches.” Other versions read, “strengthening the churches,” NKJV “making the churches stronger in the faith,” BBE “establishing the churches,” GENEVA “consolidating the churches,” NJB “helping the congregations grow stronger,” LIVING “establishing and strengthening the churches,” AMPLIFIED “on standing fast the called,” INTERLINEAR “encouraging the churches,” CEV and “making the assemblies strong,” LITV

The word “confirming” is translated from the Greek word **εὑπισθριζων** . It is in the present active tense, which means this was a continual work; i.e., it is what Paul did wherever he went. The word itself means, “ to establish besides, strengthen more; to render more firm, confirm,” THAYER “cause to be firm,” FRIBERG “to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief - 'to strengthen, to make more firm.” LOUW-NIDA

This is not strengthening as in recovering weak and backsliding people – which work is essential – but in the sense of maturing, growing up into Christ, and being more partakers of the Divine nature. Technically, this is not stabilizing a bruised reed, or fanning a smoking flax into a great flame. Those activities are essential, but that is not the meaning of “confirming.”

Actually, recovering those held captive by the devil (2 Tim 2:24-26), restoring those overtaken in a fault (Gal 6:1-2), and raising up the fallen (1 Tim 3:6-7), are activities that bring the individual to the point where they CAN grow up into Christ in all things. Once those ministries are fulfilled, the work of the laborer has not finished. Then it is necessary to get on with the work of establishing the people in the faith, or they will fall again, be bruised again, and be snared by the devil again. Let me be clear about this. The person who is dabbling in sin, succumbing to temptation, and following after worldly lusts, has been pulled out of the sphere of spiritual growth. They are on the broad road that leads to destruction.

When “the old man” dominates, “the new man” sits down. It simply is not possible to serve to masters. It is not that we should not serve two masters, it is impossible to do so. If the saints of God are not strengthened and confirmed, they cannot avoid being vulnerable to the “devices” of the wicked one.

Being “confirmed” means the person has a more firm grasp on the truth, being able to hold on to it during the storms and trials of life. Such a person is able to “stand in the evil day,” when the adversary launches unusual and prolonged initiatives against that individual (Eph 6:13). When iniquity abounds (Matt 24:12), the love of the confirmed people will not “wax cold.” In the day of adversity, they will not faint (Prov 24:10).

The “confirmed” soul can “put off the old man,” and “put on the new man” (Eph 4:22-24). They can “fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). They can “run the race with patience,” finishing the course that concludes in the presence of the Lord (Heb 12:1-2). These are the people who have effectively resisted the devil, for which cause they are able to “add” to their faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (2 Pet 1:5-6). These are the people who are obtaining more from heaven than they are denying from earth, and receiving more of the Lord than they are rejecting from the devil. They are being “taught by God” NKJV (1 Thess 4:9), have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), and are participating in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). These are the people who have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, and

have need of “strong meat” (Heb 5:12,14). They cannot subsist on meager spiritual diets. They are “prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21), being “thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17).

CONCLUSION

Our text has exposed us to the proper manner in which we are to think of the churches – all of them. It particularly accents the manner in which men should think of the churches where they have invested of themselves. A church that is not established in the faith, or “confirmed,” is not an exemplary congregation – regardless of how it may appear to men. Its size is of no consequence whatsoever, for no church of Scripture was ever evaluated upon the basis of its size. In fact, we have little or no detailed information on the size of any congregation of Scriptural record, unless it be the church in Jerusalem. There are also some indications that the church in Corinth was of considerable size, although it certainly gave them no spiritual advantage.

The stability and maturity of any congregation can be measured by the kind of diet that sustains it. If, for example, the fundamental ministries of a church pertain to getting people off the streets, aiding the needy, recovering people from moral deficiencies, putting marriages together that are falling apart, and other matters relating to moral and spiritual inadequacies, then the strength of that church is in question. It is not that any of those works are wrong, for they are not. However, not a single one of them have to do with growth up into Christ (Eph 4:15). They all have to do with getting people back on the “narrow” way that leads to life (Matt 7:14).

The stability and maturity of any congregation can be measured by the kind of diet that sustains it. If, for example, the fundamental ministries of a church pertain to getting people off the streets, aiding the needy, recovering people from moral deficiencies, putting marriages together that are falling apart, and other matters relating to moral and spiritual inadequacies, then the strength of that church is in question. It is not that any of those works are wrong, for they are not. However, not a single one of them have to do with growth up into Christ

Those who are classified as Christians, yet who live closer to the world than to heaven, are a living contradiction of “newness of life,” in which all of them had their genesis in Jesus. Our Lord certainly did say that the “sick have need of a physician” (Mk 2:17). However, who is the fool who imagines that the Great Physician leaves them sick, and that He is only a Physician? Did He not come so we could be “made partakers” of Him (Heb 3:14) – and He is certainly not sick! How is it that people who are being oriented for glory can maintain a primary affiliation with the world from which they have been delivered (Gal 1:4)? Life in Christ is calculated to bring us into the objective that God has revealed – to conform us to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). Such a conformation postulates becoming more like Him, not remaining as we were.

Ponder the advantages realized by those in Christ. These are the matters that are addressed by believers being “confirmed,” or established in the faith. These realities substantiate to us that spiritual advancement is not automatic. It requires the investment of the saved themselves, and the faithful workers who are “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9).

- Every person who is born again, with absolutely no exceptions, are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10).
- They all begin with a clean slate, having been “justified from all things” (Acts 13:39), and forgiven of “all trespasses” (Col 2:13).
- All of them were buried by baptism into the death of Christ, and raised to walk in the “newness of life” (Rom 6:4).
- All of them were “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified” (1 Cor 6:11).

- Without exception, they were raised up by God to sit together with Christ “in the heavenly places” (Eph 2:6).

- They started their new life with the “old man” crucified (Rom 6:6), and a “new man” that was “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24).

- All of them had “access” to God (Eph 3:12).

- Because they were sons, God sent His Holy Spirit into their hearts (Gal 4:6), to lead in subduing the flesh (Rom 8:13), and wait for the hope of righteousness by faith (Gal 6:5).

- Jesus Himself performed an “operation,” or work, of circumcision upon them when they were baptized, that successfully separated them from the “body of the sins of the flesh” (Col 2:11-12), so they were no longer debtors to the flesh to be dominated by its impulses (Rom 8:12).

- In addition, the grace of God came, teaching them how to successfully deny, or reject, “ungodliness and worldly lusts,” while living “soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world” (Tit 2:11-12).

- All of the saved were “reconciled to God” (Col 1:20), being no more “enemies” (Rom 5:10), and were “made free” by the Son of God from all that ensnares the soul and separates men from God (Rom 8:36; Gal 5:1).

Those who engage in the noble work of confirming the saints make much of these realities. They engage in assisting believers to see more clearly that they have been called to something that is intended to be appropriated, as well as from something to be avoided. What they have been summoned to is greater in both magnitude and nature than what they have been called from. They have been called to better things.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #68

THE INTRODUCTION OF TIMOTHY

16:1 “Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: 2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. 3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. 5 And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. ” (Acts 16:1-5)

INTRODUCTION

In the body of Christ, every member has access to God through Jesus Christ. This access is through the very same faith by which they were justified. Because it was “given” to them to believe (Phil 1:29), and the grace of God that brought salvation (Tit 2:11) “was exceeding abundant with faith” (1 Tim 1:14), there is no question about faith’s effectiveness. No member of the body of Christ is denied this access to God through faith. This means that everything required for growth and stability are well within the reach of those who are in Christ Jesus. This is something of what is involved in Divine power giving us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). However, rarely, if ever, is a “newborn babe” aware of these marvelous realities. These are matters that are opened up through teaching. If this is not done, and the Word of God is not regularly ingested, they will not be obvious to the child of God. In such a case, the person begins to live just as though the abundance that is provided in Christ does not even exist. For this reason, the individual begins to live as though mastering life in this world is really the mark of spiritual excellence. To assist such people in living out such a delusion, the professed Christian community is filled with professed experts in human behavior. None of them, however, are capable of doing what is affirmed in our text to have taken place: the establishment of the churches in the faith.

Also, there is no member that is not particularly placed in the body of Christ, or lacks a specific gift that is

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- **BUT HIS FATHER WAS A GREEK (16:1b)**
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- **PAUL DESIRES TO GO FORTH WITH HIM (16:3)**
- **THEY DELIVERED THE DECREES (16:4)**
- **THE CHURCHES WERE ESTABLISHED (16:5a)**
- **AND INCREASED IN NUMBER DAILY (16:5b)**
- **CONCLUSION**

designed to profit the whole body (1 Cor 12:18). These abilities are developed as the individual lives by faith, walks in the Spirit, and maintains the fellowship with Jesus into which he has been called. This manner of life is helped along by continuance in the apostles doctrine, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayers (Acts 2:42). No person in Christ can be built up, strengthened, or established, independently of these involvements. While this appears very evident to the person who is participating in these things, it is not at all apparent to the fledgling youth and the immature. That is one reason we are given a record of these things actually being lived out.

It will become apparent in this text that those in Christ are expected to avail themselves of the resources provided for them, and thus advance toward spiritual maturity and productivity.

AREAS OF INEQUALITY

However, there are areas in which an equality does not exist among the members of Christ. Some, for example, are referred to as “first,” “second,” and “third” (1 Cor 12:28). It is possible to “excel” (1 Cor 14:12), be “of reputation” (Gal 2:2), and be “of note” (Rom 16:7). The church in Jerusalem had those who “were of reputation” (Gal 2:2), and were “pillars” (Gal 2:9). Jesus gave Peter “the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 16:18-19). The church in Antioch had certain among them who were “prophets and teachers” (Acts 13:1). Distinctions such as these are owing to at least two factors.

- **Divine Placement.** Everyone in Christ does not occupy the same office. Just as the natural body “hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ . . . For the body is not one member, but many” (1 Cor 12:12,14). No member can assume they are not part of the body because they are not the same as others (1 Cor 12:15-18). Nor, indeed, can any member of the body affirm they have no need of the other members (1 Cor 12:21). The distinction of contributive abilities within the church is, in part, owing to their Divine placement within the body (1 Cor 12:18).

- **Eager Advancement.** In addition to the distinctions traced to their placement in the body, there is also eminence that results from ardent and consistent activity. Paul was such a person, who “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10). The household of Stephanus was also unique, in that they “addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints” (1 Cor 16:15). Paul and Barnabas were of note because they “hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26). In addition to where the Lord had placed them in the church, these brethren have uniquely availed themselves of the resources that are accessible all believers, doing so with uncommon eagerness and consistency.

I have noted over the years that the institutional church makes little room for the kind of people I have just described. Quite frequently such people are virtually ignored, and treated as though they had nothing more to offer than the rank and file of the people. This is because there really is no place in religious institutions for those who are wholly devoted to the Lord, and possess uncommon insight and devotion. Such people are generally regarded as oddities and misfits. If you happen to be such a

person, and have been exposed to what I have termed “the institutional church,” you know very well what I am talking about.

Our text introduces us to such an individual – “Timotheus,” the Greek form of his name, also referred to as “Timothy”

Here is a young man who was noted among the brethren, and was immediately recognized by Paul as being worthy of extended involvement in the work of the Lord.

SOMETHING COMMON AMONG BELIEVERS

Additionally, all of the saved have been given a “new man” (Col 3:9-10), are reconciled to God (Col 1:20), and have peace with God (Rom 5:1). From the standpoint of their acceptance by God, there is no difference among them, for in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, bond nor free (Gal 3:28).

Concerning “the new man,” very few, if any, who are first “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), are aware that they have two natures and two laws, or principles, resident in their bodies – but that is the case.

Two differing natures reside within the believer, and they are contradictory to one another. Further, this contrariety erupts in hostility. As it is written, “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:17).

Speaking of his personal involvement in this inner warfare, Paul said, “But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom 7:23). By saying “bringing me into captivity to the law of sin,” Paul does not mean that he is forced to sin, but rather that he is forced to deal with this recalcitrant law that militates against his real preferences.

James also speaks of this conflict, emphasizing the strength of the desires of the Holy Spirit for our spirit. “Or do you suppose that the Scripture is speaking to no purpose that says, The Spirit Whom He has caused to dwell in us yearns over us and He yearns for the Spirit [to be welcome] with a jealous love?” AMPLIFIED (James 4:5).

THE POINT OF MENTIONING THIS

The point of mentioning these things is to provide a proper context for the remarkable accounts recorded in the book of Acts. The advances and triumphs that were made were in spite of this inner warfare that is waged in all believers. However, fighting the war is not an end of itself. The triumph over the flesh and its desires – referred to as crucifying the flesh with its affections and lusts (Gal 5:24) – is in order to personal involvement in “that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). This, of course, is the great weakness in submitting to the “ordinances” of men that are related to attempting to control sin. Those ordinances consider the subduing of sinful tendencies to be the will of God – and, in a sense, this is true. However, in the most precise sense of the word, the will of God is related to this: “That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thess 4:4). Sanctification and honor have more to do with Divine employment than controlling the flesh. The denial of ungodliness and worldly lusts is in order that we might engage in the “good works” for which we have been “created” – works “which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

It is the participation in these “good works” that is being reported in Luke’s record of the advance of the church. It is most blessed to consider it.

TIMOTHY DISCOVERED IN THE AREA OF LYSTRA AND DERBE

16:1a “Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed . . .”

THEN

“Then . . .” Other versions read, “and,” NASB “He also,” NLT “From there.” NJB

The Greek word translated “Then” is **de**, which means “but, moreover . . . universally, by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement.” THAYER In other words this is not an explanation of the previous statement, but something that is compared with it. The previous statement is, “And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches” (Acts 15:41). This suggests that Paul and Silas had already strengthened the churches in Syria and Cilicia, for Derbe and Lystra were cities in Lycaonia (Acts 14:6). Syria and Cilicia were en route to these cities, In other words, Luke is not providing all of the details related to this trip. He is rather accentuating the events that led to the epochs he will report.

THEY CAME TO DERBE AND LYSTRA

“ . . . came he to Derbe and Lystra . . .” Other versions read, “went on also to,” NRSV “came also to,” ASV “he reached (also),” NAB “from there he went to,” NJB and “He also went to.” ISV

These were the last cities Paul and Barnabas visited on their initial trip (Acts 14:6,21). Derbe was the final city, and from there they had backtracked, visiting Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia, confirming the souls of the disciples (Acts 14:21-22).

Now Derbe and Lystra are the first cities Paul and Silas went to, following passing through Syria and Cilicia, “confirming the churches.”

Lystra was the city where Paul had been stoned during his first trip with Barnabas (Acts 14:8-19). There is where he healed a man who had been “cripple from his mother’s womb” (Acts 14:8). It is also where he and Barnabas barely restrained the citizenry from offering sacrifice to them, for the people there thought Jupiter (Zeus) and Mercurius (Hermes) had come down to them in the persons of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:11-18).

It is evident that Paul spoke the truth when he later said to the elders of Ephesus, “But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). Dominated by “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:2), Paul was moved along by something higher than self-interest.

A CERTAIN DISCIPLE WAS THERE

“ . . . and, behold, a certain disciple was there . . .” Other versions read, “there was a disciple,” NRSV “a disciple was there,” RSV “there was a young disciple,” NLT “a follower,” IE and “he found there.” WEYMOUTH

It seems to me that a measure of a real man of God is a marked tendency to spot devoted followers of Christ and culture an association with them.

Here we are being exposed to the nature of Paul. He was alert for distinguished disciples, as well as believers in general. It seems to me that a measure of a real man of God is a marked tendency to spot devoted followers of Christ and culture an association with them. Jesus Himself had this disposition. When seeing Nathanael, for example, Jesus said, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom

is no guile!” (John 1:47). He perceived the remarkable faith of a certain centurion and said, “Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel” (Matt 8:10). He also said to the Syrophenician woman who pressed him for a blessing, “O woman, great is thy faith” (Matt 15:28).

This kind of awareness is also embedded in the very text of Scripture. Those who excelled in matters pertaining to God are duly noted.

- It is said of David that God, “gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will” (Acts 13:22).
- The mighty angel Gabriel said to Daniel, “I am come to show thee; for thou art greatly beloved” (Dan 9:23).
- It is written of Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist, “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6).
- The early church referred to Paul and Barnabas as “Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:26).
- Andronicus and Junia were “of note among the apostles” (Rom 16:2).
- Persis, a Persian woman who was a believer, is described as one “which labored much in the Lord” (Rom 16:12).
- James Peter and John were “acknowledged pillars” NRSV of the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:9).

Now, coming to the region of Lystra and Derbe, there was a young man that stood out – a “certain disciple,” or follower of Jesus Christ.

In his letters to Timothy, Paul admonished him to seek out “faithful men” – those who were reliable . NIV He was to take the things he had heard from Paul and “commit,” or “transmit and entrust [as a deposit],” AMPLIFIED them to others in order that they might “teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2). I do not believe this word has been taken seriously by the modern church. There is too much reliance on methodology, education, and the obtaining of credentials.

The religious professional of our time would probably never have noticed Timotheus. However, a godly man engaged in the work of the Lord would not have passed him by.

TIMOTHEUS, THE SON OF A BELIEVING JEWESS

“ . . . named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed . . .” Other versions read, “the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed,” NKJV “whose mother was a Jewess and a believer,” NIV “the son of a Christian Jewess,” WEYMOUTH and “whose mother was a Jewish Christian.” PHILLIPS

“ Probably Timothy was about eighteen years of age, a convert of Paul's former visit a few years before (1Tim 1:2) and still young twelve years later (1Tim 4:12).” ROBERTSON'S WORD PICTURES

“Timotheus” is the Greek form of “Timothy.”

During their first trip into that region, Paul and Barnabas “preached the Gospel” (14:6-7). After Paul had been stoned in Lystra, he and Barnabas had gone to Derbe, “preached the Gospel in that city, and taught many” (14:21). On their returned trip, they had “confirmed the souls of the disciples” in that region, and “ordained elders in every church” (14:23). That is the spiritual culture in which young Timothy matured. Because Paul referred to him as his “own son in the faith,” he was probably converted during one of those visits.

There were at least three years between the initial visit of Paul and Barnabas to that area and this return – and possible as many as five years. Assuming that this was the time of Timothy’s conversion, he had greatly matured during the interim between the first and second visits. All of this being true, and considering the notation of A.T. Robertson concerning the probable age of Timothy at this time, his conversion could have been when he was somewhere between thirteen and fifteen years of age. This is probably the approximate age of Daniel, Hananiah, Michael, and Azariah when they were taken captive to Babylon.

Considering that Paul and Barnabas brought the Gospel to this region, this must also have been the time when Timothy’s mother and grandmother were converted, for the faith that Timothy had first dwelt in them (2 Tim 1:5). If it is true that Timothy, his mother, and his grandmother were converted during Paul’s first tour through that region, those three souls highlight the value of a pure spiritual environment, where saints have been “confirmed,” exhorted to “continue in the faith,” and solemnly reminded that “we must, through much tribulation, enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Where such activities are missing, it seems to me that believers are in danger of being shut up to mediocrity, and becoming more vulnerable to the attacks of the wicked one.

Timothy’s Upbringing

Timothy had been nurtured in the Scriptures from the time he was a young child. Paul reminded him in one of his letters, “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). This tutelage had come from his mother, who herself was a second generation believer. Paul wrote of her, “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Tim 1:5).

This refers to Timothy’s Jewish upbringing by his mother, prior to him becoming disciple of Christ. Here is a notable example of special education and training in the Scriptures themselves. This was a Jewish manner, who maintained their own schools, and centered their learning in the Scriptures. Ordinarily, they were never absorbed into the culture where they were found, but remained unique within it. This tendency continues to this very day.

This was a Jewish manner, who maintained their own schools, and centered their learning in the Scriptures. Ordinarily, they were never absorbed into the culture where they were found, but remained unique within it.

It was this faithful upbringing that led Timothy to believe the Gospel that Paul had preached in that region. Elsewhere Paul said of his preaching. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ” (Acts 26:22). This kind of preaching is exceedingly rare in our day. Under the leadership of the mega-church and media ministers, the thrust of preaching has been focused on meeting the perceived needs of the individual rather than declaring the Lord’s Christ. This kind of emphasis sounds noble only to those who are fundamentally ignorant of the Scriptures, which are able to “give you the wisdom that leads to salvation” NASB (2 Tim 3:15). This is the kind of departure of which Peter wrote: “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you : whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet 2:1-3).

Paul’s References to Timothy

Paul's references to Timothy confirm his uniqueness.

- “My own son in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2).
- “My beloved son” (1 Cor 4:17).
- “My workfellow” (Rom 15:21).
- “My brother” (2 Cor 1:1).
- Uniquely “likeminded” with Paul, who “naturally cared” for the state of God’s people (Phil 2:19-22).
- “He is doing the Lord's work, as I also am” NASB (1 Cor 16:10)
- “Minister of God and fellow laborer in the Gospel of Christ” (1 Thess 3:2).

All of this confirms that Timothy was just as unique as he first appeared to be. He had availed himself of the spiritual advantages that were given to him. There was spiritual substance to him, and it was duly noted by Paul.

BUT HIS FATHER WAS A GREEK

“ 1b . . . but his father was a Greek.” Other versions read, “was a Gentile,” DOUAY and “was a Grecian.” GENEVA The idea is that his father was neither a Jew nor a believer in Christ, for he is contrasted with Timothy’s mother who was “a Jewess, and believed.” By contrast – “but” – his father “was a Greek.” A contrast between Jew and Greek is often found in Scripture.

- “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).
- “And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks ” (Acts 18:4).
- “And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10).
- “And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified” (Acts 19:17).
- “Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks , repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21).
- “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek ” (Rom 1:16).
- “For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him” (Rom 10:12).
- “For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness ; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks , Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:22-24)
- “There is neither Jew nor Greek , there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).
- “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew , circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all” (Col 3:11).

Some have surmised that Timothy’s father had died, leaving him alone with his mother. However, I do not see this as a tenable view. The fact that a point is made of his father being a Greek, and that

special action will be taken in view of that fact, suggests that he was still alive. Further, I do not know why a point is made of his mother being a believer but his father a Greek if he was no longer alive. The comparison is not between a wife that was alive and a husband that was dead, but between someone who believed and someone who did not.

However a person chooses to view the situation, it does confirm that a child can, if required, be raised in the faith without a believing father. What is more, the upbringing can be extraordinary, yielding results that were duly noted by the apostle to the Gentiles.

HE WAS WELL REPORTED OF BY THE BRETHERN

“ 2 Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.” Other versions read, “well spoken of,” NKJV “had a high opinion,” BBE “spoke highly,” CSB “had a good testimony,” DARBY “gave good testimony of him,” MRD “well thought of,” NLT “respected Timothy,” IE “highly regarded,” ISV “had a high reputation,” WILLIAMS “was attested to,” INTERLINEAR “said good things about,” CEV and “held in high regard.” PHILLIPS

As used in this text, the word translated “well reported of,” has the following lexical meaning: “to be **continuously** well reported of . . . giving honorable testimony,” THAYER and “receive a good report, be well-spoken of, be approved, have a good reputation.” FRIBERG

Here was a young man, probably in his teens, who, within a relatively short period of time (2-4 years) had captured the attention of the believers in that region. Such a phenomenon would be even more extraordinary in our time than it was at the time of our text. However, this is a sterling example of what the grace of God will do in a person who is wholly given to the Lord – a person who avails himself of the Scripture and those who have insight into them.

The “brethren” were continually speaking well of Timothy, noting his spiritual excellence. The tense (perfect) of the Greek word here (**evmarturei/to**), indicates a continual witness. Robertson, in his “Word Pictures,” makes a special note of this: “ (*emartureito*). Imperfect passive. It was a continuous witness that was borne the young disciple both in his home town of Lystra and in Derbe. Already he had so borne himself that his gifts and graces for the ministry were recognized.” It also ought to be noted that a person who has not distinguished himself among local disciples, will probably not be able to do it anywhere else.

Like young Samuel, Timothy excelled his peers. Like Daniel and his three fellows, he stood out in comparison to others of his age. Although it ought to be evident, the reputation of Timothy did not pertain to athletic, scholastic, or musical skills – although it is remotely possible he may have excelled in such things. This commendation, however, had to do with the things of God. He had already begun to live out what Paul

would later buttress in a special letter to him: “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). It is refreshing to note that we have some younger brethren among us who are following in the train of such notable disciples.

Although I want to avoid appearing overly negative, I feel compelled to note the general absence of this kind of youthful response in the churches of our time. Under the incapable leadership of religious professionals, the younger brethren have been isolated from the more mature believers. It appears this has been done in order to appeal to their vernal interests. Such an approach is wholly without any Scriptural suggestion or precedent. I am not aware of any text of Scripture that suggests any spiritual aptitude or maturity can be achieved independently of the body of Christ, Imagine the laughter that would be elicited if someone suggested the eye could be better developed if all of the eyes were put together; or that a keen ear could be acquired by putting all of the ears together. The

notion of regularly, and even permanently, isolating a body of people within the church – any people – in order to focus attention upon them, is questionable, to say the least.

By becoming absorbed in the youthful culture of our time, many Christian young people have, in fact, separated themselves conceptually from the body of Christ. More and more, they are not viewed in association with the body of believers.

By becoming absorbed in the youthful culture of our time, many Christian young people have, in fact, separated themselves conceptually from the body of Christ. More and more, they are not viewed in association with the body of believers. However, the word to young people is still, “Be thou an example of the believers” (1 Tim 4:12). Note the remarkable extent of Paul’s exhortation. “Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

- **Let no man despise thy youth.** Every younger believer is a steward of their youth. They are not to exhibit youthful foolishness, the lack of sobriety that characterizes worldly youth, or one who is dominated by a lust for pleasure.

- **Be an example of the believers.** The standard of measurement are those who are living by faith (Heb 10:38) – “the believers.” These are “the household of faith” (Gal 6:10), who walk by faith, and not by sight (2 Cor 5:7). Those who believe are those who are properly focused, and live unto the Lord who died for them and rose again.

- **Be an example in word.** In speech, they are to speak as believers, not in the jargon of worldly youth. They are not to speak in a manner that makes no sense to those who are trusting in the Lord with all of their hearts, and not leaning to their own understanding (Prov 3:5). Their speech is with grace (Col 4:6), and they have a keen awareness that they will be justified or condemned by their words (Matt 12:37).

- **Be an example in conversation.** Their conversation is their conduct — the manner in which they live. Believers, of which they are to be example, are strangers and pilgrims in this world (1 Pet 2:11). They are in the process of denying ungodliness and worldly lusts. They are living soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and are looking for Christ’s appearing (Tit 2:12). The believers have a manner of life in which they fasten their gaze upon things that are not seen, rather than what can be seen, and is consequently passing away (2 Cor 4:18).

- **Be an example in charity.** This is the love that puts the interests of other above self. Charity gives, forgives, and seeks the betterment of others.; (1 Cor 13:1-13).

- **Be an example in spirit.** This has to do with living a controlled life, keeping under the body and bringing it into subjection (1 Cor 9:27). It has to do with the posture of our life, what motivates us, and how we live before the Lord. A spiritual person is one who is “humble in spirit” (Prov 29:23), is “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3), and is content with the things they have (Heb 13:5). Having been taught by the grace of God, they deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world (Tit 2:12).

- **Be an example in faith.** Young believers are to be an example of the believers in their faith – holding up under trials, and not being moved about with every wind of doctrine. The just “live by faith” (Rom 1:17), and they are to exhibit this manner in their lives.

- **Be an example in purity.** Believers are those who keep themselves “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). They are busy about cleansing themselves of all filthiness and flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1). They make it their aim to “walk in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). They labor at avoiding contaminating and defiling influences. Jesus pronounced a blessing on the “pure in heart,” declaring of such, “they shall see God” (Matt 4:8). Emphasizing the role of purity, Paul also

admonished Timothy, “neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim 5:22).

This is the manner in which youthful believers are addressed. There is no special dumbed-down version of the Gospel for them. They have not been liberated to meander about in the various “youthful lusts” of the flesh. Rather, they have been called into a life that requires the crucifixion of the flesh, and the pursuit of the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Confirming their oneness with the body of Christ they are admonished, “Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22).

THE POINT OF THIS

The point of this brief diversion is to emphasize that these are the areas where Timothy had distinguished himself. He had a good report as a believer, not merely as an energetic youth. There is, of course, a lot of unwarranted assumption concerning youthful vigor. During that period of life, children are not noted for their productivity or sustained work and industry. By nature, their energies are ordinarily devoted to passing pleasures. However, with Timothy, this was not the case. The “good report” that was given of him was not merely that he stayed out of trouble and did the bidding of his parents. He was, at a young age, a noble “example of the believers,” and had obtained that reputation among them.

PAUL DESIRES TO GO FORTH WITH HIM

“ 3 Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.”

Being alert to the environment in which he found himself, Paul took due note of Timothy. It is true that walking in the Spirit causes one to be alert to the working of the Spirit in the people of God. The person who walks in the flesh dismisses the presence of godly people as something of little consequence. I have often been in gatherings of professed Christian leaders that appeared to give little regard to especially godly people among them. It is common, for example, for a Christian philanthropist, or one who engages in some form of charitable work, is perceived as being deeply involved in the work of the Lord. As laudable as such works are, serving tables is by no means to be seen as equal to laboring in the Word and in the doctrine (Acts 6:2; 1 Tim 5:17). For example, the thing that distinguished Paul from others was his prodigious labors in preaching and teaching what he had been given to see (Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 2:4; 4:7; 9:27; 15:1,2,10; Gal 1:8; Col 1:28; 1 Thess 2:9).

There is a certain Kingdom awareness that is worthy of note. That is, as we are living in a conscious awareness of the living God and His purpose in Christ Jesus, certain things become obvious to us. Faith causes us to be alert to the presence of the Lord Himself, as well as His people. The presence of faith, hope, love, the fruit of the Spirit, works of faith, the love of the truth, and those who are pilgrims in this world, become very obvious.

By way of comparison, a fleshly mind, sectarianism, and adherence to lifeless religious tradition hide all of these things to us. In such a case, we become blind and insensitive to Divine workings. Like Jerusalem of old, such people do not know the time of their visitation (Lk 19:44).

Spiritual obtuseness is the plague of the church of our time. In order for any semblance of spiritual sensitivity to be aroused, all manner of coaching and stimulus is required. In our time, most of this appears to be artificial, being nothing more than a meager attempt to simulate spiritual life.

In such a surrounding as this, Timothy would have been very difficult to detect. First, it is doubtful that such a young man would choose to be in such an environment – unless it was in the capacity of a speaker like Stephen. Second, Paul would not have been inclined to be in such a place unless he was going to address the people.

If you have not already learned this, you will find that the more your mind is stayed on the Lord, the less you will be attracted to lifeless assemblies, even if they have a lot of outward activity. A love for the truth cultures a certain disdain for a misrepresentation of the truth. A quest for glory develops within the individual a very real contempt for things that cause this world to seem more prominent than it really is. That is the manner of spiritual life.

At any rate, it was in the activity of preaching, teaching, and “confirming the churches” that Paul took note of Timothy (Acts 15:41; 16:1). In this, he followed the example of the Lord Jesus Himself. He chose His disciples while He was in the act of preaching and teaching (Matt 4:17-23; Lk 5:17-27).

PAUL CHOOSES HIM

“Him would Paul have to go forth with him . . .” Other versions read, “wanted this man to go with him,” NASB “wanted to take him along on the journey,” NIV “wanted Timothy to accompany him,” NRSV “was disposed to take with him,” MRD “wanted to have him as a traveling companion,” NJB “wanted him to join them on their journey,” NLT and “asked him to join them on their journey.”
LIVING

Paul was not merely looking to add a young man to the group – a sort of trainee. He had already judged Mark to be unworthy of such a privilege (15:37-38). The idea here is that Paul wanted Timothy to be “with him” in the mission on which he had embarked. That work was to “go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (Acts 15:36).

In our time, who has heard of such a mission? To be sure, there are precious laborers engaged in such holy activity, but it is rare, indeed. I know of no Bible College of Seminary that endeavors to prepare students for such a work. It certainly is not common to hear of such a thing in the churches.

The very fact that Paul had a profound desire to take Timothy on such a mission is commentary enough on the spiritual quality of this young man.

We assume that Paul’s request was clearly made known to Timothy and to his mother. It is obvious that there was no reluctance on the part of Timothy, or on the part of his mother or other relatives. This young man was “prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim 2:21). He did not draw back like the person who said he would follow Jesus, but requested to go home first, and bid farewell to those of his house (Lk 9:61). Nor, indeed, was he like the would-be disciple who said he would follow Jesus, but asked that he first be allowed to go and bury his father (Lk 9:59). Both of these people were rejected by Jesus. However, there was no hesitation on the part of Timothy. In fact, it appears that he went with Paul immediately.

PAUL CIRCUMCISED HIM

“ . . . and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters . . .” Other versions read, “because of the Jews in that region,” NKJV “because of the Jews who lived in that area,” NIV “on account of the Jews in the locality,” NJB and “in deference to the Jews of the area.”
NLT

Here we are faced with an action that will confuse the sectarian. It seems inconsistent with the very letters that Paul was carrying to the churches. The apostles and elders in Jerusalem, together with the whole church, had gathered together to consider the matter of circumcision – particularly with regard to it being necessary to be saved. Now, in seeming contradiction of the decree of the apostles and elders, Paul has Timothy circumcised.

This action was taken “because of the Jews which were in those quarters” – not those of “the brethren,” as in 16:2 – but “of the Jews.” The phrase “of the Jews” is mentioned twenty-two times in the book of Acts (10:22,39; 12:11; 13:5,43; 14:1,5; 16:3; 17:1,10; 20:19; 22:30; 23:12, 27; 25:2,8,15,24; 26:2). It always refers to those who were not believers in Christ, but were fleshly Jews .

When the Gospel was first preached to them, probably by Paul, they had believed on Christ, having been taught by the Law and the Prophets to anticipate Him, and to recognize Him when He was preached.

Add to this the fact that Paul had refused to have Titus circumcised during the Jerusalem conference. Of that occasion he wrote, “But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: and that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (Gal 2:3-5).

Something more is involved here than merely following, or not following, a given procedure. Paul’s action was mingled with wisdom, and with a consideration of the impact of this circumstance upon the ministry of Timothy. As we will see, the circumstance was not identical with that of Titus. It is apparent that the Jews whom Paul considered here, were unbelieving Jews, who had not yet obeyed the Gospel.

THEY ALL KNEW

“ . . . for they knew all that his father was a Greek.” Other versions read. “

From this, we can see how Timothy’s mother had distinguished herself among the Jews – they were all aware of her, and of her marriage. Whether this was because of her devotion, or because she married a Gentile is not specified. I suspect that both were involved, with the emphasis being on the former. She had come from a devout Jewish family, whose faith in God was beyond all question. Paul said of Timothy’s mother and grandmother, “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Tim 1:5).

It is apparent that Lois and Eunice were now believers in Christ. However, they had also been devout Jews, and were noted for being so. In them the Scripture was fulfilled, “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). Like Zecharias and Elizabeth, they were “both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6). When the Gospel was first preached to them, probably by Paul, they had believed on Christ, having been taught by the Law and the Prophets to anticipate Him, and to recognize Him when He was preached.

Also, in this family, Timothy, as well as the marriage itself, was sanctified by his believing mother . Where there is a peaceful marriage among those who are divided because of faith, the believer, whether husband or wife, makes the marriage to be sanctioned by God. Therefore Paul wrote, “For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy” (1 Cor 7:14). This had taken place in the case of Timothy’s mother, and this he was considered a proper child, even though the circumstances were not ideal. This kind of thinking is very difficult for those who major on the family structure, instead of the believers who are in the family.

Now, in consideration of the Jews in that region, who were acquainted with Timothy’s family, Paul circumcises Timothy. Because of the nature of this circumstance, this was not a private matter, but a public one.

The Circumstances Were Different

In the case of Timothy, Paul's action was in consideration of Jews who were not believers in Christ. He would be journeying among them, with Timothy participating in the work he would do. It was therefore expedient that there be no unnecessary offense among the Jews because Timothy was not circumcised. It is apparent that we are not dealing here with factious Jews who had believed on Christ, yet demanded that uncircumcised believers be circumcised after the manner of Moses. Paul would not have submitted to such a demand.

It is apparent that we are not dealing here with factious Jews who had believed on Christ, yet demanded that uncircumcised believers be circumcised after the manner of Moses. Paul would not have submitted to such a demand.

Thus, as already stated, the circumstance differed from that of Titus, when "false brethren" sought to force Titus to be circumcised. Paul considered such people "false brethren," and would not submit to them for a single hour (Gal 2:3-5).

There are a number of principles to be seen in this text. They all emphasize the necessity of insightful laborers in the Lord's field.

- **WALKING IN WISDOM TOWARD THEM THAT ARE WITHOUT.**

Believers are admonished, "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time" (Col 4:5). This involves taking care not to cause needless offense. As it is written, "Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God" (1 Cor 10:32). In this case, offending the Jews was the issue – devout Jews, not malicious ones. By circumcising Timothy, Paul was confirming to the Jews that his purpose was not to merely "change the customs" of the Jews – a charge false witnesses raised against Stephen (Acts 6:13-14). Later, Paul affirmed with clarity that he had not gone about to disrupt the customs of the Jews: "Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all" (Acts 25:8). In Christ, required changes are made as a result of insight, not the adopting of some new habits or routines.

- **NOT SUBMITTING TO SECTARIAN DEMANDS.** Being considerate of others, and submitting to the demands of sectarian leaders are two different things. The latter is strictly out of order. A believer may choose to be considerate of the persuasions of others, altering his personal conduct as Paul did when he paid the expenses for a temple vow made by four Jewish men (Acts 21:23-26). In that case, James reminded Paul that those Jews were not binding their custom on the Gentiles. It was strictly a devout personal adherence to the instructions for taking a vow of dedication to the Lord for a season (Num 6:2-7). If, however, this had been a demand placed upon Paul, he would not have done it. It is obvious that wisdom is required in such cases – cases that cannot be settled by rules or routines.

- **NOVICES AND MINISTRY.** How would a novice have handled such a circumstance? It is obvious that he would not have been able to address the issue wisely. He might have erroneously treated sincere Jews as though they were hypocritical bigots, and cited strong New Covenant teaching to confirm the folly of their thinking. This is why Paul said of spiritual leaders, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim 3:6).

- **WHEN YOU ARE INTERPRETED WRONGLY.** When honest and good people interpret you wrongly, it is in order to dispel their view by considerate actions. If religious bigots see you in erroneous ways, you are under no obligation to alter your conduct to please them. There is no record of Jesus or the apostles changing their conduct in order to please hypocrites who stood in judgment of them. Of course, there is an obligation placed upon the people of God to be able to distinguish the difference between such critics.

SOMETHING ELSE TO BE NOTED

There is something else here that is worthy of our attention. Notice that precisely twenty-three words are devoted to the report of Timothy being circumcised: “. . . took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.”

- Paul circumcised Timothy.
- He did it because of the Jews in those quarters, who knew his father was a Greek.

This is not the manner in which a man of the world would have reported this incident. It is man's nature to emphasize incidentals, drawing attention to things that are not directly related to the purpose of God. However, this is not the Divine manner, and thus the Holy Spirit does not move inspired writers to linger upon such things. This is a remarkably consistent manner, whether the record involves Adam, Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, or the Prophets. It continues in the reports of men like John the Baptist, the apostles, Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, etc. For that matter, what do we know of the Lord Jesus Himself that is not directly related to the reason for which He was sent to men? What incidentals we do know are few and far between. They are not sufficient to write a detailed biography of their lives.

We should learn from this to avoid the inclusion of a lot of earthly incidentals in our preaching and teaching. They have a distracting quality about them, and often require an inordinate amount of explanation.

THEY DELIVERED THE DECREES

“ 4 And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.”

Having selected an additional companion, and removed unnecessary obstacles, Paul and company commence the further fulfillment of their mission: “to visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do” (15:36).

Behold the interest of the man of God in those upon whom he has bestowed labor! Paul is keenly aware of the Divine agenda, which is for the Son to bring many sons to glory (Heb 2:10). He also knew that his commission involved ensuring that those who turned from darkness to light, will receive the inheritance “among them which are sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18). It was not enough to bring them to a point where they ceased to live after the manner of the Gentiles. It was not sufficient for them to merely adopt a new kind of life that included various sanctified activities. The aim was for the converts to be among those who would ultimately be presented to the Lord “not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing” (Eph 5:27). It was for the believers to have “boldness in the day of judgment,” and be ready for the appearing of the Lord (1 John 4:17).

AS THEY WENT THROUGH THE CITIES

“And as they went through the cities . . .” Other versions read, “while they were passing through the cities,” NASB “as they traveled from town to town,” NIV “as they went on their way through the cities,” RSV “as they visited one town after another,” NJB and “as they were going on through the cities.” YLT

Again, note the impact of their purpose upon their mission. I do not doubt that there were many interesting sights in these cities. However, that is not what had captured the attention of this holy entourage. It was the clusters of believers in the cities that were the object of this mission. Once they were visited, there was no further reason to linger in the cities. They simply passed through them.

THEY DELIVERED THE DECREES

“ . . . they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.” Other versions read, “they were delivering the decrees,” NASB “the delivered the decisions,” NIV “they delivered to them for observance the decisions,” NRSV and “they instructed them to observe the decrees.” DARBY

When the apostles and elders sent the letters to Antioch, they addressed them to “the brethren which are Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (15:23). There were a number of cities in the region, Lystra and Derbe being two of them. Now they went throughout the region, delivering the decrees that had been “ordained of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem.” Those decrees were as follows.

- “That ye abstain from meats offered to idols.”
- “That ye abstain . . . from blood.”
- “That ye abstain . . . from things strangled.”
- “That ye abstain . . . from fornication.”

General Requirements

The original question raised in Antioch concerned circumcision. The apostles dismissed the question by saying the issue was not raised with their consent. It was wholly spurious, and the Gentiles were to disregard it. However, there were matters that did pertain to them – matters that related more to God Himself than to men. They were to guard against developing any consciousness of idols, for God has no equals or competitors (Psa 86:10). They were to maintain a high regard for life, for it is God who “giveth to all life, and breath” (Acts 17:26). They were also to refrain from the prostitution of the body, for “the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor 6:13).

These were not regional directives, but applied to all of the churches. Right and wrong, and acceptable and unacceptable are not defined by varying standards. Where differing responses are acceptable (as in Romans 14), one’s conscience toward God is the determining factor. That must be characterized by a full persuasion, “for whatsoever is not of faith I sin” (Rom 14:5,23).

There is a reason for this approach. If a person’s thinking is going to be brought into harmony with the mind of the Lord – and that is the ultimate objective – it will be done within the context of faith and of “charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (1 Tim 1:5). Spiritual life is not defined more precisely in a “what is right for you may not be right for me” mentality. Differing views of the same matter are to be held tentatively in the prospect of finally arriving at the point where we have the same mind and the same judgment (1 Cor 1:10). Private views are not the best ones, and they are not to be held and maintained as though they were. The Kingdom belongs to the Lord, and His will is the supreme will. In such a circumstance, there is no time when self can be exalted. Even when there is a good conscience about a matter, it is quite possible that continued exposure to the truth will modify that good conscience.

In this case, however, conscience was not the determining factor. The Gentiles of that region had been exposed to teaching that was expressly associated with salvation: “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). On matters relating to salvation, there is no room for human opinion. This is because “Salvation belongeth to the Lord” (Jonah 2:9), and will ultimately be ascribed wholly unto Him (Rev 7:10). Like the altar of old, human innovations cannot be employed in God’s salvation. Of that altar it is written, “And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it” (Ex 20:25).

Those who themselves require the salvation of God, cannot employ their own methodologies in it. That ought to be glaringly apparent. However, alas, it is not. Men continue to this day to insist on their own devices to rescue men from sin – either initially, or in recovering those who have been “overtaken in a fault” (Gal 6:1). It simply cannot be allowed.

The directives that were given by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem were not originated by them. Further, they had the discretion to see that although circumcision was not essential, keeping the decrees they delivered was essential. After all, they did receive them from the Holy Spirit, as they themselves affirmed: “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us” (Acts 15:28).

THE CHURCHES WERE ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH

“ 5a And so were the churches established in the faith . . . ”

The Spirit now makes a statement concerning the effectiveness of the ministry of Paul and company. Remember, the stated objective was to visit the churches and see how they were doing, progressing, or growing up into Christ in all things. This determination would be made by comparing their state with the revealed objective of God Himself – to conform the people to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29). This conformation would be accomplished through the appointed means: apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers” (Eph 4:12). It is through these gifts, that were given to the church through the exalted Jesus, and as they held fast to the Head of the body, that edification would occur. The ordained result – growing up into Christ in all things, and being filled with all the fulness of God (Eph 3:16-19; 4:12-16).

Seeing how the churches were doing in this process involved more than merely observing them. Any deficiencies would be addressed – like the misconceptions addressed by the decrees Paul delivered from the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. The aim, however, was not merely to meet the needs of the saints, or to correct any flawed conduct or perceptions that were found among them. They were not like physicians coming to see how sick the people were, but like husbandmen who were examining the productivity of the vineyards (Lk 13:7-9).

AND SO

And so . . . ” Other versions read, “Accordingly,” CJB “therefore,” DARBY “day after day,” NAB and “then, indeed.” YLT

The expression “so were” is translated from two Greek words: **me.n ou=n** .

The first word means “truly, certainly, surely, indeed.” THAYER The second word means “then, therefore, accordingly, consequently.” THAYER The meaning of the phrase “and so” is very weighty: Certainly, as a consequence of Paul and company passing through the cities, the following results were realized. This is not the mere opinion of a witness, but is a statement of the fact from heaven’s point of view. The Lord is here informing us of the results of Paul and those with him visiting the brethren. The report is like the trail of a shooting star – a certain glory that resulted from the visits of these holy brethren.

THE CHURCHES WERE ESTABLISHED

“ . . . were the churches established . . . ” Other versions read, “strengthened,” NKJV “made strong,” BBE “confirmed,” DARBY and “grew stronger.” NAB

We have already read of the churches being “confirmed” (Acts 15:32). Although there is some similarity in the expression used here, the word “established” comes from a different Greek word – **evstereou/nto** , as compared with **evpesth,rixan** in Acts 15:32. The former word refers to strengthening, like a building being made more firm, or a tree being able to stand against strong gales.

The word used here speaks of strengthening like that of the muscles – to be made more able to be productive in the Kingdom, as compared to standing against assaults by the wicked one.

The aim of the gifts Jesus has given to men is that “the whole body” might be “fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth” (Eph 4:16). That is, as each member holds to the Head, there is a mutual edification that takes place, where the people are “able to admonish one another” (Rom 15:14).

This is establishment like a well tended and nurtured vine that bears abundant fruit – or a cultivated olive tree that produces an abundance of quality fruit. Those who are made strong in this respect are consistent in being productive and beneficial in the body of Christ.

IN THE FAITH

“ . . . in the faith . . . ” All versions read the same, referring to “the faith” as the area in which the churches were made strong and productive. That is, their persuasion of the realities faith grasps became stronger. Their confidence increased in both measure and strength. They were more fully persuaded, and more sure of the accomplishments of Jesus and their own acceptance in the Beloved.

The Domain of Faith

The domain of faith is where salvation is worked out (Phil 2:12). It is not accomplished in the realm of self-discipline, although faith causes a person to be more disciplined than is possible under any other means. Faith has to do with perceiving – being able to see “Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). It has to do with being fully persuaded that God is able to do what He has promised (Rom 4:21). Faith secures to the soul what God has promised, and moves the individual to embark on otherwise impossible things – as when Noah “prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb 11:7), or when David ran to meet, and prevailed over, the giant warrior Goliath “with a sling and with a stone” (1 Sam 17:48-50).

There is no scientific method through which a person can come to be “established in the faith.” No man, however astute in intellect and analysis is capable of conceiving a procedure by which establishment in the faith can be achieved. No book has been written on this subject that is capable of delivering the desired results. If a person is ever going to be “established in the faith,” so that spiritual productivity and fruit result, it will have to be God’s way. It is simply not possible for faith to be obtained or maintained in any other way. This is because faith primarily has to do with God. Thus It is written, “But without faith it is impossible to PLEASE HIM : for he that COMETH TO GOD must believe that HE IS , and that HE IS a rewarder of them that diligently SEEK HIM ” (Heb 11:6).

Those who represent faith as primarily having to do with obtaining the things of this world, or being successful in earthly relationships, have seriously misrepresented the case.

In faith, Jesus is preeminent, and coming to God is the immediate objective (Heb 7:25). Faith has to do with things that are “not seen” – things that are “eternal” (2 Cor 4:18).

References to Establishment

A church or a person that is established in the faith does not waver, or vacillate. This state is the objective for every believer. “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering ; (for He is faithful that promised)” (Heb 10:23). Answered prayer is conditioned upon this unwavering state: “But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering . For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (James 1:6). These are souls that are not “tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). They are not subject to doctrinal confusion or delusion.

It ought to be obvious that establishment in the faith is essential. However, judging from the condition of the nominal church, this is not common knowledge – even though the Spirit has spoken clearly and repeatedly concerning it to the churches.

- **ESTABLISHMENT.** “Established” (Rom 1:11-12). “Established in the faith” (Col 2:7). To be established is to be solid like a building, fruitful like a healthy tree, and grown up in Christ.

- **STRENGTH.** “Strong in faith” (Rom 4:20). This is a strength that cannot be shaken by apparent impossibilities. It is one’s faith that is strong, enabling him to take hold of the promises of God, even when all human hope contradicts such a stance.

- **STANDING.** “Stand fast in the faith” (1 Cor 16:13). The person who “stands” is victorious, remaining upright after the battle. The winds of adversity cannot move such souls. The tide of trial does not move them. With them, weeping may, indeed, endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning (Psa 30:5).

- **ROOTING AND GROUNDING.** “Rooted and grounded” (Eph 3:17). This is a depiction of deep roots that hold the person firmly, and also obtain the vivifying water that flows beneath the surface of life.

- **CONTINUANCE.** “Continue in the faith grounded and settled” (Col 1:23). Being grounded and settled is the antithesis of being unstable and wavering. In this case, religion is not by fits and starts, and life is not a series of ups and downs. There is a continuity in both faith and hope that brings glory to God.

- **STEADFASTNESS.** “Steadfastness of your faith” (Col 2:5). “Steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet 5:9). The person who is steadfast continues to make progress in mountainous terrain. He moves forward when journeying up-hill, so to speak, or against the strong gales of opposition and testing. A person who is steadfast in the faith continues to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God, even when it is attended by difficulty and inconvenience.

- **SOUNDNESS.** “Sound in faith” (Tit 2:2). A sound faith has no weak places, or Achilles heel. This is the person who has cast off every weight, and the sin that so easily besets (Heb 12:2). It is a person who has a proper view of God, Christ, and the great salvation that is in Christ “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10).

- **ESTABLISHED IN THE TRUTH.** “Established in this present truth” (2 Pet 1:12). “The present truth” is the truth that is brought through Christ Jesus, who is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The truth of God makes sense to such individuals, because they have received the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:10-11). They love the truth “for the truth’s sake,” and not for worldly advantage (2 John 1:2).

- **FIRMNESS.** “Firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6). Spiritual firmness is to the human spirit what a healthy and mature core is to a tree. In this case, firmness has to do with maintaining a tight and unyielding grip on the confidence that is produced by faith, and the consequent rejoicing of the hope of glory. A person who is holding these “firm unto the end” will say during the most fierce trial, “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19).

- **ESTABLISHED HEART.** “Heart be established” (Heb 13:9). Only the grace of God can establish the heart, so that it is not moved about by the varied experiences of life in this present evil world. If a person’s heart is established, their thinking will be solid and God-honoring. A heart that is not established is one that has been penetrated by unbelief, which brings a pervading defilement to the individual (Heb 3:12).

This establishment cannot be accomplished by a human methodology, or a series of supposedly

logical steps or procedures. Paul was probably not with these brethren long enough to have instituted an elaborate plan – like a six or twelve month program.

All of this, and more, is involved in the churches being “established in the faith.” This was the result of a proper and insightful ministry. In the last analysis, it is the truth that sanctifies the soul (John 17:17), doing so through one’s faith (Acts 26:18).

This establishment cannot be accomplished by a human methodology, or a series of supposedly logical steps or procedures. Paul was probably not with these brethren long enough to have instituted an elaborate plan – like a six or twelve month program.

Yet, significant results took place as he “went through the cities” (16:4). The reason for the significant fruitage was the message that he delivered. The power of God unto salvation, in all of its marvelous complexities, is in the message of the Gospel, not the methodologies of men. The “Spirit of truth” employs the truth in reaching the hearts of men, illuminating them, and empowering them. If ever religious men will get to the work of insightfully proclaiming the truth, the churches will be established in the faith. Until that takes place, however, God will not allow establishment to take place, for He works only through the truth, and in those who have received a love of the truth.

The role of faith in spiritual life

In order to see the necessity and value of being established in the faith, it is essential to see the role of faith in spiritual life. This has to do with both the obtainment of salvation, and its maintenance – and both are imperative. There is no such thing as an “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9) that is not first obtained, then maintained.

FAITH IN OBTAINING SALVATION

The obtaining of salvation, or salvation in its initial phase, is inextricably associated with faith. While there are certain responses that are imperative (i.e. repenting, confessing Christ, being baptized into Christ, etc), they are all validated by faith, and are evidences of that faith. The presence of faith does not obviate the need for these responses, but is the Divinely appointed means by which they are accomplished.

Apostolic doctrine is very precise on this point, accounting for the experience of salvation by pointing to our faith.

- Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). In its entirety, from beginning to the coming of the Lord, salvation is by the means of the grace of God, which faith alone can access.
- Hearts purified by faith (Acts 15:8). The purification of the heart and the purging of the conscience are uniquely accomplished through faith.
- The righteousness of God is obtained by faith (Rom 3:22). The appropriation of the righteousness of God, which is to be man’s premier pursuit (Matt 6:33), is realized through faith. In fact, faith itself is counted to us for righteousness (Rom 4:5,9).

Salvation is not a once-for-all experience. This is because, as long as we are in the body, it is initiated and maintained in a hostile realm, with the essential treasure being maintained in an “earthen vessel”

Propitiation through faith in Jesus’ blood (Rom 3:25). Propitiation is the merciful covering that frees us from condemnation – like the mercy seat over the ark of the covenant. And, what is it that

accesses the marvelous mercy of God? This is the peculiar prerogative of faith!

- **Justified by faith (Rom 5:1).** To be justified is to be declared by God to be righteous in His sight. There are two sides to justification, and both are essential. The first has to do with the righteous removal of sin: being “justified from all things” (Acts 13:39). The second is to be declared righteous by God, having obtained His very own righteousness. This is done by Divine imputation, where the coin of faith is received as the means through which this very real righteousness is obtained (Phil 3:9).

- **Receive the promise of the Spirit through faith (Gal 3:14).** The Lord promised through the prophets that He would give His Holy Spirit to His people (Isa 32:15; Joel 2:28-29; Ezek 36:27). This is not done automatically, as some imagine. Rather, as affirmed in the above text, we receive the promised Spirit through the means of faith.

- **Children of God by faith (Gal 3:26).** While it is true that the appropriation of salvation necessarily involves obeying the Gospel (Rom 10:16; 2 Thess 1:8), we are, in the final analysis, the children of God by virtue of our faith.

- **Salvation through faith (2 Tim 3:15).** The realization of salvation, with all of its marvelous complexities and benefits, is by faith.

SALVATION IS NOT YET COMPLETED

Salvation is not a once-for-all experience. This is because, as long as we are in the body, it is initiated and maintained in a hostile realm, with the essential treasure being maintained in an “earthen vessel” (2 Cor 4:7). We are not glorified immediately, for salvation involves the following processes.

- **BEING CONFORMED.** We are being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29).

- **A WORK IN PROGRESS.** Being “changed from glory to glory” (2 Cor 3:18).

- **IN A STATE OF GROWTH.** Growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15)

- **IN THE PROCESS OF APPREHENDING.** Apprehending that for which we have been apprehended (Phil 3:12-13).

- **RUNNING A RACE.** Running with perseverance the race that is set before us (Heb 12:1-2).

- **PERFECTING HOLINESS.** Perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1).

- **STANDING AGAINST THE WILES.** Standing against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:11).

- **WRESTLING AGAINST AGGRESSIVE FOES.** Wrestling against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12).

- **WORKING OUT OUR SALVATION.** Working out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).

- **HOLDING FAST.** Holding fast the rejoicing of the hope, firm unto the end (Heb 3:6).

- **BEING TESTED AND TRIED.** Our faith is being tested in the crucible of suffering (1 Pet 1:7; 5:10).

- **READYING OURSELVES.** Making ourselves ready for being forever with the Lord (Rev 19:7).

- **THERE ARE THINGS THAT MUST BE REJECTED.** Ungodliness and

worldly lusts are to be denied, or rejected, and the deeds of the body put to death (Tit 2:12; Rom 8:13).

- **WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DOING CERTAIN THINGS.** The “old man” is to be put off, and the “new man” is to be put on (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).

- **THE DEVIL IS TO BE RESISTED.** When we are baptized into Christ, the devil does not cease his initiatives against us. We are responsible for resisting him (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:8-9).

Who would dare to imagine that these things do not involve a hearty effort, or that there is no chance that we could leave them undone? Yet, there are many who live without any significant consciousness about these requirements.

FAITH IS INVOLVED IN MAINTAINING SALVATION

The maintenance of spiritual life is something that cannot be ignored. Once a person is “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), they cannot live as though the newness of life continues on its own. We do not live in a moral or spiritual vacuum.

Being “established in the faith” is essential because of the integral part faith lays in the maintenance of our lives.

- **APPROPRIATING GRACE.** Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph 2:8; Rom 4:16).
- **SANCTIFICATION.** Sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18).
- **OBEDIENCE.** Obedience comes from faith (Rom 1:5).
- **RIGHTEOUSNESS.** The righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith (Rom 1:17a; 4:5,9).
- **LIVING.** We live by faith (Rom 1:17b).
- **JUSTIFICATION.** We are justified by faith (Rom 3:28) – both obtaining and maintaining justification.
- **STRENGTH.** Being strong in faith gives glory to God (Rom 4:20).
- **ACCESS TO GOD.** We have access to grace by faith (Rom 5:2).
- **STANDING.** We stand by faith (Rom 11:20; 2 Cor 1:24).
- **SPIRITUAL GIFTS.** Faith is the means through which spiritual gifts are given, and function (Rom 12:3,6).
- **VALIDATION.** Whatsoever is not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23).
- **WALKING.** We walk by faith (2 Cor 5:7).
- **HEARING.** Profitable hearing is by faith (Gal 3:2,5).
- **WAITING.** We wait for the hope of righteousness by faith (Gal 5:5).
- **BOLDNESS.** We have access with boldness by faith (Eph 3:12).
- **INDWELLING CHRIST.** Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17).
- **PROTECTION.** Faith is the shield that protects the believer (Eph 6:17).
- **EDIFICATION.** Godly edifying is in faith (1 Tim 1:4).

- **WISDOM.** We obtain wisdom by asking in faith (James 1:6).
- **INHERITING THE PROMISES.** Through faith and patience we inherit the promises (Heb 6:12).
- **UNDERSTANDING.** Understanding comes through faith (Heb 11:3).
- **DYING.** We die in faith (Heb 11:13).
- **BEING KEPT.** We are kept by the power of God through faith (1 Pet 1:19).

These are all areas in which spiritual growth is realized. The stated objective is for the whole body to be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19). From the individual viewpoint, each member is to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), advancing to personal maturity in their measure, unto “the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

The “measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” correlates with the predetermined objective of God, that the justified ones be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom 8:29). In the aggregate, the whole body of Christ, in the glorified state, will be a replica of Christ Himself. Just as the fulness of God dwells in Christ, His fulness is destined to dwell in His body (Eph 1:23).

Each individual member of the body, so far as function is concerned, is a “member” of the body of Christ, and possesses a “measure,” or portion, of the whole. This measure is obtained and maintained by faith, and is referred to as a “measure of faith” (Rom 12:3). By faith, drawing upon the resources that are made available to us in Christ, each member is to mature in their role in the body, so that they function in that capacity as Jesus does. This may seem like a nearly impossible thing to do – but it is not. The point is that we are to advance toward this objective by means of spiritual growth (Eph 4:15). The full measure will be realized when Jesus appears, and, seeing Him as He is, we will, be “like Him” (1 John 3:2). There is no suggestion that this will be realized in those who had the opportunity, but did not “grow up into Christ in all things” during their tenure in this world.

The Point

The point is that this growth, advancement, and spiritual maturity, was the objective of Paul’s ministry. This is what is involved in being “established.”

Being Established in the Faith

I cannot leave this subject without once again drawing your attention to the matter of establishment: “so were the churches established in the faith.” That is, they were made more firm in regard to “things hoped for” and “things not seen” – for “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1).

- **THINGS.** The “things” of reference are not nebulous. They are spiritual realities – that is, they belong to another order. They are referred to as “those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1-2). They are to be eagerly sought by all believers: “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things” (Col 3:1). Our affection, interest, or mind is to be “set . . . on things above” (Col 3:2). However, if the reality of those “things” is in question, they will neither be sought nor desired. These are “things” that come to us from above. They include faith and love (1 Tim 1:14), grace, mercy, and peace (1 Tim 1:2), wisdom (James 3:17), strength (Psa 20:2), Divine fellowship (1 Cor 1:9; 1 John 1:3), grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16), the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col 2:3), and “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). This is not to mention that supreme realities of the Father and the Son Themselves.

- **SUBSTANCE.** Other versions use the words “the assurance,” NASB “being sure of,” NIV “being confident,” CJB “the reality,” CSB “the substantiating,” DARBY “the

ground of things,” GENEVA “the persuasion,” MRD “the realization,” NAB and “guarantee,” NJB Faith gives the substantiality of these realities to the soul, so that they become more real to the believer than this world and all that is in it. All doubt of them is removed while faith takes hold of them. They are realized, enjoyed, and life is lived with a keen awareness and benefit of them. Speaking of this aspect of faith, it is said of Moses that “he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27).

• **EVIDENCE.** Other versions read, “conviction,” NASB “being . . . certain,” NIV “the sign,” BBE “proof of,” CSB “convinces us,” GWN and “manifestness.” MRD Faith itself is proof of the things on which it lays hold. It is like the hand of the soul, that obtains and uses the unseen realities that are “above.” It brings the kind of persuasion that was required for David to hasten and run to meet Goliath (1 Sam 17:51).

When an individual’s faith is “weak” they lack the conviction and assurance that is required to fight the good fight of faith, run the race with patience, and stand against the wiles of the devil. Spiritual stamina and consistency cannot be developed or maintained while faith remains weak.

In such a case, they are like the servant of Elisha who could not see the angelic hosts that surrounded the prophet. He only saw the Syrian army, and was therefore afraid (2 Kgs 6:14-15). However, the hosts of the Lord were very real – even more real than the Syrian army. It is just that the servant could not see them. However, Elisha prayed that the Lord would open his servant’s eyes to see what was otherwise invisible. When he saw, the servant knew what Elisha meant when he said, “Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them” (2 Kgs 6:16).

Faith does for the believer what the opening of the eyes did for Elisha’s servant. It puts them in the victory posture, for “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

When, therefore, the churches were “established in the faith,” they were made more confident, more sure, more persuaded of the realities that are declared in the Gospel. They were made more capable of what can only be achieved “by faith.” All of the things that are accomplished “by faith” and “through faith” were more readily apparent in them.

You Make the Comparison

How does “established in the faith” compare with the goal of establishing homes, marriages, and personal lives? How does it compare with stabilizing the youth, or enabling people to conquer bad habits? Mind you, it is not that such things are wrong. Rather, it is that they do not qualify as an emphasis, an objective, or focused kingdom labors. They are too low, and can be considered to have been achieved independently of spiritual maturity. Additionally, they are all temporal in nature, having only to do with life in this world.

A religion that majors on correction and outward adjustments in behavior cannot be right. This is primarily because their emphasis is life in this present evil world. Such an accentuation does not require spiritual maturity, but rather stresses outward discipline. Further, the procedures that support this approach [which are called “ordinances” in Scripture, Col 2:20], are not supported by the Word of God. In Scripture, putting away sinful expressions is never proceduralized. Those in Christ are simply told to put them away (Eph 4:31), mortify them (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5), and do them “no more” (Eph 4:26).

From the most favorable point of view, putting away sinful expressions has to do with clearing the pathway so we can run the race that is set before us. In Christ, there is an inward change wrought by becoming a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). This creation, referred to as “the new man,” is “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). He is also “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10). In addition, faith enables the believer to overcome the world, which attempts to allure the child God back to the temporal order. We are categorically told, “this is

the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4). Further, all desires to sin are associated with the world, whether they are “the lust of the flesh,” “the lust of the eye,” or “the pride of life.” These basic causes of sin are categorically said to be “all that is in the world,” having to do with “the things that are in the world” (1 John 2:15-17).

This simply means that those who are established in the faith are fully willing and capable of accomplishing what the routines of men claim to achieve. The failure of the ordinances of men is found in the fact that they cannot take away the desire to sin. Therefore they seek to conquer the expression of unlawful desires by regimen. This approach does not acknowledge that the one who is in Christ is “dead with Christ” to the rudiments of the world, as stated in Colossians 2:20. In that text, Paul is addressing this very subject.

The point is that by establishing the saints in the faith, all of the practical aspects of spiritual life are effectively addressed. In my judgment, it is a most serious offense to proceed to address daily living just as though this was not the case. In Christ, proper expressions are perfectly united with the heart and the desires that flow from it.

When the early churches received the decrees sent to them by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, their actions were in perfect accord with their hearts, upon which the laws of God had been written (Heb 10:16).

The Impact of Not Being Established

A word also ought to be said concerning the impact of instability on the individual in whom it is found – the one who is not “established in the faith.” That is a condition in which the individual becomes “unstable in all of his ways.” This is owing to the presence of a double mind (James 1:8), which is the direct result of not perceiving the things of God clearly. Such people are immature, and will be “tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine” – teachings that are contrived “by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting” NKJV (Eph 4:14). Being “established in the faith” moves the believer out of that category, taking the advantage away from the flesh.

AND INCREASED IN NUMBER DAILY

“ 5b . . . and [the churches] increased in number daily. ” Other versions read, “were increasing in number daily,” NASB “grew daily in numbers,” NIV “grew in number every day,” MRD “grew larger every day,” NLT and “were abounding in number every day.” YLT

This is similar to what happened when the New Covenant was first inaugurated: “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved” (Acts 2:47). In our text, the daily increase in numbers was not the result of a church-planting program. It was the churches that were being visited, not the cities. It was the disciples that were being addressed, not the community at large. It was the churches that “grew in number every day.” NIV The individual churches were what was growing, and they were doing so on a daily basis. This was the result of the churches being “established in the faith.” It is not said to have been the result of an outreach program. This was not the result of what is called evangelism, but was the consequence of believers being “established in the faith.” That is what the text states. Because the believers grew, maturing in the faith, their numbers grew – on a daily basis!

At this point, it is necessary to define what is meant by “the churches.” We will find that the Scriptures speak of “the churches” quite differently than nominal Christendom does.

The word “churches” is used thirty-seven times in the Scriptures. All of the references are found in Acts through Revelation. Most all of the standard English versions use this expression – “the

churches” – in the same verses. The phrase “all the churches” is used seven times (Rom 16:4,16; 1 Cor 7:17; 14:33; 2 Cor 8:18; 11:28; Rev 2:23). The expression “the churches” is used twenty-one times (Acts 15:41; 16:5; 2 Cor 11:16; 14:34; 16:1,19; 2 Cor 8:1,19,23,24; 12:13; Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14; Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22; 22:16). We read of the following.

- “The churches of the Gentiles” (Rom 16:4)
- “The churches of Christ” (Rom 16:16)
- “The churches of God” (1 Cor 11:16; 1 Thess 2:13; 2 Thess 1:4).
- “All churches of the saints” (1 Cor 14:33).
- “The churches of Galatia” (1 Cor 16:1; Gal 1:2).
- “The churches of Asia” (1 Cor 16:19).
- “The churches of Macedonia” (2 Cor 8:1).
- “The churches of Judaea” (Gal 1:22).

What do the Scriptures mean when they say “the churches”? From the etymological point of view, the Greek word translated “churches” (**εὐκκλησίαι**) means “called out . . . an assembly of the people.” THAYER As used in Scripture, the “churches” are bodies of believers that have been called together for purposes of edification. Paul referred to it as coming together “in one place” (1 Cor 11:20), when “the whole church be come together into one place” (I Cor 14:23).

When “the churches” come together, more is involved than simply coming together. Their gatherings are “for the better,” and “not for the worse” (1 Cor 11:17). That is, their gatherings are times when they are “edified,” built up, and “established in the faith” – like the churches mentioned in our text. Those who gathered together increased in number daily.

That is, their gatherings are times when they are “edified,” built up, and “established in the faith” – like the churches mentioned in our text. Those who gathered together increased in number daily.

The people who comprised these “churches” are referenced in various ways.

- “Believers” (Acts 5:14).
- “Disciples of the Lord” (Acts 9:1).
- “All that believed” (Acts 2:44).
- Those whom the Lord “added to the church” (Acts 2:47).
- Those who were “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14).
- Those to whom God had “granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).
- Those who have been taken out of the people for God’s name (Acts 15:14).
- Those who have “believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).
- Those whose eyes have been “opened,” who have turned “from darkness to light,” and “from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18).
- Those who are “called to be saints” (Rom 1:7).
- Those who are “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ” (Rom 6:11).
- Those who have “obeyed from the heart the form the doctrine” (Rom 6:17).
- Those who are “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2a).

- Those who “call upon the name of the Lord” (1 Cor 1:2b).
- Those who are “new creatures” (2 Cor 5:17).
- Those into whose hearts God has sent the “Spirit of His Son” (Gal 4:6).
- “The faithful in Christ Jesus” (Eph 1:1).
- Those who are “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:3).
- Those who, by God, are “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10).
- Those who are “taught by Christ” (Eph 4:21).
- Those who were “sometimes darkness, but now are . . . light in the Lord” (Eph 5:8).
- Those who have been “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom” of God’s “dear Son” (Col 1:13).
- Those who “know” the Lord (Heb 8:11).
- Those who have “obtained like precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1).
- Those who have been “washed” from their sins, and made “kings and priests unto God” (Rev 1:5).

This is only a brief sampling of such texts. These are the kind of people that were becoming more and more in number, and doing so every day. This is not the kind of increase that is realized in developing a mere roster. Further, they felt at home in churches that were being “established in the faith,” for the focus was upon “the churches.”

Those who are guilty of bringing low-grade disciples into the church need to hear and heed the warning of the Lord concerning such activity: “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor 3:17). Defiling materials are described as “wood, hay, and stubble,” which are descriptive of people who will not be able to pass through the judgment (1 Cor 3:10-15).

Both acceptable people and unacceptable people are the direct result of the teaching they have received and embraced. In our text, Paul and company delivered sound doctrine, establishing the churches in the faith. That is something that cannot be accomplished by erroneous gospels, spurious Christ’s, and a fictitious Holy Spirit (2 Cor 11:4). Only the truth of God can cause the churches to be “established in the faith” – which faith is sustained solely by means of the Word of God.

With only a few words, Luke has covered a period of time that may very well have been significant. His pungent summation mentioned four things:

- (1) **A WISE DECISION.** Paul chose Timothy to accompany him in the visiting of the cities where he had previously preached the Word.
- (2) **FAITHFULNESS.** The , delivering of the decrees from the apostles and elders, which, it appears, was accompanied with some exposition.
- (3) **CONFIRMING THE SAINTS.** The establishment of the churches in the faith.
- (4) **THE MULTIPLICATION OF DISCIPLES.** The daily increase of the number of people in the churches.

It is noteworthy that all of this was done in a manner that could not be codified. How would a person go about systematizing such activities? In the fulfillment of the objective, there is no mention of a decision making process – not even the multiplication of counselors. It should be evident that faithfulness cannot be reduced to a code or a series of steps. This is because it is accomplished in an arena of conflict where the precise circumstances cannot be predicted. The confirmation, or

establishment, of the saints requires spiritual insight, as well as a heart for the people of God. You certainly cannot proceduralize that. The multiplication of disciples cannot be planned, for it is God that gives the increase. Men can only sow and water the seed. They have no power in the matter of multiplying disciples (1 Cor 3:6-7) – and that is by Divine design.

Thus, we have seen the work of God in process – a work that involves the participation of those with insight, and the response of those of tender heart. How blessed it is to ponder such things!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #69

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

“ 16:6 “Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, 7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not. 8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas. 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. 10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; 12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. 13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither. 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul. 15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us. ”

(Acts 16:6-15)

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF SUMMATION OF THE TEXT As they moved along, visiting the churches, Paul, Silas, and Timothy journeyed throughout the regions of Phrygia and Galatia preaching the Word. At that time the Holy Spirit did not allow them to further preach the word in Asia, which was the larger region in which they were traversing. Again, when they endeavored to go into Bithynia, the Holy Spirit did not permit them to do so.

It is obvious in this text, as well as throughout the Scripture, that the Kingdom of God is one that is being administered from heaven. The King is there, and all of the power comes from there.

Throughout history, this has proved to be a very challenging lesson for men to learn.

A CLASSIC EXAMPLE

One of the classic demonstrations of the need for this fundamental knowledge is found in the history concerning Nebuchadnezzar. The king

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- **WHEN THEY HAD GONE THROUGHOUT PHRYGIA AND GALATIA (16:6a)**
- **WHERE THEY WERE NOT ALLOWED TO GO (16:6b)**
- **THEY CAME DOWN TO TROAZ (16:8)**
- **THE MACEDONIAN CALL (16:9)**
- **AN IMMEDIATE AND INSIGHTFUL RESPONSE (16:10)**
- **THEY ARRIVE IN PHILIPPI (16:11-12)**
- **ACTIVITIES ON THE SABBATH DAY (16:13)**
- **A CERTAIN WOMAN NAMED LYDIA (16:14)**
- **IF YOU HAVE JUDGED ME FAITHFUL (16:15)**
- **CONCLUSION**

himself rehearsed the events that led to his tutelage in these matters. It all started with a dream that was given to him, yet which he did not understand. He said it occurred while he was “at rest in my house and flourishing in my palace.” At that time, he said, “I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.” Although he did not understand the dream, he sensed that it was imperative that the dream be understood. He decreed that “all the wise men of Babylon” be summoned before him, in order to interpret his dream. Not having the knowledge of God, like all who are ignorant of Him, Nebuchadnezzar did not seek for an answer from God. Needless to say, none of these “astrologers” and “soothsayers” could deliver an interpretation of the dream. What comes from God cannot be deciphered by those who are enmity with Him.

Being among the wise men who were called, Daniel at last came in before the king, who told him the dream that so troubled him. In his dream he had seen a great tree “in the midst of the earth.” It was exceedingly great, with an abundance of fruit. The beasts of the earth sought protection under it, and the fowls of the air lodged in its branches. It was, indeed, a notable tree.

However, everything changed when a “a watcher and a holy one” came down from heaven, which is the citadel of all power. That powerful holy one called for the tree to be cut down, its branches cut off, its leaves shaken off, and its fruit scattered. Nevertheless, he decreed that the stump be left, together with its pervasive roots. It was even bound with a strong band of iron and bronze, so it would remain in tact. It was wet with the dew of heaven, and remained among the beasts of the earth, not as a refuge for them, but as a miserable companion.

That tree was then personified by the “holy one” from heaven. “Let his heart be changed from man's, and let a beast's heart be given unto him: and let seven times pass over him.” The solemn decree of the watchers identified the reason for this staggering demise: “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men ” (Dan 4:17).

The fact that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” is not a fact God will tolerate men to perpetually ignore. Heathen kings like Pharaoh, Sihon, Og, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Herod were taught this truth.

Upon hearing the dream, Daniel “was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him.” Nebuchadnezzar saw that Daniel was troubled, and told him not to let the dream or the interpretation of it trouble him. Daniel answered, “Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him. The king spake, and said, “Belteshazzar, let not the dream, or the interpretation thereof, trouble thee.” Daniel responded, “My lord, the dream be to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies.”

Daniel then boldly told the king, “It is thou, O king, that art grown and become strong: for thy greatness is grown, and reacheth unto heaven, and thy dominion to the end of the earth.” He told him that a decree had been made in heaven that bore directly upon him. “That they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.” However, Divine leniency would be given to Nebuchadnezzar following his persuasion of the truth he had been ignoring. “Thy kingdom shall be sure unto thee, after that thou shalt have known that the heavens do rule.”

Daniel then delivered a word of counsel to the king. “Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity” (Dan 4:17-34).

Nebuchadnezzar did not heed the admonition of Daniel, but allowed his pride to take hold of him. He was driven from his throne, and dwelt in the fields with the beasts for seven years, until he was able to receive the truth that had been declared to him: “that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.”

Note, this lesson was not merely for Nebuchadnezzar, but “to the intent that the living may know.” The fact that “the Most High rules in the kingdom of men” is not a fact God will tolerate men to perpetually ignore. Heathen kings like Pharaoh, Sihon, Og, Sennacherib, Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, and Herod were taught this truth.

WHAT BEARING DOES THIS HAVE UPON OUR TEXT?

On the surface, it may appear as though all of this has little or nothing to do with our text. However, that is not at all the case. Although natural men, or those dominated by the “mind of the flesh,” have no sense of this truth, it is something that must be known. God cannot maintain favorable dealings with men as long as they are in the dark about His government. Many a kingdom has been toppled for the very reason that accounted for the fall of Nebuchadnezzar – even though men are prone to account for such falls by pointing to unwise counsel, and sloppy government.

There is so much revealed on this matter of the prevalence and invincibility of God’s Kingdom that it boggles the mind that such a large percentage of professed Christendom conducts themselves as though this was not the case.

At this point we come to one of the marvelous aspects of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. The truth that was so difficult for the ancients to learn is perceived and held by the saved ones. This is part and parcel of knowing God, which is eternal life in its essence (John 17:3). Solemnly, and with a note of gladness, the Almighty declares, “They shall all know Me!” (Jer 31:34). That acquaintance with the Almighty (Job 22:21) brings with it a keen awareness that who

He is. The Spirit persuades the heart of the saved that “the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28). They know, at least intuitively if not cognitively, “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto him, What doest Thou?” (Dan 4:35). There is so much revealed on this matter that it boggles the mind that such a large percentage of professed Christendom conducts themselves as though this was not the case. Ponder the clear references to Deity.

• “I will destroy man whom I have created . . . I will destroy them with the earth . . . I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh . . . I will cause it to rain” (Gen 6:7,13,17).

• “The Most High” (Gen 14:18).

• “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19).

• “The Most High God” (Gen 14:20).

• “The God of the earth ” (Gen 24:3).

• “I am the Lord in the midst of the earth ” (Ex 8:22).

• “The Lord shall reign for ever and ever ” (Ex 15:18).

• “The Lord is greater than all gods” (Ex 18:11).

• “The God of the spirits of all men ” (Num 27:16).

• “He is God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath: there is none else” (Deu 4:39).

• “Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD'S thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is ” (Deu 10:14).

• “God is a God of gods ” (Deut 10:17).

• “God is King of all the earth ” (Psa 47:7).

• “God is the Judge: He putteth down one and raiseth up another” (Psa 75:7).

• “God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings ” (Dan 2:47).

• “I am the first, and I am the last; and beside Me there is no God ” (Isa 44:6).

• “I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and have given it unto whom it seemed meet unto Me ” (Jer 27:5).

• “I am the Lord God of all flesh ” (Jer 32:27).

• “I am a great King ” (Matt 1:14).

• “Who has resisted His will?” (Rom 9:19).

• “As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (Rom 14:11).

• “For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof” (1 Cor 10:26).

• “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:6).

These representations confirm that from the beginning of God's involvement with men, He made it clear who He was, and that everything is subject to Him. No being, whether angel or man, can ultimately resist Him (Rom 9:19). There is no personality in heaven, or earth, or under the earth that can finally hinder God from doing what He has determined (Job 9:12; 11:10; Isa 43:13).

It is the persuasion that the Kingdom belongs to the Lord, and that His Christ is “over all, God blessed forever” (Rom 9:5) that sustains the saints in both trial and prosperity. This is why they live by faith, not in despair. This is why they seek counsel from the Lord, and not from their peers. The One into whom God has put us (1 Cor 1:30), is the “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15). When it comes to ultimate effectiveness, and the execution of His will, there is only ONE Potentate. That is the incontrovertible fact of the matter.

The Spiritual Context of the Text

Our text is set within the context of a keen and unmistakable spiritual awareness. As these brethren went about preaching and teaching, they maintained a certain sensitivity to the Lord that made them guidable. Their composure was based upon their faith, which rested upon God Himself.

All of this is in keeping with life in Christ Jesus. The reconciliation that is realized in Him has opened the door for illumination on such matters. God did not have to send storms, as in the case of Jonah, to get these men where He wanted them. Their hearts had been circumcised, the law had been written upon them, and their consciences purged. That is why they were able to respond as they did.

They Knew Their Work Was Not Finished

Refusing to conclude that their work was completed, they moved toward to the seaport of Troaz. It was there that a vision appeared to Paul during the night. In it he saw a man in Macedonia calling out, “Come over into Macedonia and help us.”

This was a region across the Aegean Sea, and was the first country in Europe visited by Paul. The group immediately took a ship, taking a direct course to the island of Samothracia, and from there sailed to Neapolis, port city of the region to which they had been called. The Gospel now spreads to a new area.

WHEN THEY HAD GONE THROUGHOUT PHRYGIA AND GALATIA

“ 16:6a “Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia . . .” Other versions read, “traveled throughout,” NIV and “went through.” NRSV The words “gone throughout” come from a single Greek word – **Dih/lqon** . This word has the following lexical meaning. “to go, walk, journey, pass through a place travel through a region,” THAYER and “travel from place to place go about, travel throughout.” FRIBERG

There is no indication of the length of time covered by this rather extensive mission trip – an account reported in twelve words: “ Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia . As you read through Scripture, you will become acutely aware of the fact that the accounts provided are not an end of themselves – that is, this is not a mere historical report. It is the Worker behind the scenes that is the point, and the fulfillment of His determinations. There is a sense in which the laborers, the region, the cities, and the people are incidental. Actually, we are being exposed to the Lord “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12).

This is the second time Phrygia is mentioned in Scripture – the first being in the second chapter of Acts. There it is recorded that devout Jews were present in Jerusalem from this area of Asia (Acts 2:10). It is the first time that we read of “Galatia” in Scripture – a central district in Asia Minor. The area covered by these two adjacent regions was approximately three hundred miles from east to west, and two hundred miles and twenty-five miles from north to south. The territory covered is almost exactly the same as that of the state of Missouri (300 miles by 240 miles). If Paul and company traveled by foot, as the language suggests, this was a staggering accomplishment – and yet is passed over as though there was nothing extraordinary about it.

It is surmised by many, myself included, that the churches in Galatia were established by Paul during the time reported in this text. If this is true, then during this period Paul become ill in some way, and was forced to spent time in Galatia. It was at that time that he had preached the Gospel to them. This is reported in Galatians 4:13: “Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first” (Gal 4:13). Referring to this “infirmity of the flesh” other versions read, “physical infirmity,” NKJV “bodily illness,” NASB “an illness,” NIV “bodily ailment,” RSV and “I was ill.” CJB

In this we are introduced to the strength of Paul’s character, and his unwavering commitment to fulfill the work to which he had been called. His commission, given was directly from the Lord Jesus. Paul told Agrippa of his calling, affirming that he was “not disobedient” to it. He said that following identifying Himself as “Jesus, whom thou persecutes,” the Lord said to him, “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:18). One might think that a work of that magnitude would require extraordinary health and physical stamina. And, indeed, ordinarily that would be the case. However, because of the abundance of revelations that were given to him, Paul was required to fulfill his mission surrounded by adversity, which was compounded by personal infirmities. This, Paul said, was in order that he not be “exalted above measure,” but that his work might be fulfilled in the grace of Christ and through His power that rested upon him (2 Cor 12:7-9). The “thorn” given to him was not owing to his prodigious mind or extraordinary talent. It was rather because of “the abundance of the revelations” given to him from above. In view of this whole circumstance, Paul said he would “glory” in his infirmities rather than perceive them as a handicap. In my judgment, part of glorying in his infirmities was not drawing undue attention to them, but rather continuing to labor with them. That is apparently what happened during the time he spent in Galatia.

Elsewhere, Paul said that in his travels preaching and teaching the Gospel, he experience a variety of adversities that were separate from persecutions and hostilities from men. They included shipwrecks, isolation in the sea, dangers in rivers, dangers in the country, dangers at sea, weariness, painfulness, hunger and thirst, being cold, and not having sufficient clothing to keep warm (2 Cor 11:25-27). Additionally, he confronted the aggressive opposition of his own brethren, the heathen, and false brethren (2 Cor 11:26).

To me, there is no question that some of these things took place as they went through the regions of Phrygia and Galatia. However, at this point of the narrative, the Spirit focuses on a particular work in which a new initiative would be launched. The Gospel would now be proclaimed in Europe. The text suggests a great hunger was there.

WHERE THEY WERE NOT ALLOWED TO GO

“ 6b . . . and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, 7 After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.”

This area, referred to as Asia Minor, covered a very large mass of land. Paul and Silas had a desire to permeate the entire territory with the Gospel, and therefore determined to move northward and westward. For the first time, they encounter the prohibition of the Holy Spirit to preach the word. Remember, the Kingdom is being governed by the Lord Jesus, and it is His will that is being carried out. It is true that He commanded, “preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mk 16:15). This text will confirm that this is carried out under His administration.

FORBIDDEN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

“ . . . and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia . . . ” Other versions read, “kept by the Holy Spirit from,” NIV “did not let them,” BBE “prevented by,” CJB and “having been told by the Holy Spirit not to.” NJB Most versions use the word “forbidden.” This word is translated from the Greek word **kwluqe,ntej** , which means, “to cut off . . . to hinder, prevent, forbid,” THAYER “restrain,” FRIBERG “keep back,” UBS “to cause something not to happen,” LOUW-NIDA “to withhold.” LEH The New Jerusalem Bible takes too much liberty with the text, assuming that the Holy Spirit forbade them through a prophetic word – i.e. “told by.” However, the word used here does not imply the withholding was by an articulated word. This speaks of restraint by some other means – like taking away the opportunity to do something. Jesus used the word in this way when He said the lawyers “hindered” people from entering the Kingdom (Lk 11:52). They did it by clouding the things of God with their erroneous teaching and emphasis. While it is possible that some words were spoken on this matter, it appears to me that this speaks of the Holy Spirit taking away any opportunity to go into Asia, blocking every attempt to do so.

I gather that in every attempt to enter into Asia, something occurred that prevented them from doing so. This was not the proper time for the Gospel to be preached in that area. There were other priorities. The significance of Asia is seen in some of the cities located in that area – cities that would eventually hear the Gospel. They included Pergamos, Myrna, Laodicea, and Ephesus. Later, Paul will spent three years in Ephesus.

Being Directed by the Spirit

Being directed by the Holy Spirit includes prohibitions as well as the opening of doors. For example, the mortification of the deeds of the body is depicted as a facet of the Spirit’s leading (Rom 8:13-14). This presumes a sensitivity to the Holy Spirit, as well as an acute awareness of His role in living by faith. One of the tragic results of walking “by sight” (2 Cor 5:7) and living “after the flesh” (Rom 8:12), is that it takes away the ability to detect the Spirit’s leading. This is referred to as grieving or quenching the Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). Some people are so intent upon doing what is wrong that they break through all restraining influences of the Spirit. Israel of old is an example of this obstinance: “Yet many years didst Thou forbear them, and testifiedst against them by Thy spirit in Thy prophets: yet would they not give ear: therefore gavest Thou them into the hand of the people of the lands” (Neh 9:30). And again, “But they rebelled, and vexed His holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them” (Isa 63:10). This kind of obstinance was found in the Jewish council who tried Stephen. He said to them, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye” (Acts 7:51).

Effort is often expended to do this or that with a sole interest in the work of the Lord. However, there are times when our minds are not yet in synch with His. Spiritual sensitivity will allow us to survive such times without wandering outside the perimeter of the will of the Lord.

The effective leading of the Holy Spirit, whether it is through an open door, or the closing of a door, postulates sensitivity on the part of the ones being led. Those who imagine they can follow their own stubborn ways, and yet expect the Lord to make it impossible for them to do what is wrong, have not judged correctly, and they stand on the precipice of ruin.

THE SPIRIT DID NOT ALLOW THEM TO GO INTO BITHYNIA

“ . . . After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.” Other versions read, “they tried to go . . . but the Spirit did not permit them,” NKJV “were trying to go . . . but the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them,” NASB and “attempted to go . . . but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow” NRSV

Bithynia was in the northern section of Asia. The Spirit did not stop Paul and Silas from going into Asia, but from preaching the word there. Remaining in the region of Asia minor (Turkey), they set

their eyes to the Northeast, to the region of Bithynia. This bordered on the Black Sea, and was to the East of Constantinople, one of the famous cultural centers of the world.

On the one hand, they were allowed to go into Asia, but could not preach there. Now, the Spirit does not even allow them to enter into Bithynia. We are not told how they were not allowed to enter. They probably faced one obstacle after another until it became apparent that this was not the will of the Lord. It seems to me that there is a facet of spiritual life that is after this manner. Effort is often expended to do this or that with a sole interest in the work of the Lord. However, there are times when our minds are not yet in synch with His. Spiritual sensitivity will allow us to survive such times without wandering outside the perimeter of the will of the Lord. Also, during times like this, spiritual obtuseness that is brought on by self-centeredness will move a person into an area where God is provoked. Paul referred to this kind of activity in his letter to the Corinthians. “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?” (1 Cor 10:22). A tender heart knows the answer to this question, for it is a rhetorical one.

Faith enables the child of God to handle frustration in a manner that brings glory to God, and true benefit to the believer. Faith resorts to trust, not the murmuring and discontent. Our text is a noble example of such handling.

THEY CAME DOWN TO TROAS

“ 8 And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.”

Mysia was a province occupying the north-west angle of Asia Minor. McCLINTOK STRONG’S It was next to the region of Phrygia, which was immediately joined to the region of Galatia on the west. Paul and Silas had preached in that region rather extensively. Yet, there was a kind of dividing line that separated acceptable regions from forbidden ones. The only known reason for this distinction was the will of the Lord – but that was enough for the group. Further that Divine will was not associated with a rejection of the area. There would be considerable activity in Asia at a later time. By the time John wrote the book of the Revelation, churches had been established in Pergamos, Smyrna, and Ephesus (Rev 1:11).

The region of Mysia was approximately one hundred and fifty miles from east to west. However, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach in Asia, they simply went through that territory, traveling to the east-most part of the region, which was the city of Troas.

YOU HAVE TO BE WHERE GOD IS WORKING OR WILL WORK

In order for Paul and Silas to participate in the work of the Lord, being “workers together with Him” (2 Cor 6:1), they had to be where the work was to be done. At the point of our text, they do not know where that is – only where it is not. Therefore, they continue to move westward until they come to the port city of Troas.

Now, however, we find that the spreading of the Gospel was not left in the hands of men. The Head of the church directed His servants where NOT to go, as well as where to go.

The living God is moved along by His purpose, not by the directives or desires of men. When the New Covenant was inaugurated, there was a place that had been designated for its commencement. The prophets had said that Jerusalem would be the place (Isa 46:13; Joel 2:32). This is why Jesus told His disciples to “tarry in the city of Jerusalem” – that is where the blessing would break forth (Lk 24:49). God would not move the blessing to a place of their choosing. Rather, they must come to the place of His choosing.

This same manner was foreshadowed in the Law. The three feasts that were to be observed annually

by all of the men could not be in a place of their choosing. Rather, they were told, “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which He shall choose ” (Deut 16:16). There was also “the year of release,” held every seven years during the Feast of the Tabernacles. At that time “All Israel” was to come “to appear before the Lord . . . in the place which He shall choose ” (Deut 31:11).

When God brought the people into Canaan, they were to establish a place to which they would bring all that God commanded them: their burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, and heave offerings. That place was identified as “a place which the Lord your God shall choose” (Deut 12:11; 16:6-7; 26:2).

If men desire to be saved, they must come to the One God has chosen – Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). If they want to pursue proper things, they must set their affections on the place God has chosen – “Where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1-2).

The same principle holds true in the preaching of the Gospel. It had to begin in Jerusalem, then in “all Judea,” then in “Samaria,” and then “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Even when they went to “the uttermost part of the earth,” it had to be where God was going to work: the road leading to Gaza, on which a man from Ethiopia was traveling (Acts 8:26-39), the house of Cornelius (Acts 19:1-48), and the work in Asia Minor to which the Spirit called Barnabas and Saul (Acts 13:2-3).

Now, however, we find that the spreading of the Gospel was not left in the hands of men. The Head of the church directed His servants where NOT to go, as well as where to go.

How is it that the early church met with such marvelous success? Ponder the expressions of its growth: “believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and woman . . . the people [of Samaria] with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake . . . much people was added to the Lord . . . the churches...were multiplied . . . many believed in the Lord . . . a great number believed . . . a great multitude both of Jews and also of Greeks believed” (Acts 5:14; 8:6; 9:31,42; 11:21,24; 14:1). There are a number of contributing factors: (1) The true Gospel was preached, (2) It was preached by holy and insightful men, and (3) The hearts of the listeners were tender.

However, it seems to me that over and above these considerations, these were the areas in which the Lord had chosen to work. I do not doubt that many seemingly noble efforts meet with little or no success because they do not represent the will of the Lord. There are visitations by the Lord that are not recognized by men, and thus they miss the blessing – like Jerusalem not knowing the time of its visitation during Jesus’ ministry (Lk 19:44). In that case, the judgment brought upon them was proved to be righteous. In this text, the Lord will close doors to some areas, and move the workers toward the place in which He has chosen to work.

SOMETHING THAT CANNOT BE SYSTEMATIZED

It should be abundantly apparent that we are not dealing with something that can be systematized by men. If you were to determine to outline precisely how a person can be directed by the Lord, you would only be dabbling in vanity. Just as surely as God chooses where He is going to work, He also chooses those through whom He will work. He gives us enough instruction on the matter so we will not waste our time trying to involve ourselves in His work by rote. Here is what He has said on the matter.

• **A GOOD MAN.** “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in His way” (Psa 37:23).

• **A PERSON OF THE WORD.** “Order my steps in Thy word : and let not any

iniquity have dominion over me” (Psa 119:133).

- **A HOLY PERSON.** “He will keep the feet of His saints ” (1 Sam 2:9).

- **A TRUSTING PERSON.** “ Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him , and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov 3:5- 6).

- **A PERFECT HEART.** “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him” (2 Chr 16:9).

THE LOGIC BEHIND THIS ARRANGEMENT

The logic behind this arrangement is straightforward – it is God Himself “with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). Jesus has enabled us to believe in Him (1 Pet 1:21), and is bringing us to Him (1 Pet 3:18). We have been “reconciled to God ” (Rom 5:10), and are His “sons and daughters” (2 Cor 6:18). Further, we have been “called into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9). It is within the context of this fellowship that He directs our steps. That is what we are beholding in this text – and the direction is taking the form of leading to, as well as away from. Faith, of course, sensitizes the human spirit to this direction.

THE MACEDONIAN CALL

“ 9 And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”

In keeping with His nature, the Lord does not give specific directions to Paul until he is close to the place that has been chosen. This is much the way in which the Spirit directed Philip. He first sent him in the general direction of a highway that led to Gaza. Once there, the directions were more specific: “Go near, and join thyself to this chariot” (Acts 8:26,29). The saints of God should not expect detailed direction from the Lord until they are properly positioned. It is the unique property of faith to get us going in the right direction, and away from things that are not in the Divine agenda. Of course, when people live for themselves, and without due regard for the One who died for them and rose again (2 Cor 5:15), they should not be surprised when end up out of the way.

Now, Paul is positioned in Troas, right on the coast of the Aegean Sea. Across that body of water lies Europe, which to this point, so far as we know, had not yet heard the Gospel of Christ. The destination to which they will be called is about three hundred miles away, one hundred and seventy five miles of it by water, as the crow flies. That is about one and a half times as wide as Lake Michigan. Now, it is time for further directions to be given.

A VISION IN THE NIGHT

“And a vision appeared to Paul in the night . . .”

During the night, when others were asleep, and the activities of earth had slowed down, Paul had a vision. A vision is a spectacle that can, in some way, be seen.

“A supernatural presentation of certain scenery or circumstances to the mind of a person while awake.” McCLINTOK-STRONG’S “A vivid apparition, not a dream.” EASTON

The word “vision” is translated from the Greek word **o[rama]** , which has the following lexical meaning: “that which is seen, a sight, spectacle; sight divinely granted in an ecstasy,” THAYER “a supernatural *vision* , given as a means of divine communication, to be distinguished from a dream,” FRIBERG and “vision as opposed to figment of the imagination.” GINGRICH As is apparent, the lexicographers find it difficult to define this word.

This Greek word is used thirteen times in Scripture.

- Christ's transfiguration is called a "vision" (Matt 17:9).
- The burning bush that Moses saw is referred to as a "sight," or "vision" DARBY (Acts 7:31).
- Through a "vision," Jesus called Ananias to minister to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10).
- In a "vision," Saul saw Ananias coming to him (Acts 9:12).
- An angel appeared to Cornelius in a "vision," instructing him to call for Peter (Acts 10:3).
- Through a "vision," the Lord called Peter to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:17,19; 11:5).
- Jesus appeared to Paul in a night "vision," telling him to remain in Corinth (Acts 18:9).
- Paul referred to Christ's appearance to him on the road to Damascus a "heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

There is another word translated "vision" (*ovptasi,an*), which means "apparition" – something made visible. Zecharias saw a vision of the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:22). Sights that John saw on Patmos were referred to as a "vision" (Rev 9:17).

As used in this text, a vision was a supernatural sight of an existing reality.

The word of the Lord came to Abraham in a "vision" (Gen 15:1). God said He would speak to prophets in this manner – although He did not speak to Moses in that way, choosing a more direct method of communication – "mouth to mouth" (Num 12:6). Ezekiel was taken in vision to Chaldea, to those who were captive (Ezek 11:24). He also had "visions of God" (Ezek 1:1; 8:3; 40:1), as well as did Zechariah the prophet (2 Chron 26:5). Daniel saw a vision of competing worldly kingdoms (Dan 8:2), and had other visions as well (Dan 7:1-15). King Nebuchadnezzar had visions that required interpretations (Dan 2:28; 4:5-13). God told Hosea He had "multiplied visions" to the prophets (Hos 12:10). Joel said that the era of the New Covenant would be accompanied by visions (Joel 2:28), and Peter confirmed that to be the case (Acts 2:17). Paul said he had numerous "visions" (2 Cor 12:1).

In summary, and as used in this text, a vision was a means of Divine communication – in this case of directing the one laboring in the Lord's vineyard. There was nothing novel about this vision. It contained a message that was to be acted upon.

This vision appeared only to Paul. It was not a general communication given to Silas and Timothy as well – only to Paul.

A MAN IN MACEDONIA

"There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him . . ." Another version reads, "a certain man." NASB

Macedonia was across the Aegean sea, on the continent of Europe. This would be a call to a new initiative into territory that had not been charted by other believers. The indication is that there was some godly searching that was taking place in that area. There were some people who were ready to hear the Gospel.

Ordinarily, angels, or the Lord Himself, were the spokesmen in visions and dreams (Gen 15:1; 31:11; Num 12:6; Dan 8:16; Matt 1:20; 2:13,19; Lk 1:11,22; Acts 9:10; 10:3; 11:7; 12:9). This time,

however, a man from an earthly country was seen.

“Prayed Him”

The man from Macedonia “prayed” Paul to do something. Other versions read, “pleaded with him,” NKJV appealing to him,” NASB “begging him,” NIV “beseeching him,” RSV “requesting him,” BBE “urged Paul,” GWN “besought him,” MRD “implored him,,” NAB “calling upon him,” YLT and “entreating him,” WEYMOUTH

The word “prayed” is translated from a Greek word meaning, “to call to one’s side . . . to beg, entreat, beseech,” THAYER “as speaking with persistence, earnestly ask for, implore, beg,” FRIBERG “request, ask, appeal to,” UBS “as speaking with persistence earnestly ask for, implore, beg,” LOUW-NIDA “to beseech strongly,” LEH and “request, implore, appeal to, entreat.” GINGRICH

This was not a casual appeal, but a persistent and earnest one. There is a note of urgency in the request – a call for immediate action.

COME OVER AND HELP US

This is a higher quest than the resolution of personal, domestic, or social difficulties. There is a human need that transcends temporal circumstances, and it is possible to be keenly aware of it.

“ . . . saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.” Other versions read, “give us help.” BBE All versions use the same word: “help.” This word is translated from the Greek word **boh,qhson** , and means “to run to the cry (of those in danger); hence, universally, to help, succor, bring aid,” THAYER “to supply people with what they need' or 'to give to people what is necessary' or '... what they should have,” LOUW-NIDA and “to give aid, come to the rescue,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

No competent student of Scripture imagines that this was a cry for food and clothing, or for rescue from political or social oppression. That such conditions exist cannot be denied, but this was not the reason why the Lord called Paul to the apostleship, and it is not the reason for this vision.

When Jacob was dying, he blessed Joseph, saying the God of his father would “ help ” him (Gen 49:25). In the twelfth Psalm David wrote, “ Help , Lord!” (Psa 21:1). Psalm 20:2 speaks of “ help ” being sent “from the sanctuary.” The Psalms often find the man of Gold asking God to make “haste” to “ help me” (Psa 22:19; 38:22; 40:13; 70:1,5; 71:12). God Himself is referred to as “a very present Help in trouble” (Psa 46:1). The throne of grace upon which Jesus is presently seated is associated with obtaining “grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Inherent in the word “help” is an acute awareness that the resources that are sought cannot be obtained elsewhere. There is a certain poverty that exists that cannot be addressed in the energy of self, or any earthly locale. From a spiritual perspective, the seeker knows he is in “a dry and thirsty land where no water is” (Psa 63:1). Paul accounted for his prodigious ministry by saying God helped: “Having therefore obtained help of God , I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22).

In this text, “help” has to do with obtaining salvation. It is associated with a hunger and thirst “for righteousness” (Matt 5:10), and feeling after God with the intent of finding Him (Acts 17:27). This is a higher quest than the resolution of personal, domestic, or social difficulties. There is a human need that transcends temporal circumstances, and it is possible to be keenly aware of it.

Unfortunately, we are living in a time when this fact is being obscured in the professed Christian community. There is a concerted effort to present God, Christ, and salvation as the means of resolving difficult and untoward worldly circumstances. However, this is not a fair representation of the

salvation of God, and it is not wise to present Jesus Christ as though that was the case.

There is a certain logic, or pattern, of urgency, associated with the salvation of God. If this matter is approached casually, as though there was a lengthy period of time allowed for the appropriate decision and effort, the results will be disastrous.

THE LOGIC OF SALVATION BEING A MATTER OF URGENCY

There is a certain logic, or pattern, of urgency, associated with the salvation of God. If this matter is approached casually, as though there was a lengthy period of time allowed for the appropriate decision and effort, the results will be disastrous.

There Is A Time Limit

First of all, the obtaining of salvation is associated with time – and, so far as men are concerned, the duration of time is uncertain. Solemnly we are told, “now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). Again we are told, “Today, if you will hear His voice” (Heb 3:7). The only moment that belongs to us is “now.” That is the only time of unqualified acceptance for those responding to Gospel. If the Divine provision is presented in such a manner as to leave the person thinking he is guaranteed of tomorrow, the wrong impression has been left.

There is also the matter of the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. At that time, the heavens and earth will flee from before His face, for He will appear in all of His glory (Matt 24:30; Rev 20:11). We do not know the hour of that appearing (Matt 24:42), or “when” the Master will be seen (Mk 13:35). In the stirring parable of the ten virgins, Jesus revealed what will happen to those who are not prepared for that time. The “door” of salvation will be shut, and the Lord will say to the unprepared, “I know you not” (Matt 25:1-12). It is no wonder that Jesus said of the day of His appearing, “And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares” (Luke 21:34).

The thing that concerns me about the modern trend of Christian counseling and problem resolution is that it does not take the brevity of time into consideration. It leaves the people thinking that they have time to “work on” their problems, when, in reality, that may not be the case at all. In my judgment, this is why there is a proportionately small number of people in our nation who are calling out like the man in Macedonia. People have a growing satisfaction with religious entertainment and involvement in the unpleasantness of their personal lives. They have been lulled to sleep by the false conception that life in this world is going to last for a while, and that God does not demand an immediate response to the word of His great salvation.

The Church Is Called to Sobriety

Even the church – the body of Christ – is called to sobriety concerning the brevity of time. “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:11-12). And again, “Again, He limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts” (Heb 4:7).

The cry of the man in Macedonia was in perfect harmony with the nature of salvation. The urgent tone elicited in that man’s cry revealed a sense of the urgent need of help. “Come over into Macedonia” was seen to mean “Come now!” We will now see how Paul and those with him responded to this night vision, for he will relate what he saw and heard to his brethren.

AN IMMEDIATE AND INSIGHTFUL RESPONSE

“ 10 And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”

To this point, we know that at least three people were in the group – Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Now we will see that Paul shared with them how he was being directed. He knew that Kingdom laborers are not mere vassals who are not acquainted with what is being done. This is after the manner of Jesus Himself who said to His disciples, “all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15). When it comes to participation in the work of the Lord, there are no private revelations – not even to the premier apostle, who “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10).

In passing, I have observed over the years that professed preachers and teachers who major on correcting human behavior have little to share concerning what has been made known to them concerning the things of God. I surmise from this that when men are absorbed with the affairs of their peers, it tends to close off the experience of receiving “wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17).

AFTER HE HAD SEEN THE VISION

“And after he had seen the vision, immediately . . .” Other versions read, “got ready at once,” NIV “straightway,” ASV “straight away,” BBE “lost no time,” CJB and “as soon as.” WILLIAMS

Notice the absolute accord among these brethren. As soon as they knew of the vision, they immediately responded to it in faith. Their acquaintance with God, coupled with the purity of their hearts, enabled them to recognize the Divine summons. They required no additional consultants concerning the advisability of going to another continent. They made no effort to send someone ahead to validate that there was a genuine desire for the Lord in that region. They did not call for a prayer meeting to seek the will of the Lord on the matter. As soon as they knew about the vision, they moved to do what it said.

As soon as Jesus called them, James and John followed Him “immediately” (Matt 4:22). When an angel instructed Cornelius to send for Peter, he did so “immediately” (Acts 10:33). When God was pleased to reveal Jesus “in” Paul, “immediately he conferred not with flesh and blood” (Gal 1:16). When an angel called upon John to “Come up hither,” he testified, “and immediately I was in the Spirit” (Rev 4:2). In the very best view, retarded responses indicate a person is living too close to this world. At the worst, it is a symptom of deadness toward God.

“WE”

“ . . . we . . .” Another version reads, “we [including Luke].” AMPLIFIED

While the name “Luke” is not actually in the passage, this is a proper representation. Luke is the author of the book of Acts, which was a follow-up to his Gospel, which was also addressed to Theophilus (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1). At this point, he speaks of himself as being with the group – something that was not indicated before this. Beginning at this point, Luke includes himself in many of the historical references (Acts 16:10,11,12,13,16; 20:6,13,14,15; 21:1,2, 3,4,5,6,7,8,10,12,14,15,16,17; 27:1,2,3,4, 5,7,15,16,18,19,20,29,37; 28:10,11,12,13, 14,16).

The manner in which Luke includes himself evinces his personal humility. At no time did he detract from the labors of Paul by drawing attention to himself. Paul, however, in his writings acknowledged Luke’s presence and consistent faithfulness (Rom 16:21; Col 4:14; 2 Tim 4:11).

ENDEAVORED TO GO INTO MACEDONIA

“endeavored to go into Macedonia . . .” Other versions read, “sought to go,” NKJV “got ready . . . to leave,” NIV “tried to cross over,” NRSV “made the decision to go,” BBE “lost no time getting ready,” CJB “made efforts to set out,” CSB “prepared to go,” GENEVA “looked for a way to go,” GWN “were desirous to depart to,” MRD “sought passage to,” NAB “attempted . . . to go,” NET “lost no time in arranging a passage,” NJB “decided to leave for,” NLT “that settled it. We would go to,” LIVING “looked out for an opportunity of passing on to,” WEYMOUTH “laid our plans to get off to,” MONTGOMERY and “made every effort to get on to.” PHILLIPS

The immediacy of their response is challenging to consider – that is, challenging to the mind of the flesh. Paul reports that he had a vision of a man in Macedonia begging them to come over and “help” them. The nature of the “help” is not specified, and there is a sea that lies between them and that area. Yet, their hearts and minds have been so purified that they can reason upon this report and draw a proper conclusion. To be sure, the Holy Spirit is in this scenario. However, He does not force the people, but rather leads them. That leading requires a certain mind-set and spiritual sensitivity. A mind that has been cultured in the ways of the world is not a suitable mind for the direction of the Holy Spirit. That is because such a person minds “the things of the flesh,” and has neither appetite nor ability to respond appropriately to Divine direction (Rom 8:5-6; 2 Cor 2:14).

My point here is that in the modern church-culture, spiritual-mindedness is very much perceived as an unreached goal. Those who dare to emphasize the need for such a frame of mind and spirit view it as something that must be possessed, but generally acknowledge that it has not really been realized by the religious population.

However, in our text, this was the actual condition of the people involved. They were not taking a course that was theoretically designed to lead them in this direction, but were actually in possession of a “sound mind.”

ASSUREDLY GATHERING

“assuredly gathering . . .” Other versions read, “concluding that,” NKJV “being convinced,” NRSV “it seemed certain,” BBE “we inferred,” MRD “being certified,” PNT “we could only conclude,” LIVING “we understood,” IE “confidently inferring,” WEYMOUTH and “we were sure.” CEV

The words “assuredly gathering” are translated from a single Greek word – **sumbiba,zontej** . The root meaning of this word, as used in this text, is, “to put together in one's mind, to compare; by comparison to gather, conclude, consider,” THAYER “conclude, infer,” FRIBERG “bring together, unite; hold together; advise, instruct, inform; conclude, decide,” UBS and “to bring together, to cause to be a unit, to unite.” LOUW-NIDA

The idea here is that these brethren considered a number of differing circumstances. They were brought into their minds, that were dominated by their perception of the revealed purpose of God, and their personal knowledge of God. Thinking within the perimeter of spiritual understanding, it became apparent to them what God was doing. They were fully persuaded, which is a characteristic of faith (Rom 4:21).

CALLED TO PREACH THE GOSPEL

“that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.” Other versions read, “God had called us to preach the Gospel to them,” NASB “God had called us to proclaim the good news to them,” NRSV “God had sent us to give the good news to them,” BBE “God had called us to evangelize them,” CSB and “the Lord had called us to announce to them the glad tidings.” DARBY

The Gospel is “preached to the poor” (Luke 4:18), but it is not about the poor. Jesus did not die to supply food for the poor of the world. He was not raised from the dead in order that the sick

might be made well. Neither of these conditions required a vicarious sacrifice.

In his vision, Paul was not told to come over to Macedonia and preach the Gospel. The man in the vision pleaded with them, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us” (16:9). As I have already indicated, this cry would be viewed quite differently in our time. In fact, it is my persuasion that it would be rare to find a group of believers who would see that as a call to come and preach the Gospel. Some would conclude there was an urgent need for food, clothing, accommodations, or some other form of relief. I do not mean to be overly critical in this assessment. My persuasion is driven by the current predominance of relief work and benevolence in the mission field. I am by no means suggesting that such works are wrong. They are not, however, to be the thrust of those who have been called to labor in the Word and in the doctrine. The apostles themselves refused to be drawn aside into the legitimate work of providing for widows. When such a need arose they reasoned, “It is not seemly or desirable or right that we should have to give up or neglect [preaching] the Word of God in order to attend to serving at tables and superintending the distribution of food.” NIV (Acts 6:2). Notwithstanding the record of this kind of reasoning, there persists within the modern church an inordinate estimation of this kind of ministry. It must be remembered that something that is necessary is not always preeminent. Our text is dealing with matters of preeminence and focus.

It is essential that we have a clear view of the purpose of God. The Gospel correlates perfectly with the reason for Christ’s death and resurrection. The Gospel is “preached to the poor” (Luke 4:18), but it is not about the poor. Jesus did not die to supply food for the poor of the world. He was not raised from the dead in order that the sick might be made well. Neither of these conditions required a vicarious sacrifice. Neither of them cause people to be alienated from the life of God, or drive a wedge between them and GOD. They did not require Jesus to be made “to be sin for us” (2 Cor 5:21), or to be “made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). Poverty does not require an atonement. Being ill does not constitute one an enemy of God. However, Christ’s death addressed such matters – matters regarding sin, alienation, and being dead in trespasses and sins – not being dead in poverty and sickness.

Jesus “came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15), and the Gospel declares and expounds that fact. God sent His Son into the world “that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17). He “sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him” (1 John 4:9). He “appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26). God was in Christ “reconciling the world unto Himself” (2 Cor 5:19). In His death He “destroyed the devil” (Heb 2:14), “plundered principalities and powers” (Col 2:15), and ended the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).

These things are consistently taught in Scripture. Christ’s death, resurrection, enthronement, and mediation, are never said to be the appointed means of destroying poverty, or attaining wealth. They are not God’s appointment for the establishment of philanthropy. That is not the good news of the Gospel – although there is nothing inherently wrong with any of those things. However, they are not the reason for the body of Christ, nor did such things require an atoning death and the removal of sin.

WHY SAY THESE THINGS

It is necessary to say these things because of the climate that now dominates the landscape of religion. If many of day had heard a man in a foreign country saying, “Come over and help us,” they would have concluded God was calling to institute a relief program, or to teach people how to worship, or to get wayward youth off the streets. Others would imagine they were being called to heal marriages and teach people how to manage their finances – or perhaps even to establish a theological school or training institute.

The fact that Paul and those with him did not think in this manner leads me to question why men think in this way today.

It is my persuasion that the nominal church has been infected with the virus of erroneous thinking – spiritually illogical thought. It is not being moved along by the considerations that moved the brethren in our text. This is largely owing to its fundamental ignorance of the purpose of God, and the obvious lack of an earnest and unwavering commitment to the One who died for them and rose again.

All of these conditions are directly traceable to a glaring ignorance of God, Christ, and salvation itself. Those are the conditions that cause men to think differently than those of our text. It is also why it is difficult for them to arrive at sound conclusions.

THEY ARRIVE IN PHILIPPI

“ 11 Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; 12 And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days. ”

The group wastes no time in commencing their trip to the continent of Europe. That, of course, is an aspect of faith, that moves the one possessing it to act immediately upon a word from the Lord. For example, when God tried Abraham, commanding him to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to Him, “Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him” (Gen 22:1-3). When Noah was “warned of God of things not seen as yet” – namely an impending flood that would destroy every living thing – he, being “moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house” (Heb 11:7). That is how faith reacts to the word of the Lord. People who say they have faith, yet do not respond to God, living as though He had never even spoken, have lied, and the truth is not in them.

However, there are no pretenders in the group of our text. They will immediately commence to do something they have never done before, venturing into Europe to preach the Gospel.

LOOSING FROM TROAS

“Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia . . .” Other versions read, “sailing from Troas . . . ran a straight course,” NKJV “putting out to sea from Troas, we ran a straight course,” NASB and “setting sail from Troas, we came in a direct course to Samothrace.” NIV

Samothracia, or Samothrace, was a mountainous island in the Aegean Sea that could be seen from Troas, and is said to have been visible from the hills of Philippi. It was a well known island, and a place referred to as “the seat of the worship and mysteries of Cabiri.” McSTRONG The Britannica Encyclopedia describes “the mysteries of Cabiri” as, “ An important group of deities, probably of Phrygian origin, worshiped over much of Asia Minor, on the islands nearby, and in Macedonia and northern and central Greece. They were promoters of fertility and protectors of seafarers . . . The Cabeiri are often identified with the Great Gods of Samothrace, where the mysteries attracted great attention and initiation was looked upon as a general safeguard against misfortune. In the period after the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC), their cult reached its height.”

This is where they anchored on the first day. However, it seems apparent that the group did no preaching or teaching in this citadel of idolatry. They had been called to Macedonia, and were therefore making their journey there as quickly as possible. They certainly would not be turned aside by the novel traits of an island given over to idolatry, and visited by pilgrims from around the world.

THE NEXT DAY

“ . . . and the next day to Neapolis . . .” Other versions read, “and the next day came to Neapolis,”

NKJV “and on the following day to Neapolis,” NASB and “the following day to Neapolis.” RSV

Neapolis was a sea port in Macedonia – the area to which they had been called. As is apparent in the text, it took less than two days for them to make the journey. This is of some significance. Later, as recorded in Acts 20:5, they made this same trip back to Troas. That trip took more than twice as long. It is written, “And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days ; where we abode seven days” (Acts 20:6). This suggests that the winds were favorable for the journey to Macedonia. I gather that this was not a matter of coincidence. The call that had come from that area had an urgent tone to it, and the Master of both the wind and the sea caused them to arrive in a timely manner.

PHILIPPI, THE CHIEF CITY

“And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony . . .” Other versions read, “a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a Roman colony,” NASB

A “colony” consisted of Roman citizens who were military veterans. They were assigned to a portion of a conquered country, and were exempt “from personal and land taxes.” A “colony” is described in this manner: “Originally and properly a colony was a body of Roman citizens sent out as volunteers (Livy, 10:21) to possess a commonwealth, with the approbation of their own state.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S

Here, then, was a significant city with a prominent Roman citizenry, even being the leading city of the “district of Macedonia.” A “district” was a division of a conquered territory that allowed for the orderly control of the Roman empire.

The implication of this circumstance is seen in the nature of the Jewish people. They were provincial in nature, being given a special land by God. When found in other nations, it was generally owing to their dispersion by Divine judgment. Further, when found in other cultures they are consistently represented as maintaining their unique customs, which often involved gathering in synagogues.

Their culture was totally unlike the cultures of other nations, centering in the worship of the one true God. Their Scriptures constituted the Law by which they lived, and it did not train them for trafficking among the kind of people found in Philippi.

Yet, though they were, in a sense, quite different from the society in which they now found themselves, there is not the slightest indication that this group of men approached their assignment with fear and trepidation. Instead, they were forward and eager to get to the work. This was because of their faith, for faith equips the one possessing it to venture into new and challenging territory without being intimidated by it.

To me, this is something worthy of consideration. In our time, and for over one hundred and fifty years, scholasticism and special training has developed a firm grasp upon the church. Although representing itself as religious scholarship and training, the result has been that the necessity and effectiveness of faith has been seen less and less. In most Christian training, faith does not play a prominent place at all. Even a working knowledge of the Scriptures is not perceived as an absolute requisite for the service of Almighty God. It is ever true that any attempt to incorporate the wisdom of the world with faith results in the dominance of worldly wisdom. Faith cannot function in such an admixture, so it gradually diminishes.

Were the assignment of our text given to the average church-leaders of our day, one can scarcely imagine how they would go about its fulfillment. Some would probably weigh it as though they had the option of rejecting it. Others might perceive it as too challenging for them. Others might fear

venturing into an environment having such a military presence.

But none of these things are declared to have been present in our text. Under the leadership of Paul, these men, including one who was rather young – Timothy – ventured forth as though they were seasoned veterans. Their faith and their Kingdom experience had doubtless produced in them a great confidence in the Lord. They did not look at opportunities through the lens of the flesh, but through the eye of faith. I believe you will find this to be a consistent pattern throughout the book of Acts. That is because it is the manner of the Kingdom. The “just” – all of them – really do “live by faith” (Heb 10:38). Our text is a living example of that.

THEY WERE THERE SEVERAL DAYS

This being the case, the plea for “help” has obviously come from those who were seeking the Lord, and were aware of their need of Him. These will not be people who are absorbed with the ways of the world, and have no sense of their need for the Lord.

“ . . . and we were in that city abiding certain days.” Other versions read, “staying in that city for some days,” NKJV “we stayed there several days,” NIV “we spent a few days in this city,” CJB and “And there we stayed some little time.” WEYMOUTH

After traveling a considerable distance by sea, the group was not met at the port by the man who appeared to Paul in the vision. After going to the chief city of Philippi – close to fifty miles west of Neapolis – they still did not come into contact with any obvious inquirers. In a sense, this was a test of their faith. They had not been directed to a specific place in Macedonia – like Philip was directed to the desert road leading to Gaza, and Peter to Caesarea. They were not pointed toward a specific man – like Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, and Peter to Cornelius. Macedonia was an area of significant size. Now, after arriving, there was no immediate evidence of the need declared in Paul’s vision.

Those with a naive view of life in Christ would be thrown into a state of consternation by this circumstance. They see Divine direction as always being very clear, requiring little effort on the part of the Kingdom laborer. However, this text throws such ideas to the ground, for they do not represent the manner of the Kingdom. There are times when holy reasoning must be employed in a search for the proper thing to do. In the search there must be a holy familiarity with the ways of the Lord.

Take this text as an example. The vision given to Paul was that of a man in Macedonia calling out, “Come over into Macedonia and help us.” The vision was not given to a Roman soldier, as though some military assistance was needed. It was not given to a governmental treasurer, as though some money was required. The vision was not given to a food distributor, as though some food was required. It was given to a person who had been commissioned to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the forgiveness of sins, and participate in the inheritance belonging to those who are sanctified by faith (Acts 26:18). The call, then, related to that mission, for God does not work in contradiction of His callings.

This being the case, the plea for “help” has obviously come from those who were seeking the Lord, and were aware of their need of Him. These will not be people who are absorbed with the ways of the world, and have no sense of their need for the Lord. It is probable that they will be engaged in some kind of effort to know what they have perceived is from God. With this in mind, it is my persuasion that the initial time spent in Philippi was spent in an attempt to identify such people. That is precisely why Paul would visit the synagogues of a city, for they were places where true seekers were apt to be found (Acts 13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:3). Jesus Himself did the same thing (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 12:9; 13:54; John 18:20).

However, there is no record of a synagogue in Philippi. After leaving there, Paul and company

went into a synagogue in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1). Before going to Macedonia, they spent time in Iconium (Acts 14:1). But there is no record of them being in a synagogue in Philippi. This bears on how Paul will approach this work.

This kind of approach to preaching the Gospel presumes that the one who is preaching and teaching is capable of bringing a true inquirer to the “treasure” that he is seeking – for the Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that is being sought.

I will assume that during the time of reference that was spent in Philippi, an effort was made to identify people who would have a sense of the Lord, and were engaged in some kind of effort to know Him and His will more fully. To me, this passage confirms that this was the kind of quest in which they were engaged.

This blends perfectly with most all of the accounts of preaching and teaching to this point, with very few exceptions.

SOMETHING TO PONDER

This kind of approach to preaching the Gospel presumes that the one who is preaching and teaching is capable of bringing a true inquirer to the “treasure” that he is seeking – for the Kingdom of heaven is like a treasure that is being sought (Matt 13:44). Those who are ready to hear the Gospel are likened to a merchant man who is in the process of seeking “goodly pearls” (Matt 13:45). The quest of such people is driven by a sense of their own spiritual deficiency – a discerned state that is referred to as being “poor in spirit” (Matt 5:3). These are “the poor” that Jesus said would have the Gospel preached to them (Matt 11:5; Lk 4:18). These are not the economically “poor,” for the Gospel does not even address economics. It is the “Gospel of Christ” (Rom 1:15), not of success, and of “the grace of God” (Acts 20:24), not social elevation.

I question the validity of claims to “leading people to Christ” who are from the disinterested sector of society – particular when it involves little more than repeating the hackneyed “sinner’s prayer.” In my judgment there is too much shallowness in contemporary evangelism. It appears to be leaving the door standing ajar for the entrance of those who are neither aware of their sin, nor of the necessity of getting rid of it. However, there is no need to carry this matter further. For those who have ears to hear, our text will powerfully speak to this matter.

ACTIVITIES ON THE SABBATH DAY

“13 And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.”

It is important to note the time, place, and activity associated with this event. It took place on the Sabbath day. The place was a river outside of the city. The place was one noted for the offering of prayer. Keep in mind that all of this has to do with answering a call to come into Macedonia to minister “help.” This “help” has been defined as “to preach the Gospel unto them” (16:10). This is how Paul, and Silas commenced the fulfillment of that commission.

ON THE SABBATH DAY

“And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side . . .” Other versions read, “on the Sabbath day we went out of the city,” NKJV “outside the gate,” NASB “outside the town,” BBE “outside the city gate,” CSB “a little way outside the city,” NLT and “beyond the city gate.”
WEYMOUTH

Some might read this with a mind to enforce the observance of the Sabbath day – but that is not the point of the text, as is apparent by what is said of this occasion. More than a personal observance of

the day, which might very well have been observed, this was an attempt to find those whose hearts were being drawn Godward. As I have already indicated, this has been established as a key manner in which the apostles and other messengers made inroads into society. With a few exceptions, they started by addressing those who had demonstrated some propensity toward the Lord, and these were generally Jews.

The fact that they went “out of the city” confirms there was no synagogue within it. Even though it appears there were Jews in that area, they were not of sufficient number to have established a synagogue. Yet, as we will find, while in this Gentile city, they had maintained their faith, and continued to make special prayers on the Sabbath day.

Something To Be Seen

There is something else to be seen here. Drawing close to the Lord was associated with separating from normalities of life. This was established under the Law, where God instructed the people to go to sanctified places to give special honor to Him (Deut 12:5; 14:23; 15:20). When in the wilderness, the tabernacle was the place where the people would meet, which was called “the tabernacle of meeting” NKJV (Ex 27:21; 28:43; 29:4; 30:16; 31:7; 33:7; 35:21; 38:8 40:7,30). Later, the city of Jerusalem was the gathering point (Ezra 7:13; Neh 12:27; Jer 3:17). Within Jerusalem, the Temple was a place of gathering (Isa 56:7; Matt 21:13; John 8:2; Acts 5:20). The glorious events of the day of Pentecost took place in a house, not in the streets (Acts 2:2). The initial pouring out of the Spirit upon the Gentiles took place in the house of Cornelius where the people were gathered to hear words whereby they would be saved (Acts 10:22,27). The disciples in Troas came together on the first day of the week, meeting in a special upper chamber (Acts 20:7-8).

This is not intended to establish some kind of legal system concerning the gathering of the saints. It rather substantiates that there is a certain distracting element in the world – even in legitimate activities that are conducted there. A quest for the Living God does involve getting away from those things. Paul and Silas knew this, and thus went outside the city, seeking to find those engaged in such a pursuit. The Amplified Bible accents this by reading, “And on the Sabbath day we went outside the [city’s] gate to the bank of the river where we supposed there was an [accustomed] place of prayer .”

WHERE PRAYER WAS WONT TO BE MADE

“ . . . where prayer was wont to be made . . .” Other versions read, “where prayer was customarily made,” NKJV “a place of prayer,” NASB “we expected to find a place of prayer,” NIV “where it was the custom for prayer to be,” DARBY “where we thought Jewish people gathered for prayer,” GWN “because a house of prayer was seen there,” MRD “where we thought people would be meeting for prayer.” NLT

The word “wont” comes from the Greek word **evnomi,zomen** , which means, “to hold by custom or usage, own as a custom or usage; to follow custom or usage,” THAYER In other words, this speaks of something that is normally and consistently done – not a mere habit, but a custom, or manner of life. Whereas a habit can be done by rote, what men are “wont” to do is done deliberately, with thought and intention.

1 2:14-41 Peter House Pentecost Devout Jews

2 3:12-36 Peter Temple Man Healed Jews

3 4:8-12 Peter Council Accountability Jews

4 4:19-20 Peter & John Council Accountability Jews

5 5:20-21 Apostles Temple Commanded Jews
6 5:29-32 Peter & Apostles Council Accountability Jews
7 5:42 Apostles Temple/Houses Continuance Jews
8 6:9-10 Stephen Synagogue Disputing Jews
9 7:2-53 Stephen Council Defense Jews
10 8:4 Those scattered Everywhere Preaching Everyone
11 8:5-8,12 Philip Samaria Preaching Samaritans
12 8:25 Peter & John Villages Preaching Samaritans
13 8:26-39 Philip Desert Road Preached Eunuch
14 8:40 Philip Cities Preached Everyone
15 9:17-19 Ananas House Called apostle Saul
16 9:20-22 Saul Synagogues Preached Jews
17 9:29 Saul Jerusalem Disputed Jews
18 10:26-48 Peter Caesarea Preached Cornelius
19 11:19-21 Those scattered Cities Preached Citizenry
21 11:26 Barnabas & Saul Antioch Taught Believers
22 13:4-5 Barnabas & Saul Synagogues Preached Word Jews
23 13:12 Saul Governor's house Doctrine Governor
24 13:14-41 Saul Synagogue Preached Jews/Gentiles
25 13:43-48 Barnabas & Saul City Persuaded Gentiles
26 13:49 Many Region Word published Citizenry
27 14:1-3 Paul & Barnabas Synagogue Preached Jews/Greeks
28 14:6-18 Paul & Barnabas Lystra Preached Gentiles
29 14:21 Paul & Barnabas Derbe Preached Citizenry
30 14:21-23 Paul & Barnabas Cities Confirmed Believers
31 14:25 Paul & Barnabas Perga Preached Citizenry
32 15:3 Paul & Barnabas Phenice/Samaria Reported Believers
33 15:32 Judas & Silas Antioch Confirmed Believers
34 15:35 Paul & Barnabas Antioch Preached/Taught Believers

35 15:41 Paul & Silas Syria/Cilicia Confirming Churches

36 16:5 Paul & Silas Derby/Lystra Established Churches

Therefore Paul and company sought out a place where people were noted for coming to pray on the Sabbath day. If someone was ready to hear the Gospel, and there was a sense of urgency about it, as the vision Paul received suggested, these are the kind of people to whom they had been sent. They would, in this case, be Jews, that had been prepared by the “schoolmaster” to hear of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:24-25). We do not know how long Paul and those with him had been in Philippi, but I do not doubt that this was the first Sabbath day of they confronted.

The extraordinary thing about this is that this degree of commitment is not found in the average church. Traditionally, the time of prayer is the time when the least number of people come – and some have abandoned such a time altogether. This suggests a lack of seriousness about the things of God. I do not know how you would go about establishing the validity of a professed faith that did not draw people together for prayer.

SPEAKING TO THE WOMEN WHO RESORTED THERE

“ . . . and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.” Other versions read, “who met there,” NKJV “who had assembled,” NASB “who had gathered there,” NIV “who had come together,” RSV and “who had come to the meeting.” NJB

The word “resorted” means “to come together, to assemble . . . in congregation,” THAYER and “to hold by custom or usage, own as a custom or usage; to follow custom or usage.” LOUW-NIDA This, therefore, was not a group of women independent from one another who just happened to be at the same place at the same time. These women came to be together, and to pray together. They were an assembly – an intentional gathering, coming together for prayer.

These women are the ones to whom Paul and Silas chose to speak. In his vision, Paul saw a man crying out for them to come over into Macedonia and help them. Now they confront a group of women, and they see no contradiction whatsoever. They sat down and spoke to the women. You may be sure, they did not indulge in idle talk – the weather, or the social climate, etc. These women had come to pray, and they apparently had no interest in mere conversation, or the discussion of matters disassociated from the reason they came to the river. It was a perfect context for Gospel proclamation. While the Gospel is for “every creature,” some are more ready to hear it than others.

The devotion of these woman ought to be noted. We do not know the number of them, but they apparently knew each other, and had no doubt maintained their godly associations. They certainly had not become absorbed or distracted by the Macedonian society.

Although there were apparently not enough Jews in the area to justify a synagogue, they still honored the Lord on the Sabbath day . Their presence in a heathen environment did not cause their love to wax cold. We are viewing a cluster of people who were seeking the Lord.

A CERTAIN WOMAN NAMED LYDIA

“ 14 And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshiped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”

We do not know how many women had assembled by this river. However, now our attention will be turned to one of them.

A CERTAIN WOMAN

“And a certain woman named Lydia . . .” Other versions read, “one of those listening,” NIV “one who heard us,” RSV “one of them,” NAB and “one of these women.” NJB

Paul and Silas sat down and spoke to all of the women present. At this point, however, one of the women is noted above all of the others.

The word “certain” is a technically precise translation denoting a specific woman among several women. According to the text, all of the woman who were present had assembled for the purpose of prayer. Paul and Silas sat down and spoke to all of the women present. At this point, however, one of the women is noted above all of the others. Our attention is drawn toward her. Like the seed that was sown, here was some “good ground” that will receive and act upon the Word (Matt 13:8,23).

There are varying distinctions among people. Here was a group of women who were distinct from others in that they gathered together on the Sabbath for the purpose of prayer. If there was no synagogue in Philippi, as the circumstance suggests, it did not dampen their spirits. They assembled anyway. Like the woman at the well, they gave their attention to the speakers, not recoiling from their presence or speaking. This is the manner of people who are feeling after God – seeking Him out, and endeavoring to do His will (Acts 17:27). Such distinctive people are not offended when men speak to them of the things of God.

Now, we see more prestigiousness within this distinguished group of women. Here was a spiritual woman that was unique among spiritual women. Such distinctions are found throughout Scripture.

- Enoch stood out among men, walking with God (Gen 5:22,24).
- Noah stood out, being distinguished from everyone else in the world (Gen 6:8-9).
- Joseph stood out among the sons of Jacob, being “separate from his brethren” (Gen49:26) receiving a double portion of the inheritance in Canaan in his sons (Josh 16:4).
- Mary stood out among all other women (Luke 1:28).
- John the Baptist stood out among the prophets (Matt 11:11).
- Nicodemus stood out among the Pharisees, who were a strict body of people (John 3:1; Acts 26:5).
- Peter stood out among the twelve (Matt 16:19).
- Paul stood out among the apostles (1 Cor 15:10).
- Timothy stood out among the disciples in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-2).
- Andronicus and Junia stood out, being of note among the apostles (Rom 16:7).
- James (the Lord’s brother), Peter, and John stood out in the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9).

The Divine economy is one in which people can excel! Some can press in closer, like the woman with an issue of blood (Mk 5:27). It is possible to linger with Jesus, and receive further explanations concerning mysterious proclamations (Matt 13:36; Lk 8:9). In this record we are being exposed to a woman of spiritual distinction.

A SELLER OF PURPLE

“ . . . a seller of purple . . .” Other versions read, “a seller of purple fabrics,” NASB “a dealer in purple cloth,” NIV “a seller of purple goods,” RSV and “a dealer in fabrics dyed in purpose.”
AMPLIFIED

The words “seller of purple” are translated from a single Greek word (**porfuro,pwlij**). The word means, “a female seller of purple or of fabrics dyed in purple,” THAYER “a woman who specialized in selling purple cloth - 'dealer in purple cloth,” LOUW-NIDA and “a business woman dealing in purple cloth.” GINGRICH

“PURPLE”

There was a great demand for this fabric as it was used on the official toga at Rome and in Roman colonies. We still use the term "royal purple." See on Luke 16:19. Evidently Lydia was a woman of some means to carry on such an important enterprise from her native city. ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

In many of these passages the word translated “purple” means “purple cloth,” or some other material dyed purple, as wool, thread, etc.; but no reference occurs to the means by which the dye was obtained, except in 1 Macc. 4:23, where we have porfu>ra qalassi>a , ‘ purple of the sea” (comp. Diod. Sic. iii, 68; Josephus, War, v, 5, 4). There is, however, no reason to doubt that it was obtained, like the far-famed Tyrian purple, from the juice of certain species of shell-fish – i.e., Tyrian Rock-shell (*Murex trunculus*). McCLINTOK STRONG’S

It is apparent that this was a woman of means, dealing in a valuable commodity. “Purple” was prominent in the fabrics of the Tabernacle (Ex 25:4; 26:1,31,36; 27:16; 28:5; 36:8,35,37; 38:18; 39:1-8,24,29). It also prominent in the Temple (2 Chron 2:7,14; 3:14). The rich man of Lazarus fame was “clothed in purple and fine linen” (Lk 16:19). When they mocked Jesus in His trial, they “put on Him a purple robe” (John 19:2). Babylon the Great, the great false church, is depicted as a “woman arrayed in purple” (Rev 17:4), also trafficking in “purple” (Rev 18:12).

Lydia, then, was engaged in a most notable business, and was obviously a prominent women, for ordinary people did not use “purple.”

Behold the Woman

And yet, although a traveling business woman, she did not do her business on the Sabbath day. It was her custom to assemble with other women at the river to pray on the Sabbath day. However valuable and demanding her business may have been, it did not capture her attention on the day devoted to the Lord. Away from Israel, and apparently traveling away from her own home, she suspended her business on the Sabbath day in order to pray!

A WOMAN FROM THYATIRA

“ . . . of the city of Thyatira . . .” Other versions read, “from the city of Thyatira.” NKJV/NASB/NIV

Lydia was from the city of Thyatira, which was in the western region of Asia, where Paul and Silas, by the Holy Spirit, had been “forbidden to preach the Word” (16:6). We know that later this city did, in fact, hear the Word of God, and a church was established there. The church in that city was one of the churches Jesus addressed in the book of the Revelation (Rev 1:11; 2:18,24). Whether or not Lydia was instrumental in the formation of that church, I do not know. However, it is not difficult for me to accept this was the case, because this text is the only other text in Scripture where the city is mentioned. Incidentally, the Roman road from Pergamos to Sardis (two other churches mentioned in the Revelation) passed through Thyatira. McCLINTOK-STRONG’S

A WOMAN WHO WORSHIPED GOD

“ . . . which worshiped God . . .” Other versions read “a worshiper of God,” NASB “a God-fearing woman,” BBE “a God-fearer,” CJB “a convert to Judaism,” GWN “who revered God,” NJB and “worshiped the true God.” IE

We understand that Lydia was a Gentile (as her name indicates), and that she was a proselyte, having embraced the “God of the Jews” (Rom 3:29). It must be remembered that during the time of the Old Covenant, there was no known worship or worshiper of God apart from either being a Jew, or being in contact with them. All of the revelation concerning Himself and His will had been vouchsafed to the Jews. Paul makes a doctrinal point of this. “Who are Israelites ; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

The word “pertaineth” means “belongs,” NASB “their’s,” NIV “whose is,” ASV and “who have.” BBE The expression indicates that the things that are mentioned belonged exclusively to the Jews. They could neither be known nor possessed without being of that body of people, either by birth or by proselytization. Ponder the extensive nature of what was given to the,

- **THE ADOPTION.** This speaks of being brought into association with God – like adopted children. This was something God Himself did: “Israel is My son . . . “ye are the children of the Lord . . . I am a Father to Israel” (Ex 4:22; Deut 14:1; Jer 31:9)

- **THE GLORY.** This has to do with God’s manifestation of Himself. Israel saw His glory at Sinai (Deut 5:24). He spoke to Moses in the Tabernacle (Num 7:89). “The glory of the Lord” filled the Temple (1 Kgs 8:11). They alone saw His “power and glory” (Psa 63:2).

- **THE COVENANTS.** This included the covenant of a land especially for the Israelites (Gen 15:18; Ex 6:4), the covenant of a Seed through whom the blessing would come (Acts 3:35), and the covenant made with them at Sinai (Ex 19:5; 24:7). All of them belonged exclusively to Israel. Even the New Covenant was promised the “the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah” (Jer 31:31; Heb 8:6).

- **THE GIVING OF THE LAW.** The Law was given to the Jews, and they were the exclusive custodians of it. This contained a precise definition of sin, defining morality (Deut 4:8,44; 1 Chron 16:17; Rom 3:20). It was also designed to ultimately lead men to Christ, proving to them their need of Him (Gal 3:24-25).

- **THE SERVICE OF GOD.** This had to do with the worship of God. Under the Law, it was epitomized in the Tabernacle and Temple service, or ministry. Thus devotion to God was referred to as “service” and “the service of the tabernacle” (Ex 12:25-27; 27:19; 30:16; 35:21; Heb 9:6).

- **THE PROMISES.** These had to do with God’s commitment to bless, and referred to them as a people, and to the world in general as regarded the coming Savior (Psa 98:3; Lk 1:70-75; Acts 2:39).

- **THE FATHERS.** These are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom the foundational promises were given. The enjoyment of those promises required identity with them (Gen 31:53; 50:24; Ex 2:24; Acts 3:13).

- **CHRIST CAME FROM THEM, ACCORDING TO THE FLESH.** The promise of the Messiah was given to Israel. Moses prophesied of Jesus, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken” (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22-23; 7:37). He is referred to as a “Son” and a “Child” that was given to them (Isa 9:6). They are the ones to whom He came (John 1:11). Peter declared that God raised Him up as a “Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins” (Acts 5:31). Paul declared “He raised up unto Israel a Savior, Jesus” (Acts 13:23).

The truth of the matter is that God cannot be worshiped generically. Worship requires some kind of revelation, and prior to Christ, this came through the Jews.

Now, we are faced with a woman merchant from a Gentile city, coming from a region in which the Holy Spirit had forbidden the Gospel to be preached. Yet, she had been drawn to the Jews and to their God, and had embraced Him as represented by the Law and the Prophets. Now, the Sovereign Lord finds her by a river side, doing the best she could according to the knowledge she had. She has adhered to her persuasion across the sea from her homeland, and in the process of a business that probably brought her into contact with the elite of a secular society. A noble woman, indeed!

SHE HEARD US

“ . . . heard us . . .” Other versions read, “was listening,” NASB “gave ear to us,” BBE “did hear,” DOUAY “She listened to us,” NLT “gave us audience,” PNT “was hearing,” YLT and “she stayed to listen to us.” WILLIAMS

This includes riveting one’s attention on the speaker, sensing the gravity of what is being said, and a willingness to submit one’s mind to the consideration of what is being said. Comprehension is also involved – the kind that perceives what is being said is, in fact, directed toward the hearer.

As used here, the word “heard” is translated from a word with the following meaning: “attentive hearing . . . to comprehend, understand.” THAYER This includes riveting one’s attention on the speaker, sensing the gravity of what is being said, and a willingness to submit one’s mind to the consideration of what is being said. Comprehension is also involved – the kind that perceives what is being said is, in fact, directed toward the hearer. Keep in mind that Paul was not singing, he was speaking, He was not entertaining, but speaking of things pertaining to life and godliness. The verb tense of the word also suggests that she kept on listening, probably staying longer than some of the other women. Paul’s words got the attention of Lydia.

THE LORD OPENED HER HEART “ . . . whose heart the Lord opened . . .” Other versions read, “the Lord opened her heart,” NKJV “whose heart the Lord made open,” BBE “the Lord made her willing,” GWN “the Lord so moved upon her heart,” WILLIAMS and “she opened her heart.” PHILLIPS

Phillips translation is totally wrong. All five Greek versions that I have read exactly the same: “the Lord opened her heart” (ο` ku,rioj dih,noixen th.n kardi,an). She was a worshiper of God, yet required that her heart be opened. She was devout and apparently consistent in her devotion to the Lord, but her heart had to be opened. She was listening intently to Paul, and picking up on what he was saying, yet her heart had to be opened. This was something she could not do, else God would not have done it. She possessed no natural aptitude to do what was necessary. “The Lord opened her heart.”

The word “opened” is translated from the Greek word **dih,noixen** . The lexical meaning of this word is, “to open thoroughly,” THAYER “enabling one to perceive or understand,” FRIBERG and “to open wide like a folding door.” ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES This is certainly not strange language to the student of Scripture.

• **HAGAR**, “And God opened her eyes , and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink” (Gen 21:19).

• **BALAAM**. “Then the LORD opened the eyes of Balaam , and he saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand: and he bowed down his head, and fell flat on his face” (Num 22:31).

• **ELISHA’S SERVANT**. “And Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes , that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man ; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha” (2 Kgs

6:17).

• **CERTAIN SAMARITANS.** “And it came to pass, when they were come into Samaria, that Elisha said, LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and, behold, they were in the midst of Samaria” (2 Kgs 6:20).

• **THE TWO ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS.** “Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:45).

• **ALL BELIEVERS.** “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints” (Eph 1:18).

Insightful men have sought for understanding to be given to them – understanding that cannot be acquired through scholastic acumen (Psa 119:34,73,125,144,169). Even after admonishing Timothy to “consider” what he had written, Paul added, “and the Lord give thee understanding in all things” (2 Tim 2:7). That is precisely what takes place in this text. Lydia listened considerably, and the Lord opened her heart to things that were otherwise beyond her discernment.

What Does It Mean to Open the Heart?

Behind the need for this work is the effect of sin upon the human race. There is a spiritual obtuseness that has enveloped the heart so that it cannot perceive what needs to be ascertained to be saved. Further, “the heart,” out of which the issues of life proceed, does not have the power to motivate the individual appropriately. The response that God requires of men is too lofty for nature.

The opening of the heart is like a double door swinging wide open. Through one door the individual received, and through the other they are enabled to properly respond to what they receive, expressing themselves to the glory of God. This text particularly emphasizes the latter.

SO SHE COULD ATTEND TO PAUL’S WORDS

“... that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.” Other versions read, “to heed the things,” NKJV “to respond to the things,” NASB “to listen eagerly,” NRSV “to give attention,” BBE “to give heed to,” ERV “to accept,” NJB “accepted all,” LIVING “she believed,” IE and “listen carefully.” ISV

The word translated “attended unto” means “to turn the mind to,” THAYER “to hold on to,” FRIBERG “to be in a continual state of readiness,” LOUW-NIDA and “to give heed to, follow.” GINGRICH This kind of action involves concentration, readiness, and determination. Every obstacle to believing has been pulled down.

Here, much more involved in this expression than mere redundancy. In hearing, as the word indicates, she was attentive, listening carefully and deliberately to what Paul was saying. The use of the word “attend to” shows that she held on to what she heard, not allowing it to be snatched from her.

As the lexical meaning of the word suggests, she was in a state of readiness. It only remained for her to be instructed what to do. She was willing and ready to obey. Further, it was the work of the Lord that gave her the ability to do this.

IF YOU HAVE JUDGED ME TO BE FAITHFUL

“15 And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”

The Spirit does not provide us with all of the details of Lydia's response. However, He does reveal enough for us to see there was no departure from the Kingdom norm. All believers should be able to understand what is said, for it is common to everyone inducted into Christ Jesus.

AND WHEN SHE WAS BAPTIZED

“And when she was baptized, and her household . . .” Other versions read, “and when she and her household were baptized,” NKJV “when she was baptized with her household,” RSV “when she and her family had had baptism,” BBE “After she and the members of her household had been immersed,” CJB “When Lydia and her family were baptized,” GWN and “She and all of the people living in her house were immersed.” IE

There are fifteen times when the baptism of people is described by the words “was baptized” or “were baptized.”

- **PEOPLE RESPONDING TO JOHN THE BAPTIST.** “They went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt 3:5-6).

- **JESUS.** “And Jesus, when He was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him” (Matt 3:16).

- **JESUS.** “And it came to pass in those days, that Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan” (Mark 1:9).

- **PEOPLE RESPONDING TO JOHN THE BAPTIST.** “Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened” (Luke 3:21).

- **PEOPLE RESPONDING TO JOHN THE BAPTIST.** “And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized” (John 3:23).

- **PEOPLE ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).

- **CITIZENS OF SAMARIA.** “But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).

- **SIMON THE SORCERER.** “Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done” (Acts 8:13).

- **THE SAMARITANS.** “For as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 8:16).

- **SAUL OF TARSUS.** “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized” (Acts 9:18).

- **LYDIA AND HOUSEHOLD.** “And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us” (Acts 16:15).

- **PHILIPPIAN JAILOR.** “And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway” (Acts 16:33).

This speaks of a spiritual culture that is most unusual in our time. In those early days, with the

preaching of a pure Gospel by insightful souls, whole bodies of people were often converted at one time.

- **CRISPUS AND HIS HOUSE.** “And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized ” (Acts 18:8).

- **EPHESIANS DISCIPLES.** “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5).

- **THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST.** “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom 6:3).

I am not aware of any responsible student of Scripture that would contend any of these verses was speaking about being baptized into or by the Holy Spirit. This is simply not the type of language used to describe those who were baptized “with the Holy Spirit” (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; John 1:26,33). This text refers to the baptism by which we assume identity with the Lord Jesus Christ. We are, by this baptism, baptized “into Christ” and “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). This is the point at which we are put into Christ’s death, and out of which God raises us to walk in the newness of life (Rom 6:2-4). Here is where our sins are “washed away” (Acts 22:16), after which we receive the “gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). It is also at this point that we obtain a “good conscience” (1 Pet 3:21).

Not only was Lydia herself baptized, but her household was as well. We do not know if this included any children she may have had. One meaning of “household,” as used here, is “family.” STRONG’S The technical definition is those inhabiting a certain house.

This is not the first nor last incident of a person and their house, or household, being baptized.

- Cornelius and his house (Acts 10:47; 11:4).
- Lydia and her house (Acts 16:15).
- The Philippian jailor and his house (Acts 16:31-34).
- Crispus and his house (Acts 18:8).

This speaks of a spiritual culture that is most unusual in our time. In those early days, with the preaching of a pure Gospel by insightful souls, whole bodies of people were often converted at one time. You can no doubt recall many of those occasions.

- On the day of Pentecost, three thousand gladly received the Word and were baptized (Acts 2:41).

- In what appeared to be a single day, “about five thousand men” heard and believed the Word (Acts 4:4).

- The whole city of Samaria believed the preaching of Philip (Acts 8:6,8,12,14).

- A significant number of people all believed when Peter preached at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:45,47-48; 11:17).

Now, a number of people respond to the Gospel at the same time. This again confirms the universality of the Gospel, and how kindred spirits, though diverse in many ways, can be of one accord in responding to the Gospel.

SHE BESOUGHT US

“ . . . she besought us, saying . . . come into my house, and abide there . . .” Other versions read, “begged us . . . come to my house and stay” NKJV “Urged us . . . come into my house and stay” NASB “invited us . . . come and stay at my house” NIV “made a request . . . come into my house and

be my guests,” BBE “gave us this invitation . . . come and stay in my house,” CJB “entreated us . . . come and take lodging in my house,” MRD “invited us . . . come and stay at my house,” NIB “kept urging us . . . come and stay with us,” NJB “did call upon us . . . having entered into my house, remain,” YLT “earnestly entreated us . . . come to my house and stay,” AMPLIFIED and “appealed to us . . . then come down to my house and stay there.” PHILLIPS

First, this strongly suggests that Lydia and her house immediately responded to the Gospel, being baptized in the very river where they had gathered for prayer. Like all of the conversions recorded in the book of Acts, believing and obeying was upon hearing the word of the Gospel.

First, this strongly suggests that Lydia and her house immediately responded to the Gospel, being baptized in the very river where they had gathered for prayer. Like all of the conversions recorded in the book of Acts, believing and obeying was upon hearing the word of the Gospel.

Once again, we are faced with the eagerness of those of tender heart to maintain continued fellowship. This desire surfaces again and again throughout the Scriptures.

- The interested multitudes once remained with Jesus for three consecutive days (Mk 8:2).
- Upon seeing and hearing Jesus, the Samaritans “besought Him that He would tarry with them” (John 4:40).
- After Jesus had joined the two on the two on the road to Emmaus, and after hearing Hos gracious words, “they constrained him, saying, Abide with us” (Lk 24:29).
- Upon hearing that Jesus was going away, the disciples were sorrowful (John 16:5-6,22).
- The early church continued to subject themselves to the apostles doctrine, and to fellowship with one another (Acts 2:42). They were described as being “together” (2:44).
- Upon his conversion, Saul of Tarsus “remained certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus” (Acts 9:19).
- Upon hearing words whereby they could be saved, and responding to them, those at the house of Cornelius asked Peter and those with him to remain with them for several days (Acts 10:48).
- Barnabas and Saul “assembled themselves” with the church in Antioch “for a whole year” (Acts 11:26).
- In Antioch of Pisidia, after hearing the Word of God, “many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:43).
- After “rehearsing all that God had done with them,” Paul and Barnabas stayed a “long time with the disciples” in Antioch (Acts 14:27).
- After obeying the Gospel Paul preached, Lydia “constrained” him and those with him to remain at her house for a time (Acts 16:15).
- After obeying the Gospel, the Philippi an jailor brought Paul and Silas “into his house, and set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house” (Acts 16:34).
- After calling for and speaking to the elders from Ephesus, Paul told them he was departing. They wept freely, “Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more” (Acts 20:38).
- When Paul was en route to Rome, they landed in Tyre, where Paul found some disciples, who invited them to stay with them “seven days” (Acts 28:13).

Now, in keeping with this manner, Lydia desires to maintain this newfound fellowship. At this time, there were at least four in the number: Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke.

THE SPECIFIED CONDITION

“If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord.” Other versions read, “if you consider me to be a believer in the Lord,” NIV “If it seems to you that I am true to the Lord,” BBE “If you're convinced that I believe in the Lord,” GWN “If ye are really persuaded that I have believed in our Lord,” MRD “If you agree that I am a true believer in the Lord,” NLT “If you think that I believe on the Lord,” TNT “If you have made up your mind that I am a real believer in the Lord,” WILLIAMS “If in your opinion I am one really convinced [that Jesus is the Messiah and the Author of salvation] and that I will be faithful to the Lord,” AMPLIFIED and “If you are satisfied that I am a true-believer in the Lord.” PHILLIPS

In a grand display of the transparency of faith, which projects what is in the heart. Lydia calls upon these men to evaluate her faith, determining whether or not she has been trustworthy in her response. As used here, the word “judged” means “to separate, put asunder, pick out, select . . . to approve, esteem . . . deem, think . . . determine,” THAYER “as making a personal evaluation,” FRIBERG “pass judgment on,” UBS and “come to a conclusion in the process of thinking and thus to be in a position to make a decision.” LOUW-NIDA

Lydia submits herself to the judgment of Paul and those with him. She will make her request upon the basis of their conclusion. I can scarcely imagine this kind of statement being made in, what men might call, the conventional “church.” There has been such an emphasis upon profession that little thought is given to the validity of the profession. In my understanding, this is an expression of the confidence of faith. There was no question in the mind of Lydia about being faithful, and she assumes that it is apparent enough to pass the evaluation of those acquainted with the Lord. A professed faith that is so personal and self-centered it refuses to submit to the assessment of the godly is spurious.

The Greek word translated “faithful” is **pisth.n**, and means “trustworthy, faithful, of persons who show themselves faithful in the . . . execution of commands” THAYER “faithful, trustworthy, reliable,” UBS “trustworthy, worthy of credit,” LEH and “trustworthy, faithful, dependable.” GINGRICH

The words “faith” and “faithful” are not synonymous. Further, as used in this text, “faithful” does not mean full of faith. The word “faithful,” as used here (**pisto.j**), is also applied to God Himself: “God is faithful” (1 Cor 10:13); “The Lord is faithful” (2 Thess 3:3); “Faithful is He that calleth you” (1 Thess 5:24); “He abideth faithful” (2 Tim 2:13); “that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest” (Heb 2:17); “He is faithful that promised” (Heb 10:23); “She [Sarah] judged Him faithful who had promised” (Heb 11:11); “a faithful Creator” (1 Pet 4:19); “He is faithful and just” (1 John 1:9). Who would dare to say this means God is “believing,” is a “believer,” or is “full of faith?” These affirmations mean that He is trustworthy and dependable, always doing what is right, and following through with what He says. Knowing this, faith relies upon Him.

The word “faithful” is even applied to the Word of God. “This is a faithful saying” (1 Tim 1:15; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Tit 3:8); “the faithful word” (Tit 1:9). Again, it is obvious this does not mean the Word is believing, but that is trustworthy, dependable, and to be relied on. The various versions of Scripture that use alternative translations misrepresent this text: “to be a believer in the Lord,” convinced that I believe in the Lord,” GWN “that I have believed in our Lord,” MRD “that I am a true believer in the Lord,” NLT “that I believe on the Lord,” TNT and “that I am a real believer in the Lord.” WILLIAMS This is not at all what the text is saying.

Consistently, the word “faithful” is used in regards to one’s acceptable response to a command, or the handling of a stewardship, or some other commission. Thus we read of stewards being “found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2), a “faithful minister” (Eph 6:21), and being “faithful in all things” (1 Tim 3:11).

Synonyms for “faithful” are constant, resolute, steadfast, steady, and true. Related words include dependable, reliable, trustworthy, and devoted.

What Lydia was asking these brethren to judge was her response to the Gospel. Had she carried out what God intended for her to do? Were there some Divine requirements that she had not fulfilled, or had her initial obedience been thorough. A “faithful steward” is one that has fulfilled his stewardship, handling it as the Lord intended. A “faithful minister” is one who delivers the message God has given, properly instructing sinners, and feeding and nourishing the saints of God.

In one place Paul referred to “believing masters” who were “faithful and beloved” (1 Tim 6:2). He was speaking of masters whose conduct matched their profession of faith. In this case, faith is like the root [beneath the surface] which feeds and nourishes the tree, which is above the surface. Lydia was asking that Paul and those with him examine whether not what was seen in her matched what was required within her. That, of course, will be the ultimate assessment that God Himself will make of every professing believer. It is no wonder that we are admonished, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5). Such an examination is not confined to the area of thought and affection, but rather focuses on the various expressions of the individual. Are those actions in concert with the declared impact of Christ being within a person?

SHE CONSTRAINED US

“ . . . And she constrained us.” Other versions read, “persuaded us,” NKJV “prevailed upon us,” NASB “made us come,” BBE “insisted till we went,” CJB “urged us much,” MRD “would take no refusal,” NJB “compelled us to come,” MONTGOMERY and “she induced us to do it.” AMPLIFIED

The reason Lydia convinced the men to come into her house and abide for a season was because they did, in fact, consider her to have been faithful to the Lord. The evidence of her faithfulness that is recorded includes the following.

- She came down to the river on the Sabbath day to pray (16:13).
- She “worshiped God” (16:14a).
- She listened intently to what was being said (16:14b).
- The Lord opened her heart so she could respond to the things that were spoken – and she did (16:14).
- She was baptized (16:15a).
- She continued to insist that they abide in her house (16:15b).

To the spiritually minded, by means of these reactions, it became apparent that Lydia loved the Lord, His Word, and His people. Of course, the personal awareness of these Kingdom realities on the part of Paul and Silas is what enabled their proper assessment of Lydia. Those who are lacking in this discernment cannot necessary assessments.

That assessment, in turn, was based upon their own acquaintance with, and preference for, the Lord, His purpose, and His revelation. It was within that framework that they made their assessment.

CONCLUSION

The Gospel had penetrated the continent of Europe, as it continued its spread like leaven throughout the whole of the earth. This kind of increase is according to Divine objective. Even though there have been periods of history in which such increase was rare, God has revealed certain things about His kingdom. A foundational aspect of it was prophesied by Isaiah: “Of the increase of his government

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

Jesus spoke of the pervasive nature of the heavenly kingdom, affirming. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened ” (Matt 13:33). He also said that, in its beginning, it was like a small and unimpressive mustard. But at its conclusion that would not be the case. “The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown , it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Matt 13:31-32). These statements of the Lord are not a depiction of the worldly church, as some affirm. He categorically states they are rather a characterization of the “Kingdom of heaven” – an appellation never ascribed to anything of this world.

Daniel spoke of this same Kingdom attribute, declaring it to be like an unobtrusive “stone,” hewn out of a mountain “without hands.” The kingdoms of this world appeared quite formidable in comparison to this small beginning. Through a dream, the God of heaven depicted four great world empires (Babylon, Medio-Persian, Grecian, and Roman) as a great image, impressive in appearance, and apparently invincible. What was a small stone in comparison to that? It was revealed that the “stone” of reference began to move across the face of the earth, and finally that very stone “smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth ” (Dan 2:34-35).

In His promise to Abraham, the Lord alluded to the global nature of what would be accomplished in Abraham’s Seed of promise. “Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in Him ” (Gen 18:18). And again, “And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ; because thou hast obeyed my voice” (Gen 22:18). God promised the same to Isaac: “And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ” (Gen 26:4). The Lord also made the same promise to Jacob: “And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed ” (Gen 28:14). This representation of global blessing would not appear possible at first. Yet, as time progressed these promises would be obviously realized.

Before Daniel, the Psalmist prophesied of the defeat of world empires, and their subjugation to the King of kings. “He shall cut off the spirit of princes: He is terrible to the kings of the earth ” (Psa 76:12). And again, “So the heathen shall fear the name of the LORD , and all the kings of the earth Thy glory ” (Psa 102:15). And again, “ All the kings of the earth shall praise thee , O LORD, when they hear the words of thy mouth” (Psa 138:4).

Isaiah also prophesied of such a time: “And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it ” (Isa 2:2). And again, “And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people , and the veil that is spread over all nations ” (Isa 25:7).

John the Revelator also spoke of the pervasive nature of the Kingdom, declaring a time when it will be said in truth, “The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ ; and He shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev 11:15). What we have seen thus far in the book of Acts is the gradual spreading of the Gospel, together with a garnering, or harvest, of souls. Up to the point of our text, it started in Jerusalem, spreading throughout Judaea and Samaria. It reached into

Syria Cilicia, Lycaonia, Phrygia, Galatia, and finally into Europe.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #70

THE WOMAN WITH THE SPIRIT OF DIVINATION

“ 16:16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: 17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation. 18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour. 19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers, 20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans. 22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. 23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.” (Acts 16:16-24)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

As Paul and Silas spend time in Philippi they encounter a person dominated by the powers of darkness: a woman with a spirit of divination. Their encounter of this woman takes place as they are going to the place of prayer, which appears to have become their base of operation. Eventually, Paul confronts the situation, speaking directly to the spirit, and commanding it to come out of the woman. As soon as the spirit left her, she was no longer the same. The outcome of the whole event was an insurrection against Paul and Silas, for the woman proved to have been a source of income to her owners, for she was a slave. As a result, Paul and Silas are beaten publically by the officials. Then, for the first time, Paul is imprisoned, and Silas with him. They had invaded a citadel of Satanic power, and that moved the people to be hostile against them. This is owing to the aggressive nature of Kingdom labors. And thus, the work was under way in Macedonia, to which the Lord had called them – to “preach the Gospel unto them” (16:10).

In this text we are exposed to the militant nature of Gospel preaching. Being sent to Macedonia to “preach the Gospel unto them,” they were not confined to the act preaching itself. Being in a stronghold of the wicked one, they would confront opposition, and would have to do something about it. This would be a different kind of opposition, being instigated by Gentiles, who knew

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- **A WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION FOLLOWED THEM (16:16b-17)**
- **THIS CONTINUED FOR MANY DAYS (16:18)**
- **WHEN THE MEANS OF GAIN WAS TAKEN AWAY (16:19)**
- **THE CHARGE BROUGHT AGAINST THEM (16:20-21)**
- **THEY WERE BEATEN AND SENT TO PRISON (16:22-24)**
- **CONCLUSION**

not God. Prior to this, resistance had largely been instituted by the Jews. In fact, when Gentiles opposed them, it was generally owing to them being stirred up by the Jews (13:45,50; 14:2,5,19). However, in Philippi this was not the case.

THE REALITY OF SATAN

I have found that there is a certain naivete in the Christian community that does not take into account the influence of Satan and his powers in the world. The work of the Lord is often approached as though it only involved dealing with people and their varied problems and circumstances. Ponder what has been revealed about our adversary the devil – things about his nature and his activity. Consider for example, his names, which reveal his character and work:

- **Abandon** (Rev 9:11): destroying angel.
- **Accuser of the brethren** (Rev 12:10): raising charges against the saints.
- **Adversary** (1 Pet 5:8): is set against the believer.
- **Apollyon** (Rev 9:11): destroyer.
- **Beelzebub** (Matt 12:24): Dung god, dealing with spiritual refuse.
- **Belial** (2 Cor 6:15): worthlessness.
- **The Devil** (Matt 4:1): False accuser, slanderer.
- **Enemy** (Matt 13:39): hateful and hostile.
- **Liar and Father of lies** (John 8:44): falsifier, misrepresenting, distorting.
- **Murderer** (John 8:44): killer, manslayer.
- **Prince of the world** (John 12:41): chief magistrate of the world order.
- **Prince of devils** (Matt 12:24): ruler of demons.
- **Prince of the power of the air** (Eph 2:2): ruler of powerful hosts in an unseen realm.
- **Spirit that works in the children of disobedience** (Eph 2:2): the predominate worker in those who are disobedient to God, whether knowledgeably or not.
- **Tempter** (1 Thess 3:5): the author of allurements to sin.

The point of all of this is that when the messengers of the truth invade territories that have been long held by the devil, they will meet with some form of resistance.

- **God of this world** (2 Cor 4:4): the one who is served by those who are sinners.
- **Wicked One** (Matt 13:19): the author of all degeneracy and dereliction.

The hosts of the devil are staggering if contemplated apart from the Lord Jesus Christ. A vast number of demons are under his control (Matt 9:34). There is a hierarchy of wicked personalities governed by him. They include:

- **Principalities:** These are wicked rulers with power, or authority, over regions and vast areas of the world – like Persia and Greece (Dan 10:20).
- **Powers:** These have authority to execute and promote wickedness among men.
- **The rulers of the darkness of this world:** These promote and maintain moral and spiritual ignorance, moving faithless men to live as though there was no God.
- **Spiritual wickedness in high places:** These promote malignity, cruelty, immorality, and other sins of this order, that especially satisfy base desires.

Satan also has a vast host of angels under his command. Whether or not they are separate from the above personalities, I do not know (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:9).

Employing this numberless conglomeration of wicked hosts, he dominates the entire world – all those who are not alive unto God: he “deceiveth the whole world” (Rev 12:9), and “the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” NKJV (1 John 5:19). He successfully brought down Adam and Eve, the only morally perfect adults, apart from Jesus, in the history of the world. The only way for anyone to overcome the devil is to possess One within who is greater than him (1 John 4:4). Apart from Christ and the restraining hand of God Almighty, Satan can take men captive – apparently with little effort (2 Tim 2:26).

The point of all of this is that when the messengers of the truth invade territories that have been long held by the devil, they will meet with some form of resistance. It may be single person who has been the tool of the devil in a region – like Simon the sorcerer in Samaria (Acts 8:9). The opposition may come from a group of Jews who themselves have rejected the Christ who was sent to them (Acts 9:23; 12:3; 13:45,50). Under the administration of Satan, and within the framework of the Sovereignty of God, an assault can be made against people that includes the following.

- Violently taking away all the possessions one owns (Job 1:12-17).
- Causing the children of one trusting in God to die (Job 1:18-19).
- Inflicting one with painful disease (Job 2:7).
- Delivering a painful thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7).
- Provoking his vassals to stone one of God’s people (Acts 7:58-59; 14:19).
- Causing one to be bitten by a snake (Acts 28:3).

The point is that we are in a realm that requires a vital connection with the God of heaven! God has nowhere promised to insulate His people against the attacks of the rulers of this world. In fact, Jesus solemnly told His disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Paul taught the believers that we have been Divinely nominated for such opposition. He sent Timothy to the brethren in Thessalonica who were suffering for the sake of Christ, in order that they might know this. “Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlaborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: that no man should be moved by these

afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto ” (1 Thess 3:2-3).

It is not that we have merely been appointed to suffer, for there is coming a time when we will once and for all be

delivered from all suffering, pain, sorrow, affliction, etc (Rev 21:4; 22:3). However, while we are in this world, we are in a domain that is ruled by hostile forces. In the salvation of God, we are “delivered from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), and constituted citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20-21). So far as our association with this world is concerned, Jesus has chosen us “out of the world” (John 15:19), and, in a very real sense, God has taken us out of it for His own name (Acts 15:14).

THE PHILOSOPHY OF KINGDOM LABOR

There is a certain philosophy that guides laborers in the Kingdom of God. By “philosophy,” I mean an overall vision of, attitude toward, and purpose of life in Christ Jesus. It has been revealed the saved have been “created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10). These works are not our ultimate works, but those pertaining to our tenure in this world. In the world to come, we will “reign with Christ,” which will be the apex of work. However, until that time, the work that we are doing is in the world – the world that has Satan himself as its under-ruler.

First, in redemption, it is necessary to extricate us from “this present evil world,” effectually separating us from its order and dominion. In Jesus’ death, He provided the just means through which God could do this (Gal 1:4). So far as our essential life is concerned, we have been “set,” or placed, “in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). That is the realm of Divine fellowship, as well as the maintenance of spiritual life.

However, when it comes to our work, the present domain is the world – the fallen world. Our fellowship with God and Christ is in the heavenly places, but that is not the place in which our work is presently done. From this circumstance it is apparent that the works to which we have been ordained do not have to do with changing the world, or making the world a better place to live. The world has been cursed, and it is headed for destruction (2 Pet 3:10-12). The role of the saints is not to introduce a means of sustaining the world, maintaining ecological concerns, and the likes. Whatever involvements believers may have in such things, they are not their fundamental concerns, and it is not where grace sustains the soul.

The works for which we have been ordained must be done in the world while maintaining our status in the heavenly realms. The aim is to get people out of the world, not stabilize them in it. By “get people out of,” I mean separate them from the world order or system – from its priorities and concepts. It is in this effort that we inevitably confront the devil and his hordes. This is because the works for which we have been created are disruptive to his kingdom. If we do not tend to interrupt what he is doing in the world, he will not oppose us to any significant degree. With this in mind, it is quite possible that a lack of opposition indicates that Satan is not threatened by what is being done. The only exception to this are those occasions when God grants outward rest and peace to His people, as he did in Acts 9:31.

Let it be clear that opposition by no means suggests that Satan is superior, or that his forces have the dominating power. They do have power, but it is delegated and subordinate power – delegated by the Most High God, and subordinate to His will.

Our text will expose us to the invasion of one of Satan’s strongholds. While there were faithful people there, like Lydia and her household, they were in the decided minority. We know this is the case because Satan’s followers were not hesitant to cast reproach on the work. You may remember that during Christ’s ministry, and prior to the appointed time of His death, Christ’s enemies were not

able to put a hand upon Him (Mk 12:12; Lk 19:47-48). Knowing all things, Jesus drew this to the attention of His enemies (Matt 26:55; Mk 14:49). He declared to them that the only reason they were able to take hold of Him during that dark night was because it was their “hour, and the power of darkness” (Lk 22:53).

The principle is the same in our text. When the circumstance appears to find the adversary in the dominant position, it is only because they have been given leave from heaven to operate with relative and controlled freedom. However, their opposition will in no way cause the purpose of God to be pushed to the side.

AS WE WENT TO PRAYER

“ 16:16a And it came to pass, as we went to prayer . . .”

As is customary in Scripture, the significant events are reported, with the omission of mere incidentals. The objective of Scripture is not merely to pass along information. “All Scripture,” we are told, has this target: “That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:17). This is accomplished by more than directives on how to live –although the Spirit does address that matter. Scripture not only contains a record of the actions and reactions of men, but of spiritual hosts as well. There is also the matter of revealing how God works, and the efforts and people that Satan employs to hinder that work.

IT CAME TO PASS

“And it came to pass . . .” Other versions read, “now it happened,” NKJV “Once,” NIV “One day,” RSV “it occurred that,” MRD and “it fortunated.” TNT

The phrase, “it came to pass” can refer to some that, in the process of time, eventuated (Gen 4:3; Ex 2:23; Judges 11:4; 2 Chron 21:19). In such a case, the occurrence is more or less incidental. However, that is not always how the phrase is used. In our text, the expression is translated from a single Greek word – **Vege,neto** . The lexical meaning of the word is, “to come into existence, begin to be,” THAYER “be made, be done, be brought into existence.” FRIBERG

The idea here is that what comes to pass is not mere happenstance. It is rather something that is caused to happen, not something that occurs by chance. In this usage, there is an objective behind what comes to pass. This should not surprise us, for “The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1). In the creation of the earth, there was a Divine objective.

The Broad View

From a broad point of view the Lord says, “For thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited : I am the LORD; and there is none else” (Isa 45:18). The earth is not an end of itself – that is, it is not the real point. It was made to be inhabited. Those constituting mankind are the intended inhabitants, even though, because of the purpose being wrought in the earth, there are also unseen visitors: angels, demons, etc. Men are not intended to serve the earth, as the earth-worshippers affirm. Rather, the earth is intended to serve them.

From this broad view, the earth is the intended arena in which the purpose of God is being fulfilled. This has particular regard to His great salvation. That is why He is declared to be “working

salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12). In this way, and by Divine intention, God “will be exalted in the earth” (Psa 46:10). The purpose of God for the earth has not only been determined, it

will be realized. It is said of the Messiah, “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law” (Isa 42:4).

Everything Relates to This

Whatever is taking place in this world relates in some way to what God is working in the midst of it. In strict accord with the unseen influence that is driving what takes place, it is either promoting the cause of God, or opposing it. Eventually, what is said to “come to pass” is either contributing to the fulfillment of God’s purpose, or is set against it, and will finally be dashed to the ground and exposed for what it really is. Jesus taught us that this is even applicable at the level of words that are spoken (Matt 12:37). He also made clear that the works of men either glorify God, or are wicked in their nature, competing against both His purpose and glory (Matt 5:16: Lk 13:27).

The Wickedness of Living In Ignorance of the Purpose of God

The world was made by God and belongs to God. It was made to be inhabited by men, in order that the salvation of God might be wrought upon it. That is the way it really is. This being true, living as though the earth was the main thing is wrong. Living as though humanity is fundamental is also wrong. Both views miss the mark, and thus are actually aligned against God.

In our text, something will come to pass within the context of Paul and Silas doing the will of the Lord. Something will take place that was instigated by Satan and his powers of darkness. It will be done to present a corrupted view of what was taking place, and will be done in a most subtle way. The unseen worlds will here be openly set in conflict. They will, so to speak, collide.

These circumstances are what make self-centeredness sinful. Such a life contradicts the purpose of God, and is therefore aligned against Him, against His Son, and against His great salvation. Self-centeredness is the delusion that men live independent of outside influences greater than themselves. That supposition imagines that one’s own desires, needs, and interests are primary, and are therefore to be sought above all other things. Such a view contradicts reality. Furthermore, it has no impact on the real situation, but only puts the individual in a hopeless condition.

Self-centeredness is always wrong – but never more so what when it is within the context of religion. When God Almighty is seen as the means of realizing personal ambition, a sin of unspeakable magnitude has been committed. When the slogan of the church becomes, “We are here to help people,” rather than “We are living unto Him who died for us and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15), then men have fallen on hard times. Every valid work, whether it is ministering a cup of cold water where needed (Matt 10:42), turning men from darkness to light (Acts 26:18), or presenting one’s body as a living sacrifice to God (Rom 12:1-2), is directly related to the glory of God. Of course, for something to accrue to the glory of God, and profit the one doing it, it must be done with the Lord in mind. Further, when it comes to assisting men, we are to, as we have opportunity, “do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). In the end, Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats upon the basis of what they did or did not do to His own “brethren” (Matt 25:40,45). This is because, of all men, they relate most directly to the Person and purpose of God. The response of men to them reveals how they actually feel about the living God.

In Our Text

In our text, something will come to pass within the context of Paul and Silas doing the will of the Lord. Something will take place that was instigated by Satan and his powers of darkness. It will be done to present a corrupted view of what was taking place, and will be done in a most subtle way. The unseen worlds will here be openly set in conflict. They will, so to speak, collide.

AS WE WENT TO PRAYER

“ . . . as we went to prayer . . .” Other versions read, “as we were going to the place of prayer,” NASB “as we were on our way to prayer.” CSB

Most versions read “place of prayer.” The phrase in the Greek reads, **εἰς τὴν προσευχὴν** – “into the prayer.” INTERLINEAR The idea is that they were on their way to a place associated with prayer. In Jerusalem, that was considered to be the Temple, which Jesus said was called “the house of prayer” (Matt 21:13). Peter and John once “went up together into the Temple at the hour of prayer” (Acts 3:1).

Jesus had certain places where He went to pray. Once He “went up into a mountain apart to pray,” sending the multitude away in order to do it (Matt 14:23; Mk 6:46). On another occasion, He “withdrew Himself into the wilderness to pray” (Lk 5:16). Another time He “went into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God” (Lk 6:12). When He was transfigured, He had taken Peter, James, and John, and “went to into a mountain to pray” (Lk 9:28). On the night of His betrayal, He took His disciples to Gethsemane to “pray” (Matt 26:36). Scripture apprises us that “Jesus had often met there with His disciples” (John 18:2).

Jesus spoke of some sense in which there were isolated places of prayer when He said, “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret” (Matt 6:6). While in Babylon, Daniel prayed before an open window that faced Jerusalem (Dan 6:10). The early disciples continued in prayer in an upper room of a house (Acts 1:13-14). After Pentecost, believers gathered at the house of Mary [mother of John Mark] for prayer (Acts 12:12). On one occasion, Peter “went up upon the housetop to pray” (Acts 10:9).

A place associated with prayer, then, is not a strange thing. Such a concept presumes the interruptive nature of ordinary life, and the necessity, at times, of withdrawing from it. This should not be considered a strange thing by those professing faith in God.

It is probable that this “place” was where Paul and company had first found Lydia – at the river, “where prayer was wont to be made” (16:13). They took advantage of that place for God’s glory, continuing to meet the people there.

A WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION FOLLOWED THEM

“ 16b . . . a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: 17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.”

It is apparent that the powers of darkness are monitoring the activities of Paul and Silas. To be sure, they are operating under the government of God, yet they have been allowed a certain perimeter within which they can operate. Now, as the company – probably Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke (perhaps with others) – were on their way to the place of prayer, they are met by an individual.

A CERTAIN DAMSEL WITH A SPIRIT OF DIVINATION

“ . . . a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us . . .” Other versions read, “a certain slave girl with a spirit of divination,” NKJV “a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future,” NIV “a girl with a spirit which gave knowledge of the future,” BBE “a slave girl met us who had a spirit of prediction,” CSB “having a spirit of Python,” DARBY “a certain girl, having a pythonical spirit,” DOUAY “a female servant met us. She was possessed by an evil spirit that told fortunes,” GWN “a slave girl with an oracular spirit,” NAB “a slave girl met us who had a spirit that enabled her to foretell the future by supernatural means,” NET “a slave-girl who was a soothsayer,” NJB “a demon-possessed slave girl,” NLT “a certain damsel possessed with a spirit that prophesied,” TNT “a demon-possessed slave girl who was a fortune-teller,” LIVING “A slave-girl

met us. She had an evil spirit in her. This spirit gave her the power to tell what would happen in the future,” IE “a slave girl met us who claimed to be inspired,” WEYMOUTH “a slave girl met us who had the gift of magical fortune-telling,” WILLIAMS “a slave girl who was possessed by a spirit of divination [claiming to foretell future events and to discover hidden knowledge],” AMPLIFIED and “a young girl who had a spirit of clairvoyance.” PHILLIPS

I have given the various translations to show the difficulty some have had translating this verse. This difficulty is not so much with the text itself, as with the implications of the text. To be sure, it does not fit handily into certain Christian traditions. Therefore, some have taken upon themselves to superimpose their theology upon the text. This has been done to ensure that the reader did not obtain a view of the text that contradicted the stereotyped theology of preference.

The Difficult Phrase

The phrase causing the difficulty for these translators is “possessed with a spirit of divination,” also translated “having a spirit of divination.” NASB Those familiar with Scripture know that a person who has a spirit other than the Holy Spirit is possessed by it, being taken captive either at times, or with consistency (Matt 8:28; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; 17:14; Acts 8:7).

The word “possessed” comes from a word with the following lexical meaning: “to have hold . . . in the sense of wearing a garment . . . to hold fast, keep . . .to own, possess,” THAYER “having control over,” LOUW-NIDA and “to have as one’s own, to possess.” GINGRICH The spirit dominated this girl’s mind and body, at least at times, using her to express itself in its limited manner, yet superior to that of men.

These spirits caused the people to act in an unnatural manner. Some of the things they caused were as follows:

- Wildness and uncontrollable strength (Matt 8:28-29).
- Dumbness, or the inability to speak (Matt 9:32).
- Blindness and dumbness (Matt 12:22).
- Forms of grievous vexation (Matt 15:22).
- Making one lunatic, suffering from seizures, and a compulsion to jump into fire and water (Matt 17:14-15).
- Some form of uncleanness or obvious defilement (Mk 1:23).

Diviners, or those practicing divination, are not omniscient or all-knowing. Everything they say does not come to pass. But that is not owing to their lack of power or knowledge. It is rather owing to the judgment of God who thwarts their predictions (which is within the framework of their power), causing them to fall to the ground.

This circumstance of being possessed required that someone with more authority than the possessing demon cast it out. Jesus had such authority, and is declared to have regularly cast these possessing spirits out of people, commanding them to leave the one they were possessing (Matt 8:16; 9:33; 12:28; Mk 1:25,34,39; 11:15; 5:8; 9:25; Lk 4:35; 11:14).

In view of both the text and doctrine of Scripture, it is inappropriate to represent this text as saying, “who claimed to be inspired,” WEYMOUTH and “a spirit of divination [claiming to foretell future events and to discover hidden knowledge]. AMPLIFIED There are very real “powers” aligned against the work of the Lord, and it is wrong to represent them as merely claiming to have power.

The Spirit of Divination

The versions that translate “divination” as “Python” DARBY and “pythonical,” DOUAY are transliterating the Greek word, merely converting Greek characters to English letters (**pu,qwna** = poo-thona). In Greek mythology, this word is “the name of the Pythian serpent or dragon that dwelt in the region of Pytho at the foot of Parnassus in Phocis, and was said to have guarded the oracle of Delphi and been slain by Apollo.” THAYER However, as used in Scripture its lexical meaning is “a spirit of divination,” THAYER “fortune-telling spirit, spirit of divination,” FRIEBERG/UBS/LIDDELL-SCOTT “fortune-telling spirit, spirit of divination,” LOUW-NIDA and “a spirit of divination or prophecy, fortune-teller.” GINGRICH

It is apparent that the powers of darkness are monitoring the activities of Paul and Silas. To be sure, they are operating under the government of God, yet they have been allowed a certain perimeter within which they can operate.

There is enough said about divination in the Scripture for us to know it is a very real phenomenon that does NOT come from God, even though it is in ultimate subjection to Him. Whatever power or knowledge is evinced in divination, it is unlawful before God, and is soundly condemned.

- “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination , or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer” (Deut 18:10-11).

- “For these nations, which thou shalt possess, hearkened unto observers of times, and unto diviners : but as for thee, the LORD thy God hath not suffered thee so to do” (Deut 18:14).

- “And the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners , saying, What shall we do to the ark of the LORD? tell us wherewith we shall send it to his place. And they said, If ye send away the ark of the God of Israel, send it not empty; but in any wise return him a trespass offering: then ye shall be healed, and it shall be known to you why his hand is not removed from you” (1 Sam 6:2-3).

- “And Saul disguised himself, and put on other raiment, and he went, and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night: and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee. And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?” (1 Sam 28:8-9).

- “And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger” (2 Kgs 17:17).

- “That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish” (Isa 44:25).

- “Then the LORD said unto me, The prophets prophesy lies in my name: I sent them not, neither have I commanded them, neither spake unto them: they prophesy unto you a false vision and divination , and a thing of nought, and the deceit of their heart” (Jer 14:14).

- “Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners , nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon” (Jer 27:9).

- “For thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Let not your prophets and your diviners , that be in the midst of you, deceive you, neither hearken to your dreams which ye cause to be dreamed” (Jer 29:8).

- “For there shall be no more any vain vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel” (Ezek 12:24).

- “For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd” (Zech 10:2).

Diviners, or those practicing divination, are not omniscient or all-knowing. Everything they say does not come to pass. But that is not owing to their lack of power or knowledge. It is rather owing to the judgment of God who thwarts their predictions (which is within the framework of their power), causing them to fall to the ground. Thus we read of the Lord making “diviners mad” by frustrating what they predict (Isa 44:25). This is what makes them “divine a lie” (21:29). Sometimes what they move men to say actually does come to pass. However, such works are only the prelude to a call to follow other gods. Therefore it is written, “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 13:1-3). Therefore, there are times when such spirits are given leave to speak things that contradict the truth in order to test those who profess allegiance to God. Other times, God sends “strong delusion” through such spirits because men have not received the love of the truth (2 Thess 2:11). The prophets referred to this as God choosing “their delusions” (Isa 66:4).

False prophets not only say what is false, they do so while under the power of Satanic influence. When it comes to the propagation of what is not right and true before the Lord, we are dealing with more than intellectual ignorance or misunderstanding. This is why Paul referred to “deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons” NKJV as a very real phenomenon among the sons of men (1 Tim 4:1).

This was a very real opponent, dominated by a very real spirit who had very real power – subordinate power, to be sure, but power that was transcendent to mere human power or aptitude. That is, all of this was inferior, to be sure – but not inferior to men.

When, therefore, we read of a woman who was possessed by “a spirit of divination,” we are to understand that a form of substantive opposition confronted Paul and those with him. This was a very real opponent, dominated by a very real spirit who had very real power – subordinate power, to be sure, but power that was transcendent to mere human power or aptitude. That is, all of this was inferior, to be sure – but not inferior to men. It was actually a power greater than flesh and blood, else the spirit could not have “possessed” this woman.

To be “possessed” is to be dominated by, so that this wicked spirit expressed itself through this slave girl.

SHE WAS A SOURCE OF PROFIT TO HER MASTERS

“ . . . which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying . . .” Other versions read, “who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling,” NKJV “she earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling,” NIV “whose masters made great profit from her power,” BBE “brought much profit to her masters by prophesying,” DARBY “brought to her masters much gain by divining,” DOUAY “gave her masters much vantage by divining,” GENEVA and “made a lot of money for her masters by foretelling the future.” NJB

The word “soothsaying” is translated from a word meaning, “to deliver an oracle, prophesy, divine,” THAYER “used of demonic divination in the NT tell fortunes, predict future events,” FRIBERG “tell fortunes, predict the future,” UBS “to function as a more or less professional predictor of future events for the sake of a fee - 'to tell fortunes,’” LOUW-NIDA and “prophesy, divine, give an

oracle.” GINGRICH

Soothsaying and soothsayers are also condemned by God. You may remember that Baalam is referred to as “the soothsayer” (Josh 13:22). God is said to have forsaken “the house of Jacob:” because they were “soothsayers like the Philistines” (Isa 2:6). Babylon was noted for its “soothsayers” (Dan 2:27; 4:7; 5:7,11). God spoke of cutting of witchcraft out of the cities so they would have “no more soothsayers” (Mic 5:12).

Soothsayers deal with unlawful knowledge – unlawful because its source is from the wicked one. The fact that this woman provided a good income for her masters suggests that what she foretold was noted for coming to pass. I hardly see how she could have been a source of excellent income if everything she foretold fell to the ground.

We must learn from this that there is a realm of knowledge that is extraordinary, yet is not right. Things that are declared may be buttressed by very real circumstances, or some form of logic that seems to be flawless. I personally consider some of the sciences of our day to fall into this category – the chief of which is psychiatry. It boasts of an understanding of the human psyche, and what motivates people. It boasts of a knowledge of mental and emotional distinctions, and teaches men to shape their understanding and relationships with mortals upon that basis. However, such knowledge, however valid it may appear to be is not based upon foundational reality – namely, the fact that God made man, and that man is accountable to Him. How can any body of knowledge be correct that is not based upon that foundation?

But let us move on, and see how this “spirit of divination” moves this woman to speak.

SHE FOLLOWED THEM, CRYING OUT

“The same followed Paul and us, and cried . . .” Other versions read, “she kept on crying out,” NASB “Paul and the rest of us, shouting,” NIV “While she followed Paul and us, she would cry out,” RSV “she kept screaming,” CJB “she followed along behind us shouting,” LIVING “followed Paul and us everywhere. She said loudly,” IE “kept following Paul and the rest of us, shrieking,” WILLIAMS “crying out again and again,” MONTGOMERY and “shouting loudly.” AMPLIFIED

The word “cried,” as used here, means “to cry out, cry aloud, vociferate [utter loudly, shout, cry out loudly] . . . call out aloud, speak with a loud voice,” THAYER Thus, the “cry” of reference involved screaming out, shrieking loudly, and shouting. Further, as the tense of the verb indicated, she was doing this repeatedly, following Paul and those with him wherever they went – particularly on this occasion, when they were going to the place of prayer.

Also, note that she was crying out after PAUL, and those who were with him. As in Lystra, he was perceived as the “chief speaker” (Acts 14:12). It was his message that had provoked the “spirit” that possessed this “damsel,” or young female slave.

WHAT SHE SAID

“ . . . saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” Other versions read, “who proclaim to us the way of salvation,” NKJV “who are proclaiming to you the way of salvation,” NASB “who are telling you the way to be saved,” NIV “who proclaim to you a way of salvation,” RSV/NAB/YLT/ISV/WILLIAMS and “tell you how to have your sins forgiven.” LIVING

On the surface, this appears to be a statement that is precisely true. First, they were servants of “the Most High God” – a phrase that must have caught the attention of the local citizenry. In this expression the definite article “the” is used: i.e. “THE Most High God” (**tou/ qeou/ tou/ u`yi, stou**).

Literally, this would read, The [**tou**] God, The [**tou**] Highest, or Most High. That certainly appears to be true.

However, when it comes to the reference to the “way of salvation,” the definite article is not present (**o`do.n swthri,aj**). This phrase literally reads, “ A way of salvation,” for the Greek word **o`do.n** means “a way,” in distinction from “the way.” THAYER/FRIBERG This may appear to be only a technical point.

When Jesus said He was “THE way,” the definite article was used (**h` o`do.j**). The same grammatical construction is found in Christ’s reference to “ THE way” that is broad and leads to destruction (**h` o`do.j** – Matt 7:13), and “THE way that leads to life” (**h` o`do.j** –Matt 7:14). It is also used in John the Baptists expression, “THE way of the Lord” (**th.n o`do.n** – Mk 1:3), as well as the reference to Apollo being “instructed in THE way of the Lord” (**th.n o`do.n** – Acts 18:25). When the definite article is used [THE way], it indicates exclusiveness – there is no other way. When it is not used [A way], one of many ways is specified.

Several versions do reflect this meaning: “a way.” RSV/NAB/YLT/ISV/WILLIAMS/LITV While this is not a grammatical matter to emphasize to the point of distraction, it does seem to me that it merits some thoughtful consideration. While the words this woman shrieked out were correct, they were not thoroughly correct. Technically, they allowed for competing ways, whereas there is, in fact, only one way of salvation. Peter made this clear when he declared, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved ” (Acts 4:12). He declared the same to those present at the house of Cornelius: “And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is He which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead. To Him give all the prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:42-43). Paul declared the same when He wrote, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ ” (1 Cor 3:11).

But none of this is mentioned by this woman with the spirit of divination – she makes no reference to Jesus Christ at all.

It is certainly not that the dark world of wicked spirits are not aware of Jesus, and precisely who He is. An “unclean spirit” once said to Jesus, “ Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God ” (Mark 1:24). Jesus commanded that spirit, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him” (Mk 1:25). Unclean spirits cried out to Jesus, “Thou art the Son of God!” (Mark 3:11). Jesus immediately commanded them “that they should not make Him known” (Mk 3:11). Perhaps the “spirit” in our text was obeying the commandment of Jesus. I suspect that this could very well have been the case.

Although this “spirit of divination” did not refer to Christ Jesus, we will find that he was out of order making any reference to God or His great salvation. By so speaking, this spirit has associated the salvation of God with the power of darkness, as though it was something, concerning which, knowledge could be obtained from demons.

However, we know this is not the case, for even holy angels are unable to decipher the mysteries associated with salvation, even though, unlike evil spirits, they have a desire to look into, or examine them (1 Pet 1:12). You may be sure that whatever knowledge this spirit had regarding the salvation of God and those who declare it, it was not effective knowledge. It could not result in obtaining salvation, for that requires the involvement of Jesus Christ.

THIS CONTINUED FOR MANY DAYS

“ 18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command

thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”

Here we are exposed to the tenacity of wicked spirits, as well as the effect of their activity upon the sensitive souls of the elect of God.

SHE DID THIS FOR MANY DAYS

“And this did she many days.” Other versions read, “she continued doing this for many days,” NASB “she kept this up for many days,” NIV “she did on a number of days,” BBE “she did this day after day,” NJB “this went on day after day,” NLT and “This she persisted in for a considerable time.” WEYMOUTH

It appears that wherever Paul and those with him went, this woman followed them shrieking out these words: “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.” The words were coming out of her mouth, but they were actually the expression of a wicked spirit – a “spirit of divination.” That spirit had no power to restrain Paul from preaching the Gospel, and therefore engaged in a kind of unholy mockery. Notice, that the woman’s masters, who knew that she had a “spirit of divination” made no inquiry into “the way of salvation.” The words of the wicked spirit were impotent. These masters did not ask Paul and those with him to come into their houses, as Lydia did. Further, there is no evidence that the citizenry of Philippi who were exposed to this expression pursued Paul to ask concerning the salvation of which he spake. And why was this so? Why didn’t the people who heard this woman screaming out run to Paul and ask about “the way of salvation?” It was because the word spoken by this woman was powerless. It could solicit no interest in the salvation of God, because the power of God was not in it. The Kingdom of God “is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor 4:20) – and that power was not given to the words of this woman who was “possessed with a spirit of divination.”

PAUL WAS GRIEVED WITH THE SITUATION

“But Paul, being grieved . . .” Other versions read, “greatly annoyed,” NKJV “became so troubled,” NIV “very much annoyed,” NRSV “sore troubled,” ASV “greatly disturbed,” CJB “greatly aggravated,” CSB “being distressed,” DARBY “was indignant,” MRD “was exasperated,” NJB “not content,” PNT “in great distress,” LIVING “This bothered Paul,” IE “wearied out,” WEYMOUTH “wore out,” MONTGOMERY “being sorely annoyed and worn out,” AMPLIFIED and “burst of irritation.” PHILLIPS

The situation was a grievous one, to be sure. Some of its irritating qualities could be found in the following.

- An association was being made between Paul and a woman possessed by a “spirit of divination.”
- The woman was a source of income to faithless men, who were given over to greed and idolatry.
- Here was a woman who was being dominated by, and in bondage to, the powers of darkness.
- A commentary was being made concerning Paul and his message by a spirit aligned with Satan.
- Because of the appearance of this shrieking woman, and the environment it was creating wherever he went.
- Because Paul knew the source of this intrusion, and the wicked intension of the devil who was behind it.

- Because it was disruptive, detracting from both his person and ministry.

All of this, and more, was a source of grief to Paul. It was an irritation, annoyance, and source of vexation. The word “grieved” has the following lexical meaning: “be troubled, displeased, offended, pained . . . worked up,” THAYER “much grieved,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to be worn out.” LEH

There is a certain sensitivity created by faith that causes the heart to react to influences to which it is subjected. Things relating to God, Christ, the truth, and God’s great salvation, bring comfort, edification, and refreshment to the “new heart.” The things that have the world as their center, and are promoted by the devil and his subordinates are abrasive, causing irritation and grief. This is the result of the clash of the temporal and the eternal, the good and the evil, the righteous and the unrighteous. The true spirituality of a person can be measured by the impact of these influences upon the heart.

As for Paul, the confrontation of this “spirit of divination,” that speaks out things that are technically true, is a source of vexation. To the godly, the container in which truth comes is a vital matter. If Satan quotes the Bible, as he did to Jesus (Matt 4:6-7), it will not, and should not, be received. This is because when he or his hosts appear to speak the truth, there is always a wicked ulterior motive behind it. Satan’s use of Scripture, as he did with Jesus, always constitutes a temptation, never edification. This goes for all of his “ministers” as well (2 Cor 2:13-15).

PAUL SPEAKS TO THE SPIRIT

“ . . . turned and said to the spirit, I command thee . . .” Other versions read, “I charge thee,” ASV “I give you orders,” BBE “I order you,” CJB and “I enjoin thee.” DARBY

Notice the authority with which Paul speaks: “command,” “charge,” “give you orders,” “order,” and “enjoin.” The word “command” comes from a word that means, “issuing a directive from an authoritative source command, give (strict) orders.” FRIBERG This is not the expression of a preference that may or may not be rejected. It is not a word that can be obeyed or disobeyed. Power accompanies this word that renders the one to whom it is directed as impotent to reject or disobey that word. It is true that there are commandments issued in a moral and human arena in which they can be obeyed or disobeyed, received or rejected. However, this is not that kind of word. Rather, it is the kind of word that will, in the end, be spoken to all pretenders: “Depart from me” (Matt 7:23). It is the kind of word Jesus spoke to evil spirits when He said, “Hold thy peace, and come out of him” (Mk 1:25). And again Jesus said to a “foul spirit,” “Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him” (Mk 9:25). Such commands cannot be contested, resisted, or disobeyed. It simply is not possible. That is the kind of commandment that Paul spoke.

It is possible to say words like this, yet lack the authority required for them to actually take place. The sons of Sceva found this to be true when they said these words over those who had evil spirits: “We exorcize you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches” NKJV (Acts 19:13). They soon found out that the world of evil spirits know who they must obey. Before soundly trouncing these men, the evil spirit said to them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” (Acts 19:15). The fact that Satan’s hosts do recognize those to whom power has been given will be confirmed in this text.

A Word of Caution

There are some who take it upon themselves to speak to Satan and his hosts as though they have been given power to do so. Such people often do not appear to be alarmed when their word is not obeyed, and the condition they are rebuking remains. However, when Satan’s hosts do not honor a word addressed to them, it is because that word is not backed by Divine authority. Such words should not be spoken. There are sectarian circles where such feigned speaking is common. However, all such speaking is foolishness, and can even prove dangerous, as the sons of Sceva can testify.

IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . in the name of Jesus Christ . . .” Other versions read, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” IE The other forty-one versions that I have read the same as the Authorized Text: “in the name of Jesus.” Other occasions when this phrase was used include the following.

- **COMMAND TO BE BAPTIZED.** “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost” (Acts 2:38).

- **COMMAND FOR A LAME MAN TO WALK.** “Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).

- **APOSTLES COMMANDED NOT TO PREACH.** “And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus” (Acts 4:18). “And to him they agreed: and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus , and let them go” (Acts 5:40).

- **PREACHING.** “But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus ” (Acts 9:27).

The phrase “in the name of the Lord Jesus” is also used in reference to other matters (Acts 8:16; 9:29; 19:5; 1 Cor 6:11; Col 3:17).

This phraseology shows the criticality of the Person of Jesus Christ. Everything in the Kingdom revolves around Him.

He is the context of all valid preaching, teaching, and labor. He is the One who has established the borders of acceptance – both of persons and the work that they do. It is His Person that empowers and sanctifies. Nothing that cannot be traced back to Him can be valid in the work of the Lord.

That all appears plain enough, and yet there is an alarming absence of Jesus in much of what is being done by those professing to represent Him. There are practices and programs that are being done in the name of worldly wisdom, and appeals are made to that wisdom. Sometimes it takes the form of psychological principles, or some other form of human authority or wisdom. Some attempt to direct the people of God upon the basis of their genetic make-up, or family heritage, or emotional distinctions. However, there is no spiritual power in such things, for they did not originate with Jesus Christ.

“All power in heaven and earth” has been given to Christ Jesus (Matt 28:18). It ought to be glaringly obvious that to make an appeal to any other kind of power or authority in matters pertaining to life and godliness is transgression birthed by unbelief.

Any effective use of the name of Jesus assumes an actual identity with Him – a direct identity. The sons of Sceva sought to do something in the name of Jesus “whom Paul preacheth” (Acts 19:13). The demons refused to honor their word, because they were not, through faith and rebirth, directly related to Jesus. How much less are those related to Jesus who claim association to Him through a human institutions or a humanly devised theological tenet.

She was under the control of a wicked spirit, and there was not a thing she could do about it. Paul, however, having his life “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), and been given authority by the King of kings, was able to do something about this situation.

COME OUT OF HER

“ . . . to come out of her.” Other versions read, “go out from her,” DOUAY “leave that woman,” NJB “come forth from her,” YLT and “leave this girl alone.” CEV

The “spirit of divination” had taken over the body of this young woman, and was using it for evil purposes. Her will had nothing whatsoever to do with the circumstance. She was an example of someone “taken captive” by the powers of darkness (2 Tim 2:26). We are given no explanations concerning any reason for this circumstance. It is enough that we know there are very real situations in life that are not created by human submission. Some are the result of being overpowered by dark powers.

It ought to be noted, that this overpowering cannot take place in those who are Christ’s, and are living by faith. The Scriptures are clear on this point: “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not ” (1 John 5:18). This by no means suggests that Satan and his hosts do not desire to overcome those in Christ. It is rather that they are not able to do so. This is because “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you , than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

However, this was not the circumstance of this young woman. She was under the control of a wicked spirit, and there was not a thing she could do about it. Paul, however, having his life “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3), and been given authority by the King of kings, was able to do something about this situation.

In, what I conceive to be a burst of insight accompanied with the confidence of a strong faith, Paul commanded this spirit to leave the woman. He ordered that spirit to come out of her.

THE SPIRIT CAME OUT OF HER

“And he came out the same hour.” Other versions read, “came out that very hour,” NKJV “came out that very moment,” NASB “at that moment,” NIV “came out right away,” CSB “As Paul said this, the evil spirit left her,” GWN “came out of her at once,” NET “went out of her then and there,” NJB “instantly it left her,” NLT and “came out immediately,” WEYMOUTH

There was not an ounce of opposition from this spirit! It recognized the association of Paul with the One to whom “authorities and powers” have been made subject (1 Pet 3:22). Therefore, that spirit came out immediately, or at that very moment. The idea is that while Paul was speaking the words, the “spirit of divination” left the woman, making it’s exit with not so much as a single word of objection. That spirit yielded to its King – a subjection that is found in all spirits, be they human or from the unseen world.

WHEN THE MEANS OF GAIN WAS TAKEN AWAY

“ 19 And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers.”

As soon as this evil spirit left the woman, she was of no further value to her masters. All of the things provoked by this spirit left when the “spirit of divination” came out of her.

It is a principle that holds true under all circumstances, and within all people: when the source of either good or evil is no longer present, the fruit of that source is also gone. As long as the source is present, the work will continue. This is why the following admonitions are given.

- “Quench not the Spirit” . . . “Grieve not the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19; Eph 4:30).
- “Neither give place to the devil,” or “do not give the devil an opportunity” NASB (Eph 4:27).

When the Spirit has been stifled, the fruit of the Spirit cannot be produced or successfully emulated. When a place for the devil has been given, his work is inevitable. Conversely, when the devil is resisted in faith, he cannot do his work within the individual, but takes his flight (1 Pet 5:8-9; James 4:7).

HER MASTERS

“And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone . . .” Other versions read, “their hope of profit was gone,” NKJV “their hope of money was gone,” NIV “their hope of making money was gone,” NRSV “what had come out was any further prospect of profit for them,” CJB “hopes of wealth were now shattered,” NLT “These men knew that they could no longer use her to make money,” IE and “their hope of making money out of her had disappeared.” PHILLIPS

It is evident from this text that Satanic power can be exploited by wicked men. That is because such men are also under the control of the devil. Therefore, the owners of this slave girl capitalized on her powers of divination. It appeared as though the evil spirit “possessed” the girl from within, working freely through her, and these men were masters over her in the flesh, or from without.

Here was a kind of evil spirit that permitted men to control the one it possessed. This was not true of all people “possessed” by an evil spirit. For example, the demon that controlled the wild man of Gadara did not allow any person to tame or exploit him. No person could publically feature that poor man as a source of personal income. He could not be “tamed” by any man, and no one dared to come through the territory that he occupied (Matt 8:28; Mk 5:3-4). Again, a certain man had a son who was possessed by a “dumb spirit.” The spirit would, it appears, take the child at will and throw him into convulsions. It would also cause the boy to fall into fire and water, apparently seeking to destroy him (Matt 17:15; Lk 9:39). In such cases, a sense of helplessness registered on all who were involved. There was certainly no way for men to make money by capitalizing on the boy who were possessed.

In our text, however, the evil spirit did not work to produce fear, but intrigue and interest. There was actually an appeal to human advantage. What is more, on the surface it appeared as though this girl was actually being controlled by her human masters.

Now, however, it becomes clear that these men had no power at all. Their use of this girl was abruptly terminated when the evil spirit left her. What is more, all of this was very apparent to them. We are not told how they knew the girl had lost her powers. The expulsion of this spirit was attended by a public and audible word by Paul. There must have also been some outward phenomenon that made the ejection of that spirit very apparent. The woman was no longer “possessed,” and her masters knew it. She had been screaming out as she followed Paul and company. Perhaps now she was calm and docile, and, like the Gadarene demonic, very apparently in her “right mind” (Mk 5:15).

Something to Learn

In working salvation in the midst of the earth, because the thrust of attention is placed on the turning of men from the power of Satan unto God, there is a certain tolerance of sinful men that is designed to confirm their depravity.

All of Satan’s hosts serve his interests, but not in the same way. Satan’s first temptation was intellectual – moving Eve to think about a matter in a distorted manner. His next recorded move was quite different, provoking Cain to murder his brother (Gen 4:8; 1 John 3:12). He once moved David to count how many soldiers were in his army (1 Chron 21:1). Again, he moved Ananias and Sapphira to lie about the amount of money they gave to the church (Acts 5:3). There are also demons who promote false doctrine (1 Tim 4:1), while others, like the spirit in this text, promote divining, or fortune-telling.

The world of evil is certainly not one in which men are to traffic. Yet, those who refuse Christ, or do not live by faith, are cast into an arena in which it is not possible to estimate what they will do. Such poor souls are described as “children of disobedience” in whom Satan works at will (Eph 2:1-2; 2 Tim 2:26).

THEY CAUGHT PAUL AND SILAS

“ . . . they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them . . .” Other versions read, “they seized Paul and Silas and dragged,” NKJV “laid hold on,” ASV “took Paul and Silas, pulling them,” BBE “apprehending Paul and Silas, brought,” DOUAY and “grabbed.” GWN

The word “caught” means to “take possession of, overtake, to seize upon.” THAYER In this case, Paul and Silas were apprehended by those with hostile intentions. This is a most unique situation. The devil was driven out by a word from Paul, and yet evil men were not held at bay. Note that these men did not fear Paul and Silas, even though they had been stripped of their means of income by a command from Paul. A wicked spirit obeyed Christ’s servant, but evil men were moved against him.

There is a reason for this seemingly contradictory experience. Jesus revealed that his purpose for entry into the world had fundamentally to do with men – not the unseen world. “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice” (John 18:37). In His death He did “destroy the devil” (Heb 2:14), and in His cross “spoiled principalities and powers” (Col 2:15). However, the primary work regarded reconciling men to God (2 Cor 5:18-20).

In working salvation in the midst of the earth, because the thrust of attention is placed on the turning of men from the power of Satan unto God, there is a certain tolerance of sinful men that is designed to confirm their depravity. Their nature is on display in order to highlight the depth of their fall, as well as the glory of salvation. Men will be allowed to seemingly dominate Paul and Silas, while an evil spirit will not be allowed to dominate a slave girl. If it all appears unjust, remember that Satan nor his hosts could lay a hand on Jesus, but the Jews and Pilate were allowed to do so – even being motivated by the hosts who were previously restrained.

UNTO THE RULERS

“ . . . into the marketplace unto the rulers.” Other versions read, “to the authorities,” NKJV “to face the authorities,” NIV “to the market square to face authorities,” CJB “before the magistrates.” DARBY

As I understand it, the “marketplace” was what we would call the town square. It was structured around the civil court, like older town squares were build around the court house. It was also the place for public assemblies, debating, and trials. THAYER On the surface, this appears a bit incongruous. The powers of darkness are rendered powerless, and yet human adversaries appear to maintain their authority.

To the mind of the flesh, this all appears incongruous – the spirit of divination was forced to leave, being unable to resist Paul. However, these men, possessing less power than that spirit, take hold of Paul and Silas.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER

First, the earth is important ONLY because it is the environment in which God is working salvation. As it is written, “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12). It is quite true that God has made the earth “to be inhabited” (Isa 45:18). However, the salvation He is working directly relates to those inhabitants. Other forms of life are in the earth, including

vegetation and animal life – but they are not why the world was made. Their presence is incidental, and they were ultimately made for man (Gen 1:29-30; 1 Cor 6:13; 1 Tim 4:3). Portions of the creation that have no life in themselves, are also part of what has been provided for man. In fact, in the end, when sin shall have been rooted out, and a new heavens and earth are present wherein dwells righteousness, it will all be given to redeemed humanity (Psa 37:9; Isa 60:21; Matt 5:5; Rom 4:13).

The kingdom in all of its greatness and glory will be given to “the saints of the Most High.” As it is written, “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (Dan 7:27). Some versions read, “and all dominions shall serve and obey THEM.” NRSV/RSV/CJB/GWN/JPB/TNK/LIVING Ultimately, we understand that all dominions will honor and obey God Himself. However, the saints of God will be His ordained representatives. They will “judge the world,” and “angels” as well (1 Cor 6:2-3). They will be given “power over the nations” (Rev 2:26), and will “reign with” Christ (2 Tim 2:12).

This is why Jesus spoke of “the world to come,” declaring that those who forsook all to follow Him would inherit “eternal life” in its fulness at the revelation of that world (Mk 10:30; Lk 18:30). This was the subject of apostolic exposition (Heb 2:6; 2 Pet 3:13). It is held out as the consummate blessing, when there will be no more repercussions for following Jesus (Rev 21:1,4; 22:3).

And what does this have to do with our text? Everything! If it is true that the objective of our salvation is ahead of us, then we ought to reason that we are not to expect the best of what is promised while we are in this world. The word spoken to Israel is true for us also, and even to a deeper extent: “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest: because it is polluted, it shall destroy you, even with a sore destruction” (Micah 2:10). Whatever advantages the things belonging to this world may appear to have, they are not permanent, and they bring no increase in heavenly status.

Charlatans may proclaim that God wants us to have “the best of this world,” but that is not what the Holy Spirit has revealed. In fact, this world is where we receive the worst we shall ever experience. This is because the world is “not worthy” of the presence of God’s people (Heb 11:38). This is why some of those who have lived by faith “were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented” (Heb 11:37). The world treated them harshly because they were obviously “not of the world,” and therefore “confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (John 15:19; 17:14,16; Heb 11:13).

Not of the World

This should not be difficult for us to receive. When the ultimate Man, Jesus Christ, was in the world, He precisely reflected the nature of God, for “the fulness of the Godhead” dwelt in Him “bodily” (Col 1:19; 2:9). Nowhere is there a record of His enemies marveling at His wealth or His possessions. Of old time, the Philistines envied Isaac because he flourished in the land (Gen 26:14). The Queen of Sheba marveled at the staggering wealth of Solomon. Although she had heard much about his opulence, yet when she saw it for herself she exclaimed, “Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard” (1 Kgs 10:7).

Yet, in all the records of Jesus’ life on earth – 88 chapters of Scripture – there is not a syllable that so describes Jesus. In apostolic doctrine it is written that in coming to the earth Jesus “became poor” (2 Cor 8:9). The “riches” that the redeemed enjoy because of Christ’s condescension are not the riches of this world, all of which are to pass away. Rather, they are “the riches of His goodness” (Rom 2:4), “the riches of His glory” (Rom 9:23), “the riches of His grace” (Eph 1:7; 2:7), “the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God” (Rom 11:33), and “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). Who among us does not know the truth of these things? Apostolic doctrine speaks of being

“rich in good works ” (1 Tim 6:18), and “rich in faith ” (James 2:5). Those believers who are rich in this worlds goods are admonished, “that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (1 Tim 6:17-18). Those who are not “rich in this world,” yet desire to be, are told: “they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition . For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Tim 6:9-10).

Even though it looks as though it is successful, what the enemies of God do is only tentative, and it cannot impact upon the purpose of God.

Whatever you may think about such texts, it must be acknowledged that they are certainly not promoting the notion of wealth among believers. How can a person reconcile not being of the world, yet pursuing its wealth? How can any individual justify a consistent quest for what is destined to pass away? What can really be said of the person who imagines they can prepare for the coming of the Lord by amassing worldly wealth, or achieving status in the earth? Whatever may be said in justification of worldly prosperity and popularity, both will immediately pass away at the moment of death, or the coming of the Lord – and they are even subject to obsolescence before either of those events.

THIS IS WHY MEN SOMETIMES APPEAR TO HAVE THE UPPER HAND

It is the circumstance of being strangers in the world, and heirs of the world to come, that accounts for the seeming success of the enemies of God’s people. This is why the Jewish leaders could imprison Peter and John. It is why Stephen’s foes could stone him to death. It is why early believers were scattered by a persecution. It is why Herod could behead James. And, it is why these offended business men could lay their hands on Paul and Silas and drag them into the city square on trumped up charges. If they were not strangers in this world, or if their message had catered to the fickle whims of the people, this would never have happened.

Even though it looks as though it is successful, what the enemies of God do is only tentative, and it cannot impact upon the purpose of God. Ultimately “the deceived and the deceiver are His” (Job 12:16), and God will use them for His glory. When what they do no longer works to that end, He will either remove them as He did Pharaoh and Herod, or their cause will dry up.

The ungodly, in their most formidable appearance, are ignoble vessels – and they are being used by God (2 Tim 2:20). If it is Pharaoh, rising up to oppose the people of God, it is God working behind the scenes. He “raised up” Pharaoh “to show” His power in him (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17). If it is the Gentiles, Herod, Pontus Pilate, and the Jewish rulers rising against Christ, it is only to do whatever God had determined to be done. As it is written, “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done ” (Acts 4:27-28). Peter also declared this very truth on the day of Pentecost, affirming that Jesus was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” (Acts 2:23).

THINGS ARE NOT OUT OF CONTROL

When the enemy appears to have the upper hand, it is not to be viewed as though things were out of control. In such cases, God has not ceased to work salvation in the midst of the earth. He is still doing what He wills “among the inhabitants of the earth,” as well as “in the army of heaven” (Dan 4:35). He is working in Stephen’s death as well as Peter and John’s deliverance. God’s ultimate will is being done, whether in the beheading of James or the rescue Peter from the same despot.

This is because God's purpose involves more than what is happening upon the earth. While He works among men, He is also making known His "manifold wisdom" to "principalities and powers in heavenly places" (Eph 3:10). Additionally, He is confirming to His people, by means of very real experiences, that His strength is "made perfect in weakness," and that when they are "weak," that is the precise moment when they are really "strong" (2 Cor 12:9-10). The truth of the matter is that Christ's power rests, or dwells, upon us when we are weak, or have no power of our own. There is also the testimony of the reaction of the faithful to difficulty and oppression – such as the patience of Job as seen by succeeding generations (James 5:11). There was also the violent death of Stephen, as seen by Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:20).

Now, within that context, the seeming success of the enemy looks quite different. It is good for us to refuse to attach too much significance to our own well being. Life is difficult enough, without going through it imagining that we are the center of Divine attention. That is not a proper view of life.

THE CHARGE BROUGHT AGAINST THEM

“ 20 And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, 21 And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.”

Because the owners of a slave girl have lost their source of income – and for no other reason – that have dragged Paul and Silas before the “magistrates,” or political officials.

THEY BROUGHT THEM TO THE MAGISTRATES

“And brought them to the magistrates . . .” Other versions read, “the authorities,” BBE , “the judges,” CJB “the governors,” GENEVA “the officers,” TNT “the leaders,” IE “the praeters [lower level Roman judicial function],” WEYMOUTH and “chiefs of the police court.” WILLIAMS

These men were charged with maintaining civil order, something that every government of note is constrained to do. Disorder and civil disobedience have been universally viewed as not only disruptive, but conducive to the rise of hostility and insurrection.

It ought to be noted that neither Christ, nor any of His disciples or representatives, ever took up a political cause, or were noted for political disturbance. If social disruption occurred during their ministry, it was always the effects of the preaching of the Gospel and any signs that may have attended it. No man of God has ever set out to overthrow a worldly government, or cause social unrest and discontent. In God's work, when social agitation occurred, it was always because of a clash of the lie and the truth, life and death, and the powers of darkness versus the light of truth.

Worldly Rulers Are Generally Consistent in Their Stand Against the Truth

While it may not be popular to so affirm, the rulers of this world are generally noted for their opposition to the truth. This is owing to the nature of this world and all power that is related to it. Although governmental power is ordained of God, it eventually proves to be hostile against the Lord. Any exception to this is precisely that – an exception.

The Psalmist reminded us that “The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us” (Psa 2:2-3). This found its ultimate revelation in the conspiracy of political and religious rulers who opposed the Lord's Christ.

God is set forth as being “terrible to the kings of the earth” (Psa 76:12). That is, He is one whom

such rulers fear – a fear that causes them to withdraw from Him, and strike out against Him when they are faced squarely with His truth as declared by men.

THE CHARGES

How will these men present their case? Will they admit that Paul had forced an evil spirit to leave the girl who was providing their means of income? Will they confess the superiority of the name of Jesus. Indeed not, for their hearts are corrupt, and they will not acknowledge what they know to be true.

They Are Jews

“ . . . saying, These men, being Jews . . . ”

The Jewish race is the only one of its kind. Its sole distinction is its identity with God – and that identity was one of His own making. Jews are not so identified because of their land, for they obtained their land after they were a people.

The word “Jews,” and its various forms (“Jew” [32], “Jewish” [1], “Jewess” [2], and “Jewry” [3]) is mentioned 275 times in Scripture – with “Jews” referenced 258 times. The word “Jews” has the following lexical meaning: “belonging to the Jewish race . . . Jewish as respects birth, race, religion; a Jew,” THAYER and “Jew in respect to race or religion as opposed to non-Jews.” FRIBERG

The Jewish race is the only one of its kind. Its sole distinction is its identity with God – and that identity was one of His own making. Jews are not so identified because of their land, for they obtained their land after they were a people. They do have a unique language that is not spoken by any other people group – “the Hebrew tongue” (John 5:2; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14; Rev 9:11; 16:16).

In Scripture, the Jews are a race of people associated with God Himself, Abraham, and a land – i.e. “land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39). Their total life revolved around their identity with God – an identity that He Himself created. The Law by which they were governed was not one of their own making, but was given to them by God, and was superior to all other moral codes. Moses reminded the people of that when he said, “And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law , which I set before you this day?” (Deut 4:8). Also, he reminded them of their unique creation, Moses said, “Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee ” (Deut 32:18). God also spoke through Isaiah, reminding the people of their unique formation: “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee , O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee , I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine ” (Isa 43:1).

However, because of their obstinance and hardheartedness, God would cause them to be viewed with disdain throughout the world.

- Moses told Israel of how they would be viewed by the other nations. This was a prophecy that would necessarily follow their lapse into idolatry, and other sins through which they provoked the Lord to anger. “The LORD shall bring thee, and thy king which thou shalt set over thee, unto a nation which neither thou nor thy fathers have known; and there shalt thou serve other gods, wood and stone. And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword, among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee ” (Deut 28:37).

- God also told Solomon of the time when Israel would “be a proverb and a byword among all people ” (1 Kgs 9:7; 2 Chron 7:20).

- The Psalms also speak of this experience: “Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbors , a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us. Thou makest us a byword among the heathen , a shaking of the head among the people ” (Psa 44:13-14).

Paul and those with him were not insurrectionists before, at this time, or after this time. They were not noted for causing social agitation. Like Jesus, they “went about doing good,” not purposefully agitating and stirring up the people.

The prophet Jeremiah also spoke of this: “And I will deliver them to be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth for their hurt, to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places whither I shall drive them” (Jer 24:9).

Although it is true that anyone chosen of God will, because of that fact, incur the indignation of the world, the reproach of the Jews as a whole was also owing to their waywardness. In our text, the reference to Paul and Silas as “Jews” was one of derision and reproach. What Moses and the prophets said would come to pass had, indeed, done just that.

The same condition has happened with those who are disciples of Jesus. They too have become a byword – but not because of their obstinance. For the real followers of Jesus, their lack of harmony with the world and its lusts is the reason for them being held in disdain – just as it was with Jesus Himself.

They Trouble Our City

“ . . . do exceedingly trouble our city . . . ” Other versions read, “are throwing our city into confusion,” NASB “are throwing our city into an uproar,” NIV “are disturbing our city,” NRSV “are greatly troubling our town,” BBE “are causing a lot of trouble in our city,” CJB “seriously disturbing our city,” CSB “utterly trouble our city,” DARBY “are stirring up a lot of trouble in our city,” GWN “The whole city is in an uproar because of these,” NLT and “are corrupting our city.” LIVING

There is no record of Paul and Silas causing any disruption or trouble in the city. Some years later, Paul would speak of his manners among the people, and how he was never a rabble-rouser as these men have charged. “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city . . . certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult ” (Acts 24:12,18).

Paul and those with him were not insurrectionists before, at this time, or after this time. They were not noted for causing social agitation. Like Jesus, they “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38), not purposefully agitating and stirring up the people.

The trouble that surfaced in Philippi was the response of greedy men to the liberation of a poor soul who was possessed by a “spirit of divination.” That proved to be troubling to their illicit business, but could hardly be appropriately described as stirring up the city of Philippi. If the whole city was, indeed, troubled, it was owing to the testimony of these bigots who had agitated the people – not to Paul and Silas!

They Teach Unlawful Customs

“ And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.” Other versions read, “proclaiming customs which it is not lawful for us to accept or to observe,” NASB “advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice,” NIV “advocating customs that are against the law for us to accept or practice,” CJB and “teaching customs that are illegal for us Romans to practice.” NLT

Here is a blatant example of hypocrisy. When the slave they were managing was following Paul crying out, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17), these very men did not utter a syllable of objection – and this was something that went on for “many days.” As long as they could obtain financial gain from such words, they

registered no objection to what Paul and Silas were saying.

Further, I am of the persuasion that there was nothing illegal about what Paul and Silas was saying – at least not from the standpoint of the Roman government. Pilate, who represented the Roman government, could find no civil or social fault in Jesus (Lk 23:4,14). Herod, another Roman official, also was unable to find any fault in Jesus (Lk 23:15). Had Jesus broken any laws, or advocated some form of illegality, it would have been uncovered. Of course, the Jews sought to persuade Pilate that Jesus “perverted the nation . . . forbidding to give tribute to Jesus” – but they could not substantiate their claim. After hearing their charge and conferring with Jesus, he responded, “I find no fault in Him” (Lk 23:2-4).

The Jews also raised this kind of charge against Stephen, setting up false witnesses who said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.” And again, “This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law” (Acts 6:11,13). Some also opposed Paul by slanderously reporting that he said, “Let us do evil, that good may come” (Rom 3:8). Jesus referred to such words as saying “all manner of evil against you falsely, for My sake” (Matt 5:11).

The point here is that the charge was not true, but was wholly a fabrication by these men. Men do seek to justify themselves by casting reproach on what opposes their practices and persuasions . We should not be surprised when some who know us seek to do the same thing. Of course, knowing this tendency of men, we are to conduct ourselves wisely and in a godly manner before all, that no charge of being disorderly and disruptive can be justified.

THEY WERE BEATEN AND SENT TO PRISON

“ 22 And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. 23 And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”

There are times when it appears as though the enemy has the upper hand. False testimony is received as truth, people are effectively joined together, and harm is administered to those who have done good in the name of the Lord. However, we must not be swayed by appearance, as though God had guaranteed us respect in the world. What is reported in this text was unjust. Because of this, the Lord Himself will administer the justice that it requires. This is why it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom 12:19).

THE MULTITUDE ROSE UP AGAINST THEM

“And the multitude rose up together against them . . .” Other versions read, “joined in the attack against Paul and Silas,” NIV “joined in attacking them,” NRSV “made an attack on them all together,” BBE “ran together against them,” DOUAY “the crowd joined in and showed its hostility to them,” NJB and “A mob quickly formed against Paul and Silas.” NLT

Now, there really is trouble in the city – but it has not been caused by Paul and Silas. Rather, it is the result of false charges being raised against the servants of God – charges that have agitated the people. The only way the opponents could rally this crowd was to say their way of life was being threatened – they “teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans” (16:21).

People can be joined together with a lie as well as with the truth. One thing about Satan’s kingdom, it is not divided. As Jesus Himself said, “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan,

he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" (Matt 12:26).

Therefore, although Pilate and Herod were not friends, they joined together in opposition to Jesus Christ (Lk 23:12). The Sadducees and the Pharisees were divided in their doctrine concerning spirits and angels, but they came together to John's baptism, with no repentance in their hearts (Matt 3:7). They also rallied together against Jesus (Matt 16:1), and, for a while, against Paul as well (Matt 23:1-8). Such alliances are really a kind of second level of unity. They are founded upon agreement with Satan, the "prince of this world" (John 12:31). From another point of view, all opposition to the truth is the result of having "the carnal mind" (Rom 8:7), or "the fleshly mind" (Col 2:18).

If men can be brought to think after the flesh, or be dominated by the "carnal mind," they will inevitably unite against the confrontation of Christ, the truth, and the servants of God who declare the truth. Such opposition has no compunction about crossing blood-lines, friendship, nationality, or race. If you have ever engaged in declaring the truth of God, you have encountered such opposition. Jesus said those who follow Him will even have foes from their "own house" (Matt 10:36). The "natural man," or the man whose progenitor is Adam, is described as one who cannot receive "the things of the Spirit of God." In fact, they are "foolishness unto him," and it is impossible for him to "know them" (1 Cor 2:14). This accounts for the extraordinary degree of division, hostility, and spiritual ignorance that exists in the Christian community. In our text, at least the opposition came from outside the professed church.

THE MAGISTRATES COMMANDED THEM TO BE BEATEN

" . . . and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them." Other versions read, "commanded them to be beaten with rods," NKJV/NASB/NRSV/ASV "be flogged," CJB "scourge them," DARBY "with sticks," GWN and "with wooden rods." NLT

The Greek word translated "beat" is **r`abdi,zein** , and means "to beat with rods," THAYER "beat with a rod or stick," FRIBERG "to beat or strike repeatedly with a stick or rod," LOUW-NIDA and "to thresh (by beating with a rod)" LEH This was a severe beating in which the victim was struck repeatedly with wooden rods. To this very day, this form of punishment is practiced in Eastern countries.

A particularly painful, though not so deadly, type of flogging is the Oriental bastinado, or blows delivered on the soles of the feet with a light rod or knotted cord or lash. Flogging was formerly executed with great brutality. The backs of the condemned were frequently lacerated, and salt was poured into the wounds to increase the pain. Britannica

Paul testifies that he was "beaten with rods" three times (2 Cor 11:23). No doubt, this was one of those occasions. The severity of these beating can scarcely be understood in the context of our society. Until recent years, the impact of the Scriptures and the way of newness of life has had a pronounced effect upon our society – more than men are willing to acknowledge. In other countries, where the Gospel has not been dominant, and even though a high level of culture may have been maintained, yet there has not been the sensitivity to brutality that has existed in the United States of America.

Of course, all of this is changing. With the emphasis upon fickle youth and entertainment, together with the growing popularity of violence in the entertainment and athletic world, the sensitivity to brutality is rapidly diminishing. Commensurate with this, the appeal of a Savior who is "meek and lowly in heart" (Matt 11:29), and who went about "doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38) is also on the wane. As is characteristic of him, the devil has stepped into this moral decline, and moved certain religious charlatans to promote wealth and worldly prosperity in the name of Christ. That kind of emphasis would probably have been welcomed by the businessmen who hauled Paul and Silas into the city square, promoting the people to beat them publically.

MANY STRIPES

“And when they had laid many stripes upon them . . .” Other versions read, “inflicted many blows upon them,” NASB “had been severely flogged,” NIV “had given them a severe flogging,” NRSV “had given them a great number of blows,” BBE “after giving them a severe beating,” CJB “had beaten them sore,” GENEVA “had hit Paul and Silas many times,” GWN and “Again and again the rods slashed down across their bared backs.” LIVING

Under the Law of Moses, those who were guilty of punishable crimes were also beaten severely. However, God enforced some mercy upon the guilty party, forbidding him to be struck more than forty times – that is, the party was struck a maximum of forty times (Deut 23:2-3). In order to avoid the breaking of this law, the Jews only struck a maximum of thirty-nine blows. Thus Paul affirms that, in addition to being beaten with rods three times, he said, “Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one” (2 Cor 11:24).

However, in our text it is not Jews that are beating Paul and Silas, but Romans – and they had no such law. Paul no doubt refers to this excess when he says he was beaten “in stripes above measure” – that is, beyond the Jewish limitation of forty.

Do Not Forget

Do not forget that Paul had seen a vision of a man in Macedonia crying out for them to come over from Asia to Europe to “help” them. Now, after first finding a cluster of women devoted to prayer, they are being publically beaten in a merciless way – with “many stripes.” The word “many” is translated from the Greek word **polla,j**, which means “of multitude, number, etc., many, numerous, great,” THAYER “opposite of few,” FRIBERG “a great number,” LOUW-NIDA and “abundant.” LEH

A person who was riveted to the flesh, or lacked spiritual understanding, would have concluded either they should not have come to Philippi, or that they had overextended their stay. However, this is not at how Paul and Silas reasoned on the matter.

These holy men knew what Jesus meant when He said, “In the world, ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). Also, Ananias had told Paul in the beginning how Jesus had said of him, “For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake” (Acts 9:16). Later he would write to Timothy, who no doubt remembered the very occasion of our text, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12).

It is difficult enough to live by faith without trying to do so while entertaining the imagination that we are promised happy and prosperous lives in this world. There remains enough of the flesh in every believer to incapacitate their soundness of mind if they do not remain strong in their faith.

Many professing Christians are too surprised when trouble comes their way because of their faith. When they are called to “suffer with” Christ (Rom 8:17), they are too slow to react in a God-honoring way. On the other hand, Paul, because he comprehended what has been revealed, actually sought to fellowship with Christ in His sufferings (Phil 3:10).

There is a reason for unacceptable responses to suffering as a Christian. In our time Christianity has been made popular. There are a number of things that have contributed to this popularity – but none of them include godliness or a love for and propagation of the truth. The entrance of the professional mega-church with its sprawling campus and highly trained staff has presented a wholly erroneous impression. Then there is the matter of attractive religious careers, the allurements of Christian entertainment, and the prestige of a religious education. None of these things are wrong of themselves. However, when attention is drawn to them, they are too lacking in Divine glory to bring

true benefit to the people. Most of these attractions are too close to the world, and, consequently, too far from God.

In Our Text

None of these [so-called] Christian distractions were present during the time of our text. There was power, but it was threatening to hosts of darkness and those who were ruled by them. The Gospel of Christ is good news to those who see themselves as they really are. It is always intimidating and hostile to those who have a love for this world and are living in sin.

THEY CAST THEM INTO PRISON

“ . . . they cast them into prison. . .” Other versions read, “threw them into prison,” NASB and “were thrown into prison.” NJB

As it is used in this text, “cast” means “to throw or let go of a thing without caring where it falls.” STRONG’S It includes the idea of violence, with no concern at all for the welfare of the individual. If the prison was a dungeon, as some suppose, Paul and Silas would have been thrown into it, or dropped down on the floor of the prison. This was after they had been beaten with many stripes.

All of this, viewed according to the flesh, would have been difficult enough to bear. However there will be even more harsh treatment

WHERE AND HOW THEY WERE INCARCERATED

“ . . . charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24 Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.”

Keep Them Safely

Other versions read, “keep them securely,” NKJV “guard them carefully,” NIV “Securely guarded,” CSB “keep them diligently,” DOUAY “keep them under tight security,” GWN and “make sure they didn’t escape.” NLT

Here, “safely” does not mean be sure no harm comes to them. Rather, it means to make sure they do not escape, or are not rescued by some sympathizer. The jailor was to take whatever measures were necessary to ensure Paul and Silas remained there.

Thrust into the Inner Prison

Other versions read, “the inner cell,” NIV “the inmost cell,” NRSV “into solitary confinement,” GWN “the inner part of the prison,” MRD and “the inner dungeon.” NLT

Think of this as a place of confinement within a place of detention. It would parallel what is now referred to as “solitary confinement” – a place that was not only located in the heart of the prison complex, but had less space, and was even more secured than the other cells. The picture to the left is a photo of the traditional cell into which Paul and Silas were thrown – only the bars, or gates, have been removed. Picture that place of confinement with thick and strong bars of iron and a locked gate. Surely that will be enough.

Made Their Feet Fast in the Stocks

However, intent upon ensuring his prisoners do not escape, or are not rescued, he locks their feet in stocks. The

picture presented here shows Paul and Silas in a very favorable manner. After having their clothes

tore off, mercilessly beaten with many stripes, and thrown into the prison, I doubt that they appeared so well. My point here is that I hardly see how any person could be put at a greater disadvantage, or be in a circumstance that could have been more disconcerting. Bruised, bleeding and wounded, there they are in a cold dark, and dank dungeon. Their feet are securely fastened in stocks so that they cannot move about. All of this has occurred after they obeyed the vision given to them to go over into Macedonia and help the people!

How will Paul and Silas react to these conditions? How will heaven respond to what has happened, and what will be the outcome of it all? It may appear as though everything is out of control. However, we may expect God to be glorified in it all!

CONCLUSION

Anyone who tends to be naive or overly simplistic about the work of the Lord will profit very much from this. This is a slice of very real kingdom life, and what can be involved in being a laborer together with God. Ponder some of the things Paul and Silas were required to handle – thinking through them, arriving at a God-honoring conclusion, and following through with the appropriate action.

- The Spirit did not allow them to preach the Word in Asia.
- The Spirit prohibited them from entering into Bithynia.
- They were directed by a vision, through which they were called to another continent.
- After arriving in Macedonia they were not confronted with anyone who seemed to be seeking the Lord.
- They journeyed to the city of Philippi, spending several days there without contacting any seeking souls.
- On the Sabbath day they apparently inquired if there was some place where worshipers gathered.
- Going outside of the city, they found a riverside where people came to pray.
- They spoke to the woman who were gathered there.
- God opened the heart of one of those women – Lydia – so she could respond appropriately to the word delivered by Paul.
- Following her baptism, Lydia asked them to judge her response, and if it was a faithful one, to come into her house and spend some time there.
- Again, while they were en route to the place of prayer, Paul and Silas were followed by a woman who was possessed by a spirit of divination. She was shrieking out: “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation.”
- This circumstance persisted for several days.
- Paul, being grieved with the whole situation, commanded the spirit to leave the woman, and immediately it did.
- Because this woman was a source of financial gain to her masters, the departure of the spirit that possessed her dried up their business.
- These men laid hold of Paul and Silas, and dragged them to the city square, where they raised charges against them before the magistrates.
- They charged Paul and Silas with troubling their city, and teaching the people to observe customs that were against the law.

- The people all rose up against Paul and Silas, the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods.

- After laying many stripes upon them, the men threw them into prison, charging the prison keeper to make sure they did not escape.

- The prison keeper put them in the inner prison, and fastened their feet in stocks.

Now, that is a breakdown of the answer of faith to the summons: “Come over into Macedonia and help us!” Nothing in the vision suggested these things would happen, yet Paul and Silas did not appear stunned by any of them. They did not have a view of God, Christ, His salvation, or the work of the Lord that caused them to be thrown off course by these things.

- They knew what to do when doors were blocked.

- They knew how to wait when the direction was not clear, occupying their time in a profitable manner.

- They knew what to do when doors were opened.

- They knew how to respond to people who were obviously seeking the Lord.

- They knew how to judge whether or not a person had been faithful.

- They knew how to respond to an invitation to remain with someone who had obeyed the Gospel.

- They could recognize someone who was dominated by an evil spirit.

- They knew how to respond correctly to words that were prompted by a power of darkness.

- They knew how to hold up under erroneous charges.

- They knew how to keep the faith when they were beaten and imprisoned.

There is every reason to believe that you also can respond in God-honoring ways to the circumstances that confront you as you go about your Father’s business! This text has confirmed that is the case, for it was experienced by men who live precisely the same way you do – by every word of God, and by faith. You, as well as all other saints, have access to the very same resources that sustained them.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #71

THE CONVERSION OF THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER

“ 16:25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. 26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed. 27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. 29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house. 35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. 36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace. 37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. 38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. 39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. 40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed. ” (Acts 16:25-40)

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Having arrived where they had been called by God, Paul and Silas have reaped a preliminary harvest in Lydia and her household, giving the “help” that was called for in Paul’s vision. Now, in the process of going to the place of prayer, they have confronted a woman with a “spirit of divination.” Paul then “helped” that woman by commanding the oppressing spirit to leave her. The outcome, however, was their violent arrest, beating, and incarceration in the inner prison, with their feet in stocks. Here we will find a man and his house who also needed “help” – hungry souls that needed to hear the Gospel. God will intervene in this circumstance, opening the prison, and loosing the bonds that held the prisoners. All of this will be done within the framework of prayer and praise – a spiritual

environment that is duly noted in heaven, which is the Control Center of the earth and those who are in it. Things will

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- **THERE WAS A GREAT EARTHQUAKE (16:26)**
- **THE PRISON KEEPER WAS AWAKENED (16:27)**
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- **THE PRISON KEEPER'S RESPONSE (16:29-30)**
- **PAUL'S RESPONSE (16:31-32)**
- **A BELIEVER'S RESPONSE (16:33-34)**
- **A MOVE BY THE MAGISTRATES (16:35-36)**
- **PAUL DOES NOT OVERLOOK THE MATTER (16:37-38)**
- **THEY CAME AND BESOUGHT THEM (16:39)**
- **PAUL AND SILAS LEAVE (16:40)**
- **CONCLUSION**

be worked together for the good of Paul and Silas, and the salvation of men.

REVIEWING THE ORIGINAL CALL

The original call into this region was a vision of “a man of Macedonia” standing and pleading, “Come over into Macedonia and help us” (16:9). As Paul and his companions considered the vision, they immediately “endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them” (16:10). It is possible, within the context of a highly organized and structured religious institution, to envision vast numbers of people in Macedonia, ready to be harvested for Christ. However, to this point, that is not how all of this has played out.

- One woman and her household have been helped, with the Lord opening her heart so she could attend to the Word spoken by Paul (16:14-15).

- A young woman who was possessed by a “spirit of divination” has been delivered after following Paul and company for many days (16:16-18). She had surely been helped.

To this point, there is no further record of any successful ministry in Macedonia. In their brief stay in the home of Lydia, we assume they ministered to the saints. We may also assume that Paul and Silas continued to minister at the river, which was a place of prayer – but there is no record of such a ministry.

Now, in our text, another individual and his household will surface while Paul and Silas are imprisoned, and they will be helped. They will hear the Gospel, obey the form of the doctrine delivered to them, and Paul and Silas will be briefly welcomed into their home. We may assume that Paul and Silas testified to the other prisoners, but we have no record of that kind of activity.

In our text, and after Paul and Silas are released from prison, they return to Lydia's house, comfort them, and depart to Thessalonica, which was approximately one hundred miles southwest of Philippi. It was also in the region of Macedonia.

Therefore, to this point, the reported activities of helping those in Macedonia, and preaching the Gospel to them consists specifically of two individuals and those with them: Lydia, and the Philippian

jailer. However many were included in their households also heard the Gospel, possibly some additional women by the river, and prisoners in the jail where Paul and Silas had been incarcerated. I do not know of a religious organization that would consider that kind of success worthy of the investment of at least four men, a lot of inconvenience, and a severe beating. Yet, this is precisely how heaven worked. This is how the Head of the body directed His church. It is how the Holy Spirit directed sensitive souls into the will and purpose of God.

It would not be possible to build an religious institution on a mission like this. Ponder the following.

- If, for example, a mission for the poor is started, it postulates the presence of a lot of poor people. Yet, the God of heaven moved his holy prophet about, focusing on one poor widow, to whom, He gave adequate supplies – and even Jesus made a point of this (Lk 4:25-26).

- If a person wanted to start a ministry to lepers, it would also presume the existence of a lot of lepers. Yet, when God was moved to heal a leper during the time of Elias, He did not select any of the many lepers in Israel, but ministered to one, who was Naaman a Syrian – and Jesus made a point of that also (Lk 4:26-27).

The ministry of Jesus also revealed this manner of Divine working. He would often focus his attention on one person of an area, and then depart.

- On one occasion, He sailed across a sea to the land of the Gadarenes, healed a man who was possessed by a legion of demons, and then returned to his boat and went to the other side (Mk 5:1-21).

- Another time He went into the city of Nain, raised the only son of a grieving widow from the dead, and went His way (Lk 7:11-17).

- Yet another time He went to the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, healed a woman's daughter, and "departed from thence" (Matt 15:21-28).

The point is that God has represented Himself as seeking individuals, not multitudes. In fact, there were times when Jesus "sent the multitudes away" (Matt 14:22-23). One time, when He saw "the multitudes, He went up into a mountain: and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him" (Matt 5:1). Another time, when He saw the multitudes He was moved with compassion, and asked His disciples to pray the Lord of the harvest that He would send forth laborers into His harvest (Matt 9:36-38).

Ponder the individuals to whom, Jesus have special attention. Nicodemus, Zaccheus, Jairus, a centurion, a Syrophencian woman, a grieving widow from Nain, an potent man at the pool of Bethsaida, Bartimaeus, a father with a son who was vexed by a demon, a certain leper, and many others. And why was this so? Because there are certain people that draw the attention of Jesus – people who have faith, and seek Him for who He really is.

Ponder the individuals to whom, Jesus have special attention. Nicodemus, Zaccheus, Jairus, a centurion, a Syrophencian woman, a grieving widow from Nain, an potent man at the pool of Bethsaida, Bartimaeus, a father with a son who was vexed by a demon, a certain leper, and many others.

Philip was called away from the multitudes to minister to a single man who was pondering the Scriptures (Acts 8:25-29). Peter was called to go to the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:10-20).

On this matter of Divine quest and preference, God has spoken with remarkable clarity.

- "But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart" (1 Sam 13:14).

- “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him ” (2 Chr 16:9).

- “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit , to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa 57:15).

- “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at My word” (Isa 66:2).

- “And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none” (Ezek 22:30).

Our text confirms this is a consistent Divine manner. The Lord is seeking those who are pure in heart, who are suitable to labor with Him. There is no way to fit the events covered in the sixteenth chapter of Acts into an institutional setting. Exactly what kind of organization could you build on this kind of activity? In fact, it would have no appeal to a career or institutionally minded person. However, this did appeal to Paul and Silas, and they entered into the work wholeheartedly. Such people have a different set of values. They see things differently, and define opportunities and duties unlike those who are of the world. They react to circumstances in a way that brings true advantages to men, and glory to God. They are living for different reasons, and have different expectations.

AT MIDNIGHT

“ 16:25 And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.”

The scene opens with Paul and Silas in the inner prison, bruised and bleeding, and with their feet bound in stocks. It had been a long day for them, having been dragged into the city square, falsely charged before the magistrates of the city, then beaten mercilessly. And all of this occurred while they were fulfilling the mission to which the Lord had called them. How will they react to all of this? Will they be angry with God, or cast down in spirit, wondering why all of these injustices have happened to them? Today, preachers and teachers are telling the people that reactionary responses are normal, and that we should not be surprised when they are found in us. Is all of this really so? Are Paul and Silas supermen, or are they representative of the kind of people that love the Lord and live by faith. Is their reaction the normal one for believers? Indeed, I will unhesitatingly affirm that it is! What we will now read is the account of men who were living by faith and walking in the Spirit. This is how hope impacts the human spirit, and what spiritual insight does for the soul of the redeemed.

AT MIDNIGHT

“And at midnight . . .” Other versions read, “about the middle of the night.” BBE

Midnight is what the name suggests – mid-night, or the middle of the night. It is most dark at that time, and ordinarily movement and activity are unusual then. “Midnight” was the time the Lord went through the midst of Egypt by the hands of his angel (Ex 11:4; 12:29). It was also at that time that Israel made its exodus from Egypt, with Pharaoh and all of Egypt urging them to go Ex 12:31-36). “Midnight” is when Samson got up and carried away the gates of the city of Gaza (Judges 16:3). David thought so much of the Lord that he declared, “At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments” (Psa 119:62). In His parable of the ten virgins, Jesus said that it was “midnight” when the cry was made, “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him” (Matt 25:6). There was such a hunger for the Word in Troas, that when Paul was there he “continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7).

We can tell from the words that follow that Paul and Silas had not merely been spending the night

acutely conscious of pain, wondering why this had happened to them, and where they might have gone wrong. To be sure, they were very aware of their condition in the body, but it was not their dominant consideration. It is one thing to read the words, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:17-18). However, it is quite another thing for them to be our personal testimony. Such marvelous expressions can be read and considered as a goal, or something that it is best to do. However, that is not how they are written. “Our light affliction” is not a reference to what may come, but what is present. It is not something that is viewed as lengthy and tedious, but “is for a moment.” The affliction is not seen as something that is working against us, but is working “for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” That is, although it is taking something from us in this world – fleshly strength, abilities of expression, etc. – it is causing a greater measure of glory that is infinitely larger than the affliction. All of this is taking place “while we look not at the things that are seen.” That is, although the affliction is a very real experience, we do not focus upon it. That is not what has captured our attention. It does not dominate our thinking, and is not the subject of our deeper and prolonged contemplation. Our minds, however are not void, but are devoted to the consideration of “unseen things” that belong to us, but are yet to be experienced in their fulness. Faith constrains us to reason in this matter while we are enduring the affliction: “for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Cor 4:18).

In fact, affliction, when experienced in faith and hope, actually moves us to consider what is to come. It becomes more prominent in our thinking than the things that are now taking place. Our minds are moved away from this present evil world (in which the affliction is taking place), to the world to come, and the glory that awaits us. Thus faith reasons, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1). While in the body, and enduring affliction, faith moves us to “groan” under the burden. This is not a groaning like Israel in Egyptian bondage. It is rather the groan of travail in which hope reminds us, “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1). That “house not made with hands” is the “glorious” body that we will receive at the resurrection of the dead, when Jesus comes in all of His glory (Phil 3:20-21). It already exists, “in the heavens,” and is awaiting our occupancy. In that body, there will not be a solitary remnant of death, or the possibility of afflictions and infirmities, which are all facets of, and preliminary to, death.

Now, God has revealed that leaving our present bodies and entering into that “building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” is actually why we have been born again, being “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10). We have not been regenerated in order to a more pleasant life in the world – although that is often our experience. It was not in order to a better family life, which may or may not be our portion. It was not in order to financial stability, or various forms of success in this world. All of those things may very well be experienced, but they are NOT the reason for the salvation of God. There is a greater reason.

This is not mere religious conjecture, but is stated succinctly and with great power. “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor 5:5). The New American Standard Bible reads, “Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge.”

We know from this that the Holy Spirit is given to us to empower and equip us to go through sufferings that would otherwise be intolerable. That blessed Spirit can cause faith and hope to so flourish that it will diminish the strength of affliction. It will enable the contemplation of glory to outweigh the experience of suffering – and that is because the glory itself outweighs all grievous human experience. In other words, when we enter into the glory, even the recollection of the sufferings will be “swallowed up” of life.

Now, that is the doctrine concerning affliction – but the doctrine strictly comports with the experience of the believer. Paul testified in Second Corinthians that this was what he was experiencing under the chaffing voyage through affliction. His words were a personal witness as well as sound doctrine. Moved by the Holy Spirit, he wrote them down so that those who followed him could have the same perspective and experience through their “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

Our text lifts the doctrine out of the domain of theory, translating it into life. What we will now read is the record of “the work of faith” being fulfilled by Divine “power” (2 Thess 1:11).

THEY PRAYED AND SANG PRAISES

“ . . . Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God . . .” Other versions read, “praying and singing hymns,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NSRV “making prayers and songs,” BBE “in praying, were praising God with singing,” DARBY “prayed and sung Psalms,” GENEVA “prayed and lauded God,” PNT “praying and singing songs,” IE and “praying and singing hymns of praise.” AMPLIFIED

The word “praises” is translated from the Greek word **u[mnnoun]** (hoom-noon) – the word from which we get the word “hymns.” The word means “a sacred song of praise to God, especially of thanksgiving” FRIBERG “a song with religious content.” LOUW-NIDA

As used in Scripture, a “hymn” is an insightful utterance of praise. It is in no way associated with mimicry, pretension, or some form of vain repetition. The Greek Septuagint version of the Scriptures use the word “hymn” in describing the praises David ordained in the Temple: **evn u[mnoij]** [hymns] **Dauid** . It is generally understood that this related chiefly to his Psalmic praises, which were noted for their insight and spiritual precision. They are a Scriptural example of hymnology.

The language conveys the idea of prayer and singing being joined together, so that in their prayers, they broke forth in the singing of praise. Petition was thus blended with praise, and supplication with thanksgiving. Such a marvelous blending of articulation is the fruit of faith and hope, both of which are discerning and precise. When either prayer or praise degenerate into shallow and endless repetition, they cease to have any true value.

Paul and Silas saw beyond their earthly circumstance. They were able to associate what has happening to them with Divine appointments. Early in the history of the church, this was also expressed by the apostles. After being beaten and commanded to speak no more in the name of Jesus, “they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). The reasoning is based upon the revealed fact – “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim 2:12). In more detail, Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer ” (2 Thess 1:4-5). Reasoning from effect to cause, unusual suffering and persecution are evidence of the appointment of unusual glory.

Suffering and affliction also confirm that believers are out of place in this world – that is, they are not of the world. They have been made for another place, where they will fit in perfectly. Thus, from the higher perspective, Paul and Silas had good reason to sing praises to their God.

THE PRISONERS HEARD THE

“ . . . and the prisoners heard them.” Other versions read, “the prisoners were listening to them,” NKJV /NASB/NIV “in the hearing of the prisoners,” BBE “the other prisoners listened attentively.” CJB and “as the prisoners listened.” NAB

As used here, the word “heard” means “to listen to, with the probable implication of one's own interest.” LOUW-NIDA The prisoners were not merely aware of some sounds emitting from the cell of Paul and Silas. They were attentive to, and interested in, what they were saying. This signifies God’s messengers were lifting up their voice, not just mumbling some words. The sound was distinct enough to capture the attention of the other prisoners. In the words of Paul and Silas the prisoners were hearing of the God on whom they relied. They were being exposed to thanksgiving, which was not common among idolaters. They heard men praying and singing who were not in despair, although they had been treated harshly, and were confined in the inner prison, with their feet in stocks.

It is good to remember that those who remain “in the body” (Heb 13:3), are, in a sense, also “prisoners.” It is important that they hear expressions from us that confirm the superiority of life in Christ. No person who wears the name of Christ who grumbles and complains will be able to leave a wholesome influence upon their generation. In such expressions, they only confirm that, at the root, they are no different from other men.

THERE WAS A GREAT EARTHQUAKE

“ 26 And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.”

In keeping with the Divine manner, a hopeless situation will instantly be changed to one of hope. This will not be something that is gradual, but will take place immediately and effectively.

SUDDENLY

“And suddenly . . .” Every major version reads the same – “suddenly.” As used here, this word means “unexpectedly,” FRIBERG “pertaining to an extremely short period of time between a previous state or event and a subsequent state or event,” LOUW-NIDA and “immediately, at once.” GINGRICH In English, the word “suddenly” means, “marked by or evidencing abruptness or haste . . . made or brought about in a short time.” Synonyms are listed as “short, sudden, unanticipatedly, and unexpectedly.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

In this text, “suddenly” speaks of Divine intervention – a forced intrusion into the affairs of men. Something that happens “suddenly” is immediate, effective, abrupt, and unexpected.

Here, it is God Almighty who acted suddenly, without warning, without prelude, without and prophecy. He caused something to occur in the world He created, at a precise point in time, and in an exact location. That is how precisely He governs the world! So far as we know, there was no indication that He was going to move in such a manner. He did not interrupt the mock trial of Paul and Silas. He did not disrupt their flogging, causing the one doing it to die, or causing his hand to wither – all of which was well within His power. He did not stop the magistrates from having Paul and Silas thrown into prison, or the prison keeper from putting their feet in the stocks. According to appearance, there was nothing that suggested God was going to intervene in this whole matter – but He did!

THERE WAS A GREAT EARTHQUAKE

“ . . . there was a great earthquake . . .” Other versions read, “a violent earthquake,” NIV “an earthquake so violent,” NRSV “an earth-shock,” BBE “a great shaking,” MRD “a severe earthquake,” NAB “a massive earthquake,” NLT and “a violent shock of earthquake.” WEYMOUTH

So far as the ranking of earthquakes, this was not an ordinary one. It was extraordinary, severe, violent, and massive within the context of earthquakes!

Now, at the midnight hour, the Creator of the world interrupts the affairs taking place there. He

causes something to happen that was not, strictly speaking, scientific. This earthquake was not one that could have been predicted by an analysis of the arrangement certain plates in the belly of the earth, or certain fault lines that existed. This earthquake started and ended with a Divine word.

It was also very pointed. It occurred on the continent of Europe, in the region of Macedonia, in the city of Philippi, and within a specific prison. It also came at an exact time.

There is also something else to consider. The command for this earthquake passed through the domain of “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2). The realm occupied by “spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12) had to yield to the command, even though it was interrupting what they were doing. This event would reverse the judgment of men who were under Satan’s control – but there was nothing that the powers of darkness could do about it. This is how effectively the God of heaven operates.

Also, consider that, so far as men are concerned, God moved in this manner in the behalf of only two men – not a whole city, not a church, but two men! Do not doubt what heaven will do for those who have put their trust in God, forfeited their own wills, and taken up His cause! Also, do not expect that the Lord of heaven and earth will move in such a manner for those who do not extend themselves for His glory, or live in a manner that is fundamentally self-centered.

THE CALCULATED EFFECTS

“ . . . so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.”

This was a precisely controlled earthquake, not a chaotic one. This is contrary to the very nature of earthquakes. The effects of earthquakes generally appear to be random, and certainly do not yield advantages to those within the area where it occurs. But that is not the nature of this earthquake. Something specific is accomplished by this quake. It is great, but so focused, that there will be no deaths, and not a single recorded injury.

The Foundations of the Prison Were Shaken

Other versions read, “the base of the prison was moved,” BBE “shook the prison to its foundation,” CJB and “the foundations of the jail shook.” NAB

There are at least two things that ought to be noted. First, it is the structure above ground that is usually shaken by an earthquake. Here, however, it was the foundation of the structure. Secondly, the prison house was not shaken down, which is also the ordinary impact of an earthquake. Here, the house was shaken, but not in a destructive manner. In other words, this was a precisely controlled earthquake.

From the earthly point of view, care is taken to construct houses of incarceration so they are not vulnerable. However, from heaven’s viewpoint, all places of containment are vulnerable. Their purpose can be nullified in a moment of time. Of course, this is true of all forms of restriction, confinement, or containment. It may be an infirm body, a vessel at sea, a sick bed, or some form or moral bondage. It is all subject to the Lord of heaven and earth. How blessed it is to consider such realities!

Also, there is no record of any other part of Philippi being affected by the earthquake. It was strictly localized, which is also a most extraordinary phenomenon. There was a specific purpose being carried out in this earthquake, and that is exactly what will be accomplished by it.

Immediately All the Doors were Opened

Other versions read, “all the prison doors flew open,” NIV “quickly opened,” IE and “instantly the doors all flew open.” WEYMOUTH

This is probably the only time in human history when an earthquake had such an impact. Note, it was not only the doors of the cell in which Paul and Silas were bound that were opened. They were the specific target of Divine attention. However, they had been praising God, and the other prisoners had been listening intently to them. Now, those prisoners will behold the answer of God to those midnight praises. ALL the prison doors were opened – suddenly and decisively. At the word of the King, they all “flew open.” The doors were not destroyed, but they were opened, standing ajar to testify to the power of the Almighty. What kind of natural earthquake could do something like that?

Do you not see that the very existence of a God whose word has such marvelous power makes hopelessness folly to those who believe? This is precisely why hope keeps the soul. It is anchored in heaven, which is the citadel of all power. For those who put their trust in God, there is no such thing as a circumstance that is totally hopeless. Sing, saints of God! Sing at the midnight hour, where everything appears to be against you! Sing when it is the darkest, and you are at the greatest disadvantage! Shout out the words of Isaiah the prophet: “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; He will come and save you” (Isa 35:4). God can open doors that appear firmly secured – even invincible. Our text is a record of that being wrought in the domain of sight and sense. However, it is a confirmation that unseen doors of confinement can also be opened at His word.

Everyone’s Bands were Loosed

Other versions read, “everyone’s chains were loosed,” NKJV “everyone’s chains were unfastened,” NASB “everybody’s chains came loose,” NIV “everyone’s fetters were unfastened,” RSV “everyone’s chains came off,” BBE “the chains of all were pulled loose,” NAB “the bonds of all prisoners came loose,” NIB “the chains of every prisoner fell off,” NLT “all prisoners were freed from their chains,” IE and “everyone’s shackles were unfastened.” AMPLIFIED

One moment, all of the prisoners were held by chains. The next moment, none of them were bound by chains. They did not break their own chains by a sudden burst of strength – like the Gadarene demoniac. They did not work diligently to saw them in two, or use the forger’s hammer to break them off. They simply “fell off.” NLT How could a natural earthquake do such a thing? Behold the precision and effectiveness of the power of God. He could cause chains to fall off the prisoners without any of them being injured or sustaining a bruise.

There are other kinds of chains that hold men fast – various forms of bondage, or enslavement. Jesus summarized all forms of moral and spiritual bondage in these words: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”

OTHER KINDS OF BONDAGE

Of course, there are other kinds of chains that hold men fast – various forms of bondage, or enslavement. Jesus summarized all forms of moral and spiritual bondage in these words: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin ” (John 8:34). Other versions read “slave of sin,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV “bondman of sin,” DARBY “bond-servant of sin.” ERV Paul described that condition as living “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2).

That bondage is demolished instantly when the Son of God makes a person “free indeed” (John 8:36). A person who is freed from sin is under no more obligation to sin that a lame man, who has taken up his bed and is walking, is obliged to spend some time in impotency, once again laying upon that bed. You might as well argue that a blind man who was healed of his blindness must endure

periodic seasons of blindness, as that a person freed from sin remains in some sort of bondage to it.

Let no person attempt to persuade us that the iron chains fell off the prisoners in Philippi, but the moral chains remain on those who have been “made free from sin” (Rom 6:18).

I understand that this makes it difficult to explain the presence of an alarming amount of sin in the professed church. Let no one give their ears to the lie that sin, by reason of family background, physiological factors, or social circumstances, overcomes the believer. When sin is found in any person who has professed faith in Christ, there are very real reasons for it. Here are some of them.

- They did not “resist the devil” (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:7-9).
- They made a place for the devil, even though God told them not to do so (Eph 4:27).
- They did not take advantage of the “way of escape” that comes with every temptation (1 Cor 10:13).
- They did not “obtain grace to help in the time of need” – when they were tempted (Heb 4:15-16).
- They did not heed the instruction of grace, which teaches us to “deny ungodliness and worldly lusts” (Tit 2:11-12).
- They did not follow the leading of the Spirit, mortifying “the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13-14).
- They were not “steadfast in the faith” (1 Pet 5:8-9).
- They did not “stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free” (Gal 5:1).
- They did not “put on the whole armor of God” (Eph 6:11-18).
- They did not focus their attention on eternal things, but chose to look upon temporal things (2 Cor 4:17-18).
- They were not pressing toward the mark, viewing all competing influences as “dung” (Phil 3:8-14).
- They did not consider their ways (Hag 1:5,7).
- They were not living by hope, which compels the believer to “purify himself, even as He is pure” (1 John 3:2-3).

It is to be understood that none of us can say, “we have no sin” (1 John 1:8). But that is not an excuse for sin! It is not an explanation for sin either. Those of honest heart know that when sin erupts, it is for all of the reasons sited above. It is imperative that we do not allow Satan’s ministers to teach us how to account for sin in other ways – like we cannot help it, or that is just the way we are, or it takes time to conquer out old habits. That is nothing more than fleshly jargon inspired from hell. It teaches people to live with sin, while God says to “mortify it” (Col 3:5), put it off (Col 3:8), lay it aside (1 Pet 2:1), cast it off (Rom 13:12), and “sin not” (1 Cor 15:34; Eph 4:26; 1 John 2:1). Let no man teach us we cannot do what God has commanded us to do! Stop your ears to those to suggest God’s requirements are too difficult. Instead, get to the doing of it, believing what Jesus said, “If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed” (John 8:36).

Let the church send the philosophers, the psychologists, the motivators, and the counselors home! We have no need of them, for our God is “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us”

Let the church send the philosophers, the psychologists, the motivators, and the counselors home! We have no need of them, for our God is “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask

or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20). What need do those who perceive this have for these worldly experts? If they have no power to get Paul and Silas out of their trouble, how could they possibly have any power to get us out of our trouble? Send them home! Tell them to take their programs with them, for the church needs to rid itself of the arm of the flesh! God will come and save us! With but a word, inhibiting circumstances can be changed – changed instantly and effectively. All manner of chains can fall off at His word, whether they are chains on the body, the mind, or the soul! Circumstance must yield to God! It will not yield to anyone else!

Woe, woe, woe to those purveyors of human resolutions to moral and spiritual problems – who market routines, claiming they have some kind of effective power! Their religion is a subtle form of idolatry, and nothing more, for they teach people to rely on something other than God Almighty. They give too much glory to men, and too little to God. The presence of such men is a blotch on the canvas of religion.

THE PRISON KEEPER WAS AWAKENED

“ 27 And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.”

The violent earthquake, strictly controlled from heaven, did not cause the whole complex to fall down. It was gentle enough to simply awaken the jailor, yet violent enough to open every door, and cause every chain to fall off the prisoners.

THE PRISON KEEPER AWAKENS AND BEHOLDS

“And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open . . .” Other versions read, “roused out of sleep and had seen the doors opened,” NASB and “woke up, and when he saw the prison doors wide open.” NRSV

The prison keeper was asleep in the prison complex, apparently to ensure the persons were kept in the jail, as he was instructed. He did not reckon on this, but while he was asleep something had happened. Note, he was not aroused during the earthquake, but after the Divine objective had been accomplished. He must have been close at hand, for he did not yet have any light, and yet he saw the prison doors standing wide open.

In seeing the “doors,” I gather the jailer beheld the cell doors as well as the main doors to the person. The total security of the prison had been decimated by the earthquake, and yet this man was not jostled out of his bed, or covered with falling debris. Note, that the man did not behold any prisoners, and would thus conclude that they had all escaped.

HE DRAWS HIS SWORD

“ . . . he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled.” Other versions read, “had escaped,” NASB “had got away,” BBE and “had been fled.” TNT

Scriptures indicate that it was the practice of Roman officials to take the lives of those who did not manage to keep their prisoners incarcerated. When, for example, Peter was miraculously released from prison by means of a holy angel, Herod inquired into his disappearance. It is written, “And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death” (Acts 12:19).

In Babylon, even wise men who could not deliver the counsel for which they were responsible were put to death. Once, when the “wise men of Babylon” responded that Nebuchadnezzar had required an answer that no man could provide, it is written “For this cause the king was angry and very furious,

and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon ” (Dan 2:12).

This jailer knew that there could be no satisfactory explanation given to the magistrates about the disappearance of his prisoners. He therefore determined to take his own life. He seemed to sense that referring to a natural disaster would not be sufficient under Roman law.

A Principle to be Seen

In His parable of the “pounds,” Jesus even taught that the Lord Himself operated upon the principle of strict faithfulness being required of His servants. Speaking of ultimate accountability He said of the unfaithful steward, “For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me ” (Luke 19:26-27).

That is a strong word, to be sure, but its significance ought to be duly noted. If responsibility to earthly dignities is required, what ought to be said about the responsibility of men to God Himself? It is good for God’s people to rid themselves of any tendency to make excuses for unfaithfulness. Let them rather devote themselves to the God-honoring responsibility that comes with being a steward of His goods, for they are scheduled to give a strict account to Him (Rom 14:12). In this world, for the faithful stewards, God will do nothing to cause their responsibilities to be taken from them, but will rather give them more, in order that they may be rewarded more in the world to come.

PAUL CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE

“ 28 But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.”

With the jailer fully intending to take his own life, an immediate and convincing response is required, if the action is to be aborted.

PAUL CRIED WITH A LOUD VOICE

“But Paul cried with a loud voice...” Other versions read, “Paul shouted,” NIV “Paul shouted in a loud voice,” NRSV “Paul called out in a loud voice,” CSB “Paul shouted out as loudly as he could,” GWN “Paul called to him in a loud voice,” MRD “Paul shouted at the top of his voice,” NJB “Paul yelled to him,” LIVING “Paul at once shouted out to him,” WILLIAMS and “Paul called out to him at the top of his voice.” PHILLIPS

Keep in mind that this is a man who has been dragged before the city officials, beaten many strokes with a rod, and thrown into prison, with his feet locked in stocks. Now the door to the cell in which he and Silas have been confined is standing wide open, and his shackles have fallen off. By all rules of human thought, he ought to be weak and fatigued. Yet, he cries out with a loud voice. He does not do so in his own interest, but with a mind to save the life of the jailer who had fastened his feet in stocks, and securely locked his cell.

Here is a classic example of a man who did not live for himself, and whose interests did not revolve around his own affairs. That, dear reader, is the Kingdom norm or standard – the way life is intended to be lived.

DO THYSELF NO HARM

“ . . . saying, Do thyself no harm . . .” Other versions read, “Don’t harm your yourself,” NIV “Do yourself no damage,” BBE “Stop! Don’t kill yourself!” NLT “Thou mayest not do thyself any harm,” YLT “Don’t do it!” NIV and “Do yourself no injury.” WEYMOUTH

Some time later, when Paul was a prisoner on a ship that was about to be wrecked, “the soldiers’

counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.” It was at that time that, by Divine providence, the centurion that was in charge, “willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land” (Acts 27:42-43). At that time, Paul reaped what he was sowing in this text.

Life in Christ does not yield a cold and heartless spirit. It rather makes for tenderness of heart, with a desire for the showing of mercy. That is confirmed by the loud cry of Paul.

WE ARE ALL HERE

“... for we are all here.” Other versions read, “because all of us are here.” CSB

Paul not only refers to himself and Silas, but to the rest of the prisoners. God had apparently put Paul in charge of the situation, as He did Joseph when he was in prison. I cannot imagine those prisoners remaining in their cells apart from the influence of Paul and Silas. Those prisoners had heard the prayers and praises of these two men. They were also personal witnesses to the response of heaven to the prayers and praises of Paul and Silas. I do not doubt that it made perfect sense to them to yield to their leadership at this time. Therefore, they remained in their cells, while the doors were standing wide open, and their bonds had all fallen away from them.

And for what reason were Paul, Silas, and the other prisoners still present? It was for the sake of this jailer, so he would not take his life!

Different Prison Experiences

The Kingdom of God does operate by principles, but not by specific routines. Every experience of imprisoned saints is not addressed in the same way.

- **JOSEPH.** Joseph was thrown into prison unjustly, and was put in “fetters” which “hurt” him (Gen 39:20; Psa 105:18). Yet, the Lord had mercy on him in prison, giving him favor in the sight of the prison keeper, who committed all of the prisoners into his hand (Gen 39:21-22). In due time, God moved him to be released from prison, and he became the second man in charge of all of Egypt (Gen 41:39-41).

Now, how could you write a prison deliverance procedure from those accounts? There is little similarity in any of the cases, except the reason for the incarceration, which was unjust. Those who live for Christ must do so by faith. They are not offered a guarantee of immunity, or told they will be the obvious victors in every earthly circumstance.

JEREMIAH. Jeremiah was thrown into prison because of his prophecies. The dungeon into which he was thrown had much mud, into which Jeremiah sank (Jer 38:6). One of the eunuch’s of the king, an Ethiopian, reported Jeremiah’s circumstance to the king., stating that the men who had done this were wicked, and that Jeremiah was about to die of hunger. The king told the eunuch to take thirty men and get Jeremiah out of that dungeon. He did this, and Jeremiah was placed in the courtyard of the prison, where he remained until Jerusalem was conquered by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer 38:8-28).

- **JOHN THE BAPTIST.** John the Baptist was thrown into prison at the whim of Herod’s wife, remained there for some time, and was finally beheaded at the request of the same woman (Matt 14:3-11).

- **THE APOSTLES.** The apostles were put into common prison for preaching the Word of God. They were miraculously delivered by an angel of the Lord, and told to return to the Temple and preach “all the words of this life” (Acts 5:18-20).

- **PAUL AND SILAS.** Paul and Silas were severely beaten, thrown into prison, and

their feet placed in stocks. An earthquake was sent from heaven, opening the jail cells and loosing their bonds. They remained in their cells, and were eventually escorted from them by the ones who had sent them there (Acts 16:24-39).

• **PETER.** Peter was imprisoned at the behest of Herod, who sought to please the Jews. An angel delivered him from the prison, and he walked out of confinement in the presence of the guards who were completely unaware of what was happening. He went to a gathering of the disciples, and then departed for Caesarea (Acts 12:4-19).

• **PAUL.** Paul was imprisoned in Rome, but allowed to dwell in his own rented house for two years. There he welcomed inquirers, to whom he preached the Word (Acts 28:30-31). Eventually he was martyred, being beheaded by Nero, as history confirms (2 Tim 4:6).

Now, how could you write a prison deliverance procedure from those accounts? There is little similarity in any of the cases, except the reason for the incarceration, which was unjust. Those who live for Christ must do so by faith. They are not offered a guarantee of immunity, or told they will be the obvious victors in every earthly circumstance. While the enemy will ultimately go down in defeat and ignominy, there will be times and seasons when they appear to have the upper hand. That is why Paul testified, “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8-9).

Saints are headed for a place and time when “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev 21:4). There will be no more midnights, restraints, or difficulty, for “there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever” (Rev 22:5). But until then, while we are in the world, we must determine to respond to trouble and hardship in a manner that glorifies God and puts faith and hope on public display. The display of both faith and hope postulate the presence of adversity, in which they tend to flourish.

THE PRISON KEEPER’S RESPONSE

“ 29 Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas, 30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

What a marvelous depiction of alertness in crisis! A man recently beaten and in shackles, and another man about to commit suicide – and yet both are alert to their circumstances, rational, and capable of precise expression. Among other things, this confirms that it is possible for the mind to triumph over difficult circumstances. It is possible for the powers of attention and focus to remain fully intact even though what is around us call for distraction.

HE CALLED FOR A LIGHT

“Then he called for a light . . .” Other versions read, “called for lights,” NASB “sent for lights,” BBE “having asked for lights,” DARBY “asked for torches,” GWN and “told someone to bring a light.” IE

The jailer does not call for soldiers to again shackle the prisoners. He does not call out for the gate to the prison itself to be re-secured. He rather calls for something that will help him see more clearly. He calls for light, illumination, something that would make the situation more clear.

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wants to confirm the prisoners are still there, and to have enough light to conduct himself intelligently. He is clearly eager to get closer to the situation and see what has happened, and even make further inquiry.

HE SPRANG IN

“ . . . and sprang in . . . ” Other versions read, “ran in,” NKJV “rushed in,” NASB “rushing in,” NRSV “leaped in,” GENEVA and “rushed inside.” ISV

The jailor rushed into the prison proper, even though all of the prisoners were loose. At the time, the thought did not occur to him that it was dangerous to enter the prison itself. He did not call for a group of soldiers to accompany him, or to go before him to see to it that it was safe. In this text, we are witnessing the Lord at work, directing and readying the people who are involved. That is why they do not react as ordinary men.

HE TREMBLED BEFORE PAUL AND SILAS

“ . . . and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas . . . ” Other versions read, “fell down trembling before,” NKJV “trembling with fear, he fell down before,” NASB “shaking with fear, went down on his face before,” BBE and “trembling and terrified he fell down before.” AMPLIFIED

This unnamed jailer was fully aware that something had happened that was clearly outside the realm of nature. It had occurred within the domain of nature, and yet was not subject to the laws of nature. The power of an earthquake had been focused, was not primarily destructive, and had resulted in making a prison no longer a prison. Now, it was an open house in which men could move about freely, with no means of confining them. From one point of view, his job and everything that enabled him to do it had been outwardly and apparently nullified.

The jailer falls down before Paul and Silas, not any other the other “prisoners.” There may very well have been political prisoners there, or some other well known criminals. But he does not fall down trembling before them. He is able to associate this whole circumstance with these two men, who were obviously unlike the other inmates. Paul is the one who had shouted out, and the jailer appears to conclude that, so far as the men were concerned, he was really the one who was in charge.

God can orchestrate circumstances so that it becomes very clear who is superior among men. He can clarify that Moses and Aaron are superior in Egypt (Ex 10:16), as well as Joseph was before them (Gen 41:41-42). It can be made clear to Nebuchadnezzar that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego are superior to the ones who laid charges against them (Dan 3:28-29). Darius can behold that Daniel is greater than the ones who sought to remove him (Dan 7:27-28). A ship master and all who were in his ship can see that Paul is in charge during a storm, and choose to yield to his word (Acts 27:21-43).

This is not the kind of thing that can be scheduled by men. In fact, there will be times when, according to appearance, this does not seem to be the case at all. However, when the time is proper, regardless of the circumstances, God can vault His people to prominence, and everyone will know that He is doing so. History is sprinkled with occasions when He did this. Faith, persuaded that this is the truth, submits to the Lord, moving the ones who believe to cast their burdens and cares upon the Lord.

HE BROUGHT THEM OUT

“ . . . And brought them out . . . ” Other versions read, “brought them outside,” NRSV “escorted them out,” CSB “leading them out of the jail,” WILLIAMS “brought them out [of the dungeon], AMPLIFIED and “he led them outside.” PHILLIPS

The idea here is that the jailer escorted Paul and Silas out of the “inner prison,” where they had been originally placed, into an open area. Whether or not this was completely outside of the prison complex itself, I am not sure. The point is that it was not appropriate for them to remain in their cell – although they did until the time came for them to leave. This was also true of the remainder of the prisoners, of which nothing more is said.

WHAT MUST I DO TO BE SAVED?

“ . . . and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?”

“Sirs”

Other versions read, “Men,” RSV “Masters,” DOUAY and “ My lords.” MRD

The Greek word translated “Sirs” is **Ku,rioi** , which has the following root meaning: “he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has the power of deciding; master, lord . . . one who has control of the person, the master.” THAYER Other lexical meanings include, “as a form of address showing respect sir, lord,” FRIBERG and “as a respectful designation used in addressing persons of varying social or political rank, often equivalent to our sir.” GINGRICH

As used here, the word “Sirs” reflects the perception of the jailer. He was not merely addressing them in a respectful way, as his question will indicate. This was not just a courteous way of speaking, or an expression of politeness. While prior to this time, it appeared as though the jailer was in charge, he now knew this was not the case at all. He was really the subordinate, and it now knew it very well. He therefore spoke to Paul and Silas as his superiors. He knew that what had just occurred was for their sake, and not for his.

The Present Day Society

First, let us note that in all of the above cases, as well as that of our text, the inquirer senses that there was something that needed to be done. Also note that none of them were told that there was really nothing they were required to do.

At this point it is important to note how the society of our day has deteriorated. There is a rapid fading of the recognition of Divine power and authority. Now, puffed up with the wisdom of this world, men account for strange happenings by referring us to changes taking place in the cosmos – like the heating up of the earth due to changes brought on by human activity. I am sure that if these experts could have examined the subterranean structure of the area around Philippi, they could not have found anything that could have accounted for that earthquake. Their scopes and measurement devices would probably have declared that such a thing was impossible.

However, during those times that were technologically primitive, there was a logical superiority. Sailors, like those on the ship Jonah took to Tarsus, knew that more was involved in the storm that hit their vessel than a climactic change. They concluded that some “evil” had brought that storm upon them, and therefore “cast lots” to determine the identity of the evil worker (Jonah 1:7). When the Egyptian magicians confronted a power greater than their own, they said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” (Ex 8:19). Although Nicodemus did not know the full identity of Jesus, He was able to recognize that He was someone with whom God was identified (John 3:2).

There is something to be said in favor of an environment where there is a recognition of Divine power – even if it is not characterized by clarity. Such is a surrounding in which the Lord can work to the profit of the people.

“What Must I Do to Be Saved?”

Other versions read, “what have I to do to get salvation?” BBE “what must I do that I may be saved?” DOUAY “what must I do, that I may have life?” MRD and “what is it necessary for me to do that I may be saved?” AMPLIFIED

This is the only place in all of the Scripture where this question is found. On the day of Pentecost, those who believed what Peter had preached asked, “Men and brethren what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). When Saul of Tarsus was apprehended by Jesus on the road to Damascus he asked, “Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:7). However, our text is the only place the precise question was asked, “What must I do to be saved?”

First, let us note that in all of the above cases, as well as that of our text, the inquirer senses that there was something that needed to be done. Also note that none of them were told that there was really nothing they were required to do.

Perhaps this jailer had either heard, or heard about, that damsel who was following Paul everywhere he went, shouting out, “These men are the servants of the most high God, which show unto us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17). Perhaps he had also heard Paul; and Silas praying and singing praises prior to him falling asleep. But, why did he ask this question?

Some have conjectured that he was fearful of losing his own life at the hand of the Roman authorities, and thus inquired about how he could escape their wrath. However, I doubt that this is possible, for he had seen not only the door of the prison standing ajar, and the shackles that once held the prisoners apparently lying on the floor, he also saw all of the prisoners still present – probably standing in their cells as Paul and Silas were in their’s. Furthermore, Paul had shouted out that he should do himself no harm, for they were all there. Therefore, there are a number of reasons why this could have been an appeal to be delivered like that young woman had been delivered from a spirit of divination.

- It seems to me that he had been made aware that Paul and Silas had been preaching “the Gospel” in that area, for that is what they had been called to do (Acts 16:10).
- No doubt he also knew of the shrieking cries of that woman who was possessed by a “spirit of divination.”
- In addition, he probably knew that the merchant’s business had dried up because Paul had cast that spirit out of the woman.

When the world is faced with a church that is obviously committed to, and supported by, the Living God, more inquiries will be made.

- As I have already stated, he had probably heard the prayers and praises of Paul and Silas.
- He had seen the prisons doors standing open, with the means of holding the prisoners fallen to the ground.
- The voice of Paul had rang through that prison, telling not to do any harm, to himself.
- Although there was opportunity to escape, all of the prisons were still present.

That is enough evidence to provoke a desire to have what Paul and Silas had. They had delivered a woman who was possessed by an wicked and alien spirit. God had delivered them from a prison that had been made a firm as humanly possible. It was apparently clear to the jailer that they had something he felt he needed also.

Reasons Why This Question Is Not Heard Often In Our Time

I cannot help but wonder why this kind of inquiry is so rare in our time. It seems I am not alone in this. There are all manner of soul-winning techniques being marketed in church circles. There are even clinics that are called “soul-winning clinics.” There are those who regularly upbraid professing Christians for not being better soul-winners, while others are regularly told that the winning of souls is the only reason the church even exists. Apparently, such benighted souls have never heard that the real church is being built “for a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Eph 2:22).

When the world is faced with a church that is obviously committed to, and supported by, the Living God, more inquiries will be made. The Lord Himself spoke to Israel of the time when their eyes would be opened, and they would realize genuine life and a productive association with Himself. Through Zechariah He said, “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you ” (Zech 8:23).

Paul spoke of a similar circumstance to the Corinthian church that was filled with carnality and division. They had been placing an inordinate emphasis on speaking in tongues, and Paul confirmed the vanity of such an emphasis. He rather spoke of the effect of prophecy, which is insightfully speaking unto edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor 14:3). Here is what he wrote: “If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth ” (1 Cor 14:23-25).

Who is able to calculate the effect of a powerless church in which little or no spiritual fruit is evident? What kind of impact does dead religion have upon, what is referred to as, evangelistic and missionary efforts?

The ineffectiveness of the church is certainly not owing to it passing the information, and living it out as well, that holiness is an absolute requirement of the living God – something “without which no man shall see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). The spread of “true religion” (James 1:27) will take place when the church is holy, and is “filled with the fruits of righteousness” (Phil 1:11). Until that time, only spiritual mediocrity will spread, which mediocrity is the bane of the church world-wide. There are exceptions, but those exceptions are owing to the spiritual reality that is found in the lives of people. That is what is being lived out in this text. Paul and Silas were genuine, and they were blessed by God. That was glaringly apparent to the Philippian jailer, and therefore he asked the question.

PAUL’S RESPONSE

“ 31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. 32 And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.”

Both Paul and Silas do not delay to answer the jailer’s question: “ they said.” Whether they said it simultaneously, or Paul alone said it, it still came from them both. They were of one mind and judgment, and spoke the same thing. Imagine what would have been said if the jailer had addressed this question to a local ministerial association, or to a group of theological students! That response would reflect the spiritual posture of the people.

The answer of Paul and Silas will be brief and to the point. It will be an answer that contains more than the words through which it is expressed. It will be an exact answer that will say what God wanted said. It will also be a key, or pivotal, answer on which every other action will depend.

BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

“And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

First, let us settle in our minds that this statement is the truth, not a mere introduction to the truth. It is obviously not an incomplete statement, with some essential element missing. The preaching of the Word will FOLLOW this statement – a presentation of the One on whom the jailer is to believe. In a sense, this word is readying the man to hear. The means of salvation will be presented as the glorified and enthroned Man – “the Lord Jesus Christ.”

“Believe On”

Other versions read, “believe in,” NASB “have faith in,” BBE “Trust in,” CSB “Become a believer,” NJB “Commit yourself to,” IE and “Believe in . . . [give yourself up to Him, take yourself out of your own keeping and entrust yourself into His keeping].” AMPLIFIED

What does it mean to “believe” ? From the standpoint of language itself, it means: “to be persuaded of; to credit, to place confidence . . . The conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of his soul”; thus it stands, absolutely *to trust* in Jesus or in God as able to aid either in obtaining or in doing something,” THAYER “be convinced of . . . have confidence in,” FRIBERG “entrust to,” UBS and “rely on.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This is how the word “believe” is used in Scripture. The English definition is, “to accept as true, genuine, or real; to have a firm conviction as to the goodness, efficacy, or ability of something.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER I will base my comments on the way in which the Scriptures use the word. Some elements of that usage are reflected in the English definition, but it is not as thorough as the Scriptural usage.

First, let me observe that the concept of “believe,” as used in Scripture, is not at all common among men. It should not be necessary to make such an observation, for we are speaking about obtaining salvation. How is it possible that such a thing could be obtained by ordinary means, or some purely human capability?

Behold the concepts that are inherent in the Scriptural word “believe.” It should at once be apparent that we are not dealing with something simplistic – like a step in an imagined plan of salvation. In our time, there is a great need for the church to be delivered from carnal simplicity and surface thinking. The leprosy of shallowness is so rotting religious thought that there is scarcely a challenge to the mind in much of what is said by the modern church. Believing has to do with the following.

- **PERSUASION.** This has to do with the total absence of doubt, and the complete assurance that the One on whom we believe is exactly what He is represented to be, and is thoroughly competent to do what He is represented as doing.
- **CONFIDENCE.** This is associated with making an actual move to rest the weight of one’s soul upon the Lord Jesus. There is assurance that can move a person to actually walk on water like Peter, raise a withered hand like that man in the synagogue, or pick up your bed and walk like the impotent man by the pool of Bethesda.
- **CONVICTION.** This is a state of soul in which no further evidence is required. The reality of who Jesus is bursts upon the soul, and there is no doubt concerning His identity, what He has done, or what He can do.
- **TRUST.** This is an ongoing quality in which the individual readies himself for continued and unquestioned dependence upon the Lord. This is not trust for a season, but for a lifetime.
- **BEING IMPELLED.** This has to do with an inner compulsion that refuses to be denied. Where it is found there is an immediate and thorough response.
- **A LAW OF THE SOUL.** Believing goes deeper into the human constitution than

the mind. It touches the more capable and thorough aspect of man that not only determines what he thinks, but what he does as well.

• **ENTRUST TO.** This has to do with relinquishing the imagined control of one's life. The entirety of life is handed over to the Lord Jesus with no doubt concerning the advantages that will result.

• **RELY ON.** Like trust, reliance is an ongoing quality. The reasoning of the believer is so impacted that he confidently depends on what Jesus will do, even though the details of it all are not apparent.

This brief overview, of course, is itself on the surface of thought, This is because believing fundamentally has to do with the heart – for it is “with the heart” that man believes (Rom 10:10).

It should be apparent that believing thoroughly addresses the matter of human response. It is not possible to join believing and being disobedient. They will not blend together. One simply cannot believe, and yet fail to respond in an acceptable manner. It is impossible to believe and doubt at the same time. Those who affirm that believing is not enough have not seen believing properly. Our text is an affirmation that it is enough, and that is because it is more thorough than sophists imagine.

What About Demons Believing?

Some raise the matter of demons believing, as though that confirmed that believing is not enough. This sophistry is based upon a statement made by James: “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19).

Note, James is not speaking of believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, but believing “that there is one God.” That is a belief that could be found among “the twelve tribes” of Israel, to whom James wrote (James 1:1). Concerning the persuasion that there is “one God,” James states that the demons “also believe AND tremble” – something (trembling) that his readers were not apparently doing. The demons, however, do not “believe” as men do – that is, upon the basis of testimony. They believe because they have knowledgeable encountered the Living God. He has expelled them from His presence, and His Son personally exercised unquestionable authority over them., No demon ever questioned Jesus, disputed with Him, sought to resist Him, offered any opposition, or fought against Him.

This is not the kind of believing that is involved in being saved. Here we are speaking of a persuasion, reliance, confidence, and absolute trust that is based upon testimony . That means it is effective because of the work of God, not the analysis of men. This is speaking of the kind of believing that is “given” to men, as declared in Philippians 1:29.

“The Lord Jesus Christ”

Believing is on a Person, not a system. This Person stands alone – “THE.” He is the absolute Ruler who is over all – “LORD.” He Himself is a member of the human race, although uniquely so, being sent from heaven to be the Savior of the world – “JESUS.” He is the One who has been designated by God, invested with all power, and charged with bringing the sons of God home to glory – “CHRIST.”

If you think of faith as an arrow, it is to be aimed at Jesus Christ, for if it does not land there, it is of no avail. If you perceive it as a hand, it is to be extended to Christ to obtain what He gives. If it is likened to an eye, it is to be fastened on Christ, to perceive Him and His salvation with greater clarity.

Believing is not on Jesus the Helper – although He is surely that. It is not on Jesus the Sympathetic One – although you will find Him to be so. It is not on Jesus the Healer – although He is thoroughly

competent in that matter. Believing is “on the Lord Jesus Christ,” which sees Him as God has presented Him. It perceives Him in the capacity ordained by God. It does not see Jesus as the answer to human need, but as the Executor of the will of God.

I am personally persuaded that many within the Christian community know very little concerning the Person, accomplishments, and work of Jesus Christ. This being true, it bears directly upon both the possibility and extent of believing. Men are either advantaged or disadvantaged by the degree of the faith. It is possible to have “little faith” – but that not what saves and keeps a person.

“Thou Shalt Be Saved”

Other versions read, “will have salvation,” BBE “wilt have life,” MRD and “you shall be being saved.” INTERLINEAR

And what does it mean to “be saved” ? The word “saved” carries the ideas of being rescued from destruction, liberated, restored, preserved, and made safe. That, however, is only from the standpoint of language. Spiritually, and from the Scriptural point of view, being “saved” has to do with many things.

The actual experience of these realities does not require the perception of them. In fact, for some, owing to the eroding effects of sectarian influences, it is many years before they perceive what actually took place when they were “saved.” However, when the Word of God on these matters comes home to their hearts, they can at once see the truth of these realities. It is then that they can live in the power of them.

Whether the jailer knew the scope of salvation at the time or not, these things would actually take place through and because of his faith. At this point of our text, it remains for him to hear the Word concerning “the Lord Jesus Christ.” To this point, whatever he had heard was not apparently sufficient. If this was not the case, he would not have asked the question, “What must I do to be saved?”

“And Thy House”

Other versions read, “and your household,” NASB “and your family will have salvation,” BBE “and your entire household,” LIVING “and all the people living in your house,” IE and “and your household as well.” AMPLIFIED

This text has been corrupted by many to mean that the family of this man would be saved upon the basis of his faith. However, that is not the case at all. Those who are “saved” must themselves believe. They cannot be saved by proxy, so to speak, upon the basis of another.

- **Cornelius (Acts 11:14).**
- **Lydia (Acts 16:15).**
- **Philippian jailer (Acts 16:31,32,34).**
- **Crispus (Acts 18:8).**

Here, the idea is that the same salvation that was set before the jailer was for his household as well. As used here, the term “house” refers to the dwelling place, not a body of people. The word translated “house” is **oi=ko,j**, and means “an inhabited house . . . any dwelling place.” THAYER As used here, it means everyone who was living in that house, which could have included any servants or staff, as well as his person family. Wherever the Gospel is preached, whether in a house (Acts 2:2,14), a synagogue (Acts 13:42), the Temple (Acts 5:20), a marketplace (Acts 17:17), or a school (Acts 18:9), the Gospel is addressed to all within hearing distance, and the salvation that is declared is also for them all. By the grace of God, the word of salvation is delivered to “all men” (Tit 2:11). In our text,

because they were associated with the jailer, all who were in his house will hear the good news.

THEY SPAKE UNTO HIM THE WORD OF THE LORD

“And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.” Other versions read, “gave the word of the Lord,” BBE “told him . . . the message about the Lord,” CJB “spoke the message of the Lord,” CSB “preached the word of the Lord,” DOUAY “spoke the Lord’s word,” GWN “shared the word of the Lord,” NLT “told him . . . the good news from the Lord,” LIVING “told the story of the Lord,” IE “told the Lord’s message,” “told God’s message,” WILLIAMS “declared the Word of the Lord [the doctrine concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God],” AMPLIFIED “the message of God,” PHILLIPS “told him . . . about the Lord,” CEV and “preached the Lord’s word.” GW

The word translated “spake,” or “spoke,” is an interesting one. It is not the word translated “preach,” or “teach.” The Greek word used here is **evla,hsan**, from the root word **lale,w**. The lexical meaning of this word is, “to utter oneself, . . . to denote the utterances by which God indicates or gives proof of His mind and will, whether immediately or through the instrumentality of his messengers and heralds . . . to announce or preach the word of God or the doctrine of salvation” THAYER and “speak as with a message . . . of persons, speak, tell, with focus on speaking rather than on logical reasoning.” FRIBERG

The word, here translated “spake” is used two hundred and ninety-seven times from Matthew through Revelation. It is used one hundred and thirty-four times in the Gospels, sixty-three times in the book of Acts, eighty-eight times in the epistles, and twelve times in the Revelation. The majority of the time, the word is translated into some form of “speak” [spoke, spoken, speech]. A few times it is translated “talk” [talked] (Mk 6:50), “told” [tell] (Matt 26:13; Lk 1:45), “preached” (Mk 2:2), “say” [said, saying] (Mk 9:6), and “utter” [uttered] (2 Cor 12:4).

The emphasis here is placed upon speaking, or a clear articulation. That is, the message delivered was an intelligent one, and was calculated to be understood. It was not a philosophical statement, or the utterance of a mere opinion. What was spoken is said to have been “the word of the Lord.” From the standpoint of composition, the subject matter was the Lord Himself. From the standpoint origin, it had its genesis in the Lord.

- In Acts 2:4, the “utterance” is said to have been given by the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus promised (Matt 10:19-20).
- In Acts 2:11, what was spoken was “the wonderful works of God.”
- In Acts 2:31, David is said to have spoken “of the resurrection of Christ.”
- In Acts 3:21, God spoke through “the mouth of all His holy prophets.”
- In Acts 4:20, Peter affirmed they would continue to speak “the things which we have seen and heard.”
- In Acts 4:31 they “spake the word of God with boldness.”
- In Acts 5:20 an angel told the apostles to “stand and speak in the Temple all the words of this life.”
- In Acts 11:14 an angel told Cornelius that Peter would “tell” him “words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.”
- In Acts 14:1 Paul and Barnabas “so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.”
- In Acts 18:25, Apollos is said to have “spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord.”

- In Acts 19:8, Paul “ spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

- In Acts 26:22, Paul affirmed that he said , “none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.”

In these sample references, it is apparent that the speaking was extended, not being a brief statement. We also see that the subject matter was not centered in worldly experience. These days, an astounding percentage of professed Christian speaking focuses on the experiences of men. This is generally the difficult experiences of humanity, because it is exceedingly difficult for charlatans to capitalize on their good experiences. Such messages do not center in the Lord.

That is, in such proclamations, the Lord Himself is not the Subject, nor are His accomplishments set forth as the preeminent ones. It is man that is presented as the primary object, and his experiences as the fundamental focus. Thus the Lord is held out as the means of realizing personal dreams and ambitions, or settling trying circumstances. This is not the message Paul and Silas delivered. Furthermore, it is not to be the message that the church is to be delivering now. Human circumstances, however grievous it may be perceived to be, cannot justify the displacement of the Gospel for another focus. A variant message cannot save – not in any sense! Nor, indeed, can it be blessed and empowered by God.

A BELIEVER’S RESPONSE

“ 33 And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. 34 And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”

The sequence of events is noteworthy. The believing of the jailer is not the first thing that is mentioned.

HE TOOK THEM THE SAME HOUR

“And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes. . .” Other versions read, “that very hour . . . and washed their wounds,” NASB “when he had given attention to their wounds,” BBE “at that late hour . . . washed off their wounds,” CJB “at that hour . . . bathed their wounds,” NAB “cared for them and washed their wounds,” NLT “in that hour . . . did bath them from their blows,” YLT and “bathed [them because of their bloody] wounds.” AMPLIFIED

Even though the jailer did not originate the opposition to Paul and Silas, he had participated in it. Here is a display of bringing forth works “meet for repentance.” This is something that John the Baptist preached in preparing people for the Christ. He told some assuming Pharisees and Sadducees, “Bring forth fruit meet for repentance” (Matt 3:8).

On the day of Pentecost, when the people responded to Peter’s message by crying out, “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” Peter said they should first “Repent” (Acts 2:37-38). That repentance required a change of conduct as well as a change of mind. Some time later, Peter told another group of people, “ Repent ye therefore, and be converted , that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Conversion has to do with the alteration of one’s conduct, and it is required in order that sins may be blotted out. Specifically, to “be converted” means to “definitely turn to God in conduct as well as in mind,” ROBERTSON “absolutely, to turn back morally, to reform,” THAYER “of religious or moral change, change one's ways.” FRIBERG When Peter said “repent ye therefore and be converted,” he was calling for outward conduct that coincided with the turning that was taking place in the heart. If it is countered that no man can change without first being born again, or alter his conduct prior to being in Christ, consider a lame man taking up his bed and walking, or a man with a withered hand stretching it out. Fruits that

are “meet for repentance” are changes that are begun in obedience to the word of the Lord, then sustained by the Lord.

Paul testified to king Agrippa that, upon his own conversion, he declared the same thing to both Jews and Gentiles. “Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:19-20). Other versions read, “do works befitting repentance,” NKJV “prove their repentance by their deeds,” NIV “do deeds consistent with repentance,” NRSV “perform deeds worthy of their repentance,” RSV and “do works and live lives consistent with and worthy of their repentance.” AMPLIFIED There is no reason to doubt that when Paul and Silas spoke the word of the Lord that night, they also declared the requirement of works that testified to the legitimacy of repentance.

NOTE: There are at least three categories of works, and their distinction must be known.

- **DEAD WORKS.** These are works that are associated with spiritual death, and are committed while one is “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). They were committed prior to any faith or repentance, while one was under the domination of sin and death. They are the expressions of death, and are referred to as “sin,” “transgression,” “iniquity,” “wickedness,” etc.

- **WORKS ASSOCIATED WITH REPENTANCE.** These are works that are stimulated by repentance, and wrought in the strength of it (Matt 3:8; Acts 26:20). They are referred to as works that are “meet,” “befitting,” or “appropriate.” They have to do with conversion, or the outward alteration of one’s life. They actually have to do with what a person stops doing. That stoppage is seen as a “work.” Repentance – genuine repentance – will enable the individual to halt their wayward manner of life – like Saul ceased immediately to persecute the church. That cessation is nothing more than a beginning, and cannot be sustained until the individual is born of water and of the Spirit (John 3:5). Then the Spirit will lead the person in the continual mortification, or crucifixion, of the deeds of the body. A person who says they cannot cease the expression of sin has not repented, for repentance brings the power to abruptly stop such expressions. That cessation, coupled with the determination to obey, constitutes “works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:20).

Thus we have God demanding the abandonment of sin under the Law. John the Baptist required it in his preparatory ministry for the Lamb of God. Jesus Himself required the forsaking of sin. Paul preached it.

WORKS ASSOCIATED WITH FAITH AND SALVATION. These referred to as “good works,” and are associated with regeneration. They have to do with doing what is good and expressing the life that is in Christ Jesus. They are the works unto which, in Christ Jesus, we have been ordained (Eph 2:10). They are the “good works” that follow the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit (Tit 3:5). They are the “good works” for which the Word of God perfects us (2 Tim 3:17). They are the “good works” that are seen by men, which testify to the genuineness of spiritual life (Matt 5:16).

Of old time, God required this from His people – that their works justify their claim of association with Him. He said to them, “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts : and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Isa 55:7). To the Ephesians Paul wrote, “This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk , in the vanity of their mind” (Eph 4:17). Peter wrote, “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men , but to the will of God” (1 Pet 4:1-2).

Thus we have God demanding the abandonment of sin under the Law. John the Baptist required it in his preparatory ministry for the Lamb of God. Jesus Himself required the forsaking of sin. Paul preached it. I hardly see how any person can justify failing to take such words seriously. To be sure, the jailer did, confirming that he will do anything the Lord requires of him.

Today, there is a leniency toward sin that is wholly unjustified. In fact, it is in stark contradiction of the clear mandate of God. This is largely owing to the intrusion of psychological principles into preaching and teaching. It has been fundamentally corrupting, distorting the understanding of spiritual life, and offering convenient excuses for sin and transgression.

When he found him in the Temple, Jesus told the impotent man He had healed at the pool of Bethesda, "Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee" (John 5:14). He told the woman who was caught in the act of adultery, and was brought to Him, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" (John 8:11). Both of those individuals were required to take that admonition seriously, and to see to it that they sustained a whole-hearted effort to do what the Master said. It is then, and only then, that the required grace and Divine direction would be realized. We are also in precisely the same situation.

HE AND ALL HIS WERE BAPTIZED

"... and was baptized, he and all his, straightway." Other versions read, "and immediately he and all his family were baptized," NKJV "immediately he was baptized, he and all his household," NASB "then he and his entire family were baptized without delay," NRSV "he was baptized at once, with all his family," RSV "he and all his family had baptism straight away," BBE "he and all his family were baptized right away," NET "was baptized with all that belonged unto him straight way," TNT "The jailer and all of his people were immersed right away," IE and "he was baptized immediately and all [the members of] his [household]." AMPLIFIED

There are those who insist that baptism is optional, or, at the least, inconsequential. If this view is correct, exactly how do we account for the jailer and all that were in his house being baptized "immediately?" So far as the record is concerned, he was told that he would be saved if he believed "on the Lord Jesus Christ" (16:31). How did he even know about baptism, and why was he and all those with him willing to be baptized a little after midnight? If baptism is really not associated with salvation, how can we account for such an immediate response at such an inconvenient hour, and during such disruptive circumstances?

The answers to these questions is so obvious there is no need to develop them any further. The truth of the matter is that this is an inspired record, and it has those who believed being baptized immediately after hearing the Word of the Lord, and confirming that repentance had taken place.

All of the things that are associated with baptism took place when this household was baptized – whether they knew it at the time or not.

- They were baptized into Christ's death (Rom 6:3).
- They were buried with Jesus by baptism into death, and raised to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4).
- Having died to sin, they were freed from its dominion (Rom 6:4-7).
- They were baptized by one Spirit into one body, and made to drink in one Spirit (1 Cor 12:13).
- They were baptized into Christ and put on Christ (Gal 3:27).
- They were circumcised with the circumcision not made with hands, in putting off

the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11).

- They were buried with Jesus in baptism, and raised with Him through faith in the operation of God (Col 2:12).
- They were saved by baptism, obtaining a good conscience (1 Pet 3:21).

In the process of spiritual growth, these realities become more clear to us, and the magnitude of our salvation is made more apparent to us. The jailer and his family had the same experience.

HE BROUGHT THEM INTO HIS HOUSE

“And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them ...” Other versions read, “he brought them up into his house and set food before them,” ASV “brought them into his own house, he laid the table for them,” DOUAY and “took Paul and Silas upstairs into his home and gave them something to eat.” GWN

It is assumed that the jailer’s living quarters were above the dungeon area. Therefore, some versions read that he brought them “up into his house.” Not only did he bring forth fruits meet for repentance, washing their wounds, but he also immediately was hospitable, bringing Paul and Silas into his own abode to feed and nourish them. As Cornelius and Lydia, his home was open to the messengers who brought the word of salvation.

Paul and Silas had endured maltreatment during the day, and fatigue and hunger during the night. The jailer, being mindful of their circumstance, and of his own role in their condition revenged his disobedience, treating the servants of the Lord with respect and care. Again, it ought to be noted that we are being exposed to genuine conversion, and to the impact it registers upon those who experience it.

THEY REJOICED

“ . . . and rejoiced . . .” Other versions read, “rejoiced greatly,” NASB “was filled with joy” NIV “was full of joy,” BBE “he and his family were,” GWN “celebrated their conversion,” NJB “joyed,” PNT “were very happy,” IE “was filled with gladness,” WEYMOUTH “overjoyed,” MONTGOMERY and “leaped much for joy and exulted with all his family.” AMPLIFIED

It appears to me that, as regards our status in Christ, believing in God has been greatly understated – even treated as though it was something short of what is required.

The spirit of rejoicing was found in the entire household – all who had believed and been baptized. They fulfilled what Peter wrote: “in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8). This is not a joy that is stimulated by exhortation, or indulging in some exercise that is calculated to produce happiness. This was the “joy of faith” – that is, the joy that proceeds from faith (Phil 1:25). Paul wrote of a rejoicing in hope that attends having “access by faith” into the grace wherein we stand (Rom 5:2). This is “joy” that is experienced “in believing” (Rom 15:13).

This is a rational joy that results from comprehending, discerning, and being able to see Him who is invisible (Heb 11:27). It springs from the confidence that is produced by persuasion, and the absence of uncertainty.

BELIEVING IN GOD

“ . . . believing in God.” Other versions read, “having believed with all his house,” NKJV “because he had come to believe in God,” NIV “that he had become a believer in God,” NRSV “having faith in God,” BBE “to be believers in God,” GWN “to belief in God,” NJB “that he with all his household

believed in God,” PNT “because they now trusted in God,” IE “resting on God,” WEYMOUTH and “that he believed in God [accepting and joyously welcoming what He had made known through Christ].” AMPLIFIED

Here is a description of converts that is not common: “believing in God.” Paul uses this same description in his letter to Titus: “ This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). Jesus also used this language to His disciples when He said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God , believe also in me” (John 14:1). It appears to me that, as regards our status in Christ, believing in God has been greatly understated – even treated as though it was something short of what is required. The conversion of the Gentiles is reported by saying they “are turned unto God ” (Acts 15:19). Paul’s apostleship involved turning men “from Satan unto God ” (Acts 26:18). Paul declared to both Jews and Gentiles “that they should repent and turn to God ” (Acts 26:20).

Peter put this kind of believing in a proper perspective, when he told believers it was through Jesus that they believed in God. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God , that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Pet 1:18-21).

The Purpose for Salvation Cannot Be Invalidated

In the sense in which Peter wrote, believing in God is something we are enabled to do by Jesus Christ, through whose blood we have been redeemed.

To excuse recalcitrance, disobedience, hesitancy to obey, and defaulting to the flesh is nothing more than yielding to the devil’s reasoning. To state that believers are just like Israel, and that they have similar propensities to walk in their own ways, is to deny the fundamental change that is wrought in the new birth.

Further, God raised His Son from the dead and gave Him glory in order that our faith and hope might be in God . That means that where faith and hope in God is lacking, the purpose of redemption has not been fulfilled in the individual. This perfectly coincides that the stated objective of Jesus, to “bring us to God ” (1 Pet 3:18). However men may choose to explain why professing Christians fail to “live NOT unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again,” such a circumstance contradicts the revealed purpose of Christ’s death (2 Cor 5:15). There is no argument, however astute and filled with Scripture, that can support such a postulate. After all of the arguments have been presented for God being obligated to save forever those who do not actually live “for Him” NIV who died for them, such a thing necessitates a salvation that is different than the One for which Christ died.

To excuse recalcitrance, disobedience, hesitancy to obey, and defaulting to the flesh is nothing more than yielding to the devil’s reasoning. To state that believers are just like Israel , and that they have similar propensities to walk in their own ways, is to deny the fundamental change that is wrought in the new birth. In the book of Acts we have examples of real conversions. In the epistles we have doctrines delivered to real believers. When sin surfaced among believers, they were told to cease from it (1 Cor 15:34). They were admonished to put off the inclinations of “the old man” (Rom 9:13; Eph 4:22), “lay aside” sins and weights (Heb 12:1), and perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1). The reason for these admonitions is the reality of salvation, not a theory of salvation. In the salvation of God, there is no allowance for the continuance of sin, and you must embrace such a notion. Rather, men are “freed from sin” (Rom 6:6,18,22). Those who “cannot cease from sin” and have “forsaken the right way,” are likened to “natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed,”

who “speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption” (2 Pet 2:12-15). However you view it, that is not good.

No person of sound mind would contend that any sinner can be saved without turning to God and believing and obeying the Gospel of Christ. The very same reasoning that leads to that conclusion, also demands a continuance in the faith, and a refusal to again be dominated by sin.

A MOVE BY THE MAGISTRATES

“ 35 And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. 36 And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.”

Paul and Silas, and no doubt the rest of the prisoners, spent the remainder of the night in the prison complex – with the doors removed and their shackles detached. We assume that Paul and Silas remained in the place occupied by the jailer and his family, probably continuing to open the truth to the household.

THE NEXT DAY

“And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go.” Other versions read, “sent their officers,” NKJV “sent their policemen,” NASB “sent the police.” NSRV

The city officials sent the ones charged with maintaining the order in the city with a special message for the jailer. We are not told what prompted this move, but we can surely reason it out at the higher level. If “salvation is of the Lord” (Jonah 2:9), and He is the one that gives “deliverance” (Ezra 9:13), commanding it when He sees fit (Psa 44:4), then this was the result of His doing. He is the One who turned the hearts of the magistrates, like He turns the heart of the king, which is “in His hand” (Prov 21:1). It is declared, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD ” (Prov 16:1) – and both are involved in this text. It has even been revealed that God has turned the heart of some to hate His people: “ He turned their heart to hate his people , to deal subtly with his servants” (Psa 105:25). Then, when His people were carried away captive, “He made them also to be pitied of all those that carried them captives” (Psa 106:46). This is the God who is at work in our text, and all of this is on order to the fulfillment of His purpose, and the display of His glory.

The determination to release these men was made by the same ones who decided that they should be thrown into prison. It was not a higher court that overthrew the decision of a lower court. Who but God can work in such a marvelous and orderly manner, moving men to reverse their own judgment!

THE PRISON KEEPER TOLD PAUL

“ And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go: now therefore depart, and go in peace.”

Notice how the jailer at once speaks to Paul, knowing that he was the one God had placed in charge. He also was continuing to operate within the framework of the law, and Paul had made no suggestion that he do otherwise. Although he had been justified by God, and freed from the dominion of sin, the jailer was still obedient to those who were over him. The Gospel he had heard, and the fellowship he had with Paul and Silas had not led him to the conclusion that he was no longer responsible to those who were over him. The Gospel still does not lead men to that conclusion. It is only at the point that there is a clash between the civil law and Divine requirements that objections are in order.

PAUL DOES NOT OVERLOOK THE MATTER

“ 37 But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out. 38 And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.”

We are now exposed to the practicality of a spiritual mind. We will also see the kind of liberty that walking in the Spirit and living unto the Lord brings.

PAUL’S RESPONSE

“But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.”

Beaten Openly and Uncondemned

Other versions read, “beaten us openly, uncondemned Romans,” NKJV “beat us in public without trial, men who are Romans,” NASB and “They have given us who are Romans a public whipping without judging us.” BBE

Some trials and abuse are private – like the night-time trial of Jesus before Caiaphas, and the summoning of false witnesses against Him (Mk 14:54-66). When the Jewish council beat the apostles, they also did it privately, and not before the people (Acts 5:40).

One might ask why Paul did not make this point prior to the beating he and Silas sustained. At that time, there was an awareness that they had been preaching the Gospel, and had cast a spirit out of a woman. It appears that he

The thing to note here is that it is to the advantage of Kingdom laborers to be aware of potential advantages that may be available to them. These are not things in which we are to trust. However, they are a part of the world that we can “use,” while not abusing it .

sought to do nothing that would detract from what they had been doing, as though personal interests and welfare were more important at the time. Thus, it appears, he waits for a more appropriate occasion to register this complaint, removing all doubt that he was driven by purely self-interests.

Further, an injustice had been done, and at this time, after the abuse, that would be more readily apparent. Now, it would be more clear that their accusers thought nothing of violating the law they professed to honor, in order to carry out their own private intentions.

Being Romans

Romans were protected from abuse by civil law. Matthew Henry gives the following remarks on this subject. “Now both the *lex Procia* and the *lex Sempronia* did expressly forbid *liberum corpus Romani civis, virgis aut aliis verberibus caedi* — the free body of a Roman citizen to be beaten with rods or otherwise. Roman historians give instances of cities that had their charters taken from them for indignities done to Roman citizens.” MATTHEW HENRY COMMENTARY Cicero wrote, “It is a transgression of the law to bind a Roman citizen: it is wickedness to scourge him.” *Orat. pro Rabirio*

Thus the accusers of Paul and Silas, motivated by their own greed, had broken the law. They had charged the men of God with being Jews, not taking the time to ensure that they were not Roman citizens. Apparently they found it difficult to think of them as being Romans, according to earthly jurisdiction. Some time later, when Paul was being bound with thongs in preparation for being “examined by scourging,” he asked a centurion that was standing by, “Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?” (Acts 22:25). After reporting the situation to “the chief

captain,” Paul was asked if he was, indeed, “a Roman.” Paul said he was, confessing that he was “freeborn,” or a natural born citizen, being of Tarsus.

The thing to note here is that it is to the advantage of Kingdom laborers to be aware of potential advantages that may be available to them. These are not things in which we are to trust. However, they are a part of the world that we can “use,” while not abusing it (1 Cor 7:31).

Let Them Come Themselves

Other versions read, “let them come themselves and bring us out,” NASB “escort us out,” NIV “take us out themselves,” NRSV “lead us out,” NAB “to release us,” NLT and “conduct us out.”
AMPLIFIED

If anyone had cause for shame, it was the magistrates who had proceeded with the beating and imprisoning of Paul and Silas, and doing so without a fair hearing, which Roman Law required. In addition, they had not inquired concerning their citizenship, but had proceeded on the basis of assumption, giving more credit to the accusers than was proper according to civility in general, and Roman Law in particular.

Throughout Scripture, God has revealed His hatred of law-breaking, a lack of justice, and intruding upon others.

God’s Intolerance of Injustice

Throughout Scripture, God has revealed His hatred of law-breaking, a lack of justice, and intruding upon others. In the days of Noah, the description of the world was that of the ultimate intrusion upon others: “The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence . And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth. And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them ; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen 6:11-13). It is expressly stated that He hates the soul that loves violence (Psa 11:5).

Under the Law, injustice was strictly forbidden. “Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment ” (Lev 19:15, 35; Deut 16:19; 24:17). In delineating the curses of the Law it was written, “Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and widow . And all the people shall say, Amen” (Deut 27:19).

The Psalmist spoke of God rising up in defense of those who were unjustly oppressed. “For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the LORD; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him” (Psa 12:5). **Asaph** challenged the leaders of the people, “How long will ye judge unjustly , and accept the persons of the wicked? Sela. Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked” (Psa 82:2-4). **Solomon** wrote, “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just , even they both are abomination to the LORD” (Prov 17:15). An unjust man is also “an abomination to the just” (Prov 29:127).

The prophets thundered out against injustice in the land. “Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place” (Jer 22:3). Behold how pointedly they spoke: “Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat : ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right ” (Amos 5:11-12).

God spoke to **Israel** about preparing for His salvation. “Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice : for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed. Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it, and keepeth his hand from doing any evil” (Isa 56:1-2).

In commending **Abraham** , God said, “For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment ; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which He hath spoken of him” (Gen 18:19).

It is also written of **David** “And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people” (2 Sam 8:15).

The Queen of Sheba said of Solomon , “Blessed be the LORD thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel: because the LORD loved Israel for ever, therefore made he thee king, to do judgment and justice ” (1 Kgs 10:9).

When **Daniel** told Nebuchadnezzar of the impending judgment that would cause him to lose his mind for seven years, and be among the beasts, he added these words “Wherefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable unto thee, and break off thy sins by righteousness, and thine iniquities by showing mercy to the poor ; if it may be a lengthening of thy tranquillity” (Dan 4:27).

Oppression and Injustice in Religion

Injustice is always wrong, but never more so when it takes place within the professed church. As if it was not enough that history is cluttered with the persecution of the righteous by governments and heathen nations, believers have been oppressed by their own fellows. There are Christian institutions that have treated believers in an unjust manner, doing so in the name of the institution, as though that justified maligning the godly. Countless numbers of faithful preachers have suffered at the hands of men called “elders,” and church boards. It is all conveniently excused in the interest of the betterment of the institution, but it is still wrong. Of course, God is going to avenge all such oppression.

When Defense Is In Order

The determination of the propriety of standing in defense of one’s self is not something that can be decided by rules or procedures. First of all, it can only be done when one is actually living unto the Lord, devoting the whole of their life to Him, and active in doing His will. Second, spiritual perception must dictate the action. If the cause of Christ is subject to disdain, put at a disadvantage by the injustice, or the name of the Lord blasphemed, then it is proper to consider such a defense.

Paul defended himself against who misrepresented what he was preaching (Rom 3:7-8). He defended himself against those who questioned his apostleship (1 Cor 9:1-23). He also defended himself against the false charges brought against him by the Jews in a civil court (Acts 24:12-21). In none of those cases, as well as in the text before us, was Paul advancing his own person, or seeking a worldly advantage.

THE MAGISTRATES FEARED

“And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans.”

These men did not fear God, but they did fear their government; thus Paul, after a godly sort, took advantage of that fear. He did much the same thing when he was hauled before the Jewish council on erroneous charges. When he

Just as in our text, Paul was wise enough to take advantage of the situation, and do so in a godly manner. It is good for those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord to know how to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without

perceived that his accusers were a mixed group of Sadducees and Pharisees, he knew they were actually divided among themselves on theological matters. The account is found in Acts 23:6-10. This is the text from the Amplified Bible. “But Paul, when he perceived that one part of them were Sadducees and the other part Pharisees, cried out to the council (Sanhedrin), Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; it is with regard to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am indicted and being judged. So when he had said this, an angry dispute arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the whole [crowded] assemblage was divided [into two factions]. For the Sadducees hold that there is no resurrection, nor angel nor spirit, but the Pharisees declare openly and speak out freely, acknowledging [their belief in] them both. Then a great uproar ensued, and some of the scribes of the Pharisees’ party stood up and thoroughly fought the case, [contending fiercely] and declaring, We find nothing evil or wrong in this man. But if a spirit or an angel [really] spoke to him—? Let us not fight against God! And when the strife became more and more tense and violent, the commandant, fearing that Paul would be torn in pieces by them, ordered the troops to go down and take him forcibly from among them and conduct him back into the barrack.”

Just as in our text, Paul was wise enough to take advantage of the situation, and do so in a godly manner. It is good for those who labor in the vineyard of the Lord to know how to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without” (Col 4:5).

Too often, professing Christians do not fulfill this word, choosing to remain simple about life, and therefore being put at an even greater disadvantage. They are unable to avoid dangers or recognize opportunities. Walking in wisdom toward those who are unbelievers not only involves giving them no occasion to blaspheme, but also not allowing them to put the believer at a greater disadvantage than is necessary.

THEY CAME AND BESOUGHT THEM

“ 39 And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.” Other versions read, “pleaded with them . . . and asked them,” NKJV “appealed to them . . . they kept begging them,” NASB “appease them . . . requesting them,” NIV “apologized to them . . . and asked them,” NRSV and “[striving to appease them by entreaty] apologized to them . . . and asked them.” AMPLIFIED

It appears from the text that these men feared Paul and Silas would press charges against them, making a kind of public spectacle of their legal blunder. That, however, was not the purpose of the men of God.

How the countenance, demeanor, and words of these men had changed! All of their legal authority was of no comfort to them now. They, like the centurion who had besought Jesus, knew they were men “under authority” (Matt 8:9). They had violated a precept of their own law, and were well aware of the consequences of such an action. Behind the scenes, however, the Lord had turned their hearts and put fear into them. Furthermore, He did it through the words of His servant, Paul, who had demanded that they themselves come and release them, escorting them from the prison. This would be a public admission of their wrongdoing, yet would not be pressed any further by the apostle.

The wisdom of this action is seen in the fact that it would diminish the possibility of further disruption by the authorities. They would not be easily disposed to come against Paul and Silas again after this humiliating setback.

There is one other thing that I see here that is refreshing to consider. When a man’s ways please

the Lord, “He maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov 16:7). Often, as in this text, He will come to the defense of such a person within a civil context. The extent to which the Lord comes to the aid of those who live by faith can scarcely be imagined. He has been known to support them in famine (1 Kgs 17:4-6,9), put fear into the hearts of their enemies (2 Kgs 3:16-23), shut the mouths of lions (Dan 6:22), and dispatch holy angels to keep them safe in a furnace (Dan 3:25). He can move a military man to receive the counsel of a young boy, and take measures to protect the apostle Paul (Acts 23:16-31). He can move barbarous people to treat shipwrecked foreigners with kindness, rather than exploit and plunder them (Acts 28:2).

However, those foolish souls who choose to “provoke” the Lord by their inconsideration and waywardness forfeit all of these advantages. It is still true, “They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy” (Jonah 2:8). The pure in heart gain all manner of advantage before the Lord. As for others, it is written, “With the pure thou wilt show Thyself pure; and with the froward Thou wilt show thyself froward” (Psa 18:26). All of this is being lived out in our text.

I do not believe enough is being said these days about such matters. While it is not at all fashionable to encourage people to commit sin, a feigned gospel is being preached that teaches them to view sin as something that does not take advantages from them. It is not seen as driving a wedge between men and God, separating them not only from His Person, but from the benefits that come from Him as well (Isa 59:2).

PAUL AND SILAS LEAVE

“40 And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.”

Where will Paul and Silas go after they are escorted out of the prison? Their action will further acquaint us with the priorities of the Kingdom of God.

WHAT THEY DID WHEN THEY DEPARTED

“And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia . . .” Other versions read, “After Paul and Silas came out of prison, they went to Lydia’s house,” NIV and “leaving the prison, they went to Lydia’s home.” NRSV

The Philippian jailer had somewhat the same experience as the Ethiopian eunuch. The one who was used to convert him was suddenly taken from him.

The Philippian jailer had somewhat the same experience as the Ethiopian eunuch. The one who was used to convert him was suddenly taken from him. The difference here is that a cluster of believers was located in the very city in which the jailer lived. I do not doubt that Paul and Silas made the man aware of the brethren. It is even possible that he and his house went with them to Lydia’s home.

It appears from this text that the house of Lydia was a kind of base of operation during the stay of Paul and Silas in Philippi. As was the custom of those who were “workers together with God,” they preferred the consistent company of the saints.

When Peter and John were released by the Jewish council, “they went to their own company” – the believers in Jerusalem (Acts 4:23). When Peter was miraculously delivered from prison, “he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12). When Paul came to Ptolemais, “he greeted the brethren, and abode with them one day” (Acts 21:7). When he came to Caesarea, he stayed at the house of Phillip (Acts 21:8). When Apollos went into the region of Achaia, it is written, “And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia,

“the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).

It is truly “good and pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psa 133:1-3). That is more than a mere saying, or goal. It is a reality that is brought about because the brethren know of, and have embraced, the realities declared in Ephesians: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:4-6). This is why Paul and Silas, like other laborers, gravitated to those of “like-precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1). When such a preference is not apparent, both the legitimacy and effectiveness of the purported ministry is questionable.

THEY COMFORTED THEM AND DEPARTED

“ . . . and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.” Other versions read, “encouraged them, and departed,” NKJV “when they had encouraged the brothers and sisters there, they departed,” NRSV “exhorted them and departed,” RSV “gave them comfort, and went away,” BBE “encouraged them once more. Then they left town,” NLT “preached to them once more before leaving town,” LIVING and “they warned and urged and consoled and encouraged them and departed.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “comforted” is pregnant with meaning. It is a Kingdom word that speaks of a Kingdom concept and necessity. In referring to the progress of the early church, it is written that they “were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied” (Acts 9:31). Thus “comfort” is seen as both an activity and the environment in which the growth that characterizes the Kingdom is realized.

The Greek root word from which “comforted” is translated (**parakale,w**). is used twenty-one times in the book of Acts. It has a very broad lexical meaning : “to address, speak to . . . exhortation, entreaty, instruction . . . admonish, . . . enjoin a thing,” THAYER “earnestly ask, implore . . . urge, encourage,” FRIBERG “appeal to,” UBS and “strengthen.” LEH

The root meaning of this word is to “call to one’s side.” THAYER The idea is that “comfort” is something that is very personal. The one doing the comforting identifies with the people, aiming to bring certain advantages to them. There is also the idea of moving them in the right direction, or putting them into the path of blessing. In Scripture, “comfort” does not necessarily mean the ones being comforted are experiencing pain or discomfort. It does presume that they require help, assistance, and clarity of vision. In other words, being in the world, they are in a place of jeopardy that requires exhortation, admonition, direction, and consolation – all of which are wrapped up in the word “comfort.”

Below are a few of the texts from the book of Acts in which the word is used as it is in our text. I have accented the English word that is used, and underlined objective of the action.

- **SEPARATION FROM A WAYWARD GENERATION.** “And with many other words did he testify and exhort , saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation ” (Acts 2:40).
- **HOLDING ON TO THE LORD.** “Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord ” (Acts 11:23).
- **CONTINUING IN THE FAITH, AND ENTERING THROUGH TRIBULATION.** “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God ” (Acts 14:22).

The epistles mention this word sixty-one times. Some of its uses are provided below, with the same accents as shown above.

• **PRESENT YOUR BODIES TO GOD.** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God , which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1).

• **NOTE THOSE CAUSING DIVISION AND OFFENSE.** “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them ” (Rom 16:17).

• **NO DIVISION.** “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you ; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment ” (1 Cor 1:10).

• **BE RECONCILED TO GOD.** “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God ” (2 Cor 5:20).

• **DO NOT RECEIVE THE GRACE OF GOD IN VAIN.** “We then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain ” (2 Cor 6:1).

• **WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING.** “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called ” (Eph 4:1).

• **PLEASE GOD IN AN ABOUNDING MANNER.** “Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more ” (1 Thess 4:1).

• **WARN, COMFORT, AND BE PATIENT.** “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men ” (1 Thess 5:14).

• **MAKE SUPPLICATIONS, PRAYERS, INTERCESSIONS AND THANKSGIVING.** “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Tim 2:1-2).

brethren, suffer the word of exhortation ” (Heb 13:22).

• **ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS.** “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul ” (1 Pet 2:11).

• **FEED THE FLOCK OF GOD.** “The elders which are among you I exhort , who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you , taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet 5:1-2).

• **CONTEND FOR THE FAITH.** “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints ” (Jude 1:3).

Notice that none of these texts deal with the personal crises or trials of individuals. We have no idea what personal difficulties or challenges any of those meeting in Lydia's house were having. The same characteristic is found in all of the writings to the churches. The apostles did not emphasize extensive involvement with people at the detailed level. This, of course, is in sharp contrast to the manner of contemporary religion, with all of its specialists and programs.

Now, there is a reason for the manner in which “comfort” was ministered in a more general way. Salvation comes with a vast array of spiritual resources. There is no essential need of man that is not addressed by reconciliation to God. The salvation of God is specifically and thoroughly adapted for those who are living on the earth. It is tailored for those who are in the world, yet not of it – who experience oppositions, trials, friction, and hardships that occur in “this present evil world.”

There is access to God that belongs to everyone who is in Christ Jesus (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12). Because of this, grace can be obtained to give help in the time of need. Every person who is in Christ is “complete in Him” (Col 2:10). There are no essential resources outside of Him. There is no addendum to Jesus, nor has He joined in affinity with something or someone else who also supplies needed resources. Everything that does not originate with Him, yet comes in His name, is nothing more than a delusion. If any person leans on a humanly conceived plan or procedure, it will prove to be harmful, and will pierce through their hand. What was said of Pharaoh, who appeared to have what Israel needed, may also be said of such plans. “Look! You are trusting in the staff of this broken reed, Egypt, on which if a man leans, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him” NKJV (Isa 36:6).

The point is that when holy men of God comfort the saints, they deliver words relating to their association with the Lord. Their purpose is not to resolve personal difficulties that are not directly related to that association. I do understand that this is a volatile issue with some. This is largely owing to the careers, materials, and financial involvements related to the hawking of plans and procedures. However, all such plans will eventually bear this epitaph: “This also is vanity” (Eccl 2:1,15,21,26; 4:16; 7:6; 8:14).

Thus “comfort” is seen as both an activity and the environment in which the growth that characterizes the Kingdom is realized.

A Word of Caution

These words are not intended to encourage, or in any way approve of, the neglect of brethren who are in need – such as the “poor saints in Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26). Nor do they minimize the necessity of doing good to all men (Gal 6:10). When any believer sees his brother has need, he is not to shut up the bowels of compassion. He is rather to use his resources to relief such brethren (James 2:16-17; 1 John 3:17-18). My aim here is to confirm that this is not the primary work of the saints, and is not to be approached as though it was.

CONCLUSION

Thus we come to the conclusion of the initial ministry of Paul and Silas in Philippi – a ministry to which Paul was called. If you were to assess this ministry according to an institutional agenda, it would not be impressive. There really was not much on which an organization or ministry, as ordinarily perceived, could be built.

- No one met them when they arrived, even though Paul had a vision of a man in Macedonia crying out, “Come over into Macedonia, and help us.”
- Paul and company made a trip to Philippi, and again they did not encounter anyone who appeared to be in quest of the Lord, or was in any way seeking spiritual assistance.
- After remaining in Philippi for some days, they learned of a place of prayer to which people went on the Sabbath day. They went to that place – by a river – on the Sabbath.
- When they arrived at the place of prayer, there was a group of women who regularly resorted there. There was not man present, even though Paul’s vision was of a man calling out.

- Paul and Silas spoke to the women, during which time at least one of them listened intently to him – Lydia by name, a seller of purple.
- The Lord opened this woman’s heart so she could respond to the message Paul delivered.
- Lydia and her household were baptized.
- Lydia asked Paul to evaluate whether or not she had been faithful to the Lord. If so, she asked him and his company to abide in her house.
- Some time later, when Paul and Silas were returning to the place of prayer, they encountered a woman who was possessed by a spirit of divination. She followed them, shrieking out that they were servants of the most high God, and had come to show them a way of salvation. She was a slave girl, and brought considerable income to her masters through her soothsaying.
- The woman continued following Paul and Silas, crying out the same words, and causing Paul to be grieved, or vexed, within.
- It was then that Paul spoke to the spirit of divination, commanding it to come out of the woman. The spirit immediately left her.
- Now that she could no longer divine, or prognosticate, the source of her master’s livelihood was gone. Angered with the whole incident, her masters laid their hands on Paul and Silas, and dragged them into the city square, putting them before the magistrates.
- They charged Paul and Silas with causing trouble in the city, and demanding that the people do things that were forbidden by Roman law.
- The magistrates, yielding to the owners of this slave girl, commanded that Paul and Silas be beaten with rods many times, and then had them thrown into prison.
- While in the inner dungeon, with their feet in stocks, Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises to God – it was at the midnight hour, and the other prisoners heard them.
- In response to their prayers and praise, heaven sent a great earthquake, which was very focused. It resulted in the whole prison being shaken, but not destroyed. All of the doors were opened, and all of the prisoner’s shackles fell off.
- Upon being wakened, the jailer saw all of the doors opened, and surmised that the prisoners had all escaped. Knowing that he would be held in account for them, he drew his sword and prepared to kill himself.
- Paul saw him, and cried out with a loud voice to do himself no harm. All of the prisoners were still there.
- The jailer called for a light to confirm that situation, then came directly to Paul and Silas. Falling down before them, he asked what he had to do to be saved.
- Paul declared that he should believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and then he would be saved, including those in his house.
- Paul then spoke the word of the Lord to the jailer and all of his house.
- The same hour of the night, in confirmation of his repentance, the jailer washed the wounds of Paul and Silas, and was then baptized, together with all that were in his house.
- The jailer then brought Paul and Silas into his living quarters, placing a meal before them, and believing in God with all of his house.
- The next morning, the magistrates changed their minds about Paul and Silas, and sent word to the jailer to release them.

- When the jailer told Paul, he remonstrated, saying that they had been condemned and beaten publicly without the required trial, reminding him that they were Romans, and had been dealt with illegally. He demanded that the magistrates personally come and escort them, from the prison.

- Upon coming, the magistrates pleaded with them to leave the city.

- Paul and Silas then went to the house of Lydia, comforted the brethren, and departed. Thus concluded this part of their mission.

Can you conceive of this all being reported as a successful mission at a religious convention, or being written up in a brotherhood journal. And yet, the Lord had this written for believers of all ages to read!

Does this sound like the kind of beginning a successful and God-honoring church would have? Who could imagine this being set forth as a church-planting methodology? Yet, this was the beginning of the church at Philippi, which is represented as being distinctive, fellowshiping “in the Gospel,” and continuing in that fellowship, from the very first day they heard it (Phil 1:5).

Does this sound like the kind of beginning a successful and God-honoring church would have? Who could imagine this being set forth as a church-planting methodology?

This is a slice of very real spiritual life – life that is produced and maintained by the holy Spirit. It reveals a number of things worth pondering.

- The Spirit does not always lead in apparent ways.
- Although it is planned out very particularly in heaven, the work of the Lord requires considerable effort on the part of those involved in it.
- Some doors never become apparent until we look for them.
- Those who respond to the Gospel may be quite different than what we first envisioned.
- When God opens a person’s heart, they respond with obedience.
- Those who believe do not balk at any Divine requirement.
- Sometimes it is easier to cast out a demon than to deal with mortals.
- The servants of God are often treated unjustly.
- Faith can produce prayer and praise in the midst of darkness and pain.
- God can change the entire situation in an instant, without any involvement from men at all.
- It is possible to stay in a place where you were once chained, but do so willingly without the chains.
- A person who is intent upon doing what is harmful to himself can be stopped with a word.
- It is possible for oppressors to suddenly become aware of who is really in charge.
- A person who truly repents will confirm it by what he does.
- Those who oppress us can be brought to plead with us.
- Freed souls prefer to be with God’s people.
- Faithful ministers bring advantages to the people of God.
- When the work is completed, it is time to go.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #72

TROUBLE IN THESSALONICA

17:1 “ Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. 4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. 5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. 6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. 8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go. 10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. 11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. 12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. 14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. 15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed. ” (Acts 17:1-15)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Having completed their initial mission to Philippi, Paul and company now move to another region, maintaining their focus on the mission to preach the Gospel to the region of Macedonia. As was their custom, they headed for the synagogue of the region, and commenced powerfully preaching Christ. Just as in other regions, certain of the Jews objected to their message, being moved with envy. Launching a campaign against Paul and Silas, their plans are frustrated because these Jews cannot find God's messengers. The brethren immediately

CONTENTS

- **THEY CAME TO THESSALONICA (17:1)**
- **PAUL WENT INTO THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE SABBATH (17:2-3)**
- **SOME OF THEM BELIEVED (17:4)**
- **THE JEWS WHICH BELIEVED NOT (17:4)**
- **THE CHARGES MADE AGAINST PAUL AND SILAS (17:6-9)**
- **THE BRETHERN COME TO THEIR AID (17:10)**
- **THE BEREANS WERE MORE NOBLE (17:11)**
- **MANY OF THEM BELIEVED (17:12)**
- **THE JEWS FROM THESSALONICA (17:13)**
- **THE BRETHERN ARE ALERT (17:14)**
- **THEY CONDUCTED PAUL TO ATHENS (17:15)**
- **CONCLUSION**

sent Paul and Silas away by night. Coming to Berea, they again entered into the synagogue. This time, however, they encountered Jews of more nobility. They examined what Paul and Silas were preaching, searching the Scriptures to see if what they were saying was really true. As a result, many of them believed. Upon hearing of this, the Jews from Thessalonica came, and again stirred up trouble.

RECORDED RESPONSES

To this point – a period covering approximately 30 years – there have been a variety of responses to the preaching of the Gospel. These reactions reveal the nature of the Gospel, as well as the nature of men. They confirm the power of the Gospel, which is the means used to reveal the nature of men as well as the intention of the Gospel of Christ. While you are no doubt familiar with these varied reactions, it is good to peruse them in the form of a cluster. In so doing the magnitude of what is made known in them becomes more evident.

- **PENTECOST (2:14-38)**. Those who gladly received the Word were baptized, and 3,000 were added.

- **IN THE TEMPLE (3:1-4:4)**. The Jewish authorities were provoked to anger and opposed them. Also, above 5,000 men believed at that time.

- **BEFORE THE COUNCIL (4:5-21)**. The word is rejected and Peter and John are threatened.

- **IN THE TEMPLE (5:21-25)**. No response recorded.

- **BEFORE THE COUNCIL (5:26-40)**. The word is rejected, the apostles are beaten, commanded to cease speaking in Jesus' name, and released.

• **STEPHEN IN THE SYNAGOGUE** (6:9-13). The people disputed with him. But could not resist his wisdom.

• **STEPHEN BEFORE THE COUNCIL** (7:3-59). His word was rejected, and he was stoned to death.

• **PHILIP TO SAMARIA** (8:5-13). The whole city believed and were baptized.

• **PHILIP TO THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH** (8:26-39). The eunuch believed and was baptized.

To this point – a period covering approximately 30 years – there have been a variety of responses to the preaching of the Gospel. These reactions reveal the nature of the Gospel, as well as the nature of men.

• **PHILIP PREACHING FROM AZOTUS TO CAESAREA** (8:40). No record of the response.

• **SAUL IN THE SYNAGOGUE** (9:20-23). Those who heard him were amazed, he confounded the Jews, and they took counsel to kill him.

• **SAUL IN JERUSALEM** (9:29). His word was rejected, and the Grecians went about to slay him.

• **PETER TO CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSE** (10:34-48). The hearers believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized.

• **THE PREACHING OF THOSE SCATTERED BY THE PERSECUTION THAT AROSE OVER STEPHEN** (8:4; 11:19-21). A great number believed and turned to the Lord.

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF SALAMIS** (13:5). No response is recorded.

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS TO A GOVERNOR** (13:7-12). The governor believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

• **PAUL IN ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA** (13:16-52). The Gentiles asked to hear more, and were persuaded to continue in the grace of God. The unbelieving Jews rose up against them, and expelled them from their coasts.

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN A SYNAGOGUE IN ICONIUM** (14:1-5). A great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed, and the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas, making an attempt to have them stoned

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN THE REGION OF LYCAONIA** (14:6-19). The people think Paul and Barnabas are gods come down to earth, attempt to offer sacrifice to them, and Paul and Barnabas scarcely restrain them from doing so. Certain Jews came down and stoned Paul.

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN DERBE** (14:20-21). No response is recorded.

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN PERGA** (15:25). No response is recorded.

• **PAUL AND SILAS TO SOME WOMEN IN PHILIPPI** (16:13-15). The Lord opened Lydia's heart so she can attend to the word, she and her household believe, and Paul and Silas are welcomed into Lydia's home.

• **PAUL AND SILAS TO THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER** (16:31-34). The jailer is baptized, believing in God with all of his house.

Notice the divergence of the recorded responses – from hostility to the glad reception of the truth..

- Gladly received the word and were baptized.
- Opposition commenced.
- Many believed.
- Speakers threatened.
- Speakers beaten.
- Hearers dispute against what is said.
- People believed and are baptized.
- Hearers confounded and take counsel to kill the speaker.
- Hearers believe, receive the Spirit, and are baptized.
- A great number believe and turn to the Lord.
- The hearer believes. Being astonished at the doctrine heard.
- Hearers want to hear more.
- Some reject the word and expel the hearers from their coasts.
- Some hearers take counsel to stone the speakers.
- The hearers think the gods have come to visit them, and attempt to sacrifice to the speakers.
 - The heart of the hearer is opened by God, and she and her household are baptized.
 - A jailer washes the wounds of the speakers in his charge (bringing forth fruits meet for repentance), and is baptized, believing in God with all of his house.

It was the Gospel itself that produced these varied responses. All of the contradictory reactions were expressed under the influence of unbelief and the wicked one: opposing, disputing, threatening, beating, stoning, removing from their environment, and assigning the power of the speakers to their own false gods. All of the favorable responses were expressed under the influence of faith and the Spirit of God: gladly receiving, being baptized, believing, turning to the Lord, being impressed with the doctrine, wanting to hear more, bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, and believing in God.

In addition to these occasions, there are a number of instances where preachers and teachers ministered to the saints edifying, comforting, and admonishing them (9:32; 11:26; 14:22,28; 15:3,4,32,41; 16:5,40).

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

It seems to me that these reports are recorded in a manner that is intended to discourage the development of systems and stereotyped routines. At the same time, there is an evident accent on essential responses: i.e. receiving the Word, believing, turning to the Lord, and being baptized. However, none of these responses were the result of hearing a specified routine declared. Rather, they were the calculated effects of the Gospel, the working of the Lord, and the administration of the Holy Spirit. There were commands delivered (Acts 2:38; 3:19; 10:48; 16:31), but they were all within the framework of the Gospel of Christ, and the manifested interest of the hearers. In other words, men must learn to rely upon the Lord to produce valid responses through His Word and the Spirit. Those responses will not vary from person to person, but will be characterized by a certain consistency that brings glory to God. They will manifest a manner that will not make for confusion, but will rather reflect the mind of the Lord.

THEY CAME TO THESSALONICA

17:1 “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews.” Other versions read, “traveled through,” NASB “gone through,” BBE “journeyed through,” CSB and “took the road through.” NAB

The idea is that Paul and company did not linger in the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia. They were not their destination. Rather, the road on which they were traveling led through these locations. In his *Word Pictures*, A.T. Robertson observes, “They took the Egnatian Way, one of the great Roman roads from Byzantium to Dyrrachium (over 500 miles long) on the Adriatic Sea, opposite Brundisium and so an extension of the Appian Way.”

The trip to their intended destination was one of 75-85 miles – probably on foot. This would have made the journey one of approximately three-to-four days. A day’s journey is estimated to have been 20-25 miles by foot. References to “a day’s journey” are found in the following texts: Num 11:31; 1 Kgs 19:4; Jonah 3:4; Lk 2:44. A “sabbath day’s journey” is estimated to have been a little under one mile (Acts 1:12).

Once again, we see the relative absence of convenience in carrying out the work of the Lord. Whatever was required was simply done, whether it involved sailing across a body of water, or walking an extensive distance. Of course, this was also the manner of Jesus Himself, who moved about from place to place, covering an area approximately 150 miles from east to west, and 170 miles from north to south..

Yet, both Jesus and Paul took advantage of the conveniences available at the time. Jesus often took a boat and sailed across the sea of Galilee, rather than walking around it (Matt 8:23; 9:1; 14:13,32-33; 15:39). Paul apparently did not travel through the wastelands when it was not necessary, but took advantage of one of the great Roman roads available to him. The point is that when a person is devoted to the work of the Lord, that determination will move the person to do whatever is necessary to accomplish the work of God. As simplistic as that may appear, there are many souls who have not yet experienced such devotion.

Amphipolis was about thirty-two miles from Philippi, and three miles from the Aegean Sea, Apolloni was about thirty-two miles from Amphipolis. It is possible that they spent the nights in these cities, either traveling aggressively for one day between each of them, or two shorter days. I suspect the former is the way they traveled. It does not appear that a synagogue existed in either of these cities.

THEY ARRIVE AT THESSALONICA

“ . . . they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews.”

To Thessalonica (*eis Thessalonikên*). There was a synagogue here in this great commercial city, still an important city called Saloniki, of 70,000 population. It was originally called Therma, at the head of the Thermaic Gulf. Cassander renamed it Thessalonica after his wife, the sister of Alexander the Great. It was the capital of the second of the four divisions of Macedonia and finally the capital of the whole province. It shared with Corinth and Ephesus the commerce of the Aegean. One synagogue shows that even in this commercial city the Jews were not very numerous. As a political center it ranked with Antioch in Syria and Caesarea in Palestine. It was a strategic center for the spread of the gospel as Paul later said for it sounded (echoed) forth from Thessalonica throughout Macedonia and Achaia (1Thess 1:8). ROBERTSON’S WORD STUDIES

I assume from this statement that there was not a synagogue of the Jews in Amphipolis and Apolloni.

There is said to have been twenty-two Jewish synagogues at Thessalonica after the expulsion of

the Jews from Spain in the fifteenth century, and the number at the present time is stated to be thirty-six. PULPIT COMMENTARY

Although I have noted this in previous lessons, I want to again draw attention to how the Gospel was spread during those early days. Being moved along by the Holy Spirit, Paul first sought to establish the Gospel within the Jewish community – even though this was met with considerable resistance.

There are numerous accounts of Paul ministering in Jewish synagogues.

- **IN DAMASCUS** (Acts 9:20).
- **IN SALAMIS** (Acts 13:5).
- **IN ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA** (Acts 13:14).
- **IN ICONIUM** (Acts 14:1).
- **IN THESSALONICA** (Acts 17:1).
- **IN BEREIA** (Acts 17:10).
- **IN ATHENS** (Acts 17:17).
- **IN CORINTH** (Acts 18:4).
- **IN EPHESUS** (Acts 18:19; 19:8).

Inquiring Gentiles are also reported as being in the various synagogues, and they were generally receptive to the Gospel (Acts 13:42,48; 14:1; 17:4,12; 18:4).

Additionally, those who had believed on Christ were often found in the synagogues. In fact, when Saul of Tarsus launched a campaign against the disciples of Jesus, he looked for them in the synagogues (Act 9:2; 22:19; 26:11).

Thus we see some of the involvements in the Law being a “schoolmaster, to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24-26). The Law not only did this by defining and convicting of sin, but by also identifying the kind of Savior that would deliver men from sin. The Scriptures were central in the synagogues, and this made for more productive preaching. For example, such things as the resurrection of the dead would not be considered strange there, where the people were regularly exposed to Scripture.

However, in the heathen environment, where philosophy tended to dominate, the resurrection of the dead was something with which the people were not acquainted (Acts 17:18,32).

PAUL WENT INTO THE SYNAGOGUE ON THE SABBATH

“ 2 And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3 Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.”

As we consider Paul’s activities, we will learn much about him. First, we will see the message that was burning in his heart. He does not come as a consultant, or as one who can set everything in order. He is a proclaimer – one who has a message. Second, he gravitates to the place where some preparatory work has already been done – for the message of the Gospel presumes some knowledge on the part of the hearers. Third, he places a high priority on the Scriptures themselves, for they reveal things that cannot be gathered from any other source.

The synagogue provided an excellent environment in which to preach the Gospel. In his expressions concerning Jewish customs, Alfred Edersheim writes the following. “However, the chief

element in synagogue worship -- its central factor -- was not ceremonial or display but something which was of vital importance to the shaping of the subsequent life of the local churches upon which the synagogue was so influential. . . . **That element was the reading and exposition of Scripture.** Worship in the Early Church involved "Word-of-God" services. Ralph Martin very appropriately called the reading and exposition of Scripture 'the center of gravity of the synagogue's service, with the blessings and prayers gathered around it.' . . . The great historian J. Robert Teringo wrote, 'The fixed order of service began, after the customary greeting, with a prayer while the people remained standing facing the sacred Torah scroll. The reading of the law of Moses was next. The Torah scroll was taken from the chest and placed before a reader who read in the ancient Hebrew tongue and immediately translated it into Aramaic, the language of those days. A commentary was always added to this reading. Next, a portion was read from the books of the prophets and, again, immediately translated verse by verse. After a closing prayer, the service was concluded.'" SKETCHES OF JEWISH SOCIAL LIFE, CHAPTER 17

It is especially important to note these manners, developed by a people who were cultured by God Himself. While the Jews were by no means an ideal people, they were a chosen people. They provide us with what an emphasis upon God produces among the people. Although it may have degenerated into an inordinate attachment to the traditions of men, the manners still manifest the impact of a revealed religion. By its very nature, a revealed religion focuses on what has been revealed – and that is always a word.

AS HIS MANNER WAS

"And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them . . ." Other versions read, "as his custom was," NKJV "according to Paul's custom," NASB "as he generally did," BBE "according to his usual practice," CJB "as usual," GWN and "As he customarily did." NET

When the Jews came together in the synagogue, everything was not always ideal. However, there was an intellectual atmosphere in which affirmation, discussion, and an exchange of thought could take place. The synagogue was not an environment in which entertainment was featured, or mindless repetition.

Here we are exposed to the direction of Paul's life, and how it impacted his actions. While the emphasis of the commandment to keep the Sabbath was placed on resting and not working (Ex 20:10; 31:14-15; 35:2; Deut 5:14), that was not the stress of Paul. He saw that the intention of refraining from work was to apply oneself to the acquisition of the knowledge of God –even though the Sabbath commandment never actually said that. This commandment was not given to promote good health, as some suppose. While meeting in the synagogue was, for many Jews, a mere formality, for others, and especially Paul, it was a place to traffic in the things of God. It was also a place where there could be open dialog concerning Christ.

HE REASONED OUT OF THE SCRIPTURES

" . . . and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures . . ." Other versions read, "reasoned with them from the Scriptures," NASB "argued with them fro the Scriptures," NRSV "had discussions with them from the holy Writings," BBE "disputed with them by the Scriptures," GENEVA "discoursed with them from the Scriptures," MRD "entered into discussions with them from the scriptures," NAB "addressed them from the Scriptures," NET "developed the arguments from scripture for them," NJB and "opened the Scriptures to the people." LIVING

The Greek word translated "reasoned" is a large one, pregnant with meaning. The lexical definition of the word is, "to think different things with oneself, mingle thought with thought (cf. **dialogi,zomai**) ; to ponder, revolve in mind . . . to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss," THAYER

A.T. Robertson says of the word “reasoned,” “a verb in the active to select, distinguish, then to revolve in the mind, to converse (interchange of ideas), then to teach in the Socratic (“dialectic”) method of question and then simply to discourse, but always with the idea of intellectual stimulus. With these Jews and God-fearers Paul appealed to the Scriptures as text and basis of his ideas.”

ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

I want to emphasize that, although by no means a perfect environment, this is the kind of setting produced by a people who were chosen, taught, and cultured by God Almighty. They had a Law filled with details, which was given to them by the hands of Moses, with whom God spoke “mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches” (Num 12:8). That Law contained “a shadow of good things to come” (Heb 10:1). God “hewed them by the prophets” (Hos 6:5), delivering “the promises” to them. These were a people constantly exposed to the Word of God.

What kind of things were produced by God’s dealings with these people? Their’s was a religion that required thought – extensive thought. It was conducive to reasoning, discussion, and exposition. When the Jews came together in the synagogue, everything was not always ideal. However, there was an intellectual atmosphere in which affirmation, discussion, and an exchange of thought could take place. The synagogue was not an environment in which entertainment was featured, or mindless repetition.

I am sure that if Paul were able to return in the body and visit the average American church, it would have a stifling effect upon him. He would find sparse Scriptural affirmation or exposition, and would find little opportunity for discussion or profitable disputation. In other words, there would be little that would lead to the conclusion that professing Gentile Christians were actually partaking of the “root and fatness” of the Jewish “olive tree” (Rom 11:17). It is most unfortunate that the professed Christians of our time have allowed powerless religion to rise and remain prominent.

One More Thing

Reasoning is the kind of activity that assumes there is a central theme in Scripture – a common thread of thought that permeates “all Scripture.”

Reasoning is the kind of activity that assumes there is a central theme in Scripture – a common thread of thought that permeates “all Scripture.” Paul knows that “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev 19:10), and that the Scriptures in their entirety “testify” of Christ (John 5:39).

OPENING AND ALLEGING

“ . . . Opening and alleging . . .” Other versions read, “explaining and demonstrating,” NKJV “explaining and giving evidence,” NASB “explaining and proving,” NIV “saying to them clearly and openly,” BBE “explaining and showing,; CSB “opening and laying down,” DARBY “declaring and insinuating,” DOUAY “expounding and showing,” MRD “expounding and demonstrating,” NAB “clearly explained, pointing out,” WEYMOUTH “Explaining [them] and [quoting passages] setting forth and proving,” AMPLIFIED and “explaining and quoting passages.” PHILLIPS

This is a breakdown of what was involved in “reasoning with them out of the Scriptures.” Paul did not use the traditions of men as his basic postulate. He was not speaking in defense of some sectarian dogma. Scriptures were the subject matter, not the defense of a man-made theological position, or an established sect.

“Opening”

To “open” something means “to open (thoroughly) what has been closed . . . to cause to understand a thing . . . to rouse in one the faculty of understanding, or the desire of learning.” THAYER This has

to do with the mind: comprehending, discerning, and apprehending.

“Alleging”

To “allege” means to “set before in teaching . . . to explain,” THAYER and “expound, point out.” FRIBERG This involves setting the truth before the individual so that it can be seen with clarity and grasped.

A Fact Behind Opening and Alleging

When it comes to what has been revealed about Jesus Christ – “the record that God gave of His Son” (1 John 5:10) – understanding is imperative. Once the message of the Gospel has been heard, salvation makes no provision for remaining ignorant of it. If men, due to their own slothfulness and love for the world, choose to remain in the dark, they will be rendered incapable of understanding it. This is why Jesus said, “When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not , then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away that which was sown in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side” (Matt 13:19). Paul knew this, and therefore extended himself to put the Word of the kingdom within reach of his hearers – “opening and alleging.”

Professed preachers and teachers who do not do this have proved themselves to be “wicked and slothful servants” (Matt 25:26). Of course, such men do not have the Word of Christ dwelling richly within them (Col 3:16). In assuming the role of a spiritual leader, they have usurped the position, for God brings no such laborers into His vineyard.

THAT CHRIST MUST NEEDS HAVE SUFFERED

“ . . . that Christ must needs have suffered . . .” Other versions read, “had to suffer,” NKJV “it was necessary for Christ to suffer,” NRSV “It was necessary that Messiah should suffer,” RSV “Christ had to be put to death,” BBE “Christ was to suffer,” DOUAY “it was ordained that Christ should suffer,” NJB “it was needful that Christ should suffer,” WEB and “to prove the necessity for the death of Christ.” PHILLIPS

The phrase “must needs have suffered,” covers all of the adverse experiences Jesus had, which were brought to a culmination in His death. Prior to His death, Jesus told His disciples He would “suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed” (Matt 16:21) Again He said, “Likewise shall the Son of man suffer of them” (Matt 17:21). Mark refers to Jesus saying He would “suffer many things . . . and be rejected . . . and be killed” (Mk 8:31). Luke also says this (Lk 9:22). Toward the end of His ministry, Jesus accented that this was something that HAD to happen – not merely that it would happen: “But first must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation” (Luke 17:25). Speaking of His eminent death at the Last Supper Jesus said, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer” (Luke 22:15).

Christ’s Death Was a Commandment

Confirming the necessity of His suffering and death, Jesus told the people, “Therefore doth My Father love me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father” (John 10:17-18).

Following His death, when Jesus appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus, Jesus accented the necessity of His death when He told them, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (Luke 24:26). During the latter part of Paul’s ministry he testified, “That Christ should suffer” (Acts 26:23).

Born to Die

The book of Hebrews affirms that Jesus “was made a little lower than the angels FOR the suffering of death” (Heb 2:9). In fact, in order for Him to be the Captain of our salvation, He was “made perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10).

Divine Determination

In the beginning, when the Gospel was first preached, the necessity and ordination of Christ’s death was proclaimed with power. “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23). With insight, the assembled church prayed, “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:27-28).

Note What Was NOT Said

It is first important to note what Paul did NOT say. He did NOT say, “Jesus loved you so much He died for you” – or something similar to that. In fact, there is no public proclamation of the death of Jesus Christ that is so represented – not in all of Scripture. That (that Christ’s love was associated with His death) is a perspective that is given to the church alone – and there is absolute consistency in this matter (Gal 2:20; Eph 5:2,25; Rev 1:5).

The point here is that Jesus died because it was an appointment made in heaven. This was the ordained means through which men would be saved.

Why Was His Death Necessary?

The modern church has not done well in representing the reason for the death of Christ. Too often it appears to be viewed as the death of a martyr, or as though Jesus stepped in front of the impending wrath of God to stop it from falling upon us. It is quite true that there is an element of truth to this, but is by no means the whole of the matter, and should not be presented as though it was.

• **SIN HAD TO BE JUDGED BEFORE IT COULD BE REMOVED.** Thus it is written, “God . . . condemned sin in the flesh” [of His Son] . . . “He made Him to be sin for us . . . Christ redeemed us from the curse, being made a curse for us . . .” (Rom 8:3; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13). The righteous nature of God would not permit Him to overlook sin, or to simply exonerate the sinner by a Divine fiat or word.

• **OUR JUSTIFICATION REQUIRED HIS DEATH.** In order for men to be justified, or made righteous, the penalty for sin had to be paid by the death of Christ, in which He “put away sin” (Heb 9:26). Therefore we read, “being now justified by His blood” (Rom 5:9).

The modern church has not done well in representing the reason for the death of Christ. Too often it appears to be viewed as the death of a martyr, or as though Jesus stepped in front of the impending wrath of God to stop it from falling upon us. It is quite true that there is an element of truth to this, but is by no means the whole of the matter, and should not be presented as though it was.

HIS DEATH WAS REQUIRED FOR GOD TO BE JUST IN THE JUSTIFICATION OF SINNERS. Because of what was accomplished in Christ’s death, God can now be just, or righteous, in justifying sinners. “Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which

believeth in Jesus” (Rom 3:25-26).

• **THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS REQUIRED HIS DEATH.** The forgiveness of sins, or the elimination of the debt created by transgression, required the death of Jesus. Therefore we read, “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph 1:7; Colo 1:14).

• **IN ORDER FOR US TO BE BEGOTTEN FROM DEATH IN SIN, HE HAD TO BE THE FIRST BEGOTTEN FROM THE DEAD.** The resurrection of Christ is essential to our salvation, which was necessarily preceded by His death. Therefore we read that Jesus is, “the Firstborn among many brethren. . . the firstborn from the dead . . . the first begotten from the dead ” (Rom 8:29; Col 1:18; Rev 1:5).

• **SATAN HAD TO BE DESTROYED IN THE REALM IN WHICH SALVATION WOULD BE PERFECTED.** The realm into which the saved would be raised is “the heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). That is where all of the resources required for life are obtained (Eph 1:3). In order for men to be saved, their arch-enemy must be destroyed, and rendered impotent and ineffective in that domain, and ultimately cast into the lake of fire. Thus we read, “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ” (Heb 2:14).

• **PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS HAD TO BE PLUNDERED.** In order for the spiritual powers that dominated the world to be spoiled, or plundered, Jesus had to die, for it is in the cross that this took place. “. . . His cross; and having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it” [His cross] (Col 2:14-15).

• **PEACE HAD TO BE MADE.** All of the things accomplished in Christ’s death on the cross were requisite to us having peace with God. Therefore we read, “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross ” (Col 1:20).

• **DEATH HAD TO BE CONQUERED.** There could be no salvation without the defeat of death, which had world-wide dominion throughout all time. It was in Christ’s death and consequent resurrection that the death blow was dealt to death itself. Therefore we read, “. . . our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death ” (2 Tim 1:10).

• **THERE HAD TO BE A BASIS FOR RECONCILIATION.** Salvation also has to do with being reconciled to God, so that there is no more enmity between Him and man. That too was accomplished in the death of Christ. “And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death ” (Col 1:21-22).

• **THE SINS OF PAST SAINTS HAD TO BE ADDRESSED.** The salvation of God required Him to address the sins of past believers, justly removing them and making the people righteous. We could not receive the inheritance until they were made perfect. This too was accomplished in Christ’s death. Therefore we read, “And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).

• **THE INAUGURATION OF THE NEW COVENANT REQUIRED HIS DEATH.** In all of its grandeur, the New Covenant could not be enacted until a death was accomplished that satisfied God. That death was accomplished by Jesus, who Himself is the Executor of the covenant. “For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the Testator ” (Heb 9:16).

• **HIS DEATH WAS REQUIRED IN ORDER FOR HIM TO BRING US TO**

GOD. The objective of salvation is to bring men to God, from whom sin has separated them. This could only be accomplished after Jesus died. Therefore we read, “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh , but quickened by the Spirit” (1 Pet 3:18).

I do not mean to over accentuate this matter, but it is not right to present the death of Christ as only an expression of Divine love. The love of both God and Christ did enter into the reason for Christ’s death. However, when it comes to the exposition of that death the foundational reasons for it were the nature of God and the nature of sin. The love of God could never have been actually realized by men until those two matters were addressed in such a manner as allowed for the justice of God to be satisfied, and the originator and power of sin nullified. Indeed, as Paul opened and alleged, “Christ must needs have suffered” – not merely because it was predicted, but because it was morally and spiritually necessary. In my judgment, enough has not been made of this in contemporary Christian circles.

THAT CHRIST MUST NEEDS HAVE . . . RISEN FROM THE DEAD

“ . . . and risen again from the dead . . . ” Other versions read, “and rise again from the dead,” NKJV “to rise from the dead,” NRSV “and come back to life again,” BBE “risen up from among the dead,” DARBY and “rise from death.” IE

The resurrection of Jesus was not merely something that took place –it was an event that HAD to take place. This is true not only because the prophets affirmed He would rise from the dead. The salvation of God required that He rise from the dead. Salvation postulates a risen and exalted Christ. If this did not take place, there could have been no redemption, no reconciliation, no justification, and men would still be in their sins.

• **VALIDATED THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CHRIST’S DEATH.** God Himself had to be satisfied by Christ’s death, and confirm it by raising Him from death. “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many ; for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out his soul unto death : and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors ” (Isa 53:11-12).

• **DECLARED HIM TO BE THE SON OF GOD WITH POWER.** In order for a Savior with power to be declared, the “last enemy,” which is death (1 Cor 15:26), had to be conquered. “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead ” (Rom 1:4).

• **BEGOTTEN TO A LIVING HOPE BY THE RESURRECTION.** Spiritual begetting, or the new birth, is accomplished by the infusion of resurrection life. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ” (1 Pet 1:3).

• **MAKES BAPTISM EFFECTIVE.** It order for men to be raised up to walk in newness of life, a new kind of life had to exist – resurrection life. “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ ” (1 Pet 3:21).

• **RAISED FOR OUR JUSTIFICATION.** The justification of sinners postulates a living Christ who was once dead. “Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification ” (Rom 4:25).

• **PRODUCES NEWNESS OF LIFE.** The newness of life into which we are raised is the life of the risen Christ, “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that

like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life ” (Rom 6:4).

• **BRINGS TO MEN ENABLING POWER.** The life of faith can only be lived in resurrection power. “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, . . .” (Phil 3:10). “. . . the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe . . . which He wrought in Christ, when He raised him from the dead . . . (Eph 1:19-20).

The keys of death could only be received by One who had conquered death by entering its domain, and Himself coming back from it.

CONFIRMED JESUS HAS THE KEYS OF HELL (HADES) AND DEATH. The keys of death could only be received by One who had conquered death by entering its domain, and Himself coming back from it. “I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death ” (Rev 1:18).

• **CONFIRMED THAT WE ALSO SHALL BE RAISED FROM THE DEAD.** Salvation is not complete until our bodies are raised from the dead. That situation requires that Jesus be the first fruits of them that slept (1 Cor 15:20). “Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus . . .” (2 Cor 4:14).

• **GAVE ASSURANCE THAT HE WILL JUDGE THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS.** God determined that only one who has defeated death would judge the world in righteousness. “Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead ” (Acts 17:31).

• **IS THE GUARANTEE THAT MEN CAN RECEIVE THE SURE MERCIES OF DAVID.** Salvation is only as sure as the Living Christ. “And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead , now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David ” (Acts 13:34).

• **THE RESURRECTION IS A SIGN CONFIRMING JESUS IS WHO HE SAID HE WAS.** The resurrection of Christ proves that He is the chosen of God.; “But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth .” (Mat 12:39-40).

• **CONFIRMED JESUS WAS SUPERIOR TO DEATH, AND THAT IT COULD NOT HOLD HIM.** The only one who can save us is the One over whom death has no power. “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that He should be holden of it ” (Acts 2:24). “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him ” (Rom 6:9).

• **WE ARE SAVED BY HIS RESURRECTION LIFE.** It is what Jesus is doing now that saves us, and that is based upon what He accomplished in His death and resurrection. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life ” (Rom 5:10).

• **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS IS THE “RATHER” ASPECT OF THE GOSPEL.** Because of its validation and confirmation, the resurrection of Christ is pivotal to our salvation. “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again , who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).

• **THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS VALIDATES THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL.** True preaching and teaching does not consist of lifeless routines and

procedures. It must be supported by a living Savior. “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain ” (1 Cor 15:13-14).

• **THE RESURRECTION CONFIRMS THAT THOSE IN CHRIST ARE NO LONGER IN THEIR SINS.** There can be no forgiveness if Christ is not risen from the dead – for that would leave death unconquered. “For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins ” (1 Cor 15:16-17).

• **A MAN BROUGHT SIN INTO THE WORLD, NECESSITATING THAT A MAN BE THE CAUSE FOR THEM BEING RAISED FROM THE DEAD.** A man brought the race down, and a Man must bring it up – a risen Man! “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead . For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive ” (1 Cor 15:21-22).

• **THE VERY POWER THAT RAISED JESUS FROM THE DEAD IS THE SAME POWER THAT IS “TO US-WARD WHO BELIEVE.”** Whatever power was required to raise Jesus from the dead, is the same power that effectuates salvation. “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead , and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:19-20).

• **JESUS WAS RAISED FROM THE DEAD IN ORDER TO HAVE ABSOLUTE PREEMINENCE.** God could not give all power in heaven and earth to Jesus until all adversarial power had been defeated– including death. “And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence ” (Col 1:18).

• **JESUS’ RESURRECTION CONFIRMS THAT HE HAS DELIVERED US FROM THE WRATH TO COME.** Those who have been liberated from the power of Satan and death, have also been delivered from the wrath to come. “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come ” (1 Thess 1:10).

• **JESUS WAS BROUGHT BACK FROM THE DEAD THROUGH THE BLOOD OF THE EVERLASTING COVENANT – VALIDATING ITS POWER.** God raised Jesus from the dead because He was His Son, and because of what He had covenanted to do through Him. “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus . . . through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20).

Divine Logic

There is a Divine logic, or manner of reasoning, that is reflected in the Gospel itself, and expounded in the epistles. It is also affirmed in the various proclamations recorded in the book of Acts. Briefly stated, and in accordance with my own understanding, this reasoning can be stated in this manner.

• Although it did not take God by surprise, sin introduced a situation that was, apart from God, absolutely hopeless.

• It also appeared to have set certain Divine qualities at variance with one another – qualities that had to be united. These included mercy and truth, and righteousness and peace. Truth and righteousness could not overlook sin, yet mercy and peace yearned for the retrieval of man.

• If men were to be rescued from the fall, a means must be provided that allowed for the unqualified harmony of mercy and truth, as well as righteousness and peace. This was a need that God required, and transcended the desperate need of humanity. Unless this need

was met, man's need could not even be addressed, much less resolved. God must be thoroughly satisfied with any remedy, with absolutely no exceptions. This was accomplished after Jesus rose from the dead: "Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Psa 85:10).

- The means through which these challenges would be met must originate with God alone, with no input of any kind being allowed from the fallen ones. Such input would have a defiling effect which God would not allow.
- The means through which the recovery was accomplished must allow for God to be thoroughly righteous in justifying sinners.
- The salvation must absolutely rescue men from the power of sin as well as its defiling effects and guilt.
- A power must be resident in the salvation that produced a new creation within men, without destroying their identity.
- The purpose originated by God must be superior to any attempted encroachments of the devil. In fact, there must be within the execution of that purpose, the thorough defeat of the devil and all of his powers.
- The purposed salvation must allow men to remain for a season in the cursed realm, drawing upon Divine resources, and confirming in their lives the effectiveness of the salvation by God.

The salvation of God is no stronger than the foundation upon which it rests. Of course, that foundation – in summary, the death and resurrection of Christ – has impacted both heaven and the powers over which Satan presides. Heaven has been thoroughly satisfied, and Satan and his powers have been thoroughly defeated. It seems to me that it ought to be obvious that both of these realms are vastly superior to humanity itself. It is therefore inconceivable that the work that satisfied God and frustrated the devil would be ineffective among those for whom it was wrought. Any suggestions that it is ineffective – whether by word or by life – is a thorough misrepresentation.

The Implications

By implication, this means that those who teach sin is something from which men cannot refrain are wrong. Those who tell us our lives are to be lived in a continual state of repentance and brokenness have only confessed their blindness to what Jesus has done. How can it be that His marvelous work could address the dilemma sin created for God, but not do so for what sin did to men? Precisely what kind of salvation is it that leaves men alive to sin when the work of Jesus is declared to make them "dead indeed unto sin" (Rom 6:11).

Do not think for a moment that Jesus "must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead" in order to help men limp to glory! How is it possible for "the power of the resurrection" to fail to address death in trespasses and sins, when it thoroughly decimated the twin sister of sin, which is death – "sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

It is time for the saints of God to rise up and expel from their presence those who major on explaining the continued presence sin! Let them demand that their leaders, preachers, and teachers, expound the salvation of God – "the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11). If they cannot do this, it is time for the church to rid itself of them. They are nothing more than obstacles in the path to glory. There is too much "flesh" in what they say – and "the flesh profiteth nothing" (John 6:63). If it is law-keeping flesh, it is unprofitable. If it is psychological flesh, it is unprofitable. If it is scholastic flesh, it is unprofitable. Even if it is religious flesh, it is unprofitable.

If, in order to save us, Jesus had to suffer unto death, and then be raised from the dead, be sure that

nothing of the flesh was left behind. If there was so much as a molecule of anything good in man, God could have nourished it, and caused it to flourish. Instead, in the death of Christ, He brought an end to Adam, and in the resurrection of Christ, he brought in “the Second Man” and a new order. That is implicit in the facts of Christ’s death and resurrection!

THIS JESUS . . . IS CHRIST

“ . . . and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.” Other versions read, “the Christ,” NKJV “is the Messiah,” RSV “is Jesus Christ,” GENEVA and “the Christ (the Messiah).”
AMPLIFIED

Implicit in both the promises and the Gospel is the fact that every resolution required to resolve the dilemma of sin would be accomplished through a single Person – and it would be a Man. A brief sampling of the prophecies relating to “the Christ” will confirm this to be the case.

- **DEFEAT SATAN.** The Seed of the woman who would bruise the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15).
- **A PROPHET.** A Prophet raised up by God like unto Moses (Gen 18:15,18).
- **A GATHERING POINT FOR THE PEOPLE.** The gathering of the people would be to Him (Gen 49:10).
- **AN EXALTED ONE.** An anointed One who would be exalted (1 Sam 2:10).
- **ONE WHO WOULD DO THE WILL OF GOD.** One who would come and voluntarily do the will of God – particular as it related to taking away sin and establishing the New Covenant (Psa 40:6-8; Heb 10: 7-9).
- **ONE ASCENDING INTO HEAVEN.** One who would ascend on high, leading captivity captive, and receiving gifts for men (Psa 68:18).
- **ONE WHO WOULD RULE.** A Son upon whom the government would be placed, and caused to increase (Isa 9:6-7).
- **ONE PROVIDING SAFETY.** A Man who would be a place in which to hide and be safe (Isa 32:2).
- **ONE WITH A MESSAGE.** One would come who would preach good tidings to the meek, bind up the brokenhearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who were bound (Isa 61:1-3).
- **THE SERVANT OF GOD WHO WOULD BRING FORTH JUDGMENT.** God’s Servant, who would bring forth judgment (Isa 42:1-4).
- **A SIN BEARER AND INTERCESSOR.** The Arm of the Lord, upon whom the sins of the world would be laid, who would take them away and satisfy God, distribute the spoils, and make intercession for the transgressors (Isa 53:1-12).
- **A KING THE PEOPLE WOULD SERVE.** God would raise up David their King, whom they would serve (Jer 30:9).
- **A RIGHTEOUS JUDGE.** The Branch of righteousness, who would execute judgment and righteousness in the land (Jer 32:15).
- **ONE GIVEN DOMINION OVER ALL.** A Son of Man who would be given dominion, glory, and a kingdom, to whom all people would be subject (Dan 7:13).
- **ONE WHO WOULD DIE FOR OTHERS.** A Messiah whose life would be cut off, but not for Himself (Dan 9:26)
- **A RIGHTEOUS ONE BRINGING RESTORATION.** The Sun of righteousness

would arise with healing in his wings (Mal 4:2).

The Concept of Christ

It is important that men have a proper concept of “the Christ.” The term itself speaks of a primary relationship to God, not men. He is “the Lord’s Christ” (Lk 2:26), “His Christ” (Acts 4:26; Rev 11:15; 12:10), and “the Christ of God” (Lk 9:20). No person of Scripture ever referred to Jesus as “my Christ,” “our Christ,” or “man’s Christ.” Terms expressing the relation of Jesus to humanity include “Lord” (2 Tim 1:2) “Savior” (2 Tim 1:10), “Leader” (Isa 5r5:4), “Shepherd” (John 10:11), etc. His identity with God the Father is depicted in “Servant” (Acts 3:13), “Christ” (Rev 12:10), “Son” (John 3:17), “Lamb” (John 1:36), etc.

The World Is Not Salvageable

As “the Christ,” Jesus is “the chosen of God” (Lk 23:35) to do His will as it relates to the reconciliation of men. His role is not to resolve all human difficulties, or to make the world a better place to live. Men must come to the realization that “the earth” that is “now” is “reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men” NASB (2 Pet 3:7). It is referred to as “this present evil world,” and, as the Lord’s Christ, Jesus has delivered us from it (Gal 1:4). It is under the fire sentence, like the world of Noah’s day was under the flood sentence – which is the precise point that Peter makes in Second Peter 3:5-7.

Noah did not engage in an effort to reform the world. God revealed to him that the world, and the people in it, were unsalvageable. “And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (Gen 6:13). Noah is referred to as “a preacher of righteousness” (2 Pet 2:5). Many assume that this referred to his activity while he was building the ark. At that time, however, God had revealed there was no hope for the world. His Spirit had ceased to strive with them, and He had established His covenant with Noah, to save him, his wife, his sons, and their wives – no more (Gen 6:18). Noah did his preaching prior to the building of the ark. He had no doubt witnessed to his generation as Enoch did to his.

Our day is similar to the days of Noah, yet has been flavored with grace. The present world has been reserved for fire like Noah’s day was for water. It is going to be destroyed. It ought to be abundantly apparent that redemption is not an initiative to improve the world. It is rather a gracious provision to escape from it, and prepare for the new heavens and the new earth, wherein dwells righteousness.

As “the Christ,” Jesus has been designated to establish the basis for providing the means of escaping from the world, then carry it to its fruition in all who believe on Him. He is God’s commissioned Savior, and is doing the will of God. Within the framework of that will, He ministers to men. He does not come to meet the needs of men as they have perceived them, but to address them as the God, from whom sin has separated them, has assessed them. This perspective has been largely obscured by the thrust of the nominal church. However, God’s purpose has not changed, and Jesus still operates within the perimeter of the will of God, which Scripture affirms He came into the world to do. He is still doing executing that will in righteousness.

SOME OF THEM BELIEVED

“ 4 And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”

Paul’s reasoning in the synagogue – opening and alleging the necessity of Jesus suffering and resurrection – produced commendable results. The whole city did not believe, as Samaria did in

responding to Philip's preaching. However, a significant number of those who heard Paul's proclamation of Jesus did believe. They did not hear a message that focused on the healing of marriages or finances, and heard no stirring oration about prosperity in this world.

SOME OF THEM BELIEVED

"And some of them believed . . ." Other versions read, "were persuaded," NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV "had faith," BBE "were convinced," NAB "were won over," WEYMOUTH and "were induced to believe." AMPLIFIED

The "some" who believed were Jews. The word "some" suggests that they were a small percentage of the total number of Jews in that synagogue.

Here, the Greek word translated "believed" is not the ordinary word so translated (**pisteu,w** –pisteu-o). The root Greek word used here is **pei,qw** (pei-tho). The lexical meaning of this word is "to persuade, I. e. to induce one by words to believe: absolutely, to cause belief in a thing," THAYER "convince, persuade," FRIBERG "win over . . . satisfy," UBS and "to convince someone to believe something and to act on the basis of what is recommended - to persuade, to convince." LOUW-NIDA This word is translated a number of different ways, all pointing to the same effect. In the King James Version it is translated "trusted" (Matt 27:20), "persuade" (Matt 28:14), "obeyed" (Acts 5:36), "agreed" (Acts 5:40), "yield" (Acts 23:21), "confident" (Rom 2:16), "confidence" (2 Cor 2:3), and "assure" (1 John 3:19). Vine's Greek Dictionary relates it to agreeing and persuasion.

Robertson says of this expression, "Some of them (tines ex autôn). That is of the Jews who were evidently largely afraid of the rabbis. Still "some" were persuaded (epeisthêsan, effective first aorist passive indicative) and "consorted with" (proseklêrôthêsan).

In this text, the hearers have been persuaded that Jesus is the Christ of whom the Scriptures had spoken. Paul had reasoned so powerfully with the Scriptures, showing that Jesus fulfilled what they had said about the coming Messiah, that there was no doubt in the hearers but that He was the Christ. Now, they were ready to hear more concerning His Person and accomplishments.

"Faith" is more a complete word than "believe." It contains more, including the concepts of persuasion, conviction, assurance, agreement, perception, understanding, trust, and confidence. It includes the absence of doubt, and the possession of personal evidence within the soul. Obedience is also inherent in "faith." As faith grows, these various aspects of faith also increase and are brought to maturity.

I have no confidence in the sincerity of any person who does not want more of the truth, or does not attach themselves to those who are noted for speaking it.

As used in our text, "believed" accents the idea of persuasion, or being convinced of the truth of what has been said. It means that those who believed were brought into agreement with what was declared, and were prepared to receive more, fully intending to act upon the truth of which they were persuaded. At this level of faith, if I may so reference it, the mind is fully satisfied concerning the accuracy and relevance of what has been declared. However, there has not yet been a willing response to the truth. Believing, however, always moves the one who believes to act upon what he believes – and that is what these hearers will do. Initially, they will willingly associate themselves with the ones who have made the truth of Christ known.

It is my persuasion that multitudes of professing Christians have never "believed" in the sense of our text. They lack a cogent view of Jesus Christ, and thus have been led to think of Him as disassociation from the Scriptures. The failure to be persuaded of the truth of Jesus Christ accounts for the erratic and even wayward manner of their lives. It is why they are not forsaking all to follow Christ. This is the reason why they are not considering all competing influences as loss for the excellency

of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. It is why they are not seeking above all other things to know Him, and it is why they are not pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:7-14).

AND CONSORTED WITH PAUL AND SILAS

“ . . . and consorted with Paul and Silas . . . ” Other versions read, “joined,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV “were joined to,” BBE “threw in their lot with,” CJB “joined themselves to,” DARBY “were associated to,” DOUAY “joined in company with,” GENEVA “were persuaded to join,” GWN “adhered to,” MRD “came and companied with,” TNT “attached themselves to,” YLT “became converts,” LIVING and “associated themselves with.” AMPLIFIED

The word “consorted” is translated from a word that means “joined their lot to,” THAYER “join, attach oneself to, throw in one's lot with,” FRIBERG “to begin an association with someone, whether temporary or permanent - 'to join, to join oneself to, to become a part of,” LOUW-NIDA and “be attached to.” GINGRICH

One of the initial expressions of a genuine belief of the Gospel is the desire to be identified with those who delivered the word of that Gospel. For example, after Pentecost, the disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42). That is, they continued to expose themselves to the teaching of the apostles. Following their conversion, those of Cornelius’ house asked Peter and those with him to stay with them “for a few days” (Acts 10:48). In Antioch of Pisidia, after Paul had spoken in the synagogue, “the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.” After the congregation had been dismissed “many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:42-43). In Iconium, Paul and Barnabas remained a “long time,” speaking boldly to those who had believed (Acts 14:1-3). When Lydia was converted, she asked Paul and Silas to come into her house and “abide there” (Acts 16:15). After the Philippian jailer believed and was baptized, he brought Paul and Silas into his house, and set a meal before them, “believing in God with all of his house” (Acts 16:34). In Athens, certain men who heard Paul “clave to,” or “joined” NKJV him, “and believed” (Acts 17:34).

This is a consistent mark of those who have been persuaded by the truth of God – they want more of it! This is involved in hungering and thirsting after righteousness (Matt 5:6). It is part of seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). This is characteristic of those who have been convinced of the truth of the Gospel.

I have no confidence in the sincerity of any person who does not want more of the truth, or does not attach themselves to those who are noted for speaking it. It is time to disown any form of religion that allows for disinterest in the truth of God. In the Scriptures, those who had no compelling interest in the truth were not long exposed to it. Jesus told the multitudes that those who desired to follow Him and hear what He taught were unqualifiedly required to “forsake all” that they had and follow Him (Lk 14:33). He declared that all other associations were to be considered secondary, and placed in subordination to one’s identity with Him (Lk 14:26). The one who desires to learn and benefit from the truth must take up his cross every day, crucifying competing desires and interests, and bearing up under the repercussions of following the Lord (Lk 9:23). Those religious leaders who tailor their church programs for the disinterested, reducing the number of their gatherings, and shortening the exposure of the people to the truth have committed a grievous transgression. They have set in motion a process that contradicts the very nature and intent of the salvation of God.

DEVOUT GREEKS AND CHIEF WOMEN

“ . . . and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.”

Remember, the results of which we are reading took place in the Jewish synagogue, spanning a

period of three sabbath days. These results followed Paul “Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead.” This is yet another confirmation that the gospel of Christ is, in fact, “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16).

Devout Greeks

Other versions read, “God-fearing Greeks,” NASB ““those who served God,” DOUAY “a large group of Greeks who had converted to Judaism,” GWN and “of the worshipping Greeks a great multitude.” YLT

“Devout Greeks” were Gentiles who were Jewish proselytes. Being exposed to the readings and expositions of the synagogue, they had become worshipers of God, abandoning any idolatrous practices they may have had. It appears as though this kind of person was not so enslaved to Jewish tradition. They had actually embraced more of the truth, that was revealed through Moses and the Prophets, than many of the Jews themselves.

Our text says that “a great multitude” of these people believed and joined themselves to Paul and Silas. The word “multitude” means “a great number,” THAYER “magnitude, with a stress on largeness of number,” FRIBERG “crowd,” UBS “a throng.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This gives us an idea of the size of that local synagogue – even the Gentile constituency was significant in number. This also illuminates why Paul headed for that synagogue, probably being led by the Spirit.

On those three Sabbath days, these people came with honest and good hearts, and the Lord saw to it that they were rewarded. They were faithful with the knowledge that they already possessed, and thus it was gracious caused to increase!

To my knowledge, the word translated “devout” is applied only one time to those who served idols (Acts 19:27). The English word “devout” is never applied to an idolater in any major translation of Scripture. That word is found nine times in the King James Version (Lk 2:25; Acts 2:5; 8:2; 10:2,7; 13:50; 17:4,17; 22:12). Other versions of Scripture also use this word: 9, NKJV 9, NASB 7, NIV 11, NRSV 12. RSV The Greek word that is here translated “devout” (**se,bomai**) is found ten times in Scripture, and is translated in various ways.

- **Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7** – “worship.” ALL VERSIONS
- **Acts 13:43** – “religious,” KJV “devout,” NKJV “God-fearing.” NASB
- **Acts 13:50** – “devout,” KJV “God-fearing.” NIV
- **Acts 16:14** – “worshipped,” KJV “worshiper.” NASB
- **Acts 17:4** – “devout,” KJV “God-fearing.” NASB
- **Acts 17:17** – “devout,” KJV “worshippers,” NKJV “God-fearing.” NASB
- **Acts 18:7** – “worshipped,” KJV “worshiper.” NASB
- **Acts 18:13** – “worship.” KJV
- **Acts 19:27** – “worshippeth,” KJV “worship.” NKJV

As this word is used in Scripture, it refers to the outward conduct of the person so described. Within the Jewish context, it identifies who observed the outward requirements of the Law, shaping their conduct around the commandments and ordinances. It is possible for outward conduct to be a hypocritical show, as in the case of the Jewish leaders, whose worship was “vain,” or pointless, because it was shaped around their traditions – even though it appeared on the surface to conform to the Law of God (Matt 15:9; Mk 7:7).

For those prone to a legalistic approach to religion, what is outward is fundamental. For those with

insight, good outward expression is a revelation of what is within. When there is purity within, even if it is in the beginning stages, further truth will be welcomed, and conduct will be reshaped accordingly. In the case of the Jewish leaders, they were corrupt within. Even though they adhered to proper outward conduct, their failure to embrace the truth as it was revealed by Christ Jesus confirmed their hearts were defiled. In the case of our text, the Gentiles, who were fulfilling the outward requirements of the Law, and were diligent to meet in the synagogue on the Sabbath day, had honest and good hearts. This is confirmed by their attitude toward Paul and Silas, who were bringing the message of Christ to the people.

Spiritual Babylon has introduced, and maintains, an approach to religion that is fundamentally shallow. It consists primarily of outward conduct, with a disproportionately small amount of the truth being made known. Even when the Scriptures are used, it is in a very shallow and surface manner, and with a marked emphasis on brevity and infrequency. As a result of this approach, it is exceedingly difficult to comprehend who is serious about the Lord and who is not. There is not enough said to actually cause the distinctiveness of faith to surface. What is said is insufficient to draw out those who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness. There is not even enough said to draw out the corruption that may be in the hearts of the people. I know of very few assemblies where the speakers of truth are aggressively sought, or the people become “joined” to them. However, these circumstances did not exist in our text. The Seed of the Kingdom was sown, and the various soils were thus made known (Matt 13:3-9, 18-23).

Chief Women

Other versions read, “a number of leading women,” NASB “a few prominent women,” NIV “of noble women not a few,” DOUAY “of the wives of many prominent men,” GWN and “of the principal women not a few.” YLT

One thing is immediately obvious: Paul and Silas did not preach a Gospel that left women in a second-class position. Not only did a number of women join with Paul, they were “chief women,” “leading women,” and “principle women.” The word translated “chief” means “first . . . first in rank, influence, honor, chief, principal,” THAYER “first (of all), foremost, chief, most important of all . . . the most important persons,” FRIBERG and “first, foremost, most important, most prominent.” GINGRICH

Nothing in this text, either etymologically or doctrinally, suggests these were wives of leading men. That may well have been the case, but that is not the point of the text. Neither, indeed, is there any suggestion that these were leaders among the women. The text does not say they were “chief” among the women, but that they were themselves leading figures, not by virtue of their association with someone else, but of themselves.

Woman of this caliber have been mentioned before. There were “devout and honorable women” in Antioch (Acts 13:50). Lydia was a business woman (Acts 16:14). Many “honorable women” in Thessalonica are said to have later believed (Acts 17:12). Phebe was a leading woman whom Paul admonished the Roman brethren to assist “in whatever business she hath” (Rom 16:1-2).

If these women were married, no mention is made of it. Although Gentiles, and prominent in the community, they had displayed a noble interest in the truth of God by coming to the local synagogue. Now, they confirm they have sober and disciplined minds as they recognize that what they heard was true, and desired an extended exposure to it. Therefore, they joined themselves to Paul and Silas.

It is vital that no professing believer adopt an attitude toward women that makes this a difficult passage to accept. It is very straightforward and does not contain a syllable that suggests that women are inferior in matters pertaining to God, or that they are in any way restricted when it comes to the appropriation of the truth of God. In Christ there is no such thing as “female” Gal 3:28. The “new

creature” (2 Cor 5:17) is not identified by gender.

THE JEWS WHICH BELIEVED NOT

“ 5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.”

Throughout Scripture, the accent is placed on those who respond to the Lord, and the others are treated as exceptions. That is the manner of the Kingdom because it is the heavenly perspective. In the matter of praying for others, the saints have the priority (Eph 6:18; 1 Thess 3:1; 2 Thess 3:1). When it comes to doing good, the people of God are the special ones to whom good is to be done (Gal 6:10). As simplistic as it may sound, those who believe are the ones who receive Divine benefit (Mk 16:16; John 3:18,36; 6:36,47; 7:38; 11:25; 14:12; Rom 1:16; 10:4; 1 Pet 2:6; 1 John 5:5,10). Therefore, in our text, the spotlight was placed on those who believed what was preached by Paul and Silas.

Now, secondarily, our attention will be turned to those who did not believe. We will be shown the impact of their unbelief upon themselves, for by failing to believe, they were excluded from the benefit. Therefore, by default, they took a position against the Gospel.

It is still true that any who have not been convinced of the truth concerning Christ reject it because it is unreasonable to them. In that kind of situation, when the issue of Christ is pressed, as Paul and Silas did, hostility will eventually erupt.

Those who attempt to tailor the Gospel for unbelievers do well to take note of this Kingdom manner. There really is no good message for unbelievers. The word for them is, “shall be damned” (Mk 16:16), “is condemned already” (John 3:18), and “the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). We will now see how those who have this sentence upon themselves react to the good Word of God and those who bring it.

THE JEWS WHICH BELIEVED NOT

“But the Jews which believed not . . .” Other versions read, “who were not persuaded,” NKJV “the unbelieving Jews,” CJB/YLT/AMPLIFIED “some of the Jews,” NLT and “the Jewish leaders,” LIVING

Most of the later versions omit the word “unbelieving,” choosing the expression, “the Jews.” While the word “unbelieving” is not in the Greek text, it is there by implication. A small transitional word is used (**de.**), a adversative participle that indicates a transition. That is, the “Jews” who are mentioned here are being compared with the ones who “believed” (17:4). These Jews, which apparently were the majority, had not been persuaded of the truth of what had been declared. What Paul and Silas had preached contradicted their own way of thinking. They sensed they could not continue holding their thoughts, and yet embrace what had been proclaimed in their synagogue. Therefore, they set out to oppose Paul and Silas.

It is still true that any who have not been convinced of the truth concerning Christ reject it because it is unreasonable to them. In that kind of situation, when the issue of Christ is pressed, as Paul and Silas did, hostility will eventually erupt.

MOVED WITH ENVY

“ . . . moved with envy . . .” Other versions read, “becoming envious,” NKJV “becoming jealous,” NASB “moved with jealousy,” ASV “grew jealous,” CJB “having been stirred up to jealousy,” DARBY “were indignant,” MRD “full of resentment,” NJB “aroused to jealousy,” AMPLIFIED and

“in a fury of jealousy.” PHILLIPS

As used here, the word “envy” means “to be heated or to boil with envy, hatred, anger.” THAYER This was more than an inward feeling. It was more like an erupting volcano, a raging fire, and a ravishing flood. It began within them, but erupted in outward and unbridled hostility. When people are not persuaded by the truth of the Gospel, they are made available for this kind of reaction.

The “envy,” or “jealousy,” that raged within and erupted in the conduct of these people was their reaction to the success of Paul and Silas. They saw them as disrupting their local synagogue. Many of us have seen similar reactions when some of the people in a gathering are persuaded of the truth of the Gospel, while the majority are not.

LEWD FELLOWS FOR COMPANY

“ . . .took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort . . .” Other versions read, “the evil men from the marketplace,” NKJV “wicked men from the market “place,” NASB “bad characters from the market place,” NIV “ruffians in the market place,” NRSV “wicked fellows of the rabble,” RSV “vile fellows of the rabble,” ASV “low persons from among the common people,” BBE “riffraff hanging around the city square,” CJB “scoundrels from the marketplace,” CSB “wicked men of the lowest rabble,” DARBY “wicked men of the vulgar sort,” DOUAY “vagabonds and wicked fellows,” GENEVA “low-class characters who hung around the public square,” GWN “worthless men loitering in the public square,” NAB “troublemakers from the marketplace,” NLT “of the loungers certain evil men,” YLT “worthless fellows from the streets,” LIVING “some ill-conditioned and idle fellows,” WEYMOUTH “some contemptible characters who used to hang out in the public square,” ISV and “getting hold of some wicked men (ruffians and rascals) and loungers in the marketplace.” AMPLIFIED

The word “lewd” means, “bad, of a bad nature or condition . . . wicked,” THAYER and “morally corrupt and evil.” LOUW-NIDA “Fellows” means men. The expression “baser sort” means “morally corrupt and evil.” THAYER “Fellows” means men. The expression “baser sort” means, “of or belonging to the market place 2) frequenting the market place; hucksters, petty traffickers, retail dealers; idlers, loungers, the common sort, low, mean vulgar; generally, proper to the assembly, suited to forensic speaking, business-like transactions,” THAYER “a person who habitually idles in the marketplace - loafer, bum,” LOUW-NIDA These were not socially productive men, but debased men who sought to exploit others, hanging around public places to gain some ill-gotten gain. They were what men might call the “scum” of society – the leeches who are always taking and never giving. Trouble is always in their wake.

There is a certain hierarchy in society. This is from heaven’s perspective, and is not intended to represent a form of fleshly classification.

- Spiritual men are rank the highest – those who are in Christ Jesus, reconciled to God, and have the Holy Spirit.

- There are also “devout men,” who have an introductory knowledge of God, yet are not in Christ Jesus. They have a heart for the truth, yet have not been subjected to the Gospel. Cornelius and Lydia are examples of such people. They are also honest and good people – that is, people who have an “honest and a good heart.” They may not have been exposed to much of revealed religion, yet are ready to receive the truth when it is presented to them. The Philippian jailer is an example of this kind of person.

- There are also philanthropic people who are less self-centered, and willing to invest of themselves in others. The Centurion who built the Jews a synagogue is example of this kind of person, as well as Cornelius.

- There are also the people who hold to a religious tradition that is lifeless, yet are

held in high regard. These people reject the truth when it conflicts with their tradition. Because the foundation of their thought is religious, they will go to any length to suppress anything or anyone who violates it – even to the point of crucifying the Lord’s Christ. The Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees and Lawyers represent this kind of people.

- The lowest level of humanity are worthless – those who are totally unproductive, living only for self-satisfaction and pleasure. These are not only self-indulgent, but aggressively seek illicit means to satisfy their baser desires. They are noted for moral debasement, violence, and the likes. These are the kind of people the rejecting Jews of our text chose to gather together. They were lazy, idle, prone to trouble, and on the bottom rung of the social ladder. They were exploiters, hucksters, and rabble-rousers. Now, however, they became associates of those Jews who had been faithfully meeting in their synagogue, yet were offended by the proclamation of the Christ.

GATHERED A COMPANY

“ . . . and gathered a company . . .” Other versions read, “gathering a mob,” KJV “formed a mob,” NASB “getting together a great number of people,” BBE “collected a crowd,” CJB “making a tumult.” DOUAY

What a motley conglomeration of people! Ruffians and lazy rabble-rousers together with religious men – probably religious leaders. Here are different groups of people that are collected together as a result of the proclamation of the record God has given of His Son.

- Those with honest and good hearts.
- Those with basically corrupt hearts.

When the wicked people gather together they tend to be an uncontrollable “mob,” bent on doing what is wicked. By contrast, when the righteous come together, they unity is “good and pleasant,” bringing great profit

Both of these groups, though they consist of a significant variety of people, tend to unite when the Lord’s Christ is unquestionably set before them. This was precisely what Simeon prophesied concerning Christ when he held Him as a Babe: “And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, “Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against” (Luke 2:34). Peter highlighted the same thing, referring to Jesus as both a Stone that was the Head of the corner, and a stumbling Stone as well: “Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (1 Pet 2:7-8).

When the wicked people gather together they tend to be an uncontrollable “mob,” bent on doing what is wicked. By contrast, when the righteous come together, they unity is “good and pleasant,” bringing great profit (Psa 133).

CAUSED UPROAR IN THE CITY

“ . . . and set all the city on an uproar . . .” Other versions read, “started a riot in the city,” NIV “made an outcry in the town,” BBE “set the city in confusion,” DARBY “they alarmed the city,” MRD “set the city in turmoil,” NAB and “make trouble in the city.” IE

As used here, the word “uproar” means, “turbulent . . . to throw into confusion,” THAYER “to throw into disorder,” FRIBERG and “to cause people to riot against - 'to stir up against, to start a riot, to cause an uproar.” LOUW -NIDA The devil’s work is best accomplished amidst tumult, disorder,

and confusion. Remember, this whole circumstance was brought about because the Jews were envious of Paul and Silas. The tumult, or “uproar,” that they cause confirmed the truth written by James: “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16).

It ought to be noted here that when people think they are set at a disadvantage, they will react adversely, and in opposition to a matter.

THEY ASSAULTED THE HOUSE OF JASON

“ . . . and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.” Other versions read, “attacked the house,” NKJV “coming upon the house,” NASB “rushed to Jason’s house,” NIV and “having beset the house.” DARBY

The assaulting of Jason’s house could be described as invading it, or breaking into it. This was done in an effort to find Paul and Silas. This was the reaction of the Jews to the success of Paul and Silas. Since the natural course of events did not fall in their favor, they sought to force their own will into the situation. That is the manner of the flesh.

It appears that “the house of Jason” was where Paul and Silas were staying, or lodging. Some have conjectured that this is the Jason to whom Paul referred in his letter to the Romans. At that time, he was with Paul: “Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason , and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you” (Rom 16:21). The book of Romans was written some time after the events of our text (58 A.D. versus around 52 A.D.). This could very well have been the occasion when Jason became familiar with Paul, and possibly even joined those who were traveling with him.

As a point of interest, “Jason” is the Romanized form of “Jesus” (Greek), and “Joshua” (Hebrew).

We have no direct information about Jason himself. However, there are some things that are certainly implied by the text.

- Jason had received what Paul and Silas had spoken.
- He wished to be identified with them, receiving them into his house.
- Following the pattern of other converts like Cornelius (Acts 10:48) and Lydia (Acts 16:15,40), it was not uncommon for those receiving the message Paul preached, to receive him and those with him into their house. The clear inference here is that Jason was now a believer.
- It appears from the text that Jason was a well known person, so that, for many, no further description of him was necessary.
- The fact that the mob was not able to find Paul and Silas suggests that Jason had taken measures to protect them. This was a consistent practice of brethren during Paul’s ministry (Acts 9:25,30; 17:10,14). Brethren took time to care for him.

THE CHARGES MADE AGAINST PAUL AND SILAS

“ 6 And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also; 7 Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus. 8 And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9 And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.”

These people are so intent on their opposition to the message of Jesus that they are even aggressive against those who have identified themselves with Paul and Silas.

JASON AND CERTAIN BRETHREN

“And when they found them not, they drew Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city . . .” Other versions read, “dragged,” NKJV “began dragging,” NASB and “took . . . by force,” BBE

It is obvious that Jason and the brethren were alert to the schemes of the Jews, and had made arrangements for the safety of Paul and Silas, jeopardizing their own lives.

“Jason and certain brethren” were no doubt among those described in verse four: “and some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas.” Now, “the Jews” quite literally drag Jason and some brethren before the rulers of the city. They do this by invading Jason’s house, forcing their way into it, and dragging Jason and others to the rulers of the city. Their only offense was that they had believed what Paul and Silas preached, and been hospitable to them.

THEY TURNED THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

“ . . . crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also . . .” Other versions read, “have upset the world,” NASB “caused trouble all over the world,” NIV “have set the world in tumult,” DARBY “set the city in an uproar,” DOUAY “have subverted the state of the world,” GENEVA “have terrified all the country,” MRD “have been creating disturbance all over the world,” NAB “have upset the world,” NAU “have stirred up trouble throughout the world,” NET “having put the world in commotion,” YLT “have turned the world topsy-turvy,” WILLIAMS and “have upset the habitable earth.” MONTGOMERY

This is a religious perspective – charges leveled by “the Jews.” By saying Paul and Silas have “turned the world upside down,” these accusers have charged the servants of God with introducing confusion – unsettling and disturbing humanity. This, they will allege, consisted of making the people disobedient to the laws of the land. According to these men, Paul and Silas had thrown the whole world into a state of disorder, causing disruption in the cities and regions wherever they went. In their judgment the things that followed in the wake of their ministry was commotion, disturbance, disruption, agitation, social upheaval, and anarchy.

First, the charges were false. While Paul and Silas did present Jesus as King, He is a King of another order. He is not an earthly King, and, contrary to some of the teaching of our day, will, never be.

Their aim was to present Paul and Silas as political anarchists, set to disrupt social tranquility and foment rebellion against the government. They knew this kind of influence was something the officials would not tolerate.

Of course, the upheaval was really caused by the ones who did not receive the message of the Gospel – not by those who received it (13:45,50; 14:2,4-5; 17:5). The Gospel promotes peace, not unrest – in fact, it is appropriately called “the Gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15). The wisdom that is from above “is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated” (James 3:17).

Of course, all of this postulates the acceptance of the truth. Those who believe the Gospel and embrace Jesus Christ do not become troublemakers.

JASON HATH RECEIVED

“Whom Jason hath received . . .” Other versions read, “harbored them,” NKJV “welcomed them,” NASB “entertained them as guests,” NRSV and “received them to his house and privately protected them!” AMPLIFIED This confirms that Paul and Silas, and those with them, were staying with Jason, who had welcomed them into his home. The word translated “received” means, “to receive as a guest,” THAYER “welcome, receive, entertain as a guest,” FRIBERG and “to receive into one's

house, receive hospitably.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Because of the fierceness of the opposition Paul and Silas encountered, the text suggests Jason took measures to protect the men of God. As I have already said, this is something that “the brethren” did repeatedly – take special measures to protect Paul and those who were with him (Acts 9:25,30; 17:10,14).

THEY DO CONTRARY TO THE DECREES OF CAESAR

“ . . . and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.” Other versions read, “acting contrary to the decrees,” NKJV “defying Caesar’s decrees,” NIV “oppose the emperor’s decrees,” GWN and “ignoring and acting contrary to the decrees.”
AMPLIFIED

First, the charges were false. While Paul and Silas did present Jesus as King, He is a King of another order. He is not an earthly King, and, contrary to some of the teaching of our day, will, never be. Jesus Himself taught that men are to “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mark 12:17).

We know the apostles, did not teach the people to “defy” governmental rulers, or to be anarchists.

- “Honor the king” (1 Pet 2:17).
- “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers . For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation . . . Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake . For this cause pay ye tribute also : for they are God’s ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues : tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor ” (Rom 13:1-6).

Although Christ’s kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), yet those who remain in this world are subject to civil authority, for it has been ordained by God. No inspired person ever taught or acted in contradiction of civil laws that did not violate the Law of God.

Kingdom Philosophy

There is a certain holy philosophy that attends the concept of kings and kingdoms. First, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the glorified Man, has been exalted over all forms of authority in both the seen and unseen realms. He is, in fact, “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15). Even the angels, who are vastly superior to the kings of the earth, are subject to Him (Heb 1:6). As it is written, “Jesus Christ, who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him” (1 Pet 3:21-22). Seated at the Father’s right hand in the heavenly places, He has been exalted “Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come” (Eph 1:21).

The immediate objective of His reign is to “deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage,” and then to “bring many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10,15). That is the purpose of His Kingdom, which is “not of this world” (John 18:36). In His own words, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth . Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37). That is, “the truth” is the means through which deliverance is wrought, and the delivered ones are safely brought “to glory.”

In saying Jesus is the “King of kings,” it is affirmed that He is also over all civil authority and government, which was ordained by God. The objective of civil government has been revealed:

• **TO ENCOURAGE THE DOING OF GOOD.** “. . . do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same . . . For he is the minister of God to thee for good.” (Rom 13:4a). Peter also said that kings and governors are intended “for the praise of them that do well” (1 Pet 2:14). This encouragement largely consists of maintaining a peaceful environment. This is why we are exhorted to pray “For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty ” (1 Tim 2:2).

• **TO PUNISH EVIL DOERS.** “. . . he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom 13:4b). “Evil,” in this context, has to do with breaking the laws, doing violence, encroaching on the rights of others, and being generally disruptive to society. Kings or other political powers who do not carry out the revealed objective of government have been disobedient, and will be judged appropriately for it. The necessity of executing wrath upon “him that doth evil” confirms that evil can in no way be justified. Among other things, the intention of government is to keep the society from erupting into continual violence, as existing in the days of Noah – God’s way of keeping every man from doing what he wills, even it means the violation of others.

Just as many professed believers fail in their responsibilities, so many civil rulers fail to carry out their responsibility. Pilate and Herod, for example, set themselves against the ultimate doer of good, who “went about doing good” (Acts 10:38).

Keep in mind that during the life of Paul, Nero was the ruler of the world. His waywardness will be judged by the God who gave him his authority. However, his wickedness did not obviate the word of the Lord

True Spiritual Life

True spiritual life does not make one contrary to the principle of government. It does not allow for NOT doing good, or for engaging in disruptive and harmful conduct. This is precisely why Paul said in a civil court, “For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die ” (Acts 25:11). Those who belong to Christ are “the salt of the earth,” which speaks of bringing benefit to men, not the disadvantage of civil unrest (Matt 5:13).

Throughout modern history, some professing Christians have been troublesome, not obeying the laws of the land. Others have willingly chosen to burden society by not paying their bills, not working, and taking advantage of the ignorant. Such things ought not to be.

THEY TROUBLED THE PEOPLE AND THE RULERS

“And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things.” Other versions read, “stirred up the crowd,” NASB “were thrown into turmoil,” NIV “were disturbed,” NRSV “were upset,” GWN “were alarmed,” NJB and “were irritated (stirred up and troubled).”
AMPLIFIED

The way to trouble the city officials was to charge Paul and Silas, and those who had joined them, with political anarchy and social agitation: “ these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus” (17:7). They could have caused no trouble at all if they said these men were telling the people of a Savior from sin, or that there was a means through which men could be justified from all things, and obtain an eternal inheritance. Those things would not have been seen as anything important to the government – even though there are implications in such words that show the inferiority of government.

In opposing those to declare the truth, the opponents must in some way misrepresent them. In the religious world, this is done by associating them with certain positions that are guaranteed to upset

the people. For some, the charge of being “Calvinists” will do the work. For others, charging the speakers with being “antinomian,” or “lawless” is sufficient. Some, who have adopted a humanistic view of the love of God, may say faithful preachers and teachers “have no grace,” or are “harsh and judgmental.” Some have even been known to say, “They are not traditional Christians,” or “they are weird,” or “occultic.” Such charges are sure to trouble the people, even though there is not a speck of truth in them. You may rest assured, such opponents will never report what has actually been said by those who proclaim the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

The idea here is that Jason and the brethren gave a good account of Paul and Silas, satisfying the court that they had not violated the law. The court then had them post bail, through which they become responsible for Paul and Silas and their conduct.

THEY TOOK SECURITY OF JASON, AND LET THEM GO

“And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.” Other versions read, “received a pledge from Jason and the others,” NASB “they made Jason and the others post bond,” NIV and “had taken bail from Jason and the others.” NRSV

Those who had believed, followed, and housed Paul, had to pay their way out of custody – paying bail as though they had actually been guilty of some crime.

The idea here is that Jason and the brethren gave a good account of Paul and Silas, satisfying the court that they had not violated the law. The court then had them post bail, through which they become responsible for Paul and Silas and their conduct. The court was satisfied there would be no further disruption. This was an unexpected expense, to be sure, but Jason and those with him thought Paul and Silas worthy of such support. The city officials simply could not heartily embrace what these offending Jews had said.

THE BROTHERS COME TO THEIR AID

“ 10 And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.”

Perceiving the nature of the situation, the brethren immediately take the appropriate action. They do not think of themselves, but of the ones through whom they have believed. The immediacy of their action, coupled with the brevity of their discipleship, give an excellent demonstration of the power of the Gospel.

THE BROTHERS SENT PAUL AND SILAS AWAY

“And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea . . .” Other versions read, “as soon as it was night,” NIV “that very night,” NRSV “straight away,” BBE and “at once.” NET

The brethren waste no time in moving Paul and Silas out of the realm of danger. This was an act of godly discretion. There was no consistent revealed procedure on how to respond to opposition. This was done within the framework of Divine fellowship. Notice the different ways in which holy men responded to aggressive opposition, and in which they were directed to respond.

- **THE APOSTLES.** When the apostles were delivered from prison, an angel of God told them, “Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life” (Acts 5:20) – in Jerusalem, the very place where they had just been arrested (Acts 5:17-18).

- **BELIEVERS.** When persecution broke out because of Stephen, the believers were “scattered abroad,” leaving the area (Acts 8:4).

• **PAUL.** When the Jews in Damascus laid wait for Paul, the disciples took him by night and “let him down by the wall in a basket” (Acts 9:24-25).

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS.** When the Jews of Antioch raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their coasts, they “shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came to Iconium” (Acts 13: 50-51).

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS.** When Paul and Barnabas faced opposition in Iconium, remained a “long time . . . speaking boldly in the Lord’ (Acts 14:1-3).

• **PAUL AND BARNABAS.** Later, in the same city, when “the Jews with their rulers” sought to stone them, “they fled unto Lystra and Derbe” (Acts 14:5-6).

• **PAUL.** When certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium stoned Paul in Lystra, leaving him for dead, he arose, went back and “preached the Gospel in that city,” then returned again to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:19-21).

• **PAUL AND SILAS.** When Paul and Silas faced persecution in Philippi, and were beaten and imprisoned, they departed from the region after being released and having visited the brethren at the house of Lydia (Acts 16:40).

Now, faced with danger again, the servants of God are sent away to Berea by night. That involved a journey of about fifty miles. That very well may have been by sea, for both Thessalonica and Berea were on the Aegean Sea.

Again, note the inconvenience to the flesh that was required in carrying out this deliverance. Yet, there appears to have been no thought about such a thing.

If you were to attempt a manual on responding to opposition, precisely

There are decisions in spiritual life that do not depend on following a routine. They rather depend upon fellowship with the Lord. John refers to this as walking “in the light as He is in the light.”

how would you go about developing a procedure? As I have already shown, there is no revealed standard – which means there is no revealed standard on this matter.

There are decisions in spiritual life that do not depend on following a routine. They rather depend upon fellowship with the Lord. John refers to this as walking “in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). In the walk of faith, or when walking in the Spirit, there is an experience referred to as “fellowship of the Spirit,” or “fellowship with the Spirit.” NIV (Phil 2:1). Other versions refer to “sharing in the Spirit,” NRSV and “participation in the Spirit.” RSV

There is a direction that takes place as we walk in the light, by faith, and in the Spirit. To put it another way, direction is given while we are engaged in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. I gather that this is the kind of direction that dictated the disciples’ action described in this text. Those who choose to walk in, and mind the things of, the flesh forfeit this kind of direction.

THEY WENT INTO THE SYNAGOGUE OF THE JEWS

“ . . . who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.” Other versions read, “When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews,” NKJV “On arriving there, they went to the Jewish synagogue,” NIV

Once again, in keeping with the intent of the Gospel, Paul goes “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16) – even though he has just been rejected by the Jews in Thessalonica. That rejection did not cause him to lose his focus. He no doubt remembered the commission that Jesus gave to him through His servant Ananias: “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my

name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel ” (Acts 9:15).

As I have noted previously, when Paul entered a city, if there was a synagogue there, it was not long until Paul entered that synagogue and preached the word of the Lord.

- **IN DAMASCUS, IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING HIS CONVERSION:** “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20).

- **IN SALAMIS, CYPRUS:** “And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister” (Acts 13:5).

- **IN ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA:** “But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down” (Acts 13:14).

- **IN ICONIUM:** “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).

- **IN THESSALONICA:** “Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:1-2).

- **IN BEREIA:** “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews” (Acts 17:10).

- **IN ATHENS:** “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him” (Acts 17:16-17).

- **IN CORINTH:** “After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth . . . And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Acts 18:1-4).

- **IN EPHESUS:** “And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews . . . And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 18:19; 19:8).

There were powerful reasons why Paul preached to the Jews. First, Jesus had commissioned him to do so (Acts 9:15). Second, the Gospel is God’s power in order to salvation “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16). Third, his heart was to do this, for he carried a burden for the Jews. He wrote to the brethren in Rome, “Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved” (Rom 10:1). Toward the close of his life, after he had arrived in Rome to appeal to Caesar, he called the chief of the Jews in that area together. He then said to them, “For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20).

Gentiles in the Synagogues

In entering into synagogues of the Jews, Paul was not confining himself to the Jews. Devout Gentiles could also be found there (Acts 13:42-48' 14:1; 17:4,12; 18:4). The synagogue was often the place where inquiring Gentiles learned of the true God. Those who embraced “the God of the Jews” (Rom, 3:29) are referred to as “proselytes” (Acts 2:10; 6:5; 13:43).

The Jewish synagogues were one of the chief means through which God prepared the Gentile world for the Christ. They were scattered throughout the whole world – wherever the Jews had been dispersed by God Himself (Isa 11:12; Jer 9:16; 30:11; Ezek 4:13; 5:10; 6:8; 11:16; 20:23). Already in the book of Acts we have read of synagogues of the Jews in Syria (9:2), Cyprus (13:5), Asia Minor (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1), and Greece (17:10,17). In these synagogues the Scriptures were read every Sabbath day – both from Moses and the Prophets (Acts 15:21). Inquiring Gentiles, awakened by the presence of the Jews and their unique religion, went to the synagogue in order to learn of the true God. Those Jews, though dispersed for their waywardness, were used by the Lord to spread the knowledge of God. In this way, the world was prepared for the Messiah. This is confirmed in the Gentile responses recorded in Acts – with few exceptions in the setting of a synagogue (10:45; 13:48; 14:1; 17:4,12).

THE BEREANS WERE MORE NOBLE

“ 11 These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”

While the Jews in Thessalonica rejected the words of Paul and Silas, forcing them to leave that area, this was not the response of the Jews in Berea. In Damascus, the Jews took counsel to kill Paul (9:23). In Antioch they contradicted and blasphemed Paul and Barnabas, finally expelling them from their coasts (13:45,50). In Iconium the Jews “stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren,” finally forcing Paul and Barnabas to flee to Lystra and Derbe (14:2,5-6). In Lystra, certain Jews from Antioch came, persuaded the people against Paul, and stoned him (14:19). In Thessalonica, the Jews not only refused to believe what Paul and Silas preached, but gathered a motley group of people and fomented such trouble that the brethren had to send Paul and Silas away to Berea (17:5-10). Now, the servants of the Lord will enjoy a refreshing change in the hearers.

THESE WERE MORE NOBLE

These Jews did not dismiss what they heard simply because it clashed with their present views. They were willing to enter into the exploration of what Paul and Silas preached in their synagogue. They did not brush aside their words as though they were meaningless.

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica . . .” Other versions read, “were more fair-minded,” NKJV “were more noble-minded,” NASB “were of more noble character,” NIV “were more receptive,” NRSV “were more open-minded,” GWN “noblest of birth,” PNT/TNT “were better people,” IE “were of a nobler disposition,” WEYMOUTH “were better disposed,” WILLIAMS “were better disposed and more noble,” AMPLIFIED and “proved more generous-minded.” PHILLIPS

The word translated “noble” has the following lexical meaning: “well-born, of noble race . . . noble-minded,” THAYER “as a commendable attitude open-minded, without prejudice,” FRIBERG and “noble-minded, open-minded.” GINGRICH

While this word (“noble”) sometimes refers to one’s birth or natural culture, that is not the meaning here. Here it pertains to a certain quality of heart and mind. Their thoughts were more capable of expansion. These Jews did not dismiss what they heard simply because it clashed with their present views. They were willing to enter into the exploration of what Paul and Silas preached in their synagogue. They did not brush aside their words as though they were meaningless. That is what the Jews in Thessalonica did, immediately engaging in aggressive opposition to what Paul and Silas preached in their synagogue.

THEY RECEIVED THE WORD WITH ALL READINESS OF MIND

“ . . . in that they received the word with all readiness of mind . . .” Other versions read, “with great eagerness,” NASB “very eagerly,” NRSV “Gave serious attention to the word,” BBE “eagerly welcomed the message,” CJB “were very willing to receive,” GWN “Gladly heard the word,” MRD “with all willingness,” NAB “welcomed the word very readily,” NJB “listened eagerly,” NLT “with all diligence of mind,” TNT “gladly listened to the message,” LIVING “were very happy to listen,” IE and “entirely ready and accepted and welcomed the message.” AMPLIFIED

The expression “readiness of mind” is translated from a single Greek word (**proqumi,aj**), which means, “zeal, spirit, eagerness, inclination, readiness of mind,” THAYER and “a determined disposition of mind, readiness, zeal; willingness, eagerness.” FRIBERG This speaks of an attitude that is inclined to the message that was delivered to the people – they liked the sound of it, and wanted to know more of it. They had a disposition of mind that focused on what was said, and were eager and willing to know more of its meaning.

Those who have been involved in preaching and teaching for some time know that this type of hearer is somewhat rare. Some have ministered for long periods of time with very few hearers who could be so described. This situation is so common that some might be led to believe it is the normal stance of professed believers. However, this is not at all the case.

Jesus said that this kind of hearer falls into the category of His sheep – His true followers. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). This kind of hearing is described in the landmark prophecy of Moses concerning the Lord Jesus: “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken ” (Deut 18:15). The word “hearken” has the following definition: “to hear, listen to, obey; to hear (perceive by ear); to hear of or concerning; to hear (have power to hear); to hear with attention or interest, listen to.” HEBREW LEXICON The ideas of interest, subjection, and focused attention are in the word. This perfectly coincides with the description Jesus gave of His sheep – those who are received by Him and follow Him.

In a more broad statement of the case, Jesus categorized those who are subjected to the words of God: “He that is of God heareth God's words: ye therefore hear them not, because ye are not of God” (John 8:47). He also said, “Why do ye not understand My speech? even because ye cannot hear My word” (John 8:43). These statements have some alarming ramifications! They blow away all excuses that are presented for having no interest in the words that come from God.

THEY SEARCHED THE SCRIPTURES DAILY

“ . . . and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” Other versions read, “examining the Scriptures daily,” NASB “checking,” CJB “Carefully examined,” GWN and “studied.” NJB

In this case, “the Scriptures” were the writings of Moses and the Prophets. That means that the message delivered by Paul and Silas was the declaration of what was foretold by the inspired men of old, and had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Toward the close of his life, Paul gave a summation of what he taught, and it is most arresting to consider: “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come ” (Acts 26:22). I will wax bold and say that no other message is sanctioned by God! When Jesus revealed Himself to the two on the road to Emmaus, it is described in these words: “And beginning at Moses and the Prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).

Paul had no doubt taught precisely as he did in Thessalonica, reasoning “with them out of the scriptures, opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:2-3). The Gospel itself is said to be

“according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor 15:3-4).

The Christ of the Gospel is the “Prophet” of Moses, and the “Messiah” of the Prophets. They defined who He was and what He would do. They specified both the need for Him, and His ministry. This was in order that He might be recognized when He came. This is why Philip was able to say to Nathanael, “We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). While, at that time, he may not have comprehended the virgin birth (referring to Jesus as “the son of Joseph”), he was able to recognize Him as the One of whom Moses and the Prophets testified.

In my judgment, a Jesus is being preached today that does not fulfill the prophecies of Moses and the Prophets. It is a spurious “Jesus” that is designed to optimize life in this world, and provide opportunities for exploitation. Were you to go to the Scriptures to confirm that the “Jesus” that is too often proclaimed was prophesied of old, you would experience utter frustration.

But it was not so with the Jews of our text. How refreshing it must have been for them to search the Scriptures in view of what they heard in that Berean synagogue, and have confirming light shed upon those Scriptures by the Spirit! Their’s was a very real introduction to the Christ that God promised, and it wrought the results God intended.

MANY OF THEM BELIEVED

“ 12 Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”

The Gospel of Christ is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Rom 1:16). That circumstance substantiates that believing the Gospel is fundamental in the matter of salvation. There is no salvation without believing, for salvation is “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:7).

THEREFORE

“Therefore . . .” Other versions read, “consequently,” CSB “indeed,” DOUAY “as a result,” NLT and “so.” MONTGOMERY

The word “therefore” is translated from the Greek word **ou=n** . It’s lexical meaning is, “consequently, accordingly.” GINGRICH This is a conjunction found at the beginning of a sentence that marks a certain transition that depends on the previous clause.

The idea here is that what follows the word “therefore” was a consequence of what preceded it. The Gospel was preached to those who had a “ready mind” – a mind that was willing to consider what was said, being convinced that it was worthy of the effort. But the consideration was more than mere speculation, or sifting what was heard through their preconceived notions. Rather, these people resorted to the Scriptures, comparing what they had heard concerning Christ with what Moses and the Prophets had foretold of the Messiah .

This required deliberate and extended effort. It also presumed a certain familiarity with the Scriptures, which were read every Sabbath day in the synagogue. These Jews knew that God had affirmed that any new message had to be compared with what God had already revealed. Thus Isaiah had written, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20). The message they had heard had a certain attractiveness to it. It sounded good, and that was because it was good. Additionally, the Holy Spirit worked with the message drawing at the hearts of the listeners because they were “honest and good” (Lk 8:15). What follows is the consequence of such hearts laying the message of the Gospel along side of the Scriptures, and beholding the confirmation of the perfect harmony that existed between

them.

MANY OF THEM BELIEVED

“ . . . many of them believed . . .” Other versions read, “many of the Jews believed.” NASB

The word “many” applies to the Jewish constituency of the synagogue. The context reads, “And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews. These” [Jews] “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they” [the Jews] “received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them’ [the Jews] believed . . .” (Acts 17:10-12).

How refreshingly different were the results in that Berean synagogue, as compared with the ones in Thessalonica!

Believing, as used in this text, has to do with the heart, and speaks of embracing what has been declared, trusting in it, and shaping ones life around it. It speaks of placing confidence in the message.

The word translated “believed” is the ordinary Greek word for believing. This goes beyond the word used in Acts 17:4-5, which speaks of being convinced, agreeing, of assenting to what had been declared. That had to do largely with the mind. Believing, as used in this text, has to do with the heart, and speaks of embracing what has been declared, trusting in it, and shaping ones life around it. It speaks of placing confidence in the message. Lexically, the word is “used in the NT of the conviction and trust to which a man is impelled by a certain inner and higher prerogative and law of soul.” THAYER It goes deeper than persuasion, compelling the individual to act upon the word that was spoken. This is the verb form of faith, and accounts for the response of those who are recounted in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. Their faith is what moved them to act as they did.

- **ABEL** – By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice to God (11:3).
- **ENOCH** – By faith Enoch pleased God and was translated (11:5).
- **NOAH** – By faith Noah built an ark to the saving of his house (11:7).
- **ABRAHAM** – By faith Abraham left his homeland to go to the land God promised (11:8).
- **ABRAHAM** – By faith Abraham sojourned in the land of promise, even though he possessed no part of it (11:9).
- **SARAH** – By faith Sarah herself received strength to conceive seed when she was past age (11:11).
- **ABRAHAM** – By faith Abraham, when commanded to do so, offered up Isaac, accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead (11:17-19).
- **ISAAC** – By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come, even though he did not personally see them come to pass (11:20).
- **JACOB** – By faith Jacob blessed both the sons of Joseph when he was dying, even though Israel was in Egypt at the time (11:21).
- **JOSEPH** – By faith Joseph, when he died, commanded that his bones be taken out of Egypt when Israel was delivered from its bondage (11:22).
- **MOSES** – By faith Moses parents hid him when he was born, refusing to honor the edict of the king (11:23).
- **MOSES** – By faith Moses refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God (11:24-26).

- **MOSES** – By faith Moses forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king, enduring as seeing Him who is invisible (11:27).
- **MOSES** – By faith Moses kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood which delivered Israel from having their firstborn slain (11:28).
- **ISRAEL** – By faith Israel passed through the Red Sea on dry land (11:29).
- **ISRAEL** – By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after Israel had marched around them around them for seven days (11:30).
- **RAHAB** – By faith Rahab received and hid the Jewish spies in peace, thereby being delivered with her household (11:31).
- **OTHERS** – By faith kingdoms were subdued , righteousness was wrought , promises were obtained , the mouths of lions were stopped , the violence of fire was quenched , men escaped from the edge of the sword, waxed valiant in fight, and turned to flight the armies of aliens (11:33-34).

Those are examples of real faith. When these people believed, they moved out upon the word they had embraced, and did not hesitate. They did not draw back, but forged forward, even when it appeared to contradict all human reasoning.

This is the kind of believing that took place in our text. It was not mere assent, or being brought to an intellectual agreement with what was said. It rather involved the resetting of their moral compass so that they ceased to live as they once did, reshaping their lives around the Word that was delivered to them.

Those who do not act upon the Word of God have not believed it! In Scripture, the Spirit is very candid about this, stating that such people “believed not” (Psa 78:22,32; 106:24; Mark 16:14; John 6:64; 10:25; 12:37; Acts 17:5; 19:9; 28:24; 2 Thess 2:12; Heb 3:18; 11:31; Jude 1:5). All of this has a strange sound in the religious climate that has been created in our time. A new kind of Gospel is being hawked among the people that allows for a lack of godly response. Employing the corrupt wisdom of men, pleasing explanations for sin and a lack of faith have been concocted that leave men comfortable in their unbelief. Plans ad-infinitum have been developed to correct human behavior without addressing the damning presence of unbelief. All of this is by no means innocent. This entire approach is itself the result of unbelief, and is neither innocent nor tolerable.

Our text is a representation of what you might call the real thing. The real Gospel produced a real faith, which resulted in corresponding real response.

HONORABLE GREEK WOMEN AND NOT A NEW MEN

“ . . . also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.” Other versions read, “prominent women as well as men,” NKJV “prominent Greek women and men,” NASB “Greek women and men of high standing,” NRSV “Greek women of honorable estate, and of men,” ASV “Greek women of high position, and of the men,” BBE “Grecian women of the upper classes and men,” DARBY “honest women . . . and men,” GENEVA “influential Greek women and men,” NAB and “a few prominent Greeks, women as well as men.” AMPLIFIED

This is the third time women of distinction have been mentioned. In Antioch, the Jews stirred up “the devout and honorable women” (13:50). In Thessalonica quite a few “chief women” believed “and consorted with Paul and Silas” (17:4). Now many “honorable women” believe the Gospel. These were women of noble rank, prominent in the community.

It is of interest that in two of the three places such women are mentioned, they are mentioned before the men (13:50; 17:12). In 17:4, they are the only gender mentioned. I know of a significant number

of professed preachers and teachers who could not even speak in this manner. They could not find the words in their mouths.

However, the text before us is an inspired one, signifying that it is proper to speak of believing women in this manner.

THE JEWS FROM THESSALONICA

“ 13 But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people.”

Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica concerning the Jews: “. . . the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess 2:16). Although Paul had “great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart” concerning the unbelieving Jews (Rom 9:2-3), he did not gloss their condition. He charged them with killing Jesus and their own prophets, persecuting him and those with him, being contrary to all men, and forbidding them to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved. Godly concern and deep affection does not overlook wicked manners. Therefore, Paul spoke plainly about those who opposed him. They had maintained consistent opposition to the truth – both in Jesus, who Himself was the Truth, and in the Gospel, which is the rational declaration of the truth.

In acting as they did, Paul says they did so “to fill up their sins always.” Other versions read, “to fill up the measure of their sins,” NKJV “heap up their sins to the limit,” NIV “make the measure of their sins complete,” BBE “adding to the number of their sins,” CSB “fulfill their sins always,” GENEVA “constantly filling up the measure,” NAB and “they fill up [to the brim the measure of] their sins.” AMPLIFIED

Here is a perspective of sin that is virtually unknown in our time. This is because it does not blend with the spurious gospels and humanistic approaches to religion that are popular. When sin is not forgiven, and continues to be expressed, it is accruing more and more Divine wrath. The breaking forth of wrath takes place when the cup is full. Thus God spoke of the iniquity of the Amorites as “not yet full” (Gen 15:16). This condition allowed for Divine tolerance until such time as their iniquity reached the full measure. James spoke of the continued transgressions of the rich as heaping “together for the last days” (James 5:3). Paul wrote to the Romans concerning those who treasure up to themselves wrath “against the day of wrath” (Rom 2:5).

The picture is a most dreadful one – one of God’s anger increasing more and more, while He endures “with much longsuffering the vessels fitted to destruction” (Rom 9:22). These are vessels that, like the brute beasts, were “made to be taken and destroyed” (2 Pet 2:12). However, because of His righteousness, God does not execute the well deserved judgment until their iniquity has been made full, thereby confirming their corruption to all of the inquiring hosts of heaven.

The Jews in Thessalonica were in this category, and apart from repentance and the belief of the Gospel, the wrath focused upon them was increasing like a growing cloud that hovered over their heads. Those who aggressively oppose those who preach the Gospel are not innocent, as Paul affirmed to the Thessalonians.

THE JEWS OF THESSALONICA

“But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea . . .” Other versions read, “that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Berea also,” NASB “that Paul was preaching the word of God at Berea,”: NIV

Once again, they stirred up the people by introducing the notion that there were significant disadvantages that would result from any association with Paul and Silas. The devil's crowd is still attempting to make this impression upon the people concerning those who preach and teach the truth of God.

and "in Berea as well." NRSV

These Jews were not content to silence Paul in their own town, they did not want him preaching the Gospel in any town. It is apparent that they made it their business to keep track of Paul, for they could not tolerate the message he was preaching.

Something to Note

Here it is said that Paul was doing the preaching, even though others were in a supporting role of some sort (13:46,50; 15:12,35; 16:19,32; 17:4,10. Notwithstanding, the primary speaker was Paul, as affirmed in other texts (13:16; 14:9,12,19; 16:14; 17:2,13-15). Throughout His dealings with men, God has always used leaders – those who were especially conversant with Him and His will. The church is not a democracy in which all hold equal status. It is expressly revealed that "God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that . . ." (1 Cor 12:28). Paul, as well as some others, was in all three of those categories.

Prior to this, the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra, and persuaded the people to stone Paul, drag him outside of the city, and leave him for dead (Acts 14:19).

THEY STIRRED UP THE PEOPLE

" . . . they came thither also, and stirred up the people." Other versions read, "agitating and stirring up the crowds," NASB "to stir up and incite the crowds," NRSV "stirring up and troubling the multitudes," ASV "troubling the people and working them up," BBE "agitating and disturbing the crowds," DARBY "moved the people," GENEVA "ceased not to excite and alarm the people," MRD "to cause a commotion and stir up the crowds," NAB and "disturbing and inciting the masses." AMPLIFIED

In this text, the word "people" means "a crowd . . . a multitude of men who have flocked together in some place . . . a throng . . . a multitude." THAYER This confirms the remarkable success Paul and Silas had realized at Berea – a large number of Jews believed, as well as a significant number of Gentile women and men!

These wicked men no doubt hurled the same charges at Paul and Silas that they had voiced in Thesslonica: "these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus" (17:7). Not wanting to be known as political insurrectionists, these accusations troubled the common people from Berea, just as they did those from Thessalonica: "And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things" (Acts 17:8). Once again, they stirred up the people by introducing the notion that there were significant disadvantages that would result from any association with Paul and Silas. The devil's crowd is still attempting to make this impression upon the people concerning those who preach and teach the truth of God.

The enmity that exists between Jesus and Satan also exists between those who are joined to Christ, and those who are of the devil. God said to Satan, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen 3:15). The enmity was not put there by Satan, but by God Himself – and it cannot successfully be avoided. God has so arranged things that those who embrace Jesus will eventually be opposed by those who do not. There is a hostility that exists between flesh and spirit that cannot possibly be resolved. That is precisely why "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 15:50).

THE BRETHREN ARE ALERT

“ 14 And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.”

I am both impressed and challenged with the alertness of those early believers. In the wake of institutionalism and professionalism, this kind of sensitivity has been largely lost. This is because both of these plagues require a center point or emphasis that is other than the Lord Jesus Himself. When lives are lived “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15), a spiritual climate is produced in which there is an acute awareness of the relationship of circumstances to the work and praise of God. This is lived out in our text.

THE BRETHREN SENT PAUL AWAY BY SEA

“And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea . . .” Once the circumstances are discerned (and that was quickly), the brethren waste no time in getting Paul out of danger. They acted “immediately,” making arrangements for Paul to leave that region.

They determined to send him away “by sea,” as his enemies would be less apt to quickly adjust to such a circumstance. Berea was on the Aegean Sea, so that means of travel was readily available. In order to do this, some arrangements had to be made. A ship had to be chosen, and the due fare paid. The distance traveled will be somewhere between 200-250 miles. That, however, did not appear to offer much of a challenge to the brethren. Of course, where there is godly determination, challenges, obstacles, and the requirement for swift and effective action are more readily met. Many lives are lived in uncertainty and in a slovenly manner because the people have never really made up their mind to serve the Lord. Such a state contradicts the nature of salvation, as well as the express requirements for disciples.

SILAS AND TIMOTHY REMAIN

“ . . . but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.” Other versions read, “remained there,” NKJV “stayed in Berea,” NIV “remained behind,” NRSV and “abode in that city.” MRD

It is apparent that Silas and Timothy were exempt from the danger Paul was facing. This was probably owing to at least two things. First, Paul was the leader of this expedition, and had been the chief speaker. Therefore, the attention had been placed upon him. His enemies probably could not conceive of the work continuing without him – but it would! Second, Timothy was probably more of a novice, while Silas was among the “chief men” in Jerusalem (15:22), and could handle the remaining work. All of this was also being governed by the Head of the church, who would see to it that the work was carried forward. He is fully able to convince the opposing Jews that there was no danger posed to them in the presence of Silas and Timothy, even though they would preach the same Gospel. This is a sterling example of how the Lord makes a man’s enemies be at peace with the man whose “ways please the Lord” (Prov 16:7). This, however, is done with Divine discretion. It appears to me that the church in Thessalonica needed these brethren in order to be more firmly established.

In this case, Paul’s life is endangered, but the lives of Silas and Timothy apparently are not. This is all carried out within the context of God’s eternal purpose, and with a strict regard for the ministry given to each of His children. We should not be confounded by Divine strategies, as though God had to clear what He does with His children. There are higher purposes being served in His work than purely human interests. Stephen may die early in his ministry, while Daniel’s ministry spans several generations, and Paul labors into the twilight of his life. James may be removed from the field of labor, while his brother outlives all of the other apostles. Enoch may walk with God, then be translated into heaven at the tender age of three hundred and sixty-five, while Noah does not even begin his

assigned work until he was nearly five hundred years old, completing the ark one hundred and twenty years later, when he was six hundred years of age (Gen 7:6).

The person who labors for the Lord must reconcile himself to the element of uncertainty concerning the duration of life. The godly must learn to reason in this manner: “My times are in Thy hand” (Psa 31:15). From our point of view, they are like a “vapor” (James 4:14).

THEY CONDUCTED PAUL TO ATHENS

“ 15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.”

By the providence of God, Paul now goes to the southern part of Greece. The time required for the journey is not known.

THEY CONDUCTED PAUL TO ATHENS

And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens . . .” Other versions read, “the men who escorted Paul,” NIV “those who went with Paul,” BBE “those who accompanied Paul,” NET “they that guided Paul,” PNT “the believers who went with Paul,” IE “the men who acted as Paul’s bodyguard,” WILLIAMS “those caring for Paul,” MONTGOMERY and “The men who accompanied Paul took him as far as Athens.” AMPLIFIED

Within a relatively short time, Paul has moved from Philippi in Northern Greece to Athens in southern Greece. He spent three weeks in Thessalonica (17:2), and apparently a very brief time in Berea. Now, some brethren personally conduct him to Athens, actually accompanying him on the trip.

This city was the most celebrated city in Greece, and was founded about “1,556 years before the Christian era.” BARNES The city still exists today, 2,000 years later. Historically it was noted for its “philosophy, learning, and the arts. The most celebrated model of architecture and statuary were there; and for ages it held its preeminence in civilization, arts, and arms.” BARNES The Britannica Encyclopedia says of this city, “Many of classical civilization's intellectual and artistic ideas originated there, and the city is generally considered to be the birthplace of Western civilization.”

Now, this citadel of learning and worldly wisdom will be invaded, as it were, with a superior wisdom that it will consider foolishness. It is of interest that Paul had such confidence in the power of the Gospel that he did not hesitate to take it to the cultural center of the civilized world. It confirms that the Gospel is not tailored for those who are lacking in their ability to think and reason. To be sure, those who have natural disadvantages and incapacities in this area are not excluded from the Gospel. God can enable them to grasp the truth so they too can be saved. However, the Gospel has not been specifically tailored for such souls. No one who is familiar with Moses, the Psalmists, Solomon, the Prophets, John the Baptist, Christ the Lord, the apostles, or other inspired writers have charged them with simplistic teaching.

No serious student of Scripture has every considered them to be sixth-grade reading! Those who insist on always reducing the message so that a child can understand it have betrayed their lack of familiarity with God Himself. Some preachers and teachers insult their listening audience as though they were intellectual children. The Scriptures admonish us to “be men” in our understanding, informing us that there comes a time when childish understanding must be put away.

Joseph Benson, who worked with John Wesley in the mid-1700's, observed: “Paul is generally allowed to have been a man of fine taste and cultivated genius; but his thoughts were too much occupied about more sublime and interesting subjects, to make observations on these elegant or

magnificent trifles.” BENSON’S COMMENTARY

“Philosophy and sensuality, science and lawlessness, atheism and superstition, may join hands and combine to remove the candlestick of God’s Church; it will but shed its light brighter and wider in the places where God wills it to shine, until at last the whole earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God’s glory, as the waters cover the sea.” PULPIT COMMENTARY

True men of God avoid unprofitable involvements – particularly those dictated by worldly wisdom, and driven by human agendas.

A COMMANDMENT FOR SILAS AND TIMOTHY

“ . . . and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.” Other versions read, “as soon as possible,” NASB “quickly,” BBE “as quickly as possible,” CSB “at once,” GENEVA and “as soon as they could,” NJB and “hurry and join him.” NLT

This passage reminds me of the words of David to Ahimelech: “the king’s business required haste” (1 Sam 21:8). One senses that real Kingdom laborers place the highest priority on the work of the Lord – which is at it should be.

This word leads us to believe that it took some time, probably in terms of days, or even weeks, for Paul to get to Athens. I am sure that ships did not run on a daily schedule. In those times, there were special times and seasons when ships came in and departed, so that it might very well have taken weeks, or even months, for Paul and those escorting him to arrive in Athens. Likewise, the return trip would probably take considerable time, as they waited for a return voyage.

On this occasion, it appears that Paul felt enough time had been spent with the brethren in Thessalonica. They were a reasoning people, so would grow quickly. In fact, in his letter to the Thessalonians he described how they had received the Word of God.

- They bore the evidence of having been elected by God: “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God ” (1 Thess 1:4).

- “For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power , and in the Holy Ghost , and in much assurance ; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord , having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost ” (1 Thess 1:5-6).

- And again, “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God , which effectually worketh also in you that believe. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews” (1 Thess 2:13-14).

- And yet again, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (1 Thess 4:9).

Therefore, Paul calls for Silas and Timothy to come to him “with all speed,” or as quickly as they could. We are not sure why he gave this word. Perhaps he felt the work in Athens would be significant, requiring their assistance. Later, we know that he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica from Athens: “Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlaborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith” (1 Thess 3:1-2).

Now, we will see how a man with a Jewish education in the flesh, and the revelation of Christ from heaven, will fair among the world's most astute intellects. Here, we will, find a noble confirmation that spirituality benefits the mind.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed the work of the Lord being carried out in an arena of conflict. Although there is the precious fruit of ready minds, submission to the truth, believing, and obedience, there is also the presence of hostility, uncertainty, and hindrances. The arena of godly labor is an intensely active one!

The book of Acts contains the accounts of various adverse reactions to the preaching of the Gospel. This message is a good message – “glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15). It announces a righteous amnesty for sinners, and the opportunity to be “made the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). However, none of this has any appeal to those who are wedded to this world and ruled by unbelief.

THE RECORD OF ADVERSE RESPONSES TO THE MESSENGERS OF THE GOSPEL

Ponder the inspired record of some of the adverse and hostile reactions to Kingdom laborers – even though they delivered a marvelous message of hope.

- **Arrested** – “And they laid hands on them . . . And laid their hands on the apostles . . . And when he had apprehended him . . . And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers” (4:3; 5:18; 5:27-28; 12:4; 16:19).

- **Formally judged without due cause** – “And Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem . . . And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this? . . . And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us , , , and brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city” (4:5-7; 5:27-28; 16:20).

- **Incarcerated** – “. . . and put them in hold unto the next day: for it was now eventide . . . and put them in the common prison . . . he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him . . . they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely” (4:3; 5:18; 12:4; 16:23).

- **Beaten** – “. . . when they had called the apostles, and beaten them . . . And when they had laid many stripes upon them . . . and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul” (5:40; 16:23; 21:32).

Ponder the inspired record of some of the adverse and hostile reactions to Kingdom laborers – even though they delivered a marvelous message of hope.

- **Disputed against** – “Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen . . . And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians . . . spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming . . . the Jews spake against it” (6:9; 9:29; 13:45; 28:19).

- **Misrepresented and falsely accused** – “For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered

us . . . And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans . . . these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus” (6:14; 16:20-21; 17:7).

- **Stoned** – “And they stoned Stephen . . . having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead” (7:58-59; 14:19).

- **Commanded not to speak in the name of Jesus** – “And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus . . . Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name?” (4:18; 5:28).

- **Beheaded** – “And he killed James the brother of John with the sword” (12:2).

- **Subjected to public ridicule** – “And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes . . . But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans” (16:20-23,37).

- **Persecution raised against them** – “ the persecution that arose about Stephen. . . and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:50).

- **Expelled** – “. . . and expelled them out of their coasts” (13:50).

- **Forced to flee** – “Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket . . . They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe . . . And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still” (9:25; 14:6; 17:14-15).

- **The Jews caused agitation in the environment** – “And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes . . . But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city . . . But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren . . . And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city . . . they came thither also, and stirred up the people . . . when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people” (6:12; 13:50; 14:2; 17:8,13; 21:27).

- **Hounded from city to city** – “And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people . . . But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people . . . Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple” (14:19; 17:13; 24:18).

- **Mocked** – “ And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. . . much learning doth make thee mad” (17:32; 26:24)

- **Charged with insanity** – “You are out of your mind, Paul” NIV (26:32).

- **Council taken to kill them** – “. . . the Jews took counsel to kill him . . . they watched the gates day and night to kill him . . . but they went about to slay him . . . And as they went about to kill him . . . and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him . . . laying wait in the way to kill him . . . For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me” (9:23,24,29; 21:31; 23:15; 25:3; 26:21).

There are those pretentious religious philosophers who, with an intellectual tone, ask why bad things happen to good people. I have noticed over the years that such people never bring up those of Scripture who endured such suffering.

THE REACTION OF THE WORLD TO JESUS

Of course, all of this is trumped by the record of the suffering of our Lord Jesus – sufferings that

preceded the cross, on which He wrought salvation.

- He suffered many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes (Matt 16:21).
- He endured the contradiction of sinners against Himself (Heb 12:3).
- He was charged with being a Samaritan (John 8:48).
- He was charged with having a demon (John 7:20; 8:48,52).
- His own family thought He was beside Himself (Mk 3:21).
- Repeated efforts were made to take His life prior to the appointed time (Matt 26:4; Lk 22:2; John 5:18; 7:1).
- He was persecuted (John 15:20).
- He was hated (John 15:18,25).
- He was misrepresented, and false charges were leveled against Him (Mk 14:58).
- People were offended by Him (Matt 13:57; Mk 6:3).
- People “laughed Him to scorn” (Matt 9:24).
- Some said they knew He was a sinner (John 9:24).

THE NATURE OF KINGDOM WORK

Kingdom work, or work that is in alignment with, and complementary of, God’s eternal purpose, is being carried out in this world, yet is separate and distinct from it. What God is doing in Christ Jesus is not focused upon making the world a better place to live, or its inhabitants happy and successful in its domain. If a person begins with the supposition that this is the Divine objective, life will be confusing discouraging, and tedious.

All of this is covered well in the Pauline expression, “But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us” (2 Cor 4:7). The treasure of reference is not only the essential experience, but is the objective of all Kingdom labors: “to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). That is, the comprehension of this glory is only possible by an in-depth awareness of the Person of Jesus Christ. The “glory of God” is primarily in heaven, and secondarily upon earth. The knowledge of that glory has to do with who God is and what He is doing in the Person of His Son.

This remarkable treasure – “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” – is presently deposited in a frail earthen vessel: our bodies. This is contrary to the wisdom of the world. In this world, valuable commodities are not put into frail containers. To keep them in such a housing would jeopardize the contents, and make it easier for enemies of take them for their own. However, in the Divine economy, the purpose is NOT to protect the treasure, but to maintain it through use. That can only be done through Divine help – and that is stating the case mildly.

So it is that all who labor in the vineyard of the Lord must do so in a world that is condemned, and is filled with hostility and opposition. All of this is designed to promote faith and a lively awareness of the One to whom we belong, and where we are going. If these things had been lacking in Paul and those with him, they would have been overthrown by the circumstances they faced. That fact also accounts for professed believers who are derailed by circumstances. Either they never had the treasure at all, or they selfishly conducted their lives while neglecting the treasure. There really is no other way for men to fail in their labors for the Lord. It is written, “Your labor is not in vain in the Lord!” (1 Cor 15:58).

The records reported in the book of Acts reflect the very real and effective nature of the Kingdom

of God and those who are willingly participating in it. This is not a kingdom that is “of the world,” or after the worldly manner of kingdoms. It does not function as the governments and businesses of this world, and woe be to that person who attempts to impose such manners on the work of the Lord! The very fact that the King of the kingdom is not in this world, but seated at the right hand of the Majesty in the heavens, confirms that His Kingdom is not of this world – else He would have remained here. But He left!

Knowing that it is beyond all disputation that Jesus is no longer here as He was before, some teach that He will return and set up an earthly empire. In this, they are revealing the unacceptable manner in which they think. They try to impose this perspective on Scripture, wresting certain texts to agree with their corrupt understanding. However, God has spoken to this issue with unmitigated clarity – and He did so early in the history of the church.

THE REVEALING WORD

With the keys of the Kingdom in his hand, Peter boldly affirmed of Jesus, “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21).

- The words “whom the heaven must receive” refer to the ascension of Christ, when He was “received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God” (Mk 16:19).
- The word “receive until” speaks of more than a mere welcome. There is a point at which He will leave the heavens to gather His people unto Himself. The period between His ascension and that time is the “until” of the text. Jesus was “received” in heaven to administer the Kingdom, and to do so until the consummation of all things. He did not return to wait for a kingdom! Other versions capture this sense of the text: “He must remain in heaven until,” NIV/NSRV “who is to be kept in heaven till,” BBE “He has to remain in heaven until,” CSB “heaven must contain until,” GENEVA “whom heaven must keep until,” NJB “Jesus must stay in heaven until,” IE and “heaven must receive [and retain] until.” AMPLIFIED I have provided these various translations to confirm that there is no doubt concerning the actual wording of the text. There is a time set when Jesus will leave His present position. The only thing to be determined is when and why that is.
- The terminal point of “until” is specified as “the times of the restitution of all things, which God has spoken by the mouth of His holy prophets since the world began.” Other versions read, “restoration of all things,” NKJV “to restore everything,” NIV “universal restoration,” NRSV “the time for establishing all,” RSV “the time when all things are put right,” BBE “The completion of the times,” MRD “the final restoration,” NLT and “the complete restoration.” AMPLIFIED

This speaks of the fulfilment of God’s purpose, not a utopian society upon this present earth. Elsewhere it is referred to in these words, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph 1:10). Jesus referred to this as “the regeneration” (Matt 19:28). Peter referred to the environment as “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness,” stating that this will follow the destruction of the present heaven and earth (2 Pet 3:10-13).

The terminal point will involve a total change, not a partial one. It will be universal not provincial, global, and not regional. It will involve the whole world, not just Israel or the body of Christ. When Jesus leaves heaven, He will deal with both the tares and the wheat, and the faithful and the unfaithful (Matt 13:40-41; 2 Thess 1:9-10). Everything the prophets said will be fulfilled, not merely a portion of their words. Keep in mind some of the things that the prophets foretold.

- The perishing of the earth and the heavens (Psa 102:25-26; Isa 24:19-20; Isa 51:6).

- The destruction of death itself (Hos 13:14).
- The resurrection of the dead (Job 14:12-16; Psa 17:15; 49:15; Isa 26:19; Dan 12:2; Hos 13:14).
- The swallowing up of death in victory (Isa 25:8).
- Wiping away tears from all faces (Isa 25:8).
- The day of judgment (Psa 96:13; 98:9; Dan 7:9).

All of these things will preclude the coming of the Lord, for they are essential to the fulfillment of His purpose.

It ought to be obvious that the things in heaven and the things in earth cannot be perfectly united. They are contradicting orders, and cannot be merged. When Jesus left heaven, He had to empty Himself of certain Divine appearances and prerogatives, else the world would have been destroyed by His glory (Phil 2:8; Rev 20:11). Eternality and temporality, the realms and inhabitants of mortality and immortality, cannot merge. Divine glory and flesh and blood cannot blend. A glorified Christ cannot visibly cohabit with unregenerated men in temporal bodies. That ought to be apparent enough to require no further explanation.

My point in mentioning this is that the messengers of Christ labor with a mind to the passing of the present heavens and earth, not the establishment of ideal circumstances in them. That is precisely what we are being exposed to in the book of Acts. Furthermore, even the “enemies of the cross of Christ” (Phil 3:18) picked up on the clash between the Kingdom those men preached, and the kingdoms of this present evil world – or the worldly manner of rule and government. They were cognizant of the sharp contrast between the facts and values they ministered and those of this world. It is ironic that many professing Christians are ignorant of such things. It is my persuasion that this is largely owing to the prevalence of a false Gospel.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #73

PAUL IS STIRRED IN ATHENS

“ 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. 17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. 18 Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. 19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? 20 or thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. 21 For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing. ” (Acts 17:16-21)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

As Paul awaited the arrival of Silas and Timothy, he apparently spent time, among other things, looking about in the city. He is chagrined when he sees the city completely given over to idolatry. He cannot overlook the matter as it chaffs against his spirit. Immediately he heads for the Jewish synagogue, and engages in disputation with the Jews, as though to rebuke them for not addressing the prevalence of idolatry in the city in which they lived. He also disputed with the devout people, no doubt addressing the same matter. He even spoke daily in the market place with those who met with him, taking up the matter of the prevalence of idolatry in Athens. Eventually he confronts some philosophers who are intrigued by what he has been declaring. It all sounds strange to them, and they ask for a meeting in which he will expound what he means by the strange teaching he is delivering. Here was an open door, and the Apostle will eagerly enter into it.

MORE EXPOSURE TO REAL SPIRITUAL LIFE

As we proceed through this book, we are being exposed to real spiritual life. Both the manner and focus of life in Christ Jesus is being made known and confirmed in human experience. It has become fashionable in certain Christian circles for spirituality to be a kind of adjunct,

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- **PAUL WAS WAITING FOR THEM (17:16a)**
- **HIS SPIRIT WAS STIRRED BY WHAT HE SAW (17:16b)**
- **HE DISPUTED IN THE SYNAGOGUE (17:17a)**
- **HE DISPUTED WITH DEVOUT PERSONS (17:17b)**
- **HE DISPUTED IN THE MARKETPLACE (17:17c)**
- **ENCOUNTERED BY CERTAIN PHILOSOPHERS (17:18a)**
- **WHAT WILL THIS BABBLER SAY? (17:11-18b)**
- **A SETTER FORTH OF STRANGE DOCTRINES (17:18c)**
- **THEY BROUGHT HIM TO THE AREOPAGUS (17:19)**
- **STRANGE THINGS TO THEIR EARS (17:20)**
- **TELLING OR HEARING SOME NEW THING (17:21)**
- **CONCLUSION**

or appurtenant to life. It is set forth as another dimension of living, but not as the main focus. These days, the actual amount of time that a professing Christian spends feeding the soul, examining oneself, and engaging in a quest for glory is minimal, to say the least. The religion of the day has actually been tailored so this view can be maintained without a twinge of conscience. It is not unusual to hear of gatherings of believers being reduced so they can supposedly spend more time with their families. More and more, the church is providing extracurricular activities for its members – and that is generally the quality time they spend together. A relevant assembly is perceived as having all kinds of community activities designed to draw people into its membership. Everything from organized sports to exercise centers and clubs are quite common within the prominent churches of our time.

THE IMPACT OF DIVINE CHOICE

It certainly is not that such things are of themselves unlawful – at least that appears to be the safe thing to say. However, there is absolutely nothing like this in all of Scripture. When God chose Israel as His own people, He tailored all of their activities around Himself. Their feast days were in honor of His work. Their rest was devoted to a recollection of His Person as well as a cessation from work. They were taught to give their best to the Lord – the first fruits of their substance. They were taught that their first love belonged to the Lord. Their language – “the Jews language” (2 Kgs 18:26,28; Neh 13:24) was actually a theological language. They were taught to define good and evil within the context of God Himself. Their Law was given to them by God. Their leaders were given to them by God. Rather than raising up entertainers and business men for them, He raised up prophets who kept God before them.

A PEOPLE FOR HIMSELF

We belong to God, not to the world, and certainly not to ourselves. We are His by creation, and His again by redemption. The Lord has “bought” us, and we belong to Him. We must not allow this reality to be buried beneath the rubble of supposed religious practicality and life in this world! It is true that we ARE the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” – but that is solely because of our identity with God through Christ.

The Lord spoke clearly on His reason for choosing Israel. “This people have I formed for Myself ; they shall show forth My praise ” (Isa 43:21). In assessing the purpose of Israel and their deliverance David confessed, “And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel,

whom God went to redeem for a people to Himself , and to make Him a name . . . ” (2 Sam 7:23). Their obedience and covenant keeping was to be in view of their association with the Lord Himself: “Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people: for all the earth is Mine” (Exodus 19:5).

In Christ Jesus, the same objective is set forth, except it is even more full, because of the settling of the sin-issue. “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph 1:5). And again, “Who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). And again, “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His name ” (Acts 15:14). And finally, “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord : whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's ” (Rom 14:7-8).

We belong to God, not to the world, and certainly not to ourselves. We are His by creation (Psa 100:3; 1 Pet 4:19), and His again by redemption (Eph 2:10; 1 Pet 1:18). The Lord has “bought” us, and we belong to Him (1 Cor 6:19-20).

We must not allow this reality to be buried beneath the rubble of supposed religious practicality and life in this world! It is true that we ARE the “salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (Matt 5:13–14) – but that is solely because of our identity with God through Christ. “Salt” and “light” are the consequence of what we are in Christ, not the objective of life. That is a must critical distinction!

JESUS SPEAKS ON THE MATTER

When Jesus chose His disciples – twelve of them – it was so they “should be with Him , and that He might send them forth to preach” (Mk 3:14). When speaking to the multitudes about following Him, the Lord was straightforward about what was required.

- **JESUS IS TO BE THE MAIN PERSON.** “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

- **BEARING ONE’S OWN CROSS IS ESSENTIAL.** “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

- **SELF DENIAL AND DAILY CROSS BEARING IS IMPERATIVE.** “And He said to them all , If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

- **NO OTHER ALLEGIANCE IS TO BE GIVEN PRIORITY.** “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

Paul is a sterling example of someone who took these words seriously. He explained to the Philippian church something he did not, so far as the record is concerned, share with any one else.

CLARIFIED IN APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE

The apostles left no doubt about the manner in which men are to live. Men are strictly prohibited from living for themselves. Prior to being in Christ, it was their predominate interest in self that condemned them, moving them to become the servants of sin. However, God will not accept a people who lives for themselves.

- **JESUS DIED AND ROSE AGAIN TO MOVE MEN AWAY FROM THIS KIND OF LIVING.** “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if

one died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:14-15).

• **IN CHRIST WE BECOME SERVANTS TO GOD.** “But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom 6:22).

• **HOLINESS IS IMPERATIVE.** “As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:14-16).

• **THE REST OF OUR LIVES ARE TO BE LIVED UNTO THE LORD.** “Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God” (1 Pet 4:1-2).

Paul is a sterling example of someone who took these words seriously. He explained to the Philippian church something he did not, so far as the record is concerned, share with any one else. Their spiritual consistency “from the first day” of their new life appears to have qualified them to hear such a marvelous testimony. Philippians 3:7-14 contains a most marvelous testimony that confirms why Paul lived the way he did.

• **HE DISCARDED ALL COMPETING INTERESTS, COUNTING THEM LOSS FOR CHRIST.** “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Phil 3:7).

• **HE FORFEITED AN ENTIRE RELIGIOUS CAREER IN ORDER THAT HE MIGHT COME TO KNOW CHRIST.** “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ” (Phil 3:8).

• **HIS CONSISTENT QUEST WAS TO BE FOUND IN CHRIST POSSESSING A RIGHTEOUSNESS THAT WAS FROM GOD BY FAITH.** “And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil 3:9).

• **HE DID THIS IN ORDER THAT HE MIGHT PARTICIPATE IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST.** “That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death” (Phil 3:10).

• **HIS AIM WAS FOR THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD TO BE AN ASSET TO HIM.** “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:11).

• **HE KNEW HE HAD NOT YET TAKEN HOLD OF EVERYTHING FOR WHICH CHRIST HAD TAKEN HOLD OF HIM, AND SO FOLLOWED EAGERLY AFTER CHRIST IN ORDER TO DO SO.** “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12-14).

This was not a posture of life intended to be uncommon among believers – even though that is how it appears in our time. To confirm that this is, in fact, the standard, or norm, for life, Paul adds these

words. “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded.” Knowing that some were not yet living in this manner, he adds this word: “and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you .” That is, God will confirm to the hearts of those who are serious toward Him that this is really the only acceptable way to live! However, those who are not yet able to take hold of what he had said were not to sit idly by. Instead, they were to live up to the level of understanding that they had, living solely for the Lord. Thus he adds, “Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing ” (Phil 3:16). The teaching is that as this kind of

When Paul dealt with issues of life, he always did so within the context of the responsibility of men to God, and the fact that they would eventually stand before Him. There is unvarying consistency in his approach to life, which is as it should be.

life is maintained, it will be the context in which the Lord will confirm the absolute necessity of living in this manner – He will “reveal even this unto you!”

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH OUR TEXT?

All of this is not far removed from the text we are considering. This is the kind of life that is being recorded. The way Paul lives, and the reason for it, is why he was stirred within when he saw vain living. It is why he had a fervent zeal to correct flawed thinking, and establish sound thought. It is why he was concerned for the churches, and why he would not keep quiet, even when it put his life in jeopardy. It is why you never read of him getting caught up in domestic, social, or political crisis.

When Paul dealt with issues of life, he always did so within the context of the responsibility of men to God, and the fact that they would eventually stand before Him. There is unvarying consistency in his approach to life, which is as it should be. All of this is being lived out in our text.

PAUL WAS WAITING FOR THEM

“ 17:16a Now while Paul waited for them at Athens . . . ” Other versions read, “while Paul was waiting,” NASB “was waiting for Silas and Timothy.” GWN

The word Greek translated “waited for” is **evkdecme,nou** , and means “to look for, expect, wait for, await,” THAYER “wait for, expect to happen,” FRIBERG “look forward to,” UBS and “to remain in a place and/or state, with expectancy concerning a future event.” LOUW-NIDA This has more to do with an attitude than with the physical stance – although it does involve Paul remaining in Athens, the designated place of meeting (17:15). This is waiting with expectancy, looking forward to something that is going to take place. The various places this word is used in Scripture confirms its meaning.

- **THE IMPOTENT FOLK AT THE POOL OF BETHESDA.** “In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, WAITING for the moving of the water ” (John 5:3). These people waited expectantly for the opportunity to be healed.

- **WAITING FOR ONE ANOTHER AT THE LORD’S TABLE.** “Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, TARRY one for another ” (1 Cor 11:33). This involves anticipating the rare fellowship believers have around the table of the Lord.

- **PAUL’S ANTICIPATION OF SEEING TIMOTHY.** “Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I LOOK for him with the brethren” (1 Cor 16:10-11). Paul anticipated seeing Timothy and the brethren hearing their reports, and enjoying their fellowship.

- **JESUS WAITING FOR HIS ENEMIES TO OPENLY BECOME HIS**

FOOTSTOOL. “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth EXPECTING till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb 10:12-13). Jesus is looking forward to the time when His enemies will be openly made known, and will publicly bow the knee to Him and confess His name.

• **ABRAHAM, LOOKING FOR A CITY.** “For he LOOKED for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). Abraham knew there was a residence that was permanent, where unhindered fellowship with God would be enjoyed. He looked forward to being a part of that city.

• **PATIENTLY WAITING FOR THE LORD.** “Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman WAITETH for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain” (James 5:7). The anticipation of believers for the return of the Lord is mirrored in the expectancy of a husbandman who has faithfully cultivated his vineyard, and now looks forward to eating the fruit of it.

The “fulness of Christ” is poured forth into His body, which consists of “many members” spanning many ages, and in varied locations. Thus Christ ministers to His people through His people, each one contributing what their particular measure of faith is designed to do. It is not possible to circumvent, or sidestep, this means, and yet grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

THE LONGSUFFERING OF GOD WAITING IN THE DAYS OF NOAH. “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God WAITED in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Pet 3:20). While Noah built the ark, the Lord patiently endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath, fitted for destruction. He did this in the glad prospect of the purging of the world its defiling inhabitants and the saving of Noah.

Thus Paul waited expectantly for Silas and Timothy, looking forward to seeing them. This doubtless had respect to their labors in the Lord specifically, and their love for one another secondarily. Paul was especially endeared to these brethren because they had labored with him in the Gospel. Our love of the brethren is directly related to our involvement in the “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). It is within the framework of the work of the Lord that the love of the saints for one another is cultured.

THE INTER-DEPENDENCE OF THE MEMBERS OF CHRIST’S BODY

According to Divine purpose, there is an inter-dependence that exists among the members of the body of Christ. This is the means through which the limited capacity of individuals is addressed. By “limited,” I mean no person is capable of receiving all that God had provided in Christ Jesus. The fulness of the Godhead could only dwell “bodily” in Jesus Christ (Col 1:19; 2:9). In His infinite wisdom, God has provided a bride for His Son that consists of “many members” – and yet together they are “one body.” As it is written, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:4-5). And again, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ . . . But now are they many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor 12:12,20).

The “fulness of Christ” is poured forth into His body, which consists of “many members” spanning many ages, and in varied locations. Thus Christ ministers to His people through His people, each one contributing what their particular measure of faith is designed to do. It is not possible to circumvent, or sidestep, this means, and yet grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is precisely how spiritual growth and sustenance is achieved. Paul speaks of this in Ephesians 4:15-16: “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

From whom [Christ, the Head of the body] the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth [the point at which members minister to one another] , according to the effectual working in the measure of every part , maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love ” (Eph 4:15-16).

THE POINT OF THIS

The point of these observations is that Paul was not waiting for mere friends, but for those who could join him in the work, and minister to him as well. Embracing the nature of life in Christ Jesus, he did not know them “after the flesh,” or “from a human point of view” NRSV (2 Cor 5:16). Some Pauline expressions will confirm that this is the way he thought.

- “Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus ” (Rom 16:3).
- “Greet Mary, who bestowed much labor on us ” (Rom 16:6).
- “Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me” (Rom 16:7).
- “Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved” (Rom 16:9).
- “Timotheus my workfellow . . .” (Rom 16:21).
- “Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do ” (1 Cor 16:10).
- “But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state ” (Phil 2:19-20).
- “But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you . For indeed he accepted the exhortation; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you” (2 Cor 8:16-17).

Paul’s desire for Silas and Timothy is firmly set within the circumference of the will and work of God. For a season, this was not the kind of companionship he could have with John Mark. At one time he forsook the work of the Lord, and thus Paul did not desire his companionship when he determined to revisit the churches to see how they were doing (Acts 15:38). By the grace of God that circumstance did change, for Mark did come to his right mind (2 Tim 4:11). Paul did not overlook either his decline or his recovery.

HIS SPIRIT WAS STIRRED BY WHAT HE SAW

“ 16b . . . his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.”

As Paul was waiting for Silas and Timothy, he sees the city of Athens from a different viewpoint. Here is a man of God with the Spirit of God, who is engaged in a fervent quest to know Christ at all cost, and be found in Him having the righteousness that comes from God through faith (Phil 3:7-9). What does a man like that see in the great city of Athens, and how does he respond to what he sees? Here we will see how deeply the human spirit is impacted by fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9).

HIS SPIRIT WAS STIRRED

“ . . . his spirit was stirred in him . . .” Other versions read, “his spirit was provoked,” NKJV “his spirit was being provoked,” NASB “he was greatly distressed,” NIV “he was deeply distressed,” NRSV “his spirit was troubled,” BBE “his spirit within him was disturbed,” CJB “his spirit was painfully excited,” DARBY “this upset him,” GWN “he was pained in his spirit,” MRD “he grew exasperated,” NAB “his whole soul was revolted,” NJB “his spirit was stirred to its depths,”

WILLIAMS and “his spirit was grieved and aroused.” AMPLIFIED

The word “stirred” is translated from a word meaning, “to irritate, provoke, rouse to anger,” THAYER “arouse, excite, stimulate; in a negative sense provoke, irritate, cause to be upset,” FRIBERG “to anger, provoke, irritate, exasperate,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “provoke to wrath, irritate pass. become irritated, angry.” GINGRICH

Paul’s reaction to what he saw reflected his participation in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). It was a godly reaction, and, for that reason, is to be duly noted by us.

When a person is born again, he is immediately set at variance with the world. This is because “the new man” is created “in righteousness and true holiness” – neither of which is in the world. We are categorically told, “all that is in the world . . . is not of the Father, but is of the world” (1 John 2:16). By comparison, those who are abiding in Christ, and have fellowship “with the Father,” are continuing “in the Father” (1 John 2:24), and “God dwelleth in him” (1 John 4:15). This circumstance puts the believer at variance with the world. The more evident the world becomes, the more pronounced is the variance. Therefore, what Paul saw in Athens provoked his spirit. It was a clash of natures – the mundane with the Divine, the false with the true, and delusion with illumination.

The absence of this kind of sensitivity is a revelation of a carnal mind and an alienated spirit. The presence of such a reaction is confirmation that one is in fellowship with the Son of God. On one occasion, when Jesus was at the tomb of Lazarus, He took special note of Mary weeping, and “the Jews also weeping.” It is written when He saw this hopeless weeping, “He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled” (John 11:33). Other versions read, “was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled,” NASB “was greatly disturbed in spirit, and deeply moved,” NRSV and “He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. [He chafed in spirit and sighed and was disturbed.]” AMPLIFIED As Jesus went to the grave, amidst all of this weeping, it is written that He came to it “again groaning in Himself” (John 11:38).

HE SAW THE CITY

“ . . . when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.” Other versions read, “given over to idols,” NKJV “beholding the city full of idols,” NASB “all the town full of images of the gods,” BBE “subject to idols,” GWN “idols he saw everywhere in the city,” NLT “the city given to worshiping of images,” TNT and “completely steeped in idolatry.” WILLIAMS

Pliny wrote that at the time of Nero Athens had 30,000 public statues, “besides countless private ones in homes.” The sight of such statuary was oppressive to Paul’s spirit, and very troubling, for they were all tributes to false gods. The insensitive soul would see them as a cultural phenomenon, and probably marvel at the precision of the art – but that is not how Paul viewed those images.

The Scriptures never refer to idols as art-forms, or the expression of various cultures. Jacob commanded his household, “Put away the strange gods that are among you” (Gen 35:2). The Law commanded, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth” (Ex 20:4). “Ye shall not make with Me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold” (Ex 20:23). “Thou shalt make thee no molten gods” (Ex 34:17). “Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the LORD your God” (Lev 26:1). “Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven,

and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven” (Deut 4:15-19). God referred to such images as “abominations” (Deut 27:15; 32:16).

“Rackham grows eloquent over Paul the Jew of Tarsus being in the city of Pericles and Demosthenes, Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, Sophocles and Euripides. In its Agora Socrates had taught, here was the Academy of Plato, the Lyceum of Aristotle, the Porch of Zeno, the Garden of Epicurus. Here men still talked about philosophy, poetry, politics, religion, anything and everything. It was the art centre of the world. The Parthenon, the most beautiful of temples, crowned the Acropolis . . . The superstition of this center of Greek culture was depressing to Paul. One has only to recall how superstitious cults today flourish in the atmosphere of Boston and Los Angeles to understand conditions in Athens. Pausanias says that Athens had more images than all the rest of Greece put together. Pliny states that in the time of Nero Athens had over 30,000 public statues besides countless private ones in the homes. Petronius sneers that it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens. Every gateway or porch had its protecting god. They lined the street from the Piraeus and caught the eye at every place of prominence on wall or in the agora.”

ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

I believe it was John Bunyan who once said, “You can tell how close a man is to God by how he shudders at the word ‘world.’ Like godly men before and after him, he knew the impact of the glory of God upon the spirit of the redeemed ones. After all, it was the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” that initially transformed them (2 Cor 4:6). Further, it is as they continue “beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord” that they are “constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another” AMPLIFIED (2 Cor 3:18).

Now, imagine someone involved in that kind of transformation suddenly being confronted with the sight of multitudes of idols everywhere he went. Because these idols were actually tied to demons (2 Chron 11:15; Psa 106:7; 1 Cor 10:20), the sight of them constituted an assault upon the spirit of Paul, and he was troubled, disturbed, and pained in his spirit because of it.

Unfortunately, there has been a kind of Christianity perpetrated in our day that allows people to feel at home in place like Las Vegas, that is given over to gambling. Professing Christians are often not offended by the theater marquees, literature on display in retail stores, and the indecent display of flesh in the streets. They have become accustomed to seeing such things, and even though they may not partake of them, they are not offended by them. A great tragedy has taken place in the professing church when such spiritual dulness and insensitivity is common within it.

If men are not offended by sin, they will more easily indulge in it. This is a good reason to learn to “hate evil,” which we are admonished to do (Psa 97:10), and which “the new man” does (Eph 4:24).

HE DISPUTED IN THE SYNAGOGUE

“ 17a Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews . . . ” Other versions read, “he reasoned,” NKJV “was reasoning,” NASB “he argued,” NRSV “had discussions,” BBE “he debated,” NAB “he reasoned and argued,” AMPLIFIED and “He felt compelled to discuss the matter with the Jews in the synagogue.” PHILLIPS

The word “disputed” comes from a Greek word that means, “to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss: absolutely, with one drawing arguments from the Scriptures,” THAYER “of disputations contend, argue, dispute . . . of speaking to someone in order to convince address, speak, reason with,” FRIBERG “debate,” UBS and “of disputations contend, argue, dispute . . . of speaking to someone in

order to convince address, speak, reason with.” LOUW-NIDA

Other places this word is used are as follows. I have highlight the English word that is translated from the above Greek word.

- “But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest” (Mark 9:34).
- “And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures” (Acts 17:2).
- “Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him” (Acts 17:17).
- “And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Acts 18:4).
- “And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews” (Acts 18:19).
- “And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8).
- “But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus” (Acts 19:9).
- “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7).
- “And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead” (Acts 20:9).
- “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city” (Acts 24:12).
- “And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25).
- “And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him” (Heb 12:5).
- “Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee” (Jude 1:9).

Reasoning and disputation assume that opposing and contradicting ideas are present – misconceptions and delusions. The kind of disputation mentioned in this text releases the truth in such an environment. Contradicting ideas are not always held by hostile or obstinate hearts. There are always people like Saul of Tarsus who are wrong about Jesus and “the way” (Acts 24:14), yet are living “in all good conscience before God” (Acts 23:1). In fact, Paul reflected on that time of his life before king Agrippa: “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). In his mind, he was serving God within the framework of the Old Covenant, completely unaware of what had taken place when Jesus died and rose again – that there was a new and better covenant in place, and that the “old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:6,13). Such people can be persuaded by the truth.

In This Text

In this text, the subject matter was unquestionably Jesus Christ. However, he no doubt introduced that grand Subject by addressing the matter of idolatry, for Paul's spirit had been stirred with the sight of its prevalence in Athens. What had the Jews been saying about this – those who had the stewardship of the Law, which forbade idolatry? How is it that idolatry could flourish in the presence of God's covenanted people?

Lawful and Unlawful Controversy

While the insightful preacher and/or teacher does not look for controversy, he is not afraid of it. Truth is superior to the lie, and enlightenment to ignorance. When Stephen "disputed" with certain Jews in a synagogue of the Libertines, "they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake" (Acts 6:10). Even in his early days, and within Jewish "synagogues" that were not amiable, Paul "confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ" (Acts 9:20,22).

Paul wrote to Titus, declaring that the shepherds of the flock must be "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers" (Titus 1:9). He also wrote concerning false teachers "whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake" (Titus 1:11). Both of those activities involve lawful disputation and reasoning. I say "lawful," because there is a form of disputation that is not lawful, because there is no way that it can be profitable. That sort of discussion involves "foolish unlearned questions . . . genealogies, and contentions and striving about the law" (2 Tim 2:23; Tit 3:9). Such discussions have nothing to do with the Lord's Christ, salvation, or eternal things, and therefore they are unprofitable. Not only that, they have a defiling and distracting impact upon both the heart and the spirit, causing men to leave the narrow way that leads to life.

Many a poor soul has missed much needed spiritual resources because they have been distracted from them to lesser things. The people of God are to choose carefully the things about which they reason and dispute.

HE DISPUTED WITH DEVOUT PERSONS

"17b . . . and with the devout persons . . ." Other versions read, "Gentile worshipers," NKJV "God-fearing Gentiles," NASB "God fearing Greeks," NIV "God-fearers," BBE "those who worshiped God," CSB "them that served God," DARBY "them that were religious," GENEVA "converts to Judaism," GWN "God-fearing Greeks in the synagogue," NET "the worshiping persons," YLT "Greeks who worshiped the true God," IE "devout proselytes," MONTGOMERY and "those who worshiped there." AMPLIFIED

The words "devout persons" are translated from the single Greek word **sebome, noij** (seb-om-ah-ee). As used here, its lexical meaning is "to feel awe" . . . before God . . . 'to worship,' is translated 'devout,' VINE'S GREEK DICTIONARY "to revere, the worship . . . proselytes . . . men that worship God," THAYER "as a religious technical term applied to Gentiles who accepted Judaism's belief in one God and attended the synagogue but did not become Jewish proselytes by undergoing male circumcision," FRIBERG "to worship, be religious," LIDDELL-SCOTT "to worship, to revere (God)," LEH and "Godfearers, worshipers of God, unconverted Gentiles who were attracted to the legacy of Israel but did not assume all the obligations of the Jewish law," GINGRICH "'pious,' 'dutiful,' 'reverential' . . . probably, though not necessarily, proselytes of the gate, heathen by birth, who attended the synagogue services and worshiped God." ISBE The English word "devout" means, "1. devoted to religion or to religious duties or exercises 2. expressing devotion or piety 'a devout attitude' 3. devoted to a pursuit, belief, or mode of behavior." MERRIAM-WEBSTER

The “devout persons” were those who gave outward evidence of a persuasion of the truth they had heard. How is it that they could endure the prominence of idolatry? Had not these images chafed against their spirits? Or, were they aware of how serious it is to flaunt false gods before the face of the God of heaven? I do not doubt that Paul’s dialog was laced with spiritual logic, and peppered with gentle rebukes.

ON BEING DEVOUT

The way “devout” is used in Scripture emphasizes the outward conduct of the individual. Having embraced the concept and Person of God, these people shape their lives around what they have come to know about Him. Such people engage in a hearty and sincere effort to please Him. Thus other versions employ the words “worshippers,” NKJV “God-fearing,” NASB “served God,” DARBY and “religious.” GENEVA

Being Devout and Being Religious

As used in Scripture, the words “religion” and “religious,” like “devout,” have to do with outward conduct. Although these words are often used in a derogatory manner by modern

While contemporary teachers are frequently heard explaining the flawed conduct of professed believers, the God of those believers is admonishing them to live an exemplary manner. They are to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10), and “walk worthy of God, who hath called you into His kingdom and glory”

churchmen, they are basically good words, and do not necessarily imply hypocrisy or a lack of genuineness. Some of its uses are as follows.

- “Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee” (Acts 26:5).
- “If any man among you seem to be religious , and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain” (James 1:26).
- “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

The kinship between these two words (“devout” and “religious”) is confirmed by the translation of a form of the same Greek word used in this text (**sebome,nwn**). It is found in Acts 13:43, and is translated “religious.” Once again, it is emphasizing the outward conduct of those so described.

Living Up to What Is Known

In a nutshell, so to speak, “devout” people are living up to the level of their understanding of God and His requirements. They are living in a good conscience, and shaping their lives by their perception of both the nature and will of God. This, of course, is not a static condition, for the knowledge of God is a sphere of increase and advancement. This is so much of a reality, that only those who DO live up to their measure of understanding will be given more. The King Himself affirmed, “unto you that hear shall more be given . For he that hath, to him shall be given : and he that hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he hath” (Mark 4:24-25). “Devout” people fall into that category.

Being Devout and Being Blameless

Circumspect and pious men were referred to as being “devout.” These are people whose devotion could be observed . They include Simeon (Lk 2:25), the Jews present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:5), the men who carried Stephen to his burial (Acts 8:2), Cornelius (Acts 10:2), and Ananias, who was sent by the Lord to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 22:12). Their manner of life could be described as

“blameless,” for they did not intentionally walk contrary to the Lord. In this sense Zecharias and Elizabeth are described as being “both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless ” (Luke 1:6). Paul said of his life prior to being in Christ, “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless ” (Phil 3:6). Paul also alluded to this condition when he wrote to the Philippians, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless , the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:14-15).

While contemporary teachers are frequently heard explaining the flawed conduct of professed believers, the God of those believers is admonishing them to live an exemplary manner. They are to “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10), and “walk worthy of God, who hath called you into His kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12).

In Our Times

It ought to be noted that the

“Devout” people will receive more, because they have handled what they have been given with integrity and consistency.

prominence of psychiatry, which is a human effort to understand human makeup, has thrown a shroud of obscurity over the necessity of being “devout.” It actually brings nothing to the table of salvation, but only seeks to slightly subdue the expression of uncomely manners. It offers explanations for unseemly conduct that salve the conscience, and make unholy conduct appear differently than it really is.

The Bar of Devotion Has Been Raised

However, in Christ Jesus, the bar of devoutness has been greatly elevated. A number of things have taken place that accounts for this higher standard of conduct. These are all effective in those who are in Christ Jesus.

- Jesus has taken away the sin of the world (John 1:29; Heb 9:26).
- Jesus has reconciled men unto God (Col 1:21).
- Peace has been made between God and man (Col 1:20).
- Men are a new creation in Christ Jesus, with new capacities and desires (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10).
- Men now have access to God, and can come boldly to the throne of grace to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).
- God has sent His Holy Spirit into the hearts of those in Christ (Gal 4:6).
- Jesus ever lives to make intercession for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25; Rom 8:34).
- The Holy Spirit within makes intercession for them concerning things of which the believer is not even aware (Rom 8:26-27).
- The “new man” has the kind of knowledge that is found in the Lord Himself (Col 3:10).
- The “new man” is created in “righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24).
- As we behold the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is changing us from one increasing stage of glory to another (2 Cor 3:18).

If the tutelage of the elementary schoolmaster, the Law, could provide enough incentive for the ancients to be “devout,” what will be the glorious enablement of life in Christ Jesus? How will any professing believer be able to stand before God and account for a life that did not measure up to that of Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, David, and the Prophets? Those, and others like them, are described as those who “should not be made perfect apart from us” NKJV (Heb 11:40). That is, they did not have the advantages of the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. Yet, it is generally accepted that they did more with the introductory things they had, than masses of professed Christians have done with the vast riches that are in Christ Jesus.

It is becoming increasingly difficult to find “devout” people within the professed church. Further, the last two or three generations have very little acquaintance with the very concept of being “devout.” This condition is generally known among leaders in the Christian community. That is why they have invented all manner of incentive, motivational, and corrective programs to straighten out the lives of the people. However, God will not allow any humanly-conceived procedure to do what He alone can do. Further, any effort that does not depend upon the presence and glory of Jesus cannot work – God will not allow it to do so! Men are changed by beholding the glory of the Lord, not the fading glory of a law – any law.

“Devout” people will receive more, because they have handled what they have been given with integrity and consistency. That is the manner of the Kingdom, and a clear record of it is provided in the book of Acts. When you look at men, look for devoted people.

HE DISPUTED IN THE MARKET PLACE

“ 17c . . . and in the market daily with them that met with him.” Other versions read, “in the marketplace daily with those who happened to be there,” NKJV “in the market place every day with those who chanced to be there,” RSV “the market square,” CJB “in the marketplace every day with them that met with him,” ERV “ held discussions every day in the public square with anyone who happened to be there,” GWN “in the market-place with them who daily assembled there,” MRD “in the market place he debated every day with anyone whom he met,” NJB “in the market daily with them that came unto him by chance,” TNT “in the business district of the city, with people who just happened to be there,” IE “ in the marketplace [where assemblies are held] day after day with any who chanced to be there,” AMPLIFIED and “in the open market-place with the passers-by.” PHILLIPS

The word “market” is translated from the Greek word **avgora/l** (ag-or-ah). Its literal meaning is, “any collection of men, congregation, assembly . . . place where assemblies are held; in the New Testament the forum or public place, where trials are held, and the citizens resort, and commodities are exposed for sale,” THAYER “a place for trading and business, especially as the center of public life forum, public square,” FRIBERG “the place of Assembly; used not only for debating, trials, and other public purposes, but also as a market-place, like the Roman Forum,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “the center of civic life.” GINGRICH

We must not think of the “marketplace” of Scripture as though it was a modern-day shopping mall. Although commerce did take place, that was not the primary activity of the ancient marketplace. It was primarily a place where people exchanged ideas, and an interchange of thoughts occurred – a place where people marketed ideas, and discussion occurred . A “marketplace” was not an entertainment center or a game room. It was a place where people congregated for interchange – primarily intellectual reciprocation, or the exchange of thought. This ranged from civil trials to philosophical debates and general discussions. Being the cultural center of the world, there was a certain quest for knowledge that characterized Athens. It was not always a quest for proper knowledge, and often lacked true sincerity. However, it was the kind of environment in which the truth could be presented with the expectation of response.

My Own Experience

When I was a young boy, I recall our family taking trips to Southwest Arkansas, where my parents Fred and Rubye had been reared. Saturday was the day everyone went to the small town of Delight. There I sat with my father many times at, what was called, a cracker-barrel. This was a large wooden barrel that held crackers on which the men snacked as they talked with one another. It was quite common for lengthy discussions and debates concerning the Scripture to be taking place in several of these locations. I would listen as my father would debate the Scriptures with others. It was all done in a congenial atmosphere, as men tested their ideas against one another. I do not recall those occasions as being accompanied with any hostility and rudeness. The people seemed to be in quest of Scriptural knowledge, and eager to talk to one another about the variance nuances of Scriptural understanding.

Of course, in our time, this kind of thing has given way to other interests – interests that focus more in pleasure and feeling than in thought and cogitation. I seriously doubt that Paul would be attracted to the shopping malls of our day. They would bear more likeness to the idol-filled hills of Athens than to its marketplace.

Throughout my life, I have found the incalculable value of holy discussion. Here in Joplin, the Word of Fellowship meets frequently for the purpose of discussion, and the exchange of spiritual thought. Such occasions always yield long-term benefits, and the delightful expansion of spiritual understanding.

A RELIGION OF THOUGHT

Throughout God's dealings with humanity, thought has played a prominent role.

In the Beginning

In the beginning, the first command the Lord gave to Adam required sober thought. "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen 2:16-17).

Having chosen Israel for His own inheritance (Isa 19:25), God gave them a law with its attending judgments and statutes. It was a Law that emphasized thinking, for God said of it, "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart"

God brought "every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air . . . unto Adam, to see what he would name them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Gen 2:19). That required thought, for I assume Adam named them in strict accord with their nature and appearance.

When the Lord made a wife for Adam, and presented her to him, Adam gave a thoughtful analysis of her and her role: "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen 2:23-24).

The first temptation was one involving thought: "Now the serpent was more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? . . . And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die" (Gen 3:1-4). That very day, wrong thinking led to the entrance of sin and death into the world.

The first promise of one who would spoil the Tempter was one that appealed to the processes of thought: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15).

The Calling of Abraham

The calling of Abraham was an epoch in which the purpose of God was made known more fully. It involved promises and commitments that were conducive to thought, meditation, anticipation, and hope (Gen 12:3; 13:16-17; 15:5-21; 22:17-18).

The Giving of the Law

Having chosen Israel for His own inheritance (Isa 19:25), God gave them a law with its attending judgments and statutes. It was a Law that emphasized thinking, for God said of it, “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart” (Deut 6:6).

They were to teach these words to their children, talk about them when they were sitting in their houses, and when they walked by the way, when they were lying down, and when they got up. They were to display them prominently so they would think about them (Deut 6:7-9). Their’s was a religion of thought – holy and God-centered thought, and it was to be their constant recourse!

The Prophets

God guided, informed, and rebuked His people Israel through the Prophets (Isa 58:1; Jer 1:10,18; 7:25; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; ; 35:15; 44:4; Dan 9:6,10; Hos 6:5; 12:10; Amos 3:7; Zech 1:6; 8:9). Their messages were appeals to the hearts and minds of the people, and were designed to be brought into the thought processes.

The entire ministry of Jesus was conducive to thought, meditation, contemplation, consideration, and cogitation. Everything He said and everything He did promoted sound thinking.

The Lord Jesus

The entire ministry of Jesus was conducive to thought, meditation, contemplation, consideration, and cogitation. Everything He said and everything He did promoted sound thinking. In fact, when He was but a Babe, devout Simeon declared He would deal with the thoughts of men: “that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed” (Lk 2:35). It is said of Jesus that He knew “their thoughts” (Matt 9:4; 12:25), and “perceived their thoughts” (Lk 5:22). He challenged people by asking, “What do you think?” NKJV (Matt 18:12; 21:28; 22:42).

The Apostles

Who has ever given serious consideration to Apostolic words and writings without being aware that they require serious and protracted thinking? Various forms of the word “think” and “thought” are used thirty-four times in the epistles. Various forms of the word “mind” are used sixty-three times in the epistles. Thinking is integral to spiritual life. Words such as “consider” (2 Tim 2:7; Heb 3:1; 7:1; 12:3), “remember” (Eph 2:11; 2 Tim 2:6; Jude 1:17; Rev 2:5; 3:3), “know” (Rom 6:3,6,16; 8:22,28; 1 Tim 1:9; James 1:3; 2 Pet 1:20; 3:3), “understand” (1 Cor 12:3; 14:20; Eph 1:18; 3:4; 5:17; Col 1:9; 2:21 John 5:10), “comprehend” (Rom 13:9; Eph 3:18), “discern” (1 Cor 2:14; 11:29; Heb 5:14), “perceive” (1 John 3:16), and “meditate” (1 Tim 4:15) – **all postulate thought**. We are even admonished concerning the things that are to occupy our thought-life (Phil 4:8).

Our thinking and understanding is not to remain at a juvenile level. Rather, we are to excel in the use of our minds,

• **UNDERSTANDING**. We are admonished. “in UNDERSTANDING be men!” (1 Cor 14:20).

• **COMPREHENSION.** We are to be able to “COMPREHEND with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (Eph 3:18).

• **KNOWLEDGE.** We are to “KNOW the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge” (Eph 3:18).

• **DISCERNMENT.** We are to have our senses exercised to “DISCERN both good and evil” (Heb 5:14).

• **PERCEPTION.** The love of God, as profound as it is, is to be “PERCEIVED” (1 John 3:16).

• **CONSIDERATION.** We are to CONSIDER profound realities: “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession” (Heb 3:1), and “Him who endured such contradiction of sinners” (Heb 12:3).

Does anyone really wonder why Paul went where the thinkers were gathered, and where sober discussion was allowed? This is the kind of climate in which the Lord makes Himself known. Many religious gatherings are nothing more than cesspools of questionable emotion – emotion that does not yield godly manners or quests. The intellectual drivel that flows out from many pulpits is disgraceful, insulting the Divine imagery in man, and representing God and His salvation in a wholly inappropriate manner. Those who are familiar with the times in which we live will recognize that the Paul of our text would not even be permitted to speak in the average church. There is no atmosphere that would allow for him to do so, and his Christian credentials would not be officially recognized. We know this is the case because, even now, there is a prevailing ignorance in the modern church concerning Paul’s writings.

Whether in the synagogues or in the city square, Paul went where thinkers could be found. That is because he preached a thoughtful message – one that engaged the highest capacities of men. He had no word that did not require extended and sober thinking.

ENCOUNTERED BY CERTAIN PHILOSOPHERS

“ 18a Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him.”

The picture here is of repeated gatherings and discussions – things that were taking place on a “daily” basis (17:17). Apparently the citizenry became generally aware of these discussions, and soon a number of people were drawn into them. Here we are confronted with some Athenian philosophers.

PHILOSOPHERS

“Then certain philosophers . . .” All other versions that I have, read “philosophers.” with the following exceptions: “supporters of the theories,” BBE and “teachers.” GWN

The word “philosophers” is a transliteration of the Greek word **filoso,fwn** (phil-os-o-phone). The lexical meaning of the word is, “one given to the pursuit of wisdom or learning . . . in a narrower sense, one who investigates and discusses the causes of things and the highest good,” THAYER “scholar, one given to the pursuit of wisdom and learning, often from a particular world view,” FRIBERG “a person of professional or semi-professional status regarded as having particular capacity or competence in understanding the meaning or significance of human experience,” LOUW-NIDA and “one who speculates on the nature of things and truth.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

In English, the word means, “pursuit of wisdom . . . a search for a general understanding of values and reality by chiefly speculative rather than observational means . . . an analysis of the grounds of and concepts expressing fundamental beliefs . . . a system of philosophical concepts . . . a theory underlying or regarding a sphere of activity or thought.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

The Britannica Encyclopedia says of philosophy: “(from Greek, by way of Latin, philosophia, “love of wisdom”) the critical examination of the grounds for fundamental beliefs and an analysis of the basic concepts employed in the expression of such beliefs. Philosophical inquiry is a central element in the intellectual history of many historical civilizations.” This word is used only one other time in Scripture, where believers are warned against its corrupting influences: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8). Other versions read “cheat you,” NKJV “takes you captive,” NASB “makes a prey of you,” RSV “takes you away by force,” BBE “lead you away as a prey,” DARBY “rob you,” GWN and “carries you off as spoil or makes you yourselves captive.”
AMPLIFIED

This is a part of, what Paul referred to as, “science falsely so called” (1 Tim 6:20), or “contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge.” NKJV This is a wisdom that “descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15). The idea of “philosophy,” by definition, excludes technical precepts and practical arts MERRIAM-WEBSTER – that is, it is not a body of knowledge that is supported by facts, but is either a humanistic interpretation of facts, or the creation of pure imagination.

In the sense of this text, a philosopher is like a blind man groping in the night for wisdom. He is attempting to acquire foundational knowledge independently of the Fount of knowledge, and Him in whom are hidden “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). He attempts to comprehend the universe without learning from the One who spoke it into existence, framing the worlds by His word (Heb 11:3). He makes an effort to discern man independently of the One who created Him, attempting to figure out the purpose of man, as well as his assets and liabilities. Charles Darwin speculated about the origin of species without consulting with the author of life, or giving any heed to the revealed origin of life – particularly human life. Sigmund Freud compiled a system of knowledge that supposes to account for human motivation, and the manner in which nab thinks. He also ignored what God has revealed about man’s intellectual and emotional makeup, and disregarded the eroding and corrupting influences of sin. Neither Darwin nor Freud dealt satisfactorily with the purpose of life, for they did not have any cogent or stable thought on the matter.

It is wrong to develop a philosophy about something that has been revealed – particularly when it relates to matters of morality, causes, and effects. Today, within the professed church, there is an astounding amount of philosophizing – and that during the time of the greatest amount of revelation that is in Christ Jesus.

World Views

Every so often, the modern church increases its vocabulary crystalizing some of its erroneous concepts. It does so in such a manner as to leave the people thinking the terms are inspired, and are taught in the Scriptures. A few years ago, the expression “unconditional love” became a staple part of the modern Christian vocabulary. During recent times, the phrase “world view” has been vaulted into prominence. According to Wikipedia (the encyclopedia written by the people), this is the definition of the expression: “A x comprehensive world view (or worldview) is a term calqued from the German language word Weltanschauung. Welt is the German word for ‘world,’ and Anschauung is the German word for ‘view’ or ‘outlook.’ It is a concept fundamental to German philosophy and epistemology and refers to a wide world perception. Additionally, it refers to the framework of ideas and beliefs through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it.” Epistemology is “the study or a theory of the nature and grounds of knowledge especially with reference to its limits and validity.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER Men who attempt to sanctify the expression “**world view**” are extending themselves into forbidden areas, and are unwise in doing so.

This really has nothing foundational to do with the manner in which those in Christ think. The

primary quest of their knowledge is Christ Himself: “that I may know Him” (Phil 3:10). The possession of eternal life is the summation of all legitimate quests, and eternal life is knowing “the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom” He “has sent” (John 17:3). The objective of the believer is not to interact with the world, but to capitalize on the realities and personalities to which God has brought them : “But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24).

Actually, the sons of God are cutting loose from this world, and preparing to participate in the world to come , for in Jesus they are no longer “of the world” (John 15:19; 17:6). The world is not a worthy focus for the people of God. God has revealed that it has been scheduled for destruction (Psa 102:25-26; Isa 24:19-20; 51:6; Matt 5:18; 24:3; Mk 13:31; Heb 1:10-12; 2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 20:11; 21:1). Any view of the world that does not take that appointment into account cannot possibly be valid. Anyone who takes the revealed appointment seriously will diminish any interaction with “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).

Now, Paul will confront some Athenian philosophers – those who have adapted a strictly mundane view of things that is wholly based upon conjecture, opinion, and speculation.

EPICUREANS AND STOICKS

“ . . . of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks,” Other versions read “Epicurean and Stoic philosophers.” NKJV

Epicureans

The Epicureans followed the teaching of Epicurus. His philosophy was divided into three parts: Theology, Ethics, and Physics. Briefly summarized, here are the views.

• **THEOLOGY.** “Epicurus acquiesced in the existence of the gods, **but denied them any participation in the process of the universe . . .** He ascribed to them immortality and human form, and assigned to them attenuated and spectral bodies . . . He accords to them indestructibility, immutability, and the serene happiness of eternal repose. Their tranquillity would have been disturbed by any care; accordingly, **they are entirely unconcerned with everything that falls under human apprehension .”**

SUMMATION

That Deity exists, but had no part in bringing the world into existence, has a human form though immortal, and entertains no interest at all in humanity.

• **ETHICS.** “**Without divine sanction, without responsibility or existence hereafter, with neither reward nor penalty in a future life for "deeds done in the body,"** no real system of ethics is conceivable. There is **no constraint, no obligation to rectitude** ; there is no moral compulsion; there is **no domain for conscience** ; there can only be a more or less judicious and provident adaptation of actions to the judgments or dispositions of men, and to the supposed satisfaction of the individual . . . A tranquil and pleasurable existence becomes the summum bonum of the sage; **the gratification of every passion as it arises is the sole duty of an eager and undisciplined nature. ”**

That pleasure is the chief objective for men, being accomplished in an environment in which

PHYSICS. “The Physics of Epicurus were devised as a means of escape from all divine authority and superintendence. . . . The leading lines of his physical doctrine are that **matter is uncreated and indestructible** . Its primitive elements are indivisible particles — atoms — . . . **which are eternal and imperishable** , passing through various combinations, and assuming new properties and forms according to these mutable compositions.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S

SUMMATION

That matter is uncreated and indestructible, continuing on without end, and changing into variable forms. This is the philosophy that allowed for the entrance of the theory of evolution.

It is apparent that Satan is still promoting this view of things.

Stoicks, or Stoics

This body of philosophers claim descent from Socrates. This sect was founded in Athens by Zeno of Cilium during the fourth century before Christ. In general, the Stoics believed that “what is important is the pursuit of wisdom and virtue, a quest that is open to all human beings because of their common capacity for reason, no matter what the external circumstances of their lives.” They followed the reasoning of Plato who “held that human passions and physical desires are in need of regulation by reason. The Stoics went farther: they rejected passions altogether as a basis for deciding what is good or bad. Although physical desires cannot simply be abolished, the wise person will appreciate the difference between wanting something and judging it to be good. Only reason can judge the goodness or badness of what is desired. If one is wise, he will identify himself with reason rather than with desire; hence, he will not hope for the satisfaction of physical desires or worry that they might not be satisfied. The Stoic will feel physical pain as others do, but he will know that physical pain leaves the true reasoning self untouched. The only thing that is truly good is to live in a state of wisdom and virtue. In pursuing such a life, one is protected from the play of fortune that afflicts those who aim at physical pleasure or material wealth, for wisdom and virtue are matters of the intellect and under the individual's control. Moreover, if matters become too grim, there is always a way of ending the pain of the physical world. The Stoics were not reluctant to counsel suicide as a means of avoiding otherwise inescapable pain. BRITANICA ENCYCLOPEDIA

SUMMATION

That human reasoning is the superior reasoning, and the means through which all good can be done, and all evil avoided. If this fails, there is no further purpose to live.

The Stoic view, though slightly modified, is the basis for most recovery programs. The world still imagines that those living in a deviate manner can correct themselves if they are exposed to more facts concerning their condition and the documented results of continuing to live in such a manner.

As is apparent, the Stoics adopted views that were the antithesis of those held by the Epicureans. Both views, however, postulated the centrality of human desire. Neither centered in God, or acknowledged any obligation to Him. The satisfaction of self was the primary thing. It was only the means through which this was realized that differentiated the two views.

Now, those who have embraced these philosophies will confront Paul. How will they react to him? Will they feel as though they have something in common with him, or that their views are in any way harmonious with his? It will be interesting to see what Paul says to them, and how all of this plays out.

ENCOUNTERED HIM

“ . . . encountered him.” Other versions read, “were conversing with him,” NASB “began to dispute

with him,” NIV “debated with him,” NRSV “met him,” RSV “supporters of the theories . . . had a meeting with him,” BBE “started meeting with him,” CJB “argued with him,” CSB “had discussions with him,” GWN “engaged him in discussion,” NAB “were meeting together to see him,” YLT “encountered him again and again,” MONTGOMERY and “began to engage him in discussion.” AMPLIFIED

By saying these philosophers “encountered” Paul, the text does not mean they simply came across him, or happened to become suddenly aware of him. As used here, the word “encountered” means “to throw together, to bring together . . . to dispute with . . . to confer with one another, deliberate among themselves.” Inherent in the word is the idea of considering and pondering adversarial ideas, THAYER “to think about seriously, quarrel, dispute,” FRIBERG “discuss, debate, confer,” UBS “to give careful consideration to various implications of an issue - 'to reflect on, to think about seriously, to think deeply about,” LOUW-NIDA “to come together, meet,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to compare with,” LEH and “to draw conclusions about.” GINGRICH

Paul had gone to the place where men were trafficking in ideas – and he was declaring things that so obviously contradicted what they had embraced they could not ignore it. He did not stoop down to their level and talk in philosophical language. There was no guesswork in what he was declaring, but an obvious note of certitude was heard in his words. Not willing to walk away from their own ideas, they disputed with Paul – all in the name of intellectuality.

Since both the Epicureans and Stoics had adopted views that placed natural human desires at the heart of everything, the words of Paul were in stark contrast with their thoughts, for he was affirming realities that had to do with Another, even the God of heaven. His message had to do with abandoning self interests and adopting the agenda of Someone else, to whom men are ultimately accountable.

Human adaptation is the ruination of religion. This is owing to the fact that our humanness is our weakness, and is the cause which necessitates regeneration. Contrary to “the doctrine of Christ,” philosophy relies on the inferior part of man to support what it conceives to be the superior. This approach is far too common in contemporary religion, and it is not to be overlooked as though it was harmless.

WHAT WILL THIS BABBLER SAY?

“ 18b . . . And some said, What will this babbler say?” Other versions read, “what does this babbler want to say,” NKJV “what would this idle babbler wish to say,” NASB “what is this talker of foolish words saying,” BBE “What is this pseudo-intellectual trying to say,” CSB “what would this chatterer say,” DARBY “what is it that this word sower would say,” DOUAY “what is this babbling fool trying to say,” GWN “What does this word-monger mean,” MRD “what is this scavenger trying to say,” NAB “What can this parrot mean,” NJB “what would this seed picker wish to say,” YLT “he’s a dreamer,” LIVING “what is this beggarly babbler to say,” WEYMOUTH “what is this blabbermouth trying to say,” ISV “what is this scraps-of-truth-picker trying to say,” WILLIAMS “what is this beggarly fellow to say,” MONTGOMERY and “What is this babbler with his scrap-heap learning trying to say.” AMPLIFIED

Here, in Athens, was worldly wisdom at its finest – honed to a fine intellectual edge. Now it was facing spiritual wisdom at its finest, initiated by revelation and amplified by the Holy Spirit of God. This is not the wisdom of peers, but is the superior wisdom that comes down from above. It will eclipse the fading embers of worldly wisdom. They clash head-on, and Paul is considered nothing more than a blithering idiot: a babbler, speaker of foolishness, pseudo-intellectual, a fool, blabbermouth, and dreamer! This assessment is strictly owing to the comparison of the manner and content of his speech with their own. They made no effort to probe into what he said, or examine it in view of its actual content. Paul spoke of things that simply did not fit into the intellectual framework of their own making. To say it another way, their own concept of truth was the standard by which

they measured and valued what Paul was saying.

AN INTELLECTUAL ECLIPSE

There is a principle embedded in nature that depicts certain moral and intellectual conditions. It is the phenomenon of an eclipse. In astronomy, an eclipse occurs when three celestial objects become aligned. In such a case, what is the closest obscures what is the farthest away, which is generally actually the larger object. When, therefore, the moon comes between the earth and the sun, the larger sun cannot be seen. You can produce a kind of artificial eclipse by holding a penny before your eye while looking toward the sun. Although the sun is infinitely larger, that small penny will obscure your vision of it, and may altogether hide it. It is an inviolable principle in physics that the further away an object is, the smaller it appears. It the same in the Spirit.

This same principle holds true in matters pertaining to the heart and mind – particularly in things concerning life and godliness. If Jesus Christ Himself, and the “things of the Spirit of God” are kept at a distance from the heart and mind, they cannot be properly seen . At the very best, they will appear distorted, compelling the individual to draw wrong conclusions because things are not seen clearly. Erroneous deductions are the direct result of faulty vision, and faulty vision is the result of a misplaced emphasis. Whatever captures the attention of men, therefore, has a direct bearing upon their ability to perceive and reason upon the things of God. This is something that cannot be avoided.

For this reason, when anything from the earth captures our attention, regardless of what it is, “heavenly things” (John 3:12; Heb 8:5; 9:23) become obscure, and can be altogether hidden. In such a case, the wisdom of God appears to be foolishness, while the foolishness of the world appears to be wisdom.

In our text, this is precisely what has taken place. The Athenian Epicureans and Stoics have been absorbed with the philosophy of this world, and for that very reason, “the mind of the Lord” has been eclipsed to them. The meaning of the English word “eclipse” is very appropriate: “to cause an eclipse of: as a: OBSCURE, DARKEN b: to reduce in importance or repute c: SURPASS.”

MERRIAM-WEBSTER The philosophy these men had embraced did the following:

- Obscured the truth of God.
- Darkened their understanding.
- Caused the truth to appear unimportant.
- In experience, folly surpassed wisdom.

That is why they referred to Paul as a “babbling” – they had been blocked off from the truth. Their hearts had been captured by something else – something that was foolish and perishing.

THIS IS THE MANNER OF WORLDLY WISDOM

It is the manner of worldly wisdom to stand between men and the truth of God, causing it to be hidden. When, for example, professing Christians attempt to mingle the wisdom of this world into their religion, they cannot avoid the truth being pushed further away from them. In direct proportion to the amount of worldly wisdom they embrace, they become incapable of comprehending the truth. This is the mindset described in the words, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them , because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). The “natural man” is the one who is shut up to natural resources. He cannot obtain heavenly resources because they are obtained by faith – which faith can only come to the individual by means of the grace of God (1 Tim 1:14). Further, grace can only proceed from God and Christ. No work of grace can be done through natural means.

A SETTER FORTH OF STRANGE DOCTRINES

“ 18c . . . other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.”

Not only do these philosophers charge Paul with being a babbler, they also give their assessment of his message.

A SETTER FORTH OF STRANGE GODS

“ . . . other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods . . .” Other versions read, “proclaimer of foreign deities,” NKJV “proclaimer of strange deities,” NASB “advocating foreign gods,” NIV “proclaimer of foreign divinities,” NRSV “preacher of strange gods,” BBE “a propagandist for foreign gods,” CJB “announcer of foreign demons,” DARBY “setter forth of new gods,” DOUAY “propagandist for some outlandish gods,” NJB “tidings bringer of new devils,” TNT “of strange demons he doth seem to be an announcer,” YLT “he’s pushing some foreign religion,” LIVING and “His business . . . seems to be to cry up some foreign gods.” WEYMOUTH

In this text, the Greek word translated “gods” is **daimoni,wn** (dai-mon-ion). This is the word ordinarily translated “demons.” However, because its use here reflected a Gentile concept, the translators wisely chose the word “gods” lest it gender confusion. With the Greeks, “demons” were not necessarily evil – something that is firmly declared in Apostolic doctrine. In truth, demons are associated with Satan, do his work, and are hostile toward humanity (Matt 4:24; 8:29; 12:45). They are associated with idolatry (Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17; 1 Cor 10:20-21). They are also perpetrators of false doctrines (1 Tim 4:1). None of these things are acknowledged by heathen philosophers. This is an inspired view of the spiritual underworld, which the Greeks took to be a domain of “gods.”

The proper concept of God is one that has been revealed , not discovered by means of philosophy or any other sphere of human wisdom or aptitude. Among the heathen, there is a general concept of God that is fairly consistent. It is that there is really one supreme God, invested with all of the powers of Deity. However, he is withdrawn from His creation. And is inaccessible to them. The dealings men have with Deity is with a kind of second-class, or lesser god – generally one that has advanced from some lower stage to that of a minor deity. On this, the Britannica Encyclopedia records the following.

“Though the pattern varies from people to people, the High God usually is conceived as masculine or sexless. He is thought to be the sole creator of heaven and earth. Although he is omnipotent and omniscient, he is thought to have withdrawn from his creation and therefore to be inaccessible to prayer or sacrifice. Generally, no graphic images of him exist, nor does he receive cult worship or appear in the mythology. If he is invoked, it is only in times of extreme distress, but there is no guarantee that he will hear or respond. His name often is revealed only to initiates, and to speak his name aloud is thought to invite disaster or death; his most frequent title is Father. In some traditions he is conceived to be a transcendent principle of divine order; in others he is pictured as senile or impotent and replaced by a set of more active and involved deities; and in still other traditions he has become so remote that he is all but forgotten. . . . any benevolent or malevolent spiritual being that mediates between the transcendent and temporal realms.” BRITANNICA ENCYCLOPEDIA

The word translated “*gods*” (daimoniwn) denotes properly “the genii, or spirits who were superior to human beings, but inferior to the gods.” It is, however, often employed to denote the gods themselves, and is evidently so used here. The gods among the Greeks were such as were supposed to have that rank by nature. The demons were such as had been exalted to divinity from being heroes and distinguished men.

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While these people delighted in borrowing gods from the Greeks and the Romans, thinking nothing of it, they were not so amiable toward Paul. This is because of the firmness with which he preached. He gave no allowance for competing gods, or the rights of people to choose their own god.

Paul decimated their view of Deity in the sermon he delivered later “in the midst of Mars Hill” (17:22ff). He declared the God they themselves acknowledged they did not know – which happened to be “the true God” (2 Chron 15:3). As it is written, “The Lord is the true God” (Jer 10:10). Jesus referred to Him as “the only true God” (John 17:3). Distinguishing Him from all false representations, Paul referred to Him as “the living and true God” (1 Thess 1:9). John declared that the God that Jesus Christ gives us to understand is “the true God” (1 John 5:20).

The above statements are not philosophical statements. They are not the result of men searching for God, or studying the conceived evidences of Deity. These are conclusions that have been revealed.

HE PREACHED UNTO THEM JESUS AND THE RESURRECTION

“ . . . because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.” Other versions read, “was preaching.” NASB “was telling,” NRSV “he proclaimed,” CJB and “he announced” DARBY

The substance of Paul’s preaching consisted of the Person of Jesus, and the resurrection of the dead. It is interesting that the philosophers concluded that he was speaking of Deity. This means that the proper presentation of Jesus Christ will lead to the conclusion that He is more than a Man. The “fulness of the Godhead” dwells in Him “bodily” (Col 1:19; 2:9).

What IS Done When Jesus Is Preached?

Precisely what do men do when they preach Jesus? What is an appropriate description of that activity? Peter referred to the words of the Prophets when he told the people God would “send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you” (Acts 3:20). The apostles “ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). Philip “preached Jesus” to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35). Paul addressed the synagogue in Thessalonica, saying “this Jesus, whom I preach, is Christ” (Acts 17:3). Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome, telling them God had power to “stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Rom 16:25). Paul wrote to the Corinthians that Jesus Christ “was preached among you by us” (2 Cor 1:19). Again he wrote to them, “we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord” (2 Cor 4:5).

But what does all of that mean? What is done when Jesus is preached, proclaimed, announced, or declared? What is said in such declarations?

It should not surprise you that Jesus is not generally the subject of the preaching of our time. However, He was the subject of apostolic declaration, as I have already affirmed.

First, preaching Jesus involves saying what God the Father has said about Him. John referred to the preaching of Jesus as “the record that God gave of His Son” (1 John 5:10). If you were to boil it down to one succinct statement, it is this: “And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son” (1 John 5:11). If what a person is saying about Jesus does not fit into that summation, it is not possible that what is being said is the truth.

When Jesus made Himself known, He did so by means of the Scriptures: “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, He expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27). Later, Jesus spelled it out with even more specificity: “And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me” (Luke 24:44).

Through Moses and the Prophets, God prepared the world for the coming of His Son. He told them what to expect when the Messiah came, and what He would do. He acquainted them with His accomplishments in the ceremonies of the Law, and cultured their appetites with the various promises delivered by the Prophets. The manner in which the Christ would think and speak were made known in the Psalms, as well as His experience in death and the resurrection. The need for Jesus was expounded by the Prophets – a need that was found in both God and man.

Paul did not philosophize about Jesus, but declared Him as He was.

He Preached the Resurrection

Some versions read, “and His coming back from the dead,” BBE “and saying that people would come back to life,” GWN and “and His resurrection.” MRD/NLT/LIVING

I fear that the preaching of the resurrection sounds nearly as strange today as it did to those ancient Athenians. There is not a lot being said about it, for it does not blend well with the direction of contemporary Christian efforts. The things that take place in this world have been set forth as primary, and all specialists focus on the temporary – even though real life is set forth as looking “NOT on the things that are seen”

In the text, both the English and the Greek, the article is used “THE resurrection.” Most of the time this phrase is used, it refers to the general resurrection of the dead. When referring to Jesus’ own resurrection, it is made very clear: “His resurrection” (Matt 27:53; Acts 1:22; Rom 6:5; Phil 3:10), “the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:3; 3:21), etc. Jesus Himself spoke frequently of “the resurrection” (Matt 22:30,31; Lk 14:14; Lk 20:35-36; John 5:29). The apostles “preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead” (Acts 4:2). Paul taught extensively on the subject of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:21-57). In stating his own objectives, he said he was seeking to “attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:11) – that is, that he would realize his finest hour at that time. Jesus spoke of the resurrection of “they that have done good” as being the “resurrection of life” (John 5:22). That is compared to the resurrection of those who “have done evil,” which, He said, was “the resurrection of damnation.”

For those in Christ Jesus, the resurrection of the dead marks the beginning of total wholeness, when their bodies will “put on incorruption ” (1 Cor 15:54-54). For them, that will be the “redemption of the purchased possession,” which is their body (Eph 1:14). Happy day, indeed!

The Implications of the Doctrine

The implications of the resurrection of the dead are strong, with powerful incentives. A few observations will suffice.

- It confirms this life is not the only life.
- It confirms life does not end when men die.
- It confirms men are accountable to God, and will stand before Him.
- It confirms that death will be finally and totally defeated.
- It confirms that men are to prepare for what follows death.
- It undergirds the real reason for living.

Paul reasoned that if the dead did not rise, there was really no cause for separation from the world or facing jeopardy for Jesus’ sake. “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32). The “hope and resurrection of the dead” was reason enough to submit to persecution, dangers, and death itself for Jesus’ sake.

I fear that the preaching of the resurrection sounds nearly as strange today as it did to those ancient Athenians. There is not a lot being said about it, for it does not blend well with the direction of contemporary Christian efforts. The things that take place in this world have been set forth as primary, and all specialists focus on the temporary – even though real life is set forth as looking “NOT on the things that are seen” (2 Cor 4:18). However, it is only in this posture, while we are focused on the things “which are not seen,” that our inner man can be “renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16). Judging from the direction of today’s church, one would never suspect that the resurrection is one of the elementary points of the doctrine of Christ – something everyone should know, and know very well (Heb 6:2). It is one of the pillars of sound reasoning.

THEY BROUGHT HIM TO THE AREOPAGUS

“ 19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?”

Because of their penchant for novelty and knowledge, the philosophers of Athens will ask Paul to elaborate on what he has been declaring publicly.

THEY BROUGHT HIM UNTO AREOPAGUS

“And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus . . .” Other versions read, “to the Areopagus,” NASB “to a meeting of the Areopagus,” NIV “to Mars’ Hill,” BBE “brought him before the High Council,” CJB “into Mars Street,” GENEVA “the place of judgments called Areopagus,” MRD “a meeting of the Areopagus Council,” IE “to the city auditorium,” WILLIAMS and “the 10Areopagus [Mars Hill meeting place].” AMPLIFIED

There is a two-fold reference here. First, to the place – “Mars Hill” (17:22). Second, it refers to the people who gathered there in a council – “Areopagus.” This was also called the “Upper Council.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S This was a place where serious matters were taken into consideration, and even major trials were held here. It is described as “The most venerable of all the Athenian courts, consisting of all exarchons of blameless life. It was the Upper Council, to distinguish it from the five hundred, who met in the valley below.” FAUSSET

Those who doubt the mental and scholastic superiority of the Gospel do well to note how it had captured the attention of these ancient thinkers. No one should ever yield to the notion that the truth of God is simplistic, or that it does not engage the most noble and astute abilities of humanity. I know of no person of insight who has ever said the Scriptures are written in a simplistic manner, or that they contain only rudimentary knowledge. The most developed and disciplined minds in history have found the Scriptures challenging. People who devote themselves to the reading and consideration of the Word of God will find their thinking challenged and their contemplative skills awakened.

MAY WE KNOW OF THIS NEW DOCTRINE?

“ . . . saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?” Other versions read, “what this new doctrine is of which you speak,” NKJV “what this new teaching is which you are proclaiming,” NASB “what this new teaching is you are presenting,” NIV “make clear to us what is this new teaching of yours,” BBE “tell us these new ideas that you're teaching,” GWN “tell us more about this new religion,” LIVING and “May we know what this novel (unheard of and unprecedented) teaching is which you are openly declaring.” AMPLIFIED

Here we see the obvious clash of the wisdom that comes from God with the wisdom of the world. As elementary as the message of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead may seem to you, it was astounding for its strangeness to the intellectual hub of Athens.

God's Revelation to Israel

God established the Israelites as the premier nation in the world. He “chose” them “to be a special people unto Himself, upon all people that are upon the face of the earth” (Deut 7:6). He “set” His love upon them, and particularly chose them (Deut. 7:7). In truth He said to them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth” (Amos 3:2). As confirmed by the apostle Paul, every advantage belonged to them : “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

As a consequence of His choice of them, the Israelites had things revealed to them that were withheld from others.

- The origin of the cosmos (Gen 1-2).
- The nature of the true God (Gen 6:3; Ex 34:6-7).
- The origin of man (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7; 5:1; Deut 4:32).
- The origin of sin (Gen 3:1-19).
- The reality of the devil (Gen 3:11 Chron 21:1; Job 1:1-12; 2:1-7; Psa 109:6; Zech 3:1-2).
- The definition of morality (Ex 20:1-17; Deut 4:8).
- The abomination of idolatry (Ex 20:3-4; 23:13; Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17).
- The reason for death (Gen 2:17; 3:19).
- The need of salvation (Gen 49:18; Ex 14:13; 15:2; Deut 32:15; Psa 3:8; Isa 12:3; 45:8).
- The need for a Savior (Isa 19:20; 25:9; 43:11; Hos 13:4).
- The resurrection of the dead (Job 19:25-27; Psa 16:10; 30:3; Isa 25:8; 26:19; Hos 13:14; Dan 12:2-3).
- The day of judgment (1 Chron 16:33; Psa 9:7; 96:13; 98:9; Eccl 3:17; Dan 7:9-10).

None of these things were known by the heathen – not to any degree. Their wise men and philosophers could not uncover these realities, regardless of their intellectual superiority. Those who trafficked in the dark world of evil spirits were not told these things, nor could they discover them.

The nature and work of the Savior (Gen 3:15; 12:3; 49:10; Isa 11:1-16; 28:16; 32:2; 40:3-4,11; 42:1-4; 49:1-26; 53:1-12; 55:3-5).

None of these things were known by the heathen – not to any degree. Their wise men and philosophers could not uncover these realities, regardless of their intellectual superiority. Those who trafficked in the dark world of evil spirits were not told these things, nor could they discover them. However, God chose to reveal them to Israel, and none of these things were totally strange to any informed member of that nation.

But these were “strange” things to the Athenians, representing an entirely new line of thought and teaching to them. It was outside the perimeter of their knowledge. They therefore ask Paul to provide them with further explanations.

STRANGE THINGS TO THEIR EARS

“ 20 For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.”

CERTAIN STRANGE THINGS

“For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears . . .” Other versions read, “some strange ideas,” NIV “it sounds rather strange to us,” NRSV “strike us as strange,” CJB “certain new things,” DOUAY “strange notions,” NAB “surprising things,” NET “seemed startling,” NJB “we have never heard these things before,” IE and “startling things, foreign and strange.” AMPLIFIED

The strangeness of Paul’s words was owing to the fact that they spoke of a differing order of things. They were quite literally words from another world that speaks a different language, with a different focus, and supporting realities that are unknown to those who are of this world. These men could immediately recognize that Paul was speaking about something concerning which they knew nothing. Among other things, this confirms that Paul did not water the message down, or reduce it so men of this world could understand it. He did not speak in Athenian colloquialisms, or borrow his language from the philosophers with whom they were familiar. Oh, in his message, he will refer to certain of their “own poets” (17:28) – but that will only be because what was said was in harmony with truth, even if the poet was not fully aware of it. In fact, it was the very strangeness of Paul’s speech that provoked this inquiry.

Jesus Explains

Although Jesus did not speak to heathen philosophers, He did speak to some Jewish ones who were skewed the wrong way in their thinking. They also had difficulty understanding what He was saying. It was not their kind of speech. Jesus, however, told them the reason for their inability to comprehend what He said. “Ye are from beneath; I am from above: ye are of this world; I am not of this world” (John 8:23). He later further explained: “Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word” (John 8:43). There are some people who cannot hear what is being said by godly men. They do not have “ears to hear.” It can be said of them as Moses said to wayward Israel, “Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day” (Deut 29:4).

There are at least five things that prove to be barriers between the flesh and the Spirit, the saved and the lost, the carnal and the spiritual. There are no doubt more, but these will suffice to account for the strangeness of Paul’s words to the Athenian philosophers.

- **FOCUS.** There is a different focus in Divine communication. Man is not the central figure, and the earth is not the primary place. The Gospel is a message that focuses on the Person of Christ, what He has accomplished, and its appointed relevance to men. Any person lacking this focus will not be able to derive any benefit from the Gospel of Christ.

- **PERSPECTIVE.** There is a different perspective that is initiated and cultured by the Word of God. Truth is seen against the backdrop of man’s fallen condition, the presence of a conquering adversary, and coming day of judgment. If men do not take these things into account, the Word of God will have little or no meaning to them. It speaks with the inevitabilities of death and judgment in mind, and the means God has provided for safely passing through them both.

- **OBJECTIVE.** The objective of God’s Word involves getting people safely out of this present evil world – uprooting them from the temporal and anchoring them in the eternal. If men treat religion as a novelty, as did the Athenians, they will be confused by Paul, for the seriousness and gravity of his words were very apparent.

• **LANGUAGE.** Words like “THE Christ,” “resurrection,” “judgment” and “righteousness” are not within range of the world’s frequency – they cannot hear them with discernment. They do not represent the values of this world, and therefore the world cannot take hold of them. In a very real sense, they are foreign to everyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ.

• **SUPPORTING REALITIES.** The world equates reality with what can be accessed by the human senses. But that is not how reality, or truth, is viewed by the Word of God. The ultimate realities are God and Christ, and everything else relates to them in either an acceptable or unacceptable manner. There are real places like heaven, hell, the throne of judgment, and the presence of the Lord. There are spiritual realities like grace, truth, love, and Divine power. However, these are not after the worldly order, thus making it impossible for the worldly-minded to take hold of the Word of the Lord.

Jesus told His disciples, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). There you have the described condition with which the world cannot contend. Paul had been taken out of the world, and they have been left in it – absorbed with what is going on there, with no interest in the unseen realm. He had been “delivered from this present evil world” (Gal 1:4), and they had not. He was not confined to this world, and they were. What is more, in their own strength, and with all of the resources that were available to them, there was not a thing they could do about the situation. Yet, they were completely unaware of their real circumstance.

Add to this the fact that a lack of understanding is not the root of the matter – as though these philosophers could be taught in such a way as to make the truth at least palatable. That is not the case at all. It is ever true, “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Cor 2:14). As long as a person is in the category of “natural man” these things cannot be perceived, and consequently cannot be received. That is precisely what Jesus revealed when He said, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).

In view of this stark reality, we must question the effort to make spiritual things plain to carnal people. Such efforts, wherever they are found, display a fundamental lack of understanding. They are a display of ignorance, not nobility or concern.

The novice will question, therefore, why we should preach at all. After all, if men cannot understand, what is the use of declaring the truth. However, that is too simplistic for informed people to embrace. First, we cannot always identify the people who are in this category. Some who appear to be interested may not be at all, and others who seem to be indifferent may be pondering what is said with an honest and good heart. As we deliver the truth, we must do so with spiritual expertise, knowing how to handle the Word of truth (2 Tim 2:15). Then, we must rely on the Holy Spirit to use that word, probing the inner recesses of men, and discerning the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12).

WHAT DO THESE THINGS MEAN?

“ . . . we would know therefore what these things mean.” Other versions read, “we would like to know what they mean,” NIV “we have a desire to get the sense of them,” BBE “we want to know what these ideas mean,” CSB “want to know what its all about,” NLT “we want to hear more,” LIVING “want to know what this teaching means,” IE and “should therefore like to be told exactly what they mean.” WEYMOUTH

These men had heard enough, that they knew there was something more to what was being said than they had perceived. That tells us they did not think that Paul was a raving madman. There was

rationality and intelligence in what he said – they just could not discern it. The fact that they asked for more will remove from them all excuse for not embracing the truth. It will, also provide an opportunity for Paul to wield the sword of the Spirit with expertise.

Unlike Felix, unwilling to wait, they asked to hear more immediately. Perhaps Felix saw more of what Paul said than they did. When Paul “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25). However, these men took Paul to the place where things were weighed and pondered, and decisions were made. Paul is neither ashamed nor afraid to speak in such an environment. We will find, however, that their motives were not noble. Their cause was not a proper one.

TELLING OR HEARING SOME NEW THING

“ 21 For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing. ” Other versions read, “doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas,” NIV “spend their spare time talking or hearing about the latest intellectual fads,” CJB “looked for opportunities to tell or hear something new and unusual,” GWN “nothing else were at leisure but to say something, and to hear some newer thing,” YLT and “spent all their leisure time in nothing except telling or hearing something newer than the last.” AMPLIFIED

It was not a thirst for truth that drove these men, but rather an insatiable appetite for novelty. They delighted to hear of the newest ideas, read the latest books, and be exposed to new views about this or that. This attitude is the result of idleness, for when men are idle, they are attracted to the novel, and are prone to babble. One of their own, Demosthenes, said, “we, says he (for the truth shall be said), sit here, doing nothing” — — inquiring in the court, whether any new thing is said.” Respons. ad Philippi Epistolam Kuinoel observes, “I bear witness to the garrulity, and curiosity, and intemperate desire of novelty among the Athenians, by which they inquired respecting all things, even those in which they had no interest, whether of a public or private nature.” ALBERT BARNES

A PENCHANT FOR NOVELTY

The request of the Athenians was not driven by a “love of the truth,” the appointed means through which men are saved (2 Thess 2:10-11). Rather, it was their inordinate appetite for hearing new ideas and perspectives – intellectual dainties that added nothing to men.

Of course, it is one thing to read of the Athenians having this dreadful thirst for novelty, with no genuine interest in what they hear. It is quite another for this spirit to be found among professed believers.

Novelty, by definition, is

It is possible for a person to get all caught up in hearing these various views, with no real intention of taking hold of the truth, In fact, the more you submit your mind to such things, the more the facts of Christ’s return and the end of the world recede into the background of your thinking.

something old put into a new form. “Some new thing” is not really something that is “new” in the sense of Scripture. It is nothing more than a different twist on something that is already known. From the higher perspective, it is nothing more than the flesh dressed up in a way that is appealing because it appears different. In matters of religion, it would be a human opinion of something – a notion that represents what men think of a matter, and not the matter itself. For the Athenians of our text, they were thinking of a new idea about religion and the gods that were embraced. Their’s was not a quest for truth itself, but a great delight in hearing differing human opinions concerning the

matter under consideration.

A modern religious quest that is much like that of our text is, what men refer to as, Eschatology: the study of last things. There are a remarkable variety of ideas on the subject that are afoot in the Christian world. They involve such things as:

- Soul sleeping.
- Purgatory.
- The state of the dead prior to the coming of the Lord.
- The end of the world.
- The day of judgment and the manner in which it will be carried out.
- The concept of rewards.
- The great tribulation.
- The length of the tribulation.
- The rapture.
- The time of the rapture: before, during, or after the tribulation.
- The reign of Jesus on the earth.
- The mingling of glory and flesh in that reign.
- How the subduing of Satan for a season will be known.
- How the saints will reign with Christ.

On these facets of last things, there is an endless parade of human ideas, all claiming to be based upon what has been revealed in the Scriptures. However none of them are clearly taught in Scripture. All of them tend to detract from the coming of the Lord Himself, the judgment of all men, and the end of the world. Yet, such things have caught the attention of men who have an inordinate interest in human opinion.

It is possible for a person to get all caught up in hearing these various views, with no real intention of taking hold of the truth, In fact, the more you submit your mind to such things, the more the facts of Christ's return and the end of the world recede into the background of your thinking. In this case, it is the novelty that appeals to the curiosity of men, and is the means through which they are actually led away from the truth.

Apostolic doctrine warns believers of the distracting influence of things that have no inherent value. These are things that only appeal to human curiosity, and the desire to enlarge the scope of knowledge. They have nothing whatsoever to do with profit, benefit, edification, or spiritual growth and advancement.

• **THINGS THAT MINISTER QUESTIONS.** “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do” (1 Tim 1:4).

• **THINGS THAT ARE PROFANE OR WORLDLY.** “But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness” (1 Tim 4:7).

• **THINGS THAT ARE NOT PROFITABLE.** “Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers” (2 Tim 2:14).

• **THINGS THAT GENDER STRIFE.** “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid,

knowing that they do gender strifes ” (2 Tim 2:23).

• **THINGS THAT ARE VAIN.** “But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain ” (Titus 3:9).

I remember very well my renewed exposure to the Christian academic world, after having been isolated from it for some time. Having spent some thirty-five years trafficking in the truth of Scripture, and among a people who found delight in the discussion and perception of the Word of God itself, I suddenly found myself in the scholastic realm again. The contrast was so apparent that it was staggering. There was more of an Athenian spirit among the people than that of the early disciples of our Lord. A tremendous amount of interest was given to varying human views of things expounded in Scripture. There was a very apparent interest in the books of men that caused the people to often look with disdain upon anyone whose concepts had been formed by the Scriptures themselves. In fact, there was a marked tendency to think that such a thing was not even possible. In such an environment, there was a pronounced ignorance of things that were obviously unrelated to this world: i.e. the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, reigning forever with Christ, etc. As soon as any discussion drifted outside the parameters of human experience, there was a certain uncomfortableness that gripped the people. Often there was even a persuasion that such things were not relevant, and only dealt with the theoretical. This was a difficult period of my life, with many accompanying sorrows and frustrations.

THE PRECIOUS COMMODITY OF TIME

Particularly in Christ, time is a precious commodity in which men are to invest wisely. It is to be perceived as a period of opportunity to gain advantages, and make wise investments of our persons and time. Apostolic doctrine speaks of this as “redeeming the time, because the days are evil,” or “making the most of our time,” NASB (Eph 5:16). By saying “the days are evil,” Scripture means there is a disproportionate amount of evil present, so that the good things of God are not easily detected. Jesus said that the spreading and abounding of iniquity would actually cause “the love of many to wax cold” (Matt 24:12).

Time is not to be taken for granted. Even in spiritually primitive times, Moses sensed this and prayed, “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom ” (Psa 90:12). David wrote, “My times are in Thy hand” (Psa 31:15). “Times” are the divisional breakdown of “time.” It is important for God’s people to be like the children of Issachar, who had an “understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do” (1 Chron 12:32).

There are times when dangers are more prominent, and times when blessings are more abundant. How blessed it is to know what to avoid and when it ought to be done, and to know when spiritual manna is abundant on the ground of occasion, and is to be gathered.

It is possible for someone who has been given thirty years, to live as though they had been given ninety – thus squandering time. On the other hand, it is also possible for a person given ninety years, to live as though he had only been given thirty, and thus miss countless opportunities that are set before him. Those who are attracted to novelty will squander the time that is given to them, thereby falling into snares they could have avoided, and missing benefits they could have appropriated.

We are living in a time when the Christian community is being inundated with all kind of religious fads and trivia. Passing trends and temporal circumstances have captured the attention of authors, and they are cranking out record numbers of books that will be obsolete before too many years pass away. It is the spirit of the Athenians being revived, and it is not good. It is time to sound the warning to the people concerning investing their minds in things with brief and passing relevance. Our investments are to be in eternity – laying up treasures in heaven, where there will be no novelties, but only true and lasting substance. There is where treasures are to be laid up, and laid up for ourselves.

CONCLUSION

The universal application of the Gospel is refreshing to consider. Who but God Himself could produce a message that was itself tailored for all people, bringing hope and satisfaction to all who embrace it. It is a message adapted to humanity itself, rather than certain kinds of people. The Gospel in its essential form is addressed to those with differing fleshly status.

- Male and female.
- Bond and free.
- Jew and Gentile.
- Educated and uneducated.
- Married and unmarried.
- Young and old.
- Mature and immature.
- Novices and the learned.

The reason for this universal adaptation is that the above distinctions, as well as others like them, are only surface distinctions. They do not represent fundamental differences. For example, those who say that men and women are fundamentally different are not correct in that supposition. At the core of their being, the distinction of male and female does not exist. The spirit of a person is not defined by gender. That is a distinction that exists primarily in the body, and secondarily in the soul. Add to that the factor of faith, by which men are brought into affiliation with the Lord. Faith impacts the soul, but is superior to it – and it has nothing whatsoever to do with gender, or any other fleshly distinction. The Gospel is addressed to the essential part of man, not his surface or secondary parts. This is confirmed in the various accounts of the preaching of the Gospel that have been recorded to this point in the book of Acts.

- Devout Jews (2:5; 9:22).
- Citizens of various countries (2:8-11).
- Parents and children (2:39).
- Jews and Gentiles (2:39).
- The lame and infirm (3:1-11; 14:8-10).
- Worshipers in the Temple (3:12-26; 5:25).
- Jewish religious leaders (4:9-12; 5:29-32,42).
- The disciples of Jesus (4:31-33; 11:26; 15:14-19,32; 16:41).
- In various houses (5:42).
- In synagogues, to mixed crowds (7:1-53; 9:20; 13:5,14-42; 14:1; 17:1-3,10-11; 17:17).
- Everywhere (8:4).
- In cities, to the general public (8:5,12,40; 14:21,25).
- A government official (8:30-39; 13:12).
- A Gentile military man (10:36-47).
- Households (10:22).
- Greeks (11:20).

- Gentile proselytes (13:43).
- Regions, with mixed multitudes (13:49; 14:6-7).
- Idolaters (14:11-17).
- Some women worshipers (16:13-15).
- A business woman and her household (16:13-15).
- A prison keeper and his household (16:30-34).
- Public gathering places (17:17).
- Philosophers (17:18).

Although covering a vast array of differing personalities and people, it was a singular Gospel that was preached. The same Jesus was preached. The same salvation was declared. The same means of appropriation was declared. The same promises were given. The Gospel itself does not address people according to their gender, social status, ethnicity, age, or political environment. Nor, indeed, is it declared to them in accordance with their social, economical, or scholastic achievements. All of those distinctions are on the surface of humanity, and therefore are not common to all. The dilemma that is addressed by the Gospel is a common one: sin. At the root of the matter, sin has produced the same results in all of the people.

- Death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1).
- Mortality (1 Cor 15:22).
- Under the dominion of the devil (Eph 2:2).
- Alienated from the life of God (Eph 4:18).
- Enmity against God (Rom 5:10; 8:7).
- Spiritual obtuseness (1 Cor 2:14).
- Enslavement to sin (Rom 6:17).
- A state of hopelessness (Eph 2:12).

None of these conditions are directly related to being a man or a woman, a Jew or a Gentile, or being a slave or a master. They did not result from a lack of education or a lot of it. They cannot be traced back to being married or single. The existence of sin is not related to being old or young, or being under an ideal government or one that is despotic in nature. The problem with humanity is found at the foundational level, and is therefore common to everyone. As soon as men make an attempt to tailor the Gospel for men in their secondary status, they will be forced to distort it.

Although this may seem quite apparent, there are approaches to Gospel preaching that totally obscure both its nature and intent. Let it be clear that a certain oneness is reflected in the Gospel. It is spelled out in Ephesians 4:4-6: “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” No person in Christ is excluded from any of these realities – not a single one! Whatever salvation itself brings is for all who receive it. There are no secondary citizens in Christ’s Kingdom.

When men make efforts to adapt the Gospel, and even spiritual life, to circumstances other than those declared in Scripture to be related to that Gospel, they have taken from the Gospel. They have injected the virus of human thinking into the message, thereby rendering it useless. Their opinions concerning human need are like hewn stones that are attempted to be placed into the altar of God (Ex 20:25). They pollute the message.

I say these things because there is a total absence of such attempts in the inspired record of

preaching and teaching. I have shown the variety of people to whom the Gospel was preached. So far as the personal circumstances of the people, hardly any information at all is provided. We know of a government official, a military man, a business woman, and a jail-keeper. But only a minimal amount of information is provided.

This by no means suggests that the Lord has no interest in the lives of His people. However, it does suggest that those matters are worked out within the framework of Divine fellowship. For this reason, we have been called into “the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9), and “the communion of the Holy Spirit” NKJV (2 Cor 13:14). As men live by faith and walk in the Spirit, personal and effective teaching will take place concerning their lives. However, it is not the business of the ministers of God to enter into that arena with a mind to resolve human challenges and difficulties. By so doing, they are interfering with the manner of the Kingdom. Such approaches may be conducive to career development and the building of apparently great ministries. However, those who embark on such pursuits are conducting themselves in contrariety to the revealed record. The saints are not to submit to them, but rather are to turn from them (2 Tim 3:5).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #74

PAUL SPEAKS IN THE AREOPAGUS

“ 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. 23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. 24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; 25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; 26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; 27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after Him, and find Him, though He be not far from every one of us: 28 For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring. 29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. 30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: 31 Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead. 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33 So Paul departed from among them. 34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” (Acts 17:22-34)

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

Being brought by the philosophers to the place where sayings were considered, Paul seizes the opportunity to present a proper perspective of life. His words sharply conflicted with their penchant for looking for some new thing. He declares the focus should be on the Person of God, not things, affirming that this was the intent for which man was made in the first place. This message is a hallmark presentation that clears the fog of delusion created by both idolatry and philosophy. Paul again declared the resurrection of the dead, and again stumped his hearers, who said they would give him another hearing. However, they would not be given another opportunity, for Paul would not consent to their procrastination. Following the surfacing of a handful of

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- **THE ORIGINAL PLACEMENT OF MAN (17:26)**
- **THE APPOINTED VOCATION OF MAN (17:27)**
- **THE OFFSPRING OF GOD AND ITS IMPLICATIONS (17:28-29)**
- **GOD HAS WINKED AT HUMAN IGNORANCE – BUT NO MORE (17:30)**
- **THE PROSPECT OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT (17:31)**
- **SOME MOCKED, SOME WANTED TO HEAR MORE, BUT PAUL DEPARTED (17:32-33)**
- **SOME BELIEVED AND CLAVE TO HIM.**
- **CONCLUSION**

people who embraced what Paul declared, he left the area and headed for Corinth. Like the Jews in the Antioch synagogue, the Athenian philosophers had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life (Acts 13:46).

THE CONSIDERATION OF DEITY

Throughout Scripture, Deity Itself is the heart of proclamation. Prior to Christ, the fundamental message pertained to God Himself – His will, His purpose, His Law, and His promises. Further, the primary promises pertained to the One God would send into the world from heaven to fulfill His will. Following the enthronement of the Son of God, Jesus Christ was also prominent in all declarations, set forth as the preeminent expression of God and His purpose. He is set forth as the exclusive means of coming to God and receiving from Him. In fact, He is the One who is bringing men “to God” (1 Pet 3:18), and through whom we come to “the Father” (John 14:6).

Now, all of this is fully acceptable to religious men as long as it is confined to a creedal statement. They are quite content to acknowledge this is what they “believe,” and, for the most part, they are willing to put this in writing and be duly noted and included it in their formal statement of faith. However, when it comes to what they regularly say, what is declared in their pulpits, and chronicled in their books, this is not at all their primary message. This is because, in practicality, this message is not perceived as relevant to everyday life. Domestic, social, and political life is perceived as being “where the rubber hits the road.” We certainly do not hear of workshops on the character and purpose of God, or the accomplishments and ministry of Jesus Christ. However, that IS what we read about in the Scriptures.

- Jesus preached “the gospel of the Kingdom,” which primarily had to do with God

(Matt 4:23; 9:35; 11:5).

- Matthew says Jesus began to “preach” that “the Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 4:17).

- When Jesus sent out His disciples, He told them to preach “The Kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 10:7). Luke says “He sent them to preach “the Kingdom of God” (Lk 9:2).

In the Gospels alone there are 469 references to God (God, Father). There are 208 references to “Lord.” They also contain 837 direct references to Jesus (Jesus, Son, Christ). Additionally, they contain 2,887 pronouns that speak of Deity (He, Him, His, Thou [You] and Thine [‘Yours]).

- John the Baptist preached “the Kingdom of God” (Mk 1:14).

- Jesus said that since John the Baptist “the Kingdom of God is preached” (Lk 16:16).

- In the book of Acts, “Jesus” was the subject of preaching (3:20; 4:2; 5:42; 8:5,35; 9:20; 10:36,42; 11:20; 13:36; 17:3,18; 19:13), as well as “the Kingdom of God” (8:12; 20:26; 38:31).

- The “word” that was preached was “the word of the Lord” (Acts 8:25; 11:16; 13:48,49; 15:35,36; 16:32; 19:10) and “ the word of God” (4:31; 6:7; 8:14; 11:1; 12:24; 13:5,7,44,45; 17:13; 18:11; 19:20).

- Acts contains 167 references to God (God, Father), 111 references to “Lord,” 68 references to “Jesus,” 31 to “Christ,” and 14 to the “Son.” There are also 578 pronouns that reference Deity.

- The Epistles and Revelation contain over 774 references to God (God, Father), and 357 to “Lord,” There are 530 direct references to Jesus (Jesus, Christ, Son). There are also 1,723 pronouns that refer to Deity.

- These references do not include other ways in which Deity is referenced: like Most High, Lamb, Mediator, Testator, etc.

Although this is a rather cursory observation, it serves to illustrate the obvious focus of inspired utterance and writing. If the subject was working or achievement, the emphasis was placed on what God and Christ have done. If it was on speaking, it was what the Lord had said that was the point. When it came to objective or purpose, it what the Lord had determined. If the “will” was being expounded, it was the will of God. If realizing pleasure and satisfaction was the point, the issue related to what pleased God. If kings and government were addressed, the Lord and His dominion were declared. If the kingdoms or rule were the point, the Kingdom and rule of God were affirmed. These things are so obvious that it almost appears foolish to even draw attention to them. However, when theology is skewed in the wrong direction, all of these surface observations cannot even be seen, and they certainly are not the objects of extended thinking.

In the matter of preaching and teaching, there are certain priorities, and it is essential that men have some kind of understanding of them.

First, at the heart of everything God has revealed Deity itself is the point. So far as the New Covenant perspective is concerned, that consists of the Persons of God the Father and Jesus Christ His Son. God has nothing to say that does not issue forth from Them, and point back to Them, No Divine word or work is performed independently of Them or without a due regard for Them.

Second, all revelation and all Divinely initiated work is within the context of God’s eternal purpose. This is a purpose conceived before the world began (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9). What God is doing is the point.

Third, within the context of God’s eternal purpose, the Kingdom of God is the point . That involves God focusing His Divine qualities toward the fulfillment of an objective. Because it is an “eternal

purpose,” it has more to do with eternity than with time. This is an “everlasting Kingdom” (2 Pet 1:11).

Fourth, within the context of the Kingdom of God, the specific work that is being wrought is the salvation of God. In this salvation, all of the foundational work has been done by Jesus Christ, and in strict accord with the eternal purpose itself, which is a perfect expression of God’s own Person. This salvation is an ongoing work, commencing with the exaltation of Jesus throughout the history of the world.

Fifth, within the context of the salvation of God, an order has been established that is designed to perfect the saints, thereby orienting them for glory. In this perfection they are delivered from the world, receive a “new man,” and commence working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. The objective is for them to be ready to finally leave the world, stand before the Judge of all the earth, and reign forever with Jesus Christ, into whose image they are being conformed.

Sixth, there is the matter of living wholly unto the Lord. This involves the daily subjugation of the flesh, or the mortifying of the deeds of the body. It also involves putting on the new man, adding the graces given for that purpose, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord.

THE PERSPECTIVE

One cannot focus on the lives of the saints unless it is within the context of their perfection and preparation for eternity. It is not possible to concentrate on the perfection of the saints, if it is not strictly within the context of God’s great salvation. To emphasize the salvation of God without it being within the context of the Kingdom of God forces the individual to live only in view of this world and becoming a supposedly better person. Should any person think of the Kingdom of God apart from the eternal purpose of God, they will drift toward novel and unproductive views of Divine rule. Finally, to ponder the purpose of God without some kind of comprehension of His Person thrusts the individual into a fruitless endeavor.

THE RELEVANCE OF THIS

It is important to grasp at least the intellectual form of these things, for it will assist you in making more sense of Paul’s sermon. What he did was begin with the core reality with which they had the most familiarity – the existence of Deity. He then reasoned from that pivotal point in such a manner as to provoke godly inquiry among the listeners. It set before them unvarying realities upon which to think. It is a sterling example of godly reasoning.

PAUL SPEAKS IN THE MIDST OF MARS HILL

“ 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.”

Paul’s reasoning in the public square has drawn the attention of the Athenian philosophers. He has been preaching “Jesus and the resurrection.” This is doubtless the same kind of preaching that is elsewhere described in this way: “preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2).

Notice, whether in Jerusalem by Peter and John, or in Athens by Paul, preaching led the people to a consideration of what will happen AFTER death! That is preaching with perspective! Paul will not now, nor did the faithful before him or contemporary with him, preach within the primary context of life in this world or in the flesh.

CONTEXTUAL PREACHING

The context of preaching is the background against which it is presented. That is, there are facts and

circumstances that necessitate the message that is being delivered. From the standpoint of the factual environment, there are primarily God, Christ, the purpose of God, and the salvation of God. An example of surrounding circumstances is the dilemma created by sin. There is also an experiential backdrop that necessitates preaching. This has to do with appointed circumstances, not those that can be called “every day circumstances.” The two preeminent circumstances that require preaching have not yet occurred. However, they have been Divinely appointed, and will take place. They are the resurrection of the dead and the day of judgment. Both of these have to do with all men confronting the God who both made and purchased them.

Paul will preach within the context of these appointed realities. Only a modicum of thought will confirm to your heart that very little of the preaching of our time are within this context. In fact, these appointed realities are not even viewed in the category of experience – at least not in any productive way. There is a reason for this situation. Men can in no way capitalize on these appointments in a fleshly manner. They can design no program calculated to ready men for them, and they are well aware that they cannot. No religious career can be established in this arena. Yet, Paul will drive home these realities with great power. They are among the things that make Christ Jesus relevant to all men.

MARS HILL

“ 17:22a Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill . . . ” Other versions read “in the midst of the Areopagus,” NKJV “in the meeting of the Areopagus,” NIV “in front of the Areopagus,” NRSV “in the council meeting,” CJB “in the middle of the court” GWN “before the whole counsel of the Areopagus,” NJB and “the Areopagus [Mars Hill meeting place].” AMPLIFIED

Mars' Hill was the place, and the Areopagus was the gathering of intellectually astute council. Here Paul is not defending himself, as he did before Agrippa and Fetus. He is not answering false charges against himself that he was a rabble-rouser causing social disturbance. That happened at Philippi and Thessalonica, but is not the circumstance in Athens. From the Athenians point of view, “To that hill the apostle Paul was led, not to defend himself before the judges, but that he might set forth his opinions on divine subjects to a greater multitude of people, flocking together there and eager to hear something new.” THAYER “The court of Areopagus was one of the oldest and most honored, not only in Athens, but in the whole of Greece, and indeed in the ancient world.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S It is understood that the citizenry of Athens stood on the steps and in the area surrounding the sitting council, or Areopagus. Paul is addressing those regarded as the intelligentsia of Athens – yea, also even of the whole world. They are people capable of profound and extended thought, and which have a penchant for learning. I cannot help but think that Paul rejoiced at the opportunity to lay before such men things that transcended human wisdom, yet could be understood by the faith that is “obtained through the righteousness of God and of our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1).

TOO SUPERSTITIOUS

“ 22b . . . and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.” Other versions read, “in all things are very religious,” NKJV “are very religious in all respects,” NASB “extremely religious in every way,” NRSV “you are overmuch given to fear of the gods,” BBE “given up to demon worship,” DARBY “in all things ye are excessive in the worship of demons,” MRD “extremely scrupulous you are in all religious matters,” NJB “you are in every respect remarkably religious,” WEYMOUTH and “I perceive in every way [on every hand and with every turn I make] that you are most religious or very reverent to demons.” AMPLIFIED

The word “superstitious” is translated from the large Greek word **deisidaimoneste,rouj** . The lexical meaning of the word is, “reverence for the gods, piety, religious,” THAYER “pious attitude toward divinities,” FRIBERG “a set of beliefs concerning deity, with the implication of corresponding behavior,” LOUW-NIDA and “fear of the gods” LIDDELL-SCOTT

“It seems unlikely that Paul should give this audience a slap in the face at the very start. The way one takes this adjective here colours Paul's whole speech before the Council of Areopagus. The comparative here as in verse 21 means more religions than usual (Robertson, *Grammar* , pp. 664f.), the object of the comparison not being expressed. The Athenians had a tremendous reputation for their devotion to religion, ‘full of idols’” (verse 16). ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

I understand Paul’s opening words to refer to the obvious commitment of the Athenians to devotion and a respect for what they believed to be gods. They possessed, as the word itself indicates, a “fear of the gods.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The Athenians did have erroneous views of Deity, perceiving anger as the chief attribute of the gods. To them “fear” meant erecting some image or idol in honor of the gods, in an apparent attempt to appease them. One’s devotion was then measured by the commitment of the individual to that image. I understand this to be a universal misconception held by those who do not know God, yet entertain an acute awareness of the existence of Deity.

Of course, this is distinguished from the fear of the Lord, which is based upon God’s revelation of Himself, not on a human conception.

Paul will preach within the context of what the people sense, even though it has been wrapped in the rags of ignorance. He will begin where they are – being very religious, or extremely devoted to what they conceived to be Deity. He preached to the Jews within the context of the knowledge they had. He spoke to the churches in view of the understanding they had obtained. It is in this sense that He became “all things to all men, that” he “might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). Contrary to the misrepresentations of some, this does not mean that he adorned himself with the kind of clothing others wore, or that sort of disguised himself so they would think he was one of them. Paul became “weak unto the weak” by refraining from things like eating meat offered to idols, in order that he offend not the consciences of weaker brethren (1 Cor 8:13). He would pay for the Temple vows of some Jews, even though it was not necessary for Him to do so, in order to fulfill avow to the Lord (Acts 21:26). In every case, he was dealing with someone whose religion, or outward devotion, was driven by their conscience. In no case was Paul attempting to conform his conduct or manners to those who were wallowing in sin, and did not live with any kind of conscience concerning Deity. None of these instances was an attempt to assume an outward identity that was wholly unrelated to religious manners.

When Jesus admonished, “Let your light so shine before men,” He was speaking of how they appeared before men – of what men saw in them (Matt 5:16). When Paul described faithful disciples as those who “shine as lights in the world,” he was speaking of how they appeared before men (Phil 2:15). It is godly manners and appearances that distinguish the people of God in the world. The ungodly cannot see the hearts of the saints, or perceive their conscience, or motives, or intentions, or hope. They cannot detect faith, or the new birth itself. They must make some correlation between the appearance of the saints and their profession.

It is inconceivable that altering one’s appearance in order to appeal to the fundamentally ungodly could possibly be the means by which God would reach their heart. I find such imaginations highly offensive, and indicative of a degree of spiritual ignorance that cannot possibly be justified.

How to become all things to all men cannot be contained in a code of conduct. This is something that requires discernment of the circumstance, a deep devotion to the God of heaven, and an understanding of His will. Where these qualities are not found, men have no business speaking about the adaptation of their conduct to any worldly circumstance in the name of the Lord. It is time to thrust such thinking from us.

THE UNKNOWN GOD

“ 23 For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE

UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”

Paul has made an observation concerning the extreme devotion of the Athenians to the consideration of, what they perceived to be, deities. He will now confirm that this reflexion was based upon a thoughtful diagnosis of their manners. He will not begin by pointing out the various false gods to whom images had been reared. Instead, he will begin with a point of reason that will permit him to proceed toward the consideration of the one living and true God. It should be apparent that this is a wonderfully proper way of reasoning. One should never imagine that it is possible to begin with something obviously unrelated to God, and proceed from that point to the consideration of the true God. Those who seek to clarify the Lord to others must give due thought to where they begin their effort.

I BEHELD

“ For as I passed by, and beheld...” Other versions read, “considering,” NKJV “examining,” NASB “looked carefully at,” NIV “looked carefully at,” NRSV “observed,” RSV “seeing,” DOUAY “looking closely at,” GENEVA “viewing,” MRD “beheld the manner how,” PNT “contemplating,” YLT and “carefully observed.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “beheld” means, “look at attentively, to observe accurately, consider well,” THAYER “look at again and again, examine attentively, observe carefully; of mental attention consider, reflect,” FRIBERG “observe closely; reflect upon,” UBS “to observe closely and give serious consideration to, suggesting the possibility of something unusual - 'to observe, to notice,” LOUW-NIDA and “look at or examine carefully.” GINGRICH

The idea is that Paul carefully studied these idols, reading their inscriptions, and gathering a sense of the nature and seriousness of the Athenian’s approach to religion. Much could be learned by how they spoke of their gods, and which ones they chose to honor.

A Brief Observation

During my travels, I have often made it a practice to visit cemeteries in the area, noting the various inscriptions written on the grave-markers and stones. I have observed that much can be known of the spiritual culture of the area by reading their perspectives of death. There is a general consistency in these expressions, with some standing out because of the insight reflected in them. Some areas reflect hope in their inscriptions, while others articulate hopelessness and confusion. In national and military cemeteries, the sense of national pride is generally the theme.

The point is that formalized statements that have been set in stone reveal something about those who wrote them. That is, in my understanding, what Paul was perceiving as he passed among these images, carefully examining what was written on them.

YOUR DEVOTIONS

“ . . . your devotions . . .” Other versions read, “the objects of your worship,” NKJV/ASV/NASB/NIV/NRSV “the things to which you give worship,” BBE “your shrines,” CJB “your idols,” DOUAY “the temples of your worship,” MRD “your sacred monuments,” NJB and “your gods.” PNT

The word “devotions” is a noun, and refers to “whatever is religiously honored, an object of worship . . . of temples, altars, statues, idolatrous images.” STRONG’S In this case, it could refer to images, altars, shrines, and even temples, that had been erected in honor of some perceived deity. The Greek word from which “devotions” is translated is found only one other time in Scripture. There it is translated, “that is worshiped ” (2 Thess 2:4).

THE UNKNOWN GOD

“ . . . I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD.” Other versions read, “an unknown god,” NASB “the god of whom there is no knowledge,” BBE “to the hidden god,” MRD “to god – unknown,” YLT and “the god who is not known.” IE

With remarkable consistency, later versions translate the phrase “AN unknown god.” In my judgment, this is a misrepresentation of what Paul was saying. First, the precise Greek phrase is **VAgnw, stwl qew/lA** with the word God (**qew**) being in the singular. The absence of the Greek article for “the” by no means suggests that the “god” of reference is one of several, or “ an unknown god.” Secondly, in referring to the words of the inscription, Paul refers to a specific entity: “Whom.” He will also develop a point that requires this phrase to be understood as referring to a particular god, who was unknown. Although some historians (Apollonius Tyanaeus, Philostratus, Pausanias) GILL/BARNES affirm that Athens had altars erected to a plurality of unknown gods, Paul did not refer to them. He rather chose an altar to a single unknown god as his point of reference, lest he leave his audience with the conclusion that he was speaking of one god among many others.

An “unknown god” is one of whom nothing whatsoever is known, and is so confessed. The existence of such a god is not questioned, but it is acknowledged that nothing is known of him.

The existence of such an altar confirmed the seriousness of the Athenians in their religion, even though they were deceived. They apparently did not want to take a chance of offending even an unknown god, and therefore reared an altar in honor of it, and gave devotion to it. Now, Paul will capitalize on that circumstance in a most remarkable display of godly wisdom.

Something to Remember

In Christ Jesus, and within the framework of the New Covenant, an unknown God is strictly forbidden. In fact, we are forthrightly told that Christ will come “in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God . . . Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:8-9). In reality, eternal life is defined in these words: “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Further, one of the hallmarks of the New Covenant is this: “for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest” (Heb 8:11).

IGNORANT WORSHIP

“Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, Him declare I unto you.” Other versions read, “worship without knowing Him,” NKJV “worship in ignorance,” NASB “what you worship as something unknown,” NIV “without knowledge give worship to,” BBE and “reverence, not knowing Him.” DARBY

True worship cannot be accomplished within an environment of ignorance. In fact, men are “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (Eph 4:18). If eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3), and if Jesus has come to give us an understanding, that we might know God (1 John 5:20), then the most serious of all ignorance is the ignorance of God! If, when Jesus comes, He is going to take vengeance on those who know not God, then knowing God is surely the most critical area of knowledge. There is no form of ignorance that is more dangerous than the ignortance of “the true God” (1 John 5:20).

This, then, is the God Paul will declare to the Athenians. He will not do this merely to increase their knowledge, which is what they were seeking. Rather, he does this because this is the area in which God will measure men, determining whether they will remain with Him through eternity, or be thrust out from His presence. Paul has been alarmed and stirred within by the sight of their idols – not

because of the existence of he idols alone, but because it was confirmation that they did not know God! The ONLY reason any individual or group of individuals erect something in the place of God is because they do not know God. That kind of ignorance is responsible for all distorted theology, sectarianism, compromise, and borrowing from the wisdom of this world.

When a person is fundamentally ignorant of God, their efforts to maintain devotion fall short of genuine productivity. That is because such ignorance raises an impenetrable wall between man and God. That wall cannot be pierced by worship, devotion, or any form of religious activity. God is the “God of truth” (Isa 65:16), and as such cannot be accessed by erroneous means. Therefore Paul will acquaint his hearers with the God of heaven, meeting them at the point where their knowledge proves to be something with which he can work.

THE GOD THAT MADE THE WORLD

“ 24 God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”

While the Athenians were uncertain about Deity, even erecting an altar to “the unknown God,” this is not the case with Paul. He will speak with a certitude these philosophers had never before witnessed. He will address them with confidence concerning Deity – something that is still seen as impossible by many – even some professing Christians. It is important to know how He speaks to this Subject.

GOD MADE THE WORLD AND ALL THINGS THEREIN

“God that made the world and all things therein . . .” Other versions read, “made the world and everything in it,” NKJV “made the earth and everything in it,” BBE “made the universe and everything in it,” CJB “made the world and all that are in it,” PNT “made the world and all that it contains,” WILLIAMS and “produced and formed the world and all things in it.” AMPLIFIED

The word “world” is translated from the Greek word **ko,smon** , from the root word **ko,smoj** (kosmos). The root meaning of this word is “an apt and harmonious arrangement or constitution.” THAYER As used in Scripture primarily refers to “the world, I. e. the universe.” THAYER It is also used to express the inhabitants of the world (1 Cor 4:9), and the mass of ungodly and alienated humanity (John 7:7; 16:8; 1 John 4:5). In every case, this word emphasizes an harmonious arrangement that works together, having certain traits and functions that work together. Therefore we read of the tongue being “a world of iniquity” –something that must be controlled because of its natural manner (James 3:6). There is also “the world of the ungodly,” a term that expresses the commonality and unanimity of the wicked (2 Pet 2:5).

Here, however, the emphasis is the material world and everything in it , the creation of which is revealed in Genesis 1:1-2;4,7-9,19,21-23; 5:1-2. The creation consisted of “the heaven and the earth,” and everything created to be sustained in them. The whole of this marvelous creation is thus described as “the world and all things therein.”

The fact of God creating the world is frequently articulated in Scripture.

- Hezekiah confessed to God, “Thou hast made heaven and earth” (2 Kgs 19:15).
- Hiram said, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, that made heaven and earth” (2 Chron 2:12).
- Nehemiah confessed, “Thou, even thou, art LORD alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and thou preservest them all” (Neh 9:6).

- The Psalmist wrote, “Thou hast formed the earth and the world” (Psa 90:2); “Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands” (Psa 102:25); “. . . the LORD which made heaven and earth” (Psa 115:15) “. . . God . . . which made heaven, and earth, the sea, and all that therein is: which keepeth truth for ever” (Psa 146:5-6).

- Solomon wrote of God making the earth (Prov 8:26).

- Isaiah said, “Thou hast made heaven and earth” (Isa 37:16). He also said God “created the heavens,” and “formed the earth and made it,” creating it “to be inhabited” (Isa 45:18).

- Jeremiah said, “He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion” (Jer 10:12; 32:17; 51:15).

- God Himself said, “I have made the earth, the man and the beast that are upon the ground, by my great power and by my outstretched arm” (Jer 27:5).

- The Lord is described in the Revelation in this manner: “who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein” (Rev 10:6).

- All the earth is admonished, “God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters” (Rev 14:7).

The Scriptures further affirm that the creation of the world was accomplished by Divine wisdom: “The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens” (Prov 3:19). That is, there was an objective that undergirded the creation, and for which its harmonious workings were established. Happenstance, randomness, and extended development were not part of creation. God did not create a process through which the world came into being. By His word it was made in all of its completeness. So that everything that was birthed thereafter was according to established order. This not only rules out the possibility of an evolutionary process, but renders it an utter absurdity, because purposes cannot be carried out by disorder and randomness. Those professed believers who embrace a view of creation that attempts to blend revelation with science do well to study God rather than nature. When men are diverted to considering creation from the standpoint of its imagined development, they must look at what was created rather than Who created it.

In my judgment men do not do well to major on reasoning from effect to cause. In order for that can be done properly, there must be some understanding of the cause. This is precisely how Paul now reasons. He first establishes the true Origin of the entire cosmos and everything in it. Then, He affirms the following.

HE IS LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

While there is a sense of Deity resident in the unseen makeup of men, sin has brought confusion in that area, so that even the concept of God has become distorted. Further, sin will not allow men to search aggressively for God, even though that is man’s appointed vocation.

“. . . seeing that He is Lord of heaven and earth . . .” Other versions read, “since He is Lord of heaven and earth,” NASB “being Lord of heaven and earth,” RSV “who is Lord of heaven and earth,” CJB and “is Himself Lord of heaven and earth.” NJB

The word “seeing” emphasizes that it is apparent that God is over what He has created. It is totally unreasonable to think in any other way – as though what took place in the created realm was independent of its Creator.

Heathen gods were generally said to be over some aspect of the creation. This ranged from fertility, to fire, water, etc. While there is a sense of Deity resident in the unseen makeup of men, sin has brought confusion in that area, so that even the concept of God has become distorted. Further, sin will not allow men to search aggressively for God, even though that is man's appointed vocation. These conditions are addressed by a clear word about God, which tends to dispel the fog created by transgression. It clears the mental haze enough so that men can, in fact, engage in a fervent quest to find God. Paul is providing that word.

Of first importance is that the true God has made everything that had a beginning independent of man himself. Second, it is vital that God be seen as Lord over all. Of course, if He is Lord over all that was made independently of man, you may be sure He is Lord of everything man appears to have made.

DWELLETH NOT IN TEMPLES MADE WITH HANDS

“ . . . dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” Other versions read, “does not live in temples built by hands,” NIV “does not live in shrines made by human hands,” NRSV “is not housed in buildings made with hands,” BBE “does not live in man-made temples,” CJB “doesn't live in shrines made by humans,” GWN and “does not make his home in shrines made by human hands.” NJB

The word “dwelleth” means to “dwell or settle in . . . inhabit,” THAYER “live in,” UBS and “dwell in a place in an established or settled manner - 'to live, to dwell, to reside.” LOUW-NIDA This is the opposite of sojourning, visiting, or being transitory.

When Solomon built the Temple, he made clear that it was not intended to be a residence for God Himself: “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (1 Kgs 8:27). Again it is written of that occasion, “And the house which I build is great: for great is our God above all gods. But who is able to build him an house, seeing the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain him? who am I then, that I should build him an house, save only to burn sacrifice before him?” (2 Chron 2:5-6). Through the Spirit, Isaiah also spoke of this matter, adding that God takes particular note of humble and contrite spirits: “Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word” (Isa 66:1). When Stephen preached to the Jewish council, he made reference of this fact: “But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet” (Acts 7:47-48). Paul made clear that the people of God are His “temple” (1 Cor 3:16).

This, then, was a well established fact in both the Jewish and Christian communities. However, this was not known in the heathen world. Throughout the whole of Athens, Paul had seen statuary and shrines erected to the honor of gods. Those places were equated with the gods themselves. Now Paul declares to them that God cannot be localized. His dwelling place is in heaven: “God is in heaven” (Eccl 5:2). His “throne is in heaven” (Isa 11:4). We pray to Him as “Our Father which art in heaven” (Matt 6:9).

A Seeming Contradiction Considered

Some have taken the statement of this text to mean that God is completely disassociated from any and all buildings. However, as seen in both the Tabernacle and the Temple, this is emphatically not the case. Concerning the building of the Tabernacle God said, “And let them make Me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them” (Ex 25:8). Jehosaphat said of the Temple, “Art not Thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before Thy people Israel, and gavest it to the seed of Abraham Thy friend for ever? And they dwelt therein, and have built Thee a sanctuary therein for

Thy name, saying” (2 Chron 20:7-8). Jesus referred to the Temple as “My Father’s house ” (John 2:16).

In all of these texts, the structure was not God’s exclusive or permanent dwelling. Rather, it was a place He visited (Ex 40:34-35; 1 Kgs 8:11), and where He met those ordained to speak with Him (Ex 25:22; Num 7:89; 1 Sam 4:4; 2 Sam 6:2; 1 Chron 13:6).

This, then, was a well established fact in both the Jewish and Christian communities. However, this was not known in the heathen world.

Now, since Christ has been exalted (Phil 2:9), and the Holy Spirit has been sent into the hearts of the sons of God (Gal 4:6), God dwells within His people (1 Cor 3:16; 1 John 3:24; 4:15). It is the gathering of the saints together that fulfills the requirement for the Lord to dwell among them. As Jesus Himself said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt 18:20). Paul referred to this blessing when he wrote of the observation of a stranger, who witnessed God working among them, “ and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth ” (1 Cor 14:25). That was a time when “the whole church” had “come together into one place” (1 Cor 14:23). This same kind of gathering took place when the believers in Troas “came together to break bread.” It is written that they were in an “upper room” that required “many lamps” (Acts 20:7-8). Whether it was the brethren in Corinth, apparently a rather large assembly, or the one in Troas, which also appeared to be sizeable, the presence of the Lord was associated with the people, not the structure . This is a concept totally foreign to the heathen.

GOD IS NOT WORSHIPED WITH MEN’S HANDS

“ 25 Neither is worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing, seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.”

The externals of worship – how and where it takes place – has been an issue with religious men from long ago. You may recall that the woman at the well asked Jesus about this very thing: “Our fathers worshiped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship” (John 4:20). Jesus responded to her statement by saying a new day was about to arrive – one in which worship would not be approached in such a manner. “Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe Me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what : we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship Him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:21-24). The Athenians and the Samaritans had this in common: they did not know the God they worshiped. Because such people still exist, the words recorded in this text are pertinent to our time as well.

NEITHER IS WORSHIPED WITH MEN’S HANDS

“Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though He needed any thing . . .” Other versions read “served by human hands,” NASB “dependent on the work of men's hands,” BBE “ministered to by human hands,” MRD “human hands can't serve his needs,” NLT and “doesn't need any help from men.” IE

The word “worshiped” is

Today, there are some men teaching that God cannot do anything upon the earth unless there is a petition that comes to Him from men. The above affirmations cast that imagination to the ground. Beside that, God speaks of those who find Him, even though they did not seek Him: “I

am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not:

translated from the Greek word **qerapeu,etai** (thera-peue-tai) – the word from which “therapeutic” comes. The idea here is that God is not made better, helped, increased, or advantaged by what men do. Because service, or ministry, is a prominent part of “worship,” that word was chosen to convey the activities to which Paul referred. He is referring to all of the work related to building and maintaining the idols, offering sacrifices upon them, together with all of the actions that took place in the shrines that had been reared up to idols. The heathen had the idea that all of this was meeting the needs of their various deities. In fact, to this very day “The idea is prevalent among the Hindus that the sacrifices which are made, and which are offered in the temples, are consumed by the gods themselves.” ALBERT BARNES

God Is Never Advantaged or Disadvantaged By Man

The phrase “neither is worshipped by men’s hands” is a statement that affirms God is not personally advantaged or disadvantaged by what men do. His abundant resources – “the riches of His glory” – are not increased or depleted because of human activity. Men may receive more from God, but it is not because God obtained more from their service. They also may receive less, but it is never because there is less to give. This is humiliating to the flesh, to be sure. It is also one of the fundamental reasons for Jesus saying, “The flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63).

The doctrine of Scripture is that God is never Himself advantaged by what man does. Advantages and benefits always flow from God to man, and never from man to God. There are numerous revelations of this in Scripture.

- Eliaphaz posed the question, “Can a man be profitable unto God ” (Job 22:2).
- Elihu asked, “If thou sinnest, what doest thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto Him ? If thou be righteous, what givest thou Him ? or what receiveth He of thine hand ?” (Job 35:6-7).
- God said to Job, “Who has preceded Me, that I should pay him ? Everything under heaven is Mine” NKJV (Job 41:11).
- David said, “O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee ” (Psa 16:2).
- Paul asked, “For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been His counselor ? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again ?” (Rom 11:34-35).
- Paul reminded the Corinthians that they had nothing they had not received – nothing really started with them, particularly in matters pertaining to God. “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (1 Cor 4:7).
- God Himself affirmed through David that He is never put into a position of having to ask something from men. “He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people. Gather My saints together unto Me; those that have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. And the heavens shall declare his righteousness: for God is judge Himself. Selah. Hear, O My people, and I will speak; O Israel, and I will testify against thee: I am God, even thy God. I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices or thy burnt offerings, to have been continually before Me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he goats out of thy folds. For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee : for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof” (Psa 50:4-12).

Today, there are some men teaching that God cannot do anything upon the earth unless there is a petition that comes to Him from men. The above affirmations cast that imagination to the ground. Beside that, God speaks of those who find Him, even though they did not seek Him: “I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not : I said, Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by My name” (Isa 65:1; Rom 10:20).

HE GIVES TO ALL LIFE, BREATH, AND ALL THINGS

“ . . . seeing He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things.” Rather than receiving anything from man that brings advantage to Him, He is the sole giver of “life, and breath, and all things.” Other versions read, “life and breath and everything else,” NIV “life and breath and everything,” RSV “life, breath, and everything they have,” GWN “life and breath and everything to everyone,” NET “everything – including life and breath – to everyone,” NJB “life and breath to everything, and He satisfies every need,” NLT and “life and breath to all, everywhere.” PNT

Life

In its essence, life is the ability to respond to the environment in which one is placed. It involves animation, vitality, productivity, and sensitivity. It applies to both the body and the soul, including thoughts as well as words and deeds, and desires as well as bodily senses. Life pertains to the domain of the flesh and of the spirit as well.

Breath

This is “the breath of life” that was originally breathed into Adam’s nostrils (Gen 2:7), causing him to be a living soul. That breath is given to everyone who is born, so that they begin immediately to function in the domain of earth. Breath also has to do with the maintenance of life. It also provides a commentary on the tenuous nature of earthly life. There is not a deposit of breath into man – a quantity that gradually is depleted until it is finally expended. Rather, breath is given to everyone, one breath at a time. Thus the prophet Isaiah depicted the frailty of man by saying his breath was “in his nostrils” (Isa 2:22). The phrase “life and breath” also pertain to the period of time when the soul and body are united.

All Things

This expression confirms that men have nothing on their own. Whatever they have is received (1 Cor 4:7). This being true, what men give to God is only what they have first received from Him. Therefore, after collecting goods for the building of the Temple, David prayed, “But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of Thee, and of thine own have we given Thee” (1 Chr 29:14). We must guard our hearts and minds lest we draw contradicting conclusions about this. What we have, was obtained from God!

THE ORIGIN AND PLACEMENT OF MAN

“ 26 And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.”

Paul knows God created the world “to be inhabited” (Isa 45:18), and that the revelation of God directly bears upon those inhabitants – humanity. To philosophize about God apart from involvement with Him is without profit. The Living God is not merely a subject to be discussed, or an area of passing interest. Paul will now make known the relation of the true God to mankind.

ALL NATIONS MADE OF ONE BLOOD

“And hath made of one blood all nations of men . . .” Other versions read, “He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth,” NASB “From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth,” NIV “From one ancestor He made all nations to inhabit the whole earth,” NRSV “He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth,” NAB “He created all the people of the world from one man, Adam, and scattered the nations across the face of the earth,” LIVING “He caused to spring from one forefather people of every race, for them to live on the whole surface of the earth,” WEYMOUTH and “and He made from one [common origin, one source, one blood] all nations of men to settle on the face of the earth.”
AMPLIFIED

“One of the greatest proofs of the oneness of man’s nature is the power of intermingling the blood in generation. It is a general, if not universal, test of a species that the sexual union be fertile. All the varieties of man are by this test proved to be the same species; and all other earthly beings are by the same test excluded from humanity.” *Daniel D. Whendon*

Adam can be referred to as “blood” because “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev 17:11). The blood of humanity is unique among what is said to be alive. There is not a separate blood for races, ethnic groups, political groups, or gender. Those who throw dust in our eyes by saying men and women are fundamentally different must account for the commonality of their blood, for that is more fundamental, having to do directly with their origin. The blood from one person can be given to another if the type is the same. That type is not determined by gender, race, or color. All men, regardless of their location and appearance, can trace their origin back to Adam. The only exception to this is the Lord Jesus Christ, who is technically not a member of Adam’s race. He was not a sinner, nor did He fall short of the glory of God like all other people. But as for the rest of the human race, they have a solitary Creator, and can be traced back to a single man.

Notice also that Paul refers to “the nations,” not to individuals – although his words also apply to individuals. This word, however, would show how foolish it was for one nation to exalt themselves above another, or suppose they are superior to another. If one sites Israel as an example of a superior nation, it must be remembered that it was God’s choice that gave them status, not their own accomplishments or nature. Throughout their history, they confirmed that their natural makeup was no different than the other peoples of the world. It would take a “new creation” to make an essential difference in men (2 Cor 5:18; Eph 2:10). That, of course, is realized in Christ Jesus.

- **ALL MEN HAVE THE SAME BASIC CONSTITUTION.** “He fashioneth their hearts alike; he considereth all their works” (Psa 33:15).

- **THERE IS NO FUNDAMENTAL DIFFERENCE.** “The rich and poor meet together: the LORD is the maker of them all ” (Prov 22:2).

- **NATURALLY, ONE MAN IS A REFLECTION OF THE OTHER.** “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Prov 27:19).

- **WE ARE ALL THE WORK OF GOD’S HAND.** “But now, O LORD, thou art our Father ; we are the clay, and Thou our potter ; and we all are the work of Thy hand ” (Isa 64:8).

- **OUR SIMILARITY IS OWING TO OUR COMMON ORIGIN.** “Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us ” (Mal 2:10).

This fact makes racial prejudice nothing more than human foolishness. We have all been made from the same lump, so to speak.

The point here, however, is not Adam himself, but the One who uniquely made Adam – the one True God.

TO DWELL ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH

“ . . . for to dwell on all the face of the earth . . .” Other versions read, “to live on all the face of the earth,” NASB “that they should inhabit the whole earth,” NIV “living on the entire surface of the earth,” CJB “to live all over the earth,” GWN and “to settle on the face of the earth.” AMPLIFIED

God intended that the entirety of the earth be occupied by the offspring of Adam. They are the primary inhabitants of the earth, and eventually even the new earth will be placed in their charge (Psa 37:11; Matt 5:5). In this way, the ancient promise can be fulfilled, “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14; Isa 11:9). Again it is written, “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee” (Psa 22:27).

The dispersion of the human race over the face of the earth was done in consideration of the fulfillment of this promise.

TIMES AND BOUNDS APPOINTED

“ . . . and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.” Other versions read, “has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings,” NKJV “determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live,” NIV “allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live,” NRSV “having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation,” RSV “ordering their times and the limits of their lands,” BBE fixed the limits of their territories and the periods when they would flourish,” CJB “assigned the seasons which were ordained before, and the bounds of their habitation,” GENEVA “He has given them the seasons of the year and the boundaries within which to live,” GWN “decreed the times and limits of their habitation,” NJB “decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries,” NLT “decided exactly when and where they must live,” IE “marked out for them an appointed span of life and the boundaries of their homes,” WEYMOUTH and “definitely determined [their] allotted periods of time and the fixed boundaries of their habitation (their settlements, lands, and abodes).” AMPLIFIED

The word “determined” is translated from a word meaning, “to mark out the limits or boundaries, determine, appoint,” THAYER “fix, appoint, designate, decide, determine,” FRIBERG “designate,” UBS “to set limits on, to decide, to determine,” LOUW-NIDA and “determine, fix, set.” GINGRICH The word “appointed” comes from a word meaning, “to place before, to appoint beforehand,” THAYER “determine beforehand, prearrange,” FRIBERG “to appoint or determine beforehand,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

What Godly Men Have Said

About This Text

Daniel D. Whedon (Wesleyan) wrote, “God has not abandoned man, like a pile of crawling maggots, to pure random. He has preconstructed for his race a scheme and a history, with predetermined periods of time and boundaries in space.” NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

John Gill (English Baptist), Charles Spurgeon’s predecessor, said of this text, “how long the world he has made shall continue; and the several distinct periods, ages, and generations, in which such and such men should live, such and such nations should exist, and such monarchies should be in being, as the Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman, and how long they should subsist; as also the several seasons of the year, as seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, and day and night; and which are so bounded, and kept so distinct in their revolutions, as not to interfere with, and encroach upon each other; and likewise the several years, months, and days of every man’s life; (see Job 7:1 14:5) to which may be added, the times of the law and Gospel; the time of Christ’s birth and death; the time of the conversion of particular persons; and all their times of desertion, temptation,

affliction, and comfort; the times of the church's sufferings." NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

Matthew Henry (English Nonconformist) wrote, "He made them not to live in one place, but to be dispersed over all the earth; one nation therefore ought not to look with contempt upon another, as the Greeks did upon all other nations; for those on all the face of the earth are of the same blood. COMMENTARY

Albert Barnes (Presbyterian) wrote, "This evidently refers to the dispersion and migration of nations. And it means that God had, in his plan, fixed the times when each country should be settled, and the rise, the prosperity, and the fall of each nation. The different continents and islands have not, therefore, been settled by chance, but by a wise rule, and in accordance with God's arrangement and design." COMMENTARY

W. Clarkson wrote, "He is the Divine Provider and Arranger of all human affairs (ver. 26). His intelligence has foreseen, and his wisdom directed everything." PULPIT COMMENTARY

J.W. McGarvey (Restoration Movement), wrote "These facts demonstrate his entire independence of human ministrations, and exhibit, in a most striking manner, the dependence of men upon him. They not only sustain the point of contrast presented by Paul, but they involve an assumption of the most special providence of God. By special providence, we mean providence in reference to individual persons and things. If God gives to all men life and breath and all things, he acts with reference to each individual man, to each individual breath that each man breathes, and to each particular thing going to make up all the things which he gives them. Again, if God appoints beforehand the "periods" of the nation (by which I understand all the great eras in their history,) and the "boundaries of their habitations," he certainly directs the movements of individual men; for the movements of nations depend upon the movements of the individual men of whom they are composed. Sometimes, indeed, the movements of one man, as of Christopher Columbus, determine the settlement of continents, and the destiny of mighty nations. In view of these facts, we must admit the most special and minute providence of God in all the affairs of earth. ACTS COMMENTARY

JOHN WESLEY (Methodism). "That it is God who gave men the earth to inhabit, Paul proves from the order of times and places, showing the highest wisdom of the Disposer, superior to all human counsels." COMMENTARY

I have taken the time to share these various comments by a diversity of men to show there is general agreement as to the meaning of the text. This indicates that the language itself is clear, leaving no room for doubt as to what this text actually says. Coupled with the various translations of the text, it is quite plain that the following is true.

- There is no happenstance reflected in the positioning of nations in time and place.
- A Divine determination was made before the world was created concerning when and where men would be placed.

Moses provided additional information on this matter in his valedictory address to Israel. There he spoke of the deliberate assignment of the bounds of the various people. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel" (Deut 32:8). Every major version reads the same way, confirming that there is Divine order in the placement of the various people groups, or nations, of the world. Now Paul will elaborate on the reason for this Divine arrangement.

Divine appointments of this kind should not cause us to stagger. God made the Garden of Eden, "and there He put the man whom He had formed" (Gen 2:8). God placed Israel in the land of Canaan, even driving out its former inhabitants (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; Lev 25:38). The nations are categorically said to have been divided their inheritance by God Almighty, when He "set the bounds

of the people” (Deut 32:8).

Once men comprehend that the Lord God “made the world and all things therein,” and that He is, in fact, “Lord of heaven and earth,” giving “to all life and breath, and all things,” this text should pose no difficulty for those who believe. If there is the slightest tendency to philosophize about this passage as though it encroached upon the imagined free will of men, that tendency is to be crucified, along with the rest of unprofitable flesh (John 6:63).

THE APPOINTED VOCATION OF MAN

“ 27 That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.”

The deliberate placement of the nations was in order to the fulfillment of a Divine objective. Here we see the primary activity in which men are to engage. The reason for the creation of man is seen in this objective, as well as the absolute seriousness of not pursuing this aim.

THAT THEY SHOULD SEEK THE LORD

“That they should seek the Lord...” Other versions read, “God did this so that men would seek Him,” NIV “so that they would search for God,” NRSV “might make search for God,” BBE “so that people would look for Him,” CJB “that they might inquire and search after God,” MRD “so that they might seek the deity,” NJB “His purpose was for the nations to seek after God,” NLT and “He wanted the people to look for Him” IE

The text teaches that the “all nations of men” were deliberately and specifically positioned by God in both time and location in order that they might “seek the Lord.” While this is no doubt true of individuals, the stress is placed on “nations,” – which is the organization of individuals with the intent to pursue legitimate interests, to subdue evil, and to promote good. Although the gathering of peoples together by no means eliminates self-centeredness, in a crude way it diminishes that kind of quest.

God Is Not Evident to Fallen Man

This statement also confirms that God is not evident to fallen men. Sin has raised a wall between men and God. While they are in the world, that wall actually protects them, for God being righteous finds unrighteous man contrary to His own nature, and therefore offensive.

God is Merciful and Gracious

Even though man is fallen, the God he has been placed to seek, is merciful and gracious. It is only because the Lord is “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth” (Ex 34:6) that He has found a way to resolve the dreadful human dilemma.

In the Divine Image

Man – all men – have a distinct advantage in this quest: he has been created in the image of God (Gen 1:26,27; 9:6), in the glory of God (1 Cor 11:7), bears His similitude (James 3:9), is in His likeness (Gen 5:1), and is His offspring (Acts 17:29). Even though man has sinned and comes short of the glory of God, there is enough of the likeness remaining to promote a quest to “find” God, and men are expected to do so.

Deity in the Most Rudimentary Form

The Greek word translated “LORD” differs in the various Greek manuscripts. In some it is **qeo,n**

(God), and in others **ku,rion** (Lord). In both cases, the word preceded by the article “the,” signifying the quest for a single Deity. The words “God” and “Lord” are the most general terms for Deity, underscoring the Sovereignty and power of God, but providing no insight into His character or purpose. The idea here is not to come into the fellowship of God, but to come to the point where men acknowledge that “He is ” (Heb 11:6). Men will proceed no further in their quest for the Lord until this is acknowledged. In fact, it is that acknowledgment that causes individuals to maintain their quest.

This also postulates that all men have been made to think beyond themselves. However, sin has greatly reduced this capability, causing men to be more like the beasts of the earth than the One in whose image they were created.

An Environment Suitable for Seeking

This also confirms that an environment that has some semblance of order (i.e. “nations”) is conducive to the conclusion that Deity is at the helm of creation, including humanity. Even men lacking astuteness of thought recognize that order cannot result from chaos or randomness. This also postulates that all men have been made to think beyond themselves. However, sin has greatly reduced this capability, causing men to be more like the beasts of the earth than the One in whose image they were created.

The Environment of Creation

Over and above all of these considerations, the creation itself bears witness to God’s “eternal power and Godhead” (Deity). There is enough evidence for men to begin seeking, for “ The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament showeth His handiwork” (Psa 19:1). Further, it is a consistent and universal witness. As it is written, “Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard” (Psa 19:2-3).

The Fact That Man Has Fallen Has Not Altered the Purpose of God.

Men may reason that the fallenness of man excuses him from the obligation to seek after the Lord. However, this is not so. The objective for mankind was not abandoned when sin and death entered into the world. Rather, all hope of man recovering himself was lost, requiring that the required recovery be instituted and carried out by God Himself. If this was not the case, there would be no point to a quest to find God. It is in the quest for God that men, in a manner of speaking, enter into the arena in which the purposes of God are carried out.

FEEL AFTER HIM AND FIND HIM

“ . . . if haply they might feel after him, and find him . . .” Other versions read, “grope for Him and find Him,” NKJV “reach out for Him and find Him,” NIV “if possible, to get knowledge of him and make discovery of him,” BBE “by means of his creations, might find him,” MRD “by feeling their way towards him, succeed in finding him,” NJB and “in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him,” AMPLIFIED

As used here, the word “feel” is translated from a word meaning “mentally to seek after tokens of a person or thing,” THAYER and “grope one's way, like a person who is blind or in the dark,” FRIBERG The picture is that of men blinded by sin, feeling across the creation like a blind man gropes about a wall to find a door. According to appearance, if they found a door, it would be by mere happenstance, for there was no proof evident to them through any of their senses. However, in the Divine economy, it is quite another picture. God works in an environment where men are seeking Him. Jesus Himself said, “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt 7:8). This is not so merely because of the of human persistence. It is rather owing to the faithfulness of God, who desires to be found by those who seek

Him.

What About “There Is None that Seeketh”?

Perusing the human race independently of Divine revelation, it is written, “there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom 3:11; Psa 14:2-3; 53:2-3). Apart from a Divine initiative toward men, this state would have continued uninterrupted. However, even at the threshold of history, God gave a revelation of the ultimate defeat of the devil (Gen 3:15). For those who were mindful of that word, a seeking spirit could be obtained. Apparently that is what took place during the time of Enosh, son of Seth. It is written that when he was born, “men began to call upon the name of the Lord” (Gen 4:26). Jewish chronology estimates that this took place about 235 years after the fall. I assume that because Seth was the offspring through whom the promised Seed would come, that God awakened his generation in this matter of seeking. If it is true that sin introduces moral and spiritual decline, it seems to me that this would be necessary.

God Revealed Himself to Individuals

Later, both Enoch and Noah “walked with God” (Gen 5:22-25; 6:9). Both of them were given revelations by God (Enoch – Jude 1:14-14; Noah – Gen 6:8,13-7:4; 8:15-17; 9:1-17). Later God revealed Himself to Abraham (Gen 12:1,7; 13:14-17; 15:1-21; 17:1-21, etc). The Lord also appeared to Jacob, revealing much to him (Gen 31:3; 35:10-13). God revealed to Moses that He had “appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob” (Ex 6:3). Centuries later David reminded the people of the covenant God “made with Abraham, and of His oath unto Isaac, and hath confirmed the same to Jacob” (1 Chron 16:16).

God Revealed Himself to Israel

Then, there was the covenant made with Israel, who were made the custodians of the Word of the Lord (Ex 34:27; Deut 29:1; Rom 9:4). Further, owing to their own sin, this people was scattered throughout the nations, taking their religion and customs with them (Psa 44:11; Jer 50:17; Ezek 6:8; 11:16; Zech 7:14).

Knowledge Dispersed Throughout the World

These revelations provided some incentive to seek the Lord in all who were told of them. The possibility of men feeling after God was enhanced with each revelation God gave of Himself. Add to this the fame of Solomon (1 Kgs 4:34; 10:1), the universal decree of Nebuchadnezzar concerning the true God (Dan 4:1-37), the universal decree of Darius concerning the Lord God (Dan 6:25-27), and the universal decree of Cyrus concerning his charge to see to it that the Temple was rebuilt (2 Chron 36:23; Ezra 1:2-4).

Note The Divine Objective Again

Once again, note the Divine objective: “So that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after Him and find Him.” AMPLIFIED God’s revealed purpose is for men to “find Him.” It is not to resolve the problems of the world. It is not for men to realize a happy life in this world, or to obtain what men refer to as success. The objective does not revolve around men, but around God. It is not for men to know themselves, but to know God. It is not for men to find their place, but to find God. That is the secret to the realization of every legitimate objective, and the appointed means through which all valid knowledge is acquired. This is made known in the Scriptural affirmation, “For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (Psa 36:9). That is, God, who Himself “is light” (1 John 1:5), clarifies everything else. What we must perceive is made perceivable by the knowledge of God Himself, so that when we “find” Him, the whole universe of knowledge is illumined. Although this may appear quite evident for those in Christ, this is largely unknown in

modern Christian circles.

HE IS NOT FAR FROM EVERY ONE OF US

“ . . . though He be not far from every one of us.” Other versions read, “not far from each one of us,” NKJV “never far from any one of us,” GWN “not afar off from each one of us.” MRD

“Though”

The word “though” is significant in this text. It comes from the Greek word **kai, toige** , which has the following lexical meaning: “and yet, even,” FRIBERG “although and yet,” UBS “markers of concession, with the probable implication of an additional component of contrast - 'although, even though, and yet,” LOUW-NIDA and “and yet.” GINGRICH This is a word of contrast between the actual presence of the Lord and men’s lack of perception of Him. Their appointment is not to “feel after” a God that is far from them, or in some remote area, but the One who is nigh at hand, or right under their noses. Jesus declared the Kingdom of God to be of this order – in the midst of the people, yet undiscerned by them: “Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you.” or “in your midst” NASB (Luke 17:21).

How is it possible for the great God of heaven to be “not far from every one of us,” and yet the human spirit be oblivious of His presence? It is because of the effects of sin. The separation of men from God is not one of space, but of consciousness, harmony, and sensitivity. The distance between God and man is one of hostility and variance. When it comes to seeking the Lord, men grope in moral and spiritual darkness, for the light of insight left them when sin entered into the world.

Note that Paul started his reasoning by pointing the Athenians to “nations of men.” Now, however, he speaks of “every one of us,” confirming that the quest to find God is one of personal responsibility – one from which no individual is exempt. Even though it appears to human logic hopeless, yet men are to feel after God, hoping to find Him. In order to fuel that desire, it is affirmed that God “is not far from every one of us,” so that men ought to hope to find him.

Behind the scenes, of course, God Himself is at work, orchestrating the affairs of men so that seekers will be assisted, and their paths crossed with men of spiritual understanding. If this postulate is true, then those who have not found God are the very ones who have not sought Him.

THE OFFSPRING OF GOD AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

“ 28 For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. 29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.”

IN HIM

“For in Him . . .” Other versions read, “because of Him,” GWN “it is in closest union with Him,” WEYMOUTH “He gives us the power to,” CEV “Certainly we.” GW

This is a most marvelous statement. Even though sin has separated men from God consciously and experientially, yet there is a sense in which humanity remains associated with Him. Nearly all versions use the words “in Him.” There is a mystical tie between God and all men, so that their very existence is owing to Him. In Christ, this is enhanced with the added dimensions of fellowship, illumination, and guidance. But even apart from Christ, no man is totally divorced from God, and thus remains strictly accountable to Him. The details of this association is spelled out in the next clause.

WE LIVE, AND MOVE, AND HAVE OUR BEING

“ . . . we live, and move, and have our being . . . ” Other versions read, “live and move and exist,” NASB “have life, and motion, and existence,” BBE “live and move and are,” DOUAY “live, love, and exist because of Him,” GWN “live and move about and exist,” NET and “we live, we walk, we are.” IE

“We Live”

This has to do with the initiation and maintenance of life in the body . Scriptures refers to it as “the breath of life” (Gen 2:7; 6:17; 7:15,11). It also includes the capacities and abilities that are necessary to life such as eating, drinking, and general bodily functions. All of this takes place “in Him,” even though the vast majority of the human race are unaware of it. This mysterious union is expressed in the words of Abigail to David: “ . . . but the soul of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of life with the LORD thy God” (1 Sam 25:29). Other versions read “bundle of the living with the Lord.” NKJV/NASB/NIV The idea is that life exists because of identity with the Living God.

“We Move”

Moving has to do with our mobility, being able to adapt, carry out objectives, and be productive. It deals with the expressions in the body in particular, as well as the soul. It also has to do with the processes of the mind, where the greater mobility can be found. Moving from place to place, carrying out our objectives, being productive – they all are the expressions of life that is strictly owing to the God of heaven.

“We Have Our Being”

All personhood, if I may use that term, can be traced back to God, who is the ultimate Person. In the ordinary course of life in this world, our individuality is owing to our connection with God Almighty. At this point, this is not a redemptive association.

Humanity is not a mere mass of living creatures. It is comprised of individuals with unique traits. Our “being” includes our essential person – something that can be named, have a particular purpose, and fulfill personal objectives. David referred to his life, with all of its aims in these words: “while I have any being” (Psa 146:2). All personhood, if I may use that term, can be traced back to God, who is the ultimate Person. In the ordinary course of life in this world, our individuality is owing to our connection with God Almighty. At this point, this is not a redemptive association. However, redemption is for those who “live” and “move” and have their “being.”

WE ARE ALSO HIS OFFSPRING

“ as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring . . . ” Other versions read, “His children,” CJB “His generation,” GENEVA “From Him is our descent,” MRD and “the sons of God.” LIVING

Historians say this “poet” is “Aratus , , an Athenian, who lived almost three hundred years before this time. The words are also to be found, with the alteration of one letter only, in the hymn of Cleanthes to the Supreme Being, one of the purest and finest pieces of natural religion in the whole world of pagan antiquity.” ALBERT BARNES The view that this suggests Paul was a student of Grecian literature cannot be supported. This could very well have been a statement inscribed in some public place. It could also have been something to which those with whom he had debated had referred during the previous days. I do not know how a person could substantiate that a Jewish Pharisee was educated in the ways of the world, or how that would harmonize with the entire concept of God forming a people for himself. The fact that Paul was from Tarsus by no means suggests that he had

taken advantage of its heathen school.

Tarsus

“In the time of Paul, Tarsus, the home of famous Stoic philosophers . . .” BRITANICA ENCY In his article, The Early Years of Saul of Tarsus, David Padfield writes, "The university of Tarsus was not as distinguished as the universities of some of the older cities. However, Strabo, the Greek historian, geographer, and philosopher, described Tarsus as having surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of Philosophers (Strabo, Geography, 14.5.13). However, there is not the slightest hint that Paul attended that university, even though many theologians are fond of saying he did. As for Paul himself, he associated his academic learning with Gamaliel, a strictly Jewish teacher, affirming that he had been “taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers” (Acts 22:3).

“Offspring”

The word “offspring” comes from the Greek word **γενος**. This word is not properly translated “children” or “sons.” It is a more general word. Of the twenty-one times it is used in Scripture, it is translated as follows. “Kind” (5 – Matt 13:47; 17:21; Mk 9:29; 1 Cor 12:10; 14:10), “Nation” (2 – Mk 7:26; Gal 1:14), “Kindred” (3 – Acts 4:6; 7:13,19), “Country” (1 – Acts 4:36); “Stock” (2 – Acts 13:26; Phil 3:5); “Offspring” (3 – Acts 17:28,29; Rev 22:16), “Born” (2 – Acts 18:2,24); “Diversities” (1 – 1 Cor 12:28); “Countrymen” (1 – 2 Cor 11:26) “Generation” (1 – 1 Pet 2:9).

The emphasis of this word is on a larger group than is perceived in the words “children” or “sons.” The idea is commonality with God rather than merely coming from God, or having commonality with one another. That is, the Divine image is found in men. They are in His likeness, although each one is characterized by individuality. Further, the likeness, or image, has been marred, but enough of it remains for it to be respected. In fact, God Himself spoke to Noah about how a murderer was to be treated. “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man” (Gen 9:6). James said it was inappropriate to curse men “which are made after the similitude of God” (James 3:9).

You see, then, that man being in the image of God is a basis for sound reasoning. Paul therefore brings the matter of men being God’s offspring – a point from which He will reason with the Athenian philosophers.

A Point to Be Made

In our time there has been a departure from this form of reasoning within the professed church. People are now viewed through psychological glasses, which has led them to some erroneous and unprofitable ways of thinking. In my judgment, the seriousness of this departure cannot be overstated. The body of Christ should not allow its leaders to foist upon them views of humanity that fail to make much of the Divine imagery in men.

WHAT WE OUGHT NOT TO THINK

“Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.” Other versions read, “we should not think,” NIV “it is not right for us to have the idea,” BBE “we shouldn’t suppose,” CJB “we shouldn't think,” CSB “we must not suppose,” DOUAY “we have no excuse for thinking,” NJB “So you must not think,” IE “we ought not to imagine,” WEYMOUTH and “we ought not to be thinking.” ALT

There are proper and improper ways of thinking. This becomes a most critical matter when it comes to the ideas men have about God Himself. God has never condoned erroneous views of Himself, and

this is even more true now that the fullest revelation has been given of Him in Christ Jesus . Here is a realm where men are not permitted to philosophize. In fact, He reproved His people for NOT knowing Him (Psa 95:10; Isa 1:3; 5:12; 40:28; 45:4,5; Jer 4:22; Hos 5:4). The heathen were also rebuked for not knowing God (Psa 79:6).

Here Paul informs the Athenians that, in view of the fact that men have a certain identity with God through creation and sustenance, it is not right to think of Him as being like things men have crafted, Men are made, not God! Men have been formed, not God! By saying “the Godhead,” Paul means “Divinity,” DOUAY “the Divine nature,” NKJV or “Deity.” NRSV This refers to “God’s essence,” CJB or His ultimate and essential nature. This refers to who is He, versus His various attributes, which are perfectly consistent with who He is.

Associating God with Statuary

Idolatry is an attempt to Deify the perception of God, as compared with worshipping the Lord Himself. Idols made of gold and silver are an effort to display God as valuable, while stone accents solidity or permanence. However, the weakness of both forms is that they are not living – and there is no point to a lifeless God . Accepting the fact that men are God’s offspring ought to at least lead men to the conclusion that God Himself is living. Therefore, men “ought not to think of the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device,” or “skill.” NIV Although the practice has been historically common, continuing until this day, man does not have the right to invent his own God.

Misconceptions of God Are Wrong

Misconceptions of God are always serious. Professing Christians ought to know this, for it was their former ignorance of God that alienated them from His life, accounting for their death in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1; 4:18). In fact, being ignorant of God is a sin, from which men must be justified if they are to be saved. Also, in the end, the damnation of all who “know not God,” as well as “obey not the Gospel,” is certain (2 Thess 1:8). Further, in describing the Gentiles, their chief trait is that they “know not God” (1 Thess 4:5).

And what does it mean to “know not God” ? It is to be unfamiliar with His Person, His thoughts, and His ways (Isa 1:3; Jer 9:3; Psa 95:10; Isa 55:8-9),

The Example of Israel

For example, David extolled the Lord in the 95 th Psalm, contrasting Him with the despicable conduct of His own people. He stated that it appeared God was indifferent to the whole matter – yet, that was an erroneous assessment of the situation. “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself : but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (Psa 50:21). Other versions read, “You thought that I was altogether like you,” NKJV “You thought I was just like you,” NASB “you thought I was one like yourself,” RSV “it seemed to you that I was such a one as yourself,” BBE “thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like to thee,” DOUAY “That made you think I was like you,” GWN “thou thoughtest wickedly that I should be like thee,” SEPTUAGINT “Do you think that I am really like you?,” NJB and “you thought I was once entirely like you.” AMPLIFIED The flawed assessment of Israel worked against them. God declared of that situation, “But [now] I will reprove you and put [the charge] in order before your eyes.” AMPLIFIED

On another occasion Israel pondered their situation and concluded God had forgotten them: “Then said He unto me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceeding great , and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perverseness: for they say , The LORD hath forsaken the earth, and the LORD seeth not” (Ezek 9:9; 8:12). What a tragic misconception, for the Lord continued, “And as for

Me also, Mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will recompense their way upon their head” (Ezek 9:10).

Zechariah also indicted Israel for their false view of God. “ And it shall come to pass at that time, that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The LORD will not do good, neither will he do evil ” (Zeph 1:12).

The Reasoning of the Wicked

The Psalmist wrote of the wicked oppressing the righteous laying snares for them, boasting in their heart, and promoting covetous practices. Their erroneous perception of God drives their wicked ways. “He hath said in his heart, God hath forgotten: He hideth His face; He will never see it . . . Wherefore doth the wicked contemn God? He hath said in his heart, Thou wilt not require it ” (Psa 10:11,13). Again they reason, “Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it ” (Psa 94:7).

Some Modern Misconceptions

From this perspective, the vital issue is not what God thinks about us, but what we think about God. If that appears strange, consider that an ignorance of God alienates us from Him, and that men need to be reconciled to God if they are to be accepted by Him and experience His favor.

The flawed views of God that exist in any given generation always match the prevailing character of that generation. For example, a fundamentally self-centered society, such as the one in which we live, develops ideas about God that tend to condone their manners. The following statements represent a misapprehension of who God is. Yet they not only exist, but are increasing in their popularity.

- “God loves everyone the same.”
- “God’s love is unconditional.”
- “God can handle your sin.”
- “You cannot do anything that will make God love you less.”
- “God hates the sin but loves the sinner.”
- “God has a wonderful plan for your life.”
- “God loves you just the way you are.”
- “God wants you to realize all of your dreams.”
- “God wants you to have the best in this world.”
- “God’s longsuffering never runs out.”
- “There is no sin God cannot forgive.”
- “It is alright to be angry with God. He can handle that.”

It seems to me that this is a wholly inappropriate way to think about the God from whom we came, who gives life and breath and all things to us, and in whom we live, and move, and have our being. From this perspective, the vital issue is not what God thinks about us, but what we think about God. If that appears strange, consider that an ignorance of God alienates us from Him, and that men need to be reconciled to God if they are to be accepted by Him and experience His favor.

All of this will become increasingly apparent as we proceed through the message Paul delivers to the Athenian philosophers.

GOD HAS WINKED AT HUMAN IGNORANCE – BUT NO MORE

“ 30 And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent.”

According to the manner of the Kingdom, Paul not only points out the facts of the case, and what is not appropriate, but also provides the rationality of the whole matter. There are some things about God Himself and what He has purposed that does not allow for a continued ignorance of Himself and His ways. Further, in my judgment, many of the versions have done a miserable job in representing this verse. They smack more of philosophy than of a declaration of the truth.

Let it be clear that the basis for this statement concerning “ignorance” is the particular idolatry to which Paul initially referred: “an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (17:23).

TIMES OF IGNORANCE

“And the times of this ignorance . . .” Other versions read, “Those times when men had no knowledge,” BBE “the times when people didn't know any better,” GWN “the times of this error ,” MRD “such times of ignorance,” NET “such ignorance,” NJB “people’s ignorance about these things,” NLT “man’s past ignorance about these things,” LIVING “men didn’t understand God,” IE “those times of ignorance,” WEYMOUTH “such [former] ages of ignorance,” AMPLIFIED and “people did not know what they were doing.” CEV

The point here is that the ignorance the Athenians acknowledged in the altar to the unknown God belonged to a period that no longer existed. It was an age that was of necessity characterized by the ignorance of God. He was not known because He had not revealed Himself to the world at large. Even in its intellectually rudimentary form, the knowledge of God was deposited only with the Jews, coming in “the covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the promises” (Rom 9:4). The rest of the world was left in spiritual stupor. That ignorance was embodied in the phrase “unknown God.” However, not only had the Athenians, and others before them, acknowledged this ignorance, but even worshiped it, rearing up an altar to the God they did not know.

WINKING AT TIMES OF IGNORANCE

“ . . . God winked at . . .” Other versions read, “overlooked,” NKJV “regarded not,” GWN “God hath made to pass away,” MRD “tolerated,” LIVING “ignored,” IE “view with indulgence,” WEYMOUTH “ignored and allowed to pass unnoticed,” AMPLIFIED and “forgave all this.” CEV

The words “winked at” are translated from a single Greek word (**u`peridw.n**), which means “to overlook, take no notice of, not attend to,” THAYER The idea is that of God’s scanning eye, “running to and fro throughout the whole earth” (2 Chron 16:9). It is written, “The LORD looketh from heaven; he beholdeth all the sons of men” (Psa 33:13). However, in times past, when He was confronted with those who were ignorant of Him, He “winked,” not beholding the condition with His piercing vision. The word “ignored” is not an appropriate description of this circumstance, for that postulates looking at a thing, yet not considering it. However, that is not the kind of action being described. The point here is that God did NOT look on the condition, but rather closed His eye, so to speak, to the situation. This was done because the nature of God is agitated, awakening His wrath, when He is not known. This will be confirmed in the day when the Lord Jesus comes in all of His glory, destroying those who “know not God” (2 Thess 1:8).

Although it appeared as though God was tolerating this ignorance, or overlooking it, or even indulging it, that was not the case at all. In a grand display of mercy, He refused to look straight at that condition. That is the only reason He did not deal extensively with the heathen prior to the coming of Christ, holding them accountable for their ignorance of Himself.

However, wherever God had revealed Himself, He did not “wink” at the ignorance of the people. He said of His own people Israel, “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge : because thou hast rejected knowledge , I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to Me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children” (Hosea 4:6). He declared that He had “a controversy with the inhabitants of the land” of Israel, because there was “no knowledge of God in the land” (Hos 4:1). Having invested in them, and revealing Himself to them, He desired to see “the knowledge of God” in them (Hos 6:6). He did not “wink” at their dulness. He said of them, “they know not Me” (Jer 9:3), He had spoken to them, but they did not hearken, or incline their ear to Him (Jer 7:26). He did not wink at their ignorance!

BUT NOW

“ . . . but now commandeth all men every where to repent.” Other versions read, “God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent,“ NASB “now He commandeth men that they should all everywhere repent,” ASV “now He gives orders to all men in every place to undergo a change of heart,” BBE “now He is commanding all people everywhere to turn to him from their sins,” CJB “now enjoins men that they shall all everywhere repent,” DARBY “now He admonisheth all men every where to repent,” GENEVA “doth now command all men everywhere to reform,” YLT “now He commands everyone to put away idols and worship only Him,” LIVING “God commands every person in the world to change his heart,” IE and “now He charges all people everywhere to repent (to change their minds for the better and heartily to amend their ways, with abhorrence of their past sins).” AMPLIFIED

The words “but now” have strictly to do with what the Lord has done. It marks the time when God intervened into history in such a way as to impact the eternal destiny of men. This has nothing to do with the supposed improvement of man – something that is inherent in the theory of evolution and the social sciences. Man has no power to change the times, so that we can say “but now.” Here, “now” is the time following the death, burial, resurrection, enthronement, and intercessory ministry of Jesus. From the standpoint of the children of God, this is the time of the mediatorial ministry of Jesus. From the standpoint of the government of God, this is the time of the reign of Jesus who is bringing all of the sons to glory.

The ignorance of God may appear to have been tolerated until “now.” Actually, God was not looking at it, winking until the time when Jesus would take away the sins of the world, thereby enabling God to reveal Himself more fully. What was not demanded from all men before, IS demanded of them now.

Repent!

Now that heaven as moved to clarify the human situation, provide a God honoring response, and enjoy Divine acceptance, men are commanded to repent. This is not an option, or a mere suggestion – and it is at the ground level of things having to do with man’s acceptance by God Almighty: “REPENT!”

Now, I suppose there have been so many efforts to define the word “repent” that it appears futile to make any effort to do so once again. However, because of the gravity of this text, and its absolute essentiality of what it demands, it will be good to test our own ideas on the matter.

The Academic Approach

First, let’s dispense with the academic approach. There are certainly some things to be gleaned here, even though they are, in a sense, secondary. The word “repent,” as used in this text, is translated from the Greek word **metanoei/n** . The lexical meaning of the word is, “to change one’s mind . . . to change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past sins,” THAYER “change

one's mind, be converted . . . as feeling remorse regret, feel sorry," FRIBERG "have a change of heart, turn from one's sins, change one's ways," UBS "to change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness - 'to repent, to change one's way," LOUW-NIDA "to change one's mind or purpose" LIDDELL-SCOTT

The tense of the word is "present active infinitive," which means it is a "permanent command of perpetual force." ROBERTSON That is, this speaks of a manner of life that is initiated, and continues in force. In other words, whatever produced the need for repentance must cease to take place.

The word "repent" involves the following facets.

- **POINTING TOWARD GOD.** Turning toward God.
- **NEW ESSENTIAL THOUGHT PATTERNS.** A change of mind for the better.
- **CORRECTION OF MANNERS.** The amending of life that is attended with an abhorrence of the sins that required repentance.
- **A NEW DIRECTION.** The manner, way, or direction of one's life is altered, placing it in alignment with the will of God.
- **NEW MANNER OF THINKING.** A completely new way of thinking concerning both sin and righteousness.
- **NEW PURPOSE FOR LIVING.** The change of the purpose for living.
- **CHANGE OF FOCUS.** A change of heart.
- **NEW ATTITUDE TOWARD SIN.** Turning away from sin.

The change involved in repentance includes the seen and unseen parts of men. It is not possible for there to be an inward change, but no outward change. Where such a thing is professed, the problem still exists within – the problem that alienated men from God in the first place.

Before Jesus came into the world, the Lord sent one to prepare the way for Him. Several hundred years before that time, God revealed to the prophets this was going to happen. One would come described as "of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God" (Isa 40:3). And how would the way be prepared for the Lord. What kind of highway would be reared up that would lead men to God? When that messenger came, he was specifically identified as John the Baptist. Matthew wrote of him that he came "preaching in the wilderness of Judea," just as Isaiah had said. His message was, "REPENT ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Matthew then records, "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight" (Matt 3:3). Jesus followed John, preaching the same message: "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, REPENT: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt 4:17). During Christ's prodigious ministry He told the people, "except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3,5).

Repentance was not the way to receive Jesus, but was rather what was necessary to PREPARE for Him. This is also what Peter told the people on the day of Pentecost. The first thing they were to do was "REPENT." Then, and only then, were they to "be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). Peter told another group a short while later, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19). He added the word "be converted," accenting the necessity of change prior to one's sins being blotted out – at least that is what He said: "that your sin may be blotted out." Other versions read, "so that your sins may be wiped out." NIV/NRSV

People must be told that they are expected to change their manner of life before they are baptized into Christ. God's people, on the other hand, are to be wise enough to be able to

discern the evidence that this has taken place.

Furthermore, the change that is wrought by repentance is to be observable. This is why John the Baptist told the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to be baptized, “But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said unto them, O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,” or “fruit in keeping with repentance” NASB (Matt 3:7-8). The Amplified Bible reads, “fruit that is consistent with repentance [let your lives prove your change of heart].” These men refused to change, as Luke confirmed when He wrote, “But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him” (Luke 7:30).

Understanding that men, with their traditions, can expand this requirement beyond all boundaries of reason, it is still a word that is to be heeded. People must be told that they are expected to change their manner of life before they are baptized into Christ. God’s people, on the other hand, are to be wise enough to be able to discern the evidence that this has taken place.

Paul required of the Athenians the same action that took place in Thessalonica. They the people “turned to God from idols” (1 Thess 1:9). That is, they moved from their allegiance to, and worship of, idols in order to come to God. I gather this means they ceased being idolaters at that precise point, else the text makes no sense at all.

If those charged with warning the people, clearly informing them of God’s requirements, do not do so, the unwarned will die in their iniquity, but it will be required at the hands of those given the work of warning. This is the meaning of God’s word to Ezekiel: “Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel: therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me. When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek 3:18-19).

The professing church could do much better in this regard. To often they have emphasized coming to the Lord as the people are. That may have a pleasant sound to it, but I do not know what word of God can be used to justify such an emphasis. We may come weary and heavy laden, or with ashes on our heads and mourning, but we dare not come to Him without making a hearty effort to eliminate from our lives what alienated us from Him in the first place. Rest assured, that conscientious efforts to come away from things that repel the Lord will be matched with the strength to required for the task. It will be like the woman with the issue of blood pressing through the crowd, the man with a withered hand stretching it out, or a paralyzed man on a pallet extending himself to pick up his bed and stand up.

THE PROSPECT OF THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

“ 31 Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

BECAUSE

“Because . . .” Other versions read, “for,” NIV “inasmuch,” ASV “seeing that,” WEYMOUTH and “since.” WILLIAMS

The word translated “because” is the Greek word **dio,ti** . Some alternate Greek manuscripts use the word **kaqo,ti** . A review of the meanings of these words confirm they mean about the same thing.

dioti means “on this account, that, because,” THAYER AND “because, for that, inasmuch as.” FRIBERG **kaqoti** means “according to what . . . because that, because.” THAYER “because, in view of the fact that,” FRIBERG

The fact that God has “commanded all men everywhere to repent” should be enough incentive to do so. However, this is the day of salvation, when more information is given, and strong reasons and incentives are provided. Once what is here proclaimed is grasped by faith, failing to repent is nothing less than an act of insanity.

AN APPOINTED DAY

“ . . . He hath appointed a day . . .” Other versions read, “fixed a day,” NASB “set a day,” NIV and “established a day.” NAB

Who but God can do such a thing as this – appoint a day on which something will occur – then bring it to pass at the precisely appointed time? Keep in mind that Satan himself, together with principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in high places, and demons are eager to thwart this day. If they thought they could abort the mission of Jesus, I do not doubt they also are seeking to forestall this day, even though they know their end is coming.

In the process of revealing Himself to Israel, God pointed to His ability in the matter of appointments. Right here it ought to be said that the word “ability” is a rather crude word when referring to the Lord. With God, ability has to do with His nature. It is not with God as it is with man, who have to develop their abilities. Divine aptitude does not improve with use. Contrary to some theological views, God is not growing, maturing, or in any way advancing in His Personhood. It is the revelation of God that increases, not His Person. In this matter of ability, or power, the Lord said to Israel, “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done , saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth My counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it ” (Isa 46:9-11). While this text is specifically speaking of the Divine summoning of Nebuchadnezzar to do His work at a specific time, the point is that, unlike all other gods, and man himself God was ABLE to do this. He can appoint something for the future, then cause it to take place at the exact time He appointed without any modification, adjustment, or compromise. Further, He confirmed this in several different ways. Here is a brief sampling.

- Noah entered the ark on the very day God had appointed, as revealed to him one hundred and twenty years earlier (Gen 7:3).
- God appointed the time of Isaac’s birth (Gen 18:14).
- God appointed the set time of the plagues in Egypt (Ex 9:5).
- Israel was delivered from Egyptian bondage on the precise day God had appointed (Ex 12:51).
- God appointed the defeat of the good counsel of Ahithophel (2 Sam 7:10).

Everyone will eventually confront the God who made them – and they will all do it together, and at an appointed time. This makes perfect sense in view of what Paul has said to this point.

False gods are not noted for speaking, let alone making appointments. Within the context of the consideration of the true God, it is said of idols, “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased. Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not : eyes have they, but they see not : They have ears, but they hear not :

noses have they, but they smell not : They have hands, but they handle not : feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat” (Psa 115:3-7).

However, this is not true of the God that Paul proclaims. He has already told the Athenians of the true God who is “unknown” to them,

- **CREATOR OF THE WORLD.** “ Made the world and all things therein” (17:24a).
- **SOVEREIGN.** “ Is Lord of heaven and earth” (17:24b).
- **SELF-SUFFICIENT.** Is not “worshiped with men’s hands as though He needed anything ” (17:25a).
- **GIVES.** “ Giveth to all life, and breath, and all things” (17:25b).
- **MADE THE NATIONS FROM ONE MAN.** “Hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on the face of the earth” (17:26a).
- **DETERMINES AND APPOINTS.** “Hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (17:26b).
- **OMNIPRESENT.** “ Is not far from every one of us” (17:27).
- **SOURCE OF LIFE.** “ In Him we live, and move, and have our being” (17:28).
- **BEGETS.** “We are His offspring ” (17:28).
- **CHOOSES NOT TO RESPOND.** Has “ winked ” at “the times of this ignorance” of Himself, as displayed in the Athenian altar to “the unknown God” (17:30).
- **COMMANDS.** “Now commands all men everywhere to repent” (17:30).

Now, that is the kind of God that not only makes appointments, but has the right to make them, and the power to bring them to pass as well. Paul now reveals precisely why all men have been commanded to repent. Everyone will eventually confront the God who made them – and they will all do it together, and at an appointed time. This makes perfect sense in view of what Paul has said to this point: (1) God made the world and everything in it. (2) God made man. (3) God placed man where He wanted him in both time and location. (4) God gives life and breath and all things, (5) Man was created and placed in order to seek the Lord. (6) Man lives and moves and has his being in God. (7) Man is appropriately called “the offspring of God.” It is perfectly reasonable, therefore, that he should be judged by God.

JUDGING THE WORLD IN RIGHTEOUSNESS

“ . . . in the which He will judge the world in righteousness . . . ” Other versions read, “judge the world with justice,” NIV “have the world judged in righteousness,” NRSV “the world will be judged in righteousness,” BBE “judge the inhabited world, and do it justly,” CJB “judge the world in equity,” DOUAY “judge all the earth with righteousness,” MRD “the whole world will be judged in uprightness,” NJB “judge the world according to righteousness,” TNT “justly judging the world,” LIVING “judge the whole world. He will be fair,” IE and “judge the world’s people with fairness.” CEV

As I understand it, the greater context of this judgment in righteousness will take into consideration the times during which the ones being judged lived. Those, for example, who lived during the period of the New Covenant will not be judged like those who lived during the days of Noah.

“The World”

Some of the versions butcher this verse, not giving the true sense of it at all: “the inhabited world.” CJB “inhabitable earth.” DARBY Even though the word translated “world” (**oivkoume,nhn**) means

“the inhabited earth,” THAYER , here it is used “by metonymy,” to mean “the inhabitants of the earth, men,” “as the inhabitants of the world humanity, mankind, people,” FRIBERG “mankind,” UBS and “World in the sense [of] humankind.” GINGRICH The idea is that God will judge the ones whose appointed residence was the world, or earth, where they were placed in order to seek Him. This will include all of the earth’s inhabitants from Adam to the end of the world.

Prior to the coming of Christ as the Savior of the world, God revealed this judgment – the judgment of the world.

- “Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof: let the fields rejoice, and all that is therein. Then shall the trees of the wood sing out at the presence of the LORD, because He cometh to judge the earth ” (1 Chron 16:32-33; Psa 96:12-13).

- “Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together before the LORD; for He cometh to judge the earth : with righteousness shall he judge the world, and the people with equity” (Psa 98:8-9).

- “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl 12:14).

- “I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened” (Dan 7:9-10).

When Jesus walked among men, He made pointed references to “the day of judgment” (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Mk 6:11). Among the Jews, who were custodians of the Word of God, this was common knowledge. The apostles were given to see its truth more fully, and thus expounded some of the rationale behind it (Rom 2:2-3; 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10; Heb 9:27; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:7; 1 John 4:17; Jude 1:6).

“In Righteousness”

The judgment of the world will be in strict accord with righteousness – true righteousness, or God’s righteousness. There will be no favoritism or respect of persons. The bar of righteousness will not be lowered for anyone. There will be no such thing as a people who “are sinners like everyone else, just forgiven.” God will not abandon His character when He judges every offspring of Adam that ever inhabited the earth. He will not compromise His righteousness. He will not overlook what He has said He hates, or refuse to honor what He has said He loves.

As I understand it, the greater context of this judgment in righteousness will take into consideration the times during which the ones being judged lived. Those, for example, who lived during the period of the New Covenant will not be judged like those who lived during the days of Noah. Those who have heard the Gospel will not be judged with the same criteria as those who have not heard it. Those who had access to the vast reservoir of the wisdom in Christ Jesus will not be judged like those who did not have access to it. Those who lived in the blazing glory of the reign of the Son of God will not be judged like those who had only the creation for a witness. Those who were given much will not be judged in the same way as those who were given little. Those who had many opportunities will not be evaluated as those who had few. Those in Christ will not be judged with the same expectation as those who lived when such a benefit was not possible.

The appointed judgment will not be according to men’s moral standards, or their concept of right and wrong, but in strict accord with God’s righteousness, of which Christ is the embodiment.

THAT MAN

“ . . . by that man whom He hath ordained . . . ” Other versions read, “Man whom He hath appointed,” NASB “Man who has been marked out by Him for this work,” BBE “Man whom He has designated,” CJB “a man to do this. He chose this man a long time ago,” IE “ man whom He has predestined to this work,” WEYMOUTH and “a Man Whom He has destined and appointed for that task.” AMPLIFIED

This is something the prophets did not stress – that a “Man” would judge the world. The reference, of course, is to the Lord Jesus Christ, whom God has appointed to judge all men. How often the Scriptures make a point of this.

- **JESUS WILL REWARD EVERY MAN.** “For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works” (Matt 16:27).

- **ALL NATIONS WILL BE GATHERED BEFORE HIM FOR THE FINAL SEPARATION.** “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Mat 25:31-32).

- **THE FATHER HAS GIVEN ALL THINGS INTO CHRIST’S HAND.** “The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand” (John 3:35).

- **JUDGEMENT HAS BEEN COMMITTED TO THE SON.** “For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son” (John 5:22).

- **THE SON HAS BEEN GIVEN AUTHORITY TO EXECUTE JUDGMENT.** “And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man” (John 5:27).

- **GOD ORDAINED JESUS TO BE THE JUDGE.** “And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead” (Acts 10:42).

- **JESUS WILL JUDGE THE SECRETS OF MEN.** “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom 2:16).

- **THERE IS THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST.** “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom 14:10). “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

- **JESUS WILL JUDGE THE LIVING AND THE DEAD AT HIS APPEARING.** “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom” (2 Tim 4:1).

Here, the assurance is not that Jesus has raised from the dead – although that is certainly true for all who trust in Him. It is rather the confidence and sureness of the determined day of judgment that is the point.

This is a most gracious provision for men – that they will be judged by “the Man” who was “tempted in all points like as we are” (Heb 4:15). He “suffered being tempted” (Heb 2:18), and “endured the contradiction of sinners” (Heb 12:3). This will not mitigate the fact that judgment will be according to righteousness. It does, however, give a decided advantage to those who have lived by faith and walked in the Spirit.

These days there is not a lot of preaching concerning Jesus judging the world, or of Him being ordained to do so. Peter told those at the house of Cornelius that God had commanded them to testify

that God had ordained Jesus to “be the judge of the quick [living] and the dead” (Acts 10:42). On the day of judgment, it will certainly not go well for those who represented themselves as speaking for God if they ignored that word.

THE ASSURANCE GIVEN

“ . . . whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead.” Other versions read, “furnished proof,” NASB “given proof,” NIV “given a sign,” BBE “giving the proof of it all,” DARBY “giving faith to all,” DOUAY “he turneth every man to faith in Him,” MRD “provided confirmation,” NAB “publicly proved,” NJB and “offered faith to all men.” PNT

The word “assurance” is translated from the Greek word **πιστις**, which is ordinarily translated “faith.” This Greek word, in this precise form, is used fourteen times in the Gospels, and is always translated “faith” (Matt 8:10; 9:2,29; 17:20; 21:21; 23:23; Mk 2:5; 4:40; 11:22; Lk 7:9; 17:5,6). The book of Acts uses the same word three times, two of them are translated “faith” (14:9; 20:21) and in our text it is translated “assurance” (17:31). The Epistles contain this word forty times. In Titus 2:10, it is translated “fidelity” (“faith” in the NASB). In the other thirty-nine verses, it is translated “faith” (Rom 1:17; 3:3; 14:22; 1 Cor 13:2; Gal 1:23; 3:23; Eph 1:15; Col 1:4; 1 Thess 3:5,6; 1 Tim 1:19; 5:8,12; 6:11,21; 2 Tim 2:18,22; 3:8; 4:7; Tit 1:1,4; Phil 1:5; Heb 11:7,13; 13:7; James 2:1,14,18; 1 Pet 1:21; 2 Pet 1:1). The book of the Revelation contained the word three times, and all of them are translated “faith” (Rev 2:13,19; 14:12).

There is sound reasoning for the use of the word “assurance” in most of the versions. The point being made in the text is that men can now be confident of the reality of the day of judgment. Faith itself is not the point, but the conviction and assurance that it works in the heart concerning the day of judgment. The idea is that once death had been conquered, the surety of the day of judgment was firmly fixed, for “It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Here, the assurance is not that Jesus has raised from the dead – although that is certainly true for all who trust in Him. It is rather the confidence and sureness of the determined day of judgment that is the point. In other words, from the viewpoint of the listeners, the Man ordained by God to execute the judgment of the world has been raised from the dead, and is fully qualified and ready to commence with it at the appointed time. The only ones who lack readiness are men living in the world. At the time, Paul is stressing that this includes the Athenians in particular.

When He walked among men in the flesh, Jesus told the people, “An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mat 12:39-40). The raising of Jesus from the dead was that sign. For those to whom Jesus was speaking, it was the sign that He was, in truth, the Son of God. For the Athenians, it was the proof that He was really going to judge the world in righteousness.

In other words, the resurrection was the portal through which all men would enter the day of judgment. It was also the means through which Jesus entered into the role of the Judge of all men.

Paul’s approach to this correlated perfectly with what he had been publically declaring: “Jesus and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18). In other words, the resurrection was the portal through which all men would enter the day of judgment. It was also the means through which Jesus entered into the role of the Judge of all men.

The only reasonable thing to do now, was to prepare for that inevitable day by aggressively seeking God, inquiring into the identity of the appointed “Man.”

SOME MOCKED, SOME WANTED TO HEAR MORE, BUT PAUL DEPARTED

“ 32 And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. 33 So Paul departed from among them.”

The Athenians had asked to hear more of the message Paul had been preaching – more of the reasoning that supported it, and the foundation upon which it was resting. They were intending to view the whole matter philosophically as they had other new messages that had been brought to Athens. However, this message will be different, for it will declare a reality that is foreign to them – something that only faith can grasp. We will now read of the immediate response of the people – a response that was expressed while Paul was yet upon Mars Hill.

SOME MOCKED

“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked . . .” Other versions read, “began to sneer,” NASB “scoffed,” NRSV “made sport of it,” BBE “began to ridicule him,” CSB “began joking about it,” GWN “burst out laughing,” NJB and “laughed in contempt.” NLT

Keep in mind that Paul had been speaking of weighty matters.

- The creation of the world and all with it (17:24).
- The nature of God (17:24).
- The worship of God (17:25).
- The maintenance of the world and everything in it (17:25).
- The creation of man (17:26).
- The purpose for man’s placement in time and location (17:27).
- The closeness of God to every man (17:27).
- The absolute dependency of man upon God (17:28).
- The fact that man is God’s offspring – a fact certain of their own poets acknowledged (17:28).
- Why idols are unreasonable, even from a human point of view (17:29).
- The fact that God no longer tolerates an ignorance of Himself (17:30).
- The fact that God commands all men everywhere to repent (17:30).
- The fact that God has appointed a day in which all men will be judged (17:31).
- The fact that judgment will be strictly according to righteousness or uprightness (17:31).
- The fact that this judgment will be executed by a Man who has been raised from the dead, and is ready to proceed with that judgment (17:31).

Now, any one of these considerations is worthy of sober and extended thoughts, to say nothing of them all. Yet, there were some who, when they heard the words, “hath raised Him from the dead” (Paul’s last words), completely disregarded everything that he had said. With disdain, they rejected what had been said, scoffing as though someone without a sound mind had been speaking to them. Their erroneous philosophies had made no room for such a teaching, so they thought that it was foolish. It did not blend in with their manner of thought, so they mocked, scoffed, and jeered at Paul as though he was nothing more than a demented Jew.

Even though the nature and content of the message by no means encouraged a delayed response, these men treated it as a mere intellectual novelty. They were like Felix who told Paul, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee”

Of course, this is the way of the flesh, which considers the things of God to be “foolishness” (1 Cor 2:14). Let a skeptic find a single statement he feels is folly, and he will reject the whole of the revelation of God. That is why people do not believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. That is why some who feign association with Christ refuse to live wholly for Him. He has said or required something that does not fit into their way of thinking. Oh, they do not always scoff as the Athenians. Sometimes they simply “deny Him” in their “works,” “being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16). Such people are to be classed with these jeering Athenian philosophers.

WE WILL HEAR THEE AGAIN

“ . . . and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.” Other versions read, “we want to hear you again on this subject,” NIV “Let us go more fully into this another time,” BBE “We'll hear you talk about this some other time,” GWN and “We should like to hear you on this some other time.” NAB

Even though the nature and content of the message by no means encouraged a delayed response, these men treated it as a mere intellectual novelty. They were like Felix who told Paul, “Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee” (Acts 24:25). Paul said no more to him, and there is no record that Felix ever called for him. Those who treat the message with this kind of polite disdain will have it taken from them. It ought to be noted that this kind of response is quite common in the churches. That is the reason for scheduling convenient and infrequent gatherings where the truth of God is to be proclaimed.

PAUL DEPARTED

“ . . . So Paul departed from among them.” Other versions read, “At that, Paul left the Council,” NIV “At that point Paul left them,” NRSV “So Paul went out from among them,” RSV “so Paul went away from among them,” BBE “With this response, Paul left the court,” GWN “That ended Paul's discussion with them,” NLT and “That ended Paul's discussion with them.” MONTGOMERY

The word “depart” means that Paul left under his own initiative and accord. He saw no further reason to remain, or to schedule some future meeting. The Athenian philosophers had responded to his message, and now he reacts to their response by leaving the premises. Jesus frequently did the same thing, getting up and leaving certain places (Matt 4:12; 11:1; 13:53; 14:13; 19:1; Mk 5:20; 6:46; Lk 4:42; 4:43; 6:15).

Jesus did not alter His conduct in order to be popular with the people, or to indulge their lethargic spirits. You will find the apostles also reacted in this manner when sufficient interest in the truth was not perceived. An interest in truth determines how much he is given.

SOME BELIEVED AND CLAVE TO HIM

“ 34 Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

Although the level of interest did not justify Paul continuing with the philosophers, and ultimately in Athens itself, his labor was not in vain. There were some who refused to leave him.

CERTAIN CLAVE TO HIM AND BELIEVED

“Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed . . .” Other versions read, “some men joined him and believed,” NKJV “a few men became followers of Paul and believed,” NIV “and became believers,” NRSV “gave him their support,” BBE “stayed with him and came to trust,” CJB “adhering to him, did believe,” DOUAY “attached themselves to him and became believers,” NJB and “were

on his side and joined him and believed (became Christians).” AMPLIFIED

The word “clave” means “to glue together . . . fasten firmly together . . . to join oneself to, cleave.” THAYER This is the word used to report an angel telling Phillip to “join” himself to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:29). It is translated “keep company” in Acts 10:28, where Peter said it was unlawful for a Jew to keep regular company with someone from another nation. Paul used it when admonishing believers to “cleave to that which is good” (Rom 12:9). It is used in First Corinthians 6:16 to describe someone who is “joined to the Lord.”

The idea here is that these “certain men” did not simply shake Paul’s hand and walk a brief distance with him. Rather, they followed him and would not leave him. They stuck with him, unwilling to be separated from him. As has been mentioned in earlier texts, this was a common response of those who believed the word of the Gospel (Acts 2:42; 10:48; 13:43; 16:15,34).

I have noted over the years a certain consistency in those who are growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. They are always eager for an extended exposure to the truth. I have also noted that those with meager appetites rarely, if ever, display any growth in Christ Jesus.

DIONYSUS, DAMARIS, AND OTHERS WITH THEM

“ . . . among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”

AN AEROPAGITE

“A member of the court of AREOPAGUS. This, as constituted by Solon, consisted of the nine *archons* (chief magistrates) for the year, and the ex-archons. The latter became members for life; but before their admission, they were submitted, at the close of their annual magistracy, to a rigid scrutiny into their conduct in office and their private morals. Proof of criminal or unbecoming conduct was sufficient also afterward to expel them.”

McCLINTOK & STRONG’S

The two people who are named were probably significant people in the area. An “Aeopagite” was a member of the high court or council, previously described as the “Areopagus.” That council was comprised of men of noble character, noted for their wisdom. History affirms that by the appointment of Solon “the nine archons [chief magistrates of the court] became for the remainder of their lives Areopagites, provided they had well discharged the duties of their archonship, were blameless in their personal conduct, and had undergone a satisfactory examination.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S Dionysius, then, was an esteemed and noted man in Athens.

The fact that only one of the council is said to have joined himself to Paul and believed confirms that “not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Cor 1:26). It is not that the truth of God has nothing for men of mental aptitude. Rather, it is that the wisdom of the world, not those with gifted minds, causes the Truth to appear foolish by way of comparison. However, where a keen intellect is joined with a humble spirit, the things of God will draw at the heart, supplying food for thought and cogitation that transcend all that the world has to offer. I have long been chagrined by those who attempt to speak

ABOUT DIONYSIUS

“Eusebius (*Hist. Ecclesiastes* 3, 40, and 4:23) tells that Dionysius of Corinth names "Dionysius the Areopagite" (whom Luke has recorded in the Acts) as the first bishop of the Church in Athens. Suidas gives a fuller account, according to which Dionysius was born in Athens, studied there and in Egypt, and became eminent for learning; and while at Heliopolis, in Egypt, seeing an eclipse of the sun, he

exclaimed to a friend, "Either the Deity is suffering, or sympathizing with some sufferer;" and this eclipse took place at the time of the death of Christ. Returning to Athens, he became an Areopagite, was converted under Paul's discourse, and was made bishop of Athens by Paul. So far Suidas. On the authority of Aristides the Apologist he is said to have suffered martyrdom at Athens."

McCLINKTOK & STRONG'S

of the things of God in dumbed-down speech, appealing to only the most crude and uncultured minds. You may be sure that these Athenian philosophers who heard Paul speaking in the public, would not have inquired further into some simplistic and juvenile presentation of the things of God. I do not know how one could really begin to develop such a presentation on the grand themes of Jesus and the resurrection.

"A woman named Damaris" is also mentioned. Neither Scripture nor history supply any further information about this woman – yet God saw fit to mention her. Apparently she was also an individual capable of profound thought. How else could you account for her being interested in pursuing a message concerning Jesus and the resurrection. What kind of appeal does the day of judgment have to a person not given to thought, deliberation, and the pursuit of the truth?

Luke then adds, "and others with them." Other versions read, "and a number of others," NIV and "some other people." GWN Although not inherent in the word "others," that word can suggest the additional people were not as aggressive in their pursuit of the truth as were Dionysius and Damaris. The word itself is translated from a Greek word meaning "one not of the same nature, form, class, kind, different." THAYER Rather than the difference being in their interest of the truth, it appears to me that these were not members of the high court, not having the same cultural status as the two who are mentioned, yet having an unrelenting interest in the truth Paul was proclaiming. These additional people also joined themselves to Paul, followed him, and "believed." That is, they were convinced of the truth that Paul had declared, and embraced it with their hearts. They also sought for more exposure to the truth. I do not doubt that Paul opened many other things to them. Although they were but a handful of people amidst the teeming multitudes of Athens, now they were the first fruits unto God from that region, even as "Epaenetus," who was "the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ" (Rom 16:5). They were among the "few" that are chosen from among the "many" who are called. While they remained with Paul, Paul remained no longer with those remaining members of the Areopagus.

CONCLUSION

GOD IN ACTS 17:22-31

In closing, I want to briefly encapsulate the marvelous message Paul delivered to this group of astute intellects. The particular point I want to stress is his emphasis upon Deity. Those familiar with the writings of Paul know that this was true of everything he wrote, as well as the records of everything he said.

DIRECT REFERENCES TO GOD

1. "God" (4 times: 23,24,29,30)
2. "Godhead" (Once: 29) – "Divine Nature," NKJV "Divine Being," NIV "Deity," NRSV
3. "Lord" (2 times: 24,27)
4. "He" (5 times: 24,25,26,27,31)
5. "Him" (4 times: 23,27,28,31)

6. “His” (Once: 28)

17 times.

WHO GOD IS

1. Lord of heaven and earth (24c);
2. Dwells not in temples made with hands (24d).
3. Is not worshiped with men’s hands (25a).
4. Is not far from every one of us (27b).
5. In God we live (28a).
6. In God we move (28b).
7. In God we have our being (28c).

THINGS GOD HAS DONE AND WILL DO

1. Made the world (24a).
2. Made all things in the world (24b).
3. Give life to all (25b).
4. Gives breath to all (25c).
5. Gives all, things to all (25d).
6. Made all nations of men from one blood (26a).
7. Determined the times to which they were appointed (26b).
8. Determined the exact places they would inhabit (26c).
9. Determined the vocation of men – to seek after the Lord (27a).
10. Determined men should feel after the Lord and find Him (27b).
11. We are God’s offspring (28d, 29a).
12. God has winked at the times of ignorance (30a).
13. God now commands all men everyone to repent (30b).
14. God has appointed a day in which the world will be judged (31a).
15. God has appointed the world will be judged in righteousness (31b).
16. God has appointed the world will be judged by “that Man,” Jesus Christ (31c).
17. God has given assurance of this to all men (31d).
18. God has raised Jesus from the dead (31e)

This is representative of preaching with a proper perspective. The only reference Paul makes to the Athenian culture is the public display of its ignorance of God. He honors their pursuit of Deity, but does not recognize their pursuit of wisdom. He gives no dignity to their court, but mentions the court of God in which the Man Christ Jesus will judge the world. He does not speak of theories of the world's beginning, or the origin of man, but affirmed what God had revealed on both of those matters. He does not speculate about life, but declares the Divine purpose that undergirds life. He does not engage in various ethnic views of humanity, but announces that all men came from a common source, and have been assigned a common vocation. He does not breathe a word about the self-worth of men or success in the world, but delivers a word concerning men's accountability to God.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #75

“ 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. 3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers. 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. 6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. 7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them. ” (Acts 18:1-11)

PAUL PREACHES IN CORINTH

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

Following his experiences in Athens, Paul “came to Corinth.” Immediately he found some brethren, Aquila and Priscilla, who had recently arrived from Rome. He stayed with them, laboring as a “tentmaker,” a craft they all knew. Again, he spent the Sabbaths in the synagogue, persuading both Jews and Greeks. Following the arrival of Silas and Timothy, Paul was “pressed in the spirit” to elevate his dialog with the Jews, testifying that “Jesus was Christ.” This resulted in the eruption of

fierce opposition. He then entered into a house that adjoined the synagogue. This resulted in the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, and “many” of the Corinthians believing. In a night vision, the Lord

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- **PAUL DEPARTS FROM ATHENS AND COMES TO CORINTH (18:1)**
- **HE FOUND SOME BRETHERN (18:2)**
- **HE WROUGHT BY OCCUPATION (18:3)**
- **HE REASONED IN THE SYNAGOGUE (18:4)**
- **WHEN SILAS AND TIMOTHEUS CAME HE WAS PRESSED IN THE SPIRIT (18:5)**
- **WHEN THEY OPPOSED THEMSELVES (18:6)**
- **HE ENTERED INTO A CERTAIN MAN’S HOUSE (18:7-8)**
- **THE LORD SPEAKS TO PAUL IN A NIGHT VISION (18:9-10)**
- **HE CONTINUED THERE A YEAR AND SIX MONTHS (18:11)**
- **CONCLUSION**

spoke to Paul, telling him to remain in Corinth, because He had much people in that city. He assured Paul that no man would do him harm, Consequently, Paul remained in Corinth for a year and six months, “teaching the word of God among them.”

SOMETHING ABOUT JESUS THAT MUST BE SEEN

There is a lot of religious folklore in the church concerning the kind of people the Lord prefers, and those He chooses to be around. It is not uncommon to hear people say Jesus preferred to be with the low-lifers, sinners, prostitutes, and the likes. This is based upon a statement found in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34. There Jesus is referred to as “a friend of publicans and sinners.”

Ponder Who Made the Statement

First, consider the text that is cited as proof of this representation of Christ: “And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” (Matt 9:11). This is a statement of Jesus’ enemies. They referred to the time when

The Scriptures tell us why Jesus chose these men. The words are very specific: “And He ordained twelve, THAT THEY SHOULD BE WITH HIM, and that He might send them forth to preach”(Mark 3:14). He taught them things He did not make known to the multitudes

Jesus was in Matthew’s house just after Jesus had called him. Matthew, himself being called from being a publican, had made a feast for Jesus, “and many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples” (Matt 9:9-10). Jesus did not go to them – they came to Him! Later Jesus said of His critics, “The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!” (Luke 7:34). Were His critics also right when they said Jesus was “a gluttonous man and a wine bibber”? Is the statement that He was “a friend of publicans and sinners” ever affirmed in Jesus’ doctrine, or in apostolic doctrine? Did the prophets ever foretell that as a trait of the coming Savior? Jesus Himself defined His “friends,” and He was very precise about it: “Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you” (John 15:14).

People Jesus Preferred

There were certain people whom Jesus preferred – people He chose to be continually with Him,

and whom He might send forth to preach. He had many disciples, or followers – people who inconvenienced themselves to follow Jesus so they could be taught by Him. However, Jesus selected some from this large number, vouchsafing to them the privilege of being with Him all of the time. Here is the record. “And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor” (Luke 6:13-16).

The Scriptures tell us why Jesus chose these men. The words are very specific: “And He ordained twelve, THAT THEY SHOULD BE WITH HIM, and that He might send them forth to preach” (Mark 3:14). He taught them things He did not make known to the multitudes (Matt 13:11; Mk 4:34). He took them with Him wherever He went, the only exception being times of isolated prayer (Matt 14:23), or when he sent the disciples to another place while He prayed (Mk 6:46-47). It ought to be obvious that Jesus preferred to be with them above all other people.

First and foremost, these twelve disciples were those with whom Jesus preferred to be. They did not merely spend some time with Jesus, but were with Him continually. They left everything to follow Him. Peter referred to this when, speaking for all of the twelve, he said to Jesus, “Lo, we have left all, and have followed Thee” (Mk 10:28 and Luke 18:28). That was not said of everyone who followed Him. When Matthew made a great feast for Jesus, we read that “many publicans and sinners came and sat down with Him.” However, the Scriptures do say that they “sat down with Him AND HIS DISCIPLES” (Matt 9:10).

He Took His Disciples With Him

When Jesus withdrew from the multitudes, He did so “with His disciples” (Mk 3:17). A great multitude from Galilee followed Him, but He took His disciples with Him. After Jesus had raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead, He returned to His own country, and His disciples were with Him (Mark 6:1). When He took a ship to another region across the Sea of Galilee, He took His disciples with Him (Mark 8:10). It is recorded that, on another occasion, Jesus “went into a ship with His disciples: and He said unto them, Let us go over unto the other side of the lake. And they launched forth” (Luke 8:22). He never did anything like that with publicans and sinners! When He went into the northern regions of Canaan, into Caesarea Philippi, He took His disciples with Him (Mark 8:27). When He went to Jericho and returned from it, His disciples were with Him (Mark 10:46). When Jesus was invited to a wedding feast, His disciples were called as well, and went with Him (John 2:2). When Jesus entered into the Temple, and cleansed it of merchants and their wares, His disciples were with Him (John 2:12-17). When He went into Judea to preach and baptize the people, He took His disciples with Him (John 3:22). As the time of His betrayal drew near, Jesus withdrew to a city named Ephraim, continuing there with His disciples (John 11:54). On the eve of His betrayal, when He was going to observe the Passover feast, Jesus said to His disciples, “With desire I have desired to eat this passover WITH YOU before I suffer” (Luke 22:15). Is there really any question about the people-preferences of Jesus?”

Just where did Jesus prefer to be, and where did He do most of His teaching? As we consider these things, keep in mind that the church is to follow His example, not pursue the ideas and traditions of men.

Places Jesus Preferred

Just where did Jesus prefer to be, and where did He do most of His teaching? As we consider these things, keep in mind that the church is to follow His example, not pursue the ideas and traditions of men. On the Sabbath day, you were sure to find Jesus in the synagogue, where devout Jews gathered on that day. Thus it is written, “And they (Jesus and His disciples) went into Capernaum; and

straightway on the sabbath day He entered into the synagogue , and taught” (Mark 1:21). Again, “And when the sabbath day was come, He began to teach in the synagogue ” (Mark 6:2). And again, “And he came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up: and, as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read” (Luke 4:16). And again, “And it came to pass also on another sabbath, that He entered into the synagogue and taught ” (Luke 6:6). We also read statements like this: “Jesus went about all of Galilee, teaching in their synagogues” (Matt 4:23). Again, “And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues ” (Matt 9:35). And again, “He preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee” (Mark 1:39). And again, “And He taught in their synagogues , being glorified of all” (Luke 4:15). And again, “And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee” (Luke 4:44). And again , “And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath” (Luke 13:10).

At other times, Jesus could be found in the Temple, with His disciples. It is written, “And Jesus went into the Temple of God” (Matt 21:12). Again, “And Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple” (Mark 11:11).; And again, “And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple ” (Mark 11:15). And again, “And they come again to Jerusalem: and as He was walking in the temple ” (Mark 11:27). Mark 12:35 refers to Him teaching in the Temple . The fifth chapter of John tells us of Jesus healing an impotent man, then finding him later “in the Temple ” (John 5:14). John 7:14 says, “Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple , and taught.” When Jesus cried out for people to come to Him and drink, promising they would receive the Holy Spirit, John informs us that He cried out while He was “in the Temple ” (John 7:28). John 8:2 says that Jesus came into the Temple “early in the morning,” and that all the people came to Him there. John 8:20 informs us that Jesus “taught in the Temple .” John 10:23 says that “Jesus walked in the Temple , in Solomon’s porch.” Knowing He was there, the people came to Him: “And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple ; and He healed them” (Matt 21:14). When He was arrested in the Garden, when Judas betrayed Him, He told those who came, “I sat daily with you teaching in the temple , and ye laid no hold on me” (Mat 26:55). Summarizing His ministry, Jesus said to His enemies, “I spake openly to the world; I ever taught in the synagogue, and in the temple , whither the Jews always resort; and in secret have I said nothing” (John 18:20). Why do we not hear these sophists speaking of Jesus choosing to be in the synagogues and the Temple? Whose books have they been reading? Certainly not God’s!

And why was Jesus found so frequently in the synagogues and the Temple? It was because these were places where devout people were more apt to gather. Oh, He did encounter unbelieving people and hypocrites in those places, but they did not belong there, and He would tell them so. The synagogue and Temple were not places for publicans and sinners to gather, but where prayer was made and the word of God read and taught. These places were established for seeking the Lord, calling upon His name. When men made the Temple a place of commerce, selling their wares, and providing proper currency exchange, Jesus drove them out. They did not belong in these places, but Jesus did, and that is where you could find Him. Luke speaks particularly of the last period of Christ’s life, summarizing what He did when He was in Jerusalem: “And in the day time he was teaching in the temple ; and at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the mount of Olives ” (Luke 21:37). Such times represented the thrust of His ministry – the general rule, or what He ordinarily did.

Other Places Jesus Was Found

Of course, there were times when He taught and ministered to the people elsewhere. Matthew 5:1 says He went up into a mountain , and His disciples followed Him, and He taught them. Matthew 15:29-30 also says He went up into a mountain near to the sea of Galilee, and great multitudes came to Him. Mark 3:13 says He went into a mountain “and called to Him those He Himself wanted.” Mark 2:13 states that Jesus went “ by the seaside , and all the multitude resorted to Him.” Another time Jesus began to teach by the seaside , and the people gathered to Him in such great numbers He had

to teach them while sitting in a boat (Mark 4:1-2). When Jesus went “beyond Jordan into the place where John first baptized , many resorted unto Him ” (John 41). Once Jesus went into a desert place by Himself, and the people heard of it and followed Him on foot out of the cities (Matt 14:13). Luke tells us, “And when it was day, He departed and went into a desert place : and the people sought him, and came unto him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them” (Luke 4:42). He then tells us of Jesus’ reply, and what He did: “And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. And he preached in the synagogues of Galilee” (Luke 4:43-44).

The People Came to Jesus

Now, you will notice something very consistent in these matters. Jesus did not go to the people, but the people were gathered to Him. Oh, there were places Jesus went, departing from the people. Once He went to Gadara, healed a man who was possessed of a legion of demons, and then He immediately left (Mark 5:1-18). Another time He went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, healed a woman’s daughter who was vexed with a demon, and then immediately left the area (Mark 7:24-31). Yet another time, He journeyed to the city of Nain, raised the dead son of a poor widow, and departed the region (Luke 7:11-16).

Jesus Went Where He Was Invited

We also know that He went to places where he had been invited. There was the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, where He went with His disciples (John 2:1-11). Following his calling, Matthew prepared a feast for Jesus (Matt 9:9-10). He was invited to the house of a man known as “ Simon the leper” (Mark 14:3). Martha received Jesus into her house (Luke 10:38). He was also in house of Peter (Matt 8:14), and the house of Zacchaeus as well (Luke 19:5). While He was at Peter’s house, during the latter part of the day, “all the city gathered together at the door” (Matt 8:33). All of these people had some interest in Jesus. Once, when it was known that Jesus was in a certain house, “many were gathered together, insomuch that there was no room to receive them, no, not so much as about the door: and He preached the word unto them” (Mark 2:2). This was the occasion when four men let a palsied man down to Jesus’ feet from the roof. Just as when Jesus went into a mountain, by the sea shore, and in the desert, the people came to Him. When word got out where He was, the people came.

Why Do People Misrepresent Jesus?

Who do people misrepresent Jesus by saying He preferred to be around publicans and harlots? The answer is twofold. First, they do not know Him. Second, because they have superimposed their view upon Scripture, they do not have a grasp on the record God has given of His Son. They have only spouted what other ignorant people have said. However, the fact that they have presented a distorted view of Jesus is not at all innocent. That luxury is simply not permitted among the sons of men.

Why Say These Things?

It may appear nothing more than a jaunt into the controversial to say these things. However, there is good reason for drawing attention to the truth about Jesus – particularly as it regards having to do with people. The book of Acts is a record of how men who possessed Christ conducted themselves. His life was being lived out in them.

Precisely the same preferences as were revealed in Jesus are confirmed in the record of the apostles in the book of Acts. From the second chapter through this text, the following accounts reveal their where they preached and the results that were realized.

THE RECORD OF PREACHING AND PEOPLE OF PREFERENCE IN ACTS

Precisely the same preferences as were revealed in Jesus are confirmed in the record of the apostles in the book of Acts. From the second chapter through this text, the following accounts reveal their where they preached and the results that were realized.

- **PENTECOST (2:14-38)**. Those who gladly received the Word were baptized, and 3,000 were added.

- **IN THE TEMPLE (3:1-4:4)**. The Jewish authorities were provoked to anger and opposed them. Also, above 5,000 men believed at that time.

- **BEFORE THE COUNCIL (4:5-21)**. The word is rejected and Peter and John are threatened.

- **IN THE TEMPLE (5:21-25)**. No response recorded.

- **BEFORE THE COUNCIL (5:26-40)**. The word is rejected, the apostles are beaten, commanded to cease speaking in Jesus' name, and released.

- **STEPHEN IN THE SYNAGOGUE (6:9-13)**. The people disputed with him. But could not resist his wisdom.

- **STEPHEN BEFORE THE COUNCIL (7:3-59)**. His word was rejected, and he was stoned to death.

- **PHILIP TO SAMARIA (8:5-13)**. The whole city believed and were baptized.

- **PHILIP TO THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH (8:26-39)**. The eunuch believed and was baptized.

- **PHILIP PREACHING FROM AZOTUS TO CAESAREA (8:40)**. No record of the response.

- **SAUL IN THE SYNAGOGUE (9:20-23)**. Those who heard him were amazed, he confounded the Jews, and they took counsel to kill him.

- **SAUL IN JERUSALEM (9:29)**. His word was rejected, and the Grecians went about to slay him.

- **PETER SPENDS TIME WITH THE SAINTS IN LYDDA (9:32-35)**. Heals the lame man Aenas, and all Lydda and Saron see him and turn to the Lord.

- **PETER GOES TO THE HOUSE OF DORCAS, WHO HAD JUST DIED (9:39-42)**. Raises Dorcas from the dead, it is known throughout Joppa, and many believe in the Lord.

- **PETER GOES TO CORNELIUS AND HIS HOUSE (10:34-48)**. The hearers believed, received the Holy Spirit, and were baptized.

- **THE PREACHING OF THOSE SCATTERED BY THE PERSECUTION THAT AROSE OVER STEPHEN (8:4; 11:19-21)**. A great number believed and turned to the Lord.

- **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF SALAMIS (13:5)**. No response is recorded.

1. **PAUL AND BARNABAS TO A GOVERNOR (13:7-12)**. The governor believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.

Our text will reveal a remarkable consistency of the preferences revealed in both Christ Jesus and those He invested with power to carry on His work. A priority, though not exclusivity, will be placed on those who are acquainted, with and committed to, the truth of God. Others will be given opportunity to hear as long as they respond appropriately.

PAUL IN ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA (13:16-52). The Gentiles asked to hear more, and were persuaded to continue in the grace of God. The unbelieving Jews rose up against them, and expelled them from their coasts.

- **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN A SYNAGOGUE IN ICONIUM (14:1-5).** A great multitude of Jews and Greeks believed, and the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles against Paul and Barnabas, making an attempt to have them stoned

- **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN THE REGION OF LYCAONIA (14:6-19).** The people think Paul and Barnabas are gods come down to earth, attempt to offer sacrifice to them, and Paul and Barnabas scarcely restrain them from doing so. Certain Jews came down and stoned Paul.

- **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN DERBE (14:20-21).** No response is recorded.

- **PAUL AND BARNABAS IN PERGA (15:25).** No response is recorded.

- **PAUL AND SILAS TO SOME WOMEN IN PHILIPPI (16:13-15).** The Lord opened Lydia's heart so she can attend to the word, she and her household believe, and Paul and Silas are welcomed into Lydia's home.

- **PAUL AND SILAS TO THE PHILIPPIAN JAILER (16:31-34).** The jailer is baptized, believing in God with all of his house.

- **PAUL AND SILAS ENTER THE HOUSE OF LYDIA (16:40).** Following their imprisonment they went to Lydia's house, comforted the brethren, and departed.

- **PAUL AND SILAS ENTER A SYNAGOGUE IN THESSALONICA (17:1-4).** Opened and alleged that Jesus must needs have suffered and risen from the dead. Some of them believed and consorted with Paul and Silas. Unbelieving Jews launched an initiative against them.

- **PAUL AND SILAS STAYED WITH JASON, A JEW (17:5-6).** Jason's house is assaulted as the Jews seek Paul and Silas. He is arrested, and assures the authorities that Paul and Silas are not trouble makers.

- **PAUL AND SILAS ENTER A SYNAGOGUE IN BEREIA (17:10).** These Jews are more noble, searched the Scriptures to confirm what Paul said was true, and many of them believed.

- **PAUL DISPUTES IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF ATHENS (17:17a).** No response is reported.

- **PAUL DISPUTED WITH THE DEVOUT PEOPLE IN ATHENS (17:17b).** No response is reported.

- **PAUL DISPUTED IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE WITH DISCUSSIONS WERE HELD (17:17c).** The hearers feel that a strange God is being preached, having never heard of such things.

- **CERTAIN PHILOSOPHERS IN ATHENS ASK PAUL TO ELABORATE ON WHAT HE WAS PREACHING (17:18-32).** Having heard Paul preach of Jesus and the resurrection, these men asked Paul to tell them more. Paul preaches to them on Mars Hill, expounding the nature and activity of God, and the responsibility of men.

- **PAUL REASONS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF CORINTH (18:5-6).** The listeners opposed themselves and blasphemed.

- **PAUL ENTERS THE HOUSE OF JUSTUS, WHO WORSHIPED GOD (18:7-8).** Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed with all of his house, and many of the Corinthians as well believe and are baptized.

Our text will reveal a remarkable consistency of the preferences revealed in both Christ Jesus and those He invested with power to carry on His work. A priority, though not exclusivity, will be placed on those who are acquainted, with and committed to, the truth of God. Others will be given opportunity to hear as long as they respond appropriately. Ignorance and dishonesty are in those who attempt to represent holy men of God as reflected the views of twentieth century sophists. This is not something that is innocent, nor is it a mere mistake in judgment. It is inexcusable to misrepresent God-ordained men!

PAUL DEPARTS FROM ATHENS AND COMES TO CORINTH

“ 18:1 After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. . .”

AFTER THESE THINGS

“After these things . . .” Other versions read, “After this.” NIV The manner in which Luke refers to the whole experience of Paul in Athens provokes sober thought. After arriving in Athens Paul did the following.

- His spirit was stirred when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry (17:16).
-]He disputed in the synagogue (17:17a).
- He disputed with devout persons (17:17b).
- He disputed daily in the marketplace, where sundry discussions were held (17:17c).
- In these places he preached Jesus and the resurrection (17:18).
- Certain philosophers heard Paul, and referred to him as a “babbler,” because it seemed to them he was setting forth strange gods (17:18).
- Paul was brought to the place where new ideas were heard and evaluated. There he was asked to elaborate on what he had been preaching (17:19-21).
- Standing boldly before the intelligentsia of Athens, Paul declared God, His works as they related to both nature and humanity, the day of judgment, and the resurrection of Jesus who would judge the world in righteousness (17:22-31).
- Some mocked when they heard of the resurrection (17:32a).
- Others said they would consent to hearing more about these things some other time (17:32b).
- Certain people remained with Paul, including a member of the Athenian counsel, a prominent woman, and others –all of them believing (17:34).

Now, all of these events are simply referred to as “these things.” A mere man would have written a large volume concerning those events, including in it the picture or drawings of the various sites in the city. However, Paul’s preoccupation was with things pertaining to the Kingdom. He was not easily impressed when considering the works and intellectual astuteness of men. Further, the results that were yielded did not appear to justify remaining any longer in the city. He apparently entertained no hopes of great numbers of these intellects turning to the Lord. This is because he knew the manner of the Kingdom. How succinctly he stated this in his letter to the Corinthians – the city to which he will now go. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh , not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen , yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in His presence ” (1 Cor 1:26-29).

Any unusual Divine working among people such as those in Athens would have been confirmed by a significant number of those people abandoning their quest for the novel, and engaging in one for the eternal verities Paul had been proclaiming. However, when such an interest was not stirred, Paul knew it was time to move on. His understanding of the manner of the Kingdom compelled him to do so, as well as His sensitivity to the directing of the Holy Spirit. It seems to me that any other conclusion would be very difficult to justify. Protracted preaching and teaching where disinterest prevails cannot be justified – at least not with the Word of God.

The Grecian city of Corinth is about 48 miles west of Athens. It was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C. and was rebuilt about a century later. It became under the Romans the seat of government for Southern Greece or Achaia. Corinth was noted for its wealth and immorality. Sexual sins were widespread, in part, due to a temple located in the city dedicated to Venus (that is, to lust). This temple employed the services of more than one thousand "priestesses," who were nothing more than common prostitutes.

EATON'S DICTIONARY

PAUL DEPARTED

“ . . . Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth. . .” Other versions read, “and went to Corinth.” NKJV

The idea here is that Paul’s trip to Corinth was a deliberate one. It was not simply the next stop on a haphazard trip. Paul is in the center of the will of God, moving about as Jesus did, doing the works to which He had been ordained (John 5:36; Eph 2:10). We are not told

precisely what moved Paul to go to Corinth. However, the recorded events that follow confirm to us that he was, indeed, in the heart of the will of God.

Thus far in this book, Paul’s travels have taken him a number of places. Being called by the Holy Spirit to a special work (13:2), Paul and Barnabas preached in the Island of Cyprus, ministering in a synagogue in Salamis (13:5), throughout the island (13:6), and in the city of Paphos to the governor of the island (13:6-12). From there they ministered in a synagogue in Antioch of Pisida (13:14), throughout that region, a synagogue in Iconium (14:1), Lystra, Derbe, and the region around them (14:6). They preached the Word in Perga (14:26), which concluded their mission trip. Paul and Silas revisited the churches where he and Barnabas had preached (15:36). They also went throughout Syria and Cilicia (15:41), and throughout the regions of Phrygia and Galatia (15:6). They went into Macedonia, preaching in Philippi (16:12), a synagogue in Thessalonica (17:1-2), a synagogue in Berea (17:10), a synagogue in Athens (17:17), and to the philosophers of Athens (17:22).

Thus far, Paul has traveled well in excess of one thousand miles, enduring all manner of opposition, including being charged falsely, being stoned, humiliated, and publically beaten and incarcerated. Yet, because he is living by faith, he cannot be deterred from being steadfast and unmoveable, always abound in the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).

HE FOUND SOME BRETHREN

“ 2 And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.”

The body of Christ is unique – and we should expect it to be. After all, it is not only the means through which Jesus Christ expresses Himself, but all of its members are Divinely certified and placed. First we are “made accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), and “qualified. . . to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light” NKJV (Col 1:12) – certified . Second, God Himself has “set the

members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18) – placed . The association of the members is more than a mere formality or doctrinal technicality. The affiliation that they have with one another is very thorough – so much so that it is written, “we are members one of another ” (Eph 4:26), and again, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another ” (Rom 12:5). Some versions read, “each member belongs to the others,” NIV “individuals who are connected to each other,” GWN “individually parts of one another,” NAB “we are all joined to one another,” NJB and “we are parts one of another [mutually dependent on one another].” AMPLIFIED

THE ONENESS OF THE CHILDREN OF GOD

The oneness of the children of God – those who are in Christ Jesus – is marvelous to consider.

- **ONE BODY: From the standpoint of functionality** , although they are “many,” they are “one body” (Rom 12:5). This is the people into whom the Lord Jesus pours His “fulness” (Eph 1:23). Paul is the only Scriptural writer that refers to the saints of Christ’s “body,” and he does it frequently (Rom 12:4,5; 1 Cor 12:13-27; Eph 1:23; Ep 2:16; 3:6; 4:4, 12,16; 5:23,30; Col 1:18; 2:19; 3:15).

- **THE CHURCH: Considering them from the standpoint of togetherness** , or an assembly, they are “the church” – or gathering of ones called out of the world (Acts 2:47; 5:11; 20:28; 1 Cor 10:32; 12:28; 15:9; Gal 1:13; Eph 1:22; 3:10,21; Eph 5:23,24,25,29,32; Phil 3:6; Col 1:18,24; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 2:12), and “the general assembly” (Heb 12:23).

- **FAMILY: Considered from the standpoint of immediate relation to one another under Christ**, they are “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph 3:15), “the house of God” (1 Tim 3:15; Heb 10:21; 1 Pet 4:17), “the household of God” (Eph 2:19), and Christ’s “house” (Heb 3:6).

- **FLOCK: Viewed as being the custodianship of Jesus**, they are “the flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2). These are care for by Jesus Himself.

BRIDE/WIFE: Seen as being intimate with Christ , they are “the bride of Christ” (Rev 21:9), “the bride” (Rev 22:17), and Christ’s “wife” (Rev 19:7; 21:9).

- **NEW MAN: Perceived as a composite of both Jews and Greeks**, the church is said to be “one new man” (Eph 2:15).

- **HUSBANDRY/BUILDING: Seen as the people among whom God is working and dwelling**, they are Gods “husbandry” (1 Cor 3:9) , “building” (1 Cor 3:9), “temple” (1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 6:16), “a spiritual house” (1 Pet 2:9), “the habitation of God” (Eph 2:22), and “God’s heritage” (1 Pet 5:3).

- **CUSTODIAN OF TRUTH: Seen as having the responsibility of guarding and proclaiming the truth**, the saints are called “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

As used in the above texts, none of these expressions can be described in the plural: i.e. bodies, churches, flocks, wives, men, husbandries, buildings, pillars etc. The only term used in the plural is “church.” When the word “churches” is used (Acts 9:31; 1 Cor 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; Rev 2:23), it has no reference to a special body of beliefs, unique doctrines, creeds, or theological systems. Rather, it refers to the people of God geographically, and to their representation of the whole church.

This is a Kingdom perception that has been clouded by the very existence of sectarianism and denominationalism. Of course, the divisional view of the body of Christ is essential to the

maintenance of groups that do not have Christ as their Head.

The Purpose for This Observation

Our text will confirm Paul's keen perception of the oneness of those in Christ Jesus. He will seek out brethren, or those inclined to the Lord, staying and working with him in the supply of his "necessary uses" (Tit 3:14).

A CERTAIN JEW AND HIS WIFE

"And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla . . ."

Corinth was a metropolitan city, with much activity. Finding specific people within its confines would require diligence. We do not know if Paul knew of these people before. However, in due time, he "found" a couple – Aquila and Priscilla. We are told that Aquila was from "Pontus," which was a region in Asia Minor. There were some people from this region present on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:9). It is quite possible that they could have been converted at that time.

Aquila was born in Pontus, a region adjacent to Bithynia, into which the Spirit had forbidden Paul and those with him to enter.

Elsewhere Paul refers to Aquila and Priscilla as "my helpers in Christ Jesus" (Rom 16:3), also referring "the church that is in their house" (1 Cor 16:19). He also exhorted Timothy to "salute" them (2 Tim 4:19). They will be mentioned two more times in this chapter (18:18,26).

COMMANDED TO DEPART

FROM ROME

" . . . (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome) . . ."

Commentator John Gill observed, "it is thought that the reason of this edict was, that the Jews in Rome continually opposing and disputing with the Christians, about Jesus being the Messiah, Claudius, who was of a timorous disposition, was afraid of a tumult, and that it might issue in his detriment, and therefore banished all the Jews, with whom the Christians were involved; for by the Heathens they were all called Jews, the first Christians being Jews."

Suetonius mentions the fact, but unfortunately does not say in what year of Claudius's reign it took place. His account is that, in consequence of frequent disturbances and riots among the Jews at the instigation of Chrestus, Claudius drove them from Rome. The quotation is as follows: "***expelled the Jews from Rome, who were continually making tumults, being moved thereunto by one Chrestus,***" *In Vita. Cluadii, c. 25*

If these reports are true, they reflect the effects of contentions among those who claim identity with God. While the truth of the Gospel did cause some disruption, it was generally the reaction of the Jews themselves that wrought tumult (Acts 13:50; 14:2; 17:13; 21:27) – the exceptions being the masters of the woman with the spirit of divination in Philippi (Acts 16:19-22), and the silversmiths in Ephesians who made images of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:24-26). Even in these exceptions, the apostle Paul and those with him did not stir up social agitation. It was the people who could not receive them that initiated and pressed the contention.

Servants of God are reminded, "the servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men" (2 Tim 2:22). Again it is written, "But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath" (Rom 2:8). In our text, and according to historical

accounts, contentious Jews became the cause for the expulsion of all Jews from Rome. May this never be said of professing Christians.

AND CAME UNTO THEM

“ . . . and came unto them.” There is no record that Paul had a previous acquaintance with Aquila and Priscilla. Yet, he found them – apparently as he sought for kindred spirits. Having found them, “Paul went to see them.” NIV Other versions read, “went to visit them,” NAB “Paul approached them,” NET and “became acquainted with.” NLT

Some have suggested this couple was converted by Paul during this initial trip, but that is not likely. A short time later, according to verse twenty-six, Aquila and Priscilla proved competent enough to instruct Apollos more perfectly in the way of the Lord. Thus they were not only believers in Christ, but mature ones who knew the way and word of the Lord, being capable of leading others into a mature understanding of the Lord. I doubt that this could be said of new converts – at least not ordinarily.

Once again, behold how Paul sought out those with inclinations toward God – whether Jews in the synagogues, devout men, or brethren in Christ Jesus. It seems to me that this is an excellent example of establishing oneself in a new community, whether in a Gospel initiative, or moving to a new area – as did Aquila and Priscilla. It is good to conduct one’s affairs in such a way as to come into contact with such people. That is the result of letting one’s light shine.

HE WROUGHT BY OCCUPATION

“ 3 And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmaker.”

You can tell the seriousness of any Kingdom laborer by the extent to which they will go to preach the Gospel and feed the flock of God. Here we learn something about Paul of which many are not aware. We will also behold the practicality that accompanied his presence in the city of Corinth.

HE WAS OF THE SAME CRAFT

“And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought...” Other versions read, “of the same trade . . . worked,” NKJV “he was a tentmaker . . . worked with them,” NIV “same occupation,” CSB “they made tents for a living as he did,” GWN and “ they worked [together], for they were tentmakers by trade.” AMPLIFIED

In 44 BC Julius Caesar reestablished Corinth as a Roman colony. The new Corinth flourished and became the administrative capital of the Roman province of Achaia. The city is known to readers of the New Testament for the letters addressed to its Christian community by the apostle Paul.

BRITANNICA ENCYCLOPEDIA

How long it took Paul to locate this holy couple, we do not know. The size of the city of Corinth, together with the amount of activities that went on there, would make this a challenging thing to accomplish. Corinth was an administrative capital, and a seat of idolatry that was unparalleled. The extent of the activity there can be measured by some of the structures that have been excavated, “The remains of other temples, villas, a theater, shops, public baths, pottery factories, a gymnasium, a large triumphal arch, and other buildings dot the site, which since 1896 has been extensively excavated.” BRITANNICA

Yet, because of his holy preferences, and the value he placed upon the saints of God, Paul found this couple. I know of few people who are characterized by this kind of diligence.

It is assumed that the tentmaking occupation of this couple was of sufficient size, seeing it was adequate to support themselves, Paul, and perhaps many others. We learn something from this also. Having been expelled from Rome,, Aquila and Priscilla were able to establish themselves in a business, like Lydia did in Philippi. They apparently knew that work is something ordained by God as a consequence of the curse (Gen 3:19).

THEY WERE TENTMAKER

“ . . . for by their occupation they were tentmaker.”

Some of the things made by tentmaker include the following: tents “either for the soldiers, and which were made of sack cloth of hair, or of leather, and of the skins of various animals, sewed together; hence the phrase, ‘sub pellibus’, ‘under the skins’, is used for to lie in tents: or those tents they made, were canopies made of linen, and other things, which were erected in the summer season to shade and screen from the heat of the sun; though others take them for a sort of tapestry, or hangings, which they made for theaters, palaces, and stately rooms; and according to the Syriac version, they were horses’ trappings which they made. Hicronymi Catalog. Script. Eccels. sect. 54. fol. 96. D. Although of measured significance, this gives us some idea of what could have been involved in this means of providing for one’s “necessary uses” (Tit 3:14).

In his writings, Paul made several references to the fact that he had labored with his hands, supporting himself, and often those with him.

• **IN EPHESUS:** “I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:33-35).

• **IN CORINTH:** “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labor, working with our own hands : being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it” (1 Cor 4:11-12).

• **IN THESSALONICA:** “For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you , we preached unto you the gospel of God” (1 Thess 2:9).

“Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you : Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us” (2 Thess 3:8-9).

With Paul, preaching and teaching was not accompanied by the crisis of no means to make a living. We have no idea when he learned this particular trade, although Jewish historians say that it was the custom of Jewish leaders to learn an occupation so they would always have a means of support. I prefer the view that Paul did this to see to it that he was never put in a place where he could not preach the Gospel because of lack of support. I have lived in this manner myself.

HE REASONED IN THE SYNAGOGUE

” 4 And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.”

The focus of the Scriptures is the Lord and His work. While there is history and the accounts of the activities of men within them, they are not the heart of Scripture. During this period, Paul’s entire time in Corinth was a year and a half (18:11). Our attention is now turned to his involvement in fulfilling his commission, personally delivered to him by the glorified Christ: “To open their eyes,

and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:18). The only extracurricular activities that are reported of Paul during that time is that he “found” Aquila and Priscilla and “worked” with them. No details are provided concerning his activities in tentmaking, or any other daily pursuits. As for himself, Paul spoke the truth when he said, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). And again, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21),

Sectarian and professional religion have robbed the people of this perspective, even though no other kind of living is acceptable to the Lord who has purchased us. The purpose for Christ’s death includes this glorious reality: “And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). You see, then, how even the reports of Scripture, as well as the doctrine contained therein, reflect this priority.

HE REASONED IN THE SYNAGOGUE

“ And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath . . .” Other versions read, “he was reasoning,” NASB “argue,” NRSV “had discussions,” BBE “disputed,” GENEVA “would discuss,” GWN “spoke,” MRD “entered into discussions,” NIB “addressed,” NET “hold debates,” NJB “trying to convince,” NLT “preached,” TNT “tried to persuade,” IE and “discoursed and argued.” AMPLIFIED

This is now the seventh time Paul is said to have attended and spoke in a synagogue (13:5,14; 14:1; 17:1,10,17; 18:4). It is the second time a point is made of Paul reasoning with the Jews (17:2; 18:4). He will do this again in Ephesus (18:14).

As used here, reasoning is a process involving both thought and speech. Reasoning is thoughtful discussion often involving two opposing views. Ideally, it is also involves an environment in which truth can triumph because of its superiority and the integrity of its focus.

The procedures of the synagogue were conducive to an elaboration of the Scriptures and a discussion of them, for it centered around the Scriptures. It should not surprise us that a people who were cultured by God through Moses and the Prophets chose to have this kind of gathering. These people did not come together to resolve one another’s problems. Whether they took it as seriously as they should, or not, there was a general understanding that their identity with God superseded all other matters. Furthermore, what He has said takes the priority over all other words. Jews with honest and good hearts knew that this was true.

HE PERSUADED JEWS AND GREEKS

“ . . . and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.”

Other versions read, “trying to persuade,” NIV “would try to convince,” NRSV “turning Jews and Greeks to the faith,” BBE “exhorted,” GENEVA “tried to win over,” GWN “attempting to persuade,” NET “trying to convert,” NJB “Tried to win over,” WEYMOUTH “and won over,” AMPLIFIED “persuaded,” INTERLINEAR and “was persuading.” ALT

There is a vast difference between passing along some information, and engaging in a focused attempt to persuade the listeners – making every effort to convert them, changing their way of thinking. God has made no provision for us to impose the truth upon people, forcing them to think correctly about critical things.

It is important to note that valid reasoning must be based upon the Scriptures – God’s revelation. Jesus reasoned in this manner (Matt 21:42; 22:29; Lk 24:47,45; John 5:39). This was also the manner

of the apostles (Acts 17:2; Rom 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor 15:3-4). It is unfortunate that today a lot of reasoning being foisted upon God's people is based upon psychological principles, statistics, and other forms of human reasoning. Such approaches should not be allowed among the people of God. If the wisdom of this world is "foolishness with God" (1 Cor 1:20; 3:19), it certainly has no place among those who are in Christ Jesus. Any and all preaching and teaching that is based upon such wisdom is itself foolish.

WHEN SILAS AND TIMOTHEUS CAME HE WAS PRESSED IN THE SPIRIT

"5 And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ."

As is characteristic of Scriptural accounts, novel details are passed over, and events more directly related to the work of the Lord are covered. It is as though the Holy Spirit seeks to avoid undue distraction to the ordinary and mundane.

As is characteristic of Scriptural accounts, novel details are passed over, and events more directly related to the work of the Lord are covered. It is as though the Holy Spirit seeks to avoid undue distraction to the ordinary and mundane. Over the years I have observed that the interests of those who prefer to live at a distance from the Lord invariably gravitate to the workaday matters of life. It all may appear quite interesting to the mind of the flesh, but for those who are pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, such considerations are rather boring.

WHEN SILAS AND TIMOTHY WERE COME

"And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia . . ."

In Acts 17:13, it is reported that when Paul, because of opposition, left Berea, he sent word to Silas and Timothy to join him in Athens. The book of Acts does not report them coming to him.

- The books of First and Second Thessalonians included a salutation from Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus. Silvanus is the Greek form of Silas. THAYER At the time of writing, then, Silas and Timothy were with Paul.

- In his first epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul indicates that Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica from Athens. "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlaborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you . . ." (1 Thess 3:1-2).

- Paul wrote to the Thessalonians that he had sent Timothy to them to establish and comfort them concerning their faith, and that none of them should be moved by their afflictions (1 Thess 3:2-3).

- Timothy had returned to Paul and Silas from his trip to Thessalonica, bringing a good report of their faith and charity. They were noble examples to all who believe, and had sent the word throughout Macedonia and Achaia.

The place from which First Thessalonians was written is not certain. Some feel that it was from Athens, sometime between the time when his soul was stirred within by the pervasive idolatry in the city (17:16), and when he departed for Corinth following his presentation to the Areopagus (18:1). I find this entirely plausible because of the amount of activity that occurred during his stay in Athens.

- He was waiting for Silas and Timothy in Athens (17:16a).
- He had perused the city, beholding how it has been given over to idolatry (17:16b).
- He spent time disputing in the synagogue (17:17a).

- He spent time disputing with devout people (17:17b).
- He spent time disputing in the city square (17:17c).
- Sufficient time elapsed for the Athenian philosophers to encounter Paul and become aware of his message (17:18).
- At the request of the philosophers, he delivered a presentation on Mars' Hill (17:19-31).
- Certain among the Athenians believed, and "became followers of Paul" NIV (17:34).

This could easily have covered a period of several weeks, giving sufficient time for Timothy to arrive, and be sent back to Thessalonica. This being the case, Silas and Timothy would have come to Corinth from Thessalonica, which was in Macedonia. Also, if this was not the actual scenario, I do not know how Silas and Timothy would have known to join Paul in Corinth. I will proceed under the assumption that Paul had conveyed to Timothy his plans to go to Corinth.

At any rate, at the point of this text, the three of them are again united. As one might expect, there was a certain spiritual synergy that took place when they were joined together. You will note that he apparently did not involve them in the tent making trade – at least no point is made of such an arrangement. Rather, upon the arrival of Silas and Timothy, Paul was stirred within – the blessed impact of kindred spirits.

PAUL WAS PRESSED IN THE SPIRIT

"Paul was pressed in the spirit . . ." Other versions read, "compelled by the Spirit," NKJV "began devoting himself completely," NASB "devoted himself exclusively," NIV "was occupied with," NRSV "constrained by the word," ASV "completely given up to the word," BBE "was pressed in respect of the word," DARBY "was earnest," DOUAY "forced in spirit," GENEVA "was impeded in discourse," MRD "became wholly absorbed," NET "spent all his time," NLT "Constrained by the spirit," TNT "pressed in the Spirit," YLT "was preaching fervently," WEYMOUTH "engrossed in his message," MONTGOMERY "was pressed to the saying," INTERLINEAR "held completely by the Spirit," ALT "compelled by the Spirit," and EMTV "pressed by the Spirit." LITV

The word "pressed" is translated from a word meaning, "to hold together with constraint. . . to hold completely, I. e. a. to hold fast . . . to be held by, closely occupied with . . . constrained by," THAYER "devote oneself completely to, be occupied with . . . wholly absorbed in," FRIBERG "devote oneself completely to, be occupied with," LOUW-NIDA "to constrain or *force* one to a thing," LIDDELL-SCOTT and "urge on, impel or hold within bounds, control." GINGRICH

Notice the different representations presented by the translations.

- That the Holy Spirit compelled Paul. KJV/NKJV/TNT/YLT
- That Paul devoted himself completely to an activity. NASB/NIV/NLT
- Paul was completely given up to the Word. BBE
- Was pressed with respect to the Word. DARBY
- That Paul was earnest. DOUAY
- That Paul was forced by the Holy Spirit. GENEVA
- That Paul was fervent. WEYMOUTH
- That Paul was engrossed in his message. MONTGOMERY
- That Paul was impeded in his discourse. MRD

Here is an excellent example of the confusion caused by the multiplicity of translations – particular regarding wholly different representations. One set of Greek manuscripts used the Greek term for “word” (**lo,gw**l). Another group of manuscripts use the Greek term for “spirit” (**pneu,mati**).

Here Paul is apparently moved to declare Christ with even more fervency and directness. This by no means suggests that he had been casual in his reasoning in the synagogue. Up to this point, he had allowed for some two-way dialog that centered in the Scriptures. However, I do not doubt that there was a marked tendency among the Jews to divert the attention from Jesus Christ, and Paul will be moved to bring such diversions to an abrupt halt. He will bring Christ into the heart of the dialog, thrusting all peripheral matters into a secondary position. Those who have had any experience in preaching, teaching, and feeding the flock of God, know that it takes an extraordinary amount of effort to keep things centered on Christ Jesus.

Paul Was Being Directed from Above

First, let us rid ourselves of the notion that this text is speaking primarily of Paul’s personal desires. To be sure, his heart was in this matter. However, in the body of Christ, it is the Head that governs the body. The members do not function on their own. Also, in the ministration of the various gifts dispensed to the body, the Holy Spirit plays a key role. In fact, the entire Godhead is involved in the execution of these gifts. As it is written, “Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit . And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord . And there are diversities of operations , but it is the same God which worketh all in all . . . But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit , dividing to every man severally as He will” (1 Cor 12:4-6,11).

We are further told that each member of the body (and “apostles” are members of the body – 1 Cor 12:28) functions as they are holding to the Head (Col 2:19). The “whole body” functions “from” the Head (Eph 4:15-16). This confirms the statement made in Hebrews 12:20-21: “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” And again it is written, “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

When there is a minimal amount of fellowship among the brethren, there will be a small amount of work done for the Lord – if any is done at all. If it is true that the Head works within the context of His body, this ought to be glaringly apparent.

Worked Within the Context of Fellowship with the Saints

In this text Paul was driven from within, through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit, to testify to the Jews. This occurred within the context of fellowship with Silas and Timothy, as well as Aquila and Priscilla. This is the ordinary manner of the Kingdom. It took place on the day of Pentecost, when the brethren were together with one accord (Acts 2:1-4). This is what occurred when the brethren first faced opposition, and came together to seek the Lord (Acts 4:23-31). It also happened in Antioch, while the brethren were ministering to the Lord (Acts 13:1-2).

When there is a minimal amount of fellowship among the brethren, there will be a small amount of work done for the Lord – if any is done at all. Jesus does not ignore His body in the working out of His purpose. If it is true that the Head works within the context of His body, this ought to be glaringly apparent.

TESTIFIED TO THE JEWS THAT JESUS WAS CHRIST

“ . . . and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” Other versions read, “solemnly testifying,” NASB “preaching,” BBE “testified in depth,” CJB “declaring,” NJB “testifying fully,” YLT

“showed,” IE “solemnly telling,” WEYMOUTH “solemnly assured,” ISV “enthusiastically assuring,” WILLIAMS “earnestly testifying,” MONTGOMERY and “earnestly arguing and testifying.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “testifying” is **diamarturo,menoj** . As used here, it has the following lexical meaning: “to attest, testify to, solemnly affirm . . . to give solemn testimony to one . . . Testimony, to testify, cause it to be believed,” THAYER “declare solemnly and emphatically,” UBS “to make a serious declaration on the basis of presumed personal knowledge - 'to declare, to assert, to testify,” LOUW-NIDA “to affirm solemnly.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

It is translated “testify” in the following texts: Lk 16:28; Acts 2:40; 8:25; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21,24; 23:11; 28:23; 1 Thess 4:6; Heb 2:6. It is translated “witness” in Acts 20:23, and “charge” in 1 Timothy 5:21; 2 Timothy 2:14; and 4:1.

A Term Relating to God

Let me again affirm that the word “Christ” speaks exclusively of the relationship of Jesus to God Himself. He is “the Lord’s Christ” (Lk 2:26), “the Christ of God ” (Lk 9:20), “Christ, the chosen of God ” (Lkj 23:35), and “ His Christ” (Acts 4:26; Rev 11:15; 12:10). When elaborating on the term “Christ” we read the following: and “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), “the Son of God” (Mk 1:1; Lk 4:41; John 11:27; 20:31). He is also referred to as “Christ the Son of David,” emphasizing His appointed role as King (Matt 1:1), as well as “Christ the Savior of the world,” another Divinely appointed role (John 4:42).

This differs significantly from the Jesus-will-solve-your-problem mentality – so often presented to the people of our time. Few professing Christians have any lucid idea about how Jesus relates to God Himself. You may recall when God revealed to Peter who Jesus was, Peter confessed, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). Before any progress can be made in the faith, that perception must be acquired, so that the individual thinks of Christ within the context of God – not within the context of perceived human needs. This is seen in the salient statement, “Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?” (1 John 5:5). While all of this may seem rather elementary, this is not how Jesus is being presented to the masses. He is rather being perceived as someone that resolves personal and interpersonal problems. However, the primary objective of Jesus Christ is to resolve the dilemma that sin created between man and God. Once that is addressed, the individual is in a position to “obtain grace to help in the time of need” (Heb 4:16).

WHEN THEY OPPOSED THEMSELVES

“ 6 And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.”

Having experienced a good degree of receptivity in the synagogue of Berea (17:11), Paul is again faced with the hostility that frequently characterized the synagogues (13:45; 14:1-2; 17:5).

WHEN THEY OPPOSED THEMSELVES

“ And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed . . .” Other versions read, “opposed him and blasphemed,” NKJV “resisted and blasphemed,” NASB “opposed Paul and became abusive,” NIV “opposed and reviled him,” NRSV “put themselves against him, and said evil words,” BBE “set themselves against him and began hurling insults,” CJB “opposed and spoke injuriously,” DARBY “gainsaying and blaspheming,” DOUAY “turned against him and started to insult him,” NJB “said contrary, and blasphemed,” PNT and “they kept opposing and abusing and reviling him.” AMPLIFIED

Later versions emphasize that these Jews opposed Paul – and, indeed, that is the case. However, their negation also involved the contradiction of their own Scriptures, and the prophecies that had been vouchsafed to them. The sense of the text is that they set themselves in opposition to what Paul was declaring, and consequently to Paul himself. It was an act of their own will: “they opposed.” They entered heartily into this opposition: “they opposed themselves,” or “they themselves opposed.” The same language is used in Second Timothy 2:25: “In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.” Other versions read, “who are in opposition,” NKJV/NASB and “opponents.” RSV/NRSV

The idea here is not simply that these Jews had some opposing views. Rather, they themselves were the opponents, and their persons entered fully into the opposition. Their opposition had no lasting effect upon Paul, but it did have one upon them! There was a very real sense in which they did “oppose themselves,” bringing all manner of hurt and disability to their hearts and minds.

As a result of their hostility, they blasphemed, or spoke against Paul himself. That is, they denigrated his person in order to mitigate what he had said – at least that is what they thought their blasphemy would do. This was the tactic Christ’s enemies also used against Him. They said to Jesus, “You have a demon” NKJV (John 7:20); “Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?” NKJV (John 8:48). Some of His own family said, “He is out of His mind” NKJV (Mk 3:21).

When men cannot successfully contend against the truth, they will do their best to discredit the character and motives of the one who speaks the truth. Paul referred to this fleshly tendency when he said he had experienced “dishonor” and “evil report” (2 Cor 5:5).

HE SHOOK HIS GARMENT

The reception and treatment of Christ’s brethren is a barometer of how people feel about Jesus Himself, and how they feel about Jesus reflects how they feel about God.

“ . . . he shook his raiment . . .” Other versions read, “he shook his garments,” NKJV “shook out his garments,” NASB “shook out his clothes in protest,” NIV “shook the dust from his clothes,” NRSV “he took his cloak and shook it out in front of them,” NJB “shook off the dust from his robe,” LIVING and “shook out his clothing [against them].” AMPLIFIED

When Nehemiah had taken an oath from the priests to restore the usury they had from the people, he “shook out the fold of” his “garment and said, ‘So may God shake out each man from his house, and from his property, who does not perform this promise. Even thus may he be shaken out and emptied’” (Neh 5:13).

When Jesus sent out the apostles to preach that the Kingdom of heaven was at hand, He told them, “And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them” (Luke 9:5; Matt 10:14; Mk 6:11). When He sent out the seventy, He told them, “But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you” (Luke 10:10-11).

Paul and Barnabas did something similar in Iconium, shaking the dust from their feet “against them” (13:51).

The act, commanded by Jesus to both the twelve and the seventy, signified cutting off all affiliation with the people – having nothing more to do with them. If that appears to be an excessively strong reaction, think again! Men may consider the rejection of God’s messengers and their words to be

nothing serious, but that is not how heaven views the matter! Jesus said, “He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth him that sent Me. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward” (Matt 10:40-41).

The reception and treatment of Christ's brethren is a barometer of how people feel about Jesus Himself (Matt 25:40,45), and how they feel about Jesus reflects how they feel about God (John 5:23). Therefore, after spending some time with these Jews, affirming that Jesus was the Christ, their rejection of Paul's words constituted a judgment of unworthiness to receive eternal life – even as with the Jews in Antioch (Acts 46). In my judgment, this is a day when skepticism and worldly wisdom have invaded the church. When they erupt at the hearing of the truth, and the people cannot be turned, it should be met with words similar to those of our text.

AND SAID UNTO THEM

“ . . . and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.”

Your Blood Be Upon Your Own Heads

Most all versions read as the Authorized Version. Variant versions read, “You're responsible for your own death,” GWN “You're responsible for your own death,” IE “You're responsible for your own death,” WEYMOUTH and “Whatever happens to you will be your own fault!” CEV

When Jesus was being tried before Pilate, the people cried out, “His blood be on us, and on our children” (Matt 27:25). That is, they were willing to bear the responsibility for the death of Jesus, as opposed to holding Pilate responsible for it. In this text, however, the death of Jesus, or the repudiation of Paul, was not the point. Here, their own blood was upon their heads. Their demise would not be ultimately traceable to a superior nation, or military weakness. Judgment would come upon them for rejecting the truth when it was plainly declared to them.

All who come in the name of the Lord are responsible to deliver the record God has given of His Son. No preacher or teacher is free from the blood of men until he has declared “all the counsel of God.” It is incumbent upon them to particularly declare what God has said about Jesus Christ, and to show the absolute necessity of embracing Him whole-heartedly.

This kind of language, including what Paul says of himself, has its root in a word delivered to the prophet Ezekiel. “When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek 3:19). And again, “When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek 3:20-21).

In our time, the seriousness of warnings and exhortations issued from the Lord has been grossly understated. The point here is that heaven will respond to the rejection of men! God will confront those who have spurned His word and maligned His servants. Ultimately, that confrontation will take place on the day of judgment. However, as seen in Israel, there are reprisals for such rejection in this world as well, and men do well to consider it. As great as the grace of God is, it will not cover up the continued rejection of the message of Jesus Christ.

I Am Clean

Other versions read, "I am clear of my responsibility," NIV "I am innocent," NRSV "I am pure," DARBY "I am guiltless," NET "I will go . . . with a clear conscience," NJB "I go blameless," PNT "I have done all that I can do," IE "I am not responsible," WEYMOUTH and "I am not to blame for it myself." WEYMOUTH

All who come in the name of the Lord are responsible to deliver the record God has given of His Son. No preacher or teacher is free from the blood of men until he has declared "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27). It is incumbent upon them to particularly declare what God has said about Jesus Christ, and to show the absolute necessity of embracing Him whole-heartedly. Those who are recalcitrant in this duty will be held responsible by "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 11:31). No person coming in the name of the Lord is free from their responsibility until these things are proclaimed with sufficient power that it solicits a response of some kind from the people.

And what of the preachers and teachers who have not properly represented Christ, or shown the absolute necessity of receiving and following Him? Nothing favorable can be said of such men! They were not sent by God, and they are nothing more than an ungodly intrusion.

I Will Go Unto the Gentiles

It is true that Paul was designated "the apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11). Some sophists feel that Paul should have been going to them, and not spending time preaching to the Jews. Such are of the opinion that Jesus commissioned Paul to preach exclusively to the Gentiles. However, this is not at all the case. When sending Ananias to Saul to call him into the apostleship, Jesus Himself said, "But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Therefore, in keeping with his calling, and the very nature of the Gospel itself, which is the power of God unto salvation "to the Jew first," he preached to the Jews.

Paul would not linger where the Gospel was not received – even if that was among the Jews who were considered the "first" to whom it was to be preached. The Gospel was to be preached "to every creature" (Mk 16:15). Elsewhere, when addressing this subject the matter of Israel's rejection of that Gospel, Paul said, "Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28).

The opening of the door of salvation to the Gentiles not only fulfills the commission of Jesus, it also confirms the promises given by the prophets concerning the salvation of God. Although, prior to Christ, they were "not a people," (1 Pet 2:10), yet God had purposed from the beginning that they would be included in His great salvation.

- All families of the earth would be blessed through Abraham's Seed, which is Christ (Gen 12:3; 22:18).
- God promised He would give the Savior "the heathen" for an inheritance (Psa 2:8).
- All the ends of the earth would turn to the Lord (Psa 22:27).
- Nations would flow into the Lord's house (Isa 2:2).
- The Gentiles would seek the Lord (Isa 11:10).
- The coming Savior would bring forth redemptive judgment to the Gentiles (Isa 42:1).
- The Savior would be a light unto the Gentiles (Gen 42:6).
- God would give light to the Gentiles (Isa 49:6).

- The nations that knew not God would run to Him (Isa 55:5).
- The Gentiles would come to the Lord's light (Isa 60:3), coming to Him (Isa 60:5).
- All the nations would be gathered to the name of the Lord (Jer 3:17).
- All people, nations, and languages would serve the Lord (Dan 7:14).
- Many nations would be joined to the Lord (Zech 2:11).
- Many nations would seek the Lord of hosts (Zech 8:22).
- The name of the Lord would be great among the Gentiles (Mal 1:11).

Therefore, in keeping with the promises given to the patriarchs and through the prophets, Paul affirms that he will go to the Gentiles. While his heart is burdened for the people of Israel (Rom 9:2), he will not limit his labors to the Jewish people. If they will not respond, the opportunity to respond will be removed. This is a consistent kingdom manner.

HE ENTERED INTO A CERTAIN MAN'S HOUSE

“ 7 And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshiped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8 And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”

At this point Paul does not leave Corinth, but changes his base of operation. He does not cease to preach in the area, but no longer continues reasoning in the synagogue. Later, what Paul appears to sense in his spirit at this time will be fully confirmed by a personal communication from the Lord Himself.

HE ENTERED A CERTAIN MAN'S HOUSE

“And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshiped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue . . .” Other versions read, “next door to the synagogue,” NKJV “next to the synagogue,” NASB “was very near the synagogue,” BBE “adjoined the synagogue.” DARBY

JUSTUS

Other versions read “Titius Justus,” NASB/NIV/NRSV/RSV/ASV “Titus Justus,” ASV/DOUAY/ERV/AMPLIFIED

The different renderings are traced back to differences in certain Greek manuscripts. This man is described as “one that worshiped God.” It is assumed that he was a Gentile proselyte. This is the exact way in which Lydia was described, who also was a proselyte (Acts 16:14).

The point of the text is that Paul moved the place of his teaching from the synagogue to the house of Justus. Some are of the opinion that he also remained there, no longer staying with Aquila and Priscilla. If this is the case, it would buttress his statement that he was turning to the Gentiles. However, whatever view one chooses to embrace, the emphasis here seems to be that this became the place where Paul taught, continuing his affirmation and reasoning concerning Jesus being the Christ. It may be that Justus had a dwelling that could accommodate a number of people. At any rate, the words that follow confirm that the primary purpose for Paul being there was to teach.

CRISPUS

“ And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house . . .” Other

versions read, “the ruler,” NKJV “the leader,” NASB “the official,” NRSV “the president,” CJB “synagogue leader,” GWN “the Warden,” WEYMOUTH and “chief of.” INTERLINEAR

There are other men in Scripture who were rulers of the local synagogue. Jairus, whose daughter Jesus raised from the dead, was “the ruler of the synagogue” (Mk 5:22,36,38; Lk 8:41). When Jesus was “teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath,” He had to confront the “ruler” of that synagogue who objected to Him healing the woman with the bowed back on the Sabbath (Lk 13:14). Later in this chapter, a man named Sosthenes is said to have been “the chief ruler of the synagogue” (Acts 18:17). The role of this person was to maintain order in the synagogue, ensuring that the purpose for meeting was satisfactorily carried out. While this

THE RULER OF THE SYNAGOGUE

“Their duties were to preside in the public services, to direct the reading of the Scriptures and the addresses to the congregation . . . to superintend the distribution of alms, and to punish transgressors either by scourging or by excommunication.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S

is not sufficient to establish the necessity of maintaining some semblance of order and purpose in a godly assembly, it is worthy of note. This practice took place among the people who had been chosen by God, and to whom He had revealed both His will and His purpose. Neither Jesus nor the apostles spoke against such a practice. I see no reason for us to do so.

We assume that this man is the same one mentioned in the book of First Corinthians: “I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius” (1 Cor 1:14). This appears to be a reference to the event recorded in this text.

Notice how the conversion of this household is recorded: “believed on the Lord.” This kind of language is consistently employed to describe those who were added to the church.

- Those who responded to Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost are described as “all that believed” (2:44).

- The five thousand men responding to Peter’s discourse in Solomon’s porch are said to have “believed” (4:4).

In all of these cases believing and being baptized were the result of hearing a message. In addition, the Holy Spirit inspired a report of these reactions in a manner that left no question about what was done.

The growing and united number of Christians were described as “the multitude of them that believed” (4:32).

- As a result of the report of Dorcas being raised from the dead, it is written that in Joppa “many believed in the Lord” (9:42).

- Those converted at Cornelius’ house are described as those “who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (11:17).

- When certain preached the Lord Jesus in Antioch, the hand of the Lord was with them, “and a great number believed” (11:21).

- The deputy on the isle of Paphos is said to have “believed” (13:12).

- Later, in Antioch, “as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (13:48).

- When Paul and Barnabas preached in Iconium “a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed” (14:1).

- After Paul reasoned in the synagogue of Thessalonica, “some of them believed”

(17:4).

- In Berea, “many of them believed” (17:12).
- In Athens, “certain men,” included Dionysius and a woman named Damaris, are said to have “believed” (17:34).

Now, we read that Crispus and his household “believed in the Lord.” These are the words Peter used when he reported the conversion of Cornelius and those gathered at his house (Acts 11:17).

It is obvious that Crispus left the confines of the synagogue to hear the words of Paul, probably delivered in the house of Justus. Although he was the ruler of the synagogue, he did not go along with the contentions raised by others in the synagogue over which he presided. He was quite willing to separate from those people and give himself to the hearing of the Gospel. It is assumed that Crispus and his household responded in the same manner as the Corinthians, who are now mentioned – believing and being baptized..

MANY CORINTHIANS

“ . . . and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.”

This is now the ninth time the book of Acts has reported people believing and being baptized. Both Jews and Gentiles were involved.

- On the day of Pentecost, those who believed, having gladly received the Word were baptized (2:41).
- Those of Samaria “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus,” and “were baptized, both men and women” (8:12).
- Although he was later overcome by pride, Simon initially believed and was baptized (8:13).
- The Ethiopian eunuch believed and was baptized (8:36-38).
- Saul of Tarsus believed and was baptized (9:18).
- The household of Cornelius believed and were baptized (10:48; 11:17).
- Lydia and her household believed and were baptized (16:14-15).
- The Philippian jailor and his household believed and were baptized (16:31-34).
- Now Crispus and his household believe and are baptized (18:8).

In all of these cases believing and being baptized were the result of hearing a message. In addition, the Holy Spirit inspired a report of these reactions in a manner that left no question about what was done. I do not believe it is possible to maintain any semblance of integrity and conclude from these texts that baptism is optional, or has nothing to do with salvation. Without apology I affirm that those who arrive at such conclusions are either ignorant or dishonest – and in this day of salvation, neither condition can be justified. This is how the Spirit reported the conversion of people, and it should not be offensive. Of course, where there is a sectarian spirit, there will be opposition to anything that conflicts with the particular views of the sect. That is the nature of division, which men perceive must be maintained at all cost – even that of the truth.

THE LORD SPEAKS TO PAUL IN A NIGHT VISION

“ 9 Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10 For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”

While there has been some good response to Paul's preaching and teaching in Corinth, it has not been so in the synagogue. Having faced such rejection in other cities, Paul might have concluded the same would happen here. After all, the aggression of the Jews had forced him to leave Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Thessalonica, and Berea (13:50; 14:5-6; 14:19-21; 17:10, 13-15). However, the Lord will give Paul special insights concerning the city of Corinth.

A VISION IN THE NIGHT

"Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision . . ." Another version read "one night . . . in a vision." NIV

Here the Lord speaks directly to Paul – not through a prophet, or through the Scriptures, but directly, doing so through a vision.

God Has Spoken to Individuals

- God spoke to Adam and Eve (Gen 1:28; 3:13).
- God is said to have spoken to Cain (Gen 4:6,9).
- Noah (Gen 6:3;7;1 7:1; 8:15; 9:8).
- Abraham (Gen 12:1; 13:14; 18:13).
- Rebeckah (Gen 25:23).
- Jacob (Gen 31:3; 46:2).
- Moses (Ex 4:2,4,11,19,21; 6:1; 7:1,14; 8:16,20; 9:1,8,13,22; 10:1,12,21; 11:1,9; 12:43; 14:15,26,16:28; 17:5,14; 19:9,10,21,24; 20:22; 24:12; 30:34; 32:7,9,23; 33:1,17; 34:1,27; Lev 16:2; 21:1; Num 3:40; 7:11; 11:16,23; 12:14;11; 15:35; 17:10; 21:8,34; 25:4; 27:12,18; 31:14,16). God is said to have spoken directly to Moses 163 times.
- Aaron (Ex 4:27; Lev 10:8; Num 18:1,8,10).
- Balaam (Num 22:12).

There are at least three things to be seen in visions. First, God is a communicating God. Second, visions postulate a degree of sensitivity on the part of the one to whom the vision is vouchsafed. Third, visions pertained to Divine involvements with men, and the working out of God's eternal purpose.

Joshua (Josh 3:7; 5:2,9; 6:2; 7:10; 8:1,18; 10:8; 11:6).

- Gideon (Judges 6:19-20; 7:2,4,5,7).
- Samuel (1 Sam 3:11; 8:7,22; 16:1,7).
- David (1 Sam 23:2; 2 Sam 2:1; 5:19; 1 Kgs 8:18).
- Gad (1 Chron 21:9).
- Solomon (1 Kgs 11:11; 2 Chron 1:11).
- Manasseh (2 Chron 33:10).
- Ahijah (1 Kgs 14:5), Jehu (2 Kgs 10:30).
- Job (Job 42:7).
- Isaiah (Isa 8:1).
- Jeremiah (46:13).
- Jonah (Jon 4:9).

- Hosea (Hos 1:2).
- Amos (Amos 7:8).
- Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:6).
- Ananias (Acts 9:11,15).

In this text, the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision – something that was seen – a miraculous visualization. In this case, I assume what was seen was the glorified Christ – something like John saw on the isle of Patmos (Rev 1:12-16).

God has spoken in visions to Abraham (Gen 15:1), Jacob (Gen 46:2), Samuel (1 Sam 3:15), Nathan (2 Sam 7:17; 17:15), Iddo (2 Chron 9:29), Isaiah (2 Chron 32:32; Isa 1:1), Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1; 8:3,4; 11:24; 40:2), Daniel (Dan 2:19; 4:5; 7:1; 8:1; 10:7), Obadiah (Obad 1:1), Nahum (Nah 1:1), Habakkuk (Hab 2:2-3), Zecharias (Lk 1:22), Ananias (Acts 9:10), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:12), Cornelius (Acts 10:3), Peter (Acts 10:17), and Paul (Acts 16:9-10; 26:19; 2 Cor 12:1). Several of these visions were in the night (Isa 29:7; Dan 2:19; 7:7,13; Acts 16:9; 18:9).

There are at least three things to be seen in visions. First, God is a communicating God. Second, visions postulate a degree of sensitivity on the part of the one to whom the vision is vouchsafed. Third, visions pertained to Divine involvements with men, and the working out of God's eternal purpose. They never dealt with novel interests, or things unrelated to what God was doing among men.

BE NOT AFRAID

“Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace . . .” Other versions read, “Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent,” NKJV “Do not be afraid any longer, but go on speaking and do not be silent,” NASB “Have no fear and go on preaching,” BBE “Don't be afraid to speak out! Don't be silent!” GWN “Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't quit!” LIVING “Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't quit,” WEYMOUTH and “Don't be afraid! Speak out! Don't quit.” ISV

Like other visions, what is communicated to Paul is something that is certain. This is not a word of possibilities, but one that unveils a circumstance around which Paul is to shape his actions.

Jesus means that He is with Paul as he remains in Corinth. The circumstances are not what they appear to be. That is why he is to remain there, even though it looked as though he was being rejected as he was in other regions.

Right here we see the objective of the devil as well as that of the exalted Christ. Paul's commission had to do with speaking – declaring the appointed message through which salvation would be wrought. Paul had not been sent to relieve the poor – although there were times when he participated in such an effort toward the saints (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8:1-9; Gal 2:10). Primarily, however, he had been ordained as a “preacher” and a “teacher” (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11). When Paul and Barnabas were called by the Spirit, and separated for a particular work, it was to “preach the Gospel” (Acts 16:10). He acknowledged that he had been sent “to preach the Gospel” – delivering a message appropriately summarized as “the preaching of the cross” (1 Cor 1:17). When doors were opened to him, it was to “Preach Christ's gospel” (2 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 10:16). Paul made it his aim “to preach the Gospel.” He aspired to do it where Christ had not been named (Rom 15:20), and to the churches as well (Rom 1:15; 1 Cor 15:1-3).

Now, Paul has faced animosity in Corinth, even as he did in many other cities. He frequently had to leave other regions because of opposition, and until this time, there was no indication that he would not have to do the same in Corinth. He had been stoned, beaten, imprisoned, and maligned in other places, and had to eventually leave.

However, at this point hidden from Paul, Corinth was different. Jesus Himself speaks to Paul in a night vision telling him not to fear, but to keep on speaking, and not quit!

I AM WITH THEE

“For I am with thee . . .”

“I am with you,” Jesus says – with him in his labors! Following His resurrection, Jesus had told His disciples “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matt 28:20).

Christ’s promise to Paul was much like the Lord’s promise to Jeremiah: “Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD” (Jer 1:8). As with the prophet, His promised presence was not detected by the human senses. He had rather taken up His abode in Paul, as He said He would do for those who loved Him and kept His words (John 14:23). He was dwelling in his heart by faith (Eph 3:17). Christ was with Him in His faithful intercession (Heb 7:25). As the Head of the body, of which Paul was a primary member, Jesus was with Him (Col 1:18). An innumerable company of angels, all sent forth to minister to those “who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:13-14), were being managed by Jesus, who was devoted to Paul, His own servant and apostle.

I do not doubt that, technically speaking, Paul knew this. He knew Jesus had not forsaken him, but that He was a “merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God” (Heb 2:17). However, he also knew that, under Christ’s government, he had been prohibited from preaching in Asia, and blocked from going into Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). There were times when Paul had to escape for his life from the very regions in which he had been preaching (Acts 9:5; 14:6).

Jesus means that He is with Paul as he remains in Corinth. The circumstances are not what they appear to be. That is why he is to remain there, even though it looked as though he was being rejected as he was in other regions.

NO MAN WILL HURT YOU

“ . . . and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee . . .” Other versions read, “no one will attack you to hurt you,” NKJV “no one is going to attack and harm you,” NIV “no one will lay a hand on you to harm you,” NRSV “no one will make an attack on you to do you damage,” BBE “No one will succeed in harming you,” CJB “no one is able to harm thee,” MRD “no one will assault you to harm you,” NET “no one will attempt to hurt you,” NJB and “no man shall invade thee to hurt thee.” PNT

This is not something detected by Divine prescience – as though the Lord had looked into the future and saw what men would not do. This is the announcement of Divine government, for the government is on the shoulder of Jesus ! The glorified Christ would see to it that no one would be able to touch and harm Paul –or even have a compelling desire to do so. The government of Jesus is that precise!

Under the Old and inferior covenant, the Lord protected His people from the enemy. There were three occasions every year when all of the men appeared before the Lord in an appointed place (Deut 16:16-17). During those times, the land appeared to have been left vulnerable, with only the women, children, and aged left. The preciseness of Divine control is seen in God’s promise to Israel concerning those three occasions, when the land appeared to be unprotected . “For I will cast out the nations before thee, and enlarge thy borders: neither shall any man desire thy land, when thou shalt go up to appear before the LORD thy God thrice in the year ” (Ex 34:24).

This is the kind of protection the glorified Christ pledged to Paul. Even if his enemies did desire to come against Paul, no opportunity would be given them to do so. The “King of heaven” (Dan 4:37) would so impose His will upon the sons of men, that the wicked would not be able to lift their hand against the apostle Paul! Furthermore, Satan and his hosts, who move men against the truth and those

who proclaim it, would be held at bay, unable to carry out any initiative against the apostle.

I HAVE MUCH PEOPLE

“ . . . for I have much people in this city.” Other versions read, “there are many in this city who are My people,” NRSV “for I have a number of people in this town,” BBE “I have so many people that belong to me in this city,” NJB “I have so many people that belong to me in this city,” LIVING and “for I have very many people in this city.” WEYMOUTH

So far as we know, prior to Paul there had not been a major Gospel initiative in Corinth. It is true that Aquila and Priscilla were there, but there is nothing to suggest they had garnered “much people” in the Gospel net. Nor, indeed, was this something that was apparent to Paul.

I gather that this was the same kind of circumstance that was described concerning certain who embraced the Gospel in Antioch: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed ” (Acts 13:48). Paul elsewhere stated this fact of Divine knowledge: “But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (2 Tim 2:16-19). This accounts for why the Gospel was disallowed in some regions (Acts 16:6-7), yet particularly sent to others (Acts 13:2). This is why the Word was specifically sent to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:26-32), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:15), and Cornelius (Acts 10).

There is a general sense in which the Gospel is preached “to every creature” (Mk 16:15) and “all nations” (Matt 28:19). The Gospel is the Divinely appointed means of carrying out the “purpose” of God, for we have been “called according to His purpose ” (Rom 8:28; 2 Tim 1:9). Remembering that the government has been placed in the hands of Jesus, He is the One who knows, chooses, calls, keeps, and feeds. He is the One who is bringing “many sone to glory” (Heb 2:10). He is also the one from whom people are removed when they do not abide. People cannot believe if they have not heard. They cannot hear without a preacher. And preachers cannot go unless they are sent by the Lord (Rom 10:14-15).

The Lord knows the end “from the beginning” – and all of that has to do with His “counsel” (Isa 40:10). There have been some people who have been told of God’s appointed purposes for them.

- God told Pharaoh, “And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth” (Ex 9:16).

- Before they were born, and in complete disregard of their works, God said of Jacob and Esau, “Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.” Paul affirms this was done “that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of Him that calleth” (Rom 9:11-13).

- God told Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jer 1:5).

- Jesus told His twelve disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16).

- It is written of Paul, “But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace” (Gal 1:15).

In all of these cases, what God had determined preceded the involvement of the people themselves. Our salvation, together with its culmination, is ultimately traced back to Divine purpose, not human response. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). Again it is written, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9).

While it is true that the purpose of God is implemented through divinely appointed means, it is the purpose that gives meaning to the means, and not vice versa. The statement of our text – “I have much people in this city” – is from the viewpoint of the purpose, not the means. The purpose preceded the call. In fact, that is what made the call effective through the appointed means.

When Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about their own identity with God, he stated that their response confirmed God’s purpose and election. “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance . . .” (1 Thess 1:4-5). In the case of the Corinthians, Paul had no confirming evidence of the presence of the foreknown people of God in that city. However, Jesus revealed to him that such people did exist, and in significant numbers. They would, however, become known to Paul as he delivered the Gospel, which is the appointed means of the people being made known.

I understand that this is a very difficult concept for some to accept – even though considerable revelation has been given on the matter. Just as a large and productive tree does not have its roots above ground, so the works of the Lord are not accompanied by evidences of their causes. The firm and stable foundation of a large building is not apparent when you look at the structure itself. So the supporting purposes and determinations of God are not evident in our ordinary involvements in His Kingdom. It is for this reason that Jesus divulged to Paul that more was involved in Corinth than could be seen with mortal eyes.

HE CONTINUED THERE A YEAR AND SIX MONTHS

“ 11 And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.”

The spiritual progress of an individual can be measured by the degree of their sensitivity and response to Divine directives. King Saul, for example, did not do what he was told to do. Samuel told him, “Wherefore then didst thou not obey the voice of the LORD . . . For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, He hath also rejected thee from being king” (1 Sam 15:19-23). It is apparent that God is not indifferent to men’s response to His commandments.

Scripture records a conversation between two unnamed prophets. One of them was disobedient. Here is the account. “And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the LORD, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the LORD, and hast not kept the commandment which the LORD thy God commanded thee, But camest back, and hast eaten bread and drunk water in the place, of the which the LORD did say to thee, Eat no bread, and drink no water; thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers. And it came to pass, after he had eaten bread, and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him the ass, to wit, for the prophet whom he had brought back. And when he was gone, a lion met him by the way, and slew him: and his carcase was cast in the way, and the ass stood by it, the lion also stood by the carcase” (1 Kgs 13:21-24). When the prophet heard of the death of the one to whom he had delivered the word of the Lord he said, “It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord” (1 Kgs 13:26). It is a sad day when those living in the blazing light of the “Sun of righteousness” perceive less than those who lived during the lesser glory of the Old Covenant.

This was the manner of Paul’s life, and it was recognized by the Lord Jesus, who knows all

things. Paul testified, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service.” NASB

During the time of Nehemiah, he sparked a renewal Godward. During that time, Nehemiah accounted for the demise of the children of Israel. “Nevertheless they were disobedient , and rebelled against thee, and cast thy law behind their backs, and slew thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to thee, and they wrought great provocations. Therefore thou deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies, who vexed them: and in the time of their trouble, when they cried unto thee, thou heardest them from heaven; and according to thy manifold mercies thou gavest them saviors, who saved them out of the hand of their enemies” (Neh 9:26-27). Holy men have been able to correlate the experiences of men with their response to Divine leadership.

Paul’s Ministry

The banner over Paul’s ministry was expressed in truth by himself, and confirmed in his labors. He delivered this word to Agrippa, affirming how he was called, what he was told to do, and how he responded. “And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles , that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance” (Acts 26:15-20). Paul faithfully fulfilled that commission.

This was the manner of Paul’s life, and it was recognized by the Lord Jesus, who knows all things. Paul testified, “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful , putting me into service” NASB (1 Tim 1:12). This is one reason why so much was revealed to Paul (2 Cor 12:1; Eph 3:4).

HE CONTINUED THERE

“And he continued there a year and six months . . .” Other versions read, “he settled there,” NASB “Paul stayed,” NIV “he was there,” ASV “he dwelt there,” ERV “Paul lived in Corinth,” GWN “He resided,” MRD “remained,” WEYMOUTH “settled down among,” WILLIAMS “he is seated,” INTERLINEAR and “stayed on.” CEV

It only took one word from the Lord, and Paul immediately adjusted his life to the will of the Lord. There is an example of presenting one’s body a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God”

It only took one word from the Lord, and Paul immediately adjusted his life to the will of the Lord. There is an example of presenting one’s body a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God” (Rom 12:1). This is what is involved in living “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). As with all instances of submitting to the will of the Lord, it involved the mortification of “the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13), resisting the devil (James 4:7), and not quenching or grieving the Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). Remaining where the Lord places you requires one to “fight the good fight of faith,” and “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). It requires men to “put off the old man” and “put on the new man” (Col 3:9-10). The person involved in the will of the Lord must keep under their body, and bring it into subjection (1 Cor 9:17). It is incumbent upon all kingdom laborers that they “seek those things which are above,” and set their “affection” on them (Col 3:1-2).

All of this, and more, was involved in Paul remaining in Corinth for a year and six months. Many do not comprehend the sense of these various requirements because they are not actually involved in what God has called them to do. They are too absorbed in the ways of the world, and its mundane activities. Such poor souls are not living by faith (Heb 10:38), walking in the spirit (Gal 5:16,25), and maintaining the hope and anticipation of Christ's return (1 John 3:2-3). Their spiritual posture is too casual, and they live at too great of distance from the Lord. Their minds are not occupied with the things of God, and they are not living by every word of God.

The tragedy of such circumstances is that few churches would consider such people to be out of the will of God. A "form of godliness" has been adopted that does not require such holy involvements. Of course, this is why the truth lies smitten in the streets, as it did during the apostasy of Israel (Isa 59:14-15). Paul's response is the standard. Every child of God is expected to respond whole heartedly to the word of the Lord. It is never acceptable to fail to do so.

TEACHING THE WORD OF GOD

" . . . teaching the word of God among them." Other versions read, "teaching them the word of God," CJB "and taught the words of God among them," GENEVA "preaching the word of God among them," NJB "teaching the truths of God," LIVING "teaching God's message to the people," IE "went on teaching God's message," WILLIAMS "continued to teach them the word of God," MONTGOMERY and "teaching the Word of God [concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God]." AMPLIFIED

As used here, the word "teaching" is translated from a word meaning, "to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses," THAYER and "to provide instruction in a formal or informal setting - to teach, teaching." LOUW-NIDA

To teach the word of God is to show the sense of it, so that what is declared of the Scriptures can be perceived. For example, Jesus said the Scriptures testified of Him (John 5:39). An angel told the apostle John that "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy" (Rev 19:10). When the word of God is taught, this becomes clear to those receiving the teaching.

Further, the Scriptures are said to be able to make men "wise unto salvation" (2 Tim 3:15). When the word of God is taught, those who receive the teaching become more thorough in their understanding of salvation. They see more fully the things that are required by and inherent in the salvation of God. They become more conversant with faith, justification, sanctification, and hope. Those who have a desire to comprehend the truth, yet are unable to do so, have not been taught. That is the problem. They are groping about like the eunuch from Ethiopia because no one has expounded the word to them. How tragic that this circumstance is so prominent in the churches of our time.

Imagine the marvelous benefit of being taught by Paul for a year and a half! You could read every one of his epistles in a few hours. What marvelous discourses and discussions must have taken place during that period of time!

Paul's Extended Stays

We are given some information concerning Paul's extended stays in certain areas. We find that it was always with believers – the church.

- Early in his ministry he remained with Barnabas with the church in Antioch for "a whole year," assembling with them and teaching "much people" (Acts 11:26).
- After "a great multitude both of the Jews and Greeks believed," Paul and Barnabas spent a "long time" in Iconium, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord (Acts 14:1,3).

- After fulfilling the mission to which the Spirit had called them, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, remaining there a “long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:28).
- After settling the issue of circumcision that had arisen (Acts 15:1), Paul and Barnabas spent an unspecified period of time in Antioch “teaching and preaching the word of God” (Acts 15:35).
- He remained in Corinth for one and a half years (Acts 18:11).
- After spending three months disputing in the synagogue of Ephesus, Paul “separated the disciples” and disputed daily in the school of Tyrannus. This continued for two years (Acts 19:10).
- Paul told the Ephesians elders that he had spent “three years” among them, “warning every man night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). This was a summation of which two years and three months are explained above (Acts 19:10).
- Coming into Caesarea “Paul’s company” spent “many days” at the house of “Philip the evangelist,” who had four daughters that prophesied (Acts 21:10).
- When in Rome, Paul was under house arrest. He was given leave to have his own hired house, where he remained for “two whole years.” He received all who came to him, “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31).

There we have seven years and six months of extended time, plus two “long” periods, one stay of “many days,” and another unspecified period of time in Antioch.

Who were the “them” to whom Paul continued teaching the word? Every indication is that it was with the believers. It appears that, as during Christ’s ministry, the burden of the testimony was given to those with a manifested interest in the truth. Outsiders and inquirers, including publicans and sinners, came to these gatherings. Add to this the following facts.

- All of the epistles we have from Paul are addressed to believers.
- Paul, by revelation, had been given to understand “the mystery of Christ,” hidden from previous generations. Yet this was only communicated to those who were in Christ Jesus.
- Special revelations were given to Paul concerning “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” in order to “make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery” (Eph 3:8-9). Yet, there is not a solitary example or hint that he ever divulged such things to anyone outside of the body of Christ.
- The placement of apostles within the church (1 Cor 12:18,28; Eph 4:11) was for the purpose of “perfecting the saints” and “edifying the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12).

None of this suggests the Word is not to be preached to those who are alienated from God. However, there is no record of extended periods being spent with such people. It was when there was a favorable response to the Gospel that more was given.

- The fundamental or primary purpose for all spiritual gifts, including that of the apostles, is “for the profit of all” of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:7).
- Paul did not go into spiritually virgin territory when the church was deficient. He chose to stabilize the church first (2 Cor 10:15-16).

None of this suggests the Word is not to be preached to those who are alienated from God. However, there is no record of extended periods being spent with such people. It was when there was a favorable response to the Gospel that more was given. Further, the level of teaching presented to

those who remain dead in trespasses and sins is designed to

awaken them to their situation outside of Christ. There is a remarkable consistency in the very few reports of such communication (Acts 17:22-31; 24:25; 26:20,27). When Paul addressed the Jews, he always reasoned around the Scriptures, confirming their historically wayward manners, and then pointing to the promises of a coming Savior (Acts 13:40; 17:2; 24:14).

However, Paul's extended stays and his epistles were devoted to exposition of the Gospel, or the implications that were in it. Ponder the various aspects of the Gospel that were, so far as the record is concerned, only made known to believers.

- The revelation of the love of God in the Gospel (Eph 2:4).
- The fact that Jesus put away sin (Heb 9:26).
- The fact that Jesus destroyed the devil, also plundering principalities and powers (Heb 2:14; Col 2:15).
- That there is a new covenant (Heb 8:8-13; 2 Cor 3:7-10).
- That Jesus is the Mediator of a new covenant (Heb 12:24).
- What was accomplished through the blood of Christ (Eph 2:13; Col 1:20; Heb 10:19; 13:20).
- That the conscience can be purged (Heb 9:14).
- That Jesus was made to be sin, and was made a curse (2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13).
- That Jesus ascended up into heaven, and is on the right hand of God (Rom 8:24; Eph 4:8).
- That Jesus has reconciled us to God (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18; Col 1:21).
- That those in Christ are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17), have received a new man (Eph 4:24), and are no longer what they were (1 Cor 6:11).
- That Jesus ever lives to make intercession for those who are coming to God through Him (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25).
- The involvements of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:35-54; 2 Cor 5:1-5).
- That Jesus will come to be glorified in them that believe (2 Thess 1:10).
- That we have been bought with a price (1 Cor 6:20; 7:23).
- The rationale behind Divine chastening (Heb 12:5-13).
- That the Law has been ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).
- That those in Christ have an eternal inheritance (Heb 9:15).
- That we are saved by hope (Rom 8:24).
- That Christ dwells in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17).
- That God sends the Holy Spirit into the hearts of His people (Gal 4:6).
- That we are saved by grace through faith (Eph 2:8-10).
- That those in Christ are not in bondage to sin (Rom 6:15,22; 8:2,12).
- That Christ frees men in order to walk in freedom (Gal 5:1).
- That Jesus made peace through the blood of His cross (Col 1:20).
- That the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom, he may devour (1 Pet

5:8-9).

- That men have been given armor in Christ that enables them to stand against the wiles of the devil, and in the evil day (Eph 6:11,13).
- That men can resist the devil (James 4:7).
- That every temptation is common to man and comes with a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13).
- That men can have access to grace (Rom 5:2).

It is my persuasion that no person can be a true evangelist who is inept in the matter of edifying the body. Even “evangelists” are declared to have been given to the church to edify it and bring it to maturity. It is within the context of “the body” that spiritual gifts are matured and honed to their finest edge.

That we are called in one hope of our calling (Eph 4:4).

- That those in Christ are changed from one increasing stage of glory to another by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18).
- That the victory that overcomes the world is faith (1 John 5:4-5).
- The rationale behind being justified by faith (Rom 3:23-28; 5:1-3; Gal 3:24-25).
- That Jews and Gentiles are one new man in Christ (Eph 2:15).

That will suffice, lest I labor this matter to the point of distraction. The point is that none of these things were declared to those alienated from God. They were only affirmed and expounded to those who had been made accepted “in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). These are the kind of things that were opened up in Paul’s extended stays with the brethren.

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PAUL’S ACTIVITIES IN CORINTH

It will be of profit to briefly rehearse the activities of Paul in Corinth as gleaned from his letters to them. These are not spelled out in the book of Acts – only that he remained there for a year and six months.

- The people were “called unto the fellowship” of God’s Son, Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor 1:9).
- He came to them “declaring the testimony of God,” doing so without the “excellency of speech” to which Corinthians were accustomed, or the “wisdom” that had its genesis in men (1 Cor 2:1).
- While among them, and in view of the licentious nature of the environment, he determined not to know anything them but “Christ and Him crucified” 1 Cor 2:2).
- He was with them “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling,” making it a point not to rely on the flesh (1 Cor 2:3).
- His speaking was devoid of “enticing words of man’s wisdom” (1 Cor 2:4a).
- His speaking was “in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor 2:4b).
- He ministered among them with a godly awareness of their level of understanding

(1 Cor 9:20-22).

- He delivered “ordinances” to them that related to proper behavior and decorum (1 Cor 11:2).
- He delivered to them the words of Jesus concerning the Lord’s table, the reasoning behind it, and the penalty for its abuse (1 Cor 11:23-29).
- He expounded the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-3).
- He spoke in such a manner as would appeal to the spiritually mature (1 Cor 2:6).
- When he had very real needs of the body, he made no effort to make the people support him – even though he would have violated no precept of God by doing so (1 Cor 11:9; 12:13).
- He worked the “signs of an apostle” among them “in all patience,” never seeking personal advantage (2 Cor 12:12).
- They became “the epistle of Christ,” ministered by him, through whom the Holy Spirit Himself worked effectively in them (2 Cor 3:1).

when Paul received some correspondence from those who were “of the house of Chloe,” Paul engaged in a battle for their souls, writing them two epistles – by far the most he wrote to any person or church. This confirms the aggressive nature of his care for and ministry to them.

Thus we can form a profitable view of what Paul did during that the time he spent in Corinth. Although the people were among an especially decadent people, the ministry of Paul was so effective that he could write to them, “So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:7). The defection that did take place in Corinth apparently occurred after he had left. However, when Paul received some correspondence from those who were “of the house of Chloe,” Paul engaged in a battle for their souls, writing them two epistles – by far the most he wrote to any person or church. This confirms the aggressive nature of his care for and ministry to them. It also confirms that while in Corinth, the burden of his labors were directed toward the church, and that the church grew during that time.

CONCLUSION

We are being exposed to the spread of the Gospel throughout the world. As Jesus commanded, it began in Jerusalem (Lk 24:47), diffused throughout Judea, spreading northward into Samaria, and then “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). All of this was done without the development of a human strategy. There was no form of worldly promotion. There were no Christ universities or colleges. There was no church planting program, no evangelizing workshops, and no church conventions, as we know of them. In fact, God did not employ any tactic that was borrowed from the world. There was no business tactic that was borrowed. The world’s ideas about motivation were not sought. There were no fund raising campaigns. No one spoke of anything similar to the 10-40 window of out time. No pep talks were given concerning the lostness of the world, and the need for the church to send out missionaries. There were no known pleas for funds to do the Lord’s work. Yet, an astounding growth in both numbers and spiritual maturity was taking place.

The fundamental message that was being declared related to the Lord Jesus Christ (5:42; 8:5,12; 9:20; 11:20; 17:3,13) , the resurrection of the dead (4:2), the word of the Lord (8:4,25; 11:19; 13:5; 15:35), the forgiveness of sins (13:38), the Gospel (14:7,21,25; 15:36; 16:10; 17:13), peace (10:36), and the Kingdom of God (8:12; 20:25; 28:31). There was a confidence in their message as they are said to have “affirmed” (25:19), “declared” (13:32; 17:23; 20:27), and “preached boldly” (9:27).

There was a degree of unity among the believers that is virtually unknown in our time. They were “together” (2:44), “assembled together” (4:31; 12:12; 14:27), were of “one accord” (1:14; 2:1; 2:46;

4:24; 5:12; 8:6; ; 15:25), realized “singleness of heart” (2:46), and were of “one heart and of one soul” (4:32). Those who were convicted did not wait for an invitation,. But cried out inquiring, “What shall we do?” (2:37; 8:36; 9:6; 16:30). When people were converted who came from sordid backgrounds, they “came, and confessed, and showed their deeds” (19:18). When people were called by God, they immediately responded gladly, and in faith and with determination (2:41; 4:4; 8:12; 8:36; 9:8;13:2-3; 16:10, 14-15; 16:33; 18:8,9-10).

Why is there such a vast gulf between the nature of those ancient disciples and the nominal Christians of our time? It is certainly not owing to any diminishment in the power and effectiveness of the Gospel of Christ. True spiritual life does not deteriorate with time, or wax and wane with circumstances. Let it be clear that what is being reported in the book of Acts is real, whether it is righteous or evil; whether it relates to wheat or tares;

When contemporary responses are lacking in the qualities that are being revealed in this book, it is because the power is lacking. Furthermore, the power is lacking because the message through which the power is made known is not being declared.

whether it relates to the work of the devil or the work of the Lord Jesus. When contemporary responses are lacking in the qualities that are being revealed in this book, it is because the power is lacking. Furthermore, the power is lacking because the message through which the power is made known is not being declared. The message is so designed that when it is not believed, some form of hostility will erupt, signifying the contrariety of the people. When any form of hesitancy is found in those who profess to be leading the church, it is because they are not willing, for willingness prevails in the day of “His power” (Psa 110:3). Where willingness is lacking, unbelief is dominant.

Professional religious men are fond of trying to find some kind of pattern in the book of Acts – something they can emulate, putting it in some form that can be successfully copied. However, no such patterns are found in Luke’s reports. This is the chronicling of life, not routine. It is the report of Christ Jesus living within men, not men adopting a way of life. Blessed is the person who sees this!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #76

PAUL SPREADS THE WORD

“ 18:12 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law. 14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. 16 And he drave them from the judgment seat. 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things. 18 And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila; having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow. 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews. 20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; 21 But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus. 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. 23 And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. ” (Acts 18:12-23)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMATION

Paul was unhindered during the year and six months he spent in Corinth, However, when that period came to a conclusion, the Jews took advantage of the presence of Gallio, deputy of Achaia. They brought Paul to Gallio’s judgment seat. Unwilling to cooperate with their plans, Gallio drove them away, frustrating their diabolical intentions. Paul continued for some time in Corinth, finally taking Aquila and Priscilla and departing for Ephesus. Although he was well received by the Jews there, he informed them he had to keep a certain feast in Jerusalem. However, he said he would return to them. After landing in Caesarea, Paul went down to Antioch, spending some time with the saints.

He then departed for Galatia and Phrygia where he

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- **AN INSURRECTION AGAINST PAUL (18:12-13)**
- **GALLIO SPEAKS (18:14-16)**
- **SOSTHENES IS BEATEN (18:17)**
- **PAUL TARRIES A GOOD WHILE, THEN LEAVES (18:18a)**
- **PAUL HAD A VOW (18:18b)**
- **PAUL LEAVES AQUILA AND PRISCILLA, BUT HIMSELF ENTERS INTO THE SYNAGOGUE (18:19)**
- **THEY WANTED HIM TO STAY, BUT HE DID NOT (18:20)**
- **PAUL HAD TO, BY ALL MEANS, KEEP THE FEAST (18:21a)**
- **PAUL SAYS HE WILL RETURN, IF THE LORD WILLS (18:21b)**
- **PAUL SALUTES THE CHURCH, THEN GOES DOWN TO ANTIOCH (18:22)**
- **PAUL CONTINUES TO STRENGTHEN THE BRETHREN (18:23)**
- **CONCLUSION**

strengthened “all the disciples.” Thus the Word continues to spread, and the disciples of Christ continue to be strengthened and established in the faith. Paul was fulfilling his commission.

HOLY PRIORITIES BEING REVEALED

Throughout this book, holy priorities are being made known. If it is true that the church is being directed by its Head, then this is an unavoidable conclusion. People were not charting the course of Divine workings, but were being called into, and directed within, an “eternal purpose.” This is why it is foolish to search for patterns in this book. When it comes to the execution of the will of the Lord, the revelation is not encased in a perceived procedure. If Divine direction was primarily procedural, heavenly teaching and leading would not be required. Of course, those who are caught in the snare of routine are forced to think outside of the perimeter of Shepherd/sheep (Heb 13:30), and Teacher/learner (Eph 4:20-21; 1 John 5:20) arrangements.

Sensing this truth, the Psalmist wrote, “Thy way is in the sea, and Thy path in the great waters, and Thy footsteps are not known” (Psa 77:19). Isaiah expressed the same observation when he wrote, “Thus saith the LORD, which maketh a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters” (Isa 43:16). Paul picked up the refrain when he confessed, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!” (Rom 11:33).

DIVINE DIRECTION

There should be no question in the mind of any follower of Jesus concerning the possibility of the direction of the Lord. The Scriptures are quite clear about this Divine manner, the Lord extending Him to confirm this truth.

- **GUIDED IN STRENGTH.** “Thou in Thy mercy hast led forth the people which Thou hast redeemed: Thou hast GUIDED them in Thy strength unto Thy holy habitation” (Exodus 15:13)
- **GUIDED ON EVERY SIDE.** “Thus the LORD saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants

of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and GUIDED them on every side” (2 Chron 32:22),

• **GUIDED IN JUDGMENT.** “The meek will He GUIDE in judgment: and the meek will He teach his way” (Psa 25:9),

There should be no question in the mind of any follower of Jesus concerning the possibility of the direction of the Lord. The Scriptures are quite clear about this Divine manner.

GUIDED FOR HIS NAME’S SAKE . “For Thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for Thy name's sake lead me, and GUIDE me” (Psa 31:3),

• **GUIDED WITH HIS EYE.** “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will GUIDE thee with Mine eye” (Psa 32:8),

• **GUIDED UNTO DEATH.** “For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our GUIDE even unto death” (Psa 48:14),

• **GUIDED WITH COUNSEL.** “Thou shalt GUIDE me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory” (Psa 73:24).

• **DIRECTED IN THE PATH.** “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall DIRECT thy paths” (Prov 3:6).

• **STEPS DIRECTED.** “A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD DIRECTETH his steps” (Prov 16:9).

• **DIRECTED IN ALL HIS WAYS.** “I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will DIRECT all his ways: he shall build My city, and he shall let go My captives, not for price nor reward, saith the LORD of hosts” (Isa 45:13),

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

• **GUIDED IN THEIR WORK.** “For I the LORD love judgment, I hate robbery for burnt offering; and I will GUIDE their work in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them” (Isa 61:8).

• **GUIDED IN YOUTH.** “Wilt thou not from this time cry unto Me, My father, Thou art the GUIDE of my youth?” (Jer 3:4).

• **STEPS DIRECTED.** “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to DIRECT his steps” (Jer 10:23).

• **FEET GUIDED.** “To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to GUIDE our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

• **WAY DIRECTED,** “Now God Himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, DIRECT our way unto you” (1 Thess 3:11).

• **HEARTS DIRECTED,** “And the Lord DIRECT your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ” (2 Thess 3:5).

THE RECORD IS IN HARMONY WITH THE KINGDOM MANNER

It is important to note that the inspired historical records are in harmony with the manner of the Kingdom. That is, since the death, resurrection, and exaltation of the Lord’s Christ, this is especially noted.

Prior to Christ

It is an error of significant magnitude to compare those in Christ with those who lived prior to Him, whether before the Old Covenant, during its administration, or even during our Lord's earth ministry prior to His death.

Prior to that, history delivered a stirring account that verified the fallen nature of men. Sin had not been removed, the devil had not been destroyed, and principalities and powers had not yet been plundered. Men were not born again did not have a new nature, and were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God. Their sins had not been blotted out, they had not been reconciled unto God, and they did not have eternal life. Thus the history of God's people reflected their sinful condition. The Spirit made no effort to hide this.

- “I have spread out My hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; A people that provoketh Me to anger continually to My face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick” (Isa 65:2-3).

- “But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in the counsels and in the imagination of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward” (Jer 7:24).

- “And the LORD hath sent unto you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear” (Jer 25:4).

- “Nevertheless they were disobedient, and rebelled against Thee, and cast Thy law behind their backs, and slew Thy prophets which testified against them to turn them to Thee, and they wrought great provocations” (Neh 9:26).

- “We have sinned, and have committed iniquity, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even by departing from Thy precepts and from Thy judgments: Neither have we hearkened unto Thy servants the prophets, which spake in Thy name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land” (Dan 9:5-6).

Prior to Christ, there was no practical accord between the people and God because there was no acceptable basis for it. By Divine intent, the people of Israel proved to be a context within which the Messiah could be brought forth. However, very few of them experienced any personal accord with the Lord.

It is an error of significant magnitude to compare those in Christ with those who lived prior to Him, whether before the Old Covenant, during its administration, or even during our Lord's earth ministry prior to His death. While teachers and preachers are often fond of making such comparisons, they are not at all proper. For example, the obtuseness that often characterized the disciples before Jesus died, was not their manner after Pentecost, and is nowhere set forth as though it was. Even those who were spiritual giants during those times excelled when compared with their peers. It is said of those excelling spirits, “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect” (Heb 11:40).

In Christ Jesus

In Christ Jesus there is a very real change that takes place in men. They become a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17), are “born again” (1 Pet 1:23), and have their hearts purified “by faith” (Acts 15:9). They are made “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God” (Rom 6:11), and “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). They possess a “new man” that “after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). They are being progressively changed into the image of Christ “from glory unto glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). That such significant changes could take place without impacting human conduct is inconceivable.

To this point, and in clear confirmation of the reality of this significant change, Divine guidance

and direction have been consistently declared in the book of Acts. A brief recollection of this will be helpful.

- Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told His disciples to wait for “the promise of the Father” (1:4). On the night of His betrayal, Jesus had revealed the teaching/directing ministry of the Holy Spirit, which was “the promise of the Father” (14:16-17; 15:26; 16:13).

- When Peter spoke on the day of Pentecost, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (2:4,14).

- When Peter testified in Solomon’s porch, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:8).

- An angel from heaven directed the apostles on how to proceed (5:19).

- An angel directed Philip to go toward the south to the road leading from Jerusalem to Gaza (8:26).

- The Holy Spirit directed Philip to join himself to a specific chariot (8:26).

- When Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus, He directed him concerning what he should do (9:6).

- The Lord appeared to Ananias, directing him to go to Saul, and what to say to him (9:10-17).

- An angel of God directed Cornelius concerning what to do (10:3-6).

- By means of a vision, and the direction of the Holy Spirit, Peter was instructed concerning how to respond to men sent to him from Cornelius (10:11-20).

- After he was imprisoned, “the angel of the Lord” directed Peter concerning what he should do (12:7-11).

- The Holy Spirit directed the brethren in Antioch concerning the activities of Barnabas and Saul (13:2).

- When Paul confronted Elymas the sorcerer, he was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” and therefore knew what to say (13:9).

- Paul is directed through a vision to go into Macedonia, being called to “preach the Gospel unto them” (16:9).

- The Lord speaks to Paul in a vision, telling him to keep preaching in Corinth, for He had “much people” in that city (18:9-10).

Therefore, the promises concerning Divine guidance that were given through the prophets are actually realized in Christ Jesus.

AN INSURRECTION AGAINST PAUL

“ 18:12 And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.”

GALLIO

“ And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia . . .” Other versions read “proconsul,” NKJV “ruler,” BBE “Roman governor,” CJB and “governor.” NLT

GALLIO “was the elder brother of Seneca, and a man of ability, and of a most amiable temper and disposition. His brother Seneca said that he had not a fault, and that everybody loved him. He was called “Dulcis Gallio” by Statius. It is unfortunately not known exactly in what year Gallio became

either Consul or Proconsul of Achaia. Had it been known, it would have been invaluable for fixing the chronology of St. Paul's life. Lewin puts it (his proconsulate) in the year A.D. 53, and so does Renan; Howson, between A.D. 52 and A.D. 54. The circumstantial evidence from secular writers corroborating St. Luke's account is exceedingly curious. There is no account extant either of his consulate or of his proconsulate of Achaia." PULPIT COMMENTARY

This passage is the only place in Scripture where Gallio is mentioned (vs 12,14,17). That may appear unworthy of notice. However one cannot take lightly when specific names are found in Scripture. Consider how you would feel if YOU were mentioned one time in the Bible? Would you consider that to be something unworthy of notice?

Gallio was a "deputy," or Roman "Proconsul" in Achaia, the province in which Corinth was found. He was a political dignitary who had charge of that region when Rome ruled the world. He was to Achaia what Sergius Paulus was to Cyprus (Acts 13:7)

Proconsul (ajnqu>patov) was the proper title of the governor of a Roman province when appointed by the senate. Several such are mentioned in the Acts, viz. Sergius Paulus in Cyprus (8:7, 8, 12), Gallio in Achaia (18:12), and the chief officer of Achaia, whose court is indefinitely referred to in ch. 19:38, by the use of the plural."

McCLINTOK & STRONG'S

There is something of significance here that reveals a certain Divine manner. In Scripture, and with remarkable consistency, worldly dignitaries are mentioned only when they interface in some way with the people of God. Otherwise, they obtain no significance in the assessment of the world by God's people.

Following is a sample listing of non-Jewish kings that are mentioned in Scripture. I have limited these examples to kings, but underscore that the same observations made of them also apply to governors, deputies, and other under-rulers.

- A number of kings associated with activities related to ABRAHAM and LOT: Amraphel, Arioch, Chedorlaomer, Tidal, Bera, Birsha, Shinab, Shemeber (Gen 14:1-22).
- Abimelech , king of Gerar, associated with ABRAHAM . (Gen 20:2-18).
- Abimelech , king of the Philistines, associated with ISAAC (Gen 26:1; 26:8-11).
- The king of Egypt , associated with JOSEPH (Gen 40-41).
- The king of Egypt (Pharaoh), associated with the enslavement of ISRAEL and the birth of Moses (Ex 1:15-2:10).
- The king of Egypt (Pharaoh), associated with the deliverance of ISRAEL from Egypt (Ex 3-14).
- The king of Edom , associated with MOSES and ISRAEL (Num 20:1-22).
- Sihon , king of the Amorites, associated with the journey of ISRAEL to Canaan (Num 21:21-29).
- Og , king of Bashan, associated with the journey of ISRAEL to Canaan (Num 21:33-35).
- Balak , king of the Moabites, associated with the journey of ISRAEL to Canaan (Num 22:4-23:7).
- The king of Jericho , associated with ISRAEL 's possession of the promised land (Josh 2:2-3).

- The king of Ai, associated with ISRAEL 's possession of the promised land (Josh 8:1-29)
- Adonizedek , king of ancient Jerusalem, associated with ISRAEL 's possession of the promised land (Josh 10:1-1-23).
- The king of Makkedah , associated with ISRAEL 's possession of the promised land (Josh 10:28).
- Horam , king of Gezer, associated with ISRAEL 's possession of the promised land (Josh 10:33).
- Chushanrishathaim , king of Mesopotamia, associated with the chastening of ISRAEL (Judges 3:8-10).
- Eglon , king of Moab, associated with the chastening of ISRAEL (Judges 3:12-15).
- Jabin , king of Canaan, associated with the chastening of ISRAEL (Judges 4:2-24).
- The king of the children of Ammon , associated with conquests of ISRAEL in Canaan (Judges 11:12-29).
- Agag , king of the Amalakites, associated with conquests of ISRAEL in Canaan (1 Sam 15:15:8-32).
- Achish , king of Gath, associated with the life of DAVID (1 Sam 21:10).
- Hiram, king of Tyre, Associated with the reign of SOLOMON and the building of the Temple(1 Kgs 5:1,11).
- Rezon , king of Zobah, associated with God's chastening of SOLOMON (1 Kgs 11:23).
- Ethbaal , king of the Zidonians, associated with the history of ISRAEL , and the father of Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:31).

There are no purely secular, if I may use that term, accounts in Scripture. All of them are mentioned because they relate to God's workings with His people, or His government among men (as in the tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the judgment of sinful nations). Even when a record is given of famines and earthquakes, the accounts always relate to something pertaining to the working of the Lord and His people.

The king of Syria , associated with the prophet ELISHA (2 Kgs 6:11-26).

- Shalmaneser , king of Assyria, associated with the chastening of ISRAEL (2 Kgs 17:3-6).
- Nebuchadnezzar , king of Babylon, associated with the chastening of ISRAEL and the Babylonian captivity (Neh 7:6; Dan 2:37).
- Belshazzar , king of Babylon, king of Babylon, associated with the chastening of ISRAEL and the Babylonian captivity (Dan 5:30; 7:1).
- Darius , king of Persia, associated with the chastening of ISRAEL and the Babylonian captivity (Dan 6:1-28).
- Cyrus , king of Persia, associated with the rebuilding of the TEMPLE in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-8).
- Herod , king of Judaea, associated the birth of JOHN THE BAPTIST (Lk 1:5-20), and JESUS (Matt 2:1-9).
- Caesar Augustus , associated with the birth of JESUS (Matt 2:1).
- Another king Herod , associated with the arrest and death of JOHN THE BAPTIST

(Matt 14:9; Mk 6:14), and the death of JESUS (Lk 23:8-15).

- Yet another Herod , associated with the beheading of JAMES and the arrest of PETER (Acts 12:1-3).
- Claudius , Roman empower, associated with the expulsion of the JEWS from Rome (Acts 18:2).
- King Agrippa , associated with the life of PAUL (Acts 25:13).
- Another Caesar Augustus , associated with the life of PAUL (Acts 25:21-25).
- Aretas the king , associated with the life of PAUL (2 Cor 11:32).

I have taken the time to list several of these rulers (although it is only a relatively small representation of the total), in order to confirm the consistency of this manner. There are no purely secular, if I may use that term, accounts in Scripture. All of them are mentioned because they relate to God's workings with His people, or His government among men (as in the tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the judgment of sinful nations). Even when a record is given of famines (Gen 12:10; 41:30; Ruth 1:1; 2 Sam 21:1; 2 Kgs 8:1) and earthquakes (Amos 1:1; Zech 14:5), the accounts always relate to something pertaining to the working of the Lord and His people. In summary, they pertain to God's eternal purpose, and Divine relationships with people and events. Until this is seen with some degree of clarity, men tend to either neglect or corrupt the text of Scripture.

The Unity of God and His Purpose

Just as in this text, the Holy Spirit did not move holy men to write things merely pertaining to this world, whether they concerned people or events. Everything written in Scripture is within the context of God and His purpose. That is because God and His purpose cannot be separated.

What the Lord has purposed is said to have been "purposed in Himself" (Eph 1:9). Some versions distort the meaning of this text, reading, "purposed in Christ," NIV "set forth in Christ," NRSV "which He had put into His hands," BBE "decided to do through Christ," GWN "determined before hand in Christ," NJB "to plan this in Christ." IE While it is true that this purpose is actually carried out in Christ, that is not the declaration of this text (Eph 1:9). The point is that the purpose proceeded out from God Himself without any other consideration. There was no influence outside of Himself that induced Him to determine this purpose. It was an expression of Himself without regard to any other influences. Paul alludes to the same in his letter to Timothy. "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to HIS OWN purpose and grace , which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim 1:9). That purpose was carried out by Christ, and is realized by the recipients of salvation in Christ Jesus. However, the purpose itself is an expression of God Himself. It reflects His Person in all of its magnificent glory.

The Point

The point is that Scripture always reflects the great purpose of God. That purpose is not only the reason that undergirds everything God does, it is also what ties the fabric of Scripture together. If someone could uncover a legitimate flaw or error in Scripture, its entire fabric would be broken down like a wall with untempered mortar. Those who imagine they can select this or that statement of Scripture while discarding others have backed themselves into a corner from which they will not be able to escape. They have embraced a God who allows His word to be wrested, and thus His purpose to be hidden.

INSURRECTION AGAINST PAUL

“ . . . the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, 13 Saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.” Other versions read, “rose up against Paul,” NKJV “made a united attack against Paul,” NIV “made a concerted attack on Paul,” CJB and “with one consent rose against Paul.” DARBY

One of the burdens of the apostleship was the experience of being charged falsely and misrepresented. Paul referred to this experience, declaring that he was “approved” in his response to malignment. “But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in . . . in distresses . . . by . . . dishonor, by evil report . . . as deceivers . . . as unknown . . . As sorrowful . . .” (2 Cor 6:4-10).

Paul once said of the Jews, “For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us ; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved , to fill up their sins alway: for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost” (1 Thess 2:14-16). Notice what Paul says of these unbelieving Jews. This applies to everyone who stands in opposition to the Gospel and those who preach it.

- **THEY PLEASE NOT GOD.** These men would never have acknowledged that they were not pleasing to God – but that is a precise description of them. They work in contradiction of God, and are so regarded in heaven.

- **THEY ARE CONTRARY TO ALL MEN.** Wherever they are, they put men at a disadvantage, taking the truth from them, and misrepresenting the God of heaven.

- **THEY FORBID TO SPEAK THAT MEN MIGHT BE SAVED.** They think they are protecting their position. Actually, however, they are making it more difficult for men to be saved.

- **THEY ARE FILLING UP THEIR SINS.** Everyday they remain in their present condition, their sins are piling up until wrath will erupt upon them. They are like the Amalekites, whose cup of iniquity was not yet full. That is the only reason they were allowed to remain.

Reported in the Book of Acts

Think of how the Jews have been represented as opposing Paul.

- **IN DAMASCUS.** They took counsel to kill him in Damascus, at the threshold of his ministry. At that time he escaped from them by being let over the wall in a basket (9:23-24).

- **IN ANTIOCH.** In Antioch, when they saw the multitudes that came to hear Paul, they spoke against him, contradicting and blaspheming (13:45).

- **IN ANTIOCH.** In Antioch they raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, expelling them from their coasts (13:50).

- **IN ICONIUM.** In Iconium they stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil effected against the brethren (14:2).

- **IN ICONIUM.** In Iconium they sought to have Paul stoned, forcing them to flee to Lystra and Derbe (14:5-6).

- **IN LYSTRA.** Jews came from Antioch and Iconium to Lystra, and stoned Paul (14:19).

- **IN THESSALONICA.** In Thessalonica the Jews stirred up the baser people against Paul, forcing the brethren to send him to Berea (17:5-10).

• **IN BEREIA.** The Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred up the people against Paul, forcing him to depart to Athens (17:13-15).

• **IN CORINTH.** In Corinth the Jews opposed themselves and blasphemed Paul; (18:6,12-18).

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul reminds them that the Jews had him beat with forty stripes minus one on five different occasions (2 Cor 11:24).

There appears to be a prevailing opinion within the professed church that when one is engaged in the will of the Lord, that all will be well. However, we are here exposed to real spiritual life and what attends it. The records itself exposes the error of such thinking.

Paul's apostleship was not accompanied with grandeur, wealth, and worldly fame. He was called to pick up his cross as well as to preach the Gospel – and he did it well. When he said he was “crucified with Christ” (Gal 2:20), with the world being crucified to him and he to the world (Gal 6:14), he was speaking of the kind of opposition he endured while engaged in his calling. It was in the face of the experience of adversity that he said, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss . . . that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil 3:9-10). Again, when he was in the crucible of suffering he said, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14).

There appears to be a prevailing opinion within the professed church that when one is engaged in the will of the Lord, that all will be well. However, we are here exposed to real spiritual life and what attends it. The records itself exposes the error of such thinking.

GALLIO SPEAKS

“ 14 And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you: 15 But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters. 16 And he drave them from the judgment seat.”

Paul is in a court of Roman law, and will find it more congenial than the Jewish courts before whom he has stood. It is remarkable when the world has a better sense of propriety than those who claim identity with the living God – but such is often the case. That is not owing to any deficiency in Divine affiliation. Rather, it is the result of unbelief and hardness of heart among those who claim to be serving God. The absence of wisdom in the church is abnormal (1 Cor 6:4-5).

GALLIO INTERRUPTS THE PROCEEDINGS

“And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you . . .”

Paul Was About to Speak

Other versions read, “as Paul was about to speak,” NIV and “Paul was about to open his mouth and reply.” AMPLIFIED That is, Paul was about to reply to the charges brought against him.

Whether before the apostles or his critics, Paul was ready to stand in defense of what he was doing – not out of a sense of self-vindication, but because he was faithful to his calling. In Jerusalem, he reported what God had done through him and Barnabas (15:12). He elaborated on his message to the Athenian philosophers (18:19-31). He wrote to the Philippians of his “defense and confirmation of the Gospel” (Phil 1:7). He wrote to Timothy of a time when he gave an answer in a legal setting while no other person stood with him (2 Tim 4:16). He defended his posture as a teacher to the Corinthians

(1 Cor 9:1-5). Later, in Jerusalem, Paul would give a lengthy account of his calling, and a defense of his ministry among them (22:1-21). Now, Paul is prepared to speak in his own defense because he has lived in all good consciousness, and has maintained faithfulness to the One who put him into the ministry (1 Tim 1:12).

A Similar Account

Before Paul can mount a defense, Gallio interrupts the proceedings. Here is an experience that parallels that of king Jehosaphat centuries earlier. The Ammonites and Moabites gathered against Israel, and were ready to launch a devastating initiative. Their numbers were impressive, and it appeared hopeless from the human point of view. Upon hearing of the circumstance, Jehosaphat “set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout the land.”

After presenting a powerful intercessory prayer to the Lord, heaven responded. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jahaziel, a Levite of the sons of Asaph. Calling upon the people to give heed to his words he said, “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle.” Instead of fighting, they “appointed singers unto the Lord, and that should praise the beauty of holiness.” It is written that as they sang, “the Lord set ambushments against

Junius Annaeus Gallio (originally Lucius Annaeus Novatus), son of the rhetorician Seneca the Elder and the elder brother of Seneca the Younger, was born at Corduba (Cordova) about the beginning of the Christian era.

At Rome he was adopted by L. Junius Gallio, a rhetorician of some repute, from whom he took the name of Junius Gallio. His brother Seneca, who dedicated to him the treatises *De Ira* and *De Vita Beata*, speaks of the charm of his disposition, also alluded to by the poet Statius (*Silvae*, ii.7, 32). It is probable that he was banished to Corsica with his brother, and that both returned together to Rome when Agrippina selected Seneca to be tutor to Nero. Towards the close of the reign of Claudius, Gallio was proconsul of the newly constituted senatorial province of Achaia, but seems to have been compelled by ill-health to resign the post within a few years. During his tenure of office, according to the Bible, he dismissed the charge brought by the Jews against the apostle Paul (Acts 18 (<http://bibref.hebtools.com/?book=Acts&>)). His behaviour on this occasion ("but Gallio cared for none of these things", v. 17) shows the impartial attitude of the Roman officials towards Christianity in its early days. He survived his brother Seneca, but was subsequently put to death by order of Nero (in 65) or committed suicide.

Gallio's tenure can be fairly accurately dated to between 51-52 AD or 52-53 AD. The events of Acts 18 can therefore be dated to this period. This is significant because it is the most accurately known date in the life of Paul. – WIKIPEDIA

Gallio the elder brother of Seneca the philosopher, who was tutor and for some time minister of the emperor Nero. He was "deputy", i.e., proconsul, as in Revised Version, of Achaia, under the emperor Claudius, when Paul visited Corinth (Acts 18:12). The word used here by Luke in describing the rank of Gallio shows his accuracy. Achaia was a senatorial province under Claudius, and the governor of such a province was called a "proconsul." He is spoken of by his contemporaries as "sweet Gallio," and is described as a most popular and affectionate man. When the Jews brought Paul before his tribunal on the charge of persuading "men to worship God contrary to the law" (18:13), he refused to listen to them, and "drove them from the judgment seat" (18:16). Source: EASTON'S 1897 BIBLE DICTIONARY

the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir . . . and they were smitten” (2 Chron 20:1-22). God fought for them!

This is what took place in our text. Paul did not have to present a defense, even though he was ready to do so. Instead, the God of heaven intervened, turning the heart of Gallio, and causing the

dispersion of Paul's enemies.

Gallio Given to See the Situation

At once this ruler recognizes that there was no moral justification for having Paul brought before him. This was not a "matter of wrong or wicked lewdness." Other versions read, "wrongdoing or wicked crimes," NKJV "wrong or vicious crimes," NASB "misdemeanor or serious crime," NIV and "crime or serious villainy." NRSV Gallio was no doubt unaware of the Divine statement of the case concerning civil government: "For he [the civil ruler] is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom 13:4). Yet, it appears as though this appointment is written upon the conscience of humanity.

The official charge brought against Paul was, "This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law" (Acts 18:13). The law of the Romans was meant specifically, and the law of the Jews generally. As the Jews who charged Jesus falsely, they sought to establish that the law of the Romans was being contradicted (Lk 23:2).

Nothing could be further from the truth. Rather than that "pure religion" setting people against the civil government, it promotes due honor for it, only prohibiting what requires disobedience to God Himself. In distinction to participating in insurrection, the saints of God are enjoined, "Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor" (Rom 13:7), and "Honor the king" (1 Pet 2:17). Civil unrest must not be traced to professed believers! Ordinarily, they are to have a calming effect upon society, not one of agitation and turmoil.

There is a civil degeneracy in our time, for this charge would be taken up in the courts of our land, which have stooped beneath the dignity of those Roman courts of law. This circumstance is largely owing to the failure of the professing church to deliver sound doctrine and a godly perspective.

Sometimes Interruptions Are Allowed, and Other Times They Are Not

Not all proceedings against Paul and others were so interrupted. When brought before the Jewish council, Stephen was eventually martyred (Acts 6-7). In Philippi, Paul and Silas were publically beaten and incarcerated – then they were delivered (Acts 16:20-24). Jesus told His disciples of times when they would be delivered over to the councils instead of being delivered from them (Matt 10:17). Felix left Paul bound in prison for two years (Acts 24:27).

Those who labor for the Lord must learn to live by faith, and to adapt to the circumstances in which they find themselves. They may be required to be bound in prison like Joseph before they are exalted (Psa 105:17-19). Or, they may not be exalted at all, but suffer martyrdom like James (Acts 12:1-2). The saints of God must seek deliverance from simplistic views of the kingdom of God.

I WILL BE NO JUDGE OF SUCH MATTERS

"But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it; for I will be no judge of such matters." Other versions read, "arguments over doctrine and titles and your own law," NJB "points of disagreement about words and names and your own law." NET

Gallio refused to become embroiled in private Jewish controversies about religious matters. With him, the issue was not forced as it was with Pilate. Pilate also attempted to step away from Jewish controversies (John 18:31). However, because of the nature of Christ's appointed death, Pilate, and Herod as well, were necessarily involved in it (Acts 4:27; Psa 2:2). They could not back away from it.

HE DROVE THEM OUT

“ And he drave them from the judgment seat.” Other versions read, “And he drove them away from the judgment seat,” NASB “So he had them ejected from the court,” NIV and “he dismissed them from the tribunal,” NRSV

The tables were thus turned on the Jews, and they were forced to leave Gallio’s court. They had solicited the aid of the Romans, as they did with Jesus Himself, but this time it was of no avail. Since the Lord is the “King of kings,” He is the One who administered this whole affair. It was He who turned the king’s heart wherever he wanted (Prov 21:1).

The Earth Helping the Woman

Here is a classic example of the earth helping the people of God. In an apocalyptic gospel, John was given to see the devil’s assault upon the people of God. When a flood of delusion emitted from his mouth that was designed to carry away the saints, it is written, “And the earth helped the woman” (Rev 12:16). In that case, the flood fell upon others, while the saints were preserved. In our text, one of the “kings of the earth” helped the man of God, thereby ensuring the continuance of the Gospel.

Once again, it is important to see that the book of Acts chronicles the works of the Lord, not merely the works of men. What is declared in doctrine is lived out and perfected in the crucible of life. We must believe that it is no different in our time, which is also “the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2). As men live by faith and walk in the Spirit, what is contained in the doctrine will be worked out in them. This is confirmation of the truth of the doctrine and the faithfulness of God.

According to appearance, it may seem as though happenstance is the mother of all events – but it is not. The Lord is at work, fulfilling His own counsel, and bringing His purpose to fruition. This is His world, and He is administering His will within it. Blessed are those who see it. One of the roles of godly men is to point out the working of the Lord.

SOSTHENES IS BEATEN

“ 17 Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.”

ALL THE GREEKS

“Then all the Greeks . . . “ Other versions read, “and they all,” NASB “all of them,” NRSV “all the Grecians,” GENEVA “all the governor’s officers,” GWN “all the Gentiles,” MRD “the mob,” LIVING and “they [the Greeks].” AMPLIFIED

These were the Gentiles, and not Grecian Jews, as some allege. Gallio had already drove the Jews from the “judgment seat,” or chamber where trials were held. Therefore, this could not be the Jews who had leveled the charges against Paul, for they were no longer “before the judgment seat.”

There is something of significance to be seen in this text, and it confirms something affirmed by James. He wrote, “Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth !” And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell ” (James 3:6).

In this case, the Gentiles, who, so far as the record is concerned, had not been agitated about the Jews, are suddenly thrown into a rage. The fire of fleshly anger had been ignited by the bigotry of the Jews, and it spread throughout Gallio’s judgment seat.

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THEY BEAT SOSTHENES

“ . . . took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat . . . ”

Prior to this, Crispus was described as “the chief ruler of the synagogue” (18:8). It appears that after he had believed and been baptized, he was immediately replaced with Sosthenes. It is further assumed by notable Bible commentators that this is the Sosthenes that was with Paul when he wrote his first letter to the Corinthians: “Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother ” (1 Cor 1:1). If this is true, then he was the second synagogue ruler in Corinth that was converted through the ministry of Paul.

In a display of apparent anger over the disruption caused by the Jews, these Greeks hauled Sosthenes back before the judgment seat and had him beaten. It appears that these Greeks thought the disturbance caused by the Jews was far greater than the disruption they had falsely credited to Paul.

When those who claim identity with God cause social disruption, there is no way to estimate the spreading effect of their action. Throughout history, a goodly amount of social unrest has been traced to professing Christians. It may have been in the name of moral crusades, public demonstrations, or civil disobedience. All manner of explanation may be cited in justification of these disturbances – many of which may be in the name of the Lord. However, when social unrest is caused, the fruit of righteousness will not grow, for it is “sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18). I understand that there are serious disagreements on this matter. Yet, care must be taken to not adopt a stance in which it is imagined that social unrest is a valid means of drawing attention to godly causes. All of this will require wisdom from above.

GALLIO CARED FOR NONE OF THOSE THINGS

“And Gallio cared for none of those things.” Other versions read, “Gallio took no notice of these things,” NKJV “was not concerned about,” NASB “showed now concern whatever,” NIV “paid no attention,” NRSV “Gallio troubled himself about none of these things.” DARBY and “refused to take any notice at all.” NJB

The idea is that none of this captured the interest of Gallio. He, like Pilate, knew that the Jews had acted out of envy (Matt 27:18). Their cause was not a noble one, and he knew it. I gather that he was not indifferent to the beating of Sosthenes, but rather did not choose to become involved in it, and was probably displeased that it took place in his court.

There are injustices that are so blatant that even worldly leaders recognize them to be out of order. On one occasion, when Paul's “sister's son” heard of the Jews lying in wait for Paul, he “went and entered into the castle and told Paul.” Upon hearing it, “Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him” (Acts 23:17). Paul knew the conduct of the Jews was thoroughly unreasonable – even to Roman militia, Later, when legal proceedings were being brought against him, he would say, “I appeal unto Caesar.” Even in our time, as during the occasion of our text, it is a sad day when those who claim identity with the God of heaven conduct themselves in a manner that is glaringly improper in the eyes of the world. This is another example of the saying of our blessed Lord, “For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light” NKJV (Luke 16:8). The idea is that worldly people are often more disciplined and painstaking in their approach to temporal things than the children of God are in their appointed quest for eternal things. This is certainly not a commendable circumstance, and we should do everything possible to avoid it.

PAUL TARRIES A GOOD WHILE, THEN LEAVES

“ 18a And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila . . .”

On other occasions, he was forced to flee when opposition was raised against him. However, this time he had a word from the Lord concerning his safety, and a public demonstration of its truth. Therefore his faith was strong, holding to the word of the Lord.

This whole incident ends rather abruptly, and Paul continues in his labors for the Lord. God had intervened in the affairs of men, turning the heart of Gallio, and delivering Paul from danger. Just as Jesus had promised, no man put his hand on Paul to hurt him. The reason . . . He had “much people” in that city, and would not allow Paul to leave until they had been duly taught and cared for (18:10).

PAUL TARRIED A GOOD WHILE

“And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while . . .” Other versions read, “still remained a good while,” NKJV “having remained many days longer,” NASB “stayed on in Corinth for some time,” NIV and “staying there for a considerable time.” NRSV

Paul was apparently not frightened by the attempts of the Jews to stop his work. He had believed the word that Jesus delivered to him concerning not being harmed, and therefore continued for “many days” NASB in his Corinthian labors. A hireling would have been driven away by the circumstances Paul faced. On other occasions, he was forced to flee when opposition was raised against him. However, this time he had a word from the Lord concerning his safety, and a public demonstration of its truth. Therefore his faith was strong, holding to the word of the Lord.

It is in the crucible of conflict and opposition that the strength and commitment of Kingdom laborers is confirmed. Those who cannot bear the heat of trial will soon be eliminated from the service of the King – at least until such time as they recover themselves from the snare of the devil.

TOOK HIS LEAVE OF THE BRETHREN

“ . . . and then took his leave of the brethren . . .” Other versions read, “he left the brothers,” NIV “said farewell to the believers,” NRSV “went away from the brothers,” BBE and “told the brethren farewell.” AMPLIFIED

Paul spent his time primarily with the brethren – those were the people with whom he was constantly affiliated. Those who desired Paul’s company would find him among believers, just as those who sought Jesus would find Him with His disciples (Mk 3:7; 8:10,34; 10:16; John 6:3; 11:54). Paul had converted these Corinthian brethren, and remained with them until such time as they were established in the faith. The incident involving Gallio may very well have taken place during the initial time of his ministry in Corinth. If this is the case, the time he remained there rounded out the year and six months that he spent there (18:11).

Now that Paul prepares to leave that region, he does not bid farewell to those in the marketplace, or to the general populace of Corinth. He rather takes his leave from those among whom he has been ministering. He no doubt spent his last time with the believers as Jesus did with His disciples, as He prepared to die, and when He prepared to return to heaven. That is the manner of godly people.

PAUL SAILS FOR SYRIA

“ . . . and sailed thence into Syria . . .” Other versions read, “sailed for Syria,” NKJV and “set out to sea for Syria.” NASB

I am just speculating at this point, but I seriously wonder how much work for the Lord would be done in our time if it was as inconvenient as it was for Paul. Imagine traveling by boat from Corinth Greece to Syria, which was adjacent to Palestine. On the attending map, Corinth is in the upper left hand corner, and Caesarea, where Paul landed, is in the lower right section. That is well over a thousand miles by sea, in a boat driven by the wind, and subject to the perils of the sea. Yet, there is not the slightest hint of any inconvenience associated with this trip.

In my opinion, there is a certain spiritual liberty that is realized in digesting Scriptural accounts of travels associated with the work of the Lord. The manner in which they are reported provides a kind of snap-shot of the way in which the servants of God thought. It also accents the extent to which they were devoted to their calling. Those who ponder such texts will find they have a calming and sanctifying effect on both the heart and the mind.

One senses that the servant of God focuses on the objective established by the Head of the body, then takes whatever means are necessary to its fulfillment. All of this is done with a readiness of mind that allows the individual to adjust to any unforeseen circumstances related to that objective. I know that many professing believers have not yet arrived at a point where they can think in this manner. Yet, diligence must be given to such a pursuit.

HE TAKES AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

. . . “and with him Priscilla and Aquila . . .” Other versions read, “accompanied by Priscilla and Aquila.” NIV

This is the first time Priscilla is mentioned before Aquila. The same wording is also found in Romans 16:3. It is found again in Second Timothy, where the abbreviated form of her name is used: “Prisca and Aquila” (2 Tim 4:19). Among other things, this confirms that in Christ there “is neither male nor female” (Gal 3:28). In Christ the value and effectiveness of a person is neither determined nor impacted by their gender or social status. Individuals are neither included nor excluded upon that basis. That should be very apparent from the doctrine of Scripture, as well as the historical examples recorded there.

The subjection of the wife to the husband, or a woman to a man, is within the confines of marriage, not their relationship in Christ Jesus (Eph 5:23-33; 1 Pet 3:1-6). Those ordained and unique marriage associations are to be duly honored, for they have been given by God. The few texts that deal with women speaking and teaching (which are two: 1 Cor 14:34-35; 1 Tim 2:11-15), are both within the context of learning and their husbands. They have to do with the introduction of confusion in the assembly, and the usurpation of authority – not with edification or laboring together in the Gospel, as did several women of Scriptural note (Rom 16:1,2,6,7,12,15). It is not proper to attempt to shape the thrust of teaching with these texts.

PAUL HAD A VOW

“18b . . . having shorn his head in Cenchrea: for he had a vow.” Other versions read, “He had his hair cut off at Cenchrea, for he had taken a vow,” NKJV “In Cenchrea he had his hair cut, for he was keeping a vow,” NASB “Before he sailed, he had his hair cut off at Cenchrea because of a vow he had taken ,” NIV “At Cenchreae he had his hair cut, for he was under a vow,” NRSV “having shorn his head in Cenchreae; for he had a vow,” ASV “after having his hair cut short in Cenchrea, because he had taken a vow; with him were Priscilla and Aquila,” CJB “Aquila had his hair cut, since he had taken a vow,” GWN “There he shaved his head according to Jewish custom, marking the end of a vow ,” NLT “Paul had his head shaved according to Jewish custom, for he had taken a vow.” LIVING “As Paul was under a vow, he had his head shaved at Cenchrea,” MONTGOMERY and “At Cenchreae he [Paul] cut his hair, for he had made a vow.” AMPLIFIED

To anyone but a Jew, or someone familiar with God's tutelage of Israel, this text makes no sense. This is not a matter of doctrine, but one that deals with personal commitment and dedication.

At least one version, and several commentators, see this verse as saying Aquila had taken a vow. However, this is not the case, for the person under consideration is Paul, not Aquila. Priscilla and Aquila are incidental in the text, mentioned only because Paul took them with him. Another version represents Paul as leaving Aquila and Priscilla in Cenchrea, proceeding on without them (International English: "At Cenchrea, Paul cut off his hair. he had made a vow to God. Then he left Priscilla and Aquila"). Again, this is taking too much liberty with the text, which states later that Paul left them in Ephesus (v 19). All of this confirms that in the multiplicity of translations far too much liberty is assumed by those presuming to represent the Word of God. When a period of time is marked by men feeling at liberty to rework Scripture, it seems to me that it is evidence of the presence of our adversary the devil. He started his work among men with an attempt to twist God's word, and he is still working in that manner.

While the text itself may appear incidental and of relative unimportance, yet those who take such liberty are making known something about themselves that is not good. Such men are not trustworthy. As Jesus Himself affirmed, "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much" (Luke 16:10). Those who cannot be trusted to properly represent incidental texts are certainly not to be relied upon in the handling of pivotal ones.

The Taking of a Vow

To anyone but a Jew, or someone familiar with God's tutelage of Israel, this text makes no sense. This is not a matter of doctrine, but one that deals with personal commitment and dedication. Later, Paul will do something similar at the suggestion of James (21:24-26). There were times when Paul described such actions in these words: "unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law, that I might gain them that are under the Law" (1 Cor 9:20). This was an area where certain liberty had been granted.

It appears that this was a Nazarite vow, and that it had been made at some prior time. The Nazarite vow could be made for a brief time, or specific number of days (Num 6:5,13). It could also be for a lifetime – as with Samson (Judges 13:5), Samuel (1 Sam 1:11), and John the Baptist (Lk 1:15).

The Nazarite Vow

Under the Law, a Nazarite vow had to do with separating oneself to the Lord – i.e. devoting himself wholly to the Lord for a specified period of time (Num 6:8). During the duration of that period, three things were required.

- He was to abstain from wine and strong drink, and anything coming from a vine, from the seed kernels to the husks (Num 6:3-4).
- He could not cut his hair (Num 6:5).
- He must avoid all contact with the dead, even if members of his own family were to die during the period of the vow (Num 6:6-7).

Procedures Related to the Vow

The vow procedure was as follows.

- When the vow was fulfilled, the person was brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation (Num 6:13).
- An offering was made to the Lord of one male lamb, for a burnt offering, one ewe

lamb for a sin offering, and one ram for a peace offering (Num 6:14).

- A basket of unleavened bread, cakes of fine flour mingled with oil, and wafers of unleavened bread anointed with oil were also offered (Num 6:15).

- The sacrifices were offered by the priest (Num 6:16-17).

- The Nazarite shaved the hair of his separation at the door of the tabernacle, and “put it in the fire that was under the which is under the sacrifice of the peace offering” (Num 6:18).

- The priest took the boiled shoulder of the ram, one unleavened cake, and one unleavened wafer and put them upon the hands of the Nazarite after he had shaved his hair (Num 6:19).

- The priest would wave these offerings before the Lord. They then belonged to the priest, and the Nazarite could drink wine (Num 6:20).

- All of this was done in accordance with the vow the person had made to the Lord (Num 6:21).

Some Observations

Now, all of this accents the seriousness of determining to give oneself wholly to the Lord, refraining from enjoyable indulgences and contact with any form of death – even within the family of the one taking the vow. Under the Law, there were allowances for periods of special dedication, when the person was wholly absorbed with the Lord Himself. In the case of a lifetime vow, such as that of Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, the entirety of the person’s life was given to the Lord, with no provision for other pursuits.

First, within our modern church culture, there is little thought given to this kind of devotion – devotion that was found under an inferior covenant. Actually, this was a kind of mirror of “the newness of life” into which we are raised in baptism (Rom 6:3-4).

About This Text

Concerning this text, it does appear as though this was a Nazarite vow. The only omission would be the sacrifice of animals, which had been superceded by the perfect sacrifice of Christ. His was an offering for sin, and one that made peace as well. It was also a “burnt offering” because the wrath of God was upon Him as He was “made to be a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). Therefore, I cannot conceive of Paul offering the sacrifices stipulated under the law of the Nazarite. The remainder of the procedures, however, could be done with a good conscience, even though there was Divine compulsion to do so.

- It appears that this was the Nazarite vow.

- The vow was made prior to the cutting of the hair.

- In this text, the cutting of the hair probably signified the termination of the vow.

This being the case, it is assumed he would take that hair to Jerusalem, presenting it as the Law had prescribed.

- Perhaps the vow it had to do with his stay in Corinth, during which time he vowed to let nothing interfere with his stay. This would have followed Christ’s appearance to him, instructing him to remain in Corinth, not being afraid to speak (18:9).

In his letters to the Corinthians Paul did not mention Christ’s ascension, exaltation, intercession, or His mediation of the New Covenant. He only briefly alluded to His present reign .

It also had to do with confronting the Jews to whom he was going, to show them that he did not despise the Law, and that he had not embraced a religion that lacked commitment and devotion.

- The Law was, particularly in its ceremonial aspects “ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). and had not thoroughly been removed, God allowing time for a transition to the greater covenant. In view of this, and without reverting to the Law as a means to justification, Paul was at liberty to take a vow for noble purposes, including becoming a Jew to the Jews.

- We also ought to consider that Paul maintained a hard discipline over himself, BIBLE ILLUSTRATOR keeping under his body (1 Cor 9:27). “We can trust that man. We feel that a man so honest in a matter so comparatively trifling is likely to be severely true in matters of larger breadth. It is thus we must judge one another. Men cannot, perhaps, understand the articles of our theological belief, but they can understand our temper, our honesty over the counter. If they find us faithful in little things they must reason that we are faithful also in greater things.” J.D. STALKER, BIBLE ILLUSTRATOR

Of course, all of these are only rather crude thoughts, and are not intended to be an authoritative exegesis of the passage. I provide them to confirm that Paul maintained integrity in what he did, and is to be trusted to be faithful to the Lord who called Him. There are a number of thoughtless people who have stood in criticism of Paul for doing things like those mentioned in this text. In my judgment, they are wholly unwarranted and betray the absence of holy commitment as well as sound judgment.

A CONSIDERATION

It is also possible that this was related to his determination while among the Corinthians: “For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). This was a determination that he did not express to any other body of believers. In fact, among others He accented the resurrection, enthronement, intercession, and reign of the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 4:24-25; 6:9; 7:4; 8:11,34; 9:5; 10:9-10; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20-22; 4:8; Phil 2:9-11; Col 2:12,15; 3:1-2; 1 Thess 1:10).

In his letters to the Corinthians Paul did not mention Christ’s ascension, exaltation, intercession, or His mediation of the New Covenant. He only briefly alluded to His present reign (1 Cor 15:25-27). He suggested the mediation of Jesus when He wrote “ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor 6:11). There are several words pertaining to Jesus that are not mentioned in either First or Second Corinthians. They include the following: “Savior,” “Mediator,” “Shepherd,” “King,” “Advocate,” “Head,” “High Priest,” and “Redeemer.”

One of the great penalties of carnality is the necessity of withholding of key and beneficial information. Thus Paul said to the Corinthians, “I . . . could not speak unto you as unto spiritual.” And again, “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.”

I do not wish to press these omissions too far. My point is that there were great stabilizing doctrines that were delivered to other churches, yet were apparently not common to the Corinthians. These would include the following.

- Justification by faith, together with its implications (Rom 3:21-5:21; Gal 2:16-17; 3:11,24; 5:4).
- The warfare between the flesh and the spirit (Rom 7:15-25; Gal 5:15-25).
- The new man and the old man (Rom 6:6; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10).
- The uniting of Jew and Gentile in Christ (Eph 2:15-16).
- The eternal purpose of God (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; 3:11).

- What was involved in the Word becoming flesh (Rom 8:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:5-8).
- The High Priesthood of Christ (Heb 2:7; 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5-6,10; 6:20; 7:17-26; 8:1-4; 9:11; Heb 10:21-22).
- The plundering of Satan and his hosts (Col 2:15; 2 Tim 1:10; Heb 2:14). The only mentioning of the devil to the Corinthians dealt with the danger of being subverted, destroyed, or buffeted by him (1 Cor 5:5; 7:5; 1 Cor 2:11; 11:14; 12:7).

I understand this to be owing to the prevailing carnality for which they were noted (1 Cor 3:1-3). Among them, Paul had to speak carefully, lest they be drawn to what they conceived to be the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:3-5). He would not take support from them, while he did from others (2 Cor 11:8-9).

Knowing the predilection Paul had for making known the profound things that had been made known to him (2 Cor 12:1; Eph 3:2-12; Col 2:1-3), it appears to me that an extraordinary amount of discipline was required to confine himself to “Christ and Him crucified.”

One of the great penalties of carnality is the necessity of withholding of key and beneficial information. Thus Paul said to the Corinthians, “I . . . could not speak unto you as unto spiritual” (1 Cor 3:1). And again, “I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able” (1 Cor 3:2). Similarly, to the Hebrews it was written, “Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing” (Heb 5:10-11).

I am saying that it makes perfect sense that Paul’s determination to not know anything among the Corinthians except “Christ and Him crucified” could very well have been attended by a godly vow. The Corinthians were people in whom the death of Christ was not at work, and Paul chided them for it. “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus , that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh. So then death worketh in us , but life in you” (2 Cor 4:10-12). Their continued infantile state loudly testified to the lack of the dying of Jesus in them. That is why Paul had to major on the death of Christ. The death of Christ within us involves the subordination of the flesh – and that had not been taking place among the Corinthians.

Although this is only my own persuasion, I must also confess that this kind of commitment and dedication to the welfare of those being taught is virtually unknown in our time. The implications of Christ’s death are also generally little known today. That circumstance is why men appear to have such difficulty with this passage. It also accounts for the extraordinary level of sin in the church. However, let no an impugn Paul.

PAUL LEAVES AQUILA AND PRISCILLA, BUT HIMSELF ENTERS INTO THE SYNAGOGUE

“ 19 And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.”

En route to Syria, and ultimately Caesarea, the ship apparently docked in Ephesus, directly east of Cenchrea. Later, Paul will resume his journey from there. The trip between Corinth and Ephesus is estimated to take 12-15 days. WHEDON’S COMMENTARY

PAUL LEAVES AQUILA AND PRISCILLA

“And he came to Ephesus, and left them there . . .” Other versions read, “They arrived at Ephesus, where Paul left Priscilla and Aquila,” NIV “When they reached Ephesus, Paul left Priscilla and Aquila behind there,” NET and “Arriving at the port of Ephesus, he left us aboard ship.” LIVING

The meaning here is not that Paul did, in fact, ultimately leave Aquila and Priscilla in Ephesus. At this point, it may have been in a temporary location within the city. We know from verses that follow, however, that they did remain in Ephesus, where they were able to further instruct Apollos (18:24-26). At this point, however, Paul had Kingdom business that required his attention. It is also possible that Paul had more than one meeting in the Ephesian synagogue while he waited to resume his trip to Caesarea. In that case, Aquila and Priscilla no doubt joined him during his reasoning sessions.

Ephesus was one of the primary cities in Asia. Two years prior to this occasion, Paul and company were “forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6). Now, however, the season was different, and the times and seasons are under the control of the Lord (Acts 1:7; 17:25; 1 Tim 6:15). The point is that Paul is able to recognize an open door, and therefore enters into it immediately. This suggests that Spirit formerly forbade them by simply closing all the doors of opportunity, so that they simply could not preach in Asia. There are many advantages to walking in the Spirit, and one of them is being able to sense appropriate times and seasons.

PAUL HIMSELF ENTERS INTO THE SYNAGOGUE

“ . . . but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.” Other versions read, “and had a discussion with the Jews,” NRSV “argued with the Jews,” RSV “held dialogue with the Jews,” CJB “disputed with the Jews,” GENEVA “discoursed with the Jews,” MRD “held discussions with the Jews,” NAB “addressed the Jews,” NET “to debate with the Jews,” NJB and “discoursed and argued with the Jews.” AMPLIFIED

In the book of Acts, this is the tenth time those in Christ are said to have reasoned, taught, and preached in the synagogues.

- STEPHEN IN A JERUSALEM SYNAGOGUE (6:9-13).
- SAUL IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF DAMASCUS (9:20-23).
- PAUL AND BARNABAS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF SALAMIS (13:5).
- PAUL AND BARNABAS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF ANTIOCH OF PISCIDIA (13:14-41).
- PAUL AND BARNABAS IN A SYNAGOGUE IN ICONIUM (14:1-5).
- PAUL AND SILAS ENTER A SYNAGOGUE IN THESSALONICA (17:1-4).
- PAUL AND SILAS ENTER A SYNAGOGUE IN BEREIA (17:10).
- PAUL DISPUTES IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF ATHENS (17:17a).
- PAUL REASONS IN THE SYNAGOGUE OF CORINTH (18:5-6).
- PAUL ENTERS THE SYNAGOGUE IN EPHEBUS AND REASONS WITH THE JEWS (18:19-21).

Behold how the conduct of the men of God matched the doctrine. The doctrine is that the Gospel of Christ “is the power of God unto salvation to the Jew first , and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16). It is true that Paul had “great heaviness and continual sorrow of heart” for the Jews – his kinsmen according to the flesh (Rom 9:2). He explains that this was not mere fleshly sentimentality, but was based upon their favored status before God. “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5),

Notwithstanding, over and above his personal feelings on the matter, the Gospel, by its very design,

applied “first” to the Jew. They are the ones to whom the promises were made, and Paul’s fellowship with Christ compelled him to minister with that in mind. Peter, who was the apostle to the Jews, or “the circumcision” (Gal 2:9), once said to the Jews, “ Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26). Once, when rejected by the Jews, Paul said to them, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you ” (Acts 13:46). Therefore, in strict comportment with the nature of the Gospel, as well as in harmony with his own purified heart, Paul continued to address the Jews first.

THE HOLY ART OF REASONING

It seems to me that there is not a contemporary emphasis on the reasonableness of the Gospel of Christ: that is, that the message itself is conducive to sound and extended reasoning. It promotes thought, and when received sanctifies the thinking process.

In a vain display of pseudo intellectualism, clerics often attempt to explain in simplistic terms what the Gospel declares. This kind of approach is also seen in many of the versions of Scripture that are flooding the religious market. The supposition is that clarity is obtained by means of intellectual simplicity. However, this is not so. It is rather through “reasoning” that clarity is promoted. Faith is the basis of understanding, for it is rooted in God Himself. Reasoning is the field in which faith plows.

The various components of reasoning are drawn from revelation – what God has said . These statements are encapsulated in Scripture. Sound reasoning perceives these statements in view of God’s eternal purpose, as made known in His eternal salvation, which is in Christ Jesus. For example, what God has said concerning the sinfulness of man, the reality of death, and the definition of right and wrong are considered. The Law of God, which defines sin and exposes men to aspects of the Divine nature, is also brought into consideration, together with His works and promises. When these things are seen properly, the salvation of God makes perfect sense, and a conviction of both its reality and accessibility is realized.

Since the Jews had been tutored in all of these things through the Scriptures, Paul could reason in the synagogues. We do have one extensive discourse in the record of his word in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia (13:16-47). That was an occasion that revealed who was ordained unto eternal life, and who judged themselves unworthy of that life (13:46-48).

Thus we see that sound reasoning uncovers flawed thinking and hard hearts, as well as hungry souls and tender hearts. These discoveries cannot be realized independently of preaching and teaching the Gospel

ANOTHER PRIORITY

Right here it might be well to mention another priority that has been revealed. Elsewhere Paul affirmed that he had been given to see things previously hidden from men. In summation, he referred to this as “the mystery of Christ” (Eph 3:4), “the unsearchable riches of Christ” and “the fellowship of the mystery” (Eph 3:8-9). This includes powerful insights into the following, all of which are expounded in Paul’s teaching. Here are a few of those marvelous insights.

- The imputation of righteousness (Rom 3:21; 4:8-24; 5:19; 2 Cor 5:21).
- Righteousness is realized through faith (Rom 3:22,25; 4:5-13; 10:6; Phil 3:9).
- The need for, and fact and nature of, Justification (Rom 3:24-5:9).
- What occurs in baptism (Rom 6).
- The purpose of the gifts given to the church (Eph 4:8-16).
- The delineation of “the old man” and “the new man” (Rom 6:6; 7:15-25; Eph 4:22-

24; Col 3:8-9).

- The objective of salvation (Rom 8:28-30; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 3:10,16-18; 4:12-16).
- The nature of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:7-11; Gal 3:11-18; Heb 8:1-10:29).
- The High Priesthood of Jesus (Heb 2:17; 3:1-10:21).
- The nature and objective of spiritual gifts (Rom 12:1-6; 1 Cor 12:1-31; Eph 4:8-16).
- The role of hope (Rom 8:20-25).
- That the church is “the body of Christ,” into which He pours His “fulness” (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 1:23; 4:12-16; 5:30; Col 1:18; 2:19).

These things, Paul affirmed, are “for all saints” (Eph 3:18-20). The people are to know these things, their eyes being opened to them (Eph 1:18-20). This is because they are the means through which they will be conformed to the image of God’s Son, which is His revealed objective (Rom 8:29-30). The saints are to know the things that have been “freely given” to them by God (1 Cor 2:12), otherwise they are thrust into jeopardy and Satan is given the advantage.

It is a serious transgression when those in Christ continue in a state of ignorance concerning the things that have been provided for them in Christ Jesus. Not only did Paul bring the news of the promised Messiah to the Jews, he faithfully delivered what had been revealed for the saints. Just as surely as he faithfully went into the synagogues, he also was diligent in strengthening the disciples, comforting them, and ensuring that they obtained the understanding intended for them (Acts 14:22-23,28; 15:41 16:5,40; 18:23).

When the flock of God is not fed, and due care is not given to the church of God, those charged with such responsibilities have sinned against Christ. Jesus is the One who mandated that His lambs and sheep be fed (John 21:15-17). Apostolic doctrine insists, “Feed the flock of God!” (1 Pet 5:2). There is no need for convenient explanations to be given, for none of them are acceptable. It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful (1 Cor 4:2).

THEY WANTED HIM TO STAY, BUT HE DID NOT

“ 20 When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not.”

I never weary of noting the consistency and fervency of Paul regarding the things of God. Some men might have relaxed during a voyage stopover – but not Paul. Whether in Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, or Ephesus, He goes about the work of the Lord, reasoning in the synagogue, as was his custom.

THEY DESIRED FOR HIM TO TARRY

“When they desired him to tarry longer time with them . . .” Other versions read, “asked him to stay a longer time,” NKJV “asked him to spend more time,” NIV “being requested by them,” BBE “asked him to stay a few days,” LIVING and “begged him to stay longer.” MONTGOMERY

Like the synagogue in Berea, among whom some noble souls were found (Acts 17:11), Paul was cordially received in Ephesus. The trouble that took place in Berea was stirred up by some Jews from Thessalonica. Fortunately, they did not follow Paul to Ephesus.

How refreshing it must have been to Paul to have those attending the Ephesus synagogue request him to “tarry longer time with them.” The hearts of these people had been kindled by reasoning: not by singing, but by reasoning; not by handouts or entertainment, but by reasoning! When was the last time you heard of a body of people, or a single individual, who fervently asked to hear more reasoning concerning the Scriptures? That is certainly something to ponder!

Once again we find those who received the word being desirous for extended exposure to the truth.

- **CAESAREA.** The household of Cornelius, in Caesarea (10:48).
- **CYPRUS.** Sergius Paulus from Cyprus, who desired to hear the word of God (13:7).
- **ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA.** The Gentiles in Antioch of Pisidia (13:42).
- **PHILIPPI.** Lydia, in Philippi (16:15).
- **PHILIPPI.** The jailer in Philippi (16:34).
- **ATHENS.** Certain men clave to Paul in Athens (17:34).
- **EPHESUS.** The Jews in Ephesus (18:20).

It is appropriate to once again call your attention to the places where Paul spent an extended period of time.

There are countless numbers of religious institutions that maintain large and costly campuses and staffs, yet concentrate minimal time on the saints of God. Some of these institutions spend more time in community service than in nurturing the people of God.

ANTIOCH. Early in his ministry he remained with Barnabas with the church in Antioch for “a whole year,” assembling with them and teaching “much people” (Acts 11:26).

- **ICONIUM.** After “a great multitude both of the Jews and Greeks believed,” Paul and Barnabas spent a “long time” in Iconium, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord (Acts 14:1,3).

- **ANTIOCH.** After fulfilling the mission to which the Spirit had called them, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch, remaining there a “long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:28).

- **ANTIOCH.** After settling the issue of circumcision that had arisen (Acts 15:1), Paul and Barnabas spent an unspecified period of time in Antioch “teaching and preaching the word of God” (Acts 15:35).

- **CORINTH.** He remained in Corinth for one and a half years (Acts 18:11).

- **EPHESUS.** After spending three months disputing in the synagogue of Ephesus, Paul “separated the disciples” and disputed daily in the school of Tyrannus. This continued for two years (Acts 19:10).

- **EPHESUS.** Paul told the Ephesians elders that he had spent “three years” among them, “warning every man night and day with tears” (Acts 20:31). This was a summation of which two years and three months are explained above (Acts 19:10).

- **CAESAREA.** Coming into Caesarea “Paul’s company” spent “many days” at the house of “Philip the evangelist,” who had four daughters that prophesied (Acts 21:10).

- **ROME.** When in Rome, Paul was under house arrest. He was given leave to have his own hired house, where he remained for “two whole years.” He received all who came to him, “Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:31).

Why Mention These Things?

It is necessary to mention these things because of the religious climate of our times. There has been a concerted effort to accent brevity and infrequency. There are countless numbers of religious institutions that maintain large and costly campuses and staffs, yet concentrate minimal time on the

saints of God. Some of these institutions spend more time in community service than in nurturing the people of God. Furthermore, there does not appear to be many requests for “more” – more of the Word; more time together reasoning on the truth; more time in the exposition of truth. Yet, few would be willing to affirm there is little hunger and thirst for righteousness, meager interest in truth, and little or no affection for the things “that are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1-2). Men insist on maintaining a form of godliness, with all of its institutional trappings, yet manifest no genuine interest in the truth of God. One can scarcely find a mega-church where everyone comes together into one place at one time more than one time a week to concentrate on the word of God. For years the American church has had the smallest audiences when the accent was on prayer and the Word. In fact, men have now learned to live with this circumstance – one that is foreign to the Scriptures..

The arresting thing about all of this is that such circumstances are not only absent in Scripture, they are antithetical to the thrust of Scripture, and are in sharp contrast with the recorded responses of those who actually did believe the Gospel.

In this text we have a group of Jews begging Paul to stay longer with them – not merely for that particular gathering, but for an extended period of time. Was their request driven by the fact that Paul was a Jew? Who would be so foolish as to affirm such nonsense? Because of interest in the truth, the Lord was drawing them to Himself. Like it or not, those who have no prevailing interest in the truth are not being drawn by the Lord. This is because such drawing is through the truth, and a corresponding love of it. That is the means through which people are drawn to Christ. Jesus referred to this means when He spoke of His death: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). The Jesus who was “lifted up from the earth” is the Lamb who was crucified by Divine intention, took away the sins of the world, and plundered the hosts of darkness. He is the One through whom salvation was wrought and is experienced. It is not possible to participate in that salvation without having a prevailing interest in it. That interest involves wanting to be around those who proclaim it with power and insight.

HE CONSENTED NOT

“ . . . he consented not.” Other versions read, “he declined,” NIV “he said, No,” BBE “he did not accede,” DARBY “he refused,” GWN “he could not be persuaded,” MRD “he felt that he had no time to lose,” LIVING and “he would not consent.” MONTGOMERY

As used here, the word “consent” means to assent to, or express approval. THAYER Paul, then, did not approve of the suggestion that he remain with those in Ephesus. It was not because he had no interest in them, as will be confirmed in what he will add. The text suggests that there were repeated efforts on the part of those Jews to get Paul to stay, but he could not be persuaded to do so. This was not his manner, so there had to be a prevailing reason that justified his refusal to remain there. After all, this is not the record of a weak and uncommitted man.

As I have already indicated, we know from the rest of the narrative that Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus. Thus those interested souls will not be left alone. The presence of these two companions, allowed him to continue with his intentions to go to Caesarea.

PAUL HAD TO, BY ALL MEANS, KEEP THE FEAST

“ 21a But bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem . . . ”

As is characteristic of true kingdom laborers, Paul does not leave the people to whom, he has been speaking in doubt concerning himself. He provides no opportunity for the adversary to tempt them with lying thoughts about Paul. He was, in fact, speaking in wisdom toward those who were, at the

time, “without,” tempering his speech with grace (Col 4:5-6).

PAUL BIDS THEM FAREWELL

“But bade them farewell . . .” Other versions read, “took leave of them,” NKJV “he left,” NIV “went from them,” BBE and “said good-bye.” CSB

We know from the words that follow that his leaving was occasioned by the departure of the ship on which he was sailing. There is every reason to believe that they accompanied him to the ship, and that these words were spoken while he was boarding the ship.

I MUST KEEP THE FEAST

“ . . . saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem . . . ” Other versions read, “this coming feast,” NKJV “the approaching feast at Jerusalem,” MRD “this feast that cometh [to] be in Jerusalem,” PNT and “be at Jerusalem for the holiday.” LIVING

None of these scholastic considerations make the text any more sure than it already is. However, I have taken the time to briefly deal with this matter because of the doubt I have concerning the intellectually honesty of those who would place a question mark upon the English text of scripture.

This phrase is omitted in the following versions: ASV, NASB, NIV, RSV, NRSV, BBE, CJB, CSB, DOUAY, ERV, GWN, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NIB, NJB, IE, WEYMOUTH, ISV, WILLIAMS, MONTGOMERY, AMPLIFIED, and PHILLIPS. It is included in the following versions: NKJV, DARBY, GENEVA, MRD, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, YLT, WYCLIFFE, CLOVERDALE.

Although those who omit the text justify their action by saying it is not included in some of the manuscripts – yet no one is prepared to say it has no justification for being in the text. Adam Clarke says, “The whole of this clause, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem, is wanting in ABE, six others; with the Coptic, Aethiopic, Armenian, and Vulgate.” Yet, he comments on its validity, as do other imminent commentators (John Calvin, Albert Barnes, Whedon, Matthew Henry, John Gill, Pulpit Commentary, John Wesley, J.W. McGarvey, and Jamieson, Fausset and Brown. Daniel Whedon says of the text, “This entire clause is found wanting in a number of the best manuscripts; but it is sufficiently sustained to be retained in the text.” COMMENTARY ON ACTS

None of these scholastic considerations make the text any more sure than it already is. However, I have taken the time to briefly deal with this matter because of the doubt I have concerning the intellectually honesty of those who would place a question mark upon the English text of scripture. They often speak as though they are representing the community of Christian scholars, which they are not. Further, in the absence of any genuinely original manuscript, I do not know what rule of logic would compel a person to arbitrarily select copied manuscripts and assign the words “best and more accurate” to them. Such men have really added nothing to the household of faith, but have only cast the poison of carnal thought into the pot of reasoning.

What We Do Know

We do know that Paul did, in fact, go to Jerusalem, landing in Caesarea, which was adjacent to Jerusalem, and then going “up,” and saluting “the church,” which doubtless refers to Jerusalem (18:22).

We are not told of which feast he was attending, although it is assumed to be the Passover. Later, he will attend the feast of Pentecost (20:16). We know from his writings that Paul did not keep the feasts as a matter of Law (Col 2:16). However, the apostles and other brethren would be there, and

Paul could give account of his labors among the Gentiles. Because of false reports that had been circulating about him, it appears to me that he seized this opportunity to set the record straight. Later, Paul will express his strong desire to go to Jerusalem again even, knowing that opposition awaited him. “And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:22-24).

Paul was driven by high motivations that are only known to those who live by faith, walk in the Spirit, and are living wholly unto the Lord. Suffice it to say, there is no cause to imagine that Paul departed from the will of the Lord, or was not directed by Him, in determining to go to Jerusalem. The record of his faithfulness should lead us to assume he had noble motives.

PAUL SAYS HE WILL RETURN, IF THE LORD WILLS

“21b . . . but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus..” Other versions read, “God willing,” NKJV “if it is God’s will,” NIV “if God lets me,” BBE “if God wants me to,” GWN and “if God permitted.” LIVING

This is the language of a man whose heart was devoted to doing the will of the Lord. He did not live by a system of Law, imposed upon those who had no desire for it. When he said “if God will,” he spoke as one who would be able to recognize such Divine willingness. The Spirit had directed Paul and Barnabas to enter into a special work, and it was immediately recognized (Acts 13:2-3). The Spirit forbade them to preach in Asia, and they perceived it (Acts 16:7). He did not allow them to go into Bithynia, and they comprehended it (Acts 16:7). By means of a vision, Paul was directed to go into Macedonia, and Paul and those with him immediately perceived it (Acts 16:9-12). When Paul was in Corinth, the Lord appeared to him saying that He had much people in that city, and that he should not leave, but continue to speak – and Paul immediately responded in faith (Acts 18:10-11).

It is one thing to teach the people that they “ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that” (James 4:15). It is, however, possible to actually live in such a manner as does not require such exhortations. That is the kind of man Paul was.

It is not that Paul had access to some special kind of direction, even though his mission was a special mission. He was directed by a “like precious faith,” or “common faith” – for there really is only “one faith” (2 Pet 1:1; Tit 1:4; Eph 4:5). He had a special gift, but not a special Spirit, for there is only “one Spirit” (Eph 4:4). His “new man” was not unique to him, but bore the same characteristics as that which is given to everyone who is in Christ Jesus (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10).

Paul lived in the Spirit, and therefore walked in the Spirit – something that is common in all who are actually walking in the newness of life (Rom 6:4; Gal 5:25).

In keeping with the nature of the newness of life, which involves being “dead indeed unto sin, but alive to God through Christ Jesus” (Rom 6:11), Paul tells these inquiring Jews what he will surely do. He will come back to them, if the Lord wills. That presumes that he was also leaving them according to the Lord’s will. It was important that this be said, for in so doing the faithfulness of God, as well as the integrity and faithfulness of His people, would be duly demonstrated.

With these words ringing in their ears, the Ephesians Jews apparently saw Paul depart. From one point of view, it was no doubt disappointing. However, Paul left them thinking about the will of God, and the holy resolve of those who trust in Him. That is a wonderful impression to leave! It is God for the children of God to determine to have holy departures.

PAUL SALUTES THE CHURCH, THEN GOES DOWN TO ANTIOCH

“ 22 And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.”

HE LANDED AT CAESAREA

“And when he had landed at Caesarea . . .” Other versions read, “come to land at Caesarea,” BBE “arrived in the city of Caesarea,” GWN “proceeded by sea and came to Caesarea,” MRD and “The next stop was at the port of Caesarea.” NLT

The city of Caesarea was incidental, being a port city where Paul disembarked from the ship. There were actually two cities bearing this name. This city was in Judea, while Caesarea Philippi which was about 120 miles north of Jerusalem, where Peter made the confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matt 16:13-16). The seaport city where Paul disembarked is mentioned frequently in Scripture (Acts 8:40; 9:30; 10:1, 24; 11:11; 12:19; 18:22; 21:8,16; 23:23, 33; 25:1,4,6,13). Philip preached in this area. It was also the place where Cornelius lived. Herod was smitten by an angel in that city. However, notwithstanding the relative prominence of Caesarea, Paul did not remain there.

HE SALUTED THE CHURCH

“ . . . and gone up, and saluted the church . . .” Other versions read, “gone up and greeted the church,” NKJV “went up to Jerusalem and greeted the church,” NRSV “he went to see the church,” BBE “went up to Jerusalem and saluted the church,” DOUAY “went to Jerusalem, greeted the church,” GWN “greeted the church at Jerusalem,” NET “visited the church at Jerusalem,” NLT “went up to Jerusalem and inquired after the welfare of the Church,” WEYMOUTH “he went up and saluted the church [at Jerusalem],” AMPLIFIED and “paying his respects to the Church in Jerusalem.” PHILLIPS

The church in Jerusalem was the hub of apostolic activity. The city of Jerusalem is mentioned sixty times in the book of Acts, confirming its centrality in the Kingdom of God (1:4,8,12,19; 2:5,14; 4:6,16; 5:16,28; 6:7; 8:1,14,25,26, 27; 9:2,13,21,26,28; 10:39; 11:2,22,27; 12:25; 13:13,27,31; 15:2,4; 16:4; 18:21; 19:21; 20:16,22; 21:4; ,11,12,13,15,17,31; 22:5,17,18; 23:11; 24:11; 25:1,3,7,9;15,20, 24; 26:4,10,20; 28:17).

The Gospel initially spread from Jerusalem when the believers were scattered by persecution, and went everywhere preaching the Word (8:1-4). When Samaria turned to the Lord, apostles went from Jerusalem to ensure they received the Holy Spirit (8:14). Peter reported to the brethren in Jerusalem the epoch of the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius (11:2-18). Prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch to establish them more fully in the faith, and to inform them of the future need of support in Jerusalem (11:27-30). When an issue arose about circumcision that could not be satisfactorily resolved in Antioch, brethren were sent to the apostles in Jerusalem to obtain an answer, which was gladly received (15:2-4).

All of this confirms that Jerusalem was a very real center of spiritual activity. When it comes to people and places in Christ Jesus, there is no significance where there is no legitimate and beneficial activity.

Although Luke does not provide the details of this visit, it is generally understood that Paul would have given an account of his most recent travels, confirming the acceptance of the Gentiles, and the mighty working of the Lord, as he did at other times.

HE WENT DOWN TO ANTIOCH

“ . . . he went down to Antioch.”

Even though Antioch was north of Jerusalem, travels are said to go “down from Jerusalem” because of its high elevation (Mk 3:22; Lk 10:30; Acts 8:26; 25:7). Those traveling to Jerusalem, regardless of their beginning point, are said to “go up to Jerusalem” (John 11:55; Acts 11:2; ; 21:4; 25:9; Gal 1:17).

This is now the fourth time Paul has gone to Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26; 14:26; 15:22; 18:22). Each time he spend an extended period there.

- Acts 11:16: “A whole year.”
- Acts 14:26-28: “Abode long time.”
- Acts 15:22-35: “Continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord.”
- Acts 18:22-23: “Spent some time there.”

It is very apparent that Paul’s heart was especially knit to these brethren. Here is where he first spent an entire year with Barnabas, during which time the church flourished, and “the disciples were first called Christians” (11:26). It was in Antioch that the Spirit called Barnabas and Saul to a special work that extended over some period of time. Following that mission they returned to Antioch again, remaining “a long time.” It was at Antioch that the issue of circumcision was resolved, following consultation with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. And now, Paul returns again, no doubt reporting the things the Lord had done through him. This was a key congregation.

PAUL CONTINUES TO STRENGTHEN THE SAINTS

“ 23 And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples. ”

AFTER HE HAD SPENT SOME TIME

“And after he had spent some time there, he departed . . .” Other versions read, “having stayed there some time,” DARBY “when he had tarried there a while,” GENEVA “having made some stay,” YLT “stayed in Antioch for a while.” IE

Those who are fond of telling us where Jesus and His disciples preferred to spend their time will surely take note of this occasion. Once again, Paul spends “some time” with the brethren in Antioch, who obviously ranked high in his preferences. This was a strong fellowship, with teachers and prophets among them (13:1). They were also noted for their involvement in the work of the Lord. In them the saying was surely fulfilled, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa 133:1). There are countless congregations of Christians who know relatively little about working together for the glory of the Lord, or having several competent teachers among them. Antioch, however, is a notable example for us all.

HE STRENGTHENED THE DISCIPLES

“ . . . and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.”

During an earlier trip, Paul and Silas went “throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia,” preaching the Gospel (Acts 16:6). Now Paul returns to that region in a disciplined manner, going over the entire area “in order,” or “from place to place.” NIV These two trips must have yielded extensive results.

A number of Scriptural cities were in this region. “Thus at one time there is no doubt that this province contained Pisidia and Lycaonia, and therefore those towns of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, which are conspicuous in the narrative of Paul’s travels.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul speaks of “the churches in Galatia” (Gal 1:2). This is the only epistle that is addressed to a plurality of churches – others are addressed to “the church” (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; Phile 1:2). Some are addressed to “all that be in Rome, beloved of God” (Rom 1:7), and “the saints which are in . . .” (Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2).

Phrygia

This was also a significant area, with a considerable Jewish population. Scriptural cities that were within the limits of Phrygia include Laodicea, Hieropolis, Colossae, Sardis, and Philadelphia., McCLINTOK & STRONG’S

Paul’s Activity

And what was the activity in which Paul was engaged as he traveled through this extensive region? What was his priority at this time? It was “strengthening ALL the disciples.” Other versions read, “establishing,” ASV “confirming,” DOUAY “bringing strength,” NAB “encouraging,” NJB “encouraging them and helping them grow in the Lord,” LIVING “made all of the followers stronger,” IE “imparting new strength to all the disciples,” WILLIAMS “establishing the disciples and imparting new strength to them.” AMPLIFIED “putting new heart into all the disciples as he went,” PHILLIPS and “helped the followers there to become stronger in their faith.” CEV

As used here, the meaning of the word “strengthening” is, “establish besides, strengthen more, to render more firm, confirm,” THAYER “to cause someone to become stronger in the sense of more firm and unchanging in attitude or belief,” UBS “to make to lean on.” LIDDELL-SCOTT This speaks of being established in the faith – to be made spiritually solid, so the individual is no longer a child, “tossed too and fro by every wind of doctrine” (Eph 4:14). This is being enabled to stand like Job in the test of trial – to “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). This involves moral and spiritual strength.

There really is no purpose for a perpetually weak church in the world. Such a monstrosity contradicts the revealed purpose of God, and gives all kinds of advantage to the devil.

Therefore, Paul went throughout these two regions stabilizing the saints – rooting and grounding them in the faith. He clarified both the nature and intention of the Gospel, and made known the “unsearchable riches of Christ.” He made it more difficult for the devil to subvert the disciples, and ensured that they could overcome him, standing against his wiles. There really is no purpose for a perpetually weak church in the world. Such a monstrosity contradicts the revealed purpose of God, and gives all kinds of advantage to the devil. I do not deny that such a church can exist – but only for a relatively brief period of time. There does come a point at which such a congregation must be told, “For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat” (Heb 5:12). The doctrine affirms that people like this, unless they adjust their course, are headed toward a point from which they cannot be retrieved (Heb 6:1-8). The benefits of the truth will not continue with those who remain immature.

Spiritual strength is a key factor in newness of life. It is something that is to be increased, and is involved in growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). This has to do with spiritual aptitude, and being equal to the challenges of living by faith. Strength is even required for Christ to dwell in our hearts. As it is written, “That He would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:16-17). The ability to do all things that the Lord

requires of us requires this strength. Again it is written, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil 4:13).

Strength is also associated with an increase “in the knowledge of God.” As it is written, “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:10-11). Solemnly we are admonished, “Be strong” (1 Cor 16:13; Eph 6:10; 2 Tim 2:1).

Our father Abraham is described as not being weak (Rom 4:19). A conscience that is “weak” is described as subject to defilement (1 Cor 8:7). Those who are “weak” require special patience, because they easily stumble (Rom 14:1; 15:1; 1 Cor 8:9-12; 1 Thess 5:14). No person who is spiritually weak is commended, and all believers are admonished to be strong. Although all believers generally begin newness of life with some element of weakness, they are not to remain in that condition. Salvation is not calculated to leave the saved ones in a weakened state, and woe to that person who imagines this is the case.

Thus, Paul sets out to make the disciples more stable, so they will not be easily deceived. He will strengthen them by expounding the glorious provisions of grace, and clarifying the nature of spiritual life. He will make the Person and work of Jesus more clear – just as he does in all of his letters. If any churches subjected to Paul were weak and uninformed, it was not owing to any deficiency in his preaching and teaching. He labored to ensure that the people of God were mature in both their understanding and their expressions.

Revealed Objectives

The Lord has stated what He intends for His children – those who are in Christ Jesus. This is included in apostolic doctrine, and is intended to clarify what life in Christ is designed to accomplish. As we ought to expect, these objectives do not center in earthly life and its associated responsibilities. Owing to the fact that faith constitutes us strangers and pilgrims in the world, this makes perfect sense. Some examples of these objectives follow. This is only a representative sampling, but it is sufficient to clarify what God is really doing in Christ Jesus.

- Be “conformed” to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29-30).
- Be “perfect and entire, wanting [lacking] nothing” (James 1:4).
- Be “rooted and grounded in love” (Eph 3:17).
- “May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (Eph 3:18).
- That we might know the love of Christ and be “filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19).
- Come to “the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).
- “Be no more children” (Eph 4:14).
- Grow up into Christ “in all things” (Eph 4:15).
- Be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).
- Walk “worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10a).
- Be “fruitful in every good work” (Col 1:10b).
- Be “increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10c).

- Be “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:11).
- Stand “perfect and complete in all the will of God” (Col 4:12).

It appears to me that in the world at large, this kind of strength is sadly lacking among professing believers. Even in areas where disciples are standing against persecution, the great declarations of apostolic doctrine are generally, at the worst, unknown, and at the best, little known. The condition is much worse in America and Europe. Spiritual stability is glaringly absent. Both large and small congregations are often riddled with sin, and significant administrative staffs are maintained to deal with problems throughout the churches. The vast majority of a mega-church staff has little or nothing to do with strengthening the disciples. In fact, if there were not so many moral and spiritual problems in the churches, they would have little need for much of their staff.

If these assessments are true, the question must be asked why these conditions exist. If this is not the kind of church that Jesus purchased, then why does it continue to exist? Why is the kind of growth that is associated with Divine intent so lacking? The answer is straightforward: the disciples have not been “strengthened,” “confirmed,” or “established in the faith.” They have been subjected to teaching that leaves them in a weakened state, and makes no allowance for spiritual maturity. The churches are really the result of what they have been taught – whether good or evil.

Let’s look at it another way. Considering that those who remain in spiritual infancy have, in fact, been giving heed to what they are hearing, the condition is this: The Holy Spirit is not working through the words that are being spoken, and the Head, Jesus is not ministering nourishment to His body through the words that are being addressed to them . If this is not the case, then God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit are unfaithful, and such a circumstance is not even possible.

When corrupt fruit is found (and flawed spiritual lives are corrupt fruit), it is always because there is a corrupt tree (Matt 7:17-18; Mk 12:33; Lk 6:43). There is nothing about the Gospel, or the apostles doctrine, that produces inferior disciples. When “sound doctrine” (Tit 1:9; 2:1) is presented in “wholesome words” 1 Tim 6:3), those who give heed will grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Pet 3:18). Where such things are not being consistently declared, an intruder is in the pulpit.

Let it be clear, there is absolutely nothing about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the salvation of God, the Gospel, or the apostles’ doctrine that allows for perpetual novicehood and a lack of spiritual maturity. Those who grow accustomed to such conditions have demonstrated alienation from the life of God (Eph 4:18). The Head of the church has made no provisions for such teachers and leaders in His body, and neither should we! It is better to judge ourselves in this matter (1 Cor 11:31).

CONCLUSION

Another thing that should be duly noted is the consistency and spiritual stamina found in those who labored in the vineyard of the Lord. They were not quitters, and were not easily discouraged, even though they faced some very difficult opposition.

It is profitable to note the total absence, in any form, of the wisdom of men in the effective spread of the Gospel of Christ, the consequent conversions, and the establishing of the saints. There is no way to read these marvelous accounts and come up a strategy for evangelization, church planting, or maturing believers. It is glaringly apparent that the accounts are not written with that kind of mindset. Believers were directed by the Lord through various communications, prophetic utterances, and open doors that appeared to be obvious to those walking in the Spirit.

The doctrine of Scripture alerts us to the unacceptability of the wisdom of men, or the wisdom of this world. “God hath made foolish the wisdom of this world . . . the world by wisdom knew not

God . . . the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God . . . not with fleshly wisdom” (1 Cor 1:20-21; 2:5; 3:19; 2 Cor 1:12). Men may attempt to sanctify such wisdom by tacking on words like “Christian,” “church,” and the likes. However, those terms have no sanctifying quality – particularly regarding something that God has totally rejected.

It is of interest to note that the very first temptation was an attempt of Satan to promote inappropriate wisdom (Gen 3:6-7). Isaiah pronounced a “woe” upon those who were “wise in their own eyes” (Isa 5:21) – that is, their wisdom was self-induced, and did not come down from above. The fountain of nature has been polluted by sin, and cannot yield anything than can appropriate or promote the salvation of God. All of this is lived out in the book of Acts.

Another thing that should be duly noted is the consistency and spiritual stamina found in those who labored in the vineyard of the Lord. They were not quitters, and were not easily discouraged, even though they faced some very difficult opposition. We do read of John Mark, who left the work on one occasion, yet who ultimately recovered from that setback (Acts 15:38; 2 Tim 4:11). While conduct like that of young Mark is quite common in our time, it was the exception to the rule during those early days – days that were marked by a deep commitment that resulted from participation in the newness of life. That was before Satan began to make inroads into the church by means of false teaching.

The validity of spiritual life is confirmed in the lives of those who possess and walk in it.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #77

THE INTRODUCTION OF APOLLOS

“ 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25 This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. 26 And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly. 27 And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace: 28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. ” (Acts 18:24-28)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMATION

Even though Paul has left Ephesus, our attention is now drawn to certain events that took place there. We are being introduced to one of the individuals who excelled in the body of Christ – even though, for a season, his understanding was limited. Our introduction to this man will confirm the power of the truth, the alertness of those who are living by faith, and the willingness of those who have received the love of the truth. As with the previous accounts Luke provides, there is an absence of sectarianism, which would spring up later. Here, however, we are exposed to the purity that attends faith, together with the submissiveness of

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humble hearts, and the aggressiveness with which believers enter into the work of the Lord. This is nothing less than another exposure to “the newness of life.” It provides an excellent spiritual barometer by which contemporary works that claim to be from God can be effectively measured.

THE DIVINE NATURE REVEALED

It is important to see the truth in Scripture. It is possible to devote much attention to the Word of God, doing so for the wrong reasons, and therefore missing Divine intentions. Jesus spoke of this when He said to “the Jews” who were seeking “to kill Him,” “You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is these that bear witness of Me; and you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life” NASB (John 5:39-40). By this our Lord means that the Scriptures were not an end of themselves, but were an appointed means to a revealed objective.

First, they are set within the context of God’s “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9), which is received “by grace through faith” (Eph 2:8). This is not a salvation to be achieved, but rather can only be received by means of the grace of God, and through one’s own faith, which itself is “obtained” (2 Pet 1:1). It is precisely for this reason, that the Scriptures testify of Christ, who is the means through which the basis for salvation was wrought, and is also the appointed means through which it is personally experienced.

The Knowledge of God

The knowledge of God is integral to salvation itself. In fact, there is no salvation apart from that marvelous knowledge. In its grand summation, salvation is the obtaining of eternal life. As it is written, “1 John 2:25) – and eternal life is to “know . . . the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom” He “hast sent” (John 17:3). To be lost, or condemned, is to be in a state where men “know not God” (1 Thess 4:5; 2 Thess 1:8).

The Creation

From the very beginning of creation, God Almighty has been about the business of making Himself known. The creation itself is an initial exposure to God, for in it His “eternal power and Godhead” are seen. Until this is made known to man, he is unable to see it. Notwithstanding, it appears that heavenly hosts have seen it, and glorify God for it (Rev 4:10-11; 10:5-6). “Eternal power” has to do with what God does, and “Godhead,” or Deity, has to do with who He is.

The Giving of the Law

The giving of the Law was a time when God exposed humanity to more of Himself. In the Law,

we are told, there is a “form of knowledge and of the truth” (Rom 2:20). That is, by the means of the Law intelligent concepts of God, and the borders of revealed truth, were made known – particularly as they regard morality, or right and wrong. The Law further developed the rudimentary introduction of God found in nature, revealing some of its implications (i.g. Ex 20:10-11).

The Prophets, and God’s Dealings with Israel

Within the framework of the Law, which contained “the words of the covenant” God made with Israel (Ex 34:28), the understanding of God was developed even further. This was done through the Prophets, whose ministry was twofold. First, they revealed God’s response to the works of men, and to any legitimate effort to seek and please Him. Second, they foretold the time when God would reveal Himself more fully through the Messiah, who would induct “the day of salvation,” the time of man’s recovery from sin. They also declared the temporality of this present evil world, and the coming of an eternal order – a new heavens and a new earth (Isa 65:17).

God Revealed in Jesus Christ

God’s revelation of Himself reached its apex in the Lord Jesus Christ. In Him the “fulness of the Godhead” dwelt “bodily,” or corporately (Col 1:19; 2:9). That is, it was seen in Christ’s Person: His words and His works. God’s response to humble and contrite hearts was made known in Christ’s response to such souls. His reaction toward hypocrisy and lifeless religious form was seen in Jesus’ response to the scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, and lawyers. During the Lord Jesus’ ministry He manifested the compassion and mercy of God, how He searches and tries the hearts, and how all things are possible with Him. The fact that God is the “God of truth,” and sanctifies the people with the truth, was seen in the ministry of Christ Jesus. The fact that He chooses and sustains was also made known through Jesus, and that He receives all who receive His Son.

The Church Is the Fulness of Christ

The church is referred to as “the body of Christ” because it is the appointed receptacle into which all of Christ’s fulness is poured (John 1:16; Eph 1:23). Just as Jesus is the fullest expression of God, so the church is the most thorough manifestation of Christ. That is where God works “both to do and to will of His own good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). The church is where the Holy Spirit is placed, being sent into the hearts of all of its members (Gal 4:6).

The History of Believers Is the Record of the Outworking of the Life of Christ

Newness of life is given to the church, and that life is nothing less than “the life of Jesus” (2 Cor 4:10-11). The kind of people through whom God works is made known in those who embrace the Gospel. The kind of works the Lord does in acceptable people is also revealed through them. These manifestations are in perfect accord with what God declares of Himself, and He is doing in salvation.

Also, the manner in which references are made to the saints reveals Divine assessments of them. When certain things are said about the people of God, as in this very text, they are not merely the private opinion of the writer. Although the writer no doubt saw the people as being precisely what he declares them to be, he has come to that conclusion through inspiration – having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16) – not mere human reasoning. If it is proper to criticize such people, God will do so. If it is not proper, God will not do so. Men do well to duly note how God speaks about those who are in His favor. Even though it has become quite fashionable to do so, men are fools who choose to denigrate men whom God holds before us as examples. In so doing, they also violate the word of the Lord that says, “speak not evil one of another” (James 4:11).

Again, the inspired account of the lives of those who are in Christ Jesus is the record of the newness of life being lived out. It reveals how the Lord works in the hearts of men, and what happens when He does not work in them.

THE OBJECTIVE OF SALVATION

Because, as it is known today, Christianity has become a context for career development and the glory that attends human organizations, the purpose of salvation has been almost totally obscured. Because the proper knowledge of this matter assists in understanding the text before us, I thought it needful to say a few words about this matter.

First, the very fact that salvation “is of the Lord” is a primary consideration. That is, God out of His own Person conceived salvation as a means to the realization of an eternal purpose. The purpose was not merely to extricate men from sin and condemnation, for that is not far-reaching enough to bring proper glory to God. It is really what happens after salvation that gives it such great worth. That is, salvation is a means to an end, and not an end of itself.

First, from a human point of view, no one has ever entertained a precise and sound thought of God to whom God has not revealed Himself. Concerning the Person of God, the pronouncement is made over the entire human race, “There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God” (Rom 3:11). Sin impoverished mankind in its entirety. Because of that, the reality of God is so obscured that men did not engage in a fervent quest to know Him. From every point of human reasoning, this rendered the knowledge of God beyond reach, and man was declared to be in a state described as “having no hope” (Eph 2:2).

There was absolutely nothing that man could do about this situation. At least two thousand five hundred years were allotted to the race to come up with some cogent idea of God – an idea that would provoke a fervent quest for Him. That was the period from Adam to Moses. During that time, men did begin to call upon the name of the Lord in the days of Enosh, the son of Seth (Gen 4:26). Usher’s chronology reckons this to be about 245 years after the fall. The experience of Adam and Eve in the fall, together with the revelation given to them before they were expelled from the Garden was no doubt passed along to succeeding generations. However, sin had so dulled the capacities of men that it was over 200 years before they saw the need and advantage of calling upon the name of the Lord. Whether or not God revealed Himself to Enosh or others at that time is not known.

From Adam to the flood was as much as 1,655 years – 1,500 at the least – depending on which one of the various chronologies one chooses to accept. However, whatever the choice, we have a good idea of the general length of time involved. During that time there are two men mentioned who entertained some knowledge of God: Enoch and Noah. Both men “walked with God,” so their knowledge of Him was not theoretical (Gen 5:22-24; 6:9). Enoch walked with God for three hundred years (Gen 5:22), after which God “took him,” translating him to heaven without seeing death (Gen 5:22). His “walk” with God commenced over 670 years after the fall. We do not know the duration of Noah’s walk with God. He was six hundred years old when the flood waters assuaged (Gen 7:6). That would have made him about 480 years of age when he commenced building the ark. That was more than 500 years after Enoch was translated. Judging from the nature of Enoch’s prophecy (Jude 1:14-15), and the type of things revealed to Noah (Gen 6:13-21), the majority of what they both knew about God pertained to His intolerance of sin.

God first appeared to Abraham about 1860 years after Adam’s expulsion from the Garden, about 880 years after Enoch’s translation, and roughly 365 years after the flood. Until his time, there is no revelation of God speaking of a coming blessing or Savior for humanity. Even in the Garden, the revelation of the coming Seed was confined to Satan’s bruising of Him, and the promised Seed delivering a mortal bruise to Satan (Gen 3:15). During the time from Adam to Abraham – more than 1800 years – there is not a solitary record of any individual or group of individuals arriving at any accurate understanding of God independently of being exposed to God Himself, which postulates revelation. No person by reasoning or philosophy gained any understanding of God.

Intelligence Prior to the Flood

Prior to the flood, intelligence existed that is staggering. Here are a few of the social achievements that took place prior to the the flood, which is estimated to have taken place about 2518 B.C.

- **3500 B.C.** Menes unites kingdoms of Egypt, introduces irrigation.
- **2780 B.C.** Imhotep designs first step pyramid at Saqqara, Egypt. Recognized as the world's first architect, doctor, and scribe.
- **2700 B.C.** Cheops builds Great Pyramid at Giza, an architectural marvel that was encased in marble.
- **2697 B.C.** Huang-ti becomes legendary "Yellow Emperor" of China. Noted for the development of principles of medicine.
- **2640 B.C.** – Si Ling-chi introduces silk production in China.
- **2340 B.C.** – Sargon establishes Semitic and Sumerian civilizations, both of which were very advanced socially, mathematically, and technologically.

These civilizations were all destroyed in the flood. Archeological work has uncovered all manner of artifacts from those pre-flood periods. Yet, there is not a single piece of evidence that confirms any extensive and authentic knowledge of God.

Salvation Is About the Knowledge of God

I mention these things to accent the fact that salvation is really about the knowledge of God, or knowing God. It is not about social optimization or the improvement of life in this world. There is much evidence that suggests man's intellectual capacity, apart from Christ, has diminished, not increased. In our time, with few known exceptions, technological and scientific advance is built upon knowledge that was developed in primitive, but not inferior, times. These days, almost all academic knowledge is, in some sense, borrowed.

Because of the nature of salvation, it commences with a Divine initiative – revelation. With all of their intellectual aptitude, clearly demonstrated prior to to the flood, men could not come to an understanding of God, even though He was their Creator, and they were living in a domain that testified of His eternal power and Godhead (Rom 1:20).

God Most Fully Revealed in Christ

In summation, the fullest and most precise revelation of God is found in the Person of Jesus Christ, His Son. In Him dwells “the fulness the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). That is, there is no essential trait of Deity that cannot be found and perceived in Him. That is one of the primary reasons He was “made flesh” and dwelt among us (John 1:14), In Jesus Christ the knowledge of God was brought within range of human comprehension. That “fulness” is made known in the Gospel, which declares the work God, which is in perfect concert with His character.

When the Gospel, is believed, God Himself becomes more clear to the believer. In fact, eternal life, which is the consummate blessing, is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). In all of this, God is being glorified, as principalities and powers in heavenly places behold His wisdom in the working out of the salvation of men (Eph 3:10). Further, as the newness of life is lived out in the believers, God is glorified. This is owing to the revelation of the Divine nature in them, of which nature they are “made partakers” (2 Pet 1:4; Heb 3:14).

The Ultimate Revelation

The revelation of Divine glory, which is what is driving the entirety of salvation, will reach is

culmination at the end of time, when Jesus comes again. Nothing about Him will be hidden at that time (Matt 25:31; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Tim 6:15). He will come “in His own glory,” accompanied by the glory of the Father and the glory of all the holy angels (Lk 9:26). This will have a transforming effect upon those in whom the Son of God has been dwelling and the Spirit working. They will be “changed” at that time, divested of any vestige of the curse, and clothed upon with immortality (1 Cor 15:52; Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2). It is at that time that the purpose for salvation will be finalized, and all of the saints will be “conformed to image” of God’s Son, as He has predestinated (Rom 8:29-30). That will be the appointed glorification of believers in whom God Himself and Jesus will be glorified.

Whatever does not blend in with that glorification cannot possibly be associated with the salvation of God. Every valid message, exhortation, or work, must have something to do with that process. Whatever is tangential, leading in another direction and to another conclusion is not from God. The source of such things is the devil, who is “the god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4), and promotes its prominence. God is not the author of confusion (1 Cor 14:33), and thus does not obscure the truth to His people.

Why Say These Things

I am saying these things in order to maintain a proper perspective of this book. The historical records that are being reported reflect these priorities. They are why such remarkable success was realized in people. This is why they grew quickly in Christ Jesus, and labored with such unrelenting zeal. It is why the emphasis was placed upon the saints.

A JEW NAMED APOLLOS

“ 18:24 And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.”

Scripture is unique, differing from all other writing. Unlike a biography, it is not devoted exclusively to one individual. Unlike history, it does not provide all chronological details. It differs from analytical writings, which are a kind of critique of a person or period of time. Neither is it a defense or apology for a particular person or way of thought. Scripture provides us with Divine priorities, purposes, and assessments. Its objective is to acquaint us with Divine manners and provisions, and the reason for them. Its aim is not to make us better people, or the world a better place to live. It is not a kind of success manual that provides men with the secrets to worldly achievements. Humanity is not the focus of Scripture, nor is the natural environment in which they live.

Take this very text as a case in point. We have just read of Paul going throughout the regions of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the saints. Yet, not a single detail of that extensive activity is provided. Instead, the Spirit moves our attention back to Ephesus, from which Paul had departed, and focuses on a man of which there had not been a single word previously provided. He is not a man from Ephesus, but comes from another area to visit the city. Yet, for those whose hearts are enraptured with the truth, the change of subject is not at all abrasive or disruptive of sound thought. Everything that is said will blend perfectly with what has already been reported. This is because the record is really of the works of the Lord, and of the life that is realized in Christ Jesus. When our focus is right, texts like this will give us no difficulty. However, when it is not correct, there will be all kinds of abrasive and difficult things to see.

A CERTAIN JEW

“And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria . . .” Other versions read, “Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos,” NIV “an Alexandrian by birth,” NASB “a native of Alexandria,” NRSV “an Alexandrian by race,” DARBY and “An Alexandrian Jew named Apollos.” NJB

Apollos is a man of note in Scripture. Some in Corinth even named themselves after him, a practice that was unacceptable (1 Cor 1:12; 3:1). He is described as a “minister” through whom men believed (1 Cor 3:5). He is also depicted as a person who “watered” the kingdom-seed that Paul had planted (1 Cor 3:6). When speaking of certain spiritual realities, Paul joined himself with Apollos to make a particular point (1 Cor 4:6). Affectionately, Paul referred to him as “our brother Apollos,” whom he desired to come and assist the Corinthians (1 Cor 16:12). He also admonished Titus to assist Apollos on his journeys for the Lord (Tit 3:13).

Now we are introduced to this unique man for the first time, to whom Scripture refers no less than ten times. What gracious qualities he is described as possessing!

Here, a city is named, and a single individual from that city. Alexandria was “the chief maritime city and long the metropolis of lower Egypt.” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S It was so named after its founder, Alexander the Great. During the first century, Alexandria is reported to have had an adult population of 180,000. WIKIPEDIA The Britannica Encyclopedia says of it, “Once the greatest city of the ancient world and a centre of Hellenic scholarship and science, Alexandria was the capital of Egypt from its founding by Alexander the Great in 332 BC to AD 642, when it was subdued by the Arabs. It is now the second largest city, the centre of a major industrial region, and the chief seaport of Egypt. It lies on the Mediterranean Sea at the western edge of the Nile River delta, about 114 miles (183 km) northwest of Cairo.”

THE CITY OF ALEXANDRIA

It is situated on the Mediterranean, twelve miles west of the Canopic mouth of the Nile, in 31° 13' N. lat. and 25° 53' E. long. It owes its origin to the comprehensive policy of Alexander, who traced himself the ground-plan of the city (Plut. *Alex.* 26), perceiving that the usual channels of commerce might be advantageously altered; and that a city occupying this site could not fail to become the common emporium for the traffic of the Eastern and Western world, by means of the river Nile and the two adjacent seas, the Red Sea and the Mediterranean.

The city of Alexandria, although quite prominent in worldly history, is mentioned only three times in Scripture (Acts 18:24; 27:6; 28:11). The latter two references refer to “a ship of Alexandria” on which Paul sailed en route to Rome. Our text refers to a single man from Alexandria who, so far as the Word of God is concerned, was more prominent than the city itself. All of this confirms the relative unimportance of even the better things of this world.

In addition to being a cultural center of the world, Alexandria was noted for its library – “the most famous library of classical antiquity.” BRITANNICA Yet, when the city was written up by the Spirit, it was worthy of mention only because of a godly and gifted man that was born there. That is a sterling example of how heaven regards worldly fame and prominence. In Scripture, Apollos was not of note because he came from Alexandria, but Alexandria was mentioned because of Apollos’ association with it.

AN ELOQUENT MAN

“ . . . an eloquent man . . . ” Other versions read, “a learned man,” NIV “a man of learning,” BBE “an eloquent speaker,” CJB “who was trained to eloquence,” MRD “He was an educated man,” IE “a man of great learning,” WEYMOUTH “a cultured and eloquent man,” AMPLIFIED and “a gifted speaker.” PHILLIPS

As used in this text, the word “eloquent” has the following lexical meaning: “learned, a man of letters, skilled in literature and the arts; especially versed in history and antiquities . . . skilled in speech, eloquent,” THAYER “eloquent, skilled in speech . . . learned, educated, skilled in knowledge,” FRIBERG “pertaining to attractive and convincing speech - eloquent,” LOUW-NIDA

“skilled in words, eloquent.” LIDDELL-SCOTT The word speaks of a person with a significant scope of knowledge, who has the ability to effectively communicate that knowledge. Such people are exceedingly rare. As it is written, “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called” (1 Cor 1:26). “Not many” of these people are “called” of God because they have more to overcome. However, the few who are called sanctify their aptitude by their faith, and manage it for the glory of God instead of the promotion of self.

Moses was a man of this caliber also. As it is written, “And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds” (Acts 7:22). Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were also extraordinarily gifted people, to whom God gave “knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams” (Dan 1:17). When selecting certain young boys to be trained for Nebuchadnezzar’s court, they fell into the category of “Children in whom was no blemish, but well favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans” (Dan 1:4).

These unusual souls are singled out in Scripture, NOT because of their aptitude alone, but because they glorified God with their abilities. In fact, their faithfulness was honored by God giving them more wisdom and intellectual expertise than can be drawn from the well of nature.

It has always been troubling to me how a person who was supposedly devoted to the service of God could choose a primary field of knowledge other than the Word of God . . . It seems to me that deferring to any other body of knowledge as being worthy of the greatest attention severely limits even natural acumen.

The people of God are not to despise skillful minds and the proper acquisition of knowledge. God is not glorified by intellectual simplicity and undisciplined minds. This is involved in Solomon’s words, “How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorners delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge?” (Prov 1:22).

However, as the next clause confirms, there is a higher body of knowledge to which the mind can be devoted. It is in this domain of thought that Apollos excelled, and for which he is duly noted in Scripture.

MIGHTY IN THE SCRIPTURES

“ . . . and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus.” Other versions read, “with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures,” NIV “well versed in Scripture,” RSV “had great knowledge of the holy Writings,” BBE “knew how to use the Scriptures in a powerful way,” GWN “an authority on the scriptures,” NAB “with a sound knowledge of the scriptures,” NJB “knew the Scriptures well,” NLT “a wonderful Bible teacher and preacher,” LIVING “His knowledge of the Scriptures was very powerful,” IE “skillful in the use of the Scriptures,” WILLIAMS and “well versed and mighty in the Scriptures.” AMPLIFIED

The word “mighty” comes from a word with the following lexical meaning: “able, powerful, mighty, strong . . . excelling in knowledge of the Scriptures.” THAYER The idea is that he had a grasp of both the text and meaning of Scripture. He could handle the Scriptures like a warrior could handle the sword, or carpenter the tools of his trade. The Scriptural way of referring to such a grasp is, “rightly dividing the word of truth,” KJV or handling accurately the word of truth,” NASB or “correctly handles the word of truth,” NIV or “correctly analyzing and accurately dividing [rightly handling and skillfully teaching] the Word of Truth.” AMPLIFIED

A person who is “mighty in the Scriptures” recognizes their focus. Such a person can see the

integration of Scripture, and can bring it to bear upon matters of essential thought. It ought to be obvious that they have devoted themselves to the Word of God, meditate upon it, and, so far as they are able, bring all of their thinking into harmony with it. When they encounter a thought that is contrary to Scripture, they reject it because of that contradiction. They actually do “live by every word of God” (Luke 4:4), and delight to do so.

My Own Experience

Within the Christian community, there are proportionately very few people who fall into this category. When I was a young man, prior to being in my twenties, I noted the relatively few professing Christians who were even interested in being expert in the knowledge and handling of Scripture. A number of personal acquaintances of mine chose other fields of knowledge as their primary areas of intended expertise – even though they professed to be followers of Christ. While I do not sit in judgement of such choices, it has always been troubling to me how a person who was supposedly devoted to the service of God could choose a primary field of knowledge other than the Word of God. By way of contrast, and in my opinion, I do not believe it is possible to be “mighty in the Scriptures,” or possess a “thorough knowledge of the Scripture,” NIV if the Scriptures themselves are not held as the highest, and most to be desired, expression of thought. It seems to me that deferring to any other body of knowledge as being worthy of the greatest attention severely limits even natural acumen.

I also affirm that within the modern Christian environment a person can rise to religious prominence who is lacking in all of these qualities. Such a person does not represent Jesus, nor are they qualified to edify, instruct, or correct the people of God.

By way of contrast, I found the Word of God most satisfying to my spirit, and worthy of a dedicated quest. By God’s grace, I determined that I would seek to have a better grasp on the Word of God than upon any other body of knowledge. Further, it seems to me that the means to a proper understanding of Scripture cannot be a core of knowledge that is inferior to it : i.e. language, culture, history, etc.

I have heard some respected men say that an understanding of the Greek language was requisite to the proper understanding of Scripture. Others have affirmed that key requirement to be familiarity with the culture of times. I consider such views to be seriously deficient – and that is the most favorable way in which I can express this persuasion.

While it appeared to me that this was a required stance, I found that others did not share this view. In fact the circle of my close associates began to shrink, as others with whom I had been aligned chose other priorities. As for myself, I have chosen to culture the friendship of those who view the Word of God as the fundamental expression of thought, and therefore the most beneficial body of knowledge. One such soul is of more value than a hundred others who focus on inferior and worldly knowledge.

I say these things because I perceive Apollos, like Paul and the rest of the apostles, as having this kind of mindset. I do not see how it would be remotely possible to be described as being “mighty in the Scriptures” and have any other kind of perspective. I am aware that there is a way of thinking extant in the scholastic religious community that glories in having a well rounded knowledge that includes various worldly perspectives of life. However, I do not think it is possible to support this approach the word of God.

In my understanding there are several things requisite to the proper and growing understanding of Scripture.

- The experience of the new birth (John 3:3,5,7).
- The presence and dominance of faith (Heb 10:38; 11:6).

- Living by every word of God (Lk 4:4).
- A working knowledge of the text of Scripture (2 Tim 3:15-17).
- Being spiritually minded (Rom 8:6-7), with the word of Christ dwelling within richly (Col 3:16).
- A consistent and dominating quest to lay hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:2; Phil 3:7-14).

I affirm that no person is capable of being “well versed in the Scriptures” in whom these traits are not found. I also affirm that within the modern Christian environment a person can rise to religious prominence who is lacking in all of these qualities. Such a person does not represent Jesus, nor are they qualified to edify, instruct, or correct the people of God.

THIS MAN . . .

“ 25a This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit . . . ”

The manner in which Apollos is described is of special significance. It reflects Divine priorities, and what causes a man to draw the attention of God. God has frequently spoken of individuals that stood out in certain regions. Job stood out “in the land of Uz” (Job 1:1). Simeon stood out in Jerusalem (Lk 2:26). Anna stood out in the Temple (Lk 2:36-37). Bethsaida was said to be “the city of Andrew and Peter” (John 1:44).

INSTRUCTED IN THE WAY OF THE LORD

“This man was instructed in the way of the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “trained in the way of the Lord,” BBE “informed about the way of the Lord,” CJB “taught the way of the Lord,” IE “instructed by word of mouth in the way of the Lord,” WEYMOUTH and “knew much about the Lord’s Way.” CEV

As a matter of interest, here is how The Living Bible represents this verse. “While he was in Egypt, someone had told him about John the Baptist and what John had said about Jesus, but that is all he knew. He had never heard the rest of the story!” LIVING That is a sterling example of an interpretation of Scripture being foisted upon the people as though it was God’s word. In this case, a theological template was placed over the text, making it read differently.

The Way of the Lord

Note: the text does not say Apollos was NOT instructed in the way of the Lord, but that he WAS instructed in that way. As it is used here, the word “way” means “a way (I. e. manner) of thinking, feeling, deciding . . . the purposes and ordinances of God, his ways of dealing with men . . . the course of thought, feeling, action, prescribed and approved by God,” THAYER

The “way of the Lord” has to do with His nature: i.e. the way He speaks, the way He works, the way He judges, etc. You may recall that God showed Moses His “ways,” while Israel only saw His works: “He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto the children of Israel” (Psa 103:7).

Apollos was acquainted with Divine manners. That was no doubt one of the primary reasons for him being able to handle the Word of God so well. In our time, this is an area of special ignorance within the Christian community. It is staggering to consider the number of things that are not comprehended simply because God is not known, and consequently the people are ignorant of His “ways.” Erroneous views of the love of God, the grace of God, and the church of God are directly traceable to an unfamiliarity with His ways. The failure of religious men to grasp the significance of justification by faith, the criticality of living the sanctified life, and the need for comprehending the

scope of salvation is the evidence of an overwhelming lack of acquaintance with “the way of the Lord.”

When discerned, the truth of God has an impact upon the human spirit. It will hone natural abilities to their finest edge, augmenting them with holy aptitude that is not natural. Solemnly, all believers are admonished to be “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Rom 12:11).

Even under the Law of Moses, when the brightness of Divine glory was not seen, men were admonished to “walk in all His ways” (Deut 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16). That goes beyond rule-keeping. It speaks of living in a manner that does not contradict the nature of God, particularly as it was revealed in the Law. However, after leading Israel for forty years through the wilderness, the Lord said of them, “they have not known My ways” (Psa 95:10). Again, the apostolic representation of God’s assessment of ancient Israel was, “Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways ” (Heb 3:10). If, within the dim light of the Law, God was grieved with a people who did not know His “ways,” what must be His attitude toward those who are now ignorant of His ways, while living in the blazing glory of the “Sun of righteousness” (Mal 4:2).

When an individual is “instructed in the way of the Lord,” difficult texts of Scripture are seen with greater clarity. We will also see that when such a person is exposed to aspects of truth not seen before, they are easily and immediately received.

BEING FERVENT IN SPIRIT

“ . . . and being fervent in the spirit . . . ” Other versions read, “great fervor,” NIV “burning enthusiasm,” NRSV “burning in spirit,” BBE “great spiritual fervor,” CJB “spoke enthusiastically,” GWN “ardent spirit,” NAB “boldly and enthusiastically,” LIVING “full of burning zeal,” WEYMOUTH “full of zeal,” MONTGOMERY and “burning with spiritual zeal.” AMPLIFIED

This is a description of the manner in which Apollos spoke. In his own measure, the zeal of the Lord had eaten him up, as it did our blessed Lord Himself (Psa 69:9; John 2:17).

When discerned, the truth of God has an impact upon the human spirit. It will hone natural abilities to their finest edge, augmenting them with holy aptitude that is not natural. Solemnly, all believers are admonished to be “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Rom 12:11). Truth so affected David that he said, “My zeal hath consumed me” (Psa 119:139).

Thus we are introduced to Apollos. Here is what is said of him.

- He was a Jew.
- He was born in Alexandria, Egypt.
- He was a learned and eloquent man.
- He was mighty in the Scriptures.
- He was instructed in the way of the Lord.
- He was fervent in spirit.

This is the Spirit’s assessment of this man while his knowledge was deficient . In other words, he was faithful in what he had received, and articulated what he had clearly seen. This is how we are introduced to this unique individual – and it is heaven’s view of the man.

HE SPOKE DILIGENTLY, WITH LIMITED KNOWLEDGE

“ 25b . . . he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.”

Apollos had come to Ephesus, north of his homeland, and in Asia. When he arrives, he commences speaking “the things of the Lord.”

HE SPAKE AND TAUGHT DILIGENTLY

“ . . . he spake and taught diligently . . .” Other versions read, “spoke and taught accurately ,” NKJV “speaking and teaching accurately,” NASB “spoke with great fervor and taught about . . . accurately,” NIV “spoke with burning enthusiasm and taught accurately,” NRSV “spake and taught accurately ,” ASV “he gave himself up to teaching,” BBE “spoke and taught exactly,” DARBY “spake and taught,” ERV “spoke enthusiastically. He accurately taught ,” DOUAY “discoursed and taught fully ,” MRD “spoke and taught accurately the facts,” NIB “preached with great spiritual fervor and was accurate in all the details ,” NJB “taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy,” NLT “was speaking and teaching exactly ” YLT “So he was preaching boldly and enthusiastically in the synagogue’ LIVING “Apollos was always very enthusiastic when he talked to people,” IE “he was speaking and was accurately teaching ,” WILLIAMS “he spoke and taught diligently and accurately,” AMPLIFIED and “teaching the facts .” PHILLIPS

The word “diligently” is translated from a word that means, “exactly, accurately, diligently,” THAYER “characterized by exactness and thoroughness; (1) in information accurately; (2) in effort thoroughly, diligently, (3) in ethical behavior carefully,” FRIBERG “accurately; with care,” UBS “pertaining to strict conformity to a norm or standard, involving both detail and completeness – accurate, accurately, strict, strictly.” LOUW-NIDA

The very thought of speaking consistently, thoroughly and with exacting precision is refreshing. If anything should be so spoken, it is the truth of God – particularly as it regards the Lord Himself. Sloppy speaking, inaccuracies, and vagueness have no place in the declaration of the truth. Holy men of God, whether Moses, the prophets, John the Baptist, the apostles, or the Lord Jesus Himself, always spoke in this manner. If it is true that men “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), how can anyone justify speaking in any other way?

THE THINGS OF THE LORD

“ . . . the things of the Lord . . .” Other versions read, “the facts about Jesus,” BBE the things concerning Jesus,” NASB “about Jesus,” NIV “spoke enthusiastically. He accurately taught about Jesus,” DOUAY “respecting Jesus,” MRD “the facts about Jesus,” NIB “the details he taught about Jesus,” NJB “about Jesus with accuracy,” NLT “The Messiah is coming! Get ready to receive him!” LIVING “The things he taught about Jesus,” IE “teaching some details about Jesus,” WILLIAMS and “teaching the facts about Jesus faithfully.” PHILLIPS

Several versions read “teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus ,” NASB and “taught about Jesus accurately.” NIV Judging from the words that follow, it is assumed that the words “the things of the Lord” had particular regard to the Lord Jesus, and specifically what John had said about Him. As the forerunner of Jesus, and the one who particularly identified the Messiah, John said the following about Jesus Christ.

WHAT JOHN THE BAPTIST SAID ABOUT JESUS

- **HE WAS NOT APPARENT.** Jesus was among the people, but they did not recognize Him (John 1:26). While He was the Savior of the world, He was not recognizable to the flesh.
- **HE IS MIGHTIER.** He was mightier than John (Matt 3:11a; Mk 1:7; Lk 3:16). In both nature and effect, He was above the greatest of men.
- **HE IS TO BE PREFERRED.** He was preferred before John (John 1:27,30).

Among men, He was of a higher rank, NASB having priority **AMPLIFIED** over them.

- **HE IS THE LAMB OF GOD.** He was the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29,36). He Himself would be an effective sacrifice for sin.

- **HE WAS MADE KNOWN IN BAPTISM.** John did not know Him, but He came baptizing because it was during His baptism that Jesus would be made known (John 1:31,33). Being made known in his baptism, His Saviorhood was associated with repentance (not His own, but that of men).

- **HE WOULD BAPTIZE WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT.** He would baptize with the Holy Spirit and fire (Matt 3:11b; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16). The agent with which He would baptize was the Holy Spirit.

- **THE SPIRIT DESCENDED ON HIM AND REMAINED.** John saw the Spirit descending on Jesus in the form of a dove, and remaining on Him (John 1:32-33). He was a Savior in whom the Holy Spirit found permanent residence.

- **HE IS THE SON OF GOD.** John identified Him as “the Son of God” (John 1:34). So far as men were concerned, this was His primary identity.

- **HE IS THE APPOINTED THE JUDGE.** The purging fan was in His hand (Matt 3:12; Lk 3:17a). His would be an effective judgment, being carried out to its full extent. It would not be philosophical.

- **HE IS THE PURIFIER.** He would thoroughly purge His threshing floor (Matt 3:12b; Lk 3:17b). His ministry targeted the ultimate removal of all the wicked.

- **HE WILL GATHER HIS PEOPLE.** He would gather His wheat into His barn (Matt 3:12c; Lk 3:17c). While throughout history, the people of God have been scattered, under this Savior they would be ultimately gathered together.

- **HE WILL PUNISH THE WICKED.** He would burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire (Matt 3:12d; Lk 3:7d). While throughout history, the wicked generally appear to have escaped their just due, Jesus would carry out the Divine pronouncements against them.

- **HE WOULD INDUCT CORRECTION.** Every valley would be filled, every mountain and hill brought low, the crooked made straight, and the rough ways made plain (Lk 1:5). His would be an economy of thorough moral and spiritual recovery. Men would not be left in a vacillating and inconsistent state.

- **HE IS ASSOCIATED WITH PERCEPTION.** All flesh would see the salvation of God (Lk 1:6). Through the Messiah, the salvation of God would be illuminated, and thereby men enabled to participate in it.

It was necessary for the people to ready themselves for the Savior by repenting – changing their way of thinking, and their conduct as well. A change of conduct is referred to as bringing forth fruits “meet, worthy,” NKJV or “in keeping with repentance”

HE WILL REMOVE FRUITLESS PEOPLE. The ax would be laid to the root of the trees, and every tree that does not bring forth good fruit will be hewn down and cast into the fire (Lk 1:9). The economy over which He presides does not have a place for fruitless members, even though human institutions welcome such.

- **HE IS GOD-BLESSED.** When asked about the success of Jesus, John said, “A man can receive nothing except it be given Him from heaven” (John 3:27). The essential resources Jesus delivers to men by word and deed came from heaven. They are not of an earthly nature.

- **HE IS THE BRIDEGROOM.** As the Bridegroom, Jesus is the One who has the

bride (John 3:29). In the ultimate sense salvation involves the effectual joining of those who are saved with their Savior.

- **HE MUST INCREASE.** He must increase (John 3:30). Everything about Jesus Himself and what He ministers tends to increase to the glory of God.

- **HE CAME FROM HEAVEN.** He came from above (John 3:31). While He was “*in the likeness of sinful flesh*” (Rom 8:3), that was not His predominate trait. He bore more resemblance to, and compatibility with heaven.

- **HE SAID WHAT HE KNEW.** He spoke what He had seen and heard, yet no man received His testimony (John 3:32). Nothing that Jesus said was speculative or philosophical. Everything was absolute, and will never pass away.

- **THE ONE WHO RECEIVES JESUS’ TESTIMONY WOULD RECEIVE CONFIRMATION THAT GOD IS TRUE.** God is true (John 3:33). The knowledge of the truthfulness of God is confirmed in Jesus Christ.

- **HE SPOKE THE WORDS OF GOD.** Being sent by God, He spoke the words of God (John 3:34a). When Jesus spoke, it was no different in substance and significance than the voice that spoke from Sinai. His words cannot be rejected with impunity.

- **HE HAD THE SPIRIT WITHOUT MEASURE.** God gave the Spirit to Him without measure (John 3:34b). In Jesus, the Spirit has no limitations. There is no spiritual work He cannot do.

- **THE FATHER LOVES HIM.** The Father loves the Son (John 3:35a). When it comes to men, the greatest and most effectual love of God is toward His own Son.

- **THE FATHER HAS GIVEN EVERYTHING TO HIM.** The Father has given all things into His hands (John 3:35b). The government has been laid upon the shoulder of Christ, and He is the precise Point at which men will be measured.

- **THOSE WHO BELIEVE ON HIM HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.** He who believes on the Son has everlasting life (John 3:36a). The basis of the experience of eternal life is dependent upon trust in the Person of Jesus, not a system.

- **THOSE WHO DO NOT BELIEVE ON HIM WILL NOT SEE LIFE.** He who believes not on the Son shall not see life but the wrath of God abides on him (John 3:36b). No one will escape the consequences of not relying upon and trusting in Jesus Christ.

I have taken the time to itemize the twenty-seven things that John said about Jesus. This is to confirm that those who received his words had, in fact, been tutored in Divine manners – “the way of the Lord.” That “way” included the necessity of taking away the sins of the world, bringing about a new birth, the correction of wayward lives, and the judgment of all men. It ought to be noted that the average long-time American Christian is probably less informed on these matters than was Apollos – which circumstance is inexcusable.

KNOWING ONLY THE BAPTISM OF JOHN

“ . . . knowing only the baptism of John.” Other versions read, “being acquainted only with the baptism of John,” NASB “had knowledge only of John’s baptism,” BBE “knew nothings except the baptism of John,” MRD “he had experienced only the baptism of John.” NJB

The baptism of John was unique. So far as the Scriptures are concerned, there was nothing like this baptism prior to John.

The phrase “baptism of John” occurs six times in Scripture (Matt 21:25; Mk 11:30; Lk 7:29; 20:4; Acts 1:22; 18:25). It is also referred to as “the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins” (Mk

1:4; Lk 3:3), and “the baptism of repentance” (Acts 13:24; 19:4). This was the means through which John prepared the way of the Lord. It was necessary for the people to ready themselves for the Savior by repenting – changing their way of thinking, and their conduct as well. The change of conduct is referred to as bringing forth fruits “meet, worthy,” NKJV or “in keeping with repentance” NASB (Matt 3:8; Lk 3:8).

This is a requirement that is often overlooked by the casual reader – and it is in sharp contrast with many modern statements regarding coming to the Lord. Peter referred to the same requirement when he told those in Solomon’s porch, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). The word “convert” is derived from the Greek word **επιστρέφω**, which has the following lexical meaning: “to turn to . . . to turn oneself . . . turn morally, to reform,” THAYER “change one’s ways,” FRIBERG “To turn from an error, to correct,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “definitely turn to God in conduct as well as in mind.” ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES

The Proper Approach

“The baptism of John” required an outward reform that confirmed the confession of sin that accompanied that baptism. As it is written, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan, and were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins” (Matt 3:5-6). The word “confessing” refers to a statement concerning guilt that is supported by corresponding conduct. The word itself includes that idea: “to acknowledge . . . assent, agree fully . . . profess, promise.” STRONG’S

John’s baptism, which differed radically from empty ceremony, was not like the ineffectual “divers washings” that took place under the law (Heb 9:10). It also underscored the necessity of one’s outward conduct strictly comporting with their verbal acknowledgment of sin. This requirement was confirmed in John’s response to those inquiring concerning what they ought to do. “And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then? He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise. Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wage” (Luke 3:10-15).

Notice the emphasis on outward conduct strictly comporting with the claim of repentance. In coming to Christ, there must be a deliberate and resolute correction of deviate outward behavior. This must be matched by an inward resolve to please the Lord at all cost, else outward reform is of no value.

A word should be said here about the possibility of outward reform itself. Jesus, for example said the scribes and Pharisees made their outward lives clean, however were “full of extortion and excess” within (Matt 23:25-26). “Outwardly,” Jesus said, these men appeared “righteous,” even though within they were “full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt 23:27-28). Those who affirm that outward change cannot precede coming to Christ must account for the ministry of John the Baptist, who was sent to prepare the way for the Messiah. Of course, they will not be able to account for his ministry. In fact, if what they say is true, his entire ministry was pointless.

On this matter, it is interesting to observe how differently Jesus reasoned than many of our contemporaries. It is not unusual for men to ask others to ignore their wayward conduct, saying that their hearts are right. However, if Jesus’ rebuke of the religious leaders was correct, it is not possible for one’s outward life to be in glaring contradiction of the truth, and their heart still be pure.

For some, the requirement to correct aberrant behavior prior to coming to Christ may appear

impossible. However, this is not at all the case – for the scribes and Pharisees were impeccably righteous outwardly, as Jesus Himself affirmed. When Jesus declared, “except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20), He was not referring to the appearance of righteousness. He rather was referring to their lack of inner purity. The point is that willing involvement in outward transgression must be abandoned before we can truthfully be ready to come to Jesus.

Depicted in Christ’s Miracles

The involvements of coming to Christ are seen in several of His miracles. In the healing of a man with a withered hand, Jesus first told the man, “Stretch forth thine hand.” It was when he stretched that withered hand forth that it was healed (Matt 2:13). To a man who had been impotent for thirty eight years, Jesus said, “Rise, take up thy bed and walk.” As the man extended himself to obey the word of the Lord, he was healed (John 5:5-9).

The point is that as individuals make a conscientious effort to rid themselves of sinful expressions, the Lord comes along side them, giving them grace to come to Him. Coming to Christ presumes the abandonment of something else – like Bartimaeus “casting away his garment as he rose to go to Jesus (Mk 10:50).

The ministry of John prepared men for a Messiah who is wholly intolerant of sin. His baptism made that plain. This is the sense in which John “made straight in the desert a highway for our God” (Isa 40:3; John 1:23).

“Unto Repentance”

John himself said his baptism was “unto repentance” (Matt 3:11). Other versions read, “for repentance,” NASB/NIV/NRSV “to those whose hearts are changed,” BBE “unto penance,” DOUAY “to amendment of life,” GENEVA “for those who turn from their sins and turn to God,” and NLT “to reformation.” YLT

The Greek word translated “unto” is **εἰς** . As used here, it has the following lexical meaning: “of a place entered, or of entrance into a place, into.” THAYER “motion toward a place,” FRIBERG “denotes purpose and sometimes result,” UBS and “extension toward a special goal - 'to, toward, in the direction of. .’ LOUW-NIDA

Repentance is not an end of itself, but is “to salvation” (2 Cor 7:10). It is not the means through which regeneration, or the new birth, is accomplished. There is no moral power in repentance itself. It is a change that involves the will and determination of men, yet is effectual owing to Divine power, for God gives repentance (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25). Christ would not induct an economy of continual repentance. Repentance prepares people for Christ, working a certain sorrow for sin that causes it to become repugnant to the individual.

John’s baptism was more related to renunciation than appropriation – i.e. to put off surface sins, becoming more conscious of the defilement of sin in order to come to Christ. Although not limited to prohibitions, John responded to inquiries concerning conduct in this manner: “Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do? Exact no more than that which is appointed you. And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages” (Luke 3:13-14). This illustrates the significance of the phrase, “baptism unto repentance,” or “for repentance.” What it amounts to is this: those who were baptized by John had made a ongoing determination to correct their outward lives. This was confirmed by their outward manners. Their baptism also inducted them into a life in which they had pledged themselves to a continued life of moral purity.

The point is that there was quest for moral excellence, and a passion for the things of God that was previously unknown. This is how men were made ready for the coming of Christ.

Of itself, this was not sufficient to make them acceptable to God. However, it did prepare them to believe on the Christ whom John said would come after him (Acts 19:4).

The Time of John

The time in which John ministered was a kind of spiritual interim in which men were made ready for the Christ. That readiness consisted primarily of a hearty renunciation of sin. Jesus said of this interim, "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16).

It appears to me that this time was accompanied by grace that allowed for a successful transition to the era of the New Covenant. Because of the thrust of the Old Covenant it majored on abstaining from sin, not obtaining the promises. In order to prepare for Christ however, a certain hatred for, and disdain of, sin must be acquired. It was the preaching of the Kingdom of God that proved to be the catalyst for meeting this requirement. It did this by opening the door of hope.

The System of Law

This approach was also articulated under the Law, which was primarily a way of restraining evil. As it is written, "Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim 1:9-10). These are all the expressions of aberrant desires.

Frequently the prophets admonished the people to abort the manifestation of sin . " . . . put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil" (Isa 1:16). "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts . . ." (Isa 55:7). ". . . Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin" (Ezek 18:30). ". . . Turn ye now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings . . ." (Zech 1:4).

Under the powerful preaching of John, people began to meet this requirement, whereas prior to him, such a response was exceedingly rare. Speaking of this new kind of aggression Jesus said of the time of John, ". . . the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). And again, "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt 11:12). The point is that there was quest for moral excellence, and a passion for the things of God that was previously unknown. This is how men were made ready for the coming of Christ.

The Revealed Comparison of John's Baptism

There has been considerable speculation about John's baptism, and much of it reflects sound thought. Often, however, the comparison is made between John's baptism and baptism into Christ. However, there is no such direct comparison in Scripture. There is a correlation of baptism into Christ with the receiving of the Holy Spirit. That reference is included in the listing below.

Since the Scriptures do directly address the subject of comparing John's baptism with something, we do well to consider what they declare.

• **JOHN THE BAPTIST: compared his baptism with Jesus' person.** "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but He that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear . . . (Matt 3:11; Luke 3:16).

• **JOHN THE BAPTIST: compared his baptism with the baptism Jesus himself would perform.** “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance : but He that cometh after me . . . shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire” (Matt 3:11). “I indeed have baptized you with water: but He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost” (Mark 1:8). “John answered, saying unto them all, I indeed baptize you with water; but one mightier than I cometh, the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose: He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire” (Luke 3:16).

• **JOHN THE BAPTIST: compared his baptism with the hidden nature of Jesus.** “John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not . . . (John 1:26).

• **JOHN THE BAPTIST: compared his baptism with the superiority of Jesus.** “John answered them, saying, I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me , whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose” (John 1:26-27).

• **JOHN THE BAPTIST: affirmed the ultimate reason for him being a baptizer.** “And I knew Him not: but He that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on Him, the same is He which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost ” (John 1:33).

• **JESUS: compared who did the baptizing, and what they baptized with.** “For John truly baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence” (Acts 1:5).

• **JESUS: the baptism of John was from heaven.** “ The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven, or of men? And they reasoned with themselves, saying, If we shall say, From heaven; he will say unto us, Why did ye not then believe him? But if we shall say, Of men; we fear the people; for all hold John as a prophet. And they answered Jesus, and said, We cannot tell. And he said unto them, Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things” (Mat 21:25-27)

• **PETER: compared who did the baptizing, and what they baptized with.** “Then remembered I the word of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water ; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost ” (Acts 11:16).

• **PAUL: emphasized repentance and the need to believe on Christ Jesus.** “Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance , saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus ” (Acts 19:4).

Now, precisely which of those remarkable transactions were accomplished by men – either the person doing the baptizing, or the ones being baptized? Further, was it the required act of baptism that validated it, or was it what took place during that time – unseen by men? The answers to those questions ought to be obvious enough not to require extensive dialog.

As most of the above texts affirm, the matter that is distinguished between the two baptism's is twofold.

- The Person of Christ.
- The baptism that Jesus Himself performs.

This baptism does not refer to something men do – i.e. “Repent and be baptized” (Acts 2:38); “baptizing them” (Matt 28:19). This refers to what Jesus does. While it is intricately associated with what men do in being baptized, it is not synonymous with it. The effectiveness of being baptized is not owing to what men do. There is a mighty work that is accomplished behind the scenes, taking place when we are baptized with water (Acts 10:47-48).

Ponder some of the precise expressions related to baptism.

- Baptized “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38).
- When we are baptized , our sins are “washed away” (Acts 22:16).
- “ Baptized into Jesus Christ” (Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27).
- Baptized into Christ’s death” (Rom 6:3).
- “Buried with” Jesus “by baptism ” (Rom 6:4; Col 2:12).
- In baptism , we are not only “buried with” Christ, but are also “risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God” (Col 2:12).
- Baptized by one Spirit “into one body” (1 Cor 12:13).
- Being baptized into Christ, we “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).
- Baptism saves us “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21).

Now, precisely which of those remarkable transactions were accomplished by men – either the person doing the baptizing, or the ones being baptized? Further, was it the required act of baptism that validated it, or was it what took place during that time – unseen by men? The answers to those questions ought to be obvious enough not to require extensive dialog.

The Baptism Done by Jesus

The baptism that Jesus Himself accomplished “with the Holy Spirit” is what relates the matter of baptism to the new birth (John 3:5) – regeneration (Tit 3:5), being identified with Christ Himself (Rom 6:3; Col 2:12; Gal 3:27),¹ the forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:36; 22:16), and the cleansing of the conscience (1 Pet 3:21). Some of the things that occur in baptism into Christ, whether known at the time or not, are as follows. There is some redundancy in this listing, but here I am addressing the doctrine of baptism rather than how the word is used.

- **INTO CHRIST.** Baptized into Jesus Christ (Rom 6:3a).
- **INTO JESUS’ DEATH.** Baptized into Jesus death (Rom 6:3b).
- **WITH CHRIST.** Buried with Christ by baptism into death (Rom 6:4a).
- **NEWNESS OF LIFE.** Commence a walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4a).
- **PLANTED TOGETHER.** Planted together in the likeness of Christ’s death, thus ensuring we would be raised up by God (Rom 6:4b).
- **THE OLD MAN CRUCIFIED.** Our “old man” was crucified with Christ (Rom 6:5a).
- **CEASE SERVING SIN.** The necessity of serving sin was terminated (6:5b).
- **FREE FROM SIN.** We were freed from the guilt and power of sin (Rom 6:6).
- **DEAD TO SIN.** We can now reckon, or reason upon the truth, that we are dead indeed unto sin (Rom 6:7a).
- **ALIVE UNTO GOD.** We can now reckon, or reason upon the truth, that we are alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6:7b).
- **NO OBLIGATION TO SIN.** We are under no moral or spiritual compulsion to sin, but can yield our capacities to God as those who are alive from the dead (Rom 6:12-13).
- **SIN HAS NO DOMINION.** Sin no longer has dominion over us, for we are now under grace, not law (Rom 6:14).

• **SERVANTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.** We were the servants of sin, but are now servants of righteousness (Rom 6:17-22).

• **BY THE SPIRIT.** We were baptized by the Spirit into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13).

• **CIRCUMCISED.** We were circumcised with the circumcision of Christ, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh (Col 2:11).

• **RAISED THROUGH FAITH.** We were raised from baptism through our faith in the operation of God (Col 2:12).

• **REGENERATED.** We were regenerated (Tit 3:5).

• **SAVED.** Saved by baptism, as confirmed in the purging of the conscience (1 Pet 3:21).

Doctrinally, the comparisons do not have to do with the baptism itself, but with THE ONE who performed it.

John the Baptist, Jesus, and Peter drew attention to the fact that John baptized with water, but Jesus would baptize “with the Holy Spirit.” NKJV (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; John 1:33; Acts 11:16). The truth of the matter is that water itself, though absolutely essential, cannot not accomplish the realities associated with baptism, any more than the water of Jordan could take away the leprosy of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:10-14). Carrying the parallel further, the blood of the Passover lamb contained no properties that would cause the angelic minister of death to pass over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt – yet, woe to that Israelite who neglected to meet that requirement (Ex 12:13-14).

If I read this text with a mind to justify the essentiality baptism for the appropriation of salvation, I will not see its meaning. That point is substantiated elsewhere, not in this particular text. Neither, indeed, will I accomplish anything by saying Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit applied only to the apostles. This was a message that John preached to the populace of the region, not to the twelve disciples alone.

Additionally, the apostles are actually a part of the church – members of the “one body” (1 Cor 12:18,28;. Eph 4:8-11). Their function is unique, but it is performed within the context of the church as a whole, When it comes to the matter of receiving the Holy Spirit, they differed only in regard to their function, and function is not determined by experience. It is rather a matter of Divine placement (1 Cor 12:18).

Even when it comes to the matter of faith, Peter, one of the premier apostles, described those constituted “strangers and pilgrims,” as “them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 1:1). Other versions read, “a faith of the same kind as ours,” NASB “a faith of equal standing with our,” RSV and “those who have received (obtained an equal privilege of) like precious faith with ourselves.” AMPLIFIED There are not multiple ways of being added to the body of Christ, or unique experiences among the various members through which we they become identified with Jesus Christ. Surely that is evident to all. If it is not, it certainly ought to be.

BELIEVERS ARE IN THE SPIRIT

The apostles’ doctrine, which is the inspired exposition of the Gospel, declares that those in Christ are “IN the Spirit.”

• **POSSESSING THE SPIRIT.** “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom 8:9).

• **RIGHTEOUSNESS, PEACE, AND JOY.** “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost ” (Rom 14:17).

• **THE BEGINNING OF NEW LIFE.** “Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit , are ye now made perfect by the flesh?” (Gal 3:3).

• **PROGRESSION.** “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit , and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16).

• **SPIRITUAL LIFE.** “If we live in the Spirit , let us also walk in the Spirit” (Gal 5:25).

• **EFFECTIVE PRAYER.** “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit , and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints” (Eph 6:18).

• **WORSHIP OF GOD.** “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit , and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3).

• **BROTHERLY LOVE.** “Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit ” (Col 1:8).

• **BUILDING OURSELVES UP.** “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost ” (Jude 1:20).

How Did We Get Into the Spirit?

How is it that we were put “in the Spirit,” so that we had access to the various strengths and ministries found in Him alone? When Jesus baptizes men “with the Holy Spirit,” He puts them into the Spirit like men put their bodies into the baptismal waters, A merging of the human spirit with the Holy Spirit takes place in Jesus’ baptism that is so precise it is written, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). Our bodies were removed from the water, being raised out of it. However, we were not removed from the Spirit with which Jesus baptized us. The Spirit is the author of the life into which we were raised to walk (Rom 6:4; 8:10). Men did not leave us in the water, for that baptism is the “ form of doctrine” (Rom 6:17), which includes being raised up with Christ. However, Jesus left us “in the Spirit,” because that is the solitary locale in which the newness of life can be lived, matured, and brought to its intended consummation.

WAS APOLLOS A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST?

I am aware that this is a controversial area. However, I am also aware that there is no need for it to be. I have already shown the extent of John’s affirmations concerning Jesus Christ. There is also the fact that there is no record of an extensive presentation of the person of Christ to Apollos as there was to the disciples in Ephesus, as recorded in the nineteenth chapter of Acts.

The fact that “he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus,” NASB strongly suggests that he was a follower of Jesus, as compared to being a disciple of John the Baptist at that time. However, he lacked an understanding concerning the baptism accomplished by Jesus “with the Holy Spirit.” There is no suggestion that he was ignorant of the Holy Spirit like the disciples Paul encountered in Ephesus (Acts 19:2).

“We cannot but think he had heard of Christ's death and resurrection, but he was not let into the mystery of them, had not had opportunity of conversing with any of the apostles since the pouring out of the Spirit; or he had himself been baptized *only with the baptism of John*, but was not baptized with the Holy Ghost, as the disciples were at the day of Pentecost.” MATTHEW HENRY

This should not be surprising to us. Many believers, including myself, were in Christ for some time before Christ’s role in putting us into the Holy Spirit obtained any clarity in our understanding. It is

quite conceivable that a person could hear and believe the Gospel, correlating it with the Jesus John announced, yet remaining ignorant of such things as Jesus baptizing with the Holy Spirit, the nature and effectiveness of the New Covenant, the conflict that rages within the believer, and a host of other matters. This by no means casts doubt upon the legitimacy of their conversion. It does provide a sterling example of the impact of flawed or incomplete teaching. Who is able to estimate the number of believers that, when they were baptized, had no idea of what Jesus did at that time?

There is no record of Apollos being re-baptized as were the disciples in Ephesus (Acts 19:5). Many believers have actually had the same experience as Apollos appears to have had. They were not aware of the baptism that Jesus Himself performs, putting disciples into the Holy Spirit, like their bodies are placed into the baptismal waters. Many believers were in Christ for some time before they heard any substantive teaching concerning the Holy Spirit, and some, to this very day, have never heard what John said to the multitudes concerning the Lord Jesus Christ: “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt 3:11; Lk 3:16), or “He shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit” (Mk 1:8). Further, our understanding of this affirmation is not to be formed by denominational dogma, and it must not be passed through such a filter. It is imperative that the Scriptures be seen as God’s word, not that of a religious sect.

I have spent some time on this text because of my own past experience of confusion on the matter, and realizing that experience was not unique to me.

HE BEGAN TO SPEAK BOLDLY IN THE SYNAGOGUE

“26a And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue . . .” Other versions read, “speak out boldly,” NASB “preaching in the synagogue without fear,” BBE “speak out fearlessly,” NET “teach fearlessly,” NJB “speak very boldly,” ISV “speaking courageously,” WILLIAMS and “speak freely (fearlessly and boldly).” AMPLIFIED

The words “speak boldly” are translated from a single Greek word (**parrhsia,zesqai**). The lexical meaning of this word is, “ to bear oneself boldly or confidently . . . to use freedom in speaking, be free-spoken; to speak freely . . . to grow confident, have boldness, show assurance, assume a bold bearing,” THAYER and “acting with an attitude of openness that comes from freedom and lack of fear.” FRIBERG

With a confidence that is birthed by spiritual understanding, Apollos began to speak out in the synagogue of Ephesus. The subject of his speaking was within the framework of his scope of knowledge. That is defined in our text.

- Being an “eloquent,” and learned man, he effectively presented something that was spiritually reasonable, strongly appealing to both heart and mind.
- Because he was “mighty in the Scriptures,” his words were founded on the written Word, reflecting both the thrust and application of Scripture.
- Because he was “instructed in the way of the Lord,” his presentation reflected Divine manners, and focused on the purpose of God, as well as His unchanging nature.
- Because “he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus,” NASB his focus was on the Lord Jesus Christ. This had particular regard to how He was presented by Moses and the Prophets, plus the additional expositions to which he may have been exposed.
- Knowing “only the baptism of John,” it appears that the thrust of his message must have dealt with repentance, and the necessity of coming to Jesus with conviction of heart and a determination to have done with the expression of sin.

There is no evidence that Apollos was unacquainted with the baptism first declared by Peter (Acts

2:38). Nor, indeed, is there any indication that he himself had not been baptized into Christ. As I have already pointed out, the baptism of John is nowhere compared with being baptized into Christ. It is rather compared with the baptism that Jesus Himself performs.

The baptism accomplished by Jesus is one that results in a change of character, as compared to a change of conduct alone. The doctrine of the change is expounded in the sixth chapter of Romans, with some additional perspectives being presented in Colossians 2:11-15. Baptism into Christ relates to becoming “dead indeed unto sin,” and “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11). It has to do with being put into the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:13), as well as into Christ Jesus Himself (Gal 3:27). It is at this point that the prophecy of Ezekiel is fulfilled concerning the people receiving a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26).

An understanding of the nature and effectiveness of the new birth transforms one’s concept of, what men call, reformation. When a person is born again, being baptized by Jesus with the Holy Spirit, they become “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14). They become a “new creation” in Christ Jesus (Eph 2:10), and receive “the new man, which after God is created in all righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). Those who are born again have a new base of knowledge, for the new man is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10). It is then that through the promises, and in increasing measures, they are “made partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

All of this has to do with what Jesus does, not merely what we do. When a person is baptized into Christ considerable takes place that is actually unknown to the one being baptized. This is why all of the teaching concerning baptism is delivered to those who have already been baptized (Rom 6:1-22; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-28; Col 3:11-12; 1 Pet 3:21). All of that teaching is an exposition of what Jesus has done in our conversion, not what we have done.

It is easy for me to understand Apollos’ deficiency in this matter, because I myself was abysmally ignorant of what took place in my baptism. This is because the thrust of the teaching to which I was exposed dealt with the necessity of being baptized, and the remission of sins that took place at that time. The role of Jesus was rarely, if ever, mentioned, even though baptism was into Him and into His death (Rom

Typical synagogue of the first century A.D. The men met in the inner room and the balcony was the place for the women. This probably represents the synagogue at Capernaum.

From Holman's Bible Dictionary. How to Build a Synagogue Service:

Ten adult males are required to be present for a public service to proceed. The service consists of five parts:

1-Reading the Shema (Deut 6:4-9)

2-Synagogue Prayers

3-Reading from the Torah (The Law of Moses)

4-Reading from the Prophets

5-Benediction.

[“The five-part service included prayers, psalm-singing, blessings, readings from the Scriptures, and commentaries on the sacred passages, but there were no sacrifices and no standard liturgy.”] © 1995-1996 The Bible Knowledge Accelerator

No sacrifices were carried out here; rather, reading the Scriptures replaced this as the central event of Jewish Worship. There was, therefore, no praise service.

Sometimes during the period between the Old and New Testaments, formal Jewish schools for children were started in the synagogues. By the time of Jesus, all Jewish male children had to go to school. They learned how to read and write by studying the Bible. It is possible that Jesus Himself went to such a school, where he learned the Torah and grew in every way.

The great historian J. Robert Teringo wrote: "The fixed order of service began, after the customary greeting, with a prayer while the people remained standing facing the sacred Torah scroll. The reading of the law of Moses was next. The Torah scroll was taken from the chest and placed before a reader who read in the ancient Hebrew tongue and immediately translated it into Aramaic the language of those days. A commentary was always added to this reading. Next, a portion was read from the books of the prophets and, again, immediately translated verse by verse. After a closing prayer, the service was concluded..." Synagogue Worship - Alfred Edersheim

6:3-4, and I was raised with Him (Rom 6:4-5), and then seated together with Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). The fact of the matter is that the teaching to which I was exposed was more closely associated with "the baptism of John" than with baptism into Christ. John's baptism was "for the remission of sins" (Mk 1:4). However, it was not accompanied with the precious "gift of the Holy Spirit," which is promised to those who repent and are baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38). As I have already said, the text strongly suggests that this was an area in which Apollos lacked understanding – but it will not be for long. This did not alter what Jesus accomplished in baptism, but only touches on the needed awareness of those realities by those being baptized.

In the Synagogue Again

This is the eleventh time the book of Acts has referred to preaching in the synagogues (6:9-13; 9:20-23; 13:5; 13:14-41; 14:1-5; 17:1-4,10,17; 18:5-6, 19-21,26). In addition to Apollos speaking in the synagogue, we will learn from this text that Aquila and Priscilla were meeting there as well. You may recall that when Saul of Tarsus launched a persecution against believers in Christ, he asked for letters to the "synagogues," where he would seek for such believers (Acts 9:2). Further, Paul regularly ministered in the synagogues, as he himself affirmed in Acts 24:12.

Without lingering for an inordinate amount of time on this matter, ponder how appropriate it would be viewed in the churches of our land to have a person speak who was eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, and spoke accurately about the things concerning Jesus Christ.

An understanding of this custom of early believers gives us some idea of why they met together, and what they did. The synagogue gathering centered in Scripture and its exposition (Acts 15:21). It is important to keep in our minds that Jewish customs were developed within the context of an acute awareness of God. Even though the hearts of the people were often far from God (Matt 15:8), yet the form itself was anchored to revelation. These were people who had been cultured by Almighty God through the Law and the various ceremonies instituted under the Old Covenant. Within that context, the Scriptures themselves were given a prominent role in their gatherings. This is because the Scriptures are the appointed means through which the knowledge of God is honed to its finest edge.

In the early days of the church, the apostles and elders relied on the fact that the Scriptures were always read in the synagogues. When, for example, these men were considering the subject of circumcision, James said, “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day ” (Acts 15:21). Further, we are told that the reading in the synagogue included “the law and the prophets” (Acts 13:15). In Antioch, Paul reminded the people that the Jews had “the voices of the prophets . . . read [to them] every sabbath day” (Acts 13:27).

A Potentially Productive Environment

Such an environment was conducive to the insightful proclamation of Christ, and the salvation that is in Him “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10). This is because the people were exposed to a panorama of revelation that included promises as well as moral obligations, and affirmations concerning the nature of God as well as the depravity of man. The basic word was God’s word, not the word or traditions of men. The subject of exposition and exhortation was Scripture, not mere moral duty or the vain enterprises of men. In that kind of environment, a man who is mighty in the Scriptures, knows the way of the Lord, and accurately teachings the things concerning Christ, can speak profitably.

The Modern Church Environment

I cannot help but note how strange such an environment is in our times. There are gatherings of professing Christians who are exposed to teaching designed to correct marriage, improve financial accountability, and recover from moral setbacks. Even at that, the teaching is brief and sparse. The basis of such teaching is not the mind of the Lord, but the perceived need of man. The glory of God is not the point, but the temporal needs and success of men. Oh, they do their best to tie their thoughts to Scripture, but it proves too challenging for them. As a result they do not handle the word of God correctly (2 Tim 2:15). It is difficult to emphasize things concerning which the Scriptures have proportionately little to say. But the religious merchants muster their resources and do so anyway, even if they have to force their subject into Scripture.

Without lingering for a inordinate amount of time on this matter, ponder how appropriate it would be viewed in the churches of our land to have a person speak who was eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, instructed in the way of the Lord, and spoke accurately about the things concerning Jesus Christ. How would such a person fit into the average church-agenda of our day? How would the fabled pulpit committee go about determining whether or not a prospective preacher met these qualifications – or would they even consider them to be relevant to their agenda for the church?

The point I am making is this: within the confines of the organized church, these are not the qualities contemporaries expect to find in their leaders. Their adopted organizational structure gives no preeminence to such things. However, in Scripture, these ARE the traits found in Apollos, as well as other men who “helped” the people of God. It seems to me that they are requisite today also.

As you walk through this text, as well as the rest of the book of Acts, you will become aware of the total absence of institutionalized religion. There is not enough information to attempt to duplicate the reported accomplishments by means of a routine. No value is placed on human wisdom, and an obvious reliance upon Divine direction is seen on every page. This is because we are reading of real spiritual life, not simulated life, which is the bane of the modern church. Jesus is actually at work in the people of which we are reading.

THE WAY OF GOD EXPOUNDED TO HIM MORE PERFECTLY

“ 26b . . . whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.”

The relevance of what follows is against the backdrop of Apollos knowing only about John’s

baptism. Now, because of his heart and commitment to the truth, the Lord will direct him into a larger room, where more of the truth can be seen. In order to do this, and in keeping with the truth that the “steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23), the Lord brought Apollos from Alexandria Egypt to Ephesus in order that his understanding might be matured. This would have required a trip of around five hundred miles by sea, and well over one thousand miles by land.

Once again, behold the total absence of concern about inconvenience, or an intrusion on the time of those involved. One senses that living unto the Lord was so much the emphasis that the highlights of life could be written in the manner set before us. Apollos is occupied with proclaiming the truth, and Aquila and Priscilla are concerned about assisting him to see the truth more clearly. Within a purely institutional setting, these things are exceedingly rare – if, indeed, they can be present at all.

AQUILA AND PRISCILLA HEARD

“ . . . whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard . . .” Other versions read, “When Aquila and Priscilla heard him,” NKJV “hearing his words,” BBE “having heard him,” DARBY and “after hearing him.” WEYMOUTH

Here we are exposed to people who maintained a love for the truth – something that is essential to salvation. There are those who are described as people who “perish, because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thess 2:10). In this text:

- Apollos declares the truth that he has perceived,
- Aquila and Priscilla weigh what they have heard him say in view of their own love and knowledge of the truth.
- Aquila and Priscilla do not allow Apollos to remain deficient in his understanding.

Of course, all of this presumes a prevailing love for, and interest in, the truth of God. Where these are not found, it really makes no experiential difference what a person says or what he hears. These realities are behind every historical record in the book of Acts.

THEY TOOK HIM UNTO THEM

“ . . . they took him unto them. . .” Other versions read, “they took him aside,” NKJV “they invited him to their home,” NIV “took him in,” BBE “took him home,” CSB and “took him to them.” DARBY

The words “took . . . unto them” are translated from a single Greek word: **proselambonto**. The lexical meaning of the word is, “to take to oneself . . . receive into one's home, with the collateral idea of kindness,” THAYER “take aside, take hold of and lead aside, take along with oneself receive hospitably, accept, welcome,” FRIBERG “receive or accept in one's society, home, or circle of acquaintances.” GINGRICH

While, technically, the word can mean to simply take aside in the immediate area, this incident does not appear to fit that meaning well. Given the nature of this occasion, coupled with the extensive tutelage of the Jews in the matter of hospitality, it seems better to consider the text to mean that Aquila and Priscilla took Apollos to their home. However, this is not something that justifies any further word.

THEY EXPOUNDED TO HIM THE WAY OF GOD MORE PERFECTLY

“ . . . and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.” Other versions read, “ explained to him the way of God more accurately ,” NKJV “gave him fuller teaching about the way of God,” BBE “explained to him the Way of God in fuller detail ,” CSB “expounded to him the way of the

Lord more diligently ,” DOUAY “expounded unto him the way of God more carefully ,” ERV “ fully showed him the way of the Lord,” MRD “gave him more detailed instruction about the Way,” NJB “did more exactly expound to him the way of God,” YLT “ helped him understand the way of God better,” LIVING “explained God's way to him more accurately,” IE and “expounded to him the way of God more definitely and accurately .” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “way” is used twenty times in the book of Acts. When it is not referring to a geographical path being traveled (1:12; 8:26,36.39; 9:17,27; 25:3; 26:13), the following expressions are found. Note the matters with which they are associated.

- “The ways of life” (2:28).
- “Any of this way ” (9:2).
- “The right ways of the Lord” (13:10).
- God “suffered all nations to walk in their own ways ” (14:16).
- “The way of salvation” (16:17).
- “The way of the Lord” (18:25).
- “The way of God” (18:26).
- They “spake evil of the way ” (19:9).
- “There arose no small stir about that way ” (19:23).
- “I persecuted this way ” (22:4).
- “After the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers” (24:14).
- Felix, “having more perfect knowledge of that way ” (24:22).

As used here, the word “way” means “a way (I. e. manner) of thinking, feeling, deciding,” THAYER and “way of life or acting, conduct.” GINGRICH

Here, we are introduced to “the way of God” – not the way man is to take, but the way, or manner, of God Himself. To be sure, there is a way that man is to take, and it is a “narrow” way that “leads to life” (Matt 7:14). It is a “way” that God has given to men, but our text speaks of the way of God Himself – how He conducts Himself.

Having been with Paul, Aquila and Priscilla might well have delineated the nature of baptism into Christ, and the critical role of the Holy Spirit in the whole matter (Rom 6 & 8). As I have already pointed out, in Scripture, the baptism of John is never compared with baptism into Christ. It is rather compared with the ones doing the baptism: one with water, and the other with the Spirit. However extensive the instruction given to Apollos, it must have related primarily to the administration of the Holy Spirit, into whom Jesus places us. It is true that this occurs when we are baptized for the remission of sins. However, it is not necessarily known at that time.

In my judgment, Apollos was more acquainted with reform than regeneration, of which I do not consider him to have been ignorant. To suggest that he was “mighty in the Scriptures,” “instructed in the way of the Lord,” and “taught diligently and accurately things concerning Jesus Christ,” yet was not in Christ, or was ignorant of regeneration, seems to me to be a stretch of the imagination. The fact that he was taught “more perfectly” the way of God suggests that he was not untaught in the rudiments, and was in Christ.

HE WAS DISPOSED TO PASS INTO ACHAIA

“ 27a And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia . . . ” Other versions read, “desired to cross

to,” NKJV “wanted to go across,” NASB “wanted to go to,” NIV “wished to cross over to,” NRSV “was minded to pass over into,” ASV “made plans to cross over to,” BBE “purposed to go into,” DARBY “wanted to travel to Greece,” GWN “thought of crossing over to,” NJB “had been thinking about going to,” NLT “had made up his mind to cross over into,” WEYMOUTH and “wished to cross to Achaia (most of Greece).” AMPLIFIED

As used here, the word “disposed” means, “to will deliberately, have a purpose, be minded,” THAYER “of a person deliberating and deciding something will, determine, intend,” FRIBERG “to desire to have or experience something, with the implication of some reasoned planning or will to accomplish the goal - 'to desire, to want, to will” LOUW-NIDA

Here, we are given a kind of snap-shot of the thoughts of Apollos – what he wanted to do, his purposes, and his objectives. When a person is living by faith, such thoughts can reflect Divine direction, for a mind that is centered on things above is one in which the Lord will work.

It is apparent that the more perfect instruction given to Apollos concerning “the way of God” was received without any complication. Here is a man whose total life was given over to the Lord. He comes from Alexandria to Ephesus, and immediately begins speaking with boldness in the synagogue. As soon as the scope of his knowledge is broadened through the ministry of Aquila and Priscilla, he considers further labors for the Lord. We know this is the case because of the text that follows. He is not disposed to go across the Sea from Asia to Greece to see the sights. He is not embarking on a business trip. He is not driven by mere curiosity. His life has been joined to the Lord, and he knows it!

We are being exposed to people of whom it can be said, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21), and “the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Actually, this is the only type of life that is acceptable to God, for Jesus “died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). God has not, and will not, set aside that purpose.

We have been exposed to the itinerary of Paul, whose sole purpose was to serve the Lord. Aquila and Priscilla are also in that category, accompanying Paul to Ephesus, then remaining there to stabilize the work that had been started. They are so absorbed in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, that they immediately see the deficiency of Apollos’ knowledge, and set out to expand his comprehension of “the way of God.” Now, we are introduced to Apollos who lives his life in the same manner.

The Record Before Us

This is not the record of an organization or institution. It is not the report of a humanly developed missionary strategy. This is rather the record of Christ, the Head of the body, working His will in the earth, and doing so through those who have been effectually united with Him. This is the account of individuals who are, in fact, living by faith. These are people through whom the Lord will work because they are in fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), enjoy the communion of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 13:14), and are walking in the truth (2 John 1:3). Their fellowship with one another is strictly owing to their fellowship with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (1 John 1:3; Phil 2:1).

Corinth was situated in Achaia. While in Corinth, when Paul was brought before Gallio, it is said that Gallio was “the deputy of Achaia.” That was the region in which the city of Corinth was found. Stephanus, who was in the church of Corinth, is said to have been “the first fruits of Achaia” (1 Cor 16:15). In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul referred to “the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia” (2 Cor 1:1). There were, then, a number of believers in the larger province of Achaia. This circumstance will bring some lucidity to the text that follows.

Achaia was a region in Greece. Under the Romans, Greece was divided into two provinces, Macedonia and Achaia, which was the southern region of that territory. The references to Achaia in the Scriptures speak of this southern region, reflecting the division made by Rome, who was in power at that time. The land mass was approximately 200 miles from north to south, and 150-175 miles from east to west. Like many of the regions and cities mentioned in the book of Acts, the area was a crossroads for the world, containing significant cities and sea ports.

Judging from the report that follows, Apollos was aware of the many believers in the region of Achaia, where Paul had spent more than a year and a half, preaching and teaching among the people (Acts 18:11). Furthermore, the Lord had revealed to Paul that He had “much people” in the city of Corinth (Act 18:10). Now, He sends another laborer there to establish the saints.

The Centrality of the Work of the Lord

Once again, I want to draw attention to the obvious centrality of the work of the Lord. Paul once alluded to the fact that other apostles, and Peter himself, took their wives with them in their travels (1 Cor 9:5). However we have no details whatsoever on their general family lives, their children, or other things that were of a domestic nature. This by no means suggests that their family life was unimportant. However, the work of the Lord was fundamental, as it ought to be. Our present religious environment makes it difficult for many to think in such a manner. This is owing to the skewing of theology toward the world instead of heaven – which is the ultimate in contradictory thinking. That directional error is what makes accounts like this appear unusual to the modern Christian. It is not possible for an approach to spiritual life to be right, yet become a source of confusion when the mind is exposed to the pure Word of God. When accounts like this sound strange, it is because the mind has been subjected to erroneous influences that did not come from the Lord.

THE BRETHREN WROTE

“27b . . . the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him . . .” Other versions read, “the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him,” NKJV/NIV “the brethren encouraged him, and wrote to the disciples to receive him,” ASV “the brothers gave him help, and sent letters to the disciples requesting them to take him in among them,” BBE “the brothers wrote to the disciples urging them to welcome him,” CSB “the brethren exhorting, wrote to the disciples to receive him,” DOUAY “the brethren exhorting him, wrote to the disciples to receive him,” GENEVA “the believers in Ephesus encouraged him. They wrote to the disciples in Greece to tell them to welcome him,” GWN “the brothers and sisters in Ephesus encouraged him to go. They wrote to the believers in Achaia, asking them to welcome him,” NLT “So, the brothers helped pay his expenses. They wrote a letter to the followers . In the letter, they asked them to accept Apollos,” IE “the brethren wrote to the disciples in Corinth begging them to give him a kindly welcome,” WEYMOUTH “the brethren wrote to the disciples there, urging and encouraging them to accept and welcome him heartily,” AMPLIFIED and “the brothers gave him every encouragement and wrote a letter to the disciples there, asking them to make him welcome.” PHILLIPS

Note that several versions represent the exhorting, or encouragement, as being addressed to Apollos, while others relate it to the letters written to the brethren in Achaia. The text strongly suggests that the brethren did, in fact, encourage Apollos, and this was confirmed in the writing of letters to the brethren in Achaia.

THE BRETHREN

“The brethren” in Ephesus could not have been in the Lord very long – probably in the vicinity of a year at the most. Note their zeal for the Lord and interest in His work. Perceive how they were aware of kindred spirits who were across the sea

Behold the closeness of the brethren, even though separated by miles, and a sea between them. Consider again that the brethren in Ephesus were probably relatively new believers – at least this would be the case if they had been converted when Paul first testified there. There is no evidence that there were disciples of Christ in Ephesus prior to Paul arriving there earlier. The first mentioning of Ephesus in the Bible is Acts 18:19, and there is no indication that a body of believers existed there at that time. It is possible that some Jews who were present on the memorable day of Pentecost brought back the news of the Gospel, for some were present from Asia (Acts 2:9). However, there is no record of anyone finding believers in Ephesus prior to the arrival of Paul, Aquila and Priscilla.

Yet, even though these were apparently young believers, they were conversant with kingdom manners, ready to communicate with believers from another area, and knowledge of brethren in those areas. Since the scattering of the church due to the rise of denominationalism, this kind of awareness is virtually unknown. I suppose that were it not for electronic media, many professing Christians would have no sentience, or cognizance, of any believers outside the circumference of their own religious setting. The fact that this condition exists is confirmation that we are living in perilous times, indeed.

A NEW THING

An approach to Christianity has been birthed in our day that does not yield the kind of results that are recorded in the inspired record. Let it be clear that we are under no obligation to recognize as legitimate any representation of believers that is at variance with the Divine description of such. We certainly are not to be suspicious of every Christian, seeking to disqualify as many as we can from the ranks of believers. But neither are we to be naive and gullible as though in our time Jesus was producing a new kind of believer. Maintaining the posture of charitableness and wisdom, every person in Christ is to expect the manners and lives of professing believers to support their claim to identity with Him.

A Response of Paul

It was for this very reason that Paul, so noted for his outstanding love, said to the Galatians, “I stand in doubt of you” (Gal 4:20). Other versions read, “I have doubts about you,” NKJV “I am perplexed about you,” NASB “I am completely baffled by you,” ISV and “I am fearful and perplexed about you!” AMPLIFIED Their conduct did not match their profession! The same was true of the church in Corinth (1 Cor 3:1-3).

And what was it that caused Paul to have this reaction? In particular, it was that the Galatians were not bearing the fruit that is produced by faith. Their manners were in sharp conflict with the nature of spiritual life. Candidly, they were closer to the world than they were to Christ, and, from the view of godly men, this put their status into question. Paul did not condemn them, for that is a role that has not been given to men. However, without confirming evidence, their status was thrown into doubt. He told them that if they were, in fact, reverting to a system of law, they were “fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4). If immorality surfaces, the people of God are to refresh their minds with this certain reality: “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:5-6).

There are numerous evidences of the presence of genuine spiritual life. Included are a “love of the truth” (2 Thess 2:10), the “love of the brethren” (1 John 3:14), and a fervent quest to obtain the prize of our high calling (Phil 3:7-14). All of these are revealed in what we know about the brethren in Ephesus.

- They had believed and obeyed the Gospel.
- They had maintained a love for the truth.

- They received Apollos, who was from another region.
- They were aware of brethren in other areas.
- They encouraged Apollos.
- They sent letters of recommendation to the brethren in Achaia, exhorting them to receive Apollos.

Keeping in mind the apparent length of time they had been in Christ, that is a most remarkable record. It teaches us that spiritual maturity does not necessarily require a lengthy period

The objective of this mighty man of God was not to bring the saints an understanding of men, women, finances, the human psyche, or some other nuance of earthly life. Rather, he strengthened the things that had to do with getting ready to leave this world, as well as living by faith while here.

of time. This is owing to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the versatility and strength of newness of life. When spiritual growth is slow, there is always some modifying factor that is competing against spiritual influences. Tares have been sown among the wheat, and the net has caught some bad fish.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Behold the mindfulness of the brethren in Ephesus for their brethren. They did not want Apollos to undergo a time of unnecessary examination, and they desired the brethren in Achaia to obtain an accurate appraisal of him. This is an evidence of their love for the people of God, as well as their discernment.

It is possible that Paul referred to this very letter in his second epistle to the Corinthians. In that epistle, he chided the Corinthians for testing him to see if he was really an apostle or not. The folly of their efforts is seen in the fact that they themselves were the proof of the legitimacy of Paul's apostleship (2 Cor 3:2-3). In that section of his letter he said, ". . . need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?" (2 Cor 3:1).

Where the evidence was clear, no letters of approval were required. However, in the case of Apollos, he was not known in Achaia. Therefore, those who did know him bore witness to him – even though they were only briefly acquainted with him.

HE HELPED THEM MUCH WHO HAD BELIEVED THROUGH GRACE

“ 27c . . . who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace.”

When Apollos arrived in Achaia he was immediately involved in the work of the Lord. He probably came first to Corinth, which was on the eastern edge of Achaia, where Apollos would have disembarked. It is important to notice how his labors are declared.

HE HELPED THEM MUCH

“. . . who, when he was come, helped them much . . .” Other versions read, “greatly helped,” NKJV “was a great help,” NIV “he gave much help,” BBE “contributed much,” DARBY “greatly assisted,” MRD “gave great assistance,” NAB “help . . . considerably,” NJB “proved to be a great benefit,” NLT “strengthen,” LIVING “rendered valuable help,” WEYMOUTH “rendered great service,” WILLIAMS “mightily helped,” MONTGOMERY and “proved a source of great strength.” PHILLIPS

The immediate target of Apollos' labors were the brethren – no doubt those to whom the letters of

recommendation were addressed. Thus, the “who” of this text are the “the disciples” to whom the brethren in Ephesus wrote. The expression “when he was come” signifies that he gathered himself together with them, coming along side of them. That means these brethren met together, as all believers in the book of Acts were wont to do. That is the manner of “newness of life,” which moved those possessing it to come together.

He is said to have “helped them much.” The help, or assistance, that Apollos gave the brethren had to do with their understanding – with putting things together in their minds. The word used here (**suneba,leto**) means “to bring together in one's mind, confer with oneself, to consider, ponder, to revolve in the mind,” THAYER “give assistance to, contribute to,” FRIBERG “to give careful consideration to various implications of an issue - 'to reflect on, to think about seriously, to think deeply about,” LOUW-NIDA “to put together,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “Consider, ponder, draw conclusions about.” GINGRICH

In other words, Apollos brought a greater understanding to them concerning the Person of Christ and His great salvation. They were enabled to “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height” (Eph 3:18). Not only were they able to see the reality of salvation, but the great pillars of Divine reasoning that supported it as well. The objective of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus was seen more clearly. God Himself was known more thoroughly. The ministry of the Lord Jesus became more clear to them, and living for and unto Him made more sense to them. The objective of this mighty man of God was not to bring the saints an understanding of men, women, finances, the human psyche, or some other nuance of earthly life. Rather, he strengthened the things that had to do with getting ready to leave this world, as well as living by faith while here.

In doing this Apollos was watering what Paul had planted. Paul refers to the activity in his letter to the Corinthians: “I have planted, Apollos watered ; but God gave the increase” (1 Cor 3:6). In other words God was able to work with the words that Paul and Apollos delivered. The thought has frequently occurred to me that much of the spiritual impotence of our time is owing to the fact that what is being taught in Christian circles cannot be used or blessed by God.

This kind of help – the kind Apollos ministered – is becoming exceedingly rare in our time. There is too much time being given to understanding men and circumstance, and too little to the knowledge of God and Christ. The greater light illumines the lesser things (Psa 36:9). However, the imagined understanding of men will never clarify God, Christ, or the salvation that has been provided for men. Actually, the more attention that men give to what is seen, the less able they become to discern things that are not seen. If our affection is to be placed on things above, which things we are to seek (Col 3:1-2), and if the essential quest is to “know” Christ and participate in His life (Phil 3:7-14), just how serious is it to focus our attention on other things? Although such efforts are being billed as helping people, nothing could be further from the truth. True “help” comes from opening up the things of God, not shining the light of attention on men and their circumstances.

I cannot overstate the seriousness of the distorted emphases of our time. It may appear wise to treat such things as innocent efforts to help people – but that is not at all what they are. They are the direct result of teachers not plowing in the truth. They have not occupied themselves with the truth as it “is in Christ Jesus” (Eph 4:21). The circumference of their thought is too small, being confined to this present evil world. If, in fact, there were no domestic, social, or political problems, they would have little to say. Their’s is a ministry of distraction, which is the exact opposite of that of mighty Apollos.

Once these things are comprehended the religious messages and trends of our day will become abrasive to the soul. They are like troublesome gnats that aggravate the human spirit and make it more difficult to ponder the things of the Lord.

THEY BELIEVED THROUGH GRACE

Now we are exposed to yet another perspective: those who “believed through grace.” This is not a description confined to the believers in Achaia, nor is it applicable to a segment of the body of Christ. This is a proper way of referring to anyone who is in Christ Jesus. Their faith is the evidence of God’s grace, which enabled them to believe.

“ . . .which had believed through grace.” Other versions read, “by grace had believed,” NIV “through grace had become believers,” NRSV “had faith through grace,” BBE “through grace had come to trust,” CJB “come to believe through grace,” NAB “By God’s grace had believed,” NLT “through God’s favor had believed,” WILLIAMS and “who through grace (God’s unmerited favor and mercy) had believed (adhered to, trusted in, and relied on Christ as Lord and Savior). ”
AMPLIFIED

The people of God are referred to in a number of ways in the book of Acts. Some of them include the following.

- Those who “gladly received the word” and were baptized (2:40).
- Those who were “added” to the number of disciples (2:41).
- Those who were “added to the church” (2:47).
- Those who were “added to the Lord” (5:14; 11:24).
- Those who were “believers” (5:14).
- Those who “believed” (4:4).
- Those who “believed in the Lord” (9:42).
- Those who were “disciples” (1:15; 6:1,2,7,9; 9:1,19,25, 26,38; 11:26,29; 13:52; 14:20,22,28; 15:10; 18:23,27; 19:9,30; 20:1,7; 21:4,16).
- Those who were “obedient to the faith” (6:7).
- Those who “turned to the Lord” (9:35).
- Those who “believed and turned to the Lord” (11:21).
- Those who “turned to God” (15:19).
- Those who were called “Christians” (11:26).
- Those who “believed on the Lord” (11:17; 18:8).
- Those who “believed and were baptized” (18:8).

Now we are exposed to yet another perspective: those who “believed through grace.” This is not a description confined to the believers in Achaia, nor is it applicable to a segment of the body of Christ. This is a proper way of referring to anyone who is in Christ Jesus. Their faith is the evidence of God’s grace, which enabled them to believe. Emphasizing the gift aspect of grace, Paul referred to this fact when he wrote to the Philippians, “For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ , not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29). Note: it was “given” to the Philippians to believe – but it was “in the behalf of Christ,” or “for Christ’s sake.” NASB In other words, since Jesus has been exalted, the grace of God is only realized through Him. The closer one is to Jesus, the closer he is to grace. If one chooses to live at a distance from Jesus, there is a corresponding distance between that person and the grace of God, which is the consummate enablement.

Considering this subject from the standpoint of the Dispenser of the grace, Peter wrote, “Who BY HIM [Jesus Christ] do believe in God” (1 Pet 1:19-21). That is another way of saying “believed through grace.” Peter also reminded us that we have “obtained like precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1). From yet another view the ability to believe is described as God opening “the door of faith” (Acts 14:27). All of that is the result of God’s grace.

HE MIGHTILY CONVINCED THE JEWS

“ 28 For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. ”

Here was a body of people who had the utmost regard for the Scriptures. They did not doubt their authenticity, or question if it is possible they had come down to them without error. This is the very reason they can be convinced with arguments that are based solely upon Scripture. Keep in mind that there had been numerous copies of handwritten manuscripts, and a primary translation of the Scriptures, to which our text refers, into the Greek language – the Septuagint Version (250-200 B.C.). The original Septuagint version was also updated. Add to this that, like the New Covenant Scriptures, there was no copy of the original Septuagint translation, nor is there today. COLUMBIA ENCYCLOPEDIA

While there were a number of critics of the Greek version of Scripture, none of them are given so much as a sentence in apostolic writings. My point here is not to launch an argument in favor of, or against, the Septuagint. Rather, it is to draw attention to the absence – total and complete absence – of any questioning of Scripture in Matthew through Revelation – or, for that matter, anywhere in Moses or the Prophets. This is particularly significant because the Septuagint version was used by many Jews. Yet, in our text, there was such a high regard for the sacred writings that an insightful speaker could base his presentation solely on Scripture, and convince those of honest and good hearts of the truth of what he said. This kind of environment is rapidly disappearing from the modern church. The pretentious experts of our day have cast the shadow of doubt upon Scripture, and the multiplicity of modern translations have further complicated the situation. Add to that the decided reduction of the public reading and exposition of Scripture, and you have a frightening circumstance. This has opened the door to all manner of worldly wisdom, and those who specialize in such wisdom have taken full advantage of the opportunity. I confidently affirm that it is highly unlikely the Apollos would realize the success he had among the Jews of Achaia were he to preach in the average American church.

The expression “Jesus was Christ” is synonymous with “Jesus was the Christ.” This is proper, because there really is only one Christ, and the Jews knew it. They did not, however know that Jesus was that Christ, but like many Jews of our day, were waiting for Him to appear

Apollos does not appeal to philosophical considerations, or to some imagined rule of logic or hermeneutical principle. There is no record of him appealing to the Hebrew language as compared to the Greek Septuagint Scriptures. Those are all issues and approaches that have been developed by more modern men. Whatever may be said in the defense of such issues is nothing more than hot air. It certainly has not yielded much good fruit, if, indeed, any can be found at all.

HE MIGHTILY CONVINCED THE JEWS

“For he mightily convinced the Jews . . .” Other versions read, “vigorously refuted,” NKJV “powerfully refuted,” NASB “Powerfully confuted,” ASV “overcame the Jews,” BBE “with great force convinced,” DARBY “with much vigor convinced,” DOUAY “clearly showing,” GWN “reasoned powerfully against,” MRD “argued very convincingly,” IE “successfully refuted,” ISV and “with great power he refuted.” AMPLIFIED

It is important to note that when Apollos mightily convinced the Jews, his subject was not marriage, raising children, financial accountability, or some other aspect of life in this world. He did not address some contemporary domestic or political issue. In fact, so far as Scripture is concerned we have no idea whatsoever about the social conscience on such matters where Apollos was preaching.

Contemporary religious merchants are fond of addressing such issues, but there is no example of such emphases in Scripture. I will confidently affirm that the individual who has a grasp of Scripture, and is in quest of heaven, cannot be drawn aside to such things. This is because the closer one is to the Lord, the more foolish and vain the world and everything it has to offer appears. However, when there is an experiential distance between God and man, the world appears very desirable, and value is seen in its wisdom. However, that appearance is nothing more than a delusion.

SHOWING BY THE SCRIPTURES

“ . . . and that publicly, showing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ. ” Other versions read, “showing from,” NKJV “demonstrating by,” NASB “proving from,” NIV “making clear from,” BBE “establishing from,” NAB “using the,” NLT “he used the,” IE “showing and proving by,” AMPLIFIED and “quoting from.” PHILLIPS

The expression “Jesus was Christ” is synonymous with “Jesus was the Christ.” This is proper, because there really is only one Christ, and the Jews knew it. They did not, however know that Jesus was that Christ, but like many Jews of our day, were waiting for Him to appear. Devout Jews, because of true belief of the Scriptures, knew that “Christ” – God’s anointed One – would come, and they were waiting for that appearance (Matt 2:4; 26:63; Mk 12:35; Lk 2:26; 3:15; John 1:25,41; 4:29,42; 6:69; 7:26-27,31,41-42; 9:22; 10:24; 11:27; 12:34).

A Question

Would you say there is a prevailing expectation of the second coming of Christ within the professed church, as there was one of the initial appearing of Christ during the time of our text? It seems to me that this is not at all the case. In my own understanding, this is largely owing to the failure of modern teachers and preachers to declare what the Scriptures have said on that matter. The Jews during the time of our text heard frequently of the coming Messiah, and those who were of tender heart looked for him. The matter was so much a part of their thinking, that many thought John the Baptist was the Christ. But, alas, such an environment is exceedingly rare in these times of pseudo-Christianity.

Apollos Convinced the Jews

Apollos convinced the Jews that “Jesus was Christ” – that is, He is the One that God had promised through Moses and the Prophets. He persuaded them that Jesus of Nazareth was more than what He appeared to be – just as Peter did in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost (2:4-37). Apollos was able to correlate what God has said about the birth, life, ministry, and death of the coming Messiah, with what the Scriptures had foretold about Him. The finest details concerning the Christ were fulfilled in Jesus, and Apollos proved it with the Scriptures. This also says a lot about the Jews who were persuaded. They had a profound respect for the Scriptures, and yielded to what they were enabled to see in them.

If this was done in Corinth, as many suppose, these probably included some of the Jews who had previously opposed and blasphemed Paul, moving him to turn from them (18:6). It was at that time that Jesus appeared to Paul, telling him that He had “much people” in that city (18:10). By the time of Apollos, this had been abundantly confirmed.

A Current Need

While everyone cannot be an Apollos, there is a current need for insightful men who can, by the use of Scripture, publically overcome flawed arguments and approaches to Scripture. This was part of the ministry of Jeremiah the prophet. The Lord said to him, “See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy , and to throw down, to

build, and to plant” (Jer 1:10). Paul referred to such activity, affirming that the spiritual weaponry given to the saints. “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5).

Believers are to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men” with their well doing (1 Pet 2:15). That activity is to be coupled with the labors of insightful preachers and teachers who can stop the mouths of those who are subverting “whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake” (Titus 1:11).

THE DANGER OF THE WISDOM OF THIS WORLD

When religious men make an alliance with the wisdom of the world, consenting to dip into its wells for assistance in understanding Scripture, they at once put themselves at a decided disadvantage. If it is true that the carnal

Yet, in our text, there was such a high regard for the sacred writings that an insightful speaker could base his presentation solely on Scripture, and convince those of honest and good hearts of the truth of what he said. This kind of environment is rapidly disappearing from the modern church.

mind is “enmity against God,” and that it “is not subject to the Law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom 8:7), what possible spiritual advantage can be gained from it?

I say these things because I do not believe what is chronicled in this text could possibly take place in the average church of our day. There is such an abysmal ignorance of the Scriptures themselves that any argument founded solely upon them would be summarily ignored. When the people are fundamentally ignorant of Scripture they will be tempted to not regard highly arguments founded upon them. They will also be prone to put their confidence in the purported wisdom, of the speaker. Of course, a person who possesses such an ignorance is without excuse – particularly in our country. The Scriptures are readily available to anyone having a desire for them. However, when you add to this the miserable lack of pivotal preaching and teaching solidly founded upon the scriptures, you have a situation that cannot be fully described. Under such circumstances, there is a resistance to the truth that is staggering in strength.

But none of these conditions existed in the synagogues of Achaia. The people did lack an understanding of Christ, but it was only because they had not perceived Him in the Scriptures, which testified of Him (John 5:39), and with which they were familiar.

Now Apollos, not only being an expert in the Scriptures, but also instructed in the way of the Lord, teaching accurately the things of the Lord Jesus, and having been instructed more perfectly in the way of God, speaks publically among them. He is not only able to throw down their arguments against the Christ, but to handle the Scriptures accurately, even as a workman who has no need to be ashamed before God (2 Tim 2:15).

There is no indication in Scripture that the body of Christ was ever intended to be without such insightful individuals. God put them in the body (1 Cor 12:28). Clearly, everyone does not fall into this category. However, as the flock of God is fed, and they respond to such feeding, such teachers will surface. It is right and God-glorifying to expect this to take place. That is simply the nature of spiritual life. It is the fulfillment of Ephesians 4:11-16, the revealed objective of the Lord.

CONCLUSION

This is another text that will not fit handily into preconceived theological thoughts. One of the marks of doctrinal errors is that they eventually conflict with the text of Scripture, causing understanding to be abandoned in favor of the maintenance of a view of the truth rather than truth itself. This the very thing that moved the Jewish leaders to press for Jesus' death, oppose the preaching of the apostles, and stone Stephen. Erroneous views of God and His truth may go undetected for a long period of time. This is because of the neglect of leaders to expound the Word of God to the people, for it is the Word that is "living and powerful" – the appointed means to discerning the thoughts and intentions of the people (Heb 4:12).

When men busy themselves with correcting the ills of the people instead of ensuring their growth up into Christ, they have not really helped them. That is why such an emphasis is not found in Scripture. When specific sins were addressed, it was always within the context of the body of Christ and the damaging effects they had on that body, as confirmed in the epistles. To my knowledge, no corrective epistle is revealed to have been written to an individual. Personal letters were always of an instructive, encouraging, and edifying nature, not one of rebuke and correction. Recall the tone and content of these letters. Luke (to Theophilus); Acts (to Theophilus); First and Second Timothy (to Timothy); Titus (to Titus), Philemon (to Philemon); Second John (the elect lady); and Third John (to Gaius). This appears to be a consistent pattern.

If the people and work of the Lord are to flourish, men of faith and insight must surface who have a prevailing interest in the church, which is Christ's "body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23). It is within the context of that body that the individual obtains significance (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:12,20,27; Eph 4:25; 5:30; Col 2:19). Apostolic labors focused on, but were not limited to, the church (Acts 11:26; 14:22,28; 15:22-31,36,41; 16:5; 16:40; 18:22-23,27; 20:7,17,28). This agrees with the doctrine of Scripture that states the intention of the gifts the exalted Christ has given to men. "Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men . . . And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ : till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love " (Eph 4:8-16).

It seems to me that this is most clearly stated, so that no room is allowed for dissent or argumentation. The gifts themselves are delineated with clarity: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. Four gifts are revealed, with the latter one set forth in a twofold sense – "pastors and teachers." Grammatically and doctrinally two sides of the same function are stated. From the standpoint of their heart for the church, they are "pastors" – shepherds, or caretakers of the flock of God. From the view of their actual activity, they are "teachers." That is how they care for the flock – by teaching them, or feeding them (1 Pet 5:2).

The intention of these gifts is stated in a progressive manner, concluding with a concise statement of their objective. The first statement is an overview, with the outcome of perfection expounded. "For the perfecting of the saints" is the overview. For all of the gifts, including "evangelists," the focus is "the saints" and their "perfection." Other versions read, "equipping," NKJV "prepare God's people," NIV "equip the saints," NRSV and "perfecting and the full equipping of the saints." AMPLIFIED The picture is of a body, with each individual member of that body being enabled to perform its intended function. The aim of this equipping is then spelled out. All teachers and preachers are to make it their aim to enable the people to fulfill these objectives.

- The work of the ministry.
- In order to the edifying of the body.
- The accomplishment of the unity of the faith.
- The achievement of the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.
- That each member might function in their role according to their measure of the fulness of Christ.
- That the entire body of believers might live out the life of Christ Himself.
- That the people no longer be children in their understanding where they are subject to delusion.
- That each member may be able to speak the truth in love.
- That every member, and the body as a whole, may grow up into Christ in every aspect of life, thus living out of an awareness of fellowship with the Head.
- That the whole body may be fitted and held together by the contribution, or ministry, of each and every part.
- That the whole body may increase in its growth.
- That the increase will result in the body edifying itself in love.

Now, what can be said for a congregation in which these objectives are not being fulfilled? If this is what Christ Jesus intends, precisely what will be His response when these results are not realized? What of a congregation in which the majority of the members make no edifying contribution whatsoever in the assembly? What kind of a “body” is that? And, if the body consists of many members that are joined together, precisely how can they benefit each other consistently if they are not actually together. Scripture affirms that the benefits of one member pass to the others when they are in proximity of one another. How marvelously this is stated in Ephesians and Colossians. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:16). “And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:19).

THE “SOLVE- YOUR-PROBLEMS” MENTALITY

Some people have likened the church to a hospital. This is a very foolish statement. The church is a Temple (1 Cor 3:16-17), a body (1 Cor 12:27), a pillar and ground (1 Tim 3:15), a household (1 Tim 3:15), the city of the living God (Heb 12:22), and a habitation for God (Eph 2:22). But a hospital? – who is the author of that thought? Is not salvation designed to cure the human condition? And if it does not do so, precisely in what sense is it the salvation of God?

When Jesus is presented as the means of resolving human difficulties, men have stepped outside the perimeter of eternal purpose. In their emphasis they have chosen to confine themselves to the realm from which Jesus has delivered those who believe (Gal 1:4). That is the ultimate oxymoron! The church is not in the world to resolve its problems, and is nowhere so declared. As a result of being united with Christ and growing up into Him, there are various works performed that relieve the afflicted, and assist the needy in various ways. But that is not why Christ is perfecting us. The saved are primarily a people for God, not for humanity. This is not conjecture, but has been revealed from heaven. “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself . . . Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works . . . I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to

Christ . . . Come hither, I will show you the bride, the Lamb's wife " (2 Cor 5:21; Tit 2:14; 2 Cor 11:2; Rev 21:9). Rather than being a "hospital," this is the working branch of heaven upon earth. The church is "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all" (Eph 1:23). The church , His body, is where He deposits His nature and carries on His work. The members are the vessels through whom He works (Phil 2:13; Heb 13:21). The very notion of the church being a hospital contradicts these revealed intentions and purposes.

These are matters that call for sober thought and action.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #78

DISCIPLES OF JOHN IN EPHESUS

“ 19:1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples, 2 He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost. 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus. 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. 6 And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7 And all the men were about twelve. ”
(Acts 19:1-7)

INTRODUCTION

A SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

While Apollos was at Corinth, Paul took a road through the upper interior of the country, and came back to Ephesus. Upon arriving in the region, Paul finds “certain disciples” in Ephesus. Having discerned a level of faith and commitment in them, he asked them a most arresting question: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” Upon hearing that they were not even aware there was a Holy Spirit, Paul inquired about their baptism. Having learned they were baptized with John’s baptism, he told them the purpose of that baptism. They were then baptized in the name of Jesus, Paul laid his hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. As at the house of Cornelius, they spoke in other languages, prophesying. This marked the final Scriptural account of someone being baptized with John’s baptism – approximately 25 years after the day of Pentecost. This is the Scriptural record of a group of “about twelve” disciples, marking a spiritual epoch. As is apparent, numbers are not what is given

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- **PAUL FINDS CERTAIN DISCIPLES (19:1)**
- **HAVE YOU RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT (19:2a)**
- **THEY HAD NOT HEARD THERE WAS A HOLY SPIRIT (19:2b)**
- **THE ASSUMPTION OF BAPTISM (19:3)**
- **THE OBJECTIVE OF JOHN’S BAPTISM DECLARED (19:4)**
- **THEY WERE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS (19:5)**
- **PAUL LAID HIS HANDS ON THEM (19:6a)**
- **THEY SPOKE WITH TONGUES AND PROPHESED (19:6b)**
- **ALL OF THE MEN WERE ABOUT TWELVE (19:7)**
- **CONCLUSION**

attention in the Scriptures. Rather, it is nature of what took place.

THE WORKS ARE THOSE OF GOD

The works that are written up by the Spirit always have to do with what the Lord is doing. The record of the beginning of the heavens and the earth are a record of what the Lord did (Gen 1).

Judgment

The works can be judgment, as in the cases of Adam and Eve being driven from the Garden (Gen 4:22-24), the flood (Gen 6:12-13,17; 7:21-22), Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24-25), Egypt (Ex 9:14-16; 12:12), Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4:22-33), Belshazzar (Dan 5:5-30), or Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 1-11). In each of these cases, the point was not simply that something happened. God was working!

Blessing

The work may also be one of great blessing, as in the calling of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage (Ex 12), the setting of God’s love upon Israel (Deut 7:7), the exaltation of Joseph (Gen 41:37-46), the preservation of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:20-30), the deliverance of Daniel (Dan 6:16-27), and, ultimately, the sending of Jesus to bless the people (Acts 3:26). All of the details associated with these, and other, accounts were a report of how the Lord worked among men.

THE PROPER WAY TO THINK

When men behold and consider what is taking place in the world, they must not divorce God from their thinking. The highest form of consideration involves seeing and pondering the work of the Lord. If men fail to do this, they will be dominated by carnal curiosity, and led into erroneous conclusions and patterns of thought.

Throughout Scripture there are expressions of this kind of thinking – even from ancient times.

- “Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous **WORKS OF GOD**” (Job 37:14).
- “Come and see **THE WORKS OF GOD**: he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men” (Psa 66:5).
- “That they might set their hope in God, and not forget **THE WORKS OF GOD**, but keep his commandments” (Psa 78:7).

The works of the Lord have moral power – power that enables men to think and assess things properly. Thus it is written, “He hath showed His people the power of His works, that He may give them the heritage of the heathen” (Psa 111:6). For those who correctly assess His works, giving due heed to them, this word will be fulfilled: “The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works”

“Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that THE WORKS OF GOD should be made manifest in him” (John 9:3).

- “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD” (Acts 2:11).

All of God’s works “are done in truth” (Psa 33:4). None of them violate either sound reasoning or righteous law. Further, God is “holy in all His works” (Psa 145:17), which are an expression of His righteous character, for He is “righteous in all His works” (Dan 9:14). . This is why it is sinful to question God, dispute with Him, or consider what He has done to be unfair. Further, when once the works of God are perceived, it is sinful to forget them (Psa 78:11). The Lord rejoices “in His works,” and men ought to do the same (Psa 104:31). Whatever form they may take, discerning men can report the works of the Lord “with rejoicing” (Psa 107:22). It is in the consideration of His works that men will receive “counsel” from the Lord (Psa 106:13). God’s foreknowledge is said to be in regard to His own works (Acts 15:18). How can it possibly be right for men to men to ignore the fact of His working?

The works of the Lord have moral power – power that enables men to think and assess things properly. Thus it is written, “He hath showed His people the power of His works, that He may give them the heritage of the heathen ” (Psa 111:6). For those who correctly assess His works, giving due heed to them, this word will be fulfilled : “The LORD is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works” (Psa 145:9).

From the highest vantage point, “the whole earth is full of His glory” (Isa 6:3). From the most precise viewpoint God is “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12).

Truly insightful souls have recognized the works of God and given Him due honor. When young Samuel divulged to Eli the message that had been given to him – one of judgment and sorrow – Eli responded, “It is the LORD: let Him do what seemeth him good” (1 Sam 3:18). When Samuel considered Moses and Aaron and the deliverance of Israel, he told the people, “It is the LORD that advanced Moses and Aaron, and that brought your fathers up out of the land of Egypt” (1 Sam 12:6). Early one morning following Christ raising from dead, He appeared to His disciples at the sea of Tiberias. After causing them to garner a great catch of fish, John recognized the work and cried out, “It is the Lord” (John 21:7).

A new kind of Christianity is being perpetrated that majors on men, not God. What men are to do is presented as the fundamental thing, not what the Lord has done. Although there is a kind of stereotyped presentation of the things God has done, it is not with much clarity.

During the early days of the Judges, “an angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochum,” and delivered a message to the people. Speaking for Jehovah he said, “I made you to go up out of Egypt, and have brought you unto the land which I swore unto your fathers.” Following his words, this notation is made concerning the people who were not allowed to enter the promised land: “and there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD, nor yet the works which he had done for Israel” (Judg 2:1-10). That is the generation that “ forsook the Lord God . . . followed other

gods . . . and provoked the Lord to anger” (Judges 2:11). And why did this happen? It was because they did not know the works of the Lord. They failed to see His hand in their own remarkable history.

IT HAS HAPPENED AGAIN!

A similar thing has happened in our day – “the day of salvation” and “the accepted time” (2 Cor 6:2). A new kind of Christianity is being perpetrated that majors on men, not God. What men are to do is presented as the fundamental thing, not what the Lord has done. Although there is a kind of stereotyped presentation of the things God has done, it is not with much clarity. Things are said accommodatingly, and include the creation of the world by God, the death of Christ, and the interest God has in the welfare of mankind. However, the burden of emphasis is not placed on these matters, and there is very little exposition of them – i.e. an opening of the Divine rationality behind them.

The exaltation of human reasoning, and the proneness to carnal analyzation are employed in a professed interest in helping the people – i.e. helping them with their problems, not assisting them to glory. As you peruse the Word of God, you will find a total absence of such an approach to life in Christ Jesus. When dealing with natural interpersonal relationships, there is an obvious generalization. Here are some statements that confirm this.

- “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).
- “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:15-16).
- “Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time. Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col 4:5-6).
- “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men” (1 Thess 5:15).
- “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate” (1 Tim 6:17-18).
- “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men” (Titus 3:8).
- “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased” (Heb 13:16).

The details of people with sordid backgrounds are not provided. Rather only general comments are made concerning what they were, or the circumstances under which they were living. In none of the cases was a plan or regimen presented to remedy a troubling situation. Those who are fond of presenting resolutions are forced to assemble texts of Scripture for such a purpose, piecing them together like a theological puzzle. This is because there is no extended teaching in Scripture on the correction of specific flaws in human behavior. No book or letter was written to outline a process by which earthly problems could be resolved.

The overriding emphasis of apostolic teaching relates to the comprehension of what the Lord has done in our salvation. Every issue relating to human conduct, whether that of morality, domestic responsibility, or proper deportment of life, is addressed in view of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Consider these examples and behold their manner of reasoning. The matter of the salvation of God is always brought into the scenario,

- Moral promiscuity (1 Cor 6:18-20).
- Marital relationships (Eph 5:21-33).
- Children and parents (Eph 6:1-3).
- Parents and children (Eph 6:4).
- Servile relationships (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Tit 2:9-10; 1 Pet 2:18-21).
- Social leadership (Eph 6:9-10; Col 4:1).

The point to be seen is that the primary sphere of knowledge pertains to the Person and works of God.

- This includes the purposes of God, together with their objectives.
- The Person and accomplishments of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is in charge of bringing that purpose to fruition.
- The work of the Holy Spirit, who is the appointed Interface with the redeemed, bringing the work of God to fruition within the individual.

To my knowledge there is no apostolic proclamation, instruction, correction, or rebuke that does not directly interface with these matters. In other words, neither the Lord Jesus Himself, nor any person empowered by Him, addressed life in any of its complexities independently of the salvation of God. Life in this world was never viewed as fundamental. It was not the pivot on which instruction or decision turned.

Among a plethora of other reasons, this is why it is imperative that the saints of God be regularly exposed to the Scriptures.

PAUL FINDS CERTAIN DISCIPLES

“ 19:1 And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples . . . ”

Again, I want to call to your attention the nature of the inspired narrative. This not a chronological report of the varied earthly activities of men and women of God. What men refer to as “real life” and “where the rubber meets the road,” are not what is being communicated. From a very limited perspective, the “what are you doing now” scenario may be very interesting, but the Spirit does not take up our time with such considerations. From the perspective of this world, we know very little about Paul, the apostles, or anyone else of Scriptural record. In other words, we are never led to know such people “after the flesh.” Of course this is in strict keeping with the nature and intent of spiritual life. As it is written, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more” (2 Cor 5:16). That is, what is accomplished by

Life in this world is never seen as the primary environment, nor is the accent placed on matters that have uniquely to do with living in the flesh.

Divine affiliation dwarfs all other perspectives. I am careful to say that such views are not altogether unlawful. However, they are vastly inferior, and therefore can no longer be the foundational or primary view of those who live by faith and walk in the spirit. Associations and activities that belong to this world alone tend to be distracting – and blessed is the person who knows it.

It will be clear from the narrative that follows that things pertaining to life and godliness held the unquestioned priority in the life of Paul – even down to the kind of people with whom he chose to interface. Additionally, the preferred activities of Apollos will be identified with the work of the Lord.

WHILE APOLLOS WAS AT CORINTH

“And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth . . .” The original reference to Apollos’ travels did not say he was going to Corinth, simply that he was “disposed to pass into Achaia” (18:27). Now it becomes apparent that this disposition was toward the saints in Corinth, where Paul had spent at least one-and-a-half years. In his letter to Corinth, Paul states that Apollos “watered” what he had “planted.” Furthermore, spiritual “increase,” or “fruit,” came from the labors of Apollos (1 Cor 3:6).

I do not wish to make more of this than is proper, but the accounts of Scripture are set within the context of God and His work – within either a favorable or unfavorable identity. Life in this world is never seen as the primary environment, nor is the accent placed on matters that have uniquely to do with living in the flesh. Jesus highlighted this circumstance when He said, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof” (Matt 6:31-34). Admittedly, you will, not be able to build a kind of Christian business or career on these words. Perhaps that is why they are not taken seriously by many who profess to be Christians. However, notwithstanding a lack of popularity, these are words that will either snare or rescue all who hear them. Either they will disregard them and fall, or they will embrace them by faith and stand.

The relevancy of this is confirmed by the nature of the narrative we are now considering. Clearly, it is within the framework of the work of the Lord, and of those who were personally, willingly, and aggressively engaged in it.

The ministries of both Paul and Apollos involved the communication of words through which the Lord could work. While it is not true in all cases, many times words that are said to be in the name of the Lord are actually impotent because the Lord cannot use them. There is too much of the world’s wisdom in them, which wisdom shuts off the power of God. This is because such wisdom is “foolishness” with God. For this cause He has assigned it to the scrap heap of human thoughts, making ut impotent and vain (1 Cor 1:20; 3:19). The more men attempt to mingle such wisdom with their proclamations, the more senseless and useless they become.

PAUL CAME TO EPHESUS

“Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus . . .”

The “upper coasts” probably included “the inland districts of Galatia and Phrygia,” PULPIT COMMENTARY where Paul labored extensively (Acts 16:6; 18:23). Paul had labored plentifully among the churches there (1 Cor 16:1). Now, however, he works his way back to Ephesus, having completed his work in “the upper coasts” for the time. He had already told the brethren in Ephesus he would return to them “if God will” (18:21). Living in the lively awareness of the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2), it is apparent to Paul that the Lord indeed was willing, and therefore he returned. However, we must not ignore the involvement of Paul’s discretionary powers in all of this. There is a manner in which the believer can walk that makes God’s will both knowable and preferred. That is from the perspective of the believer himself. From the higher perspective, this is the Lord guiding His children with His eye (Psa 32:8). That is, there does not have to be a violent disruption of the believer in order to get his attention. When the peace of God is keeping the heart and the mind (Phil 4:7), guidance becomes the conscious norm, not the

exception. There is no way to codify or systematize this kind of Divine direction. However, those who do, in fact, live by faith, will come to the point where they will recognize this reality, and joyfully acquiesce to it.

FINDING CERTAIN DISCIPLES

“ . . . and finding certain disciples . . . ” Other versions read, “There he found some disciples,” NIV “where he found some disciples,” NRSV he found several believers,” NLT “some followers,” IE and “a few disciples.” WILLIAMS

The word “finding” is translated from an interesting Greek word (**eu`rei/n**). The lexical meaning of this word is, “to come upon, hit upon, to meet with . . . to see, learn, discover, understand . . . to find for oneself, to acquire, get, obtain, procure,” THAYER and “to find after searching discover, come on .” FRIBERG

There are a number of opinions that have been written concerning the identity of these “disciples.” Some say they possibly were “companions of Apollos, and had come with him from Alexandria.” PULPIT COMMENTARY It is also assumed they had not only been baptized with John’s baptism, but had “embraced John’s doctrine that the Messiah was soon to appear.” ALBERT BARNES Another view is that they were “Asiatic Jews.” ADAM CLARKE Yet another view is that they “professed faith in Christ as the true Messiah, but were as yet in the first and lowest form in the school of Christ.” MATTHEW HENRY Still another view is that they were “in the same stage of Christian knowledge as Apollos at the first.” JAMIESON, FAUSETT, BROWN One view states that they did “profess the name of Christ,” yet “were ignorant of the principle glory of the Gospel.” JOHN CALVIN Another view is: “They had evidently been baptized by some of John's disciples, possibly in Asia, after the Great Commission was given, and were no doubt Jews.” B.W. JOHNSON A view that I was taught is well articulated in the following statement. “ They were disciples, not of John, but of Jesus; for the uniform currency of the term *disciple* , throughout Acts, requires us to so understand it. This is further evident from Paul's question, “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?” The term believed evidently refers to Jesus as its object. They were known, then, as disciples of Jesus, and were so recognized by Paul.

Up to the moment of his conversation with them, Paul knew nothing of any irregularity in their obedience; for this was made known, to his surprise, during the conversation. When, therefore, he asked the question, “Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?” he could not have referred to that gift of the Spirit which all disciples receive; for he would take this for granted, from the fact that they were disciples. He must, then, have had reference to the miraculous gift, which some disciples did not receive. J. W. McGARVEY

Most of those commenting on this text affirm that it is a difficult one. The difficulty they have, however, is not with the text itself, but with its obvious clash with their understanding. What is being attempted is to fit the text into the theological view they have embraced. That is what makes the text so difficult for them.

However, what if the text is not intended to fit into a preconceived notion, or some theological template. What if it is, as the text clearly says, truly a unique situation?

First, let us see if there are any genuine similarities between these “disciples” and Apollos.

APOLLOS

DISCIPLES

A Jew.

Unspecified
Eloquent .
Not noted for speaking
Mighty in the Scriptures.
No statement concerning their knowledge of Scripture
Instructed in the way of the Lord.
Were basically untaught. Had not heard if there was a Holy Spirit.
Fervent in spirit
Called disciples
Taught the things of the Lord.
Nothing said about them teaching
Knew only the baptism of John.
Were baptized unto the baptism of John
Was taught the way of the Lord more perfectly.
Had to be taught they should believe on Jesus.
Nothing said about Apollos receiving the Spirit.
Paul laid his hands on them and the Spirit came on them.
Helped them much who had believed through grace.
Spoke with tongues and prophesied.

As is apparent, there is little revealed similarity between these disciples and Apollos.

The Word “Disciple”

It is true that throughout the book of Acts, the words “disciple” and “disciples” refer to those in Christ Jesus. However, in the Gospels, there are at least “four references” to “the disciples of John” (Matt 9:14; Mk 2:18; 5:33; Lk 7:18). There is also a reference in Acts to “disciples” who were followers of false teachers (Acts 20:30). The word translated “disciple” (**maqhta.j**) means “one who follows one’s teaching.” THAYER A disciple of Jesus, therefore, is one who follows the teaching of Jesus, and there is not so much as a word in this text that suggests the possibility that these men were following the teaching of Jesus. Although not specifically stated, their discipleship was devoted to John, and it was very limited at that, for Paul had to tell them about Jesus.

I conclude, therefore, that these men were a kind of second-hand disciples of John the Baptist. That is, someone who had been taught by John, or about John, had taught them. That teaching was not to be compared with that to which Apollos was subjected. He had been taught in the way of the Lord, and taught accurately the way of Christ.

There is also no suggestion that these men were Jews, or that they had been to Jerusalem, or had in any way been subjected to the message declared about Christ Jesus – a message in which he clearly identified that the Christ had come, for he pointed him out within six months of his initial ministry, affirming that He was “the Son of God” (John 1:34), and “the lamb of God that taken away the sin of the world” (John 1:29,36).

These, then, were elementary disciples who had shifted the focus of their lives, and had adopted a spiritual stance that differed from the world, and even from Judaism, yet was severely limited. They were learners, for that is what a disciple is. That is precisely why they will be able to be taught. They had a learner’s heart, even though their understanding was not mature. This should not be too difficult for us to receive, for disciples of this caliber are abundant in number – having a learning heart, but having been taught little.

HAVE YOU RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT?

“2a He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed?” Other versions read, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed,” NKJV “when you became believers,” NRSV “when you had faith,” BBE “when you came to trust,” CJB “when you believed [on Jesus as the Christ]?” AMPLIFIED and “when you first believed.” MONTGOMERY Neither the Greek nor the English text include the words “Jesus” of “Christ,” as the Amplified Bible suggests.

The question is asked in such a manner as to draw out the understanding of these “disciples.” If they are truly disciples of Jesus, they will make it known, for those who believed John’s words concerning the Christ left him, and became followers of Jesus (John 1:36-37), for John had made clear that the Messiah was greater than himself, and to be preferred over him (Mk 1:7; John 1:15,27,30).

From the experiential viewpoint, these disciples had apparently “believed” John’s message as it pertained to repentance. This is the stance that was rejected by certain religious leaders. Concerning that rejection, Jesus said to them, “Verily I say unto you, That the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not : but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe Him ” (Matt 21:32). It is apparent to me the men in our text had evidenced a clear abandonment of worldly manners, for that is what John required. Paul now asks them a question that will uncover the extent of their belief, and whether or not they are on a track that involves more than outward reform.

HAVE YOU RECEIVED THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Oh, this is a difficult question for one who has embraced a merely traditional religion. Paul does not ask these men if they had received miraculous spiritual gifts – a position taught by John Gill, Albert Barnes, John Calvin, J. W. McGarvey, and others. Why would such a question be asked in the first place, seeing that such a conferment is wholly in the hands of the Lord? Paul’s question pertains to Divine acceptance, not being endued with special power.

The doctrine of Scripture is that all who are in Christ, or are the sons of God, have been given the Holy Spirit.

- “And we are His witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him ” (Acts 5:32).

I have often pondered why this question is rarely heard in our time – a time when John’s disciples in all of their novicehood would appear advanced when compared to the average modern day Christian. Let it be clear that this is a relevant question in our time as well as that

of our text.

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us ” (Rom 5:5).

- “Now we have received , not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor 2:12).

- “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts ” (2 Cor 1:22).

- “Now He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit ” (2 Cor 5:5),

- “And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts , crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

- “He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us His holy Spirit ” (1 Thess 4:8).

- “And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us ” (1 John 3:24).

These things being true, a serious issue is raised when any one is asked if they have received the Holy Spirit. Paul asks the question in such a way as to determine the true condition of these disciples. We are not told what provoked the question, but it appears obvious to me that the words and manners of these disciples required more clarification concerning their state. This could not have been immoral conduct, for that issue was settled by any serious followers of John the Baptist.

I have often pondered why this question is rarely heard in our time – a time when John’s disciples in all of their novicehood would appear advanced when compared to the average modern day Christian . Let it be clear that this is a relevant question in our time as well as that of our text. Some approach the subject with a sectarian view of being baptized with the Holy Spirit in mind. Their aim is to confirm that people possess the evidence they perceive to confirm the presence of the Spirit. However, their approach has only muddied the waters, and contributed to more division and confusion.

Apostolic reasoning confirms the importance of knowing the answer to this question. “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His . . . But IF the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you . . . ” (Rom 8:9,11).

This question is to be understood within the context of that teaching. It further assumes an intelligent view of the Spirit, and the awareness of some evidence of His presence. This is not an inquiry concerning the doctrine of the Spirit. I will address the teaching concerning the Spirit later in this lesson.

THEY HAD NOT HEARD THERE WAS A HOLY SPIRIT

“ 2b And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.” Other versions read, “and he said to them, “No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit,” NASB “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit,” NIV “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit,” RSV “No, we have had no knowledge of the Holy Spirit,” BBE “We did not even hear if the Holy Spirit was come,” DARBY “Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Ghost was given,” ERV “No, we've never even heard of the Holy Spirit,” GWN “No, we were never even told there was such a thing as a Holy Spirit,” NJB “we don't know what

you mean. What is the Holy Spirit?" LIVING and "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." AMPLIFIED

WHAT SOME COMMENTATORS HAVE SAID OF THIS RESPONSE

As I have already pointed out, there are diverse views on what this response really meant.

- One commentary says that the response really means, "Not only have we not received the Holy Spirit, but we had not even heard that the dispensation of the Spirit was Come." PULPIT COMMENTARY

These views, together with others like them, assume several things that are not stated in the text.

Another commentator says, "they could not mean the person of the Holy Ghost: for they must have known that there was such a divine person as the Holy Ghost, from the writings of the Old Testament, with which they were conversant: and from the ministry of John, into whose baptism they were baptized; who saw the Spirit of God descend on Jesus, and bore witness of it; and declared, that Christ who was to come after him, would baptize with the Holy Ghost: nor could they mean the special grace of the Spirit, which they themselves had received; but the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit of God, which they at present knew nothing of, and which were afterwards bestowed upon them: they knew that there were prophecies in the Old Testament, concerning the effusion of the Spirit in the last days, in the days of the Messiah; but they had not heard that these had had their accomplishment; they had heard nothing of the day of Pentecost, and of the pouring out of the Spirit upon the apostles then, nor of any instance of this kind since; they did not know that the Holy Ghost was yet, they knew he was promised, but not that he was given; the Ethiopia version, to avoid the difficulty of the text, renders it, "we have only heard that there was an Holy Ghost." JOHN GILL

- Another commentator says, "That is, they had not heard that there were particular gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit to be received. They could not mean that they had not heard of the Holy Spirit; for John, in his baptism, announced Christ as about to baptize with the Holy Ghost, but they simply meant that they had not heard that this Spirit, in his gifts, had been given to or received by any one." ADAM CLARKE

- Another says, "They knew (as Dr. Lightfoot observes) that, according to the tradition of their nation, after the death of Ezra, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Ghost departed from Israel, and went up; and they professed that they had never heard of his return. They spoke as if they expected it, and wondered they did not hear of it, and were ready to welcome the notice of it." MATTHEW HENRY

- Yet another says, "This cannot be the meaning, since the personality and office of the Holy Ghost, in connection with Christ, formed an especial subject of the Baptist's teaching. Literally, the words are, "We did not even hear whether the Holy Ghost was (given)"; meaning, at the time of their baptism. That the word "given" is the right supplement, as in John 7:39, seems plain from the nature of the case." JAMIESON, FAUSSET, BROWN

- Another says, "How could it be, that men being Jews heard nothing of the Spirit, concerning which the prophets speak everywhere, and whose commendations and titles are extant in the whole Scripture? Surely we gather by this that Paul did neither speak generally of the Spirit; and that these men, as they were asked, did deny that they knew those visible graces wherewith God had beautified the kingdom of his Son. Therefore, they confess that they know not whether God give such gifts." JOHN CALVIN

These views, together with others like them, assume several things that are not stated in the text.

- That the men were Jews. This is not stated in the text, nor is there a sound basis for

assuming this was the case.

- That the men had personally heard John the Baptist, and knew of all that he said. This is neither stated nor insinuated by the text.

- That they were disciples of John the Baptist, and therefore ardent followers of his teaching. This is also assumed. The text does not say they were disciples of John, but that they were disciples. It is doubtless true that they were subjected to some of his teaching, but certainly not to the whole of it.

- That the men were knowledgeable of the writings of the Prophets. This is not stated in the text, nor can it be assumed.

- That the men knew the Holy Spirit had left, but did not know that He had returned.

- That the men knew the Holy Spirit was given, but did not know that He also conferred gifts.

Let me be clear in what I am saying. There is no firm basis for these persuasions, however reasonable they may appear to those who embrace them.

To this day, among the people with whom I have been affiliated, there is a group who maintains that the Holy Spirit is the Bible. While there are varying shades of this meaning adopted, there is one that unwaveringly affirms that the Holy Spirit is the Bible, and that it is all anyone can have of the Holy Spirit.

Further, it is the height of absurdity to adopt a view of Scripture that is founded upon a humanly perceived inference, lacking any clear declaration by the Scriptures themselves. Notwithstanding this circumstance, a sectarian spirit compels a person to perceive Scripture in a way that justifies the position that is held – whether it can be proved or not.

WHAT, THEN, DOES THE TEXT MEAN?

I will take the text to mean precisely what it says. These were not seasoned disciples. They knew some things – namely that sin was to be abandoned and an upright life lived before the Lord. However, they did not have a clear thought of a Spirit that was “holy,” much less One that could be received. One must remember that even among the Jews, there was a sect – the Sadducees – who did not believe there was such a thing as a spirit – to say nothing of the “Holy Spirit” (Acts 23:8). Among other things, this confirms the existence of this idea in the world – namely, that there was no such thing as a spirit. While the text does not specifically state these men embraced that view, the very existence of a spiritless doctrine confirms that we should not consider it strange that such an ignorance could exist among a body of sincere religious men.

To this day, among the people with whom I have been affiliated, there is a group who maintains that the Holy Spirit is the Bible. While there are varying shades of this meaning adopted, there is one that unwaveringly affirms that the Holy Spirit is the Bible, and that it is all anyone can have of the Holy Spirit.

Notwithstanding these view, within the framework of the textual considerations, there is no logical or doctrinal need to justify not taking the text simply as it reads. This will also free is from any seeming necessity to adopt a purely traditional view of the text.

THE ASSUMPTION OF BAPTISM

“ 3 And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized? And they said, Unto John's baptism.”

One can only imagine how a modern day preacher would have responded to the answer of these “disciples.” Here a response is given that is untainted with religious tradition. It is not given to

promote the advancement of a sect, nor is the aim to justify a private opinion. This is a man of God, with spiritual understanding, responding to honest and good hearts, who are not as informed as they can be. This will not be the occasion for debate or disputation – even though that is how many have chosen to respond to the subject under consideration. In our text the environment and the motives are pure, and the love of the truth is undeniably present. Those who cannot approach this subject in the manner revealed in this passage should back away from it. Such people should not take it upon themselves to speak on matters that are only seen through a sectarian template. Should they choose to speak on such matters, we should not listen to them.

UNTO WHAT THEN WERE YE BAPTIZED?

“And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized?” Other versions read, “Into what were ye baptized?” NKJV “what baptism did you receive?” NIV “What sort of baptism did you receive?” BBE “into what were ye immersed?” CJB “With what baptism were you baptized?” CSB “What kind of baptism did you have?” GWN “How were you baptized?” NAB “what baptism did you experience?” NLT “where with were ye baptized?” TNT “In what thing be ye baptized?” WYCLIFFE “Into what [baptism] then were you baptized?” AMPLIFIED and “Well then, how were you baptized?” PHILLIPS

There are Christian circles in which this question would never be asked – and they are infinitely more in number than anyone would dare to imagine. Some people would be satisfied to hear that a person was baptized regardless of the effects that followed it, or the understanding that attended it. Some perceive baptism as completely unrelated to salvation or the receiving of the Holy Spirit. Some see it as only related to the remission of sins, while others confine it to the matter of being identified with a local congregation of believers. There is by no means unanimity in the Christian community on the matter of baptism, even though there is only “one baptism” (Eph 4:5).

In this particular text, the subject is not the remission of sins – even though that is unqualifiedly associated with baptism (Acts 2:38; 22:16). The matter is not the formula that was uttered when the person was baptized, although that is a critical matter to some. Here the subject is receiving the Holy Spirit, and it is directly related the baptism of the people.

Notice also that baptism is assumed. Scripture contains no direct statement of, or any kind of allusion to, an unbaptized person in Christ. Baptism into Christ is consistently assumed for all that are in the Son. Apostolic doctrine makes clear that those who are in Christ were, in fact, baptized. The sixth chapter of Romans contains extensive reasoning on the subject. The epistle to the Colossians declares critical matters that attend baptism, including “the circumcision of Christ” and “the operation of God” (Col 3:11-12). The epistle to the Galatians affirms that we are baptized into Christ, and therein have “put on Christ” (Gal 3:27). Peter affirms that baptism with water “saves us,” being tied to the procurement of a “good conscience” (1 Pet 3:21).

Men may reason about the pious unimmersed, but no such reasoning is found in Scripture. Others may speculate about a person being saved, yet not being baptized, owing to an ignorance of the truth. However, such reasoning is not reflected in the Word of God. There, if people were not baptized, yet gave evidence of being accepted by God, they were “commanded . . . to be baptized” (Acts 10:48) .

Men may reason about the pious unimmersed , but no such reasoning is found in Scripture. Others may speculate about a person being saved, yet not being baptized, owing to an ignorance of the truth. However, such reasoning is not reflected in the Word of God. There, if people were not baptized, yet gave evidence of being accepted by God, they were “commanded . . . to be baptized” (Acts 10:48). The very first people who inquired what they ought to do in response to the Gospel were told to repent “and be baptized” (Acts 2:38). We have the record of a man who heard Christ

preached and concluded that he ought to be baptized (Acts 8:36). There is simply too much said in Scripture about baptism to justify any continued ignorance on the subject. Its necessity is always affirmed and never debated.

The word “baptized” is mentioned twenty-one times in the book of Acts (1:5; 2:38,41; 8:12,13,16,36,38; 9:18; 10:47,48; 11:16; 16:15,33; 18:8; 19:3,4,5; 22:16). Even though Jesus is declared to baptize with the Holy Spirit, not a single one of those references refers to that baptism. That baptism is not a response of men, but is a Sovereign act of the Lord Jesus. The above texts all refer to human response, or to John baptizing people (1:5; 11:16; 19:4). The word “baptized” is never used when referring to the receiving of the Holy Spirit – even though, technically, that would be a correct statement. However, it is not a sound doctrinal statement. No person of Scriptures ever said they were “baptized with the Holy Spirit” – even though, speaking loosely, that might be viewed as an accurate statement. However, this is not the manner of the Holy Spirit. It is not how He has cultured our minds to employ the word “baptized.” When referring to the unseen and spiritual baptism, the emphasis is always on the one who did the baptizing, or the Spirit Himself (Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16; Acts 11:16; 1 Cor 12:13). Baptism into Christ always accentuates the ones being baptized, and what was accomplished by the Lord at that time.

The text further suggests that someone baptized into Christ is not totally ignorant concerning the Holy Spirit. The same doctrine that provoked them to be baptized would have included some teaching concerning the Spirit. Therefore, Paul, assuming they had been baptized, asked concerning the kind of baptism they experienced. He is not inquiring about an inner experience, but an outward one.

The fact that Paul accented baptism suggests that the ordinary means through which the Spirit was given was not the laying on of hands – else he would have asked if anyone laid hands upon them.

Our Times

The peril of our times is confirmed by the confusion that exists within the professed church concerning the subject of baptism. This is an elemental point of the doctrine of Christ (Heb 6:2), and those who have no understanding of it are, at the very best, infants.

UNTO JOHN'S BAPTISM

“And they said, Unto John's baptism.” Other versions read, “Into John's baptism,” NKJV “John's baptism,” NIV “The baptism of John,” BBE and “the immersion of John.” CJB

This event occurred roughly 25-27 after the day of Pentecost. At that time, when the New Covenant was formally inaugurated, the baptism of John was obviated, together with the Old Covenant and its ceremonies. Yet, although this was the case, there was a period of time during which the former things were allowed to fade away. This display of Divine patience is confirmed by the following statement from Hebrews: “In that He saith, A new covenant, He hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Heb 8:13). Other versions read, “what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear,” NIV and “And what is obsolete (out of use and annulled because of age) is ripe for disappearance and to be dispensed with altogether.” AMPLIFIED

Admittedly, there is an element of mystery to all of this that makes it difficult to codify or systematize. Notwithstanding, spiritual growth presumes the gradual fading, and consequent abandonment, of old things, as well as the appropriation of new things. Old views, even when they were formerly valid, are rendered obsolete by new light. A kind of spiritual disintegration commences when the light of newness shines into the soul. That is one reason why continuance in sin always confirms there has been a failure to embrace the truth.

In our day, this fading period has long since passed. In fact, it had passed during the time of our

text. The fact that these disciples had only been baptized with the baptism of John will not be allowed to pass as though it was inconsequential. Keep in mind, that John's baptism meant those who were so baptized had, in fact, repented. Their lives had been altered by a determination to live acceptably before the Lord, and to refuse to allow sin to erupt in all manner of immoral conduct.

The baptism of repentance was "unto" such a life – to abstinence from sin. However, according to Divine intent, that kind of life was not an end of itself. Rather, it was the appointed way to prepare for Christ. That was the primary objective of both John's ministry and his baptism. Now that Jesus has come, and has been enthroned in heaven, John's baptism will no longer be honored.

THE OBJECTIVE OF JOHN'S BAPTISM DECLARED

“ 4 Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.”

The manner of Paul's response suggests that these men had not been exposed to the fulness of John's teaching. At the very least, they certainly had not grasped what he taught. However, being the kind of teacher that he was, it is highly unlikely that they could have been exposed to his teaching directly or indirectly, yet missed the central point that Paul is making.

PAUL'S KNOWLEDGE OF JOHN

Paul knew the purpose fulfilled by John – what he did, and what he said – even though he was never actually a disciple of John. There is no record that affirms he was directly exposed to John, although that is theoretically possible, judging from his age at the time of Stephen's stoning. However, John did not preach in Jerusalem. His preaching was in the wilderness of Judaea, where he also baptized (Matt 3:1; Mk 1:4). It is not likely that Saul of Tarsus ventured out to see and hear John. This is because John fulfilled a Scriptural prophesy, providing the means through which men were prepared for Christ. I gather that Paul received some revelation on this. That, coupled with his understanding of the prophecies of John (Isa 40:3-5; Mal 3:1), account for his understanding of John's role in the preparation of the way of the Lord.

THE BAPTISM OF REPENTANCE

“John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance . . .” Other versions read, “baptism which goes with a change of heart,” BBE “an immersion in connection with turning from sin to God,” CJB and “John's baptism called for repentance from sin.” NLT

The idea here is that John's baptism accompanied a turning from sinful expression, and the resolution to abstain from iniquity. Men were not created anew through John's baptism, but were rather made ready for the new creation that occurs in Christ alone. They were not given a new heart during his baptism, but were rather being prepared to receive one. Because Christ was the sin-bearer (Heb 9:28), and came into the world “to save sinners” (1 Tim 1:15), men were required to become sensitive of sin, and learn to hate it, resolving to abstain from it. There was no other way to be effectively prepared for the Christ.

A Tragedy of Our Time

One of the great tragedies of our time is the near-total lack of this kind of mindset among the people. Christ is being presented as facilitator of human objectives, and the resolver of their unwanted experiences. In such a state, men are not made ready for Christ. This is a total misrepresentation of Christ. He came to do the Father's will, placing it above even His own desires. As He Himself said, “For I came down from heaven, not to do Mine own will, but the will of Him that sent Me” (John 6:38). Therefore He said, “I seek not Mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent Me”

(John 5:30).

It must be remembered that the will of man is what led him into an eternal dilemma – one that could only be resolved at great cost to both God and Christ. It is therefore the height of absurdity to imagine that God is preoccupied with what men desire – unless their desire is a precise reflection of His own.

THEY SHOULD BELIEVE ON HIM

“ . . . saying unto the people, that they should believe on Him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.” Other versions read, “believe in Him,” NASB “have faith in,” BBE and “put their trust in.” CJB

Repentance, therefore, necessarily precedes believing on Christ Jesus. Even John the Baptist preached, “repent ye, and believe the Gospel” (Mk 1:15). Jesus said of those who did not respond to John’s introductory message, “For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not : but the publicans and the harlots believed him: and ye, when ye had seen it, repented not afterward, that ye might believe him ” (Matt 21:32). The person who has not repented, insisting on continuing to sin is thrust into the position where believing is not even possible.

However, these “disciples” from Ephesus had repented, and now they will be told the objective of repentance. They are not among those who “could not believe” (John 12:39).

If conformity to, and friendship with, the world is the kiss of death, then a very real hatred of sin, and the honest determination to wage war against it is the kiss of life – the commencement of living toward God.

The Involvements of Of Believing On Christ Jesus

What does it mean to “believe on” Christ? The Greek word translated “on” is **εἰς**. As a preposition (as it is used here), it means “entrance into, or direction and limit: into, to, toward.” THAYER

Repentance is the beginning of an orientation toward fellowship with Christ. Believing on Jesus is the beginning of fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which we are called by the living God (1 Cor 1:9). Several things are implied in the expression “believe on Him . . . on Jesus Christ”

- A discontent with sin and its guilt, and a determination to be freed from its dominion.
- Some knowledge of Christ – knowledge that is revealed in and through the Gospel.
- A preoccupation with, and focus upon, Christ.
- A solid persuasion that Christ is everything He is declared to be.
- A firm and unwavering reliance upon Christ to do what has been promised.
- Being convinced that Christ has accomplished what God required as a basis for the salvation of men.

Promises to Those who Believe On Christ

There are certain promises given to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and they are most remarkable.

- They are given power to become the sons of God (John 1:12).
- They not condemned (John 3:18).

- They have everlasting life (John 3:36; 6:47).
- They will not come into condemnation, and are passed from death to life (John 5:24).
- This is the work of God (John 6:29).
- They will never thirst (John 6:35).
- Rivers of living water shall flow out of their bellies (John 7:38).
- They will receive the Holy Spirit (John 7:39).
- They have believed on the God who sent Christ (John 12:44).

Anything of this magnitude must not be viewed simplistically, or treated as though it was one of a series of steps that have equal value. Furthermore, the objective of the commandments, whether it is repentance, or others that are delivered to men, is said to be “love out of a pure heart,” “a good conscience,” and “faith unfeigned,” or unpretentious

They should not abide in darkness (John 12:46).

- They will do greater works (John 14:12).
- They shall be saved (Acts 16:31).
- Their faith is counted for righteousness (Rom 4:5).
- Righteousness is imputed to them (Rom 4:24).
- They will not be ashamed (Rom 9:33; 10:11).
- They will not be confounded (1 Pet 2:6).
- They have the witness in themselves (1 John 5:10).

Anything of this magnitude must not be viewed simplistically, or treated as though it was one of a series of steps that have equal value. Furthermore, the objective of the commandments, whether it is repentance, or others that are delivered to men, is said to be “love out of a pure heart,” “a good conscience,” and “faith unfeigned,” or unpretentious (1 Tim 1:5).

Faith is not a mere creedal or intellectual persuasion. As it is written that men believe “with the heart” (Rom 10:10). Faith is associated with the following, none of which are unnecessary.

- Understanding (Heb 11:3).
- Obedience (Rom 1:5; 16:26).
- Righteousness (Rom 10:6).
- The Word (Rom 10:8).
- Spiritual aptitude (Rom 12:3).
- Prophesying (Rom 12:6).
- Speaking the truth (2 Cor 4:13).
- Hearing (Rom 10:17; Gal 3:2,5).
- Blessing (Gal 3:9).
- The household of God (Gal 6:10).
- A shield of protection (Eph 6:16).
- Joy (Phil 1:25).
- Work (1 Thess 1:3).

- Spiritual battle (1 Tim 6:12).
- Assurance (Heb 10:22).
- Prayer (James 5:15).

Faith is depicted as a “door” through which one enters into the plentitude of God – a door that is opened by the Lord. As it is written, “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). In fact, there is nothing within the remarkable scope of salvation that is not made available to the person who believes on the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE NECESSITY FOR PREACHING CHRIST

While the text does not mention Paul preaching Christ to these men, it seems to me that this is a foregone conclusion. It is inconceivable that these men had heard Christ preached, yet had only been baptized with the baptism of John. Further, in order to believe on Christ, the truth concerning Him must be declared, for “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” (Rom 10:14).

The baptism of the Ethiopian eunuch was preceded by Philip preaching Jesus unto him (Acts 8:35-38). The baptism of the Philippian jailer and his household was preceded by an admonition to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the declaration of the word of the Lord (Acts 16:31-33). When Lydia was baptized, it was because the Lord “opened” her heart in order that she might attend “unto the things which were spoken of Paul” (Acts 16:14-15). Thus believing and obeying the Gospel is always preceded by a declaration of the same – and there is no evidence that this was done prior them encountering Paul. When they believed, Paul was the preacher.

THEY WERE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS

“ 5 When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” Other versions read, “baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus,” ASV/NIV “they were immersed by the authority of the Lord Jesus,” IE “they were baptized [again, this time] in the name of the Lord Jesus,” AMPLIFIED

The same Greek word translated “on,” in the expression “believe on the name” (**ειν**) is translated “in” in this verse. Some perceive this as meaning “by the authority of Christ” IE/Robertson However, I do not see how such a meaning can be applied to the Greek word **ειν** , which has to do with entrance into something.

Others feel as though this refers to a formula that is said when the person is baptized. Those who teach this will not accept a baptism that is done “in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt 28:19). However, there is no record in Scripture of the person doing the baptizing stating a fixed expression when doing so.

Concerning the Lord’s words in Matthew 28:19, the Greek word **ειν** is also used in that text, and it is prepositional use as well. Jesus was affirming that the person being baptized is brought into the Father, into the Son, and into the Holy Spirit. This is in strict accord with His prayer on the eve of His betrayal, which focused on believers being joined to the Lord. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; That they all may be one; as Thou, Father, art IN ME, and I IN THEE, that they also may be one IN US : that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I IN THEM, and THOU IN ME, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.” (John 17:20-23).

In Scripture, the word “name” is used to denote the person. When God revealed Himself to Moses He said He was declaring His name – WHO He was by nature (Ex 34:5-7). When the Lord changed the name of a man, it was because the nature of the person had been changed in some way (Gen 17:5,15; 32:28; John 1:42; Acts 13:9).

Apostolic doctrine also affirms that this is precisely the status of those who are correctly called “the children of God.” They are “in the Father” (1 John 2:24; 4:15-16), “in the Son” (Rom 8:1; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 John 2:24), and “in the Spirit” (Rom 8:9; Gal 3:3; 5:16,25). This is encompassed in marvelous expression, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). Thus we are made “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and of the “Divine nature” as well (2 Pet 1:4). There is a very real entrance into Christ that is both initiated at our baptism, and maintained by faith.

PAUL LAID HIS HANDS ON THEM

“ 6a And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them . . . ” Other versions read, “the Holy Spirit came on them,” NASB and “the Holy Spirit came down on them.” NJB

The initial receiving of the Holy Spirit by a group of people, as well as individuals, is described in differing, yet similar, ways.

- **THE DISCIPLES ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** “And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance” (Acts 2:4). **UNIQUENESS:** The inauguration of the New Covenant.

REFERRED TO AS being filled with the Spirit (Acts 2:4), receiving the promise (Acts 2:39), receiving the Spirit (Acts 10:47; 15:9), and the Spirit being “poured out” (Acts 2:17-18). Not **ATTENDED** with the laying on of hands.

- **THE SAMARITANS.** “Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost” (Acts 8:17). **UNIQUENESS:** A people who were kind of half-breeds believing in the coming of the Messiah, yet having flawed views of worship. **REFERRED TO AS** the falling of the Spirit (Acts 8:16), and the giving of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:18). **ATTENDED** with the laying on of apostolic hands (Acts 8:16-17).

- **SAUL OF TARSUS.** “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17). **UNIQUENESS:** The call of the apostle to the Gentiles.

REFERRED TO AS Saul being “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). **ATTENDED** by the laying on of non-apostolic hands (Acts (9:17)).

However, I am going to affirm that it is not the Divine manner to confer the Holy Spirit in a unique and limited manner that He did not promise. Amos boldly announced, “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). For Him to contradict this revealed principle would also impact upon His own glory, for God has declared that His glory is found in the fact that He does what He says.

GENTILES AT THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS. “While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word” (Acts 10:44). **UNIQUENESS:** The participation of the Gentiles in the salvation of God. **REFERRED TO AS** the Holy Spirit falling on them (Acts 10:44), the Spirit being “poured out” (Acts 10:45). receiving the Spirit (Acts 10:47), and the Holy Spirit being “given” to them (Acts 15:9). Not **ATTENDED** with the laying on of hands.

- **THE EPHESIANS DISCIPLES.** “And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied” (Acts 19:6). **UNIQUENESS:** The formal termination of the baptism of John. **ATTENDED** with the

laying on of an apostles hands (Acts 19:6).

THE PROPHETS PROMISED THE SPIRIT WOULD BE GIVEN

Much is made of this in Scripture – the giving of the Holy Spirit in the time of the new and better covenant.

- “For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and My blessing upon thine offspring” (Isa 44:3).

- “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out My spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out My spirit” (Joel 2:28-29).

- “And I will put My spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and ye shall keep My judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:27).

- “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out My spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek 39:29).

It is in view of these prophecies that the Holy Spirit is referred to as “the Spirit of promise” (Eph 1:13). Believers are said to “receive the Spirit of promise” (Gal 3:14). Peter referred to the gift of the Spirit as “the promise” (Acts 2:39). To my knowledge the Prophets never distinguished between a miraculous gift of the Holy Spirit and an ordinary one. This is, however, how several notable commentators and religious bodies view the matter. There is an attending logic that appears to these people to fully justify their view. However, I am going to affirm that it is not the Divine manner to confer the Holy Spirit in a unique and limited manner that He did not promise. Amos boldly announced, “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto His servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). For Him to contradict this revealed principle would also impact upon His own glory, for God has declared that His glory is found in the fact that He does what He says. “Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure: Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it” (Isa 46:9-11).

Although the things that were manifested at these times were unique, care was taken in the reporting of the events to associate them with the common salvation. The fact that the Holy Spirit was given without any human interposition, whether in word or deed, did not make it a special gift.

This applies to blessings as well as judgments. In fact, Paul is careful to say that He did not preach or teach anything that was not previously promised by Moses and the Prophets. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). The same may be said of the Lord Jesus Himself, His twelve apostles, and other inspired men.

THE UNIQUENESS WAS IN THE MANIFESTATION, NOT THE REALITY

When reporting the reality of receiving the Holy Spirit, it was not declared as a unique thing, even though it may have been attended by unique circumstances.

- **THE EVENTS OF PENTECOST.** No laying on of hands. The recipients received the Spirit when they were sitting in one place and in one accord. They spoke with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance, speaking of “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:4,11).

- They were “filled with the Spirit” (Acts 2:4).
- The promise of the Holy Spirit was given (Acts 2:33).
- The Spirit was “poured forth” (Acts 2:16-17).
- The Spirit “shed forth” by Jesus (Acts 2:33).
- The same thing occurred that later took place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 10:47; 11:15).
- The fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:16-17).
- The “promise” was applicable to the hearers and their children (Acts 2:39).
- **THE SAMARITANS.** Peter and John laid their hands upon them, and they “received the Holy Spirit.” There is no record of them speaking with other languages or prophesying.
 - They “received the Holy Spirit ” (Acts 8:17).
 - The Holy Spirit was “given” (Acts 8:18).
- **CONVERSION OF THE GENTILES.** No hands were laid on the recipients, but the Spirit fell on them while Peter was preaching. They did speak with other languages and prophesied.
 - The Spirit fell on them (Acts 10:44).
 - The gift of the Holy Spirit was “poured out” (Acts 10:45).
 - They “received the Holy Spirit,” just as Peter and those with him (Acts 10:47).
 - Peter remembered the words of the Lord concerning being baptized with the Holy Spirit (Acts 11:16).
 - God gave them then “like gift,” who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17).
 - God granted the Gentiles “repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).
 - God gave them the Holy Spirit (Acts 15:8).
 - God purified their hearts by faith (Acts 15:9).
 - They were saved through the grace of God (Acts 15:11).
 - God visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name (Acts 15:14).
 - What took place agreed with the words of the prophets (Acts 15:15).
 - The Gentiles were “turned to God” (Acts 15:19).
 - **THE EPHESIANS DISCIPLES.** Paul laid his hands on the disciples following their baptism, and the Spirit came on them. They spoke with other languages and prophesied.
 - They “received the Holy Spirit ” (Acts 8:17).
 - The Holy Spirit was “given” (Acts 8:18).

Although the things that were manifested at these times were unique, care was taken in the reporting of the events to associate them with the common salvation. The fact that the Holy Spirit was given without any human interposition, whether in word or deed, did not make it a special gift. The conferment of the gift through the laying on of hands did not make it a special gift. The giving of the Spirit while Peter was speaking, and without any other human involvement did not make it a special outpouring.

When, for example, Peter delivered the report of the events taking place at the house of Cornelius, he did not report that they spoke in tongues and prophesied – even though that did take place (Acts

11:15-17; 15:8-11). In fact, that marvelous working was categorically associated with being “saved” by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ (15:11), believing (Acts 11:7,17), being granted repentance (Acts 11:18), hearts being purified by faith (Acts 15:9), God taking a people for Himself (Acts 15:14), and turning to the Lord (Acts 15:19).

What could possibly warrant the development of a doctrine that views these events as unique experience that were not directed related to the salvation of God. What would constrain men to think of them in association with special empowerment and special gifts? The Scriptures never review these historical matters in such a way, and neither should we!

THE LAYING ON OF HANDS

The Apostles are not the only people who conferred the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands – although that work is most generally assigned to them. Ananias, however, was the means through which Saul of Tarsus was not only healed of his blindness, but also received the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:17-18).

All the Sons Receive the Spirit

The Holy Spirit is given to those who believe (John 7:39), and also to those who obey (Acts 5:32). The Spirit is sent into their hearts because they are sons (Gal 4:6). All who are in Christ are apprised of the fact that the Holy Spirit has been given to them (John 7:39; 1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 1:22; 2 Cor 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). In fact, it is strongly affirmed, “But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9).

Spiritual Epochs

In the dispensing of the Holy Spirit, the laying on of hands has been employed by God – but not always. In fact, this was not the norm. In the instances where this did occur, or where there was a manifestation of speaking in other languages and prophesying, or declaring the wonderful works of God, a spiritual epoch was taking place.

It should not surprise us that extraordinary phenomena accompanies great beginnings. When Israel came out of Egypt, great signs and wonders took place. The same was true when the Law was given at Sinai, and when Jesus commenced His ministry among men. But these signs were not intended to have a permanent presence. That would have diminished their effectiveness.

PENTECOST. The first time the exalted Christ shed forth the Spirit. This was the time the New Covenant was inaugurated, and the Gospel was preached with power and insight. Such an occasion required confirmation. There could be no doubt concerning what was taking place.

- **SAMARIA.** This was a body of people that had not been granted the privilege of hearing the Gospel of the Kingdom as those in Galilee and Judaea. Jesus had forbade His disciples to go among them (Matt 10:5). Jesus had spent two days there during His ministry (John 4:40). However, with the belief of the Gospel as preached by Philip, a new era started for them. During this beginning, confirmation was given because of the newness that was taking place, and to establish the apostles as the foundation-layers of the church (Eph 2:20). It was through their word, or doctrine, that men would believe (John 17:20).

- **THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS.** This marked the acceptance of the Gentiles, something that had been prophesied, yet remained unclear. This required confirmation, in order that the scope of salvation might be seen. Special confirmations were given to both Cornelius and Peter at that time (Acts 10).

• **THE DISCIPLES AT EPHESUS.** This marked a formal end to John's baptism. John had said he had to decrease, and yet that had not yet taken place among these disciples. Therefore things accompanied the receiving of the Spirit that were by no means ordinary.

Beginnings Differ In Appearance, But Not in Substance

It should not surprise us that extraordinary phenomena accompanies great beginnings. When Israel came out of Egypt, great signs and wonders took place. The same was true when the Law was given at Sinai, and when Jesus commenced His ministry among men. But these signs were not intended to have a permanent presence. That would have diminished their effectiveness.

In addition to these things, the government of the kingdom is upon the shoulder of Christ Himself. He is the One who determines both the extent and nature of any manifestation. Because epochal beginnings are by their very nature within an environment of relative ignorance, extraordinary things accompany them. In a way of speaking, it is like kick-starting faith, so that the beginning itself is effective. Signs and wonders are not intended to awaken an appetite for them.

However, as faith matures, the confirmation of Divine working takes a form that must be discerned independently of physical, or outward, phenomenon. This matter is develop-ed in apostolic doctrine, which defines the role of the Holy Spirit in the perfecting of salvation, or sanctification. I will address this more fully after commenting on verses six and seven.

THEY SPOKE WITH TONGUES AND PROPHESED

“6b . . . and they spake with tongues, and prophesied.” Other versions read, “they had the power of talking in tongues, and acting like prophets,” BBE “they began to talk in other languages and to speak what God had revealed,” GWN “they spoke in languages, and prophesied,” WEBSTER “They began speaking different languages and prophesying,” IE “they began to speak in foreign tongues and to prophesy,” WILLIAMS “they spoke in [foreign, unknown] tongues (languages) and prophesied,” AMPLIFIED “they began to speak with tongues and the inspiration of prophets.” PHILLIPS and “they spoke in strange tongues and also proclaimed God's message” GNB

This is one of three new covenant accounts of men speaking in tongues. Men first did this on the day of Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus were filled with the Spirit and so spoke. Their subject was “the wonderful works of God,” but we do not know a single syllable that they said (Acts 2:4,11). The second was at the house of

I do not know how it is possible to develop a syllabus on speaking in tongues with that kind of data, but some have managed to do it – at least, that is what they think they have achieved.

Cornelius where Peter and those with him heard the Gentiles “speak with tongues and magnify God” (Acts 10:46). We are not apprised of a single specific word that they spoke – although the nature was that of drawing attention to the God of heaven. The third is our text, where, following their baptism and the imposition of Paul's hands, men spoke with tongues and prophesied. Again, we have absolutely no idea concerning the message they gave. Three unique occasions, and three ways of stating the subject on which they spoke. (1) The wonderful works of God. (2) Magnifying God. (3) Prophesying. I do not know how it is possible to develop a syllabus on speaking in tongues with that kind of data – but vain men have managed to do so. All of this is compounded by the fact that no eye-witness reporting such an event ever drew attention to the fact that the recipients of the Spirit spoke in tongues (Acts 11:15; 15:8-9).

That is true of Pentecost, the house of Cornelius, and the disciples from Ephesus. No one ever interpreted what they said for those hearing the report – even though they doubtless did understand what was spoken in another language – else they could not have identified it as relating to the wonderful works of God, magnifying God, or prophesying. In other words, when speaking of a

message from God, the Holy Spirit never dignified mystery, drew undue attention to it, or provoked people to desire to speak in such a manner – never!

Additionally, Paul taught that speaking in a language that is not understood by the hearers is forbidden in the assembly of the saints (1 Cor 14:11-20). He also affirmed that an insistence upon maintaining such a practice was the evidence of the curse of God, not his blessing (1 Cor 14:21-25). Actually, the first example of men speaking in other languages was a judgment from God to abort the vain work they had undertaken (Gen 11:7-9).

ALL THE MEN WERE ABOUT TWELVE

“ 7 And all the men were about twelve.” Twelve men, all disciples, all hearers, all learners, all obedient, and all blessed. Among them there were no dissenters, no disobedient, and none who did not receive the love of the truth. That is a most extraordinary circumstance!

God does not always provide the count of those who turn to Him. Sometimes He simply says that “multitudes both of men and women” were added (Acts 5:14). Another time it is said that “the number of disciples multiplied” (Acts 6:1,7). Other times He says that “much people was added to the Lord” (Acts 11:24), and once speaks of an entire city that gave heed to the Gospel (Acts 8:6-8). Another time it is written that “a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21). Other times He simply refers to a household, and omits all counts (Acts 10:33; 16:14,34; 18:8). There was also a period of time when the churches “increased in number daily” (Acts 16:5). In the cases of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38) and Saul of Tarsus, we have one person. There were also counts cited: 3,000 (Acts 2:41), and 5,000 (Acts 4:4).

Here we read of twelve men. It is obvious that the number of people, while sometimes impressive, is not the real point. Where the hearts of men are tuned to the Lord, a great work of God has been accomplished, for any conversion, whether of a single man or a multitude, is “impossible” with men (Matt 19:25-26).

WHETHER OR NOT MEN HAVE THE HOLY SPIRIT IS STILL AN ISSUE

No person can claim identity with Christ who does not have the Spirit, for “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His” (Rom 8:9). How, then, can it be known that a person has the Holy Spirit? It is true that God gave immediate evidence of that affiliation with the disciples on Pentecost, those at the house of Cornelius, and the Ephesians disciples. However, this kind of evidence was required by the times, and the freshness of the work that was being done. The standard means of making this determination is to look for what the Spirit does in the people of God. That evidence cannot be limited to speaking in tongues and prophesying, for it is written that all who have the Spirit do not do such things (1 Cor 12:30).

We are not left to conjecture on this, for considerable has been revealed concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is the evidence of His presence.

We are not left to conjecture on this, for considerable has been revealed concerning the ministry of the Holy Spirit, which is the evidence of His presence. While the following is by no means a complete list, it provides enough information to enable the nature of the Spirit’s work to be detected.

- **The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts:** “And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom 5:5). It is because of this work of the Spirit that we love God, because He first loved us (1 John 4:19),

- **Mortifying the deeds of the body:** “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if

ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). Those who have the Spirit suppress the expression of sin .

- **Confidence that we are the children of God:** “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God” (Rom 8:16). Those who have the Spirit of God possess assurance of their sonship.

- **The favorable testimony of our conscience:** “I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 9:1). The indwelling Spirit removes a condemning conscience.

- **The possession of joy:** “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17; 1 Thess 1:6). The Holy Spirit broadens the scope of perception and participation.

- **Abounding in hope:** “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Rom 15:13). The Holy Spirit brings one to the point where life is lived in prospect of the coming of the Lord and glory.

- **Keeping what God has given to us:** “That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us” (2 Tim 1:14). Spirit enables us to maintain what we have been given.

- **The continual renewing of spiritual life and strength:** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5). In a world that is constantly diminishing, the Spirit causes the believer to continually increase in strength.

- **Patiently waiting for the hope of righteousness:** “For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith” (Gal 5:5). Through the Spirit, the believer can patiently wait for the experience of thorough righteousness.

- **Obedying the truth:** “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22). The consistent obedience of the truth is a fruit of the Spirit.

- **Saying from the heart that Jesus is the Lord:** “Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost” (1 Cor 12:3). The Spirit moves one to personally confess, and acquiesce, to the fact of Jesus being Lord.

- **An increasing moral and spiritual change into the likeness of Christ :** “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). Where the Spirit dwells, there is consistent growth and conformity to Christ.

- **Being free from the dominion of the law of sin and death:** “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). There is a liberty from the dominion of sin whoever the Spirit is.

- **Obtaining things that help our weakened condition – even though we do not know what we should pray for:** “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Rom 8:26-27). No person who possesses the Spirit will ultimately lack what is required to live in a manner that pleases God.

• **Groaning under the weight of mortality, and living in expectation of occupying our new bodies:** “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor 5:4-5). The presence of the Spirit produces a certain discontent with the world, our present bodies, and temporality.

• **Unity with the children of God:** “Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph 4:3). The Spirit draws the person possessing Him to the other members of the family of God.

• **A life that is lived “in goodness and in truth”:** “For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth ” (Eph 5:9). Goodness and truth characterize the life of a person who has the Holy Spirit.

• **Accord, or a fellowship of agreement with the Spirit:** “If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies” (Phil 2:1). Those who possess the Spirit and do not quench Him, will find themselves in agreement with Him.

When these evidences are absent in professed believers, the presence of the Holy Spirit cannot be confirmed. Further the Holy Spirit is a “seal” that marks the individual as a child of God, and is the earnest of our inheritance

Keeping the commandments of God: “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24). The Spirit of God brings a preference for, and obedience to, God’s commandments.

• **Not fulfilling the lust of the flesh:** “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Gal 5:16). The Spirit enables the one in whom, He resides to resist the devil, reject his encroachments. And refuse to obey the sinful impulses of the flesh.

• **The unique and effective fruit of the Spirit:** “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal 5:22-23).

• **Love:** Giving of self, bringing advantage, not causing abuse, loving the saints as Christ’s brethren, being considerate.

• **Joy:** Joying in God, rejoicing in hope, joy that comes from faith.

• **Peace:** Peace that rules, keeping the heart and mind, peace with God, causing one to be a peacemaker, at peace with the brethren.

• **Longsuffering:** Able to endure long, not easily provoked or discouraged, and consistent.

• **Gentleness:** Not carnally abrasive, intention to bless, not offending or offensive.

• **Goodness:** Bringing good, causing spiritual profit, and doing good works.

• **Faith:** Faithful, trustworthy dependable, and reliable.

• **Meekness:** Humble, not self-seeking, strength is harnessed for good.

• **Temperance:** Self control, not excessive, moderation, not allowing the flesh to dominate.

When these evidences are absent in professed believers, the presence of the Holy Spirit cannot be confirmed. Further the Holy Spirit is a “seal” that marks the individual as a child of God, and is the earnest of our inheritance (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30).

Our view of the Holy Spirit must be associated with His role in the Kingdom of God – what He DOES within the one who is “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). Our text has to do with the entrance of people into the Kingdom, not with their ultimate conformity to the image of Christ. It is not necessary for us to decide whether this experience was intended to be a permanent one, or was confined to the first century. If we were able to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion on such a matter, what difference would it make?

Apostolic doctrine does not associate the experience of the Ephesians disciples with the standard entrance into the Kingdom of God, anymore than it does the thief on the cross, the Samaritans, or Saul of Tarsus,

The doctrine, or teaching, concerning the work of the Holy Spirit, has to do with the fruit that He bears in the believer, and the ministry He fulfills in the behalf of those who are in Christ Jesus. His ministry to the brethren consists of directing them in the subduing of the desires of the flesh. This assistance is seen from two perspectives. First, from the subjective viewpoint, the “deeds of the body,” or “the evil deeds prompted by the body” are subdued. AMPLIFIED (Rom 8:13). Second, behind the scenes, and apart from our consciousness of His activity, He makes intercession for us when we do not know what we should pray for as we ought (Rom 8:26-27). This doubtless relates to the fruit of the Spirit, even though that is not the immediate emphasis of the text just cited.

It seems to me that these are the matters with which men of godly thought ought to be occupied. The attempt to convert inspired examples into doctrine is quite common in Christian circles, but it is not right. Examples may have some association with doctrine, but only to the extent they are handled in that manner by the inspired writers of Scripture.

Our text is a case in point. The doctrinal emphasis is whether or not the disciples of reference had received the Spirit, not how He was received, or the immediate impact that reception had on the disciples. Also, the point was not whether they had worked miracles.

Subjectively, the common thing in accounts of the Spirit being given is that He was “received” by the people (Acts 8:17; 10:47). This is in perfect accord with the doctrine, which pertains to all who are in the Son (Rom 8:15; 1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 11:4; Gal 3:2). The attending circumstances, however, were not identical.

Objectively, the point was that the Spirit had been “given,” or “shed forth” (Acts 2:38; 5:32; 8:18,20; 10:45; 11:17). This also precisely accords with apostolic doctrine (Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 6:19; 2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; 1 Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24; 4:13). Again, the attending circumstances were not identical.

The doctrine also states that the Spirit dwells in the saints (Rom 8:9,11; 1 Cor 6:19; James 4:5). At no point does the experience contradict the doctrine – yet the experience itself is not the doctrine. It is the doctrine that is to be taught.

CONCLUSION

By their very nature, texts like the one with which we have just dealt draw the attention of men. This is because it departs from the norm – a prerogative that is open to God, but not to men. Theoretically, things like this are associated with the transition to the New Covenant, and not to the covenant itself. They were probably evidence of the acceptance or lack of acceptance of the people to the ones who were preaching to them. However, the text does not say this, but simply gives the report of what the Lord did, and how He did it.

When it comes to what men teach, or the doctrine they affirm, they must affirm what is consistent, not what is inconsistent. They are not pass over unique texts, such as events concerning the disciples from Ephesus. However, they are not to be declared as though they were a pattern for future

generations. It is quite possible for them to occur again, because they are things that are strictly governed by the Lord Himself. These are some of those paths that are “in the sea,” and His footsteps “that are not known” (Psa 77:19). They are not intended to be things that formulate a doctrine, or experiences that are to be eagerly sought. These are not matters over which saints are to divide.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #79

PAUL SPENDS TWO YEARS IN EPHEBUS

“ 19:8 And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. 9 But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. 10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks. 11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: 12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. ”
(Acts 19:8-12)

INTRODUCTION

A SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

Once again, the preference of Paul to be with the followers of Christ is confirmed. It was these people – those who are in Christ Jesus – to whom, Paul made known “the unsearchable riches of Christ” (Eph 3:8), “the riches of the glory of this mystery” (Col 1:27), and “the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret from the foundation of the world” (Rom 16:25). These are matters that are to be made known to saints (Eph 3:18). In this text, Paul, as his custom was, began in the synagogue. However, when some were hardened, and maligned “the Way” publically, Paul withdrew the disciples, and went to a neutral place where such opposition would not be encountered. The Word quickly spread throughout the region, and God wrought special miracles by the hand of Paul. All of this confirmed that the fruit of righteousness is, indeed, “sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18). Those who raise carnal

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• **HE SEPARATED THE DISCIPLES (19:b)**

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• **FROM HIS BODY WERE BROUGHT HANDKERCHIEFS OR APRONS (19:12)**

• **CONCLUSION**

contention, by that very work, forfeit the fruit. Wherever such people are found, an environment is produced is not only not conducive to spiritual fruit bearing, it actually militates against it, making it virtually impossible for the intentions of God's great salvation to be realized.

FOCUS

It is good that we frequently remind ourselves of the necessity and profitability of spiritual focus. In Christ, and within the framework of the New Covenant, looking is especially critical. To be more specific, what has captured our attention is all important. The salvation of God is of such a nature as not to allow pluralism – i.e., maintaining two or more matters considered to be central.

Defining "Focus"

As I am using the word, "focus" is what central or the key matter – it is the object or fact upon which we gaze; i.e. what has captured our attention. This is reflected in a number of salient texts.

• "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18)

• "While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:18).

• "For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succored thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Cor 6:2).

• "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil 3:20).

• "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

• "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb 9:28).

• "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:2).

• "Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (2 Pet 3:12).

- “Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet 3:13-14).

- “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ . . . That I may know Him , and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil 3:8-10).

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do , forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Phil 3:13).

Focus has to do with being in alignment with the revealed purpose of God. This has to do with pressing past the various distractions of this world – not allowing them to turn our attention from the Captain of our salvation, the salvation itself, and its revealed objective, or purpose. Synonyms for “focus” include emphasis, accent, stress, fundamental thing, main thing , and basic thing. The focus is what supports and justified all other involvements. It is what causes the salvation of God to make sense, and the requirement for holiness rational. It does not exclude other things, but causes them to be approached properly, so the individual is not turned away from the fundamental thing. That purpose, although multifaceted, is essentially single in nature, and is stated in a number of ways.

- Conforming the justified ones to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29-30).
- Present a bride to Christ that is without spot or wrinkle (Eph 5:27).
- Displaying His manifold wisdom to heavenly hosts through the church (Eph 3:10).
- Give the kingdom to the saints, when they will reign with Christ (Lk 12:32; Dan 7:18,22,27; 2 Tim 2:12).

THE RELIGION OF OUR TIME

The relevance of these observations is seen in the comparison of the church in the book of Acts with the church of our day. Any similarities at all are extremely difficult to identify. I am affirming that this is because a different message is being preached in our time .

Much, if not the preponderance, of the religion of our time is nothing more than a novel distraction. There is too much of man in it, and it makes too much allowance for life in this world. It is not aggressive against sin – which is the very thing salvation addresses. There is too much casualness, indifference, and outright disinterest. The distinction between the novice and the mature believer has disappeared amidst the facade of religious pretension. Religious institutions have been raised to more conscious prominence than the kingdom of God. The absolute necessity of preparing for coming of the Lord, death, and standing before the throne of judgment is virtually unknown. The fundamental ignorance of the Word of God is staggering in measure – even among those who are professed leaders of the church. Both the Person and the way of the Lord are virtually unknown. Bantering about religious views has taken the place of holy proclamation. Confidence and assurance are not found among professing believers – at least not to any measurable degree. Immorality has raised its ugly head within the professed church, and that very church is trying counsel it out. Although the Gospel, has brought “life and immortality to light” (2 Tim 1:10), there is a prevailing disinterest in eternal life, heaven, dwelling forever with the Lord, and being freed from the encumbrances of the body.

No person with even a modicum of understanding is ignorant of these heart-rending realities. They are the result of an erroneous emphasis. We know this is the case, because the Word of God, which perfectly reflects the Divine emphasis or focus, cannot produce such things. The Word of God “effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). It makes men “wise unto salvation” (2

Tim 3:15), promoting and sustaining life toward God (Lk 4:4).

THE RELEVANCE OF THESE OBSERVATIONS

The relevance of these observations is seen in the comparison of the church in the book of Acts with the church of our day. Any similarities at all are extremely difficult to identify. I am affirming that this is because a different message is being preached in our time – one that is a contrived, but ineffective, mixture of the Word of God with the wisdom of men. I, Scripture, it is what was declared that became the means through which certain responses were wrought. These include bold proclamations, aggressive opposition from the enemies of the Gospel, instant obedience in those who heard and believed, unity among the believers, sacrificial living for Christ, the abandonment of sinful manners, effective correction in those whose understanding was deficient – and a host of other things.

Where the Gospel of Christ is not consistently and aggressively preached, there is no possible means of producing or sustaining spiritual life. In such a case, all professed Christianity is at once spurious, for spiritual life cannot be sustained with independently of spiritual means. Any contrary claim is simply from the father of lies, who himself did not abide in the truth, and endeavors to pull men into the same quagmire of falsehood (John 8:44).

The book of Acts is not intended to be a record of the glory-days – when the church used to be triumphant, and spiritual power was a kind of beginning grace. This is not the presentation of an ideal church, or a model church, but the real church. Now, to the contemporary church, it is what a museum and historical documents are to the historian. In reality, however, this is rather like a spiritual plumb-line in which the powerful effects of the Gospel and faith in Christ are made known. The change of character that takes place in salvation is chronicled in this book.

HE SPOKE BOLDLY, IN THE SYNAGOGUE THINGS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.”

DISPUTING AND PERSUADING

“Disputing and persuading.” Other versions read, “reasoning and persuading,” NKJV “arguing persuasively,” NIV “arguing and pleading,” RSV “reasoning and teaching,” BBE “disputing and exhorting,” DOUAY “persuading,” MRD “debated boldly with persuasive arguments,” NAB “talked bravely,” CEV “spoke boldly with the people, holding discussions with them and trying to convince them,” GNB and “having reasoned with them, and persuading.” LITV

The word “disputing” is translated from the Greek word **dialego,menoj** (dis-leg-omen-os). As used here, the word means “to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss . . . drawing arguments from the Scriptures,” THAYER “(1) of a reasoned discussion discuss, discourse with, conduct a discussion; (2) of disputations contend, argue, dispute; (3) of speaking to someone in order to convince address, speak, reason with,” FRIBERG “to argue about differences of opinion - 'to argue, to dispute, argument.” LOUW-NIDA

The word “persuading” is translated from the Greek word **pei,qwn** (pei-thown). As used here, the word means “to persuade, I. e. to induce one by words to believe,” THAYER “convince, persuade,” FRIBERG and “to convince someone to believe something and to act on the basis of what is recommended - to persuade, to convince.” LOUW-NIDA

As noted in previous verses, the synagogue environment was conducive to the exposition of the prophets, the proclamation of the Gospel, and Scripturally-based reasoning and discussion. This is

because the entire synagogue service centered in the Word of God – particularly Moses and the Prophets (Lk 4:16-17; Acts 13:15,27; 15:21). We are living in a time when the center of the gathering is a time of simulated praise. In fact, there are many gatherings where proclamation and reasoning are considered second to a carefully choreographed and orchestrated praise service. This whole approach has yielded a body of people who are Scripturally illiterate. It is not possible to reason upon the Scriptures with a people who are fundamentally ignorant of them. This is one reason why the people of God Himself were cultured through the reading of Scripture (2 Kgs 22:8-16; 23:2; Neh 8:3-18; 9:3; 13:1; Isa 34:16; Jer 36:6-15; Lk 4:16; Acts 13:27; 15:21,31; 2 Tim 3:15). It is this culture that birthed the productive environment of textual literacy found in the synagogue.

Modern Religious Culture

In our day, there is also an environment that has been cultured by the religious leaders – but it is not one of familiarity with the text of Scripture. There is rather an astounding lack of acquaintance with the Bible itself, to say nothing of the concepts developed therein. Let it be clear that just as an environment of Scriptural literacy is produced by teachers and leaders, so one of Scriptural illiteracy is also produced by what is now being taught. The truth of the matter is that we now have a church culture on our hands that does not require any semblance of Scriptural understanding. If the Scriptures are able to make one “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 2:15), then an ignorance of them brings a corresponding ignorance of the salvation of God – what it is, its intent, and its determined destination. I do not know any way that such an ignorance can be avoided where a working knowledge of the Word of God is lacking.

For example, today nominal Christendom has made room for psychiatry, statistical surveys, motivational experts, financial wizards, health gurus, and the likes. With the entry of such bodies of knowledge, truth is neutralized – and when truth is neutralized it becomes impotent and falls in the street

This kind of ignorance is the breeding ground for “divers and strange doctrines” (Heb 13:9). Fundamental to strange doctrines is an erroneous emphasis. That is, the core, or foundational, message is flawed – skewed in the wrong direction. If, for example, one begins with the basic postulate that God wants men to lead a happy and prosperous life in this world, or that He desires that our dreams are all fulfilled, the necessity of Christ is seriously diminished, for neither His earthly ministry nor His exaltation is affirmed to be for that purpose. The same is true of the supposition that the home is the pillar of real life, or that recruiting new disciples is the fundamental activity. Neither of these is affirmed in Scripture, and neither was the subject of proclamation or extensive exposition.

Also, the more an emphasis relies on the wisdom of men, the more erroneous it becomes. For example, today nominal Christendom has made room for psychiatry, statistical surveys, motivational experts, financial wizards, health gurus, and the likes. With the entry of such bodies of knowledge, truth is neutralized – and when truth is neutralized it becomes impotent and falls in the street (Isa 59:14). This is because the truth of God and the world are an admixture. They cannot be homogenized, and when the attempt is made to do so, the whole conglomeration becomes putrid, and truth is voided. Thus, Jesus said to the religious traditionalists, “ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition ” (Mat 15:6). And again, “For laying aside the commandment of God , ye hold the tradition of men” (Mark 7:8).

A principle revealed under the Laws affirms that something unclean can contaminate what is clean, while something clean cannot purify what is unclean. The text of reference is Haggai 2:11-14: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying, If one bear holy flesh in the skirt of his garment, and with his skirt do touch bread, or pottage, or wine, or oil, or any meat, shall it be holy? And the priests answered and said, No. Then said Haggai, If one that is unclean by a dead body touch any of these, shall it be unclean? And the priests answered and said, It shall be

unclean. Then answered Haggai, and said, So is this people, and so is this nation before me, saith the LORD; and so is every work of their hands; and that which they offer there is unclean” (Hag 2:11-14). What is unclean defiles whatever it touches. This is the reason for the admonition, “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal 6:1). Solemnly the saints are warned, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33). And again, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17).

This puts the lie to the notion that to bring a person to Christ, one must first become their friend. No such procedure is ever reflected in Scripture. Pentecost, Philip and the city of Samaria, the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, the household of Cornelius, the house of Cripus, Lydia’s household, the Philippian jailer, etc. – how do they in any way reflect this methodology?

THINGS CONCERNING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“ . . . the things concerning the kingdom of God.” Other versions read, “about the kingdom of God,” NASB “the things that appertain to the kingdom of God,” GENEVA “in regard to,” MRD and “concerning the reign of God.” YLT

The word “kingdom” comes from the Greek word **basilei,aj** (bas-il-ei-as). As used here, the lexical meaning is “a kingdom, dominion,” THAYER “(1) abstractly, the power exercised by a king, kingship, royal rule, reign (Acts 1.6); (2) concretely, the territory ruled by a king, kingdom, realm,” FRIBERG “reign, rule; kingdom, domain,” UBS “to rule as a king, with the implication of complete authority . . . It is generally a serious mistake to translate the phrase **h` basilei,a tou/ qeou/** 'the kingdom of God' as referring to a particular area in which God rules. The meaning of this phrase in the NT involves not a particular place or special period of time but the fact of ruling.” LOUW-NIDA

Jesus introduced men to the nature of this kingdom, choosing to do so through parables. In this manner, as He intended, He hid the truth from the disinterested. On the other hand, He provided an incentive for earnest inquirers who had been given eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand.

The expression “kingdom of God” is found in Matthew through Revelation – 69 times.

- It is used 54 times in the Gospels (Matt 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31,43; Mk 1:14,15; 4:11; 26,30; 9:1,47; 10:14,15,23,24,25; 12:34; 14:25; 15:43; Lk 4:43; 6:20; 7:28; 8:1,10; 9:2,11,27,60,62; 10:9,11; 21:20; 12:31; 13:18,20,28,29; 14:15; 16:16; 17:20,21; 18:16,17,24,25; 19:11; 21:31; 22:16,18; 23:15; John 3:3,5).
- 7 times in Acts (1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).
- 8 times in the epistles (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 6:9,10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Col 4:11; 2 Thess 1:5).
- Matthew frequently uses the term “kingdom of heaven,” which is found 32 times in his gospel (3:2; 4:17; 5:3,10,19,20; 7:21; 8:11; 10:17; 11:11,12; 13:11,24,31,33,44, 45,47,52; 16:19; 18:1,3,4,23; 19:14, 23; 20:1; 22:2; 23:13; 25:1,14).
- The phrase “His kingdom” is found 11 times in Scripture (Psa 145:12; Isa 9:7; Dan 4:3,34; 6:26; 7:14,27; Matt 13:41; 16:28; Lk 1:33; 2 Tim 4:1).
- The phrase “the kingdom” is used 12 times from Matthew through Revelation (Matt 4:23; 6:13; 8:12; 13:19,38,43; 19:12; 24:14; 25:34; 12:32; Acts 1:6; Rev 1:9).
- “Heavenly kingdom” is used once (2 Tim 4:18).
- “The kingdom of His dear Son” is mentioned once (Col 1:13).

- “The kingdom of Christ and of God” is mentioned once (Eph 5:5).

There you have 127 direct references to the “kingdom” – associated with God, Christ, and heaven. By way of comparison, the word “church” occurs 77 times, “baptize” in all of its varied forms is found 75 times. “Repent,” in all of its forms, occurs 105 times, “husband” 120 times, “marriage” 19 times, and “free will” 17 times (never in respect to a natural human trait, and never in any standard version of Matthew through Revelation).

Also, the following expressions are never found in any standard version of Scripture (KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASV, NIV, NRSV, RSV): “evangelize,” “evangelistic,” “evangelism,” “great commission,” “unconditional,” “unconditional love,” “free moral agency,” “sinner’s prayer,” “plan of salvation,” “law of love,” “church planting,” and “missionary” – to name a few.

I say these things to accent that there is an enormous amount of preaching, teaching, and professed Christian activity that is built around concepts and terms that are not even mentioned in the Scriptures. Yet, in contemporary preaching, “the kingdom of God” is rarely the focus of either speaking or thought. In the Word of God, not only is this kingdom mentioned frequently, but it is never brought up in a casual manner, is never incidental, and is always tied to pivotal matters. It was the subject of prophecy (Isa 9:7; Dan 2:44; 7:22,27; Lk 1:33). John the Baptist preached of this kingdom (Matt 3:2; Mk 1:14,15). Jesus Himself preached extensively concerning both its reality and nature (Matt 4:17,23; 5:3,10,19,20; 6:10,13,33 . . . John 3:3,5; 18:36). Philip preached the kingdom (Acts 8:12). Paul and Barnabas spoke of entering into it (Acts 14:22). Our text affirms that Paul focused on “things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8). Over a period of three years he preached among the Ephesians the kingdom of God (Acts 20:21,25). The last segment of his ministry was spent expounding the kingdom of God (Acts 28:23,31).

Parables of the Kingdom

Jesus introduced men to the nature of this kingdom, choosing to do so through parables. In this manner, as He intended, He hid the truth from the disinterested (Matt 13:10-15; Isa 29:10-12). On the other hand, He provided an incentive for earnest inquirers who had been given eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts to understand (Matt 13:16-17).

- Growth and maturity take place in the realm of competition. Matthew 13:24-30,38-43 – Wheat and the tares.
- It has a small beginning, but a large ending. Matthew 13:31-32; Mk 4:30-32; Luke 13:18 – A mustard seed sown into the ground.
- Powerful and effectual working within. Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20-21 – Leaven hid in a measure of meal.
- Divine riches are hidden, yet can be found. Matthew 13:44 – Treasure hid in a field.
- Those who seek will find. Matthew 13:45 – A merchant seeking goodly pearls.
- Divine purposes involve the use of ungodly people, who will finally be discarded. Matthew 13:47-49 – A net cast into the sea.
- Men are required to act in harmony with the grace they have received. Matthew 18:23-35 – A king taking account of his servants.
- There is a sense in which the gift of God is common to all who receive it – without respect of persons. Matthew 20:1-16 – A householder who went to hire laborers for his vineyard.
- Those who are invited to be joined to the Lord are expected to respond favorably, and to be prepared to stand in His presence. Matthew 22:2-14 – A king who made a marriage

for his son.

- Those who are betrothed to Christ must stand the test of time, and be prepared when Jesus comes. Matthew 25:1-13 – Ten virgins who went to meet the bridegroom.

- The Divine manner is to distribute appropriate responsibilities, and hold men responsible for handling them appropriately. Matthew 25:14-30 – A man traveling into a far country, who called his servants and delivered unto them his goods: the talents.

- Spiritual growth cannot be facilitated or explained by earthly means. Mark 4:26-29 – A man who cast his seed into the ground, and it grew, he knew not how.

The Doctrine of the Kingdom

When we consider what is said about this kingdom, its centrality and significance become obvious.

- Men are to see and enter this kingdom while in this world (John 3:3,5; Acts 14:22).

- The conclusion of the life of faith involves an entrance into this everlasting kingdom (2 Pet 1:11).

As is apparent, “the things concerning the kingdom of God” pertain to what the Lord has purposed, has done, and is doing. These are not man-centered, but God-centered. They do not concentrate on the kingdom of men, but on the kingdom of God.

- This kingdom is related to righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17).

- It is associated with power, and not with word alone (1 Cor 4:20).

- The kingdom is what the saved inherit (1 Cor 6:9-10; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5; James 2:5).

- When we are delivered from the power of darkness, we are translated, or transferred into this kingdom (Col 1:13).

- The work of the Lord is associated with this kingdom (Col 4:11).

- We have been called into this kingdom (1 Thess 2:12).

- God works in our lives in order that we might be counted worthy of this kingdom (2 Thess 1:4-5).

- This kingdom is governed by Christ, and will become obvious when He appears (2 Tim 4:1).

- The Lord preserves His people to bring them safely to this kingdom (2 Tim 4:18).

- Righteousness is the scepter of this kingdom (Heb 1:8).

- In Christ, we have come to this kingdom, which coming is detailed as follows: “ye are come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:24,28).

- We are companions with other saints in this kingdom (Rev 1:9).

- This kingdom is related to Divine strength and salvation (Rev 12:10).

As is apparent, “the things concerning the kingdom of God” pertain to what the Lord has purposed, has done, and is doing. These are not man-centered, but God-centered. They do not concentrate on the kingdom of men, but on the kingdom of God. While they do touch on what men should do, that

is NOT their focus. This world is not their fundamental objective, nor the things that are in the world.

The kingdom of God is theo-centric, or God centered – not man centered. The works of God are primary (Acts 2:11; John 9:3; Psa 78:7). Eternal life itself is knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. As it is written, “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). And again, “And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20).

Preaching and teaching is powerful in direct proportion to the place of God Himself and the Lord Jesus Christ in what is said. That is something to think about!

DIVERS WERE HARDENED, AND SPOKE EVIL OF THE WAY

“ . . . But when divers were hardened, and believed not . . . ”

The proclamation of the truth and spiritual reasoning is like bright light that exposes “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). This is one reason why the Gospel is to be preached “to every creature,” or “all creation”

The proclamation of the truth and spiritual reasoning is like bright light that exposes “the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). This is one reason why the Gospel is to be preached “to every creature,” or “all creation” NIV (Mk 16:16). This is also referring to preaching the Word, being instant – preached, “in season and out of season” (2 Tim 4:2).

The Parable of the Sower

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record our Lord’s parable of the sower. Mark states this parable was included “in His doctrine” (Mk 4:2-3). In this parable the Word of God is identified as what was being sown (Lk 8:11). The seed was sown in good soil – but not only in good soil. It was also sown on a pathway, trodden down by travelers. It was also sown in soil that had impenetrable rock just beneath the surface. The sower also sowed seed on ground that had thorn seeds that had not yet sprouted. Only the “good ground” yielded a crop. The seed that fell on the stony ground had no depth of earth, and hence its roots were shallow. When the sun rose, the plant withered and died because of a deficiency in its root system. When the seed sown on the thorny soil broke through the ground, the thorns grew up with it, and choked the life from it, so that it yielded no fruit.

The criticality of fruit is seen in the fact that this is why we have been joined to Christ – to bear fruit . As it is written, “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God ” (Rom 7:4). This is not an option, but is rather a necessity. Further, the fruit is not for the individual who is in Christ – it is for God. It is not fruit for the institution, it is for God. Additionally, it is fruit that is intended to “remain” (John 15:16). While some teach that the intended “fruit” is other souls that are won to Christ, this is emphatically not a revealed definition of “fruit.” Paul sought to have some “fruit” among the Roman believers (Rom 1:13). That certainly was not new converts. Romans 6:22 suggests that the fruit is found in personal holiness: i.e. “ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life” (Rom 6:22). Romans 16:25-27 identifies an offering taken for the poor saints in Jerusalem as “fruit.” Galatians 5:22-23 defines the fruit as the work of the Spirit within the believer – “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law” (Gal 5:22-23). When the Thessalonians supported Paul in his time of need, he referred to it as “fruit” (Phil 4:17). The epistle to the Hebrews refers to the “peaceable fruit of righteousness” (Heb 12:11). James also refers to “the fruit of righteousness” (James 3:18). Praise is referred to as “the fruit of our lips” (Heb 13:15). Where these qualities are not found, fruit is lacking, and the Seed of the Word has not been productive, as

interpreted by this parable, for fruit bearing is the objective of planting the seed. Further, the preliminary growth of the seed is not called fruit.

The surface thinker might imagine that the seed should only be sown on the “good soil.” After all, flesh reasons, “What purpose is served by sowing seed where it cannot grow and bring forth fruit.” However, there is a purpose that is served when the word, particularly the Gospel, is preached to “every creature.” Hearts are made known that would not otherwise be apparent. One of the functions of the Word is to “discern the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb 4:12). The uncovering of these hearts does not always yield submissiveness and obedience. Sometimes it causes animosity and hostility to erupt – conditions that would never have been manifested if it were not for the powerful effects of the word. One purpose for the preaching of the Word is the uncovering of the hearts of men. Our text deals with this kind of revelation.

This exposes certain teachings and suggestions as nothing more than lies. Those who teach people to first make friends with potential converts, have only betrayed their ignorance. They imagine that fleshly friendship will decrease the possibility of being hardened to the Word of God. However, this is not at all the case, for the Word is the means of discovering a condition that cannot be changed by men. Others compromise the Word, withholding Divine requirements that they perceive as inhibitive to believing. Therefore, they emphasize the practical aspects of life in this world, and how the Lord can help the people in these areas: i.e. family life, finances, personal enslavements to sin, etc. But they do not tell the people what Jesus said about becoming His disciple, or being enrolled as one of His students, which equates to salvation (Matt 11:28-29). He affirmed that a person who does not forsake everything, including his own life, cannot be His disciple (Lk 14:33). He also said that anyone who does not take up their cross everyday and follow Him, cannot not be His disciple (Lk 9:28; 14:27). There was also the qualification of not allowing any earthly relationships to override one’s primary allegiance to Christ (Lk 14:26). These are among the appointed means through which the sincerity of human hearts is tested. If they are withheld from the people, a sincere response can really not be confirmed.

DIVERSE WERE HARDENED

“But when divers were hardened . . .” Other versions read, “were becoming hardened,” NASB “became obstinate,” NIV “stubbornly refused,” NRSV “were stubborn,” RSV “were hard-hearted,” BBE “became stubborn,” ESV “in their obstinacy,” NAB and “waxed hard.” PNT

The word “divers” refers to a certain class of people within a larger group of people. Here, the number of the people is not the point, but the trait that distinguishes them from the Others. The use of the word here is similar to the use of “some” in Romans 3:3: “What is SOME did not believe?” Coming from the same Greek work as our text (**tinej**), this word applied to the vast majority of the Jews who did not believe Jesus was the Christ. Even though they were in the majority, as appears to be the case in our text, they were actually the spiritual exception. In other words, in both Acts and Romans, the ones who did not believe were the ones who were “out of the way” (Rom 3:12). They are the ones who were wrong, even though they treated the believers as though they were the ones who had departed. From one perspective, it is true that believers in Christ are pilgrims and strangers in the world. However, from the standpoint of eternal destiny and the ultimate custodianship of the earth, they are the fundamental people, and all others are intruders – like “tares.” Those in Christ are the people God prefers, and for whom Jesus has prepared a place, that they may be with Him.

From one perspective, it is true that believers in Christ are pilgrims and strangers in the world. However, from the standpoint of eternal destiny and the ultimate custodianship of the earth, they are the fundamental people, and all others are intruders – like “tares.”

The word hardened is translated from a word meaning , “to **make** hard, to harden . . . to **render**

obstinate, stubborn . . . to **be** hardened, I. e. **become** obstinate or stubborn,” THAYER and “literally **cause** one's heart to be hard, i.e. act stubbornly, refuse to change one's attitude (Heb 3.8); of **God's judicial action**, cause someone to be stubborn, make someone refuse to listen.” FRIBERG

This is a hardness that is a judgment – a judgment because of the condition of the heart, and the refusal to hear the word of the Lord – something initially known only to the Lord. It is written of this judgment, “Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth” (Rom 9:18). This kind of judgment is mentioned several times in Scripture.

- God hardened Pharaoh’s heart. “And the LORD said unto Moses, When thou goest to return into Egypt, see that thou do all those wonders before Pharaoh, which I have put in thine hand: but I will harden his heart, that he shall not let the people go . . . And He hardened Pharaoh's heart, that he hearkened not unto them; as the LORD had said . . . “ the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart . . . the Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh. . . ” (Ex 4:21; 7:13; 9:12; 10:20,27; 11:10; 14:8).

- God hardened the heart of king Sihon. “But Sihon king of Heshbon would not let us pass by him: for the LORD thy God hardened his spirit, and made his heart obstinate, that he might deliver him into thy hand, as appeareth this day” (Deut 2:30).

- The Lord hardened the nations in the promised land, so Israel could destroy them. “There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favor, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses” (Josh 11:19-20).

- When Israel wandered, the Lord hardened their hearts. “O LORD, why hast Thou made us to err from thy ways, and hardened our heart from thy fear? Return for Thy servants' sake, the tribes of Thine inheritance . . . For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered” (Isa 29:10; Isa 63:17).

A hard heart is obstinate, stubborn, perverse, and impenitent. It is disobedient, incorrigible, and rebellious. There is a sense in which its existence defiles sound reasoning. Those who are hard of heart cannot see that everything is against them, and there is no hope of ultimately overcoming what they are resisting. Those whose hearts are hardened are militant against the Lord and His people. However, opposition to God is totally futile, even though those who oppose Him cannot possibly concur with that judgment. It is the reality of God that they have questioned, not what He does.

Hardening is a condition imposed upon men who resist the truth. When individuals are hardened, they resist the truth, which is the appointed agent used to produced the hardening. Rather than being drawn by the truth, they are repelled by it.

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The same truth that softens the heart of the elect hardens the heart of the reprobate – just as the same sun that melts ice hardens clay.

AND BELIEVED NOT

“ . . . and believed not . . . ” Other versions read, “did not believe,” NKJV “disobedient,” NASB

“refused to believe,” NIV “disbelieved,” RSV “would not give hearing,” BBE “continued in unbelief,” ESV “disobeyed,” GENEVA “disputatious,” MRD “into unbelief,” NJB “would not believe,” GNB and “did not obey.” LITV

The words “believed not” are translated from a single Greek word, **hypei,qoun** . The lexical meaning of this word is, “not to allow oneself to be persuaded; not to comply with; a. to refuse or withhold belief . . .to refuse belief and obedience,” THAYER “(1) disobey, be disobedient (Rom 11.30); (2) of the most severe form of disobedience, in relation to the gospel message disbelieve, refuse to believe, be an unbeliever,” FRIBERG “disobey; be an unbeliever,” USB “unwillingness or refusal to comply with the demands of some authority - 'to disobey, disobedience.” LOUW-NIDA

This word is different than the expression in Mark 16:16 – “he that believeth not shall be damned.” There the Greek word is **avpisth,saj** . The lexical meaning of the word is “to disbelieve, distrust, mistrust, ” THAYER “not believe, refuse to believe, be distrustful,” FRIBERG “fail or refuse to believe; prove or be unfaithful,” UBS and “to believe that something is not true - 'to not believe, to disbelieve, to not think to be true.” LOUW-NIDA

The two words just described are actually two individual actions. In this case, unbelieving, or not believing is more than the absence of faith. It is an independent act in which there is a refusal to believe. Not believing, as used in Mark 16:16 has a character of its own. It involves a judgment, an analysis, and a conclusion. It is something that Satan puts into the heart, and is the result of distorted reasoning.

The Greek word in our text [**hypei,qoun**] is used in varied forms sixteen times in Scripture, and is translated in a variety of ways, all carrying the same idea. The emphasis is placed on the process that leads to unbelief, and the rejection and disobedience that results from it.

- **John 3:36:** “believeth not,” KJV “does not believe,” NKJV “does not obey,” NASB “rejects” NIV “disobeys,” NRSV “obeyed not,” ASV “does not have faith in,” BBE “is not subject to,” DARBY and “refuses to believe.” NJB

- **Acts 14:2:** “unbelieving,” KJV “disbelieved,” NASB “refused to believe,” NIV “disobedient,” ASV “had not faith,” BBE “did not believe,” DARBY and “spurned God’s message.” NLT

- **Acts 17:5:** “believed not,” KJV “were not persuaded,” NKJV and “unbelieving.” YLT

- **Acts 19:9:** “believed not,” KJV “did not believe,” NKJV “disobedient,” NASB “refused to believe,” NIV “disbelieved,” RSV “would not give hearing,” BBE “continued in unbelief,” ESV “disobeyed,” GENEVA “disputatious,” MRD “hardened into unbelief,” NJB “rejected his message,” NLT and “were disbelieving.” YLT

- **Romans 2:8:** “do not obey,” KJV “reject,” NIV “obey not,” NRSV “are not guided by,” BBE “disobedient,” DARBY “disobey,” GENEVA “have not taken for their guide,” NJB and “refuse to obey.” NLT

- **Romans 10:21:** “disobedient,” KJV “hearts turned away,” BBE “disobeying,” DARBY “believeth not,” PNT and “unbelieving.” YLT

- **Romans 11:30:** “not believed” and “unbelief,” KJV “disobedient” and “disobedience,” NKJV “not under the rule of God” and “turning away,” BBE “disobeyed” and “disobedience,” NAB and “were rebels.” NLT

- **Romans 11:31:** “not believed,” KJV “disobedient,” NKJV “gone against,” BBE “disobeyed.” NAB and “rebelled.” NLT

- **Romans 15:31:** “not believe,” KJV “disobedient,” NASB “unbelievers,” NIV “put

themselves under the rule of God,” BBE “believe not,” MRD “refuse to obey,” NLT and “not believing.” NLT

• **Hebrews 3:18:** “believed not,” KJV “did not obey,” NKJV “disobedient,” NASB “disobeyed,” NIV “disobedient,” NRSV “went against His orders,” BBE “not hearkened to His word,” DARBY “were incredulous,” DOUAY “obeyed not,” GENEVA “would not believe,” NJB “were not obedient,” PNT and “did not believe.” YLT

• **Hebrews 11:31:** “believed not,” KJV “did not believe,” NKJV “were disobedient,” NASB “gone against God’s orders,” BBE “the unbelieving,” DARBY “unbelievers,” DOUAY “obeyed not,” GENEVA “refused to obey,” NLT and “disbelieved.” YLT

• **1 Peter 2:7:** “disobedient,” KJV “disbelieve,” NASB “do not believe,” NIV “without faith,” BBE “believe not,” DOUAY and “unbelieving.” YLT

• **1 Pet 2:8:** “disobedient,” KJV “disobey,” NIV “go against it,” BBE “neither do they believe,” DOUAY “believe not,” MRD “disobeying,” NAB “do not believe,” NJB “or obey it,” NLT and “being unbelieving.” YLT

• **1 Pet 3:1:** “obey not,” KJV “do not obey,” NKJV “disobedient,” NASB “do not believe,” NIV “give no attention to the word,” BBE “disobey,” NAB and “refuse to accept.” NLT

• **1 Peter 3:20:** “disobedient,” KJV “disobeyed,” NIV “did not obey,” NRSV “went against God’s orders,” BBE “disobedient,” NAB “refused to believe,” NJB and “disbelieved.” YLT

• **1 Peter 4:17:** “obey not,” KJV “do not obey,” NKJV “not under the rule of God,” BBE “refuse to believe,” NJB “never believed,” NLT “believe not,” TNT and “disobedient.” YLT

The largeness of this word is confirmed by the scope of the words used to translate it into English.

- **Believing not.** Does not rely upon, trust in, or count to be credible.
- **Continued in unbelief.** Choose to remain in the same state occupied before they heard the Word.
- **Did not put themselves under God’s rule.** Did not associate the Word of God, or God Himself, with necessity or any sense of obligation.
- **Disbelieved.** Weighed what was said, found it contradicted their way of thinking, and therefore rejected it, assigning no value to it.
- **Disputatious.** Argued against the truth, and contended with it, seeking to justify their own way of thinking.
- **Does not believe.** Does not make the transition from unbelief to belief.
- **Does not obey.** Does not yield to the truth, do what it demands, or shape one’s life around it.
- **Does not have faith.** Faith never “comes” to the individual, is never “obtained,” and it is never “given” to them to believe.
- **Give no attention to the word.** The Word of God never got their attention. They were not intrigued or drawn by it, seeing nothing of critical value in it.
- **Go against it.** Not content to themselves reject the Word, they openly oppose it, and fight against it.
- **Gone against God’s orders.** Refused to be directed by the God of heaven.
- **Hardened into unbelief.** As the heart grew harder and more obstinate, it moved the

individual into a state where they were dominated by unbelief.

- **Hearts turned away.** They thrust the Word from themselves as something putrid, offense, and obnoxious.

- **Incredulous.** Treats the message as something obscured, unbelievable, incredible, and beyond the limits of reason.

Even though strong arguments and proofs were declared, the heart was so hard it could not be persuaded to accept it or act upon it.

- **Is not subject to.** Does not consider himself to be subject to, or in need of, the Word delivered.

- **Never believed.** The person does not vacillate between belief and unbelief, but immediately determines to reject the Word he heard.

- **Not under the rule of God.** Sees self as thoroughly sufficient, and therefore cannot think of himself as being subject to the God who has spoken.

- **Not hearken to His word.** Does not take the word seriously, so as to respond correctly to it.

- **Refused to obey.** Will not yield to the demands of the word.

- **Refused to accept.** Will make no place in the mind or heart for the Word to remain.

- **Refuses to believe.** Will not trust in or rely upon.

- **Reject.** Thrusts the word from himself as something that is unfitting and obnoxious.

- **Spurned God's message.** Disdains the Word, holding it in contempt and disrespect.

- **Went against His order.** Did not think as the Word said, did not do what the Lord commanded, but rather walked in rebellion.

- **Were not persuaded.** Even though strong arguments and proofs were declared, the heart was so hard it could not be persuaded to accept it or act upon it.

- **Were rebels.** When the Word was heard they resisted, defied, withstood, renounced any allegiance to it.

- **Without faith.** Destitute of faith, without it, and dominated by unbelief.

- **Would not believe.** The will is involved in not believing. The preference is not for the Word of God, and there is no delight in it. It is rejected with determination.

- **Would not be persuaded.** Even though an extensive and holy effort was involved in the preaching and teaching of the Word, a carnal shield was raised up to deliberately hinder the entrance of the Word.

All of these things are involved in not believing. This is what makes it so serious. It involves a consideration of what is said, a judgment that it is not true, a rejection of it as valid, and a refusal to obey its demands. Therefore, the absence of faith among those who have been subjected to the good word of God is not an innocent thing. It is deliberate, sinful, and reprehensible to God Himself. Unbelief will exclude one from the salvation of God, and from dwelling forever with Him. It always leads to disobedience and rebellion.

'Belief and Obedience Are Expected

From one point of view God expects those who hear His word to believe it and obey Him. That is, Divine affirmations and exhortations are accompanied with enabling power. Let me emphasize that this is enabling power, so that the hearer can, from the normal point of view, do what is required by

God. This kind of power might be called moral power, or power that renders the hearer capable of discerning good and evil, and acting accordingly. However, this power is not intended to force the hearer into obedience. The Psalmist prophesied of this kind of power in the 100 th Psalm: “Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power” (Psa 110:3).

However, as indicated earlier, that same word also discovers the thoughts and intents of the heart (Heb 4:12). Because this is “the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2), this powerful word can be resisted, and men can choose not to hear it or submit to it. Eventually, unless they repent of that rejection, as those hearers on the day of Pentecost, the judgment of God will eventually be focused on these people.

Men may grow accustomed to people not believing, or thrusting the Word from them (Acts 13:46), but God does not. I have noted, especially in recent years that preachers speak to professing Christians as though they really did not agree with God, and always resist the truth. Such represent this backward stance as the nature of the Christian – a normal condition. They affirm that “this is the way we are,” often even ascribing the trait to themselves. When referring to the examples of faith that are sited in Scripture, they say things like, “I certainly would not have responded in that way.” Other statements are, “We are just like the Israelites of old,” and “We find ourselves continually resisting the Word of God.” To offset this imagined condition, they speak of forming new habits, so we can live without thinking, something that is antithetical to the very nature of spiritual life. The notion of these false teachers is that we are trained to live godly like a dog is trained to do tricks. But this is an unethical way of behavior, for God is to be loved and served “with all the mind” (Matt 22:37), with a “willing mind” (1 Chron 28:9; 2 Cor 8:12), and with a renewed mind (Rom 12:2). Where the mind is not involved, the love of God and faith are not present, for both require reasoning, deliberation, and a willing response. The notion that living for God is something habitual is nothing more than ignorance veiled with ostentatious conjecture. God cannot be truly honored or served habitually. This is because salvation makes men free.

The Jews mentioned in our text had been blinded to the truth, so what they heard made no sense to them. They thought through what they had heard and concluded that it was not true. Hence they not only rejected it, refusing to obey the Lord, but also openly opposed what was said. That is still the trait of those with hardened hearts. It is essential for believers to recognize this and see it for what it really is.

THEY SPOKE EVIL OF THE WAY BEFORE THE MULTITUDE

“ . . . but spake evil of that way before the multitude . . . ” Other versions read, “publicly maligned the Way,” NIV “saying evil words about the way,” BBE “speaking evil of the way of God,” GENEVA “disparaged the way,” NAB “began attacking the way,” NJB “said terrible things about God’s way,” CEV and “said evil things about the way of the Lord.” GNB

It is interesting to note how the opposition of these Jews is stated. During Jesus’ ministry, the Jewish leaders took counsel “against Him ” (Matt 12:14; Mk 6:19; 14:56-57). The scribes and Pharisees sought to “find an accusation against Him ” (Lk 6:7). During His mock trial before Caiaphas, “ many other things blasphemously spake against Him ” (Lk 22:65).

However, in this text they “spake evil of that way before the multitude.” That is, there was a direction to Paul’s doctrine as well as specific and detailed content. The direction was heavenward. Mind you, what Paul preached was precisely what Moses and the Prophets said concerning the coming Christ. He continued this manner throughout his ministry. As the time drew near for his departure, he testified, “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). There was nothing novel about Paul’s preaching. It did not reflect the values of contemporary society. It did not constitute a rebuttal to the social trends of the day. The

foundation for his teaching was what God had foretold by His own prophets. Yet, even though these Jews had an intellectual acquaintance with the Scriptures, they were unable to correlate the doctrine of Paul with what their own Scriptures declared. Thus, they spoke “evil of the way” that was glaringly opposed to the way they thought.

Some Considerations

There are several considerations involved in the “way.” First, salvation constitutes one believers strangers and pilgrims in the world (1 Pet 2:11). Their primary citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:21 NKJV). Redemption causes them to groan in their present bodies, longing for their new bodies, described as “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1). According to the word of their King, they are laying up for themselves “treasures¹ in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and thieves do not break through and steal” (Matt 6:20). They have a “hope which is laid up for” them “in heaven” (Col 1:5). They also have a “better and enduring substance in heaven” (Heb 10:34), and “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled” is “reserved” in heaven for them (1 Pet 1:4).

Take heaven out of the scenario, and there is really no point to being a Christian. However, one would never suspect this is the case from the tone of today’s preaching and the life of the nominal Christian. A religion that is earth-centered now dominates Christendom. Experts in religion are generally billed as experts in life in this world. This is the result of a contemporary malignment of “the way.” In a way, we have experienced this in our fellowship here in Joplin. By subtle innuendo, the manner of our teaching has been generally rejected, and a more practical form of religion preferred. We have been depicted as a cult, and strange in our approach, even though we emphasize nothing that is not emphasized in Scripture, and has not been held consistently in historical and conservative Christianity.

Some Contemporary Sayings that Reflect This Mentality

“We need to take our religion outside of the four walls” [of the building where believers meet]. This assumes that true spirituality can be concealed, or hidden within institutional walls. It does not take into account the compelling nature of the newness of life.

We should expect our adversary the devil to be crafty in his opposition of “the way.” He will speak in such a manner as to cause intellectual confusion concerning the truth. His malignment of the way is often by innuendo and subtle suggestion, rather than outright opposition. Here are a few of the sayings that reflect opposition to “the way.” All of them confirm that the nature of the kingdom of God has not been discerned. It makes no difference what men say.

- “Don’t be so heavenly minded you are no earthly good.” This assumes that heavenly mindedness causes a person to be impractical, and oblivious to the necessities of life in this world. It does not take spiritual understanding into account.
- “We need to take our religion outside of the four walls” [of the building where believers meet]. This assumes that true spirituality can be concealed, or hidden within institutional walls. It does not take into account the compelling nature of the newness of life.
- “We need to make more friendships with those who are lost, so we can win them.” In this case, the statement assumes the lost are won by friendship, rather than beholding the light of spiritual life emanating from those who possess it. It is the unique lives of the saints that attracts humble and contrite hearts, not their camaraderie.
- “God wants you to be happy in the world, and have the best things possible.” There is absolutely no evidence in Scripture that any true perspective exists in this statement. We are candidly told that life beyond this world is the objective, and that, so far as this world is concerned, it involves a strait and narrow way. The value is to be set upon the kingdom of

God and His righteousness – both of which are other-worldly (Matt 6:33).

Let it be clear, that these misconceptions are far beneath those of the Jews of our text. They did take the time to isolate themselves from society when they came into the synagogue. They did traffic in the Scriptures, faithfully reading them. Their lives did, so far as they were concerned, revolve around their religion. However, they had not viewed the Scriptures correctly, and became riveted to their religious tradition. That is what moved them to speak evil of “the way.”

As if that situation was not bad enough, an even more serious condition has arisen in our time. It is one that is not driven by a misapprehension of Scripture – or even religious tradition,

Now the church is faced with, what I would call, raw carnality – a form of religion that allows for, and attempts to explain, the outward expression of iniquity. Those who reflect the mind of the Lord on such outbreaks are viewed as intolerant and insensitive to the needs of people.

for, in the religious masses, there is not a high level of intelligence in either of those areas. Now the church is faced with, what I would call, raw carnality – a form of religion that allows for, and attempts to explain, the outward expression of iniquity. Those who reflect the mind of the Lord on such outbreaks are viewed as intolerant and insensitive to the needs of people. However, and make no mistake about it, such expressions are actually speaking evil of “the way.” They evidence the certain intolerance of the religious masses with the ways and purpose of God Almighty. This is precisely the reference of James when he said to professing believers, “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4). That saying is still true!

HE DEPARTED FROM THEM

“ . . . he departed from them . . . ” Other versions read, “withdrew from them,” NASB “left them,” NRSV “went away from them,” BBE “withdrew himself,” MRD “broke with them,” NJB “left the synagogue,” NLT and “separated himself from them.” AMPLIFIED

To the student of Scripture, this is not strange language – departing from a certain environment or region. It denotes the detection either of a lack of spiritual profitability, or a call to some other work. For example, when Jesus heard that John the Baptist was cast into prison in Judaea, “He departed into Galilee” (Matt 4:12). Another time, when the Lord knew the Pharisees were taking counsel against Him, “He withdrew Himself from thence” (Matt 12:15). When John the Baptist was slain and buried by his disciples, Jesus “departed thence by ship into a desert place apart” (Matt 14:13). Again, when a wicked and adulterous generation sought a sign from Him, “He left them and departed” (Matt 16:4). After being rejected by the Jewish leaders, and pronouncing judgment against Jerusalem, Jesus “departed from the Temple” (Matt 24:1). Yet another time, when being pressed by the multitudes. The Lord “departed into a solitary place” (Mk 1:35). After the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus “sent them away” and “departed into a mountain to pray” (Mk 6:46). After healing the vexed son of a certain father, the Lord “departed thence, and passed through Galilee, and He would not that any man knew it” (Mk 9:30). Again, when Jesus perceived that the people “would come and take Him by force, to make Him king, He departed again into a mountain himself alone” (John 6:15).

In Antioch, when the Jews raised a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, they “shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came to Iconium” (Acts 13:51). In Athens, when the philosophers “mocked” him, “Paul departed from among them” (Acts 17:33).

The point is that there are people and environments who, because of their spiritual obtuseness, are no longer worthy of hearing the Word of God. In the words of Paul to such a group, “but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). Paul said of those who insisted on maintaining a form of godliness while rejecting its power, “from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:5). In my judgment this word is nearly altogether ignored.

At the precise point that hostility and friction cannot be subdued, leaving is the only alternative. It is to be understood that in such a case, the believers have not compromised their faith or refused to speak the truth of God. The departure is necessitated because of the fruitless environment, for “the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace” (James 3:18). Once again, the existence of hostility, or a lack of peace, can only be discovered against the background of the powerful and uncompromising declaration of truth.

HE SEPARATED THE DISCIPLES

“ 9b . . . and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.”

When Paul separated himself from the contentious environment of the synagogue, he did not leave alone. An environment that was unproductive for him, also lacked productivity for other believers. This is because all disciples draw their nourishment from the same supply. There are not contradicting statements or principles in the warehouse of truth. As it is written, in Christ “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). None of those treasures are contradictory. None of them compete with one another. All of them are spiritually profitable, and cohere together with perfect consistency. No level of truth, if I may speak in such a manner, competes with another level. What is calculated for babes still has nourishment for the mature, and what is addressed to the mature has spiritual nutrients that can feed the young as well. Therefore the advanced Paul takes some spiritually young disciples with him, refusing to leave them in that stultifying environment.

HE SEPARATED THE DISCIPLES

“ . . . and separated the disciples . . . ” Other versions read, “withdrew the disciples,” NKJV “took away the disciples,” NASB “took the disciples with him,” NIV “taking the disciples with him,” NRSV “kept the disciples separate,” BBE “met separately with the disciples,” CSB “took his disciples,” GWN “took away the disciples,” NAU and “took his disciples apart.” NJB

Briefly consider the revealed objective for all apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers. “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, 1 for the work of the ministry, 2 for the edifying of the body of Christ: 3 till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, 4 unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 5 that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 6 but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 7 from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, 8 maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:11-16).

• **For the perfecting of the saints.** This has to do with spiritual maturity. The target is for the child of God to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). There is no provision – absolutely none – in Christ Jesus for remaining juvenile and immature. Salvation does not sustain such a state. The grace of God is not calculated to leave one in that state. Faith has no quality that encourages immaturity or a lack of growth. Hope makes no contribution to such a condition. If the aim is to conform the sons to the image of Christ, this ought to be abundantly apparent. However, judging from the condition of the modern church, one would never suspect that this was the case. The church of our time, with exceedingly few exceptions, is a gigantic contradiction to this Ephesians text – all talk notwithstanding.

While every believer is at some point a novice, they are not to remain in that state. They are to be conversant with the things of God – able to perceive them, take them up, and handle them. Every member of Christ’s body who remains deficient in faith and the knowledge of the Son of

God must grow out of that state.

For the work of the ministry. Other versions read, “equipping of the saints for the work of service,” NASB and “prepare God’s people for works of service.” NIV This is not a reference to community service or common philanthropic work. This has to do with ministries within the body of Christ, as the text will confirm in verses 15-16. Each member of Christ’s body is strategically, placed within the body by God Himself. As it is written, “But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18). It is their relationship to the other members of the body that is the point. They have been baptized by one Spirit into one body in order to be a means through which Christ ministers to His people (1 Cor 12:13). There is no such thing as a non-functioning member of Christ’s body. The point of the gifts given to the church (Eph 4:11) is to get them working productively and effectively.

- **For the edifying of the body of Christ.** Other versions read, “for the building up of the body of Christ,” NASB and “so that the body of Christ may be built up.” NIV This is not talking about numerical growth – although that may very well happen. This is addressing the matter of spiritual maturity – a state in which one can discern good and evil (Heb 5:14), and effectively minister to the children of God. Edification occurs when faith, hope, and love, are made stronger, and the individual members are able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

- **Till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.** Every person who does not grow up into Christ is a liability to the church. They are a portal through which Satan can work, for, by remaining in a state of childishness, they are a living contradiction of the Kingdom of God, which is as a mustard seed that begins small, yet grows into a large tree (Matt 13:31-32). The body of Christ is to be brought to a point where everyone can comprehend the things of God. An intelligent grasp of both the nature and direction of the Kingdom of God is to be possessed. There is only “one faith” (Eph 4:5), and while it may vary in degrees, it does not vary in nature. The “knowledge of the Son of God” is acquaintance with Him, so that His voice is known, and His ways discerned to some measurable degree. While every believer is at some point a novice, they are not to remain in that state. They are to be conversant with the things of God – able to perceive them, take them up, and handle them. Every member of Christ’s body who remains deficient in faith and the knowledge of the Son of God must grow out of that state. The gifts given to the church are designed to make that happen. Where it is not happening, either no true minister is present, or the minister has been recalcitrant to his revealed duty.

- **Unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of Christ.** The “perfect man” is the church aggregate: “till we all come . . . unto a perfect man.” Although comprised of individuals, the “church,” which is “the body” (Col 1:18), a single entity – “one body” (Eph 4:4). It is not that it ought to be “one body,” that is what it is . Its oneness is directly traced to the likeness of its members to the Head, which is Jesus Christ. Since no single member possesses all of the traits of Jesus, the aim is for each member to mature in that Divine quality that is most prominent in them. In other words, in their Divinely assigned capacity within the body of Christ, they are to conduct themselves as Jesus. That is the aim. In so doing, they will reflect their “measure of the stature of Christ.”

Each member is like a spiritual conduit through which spiritual nourishment is ministered to the brethren. Any kind of spiritual life that is unrelated to this objective is spurious and worthless.

That we be no more children. In Christ, simplicity and naivete are not friends. Because eternal life is knowing God and Christ (John 17:3), ignorance is a liability. The barrage of false teaching that originates with Satan and his hosts is especially hurled at those who are babes in Christ – those who are not grown up. In the initial phase of spiritual life, the Lord protects His children, making them stand (Rom 14:4), and gently leading and caring for them (Isa 40:11). However, there does

come the time when they themselves must “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11). They must see through the errors to which they are subjected, and learn to “fight the good fight of faith,” laying “hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12).

• **Speaking the truth in love may grow up into Him.** Other versions read, “holding the truth in love,” DARBY “doing the truth in charity,” DOUAY “follow the truth in love,” GENEVA “living the truth in love,” NAB “practicing the truth in love,” NET “live by the truth and in love,” NJB “being true in love,” YLT and “let our lives lovingly express truth [in all things, speaking truly, dealing truly, living truly].” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “speaking” has no true parallel in the English language. It does include the idea of speaking, but is not limited to that. The idea is that “truth is the element in which we are to live, move, and have our being.” PULPIT COMMENTARY Speaking the truth in love has nothing whatsoever to do with tone. Those who reject the truth because they do not like the way it has been said have revealed their own hearts, not the hearts of those who testified to them. In my judgment, the word “speaking” is used to accentuate the gifts the text states have been given to the church. They are all “speaking” gifts: “apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11). It is understood that those ministries can only be effective within the context of truth – truth that is lived out as well as spoken.

• **Through Christ, the whole body is compacted together by the working of every part.** As the “Good Shepherd,” Christ ministers to His people, feeding them and leading them (John 10:11-14; Heb 13:20). However, He does this through means. So far as His body is concerned, it is apparently most frequently, though not exclusively, through its various members. Each member is like a spiritual conduit through which spiritual nourishment is ministered to the brethren. Any kind of spiritual life that is unrelated to this objective is spurious and worthless.

• **That an increase may be realized, which is defined as the body edifying itself in love.** The “increase” of reference is not numerical growth. It is true numerical growth can take place in varied ways. This can take place exponentially – multiplication (Acts 6:1,7; 9:31 12:24), It can also range from “a great multitude” and “many” (Acts 17:4,12), to a household (Acts 16:15,34; 18:8), and even to a single individual (Acts 8:38-39). However, the “increase” mentioned in this text refers to spiritual maturity, or growing up into Christ “in all things.” It is increasing in faith, spiritual aptitude, and godly expression. This is the point at which the individual members [and, consequently] the whole body begins bringing forth “fruit unto God” – the revealed intention of it all (Rom 7:4).

Given these revealed objectives, precisely what kind of justification can be presented for remaining in a gathering where such things are not at all apt to happen? If there is only a “form of godliness that denies the power thereof,” are not God’s people told to “turn away” from such (2 Tim 3:5). Jesus did not remain where truth was not received (Matt 16:4; 21:15-17; Mk 12:13-14), nor did Paul and those with him (Acts 13:46,51; 18:6). In fact, since Jesus has been exalted into heaven, we have no example of any lengthy period during which any man of God sought to teach or direct those lacking a love for the truth. When stubborn unbelief rears its head and refuses to leave, the time has come for the man of God to move on! I understand that patience is required, as well as discernment of the true situation. Also, judgments cannot be made upon the basis of human opinion or conjecture. But eventually, unbelief will have the truth withdrawn from it, and woe to the person who insists on remaining united with those who refuse to be united to Christ through their rejection of the truth!

Thus, it makes perfect sense that Paul took the disciples and left the synagogue. Had there been a compelling interest in the truth of the Gospel, he would have rejoiced to stay. But such an environment was not present. In the interest of the disciples – who are the premier people before God – he moved to a place that was more conducive to collective teaching.

DAILY IN THE SCHOOL OF TYRANNUS

“ . . . disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.” Other versions read, “reasoning daily,” NKJV “had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus,” NIV “argued daily,” NRSV “argued daily in the hall of Tyrannus,” RSV “holding daily dialogues in Tyrannus's yeshivah,” CJB “conducting discussions every day,” CSB “discoursed with them daily in the school of a man named Tyrannus,” MRD “addressing them every day,” NET “held daily discussions,” NLT and “he spoke there everyday.” CEV

The Greek word translated “school” is **scolh/ /** (schol-aa). It is another word that is a transliteration, where the letters are converted to English letters, rather than using a fixed English word. The lexical meaning of the word is, “freedom from labor, leisure” – in this case, a place for learning, as compared with working, THAYER “strictly freedom from occupation; hence, a place where there is leisure for learning, school, lecture hall,” FRIBERG “lecture hall,” UBS “strictly freedom from occupation; hence, a place where there is leisure for learning school, lecture hall,” LOUW-NIDA and “that in which leisure is employed, esp. a learned discussion, lecture . . . a place for lectures, a school,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

The Jewish Bible (CJB) refers to “ Tyrannus's yeshivah .” By modern definition, a “yeshivah” is: “1 – A school for talmudic study. 2 – An Orthodox Jewish rabbinical seminary. 3 – A Jewish day school providing secular and religious education.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

There has been a lot of speculation concerning Tyrannus and the school, or lecture hall, associated with his name. However, the bottom line is that we do not know anything certain about him, either from an historical point of view or that of the Scriptures – which here is our fundamental interest.

By way of comparison, we have in this text a sterling example of how the Gospel was spread. First, the disciples were removed from a contentious environment. Second, they were moved to a place in which discussion, debating, declaration, and reasoning could take place. Paul did not bring the disciples to a theater. He did not convene their gatherings in the marketplace, or a political arena. He gathered them in a place that was noted for learning and the weighing of ideas – in this case, inspired thoughts were revealed from heaven.

The point to be seen is that the preaching and teaching of Paul was set within a rational environment. It included thought, intelligent expression, discussion, and exposition. He did not operate in a atmosphere of entertainment or raw emotion. Chants, endless repetition, hype and other modes of mindless expression were foreign to everything we know of him. However, in our time, this is now a primary way of religious expression, and the more hype and emotion there is, the more people think the Lord is present. Ignorantly and without any Scriptural precedent or example, people speak of feeling the Lord's presence. A kind of group hypnosis is taking place that is being credited to God and the moving of the Spirit.

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This kind of environment, particular in matters pertaining to life and godliness, is exceedingly strange in our time. In our text, the subject matter was “things concerning the kingdom of God” (19:8). When was the last time any nominal Christian even heard of such a thing? What professed ministry for the youth, or anyone else, has ever come to town with such an agenda? Something has happened in our time that is not only unlike the record of Divine workings recorded in the book of Acts, it bears

not even the slightest resemblance to it!

The Example of Jesus and His Disciples

The manner of the kingdom is reflected in the ministry of Jesus to His disciples – particularly the twelve, whom He ordained to be “with Him” (Mk 3:14).

- Nine times it is written that Jesus “taught them” (Matt 5:2; 7:29; 13:54; Mk 1:22; 2:13; 4:2; 10:1; Lk 4:31; John 8:2). There are twelve direct references to Him “teaching” (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 21:23; 26:55; Mk 6:6; 11:49; Lk 5:17; 13:40,22; 21:37; 23:5).

- In addition to the above references, sixteen times it is written that Jesus “taught” (Mk 1:21,22; 9:31; 11:17; 12:35; Lk 4:15,31; 5:3; 6:6; 19:17; 20:1; John 6:59; 7:14; 8:2,20; 18:20).

- Twenty-three times it is written that Jesus “answered” someone while in dialog with them (Matt 12:39,48; 13:11,37; 15:3,13,24,26; 16:2; 19:4; 26:23; Mk 3:33; 6:37; 7:6; 9:12; 10:3; 14:20; Lk 8:21,50; 17:20; 19:40; 20:3; 23:3).

- Thirty-one times it is written that someone asked Jesus something (Matt 12:10; 17:10; 22:23,35; 27:11; Mk 4:10; 7:5,17; 9:11,28; 10:2,10,17; 12:18,28; 13:3; 14:61; 15:2,4; 7:36; 8:9,37; 11:37; 18:18; 20:21,27; 21:7; 22:64; 23:3; John 4:10; 9:2).

- The words, “Jesus said,” are recorded 129 times in the Gospels. “Jesus spoke” are recorded nine times. In the Gospels there are 318 references to “sayings.”

- The Gospels also contain thirty-seven references to preaching (“preach,” “preached,” and “preaching”).

In view of these rather cursory observations, it certainly should not surprise us that one of the three major gifts in the church is that of “teacher,” described as “third,” and only preceded by two other teaching ministries, “apostles and prophets” (1 Cor 12:28).

Paul Followed the Kingdom Manner

In separating the disciples to a place conducive to reasoning and learning, Paul followed the Kingdom manner. If eternal life is knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3), and if Jesus has come and given us an understanding that we might know Him (1 John 5:20), then what can really be said about an approach to religion that leaves the people in a perpetual state of ignorance? If the gatherings of professed Christians, together with the literature they read, and the songs they sing, do not increasingly clarify the truth to their hearts, how can it be possible that Jesus is among them? With very few exceptions, did Jesus ever come to a city, town, or village, and never teach? He taught in the synagogues (Lk 4:15), in the Temple (Mk 12:35), in the wilderness (Mk 8:4-5), by the sea side (Mk 13:2), in the desert (Mk 6:31-34), and even while sitting on a well in Samaria (John 4:6-26). Why would anyone associate Jesus with activities that excluded teaching? What is there about Scripture or the revealed intent behind salvation that would lead a person to such an erroneous conclusion? It seems apparent to me that such notions have been birthed in Satan’s domain!

FOR TWO YEARS THEY HEARD THE WORD OF THE LORD JESUS

“ 10 And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”

This being the case, we have daily sessions, each one lasting around five hours, for at least seven-hundred and twenty-eight days (5 hrs X 7 X 104)! That would be a total of three thousand, six hundred, and forty hours!

Here is a text that cannot be comprehended by those attracted to brevity, and who are accustomed to brief periods of professed spiritual concentration. Over the years I have observed countless numbers of professed Christian works that were not sustained. Keep in mind that our text is speaking of something that took place every day: “reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus.” NKJV Based on some Jewish tradition, the Amplified Bible reads, “holding daily discussions in the lecture room of Tyrannus reasoning from about ten o’clock until three.” One would be hard pressed to find professed Christians subjected to five hours of teaching and spiritual reasoning in an entire week. Even the Lord’s day, the accumulative time Christians spend together does not approximate five hours, and even then, their gatherings do not major on teaching. Well, in this text, we are being exposed to real spiritual life, the kind of appetite that it promotes, and the caliber of true spiritual leaders and learners.

THIS CONTINUED BY THE SPACE OF TWO YEARS

“And this continued by the space of two years . . .” Other versions read, “this continued for two years,” NKJV “this took place for two years,” NASB “this went on for two years,” NIV “this was done by the space of two years,” GENEVA and “this happened for two years.” YLT

The activity termed “this” refers to the daily reasoning in the school of Tyrannus. I can only conceive of the Sabbath day being the exception to the “daily” activity – and even then, that was what took place in the synagogues. This being the case, we have daily sessions, each one lasting around five hours, for at least seven-hundred and twenty-eight days (5 hrs X 7 X 104)! That would be a total of three thousand, six hundred, and forty hours!

Let’s put this matter in the context of our times. It is commonly said that the average sermon is 20-25 minutes long. Let us be charitable, and say thirty minutes, although there are not many popular sermons that are that long. The nominal Christian hears one of these a week. Using that average, the time Paul continued this daily activity would amount to 7,280 sermons. For those exposed to a single sermon a week, that would account for one hundred and forty years . For those bold souls who hear one thirty minute sermon, and attend one 45 minute class a week, it would translate into 2,912 Sundays, or fifty-six years.

Of course, the gatherings no doubt grew, as will be evident by the remainder of this text, so that everyone was not there all of the time. But many from Ephesus were probably there daily. At any rate, we are being exposed to what really does happen when people receive the love of the truth and desire “the sincere milk of the Word” (1 Pet 2:2). Where there is little or no spiritual appetite, how can the presence of life from God be confirmed – either on an individual or group level. Mind you, I am not saying this to judge people – only to say that a lack of spiritual appetite throws one’s profession into the arena of question. God is the One who will ultimately pronounce the verdict. However, when He does, it will not be in accordance with one’s profession, but with the reality of the case.

Our own assembly has frequently been charged with being too lengthy. What would such poor souls say of daily gathering that were held for five consecutive hours, involving extensive in-depth teaching, discussion, and meaningful dialog?

As if this were not enough, is there anyone who imagines that Paul delivered the same discourse every day, or led a discussion of the same subject. Can any person of sound mind read the Gospel’s and conceive of a Jesus that repeatedly taught the same thing? Is there any Epistle that contains intellectual repetition? Where have the notions arisen that suppose the things of God can be discerned by a momentary and unsustained exposure to them? I think I know their source, and it is not from heaven!

ALL THEY THAT DWELT IN ASIA

“ . . . so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard. . . both Jews and Greeks.” Other versions read, “all who lived in Asia . . . both Jews and Greeks,” NASB “all the Jews and the Greeks who lived in the province of Asia . . . both Jews and Greeks,” NIV “all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks,” NRSV “all who were living in Asia . . . Greeks as well as Jews,” BBE “who resided in [Proconsular] Asia, both Jews and Gentiles,” MRD “all the inhabitants of the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord, Jews and Greeks alike,” NAB and “people throughout the province of Asia-- both Jews and Greeks.” NLT

What is called “Asia” in Scripture came to be known as Asia Minor. The land mass covered was over 1,800 miles from east to west, and about 700 miles from north to south. That is approximately two-and-one half times the width of the State of Texas. The Asia of the New Testament Scriptures was about 1,260,000 square miles. Texas has 266,853 square miles.

The Britannica Encyclopedia says of the region, “Asia was a peaceful province and was under senatorial jurisdiction, governed from Ephesus by a proconsul of consular rank (under the republic the governor had usually been a former praetor). The provincial assembly, called the koinon of Asia, to which the cities sent representatives, met annually in different cities, chose the officials known as Asiarchs, passed resolutions, made appeals, and sent deputations on provincial matters.

The great cities of Asia were leading educational and cultural centres in the Eastern Roman Empire. Important Christian communities and bishoprics grew up within the province, as did important heresies, such as Montanism. BRITANNICA 2008, ANCIENT ROMAN PROVINCE OF ASIA

Now, our text says that “all they which dwelt in Asia heard . . . both Jews and Greeks.” This took place while Paul was reasoning and teaching every day in Ephesus. This rapid and thorough spread of the word was not due to the evangelistic travels of Paul! In the most favorable stance, representatives from Asia had to make a trip to the capital city of Ephesus and be exposed to what he was saying. They had to come to him. He did not go to them. Further, it could not be that in his previous trips people from Asia had been exposed to his preaching, for he had been “forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia” (Acts 16:6). Some kind of Asian migration took place during those two years that was of an epochal nature.

This should not surprise us, for the Queen of Sheba came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs 10:1-13; Matt 12:42). When John the Baptist came preaching, the people came to him (Matt 3:5). When Jesus preached in Galilee multitudes came from Decapolis, and beyond Jordan, the border of the promised land (Matt 4:25). His fame spread to Syria, and they brought the sick to Him (Matt 4:24). There are also other occasions when someone was “brought” to Jesus, the people bringing the needy where Jesus was ministering (Matt 9:2,32). In fact, as with John the Baptist, the people who wanted to hear Jesus had to go where He was. There were times when Jesus went out of His way to minister to a single individual (Lk 7:7-17; Matt 15:21-29; Mk 5:1-21). However, this was not His normal manner. With these exceptions, people generally had to go to Him to obtain the blessing. In fact He urged the multitudes to do precisely that: “Come unto Me” (Matt 11:29).

Following the martyrdom of Stephen, when the believers were scattered in persecution the believers in Jerusalem were dispersed, except for the apostles (Acts 8:1). They remained in Jerusalem to establish the disciples, and as a point of contact for questions that arose (Acts 8:14,25; 15:2). As the Gospel began to spread throughout the world, the synagogues became primary places that were visited – places where even Gentiles who were seeking the Lord gravitated (Acts 6:9; 9:20; 13:5,14-15,42; 14:1; 15:21; 17:1,10,17; 18:4,19,26; 19:8).

In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul postulated someone unlearned or an unbeliever – we presume an inquiring one – who came in among believers when they were gathered together in one place (1 Cor 14:23-25).

Now, in our text, Paul moves to a specific location that became a sort of base for his daily reasoning and teaching. In this case, there was no need to launch a missionary effort to penetrate other regions, even though, under the administration of the Holy Spirit, special initiatives were directed (Acts 13:2). This holy methodology was successful because something of substance was being taught. A vast region was finally permeated with the Gospel because representatives from that region, like the Queen of Sheba either went to inquire of Paul, or were providentially directed to him during some trip to Ephesus – like the Jew from around the world were directed to Peter and the apostles on the day of Pentecost.

Among other things, this indicates that Paul was not delivering a provincial message, or one tailored only for the community in which he was located. What do you suppose inquiring brethren from some foreign country would hear were they to enter the average Christian assembly in our own town –or any city in our country.

What This Means

Among other things, this indicates that Paul was not delivering a provincial message, or one tailored only for the community in which he was located. What do you suppose inquiring brethren from some foreign country would hear were they to enter the average Christian assembly in our own town –or any city in our country. On any given Lord’s day they might hear anything from a political speech to teaching on the family, or how to be successful, or how to think positively. At any rate, it would not be a message that could easily transport to any region of the world – which would mean it was not Gospel, which is intended for all the world. However, should a person come from any section of Asia to the school of Tyrannus and hear the reasoning of Paul, it would be eternally profitable. That also means God would bless what was said, and it would work mightily through those who took it back to their homeland.

Seeking After the Truth

As is confirmed in this text, one of the first proofs of sincerity and a spiritually inquiring mind is taking advantage of the opportunity to hear truth. If Jesus was in the city, it was on the part of wisdom to see to it that you heard Him. If it was known that Paul and Barnabas were going to be in the synagogue of Antioch on the next Sabbath, truly seeking people would be there (Acts 13:42). Throughout my life I have made it practice to take every possible advantage of hearing a man of God who was noted for declaring spiritually insightful and pertinent things. The tragedy of the whole circumstance is that such men are exceedingly rare. Mediocrity presently reigns in the professing church. In my judgment, this is why Christianity is not spreading in the nations formerly known for being Christian. When the message is, at the very best, weak, the blessing of God will not be upon it.

THE WORD OF THE LORD JESUS

“ . . . the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.” Other versions read, “the word of the Lord,” NASB “the message about the Lord,” CJB and “the Word of the Lord [concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God].” AMPLIFIED

The term “word” is translated from the Greek word **lo,gon** , which has the following lexical meaning: “things which are put together in thought, as of those which, having been thought I. e. gathered together in the mind, are expressed in words . . . a word which, uttered by the living voice, embodies a conception or idea,” THAYER In the Greek language, and as used here, synonyms are prophecy, command, report, message, teaching, declaration, statement, and discourse. Synonyms of the English term are announcement, declaration, and pronouncement.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

In our time there are vast bodies of Christendom that do not have a valid message, announcement, or declaration . A valid message is not one that centers in humanity, or the circumstances of men. It

is not the announcement of what men could be, or even what they ought to be. Such words are often necessary, but they are never the core of what is to be made known. From the true perspective, a “word” that states you can live a happy life, or can have a successful marriage, or can have all of your troubles removed, is really no word at all. It is true there is a place for directing people into more proper and beneficial ways of living – but that is only after the real message has been declared AND received.

Our text specifies the kind of word that was made known throughout all Asia: “the word of the Lord Jesus.” Modern translations leave out the word “Jesus,” but they have certainly not done the readers a favor by doing so. Jesus IS the subject of the word delivered, for God has no word to speak to men today that does not relate directly to, and is spoken by, the Lord Jesus Christ. As it is written, “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds” (Heb 1:1-2).

“The word of the Lord Jesus” is a message that centers in Jesus Christ. It declares who He is, why He came, what He did, and what He is doing. It affirms His reign or Sovereignty, and declares His objectives. It announces His victories, accomplishments, present activities, and what He will do. It affirms what He did among men, what He did to Satan, and what He is doing for men. It announces His relationship to God the Father, why that relationship exists, and what is being accomplished by it.

My Own Experience

Beginning with my personal commitment to Christ and spiritual consistency, I spent a significant time among Christian preachers and teachers. From sixteen years old until this day (58 years) this has been my preferred environment. I made it a point to hear what I considered to be insightful preachers and teachers. I subjected myself to the literature recommended by these men. I spent my quality time with the people of God and in activities I felt would advance my faith and knowledge of God. Of course, I was acquainted with many aspects of the truth, and experienced some measure of spiritual growth, for which I am thankful. No one who knew me thought I was not serious about the Lord or was not wholly devoted to what I conceived to be His will.

My point is that the environment in which I had chosen to dwell was actually a spiritual inhibition. I had to leave it before I could advance further in the faith. This did not involve the condemnation of anyone, for that is not my prerogative. However, it did involve the assessment and discernment of faith, and the resolve to continue to pursue the Lord at any cost.

Yet, it was not until I was in my mid-twenties that it began to register upon my spirit that I was really not focused upon the Lord Himself. As I approached the later twenties, I sensed that I had really not been preaching or teaching about God Himself – His purpose, objectives, His character, and His will. I was convinced that after all of my study, and all of the things I had heard, that I actually knew very little about the Lord Jesus Christ, what He had accomplished, and what He was doing now. At this point, I turned to my father, whom I had discerned while yet young was quite different from the supposedly religious elite among whom I had walked, and by whom I had been taught. He always emphasized faith, the knowledge of God, and the purpose of God. For the next forty years we labored together. At the first, there was a sense in which we could only fellowship extensively with each other, with a few scattered souls to which we had rare access. However, slowly but surely, we were part of a growing nucleus of kindred spirits. Within that context, spiritual understanding increased on a daily basis, and I began to see that like David, my feet had been set in a “large room” (Psa 31:8). To this very day, this glorious expansion in perception has not ceased. Rarely do I have a day when some new vista of truth is not uncovered to me – something that was under my nose all the time.

My point is that the environment in which I had chosen to dwell was actually a spiritual inhibition. I had to leave it before I could advance further in the faith. This did not involve the condemnation of anyone, for that is not my prerogative. However, it did involve the assessment and discernment of faith, and the resolve to continue to pursue the Lord at any cost. The church is intended to provide an environment in which the saints may grow up into Christ in all things. It makes no difference if they are meeting in the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9), the apparently larger surrounding of the Corinthian assembly (1 Cor 11:20; 14:23), or the home of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom 16:3-5). When environs of this sort are found, God will see to it that increase takes place. The report of faith and love will go out, and inquiring souls will in some way gravitate to those surroundings.

Our text is a sterling example of the effectiveness of spiritual insight and focus coupled with godly wisdom. One environment had to be forsaken in favor of another. When this took place, something happened that could not possibly have been realized in a purely institutionalized setting. Within two years, without any revealed outreach-plan, all of Asia heard the proclamation or message of Jesus!

GOD WROUGHT SPECIAL MIRACLES BY THE HANDS OF PAUL

“ 11 And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul.”

Once again, the environment was everything! For example, it is said of Jesus’ ministry in “His own country . . . “And He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them” (Mark 6:5). Matthew says of the occasion, “And He did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief” (Matt 13:58). This was not the case in our text. Rather, extraordinary things took place.

SPECIAL MIRACLES

“And God wrought special miracles . . . ” Other versions read, “unusual miracles,” NKJV “extraordinary miracles,” NASB “no ordinary miracles,” DARBY “no small miracles,” GENEVA “very great miracles,” MRD “remarkable . . . miracles,” NJB “mighty works also – not common,” YLT “very unusual miracles,” IE “most unusual demonstrations of power,” PHILLIPS and “unusual and extraordinary miracles.” AMPLIFIED

Rendered literally, the phrase “special miracles” is “not the casual or ordinary kind.” INTERLINEAR Robertson provides the following explanation: “Powers not the ones that happen by chance, not the ordinary ones.” ROBERTSON’S WORD PICTURES Vine’s Greek Dictionary says of this word, “not common or ordinary.”

This is not a comparison of the works of God with the works of men. From that vantage point, all of God’s works are extraordinary, for none of them can be done by men. Here the idea is that these were miracles that God did not ordinarily do through anyone. They were not the way that He commonly worked through His people.

The Context of the Events

The context of this phenomenal outbreak of miracles was not a special healing service! Rather, it was daily sessions in which reasoning and teaching took place. A certain spiritual environment existed in the school of Tyrannus that solicited, as it were, the attention of heaven. Things that did not ordinarily occur began to take place – “special miracles.”

The Attempt to Make the Extraordinary Ordinary

There appears to be a tendency in religious flesh to make the extraordinary ordinary. It has become common in some circles to talk about “your miracle,” and to speak as though the environment of faith

is always bathed in the miraculous. But this is not at all the case, and it is wrong to lead people to believe that it is.

The very man of whom we are reading wrote of times when he did not experience extraordinary Divine intervention: “Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes

This Divine arrangement eliminates casual and disinterested disciples from involvement in the work of the Lord. There are holy activities in which those who are not wholly devoted to the Lord cannot participate.

above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor 11:23-27). Again he wrote, “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor 1:8). All of this occurred WHILE he was doing the will of the Lord. They also took place while his word was not as successful as it was in Ephesus.

In the above trials the point was getting through them, not avoiding them. It was living by faith in the trial instead of being delivered from the trial. In their own measure, every believer experiences such things, when it appears as though the extraordinary is not happening at all. Yet, behind the scenes, the Lord is sustaining the soul, nourishing the believer, managing their temptations, and refusing to allow Satan to test them beyond their capacity.

There are times, however, like our text, when the arm of the Lord moves in an extraordinary manner. In my judgment, these are occasioned by the insightful, and corresponding extraordinary, exposition of the truth of God. This is also accompanied by a unusual and favorable response to that truth. Jesus indicated that a “wicked and adulterous generation” was wasting their time seeking any sign, to say nothing of a special one (Matt 12:39). The only sign He gave such a generation was His resurrection from the dead, which no mortal being saw. It was an unseen sign, with only the evidence of a living Jesus being proof that He was risen – and even that was seen only by witnesses chosen by God, and there was not a person among them who was not already a disciple of Jesus (Acts 10:40-41; 1 Cor 15:4-8).

THE HANDS OF PAUL

“ . . . by the hands of Paul.” Other versions read, “through Paul.” NIV “By Paul’s hands,” CSB “gave Paul the power,” NLT “using Paul to perform,” IE “through Paul’s instrumentality.” WEYMOUTH

The phrase “by the hands of” equates to through the instrumentality of. It is not the same as the laying on of hands, for these miracles were not wrought by a direct confrontation of Paul. When it comes to the work of God, the Head of the body works through the body – through those members who have a secure and stable connection with Him. Colossians refers to this as the members who are “holding the Head,” (Col 2:19), from which nourishment is “ministered.” This Divine arrangement eliminates casual and disinterested disciples from involvement in the work of the Lord. There are holy activities in which those who are not wholly devoted to the Lord cannot participate. Thus, Paul is affirmed to be the appointed instrument through whom the Lord wrought “special miracles.”

Even with these considerations, there is no guarantee that faithful disciples will be able to work

miracles. John the Baptist, for example, who towered above all other men prior to Christ (Matt 11:11), “did no miracle” (John 10:41). As already pointed out, there are also cities and regions in which “special miracles” cannot be done because of the environment (Mk 13:58). The word “special” means precisely that – “special.” This is something strictly controlled by the Lord Jesus. The government or will of men cannot bring such things into the world. We are to be occupied with other things: like seeking “first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt 6:33). That focus will shape how we think, how we speak, how we work, and how we function within the body of Christ.

FROM HIS BODY WERE BROUGHT HANDKERCHIEFS OR APRONS

“ 12 So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.”

This is something men cannot make happen, although there are some who make a valiant attempt to do so.

What we are reading is a report of what the God did: “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul.” It involves His ways which are “past finding out” (Job 9:10; Rom 11:33). This is part of His way that is “in the sea,” and His path that is in “great waters” (Psa 77:19). This is something men cannot make happen, although there are some who make a valiant attempt to do so. They anoint cloths, pray over them, and send them hundreds of thousands of people. But the testimonies of anything actually being accomplished are extremely rare, and some of them are even questionable. This is not the kind of thing we are reading about. Paul is not said to have prayed over these articles, or anointed them with oil, or laid them before the Lord for special power. The report is strait forward, and is to be received precisely as it is written. Remember, this was something “special.”

HANKERCHIEFSAND APRONS

“So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons . . .” Other versions read, “handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him,” NIV “that had touched his skin,” NRSV “were carried away from his body,” RSV “bits of linen and clothing from his body,” BBE “napkins and aprons were brought from his body,” DARBY “face cloths or work aprons,” CSB “the clothes on his body, napkins and rags,” MRD “handkerchiefs or parts of his clothing,” LIVING “towels or aprons . . . which Paul had handled,” WEYMOUTH and “handkerchiefs or small-clothes which had been in contact with his body.” AMPLIFIED

The lexical meaning of “handkerchief” is “a cloth for wiping perspiration from the face and for cleaning the nose,” THAYER “face cloth,” FRIBERG and “small piece of cloth used as a towel, napkin, or face cloth - 'towel, napkin, handkerchief, face cloth.” LOUW-NIDA These were not tiny sanitized cloths cut from a large bolt of material. They were pieces of material that Paul had used – probably to cleanse and dry his face. They were apparently not sent out to individuals, but were taken from Paul, perhaps involving several different people.

The meaning of “aprons” is “a narrow apron, or linen covering, which workman and servants were accustomed to wear,” THAYER and “a linen covering used by workers and servants to cover the front of the body to protect clothing.” FRIBERG Again, these were not made especially to be a media through which miracles were wrought. There is no indication that they were put into a big pile and prayed over, or anointed with oil. These were everyday articles that were used in the workshop – perhaps on occasions when Paul made tents. They were things that had touched Paul’s body in the daily course of his life.

You can judge for yourself whether it is intelligent to suppose that there were hundreds of these handkerchiefs and aprons. The wording of the text (“from his body were brought unto the sick

handkerchiefs and aprons”) it appears that certain people had charge of these articles, and that they were relatively few in number. The text does not say they laid the cloths on the sick people, although I suppose that is possible.

Let it be clear that this is not a statement of apostolic doctrine, although certain within the Christian community have done their best to make it so. This is a report of something “special” – something that God “wrought,” or caused to happen. Those who insist on standardizing reports, making binding precedents of them, have seriously erred – and that is the most gentle way to say it.

These unusual works are similar to the report of Peter. It is recorded that the people brought sick people into the streets of Jerusalem, laying them on beds and couches, “that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them” (Acts 5:15). I have never yet heard of those who make a practice of sending out prayer miracle-working prayer cloths capitalizing on their shadow. The occasion reported in the fifth chapter of Acts also took place during a remarkable outbreak of preaching and believing. The believers were “all together with one accord,” no one who lacked faith dared to join themselves to them, “multitudes both of men and women” were being “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:13-14). That is precisely the context of our text!

DISEASES DEPARTED

“ . . . and the diseases departed from them . . .” Other versions read, “diseases left them,” NKJV “their illnesses were cured,” NIV “their diseases went away from them,” BBE “they would recover from their ailments,” CJB “their sicknesses would be cured,” GWN “they were healed of their diseases,” NLT and “they were healed.” LIVING

I continue to be chagrined by the liberty that some feigned translators take with the text of scripture. I cannot conceive of the Holy Spirit of God inspiring loose language lacking the precision that characterizes the Godhead. The text states that the diseases “departed.” This word is translated from the Greek word **avpalla,ssesqai** . The meaning of this word is “to remove . . . to be removed, to depart,” THAYER “set free, release . . . go away.” FRIBERG The thing to which this word is applied is not the diseased people, but the “diseases” themselves. This is why “healed” or “freed” is not proper. Those words apply to the people, not the disease. The text means precisely what it says. The diseases left the people, doing so because of the handkerchiefs and aprons that were “brought” to the sick.

The text suggests those with disease did not merely have an infection, or some fleshly debility. They were under the control of something – in this case, “diseases.” I am not prepared to say that all sickness of this order. Timothy, for example, had some reoccurring infirmities or illnesses that Paul said could be addressed by using a “little wine” (1 Tim 5:23). Paul had “infirmities” – also translated sickness and weakness – with which he was willing to live. They became the portal through which Divine power was given to him – and he know it (2 Cor 12:5-10). The person who can distinguish such things is blessed indeed.

This record is similar to the report of Jesus healing Peter’s mother-in-law. She was sick with a severe fever when Jesus confronted her. Jesus came and “took her by the hand, and lifted her up; and immediately the fever left her , and she ministered unto them” (Mark 1:31).

EVIL SPIRITS WENT OUT

“ . . . and the evil spirits went out of them.” Other versions read “came out of them,” CSB “wicked spirits went out of them,” DARBY “wicked spirits,” DOUAY “demons also went out,” MRD “evil spirits left them,” NIB “evil spirits were expelled,” NLT “went forth from them,” YLT and “demons within them came out.” LIVING

Scripture often equates demons with “evil spirits.”

Women with a vexed daughter

Matt 15:22 –a devil (demon)

Mark 7:25 – unclean spirit

Gadarene Demoniac

Matt 8:28 – devils (demons)

Mark 5:2 – unclean spirit

Father’s son, vexed with

Lk 9:42 – devil (demon), and unclean spirit

Mark 9:20 – spirit

Mark 9:25 – dumb and deaf spirit

Evil spirits, or demons, have power to bind people with certain infirmities. Some of them that are specified include the following.

In the matter demons or evil spirits, men, of themselves, are impotent. However, in the Kingdom of God, such power and spiritual aptitude can be given to men that a cloth with which they wiped their sweated brow can cause an evil spirit to loose his hold oppressed souls.

Caused a man to be out of his mind, cut himself, and be strong enough to break chains. A legion of demons possessed this man, which were at least 2,000 in number, and possibly more. Matthew says there were two men, while Mark focuses on only one of them (Mk 5:2-20; Matt 8:28-34).

- Caused a man to be dumb, unable to speak (Matt 9:32-33).
- Caused a man to be blind and dumb (Matt 12:22).
- Caused a young girl to be “vexed,” also causing her to be “unclean” in some unspecified way (Matt 15:22-29).
- Caused a young boy to be lunatic, throwing him into seizures in which he foamed at the mouth and wallowed on the ground. Also compelled the boy to jump into fire and water, though unable to take his young life. Even when his father was bringing him to Jesus, this spirit threw the boy on the ground, throwing him into a convulsion (Matt 17:14-18; Mk 9:17-27; Lk 9:37-42).
- Caused a man in a synagogue to be unclean in an unspecified way. Before coming out, the spirit shrieked out and threw the man to the man down in the presence of the people (Mk 1:23-26; Lk 4:33-35).
- Jesus cast seven demons out of Mary Magdalene. The effect they had upon her is not made known (Mk 16:9; Lk 8:2-3).
- A “spirit of infirmity” caused a woman to be bowed over, unable to straighten herself, for a period of eighteen years (Lk 13:11-13).

In the matter demons or evil spirits, men, of themselves, are impotent. However, in the Kingdom of God, such power and spiritual aptitude can be given to men that a cloth with which they wiped their sweated brow can cause an evil spirit to loose his hold oppressed souls. In such a case the powers

of darkness are not only held at bay, they are forced to let go of those whom they possessed.

Keep in mind that this power was given to a single man. He did not have to go to the oppressed. Someone else could take cloth that had touched his body, and invade the citadels of dark power, so that a vast region – Asia Minor – could be blessed.

Who is able to estimate what a single person can experience from God when wholly given to Him? And what is the potential of a vast number of disciples who could everything but loss for Christ Jesus? Let every soul declare war on mediocrity and distraction, giving themselves wholly to the Lord. Pondering on these arresting thoughts will bless your soul, challenging your mind, warming your heart, and opening new vistas of possibility.

CONCLUSION

Once again, I want to emphasize that we are not reading the record of an institution. This is not about institutional growth, the mere amassing of numbers, or the living out of a human methodology. This is the inspired record of Jesus building His church. It is the account of the advancement and maturity of spiritual life, pressing toward the mark, and fighting the good fight of faith. It testifies of obstacles being overcome, counting everything loss for Christ, and increasing in the knowledge of God. Blessed is the person who sees these things and determines to participate in them. Such souls will realize unparalleled joy and satisfaction.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #80

THE RESPONSE OF THE EPHESIANS

“ 19:13 Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. 14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so. 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? 16 And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. 18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds. 19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. 20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed. ” (Acts 19:13-20)

INTRODUCTION

This text reports a rare occasion when some wandering Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to expel a demon in the name the Jesus whom Paul preached. Here we have a remarkable parallel to many contemporary practices that bring to men a religion contained in empty and powerless words. Although religious tradition allows for such lifeless expressions, even the hierarchy of Satan himself does not honor such efforts. Only men, easily swayed because of their unbelief, are moved by such theatrics. Heaven is certainly not deceived by such religious antics, and, as this text makes abundantly evident the powers of darkness mock them in derision.

In Ephesus pretension was exposed in a most unique way, revealing the impotence of religious flesh. It is incumbent upon us to take due note of the reported event, and make a correlation with the blatant simulation of religious authority that is found in our time. This is a day of “strong delusion,” sent as a judgment from God upon an

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- **A CASE OF RELIGIOUS PRETENSION (19:13b-14)**
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- **THE JEWS WHICH BELIEVED NOT (19:15)**
- **THE IMPOTENCE OF FLESH AGAINST SPIRITUAL DARKNESS (19:16a)**
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ostentatious and false church. In this lesson, I will do my best to expose the sinfulness of adopting a powerless religion, and clinging to lifeless creeds and false assumptions. Such things are a form of unbelief, dishonor the Lord Jesus, and quench the Spirit of God.

As a result of the incident reported in this passage, a great awakening took place in Ephesus. Fear fell on the citizenry, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. Many who believed came publically confessing their sins and disclosing some of their secret deeds. The renunciation of their former manners was revealed in an unusual way, yet one that perfectly comported with the nature of spiritual life.

While contemporary evangelistic success is too frequently measured by numbers and some form of verbal confession alone, this renewal was marked by a stark change in conduct, and a public and effective renunciation of unacceptable practices. This, of course, revealed the reality and effectiveness of genuine conversion.

THE NECESSITY OF AUTHENTICITY

The very notion of the “God of truth” (Deut 32:4; Psa 31:5; Isa 65:16) being associated with something that is not true or real, is reprehensible beyond measure. To represent a work that is not effective as being associated with, or even instigated by, a God from whom only truth proceeds is of such a serious nature that it cannot be adequately described. For the God of heaven, whose works are all “done in truth” (Psa 33:4; 111:7-8), to be concomitant with an unholy church is such a significant misrepresentation that only the day of judgment will successfully clear the moral air of the blasphemous claim. For the Almighty God to be connected with conversions that do not result in a genuine and lasting change, is an irreverent reproach to Him. For people to wear the name “Christian,” yet whose manner of life stands in stark contrast with “the Righteous One” NIV (1 John 2:1), demeans the Lord Christ, and belies any claim of being associated with Him.

The prophets prophesied of the day of salvation, affirming certain traits would be found in those who participated in it. I do not tire of mentioning them, and of drawing attention to their absence in the modern church. They are like a warning trumpet blast from heaven that identifies the spurious nature of much, if not the majority, of the professing church.

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absence in the modern church. They are like a warning trumpet blast from heaven that identifies the spurious nature of much, if not the majority, of the professing church.

THE CIRCUMCISION OF THE HEART. “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live” (Deu 30:6).

• **THOROUGH SATISFACTION.** “They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures” (Psa 36:8).

• **JOYOUS ACCESS.** “Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation” (Isa 12:3).

• **INSIGHTFUL REJOICING.** “And in that day shall the deaf hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind shall see out of obscurity, and out of darkness. The meek also shall increase their joy in the LORD, and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (Isa 29:18-19).

• **HOLINESS COUPLED WITH GLADNESS.** “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away” (Isa 35:8-10).

• **PRODUCTIVE ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.** “They shall all know Me” (Jer 31:31).

• **AN ESSENTIAL CHANGE IN CHARACTER.** “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Ezek 36:26-27).

I do not know how it can be established that those who lack these things have, in fact, been reconciled to God, and are enrolled in heaven. One might as well attempt to establish that a person was “the Christ” who did not fulfill what the prophets said of Him. If what God affirms He will do in a people is not done, how can those in whom His promised work is not apparently accomplished be established as His people? And, if His work is not really apparent in the individual, how can anyone be sure that He has really worked in such a one?

I do not know how it can be established that those who lack these things have, in fact, been reconciled to God, and are enrolled in heaven. One might as well attempt to establish that a person was “the Christ” who did not fulfill what the prophets said of Him.

When the appropriate indications of salvation were not found in a people professing to possess it, certain warnings were issued by the apostles. The absence of the things that “accompany salvation” (Heb 6:9) was not glossed – and it is wrong for them to be treated so casually today. Religious institutions – all of them – be hanged! If what God affirms to take place in salvation is not found, woe to that bigot who dares to say they are saved! Let men heed what is declared to those whose lives contradict the truth!

• **THE FORFEITURE OF LIFE.** “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die : but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13).

• **EMBRACING ANOTHER GOSPEL.** “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel ” (Gal 1:6).

• **BEWITCHED INTO NOT OBEYING THE TRUTH.** “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Gal 3:1).

• **CHRIST IS OF NO EFFECT.** “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal 5:4).

• **DO NOT LET IT HAPPEN – EVEN ONCE.** “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Eph 5:4-6).

• **SPIRITUAL SPOILATION.** “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Col 2:8).

• **BECOMING GOD’S ENEMY.** “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God” (James 4:4).

• **THE DOMAIN OF IMPOSSIBILITY.** “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb 6:6).

• **SPIRITUAL BLINDNESS.** “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins” (2 Pet 1:9).

• **A STATE THAT IS WORSE.** “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Pet 2:20-21).

• **NO LOVE FOR OR KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (1 John 2:15).

• **NO ACQUAINTANCE WITH GOD.** “Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him” (1 John 3:6),

These texts are not to be explained, but they are to be believed! Men are to make no attempt to blend them with their stilted theology. They are to be believed! If they are difficult to believe, they are to be believed anyway! These are Divine assessments, and to ignore them is to ignore God Himself. Their power is found in their affirmation and the embrace of faith. Further, they are to be declared to the church, for they are affirmations, and they are addressed to the church. They are Divine statements of the reality of the case. There is not the slightest possibility that they are inaccurate. It is not possible that they do not reflect the character and will of God.

The lack of these qualities among a people professing to be of Christ is, at the very best, a sign of drawing back and unbelief. Further, God has spoken to the matter of drawing back, or recoiling at His word. Additionally, drawing back is to perdition, or destruction, not to a blessing! As it is written, “Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the

soul” (Heb 10:38-39). The fact is that some do NOT draw back, and some do. Which category best describes you?

The presence of sin in the church must not be glossed or treated as though it was normal. A holy mandate has

The glorification of Christ Jesus has certainly not amended His essential character. The objectives for the church have not been reissued. All of the changes – every single one of them – are on the part of men.

been issued from the Throne: “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7). Again, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). And again, “But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16).

It is time for the professed church to dismiss from their presence any and all men who attempt to explain sin and pacify sinners. It is time to expel those who build careers on the moral failures of people, and supply worldly-wise solutions to the dilemma of sin. They have no place among the redeemed of the Lord, and woe to that man or group that presumes to make a place for them!

THE RELEVANCE OF THESE WORDS

The relevance of this apparent diversion is seen in the nature of our text. There is a response to the presentation and discussion of “things concerning the kingdom of God” that stands in stark contrast to the preponderance of reported Christian results today. That contrast is certainly not owing to any change in the nature of God, or any lack of true effectiveness in the powerful Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16). The general environment and nature of humanity has not changed. A different Gospel has not been given from heaven. The Holy Spirit has not altered His indispensable ministry. The glorification of Christ Jesus has certainly not amended His essential character. The objectives for the church have not been reissued. All of the changes – every single one of them – are on the part of men.

Further, all valid moral and character change is associated directly with man’s relationship to God, whether it is for weal or woe, good or evil, blessing or cursing. It seems to me that this is beyond all controversy. – even though it is difficult for some to receive.

VAGABOND JEWS ENCOUNTER A REAL DEMON

“ 19:13a Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus . . . ”

In his record of the activities of early believers, Luke is careful to write in such a manner as to expose the absolute distinction between religious pretension and error, and the truth of God and its impact upon the human spirit. Error is never tolerated or never viewed as inconsequential. Behavior that is out of harmony with the nature of salvation is also duly noted and rebuked. There is a remarkable consistency in all of this so that the issues of life are made quite clear.

- On the day of Pentecost, Peter quickly pointed out the erroneous judgment of the Jews who demanded the death of Jesus (Acts 2:22-23).
- When those who witnessed the healing of the lame man at the gate Beautiful beheld Peter and John as though they had done this under their own power, they were quickly and thoroughly corrected (Acts 3:11-26).
- When Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit, and misrepresented their

commitment to the Lord and His work, they were promptly rebuked and judged (Acts 5:1-10).

- When the Jewish council balked at the preaching of Stephen, he exposed their hearts, doing so publically (Acts 7:51).

- When Simon sought to buy the ability to confer the Holy Spirit by the laying on of his hands, Peter soundly rebuked him, saying he had no part in the matter (Acts 8:19-24).

- When an Ethiopian eunuch was confused about the meaning of Scripture, one was sent to declare the truth of that text to him (Acts 8:26-39).

- When Cornelius sought to pay undue homage to Peter, the apostle refused to allow him to do it (Acts 10:22-23).

- When Elymas opposed the truth and attempted to interfere with its proclamation, Paul soundly rebuked him, pronounced him an enemy, and struck him blind for a season (Acts 13:8-11).

- When the Jews in Antioch contradicted and blasphemed what Paul was preaching, he said they had judged themselves unworthy of eternal life, and promptly left with Barnabas (Acts 13:45-46).

- When idolatrous men in Lystra sought to honor Paul and Barnabas as though they were gods, the men of God tore their clothes and ran among them, restraining what they sought to do (Acts 14:8-18).

- When certain Jews taught that it was necessary to be circumcised after the manner of Moses, the leaders promptly addressed the matter, sent to the apostles, and delivered corrective teaching to all of the churches (Acts 15:1-31).

- When the philosophers in Athens mocked Paul's preaching of the resurrection, he left the area (Acts 17:32-33).

- When certain in Corinth blasphemed, Paul shook his garment and said their blood was on their own heads (Acts 18:4-5).

- When Aquila and Priscilla saw that Apollos was deficient in his understanding, they taught him more perfectly in the way of the Lord (Acts 18:25-26).

- When Paul confronted some disciples in Ephesus who were unaware of the need for believing on Christ, he promptly informed them of the deficiency of their baptism and the need for believing on Christ (Acts 19:1-5).

In our day, a certain tolerance of both error and ignorance pervades the professing church. Such an attitude is antithetical to everything we know about the Lord. In fact, we are told that God Himself is no longer tolerant of ignorance. Now, since Jesus has been exalted to His right hand, the command is sent forth to humanity to "repent." Their ignorance of God is no longer overlooked – and that is the way it really is! "And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent" (Acts 17:30). Men are not excused from this responsibility under any circumstance.

In this economy of revealed truth, pretension, hypocrisy, and misrepresentation are wholly out of order. Our text confirms this to be true. The people of God must learn to maintain a posture that is firmly against all forms of the lie – especially those which seek to distort Christ and His great salvation.

VAGABOND JEWS

"Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists . . ." Other versions read, "itinerate Jewish exorcists," NKJV "Jewish exorcists, who went from place to place," NASB "Jews who went around

driving out evil spirits,” NIV “strolling Jews, exorcists,” ASV “Jews used to travel from place to place and force evil spirits out of people,” GWN “excising demons,” MRD “traveling from town to town casting out evil spirits,” NLT “wandering Jews were also trying to make evil spirits go out of people,” LIVING “Jews who went around trying to drive out demons,” ISV “wandering Jews who claimed to be driving out the evil spirits,” WILLIAMS and “traveling Jewish exorcists (men who adjure evil spirits).” AMPLIFIED

According to some linguists, the literal rendering of this intriguing expression is “strolling Jewish exorcists.” PULPIT COMMENTARY The men so described were something like aimless peddlers, roaming from place to place, apparently without having a settled purpose. Although there is not a lot said about such people, Jesus did refer to them when He said, “And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges” (Mat 12:27). That this did, in fact, take place is confirmed by a certain incident that is recorded by Luke. “And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us” (Luke 9:49-50).

This incident bears some similarity to a statement made by Paul concerning some who were preaching the Gospel of Christ. “Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Phil 1:16-18). Among of other things, this confirms the exalted nature of the name of Christ. Even when some preached the Gospel thinking to add more affliction to Paul, yet the truth was being made known, and for this Paul gave thanks. So in our text, something is reported that is certainly not an ideal circumstance. Yet, there is no reason to suspect they were nothing more than charlatans exploiting the people.

FROM JOSEPHUS, Jewish Historian

“We learn also from Josephus, ‘Ant. Jud.,’ 8:2, 5, that forms of exorcism, said to have been invented by King Solomon, so efficacious that the devils cast out by them could never come back, were used with great effect in his days. He adds that he himself knew of an instance in which one of his own countrymen, Eleazar by name, had cast out devils in the presence of Vespasian and his sons and officers and a number of his soldiers. The method used was this: The exorcist applied to the nose of the possessed the bezil of a ring, under which was a certain root prescribed by Solomon, and so drew out the evil spirit through the man’s nostrils. The possessed then fell to the ground, and the exorcist commanded the evil spirit in the name of Solomon never to return, and then recited one of Solomon’s incantations. To give full assurance to the bystanders that the evil spirit had really left the man, the exorcist placed a vessel full of water at some distance off, and then commanded the ejected spirit to overturn it, which he did. Thus far Josephus.” PULPIT COMMENTARY

Whether or not these men actually cast out demons is not the point here. Historians and commentators are divided over this matter. Should a person explore what actually took place in the exorcisms of the nomadic Jews, several theories could be set forth.

The point of this text is the presumption involved in attempting an experiment, as it were, with the name of Jesus. It also is a sterling testimony to the impact of Jesus and those He has sent and empowered in the regions of darkness.

- That their works were purely pretentious, and nothing more than a delusion. The manner in which the text is reported does not lend itself to this view.
- That they employed magical powers that were actually under the administration of

the devil himself – like the magicians of Egypt in their encounter with Moses and Aaron. The text itself gives no hint that this is the case.

- That Satan used the occasion to feign exorcisms, engaging in a kind of taunting of the people. This being the case, it is difficult to understand why the Spirit referred them as exorcists instead of Satan’s workers.

- That Jesus had so thoroughly decimated the kingdom of darkness that they had to yield to certain devout Jews. This is a theoretic possibility, but is accompanied with certain unanswered questions.

However, since the Holy Spirit did not see fit to elaborate on the subject from that viewpoint, it seems to me that men are out of order in speculating on it. The point of this text is the presumption involved in attempting an experiment, as it were, with the name of Jesus. It also is a sterling testimony to the impact of Jesus and those He has sent and empowered in the regions of darkness.

TOOK UPON THEM

“ . . . took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus . . . ” Other versions read, “attempted to name over those,” NASB “tried to invoke,” NIV “tried to use,” NRSV “undertook to pronounce the name,” RSV “took upon themselves to make use of,” BBE “tried to make use of,” CJB “attempted to pronounce,” CSB “took in hand to name,” GENEVA “were disposed to exorcize,” MRD “tried to use,” NLT “planned to experiment,” LIVING and “undertook to call.” AMPLIFIED

The phrase “took upon them” is translated from a single Greek word (*evpecei,rhsan*). The lexical meaning of this word is, “to take in hand, undertake, attempt (anything to be done),” THAYER “try,” FRIBERG “to make attempt on,” and LIDDELL-SCOTT “to endeavor.” LEH

The point here is that this was not an effort of faith. It was an attempt to do something they had never done before, and to achieve success by some form of emulation. In other words, it was an attempt of “the flesh” – something undertaken in the wisdom of men, and without regard to identity with God. It was apparently not accompanied by any prayer, or the confidence that is inherent in the faith that comes from God. The fact that they undertook this work suggests that they had not been as successful in their endeavors as they desired. If this was not the case, it makes no sense that they would experiment with another means of expelling demons. They seemed to sense the superiority of the name of Jesus, yet did not believe on Him.

THE DANGER OF EXPERIMENTATION

In a day when the Christian world leans heavily upon worldly wisdom, it is important to stress the danger of spiritual experimentation. It is still true that “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23). That is, whatever is done, regardless of its nature or extent, that is not undergirded by the assurance and confidence of faith, is wrong. That is precisely the point of the text in the fourteenth chapter of Romans. Faith is the spiritual canopy over the entirety of life. Thus it is written, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col 3:17). And again, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor 10:31). And yet again, “And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). If we are to offer our bodies unto God, “a living sacrifice,” it is imperative that nothing be done that cannot be supported by our faith. No facet of life, regardless of its seeming insignificance, can be lived with a sole regard for self, just as though there was no God.

The sacrifice of our lives to God is like a thank offering for His great salvation. Admittedly, it requires considerable effort – particularly when we are in the midst of a society that emphasizes self

and the realization of a more agreeable life in this present evil world. Notwithstanding, that kind of sacrifice is precisely what God demands in return for pulling us out of the moral and spiritual quagmires of sin, and setting us on a solid rock. A proper response is demanded of those so delivered.

A CLASSIC CASE OF RELIGIOUS PRETENSION

“ 13b . . . saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. 14 And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.”

It appears to me that this incident is written as a brief commentary on the nature of powerless religion, and how it is regarded among Satan’s hosts. Solemnly believers are warned concerning a “form of godliness that denies the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5). This is a “form” that maintains the trappings of external religion, while allowing its constituents to live in the flesh. Crucifixion is not required as it is in “true religion and undefiled” (Gal 5:24; James 1:27). Western Christianity is, for the most part, without the cross. Self and flesh are not debased, but are freely permitted to move about without restraint. Like those who worship images, men bring their fleshly preferences into the church, imposing a worldly flavor on everything that is done in the name of the Lord. Preachers hawk their wares like worldly merchants. Singers and instrumentalists throw the mantel of the world upon their music, so that it jars against spiritually sensitive souls. The result is that there is no power present in the church. Sin breaks forth with little effort. Lukewarmness thrives, and the people are content to remain ignorant – even though eternal life is knowing God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3). Psychiatrists are brought in to deal with what is called the human psyche, and financial counselors are summoned to assist with monetary problems. All of this is confirmation that such people lack the power required to live acceptable before God. Mind you, they use the name of Jesus, and readily claim identity with Him. Yet, they lack both moral and spiritual power. Paul teaches that this condition is not owing to their humanness. Rather, they have “denied,” or rejected the power that always is granted with salvation. Where that power is actually lacking, the possession of salvation is, at the very best, questionable.

While the parallel with our text is not exact, the kind of people that are chronicled in it are a sterling example of those who lack power with God and man. These are Jews who are experimenting with religion – trying out what they perceive to be the latest religious technique. They themselves are not followers of Jesus, and are fundamentally unfamiliar with Him. Yet, they have heard and seen some things that have peaked their fleshly interest. With great confidence in their own ability, they take it upon themselves to use the name of Jesus.

JESUS WHOM PAUL PREACHETH

“ . . . saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. . . .” Other versions read, “We exorcize you,” NKJV “I command you,” NRSV “I give you orders,” BBE “I conjure you,” DOUAY “I order you,” GWN “I sternly warn you,” NET and “I solemnly implore and command you.” AMPLIFIED

The word “adjure” means “to solemnly implore,” THAYER “put someone *under oath, adjure* ; the sense is not to be weakened to begging or imploring,” FRIBERG “command someone,” UBS and “to demand that a person take an oath as to the truth of what is said or as to the certainty that one will carry out the request or command.” LOUW-NIDA

However, let us project this circumstance into our own situation. If belonging to the “one true church,” or going through the proper outward ordinances is all that is required, then surely God will work in the behalf of such people because of their seeming qualification.

To “adjure” is to issue a supposedly authoritative command. In this case, these men were commanding the demon in the name of Jesus to come out of the man. If the sound of the name “Jesus” is all that is required, the powers of darkness will instantly yield to it.

I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have heard Satan and his hosts commanded to do this or that in the name of Jesus. I have heard people refuse to accept what Satan is perceived to have cast upon them, whether a disease or some other thing. Some pseudo preachers tell people to command Satan to take his hands off of God's property, or give them back their children. Such souls do well to give heed to this text, for there is much in it they ought to learn.

When what is supposedly done in Jesus' name is powerless and ineffective, we cannot at all be sure Jesus is actually in the matter.

SONS OF THE CHIEF OF PRIESTS

“ . . . And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.”

Here were some men who were not only from among the chosen people, they were the sons of the highest of the priests – an ordained office under the Law. If fleshly rank has anything to do with the dispatch of Divine power, it will surely be made known through these men.

Lest we be presumptuous in our conclusions, it is good to remember that Nadab and Abihu were genuine priests, and the sons of Aaron. Yet, when they attempted to offer incense to God with fire that was not lawful, He slew them, and was glorified in the process (Lev 10:1-3). Hophni and Phinehas were also very real priests – sons of “Eli the priest.” Yet, even though they were involved in official service to God, they were really “sons of Belial.” In their priestly activities, they insisted on taking portions for themselves in an unlawful manner (1 Sam 2:12-17). They even “lay with the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle” (2 Sam 2:22), therefore exploiting their office. Not only did they have no right to do this, the Lord slew them for their deeds (2 Sam 2:25,34). They were not allowed to use a holy office for unholy activities. Their lineage and position did not remove that fact.

However, let us project this circumstance into our own situation. If belonging to the “one true church,” or going through the proper outward ordinances is all that is required, then surely God will work in the behalf of such people because of their seeming qualification. Ponder Ananias and Sapphira who exercised covetousness under the cloak of religion (Acts 5:1-11).

This demon knew about the distinctiveness of the Jesus Paul preached. Yes, even more than that, they knew the Jesus he preached was the real Jesus, and not “another” one.

It should not surprise us that some men imagine they can speak for God because they have an ordination certificate, or a degree from some theological school. This practice is so prevalent in contemporary Christendom that it is considered heretical to question it. However, it is still wrong, and the ineffectiveness of such men to actually impact the lives of the people for righteousness is proof of it.

The Jesus Preached by Paul

This demon knew about the distinctiveness of the Jesus Paul preached. Yes, even more than that, they knew the Jesus he preached was the real Jesus, and not “another” one (2 Cor 11:4). And, who was the Jesus Paul preached?

- The One God anointed above everyone else (Heb 1:9).
- The One God raised from the dead and showed to chosen witnesses (1 Cor 15:4-8).
- The One who was made to be sin for us (2 Cor 5:21).
- The One who was “made a curse” for us (Gal 3:13).
- The One who was rich, yet became poor, that we through His poverty might be made rich (2 Cor 8:9).

- The One declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4).
- The One who sends grace and peace (Rom 1:7).
- The One through whom God will judge the secrets of men (Rom 2:16).
- The One through whom righteous is granted by faith (Rom 3:22).
- The One who saves those who are coming to God through His faithful intercession (Heb 7:25).
- The One who takes up residence in those who love Him and keep His word (John 14:21,23).
- The One through whom “we have now received the atonement” (Rom 5:11).
- The One through whom we are “made righteous” (Rom 5:17-19).
- The One through whom the saved “reign in life” (Rom 5:17).
- The One through whom we are “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God” (Rom 6:11).
- The One in whom we are established (2 Cor 1:21).
- The One through whom the sweet fragrance of Christ emits through those belonging to Him (2 Cor 15-16).
- The One through whom we are changed by the Holy Spirit while we gaze upon His glory (2 Cor 3:18).
- The One whose love compels us to live to God’s glory (2 Cor 5:14-15).
- The One who has delivered us from “this present evil world” (Gal 1:4).
- The One who is “formed” within us (Gal 4:19).
- The One who, when in us, causes the body to “be dead” (Rom 8:10).
- The One in whom are “hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” Col 2:3).
- The One through whom “all things” can be done (Phil 4:13).
- The One before whom every knee will eventually bow (Phil 2:10).

This is a very small sampling of statements Paul made concerning the real Jesus. You should recognize that many of these realities are rarely mentioned in today’s church culture. There is another Jesus being preached that is more accommodating to the human condition.

Such is a spurious Jesus to whom the powers of darkness will not yield. Crafty men choose to sidestep this circumstance by speaking of addictions, family curses, generational curses, genetic makeup, and physiological circumstances. Such things, they affirm, can be corrected by special procedures they have concocted. That is why they have developed their procedures. However, the truth of the matter is that Satan and his hosts will not yield to their word.

Let us now behold how the powers of darkness react when men who really have no power order them, barking commands at them like a dog. How will they respond to the command?

THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

“ 15 And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?” Other versions read, “wicked spirit,” DARBY/DOUAY and “the demon.” LIVING

This text will give us some sound ideas about the nature of that battalion of wicked spirits against

whom we wrestle (Eph 6:12). They are intelligent, for the issuance of lies, delusions, craftiness, snares, and the likes, are evidence of intelligence. From one perspective Satan's empire is well informed, although they are not omniscient or all knowing. In view of this, unwarranted theological simplicity is welcomed by the wicked one as an opportunity for him to dominate through delusion. Those who promote simplistic views, and dumb-down the Gospel, have unwittingly played into the hand of our "adversary the devil" (1 Pet 5:8-9). A condition that is to be eagerly sought by all believers is one in which "we are not ignorant of his devices."

JESUS I KNOW

"And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know . . ." Other versions read, "I recognize Jesus," NASB "said to them in reply," NAB "answering said unto them, I have knowledge of Jesus," BBE "answered, and said, Jesus I acknowledge," GENEVA "said to them, Jesus I well know," MRD "Jesus I recognize," NAB and "replied to them, I know about Jesus." NET "I have heard about Jesus," IE "[one] evil spirit retorted, Jesus I know." AMPLIFIED

As used here, the meaning of the word "know", is "to learn to know, come to know, get a knowledge of," THAYER "of intelligent comprehension know, come to understand, ascertain . . . as learning something through sense perception learn of, become aware of, find out, perceive," FRIBERG "to have knowledge; acknowledge, recognize . . . be very certain, remember," UBS "to know about," LOUW-NIDA and "acknowledge, recognize." GINGRICH

This is not the knowledge or understanding that comes through faith (Heb 11:3). Evil spirits do not know Jesus through the familiarity of fellowship (1 Cor 1:9; Phil 3:7-14). They do not know Jesus because He has made Himself known to them (John 14:21,23).

These wicked spirits know Jesus because of at least three distinct experiences.

- First, Jesus invaded their kingdom during His earthly ministry, when He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:39). During That **There is a level of knowledge and communication in the spiritual underworld that is staggering to consider. Contrary to much thinking, Satan's empire is not**

time, they actually knew who Jesus was. One of their number once cried out in a synagogue, "Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God" (Mark 1:24). The men from Gadara, possessed of a legion of demons, cried out, "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Mat 8:29). When "unclean spirits" saw Jesus, they "fell down before Him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God. And He straightly charged them that they should not make Him known" (Mark 3:11-12). No demon ever argued with Jesus. None ever attacked Him, or failed to obey Him. Evil spirits did, indeed know Jesus by adversarial experience.

- Satan's kingdom knows Jesus because at His cross He spoiled and plundered them, wresting their captives from their hands, and decimating their empire. Thus it is written, "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" Col 2:15).

- The hosts of darkness know Jesus because in His ascension He "led captivity captive," or "led a train of vanquished foes" AMPLIFIED (Eph 4:8). From the time of His resurrection, these wicked hosts have been absolutely and fully under the control of Jesus. As it is written of Jesus, "Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him" (1 Pet 3:22).

- Because they have personally confronted the Lord Jesus, been conquered by Him, and made subject to Him, they are convinced of His nature, and tremble before Him (James

2:19). Their's is not the trembling of faith, but of conscious proximity.

Thus, evil spirits yield to Jesus without any kind of resistance. They do not engage in warfare against Him, nor does Satan their leader.

PAUL I KNOW

“ . . . and Paul I know . . .” Other versions read, “I know about Paul,” NASB “Paul I recognize,” CSB “Paul I am acquainted with,” DARBY and “Paul I have heard of.” WEYMOUTH

There is a level of knowledge and communication in the spiritual underworld that is staggering to consider. Contrary to much thinking, Satan's empire is not characterized by chaos and confusion, for then it could not stand. Jesus once said of our adversary, “And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?” (Matt 12:26). Heaven is not divided either. It is only upon earth that personalities are divided.

Apparently news traveled among the hosts of hell as Paul went here and there, assaulting the kingdom of darkness. This particular evil spirit was well aware of Paul. No doubt others who were laboring together with Christ in such a manner were also known among the hosts of darkness. Some of their number had been subject to Paul, who had been empowered by the One who had thoroughly defeated them as they gathered together against Him.

WHO ARE YOU?

“ . . . but who are ye?” Other versions read, “who are you” (plural), NASB/NIV and “who on earth are you?” PHILLIPS

This demon refused to yield to the words of these men because they had not been sent by Jesus, and were not His followers. They did not have power in the world of dark spirits, and were nothing more than deceivers – and this demon knew it.

This demon refused to yield to the words of these men because they had not been sent by Jesus, and were not His followers. They did not have power in the world of dark spirits, and were nothing more than deceivers – and this demon knew it.

What We Learn from This

Those who have not received power to work miracles and cast out demons ought not to conduct themselves as though they had. If they have no such power, let them not pretend as though they did, calling out, shouting, and going through rituals they think will work.

There is such a thing as failure that is traced back to presumption. This is a serious sin that leads to the “great transgression” – or one from which recovery is not possible. Thus the man after God's own heart prayed, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression” (Psa 19:13).

Also, consider that it is quite possible that the failure of human programs is also owing to the refusal of the powers of darkness to yield to such attempts to improve human behavior.

Education cannot produce spiritual empowerment. Neither can the official sanction of a religious institution confer power in spiritual domains. At no point is the work of God accomplished or assisted by the wisdom and approval of men. It is imperative that believers learn this truth and operate within its confines. Today, there is an enormous amount of activity within the professing church that is more related to the work of the sons of Sceva than they are to the work of the Lord.

It should surprise no informed soul:

- It should not surprise that Satan’s hosts do not react in the identical manner reported in our text us.
- That they do refuse to yield to institutional authority is confirmed by the presence and growth of sin within the professing church.

The bane of the modern church is its abysmal level of spiritual understanding, and its glaring impotence in the arena of conflict. These are not indicators of good things!

THE IMPOTENCE OF FLESH AGAINST SPIRITUAL DARKNESS

“ 16a And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them . . .” Other versions read, “leaped on them and overpowered them,” NKJV “leaped on them and subdued them,” NASB “jumped on them and overpowered them all,” NIV “leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them,” NRSV “prevailed against them,” BBE “fell upon them, overpowered them and gave them such a beating,” CJB “attacked them. He beat them up so badly,” GWN “sprang at them and subdued them all,” NAB “jumped on them and beat them all into submission,” NET “hurled himself at them and overpowered first one and then another, and handled them so violently,” NJB “ran on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them,” PNT and “jumped on these Jews. He was much stronger than they were. He beat them up.” IE

Several versions read that the man leaped on “two” men (Darby, ERV, Living, Weymouth, Montgomery, and Amplified). This is based on some variant manuscripts, and a flawed interpretation of what they actually say. Technically, even those manuscripts can mean “more than two” – a phrase that does not give a specific number, only that it is more than two. However, there is no need for these linguistic gyrations, since the text has already identified the number of men involved: “seven sons of one Sceva,” declaring that they were all involved in this account (verse 14). Those professed language experts that toy with the text of Scripture bring no true benefit to the children of God. Rather, through their sloppy manners, they inject the virus of doubt into the minds of men. That doubt, like leaven, spreads throughout the entirety of thought, finally yielding the fruit of unbelief, which will damn the soul. Such men should not be allowed to tamper with the Word of God, for when they “wrest” it, they do so to their own destruction (2 Pet 3:16). I understand that such comments are irritating to those who overstate the value of the human analysis of language. However, their liberty with the text is equally irritating to those who treasure the Word of God. Besides this, God has not conferred upon men the liberty to manipulate what He has revealed. If we “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), we will not condone men handling it like they do the writings of mere men.

THE MAN LEAPED ON THEM

Here was a man controlled by an “evil spirit,” and it made him stronger and more agile than seven grown men. Something similar occurred in the demoniac from Gadara, who, under the influence of a legion of demons, was able to break the “fetters and chains” with which men bound him (Mk 5:3). It is written that “the chains had been pulled

When it comes to the matter of sin, no person in Christ Jesus is helpless. Their lives are not out of control unless they are neglecting God’s great salvation.

apart by him, and the shackles broken in pieces” NKJV by him (Mk 5:4).

In this, the relative frailty of the human constitution is accented. Men are, in every way, inferior to God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. If any or all of these are against us, no one can effectively be for us. In matters of strength and wisdom, men are inferior to the holy angels – all of them. Were we to contend with a holy angel, there would be no way we could prevail. In strength and aptitude, they are also inferior to Satan and all of his hosts. Were it not for the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and the faith that appropriates it, these forces would be our thorough undoing.

FOR THOSE WHO ARE ACCUSTOMED TO MORAL FAILURE

Since the capture of the professed church by the psychoanalysts and professionals, moral failures have increased exponentially. This has proved to be an opportunity for religious charlatans to develop new and lucrative careers that depend on the ongoing nature of moral failure. However, there is something to be learned from this text that is germane to this circumstance. If an “evil spirit” can cause an individual to do things outside of the scope of ordinary human ability, what can the indwelling Holy Spirit do? What holy aptitudes can be found in those in whom the Spirit dwells, and is not grieved or quenched? Ponder “the fruit of the Spirit” that is produced in the believer (Gal 5:22-23). Think of the dominating hope that comes, together with the ability to purify oneself (Rom 15:13; 1 John 3:1). Consider the obedience that is wrought “through the Spirit” (1 Pet 1:22), and putting “to death the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). God’s people must never permit a compromise with the flesh – not in view of the distinct and effective advantages that are given to them in the salvation of God! Ponder some of those advantages, and then you will see how absurd it is to make any attempt to explain or justify sin in a professed Christian. Believers have been:

- Begotten of God (1 John 5:18).
- Born again (1 Pet 1:23).
- Are a new creation (Eph 2:10).
- Are reconciled unto God (Col 1:20).
- Have peace with God (Rom 5:1).
- Have access to God (Eph 3:12).
- Can obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).
- Have been given the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6; 1 Thess 4:8).
- Have been given the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-18).
- Have been given spiritual weapons that are mighty through God (2 Cor 10:3-5).
- He that is in them is greater than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4).
- If they resist the devil, he will flee from them (James 4:7).
- The Holy Spirit makes intercession for them (Rom 8:26-27).
- Jesus ever lives to intercede for them (Heb 7:25).
- Their temptations are managed from heaven (1 Cor 10:13).
- They can do all things they are required to do through Christ (Phil 4:13).
- They are not debtors to the flesh, or forced to obey its lusts (Rom 8:13).
- The same grace of God that brings salvation to them also effectively teaches them to reject worldly lusts and live godly (Tit 2:11-12).
- The Holy Spirit is present in them to lead in the mortification of the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13).

When it comes to the matter of sin, no person in Christ Jesus is helpless. Their lives are not out of control unless they are neglecting God’s great salvation. Candidly, I do not believe this is being declared among believers. If this assessment is correct, it profoundly accounts for the miserable state in which Christendom finds itself. The whole condition is inexcusable.

THE EPITAPH OF SPIRITUAL FAILURE

“ . 16b . . . so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” Other versions read, “naked

and bleeding,” NIV “wounded and without their clothing,” BBE “denuded and bruised,” MRD “stripped of their clothing and badly mauled,” NJB “naked and battered,” NLT “naked and badly injured,” LIVING “stripped naked and wounded,” AMPLIFIED and “wounded, with their clothes torn off their back,” PHILLIPS

What a pathetic sight it must have been! Seven roaming Jewish exorcists running naked and bleeding from a house in which they had attempted an exorcism in Jesus’ name – the Jesus that Paul preached. It seems to me that this is the ultimate humiliation – not only to fail in what you do, but to be severely wounded in the process. Instead of driving out a single demon, that demon so strengthened the man in whom he was dwelling, that the man pummeled the would-be exorcists into submission, tore the clothes off of them, and sent them out of the house badly mauled.

Among other things, this confirms that Divine power, whether it is sought for blessing or for cursing, is not implemented by means of a mere formula. There is no set of words that have been given to the sons of men that, of themselves, are capable of bring the power of God to bear upon a situation. The mere sound of a human voice does not of itself draw the power of God into the situation.

Exorcists being mauled by a demon-possessed man is similar to certain situations that are taking place in the Christian community. Often we hear of marriage counselors whose own marriages are in shambles. There have been national evangelists who have chided people for immorality, yet have themselves been caught in the trap of moral wickedness. All of this accents that true life and kingdom authority cannot be emulated. They cannot be arrogated to oneself by an act of the will or the adoption of a sectarian creed. If there is no vital connection with the Lord of glory, His name cannot be effectively employed. Neither heaven nor hell will respond favorably to such efforts.

Let it be clear, there is no such thing as effective religion that is by proxy, or in the name of a Christ who is not personally known and embraced. Second hand religion is a bane to any society. Yet, it is all about us, and in increasing measures. Sectarianism, religious tradition, and denominationalism, are founded in the second hand concept. A system is embraced that is impersonal. Things are taught that have not been perceived or experienced, and the fear of God is taught by the precept of men (Isa 29:13). These are deplorable practices, and their failure will be the epitaph over their institutional grave.

THE IMPACT OF THE REPORT OF THE WORKING OF THE LORD

“ 17 And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.”

It is a principle of God’s kingdom that His works are known where they are wrought. The report of the working of the Lord gets out. In this manner the whole earth continues to be full of His glory.

It is a principle of God’s kingdom that His works are known where they are wrought. The report of the working of the Lord gets out. In this manner the whole earth continues to be full of His glory (Isa 6:3). The following are examples of this kind of working, which is consistent in Scripture.

• **ISRAEL’S DELIVERANCE.** When Israel was delivered from Egypt, crossed the Red Sea, and overcome heathen kings, it was known throughout that region. “For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed” (Josh 2:10). “For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red sea, which he dried up from before us, until we were gone over: That all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear

the LORD your God for ever” (Josh 4:23-24),

- **THE KINGS OF ISRAEL.** Heathen nations heard about the comparative distinction of “the kings of the house of Israel.” “And his servants said unto him, Behold now, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings: let us, I pray thee, put sackcloth on our loins, and ropes upon our heads, and go out to the king of Israel: peradventure he will save thy life” (1 Kgs 20:31).

- **THE FAME OF SOLOMON.** The queen of Sheba heard of the wisdom and wealth of king Solomon. “And when the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to prove him with hard questions . . . And she said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in mine own land of thy acts and of thy wisdom . . . Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard” (1 Kgs 10:1-10).

- **AT THE BEGINNING OF JESUS’ MINISTRY** When Jesus returned from His wilderness temptation, He came in the power of the Spirit, and “there went out a fame of Him through all the region round about” (Lk 4:14).

- **WHEN JESUS EXPELLED DEMONS.** When He expelled demons from many, “the fame of him went out into every place of the country round about” (Luke 4:37).

- **WHEN JESUS HEALED TEN LEPERS.** When He healed ten lepers, “so much the more went there a fame abroad of Him” (Lk 5:15).

- **THROUGHOUT JESUS MINISTRY.** During Jesus’ prodigious ministry “His fame went throughout all Syria” (Matt 4:24).

- **HEROD HEARD OF JESUS.** Herod “heard of the fame of Jesus” (Matt 14:1).

- **THE WOMAN WITH THE ISSUE OF BLOOD.** The woman with the issue of blood “heard of Jesus” (Mk 5:27).

- **WHEN JESUS RAISED JAIRUS’ DAUGHTER.** When Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead, “the fame hereof went abroad into all that land” (Matt 9:26).

- **WHEN JESUS HEALED TWO BLIND MEN.** After Jesus had healed two blind men, they departed and “spread abroad His fame in all that country” (Matt 9:31).

- **A CERTAIN CENTURION HEARD OF JESUS.** A certain centurion who sought healing for one of his servants “heard of Jesus” (Lk 7:3).

- **THE FATE OF JUDAS.** When the treacherous of Judas resulted him hanging himself, “it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem” (Acts 1:19).

- **THE EVENTS OF THE DAY OF PENTECOST.** When the Spirit was given on the day of Pentecost, “this was noised abroad” (Acts 2:6).

- **THE JUDGMENT AGAINST ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA.** When Ananias and Sapphira were struck dead for their transgression “great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:11).

- **THE CONVERSION OF SAMARIA .** When the city of Samaria received the word of God delivered by Philip, “the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard” it (Acts 8:14).

- **WHEN PETER RAISED DORCAS.** When Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, “it was known throughout all Joppa” (Acts 9:42).

- **THE FAITH OF THOSE IN ROME.** All of this was more than mere coincidence. The faith of the brethren in Rome was “spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8).

Men must learn this fact in order to avoid the promotion of self. If God is really working among the people, He will see to it that the word gets out. Men may not receive the report. They may even fight against it. But God's glory will be found where He is working, acknowledged or not!

THE FAITH AND LOVE OF THE EPHESIANS. From afar, Paul heard of the faith and love of the Ephesian brethren. "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints" (Eph 1:15).

• **THE FAITH AND LOVE OF THE COLOSSIANS.** Before he went to Colossae, Paul heard of their "faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love" they had "to all the saints" (Col 1:4).

• **THE FAITH OF THE THESSALONIANS.** In the case of the Thessalonian believers, Paul declared their "faith to God-ward is spread abroad" (1 Thess 1:8).

None of these reports involved a marketing plan. None of them were designed to promote the individuals or the congregations involved. This is simply the manner of the Kingdom. It is the way God works. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid" (Mat 5:14). The works of God cannot be hidden or concealed. If men do not see them, it is because they are blind, and do not have eyes to see.

Our Own Experience

Although The Word of Truth Fellowship is small and insignificant by institutional standards, it is widely known throughout the United States, and in foreign countries as well. These include Burkina Faso, Pakistan, India, Myanmar, the Philippines, and others. None of this knowledge was promoted by the fellowship here. All of it is the result of hearing of our faith in Christ and the love possessed for the people of God. It is "the fruit of their doings" (Isa 3:10).

Men Must Learn

Men must learn this fact in order to avoid the promotion of self. If God is really working among the people, He will see to it that the word gets out. Men may not receive the report. They may even fight against it. But God's glory will be found where He is working, acknowledged or not!

There are a staggering number of churches that would remain hidden in the dregs of society if they were not promoting themselves. They are not noted for their faith in Christ, or for their love for all saints. They may be noted for their numbers, or for their involvement in the social affairs of the community. However, the kind of reports that are recorded in Scripture are not be given about them.

When the focus of the people of God is upon the Lord Himself, and they are growing up into Christ in all things, a work will be done among them that will be reported. That is how the Lord works.

THE NEWS SPREAD RAPIDLY

"And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus ..."

What a report this was! There is no record that the man with the demon was healed. The report is that a demon possessed man severely wounded some religious pretenders. That man, however, did not attack Paul!

Therefore, the Jewish exorcists were exposed as false, while Paul and his preaching were honored. Even the evil spirit acknowledged that he knew Paul, yet did not recognize the others.

The real contrast here is found in comparing the works of Paul versus the feigned attempts of these Jewish exorcists. On the one hand, handkerchiefs which touched the body of Paul were brought, and

“evil spirits went out” of those who were oppressed by them (19:12). Now, rather than the evil spirit coming out of a man, that spirit moved the one controlled by it to violently and effectively overcome seven men. Thus the validity of Paul’s message was confirmed – for the pretentious exorcism was said to be in the name of Jesus “whom Paul preacheth.” Therefore, the Jewish exorcists were exposed as false, while Paul and his preaching were honored. Even the evil spirit acknowledged that he knew Paul, yet did not recognize the others.

This news traveled like a raging fire throughout Ephesus, so that the contrast between Paul and the Jewish exorcists was known to both Jews and Greeks. Paul was vindicated and the exorcists were exposed.

Let me again affirm that ineffective religion is undergirded by a false view of both God and Christ. Further, effective religion is manifested by the exposure of falsehood as well as the confirmation of the truth in those who believe.

FEAR FELL ON THEM

“ . . . and fear fell on them all . . .” Other versions read, “they were seized with fear,” NIV “everyone was awestruck,” NRSV “fear came on them all,” BBE “filled with awe,” NJB “a solemn fear descended upon the city,” NLT “alarm and terror fell upon them all,” AMPLIFIED and “a great sense of awe came over them all.” PHILLIPS

This kind of thing has taken place several times among those witnessing the work of the Lord.

- Once, when king Saul issued a solemn warning to anyone who refused to come after him and Samuel, “the fear of the Lord fell on the people” (1 Sam 11:7).
- Another time when the Levites went throughout the land teaching in Judah from the book of the Law, “the fear of the Lord fell upon the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah” (2 Chron 17:10).
- When Israel was delivered from Egypt, “Egypt was glad . . . for the fear of them fell upon them” (Psa 105:38).
- After the day of Pentecost, as the disciples “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and in prayers . . . fear came upon every soul” (Acts 2:43).
- When Ananias and Sapphira were judged, “great fear came on all them that heard these things” (Acts 5:5), and “great fear came upon all the church” (Acts 5:11).
- When the early churches experienced a season of rest, they walked “in the fear of the Lord” (Acts 9:31).

In this text an acute awareness of the presence of the Lord registered upon the people. This was accented by the impotence of the pretenders as well as the effectiveness of the real message of the Lord and the one who delivered it.

In saying the fear “fell on them,” or that they were “seized” by fear, the point is that this was produced by the very real presence of the Lord. The people were able to associate what was taking place in the remarkable healings, as well as the overthrow of Satan’s workers, with the Lord and His Christ. It was as though the people were afraid to oppose what was being said and done in the name of the Lord.

What Is Happening in Our Time

Under the teaching of the day, a sense of the fear of God has nearly disappeared from the professing church, and thus from society as well. People are unable to associate what is taking place with the

hand of the Lord. This is wholly owing to the teaching they have willingly accepted. A God and Christ are being presented that do not induce fear in those who accept it. As both the Psalmist and Paul wrote, "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Psa 36:1; Rom 3:15).

Just as surely as the fear mentioned in our text was the result of a comprehension of the work of God, so the lack of fear is the result of a lack of that comprehension. This condition is the direct result of a false message being delivered. The true God and Jesus Christ His Son are not being proclaimed to the people. It is for this reason that there can be no power in the message, for the Lord will not undergird a word that is not from Him. He will not bless what has misrepresented Him.

The "falling away" of which Paul spoke is the direct result of delusion (2 Thess 2:3-12). That delusion, according to the Second Thessalonian text, has been mandated by the Lord because men have not received "the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2:10). From the standpoint of the hearers themselves, they have fulfilled this word: "they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" (2 Tim 4:3). False teachers have gladly acquiesced to their preferences, delivering a sinner-friendly and worldly-centered message that pacifies the people. All of this also makes for a lucrative career and an impressive organization. But their approach cannot stem the tide of iniquity. It cannot keep sin out of the church. Neither does it produce mature followers who grow up into Christ in all things.

THE NAME OF THE LORD JESUS WAS MAGNIFIED

"... and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified." Other versions read, "was held in high honor," NIV was praised," NRSV was extolled," RSV "was made great," BBE "began to speak very highly about it," GWN "held in great esteem," NAB "were giving more and more honor," IE "extolled and magnified," AMPLIFIED and "became highly respected." PHILLIPS

The magnification of the name of Jesus is not only appropriate, it is essential. It is written, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Phil 2:9). This being true, it is a great sin for men NOT to exalt and magnify the name of Jesus. By failing to do so, they have set themselves against God, and have thus become His enemy. For men to live for themselves instead of Christ is wrong in the fullest sense of the word. For them, to ignore the word and work of Jesus in preference for other things is iniquity. When men compare themselves with themselves instead of with Christ, they transgress. When they seek to please men rather than the Lord Jesus who has bought them, they are in the bond of iniquity, and the truth is not in them.

The more men speak insightfully about Jesus, the more it confirms they have really seen something. The more they speak about human organizations and mundane life, the more it confirms they have seen very little of the truth, and perhaps none at all. If it is true that, as Jesus Himself said, we are sanctified by the truth (John 17:17,19), then the less the truth is known, the least apt a person is to be sanctified, or set apart unto God. No person can belong to the Lord and gain the advantage from His presence, while living in disassociation from the truth.

The measure of a person or group of persons is largely determined by their knowledge of, and commitment to, the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

The measure of a person or group of persons is largely determined by their knowledge of, and commitment to, the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. If Jesus is, in fact "THE TRUTH," how can it be any other way (John 14:6)? Ponder what is said of the truth.

- Knowing the truth makes us free, and is equated with Jesus Himself making us free (John 8:32,35).
- If Jesus says the truth, He asks why men do not believe Him (John 8:46).

- We are sanctified, or set apart to God and made holy, by the truth (John 17:19).
- Everyone who is of the truth hears Christ's voice (John 18:37).
- Indignation and wrath awaits those who do "not obey the truth" (Rom 2:8).
- True love rejoices in the truth (1 Cor 13:6).
- Not obeying the truth is a sign of being bewitched and hindered by other influences (Gal 3:1; 5:7).
- Growing up into Christ is contingent upon speaking the truth in love (Eph 4:15).
- Jesus teaches men "as the truth is in Jesus" (Eph 4:21).
- The knowledge of the hope that is laid up for us is discovered within the context of "the word of the truth of the Gospel" (Col 1:5).
- Men are saved by means of receiving "the love of the truth" (2 Thess 2:10).
- Those who do not receive the love of the truth will be sent delusion, and finally be damned (2 Thess 2:12).
- God wills that men be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4).
- The church is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15).
- Recovery from the snare of the devil is contingent upon acknowledging the truth (2 Tim 2:25).
- Not being able to endure sound doctrine is caused by turning away the ears from the truth (2 Tim 4:3-4; Tit 1:14).
- The soul is purified by obeying the truth (1 Pet 1:22).

When the name of Jesus is magnified, all of the above things take place in exponential measure. God glorifies Himself and magnifies His Word in this manner. Where Jesus is not magnified, it is not possible for these benefits to be found. That distinction is very real, manifesting who believes the truth and who does not. When God is not glorified, it is only because He has not been believed.

WHEN SINNERS SHOWED THEIR DEEDS

" 18 And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds."

When the truth is received, things begin to happen that could not otherwise take place. Further, the reception of truth, particularly initially, is always associated with some proclaimer – someone who has been sent to "preach." Paul expressed it this way: "How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom 10:14-15). Further confirming this to be the mode of the Kingdom Paul wrote, "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" (1 Cor 3:5).

This particular text reports a most extraordinary phenomenon. Many who believed were on the initiative to do something. There is no indication that they had to be exhorted or admonished to do this. They were rather driven from within, being made willing in the day of God's power.

In the text before us, the proclaimer was Paul, and the place in which he was declaring and expounding "the things concerning the kingdom of God," was Ephesus – in particular, the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-10). People apparently came from various regions in Asia to hear him, and carried the word back to their homeland. Additionally, some had also brought handkerchiefs and

aprons that had touched the body of Paul, and wrought many miracles. Those miracles are said to have been wrought “by the hands of Paul.” The text suggests that these took place throughout Asia, as well as in the city of Ephesus itself.

Now, our attention is turned specifically to the city of Ephesus. As I have said, the text suggests that the “special miracles” were also occurring in Ephesus, as Paul continued there for the space of two years in his powerful daily ministry.

MANY THAT BELIEVED

“ . . . And many that believed came . . .” Other versions read, “who had believed,” NKJV “who became believers,” NRSV “who were now believers,” RSV “who had faith,” BBE “earlier made professions of faith,” CJB “were now believers,” AMPLIFIED “had professed their faith,” PHILLIPS and “who were followers.” CEV

The term “believers,” and the expression “believed,” are often used to describe those who receive Christ as the Gospel declares Him (Acts 2:44; 4:4,32; 5:14; 8:12,13; 9:42; 10:46; 11:17,21; 13:12, 8; 14:1,23; 15:5; 16:1; 17:4,12,34; 18:8,27; 19:18; 22:19; 28:24; Rom 4:3,17,18; 13:11; 1 Cor 3:5; 15:2,11; Gal 2:16; 3:6; Eph 1:13; 2 Thess 1:10; 1 Tim 3:16; 2 Tim 1:12; Tit 3:8; Heb 4:3; James 2:23; 1 John 4:16).

The Gentile church has greatly minimized believing, both by neglecting a proper emphasis of it, and by distorting what it really means to believe. This departure from the truth has been so pronounced that religious men rarely speak about faith, and when they do, they do not give to it the value assigned by the Spirit of God. Whether wittingly or unwittingly men are exalting above faith such things as, fasting, obedience, various outward disciplines, and supposed success in this present evil world.

There is a pronounced absence of such accents in the Scriptures. Here, in the book of Acts, a report is given of the impact of the truth upon the hearts of men. Some became more hostile than they ever were before. Others yielded to the Lord, withholding nothing from Him. This particular text reports a most extraordinary phenomenon. Many who believed were on the initiative to do something. There is no indication that they had to be exhorted or admonished to do this. They were rather driven from within, being made willing in the day of God’s power (Psa 110:3). This is something that was done publically.

CONFESSED AND SHOWED THEIR DEEDS

“ . . . and confessed, and showed their deeds.” Other versions read, “came confessing and telling their deeds,” NKJV “kept coming, confessing and disclosing their practices,” NASB “came and openly confessed their evil deeds,” NIV “confessing and divulging their practices,” RSV “made a public statement of their sins and all their acts,” BBE “came and admitted publicly their evil deeds,” CJB “openly admitted their involvement with magical spells and told all the details,” GWN “came and narrated their faults, and confessed what they had done,” MRD “began to admit all of the evil things they had done,” IE “came confessing without reserve what their conduct had been,” MONTGOMERY “kept coming and confessing and uncovering their former practices,” WILLIAMS and “came making full confession and thoroughly exposing their [former deceptive and evil] practices,” AMPLIFIED

The actions here described were prompted by the fear of God. Such a response shows the powerful effects of witnessing the works of God, beholding with insight the overthrow of the devil, and believing the Gospel. At the threshold of human history, when sin first entered into the world, a confrontation by God Himself did not produce such marvelous results. When God asked Adam, “Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? (Gen 3:11), Adam replied, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Gen

3:12). When God asked Eve, “What is this that thou hast done?” the woman replied, “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat” (Gen 3:13). Both Adam and confessed “I did eat,” but they also offered an excuse for their action. That was proof that in the very day that ate of the forbidden tree they did, in fact, “die,” just as the Lord said they would (Gen 2:17).

Now, however, a greater light had come into the world – greater than the light of a prohibition. People from Ephesus stepped forward, confessed their sin, and “disclosed their practices.” NASB They offered no excuse for what they had been doing.

The ministry of John the Baptist produced similar results among the Jews. It is said of those who responded favorably to his word, “And were baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins ” (Matt 3:6). Here, however, it appears as though the people went even further. They not only “confessed” to their wrongdoing, but “showed their deeds,” bringing forth some evidence of what they were renouncing.

I have observed a marked decline in this kind of practice over the past few decades. Sin is not generally treated with the kind of seriousness reported in this text. In fact, it is often glossed as though it did not even occur. In my judgment, this trend is the direct result of flawed preaching and teaching. What is currently in vogue in the Christian community is much the same as took place in the Corinthian defection. There is the presentation of “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4). I am persuaded this is the case because the kind of results that are staring us in the face are not what is produced by the real Jesus, the real Spirit, and the real Gospel. What is taking place in our day needs to be compared with the inspired report of the impact of “sound doctrine” – the preaching of Christ, and expounding things concerning the kingdom of God. That comparison will produce a certain sobriety in the people.

NOTHING REALLY IS LOST WHEN SIN IS ABANDONED

“ 19 Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.”

Some details are now provided concerning what was publically confessed, and the deeds that were openly shown. As we will see, they were directly related to the demonic world, and the spiritual darkness with which the people had been confronted when the demon possessed man attacked and overcame the pretending Jewish exorcists. The public nature of what was done is worthy of note. It confirms the nature of genuine conversion, and the forwardness of real repentance. In such responses glory is brought to God, and He is justified in what He has said concerning the change He works within those who believe.

MANY OF THEM ALSO

“Many of them also . . .” Other versions read, “a number,” NIV “not a few of them,” ASV “a great number,” BBE “a considerable number,” CJB “a large number,” NAB and “large numbers.” NET

There are two ways to take this text.

- That a significant number of those who confessed their sins and showed their deeds were in the category now mentioned. Versions that represent this view are The Living Bible (“Many of the believers who had been practicing”); International English (“Many of the believers”); Weymouth (“many of those also who believed”); Williams (“Many who became believers”); Montgomery (“Many also of those who became believers”); The Amplified Bible (“Many of those also who were now believers”); and Phillips (“ Many of those who had professed their faith”).

- A considerable number of those who had been practicing the particular

transgression mentioned came, confessed, and showed their deeds. All of the Standard versions give this view, and most of the other versions as well: i.e. "Many of those who had practiced . . ."

The meaning of the text is that of those who were practicing the particular sin that is mentioned, a large number renounced that practice. In other words, considerable inroads were made in that spiritually aberrant section of society. Where Satan was apparently maintaining a stronghold a devastating and crippling blow was struck. The means through which this was accomplished was the daily reasoning and persuading of Paul "concerning the kingdom of God" (19:9). In other words, the light of spiritual knowledge, or illumination, was dissipating the power of darkness.

CURIOUS ARTS

" . . . which used curious arts . . ." Other versions read, "practiced magic," NKJV "practiced sorcery," NIV "practiced magical arts," ASV "experts in strange arts," BBE "engaged in occult practices," CJB "involved in the occult," GWN "used curious arts," TNT "had been practicing black magic," LIVING and "practicing witchcrafts." CEV

As used here, the words "curious arts" are translated from a single Greek word (*peri,erga*) meaning, "impertinent and superfluous, of magic (A. V., *curious*) arts," THAYER "of things intriguing, curious; neuter plural **ta. peri,erga** as a substantive magic arts, sorcery, witchcraft," FRIBERG "witchcraft," LOUW-NIDA and "magic." GINGRICH

The expression "curious arts" carries the meaning of "busy with trifles and neglectful of important matters." THAYER From an

CONCERNING CURIOUS ARTS

"Arts or practices requiring skill, address, cunning. The word used here *perierga* denotes properly "those things that require care or skill," and was thus applied to the arts of "magic, jugglery, and sleight of hand" that were practiced so extensively in Eastern countries. That such arts were practiced at Ephesus is well known. The Ephesian letters, by which incantations and charms were supposed to be produced, were much celebrated. They seem to have consisted of certain combinations of letters or words, which, by being pronounced with certain intonations of voice, were believed to be effectual in expelling diseases, or evil spirits; or which, by being written on parchment and worn, were supposed to operate as amulets, or charms, to guard from evil spirits or from danger." JOHN CALVIN

illuminated point of view, this means that such activities are bringing no genuine advantage, but can, at the very best, deal with secondary and inconsequential matters. While such activeness is often nothing more than a delusion, that is not necessarily the case all of the time. There is a dark world that deals in matters that transcend natural human aptitude. The activities of demons confirm this to be the case. Some representatives of that number caused a man to become like a wild beast, running and shrieking through the country, and cutting himself. He also became extraordinarily strong, breaking both chains and shackles (Mk 5:4). Demons have also imposed upon men deafness and dumbness (Mk 9:25), blindness and dumbness (Matt 12:22), violent seizures (Matt 17:14-18; Mk 9:17-27; Lk 9:37-42), and a condition in which a woman was bowed together for eighteen years (Lk 13:11).

Under the Law, consultation with evil spirits and the practice of sorcery and witchcraft were strictly forbidden. This included "familiar spirits" and "wizards that peep and that mutter" (Isa 8:19). Other versions refer to consulting with "mediums and the spiritists who whisper and mutter." NASB The point of condemnation was that the people did not seek to acquire knowledge from their God. Rather, they chose to consult with members of Satan's empire. Thus God reasons, "And when they say to you, "should not a people consult their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living?" (Isa 8:19).

Of those who engaged in such activity the Lord said, “And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set My face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people” (Lev 20:6). And again, “There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer” (Deu 18:10-11). The Lord also referred to one who had a familiar spirit, who spoke out of the ground (Isa 29:4).

Men may banter about whether or not supernatural things really were wrought by these spirits. However, if this was not the case, I cannot conceive of why God would speak as He did about them. The point is that consultation with such alien spirits is an unlawful means of appropriating knowledge. Whatever is made known by them will not bring eternal advantage to the soul, but will cause God to be against the person who sought such knowledge. Various modern day forms of this kind of knowledge include horoscopes, palm-readers, psychics, astrology, psychiatry, phrenology (study of the skull as a means of determining human behavior), acupuncture, hypnosis, necromancy (conjuring up the souls of the dead), witchcraft, etc.

At any rate, the teaching of Paul, together with the exposure of the powerlessness of spurious religion, convicted these people of their sin, and they came forward confessing they had been wrong, and unveiling their works.

THEY BURNED THEIR BOOKS

“...brought their books together, and burned them before all men . . .” Other versions read, “and began burning them in the sight of all,” NASB “burned them publicly,” NIV “put them on the fire in front of everyone,” BBE and “collected their books and [throwing them, book after book, on the pile] burned them in the sight of everybody.” AMPLIFIED

This was bringing forth fruits “meet for repentance” (Matt 3:8). The conversion of these people was genuine, and therefore there was a change in their conduct. This is what happens under the convicting ministry of the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11). Here was a total renunciation of a former manner of life in which an unlawful body of knowledge had been sought. Gathering together the books having to do with this realm of knowledge, the people put them in a heap and burned them publicly.

This would be something like a group of people converted from the rock-and-roll generation burning all of their recorded media. Or, a group of psychics burning the literature pertaining to that field. I can even conceive of a body of men converted from the field of psychiatry burning all of their literature, or some turning to Christ from the embrace of evolution gathering their books together and burning them. Of course, such actions would be viewed as extremely radical in this day of loose theology. However, in the book of Acts we are reading of real conversions.

My Own Experience

Back in the early seventies, we experienced an incident in the congregation in Indiana – then known as “The Church at 78 th and Independence.” One of our sons (not by flesh and blood), whom we had raised from a young age, converted a young lady who had been raised by a family devoted to occultism. She had absolutely no exposure to the teaching of Christ prior to that time, and was now a fervent disciple of the Lord. She gathered all of her occultic books and brought them to a week-night gathering of the saints, determined to burn them all. We had an area outside the building where this could be done, and soon the burning commenced. There were a considerable number of books on the heap. Having started the fire, we observed that it swirled around the books, yet was not actually burning any of them. Angered by the whole circumstance, our daughter in-law took hold of a rake, and began to open the books one by one, causing a page at a time to burn. As she continued in this

activity, the books finally caught on fire, and the whole of them was burned into a heap of ashes. Afterward she said she was determined not to allow Satan to have his way in the matter. She had been consumed with the zeal of the Lord, and was resolute in her renunciation of what she then saw as a false and damning body of knowledge. I shall never forget that blessed occasion, which brought great rejoicing to all who were present.

Our Time

Considering the days in which we are living, and the false and corrupt literature that is pervading society, one might expect there would be a lot of book burning like that which took place in Ephesus. However, this is not at all the case – as least we are not hearing any reports of such activity. It seems to me that a kind of gospel is being preached that causes such accounts to appear strange. If a time should come when genuine conversions take place on any scale of largeness, events like that described in our text will take place.

THEY COUNTED THE PRICE

“ . . . and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.” Other versions read, “about two million dollars [\$9,900,000 in 2009],” IE–1973] “\$10,000” [\$52,800 in 2009] LIVING– 1971 “ten thousand dollars.” [\$150,200 in 2009] WILLIAMS–1937 “fifty thousand drachmas. (A drachma was a silver coin worth about a day's wages @ \$48 daily = \$2,400,000” [\$5,000,000 in 2009], NIB–1984 “several million dollars,” NLT–2004 “about \$9,300 [\$72,726 in 2009]. AMPLIFIED–1954

VERSION

VALUE IN VERSION YEAR

VALUE IN 2009

Williams – 1937	\$10,000
	\$150,200
Amplified Bible – 1954	\$9,300
	\$72.726
Living Bible – 1971	\$10,000
	\$52,800
International English– 1973	\$2,000,000
	\$9,900,000
New International Bible– 1984	

\$2,400,000

\$5,000,000

As you can see, there is by no means unanimity on the amount of money intended by the expression – but the books were of considerable value. The represented least value, as of 2009, would be \$52,800, and the most \$9,900,000. If Judas objected to pouring out ointment on Jesus that was valued at a year's wages NIV (for comparison purposes, \$30,000), what would he have said about the burning of these books? A modern Christian might say the books could have been sold and the funds procured given to missions.

Yet, in the view of these people, the burning of their books was a gain, not a loss. It constituted the removal of temptation, deliverance from the unlawful and inferior, and a sacrifice that was willingly offered in thanksgiving to God. Whatever is put away in deference to the obtaining of salvation is not a painful loss. What is obtained in redemption constitutes a far greater gain than what must be abandoned to appropriate it. It is never wrong to leave the inferior in preference for the superior; to abandon what is defiled to appropriate what is pure; and to give up what is passing away for what is eternal.

Those who accent life in this world are not to be allowed places of leadership in the body of Christ – all of their imagined credentials notwithstanding. It is time for the professed church to exclude all priorities that do not have to do with fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life. If that requires a massive burning of some sort, then let it be so!

WHEN THE WORD OF GOD GREW AND PREVAILED

“ 20 So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”

SO

“So . . .” Other versions read, “in this way,” NIV “Thus,” CJB “In this powerful way,” GWN “This indicates,” LIVING ,” “This is how,” IE and “In a way of just such power.” WILLIAMS

What has just been reported is a sampling of what took place during the two years Paul taught in the school of Tyrannus. I gather that the exposition of the kingdom of God, together with the hearty acceptance of the message provided an environment in which the Lord was pleased to work in an unusual way. If Jesus “could do no mighty work” where unbelief was prevalent (Mk 6:5), what can be said of an environment in which faith is prominent?

MIGHTILY GREW THE WORD

“ . . . mightily grew the word of God . . .” Other versions read, “growing mightily,” NASB “spread widely,” NIV “increased very greatly,” BBE “continued in a powerful way,” CJB “flourished,” CSB “,” GWN “spread more and more widely,” NJB “spread widely ,” NLT “This indicates how deeply the whole area was stirred by God's message,” LIVING “was influencing more and more people,” IE “mightily did the Lord's Message spread,” WEYMOUTH “grew and spread and intensified,” AMPLIFIED and “continued to grow.” PHILLIPS

The same kind of expression is found in Acts 12:24. Herod had just been smitten by an angel, and died when “he was eaten of worms.” Immediately following that occasion it is written, “But the word of God grew and multiplied” (Acts 12:24).

The Word of God grew in this manner. It was powerfully preached and heartily received. People turned from their wicked ways, openly confessed their deeds, and separated themselves from defiling

influences. They willingly gave up their former evil occupations, and discarded everything associated with their former previous manner of life. The attention of the people was turned to the Word of God, and it was given prominence in their lives. Men began to live “by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), which was working “effectually” in them (1 Thess 2:13).

The Stark Contrast of Our Time

Even though, by reason of both time and the nature of Kingdom life, the Word of God should be pervasive throughout our nation, as well as the rest of the world, that is not at all the case. God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the nature of the Kingdom He would set up on the earth. It would begin small, but eventually fill the whole earth, prevailing over all other kingdoms (Dan 2:35-45).

Unless you go back to the Dark Ages, it will be difficult to identify a time when the ignorance of the Word of God was ever as prevalent as it is today. It is steadily decreasing, and the attention of professing Christians is being turned to other things. Whatever is being preached, it has not induced a hearty appetite for the Word of God. Job, who lived in spiritually primitive times once said, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food” (Job 23:12). David, who lived over 3,000 years ago said, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Psa 119:103). And again, “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold” (Psa 119:127). Jeremiah, who lived around 2,500 years ago said, “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O LORD God of hosts” (Jer 15:16). Such men are described by the Holy Spirit as dying in the faith, NOT receiving the promises, yet seeing them afar off, being persuaded of them, and embracing them (Heb 11:13). It is written that they were not made perfect without us, for whom God provided “some better thing” (Heb 11:39-40). Yet, in both their understanding and commitment they were light years ahead of the average American Christian. What further compounds the problem is that these second-rate and uninformed Christians are evangelizing the world, spreading their mediocrity to other continents.

Is it all something innocent? Indeed, it is not! God has divulged more of Himself, His mind, and His purpose in Christ Jesus. He has poured forth His Spirit in an abundant measure on those who believe the Gospel (Tit 3:5-6), which is His power unto salvation (Rom 1:16). He has given believers His grace to effectively teach them to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, and to look for the return of Jesus – the “blessed hope” of the church (Tit 2:11-13). The “whole armor of God” has been provided that enables the believer to stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:10-18), and a spiritual arsenal has been supplied that is “mighty through God” (2 Cor 10:3-5).

What reason can be adduced for a weak and uninformed church? How can men explain why sin is so pervasive in the church? Why isn't the Word of God prevailing instead of psychiatry, humanly developed plans, and religious tradition? Why?

If my assessment is correct, I fear the modern church is under

Whatever the word of God confronted, whether Jewish tradition, or members of the occult in Ephesus, it overcame and prevailed. That is, people were more apt to believe the Word of God than the opposing views to which they were subjected.

the judgment of God, just as Israel was when they embraced tradition and lifeless religion. It is said of them, “For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned” (Isa 29:12). God has so

impacted the understanding of the religious leaders that they cannot comprehend what He has said in His Word. Their professed field of expertise is not the Word, because they have been blinded to it. We are living in the midst of the fulfillment of the prophesy of Amos. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord GOD, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the LORD: And they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the LORD, and shall not find it. In that day shall the fair virgins and young men faint for thirst" (Amos 8:11-13).

It may sound radical and depressing to say such things. But if this is not the truth, then the nature of the Kingdom of God has changed, and the power of the Word is no longer present. If what I have said is not true, then the Word has ceased to work effectually in those who believe. In such a case, the grace of God has ceased to teach men (Tit 2:11-12), and the Holy Spirit no longer is leading men to mortify the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). The Spirit has, then, ceased to change men from glory to glory, conforming them to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). Who would dare to postulate such absurdities?

AND PREVAILED

"... and prevailed." Other versions read, "and prevailing," NASB "and grew in power," NIV "and was full of power," BBE "continued in a powerful way," CJB "and was confirmed," DOUAY "gaining strength," GWN "and successfully," NJB "and had a powerful effect," NLT "the whole area was stirred by God's message," LIVING "in a powerful way," IE "and triumph!," WEYMOUTH "prevailing mightily," AMPLIFIED and "and influence." PHILLIPS

Whatever the word of God confronted, whether Jewish tradition, or members of the occult in Ephesus, it overcame and prevailed. That is, people were more apt to believe the Word of God than the opposing views to which they were subjected. That is a circumstance much to be coveted in our time.

Albert Barnes suggests this verse implies the following. They are good practical observations.

- (1) That religion has power to break the hold of sinners on unjust and dishonest means of living.
- (2) That those who have been engaged in an unchristian and dishonorable practice will abandon it when they become Christians.
- (3) That their abhorrence of their former course will be, and ought to be, expressed as publicly as was the offence.
- (4) That the evil practice will be abandoned at any sacrifice, however great. The question will be, what is right; not what will it cost. Property, in the view of a converted man, is nothing when compared with a good conscience.
- (5) This conduct of those who had used curious arts shows us what ought to be done by those who have been engaged in any evil course of life and who are then converted. ALBERT BARNES, COMMENTARY ON ACTS

It is true that a tree is known by its fruit, and that even men are known by their fruits, or the results of what they preach and teach. Thus Jesus said, "Beware of false prophets, who come to you dressed as sheep, but inside they are devouring wolves. [Ezek. 22:27.] You will fully recognize them by their fruits. Do people pick grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles Even so, every healthy (sound) tree bears good fruit [worthy of admiration], but the sickly (decaying, worthless) tree bears bad (worthless) fruit. A good (healthy) tree cannot bear bad (worthless) fruit, nor can a bad (diseased) tree bear excellent fruit [worthy of admiration]. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and cast into the fire. Therefore, you will fully know them by their fruits" AMPLIFIED (Matt 7:15-20).

This being true, it seems to me that we must insist on examining what is produced by the doctrines to which we are exposed. If this is not the case, then what can be the meaning of Christ's words?

It is to be understood that when the Gospel is believed, and the obedience of faith follows, the individuals will make voluntary adjustments in their lives. A salvation that does not effect a change of life is no salvation at all. That would be like Israel being delivered from Egypt yet remaining in it. When Saul of Tarsus was converted, he ceased persecuting the church. It is true that some must be exhorted to make the changes – like the admonition to certain in Ephesus: “Let him that stole, steal no more” (Eph 4:28). All believers are exhorted, “Mortify therefore your members that are upon the earth” (Col 3:5), and “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).

And why is this the case? Because the wine of the newness of life cannot be poured into the old life. It cannot be contained in a manner of living that is in synch with the world, from which Jesus has delivered us. All religion that allows for, or excuses, deviate conduct, is to be forthrightly abandoned.

CONCLUSION

Our text has exposed us to certain things about Satan's kingdom. First, it does not yield to powerless religion or religious pretension. The devil and his hosts are actually invincible when confronted with a religion that is not rooted in a very real identity with the Lord Jesus Christ. Men may develop systems to alter human behavior, but when that behavior is governed by the powers of darkness, human procedures are impotent.

Second, when anyone hears and believes the Gospel of Christ, yielding the obedience of faith, they can make a clean exit from the worst of intellectual and emotional falsehood. When the Ephesians who were devoted to “curious arts” gathered their books together, all the powers of darkness could not hinder them. Further, the Word of God grew in its influence, and prevailed over all competing powers. Satan and his hosts could not stop the preaching or the spread of the Word of God. A territory over which he had apparently exercised dominion for some time was invaded, and he was powerless to stop that invasion.

Can such things happen in our day and time? There is no need to spend time speculating and philosophizing about it. The truth of the Gospel is confirmed in the crucible of conflict among those who believe it and respond to it accordingly.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #81

DEMTRIUS CAUSES TROUBLE

“ 19:21-29 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome. 22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season. 23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way. 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; 25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. 26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: 27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth. 28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theater. ” (Acts 19:21-29)

INTRODUCTION

A SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

With the growth of the Word of God, and it prevailing over all competing influences, a devastating blow was struck to the idol-worshipping community. Not only were “curious arts” abandoned by a significant number of people, but idol-centered religion was being forsaken as well. This impacted the business community in Ephesus, causing no small stir among those who crafted images. Demetrius, a local silversmith who made images, called for a special meeting, determined to launch a campaign against Paul. His reasoning unveils the manner in which spiritually uncultured minds think. It also reveals how hard hearts can be that are devoted to false religion. Another thing to see is

the confusion that is wrought by a commitment to idols, as compared to the peaceful fruits of righteousness that are produced by the Gospel in those who receive it. This kind of contrast exists today as well, and is to be duly noted.

THE GROWING AND PREVAILING WORD

In Ephesus, the Word of God “grew mightily and prevailed.” Not only were

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there a great number of people turning to the Lord, there were even a significant number of people who had been devoted to the occult who abandoned their way of life, confessed their deeds, and even burned the books that taught the ins and outs of “*curious arts*.” However, that is not all that took place. **The whole fabric of the system of idol-worshiping began to unravel, and this caused no small stir among the merchants who earned their living by making idols.** The people who were embracing what Paul preached simply could not continue in their old ways. They could not put the wine of newness of life into the old wineskins of the flesh.

THE ILLOGICAL NATURE OF CONTINUANCE IN SIN

For those who are in Christ Jesus, continuance in sin, however minuscule men may imagine it to be, is contrary to sound thought. In fact, it is a form of insanity – the worst form of it. As it is written, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” (Rom 6:1-2). If it is true that those who are baptized into Christ’s death, having obeyed from the heart the form of the doctrine delivered to them, are “dead indeed unto, but alive unto God,” then precisely how is a continuation in sin to be explained (Rom 6:3,11,17)? If the purpose for Jesus Christ dying for all was that from now on those in Him are to live no longer for themselves, but unto the One who died and rose again (2 Cor 5:15), what is really the cause that moves people to fail to do exactly that?

And, why aren’t these questions being addressed by the educational branch of the professed church? Why are the supposed leaders of the Christian community consulting with the psychologists and motivational gurus? Whatever the answers that are put forward, they will not be supported by the book of Acts! In this record there is a genuineness of both doctrine and life that stands in stark contrast to what is called the church of our day.

READING THE BOOK OF ACTS THROUGH SECTARIAN GLASSES

Most honest people know that the modern church is riddled with sin – sin of the worst order. Such lives are, in a sense, the fruit of the teaching that has been accepted. Unlike Paul’s teaching, much of the preaching and teaching of our time has little or nothing to do with the

kingdom of God.

It is possible to read the book of Acts through sectarian glasses – in fact, once a people have devoted themselves to a Christian sect or denomination, it is virtually impossible to avoid perusing this volume in such a manner. Subconsciously, the person begins to think that in writing the book of Acts, Luke is actually presenting a defense for their emphasis.

However, Luke is not trying to justify the stance of the early church. He is rather reporting it. He is not establishing HOW people became Christians, but the fact that they did believe on the Lord Jesus, obey Him, and conduct their lives in harmony with what He is doing. His aim was not to show how churches were organized, or where they met, but that those in Jesus do, in fact, gravitate to one another, and delight in one another's company.

Through the Spirit, Luke reports the effects of genuine and God-sanctioned preaching and teaching. From the standpoint of WHO was preached, it was Jesus Christ (8:5,35; 9:20; 17:18). From the perspective of Divine purpose, the Kingdom of God was preached (8:12; 19:8; 28:23,31). If we view it from it from the position of text, it was the Word of God or the Scriptures (8:35; 13:5; 14:25; 15:36; 17:13). The marvelous results recorded in this volume mark the beginning of Christ dwelling within men. The results that are chronicled by Luke are because of the message that was preached and believed. It impacted the earth, the domain of darkness, and heaven as well. While these outcomes were wrought by the hand of the Lord, they did not differ in order from the manner in which God works in this present day.

BAD FRUIT INDICATES A BAD TREE

Most honest people know that the modern church is riddled with sin – sin of the worst order. Such lives are, in a sense, the fruit of the teaching that has been accepted. Unlike Paul's teaching, much of the preaching and teaching of our time has little or nothing to do with the kingdom of God. A man-centered message is being presented. Rather than delivering a word from God, feeble attempts are being made to give an answer for the pain and complexity of life that is caused by spiritual stupidity and a love for sin. Whatever is intended by such miserable dissertations, the fruits they are producing confirm God is not in them.

Like it or not, our day is marked by false teachers who are presenting a God, a Christ, and a gospel, that does not produce the kind of disciples prophesied by the prophets, recorded in the book of Acts, and described in the Epistles.

At some point men must begin to question the validity of preaching and teaching that, when accepted, does not produce growing and maturing disciples. Jesus does not produce faltering and halting disciples. The Holy Spirit does not lend His indispensable influence to making such followers. The Gospel itself, which is God's "power unto salvation" does not produce such fruit. Heaven neither makes nor condones lives that are not advancing toward the prize of a high calling. A good tree not only DOES not produce evil fruit, it CANNOT do so. Further, an evil tree CANNOT produce good fruit (Matt 7:15-20).

All religion that allows for, or excuses, deviate conduct, is to be forthrightly abandoned. The teaching that has produced a flawed life is like a corrupt tree that must be cut down. That is precisely why John the Baptist, who prepared the way for Jesus, said, "And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt 3:10).

Like it or not, our day is marked by false teachers who are presenting a God, a Christ, and a gospel, that does not produce the kind of disciples prophesied by the prophets, recorded in the book of Acts, and described in the Epistles. There are 2.5 billion professing Christians in the world today – nearly twice as many as the total number of Muslims (1.5 billion). They are all the products of what they

have been taught. Oh, there is a remnant among them, for God has always reserved a remnant for Himself.

If the Kingdom of God is an ever-increasing kingdom, as declared in Scripture (Isa 9:7; 11:9; Dan 2:35,44-45; Hab 2:14; Matt 13:31-32), exactly how does one explain spiritual deterioration? What is the source of such phenomenon? If what the prophets and Jesus said about the nature of the Kingdom and spiritual life is true, what does cause spiritual decline? Is it the nature of newness of life to wane? Is growing up into Christ a kind of abnormality, or is it really the nature of spiritual life? Does Jesus promote mediocrity? If not, who does? Does the Holy Spirit have anything to do with disinterest, a preference for the world, and self-centeredness? If not, what spirit does promote, or advances such things? These are certainly things to think about.

A GODLY MAN PURPOSES IN THE SPIRIT

“ 19:21 After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.”

As is characteristic of Scriptural history, the next recorded event is one of significance in which a very brief literary transition is made. This is true notwithstanding the remarkable report that has just been given. The nature of the incident involving the burning of books, could have been drawn out, with a strong appeal to the curiosity of men. That is what men in the flesh would do, specifying some of the books, and commenting specifically on the way the lives of those who burned them were changed. However, that is not the manner of the Spirit, or of those who are being directed by Him. Instead, the effect of the action upon the surrounding people is reported. First, the word of God “grew mightily and prevailed,” while the recorded words pertaining to “curious arts” waned and dissipated. Now, we will find that there was also an impact upon the society that had capitalized on the requirements of idolatry. This will be revealed in the midst of a holy resolution made by Paul.

AFTER THESE THINGS WERE ENDED

“After these things were ended . . .” Other versions read, “were accomplished,” NKJV “were finished,” NASB “had happened,” NIV “after these events,” RSV “were over,” CSB “were fulfilled,” DARBY “was concluded,” NAB “had taken place,” NET “When matters had reached this point,” WEYMOUTH and “had been brought to a close.” WILLIAMS

Do not forget what has just been reported. They were of an epochal nature.

- Paul had been teaching daily in the school of Tyrannus for two years (19:9-10a).
- All that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks (19:10b).
- Special miracles were wrought by the hands of Paul (19:11).
- Handkerchiefs and aprons were brought from Paul’s body, diseases departed, and evil spirits went out of those possessed by them (19:12).
- Certain vagabond Jewish exorcists had been exposed when they attempted an exorcism by using the name of “Jesus whom Paul preached.” The possessed man leaped on the seven men making the attempt, forcing them to leave the house naked and bleeding (19:13-16).
- This was known to all the Jews and Greeks in Ephesus, fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified (19:17).
- Many that believed came and confessed and showed their deeds (19:18).
- Many also who had used “curious arts” brought their books together and burned

them publicly (19:19).

- Thus, the Word of God grew mightily and prevailed” (19:20).

Concerning this series of events, the Spirit moves Luke to refer to them as “these things.” Most men would not have referred to them in such a manner, but would have accented how unusual and remarkable they were. However, this is not how a spiritual man assesses such things. Even when referring to the most unusual phenomenon of handkerchiefs and aprons being brought from Paul’s body, which were apparently significant in the working of several miracles, care was taken to state it in a God-glorifying way: “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul” (Acts 19:11). “Special” and startling and not the same thing. “Special” is something God does, while startling or arresting is the impact it has upon men. In other words, the unusualness of the miracles was not from a human point of view, for any miracle would fall into that category. This report, however, accents that God worked in a manner that was not common for Him to work. This does not accent the miracles, but the One who did them, working without any kind of restraint or inability. These were not works that were difficult for God, but were rather not ordinary among men.

This may appear to be an insignificant distinction, but that is not at all the case. The extraordinary nature of miracles is not the thing that is to capture our attention, but the One who works them. To approach the event of reference in any other way would have drawn undue attention to Paul, and caused men to marvel without fearing God. This is a trap into which miracle-mongers fall – those who have an inordinate appetite for miracles. Such people are not noted for their fear of God, for they assess miracles from a human point of view, not making an association with the God of heaven, whose will and purpose are absolutely superior. The thought that God Almighty can work in such a way confirms that His wrath is to be feared, and His will obeyed without delay. Blessed is the society who perceives these things to be so.

Therefore, the expression “these things” highlights a God that works without restraint, even in a realm that has been dominated by the wicked one. It also accents the necessity of being joined to Christ Himself, for God will not honor the words of those who simulate identity with Christ, as confirmed in the seven sons of Sceva.

PAUL PURPOSED IN THE SPIRIT

“Paul purposed in the spirit . . .” Other versions read, “decided,” NIV “resolved in the Spirit,” NRSV “came to a decision,” BBE “decided by the Spirit,” CJB “purposed in his spirit,” DARBY “purposed in his mind,” MRD “made up his mind,” NJB “felt compelled by the Spirit,” NLT “made plans,” IE “decided in his own mind,” WEYMOUTH “under the guidance of the Spirit,” WILLIAMS “determined in the [Holy] Spirit, AMPLIFIED and “set his heart.” PHILLIPS

The various translations present two distinct views of this text – and they are contrary to each other.

- That the “spirit” of reference is Paul’s own spirit, accenting that this was a decision he made on his own. (New International Version, Basic Bible English, Darby, God’s Word, James Murdock Translation, New American Bible, New Jerusalem Bible, International English, Weymouth, Montgomery, Phillips).

- That this decision was made through the influence of the Holy Spirit, to which Paul submitted Himself. (KJV, New King James, New American Standard, Revised Standard, New Revised Standard, American Standard, Complete Jewish Bible, Christian Standard Bible, Douay, English Revised, Geneva, NET Bible, New Living Translation Webster, Revised Webster, Bishop’s New Testament, Tyndale, Young’s Literal Translation, Living Bible, Williams, Amplified).

The precise Greek phrase used in this text is **evn tw/l pneu,mati**. This is consistent in the Greek

texts, and is properly translated “in” (**evn**) “the” (**tw**) “spirit” (**pneu,mati**). If it is true, as Paul himself confessed, that Christ was living in Paul, and that the life he lived was not his own (Gal 2:20), then it is inconceivable that he was directed by his own independent thinking. Consider also that Jesus considered Paul “faithful,” putting him into the ministry (1 Tim 1:12). Paul was a man who was easily directed by Jesus, as various reports confirm (Acts 9:6; 16:9-10; 18:10; 23:11; 26:16; 27:22-25).

The priority of the sons of God has been largely hidden from the consideration of believers by the current emphasis on evangelism.

Therefore, I see no reason to conclude anything other than this: that the Holy Spirit was directing Paul in this decision, just as He did on other occasions.

JERUSALEM, THEN ROME

“ . . . when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.” Other versions read, “I must visit Rome also,” NIV “I have a desire to see Rome,” BBE “I must see Rome as well,” CSB “I must go on to see Rome as well,” NJB and “it behoveth me to also to see Rome.” YLT

The aim of passing through Macedonia and Achaia was to visit the brethren, confirming them in the faith and strengthening their hands in the Lord. The immediate purpose for going to Jerusalem, was to deliver the collection that was being gathered for the poor saints there – their poverty being the result of a great dearth that had been prophesied earlier (Acts 11:28-29).

It has been revealed that this is a Kingdom priority – the establishment and care of the saints (Eph 4:11-16; Col 1:9-17; 4:12; Heb 6:1-8; 1 Pet 5:10). Jesus taught this as well (John 21:15-17; Matt 25:32-46). The Lord taught that the distinguishing trait of the saints was their love for one another (John 13:35). John taught the same (1 John 5:10; 3:10-14; 4:20-21). Yet, with alarming consistency, this has been glossed by the modern church, which has emphasized a love for those who are of the world.

The priority of the sons of God has been largely hidden from the consideration of believers by the current emphasis on evangelism. It is thought that, what is referred to as “the winning of souls,” is the primary function of the church. This emphasis has been adopted, even though there is not a single word addressed to the churches that suggests this is their primary work. The Scriptures contain letters to seven specific churches: Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Philippi, Ephesus, Colossae, and Thessalonica. There are letters written to collective groups of brethren: Hebrews, James, First and Second Peter, First John, and Jude. The book of the Revelation was written to a collection of churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea. There are letters of instruction to individual believers who were generally leaders: Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Gaius, and the elect lady. Yet, none of these inspired words mention the priority of winning souls. All of them emphasize the necessity of being established in the faith – i.e. that this is what salvation is calculated to do. On a practical level, this is what guarantees the insightful and productive spread of the Word of God.

My point is that Paul ministered with the saints and their preparation for glory as his primary motivation. This is why he made a practice of revisiting believers to see how they were doing, and then establish them in the faith.

In this text we see the resoluteness of Paul to visit and strengthen the churches. This was his constant manner (Acts 14:21; 15:36; 16:6; 1Thessalonians 3:1-5). The church at Philippi was in Macedonia, and Corinth was in Achaia. Rather than seeking his own interests, he deferred to give himself for the strengthening of the churches, that he might present them to Christ as chaste and mature (2 Cor 11:2; Col 1:28). There is a vast difference between that noble motive and giving oneself to the resolution of earthly difficulties and challenges. Those who make their primary aim the easing

of the saints lives in this world, are coming short of the revealed purpose of God. To begin with, God has nowhere promised that life in this world will be easy. In fact, in this very book believers were told “that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

The whole of redemption, every whit of it, is to ready people for passing from this world to stand before the Judge of all the earth. If that objective is not met, it really makes no difference what else may appear to have been accomplished. If, in the end, the individual is not suited to joyfully dwell forever with the Lord, whatever he has done in this world has been meaningless. It is my persuasion that it will not go well on the day of judgment for those pretentious church leaders who have conducted their ministry in stark contradiction of this revealed preference. Perpetual spiritual immaturity is evidence of wrong teaching.

HE SENT THOSE WHO MINISTERED TOO HIM

“ 22 So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.”

We are being exposed to the manner of a person who lives by faith. The absence of ungodly haste is very apparent. As it is written, “he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16) – making haste denotes an impulsiveness that is produced by a lack of confidence and assurance. In other words, getting the work done is not the compelling nature of spiritual life. It is rather doing the will of the Lord, which will include the completion of the work. There is a fellowship with the Lord that is involved in His work that produces a godly deliberation and alertness. It is apparent to me that the details of serving God are not always apparent. Rather, in the process of working out one’s own salvation, and pursuing his calling Divine direction is realized. This has already been made clear in the calling and direction of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 13:2-14:28), as well as Paul and Silas (Acts 15:40-18:5).

+ Those who are not living by faith have no idea of how to proceed in such a manner. Among those who lack assurance, the very idea of Divine direction is associated exclusively with commandments and, what is conceived to be, complete step-by-step plans. But this is not the manner of the Kingdom, nor has it ever been. Those who walk with God and labor together with Him will be required to employ their perception and wisdom as they proceed along the path of service. This is the kind of thing to which we are now being exposed.

TWO OF THEM THAT MINISTERED UNTO HIM

“So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus . . .”

Now Paul sends two brethren into Macedonia. That is the region to which Paul had been called earlier, when the Spirit had forbidden them to preach in Asia (Acts 16:9-10). That was 3-5 years earlier, prior to the three years he had spent in Ephesus (Acts 20:31). At that time, Timothy had already joined his party (Acts 16:1-3). Some time during the intervening period, Erastus had also joined him, and, together with Timothy were among those who ministered to Paul. If this is the same Erastus mentioned in Romans 16:23, he was the chamberlain of the city of Corinth, from which the Roman letter was written. In the place of “chamberlain,” other versions read “treasurer,” NKJV and “director of public works.” NIV This being the case, he and Timothy had possibly accompanied Paul to Galatia, Phrygia, Macedonia, Corinth, and Ephesus (16:6-12; 18:1; 19:1). This was sufficient time to confirm his character and faithfulness in matters pertaining to the Kingdom.

We know that Paul was intolerant of vacillating disciples who abandoned the work, as confirmed in his reluctance to take John Mark, who had departed from the work in Pamphylia, when Paul had determined to visit the churches (Acts 15:36-38). Although some have taken it upon themselves to criticize Paul for this action, it proved to be a wise move, as confirmed by the ministry of himself and

Silas, joined by the likes of Timothy.

It ought to be noted that those who serve the Lord must “first be proved” or “tested” NKJV (1 Tim 3:10). Spiritual responsibilities are not to be assigned to people who have not demonstrated unquestionable faithfulness in their commitment to the Lord. That, of course, is the express requirement of the Lord, and no person should balk at it. If a person has a desire to serve the Lord in some responsible capacity, they must take seriously the matter of faithfulness and dependability.

It is generally understood that these two brethren were dispatched to assist in gathering the offerings for poor saints in Jerusalem, confirm the state of the churches, and to report Paul’s activities for the Lord (Phil 2:19; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10). Once again, the priority of Paul’s concern for the churches is clear. Of course, this reflects the concern of the Good Shepherd Himself who cares for His flock, cherishing and nourishing them.

HE HIMSELF STAYED IN ASIA FOR A SEASON

“ . . . but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.” Other versions read, “for a time,” NKJV “for a while,” NASB “a little longer,” NIV and “went on living in Asia for a time.” BBE

We do not know how long Paul remained in Asia, no doubt in Ephesus, as the text that follows substantiates. Once again, this confirms the nature of laboring together with the Lord. Matters are not always spelled out in detail. Sometimes, perhaps even the majority of the time, the laborer must be sensitive to the Lord, remaining faithful and focused in his labors, and alert to opportunities and needs that require attention.

Insensitive and fluctuating souls cannot operate in such a manner, and therefore will not be directed into profitable labors for the Lord . It has been my observation over the years that those who choose to labor in an institutionalized environment are rarely qualified to be called to specific duties, as were Timothy and Erastus. Such a surrounding has a dulling effect upon the soul, destroying spiritual sensitivity. That is because Christ is never the heart of a human institution or organization. When it comes to a body of people, the Lord Jesus confines the distribution of His glory, and the allocation of meaningful work, to the church, “Which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). This is mode of the Kingdom, and the Lord never departs from it. Only honorable vessels are used for honorable purposes.

THE WAY THAT TROUBLED THE UNGODLY

“ 23 And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.”

Meanwhile, while Paul remained in Ephesus, some trouble broke out. It did not occur, however, until after the Word of God had grown mightily and prevailed, with all of Asia hearing the Gospel. The powers of darkness were held at bay until a decisive blow was dealt to the occultist community. With all of his power and host of workers, the devil was unable to stop the invasion of that dark community. Now that those accomplishments have taken place, it is as though a small window of opportunity is afforded the enemy, and the wicked one at once goes to work.

NO SMALL STIR

“And the same time there arose no small stir . . .” Other versions read, “a great commotion,” NKJV “no small disturbance,” NASB “A great disturbance,” NIV “no little disturbance broke out,” NRSV “no little stir,” RSV “a great outcry,” BBE “a major furor,” CJB “no small trouble,” GENEVA “a serious disturbance,” GWN “no little ado,” TNT “a big blowup developed,” LIVING and “some bad trouble.” IE

There is not only a difference between the kingdom of light and that of darkness, there is a certain hostility that exists between them. There is a mutual hatred they have toward each other, and a discontent in one, at the presence of the other. Where there is moral and spiritual disparity, there is absolutely no neutrality or tolerance. Neither side allows for the presence of the other, just as surely as there is no accord between Christ and Belial (2 Cor 6:14-16). Wherever there are professing Christians who are indifferent to the encroachments of evil, false claims are being made about being identified with Christ Jesus.

Now, in the midst of a rapidly spreading spiritual awakening, the definitive line between good and evil is suddenly made very apparent. This is because the spread of light penetrates and neutralizes darkness. There is a resistance of the truth in moral “miry places” where individuals refuse to come to the light, lest their deeds be even further exposed (Ezek 47:11; John 3:19-20).

Now tumult arises, which is the work of the wicked one, “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16). The renewal that is taking place has introduced certain restrictions among the wicked, and they will oppose what is taking place.

ABOUT THAT WAY

“ . . . about that way.” Other versions read, “the Way,” NKJV “the way of the Lord,” DOUAY “the way of Christ,” GWN “the way of God,” MRD “concerning the Christians,” LIVING “the new faith,” WEYMOUTH and “the way [of the Lord].” AMPLIFIED

This is “the way of salvation,” of which the powers of darkness are keenly aware (Acts 16:17). It is also referred to as “the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25), and “the way of God” (Acts 18:26). Earlier, in the synagogue of Ephesus, there were those who “spake evil of that way ” (Acts 19:9). The unbelieving Jews referred to it as “heresy” (Acts 24:14). The Psalmist referred to “the way of the righteous” (Psa 1:6). David said that God was good, and “therefore He will teach sinners in the way ” (Psa 25:8). Isaiah prophesied of “The way of holiness” that would be raised up for “wayfaring men” who were traveling through this world (Isa 35:8). New Covenant language refers to “the new and living way ” that has been “consecrated for us” by the Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 10:20).

This is not a “way of life” in which living is addressed by a set of rules or procedures. It is more related to a highway, or road, on which men travel to glory, as indicated by Isaiah. In fact, Jesus referred to Himself as “the Way ” (John 14:6). This all assumes that men are journeying to a certain destination that is external to this world. It also assumes that it is not only distinct, but is at variance with the way, or manner, in which those who are not in Jesus live. Such benighted men live for this world, just as though they would never leave it. On the other hand, those pilgrims who are walking on the highway of holiness are en route to another world, and are readying themselves to occupy a better city, and inhabit a better country (Heb 11:10,16).

Now a commotion is raised “about that way” – a manner and direction of life that significantly impacts upon the way men live. In this case, the lives of the people were so altered that it impinged upon the business community. Men stopped buying certain articles, and certain retail merchants were no longer able to make an adequate living.

There are conscientious Christians who long for such an impact in our time – when certain goods can no longer be sold, and wickedness cannot be marketed with any measure of success. Historically, wherever real spiritual renewal takes place, this kind of effect has been wrought. Liquor stores, night clubs, and other businesses that are uncomely have been closed. Some places had no further need for jails, and the need for law enforcement was greatly reduced.

Today religious sophists refer to the church as a hospital for the morally sick. I suppose they speak

in such a foolish manner because there are so many people among them that fall into this category. However, neither the prophets nor Jesus said that redemption would provide a place for the morally and spiritually infirm. The Prophets affirmed that in redemption “the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes” (Isa 35:5-7). Jesus boldly announced that He had been sent to “heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18).

The church is not a place like the pool of Bethesda, where “a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water” (John 5:3). Rather it is the residence of those who have been healed by the great Physician, and are no longer in the category of sick and infirm – what they once “were” (Rom 6:17,20; 1 Cor 6:9-10; 12:2; Eph 2:12; 5:8' 1 Pet 2:25). When people are “added” to the body of Christ, they are removed from the unacceptable category in which they were once confined.

There is no such thing as a salvation in which there is no fundamental moral and spiritual change. In conversion the individual passes from death unto life, from not being a people to being the people of God, and from being an enemy to being reconciled. There is a very real transition from being without hope to having a living hope, from having no mercy to obtaining mercy, and from being alienated to being called into the fellowship of Christ. One cannot enter the kingdom of God without being delivered from the world. It is not possible to be in Christ and still be dominated by sin and ruled by the devil. You cannot be added to the church without being subtracted from the roster of the condemned of this world.

To postulate that all of this could take place without any firm evidence borders on blasphemy, and is a sure sign of unbelief. Such a condition would presume a Savior who really did not save, and a new creation that was not different from what men are in Adam. Men are not free to philosophize about salvation, or speculate about what it means to be born again.

The fact of the matter is that “the unclean” are not allowed on the “way” that leads to glory. That is precisely what Isaiah said: “And an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it ; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein” (Isa 35:8). Should there be among believers those whose lives are characterized by moral or spiritual sickness, they are admonished, “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless ” (2 Pet 3:14).

THE POINT OF THIS

The point of this is that those who turned to the Lord in Ephesus ceased their identification with their former lives. That is what it means to be “dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God” (Rom 6:11). It even affected what they purchased in the marketplace, and the buildings they once frequented. They were different – “created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph 2:10).

When it comes to moral blemishes like fornication, uncleanness, and covetousness, we are told, “let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints” (Eph 5:3). The church is not a place where such people are housed, but where they lose that kind of identity! I do not how that truth can be contravened.

In this text, the change wrought in those who believed was so marked that it impacted on the business affairs of the city of Ephesus. The salvation of God is still marked by that kind of effect. This is because it ushers men into a spiritual realm called “the heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). This new

domain is at variance with the world, being of a higher and superior order. It is not possible to avoid the resultant conflict. In order to occupy that heavenly realm, you must refuse to be of the world, and travel through it as a pilgrim and a stranger. Even during the times prior of the New Covenant, this was the posture of those who believed in the Lord. It is said of them, they “confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country” (Heb 11:13-14). It is this circumstance that created the conflict that is now reported to have taken place in Ephesus.

THE CONCERNS OF THE IDOL WORSHIPERS

“ 24 For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; 25 Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.”

The wicked are forward to register their objection to “the way” that leads to glory, and to the teaching that attends it. This is because the variance of that “way” to the world is revealed in very practical ways. Christian influence is not theoretical, even though, judging from the manners of the modern church, one would think that is the case. An astounding percentage of professed Christian teaching and living is on a theoretical or philosophical basis, having no genuine impact on society. For example, it has become very fashionable to say, “God has called us to be salt and light,” or “We are to be salt and light in the world.” It all sounds very Scriptural, and all of the church members acquiesce with a nod of agreement, admitting that is certainly the way it ought to be. However, that is not what the Savior said. He said, “Ye ARE the salt of the earth,” and “Ye ARE the light of the world” (Matt 5:13-14). That is not theoretical, but factual!

Our text certainly reveals that Christian influence was not theoretical or philosophical in the city of Ephesus. There, the real power of God was being made known through the teaching of Paul and those who received his word.

A CERTAIN MAN NAMED DEMETRIUS

“For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana . . .” Other versions read, “made silver shrines of Artimas,” NASB “silver boxes for the images of Diana,” BBE “objects connected with the worship of the goddess Artemis,” CJB “making silver temples of Artemis,” DARBY “silver temples of Diana,” GENEVA “silver models of the temple of Artemis,” GWN “silver shrines for Artemis,” NAB “making silver sanctuaries of Artemis.” YLT “little silver models which looked like the temple of the goddess Artemis,” IE “miniature silver sanctuaries of Diana,” WEYMOUTH and “silver shrines of [the goddess] Artemis [Diana].” AMPLIFIED

The *Artemis* of the Greeks (*Artemis* Acts 19:24), and Diana of the Romans, is a goddess known under various modifications and with almost incompatible attributes. According to the Homeric accounts and Hesiod, she was the daughter of Jupiter and Latona, born at the same time with Apollo at Delos. As the tutelary divinity of Ephesus, in which character alone she concerns us here, she was undoubtedly a representative of the same power presiding over conception and birth which was adored in Palestine under the name of A SHTORETH . – MCCLINTOK & STRONG’S

Several of the later versions read “Artemis” instead of Diana. This is

The Temple of Artemis (Greek: ἄρτεμιον Artemision), also known less precisely as Temple of Diana, was a Greek temple dedicated to Artemis completed— in its most famous phase— around 550 BC at Ephesus (in present-day Turkey). Though the monument was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, only foundations and sculptural fragments of the temple remain. There were previous temples on its site, where evidence of a sanctuary dates as early as the Bronze Age.

The new temple antedated the Ionic immigration by many years. Callimachus, in his Hymn to Artemis, attributed the origin of the temenos at Ephesus to the Amazons, whose worship he imagines already centered upon an image (bretas). In the seventh century the old temple was destroyed by a flood. The construction of the "new" temple, which was to become known as one of the wonders of the ancient world, began around 550 BC. It was a 120-year project, initially designed and built by the Cretan architect Chersiphron and his son Metagenes, at the expense of Croesus of Lydia.

It was described by Antipater of Sidon, who compiled the list of the Seven Wonders: "I have set eyes on the wall of lofty Babylon on which is a road for chariots, and the statue of Zeus by the Alpheus, and the hanging gardens, and the colossus of the Sun, and the huge labour of the high pyramids, and the vast tomb of Mausolus; but when I saw the house of Artemis that mounted to the clouds, those other marvels lost their brilliancy, and I said, "Lo, apart from Olympus, the Sun never looked on aught so grand." – WIKIPEDIA, Encyclopedia

transliteration of the Greek word used here. This goddess "was worshiped as the goddess of fertility." ROBERTSON'S WORD PICTURES

The "shrines" of reference were miniature temples, made of silver, in which an image of Diana was placed. These were often kept in the homes of the worshipers, and even worn by them.

The temple of Diana, or Artemis, which was modeled in these small "shrines," was one of the seven wonders of the world, impressive in appearance. Parts of this temple remain to this very day.

The point of mentioning all of this is to emphasize the commitment of these people to the false goddess Diana. There was no tolerance for those who chose to ignore this god, or who said or insinuated in any way that she was not a god. Further, the lives of these idol-worshippers depended upon prevalence of the god they worshiped. Their's was not a casual religion, to say the least.

BROUGHT GAIN TO THE CRAFTSMEN

". . . brought no small gain unto the craftsmen . . ." Other versions read, "no small profit," NKJV "no little business," NASB "no small amount of work," CJB "a great deal of business," CSB "brought great gains," GENEVA "afforded great profits," MRD "provided work for a large number of craftsmen," NJB "kept many craftsmen busy," NLT "not a little beneficial," TNT "the men who did the work made lots of money from it," IE "brought rich profit to his workmen," MONTGOMERY and "brought no small income to his craftsmen." AMPLIFIED

Here, then, was a lucrative business built upon the religion of the people. Their work consisted of making small silver replicas of the Temple of Diana. Several depictions of this temple are provided on this page, one of which is a replica of an ancient artist. It is apparent that much detailed work went into the making of these "shrines," and thus much profit was realized. Further, the city was largely devoted to the worship of this false god.

Now, after at least two years of Paul's teaching concerning the kingdom of God, this lucrative business had been seriously disrupted. The truth of God had an impact on the business world, particular the part of it that depended upon the worship of a false god.

Since the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim 6:10), anything that impacts on the amount of money that people have is subject to their condemnation – whether the matter is true or not. The true perspective of worldly wealth is clearly stated by the Lord Jesus Himself. "Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15).

The action that is now described really had nothing to do with right and wrong, or truth and error. It was rather driven by a covetous spirit, and assumed that life did consist of how much of this world's

goods a person possessed.

HE CALLED THEM TOGETHER

“ . . . Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said . . .” Other versions read, “similar occupation,” NKJV “similar trades,” NASB “related trades,” NIV “same trade,” NRSV “engaged in this kind of business,” CSB “who wrought in such things,” DARBY and “all the artisans of his trade, and those who labored with them.” MRD

The idea here is that Demetrius called together all those who worked for himself, together with those engaged in businesses related to the making of shrines for the goddess Diana. This could include quite a panorama of business men. Here are some examples.

- Those who purchased large quantities of silver for retailing.
- Those who smelted silver, rendering it more pure.
- Those developed equipment for the smelting of silver.
- Those who sold smelting equipment.
- Those who developed tools for working with silver.
- Those who manufactured the tools.
- Those who sold the tools.
- Specialists who used the tools.
- Those who made the forms into which the silver was poured.
- Those who sold the forms.
- Those who used the forms.
- Retailers who sold the forms.
- Those who made small images to be placed in the miniature shrines.
- Those who sold the small idols.

That will suffice to show something of the involvements of making and selling shrines for the goddess Diana. It does not take into consideration the possible assembling of the shrines and images for sale. Now, Demetrius calls them all together, for what is taking place in their city has a direct bearing upon all of them.

BY THIS CRAFT WE HAVE OUR WEALTH

“ . . . Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.” Other versions read, “our prosperity by this trade,” NKJV “our prosperity depends upon this business,” NASB “we receive good income from this business,” NIV “this line of business provides us our living,” CJB “our well-living arises from this work,” DARBY “Our gain is by this trade,” DOUAY “by this craft we have our goods,” GENEVA “we’re earning a good income from this business,” GWN “our gains are all from this manufacture,” MRD “by this craft we have advantage,” PNT “this business is our income,” LIVING and “we make a lot of money from our business.” IE

Here is a significant part of the citizenry of Ephesus that has been impacted by what Paul has preached and taught over a period of two years. Wherever his message was embraced, it directly effected these business men, significantly reducing the amount of their income. This is confirmation of the power of the Gospel, as well as the change that takes place in the nature of those who believe and obey it.

Here was a system of false religion – specifically the worship of Diana – that had nurtured covetousness in the hearts of marketeers. It had promoted wealth in this world – something that certain professing Christians are advocating this very day. How deluded a people must be to think that Deity – particularly the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ – would actually make it His aim to establish His subjects in this present evil world, which He has cursed. Yet, this is the postulate of nearly all religion that is not solidly based upon Jesus Christ.

THE SITUATION IN OUR DAY

This is the same spirit that was animating the silversmiths in Ephesus – a spirit of covetousness. Now, Satan has permeated professing Christendom with the same delusion, which is much worse.

Today we are faced with a type of Christianity that is actually impotent. Not only does it fail to change the lives of those who embrace it, it has no illuminating influence in the cities that have an abundance of what they call “churches.” It certainly has not impacted the income of uncomely businesses. There has not been a massive closing down of liquor stores, or pornography marketers, and stores that are purveyors in uncomely literature and entertainment media. The palm-readers and fortune-tellers of these cities have realized no significant reduction in marketing their works.

I am not naive. I do realize that God has not promised such effects will always take place. However, throughout history, there have been consistent results like this wherever the Gospel had been received.

Satan’s False Church

In the Revelation, John was shown the false church – a fabrication of the devil designed to be his repository for religious delusion. This church is referred to as a “harlot,” or “the great whore” (Rev 17:1,15,16; 19:2). She is noted for her fornication (Rev 14:8; 17:2,4; 18:3,9; 19:2). That is, she is unfaithful to God, having played the harlot with the world.

She is also depicted as having a significant impact upon the commercial world. That is why, when she falls, the world will lament. This aspect of her being is encapsulated in the following description. “And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine [fragrant] wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, and cinnamon, and odors [incense], and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil [fragrant oil] , and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls [bodies and souls] of men” (Rev 18:13). This is the same spirit that was animating the silversmiths in Ephesus – a spirit of covetousness. Now, Satan has permeated professing Christendom with the same delusion, which is much worse.

If you can bear to do so, contemplate the vast number of religious businesses that would become defunct were a spirit of revival and spiritual renewal to sweep across our nation. It is staggering to consider! Religious images, clothing manufacturers and retailers, the music industry, financial consultants, domestic consultants, building contractors, the educational world, religious jewelry, youth and other specialized ministries, popular religious books, professed Christian vacation resorts and theme parks, mass communication media, and scores of other financial empires. Many ministers would have to retire, for the near-totality of their ministry depends upon the existence of a weak and deficient church. Only the devil capitalizes on a substandard church!

IDENTIFYING THE EFFECTS OF PAUL’S PREACHING

“ 26 Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul

hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands . . .”

The objection that is raised concerns what Paul was preaching and teaching. It was the same with the Prophets, and the Lord Jesus Himself. It is passingly strange that there are significant numbers of preachers and teachers these days that are not known for what they say. In fact, I have often lamented that I do not have the faintest idea what many of these men teach the people. Unless one attends their gatherings, there is not much said about what they actually preach. However, this was not the case with the objectors in our text. I seriously doubt that they made a practice of going into the school of Tyrannus to hear Paul. However, word of his message had been carried throughout all of Asia. People knew what he was declaring.

Solomon referred to the kind of wisdom that is required to convince people in this manner: “he that winneth souls is wise” (Prov 11:30). The meaning is that true wisdom appeals to the disciplined mind and tender heart, so that reason triumphs over delusion.

THIS PAUL HAS PERSUADED

“Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people . . .” Other versions read, “has convinced and led astray,” NIV “persuaded and drawn away,” NRSV “teaching numbers of people and turning them away,” BBE “persuaded and misled,” CSB “by persuasion has drawn away,” DOUAY “has won over,” GWN “persuaded and enticed,” MRD “persuaded and converted,” NJB “has influenced many people,” IE “has led away a vast number of people by inducing them,” WEYMOUTH and “has succeeded in changing the minds of a great number of people.” PHILLIPS

Nearly every version employs the word “persuaded.” This word is translated from the Greek word **pei,saj**, which is a form of the word **pei,qw**. Here it is used in the aorist active tense, which means Paul was not trying to persuade the people, but was actually doing it. He was not merely using persuasive speech, but was effective in changing the minds of the people.

Observe that this places Paul’s preaching and teaching in the category of productive Kingdom thought. While I do not doubt that his presentations were emotional, they transcended mere emotion. These were presentations that were related to understanding, comprehension, discernment, perception, and discretion. They summoned judgment and decision to the environment, analysis and cogitation. The hearers were moved to make a comparison with what they had formerly embraced, and to make a deliberate choice concerning what they would follow.

Jesus spoke of this kind of presentation in his parable about the great supper. When those who were previously invited to the feast refused to come, the master of the feast was angered and told his servants, “Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). Other versions read, “make them come in,” NIV “constrain them,” ASV “insistently persuade,” CJB “urge,” GWN “press people,” NLT and “urge and constrain [them] to yield and come in.” AMPLIFIED

This is not the same as forceful coercion in which the will of the people is overridden and they are moved by fear. The compelling of reference was an appeal to reason. In the case of the Lord’s parable, as well as in our text, the glory and truth of what was being told drew upon the hearts of the people. Their minds were captured, so to speak, with the marvelous nature of what was declared. They became aware of the sense of it, and their hearts yearned to possess what was affirmed.

Of course, all of this is owing to the power of the word of the Kingdom itself. The Holy Spirit is working through it, so that the person is impacted by what he hears. In the case of the Ephesians, it shed light on the depraved nature of idol-worship, confirming it to be folly. It no longer made sense

to purchase shrines for the Diana, goddess of the Ephesians. The books they once valued were seen as nothing more than something to be burned,

In one of his salient statements, Solomon referred to the kind of wisdom that is required to convince people in this manner: “he that winneth souls is wise” (Prov 11:30). The meaning is that true wisdom appeals to the disciplined mind and tender heart, so that reason triumphs over delusion. Winning souls, in this case, is not increasing the tally of devotees. Rather, it involves people being convinced or persuaded. Our day could certainly use an increase of this kind of godly influence.

NO GODS WHICH ARE MADE WITH HANDS

“ . . . saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands . . . ” Other versions read, “gods made with hands are no gods at all,” NASB “man-made gods are no gods at all,” NIV “gods made by humans are not gods,” GWN “handmade gods are really not gods at all.” NLT

This, they said, was not only taught in Ephesus, but “almost throughout all Asia.” This certainly is not all that Paul taught, but he did proclaim this. In Lystra, Paul admonished the people to “turn from these vanities unto the living God” (Acts 14:15). In Athens he proclaimed, “we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device” (Acts 17:29). The Psalmist accented the lifelessness and lack of productivity in all gods made with human hands (Psa 115:4-8; 135:15-18). Isaiah said such images are “profitable for nothing” (Isa 44:10-11). Jeremiah said of them, “for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good” (Jer 10:5). Paul affirmed to the Corinthians that “an idol is nothing in the world” (1 Cor 8:4).

The phrase “made with hands” refers to something man made. It is not limited to man’s hands. Prior to this occasion it is said that God wrought “special miracles by the hands of Paul” (19:11). Yet, some of those miracles were accomplished by means of handkerchiefs and aprons that were taken from the body of Paul. The expression means that God wrought unusual miracles through Paul.

So it is that god’s “which are made with hands” are gods of man’s own creation. That certainly includes idols – even small boxes made for idols. But it is not limited to tangible gods that can be touched or seen with the human eye. It also includes god’s created by the human imagination as it is influenced by the god of this world. John alluded to this when proclaiming the real Christ. He affirmed that the “Son of God” is one who “is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God , and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). A God with whom a professed Christ does not acquaint us is not god at all, and the Christ who introduces such a god is a false Christ as well. There is such a thing as “ another Jesus” who declares a fictitious god (2 Cor 11:4)! Therefore, John concluded his remarks by saying, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols . Amen” (1 John 5:21).

When anyone dares to insinuate that these imaginary gods and Jesus’ are not real, the indignation of the institutional slaves is aroused – just as surely as Demetrius excited the Ephesian merchants with his nonsense.

Today there is a false god resident in professed Christendom. It is a god who has been declared by “another Jesus,” and promoted by false prophets. There is a false Jesus who does not give the people an understanding – even though they may profess to have been in Him for decades. The god this false Jesus promotes is not the true God, and knowing him can by no means be described as “eternal life.”

There are intellectual “shrines” that serve in the same capacity as the shrines the Ephesus silversmiths made. They are institutional shrines to house their false god. Some of them are even bold enough to say they are members of the only church in which God dwells. What they really mean, it is the only place the god they have created dwells. But God does not well “in temples made with hands” – even those institutions that men imagine hold the God of heaven.

When anyone dares to insinuate that these imaginary gods and Jesus' are not real, the indignation of the institutional slaves is aroused – just as surely as Demetrius excited the Ephesian merchants with his nonsense. If all of this appears a bit strong, one must remember that the Head of the church told us that we know the validity of teachers and their adherents by their fruit (Matt 7:15-20). If the consistent fruit is deficient, then it is only because the tree is deficient. To put it another way, it is because God is not working there, both to will and to do of His own good pleasure (Phil 2:12-13). And, if God is not working there, it is only because He is not dwelling there. I realize the implications of this are rather strong, but they are true.

THE IMPACT OF THE GOSPEL ON FALSE RELIGION

“ 27 So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.”

Demetrius sees the message of Paul, together with him persuading the people of its truth, as having a threefold effect upon their society – a society in which they were thriving financially. All of this sounds strange in our society, where Christianity is noted for its sterility, and many of its leaders for their lack of understanding and even immorality. However, as I have repeatedly stated, in the book of Acts, we are being exposed to a real message, godly messengers, and the effect faith has on those who possess it.

No one is under any obligation to receive as true something that does not produce what is true. If a representation of Christianity produces effects that are at variance with the what God has said about faith, then the claims of identity with Him are questionable, to say the least. Let the people examine themselves to determine whether they are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5). If that examination uncovers falsity, then let them repent of their sin, and turn to God with their whole heart. If they are unwilling to do this, then let the church reject them, and let them cease to wear the name “Christian.” Be sure of this, whatever excludes a person from heaven on the day of judgment (Matt 7:22-23), excludes them from identity with the church while they are in this world.

The three conclusions Demetrius gives are as follows.

- Our means of making a living is in danger of being eliminated.
- The temple of Diana will be despised.
- The magnificence of Diana will be destroyed.

OUR CRAFT IS IN DANGER

“ So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought . . .” Other versions read, “this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute,” NKJV “our trade will lose its good name,” NIV “Our trade may be damaged in the opinion of men,” BBE “the reputation of our trade will suffer,” CJB “our business may be discredited,” CSB “that this our portion may be reproved,” GENEVA “this occupation slandered and impeded,” MRD “Our trade will lose its good name,” NIB “the loss of public respect for our business,” NLT “this our craft cometh into peril to be set at nought,” PNT “in danger for us coming into disregard,” YLT “our loss of income,” LIVING and “turn people against our work.” IE

Precisely what was it that caused this dread of losing the means of gaining wealth – of their occupation suddenly becoming obsolete? At the foundational level, it was Paul teaching things concerning the kingdom of God. The detailed level of that teaching was the singularity of God: “God is One”– and it was not Diana of the Ephesians!

Precisely what was it that caused this dread of losing the means of gaining wealth – of their occupation suddenly becoming obsolete? At the foundational level, it was Paul teaching things concerning the kingdom of God (19:8). The detailed level of that teaching was the singularity of God: “God is One” (Deut 6:4; Gal 3:20) – and it was not Diana of the Ephesians! At the evidential level, it was that people were believing what he taught, and thus their lives were so restructured that they would no longer purchase what these men were making. No person of sound mind will continue giving devotion to something he is convinced is false.

There you have firm evidence that true conversion changes what people think and do. It is more than a trite saying that God works in those who are reconciled to Him “both to will and to do” (Phil 2:12). The only people in whom God is not working are those in whom He is not dwelling, for the Lord never stays where He is not wanted. This was actually lived out during Christ’s ministry. He did not stay where He was not wanted. If people did not receive what He said, He removed Himself from them. This fact is stated in apostolic doctrine. “He that saith, I know Him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). “Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him” (1 John 3:6). And again, “We are of God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error” (1 John 4:6). Even the heathen of our text knew that if people embraced what Paul was saying – and that is what was happening – they would be put out of business.

Speaking of our own generation, there are occupations that depend upon an unformed, weak, and faithless church. Demons have developed doctrines that are tailored for such people (1 Tim 4:1), and Satan’s children perpetrate them. The current floodtide of religious fiction that contains false doctrinal innuendos is a case in point. These include the “Left Behind” series, all of the “How To” books, and a host of seminars and workshops that are of a problem-solving nature. Much, if not all, of the Christian counseling business would become obsolete if professing Christians actually lived by faith. The Christian music empire has flooded society with concepts that, at the least are unbecomingly juvenile, and at the worst, are totally devoid of the truth. All manner of teachings are resident in the professing church that leave people thinking sin is really not that bad. Iniquity is conveniently traced back to things that have nothing at all to do with the human will and preference: family genealogy, genetic make-up, psychological defects, the development of bad habits, and the likes. Solutions are provided in book form and the development of thoughtless routine. However, what would happen if people actually believed what is declared in apostolic doctrine? What if they availed themselves of the intercessory ministry of Jesus, and the powerful effects of the knowledge of God. How would these businesses fare if people lived by faith (Heb 10:38-39) , and were dominated by hope (1 John 3:3)? What if professing Christians were busy working out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12), and cleansing themselves of all filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor 7:1). I will tell you what would happen. It would put all such businesses and occupations in jeopardy, for they all depend upon a weak and unformed church!

There are those who will reply that this is a heartless view, and does not allow for godly concern. However, it is these, and similar, occupations that are guilty of heartlessness. Those occupied in them wear the pious-looking robes of concern, and present themselves as possessing a deep and unconditional love for people. But the way they are leaving the people belies all of their false claims. Like the Ephesian silversmiths, they want to maintain their trade, even if it conflicts with the kingdom of God.

THE TEMPLE OF THE GODDESS DIANA DESPISED

“ . . . but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised . . .” Other versions read, “regarded as worthless,” NASB “be discredited,” NIV “scorned,” “count for nothing,” RSV “made of no account,” ASV “no longer honored,” BBE “come to be taken lightly,” DARBY “begin to be destroyed,” DOUAY “be nothing esteemed,” GENEVA “regarded as worthless,” NAU “reduce

the sanctuary of the great goddess Diana to unimportance,” NJB “will lose its influence,” NLT “be despised,” PNT “reckoned for nothing,” YLT and “brought into contempt.” WILLIAMS

Demetrius knew that if the Goddess Diana was not respected, there would be no need for the temple erected to maintain her honor. If men were not devoted to this idol, they would give no honor to anything associated with it. Even though this temple was one of the seven wonders of the world, it would become worthless if the idol for whom it was built ceased to be viewed as a god.

There is a principle to be seen here that must be embraced. If a person does not place value on something or someone, they will not have a high regard for things associated with that person or thing. Bringing this down to its necessary implications, if an individual or group of individuals do not have a high regard for the Living God, they will not honor His commandments, His will, or His promises. It is their attitude toward God Himself that is reflected in their view of what He has said and done. If a person does not honor the Son, they certainly will not abandon all competing interests to follow Him. If they do not place a high value upon the Word of God, they will not expose themselves to it, or give themselves to shaping their lives by it. Where disinterest and lukewarmness exist, the love of God is not found, and the heart is not pure. There really is no such thing as a person who loves God, yet disdains His Word. It is not possible to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet refuse to follow Him. One cannot have faith, and yet disregard what brings and sustains faith.

Even the heathen know this principle. It is uncomely beyond description for the professing church to be riddled with the problems that proceed from unbelief.

HER MAGNIFICENCE SHOULD BE DESTROYED

“ . . . and her magnificence should be destroyed . . .” Other versions read, “be dethroned from her magnificence,” NASB “be robbed of her divine majesty,” NIV “will be deprived of her majesty,” NRSV “put down from her high position,” BBE “being ignominiously brought down from her divine majesty,” CJB “her magnificence come to the verge of ruin,” CSB “her greatness should be destroyed,” DARBY “robbed of her glory,” GWN “the goddess herself . . . is condemned,” MRD “will be robbed of her great prestige,” NLT and “her glorious magnificence may be degraded and fall into contempt.” AMPLIFIED

There is a logical progression in the effects of Paul’s teaching – and Demetrius saw it. If the goddess Diana was no longer honored, a temple erected for that honor would also be despised. If the temple was seen as worthless, then shrines that duplicated it would at once be rendered obsolete. It seems to be that this represents an inviolable principle. When what is false is seen for what is really is, and is held in disdain, nothing will be honored that is associated with that falsity.

This is the means through which false religion is overthrown. It is how the kingdom of God, which started like a small stone, grows and rolls over all competing kingdoms (Dan 2:35-44). Through the knowledge of God, and by faith, the delusions of the devil are exposed. Once seen, allegiance is withdrawn from them and given to God. When this actually takes place, activities required by and related to that false idea are abandoned. When this happens, the businesses and occupations that were sustained by that false notion are at once rendered obsolete, for they are no longer seen as important.

The Kingdom of God is an economy of understanding. It is an environment in which discernment and comprehension thrive, and things are seen as they really are. Where that understanding is deficient, devotion to what is false will remain, and necessarily so, for no rational person will abandon something to which they have attached value. Jesus referred to this principle when He said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Mat 6:21).

Now, permit me to think in a backward mode. When God is ignored by the professing church, it is because the true message of God has not been believed, for it is the belief of the truth that sets all

valid change in motion. The failure to believe that can be owing to the fact that the message has actually not been heard. However, when we consider that God positioned all men in both time and location in order that they might seek the Lord, this is not an adequate excuse (Acts 17:26-27). Too, the Gospel has been preached throughout the world – from the first century (Col 1:23). Even now, enough is being said to induce earnest inquiry into the things concerning the Kingdom of God. A remnant of believers is also present from whom truth can be made known. Under these circumstances, to be faced with an uninformed and worldly church cannot be justified under any circumstances. Further, the fact that false religion is thriving is itself evidence that the truth is not prominent. The same condition exists in our day that was found during the time of Isaiah the prophet. “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth ; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey : and the LORD saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:14-15). The lack of judgment, the presence of injustice, and the disdain of men and women of faith are evidences that truth has fallen. Further, the whole circumstance is seen by God, and He is displeased with it.

Even Demetrius the idolater and opportunist knew that when the things concerning the Kingdom of God are actually believed, competing interests are disdained. What can really be said of professed believers who do not see this?

ALL ASIA AND THE WORLD WORSHIPS

“ . . .whom all Asia and the world worshippingeth.”

Diana was a popular goddess – not only in Asia, but in all the world. She had a good reputation, and was held in high regard. However, if the preaching of Paul was believed – and that is what was happening – all of that worship would be brought to a grinding halt. There would not have to be a deprogramming technique to uproot the people from the worship of Diana. A battery of psychiatrists would not have to be hired to deal with the trauma of sudden change. This would not require the development of a new profession that would ease the transition from idolatry to the worship of the true God. That erroneous approach reflects the kind of thinking that is extant in our time, and it is false to the core. It is even beneath the thinking of Demetrius. He had seen enough of the effects of Paul’s preaching to know that unless something was done to stop it, it would eventually spoil the kingdom of Diana. I must admit that it would be most refreshing to hear of such conclusions concerning the preaching of the truth in our time.

Daniel said of Kingdom of God, “it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan 2:44). Even the heathen have a sense of this. That is why they oppose the preaching of the Gospel. Further, this kind of spread of the truth of the Gospel, and the consequent decimation of competing kingdoms, was the subject of several of Christ’s parables. This is what truth does when it is proclaimed and received.

The ongoing existence of this area is a kind of testimony to the sterility of modern Christianity. It is a living contradiction of the doctrine of Scripture, as well as the inspired history of the early church.

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof” (Mat 13:31-32).

- “Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened” (Mat 13:33).

Once this is perceived, it will bring to an end the vain imagined evangelistic strategies of men. For

example, I have been hearing about the “10-40 window” of evangelistic opportunity for at least twenty years. The term “10-40 window” was coined by Christian Missionary strategist Luis Bush in 1990. It describes a geographical area 10-40 degrees north of the equator, and has become a standard phrase in the Christian missionary community. This “window” is described in this manner: “Of the 55 least evangelized countries, 97% of their population lives within the Ten Forty Window . . . Two-thirds of the world's population -- more than 3.2 billion people -- live in the 10/40 Window.” Impressive statistics are as follows.

- 865 million unreached Muslims or Islamic followers in 3330 cultural sub-groupings
- 550 million unreached Hindus in 1660 cultural sub-groups
- 150 million unreached Chinese in 830 groups
- 275 million unreached Buddhists in 900 groups
- 2550 unreached tribal groups (which are mainly animistic) with a total population of 140 million
- Forming a smaller -- though important -- unreached group are the 17 million Jews scattered across 134 countries

The ongoing existence of this area is a kind of testimony to the sterility of modern Christianity. It is a living contradiction of the doctrine of Scripture, as well as the inspired history of the early church. Truth will ultimately triumph when it is faithfully proclaimed. This is because Divine power is in it. There is also the determined purpose of God: “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isa 11:9). And again, “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14). When it is believed and embraced, the power of God, coupled with the revealed purpose of God, settles the matter of the superiority of truth.

THE VALUES OF IDOLATERS EXPRESSED

“ 28 And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

Sin always introduces a lack of true rationality. It takes from those who commit it the ability to think correctly. This is because Satan never works within in context of truth. The sphere of his influence is wrought within the perimeter of the lie, and the means through which he perpetrates his ways is delusion. In this text we have a sterling example of people who are deluded, and thus cannot reason upon the truth.

WHEN THEY HEARD THESE THINGS

“And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath . . .” Other versions read, “filled with rage,” NASB “were furious,” NIV “were enraged,” NRSV “were very angry,” BBE “filled with fury,” NAB “aroused them to fury,” NJB “their anger boiled,” LIVING and “became furiously angry.” WEYMOUTH

They are thinking of themselves being made to feel better if they can allow their hostilities to erupt through their mouths. Being themselves deceived, they are unaware that their words have kindled a spiritual bonfire that will wreak havoc among the hearers, bringing destruction in its wake.

The term “wrath” is translated from a word that means, “passion, angry heat . . . indignation which has arisen gradually and become more settled,” THAYER and “swelling up of anger, hot temper, angry outburst.” FRIBERG The idea is that as Demetrius continued speaking, the anger and

hostility of those in the audience began to heat up and boil, filling all of their persons. Finally it boiled over, or erupted, in the expression that follows. James referred to this process as “the superfluity [overflow NKJV] of naughtiness” (James 1:21) – a process in which anger begins to heat up, being brought to a boil, then boiling over into sinful expression.

Here is an example of what James said in the third chapter of his epistle. “And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell ” (James 3:6). Other versions read, “sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell, “ NASB “setting on fire the wheel of birth (the cycle of man’s nature), being itself ignited by hell (Gehenna),” AMPLIFIED “inflameth the wheel of our nativity, being set on fire by hell,” DOUAY and “is set on fire by hell itself, and can turn our whole lives into a blazing flame of destruction and disaster.” LIVING The idea is that when men speak inappropriately, it awakens the whole of the fallen nature, and the individual begins to be consumed, with everything good being removed. This kind of speaking is kindled by hell, being one of the means the devil uses to disseminate his damning venom.

Thus, the words of Demetrius have awakened every evil manner in the people, robbing them of the ability to think properly, and inciting them against Paul, who had spoken the truth of God. Those who feel it is best to vent their corrupt feelings are not thinking correctly., They are thinking of themselves being made to feel better if they can allow their hostilities to erupt through their mouths. Being themselves deceived, they are unaware that their words have kindled a spiritual bonfire that will wreak havoc among the hearers, bringing destruction in its wake.

Another thing that is seen here is that those who think alike are, by virtue of their kindred thought, brought together, and united. The rationality, or lack thereof, of their thinking has no bearing on their unity. Neither is correctness the issue. That is something that is assumed. It is taken for granted that they are right because they all think the same. While imagining they are thinking accurately, they have actually been thrown into a form of insanity. They are completely oblivious to the fact that they have set themselves against the ultimate Person, with the ultimate mind, and the most precise and true purpose.

THEY CRIED OUT

“ . . . and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” All versions read essentially the same, with the only difference being the use of the transliteration, “Artemis” for “Diana.”

The people began shouting “Great is Diana of the Ephesians” as though that expression would make it true – or at least more firm. However, the repetition of a lie does not make it more sure, nor is it stabilized by the fact that many people have embraced it. This is why polls and pollsters have no bearing whatsoever on reality.

One of the principles of false religion is that when a significant number of people prefer a certain thing, that makes it right. Thus Paul, when warning Timothy of a falling away, said, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim 4:3). Other versions read, “wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires,” NASB “they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear,” NIV and “they will gather to themselves one teacher after another to a considerable number, chosen to satisfy their own liking and to foster the errors they hold.” AMPLIFIED

There are Christian sects that boast of their numbers as though that was proof they were being blessed by God. Others pursue numbers as though this was really so. However, this view of numbers is not an expression of the mind of the Lord. During Jesus’ ministry vast multitudes followed Him, seeking Him out and apparently listening to Him intently (Matt 4:25; 8:1,18; 9:8,33,36; 11:7; 12:15;

13:2, 34,36; 14:14,19,22,23; 15:10,30,31. 32.33, 39; 17:14; 19:2; 20:29; 21:8; 22:33; 23:1). Yet, He frequently actually sent the multitudes away (Matt 13:36; 14:22-23; 15:39).

Other times Jesus upbraided the multitudes (John 6:26,64). Some multitudes were offended by Christ's teaching, and finally left Him altogether (John 6:66). Further, Jesus never delivered any substantive teaching to the masses. This was so pronounced that His disciples said to Him, "Why speakest Thou unto them in parables?" Jesus answered them candidly, confirming that He did not speak in this manner to clarify the truth. "He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given . For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them " (Matt13:11-15).

Finally, many of these very people were carried away by their leaders, and thus called for the crucifixion of Jesus (Mk 16:11-13). Vast numbers, then, are not an end of themselves. Of themselves, they are not a worthy goal, but fall short of nobility. If the Gospel produces a great influx of believers, we will rejoice. But we will not tailor our labors to manufacture such things after the flesh. Such labors are poison to the soul. They provide an environment in which the flesh is dominate, and the Holy Spirit retires, at the best, into the background.

THE PROMOTION OF CONFUSION

“ 29 And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theater. ”

One of the evidences of the nature of incorrect thinking is the effect it has upon those subjected to it. This falls into the category of knowing a tree by its fruit. The impact of Demetrius' speech upon the Ephesian society confirms its source.

THE WHOLE CITY WAS FILLED WITH CONFUSION

“And the whole city was filled with confusion . . .” Other versions read, “was in an uproar,” NIV “full of noise and trouble,” BBE “was in commotion,” MRD “was in a roar,” PNT “became very upset,” IE and “riot and uproar.” WEYMOUTH

The word “confusion” is the translation of the Greek word **sugcu,sewj** , which has the following lexical meaning: “confusion, disturbance: of riotous persons,” THAYER “disorderly mob revolt, with special implications of uproar and disturbance - uproar, revolt,” LOUW-NIDA and “tumult.” GINGRICH In English the word means, “state of being confused mentally: lack of certainty, orderly thought, or power to distinguish, choose, or act decisively.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

As used here, confusion is the opposite of a “sound mind” (2 Tim 1:7), and the peace of God ruling in the heart (Col 3:15). The preaching and teaching of Paul had brought clarity of thought to the city. People were able to believe the Gospel, see their sins, confess them, and abandon them (19:18). Those who had been given to curious arts were enabled to think soundly about them, which moved them to bring their books and burn them publically (19:19). This is the kind of orderliness that was produced by the belief of things concerning the Kingdom of God.

Viewing this as the work of the rulers of the darkness of the world, this was the devil confusing and disorienting the people. From the Divine point of view, the people were “turned back and

brought to confusion.” This is the kind of environment in which Divine benefits are not realized.

Now, a foe enters the stage on which the drama of redemption is being worked out. He does not agitate the believers, but those who are unbelievers. As is characteristic of the devil’s wisdom, confusion and discord is produced in “the whole city.” Confusion involves being confounded, bewildered, befuddled, and puzzled. It includes being nonplused, dumbfounded, and illogical. Those who did not receive the message being delivered by Paul were thrown into a state of discombobulation – a condition in which they were confused, and unable to form a rational thought.

Viewing this as the work of the rulers of the darkness of the world, this was the devil confusing and disorienting the people. From the Divine point of view, the people were “turned back and brought to confusion” (Psa 35:4; 70:2). This is the kind of environment in which Divine benefits are not realized. It is also the domain in which the devil can work more freely. The more confused and lacking of spiritual understanding men are, the more freely the devil can work. This is the intellectual field where his seed grows.

PAUL’S COMPANIONS IN TRAVEL

“ . . . and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel . . .” Other versions read, “seized . . . Paul’s travel companions,” NKJV “dragging along,” NASB “having taken by force . . . who were journeying in company with Paul,” BBE “seized and carried off . . . DARBY and “ . . . men from Macedonia. (These men always traveled with Paul).” IE

Paul was apparently not accessible at the time, so the mob seized the men who had been traveling with him – Gaius and Aristarchus. We are told in Acts 20:4 that Aristarchus was “of the Thessalonians.” Acts 27:2 adds that this man was “a Macedonian of Thessalonica.” He left Ephesus with Paul (Acts 20:4), was later imprisoned (Philem 1:24), and is referred to as a “fellowlaborer” with Paul (Col 4:10).

In this text, Gaius is said to be a man “from Macedonia.” Acts 20:4 mentions a Gaius who was from Derbe – a place in which Paul and Barnabas had preached the Gospel some time earlier (Acts 14:6-7,20-21). There was also a brother named Gaius who was from Corinth (1 Cor 1:14), and yet another Gaius to whom John the apostle wrote (3 John 1:1). I take the Gaius of this text to be distinct from the ones from Derbe, Corinth, and the one to whom John addressed his third epistle. Some are of the opinion that they all were the same man. However, I do not see how that conclusion can be substantiated.

It is apparent that throughout his labors there were converts that joined Paul, so that a company of men generally traveled with him. When Paul disembarked from Ephesus he was accompanied by Sopater of Berea, Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica, Gaius and Timotheus of Derbe, and Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia (Acts 20:4). Earlier, Aquila and Priscilla journeyed with him (Acts 18:18).

In this brief consideration we see something of the manner of early labors with Christ. Laborers were not especially trained and sent out, but were reaped from the labors of Paul. He gathered about him people who were noted for believing and fearlessly embracing the cause for which he labored. These were not religious professionals, but men whose hearts had been touched by the truth of Christ. In our day, this is not a common practice. In my judgment, this is owing to a falling away that has resulted in the exaltation of an institution over the truth, and the admiration of a position, as compared with the truth of God. The result of this falling away has been a division among the people that will not allow for the kind of unity evident in this text.

Also, it is of interest to note that the alliance between Paul and these men was so evident that the howling mob recognized it. A unity of both mind and work existed between these men and Paul that could not be hidden. That kind of thing can only be apparent where there is deep devotion and

consistency of life.

RUSHED TO THE THEATER

“ . . . they rushed with one accord into the theater. ” Other versions read, “rushed as one man into the theater,” NIV “they all came running into the theater,” BBE “rushed all together into the amphitheater,” CSB “rushed into the common place with one assent,” GENEVA “rushed into the common hall with one assent,” PNT and “ran together to the stadium with a single purpose.” IE

The following is a general description of a “theater,” which was a structure in which spectacles and presentations took place. “Theater, among the ancients, is a public edifice for the exhibiting of scenic spectacles, or shows to the people — under the word theater was comprehended not only the eminence, whereon the actors appeared, and the action passed, but also the whole area, or extent of the place common to the actors and spectators: in this sense the theater was a building encompassed with porticos, and furnished with seats of stone, disposed in semicircles, and ascending gradually over one another, which encompassed a space called the “orchestra”; in the front whereof was the “proscenium” or “pulpitum”, whereon the actors performed the “scena”, a large front adorned with orders of architecture; behind which was “postscenium”, or the place where the actors made themselves ready, retired, etc. so that the “scena”, in its full extent, comprehended all the part belonging to the actors. In the Greek theatres, the “orchestra” made a part of the “scena”; but in the Roman theatres, none of the actors ever descended into the “orchestra”, which was taken up by the seats of the senators.”

Some have though the intent of the mob was to throw these two men to the beasts, as the people watched them devoured. It might very well have been similar to – perhaps even identical with – the occasion to which Paul alluded in First Corinthians: “If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus , what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die” (1 Cor 15:32).

Albert Barnes says of this occasion, “The theaters of the Greeks were not only places for public exhibitions, but also for holding assemblies, and often for courts, elections, etc. The people, therefore, naturally rushed there, as being a suitable place to decide this matter.”

Adam Clarke notes, “The theatres, being very spacious and convenient places, were often used for popular assemblies and public deliberation, especially in matters which regarded the safety of the state. There are several proofs of this in ancient authors. So Tacitus, Hist. ii. 80, speaking concerning Vespasian, says: ‘Having entered into the theater of the Antiochians, where it was the custom to hold consultations, the people running together, and being profuse in flattery, he addressed them.’ Frontinus, in Stratagem lib. iii. cap. 2, speaking of a public meeting at the theater at Agrigentum, observes, ubi ex more Graecorum locus consultationi praebebatur; which, according to the custom of the Greeks, is the place for public deliberation.”

Although this was a howling mob, driven by corrupt passions and delusion, they thought they were coming together to reason. In their minds, they were seeking the interest of the Ephesians, particularly the craftsmen and merchants whose living had been jeopardized by the conversion of multitudes. They did not perceive Paul to be a harmless religious fanatic, but someone who threatened the social fabric of their community.

WHY DID THIS OCCUR?

What could drive this mob to act in such an irrational and inconsiderate manner. What could move them to drag men into an area whose only crime was traveling and laboring with Paul. They were not guilty of civil disobedience, or speaking against the government, or inciting a rebellion against the authorities. This is not what those who labor together with Christ are noted for! Yet, judging from the

action of these people, an onlooker would judge that some great injustice had been done.

This is how people who are under the control of the devil conduct themselves. They are taken captive by him at his will (2 Tim 2:26), and always align themselves against the Lord, His purpose, and His people. Their's is a mentality dictated by the evil one, and there is nothing truly rational about it, even though they think what they are doing is perfectly reasonable. Satan can fill a person's heart (Acts 5:3), put into the heart of a person thoughts and intentions (John 13:2), and enter into them to dominate and control them (John 13:27).

When people are deceived, they see it as true understanding, being convinced that what they do is right, and the ones they oppose are wrong. It is not that they simply do not want to see or understand, they cannot do so. Deluded people are captivated people, not simply individuals who have a differing opinion.

There is a mitigating factor to all of this. Satan cannot simply carry out his will. He functions under the authority of the King of kings, to whom he and all of his cohorts are subject. If he desires to sift a believer, he must be granted the right to do so.

THE MITIGATING FACTOR

There is a mitigating factor to all of this. Satan cannot simply carry out his will. He functions under the authority of the King of kings, to whom he and all of his cohorts are subject. If he desires to sift a believer, he must be granted the right to do so (Lk 22:31). Even if he is given the right to carry out such sifting, the Intercessor's petition that the faith of the one being sifted will not fail is honored above Satan's his own (Lk 22:32). The Kingdom of God is the superior kingdom, and will totally and violently destroy all competing kingdoms (Dan 2:44).

Any success realized by Satan is only temporary, and his work will finally be totally and apparently overthrown. Even in the midst of what appears to be success, God's will is being brought to its intended culmination. Once that completion is reached, Satan's work will be terminated,

CONCLUSION

The passage we have just reviewed confirms that laboring for the Lord is not a simplistic thing. Neither, indeed, are Kingdom labors to be approached as though there is constant and unwavering triumph in every circumstance. Paul recounts to the Corinthians the phenomenal opposition that he faced nearly everywhere he went (2 Cor 11:23-33). He received at least eight severe beatings, experienced three shipwrecks prior to writing the Second letter to the Corinthians. At least one more is recorded in the twenty-seventh chapter of Acts. He spent a day and a night in the "open sea." NIV In his travels he encountered "perils," or dangers at sea, on rivers, at the hands of robbers, among his own brethren the Jews,, as well as among the heathen. He faced dangers in the city, in the wilderness, on the sea, and among false brethren. As he went about doing the work of the Lord he experienced weariness, painfulness, often going without sleep and without food.

In Christ, triumph does not always mean the immediate overthrow of the enemy. Sometimes it means outlasting the enemy, or even delivering a message that hounds the enemy as Stephen's defense must have lingered in the mind of Saul of Tarsus. People of God should expect opposition and trouble, not marvel when it comes to pass. When professing Christians go out of their way to avoid trouble, even to the compromising of the truth, or even a refusal to declare it, a sin of unspeakable enormity has been committed. Ponder what has been revealed on this subject.

• **THE WORLD HATES BELIEVERS.** "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19).

• **YOU WILL HAVE TRIBULATION.** “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

• **WE MUST ENTER THE KINGDOM THROUGH MUCH TRIBULATION.** “Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

• **THOSE WHO ARE BORN AFTER THE FLESH PERSECUTE THOSE BORN AFTER THE SPIRIT.** “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now” (Gal 4:29).

• **WE ARE APPOINTED TO AFFLICTIONS.** “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto” (1 Thess 3:3).

• **WE SHOULD SUFFER TRIBULATION.** “For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know” (1 Thess 3:4).

• **THE GODLY WILL SUFFER PERSECUTION.** “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12).;

• **DO NOT MARVEL WHEN THE WORLD HATES YOU.** “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13).

What can really be said in favor of those who modify their behavior and tone down their words in order not to offend the ungodly? Jesus Himself, together with His disciples, were persecuted because of what they said. This was also true of the Prophets that were before them (Matt 5:12; Acts 7:52). That confirms the fundamental enmity that exists between the regenerate and the unregenerate, the spiritual and the carnal, and those born of the Spirit and those born of the flesh. Ponder the record of opposition found in this book up to the text just reviewed.

• The apostles were arrested and confined following the healing of the impotent man (Acts 4:3-7).

• Upon finding the apostles preaching in the Temple, after they were commanded not to do so, the religious leaders laid hold of them and put them in the common prison (Acts 5:18).

• The apostles were beaten following their defense of preaching in the Temple (Acts 5:40).

• Stephen is hailed before the Jewish council after the leaders were unable to resist the wisdom with which he spoke (Acts 6:10-15).

• Stephen is stoned to death after exposing the falsity of the Jewish council (Acts 7:51-60).

• A great persecution is unleashed against the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19).

• Saul of Tarsus initiates a fierce persecution against the church (Acts 9:1-2).

• The Jews seek to kill Paul (Acts 9:23-24).

• Herod kills James the apostle, and incarcerates Peter, thinking to have him killed also (Acts 12:1-5).

• Paul and Barnabas are persecuted in Antioch (Acts 13:50-51).

• Paul is stoned at Lystra (Acts 14:19).

• Paul and Silas are beaten and imprisoned in Philippi (Acts 16:19-34).

- Paul is threatened at Thessalonica, and forced to leave (Acts 17:10-12).
- The Jews from Thessalonica come to Berea and stir up trouble against Paul (Acts 17:13-15).
- Paul is persecuted at Corinth (Acts 18:12-18).
- Paul is jeopardized in Ephesus, and his companions in travel are hauled into the local amphitheater (Acts 19:23-30).

What kind of spirit would seek to assuage the world by neglecting to declare the whole counsel of God? What would lead any person of sound mind to seek to avoid the indignation of the world by seeking to win them by friendship, instead of through the preaching of the Gospel? The examples of Moses and the Prophets, the teaching of John the Baptist, the entire ministry of Jesus, and the record of the spread of the Gospel under the leadership of the apostles confirm that such an approach is nothing more than the imagination of men – and they are not godly men!

It is time for the church to rid itself of charlatans who seek their own interests rather than those of the Lord. Such men are not to be afforded a place of prominence within the body of Christ – none at all. God has made no place for them, and neither should we. They are an affront to Christ Jesus the Lord, and have borrowed their wisdom from the world. The teachers to whom they have subjected themselves are not the ones the Lord has placed within the church.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #82

19:30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. 31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre. 32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. 33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. 34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. 35 And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? 36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. 37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. 38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. 39 But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. 40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. 41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.” (Acts 19:30-41)

A TUMULTUOUS ASSEMBLY

INTRODUCTION

Convinced they have a legitimate legal case against Paul and his co-laborers, the craftsmen of Ephesus have entered the theater to present their case. When Paul knew of this, he sought to enter the theater to present his own defense. However, there was such tumult that the brethren did not allow

him to enter. Some friends from Asia also advised him not to enter into the fray. Through this means, Paul was spared unnecessary hardship. God Himself resolved the whole

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- **HIS FRIENDS DESIRE THAT HE NOT ENTER INTO THE THEATER (19:31)**
- **A CONFUSED ASSEMBLY (19:32)**
- **ALEXANDER IS PUT FORWARD (19:33)**
- **A PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT RESPECTED (19:34)**
- **THE TOWN CLERK SPEAKS (19:35)**
- **A LEGITIMATE CHARGE CANNOT BE RAISED (19:36-37)**
- **IT SHALL BE DETERMINED IN A LAWFUL ASSEMBLY (19:38-40)**
- **HE DISMISSED THE ASSEMBLY (19:41)**
- **CONCLUSION**

matter, turning the heart of the civil authority, and enabling him to see the unreasonableness of the whole assembly. The mob itself was guilty of breaking the law, and therefore he would not allow the proceedings to continue. He simply dismissed the assembly. Thus, we have a classic example of the protection of the servant of God through the means of government, which was ordained by God for the punishment of evil doers. Such intervention is always done according to Divine discretion. Those who live by faith will see this and give thanks.

THE NATURE OF THE WORK OF THE LORD

It is essential that men consider the nature of the work of the Lord, lest they be discouraged by the circumstances they face while engaged in it. There is a form of spiritual naivete that will cause the person who seeks to serve God to become faint, being unduly weakened by oppression. This comes because of a misapprehension of some of the terms ascribed to those who are aligned with Christ. These include the following:

- “Conquerors” (Rom 8:37).
- “Triumph” (2 Cor 2:14).
- “Victory” (1 Cor 15:57; 1 John 5:4).

This juvenile attitude is also related to a lack of understanding concerning certain key and comforting expressions.

- “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee” (Psa 91:7).
- “No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD, and their righteousness is of me, saith the LORD” (Isa 54:17).
- “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Paul expressed the nature of spiritual warfare from the experiential point of view. In this reflection the necessity of faith and the spiritual stamina that is brings is emphasized.

Such texts involve human effort, yet are not limited to that effort. There is such a thing as God

CAUSING us to triumph (2 Cor 2:14), MAKING us stand (Rom 14:4), and GIVING us the victory (1 Cor 15:57). It is not proper to think of such texts as guaranteeing the absence of opposition, or suggesting that foes will never be faced.

There are Scriptural words that encapsulate the idea of extensive warfare, battle, an extensive skirmish, far reaching militant involvement. Believers have certainly not been called to a tea party.

- “Overcoming” (1 John 5:4).
- “Resist” (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:9).
- “Stand” (Eph 6:11,13,14).
- “Stand fast” (1 Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Phil 1:27; 4:1; 1 Thess 3:8; 2 Thess. 2:15).
- “Fight” (1 Tim 6:12).
- “Wrestle” (Eph 6:12).

All of these postulate a warfare in which the battle sometimes see-saws back and forth, as when Israel fought Amalek (Ex 17:11-13). Such battles have a way of eliminating the timid and the weak – especially those who never thought such battles were possible.

Paul expressed the nature of spiritual warfare from the experiential point of view. In this reflection the necessity of faith and the spiritual stamina that it brings is emphasized. “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:6-9). Several key considerations are found in this insightful testimony.

- **THE NATURE OF THE TREASURE.** That the treasure to be protected and maintained is the “light of the knowledge of the glory of God.” That refers to the insight and understanding of God Himself that is part and parcel of His great salvation. Satan seeks to take this from us, for our salvation depends upon it.

- **CONSTANT DEPENDENCE.** That God has so structured salvation as to make us continually dependent upon Himself. At no point does salvation proceed in its development independent of the personal knowledge of God.

- **WORKED OUT IN EXPERIENCE.** That salvation is worked out in the crucible of human experience and participation in the good will of the Lord. The believer faces opposition that is superior to his own strength. This sets up a scenario that absolutely requires faith – conscious and deliberate reliance upon the Lord.

- **THE APPOINTED MEANS.** That the skirmishes that are regularly faced by the believer are the means God uses to advance them in the faith, thereby bringing glory to Himself.

- **SOMETIMES IT APPEARS AS THOUGH WE ARE LOSING.** That, by Divine design, there are times that suggest the child of God is actually losing the battle – times in which he is troubled on every side, persecuted, and thrown down to the ground.

When these realities are not expounded to the saints, they are at once at a decided disadvantage in the good fight of faith. If they do battle imagining there will never be setbacks, or times when they appear helpless, Satan will gain the advantage against them.

When these realities are not expounded to the saints, they are at once at a decided disadvantage in the good fight of faith. If they do battle imagining there will never be setbacks, or times when they appear helpless, Satan will gain the advantage against them. This is precisely why many professed

believers come short of finishing the race, falling away in the time of temptation, or trial.

Think of what Paul had faced in Ephesus to this point. It was sufficient to thrust a novice from the work.

- The people at Ephesus first asked him to stay with them, but he was unable to do so because the Lord was leading him elsewhere (18:19).
- When returning to Ephesus, he confronted certain disciples who had not even heard if there was a Holy Spirit (19:1-5).
- When he spoke in the synagogue, certain were hardened, believed not, and spoke evil of the way. This forced Paul to remove the disciples, and continue teaching daily in the school of Tyrannus. This was followed by a two year period during which all Asia heard the word of the Lord (19:9).
- Certain vagabond Jews came, experimenting with the name of Jesus, whom Paul preached. Paul's continued preaching shook the powers of darkness to their very foundation (19:13-20).
- Now the entire city is set ablaze with confusion, and an initiative is launched against Paul and those who were laboring with him (19:23-29).

All of those potentially disconcerting events contained doors through which the timorous could exit, leaving the work of God like John Mark did in Pamphylia (Acts 15:38). Apparent success can be a cause for failing owing to pride, as well as opposition can cause failure because of fear or discouragement. But Paul did not abandon the work. This is because he had a spiritual understanding of the nature of the work, and was not deceived by appearance.

It is good to discern such things, and to walk in a keen awareness of them, lest we be discouraged by the way. Like the whorish woman of proverbs, the devil works among "the simple ones," who are "void of understanding" (Prov 7:7-21), to turn them from the way.

THE IMPACT OF A WEAK CHURCH

There are few disadvantages that are greater than the ignorance that is imposed upon the people by failing to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). Who is able to calculate the number of falls that are directly traceable to flawed and incomplete preaching? When the truth, of which the church is the custodian (1 Tim 3:15), is compromised, diluted, or no longer proclaimed, iniquity even pours into the world like a flood. This is why Babylon the Great, the false and fornicating church, is referred to as "the mother of harlots AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Rev 17:5). Not only is this spiritual monstrosity guilty of birthing erroneous and unfaithful churches, the decay of society in general is traced to her doorstep. When the church becomes weak, it directly impacts upon the fabric of society. In reality, society reflects the status of the church. This is because the body of Christ is, by Divine design, influential among men – either for good or evil. If the church loses its moral and spiritual compass, the means of maintaining social civility and rectitude is removed, thereby mandating moral decline. This is involved in being the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

THE DISCIPLES DO NOT PERMIT PAUL TO ENTER

"19:30 And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not." Other versions read, "would not allow him," NKJV "would not let him," NASB "restrained him," MRD "refused to let him," NJB "permitted him not," RWB and "were not suffering him." YLT

"The disciples" were the ones who had embraced the Gospel Paul preached, and were following him, taking advantage of his faithful and insightful teaching. Disciples are learners, students, and

those who have willingly subjected themselves to the one who is teaching. When it comes to the New Covenant, valid “disciples” are those who are following Jesus, and being taught by Him (Eph 4:20-21). They are the ones who have taken up their cross daily, and are following the Lamb wherever He goes (Lk9:23; Rev 14:4). Where such people cannot be found, real disciples are not found. There is no such thing as a Christian who does not follow Jesus and learn from Him. Although non-followers of Jesus often wear His name, insisting on being called “Christian,” they are really imposters – tares planted by the devil among the wheat, or genuine followers of Jesus. Such are fruitless, and God has made no provision for fruitless members of the body of Christ. He personally removes those who do not bear fruit (John 15:1-2).

HERE WE LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT PAUL

Paul was a “chosen vessel,” handpicked by Jesus for a special work (Acts 9:15; Gal 1:15). He was a Kingdom leader by virtue of the extraordinary revelations that had been given to him (2 Cor 12:1; Eph 3:3-7; Col 1:25-27). Yet, he did not lord it over the flock of God, choosing rather to feed and nourish it as a “wise master builder,” “expert builder,” NIV or “skilled master builder” NRSV (1 Cor 3:10).

Paul did not think of himself as separate from the rest of the members of the body. As an apostle, he was placed in the body of Christ, not over it (1 Cor 12:18,28). He could be comforted by the mutual faith of the brethren (Rom 1:12). He viewed fellow laborers as helpers, not vassals (Rom 16:9). There were times when the Lord used the other members of the body to rescue and protect Paul (Acts 9:25,30; 17:10,14; 2 Cor 11:33). Other times, they were used to encourage him (Acts 28:15). Still other times, he was sustained by them (Rom 16:2; Phil 2:25; 4:16). There were even brethren who regularly “ministered unto him” – which was infinitely more than a relationship like a slave to a master (Acts 19:22).

In this text Paul submitted to the counsel of other members of the body. It is not that he was ignorant in this area, and needed to be directed more wisely. Rather, this is the manner in which the body of Christ functions. There is a holy interdependence among those who are in Christ Jesus, and it is by Divine design. No member of the body of Christ is advantaged by distancing himself from the other members of the body. By its very nature, spiritual life is designed to be nurtured and sustained from outside itself, in addition to the well that springs up within (John 4:14). Our completeness in Christ postulates the contributions of His body, through whom He works.

WE ALSO LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT DISCIPLES

Notice the concern the disciples had for Paul – one of the premier laborers in the Kingdom of God. He was a “wise master builder” (1 Cor 3:10), and these disciples knew it. They did not stop the Ephesian mob from dragging Paul’s companions into the theater, but they kept them from apprehending Paul. This does not suggest they had no concern for their other brethren. They doubtless knew that the mob was actually more interested in taking hold of Paul. As for the disciples themselves, and those who were laboring with Paul, they had the same trait as Aquila and Priscilla, who, for Paul’s own life, “laid down their own necks” (Rom 16:3-4). This is in perfect keeping with the teaching of John the beloved who wrote, “Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

Therefore, in the interest of the work of the Lord, and nature of Paul’s ministry, together with their consistent love and respect for Paul himself, they would not permit him to enter the arena. Reason was not on the throne in that Ephesian theater, but tumult was reigning supreme. They knew no good could come from Paul’s presence there. Therefore, they stepped into the room of decision, and protected Paul, even as did others before them. What a marvelous picture of the body of Christ being “fitly framed together” (Eph 2:21).

HIS FRIENDS DESIRE THAT HE NOT ENTER THE THEATER

“ 31 And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.”

CERTAIN OF THE CHIEF OF ASIA

“And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends . . .” Other versions read, “officials of Asia,” NKJV “some of the Asiarchs,” NASB “officials of the province,” NIV “officials of the province of Asia,” NRSV “rulers of Asia,” DOUAY “provincial authorities,” NET “the Asiarchs (political or religious officials in Asia),” AMPLIFIED “Roman officers of the province,” LIVING “leaders of the country,” IE and “public officials.” WEYMOUTH

COMMENTS BY ROBERTSON

Act 19:31 - Certain also of the chief officers of Asia (*tines de kai tôn Asiarchôn*). These "Asiarchs" were ten officers elected by cities in the province who celebrated at their own cost public games and festivals (Page). Each province had such a group of men chosen, as we now know from inscriptions, to supervise the funds connected with the worship of the emperor, to preside at games and festivals even when the temple services were to gods like Artemis. Only rich men could act, but the position was eagerly sought. ROBERTSON'S WORD PICTURES

These men, referred to as being “of the chief of Asia,” were political people. They were operating under the authority of Rome, which then ruled the world. It was the last of the four great world empires that were the subject of a dream God gave Nebuchadnezzar. These empires were Babylon (Dan 2:38), the Medio-Persians (Dan 5:28), Greece (Dan 8:21; 10:20; 11:2), and Rome (which overthrew Greece (Dan 2:40; 7:7,19,23). It was during the days of these kingdoms that God would set up His own kingdom upon the earth – that time being during the reign of Rome (Dan 2:44). Jesus was the Administrator of that Kingdom (John 18:36), which was of another order, and would eventually throw down all other kingdoms (Dan 2:44–45; Rev 11:15). This is another perspective of Jesus bruising the head of the serpent, destroying him, together with all of his works (Gen 3:15; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8; Rev 20:10).

Even during the time when these kingdoms were dominant, and prior to them as well, God raised up global leaders that were sympathetic toward the people of God.

- Pharaoh, head of Egypt, who ruled the world, was inclined toward Joseph (Gen 41:41-44).
- During the time Israel was in Egypt, Moses was targeted for the riches of Egypt, being called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Heb 11:24-28).
- Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel the ruler over all the province of Babylon (Dan 2:48).
- Belshazzar made Daniel the “ third [highest] ruler of the kingdom” of Babylon (Dan 5:29).
- Daniel “prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian” (Dan 6:28).
- Cyrus was commissioned by God to assist the Jews in the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:1-8; 6:14; 7:11-28).
- Artaxerxes assisted Nehemiah by giving him what was required to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls (Neh 2:1-8; 5:14; 13:6).
- Gallio, Roman deputy of Achaia, refused to allow charges to be brought against Paul by the Jews (Acts 18:14-16).

- The townclerk of Ephesus dismissed an assembly aligned against Paul and his co-laborers, declaring the assembly to be unlawful (Acts 19:35-41).

- Paul once appealed to Caesar, convinced there would be more justice in the civil court than among the hard-hearted Jews (Acts 25:11; 28:19).

Now, we find that some of the political officials were personal friends to Paul. Like a true friend, he had showed himself friendly among them (Prov 18:24). His life was doubtless an excellent testimony of the peace that characterizes one who lives unto the Lord, as compared to living with a focused interest on self.

Throughout history, God has used governments and their rulers in the execution of His purposes. Although, from one view, these governments were competing powers, from yet another more complete view, they were pawns in the hands of the Lord. When He desired, He turned their hearts like the rivers of water (Prov 21:1). As the King of kings (1 Tim 6:15) and Lord of lords (Rev 19:16), he raised up kings, took them down, and put others in their place (1 Sam 2:8; Psa 75:6-7; Dan 2:21; 4:17).

Therefore, it should not surprise us when civil authorities sometimes rose in defense of the servants of the Lord, sometimes even promoting the knowledge of God among the empires over which they presided, and often assisting the children of Israel in what they had been commissioned to do (Dan 4:1-3; 34-37; 6:26-27; Ezra 1:1-8; 6:14; 7:11-28; Neh 2:1-8; 5:14; 13:6).

Believers Were Not Reactionaries

This also confirms that early believers were not rabble-rousers, inciting civil disobedience or a lack of respect for political rulers of the people. While they by no means condoned everything done by government officials, as confirmed in John the Baptist rebuking Herod (Matt 14:4), yet they knew that they had been placed in their position by God Himself, who said, “You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people” NKJV (Ex 22:28).

When it comes to societal influence, the “works” of believers are the appointed means of testimony (Matt 5:16). They are not to launch crusades against the civil authorities, like Barabbas did (Mk 15:7).

On one occasion, when the Jews had hauled Paul into court to raise charges against him, he pointed out to the governor that he had not been found stirring up trouble. “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city” (Acts 24:12).

CHRONOLOGY OF WORLD EMPIRES

1st world power = **EGYPT** (in power to 1491 BC) – *Joseph and Moses prominent.*

2nd world power = **ASSYRIA** (1491 - 606 BC) – *Israel enters/conquers Canaan, Judges, David, Solomon, Prophets*

3rd world power = **BABYLON** (606 - 538 BC) – *Daniel prominent*

4th world power = **MEDO-PERSIA** (538 - 333 BC) – *Daniel prominent*

5th world power = **GREECE** (333 - 44 BC) – *Inter-testamental Period*

6th world power = **ROME** (44 BC - 476 AD) – *John the Baptist, Jesus, Apostles*

In our day, it has become fashionable for professing believers to speak openly against civil rulers. Such activities need to be addressed with great sobriety and a keen understanding of what God has said on the matter, as well as the examples set by the Lord Jesus and the apostles.

DESIRING HIM NOT TO ENTER THE ARENA

“ . . . sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.” Other versions read, “sent to him pleading that he would not venture into the theater,” NKJV “repeatedly urged him not to,” NASB “sent him a message begging him not to,” NIV “ requesting him seriously not to put himself in danger,” BBE “and urged him not to throw himself into the theatre,” DARBY and “warned him not to risk venturing into the theater.” AMPLIFIED

This is a remarkable example of God working all things together for the good of His people (Rom 8:28). A God like this is to be trusted. On other occasions, Paul was able to present a defense (Acts 21:37-30; 23:1-10; 24:24-26; 26:1-32). In this case, however, the circumstances were apparently more hostile, and it was not wise for Paul to give a defense of himself.

Being alert to Divine direction, God could order his path through the disciples, and through friendly civil authorities as well. Paul was able to be directed in this manner, a trait that does not characterize all who profess to be followers of Christ.

A CONFUSED ASSEMBLY

“ 32 Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.”

Demetrius had presented what appeared to be a very logical case. Calling the craftsmen related to the making of artifacts honoring the goddess Diana, he had laid before the people the following argument.

- The craftsmen made their living making shrines for the goddess Diana.
- Paul had successfully convinced people that a god made by men was really no god at all.
- This would lead to the despising of the goddess Diana.
- This would lead to the obsolescence of the temple erected in her honor.

theater is what David asked to take place among his enemies. “Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt.”

This would render their trade outdated and no longer needed.

Yet, although the argument seemed logical enough, the cause was not valid , and therefore it did not yield the desired results.

SOME CRIED ONE THINGS, AND SOME ANOTHER

“Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused . . .” Other versions read, “the assembly was in confusion,” NASB “there was no order in the meeting,” BBE “the assembly was in complete confusion,” CJB “the assembly was tumultuous,” DARBY “the assembly was out of order,” GENEVA “the assembly was in chaos,” NAB “the assembly itself had no idea what was going on,” NJB “the assembly was all out of quiet,” PNT “the assembly was all uproar and confusion,” WEYMOUTH “was in an uproar,” MONTGOMERY and “the gathering was in a tumult.” AMPLIFIED

What we have here is the fulfillment of the saying, “Thus saith the LORD, thy redeemer, and he that formed thee from the womb, I am the LORD that maketh all things; that stretcheth forth the heavens alone; that spreadeth abroad the earth by myself; That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish ” (Isa 44:25). And again the Psalmist affirmed, “The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought: He maketh the devices of the people of none effect” (Psa 33:10).

What took place in that Ephesian theater is what David asked to take place among his enemies. “Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt” (Psa 35:4). Again he wrote, “Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine hurt: let them be clothed with shame and dishonor that magnify themselves against me” (Psa 35:26). Isaiah the prophet wrote, “They shall be ashamed, and also confounded, all of them: they shall go to confusion together that are makers of idols” (Isa 45:16).

It seems to me that it is in order to ask the Lord to impose confusion and shame upon those who set themselves against the Lord and His Christ. If someone is going to be confused, let it be the ungodly.

THE MORE PART KNEW NOT WHY THEY WERE COME TOGETHER

“ . . . and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.”

Here is a classic example of confusion – when the people do not know why they have come together, and all reason is abandoned. In Christ, crowds can be orderly, with everyone attentive to what is being said. This is what occurred on the day of Pentecost. Although there was a diversity of people present who spoke differing mother tongues, yet there was a certain order in that gathering that cannot be explained apart from the working of the Lord (Acts 2:8-12). The gathering of which we are reading was the antithesis of that gathering in Jerusalem, when focus and order were present.

ALEXANDER IS PUT FORWARD

“ 33 And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people.”

Now, an attempt will be made to have some order among the people, and the intelligent presentation of a cause. However, God had imposed confusion upon them, and the effort will be in vain. Ultimately, the unity of the wicked is futile. As it is written, “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered” (Prov 11:21).

THEY DREW ALEXANDER OUT OF THE MULTITUDE

“And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward.” Other versions read, “And some of the crowd concluded it was Alexander, since the Jews had put him forward,” NASB “The Jews pushed Alexander to the front, and some of the crowd shouted instructions to him,” NIV “Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward,” NRSV “And they brought Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward,” ASV “Some of the crowd explained the situation to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed to the front,” CJB “Some of the crowd prompted Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward,” ESV “some people concluded that Alexander was the cause, so the Jews pushed him to the front,” GWN “And the Jewish people who were there, brought forward one of their men, a Jew, named Alexander,” MRD and “Some of the crowd called upon Alexander [to speak], since the Jews had pushed and urged him forward.”
AMPLIFIED

The multiplicity of Bible versions once again present a confusing picture.

- That the Ephesian craftsmen thought Alexander was the cause of the uproar, and so brought him forward. NASB/GWN
- The Jews explained the situation to Alexander, who was apparently an able spokesman, then put him forward. NIV/NRSV/CJB
- Some of the craftsmen explained the situation to Alexander, whom the Jews had put forward. ESV/AMPLIFIED

The defense was certainly not in the behalf of Paul, for the Jews would never have put Alexander forward for that purpose. The Jews in Ephesus had been guilty of speaking “evil of the way” which Paul was declaring, doing so “before the multitude”

The Jews put forward Alexander to explain the whole situation. MRD

We do not know the identity of this man. Some have supposed this was “Alexander the coppersmith,” to whom Paul alluded in his second letter to Timothy (2 Tim 4:14). That is a matter, the resolution of which, is not worthy of any extensive pursuit. I do not know how a person could fully support a conclusion on the matter.

Judging from the verse that follows, it seems to me that the Jews put him forward to clarify that the Jews were not involved in this whole matter, and that they did not stand in support of Paul. If this is true, then the effort was strictly a selfish one, with no interest in the execution of justice.

HE TRIED TO MAKE A DEFENSE TO THE PEOPLE

“And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people.” Other versions read, “wanted to make his defense,” NKJV “Alexander was intending to make a defense,” NASB “make a statement to the people in answer,” BBE “would have given the people satisfaction,” DOUAY “would have excused the matter to the people,” GENEVA “wished to explain something to the gathering,” NAB “with the intention of explaining things to the people,” NJB and “wishing to make a defense and [planning] to apologize to the people,” AMPLIFIED

The defense was certainly not in the behalf of Paul, for the Jews would never have put Alexander forward for that purpose. The Jews in Ephesus had been guilty of speaking “evil of the way” which Paul was declaring, doing so “before the multitude” (19:9).

However, the Jews did not condone the worship of Diana of the Ephesians, and her worshippers were certainly aware of that. Nevertheless, the Jews in Ephesus, like those in Athens (Acts 17:16-17) had not made a stand against idolatry. They were apparently quite willing to live amidst the exaltation of false gods without being contentious about it. Paul, on the other hand, was not willing to do so, either in Athens or in Ephesus. He insisted on publicly proclaiming that idols were not gods, and that it was wholly improper to worship them, or to in any way suggest they were deities. Thus, the Jews put forward Alexander, who was apparently a good speaker like Tertullus, who could present a false way in a good and convincing manner (Acts 24:1-8). The aim here was no doubt to take the pressure off of the Jews, and confirm they had nothing whatsoever to do with Paul.

THE SPIRIT OF COMPROMISE

The spirit of compromise maintains a dreadful presence in the current Christian community. Under the shroud of a feigned peace, the modern church has moved into the moral background. Even though it is the appointed and ordained “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), it has chosen to be muffled by an institutional emphasis, and thus has lost its saltiness.

Compromise is nothing less than a fleshly attempt to make the truth more palatable. This assumes

that, as stated in Scripture, it has been overstated, or put too strongly, in the raw form of Divine utterance or inspiration. It is simply seen as not palatable to men – and, indeed, this is true of those who are “carnally minded” (Rom 8:6). Of course, truth, by Divine design, is never tailored for such people, for they have no natural capacity to receive the truth in any form. It is beyond the scope of their understanding. The only hope for such people is for the truth to be presented in its purest form, for the Holy Spirit then uses it for the purposes God has ordained. To mitigate the truth, therefore, is to put it beyond the reach men, all the while imagining that, by reducing its potency, it is being put within their reach. It is the betrayal of a most pitiful state when supposedly Christian men attempt to make the truth acceptable to worldly-minded people. By diluting the truth itself, or failing to proclaim it in its fulness, men imagine that they are either giving a greater advantage for truth to work, or are creating a peaceable environment in which living will be more tolerable for themselves and their hearers.

However, when compromise is initiated, or tolerance allowed, those who do such things are losing their saltiness, or “savor.” They are made less effective in their attempt to blur the line between truth and the lie. By attempting to make the truth less abrasive, they have robbed it of its power, for it is its abrasiveness that serves to draw out the real nature of the people exposed to it.

Jesus said, there was no way to regain saltiness once it had been lost. “You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste (its strength, its quality), how can its saltiness be restored? It is not good for anything any longer but to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men” AMPLIFIED (Matt 5:13). That is a most arresting statement, and worthy of extended consideration. Among other things, it accentuates the seriousness of being silent in a declining generation. The prophets were noted for their denunciation of false ideas (Isa 3:11; 5:11; 10:1; 29:15; Ezek 13:3; Zeph 2:5). Jesus was the premier spokesman against religious falsity (Matt 11:21; 18:7; 23:13; Lk 6:24; 11:46). The apostles, under the direction of Jesus and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did not allow religious corruption to go unrebuked (Acts 19:26; Phil 3:2; Col 2:8; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 4:3-4; 2 Pet 2:12-19; 3:17; Jude 1:11-13).

Compromise can take many forms. It is found in not carrying a Bible, lest it offend someone. Perhaps it is not using the vernacular of Scripture, or adjusting one’s outward appearance so as to remove any suspicion that one is a Christian. It may take the form of silence, being tolerant of crude speech and immoral manners. Some even stoop to adopting outward manners that cause the sinner to be at ease – like holding a can of strong drink, or consenting to accompany a carnal friend to a worldly affair. However, whatever form compromise takes is dishonoring to the truth itself. It reveals ignoble motives and spiritual ignorance.

God’s people must not ignore the presence of corruption around them, or attempt to live as though it did not exist. The Divine mandate is to separate from competing interests, making no effort to blend with or tolerate them (2 Cor 6:15-7:1). It seems to me that this is a requisite for maintaining moral and spiritual purity.

A PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT RESPECTED

“ 34 But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.”

Here is an effort at compromise that came crashing down to the ground. It did so because the Jews themselves were not respected. Or, more precisely, their religion was held in disdain, and thus their persons were despised. This is a factor that compromisers never take into consideration.

WHEN THEY KNEW HE WAS A JEW

“But when they knew that he was a Jew . . .” Other versions read, “found out that he was a Jew,”

NKJV “recognized that he was a Jew,” NASB “realized that he was a Jew,” NIV “perceived that he was a Jew,” ASV “knowing him to be a Jew,” MRD “having known that he was a Jew,” YLT and “as soon as they saw that he was a Jew.” WILLIAMS

There was, then, a distinctiveness in the Jews. Some of it may have been owing to their appearance. However, it seems that the greater distinction was the knowledge of their religion. Even though many of them had not embraced it with zeal, their exposure to, and acquaintance with, God had produced some effects in the other nations. This distinctiveness could not be destroyed – even by their failure to adhere to the Lord and believe on His Son. They had been Divinely cultured, and that was the cause of much of the prejudice against them. It is true that the Egyptians held the offspring of Jacob in contempt because they were shepherds. As it is written, “for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians” (Gen 46:34). However, that was not the point here, for the outcry of the crowd was not one promoting silversmiths, but one that elevated their god above the One of the Hebrews.

Although there was mass confusion at this time, it did not jar the Ephesian craftsmen out of their prejudice toward the Jews. Suddenly, when recognizing that Alexander was a Jew, they had a moment of lucidity – enough to choose who they would despise, and who they would exalt. Both of those are exercises of human intelligence, and both are deliberate.

I have observed over the years that people who appear to be nearly out of their mind, losing all sense of reason, can suddenly marshal all of their rational powers against those whom they perceive to be a threat. Of course, this kind of rationality is not from above, but is a form of wisdom that is appropriately termed “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15).

WITH ONE VOICE THEY CRIED OUT

“ . . . all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.” Other versions read, “a single outcry,” NASB “shouted in unison,” NIV “began bellowing in unison,” CJB “a united cry went up from all of them,” CSB “everyone started to shout in unison,” GWN “there arose from them all one roar of shouting,” WEYMOUTH

The original intent was no doubt to make it impossible to hear the defense that Alexander attempted to make. Their contempt for the Jews, together with the perceived association of the Christians with the Jews, compelled them to take the ears of the people away from this Jew. As they continued shouting, the fervor for Diana apparently increased more and more. That is the effect that shouting can have upon people.

THE RELEVANCY OF THE SHOUT

In nearly every aspect of social life, whether athletic, political, entertainment, or general camaraderie, the excitement of a shout is common. Yet, in the field of religion, men often lisp as though they had no power to project their voice.

Of old time, there was such a thing as a “shout for mastery” (Ex 32:18). When the walls of Jericho fell down, the people were instructed, “all the people shall shout with a great shout: and the wall of the city shall fall down flat” (Josh 6:5). That is precisely what happened (John 6:20). Once, during the days of David, when he went to his brothers when Goliath was taunting the army, it is written that he came as “the host was going forth to the fight, and shouted for the battle” (1 Sam 17:20). After David had slain Goliath, “the men of Judah arose, and shouted, and pursued the Philistines” (2 Sam 17:52). Another time, “as the men of Judah shouted, it came to pass that God” Himself entered into the battle (2 Chron 13:15). During the days of Ezra, when a spiritual renewal was taking place, “All the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord” (Ezra 3:11).

The saints of God are admonished, “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for

joy , all ye that are upright in heart” (Psa 32:11; 35:11). Again they are exhorted, “ shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (Psa 47:1). And again, “let thy saints shout for joy ” (Psa 132:9). The Psalmist proclaimed that when the Lord clothed men with salvation, the “saints shall shout aloud for joy” (Psa 132:16). The inhabitants of Zion are told, “Cry out and shout ” (Isa 12:6). At the report of the working of the Lord the people of God are commanded , “ shout , ye lower parts of the earth” (Isa 44:23). Through Jeremiah the Lord said, “ shout among the chief of the nations: publish ye, praise ye” (Jer 31:7). At the prospect of blessing Israel was told, “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout , O Israel” (Zeph 3:14). Zechariah admonished the people, “ shout , O daughter of Jerusalem” (Zech 9:9). When the Lord descends from heaven, He shall do so “with a shout ” (1 Thess 4:16). Those who bring good tidings are commanded, “ lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up , be not afraid!” (Isa 40:9). In prophecies concerning the day of salvation, Isaiah said, “Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice ” (Isa 40:9). When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, it is written that he “ lifted up his voice ” (Acts 2:14).

In nearly every aspect of social life, whether athletic, political, entertainment, or general camaraderie, the excitement of a shout is common. Yet, in the field of religion, men often lisp as though they had no power to project their voice. Why should gatherings shout at an athletic event, but whisper in the congregation of the saints? What logic can be adduced for verbal articulation that cannot be easily heard and distinguished – particularly when the truth of God is spoken? Does not God admonish His people time and time again to speak with fervor. And why is this so? Because there is something about the elevated voice that impacts upon human emotion. Even when God spoke from heaven, it was associated with thunder, not a gentle and silent flowing stream (Ex 20:18; Psa 18:13; John 12:29; Rev 4:5; 8:5; 11:19; 19:6). It seems to be that it is a comely trait to speak up in matters pertaining to life and godliness. The microphone-generation should not have an undue effect upon those who speak for Jesus. The voice, like the rest of our “members,” is to be sanctified, given to God, and used for His glory. This seems apparent enough to say no more about it.

THE TOWN CLERK SPEAKS

“ 35 And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?”

On the surface, it appears as though a local political official brings some semblance of order in a shouting mob. Behind the scenes, however, it is the living God who is at work, working things together for the good of those who love Him.

THE TOWNCLERK

“And when the townclerk had appeased the people . . .” Other versions read, “city clerk had quieted,” NKJV “chief secretary had got the people quiet,” BBE “city clerk had calmed the crowd down,” CSB “chief of the city had tranquilized them,” MRD “town clerk restrained the crowd,” NAB city secretary quieted the crowd,” NET “the mayor was able to quiet them,” NLT “town clerk had pacified the people,” PNT “the main city official made the crowd be quiet,” IE “city recorder quieted the mob,” WILLIAMS and “at length the recorder got them quiet.” MONTGOMERY

As the above coin indicates, this was an important office in the Roman government. This person was responsible for recording and reading the laws of the state. It is also suggested in this text that this person probably recorded the proceedings that took place during official meetings held in the amphitheater. It is to be admitted that on paper, this meeting would not be impressive, and would probably cause indignation among the rulers, for the peace of the city had been disrupted. By way of comparison, when those who were given to “curious arts” brought their books together and burned them publically, there was not a tumultuous environment. No disruption was brought to the

city by those who had believed on the name of Jesus Christ.

I wonder how many church meetings would continue if someone of authority insisted on maintaining order, and was recording everything that was being said. Of course, those of tender heart know that there is a record written in heaven of what men are saying, and that the record will be brought up on the day of judgment (Matt 12:36).

Even the devil's crowd knows that confusion and pandemonium is an uncomely environment in which nothing of worth can be accomplished.

It is unfortunate that a sizeable segment of the Christian community has made an effort to dignify confusion by saying it is a special outpouring from God. Thus people falling down under the purported influence of the Spirit, and speaking in an unknown tongue, mingled with varied unintelligible utterances, is viewed as a blessing from God. How likely is it that the God who demands that He be loved with all of the mind would send an extraordinary blessing on His people that excluded the mind? To dignify such action, we need something more than the biased opinion of men, or those who wrest the Scriptures to suit their preconceived notions.

WHAT MAN IS THERE WHO DOES NOT KNOW

“ . . . he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana . . .”

First, the city official points out that there is no need to extol Diana in this public and tumultuous gathering – particularly by irrational shouts and tumult. There was no person in those parts that did not know the city of Ephesus worshiped “the great goddess Diana.” This was general knowledge, and there was no need to affirm it as though it was not known by everyone.

THE IMAGE WHICH FELL DOWN FROM JUPITER

“ . . . and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?” Other versions read, “and of the image which fell down from Zeus,” NKJV “the image which fell down from heaven,” NASB “the statue that fell from heaven,” NRSV “the sacred stone that fell from the sky,” RSV “Diana, which was sent down from Jupiter,” BBE “Jupiter's offspring,” DOUAY “her image which descended from heaven,” MRD “her image that fell from the sky,” NAB “her statue that fell from heaven,” NJB “whose image fell down to us from heaven,” NLT “the image which came down from Jupiter,” PNT “her holy rock,” IE “the sacred stone [image of her] that fell from the sky.” AMPLIFIED “the image which fell down from Jupiter himself,” PHILLIPS “Who doesn't know that her image which fell from heaven is right here,” CEV and “her sacred stone image that fell straight out of heaven.” MESSAGE

The differing versions present several possibilities.

- That an image fell down from Jupiter, or Zeus.
- That the image fell down from heaven.
- That the very statue in the temple fell from heaven.
- That a rock, or stone of some sort fell down from heaven.
- That Diana was sent down from Jupiter.
- That Jupiter's offspring fell down from heaven.
- That Diana's image descended from heaven.
- That a holy rock belonging to Diana fell down from heaven.
- That the sacred stone that fell from heaven was an image of Diana.

- That Jupiter himself personally sent the stone from heaven.

I gather that the image that is said to have fallen down from heaven is the image of Diana, the idol that resided in the temple dedicated to her, and of which small replicas were made by the silversmiths. This fits perfectly with the text which does not have to do with religious artifacts, but with gods that have been made with hands.

I gather that the image that is said to have fallen down from heaven is the image of Diana, the idol that resided in the temple dedicated to her, and of which small replicas were made by the silversmiths. This fits perfectly with the text which does not have to do with religious artifacts, but with gods that have been made with hands.

According to the flesh, this was an ingenious and calculating statement. Demetrius had affirmed that Paul taught that gods made with hands were no gods at all. Now the town clerk affirms that this is not the kind of God that the Ephesians worshiped (even though, in fact, the idol was made by men). By referring to “the image” as falling down from Jupiter, he will be able to say that Demetrius had not leveled a legitimate charge at Paul. This the whole meeting, he concluded, was out of order.

THE ASSUMPTION OF HEAVENLY ACTIVITY

The assumption of heavenly activity remains common among religious men. This is even true of the Christian community. All sectarianism, or denominationalism, assumes that their interpretations have been given by God, or are in precise accord with what is written. From the Roman church to the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witness, with everything in between, men are of the opinion that their religion was given by God. However, since God is “not the author of confusion” (1 Cor 14:33), this cannot be true.

I personally come from a background where claims were made of being the “true New Testament church.” Many of the congregations within this movement even put this representation on the cornerstone of their buildings: “Founded in 30 A.D.” Although the exclusivity of that particular institution was not taught with equal vigor by all of its teachers, the clear implication of their teaching led to this conclusion. Some branches of the movement, which is significantly fractured, even ruled out other segments of it upon the basis of human interpretation. Their view of this interpretation was much like that of the Roman church, which assigns infallibility to its head – a head who is chosen by the election of key men within its organization.

This whole circumstance does not differ substantially from that of our text. It unveils a human tendency that has been prominent following the expulsion of our parents from the Garden. Men have this inveterate tendency of assigning inordinate worth to their own opinions, as well as a marked proclivity to be doubtful of the affirmations that have been made by God Himself in the Holy Scriptures .

All of this is highlighted in our text. However, men of wisdom must be able to make the transition to our present time, confirming that this is a sterling example of the reasoning of fallen men. Even if this manner of thinking is done in the name of “Jesus whom Paul preacheth” (Acts 19:13), it is still foolish, and ought not to be found among those who claim identity with God through Jesus Christ the Lord.

Weak thinking cannot support critical postulates, or be the basis for religious conclusions. It must be excluded from anything associated with Christ.

A LEGITIMATE CHARGE CANNOT BE RAISED

“ 36 Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing

rashly. 37 For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.”

THE SUPREMACY OF THE LORD

Keep in mind that we are being exposed to the working of the Lord Himself. Although it may appear as though He is working behind the scenes, His hand is actually eminent in the scene. If men cannot see it, it is only because they have not been given eyes to see. It is said of ancient Israel, who was also obtuse concerning the working of the Lord, “Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day” (Deut 29:4). When speaking with the prophet Ezekiel, God spoke of a condition where the people had eyes, yet could not see. “Son of man, thou dwellest in the midst of a rebellious house, which have eyes to see, and see not; they have ears to hear, and hear not: for they are a rebellious house” (Ezek 12:2). In such a case, even though the Lord was at work at a remarkably detailed level, yet it was not apparent to those whose hearts were hardened. Their condition was imposed upon them because of their refusal to give heed to what was given to them. Therefore Isaiah said, “ He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them” (John 12:40; Isa 29:10).

Men may banter about the free will of man, human volition, and the likes. But after they have expended all of their intellectual energy, they must contend with the fact that they have been created by the God whose purpose drives the events and destiny of this “present evil world.” The prophets teach us that when calamity breaks out, there is a sense in which it can be traced back to God Himself: “shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?” (Amos 3:6). If there are deceivers afoot among men, we are taught, “the deceived and the deceiver are His” (Job 12:16). If there are heresies, or divisions, among those professing identity with God, we are taught that this is a necessity. “For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor 11:19).

Professed Christians who argue about the Sovereignty of God are brothers to the Ephesian craftsmen. They speculate about things that have been revealed, thereby exposing the hardness of their own hearts. They are like those to whom Paul had to say, “Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?” (Rom 9:19-21).

As Paul indicates in the above text, all people have not been made for the singular purpose of being honorable. Some, like Pharaoh, are intended to be used for dishonorable purposes (Rom 9:17). They are like the “bad” fish who were caught in the kingdom net, only to be at last cast away (Matt 13:47-49).

Such lofty considerations are not attended with lengthy explanations concerning their cause. Rather, they are set before us that we might know that, ultimately, everything is really traced back to God. As it is written, “For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). Men may not understand it. They may even object to such things being said. However, they have been said, and men are to believe them, whether they can understand them or not.

THE NECESSITY OF THIS DISCUSSION

This kind of discussion is necessary in order to the maintenance of both a sound mind and sound doctrine. If the matter of salvation is set within the context of the human will, men will never be able to have the confidence that is required to run the race that has been set before them (Heb 12:1-2).

There are several revealed pillars of thought that support sound and beneficial reasoning concerning the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. They begin with the basic postulate that God is “above all.” There is no one, nor is there any circumstance, to which God Himself is subject. That includes the Lord Jesus Himself, who has been exalted “above all.” It is said of that marvelous exaltation, “For He [God the Father] hath put all things under His [Jesus the Son] feet. But when He [God the Father] saith all things are put under Him [Jesus the Son] , it is manifest that He [God the Father] is excepted, which did put all things under Him [Jesus the Son] . And when all things shall be subdued unto Him [Jesus the Son] , then shall the Son also Himself be subject unto Him [God the Father] that put all things under Him [Jesus the Son] , that God may be all in all” (1 Cor 15:27-28).

If God is not subject to the One who has been exalted above all else, including every name that has been named, you may be sure He is not subject to anyone or anything else.

The absolute and

What appears to be nothing more than opposition is actually a patch of desert through which the sons are passing en route to glory. Viewed in any other way, the text will become confusing, for it appears as though there is a window in the lives of Paul and his co-laborers when the enemy has the upper hand.

unquestionable supremacy of God is affirmed in Scripture. “And He blessed him, and said, Blessed be Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth ” (Gen 14:19). Again, “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36). “One God and Father of all, who is above all , and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:6). Sound reasoning is based upon the cognizance of Divine domination. If this fact is denied, there is nothing of eternal value that can be apprehended.

- **GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE.** The fact of God’s “eternal purpose” is stated in Ephesians 3:11. “According to the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is a purpose that determines what God does, for He works everything “according to the purpose” (Eph 1:11). Although this purpose includes the consideration of men, there is a sense in which it stands separate and apart from them. This is seen in the fact that it is purpose “in Christ Jesus.” Even when men are “called” by God, it is not according to their need, but “according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

- **DETERMINED IN CHRIST.** So far as the execution of this purpose is concerned, it is “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:11). The Son of God forms the perimeter of this purpose, so that no benefit can be realized from it, apart from fellowship with Christ, into which men are called (1 Cor 1:9). So far as beneficial involvement by God Himself, it all hinges on one’s productive and fruitful participation with Christ (Heb 3:14).

- **CHRIST EXALTED ABOVE ALL.** Following His vicarious death (Isa 53:5), the removal of sin (John 1:29; Heb 1:3), and destruction of the devil (Heb 2:14) and his works (1 John 3:8), Jesus was exalted. There is no name, no power, and no domain over which Jesus does not presently preside. The solitary exception is God Himself, who alone is not subject to Christ (1 Cor 15:27).

- **GOD CHOOSES A PEOPLE.** There is a people in the earth who have been chosen by God. This is not a human speculation, but a Divine affirmation. These people are referred to as a “chosen generation” (1 Pet 2:9). They are said to have been “chosen in Him (Christ) before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4). Further, they were chosen “to salvation” by the means of “sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth” (2 Thess 2:13).

- **THE PEOPLE ARE GIVEN TO CHRIST.** Those whom God has chosen belong to Him. Not only has He created them, He has made full provision for the liquidation of the

debt created by their sin. He has also regenerated, or re-created them, so that they are his “sons and daughters” (2 Cor 6:18). In strict keeping with His purpose, God has given these chosen ones to Christ Jesus, to shepherd and care for them. Ultimately, He is bringing them to glory (Heb 2:10). Jesus confessed that God had given them to Him (John 6:39; John 17:7,9,11,21).

These realities are all fully operative in our text. In spite of the apparent circumstances, the God of heaven is working according to His purpose, and the Lord Jesus is bringing the children who have been given to Him to glory. What appears to be nothing more than opposition is actually a patch of desert through which the sons are passing en route to glory. Viewed in any other way, the text will become confusing, for it appears as though there is a window in the lives of Paul and his co-laborers when the enemy has the upper hand. However, this is emphatically not the case. This is all being done under the general canopy of Divine working. As it is written, “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12). He is bringing the sons to glory, perfecting them, and working all things together for their ultimate good.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF OUR TEXT

In our text, God has brought confusion among the people just as surely as He did at Babel (Gen 11:7). He has also turned the heart of the leader of the people like a river of water, thereby changing the whole direction of this assembly (Prov 21:1). Suddenly, things have turned for the benefit of the ones targeted for persecution. In the words of Scripture, “This is the LORD'S doing; it is marvelous in our eyes” (Psa 118:23).

There is a very definite sense in which the will of the Lord is being worked out among men – even among those who are not consciously subject to Him. While this reality is disputed among religious men, those who are of faith can sense not only the reality of this, but its necessity as well. God will use a speech made by an unregenerate government official to diffuse a determined persecution.

THESE THINGS CANNOT BE SPOKEN AGAINST

“Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against . . .” From the perspective of the town clerk, the commitment of the Ephesian citizenry to Diana was so settled that it could not be unseated by the words or works of Paul. Of course, there had been sufficient inroads made in the idolatrous community, so that even the living of the silversmiths was now jeopardized. However, this man dismisses that, together with the fact of the massive book-burning that had taken place in the city. He apparently feels that things will eventually revert to the Ephesus-norm.

YE OUGHT TO BE QUIET

“ . . . ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly.” Other versions read, “keep calm and do nothing rash,” NASB “it would be better for you to be quiet, and do nothing unwise,” BBE “and not do anything foolish,” GWN “ought to be tranquil, and to do nothing with precipitancy,” MRD “and not do anything reckless,” NET “You must stop and think before you do anything wrong.” IE and “(keep yourselves in check) and do nothing rashly.” AMPLIFIED

The word “rashly” is translated from a word meaning, “falling forward, headlong. . . precipitate, rash, reckless,” THAYER “thoughtless,” FRIBERG “pertaining to impetuous and reckless behavior - 'reckless, impetuous,” LOUW-NIDA and “hastily.” LIDDELL-SCOTT In the English language the word “rash” means “proceeding from lack of deliberation or caution : acting, done, or expressed with undue haste or disregard for consequences : imprudently involving or incurring risk.” In other words, it is conduct that is more characteristic of the brute creation than of man, who is made in the image of God.

From the Scriptural perspective this kind of compulsive behavior is referred as being hasty, or making haste. When prophesying of the era of the Christ, Isaiah said, “he that believeth shall not make haste” (Isa 28:16). In other words, believing stops a person from acting compulsively, rashly, or without due thought. The tendency to react impulsively, erupting in thoughtless words and deeds and in a state of hotheadedness, is an area in which Satan is especially active. There have been persecutions launched against the saints of God that were driven by this kind of reaction. In fact, that was the intent of the gathering described in our text. Were it not for the government of God, His children would not be able to survive such behavior. However, the Lord is at the helm of ship-humanity, and He is governing the world with His people in mind.

Therefore it is written, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain ” (Psa 76:10). It is written that God “stilleth . . . the tumult of the people” (Psa 65:7). Just as God has established borders for the massive seas of the earth, beyond which they cannot pass (Job 26:10; 38:11; Psa 104:9; Jer 5:22), so God has set the bounds for human wrath and opposition, and He will not allow the impulsiveness of man to go beyond those borders. An example of the wrath of man praising God is the death of Christ. Men gathered together against Christ, thinking to rid themselves of His restraining influence. But God took their action and used it for His own purpose, making an end of sin (Heb 9:26), destroying the devil (Col 2:15; Heb 2:14), and opening a living way to heaven (Heb 10:20).

Our text is an example of the Divine restraint of human wrath. It depicts the hand of God reaching into earth and putting shackles on human intentions.

The idea here is that neither Paul nor those aligned with him, had pilfered things from the temple dedicated to Diana. Paul had soundly denounced idolatry, but he had not entered into the Ephesian temple and removed some temple artifact to destroy it.

From the perspective of the town clerk, it was important that order be maintained and the civil authorities not be called into the matter. Even the heathen know that civility and order are proper. However, there is more to this matter than that. God has come to the aid of His servants Gaius and Aristarchus. He does not make them physically superior to their enemies like Samson. He does not move the brethren to secretly escort them out of the city, like the Thessalonian brethren. Here the Lord whistles, as it were, for the town clerk to step into the situation and deliver Paul’s companions from danger. The words of the official were spoken to calm the situation so as not to require further intervention. However, this occasion, as all others, is being driven by the Divine agenda, “For the kingdom is the LORD’S: and He is the Governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28).

THESE MEN ARE NOT ROBBERS OR BLASPHEMERS

“For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.”

Now the official chides Demetrius and his cohorts for acting compulsively and without due regard for civil authority. As I have already said, there was a Divine intention being fulfilled here, even though the official was completely unaware of it.

They Are Not Robbers of Churches

Other versions read, “robbers of temples,” NKJV “temple robbers,” NRSV “sacrilegious,” RSV “doing damage to the holy place,” BBE “temple-plunderers,” DARBY neither committed sacrilege,” GENEVA “have stolen nothing from the temple,” NLT and “plunderers of the temple.” PHILLIPS

Here, the word “churches” is not translated from the Greek word **evkkllhsi,ai** (ek-klay-see-ai) as in Acts 9:31; 15:41; and 16:5. In those texts, the reference was clusters of believers who gathered

together. Here, however, the reference is to a structure. The Greek word used is ἱεροσυλοῦν (hee-er-os'-oo-los), a compounded word that puts "robbers" and "temple" together. The expression "robbers of churches," or "robbers of temples," is the translation of the single Greek word of reference. This is the only place it is used in the entirety of Scripture. The verb form of the Greek word (it is in the noun form here) is found in Romans 2:22, where it is translated "commit sacrilege," KJV/NKJV/NASB,NIV,NRSV "rob temples," NKJV and "robbing the sanctuary and doing sacrilege." AMPLIFIED

The idea here is that neither Paul nor those aligned with him, had pilfered things from the temple dedicated to Diana. Paul had soundly denounced idolatry, but he had not entered into the Ephesian temple and removed some temple artifact to destroy it. This kind of action was taken by several Old Testament saints who were noted for destroying physical things associated with idolatry (2 Chron14:3; 23:17; 31:1; 32:12). The distinction is that such action took place because idolatry had arisen among the Israelites themselves.

Here, however, the believers did not enter into the temple of Diana to rob or destroy anything there. That was not the manner of those who believed in Christ. They overthrew idolatry by teaching, not by overt activity.

They Are Not Blasphemers

Other versions read, "blasphemers of our goddess," NASB "talking against our goddess," BBE "speak injuriously of your goddess," DARBY "insult our goddess," GWN "reviled our goddess," MRD "spoken against our goddess," NLT "despisers of your goddess," PNT "speaking evil of your goddess," YLT "defamed her," LIVING "said anything bad about her," IE "abusive speech against our goddess," WILLIAMS and "blasphemous speech about our goddess." AMPLIFIED

If the assessment of the town clerk is true, and there is no reason to suspect that it is not, we have a confirmation of the nature of Paul's preaching. He did not launch into a diatribe against the idols, but simply classed put them all together as being "no gods." Rather than his message being an expose of particular false god's, it was a proclamation of the true God and His Christ.

If the assessment of the town clerk is true, and there is no reason to suspect that it is not, we have a confirmation of the nature of Paul's preaching. He did not launch into a diatribe against the idols, but simply classed put them all together as being "no gods" (19:26). Rather than his message being an expose of particular false god's, it was a proclamation of the true God and His Christ. This is underscored repeatedly in the book of Acts, which speaks of the focus of good preaching.

FOCUSED PREACHING

- Jesus Christ is said to have been "preached" (3:20).
- They "preached through Jesus the resurrection of the dead" (4:2).
- The disciples "ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (5:42).
- They "preached Christ" (8:5; 9:20).
- It is written that "preached the word of the Lord" (15:36), and "preached the Gospel" (8:25; 16:10).
- Jesus was "preached" (8:35). Preaching was done "in the name of Jesus" (9:27).
- They "preached the word of God" (13:5; 14:25).
- Through Jesus they "preached . . . the forgiveness of sins" (13:38).
- It is written that they "preached the gospel" (14:7,21).

- They preached Jesus, that He “is Christ” (17:3).
- They preached “Jesus and the resurrection” (17:18).

Paul did teach that men “ought to turn from these vanities unto the living God” (14:15). That, of course, was stated when the people of Lystra sought to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas. In Athens Paul also affirmed, “we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device” (Acts 17:29). However, he did not engage in inflammatory speech about the false gods themselves.

True preaching is to thinking people. It is by means of holding forth the superior that the inferior is made known. The heart of the preaching of Paul and the other apostles was the Person of Christ and His indispensable ministry. They did not hold classes in the weakness of false religion, but taught of the superiority of Divine wisdom as it is revealed in Christ Jesus.

When detailed instruction was given concerning corruption, it was generally to the church, and that because it had either crept into the church, or was about to do so.

The Danger of A Distorted Emphasis

There is a subtle danger in maintaining a distorted emphasis. I speak particularly of those who speak in the name of Jesus Christ. One of the indications of a falling away is when the accent of preaching is changed. There are those, for example, whose preaching centers in the developing of good marriages. Others accent the home, or family itself, majoring in nearly every message on that facet of life. Still, others choose to emphasize personal success, particularly in the form of health and wealth. Still others are on a crusade restore the nation to a state of godliness. Some choose to continually speak of abortion and the right to life. Others insist on underscoring political freedom and the right to pursue personal interests.

There are other seemingly good emphases, such as apologetics – seeking to prove there is a God and that the Bible is true. Others speak and write extensively about the flaws in heathen religion. Some are specialists in historic Christianity, and are zealous to restore the ancient example of the church of the living God. Some make it their aim to unite all professing believers.

It is not that any of these things are wrong of themselves. Yet, all of them are wrong as an emphasis. There is not a solitary example of such a focus in the Word of God. This is because such things are more man-centered than God-centered. They also depend on human analysis rather than Divine revelation and proclamation.

In my judgment, and I am dogmatic on this, it is never right to upstage the Lord Jesus by assuming another emphasis. The nobility of the cause has nothing whatsoever to do with sound thinking. If any other emphasis is valid, then men are not made complete in Christ. If the only way to correct waywardness is to continually hammer upon it, then faith really does not alter the perspectives and persuasions of men.

I realize that the above position evinces a certain contempt for religious careers, and the building of specialized ministries. However, if the thrust of preaching is not Christ, I do not know how it is possible to say God will undergird the cause – regardless of its seeming nobility. If God has hinged everything to Christ, and given Him to be the “Head over everything for the church” (Eph 1:22), what valid reason can be adduced for adopting any other emphasis. May God hasten the day when those who wear the name of Jesus are noted for their proclamation and exposition of Him, His accomplishments, and His ministry. When this happens, erroneous emphases will be apparent.

IT SHALL BE DETERMINED IN A LAWFUL ASSEMBLY

“ 38 Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. 39 But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. 40 For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.”

The town clerk does not rely upon mere political authority, but appeals to the reasoning of the Ephesian mob. His purpose is to avoid being called into question about the inciting of the riot. However, God Himself is in this whole matter, moving upon the people to act in favor of His own people.

THE NEED TO UNDERSTAND

In order to truly benefit from this record, the godly must be able to make the transition to their own lives, beholding and acknowledging the truth of Hebrews 13:5-6; “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” As confirmed in this text, God being with us and not forsaking us does not mean we will not pass through troublous times. When Gaius and Aristarchus were caught and dragged into the arena, it was probably not with gentleness and kindness. The insensitive soul might have reasoned, “Why is all of this happening? Where is the Lord?” Such thinking is too foolish to be found in the minds of those who live by faith. The godly will be saved **IN** trouble, like Noah was saved **DURING** a flood, Daniel **IN** the lion’s den, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego **IN** the furnace of fire.

Even the law recognized the necessity of legitimacy in registering a complaint against someone – that is, a case in which one person had truly disadvantaged or harmed another. Among civilized people, and even among some barbarians, it is recognized that one person ought not to render disadvantages to another.

In our time, there appears to be a great weakness among professing Christians concerning this type of thinking. There is also a reason for this serious deficiency. Much of the preaching of our time centers in the well being and success of the believer. The gospel that is being preached is man-centered rather than Christ-centered. It is a kind of dumbed-down self-help system designed to make people think they can do better, be better, and have more things – and that God will help them in these matters. This frothy nonsense is presented as though it represented the Divine focus, the reason for Christ’s reign, and the intention behind salvation. Having added the pseudo-science of psychology to its feeble arsenal, the nominal church has now become the purveyor of self-help methodologies that require the assistance of men more than the help of God Himself. All of this has created a religious environment that generates naive and uninformed disciples. What has always been common to believers now appears strange and unreasonable. When trouble arises, it raises questions instead of faith, and murmuring instead of prayers.

By way of contrast, our text does not speak of the impact of this trouble upon Gaius and Aristarchus. Instead, it focuses on how heaven reacted to their circumstance, moving upon men to act in the interest of God’s children, even though they did not know that was the circumstance.

IF THEY HAVE A MATTER AGAINST ANY MAN

Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man . . .” Other versions read, “have a case against anyone,” NKJV “have a complaint against any man,” NASB “have a grievance against anybody,” NIV and “have a protest to make against any man.” BBE

Even the law recognized the necessity of legitimacy in registering a complaint against someone – that is, a case in which one person had truly disadvantaged or harmed another. Among civilized

people, and even among some barbarians, it is recognized that one person ought not to render disadvantages to another.

They felt the genuineness of a charge had to be substantiated. Whatever the motive may have been, this was sound thinking and reflected the intention for civil government – to encourage those who do good, and avenge those who do wrong (Rom 13:3-4). Those who imagine the God-ordained purpose of government is to meet the needs of humanity are not correct. That may be appropriate in encouraging those who do good, but it is not the primary purpose for civil authority. The difficulties our present government is having is largely traceable to the insufficient manner in which it carries out the revealed intention for its existence: to encourage those who do good, and to punish those who do evil. It is interesting to note that the heathen government of Rome, in spite of its moral deficiencies and idolatry, was more in harmony with this purpose than our own government. Our text is a case in point, as well as Paul's later appeal to Caesar as a means of experiencing some justice in the case that had been leveled against him by the Jews (Acts 25:11; 28:19).

THE LAW IS OPEN

“ . . . the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another” Other versions read, “the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another,” NKJV “the courts are in session and proconsuls are available; let them bring charges against one another,” NASB “the courts are open and proconsuls are [available]; let them bring charges against one another [legally].” AMPLIFIED

In the legal system of Rome, arrangements were made for registering legitimate complaints immediately: “the courts are in session, and the proconsuls are available.” NASB This approach reduced the possibility of anarchy or insurrection. Means were made available to the people to settle grievances before they infected the fabric of society, or resulted in some form of violence.

Over these senatorial provinces the senate appointed by lot yearly an officer who was called “proconsul,” who exercised purely civil functions, had no power over life and death, and was attended by one or more legates. He was neither girt with the sword nor wore the military dress. He was chosen out of the body of the senate; and it was customary, when any one's consulate expired, to send him as a proconsul into some province . . . The proconsuls decided cases of equity and justice, either privately in their palaces, where they received petitions, heard complaints, and granted writs under their seals; or publicly in the common hall, with the formalities generally observed in the courts at Rome. McCLINTOK & STRONGS'S

Other deputies, or proconsuls, that are mentioned in the book of Acts include Sergius Paulus on the Island of Crete (Acts 13:7-12), and Gallio, who was the deputy or proconsul of Achaia (Acts 18:12). It is interesting that in these two cases, as well as the one before us, the officials were in favor of the people of God. These are most excellent examples of the meaning of Romans 14:18: “For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men ” (Rom 14:18). Again the saints are admonished concerning, “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men ” (2 Cor 8:21). It is also said of Jesus during His youth, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man ” (Luke 2:52). It is to be noted that these texts refer to men of integrity who have some aptitude in discerning good and evil. I say this because believers are, under no circumstances, to conduct their lives in an effort to please men. Should they do this, they abruptly cease to be the servants of God. “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). However, we are to live in such a manner as to pass the approval of discerning men, who can decipher between right and wrong and just and unjust. This would have particular reference to civil authorities, not to the fickle men of the street.

In the Roman form of government, provisions were made in the legal system for both parties to

present their cases to the proconsuls

This kind of arrangement antedated the Roman government, being put in place by the God of Israel. Early in their history, judges were established among the people for the purpose of resolving differences in a timely and just manner (Ex 21:22,28; 22:9; Deut 1:16; 16:19). Jesus also spoke of this arrangement, admonishing His disciples to avoid the necessity of a judge entering into their disputes (Matt 5:25; Luke 12:58).

In our day, it almost sounds strange to hear of a procedure that allows for the timely and just resolution of a legal dispute. This is certainly not the way that our legal system works. This is largely owing to the practical abandonment of God's law, and the institutions He has put in place for the purpose of maintaining social order. This entire circumstance has arisen because of the recalcitrance of the professed church. She is "the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15), but has been obstreperous to her duty. As of this time (2009), we are in the third generation of those who have not been exposed to the truth of God – at least not to any measurable degree. Thus the demand for justice has given way to the interests of those with money and influence.

Justice is not guaranteed by government, but by the conscience of the people – a conscience that has been formed by the truth of God. Of old time, God required that His people, Israel, "do justice" (Isa 56:1). When that justice was not present, the people were soundly rebuked by the prophets: "None calleth for justice, nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity" (Isa 59:4). How poignantly this is stated by Isaiah: "And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off : for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter" (Isa 59:14). Notice that the absence of justice was preceded by truth falling in the street because men did not take hold of it.

Solemnly Jeremiah told the people, "did not thy father eat and drink, and do judgment and justice , and then it was well with him?" (Jer 22:15). Ezekiel cried out, " Thus saith the Lord GOD; Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice , take away your exactions from my people, saith the Lord GOD" (Ezek 45:9). At one point the prophet Micah summarized God's requirement for Israel: "He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly , and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8).

The point here is that the civil government had appointed a convenient and thorough manner for addressing social difficulties. The people were not permitted to take matters into their own hands, for that would lead to anarchy and social rebellion.

I believe you will find a certain consistency in human history on this matter. When the truth of God was not upheld by His people, there was a marked tendency to injustice. In fact, much of the injustice takes place within the professed church itself, just as it did in Israel when they persecuted, and even killed, their own prophets. This is not to mention their opposition to Jesus Christ, the stoning of Stephen, the hounding of Paul, and the sanction of Herod arresting Peter. I myself have been the recipient of injustice by organized religion. I could easily recite the names of a staggering number of believers who have suffered under the bludgeon of injustice from the professed church. Were you able to summon to the witness stand those who have been treated unjustly by their religious peers, your mind would not be able to process what you saw.

I know of no available resource that is noted for resolving religious conflicts, doing so in as timely and just manner. By Divine appointment, the Jews had such resources. The early church could take serious issues to the apostles for resolution, as demonstrated in the congregation in Antioch of Syria (Acts 15:1-2). The church at Corinth, particularly those of the house of Chloe, made inquiry of Paul concerning certain uncomely manners that existed in Corinth – and received a prompt answer (1 Cor 1:11).

Why is this present disinterest in godly justice present in the church? It is for the same reason that is was found in Israel: “truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey : and the LORD saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment” (Isa 59:14-15). This circumstance still displeases the Lord – especially now that Jesus has been exalted to His right hand, and adequate resources have been made available to men. The thing that makes the whole situation disgraceful is that a town-clerk of Ephesus, himself validating the worship of Diana, had a greater sense of justice than many Christian leaders of our day. He was able to discern wrong motives more quickly, and stood against a mob in the interest of justice.

OTHER MATTERS REQUIRE A LAWFUL ASSEMBLY

“But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly.” Other versions read, “legal assembly,” NIV “regular assembly,” NRSV “in the place assigned by law for an assembly,” MRD “regular City Council meetings,” LIVING and “regular town meeting of the people.” IE

The point here is that the civil government had appointed a convenient and thorough manner for addressing social difficulties. The people were not permitted to take matters into their own hands, for that would lead to anarchy and social rebellion. Even the Roman government knew that a house divided against itself will fall (Matt 12:28). Further, especially in a social setting, division is the ultimate child of controversy.

Also observe that the civil system made provision for the protection of the society – it held town meetings, and the leader was the town clerk. Even the heathen knew that the undue exaltation of personal interests was not proper. The whole of society must be the preeminent concern, not the rights of the individual. This, of course, can only be done within the broader perimeter of justice, which seeks the encouragement of good and the punishment of evil.

A Principle for Believers

The same principle holds true in the body of Christ. That is because God Himself is the Author of both. Of course, within the church, the principle is carried out more fully, as well as more precisely. Solemnly believers are told, “Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth” (1 Cor 10:24). Again, speaking for himself Paul said, “Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many , that they may be saved” (1 Cor 10:33).

How is it possible to fit that into a health and wealth gospel – which is really no gospel at all? Again, when dispensing spiritual gifts to the church, the Divine objective was not to make the individual satisfied and successful, but to bring profit to the whole body. Thus it is written, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal ” (1 Cor 12:7). Other versions read, “the profit of all,” NKJV “the common good,” NASB “the common good of everyone,” GWN “the general good,” NJB “profit the congregation,” TNT and “helping the entire church.” LIVING Again believers are admonished, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others ” (Phil 2:4).

Once again, the approval of men, or their acceptance, postulates men of integrity who are not personally hostile to believers. There is no possible way that any other kind of people could approve of those who live unto the Lord, not for themselves, and in the interest of others. This is why Paul committed himself to the consciences of his readers: “But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God ” (2 Cor 4:2).

THE DANGER OF HAVING NO CAUSE

“For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.” Other versions read, “give an account for this disorderly gathering,” NKJV “account for this commotion,” NIV “justify this commotion,” NRSV “because we have assembled needlessly, and been tumultuous without a cause,” MRD “if Rome demands an explanation, we won't know what to say,” NLT and “called to render an account and of being accused of rioting because of [this commotion].” AMPLIFIED

The town clerk was thinking of giving an account to the authorities, and he knew that it would not be possible to give an adequate one. Of course, Demetrius and those who had been stirred by his emotional speech had conveniently forgotten that they might have to defend their action before the legal authorities to which they were subject. Like all who are dominated by self-justification, seeking their own interests, they gave no thought to the future, or how this would appear to those who had a larger interest than that of the rioting mob.

That is what sin does to those it rules. It blots from the mind all thoughts of accountability, and facing one greater than themselves, to whom they will have to give an explanation. However, they will have to do so anyway. In this text, it was possible that the crowd would have to face the Roman authorities and explain what was worthy of stirring up the whole city. The town clerk knew they would not be able to give a satisfactory answer to the officials – even though, at the time, their gathering seemed perfectly reasonable to them. However, that was only because they were blinded by rage, and dulled by their self-centeredness.

By failing to teach extensively on this subject, the preachers and teachers have put the people in a very precarious situation. A due consideration of the day of judgment will put up a roadblock to the expression of sin. It will lessen the possibility of acting in an ungodly manner.

THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

I cannot leave this section without commenting on the great day of accountability that is on the appointed horizon – the day of judgment. Unlike the time the town clerk feared, the day of judgment is inevitable. It is, after all, “appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment” (Heb 9:27). Solemnly men are reminded that God “commandeth all men every where to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Even those in Christ are warned, “So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12). Again we are told, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

I know that it is not fashionable these days to speak with certainty about the day of judgment. There are multitudes of professing Christians who have never heard a sound exegesis of the day of judgment. They live their lives day in and day out without a solitary thought of standing before God in that day. There are eight Scriptural texts that use the expression “the day of judgment” (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Mk 6:11; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:7; 1 John 4:17). There are one hundred and ninety two Scriptural references to that day (Twenty-eight from Genesis through Malachi, and one hundred and sixty-four from Matthew through Revelation). Jesus Himself spoke of that time one hundred and nine times. The book of Acts refers to it six times. The epistles teach of it thirty-eight times, and the Revelation contains eleven such references. What possible reason can be adduced for the remarkable silence on this subject in the pulpits of the land?

By failing to teach extensively on this subject, the preachers and teachers have put the people in a very precarious situation. A due consideration of the day of judgment will put up a roadblock to the expression of sin. It will lessen the possibility of acting in an ungodly manner. What person has ever

asked himself the question, “How will I explain this action to God on the day of judgment?” without feeling a compulsion to draw back from sinful expressions. Even when people have been taught concerning this appointed day, they must ponder it for it to have a proper effect upon them. But what of those who do not hear about it – those whose minds are never brought to process the thought of standing before the Judge of all the earth and giving an account of what they have done, whether it is good or bad? What are the practical possibilities of such people consistently resisting the devil or living by faith?

The churches of our day should not allow themselves to be exposed to preaching and teaching that excludes timely and insightful references to the day of judgment. If the town clerk of Ephesus, with not so much as a solitary thought about the God of heaven and the day of judgment, thought it necessary to bring a halt to a hostile gathering, what ought to be said of some of the gatherings of our time? Verily, here is an example of one of the sayings of our blessed Lord, “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8). Salvation makes no allowance for such a condition. True wisdom is to reside with believers, and all the provisions have been given for this.

HE DISMISSED THE ASSEMBLY

“ 41 And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.” Other versions read, “he sent the meeting away,” BBE “Then he dismissed them, and they dispersed,” NLT “he let the congregation depart,” TNT “they dispersed,” LIVING “Then all of the people left,” IE and “he sent them home.” MESSAGE

Religious men would do well to follow the line of reasoning presented in this text. If the gathering cannot be explained in a rational manner, and if it will put them at a disadvantage on the day of judgment, the meeting ought to be dismissed.

There was no further need for the assembly, seeing that it was dangerous and unwise. Therefore, after presenting his case, the town clerk sent the people away. Apparently the mob saw the sense of what he said. Not wanting to put themselves at an unnecessary disadvantage, they consented to bring the meeting to a halt. This confirmed their primary interest in themselves, for they had thought nothing of dragging Gaius and Aristarchus into the amphitheater, and mounting a formal attack on Paul. However, when it came to their own experience, they did everything possible to take the political pressure off of themselves.

Religious men would do well to follow the line of reasoning presented in this text. If the gathering cannot be explained in a rational manner, and if it will put them at a disadvantage on the day of judgment, the meeting ought to be dismissed.

MY OWN EXPERIENCE

Sometime during 1993-1994, one of the local congregations experienced a serious upheaval. The minister had been so aggressive in turning people from darkness to light, that they were outgrowing their present facility. The leaders of the congregation, together with those who held them in high regard, opposed the influx of the new people, because they had come from a crude manner of life. Although genuinely converted, they were not schooled in the traditions of the leaders, and could not consent to the brevity and practical restraints that the leaders were imposing upon the people. After a lengthy period of friction, a general meeting was called to resolve the differences – at least that is what the leaders said. I was personally asked to moderate this meeting, and consented to do so.

When I arrived at the meeting, the building was filled, and an unparalleled spirit of hostility was present. I had stepped into a war zone. The new and zealous converts sat on one side of the auditorium, together with a few of the members who agreed with them. The opposing members sat on the other

side. Angry stares were all about, and several of the people were ready to erupt in lengthy speeches, the presentation of complaints, and the iteration of the official traditions of the church.

I called the meeting to order and informed them we would begin with a time of prayer. I suggested the prayer be one of intercession, in which reasons for the church remaining be presented to God. I called for everyone to kneel before the Lord, assuming the posture of contrition and submission. Most of the people consented to this. After informing them that I would close the prayer session, the time of prayer began. After at least five rather lengthy minutes there had not been a single syllable uttered from the audience. I waited for another few minutes that confirmed no one in the audience was going to prayer. I then offered a petition to the Lord, after which I stood up, with the others assuming a seated position.

Instantly, hands shot up all through the audience, as people were anxious to present their cause. I refused to allow any of them to speak, saying that if they could not speak to God about this unfortunate situation, they had no right to speak to anyone else about it. I asked them to rise, pronounced the benediction, and sent them home. The people did leave courteously. I suppose that is the same way the people disbanded in the Ephesian amphitheater. Even so, I felt the name of the Lord was reproached, and His great salvation demeaned by such crude and uncivilized behavior. I was further called into account, and criticized, by local religious authorities for having anything to do with the gathering. I dismissed their objections as idle chatter driven by a sectarian spirit.

My point is that there are still volatile situations among professing believers that require the presence a “town clerk” type of individual – one who can assess the situation. However, there has been such a remarkable degeneracy in church life that people recoil from the correction of trouble, thereby allowing spiritual wounds to fester.

CONCLUSION

This text has confirmed the necessity of godly wisdom and of properly assessing a situation. Concerning the involvement of Paul in this event, the brethren, together with several sympathetic rulers saw that it was not wise to attend such a gathering. This was not simply something they saw, they acted upon their perception, thereby relieving Paul of a fruitless endeavor.

One might ask why Paul needed to be restrained in the first place. Should he not have known the proper response without being so directed by his brethren? We know that he saw the wisdom of their counsel, because he submitted to it. Here, it is necessary to see the nature of the body of Christ. The members, even when they are apostles, are in various ways dependent upon the rest of the body. This is because the Head of the body ministers through its various members, not restricting His direction to the apostles. For example, there were times when Paul had necessities that had to be met by other people (Phil 4:16; 2 Cor 12:10). There were times when he was succored, or helped, by other saints (Rom 16:2). Some brethren “ministered unto him” (Acts 19:22). On another occasion Julius, a centurion that was guarding him en route to Rome as a prisoner, “courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself” (Acts 27:3). By the hands of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus Paul was “refreshed” (1 Cor 16:17-18). When he was in Thessalonica the Philippian brethren sent “once and again” unto his “necessity” (Phil 4:16). Although he was an apostle who “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10), yet he could be “comforted together” with the brethren in Rome by their “mutual faith” (Rom 1:12). That is simply how the body of Christ works.

Add to this the assistance that was rendered by the town clerk of Ephesus, thereby giving an advantage to Paul. Julius the centurion “courteously entreated Paul,” allowing him to go to his friends for refreshment (Acts 27:3). Later, when the ship on which Paul was sailing was breaking up during a fierce storm, a centurion was moved to not allow the killing of the prisoners, for he “was willing to

save Paul” (Acts 27:43). Publius, a “chief man of the island” of Melita, lodged Paul and Silas for three days, and came to be healed of a “bloody flux” (Acts 28:7). The barbarians that occupied that island, where Paul and two hundred and seventy-five others were stranded due to a shipwreck, showed them “no little kindness,” even kindling a fire for them to dry out and warm themselves (Acts 28:2). When many of the island were healed, they honored them with many honors, and gave them all of the supplies they needed when the time came for them to depart (Acts 28:9-10).

The point is that the Lord cares for His own, often using influential people of the world, as well as the members of His own body – the church.

It is good to remember these things when you face difficulties in this life. When the saints are put to a disadvantage by illness, financial straits, or the hardships created by natural disasters, God can marshal a troop to sustain them. He may draw a doctor like Luke into the situation, or a political official, or an employee of the government. He may incline a saint you have never before met, and some with whom you are familiar. People may see your situation and be inclined to render assistance to you, even though they do not know why they are acting in such a gracious manner. “The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1). He can bring it all together to sustain you – and He is forward to do so for those who live by faith. Take heart, child of God, and never yield to despair. These things have been written for our admonition (Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11).

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #83

PAUL PREACHES AT TROAS

20:1 “And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia. 2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, 3 And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. 4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5 These going before tarried for us at Troas. 6 And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. 7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. 8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together. 9 And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutyclus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. 10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him. 11 When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed. 12 And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.” (Acts 20:1-12)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

To this point, a marked emphasis has been placed upon ministering to the saints, as well as to the Jews, to whom Jesus was specifically sent first (John 1:11; Acts 3:26; 13:20,33), as well as the rest of the world, or all sinners (John 3:16; 4:42; Acts 26:23; 1 Tim 1:15). Paul ministered to the saints as

he traveled, finally arriving at Troas, where he spent seven days. He met with them on the Lord's Day, as they came

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- **HE GAVE THEM MUCH EXHORTATION (20:2-3a)**
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- **AFTER THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD (20:6a)**
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- **CONCLUSION**

together to "break bread." This is the occasion when a young man named Eutychus fell from a third story window, and "was taken up dead." Paul raised him from the dead, and even though he had already been preaching for a long time, continued to talk "till break of day." The brethren profited much from his presence, "and were not a little comforted." Something of the mind-set and manners of genuine disciples is made known in this familiar text. It is essential that we glean from it as much as possible, and not be hindered by cherished and empty traditions.

THE MARVEL OF A DISTORTED EMPHASIS

The activities recorded in the book of Acts reflect Divine priorities. There is an undeniable accent in the actions as well as in the message that was preached. It is this emphasis that has been greatly distorted and misrepresented. This distortion is wholly owing to an institutional emphasis that is not at all in harmony with the revealed objective of God Himself. This target is stated with great pungency in Scripture, and, like a diamond, is viewed from several different objectives.

- **CONCERNING PEOPLE.** If we view this from the perspective of the people involved, it is to conform them to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29-30). This is in order that the bride might be presented to Christ "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such things" (Eph 5:27). The process in which these appointments are accomplished is spiritual growth (Eph 4:14; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18).

- **CONCERNING THE FOE.** Seen from the standpoint of the adversary it is to "destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3: 8).

- **CHRIST'S PRESENT ACTIVITY.** Considered from the viewpoint of Christ's current activity, it is to bring "many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10), and ever live to make intercession for them (Heb 7:25). It can also be summarized as Jesus nourishing and cherishing the church (Eph 5:29).

- **DELIVERED FROM THE WORLD.** From a broad perspective, the Divine purpose is to deliver us "from this present evil world" (Gal 1:4). That means removing men from the worldly order like Israel was delivered from Egypt. Absolutely no provision is made in Christ for maintaining closeness with the world. This too is a process that spans the entire lifetime of those who are in Christ Jesus They are continually cleansing themselves of all filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor 7:1). The reason for the continuation of this work is that there are ongoing discoveries of spiritual contaminants as the people grow up into Christ

in all things.

The priority of the saints ought to be obvious. Doctrinally, this is the reason for Christ's intercession, the Holy Spirit's intercession, and the ministry of the holy angels. All of the spiritual gifts are given to the church and for the church

All of this has a point at which the various processes begin – an initiation point. That beginning point is the commencement of the salvation of sinners, for which cause Christ came into the world (1 Tim 1:15). This beginning occurs when one is baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27), placed in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18), or born again (1 Pet 1:23).

However, the saving of sinners is a process, not a single point in time. Beginning is not the ultimate point or objective. Even as in a race, finishing is the point, for if that is not done, there really has been no point to, or value in, a beginning. Neither, indeed, is there any point to a plant that, after its duration, has yielded no fruit. Salvation must be brought to completion, or finished, to be effective (Phil 1:6; 1 Thess 5:23). The status of “sons” and “daughters” can only be finalized in those who come out from among the defiled, and “touch not the unclean thing” (2 Cor 6:17-18). This is required because only one master can be served (Matt 6:24), and a person can be no more like Christ than he is unlike the world.

IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

In the book of Acts, there is a marked emphasis on the perfecting of the saints. What is taught doctrinally in the epistles is lived out experientially in the chronicles of the early activities of the body of Christ.

The priority of the saints ought to be obvious. Doctrinally, this is the reason for Christ's intercession (Heb 7:25), the Holy Spirit's intercession (Rom 8:26,27), and the ministry of the holy angels (Heb 1:13-14). All of the spiritual gifts are given to the church and for the church (Eph 4:8-16; 1 Cor 12:7). These people are the focus of heaven.

This priority is reflected in the chronicles of the ministry of Paul. With Barnabas, he spent a whole year with the church in Antioch (Acts 11:26). He again spent a “long time” with the disciples in Antioch (14:28). He spent a year and six months in Corinth (Acts 18:11). He spent three years in Ephesus, speaking with great soberness to the brethren (Acts 20:31). Paul and those traveling with him spent “many days” with Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8-10). Additional reports include the following.

- PAUL DETERMINES TO VISIT THE BRETHREN IN EVERY CITY WHERE THEY HAVE PREACHED (15:36,41).
- JUDAS AND SILAS EXHORT AND CONFIRM THE BRETHREN (15:32).
- PAUL AND BARNABAS REMAIN IN ANTIOCH WITH THE CHURCH (15:35).
- PAUL AND SILAS GO THROUGHOUT SYRIA AND CILICIA CONFIRMING THE CHURCHES (15:41).
- PAUL AND SILAS ESTABLISH THE CHURCHES IN LYSTRA AND DERBE (16:4-5).
- PAUL AND SILAS ENTER THE HOUSE OF LYDIA AND COMFORT THE BRETHREN (16:40).
- PAUL LANDS IN CAESAREA AND SALUTES THE CHURCH (18:22)
- PAUL GOES TO ANTIOCH AND SPENDS SOME TIME THERE WITH THE CHURCH (18:22A-23a).

- PAUL DOES OVER THE COUNTRY OF GALATIA AND PHRYGIA STRENGTHENING THE DISCIPLES (18:23).

- APOLLOS. SPEAKS IN ACHAIA, HELPING THEM MUCH WHO HAD BELIEVED THROUGH GRACE (18:27).

- TAKING THE DISCIPLES WITH HIM, PAUL TEACHES DAILY IN THE SCHOOL OF TYRANNUS FOR TWO FULL YEARS (19:9-12).

- PAUL GOES THROUGHOUT MACEDONIA EXHORTING THE DISCIPLES (20:1).

- PAUL REMAINS WITH THE BRETHREN IN TROAS FOR SEVEN DAYS (20:6-12).

In this respect, Paul followed the steps of the Savior, who consistently spent His choice and preferred time with His disciples.

Anyone who imagines that the thrust of apostolic doctrine, or the record God has given of His Son, is upon recruiting disciples is not familiar with the Word of God. To be sure, such efforts were found, and are not to be despised. However, when that becomes the thrust of religious activity, those so engaging their efforts are at variance with both the doctrine and example of holy men of old.

The more extended stays of Paul were spent with those who believed. They are the ones to whom he expounded “the riches of His grace,” “the unsearchable riches of Christ,” “the riches of the glory of this mystery,” and “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:7; 3:8; Rom 16:25).

Although I have drawn attention to this previously, I do want to mention it again. The priority of those to whom Paul preached is consistent throughout the book of Acts. It is in a particular order. I have already shown the priority of those in Christy Jesus – a priority that is also revealed in all of Paul’s writings. In addition to this,, The following may be noted.

- **The Jews.** This was generally in the synagogues, or some place where they met to pray (9:20,22; 13:5,14; 14:1; 7:1,10,17; 18:4,5,7,8,19; 19:8, 10).

- **Gentile proselytes.** These were generally found in the synagogues, although there are also examples of teaching them in their homes (13:43; 14:1; 17:4,12; 18:4; 19:10). Peter was used to preach the Gospel to those who gathered at the home of Cornelius to hear words whereby they could be saved (10:1-47; 11:14).

- **Devout people.** These were devoted to either the Lord, or to some form of religion that was not correct. Yet, they had regard for the concept of Deity, and were more open to the Gospel than many (17:10,17).

- **Untaught Gentiles.** These were Gentiles that gave no particular evidence of interest (14:15; 17:22-32; 4:25).

When Paul referred to his apostleship to the Gentiles, the statement was always made to those who were in Christ Jesus (Rom 1:13; 11:12-13; 15:16,18; Eph 3:1,8; Col 1:27; 1 Tim 2:7). In fact, when Paul taught believers who had come from the Gentile quadrant of humanity, he said he was fulfilling his apostleship.

- “For I speak to you Gentiles , inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office ” (Rom 11:13).

- “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, that I should be the

minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles , ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost” (Rom 15:15-16).

- “For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles ” (Eph 3:1).

- “Whereof I am made a minister , according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you , to fulfil the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints : To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you , the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).

- “Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity” (1 Tim 2:7).

Paul’s primary ministry was to the church – particularly “all the churches of the Gentiles” (Rom 16:4). These are the ones to whom Paul made known the mystery that had been revealed to him – the “unsearchable riches of Christ.” This is not what he preached to the philosophers of Athens, or

There is too much malnourishment in Christendom for this to be effectively denied. It is a very serious condition, for it contradicts the nature of salvation, as well as its intent.

to Felix, or Agrippa. Paul’s work was related to that of Jesus: nourishing and cherishing the church (Eph 5:26), shepherding the flock (Heb 13:20), and bringing the sons of God to glory (Heb 2:10).

Although this ministry of Jesus, and consequently of Paul as well, is not directly denied by the contemporary church, it is denied in the activities of the professed church leaders. There is too much malnourishment in Christendom for this to be effectively denied. It is a very serious condition, for it contradicts the nature of salvation, as well as its intent. It simply is not possible for anything to be right that contrasts with God’s great salvation.

One of the reasons for the remarkable success of the early church was the accuracy of its message. For the most part, the true Gospel was preached. When distortions were presented, immediate steps were taken to correct the condition (15:1-29).

Jesus had instructed the chief of the twelve apostles, “Feed My lambs . . . Feed My sheep . . . Feed My sheep” (John 21:15-17). That is what is being done in the book of Acts. The doctrine is being effectively lived out by those who represented Jesus Christ. This is because they had been reconciled to God, and taught by Him as well.

Now, let us see if we can behold the truth of this in our text.

AFTER THE UPROAR CEASED

“ 20:1 And after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.”

For the average American Christian, a focus upon the work of the Lord is the exception. Once a modicum of time has been given to some shallow form of religious activity, life is resumed in, what is conceived to be, its normal mode – taken up with the cares of this world. This is the fruit of unbelief, which is necessarily fostered by brief and shallow exposures to the things of God. However, this was not the mode of life for the apostle Paul. For him, interruptions constituted a distraction from the work to which the Lord had called him. These included such things as those just experienced in Ephesus. There were also things like imprisonment, beatings, shipwrecks, and the likes. However, as confirmed in this text, as soon as they were over, Paul resumed the activities he preferred, which were wholly centered in the Lord. Even when he was disadvantaged, like being in prison, he devoted himself to the work of the Lord to the fullest extent possible, writing epistles and teaching those with

whom he came in contact.

Lest we miss the significance of this, let me remind you that this is what Paul meant when he wrote, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). And again, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). This is living “unto Him which died for them and rose again” { (2 Cor 5:15). This is what is involved in pressing “toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:14), while “forgetting the things that are behind” (Phil 3:13). This is the kind of life that is described as living “by faith” (Heb 10:38), and walking “in the Spirit” (Gal 5:16,25).

I say these things because our day is marked by an enormous amount of ambiguity concerning what is called “the Christian life.” We now live in an era where not fulfilling baser lusts, or managing to refrain from sinful indulgences with the aid of counseling, and special programs, is considered growing in the Lord and doing His will. However, while it is essential to “sin not” (1 Cor 15:34; Eph 4:26; 1 John 2:1), this is not the epitome of spiritual life. You can be a Pharisee and live in such a manner, with the outside clean, yet the inside filled with dead men’s bones (Matt 23:27). True spiritual life is made known when the individual is engaged in the “good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:11-2). God has created men “unto good works” (Eph 2:10), not merely abstinence from bad ones. Such works are the focus of the expressions of spiritual life. It is that focus that enables the individual to refrain from unlawful involvements.

In Scripture, the lives of believers are not described as merely refraining from sin – although they most certainly did that. For example, Paul’s life in Christ is not described as no longer persecuting the church – or being able to live another day without opposing the saints. What we know about Mary Magdalene is not merely that she was no longer dominated by seven demons. Matthew is not described as being able to consistently refrain from collecting taxes. It is what they did toward God that is reported, for that is a proper representation of the manner in which they lived.

AFTER THE UPROAR CEASED

“And after the uproar was ceased . . .” Other versions read, “had ended,” NIV “come to an end,” BBE “died down,” CJB “was over,” CSB “was appeased,” GENEVA “had subsided,” MRD and “stopped.” IE

The event that had just passed was described as an assembly that “was confused,” 19:32 “the uproar,” “the noise,” BBE “the tumult,” DARBY “the disturbance,” NAB “the rage,” TNT and “the trouble.” IE This is the kind of circumstance that is almost, if not altogether, uncontrollable. Many times, force must be used to subdue raging crowds. Recent riots in Iran confirm this to be the case. Mass destruction often attends such protests, with whole sections of towns being burned down and looted. Modern control methodologies include subduing people with tear gas and fire hoses, clubs, and even gunfire.

Yet, in this text, there was a certain orderliness to the cessation of the tumult. Reason prevailed, which is nearly impossible under such conditions. This, however, was not owing to human ingenuity, but to the working of the Lord, who does have control over the hearts of men. He can “put” things into the heart of man, including the following.

- Wisdom (Ex 35:34; 36:2; 1 Kgs 10:24).
- To beautify the house of the Lord (Ezra 7:27).
- To rebuild the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:12).
- To reckon a genealogy (Neh 7:5).

- Gladness (Psa 4:7).
- Earnest care for the church (2 Cor 8:16).
- His laws (Heb 10:16).
- To fulfill His will by giving their kingdom unto the beast (Rev 17:17).

Some may be concerned about this impinging upon the mythical free will of man. However, no such concerns are ever evinced in Scripture. God does not govern the nations by the will of man, but by His own will. His power is not theoretic, but is very real and active. What do you suppose God has to do to deliver His people from the snare of the fowler, the evil intents of men, and the hostility of the powers of darkness. In such deliverances, is He hampered by the will of the enemies? Indeed, He is not. He can work overtly, or put it into the hearts of men, to fulfill His will. Who does not know this is the case?

In this text, the subduing of the wrath of man was the work of the Lord. As it is written, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain” (Psa 76:10). Whether you take this verse to mean that the wrath of man is restrained, KJV or that the Lord restrains His own wrath, NRSV the meaning is substantially the same. Were God not to stop the expression of human indignation against His people, He would destroy its perpetrators. In either case, the tumult was stopped – which is the whole point of the text. Further, the tumult ceased because He caused it to cease, doing so through means, but nevertheless, doing it. This is one of the means employed to work all things together for the good of those who love Him, and are the called according to His purpose.

Paul did not leave the disciples in Ephesus until this uproar had ceased. He doubtless remained to ensure that they were not diverted from the way, and to provide the necessary comfort and edification required to enable them to stand against the wiles of the devil.

PAUL CALLED HIS DISCIPLES

“ . . . Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them . . .” Other versions read, “called the disciples to himself . . . embraced them,” NKJV/DARBY/GENEVA/YLT “sent for the disciples . . . exhorted them,” NASB “sent for the disciples . . . encouraging them,” NIV “sent for the disciples . . . and given them comfort,” BBE “sent for the disciples . . . speaking words of encouragement to them,” NJB “invited the followers to come visit him. He wanted to encourage them,” LIVING and “sent for the disciples and warned and consoled and urged and encouraged them; then he embraced them.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “embraced” is a rather comprehensive one. The lexical meaning of the Greek word is, “of departing take leave of, say good-bye to.” FRIBERG This does not denote a wordless parting, with a mere physical embrace – although that was involved. It was not the manner of Jesus or the apostles to part without words. Before Jesus left His disciples to lay down His life, He spent an evening delivering words to them (John 13-16). After He rose from the dead, and before He ascended into heaven, He again delivered words to them (Matt 28:16-20; Lk 24:17-46; Acts 1:1-9).

It was also Paul’s manner to precede his farewells with meaningful words (Acts 18:21; 20:17-37; 1 Cor 13:11-14). This is the nature of parting among those who are in Christ Jesus. They speak comfortably to one another. The Amplified Bible gives the sense of the text: Paul “sent for the disciples and warned and consoled and urged and encouraged them; then he embraced them.”

HE DEPARTED FOR MACEDONIA

“ . . . and departed for to go into Macedonia.” Other versions read, “Set out for Macedonia,” NIV “left for Macedonia,” NRSV “went away from them to Macedonia,” BBE “set forward to

Macedonia,” DOUAY “set out on his journey to Macedonia,” NAB and “went to the country of Macedonia.” IE

Earlier, Paul had “purposed in the Spirit” to go to Macedonia (19:21). He had even sent Timotheus and Erastus into Macedonia before him, doubtless to prepare for his coming (19:22). Having written the book of Corinthians while in Ephesus, he had told them he would pass through Macedonia en route to them (1 Cor 16:5).

ERRONEOUS VIEWS OF PAUL’S MINISTRY

Here, then, we have the work of the apostle of the Gentiles clearly including a determined return to the churches. This was done in order to establish them in the faith – a ministry to which he consistently devoted himself (Acts 14:22; 15:36,41; 16:5; 18:23).

In my religious academic training, I have never heard a teacher make a point of this, develop it, and draw a conclusion on the matter. Although I exposed my mind to, what I conceived to be, the most accurate teaching, I came away thinking that Paul preferred to labor only where no previous labor had been expended. This was based upon a statement of Paul, made in Romans 15:20: “Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation.”

Paul did NOT say “I have ONLY strived to . . .” as though he determined to limit himself to this ambition.

To the Corinthians

It is time for the church to declare war on shallow thought and empty human traditions. They are the foundation upon which sectarianism rests, and, if for no other reason, should be discarded in the scrap-heap of worthless imaginations.

When writing to the Corinthians, Paul said he would not go to other regions in which others had not labored until the church in Corinth had been more firmly established in the faith. “ We, on the other hand, will not boast beyond our legitimate province and proper limit, but will keep within the limits [of our commission which] God has allotted us as our measuring line and which reaches and includes even you. For we are not overstepping the limits of our province and stretching beyond our ability to reach, as though we reached not (had no legitimate mission) to you, for we were [the very first] to come even as far as to you with the good news (the Gospel) of Christ. We do not boast therefore, beyond our proper limit, over other men’s labors, but we have the hope and confident expectation that as your faith continues to grow, our field among you may be greatly enlarged, still within the limits of our commission, So that [we may even] preach the Gospel in lands [lying] beyond you, without making a boast of work already done in another [man’s] sphere of activity [before we came on the scene]” AMPLIFIED (2 Cor 10:14-16). Where, then, was his priority? Is it not abundantly obvious – and yet there is more.

To the Romans

Further substantiating that Paul did not restrict his ministry to preaching where Christ had not been named, he made known that he was determined to preach the Gospel to those in Rome, where he had never been, yet where a strong church was already established (Rom 1:15-16). In that city, not only would he preach the Gospel, of which he was not ashamed (Rom 1:16), but he would also be comforted by the mutual faith of the believers there (Rom 1:12).

To the Colossians

In addition, he also sought to go to Colossae in order to minister to believers whom he had never

seen – to a church that was not established by himself . He wrote to the Colossians that in so doing, he would be fulfilling his ministry (Col 1:25).

It is time for the church to declare war on shallow thought and empty human traditions. They are the foundation upon which sectarianism rests, and, if for no other reason, should be discarded in the scrap-heap of worthless imaginations. The consequences that are found in the wake of this blight are staggering. Those who are swept away by this contaminating wave are lacking in faith, hope, and love. They are deficient in spiritual understanding and insight, and lack stability. They cannot see well, cannot ear with discernment, or speak with eternal benefit.

Maintaining Doctrinal Integrity

In our day a view has arisen that places minimal value upon doctrine, or what is being taught. Some sophists, like the ostrich from whom wisdom has been withheld (Job 39:13-17), say they are not about doctrine, but only about Jesus. Others even decry “doctrine,” equating it with the “the doctrines of men” (Col 2:22). However, God Himself has a “doctrine,” and it is intended to be embraced and declared by men (Deut 32:2). Jesus also spoke of His doctrine (John 7:16), and Paul of his (2 Tim 3:10). Jesus proclaimed the doctrine belonging to God, and Paul declared the doctrine belonging to Christ.

It is no wonder that insightful men have maintained a keen interest in the church, rising up to oppose flawed doctrines, and waging relentless war against the encroachment of charlatans and worldly wisdom. All of those who have been productive in unstopping the wells of truth have had to deal with major misconceptions of God and His great salvation that were resident in the church itself. In fact, false teaching always precedes an unfavorable change in theological emphasis and behavioral degeneration.

An ignorant church cannot possibly walk in Divine favor. A deteriorating church is a disgrace to Christ and a liability to men. A professed church that is the haven for false teaching is a testimony to the presence of the devil himself, not the Lord’s Christ.

THE PRIORITY OF KINGDOM WORK

I do not consider “Kingdom work” and professed work in the Kingdom to be synonymous. There are some who may imagine their work is in the interest of truth and of the will of the Lord, who are completely wrong in their assumption – like those who taught men had to be “circumcised after the manner of Moses” to be saved (Acts 15:1). Or, those who taught there was “no resurrection” (1 Cor 15:12). Others forbade men to marry, and to abstain from meats (1 Tim 4:3). Still others taught “another Jesus,” “another Spirit,” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4).

None of this was glossed by holy men. This is because “faith comes by hearing” (Rom 10:17), and when what is willingly heard is corrupt, it has a direct bearing upon faith. Faith cannot rest on error, and error tends to erode faith. Faith must grow in the soil of the Word of God – particularly the Gospel. It cannot come or be caused to grow through the diagnosis and opinions of men. It cannot thrive on procedure, or be enhanced by some secret routine. Hence, correction was a constant activity of inspired writers. That correction was accomplished by comparing what was erroneously taught to the Gospel of Christ. It is found in Romans (chapters two through four, thirteen and fourteen); First Corinthians (chapters three through fifteen); Second Corinthians (chapters three, eight, and nine), Galatians (chapters three through six), Ephesians (chapters two and four), Colossians (chapter two), First Thessalonians (chapter four), Second Thessalonians (chapters one and two), Hebrews (chapters one through ten), James (chapters two and four), First Peter (chapter two), Second Peter (chapter three), and Jude (chapter one).

A preacher or teacher who leaves error unchallenged is recreant to his duty. Such a posture simply

cannot be excused, for men are to “take heed” how they build upon the proper foundation (1 Cor 3:10). Those who, through their teaching, allow for the placement of improper people within the church, which is the temple of God, will be destroyed by God. Thus it is written, “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor 3:17). This is why Paul revisited the churches, keeping track of their progress, and correcting any misconceptions that may have crept in unawares.

By its very nature, Kingdom work is not attended by random activity and a lack of proper and GHod-centered planning. As set forth in this text, the planning is done through the direction of the Spirit, but it is done.

HE GAVE THEM MUCH EXHORTATION

“ 2 And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece, 3a And there abode three months.”

WHEN HE HAD GONE OVER THOSE PARTS

“And when he had gone over those parts . . .” Other versions read, “gone over that region,” NKJV “gone through those districts,” NASB “traveled through that area,” NIV “all the towns,” NLT and “from place to place.” CEV

We know from the text that the purpose for going through this area was to strengthen the churches. Churches in this area included Philippi (16:12-15,30-33,40) Thessalonica (17:1-4,10), and Berea (17:10-13).

Without being redundant, I will once again point out the priority Paul gave to the churches. In a very real sense, the work of the Lord depends upon the body of Christ, for that is the exclusive means through which the Lord works in the accomplishment of God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11). The church is “His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). What form of reasoning could justify the neglect or continued deficiency of this body of people? If the eyes of the Lord are upon them, and open to their cries (), and if Jesus is teaching (1 John 5:20), them and interceding for them (Heb 7:25), if the Holy Spirit is leading them (Rom 8:13-14) and making intercession for them (Rom 8:26-27), and if the holy angels are ministering to them (Heb 1:13-14), what possible reason can be adduced for men – particular preachers and teachers – neglecting them? How is it that the modern church is so unformed, and so spiritually ignorant? Why can they not handle the Word of God in a becoming manner, or live above this present evil world? It is because they are not established in the faith. They are the victims of flawed, and sometimes completely erroneous, teaching. Even though they will surely give an account for the flock of God, their leaders have not been mindful of them in the manner exhibited in this text. Some people would have us overlook this uncomely situation, but we cannot do so.

GIVEN THEM MUCH EXHORTATION

“ . . . and had given them much exhortation. . .” Other versions read, “encouraged them with many words,” NKJV “given them much teaching,” BBE “Had comforted them with many discourses,” MRD “a long exhortation,” PNT “preaching to the believers,” LIVING “encouraged the disciples in many addresses,” MONTGOMERY “warned and consoled and urged and encouraged the brethren with much discourse,” AMPLIFIED “encouraged the followers with many messages,” CEV “gave constant encouragement, lifting their spirits and charging them with fresh hope,” MESSAGE and “spoke many heartening words to the people.” PHILLIPS

The word “exhortation” is translated from the Greek word **parakale,saj** , which, as used here, has the following lexical meaning: “to address, speak to (call to, call on), which may be done in the way

of exhortation, entreaty, comfort, instruction,” THAYER “as speaking authoritatively exhort, urge, encourage,” FRIBERG and “encourage, speak words of encouragement; request, ask, appeal to; console, comfort, cheer up.” UBS The word combines gentility and moral force.

The nature of spiritual life, as well as its maintenance, depends on the strength of one’s faith. Faith commences with hearing, and is stirred up and strengthened by the same means. This is because rationality and reasoning are associated with faith, for one cannot believe without reasoning. Believing God involves thinking upon what He has said. It requires coming to a conclusion that God is to be trusted, then exerting the will to do so. Because faith is maintained in a hostile world, and amidst a staggering amount of opposing ideas, believers must be regularly admonished, exhorted, and comforted. That is simply the manner of the kingdom.

This is the kind of activity in which Paul was involved – building up the saints of God. This is to the soul what strengthening the grip is to the hand. It enables the child of God to “hold fast” (1 Thess 5:21; Heb 3:6; 4:14; 10:23; Rev 2:25; 3:3). When Christians do not “hold fast,” cleaving to the Lord with purpose of heart (Acts 11:23), it is because they are not strong. The lack of such strength is owing to one of two things: either they have not been properly instructed, exhorted, and admonished, or they have been, and paid no heed to it. Either circumstance is unacceptable.

Notice that Paul did this with “much exhortation,” or “many words,” NKJV or “saying much,” CJB or “many discourses,” MRD or “long exhortation,” PNT or “frequent addresses,” WEYMOUTH or “many addresses.” MONTGOMERY Whatever may be said to justify brevity and infrequency, there certainly is none of it in this text. How is it that Paul conducted his ministry in a way that so sharply contradicts the ministerial procedures of our time? It is because he saw things as they really are, and those who fail to pay due heed to the saints do not. It was because he was working “together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), and they are not. It was because he was a messenger sent by God (Rom 10:14), and they are not. If this seems too harsh, the other theoretic possibility is that the heavenly agenda has been changed – and that simply is not possible.

HE ABODE IN GREECE FOR THREE MONTHS

“... he came into Greece, and there abode three months.” Other versions read, “arrived in Greece, where he stayed three months,” NIV and “he went to Greece.” GWN

It is assumed that Paul landed at the port city of Athens after leaving Berea. From there it appears that he journeyed northward, after a stay of three months heading due North. It was some time during this period that Paul wrote his second letter to the Corinthians. It was at this time that Titus brought word to him concerning the church at Corinth. That church had been in a sad state, and Paul had a deep concern for their stabilization in the faith. According to his second letter, Titus delivered a good report, confirming that some progress had been made in response to his first letter (2 Cor 7:6-13). He later sent Titus back to Corinth with the second letter, and also to gather the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem that they had pledged (2 Cor 8:6-9:15).

One of the weaknesses of so-called evangelistic, or recruitment methodologies of our day, is the glaring absence of what is required to be a disciple of Jesus, and what necessarily follows being baptized into Christ.

PAUL’S PREOCCUPATION

It is refreshing to consider the manner in which Paul lived. It was wholly to fulfill the commission Jesus delivered to him on the road to Damascus. That solemn word is worthy of repetition. “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they

may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me ” (Acts 26:16-18).

There was a remarkable consistency in Paul’s life – even though his mission took him through some of the most harrowing experiences suffered by any man – the only exception being our blessed Lord. It is interesting to note that Jesus revealed Paul’s mission at the very threshold of his calling, as the above text confirms. Paul was even told that he would suffer “great things” (Acts 9:16).

One of the weaknesses of so-called evangelistic, or recruitment methodologies of our day, is the glaring absence of what is required to be a disciple of Jesus, and what necessarily follows being baptized into Christ. Consider the following.

- **THE WORLD WILL HATE YOU.** “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ” (John 15:18-19).

- **SELF DENIAL AND CROSS-BEARING.** “And he said to them all, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily , and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

- **JESUS SEEN AS ABOVE EVERYONE ELSE.** “If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26).

- **BEARING UP UNDER THE CROSS.** “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me , cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27).

- **FORSAKING ALL THAT YOU HAVE.** “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath , he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:33).

- **APPOINTED TO AFFLICTION.** “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto ” (1 Thess 3:3).

- **SUFFERING WITH CHRIST.** “ If we suffer , we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Tim 2:12).

- **YOU WILL SUFFER PERSECUTION.** “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution ” (2 Tim 3:12).

- **DO NOT MARVEL WHEN YOU ARE HATED.** “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you ” (1 John 3:13).

It is the rich compensation of faith that offsets these otherwise grievous experiences. There are certain benefits realized by those who forsake all to follow Jesus. The realization of them neutralizes the effects of opposition, persecution, and other forms of enmity from the world. Here are a few of them.

- **THE NATURE OF GOD’S KINGDOM.** “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17).

- **CALLED INTO FELLOWSHIP WITH JESUS.** “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:9).

- **NO TRIAL GREATER THAN OUR ABILITY TO BEAR IT.** “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13).

- **GOD CAUSES US TO TRIUMPH.** “Now thanks be unto God, which always

causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place” (2 Cor 2:14).

• **THE REALIZATION OF GRACE, LOVE, AND COMMUNION.** “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor 13:14).

• **THE LORD IS OUR HELPER.** “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man **There is a Divine fellowship and ministration that is**

shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6).

• **THE POSSESSION OF JOY UNSPEAKABLE.** “Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Pet 1:8).

There is a Divine fellowship and ministration that is experienced in the midst of suffering, and it cannot be realized in any other context. It was the awareness of this that moved Paul to forsake all competing interests in order to participate in Christ’s sufferings – i.e. “the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil 3:10).

The understanding of this circumstance is what compelled Paul to “labor more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10). Fulfilling his calling was not viewed as a chore, or something that inconvenienced him. He did not see it as unfair, or a requirement to do things that were not expected from other people. While he did live obediently, the commandment of the Lord Jesus was not grievous to him (1 John 5:3). That is why he never complained about his extensive travels, the opposition that he endured from men, and the staggering inconveniences and dangers to which he was exposed. He saw spiritual life correctly, and responded accordingly.

THE JEWS LAID WAIT FOR HIM

“3b And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia.”

After being in Greece, Paul prepared to go to Syria, where the church in Antioch was located. He had spent considerable time there, and that was the place from which he and Barnabas had departed for the work to which the Spirit had called them (Acts 13:1-3). Now, however, an obstacle is set before him. It will be interesting to learn how he dealt with the uncomely circumstance.

THE JEWS LAID WAIT FOR HIM

“And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria . . .” Other versions read, “the Jews plotted against him,,” NKJV “a plot was formed against him by the Jews,,” NASB “the Jews made a plot against him as he was about to sail for Syria,,” NIV “the Jews had made a secret design against him,,” BBE “As he was preparing to set sail for Syria, he discovered a plot against him by the unbelieving Jews,,” CJB “treacherous plot against him having been set on foot by the Jews,,” DARBY “When Paul was going to board a ship for Syria, he found out that the Jews were plotting to kill him,,” GWN and “The Jews having planned to waylay him whenever he might be on the point of taking ship for Syria.” WEYMOUTH

Elsewhere Paul referred to the consistent manner in which the Jews opposed him. Five times they had him beaten with thirty-nine stripes (2 Cor 11:24). To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote the Jews “have persecuted us” (1 Thess 2:14). The book of Acts makes particular mention of some of these occasions.

- Shortly after Paul's conversion, the Jews had plotted against him. That time, "the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket" (Acts 9:24,25).

- When Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch of Pisidia, "the Jews" were angered because of the multitude that gave heed to them, "were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming" (Acts 13:45). They even "stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts" (Acts 13:50).

- In Iconium, the Jews joined with others and conspired to stone Paul and Barnabas (Acts 14:5).

- At Lystra, "there came thither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead" (Acts 14:19).

- In Thessalonica the Jews set the whole city on an uproar in open opposition to Paul (Acts 17:5).

- When he was in Berea, "the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people" (Acts 17:13).

- In Corinth "the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat" of Gallio (Acts 18:12).

- Later "more than forty" Jews "bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul" (Acts 23:12).

- Again, when Paul was to appear before Festus, "the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him [Festus] against Paul, and besought him, and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him" (Acts 25:2-3).

Yet, with all of their plotting and conniving, they were never able to fulfill their ambitions against Paul. He was on a mission from the Lord, and the Lord protected him.

Yet, with all of their plotting and conniving, they were never able to fulfill their ambitions against Paul. He was on a mission from the Lord, and the Lord protected him.

In this case, the Jews had secretly plotted against Paul, yet he was made aware of it. There were times when Paul knew of certain threats against him, yet the Lord revealed to him "in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee : for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). In that case, in the interest of a significant number of people the Lord had in that area (they were yet unconverted), the circumstance was governed from heaven to allow Paul to remain. Another time, when he was in Jerusalem, the Lord appeared to him and said, "Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me" (Acts 22:18). Apparently his work for that time had been concluded, and thus Paul was relocated, so to speak, to another appointed area.

Oh, the marvelous versatility of faith! It is something that those who live by mere habit never know. This is the weakness of thoughtless living – or living by habits, like a trained animal. Without due regard for what they are doing, such people lose the spiritual sense of seeing and hearing. I do not know how the Lord would direct a people who have been taught to live by the law of redundancy, going through life as though they were on automatic pilot. Such a person cannot possibly love the Lord with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength, because they have been taught to love by heartless routine. However, when a person lives by faith, they are more involved in what they do. The eyes of their understanding are opened wide, and things sink down into their ears.

The Scripture does not reveal how Paul knew about this secret plot. Perhaps the Lord revealed it

to him, as He did the plot that was made against him in Jerusalem (Acts 22:18). It could be that someone overheard the plot, and informed Paul of it – as his nephew would do at a later time (Acts 23:16). However it was made known to him, it was evidence of the direction of the Lord. Solomon knew this Divine manner and wrote, “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” (Eccl 10:20).

When the Scriptures say, “In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths” (Prov 3:6), this kind of direction is involved. The direction of our steps (Prov 16:9) includes needed warnings as well as the opening of doors of opportunity. Through David the Lord promised, “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with Mine eye” (Psa 32:8). Through Isaiah He said, “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa 30:21). Again He promised, “I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go” (Isa 48:17).

Child of God, faith can take hold of these words, relieving the trusting one of the tendency to fret about the future. Like David, our “times” are in the hands of the Lord (Psa 31:15). See, there are good reasons to trust the Lord, as well as pleasant experiences and benefits.

Behold the alertness of Paul – how that he was able to respond to this danger immediately. That is something that lethargic souls cannot do. Many people go from one trouble to another because they are not alert. Their senses have been dull so that they cannot see beyond their present circumstances.

Take due note of the fearlessness of Paul – he was not crippled with fear, but maintained a sound mind, and was able to respond in an appropriate manner. Timorous souls are not able to react to the report of danger in such a way – quickly and effectively. More and more I can see the genius of living by faith. It brings all of one’s powers to their peak capacity, and enables the believer to maintain a sound mind and a straight course.

Also see how Paul thought of the work of the Lord – not being dominated by merely making provision for personal protection. He did not run to a place of temporary safety, but sought another way to do the work to which Jesus had called him. The work would go on. Such a frame of mind honors the Lord.

HE PURPOSED TO RETURN THROUGH MACEDONIA

“ . . . he purposed to return through Macedonia.” Other versions read, “he decided to return through Macedonia,” NKJV “he determined to return through Macedonia,” NASB “he decided to go back through Macedonia,” NIV and “he resolved to go back through Macedonia.” AMPLIFIED

Actually, this was the long way around. He would backtrack through Macedonia, where he had spent time earlier. However, there were other advantages to going this way. He could visit the brethren again, gaining comfort from them. He would also be able to exhort and admonish the brethren, giving them further advantages.

Thou Shalt Not Tempt the Lord

Although God is the Helper of those who believe, and is their Shield, that does not relieve them of having a due

I do not doubt that some people have experienced unnecessary trouble because they have not gived due heed to this word. Our text provides an excellent example of not tempting the Lord.

regard for their own lives. There is such a thing as tempting God by thrusting ourselves into uncomely circumstances, expecting the Lord to bring us out even though we have acted foolishly. This is how Satan tempted Jesus. Having taken the Lord and set Him on the pinnacle of the Temple, he said, “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Matt 4:6). Jesus responded, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God” (Matt 4:7). This particular word was given by Moses in Deuteronomy 6:16. Men are not to presume upon the grace of God by getting themselves into difficult circumstances that could easily have been avoided.

I do not doubt that some people have experienced unnecessary trouble because they have not given due heed to this word. Our text provides an excellent example of not tempting the Lord.

ACCOMPANIED INTO ASIA

“ 4 And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5 These going before tarried for us at Troas.”

Couched within the chronicles of the early church we find the nature of “the body, the church” of the Lord Jesus Christ. The church is comprised of an interdependent network of believers. By “interdependent,” I mean they are complementary of one another, enhancing the ministries and utility of one another. The body of Christ is, in other words, designed to work together in a common objective. The isolation of the members from one another is not the normal mode. Even when John was isolated in exile on Patmos, he had communication with the churches. When Paul was in prison, he still communicated with the churches, and received brethren who sought him out. In Christ, the focus is not on the individual members, but on the whole of the body. There are times when the group ministers to the individual. However, that is not the normal mode of operation. The “one another” mode is the standard (Rom 12:5,10; 12:16; 13:8; 14:19; 15:5,7,14; 16:16; 1 Cor 11:33; 12:25; Gal 5:13; ; Eph 4:2,25,32; 5:21; Col 3:13,16; 1 Thess 4:9,18; 5:11; 1 Tim 5:21).

This kind of relationship is found in the text before us. As the work of the Lord was being fulfilled, kindred spirits joined themselves to the work. In this the singularity of their hearts and minds is confirmed.

THOSE WHO ACCOMPANIED PAUL

“And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus.”

The thought of accompanying Paul is an intriguing one. The benefits of such an experience can scarcely be imagined. His manners and speech had been cultured by faith, and his involvement in the will of God was consistent and productive.

In this verse we get the picture of brethren joining him along the way – brethren who had been subjected to his teaching, and had developed an appetite for both his word and work.

Sopater of Berea. This is the only place in Scripture where this man is mentioned. Berea is the place where the Jews received what Paul said with “all readiness of mind,” searching the Scriptures daily to see “whether these things were so” (Acts 17:11). Sopater was probably among the many souls who believed, which included Greeks (Acts 17:12). Paul did not stay there, for he was forced to leave by certain Jews who came from Thessalonica and stirred up the people (Acts 17:13-14).

Aristarchus and Secundus of the Thessalonians. Aristarchus is mentioned several times in

Scripture, including two of Paul's epistles. He went with Paul to Italy, was a fellow prisoner with Paul, and was called a "fellowlaborer" (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:2; Col 4:10; Phile 1:24).

Secundus is mentioned only here.

Gaius and Timotheus of Derbe. This is the only place Gaius of Derbe is mentioned. Timotheus is mentioned frequently in Scripture, remaining identified with Paul from the time he joined him (16:1; 17:14,15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom 16:21; 1 Cor 4:17; 16:10; 2 Cor 1:1,19; Phil 1:1; 2:19; Col 1:1; 1 Thess 1:1; 3:2,6; 2 Thess 1:1; 1 Tim 1:2,18; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:2; Phile 1:1; Heb 13:23).

Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia. Tychicus is mentioned several times. Being sent by Paul, he carried the letter of the Ephesians to that church, and made known Paul's affairs to them, doing the same at Colossae. Paul also may have sent him to assist Titus (Acts 20:4; Eph 6:21; Col 4:7; 2 Tim 4:12; Tit 3:12).

Trophimus is also mentioned two other times. He was from Ephesus, and traveled with Paul. Once, unable to continue traveling with Paul, he was left "sick at Miletum." (Acts 20:4; 21:29; 2 Tim 4:20).

The point here is that none of these men would have been known to us if it were not for the labors of Paul. This is also characteristic of the Kingdom of God. There are certain key individuals, chosen by God, around whom others are gathered. Of old time, this included men like Moses, David, Ezra, Nehemiah, and the Prophets. Prior to Christ, there was John the Baptist, who had disciples. Following Jesus there were Peter, Paul, and other key individuals.

This accents that the work of the Lord is not driven by democratic principles, even though there are times when all agree to do certain things.

THEY WENT BEFORE AND WAITED

"These going before tarried for us at Troas." Other versions read, "waited for us," NKJV "were waiting for," NASB "stayed for us," DOUAY "did remain for us," YLT and "were waiting for us [including Luke]." AMPLIFIED

Troas is the place where a vision was given to Paul concerning going over to Macedonia (Acts 16:8-11). There must have been some fond recollections of that occasion. This time, however, Paul was headed for Syria, and would come through Macedonia, from which he planned to disembark for Troas, and then on to Syria.

Notice the submissiveness of this cluster of brethren. None of them left the work as John Mark had done earlier (Acts 13:19), or forsook Paul as Demas did on another occasion (2 Tim 4:10). Here is a sterling example of the submissiveness that is required of believers. As it is written, "submitting yourselves to one another in the fear of God" (Eph 5:21). And again, "be subject one to another" (1 Pet 5:5). Of course, this postulates that the one to whom the brethren subject themselves is being directed by the Lord, and not following his own whims.

The language of the text reveals that Luke is now traveling with Paul – "tarried for us." Luke first mentions himself as being with Paul in the sixteenth chapter of Acts, when Paul was called into Macedonia. In using the words "we" and "us," Luke refers to himself as being with Paul during the events he records— (16:10,11,12,13,14, 15,16,17; 20:5,6,13,14,15; 21:1,2,3,4,5,6,7, 8,10, 11, 12,14,15,16,17, 18; 27:1,2,3, 4,5, 6,7,15,16, 18,19,20,26,27, 29,37; 28:2,7,10, 11,12,13, 14,15,16). He was a faithful companion to Paul, who once acknowledged, "Only Luke is with me" (2 Tim 4:11). His "perfect understanding" (Lk 1:3) must have brought much consolation to Paul. Luke probably ministered to Paul in the capacity of a physician as well, for Paul referred to him as "the beloved physician" (Col 4:14).

AFTER THE DAYS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD

“ 6a And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread . . . ”

Here it is confirmed that the trip into Macedonia was to visit the brethren, for, so far as the record is concerned, there was no other reason to be in Philippi. It must have been a blessed occasion to visit Lydia and those with her, perhaps even including the Philippian jailer. As many as three years had passed since Paul was last there. The Philippian believers, however, had established themselves as faithful brethren from the very first (Phil 1:5).

We are not told how long they spent in Philippi, although it must have been a week or more, judging from the reference to “the days of unleavened bread,” which feast was seven days in length (Ex 12:18-20; 13:6-7). The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover Feast, which took place on the fourteenth day of the first month (Lev 23:5). It was followed by the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which was seven days in length (Lev 23:6).

WHY MENTION THIS FEAST?

Why did Luke mention this period –“the days of unleavened bread” ? Is it because Paul and company were keeping the Passover Feasts, and the Feast of Unleavened Bread as well? I do not believe this is the case. In instructing the Corinthians, Paul referred to the Lord’s Table as a Feast, and told the people to keep it “with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:8). The preceding verse makes clear that he was speaking with the redemption of Christ in mind, not Israel’s deliverance from Egypt: “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor 5:7).

Earlier, when Paul is recorded as saying he had to “keep the feast that cometh in Jerusalem” (Acts 18:21), it is assumed that the Passover was meant. However, it is doubtful that he was speaking of participating in that feast as a Jew. It is rather more likely that he sought to use the occasion to preach Christ, who is “our Passover.”

This seems to be the most reasonable way of considering the matter, for Paul never promoted the Passover Feast itself, or the Feast of Unleavened Bread. He never instructed the disciples of Christ to keep those feasts – which he surely would have done if that was proper.

THE JEWISH MANNER

The Jews were a people cultured by God Almighty. Their entire lives revolved around their identity with God. They marked time by the feasts God had ordained – and all of those feasts involved a consideration of the Lord and what He had done for them. They did not mark time by the birthdays of people, or some aspect of history that was unrelated to the Lord. Further, the feasts ordained by God for them, were spaced throughout the year so the people could be kept in constant remembrance of His goodness toward them.

I take it, therefore, that the reference to the Feast of Unleavened Bread was a way of marking, or identifying, time, and did not have any reference to the practice or promotion of that day among believers.

HE CAME TO THEM AT TROAS

“ 6b . . . and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days. 7 And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight. 8 And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.”

Once again, notice that the accent is placed upon the work of the Lord. Here five days are covered without so much as a syllable about what took place during that time. A generation that has been cultured by novelty and constant distractions finds it difficult to think in such a manner. Notwithstanding, it is good for the people of God to learn to think, reason, and talk, with main things in mind. Admittedly, there are relatively few people who even know what is involved in a godly focus. Much of the Christianity of our day deals with fads, novelties, current crises, and the likes. There is not an overriding accent on what is being said. Sadly, it leaves the people in confusion, so that they rarely have any idea concerning the fundamental objective of life. While there are some people who refer to seeking first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33), you will be hard pressed to find an individual who has a cogent thought about what that actually means. You rarely hear anyone

It is also quite possible that behind the scenes, the wicked one was doing his best to thwart this trip. He was aligned against Paul, and thus fought vigorously against him. However, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, not the devil.

quote the words of Jesus: “One thing is needful” (Lk 10:42); or the words of David: “one thing have I desired” (Psa 27:4); or the words of Paul: “this one thing I do” (Phil 3:13). That is simply not the fashionable way for today’s Christian to talk. However, this IS the way to live, and it is reflected throughout Scripture – even in the recounting of historical events.

A lot of loose talk and writing is owing to a lack of proper perspective. That is what makes much of it so boring to the one who is absorbed with the Lord. You do not find any writing of Scripture that reflects this kind of mind-set. That is one of the proofs that it is inspired. Holy men of God wrote with focus, and a due regard for the living God. They never became absorbed with social, political, or domestic concerns. When such things were mentioned, it was always in association with something that God was doing.

THEY CAME TO TROAS IN FIVE DAYS

“ . . . and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.”

Earlier, when sailing from Troas to Philippi, the trip took only two days (Acts 16:11-12). They came in a “straight course to Samothracia, in a single day, arriving in the port city of Neapolis the next day. This trip, the winds were apparently not so favorable, making the trip more than twice as long. Yet, Luke says no more about the matter, for the point was to get to the brethren who were waiting at Troas. That being accomplished, the trip was a resounding success, regardless of how long it took.

It is also quite possible that behind the scenes, the wicked one was doing his best to thwart this trip. He was aligned against Paul, and thus fought vigorously against him. However, the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, not the devil (Psa 37:23). It is true that many of the complexities of life are resolved by a godly focus, and by involvement in the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God (Rom 12:2).

UPON THE FIRST DAY OF THE WEEK

“And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread . . .” Other versions read, “gathered together to break bread,” NASB “we met to break bread,” NRSV “come together for the holy meal,” BBE “we assembled to break bread,” CSB “we assembled to break the eucharist,” MRD “we met for the breaking of bread,” NJB “we gathered with the local believers to share in the Lord's Supper,” NLT “we gathered for a communion service,” LIVING “we all met together to eat the supper of the Lord,” IE “we gathered together for the fellowship meal,” GNB “We met on Sunday to worship and celebrate the Master's Supper,” MESSAGE and “when we were

assembled together to break bread [the Lord's Supper]." AMPLIFIED

Once again, our attention is turned to a gathering that was centered, or focused, involving all of the disciples in Troas.

The First Day of the Week

This can be literally rendered, "the first day after the Sabbath," which was "the first day of the week." Without a known commandment from the Lord, yet in deference to the Person of Christ and His resurrection, disciples met on the first day of the week. This can doubtless be traced to the time following Christ's resurrection when He appeared to the disciples at least two times on the first day of the week.

- Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week (Mk 16:9).
- He appeared to Mary Magdalene on the first day of the week (Mk 16:9).
- He appeared to the women who came to anoint His body on that day (Matt 28:1,9).
- He appeared to the two on the road to Emmaus on that day (Lk 24:13-31).
- He appeared to the disciples when they were gathered together on the first day of the week (Lk 24:33-49; John 20:19-25).
- He appeared again to the disciples on the first day of the week – "eight days" following the first appearance (John 20:26-29).
- The day of Pentecost (which means "fiftieth") took place on the first day of the week, fifty days after the Sabbath of the Passover week (Lev 23:16; Acts 2:1).
- The brethren in Corinth are said to have gathered on "the first day of the week" (1 Cor 16:1).
- It is generally acknowledged that this was "the Lord's day" to which John referred, when he received the Revelation (Rev 1:10).

It seems to me that a spiritual mind would gravitate to the first day of the week as a time to honor the Lord. He rose from the dead on that day, and appeared at least two times to His disciples on that day. It is most difficult for me to accept that this would not have shaped their view of gathering together.

A STATEMENT MADE LESS THAN 100 YEARS AFTER THE EVENT OF OUR TEXT

"On the day which is called Sunday, all (Christians) who dwell either in town or country come together to one place. The memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read for a certain time, and then the president of the meeting, when the reader has stopped, makes a discourse, in which he instructs and exhorts the people to the imitation of the good deeds of which they have just heard. We then all rise up together, and address prayers (to God); and, when our prayers are ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president, to the best of his ability, offers up both prayers and thanksgivings, and the people assent, saying 'Amen.' And then the distribution of the bread and wine, over which the thanksgivings have been offered, is made to all present, and all partake of it." He adds that the elements are carried to the absent by the deacons, and that collections are made for poor widows, and orphans, and sick, and prisoners."

JUSTIN MARTYR, 100-165

Apology given before Marcus Aurelius

They Came Together to Break Bread

It is said of the early believers, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). This cannot have been merely meeting together for a common meal, for that is not harmonious with “the apostles' doctrine, and fellowship . . . and prayers.” How is it possible that early disciples merely made a practice of eating a meal together? Was this not the very thing that was happening at Corinth, for which cause Paul severely upbraided them? “When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not” (1 Cor 11:20-22). Further, in delineating the table of the Lord, Paul made a point of saying Jesus “took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it” (1 Cor 11:24).

At the point Jesus instituted the Table of the Lord, it was a higher occasion than the Passover. He did not tell the disciples to remember the deliverance of Israel from Egypt – which remembrance occasioned the Passover Feast itself (Ex 13:3; Deut 16:3). That entire evening is covered in detail by John (John chapters 13-17 – 24% of John's Gospel), The other Gospels focus on the institution of the Supper itself (Matt 26:17-30; Mk 14:22-23; Lk 22:19-20). Paul also provides some of the details (1 Cor 11:23-34). Further, that this was not intended to be an occasion for a mere meal is clarified when Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “If any man hunger, let him eat at home” (1 Cor 11:34). That is, eating a common meal together was not to be the primary reason for coming together. In all of those accounts, there is not a single reference to the remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. Even if the Jews broke bread together, it was not to remember that deliverance.

Jesus was very pointed in what was to be recalled: “this do in remembrance of Me” (Lk 22:19). Paul clarifies that in the eating of the bread and drinking the cup, the remembrance of Jesus was the point. “And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me” (1 Cor 11:25).

Some say that at this table we remember the body of Christ – i.e. the church: that the members of the body are the ones who are discerned. Thus they explain Paul's words, “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body” (1 Cor 11:29). However, Jesus did not say to remember His disciples, but to remember Him! If people do not have regard for believers, it is because they do not have due regard for their Lord.

The Reason for Gathering

Our text makes clear that the reason the disciples came together was to “break bread.” They did not do this because there were commanded to do so, for there is no such commandment. The commandment related to remembering Christ, and it was the Table that provided the occasion for that focused remembrance.

The Rationale of the Lord's Table

There is a certain rationale associated with the table of the Lord. The focused remembrance of Christ sheds light upon the whole of life, and brings Divine resources within our grasp. This is because, although there are tangible items associated with the table, faith and hope are the chief matters. This does not dispense with the form, for the form precisely comports with the reality. The bread is made from grain that has been pulverized, even as our Savior's flesh was bruised. The cup contains the fruit of the vine, which was pressed out of the grape, like the Lord's blood was forced from His veins – particularly by the spear that pierced His side. Like two great hands, faith and hope combine to strengthen the believer. Faith reaches into the past and takes hold of the death of Christ. Hope reaches into the future, and expectantly looks for His return. Thus Paul wrote, “For as often as

ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor 11:26).

While we remain in that posture, we are made more aware of the provisions of redemption as well as the Redeemer Himself. It is not possible to have a more precise view of God Himself than when we remember Christ, for the fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Colo 1:19; 2:9). All of the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Him (Col 2:3). It is the Lord Jesus Christ who is made unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). It is He who is "our hope" (1 Tim 1:1). Salvation in its totality is "in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 2:10). The love of God that is toward us is in Him (Rom 8:39). Salvation is realized "through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 3:15). The lives of those whom God has accepted are "hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

As we remember Him, all of these realities glow with celestial glory, and the world is thrust into the background. Who better to remember than the Lord Jesus Christ. How is it possible to be any more pleasing to God than when we are focused upon Jesus and attentive to His Word?

Also, we eat at this table every first day of the week. Unlike the Sabbath day, the Lord's day begins the week, thereby distinguishing the New Covenant. Under the First Covenant rest came after work – at the end of the week, the seventh day. In the New Covenant we are made adequate for the works unto which God has ordained us by the due recollection of Jesus on the first day of the week.

There is a participation at this table that is not realized at any other place. Here is how Paul put it: "I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:15-16). Other versions read, "sharing in the body. . . sharing in the blood," NASB "participation in the body . . . participation in the blood," NIV Who is to measure the depth of such statements? Do they not accept the importance of this table? This is something that transcends mere appearance. To commune, or have fellowship with, the body and blood of the Lord is to realize the benefits that have been made available through them.

During our time at this table, the illogicality of being worldly minded becomes apparent. Thus Paul wrote, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Cor 10:21). This is such an important matter that the church of Corinth was admonished to expel a fornicator from their gathering in order that they might observe the Lord's Supper properly. The words of Paul are quite poignant. Following his instructions concerning the handling of the transgressor in question, he gave the following exhortation. "To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:5-8) Such language as this could not be received by the average American church. However, it serves to accent the nature of this table, and the necessity of approaching it in a proper frame of mind.

It is most unfortunate that the Christian community is not at all united on the matter of the Lord's Table. In many places, it is not the reason for gathering – even as the Corinthians who did not gather to eat the Lord's Supper. For some people, praising is now the reason for gathering. For others mere human camaraderie is the reason for coming together. For others who actually to partake of the Lord's Supper little is actually said about the Lord, and a focused remembrance is difficult because of shoddy presentations at the Table.

The truth of the matter is that the messages that are being heralded from the pulpits of the land do not awaken a desire for the Word.

It has now become fashionable in some places to move the table to the back of the meeting place,

where it is no longer prominent. There is also an accent on privacy, with each person going to the table alone and without due regard for the fact that this is a public ordinance.

Some partake of the table once a month, once a quarter, or even once a year. In that way, they reason, the tale will not become common. Their reasoning betrays their carnality. If there is any soul who imagines that Christ's words can be interpreted to mean such a thing, an alarming level of ignorance at once becomes apparent. Paul upbraided the Corinthians for not coming together to eat the Supper (1 Cor 11:20). What do you suppose he would say to those who partake of this table on a quarterly or annual basis? Precisely why are they meeting together on the first day of the week? However, after all of the arguments have been presented for eating at this table infrequently, the disciples at Troas still gathered together on the first day of the week to break bread – and the Holy Spirit saw to it that it was recorded in the Scriptures.

PAUL PREACHED UNTO THEM

“Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow . . .” Other versions read, “spoke to them,” NKJV “began talking to them,” NASB “spoke to the people,” NIV “was holding a discussion with them,” NRSV “discoursed with them,” ASV “gave them a talk,” BBE “Was discussing Scripture with the people,” GWN “preached a sermon,” NJB “reasoned with them,” PNT “was discoursing,” YLT and “addressed them,” WILLIAMS

The word translated “preached” is a different Greek word than is normal – **dielegeto** . The lexical meaning of this word is quite diverse: “to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss absolutely,” THAYER “of a reasoned discussion discuss, discourse with, conduct a discussion,” FRIBERG “address, speak,” UBS “of a reasoned discussion discuss, discourse with, conduct a discussion,” LOUW-NIDA “to converse with; to discourse, to ; to discuss,” LEH and “discuss, conduct a discussion; speak, preach.” GINGRICH

What did Paul do? Hold a discussion, dispute with the brethren, or deliver a discourse? According to the phrase that follows, it was fundamentally a discourse, which no doubt allowed for discussion, as this was often Paul's manner.

That the observance of the Lord's Table was harmonious with preaching and holy discussion is quite apparent. It is also clear that Paul was noted for his insight, and therefore was welcomed by those who hungered and thirsted for righteousness. The propriety of such gatherings is rapidly diminishing in our society. There are some few spiritual gatherings who manifest a hearty appetite for the things of God, but they are not easy to find. What was normal in the first century has now become abnormal. That is owing to the nature of what is being preached. The truth of the matter is that the messages that are being heralded from the pulpits of the land do not awaken a desire for the Word . Paul would probably not be welcomed in many churches of our land – particularly if he preached as long as he did in Troas.

One begins to sense the vast chasm that is between those early believers and those who profess faith in our time. I find this very disconcerting, for the Lord Himself has not changed, the Gospel message has not changed, and the need of the saints has not changed.

HE CONTINUED HIS SPEECH UNTIL MIDNIGHT

“ . . . and continued his speech until midnight.” Other versions read, “his message,” NKJV “kept on talking,” NIV “prolonged the discourse,” DARBY “continued the preaching,” TNT and “prolonged his address.” PHILLIPS

The word “speech” is translated from the Greek word **logos** (from logos). The emphasis of this word is a message, or the declaration of a particular word or teaching. I do not doubt that Paul

preached concerning the Table and its implications, as He did in his letter to the Corinthians. In that letter he made known the remarkable number of involvements associated with the table of the Lord.

Although these brethren were meeting for the right reason, and were obviously devoted to the Lord, I do not doubt that there was an abundance of relatively new things that Paul knew they needed to hear.

+This is a feast that is to be characterized by the purging of unacceptable manners, and the presence of sincerity and truth.

- Here, we participate in the body and blood of Christ (1 Cor 10:16).
- Believers are one bread, and partake of one bread (1 Cor 10:17).
- We cannot partake of the table of demons and the table of the Lord at the same time (1 Cor 10:21).
- At this table, we can provoke the Lord to jealousy by commitment to the devil's table (1 Cor 10:22).
- When we do not come together on the first day of the week to break bread, we have gathered for the wrong reason (1 Cor 11:20).
- We are to partake of this table in remembrance of Christ (1 Cor 11:24-25).
- In eating the bread and drinking the cup, we are declaring the Lord's death until He come (1 Cor 11:26).
- Those who eat and drink at this table in an unworthy manner will be charged with the guilt of the body and blood of the Lord (1 Cor 11:27).
- No believer is free to ignore this table. Each one must examine himself, then eat of the bread and drink of the cup (1 Cor 11:28).
- The person who fails to do this, eats and drinks damnation, or judgment, upon himself, because he did not discern the Lord's body (1 Cor 11:29).
- Many people have become weak and sickly, and some have even died, because they conducted themselves improperly at this table (1 Cor 11:30).
- If we judge ourselves at this table, examining our own selves, such judgment will not come upon us (1 Cor 11:31).
- When the Lord chastens us, it is in order that we be not condemned with the world (1 Cor 11:32).
- At this table, we are to be considerate of one another (1 Cor 11:33-34).

I have briefly listed these considerations, taken only from First Corinthians, to illustrate how much could be said concerning the Table alone. Although these brethren were meeting for the right reason, and were obviously devoted to the Lord, I do not doubt that there was an abundance of relatively new things that Paul knew they needed to hear. Recall the manner in which he wrote his letters to the churches. That will give you a good idea how he spoke when he gathered with the disciples.

I cannot help but observe that very few Christians have had the privilege of being present where extended preaching took place. I remember a New Year's Eve celebration held in 1954 in Olney, Illinois. Several notable speakers were part of that gathering, including Leroy Garrett and Carl Ketcherside. There were twelve consecutive speakers, and I was the twelfth, though by far the youngest speaker present. Several hundred people were in attendance for this lengthy session. I cannot conceive of such a thing taking place in our time.

MANY LIGHTS

“And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.” Other versions read, “many lamps,” NKJV “a number of lights,” BBE and “numerous lights.” AMPLIFIED

The meaning of the word “many” includes the idea of sufficient, or adequate. STRONG’S The Greek word used here (**ἰκαναί** .) is elsewhere translated “ large money” (Matt 28:12), “ great number” (Mk 10:46), “many” (Lk 7:11), “ much people,” Lk 7:12), “many swine” (Lk 8:32), and “many days” (Acts 9:23). This indicates there were a great number of lights, which implies a room of considerable size, and a significant number of people. It also suggests that provision was made for everyone to see.

The words “upper chamber” do not refer to a mere room, but to a story – in this case, the third story. Lexically it is defined as follows: “a room in the upper part of a house, sometimes built upon the flat roof of the house.”

Considering how oriental people still seat themselves, the number of people assembled in this upper chamber could easily have exceeded a hundred. Yet, there was an apparent accord as they gathered together and listened to the apostle Paul. It had apparently been some time since he had been there – possibly as long as three years, when he first went to Philippi (Acts 16:11).

I cannot help but note the indications of the level of interest these brethren had in the truth. They came and continued together when it was dark. They ascended to the third story to attend to things pertaining to the remembrance of the Lord. They made provision for Paul to speak to them. They made sure the lighting was appropriate. They also had an obvious appetite for the Word of the Lord, as well as for those who brought it. There are many professed believers who have never attended such an assembly. The gatherings they attend are generally brief –some as little as a single hour. It ought to be clear that something was present in these brethren that distinguished them from those smitten with the blight of mediocrity. It seems that I cannot get away from observing the corrupted form of Christianity that is prevalent today. That is because it so sharply contrasts Scripture accounts like this one.

A POTENTIAL DISTRACTION

“ 9 And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead. 10 And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.”

It should not surprise us to read of some kind of interruption taking place on this occasion – some intrusion that could break up the assembly and thereby rob the people of the true benefit of their visitor. Like young Elihu during the time of Job, Paul had come “full of matter” (Job 32:18), and he could not keep silence. He was among kindred spirits, the occasion was a sacred one, and the people were lovers of the truth. This was an ideal situation in which enlightenment and edification could take place. There were no rebellious Jews present to argue with Paul. There were certainly no Ephesian silversmiths in the audience to cause a tumult. However, alas, a test will be experienced, and it will be a hard one. It will not be in the moral arena, but will have to do with life in the body. It will not seem to be appropriate, yet it will not interfere with the proceedings of the evening.

A CERTAIN YOUNG MAN NAMED EUTYCHUS

“And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus . . .”

Other versions read, “a certain youth,” DARBY/YLT/WEYMOUTH

The words “young man” are translated from a single Greek word (**νεανία**) that has a rather

broad meaning. Here is understood to mean “a young man beyond the age of puberty, but normally before marriage,” LOUW-NIDA “youth,” LIDDELL-SCOTT or “children, youth,” LEH Eutychus was not a mature man, nor was he a fledgling youth, or adolescent. He was probably somewhere in his teens. The emphasis of the expression is on “young,” not “man.”

First, observe the interest of this young man. Although young in years he did have an interest in assembling with the saints, eating at the Lord’s Table, and hearing the preaching of Paul. Also, there was obviously no special interest group for the youth, but they remained identified with the more mature people.

Apparently the room was rather crowded, so young Eutychus had assumed a position in the window. This also suggests he was rather young.

FALLEN INTO A DEEP SLEEP

“ . . . being fallen into a deep sleep . . . ” Remember, Paul had been preaching for a long time – continuing his “speech until midnight.” If they met about the sixth hour, as some suppose, the apostle to the Gentiles had been speaking for six hours. However you may choose to judge the circumstance, it appears as though several hours had passed.

Owing to the weakness of the youthful constitution, Eutychus fell into a deep sleep. Gradually his awareness of the surroundings were less and less obvious, as all of his cognitive powers began to diminish, and a state of unconsciousness began to dominate him. I assume that this took a while to take place. It is certain he did not purposefully assume a position in which he could fall asleep, for it was in an open window three stories above the ground.

HE FELL DOWN FROM THE THIRD LOFT. AND WAS TAKEN UP FOR DEAD

“ . . . and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.”

Paul continued preaching, unhindered by the passing of time or the sleeping of Eutychus. The rest of the people apparently were alert and profiting from what they were hearing, else they would have dismissed the assembly.

At any rate, Eutychus fell into a deep sleep, and fell from the third story window to the ground. A violent and grievous interruption indeed! The fall must have been at least 20-25 feet [depending on the height of each story], in a limp state, for he was sound asleep.

The composure with which this whole incident was handled is most edifying. The text does not depict any state of crisis, unless it be the sorrow that attended the lad being “taken up for dead.” Other versions read, “taken up dead,” NKJV “picked up dead,” NASB “When they picked him up, he was dead,” CJB “was dead when they picked him up,” GWN “dropped three stories to his death,” NLT “was lifted up dead,” YLT and “When they got to him, he was dead.” IE The words “taken up for dead” do not mean they thought he may have been dead. Rather, they mean they picked him up as a dead person would be picked up – as opposed to examining the boy to see whether or not he was dead.

It must have taken a few minutes to get to the body, for the people had to descend three stories to get to the ground. Also, it is worthy of note that even though it was midnight, the people were alert enough to know the boy had fallen out of the window. Of course, the absorption of the mind with the things of God does not make a person insensitive of their surroundings, or rob the soul of alertness. How reasonable is it to imagine that hearing and discussing the things of God would take from a person the natural senses placed in him by God? The occupation of the mind with things pertaining

to life and godliness will elevate the capacities related to the image of God to the optimum level.

Now that the boy has been taken up dead, what will the people do? How will Paul address the situation? Will this conclude the gathering, with the people returning to their homes in a state of sadness, as the brethren did when Stephen was stoned to death by the Sanhedrin (Acts 8:2)? Indeed not! The exposition of Christ and His salvation is conducive to peace and composure in those who embrace it. They are made able to better handle earthly crisis, and will perceive more readily the proper thing to do. That is one of the great benefits of salvation, which is by grace through faith.

PAUL WENT DOWN

“ . . . And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.”

Immediately Paul “went down” the three stories. Other versions read “descending,” DARBY and “had gone down.”

DOUAY Whether the people called for him, or he also perceived the event and responded to it is not revealed. I suspect that both are true. He probably saw the lad fall, and then was also apprised that he was dead, killed by the fall. With news like that, some people would not have come down at all. Others would have rushed to the relative of the boy, if they were there, to console them. But this is not how Paul reacted.

Paul went directly to the boy and “fell on him.” Other versions read, “threw himself on the young man,” NIV “bending over him, took him in his arms,” NRSV “bent over him and embraced him,” RSV “falling on him took him in his arms,” BBE “fell upon him, and enfolding him in his arms,” DARBY “laid himself upon him, and embracing him,” DOUAY and “threw himself on the young man, and put his arms around him.” NET

What a tender scene is this! It is a most vivid depiction of apostolic composure, faith, and confidence. It is reminiscent of the time when Elijah raised the widow’s son. When confronting the dead boy the prophet “stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child’s soul come into him again. And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him, and he revived” (1 Kgs 17:21-22). Something similar happened when the prophet Elisha raised the son of the Shunammite woman, who was not a widow. When coming in the body of the boy, Elisha “lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon the child; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. Then he returned, and walked in the house to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes” (2 Kgs 4:34-35).

Something like that took place at midnight in Troas, when the saints were gathered together, and Paul was discoursing to them. It was a marvelous display of Divine power, wrought through a man who had counted all but loss to know Christ, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings (Phil 3:7-14).

The individual who does not forsake all to follow Jesus, or who attempts to follow Him at a distance, or perhaps not at all, will never know in this world what he has willingly forfeited – but you may be sure, it will be much. The half-hearted church member, the frivolous youth, and the person enslaved to religious tradition have robbed themselves, shutting off Divine input to a degree they are not, in their present state, capable of comprehending. Unless they repent of their ways, there is really not much hope for them, for their condition is such as grows worse and worse, leading to the blackness of spiritual night. Oh, that God would give such people repentance!

A religion that actually fosters aloofness from God by catering to the flesh, reducing the amount of time the people are exposed to the truth, and allowing for erratic living, is of the worst possible rank. It shuts the door to Divine supply, and opens the door to the god of this world. Purported movements and ministries that make people more conscious of this present evil world are to be abandoned with haste. They are lethal.

HE TALKED A LONG WHILE

“ 11 When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.”

What will this band of disciples do, now that the crisis has passed? Will the interruption be the occasion for concluding the meeting. After all, it is difficult to think of a more tragic circumstance taking place. Beside this, it was then after midnight, and people need their sleep – at least that is the ordinary rule. But this is no ordinary occasion. The apostle Paul is present, and he possessed insights into the things of God that no other person apparently had.

I cannot conceive of this whole thing happening among within Christendom. To begin with, the people would not have stayed until midnight, listening to the apostle Paul, or anyone else. Secondly, the fall and death of Eutychus would have disbanded the meeting, with people saying the boy would never have died if Paul had not preached so long. Thirdly, after he was raised from the dead, the people would surely have confessed that was enough excitement for the day, and would have called for the cessation of the meeting. However, all praise to God, the people at Troas bore no resemblance to the average professing Christian of our time. These were real disciples, with new hearts and spirits, a love for the truth, and commitment to the Savior. All of the things that are declared to take place in those who are baptized into Christ had actually taken place in them. The things disciples are admonished to do, they were doing. No person should expect they would respond to either blessing or crisis in the manner to which this generation is accustomed.

HE CAME UP AGAIN

“When he therefore was come up again . . .” Other versions read, “when he had gone back up,” NASB “he went upstairs again,” NIV “Then Eutychus went upstairs again,” GWN “he returned upstairs,” NAB “they all went back upstairs,” NLT and “They brought the young man inside . . . Paul went upstairs again.” LIVING

It seems appropriate to me that the disciples, with Paul, would once again break bread – particularly since the Lord had worked so mightily among them. Then, because of the lateness of the hour, they would have eaten for bodily nourishment. Notwithstanding, this is not a matter worthy of disputation.

So who went upstairs again? Paul? Eutychus? Or everyone? There is no doubt but that all of them returned to the third floor to resume their meeting. Eutychus had good reason to return and give thanks. Paul would continue teaching, and the people would continue listening. During the entirety the whole episode Satan was soundly defeated, God was glorified, and the people edified.

The hour was late, to be sure, but Paul was going to be leaving the next day (20:7). The people, having an appetite for the truth, and living by every word of God, desired to obtain as much as possible from this apostle, who “labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10).

THEY BROKE BREAD AND ATE

“ . . . and had broken bread, and eaten . . .” Other versions read, “had taken the broken bread,” BBE “breaking bread and tasting,” DOUAY “shared in the Lord's Supper, and ate together,” NLT

“broke bread and took some food,” WEYMOUTH and “had broken bread and eaten [with them].” AMPLIFIED

There are at least three views taken of this passage. Although I do have a view of it myself, it may be of value to mention them.

- That breaking bread and eating refers to two different activities: the first to partaking of the Lord’s Table, and the second to an ordinary meal.
- That both expressions refer to a common meal.
- That the disciples had not yet broken bread because of Paul’s long discourse. When they returned, they did eat at the Lord’s Table, then had a common meal together for refreshment of the body.

It seems appropriate to me that the disciples, with Paul, would once again break bread – particularly since the Lord had worked so mightily among them. Then, because of the lateness of the hour, they would have eaten for bodily nourishment. Notwithstanding, this is not a matter worthy of disputation.

I do not doubt that Eutychus was also there. When he ate, it was much like Jairus’ daughter. After Jesus raised her from the dead, He commanded that they give her something to eat (Mk 5:43).

HE CONTINUED TALKING UNTIL THE BREAK OF DAY

“ . . . and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.” Other versions read, “continued to converse with them,” NRSV “he conversed with them,” RSV “went on talking to them,” BBE “having long spoken,” DARBY “talked with the people,” GWN “discoursed,” MRD “a long conversation,” NAB “talked a long while,” RWB “commented a long while,” TNT “Paul preached another long sermon,” LIVING “Paul spoke to them a long time,” IE “continued a long earnest talk with them,” PHILLIPS and “talked confidentially and communed with them for a considerable time.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “talked” can be used to describe talking to or talking with. While there may very well have been some input from the brethren in Troas, it seems to me that the burden of the conversation was carried by Paul. The length of his talk may have been occasioned by questions or comments from the people. However, considering the caliber and role of the apostle Paul, I can hardly believe that discerning people would fill up the time with their own words. He was the one with the most to say. Notwithstanding, this is one of those texts that appears to allow some latitude for thought, without compromising the significance of the text itself. Let every person be fully persuaded in their own mind.

THEY WERE NOT A LITTLE COMFORTED

“ 12 And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.” Other versions read, “greatly comforted,” NASB “greatly relieved,” CJB “rejoiced over him greatly,” MRD “immeasurably comforted,” NAB “greatly encouraged,” NJB “comforted in no ordinary measure,” YLT “were not a little comforted and cheered and refreshed and encouraged,” AMPLIFIED and “feeling immeasurable relieved.” PHILLIPS

A worldly reporter would not have written the record in this manner. First, the fall of Eutychus from the third story window would have been the featured article.

A worldly reporter would not have written the record in this manner. First, the fall of Eutychus from the third story window would have been the featured article. Then, after he had been raised from the dead, the attention would have shifted to the comfort that was ministered during the occasion. If

there was time and space sufficient, some mentioning might have been made of the guest, and of the lengthy discourses he delivered that day, but it would probably not have been complimentary.

However, Luke writes up the events in another manner.

- Luke places the stress on the gathering itself, and why it convened.
- The length of Paul's first discourse.
- The events related to Eutychus.
- The return to the meeting.
- The length of Paul's second discourse.
- The presentation of Eutychus alive and well.
- The extraordinary comfort that was ministered to the brethren.

I gather this is not reported in strict chronological order, but rather in a manner that reflected the priority of the events. The fact that the brethren received no small amount of comfort from the presentation of Eutychus confirmed they were in no way indifferent to him. However, for them, everything that took place was within the context of the remembrance of the Lord and the preaching of Paul. That is also the context in which the raising of Eutychus took place.

Concerning the extraordinary comfort the brethren experienced, Young's Literal Translation seems to capture the meaning of the text: "and they brought up the lad alive, and were comforted in no ordinary measure." The idea is that just as the work performed was extraordinary, so the comfort derived through it was far beyond ordinary limits.

It does not appear right to me to respond in ordinary ways to extraordinary works and benefits. Giving thanks for all things does not imply the same measure of thanks for everything. True comfort, as well as praise and joy, are governed by discernment, and there is more to be seen in works that are more obviously beyond the boundaries of nature. Those who are given to behold the marvelous works of God are obliged to react accordingly – in a way that is consonant with their nature. Praise and insight are to be wed.

CONCLUSION

From one point of view, the book of Acts contains the records of extraordinary people and unusual works. From another, and more discerning viewpoint, it is the record men and women living by faith – which is the norm of the Kingdom of God. If the reports that are given in this volume are of a differing order than those professing believers experience today, it is only because there is a difference in the caliber of people. God has pledged Himself to support and direct those who live by faith (Psa 25:9; 32:8; 37:23; 85:13; 121:3,8; 1 Sam 2:3; Prov 3:5-6; 16:9; Isa 30:21; 48:17; 49:10; Rom 8:14; ; Gal 5:18). What we have in this record are examples of people being led by the Lord. This is because they were on the highway that is characterized by such leading (Isa 35:8). It is because they were relying on Divine direction, having assumed the posture of strangers in this world and citizens of the world to come.

To put it another way, salvation in all of its aspects, and throughout the entire of its scope, is ever "by grace through faith" (Eph 2:8). When men live by faith, they are in the position where they can be led and directed by the Spirit. This is because faith sensitizes the soul, opens the eyes, and unstops the ears. Ponder how marvelously this is confirmed in the book of Acts.

- As the brethren were together with one accord and waiting expectantly for what the Lord had promised, they were filled and led by the Spirit to say what was appropriate for the occasion (Acts 2:1-41).

- As they were engaged in the work of the Lord, yet imprisoned, the angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought the apostles out, directing them what to do (Acts 5:19-20).

- While Philip was involved in the will of the Lord, the angel of the Lord directed him to go toward the south, where he would confront the Ethiopian eunuch. As he went, the Holy Spirit directed him what to do (Acts 8:26-29).

- While Cornelius, an earnest seeker, was praying, an angel of the Lord directed him what to do in order that he and his house could be saved (Acts 10:3-6).

- While Peter was praying, the Lord directed him concerning his response to the men sent to him from Cornelius (Acts 10:9-19).

- When Peter was imprisoned by Herod, the angel of the Lord delivered him, telling him what to do (Acts 12:7-8).

- While the brethren in Antioch were ministering to the Lord, the Holy Spirit directed them concerning the separation of Barnabas and Saul for a special work (Acts 13:2).

- While serving the Lord in Asia, Paul and company were directed by the Lord to go to Macedonia, calling them to preach the Gospel there (Acts 16:9-10).

- When in Corinth, serving the Lord, yet facing opposition, the Lord directed Paul, telling him He had much people in that city, and that no one would seek to hurt him (Acts 18:10).

- While a prisoner on a boat that was in a fierce storm, the Lord directed Paul, informing him that he was in charge of everyone on the ship, and would appear before Caesar (Acts 27:23-24).

It is the manner of the Lord to direct people as they are engaged in believing and obeying. Thus Abraham was shown where to go after he commenced his journey to an unknown land, as God had commanded him (Gen 12:1). After he set out to offer Isaac as a burnt offering to God, as the Lord commanded, he was directed where to go (Gen 22:2). After Israel had left Egypt and crossed the Red Sea, they were directed to the promised land (Ex 12:25). After Saul of Tarsus had gone to a certain place, as the Lord commanded him, he was told what to do (Acts 9:6).

Divine direction is accomplished “in the way” – on the proper path. Thus the servant of Abraham, when on an appointed mission to obtain a wife for Isaac, confessed he had been directed by the Lord. “Blessed be the LORD God of my master Abraham, who hath not left destitute my master of his mercy and his truth: I being in the way, the LORD led me to the house of my master's brethren” (Gen 24:27). Jacob also acknowledged he had been directed when he was “in the way” (Gen 35:3). An angel was sent to direct Israel when they were “in the way” (Ex 23:20).

This is the kind of guidance we are witnessing in the book of Acts. As the people walked in the newness of life, they were directed. When they were engaged in the will of the Lord, their steps were ordered by the Lord. Many a poor soul has never, or perhaps rarely, experienced Divine guidance because they are not on the proper path. They are walking on the wrong road – a road in which such marvelous guidance cannot be realized. Blessed is the person who can see this.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #84

MEETING WITH THE ELDERS OF EPHEBUS, #1

“ 20:13 And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot. 14 And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. 15 And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus. 16 For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost. 17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church. 18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, 19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews: 20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house, 21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. 22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. 24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. 25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. 26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” (Acts 20:13-27)

INTRODUCTION

A SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

Luke and others set out to go to Assos by ship, while Paul goes there on foot. After he joined them, they sail to Miletus, from which he called for the elders of Ephesus – the place where he had spent

three years. He delivers to them a stirring and insightful word that encapsulates his time with them, and provides a warning for the future. Once again, the priority of equipping the saints is made clear in both word and action. There is also an obvious unity of the Spirit confirmed in the willingness of those traveling with Paul, and the elders who

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- **PAUL JOINS THEM IN SAILING TO MILETUS (20:14-15)**
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- **CONCLUSION**

came to him at his bidding. All of this demonstrates the effect of faith upon the hearts of those who possess it. Here, there is no evidence of the friction and competition that have stamped their mark upon Babylon the Great –that great spiritual whore that now fills the earth. The presence of such things is proof of the absence of faith. The fellowship among the brethren that is seen in this text is not a miracle, but is rather the evidence of genuine spiritual life.

INDEX TO THE LORD’S WORK

As Paul goes about fulfilling his commission, he provides a kind of index to the Lord’s working. There is an evident priority reflected in what he does, and it is worthy of note. That priority radiates with the nature of what Jesus Himself is doing, now that He is enthroned in glory at the right hand of God. I do not know how it is possible to justify any priority in which Jesus Himself is not engaged. It is not possible that He has changed His precedency, revealing some new thrust to non-apostolic individuals. Ponder some of the emphases that men claim reflect the will of the Lord.

- Monitoring and stabilizing political agendas.
- Ministering to the poor of the world.
- Reaching the youth, and preparing them to be the church of tomorrow.
- Solidifying marriages.
- Leading people out of, according to human definition, addictions to this or that.

It is not that these things are inherently wrong, but that they are not a proper emphasis.

THE ROLE OF THE APOSTLES

It is critical that the saints see the ordained role of the apostles of Jesus Christ. I speak “ THE twelve apostles” Matt 10:2; Lk 22:14; Rev 21:14), and of Paul, “ THE apostle of the Gentiles” (Rom 11:13). By rank, these are the “first” in the church (1 Cor 12:28). Apart from himself, Paul referred to “the twelve” as “all the apostles” (1 Cor 15:5,7).

We have in the book of Acts the carrying out of a Divine agenda. The actions that are recorded are said to have been initiated by heaven.

The “foundation” upon which the church is built is referred to as “the foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Eph 2:20). That is, they are the ones who put the foundation in place, God laying it through them (1 Cor 3:10-11). There is no valid thought of Jesus Christ that was not originally foretold by the prophets, then set forth and expounded by the apostles of Christ. None-apostolic writers like Luke, James, and Jude, did not present some new and hitherto undeclared aspect or ministry of Christ Jesus. Peter refers to this Divine arrangement in his second epistle: “That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior” (2 Pet 3:2). Jude hearkens his readers to recall the words of the apostles (Jude 1:17). The early church continued steadfastly in “the apostles doctrine” (Acts 2:42). There is no record of any non-apostolic prophet after Jesus making known some totally new perspective of Jesus Christ or of the salvation of God. There simply is no foundational teaching that was not transmitted to the sons of men that did not come through the apostle’s mouth.

We conclude, therefore, that there is no proper emphasis that was not foretold by the prophets, and declared and expounded by the apostles – and that includes Solomon, who, although he wrote Scripture, was distinguished from the prophets (1 Kgs 1:34,38; 2 Chron 9:29). His character and spiritual retardation was not characteristic of the prophets of God (1 Kgs 11:4,9). This does not obviate the writings of Solomon. However, they must not be considered as foundational in the salvation of God. When compared with the words spoken by the prophets, the Lord Jesus, and the apostles, they are rudimentary. They are not the appointed commentary on life in Christ Jesus.

DIVINE DIRECTION IN ACTS

We have in the book of Acts the carrying out of a Divine agenda. The actions that are recorded are said to have been initiated by heaven.

- **ANGELS.** The interposition of angels (Acts 5:19; 8:26; 10:3,22; 11:13; 12:7; 27:23).
- **PROPHECIES.** The utterance of prophecies (Acts 21:10).
- **VISIONS.** Divine direction through visions (Acts 9:10,12; 10:3,17,19; 11:5; 16:9,10; 18:9; 26:19).
- **THE LORD.** The Lord speaking (Acts 9:5,10,15; 18:9; 22:10; 23:11).
- **SCRIPTURE.** A correlation of with the Word of God (Acts 2:16; 15:15; 17:2,11).
- **HOLY SPIRIT.** The direction of the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 13:2).
- **HOLY REASONING.** Holy men pondered what was said or revealed to them (Acts 16:10).

Yet, in all of these influences and direction, there is not a syllable that parallels much of the contemporary claims of being directed by God. Keep in mind, we are speaking of priorities or emphases. And, how are we to consider such claims? Are we to imagine that some kind of new stress has been established by heaven? Like the infamous chameleon, has the church adapted to its environment? Who would care to take it upon themselves to prove such a postulate? How is it possible to establish a primary thrust that is never mentioned in Scripture? If such cannot be done, there is no basis for requiring that the family of God support it. Yet, in all of the religious fervor of our time, there is precious few public intentions of establishing and edifying “the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). In order to justify such an omission, it must be established that:

- The Divine emphasis has been changed from the church to the world.

- The church no longer stands in need of such attention, being fully established.
- The heart of God is more fully set upon enlarging the church rather than establishing it.
- The book of Acts does not reflect the mind of the Lord.

Of course, it appears absurd to even suggest such things. However, the emphatic thrust of the modern church and its ancillary activities require that someone step forward and justify the departure from the obvious thrust that is chronicled in the book of Acts. There really needs to be an explanation!

PAUL’S THIRD MISSIONARY JOURNEY

We are in the midst of what is commonly called the third missionary trip of Paul. It covered approximately 2,700 miles, and lasted for a period out five years (54-58 A.D.). Paul disembarked from Antioch (Acts 18:23), visiting Galatia and Phrygia (18:23), Ephesus (19:1-7), Macedonia and Greece (20:1-5), Troas (20:5-10), Assos, Mitylene, Kios, Samos (20:13-15), Miletus (20:17), Cos, Patara (21:1-3), Tyre (21:3), Ptolemais and Caesarea (21:7-8), and Jerusalem (21:17). More than half of that time was spent in Ephesus (three years (Acts 20:31).

The establishment of the believers was the objective of most of Paul’s journey’s. All of his epistles were written to them. It is unconscionable that such priorities have been almost universally ignored during the last hundred years of church activity. Even the great reformation movements of history have been for the establishment of the church – for freeing it from the encumbrances of religious tradition, and anchoring it once again in the truth of Christ. We are living in a day that is crying out for another major refocusing of the church. For the most part, its current preachers, teachers, and educational leaders are not properly focused, but like entertaining minstrels are playing the tunes loved by those who are living in practical alienation from God. It is not an ideal situation, to say the least.

SOME GO BY SHIP, WHILE PAUL GOES BY FOOT

“**20:13** And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.”

Having avoided the Jewish plot to apprehend Paul, the holy company resumes the pursuit of Paul’s objectives.

WE WENT AND SAILED TO ASSOS

“And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul . . .” Other versions read, “we went ahead to the ship and sailed to Assos,” NKJV “We went on ahead 49 to the ship and put out to sea for Assos,” NET and “going on ahead to the ship, the rest of us set sail for Assos.” AMPLIFIED

By sea, Assos was about forty miles from Troas. At this point, as indicated by the text, Luke was traveling with “the rest.” The group included Luke, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timotheus, Tychicus, and Trophimus. They were from different areas: Berea, Thessalonica, Derbe, and Asia. Yet, they were in the “unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3), and “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13). The work of the Lord cannot be conducted in any other way.

At this point, Paul is not with the group. According to their plans, they intended for Paul to join them in Assos.

PAUL MINDED TO GO AFOOT

“ . . . for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.” Other versions read, “so he had given orders, intending himself to go by foot,” NKJV “thus he had arranged it, intending himself to go by land,” NASB and “he had made this arrangement because he was going there on foot.” NIV

These plans were made by Paul himself, who apparently wanted to be alone during this time. The trip by foot was approximately half the distance by ship, being twenty miles in length.

We are not told why Paul preferred to go by foot. Some suggest that he may have lingered a little while with the brethren at Troas, GILL and others that he may have intended to visit some friends along the way. BARNES I doubt that such intentions are covered under the heading “minding himself to go afoot.”

It appears more likely to me that he sought the solitude for meditation, prayer, and Divine fellowship. This is the kind of life Jesus Himself led, often preferring to be alone (Matt 12:15; 14:23; Mk 3:7; 6:47; Lk 5:16; John 6:15). There is something about constant contact with people that erodes the soul, as though requiring an extraordinary measure of grace. Few people appear aware of this, but Jesus was keenly aware of it. I do not doubt that the closeness of Paul to Christ brought the same experience to him. This by no means points to an inferiority of fellowship with brethren. It does accent the necessity of immediate fellowship with Christ Himself. While this does involve His body, the church, there is also an intensely personal aspect to it. Spiritual life cannot be maintained independently of Christ Himself.

Over the years I have observed that walking and talking with the Lord is a most excellent means of obtaining spiritual satisfaction. Articulation is like a refreshing stream that flows out, making room for Divine input.

PAUL JOINS THEM IN SAILING TO MILETUS

“ 14 And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. 15 And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus.”

The trip by sea to Miletus took nine days: five days from Philippi to Troas (20:6a), plus one day from Troas to Mitylene (20:14), plus one day to Chios (20:15), plus one day to Samos, plus one day to Miletus. Translated into hours, that was one hundred and twenty hours to Troas, plus ninety-six hours from Troas to Miletus – a total of two hundred and sixteen hours. This does not include the seven days spent with the brethren in Troas. Add to that the twenty-mile walk of Paul from Troas to Assos. This is what was involved in serving the Lord during the first century. I find it exceedingly difficult to conceive of that kind of personal investment taking place in our day – a time when convenience and ease have assumed the place of a gods.

WE TOOK HIM IN

“And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene . . .”

With no recorded difficulty, Paul met them in Assos, and boarded the ship for the remainder of the trip. I say “no recorded difficulty” – but that does not imply there was none. Paul mentioned elsewhere that had encountered “perils of robbers . . . perils by the heathen . . . perils in the wilderness” (2 Cor 11:26). Perhaps some of these perils were encountered during his walk to Assos. Whatever the circumstances that may have taken place during that time, a commitment to the Lord and a love for His work is abundantly evident – and it is refreshing to read such a report.

There is a consistency in Luke’s reporting that is worthy of notice. He never views the life of the saints from the mundane point of view. What men may consider ordinary or casual living is not

reported by holy men of God. Life is not recorded from the incidental point of view. We do not have a solitary example of the daily activities of men and women of God from a purely earthly point of view. Whether it is Adam and Eve, Enoch, Noah Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, we do not have the slightest idea of the manner of their domestic life. How they conducted themselves with the wives, their children, or their neighbors is simply not reported. The same is true of Moses, Aaron, David, the prophets, and John the Baptist. We have a single excerpt of the first twelve years of Jesus' life – and it has to do with the observance of an ordained feast, and his activity in the holy city.

There is an underlying postulate that living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and fellowship with Christ will provide a framework in which the details of life can be worked out for the glory of God and the satisfaction of the individual. However, this circumstance is not acceptable to those who walk in the flesh.

Even though those in Christ are admonished concerning domestic and social behavior, yet the instruction is not on a detailed level, and there are not sufficient examples to formulate a step-by-step system concerning mundane life. There is an underlying postulate that living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and fellowship with Christ will provide a framework in which the details of life can be worked out for the glory of God and the satisfaction of the individual. However, this circumstance is not acceptable to those who walk in the flesh. Therefore, they develop plans, procedures, and routines according to their own pleasure that are designed to address life in this world. However, in so doing they have only confirmed their practical alienation from the living God. To them, whether they confess it or not, men are not made complete in Christ (Col 2:10).

If all of this seems irrelevant to the text, one must consider how the activities of Paul and those with him are written up. If what I have said of life is not true, then one can only perceive these

accounts as incidental, with no practical relevancy to life. Such a view is altogether unacceptable. It is not possible that inspired history is unrelated to Divine purpose.

WE FINALLY ARRIVED IN MILETUS

“And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus.”

Luke often gives some details of Paul's travels, revealing their extensive nature. In my understanding, there is a purpose to this approach. It confirms that Divine direction does not always come in the form of visions, dreams, and prophecies. Often, if not the majority of the time, it is accomplished within the context of Divine fellowship – when the individual is simply living for the Lord. That is what is involved in walking and pleasing God (1 Thess 4:1), and living unto Him who died for us (2 Cor 5:15). Such living is the required context for Divine direction, as is confirmed in the faithful. This, I say, ought to be abundantly apparent.

PAUL DETERMINES A PARTICULAR COURSE

“ 16 For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia: for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.”

GODLY PLANNING

Paul planned his life around Divine direction and holy remembrances. It is very difficult for the person dominated by the mind of the flesh to see the value of such manners. Both of them yield to the Lord, and do not give the central position to self. This differs significantly from the manners that were cultured under the Old Covenant. While there were souls who pressed to know the Lord during that time, they were few and far between: i.e. David (Psa 27:4), Isaiah (Isa 26:9), Jeremiah (Jer 15:16),

etc. The rank and file of the people “forgot” the Lord (1 Sam 12:9; Psa 106:21), and did not submit to God (Psa 81:11). The summation of their response to the Lord is stated by Himself; “My covenant they brake” (Jer 31:32). His appeals to them were stated like this: “But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:21). The Lord had to send them the prophets, over and over again, to jar them out of their complacency – yet they did not hearken to them. Thus it is written, “Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day I have even sent unto you all my servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: Yet they hearkened not unto me, nor inclined their ear, but hardened their neck: they did worse than their fathers” (Jer 7:26; 25:4; 26:5; 29:19; 35:15; 44:4).

Yet, you will not find this kind of response in the book of Acts. It is true that there were wayward people like Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), and John Mark who abandoned the work of God at one time (Acts 13:13; 15:38). But these were by no means representative of the mass of believers. Those in Christ were part of a covenant in which the laws of God were written upon the heart and put upon the mind (Heb 8:10). They had new hearts, and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26), and were prone to walk in the ways of the Lord (Ezek 36:27). According to the promise of God, all those in Christ “know” the Lord (Jer 31:34; Heb 8:12; 10:17-18).

All of this translates into lives that were lived out unto the Lord. The early saints did not think in terms of fleshly convenience, worldly preferences, and the likes. They thought in terms of doing the work of the Lord – like Paul; and of following holy men, like those who joined Paul.

All of this translates into lives that were lived out unto the Lord. The early saints did not think in terms of fleshly convenience, worldly preferences, and the likes. They thought in terms of doing the work of the Lord – like Paul; and of following holy men, like those who joined Paul. That is the Kingdom norm, and yet if we were to confine our attention to the church of our day, I do not believe it would be possible to come to that conclusion. It is the failure to see this that has given birth to such sayings as, “Christians are sinners like everyone else, with the only difference being that they are forgiven.” Or, “God loves everyone the same.” Or, “You know how we are, always wanting to do the wrong thing.” Observations of this sort are developed when people, at the very best, are dwelling at an unacceptable distance from the Lord.

How could a person possibly attribute such feeble-minded sayings to men like Paul, Sopater, Gaius, Aristarchus, Secundus, Timothy, Tychicus, Trophimus, and Luke? We are reading of men who not only knew the Lord, but were living in the focused awareness of that knowledge.

PAUL DETERMINED TO SAIL BY EPHEBUS

“For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia . . .”

Paul had spent the three previous years in Ephesus, and was not inclined to return there at this time. His heart told him that this was not the time to be in Asia. I personally consider this to have been Divine direction – particularly when you consider the outcome of the choice. Jesus had considered Paul “faithful, putting” him into “the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12). That is, Paul could be trusted to fulfill the task given to him, just as God knew Abraham would do what was right concerning the promises (Gen 18:19). This involved HOW the trusted ones went about fulfilling what was required of them. That is involved in counting a person “faithful.” This would involve being directed by the Lord’s eye, as compared to having to be pulled this way and that by a bit and bridle (Psa 32:9).

Some people have remarkable capacities, but must be directed in their use by more forceful means. This is because their strength and sensitivity are not equal. When strength or aptitude is strong, but sensitivity is weak, it is time for the bit and bridle. When one’s sensitivity is strong, but their strength is weak, God turns their weakness into strength (2 Cor 12:10).

HE WANTED TO BE IN JERUSALEM ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST

“ . . . for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.” Other versions read, “he was hurrying,” NKJV “he was eager,” NRSV “he was going quickly,” BBE “he was anxious,” NJB and “very desirous.” WEYMOUTH

Paul’s motives have been mis-assessed by many self-assigned teachers of our time. Some contemporaries, among whom I have traveled, felt that Paul was keeping the day of Pentecost as a Jew would keep it. Perhaps he did not do so out of a sense of obligation, but, they surmise, it was a Jewish manner that clung to him. However, this is not sound reasoning, for Paul never gave indication that he remained devoted to shadows once the substance had come.

The Feast of Pentecost

This was the second feast that was to be attended by all males of Israel; the first being the Feast of the Passover (Lev 23:15-22), and the last being The Feast of Tabernacles (Lev 23:34). The feast of Pentecost, like the Passover, lasted only one day – the fiftieth day after the Passover, or the day after seven sabbaths (7 X 7 =49) had passed. The was also called “the feast of harvest,” and was the time which was “the firstfruits of thy labors, which thou has sown in the field” (Ex 23:16). It was also referred to as “the day of the firstfruits” (Num 28:26). At this time special loaves of bread were made from the first-ripened grain, and waved before the Lord, being presented to Him (Lev 23:15-17). The offering of bread was to be accompanied by the sacrifice of seven lambs without blemish, that were in their first year; one young bullock, and two rams as burnt offerings (Lev 23:18). This was to be followed by the sacrifice of one “kid of the goats for a sin offering, and two lambs of the first year for a peace offering” (Lev 23:19).

It should not require extensive thought to confirm that Paul was not going to keep the day of Pentecost as it was instituted under the Law. Such an observance would have been a repudiation of the sacrifice of Christ.

The Reason for Paul’s Attendance

The reason Paul sought to be in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost was doubtless to testify to the Jews concerning Christ Jesus. This was the time when the spiritual firstfruits were reaped from the field of the Jews – three thousand of them (Acts 2:41). Paul doubtless saw this as the early harvest, and longed to see the full harvest come it.

We know how this beloved apostle thought about the Jews. He acknowledged to a Gentile church, “That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3). This was not mere fleshly sentimentality, but was based upon God’s dealings with them. “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

The three feasts, of which Pentecost was the second, were observed in Jerusalem, and therefore there would be devout men there out of every nation, just as there was on the first Pentecost after Christ’s enthronement (Acts 2:5).

This was also the day on which the New Covenant was officially inaugurated, and three thousand first-ripe spiritual fruits were presented to the Lord. Such holy recollections, together with a fervent desire that the Jews might be saved was driving Paul at this time.

Jerusalem

However, it seems to me that each person has a kind of spiritual obligation to recognize times when Christ can be more profitably presented.

As a point of interest “Jerusalem” is mentioned sixty times in the book of Acts (1:4,8,12,19; 2:5,14; 4:6,16; 5:16,28; 6:7; 8:1,14,25,26,27; 9:2, 13, 21,26,28; 10:39; 22:2,22,27; 12:25; 13:13,27, 31; 15:2,4; 16:4; 18:21; 19:21; 20:16,22; 21:4,11,12,13, 15,17,31; 22:5,17,18; 23:11; 24:11; 25:1,3,7,9, 15,20,24; 26:4,10,20; 28:17).

The city of Jerusalem was declared to be related to the working of salvation in the midst of the earth. In this sense, this city was referred to as “the throne of the Lord” (Jer 3:17). God said it would continue (Joel 3:20). Zechariah said that God would dwell in Jerusalem, and it would be called “the city of truth” (Zech 8:3). It was also prophesied, “many people and strong nations shall come and seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem” (Zech 8:22). Isaiah foretold that the word of the Lord would go out from Jerusalem (Isa 2:3). All of these things began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost.

There Are Special Seasons

In Christ there are special seasons when productivity is elevated. This is owing to holy associations being made at such times, unusual tenderness of heart, and the gathering of many people for a God-centered cause. Scripture would call such times “in season” (2 Tim 4:2). During such occasions, for those of tender heart, the Lord’s Christ Himself becomes the dominate consideration, even though many people may have gathered for lesser religious reasons. I have observed over the years that such gatherings, whether in celebration of the resurrection of Christ, His birth, or some other holy remembrance, are often viewed as times for family gatherings, or the assembly of those who are nothing more than fleshly acquaintances. Men are not at liberty to create laws for such occasions, or to sit in judgment of the plans of others. However, it seems to me that each person has a kind of spiritual obligation to recognize times when Christ can be more profitably presented.

Perhaps it would be better said that there are, indeed, such times, and that it is honoring to the Lord to use them to reach people who are otherwise rather insensitive. This is an area where wisdom is required.

PAUL CALLS FOR THE ELDERS FROM EPHEBUS

“ 17 And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.” Other versions read, “called to him the elders,” NIV “asking the elders of the church to meet him,” NRSV “sent to Ephesus for the rulers of the church,” BBE “called the spiritual leaders 1 of the church,” GWN “had the presbyters of the church at Ephesus summoned,” NAB “telling the elders of the church to come to him,” NET “the elders of the congregation,” TNT and “elders of the assembly.” YLT

There are three particular churches that are specifically said to have elders.

- Jerusalem (Acts 11:30; 15:2,4,6,22, 23; 16:4; 21:18).
- Ephesus (Acts 20:17).
- Philippi, referred to as “bishops” (Phil 1:1).
- After visiting the churches established by themselves, and “confirming the souls of the disciples,” Paul and Barnabas “ordained elders in every church” (Acts 14:23).
- Paul told Titus to ordain elders in every city (Tit 1:5), IF they met the standards set forth (Tit 1:6-9).
- The type of men intended to fill this office were specified by Paul to both Timothy and Titus (1 Tim 3:1-7; 5:17; Tit 1:6-9).
- James wrote of those who were sick calling for the elders, who were to “pray over

him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord” (James 5:14).

- Peter admonished the elders to “feed the flock of God, taking the oversight thereof” (1 Pet 5:2-4).

- The epistle to the Hebrews speaks of those who “have the rule over you,” who have “spoken the word of God” to them, and whose faith they were “to follow,” admonishing the saints to “remember them” (Heb 13:7,24). It is also said that such men were watching for their souls, as those who “must give account” of the flock to God (Heb 13:17).

I say these things because the church of our day has very little understanding of this office. It is largely viewed as a role that must be filled, and that those filling it are something like bosses who manage the church like an executive manages a business concern.

It is understood that this is the office to which Paul referred in his letter to the Ephesians, listing it as one of the gifts Jesus gave to the church: “pastors and teachers” – a single office with two sides. Being “pastors” has to do with caring for and protecting the flock. Being teachers accents the feeding of the flock, acquainting them with the ways of the Lord and the manner of the kingdom.

The purpose for all of the teaching gifts given to the church is spelled out in the fourth chapter of Ephesians.

- The perfecting, or equipping, of the saints for the work the ministry – or the various means of building up and edifying the body of Christ (4:12).

- This edification is to eventuate in the body being united in faith and in their knowledge of the Son of God (4:13a).

- The objective is for the individual members to mature in their role in the body, so that the whole church may properly reflect Christ. Each part is to function in their capacity as Jesus Himself (4:13).

- The aim is to bring the whole body to a point where the individual members are no more children, easily deceived and carried about by every wind of doctrine (4:14).

- Each member of the body is to be brought to a point where they can “speak the truth in love,” thereby contributing to the whole body growing up into Christ in “all things” (4:15).

- As each member grows up into Christ in every aspect of life, Christ ministers through them as the Head does through the various members of the physical body. In so doing, the members are firmly joined and compacted together by means of the various contributions of the individual members (4:16).

Apart from these objectives, there really is no purpose elders. God has made no provision for a nucleus of men to run the business affairs of the church, or be the official monitors and resolvers of personal difficulties and conflicts.

When we consider what Paul says to these elders, viewing it from the perspective of the role and ministry of such leaders, what we is said above will become very clear.

The difficulty with our time is that these things have been conveniently placed to the side in favor of formal leading that is more related to a business corporation than it is to the church. For example, some view the elders as monitors over what is being taught, while the Scriptures depict them as the ones who are doing the teaching. Further, there is not an insistence upon them being the kind of men, and exercising the type of leadership that is held forth in Scripture. For example, they are to be able to stop the mouths of gainsayers who seek to subvert the church, doing so “by sound doctrine,” both exhorting and convincing the offender (Tit 1:9-11).

The elders at Jerusalem were of such a caliber that they could join with the apostles in making major judgments (Acts 15:2,4,6,22,23; 16:4). This is an office that is to be taken seriously. It is also one that is established by God, who is the One who places the members in the body as it has pleased Him (1 Cor 12:18) – and that included the office of elder, or bishop. This is not a function assigned by men, or agreed on by mere human consensus. Perhaps it would be well to consider briefly the traits of a man who is an elder. I will tell you beforehand, there will be little similarity in these descriptions with the body of elders that are found in the average congregation. These descriptions confirm the seriousness of this office.

- The office is to be desired by those who occupy it (1 Tim 3:1).
- The man must be “blameless,” or beyond rebuke (1 Tim 3:2a; Tit 1:7a).
- The “husband of one wife” (1 Tim 3:2b). That is, he cannot be a bigamist.
- He must be “vigilant,” or temperate and in control of his life (1 Tim 3:2c; Tit 1:8d).
- He must be “sober,” prudent and discreet in both his perspectives and judgments (1 Tim 3:2d; Tit 1:8c).
- He must be of “good behavior,” respectable and spiritually dignified (1 Tim 3:2e).
- He must be inclined to be “hospitable,” and not hesitate to entertain strangers and brethren in his home (1 Tim 3:2f; Tit 1:8a).
- He must be “apt to teach,” or able to teach, or an apt teacher (1 Tim 3:2g).
- He must not be “given to wine,” or addicted to strong drink (1 Tim 3:3a; Tit 1:7e).
- He cannot be a “striker,” or violent in his demeanor or emotion – not pugnacious (1 Tim 3:3b).
- He cannot be “greedy of filthy lucre,” being free from the love of money (1 Tim 3:3c; Tit 1:7f).
- He must be “patient,” gentle and noted for moderation (1 Tim 3:3d).
- He cannot be a “brawler,” but be of a peaceful disposition (1 Tim 3:3e).
- He cannot be “covetous,” having a grasping spirit, and wanting more than he requires (1 Tim 3:3f).
- He must be a man that rules his own house well, “having his children in subjection with all gravity” (1 Tim 3:4-5). This is understood to refer to the children that remain under his control.
- He cannot be a “novice,” lacking a thorough understanding of the Lord and His purpose (1 Tim 3:8a).
- He must have a “good report of them that are without,” not being a man with of bad reputation (1 Tim 3:7b).

The nature of Paul’s testimony to these men, together with his instructions, will confirm the necessity and ministry of these spiritual qualities and characteristics. Unfortunately, the church has had its share of men who were called elders, who were sorely lacking in these areas.

He cannot be “self-willed,” arrogant, haughty, and having a high estimation of himself (Tit 1:7c).

- He cannot be “soon angry,” flying off the handle at the slightest provocation (Tit 1:7d).
- He must be a “lover of good men” (Tit 1:8b).

- He must be “just,” or holy and righteous (Tit 1:8c).
- He must be grounded in the faith, holding “fast the faithful Word,” that he may be able, with sound doctrine, to both exhort and convince the gainsayer (Tit 1:9a).
- They are to feed the flock of God (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2a).
- They are to “take the oversight,” or care, of the flock, doing so willingly, and not by constraint, or because they have to (1 Pet 5:2b).
- They are not to “lord it over” the flock of God, but to be an example to it (1 Pet 5:3).

The nature of Paul’s testimony to these men, together with his instructions, will confirm the necessity and ministry of these spiritual qualities and characteristics. Unfortunately, the church has had its share of men who were called elders, who were sorely lacking in these areas. As James would say, “My brethren, these things ought not so to be” (James 3:10). My personal experience with elders, with very few exceptions, has been very disconcerting and disappointing. How thankful I am for the exceptions.

THE MANNER OF PAUL’S MINISTRY

“18 And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons, 19 Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews. . .”

THEY WERE COME TO HIM

“And when they were come to him . . .” Other versions read, “when they had come to him,” NASB “when they arrived,” NIV “when they were with him,” GWN and “upon their arrival.” WEYMOUTH

Notice the dispatch with which the elders came to Paul from Ephesus. The trip was 50-60 miles, probably on foot. This confirms several things concerning these men.

- Their love for Christ, who is the Head of the church.
- Their respect and love for Paul, who was the one who had taught them the things pertaining to the Person of Christ and the purpose of God.
- Their love for the church itself, and of their concern for its purity and stability.
- Their willingness to allow their lives to be molded around the work of the Lord.
- The immediate nature of their obedience.

Now, all of these, together with things related to them, reflect the nature of those upon whose hearts the law of God has been written. This is how men who have a new heart react to men sent from God. This is the kind of reaction that mature members of the body of Christ display.

Now, all of these, together with things related to them, reflect the nature of those upon whose hearts the law of God has been written. This is how men who have a new heart react to men sent from God.

In our time, such responses are not common. That is why there are all kinds of workshops and courses that attempt to teach people to be spiritual. However, spirituality is the result of spiritual understanding. Commitment to God comes from a heart that has been circumcised. When men do not have spiritual responses, it is because they are not spiritual. If they do not conduct their loves in a holy manner, it is because they are not holy. If they do not keep Christ’s commandments, it is because they do not love him. When men consistently act in a carnal manner, it is because they are carnal.

By the same token, as John has said it, “If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him ” (1 John 2:29). And again John says with great poignancy, “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous . He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:7-8).

If these men had not been godly, Paul would not have called them to Miletus. In such a case, he would probably have remained in Ephesus until such time as they could be trusted to care for the flock.

A MANNER FOR ALL SEASONS

“ . . . he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons . . . ”

There was a consistency in Paul’s ministry that reflected His closeness to the Lord, as well as his grasp of the nature and purpose of the church. One of the great blights of the modern church is the inconsistency of its ministers. They are too shallow, too sporadic, and willing to adapt to people whose commitment to the Lord is questionable. It is a most uncomely situation.

We will find that Paul’s activities did not include becoming involved in the daily intricacies of the lives of the people. Today’s “minister” is something like a cheap psychiatrist that offers counseling and resolution for domestic and interpersonal conflicts. That is more closely related to the function of leaders under the Law than those under Christ Jesus. The need for “judges” was not so much owing to the complexities of life as it was to the hardness of the hearts of the people. Procedures for issuance of a bill of divorcement, for example, were given “because of the hardness” of the hearts of the people – and that is a word that was delivered by the King Himself (Matt 19:8; Mk 10:4-5).

In Christ there is a resolution for hardness of heart. It is the conferment of a “new heart” upon which is written the very laws of God (Ezek 36:26; Heb 8:10). The need for endless counseling and moral direction indicates that God’s “great salvation” has been neglected (Heb 2:3). A salvation that does not successfully address the attitudes and demeanor of men is no salvation at all.

Now, let us behold precisely how Paul ministered among the redeemed.

SERVING THE LORD WITH HUMILITY OF MIND

“ . . . Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, . . . ”

Serving the Lord

Other versions read, “I served the Lord,” NIV Doing the Lord’s work,” BBE “laboring for God,” MRD and “have done the Lord’s work.” NLT

The word “served” is translated from the Greek word **douleu,wn** which has the following lexical meaning: “to be a slave, serve, do service absolutely . . . to obey, submit to . . . absolutely to yield obedience . . . to obey one’s commands and render to him the service due,” THAYER “spiritual service to God serve, obey.” FRIBERG Serving the Lord involves doing His will as one who is indebted to Him and owned by Him. There is no question about this. The individual who serves the Lord is doing His will, serving His interests, and fulfilling the mandate that has been delivered to him.

Jesus left no doubt when He called Paul to be an apostle. He spelled out the work that he was to

do. Although I have mentioned this commission frequently in these lessons, I am compelled to do so once again. The word of Jesus to Paul, then Saul, is recorded in Acts 26:16-18.

- To be a witness of the things Jesus had revealed to him.
- Open their eyes.
- Turn them from darkness to light.
- Turn them from the power of Satan unto God.
- Work to the end that the people may receive the forgiveness of sins.
- Labor in order that they might receive an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Jesus.

Paul was NOT called to help people with problems in their personal, domestic, and social lives. Any involvement he had in those areas were directly related to illuminating the people, turning them to God, and preparing them to receive an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). Jesus did not call Paul to relieve the poor of the world, correct the political views of the people, or enable them to be successful in the world. In fact, there is no record of God calling anyone into such works. That is, these are not the main purpose of anyone of Scriptural record. This does not mean that such things are wrong of themselves, but they are never right as a focus or emphasis. When eternity is taken out of the picture, the service, strictly speaking, is not toward God.

During the last few decades, there has been a significant shift of emphasis within the nominal church. It has tuned its harp to psychological music, and is now playing the songs the public demands. People want help with their problems, their marriages, their children, their finances, and other personal, domestic, and social issues. Little if any of their interests merge with eternity. Little thought is given to death, the day of the coming of the Lord, and the day of judgment. These days, as soon as someone begins talking about eternal things, or things pertaining to “life and godliness” as defined by God, questioning looks come over the people. These are not the areas being explored and expounded by the clerics – at least, not by the popular ones. It is now quite possible to graduate from a Bible College and even Seminary with very little understanding of the Scriptures. True religious utility is not equated with serving the temporal interests of people. In fact, a significant percentage of missionary work is now devoted to relief work.

All of this may appear quite innocent, but it is not. The truth of the matter is that relatively few people have a single cogent idea about what it means to serve the Lord. These days, that is just not the way people think and talk.

Humility of Mind

Other versions read, “all humility,” NKJV “great humility,” NIV “all lowliness of mind,” ASV “without pride,” BBE “much humility,” CJB “all lowliness,” DARBY “all modesty,” GENEVA “humbly served,” GWN “humbleness of mind,” TNT and “I never thought about myself first.” LIVING

A professed minister of Christ who, through his ministry, seeks his own welfare and interests is a living contradiction to the will of God. In that respect he is unlike the Christ he professes to serve. Such men will not fare well on the day of judgment.

The words “humility of mind” are translated from a single Greek word: **tapeinofrosu,nhj** . The word means, “having a humble opinion of one’s self; a deep sense of one’s littleness, modesty, humility, lowliness of mind,” THAYER “a quality of voluntary submission and unselfishness, humility, self effacement,” FRIBERG and “without arrogance.” LOUW-NIDA

While the above is the lexical meaning of the word, the concept itself was lived out by Jesus, and is spiritually defined in His Person. This it is written of Him, “Who, although being essentially one with God and in the form of God [possessing the fullness of the attributes which make God], did not think this equality with God was a thing to be eagerly grasped or retained, But stripped Himself [of all privileges and rightful dignity], so as to assume the guise of a servant (slave), in that He became like men and was born a human being. And after He had appeared in human form, He abased and humbled Himself [still further] and carried His obedience to the extreme of death, even the death of the cross!” AMPLIFIED (Phil 2:6-8).

To confirm that Jesus lived out the standard of the Kingdom, the above words are preceded by this expression: “Let this same attitude and purpose and [humble] mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus: [Let Him be your example in humility]” AMPLIFIED (Phil 2:5).

This is the manner in which Paul conducted his ministry among the Ephesians. He was not among them to gain personal advantage, or to seek his own selfish interests. He was not there to become rich through them, or to come into the possession of many worldly things as a result of being there. He did not come to make a name for himself, or to garner followers for his personal cause.

Humility involves taking the lower seat, and allowing the interests of another, even Jesus Christ, to dominate you. This is the frame of spirit that Paul described in these words: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

A professed minister of Christ who, through his ministry, seeks his own welfare and interests is a living contradiction to the will of God. In that respect he is unlike the Christ he professes to serve. Such men will not fare well on the day of judgment.

Likewise, those professed ministers who make it their aim to please the people have been recalcitrant to their trust. They are the servants of the Lord, and it is their business to know the will of their Master, and then to do it.

SERVING THE LORD WITH MANY TEARS

“Serving the Lord . . . with many tears . . .” Other versions read, “with tears,” NASB “through all the sorrows,” BBE “with tears in my eyes,” GWN “sometimes I even cried,” LIVING “in tears,” WILLIAMS and “tears I have shed over the trials.” PHILLIPS

As used in this text, “tears” are spiritual tenderness expressed. They are a wounded heart spilling out through the eyes, and are associated with sorrow and inward pain.

Paul was a man of tender heart, another aspect in which he was like His Lord. For example, when having to deal with the carnality of the Corinthians he wrote, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears ; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Cor 2:4). When writing to the Philippians about religious charlatans who were making pride with religion he wrote, “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping , that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil 3:18).

As used in this text, “tears” are spiritual tenderness expressed. They are a wounded heart spilling out through the eyes, and are associated with sorrow and inward pain. The next clause associates those tears with the trials caused by hostile Jews who hounded Paul continually.

TEMPTATIONS WHICH BEFELL ME

“ . . . and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews. . . .” Other versions read, “trials which happened to my by the plotting of the Jews,” NKJV “I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews,” NIV “enduring the trials that came to me through the plots of the Jews,” NRSV “trials which befell me through the plots of the Jews,” RSV and “ in the midst of adversity (affliction and trials) which befell me, due to the plots of the Jews [against me].” AMPLIFIED

When writing to the Corinthians, Paul mentioned some of the trials he endured, stating that God had set forth the apostles “last,” insofar as popularity was concerned. “For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak , but ye are strong; ye are honorable, but we are despised . Even unto this present hour we both hunger , and thirst , and are naked , and are buffeted , and have no certain dwellingplace ; And labor, working with our own hands : being reviled , we bless; being persecuted , we suffer it: Being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world , and are the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1 Cor 4:9-13). Again, he wrote of being “troubled on every side,” perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “cast down” (2 Cor 4:9). He also mentioned being beaten by the Jews “five times,” and being “in perils by mine own countrymen” (2 Cor 11:24,26). First and Second Corinthians were written (57 A.D.) during this third missionary tour of Paul (54-58 A.D.). Therefore, the hostility of the Jews that he mentions in those letters were related to the general time of this report.

While we are not to view persecution as the ultimate tragedy, neither are we to imagine that it does not have an effect upon those of tender heart. David mentioned his own experience of being a stranger and sojourner, referring to the “tears” associated with that circumstances (Psa 39:12). Some of his tears were associated with “wanderings,” a term that denotes being viewed as a pilgrim and a stranger (Psa 56:8). He also wrote of tears that were related to the hardships of sowing (Psa 126:5).

Those who take the work of the Lord seriously are not impervious to the effects of rejection, hostility, and misrepresentation. Also, to behold the truth being corrupted impacts upon their spirit, and is capable of causing considerable sorrow. In this regard, Paul spoke of “the care of all the churches” that came upon him every day, or “daily” (2 Cor 11:28). As used here, the word “care” means anxiety, concern, disquietude, and uneasiness. WEBSTER The Greek word from which the word is translated means “care, anxiety,” THAYER “concern,” FRIBERG “worry,” UBS and “a feeling of apprehension or distress in view of possible danger or misfortune -anxiety, worry, anxious concern.” LOUW-NIDA Paul doubtless shed many tears over the conditions of the certain churches, the errors to which they were subjected, and some who sought to exploit them.

It is doubtful, to say the least, that an insensitive person can be effectively used by God in the work of the Kingdom. A circumcised heart cannot be insensitive.

THE THOROUGHNESS OF PAUL’S MINISTRY

“ 20 And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house”

A proper ministry is related to thoroughness. Main things cannot be excluded, nor can a ministry be conducted as though subsidiary matters were primary. The objective of salvation must permeate every aspect of a valid work. For example, no work for God can be carried out as though this world was the primary world, and existence in the body was the fundamental existence. As simplistic as that may appear, much professed Christian activity projects this misperception. Consequently, spiritual advancement is often related to the mere cessation of unacceptable manners of conduct. To many, “victory” means no longer committing a certain transgression. However, this is not a proper concept at all. While sin must have a termination point, victory and triumph are related to making progress in the faith – and progress has to do with attainment, not mere cessation.

I KEPT BACK NOTHING THAT WAS PROFITABLE

“And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you . . .” Other versions read, “I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable,” NASB “have not hesitated to preach anything that was helpful,” NIV “held back nothing that could be helpful to you,” CJB “I shunned not that which was advantageous to your souls,” MRD “I did not at all shrink from telling you what was for your benefit,” NAB “I always did what was best for you,” IE and “I never shrank from telling you anything that was for your good,” WILLIAMS

The word “profitable” means “to bring together,” THAYER “to confer a benefit, be useful or profitable,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “help, confer a benefit, be advantageous or profitable or useful,” GINGRICH

In this case, help, or advantage, does not have to do with giving the people their own personal desires – unless those desires are in synch with the purpose of God. Neither, indeed, does it have to do with earthly advantage, whether personal, domestic, or social. Strictly speaking, it is not related to answering the questions of the people, or assisting them in the resolution of their dilemmas. Such things may be appropriate under certain circumstances, but they are not to be the driving force of the work of God. Technically speaking, the resolution of personal difficulties are to be addressed within the context of Divine fellowship (1 Cor 1:9), the leading of the Spirit (Rom 8:13; Eph 4:18; 1 Thess 5:19), and working out one’s own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).

In this case, profitability is to be seen within the context of the purpose of God as He has revealed it. This has been stated in a number of ways, but they are all pointed in the same direction. Being truly profitable has to do with things that will occur AFTER life on earth is completed. More precisely, it is related to what will take place when Jesus returns, and the day of judgment is completed.

The ultimate objective of salvation is stated in a number of ways. These ways are not at variance with one another, and are all facets of a single purpose. Here are some ways the Divine intentions for salvation is stated.

- **CONFORMITY TO CHRIST.** To conform those who were foreknown and predestinated by God to the image of His Son. “For whom He did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

- **GROWTH INTO CHRIST.** For those in Christ to “grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ” (Eph 4:15).

- **TO BE FOUND IN A PROPER STATE WHEN JESUS COMES.** Paul states this objective in a very personal way – as one who has embraced it. “And be found in Him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:9-11).

- **STATE OF CHANGE BY INCREASING STAGES OF GLORY.** That a change may take place within believers by the Holy Spirit, that is from one increasing change to another. This is accomplished while we are focused upon “the glory of the Lord,” as seen in the Person of Christ. “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

- **EXPERIENCING KINGDOM LIFE.** That the life and glory of the Lord may be expressed in the lives of those in the Son. “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it,

do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:9-11).

As a man would lift up an article for the people to behold, so the man declaring, or showing, the Word of the Lord raises it up, so that it is prominent, and the people will become familiar with the facts of the case.

THAT THE SONS OF GOD MAY BE BROUGHT TO GLORY AND AN ETERNAL INHERITANCE. That all of the sons might be brought to glory, obtaining an “eternal inheritance.” “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings . . . And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb 2:10; 9:15).

This brief listing is by no means complete. However, it does reflect the direction and ultimate intent of God’s great salvation. Something that is “profitable” directly relates to such matters. From this perspective, something temporary cannot be truly profitable, and must never be permitted to occupy the place of preeminence. I have found that a proportionately small number of people appear to have grasped this fact. If this assessment is true, it confirms that there are a host of ministries that are skewed in the wrong direction, for both the perspective and the lives of the people are but commentaries on what they have embraced.

I HAVE SHOWED YOU

“ . . . but have showed you . . .” Other versions read, “proclaimed it to you,” NKJV “declaring to you,” NASB “to preach,” NIV “proclaiming the message,” NRSV “announce it to you,” DARBY and “telling you.” NAB

The word “showed” is translated from the Greek word **avnaggei/lai** , which means “to announce, make known . . . to report, bring back tidings, rehearse,” THAYER “announce, proclaim, openly declare,” FRIBERG “report,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to recount,” LEH In his Greek Dictionary, Vine says of this word, “signifies . . . to lift up and show, show forth, declare.”

As a man would lift up an article for the people to behold, so the man declaring, or showing, the Word of the Lord raises it up, so that it is prominent, and the people will become familiar with the facts of the case. This does not differ from the exposition of the truth, which is covered in the next term. Both what the Lord has done, and what the Lord has said are to be set before the people – not as a kind of novelty, but as something that is fundamental, primary, and foundational. This would not be quoting a few excerpts from the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Even though they are inspired by God, they are not the highest revelation of God, and are limited to life in this world. The only way such sayings are really profitable is when they are within the context of a greater and more fundamental message. Even then, the measure of their profit is not very large.

There are people who have been present in a religious assembly for decades, giving their full attention to what is being said. Yet, they have very little understanding of the purpose of God, main things, or the body of knowledge that is made known exclusively by Christ. Whatever may be said about those who have preached to such people, they have not been faithful servants of the Lord. If men do not apprise those to whom they regularly speak of what the Lord has emphasized, they have done little more than usurped the office of a preacher. I hardly see how it is possible to come to any other conclusion.

I HAVE TAUGHT YOU

“ . . . and have taught you . . .” Other versions read, “teaching you,” NASB and “instructed.” NJB

As used here, the word “taught” means, “to hold discourse with others in order to instruct them, deliver didactic discourses . . . to impart instruction, instill doctrine into one . . . to explain, expound, a thing,” THAYER “to cause to learn or to cause to know.” LOUW-NIDA

The person who teaches causes the hearers to become familiar with what is taught, bringing them to a point where they can handle the truth, use it, and comprehend something of its meaning and scope. Keep in mind, that the things that were being taught were “profitable,” integrating with the purpose of God, and the objective that drives salvation. This is not a mere academic understanding, but eventuates in “spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

PUBLICLY AND FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE

“ . . . publicly, and from house to house . . .” Other versions read “publicly and privately,” BBE “publicly and in every house,” DARBY “openly and throughout every house,” GENEVA “openly and in your houses,” TNT and “in public meetings and from house to house.” AMPLIFIED

The preaching and teaching to which Paul refers was both in public gatherings, and in houses where believers met. I gather that this refers to times when the believers were “come together into one place” (1 Cor 11:20), or “the whole church be come together into one place” (1 Cor 14:23). Initially, it must have also referred to the daily meetings held in the school of Tyrannus (19:9). The situation was much like that of the early believers, immediately following the day of Pentecost: “And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:46). This does not describe the formal setting of the gatherings, but is rather the overflow of hungering and thirsting souls who were not satisfied to meet once in a while, and in a larger and more public gathering.

Notice the nature of the public and private meetings: it was for showing and teaching, or preaching and expounding. That was a primary activity among the early believers.

THE SUMMATION OF PAUL’S MINISTRY

“ 21 Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Sayings like the one before us are important – important because they set forth the emphasis of apostolic preaching. They provide a kind of summation under which all valid preaching and teaching is classified.

INITIALLY TESTIFYING TO BOTH JEWS AND GREEKS

“Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks . . .” Other versions read, “solemnly testifying,” NASB “declared,” NIV “declaring with utmost seriousness,” CJB “earnestly bore witness,” NAB “I have had one message,,” NLT “urging upon,” WEYMOUTH and “constantly and urgently I bore testimony.” AMPLIFIED

Translated from the Greek word **diamarturo,menoj**, the word “testifying” means “to testify, I. e. earnestly, religiously to charge: followed by an imperative,” THAYER “strongly urge, insist,” FRIBERG “to make a serious declaration,” LOUW-NIDA “to affirm solemnly,” LEH and “charge, warn, adjure . . . bear witness to solemnly,” GINGRICH

At the core of salvation are matters relating to both God and Christ. These represent the heart of

the issue, for if they are not addressed satisfactorily, nothing else matters. This was a universal message – to both Jews (a covenanted people) and Greeks (a people without a covenant with God). Greeks distinguish the people from the Jews upon the basis of language, which at that time, and owing to the influence of Alexander the Great, was the universal language. The Jews had their own language, which was basically a theological language (2 Kgs 18:26,28; Neh 13:24; Esth 8:9; Isa 36:11,13).

REPENTANCE TOWARD GOD

“ . . . repentance toward God . . . ” Other versions read, “must turn to God,” NIV “repentance to God,” RSV “turning of the heart to God,” BBE “turn from sin to God,” CJB “change the way they think and act,” GWN “turn to God in repentance,” NIB “turn to God,” NJB “repenting from sin and turning to God,” NLT “toward God reformation,” YLT “change their hearts to God,” IE and “turn in repentance [that is due] to God.” AMPLIFIED

The need for repentance to God postulates alienation from God. It addresses a situation where the individual is not living within the framework of God-consciousness. Whether we are speaking of initial salvation, or of a recovery from going backward, the issue is turning to God. Paul preached that men “should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance,” or “prove their repentance by their deeds” NIV (Acts 26:20). Paul’s commission included turning men “from the power of Satan unto God” (Acts 26:18).

This is a perspective that is sorely needed in our time. First, sin is not being addressed as “sin,” nor is it associated with alienation or a departure from God. Consequently, little is being heard these days about repentance.

Repentance is large in scope, including both the heart and the body, thoughts and deeds, intentions and the carrying out of them. No person has repented in the sense of this text whose thinking and conduct has not changed. Those who take the requirement of “repentance toward God” seriously, will be aided in that work by the One who demands it. Sinners , whether in that state by nature, or because they have fallen into it following believing on the Son, must possess a keen awareness of what sin has done – cut them off from God. That situation must be resolved. There must be “repentance toward God.”

Properly viewed, repentance is not toward man, but toward God. While those who sin against men must repent toward those against whom they have sinned (Lk 17:3), it must be preceded by repentance toward God – else it has no value.

FAITH TOWARD OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.” Other versions read, “faith in,” NASB “put your trust in,” CJB “believe in,” GWN “the faith which is towards,” PNT “through faith in,” LIVING and “trust in.” IE

This presumes the all-sufficiency of Christ (Col 2:10), as well as His indispensability. Dependence must not be upon self, but upon Christ. Trust cannot be in a system, or a routine, but in Jesus Christ. Faith is not a confession, but prompts a confession. The person who says “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37), has not believed because he said those words, but has said them because he has believed. Furthermore, just as repentance was confirmed by appropriate works, so faith is initially validated by doing what Jesus requires. That is seen in the responses the Jews at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), the believers at Samaria (Acts 8:12), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:36-38), Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:18), Cornelius and his household (Acts 10:47-48), Lydia and her household (Acts 16:15), the Philippian jailer and his household (Acts 16:33), and Crispus and his household (Acts 18:8).

Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ thoroughly addresses the matter of obedience and the appropriation of the salvation of God. It always inquires what is to be done, then sets out to do it.

BOUND IN THE SPIRIT AND ARMED WITH KNOWLEDGE

“ 22 And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: 23 Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.”

Here Paul accounts for his determination to go to Jerusalem, not knowing what he will face once he is there. His motive superceded any fear or uncertainty concerning the trip. This is the posture of faith, and is consistent in all who possess it.

BOUND IN THE SPIRIT

“And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “bound in spirit,” NASB “compelled by the Spirit,” NIV “as a captive to the Spirit,” NRSV “bound in the Spirit,” RSV/GENEVA “a prisoner in spirit,” BBE “bound in my spirit,” CSB “constrained by the Spirit,” ESV “in captivity to the Spirit,” NJB “bound by the Spirit,” NLT “bound by the [Holy] Spirit and obligated and compelled by the [convictions of my own] spirit,” AMPLIFIED “I must obey God’s Spirit,” CEV “in obedience to the Holy Spirit,” GNB “I feel compelled to go,” MESSAGE “Drawn there irresistibly by the Holy Spirit,” LIVING “I must obey the Holy Spirit,” IE “impelled by a sense of duty,” WEYMOUTH and “I am impelled by the Spirit.” WILLIAMS

The word “bound” is the translation of a word meaning, “put under obligation . . . compelled by my convictions.” THAYER

Does this mean Paul was being compelled by the Holy Spirit, as represented by a significant number of versions? (NIV/NRSV,GENEVA/ESV/NJB/NLT/AMPLIFIED/CEV/GNB/LIVING/WILLIAMS) Or does it mean he was driven by his own spirit, as other versions suggest? (NASB/BBE/CSB/MESSAGE/ WEYMOUTH) I am not sure it is proper to separate these two concepts. Both are no doubt involved. The Holy Spirit was directing the activity, and the human spirit was responding to it. That is something of what is involved in walking “in the Spirit” (Gal 5:16,25), not quenching the Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), not grieving the Spirit (Eph 4:30), and being “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:14).

Valid kingdom labors cannot be accomplished through the human spirit alone. Nor indeed, is personal motivation the appropriate basis for such work. The doctrine of the Lord informs us that we are not our own, that we have been bought with a price. The conclusion of that fact is that we are to glorify God in both our spirit and body (1 Cor 6:19-20). I doubt seriously that this can be accomplished through an inward compulsion that is not under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Couple this with the fact that “it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” (Jer 10:23), and that “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23), and it becomes clear that any inner compulsions within the saint is under the direction of the Holy Spirit. If, as Jesus taught His disciples, the Spirit would teach them what to say (Lk 12:12), it seems perfectly reasonable that He would also lead them where to go.

All of this postulates a spiritual depth that is quite uncommon in our day. No person can live on the surface of life, so to speak, and experience the direction of the Holy Spirit. Whether it is attesting our sonship, or directing our steps, the Spirit bears witness with our spirit , not our mind or our emotion (Rom 8:16). That is, He communes (2 Cor 13:14) with the part of us that has been born again, renewed, or regenerated. It is the “new man” that is directed, for “the old man “is corrupt according to deceitful lusts,” and is therefore insensitive to the Spirit (Eph 4:22). Paul, then, was

compelled from within his own person by means of the Holy Spirit of God, which he neither quenched nor grieved.

NOT KNOWING

“ . . . not knowing the things that shall befall me there . . .” Other versions read, “not knowing what will happen to me there,” NASB “having no knowledge of what will come to me there,” BBE “not knowing what I will encounter there,” CSB “What will happen to me there I do not know,” NAB “I don't know what awaits me,” NLT and “I am not aware what will befall me there.” WILLIAMS

God does not always provides all of the details pertaining to the future. Abraham, for example was called to leave his own country and journey to a land, the identity of which was unknown to him (Heb 11:8). When God commanded him to offer his only son, Isaac, as a burnt offering, the Lord sent him to a mountain that was unknown to him at the time of his departure (Gen 22:2). It was along the way that the details were made known. This is the manner of walking by faith.

Notice the absence of debilitating fear and the presence of stabilizing peace. This too is a result of living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It also reveals the high value that Paul placed on the will of the Lord and working in His vineyard.

INSPIRED WITNESSING

“ , , , Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.” Other versions read, “chains and tribulations await me,” NKJV “prison and hardship are facing me,” NIV “imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me,” NRSV and “jail and suffering lie ahead.” NLT

When Paul was called to the apostleship, the glorified Christ told Ananias, “For I will show him how great things he must suffer for My name's sake” (Acts 9:16). When Paul and Barnabas preached in Derbe, they themselves told the people, “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). Later, certain disciples in Tyre said to Paul through the Spirit, “that he should not go to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:3-4). A prophet from Judaea named Agabus “ took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:11).

Care must be taken not to think of Divine direction and the work of the Lord as being in isolation from uncomfortable circumstances, opposition, and sore trials. When Paul spoke of the many things he endured, he was referring to what happened to him while he was doing the work of the Lord.

We have no further records of the witnessing to which Paul alludes. Some sophists conclude that the intent behind the prophecies was to keep Paul from going to Jerusalem. Here, however, the text suggests the Spirit employed these prophecies to direct Paul to go to Jerusalem, knowing that adversity awaited him there. He did not know the exact nature of the opposition, but it would not inhibit the completion of the work he had been assigned to do.

When I consider this text, I am reminded that Jesus Himself was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil” (Matt 4:1). For the Lord Jesus this was a time of preparation for His ministry – a time of testing that would better equip Him for His assigned work. I cannot but conclude that this was the kind of experience that awaited Paul – a preparatory experience that would better fit him for the completion of his work. The fact that he was admonished not to go to Jerusalem was much like a test to bring out the determination that is required to labor in the vineyard of the Lord.

Care must be taken not to think of Divine direction and the work of the Lord as being in isolation from uncomfortable circumstances, opposition, and sore trials. When Paul spoke of the many things he endured, he was referring to what happened to him while he was doing the work of the Lord . He did not run from, his work like Jonah, who endured three days and nights in a whale’s belly (Jonah 1:17). Instead, he ran to the work, forfeiting self interests and advantages in order to take a more firm hold on the work Jesus gave him to do. In his activity he spoke of “labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches” (2 Cor 11:28).

These things were experienced WHILE Paul was in the center of God’s will, doing that will from the heart. The good and acceptable and perfect will of God is wrought in the midst of a world that is alienated from God, and a people that are characterized by hostility against Him. Only the naive soul is taken unaware by the presence of trouble and opposition. As the servant of God matures in his faith in and acquaintance with the Lord, he finds there is a very real fellowship in the “sufferings” of Christ (Phil 3:10). It is this participation that moved Paul to respond as he did to the prophecies of chains and imprisonment that were spoken concerning him going to Jerusalem. Also, keep in mind that this was the “holy city” (Matt 4:5) where the Lord Jesus Himself was tempted by the devil and endured the oppositions of ungodly religious men.

It is no wonder that Jesus told His disciples, “In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). And again, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you ” (John 15:19). Such experiences cannot possibly, of themselves, separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:38-39). However, the way that truth is confirmed to the heart is by having the experiences of reference. The potency and ability of the grace of God is substantiated in the crucible of trial and suffering . That, of course, is precisely why Paul was so effective in his teaching concerning the grace of God – a ministry that uniquely belonged to him.

PAUL IS UNMOVEABLE

“ 24 But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God .”

NONE OF THESE THINGS MOVE ME

“But none of these things move me . . .”

The person who places the higher value on living in this world has, by that very deed, not only forfeited the good things of God, but has guaranteed he will lose what he has valued.

We are being exposed to the reasoning of a man whom Jesus “counted faithful, putting Him into the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12). This is one who was “a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the Gospel of God” (Rom 1:1). Being among “the apostles and prophets,” who were “the foundation” upon which the church is built (Eph 2:20), there was an unwavering consistency in his commitment to the Gospel. We have no example, other than Judas Iscariot, of an apostle or prophet who failed to carry out their mission – and even Judas carried out what was said of Him, betraying the Son of God (Psa 41:9; Psa 109:8; Matt 26:21; Acts 1:16,20). With the single

exception of Judas, no apostle or prophet fell “by transgression” (Acts 1:25). None of them failed to deliver the message with which they were charged. There may be apostasy, defection, and anarchy among some of the disciples, but it was not so among the apostles and prophets.

NEITHER COUNT I MY LIFE TO BE DEAR

“ . . . neither count I my life dear unto myself . . .” Other versions read, “I do not consider my life of any account as dear to myself,” NASB “I consider my life worth nothing to me,” NIV “I do not count my life of any value to myself,” NRSV “I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself,” RSV “I put no value on my life,” BBE “I consider my own life of no importance to me whatsoever,” CJB and “neither do I esteem my life dear to myself.” AMPLIFIED

To “count” is to consider or reckon. It is a foundational way of thinking – viewing things as a principle. Paul reasoned in this manner because he had been “crucified to the world,” and the world “crucified” to him (Gal 6:14).

Shortly before retiring with His disciples for His last evening with them prior to His death, Jesus said to the multitudes, “He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal” (John 12:25). Again Jesus said, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it : and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt 16:25; Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24; 17:22). Neither of these sayings is ambiguous. The person who places the higher value on living in this world has, by that very deed, not only forfeited the good things of God, but has guaranteed he will lose what he has valued.

As might be expected, this is not a highly-treasured saying in these days. Much of the religion that is being declared and embraced by the people is nothing more than a practical denial of what Jesus has plainly declared. The love of ones life in this world is actually being promoted by those professing to have embraced Christ. How ironical! The very thing Jesus has forbidden is now being embraced in His name, with purely self interests being promoted in the Christian community! In this kind of environment, Paul’s response has a different sound than it did to the Ephesian elders.

It is one thing to state this as a requirement, and quite another to testify that is actually the experience of the individual believer. A complicating factor is that we are living in the midst of a religious culture that stresses what “we ought to be,” yet bears little witness to the realization of those “ought to’s.” We do not often hear testimonies of those in whom the words of Jesus are actually being fulfilled. Also, a higher worth is placed on stating what ought to be done than on the testimony that it is being done in the individual. At this time, it is actually considered virtuous and common for a professed believer to say they are struggling with the very things Jesus forbids. In other words, we are living in a kind of plastic society where what is perceived as necessary is repeated, but is not incorporated in the fabric of life itself. The imagined virtues of repeating what is required, then saying that is accepted as truth, is presented as though it justifies living in contradiction of the Word of God. It is never right to be textually correct but morally wrong.

By not counting his life dear unto himself, Paul is placing the priority upon doing the will of God – no matter what it costs, or regardless of the course that is set before him. It is this factor – that “no-matter-what-it-costs” factor – that separates real disciples from mere pretenders.

THAT I MIGHT FINISH MY COURSE

“ . . . so that I might finish my course with joy . . .” Other versions read, “finish my race with joy,” NKJV “complete the task,” NIV “accomplish my course,” RSV “see the work complete,” BBE “consummate my course,” DOUAY “fulfill my course,” GENEVA “finish the race I am running,” GWN “complete the mission,” NJB “finishing the work,” NLT “Doing the work assigned me,” LIVING and “run my race.” MONTGOMERY

The word “course” refers to “the course of life or of office,” THAYER “Racecourse, or place of running . . . of ones purpose in life and obligations in relation to a task,” FRIBERG “the course one follows in a race,” LOUW-NIDA and “career.” GINGRICH

“Course” and “task” are not synonymous terms. Technically, the “course” is the place where the task is completed. In this case, it is a way of holiness (Isa 35:8), of self sacrifice and denial (Matt 16:24), and of humility (Col 3:12). The course is more related to the office or function than what is done within the function. In Paul’s case, the office was an apostle, and the work was opening men’s eyes, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. It involved making known the mystery that had been revealed to him, all the while maintaining a strong faith, godliness, and an unfading hope. God had assigned him a lot in life that involved a certain course – just as a runner is assigned a certain course or lane to which he is confined. Even a long race, like a marathon, must be run within certain parameters, else it is not valid.

Every believer is given a course to run, which involves a work to be accomplished. Thus those in Christ Jesus are admonished, “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:1-2).

This “course” reflects a Divine purpose or agenda that is to be embraced by the runner. Neither the course nor the objective was developed by the one who is on the course and doing the work. It was initiated by the Lord Himself, who assigned it to the individual. The aim is to finish the course, not to start it. It is to complete the race, not run a portion of it. It is to finish it in a timely manner, not wandering from the course, and spending time in matters unrelated to the course.

Paul affirms he wants to finish his course “with joy” – with a rejoicing that comes from triumph, accomplishing the work that was given to him, and being ready to give a good account of himself to the Lord.

We are living in a time when an inordinate amount of emphasis has been placed on beginning the race. Some emphasize the experiences of life along the race. Others spend the better part of their life trying to figure out where the course is, and thus do very little actual running. However, the point is to finish the race, and do it in such a manner as will bring glory to God and joy to the runner. This is precisely why the emphasis of Scripture is placed on those who are actually running the course. The primary objective is not to recruit others to run in the race, but to finish the race, accomplishing the assignment given to you. Jesus summed it up in these words: “For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work , and commanded the porter to watch” (Mark 13:34).

When Paul said he did not count his own life dear in order that he might finish his course with joy, he meant that if the course led through dangerous terrain, that is where he would go.

AND THE MINISTRY

“ . . . and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus . . .” Other versions read, “complete the task,” NIV “the work,” BBE “the task,” CJB “and the ministration,” GENEVA “the mission,” GWN “the duty,” WEYMOUTH and “service entrusted.” WILLIAMS

While on the course, there was an assignment to be completed. Unlike an ordinary race, there was an activity to be accomplished during the race itself – a race that was run on a particular course. Not only, then, was the race itself to be completed, but the assignment delivered to Paul – an assignment to be carried out during the race, which was being run on a particular and assigned course.

Not only, then, was the race itself to be completed, but the assignment delivered to Paul – an assignment to be carried out during the race, which was being run on a particular and assigned course.

The manner in which Paul lived his life was not unique to him. This is what it means to forsake all and follow Christ (Lk 14:33) – something that is required of every disciple. This is what it means to count everything but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus the Lord (Phil 3:8-15). This is what is involved in living “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). To put it another way, Paul wrote, “For me to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21), and again, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

If it is true that God has “set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18), then there is a work, or ministry, that each of them has been assigned to do. While it may differ from the work of an apostle like Paul, it is headed toward the same objective, and it is to be completed, for that is why it was given.

I remember well when the psychiatrists convinced the business world that it was necessary to set short-term and long-term goals. No one had talked much about such things until the early 80's. As is generally the case, it was not long until the professed church began talking in the same jargon, parroting the ways of the world. Instead of being a light itself to the world, it was being supposedly illuminated by the world. But the taint of the world was on this “purpose-driven” goal-setting mentality. It all centered in self, and what the individual personally perceived to be the most advantageous course. Also, none of it had to do with the person's state after death, or whether to not they would be acceptable to the Lord when they stood before Him. The whole matter was earth-centric, and had nothing whatsoever to do with morality, spirituality, or the stark realities of death and judgment.

Now Paul clarifies the central purpose of life – a purpose around which everything else must revolve. God has positioned men in both time and place, in order that they might seek and Lord AND find Him. He then puts them in the body of Christ where He wants them, and gives them a particular role in that body – a role that is beneficial to the other members of the body. The aim is to grow up in the capacity assigned to them, and to finish the work they have been given to do, whatever it is. In such a case, ones personal life is not counted “dear” to himself. That is, the preservation of life on earth and the realization of earthly aims are not the central reasons for living.

All of this certainly does not doom a person to live a frustrating life where nothing personal is ever achieved. The truth of the matter is that regeneration brings one into accord with the purpose of God, so that he intentionally lives for the Lord. Along with that, the Lord cares for the individual, not merely meeting his needs, but granting him the desire of his renewed heart. The outcome is a life that is satisfying and good, one in which the person can rejoice in the Lord always, and derive benefit from all of the other members of the body who are doing the same thing.

How Can Believers Know Their Course and Ministry?

There is no revealed details concerning this matter. To my knowledge, the only insight can be gained from the Scriptural record of those who successfully ran the race set before them. Even then, sanctified reasoning must be employed to gain any understanding of the subject at all.

As with all other aspects of life in Christ Jesus, valid knowledge is always obtained within the context of living by faith and walking in the Spirit. The individual who is not actually, consciously, and deliberately living for the Lord, cannot possibly perceive any aspect of this matter. There must be regular participation in the body of Christ, for it is within the context of body-life that such things are made known.

Your placement in the body of Christ is, as I see the matter, attended with the following. I do not use the word “need” to describe something defined by the people toward whom the ministry is focused. “Need” is defined by the purpose or objective of God. It is something that is required to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, and contributes to their growth, stability and unity in the faith.

- The perception of an area of spiritual productivity.
- A desire to meet that need.
- The opportunity to meet that need.
- An enjoyment in meeting the need.
- A heart that looks for the opportunity to minister to that need,
- Proficiency in meeting the need.
- Excelling in meeting the need.

While these cannot be approached from a purely systematic point of view, the person who is living by faith and walking in the Spirit will gain acquaintance with these matters, grow in their aptitude, and be competent in the execution of the work.

TO TESTIFY OF THE GRACE OF GOD

“ . . . to testify the gospel of the grace of God.” Other versions read, “to testify solemnly,” NASB “be a witness,” BBE “to bear witness,” NJB “telling others,” NLT “proclaiming, as of supreme importance,” WEYMOUTH and “to attest to,” MONTGOMERY

Paul did not see his purpose as answering the problems of humanity, or addressing all of the ills that were among men. He was not appointed to be a consultant or advisor. Rather, he was a proclaimer. This is the principle means by which Paul would open men’s eyes, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, in order that they might receive the inheritance. He would do this by the proclamation of a message. This message would not be what men perceived to be their need. Rather, it was the message of something that had already been accomplished.

This message would not be what men perceived to be their need. Rather, it was the message of something that had already been accomplished.

Paul did not come to tell men what to do to be saved – although that was involved. This was the good news of “the grace of God” – grace that had constrained God to do something. That grace, or Divine favor, had been deposited and wrapped up in the Person of Jesus Christ, for apart from Him, there can be no realization of the grace of God. That is why Jesus is declared to be “full of grace” (John 1:17). The grace is also referred to as “the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,” by which we are “saved” (Acts 15:11). Paul referred to it as “the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:15). The last words of the Bible are, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” (Rev 22:21).

Oh, the glory of a ministry that majors on proclaiming and expounding the marvelous grace of God! That message is nothing less than the Gospel of Christ, which is “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). Where this message is not proclaimed, the power of God will not work for the salvation of men. Salvation will neither be initiated or brought to fruition independently of this message. If a message is being preached that does not focus upon the grace of God, then it is “another gospel,” and is to be rejected as soon as it is heard. Those who preach such a gospel are subject to the curse of God. As it is written, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed . As we said before, so say I now

again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed ” (Gal 1:9).

There are other messages being delivered to the people in this time. Some of them affirm that this is a time when unparalleled prosperity can be realized. Others deliver a message that centers in marriage, rearing children, and the home. Others are promoting Jewish concepts, restoring the three major feasts of the Jews. Still others are proclaiming a message that centers in the keeping of the Sabbath day. Paul’s core message – the message from which all of his teaching sprang – was “the gospel of the grace of God.” Whatever he taught was brought back to that central theme. If he addressed the matter of morality, it associated it with what God’s grace has accomplished (1 Cor 6:19-20). If it was gathering an offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem, he connected it with the grace of God (2 Cor 8:9). The conduct of brethren toward one another was also related to this message of the grace of God (Rom 15:7).

This is the only message that addresses every aspect of life, and is inherently efficient and productive – from heaven’s point of view. It is imperative that this be seen.

PAUL’S LAST MEETING WITH THE BRETHREN FROM EPHESUS

“ 25 And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.”

Paul now breaks the news to the Ephesian elders of something that he knows. The source of this knowledge can only have come from the Head of the church. Precisely how it was made known to him, we do not know. However, he is aware of the fact that this is the beginning of the end of his course. His ministry will soon come to a conclusion, as will be attested by the remainder of Luke’s record.

As he approaches the end of his ministry, and consequently the end of his life, he will run at full speed, sprinting, as it were, to the finish line. Luke records the following activities of Paul.

- Landed in Tyre, tarrying there seven days. There the disciples told Paul he should not go up to Jerusalem (21:3-5).
- Came to Ptolemais and saluted the brethren there, remaining for one day (21:6-7).
- Came to Caesarea where they remained with Philip the evangelist many days. Agabus warns Paul that he would be bound and delivered to the Gentiles in Jerusalem (21:8-14).
- They went to Jerusalem, and were gladly received by the disciples. Paul reported to them what God had wrought through him among the Gentiles(21:15-20a). **As he approaches the end of his ministry, and consequently the end of his life, he will run at**
- James tells Paul that many of Jews had heard he was telling the Jews to forsake Moses and not to circumcise their children. He then gave him some particular advise that would confirm this was not an accurate report (21:20b-26).
- The Jews, seeing Paul in the Temple, stirred up the people against him. They came and removed Paul from the Temple, determined to kill him. The chief of the military guard heard there was an uproar in Jerusalem and rescued Paul (21:27-32).
- The guard put Paul in chains and inquired who he was and what he had done. (21:32-39).
- Paul is allowed to make his defense before the people, causing great anger among

them (21:39-22:23).

- Upon learning that Paul was a Roman, the official refused to beat him, or examine him by scouring, He presented Paul to the Jewish council to make a defense of himself. He was eventually released (22:24-23:10).

- The night following the Lord stood by Paul and assured him that just as he had given witness in Jerusalem, so he would bear witness of Jesus in Rome also (23:11).

- Paul is protected by the Romans, and sent to Felix the Governor (23:11-24:26).

- Paul is kept in prison for two years, until he is presented to Festus. It was during this time that Paul appealed to Caesar, and Festus consented to the arrangement (24:27-25-12).

- Paul gives an account in Caesarea before Agrippas (25:13-26:32).

- Paul begins his voyage to Rome, is shipwrecked on the isle of Melita, and, after many days, resumed the journey to Rome (27:1-28:13).

- Arriving at Puteoli, brethren were found, and Paul is permitted to remain with them for seven days (28:14).

- Upon resuming their journey, certain brethren from heard of them, and came to meet them, bringing great encouragement to him (28:14-16).

- Paul calls the chief of the Jews together, and presents a defense to them, a day being appointed for him to do so (28:17-29).

- Paul dwells two years in his own rented house, teaching all who came to him those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ (28:30-31).

- While the details are not supplied, Paul was martyred at the conclusion of this period. He was in a state of readiness to depart, having finished his work and kept to the course. In his own words, written during this period, he said: "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim 4:6-8),

Thus we see the manner in which Paul concluded his life. During the remainder of the book four full years are accounted for, during which he was a prisoner. He was confined in Caesarea for two years, and in his own hired house, as an official prisoner of Rome, for two years. All of his activity pertained to the Kingdom. The two groups of people to which he spoke were the Jews and the brethren in Christ Jesus. A lot of preaching was done in his defenses before the Jews, and before political rulers.

I give this brief summary to make more clear something of the involvements in Paul finishing his course and fulfilling his ministry.

PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“ . . . among whom I have gone, preaching the kingdom of God.” Other versions read, “preaching the kingdom,” NASB “proclaiming the kingdom,” NRSV “Whom I told about the kingdom,” GWN “Preaching the reign of God,” YLT “teaching the kingdom,” LIVING and “proclaiming the coming of the kingdom.” WEYMOUTH

Once again, the details of Paul ministry included opening men’s eyes, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive the inheritance that is obtained by faith (Acts 26:18). The spiritual canopy that covered every aspect of this ministry was “the kingdom of God.” These things were not accomplished within the framework of human response, but

were under “the kingdom of God.” They were not fully achieved within the framework of obedience, or knowing how and what to do, but within the framework of “the kingdom of God.” Every legitimate word and every valid human response is within the circumference of “the kingdom of God.” In other words, it is what God does that makes the real difference, not what man does. The new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10), being put into Christ (1 Cor 1:30), being made a partaker of Christ (Heb 3:14), being translated into His kingdom (Col 1:13), having one’s trespasses forgiven (Col 2:13), being circumcised by Christ (Col 2:11), having one’s name written in heaven (Heb 12:23), and being changed from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18), are all traceable to Divine workings. These are things that the Lord does. Men experience them. It is certainly true that faith and obedience are to be found in men, but apart from “the kingdom of God,” neither of them is even possible.

Preaching and teaching the Kingdom of God involves declaring what the Lord has done in salvation, what He is doing, and what He will do. The matter of salvation must eventually become clear to the saved if they are to endure all things and at last land safely on that heavenly shore. The works that are to be expounded are “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11). When it comes to what has been done, it is what the Lord has done that must be seen before anything else is clear (Psa 126:2-3).

Ponder the proclamation of the Kingdom of God in these revealed accomplishments.

- It is God that sent a preacher to us, by whom we have believed (Rom 10:14-15; 1 Cor 3:5).
- God gave us ears to hear (Deut 29:4; Acts 28:27; Rev 2:7).
- The Holy Spirit convicted us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8).
- It was given to us to believe (Phil 1:29).
- It is God that granted repentance through Christ (Acts 5:31; 11:18).
- Through the Holy Spirit we confess that Jesus is Lord (1 Cor 12:3).
- The Spirit baptizes us into one body (1 Cor 12:13).
- It is God who put us into Christ (1 Cor 1:30).
- It is the Spirit who changes us (2 Cor 3:18).
- It is God who translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:13).
- God, through Jesus, has delivered us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
- In Christ, we are God’s creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10).
- The grace of God brought us salvation (Tit 2:11).

Preaching the Kingdom of God is not merely telling people what to do, answering their questions, and resolving their difficulties. Rather, it is expounding what God Himself, through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, has and is doing in salvation.

The grace of God teaches us to reject sinful inclinations, and to culture godliness (Tit 2:12).

- Jesus teaches us about God, confirming the nature of eternal life (1 John 5:20).
- God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself (2 Cor 5:18-20).
- The Lord keeps us from falling (Jude 1:24-25).
- The Lord preserves us to the heavenly kingdom (2 Tim 4:18).
- The Lord works in us to will and to do of His own good pleasure (Phil 2:13).
- The cutting away of the body of the sins of the flesh was accomplished by Christ

(Col 2:11-12).

- We are taught by God to love one another (1 Thess 4:9).
- God places the members in the body where it has pleased him (1 Cor 12:18).
- God has established the objective of salvation (Rom 8:29-30).
- God grants that we be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ can dwell in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:16-17).
- It is God who will bruise Satan under our feet (Rom 16:20).
- God causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 2:14).
- God gives us the victory through Christ Jesus (1 Cor 15:57).
- It is God who will not allow us to be tempted above what we are able, but with the temptation provides a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13).
- It is Jesus who is the Captain of our salvation (Heb 2:10).
- It is Jesus who is bringing the sons to glory (Heb 2:10).

These are but a few samples of the works of the Lord, which are expressions of His Kingdom. It is the God- factor that makes salvation, salvation . Preaching the Kingdom of God is not merely telling people what to do, answering their questions, and resolving their difficulties. Rather, it is expounding what God Himself, through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, has and is doing in salvation.

If you have experienced any measurable growth in Christ, it is largely, if not wholly, owing to a perception of the hand of the Lord in your salvation.

I spent many years in a religious system that did not expound these things. God was not at the center of the message being declared. His work was not the primary work. In fact, other than saying a few cursory things about the death of Christ, very little was actually said about what the Lord had done and is doing. The bottom line is that the Kingdom was not preached. I thank God for deliverance from that system of spiritually sterile thought – and it was a deliverance!

If you have experienced any measurable growth in Christ, it is largely, if not wholly, owing to a perception of the hand of the Lord in your salvation. Men in the grip of mere sophistry choose to argue about the Divine role in salvation. They attempt to attribute the decisive causes to men rather than to God. Such efforts are to be abandoned in favor of preaching the Kingdom of God.

Ponder what is said of this kind of preaching in Scripture.

- John the Baptist preached “the Gospel of the kingdom” (Mk 1:14), thereby preparing the way for Christ.
- Jesus preached “the Gospel of the kingdom” (Matt 4:23; 9:35; Lk 8:1).
- Jesus said, “I must preach the kingdom of God” (Lk 4:43).
- When Jesus first sent out the twelve, He told them to “preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 10:7; Lk 9:2).
- Jesus said “this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations” (Matt 24:14)
- Jesus said that the “law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it” (Luke 16:16).
- After rising from the dead, Jesus spoke to His disciples “ of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:3).

- Philip preached “things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 8:12).
- Paul preached in Ephesus “disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8).
- Paul preached the kingdom of God (Acts 20:25; 28:23,31).
- In distinction to mere rules, the kingdom of God is declared to be “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom 14:17).
- The “kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor 4:20).
- God translated us into the “kingdom of His dear Son” (Col 1:13).
- God has called us “unto His kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:12).
- Those in Christ have “received a kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb 12:28).

This is a description of substantive preaching. Such declarations place the emphasis on the right things, and this brings a great glory to God. They constrain men to come to Christ for the right reasons, and to live with proper objectives. This is what enables them to endure and at last obtain the prize. I question that godly endurance is possible apart from the awareness of these things.

THE COMPLETENESS OF PAUL’S MINISTRY

“ 26 Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. 27 For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.”

It is a grand day when a laborer can attest to his own faithfulness to the commission given to him. While this is not a common practice in our time, there is really no acceptable excuse for not being able to truthfully speak in this manner. As in all valid ministries, this statement postulates a working familiarity with the Person and purpose of God and Jesus Christ. It presumes an acquaintance with the “great salvation,” the Gospel that affirms it, and the doctrine that expounds it. Where this is lacking, it is not even possible to speak in such a manner.

I TAKE YOU TO RECORD

“Wherefore I take you to record this day . . .” Other versions read, “I testify to you this day,” NKJV “I declare to you this day,” NIV “I say to you this day,” BBE “I witness to you this day,” DARBY “I solemnly declare to you this day,” NAB “so on this very day I swear,” NJB “I call you to witness this day,” WEB “Let me say plainly,” LIVING “I can tell you one thing I am sure of,” IE “I protest to you today,” WILLIAMS and “I testify and protest to you on this [our parting] day.” AMPLIFIED

In this saying, Paul is not merely testifying to the clearness of his own conscience, as some versions suggest. He is rather appealing to their conscience, not to his. They were well acquainted with his ministry, its manner, and its substance. They could attest to the truth of what he will say. Here he expresses himself much as he did to the Corinthians when he wrote, “commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God” (2 Cor 4:2). There is a twofold appeal here: first, to the conscience of the Ephesian elders, and second he speaks with a full awareness of the attention of God to what he is saying.

I AM PURE FROM THE BLOOD OF ALL MEN

“ . . . that I am pure from the blood of all men . . .” Other versions read, “I am innocent from,” NKJV “not responsible for,” NRSV “I am clean from,” BBE “I am clear from,” DOUAY “my conscience is clear,” NJB “If anyone suffers eternal death, it's not my fault,” NLT “I’m not to blame if any of you will not be saved,” IE and “I am clean and innocent and not responsible for.” AMPLIFIED

Here, the appeal is to something declared to Ezekiel. It speaks of the responsibility of men who speak in the behalf of God. God spoke solemnly to Ezekiel about faithfulness in declaring what he was given by Him to say. “ “When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul . Again, When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul ” (Ezek 3:18-21).

It is most unfortunate that much theological education conveniently omits this fact. Were this matter pressed upon would-be preachers, many of them would no longer consider what they conceive to be a religious profession or career.

If the Lord denounces certain manners that are found in the people, whether in the leaders or those who are taught, the people are to be told. Failure to do this will be duly noted by the Lord, and the one charged with the responsibility of warning the sinner will be held accountable for failing to speak.

The truth of the matter is that what God has said about both righteousness and unrighteousness is to be communicated to the people. If the Lord denounces certain manners that are found in the people, whether in the leaders or those who are taught, the people are to be told. Failure to do this will be duly noted by the Lord, and the one charged with the responsibility of warning the sinner will be held accountable for failing to speak. Admittedly, there may be objections on the part of those being warned, but that is not to cause the one doing the warning to keep silence. His own soul is at stake in the matter as well as that of the transgressor.

The one doing the warning, telling the sinner that God has said he will “surely die,” may be charged with being insensitive, crude, and unwise – but he must speak anyway. He may be charged with not speaking in love – but he must speak anyway. When sinners lay the fault of their sin at the feet of other people, they must be told that God’s word to them is, “Thou shalt surely die.” That word is just as sure as it was when spoken to Adam (Gen 2:17).

Paul is saying that he has conducted his ministry within an acute awareness of what he was given to say – whether it was comfortable or convicting. Until this is done, the professing preacher or teacher IS in some way responsible for the condition of the people, and will be held accountable for their demise.

I HAVE NOT SHUNNED TO DECLARE THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

“ . . . For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” Other versions read, “For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God,” NASB “did not hesitate to proclaim to you the whole will of God,” NIV “I have not kept back from you anything of the purpose of God,” BBE “the whole plan of God,” CSB “have not shunned to acquaint you with all the will of God,” MRD “did not shrink from proclaiming to you the entire plan of God,” NAB “I have without faltering put before you the whole of God's purpose,” NJB “all that God wants you to know,” NLT “all God’s message,” LIVING “God’s whole truth,” WEYMOUTH “I never shrank or kept back or fell short from declaring to you the whole purpose and plan and counsel of God,” AMPLIFIED and “the complete will of God.” PHILLIPS

What is “the whole counsel of God?” I well remember being taught that this referred to the “plan

of salvation,” the steps purported to be necessary to be initially saved. While what is required to forgiven of sin and reconciled to God is certainly essential, this is not the point of reference in this text. He was speaking to the elders of the church of Ephesus, and he certainly was not telling them he had faithfully conveyed to them how to be saved, as asked in Acts 16:31.

The word “counsel” is translated from a word meaning, “purpose . . . especially of the purpose of God respecting the salvation of men through Christ,” THAYER “intention,” UBS “that which has been purposed and planned,” LOUW-NIDA “design,”

As used here, the word “counsel” does not refer to the process through which one is saved, but rather to the reason or objective of salvation. It is what is accomplished in salvation that is the point here – the reason behind it.

LIDDELL-SCOTT , and “motive.” GINGRICH

As used here, the word “counsel” does not refer to the process through which one is saved, but rather to the reason or objective of salvation. It is what is accomplished in salvation that is the point here – the reason behind it. This is stated in a number of different ways, and assists the people in thinking correctly about the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory (2 Tim 2:10).

- **CONFORMITY TO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST.** “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29).

- **PRESENTATION AS A CHASTE VIRGIN.** “For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor 11:2).

- **GATHER TOGETHER ALL THINGS IN ONE.** “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him” (Eph 1:10).

- **SHOW THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE IN THE AGES TO COME.** “That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:7).

- **THROUGH THE CHURCH TO SHOW GOD’S WISDOM TO PRINCIPALITIES AND POWERS.** “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10).

- **FILLED WITH THE FULNESS OF GOD.** “And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:19).

- **GROW UP INTO HIM IN ALL THINGS.** “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:15).

- **A GLORIOUS CHURCH WITHOUT SPOT OR WRINKLE.** “That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27).

- **FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIS WILL,** “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

- **REIGN WITH CHRIST.** “If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him: if we deny Him, He also will deny us” (2 Tim 2:12).

- **BRING MANY SONS TO GLORY.** “For it became Him, for whom are all things,

and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10).

• **PRESENT US FAULTLESS BEFORE HIS GLORY.** “Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24).

This is the kind of “counsel” that is made known elsewhere by Paul. “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will ” (Eph 1:11).

There are untold numbers of professed believers who have been exposed to very little of the counsel of God – certainly not to “the whole counsel of God.” It is not an innocent situation, or one to be passed off as unimportant. The very manner in which Paul expressed himself in this text confirms this to be true.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious from the tone of this text that Paul is addressing matters of a most serious nature. He is being faithful to his stewardship of the truth, alerting the saints of God to things concerning which they are not to be kept ignorant. As Paul heads into the last stage of his life, he speaks to the leaders of matters that bear directly upon the purpose of God – the driving force behind His great salvation. As he proceeds in this address, the tone grows even more serious. It will not at all agree with the watered-down messages of our day. It will become apparent that Paul is concerned with issues that have nothing whatsoever to do with institutionalism, the culturing of an earthly career, or the maintenance of favor with the people. This is a real man of God, delivering the real will of God, to the real people of God! In this text, we are not dealing with theory but with spiritual realities. In this passage men are not groping for the will of God, but are fulfilling it. This is a slice of genuine spiritual life – of a very real accord with the God of salvation.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #85

MEETING WITH THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS, #2

“ 20:28 ”Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. 29 For I know this, that after my ing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. 32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified. 33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. 35 I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive. 36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. 37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, 38 Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.” (Acts 20:28-38)

INTRODUCTION

A SUMMATION OF THE TEXT

Paul's admonition to the elders is within the context of Divine purpose (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11), Divine placement in the body (1 Cor 12:18), and the giving of gifts to the church (Eph 4:8-11). What is spelled out to them is not simply a matter of duty, but relates to the purpose God has for the church, and the means through which it is made suitable for a dwelling place for Himself (Eph 2:21). Within the body of Christ, leaders and teachers can only be considered within the framework of God's objective for the church. Such people are not culturing personal careers, or fulfilling their own natural wills. They are serving the purpose of Almighty God, and as soon as this ceases to be done, there really is no place for them within the body of Christ. Thus, Paul speaks with serious tones and a sense of urgency. He affirms that danger is looming on the horizon of time – dark and ominous clouds that contradict what God has revealed to be the purpose for his church. The elders are to be alert, and ready themselves and the people for what is coming. They cannot ignore Paul's solemn warning with

impunity. They must give heed to it.

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- **FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD (20:28b)**
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- **THE ENVIRONMENT FROM WHICH THE PERVERSE SPEAKERS COME (20:30)**
- **WATCH AND REMEMBER (20:31)**
- **COMMENDED TO GOD AND THE WORD OF HIS GRACE (20:32)**
- **PAUL AND LIFE IN THE FLESH (20:33-34)**
- **THE SPIRIT OF GIVING (20:35)**
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- **THEY ACCOMPANIED HIM TO THE SHIP (20:38b)**
- **CONCLUSION**

THE HEART OF A LEADER

In Paul we have the epitomization of the heart of a true leader. He does not build around himself, but focuses the attention of the people upon spiritually stable things.

- Key men taking heed to themselves.
- Spiritual leaders taking heed to the flock, over which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers.
- Feeding the church of God, which He has purchased with His own blood.
- Warning them of coming encroachments.
- Remembering the warnings of holy men.
- Reminding them that the grace of God can build them up.
- Reminding them that the grace of God can give them an inheritance among those who are sanctified.
- Remembering that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

REVEALED PRIORITY

Notice the priority of the people of Lord in all of these things Paul mentioned to the elders (20:19-38).

- “Serving the Lord ” 19
- “Repentance toward God ” 21
- “Faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ” 21
- “The Holy Spirit witnesses” 23
- “The ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus ” 24
- “The gospel of the grace of God ” 24

- “The kingdom of God ” 25
- “All the counsel of God ” 27
- “The Holy Spirit hath made you overseers” 28
- “The church of God ” 28
- “ He hath purchased with His own blood ” 28
- “The word of His grace ” 32
- “The words of the Lord Jesus .” 35

In the body of Christ, people do not have a right to their own opinion concerning something on which the Lord has spoken. In fact, the warning issued in this text precisely pertains to that kind of thing.

Who cannot see the accent of Paul’s words? He speaks with a priority that is scarcely known during our time. There is absolutely no sectarian agenda or denominational emphasis. You become keenly aware of the total absence of involvement in the personal affairs of men. He is not promoting a special work, or sharing his personal needs. In all of this we are beholding how a person who is living for Christ speaks. We are witnessing the manner of his reasoning, the things that concern him, and his care for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE SAINTS THEMSELVES

It is the saints themselves, the “household of faith,” that Paul sets before the elders of Ephesus, as well as their responsibility to it. He does not tell them to be mindful of sinners, or the lost, or status in this world. He does not speak of health and wealth, the realization of personal “dreams,” or the expansion of the number of disciples. Such things have the stench of institutionalism upon them.

All of the things of which Paul speaks assume the thoroughness of Christ and our completeness in Him (Col 2:10). Thus, the solidification of our association with the Lord’s Christ is the stress, from which all valid activity will flow. The church must be kept in a state of good spiritual health. It must be nourished by alert and insightful leaders.

Anything that endangers the body of Christ, or lends itself to its weakening or confusion, is from the devil, and is to be vigorously opposed, regardless of the one who propagates it. Whatever introduces confusion, robs the people of spiritual understanding, or thrusts them into a state of uncertainty is to be viewed as grave and unsafe.

In the church, absolutely no tolerance is displayed for human opinions that divide, or fleshly perspectives of spiritual realities. In the body of Christ, people do not have a right to their own opinion concerning something on which the Lord has spoken. In fact, the warning issued in this text precisely pertains to that kind of thing. Paul warns that things will be spoken that are “perverse,” corrupt, and distorted views that were nothing more than lies dressed up human opinions. The thing that made them perverse was the injection of human wisdom.

THE ERODING EFFECTS OF FALSITY

In view of the means through which humanity fell, it should be apparent that a religious lie, though false to the core, nevertheless has power to subvert, undermine, and weaken the faith of those who hear it.

Jesus warned His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt 16:6). Although they did not grasp the significance of what He said, later His disciples were given to see that Jesus was speaking about “the doctrine of the Pharisees and the

Sadducees” (Matt 16:12). Paul warned Timothy that the teaching of certain intruders “will eat as a canker,” and will “overthrow the faith of some” (2 Tim 2:17). In view of the means through which humanity fell, it should be apparent that a religious lie, though false to the core, nevertheless has power to subvert, undermine, and weaken the faith of those who hear it. This takes place even if the individual is not aware of this inevitable effect. What can be said of those who willingly subject their minds to misrepresentations of the mind and will of the Lord – who, in the name of politeness and tolerance, listen to corruptions of the Word of God as it is spewed from the pulpits of the land like the venom of the “old serpent” himself (Rev 12:9; 20:2). Do such people imagine that they are impervious to the devices of the wicked one? Are they more equipped to subject themselves to his lies than Eve, who was in a state of absolute moral innocence when she listened to the devil?

The fact that such naive people listen to perverse things with their friends does not diminish the power of the lie. When someone is known to be delivering a false or skewed message, the people of God are directed, “from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim 1:3-5). These are teachers who “teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words.” That is, their fundamental message is not the Gospel, and their expositions really have nothing to do with the Lord Jesus Christ or the edification of His “brethren.”

This tutelage is more than relating a formal sectarian routine. Here we are dealing with spiritual life, not mere human preferences. If men “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), then they had better be hearing and responding to that word. If “all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God,” and is “profitable” in order that “the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto every good work,” then what possible reason can be given for delivering some other message? Lest any be confused on this matter, we are further told that the Scriptures “are able to make” us “wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). This is not speaking of initial faith, or the commencement of salvation. There is a whole body of spiritual verity that is related to this salvation which is “with eternal glory” (2 Tim 2:10), and leads to an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). While God’s word does deal with human conduct and interpersonal relationships, that is not its intended thrust. If God is not known, and the individual is fundamentally unacquainted with the ways and purpose of Almighty God, nothing else is of any real consequence.

It is not right for professing church leaders to take it upon themselves to assist people in the resolution of their personal difficulties. No such thrust is found in Scripture. In fact, I do not believe you can find a solitary record of an incident in the Word of God where the everyday difficulties of life are addressed. Apart from his life toward God, and His ministry for God, we do not have a single record of the daily life of Jesus Himself. The same is true of the twelve disciples, Paul, Stephen, Philip, Timothy, and other key individuals in Scripture. There are no “how-to” details of living pertaining to the requirements of domestic, social, or political life. Admonitions pertaining TO such areas are remarkably general – something that cannot be systematized or organized. It has proved to be so confusing to religious sophists that they have developed their own routines and laws, being dependent upon the same.

The words of Paul to the Ephesian elders are an excellent example of these things. Notice the thrust of what he says to them, and what he considers to be imminent danger. Ask yourself if this is the kind of thing that is being delivered to the churches today. Ponder why the agenda that dominated Paul’s ministry is so little known today. In our culture, the words of our text have a strange sound. That circumstance is most serious.

TAKE HEED UNTO YOURSELVES AND THE FLOCK

“ 20:28a Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers . . .”

Elders are addressed concerning their capacity in the body. They occupy an office for which they

are responsible, and they must be reminded of it. It is time for elders to cease directing those who faithfully preach the word (something that is outside of the circumference of their responsibility), and it is also time for those who know and preach the truth to address the elders. They are not figureheads in the body of Christ, but have certain responsibilities. On one occasion, Paul told Timothy, “Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren . . . Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses” (1 Tim 5:1,19). Paul then said, “Them that sin rebuke before all , that others also may fear” (1 Tim 5:20). Even though Timothy was relatively young, he did have a grasp of the truth, and was therefore told to “entreat” elders politely, as though they were his father. To “entreat” is to “exhort,” NKJV or “appeal to,” NASB and has to do with correction. GWN The word includes the idea of instructing and teaching. THAYER This is precisely what Paul does here, and he does it in solemn tones and with the greatest sobriety.

TAKE HEED UNTO YOURSELVES

“Take heed therefore unto yourselves . . .” Other versions read, “be on guard for yourselves,” NASB “keep watch over yourselves,” NIV “give attention to yourselves,” BBE “watch out for yourselves,” CJB “pay careful attention to yourselves,” ESV “and now, beware,” LIVING “Take care and be on guard for yourselves.” AMPLIFIED and “look after yourselves.” CEV

The words “take heed” are translated from a single Greek word – **prose,cete** . The lexical meaning of this word is, “to turn the mind to, attend to, be attentive to a person or thing . . . to attend to oneself, I. e. to give heed to oneself . . . to guard oneself, I. e. to beware,” THAYER “watch out for, beware (of), be on guard (against), take care,” FRIBERG and “to be in a continuous state of readiness to learn of any future danger, need, or error, and to respond appropriately - to pay attention to, to keep on the lookout for, to be alert for, to be on one's guard against.” LOUW-NIDA

Timothy was apparently an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5), and he also was told: “Take heed unto thyself” (1 Tim 4:16). God also told the Israelites, “Take heed unto yourselves” (Deut 4:23). The person who sits at the Lord’s table is admonished to “examine himself” (1 Cor 11:28). All believers are told, “examine yourselves” (2 Cor 13:5). Those in Christ are exhorted to “take heed lest he also spare not thee” (Rom 11:21). Those engaged in building the body of Christ are told, “take heed how he buildeth” on the foundation (1 Cor 3:10). The person who thinks he stands is told to “take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12). All believers are admonished, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12).

Why Is Taking Heed to Self So Important?

As you can see, whether it is the elders, the brethren in general, or the brethren collectively, taking heed, or being in a continual state of readiness and alertness, is necessary. Why is this so? It is obvious from the religious environment of our time, that professed Christians have not discerned a reason that necessitates this posture. In fact, that is what has allowed false teachers to enter, and people to believe them.

Outside of Christ there are certain distinctions that exist. The only sweeping distinction is one that God Himself imposed upon the human race: Jew and Gentile. Now that Jesus has removed sin and reconciled the world to God, the “middle wall of partition” that divided them has been broken down in Christ Jesus, and no longer exists

In reality, our relationship to God is cultured through a variety of means. The maintenance of our faith is the primary means (2 Cor 13:5; 2 Cor 4:7). There is also the sustenance of hope (Rom 8:24; Heb 3:6). Among these appointed means is the ongoing examination of self, and taking heed to ourselves. This is because faith does not maintain itself. Nor, indeed, is the Lord pledged to keep one’s faith robust, even though it is neglected. While this appears to me to be abundantly clear in Scripture, it seems to me that great and staggering numbers of professing Christians remain ignorant

of this fact. This is especially true of elders, who are charged with the care of the church. I do not know how it is possible to account for a “falling away” apart from a failure to be vigilant in this matter. How is it that false teaching has so easily penetrated the professed church? How can erroneous doctrines be initiated and rapidly perpetuated with little apparent difficulty? Why do masses of professed Christians remain in a state of spiritual infancy and naivete, even though they may have been among that group for a good number of years?

Not only have leaders failed to “take heed unto themselves,” much of the teaching that is taking place during their watch is not at all conducive to self-examination. In fact, it is the teaching itself, seemingly noble motives notwithstanding, that have produced the woefully deficient state in which the nominal church finds itself.

Contributing to this condition is the fact that the fatal flaw of sectarianism is that the sect takes the place of Christ, and trust is therefore placed in being a part of it instead of being joined to the Lord. This should not require extended commentary, owing to its apparency to those of humble heart.

TAKE HEED TO ALL THE FLOCK

“Take heed . . . to all the flock . . .” Other versions read, “the whole flock,” DOUAY “the entire flock,” GWN “God’s people,” NLT “all the people of God,” IE “everyone,” CEV and “your congregation.” MESSAGE The larger percentage of all versions read, “all the flock.”

Outside of Christ there are certain distinctions that exist. The only sweeping distinction is one that God Himself imposed upon the human race: Jew and Gentile. Now that Jesus has removed sin and reconciled the world to God, the “middle wall of partition” that divided them has been broken down in Christ Jesus, and no longer exists (Gal 3:28; Eph:15). With great pungency the Spirit reveals, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Men have had the audacity to add to these distinctions, shaping their ministries around differentiations that, before God, do not even exist. Now, in addition to the ones stated in Galatians 3:28, men have added “married and unmarried,” “husbands and wives,” “adults and youth,” “educated and uneducated,” “old and young,” “rich and poor,” “black and white,” etc. Not only have these distinctions been imposed upon the church, religious careers, systems of lower and high education, and innumerable volumes of books have been shaped around these distinctions. Let no one be foolish enough to rise to the defense of such professed “ministries,” for they are nothing more than a flagrant contradiction of our text.

It is thoroughly wrong to have a religious environment in which a twelve-year old can be raised without being conversant with the things of God – as the Master was when He was twelve

Leaders are to take heed to “all the flock,” not a portion of it. Just as the same manna sustained all of Israel, whether young or old, married or single, or master or servant, so the same spiritual nourishment sustains “all the flock.” The only difference is in the amount that is consumed, not in the substance of the spiritual nourishment itself.

It is thoroughly wrong to have a religious environment in which a twelve-year old can be raised without being conversant with the things of God – as the Master was when He was twelve (Lk 2:40-49). No person is capable of justifying an approach to religion that does not permit a child to become “wise unto salvation,” as did Timothy (2 Tim 3:15). How can any approach to spiritual culture be right that does not allow for young Samuel and old Eli to be together in the service of the Lord? (1 Sam 2:18-21). I have rarely seen a so-called “church” where such a thing could happen – and this is the day of the “better thing” (Heb 11:40).

There are modern-day assemblies in which the burden of teaching and admonition is addressed to married couples with children. There are others where the emphasis is place upon the youth. Still others speak of nothing more than outreach and recruitment. Yet, above all of the religious noise that

is being made about such approaches, a loud voice rings out from the heavenly chambers: “Take heed unto all the flock!” No person in possession of their faculties can say this word is no longer relevant, or that it has become obsolete, or been forced to give way to a more contemporary emphasis. Should such a person arise and demand that we listen to him, we must refuse to do so, and request that he either submit to the word of the Lord or leave our presence.

These so-called specialized ministries are bleeding off the resources that have been given to “all the flock.” By centering on certain people groups, they are neglecting the whole body. Men who pioneer these views have carved out a convenient career for themselves, but the flock of God has suffered because of what they are doing – notwithstanding their pretentious claims.

Foreshadowed in the False Shepherds of Israel

The damaging effects of false shepherds is confirmed in the nation of Israel. Their defection from the Lord and moral deficiencies are traced to their own prophets and teachers. As it is written, “My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace” (Jer 50:6). The absence of good shepherds equates to having no shepherds at all. Here is how the Lord stated the case through Ezekiel: “The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd : and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them” (Ezek 34:4-6).

Through Jeremiah, the Lord revealed that the false prophets and teachers had actually loosed the hordes of opportunists and evil workers who did remarkable damage to the people of God. “I have seen also in the prophets of Jerusalem an horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies: they strengthen also the hands of evildoers , that none doth return from his wickedness: they are all of them unto me as Sodom, and the inhabitants thereof as Gomorrah” (Jer 23:14). How is it, in our day, that such a remarkable number of religious opportunists have risen to exploit the Christian community? What has caused this flood of strange doctrines, erroneous emphases, and distorted representations of God? It is the brand of religion that has been hawked by the preachers, teachers, and educators, who have conspired together to fulfill their own agenda – an agenda that has been fostered by spiritual blindness. They have not taught the people in such a manner as promoted spiritual growth; They have glossed sin by attributed immorality to genetic, physiological, and habitual causes. They have not distributed cool and refreshing waters from the depths of the wells of salvation. They have dabbled in culture, strode through the domestic chamber, and feigned real interest in the political climate. They have neglected the proclamation and exposition of the Gospel in favor of dealing with contemporary issues. They have allowed the world to set the tone and agenda of the church by adopting its passing fads and interests. In so doing, they have produced an environment tailored for opportunists and those who seek to exploit the people of God for personal advantage. They have opened the door for those to whom the door is closed by Christ Himself. They warble like a lovely song-bird that appeals to the people. As the prophet Ezekiel said, “And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument: for they hear thy words, but they do them not” (Ezek 33:32). The people clap and chant when they hear about Jesus coming to gather a glorious church – but they avoid the things that cause the glory. When the religious orators tell them what they ought to be, then add that they themselves are among those who come short of the aim, the people shout and cheer, as though there was some kind of merit in intellectually assenting to the truth, while failing to live it out.

All of this is evidence of that what is required of spiritual leaders is being ignored: “take heed to

all the flock.” Is there anyone of sound mind who imagines that God Almighty will ignore such insolence among those who claim to represent Him? When has the Lord ever said anything that was of no relevance, or made a requirement that He did not intend for men to fulfill?

THE HOLY SPIRIT MADE YOU OVERSEERS

“ . . . over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers . . .” Other versions read, “the Holy Spirit has made you overseers,” NASB “made you bishops,” ASV “given into your care,” BBE “appointed you overseers,” NAB “made you the guardians,” NJB “appointed you as elders,” NLT “holding you responsible as overseers,” LIVING “to guard this flock,” IE “to take the oversight for Him,” WEYMOUTH and “has appointed you bishops and guardians.” AMPLIFIED

By its very nature, this office cannot be filled by the consensus of the people. They are the ones who require care, and how can such people have the determining word concerning who cares for them? The only circumstance under which their input is valid is if they are hungry and thirsty for righteousness

In addition to their revealed responsibility, Paul tells the elders of the source of their office. These were not men elected by the people, but positioned by the Holy Spirit of God. No person who cannot be so described can possibly be an elder – whatever else may be said of him. Further, the Holy Spirit did not position them so they could gradually become overseers, that is what they were when He duly endowed them. He is the administrator of the spiritual gifts, of which the elders, or “pastors and teachers,” are one (Eph 4:11; 1 Cor 12:4,7-11,28).

The word “overseers” is translated from the Greek word **επισκοποι** . The lexical meaning of this word is, “an overseer, a man charged with the duty of seeing that things to be done by others are done rightly, *any curator, guardian, or superintendent . . . guardian of souls, one who watches over their welfare*” THAYER/LOUW-NIDA

The means by which this guidance and care are carried out is specified in the next clause. Caring for the flock is the primary matter here – seeing to it that they are properly prepared to face the Lord, as compared to them carrying out the will of the overseer . Such a person is to see to it that the “all the flock” measures up to Divine expectations , for if that does not happen, their own future becomes rather gloomy.

By its very nature, this office cannot be filled by the consensus of the people. They are the ones who require care, and how can such people have the determining word concerning who cares for them? The only circumstance under which their input is valid is if they are hungry and thirsty for righteousness (Matt 5:6), and are actually seeking for honor, glory, and immortality (Rom 2:7). In such a case, they have a right to demand that their leaders provide the nourishment for which their renewed spirits long. However, the choice of who this will be is made by the Holy Spirit. He, and He alone, can make a person an overseer, equipping him with what is necessary for that work. No one should be so naive as to think that the Spirit underwrites the decisions of men. It is men who are obligated to discern the choices made by the Spirit. This is an example of the Lord placing each member in the body “as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18).

It also ought to be noted that the care of “all the flock” requires some discernment of what God has purposed for His people. Caring for the flock has to do with them receiving what God has provided, and growing up into the kind of people He describes as His objective. This objective is not defined by world societies and purported experts. If God has not revealed a specific thing to be His objective, it cannot be presented as though He had. No matter what kind of arguments and proofs are presented to justify such a presentation, it simply cannot be true, and it is certainly not to be received as though it was.

FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD!

“ 28b . . . to feed the church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood.”

It is at this point that the manner in which care is administered to the flock is defined. Let it be clear, it is not by resolving their personal issues, as though they themselves had no access to God – much less, as though they did not have that access “with confidence” (Eph 3:12). Making business decisions, giving personal advice to those with personal and domestic problems, and the likes, is not an appropriate description of caring for the flock. This is not a matter of philosophy, but of revelation. God has spoken directly to this issue, and any contradicting answer is simply not allowable, and therefore ought not to be spoken or heard.

The role of feeding in the matter of caring and shepherding the flock of God is also seen in the Psalmist’s description of the Lord being His Shepherd. This is found in the 23rd Psalm.

TO FEED THE CHURCH OF GOD

“. . . to feed the church of God . . .” Other versions read, “to shepherd,” NKJV “to care for,” NRSV “give food to,” BBE “to rule,” DOUAY “tend,” NAB “feed and shepherd,” NLT and shepherd (tend and feed and guide.” AMPLIFIED

What does it mean to “feed the church of God.” Most of the standard versions read “feed.” Some read “shepherd,” and others “tend.” There are even some that translate the word “rule.” Does anyone really imagine that this is a general word, leaving the whole matter of its meaning to human opinion?

First, God spoke concerning this activity to Israel when He addressed the matter of false shepherds – those who had inserted themselves into the office. When speaking of their failure He stated it in this way.

- He chided them, “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” (Ezek 34:2).
- “Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock” (Ezek 34:3).
- The shepherds “fed themselves and fed not My flock” (Ezek 34:8).

The care of the Lord’s sheep is summarized in feeding them, for if that is not accomplished, nothing else really matters. In the case of the false shepherds, they took advantage of the flock for their own good, but gave them nothing of substance to eat.

The role of feeding in the matter of caring and shepherding the flock of God is also seen in the Psalmist’s description of the Lord being His Shepherd. This is found in the 23 rd Psalm.

- Would not “want,” or be without needed resources (23:1).
- Lie down in green pastures (23:2a).
- Lead beside still waters (23:2b).
- Restoreth my soul (23:3a).
- Lead in the paths of righteousness (23:3b).
- Prepare a table before me (23:5a).
- My cup runneth over (23:5b).

These, then, are the proper definitions of a shepherd. Such a one is charged with the feeding,

nourishment, and protection of the people of God.

The Lord further defines what this means in the book of Hebrews. There He refers to those who care for the flock.

- They have “spoken to you the word of God” (Heb 13:7a).
- Their “faith” is to be followed (13:7b).
- The outcome of their life of faith is to be favorably considered, and is more specifically defined as “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:7c).
- They watch for the souls of the people as those who will give an account for their condition (13:17).

Peter fortifies Paul’s words in his admonition to elders. “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:1-3).

The role of elders in the body of Christ is not merely to see to it that the flock is fed, doing it, so to speak, by proxy by hiring someone to do that work. They are to “feed the church of God” themselves, delivering the Word of God to them, and caring for them. How can a person who is not competent to teach determine who does meet that qualification? Such a thought is nothing more than an expression of absurdity. That is like saying a man who has never practiced carpentry can be proficient in detecting who really is expert in that craft.

The Nature of Eternal Life Demands This Kind of Ministry

“FEED My lambs . . . FEED my sheep . . . FEED My sheep” (John 21:15-17). “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to FEED the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). “FEED the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind” (1 Pet 5:2).

In his High Priestly prayer to the Father on the eve of His betrayal, Jesus defined the purpose of God, and clearly stated His own role in that objective. “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify Thy Son, that Thy Son also may glorify Thee: As Thou hast given Him power over all flesh, THAT HE SHOULD GIVE ETERNAL LIFE to as many as thou hast given Him” (John 17:1-2).

Here the ultimate matter was the glorification of God Himself. This intended glory would be accomplished through the glorification and consequent ministry of Jesus Himself. The appointed means through which this would be accomplished was Jesus Christ giving eternal life to those whom the Father had given to Him.

Although it was certainly involved, the straightening out of the people was not the aim. Delivering them from uncomely habits and tendencies would not fulfill the objective, although that fruit would be found within the real purpose. God did not send Jesus into the world to build successful marriages, or to resolve marital issues. He did not send Him to guarantee His people would have a lot of things belonging to the world, from which Jesus would deliver them (Gal 1:4). THE GIVING OF ETERNAL LIFE WAS THE POINT, and if that was not accomplished, what God intended would not be achieved, and Jesus would be proved disobedient in the whole process. This is precisely why Jesus prayed with such a sense of urgency.

The modern church has managed to hide this appointed agenda from the people. By becoming immersed in the temporal lives of individuals, the attention has been turned from eternity to time, and from heaven to earth. Oh, it all sounds very intelligent, and even has a tone of spirituality about it. But it is off-center, and is failing to prepare the people for two appointments they cannot avoid – death and judgment (Heb 9:27). Eternal life IS the issue. That is what Jesus came to give, and the matter cannot be ignored with impunity. No person is justified in being turned aside to the personal lives of people, at the expense of them coming short of eternal life.

We are not left to speculate about the meaning of “eternal life.” Jesus Himself defined it – not to men, but to God the Father. “And THIS is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent” (John 17:3). There are two sides to eternal life, and neither of them has to do with life in this world. The first is knowing God, and the second is knowing Jesus Christ, His Son. Apart from these, there is no eternal life.

Knowing God and His Son whom He has sent, involves acquaintance with God, or familiarity with both Him and His Son (Job 22:21). It involves being able to understand His Word, and being inclined to His will. It includes having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). There is also the matter of having fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which we have been called.

Knowing God and His Son whom He has sent, involves acquaintance with God, or familiarity with both Him and His Son (Job 22:21). It involves being able to understand His Word, and being inclined to His will. It includes having the mind of Christ (1 Cor 2:16). There is also the matter of having fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which we have been called (1 Cor 1:9). It also includes knowing the “good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2), having His nature (Heb 3:14; 2 Pet 1:4), and becoming pure as Jesus is pure (1 John 3:3). Those who know God and His Son “walk in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7). While others are confused about God and Christ, those who are given eternal life possess “the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgment of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ” (Col 2:2).

It is precisely this circumstance that requires that the flock of God be fed, nourished, and built up in the most holy faith. Familiarity with God cannot be realized intuitively, or through the realization of worldly abundance. It is something that is accomplished within the domain of cognition, knowledge, or understanding. It also includes the ideas of awareness and judgment. None of these things are related to intuition, habit, or mindless routine. They all involve thought, discernment, and comprehension.

Feeding the church of God has to do with such things, because it immediately relates to the possession of eternal life. When the people of God are fed, they become spiritually intelligent. It ought to be clear that the agenda of preachers, teachers, prophets, and elders, cannot differ from, or compete with, the appointed objective of Jesus. Yet, when I peruse the religious landscape, I see all manner of agendas that are in sharp conflict with what Jesus is revealed to be doing, rather than in strict harmony with it.

WHICH HE HATH PURCHASED

“ . . . which He hath purchased with His own blood.” Other versions read, “bought with His own blood,” NIV “obtained with the blood of His own Son,” NRSV “for which He gave His blood,” BBE “which He won for Himself at the cost of His own Son's blood,” CJB “purchased with the blood of His own,” DARBY “acquired with His own blood,” GWN “He obtained for Himself [buying it and saving it for Himself] with His own blood,” AMPLIFIED and “God himself thought they were worth dying for.” MESSAGE

This expression – “His own blood” – has provoked a variety of responses. Since the antecedent to the verse is “the church of God,” the word “His” obviously refers to God. The difficulty is that “God

is not a man,” and hence has no “blood.” Some have actually translated it “the blood of God,” which, within a certain framework of thought, does not make sense. Some have addressed the dilemma by translating the verse, “the blood of His own Son,” BBE/NET/NJB/CEV “His own son’s blood,” CJB and “the blood of His Son.” GNB The difficulty with this interpretation is that this is not how the text reads, either in the original or the English.

However, the difficulty is easily resolved if we take the word “God” to refer to Christ Jesus Himself. This should not be a strange view to anyone, for the Father Himself refers to the Son as “God.” As it is written, “And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O GOD, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom” (Heb 1:6-8). Again, when Thomas confronted the risen Christ, and was challenged, “Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing,” he responded, “My Lord and MY GOD” (John 20:27-28) – and was not rebuked for doing so. Again, when speaking of the revelation of Christ at His second coming, Paul ascribes to Him the attributes that belong to God. “Which in His times He shall show, who IS the blessed and ONLY POTENTATE, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; WHO ONLY HATH IMMORTALITY, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen” (1 Tim 6:15-16). In addition to this, the Father and the Son are “One” – as Jesus said in His prayer, “We are one” (John 17:22).

THE POINT OF THE TEXT

The point of this text is not a technical argument, but an indisputable fact. The church – “all of flock” – belongs to God, not men. It has been purchased as His possession through Christ, and He has given the church to Christ as His bride-to-be. In view of that circumstance, the work of the elders is not to make sure the traditions that distinguish them as a group are maintained. Their role is not to ensure that the church contributes to the community in which it is located, or that it participates in key events hosted by that community. It is not that any of these things are wrong of themselves. However, that is not why elders have been placed in the body. They are there to take heed unto themselves and to “all the flock.” Their primary activity is to “feed the church of God,” ensuring that they grow up into Christ in all things, and are no longer children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (Eph 4:14-15). The aim is for every member of the body to be a participant when the body is assembled together – for an unassembled body has no real value. The fact that this kind of eldership is not common does not change this requirement. It still exists, and is to be heeded by the people of God. Ignorance of this cannot be justified.

AFTER MY DEPARTING

Is it possible for a single man to make a significant difference in the spiritual condition of people? Indeed it is! Of old time, the preservation of wayward Israel was traceable to a single man – Moses. Israel took the whole land of Canaan under the leadership of a single man – Joshua.

“29 For I know this, that after my DEPARTING shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.” This is one of the most sobering statements concerning the church itself that is found in Scripture. Nothing – absolutely nothing – about the passage is in anyway tolerant or accommodating. It constitutes a solemn warning of things that had not yet occurred – things for which the elders must prepare themselves.

AFTER MY DEPARTING

“For I know this, that after my DEPARTING . . .” Other versions read, “after my departure,”

NKJV “after I leave,” NIV and “after I have gone.” NRSV

Paul is not speaking directly of his death, but of his departure for Jerusalem, and of the fact that these elders from Ephesus would never see him again. The events that follow will eventually lead to his martyrdom, and I do not doubt that his words have a secondary reference to that, although the details of that occasion were apparently not made known to him at that time. However, here he is specifically referring to the future, and what would take place in his absence.

Is it possible for a single man to make a significant difference in the spiritual condition of people? Indeed it is! Of old time, the preservation of wayward Israel was traceable to a single man – Moses (Ex 32:12-14, 30-32). Israel took the whole land of Canaan under the leadership of a single man – Joshua (Josh 1:23). The entire city of Samaria believed because of the preaching of one man – Philip (Acts 8:12). One man – Apollos – “helped them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).

Indeed, one person can make a difference! Spiritually insightful men are like a barrier that guards the flock. Where such men are absent, there is a certain vulnerability that can scarcely be imagined. This very text substantiates that this is the case.

GRIEVOUS WOLVES SHALL ENTER

“ . . . shall grievous wolves enter in among you . . .” Other versions read, “savage wolves,” NKJV “fierce wolves,” RSV “evil wolves,” BBE “ravaging wolves,” DOUAY “vicious wolves,” NLT “cruel wolves,” WEYMOUTH and “ferocious wolves.” AMPLIFIED

This is extraordinarily strong language. The reason for its strength is that the nature of these spiritual intruders are not at all apparent. Jesus said such men were “inwardly ravaging wolves,” but appeared “in sheep’s clothing” (Matt 7:15). The scribes and Pharisees were such men, that “outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity” (Matt 23:28). Their appearance was meticulously clean. As Jesus said, “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess” (Matt 23:25).

Those who evaluate such men from an apparent point of view may be impressed by their credentials, the seeming success of their ministry, and their polished manner and acquaintance with the things valued by the world. But all of that is nothing more than a facade, designed to attract those who lack “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). Those who naively receive such people are the worst for it. They will be robbed of such resources as they have, few though they may be.

The word “grievous,” as used in this text, means, “burdensome . . . violent, cruel, unsparing,” THAYER “fierce,” FRIBERG those who “fix heavy loads that are hard to carry and tie them on people's backs,” LOUW-NIDA and “fierce, savage.” GINGRICH

This is a spiritual assessment of

these “wolves,” who are devouring in nature. Under their leadership the sheep are not fed, and consequently do not grow up into Christ. Rather, they are moved to adopt an approach that is burdensome to the sensitive of heart. These men are like rabid dogs who leave the people incapacitated, so that they cannot do the will of the Lord “from the

What they advocate is not doable because these men require neither faith nor whole-heartedness. Their’s is a religion of procedure so they can capitalize on it. They allow for failure, and even teach men to expect a long recovery period, and continuous reliance upon their self-conceived routines.

heart” (Eph 6:6), even though they are provided with many procedures, tips, and outlines for acceptable conduct. What they advocate is not doable because these men require neither faith nor whole-heartedness. Their’s is a religion of procedure so they can capitalize on it. They allow for failure, and even teach men to expect a long recovery period, and continuous reliance upon their self-conceived routines.

JESUS SPEAKS OF FALSE TEACHERS

- Inwardly they are ravening wolves (Matt 7:15).
- They are hypocrites (Matt 15:7).
- They are blind leaders (Matt 15:14).
- They bind heavy burdens on the people (Matt 23:4).
- All their works are done to be seen of men (Matt 23:5).
- They love to occupy the significant places, and to be greeted in public (Matt 23:6-7).
- They shut up the kingdom of God against men (Matt 23:13).
- They devour widows houses (Matt 23:14).
- They are pretentious in their prayers (Matt 23:14).
- They work diligently to convert people, then make them a child of hell (Matt 23:15).
- They are “fools and blind” (Matt 23:19).
- They omit the weightier matters (Matt 23:23).
- They appear beautiful, but are full of all manner of uncleanness (Matt 23:27).
- They are a generation of vipers (Matt 23:32).
- They take away the key of knowledge (Lk 11:52).
- There shall rise false Christs (Matt Matt24:24).
- They shall show great signs and wonders so powerful that, if it were possible, they would deceive the very elect (Matt 24:24b).

THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE CONCERNING FALSE TEACHERS

- They are grievous, or savage wolves (Acts 20:29a)
- They will not spare the flock, have no mercy upon them, MRD and do them damage BBE (Acts 20:29b).
- They will speak perverse things (Acts 20:30a).
- They will draw away disciples from Christ to themselves (Acts 20:30b).
- They cause divisions and offences (Rom 16:17).
- They serve not our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 16:18).
- They serve their own belly (Rom 16:18).
- They deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom 16:18).
- They defile the temple of God (1 Cor 3:14-16).
- They preach another Jesus, another spirit, and another gospel (2 Cor 11:4).
- They are false apostles and deceitful workers (2 Cor 11:13).
- They are Satan’s ministers “transformed as ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor

11:15a).

- Their end is destruction (2 Cor 11:15b).
- They are “fools” (2 Cor 11:19).
- They “bewitch” the people (Gal 3:1).
- They zealously affect the people, but not well (Gal 4:17).
- They “hinder” the people (Gal 5:7).
- They are “dogs” (Phil 3:2a).
- They are “evil workers” (Phil 3:2b).
- They “beguile” the people with “enticing words” (Col 2:4).

They perpetrate “the traditions of men” and the rudimentary knowledge of the world

They “spoil” the people with “philosophy and vain deceit” (Col 2:8).

• They perpetrate “the traditions of men” and the rudimentary knowledge of the world (Col 2:8b).

• They are “not holding the Head” (Col 2:19).

• They desire to be teachers of the law, yet understand “neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).

• They are blasphemers (1 Tim 1:20).

• They give heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons (1 Tim 4:1).

• They speak “lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim 4:2).

• They “teach otherwise,” not submitting to “wholesome words” (1 Tim 6:3).

• They are “proud, knowing nothing ” (1 Tim 6:4).

• They are “men of corrupt minds, destitute of the truth” (1 Tim 6:5).

• Their word eats as a consuming cancer (2 Tim 2:16-17).

• They have erred from the truth (2 Tim 2:18).

• They are “ever learning, but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:5).

- They are “unruly and vain talkers” (Tit 1:10).
- They “subvert whole houses” (Tit 1:11).
- They have “turned from the truth” (Tit 1:14).
- They bring in “damnable heresies ” (2 Pet 2:1).
- They set “pernicious ways” before the people (2 Pet 2:2).
- Through covetousness, they “make merchandise” of the people (2 Pet 2:3).
- They “walk after the flesh” (2 Pet 2:10).
- They are “as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed” (2 Pet 2:12a).
- They speak evil of things they do not understand (2 Pet 2:12b).
- They have eyes full of adultery and cannot cease from sin (2 Pet 2:14a).
- Their heart is exercised in covetousness (2 Pet 2:14b).

- They are “cursed children” (2 Pet 2:14c).”
- They have forsaken the right way (2 Pet 15).
- They are “wells without water” (2 Pet 2:17a).
- They are “clouds that are carried with a tempest” (2 Pet 2:17b).
- They speak with “great swelling words of vanity” (2 Pet 2:18a).
- They allure through “the lusts of the flesh” (2 Pet 2:18b).
- They promise liberty, yet themselves are “the servants of corruption” (2 Pet 2:19).
- They “wrest” the Scriptures because they are “unlearned and unstable” (2 Pet 3:16).
- They “seduce” the people (1 John 2:26).
- They are “ungodly men” who are “ordained” unto condemnation (Jude 1:4a).
- They are “ungodly men” (Jude 1:4b).
- They “turn the grace of God into lasciviousness” Jude 1:4c).
- They have “gone the way of Cain” (Jude 1:11a).
- They have ran “greedily after the way of Balaam” (Jude 1:11b).
- They are “spots” in feasts of charity (Jude 1:12a).
- They “feed themselves without fear” (Jude 1:12b).
- They are “clouds that are without water, carried about of winds” (Jude 1:12c).
- They are trees whose fruit withers (Jude 1:12d).
- They are trees “without fruit” (Jude 1:12e).
- They are trees that are “twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 1:12f).
- They are “raging waves of the sea, foaming out their shame” (Jude 1:13a).
- They are “wandering stars, to whom is reserved the darkness forever ” (Jude 1:13b).
- Their mouth “speaks great swelling words, having men’s persons in admiration because of advantage” (Jude 1:18).

There are eighty-four statements made concerning false prophets. None of them are favorable. None of them are hopeful. All of them are in the context of warning. All of them are certain.

Observation

If this could happen after the consistent, faithful, and thorough ministry of Paul, what ought we to expect from weak and insipid ministries that do not ground people in the faith, or mature them in Christ Jesus? How easily can those with a weak faith, who are unlearned and ignorant in the ways of the Lord, be deceived?

The salvation of God equips men with a new heart and spirit, so that, under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit, they can “know all things” (1 John 2:20). They can detect aberrant teaching and abide in Christ (1 John 2:27). There is no valid reason for those in Christ being deceived, or failing to appropriate the knowledge of the truth.

NOT SPARING THE FLOCK

“ . . . not sparing the flock.” Other versions read, “doing damage to the flock,” BBE “will have no mercy on the flock,” MRD “trying to destroy the flock,” IE and “without mercy for the flock.”
PHILLIPS

Examples of “not sparing the flock” are seen in the leaders of Israel during former times. The language through which such leaders were reprimanded is most arresting. “Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture ! saith the LORD. Therefore thus saith the LORD God of Israel against the pastors that feed My people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them : behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the LORD” (Jer 23:1-2).

If this could happen after the consistent, faithful, and thorough ministry of Paul, what ought we to expect from weak and insipid ministries that do not ground people in the faith, or mature them in Christ Jesus? How easily can those with a weak faith, who are unlearned and ignorant in the ways of the Lord, be deceived?

Ezekiel is even more harsh in his inspired denunciation of the shepherds of Israel. “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves ! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed : but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened , neither have ye healed that which was sick , neither have ye bound up that which was broken , neither have ye brought again that which was driven away , neither have ye sought that which was lost ; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them . And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd : and they became meat to all the beasts of the field , when they were scattered. My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth , and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because My flock became a prey , and My flock became meat to every beast of the field , because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock , but the shepherds fed themselves , and fed not my flock ; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds ; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them” (Ezek 34:2-10).

Zechariah said, “Woe to the idol shepherd that leaveth the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened” (Zech 11:17).

Thus, in these few examples of “not sparing” the flock of God, the following has been mentioned.

- They destroyed and scattered the sheep of God’s pasture.
- They drive them away.
- They did not visit them.
- They fed themselves.
- They killed them that were fed.
- They did not feed the flock.
- They did not strengthen the diseased.
- They did not heal the sick.
- They did not bind up the broken.
- They did not bring again those who were driven away.
- They did not seek those who were lost.
- They ruled the sheep with force and cruelty.

- The people were left without a shepherd.
- They became prey to predators.
- They caused the sheep to wander.
- The sheep were scattered throughout the earth.

Some few souls rightly lament the present scattering of the people of God, and the grievous divisions that exist among them. However, we must remember that men have caused these circumstances. Their contrived doctrines have been the instruments of scattering, starving, and making the people vulnerable to the devices of the wicked ones.

Some few souls rightly lament the present scattering of the people of God, and the grievous divisions that exist among them. However, we must remember that men have caused these circumstances. Their contrived doctrines have been the instruments of scattering, starving, and making the people vulnerable to the devices of the wicked ones. It is precisely what has been taught that has caused the condition. Rather than nourishing the sheep, and enabling them to be strong, their word had eaten like a malignant cancer, wreaking havoc among those who wear the name of the Lord. It really is not an innocent or tolerable circumstance!

REMEMBER!

Remember, we are speaking of “The flock of God” (1 Pet 5:2), or “God’s heritage” (1 Pet 5:3). While that may seem to suggest such people are beyond the place of harm, this is not all the case. As long as the people of God are immature, they are vulnerable to the devices of the wicked one. It is true that during their initial infancy in Christ, the Good Shepherd often carries them, and gently leads them (Isa 40:11), warding off the preying wolves that are prowling in their vicinity. However, there are also duly placed under-shepherds, whose duty is to oversee and feed the flock of God so they are no longer vulnerable to the heralds of corrupt teaching. The protection of the sheep is found within the framework of “wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). These are facilitated by feeding them “the good knowledge of the Lord” (2 Chron 30:22).

In the text before us, a warning is given concerning those who do damage to the sheep by leaving them in worse shape than they were when God first delivered them from the power of darkness, and translated them into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col 1:13). Rather than facilitating their growth “up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15), they major in life in the very world from which Jesus has delivered them (Gal 1:4). However noble their intentions may appear, they do not mesh with the revealed ministries that have been placed within the church.

The Tragedy of Religious Exploitation

As unpopular as it may be to affirm, God has not appointed problem-solvers in the body of Christ. ALL of the spiritual gifts have to do with equipping the saints to grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:11-16). Here are some of the gifts God has placed within the church, which is the body of Christ.

- **ROMANS 12:3-8**
- 01–Prophecy
- 02–Ministry (service)
- 03–Exhorting
- 04–Ruling
- 05–Showing mercy
- **1 CORINTHIANS 12:6-10**

- 06–The word of wisdom
- 07–The word of knowledge
- 08–Faith
- 09–Gifts of healing
- 10–Working of miracles
- Prophecy (duplicate)
- 11–Discerning of spirits
- 12–Diversity of tongues (languages)
- 13– Interpretation of tongues
- **1 CORINTHIANS 12:28**
- 14–Apostles
- Prophets (duplicate)
- 15–Teachers
- Miracles (duplicate)
- Gifts of healing (duplicate)
- 16–Helps
- 17–Governments
- Diversities of tongues (duplicate)
- **EPHESIANS 4:11-16**
- Apostles (Duplicate)
- Prophets (duplicate)
- 18– Evangelists
- 19–Pastors/Teachers
- **1 PETER 4:10-11**
- 20– Speaking
- Minister (serve)–duplicate

While some of these gifts may be construed to be related to problem solving and counseling (word of wisdom, word of knowledge, teachers), none are clearly affirmed to be for that purpose. That kind of activity is actually fulfilled by personal identity: fellowship with Christ (1 Cor 1:9), living by faith (Heb 10:38), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25), and drawing near to God to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16).

The intention of the gifts is clearly stated in Ephesians 4:11-16.

- For the perfecting of the saints.
- For the work of the ministry.
- For the edifying of the body of Christ.
- Coming to the unity of the faith.
- Coming to the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.
- Collectively coming to be a mature body, with each part effectively projecting their

measure of the fulness of Christ.

- That we be no more children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.
- That, speaking the truth in love, the saints may grow up into Christ in all things.
- That the body of Christ maybe compacted together by he effective ministration of every part.
- That the body may increase in the good work of edifying itself in love.

Those professed ministers, preachers, and teachers who are not contributing to the realization of these objectives are doing harm to the people of God – “not sparing the flock.”

The truth of the matter is that too many religious men are capitalizing on the weaknesses of the people professing allegiance to Christ Jesus. The very existence of their profession suggests that men are not complete in Christ (Col 2:10). For such men, the domain of religion offers an opportunity for a career, a business, or some work that is closer to this world than the world to come – which is the subject of apostolic exposition (Heb 2:5). This is not at all an innocent situation. When due care is not given to the flock of God, the future becomes very gloomy.

These days there is a marked tendency to neglect the people of God. Rather than proving a haven for the people of God, there is actually a focused effort on bringing the world into the church. It has even become popular to refer to churches “without walls,” as though that reflected a heavenly preference for the church. As noble as it is to have a genuine heart for the conversion of sinners, when the body of Christ assembles, it is not to reach the lost, but to remember Jesus and edify one another (1 Cor 11:17-20; 14:23,26; Col 3:16; 1 Thess 5:11; Heb 10:24-25).

The influence of the men who teach “perverse” things leads the people away from the emphasis established by God. Therefore, it causes the sheep to become vulnerable to the devices of Satan.

THE ENVIRONMENT FROM WHICH THE PERVERSE SPEAKERS COME

“ 30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”

Paul now warns the elders from Ephesus of impending corruption that would rise in the church. He identifies the source of the corruption, its nature, and the intent that drives it.

OF YOUR OWN SELVES

“Also of your own selves shall men arise . . .” Other versions read: “from among yourselves,” NKJV “even from your own number,” NIV “Some even from your own group,” NRSV “from your own ranks,” NJB and “Even some of you.” NLT

The most dangerous enemies of the church have risen from its own environment! Danger comes from defectors, not mere intruders. Ishmael was in the house with Isaac. Esau was in the womb and the home with Jacob. Joseph’s brothers, who were so aligned against him, were raised in the same house as himself. Judas, noted for his betrayal of the Lord and for being under the dominance of Satan, was “numbered with” the twelve apostles, partaking of their unique ministry (Acts 1:17). John spoke of some false prophets who “went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us” (1 John 2:19).

Thus, Paul warns these “elders” that some of their own number would break away from the Lord and the Divine agenda, and would use their position to promote their own cause. In order to do this, they will have to depart from “the apostles doctrine” (Acts 2:42), and develop a unique message that

serves their own corrupt interests.

SPEAKING PERVERSE THINGS

“ . . . speaking perverse things. . .” Other versions read, “distort the truth,” NIV “distorting the truth,” NRSV “give wrong teaching,” BBE “speaking twisted things,” ESV “perverting the truth,” NAB and “with a travesty of the truth.” NJB

The words “perverse things” are translated from the single Greek work **diestramme,na** , which means “to distort, turn aside . . . to turn aside from the right path, to pervert, corrupt,” THAYER “become misshapen; figuratively pervert, corrupt, distort; passive, of the truth be perverted, be distorted,” FRIBERG “pervert, distort (crooked, wrong); divert, turn away; mislead, lead astray,” UBS and “to cause someone to believe something that is quite different - 'to cause someone to turn away from a belief, to mislead.” LOUW-NIDA

“Perverse things” are teachings that take men off the narrow way that leads men to life. They are not necessarily perverse in appearance. They may not discard Scriptures, but actually profess to rely upon them. However, they are like a doctrinal caricature that accents the wrong thing, bringing distortion to the understanding.

There is an approach to Scripture that places the accent on the wrong thing. From the most concentrated perspective, the accent of Scripture is God Himself. Technically, the Word of God is the revelation of Himself, His purpose, and His will. Insofar as the implementation of that will, or purpose, is concerned, Jesus Christ is the Subject, for the Scriptures testify, or bear witness, to Him (John 5:39; Rev 19:10). Jesus is presented within the context of God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11), apart from which He has no relevance to mankind. His birth, life, ministry, death, burial, resurrection, ascension, enthronement, and present rule all relate directly to that purpose.

“Perverse things” pull men away from that purpose, and thus away from Christ Himself – who relates directly to that purpose. When this diversion takes place, Christ is no longer at the helm of teaching, nor is He its focus. He is thus assigned a secondary role (at the best), which is designed to support what men have presented as the primary objective,

doctrines, perspectives, emphases. Now, however, their primary objective reflects nothing more than corrupt human understanding, and tends to accrue to the ultimate advantage of its perpetrator. Some current doctrinal thrusts that can be properly referred to as “perverse things” include the following. These all are wrong in the sense of being the emphasis, of thrust, of the teaching. None of them are wrong of themselves, or are intended to be excluded from sound teaching and doctrine. However, when they become the emphasis, or accentuation of the teaching, Christ is moved from the perceived place of prominence.

- **The conversion of the lost.**
- **The means through which men are saved.**
- **The optimization of the married state.**
- **The proper rearing of the family.**
- **The happiness of the individual.**
- **Gaining control of one’s life.**
- **Following a prescribed and exact pattern in worship.**
- **The public praise and worship of God.**
- **The realization of personal desires and ambitions.**
- **Success and dominance in this world.**

- **The Attainment of Health and wealth.**
- **The relief of the poor and oppressed.**
- **Doctrines that *CENTER* in such things as the Sabbath, meats and drinks, fasting, feast days, etc.**

None of these matters directly relate to Christ Himself, His return in glory, or preparation for the day of judgment. They do not depend upon Christ. They are not fostered by faith, do not require grace, nor are they represented as being administered by the Holy Spirit. As an emphasis, they are primarily related to this world and time. The aforementioned matters are valid only as they are placed within the context of God, Christ, and the revealed “eternal purpose” of God. No revealed spiritual gift or aptitude is said to be related to such things. All specialists in such fields must subscribe to disciplines and approaches developed by men. Each person majoring on such things must determine if this is the proper thing to do.

The truth itself will not induce men to develop a teaching that can be described as “perverse things.” No statement or thrust of Scripture will produce a sectarian – not so much as an isolated syllable! That circumstance is precisely what requires the development of special doctrines that will promote the cause of the one speaking “perverse things.”

TO DRAW AWAY DISCIPLES

“ . . . to draw away disciples after them.” Other versions read, “to entice the disciples to follow them,” NRSV “turning away the disciples after them,” BBE “in order to drag away the talmidim after themselves,” CJB “to lure the disciples into following them,” CSB “to induce the disciples to follow them,” NJB “to draw a following,” NLT

As I have already stated, the Gospel is not conducive to promote a human cause, or to build a personal following. That undeniable circumstance is the reason for these men delivering unique and flawed dogmas – it is the only way they can increase the number of people following them. For example, who is the person willing to affirm that “the Gospel of Christ” would lead a person to be a Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, or member of the Christian Church? What person would dare to allege that “the apostles’ doctrine” would make a person a premillennialist, a charismatic, or a Seventh Day Adventist?

When once a preacher or teacher establishes an agenda of his own, or adopts the agenda of another, it is at once essential to have a unique doctrine that promotes that agenda. This is because God’s “doctrine” (Deut 32:2) does not promote priorities developed by men. It is only relevant within the context of His revealed purpose.

The Philosophy of Making Disciples

A word is in order concerning the philosophy of making disciples. Precisely what is the reason for Christ’s words, “teach all nations,” KJV or “make disciples of all the nations” NKJV (Matt 28:19). Is it merely to increase the total number of disciples? Surely it does not require any extraordinary degree of intelligence to see that He is not referring to inflating the numbers of denomination “A” or “B.” Is His purpose to get more people to recite the “sinner’s prayer”? – which phraseology is not even found in Scripture.

First and foremost, it is the Lord’s harvest into which the laborers are sent. Thus Jesus admonished His disciples, “Then saith He unto His disciples, The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He will send forth laborers into His harvest” (Matt 9:38). Notice that the harvest was ready – “plenteous,” or “great” (Lk 10:2). Elsewhere, Jesus saw a great company from the city of the Samaritans approaching Him, and referred to them as being fields

that were “white unto harvest” – like ripened grain (John 4:35). He was describing a people who had been made ready for the Lord – someone had planted and sowed, and the time for increase had come. A great multitude of people who are yet in trespasses and sins do not constitute a field that is white unto harvest. A multitude of such people existed in Asia, yet the Lord, at one point in time, forbade any attempt to reap there (Acts 16:6). The same was true in the region of Bithynia (Acts 16:7). At that time, the fields were white in Macedonia (Acts 16:9-10). Later, the fields were whitened in Asia, and the Lord sent laborers to reap it (Acts 19:26). Another time, when the fields did not look white in Corinth, Jesus appeared to Paul and informed him that it was time to reap,

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and that he ought to remain in Corinth, guaranteeing him of safety from the Jews, who often sought his life (Acts 18:9-11).

The modern church has wasted a lot of time and resources attempting to reap where there was no harvest. It has studied maps, and trends, and statistics – none of which drove the spread of the Gospel and the increase of converts in the first century. Of course, there is no comparison in the results, either. This is largely because of insensitivity to the Lord Himself, and a lack of acquaintance with His manners.

Only God can give the increase, and He does not do it through the imaginations and doctrines of men. Genuine seed must have been planted and authentic watering must have taken place BEFORE God gives the increase. This is not necessarily related to time.

Further the aim of salvation is not merely to bring a cessation to immorality and enslavement to sin. That is involved, to be sure, but it is not at the core of the purpose. Reconciliation to God, or oneness with Him is the revealed objective (Rom 5:10; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Col 1:20–21). There is also the matter of being a “partaker of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and being “partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4) – i.e. becoming a new creation (2 Cor 6:17; Eph 2:10), and receiving a new man that is “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24), being “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10). When men do not “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15), there is no point to the remission of sins or deliverance from servitude to sin.

In the salvation of God – the “great salvation” – the revelation of participation is not found in what men do NOT do, or what they are attempting to overcome. It is rather found in their fellowship, or participation, in Christ (1 Cor 1:9; Eph 4:15), and their conformity to His image (Rom 8:19); 2 Cor 3:18). If men do not have what salvation offers, then it is not possible to confirm that they are saved. That is why all believers are admonished, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5). That text confirms that every professing believer is either accepted or rejected, in or out, a participant of a non-participant – and none of those conditions is to be assumed.

We do not have to inquire into whether or not such noble and revealed objectives are being served by the church at large. The current condition of the professed church belies any profession of being a new creation. The fruit of current church work does not even suggest that the revealed purpose is even known, much less that men have been consciously joined to the purpose itself. When men say that God is moving them to do this or that, the results will confirm whether their claim to Divine guidance is correct or not. I do not believe this perspective is common among professing believers. However, it is the truth. It is ever true, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.” (Mat 7:20).

WATCH AND REMEMBER

“ 31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.”

Paul does not simply declare that false teachers will come, letting the matter drop with a prophecy. He does not suggest that whatever will be, will be, and therefore the elders from Ephesus should not be surprised when what he declares comes to pass. Men often reason in such a manner, but they are neither holy nor inspired men. When a period of spiritual corruption is foretold, those who hear the word are to see to it they are not caught in the tide of defection. They are also to be vigilant so those under their care are not put at a disadvantage by such teachers. As I see things, this kind of posture is glaringly absent in today’s “church” culture.

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THEREFORE WATCH

“Therefore watch . . .” Other versions read, “be on the alert,” NASB “be on your guard,” NIV “keep watch,” BBE “be ye vigilant,” NAB “Watch out!” NLT “awake,” TNT and “be always alert and on your guard.” AMPLIFIED

The word “watch” means, “to give strict attention to, be cautious, active; to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one,” THAYER “to keep awake,” UBS “give strict attention to, be cautious, active; to take heed lest through remission and indolence some destructive calamity suddenly overtake one,” LOUW-NIDA and “to be or become fully awake, to watch.” LEH

The word “watch,” as used in this text, is mentioned twenty-three times from Matthew through Revelation. Jesus used the word on two critical occasions.

• **REGARDING HIS SECOND COMING.** “ Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matt 24:42; 25:13; Mk 13:34-37; Lk 12:37-39).

• **ASKING HIS DISCIPLES TO JOIN HIM IN PRAYING ON THE EVE OF HIS BETRAYAL.** “Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with Me” (Matt 26:38,40,41; Mk 14:34,37,38).

The “apostles’ doctrine” also includes this word, clearly associating it with alertness, vigilance, and taking heed to matters of a most solemn nature.

• **SPIRITUAL STABILITY.** “ Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong” (1 Cor 16:13).

• **BEING ALERT IN PRAYERFULNESS.** “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving” (Col 4:2).

• **ALERTNESS TO THE DANGERS ABOUT US.** “Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thess 5:6).

• **BEING KEENLY AWARE OF THE NATURE AND INTENTIONS OF THE DEVIL.** “Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

• **BEING AWARE OF OUR CONDITION BEFORE THE LORD.** “Be watchful , and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die: for I have not found thy works perfect before God” (Rev 3:2).

• **AVOIDING BEING FOUND IN AN UNACCEPTABLE STATE.** “Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee” (Rev 3:3).

• **READINESS FOR THE APPEARING OF THE LORD.** “Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame” (Rev 16:15).

The intention of Paul’s exhortation is clear. A defection from the truth will take place under the leadership and teaching of some wayward church leaders. The intention of that defection will be to build an organization around men that will promote their cause. In order for this to occur, “perverse things” must be taught, for the truth itself cannot be employed for such purposes. The elders from Ephesus were to be alert for this intrusion, remaining in a state of constant readiness, lest it take place while they were spiritually asleep.

Elsewhere Paul refers to this defection from the standpoint of the hearers. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (2 Tim 4:3). This demand by the hearers is the result of embracing the “perverse things” introduced by the teachers of which Paul was warning the elders. Once the erroneous teaching was introduced, it would rapidly spread through the church, corrupting the thinking of the people. It is the influence of false teaching that has moved professing Christians to demand froth and flesh-pleasing preaching.

AND REMEMBER

“ . . . and remember . . .” Other versions read, “remembering,” NASB “having in mind,” BBE “keeping in memory,” DOUAY “always remember,” IE and “be mindful.” AMPLIFIED

The word “remember” involves the will, as well as some degree of understanding or discernment. It has to do with recollecting, and to keep in memory constantly, not allowing the matter at hand to slip away from the mind. The thing to be remembered is what Paul had said concerning the coming defection of certain leaders, and the introduction of erroneous teaching that would do damage to the flock of God.

Jesus told His disciples of this phenomenon. “And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold” (Matt 24:11-12). He continued, “For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect” (Matt 24:24).

• Paul also taught that these false teachers would actually be taught by demons – that their doctrines were spawned, so to speak, in hell. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall fall from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils [demons NKJV]; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron” (1 Tim 4:2).

• Peter said they would “bring in damnable heresies,” that many would “follow their pernicious ways,” and that their teaching would cause men to speak evil of “the way of truth” (2 Pet 2:1-2).

• John referred to them “many antichrists” who had severed their association with those who spoke the truth (1 John 2:18).

• Jude said they were “ungodly men, turning the grace of God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4).

I do not know how a circumstance could be any more serious – unless it be the day of judgment in

which these men will stand before God to give an account for their reprehensible manners and doctrines. The men themselves are not the point, but their contemptible doctrines. Remember, Peter said they were “damnable.” Other versions read, “destructive,” NKJV “For your destruction,” BBE “sects of perdition,” DOUAY “disruptive views,” NJB “destructive sects,” YLT “fatal divisions,” WEYMOUTH “harmful lies,” CEV and “perversions of the truth.” PHILLIPS These doctrines would not appear to be so serious – that is why the warnings were issued. If they were very apparent, there would be no need for such exhortations.

As you can detect from the various versions, there is a marked tendency among modern translators to avoid the obvious harshness of the text. Although the word “destruction” is an acceptable technical definition, yet it lacks the potency of the word “damnation” – which is an obvious action of God Himself, for no man can “damn.” The Greek word from which “damnable” is translated is **αἰώνιος**. As used here, the lexical meaning of the word is: “a destroying, utter destruction . . . perishing, ruin . . . the destruction which consists in the loss of eternal life, eternal misery, perdition,” THAYER “(utter) ruin, (complete) loss; as the eternal punishment of the wicked,” FRIBERG “one bound to be lost or one destined for hell.” UBS

Other Scriptural uses of this word are as follows.

The teachings, or message, of these false teachers, who speak “perverse things,” are of a most serious nature. What they teach actually is leading men into eternal ruination. Just as the Gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom 1:16), these “damnable heresies” are one of Satan’s means of drawing people into hell. This is not an opinion, but a matter of written revelation.

“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Mat 7:13).

- “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled” (John 17:12).
- “But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money” (Acts 8:20).
- “What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” (Rom 9:22).
- “And in nothing terrified by your adversaries: which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God” (Phil 1:28).
- “Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil 3:19).
- “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (2 Thess 2:3).
- “But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition” (1 Tim 6:9).
- “But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39).
- “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Pet 3:7),

The teachings, or message, of these false teachers, who speak “perverse things,” are of a most serious nature. What they teach actually is leading men into eternal ruination. Just as the Gospel is God’s power unto salvation (Rom 1:16), these “damnable heresies” are one of Satan’s means of

drawing people into hell. This is not an opinion, but is a matter of written revelation.

Now we are living over two thousand years past the time in which Paul spoke these words. The men of which he warned entered long ago, and now we are in an era in which the Christianity of the masses has been largely shaped by the teaching of false prophets. Error is so pervasive within the professed church that it is staggering. There is hardly a Scriptural subject that has not been grossly distorted. “Diverse and strange doctrines” (Heb 13:9), together with corrupt emphases and an off-centered focus are common. There is no quadrant of the globe where these condition cannot be found. The doctrines of reference have truly eaten as a cancer.

FOR THREE YEARS I WARNED EVERYONE

“ . . . that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one . . .” Other versions read, “for three years I did not cease to warn,” NKJV “a period of three years I did not cease to admonish,” NASB “for three years I never stopped warning,” NIV and “I never stopped . . . to admonish and advise and exhort you one by one.” AMPLIFIED

“Three years” was the length of time Paul labored in Ephesus, using it as his base of operation. This is divided into three sections of time – two of them precise, and one general.

I suppose some might have considered this a negative message – but such an imagination only betrays a high level of ignorance. This was involved in caring for the flock of God –something Paul has admonished the elders of Ephesus to do. He now adds this word to provide an example of faithfulness in this area. He steadfastly conducted his ministry among them in the precise frame of spirit, and with the same care, that he now requires of the elders. This is the manner in which he ministered everywhere, providing an example of how and what to minister (Phil 3:17; 2 Thess 3:9).

During the pioneer days of our country, there were vast wastelands that had pools of contaminated water. Thoughtful souls who knew the condition of this water would post a warning sign for weary travelers, lest they drunk from that polluted water. Oh, that men were more faithful to warn the people of God of dangerous teachings that cause men to swerve aside, falling into damnable ways of thinking.

Here are a few ensamples of erroneous messages that were already being preached near the middle of the first century.

- That the resurrection is already past (2 Tim 2:16).
- Forbidding to marry (1 Tim 4:3).
- Commanding to abstain from meats that God has created (1 Tim 4:3).
- Presenting gain as godliness (1 Tim 6:5).
- Voluntary humility, or self-abasement, and the worship of angels (Col 2:18).
- Another Jesus, another gospel, and another spirit (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6).

When men embrace something that is a lie, it is not harmless. Do not imagine that such poor souls will simply grow out of the delusion. This is not possible, because the delusion itself forces men into a path that ultimately leads to condemnation. Even when it appears that men have read or studied their way out of error, a careful examination will find that their path had been crossed by some faithful soul who gave a word that proved to be a challenge to their way of thinking. I understand that it is necessary to employ godly wisdom, and to show the conflict of the false teaching with the truth of God – but something must be said. If what I have just said is not the expression of a proper perception, then how do we account for the faithfulness of Paul in addressing this subject for a period of three years?

NIGHT AND DAY WITH TEARS

“ . . . night and day with tears.” Other versions read, “with weeping,” BBE “with tears in my eyes,” CJB “tears for you,” NLT “many tears for you,” LIVING and “I often cried over you.” IE

The very thought of deficiency in the people of God, whether a current circumstance or a potential one, has been the cause of many holy men weeping – and even the Lord Jesus, when He “dwelt among us.”

• **JESUS, AT THE UNBELIEF PRESENT WHEN LAZARUS DIED:** “When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, He groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto Him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept ” (John 11:33-35).

• **JESUS OVER JERUSALEM:** “And when He was come near, He beheld the city, and wept over it , Saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes” (Luke 19:41-42).

• **JEREMIAH THE PROPHET AT THE CONDITION OF ISRAEL.** “ Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!” (Jer 9:1). “But if ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears , because the Lord's flock is carried away captive” (Jer 13:17).

• **ELISHA, WHEN HE KNEW THE EVIL THAT WOULD BE DONE TO THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.** “And he settled his countenance steadfastly, until he was ashamed: and the man of God wept . And Hazeal said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel: their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child” (2 Kgs 8:11-12).

• **EZRA, WHEN CONFESSING THE SINS OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.** “Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God , there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children: for the people wept very sore” (Ezra 10:1).

• **NEHEMIAH, UPON HEARING OF THE RUINATION OF JERUSALEM AND THE STATE OF THE PEOPLE.** “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven” (Neh 1:4).

• **PAUL AT THE CONDITION OF THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH.** “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears ; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you” (2 Cor 2:4).

• **PAUL, WHEN CONSIDERING THE PRESENCE OF FALSE TEACHERS.** “For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping , that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things” (Phil 3:18-19).

• **TIMOTHY DURING HIS LABORS.** “Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears , that I may be filled with joy” (2 Tim 1:4).

Today, there is a glaring absence of this kind of concern in the churches, and among their leaders. Erroneous doctrines are abounding in the land – all presented as coming from God. There is a tidal wave of darkness and ignorance that has veiled the revelation of God, all the while pretending to be a new word from the Lord. The religious concerns that are being taught and marketed by this corrupt

breed of teachers has little to do with eternity, the condition of men before the Lord, eternal life, or the danger of everlasting destruction. In the name of Christ, men are being immersed into the details of life in this world in a way that causes them to actually ignore eternal matters. Even though, in conversion, God raises us up and causes us to be seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6), the general emphases of modern Christendom is pulling them back down into the arena out of which they were delivered and raised.

There is such a thing as ultimate reality. As used in Scripture, it pertains to what will survive the demise of the world, and remain after death has been swallowed up in victory. Truth cannot be changed or altered. If this were not so, God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit could not Themselves be described as “truth.”

The consequences have been disastrous. Now, sin is more prominent, human weakness is more prevalent, and spiritual ignorance is at an astounding level – in the professed church! All of this has happened under the watch of educated, polished, and refined ministers whose primary message is questionable, to say the very least. If it is true that “Ye shall know them by their fruits” (Matt 7:16,20), exactly what are these conditions telling us?

THE TRUTH

The seriousness of false and erroneous teaching is seen in the nature of truth itself.

Defining truth is not as simplistic as it may at first appear. **MCCLINTOCK & STRONG’S CYCLOPEDIA** defines truth in this way: “The foundation of all truth is in truth of being--that truth by which a thing is what it is, by which it has its own nature and properties; and has not merely the appearance, but **reality** , of being. Truth, as predicated of knowledge, is the conformity of our knowledge with the **reality** of the object known; for, as knowledge is the knowledge of something, when a thing is known as it is that knowledge is formally true.”

In other words, truth is reality, or the way things really are. In Scripture, the way things really are is defined by God. It is His assessment that confirms the reality of a thing. When it comes to the things of God, or the assessment of things that pertain to life and godliness, exclusive definitions and teaching belong to God Himself, coming through Christ Jesus and the Holy Spirit. With Him, there is no such thing as philosophy, speculation, or opinion. He only speaks what actually IS, and His assessments are the ONLY ones that are flawless, perfectly conforming to ultimate reality.

The word “true” – for truth pertains to what is “true” THAYER – is lexically defined as follows: “that which has not only the name and semblance, but the real nature corresponding to the name,” THAYER “of words that conform to facts true, correct, dependable; of what conforms to reality genuine, real, true,” FRIBERG and “of words that conform to facts true, correct, dependable; of what conforms to reality genuine, real, true.” LOUW-NIDA

There is such a thing as ultimate reality. As used in Scripture, it pertains to what will survive the demise of the world, and remain after death has been swallowed up in victory. Truth cannot be changed or altered. If this were not so, God, Christ Jesus, and the Holy Spirit could not Themselves be described as “truth.”

With that in mind, here is how the word of God speaks of “truth.”

- Truth belongs to God – it is “His truth” (Gen 24:27; Psa 57:3; 91:4; 96:13; 98:3; 100:5).
- God is “abundant in truth” (Ex 34:6).
- God is a “God of truth” (Deut 32:4; Psa 31:5).

- God is to be served “in truth” (Josh 24:14; 1 Sam 12:24).
- Men are to walk before the Lord “in truth with all of their heart” (1 Kgs 2:4).
- Truth is to be spoken “in the heart” (Psa 15:2).
- All the paths of the Lord are “truth” (Psa 25:10).
- All of God’s works are “done in truth” (Psa 33:4).
- God desires “truth in the inward parts” (Psa 51:6).
- God’s salvation is characterized by truth (Psa 69:13).
- Jesus Christ is “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

In order to be saved, men must receive “the love of the truth.” If they do not, God will send them “strong delusion,” and they will be “damned”

- “Truth . . . came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:17).
- Those who worship God must do so “in truth” (John 4:24).
- The truth, when known, “shall make you free” (John 8:32).
- Jesus Himself is “the truth” (John 14:6).
- The Holy Spirit is “the Spirit of truth” (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13).
- The Holy Spirit guides “into all truth” (John 16:13).
- God sanctifies men “through” His “truth” (John 17:17,19).
- God’s word “is truth” (John 17:17).
- Jesus came to “bear witness unto the truth” (John 18:37).
- The wrath of God is revealed against those who hold back the truth (Rom 1:18).
- Those who “changed the truth” were given up by God to vile affections (Rom 1:25-26).
- The judgment of God is “according to truth” (Rom 2:2).
- Indignation and wrath are reserved for those who “do not obey the truth” (Rom 2:8).
- Truth is to be obeyed, and men are faulted by God if they do not do so (Gal 3:1; 5:7).
- The Gospel of salvation is called “the word of truth” (Eph 1:13).
- The truth is to be spoken (Eph 4:15,25).
- The “fruit of the Spirit is in all . . . truth” (Eph 5:9).
- In order to be saved, men must receive “the love of the truth.” If they do not, God will send them “strong delusion,” and they will be “damned” (2 Thess 2:10-12).
- Salvation involves coming “into the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4).
- The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).
- When God gives repentance, there is an acknowledging of the truth (2 Tim 2:25).
- God begets His children “with the word of truth” (James 1:18).
- Erring from the truth requires that such a person be “converted” (James 5:19).
- Men purify their souls by “obeying the truth through the Spirit” (1 Pet 1:22).
- Men are “established” in the truth (2 Pet 1:12).

- The way that leads to life is “the way of truth” (2 Pet 2:2).
- No lie is “of the truth” (1 John 2:21).
- The “Spirit is truth” (1 John 5:6).
- The people of God “walk in the truth” (2 John 1:4; 3 John 1:4).
- The faithful have a good report “of the truth itself” (3 John 1:12).

Is it possible that permission is given to men to venture into the arena of opinion when addressing the subjects of God, Christ, the Word of truth, the things of God, the salvation of God, or the purpose of God? Has God really given men leniency in such matters, so they can consult with the wisdom of men, promote their own opinions, or allow for varying and contradicting views of something God has revealed?

Who would dare to postulate such folly, and what would be the purpose of doing so? Without lingering on the subject, what about the coming of the Lord? Within the Christian community there are least four independent and isolated areas of thought on the subject: Premillennialism, Postmillennialism, Amillennialism, and Preterism. None of these views can be merged, and none will allow the acceptance of the other views. Whole bodies of theology are incorporated into these contradicting views. The human opinions concerning these areas of thought include the following. This is not intended to be a complete listing.

- The coming of the Lord itself.
- The enthronement and reign of Christ.
- The resurrection of the dead.
- The day of judgment.
- A period of tribulation.
- The coming of antichrist.
- The matter of rewards.
- The visibility of Christ’s return.
- The separation of the godly from the ungodly.
- The conversion of sinners.

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- The conversion of the Jews.
- The work of the Holy Spirit.
- The preaching Gospel of Christ.
- The existence of the world.
- The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Haggai, Daniel, Zechariah, Malachi, Paul, and John – with several others.

It is difficult to conceive of a subject that touches more matters than these – and God has spoken particularly about each one of the above.

No person can afford to be wrong about what God has revealed – or, to be more precise, to REMAIN wrong about what God has revealed. This is of particular importance when it comes to views of Christ and the salvation that He has effected.

Further, they are all deal with critical subjects.

In these positions concerning the coming of the Lord, there is a readiness to equate the opinions of men with the affirmations of God. Further, there is little consciousness of the seriousness of sifting the Word of the Lord through the maze of human judgment. Additionally, allowance is made for the saints accepting one of these views to the exclusion of others. Such tolerance is even affirmed to be done with sincerity and a pure heart.

How serious is it to approach the Word of God in such a manner? Is it possible that contradicting representations of the will and way of the Lord are harmonious? Will God really work through a word that is not true – that does not conform to ultimate reality? The real situation is this: whatever is not left standing after the present heavens and earth have passed away, and death has been swallowed up in victory, cannot possibly have been true – and that is precisely how men will be forced to think as they stand before the Judge of all the earth.

No person can afford to be wrong about what God has revealed – or, to be more precise, to REMAIN wrong about what God has revealed. This is of particular importance when it comes to views of Christ and the salvation that He has effected. Those subjects account for the burden of Divine revelation. This is precisely why the saints of God must be fed a proper and beneficial diet. Those leaders who refuse to do this must be expelled now. Unless they repent of their doing, they WILL be expelled at the great separation, just as Paul affirmed (2 Cor 11:15; Phil 3:19). Any other position on this matter is indefensible, and must be forthrightly abandoned.

The highest value must be placed on the truth itself, and whatever does not conform precisely to it is a lie, and is to be so viewed.

COMMENDED TO GOD AND THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

“ 32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”

Now that Paul is leaving these brethren, and has duly warned them of the impending defection of some of their own number, what does he desire for them? How do you speak to people after issuing such a solemn warning? The manner of the kingdom and the nature of salvation is revealed in what Paul now says to these leaders.

I COMMEND YOU TO GOD

“And now, brethren, I commend you to God . . .” Other versions read, “commit you to God,” NIV “give you into the care of God,” BBE “entrusting you to God,” GWN “I commit you to God [I deposit you in His charge, entrusting you to His protection and care],” AMPLIFIED “I am giving you to God,” IE “I commend you to the Lord,” PHILLIPS and “I am turning you over to God.” MESSAGE

To “commend” is to “place near, or set beside . . . to deposit, to intrust, commit to one’s charge . . . to be cared for . . . to commend one to another for protection, safety, etc.” THAYER

There are several critical matters that are assumed when someone is commended to the Lord.

- That the Lord is capable of taking care of the people involved.
- That the people being commended to the Lord are themselves committed to Him.
- That the one doing the commending is familiar with the Lord, and has some understanding of what the Lord is doing.
- That there are hostile influences and forces that transcend the natural abilities of the ones being commended to the Lord.

- That there is some worthy objective for which the people being commended to the Lord are being prepared.

- That in the absence of the one doing the commending, the people involved will be subjected to some form of increased hostility.

- That the presence of the one doing the commending gave the believers certain advantages they did not have while he was not in their presence.

While this is not the place to develop these thoughts, the mentioning of them will be apparent to those with spiritual understanding. Even in his absence, Paul was thinking of the flock, and took care of it by commending the people to the Lord Himself, knowing full well that He cares for the righteous (1 Pet 5:7), and is “able” to keep them from falling, and present them faultless before His presence with exceeding joy (Jude 1:24-25).

I COMMEND YOU TO THE WORD OF HIS GRACE

“ . . . and to the word of His grace . . . ” Other versions read, “the message of His grace,” NRSV “the message of His love and kindness,” CJB “His message that tells how kind He is,” GWN “that gracious word of His,” NAB “His wonderful words,” LIVING “the message of God’s gracious love,” IE “the message of His favor,” WILLIAMS “the Word of His grace [to the commands and counsels and promises of His unmerited favor],” AMPLIFIED “the message about His great kindness, CEV and “the saying of His grace.” INTERLINEAR

The term “word” is taken from the Greek word **logos**, which means, “those things which are put together in thought, as of those which, having been thought I. e. gathered together in the mind, are expressed in words,” THAYER and a word “that embodies a conception or idea . . . the sayings of God . . . doctrine, teaching . . . a narrative . . . the thing spoken of or talked about,” GINGRICH Men use the term in this way when they say, “This is my word to you,” or “Do you have a word for us?”

The “word of His grace” is what God has said about His grace – it is the Divine teaching, or doctrine, concerning the grace of God – the message of what His grace has accomplished, what it does and what it brings to the believer.

It is interesting that Paul does not commend them to the word of God’s requirements – even though there is such a word. However, commandments do not go as far as grace, nor do they contain the resources made available through grace . The commandments of God are to be obeyed, to be sure, and woe to that person who disdains them, or withholds them from the people. However, they have more to do with the outer court than with the holy of holies. They are more related to the approach to God than the fellowship of Jesus. They are not the appointed means through which we become “partakers of the Divine nature.” That sharing is through God’s “precious promises,” which are the expression of His grace, and through which resources are acquired that assist us in being conformed to the image of God’s Son (Rom 8:29; 2 Pet 1:4).

The “word of His grace” is the message concerning His “precious promises,” the blessings that come “down from above,” and all the things that meet our “need,” as defined by the Lord.

Associations of Grace

This “grace” is associated with things relating to the fulfillment of God’s purpose in His people. Here is a partial listing of the matters revealed in Scripture to be directly related to the grace of God.

- The experience of being justified (Rom 3:24).
- Salvation by faith (Rom 4:16).
- Access by faith (Rom 5:2).

- Abounding favor (Rom 5:15,20).
- Abundance (Rom 5:17).
- Men reigning (Rom 5:21).
- Being freed from the dominion of sin (Rom 6:14).
- The election of God (Rom 11:5).
- Distinguishing salvation from a system of works (Rom 11:6).
- Spiritual gifts (Rom 12:6).
- Being a wise master-builder (1 Cor 3:10).
- Being a prodigious laborer (1 Cor 15:10).
- A godly life (2 Cor 1:12).
- The humility of Christ (2 Cor 8:9).
- Sufficiency (2 Cor 12:9).
- What we are called to (Gal 1:6).
- Being called by God (Gal 2:9).
- Being made accepted (Eph 1:6).
- The forgiveness of sin (Eph 1:7).
- Being made alive with Jesus (Eph 2:5).
- God's kindness toward us (Eph 2:7).
- Being saved (Eph 2:8).
- The measure of the gift of Christ (Eph 4:7).
- Spiritual knowledge (Col 1:6).
- Consolation and hope (2 Thess 2:16).
- The gifts of faith and love (1 Tim 1:14).
- Being strong (2 Tim 2:1).
- Bringing salvation (Tit 2:11).
- Teaching us how to deny sin and live godly (Tit 2:12).
- Christ tasting of death for every man (Heb 2:9).
- Divine help (Heb 4:16).
- Serving God acceptably (Heb 12:28).
- Establishment (Heb 13:9).
- The final revelation of Christ (1 Pet 1:15).
- Being stewards (1 Pet 4:10).
- Standing (1 Pet 5:12).
- Growth (2 Pet 3:16).

What can really be said of a message that does not leave people thinking about and depending upon the grace of God. How is it possible for the Holy Spirit to have inspired so much to be said about God's grace, yet professing believers to be so ignorant about it? The answer is simple, although it is by no means pleasant. It is because an erroneous message has been preached!

What can really be said of a message that does not leave people thinking about and depending upon the grace of God. How is it possible for the Holy Spirit to have inspired so much to be said about God's grace, yet professing believers to be so ignorant about it? The answer is simple, although it is by no means pleasant. It is because an erroneous message has been preached! I do not believe it is possible for those with good and honest hearts to avoid this conclusion. A graceless message is not only indefensible, it is a message that leads people away from God, for it is a word through which God will not work.

WHICH IS ABLE TO BUILD YOU UP

“ . . . which is able to build you up . . . ” Other versions read, “which is able to make you strong,” BBE “able to build further,” GENEVA “help you grow,” GWN “Able to build further,” TNT “able to build your faith,” LIVING “can help you,” CEV and “can make you into what He wants you to be.” MESSAGE The great majority of the versions read “build you up.”

And what does it mean to be built up? The words “build you up” are translated from a single Greek word – **εὑποικδομῆ/σαι** . This word means “to finish the structure of which the foundation has already been laid, I. e. in plain language, to give constant increase in Christian knowledge and in a life conformed thereto,” THAYER “build up, make more able, cause to be strong,” FRIBERG

The idea of building upon the foundation of Christ is declared in other places. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul refers to the church being “God’s building ” (3:9). He speaks of those who build upon the foundation that has been put in place (3:10), declaring that care must be taken on HOW and WHAT is built upon that foundation (3:10-12). In his letter to the Ephesians Paul states that the church is “ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (2:20). He states that the building is “fitly framed together,” growing together “unto a holy temple in the Lord” (2:21). He further states that the church is “ builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit” (2:22).

This building has to do with growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). It is going on to perfection (Heb 6:1), and coming into spiritual maturity. It relates to being “men in understanding,” and comprehending “with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:18-19).

There really is no point to an immature church, for it contradicts the very purpose for its existence. In His doctrine, Jesus made clear that maturity relates to fruit bearing, and that bearing fruit to God is a principle point of being saved. This is confirmed in the parable of the sower. Of the four soils upon which the seed was sown, only one yielded a harvest. One soil yielded no response at all, and thus the birds ate up the seed sown upon it. Two soils showed some signs of life, but did not bring forth fruit “to perfection” (Lk 8:11-15).

Romans 7:4 states, “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God ” (Rom 7:4). It is inconceivable and foolish to the point of absurdity to infer that the purpose for salvation could not be met, and yet its effects remain.

If the word of God’s grace is able to build us up, then it ought to be constantly affirmed. There is no excuse for people being Christians for years, yet hearing very little about the grace of God and what it provides. I personally had to overcome the doctrine of the church with which I was affiliated to come to any satisfactory understanding of God’s grace. I lament that this was the case, but it was, and it is time for people with similar experiences to declare it. If the means through which spiritual maturity is reached is withheld from the people, we should not be surprised when we see professing Christians remaining in juvenileness for the greater part of their life. It is uncomely for such a state

to exist, and there should be an instant abandonment of anything that sustains such a miserable condition.

WHICH IS ABLE TO GIVE YOU AN INHERITANCE

“ . . . and to give you an inheritance . . .” Other versions read, “give you your heritage,” BBE “give you all the inheritance,” LIVING “give you the blessings,” IE “give you your inheritance,” WEYMOUTH “give you your proper possession,” WILLIAMS “give you [your rightful] inheritance,” AMPLIFIED “give you what belongs to God’s people,” CEV “give you everything you possibly need,” MESSAGE and “give you your place.” PHILLIPS

Salvation is not completed until the inheritance is obtained. While we remain in the body, and in this world, we have “the firstfruits of the Spirit” (Rom 8:23), and not the whole of the inheritance. The inheritance of this text is an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15). The aim of all valid ministry is to bring the saints to “receive” that inheritance (Acts 26:18). All who are immoral are excluded from this inheritance (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5). The inheritance is “obtained” because men have been “predestinated according to the purpose of Him that worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11). Presently, we have the “earnest,” or down payment, of that inheritance, “until the redemption of the purchased possession” (our bodies) – not the whole of it (Eph 1:14). Further, we have been begotten in order to obtain that inheritance (1 Pet 1:3-4). To come short of that obtainment is to have lived in total vanity.

THEM THAT ARE SANCTIFIED

“ . . . among all them which are sanctified.” This inheritance will be realized by “all them which are sanctified.” Other versions read, “among all the saints,” BBE “all those who have been set apart for God,” CJB “all of God’s holy people,” GWN “all who are consecrated,” NAB “all those He has set apart for Himself,” NLT “all God’s set-apart ones (those consecrated, purified, and transformed of soul),” AMPLIFIED “this community of holy friends,” MESSAGE and “all those who are consecrated to God.” PHILLIPS

Those who “are sanctified” are holy, dedicated to God, and living for Him. They have been set apart for God by their faith. Jesus Himself said that they are “sanctified by faith that is in Me” (Acts 26:18). Their sanctification is no more sure than their faith, and is in direct

All who are immoral are told they will not receive the inheritance for which men are begotten again. It is impossible for them to be “forever with the Lord” if they are living in opposition to Him. If this were made sufficiently clear in the churches, the greater percentage of their recovery programs would no longer be required.

proportion to that faith. These are the people who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit. They are not of this world, but are strangers and pilgrims in it (1 Pet 2:11). They alone are “heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ” (Rom 8:17), for the children of God are heirs, and they are “all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:26).

These days, a lot is not being said about the “eternal inheritance” and being sanctified by faith. Men speak about heaven and the world to come with a certain disdain, as though there was something inferior about living for the future. However, the Lord has been very clear about this matter. This world is destined for destruction by fire (2 Pet 3:10-12), and is going to be replaced by “a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Pet 3:13). There is no possibility of this judgment being reversed, and thus men are obliged to prepare for “the end of all things” (1 Pet 4:17). Men may write about “Your Best Life Now,” and boast of being the head in this world, and not the tail – but no such thing is promised to those who are in Christ Jesus. Even when that was promised under the Old Covenant – which was a vastly inferior covenant – it was attached to this unalterable condition: “And the LORD

shall make thee the head, and not the tail; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them : And thou shalt not go aside from any of the words which I command thee this day , to the right hand, or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them” (Deut 28:14). Israel never achieved that status, for the Old Covenant was “weak through the flesh,” not providing as much as one mote of strength to keep the commandments of God. Yet, there are actually people preaching this commandment as integral to life in Christ Jesus. As Paul said of them, “some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (1 Tim 1:7).

The truth of the matter is that no one who is unholy has a bright future. Those who are continually yielding to sin are facing a dismal eternity – and that is putting it mildly. God has spoken so plainly on this matter that a person has to be a fool not to see it. All who are immoral are told they will not receive the inheritance for which men are begotten again. It is impossible for them to be “forever with the Lord” if they are living in opposition to Him. If this were made sufficiently clear in the churches, the greater percentage of their recovery programs would no longer be required. The existence of such programs can only be maintained if men are kept ignorant of the excluding and disqualifying nature of sin. Once this is seen, those who are serious will work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

Now, if the word of His grace is able to give men the inheritance, then what can be said of those who are not subjected to this word? Precisely what chance is there of a person obtaining the inheritance if he rarely hears about it, and does not know what excludes men from it? And what can really be said of preachers and teachers who teach the people as though life in this world were the fundamental life, and that Jesus died to secure for men a happy and successful life in this world.

Note, the text says “all them which ARE sanctified.” Whatever one chooses to emphasize in this world, nothing is more important than preparing to receive the inheritance – “the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor 2:9). That is the focus of Jesus’ present ministry, as well as all those whom He has “put into the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12). Absolutely no advantage or benefit will be brought to anyone who has not made himself ready to receive the inheritance, and be forever joined to the Lord.

PAUL AND LIFE IN THE FLESH

“ 33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.”

Paul does not hesitate to remind people how he lived among them, for that was the outward evidence of his unwavering commitment to the Lord. Faith, when obtained and nurtured, compels the individual to live unto the Lord, and in strict harmony with the Divine Nature. Consistently flawed lives are the product of a lack of faith, for “this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

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The commitment of a man to the feeding of the flock of God is measured by the degree of personal inconvenience he is willing to endure. The person who thinks of himself in an inordinate manner will not be used extensively, if at all, in the vineyard of the Lord.

I HAVE NOT COVETED

“I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.” Other versions read, “silver, gold, or clothes,” NASB “silver, gold, or clothing,” NIV “silver, or gold, or garments,” MRD “I have never wanted,” NAB “I have desired no ones,” NET “I have never asked anyone for money or clothes,” NJB “silver, or gold, or fine clothes,” NLT “silver, gold, or vesture,” PNT “I have never been hungry for money or fine clothing,” LIVING and “silver, gold, or [costly] garments.” AMPLIFIED

Here, the Jerusalem Bible captures the sense of the text: “I have never asked anyone for money or clothes.” In this case, the lack of covetousness is not established by a verbal testimony, but by Paul’s manner of life. Unlike many professed Christian leaders of our day, Paul was not a professional beggar. It was not that he refused to receive support from brethren, for he often spoke of those who provided for his needs. To the Philippians he wrote, “For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity” (Phil 4:16). He reminded the Corinthians that he “took wages” from “other churches” in order to minister to the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:8). But these gifts were not solicited by Paul. That is the point of this text. As Paul said to the Corinthians, he preached the Gospel “without charge” (1 Cor 9:18). And again, “And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself” (2 Cor 11:9).

He is not speaking of an lust for money and clothing, as ordinarily perceived. He was not dominated by the flesh, and his conduct among the saints confirmed this was the case. Neither, indeed, did he spend time raising support for himself.

THESE HANDS HAVE MINISTERED TO MY NEEDS

“Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.” Other versions read, “provided for my necessities and those who were with me,” NKJV “to my own needs and to the men who were with me,” NASB “supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions,” NIV “to support myself and my companions,” NRSV “not only for my own needs, but for the needs of my coworkers as well,” CJB “I worked to support myself and those who were with me,” GWN and “mine earned enough to meet my needs and those of my companions.” NJB

Note that Paul not only labored to support himself, but those who were with him as well. This is a display of the deep devotion and humility of this man. He was thoroughly devoted to the Lord, and was mindful of those who joined him in the work. He did not send his companions out to raise their own support – a practice that is quite common today. I have noted that those who are fond of establishing various practices by referring to apostolic precedent are rarely, if ever, noted for following this Pauline practice. Of course, Paul was not establishing a precedent, but was rather displaying his love for the work of the Lord and the brethren who were also engaged in it with him. His heart is made known in this action, not the fulfillment of a command.

Paul frequently referred to the fact that he worked for his own needs. To the Corinthians he wrote, “And labor,

The more the Gospel is perceived, or comprehended, the more supple the individual becomes in the hand of the Lord. Self-centeredness diminishes decidedly, and the care of others is brought to godly maturity. From the vantage of the laborer, there is no sacrifice too great for the servant of God to pay.

working with our own hands” (1 Cor 4:12). To the Thessalonians he wrote, “For ye remember, brethren, our labor and travail: for laboring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God” (1 Thess 2:9). And again, “Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be

chargeable to any of you” (2 Thess 3:8).

This was not something Paul was required to do, but was a choice that he made in interest of the churches. From the strictly legal point of view, it would have been right for him to have received wages for his labors. Therefore he wrote to the Thessalonians, “Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” (2 Thess 3:9-10).

Jesus Himself said, “for the workman is worthy of his meat” (Matt 10:10). Again, when sending out the seventy, He told them, “And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the laborer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house” (Luke 10:7). In other words, when it comes to kingdom laborers, what is given to them is not, strictly speaking, charitable giving. It is rather compensation for their labors.

God established this principle under the Law, that commanded the people to support the Levites with their tithes and offerings (Deut 12:12,19). Paul taught that this principle carried over to the church (1 Cor 9:13-14). Yet, he said, “But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void” (1 Cor 9:15). He was driven by a higher principle than obtaining support. He therefore forfeited something that was right in order to set an example for the people.

Paul reasoned with the Corinthians, who misinterpreted the ground for the labor of his hands. “Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas? Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?” (1 Cor 9:4-9). Again he said, “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:11-12).

Paul even taught the Galatians, “Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things” (Gal 6:6). However, Paul did not say these things so the people would support him. There were some few souls who saw the value of Paul’s teaching, and therefore sent support to him – but it was not because he asked them to do so.

A Conclusion

As we survey the marvelous ministry of Paul, we are beholding the impact of the Gospel on those who perceive it. The more the Gospel is perceived, or comprehended, the more supple the individual becomes in the hand of the Lord. Self-centeredness diminishes decidedly, and the care of others is brought to godly maturity. From the vantage of the laborer, there is no sacrifice too great for the servant of God to pay. He will proclaim the truth that he has been given to see, regardless of what it takes to do so. If he is among a people who can misinterpret his motives, he will extend himself to make it difficult for them to do so. If there are others involved in the work that he is doing, he will not overlook their necessities. His life itself will testify to the effectiveness of the message that he is proclaiming. Boiled down to its essence, that effect is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of the brethren.

THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

“ 35 I have showed you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

Paul now affirms that he not only taught them “all the counsel of God” (20:27), but set before them a consistent example of the manner in which a godly leader is to live. While these words can properly be applied to all of the saints, they particularly are pertinent to those who feed the flock of God. There must not be inconsistency between what the teacher teaches and how he lives.

I HAVE SHOWED YOU ALL THINGS

“I have showed you all things ...” Other versions read, “I have shown you in every way,” NKJV “I have given you an example,” NRSV “I was an example to you,” BBE “by every means I have shown you,” NJB “I have been a constant example,” NET “In everything I have pointed out to you [by example],” AMPLIFIED and “in everything I’ve done, I have demonstrated to you.” MESSAGE

A person cannot embrace the doctrine, then live in contradiction of it. As soon as one’s life gets off course, the truth can no longer be heartily embraced. That is precisely why people are known by their fruits. When hardness of heart sets in, waywardness in living commences.

Paul affirms that his life demonstrates this. Any person could examine his life closely, whether in public or in private, and would find that what Paul here confesses is the truth. The scope of the consideration is quite impressive: “all things.” That is, Paul’s faith had impacted the whole of his life, not merely a segment of it. Now, the particular area he mentions can be a sensitive one, particular for those who emphasize themselves, living only for self. What Paul now says will clash with the thinking of those who amass great debt providing for temporal things that are of no real consequence. It will make no sense at all to the person who plans for his own security with no regard at all for others. Each person will have to do their own thinking on this matter, as this kind of living is not determined by a moral code, or law. Notwithstanding that circumstance, we are dealing with something that is necessary: “ye ought...”

SUPPORTING THE WEAK

“how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak . . .” Other versions read, “by laboring like this ye must support the weak,” NKJV “by working hard in this manner you must help the weak,” NASB “by this kind of hard work we must help the weak,” NIV “by so toiling one must help the weak,” RSV “by laboring like this,

As you can see, there is also protection for those who have more than enough to sustain themselves. By assisting the poor, they reduce the possibility of self-reliance, and a denial that every good and perfect gift comes down from above – including “our daily bread”

it is necessary to help the weak,” CJB “thus laboring we ought to come in aid of the weak,” DARBY “it is a duty to labor, and to care for the infirm,” MRD “we must exert ourselves in this way to support the weak,” NJB “you can help those in need by working hard,” NLT “so laboring ye ought to rescue the weak,” PNT “behoveth us to partake with the ailing,” YLT and “by working diligently in this manner, we ought to assist the weak.” AMPLIFIED

“The weak” refers to certain who are unable to provide for themselves. In keeping with the rest of the text, these are people within “the flock,” or “the church of God.” Although assisting the poor of the world is a noble work, the church has not been appointed a caretaker of the world, and no one must attempt to lay that burden upon the body of Christ. Those who have the means to do this are certainly in order doing so – UNLESS it means the neglect of the people of God. Jesus said men would be judged for their response to His “brethren,” not to the needs of those within the world (Matt 25:40,45).

Among the general manner of life for all believers is “distributing to the necessity of saints” (Rom 12:13). Such relief is not limited to the saints, for the body of Christ is also said, “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom 12:20). However, the emphasis of such care is placed upon the household of faith. As it is written, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). In mentioning care for the poor and needy, John referred to a believer seeing “his brother” (1 John 3:17). James did the same (James 2:15-16). The collection Paul gathered from all of the churches for the poor was for “poor saints” that were in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26; 1 Cor 16:1). When addressing the assistance of the poor, Paul referred to “ministering to the saints” (2 Cor 9:1,12). The church cared for widows who were believers, and qualified for such care (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim 5:3-10,16).

There are no examples of believers caring for the poor of the world, or being admonished to do so. As I have said, this is not to be construed as a law. However, it does mean that such endeavors cannot be pressed upon the churches as though it was required of them to meet the needs of the world. Blessed is the person who can handle this knowledge in a God-honoring manner.

The idea of caring for the poor is that they be not faced with temptations to conduct their lives their lives in opposition to the truth by seeking. Solomon spoke of this kind of temptation being leveled at the poor when he said, “Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain” (Prov 30:9). As you can see, there is also protection for those who have more than enough to sustain themselves. By assisting the poor, they reduce the possibility of self-reliance, and a denial that every good and perfect gift comes down from above – including “our daily bread” (Matt 6:11)..

Paul applied the text to his own labors which met the needs of his companions in labor. It is quite possible that they had forsaken “houses” and “lands” to travel with Paul, putting them at a seeming advantage. If this was the case, Paul was sensitive to the circumstance, and therefore worked with his own hands to provide for them as well.

REMEMBERING THE WORDS OF THE LORD JESUS

“ . . . and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

This confirms that the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11) was not intended to be a thorough report of everything He said and did during His three and one half year ministry – to say nothing of the first thirty years of His life. The record, however, is thorough in its representation of what Jesus said and did.

These words are not found in the record of Jesus’ ministry (Matthew-John). That should not prove to be a difficult situation for anyone, for everything Jesus said was not recorded by the Gospel writers. After giving a rather extensive report of the sayings and works of Jesus, John ended his gospel by saying, “And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen” (John 21:25). This confirms that the record God has given of His Son (1 John 5:10-11) was not intended to be a thorough report of everything He said and did during His three and one half year ministry – to say nothing of the first thirty years of His life. The record, however, is thorough in its representation of what Jesus said and did.

I gather, therefore, that this is a saying of Jesus that is not recorded, yet was passed along by those who heard it.

- This was in perfect accord with the instruction under the Law. “But the seventh year thou shalt let it rest and lie still; that the poor of thy people may eat: and what they leave the beasts of the field shall eat. In like manner thou shalt deal with thy vineyard, and with thy oliveyard . . . At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest . . . If there be among you a poor man of one of thy brethren within any of thy gates in thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not harden thine heart, nor shut thine hand from thy poor brother: But thou shalt open thine hand wide unto him, and shalt surely lend him sufficient for his need, in that which he wanteth” (Ex 23:11; Deut 14:28-29; 15:7-8).

- This principle is also reflected in the Psalms. “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness . . . A good man showeth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honor” (Psa 41:1-3; 112:5-9).

- Solomon also spoke of the advantages associated with assisting the poor: “He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again” (Prov 19:17).

- Isaiah the prophet also declared the advantage of giving to the poor: “But the liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand . . . Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh? Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward” (Isa 32:8; 58:7-8).

- It also was in strict harmony with the revealed teaching of Jesus. “Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink . . . Give to every man that asketh of thee . . . do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil . . . Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee. . . “ (Matt 25:34,35; Lk 6:30,35,38; Lk 14:13-14).

- One of the marks of the one who believes on Jesus is that “OUT of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:38).

- When Jesus sent out His disciples He said: “freely ye have received, freely give” (Matt 10:8).

- In his instruction to the church at Ephesus he wrote, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may

have to give to him that needeth” (Eph 4:28).

- When Paul met with the apostles, they asked him to remember the poor. “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do” (Gal 2:9-10).

Therefore, this word is in perfect harmony with the Law, the Psalms, the Proverbs, the testimony of the prophets, the words of Jesus, and apostolic instruction in righteousness. There is no reason to doubt its truth, necessity, or practicality. It is the business of believers to work out their own salvation on this matter.

HE PRAYED WITH THEM ALL

“ 36 And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.”

A tender sight, indeed, as the faithful teacher admonishes, then prays, with these elders from Ephesus. He has spent three years among them, but it had not diminished his love and affection for them. They were among the churches for which he cared “daily,” wanting them to go on to perfection, and be uncontaminated with the teaching of spiritual impostors. Later, en route to Rome as a prisoner, and having met some disciples from Tyre, Paul “kneeled down” and prayed with them, together with their wives and children (Acts 21:4-5). It is a blessed circumstance when brethren can pray together. It eases the burden of kindred spirits when they are forced to part.

Luke does not provide us any specifics concerning the content Paul’s prayer. However, enough has been revealed about the way in which he prayed for the churches that we can form some very sound views of the matter. Here are a few excerpts from his recorded prayers for the churches.

- **MIGHT HAVE A PROSPEROUS JOURNEY TO MINISTER TO THE PEOPLE.** “For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established; That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Rom 1:9-12).

- **DO NO EVIL, DOING WHAT IS HONEST.** “Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates” (2 Cor 13:7).

- **LOVE ABOUND IN KNOWLEDGE AND JUDGMENT.** “And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment” (Phil 1:9).

- **BE GIVEN THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** “Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power” (Eph 1:16-19).

- **BE STRENGTHENED, CHRIST DWELL IN THEIR HEARTS, BE ROOTED AND GROUNDED, AND COMPREHEND THE EXTENT OF SALVATION AND THE GREATNESS OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST.** “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, That He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened

with might by His Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:14-19).

• **BE FILLED WITH THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD’S WILL. WALK WORTHY OF THE LORD, BE FRUITFUL IN EVERY GOOD WORK, INCREASE IN THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, STRENGTHENED UNTO ALL PATIENCE AND LONGSUFFERING WITH JOYFULNESS.** “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God; Strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness” (Col 1:9-11).

• **SANCTIFIED COMPLETELY, SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY.** “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

• **COUNT WORTHY OF CALLING, FULFILL GOD’S GOODPLEASURE, EXPERIENCE THE WORK OF FAITH WITH POWER, AND THAT JESUS MIGHT BE GLORIFIED IN THEM.** “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power: That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:11-12).

Even a casual perusal of these prayers confirm the vast chasm that exists between the church of our time and the one depicted as being of God. If these prayers reflect the will of God for His people, the modern church has, indeed, fallen upon hard times. This circumstance is largely owing to its leaders. And the messages they deliver to the people.

A SORROWFUL MOMENT

“ 37 And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, 38a Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.”

When hearts are “knit together in love” (Col 2:2), and by that “nourishment” that comes from above (Col 2:19), parting is not an easy thing. One of the telling marks of a shallow religion is the absence of such sorrow, and the failure to take advantage of opportunities to be together. An infrequency of gathering will not allow for a sorrow in parting. This, however, is not the circumstance of our text. Also, one of the marks of the degeneracy of the modern church is the lack of this kind of love and affection among its members. If there is a closeness at all, it is built around belonging to the same sect, or having similar worldly interests.

THEY ALL WEPT SORE

“And they all wept sore . . .” Other versions read, “wept freely,” NKJV “began to weep aloud,” NASB “there was much weeping,” NRSV “were all in tears,” BBE “a great deal of weeping,” CSB “they wept all abundantly,” GENEVA “cried a lot,” GWN “there was great weeping among them,” MRD “wept bitterly,” RWB “there came a great weeping to all,” YLT “cried

The entire history of God’s dealings with humanity confirm that His preference is for those who are aligned with or seeking Him. The same was true of Jesus, who spent all of His quality time with His disciples, and those who wanted to hear what He had to say.

and cried and cried,” IE “loud lamentation,” WEYMOUTH “loud weeping,” WILLIAMS “considerable weeping,” EMTV and “a river of tears.” MESSAGE

The words “wept” comes from the Greek word **klauqmo.j** , which is a strong word meaning “lamentation,” THAYER “a strong inner emotion, weeping, crying, lamentation,” FRIBERG “bitter crying, wailing,” UBS and “to weep or wail, with emphasis upon the noise accompanying the weeping.” LOUW-NIDA

As I see it, their profound weeping was occasioned by at least two things. First, their closeness to, and appreciation of, Paul himself. He had been a faithful and exemplary teacher among them for three years, and seeing him leave was difficult for them. Spiritual attachments and association are exceedingly precious to those who are strangers and pilgrims in this world. Secondly, they were no doubt moved by his prayers, which put into words his feelings and desires for them. While the content of his prayer is not specified, we can obtain a very good idea of their content by how he was prone to pray for the people of God. Tender hearts are touched by such expressions.

In a national society such as ours, the display of such affection is rare. Self-centeredness is being cultured among the people to such a degree that godly associations are rarely valued. In fact, quite often they are denigrated as people are taught to value and prefer worldly associations to godly ones. Some are even taught that this is virtuous. I cannot see how any view could be more unlike God and Jesus than this. The entire history of God’s dealings with humanity confirm that His preference is for those who are aligned with or seeking Him. The same was true of Jesus, who spent all of His quality time with His disciples, and those who wanted to hear what He had to say. How people can read the Scriptures and miss this is most remarkable to me. Yet, the staggering influence of false prophets has moved them to do so.

FELL ON PAUL’S NECK AND KISSED HIM

“ . . . and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him . . .” Other versions read, “embraced Paul; and repeatedly kissed him,” NASB “Threw their arms around his neck and kissed him farewell,” CJB “hugged Paul and kissed him,” NLT “to throw their arms about his neck, and to kiss him lovingly again and again,” MONTGOMERY “threw their arms around Paul’s neck and kissed him fervently and repeatedly,” AMPLIFIED “falling on Paul's neck, they were affectionately kissing him,” EMTV “falling on the neck of Paul, they ardently kissed him,” LITV and “Much clinging to Paul, not wanting to let him go.” MESSAGE

These were affectionate kisses, but not romantic ones. They had to do with the heart, not the flesh, and were an expression of a deep spiritual and tender fondness for Paul. This is an example of a “holy kiss” (Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 16:20; 2 Cor 13:12; 1 Thess 5:26). It was not intended to inflame fleshly feelings, but to express holy preference. This was an outward display of the love of the brethren. It is not something that can be legislated among the saints, for that could negate its meaning.

It is a most marvelous thing that in this text weeping and kissing are joined. That is a most excellent commentary on the nature of spiritual life, which joins the most meaningful, tender, and profitable expressions of men.

SORROWING MOST OF ALL

“Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.” Other version read, “would never see his face again,” NIV “would not see him again,” NRSV “behold his face no more,” ASV and “not seeing Paul again.” GWN

This was after Paul spent three years among the Ephesians brethren – a rather brief time by many standards. Yet, when you consider the nature and power of Paul’s ministry, this time represented an

enormous amount of insightful teaching. We know that at least two of those years he taught every day.

Consider how much Paul said in his epistles to the churches – Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians. You can easily read aloud all of these letters in considerably less than eight hours.

WORDS CONTAINED IN EPISTLES TO THE CHURCHES

Romans 9855 words

1 st Corinthians 10,326 words

2 nd Corinthians 6,580 words

Galatians 3,238 words

Ephesians 3,177 words

Philippians 2,287 words

Colossians 2,074 words

1 st Thessalonians 2,015 words

2 nd Thessalonians 1,116 words

Total 40,668 words

Speaking at a rate of 100 words a minute, which is very moderate rate, the whole of the epistles listed would require less than seven hours to read. This would allow for a clear and succinct reading.

Jewish history estimates that Paul spoke daily for two years in the school of Tyrannus, speaking each day for about five hours. I understand this to have been a customary length of time for teaching in a disciplined environment. This being true, Paul could have said every word written to the churches listed above more than four times in the first week of that two-year period. No person of sound mind would even entertain the notion that such a thing was even possible. In the context of the present religious environment, it is not even possible to give a reasonable estimate of the sheer volume of words Paul must have said during his stay in Ephesus. Add to your consideration that there is not a single instance of the apostle speaking publically about politics, social trends, or various domestic and social issues of the day. I do not question that his preaching and teaching would be considered by many of our peers as totally irrelevant to the complexities of daily life. I doubt that such people would even be capable of weeping at the thought of never seeing Paul again. Of course, such people have spent little time subjecting their minds to his teaching as provided in his epistles.

The point here is that the doctrine presented in Scripture, and the record of specific discourses, is in seed form. The whole of what was said is not recorded. Thus we read expressions like, “many other words” (Acts 2:40), “speaking to them” (Acts 13:43), “long time abode they speaking boldly” (Acts 14:3), “with many words” (Acts 15:32), “continued his speech” (Acts 20:7), “among whom I have gone preaching” (Acts 20:25), etc.

Insightful preaching requires a working knowledge of the Scripture, as well as living by faith and walking in the Spirit. A grasp of the revealed purpose of God is essential, for this allows for the proper integration of the preaching with the purpose of God, the Scriptures as a whole, and the teaching of

Jesus and the apostles in particular. This is involved in preaching “the kingdom of God” (Acts 8:12; 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31).

I gather that it was not merely Paul’s friendship that these men would miss. It was rather his preaching and teaching, which is the very activity that he mentions in connection with his presence among them. He refers to:

- “Serving the Lord with all humility of mind” (20:19).
- Keeping nothing from them “that was profitable” to them (20:20a).
- Showing them, and teaching them “publicly and from house to house” (20:20b).
- “Testifying” to the Jews and the Greeks “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (20:21).
- “Preaching the kingdom of God” (20:25).

The church of our time stands in desperate need of men who have a grasp of the truth, and are faithful in its proclamation – even if it means suffering at the hands of the Christian populace

Declaring to them “the whole counsel of God” (20:27).

- Warning “every one night and day “with tears” (20:31).

This is the man that caused them to weep sore, and sorrow greatly, because they would “see his face no more.” This was not a man who identified with all the troubles and challenges of their lives. It was rather the one who taught them the things of God, and acquainted them with the manner of the Kingdom of God. I do not believe I am exaggerating the case when I say that few professing Christians have been exposed to such a man.

A FINAL OBSERVATION

Throughout the years, I have noted that the closer a man is to the Lord, the greater his understanding of the things of God, and the more faithful he is in proclaiming the mysteries of the Kingdom, the less popular he is among church folk. This is a lamentable circumstance. Yet, I find there are few exceptions to this rule. The more popular preachers and teachers are generally rather shallow in their proclamations. Of course, it appears that it was this way it was during the early days of the church. There were people who had the advantage of a lengthy ministry of Paul – like Corinth, who did not maintain a high evaluation of the man. Yet, because Paul was not the servant of men, this did not deter him in the preaching of truth.

The church of our time stands in desperate need of men who have a grasp of the truth, and are faithful in its proclamation – even if it means suffering at the hands of the Christian populace.

THEY ACCOMPANIED HIM TO THE SHIP

“ 38b And they accompanied him unto the ship.” Other versions read, “Then they brought him to the ship,” NRSV “so they went with him to the ship,” BBE “escorted him to the ship,” CSB “they brought him on his way to the ship,” DOUAY “they took Paul to the ship,” GWN “they accompanied him down to the ship,” LIVING and “they walked him down to the ship.” MESSAGE

Although their hearts were heavy with sadness, these faithful elders accompanied Paul to the ship on which he would sail on the next leg of his journey to Jerusalem. The word “accompanied” is translated from a word that means, “to send forward, bring on the way, accompany or escort . . . to set one forward, fit him out with the requisites for his journey ,” THAYER “as furnishing things necessary for someone's travel help on one's journey, send on one's way,” FRIBERG “send or help on one's way; escort, accompany,” UBS and “to send someone on in the direction in which he has

already been moving, with the probable implication of providing help - 'to send on one's way, to help on one's way.'" LOUW-NIDA

These brethren did not send Paul on his journey with the words, "be ye warmed and filled" (James 2:16), but no doubt provided things necessary for the trip. This would include the fare for the journey itself, and perhaps some food and drink for the trip. He had taught them well, and they had learned in truth that "it is more blessed to give than to receive." Keep in mind, this was not a missionary they were themselves sending out. In fact, they regretted to see him leave, knowing that a certain spiritual poverty would follow his absence, just as he had said. Yet, their hearts were joined to him, and they did everything within their power to assist him.

Thus Paul's stop at Miletus came to a close – an ancient seaport city in western Asia Minor. He did not stop to see the sites, or to rest,¹ but to minister to those leaders with whom he had labored for three productive years. He saw the impact of truth had stirred the powers of darkness, and there warned the brethren.

CONCLUSION

In our text, the solemn warning of a spiritual defection is attended by a strong exhortation to guard the flock. The intrusion of false teaching is always a serious thing. This has been confirmed in our generation by the wake of its effects. While false prophets herald a coming time when a wicked despot will rule the world, we are living in the very midst of the falling away that was foretold by the Lord Jesus Himself, as well as His apostles. While I have mentioned some of these texts in this lesson, I am compelled to gather them together in this conclusion. They are of a most serious nature that demands our comprehension of them.

- **MANY WILL BE DECEIVED.** "And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many . And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt 24:10-12).
- **STRONG DECEPTION.** "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt 24:24).
- **FALSE CLAIMS.** "And he said, Take heed that ye be not deceived: for many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and the time draweth near: go ye not therefore after them" (Luke 21:8).
- **NOT SPARING THE FLOCK.** "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock" (Acts 20:29).
- **A MASSIVE FALLING AWAY.** "Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first , and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2 Thess 2:3-4).
- **A DEPARTURE FROM THE FAITH.** "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith , giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth" (1 Tim 4:1-3).
- **POWERLESS RELIGION.** "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection,

trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof : from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

The erroneous teachings concerning a falling away are of themselves proof that it has already taken place. The staggering divisions among professing Christians confirm that a falling away has taken place. The pervasive presence of immorality and ignorance within the churches announce that perilous times are here. The prevalence of religious opportunists and charlatans within the Christian community is validation of a falling away.

FALSE DOCTRINE PREFERRED. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

• **DAMNABLE HERESIES.** “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies , even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet 2:1-3).

• **MANY ANTICHRISTS.** “Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time” (1 John 2:18).

• **MANY FALSE PROPHETS.** “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

• **MANY DECEIVERS.** “For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist” (2 John 1:7).

What is there about these words that would lead a person to think this defection is not accompanied by the greatest dangers? How is it that the doctrines of demons, who are stronger and more persuasive than mere men, are not something to be detected and avoided? What has moved men to imagine that the church will be removed before this massive falling away takes place?

The erroneous teachings concerning a falling away are of themselves proof that it has already taken place. The staggering divisions among professing Christians confirm that a falling away has taken place. The pervasive presence of immorality and ignorance within the churches announce that perilous times are here. The prevalence of religious opportunists and charlatans within the Christian community is validation of a falling away. The fact that the masses of Christians have so readily received those whose teaching is, at the least off-center, and at the worst an outright lie, confirms that the time of deception has arrived.

Yet, in the midst of all of this religious confusion and defection, the professing church is sound asleep – with the Judge standing at the door (James 5:9). How appropriate are the words of the Spirit: “And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof” (Rom 13:11-14). It is time for the church to shake itself, and throw off the mantel of lethargy! This is “high time,” and to fall asleep during it is lethal.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #86

TRAVELING BY SHIP AND MEETING BRETHREN

“ 21:1 ”And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: 2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. 3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden. 4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem. 5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. 6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again. 7 And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day. 8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. 9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy”

(Acts 21:1-9)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

With godly intention and firm resolution, Paul and company resume their journey to Jerusalem, launching forth from Miletus. Along the way they make some necessary stops, always finding brethren with whom to have profitable fellowship. Some spoke to Paul in the Spirit, pertaining to his trip to Jerusalem, The life of Paul centered in doing the will of the Lord, and following through with his convictions. Neither unpleasantries nor the sweetness of fellowship with the saints deterred him

from his objective. During one of the stops, they found a number of brethren, with their wives and little ones, and spent some days with them. When they set out once again on their journey, Paul prayed with the families, who then returned to their homes. After spending another day with brethren during another stop, they resumed their journey. Coming to Caesarea, they spent “many days” at the home of Philip the evangelist, who had four daughters that prophesied. Surely that was a blessed time.

LIVING UNTO THE LORD

As we go through this book, we are witnessing individuals living unto the Lord – a posture that is mandated by redemption. As it is written, “For the love

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- **A STOP ALONG THE WAY (21:3)**
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- **AFTER PRAYING WITH THE BRETHREN, THEY CONTINUE ON THEIR WAY (21:5)**
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- **THEY STAY A WHILE WITH PHILIP THE EVANGELIST (21:8-9)**
- **PAUL AND LIFE IN THE FLESH (20:33-34)**
- **THE SPIRIT OF GIVING (20:35)**
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- **A SORROWFUL MOMENT (20:37-38a)**
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of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:14-15).

Ponder the individual believers that have been identified in this book with the work of God, bring mentioned by name: Peter, John, Matthias, Stephen, Philip, Ananias, Paul, Mary (the mother of Mark), Barnabas, Simeon. Lucius, Manaen, Judas (Barsabas), Silas, Timothy, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Tychicus, Trophimus, and others. Independently of the work of God, precisely what do we know of these people? They are only mentioned in reference to the work of the Lord. This was the primary aspect of their lives – by way of comparison, everything else was incidental.

This kind of life is the declared objective of life in Christ Jesus, and is stated in a number of ways.

• **YIELDING UNTO GOD.** “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God” (Rom 6:13).

• **BRINGING FORTH FRUIT UNTO GOD.** “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God” (Rom 7:4).

• **PRESENTING YOUR BODIES AS A LIVING SACRIFICE TO GOD.** “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1).

• **LIVING UNTO THE LORD.** “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's” (Rom 14:7-8).

• **GLORIFYING GOD.** “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:20).

In today's professed church, the circumstance has been turned around. Now, the exceptions are those who are really living for the Lord, and the norm is living in a spiritually haphazard manner.

CREATED TO DO WORKS GOD HAS ORDAINED. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

• **MAGNIFY CHRIST IN OUR BODY.** “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:20-21).

• **DOING ALL IN THE NAME OF THE LORD.** “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Col 3:17).

• **A UNIQUE PEOPLE FOR GOD, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.** “Who gave Himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

By implication, these texts apply to every facet of life: personal, domestic, social, occupational, etc. And yet, bringing glory to God is never taught in such a way – i.e. glorify God in your marriage, your business, your school work, your employment, etc. That God is to be glorified in those various relationships is certainly true. Yet, our thinking must not be confined to, nor are we to major in, those aspects of life. They are too low to have the emphasis.

TRUE SPIRITUAL LIFE

What we are seeing in the book of Acts is the expression of true spiritual life. This is how people live who are joined to the Lord, and are living by faith. In the aggregate, they are of “one accord,” have fellowship “with gladness and singleness of heart,” and are “of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 2:46; 4:24; 5:12). Any deviation from this was the exception, not the rule – i.e. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10), Simon, the sorcerer (Acts 8:13,18-24), and John departing from the work (Acts 13:13; 15:38). In today's professed church, the circumstance has been turned around. Now, the exceptions are those who are really living for the Lord, and the norm is living in a spiritually haphazard manner. The falling away had not yet occurred.

If this is a proper representation of the case, then some malfunction has taken place. My persuasion is that this has been caused by a change in the message that is being sounded forth by the modern church. If the Gospel of Christ is God's power unto salvation, then where power is missing, it is owing to either a failure to declare the message, or the failure to believe it. In a sense, both of these have taken place, for the people, being largely discontent with the Gospel itself, have heaped to themselves teachers after their own lusts, and they have swept in like a flood. If the message that is preferred and embraced does not produce the kind of lives that are set forth in the book of Acts, then it is a distortion, and not the truth itself. I do not know how it is possible to avoid this conclusion.

In the context of this departure from the faith, the records to which we are exposed in Acts tend to be viewed as mere history, with most of the people named being seen as something like heroes, or extraordinary achievers. Where such an attitude is fostered, the only thing of value that is seen in this

book pertains to perceived patterns and precedents, Most of which are really nothing more than human imaginations. The book of Acts is not a doctrinal treatise, but a report of the impact of true doctrine upon the lives of those who believe it. It is not an exposition of life, but a record of it.

THE TRIP TO JERUSALEM RESUMES FROM MILETUS

“ 21:1 And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara. 2 And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.”

Although this may read like nothing more than a report of the resumption of their journey, the record is wrapped up in the cloth of grace. It testifies to the closeness of those who live by faith and take the word of God seriously. We must never forget that there is a spirit in the text of Scripture as well as words. The words project the nature of the kingdom, the status of the believers, and the effects of salvation.

AFTER WE WERE GOTTEN FROM THEM

“And it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched . . .” Other versions read, “departed from them,” NKJV “parted from them,” NASB “torn ourselves away from them,” NIV/NJB/WEYMOUTH/WILLIAMS/ MONTGOMERY “torn ourselves away from the Ephesian elders,” CSB “finally left them,” GWN “separated from them,” MRD “taken leave of them,” NAB “tore ourselves away from them,” NET “after saying farewell to the Ephesian elders,” NLT “after we all said good-bye to the elders,” IE “having withdrawn from them,” EMTV “with the tearful good-byes behind us,” MESSAGE “had torn ourselves away from them and withdrawn,” AMPLIFIED and “being from-pulled from them.” INTERLINEAR

The word “gotten” is translated from the Greek word **avpospasqe,ntaj** . The lexical meaning of this word is “to draw off, to tear away . . . having torn themselves from the embrace of their friends,” THAYER “pull or drag away,” FRIBERG “to pull or draw away from or out of - 'to pull out, to draw out, to drag,” LOUW-NIDA “to be dragged away, detached, separated from.” LIDDELL-SCOTT

This is an emotionally violent word, denoting the great difficulty involved in parting from the elders of Ephesus. These brethren were united by their faith in Christ and love for one another – and it was a close and secure unity. In them the words was fulfilled, “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Rom 12:10).

Paul had interrupted his trip to Jerusalem to spend time with them, and they had left the convenience of Ephesus to with him. The thing that drove both their own and Paul’s action was a dominating interest in the work of the Lord. Issues involving “all the flock . . . the church of God” (20:28), had been addressed, and they were of a most serious nature.

Although the message was, in a sense, quite stern, yet it is apparent that the elders had received it. This was a real situation, where the grievous reality of coming circumstances was received, being taken seriously. The reluctance of the elders to part from Paul and company confirms that to have been the case. Even though Paul had revealed that some of their own number would pioneer the defection of which he spoke, yet he did not hold these brethren in disdain. His love for them compelled him to speak candidly, yet with a genuine interest in the people of God.

Now, it is the work of the Lord that has dictated their separation. It was a difficult one because of their kindred spirit – but that did not deter the man of God. The work of God is higher than the human relationships – even though they are legitimate, God-honoring, and tender.

This kind of mindset, which is essential in the service of God, has all but been eliminated in the

current church scene. The doctrinal emphasis is now on the people, not the Lord Himself and His good pleasure. The stress is being placed upon the desires of the people instead of the good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God. The situation is so grave that many servants of God are actually criticized for honoring the will of God above their own. Even though Jesus clearly affirmed that one's own person, relatives, or even family, are not to be placed ahead of the Lord (Matt 10:37; Lk 14:26), yet those who take this word seriously are criticized for doing so. The supposition is that preferring Christ means one will neglect his family, not provide for them, or in some way despise them. However, this is not at all what Jesus was saying. He referred circumstances where there was a conflict in which the individual was forced to choose between Christ and others. Where this circumstance rises, He left no question about what is to be done.

The point is that this principle is being lived out in our text. The unity that was forged between Paul and the elders of Ephesus was closer than any unity that can possibly be realized in flesh-and-blood relationships. Yet, it gave the precedence to doing the will of the Lord. This is the manner of the Kingdom.

Why Do Religious Men Choose Other Emphases?

Precisely why is it that religious men choose to emphasize other matters – marriage, the home, the youth, purported addictions, success, happiness, etc? Quite simply, it is because they are blinded to what God has said about life and godliness. They cannot see what is plainly declared, for God has poured out upon them the spirit of deep sleep, and blinded them, just as He said He would (Isa 29:10-12). The effects the prophet described are as follows.

- The people have fallen into a deep spiritual sleep.
- The eyes of the prophets, rulers, and seers have been closed so they cannot see.
- The words of God's book are sealed, so that the learned and unlearned alike cannot discern what is being said.

All of this is said to have taken place because “this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men” (Isa 29:13).

Jesus affirmed that this circumstance existed during His earthly ministry (Matt 15:7-9). Paul said it existed during the close of his minister (Acts 28:26-27). He also taught that this is why the Jews are in their present state of unbelief (Rom 11:7-10). It exists in our day as well, and it is a most serious situation. In my judgment, we are living in a time of this kind of judgment.

WE CAME WITH A STRAIT COURSE

“ . . . we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara.” Other versions read, “sailed strait to Coos,” NIV “made a straight run to Cos,” CJB “came by a direct route to Cos,” CSB and “sailed straight to the island of Cos.” GWN

Having set out from Miletus, the ship headed straight for Cos, a small island in the Aegean Sea. Here is where Paul spent the night, as the port here was an apparent stopover in his trip to Jerusalem. Historians tell us this was a place that was “a museum of anatomy and pathology.” A “school of physicians” was there attached to “the temple of Aesculapius.” MCCLINTOK & STRONG'S However, as notable as all of that has been to others, it held no interest for Paul. Luke was so thoroughly unimpressed with the uniqueness of this island, he made no mention at all of that for which it was noted. So far as this holy band of men were concerned, it was nothing more than a stopover port en route to the main city – Jerusalem – and the main people – the saints. The state of a man's character can be measured in part but what it takes to turn his head toward the earth. So far as

the Scriptures are concerned, no man of God was ever taken up with the interesting things of this present evil world. While I suppose that a person could draw some unwarranted conclusions from that circumstance, that is still the perspective of Scripture and the nature of its accounts.

There is something else to be learned here by inference. The ship on which they sailed took a straight course to Cos, not meandering through the various islands in that vicinity. Paul was not on a site-seeing trip, but was doing the work of the Lord. As was customary with the prophets, Jesus Himself, and the messengers sent into the world by Jesus, they spent as little time as possible in worldly surroundings. Search the record and see if this is not the case.

FINDING A SHIP

“And finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth.” Other versions read, “having found a ship,” NASB “we found a ship,” NIV “when we had gotten a ship,” PNT and “At Patera, we found a ship. IE

Of course, Paul and company were not working on an earthly reservation system. The details of the trip to Jerusalem had not been planned out in a detailed manner, for they did know what a day might “bring forth” (Prov 27:1). Neither indeed, did they know how they were going to take the next leg. of their trip – they only knew where they were going. Therefore, they had to find a ship that was headed in that direction, and they expended themselves to find out the availabilities.

There are times when Divine direction is very apparent – like when Paul was called to go to Macedonia (Acts 16:9), and to stay in Corinth (Acts 18:10). There are other times when the people of God must use wisdom, relying on their faith and understanding of the will of the Lord, In the case of the latter, those who actually do live by faith and walk in the Spirit find themselves more competent to make decisions that are God-honoring, even if they do not have all the details.

PARALLEL TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

There is a sense in which the Kingdom of God is, indeed, like a hidden treasure, found only by those who diligently dig for things of true worth

Life in Christ is not always attended by easy answers and obvious direction. The “treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3) are not always on the surface of life, scattered, as it were, like diamonds on the hard soil of earthly life. Sometimes they have to be “found” (Prov 3:13). There is a sense in which the Kingdom of God is, indeed, like a hidden treasure, found only by those who diligently dig for things of true worth (Matt 13:44). The same is true of the various facets of Divine direction. That direction frequently takes place while the child of God is discreetly going about to do the will of the Lord. It is then that they are directed by God.

A STOP ALONG THE WAY

“ 3 Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.” Other versions read, “when we have sighted Cyprus, we passed it on the left . . . and unload her cargo,” NKJV and “sighting Cyprus and passing to the south of it.” NIV

There was a time when Paul stopped and preached throughout Cyprus (Acts 13:3–12). Also, earlier, when believers were scattered “upon the persecution that arose about Stephen,” some had gone to Cyprus, “preaching the word to none but Jews only” (Acts 11:19). Yet, on this occasion, the time was apparently not appropriate to preach in Cyprus. Thus, Paul registered no objection when they sailed past this island, once the home of Barnabas (Acts 4:36). There is no issue made of this, indicating that it was not something with which Paul wrestled, being unsure of what to do. When the mind of the believer is firmly set on doing the will of God, living is greatly simplified. On the other

hand, those who do not so yield themselves to God will find that life is often disconcerting.

It ought to be noted that doing the will of God involves both sensitivity and discernment, which are linked with practicality. It also requires living by faith and walking in the Spirit.

FINDING DISCIPLES

“4 And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.”

While this may appear to be an incidental account, something of the manner of the kingdom is revealed in it. Within the body of Christ there is a certain affection and interdependence that is actually the work of the Spirit. After all, it is the Holy Spirit who has baptized us “into one body” (1 Cor 12:13), and the fellowship that has resulted from that baptism is marvelous.

FINDING DISCIPLES

“And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days . . .” Other versions read, “looking up the disciples,” NASB “having sought out the disciples,” RSV “having found the disciples,” ASV “Having searched out,” CJB “we searched for the disciples,” GWN “we located the disciples,” NET “we went ashore, found the local believers, and stayed with them a week,” NLT “Having searched for the disciples and found them,” WEYMOUTH

Once again, I draw your attention to the manner of Paul in his travels, particularly as it regards finding brethren (Acts 14:26; 15:3,36; 16:40; 18:23; 19:1; 20:7; 21:4,7,8; 28:14). Now, our text speaks of Paul and company finding disciples. That is, they searched them out. These are the people who had been “added to the church,” that unique body of people for whom Jesus intercedes, and through whom He works (Acts 2:47).

The priority of the saints of God is apparent in the record of Paul’s travels, as well as all of his writings that have been handed down to us.

The priority of the saints of God is apparent in the record of Paul’s travels, as well as all of his writings that have been handed down to us. When he testified of the people for whom he cared the most, he referred to his kinsmen the Jews, to whom had been given all of the pre-new covenant benefits (Rom 9:1-5), and “the churches” (2 Cor 11:28). It is most striking that in the average church, and among the rank and file ministers, these two qualities are glaringly absent.

It has also been a source of much sorrow to me personally that the contemporary church is fundamentally ignorant of the ministry of Paul, even though his writings comprise over 50% of the New Covenant writings (14 of 27 books, including Hebrews). The subjects exclusively delineated by Paul are those least familiar to most Christians, and covered the least by the majority of preachers and teachers. Following is a brief listing of subjects uniquely developed by Paul.

PAUL’S UNIQUE TEACHING

- That the church is the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4,12-16; 5:23,30; Col 1:16; 2:19; 3:15).
- The merging of Jew and Gentile in Christ (Eph 2:15-16,19).
- The exposition of justification by faith (Rom 3:20-5:18; Gal 2:16-17; 3:8-24).
- The distinction between the Old and New Covenants (2 Cor 3:6-14; 7:22; 8:8-13; 10:16-17; Gal 3:15-17; 4:22-28; Heb 9:15-20).
- The reality of “*the old man*” and “*the new man*” (Rom 6:6; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:9-

10).

- The inner warfare experienced by those who live by faith (Rom 7:15-25; Gal 5:17).
- The spiritual logic that declares the coming conversion of the Jews (Rom 9-11).
- The High Priesthood of Christ (Heb 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21).
- The relation of Abraham to those who believe (Rom 4:1-16; Gal 3:6-18).
- The significance of Melchizedec (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-21).
- The eternal purpose of God (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9).
- What took place behind the scenes when Jesus died (Col 1:20; 2:14-15; Heb 2:14; 9:26).
- The whole armor of God (Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:7; Eph 6:10-18).
- Spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:4-5; Eph 6:17).
- Believers battling with principalities and powers (Eph 6:12).
- The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9).
- The works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21).
- The office of a Bishop (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:7-11).
- The office of a deacon (1 Tim 3:10-13).
- The exposition of spiritual gifts, and how they are administered (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31; 14:1-12; Eph 4:11-16).
- Why men cannot be justified by works (Rom 3:26; 4:2; Gal 2:16; 3:2-5).
- The imputation of righteousness upon the basis of faith (Rom 1:7; 3:22-25; 4:5-25; 10:6-10; Phil 3:9).
- Extensive teaching concerning baptism into Christ (Rom 6:1-23; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:11-15).
- The comparison of Adam and Christ (Rom 5:14-21; 1 Cor 15:22,45).
- Extensive teaching on the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:15-57).
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11-14, 26-27; 2 Cor 3:3-18; Gal 4:6, 29; 5:5,16-18,22-24; 6:8; Eph 2:22; Eph 5:9).
- The intercession and mediation of Christ Jesus (Heb 7:25; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).
- The intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27).
- Predestination and election (Rom 8:29-33; 9:11; 11:5-7,28; Eph 1:5,11; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 2:10; Tit 1:1).
- The body being for the Lord (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:13-20).
- God's objective for believers (Eph 3:15-30; 4:12-16; Col 1:9-11).
- The resurrection body (2 Cor 5:1-5).
- The accomplishments of the cross (Eph 2:16; Phil 2:8; Col 1:20; 2:14-15).
- Extensive teaching concerning the Lord's Table (1 Cor 10:21; 11:23-29).
- Types and shadows (Gal 4:24; Col 2:17; Heb 8:5; 9:24; 10:1).

- Extensive teaching of the grace of God (Rom 3:24; 4:4,16; 5:2, 15-17, 20-21; 6:14-15; ; 11:5-6; 12:3-6; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 1:15; Eph 2:5-8; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 2:11-12; Tit 3:7; Heb 2:9; 4:16; 12:28).

Were Paul to appear on today's scene, and commence teaching in the churches, most of the people would not have the faintest idea what he was speaking about – even though his writings have been in their possession for many years. If this assessment is true, this is a most unfortunate circumstance. It reveals a fundamental flaw in the fabric of nominal Christendom.

In my judgment, the reason for today's absence of the attitudes and preferences reflected in the book of Acts is found in the manner in which the people were taught, and the substance of that teaching. When the message delivered to the church focuses upon life in this world, the people are at once put to a disadvantage. The life that they receive in Christ Jesus is not of this world – it is “eternal life,” and it is ultimately adapted for the world to come. When the proper message is not preached and believed, kingdom attitudes and proper perceptions simply cannot be developed.

Were Paul to come to the city in which you live, who do you suppose he would classify as “disciples,” and with whom would he prefer to be? I certainly am not seeking an answer to that question, but am rather seeking to provoke a godly assessment of the times and circumstances in which we live. If we are to serve our generation as David served his (Acts 13:36), it seems to me that we should have a sound and proper view of that generation.

WHO SAID TO PAUL IN THE SPIRIT

“ . . . who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.” Other versions read, “kept telling Paul through the Spirit,” NASB ““guided by the Spirit,” CJB “the Spirit had the disciples tell Paul,” GWN “speaking in the Spirit,” NJB “prophesied through the Spirit,” NLT and “prompted by the [Holy] Spirit, they kept telling Paul.” AMPLIFIED

Here we confront a seeming contradiction – at least that is what some people think. First, when Paul commenced this trip to Jerusalem he said, “And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there” (Acts 20:22). The phrase “the Spirit” reflects the precision of the Greek language. He did not say “my spirit, but “THE Spirit” (**tw/ pneu,mati**), an obvious reference to the Holy Spirit, for this is not how Scripture refers to the human spirit. Nor, indeed, is a person said to be “bound” by his own spirit, or the human spirit.

It seems to me that this text is an elaboration and example of what Paul had said earlier. “And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me” (Acts 20:23). Later, some other disciples will try to turn Paul from going to Jerusalem, and he will answer them with no ambiguity. At that time, those to whom he spoke acquiesced saying “the will of the Lord be done.” That account reads as follows. “And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 21:10-13). Further, after he had arrived in Jerusalem, and began to be opposed by the Jews, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and said, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). He did not rebuke Paul for going to Rome. Rather, that proved to be the very place where things were set in motion for him to go to Rome.

Therefore, I conclude that Paul did not go against the council of the Spirit in going to Rome.

Rather, it seems to me that the Spirit moved certain brethren to testify of Paul's apprehension in Jerusalem – something that, prior to this, he had managed to elude. The prophets through whom the word came themselves concluded that this meant Paul was not intended to go do Rome at all. However, this is not what the case. This was the conclusion of the prophets, who were used by the Spirit to inform Paul what would happen to him at Jerusalem, for he had said he did not know what awaited him there (20:22).

One of the tests of a true man of God is found in his reaction to opposition. For such a person, faith and commitment become the means through which a proper sense of direction is established. Such was the case with Paul.

AN EXAMPLE OF TAKING UP THE CROSS

Jesus declared, “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross , and follow Me ” (Matt 16:24). And again, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross , and come after Me, cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:27). This, then, is a defining matter. Those who follow Jesus must deny themselves, and take up their cross. Elsewhere, Jesus said the intending disciple must “take up his cross daily ” (Lk 9:23). Those who do not do this are excluded from the disciples – they “cannot” be one; they “cannot” follow Jesus. – i.e. He will not allow them to do so. Because a disciple is, in fact, a learner, the one who does not take up his cross cannot “learn from” Jesus (Matt 11:29). He will not teach them.

Coming to Jesus also required that all competing influences be thrust to the side, and a deaf ear turned toward them. This also includes the matter of personal fleshly interests and preferences. Jesus put it this way, “If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple” (Luke 14:26). Thus, even the approach to Jesus (coming to Him) has restrictions. They do not have to do with defilement, or a requirement for cleansing, for if that was the case, no one would be allowed to come to Him. However, it does require the repudiation of any and every thing that would cause that quest to diminish or altogether go away. Remember, all of this has to do with COMING to Jesus, or ENLISTING, as it were, as a disciple.

I am sure that you recognize these requirements exclude a significant percentage of professing Christians. Yet, there is no circumstance of life, or any form of human rhetoric or carnal expertise, that can remove them. They are firmly fixed in place. No one gets into the sheepfold who seeks entrance in any other way. If a person does not want Jesus more than anything, there is no need to seek Him, for it will be in vain. If they do not want His forgiveness and tutelage more than the approbation of men, or any form of temporal satisfaction, such a person will not even be allowed to approach unto the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a person may be so unaware of his circumstance that Jesus will have to send him away, even as He did the rich young ruler. “One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow Me” (Mark 10:21). Jesus loved that young man (Mk 10:21a), yet sent him away with a word that discovered his refusal to “forsake all” (Lk 14:33), take up his cross, and follow Him.

I am pressing this point because of the rarity of its proclamation from the pulpites of the land. Men without the kind of commitment that Christ demands are being allowed to think they are really coming to Jesus, and that He has really received them. However, if we are to believe the words of Christ, uncommitted people have either never really come to Jesus, or they have left Him. If this is not the case, then Christ's words have no weight at all, nor are any of His other words to be taken seriously.

It is the frame of mind described by Jesus that is being set forth in the life of Paul, and those who

faithfully traveled with him as well. His total commitment to Christ is why he continued his trip to Jerusalem, even though he was duly warned concerning what would befall him there.

Christ's words are also reflected in apostolic doctrine concerning living by faith. Those who are in Christ are apprised that they are to live with the same commitment that characterized them when they first came to Christ. Doctrinally it is stated in the following ways.

- **THE HENCEFORTH FACTOR.** "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin" (Rom 6:6).

There is no point in life, or any isolated occasion, when the child of God can depart from this manner of life. These are not teachings that are presented as goals to be finally achieved. They are not directions for special occasions when some quick relief is sought. This the manner of spiritual life.

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

- **GLORIFYING GOD.** "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 6:20).

- **LIVING UNTO HIM.** "And that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again" (2 Cor 5:15).

- **CRUCIFYING THE FLESH.** "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal 5:24-25).

- **NOT WALKING IN THE VANITY OF OUR MIND.** "This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind" (Eph 4:17).

- **SEEKING THINGS ABOVE.** "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col 3:1-3).

- **PUTTING TO DEATH ABERRANT DESIRES.** "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col 3:5).

- **BEING HOLY.** "As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet 1:14-16).

There is no point in life, or any isolated occasion, when the child of God can depart from this manner of life. These are not teachings that are presented as goals to be finally achieved. They are not directions for special occasions when some quick relief is sought. This the manner of spiritual life. It is what is involved in walking "in the light as He is in the light" (1 John 1:7). This is such a rare kind of living, that, at the time, even some of the disciples and prophets did not associate Paul's attitude with these realities. However, it is apparent from the record that they finally did acquiesce to Paul's decision, sensing that more was involved than his personal will, or a high level of concern for his own safety.

Notwithstanding, their advise came from their deep love for him, and an appreciation for his presence and teaching. However, they did not see what Paul saw. They were, however, willing to yield to his understanding of the matter.

AFTER PRAYING WITH THE BRETHREN, THEY CONTINUE ON THEIR WAY

“ 5 And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.”

ACCOMPLISHED THOSE DAYS

“And when we had accomplished those days . . .” Other versions read, “had come to end of those days,” NKJV “when our time was up,” NIV “when the week was over,” CJB and “when our time was over.” NLT

Do not fail to take note of how Paul preferred to spend his time – with the disciples. He apparently knew how long it was going to take for the cargo of the ship to be unloaded, and due preparations made for the continuance of the journey. He did not spend his time sight-seeing, but sought out brethren with whom to company.

These are the “seven days” mentioned in verse four. They were probably the time required to unload the ship, and prepare it for the next leg of its journey. This being the case, the text infers that Paul and company knew the appointed duration of the ship’s stay in Tyre. Armed with this knowledge, they had determined how to spend their time in this ancient city.

Do not fail to take note of how Paul preferred to spend his time – with the disciples. He apparently knew how long it was going to take for the cargo of the ship to be unloaded, and due preparations made for the continuance of the journey. He did not spend his time sight-seeing, but sought out brethren with whom to company.

Throughout the book of Acts, there are repeated texts that emphasize the preference of the saints of God for one another. Whether in times of threat and danger, or in times of favor and peace, they chose to be together.

- “Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey . . . These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren” (Acts 1:12,14).

- “And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1).

- “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

- “And all that believed were together , and had all things common” (Acts 2:44).

- “And they , continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart” (Acts 2:46).

- “And being let go, they went to their own company , and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them” (Acts 4:23).

- “And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together ; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31).

- “Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus” (Acts 9:19).
- “And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples” (Acts 9:26).
- “Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:25-26).
- “And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark; where many were gathered together praying” (Acts 12:12).
- “And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:21-22).
- “And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27).
- “And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed” (Acts 16:40).
- “And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).
- “And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him: who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace” (Acts 18:27).
- “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight” (Acts 20:7).
- “And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4).
- “And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day” (Acts 21:7).
- “And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage” (Acts 28:15).

That will suffice as a representation of the preference of brethren for one another. How can it be said that brethren love one another if they do not desire to be with one another? Precisely what kind of rationale seeks to justify a preference for the ungodly?

If it is true that Jesus works through the various members of the body as they hold steadfastly to Him (Eph 4:15-16; Col 2:19), then how can the work of the Lord be done if they do not have preferred fellowship with one another? And exactly where is an example of the work of the Lord being accomplished independently of frequent recourse to the saints of the Lord?

The current trend of Christians choosing to be with the ungodly is justified by saying they are seeking to win them to the Lord. I think rather that it is owing to their affinity with them.

WE WENT ON OUR WAY

“ . . . we departed and went our way . . . ”

Refreshed by the communion of the saints, Paul and company resume their journey to Jerusalem. Owing to the words of some of the disciples, Paul was now more thoroughly prepared for what awaited him at Jerusalem.

The Philosophy of the Way

The text states the band of holy men “went on our way .” Other versions read, “started on our journey,” NASB and “proceeded on our journey.” NRSV As used here, the word “way” means, “to pursue the journey on which one has entered, to continue on one's journey.” THAYER The idea is that of a purposed journey in which a specific objective was to be realized.

There is a view of the work of the Lord that holds a certain disdain for all planning. However, there is a place for godly purposing. For example, early believers were exhorted “that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Purposing has to do with objective more than the means of meeting that objective. Within the context of contemporary Christianity, such an approach to life sounds a bit strange. The thrust of much teaching in our time has more to do with managing problems than achieving an objective.

PAUL'S PURPOSE FOR LIVING

Paul testified to his personal ambitions in Philippians. 3:8-11.

- Winning Christ.
- Being found in him with the righteousness that comes from God by faith.
- Knowing Christ.
- Knowing the power of Christ's resurrection.
- Knowing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings.
- Being made confirmable to Christ's death.
- Attaining unto the resurrection of the dead.

Paul made his plans within the framework of those objectives. Ultimately, he had eternity in perspective, and the desire to be found acceptable at that time, having lived out his life for the glory of God. I understand the trip mentioned in this text to have been made within that context.

THEY ALL BROUGHT US ON OUR WAY

“ . . . and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city . . . ”

These brethren had taken advantage of Paul's presence during that seven day layover. It must have been a time of great refreshment, and a heightened awareness of the will of the Lord. With a spirit of thankfulness to God and love for Paul and his brethren, these brethren brought them on their way. They no doubt met some of their needs, and ensured that they were not sailing away with unnecessary wants.

The whole body of disciples came along, including their wives and children. They knew nothing of segregating these groups, as opportunists are wont to do during our time. The favorable impact of the whole family being exposed to the things of God cannot be overstated.

The whole body of disciples came along, including their wives and children. They knew nothing of segregating these groups, as opportunists are wont to do during our time. The favorable impact of the whole family being exposed to the things of God cannot be overstated. I was personally reared

in this kind of environment, with holy men and women often visiting our home. From a tender age, I was exposed to insightful discussions concerning God's Word, reports of involvement in the work of the Lord, and the demonstration of the love of the brethren. Throughout the years this has had an incalculable effect upon my spirit, and I am grateful for being exposed to genuine Kingdom life. Today, I lament that so many Christian families know little or nothing about such holy relationships.

WE KNEELED DOWN AND PRAYED

“. . . and we knelt down on the shore, and prayed.” Other versions read, “and there on the beach we knelt to pray,” NIV “going on our knees in prayer by the sea,” BBE “they fell on their knees by the seaside, and prayed,” MRD and “having bowed the knees upon the shore, we prayed.” YLT

The language suggests that this was a public act, and was located very close to the ship on which they would depart. This being the case, what a testimony this must have been – men, women, and children praying together.

Throughout the book of Acts, prayer is frequently mentioned. It confirms the reliance of those early brethren upon the Lord. I have observed that the further people are from God, the least apt they are to prayer. On the other hand, the more aware they are of the Lord, the more frequently they pray. Such prayer is an outgrowth of faith and perception.

Prayers in the Book of Acts

Prayer played a prominent role in the life of the early church. Corruption had not yet set in to the degree prophesied by Paul, and therefore a more lively awareness of God and the sustaining and directing ministry of Jesus was found among the brethren.

The following listing refers to the various prayers that are recorded in Luke's record of the early church and spread of the Gospel.

- Acts 1:14 – After Jesus' ascension, his disciples and family devoted themselves to prayer.
- Acts 1:24-25 – The apostles pray before selecting a replacement for Judas.
- Acts 2:42 – The Jerusalem believers devote themselves “to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”
- Acts 3:1 – Peter and John go up to the temple at the hour of prayer.
- Acts 4:29-31 – Peter and John, with the church, pray for boldness in preaching and for God to do miracles.
- Acts 6:4-6 – The apostles select seven men to serve the community, so they can devote themselves to prayer and preaching; they appoint them by praying and laying hands on them.
- Acts 7:59-60 – Stephen prays to the Lord Jesus at the moment of his death.
- Acts 8:15 – Peter and John go to Samaria to pray that new believers may receive the Holy Spirit.
- Acts 8:22-24 – Peter tells Simon the Magician to repent and pray for forgiveness; Simon asks Peter to pray for him.
- Acts 9:11 – After encountering Jesus on the road, Saul of Tarsus remains in Damascus praying.
- Acts 9:40 – Peter prays before raising Tabitha back to life.

- Acts 10:2-4 – Cornelius, a Roman centurion, is described as a devout man who prayed constantly.
- Acts 10:9 – While in Joppa, Peter goes up to a roof to pray⁶ (cf. 11:5).
- Acts 10:30-31 – Cornelius recounts how an angel appeared to tell him his prayers had been heard.
- Acts 12:5, 12 – While Peter is in prison, the church prays for him.
- Acts 13:3 – The Christians at Antioch fast and pray before sending Barnabas and Saul off on a mission.
- Acts 14:23 – With fasting and prayer, Barnabas and Paul appoint elders for the churches they founded.
- Acts 16:13, 16 – Paul, Silas, and Timothy go to a place of prayer outside of Philippi.
- Acts 16:25 – While in prison overnight at Philippi, Paul and Silas pray and sing hymns.
- Acts 20:36 – After speaking to the elders from Ephesus, Paul kneels with them and prays.
- Acts 21:5 – On a beach near Tyre, Paul kneels and prays with believers from that city.
- Acts 22:17 – Paul tells a crowd of Jews about what happened while he was praying in the Jerusalem temple.
- Acts 26:29 – Paul tells King Agrippa that he prays that he and everyone listening will become Christians.

We have good reason to doubt the sincerity of any professing Christian who is deficient in the desire to pray, or who does not associate both need and blessing with it.

Acts 27:29 – During a storm at sea, the whole crew prays for day to come⁶ (so that they might be safe).

- Acts 27:35 – While on the ship, Paul gives thanks to God for the bread before they all eat.
- Acts 28:8 – On Malta, Paul cures the father of the governor Publius by praying and laying his hands on him.
- Acts 28:15 – Upon landing on the Italian mainland, Paul thanks God for the believers who meet him.

IN OUR TIME

Our day is marked by a glaring absence of prevailing prayer. In the activities of the church and Christian organizations, prayer is often more an empty form, than the expression of absolute reliance upon the Lord. We have good reason to doubt the sincerity of any professing Christian who is deficient in the desire to pray, or who does not associate both need and blessing with it.

I do not know how you could establish the existence of faith where there is no practical reliance upon the Lord. While it is not our purpose to sit in judgment upon others, it is our business to examine ourselves.

THEY RESUME THEIR JOURNEY

“ 6 And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship; and they returned home again.

7 And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them

one day.”

TAKEN OUR LEAVE ONE OF ANOTHER

“And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship . . .” Other versions read, “we said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship,” NASB “After saying good-bye to each other, we went aboard the ship,” NIV “bade one another farewell. Then we went abroad the ship,” RSV “We said our last words to one another, and got into the ship,” BBE and “having embraced one another, we went on board ship.” DARBY

Keep in mind that this had apparently not been a previously arranged visit with the brethren. Further, there is no record of Paul having been in Tyre before. Yet, they had been received hospitably, for the brethren in Tyre were obviously “given to hospitality” (Rom 12:13). They conspicuously “used hospitality without grudging,” or not considering it an inconvenience, or an intrusion upon them (1 Pet 4:9). Ponder the effects of a group of brethren traveling through our area, looking us up, and informing us of their seven-day layover – all the while seeking the fellowship of kindred spirits. I am persuaded that most of the brethren in The Word of Truth Fellowship would find no difficulty in welcoming them into their homes. However, I am also keenly aware that this is by no means ordinary among professing believers. This is because their lives have been tailored around themselves, their desires, and various family activities.

However, enough is said of hospitality in apostolic teaching to provoke serious introspection concerning this aspect of our lives (Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9; 3 John 1:5-8). No man who is not given to hospitality is permitted to be a leader among the people of God (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7-8). One of the qualifications for the support of a widow by the church is this: “Well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work” (1 Tim 5:10). Jesus Himself taught that one of the defining characteristics of holy people is being hospitable to His brethren: “I was a stranger, and ye took me in . . . Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt 25:35,40). Those not so characterized were consigned to “everlasting punishment” (Matt 25:32-46). That is certainly an arresting thought.

Taking leave of one another no doubt involved saying some appropriate words. We are not provided the details of their farewell, but we can obtain a fairly good idea among how brethren parted from one another in those early days, before the corruption foretold by Paul had taken place. Here are some examples of parting words and holy benedictions.

• **LIKE-MINDEDNESS AND GLORIFYING GOD.** “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:5-6).

• **THE REALIZATION OF AND, PEACE, AND ABOUNDING HOPE .** “Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost” (Rom 15:13).

• **THE PRESENCE OF GOD.** “Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen” (Rom 15:33)

• **THE REALIZATION OF THE GRACE OF CHRIST.** “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Rom 16:24; 1 Cor 16:23; Phil 4:23; 1 Thess 5:28; 2 Thess 3:18); Phile 1:25; Rev 22:21).

• **THE AWARENESS OF THE MINISTRY OF, AND FELLOWSHIP WITH, THE ENTIRE GODHEAD.** “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen” (2 Cor 13:14).

Notice the consistency in these closing words. Take due note of their focus, and of the direction in which they were pointed. All of them had to do with spiritual stability, the realization Divine benefits, and Divine utility.

PEACE TO THOSE WHO WALK ACCORDING TO THE RULE OF NEW CREATURESHIP. “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God” (Gal 6:15-16).

• **GRACE REALIZED WITHIN THE HUMAN SPIRIT.** “Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen” (Gal 6:18).

• **THE REALIZATION OF PEACE, LOVE, AND FAITH, AND SPECIAL GRACE TO THOSE LOVING CHRIST IN SINCERITY.** “Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen” (Eph 6:24).

• **BEING GIVEN ALL PEACE BY ALL MEANS.** “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all” (2 Thess 3:16).

• **THE PRESENCE OF JESUS WITH THE HUMAN SPIRIT.** “The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen” (2 Tim 4:22).

• **SPIRITUAL PERFECTION THAT WOULD RESULT IN GOD WORKING WITHIN.** “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb 13:20-21).

• **GRACE BEING WITH EVERYONE.** “Grace be with you all. Amen” (Heb 13:25).

• **PERFECTION, ESTABLISHMENT, STRENGTH, AND SETTLING.** “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet 5:10).

• **PEACE TO EVERYONE IN CHRIST.** “Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen” (1 Pet 5:14).

• **THE REALIZATION OF GRACE, MERCY, PEACE IN TRUTH AND LOVE.** “Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love” (2 John 1:3).

Notice the consistency in these closing words. Take due note of their focus, and of the direction in which they were pointed. All of them had to do with spiritual stability, the realization Divine benefits, and Divine utility.

There is consistent mindset revealed that is not anchored to this world, but is rather looking forward to the consummation of all things, and readiness to confront the Lord with confidence. The obvious accent is on spiritual progress, not worldly success. These things are so plain it is a marvel that they can be overlooked. Of course, it is not that men simply overlook them. Rather, because of their willingness to live for self, they have been blinded so they cannot perceive the realities that are so conspicuous to faith. This blindness is a Divine judgment. It was affirmed by Isaiah of his own generation, and confirmed by John concerning the generation during Christ’s earthly ministry.

• **ISAIAH.** “For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isa 29:10-14).

• **JOHN.** “But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him: That the saying of Esaias the prophet might be fulfilled, which he spake, Lord, who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore they could not believe, because that Esaias said again, He hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their heart; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spake of Hm” (John 12:38).

• **PAUL.** “And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Acts 28:25-27).

How different the response of the brethren from Tyre to the ministry of Paul. It is obvious the Lord had not blinded their minds, with hardened hearts were glad to see Paul leave. These brethren accompanied Paul and those with him to the ship, and congenial words were exchanged as the holy entourage continued on their mission.

THEY RETURNED HOME AGAIN

“ . . . and they returned home again.”

With joy and sorrow mingled in the cup of human experience, the disciples from Tyre returned home. They had profited from the visit of Paul and company, and yet yielded to the purpose of God that required them to part.

WE CAME TO PTOLEMAIS

“And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais...”

Other versions read, “finished our voyage from Tyre,” NKJV “completed our voyage from Tyre,” CSB “having finished the voyage by sea,” DOUAY and “The next stop after leaving Tyre was Ptolemais.” NLT

The suggestion is that the sea voyage part of their journey ended here. It appears that they traveled on land from this point on. Concerning this particular trip, there is no more reference to ships or the sea. All of the maps of Paul’s third missionary journey, to which I have access, show that the ship voyage included an additional leg to Caesarea. However, the text does not give that indication. It strongly suggests that the sailing portion of the voyage terminated at Ptolemais.

WE SALUTED THE BRETHREN

“ . . . and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.” Other versions read, “greeted the brethren, and stayed with them one day” NKJV “we had talk with the brothers and were with them for one day,” BBE “we inquired after the welfare of the brethren, and remained a day with them,” WEYMOUTH and “paid our respects to the brethren and remained with them for one day.” AMPLIFIED

Once again, before setting forward on their journey, Paul; and the brethren with him connect with some of the saints of God. Being without modern-day methods of communication, it is not at all probable that they sent a message ahead, telling them they would be arriving there soon.

As used here, the word “saluted” means “to pay respects to a distinguished person by visiting him; of those who greet one whom they meet in the way . . . pay one's respects to,' of those who show regard for a distinguished person by visiting him.” THAYER Technically it could mean that “the brethren” of reference met them, and Paul and company greeted them in a godly manner. It could also mean that the travelers searched out the brethren, and then greeted them with the respect and honor that was common among disciples. I am more inclined to the latter view, which seems to blend better with the report of this whole trip. Notwithstanding, it is not a matter suitable for contention.

What a “day” that must have been – when Paul and his companions “abode with them one day.” It was surely something more than a mere rest stop, for there is something rejuvenating about saints being with one another. What child of God has not experienced the exhilarating effects of kindred spirits?

The Value of “The Brethren”

The word “saluted” carries the idea of respect, as previously noted. The doctrinal way of referring to this high regard is “the love of the brethren.” – something that is the result of obeying the truth. Peter states this in a most succinct manner. “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren , see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently: Being born again , not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:22-23). This remarkable preference is traced back to being born again of incorruptible seed. In other words, the new birth itself involves a certain preference for, and attraction to, the children of God. On this matter John writes, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God , and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7). And again, “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God : and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him” (1 John 5:1). Thus we read powerful statements like the following:

• **CONFIRMATION OF DISCIPLESHIP.** “By this shall all men know that ye are My disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

• **CONFIRMATION OF LIFE.** “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death” (1 John 3:14).

The existence of this love is the basis for various expressions of how the redeemed are to live.

• **HONOR AND PREFERENCE.** “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another ” (Rom 12:10).

• **UNPRETENTIOUS AND FERVENT.** “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently ” (1 Pet 1:22).

Confirming the association of this love with the Divine nature, we are apprised that God Himself teaches His children to love one another. “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” (1 Thess 4:9). This is a consistent

message that God has delivered to men. “For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another” (1 John 3:11). Now that Christ has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself, this love can be carried out, because in Him men receive a “new heart” and a “new spirit” (Ezek 36:26), and the Law of God is written into their hearts and minds (Heb 10:16).

The very existence of this love confirms that an essential change has taken place in all who are in Christ Jesus. They are drawn to those who are not of the world, and delight in their company – an attitude that reflects the Divine nature itself. It is said of the Lord that He is scanning the entire world, looking for those whose hearts are perfect toward Him (2 Chron 16:9). He looks favorably toward the man who is “poor and of a contrite heart, at that trembleth at My word” (Isa 66:2). He takes special note of those who fear Him and speak often with one another (Mal 3:16). The Lord Jesus, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily chooses to be among those who gather together in His name (Matt 18:20).

It is not strange, therefore, that those who have been joined to the Lord have a special attraction to His people. They are, after all, being conformed to the image of His Son (Rom 8:29), and it is no strange thing that His character is found in them.

Without lingering too long on this doctrinal point, it will suffice to say that this kind of love is being lived out in Paul and those with him, as well as in those with whom they stayed. There was a closeness created in Christ Jesus that was compelling, drawing souls together, and causing them to consistently seek out kindred spirits. The absence of this kind of “brotherly love” is a brightly flashing signal of fundamental deficiency.

THEY STAY A WHILE WITH PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

“ 8 And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. 9 And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.”

Now, the trip to Jerusalem continues. The stops along the way that were necessitated by the shipping schedule proved to be blessed occasions for Paul and those traveling with him. This is an example of “redeeming the time,” or “making the most of your time” NASB (Eph 5:16; Col 4:5). Many a naive young believer has fallen into sin simply because they did not use their time properly.

THE NEXT DAY

“And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed . . .” Other versions read, “we who were Paul’s companions,” NKJV “we left,” NRSV “Paul and we that were with him,” GENEVA and “Paul and his company.” YLT

Luke, who is writing this record, is included in the “we.” Others were also included, with the following being identified: “And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus” (Acts 20:4). That is nine in all, including Luke and Paul. Ponder how many you know who could hospitably receive nine people – perhaps for as long as seven days, or even longer. There can be no question about this: a social climate existed in the early church that is like a museum artifact in our time.

CAME INTO CAESAREA

“ . . . and came unto Caesarea. . .” Other versions read, “came to Caesaera,” NKJV “reached Caesarea,” NIV “went on to Caesarea,” LIVING and “went to the city of Caesarea,” IE

This is Caesarea close to Jerusalem, as compared with Caesarea-Philippi, which was 120 miles North of Jerusalem. After Philip had preached in Samaria, preached to the eunuch, and baptized him into Christ, he continued preaching until he “came to Caesarea” (Acts 8:40). After Paul was converted, and his life was threatened, the disciples “brought him down to Caesarea,” where they sent him to Tarsus (Acts 9:30). This is the city in which Cornelius lived (Acts 10:1). When Paul first sailed from Ephesus, and before his return there to spend three years, he had gone to Caesarea, from which he went to the church in Jerusalem, saluting the brethren there (Acts 18:22). Paul will have a variety of experiences in this city later on (Acts 23–33; 25:1-13).

I am assuming this trip was made by foot, and not by sea. The distance from Ptolemais to Caesarea was 35-50 miles – a two-day journey. What marvelous fellowship they must have had along the way. Jesus taught His disciples as they were walking in “the way” (Matt 20:17; 21:19-22; Mk 10:32-45). It was while Cleopas and his companion were walking on “the way” that Jesus joined them and expounded to them such things as caused their hearts to burn (Lk 24:17-27,32). It was as the Ethiopian eunuch was traveling on “the way” that Philip taught him, concerning Christ (Acts 8:27-39).

THE HOUSE OF PHILIP

“ . . . and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist , which was one of the seven; and abode with him.” Other versions read, “Philip the preacher,” BBE “Philip the proclaimer,” CJB and “Philip . . . a missionary.” GWN

Such proclaimers are not intended to preach only to the lost, although that is a common misconception. Through Paul, the Spirit affirmed the role of an evangelist, together with the other teaching gifts, was given to the church.

An “evangelist” is “a bringer of good tidings,” THAYER and “one who brings or announces good news.” FRIBERG This is one of the gifts that the exalted Christ gave to men – “evangelists” (Eph 4:11).

This is a person who has insight into the “glad tidings” through which faith “comes” (Rom 10:14-17). As Philip did with the Ethiopian eunuch, an “evangelist” can expound the prophetic words that foretold the coming of a Savior. They declare more than a message that says “God loved you so much . . .” They speak more of what was accomplished by the Lord Jesus – things that effectively resolved the matter of sin and opened the way to God.

Such proclaimers are not intended to preach only to the lost, although that is a common misconception. Through Paul, the Spirit affirmed the role of an evangelist, together with the other teaching gifts, was given to the church. It also was “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:12-16).

Just as surely as those who are “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1) need to hear an insightful proclaimer of the Gospel in order to be saved, so the church needs such insightful proclaimers in order that the following might be achieved:

- Their perfecting, or spiritual maturity.
- In order to do the “work of the ministry.”

- For the edifying of the body of Christ.
- To come into the “unity of the faith.”
- To realize “the unity of the knowledge of the Son of God.”
- To reflect “the image of Christ” in their the various roles within the body.
- They be “no more children, tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine.”
- That speaking the truth in love, they may “grow up in to Christ in all things.”
- That the body may be “fitly joined together by that which every joint supplieth.”
- To have “every part” working effectively.
- That the body might make increase to the “ edifying of itself in love.”

Philip

Philip is described as “one of the seven” – that is, the seven men who were chosen to administer the daily distribution of food to the believing widows in Jerusalem (Acts 6). At that time, he was among those noted for being “of honest report, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom” (Acts 6:3).

This is the man who “went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them.” The result was that “the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spoke.” They also saw “the miracles which he did, For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed” (Acts 8:7). Great joy filled the city as Philip preached to them “the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” (8:12).

Philip was also directed by a holy angel and the Holy Spirit to preach to a political official who was the treasurer of the Queen of Candace. He did, and the man was baptized into Christ, going on his way rejoicing (8:26-39). Following that Philip “preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea” (8:40).

Now, considerably more than twenty years later, Philip is still noted for being an insightful proclaimer of the Gospel – “Philip the evangelist.” He is an example of spiritual stability and consistency.

It is interesting to note that considerable emphasis is placed on “evangelism” in our time – a word that is not found in Scripture. Instead, mention is made of a person gifted to be an evangelist, who apparently continued to “stir up” the gift that was in him (2 Tim 1:6).

Philip is also a notable example of someone who used the office of a deacon well. As it is written, “For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 3:13). Another versions reads, “For those who perform well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and also gain much confidence and freedom and boldness in the faith which is [founded on and centers] in Christ Jesus.” AMPLIFIED This is of particular interest to me, having spent my young years thinking that deacons were appointed to pass the Lord’s Supper and the offering plates.

From the standpoint of the individual, being a deacon, or servant of the church is an office in which one proves his competency. In fact, prior to being put into that office, they must have demonstrated their ability to function properly in it. Therefore Paul wrote, “And let these also first be proved ; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless” (1 Tim 3:10).

THE FOUR DAUGHTERS OF PHILIP

“ . . . And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy.” Other versions read, “four virgin daughters who were prophetesses,” NASB “four unmarried daughters who prophesied,” NIV “four unmarried daughters who had the gift of prophecy,” NRSV and “four unmarried daughters who had the ability to speak what God had revealed.” GWN

What a blessing it must have been to be in this home! To my knowledge, it is the only home so distinguished. During the captivity in Egypt, a Jewish man named Amram married a Jewish woman named Jochebed. It is written, “and she bare unto Amram Aaron and Moses, and Miriam their sister” (Num 26:59). I suppose three more notable people have never been born to a single family. Another cluster of unusual offspring from a single family were Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:1). James and John, apostles of Christ, were brothers, born of the same father and mother (Mk 10:35). Peter and Andrew, also two apostles of the Lamb, were brothers (Matt 4:18). Yet, Philip had “ four virgin daughters who were prophetesses.” NASB

This is significant, for prophets are a gift given to the church – not to women, or children, but to the church. Further, they rank high in the body of Christ, being the “second” in significance, and outranked only by “apostles.”

This is significant, for prophets are a gift given to the church – not to women, or children, but to the church (Eph 4:11). Further, they rank high in the body of Christ, being the “second” in significance, and outranked only by “apostles” (1 Cor 12:28). Jesus gave them (Eph 4:8,11). God the Father placed them (1 Cor 12:18). The Holy Spirit distributes this gift (1 Cor 12:4). The Lord administers it (1 Cor 12:5). God Himself works “all in all” (1 Cor 12:6). They are a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, given for the profit of the whole church (1 Cor 12:7). They are a manifestation of Divine distinction – for all are not prophets – and they are a means through which the Head speaks to His body, which is the church.

Here in this text, then, we have a revelation of something that involved the entire Godhead: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Philip had four virgin daughters that prophesied. Admittedly, this does not conform to the theology of some – which means that their theology is wrong. Whatever texts they imagine forbids this kind of operation has simply been misunderstood, for God does not contradict His word.

Did Philip’s daughters prophesy only to women? If so, they had a gift that was not intended to profit everyone in the church – and that idea contradicts the revealed purpose of the gift of prophecy. Or, perhaps they only spoke privately, and not in the assembly. But that too contradicts the clearly stated purpose of all spiritual gifts – especially the gift of prophecy, which is a superior gift (1 Cor 14:5).

One of the marks of the New Covenant, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh was this: “and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17). Peter said that this was being fulfilled before the multitude on that memorable day of Pentecost (Acts 2:15,33). This record, therefore, should not surprise us.

Of old time, there were prophetesses – women who prophesied by the Spirit of God. Each one is referred to as a “prophetess.”

- Miriam (Ex 15:20).
- Deborah, the wife of Lapidoth (Judges 4:4)
- Huldah, the wife of Shallum (2 Kgs 22:14).
- Isaiah’s wife (Isa 8:3).
- Anna, a widow (Lk 2:36).

Paul told the church at Corinth, “Ye may all prophesy one by one” (1 Cor 14:31). Married women who prophesied were to do so as subordinate to their husbands (1 Cor 11:5), which it is assumed were themselves believers.

The texts that forbid women to speak in the church, or to instruct men, were by no means ordinary. There are only two such texts, and they both have to do with learning, not prophesying (1 Cor 14:3; 1 Tim 2:11-12). Disruption is the thing forbidden in the Corinthian text, and the context of First Timothy strongly suggests it is speaking about the same thing. The woman was not told to sit in silence, but to “learn” in silence. Further, the context was the assembly of the saints – when all of them were together.

I do not care to remain on this topic, as I have dealt with it elsewhere. I only desire to show at this time that the existence of four daughters that prophesied is in perfect harmony with the history of God speaking to humanity, with the promise of the New Covenant, and with the things revealed concerning the body of Christ. God never works out of harmony with what He has said, or in contradiction of His purpose..

CONCLUSION

Thus, what appears to be nothing more than an historical record has life pumped into it, so it can minister to the soul. Ponder the description of all God-inspired writing. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim 3:16-17).

This applies to historical narratives contained in books like Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, First and Second Samuel, First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, Jonah, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and Acts. This is not to mention the historical reports that are found in the books that major on prophecy and teaching. In such reports Divine reactions to both good and evil are seen. The effects of God’s presence, and the personal knowledge of Him, upon men are also seen. We are exposed to the way people think whose mind is set on the Lord, and the way minds that are not set on the Lord process things. We see how God’s promises effect those who believe, and how His Law is considered by those who fear Him. We are exposed to the reactions of both the holy and unholy to Divine working.

How often the church is reminded to ponder the various events related to Israel. In fact, it is written that the things that “happened” to them were “ensamples,” or samplers – a model for imitation. STRONG’S They were, in fact, “written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11). It is also true that they “were written aforetime . . . for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope” (Rom 15:4). In the book of Acts, the greater percentage of the reports are examples of those who lived by faith, whereas Israel’s record largely provides an example of those who do not live by faith, and of the consequences of such an approach to life. They also provide us with a sterling example of how God responds to such people, while the book of Acts provides the record of His response to men of faith.

May the Lord deliver men from mere academic approaches to the book, of Acts – or any other book of Scripture. Such an approach is lethal, leading the soul to think incorrectly, and also to place a low value on the Scriptures themselves. Professing Christians who remain fundamentally ignorant of the Scriptures, refusing to expose their minds to them, have put themselves in a most precarious situation. They have removed themselves from the means of spiritual sustenance, for man lives “by every word of God” (Lk 4:4). That is a circumstance that cannot possibly be avoided or contradicted – and what person of faith would want to do such a thing?.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #87

ARRIVING IN JERUSALEM

“ 21:10 ”And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. 12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. 13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. 14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. 15 And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. 16 There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge. 17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. 19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.” – (Acts 21:10-19)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

As Paul and company remain for a season at the home of Philip, a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea and prophesied Paul would be bound in Jerusalem. After hearing what Agabus said, the brethren with Paul, together with those “of that place” attempted to persuade him not to go to Jerusalem. However, they could not prevail. Recognizing the sacrificial commitment of Paul, they submitted themselves to the will of the Lord, and ceased their attempts to dissuade him. Some from

that area then joined Paul, and the eight who were with him, in the journey to Jerusalem, where he and those with him were gladly received. The day after their arrival, Paul went in unto James, the Lord's brother, who was a pillar of the church in Jerusalem. All of the elders were present at the meeting. After saluting them, Paul declared "particularly," or in detail, the great things God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. It must have been a memorable occasion, indeed.

KINDRED SPIRITS

The value of spiritually kindred spirits cannot be overstated. After all, when the Lord placed believers, it was in Christ's "body" (1 Cor 12:18) as well as "in

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- **ADDITIONAL BRETHERN JOIN THEM IN THE TRIP TO JERUSALEM (21:15-16)**
- **THE BRETHERN RECEIVE THEM GLADLY (21:17)**
- **PAUL GOES IN TO JAMES (21:18)**
- **PAUL DECLARES WHAT GOD HAS DONE BY HIS MINISTRY (21:19)**
- **CONCLUSION**

heavenly places" where that body convenes (Eph 2:6). Judging from the spiritual climate of our nation, this value has become outdated. The gathering of believers is shrinking in both duration and frequency. The spiritually illogical nature of this trend is seen from several different perspectives.

- When there were only two people on the face of the earth, they were together, and were intended to stay together (Gen 2:19-24).
- God chose Abraham, then developed a nation through him that were intended to be together. In fact, God gave them their own special land so they could be together (Gen 12:7; 13:15; ; 15:5; 17:8; Ex 12:25 Lev 20:24).
- When Israel went into Egypt, they were together (Ex 1:5; Deut 10:22), and when they came out as well (Ex 12:37-38; 13:3; Deut 5:6).
- Israel journeyed to the promised land together (Deut 8:15).
- Israel entered the promised land together (Josh 3:17; 4:1).
- During times of moral and spiritual decay, those who feared the Lord spoke often with one another (Mal 3:16-17).
- When John the Baptist came, he spoke to the people when they were together (Matt 3:5; Mk 1:5; Lk 7:29).
- When Jesus ministered, He gathered around him disciples to be "with Him" (Mk 3:14), and multitudes followed Him, gathering to Him (Matt 4:25; 8:1; 13:2).
- After Jesus ascended to heaven, and until the Spirit came, the disciples were together (Acts 1:14-15).
- Those who were joined to the Lord were noted for being together (Acts 2:44; 4:31; 12:12; 14:27).

- The church is “fitly framed together,” and “builded together” for a habitation of God (Eph 2:21-22).

- The body of Christ is “joined together” by the effective working of every part (Eph 4:16).

Doctrinally, believers are said to be members of “one another” (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). Together, they are “the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27).

There is a sense in which the saints strive together “for the faith of the gospel” (Phil 1:27).

- There is a certain comfort that is ministered when believers are “together” (1 Thess 5:11).

- When the righteous are raised, they will be together (John 5:26; 1 Thess 4:16).

- When we rise to meet the Lord, it will be together (1 Thess 4:17).

- Throughout eternity, the saved will be together (1 Thess 4:17; Rev 14:4).

- Now, throughout the book of Acts it is continually noted that the people of God were together (14:28; 15:6,30; 20:7-8; 21:22).

THE DOCTRINE OF TOGETHERNESS

Doctrinally, believers are said to be members of “one another” (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25). Together, they are “the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27). The idea of an unassembled body is one that denotes death and decay, as confirmed in the vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek 37:1-28). This depicted the whole house of Israel, who were scattered. In the vision, the very first thing that happened in the reclaiming of the people was that the bones “came together, bone to his bone.” Similar to the coming resurrection of the dead, the work was performed upon them when they were together. When the bones were together, covered with flesh, sinews, and skin, they were revived, standing up together as a great army.

Believers are to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). Certain holy activities can only be done when the church is “gathered together” (1 Cor 5:4; 11:17-33; 14:26).

This is the nature of life in Christ Jesus. That is why the Ephesian elders were sorrowful when they heard they would never see Paul again (Acts 20:38). This is why Paul generally traveled with brethren. It is why he sought out disciples whenever he had the opportunity to do so, to spend some time with them.

Now, however, we are living in a time when all of this sounds strange to many. They cannot see why believers enjoy being together, and profit from such gatherings. To them, it makes more sense to leave the people of God and try to reach others for Christ – at least that is what

But this was not the environment of our text. There was an undeniable value placed on the people of God, and being with them. It was more profitable to give reports of the working of the Lord to them. It was better to settle matters of concern when these people were together.

they say they are doing. What they seem to overlook, and conveniently so, is that the early saints who did garner many souls, were the very people who met often with one another. They are the ones who sought out disciples, spent time with them, and profited from one another.

Our times are critical, in that they are conducive to spiritual dullness. There is a religious environment in which it is most difficult to take hold of the truth of God, or gain any genuine spiritual advantage. It is also a time when less value is placed on the people of God, which condition mandates infrequent and unprofitable assemblies. Those who are wholehearted toward the Lord will confirm

that any advancement in Christ must be made with unusual aggression. Anything that tends to casualness is disarming because it moves people to conduct themselves as though there was peace all around them, when that is not at all the case. This is why such religious froth is popular. It is why there are shallow and sometimes thoughtless sermons. It is the reason for the popularity of humor and other forms of entertainment. It is why the door has been opened for the creation of earth-centered “gifts” that have little or nothing to do with the gifts Jesus has given to the church.

But this was not the environment of our text. There was an undeniable value placed on the people of God, and being with them. It was more profitable to give reports of the working of the Lord to them. It was better to settle matters of concern when these people were together. Jesus ministered to a greater extent to them while they were together, and they knew it.

See, all of this is being lived out in our text, confirming the truth of what I have just said.

A KEY EVENT AT THE HOUSE OF PHILIP

“ 21:10 And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11 And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.”

It ought to be noted that Divine direction is more apt to occur, although it is not limited to, occasions when those being directed are among the people of God. Some examples recorded in Acts are as follows.

- **AGABUS.** “And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:28).

- **SUNDRY SAINTS.** “Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me” (Acts 20:23).

- **CERTAIN DISCIPLES.** “And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:4).

- **AGABUS.** “And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles” (Acts 21:11).

Doctrinally, the body of Christ is addressed concerning prophesying in the assembly – i.e. speaking unto edification, exhortation, and comfort (1 Cor 14:3). This is always addressed within the context of the assembly, or the body of Christ.

- **ACCORDING TO THE MEASURE OF FAITH RECEIVED.** “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith” (Rom 12:6).

- **EDIFYING THE CHURCH.** “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church. I would that ye all spake with tongues, but rather that ye prophesied: for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying” (1 Cor 14:4-5).

- **EFFECTIVE IN AN ASSEMBLY .** “But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth” (1 Cor 14:24-25).

• **MAINTAINING A PROPER ATTITUDE.** “Despise not prophesyings” (1 Thess 5:20).

In part, this accounts for the consistent manner of Paul, finding disciples and spending time with them. If there was a word of God for him, that was to be delivered by some member of the body of Christ, he would be more apt to receive it while he was with the saints.

Of course, for those who neglect the assembling of themselves together (Heb 10:25), this is all forfeited. It may make sense to the flesh to isolate oneself from the assembly of the righteous, imagining that in such a case God would direct them privately. I will not deny that such direction is possible, but it is the exception, not the rule. The members are placed within the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18). This is not a mere technicality, nor is it some kind of general or mystical teaching. The purpose of placing the individual members in the body is that this is the primary area in which sustenance, correction, and direction are ministered. This is the clear teaching of First Corinthians 12:24; Ephesians 4:11-16, Philippians 1:27, Colossians 2:18-19, First Thessalonians 5:11, and elsewhere.

Who is able to measure the devastating effects of the trendy reduction of both the frequency and duration of holy gatherings? Who can estimate how much has been forfeited by viewing the gathering of the saints as an inconvenience? What can be said of those who tailor their assemblies for those who are not in Christ, and pretend as though this is pleasing to the God who placed His people in a body.

Our text is confirming the value of the saints being together – not merely in theological persuasion, but in actual company and fellowship. There is a sense in which spiritual growth is directly associated with the amount of time spent with the people of God. This is one of the many weaknesses of the position that states believers should make more ungodly friends so they can win them. Such a thought is at variance with sound theology, as well as being impractical. It conveniently ignores the solemn warning of Scripture. “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33).

WE TARRIED MANY DAYS

“And as we tarried there many days . . .” Other versions read, “stayed many days,” NKJV “a number of days,” NIV “for several days,” NRSV “somewhat lengthy stay.” WEYMOUTH

The word “many” is translated from a word than means, “greater in quantity . . . longer than expected . . . greater in quality,” THAYER “many more . . . more and more and on and on.” UBS The idea is that the group had planned to spend an extended period at the house of Philip, but stayed even longer than they had expected. The clear reason was the profitability that was being realized while they remained there.

I have learned by experience that there are certain blessings and spiritual increase that take place because I lingered in a holy environment. Such benefits are forfeited by hasty departures, when the person yields to the frailty of the flesh, or seeks for more convenience. While this is a matter to be settled personally, and within the framework of one’s faith, it is worthy of attention.

A CERTAIN PROPHET NAMES AGABUS

“ . . . there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. ”

As noted before, even though the direction from Jerusalem to Caesarea was north, yet one went “down from Jerusalem” to Caesarea. That is a topographical description, highlighting the elevated nature of the region of Judea, and particularly of Jerusalem. You ascended to Jerusalem, and descended from it. In this regard, it is a most fitting parallel to the “Jerusalem that “is above” (Gal 4:26). You always have to ascend to traffic in that holy realm, and when you leave it, you can only

go down.

Now, traveling, probably on foot, a distance of at least 50-55 miles, a “certain prophet named Agabus” came to see Paul and company.

Acts 11:26 informs us that Agabus was a prophet “from Jerusalem.” When Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch of Syria, Agabus made that long trip from Jerusalem with some other prophets (about 200 miles). At that time he stood up “and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar” (Acts 11:28). As a result of that prophecy, “the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul” (Acts 11:29-30). There was also some ongoing support of the saints in Jerusalem that resulted from this prophecy. Paul was associated with the gatherings of offerings for them from the Gentile churches, and mentions it quite often (Rom 15:25-27; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 8:9-15; Gal 2:10). Now, this same man travels to Caesarea to converse with Paul.

News had traveled to Jerusalem concerning Paul’s presence, once again highlighting the kind of communication that existed between disciples in those days.

While I do not wish to linger long on this matter, I have particularly noted the lack of this kind of awareness in the Joplin Missouri area. Over the years I have known a number of kingdom dignitaries, noted for their spiritual understanding, that have come to this city. These were men who trafficked in the higher realms of the Spirit. Almost to a man, they have told me that few people were even aware of their presence. A few of them relocated and left this world from here, and still remained largely unknown.

This is certainly not a trait unique to Joplin, yet, owing to the significant number of Christian ministries and churches in this area, it is a rather disconcerting piece of information. I am fully persuaded that if Paul were to reappear in this city, relatively few people would be aware of it, even though he remained for a significant period of time. This was not the kind of environment in which our text took place, and the disciples were not of the caliber with which we are quite often confronted.

THE JEWS WILL BIND THIS MAN

“And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.” Other versions read, “took Paul’s belt,” NASB and “the band of Paul’s clothing.” BBE

Coming in among the those gathered at Philip’s house, Agabus takes the “girdle,” belt, or sash, around Paul’s waist and ties up his own hands and feet. Being moved by the Holy Spirit he says, “This is what the Holy Spirit says: ‘In this way the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.’” NASB Other versions read, “The Holy Spirit says these words,” BBE “the Holy Spirit declares,” NLT “The Holy Spirit tells me,” IE “The Holy Spirit says these things.” LITV

Elsewhere Paul says that the words of the prophets are to be examined by other prophets, not simply taking fore granted that they were given by the Holy Spirit. “Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge” (1 Cor 14:29). Other versions read, “let the others pass judgment,” NASB “the others should weigh carefully what is said,” NIV “the others should evaluate,” CSB “let the others discern,” ERV “Everyone else should decide whether what each person said is right or wrong,” GWN “while all the others listen,” LIVING “consider carefully what is said,” WILLIAMS “exercise their judgment,” MONTGOMERY “pay attention and weigh and discern what is said,” AMPLIFIED “let others discriminate,” EMTV and “listening and taking it to heart.” MESSAGE

The Good News Bible, Living Bible, and The Message, as is too often characteristic of them, water-down the text, taking the substance out of it. The word “judge” (“let the others judge”) pertains to the other prophets, not the congregation in general. The word translated “judge,” as it is used here, has the following lexical meaning: “to separate, make a distinction, discriminate . . . to learn by discrimination, to try, decide,” THAYER “evaluating the difference between things discern, distinguish, differentiate,” FRIBERG and “evaluating the difference between things discern, distinguish, differentiate.” LOUW-NIDA

Judging What the Prophets Say

In the assembly of the righteous, men are free to speak only the truth. Even then, those with understanding are not to take for granted that what is said – even by a prophet – is the truth. Their words are to be weighed by the other prophets – not with a mind to find fault, but with a godly determination to establish the truth.

In our text, there was a body of people, some of whom were no doubt prophets/prophetesses. I do not doubt that they were weighing what Agabus said – evaluating it. First, his word did agree with others who had spoken by the Holy Spirit concerning Paul’s trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:23; 21:4). Paul is once again made alert concerning what is awaiting him in Jerusalem. Satan will seek to work through this word to dissuade Paul from going, while the Holy Spirit will comfort him, assuring him that he will be able to do what he is being sent to do.

LUKE AND COMPANY RESPOND TO THE PROPHECY

“ 12 And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.”

The brethren with Paul listen to what Agabus has prophesied, and respond to it. Their response indicates their deep love and concern for Paul. It also confirms that they did not see as far as Paul did. Nevertheless, they spoke with good intentions.

WHEN WE HEARD THESE THINGS

“And when we heard these things . . .” Other versions read, “heard this,” NASB “heard these words,” MRD “hearing this,” LIVING “as soon as we heard these words,” WEYMOUTH and “which thing when we heard.” WYCLIFFE

The idea is that as soon as they heard the words of Agabus, they responded. They were not of either a slow heart or mind.

Such responses are not always favorable. When Jesus spoke in His home-town synagogue, those who heard His words “were filled with wrath” (Lk 4:28). On the other hand, when Jesus spoke out on the great day of the feast, those who heard His saying responded, “Of a truth, this is the Prophet” (John 7:40). In another synagogue, when Jesus responded to those who thought He should not heal on the Sabbath day, those who heard His words “held their peace” (Mk 3:4). Another time, upon hearing Jesus’ answer to their interrogation, the chief priests and scribes “marveled at His answer, and held their peace” (Luke 20:26).

The point is that when there is a word from heaven, men are not indifferent to it. There is a gravity to the words that demand some kind of response from men. The words of men do not always have this kind of impact.

WE AND THOSE OF THAT PLACE

“. . . both we, and they of that place . . .” Other versions read, “we as well as the local residents,” NASB “we and the people there,” NIV “we and those living in that place,” BBE “we and the local people,” CSB “we and the believers who lived there,” GWN and “we and the people there.” PHILLIPS

It is quite possible that “we and those of that place” were a significant number. They would have included:

- Eight that came with Paul: Luke, Sopater, Artistarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Timotheus, Tychicus, and Trophimus.
- Those of Philip’s household: Philip and his four daughters, possibly his wife (5-6).
- Possibly certain disciples from Caerea, the home of Philip, who are mentioned later (v 16).

Because we have the extended record of Paul’s travels, we do not have to speculate about whether or not he was in the center of God’s will. The remaining seven chapters of Acts put down any arguments that he was out of God’s will.

This could very well have been a cluster of people exceeding twenty in number. They were in one accord in their desires for Paul. They were not contradicting Agabus, but interpreted what the prophet had said to be an admonition from heaven not to go to Jerusalem. However, both Paul’s response and the events that followed confirm that this was not a proper assessment, even though it was a conscientious one.

Solomon said, “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety ” (Prov 11:14). And again, “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established ” (Prov 15:22). And yet again, “For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 24:6). However, this is not true in the Spirit. It is a rule that applies to the order of flesh, and where no word from God has been given. It did not, nor was it intended to, take Divine direction into consideration, but pertained to areas of doubt, and concerning which a word from God had not been given. At the time of Solomon, the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to the people of God, for Jesus had not yet come, much less been glorified, as Jesus Himself affirmed in John 7:39. With Jesus enthroned in glory, men reconciled to God through Him, and the Holy Spirit dwelling within, the playing field has been altered significantly.

BESOUGHT HIM NOT TO GO UP

“. . . besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.” Other versions read, “pleaded with him,” NKJV “began begging him,” NASB “urged him,” NRSV “made request to him,” BBE “desired him,” DOUAY “called upon him,” YLT “kept begging,” IE and “entreated.” WEYMOUTH

The pleas of the brethren there were strong and extended. They felt that it would be out of order for a man of Paul’s spiritual caliber to walk into such a danger zone. It was their love of the brethren, particularly Paul, that drove their action, not a penchant for law.

Because we have the extended record of Paul’s travels, we do not have to speculate about whether or not he was in the center of God’s will. The remaining seven chapters of Acts put down any arguments that he was out of God’s will. Following this occasion, Paul had at least three visitations from heaven: twice by the Lord Himself, and once by the angel of the Lord. Paul was not rebuked for going to Jerusalem on any of these occasions. Once he was warned of the evil intentions of the Jews at Jerusalem, being told they would not receive Paul’s testimony about Christ (22:17-18). Another time the Lord told him that just as he had testified of Jesus in Jerusalem, so would be do in Rome (23:11). The final time was in the midst of a storm, when an angel told Paul he was to appear before Casesar, and therefore God put the people on the ship in his charge – none of them would die, only

the ship would be lost (27:23-24).

Those occasions should settle the issue of whether or not Paul was in the will of God. Men may haggle about this matter, but there was no confusion in heaven about it, and there ought not to be any on earth. The full record will confirm this to be the case.

A STATEMENT OF READINESS

“ 13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”

Brethren can confront surface disagreements with honesty and faith. In such a circumstance, the truth will prevail, and the unity it produces will not be interrupted.

Brethren can confront surface disagreements with honesty and faith. In such a circumstance, the truth will prevail, and the unity it produces will not be interrupted. Here was an occasion when the majority, if not all, of the brethren present thought Paul should not go to Jerusalem. Yet, he was determined to go. His answer will reflect both his love for the brethren, and his intention to do the will of God.

WHAT MEAN YE?

“Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? . . .” Other versions read, “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart?” NKJV “What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?” NASB “Why are you weeping and breaking my heart?” NIV “What are you doing, weeping and wounding my heart?,” BBE “What do you mean weeping and afflicting my heart?” DOUAY “What do ye, weeping and crushing my heart?” MRD “Why all this weeping? You are breaking my heart!” LIVING “Why are you crying? Why are you making me so sad?” IE and “What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart like this?” AMPLIFIED

Here is a marvelous commentary on the superiority of faith to intellect and emotion. The pleas of the brethren were heart-wrenching to Paul. They did not understand his resolve and his mission, and it was crushing the manly part of him – a kind of affliction. There is a sense in which a man with spiritual understanding is afflicted when that trait is not found in sufficient quantities in others. Jesus articulated a measure of disappointment when His disciples did not understand what He said. “Are ye also yet without understanding? . . . Do not ye yet understand? . . . Do ye not yet understand? . . . How is it that ye do not understand?” (Mat 15:16-17; 16:9,11). A person who is merely willing to allow others to have differing opinions of a matter is not so afflicted. However, when understanding and assurance are wed together by faith and hope, men can as Paul did, without being factious or hateful.

I AM READY

“ . . . for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Other versions read, “For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus,” NKJV “I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus,” NIV “ for I am ready, not only to be a prisoner, but to be put to death at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus,” BBE “For I am ready not only to be bound, but to die also in Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus,” DOUAY “For I am prepared, not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of our Lord Jesus Messiah,” MRD “For I am ready not only to be jailed at Jerusalem, but also to die for the sake of the Lord Jesus,” LIVING “Why are you making me so sad? I am ready to be bound in Jerusalem. I am even ready to die for the name of the Lord Jesus!” IE and “For I hold myself in readiness not only to be arrested and bound and imprisoned at Jerusalem, but also [even] to die for the name of the Lord Jesus.” AMPLIFIED

As used here, the word “ready” means, “readily,” THAYER “ready, or willing to,” FRIBERG “prepared,” UBS “pertaining to a state of readiness - 'ready, prepared,” LOUW-NIDA and “willingly.” LOUW-NIDA This precise Greek word is used in two other texts.

• **Of Paul’s readiness to go to Corinth:** “Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you” (2 Cor 12:14).

• **In Peter’s teaching concerning Jesus’ readiness to judge the living and the dead:** “Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead” (1 Pet 4:5).

The use of this word in other tenses are numerous, and include the following.

• **In Jesus’ parable of the man who prepared a great wedding-feast for his son:** “Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready : come unto the marriage” (Matt 22:4). “Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready , but they which were bidden were not worthy” (Matt 22:8).

• **In Jesus exhortation to be ready for His return:** “Therefore be ye also ready : for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matt 24:44).

• **In Jesus’ parable of the ten virgins:** “And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut” (Matt 25:10).

• **In Paul’s exhortation for the Corinthians to prepare the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem:** “Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up before hand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready , as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness” (2 Cor 9:5).

• **In Paul’s admonition concerning be prepared for every good work:** “Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work” (Titus 3:1).

• **In Peter’s word concerning the salvation that is read to be revealed:** “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5).

• **In Peter’s exhortation concerning being prepared to give an answer for the hope that is possessed:** “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pet 3:15).

In English the word “ready” means, “in a state of mental and physical fitness for some experience or action (ready to leave at a moment’s notice.” Synonyms are, “prepared, set, and willing.” Related words are “adjusted, qualified, and primed.” Idioms assigned to this word are “all ready, all set.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

This, then, is a strong word. Paul is not philosophizing – like saying, “Here is what I think,” or “In my opinion.” When you examine the things for which he was ready, prepared, and willing, the gravity of his words becomes more apparent.

- Ready “to be bound” in Jerusalem.
- Ready “also to die at Jerusalem.”

And precisely how does a person prepare for being bound and imprisoned, or for dying in

martyrdom? I do not doubt that some people find it most difficult to think of either situation. It is simply too difficult for them to consider such things. Frankly, this is because they are living close to this present evil world, and are not as aware of the world to come as they could be.

When you get right down to it, the same grace that equips you to live, also prepares you for persecution, and even death. The same spiritual understanding required to live acceptably also applies to going through times of trial, and dying as well. All of this is bound up in the saying, "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom 14:8-9).

This is the real genius of living by faith, and unto the Lord. It equips you for receiving the blessing of God when it comes your way, facing the hostility of foes, and even the last enemy of death, which is death, and everything between as well.

From this perspective, those who immerse us in the affairs of this life have put us at a great disadvantage. Those who major on human experience or the correction of deviant conduct are, in a sense, robbers who are plundering the church of God.

Living by faith and walking in the Spirit are wholly sufficient to address these matters, and do so effectively and efficiently. That is how Paul lived, and that is why he was ready.

THE WILL OF THE LORD BE DONE

" 14 And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done."

Here is a classic example of brethren temporarily in disagreement, yet not divided. This is because both parties considered the will of God to be the preeminent will.

HE WOULD NOT BE PERSUADED

"And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased . . ." Other versions read, "would not be persuaded, we fell silent," NASB "would not be dissuaded, we gave up" NIV "might not be moved, we did no more," BBE "would not be dissuaded we let the matter rest," NAB "would not yield to our appeal, we stopped begging him," WILLIAMS and "would not yield to [our] persuading, we stopped [urging and imploring him]." AMPLIFIED

The unlearned might conclude from this text that Paul was stubborn. However, this is not a fair representation of the text. He was rather determined, being convinced that this was what God was leading him to do. Further, his life attests that he did not live in a state of always seeking his own will. He spoke the truth when he said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

The brethren were thinking of his safety, and therefore sought to turn him from going to Jerusalem. However, they too were living for the Lord. Upon seeing the resolution of Paul, they stopped pleading with him. It was not that they simply saw there was no use in going any further. The next clause confirms that their thinking was on a higher level.

THE WILL OF THE LORD BE DONE

" . . . saying, The will of the Lord be done." Other versions read, "The Lord's will be done," NIV "Let the purpose of God be done," BBE "Let the pleasure of our Lord take place," MRD "the will of the Lord be fulfilled," PNT "We pray that what the Lord wants will be done," IE "Lord, please make us willing to do what you want," CEV "It's in God's hands now," and we said. 'Master, you handle

it.” MESSAGE

What did they mean by this statement? It appears to me that this is in perfect accord with the manner in which the Savior Himself taught men to pray. “Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matt 6:10). It is how Jesus prayed on the night of His betrayal: “O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (Matt 26:42). In fact, some versions of Scripture represent this as a prayer, not simply a phrase expressed to Paul. IE / CEV

“The will of the Lord” has to do with His purpose, intentions, and aims. It assumes a kind of spiritual template over everything man does. And reflects what God is purposefully doing, not what man wants to do. Right here there are two contradicting philosophies afoot in the Christian world.

- That God is present to assist man in what he determines to do.
- That man is here to join God in what He has purposed to do.

Is it really a minor matter for men to think God is pledged to assist them in the fulfillment of their own dreams or purposes? I am rather of the opinion that such a teaching is a form of idolatry, not of insight into the nature and focus of the Almighty. Here we are touching on a matter of revelation. It is written: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:9-10).

This is something that concerns salvation: HOW and WHY we are saved. Salvation involves a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). This new creation is in order that men might walk in works God has ordained – not in dreams they have dreamed, or in purposes they have conceived. In Christ men are delivered from self-centeredness, not solidified in it. They present their bodies – not their dreams – to God as a living sacrifice, doing so in order that they might “discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect” NRSV (Rom 12:1-2)

In Christ Jesus, men are not soliciting God to help them meet their objectives, but God is employing them to fulfill his aims. These saints were not asking God to support Paul in his plans, but to work out through Paul what He had purposed.

Admittedly, this kind of thinking is at variance with a considerable percentage of contemporary preaching and teaching. That is because of the wrongness of much of the current preaching and teaching of reference. It, in the very best sense, is off-center. Because of that, it is leading men away from glory, not to it. I realize that is a most serious allegation, but it is because this circumstance has eternal ramifications.

The disciples that are referenced in this text had a grasp of what was driving all valid activities in the Kingdom. It was not the determined will of its citizens, but the firm and unchanging will and purpose of God. That is what they wanted to be done. Now that Paul, a righteous man, had been so resolute in his determination to go to Jerusalem, the brethren were more prone to think of his trip in light of the will of God. Had he not been noted for being righteous and self-sacrificing, they would not have thought in this way.

A WORD ABOUT RESOLUTENESS

It is in order to say a few words about resoluteness – as compared with inconsistency, vacillation, and hesitation. While there are times when we are cast on the horns of a dilemma, and do not know what to do, that is not a good state in which to remain. We have several examples in Scripture of holy men who called upon the people to make the right decision.

- Moses called upon the people to make a decision, and to do it right away: “I call

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

- After entering the promised land, Joshua called the people to make an immediate choice, and to do it that very day: “And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD” (Josh 24:15).

- Elijah once asked some wavering Israelites to make an immediate decision: “How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word” (1 Kgs 18:21). He also called for an immediate decision.

In my judgment, we could do with a revival of this kind of holy pressure. We should not be content for the worldly to be the only ones that press people for a decision. This is particularly true in the light of the times, which contain all kinds of indicators that we are on the verge of some great epoch.

ADDITIONAL BRETHERN JOIN THEM IN THE TRIP TO JERUSALEM

“ 15 And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. 16 There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.”

There is a rather simplistic view of traveling that is taken by some. They are of the persuasion that no preparations are necessary – that they should simply trust the Lord to provide what they need along the way. However, this is too simplistic for thinking people to embrace.

As they continue the trip to Jerusalem, the number of those traveling with Paul continues to increase. This confirms that some confidence had been experienced by those in Caesarea following the response of Paul to their pleas to change his mind about going to Jerusalem. If Paul had said nothing, or if the subject had been left up in the air, so to speak, I doubt that some would have decided to join Paul and those with him.

WE WENT TO JERUSALEM

“And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “we packed,” NKJV “we got ready,” NASB “we made ready,” NRSV “took up our baggage,” ASV “having got our effects ready,” DARBY “we trussed up our fardels [bundle, or bale of goods MERRIAM-WEBSTER],” GENEVA “we prepared ourselves,” MRD “we made preparations for our journey,” NAB “we packed our things,” NLT “took up our furniture,” WEB “having taken our vessels,” YLT and “we loaded our baggage-cattle” WEYMOUTH

The word “carriages” is translated from a word that means, “to carry off one's personal property or provide for its carrying away,” THAYER and “pack up and leave.” FRIBERG Webster's Bible refers to taking up “furniture.” This is based on one of the meanings of the Greek word employed here (**avposkeuasa,menoi**): “to remove furniture, to strip of furniture.” LEH I doubt that this is the meaning in this text. The reference possibly means refers to loading their baggage on beasts of burden to take it to the ship. ROBERTSON Whatever the technical meaning of the word may be, the intention is to report that they prepared for travel, in some way packing what they were taking with them.

Something to Consider

There is a rather simplistic view of traveling that is taken by some. They are of the persuasion that no preparations are necessary – that they should simply trust the Lord to provide what they need along

the way. However, this is too simplistic for thinking people to embrace.

Early in His ministry, Jesus sent “the twelve” out with instructions not to take anything with them. “Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat” (Matt 10:10). Mark reports, “And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse; but be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats” (Mark 6:8-9). Luke records, “And he said unto them, Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece” (Luke 9:3). Luke also records the same instructions given to the seventy, whom Jesus sent out: “Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes: and salute no man by the way” (Luke 10:4).

Some, seizing upon these texts, affirm that this is still the way in which laborers are to set out in the work of the Lord. This, however, is not the case, for the playing field has changed. On the night of His betrayal, Jesus prepared His disciples for a differing set of circumstances. “When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said He unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in Me, And He was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning Me have an end” (Luke 22:37).

The word concerning the “sword” was not a call to arms, for Jesus was not assembling an earthly army (John 18:36). Rather, it was to alert them to the hostility they now would confront. We know this is the case because later, in the garden, Peter drew his sword, only to hear Jesus say, “Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword” (Matt 26:52).

When Jesus ascended into heaven, Satan was cast out (Lk 10:18; Rev 12:7-9). However, he did not enter into a state of inactivity. In fact, those who are in the world are solemnly told, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). Now Satan is making war “with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17).

That is why these laborers make preparations when they travel. They are no longer in a kind of safety zone, as the disciples were when Jesus was with them in the flesh. At that time, no one attacked the disciples, or sought to do them harm. The powers of darkness were held at bay while they became familiar with the mind and will of the Lord. But that is not the case now. While God’s people are being kept from falling (Jude 1:24-25), the devil is stalking about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:7-8). The followers of Jesus do well to keep that in mind, and do nothing that may be seen from heaven as tempting the Lord their God (Matt 4:7).

CERTAIN DISCIPLES

“ . . . There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea . . .” Other versions read, “some of the disciples . . . came with us.” NASB

In Paul’s travels, there were frequently believers who joined him along the way. On this particular trip, seven disciples joined him. Earlier, when he was in Asia, Timothy joined them (Acts 16:1-3). When he left Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla joined him (Acts 18:18). Now certain disciples from Caesarea join him.

All of this confirms the common interest brethren had in the work of the Lord. It also makes known something of the spirit of Paul, who was willing to travel with other brethren. Much of this kind of

spirit has been removed by sectarian interests, thereby confirming how evil they are. The real work of the Lord is always attractive to the real people of God.

This entourage was probably of considerable size, possibly numbering as much as twenty or more. What a holy concourse of brethren it was, and what fellowship they must have had along the way. It is always “good and pleasant” for brethren to be together (Psa 133:1-3).

AN OLD DISCIPLE

“ . . . and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.” Other versions read, “bringing with them one Mnason,” ASV “brought with them a certain Mnason,” NKJV “taking us to Mnason,” NASB “brought us to the home of Mnason,” NIV “taking a certain Mnason,” BBE “bringing with them him with whom we may lodge, a certain Mnason,” YLT and “conducting us to the house of Mnason.” AMPLIFIED

Two differing views of the text are presented in the various translations.

- That Mnason went with them from Caesarea to Jerusalem, where he had a home.
- That the group traveled without Mnason to Jerusalem, bringing Paul and company to his home in Jerusalem.

What We Know About Mnason

- He, like Barnabas, was originally from the country of Cyprus (Acts 4:35; 21:16).
- He was an old disciple, probably both in the length of his discipleship as well as his age.
- He had a dwelling in Jerusalem in which the traveling company would reside while there.

It is not unreasonable to think of a man from Cyprus having a home in Jerusalem – particularly in view of the commencement of the church there, and its centrality in the lives of those early believers. Mnason could very well have come down from Jerusalem to Caesarea to meet Paul, possibly traveling with Agabus. In this case, it is not unreasonable to consider him to have returned to Jerusalem with the travelers, taking them to his own home, where the travelers would be residing. I therefore take the text as it stands in the KJV. All of the older versions represent the situation in this manner also (Darby, 1884 Douay-Rheims, 1899 English Revised, 1885 Geneva, 1599 James Murdock, 1852 Bishop’s, 1595 Revised Webster, 1833 Tyndale 1534 Wycliffe, 1382 Young’s Literal. 1862) Some more modern versions do the same (ASV, 1901 BBE 1949).

Here was an older disciples still serving the Lord – still maintaining an interest in the work of the Kingdom – still practicing hospitality with love. There are some things age cannot take from you.

We gather from this text that the home of Mnason was of impressive size, adequate to house such a group. Philemon seems to have owned a similar dwelling (Phile 1:2), and Philip the evangelist as well (Acts 21:8). Others whose homes were given to frequent gatherings included Aquila and Priscilla (Rom 16:3-5; 1 Cor 16:19), and Nymphas (Col 4:15). Gaius, to whom John wrote, was also noted for opening his home to travelers (3 John 1:5-8). Lydia also brought Paul and those with him into her house, where they remained for a while (Acts 16:15-16).

Behold how the early disciples practiced hospitality. If they were blessed to have more than enough, they shared it with the household of faith. In the case of Mnason, he was apparently known for his gracious entertainment of the people of God, and had been designated, or perhaps volunteered, for this large group of people to dwell in his house during their stay in Jerusalem. I assume that this included feeding them as well as providing comfortable accommodations. If you have ever been the

recipient of hospitality in the name of the Lord, you know of the grace that is ministered to the saints through such brotherly consideration.

It is apparent to me that the carrying forth of the work of the Lord involves the practice of godly hospitality (3 John 1:5-8). It is therefore of great concern that this is such a rare trait among the Christians of our times. By the grace of God, there are still brethren noted for this practice, but it is growing more and more rare.

THE BRETHREN RECEIVED THEM GLADLY

“ 17 And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.”

As is customary in Scriptural accounts, details are provided only as they serve to clarify the event, or provide insight into the manner of Divine workings. If a matter is in the record, there is a sense in which it is not incidental. Something is contained in the words that will have a calculated effect upon the heart when duly heeded and perceived.

WHEN WE WERE COME TO JERUSALEM

“And when we were come to Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “arrived in Jerusalem,” NIV and “reached Jerusalem.” CSB

When you consider the aggression of the devil, arriving in Jerusalem is seen in a whole new light. Satan has launched an aggressive campaign against those who “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev 12:17). His initiative is of such magnitude that heaven warns, “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). Those in Christ are candidly told, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Those who are spiritually sleepy, lacking spiritual alertness are told, “But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ” (2 Cor 11:3).

These warnings are issued to all of the people of God in general. But what of those who are involved in Kingdom initiatives? What of those who are “laborers together with God” (1 Cor 3:9), and are invading territories over which the powers of Satan have long dominated?

Once Paul wrote of some significant delays caused by the wicked one. “Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us ” (1 Thess 2:18). Another time, when Paul was engaged in the work of the Lord, the assaults were so vicious that Paul despaired of life. “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Cor 1:8-9).

Who can forget the arresting description Paul gave of experiences that took place during some of his travels: “. . . thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep . . . In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Cor 11:26).

Thus, in spite of Satan’s hindering influences, the full group arrived in Jerusalem. This occurred even though Satan is described as “having great wrath, because he knoweth he hath but a short time” (Rev 12:12). It took place even though, as an adversary, he “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8). Even though he has many “devices” (1 Cor 2:11), the devil could

not stop them. That is a perspective of safety and holy accomplishments that must be brought into our thinking, because “safety is of the Lord” (Prov 21:31).

THE BRETHREN RECEIVED US GLADLY

“ . . . the brethren received us gladly.” Other versions read, “received us warmly,” NIV “were pleased to see us,” BBE “received is joyfully,” MRD “gave us a very warm welcome,” NJB “welcomed us cordially,” LIVING “were very happy to see us,” IE “have us a hearty welcome,” WEYMOUTH “received and welcomed us gladly,” AMPLIFIED and “received us willfully.” WYCLIFFE

The word “gladly” is translated from a word that means “with joy, gladly,” THAYER “warmly,” UBS “pertaining to experiencing happiness, implying ready and willing acceptance - 'happily, gladly,” LOUW-NIDA and “readily.” LEH This is a large word, encompassing quite a few attitudes, and reflecting a sense of values as well. This is not the description of a mere formal greeting, nor does it involve the ordinary perception of politeness. The lives of the brethren at Jerusalem were such as prepared them to receive brethren of the caliber of Paul and his companions. That alone is a most arresting circumstance. There is such a thing as living so you are never prepared to confront and receive godly people. Some people live in such a manner that any exposure to spiritual people is like an intrusion into their lives. This, of course, is an evidence of a deficiency in a love for the brethren – one of the distinguishing marks of the real followers of Jesus (John 13:35; 1 John 3:14).

If it seems unusual to find this blessed trait in one person, here is an entire body of people in whom it was found. Keep in mind that the church at Jerusalem was no small assembly. During this very occasion, James will draw attention to “thousands of Jews . . . which believe,” that were present in Jerusalem at that time (Acts 21:20). Many of the people were no doubt from other places, assembled in Jerusalem for the occasion. Yet, we have every reason to believe that the regular assembly there was of considerable size.

Yet these brethren in Jerusalem had a transcendent unity. During the beginning years of these brethren, it is said that “the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul” (Acts 4:32). Now, several years later, this same spirit is evinced in the hearty welcoming of Paul and company. The brethren in Jerusalem were glad to see them, and received them discerningly as well as lovingly.

The Focus of These Brethren

Keep in mind that the context in which these brethren were recognized and received was that of preaching and teaching the Word. The ministry of Paul, and, consequently, of those who traveled with him, was not that of philanthropy – although I do not doubt that they were considerate in meeting the needs of others. However, they were noted for both the fact and substance of what they taught.

I have noted over the years the relative unimportance that the Christian community attaches to preaching and teaching. Commendable church leaders are rarely noted for what they say. When those who are enamored of them speak about them, it is generally about some impressive thing they have done – not what they have said, or are, saying. Perhaps they have taken a congregation of fifty, and built it to several thousand. Maybe they have provided a safe haven for the poor, or have assembled the young who were meandering throughout the streets into a common place, where entertainment and wholesome pleasure could be enjoyed. There is certainly nothing wrong with such things – but they are not where the accent should be placed. When it comes to what the church actually does, it is primarily “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15) – and “the truth” is always associated with words, and with speaking. Every other ministry it performs is within that context. This should not surprise us, for it is the way the Lord Jesus Himself conducted His ministry. He was a miracle worker, to be sure, but He was primarily a Teacher – “Rabbi” (John 1:38,49; 3:2; 6:25; Matt 5:2; 7:29; 13:54;

Mk 1:21; -22; 2:13; 4:2; Mk 9:31; 10:1; 11:17; 12:35). It is said of Him, “And He taught daily in the temple” (Luke 19:47). “When Jesus Himself summarized His activity He said, “I was daily with you in the temple teaching” (Mark 14:49; Lk 22:53). This is not the only thing He did, but it was the main thing He did – the hub, so to speak, of his total activity! The same was true of our blessed Lord, who was fundamentally noted as a teacher, or “Rabbi.” The church must not allow this perspective to be clouded by developing other priorities. Such priorities, should the church decide to embrace them, will turn them from God.

The report that Paul will give is within the context of teaching, and the results that came from it. That is the means through which the Lord worked.

PAUL GOES IN TO JAMES

“ 18 And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present.”

The entire group now goes in to James. This gather was also with “all the elders.” They come to report the working of the Lord through them. Anyone who is actually doing the work of the Lord is not ashamed to report their activity to notable spiritual leaders.

PAUL WENT IN WITH US UNTO JAMES

“And the day following Paul went in with us unto James . . .” Other versions read, “Paul and the rest of us went in to see James,” NIV “went in to visit James,” NRSV “Paul accompanied us on a visit to James,” NAB “to meet with James,” NLT “Paul took us with him to meet with James,” LIVING and “we went with Paul to call on James.” WEYMOUTH

This is not the brother of John, who was martyred by Herod several years prior to the time of this text (Acts 12:1-2). We understand this to be “James the Lord’s brother” (Gal 1:19). He was one of several brothers to Jesus – technically half-brothers, for Joseph was their father. The multitudes called Jesus their brother, not believing the father of Jesus was God Himself. “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him” (Mark 6:3). Matthew reads, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him” (Mark 6:3). Luke writes that the people said of Jesus, “And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?” (Luke 4:22). Thus, the people assessed Jesus to be:

- The carpenter
- The son of a carpenter
- The brother of James, Joses, Juda, and Simon.
- The son of Mary.
- One who had sisters.
- Joseph’s son.

Neither James (the author of the book of James) nor Jude ever referred to themselves as the Lord’s brother. This is because the relationship they maintained to Jesus was higher than any earthly kinship.

It is interesting to note that the doctrine of Scripture never refers to Jesus as the “Son of Mary.” Rather, it refers to Mary as His “mother” (Matt 1:18; 2:11,13,14,20,21; 16:16; Lk 1:60; 2:33-34; Acts 1:14). As for Jesus, He is declared to be “the Son of God” (Matt 14:33; Mk 1:1; John 1:34,39; Acts 8:37; 9:20; Rom 1:4; 2 Cor 1:12; Gal 2:20; Eph 4:13; Heb 4:14; 6:6; 7:3; 10:29; 1 John 3:8;

4:15; 5:5,10,12,13,20; Rev 2:18).

As for Jesus' brothers, they did not believe on Him in the beginning, even though they knew that He was doing many mighty works. As it is written, "His brethren therefore said unto him, Depart hence, and go into Judaea, that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest. For there is no man that doeth any thing in secret, and he himself seeketh to be known openly. If Thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did His brethren believe in Him " (John 7:3-5). At the time, they were not among His "disciples."

However, there came a time when they did believe on Him. We do not know precisely when this occurred. It is quite possible that Jesus was speaking of his half-brothers when he told the women, "Be not afraid: go tell My brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see Me" (Matt 28:10). And again to Mary Magdalene before that occasion, " go to My brethren , and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17).

We do know that following the ascension of Jesus, they were among those who were praying and waiting for the promise of the Father: "These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren" (Acts 1:14).

Paul refers to the brethren of Jesus as being among those who were traveling about, declaring the Gospel: "Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord , and Cephas?" (1 Cor 9:5). It is also the consensus of Bible scholars that the author of the book of Jude was one of these brothers, referred to as "Juda" in Mark 6:3. "Judah, Judas, Juda, and Jude are all forms of the same name. The "Jude" who wrote the epistle of Jude refers to himself as "the brother of James." Neither James (the author of the book of James) nor Jude ever referred to themselves as the Lord's brother. This is because the relationship they maintained to Jesus was higher than any earthly kinship.

JAMES

James is mentioned at least nine times in Scripture. The manner in which He is mentioned confirms that he was a key figure in the church at Jerusalem.

Some notable commentators feel that James the Lord's brother was also an apostle – "James the Less" (Matt 15:40), also called "James the son of Alphaeus" (Matt 10:2). However, this cannot be, for the text that states his brethren did not yet believe on Him took place after the feeding of the 5,000 – and the twelve apostles had been chosen some time before that (John 6 and 7 with Matt 10:2-4). Matthew records the choosing of the apostles in the tenth chapter of his Gospel, and the feeding of the 5,000 in the fourteenth chapter. Thus James the Lord's brother cannot be one of the twelve apostles as some allege.

James is mentioned at least nine times in Scripture. The manner in which He is mentioned confirms that he was a key figure in the church at Jerusalem.

- When Peter was delivered from prison, and had reported to those who were praying for him at the home of Mary, he told them "Go and show these things to James, and to the brethren" (Acts 12:17).
- It was James who weighed the report of certain men teaching that Gentiles had to be circumcised after the manner of Moses. He then recommended the manner in which that crisis should be addressed, which recommendation was received (Acts 15:13-22).
- Our text, in which Paul and those with him went in to speak to James (Acts 21:18).
- Paul says there was a special appearance of the resurrected Christ to James (1 Cor 15:7).

- Paul conversed with James, the only other apostle with whom he consulted being Peter (Gal 1:18-19).
- James, together with Peter and John, were considered to be "pillars" in Jerusalem
- When Peter was in Antioch with Paul, James sent several brethren from Jerusalem to be with them (Gal 2:12).
- In his epistle, James refers to himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1).
- Jude, in writing his epistle, refers to himself as "the brother of James" (Jude 1:1).

This visit is not specified in any other writings. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul mentions going to Jerusalem two times. The first was three years after his conversion (Gal 1:18). Then, it was to see Peter, who is not said to have been at the meeting of our text. The second was fourteen years after his conversion, when he returned with Barnabas to Jerusalem, also taking Titus with him (Gal 2:1-2). Paul had long been separated from Barnabas at the time of our text, and Timothy was with him, not Titus.

HOLY CONCLAVES

This is another one of the holy conclaves, or private gatherings, in which weighty matters were considered. There are several such meetings recorded in the book of Acts and the epistles.

- At the choosing of a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:15-26).
- When Peter reported what had taken place at the house of Cornelius (Acts 11:1-18).
- When they gathered with Paul and Barnabas, and several from Antioch, to consider the matter of circumcision (Acts 15:4-30).
- When Paul and Barnabas rehearsed their work among the Gentiles to the church in Antioch (Acts 14:26-27). Peter was also at this meeting, together with several sent by James from Jerusalem (Gal 2:11-14).
- Fourteen years after his conversion, when Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem to report the working of the Lord among the Gentiles (Gal 2:1-10).

There was a fellowship that existed in the early church that has become strange and unusual in our day. The intrusion of sectarianism has robbed the church-at-large of the sweetness of this kind of profitable fellowship.

ALL THE ELDERS WERE PRESENT

" . . . and all the elders were present." Other versions read, "all the rulers," BBE "all the elders came there," DARBY "all the ancients were assembled," DOUAY "all the spiritual leaders were present," GWN "all the presbyters were present," NAB "all the elders of the Jerusalem church were present," NLT "all the elders came together," PNT "all the elders also came." YLT

Elders may have been aged, but not necessarily so. They were men who were mature in the faith, being able to labor in and handle the Word profitably. The following are some of the activities associated with being an elder.

- Feeding the flock of God (1 Pet 5:2).
- Willingly taking the oversight of the flock (1 Pet 5:2).
- Ruling in Kingdom matters (Heb 13:7,17,24).
- Speaking the Word of God (Heb 13:7).

- Living a life of faith that can be followed (Heb 13:7).
- Able to convince the gainsayers (Tit 1:9).
- Labor in the Word and doctrine (1 Tim 5:17).
- Setting apart Kingdom laborers (1 Tim 4:14).

We do not have any idea of the number of elders that were in the Jerusalem church. However, they are frequently mentioned, particularly in the book of Acts.

- The early collection gathered for the poor saints at Jerusalem was delivered to the elders there by Paul and Silas (Acts 11:30).
- The apostles and elders came together to consider the matter of circumcision (Acts 15:2,4,6).
- The resolution put forward by James during that meeting pleased the apostles and elders (Acts 15:22).
- A letter was prepared for the Gentile churches to correct misconceptions of circumcision, and establish certain matters of conduct. This was sent by the apostles and elders (Acts 15:23).
- The decree that was written was ordained by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 16:4).

The unusual qualifications of these men are seen in the fact that they joined with the apostles in making critical decisions.

Now, at the presence of Paul, all of the elders are present. No apostle is mentioned in relation to this visit to Jerusalem. The words “apostle” and “apostles” do not appear in the book of Acts after chapter sixteen (from Acts 16:4 through the end of chapter 28). Prior to that (1:1-16:2), they are mentioned thirty times. The last mentioning of Peter (“Peter,” ”Cephas,” or “Simon”) in the book of Acts is found in Acts 15:7. The last direct mention of the apostle John in this book is found in Acts 8:14. He is mentioned indirectly as James’ brother in Acts 12:2. With the exception of Peter, James, and John, the other nine apostles are mentioned a single time in the book of Acts (Acts 1:13). None of the other apostles (with the solitary exception of Matthias; Acts 1:23,26) are mentioned by name after Acts 1:13 (Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James).

Peter is mentioned twelve times from Romans through the Revelation (1 Cor 1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5; Gal 1:18; 2:7,8,9,11,14; 1 Pet 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1). John is mentioned six times from Romans through Revelation (Gal 2:9; Rev 1:1; 4,9; 21:2; 22:8). By way of comparison, Paul (“Paul” or “ Saul”) is mentioned one hundred and forty-six times in the book of Acts, and twenty-nine times from Romans through Second Peter.

We know from church history that the other apostles traveled throughout the world, preaching the Gospel and reaping the harvest. Records from church history indicate the following.

And what does all of this mean? Simply this: the emphasis was being placed on the Gentile church, and the preaching and activities of Paul. Prior to that, the emphasis was placed on the Jews, and on the church in Jerusalem. This by no means suggests that the twelve apostles and the church in Jerusalem were no longer significant – and no inspired person ever thought that was the case. Notwithstanding, it does appear to amplify somewhat on Jesus’ words prior to His death: “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord” (Mat 23:39). Under ordinary circumstances, it might appear as though this would mean the dissolution of the church that was centered in

Jerusalem for several years. However, in order to thwart any intentions of the evil one in this matter, the Lord raised up an apostle for the Gentiles, and established several strong churches to carry on the work. Thus the work continued.

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HISTORY ON THE APOSTLES AND KEY MEN

Most of our information about the deaths of the apostles is derived from early church traditions. While tradition is unreliable as to small details, it very seldom contains outright inventions. Eusebius, the most important of the early church historians wrote his history of the early church in A.D. 325. He wrote, "The apostles and disciples of the Savior scattered over the whole world, preached the Gospel everywhere." The Church historian Schumacher researched the lives of the apostles and recounted the history of their martyrdoms.

Matthew suffered martyrdom in Ethiopia, killed by a sword wound.

John faced martyrdom when he was boiled in a huge basin of boiling oil during a wave of persecution in Rome. However, he was miraculously delivered from death. John was then sentenced to the mines on the prison island of Patmos. He wrote his prophetic Book of Revelation on Patmos. The apostle John was later freed and returned to serve as Bishop of Edessa in modern Turkey. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

Peter was crucified upside down on an x-shaped cross, according to church tradition because he told his tormentors that he felt unworthy to die in the same way that Jesus Christ had died.

James the Greater, a son of Zebedee, was a fisherman by trade when Jesus called him to a lifetime of ministry. As a strong leader of the church, James was ultimately beheaded at Jerusalem. The Roman officer who guarded James watched amazed as James defended his faith at his trial. Later, the officer walked beside James to the place of execution. Overcome by conviction, he declared his new faith to the judge and knelt beside James to accept beheading as a Christian.

Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael, was a missionary to Asia. He witnessed to our Lord in present day Turkey. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia when he was flayed to death by a whip.

Thaddaeus may have preached in Assyria (eastern Iraq) and Persia (Iran), before joining with Simon the Zealot and being killed with him in Persia.

Andrew was crucified on an x-shaped cross in Patras, Greece. After being whipped severely by seven soldiers they tied his body to the cross with cords to prolong his agony. His followers reported that, when he was led toward the cross, Andrew saluted it in these words: "I have long desired and expected this happy hour. The cross has been consecrated by the body of Christ hanging on it." He continued to preach to his tormentors for two days until he expired.

Thomas was stabbed with a spear in India during one of his missionary trips to establish the church in the subcontinent. Thomas may have laboured for the Gospel in Parthia (including modern Iraq and Iran), but stronger traditions link him with southern India. Indian Christians from the west coast Kerala area claim they were evangelized by Thomas, who was later speared to death near Madras on the east coast. Mount St. Thomas, close to Madras is

associated with his name.

Matthias , the apostle chosen to replace the traitor Judas Iscariot, was stoned and then beheaded. He may have preached and been martyred in Ethiopia, Other traditions place him in Judea, and later Cappadocia (eastern Turkey) and the Caspian Sea area.

Simon is referred to both as the "Cananaean" and the "Zealot". The titles may refer to him being "zealous", or to his membership of one of the Jewish revolutionary movements known as Zealots. Nothing else is known about him. One tradition is that he first preached in Egypt, before joining Jude and travelling to Persia, where both were martyred. Simon may have been crucified or hacked to death.

The apostle **Paul** was tortured and then beheaded by the evil Emperor Nero at Rome in A.D. 67. Paul endured a lengthy imprisonment which allowed him to write his many epistles to the churches he had formed throughout the Roman Empire. These letters, which taught many of the foundational doctrines of Christianity, form a large portion of the New Testament.

Mark died in Alexandria, Egypt, after being dragged by horses through the streets until he was dead.

Luke was hanged in Greece as a result of his tremendous preaching to the lost.

James the Just, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, was thrown over a hundred feet down from the southeast pinnacle of the Temple when he refused to deny his faith in Christ. When they discovered that he survived the fall, his enemies beat James to death with a fuller's club. This was the same pinnacle where Satan had taken Jesus during the Temptation.

Barnabas , one of the group of seventy disciples, wrote the Epistle of Barnabas. He preached throughout Italy and Cyprus. Barnabas was stoned to death at Salonica.

Jude , the brother of Jesus, was killed with arrows when he refused to deny his faith in Christ.

The details of the martyrdoms of the disciples and apostles are found in traditional early church sources. These traditions were recounted in the writings of the church fathers and the first official church history written by the historian Eusebius in A.D. 325. Although we cannot at this time verify every detail historically, the universal belief of the early Christian writers was that each of the apostles had faced martyrdom faithfully without denying their faith in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Compiled from Grant R. Jeffry's book, "The Signature of God"

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth " (Rev 14:13).

PAUL DECLARES WHAT GOD HAD DONE BY HIS MINISTRY

“ 19 And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.”

Having met with James and the elders from Jerusalem, Paul recounts the working of God through his ministry. In this manner, the Lord will receive glory, and the saints refreshment.

Having met with James and the elders from Jerusalem, Paul recounts the working of God through his ministry. In this manner, the Lord will receive glory, and the saints refreshment. He will draw

attention to what God is doing.

WHEN HE HAD SALUTED THEM

“And when he had saluted them . . .” Other versions read, “greeted them,” NASB “said how glad he was to see them,” BBE and “when he had embraced them.” GENEVA As noted in some previous texts, the word “salute” involves the whole person: spirit, soul, and body. There is the embrace bodily, the affection of the soul, and the respect of the spirit. There is esteem in saluting someone, an affinity with them, and a profound spiritual attraction to them. This is the outworking of the love of the brethren (1 Pet 1:22), preferring one another (Rom 12:10), and highly esteeming others better than self (Phil 2:3).

HE DECLARED PARTICULARLY

“ . . . he declared particularly . . .” Other versions read , “in detail,” NKJV “one by one,” NASB and “a detailed account.” BBE Paul did not simply provide a general overview of what the Lord had done through him, but furnished such details as would promote the glory of God.

WHAT THE LORD HAD WROUGHT

“ . . . what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.” Other versions read, “which God had done,” NKJV and “God had accomplished.” NAB

With care, Paul related what the Lord had done, not what he had done. The works were through him, but not by him. Thus he gave substance to the doctrinal declaration, “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

These days there is an approach to gatherings that is less and less associated with a testimony of the working of the Lord. There is a fast developing notion that singing together is the preferred mode of communication. As much profit as there is in such activity, when done with grace in the heart unto the Lord (Col 3:16), gatherings of the saints should include a rehearsal of the wonderful works of God .

In Deborah’s prophetic song, she spoke of the benefit of declaring the mighty acts of the Lord. “They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD , even the righteous acts toward the inhabitants of his villages in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates” (Judg 5:11).

Samuel also did this when he said to Israel, “Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the LORD of all the righteous acts of the LORD, which he did to you and to your fathers” (1 Sam 12:7).

David wrote, “They shall abundantly utter the memory of thy great goodness, and shall sing of thy righteousness” (Psa 145:7). He also affirmed, “I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings” (Psa 77:12).

So it is that Paul, in keeping with people of faith throughout the ages, will declare what the Lord has done.

All of this makes perfect sense, for Paul had carried the letters that James suggested to the Gentile churches, delivering their message to the people. Now he will report the results.

Remember the Letters

The significance of Paul relating the effects of his ministry goes back to chapter fifteen, when he

and Barnabas had gone up to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders concerning the matter of circumcision, and various points of the Law. At that time, letters were prepared for the Gentile churches, instructing them more fully in the ways of the Lord, and what is expected of the followers of Christ. These letters were written to “the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia” (Acts 15:23).

When in those areas, it is said of Paul and those traveling with him, “And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily” (Acts 16:4).

Some of the things that took place during that time include the following.

- When they read the letters in Antioch, they rejoiced for the consolation. Judas and Silas, prophets from Jerusalem, remained there for a season. After Judas returned to Jerusalem, Silas remained. Paul and Barnabas continued, preaching the word for many days, along “with many others also” (15:30-35).
- Paul and Silas went throughout Syria and Cilicia “confirming the churches” (15:41).
- Timothy joined them in the Derbe/Lystra area, and they “went through the cities,” delivering the decrees “which were ordained by the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.” This resulted in the churches being “established in the faith,” increasing “in number daily” (16:4-5).
- Lydia and her household were converted in Philippi (16:12-15).
- A jailor and his entire household were converted while Paul and Silas were in prison (16:25-35).
- After being released from prison they comforted the brethren at Lydia’s house. This was the beginning of the church at Philippi (16:40).

Some believed in Thessalonica, even though there was some fierce opposition. The church in Thessalonica was launched at that time (17:1-4).

• Thus Paul acknowledged the hand of the Lord through his travels among the Gentiles. No doubt, it also cheered the hearts of James and the elders to hear of the

- Paul and Silas journey to Berea, where they ministered in the synagogue, and “many of them believed” (17:10-12).
- Paul ministers in Athens, and “certain men clave to him.” Among them as Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (17:34).
- Paul ministers in Corinth for a year and a half, persuading both Jews and Greeks. At the word of Jesus, he continued that full time ”teaching the word of God among them” (18:9-11).
- Paul came to Ephesus and reasoned with the Jews. He then left them, Saying he would return (18:19-20).
- After spending some time in Antioch, Paul went over all the country of Galatia and Phygia, “strengthening the disciples” (18:23).
- Paul confronts some disciples in Ephesus who had been baptized with John’s baptism. After instructing them more perfectly, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus, Paul laid his hands on them, the Spirit came upon them, and they prophesied in other languages (19:1-7).

- Paul continues for two years in Ephesus, where “special miracles” were wrought by his hands. The name of the Lord was magnified, many confessed their deed, burned their books of curious arts, and the Word of God “grew mightily and prevailed” (19:9-20).
- A devastating blow was dealt to idolatry in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-41).
- Paul went over parts of Macedonia giving them “much exhortation” (20:2).
- Paul and company spent seven days in Troaz, where they met with the saints. At this time he raised Eutychus from the dead (20:6-12).
- At Miletus he called for the elders of the church in Ephesus and warned them of the coming apostasy (20:17-38).
- Paul and company spend seven days in Tyre, meeting with and comforting the disciples there (21:4-6).
- Paul and his comrades spend several days with Philip the evangelist, and others join them there (21:8-14).

Thus Paul acknowledged the hand of the Lord through his travels among the Gentiles. No doubt, it also cheered the hearts of James and the elders to hear of the unreserved acceptance of their letters. They had worked together for the Lord. Thus a slice of Kingdom time has been described.

CONCLUSION

The chronicles recorded in Acts are a kind of detail that is introduced to us in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. It pertains to holy men and women, with the wicked only being mentioned incidentally. The record of sinful people is certainly present: Judas, the Jewish leaders, Ananias and Sapphira, Simon the sorcerer, Herod, Elymas, unbelieving Jews, the silversmiths of Ephesus, and others. However, they are never the subject of the revelation, and are only mentioned because they were aligned against the holy people of record. The inspired writer never lingers long upon them, but focuses his attention upon those who have been joined to Christ. He never spends any significant time addressing social or political concerns. There is no official Christian stance declared concerning a recommendation for rulers and political climate. The laws passed by the Roman senate are never the subject of exposition.

The status of families in the various cities of record is not mentioned: Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch of Syria, Caesarea, Antioch of Pisidia, Derbe, Lystra, Philippi, Berea, Thessalonica, Athens, Ephesus, Troaz, Miletus, Tyre, etc. What is it that is said about such key cities? If it were not for the presence of the saints in them, we would not read of them at all.

It is not to be denied that an inordinate amount of time is being spent these days in matters that are not directly related to life in Christ Jesus. By “directly related,” I mean aspects of life that are integral to living unto the Lord. Some may argue that Christians ought to be involved in the business and political facets of life, as a sort of sanctifying element. However, I do not know that a point is actually made of having influence among men as the result of an intentional effort to be with the ungodly – unless it be to preach the Gospel to them. Even those examples are very few in Scripture.

And why make such an observation. Is it to be taken as an expression of disinterest in the souls of men? Not at all! When persons actually do live unto the Lord, living by faith and walking in the Spirit, holy influence is exerted wherever they are. Their light does not shine by intention, but because they themselves are walking in that light. Furthermore, as it is written, the Lord “will light my candle” (Psa 18:28), which “candle” is man’s spirit (Prov 20:27). If ever the light of God can get into a person, it will not fail to get out, for “a city set upon a hill cannot be hid” (Matt 5:14). Even men do not light a candle and put it under a bushel – much less does God do such a thing. He does not violate His own principles.

Doctrinally, the focus of human activity is placed upon the identity of the individual with God, through Christ, and by faith. Everything flows from there, because such an association is all-pervading, and cannot be concealed. If you insist on hiding the fact that you are a Christian, you will not long be one. That is because spiritual life requires sustaining as well as initiation. That is the doctrine of Scripture. The book of Acts is a record of that actually being done.

This is a kind of snapshot of the manner of thinking that is to be found among the people of God. It is consistent through all generations.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #88

PAUL PURIFIES HIMSELF WITH FOUR MEN TAKING A VOW

“ 21:20 ”And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: 21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. 22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. 23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; 24 Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. 25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication. 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them. 27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.) 30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut.” (Acts 21:20-30)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

There is a certain versatility in newness of life that is scarcely comprehended in our time. In fact, throughout history it has been misunderstood and abused by professing Christians. Those with a Law mindset do not comprehend the text before us. It violates what they perceive to be the will of the Lord. However, when human opinions differ from the decisions made by men who are of the caliber of James and Paul, I hardly see that we have any choice concerning who to follow. Upon the advice of James, and in order to remove a stumbling block from those whose understanding was not yet mature, Paul will join four Jewish believers who have made a vow, and will pay the expenses related to that vow. When he is seen in the Temple by some Jews from Asia, they stirred up the people, laid their hands on Paul, telling the people he had been speaking against the Jews and their customs, as well as the Law and the Temple. With all the people being in an uproar, the accusers took Paul from the Temple, and shut

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- **WHEN THEY HEARD IT, THEY GLORIFIED THE LORD (21:20a)**
- **MANY THOUSANDS OF JEWS WHICH BELIEVE (21:20b-21)**
- **THEY WILL HEAR (21:22)**
- **DO THEREFORE THIS THAT WE SAY UNTO THEE (21:23-24)**
- **AS TOUCHING THE GENTILES WHICH BELIEVE (21:25)**
- **PAUL PURIFIES HIMSELF (21:26)**
- **WHEN THE SEVEN DAYS WERE ENDED (21:27-28)**
- **THEY HAD SEEN PAUL WITH TROPHIMUS (21:29)**
- **ALL THE CITY WAS MOVED (21:30)**
- **CONCLUSION**

the temple doors.

Thus a saga commences that will finally terminate with Paul being in Rome, preaching the Gospel as Jesus said he would (Acts 23:11), and then being martyred.

THE SERIOUSNESS REFLECTED IN THE TEXT

Through this text there is a level of spiritual seriousness that stands in stark contrast to the casualness of our time.

- **PAUL.** He has been laboring for the Lord, and now comes to give a report of the how the Lord has worked through his ministry.
- **JAMES AND THE ELDERS** listen intently to Paul's report. Giving glory to God for the things that had been done.
- **THOUSANDS OF JEWS.** These were Jews who had believed and were concerned about what they had heard relative to Paul. They are described as being "zealous of the law."
- **FOUR JEWISH MEN.** Four unnamed men who had taken a holy vow before the Lord, and were in the process of fulfilling it.
- **CONCERN FOR THE JEWS WHO BELIEVE.** James is concerned that the believing Jews do now have a false impression of Paul, and therefore is moved to suggest a certain course of action.

• **THE GENTILES WHO BELIEVE.** The Gentiles who had believed were easily directed in a wise course of living by the letters sent to them from the Apostles and elders.

• **THE JEWS FROM ASIA.** Although they were opposed to Paul, it was on the basis of their commitment to the Law and the Old Covenant.

This is the context in which the events of our text take place: one of religious sobriety and zeal.

Such activities take place in the domain of soberness. I do not know how it is possible to engage such adversarial influences while lacking seriousness. In fact, delusion itself requires a form of sobriety and seriousness.

I cannot help but observe how different this is from the religious environment of our time. There is almost a total lack of sobriety and spiritual sensitivity in the religious gatherings of our time. A significant percentage of Christian meetings are actually spiritually disarming, catering to the flesh, speckled with humor, and flaunting the wisdom of the world before the faces of the people. It is questionable whether the Holy Spirit can work in such surroundings.

The environment of Christian gatherings is a testimonial to where the people have been living. It reveals whether their minds have been set on things above, or things on the earth; whether they have been living for themselves, or unto the Lord. When surroundings make it difficult to receive the Word of God, it is because they are saturated with unbelief.

Those who opposed the truth were generally driven by their religious convictions – whether the Jews, or the silversmiths of Ephesus.

THE NATURE OF THE WARFARE

War itself is a sobering thing. It is much more so when we ponder what is involved in spiritual warfare. Believers are apprised of the fact that they are wrestling “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12). Thoughts and ways of thinking are also involved in the good fight of faith: “For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:3-5).

Such activities take place in the domain of soberness. I do not know how it is possible to engage such adversarial influences while lacking seriousness. In fact, delusion itself requires a form of sobriety and seriousness.

The promotion of a casual religion, or one that allows for undisciplined thought, is nothing more than a bottomless pit. When religion is driven by frivolity and humor, an environment is created that is spiritually hostile. A spiritual mind cannot profit from such an environ, because it is antithetical to every aspect of spiritual life, whether it is growing up into Christ, resisting the devil, or engaging hostile forces in spiritual warfare.

THE DIFFERENCE IN TODAY’S RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

The difference in today’s religious environment is largely owing to the lack of godly sobriety. The spiritual posture that is encouraged is one in which Satan can catch the people unawares, for they are ignorant of his devices. It is also one in which the Holy Spirit is not apt to work, because the mind of the people is too close to the earth, and too far from heaven. The concepts of strangership and pilgrimage are strange to the modern church. Not loving the world has the sound of an unfamiliar note. The admonition to seek the things that are above has a strange and confusing sound to it, for the

people do not appear to be conscience of the existence of such things, much less feel a compulsion to seek after them. All of this has happened amidst a flurry of religious activities, increased mega-churches, and ministers that are writing best sellers. How-to religion is a burgeoning business. However the results of it all are not good. Considering whoever is responsible for feeding the flock of God, all of this has happened on their watch – which means they did not watch as they were supposed to. Someone of responsibility let seducers into the assembly. Failing to do what is required of them. I do not know how it is possible to ignore this circumstance.

WHEN THEY HEARD IT, THEY GLORIFIED THE LORD

“ 21:20 And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord . . . ”

One can scarcely imagine this kind of report being given to the average church leaders. None of the things that mark successful enterprises were included in the report. Rather, it concerned what God had done through Paul’s ministry. The capacity to listen to and absorb such reports is marvelous, indeed.

The report of “particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by” Paul’s “ministry,” produced some effects among James and the elders of Jerusalem. Their response will reveal, much about them, and where their hearts were focused. Their love for the brethren, and quickness to recognize what the Lord had done will also be made known. There will be no sectarian or factious response, or any attempt to neutralize the report by comparing it to what was being done in Jerusalem.

WHEN THEY HEARD IT

“And when they heard it . . . ” Other versions read, “when they heard this,” NIV “and hearing it,” BBE “On hearing it,” CJB “having heard it,” DARBY “heard about everything,” GWN “after hearing this, NLT “heard these things,” IE “had heard his statement,” WEYMOUTH and “on hearing this account.” PHILLIPS

As it is used here, the word “heard” means, “to attend to (use the faculty of hearing), *consider* what is or has been said . . . to understand, perceive the sense of what is said.” THAYER There is interest, attentiveness, and understanding in this kind of hearing. It goes far beyond merely hearing the sound of human speech. There is discernment – spiritual discernment. When Paul reported what God had done through his ministry, these hearers were able to associate what was done with the work and purpose of the Lord.

One can scarcely imagine this kind of report being given to the average church leaders. None of the things that mark successful enterprises were included in the report. Rather, it concerned what God had done through Paul’s ministry. The capacity to listen to and absorb such reports is marvelous, indeed. It is the outworking of being reconciled to God, having his laws written upon our hearts, and possessing the Holy Spirit within.

AND GLORIFIED THE LORD

“ . . . they glorified the Lord . . . ” Other versions read, “began glorifying God,” NASB “praise God,” NIV “gave praise to God,” BBE “gave glory to God,” NJB “were glorifying the Lord,” YLT and “they adored and exalted and praised and thanked God.” AMPLIFIED

Upon hearing the report of Paul, James and the elders “glorified the Lord,” or “gave praise to God.” Pricisely what does that mean?

In our time, There is a great deal of confusion, and even disinterest, in the matter of glorifying the Lord, or praising Him. Some have even equated this with singing choruses. In fact, there is a growing

tendency among professed believers to actually limit praising and glorifying God to joint expressions in song. While “singing and making melody in our heart to the Lord” (Eph 5:19), and “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Col 3:16) – and doing so in our hearts – is an appointed means or bringing profit to the saints, it is by no means the exclusive, or even superior means through which God is glorified or praised. The “fruit of our lips” is certainly not limited to singing (Heb 13:15). Yet, this impression is growing in its impact upon the Christian community. Were you to ask what role the new “worship leader” plays in the congregation, you would be hard pressed to find anyone who did not say it was the person who led the singing, now referred to as “praise and worship.”

None of these concepts were in place at the time of our text. When James and the elders heard the insightful report of Paul, they did not begin singing, entering into a time of, what men call, “praise and worship.” While such a thing may very well have been included, most thinking people know is not the default meaning of the text.

Early in the Acts, it is written that “men glorified God for that which was done” (Acts 4:21). This had particular reference to the healing of the lame man at the gate called Beautiful. Later, when Peter reported the conversion of the Gentiles at the house of Cornelius, those who heard him “ glorified God , saying Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18). In Antioch of Pisidia, when Paul declared that God had commanded “saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:47), the Gentiles “were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord : and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).

In Romans, the Gentile world was charged with not glorifying God “as God,” choosing rather to change the glory of God into an image (Rom 1:21). When the churches in Judea heard that Saul of Tarsus, who once persecuted the church, was “preaching the faith which once he destroyed,” they “glorified God” in him (Gal 1:24). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, telling them he was praying that God would count them worthy of calling, “That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified ” in them (2 Thess 1:12). Peter wrote, “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth: that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:11). To those who were being reproached for the name of the Lord he wrote, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part He is glorified ” (1 Pet 4:14).

Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome, “That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God , even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 15:6). To the Corinthians he wrote, “For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's” (1 Cor 6:20). Peter wrote to dispersed believers, “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12). Again he wrote, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet 4:16).

A Brief Summation

Notice what is said about God being glorified.

- God was glorified for what was done.
- God was glorified by saying He had granted repentance to the Gentiles.
- The word of the Lord concerning the acceptance of the Gentiles was glorified.
- God was not glorified when the Gentiles to serve gods of their own making.
- The disciples glorified God when they heard that Saul of Tarsus was preaching the

faith.

- The name of the Lord Jesus is glorified by the upright walk of His people.

To me, it is no wonder that Satan has so muddied the waters concerning the praise of God. He has brought influences to bear upon unstable hearts which has led them to believe that glorifying the Lord, or rendering praise to Him, will somehow make up for the deficiencies in men

- Those who minister with the ability that God gives make it possible for God to be glorified in all things.
- God is glorified when His people are persecuted for righteousness' sake.
- The church is to glorify God with one mouth and one mind.
- God is to be glorified in our body, by an upright conversation.
- A holy life will provoke enemies to glorify God in the day of their visitation.
- Those who suffer as a Christian can glorify God.

What Does It Mean to Glorify God?

Glorifying God is an expression of faith and insight. It is the result of beholding the hand of God in the affairs of men. This has particular regard to what has been accomplished in Christ Jesus, the implications of those accomplishments, and the general working of salvation in the earth. People cannot glorify the Lord in a state of ignorance, or in a condition in which the hand of the Lord is not clearly seen. When God works, those who recognize and appreciate it can give Him glory. Faith will compel them to do so, and the benefits realized from such insight will cause them to do it thankfully.

To me, it is no wonder that Satan has so muddied the waters concerning the praise of God. He has brought influences to bear upon unstable hearts which has led them to believe that glorifying the Lord, or rendering praise to Him, will somehow make up for the deficiencies in men – that the God from whom they are in practical alienation, will suddenly draw near to them to bless and strengthen them. All of this is perceived as being done in spite of the miserable condition of the people.

In the word of God, those who glorified God were cognizant of His presence, and were already engaged in the will of God. They were familiar enough with God to discern His unique and effective work.

MANY THOUSANDS OF JEWS WHICH BELIEVE

“ . . . and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: 21 And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. . . ”

James and the elders hear of what God had done through Paul among the Gentiles, and immediately think of the Jewish believers. It was important to them that an incorrect view of Paul's ministry not be embraced by their own people. Intuitively, they seemed to be keenly aware that the working of God through Paul's ministry did not mean that the Jews were being abandoned. Although the majority of them had not believed on Christ, they had not been discarded by the Lord as a despised race. Only those who did NOT believe were ever rebuked by Paul. Never did he insinuate that, as a nation, they were now a despised and rejected people. Yet, people with just a smattering of knowledge might be drawn to that conclusion. Also, those Jews who had been teaching the necessity of circumcision to be saved (Acts 15:1) may very well have given a report of Paul that could easily lead people to such conclusions.

Now, we are exposed to the reasoning of holy men who do not want people to draw the wrong conclusions about the legitimate work of God, or the people through whom that work was being done. Oh, that there were more such people in our time, who would be quick to put-down any misperceptions of those through whom God is working.

MANY THOUSANDS OF BELIEVING JEWS

“ . . . and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe . . .” Other versions read, “many myriads of Jews who have believed,” NKJV “thousands of Jews have believed,” NIV “how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews,” NRSV “what thousands there are among the Jews, who have the faith,” BBE “how many tens of thousands of believers there are among the Judeans,” CJB “you can see that thousands of Jews have become believers,” IE and “how many tens of thousands of Jews there are among those who have accepted the faith.” WEYMOUTH

The impact of the preaching in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas is made known in this text. What a description of the number of believers in a given city at one time: “many thousands.”

The word “many” means, “great . . . how much,” THAYER “a considerable amount,” LOUW-NIDA “magnitude,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “how great.” GINGRICH This term is not applied to the Jews themselves – i.e. “many Jews, or a great number of Jews.” The large number is applied to the word “thousands” – i.e. a staggering number of thousands. As used here, the word “thousands” means “ten thousand . . . innumerable multitude, an unlimited number, like our ‘myriads,’ THAYER and “countless thousands.” FRIBERG Synonyms would be “thousands upon thousands,” and “tens of thousands.” A similar expression (**muria,dej muria,dwn**)is found in Revelation 9:16: “And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand : and I heard the number of them” (Rev 9:16).

This number doubtless included a number of dispersed Jews who were gathered together in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost – even as there was on the day of Pentecost following Christ’s ascension into glory (Acts 2:5). The difference in this text is that the Jews of reference were all “believers.”

The term “believers” is never applied to anyone outside of Christ . This is a term applied to those who were “added to the Lord” (Acts 4:14). From Genesis through Malachi, the words “believe” and “believed,” as related to a response to God Himself, are only used favorably nine times, the other use being “believed not ” (Gen 15:6; Ex 4:31; 14:31;Psa 27:13; 106:12; 116:10; 119:66; Dan 6:23; Jonah 3:5). By way of comparison, they are used 123 times in Matthew through Revelation (58 times in Matthew through John, 30 times in Acts, and 35 times from Romans through the Revelation).

Matthew 35 AD

Mark 42 AD

Luke 59 AD

John 42 AD

Acts 63 AD

Romans 57 AD

1 Corinthians 56 AD

2 Corinthians 57 AD

Galatians 53 AD

Ephesians 61-63 AD

Philippians 61-63 AD

Colossians 61-63 AD

1 Thessalonians 51 AD

2 Thessalonians 52 AD

1 Timothy 63 AD

2 Timothy 67 AD

Titus 63 AD

Philemon 61-63 AD

Hebrews 61-62 AD

James 40-41 AD

1 Peter 64-65 AD

2 Peter 65-66 AD

1 John 63-64 AD

2 John 63-64 AD

3 John 63-64 AD

Jude 66-67 AD

Revelation 95 AD

These dates are only human estimates, and there are varied opinions about them. Yet, they offer a valid comparative analysis of general times .

As Paul stated, believing was not something associated with the Law, or the First Covenant. As it is written, “And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them” (Gal 3:12). Other versions read, “not based upon faith,” NIV “does not rest on faith,” NRSV “not based on trusting and being faithful,” CJB “have nothing to do with faith,” GWN “does not depend upon faith,” NAB and “does not rest on faith [does not require faith, has nothing to do with faith].”
AMPLIFIED

This staggering multitude of believers, therefore, cannot be referring to devout Jews who were not in Christ Jesus. The Law was calculated to bring men to Christ (Gal 3:24), but it could not induct them into Christ or bring them to believe on Him. Believing is a response to the Gospel, not the Law (Mk 16:15-16). It has to do with responding to Jesus, not the commandments of the Law.

The law was calculated to prepare men for Christ by means of a devoted and consistent life that was lived with an acute sensitivity to the will of God. It was that very circumstance that defiled the conscience, for the Law had no power to effect the changes that it demanded. Like all other believers in the book of Acts, this vast number of Jews were disciples of Christ, having believed and obeyed

the Gospel.

THEY ARE ALL ZEALOUS OF THE LAW

“ . . . and they are all zealous of the law . . .” Other versions read, “zealous for the Law,” NASB “have a great respect for the Law,” BBE “deeply committed to Moses' Teachings,” GWN “zealous observers of the Law,” NAB “ardent observers of the Law,” NET “staunch upholders of the Law,” NJB “follow the Law of Moses very seriously,” NLT “earnest followers of the Law,” PNT “very insistent that Jewish believers must continue to follow the Jewish traditions and customs,” LIVING “they all think it is very important to obey the law,” IE and “enthusiastic upholders of the [Mosaic] Law.” AMPLIFIED

In reading a text like this, one must keep in mind that the New Testament Scriptures had not yet been written and dispersed. With some slight differences of view, conservative Bible scholars estimate that the books of Matthew through Revelation were written between 35 AD and 95 AD.

It is estimated that the occasion of our text took place around 57 AD. This being the case, Only Matthew, Mark, John, Galatians, and First and Second Thessalonians had been written – to say nothing of the dissemination of the letters to all of the churches. The point is that much of the teaching with which earnest disciples are now acquainted was not yet common knowledge among those early disciples. They had met and discussed extensively the necessity of circumcision, as well as what portions of the Law were still to be honored (Acts 15).

When it says these Jews were zealous for the Law, it does not mean they were adhering to it as a basis of salvation - attempting, so to speak, to establish their own righteousness. That was the status of unbelieving Jews, not believing ones (Rom 10:3).

The Old Covenant, with all of its varied ceremonies, was not abruptly terminated on the day of Pentecost. The sacrifices were no longer valid, as the Gospel announces Christ is the only valid propitiation “for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1), Him being the Lamb of God that took “away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). John the Baptist prepared the Jews for the Lamb of God through his introductory ministry.

The Fading of the Old

In an arresting passage, the epistles of Second Corinthians and Hebrews addresses the manner in which the Old Covenant, together with its attending ceremonies, was invalidated from a practical point of view. Keep in mind that we are not speaking of becoming righteous, a propitiation for sin, and acceptance by God. This pertains to the ceremonial aspect of the Law.

Second Corinthians

- The Law is referred to as a ministration of death, engraved on stones (3:7). This is compared to the New Covenant, which is the ministration of the Spirit (3:8).
- There was a glory that attended the giving of the Law, but it faded, like the glow of Moses' face did after he had spoken with God (3:7b). This is compared with the exceeding glory of the New Covenant which continues to increase in glory, rather than decrease (3:8-9).
- The Old Covenant was “done away,” not by a word of dismissal, but by a greater glory that outshined it (3:11).
- Even the lesser glory of the Law blinded the minds of those who were under it, so they could not perceive the glory of God (3:13-15).

- The veil of obscurity is lifted only when Christ is seen more clearly than the Law (3:14-16).

Hebrews

- The Law with its attending ceremonies served as a “example and shadow of heavenly things” (8:5).

- Jesus has a more excellent ministry, being the Mediator of a better covenant that is established upon better promises (8:6).

- The New Covenant is of a differing order, and is not after the manner of the Old Covenant, which was based upon doing (8:9-12).

- Now that the New Covenant is in place, the old is “ready to vanish away,” which vanishment is one of perception, not mere legality (8:13). Its glory gradually fades, like the glow that was on the face of Moses.

In order to facilitate this transition, the apostles’ doctrine told the people of things that could not be continued, and things that remained in place for all believers. As time progressed, those who believed came to see these things more clearly.

It is as the glory of the New Covenant dawns upon the soul that the glory of the Old Covenant commences to fade from view. Because of the remarkable contrast in the nature of the covenants, it apparently took some time before the fog of legalism was sufficiently dispelled. Paul is the agent chosen by God to expound the nature of the New Covenant. He is the one who extensively showed the role of faith in the New Covenant, and the basis of God’s grace in the entire economy. Because his message was not comprehended, false charges were made against him, with some reporting that Paul said, “Let us do evil that good may come.” Paul wrote of such people, “whose damnation is just” (Rom 3:8).

Even to this very day, the glory and nature of the New Covenant is largely unknown in the professing church. As a direct result of this area of spiritual blindness, all manner of distorted views of the Law, commandments, and Old Covenant ordinances are being perpetrated in the name of Jesus Christ.

In order to facilitate this transition, the apostles’ doctrine told the people of things that could not be continued, and things that remained in place for all believers. As time progressed, those who believed came to see these things more clearly.

WHAT THEY HAD HEARD OF PAUL

One of the marks of approval among the servants of God is the kind of reports that are circulated concerning them. Of this Paul wrote, “But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God . . . By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true” (2 Cor 6:4-8). Those who lacked noble motives gave evil reports of Paul, suggesting that he was too lenient toward sin, and prejudiced toward the Jews. The reports were not true, but were constrained by Satan to so damage Paul’s reputation that people would not listen to him. James had heard of these false reports, and will not ignore them. He will suggest that Paul act in such a manner as to confirm they were false allegations.

Teach All the Jews Which Are Among the Gentiles

“And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles . . .” Other versions read, “all the Jews which live among the Gentiles.” NIV With great subtlety, the report had gone out that Paul had a different message for Jews that were living among the Gentiles. In other words, he would preach one thing in Jerusalem, and another in Antioch; one Gospel in Judaea, and

another in Bithynia.

To Forsake Moses

“ . . . to forsake Moses . . .” Other versions read, “turn away from Moses,” NIV “Give up the law of Moses,” BBE “abandon Moses,” CSB and “turn back from and forsake Moses.” AMPLIFIED

There are numerous records of Paul referring to Moses.

- “And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses ” (Acts 13:39)

- “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22).

- “ And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses , and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

- “For he saith to Moses , I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Rom 9:15).

- “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them” (Rom 10:5).

In Christ Jesus, as declared by the Gospel, a greater light is made known. However, a fuller light is not necessarily a contrary light. It does not obviate the former light, but drowns it in glory – and there is a vast difference between the two. Although men cannot be justified by the Law, a place is still kept for the Law.

“But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you” (Rom 10:19).

- “For it is written in the law of Moses , Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?” (1 Cor 9:9).

- “And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea” (1 Cor 10:2).

- “But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away” (2 Cor 3:7).

- “And not as Moses , which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished” (2 Cor 3:13).

- “But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart” (2 Cor 3:15).

- “Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses , so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Tim 3:8).

The Jews in Achaia charged that Paul persuaded men “to worship God contrary to the Law” [of Moses] (Acts 18:13).

Paul, on the other hand, confessed to Felix, “But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets” (Acts 24:14). He also said to Festus, “ Neither against the law of the Jews , neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all ” (Acts 25:8). In

His epistles, Paul refers to “the Law” one hundred and twenty-eight times, and never in a derogatory manner. He confirms that the Law was never intended to justify (Acts 13:39), that through it is the knowledge of sin (Rom 3:20), and that it has been ended only as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).

Paul affirmed that the message he delivered was foretold by Moses (Deut 18:15,18; 30:6).

In Christ Jesus, as declared by the Gospel, a greater light is made known. However, a fuller light is not necessarily a contrary light. It does not obviate the former light, but drowns it in glory – and there is a vast difference between the two. Although men cannot be justified by the Law, a place is still kept for the Law. There is still a valid work that it is to do, for “by the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). It is still “Our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal 3:24-25). We are not “under the Law” (Rom 6:14), but that does not mean it serves no purpose.

Paul did not teach that men ought to abandon the Law. He rather taught it was not the means to justification, and that men were under no obligation to keep its unique ceremonies. This is a fine distinction that the unlearned cannot discern.

Ought Not Circumcise Their Children

“ . . . saying that they ought not to circumcise their children . . . ”

There is no record of Paul ever forbidding the Jews to circumcise their children. Rather, he taught that circumcision had nothing whatsoever to do with the New Covenant, and that it gave no person a spiritual advantage before God. He also taught that true circumcision was “of the heart, in the spirit,” and not in the flesh (Rom 2:28-29). In other words, like all of the ceremonial Law, and the Sabbath as well, something superior replaced the ancient ceremonies – a greater glory did away with their necessity. Now that men receive a new heart through “the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11), outward circumcision is completely unrelated to one’s identity with God and involvement in the covenant over which Jesus presides.

Neither Walk After the Customs

“ . . . neither to walk after the customs. . . ” Other versions read, “live according to the customs,” NIV “observe the customs,” NRSV “keep the old rules,” BBE “observe the rites of the Law,” MRD and “follow the customary practices.” NJB

This charge was also false. Paul never advocated an overthrow or abandonment of Jewish customs. He did not call for the closing of the Temple, or the discarding of the synagogue. He was not opposed to the reading of the Jewish Scriptures, or even the observance of Jewish feasts. Further, his conduct did not reflect such a persuasion.

- Paul went into the Temple (Acts 21:26; 22:17; 24:12,18; 26:21).
- Paul attended the synagogues (Acts 13:14; 14:1; 17:1-2,10,17; 18:4,19; 19:8).
- Paul observed some of the Jewish feasts (Acts 18:21; 20:1).
- Paul took a vow according to Jewish customs (Acts 18:18; 24:18).

Paul did teach that believers were not to allow others to impose Jewish feasts and customs upon them, pointing out that they were a “shadow of things to come,” while the real spiritual substance was found in Christ (Col 2:16-17). Once this was seen, an inordinate attachment to the Jewish customs will not be maintained out of a sense of obligation. The new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15) desires the “better things,” and gravitates to involvement in such things. Even though outwardly it may appear as though Jewish customs are being observed, that is not the case at all. Paul did not go to the

synagogue out of a sense of obligation, or commitment to the traditions of the fathers. Rather, it was in order to teach and preach about Jesus Christ. If he did take a vow, it was with Jesus Christ in mind, not with a sense of obligation to the Law.

Admittedly, this is a difficult thing for the spiritually uncultured mind to comprehend. A person, for example, who is motivated strictly by Law, as opposed to being tutored by grace (Tit 2:11-12), and led by the Spirit (Rom 8:13-14), is unable to distinguish higher motives.

James will now give his advice with the weaker brethren and their conscience in mind. He will take for granted the genuineness of their faith as well as the freedom in which Paul could operate.

Oh, the blessedness of the liberty that is displayed in this text. In it we see a most noble example of what it means to honor the conscience of another brother, and to avoid doing anything that will lead the weaker brethren – those whose vision is not finely tuned – to be loose in their conduct, living for any other reason than to please the Lord. That is what is to be learned in this text.

Paul's Doctrine on the Matter

Paul taught extensively on matters involving other believers who were of tender heart, yet whose conscience had not yet matured.

- **The believer who felt he could not eat meat.** This had to do with eating meat that had been offered to idols, and was later sold in the “shambles,” or “meat market” NASB (1 Cor 10:25). “But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. **This by no means sanctioned the maintenance of a flawed view, but was the means through which any erroneous conclusion would be seen for what it was. Paul alluded to this principle after testifying of his own**

But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols” (1 Cor 8:8-10). This involved people who had a tender conscience toward God, yet was immature in their understanding. A similar line of teaching is found in Romans 14:1-9.

- **The believer who had not yet seen there is only one God.** As difficult as it may be to believe, there were some early believers who had been converted from heathen idolatry. They had not yet seen that there really is only one God. Hence, when they beheld the conduct of believers who ate meat that had been offered to idols, they were driven to the conclusion that they were gods of the heathen. Thus Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge : for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled” (1 Cor 8:4-7).

- **Becoming all things to all men.** A text that has been often misrepresented has to do with Paul becoming all things to all men. “To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men , that I might by all means save some . . . Even as I please all men in all things , not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Cor 9:22; 10:33). Paul did not become an idolater in order to reach idolaters, or a glutton to reach gluttons. He is speaking of those who had commitment to God, yet who were juvenile and immature in their understanding. In his accommodation to

such people, he violated neither his conscience nor any word from God. He operated in the legitimate domain of liberty, doing so out of a concern for the eternal welfare of those who saw him. He did not take upon himself the appearance of a sinner to reach sinners.

• **Let each believer be fully persuaded in their own mind. The Lord would then bring them forward to maturity.** Those who maintain a good conscience before the Lord, not violating what they perceive to be right, and always living with a mind to please the Lord, will be given greater light where it is needed. This is why Paul admonished those with differing views to be “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom 14:5). This by no means sanctioned the maintenance of a flawed view, but was the means through which any erroneous conclusion would be seen for what it was. Paul alluded to this principle after testifying of his own commitment to the Lord (Phil 3:14). He sensed that the implications of a total commitment to the Lord had not yet registered on the minds of some. After hearing of the manner in which Paul lived, they might conclude that they were incapable of such devotion, and perhaps may not have been accepted by the Lord. Thus he reasoned, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect” [mature NIV] , “be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Phil 3:15). That is, as they lived up to their level of understanding, God would bring them to see what Paul had said, and therefore they would follow his example. This is a marvelous principle to be perceived.

• The flaw in much contemporary reasoning is found in the notion that ignorance can be perpetual with impunity – that continuing to be at variance with the truth is somehow a tolerable thing before the Lord. However, this is not at all the truth, as any informed disciple knows.

• Life in Christ Jesus is the kind that grows, matures, and brings forth fruit (Rom 7:4; Eph 4:15; 1 Pet 5:10; 2 Pet 3:18). No manner of life that fails to move in this direction is the expression of true spiritual life. With these things in mind, let us hear how James counsels Paul.

THEY WILL HEAR

“ 22 What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.” Other versions read, “must certainly meet, for they will hear that you have come,” NKJV “they will certainly hear that you have come,” NIV “they have heard that thou hast arrived here,” MRD “The Jewish believers here will learn that you have come,” IE and “A multitude will come together, for they will surely hear that you have arrived.” AMPLIFIED

The “they” of reference are tens of thousands of believers, not a handful of religiously elite leaders.

Immediately we see the caliber of people to which James refers. These were by no means casual disciples. They were appropriately described as “believers,” and had come together to honor the Lord.

Immediately we see the caliber of people to which James refers. These were by no means casual disciples. They were appropriately described as “believers,” and had come together to honor the Lord. As in the first Pentecost following Christ’s enthronement, there were no doubt Jews from around the world gathered together. Such a phenomenon is not at all common in our country.

James also states that they had already, or would soon, hear of Paul’s arrival in Jerusalem. They knew about him, and had heard things said about him, as James had already affirmed. Now, I cannot conceive of such a thing happening in the United States of America, or even in some of its cities that are noted for being Christian centers – such as Joplin Missouri. I am persuaded that if Paul himself turned up in our city, it is questionable that he would receive a fair hearing. This is largely because his writings are not familiar to the Christian masses. Further, he would probably not travel with a musical group to draw the attention of the people. It is what Paul TAUGHT that intrigued the people,

and he was noted for what he said.

Notice how critical news traveled in the Christian community. Paul – a man who, “in presence” was “lowly among” the people (2 Cor 10:1), was perceived as someone worthy of seeing face-to-face. Those who had seen him, and among whom he had labored, declared that “his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible,” even though his letters were admittedly “weighty” (2 Cor 10:10). However the thousands of believers in Jerusalem did not come to read Paul’s letters, but to be with him personally. They had heard that he taught certain things, and wanted to know if this was the truth.

I feel compelled to say a few words about the religious climate of our time. It has been created by religious leaders, and it is not a commendable one. There is not only a prevailing canopy of spiritual ignorance over the people, but a dominate disinterest in the things of God. That is the reason for the popularity of self-help books, workshops, and various programs. It is what has given license to the thirst for religious entertainment and the hunger for religious careers. All of this has taken place during the watch of those who are perceived as religious leaders. They have not taught in a manner that brought the people to maintain a preference for the Word of God. The people have not been addressed in such a manner as to promote a hunger and a thirst for righteousness. The leaders have come too low in their attempt to reach the people, and are now maintaining a perspective that accommodates itself to the zone of this present evil world. Paul is neither well known nor popular in the modern church. His writings are generally treated as though they were worthless, and can contribute nothing to the fath of God’s people.

All of this is to be seen in stark contrast with the church of the book of Acts. I can only conclude that this is because a different message is being preached these days – a message that is not producing genuine fruit unto God.

DO THEREFORE THIS THAT WE SAY TO THEE

“ 23 Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; 24 Them take, and purify thyselves with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.”

We are now exposed to some spiritual reasoning. On the surface, it will appear to contradict the truth of the Gospel, but this is not the case. This is an example of lawful adaptation to the sincere and devoted, yet immature, hearts of believers. Guided only by the principle of Law, this passage cannot be properly understood. In fact, it will generate confusion in the hearts of the unlearned. We must, however, remember that we are being exposed to the thinking and reaction of two of the most seasoned saints of all time: James and Paul. Following the exaltation of Jesus, there is no record of either of these men being reprovved for thinking or acting improperly. This cannot even be said of Peter, against whom only a single infraction is recorded following the inauguration of the New Covenant (Gal 2:11-14).

DO THIS

“Do therefore this that we say to thee . . .” Other versions read, “do what we tell you,” NKJV “follow our advice,” GWN “So this is what we suggest that you should do,” NJB “We advise you to do this,” IE “Now you must do just what we tell you,” WILLIAMS and “Now why not follow this suggestion of ours?” PHILLIPS

There is a confidence reflected in this counsel that indicates it was Divine direction. Some of the versions reflect this perspective: i.e. “Do what we tell you,” NKJV and “You must do just what we tell you.” WILLIAMS Others leave a question in our minds as to whether or not this was heavenly

direction, or human advice: “this is what we suggest,” NJB and “why not follow this suggestion of ours.” PHILLIPS

The language, both in the Greek and in the English, does not lend itself to the thought that this was simply an idea that should be weighed by Paul. As used here, the word “do” means “to make . . . to produce,” THAYER and “accomplish.” FRIBERG The word “this” refers to the action they had set before Paul, and the word “say” means to “command, direct . . . point out with words.” GINGRICH There are varying views on this text. Some see it as an unnecessary compromise. Others see it as confirmation that the truth of the Gospel was not comprehended by either James or Paul at the time of this text. I do not choose to see the text that way, although I am not willing to be factious about the matter. I am proceeding with the persuasion that this was actually the Lord directing Paul through the word of other members of the body of Christ.

WE HAVE FOUR MEN

“ . . . We have four men . . . ” Other versions read, “There are four men with us,” NIV and “with us are four men.” AMPLIFIED That is, these were four Christian men – men who were identified with the church in Jerusalem, and were walking in accord with conduct associated with being distinguished as a disciple of Christ. These were Jews according to the flesh, but had embraced the Gospel and the Christ of the Gospel.

WHICH HAVE A VOW

“ . . . which have a vow on them . . . ” Other versions read, “who have taken a vow,” NKJV “who are under a vow,” NASB “who have made a vow,” NIV “who have taken an oath,” BBE “who have obligated themselves with a vow,” CSB “who have made a vow to God,” GWN and “who have vowed to purify themselves.” MRD

The mindset with which vows were made perceived an obligation to the Lord, and the individuals were willing to extend themselves in the service of God, even formalizing their commitment.

Here is a matter with which the Western Christian world is not at all familiar. Some would perceive this as totally unnecessary, and even out of order. The making of vows, however, is not strange in Scripture. It is something that was specifically addressed unto the Law.

Jacob made a vow to God after he had dreamed of a ladder set up on the earth that reached into heaven, with angels ascending and descending upon it. At that time God Almighty was seen standing above the ladder, reaffirming the Abrahamic covenant, and assuring Jacob that it would be fulfilled through him. He also promised to keep Jacob in all the places he went (Gen 28:12-15). Jacob then “vowed a vow , saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, so that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: and this stone, which I have set for a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee” (Gen 28:20-22). Later, God recognized that very vow in a special appearance to Jacob: “I am the God of Bethel, where thou anointedst the pillar, and where thou vowedst a vow unto Me : now arise, get thee out from this land, and return unto the land of thy kindred” (Gen 31:13).

The Law recognized the making of vows to the Lord (Lev 7:16; 22:18,21,23; 23:38; 27:2; Num 6:2-21; 15:3,8; Num 29:39; 30:2-5,7-9,11-14; Deut 12:6,11,17,26; 23:18,21,22).

Hannah made a vow to the Lord (1 Sam 1:11(as well as her husband Elkanah (1 Sam 1:21). David also made vows (Psa 22:25; 61:5,6; 66:13; 116:14,18).

Solomon spoke of making a vow to the Lord, and the seriousness of it (Eccl 5:4). Malachi spoke of corrupted vows (Mal 1:14).

At one time, prior to this occasion, Paul himself had taken a vow (Acts 18:18).

Vows were entirely a voluntary matter, but were to be taken seriously when made to the Lord. Scriptures make such statements as, “thou shalt pay thy vows ” (Job 22:27), “I will pay my vows” (Psa 22:25; “pay thy vows” (Psa 50:14); “Thy vows are upon me, O God” (Psa 56:12); “I will pay Thee my vows” (Psa 66:13).

The mindset with which vows were made perceived an obligation to the Lord, and the individuals were willing to extend themselves in the service of God, even formalizing their commitment. This was done on a voluntary basis, but with an acute awareness of God Himself and the necessity of serving Him. We know from Scripture that God also takes vows seriously.

PURIFY THYSELF WITH THEM

“ . . . Them take, and purify thyself with them . . .” Other versions read, “be purified with them,” NKJV “join in their purification rites,” NIV “make yourself clean with them,” BBE “sanctify thyself with them,” DOUAY “go through the purification ceremony with them,” GWN and “Go with them to the Temple and join them in the purification ceremony.” NLT

Later, Paul will refer to his involvement in the purification ceremony (Acts 24:18).

This vow is generally considered to be the Nazarite vow that was outlined in the sixth chapter of Numbers. It was possible for this vow to apply to one’s entire lifetime, as was commanded concerning Samson “from the womb to the day of his death” (Judges 13:5-7). His mother was under the vow until she gave birth to Samson (Judges 13:3-4,7). As with Samson’s mother, there were shorter durations of this vow, during which the individual was separated “unto the Lord” (Num 6:2).

Indications are that John the Baptist was a Nazarite all of his life (Lk 1:15). It is also the considered opinion of many scholars that Jesus was a life-long Nazarite, and that this is the point of him being called a “Nazarene” (Matt 2:23). If this reasoning is correct, Jesus would never have imbibed wine or any form of strong drink.

The time of a Nazarite vow was apparently a period during which the one making the vow gave himself wholly to the Lord and His service, as was required for the priests. In a nutshell, it involved being separated from the mundane and devoted wholly to the Lord throughout the duration of the vow.

The time of a Nazarite vow was apparently a period during which the one making the vow gave himself wholly to the Lord and His service, as was required for the priests. In a nutshell, it involved being separated from the mundane and devoted wholly to the Lord throughout the duration of the vow. The following was required under the Law.

- Separation from all wine and strong drink (Num 6:3a).
- Nothing that was fermented could be ingested (Num 6:3b).
- Grape juice could not be ingested (Num 6:3c).
- Neither grapes nor raisins could be eaten (Num 6:6d).
- Nothing from the grapevine could be eaten, from the seeds to the skins (Num 6:4).
- Throughout the vow, the hair could not be cut, but the hair must be permitted to grow long (Num 6:5).

- All of the days of the vow, the person could not go near a dead body (Num 6:6).
- Even if his own father, mother, brother, or sister died, the person could not come near their dead body (Num 6:7).
- Throughout the period the person was consecrated completely to the Lord (Num 6:8).
- If someone died suddenly in the presence of the one under the vow, the person was defiled, and was required to shave his head on the seventh day following (Num 6:9).
- On the eighth day, two birds were to be brought to the priest at the door of the tabernacle, or later, at the Temple (Num 6:10).
- The priest would offer one bird for a sin offering, and the other for a burnt offering, to “make an atonement for him, for that he sinned” by being in the presence of a dead body (Num 6:11).
- The person must dedicate himself to the Lord for the period of separation by bringing a year-old lamb for guilt offering. The previous days did not count “because he became defiled during his separation.” NIV (Num 6:12).
- If the vow was completed, the person was to be brought to the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. There he would offer one male lamb of the first year, one ewe lamb of the first year, and one ram for a peace offering, a basket of unleavened bread mingled with oil, and wafers spread with oil (Num 6:13-14).
- The priest would take these and offer the appropriate offerings to the Lord (Num 6:16-17).
- The Nazarite would then shave his head at the door of the tabernacle, and put the hair in the fire which was under the peace offering (Num 6:18).
- The priest would then take a boiled shoulder of the ram, and a cake and a wafer from the basket, placing them in the hands of the Nazarite (Num 6:19).
- Then the priest would wave these before the Lord, and they became his (Num 6:20a).
- After this, the Nazarite could drink wine (Num 6:20b).

Some additional considerations will be addressed in verse twenty-six.

The Lesson Being Taught

The law was a “schoolmaster.” It introduced men to the concept of living unto God, and of the absolute need of devotion and consistency in the matter of serving Him. No person could take the Law seriously and be casual or halfhearted toward God.

Take this matter of making a vow unto the Lord – not a vow having to do with mundane matters, but one that involved giving oneself wholly to the Lord without distraction. How can anyone read the requirements for this vow and conclude that giving oneself to the Lord was something requiring little effort? What would possibly lead a person to think that a vow was not to be taken seriously. Breaking it was equated to sinning – even if it was inadvertent, like someone dropping dead in the presence of the one who had taken the vow.

My point is that the Jews had been raised to think of God differently than everyone else in the world. These Jewish believers had taken a vow in the most sober state of mind and holy rectitude. Some may argue that such a vow was not necessary, and that they were slaves to the Law. But that is not what our text says. These men were operating within the framework of a good conscience, not

out of a sense of unwanted compulsion.

James would not ask Paul to accommodate himself to Jews who lacked a sober mind, or were contentious. These were devoted men, and therefore James gave his counsel.

BE AT CHARGES FOR THEM

“ . . . and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads . . .” Other versions read “pay their expenses,” NKJV “pay for the shaving of their heads,” NRSV “make the necessary payment for them,” BBE and “pay their expenses [for the temple offering.]” AMPLIFIED

The expenses involved the offerings that were to be brought at the completion of the vow. In this case, and under the Law, four men would have required eight lambs, four rams, and four baskets of unleavened bread and wafers. Paul, then, took care of the expenses associated with those requirements. He did not primarily make offerings for himself, but paid for the offerings of the others.

Some Are Troubled by this Passage

Some have felt there was unwarranted compromise revealed here – that James and the elders were out of order in their counsel. Others feel that Paul did not yet understand the truth concerning liberty from the Law, and thus acquiesced to this bad counsel. However, Luke gives no hint of the impropriety of thinking in such a manner. Newness of life is not merely subjecting to a new code of conduct. It rather involves the possession of eternal life, and life is something that advances, or grows. An infant is not considered partially dead because they are not yet mature, and these believing Jews were not considered to be in error because they were observing some of the Jewish customs.

There were occasions when Paul would take care not to offend sincere Jews. There were other times when he would not submit to their whims for a single hour. Timothy and Titus are cases in point. Timothy had not been circumcised, although his mother was a Jewess. However, his father was not. Because of sincere Jews in that vicinity, Paul circumcised Timothy in order that they not be offended (Acts 16:3). Yet, when the Jews sought to compel Titus to be circumcised, Paul refused to do so (Gal 2:3). The difference in the two cases was the spiritual status of the people to whom Paul responded. One group was honest and good in heart, the other was factious

The nature of the liberty we have in Christ Jesus also ought to be noted. We are never free to be immoral in order to attract the immoral. Too, it is never in order to engage in sacrifices to false gods in order to influence idolaters.

Only those with spiritual understanding can react as James, the elders, and Paul did in this matter. This is not a realm where novices and those with little or no understanding are to traffic. Further, this is not something that can be adapted to every-day life. The occasion is special, the people were not ordinary, the ones giving the advice were advanced in the Lord, and Paul was certainly not a novice. This was not something he did every day, nor was it intended to establish a fixed pattern of conduct. Further, only those involved in the dissemination of the Word of God will even confront such a circumstance.

ALL MAY KNOW

“ . . . and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing . . .” Other versions read, “there is nothing to the things they have been told about you,” NASB “there is no truth in these reports,” NIV and “the statements made about you are not true.” BBE

This is the kind of assessment James, the elders, and Paul are seeking to avoid. In Romans, it

had to do with the reaction of the Gentiles to Christian Jews who themselves were living in contradiction of the Law they professed to be following, In our text, the issue is believing Jews who have heard that this was the manner in which Paul lived – a word that was wholly false.

Notice, the purpose was not to directly influence the four men involved in this incident. It was rather to confirm to the great mass of Jews that Paul was not a mere reactionary. Like Jesus, he did not come to destroy the Law. His purpose was not to sever men from the Law, but to unite them to Christ. It was in that marvelous unity that the insufficiency of a ceremonial religion would be made clear. That is, it is in Divine light that they would “see light” (Psa 36:9).

YOU WALK ORDERLY AND KEEP THE LAW

“ . . . but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.” Other versions read, “are living in obedience to the Law,” NIV “observe and guard the Law,” NRSV “live in observance of the Law,” RSV “put yourself under rule, and keep the Law,” BBE “are careful about observing the Law,” CSB “ you carefully follow Moses teachings,” GWN and “you yourself live in conformity with the Law.” NET

We must not forget the purpose of this action. It was to deal with a slanderous assessment of Paul’s ministry. That is why James and the elders gave this counsel. It was not so that Paul might be noted for upholding the Law, but so that it might be clear to all that he was not attacking the Law, or condemning the people who used some of its ceremonies to confirm their dedication to the Lord. The desire to the brethren was that Paul might be perceived correctly, and not incorrectly.

Elsewhere, Paul condemned believing Jews who were living in contradiction of the Law – a practice he by no means condoned. “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest His will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law; and art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written” (Rom 2:17-24).

This is the kind of assessment James, the elders, and Paul are seeking to avoid. In Romans, it had to do with the reaction of the Gentiles to Christian Jews who themselves were living in contradiction of the Law they professed to be following, In our text, the issue is believing Jews who have heard that this was the manner in which Paul lived – a word that was wholly false.

Who does not know the impact of a preacher and teacher who opposes sin vigorously, then falls into sin himself? This has happened multiple times in our generation – nationally known ministers being found committing immorality. The whole matter is generally treated too lightly.

James and the elders themselves knew the real manner of Paul’s life. Otherwise they would not have given this counsel. Paul, on the other hand, was aware of the liberty he had in Christ Jesus. He knew the extent of that liberty, and was willing to use it to bring about a proper assessment of his ministry.

James and the elders themselves knew the real manner of Paul’s life. Otherwise they would not have given this counsel. Paul, on the other hand, was aware of the liberty he had in Christ Jesus. He knew the extent of that liberty, and was willing to use it to bring about a proper assessment of his ministry. However, he would not submit to factious notions and the binding of ceremonial religion upon him for a single moment (Gal 2:5).

It ought to be apparent that all of this can be lived out only by those who are mature in Christ Jesus, and possess “all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9). Others should stand back from this subject, refusing to speculate about it. The church does not need additional opinions on this subject.

The Righteousness of the Law Fulfilled

Paul makes a salient statement concerning the righteousness of the Law in the eighth chapter of Romans. He declares the impotence of the Law to effect righteousness within men, and the effectiveness of the New Covenant in the realization of that righteousness. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us , who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

Although the propensities to sin remain in us, being resident in “the old man,” through the Spirit we are now equal to their challenge. After all, “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). It is also “spiritual” (Rom 7:14). By this, I understand Paul to mean that the Law speaks of a higher order of things – an order that is in perfect accord with the very nature of God. Although it was addressed to men, it was loftier than man, and required men to do what was beyond their ability. The term “the righteousness of the law” is not speaking of the detailed commandments of the Law, which were, for the time being, the established means to righteousness. But they were not the righteousness itself. “The righteousness of the law” is the summation of the law, encapsulated in the two great commandments: “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut 6:5), and “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18) – Mk 12:30-31. This is what is fulfilled in those who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. In fulfilling this righteousness, all of the commandments are duly fulfilled as well, for they all hang upon their summation.

The reason for this circumstance is that God created man for Himself, and in order to fellowship with Himself. However, God is holy, and cannot fellowship with those who are unholy. Therefore, the Law was not a Divine accommodation to men, addressing them on the low level of flesh and blood. Rather, it imposed upon them a higher order of things that did not allow for self-centeredness and the gratification that goes with that condition.

Through the atoning death of Christ, in which God “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom 8:3), it was ended as a means to righteousness. As it is written, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth” (Rom 10:4) – that is, as a means to righteousness. Now men are “made righteous” (Rom 5:19) apart from the Law, as it is imputed to them upon the basis of their faith. Thus it is written that “now the righteousness of God without the Law is manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the prophets” (Rom 3:31).

The death of Christ was the precise point at which the sin of the world was judged and taken away. When we are baptized into that death (Rom 6:2,4), so far as the Law is concerned, we are dead, for our sins were justly and completely removed. We became, in fact, “dead to the Law” (Rom 7:4) – and the Law has no power over a dead man, much as a dead husband has no more authority over a living wife (Rom 7:1-4).

Knowing this condition, Paul will be able to respond to the suggestion of James and the elders with a good conscience, and without violating the Law, or the spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

AS TOUCHING THE GENTILES WHICH BELIEVE

“ 25 As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and

from strangled, and from fornication.”

Notice the care James takes in explaining this situation to Paul. He will make clear that what they have advised him to do is not a matter of doctrine. It was not something that they preached universally, nor was it something they were binding upon Paul and others. This occasion was unique, and called for a godly assessment and considerate conduct. Further, it was not a circumstance that permitted the truth to be disdained, the Law to be disobeyed, or the Gospel to be distorted. These are considerations that are forfeited when men pick up the sectarian banner.

TOUCHING THE GENTILES WHICH BELIEVE

“As touching the Gentiles which believe . . .” Other versions read, “concerning the Gentiles who believe,” NKJV “as for the Gentile believers,” NIV and “as to the Gentiles who have the faith.” BBE

Here is another confirmation of the necessity of wisdom in executing the will of the Lord. Those who can only operate according to a list of rules or procedures will not be able to function properly in the body of Christ. While there are certain procedures involved in living unto the Lord, they are not of a worldly order. The following are examples of such procedures.

- **The procedure in approaching the Lord.** “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need. (Heb 4:16).
- **The procedure involved in drawing near to the Lord.** “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:22).
- **The procedure involved in running the race set before us.** “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:1-2).

The difference in these procedures is found in their requirement for thought and discernment. Normally, procedures are an end of themselves.

In this text there is, from one point of view, a procedure being advocated. It involved Paul identifying himself with four men, going into the Temple with them, and being responsible for the expenses associated with the completion of their vow. Yet, strictly speaking, this was not a fixed procedure – that is , it was not something that applied to all believers, particularly Gentile believers. They required a different approach.

WE HAVE WRITTEN AND CONCLUDED

James establishes that their counsel to Paul was not intended to convey the thought that this is what they were teaching in their doctrine. It was rather an accommodation to the Jews who were zealous for the Law – not out of a sense of mere tradition, but in all good conscience toward God.

“ . . . we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing . . .” Other versions read, “written and decided that they should observe no such thing,” NKJV “written to them our decision,” NIV “sent a letter with our judgment,” NRSV “written, deciding that they should observe no such thing,” DOUAY “written and determined that they should observe no such thing,” GENEVA “written and concluded that they observe no such thing,” PNT/TNT and “written, having given

judgment, that they observe no such thing.” YLT

As you can see, later versions omit the phrase “that they observe no such thing.” This is a play on the words “save only,” which are translated from the Greek expression **εἰ μὴ**, which means “except,” or “but.” STRONG’S The idea is that the Mosaic ordinances were not binding on the Gentiles, EXCEPT for the proscriptions that are mentioned. The letter, as recorded in the fifteenth chapter of Acts reads like this: “Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment . . . For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things ; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well . Fare ye well” (Acts 15:24-29).

The point of the letter was that the Gentiles were not obligated to be circumcised, or to keep any other portion of the ceremonial law. That, of course, is the precise point that James is making in this text. By omitting the words “that they observe no such thing,” the translators have obscured this perspective, as though the reason for writing to the Gentile churches was to alert them do their duty. But that was not at all the purpose for the writing. Rather, it was to alert them to their freedom from the ceremonies bound by the Law.

ONLY THAT THEY

“ . . . save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.”

The freedom of the Gentiles from the ceremonial law had these exceptions – eating meat offered to idols, eating blood, eating things that were strangled, and committing fornication. James establishes that their counsel to Paul was not intended to convey the thought that this is what they were teaching in their doctrine. It was rather an accommodation to the Jews who were zealous for the Law – not out of a sense of mere tradition, but in all good conscience toward God.

Men are not to tamper with the conscience of those who are sincerely serving the Lord – even though they may be doing things that technically belonged to the Old Covenant – with some exceptions, such as observing the day of atonement (Lev 16).

This text also confirms the Jews who believed were Christians – followers of Christ. They were not “devout Jews’ ” in the same sense as those who were present when Peter preached on the day of Pentecost. Those Jews were not referred to as believers until they had, in fact, believed on the Lord Jesus Christ.

This was not sin in the ordinary sense of the term i.e. a moral infraction of the Law. It is understood that the “sin offering” presented during the completion of the vow was not for any specific transgression, but for unconscious sins committed during the time of separation. This is referred to as a “sin through ignorance”

The Sacrifices for Sin

Some might point out that the sacrifices associated with the completion of a vow included “a sin offering” (Num 6:11,14,16). In case a person died suddenly in the presence of the one who had made a vow, the sin offering was to “make an atonement for him, by that he sinned by the dead” (Num 6:11) – that is, he was near a dead body, which was forbidden for one under the Nazarite vow. This was not sin in the ordinary sense of the term i.e. a moral infraction of the Law. It is understood that the “sin offering” presented during the completion of the vow was not for any specific transgression, but for unconscious sins committed during the time of separation. This is referred to as a “sin through ignorance” (Lev 4:2,13,27; 5:15; Num15:27). Owing to the fact that there are other prophetic

considerations, I will deal more with this matter in an exposition of the 26 th verse.

When the book of Hebrews addressed the ineffectiveness of sacrifices made for sin, it referred to the day of atonement – annual sacrifices: “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4). The guidelines for that day contained the words “make an atonement” no less than twelve times (Lev 16:6,10,11,16,17, 18,24,30,33,34), and “make atonement” once (Lev 16:27).

While I do not wish to make an unwarranted issue of this matter, it helps to account for Paul’s willingness to pay for the expenses associated with the vow of these four men. The sacrifices, technically speaking, were not for sin itself, but were associated exclusively with the the vow that was made to serve the Lord.

PAUL PURIFIES HIMSELF

“ 26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.”

Paul acquiesces to the words of James and the elders. He had been living by faith and walking in the Spirit, and was therefore able to quickly assess and discern what the word they delivered. This is one of the benefits of living “unto Him” who died for us and rose again (2 Cor 5:15). Some people are confused when they are given godly counsel or advice. But it is only because they have not been living by faith. The closer one is to the world, and the more absorbed in worldly matters they become, the less able they are to process spiritual wisdom.

PAUL TOOK THE MAN, PURIFYING HIMSELF WITH THEM

“Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them. . .” Other versions read, “purifying himself along with them,” NASB “having purified himself,” NRSV “making himself clean with them,” BBE “went through the purification ceremony with them,” GWN “was purified with them,” MRD “went with the men to the Temple for the ceremony,” LIVING and “[he went through the rites of] purifying himself along with them.” AMPLIFIED

Here Paul lives out what he said of himself: “And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law” (1 Cor 9:20). This kind of action cannot be satisfactorily explained to those who approach the New Covenant as though it was of the same order as the Old Covenant. The liberty that is realized in Christ Jesus is not freedom for the flesh, to follow its impulses and yield to its demands. It is rather a liberty to move about in the heavenly realms, and to act in consideration of the weaker brethren while not treating inferior ways of serving the Lord as though they were compulsory or forever tolerable.

Paul knew that there was nothing inherently wrong with making a vow to devote oneself to the Lord in a uniquely exclusive way for a limited period of time. Some might contend that this is how we are to live all of the time – and this is true, for we are to do whatever we do for the glory of God (Col 3:17). However, there are also special times, when we retreat from lawful involvements in order to give ourselves more fully to the Lord.

An Example of This Principle

In fact, this is the principle that is exhibited in fasting. Paul once admonished the married, “Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer ; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency” (1 Cor 7:5). This is the only doctrinal statement made concerning fasting in Acts through Revelation.

Examples of fasting recorded in the book of Acts include the following:

- Cornelius praying and fasting, during which time the angel of the Lord directed him (Acts 10:30).
- The brethren in the church at Antioch fasting, during which time the Holy Spirit called for the separation of Barnabas and Saul for a special work (Acts 13:2-3),
- Paul and Barnabas fasted when they ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23).

In the Gospels, fasting is mentioned seven times.

- After He was baptized, Jesus fasted for forty days and forty nights (Matt 4:2).
- Jesus taught his disciples concerning how to conduct themselves when they fasted (Matt 6:16-18).
- Jesus told His disciples that the children did not fast when the Bridegroom was with them (Matt 9:14-15; Mk 2:18-20; Lk 5:34-35).
- Jesus said that some demons could be expelled only “by prayer and fasting” (Matt 17:21; Mk 9:29).
- Anna served God in the Temple with fastings and prayers (Lk 2:37).
- The disciples of John fasted often (Lk 5:33).
- Jesus spoke of a Pharisee that boasted he fasted “twice in the week” (Lk 18:12).

It is inconceivable that an official doctrine concerning fasting could be developed from these texts, or that fasting could be set forth as a regular part of life in Christ. However, many modern teachers have sought to do precisely this.

Conclusion

My point here is that giving a special period of time to the Lord, during which no other mundane things would occupy the attention of the individual, is lawful, but not compulsory. It was not the ordinary course of life, but was a means of adjusting one’s focus while forbidding the person to be distracted by lawful, but lesser, things.

This was the circumstance of the four men who were under a vow to God. Paul joined them by purifying himself in the same manner – i.e. setting himself apart for some exclusive involvement with the Lord. We do not know the duration of this purification, or the involvements contained in it. However, the motive behind it all was to confirm that Paul was not a mere reactionary against the Jewish manner of life. I gather that during this time he made an extended effort to ensure that this conclusion would be reached by those of honest and good hearts.

TO SIGNIFY THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF THE DAYS OF PURIFICATION

Daniel was given to see the death of Christ and its significance. Although it is wrapped in some language that is attended with some difficulty, certain essential matters are clearly stated.

“ . . . entered into the temple to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification . . .” Other versions read, “to announce the expiration of the days of purification, at which time an offering should be made for each one of them,” NKJV “giving notice of the completion of the days of

purification, until the sacrifice was offered for each one of them,” NASB “making public the completion of the days of purification when the sacrifice would be made for each of them,” NRSV “declaring the fulfilment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them,” ASV “giving out the statement that the days necessary for making them clean were complete, till the offering was made for every one of them,” BBE “he went into the temple courtyard to announce the time when the purification would be over and the sacrifice would be offered for each of them,” GWN and “to give notice when the days of purification (the ending of each vow) would be fulfilled and the usual offering could be presented on behalf of each of them.”
AMPLIFIED

While the making of the vow was a personal thing, it was not a private matter. There was a kind of announcement of the vow itself, and when it would be brought to completion. From a practical point of view, this would alert the priest concerning the offerings to be made at that time. It would also be the time when Paul would make clear that he was going to underwrite the expenses associated with that ceremony. That is what is covered in the idea of signifying the accomplishment of the days of purification.

One can only imagine the impact that would be registered upon those who make vows to the Lord if they were made public where Christians gather.

UNTIL AN OFFERING

“ . . . until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.” Other versions read, “at which time an offering should be made,” NKJV “until the sacrifice was offered,” NASB “and the offering would be made,” NIV “when the sacrifice would be made,” NRSV “the presentation of the offering,” MRD “and the offering would be made,” NIB “the offering would be presented,” NJB “an offering would be offered,” PNT/TNT “till the offering was offered,” YLT “an offering would be given,” IE and “the usual offering could be presented.” AMPLIFIED

The word used here is “offering,” and is distinguished from “sacrifice.” The Greek word for “offering” is **proshne,cqh** , whereas the word for “sacrifice” is **qusi,an** . Both words are nouns. The first (“offering”) , as used in our text, is defined as, “an offering, bloody or not.” THAYER Most of the time this word if used in the New Covenant Scriptures, it does not have to do with bloody sacrifices (Acts 24:17; Rom 15:16; Eph 5:2). It is also used to depict the sacrifices under the Law (Heb 10:5,8,18), and the offering of the body of Christ (Heb 10:10,14).

The second (“sacrifice”) means “a victim.” THAYER This most generally has to do with offering something that was alive to God. The offering involved the taking of the life, or the shedding of blood (Matt 9:13; 12:7; Acts 7:41,42; 1 Cor 10:18; Eph 5:2; Heb 5:1; 7:27; 8:3; 9:9,23,26; 10:1,5,8,10,11,12,26; 11:4). Sometimes it is also used to depict the offering up of our lives to the Lord (Rom 12:1; Phil 1:27; 4:18; Heb 13:15,16; 1 Pet 2:5).

Daniel’s Prophecy

There is a prophecy declared by Daniel that bears upon this situation. It serves to remove some barriers that make an understanding of the verse difficult.

Daniel was given to see the death of Christ and its significance. Although it is wrapped in some language that is attended with some difficulty, certain essential matters are clearly stated.

- The Messiah would “finish the transgression,” inducting an era where the people would no longer live their lives in a state of sinfulness (9:24a).
- During His time, the Messiah would “make an end of sins” (9:24b); i.e. take them away.

- He would “make reconciliation for iniquity” (9:24c).
- He would “bring in everlasting righteousness” (9:24d).

There are no examples of anyone offering animal sacrifices to God in the book of Acts. The only text that offers any possibility of such a thing is the one we are presently considering – and nothing specific is said about animal sacrifices in it.

He would put the “seal” of completion upon “the vision and prophecy,” validating them by fulfilling what they made known (9:24e).

- He would “anoint the most Holy” [place], allowing for the entrance of the people (9:24f).
- The main purpose for the maintenance of Jerusalem was in order for the presence of the Messiah, Jesus Christ (9:25).
- The Messiah would be “cut off,” or die, but not because of any transgression of His own (9:26).
- He would cause the cessation of the sacrifice and oblation (9:27).

The Cessation of the Sacrifice

It is this last item – causing the sacrifice and oblation to cease – that is of particular relevance to this text. I understand Daniel’s prophecy to mean that Christ’s death officially invalidated all animal sacrifices, and that with the passing of time, the practice would cease. Because these sacrifices were associated with the Temple, when the Temple was destroyed, all of the ceremonies tied to it also went away. The priesthood passed, the altar, and the sacrifices. They have not been practiced from that time (70 AD). The invalidation of the sacrifices was confirmed at that time.

In addition to this, there is no evidence that they existed after Christ’s death. In all of the New Covenant Scriptures, there is only one particular animal sacrifice mentioned. It was when Joseph and Mary came to the Temple to dedicate the infant Jesus. At that time they brought a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons (Lk 2:24). Prior to Christ’s death, we assume some were offering sacrifices, for animals were being sold in the Temple for that purpose (John 2:14,15; Matt 21:12). Some also told Jesus of some Galileans “whose blood Pilate mingled with their sacrifices” (Lk 13:1). However, the details of such sacrifices are not provided.

There are no examples of anyone offering animal sacrifices to God in the book of Acts. The only text that offers any possibility of such a thing is the one we are presently considering – and nothing specific is said about animal sacrifices in it.

How likely is it that Christian Jews would offer animal sacrifices under such circumstances? How likely is it that they would be ignorant of Daniel’s prophecy, or not be aware of the oblation of animal sacrifices? Although the Temple is mentioned twenty-five times in the book of Acts, there is not a single reference to any bloody sacrifice being offered in it (2:46; 3:1,2,3,8,10; 4:1; 5:20,21,24,25,42; 19:27; 21:26,27,28,29,30; 22:17; 24:6,12,18; 25:8; 26:21).

I therefore conclude that Paul could be at charges for the offerings associated with the making of a vow, and do so without any violation of his conscience. The only kind of offering that would violate the redemption that is in Christ Jesus is a bloody offering, and there is no evidence that any such offering was made.

Four Views in the Christian Community

There are a number of differing views concerning this passage. Here are four of them. With the possible exception of the last one, the others are not worthy of comment.

- Some suggest the event never happened; it is alleged that Luke fabricated the incident in order to show that Paul was a law-abiding Jew.
- Others argue that the apostle was sincere in yielding to this procedure; he simply did not fully understand at this point that the law had been abrogated.
- Many allege that Paul, in a moment of weakness, knowingly sinned, yielding to the pressure.
- Some contend that the apostle's actions were a matter of expediency in a unique time-period when certain elements of the Mosaic system (particularly civil/ceremonial) gradually were passing away.

The following is a statement of the case from the author of *New Testament Notes*: “We cannot be certain that the advice was just right, or that Paul did just right to comply, but these grand men acted according to their knowledge, and the record of Acts portrays both the shortcomings and the perfection of its great worthies. Concerning this advice of James and compliance of Paul, Pres. Milligan says: ‘Three different views have been taken: (1) that Paul in this case acted ignorantly, not being aware of the fact that the law of Moses was no longer binding; (2) that, like Peter, he acted from fear of the Jewish brethren (Gal 2:11); (3) that he acted in conformity with the law of Christian benevolence which requires us to respect even the weaknesses and prejudices of our brethren, so far as this can be done without in any way neglecting the requirements of the Gospel.’”

WHEN THE SEVEN DAYS WERE ENDED

“ 27 And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28 Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.”

SEVEN DAYS WERE ALMOST ENDED

“And when the seven days were almost ended . . .” Other versions read, “the seven days were nearly over,” NIV “the seven days were almost over,” NRSV and “When the seven days were drawing to a close.” AMPLIFIED

This pertains to the announcement made by Paul, when “he went to the Temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end” (21:26). Apparently seven days were announced, during which the ones who made the vows would be made even more alert concerning their determination. Also, depending on the nature of the vow, the eyes of the people would be upon them. Apparently the men and Paul went to the Temple every day during this period. No doubt they were praying and engaging in solemnities that made for a sober mind and more keenly focused their attention on what they had vowed.

THE JEWS FROM ASIA

“ . . .the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him . . . ”

There was a public nature to religion that was cultured in Judaism. While every conscientious person attended to private matters relating to himself and God, there was a public nature to religious life that was woven throughout the fabric of Jewish life. The Law fostered communal religion, with frequent gatherings. The activities in the Temple and the synagogues confirm this to be the case. Also, the multitudes that went out to hear John, and to see and hear Jesus reflect this kind of culture. This carried over into the church, as the believers were continually together in both the Temple and various homes (Acts 1:4,6,14; 2:1,6,44,46; 4:24; 5:12; 12:12; 14:27; 15:30; 20:7-8; 21:22).

The Christians were not the only ones in the Temple. There were also some Jews from Asia who were opponents of Paul. They had no doubt come to observe the feast. Now they see Paul in the Temple – something they probably did not expect to see. Immediately they begin to stir up the people, agitating those who had come to the “house of prayer” (Isa 56:7; Matt 21:13). Other versions read, “stirred up the whole crowd,” NKJV “set all the crowd in a tumult,” DARBY and “incited all the rabble.” AMPLIFIED

Finally, in a display of fleshly animosity they “laid hands” on Paul. Other versions read, “seized him,” NIV “grabbed him.” BBE This was an act of violence, the people forcefully taking hold of Paul as though he was a common criminal.

THE CHARGES AGAINST PAUL

“Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.”

These Jews from Asia, however, poured lies out of their mouth, falsely charging Paul, who carried in his heart a great burden for them. However, Satan so blinds the hearts of sinners that they cannot recognize the only people on the face of the earth who have their genuine interest in heart.

Help!

Other versions read, “Come to our aid,” NASB “help us,” NIV and “Help! Help!” LIVING Judging from their cries, you would have thought they were trying to wrestle Samson to the ground. This was a man whose bodily presence was “weak” (2 Cor 10:10). He apparently bore no outward resemblance to the mighty warrior that he was within. However, even these Jews from Asia knew there was a sense in which he was a formidable opponent.

One thing that is confirmed by this whole incident, the opponents of the Gospel have the undeniable characteristic of lying – like their father the devil who “is a liar” (John 8:44). This is a trait of those who do not know the Father, as affirmed by Jesus Himself: “Yet ye have not known Him ; but I know Him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you : but I know him, and keep his saying” (John 8:55).

Teaches Against the Jews

“ . . . teaches all men everywhere against the people” [the Jews]. It is true that, like Jesus and Stephen, Paul had spoken against some of the Jews. Jesus said, “The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation , and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here” (Mat 12:41). Stephen said to the Sanhedrin, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye ” (Acts 7:51).

Paul had also upbraided certain Jews. “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life , lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). And again, “ Your blood be upon your own heads ; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles” (Acts 18:6).

However, none of these rebukes was owing to the people being Jews. It was their unbelief that prompted such words to be spoken. Far from speaking against the Jews, Paul testified “That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:2-3).

These Jews from Asia, however, poured lies out of their mouth, falsely charging Paul, who carried in his heart a great burden for them. However, Satan so blinds the hearts of sinners that they cannot recognize the only people on the face of the earth who have their genuine interest in heart.

Teaches Against the Law

“ . . . teaches all men everywhere against . . . the Law.”

This too is an utterly false charge. In fact, Paul was in the very act of fulfilling a vow according to the Law. This is the very man who said of the Law, “by the Law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20); “the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, just, and good” (Rom 7:12); and “the Law is spiritual” (Rom 7:14). With his mind, he served the Law of God (Rom 7:25), and taught that in Christ “the righteousness of the Law” is fulfilled (Rom 8:4). However, again they lied, thinking nothing of it, though they could not cite a syllable in which Paul had defamed the Law. That is how blind they were.

Teaches Against the Temple

“ . . . teaches all men everywhere against . . . this place” [the Temple]. Paul was in the Temple, and had been for several days – yet he had spoken no word against the Temple. It is true that he had reminded the Athenians that God “dwelleth not in Temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). However, Solomon said the same thing (1 Kgs 8:27; 2 Chron 6:18). Isaiah declared the same (Isa 66:1). However, none of those lying Jews had charged those ancients with speaking against the Temple.

Polluted the Temple

“ . . . and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.” Here is a vague reference to a word spoken by God through Jeremiah. “The adversary hath spread out his hand upon all her pleasant things: for she hath seen that the heathen entered into her sanctuary , whom thou didst command that they should not enter into thy congregation” (Lam 1:10). The general commandment was given through Moses, “An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever” (Deut 23:3; Neh 13:1). Ezekiel referred to the same proscription (Ezek 44:7).

We will find, however, that these men had not properly assessed the situation.

THEY HAD SEEN PAUL WITH TROPHIMUS

“ 29 (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)”

Those who foment trouble, agitating sacred surroundings, and opposing the people of God, are always loose in their speech. They do not speak in accord with the facts of the case, and are quick to assume things that are not true. That, course, is a characteristic of the devil himself, as confirmed in the case of Job (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5). Those who employ such tactics make known that they are being controlled by Satan.

THEY HAD SEEN HIM BEFORE

We also see in this text the vigilance of the Jews in keeping their eye upon Paul. This is the city of Jerusalem, and the believing Jews alone numbered in the tens of thousands (21:20). It is good to aim at being more diligent for the Lord than His enemies are against Him and His people.

“For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian . . .” Other versions read, “For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city.” NKJV

Trophimus was from Asia, in which Ephesus was located, and had joined Paul after he had left Macedonia (Acts 20:4). He had tarried with others in Troas, awaiting the arrival of Paul from Philippi (Acts 20:5). Paul had joined them in Troas where they remained for seven days (Acts 20:6). He had continued with Paul when he went to Miletus, from whence he called the elders at the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:14-17). He then continued with Paul to Coos, Rhodes, Patara, Phenicia, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea, from whence they had departed to Jerusalem (Acts 21:1-17). This is quite a commentary on this man, whom we assume was relatively young.

We also see in this text the vigilance of the Jews in keeping their eye upon Paul. This is the city of Jerusalem, and the believing Jews alone numbered in the tens of thousands (21:20). It is good to aim at being more diligent for the Lord than His enemies are against Him and His people.

THEY SUPPOSED

“ . . . whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.” Other versions read, “and assumed that Paul had brought him into the temple area,” NIV and “and they supposed that he had brought the man into the temple [into the inner court forbidden to Gentiles].” AMPLIFIED

The text does not say that Paul brought Trophimus into the Temple – particularly in regards to being associated with the four Jews who had taken a vow. Notice how they did not make a special note of Paul’s identity with those men, even though he had publically declared the time their vow would be completed. Instead, they assumed that Paul had brought Trophimus into the Temple.

Now they agitate the people, who were devout Jews observing a feast of the Lord. They were presently in the Temple, conscious of the Lord to some degree, when they hear these shouting Jews from Asia, warning them that someone has defiled the Temple area.

It is enough to say at this point that those who stir up strife have no good in mind. That is why reason why the Lord especially hates the one who “sows discord among brethren” (Prov 6:19). James taught that the existence of strife is the result of wisdom that is “earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:14-15).

Thus, in the text before us, Satan works through some of his own people, as he is wont to do, attempting to disrupt the ministry of the apostle Paul. This event, as well as those that follow, confirm the prophecies that had been uttered before, preparing Paul for this kind of opposition. All through his journey he had been warned of the conflict he would have in Jewrusalem.

ALL THE CITY WAS MOVED

“ 30 And all the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. ”

It is well written, “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16). Strife is like a great door through which iniquity comes in like a flood. Whoever seeks to stir it up is to be rebuked, and no tolerance is to be given to it. In describing the life of faith, Paul says it is not to be done “in strife” (Rom 13:13). He also states that “strife” is evidence of carnality, which puts one at enmity with God Almighty (1 Cor 3:3; Rom 8:7). “Strife” is a work of the flesh, which excludes men from the kingdom of God (Gal 5:20-21). The people of God are admonished to “let nothing be done through strife” (Phil 2:3). It is most unfortunate that throughout history the professing church has been unduly noted for strife. It is one of the great contradictions that is fostered by Babylon the Great.

ALL THE CITY WAS MOVED

“And all the city was moved, and the people ran together . . .” Other versions read, “all the city was disturbed,” NKJV “all the city was aroused, and the people came from all directions,” NIV “the whole city was stirred up,” CSB “the whole city was in an uproar,” DOUAY “The whole city was in chaos, and a mob formed,” GWN and “the whole city was aroused and thrown into confusion.”
AMPLIFIED

The rumor quickly spread, and soon the city, teeming with thousands of people, was in a state of uproaring confusion. It was akin to the condition of Ephesus, when the silversmiths caused an uproar over Paul’s presence and ministry: “the whole city was filled with confusion” (Acts 19:32). The people gave leave of their senses, and, thinking Paul was speaking against the Jews, the Law, and the Temple, they rushed together, boiling over with wrath and confusion. All of this was caused by a lie.

I cannot help but note that this was a religious cause. It was not a political uprising, or a crusade against some form of social discontent. It was because the people thought their religion was being attacked and reproached.

Compare that with the attacks being made on Christianity in our day: against those who are called Christians, against the Bible, and against places where Christians gather. This is not to mention the corruption that is taking place in the matter of doctrine. The preaching of “another Jesus,” “another spirit,” and “another gospel” now dominates the Christian scene (2 Cor 11:4). While the proper form of objection would not be the forming of a mob and the dissemination of lies, it seems strange to me that so very little objection is being registered in some civil way. There are a few who are speaking out, but for the most part, there is a strange aura of silence that has fallen upon professing church. This circumstance is largely owing to a disinterest in the truth, and a fundamental ignorance in the Gospel. That is a condition that is beneath even the rabble-rousing Jews in this text.

THEY TOOK PAUL

“ . . . and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple . . .” Other versions read, “seized Paul, and dragged him out of the Temple,” NKJV “taking hold of Paul, they dragged him out of the Temple,” NASB and “Paul was grabbed and dragged out of the Temple.” NLT

Thinking that the Temple was being polluted, the mob seized Paul and forcibly removed him from the Temple. This was not a gentle removing, but one driven by irrational frenzy. There was no doubt a lot of pain and discomfort realized by Paul in this severe and hostile removal. Later, Paul will declare the total absence of any true cause for this action: “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city” (Acts 24:12).

THE DOORS WERE SHUT

“ . . . and forthwith the doors were shut.” Other versions read, “immediately, the doors were shut,” NKJV “immediately the gates were shut,” NIV and “immediately the gates were closed.”
AMPLIFIED

THE 10 GATES OF HEROD’S TEMPLE

Of the gates of the outer courts of Herod's temple, **nine** were covered with gold and silver, as well as the posts and lintels; but **the middle one**, the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:2), was made entirely of Corinthian brass, and was considered to surpass the others far in costliness (Joseph. *War*, 5:5, 3). This gate, which was so heavy as to require twenty men to close it, was unexpectedly found open on one occasion shortly before the close of the siege (Josephus *War*, 6:5,3; *Ap.* 2:9).

Although there were a number of gates in the Temple complex, it is understood that these were the

doors, or gates, leading into the Temple proper. This was the area where only Jews were allowed, and was accessed through “The Great Gate,” as it was called in Herod’s Temple.

Thus, not only is Paul himself removed from the Temple area reserved for the Jews, the doors are shut so that no one can enter. The fact that this occurred during the time of a feast made no difference to the opponents of Paul. Their hatred for him was so great it had consumed them.

CONCLUSION

Thus the stage is set for Paul’s voyage to Rome. It will take some time for him to actually arrive there, but this single event commenced his total withdrawal from Jerusalem and Israel in order to the fulfillment of him preaching the Gospel in Rome. This whole matter will ultimately consummate in his martyrdom.

All of this will be worked together for the good of Paul, and for the good of believers in later generations as well. These experiences were not pleasant, to be sure, but they were right in the heart of the will of God. May the Lord deliver us from naive notions about what is involved in serving the Lord! Those who would partake of the life of Christ, must also partake of His sufferings. This is done by measure, and in strict accord with the place in which the members have been placed in the body of Christ.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #89

WHEN ALL JERUSALEM WAS IN AN UPROAR

“ 21:31 ”And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. 33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done. 34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle. 35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. 36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him. 37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? 38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers? 39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people. 40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying.” (Acts 21:31-40)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

The stage is being set for the final phase of Paul’s ministry. The hardness of certain Jews will be confirmed. Assurance will also be ministered to Paul through the ordeal that follows. It must be seen that the rejection of Christ awakens animosity and depraved ways of reasoning that cannot be

thoroughly explained or controlled by men. If the sin of which the Holy Spirit convicts men is not believing on Christ (John 16:9), then it should not surprise us that Satan is especially active in such a transgression. Men are deprived of true wisdom and sanity when they reject the Lord's Christ, becoming like brute beasts. However, even though this is true, the Lord is still "over all," and will manage the anger of men so that it does not interfere with His determinations. This is taught in Scripture, as well as demonstrated in the lives of His servants. As we go through this incident these things will become more and more apparent to the sensitive heart, contributing to confidence and a strong hope. What God does perfectly agrees with what He says.

THE ACTS OF GOD

The "acts" of God are the outward manifestation of His will. They also reflect His determinations, and the total inability of man to interfere with them. The Psalmist highlighted this when he wrote, "He made known His ways unto Moses, His acts unto

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- **THE EARTH HELPED THE WOMAN (21:32)**
- **ORDERLINESS IN CHAOS (21:33)**
- **CONFUSION INTERFERES WITH CERTAINTY (21:34)**
- **PURSUED BY THE ENEMY (21:35-36)**
- **A DISPLAY OF FEARLESSNESS AND CONCERN (21:37-38)**
- **PAUL IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AND ASKS TO SPEAK (21:39)**
- **HE SPEAKS TO THEM IN THE HEBREW TONGUE (21:40)**
- **CONCLUSION**

the children of Israel" (Psa 103:7). Those "acts" were in perfect concert with God's "ways," which He "made known" to Moses, even though the Israelites failed to correlate them in their thinking. For example, God revealed Himself to Moses as "merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex 34:6-7). This perfectly agrees with the way in which He made known His acts to Israel.

MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS AND ABUNDANT IN GOODNESS AND TRUTH.

- Delivering Israel from Egypt (Ex 12:27; Psa 78:42; 107:6).
- Bringing them through the Red Sea on dry ground (Ex 14:22; Psa 106:9; 136:13).
- Destroying Pharaoh and his armies before their faces (Ex 14:30-31).
- Giving them daily manna (Ex 16:35)..
- Providing them with water like a river out of a rock (Ex 17:6; Num 20:8-11; Psa 78:16).
- Protecting them through their journey through the wilderness (Deut 8:15; Psa 136:16).
- Mandating that their clothes and shoes did not wear out (Deut 8:4).
- Making them superior to enemies that were greater than they (Num 14:9; Deut 4:38; 7:1).

- Giving them an oasis in the desert (Ex 15:27).

KEEPING MERCY FOR THOUSANDS, FORGIVING INIQUITY AND TRANSGRESSION AND SIN

- At the prayer of Moses, stopped the fire He sent from consuming all of the people (Num 11:2).
- Not utterly destroying the Israelites when they murmured, providing a remedy (Num 21:7-9).

Pardoning them when they did not deserve it (Num 14:20).

- Forgiving their iniquity and not destroying them (Psa 78:38).
- Redeeming and leading them, although they were unworthy (Ex 15:13).
- Giving the promised land to the survivors of the desert.

BY NO MEANS CLEARING THE GUILTY, VISITING THE INIQUITY OF THE FATHERS UPON THE CHILDREN

- Destroying Korah and his rebels, with their families (Num 16:27-35).
- In a single plague, owing to the obstinance of Israel, destroyed 14,100 (Num 16:49).
- Sent poisonous snakes among the people when they spoke against God and Moses (Num 21:5-6).
- Because of the mingling with the Moabites, God sent a plague upon Israel that killed 24,000 (Num 25:9).
- When the people complained, He sent a fire that consumed those dwelling in the uttermost part of the camp (Num 11:1-2).
- Pledged to blot out the remembrance of the Amalekites (Deut 25:19).
- To their tenth generation, forbade an Ammonite or a Moabite to enter into the congregation of the Lord (Deut 23:3).

OBSERVATIONS

No person who perceives the harmony between God's ways and acts will ever ask, "Why did the Lord do . . . ?" Israel asked, "Why came we forth out of Egypt?" (Num 11:20). "Why have ye brought the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness?" (Num 20:4). A hard heart and a stiff neck are disabling, rendering the person possessing them incapable of seeing the glorious harmony between the ways of God and His acts. This is compounded when one realizes that there is a very real sense in which "all things are of God" (2 Cor 5:18). Again, it is written, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things : to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom 11:36). Not only does every good and perfect gift come down from Him (James 1:17), but even calamity, for He brings prosperity and creates disaster NIV (Isa 45:7).

These days, there is not enough being said about the ways of the Lord. However, those ways are seen throughout the inspired record of Luke, and it is on the part of wisdom to be diligent to perceive those ways and conform our lives to them.

The various attributes of God working together is seen in a most unusual way in the case of Jonah.

- God sent a prophet to declare His judgment (Jonah 1:2).
- He sent out a great wind and a mighty tempest in the sea (Jonah 1:4).
- He prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah (Jonah 1:17).

- He spoke to the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land (Jonah 2:10).
- He prepared a gourd to bring relief to Jonah (Jonah 4:2).
- He prepared a worm to cause the gourd to wither (Jonah 4:6).
- He rebuked the prophet for his lack of understanding (Jonah 4:10-11).
- He spared Nineveh, their children, and their cattle when the people repented (Jonah 11).

There you have the same God, working within the same purpose, calling a prophet, judging a prophet, delivering a prophet, comforting a prophet, rebuking a prophet, and challenging a prophet concerning the Divine character. It would be entirely out of order to question why the Lord sent a vicious storm, or caused Jonah to pass through the ordeal of spending three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish, or caused a comforting gourd to die. It would be just as reasonable to ask why He spared Jonah delivered him, and gave power to his words. It is still entirely out of order to question God. That is why Paul did not raise such questions to the Lord.

The salvation of God is the pinnacle of demonstration of the ways and acts of the Lord being harmonious. Prophesying of this harmony the Psalmist spoke of the attributes of God being brought together in Christ Jesus. "Surely His salvation is nigh them that fear Him; that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven?" (Psa 85:9-11).

These days, there is not enough being said about the ways of the Lord. However, those ways are seen throughout the inspired record of Luke, and it is on the part of wisdom to be diligent to perceive those ways and conform our lives to them.

INTENTIONS AND DIVINE CONTROL

" 21:31 "And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar."

It is well to remember that we are not reading about domestic, social, or political disturbance. This tumult is within the realm of religion. Those involved are serious in their contentions, thinking that they are doing what is right before God – in this case, "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." The aggressors are intent on subduing what they perceive as a threat against truth. The victim of the aggression is being persecuted for his proclamation of the truth of God. Even though oppressors have affirmed that Paul has spoken against them, their temple, and their Law, this is not true. It is the result of their hard hearts and blindness. The aggressiveness of Paul is found in his preaching and teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. The contentiousness of the Asian Jews is owing to their embrace of a traditional view of the Law, and their misapprehension of the purpose of that Law.

While I do not wish to dwell upon this, I do want to briefly draw your attention to the near-total absence of this kind of religious persuasion in our day. There is staggering amount of religious apathy in our time, which has made it easy for unbelievers to spout their tainted opinions and market their views. But a firm commitment to the truth is not at all common. However, should the time come when the fervency of the early church once again surfaces, the kind of opposition that is chronicled in this text will no doubt rise again. Should this actually come to pass, the faithful will experience the Divine aid that was made known in Paul.

THEY WENT ABOUT TO KILL HIM

"And as they went about to kill him . . ." Other versions read, "they were seeking to kill him," NKJV "they were trying to kill him," NIV and "attempting to put him to death." BBE

The language confirms these Jews were zealous in their attempts, being creative as well. Perceiving he was a threat to their entire way of life, they were seeking any means available to them to end the life of Paul. This is an example what Paul said was being “in perils by mine own countrymen” (1 Cor 11:26).

The Psalmist succinctly stated this kind of intention, himself experiencing the very same kind of opposition.

- “With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions. I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people” (Psa 35:16-18)
- “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for He seeth that his day is coming” (Psa 37:13).
- “The wicked watcheth the righteous, and seeketh to slay him” The LORD will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged” (Psa 37:33).
- “The wicked have laid a snare for me: yet I erred not from thy precepts” (Psa 119:110).
- “Our soul is escaped as a bird out of the snare of the fowlers: the snare is broken, and we are escaped. Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth” (Psa 124:7-8).
- “The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside; they have set gins for me. Selah. I said unto the LORD, Thou art my God: hear the voice of my supplications, O LORD. O GOD the Lord, the strength of my salvation, thou hast covered my head in the day of battle” (Psa 140:6-7).
- “When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I cried unto thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living” (Psa 142:3-5).

These are opposing thoughts put into the minds of men by the devil – fiery darts that have no known depth of depravity. Faith is fully able to overcome such thoughts, for it is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4). It can stop despair from taking over the heart, and cast down foreboding imaginations that debilitate and discourage. This is the doctrine of scripture. The book of Acts fleshes out that doctrine in a record of the behavior and responses of men and women of faith.

There are several things to note of occasions such as the one in our text. These conditions are expressed in the psalmic expressions noted above.

- The plans of the wicked against the just caused no concern in heaven. They were the occasion of the laughter of derision.
- The righteous were unmoved by the threats, continuing to serve the Lord and maintain their faith in Him.
- The targets for oppression sought Divine aid.
- The wicked did not realize the fulfillment of their purposes.
- The deliverance of the righteous became the occasion for praise to God.

All of this is accomplished within a very real context. Scripture defines that circumstance in various ways.

• **God is the ultimate King.** “For the LORD most high is terrible; He is a great King over all the earth” (Psa 47:2).

• **God governs the nations.** “For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the Governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28).

• **Everything is being worked for the good of God'[s people.** “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28).

• **All things are ultimately traced to God.** “For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

We can read the book of Acts with an emphasis on the successes and woes of the people involved – the extremities of human experience. Or, by the grace of God, we can read with a mind to behold in its factual accounts the governorship and faithfulness of God, the superiority of faith, and the futility of unbelief. I recommend the latter.

TIDINGS CAME TO THE CHIEF CAPTAIN

“ . . . tidings came unto the chief captain of the band . . .” Other versions read, “news came to the commander of the garrison,” NKJV “a report came to the commander of the Roman cohort,” NASB “news reached the commander of the Roman troops,” NIV “word came to the tribune of the cohort,” NRSV “tidings came to the chief captain of the band,” ASV “word reached the commander of the Roman battalion,” CJB “word went up to the commander of the regiment,” CSB and “the commandant of the regular Roman garrison.” AMPLIFIED

The various translations refer to this military leader was “chief captain,” “commander,” “tribune,” and “commandant.” The military personal over which he had command are referred to as “band,” “garrison,” “Roman cohort,” “troops,” “Roman battalion,” “regiment,” and “the thousand-chief of the band.” INTERLINEAR

The Greek words used have the following lexical meaning. “Chief captain” (**cilia,rcw** |): “chiliarch, commander of a thousand soldiers; in Roman military organization tribune, commander of a Roman cohort of about 600 soldiers; generally high-ranking officer, chief captain, equivalent to a major or colonel,” FRIBERG “tribune (a high ranking military officer generally in charge of 600-1000 men), officer, high ranking office,” UBS “tribune (a high ranking military officer generally in charge of 600-1000 men), officer, high ranking officer,” LOUW-NIDA “the commander of a thousand men, a chiliarch,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “captain over a thousand men,” LEH and “military tribune, commander of a cohort, about 600 men, roughly equivalent to major or colonel.” GINGRICH

The Greek word translated “band” (**spei,rhj**) has the following lexical meaning: “the tenth part of a legion (I. e. about 600 men (I. e. legionaries), or if auxiliaries either 500 or 1,000,” THAYER “cohort, battalion, a Roman military technical term for the tenth part of a legion, normally containing 600 troops,” FRIBERG “cohort (the tenth part of a Roman legion having about 600 men), band of soldiers,” UBS “a Roman military unit of about six hundred soldiers, though only a part of such a cohort was often referred to as a cohort - 'cohort, band of soldiers,’” LOUW-NIDA “ *a body of men-at-arms*, the Roman manipulus,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “tactical unit, division,” LEH and “cohort (normally about 600 soldiers).” GINGRICH

Those who imagine that the Greek is the exclusive means through which clarity of Scripture can be achieved ought to take note of the variance found in the differing Greek lexicons on this word.

This captain is named in Acts 23:26 as “Claudius Lysias.” Most Bible and Greek scholars are of the opinion that, as a captain, he was over one thousand soldiers, whereas a centurion was over one hundred. I will proceed accepting this postulate, that this captain was over one thousand soldiers.

Later we will find that these were also divided into groups, with leaders over each section.

These soldiers were apparently stationed near the Temple to ensure the maintenance of order in the city. Remember, this was the feast of Pentecost, and the city was filled with Jews from around the world. The number was probably in the millions. James had told Paul that “thousands” of them were believers, which were no doubt the vast minority of the total number.

It ought to be apparent that Paul had desired to be in Jerusalem during the feast of Pentecost because of this great number of Jews. He had begun his new life in Christ by testifying to the Jews (Acts 9:20,29), and a considerable amount of his ministry of several years doing the same (Acts 13:5-50; 14:1-4; 16:3; 17:1-4, 10-12,17; 18:4-5,19; 19:8-10).

In nearly all of his ministry among his own people he faced severe opposition from unbelieving Jews – just as he is doing in our text. However, the Lord so worked in each situation that Paul was delivered, and enabled to continue his ministry until the time he would be called home. It is no different in this text. We are witnessing the Lord protected Paul until he could finish his testimony.

This is how the Lord works, and the record of Him doing so is intended to buoy up the hearts of the saints, enabling them to have a strong faith and hope, and not to fear what men can do unto them. As it is written, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6).

ALL JERUSALEM WAS IN AN UPROAR

“ . . . that all Jerusalem was in an uproar.” Other versions read, “confusion,” NASB “out of control,” BBE “in turmoil,” CJB “in a tumult,” CSB “rioting,” GWN “in a ferment,” WEYMOUTH “stirred up,” EMTV and “boiling over.” MESSAGE The lexical meaning of the word translated “uproar” is, “to disturb . . . to stir up to tumult or outbreak, to confound or bewilder,” THAYER “confuse, stir up, cause dismay,” FRIBERG “to cause consternation, to confound,” LOUW-NIDA and “to be thrown into confusion.” LEH

Let it be clear that this was the report given to the captain. It represented what appeared to be the case, namely that things were out of control in Jerusalem. A situation was in place that had, men thought, spilled over the wall of control or restraint. However, this was not at all the case. God was not merely monitoring the situation, but was in full control of it.

In fact, it is His control that caused the report to come to the captain. Speaking of this kind of control Solomon wrote, “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” (Eccl 10:20). Everything and everyone capable of delivering a message of any kind are in the army of the Lord. They are all His servants, whether they are aware of it or not. This is one of the many reasons why God is fully able to work everything together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). In fact, that is precisely what is happening in our text! Among a teeming multitude probably numbering in the millions, and in the midst of confusing uproar and a seemingly uncontrollable situation, an appropriate word is delivered to the captain of a large number of soldiers, whose job it is to keep order. How likely is it that something like that could take place randomly or by chance?

THINGS TO BE LEARNED FROM THIS EVENT

Because the Word of God is living and powerful (Heb 4:12), it is an active teacher, always delivering things vital to spiritual life. Here are some things we can learn from this text.

- For the believer, no facet of life is out of control.

- God is working everything together for our good, causing all things to blend together to serve a gracious purpose.
- Tumult is not what it appears to be.
- Sometimes God allows things to seem like they are out of control, thereby testing our faith.
- God does not always use apparently miraculous means to bring an end to trouble.
- Divine control does not always appear to be control.
- God does not always appear to men to be King over all the earth.
- God does not always appear to be governing the affairs of men.
- Our enemies can seem to have control over us.
- Peace that keeps the heart and mind can be ministered in the presence of trouble.
- Government and military officials are at God's disposal.
- God sometimes uses conventional means to control the situation.

It is never vain to trust in, or live for, the Lord. One of the purposes of the assembly of the saints is the ministration of this knowledge. This is also something that is forfeited when unthinking Christians forsake the assembling of themselves together, "as the manner of some is" (Heb 10:25).

Defining Deliverance

It seems to me that the clarification of deliverance, as it pertains to those living by faith, is necessary. Deliverance does not always mean exemption from some hardship or seeming dilemma. There are times when the believer is delivered IN the lion's den before he is removed from it. Sitting in a den of lions while an angel shuts the mouths of those ravenous beasts is a deliverance (Dan 6:16-24). There is such a thing as being delivered IN a furnace of fire prior to being separated from it (Dan 3:17-26). A prophet, together with a widow and her son, can be delivered from the effects of a famine, even though they are right IN the middle of it (1 Kgs 17:13-16).

Take Israel in Egypt as an example of the multifaceted nature of deliverance. While they were in Egypt, they were delivered from extinction, growing during a time of oppression (Ex 1:12). While they were in Egypt, they were delivered from the plagues that we sent upon Egypt (Ex 8:22; 9:26). In a single night, all of them were delivered from Egypt as they walked out, having spoiled the Egyptians who were anxious to see them go (Ex 12:31-36).

Deliverance does not always have to do with being removed from adverse circumstances. Sometimes it is protection in the midst of adversity. The bottom line of deliverance is that Satan's intentions are not realized, even if he has a grievous "thorn" with which to work.

Deliverance does not always have to do with being removed from adverse circumstances. Sometimes it is protection in the midst of adversity. The bottom line of deliverance is that Satan's intentions are not realized, even if he has a grievous "thorn" with which to work (2 Cor 12:7-10).

That is much like the experience of Paul during this time in Jerusalem. He was dragged from the Temple, beaten, and his life threatened. Yet, the enemy was foiled in their attempts, which were to kill him. God will use means to deliver His servant, so that his work may be completed, and his course run with patience to the appointed end.

If we are to learn from this noble example, we must come to the point where we do not become disconcerted when we face hard times. Our aim must be to remain faithful, whether it is under oppression, or during times when we are given comfort, and freedom from trouble. Difficult

experiences are tests, like the desert wandering was a test to Israel – a place where they were “proved” (Deut 8:2). However, in that desert Israel was taught what they could go through if God was with them (Deut 1:19). They learned by experience how the Lord carried the weak (Deut 1:31). They learned they could spend forty consecutive years in a desert without experiencing the lack of necessary things (Deut 2:7). Israel’s time in the desert was a part of their deliverance from Egypt – and those who depended on Him made it through, reaching the promised land, and taking possession of it.

Joseph experienced a similar deliverance. He was delivered from the intention of his brothers (Gen 37:19-22). He was delivered from the intentions of Potiphar’s wife (Gen 39:9-16). He was also delivered from a lengthy stay in prison, in which he was delivered from further abuse (Gen 40:21-23; 41:14-44). The 105 th Psalm provides an overview of Joseph’s life, confirming that he was tested during severe trials, yet was kept alive and finally realized ultimate deliverance from all oppression. “Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom” (Psa 105:19-22). Joseph’s entire saga was under the Lord’s control, which fact was at last made clear.

Let us now behold a similar working in the life of Paul. One who is “over all, God blessed forever” (Rom 9:5), has all resources at His disposal. He will cause things to turn out for the ultimate good of Paul.

THE EARTH HELPED THE WOMAN

“ 32 Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.”

In a grand pictorial overview of the history of God’s people, John saw the magnitude of Satan’s attack against the people of God – especially the church. In a display of power that is transcendent any human aptitude, he assaulted the church. In apocalyptic language it is stated this way: “And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth” (Rev 12:15-16). The idea here is that the King of kings employed those of the earth – unlikely sources of help – to assist His people, so that the intentions of the devil could not be realized.

- When Joseph was in prison, the prison keeper favored him, giving him rule over the prisoners (Gen 39:21).
- Pharaoh exalted Joseph, making him the second in command over Egypt (Gen 45:8).
- Pharaoh assisted Jacob and the Israelites, giving them the land of Goshen, and favoring them (Gen 47:11).
- Pharaoh’s daughter rescued and raised the infant Moses to manhood (Ex 2:5-10).
- Nebuchadnezzar exalted Daniel, making him a great man and ruler over the province of Babylon (Dan 2:48).
- Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon (Dan 3:30).
- Belshazzar exalted Daniel, making him the third over the land (Dan 5:29).
- Darius made Daniel the first in rank of three presidents, preferring him above the others (Dan 6:31-3).

- Cyrus assisted in the building of the Temple (2 Chron 36:23; Ezra 6:3-12).
- Artaxerses assisted Nehemiah (Neh 2:4-9).
- Hiram assisted Solomon in the building of the Temple (I Kgs 5:1-10).

The Lord could have abruptly stopped these proceedings in other ways – like causing fire, or gigantic hail stones to fall from heaven upon the oppressing Jews. Or, he could have sent a destroying angel to slay them all. This time, however, He will use the army of the nation that is dominating the Jews at that time, being stationed in their chief city, Jerusalem

That is the kind of thing that is reported in this case. All of this confirms the statement Solomon made concerning God and the kings of the earth: “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov 21:1).

Helped by the Brethren

There were also times when the brethren – the saints of God – assisted in the deliverance of Paul.

- In Damascus, when threatened by certain Jews who sought to kill him, “the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket” (Acts 9:25).
- In Lystra, after Paul had been stoned, “the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe” (Acts 14:20).
- In Thessalonica, when the Jews sought to do harm to them, “the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews” (Acts 17:10).
- In Ephesus, the disciples restrained him from going into the arena where a mob was waiting to harm him (Acts 19:30).

This time, however, deliverance will come from outside the church – from those who are of the earth, so to speak.

HE IMMEDIATELY TOOK SOLDIERS AND CENTURIONS

“Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them . . .” Other versions read, “officers and soldiers,” NIV “some armed men,” BBE and “soldiers and undercaptains.” TNT

Notice how the captain made no delay, but “immediately” gathered his militia and went to the scene. From his perspective, he was keeping order, lest he be called into account for the disturbances of the day. From the higher view, God called him into action quickly, in order that the intentions of the Jews be brought to a grinding halt.

The Lord could have abruptly stopped these proceedings in other ways – like causing fire (Num 26:10) or gigantic hail stones (Josh 10:11) to fall from heaven upon the oppressing Jews. Or, he could have sent a destroying angel to slay them all (2 Sam 24:16). This time, however, He will use the army of the nation that is dominating the Jews at that time, being stationed in their chief city, Jerusalem. God does not have to import help, so to speak. He can use those in the vicinity to come to the aid of His people, even though they may technically be their enemies. As it is written, “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom 8:31).

What a scene this must have been – one thousand soldiers, in strict order and discipline, coming upon the scene! They are referred to as an army in Acts 23:27, where this very captain is giving an account of the affair: “This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman” (Acts 23:27). That

army was a tool in the hands of the Lord, and He turned them according to His own power to do His will.

With a God like that, what have the saints to fear? What should cause them to tremble in fear of man or circumstance, or any other adversarial power? All of this is involved in the fact of God ruling your heart, and keeping your heart and mind.

THEY LEFT BEATING OF PAUL

“ . . . and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.” Other versions read, “they stopped beating Paul,” NKJV “gave no more blows to Paul,” BBE “ceased beating Paul,” DOUAY “desisted from beating Paul,” MRD “left smiting of Paul,” TNT “did leave off beating Paul,” YLT and “quit beating Paul.” LIVING

As soon as the Jews saw the “army” approaching, they knew they were there to stop the tumult. They did not mount an insurrection against these soldiers, the Lord subduing them. Nor, indeed, did they continue what they were doing. The Lord has this kind of precise control over all men. The fact that He does not always respond in such a manner does not suggest that He cannot do so. This is one reason why believers can lean the weight of their souls upon the Lord, knowing that with Him, all things are possible, and that He is not hindered by any circumstance, however intimidating it may be.

This is the first mention of the mob beating Paul. The initial report of Luke said, “they took Paul, and drew him out of the Temple” (21:30). Between that time and when the Captain arrived with hundreds of soldiers, the people had commenced a beating of Paul. This may very well have been an additional beating, not included in the “five times” that the Jews had beaten Paul with forty-save-one stripes (2 Cor 11:24). The way the text reads, I gather that this beating was interrupted before it was completed. In my judgment, that would exclude it from the times of beating to which he referred in his second epistle to the Corinthians.

In Philippi Paul and Silas were beaten by the officials of the city (Acts 16:22). That was a public beating, as was this one (Acts 16:37).

During that beating, as well as others he endured, I do not doubt that Paul remembered when he himself had sanctioned the beating of believers. Later, and in conjunction with this very event, Paul will tell these Jews what he had said to Jesus, who had appeared to him when he was in Jerusalem at an earlier time: “And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee ” (Acts 22:19).

I do not doubt that he gave much thought to this matter.

ORDERLINESS IN CHAOS

“ 33 Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.”

This begins a rather lengthy series of events that eventually lead us to Paul arriving in Rome, where Jesus will later assure Paul he would testify (Acts 23:11). The thought of going to Rome had been put into Paul’s spirit after he had met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, who had been expelled from Rome with all known Jews (Acts 18:2). While he was in Ephesus near the close of a period of three years, he had “purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome” (Acts 19:21). At the time, I am not sure this was more than a kind of intuitive knowledge that was compelling in nature. However, as time marched forward, this became a more settled persuasion that was finally confirmed by a word from Jesus Himself.

While this is not the appropriate place to further develop this matter, it is enough to make us aware of what is being accomplished in all of this seeming chaos and injustice. He who “has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm” (Nah 1:3), also fulfills His immutable will among social disorders, oppositions, and all manner of seemingly uncontrollable tumult. This is a matter that faith can grasp, thereby quieting the soul during disruptive influences. It is not uncommon to hear professed Christian teachers affirm that God is not in control – that He has so structured things that men can do whatever they please, even if it impinges upon His determinations. While this is true to a measured extent, there is a level of Divine determinations and

When a theology is adopted that minimizes the Sovereignty of God, it makes life more difficult. Confidence and assurance are less likely to be experienced, and there is a tendency to be overwhelmed by trouble.

purposes that cannot possibly be impacted by what men do or will to do. Some examples are the coming of Jesus into the world (Gal 4:4), the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:33; 3:18; 1 Cor 15:1-3), the ascension of Christ (Eph 4:8; Psa 68:18), the commencement of the church (Psa 2:1,47), the inauguration of the New Covenant and the fading of the old (2 Cor 3:7-11; Heb 8:8-13), the second coming of Christ (1 Tim 6:14-16), and the day of judgment (Acts 17:31). All of these have to do with precise periods of time, and even exact days. None of them could be abrogated, changed, or in any way hindered by men.

There are also exact times that could not in any way be altered or forestalled by men. These include the following.

- The day the flood began (Gen 7:23).
- The miraculous birth of Isaac (Gen 17:21).
- The deliverance of Israel from Egypt (Ex 12:41,51).
- The Babylonian captivity Hab 2:3; Jer 34:1-2).
- The fall of the worldly empires of Babylon, the Medes and the Persians, Greece, and Rome (Dan 2:28-43).
- The day of Pentecost that was fully come (Acts 2:1).
- The calling of Paul as an apostle (Gal 1:15).

Holy men of God lived in the awareness of such realities. This contributed to their boldness and certain expressions of faith that reflected great confidence.

- **JOB.** “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:16-27).
- **DAVID.** “My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me” (Psa 31:15).
- **PAUL.** “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19).
- **PAUL.** “And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (2 Tim 4:18).
- **PETER.** “Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me” (2 Pet 1:13-14).

When a theology is adopted that minimizes the Sovereignty of God, it makes life more difficult.

Confidence and assurance are less likely to be experienced, and there is a tendency to be overwhelmed by trouble.

The same God who rules the world monitors the lives of His people, so they can carry out the foreordained good works for which they were created. In order to derive the most benefit from the text before us, it must be read with these things in mind.

THE CHIEF CAPTAIN TOOK HIM

“Then the chief captain came near, and took him . . .” Other versions read, “came up and took hold of him,” NASB “came up and arrested him,” NIV “came up, took him into custody,” CSB “went to Paul, grabbed him,” GWN and “came up to him, and seized him.” MRD

The captain immediately takes charge of the whole affair, doing so in an orderly and lawful manner. I am sure he was not aware of the of the mandate of the true God concerning government, yet he was fulfilling it through the influence of the Governor of the nations.

The captain immediately takes charge of the whole affair, doing so in an orderly and lawful manner. I am sure he was not aware of the of the mandate of the true God concerning government, yet he was fulfilling it through the influence of the Governor of the nations. God ordained civil authority, investing it with power. The objective of that power, we are told, is to be a “terror to the evil” (Rom 13:3). That this is what was actually happening is confirmed in the Jews ceasing their oppression of Paul as soon as they saw him and his army. They probably did not know the extent of his ordained power, but, as it is written, a civil ruler is “the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom 13:4). His role in society is to take whatever means are necessary to abruptly stop the perpetrators of evil. For this captain, that included the cessation of social disturbance such as had been fomented by these unbelieving Jews.

The captain probably assumed that some form of insurrection was being raised like that of the Jew Barabbas, when Jesus was crucified (Matt 27:16; Mk 15:7). In his mind, he was charged with keeping order in the city, especially at this time, and Paul appeared to be the cause of unlawful disruption.

The officer abruptly terminated the Jewish proceedings, foiling their plans and frustrating their purposes. God was in the matter, even though the Captain did not know it.

Evil Intentions Frustrated

Thus the evil intentions of the Jews were frustrated. But this was more than mere social happenstance. It is God who does such a work. As it is written, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain ” (Psa 76:10). Other versions read, “the survivors of your wrath are restrained,” NIV and “the remnant of the rage shalt thou restrain.” GENEVA The idea is that God uses the wrath of man for His own purposes, frustrating mere human intentions. How vividly this is portrayed in the 46 th Psalm: “The heathen raged, the kingdoms were moved: He uttered his voice, the earth melted” (Psa 46:6). Again it is written, “Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people” (Psa 65:7).

Another historical account that confirms this Divine working is found in the life of Joseph. He suffered indignity from his brothers, the false accusation of Potiphar’s wife, and an unjust imprisonment of several years. Yet, by his own insightful confession to his brothers, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20). The Psalmist says of all of Joseph’s sufferings, “He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him . The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free” (Psa 105:17-20).

The most significant expression of this truth is seen in the death of the Lord Jesus (Acts 2:23).

An Observation Concerning Our Times

This view of government has been largely lost in our day, when undue influence is being exerted by lawyers. Now the advantage is actually given to the perpetrators of evil, to ensure that they receive all of their rights, even though they are tearing at the fabric of society. This is the result of a distorted understanding of social freedom, which was not prevalent at the time of our text. The relevance of this observation is seen in the fact that this corruption has taken place during the day of salvation, when the church has been placed in society to be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Instead of keeping the people aware of the will and ordinations of God, the church has taken on the nature of the world itself. The nominal church is wedded to the world, and “world” is her wedded name. She thinks like the world, and therefore acts like it as well. It has now entered into the political arena, even though it does not apparently have very much to offer. All of this has been done with professing Christians, many of them in government, being the occasion of blaspheming the name of God while they are found guilty of immorality in the civil arena, as well as in the religious.

The degeneration of the church has been the occasion for further degeneration in both the government and society in general. Scripture refers to this kind of impact when it calls the false church, “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH” (Rev 17:5). She has brought further confusion among men, and is therefore called “Babylon the Great.” She has caused all kinds of factions, sects, and heresies, and is therefore termed “The Mother of Harlots.” Rather than being a holy influence among men, particularly the American church has been a blotch on the fabric of society, and is therefore called, “The Mother of Abominations of the Earth.”

If all of this seems strong, it is really not strong enough. The circumstance is so serious and corrupt that human language fails to adequately describe the situation. This is the “falling away” of which Paul wrote (2 Thess 2:3). I am speaking of a body of people who can no longer “endure sound doctrine,” but “after their own lusts” have heaped “to themselves teachers, having itching ears” (1 Tim 4:3). This is an era in which professing church bodies have a “form of godliness,” yet have rejected “the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:1-5). Not only do multitudes of professing Christians live like the world, their preachers and teachers have invented theologies and ministries that justify sinfulness in and among the saints.

I mention these things because none of them were dominant at the time of our text. Churches like Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Sardis, Thyatira, Pergamos, and Laodicea were singled out and rebuked for their waywardness. Bodies of believers like the Hebrews, and those to whom James wrote, were also called to account for having lived in contradiction of the nature of the New Covenant. They were, however, the exception to the rule, and not the norm. Sadly, that is not the case in our day.

One of the distinct differences between the nation of Israel and the church of Jesus Christ is found in the people themselves.

- The hearts of Israel were not circumcised (Deut 10:16; Jer 4:4; 9:26; Acts 7:51). The hearts of the saints are circumcised (Deut 30:6; Rom 2:29; Col 2:11).
- Israel did not have a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 18:21). The church does have a new heart and spirit (Ezek 36:26; Rom 7:6), being a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Eph 2:10).
- Israel did not have the Holy Spirit (Ezek 36:27; Joel 2:28), the church does (Gal 4:6; Thess 4:8; 1 John 3:24).
- The mass of the people of Israel did not have access to God (Ex 28:1; Lev 16:15; Heb 5:1), those in Christ do (Rom 5:2; Eph 2:18; 3:12).

• Israel was fundamentally a “disobedient and gainsaying people” (Deut 9:1; Deut 31:27; Rom 10:21). Those in Christ “are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet 2:9).

Those who insist on likening the body of Christ to the ancient Israelites only display their own ignorance. It is quite true that in the professed church there are many likenesses to those rebellious people, but that is strictly owing to the lack of the Divine nature, of which the children of God are “partakers” (2 Pet 1:4). The very fact that deplorable conditions continue to exist confirm that the people are not really “joined to the Lord,” being “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17).

HE BOUND HIM WITH TWO CHAINS

“ . . . and commanded him to be bound with two chains . . . ”

Not knowing the circumstances, the captain assumes that Paul may very well be the perpetrator, and therefore puts him in chains. By doing this, he has removed Paul from the hands of the Jews, and placed him under the authority of Rome. From his viewpoint, he was taking charge of the situation. However, what was really happening was that God was delivering Paul from the malice of the Jews, and preparing the circumstances so he could go to Rome.

HE DEMANDED SOME FACTS

“ . . . and demanded who he was, and what he had done.” Other versions read, “he asked who he was and what he had done,” NKJV “he began asking who he was and what he had done,” NASB “questioning them as to who he was and what he had done,” BBE “he tried to find out who he might be and what he had done,” NAB and “demanded what he was and what he had done.” TNT

The captain begins inquiring about Paul – who he was, and what he had been doing. He wanted to gather the facts, and was apparently not willing to simply assume that the Jews were engaged in a just cause.

Unwittingly, the captain was fulfilling the purpose for government that had been established by God. Of course, God does not need human laws to implement His objectives. However, His purposes sometimes have more to do with the formation of laws than men dare to imagine. The establishment of civil authority, as affirmed in the thirteenth chapter of Romans, was not merely for the purposes of maintaining an orderly society. Ultimately, it related to the care of His people – those who are in Christ Jesus. God cares for the world for their sake. It is the arena in which He is carrying out His predetermined objective to take out of men a people for His own name (Acts 15:14). There are times when that involves the subduing of the enemies of God’s people – something that has been demonstrated throughout history.

God and Justice

God is against injustice, and often speaks about it. The prophets frequently spoke on this matter. Under the Law, men were strictly forbidden to raise false reports against someone (Ex 23:1-2). Defrauding and robbery were forbidden, for both are unjust (Lev 19:13). The psalmist wrote, “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy” (Psa 82:3). Isaiah even related justice to the matter of salvation: “Thus saith the LORD, Keep ye judgment, and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed” (Isa 56:1). The absence of justice is indication that truth is “fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter” (Isa 59:14). One of the marks of degeneracy among Israel was that “none calleth for justice” (Isa 59:4).

Some mention of this is also made in the Scriptures that are addressed specifically to the church. James addressed professing Christians who were unfair in their wages, withholding what was right. “Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by

fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth” (James 5:4).

In our text, the Roman government had a better sense of justice than the Jews from Asia. That is a most lamentable condition. I have noted over the years that many of God’s people are treated more fairly and justly by the world than they are by their brethren. For myself, this was a cause of great sorrow, and some degree of

He was dragged from the Temple and beaten unjustly, and false charges were raised against him – all from his own kinsmen according to Divine choice. It was a sad circumstance, indeed!

consternation when I was a young man. For a while I wrestled with why the world recognized my abilities, and the nominal church did not. By the grace of God, I was rescued from despair by several considerations.

- First, I was accountable to God, and He would be just in His treatment of me, both chastening and blessing.
- Second, I learned to be more precise in my definition of the church. This led me to not be so surprised at some of the manners of those who professed they were Christians, but really gave no evidence of affiliation with Christ.
- Third, in my worldly employment I found that I could serve God, whether men appreciated it or not. I found great joy in Divine acceptance, which also brought unalloyed satisfaction. By the grace of God, I did find favor with men – something I did not find in any significance measure in the institution with which I was identified.

I say these things because, in this text, Paul is receiving more justice from a heathen military man than he was from the people were identified as God’s people. He was dragged from the Temple and beaten unjustly, and false charges were raised against him – all from his own kinsmen according to Divine choice. It was a sad circumstance, indeed!

However, the fact that it appears men are getting by with being unjust is only an appearance. Records are being kept in heaven, and all accounts will eventually be settled. The day of judgment has been appointed to resolve all such matters, and show that God is true, and all who conduct themselves in opposition of God are liars.

CONFUSION INTERFERES WITH CERTAINTY

“ 34 And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.”

This text, like all Scriptural accounts, is revealing more than the circumstance being reported. The nature of people is being made known, as well as the nature of the flesh itself. The character of people, regardless of who they are, is projected in what they say and do. What Noah did (Heb 11:7), and how the world reacted to it (Matt 24:38), unveiled the character of both. The conduct of the people in a plain of Shinar unveiled the kind of people they were (Gen 11:4). This applies to Moses’ response to the presence of the Lord (Ex 33:18), as well as that of Israel (Ex 20:19). It is seen in the thrust of David’s life (Psa 27:4), as well as that of his son Absalom (2 Sam 15:6). The responses of Nehemiah (Neh 2:3) and Sanballot and Tobiah (Neh 2:10) manifested the difference in their character. Those who submitted to John the Baptist (Luke 7:29), as well as those who did not (Luke 7:30), were displaying their character in their responses. Today, there are all manner of teachings and philosophies that deny that human conduct reveals human character. Excuses are made for deviate conduct that conveniently omit the condition of the heart. Such views are an indication of the nature of the times.

The result of human expression also confirms the nature of the character of the people. The flood of Noah's day confirmed that "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his [man's] heart was only evil continually" (Gen 6:5). The fact that Noah was "saved" confirmed that Noah was "righteous" before the Lord (Gen 7:1). The dispersion of the people who were building a city and a tower for their own name, confirmed their character was corrupt (Gen 11:8). The fact that God showed Moses His glory confirmed that Moses had a godly character (Ex 33:21-23; 34:5-7). When the Spirit of God came upon David (1 Sam 16:13), it confirmed his godly character. When Absalom was slain, it confirmed his reprehensible nature (2 Sam 18:14). When God blessed Nehemiah in rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem in record time (Neh 6:15), it confirmed the tenderness of his heart. The frustration of the efforts of Sanballat and Tobiah to thwart the building of the wall testified to their hardened hearts (Neh 6:14-15). The fact that the people who submitted to John "justified God" (Lk 7:29), confirmed the sincerity of their hearts. The fact that the Pharisees and lawyers "rejected the counsel of God" confirmed the corruptness of their hearts (Lk 7:30).

I have taken the time to say these things because of the nature of this text. The hearts of the people are being revealed in what they will say, as well as the results their assembling. Their deeds cannot be divorced from their actions, else there would have been no purpose for pointing out the impact of what they were doing on the occasion.

AND SOME SAID ONE THING, SOME ANOTHER

"And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude . . ." Other versions read, "some were shouting one thing, and some another," NASB "Everyone in the crowd shouted something different," CJB "different persons cried some different thing in the crowd," DOUAY "one cried this, another that," GENEVA "People in the crowd called out different things," NJB and "Some in the crowd kept shouting back one thing and others something else." AMPLIFIED

Here, the Jews from Asia took on themselves the nature of the heathen, whom they despised, as evidenced by their charge that Paul had defiled the Temple by bringing a Greek into it (Acts 21:28). You may recall that when the Ephesian silversmiths had called a gathering against Paul, it is said of them, "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another : for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together" (Acts 19:32). This precisely characterized the gathering being described in our text. The difference is that these people were Jews – members of Israel "Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom 9:4-5). Yet, with all of the remarkable advantages they had been given, and with the sacred writings in their care, there was no measurable difference between them and the heathen. They were "Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles" (Gal 2:15). Yet, they had the same kind of hearts that their Roman oppressors had!

The Parallel in the Professing Church

If the holy, just, and good Law of God could not resolve the sin dilemma, you may be sure that the wisdom of men will not do so. The fact of the matter is that the explosion of sin within the confines of the church is revealing the character of the people.

Who cannot see the parallel that exists in our time. The professing church is really not that different from the world. Such things as divorce, immorality, extortion, and all kinds of uncleanness are found within it. The world knows it, and it is inexcusable for professed believers to engage in explanations that neutralize those conditions – like pointing out that Christians are sinners like everyone else, with the only difference being that they are forgiven. Instead of rebuking sin, the

professing church has taken to trying to resolve transgression with the wisdom of men. If the holy, just, and good Law of God could not resolve the sin dilemma, you may be sure that the wisdom of men will not do so. The fact of the matter is that the explosion of sin within the confines of the church is revealing the character of the people.

The Impact of Confusion

“ And some cried one thing, some another among the multitude, and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult . . .” (Acts 21:34)

The confusion caused by the people shouting different things, and giving differing assessments, made it impossible for the captain to learn the truth of the matter from them.

That is what confusion does – it inhibits the acquisition of the truth. This is because “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Cor 14:33). Where confusion is found, God is not present, other than in a Sovereign sense. The existence of confusion does not cause God to leave the scene, so to speak. It does, however, remove any benefits from His presence, for He does not minister to people under such conditions. I am aware that those of tender heart, even though they be in the midst of a confusing environment, can receive comfort and tutelage from the Lord. However, that benefit is not passed along to those of the general populous in such surroundings.

Confusion reveals the presence of envying and strife, both of which are excluded from the new nature (James 3:16). Those are part of “the old” that passes away when a person becomes a “new creature” (2 Cor 5:17). If confusion surfaces among professed believers, it is because they are not walking in the light, walking in the Spirit, and living by faith. Confusion is a trait of the flesh, not the Spirit.

Confusion in the Professing Church

If ever there was a mass of confusion, with one group shouting one thing, while the other shouts another, it is within the professing church. The very existence of thousands of denominations who call themselves “Christian” confirms this to be the case. Christendom, as a whole, is a mass of confusion. Here is a cursory listing of some matters on which the modern church is by no means agreed. Some are saying one thing, while others are saying another.

- The Sovereignty of God.
- The work of the Holy Spirit.
- The priorities of Jesus Christ.
- Justification.
- Sanctification
- What must a person do to be saved?
- The newness of life.
- The new creation.
- The New and Old Covenants.
- The distinction between law and grace.
- The distinction between faith and works.
- Whether or not a person is locked into salvation.
- The nature and necessity of the Lord’s Table.
- What it means to live by faith.

- The nature of obedience.
- The love of God.
- The kind of people Jesus prefers.
- The second coming of Christ.
- The nature of hell.
- The resurrection of the dead.
- The day of judgment.
- The role of baptism.
- What it means to be in Christ.
- The necessity of hope.
- The nature of repentance.
- How the new birth impacts upon life.
- The role of the church.
- The death of Christ.
- The present activity of Christ.
- The purpose for the church.
- The election of God.
- The grace of God.
- The conversion of the Jews.
- Things preceding the return of Christ.
- The Christian and the world.
- The baptism with the Spirit.
- Speaking in tongues.
- Prophesying.
- Spiritual gifts.
- The state of the soul after death.
- What happens when a person dies.
- Life after death.
- What God is doing.
- The wisdom of the world.
- The new birth.
- The priority of faith.
- The explanation for the presence of sin.
- The effect of Adam's transgression.
- The imputation of righteousness.
- What it means to be righteous.
- The meaning of reconciliation to God.

- Predestination.
- The effectiveness of prayer.
- The role of the promises.
- The effects of Christ's death.
- The old man and the new man.
- Temptation.
- The believers ability to resist the devil.
- The great tribulation.
- The antichrist.
- The end of the world.
- The judgment seat of Christ.
- When a person receives the Holy Spirit.
- Whether or not a person can fall away.

It is evidence of a grand leap forward when any believer comprehends that truth is not defined by consensus. Throwing a matter open for discussion is fine if the people doing the discussing are informed. If they are not, then such an action is nothing more than opening the door for the entrance of confusion, and the consequent ignorance that follows in its wake.

There are sixty-four subjects on which the nominal church is fundamentally disagreed – with some shouting one thing, and some another. Further, this is only the tip of the iceberg. And what is the result of all of this confusion? It is precisely the same of the confusion of our text. Those who really do not know the facts find it nearly impossible to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. All of these matters have become obscure in the public arena. Theological confusion has hidden the truth. The only way a person can actually find the truth is to find it outside the confines of organized religion. By “organized” religion, I mean an approach to the truth that accents the ones who are said to hold the truth rather than the truth itself. I am referring to the maintenance of a theological system that makes for distinction among believers, rather than holding to the Head, from which all understanding proceeds (Col 2:19).

If this captain is going to find out what really happened, he will require a different environment. He must take the inquest to a new surrounding, where bigotry and opinion are not dominant. This same procedure always precedes an honest inquiry into the truth.

PAUL WAS CARRIED TO THE CASTLE

“ . . . he commanded him to be carried into the castle.” Other versions read, “taken into the barracks,” NKJV “the army building,” BBE “the fortress,” DARBY “the compound,” NAB “the armory,” LIVING “the fort,” GNB and “military barracks.” MESSAGE

The word “castle” is translated from a word that means, “an encampment . . . an enclosure.” In this text, “the barracks of the Roman soldiers, which at Jerusalem were in the castle Antonia,” THAYER “a permanent army base barracks, fortress, soldiers' quarters,” FRIBERG “barracks . . . headquarters.” GINGRICH

In the English language “castle” means, “a large fortified building of set of buildings . . . a retreat safe against intrusion or invasion.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

This was, then, a secured place where disruption would be neutralized and the prisoner protected.

Here, the captain would be more apt to find out what really happened.

An Application

It is evidence of a grand leap forward when any believer comprehends that truth is not defined by consensus. Throwing a matter open for discussion is fine if the people doing the discussing are informed. If they are not, then such an action is nothing more than opening the door for the entrance of confusion, and the consequent ignorance that follows in its wake.

When a Kingdom matter is not clear, those who are knowledgeable of the Word and ways of the Lord are to be consulted. This is the procedure the early church pursued when confusion about circumcision arose. They did not take a vote from among the people, but determined to “go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question” (Acts 15:2). This was after they had disputed about the matter long enough to determine that no one in their company had the answer. Therefore, they appealed to those noted for their understanding to be included in the matter. Even then, all of the critical information was rehearsed and delivered to those with understanding.

The matter was finally resolved when it could be correlated with Scripture. The decision was such as could be delivered to all Gentile churches, for it was the truth, and represented a god manner of reasoning concerning the subject (Acts 15:1-29).

PURSUED BY THE ENEMY

“ 35 And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. 36 For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.”

Paul is taken away from the Temple area to the barracks, where he could be more readily protected. The intention of the captain was to keep Paul safe while he continued pursuing the truth about what had been happening, and why Paul was being beaten by his fellow countrymen.

WHEN HE CAME UPON THE STAIRS

“And when he came upon the stairs, so it was . . .” Other versions read, “reached the stairs.” NKJV “got to the stairs,” NASB

came to the steps,” NRSV “got upon the stairs,” DARBY “came to the stairs of the barracks,” GWN and “came to mount the steps.” AMPLIFIED

These stairs are the point of entry into the “castle,” “barracks,” or place of protection. Once inside the walls. He would be safe from the crowd, and under the militant protection of the Roman guard. Some might suppose that Paul was about to breathe a sign of relief, being hustled away from a crowd that had already beat him, and was getting ready to take his life. Perhaps some might see Paul as praying for deliverance all the way, fervently seeking to get at a safe distance from the crowd.

The text will suggest that this was not at all Paul’s mindset. In fact, it appears clear to me that he had been thinking all along the way of what he would do – thinking his thoughts before the Lord. Seeking for Divine guidance, he might very well have prayed like the Psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts?” (Psa 139:23), confessing, “Thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off” (Psa 139:2).

To conduct oneself during a trial with both faith and confidence is evidence of an awareness of the grace of God. Such a person knows that God is “over all,” and that his persecutors are subject to Divine rule, whether they know it or not. The one who goes through trial confidently is the one who has discerned the fact that God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and

have been called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28). Such people are not impervious to pain, and do not take delight in being helpless of themselves. It is their faith that sustains them, causing them to be an overcomer in the most hostile circumstances.

HE WAS BORNE OF THE SOLDIERS

“ . . . that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people.” Other versions read, “carried by the soldiers,” NKJV “lifted up by the armed men,” BBE “had to lift him to their shoulders,” NLT “had to lift him to their shoulders,” LIVING and “actually being carried by the soldiers.”
AMPLIFIED

Having been beaten by the Jews, he was now carried by the soldiers, obtaining mercy from those who knew not God, while enduring violence from those who professed to know Him.

THE MULTITUDE OF PEOPLE FOLLOWED

“ . . . For the multitude of the people followed after . . . ” Other versions read, “because of the violence of the mob,” NKJV “because of the force of the people,” BBE “because the mob was so wild,” CJB “the mob grew so violent,” LIVING and “the mob became so violent that the soldiers had to carry Paul.” MESSAGE

The soldiers did not carry Paul because he had been weakened by the beating he endured at the hands of the Jews. Of course, the Romans were not naturally sympathetic with those supposed to be criminals. The crucifixion of malefactors confirmed this was true – a death that was excruciating and of long duration. If, at the end of the day, the victims had not died from the ordeal, they would break their legs, causing the weight of their body to induce a quick death (John 19:31). They would also subject prisoners to severe scourging, even when they were in a weakened state (Matt 27:26; Mk 15:15; John 19:1). Even when the condemned had been beaten, and was on the way to be crucified, they were compelled to carry the cross on which they would die (John 19:16-17).

There is no record of the Roman militia showing the mercy now shown to Paul – carrying him on their shoulders because of the pressing and angry mob. However, this was no ordinary circumstance, and Paul was being protected by the invisible God – even though men did not know it. Thus, the mob was kept from carrying out its will, and Paul was granted a brief period to regain his strength, which he will use for the glory of God.

The physical resilience, or irrepressibility of Paul is astounding to the flesh. To this point in the book of Acts he has been physically beaten (16:22-23; 21:32), imprisoned (16:23-24), expelled from a city (13:50), persecuted (13:50), and stoned (14:14:19). He has also experienced fierce opposition and argumentation (16:20; 18:6), and false charges (17:6; 19:26-27; 21:21). Add to this the details Paul provided concerning the oppositions and difficulties he faced while he was about his Father’s business.

- Stripes above measure.
- In prisons more frequent than others.
- Often subjected to death.
- Beaten by the Jew five times.
- Beaten with rods three times.
- Abandoned in the sea for a night and a day.
- In perils of waters.
- In perils of robbers.

- In perils from his own countrymen.
- In perils among the heathen.
- In perils in the city.
- In perils in the wilderness.
- In perils in the sea.
- In perils among false brethren.
- In weariness.
- In painfulness.
- In watchings, or sleeplessness often.
- In hunger and in thirst.
- In frequent fastings – many of which were not voluntary.
- In cold and nakedness – i.e. without adequate clothing.

His experiences also included dishonor, evil reports, being charged with being a deceiver, being unknown, being chastened, being sorrowful, being poor, and having nothing (2 Cor 4:8-10; 11:23-27).

Yet he remained faithful to the end of his life, at which time he confessed in truth, “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith” (2 Tim 4:6-7).

And how was such a remarkable stance possible? It was because he knew and availed himself of the things provided in God’s great salvation. He himself referred to them “all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3). Peter referred to them as “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). As this text continues the impact of these benefits upon the heart and mind of Paul will be confirmed. Furthermore, all of them are still in place, and are available to all who are willing to live by faith and walk in the Spirit.

AWAY WITH HIM!

“ . . . crying, Away with him.” Other versions read, “Kill him,” CJB “Kill him, kill him!” NLT “take him away,” EMTV and “Away with him! [Kill him!]” AMPLIFIED

Thus the mob calls for the death of Paul. The words “away with him” would equate to the expression, “do away with him.” They were not calling for Paul’s incarceration, but for the forcible termination of his life.

A significant number of Jews are calling for this death. Now we will see if they are able to carry out their will, and if they will be able to convince the authorities to do what they wanted – like the Jews imagined they had convinced Pilate to crucify Jesus.

Remember, behind the scenes, God is “for” Paul, having called him to a work that belonged exclusively to God. Now the Spirit will confirm the certainty that has been recorded in the Scriptures. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress , or persecution , or famine, or nakedness, or peril , or sword ? . . . For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:35-36,38-39). If the spiritual powers that work through men are not able to separate the saints from the love of God, you may be sure that the ones they employ for their diabolical

purposes will not be able to do so.

A DISPLAY OF FEARLESSNESS AND CONCERN

“ 37 And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? 38 Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?”

Behold the confidence and presence of mind that is displayed in Paul. He is not wringing his hands in despair. He is not calling for legal counsel, or convulsing in hopeless weeping. He rather speaks as a king and a priest who knows the One who governs kings and is King over all the earth. He waxes bold, and asks his captor for a favor. That is a marvelous display of faith!

HE SAID UNTO THE CHIEF CAPTAIN

“And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? . . .” Other versions read, “May I speak with you?” NKJV “May I say something to you,” NASB “Is it all right if I say something to you?,” CJB “Am I allowed to say something to you?” CSB “Wilt thou permit me to speak with thee?” MRD “if he could have a word with him,” NJB “Is it permitted to me to say anything unto thee?” YLT and “Do I have the right to say something to you?” IE

Paul is giving honor to whom, honor is do – something that is required of those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 13:7). By inquiring what is allowed, he is also honoring the king, as Peter wrote in his first epistle (1 Pet 2:17). He seasons his words with salt, so they will not be taken in the wrong way (Col 4:6). He does not insist on his rights. He does not challenge what the captain has already done. He simply inquires if, under the Roman law, he is allowed to speak to the leader of this band of soldiers.

Faith enables a man to speak in this way, because he knows the Author of government, who is also in charge of it. Thus Paul asks a question, the answer of which will direct him in what he is to do. Sometimes the will of the Lord is made known in such a way, with the seeker using all of their powers, together with wisdom, to discover the “path of the just” (Prov 4:18; Isa 26:7).

SOMETHING OF PAUL IS LEARNED

“Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? +Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?”

“The account which he gives is, that this Egyptian, whose name he does not mention, came from Egypt to Jerusalem, and said that he was a prophet, and advised the multitude of the common people to go with him to the Mount of Olives. He said further that he would show them from thence how the walls of Jerusalem would fall down: and he promised them that he would procure for them an entrance through those walls when they were fallen down. Josephus adds (Jewish Wars) that he got together 30,000 men that were deluded by him; “these he led round about from the wilderness to the mount which was called the Mount of Olives, and was ready to break into Jerusalem by force from that place. But Felix, who was apprised of his movements, marched against him with the Roman soldiers, and defeated him, and killed 400 of them, and took 200 alive. But the Egyptian escaped himself out of the fight, but did not appear anymore.”

Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 8, section 6, and Jewish Wars, book 2, chapter 13, section 5 per Albert Barnes

First, it is apparent that Paul spoke in Greek to the Centurion. Later, he will speak to the Jews in Hebrew (verse 40). He will also do this some time after this occasion (22:2). By speaking in Greek,

he will leave the idea that he is a Roman citizen, and the better gain the attention of the captain.

We also learn that the captain thought Paul was a man who had previously caused an uproar in the city. Josephus provides an account of this unnamed Egyptian who mounted a campaign against Rome. He states that Felix overthrew him, killing many of his soldiers, but that the leader has escaped. All of this took place during the time of our text, which accounts for the captain's response.

We learn here that what the saints do can be associated with what evil men do, particularly when only a sparse amount of their activity is known. In this case, the Asian Jews had painted the picture of an insurrectionist, who was causing an uproar in the city. It does not appear they were thinking of this "Egyptian" who had attempted to rally an army of despots against the Roman government. But what they reported of Paul led the captain to the conclusion that this could very well be the same man who had previously opposed the government, and sought to take charge of Jerusalem himself.

It should not surprise us that Satan still moves men to think in this manner. He will influence some to speak of Christian men as though they were identified with someone other than Christ. Today, it is a bit more subtle than the events of our text. But who has not heard of, or perhaps experienced, the accusation belonging to some sect of Christendom because the unvarnished concerning being saved by grace through faith, or being appointed to salvation, or insisting that the new birth does, in fact, yield holiness. Upon hearing such things some will charge that the person is a Calvinist, or a perfectionist, or some other supposed defaming epithet.

These are all tactics of the wicked one. He moves men to oppose speakers of truth, not because of what they actually said, but because of associations their critics said they had. It is good to note the wisdom with which Paul conducted himself under such circumstances. It will assist us to be more wise in our dealings with those who oppose us.

PAUL IDENTIFIES HIMSELF AND ASKS TO SPEAK

“ 39 But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.”

It will be interesting how Paul identified himself. Will he try and posture himself so as to gain an advantage with the captain, or will he simply tell the truth? We will find that his answer contains a bit of both.

I AM A MAN

“But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia . . .” Other versions read, “I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia,” NKJV “I am a Jewish man from Tarsus of Cilicia,” CJB “I am a Jewish man from Tarsus of Cilicia,” CSB “I, indeed, am a man, a Jew, of Tarsus of Cilicia,” YLT and “I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia.” GNB

Tarsus was in the region of Cilicia, which is in the southern region of what is now called Turkey. Modern Saudi Arabia is on the bottom-right of the map above, and Iran is to the right of the map, near Chaldea. The mountains of Ararat, where Noah's ark landed, is on the upper right of the map. Haran, from which Abraham departed when he struck out for Canaan, is located on the upper third of the map. Eden, the plain of Shinar where the tower of Babel was built, and Babylon are in the same general vicinity, to the right of the map.

All of this accents how much of the work of the Lord was centered in that region of the world. Eden, Noah, Abraham, key nations having to do with Israel, and the promised land of Canaan, referred to as God's own land, were in that region.

The city of Tarsus is mentioned five times in Scripture, and though it was an ancient and significant

city, it is associated exclusively with Paul (Acts 9:11,30; 11:25; 21:39; 22:3).

A CITIZEN OF NO MEAN CITY

“ . . . a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee . . .” Other versions read, “a citizen of no insignificant city,” NASB “a citizen of no ordinary city,” NIV “a citizen of an important city, NRSV “which is not an unimportant town,” BBE “a citizen of no obscure city,” ESV “a famous city,” GENEVA “a noted city,” MRD “no ordinary city,” NIB “no vile city,” PNT “well-known city,” NJB and “no insignificant or undistinguished city.” AMPLIFIED

Tarsus has a significant place in human history, which records that it was founded by Sardanapalus, king of Assyria. McClintok and Strong’s Cyclopeda records: “It appears first in authentic history in Xenophon’s time, when it was a city of some considerable consequence (Anab. 1, 2, 23). It was occupied by Cyrus and his troops for twenty days and given up to plunder. After Alexander’s conquests had swept this way (Q. Curt. 3, 5) and the Seleucid kingdom was established at Antioch Tarsus usually belonged to that kingdom, though for a time it was under the Ptolemies. In the civil wars of Rome it took Caesar’s side, and on the occasion of a visit from him had its name changed to Juliopolis (Caesar, Bell. Alex. 66; Dion Cass. 47, 26). Augustus made Tarsus free (Appian, Bell. Civ. 5, 7) . . . It was renowned as a place of education under the early Roman emperors. Strabo compares it in

this respect to Athens and Alexandria, giving, as regards the zeal for learning shown by the residents, the preference to Tarsus (14, 673). Some distinguished names adorn its annals; among others, Athenodorus; the tutor of Augustus, and Nestor, the tutor of Marcellus, the nephew of Augustus; Artemidorus and Diodorus, celebrated grammarians, and Dionysides, a tragic writer. Tarsus, also, was a place of much commerce, and Basil describes it as a point of union for Syrians, Cilicians, Isaurians, and Cappadocians (*Ep. Euseb. Samos. Episc.*).

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The modern practice of obtaining theological credentials from the schools of men – many of them being secular schools – reflects a distorted sense of values. While such a practice is highly treasured in certain circles, it is classified as “dung” by Paul.

I provide this rather extensive quote for at least two reasons. First, to establish the significant description of Paul – “no mean city.” Second, to confirm that what is great in the world is nothing more than incidental in the Divine record of things. If it had not been for the Scriptural account of Paul, there would never have been anything said about this city, or others similar to it: i.e. Athens and Corinth of Greece, Alexandria Egypt, Ephesus of Asia, etc. The same could be said of the ancient cities of Nineveh, Babylon, etc.

The city of Tarsus did not in any way contribute to the greatness of Paul, even though it was a citadel of education and learning. When Paul accented his academic learning, he referred to sitting at the feet of Gamaliel, who was an expert in the Law of God (Acts 5:34; 22:3). Yet, Gamaliel, as great as he was, is only mentioned two times in Scripture.

In speaking in this manner concerning Tarsus, Paul was not boasting, but was drawing attention to a city of which the captain would be aware.

Application

The modern practice of obtaining theological credentials from the schools of men – many of them being secular schools – reflects a distorted sense of values. While such a practice is highly treasured in certain circles, it is classified as “dung” by Paul (Phil 3:6). Before God Almighty, such wisdom is considered “foolishness” (1 Cor 3:19). No amount of defense or human reasoning can change that perspective, which is to be adopted by every believer.

SUFFER ME TO SPEAK TO THE PEOPLE

“ . . . suffer me to speak unto the people.” Other versions read, “permit me to speak,” NKJV “allow me to speak,” NASB “Please let me speak,” NIV “I beg you, let me speak,” NRSV “I beseech thee, give me leave to speak,” ASV “I make a request to you to be me say a word,” BBE “I ask your permission to let me speak,” CJB and “I beg you, allow me to address the people.” AMPLIFIED

Note the total absence of brashness and disrespect. Having gathered that it was in order to speak to this military man, Paul proceeded with a humble request. He does not ask for his own release, or for a fair trial. He rather asks for permission to speak to his enemies – the ones who have dragged him from the Temple, and made false charges against him. He does not assume they will not listen to him, but chooses to begin with the thought that it will be profitable to speak to them. There is no evidence that he had spoken to these Asian Jews prior to this occasion. Here is an excellent example of one of the traits of charity: “Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (1 Cor 13:5). Once again, we see the truth being lived out by those in Christ Jesus. Oaul has spiritual composure as he speaks.

HE SPOKE TO THEM IN THE HEBREW TONGUE

“ 40 And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying.”

Here is an example of a man who is not dominated by “the fear of man,” which “bringeth a snare.” Solomon states that “the fear of man” is the opposite of trusting in God. “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov 29:25). In new covenant language it is stated this way, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6). David said, “I will not fear what flesh can do unto me” (Psa 56:4). Again he wrote, “In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me” (Psa 56:11). And again the psalmist wrote, “The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me?” (Psa 118:6). Jesus counseled, “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt 10:28). Luke records, “And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear him” (Luke 12:4-5). The Lord said to Jeremiah, who was sent to a rebellious people, “Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD” (Jer 1:8).

What, then, shall we say of those who shape their words to please men, and alter their messages because they are afraid of what the people will say? What of those who make a survey of what the people want, and ignore what the Lord demands? There are professing Christians who are afraid of what their spouses will say, and children who tremble at what their parents might say if they learned of their faith. Students of all ages are noted for altering their appearance and their manners so they will be the better received by their critical peers. Let all such compromisers learn from this text to boldly face their enemies, and not be afraid of their faces or what they think they can do.

WHEN HE HAD GIVEN HIM LICENSE

“And when he had given him licence . . .” Other versions read, “when he had given him permission,” NKJV “having received the commanders permission,” NIV “when he had given him leave,” RSV “when he let him do so,” BBE “when he had allowed him,” DARBY the man gave his consent,” NJB “the commander agreed,” NLT and “he granted the request.” WILLIAMS

Paul would not proceed to speak until he was given permission to do so, thus honoring the civil authority. He had so phrased his request as to not arouse suspicion that he would cause further disruption. I do not doubt that he was also relying upon the Lord, according to the words of holy men of old.

Once again, we are witnessing the impact of living by faith and walking in the Spirit. I fear that many people have continual trouble with those around them because they are not living by faith – trusting in the Lord concerning their situation. This lack of trust is largely owing to the manner of Christian teaching that is popular in our time. This is the time of the counselor and expert in social and domestic affairs. There is no need for faith in God. Someone will always be available who can counsel you out of a dilemma, regardless of its nature. There are routines and procedures conveniently prepared that will allow the people to speak like a parrot instead of like a wise man. These various methodologies have actually taught the people NOT to trust in the Lord. They now default to human instruction rather than Divine guidance.

Men who are enslaved to this mechanical form of life do not really expect opportunities to be opened to them by the Lord Jesus Himself. However, the trusting ones rely upon this word, “These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth” (Rev 3:7).

Paul wrote to the Corinthians about a door opened to him that was attended by many adversaries. “For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries” (1 Cor 16:9). When he was in Troas, he said, “a door was opened to me of the Lord” (2 Cor 2:12). He asked the Colossians to pray that a door of utterance might be opened to him. “Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds” (Col 4:3).

The point is that Paul perceived that an open door had been set before him, and therefore asked for an opportunity to speak. That is how this occasion should be viewed, not simply as a man stabbing in the dark, trying to stumble on an opportunity. That is not the manner of life that is directed by the Spirit, or lived by faith.

HE BECKONED WITH HIS HAND TO THE PEOPLE

“ . . . Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people . . .” Other versions read, “motioned with his hand to the people,” NKJV “made a sign with his hand to the people,” BBE “gestured to the people with his hand,” NET “raised his hand to the people for silence,” NJB “motioned to the people to be quiet,” NLT and “made signs with his hands, so that the people would be quiet.” IE

In a sense, this was an act of faith. Until this time, these people had been a shouting, rioting mob, with different things being shouted out. There had been such a state of confusion among these people that the captain had moved the attempted proceedings to another location.

Yet, in these new surroundings, and with the Roman militia present to keep order, the situation was more favorable. Yet, with all of that, it was the Lord who was managing this whole affair, bringing His own will to pass through a surrendered man.

HE SPOKE TO THEM IN THE HEBREW TONGUE

“ . . . And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying.” Other versions read, “and when there was a great hush, he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying,” NASB “When they were all silent, he said to them in Aramaic,” NIV/NET/NIB/NLT “and when there was a great hush, he addressed them in the Hebrew language, saying,” NRSV “when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew language, saying,” ASV “When they finally became still, he addressed them in Hebrew,” CJB “and a great silence having been made, he addressed them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,” DARBY “When the mob was silent, Paul spoke to them in the Hebrew language,” GWN “The people became even quieter when Paul used the Aramaic language to speak to them,” IE and “and there was a great hush. Then he spoke to them in the Hebrew dialect, saying.” AMPLIFIED

A Great Silence

The shouting mob suddenly became quiet, hushed at Paul beckoning with his hand. Considering the circumstances, this is most extraordinary. In fact, it is a manifestation of the power of God. The Scriptures often speak of God’s subduing power (Psa 18:39,47; 144:2). In this case, it is the wrath of the people that was subdued for a season in order that Paul might speak.

This would also confirm to the captain that Paul was, in fact, a Jew. There is no record of any other body of people speaking this language.

A LINGUISTIC VIEW OF THE HEBREW LANGUAGE

The Greek language, therefore, in its most perfect form, was the offspring of reason and taste; the Hebrew, of imagination and intuition.

It was the same mind that found expression in the Hebrew language, which gave birth, under the influence of divine inspiration, to the sublime revelations of the Old Testament Scriptures.

The Hebrew composition is also extremely *pictorial* in its character-not the poetry only, but also the prose. In the history the past is not described, it is painted. It is not the ear that hears, it is rather the eye that sees. The course of events is made to pass before the eye; the transactions are all acted over again. The past is not a fixed landscape, but a moving panorama. The reader of the English Bible must have remarked the constant use of the word *behold*, which indicates that the writer is himself, and wishes to make his reader also, a spectator of the transactions he describes.

But the singular phenomenon admits of an easy explanation. It was because the Hebrew viewed and described the transactions of the past, not as all past and done, but as in actual process and progress of evolvment, that he makes such frequent use of the so-called future.

The same effect is also produced by the *symbolical way of representing mental states and processes which* distinguishes the Hebrew writers. Such expressions as *to bend or incline the ear* for “to hear attentively,” *to stiffen the neck* for “to be stubborn and rebellious,” *to uncover the ear* for “to reveal,” are in frequent use. Even the acts of the Divine Mind are depicted in a similar way.

The Babylonian Captivity is assigned as the commencement of that decline and corruption which mark the second period in the history of the Hebrew language; but the Assyrian deportation of the ten tribes, in the year B.C. 720, was probably the first means of bringing the Aramaic idiom into injurious proximity with it.

EXCERPTS FROM McCLINTOK & STRONG’S CYCLOPEDIA

Some versions represent Paul as speaking in “Aramaic” (NIV, NET, NIB, NLT, IE, CEV). Others read “Hebrew tongue” (KJV, DARBY, DOUAY, GENEVA, PNT, TNT), “Hebrew language” (NKJV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, BBE, CSB, ERV, ESV, GWN, RWB, WEB, EMTV), “Hebrew dialect” (NASB, NAB, NAU, YLT, LITV, AMPLIFIED), “Hebrew ” (CJB, MRD, NAB, NJB, LIVING, WEYMOUTH, WILLIAMS,

The wisdom with which Paul conducts himself throughout this entire incident is worthy of note. It is a kind of commentary on the effectiveness of living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and maintaining a lively fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. When one actually does walk in the light, Divine direction is more apparent.

MONTGOMERY, GNB, MESSAGE).

The Greek phrase from which “Hebrew tongue” is translated is Ebrai<di diale,ktwl le,gwn . The literal translation of these words is, “Hebrew dialect saying.” INTERLINEAR The word dialect is defined as, “a variety of language that is used by one group of persons and has features of vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation distinguishing it from other varieties used by other groups.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

In the normal use of the word “dialect,” it is assumed that the language reflects the surroundings and culture of the people, as ordinarily perceived. However, it is different for the Hebrew language. It was basically a theological language, and reflected the identity of the people with the living God. It is first mentioned in Second Kings.

Even the linguists take special note of the Hebrew language. It was more of a living language, particularly painting history as something that was moving along. This allowed for the superimposition of God Himself upon history. A brief synopsis of the language is in the box labeled “A Linguistic View of the Hebrew Language.” Places where it is noted in Scripture are as follows.

- Jew’s language – 2 Kgs 18:26,28; Neh 3:24; Esth 8:9; Isa 36:11,13
- Hebrew tongue – John 5:2; Acts 21:40; 22:2; 26:14; Rev 9:11; 16:16

Historically, the Hebrew language was important to the Israelites. On one occasion, after they had intermarried with heathen peoples, Nehemiah took note of the deterioration of the use of the Hebrew language. Some people could not speak it any longer, and others had adopted a distorted vocabulary that was part Hebrew and part another language. “In those days also saw I Jews that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab: and their children spake half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews’ language, but according to the language of each people” (Neh 13:23-24). This matter greatly agitated Nehemiah, for in it he saw a dangerous trend. “And I contended with them, and cursed them, and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear by God, saying, Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons, nor take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves. Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel: nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin. Shall we then hearken unto you to do all this great evil, to transgress against our God in marrying strange wives?” (Neh 13:25-27).

Some are of the opinion that the Hebrew language itself had been altered at the time of our text, so that it was not a pure language any longer. I do not doubt that, for some, this was the case. However, this does not mean that the general purity of the text was not maintained by the devout. Were this not the case, I do not see why Luke would make special mention of Paul addressing the people in “the Hebrew tongue.”

By speaking to the Jews in their native language, the following could have been accomplished.

- It would confirm to the captain that Paul was, indeed, a Jew, for there is no record of any other people speaking this language.
- To the Jews themselves, it would accent that Paul was not conducting himself contrary to Jewish manners.
- Paul would be able to speak more precisely concerning the matters he presented to the people.

The wisdom with which Paul conducts himself throughout this entire incident is worthy of note. It is a kind of commentary on the effectiveness of living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and maintaining a lively fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. When one actually does walk in the light, Divine direction is more apparent.

CONCLUSION

Solomon once wrote, “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Prov 27:1). James added, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away” (James 4:14). For those who are living by faith, eternity is certain. However, so far as life in this world is concerned, there is an element of uncertainty that attends life. Living by faith involves navigating through life a day at a time, and often in significantly lesser increments of time. The future must be viewed as something that is managed by God Himself. The role of the faithful is to remain alert and vigilant, not allowing the distractions of unbelief and care to enter the heart.

The stance of faith includes putting on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-18), putting off the old man, and putting on the new man (Eph 4:22-24). In summary, the believers live unto Him who died for them and rose again. Their lives are not their own, for they have been purchased with a price, and they know it.

This is the kind of life that Paul has been living. It is why he is alert to both dangers and opportunities. It is why he is able to react to challenges in such a way as brings glory to God. It is vital that we see such things as we go through this book. That is what will make it profitable to us, so that we are able to behold the wonderful works of God in what is reported.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #90

PAUL'S DEFENSE TO THE JEWS, #1

“ 22:1 ”Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. 2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) 3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. 4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. 5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. 6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. 7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. 9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. 10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. 11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. 12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, 13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.” (Acts 22:1-13)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

In defending himself, Paul is accounting for how he is conducting his life, and for the message he is preaching to the people. He will establish to these Jews that he comes from a zealous background as themselves, and was taught under the most respected Jewish teachers. His words will establish that he is not a mere reactionary, as some have alleged. There was an epoch in his life that altered its course. Although Gamaliel was a peaceable man, a higher authority than Gamaliel had spoken to Paul. Paul too was known for persecuting this way, which the high priest and elders could confirm. Now, owing to the appearance of “Jesus of Nazareth,” he had embraced the way he once opposed. Formerly, he simply had not seen it correctly. As a sign to him, a devout man according to the law, who had a good report of all the Jews, came to him and he received the sight that he has lost in the blazing glory of that experience on the road to Damascus.

THE STRONGEST TESTIMONY IS THAT OF A CHANGED LIFE

By contrasting his present life with his former manner of life, Paul will establish that a significant change has taken place in

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- **THE KIND OF MAN I AM (22:3)**
- **I PERSECUTED THIS WAY (22:4)**
- **THE HIGH PRIEST BEARS ME WITNESS (22:5)**
- **A GREAT LIGHT FROM HEAVEN (22:6)**
- **I FELL TO THE GROUND AND HEARD A VOICE (22:7-8)**
- **THEY THAT WERE WITH ME (22:9)**
- **WHAT SHALL I DO, LORD? (22:10)**
- **THE GLORY OF THAT LIGHT (22:11)**
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- **CONCLUSION**

him. With spiritual expertise, he accounts for that change by testifying to the events through which that alteration had been initiated. It is good to remember that those in Christ have experienced a very real change.

• **FROM DEATH TO LIFE.** They have passed from death unto life (John 5:24; 1 John 3:14).

• **FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT.** They have been turned from darkness to light (Acts 26:28a).

• **FROM THE POWER OF SATAN TO GOD.** They have been turned from the power of Satan unto God (Acts 26:18b).

• **DEAD, BUT MADE ALIVE.** They were dead, but now they are quickened, or made alive (Eph 2:1).

• **ENEMIES, BUT RECONCILED.** They once were enemies, but now they are reconciled to God (Rom 5::10).

• **ONCE ASTRAY, BUT NOW RETURNED.** They were as sheep going astray, but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of their souls (1 Pet 2:25).

• **FROM SERVANTS OF SIN TO FREE FROM SIN.** They were the servants of

sin, but are now made free from sin (Rom 6:17-18).

- **FROM UNRIGHTEOUS TO JUSTIFIED.** They were once unrighteous, but are now washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:9-11).

- **FROM FAR FROM TO NIGH.** They once were “far off,” but have now been “made nigh by the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:13).

- **FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT.** They once were darkness, but now are light in the Lord (Eph 5:8).

- **FROM NOT A PEOPLE TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD.** They once were “not a people,” but are now “the people of God” (1 Pet 2:10a).

- **FROM ALIENATED TO RECONCILED.** They once were “alienated and enemies” in their minds, but are now “reconciled” (Col 1:21).

- **FROM CHILDREN OF DISOBEDIENCE TO BEING MADE TO SIT TOGETHER WITH CHRIST IN HEAVENLY PLACES.** Once they were vassals of the devil, but now they are sitting with Jesus, and are joint heirs with Him (Eph 2:2-6; Rom 8:17).

It is not that those in Christ ought to change; they have been changed, and are continuing to be changed by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18). That is the Kingdom norm. Any deviation from that is precisely that – a deviation.

It is not that those in Christ ought to change; they have been changed, and are continuing to be changed by the Spirit of God (2 Cor 3:18). That is the Kingdom norm. Any deviation from that is precisely that – a deviation. When believers have to be admonished to change, it is because they have retrogressed, and removed themselves from the One who called them into the grace of Christ (Gal 1:6). When they are not growing, it is because they have not added the various virtues that have been provided for them, and of which they have been apprised (2 Pet 1:5-10).

Paul will set himself forth as an exhibit of what happens when a person is justified – when they have been made a partaker of Christ (Heb 3:14), and have been reconciled to God (Colo 1:20-21).

Elsewhere Paul declared that he was chosen to be an example, or pattern, of what happens when God shows mercy on a person. “This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners ; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (1 Tim 1:15-16). Paul also provides a sterling example of a person who does not resist the Spirit, or choose the flesh over the Spirit.

The prophets foretold this type of change – one that involved the fundamental altering of man’s basic constitution.

- **MOSES SAID GOD WOULD CIRCUMCISE THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE.** This is a circumcision that would result in the people loving God with their whole being. “And the LORD thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul , that thou mayest live” (Deut 30:6).

- **JEREMIAH SAID THE PEOPLE WOULD NOT DEPART FROM HIM.** The people would be united with one heart, and would be faithful. “And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them: And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me ” (Jer 32:39-40).

• **JEREMIAH SPOKE OF GOD GIVING THE PEOPLE A HEART TO KNOW HIM.** This new heart would induce the people to return to Him with their whole heart. “And I will give them an heart to know me, that I am the LORD: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God: for they shall return unto me with their whole heart ” (Jer 24:7).

• **EZEKIEL SPOKE OF THE PEOPLE RECEIVING A NEW HEART AND SPIRIT.** A new heart and spirit would result in the people walking uprightly. “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them ” (Ezek 36:16-27).

These days, there is too much attention given to explaining the presence of sin among professing Christians. Actually, the testimony should be of a people who have been obviously and undeniably changed. If this change is not obvious, a claim of identity with Christ is nothing more than supposition, and a glorifying testimony cannot be given. Identity with God assumes a lack of identity with sinners. The only exception to this rule is the testimony of the past, which, as Paul will show, is in sharp conflict with the testimony of the present. That is because a very real and fundamental change has taken place. This change is not merely a new discipline or regimen. It is a change in character in which the new comes, and the old passes away (2 Cor 5:17).

A religion that is not manifested in an observable change is a fraudulent one. If this were not the case, Paul’s testimony would carry no weight at all. However, there was a change in his manner of life – a change that could be attested by observation. Further weight will be given to his testimony because he came from the same background as those who were opposing him. He was also zealous in his former opposition to Christ and those who believed on Him. The contrast will confirm that a work had been done in him.

HEAR MY DEFENCE

“ 22:1 Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. 2 (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith) . . . ”

MEN, BRETHREN, AND FATHERS

“ . . . Men, brethren, and fathers . . . ” Other versions read, “Brethren and fathers,” NKJV “brothers and fathers,” NIV “My brothers and fathers,” BBE “men, brethren, and fathers,” DARBY/DOUAY/GENEVA/RWB/TNT/WEB/YLT/ EMTV/LITV “brothers and esteemed fathers,” NLT “my friends and leaders of our nation,” CEV “my fellow Jews.” GNB and “Brethren and fathers [Men, brethren and fathers.” WYCLIFEE

Here is a classic example of the fulfillment of Jesus’ word: “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matt 5:44). Notice with what kindness he addresses them – “brethren, fathers.” Elsewhere he referred to the Jews in general as, “my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3). He also said of himself, “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1).

This identity according to the flesh was not like that of ordinary national or ethnic associations. This was a fleshly association that was ordained and blessed by God. Jesus Himself came from Israel “concerning the flesh” (Rom 9:5), and was related to David, for example, “according to the flesh” (Acts 2:30; Rom 1:3). To be sure, Jesus was not limited to the fleshly lineage, for He was primarily “the Son of God” (Mk 1:1; Lk 1:35; John 1:34; Acts 8:37; Rom 1:4; 1 John 5:20). Secondly, however, He was also a “Jew” (John 4:9), and Paul also confessed himself to be a “Jew” (Acts 21:39; 22:3). Holy men would speak of “sinners of the Gentiles” (Gal 2:15), but would speak of the Jews as

having a noble lineage (Rom 9:3-5). In this way, they honored the choice of God, as well as the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Being saved involves infinitely more than being the fleshly offspring of Abraham. However, men of God spoke of such associations as blessed ones, even if the people did not handle that association properly. Jesus spoke of a distinction within the Jewish race. “They answered and said unto him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the works of Abraham” (John 8:39). Paul did the same when he wrote, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel” (Rom 9:6).

Notwithstanding this distinction, Paul was not ashamed to associate himself generally with the offspring of Abraham – a blessed race indeed.

HEAR YE

“ . . . hear ye my defence which I make now unto you . . .” Other versions read, “my defense which I now offer to you,” NASB “listen to my defense,” NIV “the story of my life which I now put before you,” BBE “what I have to say in my defense,” WILLIAMS “listen as I explain what happened,” CEV and “listen carefully to what I have to say before you jump to conclusions about me.” MESSAGE

The word “defense” comes from the Greek word **avpologi,aj** (apologias). This is word from which we get the term “apology.” The primary meaning of this English word is

“something said or written in defense or justification of what appears to others to be wrong or of what may be liable to disapprobation.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER In this case, Paul’s manner, or conduct, appeared to contradict what the Jews who were accusing him thought was proper. Confirming that he had not merely adopted a different earthly philosophy, Paul justifies what he is doing, showing that it was altogether proper. He will confirm that he is acting in perfect harmony with what he has been given to see, and how he has been changed.

In a most powerful manner, he will associate the way he is living with what he has experienced. That experience will be defined as a confrontation of the Lord Jesus Christ, which confrontation wrought an instant moral change, and inducted a completely different perspective of life.

Of course, all of this would be pointless if a change in his manner of living was not apparent. This is precisely why it is so wrong for a professing Christian to shape his appearance and life as though he was no different than other people. Such foolish efforts make an apology pointless, for there is no reason for a defense of the faith if the one giving it provides no evidence of the change wrought in regeneration.

The Purpose of an Apology

Peter referred to this kind of defense when he wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet 3:15-16). All of this postulates a radical change in those who have “received” Christ (John 1:12). The lives of such people are significantly different than those who remain “alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them” (Eph 4:18). It is that stark difference that solicits the inquiry of others, whether it is an amiable one, or one that is hostile, such as is revealed in this text.

In our time, the definition and purpose of apology has been changed to be harmonious with institutionalism. The study of apologetics is not one that is personal, or accounts for a different manner of life. Now an apology is associated with a purely scholastic defense of the Christian view of things. It may deal with the orderliness of creation, or certain rules of logic – but the personal aspect of giving

an apology is not generally known. While there may be some measured value in such an approach, it has no power in it, because it is not undergirded by lives that are being lived by faith.

I would venture to say that giving an answer for the hope that is within a person is virtually unknown in our time. At the very least, it is not common. This is evidence of the perilous nature of the times in which we are living. When the power of God is absent in religion, we have fallen upon hard times.

THEY KEPT THE MORE SILENCE

“(And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,)” Other versions read, “they kept all the more silent,” NKJV “they became even more quiet,” NASB “they became very quiet,” NIV “they settled down more,” BBE “the silence was even greater than before,” NJB “they became very quiet,” IE “they granted more silence,” EMTV “they showed more quietness,” LITV and “they grew even quieter. No one wanted to miss a word of this.” MESSAGE

The Hebrew tongue was the native language of the listeners, and could no doubt be better understood. It was something that contributed to their uniqueness from other peoples. I do not doubt that Paul could also express himself more precisely in this language.

Remember, the word that had been spread about Paul was this: “This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place” (Acts 21:28). An additional report had been circulated about him: “And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs” (Acts 21:21). Thus, the following charges had been leveled against Paul.

- He taught the Jews who were among the Gentiles to forsake Moses.
- He taught the Jews ought not to circumcise their children.
- He taught the Jews should not walk after the customs of the Jews.
- He taught against “the people,” or the Jews.
- He taught against the Law.
- He taught against the Temple.
- He had brought Greeks into the Temple, polluting it.

Now, as Paul speaks to his accusers, he speaks in the Hebrew tongue. This so contradicted the charges leveled against him, that it at once caught the attention of the Jews. Although many of them no doubt spoke Greek, it is the opinion of many scholars that they had no heart for it. John Gill writes, “. . . chiefly because the Hellenistic language was not so agreeable to them, nor the Hellenistic Jews, who spoke the Greek language, and used the Greek version of the Bible; and such an one they took Paul to be, besides his being a Christian; wherefore when they heard him speak in the Hebrew tongue, it conciliated their minds more to him, at least engaged their attention the more to what he was about to say.” JOHN GILL, COMMENTARY ON ACTS

The Hebrew tongue was the native language of the listeners, and could no doubt be better understood. It was something that contributed to their uniqueness from other peoples. I do not doubt that Paul could also express himself more precisely in this language.

The point here, however, is that Paul spoke with great wisdom. He went about to diffuse the anger of the people by appealing to their uniqueness. In so doing, he at once cast a veil of suspicion over

the charges being brought against him. Here is a marvelous demonstration of knowing “how ye ought to answer every man” (Col 4:6).

Today the saints of God should exercise themselves to speak in such a manner as to diffuse erroneous reports and flawed views. Sometimes unwise answers only fuel controversy, bringing no remedial benefits to the listener. There are lawful ways to do this without compromising the truth. It is not comely for those in Christ to come short in this matter, not knowing how they ought to answer those who are critical of them.

THE KIND OF MAN I AM

“ 3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.”

Redemption enhances the truth, even though it may first have been known only in types and shadows. This is something that is exceedingly difficult for those with a legalistic bent to perceive. Salvation in Christ Jesus does not technically render everything foretold of it obsolete.

By speaking of his heritage, he is affirming that he is not ashamed of his identity with the Jewish people, or their manner of life. While his conversion required the abandonment of some of his conclusions concerning the Law, it did not require a renunciation of it. Those who come to Christ are never required to renounce any truth they previously embraced. Redemption enhances the truth, even though it may first have been known only in types and shadows. This is something that is exceedingly difficult for those with a legalistic bent to perceive. Salvation in Christ Jesus does not technically render everything foretold of it obsolete. There is a vast difference between fulfillment and obsolescence. For example, the Old Covenant itself was ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4). It was in this sense that the Lord Jesus “ fulfilled” both the Law and the Prophets. He did not erase them, or render them useless.

In the fulfilling of the Law and the Prophets they are now seen in a different light. They are not eliminated from the Scriptures, but occupy a secondary position – one that is enhanced by the greater glory of the New Covenant. Now, for example, “the righteousness of the Law” is fulfilled in those who “walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). The Prophets have a special utility in defining Christ and the nature of the salvation He came to effect. The fulfilling of the Prophets really has no relevance to the believer if the Prophets are fundamentally unknown. That kind of ignorance is primary, for it hides from the people the kind of Savior Jesus is, and what He actually came to do. Your acquaintance with the Prophets will confirm this to you.

BROUGHT UP IN JERUSALEM

“I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel . . .” Other versions read, “I had my education in this town,” BBE “brought up here in this city,” NJB “brought up and educated here in Jerusalem,” NLT “grew up in this city of Jerusalem,” IE “reared in this city,” AMPLIFIED “brought up here in Jerusalem,” GNB “having been up-nurtured, reared.” INTERLINEAR The preponderance of versions read “brought up in” Jerusalem.

The words “brought up” are translated from a Greek word meaning, “to nurse up, nourish up . . . properly of young children . . . nourished to promote their growth,” THAYER “nurturing rear, train, educate,” FRIBERG “to raise a child to maturity by providing for physical and psychological needs - to raise, to rear, to bring up,” LOUW-NIDA and “to bring up, care for, rear.” GINGRICH

The clear implication of the text is that Paul was exposed to the Law, and the teachings that

surrounded it, from the time he was very young. This is something unique to the Jewish people – a people that were directed and cultured by the Lord. This is why it is so important to behold their manners. While they were certainly not a perfect people, and were prone to wander because of their hard-heartedness, their manner of life provided a context in which the Lord could work.

There are a number of Scriptural references to the teaching of children

- Abraham's children (Gen 18:19). Abraham faithfully passed the promises of God along to his own children. That manner was also passed to the children's children, as is evidence by Joseph's understanding of the promise of Israel's deliverance from Egypt (Gen 50:25).
- About the Passover (Ex 12:26-27). The meaning of the Passover feast was to be faithfully explained to the children. When the things related to the Passover were carried out, it was to be before the children.
- Redeeming a lamb (Ex 13:13-15). When the firstling of an ass was redeemed, a certain procedure was put in place. It was to be done before the children, so that when they inquired about the meaning of what was done, an explanation of their deliverance from Egypt and the consecration of the firstborn might be given.
- Under the Law (Deut 4:9-10; 6:2,7; 11:19). Under the Law, the children were to be taught the specifics of the Law, as well as the details of how it was given to Israel.
- Samuel (1 Sam 2:18; 3:1). As soon as Samuel was weaned, he was raised by Eli, ministering in the Tabernacle, and learning the routines of sacred service.
- The Psalmist (Psa 78:4). True Israelites pledged to make known the praises of the Lord to generations, His strength, and the wonderful works that He had done.
- Ahab's children (2 Kgs 10:1). Ahab had seventy sons. As wicked as he was, he arranged for them to be brought up. When Jehu wrote letters to those in Samaria, he made sure the teachers of the children of Ahab got copies.
- Jeremiah (Jer 1:5-7). Jeremiah was separated from the womb unto the Lord. The Lord apparently directed to him at a very young age, for Jeremiah told the Lord he was only a child. The Lord commanded him not to say that, but to rather do what he was commanded.
- John the Baptist (Lk 1:15,80). John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit from his mother's womb. As he grew, he eventually went into the desert, remaining there until he was made known to Israel to announce the coming of the Savior.
- Jesus (Lk 2:40,46-47,52). Jesus was raised diligently by Joseph and Mary, so that at the age of twelve he was conversant with the things of God.
- Timothy (2 Tim 3:15). Timothy was knowledgeable of the Scriptures from the time of his youth, being faithfully taught by his mother and grandmother.
- Christian fathers (Eph 6:4). In the body of Christ, fathers are told to raise their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." Other versions read, "training and admonition," NKJV :disciple and instruction," NASB and "training and discipline and the counsel and admonition." AMPLIFIED That includes more than abbreviated Bible stories, and simplistic Christian songs.

The failure of many Christians to communicate the truth of future events to their children is seen in the near-total absence of understanding among the younger generation concerning the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, and an eternal inheritance. Children should be taught more than to be kind and share their toys. They are capable of profiting from direct statements of scripture and sound explanations of the Word of the living God.

I have observed over the years that some people wait until it is too late to educate their children in the ways of the Lord. Of course, with nurseries, children's church, and preschool provisions this is easy to do. But that does not made it right.

Training in the home is essential, but it is not enough! Paul was a Jew, brought up in Jerusalem, even though his father was a Pharisee. He was not brought up under the teaching of a nanny, or a children's pastor, but at the feet of Gamaliel, who was an astute teacher of the Law. Likewise today, in addition to godly parents, children need to be exposed to the best teachers available.

Under the Law, the children were with their parents when the Law was publicly read (Josh 8:35; 2 Chron 20:13; Ezra 10:1; Neh 8:3).

The failure of many Christians to communicate the truth of future events to their children is seen in the near-total absence of understanding among the younger generation concerning the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, the day of judgment, and an eternal inheritance.

During the ministry of Jesus, "children" were brought with their parents to hear Him (Matt 14:21; 15:38; 18:2). Jesus told His disciples not to forbid the children to come to Him. It was the "children" who cried out "Hosanna to the Son of David," when Jesus triumphantly rode into Jerusalem (Matt 21:15). When Paul spent seven days in Tyre, and departed, whole families accompanied him to the ship, including their children (Acts 21:5).

As confirmed in our text, this was a Jewish manner. It is not the manner in the churches of our day. Someone needs to ask those promoting the separation of children from the adults the basis for such an action.

THE PERFECT MANNER OF THE LAW

" . . . and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers . . ." Other versions read, "the strictness of our father's law," NKJV "strictly according to the law," NASB "thoroughly trained in the law," NIV "educated strictly according to our ancestral law," NRSV "trained in the keeping of every detail of the law," BBE "according to the exactness of the law," DARBY "My education was in the strict rules handed down by our ancestors," GWN and "according to the strictest care in the law." AMPLIFIED

It is clear that young Saul of Tarsus was not raised with a childish version of the law. He was rather exposed to its meticulous details.

Paul's training probably included the traditions that had been developed by the leaders of Israel. Both the Law and the traditions surrounding it were very exact and precise. Yet, Paul's parents saw fit for him to be reared in Jerusalem by Gamaliel, one who was an expert in that law. This is the same kind of decision Hannah made in sending young Samuel to Eli. Hannah viewed that as lending her son to the Lord for as long as he lived (1 Sam 1:27-28). Eli also viewed her action in this way (1 Sam 2:20). The very idea of such a decision is strange to the American Christian. However, that is only because few people see raising children in the Lord as something to actually be done.

ZEALOUS TOWARD GOD

" . . . and was zealous toward God . . ." Other versions read, "being zealous for God," NASB "given up to the cause of God with all my heart," BBE "I was a zealot for God," CJB "devoted to God," GWN "full of duty towards God," NJB "very zealous to honor God in everything I did," NLT "fervent minded to Godward," TNT "very anxious to honor God in everything I did," LIVING "very serious about serving God," IE "ardent for God," MONTGOMERY and "being ardent [even a zealot]

for God.” AMPLIFIED

This is a most intriguing phrase: “zealous toward God.” It is an expression that reveals the conscience of Paul, and his singular devotion to God Himself. In his epistle to the Galatians he wrote of formerly “being more exceedingly zealous of the tradition of my fathers” (Gal 1:14). It does not appear that this was referring to the “tradition of the elders,” which was soundly denounced by the Lord Jesus (Matt 15:2-6). The manner in which Paul speaks here indicates that he was speaking of traditions that he saw as based solidly on Scripture – else he would not have said he was “zealous toward God.” I gather that he had a spirit during those times that was close to that of David, who lived with a more lively awareness of God than of men.

Add to that this was a zeal produced by Paul being taught according to “the perfect manner of the Law.” He was not moved by youthful hype, or some week-end of distraction with other youths. It was his exposure to the teaching of Gamaliel, who taught the youth, but was himself not a youth-teacher, for he also taught the leaders of the Jewish community, for he himself was

It is exceedingly difficult to parallel Paul’s former life with the sectarian posture of many today. The difference is that those who have embraced mere human tradition claim to be followers of Christ. Also, they do not have enough of an understanding of Scripture to be zealous toward God, for their view of Him is not conducive to such a committal.

a Pharisee (Acts 5:34). The very thought of today’s youth ministers teaching the adults, elders, deacons, etc, is a frightening one! If that is the case, it should also be a disconcerting thought to ponder them teaching our children!

AS YE ALL ARE

“ . . . as ye all are this day.” Other versions read, “just as you all are today,” NASB and “as any of you are today.” NIV

Paul does not see the attack of these people as a purely personal one. They have acted out of a misapprehension of God Himself – just as he did when he persecuted the church.

There is a gem of truth hidden in this that is not at all apparent to the modern church. The Jews were cultured to live for God. That was their whole reason for being. Behind the scenes, Satan raised up false prophets and teachers among them to convert that zeal. He made attempts through the efforts of idolatrous nations, but eventually that failed – particularly after the Babylonian captivity. With the removal of outward idolatry from the Jewish community, there was only one way for the devil to corrupt their understanding. That was through an erroneous view of God Himself. In particular, the purpose of God concerning the whole world was hidden from them, and they became ingrown.

In the case of Paul, he did not see God as having an only begotten Son through whom grace and truth had come. He rather thought within himself that he ought to “do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). However, once he saw Jesus correctly, his zeal for God included the proclaiming and exaltation of the name of Jesus.

It is exceedingly difficult to parallel Paul’s former life with the sectarian posture of many today. The difference is that those who have embraced mere human tradition claim to be followers of Christ. Also, they do not have enough of an understanding of Scripture to be zealous toward God, for their view of Him is not conducive to such a committal. Zeal without knowledge is not good (Rom 120:2).

I PERSECUTED THIS WAY

“ 4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.”

Paul proceeds to account for the change in his life – something of which the Asian Jews were probably not aware. Christians had heard of Paul’s transformation (Acts 9:13), but there is no record of the Jews circulating such information. Believing Jews had heard that Paul was preaching against Jewry (Acts 21:21), but apparently had not been apprised of his former life.

I PERSECUTED THIS WAY

“And I persecuted this way. . .” Other versions read, “I persecuted the followers of this Way,” NIV “I made attacks on this Way,” BBE “people who followed the way of Christ,” GWN “the Christians,” LIVING “this new faith,” WEYMOUTH and “I harassed (troubled, molested, and persecuted) this Way [of the Lord]” AMPLIFIED

The text does not say that Paul persecuted people, as the NIV/CJB/NIB/NLT (“followers”), GWN/GNB (“people”), Message (“anyone connected with”), and Living Bible (“the Christians”) read.

“The WAY” denotes a certain profession and manner of life. As used here, the word “way” refers to “a course of conduct, a way (i. e. manner) of thinking, feeling, deciding,” THAYER “a manner of living and acting way of life, type of conduct,” FRIBERG and “way of life, conduct; Way (of the Christian faith and life).” UBS What Paul was really attacking was the newness of life in Christ Jesus. He did not oppose people because of their persons, but rather because of the manner in which they lived – and there is a fine distinction in those two things.

The fact of the matter is that those in Christ live differently – noticeably different. They can be distinguished from all other people by the way they live. There is such a distinguishable difference in their life that it provokes inquiry concerning “the hope” they possess (1 Pet 3:15). Paul makes a frequent point of this comparison.

- Dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God (Rom 6:11).
- Servants of sin and made free from sin (Rom 6:17-18).
- Servants of sin and servants to God (Rom 6:20-22).
- Believers and unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14a).
- Righteous and unrighteous (2 Cor 6:14b).
- Light with darkness (2 Cor 6:14c, Eph 5:8).
- He that believes with an infidel (2 Cor 6:15).
- What we were and what we now are (1 Cor 6:11).
- Dead in sins and quickened together with Christ (Eph 2:5).
- Far off and made nigh (Eph 2:13).

Peter does the same.

- Sheep going astray and returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet 2:24).
- Called out of darkness and called into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9).
- Not a people and the people of God (1 Pet 2:10a).
- Had not obtained mercy and not have obtained mercy (1 Pet 2:10b).

These are not mere philosophical distinctions. Neither, indeed are the creedal pronouncements. These descriptions are reflected and confirmed in “the way” people live. That “way,” or manner, is what Paul opposed. In his mind, this involved following Jesus rather than Moses.

In our time, if someone was asked to describe HOW, or the way, a Christian lives, what would they say? How do you describe those who are in Christ Jesus? We have come to a time when such an approach to defining a Christian is virtually unknown. It has become exceedingly difficult to distinguish professing Christians from the rest of the world. A Gospel has been preached that has not underscored what actually happens to a person when they are born again. Therefore, Satan has moved men to define Christians in a vague manner. That is why men say things like, “We are all sinners, but Christians are forgiven.” However, that is not the way Saul of Tarsus thought, and it is not how he viewed the community of believers. He perceived them as being on a different “way,” living in a different manner, and motivated by different principles.

When the professing church is required to have recovering ministries, special classes for the divorced, and tailored ministries for young people, its likeness to “this present evil world” is accented. When, in matters of analysis and motivation, it has to borrow its wisdom from the world, it has publicly confessed its likeness to the world. The reality of “the Way” has thus been obscured. Whatever defense may be presented for such a condition, it is a flagrant denial of the reality of the new birth, reconciliation to God, a new creation, and being made to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places.

I seriously doubt that Saul of Tarsus would persecute the nominal church of our day? He would probably perceive it as beneath the dignity of devoted Jews, like himself prior to his change.

UNTO THE DEATH

“ . . . unto the death . . .” Other versions read, “to the death,” NKJV “to their death,” NIV “to the point of death,” NRSV “until they were executed,” GWN and “some of them were killed.” IE

The aggressive stance was the result of devotion to the Law of Moses, which spoke precisely about what to do with false prophets and those who sought to turn the hearts of the people to another god. Death was mandated.

- Speaking blasphemous words about God (Lev 24:11-16,23).

Oh, that professing Christians would take this mandated death as seriously as Saul of Tarsus and the Asian Jews took the death imposed upon false prophets!

Those who prophesied falsely, were to be put to death. If they prophesied something and it came to pass, yet if they called upon the people to follow other gods, they were to be put to death (Deut 13:1-5).

- A relative that secretly said to follow other gods, was to be put to death (Deut 13:6-9).
- The prophet who presumed to speak a word in the name of the Lord, which God had not commanded him to speak, was to be put to death (Deut 18:20).

Saul of Tarsus took these commandments seriously. He saw early Christians as following a false teacher, worshiping a false god, and promoting a false way. He was wrong in his assessment, yet was seeking to act in strict comportment with the Law of the Lord. This, of course, was the same frame of mind in which the Jews before him were conducting themselves.

AN APPLICATION

The New Covenant also demands death – but not after the manner of the Old Covenant. Through the Holy Spirit, we are to “mortify,” or “put to death,” NIV “the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). Elsewhere it also said, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5).

Referring to the manner of this death, we are told, “And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Gal 5:24). Initially, when we are baptized into Christ, “our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom 6:6). Those in Christ are to keep “the old man” upon the cross, where he will eventually succumb. Paul acknowledged that he was doing this when he wrote, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). He saw this as something in which he could legitimately glory. As it is written, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (Gal 6:14).

Oh, that professing Christians would take this mandated death as seriously as Saul of Tarsus and the Asian Jews took the death imposed upon false prophets!

BINDING AND DELIVERING

“ . . . binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.” Other versions read, “binding and putting,” NASB “Arresting both men and women, and thowing them into prison,” NIV I tied up men and women and put them into prison,” GWN and “putting in chains and committing to prison both men and women.” AMPLIFIED

Luke’s record of this initiative in The Acts reads as follows: “As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul had actually been more zealous than the Jews who were opposing him. He did not merely go after the leaders, but sought out everyone who named the name of Christ. This initial opposition was no doubt within the confines of Jerusalem. However, Paul did not limit his efforts to that central city.

THE HIGH PRIEST BEARS ME WITNESS

“ 5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.”

Paul had been an angry Jew, but he had chosen to work within the framework of the Jewish system. This tells us that he was acting more as a devout Jew than a mere reactionary to those who were following Christ. His conduct was a testimony of his conscience toward God, and of his persuasion that the Jewish system remained the only valid way of approaching to or serving the God of heaven.

Within the memorable past, there had been some remarkable witnesses in the city of Jerusalem.

- The news of the birth of “the King of the Jews” – something that had caused all Jerusalem to be “troubled” (Matt 2:3).
- At the time the infant Jesus was dedicated, the news disseminated by Anna to those who were looking for redemption in Jerusalem (Lk 2:38).
- The remarkable ministry of John the Baptist, when the citizenry of Jerusalem went out to hear him (Matt 3:5).
- The prodigious ministry of Jesus Himself during which people from Jerusalem followed Him (Matt 4:25).
- Jesus feeding the multitudes – 5,000, and also 4,000 men beside women and children (Matt 14:19-21; 15:36-37).
- Jesus preaching in the Temple and the surrounding synagogues (Matt 4:23; 9:35; 21:12; 26:55).

- The death of Christ that was known throughout the city (Lk 24:18).
- The testimony of the saints who rose from the dead when Jesus died, and went into the city to appeared to many after He was risen from the dead (Matt 27:52-53).
- The events that took place on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:6).
- In Jerusalem, the addition of 5,000 men to the followers of Jesus (Acts 4:4).
- Jerusalem was filled with the doctrine of Christ (Acts 5:28).
- The testimony and death of Stephen, which initiated the persecution in which Saul became dominant (Act 7:58-8:1).

Ponder the caliber of the witnesses that had been in Jerusalem: The Lord Jesus Christ, John the Baptist, the twelve Apostles, Stephen, and Paul the Apostle. All of their witnesses were consistent, and none of them contradicted what the others had said.

Yet, the glory of these unparalleled reports had faded. This event is estimated to have taken place about 57 AD, only 27 years after the ministry and death of Jesus. This forgetfulness was so powerful that not a single Jew is said to have come to the defense of Paul. It even appears that some of the local Jews had joined in the opposition of the Jews from Asia.

No person should be stunned when places once exposed to the good things of God deteriorate into a state where such things can no longer be remembered.

THE HIGH PRIEST AND ALL THE ESTATE OF THE ELDERS

“As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders . . .” Other versions read, “all the council of the elders,” NKJV “all the Council,” NIV “the whole council of elders,” NRSV “all the rulers,” BBE “the whole Sanhedrin,” CJB “the elderhood,” DARBY “the ancients,” DOUAY “company of the elders,” GENEVA “council of the leaders,” GWN “the eldership,” YLT “the whole council of Jewish elders,” IE and “whole council of elders [Sanhedrin].” AMPLIFIED

The expression “estate of the elders” is translated from a single Greek word (**presbute,rion**). The lexical meaning of the word is, “body of elders, presbytery, senate, council of the Jewish elders,” THAYER “group of elders functioning with administrative authority *body* or *council of elders* ; (1) in Jerusalem equivalent to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court,” FRIBERG and “the highest council of the Jews (see also **sune,drion** ‘Sanhedrin, the council of the Jews.’” LOUW-NIDA

This word is found three times in Scripture.

- Luke 22:26: “And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying” (Luke 22:66).
- Acts 22:5 : “As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders : from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished” (Acts 22:5).

SANHEDRIN QUALIFICATIONS

The qualifications for membership were both very minute and very numerous. The applicant had to be morally and physically blameless. He had to be middle aged, tall, good looking, wealthy, learned (both in the divine law and diverse branches of profane science, such as medicine, mathematics, astronomy, magic, idolatry, etc.), in order that he might be able to judge in these matters. He was required to know several languages, so that the Sanhedrim might not be dependent upon an interpreter in case any foreigner or foreign question came before them (*Menachoth*, 65 a; *Sanhedrin*, 17 a; Maimonides, *Iad Ha-Chezaka*, *Hilchoth Sanhedrin*, 2, 1-8). Very old persons, proselytes, eunuchs,

and Nethinim were ineligible because of their idiosyncrasies; nor could such candidates be elected as had no children, because they could not sympathize with domestic affairs (Mishna, *Horajoth*, 1, 4; *Sanhedrin*, 36 b); nor those who could not prove that they were the legitimate offspring of a priest, Levite, or Israelite, who played dice, lent money on usury, flew pigeons to entice others, or dealt in produce of the Sabbatical year (Mishna, *Sanhedrin*, 3, 3).

McCLINTOK & STRONG'S

1 Timothy 4:4; "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery" (1 Tim 4:14).

It is generally understood that this is a reference is to the Sanhedrin, a term that is not found in the Authorized Version. The New International Version uses it nineteen times (Matt 5:22; 26:59; Mk 14:55; 15:1; John 11:47; Acts 4:15; 5:21,27,34,41;6:12,15; 22:30; 23:1,6,15,20,28; 24:20). The word "Sanhedrin" is a transliteration of the Greek word **sune,drion** (sun-he-drion). It is translated "council" KJV (Matt 5:22; 26:59; Mk 14:55; 15:1; John 11:47; Acts 4:15; 5:21,27, 34,41; 6:12,15; 22:30; 23:1,6,15,20,28; 24:20).

The custom of the Sanhedrin is traced back to the time of Moses, when seventy men were chosen to be judges of the people with Moses. When the Law was given, there were "seventy elders of Israel" who were allowed to come up Mount Sinai – but not as far as Moses (Ex 24:1,9-10). Later, "seventy men of the elders of Israel" were ordained by God to assist Moses. He took "some of the spirit" that was upon Moses, "and put it upon them," so Moses would not have to bear the burden of the people "alone" (Num 11:16-17). These were probably "the judges" that are referenced prior to the time of individual Judges who were over Israel (Num 25:5; Deut 19:17,18).

These men were charged with applying the Law to circumstances, and using their seasoned wisdom to do so in a proper manner.

Now, Paul says he not only received authority from the high priest to arrest and bind believers in Damascus, but that "the elders" also concurred with that mission, giving him the authority to fulfill his purpose in the persecuting of believers.

Behold the aggressiveness of Saul of Tarsus! Damascus was about one hundred miles north of Jerusalem. He was not content to merely arrest and bind those in Jerusalem, but pursued believers into Damascus of Syria – all the while supposing that he was serving God.

I RECEIVED LETTERS UNTO THE BRETHREN

" . . . from whom also I received letters unto the brethren . . . " The word "brethren" refers to Jewish brethren, not those in Christ Jesus. The account of this is given in the ninth chapter of Acts. "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem" (Acts 9:1-2). Saul, then, was not commissioned by the high priest. He himself was on the initiative to obtain letters that would permit him to make arrests in the synagogues of Damascus.

We learn from this that believers were continuing to meet in the synagogues, which provided a forum to proclaim and discuss the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. It makes perfect sense for them to do this, for all of the prophecies concerning the coming of Christ were in the Jewish Scriptures. There is no known prophecy issued by a Gentile of the coming Savior, or of the salvation that He would effect.

As confirmed throughout the book of Acts, there was a consistent effort to open the truth of the Gospel to those who had been exposed to Moses and the Prophets. Even when Gentiles heard the

Gospel, they generally had already been exposed to Moses and the Prophets among the Jews and in the synagogues (Acts 8:27-28; 10:1-2; 13:42; 17:4,12; 18:4).

TO BRING THEM BOUND TO JERUSALEM TO BE PUNISHED

“ . . . and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.”

The word “punished,” together with the fact that these believers were found in the synagogues, suggests that Paul was targeting Jewish believers. They were being punished because they were perceived as defecting from the one true God. Jerusalem was the place where this could be done officially under the authority of the leaders. What a commentary that is on the unvarnished faith of those early brethren!

A GREAT LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

“ 6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.”

There are three accounts of this event in the book of Acts: 9:3-19; 22:6-21; 26:12-18. It is obviously a pivotal event in the life of Paul. The report of it will emphasize certain things with which the Jews were familiar.

- **DIVINE COMMUNICATION.** Through the Scriptures, the Jews were familiar with the true God communicating to Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and the prophets. The whole body of the people heard the communication of the Law. He communicated it verbally, by dreams, through holy angels, and by visions. Other nations did not have communicating gods.

- **DIVINE DIRECTION.** Other nations were not directed by a living god. God directed Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, and the Prophets.

- **SUPERNATURAL MANIFESTATIONS.** Supernatural manifestations were not common in the heathen nations. Other nations did not have directing gods. The Jews knew of the flood, the scattering of the people at the tower of Babel, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, the ten plagues of judgment against Egypt, the manifestations of Sinai, and all manner of Divine workings in military victories, supernatural sustenance, and miraculous judgments. No heathen gods wrought such things.

- **THE WILL OF GOD.** Israel was made knowledge of the will of God through Moses and the Law, and the prophets. The will of heathen gods was largely unknown.

- **THE INVOLVEMENT OF THOSE TO WHOM THE LORD APPEARS.** Israel was knowledgeable of those who personally participated in the will of God: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Israel, and the prophets. The involvement of heathen peoples with their gods was not a known practice. Only in folklore did such things occur.

Others gods did not conduct themselves in such a manner. Some of the false gods referenced in Scripture include the following.

- Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Zidonians (1 Kgs 11:33a).
- Baal, god of Phoenicia and Canaanitish tribes (Num 22:41).
- Baal-peor, a god of the Moabites (Num 25:3).
- Chemosh, the god of the Moabites (Judges 10:6c; 1 Kgs 11:33b).
- Dagon, a god of the Philistines (Judges 16:23).

- Diana, a goddess of the Ephesians (Acts 19:24).
- Jupiter, or Hermes, a Greek and Roman god (Acts 14:12a)
- Mercurius, or Zeus, a Greek and Roman god (Acts 14:12b).
- Milcom, the god of the children of Ammon (Judges 10:6d; 1 Kgs 11:33c).
- Molech, Moloch, or Milcom, a god of the Ammonites (Lev 18:21).
- The gods of the Amorites (Josh 24:15).
- The gods of Syria (Judges 10:6a).
- The gods of Zidon (Judges 10:6b).
- The gods of the Philistines (Judges 10:6e).
- The gods of the nations (2 Kgs 18:33).
- The gods of the countries (2 Kgs 18:35).
- The gods of the people (1 Chron 5:25).
- The gods of the children of Seir (2 Chron 25:14).
- The gods of other lands (2 Chron 32:17).
- The gods of the Egyptians (Ex 12:23; Jer 43:13).

AS I MADE MY JOURNEY

“And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus. . .” Other versions read, “as I made my journey,” NASB and “while I was on my way.” NRSV

This was not a light that lit up the sky, as the sun does. It was rather a vastly superior light that was focused upon Saul of Tarsus. It was pinpointed, so to speak, on him. That light was to the day what the sunlight is to the blackness of midnight.

It is as Paul was carrying out his initiative against the believers that this event occurred. He was not seeking the Lord at this time. He was not engaged in a quest to understand Jesus Christ. This was a Divine intervention concerning which Paul had no advance information.

Here is an example of the Lord forcing His way into a person’s life, interrupting their course, halting the fulfillment of their purpose, and making them consider Him. Whatever a person may think about God doing such a thing, here is a factual account of Him forcibly bringing a halt to evil intentions. It is an example of God coercing a person to think about Him.

God interrupted the activities of Adam and Eve in the Garden. He interrupted the activities throughout the whole earth in the judgment of the flood. He forced the building of the tower of Babel and its attending city to halt. He halted the moral mayhem of Sodom and Gomorrah. He interrupted Moses by the burning bush. He abruptly ended king Herod’s gloating, as well as that of Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar.

The doctrines of men that represent God as never doing such a thing, but always deferring to the will of men could not be further from the truth. Jesus forced Himself into the dialog of Cleopas and his companion. Following His resurrection, He forced Himself into a gathering of His disciples who were lamenting because they thought their hopes had been dashed to the ground.

So the Lord interrupted Saul’s plans, while he was in the process of carrying them out. In this case, it was not for cursing, but for blessing. The time had come for him to be called, and even though the circumstances were unfavorable, the call was issued and he was drawn to Jesus.

THERE SHONE FROM HEAVEN

“ . . . about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.” Other versions read, “about noon, suddenly a great light from heaven shone around me,” NKJV “about noontime, a very bright light suddenly flashed from heaven all around me,” NASB and “About noon . . . suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me.” NIV

At noon – the time when the sun is at its highest – a brighter light “shone from heaven.” The word “shone” is translated from a word that means, “to flash about, shine around,” THAYER “to shine around someone,” FRIBERG “to shine very brightly on an area surrounding an object - to shine brightly around, to flash around” LOUW-NIDA

This was not a light that lit up the sky, as the sun does. It was rather a vastly superior light that was focused upon Saul of Tarsus. It was pinpointed, so to speak, on him. That light was to the day what the sunlight is to the blackness of midnight. It was the kind of light that was commanded to shine in the beginning, that pierced through darkness and defined the meaning of day (Gen 1:3). Paul says of that original light that God “commanded the light to shine out of darkness” (2 Cor 4:6a). In this case, it was commanded to shine on a person – a person flesh would not have suspected to be the target of such illumination.

This account is a revelation of the manner of the kingdom. In order for man to obtain spiritual vision or understanding, a greater light than that of nature must shine upon him. This was involved in Peter having it revealed to him that Jesus was “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16-17). It is what is involved in the new birth, as written in Second Corinthians: “For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). This is the illumination to which Hebrews 10:32 refers: “But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” It is the enlightenment mentioned in Hebrews 6:5: “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost.”

The position that states there is no heavenly involvement or intervention prior to being in Christ is most absurd. In order to get into Christ, something superior to nature must be brought to bear upon man. That is precisely why believers are referred to as “a new creation” NKJV (2 Cor 5:17), and “the workmanship of God” (Eph 2:10). This is illustrated in this very text. A “new creation” refers to something Deity does, for only Deity can create. Further, a “new creation” is not a work that consists of something man has done together with God, or that God has done together with man. There are things that men do, but they are a response that requires strength and wisdom that are not resident in nature.

I FELL TO THE GROUND AND HEARD A VOICE

“ 7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? 8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.”

The weight of glory is greater than that of nature (2 Cor 4:17). Strictly speaking, the reaction here described did not proceed from the human will, as one that falls down to worship. Before Saul had any idea of the source of this blazing light, he was rendered helpless. He could not remain on his feet.

I FELL TO THE GROUND

“And I fell unto the ground . . .” Other versions read, “went down on the earth,” BBE and “falling

on the ground.” DOUAY As used here, the word from which “fell” is translated means, “to be prostrated, fall prostrate; of those overcome by terror or astonishment or grief,” THAYER “as coming down forcefully from a higher to lower level fall, drop.” FRIBERG

When soldiers from the high priest came to arrest Jesus in the Garden, as soon as He identified Himself, “they went backward and fell to the ground” (John 18:6). Moses confessed that he “fell down before the Lord” (Deut 9:25). Ezekiel said when he saw the glory of the Lord, “I fell on my face” (Ezek 3:23). When Daniel saw a great vision from the Lord, he retained no strength – it was too great for his natural capacities (Dan 10:8,16,17). When John saw the glorified Christ, he “fell at His feet as dead” (Rev 1:17).

I HEARD A VOICE

“ . . . and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? . . .”

Other versions read, “why are you persecuting Me?” NASB “Why do you persecute Me?” NIV “why are you attacking me so cruelly?,” BBE “Why do you keep persecuting Me?” CJB and “why do you persecute Me [harass and trouble and molest Me]?” AMPLIFIED and “why are you out to get me?” MESSAGE

The account in Acts twenty six adds these words of Jesus to Saul: “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks,” or “goads” NASB (Acts 26:14). This indicates that the Lord had been preparing the heart of Saul for this confrontation. How long he had endured a pricking conscience, we do not know.

The lexical meaning of the word “persecute” is as follows: “to make to run or flee, put to flight, drive away . . . to run swiftly in order to catch some person or thing, to run after . . . to pursue in a hostile manner . . . in any way whatever to *harass, trouble, molest* one; to persecute,” THAYER “of hostile pursuit persecute,” FRIBERG “to chase, hunt” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Paul was aggressive in his attempts to rid the land of the influence of those who were of “the way” of Christ. He hounded them, chasing them down like wild animal in order that he might bind them and haul them off to Jerusalem to be punished – even by death.

Unknown to Saul, the Lord Jesus was monitoring his entire crusade. He had taken Saul’s initiative personally, and now He confronts the persecutor as the persecuted One.

In saying this, Paul was also drawing attention to the activities of the persecuting Jews. Perhaps they would see the parallel of Paul’s former actions with their own.

I ANSWERED

“And I answered, Who art thou, Lord?” Other versions read, “Who are you, sir?” GWN/NAB/LIVING and “Who are you Master?” MESSAGE

Saul did not know who this was – only that it was someone infinitely greater than himself. There are accounts of men calling angelic messengers “Lord.” Gideon called an angel “Lord” (Judges 6:12,13). Daniel also called an angel “Lord” (Dan 10:16,17,19). Cornelius also referred to an angel as “Lord” (Acts 10:4).

The Greek word here translated “Lord” is **ku,rie** . It is used no less than 747 times from Matthew through Revelation. Several times (KJV) it is translated “Sir” (Matt 13:27; 21:30; 27:63; John 4:11,15,19 49; 5:7; 12:21; 20:15; Rev 7:14). Some of them are expressions spoken to an earthly master (Matt 13:27; 21:30). One was addressed to Pilate (Matt 27:63). Some were addressed to Jesus, but without the knowledge of who He really was (John 4:11,15,19,49; 5:7; 12:21; 20:15). One was

addressed to a holy angel (Rev 7:14). Sometimes it is translated “Lord,” but is applied to an earthly master (i.e. Matt 25:24). Jesus also spoke of those who called Him “Lord,” yet did not do what He said (Matt 7:22).

Thus we see that this term is not always used by those who have recognized Jesus for who He really is. At this point, Saul does not use it in that sense either. He only knows that he is dealing with someone vastly superior to himself.

I AM JESUS OF NAZARETH

“And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth , , ,”

From Matthew through Acts, the expression “Jesus of Nazareth” is used (Matt 26:71; Mk 1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Lk 4:34; 18:37; 24:19; John 1:45; 18:5,7; 19:19; Acts 2:22; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9).

- Christ’s enemies referred to Him in this manner (Matt 26:71; Mk 14:67).
- Demons also referred to Jesus in this way (Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34).
- This is how blind Bartimaeus knew him (Mk 10:47; Lk 18:37).
- Holy angels identified Him with these words (Mk 16:6).
- The two on the road to Emmaus used this expression (Lk 24:19).
- Philip told Nathanael they had found the One of whom Moses prophesied, referring to “Jesus of Nazareth” (John 1:45).
- Those arresting Jesus in the Garden used this expression (John 18:5,7).
- Pilate wrote these words on a sign, and put it on the cross: “JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KIND OF THE JEWS” (John 19:19).
- On the day of Pentecost, this is how Peter first referred to Jesus (Acts 2:22).
- The false witnesses who rose up against Stephen referred to Jesus in this way (Acts 6:14).
- When Peter preached at the house of Cornelius, he referred to Jesus in this manner (Acts 10:38).
- In describing his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, Paul also used this expression (Acts 22:8; 26:9).

The Name Jesus Was Not Unique

The angels surely did not leave Him after He was born. We know that they warned Joseph of the aggression of Herod, and told him when and where to escape his wrath. Their ministry no doubt continued in the behalf of the young child.

The name “Jesus” is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Joshua, and is so used in Hebrews: “For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day” (Heb 4:8). Later versions read “Joshua” in this verse.

Paul also refers to a man named

“Jesus” in his letter to the Colossians. He was distinguished from the Lord Jesus by referring to him as “Justus” – “And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me” (Col 4:11).

The Savior Sanctified the Name

The Lord Jesus sanctified this name. Of the 983 times it is used from Matthew through Revelation, 981 of the references are to the Son of God.

Although the Lord was distinguished from other men bearing this name by associating Him with Nazareth, that is not what distinguishes Him to the saved. Nazareth distinguished Jesus prior to the commencement of His ministry. He did not remain there after He began His work.

Nazareth was not a good place to be raised. When Philip told Nathanael they had found the Prophet foretold by Moses, saying it was “Jesus of Nazareth,” Nathanael replied, “Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?” (John 1:46). According to the flesh, this was not a good city in which to raise the Son of God. Some might object that during His formative years, this would be a great liability. However, Joseph and Mary were faithful in raising young Jesus, so that it is said of Him, “And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man” (Luke 2:52).

Jesus once referred to angels as having a special care for the “little ones.” He said, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat 18:10). I do not doubt that they were especially diligent in the care of young Jesus. It is written, “when He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him” (Heb 1:6). The angels surely did not leave Him after He was born. We know that they warned Joseph of the aggression of Herod, and told him when and where to escape his wrath (Matt 2:13,19-20). Their ministry no doubt continued in the behalf of the young child.

After He had commenced preaching, Jesus returned to Nazareth, and ministered in the synagogue. The people of His home town became so angry, that it is written, “And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong” (Luke 4:28-29).

WHOM THOU PERSECUTEST

“ . . .whom thou persecutest.”

Notice how closely aligned the Lord Jesus is with His people. What is done to them, is said to be done to Him – whether for good or for evil. Jesus spoke specifically to this matter in Matthew 25:40,45). The eternal destiny of men will be directly impacted by how men have treated Christ’s brethren – for Jesus is described as “the firstborn of many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Furthermore, He is not ashamed to call them “brethren” because they are “all of One.” That is, they have been begotten by God by virtue of their new birth. Jesus is the “Firstbegotten,” but not the last begotten, although He was begotten uniquely. As to the manner in which He was begotten, He is “the only begotten” (John 1:14,18; 3:16,18; 1 John 4:9).

It is written, “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). The record of conversions includes this description, “and believers were the more added to the Lord ” (Acts 5:14). Those who are born again are appropriately said to be “in Christ” (2 Cor 5:17), and Christ dwells in their hearts by faith (Eph 3:17). They are made “partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and are said to be “members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Eph 5:30).

It is no wonder, therefore, that Jesus says He was really the One who was persecuted by Saul of Tarsus. That circumstance has not changed. Jesus still takes persecution personally. It may not have appeared that way to those believers who were arrested, bound, delivered to Jerusalem, and eventually killed. Men may not be able to reason out why such things happen. However, it will help to consider

that this world was not meant to be the arena in which all difficulties are resolved, all injustices aborted, and all inhumanities judged. There is a day of judgment that has been appointed for every injustice to be exposed and judged, and for the vindication of all who have lived unto the Lord. That day will eventually arrive, and all things will be settled for the glory of God and the benefit of the saints.

Paul's account of this event in the twenty-sixth chapter adds the following details. "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (Acts 26:16-18).

THEY THAT WERE WITH ME

"9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me."

Paul was traveling with a band of men – perhaps soldiers from the high priest. They were not merely on a spying mission, but fully intended to do something of consequence when any believers were found. Those who were with Paul would prove to be witnesses that something of an epochal nature occurred that day as they headed for Damascus.

THEY SAW THE LIGHT

"And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid . . ." Other versions read, "beheld the light, to be sure," NASB "saw verily a light," PNT "the light did see." YLT

This, then, was not a personal vision or dream that was only apparent to Saul. It was a demonstration in nature that was visible to all who were with Paul. The event belongs to the class of revelations such as the giving of the Law at Sinai, when the glory of God was seen (Ex 24:10-11). Then there were flashes of lightning that were more intense than can be produced by nature itself (Psa 144:6). A similar light occurred when an angel was sent to release Peter, and "a light shined into the prison" (Acts 12:7).

This light was actually the glory of the exalted Christ, who was appearing to Saul to call him into the ministry. It is the appearance to which Paul referred in his first letter to the Corinthians: "And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time" (1 Cor 15:8).

An introduction to this glory was seen by Peter, James, and John, when Jesus was transfigured before their eyes, and "His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as light" (Matt 17:1-3).

The fulness of this glory will appear when Jesus comes the second time. He will come like a flash of lightning that flashes from one end of the earth to the other (Matt 24:27). Jesus will appear, or be made visible, "in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him" (Matt 25:31). He will also appear in the Father's glory, as well as the glory of the holy angels (Lk 9:26). According to Mark's record, Jesus will "come in the clouds with great power and glory," at which time He will "send His angels, and shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven" (Mark 13:27). Matthew says "all the tribes of the earth" will mourn when they see "the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory," at which time He "shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt 24:31).

That will no more be a secret coming than Christ's appearance to Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus. Those who speak of a secret rapture in which the Lord will gather all of the saints, wafting them away from the earth without anyone knowing it, have betrayed an inexcusable level of ignorance. Aside from that, they have reproached the Lord of glory, as though His magnificent glory could be concealed as He comes within the proximity of the earth. Even the Psalmist, living in a period of lesser light, said, "The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the people see His glory" (Psa 97:6).

THEY HEARD NOT THE VOICE

"... but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me." Other versions read, "did not understand the voice," NASB and "they did not hear [the sound of the uttered words of] the voice of the One Who was speaking to me [so that they could understand it]." AMPLIFIED

As it is used here, the word "hear" is translated from a Greek word that means, "to understand, perceive the sense of what is said," THAYER and "of inner comprehension understand, be aware of, listen to." FRIBERG This agrees with the statement made in the ninth chapter concerning this event: "And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (Acts 9:7). Although the same Greek word is used, it is in a different sense. The ninth chapter speaks of hearing the sound of a voice. Our text speaks of discerning what the voice said.

Here was a private message delivered in a public setting – something like the word delivered to Archippus in a public letter: "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col 4:17). Archippus would know the meaning of the exhortation, while others who heard these words might not.

This perspective of hearing is addressed in a word Jesus delivered to a group of doubters: "Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word" (John 8:43). Paul spoke of the same circumstance in his letter to the Romans: "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom 10:17-18). Faith does not come from exposure to the sound of God's Word, but from the comprehension of what has been said.

Here was a private message delivered in a public setting – something like the word delivered to Archippus in a public letter: "And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it" (Col 4:17). Archippus would know the meaning of the exhortation, while others who heard these words might not.

So it is that Saul of Tarsus was able to respond to Jesus because he understood, or comprehended, what He had said. This could not be said of those who were traveling with him, even though they technically heard the same voice.

WHAT SHALL I DO, LORD?

"10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do."

The immediacy of Saul's response, as well as its nature, is worthy of focused attention. This is the kind of reaction that consistently takes place when the word of the Lord is understood.

WHAT SHALL I DO, LORD

"And I said, What shall I do, Lord? . . ." Other versions read, "What am I to do, Lord?" NRSV "What have I to do?" BBE "What should I do?" CJB "What do you want me to do, Lord?" GWN and "What must I do?" MRD

Recognition of Jesus as “Lord” was the first thing Paul recognized. It was that cognition that prompted him to ask what he ought to do. The concept of a Lord that does not require a person to do something is wholly erroneous. There is no such things as a “Lord” who does not have a will to which His subjects are subservient.

This is the kind of response the hearers had to Peter’s message on the day of Pentecost: “Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37). It is how the Philippian jailer responded to Paul and Silas: “And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

This is not the manner of perception being confessed today, and it is of great personal concern to me. People who say they are followers of Jesus are not asking what they ought to do. This suggests that they have not yet seen Jesus as “Lord,” which is a most serious circumstance.

IT SHALL BE TOLD THEE ALL THINGS WHICH ARE APPOINTED

“And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.” Other versions read, “all that has been appointed for you to do,” NASB “all that you have been assigned to do,” NIV “it will be made clear to you what you have to do,” BBE “everything that has been laid out for you to do,” CJB “it shall be told thee of all things that thou must do,” DOUAY “everything I’ve arranged for you to do,” GWN “all that it is commanded thee to do,” MRD “everything that you have been designated to do,” NET and “all that it is destined and appointed for you to do.” AMPLIFIED

The meaning of the word translated “appointed” is, “to put in place, top station, to place in a certain order . . . to arrange, to assign a place, to appoint . . . to assign (appoint) a thing to one,” THAYER “be instituted, be appointed, be established ,” FRIBERG “appoint, designate, set aside; command, order, direct,” UBS “to give a task to,” NIDA “to appoint one to do a thing,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “to prescribe.” LEH

The various translations accent the strength of this word: “assigned,” NIV “have to do,” BBE “laid out for you to do,” CJB “must do,” DOUAY “commanded,” MRD “designated,” NET and “destined and appointed.” AMPLIFIED

Jesus did not know anything about a “you-don’t-have-to-do-anything” religion. He certainly did not leave Saul with the impression that everything had been already done. We understand that the basis for salvation had, indeed, been done, and the foundation laid. But participation is quite another thing, and until men participate in what Jesus has done, it has no benefit for them.

Jesus once asked, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). That is a telling question that must be asked of this generation.

It also ought to be noted that what Jesus commands is compulsory. Men are not free to disobey Jesus, or fail to carry out His demands. If He says men are to pick up their cross and follow Him, then that is what they are required to do (Lk 9:23). If He says to “forsake all,” then that is what men are obliged to do (Lk 14:33). This has to do with initially following Christ, as well as being a functioning member of His body – and both will be required of Saul.

I do not believe this perspective is being proclaimed by the professing church of our time. There is too much disobedience in the nominal church, and that is undeniable evidence of unbelief and hard-heartedness. Make no mistake about this, “an evil heart of unbelief” will disqualify a person from glory.

Now that Jesus is exalted, no communication or direction from Jesus is so personal that it excludes the members of His body from involvement. Here is a most unusual apostle, and he is being called to a most unusual work. He will be given insight into unusual things. But in order to begin his race, he must come into contact with someone else who has been joined to the Lord. A member of Christ's body would tell him what to do in order to enter the Kingdom of God.

THE GLORY OF THAT LIGHT

“ 11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.”

Paul now reports the immediate effects of the blazing light that he had seen – a light that confirmed the presence of the Lord.

I COULD NOT SEE

In the flesh, Saul could not endure the glory of Christ – and what was revealed to him on the road to Damascus was not the full glory of Christ! It was a subdued glory, else the heavens and earth would have fled away, as they will when the fulness of His glory is made known

“And when I could not see for the glory of that light . . .” Other versions read, “because of the brightness of the light,” NASB “because of the brilliance,” NIV “because the light had been so bright,” GWN “had been so dazzling that I was blind,” NJB “by the intense light,” NLT “because of the dazzling sheen of that light,” WILLIAMS and “because [of the dazzlingly glorious intensity] of the brightness of that light.” AMPLIFIED

This glory was so bright – supernaturally bright – that it blinded Paul. Furthermore, the blindness was not momentary. This confirms the inability of the flesh to stand in the glory of the risen Christ. The afterglow of Divine glory caused Moses' face to shine so brightly the people could not look upon it. It must have been like the noonday sun before the people. Paul says the people “could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance” (2 Cor 3:7; Ex 34:29-35). That was, so to speak, a filtered glory. First, it was the effect of the afterglow, or “hinder part,” of divine glory, and not the full force of it (Ex 33:21-23). Second, the glory was reflected in the skin of Moses – a kind of second-hand glory (Ex 34:29-30,35). Third, it was a fading glory, for with the passing of but a short time, the skin of Moses' face no longer glowed (2 Cor 3:13).

A Carnal View of Jesus Return to Earth

In the flesh, Saul could not endure the glory of Christ – and what was revealed to him on the road to Damascus was not the full glory of Christ! It was a subdued glory, else the heavens and earth would have fled away, as they will when the fulness of His glory is made known (Rev 20:11). In an even more subdued manifestation of Divine glory, the children of Israel could not behold the reflected afterglow of Divine glory in the face of Moses, requiring that he wear a veil when speaking with them.

Yet, even though these things are recorded for our learning and admonition, some insist on teaching that the glorified Christ will return to sit on a throne in Jerusalem, and that He will be accessible to all the people in the world. Those who have embraced such a heresy appear willingly ignorant of the greatness of the glory of Jesus. We are expressly told that His arch-enemy will be destroyed by the “brightness of His coming” (2 Thess 2:3). Yet, men have the glorified Christ leading flesh and blood armies to fight flesh and blood foes. They even imagine that, in the mythical rapture, He will gather His elect without anyone knowing what has happened. All of this betrays a serious ignorance of Christ Himself. Once God “shows” Him in all of His glory (1 Tim 6:15-16), there will be no doubt who He is, and the passing of the fleshly order will have to occur before that glory is

manifested – even though it will be “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye” (1 Cor 15:52).

I CAME INTO DAMASCUS

“ . . . being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.” Other versions read, “my companions led me by the hand,” NIV “those who were with me took my hand and led me,” NRSV and “I was led by the hand by those who were with me.” AMPLIFIED

Since Saul’s companions did not understand what Jesus said to him, Saul must have told them that Jesus had commanded him to “go into Damascus.” That is the city to which they were going to arrest and bind those who were believers. Now, however, that city would prove to be the place where he would be illuminated concerning what he must initially do, and of the vocation he would now pursue.

Although Paul does not recount this here, he remained three days in that city, blind and without any communication concerning what he was supposed to do. Of that time it is written, “And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink” (Acts 9:9). What thoughts he must have had during that time! His repentance had to be significant, for now he saw his entire life from a new perspective. Anxiously he must have waited for the instructions that Jesus promised would be given to him. During this time, his faith would be tested.

In the ninth chapter of Acts we are told that Saul was praying during this time, and was given a vision to enable him to tarry until the appointed time. Jesus told Ananias, who would instruct Saul, “Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and inquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight” (Acts 9:10-12).

Behold the details orchestrated in heaven.

- Saul was located in a house on the street called “Straight.”
- Saul was in the house of Judas.
- Saul was praying.
- Saul had been given a vision in which the name of “Ananias” was specified, and what he would do was revealed.

RECEIVE THY SIGHT

“ 12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, 13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.”

Here we will see how the Lord uses clean vessels to do His appointed work of blessing. There are judgments in which He uses the wicked to punish His people – like Nebuchadnezzar, God’s “servant” (Jer 27:6) Then there was Cyrus, raised up to assist in the building of the Temple. God referred to this Persian heathen as “My shepherd” (Isa 44:28).

However, when it comes to the Lord’s Christ, the announcement of the Gospel, and the promotion of the Kingdom of God, God uses holy people! In the case of Jesus there was Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds, Simeon, Anna, John the Baptist, the Apostles, the seventy, Paul, and others. The more significant the cause, and the more bearing it has upon eternity, the more particular are Divine choices concerning those who are involved.

Now, notice what is said of Ananias.

ANANIAS, A DEVOUT MAN

“And one Ananias, a devout man

The words “devout,” “pious,” and “upright” have to do with human conduct. It is how a truly spiritual life is lived out. No person who lives in an outwardly sloppy manner is devote or pious. Also, some people who appear devoted are not really devoted – like the scribes and Pharisees .

according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there . . .” Other versions read, “devout by the standard of the Law,” NASB “devout observer of the Law,” NIV “a God-fearing man who kept the Law,” BBE “a pious man according to the Law,” DARBY “a godly man as pertaining to the Law,” GENEVA “a devout man who followed Moses’ teachings,” GWN “upright according to the Law,” MRD “a devout observer of the Law,” NAB “a godly man, deeply devoted to the Law,” NLT “a perfect man, and as pertaining to the Law,” TNT “as godly a man as you could find for obeying the Law,” LIVING and “a man devout in strict accordance with the law.” WILLIAMS

The words “devout,” “pious,” and “upright” have to do with human conduct. It is how a truly spiritual life is lived out. No person who lives in an outwardly sloppy manner is devote or pious. Also, some people who appear devoted are not really devoted – like the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:27-28).

Notice how the text specifies that Ananias’ devoutness was “according to the Law.” That is, “the righteousness of the Law” was fulfilled in him, as stated in Romans 8:4: “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom 8:3-4).

While we are not justified by the deeds of the Law, neither do the followers of Christ live in contradiction of that Law. The summation of the Law was being lived out in Ananias: “Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Mat 22:37-40). Knowing that Saul lived in allgood conscience before the Lord, it certainly would have been counter-productive, to say the least, to have a person tell him what he should do who himself was walking in contradiction of the Law. In our time, there is not a lot of lucidity among church folk on this matter.

Ananias also was of good report among all of the Jews in the area of Damascus. This no doubt had to do with the Jews in general, both those in Christ and those who were not. His holy life caused them to hold Ananias in high regard. It ought to be noted that a professing Christian who is unholy causes the name of the Lord to be reproached.

Ananias also was of good report among all of the Jews in the area of Damascus. This no doubt had to do with the Jews in general, both those in Christ and those who were not. His holy life caused them to hold Ananias in high regard. It ought to be noted that a professing Christian who is unholy causes the name of the Lord to be reproached. As Paul said to some pretentious people in Rome, “Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal? Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege? Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written” (Rom 2:21-24). These days, there is a deplorable absence of rebuke leveled at professing Christians who are living beneath the requirements of the Lord.

BROTHER SAUL

“ . . . Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight . . . ”

Acts 9:17 reads, “And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul.” He was not addressing Saul as a fellow Jew, but as one who had believed on Christ. He had not yet been baptized into Christ, but he had believed and repented, and only needed to be told what to do. As pointed out in Acts 26:16-18, the intentions of Jesus had already been revealed to Saul, giving him something to ponder with focused attention over the three days that preceded the visit of Ananias.

Ananias said to Saul, “Receive thy sight.” The ninth chapter of Acts records Ananias saying, “Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17). Jesus had told Ananias that Saul had seen him in a vision: “And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight” (Acts 9:12). Thus, in obedience to the Lord, Ananias fulfilled that word.

THE SAME HOUR I LOOKED UPON HIM

“ . . . And the same hour I looked up upon him.” Other versions read, “I looked up at hm,.” NASB “And at that very moment I was able to see him,” NIV “I regained my sight and saw him,” NRSV and “And in that very instant I [recovered my sight and] looking up saw him.” AMPLIFIED

Acts 9:18 provides some additional details. “And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized” (Acts 9:18).

The only categorical accounts of the healing of the blind occur during and after the ministry of Jesus (Matt 9:27-30; 11:5; 12:22; 21:14; Acts 22:13). Isaiah prophesied of such a work (Isa 29:15; 35:5; 42:7). What happened to Saul in his body also took place in his heart and soul.

CONCLUSION

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 1/1/10. We will continue our current series of lessons on the book of Acts. The ninety-first lesson will cover verses 14 through 22 of the twenty-second chapter: “PAUL’S DEFENSE TO THE JEWS, #2.”

Thus, through a series of remarkable events, we behold the working of the Lord. He carries out His purpose in the midst of what appeared to be impossible circumstances. The Lord aborts a hostile mission. He forces Himself into the life of Saul of Tarsus. He announces that Saul has been wrestling with a condemning conscience for some time. He declares Saul is a chosen vessel, even though he appeared to be nothing more than an aggressive enemy. Thus, as with Joshua the high priest, the Lord snatches him from the fire (Zech 3:2). He calls him to a work for which he has been in preparation from a youth, even though he was not aware of it.

In relating this whole series of events, Paul is speaking of things with which the Jews were familiar, His experience dove-tailed perfectly with the declaration of Scripture concerning God turning hearts (Prov 21:1), alluring people into a place where he could speak more comfortably to them (Hos 2:14), and frustrating evil intentions against His people (Isa 44:25). It also confirmed the reality of a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 36:26). How unsearchable are His ways! Paul’s life is a commentary in the circumcision of Christ (Col 2:11-12).

We have a sterling example here of God working all things together for the good of those who love Him, and are called according to His purpose.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #91

PAUL'S DEFENSE TO THE JEWS, #2

“ 22:14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. 15 For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. 17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; 18 And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me. 19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee: 20 And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. 21 And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. 22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.”
(Acts 22:14-22)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Paul continues his defense before his accusers, drawing their attention to the commission that was delivered to him by Ananias, a man respected by the Jews. The reason for God's choice of Paul is affirmed, which perfectly corresponded to what he had been doing. There was no variance between what Paul was called to do and what he actually did. Paul then recounts his own baptism into Christ, as directed by Ananias. The reason for his baptism is of special significance. Paul also informs them that the glorified Jesus had appeared to him when he was earlier in the Temple – the place from which the Asian Jews had removed him. Jesus warned him that the Jews would not receive his testimony, even though it was the unvarnished truth. After being told to leave Jerusalem, Paul related how he

had told Jesus that he formerly had consented to the death of Stephen, Jesus' own martyr. He is telling this to Jews who intended to do the same thing to him that the Jews had done earlier to Stephen.

THE EMPHASIS ON DEITY

In Paul's defense, there is a remarkable emphasis on Deity. It is certainly worthy of noting at this point, for it helps to account for the nature and extent of Paul's ministry.

- He was "zealous toward GOD" (v 3).
- He "heard a VOICE," which proved to be that of the Lord Jesus (v 7).
- Jesus asked, "Why persecutest thou ME" (v 7).
- Paul asked, "Who art Thou LORD" (v 8).
- Jesus answered Him, "HE said unto

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS HATH CHOSEN THEE (22:14)

THOU SHALT BE HIS WITNESS (22:15)

WHY TARRIEST THOU (22:16)

WHILE I PRAYED IN THE TEMPLE (22:17-18)

THEY KNOW (22:19)

I WAS STANDING BY (22:20)

I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE (22:21)

THEY GAVE HIM AUDIENCE UNTIL THIS WORD (22:22)

CONCLUSION

•

me" (v 8).

- Jesus said, "I am . . ."
- Jesus identified Himself as "JESUS OF NAZARETH" (v 8).
- There is reference to "the voice of HIM that spake unto me" (v 9).
- Paul asks, "What shall I do LORD?" (v 10a).
- He stated, "The LORD said unto me" (v 10b).
- Ananias told Saul, "The GOD of our fathers hath chosen thee" (v 14a).
- Ananias said Paul had been chosen to "know HIS will" (v 14b).
- Ananias said Paul had been chosen to "see the JUST ONE" (v 14c).
- Ananias said Paul had been chosen to "hear the voice of HIS mouth" (v 14:d).
- Ananias said Paul would be "HIS witness unto all men" (v 15).
- Ananias told Paul to be baptized "calling on the name of the LORD" (22:16).
- When Paul was in the Temple he said he "saw HIM saying unto me" (v 18a).
- Jesus told Paul to get out of Jerusalem "for they will not receive thy testimony concerning ME" (v 18b).
- Paul replied, "LORD they know . . ." (v19a).
- Paul continued, "I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on

THEE ” (v 19:b).

- Paul referred to “the blood of THY faithful martyr Stephen” (v 20).
- Paul said, “ HE said unto me . . . ” (v 21a).
- Jesus replied, “ I will send thee unto the Gentiles” (v 21b).

There are twenty-three direct references to Deity – and they are the things that shape the text, giving it meaning.

The same thrust is seen in the other accounts of the call of Tarsus.

• **Acts 9:3-16:** “Why persecutest thou ME . . . the LORD said . . . I am Jesus . . . LORD what wilt THOU have me to do? . . . The LORD said unto him . . . the LORD said unto him . . . I am here LORD . . . the LORD said unto him . . . LORD I have heard . . . THY saints in Jerusalem . . . all that call upon THY name . . . the LORD said unto him . . . He is a chosen vessel unto ME . . . to bear MY name . . . I will show him . . . for MY name’s sake.” These include nine additional references that are not mentioned in our text.

Remove the Lord Jesus from the picture, and Paul has neither apostleship nor ministry. He has absolutely no relevance to us apart from the Lord Jesus Christ and the purpose of Almighty God.

Acts 26:13-: “I heard a VOICE speaking unto me . . . why persecutest thou ME . . . Who art thou LORD ? . . . HE said . . . I am . . . JESUS whom thou persecutest . . . I have appeared unto thee . . . I will appear unto thee . . . the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee . . . “from the power of Satan unto GOD . . . by faith that is in ME . . .” These include five additional references that are not mentioned in chapters nine and twenty-two.

All totaled, there are thirty-seven direct and different references to Deity in the account of Paul’s Damascus road experience. Again, I want to emphasize that these are what bring lucidity to Paul’s apostleship and ministry. These are the details to which general statements refer that account for Paul’s apostleship. Here are a few of those general statements.

• “And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time” (1 Cor 15:8).

• “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me , for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry” (1 Tim 1:12).

• “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ , who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel: Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles” (2 Tim 1:10-11).

• “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God , according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 1:1).

I do not mean to be overly tedious in this matter, but in view of the present state of things, this is important to see. Remove the Lord Jesus from the picture, and Paul has neither apostleship nor ministry. He has absolutely no relevance to us apart from the Lord Jesus Christ and the purpose of Almighty God.

In our day, however, there are no small number of purported ministries that have little to do with the Person and present activity of Jesus Christ. Neither the origin nor purpose of these humanly conceived works can be obviously traced to Jesus. They do not require the ministry of Christ to be started or maintained. In fact, many confess that the success and support of these works depend upon men – particularly men with money.

Were the leaders of many of these ministries to be called to defend them, they could not speak like Paul. There would be no obvious correlation of the work with the exalted Christ.

That is precisely why it is essential that we ingest and digest Paul's defense. It provides us a microcosm of the work of the Lord, why it exists, and what it is designed to do. No man has a right to invent a new work, or a fresh emphasis. Admittedly, there are different ways of carrying out the work of the Lord that may include communication technology, modes of transportation, etc. But a new message cannot be adopted, nor can a new purpose for that message. No valid work for the Lord will ever extend beyond the remission of sins, deliverance from the power of Satan, and making preparation for the death and the day of judgment, which are appointments for every man (Heb 9:27). No valid ministry will concentrate on orienting men to this present evil world, or living as though there really was no eternity. The people of God must insist on such a diversion not being initiated or maintained.

Our text begins with Paul recounting the words of Ananias, a devout man who was sent to him by the Lord. This account provides some details concerning why the Lord Jesus was calling Saul of Tarsus.

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS HATH CHOSEN THEE

“ 22:14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth.”

ANANIAS

The record of the calling of Saul of Tarsus is the only occasion in which this Ananias is mentioned. In a sense, his presence in Scripture compensates for the other Ananias of record, who was noted for lying to the Holy Spirit, keeping back part of an offering given for the support of the saints. It is said of him that Satan filled his heart, he lied to the Holy Spirit, he lied unto God, and agreed with his wife to “tempt the Spirit of the Lord” (Acts 5:1-10). Behold with what exactness the Spirit chronicles the things of a man! The whole matter is a prelude to the day of judgment, when everything about every person will be made known – publicly and with eternal consequences.

Note what is known of the Ananias of our text.

- He was a disciple (Acts 9:10).
- He was a devout man according to the Law (Acts 22:12a).
- He had a good report of all the Jews that dwelt in Damascus (Acts 22:12).
- He knew of the reports concerning Saul of Tarsus' initiative against the saints (Acts 9:13-14).
- Jesus revealed to him the details of God's appointments for Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:15-16; 22:14-15).
- He obeyed the Lord immediately (Acts 9:17a).

He knew that Jesus had appeared to Saul in the way leading to Damascus (Acts 9:17b).

- He was sent that Saul might receive his sight and be “filled with the Holy Ghost” (Acts 9:17c).
- When he laid his hands upon Saul, he received his sight (Acts 22:17-18).
- He baptized Saul (Acts 9:18; 22:16).

Thus, all that we know about Ananias pertains to the assessment of his character before God, his

reputation among the Jews, and events surrounding the calling Saul of Tarsus. There is no evidence that he was an influential leader, or if he held an official position among the brethren in Damascus. However, he ranks among the elite in Scripture.

How do you suppose you are perceived in heaven? If a few lines concerning you, your person, and your activities, were written in Scripture, what do you think they would be? Rest assured, there is an appointed day when you will know such things. May you be ready for that assessment and proclamation.

THE GOD OF OUR FATHERS

“And he said, The God of our fathers . . .” Other versions read, “God of our ancestors,” NRSV “God of our forefathers.” WEYMOUTH The “fathers,” in this case is speaking of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who represented the lineage through which the nation of Israel came. Out of the three sons of Terah, God chose one: Abram, later renamed Abraham. Out of Abraham's eight sons, God chose one: Isaac. Out of Isaac's two sons, God chose one; Jacob. Each one of Jacob's twelve sons became the head of a tribe, with Joseph having a double portion through his sons Manasseh and Ephraim.

Ananias is careful to identify the God who had called Paul. He does not refer to Him as the God of Israel when they were in Egypt, or the God who led them out, or the God who brought them into the promised land. He does not call Him the God of the Law, or the God of the Prophets – although He was all of that. Paul's calling, however, was in strict keeping with the covenant made with Abraham – namely that promised Seed through whom the world would be blessed – the Lord Jesus Christ.

GOD HAD CHOSEN PAUL

“ . . . hath chosen thee . . .” Other versions read, “has appointed you,” NASB “You have been marked out by God,” BBE “God . . . determined in advance,” CJB “God . . . hath preordained,” DOUAY “hath ordained thee,” MRD “designated you,” NAB “has already chosen you,” NET “did choose beforehand,” YLT “chose you a long time ago,” IE “destined and appointed you,” AMPLIFIED “handpicked you,” MESSAGE and “before-ordained thee.” WYCLIFFE

From the most precise to the most liberal translators, no one evidences any confusion about what this verse actually says. Keep in mind that we are speaking of a man who was not yet in Christ, and had the history of being a persecutor of believers, and seeking to do things against the name of Jesus. Yet, one of the very first things Ananias reveals to him is that he had already been chosen by God! Jesus Christ himself had revealed this to Ananias declaring, “He is a chosen vessel unto Me” (Acts 9:15).

The choosing of Saul preceded his calling. The Divine choice of him was before his choice to believe and obey Jesus. He was chosen before he was baptized. Before he knew the will of the Lord, the Lord had chosen him.

This perfectly accords with the doctrine concerning salvation and involvement with the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Jesus said to His disciples, “Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:16),
- “Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them he also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified” (Rom 8:30).
- “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that

we should be holy and without blame before Him in love” (Eph 1:4).

The fundamental proclamation of the Gospel relates to the will of God – not the will of man, and not the objectives for men. Such things have light shed upon them by the chronicling of what God Himself is doing in Christ Jesus.

“But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto He called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:13-14).

- “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9).

- “But ye are a chosen generation , a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

Thus, Divine choice is affirmed personally by Jesus, is taught doctrinally, and is affirmed by historical examples. Further, the texts of reference do not explain Divine choice within the context of the human will. It is God’s will that is dominate in all of the passages touching on this subject. There is never any modification to the proclamations, as though Divine choice was contingent upon some factor or characteristic resident in men.

I understand that what Paul affirmed contradicts great bodies of theology. But it did not offend those acquainted with Scripture (the Jew), and certainly not those who were in Christ Jesus.

However, the case is made even more strong by the proclamation of the objective of the Divine choice that is affirmed.

THAT HE SHOULD KNOW GOD’S WILL

“ . . . that thou shouldest know His will . . .” Other versions read, “to know His will,” NASB “have knowledge of His purpose,” BBE “know His plan,” IE “learn His will,” WILLIAMS “to come progressively to know His will [to perceive, to recognize more strongly and clearly, and to become better and more intimately acquainted with His will],” AMPLIFIED “know what He wants done,” CEV and “to be briefed on His plan of action.” MESSAGE

The “will” of reference was not what God had purposed for Paul Himself, although that was involved to a small degree. Here, God’s will equates to His purpose – His “eternal purpose” as it has been revealed in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:28; 9:11; Eph 1:9,11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 John 3:9). That is the preeminent will.

The fundamental proclamation of the Gospel relates to the will of God – not the will of man, and not the objectives for men. Such things have light shed upon them by the chronicling of what God Himself is doing in Christ Jesus. No person should be engaged in preaching or teaching that is fundamentally unacquainted with God’s purpose, or objective. Further, this is not learned academically, else there would be no point in choosing anyone to know it.

From the standpoint of the believer, knowing the will of God has to do with the presentation of our bodies to the Lord – not with a special training or indoctrination course.

From the standpoint of the believer, knowing the will of God has to do with the presentation of our bodies to the Lord – not with a special training or indoctrination course. As it is written, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy,

acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God ” (Rom 12:1-2). Other versions read, “that you may be able to test and approve what God’s will is,” NIV “may be able to discern what is the will of God,” NRSV “so that by experience you may have knowledge of,” BBE and “determine what God really wants,” GWN and “discern for yourselves.” NJB

CHOSEN TO KNOW – that is a most arresting concept, but it is a true one, being revealed by Jesus. Let it be clear that if eternal life is knowing God (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20), it is clear that it is something controlled by God, not men.

THAT HE SHOULD SEE THE JUST ONE

“ . . . and see that Just One . . .” Other versions read, “see the Righteous One,” NASB “the Upright One,” BBE “the One who has God’s approval,” GWN “see that which is rightful,” TNT “see the Messiah,” LIVING “the Righteous One (Jesus Christ, the Messiah),” AMPLIFIED “the One who obeys God,” CEV “His righteous Servant,” GNB and “the Righteous Innocent.” MESSAGE

The expression “Righteous One” is not philosophical language, but refers to the Lord Jesus in the language of the Prophets. Isaiah referred to the Messiah as God’s “ Righteous Servant” (Isa 53:11). John refers to the Lord Jesus as “the Righteous [one]” NIV (1 John 2:1). The idea here is that the Lord Jesus has faithfully discharged His office, perfectly fulfilling the will of God, which He came to do (Psa 40:8; Heb 10:7,9). Jesus is not “Just” or “Righteous” because He does what is best for you, but because He fulfills what God has determined , doing it so precisely and fully that it is the basis for our acceptance by God.

Now, Paul was appointed by God to see the Messiah, even though he was blinded by the sight. However, the very light that blinded his flesh illuminated his spirit. He could not describe what He saw with his eyes, but spend his life declaring what he had seen with his spirit. He was chosen to know!

THAT HE SHOULD HEAR THE VOICE OF JESUS’ MOUTH

“ . . . and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth.” Other versions read, “an utterance from His mouth,” NASB “words from His mouth,” NIV “His own voice,” NRSV “a voice from His mouth,” RSV “the sound of His voice,” CSB “hear Him speak to you,” GWN “a command from His mouth,” NET and “a voice from His [own] mouth and a message from His [own] lips.” AMPLIFIED

Paul was chosen, not to hear a second-hand message, but to hear words coming directly from the ascended and glorified Christ. This was a privilege vouchsafed only to one other man – John the Beloved on the Isle of Patmos (Rev 1:10-20).

Accounts of the glorified Christ speaking to Paul include the following.

- On the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4-6; 22:7-10; 26:14-18).
- In the Temple (Acts 22:17-21).
- Later, the night after the people were about to pull Paul into pieces (Acts 23:11-11).
- Paul referred to the Lord instructing him concerning the Lord’s Table (1 Cor 11:23-

33).

Stephen saw the glorified Christ standing at the right hand of God, but did not hear His voice (Acts 7:55-56). Philip was directed by an angel and the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:26,29). Cornelius was directed by a holy angel (Acts 10:3,22; 11:13). Peter was also directed by an angel and the Spirit (Acts 10:19; 12:7-8). The brethren in Antioch were directed by the Holy Spirit (13:2). But only Paul and John

actually heard the voice of the enthroned Jesus. Both were chosen to do so. That is a decision made in heaven, not upon earth. Being schooled in Moses and the Prophets, Paul could receive this word.

DOES GOD PREFER ONE OVER ANOTHER?

The single example of the choosing of Saul of Tarsus answers this question. However, although a thorough account is given of the selection of Saul, and the means through which it was carried out, this remains a subject that is heavily debated among professing Christians. Let it be clear, that so far as the provision of salvation is concerned, it is for “for all.” This is repeatedly affirmed in Scripture.

- “The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world ” (John 1:29).

- “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is My flesh, which I will give for the life of the world ” (John 6:51).

- “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if One died for all , then were all dead” (2 Cor 5:14).

- “And that he died for all , that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15).

- “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all , to be testified in due time” (1 Tim 2:5-6).

- “By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all ” (Heb 10:10).

- “And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world ” (1 John 2:2).

- “And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world ” (1 John 4:14).

However, all of God’s dealing with humanity are not after this order. He has made known that He does have preference, choosing some and rejecting others, rejecting some while accepting others.

- Abel and his offering were preferred to Cain and his offering (Gen 4:4-5).

- Isaac was preferred to Ishmael (Gen 21:12-13).

- Jacob was preferred to Esau (Rom 9:13).

- Joseph was preferred to his brothers (Gen 37:5-11; Psa 105:17).

- Those dwelling in Goshen were preferred to those in the rest of Egypt (Ex 8:22-23; 9:4-6; 9:26; 10:23; 14:20).

- Aaron was preferred to others of the tribe of Levi (Num 17:6-8; Psa 105:26).

One of the appointed means through which commitment is generated in the hearts of believers is the understanding of the Sovereignty of God.

David was preferred over his brothers (1 Sam 16:11-14).

- Israel was preferred to the rest of the nations (Deut 14:2).

- The body of Christ is preferred to the world (Matt 18:20; John 17:9).

- Christ’s disciples were given to know things withheld from the multitudes (Matt 13:11).

- When it came to visions and revelations, Paul received more (2 Cor 12:1).

- The Lord preferred to exempt the church in Philadelphia from trials coming upon the face of the earth (Rev 3:10).
- There is such a thing as those ordained to eternal life believing while others do not (Acts 13:48).
- In the end, the sheep will preferred to the goats (Matt 25:22-23).

Application

One of the appointed means through which commitment is generated in the hearts of believers is the understanding of the Sovereignty of God. Until people arrive at the point where they can insightfully and thankfully say, “Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb” (Rev 7:10), their commitment to the Lord will be partial, and their lives fragmented. I do not believe it is possible to live wholly unto the Lord without this understanding. It is most unfortunate that it has become a subject for debate among professing Christians, as though the Creator was not really greater than the created.

THOU SHALT BE HIS WITNESS

“ 15 For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.”

Notice who is talking, and who is being addressed. Saul is not speaking, but listening, and Ananias is doing the speaking, and doing so as directed by the glorified Christ. Saul is being told what he will be! He is not asked if this is what he wants. He is not asked to chose whether or not to accept what is being told him. There are no options declared to him, only what he has been chosen to do, and WILL do.

A similar call was issued to other apostles: “ Follow Me” (Matt 4:19; 9:9; John 1:43). He did not ask if they wanted to follow Him. Again He said to them, “ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence . . . ye shall be My witnesses” (Acts 1:5,8). He made no appeal to them to choose whether or not they wanted to be baptized with the Holy Spirit, or if they would consent to be His witnesses. Later, on the eve of His betrayal, He told His disciples, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you , and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:16).

Men may respond that God does not choose arbitrarily – but is that really a proper assessment. For clarification, the first meaning of “arbitrary” is “depending on choice or discretion; specifically: determinable by decision of a judge or tribunal rather than defined by statute.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER I understand that this can be carried too far, as though man was not involved in the matter at all. However, human involvement can be because of Divine choice, as confirmed in the case of Saul. His role in the body of Christ was an assignment, not something driven by the will of Saul of Tarsus. The Lord said to Ananias concerning Saul, “he is a chosen vessel unto Me, to bear My name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15) – just as the other apostles were. Our text reports both the choosing and the purpose of the choosing of Saul of Tarsus. Ananias told him, “The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth” (Acts 22:14).

This confirms that God cannot be found by searching (Job 11:7). If God or Christ do not reveal themselves, they cannot be known, or comprehended – and God delights in being known (Jer 9:24-25). It also confirms that legitimate ministries are ordained by the Lord, not created by men.

Now, based upon the choice of Saul, Ananias tells him what he will do. This is not a commandment, but a prophecy. It is not a suggestion that he is to accept, but a revelation of what will be. Any theology that does not make allowance for the free and unreserved acceptance of this revealed

fact is in some way flawed. It could also be that it is stated clumsily, being driven more by the wisdom of men than by the word of the Lord. At any rate, men should never attempt to explain why they believe something that contradicts Scripture. If it is true that man lives “by every Word of God” (Lk 4:4), then we must always defer to the Word, discarding quickly any thought that conflicts with it.

HIS WITNESS UNTO ALL MEN

“For thou shalt be His witness . . .” Other versions read, “you will be a witness.” NASB “you will be His witness, NRSV and “has chosen you . . . so that you may become His witness.” PHILLIPS

As it is used here, and by technical definition, the word “witness” has at least four meanings.

- **A witness in a legal sense.** In this case, a “witness” is one who has been chosen by Christ, called by Him, and appointed to testify of specific things.
- **One who is a spectator of anything.** As used here, the “witness” is not bearing testimony as one who is a second-hand witness – who has heard the truth from one of his peers. This was a requirement for apostles – first-hand knowledge.
- **In an ethical sense: what is right and honorable.** There is such a thing as a “false witness” (Psa 27:12; Matt 26:60; Acts 6:13). These are witnesses who lie when they say they have seen this or that, or that God has revealed to them the lie they are telling. A true witness is a “faithful witness” (Prov 14:5), who relates precisely what he has seen and heard.
- **One who maintains the witness even to death.** As used here, a witness is one who continues to deliver the message given to him, even though it may lead to his death, or martyrdom.

UNTO ALL MEN

“ . . . unto all men . . .” Other versions read, “ to all men,” NASB “to all the world,” NRSV “to all people,” NET and “before all men.” PHILLIPS

The revelations and visions that were given to Paul (2 Cor 12:1; Eph 3:4) were not private and personal communication, intended only for him. They were meant for “all men,” or “all the world.” The marvelous things that were opened to Paul concerning the purpose of God, salvation, the accomplishments of Christ, the New Covenant, etc., were matters God intended for all men to know, even down to this generation. That is why they were given to Paul – to be testified to “all men.”

If this is true – and it most assuredly is – then how can an ignorance of Paul’s writings within the professed church be justified? Thirty percent of the total words contained in Matthew through Revelation were written by Paul. Although I have mentioned these teachings in previous lessons, and having added to this listing, I want to draw your attention again to them.

PAUL’S UNIQUE TEACHING

THINGS GIVEN FOR ALL MEN TO HEAR

1. That the church is the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4,12-16; 5:23,30; Col 1:16; 2:19; 3:15)
2. The merging of Jew and Gentile in Christ (Eph 2:15-16,19).
3. The exposition of justification by faith (Rom 3:20-5:18; Gal 2:16-17; 3:8-24).
4. The distinction between the Old and New Covenants (2 Cor 3:6-14; 7:22; 8:8-13; 10:16-17; Gal 3:15-17; 4:22-28; Heb 9:15-20).
5. The reality of “*the old man*” and “*the new man*” (Rom 6:6; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:9-

10).

6. The inner warfare experienced by those who live by faith (Rom 7:15-25; Gal 5:17).
7. The spiritual logic that declares the coming conversion of the Jews (Rom 9-11).
8. The High Priesthood of Christ (Heb 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21).
9. The relation of Abraham to those who believe (Rom 4:1-16; Gal 3:6-18).
10. The significance of Melchizedec (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-21).
11. The eternal purpose of God (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9).
12. What took place behind the scenes when Jesus died (Col 1:20; 2:14-15; Heb 2:14; 9:26).
13. The whole armor of God (Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:7; Eph 6:10-18).
14. Spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:4-5; Eph 6:17).
15. Believers battling with principalities and powers (Eph 6:12).
16. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9).
17. The works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21).
18. The office of a Bishop (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:7-11).
19. The office of a deacon (1 Tim 3:10-13).
20. The exposition of spiritual gifts, and how they are administered (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31; 14:1-12; Eph 4:11-16).
21. Why men cannot be justified by works (Rom 3:26; 4:2; Gal 2:16; 3:2-5).
22. The imputation of righteousness upon the basis of faith (Rom 1:7; 3:22-25; 4:5-25; 10:6-10; Phil 3:9).
23. Extensive teaching concerning baptism into Christ (Rom 6:1-23; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:11-15).
24. The comparison of Adam and Christ (Rom 5:14-21; 1 Cor 15:22,45).
25. Extensive teaching on the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:15-57).
26. The ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11-14, 26-27; 2 Cor 3:3-18; Gal 4:6, 29; 5:5,16-18,22-24; 6:8; Eph 2:22; Eph 5:9).
27. The intercession and mediation of Christ Jesus (Heb 7:25; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).
28. The intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27).
29. Predestination and election (Rom 8:29-33; 9:11; 11:5-7,28; Eph 1:5,11; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 2:10; Tit 1:1).
30. The body being for the Lord (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:-13-20).
31. God's objective for believers (Eph 3:15-30; 4:12-16; Col 1:9-11).
32. The resurrection body (2 Cor 5:1-5).
33. The accomplishments of the cross (Eph 2:16; Phil 2:8; Col 1:20; 2:14-15).
34. Extensive teaching concerning the Lord's Table (1 Cor 10:21; 11:23-29).
35. Types and shadows (Gal 4:24; Col 2:17; Heb 8:5; 9:24; 10:1).

36. Extensive teaching of the grace of God (Rom 3:24; 4:4,16; 5:2, 15-17, 20-21; 6:14-15; ; 11:5-6; 12:3-6; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 1:15; Eph 2:5-8; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 2:11-12; Tit 3:7; Heb 2:9; 4:16; 12:28).
37. Heavenly hosts being tutored concerning God's wisdom through the church (Eph 3:10).
38. Angels being present in the assembly of the saints (1 Cor 11:10).
39. How the church is to respond to immoral people among them (1 Cor 5:1-9).
40. With the exceptions of six references to the "Gospel" in the book of Acts, and five references in the epistles and Revelation, every mention of that word from in Romans through Revelation (seventy-five) is found in Paul's writings.
41. The ascension of Jesus and its bearing on the gifts given to the church (Eph 1:20; 4:8-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3; 4:14; 9:14).
42. The use of the word "heavenly" (1 Cor 15:48,49; Eph 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 3:1; 6:4; 8:5).
43. The degeneracy of the Gentile world without Christ (Rom 1:19-32).
44. With the exception of two references in First Peter, and one in Third John, the remaining teaching concerning Gentiles is given by Paul (48 references).
45. The fact that some of the Jewish branches were broken off, and some Gentiles were grafted into the Jewish olive tree (Rom 11:11-24).
46. The destruction of the man of sin at the coming of the Lord (2 Thess 2:3-10).
47. Receiving the love of the truth, and the consequences of not doing so (2 Thess 2:10-12).
48. What was involved in the condescension of Christ coming into the world (Phil 2:5-8).
49. What we are "come to" in Christ Jesus (Heb 12:22-24).
50. In showing the folly of seeking to be justified by Law, the allegory of Hagar and Sarah in explaining the distinction of the New Covenant (Gal 4:21-31).

OF WHAT THOU HAST SEEN AND HEARD

" . . . of what thou hast seen and heard."

The reference here is what Paul; had seen and heard from Christ Himself . This is confirmed by the testimony Paul gave before king Agrippa. There he recounted the words Jesus spoke to him on the road to Damascus. "But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I WILL appear unto thee " (Acts 26:16). This would include his tutoring by Jesus during the three years before he went to see Peter at Jerusalem (Gal 1:18). Prior to that he did not confer "with flesh and blood" (Gal 1:16). He was not taught by the twelve apostles or any other man concerning what he was to preach. Ananias did not outline any message to him, but only told him what he had been appointed to do. The writings of Paul – all of them to the church – are confirmation that he was a faithful steward.

WHY TARRIEST THOU

" 16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."

Here is a man who was called and commissioned directly by Jesus Christ. Yet, when it comes to his entry into the Kingdom, coming into Christ, and being added to the church, there is nothing unique about what he is told to do. Paul's sins will not be washed away in a special way, but in a manner that is characteristic of the "common salvation" in which all with the "common faith" participate (Jude 1:3; Tit 1:4). There are social ministries, but, with the exception of the thief on the cross, no special entrances.

Uniqueness only applies to the

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assignment of the work a person is to do in the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:18). It does not apply to how they are inducted into Christ, or the manner in which they are to conduct their lives. Their mindset is to be the same, with the affection of every believer being set on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1). They are all to work out their salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12). This being the case, how great a transgression it is to have contradicting messages daily delivered by the professing church on these matters!

Every believer is to resist the devil (1 Pet 5:7-8; James 4:7), perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1), and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:14). No one is exempted from living by faith (Heb 10:38), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25), or keeping the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Heb 3:6). Yet, these are not consistent requirements by modern churches.

All believers are to keep themselves in the love of God (Jude 1:21), possess their bodies in sanctification and honor (1 Thess 4:4), and run the race with patience (Heb 12:1-2). Not a single one of those who are in Christ Jesus is excluded from the mandates to "be holy" (1 Pet 1:15-16), "love the brethren" (1 John 3:14), and to present their bodies a living sacrifice unto God (Rom 12:1-2).

The fruit of the Spirit is to be found in every professing Christian (Gal 5:22-24; Eph 5:9), and none of them are allowed to make a place for the devil (Eph 4:27). Every single believer is expected to add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity to their faith (1 Pet 1:5-8).

All believers are "strangers and pilgrims" in the world (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11), "kings and priests unto God" (Rev 1:6), and part of a "chosen generation" (1 Pet 2:9). All of them have been "quickened" (Eph 2:1), "turned" (Acts 26:18), "washed," "sanctified," and "justified" (1 Cor 6:11). They have all been "made to sit together with Christ in heavenly places" (Eph 2:6), have access to God (Rom 5:2; Eph 3:12), and possess the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:14; 1 Thess 4:8).

Everyone in Christ has received a kingdom (Heb 12:28), are being "kept by the power of God" (1 Pet 1:5), and have their "names written in heaven" (Heb 12:23). They have all been "made accepted in the beloved" (Eph 1:6), are being brought to glory (Heb 2:10), and their temptations are strictly monitored and controlled by the Lord (1 Cor 10:13). All of the promises of God belong to them (2 Cor 1:20), they are being changed from one increasing stage of glory to another by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 3:18), and the Holy Spirit is making intercession for them (Rom 8:26-27).

Some may wonder why it is necessary to mention such things, being that they are declared with power in the Scriptures. While this is true, the Scriptures are not being declared as they should be in this generation. The people of God are not being told of the great salvation in which they have participated.

The characteristics and possessions

It is for this reason that Ananias will require Paul to do what every believer is required to do. His calling was singular, his office was unparalleled, but his entrance was just like yours!

I have just enumerated are generally thought to belong to extraordinary and leading Christians. No person of sound mind would dare to affirm that they are evident in the average church to any significant degree. We are now faced with as younger generation of professing Christians in which they are glaringly absent. There is a brand of Christianity that has been foisted upon the people that accepts mediocrity and spiritual ignorance as normal. Any individual who manifests some consistent interest in the things of God is viewed as an exceptional person. This is a most serious condition, even though it is very popular.

However, even when a person is placed in an exceptional office, there is no reduction in the requirement of things common to salvation. Unique requirements pertain to “the office” (Rom 12:4), and not to the character or spirituality of the one involved.

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WHY TARRIEST THOU?

“ And now why tarriest thou? . . .” Other versions read, “who are you waiting?” NKJV “why do you delay?” NASB “what are waiting for?” NIV “why lingerest thou?” DARBY “don’t wait any longer,” IE and “what are you going to do?” EMTV

While men are fond of delays, the Lord is not, nor are those who have the mind of Christ. Israel was not to delay giving their first fruits to the Lord (Ex 22:29). The Psalmist did not delay to keep the Lord’s commandments (Psa 119:60).

It will be interesting, to say the least, how Paul reacts to the matter concerning which there is to be no delay. It will be obvious that some of the religion traditions that have risen to prominence in Christendom were unaccepted and unknown at the time of our text.

ARISE AND BE BAPTIZED

“ . . . arise, and be baptized . . .” Other versions read, “Get up, be baptized.

NIV “get up, and have baptism,” BBE “Get up, immerse yourself,” CJB “Get up and have yourself baptized,” NAB “Hurry and be baptized,” NJB “having risen, baptize thyself,” YLT “Go and be baptized,” LIVING “Rise up, get yourself immersed,” IE and “get yourself baptized.” WEYMOUTH

Here is a text that illustrates the inadequacy of etymology. The technical meaning of Greek words is often helpful, and assists in confirming textual meaning. However, unless a person has a grasp of “sound doctrine,” a technical view of language can actually lead them out into left field, so to speak. This is seen in the sloppy expressions in some versions: “immerse yourself,” CJB and “baptize thyself.” YLT There is no record of a believer baptizing, or immersing, himself, as Naaman dipped himself in the river Jordan seven times (2 Kgs 5:10,14). Wherever there is a record of someone being baptized, another person baptized them. John the Baptist baptized the people, as recorded in John 3:23. He baptized Jesus, at the insistence of Jesus Himself (Matt 3:14-16). Peter did not tell penitents on the day of Pentecost to baptize themselves, but to “ be baptized” (Acts 2:38). It is written that “they that gladly received the Word were baptized” (Acts 2:41). When those in the city of Samaria “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12). Philip baptized the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38). Peter commanded those of the house of Cornelius to be baptized in water (Acts 10:47-48).

Upon hearing the preaching of Paul, Lydia “was baptized, and her household” (Acts 16:14-15). Not delaying, the Philippian jailer and his household were baptized “the same hour of the night” (Acts 16:33). When Paul preached in Corinth “many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). After hearing of Christ and the necessity of believing upon him, certain disciples in Ephesus “were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:5). This was something performed by the servants of God. It was accompanied by “the operation of God,” to be sure (Col 2:12), confirming the validity of the action.

None of these cases are reported in such a manner as to lead to the conclusion that the baptism of reference was unseen, and accomplished independently of personal obedience. They are not accompanied by any form of ambiguity or vagueness. The baptism of John prepared the people by giving them a proper conception of the physical action of baptism, and no one who believed John had any difficulty understanding what being baptized involved. The fact that this subject is attended by so much controversy and disagreement among professing Christians is yet another confirmation that we are living in a massive falling away.

WASHING AWAY THY SINS

“ . . . and wash away thy sins . . .” Other versions read, “wash your sins away,” NIV “have your sins washed away,” NRSV “be cleansed from thy sins,” MRD “wash off your sins,” WEYMOUTH and “scrubbed clean of those sins.” MESSAGE

There is no way to effectively dissociate the initial removal of sins from being baptized. Further, being baptized with the Holy Spirit, or with suffering unto death, are never directly associated with being forgiven.

There is no way to effectively dissociate the initial removal of sins from being baptized. Further, being baptized with the Holy Spirit (Mk 1:8; Acts 1:5; 11:16) or with suffering unto death (Lk 12:60; 1 Cor 15:29), are never directly associated with being forgiven. This is the baptism that is an appeal for a purified conscience (1 Pet 3:21), and stands at the threshold of the entrance into the Kingdom of God (John 3:5). Where this is denied, the element of godly honesty is missing.

This is the washing to which other texts refer.

- “And such were some of you: but ye are WASHED, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11).
- “ . . . Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the WASHING of water by the word” (Eph 5:26).
- “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the WASHING of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).
- “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies WASHED with pure water” (Heb 10:22).

It is quite true that at the root, our sins are removed when Jesus “washed us from our sins in His own blood” (Rev 1:5). However, that had to do primarily with His death, through which He took away the sins of the world (John 1:29). It is in our baptism that we appropriate that washing, being “baptized into His death” (Rom 6:3).

Many people are related to Naaman, the Syrian leper, in their attitudes. It is as difficult for them to associate baptism with washing away sins, as it was for Naaman to perceive any connection with dipping in the river Jordan with the healing of his leprosy. One essential difference between Naaman and these people is that Naaman did do what he told to do – dipping seven times in the Jordan river. After doing this, he no longer had any difficulty making the required association.

CALLING UPON THE NAME OF THE LORD

“ . . . calling on the name of the Lord.” Other versions read, “calling on His name,” NASB “giving worship to His name,” BBE “as you call on His name,” CJB “invoking His name,” DOUAY “in calling on His name,” GENEVA “whilst thou involkest His name,” MRD “by calling upon the name of the Lord,” NLT “in calling on the name of the Lord,” PNT “trusting in His name,” IE and “by calling upon His name, wash away your sins.” AMPLIFIED

Peter told those to whom he preached on the day of Pentecost, “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:21). Paul taught the same thing in Romans 10:13. Those in Christ are described as those who “call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor 1:2). For that matter, when the Lord Jesus Himself was baptized he prayed. As it is written, “it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying , the heaven was opened” (Luke 3:21).

I have heard many contend for the necessity of being baptized into Christ – and rightly so. However, I do not recall ever hearing them contend that men must also call upon the name of the Lord. While this is done at the time a person is baptized, it is not synonymous with being baptized. This phrase – calling upon the name of the Lord – equates to an expression found in Colossians. “In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God , who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses” (Col 2:11-13). Other versions read “through faith in the working of God,” NKJV “through your faith in the power of God,” NIV “through faith in the powerful working of God,” ESV “ye believed in the power of God,” MRD “because you trusted the mighty power of God,” NLT “through faith that is wrought by the operation of God,” TNT “because you trusted the Word of the mighty God,” LIVING “through faith produced within you by God,” WEYMOUTH and “through your faith in the energy of that God,” MONTGOMERY

Technically speaking, it is one’s faith in the working of God that causes the individual to be raised to “walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). It is also true that the faith itself is the working of the Lord, as some versions indicate: “through faith that is wrought by the operation of God,” TNT and “through faith produced within you by God.” WEYMOUTH Men must be taught properly concerning baptism, so that they are not left trusting in their baptism, but in the God who

Baptism is the point of entrance into Christ, but it is not itself the entrance – and there is a vast difference between the two. In this baptism, men baptize men, but men do not effect the forgiveness of sins, the entrance into Christ Jesus, the receiving of the Holy Spirit, or becoming a part of the body of Christ.

works effectively at that time.

The point here is that having faith in the working of God, and relying upon His power to do what must be done, equates with calling upon the name of the Lord. In all candor, I must acknowledge that I am not aware of any leading person in the group with which I was identified ever making a point of this. They left the people thinking that the act of baptism itself appropriated the benefit of remission. However, that is not an accurate concept. The remission was appropriated at that time , but it was the working of God that accomplished it, not the obedience of man – even though it is imperative for men to obey.

It is no more right for believers to trust in their baptism that it was for the Jews to trust in their circumcision. Yet, this is quite common among certain people. Baptism is the point of entrance into Christ, but it is not itself the entrance – and there is a vast difference between the two. In this baptism, men baptize men, but men do not effect the forgiveness of sins, the entrance into Christ Jesus, the

receiving of the Holy Spirit, or becoming a part of the body of Christ. That falls under the classification of “the operation of God,” or “the working of God” – what God Himself does. The time of blessing and the blessing itself must not be confused.

WHILE I PRAYED IN THE TEMPLE

“ 17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; 18 And saw Him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.”

Paul now shows his listeners that he had turned to the Gentiles by Divine direction, and not out of any hatred for the Jews themselves.

WHEN I WAS COME AGAIN TO JERUSALEM

“And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem . . .”

This refers to the time following his three years with the Lord – when he again went to Jerusalem as recorded in Acts 9:26-29). During that time Paul (then Saul) sought to join himself to the disciples, but they were afraid of him, and did not believe he was a disciple. Barnabas then brought him to the apostles “and declared unto them how he Saul) had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus” (Acts 9:27). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul said this was three years after the Damascus road experience, and that it lasted for fifteen days.

WHILE I PRAYED IN THE TEMPLE

“ . . . even while I prayed in the temple . . .” Other versions read, “and was praying in the Temple,” NKJV “while I was at prayer in the Temple,” BBE and “While I was praying in the temple courtyard.” GWN

When I read these words I recall what Jesus said when He cleansed the Temple of “all them that bought and sold in the Temple” (Matt 21:12). After He had overthrown the “ tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves,” He cried out to them, “It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer ; but ye have made it a den of thieves” (Matt 21:13; Mk 11:27; Lk 19:46; Isaiah 56:7).

A TRANCE

“ . . . a supernatural state of body and mind, the nature of which has been well conjectured by Doddridge, who defines it “such a rapture of mind as gives the person who falls into it a look of astonishment, and renders him insensible of the external objects around him, while in the meantime his imagination is agitated in an extraordinary manner with some striking scenes which pass before it and take up all the attention.” He refers to some extraordinary instances of this kind mentioned by Gualterius in his note on Acts 10:10,(Family Expositor, ad loc. note g). Stockius also describes it as “a sacred ecstasy, or rapture of the mind out of itself, when, the use of the external senses being suspended, God reveals something in a peculiar manner to prophets and apostles, who are then taken or transported out of themselves.” MCCLINTOK & STRONGS

“The condition expressed by this word is a mental state in which the person affected is partially or wholly unconscious of objective sensations, but intensely alive to subjective impressions which, however they may be originated, are felt as if they were revelations from without.”
INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE ENCYCLOPEDIA

I FELL INTO A TRANCE

“ . . . I was in a trance . . . ” Other versions read, “I fell into a trance,” NASB “my senses became more than naturally clear,” BBE “I went into a visionary state,” CSB “I became in ecstasy,” DOUAY “I saw a vision,” IE “I fell into a trance (an ecstasy),” AMPLIFIED and “lost in the presence of God.” MESSAGE

The Greek word from which “trance” is translated is **evksta,sei** . The transliteration of this word is “ecstasy.” The lexical meaning of the word is, “a throwing of the mind out of its normal state . . . or that of the man who by some sudden emotion is transported as it were out of himself, so that in this rapt condition, although he is awake, his mind is so drawn off from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on things divine that he sees nothing but the forms and images lying within, and thinks that he perceives with his bodily eyes and ears realities shown him by God,” THAYER “as a partially suspended consciousness ecstasy, trance,” FRIBERG “trance, vision.” UBS

The word “trance” is mentioned three times in the Authorized Version.

- Balaam is said to have fallen into a trance: “He hath said, which heard the words of God, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open ” (Num 24:4). “He hath said, which heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the most High, which saw the vision of the Almighty, falling into a trance, but having his eyes open ” (Num 24:16).

This was a unique experience in which Paul saw, but not with his eyes, what was actually taking place at the time – Jesus was speaking to him, and was doing so concerning a present circumstance. In some way, he was projected into the unseen spiritual realities that were taking place at the time.

Peter fell into a trance on a rooftop, where he had gone to pray. “And he became very hungry, and would have eaten: but while they made ready, he fell into a trance ” (Acts 10:10). His himself said, “I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision , A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me” (Acts 11:5).

- Paul is recounting his vision in this text. “And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance ” (Acts 22:17).

Other versions present these verses in the following words.

- Numbers 24:4,16 – “falls down,” NKJV “falls prostrata.” NIV
- Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17 – “visionary state,” CSB “ecstasy of mind.” DOUAY Most other versions use the word “trance.”

While there is some mystery that surrounds the matter of trances, several general observations can be made.

- Divine communication is not limited to natural experiences.
- There are realities that can be seen without the employment of natural vision and hearing.
- The human spirit is capable of more than what can be expressed through or received by the body.
- Peter, and Paul fell into a trace while they were praying.
- Spiritual life can and must be lived by the believer – but it cannot be controlled by the individual, nor is it in man that walks to direct his own steps. As it is written, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”

(Jer 10:23).

I SAW HIM SAYING UNTO ME

“ And saw Him saying unto me . . .” Other versions read, “I saw the Lord speaking,” NIV “saw Jesus saying to me,” NRSV “and I saw the Lord. He told me,” GWN and “I saw a vision of Jesus saying to me.” NLT

This was a unique experience in which Paul saw, but not with his eyes, what was actually taking place at the time – Jesus was speaking to him, and was doing so concerning a present circumstance. In some way, he was projected into the unseen spiritual realities that were taking place at the time. This was something that was being strictly revealed and governed from heaven. There is no human faculty that would have enabled Paul to see what was taking place in this trance.

GET THEE QUICKLY OUT OF JERUSALEM

“ . . . Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “and I saw Him saying to me, 'Make haste, and get out of Jerusalem quickly,” NASB “Quick . . . Leave Jerusalem immediately,” NIV “Hurry, and get out of Jerusalem quickly,” NRSV “Hurry! Leave Jerusalem now!” LIVING

For Paul, Jerusalem was not the place to be at that time. The opposition that he was meeting there was too serious. When Paul was in Corinth, he also faced some serious opposition. However, when he had determined to leave the area, the Lord appeared to him in a vision and said, “Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: (For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:9-10). Paul remained in Corinth for another year and a half (Acts 18:11).

The incident that Paul is relating actually took place before the one at Corinth. Yet, the Lord, who can control men at will, did not tell him no one would hurt him. Although the circumstance at Jerusalem may have appeared nearly identical to that of Corinth, that was not all the way it was.

Only the Lord can properly direct our steps. Even though we must extend ourselves to be wise and discreet in doing the work of the Lord, when it comes down to the bottom line, it is the Lord who directs our steps. The only way we can be directed, however, is to walk on the narrow path, live by faith, walk in the Spirit, and maintain our fellowship with Jesus, into which we were called. If we do so, living unto the Lord, His promise will be fulfilled in us: “And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: and thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa 30:20-21).

The Bane of a Shallow Religion

Right here it is necessary to make a few comments concerning the bane of a shallow religion. By a “shallow religion,” I mean an approach to living that only deals with surface matters – or issues relating to life in this world. It is the kind of life where there is no “root” – men hear the Word of the Lord but it does not go deep enough into their persons. Jesus described this kind of person as being like a shallow layer of earth that was thinly spread upon a large and impenetrable layer of rock. He described such a person in these words, “But he that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended” (Matt 13:5-6). Mark reads, “And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake,

immediately they are offended” (Mark 4:16-17). Luke reads, “They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away ” (Luke 8:13).

This is a most vivid description that accounts for the fall of those who have made a profession of faith. There is a sense in which the Word never went deep enough in their hearts to make them sensitive to the Lord. Somehow they thought they could live by rules instead of by faith. They did not know the wickedness of the world, and so they stayed too close to it (1 John 2:15-17). They were not cognizant of the craftiness of the devil, and so made a place for him to work in their lives (Eph 4:27). They had very little idea of how very much is given to us in Christ Jesus (Eph 1:3), and therefore, they never pressed toward the mark, or zealously sought the things which are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Col 3:1-2). That is why they fell! That is why they were unable to hear the voice of the Lord!

What we have in our day is an approach to the Christian life that actually promotes this kind of spiritual naivete and immaturity. Professing Christians are being produced that do not grow into a state of fruit bearing (Rom 7:4). The professing churches knows they have this kind of people on their hands, yet they are apparently blind to the cause of it. They have created artificial means to address a lack of depth, a weak faith, and fruitless lives. They have counselors, workshops, programs, and a variety of special ministries they imagine are addressing the ills of the church. But none of those means have been able to develop spiritual sensitivity in the people. It has only made them dependent upon humanly devised means.

But Paul did not embrace this kind of approach to God. He lived and walked in such a manner as made him sensitive to Divine direction. This was not something that was especially for him. This is a New Covenant provision, and is included in the glorious expression, “the knowledge of God” (1 Cor 15:34; 2 Cor 10:5; Col 1:10; 2 Pet 1:2).

THEY WILL NOT RECEIVE YOUR TESTIMONY

we now have a generation of professing Christians who know very little about Christ Jesus the Lord. Their perception of why He came into the world is very limited. What He was doing in His ministry is not clear to them. The accomplishments of His death have not been perceived beyond an introductory view.

“ . . . for they will not receive thy testimony concerning Me.” Other versions read, “accept your testimony about Me,” NASB “your witness about Me,” BBE “what you have to say about Me,” CJB “the testimony you are giving about Me,” NJB “thy witness that thou bearest of Me,” TNT “when you give them My message,” LIVING and “the truth about Me.” IE

Notice what Jesus did not say to Paul. He did not say the Jews would reject Paul himself – although they did. He did not say they would reject his personal testimony concerning how he had been called. It is what Paul was saying about Christ Jesus Himself that would be rejected. That was reason enough for him to leave. Luke says that during that time “he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 9:29). Prior to that, and immediately after his conversion, Paul had “increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ” (Acts 9:22). Christ Jesus was the subject or theme of his testimony.

A person who does not preach Christ, declaring and expounding His Person, accomplishments, and current activity, has no right to preach or teach among the people of God. This especially applies to those who tailor their message to please the people. It is the message of Christ that discovers the kind of people that are being addressed. If they have no interest in Jesus Christ Himself, then God really has nothing more for them. Everything God has for men is given to them through His Son, and if men do not want the Son, they are locked into a state of spiritual ignorance and poverty.

This kind of testimony stands in stark contrast to the preaching and teaching of our day. With very few exceptions, the theme of today's preachers and teachers centers in humanity – their problems, and their potential. These men come with resolutions for difficulties and challenges, and they are encased in a code or a system they themselves have created.

The result is that we now have a generation of professing Christians who know very little about Christ Jesus the Lord. Their perception of why He came into the world is very limited. What He was doing in His ministry is not clear to them. The accomplishments of His death have not been perceived beyond an introductory view. What He is doing now is not common knowledge, and the reality and purpose of His second coming are rarely heard. The relationship of the church to Him is only vaguely seen. The fact of men being conformed to His image has been buried beneath the rubble of self-help systems and the promotion of religious institutions. Actually, the modern and popular Christian message is essentially a proclamation about men, not Jesus. The Son of God that is being represented is more like a genie in a bottle than the Savior of men. It is “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4).

This is by no means an innocent situation, and it must not be glossed as though it did not exist. As the prophet Jeremiah exclaimed, “A wonderful and horrible thing is committed in the land; The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so : and what will ye do in the end thereof?” (Jer 5:30-31). What will the outcome of such a circumstance be? Would God really be glorified by saving and receiving such a people? If so, then precisely what is the purpose of salvation, and the awful requirements that were laid upon the Lord Jesus in order to the expiation of sin, the conferment of the Holy Spirit, and Divine acceptance? If God's integrity and faithfulness can really be maintained in a compromising posture, why have Jesus?

THEY KNOW

“ 19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on Thee. . .”

There are several instances in Scripture of men responding to the Lord – holding a dialog directly with Him. These incidents are distinguished from prayers and inquiries made to the Lord. Here is a brief sampling of such dialog. These do not include communications with angels.

- Adam (Gen 3:9-12).
- Eve (Gen 3:13).
- Cain (Gen 4:13-15).
- Abraham (Gen 15:2-3; 18:23-28;
- Abimelech (Gen 20:4-8).
- Moses (Ex 3:4-5:18; 21:9-14).
- Isaiah (Isa 6:8-11).
- Jeremiah (Jer 4:10).
- Ezekiel (Ezek 11:13-23).
- Paul (Acts 22:10,19).

This kind of beating was done with such force and repetition as to separate the skin from the bone. This was done, the Jews imagined, in fulfillment of the Law, which spoke of the manner in which wicked people were to be punished.

The fact of these occurrences is most arresting to ponder. They are to be compared with Israel who, when they heard the voice of God collectively, did not want to hear it anymore (Ex 20:19). There

was also an occasion when God spoke from heaven, but the people were unaware of who spoke (John 12:28-29). Few, indeed, are the occasions when men dialoged with God, asking and answering verbally.

The answer of Paul to the glorified Christ is an example of the boldness of faith (Eph 3:12). It also reveals the potential impact of being reconciled unto God (Col 1:20-21), and participating in the Divine nature (2 Pet 1:4). Additionally, the implications of being called into the fellowship of God's Son (1 Cor 1:9) are lived out in this text.

LORD

“And I said, Lord . . .” Other versions read, “Lord, I replied,” NIV “And I said: My Lord,” MRD ““Lord,’ I answered,” NJB ““But Lord,’ I argued,” LIVING “But Lord,” IE and “So I said, `Lord.” WILLIAMS

This is the same way in which Paul addressed the Savior on the road to Damascus: “LORD, what wilt Thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6; 22:10). Just as in Paul's initial encounter with the glorified Christ, this is a perceptive response, not merely a formal one.

I IMPRISONED AND BEAT

“ . . . they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue . . .” Other versions read, “putting in prison and whipping,” BBE “cast into prison and beat,” DOUAY “delivered up to prison and have scourged,” MRD and “cast into prison and flogged.” AMPLIFIED

As if putting them in prison was not enough, Paul had the believers beaten, whipped, or flogged also. The word “beat” is translated from a word that means “to flay, skin . . . be beaten with many stripes,” THAYER “literally remove the skin, flay figuratively in the NT beat, strike repeatedly, whip,” FRIBERG and “to strike or beat repeatedly - 'to strike, to beat, to whip.” LOUW-NIDA

This kind of beating was done with such force and repetition as to separate the skin from the bone. This was done, the Jews imagined, in fulfillment of the Law, which spoke of the manner in which wicked people were to be punished. “And it shall be, if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his fault, by a certain number. Forty stripes he may give him, and not exceed : lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then thy brother should seem vile unto thee” (Deut 25:3). In their penchant for precision, and not willing to take a chance of exceeding the number forty, the practice of the Jews was to beat the one being punished with “forty stripes save one” (2 Cor 11:24). The beating took place in the prison, as well as in the synagogue. Jesus had told His disciples they would be beaten in the synagogues: “But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues” (Mat 10:17).

There are least eight records of this oppression in the book of Acts.

- **Acts 8:3:** “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church , entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison .”

- **Acts 9:1-2:** “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem .”

- **Acts 22:4:** “And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.”

- **Acts 26:10-11:** “Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I

shut up in prison , having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death , I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.”

• **1 Corinthians 15:9:** “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God .”

• **Galatians 1:13:** “For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it.”

• **Philippians 3:6:** “Concerning zeal, persecuting the church ; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.”

• **1 Timothy 1:13:** “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious : but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.”

THEM THAT BELIEVED ON THEE

“ . . . them that believed on Thee. . . ” Other versions read, “those whom believe in You,” NIV “those who had faith in You,” BBE “who trusted in You,” CJB “believed in Thee,” DOUAY “those believing on Thee,” YLT and “who believed on (adhered to and trusted in and relied on) You.”
AMPLIFIED

There are two sides to believing, and the absence of either of them voids any claim to having believed. First , this is a firm persuasion of the reality of Christ’s Person, and the fact and effectuality of what He has done in the behalf of humanity. Where this persuasion is missing, the individual has not believed, and ought not be treated as though he had. The second is trusting, or leaning wholly upon the Savior. The one who believes does not hesitate to cast the weight of his soul upon the Lord, anticipating that he will be sustained, nourished, and guided by Jesus. Where this trust is absent, a claim to have believed is a lie. No person is believing who lives without relying on Jesus.

Satan himself has inserted corrupt thoughts concerning believing into the professed church. Rarely will you find a person or a congregation who attaches preeminence to the act of believing itself. Generally, it is WHAT a person believes that is accented, and that is usually associated with sectarian views instead of the truth itself. Considering believing as though it was some kind of academic activity, many make a point of saying that believing is not enough. They are eager to cite James, who states that faith without works is dead, being fundamentally ignorant of the subject he was expounding.

Note this text. Paul is speaking to the Son of God Himself – the glorified Son of God. He refers to His people – those who have been joined to Him. And how is it that he refers to them? He says they are those who believed, or were believing on Christ Jesus. How could this be a shallow and incomplete term if it is spoken by an insightful man to the enthroned Savior? What is there about Paul’s expression that is deficient, incomplete, or not adequate to describe those who are in Christ Jesus?

Twenty-six times in the book of Acts, those who accepted the truth concerning Christ, and were joined to Him, are referred to as believing, or having believed (2:44; 4:4,32; 5:14; 8:12,13; 9:42; 10:45; 11:17,21; 13:12,48; 14:1,23; 15:5; 16:1,34; 17:4,12,34; 18:8,27; 19:2,18; 22:19; 28:24). When other acts of obedience are mentioned, such as baptism, they always follow believing, confirming that the obedience was, in fact, the “obedience of faith” (8:12,13; 18:8; Rom 16:26). Those who rejected the message are said to have “believed not” (17:5; 19:9; 28:24).

Believing is a summation of human response, or the fountain from which all valid response flows. Thus Paul could refer to the people of God as those who were believing, doing so before the Lord’s

Christ, and without any twinge of conscience.

Why Was This Allowed?

Both the novice and the sophist find great difficulty with righteous people being beaten. How is it that those who are believing can in any way be oppressed by those who do not believe on Christ. How can statements such as the following texts possibly be true if those who trust in the Lord are persecuted.

- “And the LORD shall make thee the head, and not the tail ; and thou shalt be above only, and thou shalt not be beneath; if that thou hearken unto the commandments of the LORD thy God, which I command thee this day, to observe and to do them” (Deut 28:13).
- “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee ” (Psa 91:7).
- “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy : and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:19).
- “Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savor of his knowledge by us in every place” (2 Cor 2:14).
- “Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

If these statements are intended to convey the idea that the people of God will be delivered from any and all oppression, then how can there be a martyr, or such a thing as persecution, oppression, or suffering?

- First, these statements are true in the ultimate sense: that is, in the end, no one who put their trust in the Lord will have been overthrown by the enemy.
- Second, the purpose of God cannot be nullified or rendered ineffective by the enemy.
- Third, the superiority of faith is demonstrated and confirmed in the crucible of suffering. Deliverance is nothing more than a theory if there is nothing to be delivered from.
- Fourth, heavenly principalities and powers are being taught through the church – the church as it lives here upon the earth. When they stand under oppression, it displays the wisdom of God to the angelic hosts.
- Fifth, Satan cannot effectively interfere with the Divine assignments that have been given to the saints – those who are believing. They will finish their work, completing their course, even though they are subjected to suffering.
- Sixth, suffering is used to filter out of the church those who are not really trusting in the Lord. In the time of testing and suffering, those who are not continuing to believe will fall away.

Much more can be said on this subject, but this will suffice to show how foolish it is to be staggered by the presence of suffering and hardship. Believers cannot afford to be mystified by trouble. Throughout the centuries, believers have suffered. It should not surprise this generation.

I WAS STANDING BY

“ 20 And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.”

Now Paul rehearses the part of his life that preceded the persecution he unleashed against the

church: the stoning of Stephen. Although this sin had been forgiven, as well as that of persecuting the church, he confesses it once again before the Lord. This was not a sign of unbelief on his part, but rather confirmed his recognition of the enormity of the sin he now mentions.

THY MARTYR STEPHEN

“And when the blood of Thy martyr Stephen was shed . . .” Other versions read, “Your martyr Stephen,” NKJV “Thy witness Stephen.” NASB

The word “martyr” is also applied to a man named “Antipas” (Rev 2:13), and to those who were killed by the false church, Babylon the Great (Rev 17:6). As the word (**ma,rturo,j**) is used here, it refers to those who “have proved the strength and genuineness of their faith in Christ by undergoing a violent death,” THAYER

STANDING BY AND CONSENTING

“ . . . I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.” Other versions read, “approving,” NASB “giving my approval,” NIV “in full agreement,” CJB “performed the pleasure of his slayer,” MRD “In complete agreement,” NLT “assenting to his death,” YLT “agreeing,” LIVING “consenting and approving,” AMPLIFIED “cheered them on,” CEV/MESSAGE

The word “consenting” is translated from the Greek word **s uneudokw/n** , which has the following lexical meaning: “to be pleased together with, to approve together (with others): absolutely (yet so that the thing giving pleasure is evident from the context),” THAYER “to decide with someone else that something is preferable or good - ‘to agree to, to consent to.’” LOUW-NIDA

The actual account of Stephen’s stoning reads as follows: “And cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul . And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep. And Saul was consenting unto his death . And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.” (Acts 7:58-8:1).

“The witnesses” were those who had raised a false witness against Stephen (Acts 6:13). According to the Law of Moses, the ones who witnessed against the purported infractor of the Law, were to be the first to commence the stoning. “The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterward the hands of all the people. So thou shalt put the evil away from among you” (Deut 17:7; 13:9-10).

And how did Paul consent to, or agree with, those who were stoning Stephen to death. It was not by lifting up his voice in accusation, and delivering some kind of verbal attack on Stephen. He did not pick up stones and hurl at Stephen. He simply stood there, taking care of the outer garments the men had discarded so they could more easily hurl the stones at Christ’s faithful witness. He did not lift up his voice in defense of Stephen. He expressed no objection to what they were doing. Thus, he participated in the wicked deed by not objecting to it.

There are still those who speak falsely concerning the people of God – particularly those who are preaching the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. Those who listen indifferently to their charges, and shape their views of the saints by the words of such people, have joined in the opposition of the saints. Their silence is really their consent to the malignment of the people of God. Such people are the enemies of God, and consequently of the people of God as well. Those who believe must be able to recognize their enemies, and conduct themselves accordingly. Although they pray for them, and treat them with

godly civility, not returning evil for evil, yet they must know that these people are their enemies. They must not conduct themselves in their presence as though this was not the case. Rather, they are to speak out the things that accent their enmity – things that do not pertain to their persons, but to the Savior with whom they have sided – like Stephen did. This is precisely why Paul wrote, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph 5:11). Other versions read, “And do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them,” NASB , and “ Take no part in and have no fellowship with the fruitless deeds and enterprises of darkness, but instead [let your lives be so in contrast as to] expose and reprove and convict them.” AMPLIFIED Fellowship, participation, and taking part in, can be done by consent – just as in the case of Saul fo Tarsus.

Implications of this Passage

Why did Paul speak in this manner in his response to the Lord Jesus? Why did he explain how the people knew he was formerly a persecutor of believers, and had consented to the murder of Stephen? There are several possible implications of this text.

- **A MERE REHEARSAL OF THE EVENTS.** On the surface, this could be merely rehearsing that what he had done in the past was known to all the Jews. I am persuaded, however, that there is more to the text than that.

- **THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE PEOPLE MAY HAVE DETECTED A CHANGE IN PAUL, AND THUS BE MOVED TO LISTEN TO HIM.** Paul could be saying that he already knew he was not going to be received. However, perhaps by seeing the change in him, the Jews might be convinced to hear him.

- **THAT THE BELIEVERS WOULD SEE THE CHANGE IN HIM, AND MORE READILY RECEIVE HIM.** He could also be saying that the believers would recall what he had done in the past, and would therefore more readily receive him when they heard him contending for the faith. This view cannot be true, for the believers that were there already knew he was a believer, even though they had heard false things about what he was preaching.

I defer to the second view: that Paul was reasoning with the Lord, as Abraham (Gen 18:23-33) and Moses (Ex 32:9-14) did. He was willing to continue testifying even though, at the time, they were not receptive to his word. How gracious it was for the Lord to bear with Paul, allowing him to speak, even though it would not alter what He had told the apostle to do.

I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE

“ 21 And He said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. ”

The reasoning of Paul will not change the command of the Lord Jesus. This same kind of reaction may be found in the prayers and petitions of the saints. The Lord will gracious hear them out when their reasoning is based upon faith, and some understanding of the Divine nature.

The reasoning of Paul will not change the command of the Lord Jesus. This same kind of reaction may be found in the prayers and petitions of the saints. The Lord will gracious hear them out when their reasoning is based upon faith, and some understanding of the Divine nature. However, as with Abraham, when he pled for the righteous in Sodom, the cities were still destroyed, even though the righteous were spared. When Moses pled for the Israelites, multitudes of them were still destroyed by plagues, and a forty year trek in the wilderness was mandated. Again, those who believed were spared.

The prayers and reasonings of the people of God will not move God to change His appointments.

Ultimately they will be carried out, even though some temporary mercies may very well be granted. A knowledge of these will assist in shaping your prayers, and being patient and faithful when the answers do not come as you prefer.

DEPART!

“And He said unto me, Depart . . .” Other versions read, “Go!” NASB “Get going,” CJB “Leave Jerusalem,” LIVING “Leave now,” IE and “Don't argue. Go.” MESSAGE

To clarify the matter, Paul did leave Jerusalem at that time, being assisted by the brethren in there (Acts 9:29-30).

There is something to be seen here that is of special significance. When the witness of the truth is not received, ultimately, the witness will be withdrawn. Sometimes the witness is withdrawn by martyrdom, confirming that the work of the witness has been completed. This was the case with Stephen (Acts 6-7), whose witness was not intended to extend beyond Jerusalem.

When He was upon earth, Jesus taught His disciples to think in this manner: namely that those who do not receive the truth have lost the right to hear it – at least at that time.

- “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city” (Matt 10:14-15).

- “But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another : for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come” (Matt 10:23).

Paul and Barnabas practiced this. When rejected by the Jews of Antioch of Pisidia, “they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium” (Acts 13:51). Paul did the same thing in Athens. “And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment , and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles ” (Acts 18:5-6).

When Jesus dwelt among men, He was once soundly rejected by an area, with the Pharisees in that place seeking to even take His life. It is written, “But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew himself from thence” (Mat 12:15).

The Divine manner appears to have been successfully hidden by the watered down gospel that is being preached these days. Churches actually tailor their services for the disinterested, imagining that this is the way to reach them. Such have forgotten that the Gospel remains “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). If men cannot be attracted to Christ by that Gospel, they cannot be attracted by anything, for the Gospel, and the Gospel alone, is God’s “power unto salvation.”

An Exception

There were prophets who were sent to a people that would not hear them, and yet they were to deliver the message God had given them. This included Isaiah (Isa 30:9), Jeremiah (Jer 5:23-24), and Ezekiel (Ezek 2:3-8). The obstinance of the people was so pronounced that the Lord told Jeremiah not to pray for them – and if he did, the Lord would not hear his prayers (Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11).

A Serious Misrepresentation

These days, some are teaching that the longsuffering of God is endless, and can never have a terminal point. This teaching is based upon a corrupt representation found in the New International Version, which is currently the most popular version of the Bible being sold. The passage of reference reads, “But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life” (1 Tim 1:16). The New Jerusalem Bible uses a similar expression: “inexhaustible patience,” as well as the Montgomery New Testament: “boundless patience” The Contemporary English Version and The Message use “endless patience.”

The seriousness of this matter is seen in the fact that men have actually developed a doctrine that is based upon a misconception of God that was reflected in a modern translation of the scripture. Then, they have developed programs that are based upon the flawed concept, pawning it off as though it actually came from God.

The words “unlimited patience,” as found in the NIV are translated differently in other versions: “all longsuffering,” KJV/NKJV “perfect patience,” NASB “utmost patience,” NRSV “all His longsuffering,” ASV “all His mercy,” BBE “how very patience He is,” CJB “utmost patience,” CSB “the whole long-suffering,” DARBY “all patience,” DOUAY “great patience,” NLT “all long patience,” TNT “the fulness of His long-suffering,” WEYMOUTH and “full patience.” GNB

The word “all,” as in “all longsuffering,” is translated from the Greek word **α[π]ασαν** . This word connotes the idea of “the whole,” or “all.” THAYER/FRIBERG A Bible word for limitless or boundless is “infinite” (Nah 3:9, NJV); also translated “without limits,” NASB and “boundless.” NIV The idea of something being without limits is also conveyed in this word concerning Christ Jesus: “God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto Him” (John 3:34). Other versions read, “without limit.” NIV This word is translated from another Greek word: **με,τρον** . As used in John 3:34, this word means “not from a measure, that is, without measure.” GINGRICH

The point here is that the longsuffering of God is not “without measure,” or boundless. It is abundant, but not endless. The doctrine of Scripture makes this quite clear. God’s longsuffering ran out, so to speak, in the days of Noah, and His Spirit ceased to strive with men (Gen 6:3). It ran out for Jerusalem, which consummated in her being left desolate (Matt 23:38). It ran out for Israel, as confirmed in God’s words to Jeremiah. There is a sin, Jesus said, “which hath never forgiveness” (Mk 3:29). There is a condition from which men cannot recover (Heb 6:4; 10:26). All longsuffering will eventually run out for all of the wicked, who will be summarily condemned with absolutely no extension of mercy toward them. The wrath of God will be poured out upon them “without mixture” (Rev 14:10).

Now, that is the doctrine of Scripture. And it is stated with great clarity, and without ambiguity, One of the great differences between ancient translators of Scripture and many modern ones is that they had a working knowledge of the doctrine of Scripture, whereas many of the modern translators do not. Their works often reflect sectarian theology, rather the mind of God. No person should be allowed to translate Scripture who is unfamiliar with the doctrine of Scripture. This is because, of itself, etymology, which deals with the analyzation of language, is not a sufficient tool to translate the thoughts of God from one language to another. At some point spiritual wisdom and the understanding of Scripture must be brought to bear on translation. I do not know of any aspect of handling the word of God where this is not true.

The seriousness of this matter is seen in the fact that men have actually developed a doctrine that is based upon a misconception of God that was reflected in a modern translation of the scripture. Then, they have developed programs that are based upon the flawed concept, pawning it off as though it actually came from God.

This misrepresentation cannot account for the withdrawal of a truthful witness, or for the wrath of

God, or for the judgment and condemnation of the wicked. It cannot account for the flood, the incineration of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, the decimation of Egypt, or the destruction of the Amalekites.

A Personal Witness

After over fifty-six years of preaching in churches, I have only been forced to react one time in this manner. It was in Dallas City, Illinois, where there was a solid reaction against the preaching of the Word of God. In 1957, I stood before the congregation, told them I was leaving, and why I was doing so. That message was the last one I preached among them. Eventually, the congregation became extinct under the leadership of those who rejected the truth.

I have long been concerned about those theological schools that prepare and send out supposed ministers without instructing them concerning this Divine manner. No person, regardless of the sentimentality that may be associated with their purported ministry, should remain where the Lord Jesus Christ and His Gospel are not preferred. Should it be confirmed that this condition exists among the people, it should be made known publically that such a stance is not acceptable before God, and that the person discerning it will no longer remain among, or minister to, them while they remain hard-hearted. I realize this is too difficult for some to receive, but it is nevertheless true.

I WILL SEND THEE FAR HENCE TO THE GENTILES

“ . . . for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. ” Other versions read, “I will send you far from here to the Gentiles,” NKJV “I will send you far away to the Gentiles,” NASB “I will send thee to the nations afar off,” DARBY “You'll go far away to people who aren't Jewish,” GWN and “I am sending you out to the gentiles far away.” NJB

Unlike what is happening to many today, when the people to whom Paul was ministering rejected him, he did not retire from being an apostle. All of this postulates that the preacher has been given to see something – i.e. to comprehend the things of God. Such revelations are not given to be contained. They are to be spoken, delivered with confidence and power. Therefore, when leaving Jerusalem, where the people would not listen to him, Jesus sent Paul to some far places where the people would listen. This was such a remarkable commission that it was prophesied of the Gentiles who would hear the Gospel, “I am sought of them that asked not for Me; I am found of them that sought Me not: I said, Behold Me, behold Me, unto a nation that was not called by My name.” (Isa 65:1; Rom 10:20). This call came because of Divine choice, and by the Gospel. As it is written, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth; Whereunto he called you by our gospel , to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:14).

When accounting for the salvation of anyone, whether of self or others, it is imperative that this perspective be grasped. The call came from God, and at Divine discretion.

THEY GAVE HIM AUDIENCE UNTIL THIS WORD

“ 22 And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.”

The listeners now rebel, no longer holding their silence, or listening intently. Their hearts are made known by what Paul says, and they instantly react to him.

THEY GAVE HIM AUDIENCE UNTIL THIS WORD

“And they gave him audience unto this word . . .” Other versions read, “and they listened to him until this word,” NKJV “they listened to him up to this statement,” NASB “the crowd listened to Paul until he said this,” NIV “they gave him a hearing as far as this word,” BBE “when they had heard Paul as far as this sentence,” MRD and “Up to the moment that Paul made this last statement, the people listened to him.” AMPLIFIED

The people listened intently as long as their cherished traditions were not directly exposed. Further, Paul did not avoid speaking about things that he knew would offend these people. The modern concept of “seeker-friendly” is a wholly erroneous one, riddled with hollow places like a bag that is filled with holes (Hag 1:6).

Suddenly, the attentiveness of the people was brought to a grinding conclusion when they heard the words, “I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles .” These people could tolerate a Jesus who had a prevailing interest in the Jews, but would not tolerate for a moment one who would command someone to leave the Jews and go to the Gentiles. While this exact circumstance may not be common in our day, this kind of thinking is quite common. It would be similar to a preacher saying to a Christian Church that he was leaving them to preach to a Baptist Church. Or, a preacher telling some Roman Catholics that he was going to preach to some Lutherans. Perhaps it would involve telling a Presbyterian Church that the preacher was leaving to minister to a Charismatic group. It could even be telling a Pentecostal group that the preacher was leaving them to minister to a Methodist Church. An even more preposterous circumstance, yet a very real one, would involve a preacher telling a Church of Christ, One Cup, and Bread Breaking, that he was leaving them to minister to a Christ of Christ who served multiple cups at the Lord’s Table and supported orphanages. Oh, the mentality revealed in this text is alive and flourishing.

Paul no doubt knew what the response of the people would be, but he declared what Jesus had told him anyway. What would compel any person to NOT say what Jesus said in order to appease those who hold to corrupted views?

The Example of the Prophets

The fact that it is the Divine manner to bring out what people are by words, is also confirmed by the prophets. When the Lord spoke to them with the intention to bless them, the people did not listen.

The fact that it is the Divine manner to bring out what people are by words, is also confirmed by the prophets. When the Lord spoke to them with the intention to bless them, the people did not listen. Ordinarily, a little teaching here and a little teaching here, is designed to nurture up infants. Thus it is written, “Whom shall He teach knowledge? and whom shall He make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:9-10). But the people did not heed what was said, and thus did not make advancement in their understanding. Therefore God deluged them with words causing them to fall, being broken and snared. It is written, “To whom He said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken ” (Isa 28:12-13).

The Example of Jesus

Early in His ministry, Jesus preached in His hometown synagogue. After he had read the passage concerning which He would speak, “the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on Him” (Luke 4:20). It is written that they “bare Him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth” (Luke 4:22). However this attentiveness was suddenly interrupted

when Jesus drew attention to two notable incidents that were written in their Scriptures. “But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; but unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:26-27). No sooner were these words uttered than “all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up, and thrust Him out of the city, and led Him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast Him down headlong” (Luke 4:18-29). The words of the Lord revealed the state of their hearts.

On another occasion, Jesus was speaking to a multitude of people He had just fed with five loaves and two fishes. They had followed and listened to Him for three days before He fed them (Matt 15:32). He had sent them away after He fed them (Matt 15:39), and now they had tracked Him down again. This time, His teaching was stronger, and would require earnest inquiry on the part of the hearers. He said, “I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him” (John 6:53-56). Jesus did not give them the slightest hint that He was speaking metaphorically. It all sounded like cannibalism, and Jesus did not say anything that would lead them to think otherwise. It is written that “From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him” (John 6:66). They really did not want to know what Jesus meant, or they would have asked Him what was intended by those words. His saying confirmed that to be the truth.

This is how God reacts to dulness of hearing – regardless of what pretentious teachers are saying. The words of God are never favorably tailored for the disinterested. In fact, truth is hidden from such people. We know this by two revelations: one by the Lord Jesus, and one by the apostle.

- **JESUS.** When the twelve asked Jesus why He spoke in parables to the multitudes, never giving them explanations, He replied: “He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them” (Mat 13:11-15).

- **PAUL.** Paul spoke of receiving the love of the truth, stating that it was to anyone's eternal disadvantage not to receive such a marvelous love. To refuse to receive the love of the truth provokes a response from God Almighty. “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:8-12). Those who speak of this despot are not telling the people WHY he has been loosed upon the earth. His presence is a judgment from God – a judgment that has come because people did not receive the love of the truth, or a love for the truth itself. God, then, responds

by sending them strong delusion. It is so strong they are incapable of resisting or rejecting it. Further, their embracement of delusion will be the very cause for their damnation, for was the reason for sending strong delusion.

No wonder Satan wants people to think God loves them no matter what they do, and that they cannot drift too far from God, or that it is not possible to sin to such a degree that you pass beyond the point of recovery. The devil himself is the one who has influenced people to believe such nonsense.

THEN THEY LIFTED UP THEIR VOICES

“ . . . and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.” Other versions read, “he should not be allowed to live,” NASB “Rid the earth of him! He is not fit to live,” NIV “it is not right for him to be living,” BBE and “it’s a disgrace for him to live!” CSB

These are the same kind of words the Jewish crowd shouted out against Jesus: “Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him” (John 19:15).

Upon hearing the word “Gentiles,” this mob called for the elimination of Paul, saying he was not fit to live – all because he said the word “Gentiles” in a favorable way. It is the business of every believer to be sure they are not deceived into adopting this same mindset – so they cease to listen because there is mention of some person who has been favored by God, yet is not approved by those who are bigoted and prejudiced. I do not doubt that Paul remembered when he had been persecuting believers, consenting to their death. He also no doubt rejoiced that the Lord had mercy upon him.

THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE WITNESS

Because it is a critical part of spiritual understanding, I want to again emphasize that a failure to respond to the witness that is sent by the Lord will eventually result in the withdrawal of the witness. This is the upper side of the coin of martyrdom or death. In the case of one godly (Enoch) man, translation was the mode of removal. In the text before us, removal to another geographical location was the means of withdrawal. From the lower side, it is the murder of the innocent by the guilty. Those who were removed in this manner include Abel, Enoch, Stephen, Antipas, and those who were beheaded for their testimony.

This aspect of the Divine nature must not be glossed. Eventually, it will be demonstrated on a grand scale, with all unbelievers being once and for all removed from the presence the Lord, and all those who have been joined to Him.

The church must operate within the framework of this consciousness, not making friends with the world (James 4:4), or being overly tolerant of its unbelief.

CONCLUSION

I want to again emphasize that the record we are reviewing does include historical facts. These things really did take place. They are not exaggerations or hyperboles. However, an even higher view of them renders a more lasting impact upon the soul, and educates us in the ways of the Lord, as well as providing further insight into the nature of fallen men, and redeemed men as well. These insights are represented by this sampling of the various insights that are provided in the event of Paul’s arrest, the response of the military captain, and Paul’s defense before a people who called for his immediate death.

- Divine missions are not carried out in a moral vacuum. The will of the Lord is often fulfilled amidst opposition and hostility.

- Corrupt religion makes men more unreasonable than the world, that is totally ignorant of the Lord.
- Flesh jumps to conclusions.
- Holy men are not moved by opposition to compromise their message or mission.
- Sometimes the people of the world are wiser about certain matters than those who have some identity with God.
- The people for whom we have burdens are not always receptive to our message.
- Often the path that leads to our appointed destination does through hostile territory.
- Sometimes people listen for quite a while before rejecting what is said.
- The nature of people is not changed without hearing the truth, yet hearing the sound of true words does not necessarily convince them.
- The one who believes God does not shape his message to please the people.
- Those who truly live unto the Lord do not allow discouragement to stop their mouths.
- God can provide protection through civil authority.

The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (Volumes published 1776-1789)

Edward Gibbon, student of the Enlightenment

The books cover the period of the Roman Empire after Marcus Aurelius, from 180 to 1453, concluding in 1590

According to Gibbon, the Roman Empire succumbed to barbarian invasions in large part due to the gradual loss of civic virtue among its citizens. They had become weak, outsourcing their duties to defend their Empire to barbarian mercenaries, who then became so numerous and ingrained that they were able to take over the Empire. Romans, he believed, had become effeminate, unwilling to live a tougher, "manly" military lifestyle. He further blames the degeneracy of the Roman army and the Praetorian guards. In addition, Gibbon argued that Christianity created a belief that a better life existed after death, which fostered an indifference to the present among Roman citizens, thus sapping their desire to sacrifice for the Empire. He also believed its comparative pacifism tended to hamper the traditional Roman martial spirit. Lastly, like other Enlightenment thinkers, Gibbon held in contempt the Middle Ages as a priest-ridden, superstitious, dark age. It was not until his own age of reason and rational thought, it was believed, that human history could resume its progress.

Gibbon sees the primary catalyst of the empire's initial decay and eventual collapse in the Praetorian Guard, instituted as a special class of soldiers permanently encamped in a commanding position within Rome, a seed planted by Augustus at the establishment of the empire. As Gibbon calls them at the outset of Chapter V: The Praetorian bands, whose licentious fury was the first symptom and cause of the decline of the Roman empire... He cites repeated examples of this special force abusing its power with calamitous results, including numerous instances of imperial assassination and demands of ever-increasing pay.

Sound reasoning can be overridden by prejudice.

- What is good can be rejected in preference for what is evil.
- Religious tradition can have a blinding effect upon the human spirit.
- When God speaks to the heart, it outweighs all trials and opposition.
- When the servant of God is not received one place, another place will be opened.

This is only a cursory sampling of the kind of insights that are resident in the historical incidents of scripture. In this regard, Scriptural history is the record of the working and government of God – two realities in which His character and purpose are always present as both the cause and the message. We must not allow ourselves to be confused by the carnal explanations of those who know not God.

Worldly historians peruse history with a different mindset. They try and assign causes according to their own understanding. For example, in Gibbons' classic work on "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire," he assigns philosophical reasons for the eventual falling of the Roman Empire. A few of the principle reasons are shown on this page. Even though it has been fashionable for many Christian preachers and teachers to cite from these volumes, paralleling the current condition of the United States of America to that of Rome, this view is too earthy to be adopted by men and women of faith.

We can account for fall of Rome, as well as all other worldly empires, upon the basis of revelation, not human reasoning. Actually, the reasons historians provide are symptoms, not causes. The cause for the fall of worldly kingdoms is the preeminence of the Kingdom of God. That is revealed in a dream given to Nebuchadnezzar, and interpreted by Daniel the prophet. The Kingdom of God in its earthly manifestation is likened to a small stone taken out of a mountain without hands. That stone began to roll throughout the earth, and the more it rolled, the larger it became. It finally crushed all of the kingdoms of this world, itself becoming a mountain that filled the whole earth (Dan 2:31-45). That Kingdom is what brought Rome down, just as Daniel said. Edward Gibbon cites Christianity as one of the causes for the decline and fall of Rome – but he saw it as an unfortunate influence that interfered with the advancement of Rome. How wrong he was!

The knowledge of such things will keep us from being dominated by doubt and fear. It will also keep us from being ruled by imaginations. This is because faith can take hold of these realities. On the surface, it appears as though the Jews forced Paul to leave Jerusalem earlier, and were attempting to do so again. However, the reality of the matter was that God was withdrawing the witness from Jerusalem, and preparing for its desolation, which would take place in 70 A.D.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #92

PAUL PROTECTED FROM THE CROWD

“ 22:23 "And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, 24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. 25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned? 26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. 27 When the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. 28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. 29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him. 30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them." (Acts 22:23-30)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Once Paul had mentioned the word “Gentiles” in a favorable sense, the Jewish crowd erupted in anger, throwing off their clothes in readiness to stone him, and throwing dust into the air. The captain of the Roman soldiers quickly removed Paul from the open place, and prepares to examine him by scourging. It is at this point that he learns Paul is a Roman citizen, and therefore could not be beaten until a valid charge against him was substantiated. Upon further inquiry, he learned that Paul was a natural-born citizen, and thus was in a more favorable state than the captain himself, who had purchased his citizenship. He then had the thongs removed from Paul, allowing him to wait for further

legal proceedings without being flogged. The captain was not willing to let the case go, because the tumult had been reported, and was now a matter of record. The situation had to be resolved satisfactorily, and the fact of Paul's innocence established. This will prove to be the beginning of a process that will not conclude until Paul is in Rome, where Jesus said he would preach the Gospel. It is also there that he will eventually be martyred.

HAVING A GODLY VIEW OF THINGS

There is a certain perspective of life that is developed in Scripture. This pertains particularly to those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit – to those who are “in Christ Jesus.” Life is not what it seems to be according to appearance. There are certain very real circumstances that provide the true context in which the newness of life is lived out. Here are some of them.

- **THINGS ARE BEING WORKED TOGETHER.** God is working all things together for the ultimate good of those **CONTENTS**

THE TUMULT INCREASES (22:23)

AN EFFORT IS MADE TO ARRIVE AT THE TRUTH (22:24)

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THIS MAN IS A ROMAN (22:26-27)

PAUL WAS FREEBORN (22:28)

AFRAID OF BEING UNJUST (22:29)

CONFINED, YET FREE (22:30)

CONCLUSION

•

who love Him and are called according to His purpose. “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom 8:28).

- **DEMONSTRATION OF DIVINE WISDOM.** The manifold, or multifaceted wisdom of God is being shown to heavenly principalities and powers through the church – that is, through expressions and experiences of the body of Christ “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph 3:10).

- **BEING KEPT.** The Lord is keeping His people from falling. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy” (Jude 1:24) – keeping them by their faith. “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5)

- **THEIR TEMPTATIONS ARE MANAGED.** The Lord provides a way of escape that accompanies every temptation. “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13).

- **ORDERED, OR REGULATED, STEPS.** The steps of the good man are directed by the Lord. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way” (Psa 37:23).

- **GOD IS WORKING IN THEM.** God is working in His people both to will and to do of His own good pleasure. “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13).

• **THEY ARE BEING PERFECTED.** God is perfecting, establishing, and settling His people. “But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet 5:10).

• **AN ADVERSARY IS STALKING THEM.** The devil is prowling about, seeking whom he may devour. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8).

• **ANGELS ARE MINISTERING TO THEM.** Holy angels are ministering to those who are the heirs of salvation. “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Heb 1:13-14).

The faith of God’s elect is being tried in order that it might be a cause of praise to God when Jesus comes.

THE HOLY SPIRIT INTERCEDES. The Holy Spirit is interceding within us, expressing to the Father things for which we do not know how to pray. “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Rom 8:26-27).

• **JESUS IS INTERCEDING.** Jesus is interceding for the saints at the right hand of God. “Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

• **BEING BROUGHT TO GLORY.** Jesus is bringing the sons of God to glory. “For it became Him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10).

• **IN A WORLD GOVERNED BY GOD.** The world is being governed by God through Jesus Christ “For the kingdom is the LORD’S: and he is the governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28); “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: (He is Lord of all)” (Acts 10:36)..

• **OBJECTIVES ARE INVOLVED THAT INCLUDE SUFFERING.** Needed trials are being experienced in order that our faith might be found to the praise, honor, and glory of God when Jesus appears. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7).

• **A SPECIFIED COURSE OF LIFE.** Believers are running a specific course that has been set before them. “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Heb 12:2).

• **FAITH IS BEING CULTURED.** The faith of God’s elect is being tried in order that it might be a cause of praise to God when Jesus comes. “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7).

• **THEY GRAPPLE WITH HIGHER POWERS.** Believers have been called into conflict with principalities and powers that dwell in higher realms. “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12).

• **HERESIES ARE FACED.** Heresies, or divisive doctrines, are faced in order to must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor 11:19).

• **BEING CHANGED.** A continual change is wrought by the Holy Spirit, whereby we are being conformed to the image of God’s Son. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29); “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

• **REIGNING OVER THEIR BODY.** Those in Christ are given the commission of managing their body, together with its appetites. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1); “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1 Cor 9:27); “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5).

• **PARTAKING OF HOLINESS THROUGH CHASTENING.** The children of God must endure chastening because they are the sons of God. This is not mere punishment, but becomes the means through which we become partakers of His holiness. “But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness” (Heb 12:10).

• **MADE FUNCTIONAL.** Through edification, the saints are being brought to the point where they can function in the body of Christ, being themselves a source of edification. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Eph 4:15-16).

• **GROWING UP WITH TARES.** To further complicate things, the children of God live out their lives with tares among them. As confirmed in the parable of the tares of the field, the wheat is not among the tares, but the tares are among the wheat. In spite of that circumstance, the children of the kingdom are brought to the point of productivity, or fruit bearing. “But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also . . . Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn. “The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear” (Mat 13:26,30,41-43).

These are very real objectives and activities, and they are not being accomplished in a moral vacuum. God has chosen to do these things in a domain that is competitive and hostile – “this present evil world.” It is true that we have been delivered from this world (Gal 1:4), and yet we are being perfected and prepared in it. This is what necessitates Divine involvement in the process of salvation. It is unreasonable to imagine that we could, in our own strength and of ourselves, overcome the enemies that held us captive before our new birth. It is He “that is in us” is greater than “he that is in the world.” That is made quite clear in the declaration, “Ye are of God, little children, and have

overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4),

We should not expect the life of faith to be simplistic, without challenges, and accomplished in a kind of coasting mode.

THE POINT OF IT ALL

The point is that all of these things are operating behind the scenes of the event we are reviewing. According to appearance, the following were involved: Paul, a group of angry Jews, a Roman captain, some centurions, and at least one hundred soldiers. But actually, there were a lot of unseen powers and influences at work.

- The devil and his hosts were at work within the Jews, and endeavoring to hinder Paul.
- The Holy Spirit was at work within Paul, strengthening, comforting, and granting wisdom.
- God was beholding Paul and governing the whole situation for his good.
- From within, Jesus was sustaining Him and causing Him to stand.
- God was controlling the captain, working things out for the good of Paul.
- Holy angels were at work, subduing the enemies, and ministering to Paul.
- Lofty heavenly personalities were beholding the wisdom of God in the whole matter.

It is no wonder that Jesus admonished the people, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Much more is going on than what can be seen, and all who are in Christ Jesus are obliged to know it. For those who are living by faith, this is a wonderful thing.

THE TUMULT INCREASES

“ 22:23 And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air. ”

AS THEY CRIED OUT

“And as they cried out . . .” Other versions read, “were shouting,” NIV “wee screaming,” CJB “were yelling,” CSB “vociferated,” MRD and “furious shouts.” WEYMOUTH

The words “they cried out” are translated from a single Greek word: **kraugazo,ntwn** . The lexical meaning of the word is: “to shout or cry out, with the possible implication of the unpleasant nature of the sound - 'to shout, to scream.” LOUW-NIDA

This is the kind of thing that happened in our text. Paul had declared to the people how Jesus had called Him into the most noble of all works. He had testified that he had been directed by Jesus to leave one place and go to another.

The idea here is that the people were seized with frenzy and carnal hysteria. It is as though the devil moved into them, causing them to lose all rationality and scream out like the beasts of the field.

There is a state where men become more like brute beasts than like “the offspring of God.” Brother Peter and Jude place false teachers into this category – “as natural brute beasts,” and “as brute beasts” (2 Pet 2:12; Jude 1:10). As used by Peter and Jude, this refers to the absurdity of the teaching of certain people. There is no sound reasoning in it, but their doctrine is the result of their own spiritually wild and uncontrollable nature.

When Asaph was disconcerted at the seeming prosperity of the wicked, he went into the sanctuary and had his thinking straightened out. In describing his former state of mind he confessed, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee” (Psa 73:22). In describing the state of men outside of Christ, among whom we all served our tenure, Paul wrote, “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another” (Titus 3:3).

Our text described people who are controlled by the flesh, shouting and screaming in anger and frustration like a wild animal that had been snared. Such a condition cannot be corrected by some kind of outward force. Thus we read of grievous plagues being poured out upon the ungodly, with a beastly response from them: “and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds” (Rev 16:10-11). Such a response is the result of a depraved and unsound mind. God Almighty had punished the people, and they had reacted by blaspheming “the God of heaven.”

This is the kind of thing that happened in our text. Paul had declared to the people how Jesus had called Him into the most noble of all works. He had testified that he had been directed by Jesus to leave one place and go to another. The direction was for God’s glory, the honor of Jesus, the illumination of people, and the good of Paul. What a marvelous thing that a man could be so favored of heaven!

And how did the crowd react to it all? They heard the word “Gentiles,” and suddenly they were filled with hatred, being dominated by an unsound and erroneous mind. They forget that Paul had not been talking about himself, but of the Lord. The record of his words to them during this occasion are contained in verses one through twenty one. In them he developed a certain perspective. Test yourself to see if you can grasp the subject of his words.

- He spoke respectfully to them, referring to them as “men, brethren, and fathers” (v 1).
- He spoke to them in the Hebrew tongue, which was absolutely unique to their nation, because of their identity with the living God (v 2).
- He told them he was a Jew like themselves, and had been raised in the strictest manner of their religion (v 3).
- He himself, like them, was engaged in persecuting the way of the disciples of Jesus – yet he was even more zealous than they (v 4).
- The Jewish high priest and leaders had honored his request for special letters that would authorize him to arrest and bring followers of Jesus bound to Jerusalem to be punished (v 5).
- He was confronted by Jesus Himself on his way to Damascus as a light from heaven focused upon him (v 6).
- Struck down to the ground by the majesty of Christ, he heard Him say He was the One Paul had been persecuting (v 7).
- When Paul inquired who the personality was, he was told He was Jesus of Nazareth whom he was persecuting (v 8).
- This was not a dream or a personal vision, for those who were with him saw the light, even though they could not understand the voice (v 9).
- Upon asking what he should do, Paul was told by Jesus to go into the city, and everything he was to do would be told to him (v 10).
- The person Jesus assigned for this work was Ananias, a man who was held in good

report by all of the Jews (v 12).

- Ananias delivered the message to Paul after first restoring his sight (v 13).
- He told Paul that the God of the fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) had chosen him, that he might know His will, see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth (v 14).
- He told him that he had been chosen to be a witness unto all men of what he had seen and heard (v 15).
- Ananias asked Paul why he was tarrying, exhorting him to rise up and be baptized, washing away his sins and calling upon the name of the Lord (v 16).
- Later, when he went to Jerusalem, while he was praying in the Temple, he fell into a trance (v 17).
- The same Jesus told him to leave Jerusalem quickly, for they would not receive his testimony about Him (v 18).
- Paul recounted to Jesus how the people knew he had imprisoned and beat believers in every synagogue (v 19).
- He confessed to Jesus that he had been there when Stephen, Jesus' own martyr, was killed, and that he had consented to his death (v 20).
- Jesus then told him to leave Jerusalem, for He was going to send him "far hence to the Gentiles" (v 21).

Now, what was the focus of that testimony: Paul's will of the will of the Lord? Whose agenda had the priority: Paul's or that of Jesus? What was the preeminent work: what Paul did, or what Jesus did? Whose will was overthrown: Paul's will or the will of the Lord? Whose word took the priority: Paul's word or the word of Jesus? What was the real testimony about: What Paul was doing, or what Jesus was doing? Where did Paul's testimony end: with God honoring his will, or the will of Jesus? Who was Paul promoting: himself or Jesus?

Why did Saul of Tarsus yield to the will of the Lord, but the Jews now before him did not? It was because he had been living with all good conscience toward God, and they were not. It is because his zeal was really towards God, and their's was not. That is why Saul's mind was changed, and their's was not. It is why he believed, and they did not. It is why he submitted to Christ and they did not.

THEY CAST OFF THEIR CLOTHES

" . . . and cast off their clothes . . ." Other versions read, "tore off their clothes," NKJV "throwing off their cloaks," NASB "waved their garments," RSV "pulling off their clothing," BBE "flinging aside their robes," CJB "taking off their coats," GWN "threw off their coats," NLT and "tearing their garments." LITV

This action was no doubt like that of those who stoned Stephen, who took off their outer garments, and laid them at the feet of Saul. It is written that those men "laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul" (Acts 8:58).

Even though the entire human race consisted of but two people, they both made an effort to cover their nakedness, not knowing that the human body is, as some allege, beautiful. Even when they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden, they did not feel comfortable walking about with a fig-leaf covering, considering themselves still to be "naked."

This text must not be viewed through Western eyes, as though Paul's accusers now stood before him naked. That is not what throwing off their clothes means. At this point it is good to remind us of the modesty that was cultured under the Law, but has not been abandoned for the sake of

convenience. After sin had entered the world, Adam and Eve became acutely aware of their nakedness, and were ashamed – and that is before they were aware of the presence of the Lord (Gen 3:7). Even though the entire human race consisted of but two people, they both made an effort to cover their nakedness, not knowing that the human body is, as some allege, beautiful (Gen 3:7). Even when they heard the voice of the Lord walking in the garden, they did not feel comfortable walking about with a fig-leaf covering, considering themselves still to be “naked” (Gen 3:8-10). One of the great curses in humanity resulted from one of Noah’s sons willfully seeing him “naked” (Gen 9:22), while his brothers refused to do so (Gen 9:23).

In the Tabernacle service, even a naked thigh was offensive to God (Ex 28:41-42). Members of a family, other than the wife and husband, were not to look upon the nakedness of other members of the family (Lev 18:8-19; 20:17-21).

When the Scriptures speak of someone being publicly “naked,” it is not speaking of being nude, or without any clothes or covering. When, for example, David, upon the return of the ark of the covenant, “danced before the Lord with all of his might,” he is said to have been “girded with a linen ephod” (2 Sam 6:14). Yet, when his wife Michal, said “How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!” (2 Sam 6:20). For her foolish saying, she was cursed for all of her life with barrenness (2 Sam 6:23).

Another incident concerns Peter, following our Lord’s resurrection. Following two appearances of the Lord to His disciples (John 20:19-29), he and some of the other disciples had gone fishing. Jesus appeared to them on that occasion, causing them to garner a miraculous catch of fish. When John recognized it was the Lord, he cried out, “It is the Lord. Now when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he girt his fisher's coat unto him, (for he was naked,) and did cast himself into the sea” (John 21:7). This does not mean that he was “nude.” The word “coat” signifies “an upper garment . . . a kind of linen blouse which fisherman used to wear at their work.” THAYER Other versions reflect this meaning of John 21:7, referring to “his outer garment,” NKJV “his overcoat,” DARBY “his tunic,” MRD “he was lightly clad,” NAB “his fisherman’s coat,” RWB “mantel,” TNT “his tunic (for he was stripped to the waist),” LIVING “fisherman’s shirt,” WEYMOUTH and “his upper garment (his fisherman’s coat, his outer tunic).” AMPLIFIED

I have taken the time to briefly mention the Scriptural perspective of nakedness because of the loose manner in which it is considered in our society. It is important not to read the Scripture within the context of the average American life and circumstance. All Scripture, with the exception of Luke’s writings (the Gospel of Luke and Acts), was written by Jews. All of it was written with the Jewish culture in mind, together with the promises given to them.

AND THREW DUST INTO THE AIR

“ . . . and threw dust into the air.” Other versions read, “tossing dust,” NASB “flinging dust,” NIV and “tossed handfuls of dust.” NLT

It is the manner of sin to grow “worse and worse.” That is, the more men “resist the truth,” the tighter the hold of iniquity becomes, and the more dominant Satan becomes. Sin sets a certain degeneracy into motion that can only be aborted by “the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness.”

Casting dust into the air was an indication of utter contempt, but of absolute frustration as well. When Shimei expressed his frustrating contempt for David, he threw stones at him “and cast dust” (2 Sam 16:13). There was really nothing else that he could do, and what is dust to a sword?

So in this text, even though these Jews were standing in front of the military barracks, they were so filled with hatred they tossed dust into the air. Like their own hatred, that very dust returned upon

themselves.

There is a certain irrationality in iniquity that is arresting to consider. The further one is from God, and the more their opposition to His messengers, the more incoherent they become – particularly toward the things of God. They had been confronted by a messenger from God – one who was quite willing to share that marvelous message with them. This was not a message of condemnation, but one that announced that what God had promised throughout the centuries had now come to pass. It was a message of remission, justification, and everlasting hope. However, as marvelous as that message was, even allusions to it caused hatred to rise in the hearts of these people.

It is the manner of sin to grow “worse and worse” (2 Tim 3:3). That is, the more men “resist the truth” (2 Tim 3:8), the tighter the hold of iniquity becomes, and the more dominant Satan becomes. Sin sets a certain degeneracy into motion that can only be aborted by “the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness” (Tit 1:1).

Sin is not neutralized by human effort, trying to do better, or entering into a philosophical program of self-improvement. Judging from the popularity of recovery and improvement plans, one would think that the devil was actually honoring them, relinquishing his hold upon his victims. But the slightest inclination toward this imagination is turned in the direction of futility. Churches could not possibly be more wrong than when they adopt a man-made plan for recovering from sin. A plan is already in place, and no Divine allowance has been made for an additional plan, or an addendum to the one that is found in Christ Jesus. If, for example, these Asian Jews reject Paul and the Gospel he preached, no alternative plan will be presented to them. Although men tend to think that another messenger may do better, there is no support in Scripture for such a notion. If it can be established that God has sent a messenger to the people, whether it be Jeremiah to Israel, or Paul to the Asian Jews, if that message is rejected, things will only grow worse for the people.

These realities are being lived out in this text, and the record is to be taken quite seriously. In our day there is too much allowance for the rejection of the Gospel, and refusing to receive the “love of the truth.” When approaches and messages are adopted that have the smell of earth upon them, a departure from the faith has occurred. When men attempt to mingle the presentation of the Gospel with the wisdom of men, and cater to carnal appetites, the truth falls down in the streets (Isa 59:14). Such attempts are really not in consideration of the lost, but are rather the clear expression of contempt for the Lord Jesus Christ, whether that circumstance is known or not. They constitute a denial of Christ, because something is put ahead of Him – and He will not accept a subordinate position, for that contradicts who He is.

AN EFFORT IS MADE TO ARRIVE AT THE TRUTH

“ 24 The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.”

The captain gives no heed to the shouts and antics of the angry mob. He knows that his charge is not to please the people, but to honor the government by which he has been employed. Whether noble or ignoble, he acts out of a preference to be in the favor of Rome, not the Jews among whom he has been charged to maintain order.

This is in strict comportment with the rule of any government or military regime. An orderly government does not allow for the ignoring of the will of its head. How much more is this true of the government of the Lord, who is “over all” (Rom 9:5; 10:12; Eph 1:22). If the captain has difficulty fulfilling his duty in the present environment, he will simply remove himself to a place that is conducive to that fulfillment.

What the Roman captain is doing for Rome, Paul is doing for Jesus. He is yielding to his Ruler,

carrying out His will in the place that is most conducive for that fulfillment. That is the manner of the Kingdom.

Through the prophet Daniel, God revealed that He would set up His Kingdom among men during a time of rulers who dominated the entire world. “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan 2:44). Four successive empires were established that were global: Babylon, Median-Persian, Greece, and Rome. It was during the latter that the government of God was formalized in this world. That government had always existed, though few among men discerned that reality. However, in Christ that government is focused. It involves governing the entire world with a mind toward the elect of God, who are being brought to glory by the King. Although the world is hostile, rejecting the people of God, through Christ He will protect them, nourish them, and bring them to stand before His throne without fault and filled with joy (Jude 1:24).

Such a government is certainly not depicted by democracy. In this government, human rights and preferences are not the point, but the will of the Lord. This is a will that extends into eternity, not being limited by time. If one can see it, this is why great global empires existed – to introduce men to the kind of rule that God maintains.

THE CAPTAIN COMMANDED HIM TO BE BROUGHT

“The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle . . .”

Here again we see the authority of a man’s word. It is carried out immediately, and without question. This is the kind of word to which a certain centurion referred when he sought for help from Jesus. “For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it” (Mat 8:9). In his thinking, this man made an association of that kind of authority with the Lord Jesus. Therefore he sent word to Jesus, “Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed” (Luke 7:6-7).

As noble and preferable as the government of our country may appear, it does little in the matter of assisting us to comprehend the nature of the Kingdom of God. No small amount of theology reflects the culture of our place and time rather than the nature of God and Divine authority.

EXAMINED BY SCOURGING

When warring factions come together to discuss their differences, it may appear to be a noble effort – but it is not! Contention cannot be settled by discussion. There may be an apparent lessening of hostility, but the issue that caused the contention will not be resolved.

“ . . . and bade that he should be examined by scourging . . .” Other versions read, “flogged and questioned,” NIV “examined by flogging,” NRSV “put him to the test by whipping,” BBE “examined with the scourge,” CSB “scourged and tortured,” DOUAY “question Paul as they whipped, him,” GWN “interrogated under the lash,” NAB “interrogate Paul by beating him with a lash,” NET and “lashed with whips to make him confess his crime.” NLT

It is clear from this tactic that the captain, Lysias by name (Acts 24:7,22), had not understood what Paul said in Hebrew. This being the case, Paul was clearly more interested in reaching the Jews than in defending himself before the government official. This provides us with a kind of index as to how Paul thought. It was not in a self-centered manner.

Now the captain endeavors to extract from Paul the reason for the tumult, doing so by force, or the infliction of pain. Flogging was not a pleasant process, and was designed to be so uncomfortable that the person with a guilt-ridden conscience would finally divulge the matter to be known. Of course, with Paul, there was no just cause for a tumult being raised against him, and he knew it. That changes the entire circumstance.

THAT HE MIGHT KNOW

“ . . . that he might know wherefore they cried so against him.” Other versions read, “that he might know why they were shouting against him that way,” NASB and “find out the reason for this outcry against him.” NRSV

In order to arrive at the truth of the matter, the captain first had to remove Paul from the area of contention and rage. That is not a suitable environment in which to learn the truth of a matter. This is because “by pride cometh contention” (Prov 13:10), and no good can come from pride, for God withdraws from such people. As it is written, “These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look . . .” (Prov 6:16-17). Pride is like a chain that encircles or confines its victim (Psa 73:6). God will not suffer, or tolerate, the person with a “proud heart” (Psa 101:5). Because pride births contention, no good can come from it.

As regards this text, the truth could not be discovered in a contentious environment. The captain had to take Paul and withdraw him from that surrounding. That was the only way he could hope to arrive at the truth of the matter before him.

When warring factions come together to discuss their differences, it may appear to be a noble effort – but it is not! Contention cannot be settled by discussion. There may be an apparent lessening of hostility, but the issue that caused the contention will not be resolved. A classic example of this is found in the attempts of men to resolve the issue of divisions among professing Christians. Who is able to reckon up a reasonable assessment of the number of meetings devoted to this objective? And yet, I do not know of a single Christian faction in all of history that was exculpated by discussion. Often, such discussions actually result in further divisions. This is because the subjects of discussion always center in a human interpretation of revelation rather than revelation itself.

An Example

An example of this is found among certain brethren with whom I have had more than a passing acquaintance. It has to do with the acceptance of instrumental music in the worship of God. This matter is an issue in several other denominations as well. One body of people say it is unlawful to use instrumental music in any act of reverence toward God, or any assembly meeting in the name of Christ. The opposing bodies contend there is nothing wrong with such a practice, and allow it without any form of condemnation. In the group; with which I am familiar, this matter has been debated and discussed for over a century and a half. It has never really been settled. Both factions still exist, continuing to compete with one another. However, if all discussions on the subject outlawed the expression of any human opinion, no matter how valid it may appear, and insisted on confining the discussion to express statements made in Scripture concerning instrumental music and how God is said to have regarded it, the entire character of the discussions would be significantly altered.

This, of course, is not the approach that is taken, although both parties insist that they believe the Word of God. In fact, they do not argue about what God has said on the subject, but rather argue over what they perceive Him to have meant. The result – contention! And why is this so? Because men are not willing to let go of their own thoughts and words in order that they might embrace “the good word of God” (Heb 6:5).

Our Contemporaries Can Learn from this Roman Captain

There are some things to be learned from this brief account. It is like a mirror of greater issues regarding more profound realities.

- Seeing contention for what it really is – an arena in which good fruit will not be produced.
- Knowing when to leave the area of contention. When fruit is not realized, it is time to leave.
- Getting at the truth of a matter, no matter what is required to do so. For the captain, this issue was driven by a respect for the Roman government, and a certain fear of being found tolerating something it forbade. For the believer, it involves the cognition of the will of the Lord, and a fear of standing before Him not having honored His will.
- The sanctified process is one that targets the discovery of the truth itself, not the justification of a humanly contrived view of the truth.

While it is painful to acknowledge the presence of such a circumstance, there is not much evidence in our time of a genuine interest in the truth of God. As a result, Jesus ranks very low on the pole of practicality, and the salvation of God is not seen as absolutely essential. Too much room is made for the will of man.

AN APPEAL TO THE LAW OF THE LAND

“ 25 And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?”

It is said of Jesus that He is NOT a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Heb 4:15). Of course, that is addressing the matter of approaching difficulties, or temptations. Not by coincidence, that is the precise circumstance in which Paul finds himself.

Now they commence to prepare Paul for the examination by scourging. It is important to perceive the composure of Paul during this process. Scourging was a painful procedure, and some never did recover from it. For Paul, there could have been painful recollections of previous beatings he had endured, to say nothing of him being stoned at Lystra. For those who are unduly impacted by the past, the prospects of yet another beating could have been most disconcerting. Further, at this time Paul did not have fellow believers close to him whom he could ask for prayer. This is a trial he would have to bear alone, so to speak. If he was to be encouraged, he would have to do like David of old. As it is written, “And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God ” (1 Sam 30:6).

There is an approach to the difficulties of life that is being marketed in our day that does not emphasize believers building up themselves on their most holy faith (Jude 1:20). Those with what is referred to as “struggles” are actually taught to seek out others who have those same difficulties, drawing strength from them. It all appears to be an acceptable approach, but the Lord Jesus Himself is strangely absent from such plans. It is said of Jesus that He is NOT a High Priest who cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Heb 4:15). Of course, that is addressing the matter of approaching difficulties, or temptations. Not by coincidence, that is the precise circumstance in which Paul finds himself. Relying upon the Lord, he will be directed through this whole affair, knowing what he ought to do. In the midst of preparation for this beating, he will be characterized by a sound mind, wisdom, and boldness to speak the right thing.

If all of this seems a bit irrelevant, it must be remembered that this kind of scenario is not at all common in the American church. Stumbling and failure are occurring throughout the professed church, even though it has engaged in all manner of recovery programs – programs that depend upon

suffering peers instead of a compassionate High Priest. This is not an innocent situation, and those feigned teachers who promote that kind of approach to temptation and suffering have drawn attention away from Jesus instead of to Him. I will wax bold and affirm that Paul could not have endured such occasions if he had addressed them with the methodologies being foisted upon the church today. This will be confirmed by his conduct through this whole incident. We are being exposed to a man who is actually living in fellowship with Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:9).

THEY BOUND HIM WITH THONGS

“And as they bound him with thongs . . .” Other versions read, “and they stretched him out to flog him,” NIV “and they tied him UP with thongs,” NRSV “they put leather bands around him,” BBE “stretching him out with things,” CJB “stretched him forward with thongs,” DARBY “stretched him out for the whips,” ESV “had Paul stretch out to tie him to the whipping post with the straps,” GWN “stretched him out with thongs.” NAS

Robertson says the literal translation is, “when they stretched him forward.” WORD PICTURES The pictures displayed on this page show what was involved in tying Paul with thongs. These were used to stretch Paul out, so the totality of his back could be exposed to the beating that was intended to follow.

PAUL SAID TO THE CENTURION

“Paul said unto the centurion that stood by . . .” Other versions read, “Paul said to the centurion standing there,” NIV and “the centurion who stood by him,” DOUAY and “the centurion who stood over him,” MRD

This was apparently the officer who was immediately in charge of the beating. He was probably to see that it was administered properly, and within the confines of Roman law. Notice the composure with which Paul now speaks, and the alertness that is evident in him. These are the effects of faith.

IS THIS LAWFUL?

“Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?” Other versions read, “Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?” NIV “Is it the law for you to give blows to a man who is a Roman and has not been judged?” BBE “Is it legal for you to whip a man who is a Roman citizen and hasn't even had a trial?” CJB and “Is it legal for you to lash a man who is a Roman citizen without a proper trial?” NET

Paul said this AS he was being stretched out for the flogging. That requires an alert, sensitive, and cultured spirit. Even under great duress, he is able to recognize an opportunity – a means through which the Lord of glory can work. His faith had confirmed to him that the Lord sometimes uses earthly dignitaries to minister to His people. Pharaoh’s daughter raised Moses (Ex 2:5-10). Jethro, a heathen priest of Midian, ministered to Moses (Ex 3:1; 4:1-18). An Egyptian Pharaoh exalted Joseph from prison to the throne (Gen 41:41-43). Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar, Darius, and Cyrus exalted Daniel to a place of political prominence (Dan 2:48; 5:29; 6:1-3; 28). Nebuchadnezzar promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, after recognizing God had delivered them (Dan 3:30). King Artaxerxes assisted Nehemiah in returning and rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem (Neh 2:1-9). Cyrus was used of God to restore the Temple (Ezra 1:2-7).

All of this comes under the general statement, “And the earth helped the woman” (Rev 12:16). It also confirms that the Lord is, in fact, “the Governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28), using whom He will to accomplish His purposes. He has been known to use worldly kings to chastise His people (1 Chron 6:15), as well as to bless them, as in the case of Joseph (Gen 47:5-7).

A word also ought to be said concerning God's notation of injustice.

- “Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy” (Psa 82:3).
- “By me kings reign, and princes decree justice ” (Prov 8:15).
- “To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice” (Prov 21:3).
- “ None calleth for justice , nor any pleadeth for truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity” (Isa 59:4).
- “Thus saith the LORD; Execute ye judgment and righteousness , and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence to the stranger, the fatherless, nor the widow, neither shed innocent blood in this place. For if ye do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting upon the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people. But if ye will not hear these words, I swear by myself, saith the LORD, that this house shall become a desolation” (Jer 22:3-5).
- “Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor , and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions, and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe , and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right” (Amos 5:11-12).

Isaiah affirmed that the lack of justice indicated that truth had fallen in the street: “And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter” (Isa 59:14). Where injustice prevails, whether in America or in a nation that openly avows another god, it is because truth has not been faithfully proclaimed.

In our text, it is ironic that injustice was found among a people who had been cultured in Divine manners, while justice was carried by those who were not so blessed. The only way to account for such a circumstance is to recognize that God was governing the whole situation.

You remember that when Mordecai, Esther's uncle, admonished her to go before the king [who was her husband] and plead for the Jews, he said, “For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place ; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Esth 4:14).

There is a view of God that affirms He does not require moral conduct from the wicked, or those who are not in covenant with Him. However, this is not the truth, as Scripture confirms.

- Even though Abel was the appointed seed, Cain was held accountable for his injustice toward Abel (Gen 4:9-12).
- The world of Noah's day had no covenant with God, yet was destroyed because it was given over to violence (Gen 6:11-13).
- The Egyptians were punished for treating the Jews unjustly (Ex 7:4; 12:12).
- The Amalekites were judged for their unjust treatment of Israel when they were journeying to the promised land **It is essential that all men be wise and moral in their conduct, for that is something the God of heaven requires. Although it is a much lower level than “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” there are just laws in the world**

(Deut 25:17-18).

- The Edomites were judged for their unjust dealing against Israel (Amos 1:6-11; Mal 13-4).
- Nebuchadnezzar was judged for not giving glory to God (Dan 4:30-33).
- Belshazzar was judged for drinking from vessels that had been dedicated to the Lord (Dan 5:22-23).
- Herod was rebuked for taking his brother's wife (Matt 14:3-4).
- Another Herod was judged for not giving glory to God (Acts 12:21-23).

Those who imagine that the moral bent of a nation, or the flagrant disregard of the living God by its leaders, are of no consequence, need to think again. God is not indifferent to such circumstances – and they are a growing phenomenon in our country.

It is essential that all men be wise and moral in their conduct, for that is something the God of heaven requires. Although it is a much lower level than “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus,” there are just laws in the world to which men can appeal – such as Paul is doing in this text. These are things described as being “honest in the sight of all men” (Rom 12:17; 2 Cor 8:21), and things “approved of men” (Rom 14:18).

When professed believers are guilty of things even the world rejects, they have fallen into deep sin (1 Cor 5:1).

THIS MAN IS A ROMAN

“ 26 When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. 27 When the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.”

Here again we see the Lord working all things together for the ultimate good of Paul (Rom 8:28). This will require the alert and intelligent involvement of Paul himself. God does not always work in the background without any involvement of the ones being delivered. Even a man with a withered hand is asked to stretch it forth (Matt 12:13), and a blind man was required to go and wash clay from his eyes at a certain pool (John 9:7). God's people must not be naive and overly simplistic about the working of the Lord. He has provided us with enough examples to form sound concepts of deliverance and help.

Noah had to personally build the ark in which he would escape the destruction of the flood, then fill it with pairs of all the animal species. Only then could he and his family enter into safety (Gen 6:14-22). There are many records of military victories by the people of God that required extensive fighting (Ex 17:10-13; 1 Sam 7:11), and precious few where they were granted the privilege of beholding the enemy struck down without their personal activity (2 Kgs 19:35; 2 Chron 20:17-25).

The Israelites were required to do a number of things before they were delivered from Egypt. Even though that deliverance was described as them being carried out “on eagles' wings” (Ex 19:4), they did not literally fly out of the land of bondage. They walked out, carrying all of their possessions, taking their infants and little ones with them, and herding their flocks as well. Before they walked out, they had to kill the Passover lamb, put its blood upon the side posts and upper post of the doors of their houses, cook the lamb a certain way, and eat it with haste (Ex 12:5-11). There have been deliverances that did not require a lot of activity from the ones being delivered – like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace (Dan 3:20-26), and Daniel from the lion's den (Dan 6:16-27). But even in those deliverances, there was some bold activity that preceded the incarceration from which they were delivered.

God's people are required to walk by faith. Only then will they be able to identify when they are involved in deliverances, and recognize the appropriate thing to do. Once again, all of this is being lived out in our text. The book of Acts is not the record of heroes, but of those who lived by faith and walked in the Spirit – things that are common to all who are in Christ Jesus.

WHEN THE CENTURION HEARD THAT

“When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying . . .”

Notice the immediacy with which this centurion acted. The beating was not carried out, but additional information was immediately conveyed to the chief military man. What caused all of this to occur? Was this merely a display of military subordination and due honor? Is anyone naive enough to think that this kind of protocol was always followed? Pilate did not display such consideration when the Son of God stood before him, nor did Herod when he also was confronted with the Lord. While Roman law did provide a framework for such consideration, we are not told that it was always honored when dealing with the disciples of Jesus. Pilate did not hesitate to kill some Jews, mingling their blood with their sacrifices (Lk 13:1), and that certainly was a miscarriage of justice.

Once again, this was the Lord, causing the events to take a new direction in favor of His own apostle.

TAKE HEED WHAT THOU DOEST

“ . . . Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. . .” Other versions read, “Take care what you do,” NKJV “What are you about to do?” NASB “Do you realize what you are doing?” CJB and “Do you know what you are doing?” IE

Even in civil law, there are occasions when a person occupying a higher position must be informed that what he is doing is questionable, to say the least. Thoughtless submission is not necessarily right. Even when there is no question about the necessity of carrying out the edict of a superior, if there is a sound basis for objecting, that objection ought to be stated – just as it was here. The truth of the matter is that there was some additional information that was critical to this, and it was not common knowledge.

I have been in academic circles, lowly by way of comparison, where this kind of liberty was not granted to the students. There is no realm in which the right to affirm the truth is out of order. Notwithstanding, I have been in church board meetings, where there was less of an interest in the truth than existed in the barracks in which Paul was standing. Such things ought not to be! In fact, God Almighty will use this kind of setting to deliver His servant.

CONCERNING ROMAN LAW

Cicero says that the body of every Roman citizen was inviolable. “The Porcian law,” he adds, “has removed the rod from the body of every Roman citizen.” And in his celebrated oration against Verres, he says, A Roman citizen was beaten with rods in the forum, O judges; where, in the meantime, no groan, no other voice of this unhappy man, was heard except the cry, ‘I am a Roman citizen’! Take away this hope,” he says, “take away this defense from the Roman citizens, let there be no protection in the cry I am a Roman citizen, and the praetor can with impunity inflict any punishment on him who declares himself a citizen of Rome, etc.”

ALBERT BARNES, ACTS

The Valerian law forbade any Roman citizen to be bound. The Porcian law forbade any to be beaten with rods. And by the same law the liberty of a Roman citizen was never put in the power of the

licitor. It is a transgression of the law to bind a Roman citizen: it is wickedness to scourge him. And the illegality of the proceedings of these magistrates was farther evident in their condemning and punishing them unheard. This was a gross violation of a common maxim in the Roman law. Many who are accused of evil may be absolved, when the cause is heard; but unheard, no man can be condemned.”

ADAM CLARK, ACTS, CICERO, Orat. pro Rabirio, Verrem, Orat. 5

TELL ME, ART THOU A ROMAN?

“When the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea.” Other versions read, “Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?” NIV

Knowing that Roman citizens were vouchsafed unique privileges, as is ideally true of every form of civil government, the captain at once set out to confirm if Paul was, in fact, a Roman citizen. Remember, at the first, he thought Paul was an Egyptian (Acts 21:36). If Paul answers in the affirmative, that will change this whole situation.

You may recall that a similar incident took place in Philippi – except in that case Paul and Silas were actually beaten. Still not knowing that they had been dealing with Roman citizens, the political magistrates had sent word to the keeper of the jail to let Paul and Silas go in peace. Having heard the message Paul replied, “They have beaten us openly uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out” (Acts 16:37). As soon as the officials were told what Paul said, “they were afraid when they heard that they were Romans. Then they came and pleaded with them and brought them out, and asked them to depart from the city” NKJV (Acts 16:38-39).

Note, Paul did not say he was not a citizen of Rome, but rather that he was a citizen of heaven – although that is really what he was. It is quite true that in this world we are “strangers and pilgrims” (1 Pet 2:11), having our citizenship “in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” NKJV (Phil 3:20). However, this was not the time to make an appeal to that unalterable fact. This was an occasion when Paul was standing before men who were fulfilling a God-ordained office, even as he did in Philippi. By Divine edict, worldly rulers are not intended to be a “terror to good works, but to the evil” (Rom 13:2) – and Paul had done no evil work. One of the primary purposes of civil authority is to “execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom 13:4). Not only had Paul refrained from doing evil, he had not conducted his life unwisely, or without giving due consideration to the civil laws of the land. He was not an insurrectionist like Barabbas.

While this was not a major area of Paul’s life, he was familiar with the laws of the empire of Rome, and could therefore use them appropriately. This was also a benefit of following the mandates of the King of kings, who inspired the following statements.

- “My son, fear thou the LORD and the king: and meddle not with them that are given to change” (Prov 24:21).
- “Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter” (Eccl 10:20).
- “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor” (Rom 13:7).
- “Honor the king” (1 Pet 2:17).
- It is said of wicked people who feign themselves to be representatives of God, “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government.

Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2 Pet 2:10). And again, “Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities” (Jude 1:8).

- The people of God are not to be noted for breaking the Law, despising government, withholding their taxes, and speaking against dignities. This is because God is involved in the raising up of political rulers – even when they are not commendable people. Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, “This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones: to the intent that the living may know that the most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will , and setteth up over it the basest of men” (Dan 4:17). The psalmist affirmed, “For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another ” (Psa 75:7). God even said of the despot Nebuchadnezzar, “And now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, my servant; and the beasts of the field have I given him also to serve him” (Jer 27:6).

- When the Lord was instructing Israel concerning the coming Babylonian captivity, He instructed them bring their “necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him, and his people” (Jer 27:11). Even after they were carried away captive, He told them , “And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace” (Jer 29:7). All of this took place under the administration of the Almighty. In chastening His people for their disobedience, He raised up Nebuchadnezzar, then later put him down for going too far.

When navigating through trials, there is no substitute for a knowledge of these things. In our trials as well as in our blessings, we are being oriented for glory.

In trial, we are being severed more completely from this present evil world. In blessing, we are gaining an acquaintance with an “eternal inheritance.” In all of these things we are to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matt 10:16). It is never right for the saints to be ignorant.

PAUL WAS FREEBORN

“ 28 And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born.”

Roman citizenship was considered a privilege – particularly since Rome was ruling the world. Special privileges were given to its citizens, as is the case with every civilized country.

WITH A GREAT SUM I OBTAINED THIS FREEDOM

“ And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom . . . ” . Other versions read, “I obtained this citizenship,” NKJV and “I acquired this citizenship.” NASB

The word “freedom” refers to political freedom which, in this case, is synonymous with citizenship. The Greek word from which it is translated is **politei,an** , which means “citizenship.” Freedom, in this case, means free to advantage from the special benefits of citizenship. It is not a word that equates with license, or the right to do whatever one pleases. It is “freedom” as compared with slavery, being vassals, or someone in bondage.

I WAS FREEBORN

“ . . . And Paul said, But I was free born.” Other versions read, “born a citizen,” NKJV “Roman born,” ASV “Roman rights . . . I had them by birth” BBE “a citizen by birth.” ESV

Paul was not born in the city of Rome itself, but within the Roman empire, which included the city

of Tarsus, a city that operated under its authority, and was subject to its requirements.

THE PARALLEL IN THE SPIRIT

The language of this verse contains a wonderful parallel in the Spirit. Many practical aspects of the Christian life are now being represented as though they could be purchased from men who market their lifeless rules and disciples to the professing church. However, those who are in Christ have access to the Fount of all wisdom and knowledge, and it is their's for the asking. No person who is in Christ Jesus does not have these privileges, for they are part of the birthright of those who are born again.

Expressions of this Birth

Just as surely as Paul was born a citizen of the Roman Empire, with all of the privileges of that empire, so those who are born again have access to everything that is in Christ Jesus. Ponder the various expressions of this birth that are found in the words of Jesus and those who proclaimed His truth.

- **CHILDREN OF GOD.** “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God ” (Matt 5:9).
- **CHILDREN OF YOUR FATHER WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.** “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust” (Mat 5:45).
- **BORN . . . OF GOD.** “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born , not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12-13).
- **BORN AGAIN.** “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again , he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:3).
- “Ye must be born again ” (John 3:7).
- **BORN OF THE SPIRIT.** “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit ” (John 3:8).
- **THE SONS OF GOD.** “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God , even to them that believe on his name” (John 1:12).
- **THE CHILDREN OF GOD.** “And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad” (John 11:52).
- **NEWNESS OF LIFE.** “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life ” (Rom 6:4).
- **NEWNESS OF SPIRIT.** “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit , and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6).
- **A NEW CREATURE [CREATION].** “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor 5:17).
- **BORN AFTER THE SPIRIT.** “But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now” (Gal 4:29).
- **A NEW CREATURE [CREATION].** “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature ” (Gal 6:15).

• **CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS.** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

• **THE NEW MAN . . . CREATED.** “And that ye put on the new man , which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24).

• **THE NEW MAN . . . RENEWED.** “And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him ” (Col 3:10).

• **REGENERATION.** “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration , and renewing of the Holy Ghost” (Titus 3:5).

• **BEGOTTEN AGAIN.** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).

• **BEING BORN AGAIN.** “Being born again , not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever” (1 Pet 1:23).

• **BORN OF HIM.** “If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him ” (1 John 2:29).

Being born again constitutes one a citizen of heaven. Such a marvelous citizenship cannot be obtained any other way. It certainly cannot be purchased with silver and gold. In fact, the people of God are themselves purchased, and are citizens of heaven, being now “strangers and pilgrims” on the earth. Heavenly citizenship is now primary, and trumps all earthly associations.

BORN OF GOD. “Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God ” (1 John 3:9).

• “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God , and knoweth God” (1 John 4:7).

• **BEGOTTEN OF HIM.** “Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God : and every one that loveth Him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of Him ” (1 John 5:1).

• **BORN OF GOD . . . BEGOTTEN OF GOD.** “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith” (1 John 5:4).

• “We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not” (1 John 5:18).

There are thirty-four statements that affirm a new kind of life – a life that is begotten by God and birthed by His power. Every description of it is precise and without ambiguity.

- It is the result of God’s own work.
- It is new and not part of the natural order.
- It involves a new image and new capacities.
- It is related to the work of the Spirit.
- It is associated with purity, or washing.
- It is associated with not sinning.
- It is associated with overcoming the world.

- It is related to the love of the brethren.
- It is an absolute necessity.
- It is associated with believing Jesus is the Christ.
- It is associated with righteousness and holiness.
- It is associated with a walk, or manner of life.
- It is a new creation.
- It is a regeneration: i.e. a new lineage and a new kind of life.

Being born again constitutes one a citizen of heaven. Such a marvelous citizenship cannot be obtained any other way. It certainly cannot be purchased with silver and gold. In fact, the people of God are themselves purchased (1 Cor 6:20), and are citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20-21), being now “strangers and pilgrims” on the earth (1 Pet 2:11). Heavenly citizenship is now primary, and trumps all earthly associations.

THE RIGHTS OF HEAVENLY CITIZENSHIP

In Christ Jesus we have all of the rights of heavenly citizenship. These rights are extensive and thorough. Nothing that is required for life and godliness can be acquired from any other source – it is all found in our identity with heaven (2 Pet 1:3). Ranking high on those privileges are access to God (Eph 3:12), an Intercessor in heaven (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), and an Intercessor within (Rom 8:26-27). In Christ we are authorized, so to speak, to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). “All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” hidden in Christ, are available to all of the citizens (Col 2:3). “Every good and perfect gift” comes down from the homeland (James 1:17).

All of the citizens of heaven are born free. They are free to come to God (Heb 10:22), free to resist the devil (James 4:7), and free to abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 Pet 2:11). They are no longer debtors to the flesh, to fulfill its lusts (Rom 8:12). They are no longer the servants of sin (Rom 6:17), for they have been “made free from sin” (Rom 6:18). They are free from the encumbrances of “the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:2). Further, Christ has made us free “for freedom” NASB (Gal 5:1).

Those who hawk methods, techniques, and plans for recovery are blotches on the landscape of spiritual life. They are not telling the truth when they ascribe recovering power and stabilizing effects to their plans. All of their plans have come from the earth, which is the land of bondage. When they belch out claims of secret sources of strength and victory that can only be found in their manuals, they have lied to us. The citizens of heaven have not been shorted in any aspect of life.

There are a variety of things being said within the Christian community today that are a reproach to Christ. Things are being assigned a primary role in spiritual life that have not been given that designation by the living God. Some are teaching that obedience is the key. Others affirm that prayer is the secret. Still other say that living

All of these things are related to heavenly citizenship, and are rights that are vouchsafed to those so described. They are a classic commentary of what it means to be “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10).

in a continual state of brokenness is the means by which we tap into Divine power. Some are teaching that the secret to a strong spiritual life is fasting. The new false teachers are saying that being familiar with our Jewish roots is the key factor. Some are saying that knowing the Greek language is the guarantee of understanding the Scriptures. There are even those who say witnessing

is the thing that causes spiritual life to mature.

The thing that all of these approaches have in common is the minimization of faith. Even though grace is said to be accessed “through faith” (Eph 2:8), these spiritual merchants have plans that can get grace by other means. In spite of the clear declaration that faith “is the victory that overcometh the world” (1 John 5:4), the cause for victory is being ascribed to other things. The Spirit witnesses that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6). It does not say without these other things it is impossible to please God. And why not? Because faith encompasses and superintends all of the essentials. It is only as you obey, pray, fast, etc. by faith that any of those activities are even valid. None of them are an end of themselves. None of them make you a child of God, for we are “all the children of God by faith” (Gal 3:26). None of them can justify, for we are “justified by faith” (Rom 5:1). In fact, “whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23). We “live by faith” (Rom 1:17), stand “by faith” (2 Cor 1:24), “walk by faith” (2 Cor 5:7), and our hearts are “purified by faith” (Acts 15:9).

All of these things are related to heavenly citizenship, and are rights that are vouchsafed to those so described. They are a classic commentary of what it means to be “complete” in Christ (Col 2:10). “Complete” means nothing is lacking in Christ. No needed resource can be found apart from Him.

AFRAID OF BEING UNJUST

“ 29 Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.”

Upon hearing that Paul is a Roman citizen, the whole circumstance is altered. One minute he is being prepared to be beaten, and the next he is freed. Again, this is God working all things together for the good of Paul. He not only emboldens Paul, granting him wisdom to speak appropriately, but turns the heart of the captain. No further proof is required than the testimony of Paul himself. How could that have taken place without the management of the Lord? Before this point, the word of Paul had not been sufficient. Paul had already told the captain that he was a citizen of Tarsus, which was under the dominion of Rome (21:39). Now, however, the matter seemed perfectly clear to the captain, and it was upon the word of Paul that it was established. The Lord had turned the heart of that man!

THEY DEPARTED FROM HIM

“Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him . . .” Other versions read, “those who were about to examine him withdrew,” NKJV “immediately let go of him,” NASB “those who were about to question him withdrew immediately,” NIV “those who were about to put him to the test went away,” BBE and “Instantly those who were about to examine and flog him withdrew from him.” AMPLIFIED

Remember what was about to happen. Paul was going to be examined by flogging. That is, he was going to be beaten until he submitted a satisfactory answer to the captain concerning what had taken place. He had been tied up, and the administrators of the flogging were ready to begin their grisly work. Yet, immediately they withdraw because of enlightenment concerning the situation before them. The next phrase suggests they were directed by the captain to do this, but the immediacy of their response is the thing to be noted. It indicates a situation that was being governed by the Lord, even though those involved were not aware of it.

THE CHIEF CAPTAIN WAS AFRAID

“ . . . and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.” Other versions read, “the commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains,” NIV and “the commandant also was frightened, for he realized

that [Paul] was a Roman citizen and he had put him in chains.” AMPLIFIED

Note that this is something the captain “knew” – and his knowledge was purely upon the testimony of Paul. Paul had submitted no documents, nor had he called for a lawyer, or someone of note who could testify to the truth of what he said. Yet, upon the basis of his testimony the captain not only knew that Paul was a Roman citizen, he also knew that he himself had broken the law in having Paul bound with chains. That was something worthy of fear, for the Romans did not tolerate insubordination or their officials to be ignorant of the law and how they were applying it.

Admittedly, these circumstances sound strange to our culture, for it is one in which insubordination is tolerated and serious errors are overlooked.

THE SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

This same kind of reaction was addressed in a word delivered to Israel. When they prepared to enter into Canaan to possess it, God gave them this word: “Rise ye up, take your journey, and pass over the river Arnon: behold, I have given into thine hand Sihon the Amorite, king of Heshbon, and his land: begin to possess it, and contend with him in battle. This day will I begin to put the dread of thee and the fear of thee upon the nations that are under the whole heaven, who shall hear report of thee, and shall tremble, and be in anguish because of thee” (Deu 2:24-25). In this instance, the fear and dread was provoked by the keen awareness that God Almighty stood with Israel. With the captain of our text, the fear was of the Roman officials – yet it was sufficient to provoke a change in his conduct.

One dreadful thing that a carnal church does is this: it removes any notion of such a body of people being identified with the Lord of glory. This is precisely why political officials are not afraid to conduct themselves in opposition to the Word of the Lord, and look with disdain upon the law of the Lord. Should these people ever be convinced of God’s identity with believers, it would alter the landscape of society. However, when the professed church conducts itself in contrariety to the God they profess to worship, the ungodly become more bold in their opposition.

CONFINED, YET FREE

“ 30 On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.”

The fear of the captain did not provoke him to drop the case. He rather approached it in a different manner. Keeping order in Jerusalem was his charge, and he could not get away from that duty. However, in the doing of it, he could not work in violation of the law of the land.

When men are as earnest about obtaining a knowledge of the truth that makes men free as this captain was about learning the truth about the Jewish allegations, the truth will soon be found.

THE CERTAIN WHEREOF HE WAS ACCUSED

“On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews . . .” Other versions read, “wanted to know for certain why he was accused of the Jews,” NKJV “find out exactly why Paul was being accused,” NIV and “know the real reason why the Jews accused him.” RSV

This captain was carrying out his duty, part of which was knowing the reason for the tumult. He sensed he had not been exposed to all of the facts needed to make a sound judgment. He also knew that he was not at liberty to force Paul to divulge the reason by having him whipped. Therefore, within the constraints of the law, he now makes an effort to get at the truth.

An Application

We have an example here of some of the involvements in seeking to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. The quest for truth must be accomplished within a lawful environment. A person, for example, who seeks the truth while living in contradiction of it, is engaged in a vain quest. Men may tritely say that an immoral person is seeking the truth. That, however, is virtually impossible to confirm, for it violates everything we know about the revelation of truth. The acknowledgment of the truth, for example, must be preceded by repentance, which is “to the acknowledging of the truth” (2 Tim 2:25).

When men are as earnest about obtaining a knowledge of the truth that makes men free as this captain was about learning the truth about the Jewish allegations, the truth will soon be found.

HE LOOSED HIM FROM HIS BANDS

“ . . . he loosed him from his bands . . .” Other versions read, “released him from his bonds” NKJV

The loosing took place the next day – “on the morrow.” Paul was, then, kept prisoner over the night. This was no doubt because of the Jews, who were raging with hatred. In this case, remaining a prisoner was for his safety.

While the chains that had been placed upon him had remained, apparently the thongs with which he had been tied were previously removed, for they applied exclusively to him being examined by flogging. Paul was a prisoner, but like Joseph, he was not an oppressed one.

A FAIR HEARING WILL TAKE PLACE

“ . . . and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.” Other versions read, “the chief priests and all the Sanhedrin,” NIV and “the chief priests and the entire council.” NRSV

To this point, the “chief priests” and “council” have not been mentioned in association with this case. In fact, this is the first mentioning of “the chief priests” since Acts 9:21, and the first time “the council” is mentioned since Acts 6:15. Originally this tumult was stirred up by “the Jews which were of Asia,” who had “stirred up all the people” (21:27). It is not made known whether or not this included all the chief priests and council, although that was quite possible. The “chief priests” were identified with the Temple, and were probably present at the time the tumult started. The “council” had to be convened, for they did not travel about in company with one another.

This gathering was an official one, convened to arrive at the truth concerning allegations brought against Paul. Apparently the captain assumed they would be knowledgeable of the situation.

Even the world senses the need for being reasonable. It is surely uncomely for any form of unreasonableness to be found among those professing allegiance to God, including “the Jew first, and also the Greek.”

A Prisoner, Yet Free

And thus we have Paul depicted as a prisoner who is free. What a perspective! And yet, that is precisely how the believer is set forth in Scripture. Concerning servitude to sin and the flesh, those in Christ have been set free. No allegiance is owed to the flesh. Yet, from another perspective, we groan under the weight of mortality, crying out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Rom 7:24). In a sense, we are trapped in a restricting and vile body. And yet, we are not confined there. We can take the wings of faith, and fly away, finding rest and solitude in Christ Jesus. Blessed are the people who know how to live under such restrictions, availing

themselves of the rights of heavenly citizenship.

CONCLUSION

The sequence of events with which we have just dealt is filled with evidences of the hand of the Lord and Divine direction. This record is intended to bolster the confidence of those who live by faith. God can marshal earthly and heavenly personalities to come to the aid of His people. He can cause men to cease to beat His people, as He did when the Jews saw the Roman captain coming. He can empower his servants to speak up in intimidating circumstances, as he did Paul. He can give those who are not in Christ an inclination to protect the holy people, as he did in the captain. He can give his servants wisdom to appeal to areas of right and wrong that are recognized by those who are not reconciled to God. He can cause an appointed beating to not be carried out. He can move an unbeliever to want to get at the truth of a matter. He can cause bonds to be loosed by those who are themselves strangers to the Kingdom of God.

In these, and other, ways, we see how the Lord works all things together for the good of those who love Him and are the called according to His purpose. Faith takes hold of these realities and triumphs over the world, doing so in the midst of opposition.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #93

PAUL TURNS THE PHARISEES AND SADDUCEES AGAINST EACH OTHER

“ 23:1 "And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day. 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth. 3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law? 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest? 5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people. 6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. 7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both. 9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God. 10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle." (Acts 21:1-10)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Paul commences a further explanation to "the chief priests and all their council." No sooner had he commenced his defense, and the high priest commanded that he be smitten on the mouth. Paul

responded, and a brief dialog followed between him and those standing by. He then perceived a mixed company before him, consisting of Pharisees and Sadducees, who by no means were agreed in their view of the things of God. Immediately he spoke in such a manner as to set these theological opponents at a variance with one another, pointing out that he was a Pharisee, and had been called into question concerning “the hope and resurrection of the dead.” Because this was an area of controversy for these groups, confusion ensued. Ultimately this resulted in Paul being removed from the unruly crowd, and again taken by force into the “castle,” or military barracks, therefore being afforded temporary protection.

THE MINISTRY OF TROUBLE

Throughout this entire episode we are beholding the outworking of spiritual life. Faith, which is the pulse of spiritual life, is able to respond appropriately to trouble as well peace, and to hardship as well as blessing. In fact, it causes the trusting one to go deeper into the well of the water of life, drawing refreshment when all does not appear to be going well. However, none of this is done passively, or without the involvement of the one who has faith.

While we are in this world, from the standpoint of the flesh, trouble is an inevitability. This is because we are in a cursed world that is in the throes of death, groaning and travailing in anticipation of the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom8:19-

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21). However, there is more to trouble than this. There is also trouble and tribulation that come to us because we are the sons of God. Consequently, difficulty, inconvenience, pain, and sorrow should not surprise us, much less overwhelm us. This is often trouble that comes because of our faith, and it is as sure as the trouble that comes because we are in a cursed and temporal environment.

Jesus said to His apostles, who are the most privileged and significant class in His body (1 Cor 12:28), “In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). He had earlier explained to them, “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:19). Make no mistake about this, those who deliberately hurt and afflict the people of God do so because they hate them. Therefore believers are told, “Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you” (1 John 3:13).

There is a ministry that opposition and affliction has for the people of God. We are to know “tribulation brings about perseverance” NASB (Rom 5:3). God works to perfect His people within

the context of suffering – suffering that results from their faith. As it is written, “ But the God of all grace , who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you” (1 Pet 5:10). Notice that this is accomplished by “the God of all grace.” Trouble, affliction, suffering, etc, prove to be an excellent context in which the grace of God can effectively work.

Now, it is one thing to have a pedantic acquaintance with these facts. It is quite another thing to perceive them in the Scriptural accounts of various saints. Think of the people who were perfected in the surrounding of trouble and ungodliness. The list is quite impressive, including saints like Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and all of the prophets. In the book of Acts we are introduced to others like Peter and John, the apostles, Stephen, Paul, Barnabas, Silas, and several others.

Those who have developed and perpetrated a theology that strives for the approval of the world and its citizens have led the people astray.

Those who have developed and perpetrated a theology that strives for the approval of the world and its citizens have led the people astray. Their approach to theology and the understanding of the Scripture contradicts the very purpose of God, which includes not only the Divine objective, but HOW it is carried out and brought to completion. Any approach to ministering that attempts to make the message palatable to those who are alienated from God, as opposed to those who are seeking Him, is off-center, to say the very least. At the heart of such approaches is the ignoring of the Lord Jesus Himself, who is the sole means of approaching God (John 14:6).

PAUL’S RECORDED TROUBLES

In Summation

- Beatings, floggings, being stoned, shipwrecks, isolation, frequent journeys, perils, weariness, painfulness, going without food, cold and exposure (2 Cor 11:24-27).
- Trouble on every side, perplexed, persecuted, cast down (2 Cor 4:8-9).
- Hungered, thirsted, lacked adequate clothing, was beaten, had no certain dwelling place, was reviled, was persecuted, defamed, and made as the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things (1 Cor 4:11-13).
- Dishonor, evil reports, seen as deceivers, being unknown, dying, chastened, sorrowful, being poor, and having nothing (2 Cor 6:8-10).

Details

- In Jerusalem, the Jews took counsel to kill him (Acts 9:23-24).
- Persecuted and expelled from Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:50-51).
- Driven from Iconium (Acts 14:1-6).
- Stoned at Lystra by the Jews from Antioch and Iconium (Acts 14:19).
- Persecuted in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (2 Tim 3:11).
- Beaten and imprisoned at Philippi (Acts 16:19-24).
- Treated shamefully at Philippi (1 Thess 2:2).
- Opposed in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-4).
- The Jews from Thessalonica came to Berea and stirred up the people against him (Acts 17:13-15).

- Opposed by the Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:12-18).
- Beaten in Jerusalem (Acts 21:32).
- More than forty Jews agree to fast until they killed Paul (Acts 23:12-15).
- Imprisoned in Herod's judgment hall (Acts 23:35).
- Left bound in prison for two years by Felix (Acts 24:27).
- Shipwrecked on the island of Melita (Acts 27:14-28:1).
- Bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 28:3-6).
- Was pressed out of measure, so that he despaired of life (2 Cor 1:8-11).
- Had a grievous thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7-8).
- Preached to the Galatians during a time when he was sick (Gal 4:13-14).
- Made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men (1 Cor 4:9).

These experiences all took place WHILE Paul was engaged in the work of the Lord – doing what Jesus had commissioned him to do. The period during which these things were experienced was approximately twenty-six years.

Several valuable lessons can be learned from these things.

1. THEY TEND TO MINIMIZE OUR SUFFERINGS. For most believers, Paul's sufferings tend to minimize those through which we are called to pass. In Paul we see an example of how much believers can endure without conducting themselves in an uncomely manner. Job is another example.

2. SUFFERINGS ARE CONTROLLED BY HEAVEN . Peter reminds us that our sufferings are under the Sovereign control of God, and are only for a time. "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you" (1 Pet 5:10). Seen correctly, sufferings prepare us for spiritual maturity (perfect), solidity (stablish), spiritual stamina (strengthen), and a life of faithfulness (settle).

3. KEPT FROM FALLING. Paul is a sterling example of Jesus keeping His servants from falling, and making them stand. Although the accounts to which I have referred were not intended to be a kind of biography of Paul's troubles, yet they identify the seriousness of his trials, as well as the pain and concerns they generated. No ordinary man could have endured such an extended period of suffering, to say nothing of the severity of the experiences he mentioned. His stability was an example of being "kept by the power of God" (1 Pet 1:5), being kept "from falling" (Jude 1:24), and being made "to stand" (Rom 14:4).

4. SPIRITUAL CONSISTENCY AND STEADFASTNESS. It is also a display of the spiritual consistency that characterizes those who have eternal life, and are clinging to the Lord with purpose of heart. The doctrine affirms that "tribulation produces perseverance" (Rom 5:3). Instead of trials and temptations causing Paul to stumble, thereby bringing the need for repentance and recovery, they made him more steadfast. That is the result of responding to the teaching of grace (Tit 1:11-12).

5. THE NATURE OF SPIRITUAL LIFE AND VICTORY. Additionally, we see that the life of ease, and the lack of opposition, are by no means the dominant traits of spiritual life. Being "more than a conqueror" does not suggest the absence of battles – even fierce ones. It is still true that the devil, with all of his wiles and subtlety, has no weapon that can effectively offset saying "NO!" to his temptations (Tit 2:12). He has no effective

weaponry against the individual who resists him (James 4:7; 1 Pet 5:7-8).

PAUL EARNESTLY BEHOLDS THE COUNCIL

This is an example of how a man with a good conscience conducts himself before his enemies. His conscience does not condemn him; he knows that he is not guilty of the charges brought against him.

“ 23:1a And Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said . . . ” Other versions read, “looking earnestly,” NKJV “looking intently,” NASB “looked strait at,” NIV “looking fixedly,” BBE “fixing his eyes on,” DARBY “stared at,” GWN “looked directly at,” NET “earnestly gazing at,” AMPLIFIED and “surveyed the members of the council with a steady gaze.” MESSAGE

This is an example of how a man with a good conscience conducts himself before his enemies. His conscience does not condemn him; he knows that he is not guilty of the charges brought against him. He also is keenly aware that the Lord is his Helper, and thus does not fear what men shall do unto him (Heb 13:6). He is not intimidated by men – especially those who oppose the Gospel of Christ.

Beholding involves riveting one’s attention on something. Discernment and consideration is in the word also. Solemnly the Psalmist prayed, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in Thy way” (Psa 119:37). When the enemies of the apostles beheld the lame man whom they had healed, “they could say nothing against it” (Acts 4:14). Thus we are reading of a lingering and considerate look.

THE COUNTENANCE

Paul is beholding the countenance of the people before him – discerning therein something of their persons. By definition the countenance is “the face as an indication of mood, emotion, or character; bearing or expression that offers approval or sanction: moral support.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

Early in the history of humanity, we read of the countenance. For example, when Cain’s offering was rejected, “his countenance fell” (Gen 4:5). What is even more, the Lord asked him, “why is thy countenance fallen?” (Gen 4:6). Cain’s face reflected disappointment that his offering was not accepted. However, even then the Lord gave an opportunity to present an acceptable offering. “If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him” (Gen 4:7). However, because Cain was “Of that wicked one” (1 John 3:12), he not only rejected Divine counsel, but murdered his brother Abel. That confirmed Cain “belonged to the evil one.” NIV

Other references to the human countenance confirm that it reflects satisfaction or dissatisfaction, favor or hatred, and acceptance or rejection.

- Laban changed his countenance toward Jacob: “And Jacob beheld the countenance of Laban, and, behold, it was not toward him as before” (Gen 31:2).

- Jesus said men should not have a sad countenance when they were fasting. They were rather to groom and present themselves as those who were not fasting. “Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly” (Mat 6:16-18).

Because the body is an integral part of our persons, something of the individual can be known by its various expressions. The countenance, or visage certainly is not a thorough index to the individual, but enough can be perceived in it to give the one beholding it some valuable

information.

The wicked not only refuse to seek God, but betrays his reprobacy in his countenance. “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts” (Psa 10:4).

- The Psalmist spoke of the health of his countenance, tracing it back to God Himself. “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God” (Psa 42:11; 43:5).

- Solomon said “A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance: but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken” (Prov 15:13).

- It is written, “Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend” (Prov 27:17).

Because the body is an integral part of our persons, something of the individual can be known by its various expressions. The countenance, or visage certainly is not a thorough index to the individual, but enough can be perceived in it to give the one beholding it some valuable information. In the case before us, the countenance of the people will betray their feelings toward Paul – whether they are raging with madness, or are open to sound reasoning.

Paul earnestly beholds the Jewish council as he speaks. Extemporaneously, he will frame his words in a manner appropriate for the situation. His is not a prepared speech to be delivered whether or not the people are listening. His words will rather be suited the occasion, being mingled with wisdom and deep spiritual insight. As such, the Lord will be able to work with them to accomplish certain things in Paul’s behalf.

HE LIVED IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE

“ 23:1b . . . Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.”

MEN

“ . . . Men . . .” Here Paul addresses his audience as fellow members of the race of Adam: “men.” The word translated “men” (**Andrej**) also assumes adulthood, when people are capable of reasoning and drawing sound conclusions. Paul does not insult his audience by speaking to them as though they were children. He does not lisp to them in baby talk, but rather makes an appeal to mature minds. If their heart is right, the Holy Spirit will assist them in coming to a sound conclusion. If their heart is not right, Paul’s manner of speaking will cause their corruption to erupt.

To my knowledge, there is not so much as a sentence of Scripture that is addressed to immature and childish minds. I understand that in the instruction of immature children the word of God must be opened and expounded. However, the Scripture itself is never addressed to those whose rational powers have not yet been matured. Even children are addressed as thinkers (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:1-2). Yet, the Scripture is thoroughly capable of making young minds “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15). It is not that the Scripture itself is adapted to the immature mind. It rather is conducive to the development of a mature mind. Working with the Scripture, the Holy Spirit will cause the child’s mind to eventually be elevated spiritually. The marvelous horizon of truth will burst upon the child as he advances in “wisdom.”

Notwithstanding, in this text, Paul is not addressing children, but mature “men.” He speaks to them in such a manner as to provoke deep and sound reasoning. He knows that their countenance will reflect their manner of reasoning, whether sound or perverse. Without undue elaboration, I have noticed a current tendency in preaching that is most uncomely. Much of what is being delivered to

the people is juvenile. It does not appeal to the reasoning capacity of the people, especially those who are in Christ Jesus. Shallow preaching will inevitably produce shallow and unthinking people.

One of the great transgressions of the modern church is that some of its preachers and teachers address the people as though they were not the children of God – as though they had not been regenerated, given a new heart, and been made “accepted in the beloved”

It is my opinion that those to speak to the people of God should remove from their speaking terms like, “I hope you understand what I am saying,” or “Are you getting this?” or “I’ll explain that later.” If a word is being addressed particularly to children, speak briefly to them. But the majority of what the man of God says should be addressed to those who have the capacity of understanding. This is precisely how Paul addressed Agrippa when he said, “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8). The truth of what men are and what they prefer is made known in the arena of thought, cogitation, and mental challenge.

AND BRETHREN

“ . . . and brethren . . . ”

Paul also addresses them as the people of promise, the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: “brethren.” This is how Peter addressed the Jews on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:29). It is how Peter addressed the crowd in the Temple (Acts 3:17). This is how Stephen began his address to the Jewish council (Acts 7:2). It is how Paul addressed the Jews in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:38).

Even though those to whom Peter, Stephen, and Paul spoke may have been bad Jews, they spoke to them as sincere Jews – as the progeny of Abraham. They framed their words as though those before them were familiar with the Scriptures, and were serious about their identity with God. It is only when hostility was detected that holy men addressed the people as foes. Much of this detection was perceived in the countenance of the people.

When Paul and Silas addressed the heathen in Lystra, they did not call them “brethren,” but rather referred to them as “men,” or “sirs” (Lk 14:15). When Paul spoke at Athens, he did not speak to brethren in any sense, whether as Jews or as followers of Jesus. He addressed them according to what they were: “Ye men of Athens” (Acts 17:22).

A careful examination of the epistles will confirm that Paul, Peter, and John wrote to the churches according to what they were in Christ: “called to be saints” (Rom 1:7), “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (1 Cor 1:2), “the saints” (2 Cor 1:1), “faithful brethren” (Col 1:2), “in God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 1:1), “elect” (1 Pet 1:2), “them that have obtained like precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1), “they that have known the truth” (2 John 1:1) . . . etc.

One of the great transgressions of the modern church is that some of its preachers and teachers address the people as though they were not the children of God – as though they had not been regenerated, given a new heart, and been made “accepted in the beloved” (Eph 1:6). Too often their messages are peppered with sayings like, “we are all sinners,” “we are just like those Israelites,” and “we never really want to do what God requires of us.” All of this is supposedly sanctified by statements like, “God accepts us just as we are,” “You can’t do anything to make God love you less,” and “God can handle your weaknesses.” Of course, such speech neutralizes any truth that may be said, disarming the soul, and producing a kind of spiritual laxity that gives Satan the advantage.

When Jesus spoke to the people, He addressed them for what He perceived them to be – which was precisely what they were.

- He addressed the scribes and Pharisees as a “generation of vipers” (Matt 23:33).

- He spoke to the unbelieving Jews during His ministry as a generation who chided Him for not doing what they wanted. “But whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented” (Matt 11:16-17).

- To His disciples He said, “Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations” (Luke 22:28). When their faith was weak, He addressed them as those who could have maintained faith: “How is it that YE do not understand . . . How is it that YE have no faith” (Matt 16:11; Mk 4:40).

Thus Paul addresses his audience according to what they really are. As he speaks, he looks steadfastly at them, ready to detect a favorable or unfavorable change in their countenance.

I HAVE LIVED IN ALL GOOD CONSCIENCE

“ . . . I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.” Other versions read, “perfectly good conscience,” NASB “a clear conscience,” NRSV “my life has been upright,” BBE “perfectly clear conscience,” GWN and “perfectly good conscience.” AMPLIFIED

We live in a generation that could not receive this statement. I do not doubt that the accuracy of such an expression would be immediately questioned by most professing Christians. The reason for this circumstance is that the church of our time has learned to live with willful and persistent sin. Church staffs and theological schools are maintained with sinners in mind rather than those of good conscience. However, throughout history there have been people who maintained their life with spiritual consistency. This does not mean they never sinned, but sin was not their manner – and Paul is speaking of the manner of his life.

The Scriptures draw attention to several people who were especially noted for the righteous manner of life.

- **ABEL.** “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.” (Heb 11:4)

- **ENOCH.** “And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.” (Gen 5:22)

- **NOAH.** “These are the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God.” (Gen 6:9)

- **JOB.** “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.” (Job 1:1)

- **ASA.** “But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days” (1 Ki 15:14).

- **HEZEKIAH.** “I beseech thee, O LORD, remember now how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight. And Hezekiah wept sore” (2 Ki 20:3).

- **DAVID.** “I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart” (Psa 101:2).

- **ZECHARIAS AND ELIZABETH.** “There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God,

walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” (Luke 1:6)

There are other noble souls against whom no sin is recorded. It is not that these people never sinned. Rather, they were noted for their righteousness and integrity. With them, sin was an exception, not the rule. These include the following, and accounts for their lives prior to the establishment of the new birth and the new covenant.

- Abel.
- Enoch.
- Noah.
- Melchizedec.
- Joseph.
- Samuel.
- Daniel.
- Shadrach.
- Meshach.
- Abednego.
- John the Baptist.
- Nathanael.

Each person is responsible for living up to what they do know. While it is true that it appears as though relatively few people actually do this, Paul was one of those noble souls who lived in such a manner.

Once again, the point being made is not that these persons needed no Savior, or that they were without sin. The point is that sinning was not their manner. Their primary characteristic was living with a heart and mind to please the Lord. That is what is involved in living “in all good conscience.” Prior to the coming of Christ and regeneration the Psalmist wrote, “God is in the generation of the righteous” (Psa 14:5). Zecharias, father of John the Baptist, confessed this to be the manner of the Lord. “And His mercy is on them that fear Him from generation to generation” (Luke 1:50).

The same is true of Paul prior to his conversion, who confessed he lived in “all good conscience” until the very day he was speaking. If it is countered that Paul persecuted the church, and therefore could not have had a good conscience, consider the following. The conscience is not an infallible guide, although God has made no provision for violating it. Even when a person may have drawn the wrong conclusions about right and wrong, he cannot go against his conscience, but must do what he does as unto the Lord. That is the whole point of Romans 14. When Paul wrote, “And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin” (Rom 14:23), he was addressing the matter of the conscience. It is another way of saying, “Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind” (Rom 14:5). All of this postulates that a person is living to please the Lord. God will direct such a soul, for his heart is tender and directable. For those outside of Christ we have the examples of the Ethiopian eunuch, Saul of Tarsus, and Cornelius. For those in Christ whose conscience requires further training, this word is given: “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Phil 3:15). Paul then adds that each believer is responsible for living in strict accord with what they do know, thereby maintaining a good conscience: “Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind” NKJV (Phil 3:16). Each person is responsible for living up to what they do know. While it is true that it appears as though relatively few people actually do this, Paul was one of those noble souls who lived in such a manner.

When Paul persecuted believers, he thought he was serving God. He was doing what he perceived the Law of God to have commanded (Deut 13:1-5; 18:20; Zech 13:3). Speaking of that period of his life, he confessed to Agrippa, “I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). His actions were caused by ignorance and unbelief, as he said in First Timothy 1:12-13: “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.” That ignorance and unbelief was not a preferred mode of life for Paul. It was brought on by a lack of knowledge and understanding. He had not seen the Prophets or Jesus Christ from a proper perspective. However, when Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, then Saul of Tarsus, he immediately believed and willingly yielded, inquiring what the Lord wanted him to do.

While this is something that cannot be codified or comprehended statistically, there is a sense in which Paul’s manner of maintaining a “good conscience” allowed him to respond more immediately to the truth. A man who has been conscientiously living for the Lord, though incorrect in his perception, can be more apt to respond to the truth when it confronts him.

THE HIGH PRIEST COMMANDS PAUL TO BE SMITTEN

“ 2 And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.”

THE HIGH PRIEST ANANIAS

This Ananias was doubtless the son of Nebedinus (Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 5, section 3), who was high priest when Quadratus, who preceded Felix, was president of Syria. He was sent bound to Rome by Quadratus, at the same time with Ananias, the prefect of the temple, that they might give an account of their conduct to Claudius Caesar (Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 6, section 2).
Albert Barnes

While there is some controversy concerning the precise identity of Ananias the high priest, I consent to the record of Josephus, together with several commentators. To me, the significant thing to note is that at the time of our text, the high priest was appointed by the political dignitary – at this time, Agrippa. Most historians and commentators concur that this was the custom at the time of our text.

The above being true, we see what a degeneration had taken place in the matter of high priests. According to God’s Law, high priests were to be descendants of Aaron, who was appointed by God as the first high priest (Num 17:2-10; Lev 21:10; 1 Chron 6:49; Heb 5:4; 7:11-14). The responsibilities of the high priest were as follows.

- **Had charge of the sanctuary and altar.** (Num 18:2-7)
- **Offered sacrifices.** (Heb 5:1; 8:2).
- **Designated subordinate priests.** (Num 4:19)
- **Officiated at the consecration of the Levites.** (Num 8:11-21).
- **Had charge of the treasury.** (2 Kgs 12:10; 22:4).
- **Light the lamps in the tabernacle.**
- **Burn incense.** (Ex 27:20-21).
- **Place showbread on the table every Sabbath.** (Ex 30:7-8; 1 Sam 2:28; 1 Chron 23:13).
- **Offer for his own sins of ignorance.** (Lev 4:3-12).

- **Officiate on the day of atonement.** (Ex 30:10; Lev 16:1-34; Heb 9:7).
- **Judicial responsibilities.** (Num 5:15; Deut 17:8-13).
- **Number the people.** (Num 1:3).
- **Officiate at the choice of a ruler.** (Num 27:18-21).
- **Distribute the spoils of war.** (Num 31:26-29).

All of the duties of the high priest had to do with things pertaining to God. This is stated succinctly in Hebrews. “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins” (Heb 5:1). This same thing is true in the various functions and offices that are found within the church.

Yet, at the time of our text, the office of the high priest was an appointment by civil authorities. Further, when the civil and the religious stood together, the civil was, according to appearance, in control (Matt 27:12-13; Acts 22:30; 23:10; 24:20-22; 25:10-12).

This perfectly accords with the depiction of the false church in the book of the Revelation. There, the church thrust into society by the wicked one is set forth as “a great whore that sitteth upon many waters,” and “with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication” (Rev 17:1-2). Later, the Spirit unravels some of the mystery that surrounded her. She was being carried along by a “beast,” which is confirmed to be governments, headed up by “kings” that make war with the Lamb (Rev 17:3-13).

This appears to be one of Satan’s consistent strategies. It involves the corruption of religion, so that it is closer to the world than it is to God. Then there is a merger of religion with the world, which results in the inevitable dominance of the world over religion. We see this taking place in a more apparent way in our text, with God-ordained offices being managed by Rome. But this did not occur until Judaism had been so corrupted it bore very little resemblance to the institutions Moses had put in place under the direction of Almighty God.

This is not the place to be diverted to a lengthy discussion on this subject. However, it ought to be apparent that this very same strategy has been employed against the church. It is, however, totally inexcusable because of the superior knowledge, power, and resources that have been vouchsafed to the church. However, even though such gracious gifts are thoroughly adequate to protect and empower the church, unused they fall in the street as truth did during the time of Isaiah (Isa 59:14).

SMITE HIM ON THE MOUTH

“ . . . the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.” Other versions read, “strike him on the mouth.” NKJV

And what was it that provoked this command? It was that Paul affirmed, “Brethren, I have lived my life with a perfectly good conscience before God up to this day.” NASB

It is obvious that Ananias the high priest was convinced Paul was taking the name of the Lord in vain. One of the Ten Commandments reads, “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain” (Ex 20:7). Other versions read “misuse the name,” NIV “use for an evil purpose,” BBE “use lightly.” CJB “idly utter,” DARBY “use . . . carelessly,” GWN “swear falsely,” TNK and “lightly or frivolously, in false affirmations or profanely].” AMPLIFIED

Thus, Paul’s confession of having maintained a good conscience “before God” was viewed as a reckless use of the name of the Lord. The high priest viewed this as an insincere attempt to bring God into the matter at hand. However, Ananias’ was himself insensitive to God, and thus unable to

decipher a “good confession” (1 Tim 6:13). His diagnosis of Paul had been sifted through his corrupted view of God and the Scriptures.

When men filter Scripture and events through their religious tradition, they cannot possibly arrive at the truth of a matter. Their conclusions will always be erroneous, because the filter of tradition removes reality and proper perspective from what they are considering. Their thoughts are actually molded by their religious tradition, and where the truth contradicts their tradition, they have no capacity to detect that variance.

It also ought to be noted that religious tradition is never willing to take a secondary or subordinate position. Once embraced, it assumes headship over even the truth itself. This is a circumstance from which men must be delivered. Peter alludes to this when he wrote, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers ” (1 Pet 1:18).

Although it may be attended by considerable difficulty and challenge, no believer is obligated to maintain allegiance to what is perceived as vain religious tradition.

Although it may be attended by considerable difficulty and challenge, no believer is obligated to maintain allegiance to what is perceived as vain religious tradition. It is quite true that those who conscientiously and energetically maintained erroneous traditions often find them lurking in nearly every corner of their thinking, it is equally true that Christ has freed us from their dominion. Even though a strong grip of misconception may appear, it can be overcome because it is of the world, and faith is the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5).

Another Valuable Lesson

The wicked are often allowed to vent their rage against the people of God with no apparent restraint. Paul himself reported that he was beaten of the Jews “five times” (2 Cor 11:24).

Those in Christ should not be naive about those who persecute them. Although it may appear as though they are in control, they are not. Persecution and martyrdom suggest that the adversaries of the saints have dominion over them. Thus were the prophets persecuted and martyred (Matt 5:12; 23:31), Stephen was slain (Acts 7:58-60), as well as James (Acts 12:2). Paul and Silas were beaten and imprisoned at Philippi (Acts 16:37).

When the saints of God are opposed with seeming impunity, or exemption from appropriate punishment, several things are being made known.

- That the world does, in fact, hate both Christ Jesus and those who are joined to Him (John 15:18).
- That the world cannot receive the Spirit of truth (John 14:17).
- The eyes of the ungodly have been blinded by the prince of this world (2 Cor 4:4).
- That those who are of the world love darkness rather than light (Joan 3:19).
- That Christ’s Kingdom and those who have been translated into it are not of this world (John 8:23; 18:36; Col 1:13; John 15:19).
- That truth and error cannot be reconciled (2 Thess 2:10; 1 John 2:21; 3:18-19; 4:6; 3 John 1:3).
- That there is a sense in which persecution is in order that the saints might be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God (2 Thess 1:4-5).
- That it may be confirmed that it is a righteous thing for God to judge the wicked for

their actions (2 Thess 1:6).

While the welfare of the saints is a matter with which our Lord is identified, it is always within the greater context of the glory and purpose of God, and in view of the end of the world and eternal judgment. None of God's dealings with men are independent of these considerations. Those who declare a kind of sympathetic God who earnestly wants to be involved in the intricacies of human life, have seriously misrepresented the case. Actually, the objective of God is to involve us in what He is doing. That is precisely why, in Christ, we are said to be "joined unto the Lord" (1 Cor 6:17). It is why He has created us to do good works that HE has ordained (Eph 2:10). In the last analysis, it is men who are being changed into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18), and being prepared for eternity. It is why the saved are citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20), and live unto the Lord (2 Cor 5:15).

If we do not remember these things, suffering and opposition may confuse us – and confusion is an arena in which Satan can work more freely. It is by far best to culture the proper spiritual understanding, which makes for a more tender and responsive heart. Blessed is the person who understands these things.

THE RESPONSE OF PAUL

“ 3 Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?”

This text has moved some to speak critically of Paul, reminding us that when Jesus was led like a lamb to the slaughter He did not open His mouth (Isa 53:7; Acts 8:32). However, the circumstances of these two occasions are not the same. First, Jesus was being "delivered up" by God Himself (Rom 8:32). This was done according to God's own "determinate counsel and foreknowledge" (Acts 2:33). Additionally, the suffering of the Lord was in strict accord with God's "prophets" (Acts 3:18).

Additionally, Jesus did not maintain total silence during the events leading to His death. When Jesus stood before the high priest prior to being delivered to Pilate, He refused to answer him (Mk 14:60-61). When chided by Pilate for not answering him, Jesus answered, "Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin" (John 19:11). During His earthly ministry, Jesus severely upbraided the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23), leaders among the people, as well as the lawyers (Lk 11:46-52). Prophets also were noted for rebuking priests and rulers (Isa 29:10; Jer 5:31; Mal 1:6).

Suffice it to say, sin and wickedness was always rebuked wherever it existed. The ruler of the people was not excluded from a godly denunciation, and the Law was not to be interpreted so as to lead men to that conclusion.

GOD SHALL SMITE THEE!

“Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whited wall . . .” Other versions read, “God will strike you, you whitewashed wall,” NKJV “God will give blows to you, you whitewashed wall,” BBE “God will slap you, you corrupt hypocrite!” NLT and “God is about to strike you, you whitewashed wall!” AMPLIFIED

It is not certain that this was a prophecy of a particular Divine judgment. However, as a matter of historical record, Ananias the high priest was slain about five years later.

Ananias perished by the daggers of the Sicarii (Josephus, 'Bell. Jud,' 2. 17:9), at the beginning of the Jewish war under the procuratorship of Florus, in the year A.D. 66. He had been previously deposed from the high priesthood by King Agrippa toward the close of the government of Felix ('Ant. Jud.,' 20. 8:8), about A.D. 59, or early in A.D. 60, less than two years from the present time. JOSEPHUS

“ . . . and if this was Ananias, the son of Nebedaeus, as is generally thought, it is remarkable, that five years after this, in the beginning of the wars of the Jews with the Romans, this Ananias, hiding himself under the ruins of a conduit, was discovered, and taken out, and killed fl 144 : and no doubt but he very fitly calls him.” JOHN GILL

SITTEST THOU TO JUDGE ME?

“ . . . for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?” Other versions read, “in violation of the Law,” NASB “your yourself violate the Law,” NIV “in defiance of the Law,” AMPLIFIED “breaking the Law,” DARBY and “transgressing the Law.” GENEVA

I understand the law to which Paul referred – the law Ananias violated – to be found in Leviticus 19:15: “ Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment : thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor.” Nicodemus, a Pharisee, referred to this kind of abuse during the mock-trial of Jesus. “Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth?” (John 7:51). He doubtless referred to the law specified in Deuteronomy 1:17: “Ye shall not respect persons in judgment; but ye shall hear the small as well as the great; ye shall not be afraid of the face of man; for the judgment is God's: and the cause that is too hard for you, bring it unto me, and I will hear it.” Solomon also wrote, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Prov 18:13).

Thus Ananias commands that Paul be struck on the mouth, interrupting what he was saying, making an unwarranted assumption, and acting rashly before all of the facts and defense had been made. This kind of conduct was even wrong under Roman law (Acts 16:37-39; 22:25-30). The Mosaic law forbade rash and unrighteous judgment (Ex 23:2,7; Lev 19:15; Deut 1:17; 16:18,19). The Psalms, Proverbs, and the Prophets also addressed the matter of injustice with remarkable clarity (Psa 82:2; Prov 17:15; Isa 26:10; Jer 22:3-5; Lam 3:34-36; Amos 5:11-12). The conduct of Ananias was thoroughly unacceptable.

The point here is that injustice is always wrong, and the fact that those committing it hold a high position does not change that fact. Wrong is never sanctified by a superior religious or political position. In matters of morality, there can be no respect of persons. That is how God views the matter, and He responds accordingly.

THE OBSERVATION OF THOSE STANDING BY

“ 4 And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?” Other versions read, “You dare to insult God’s high priest?” NIV “Do you say such words against God’s high priest?” BBE “Doest thou rail against the high priest of God?” DARBY “Doest thou reproach the priest of God?” MRD “Do you rail at and insult the high priest of God?” AMPLIFIED and “Is that the way to talk to God's High Priest?” LIVING

Do not be unduly concerned about this question, for it is not to be our initial consideration. When those who stood by referred to Ananias as “God’s high priest,” they altered the way we are to consider this matter. They brought God into the matter, and that changed everything.

The office of the high priest was a critical one. In the epistle to the Hebrews, a point is made of the primary function of this office, and the manner in which it was populated.

THE PRIMARY FUNCTION OF THE HIGH PRIEST

First, the high priest focused on things relating to God – i.e. to the people of Israel and their relationship to God. “For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things

pertaining to God” (Heb 5:1). Another statement relating to his function reads, “For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices : wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer” (Heb 8:3).

The matter in this text has nothing whatsoever to do with doing “things pertaining to God.” The entire council, including the high priest, has been convened upon the demand of a political official, who had “commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear” before him (Acts 22:30). The objective was to determine the legitimacy of the charges brought against Paul. Therefore, at this time, they are not meeting as a Jewish council, but as subordinates of the Roman empire. Yet, Ananias conducts himself as though he was in charge of the whole affair. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, he had done what the Roman official had not dared to do – commit an infraction of Roman law by striking a Roman citizen without having established an authentic charge against him.

THE MEANS OF SELECTING AND APPOINTING A HIGH PRIEST

By Divine intention, the high priest could not assume his office. Precisely as the first high priest Aaron was called of God, so must every high priest be appointed in strict comportment with the will of God. Thus, it is written, “And no man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron” (Heb 5:4). This was largely done through following the proper Levitical lineage, particularly through Aaron (Ex 27:21; 28:43; 29:9).

There were additional qualifications that had to be met. For example, they included being without any kind of physical blemish. He could not be blind, lame, or have any physical deformity (Ex 21:17-23). The high priest could not marry a prostitute, widow, or a divorced woman (Lev 21:7-15).

The point here is that simply saying Ananias was the “high priest of God” did not make it so. Those who criticize Paul for the manner in which he spoke have not examined the case carefully enough. He did not break God’s Law unless this was really “the high priest of God.” If he did not meet the qualifications, he was nothing more than a hypocrite, like the rest of the Pharisees and Sadducees that were present. It is always proper to expose works of darkness (Eph 5:11). This is in the same category as John the Baptist rebuking Herod (Matt 14:3-4; Mk 6:18). No office is exempted from the rebuke of sin.

PAUL AGAIN RESPONDS

“ 5 Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.” Other versions read, “I did not know,” NKJV “I was not aware,” NASB “I did not realize,” NIV and “I was not conscious of.” AMPLIFIED

Himself a Pharisee (Acts 23:6; 26:5), Paul was very familiar with the requirements of the Law. The text to which Paul refers is Exodus 22:29; ‘Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people’ (Ex 22:28). The text postulates a valid ruler of the people.

Also, Paul had not reviled or railed on Caiaphas, which presumes false and prejudiced charges. Jesus referred to Herod as a “fox” (Lk 13:32). John the Baptist referred to a cluster of Pharisees and Sadducees as a “generation of vipers” (Matt 3:7). Jesus did the same (Matt 23:33).

“Soon after the holding of the first council at Jerusalem, Ananias, son of Nebedenus, was deprived of the high priest’s office, for certain acts of violence, and sent to Rome, whence he was after released, and returned to Jerusalem. Between the death of Jonathan, who succeeded him and was murdered by Felix, and the high priesthood of Ishmael, who was invested with that office by Agrippa, an interval elapsed in which this dignity was vacant. This was the precise time Paul was apprehended; and the Sanhedrin being destitute of a president, Ananias undertook to discharge the office. It was probable Paul was ignorant of this circumstance (Acts 24:17).” **NOTE** : Acts 24:17 relates to the continuation

of this very event, in which Paul states that he had been away from Jerusalem for “many years.” That is the reason for the last statement in this quotation.

TREASURY OF SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE

It ought to be noted that Paul did not retract his statement, or say that he repented for making it. This indicates that he did not regard Ananias in the same way as those who were with him. His statement concerning not realizing that Ananias was the high priest is explained in the attending box. However, it seems to me that more is involved here than what appears on the surface.

The fact that Paul brushes the whole matter aside, and proceeds in his assessment of the situation confirms to me that he recognized Ananias was really not “God’s high priest.” Instead, he was to genuine high priests what “false prophets” (Matt 7:15) were to God-sent prophets, or “false apostles” were to genuine apostles (2 Cor 11:13). There is such a thing as religious frauds. I know of no word from God that says such men are to be honored as though they were sanctified by the office they usurped, and were honored by the Lord as though they were functioning lawfully. That is precisely why God is said to have no respect of persons (Rom 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; 1 Pet 1:17).

PAUL CAPITALIZES ON THE MOMENT

“ 6 But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.”

It is evident from Paul’s conduct that the peace of God was keeping his heart and his mind (Phil 4:7). Even though the circumstances were tumultuous – he had been beaten and jostled about, and the air was charged with dissension and animosity – yet Paul has the presence of mind to survey the situation with the intention of adopting a wise course of action. He has not been unduly distracted by the events of the last two days, but is thinking and acting with godly discretion. That is the effect of letting, or allowing, the peace of God to “rule” in the heart (Col 3:15).

In today’s “Christian” world, there is not much being said concerning the reality and nature of the “peace of God.” In my judgment, a considerable amount of sin can be traced directly to the absence of the peace that is given to the believer. Jesus said this peace directly bore on being troubled and afraid (John 14:1,27). The absence of these stabilizing qualities leaves a gaping door through which Satan is sure to enter.

PAUL PERCEIVED THE CIRCUMSTANCE

“But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees.” Other versions read, “knowing that some of them were,” NIV “noticed that some were,” NRSV “saw that half of them were,” BBE “realized that,” CSB and “was well aware.” NJB

The Amplified Bible reads, “When Paul perceived—from the discussion which plainly had by this time arisen between the parties. that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees.” The Pulpit Commentary takes a different view: “Possibly the Pharisees in the Sanhedrim were disgusted at the brutal act of Ananias, and were not sorry to hear him called “a whited wall;” and St. Paul’s quick intelligence saw at a glance that the whole council did not sympathize with their president, and divined the cause.” Adam Clarke is of the opinion that Paul knew some of these men from former associations, even though he had been absent from them for fourteen years (Gal 2:1).

The point here, however, is not HOW Paul arrived at this proper conclusion, but that he was alert and sensitive to assess the situation. Once again we see the selflessness of this man of God. The fact that he has been beaten, maligned, and is presently being examined by a Roman military man and a

group of spiritually deranged Jews had not turned his eyes inward. It ought to be noted here that some people live in such a spiritually sloppy manner that all trouble is thought to be punishment for unacceptable conduct. Note that such a reaction is never credited to Paul.

With a keen and perceiving eye, Paul assessed the audience before him. He sees what it is most expedient to say – something that will turn the attention from himself, for he was not the transgressor in this matter.

A PHARISEE CALLED INTO QUESTION CONCERNING THE HOPE OF THE RESURRECTION

“Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.”

It should not surprise us that some have criticized Paul on this matter, even affirming that he lied. I rather see this as a fulfillment of a certain promise that Jesus delivered to the twelve. “But when they shall lead you, and deliver you up, take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate: but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye: for it is not ye that speak, but the Holy Ghost” (Mark 13:11).

“Orobio charges this upon Paul as an artful manner of declining persecution, unworthy the character of an upright and honest man. Chubb, a British Deist of the seventeenth century, charges it upon Paul as an act of gross ‘dissimulation, as designed to conceal the true ground of all the troubles that he had brought upon himself, and as designed to deceive and impose upon the Jews.’ He affirms also that ‘Paul probably invented this pretended charge against himself to draw over a party of the unbelieving Jews unto him.’ See Chubb’s Posthumous Works, vol. ii. p. 238.” ALBERT BARNES

Divine deliverances are not always wrought by straightforward means. For example, when Samuel was sent by God to anoint David king he responded, “How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me.” The Lord responded, “Take an heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the LORD. And call Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show thee what thou shalt do: and thou shalt anoint unto Me him whom I name unto thee” (1 Sam 16:2-3). A sophist might object, saying that is really not why Samuel was being sent. However, this is like replying against the Almighty. Samuel did, in fact, offer a sacrifice, even though the primary reason for going was to anoint David king over Israel. However, the Lord does not always divulge the fulness of His cause – particularly to His enemies. In His works, He has a mind to protect His people.

One might also reason that there was some form of duplicity in the commission given to the prophet Jonah. He was told to go to Nineveh and boldly preach, “Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). God referred to this message as “the preaching that I bid thee” (Jonah 3:2). Again, a sophist might reason that an all-knowing God knew Nineveh was really not going to be destroyed. But all such reasoning is foolish. This is a Divine manner, and it does not involve misrepresentation or lying. The fact that it is confusing to the carnal mind is really irrelevant. In the instance concerning the anointing of David, this was God’s way of protecting young David, ensuring the safety of Samuel, and suppressing the animosity of Saul. Only a wise God can accomplish such things with a single saying.

Therefore, in keeping with that Divine manner, Paul also previously appealed to Roman citizenship to avoid further beating. Now he capitalizes on the division among his accusers in order to deal with the dilemma before him.

Things To Consider

Concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead, this was a primary teaching of Paul, and was

one of the pillars of his reasoning (Acts 17:18,31-32; 1 Cor 15; Acts 13:34; 26:6,7,23,25). The same was true of the other apostles who were noted for preaching “through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2). The fact that all of this has a strange sound to many nominal Christians and their teachers is owing to a falling away, and is in no way related to the truth. Take away the fact of the resurrection, and faith and preaching are pointless. Consider the powerful reasoning of Paul on this matter. “But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable” (1 Cor 15:13-19). In light of this, Paul’s answer was a most excellent summation of the case.

Notice how Paul so loved the truth, that he would acknowledge it, even if flawed teachers gave assent to it. Himself a Pharisee, he knows very well that they acknowledged the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees denied it. Yet, these two parties had overlooked their theological differences in order to oppose Paul – much like Pilate and Herod, formerly enemies, were united in their opposition to Jesus Christ (Lk 23:12). If dissension could not be avoided, it just as well be between Paul’s enemies.

It seems to me that it is still in order for the divisions in professing Christendom to be pointed out in a discreet manner. Where division exists, regardless of the reason or its assumed acceptance, something is seriously wrong, for Christ is not divided (1 Cor 1:13). There is an undeniable unity in the Godhead Itself, and in the truth that issues forth from it. Division and variance have no place in the heavenly economy. Wherever division is found, Christ is not the prominent Person, and truth is not given the proper emphasis. That division may very well be the result of Divine judgment, as occurred in “a plain in the land of Shinar” (Gen 11:2-9). Those who pretend to traffic in the truth, yet defer to the traditions of men will not obtain the blessing of God. They will not experience “the unity of the Spirit” or “the unity of faith” (Eph 4:3,13). Such was the group before whom Paul is standing. They were a group of fundamentally divided religious people. They could live with this as long as an informed person was absent.

THERE AROSE A DISSENSION

“ 7 And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided. 8 For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.”

In a single discerning saying, Paul has transferred the attention from himself to the sectarian bodies before him. If confusion is found, it ought to be among those who oppose the truth, not those who claim allegiance to it. This circumstance will also bear a powerful witness to the Roman captain. Now he will see the real troublemakers were the ones raising the allegations against Paul.

THERE AROSE A DISSENSION

“And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees: and the multitude was divided . . .” Other versions read, “a dispute broke out,” NIV “There was an argument,” BBE “there was a tumult,” DARBY “a quarrel,” GWN “fell upon one another,” MRD “there arose a debate,” PNT “there was a discord,” LITV “going at each other in heated argument,” MESSAGE and “an angry dispute.” WEYMOUTH

This tactic of Paul would be considered rude and unwise by many clerics of the day. The general view of things is that we should avoid matters that are controversial, and just speak of things on which we are all agreed. There is an element of truth to that view, but it is actually very small

proportionately. Being of “one mind” is not achieved by ignoring doctrinal differences (Rom 15:6; 1 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8). It rather involves seeing the truth for what it is, embracing it, and then propagating it.

THE SADDUCEES SAY

“ For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit . . .”

In other words, they had a high estimation of themselves and their views – they, like the Pharisees, did not derive their origin from the ordination of God – unlike the priests, high priests, prophets, etc. As such, they bear a remarkable resemblance to several Christian sects of our day.

The Sadducees were a Jewish sect that came into being over one hundred years before Jesus was born. It is a sect that was founded on an interpretation of Moses’ writing, rather than on the Word of God itself. History tells us that the Sadducees called themselves “the righteous” (Epiphanius, *Adversus Hoereses*, 1, 4). They viewed themselves as “the straightforward, open, honest, and righteous.” *McCLINTOK & STRONG’S CYCLOPEDIA* In other words, they had a high estimation of themselves and their views – they, like the Pharisees, did not derive their origin from the ordination of God – unlike the priests, high priests, prophets, etc. As such, they bear a remarkable resemblance to several Christian sects of our day.

The Sadducees are mentioned fourteen times from Matthew through Acts. No other section of Scripture refers to them. They are referred to nine times in the Gospels (Matt 3:7; 16:1,6,11,12; 22:23-24; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27). They are mentioned five times in the book of Acts. Although they were not as prevalent as the Pharisees, they exercised considerable influence among the Jews. Even though they were fundamentally disagreed with the Pharisees, they were often found together (Matt 3:7; 16:1,6,11,12; 22:34; Acts 23:6,7,8). The context of their mention is consistently not good.

- They came with the Pharisees to the baptism of John, only to be rebuked by him when he referred to them as a “generation of vipers” (Matt 3:7).
- They joined with the Pharisees in tempting Jesus to show them “a sign from heaven” (Matt 16:1-4).
- Jesus warned His disciples, “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees” (Matt 16:6-12).
- They came to Jesus and tempted Him, presenting a theoretic scenario of a woman who had seven husbands, asking Him who would have her as his wife “in the resurrection,” but Jesus put them “to silence” (Matt 22:23-34).
- They also surface in our text, again joining with the Pharisees, and seeking to raise a punishable charge against Paul (Acts 23:6-8). In introducing this text, it is stated, “the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection” (Matt 22:23).

There is nothing good said about the Sadducees, although I do not doubt that they had some evidences of sincerity. The fact that they emphasized righteousness is certainly a favorable point, even though they did not practice righteousness, as this very text confirms.

WHAT THEY SAID

Yet, in spite of their identity with the Scriptures, they categorically denied the reality of the resurrection, angels, and spirits. They represent one of Satan’s initiatives. He moves people to claim an interest in the Word of God and the people of God, yet, who cannot receive what appears to be very plain declarations.

“ . . . that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.” That is a remarkable summary of willing ignorance. This was a religious body of people. In fact, there is not a single reference to them that is not within the context of the Scriptures and those who declared them. This included John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostle Paul. Yet, in spite of their identity with the Scriptures, they categorically denied the reality of the resurrection, angels, and spirits. They represent one of Satan’s initiatives. He moves people to claim an interest in the Word of God and the people of God, yet, who cannot receive what appears to be very plain declarations. For example, consider the three things they are here said to deny.

• **THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD.** Moses and the Prophets contain at least 33 references to the resurrection of the dead. Early in human history, Abraham reasoned what God would raise Isaac from the dead if he was slain on the altar of sacrifice (Heb 11:19). Job, living around the time of Abraham, reasoned concerning the resurrection of the dead (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27). David spoke of the resurrection of the dead (Psa 16:16:9–10; 17:15; 30:3; 49:15; 71:20; 86:13). The Prophets wrote extensively about the resurrection (Isa 25:8-9; 26:19; 37:1-14; Dan 12:2-3,13; Hos 6:2; 13:14). There were three specific resurrections record in the Scriptures with which the Sadducees were familiar: The son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17-23), The Shunnamite’s son (2 Kgs 4:32-37), and a corpse that was cast into the open grave of Elisha (2 Kgs 13:21).

• **ANGELS.** “Angels” are mention 100 times in Moses and the Prophets. Moses mentioned them 32 times (Gen-Deut).

• **SPIRIT.** “Spirit” or “spirits” are mentioned 235 times in Moses and the Prophets, with Moses mentioning the terms 27 times. The Holy Spirit is mentioned 14 times from Genesis through Ezekiel (Gen 1:2; 41:38; 2 Chron 15:1; 18:23; 20:14; 24:20; Isa 40:13,16; 59:19; 48:16; 59:19; 63:10,11,14; Ezek 11:5,24). He is referred to as “the Spirit of God,” “the Spirit of the Lord,” “His Spirit,” and “the Holy Spirit.” The word ”spirit” is used 230 times from Genesis through Malachi,” and “spirits” is used 14 times – sometimes of an “familiar spirit” or “familiar spirits ” (15 times). Angels are called “spirits” in Psalm 104:4).

There are five revealed categories of spirits – i.e. spirits with personalities, wills and influence.

- The God and Father, who is identified as “a Spirit” (John 4:24).
- The Holy Spirit
- Holy angels
- Evil spirits
- Human spirits. These spirits are located in at least three realms. The earth, a place of torment, and a place pf blessing. The latter two are the spirits of those who have passed from this life.

These occupy an unseen world of teeming activity. No spirit occupies a dormant and inactive realm. So far as revelation is concerned, all spirits are conscious and engaged in some kind of expression. Yet, the Sadducees denied the existence of four of them, evidently not perceiving that the God they professed to serve is a Spirit.

BUT THE PHARISEES CONFESS BOTH

“ . . . but the Pharisees confess both.” Other versions read, “acknowledge them all,” NKJV “acknowledge all three,” NRSV “have belief in all these,” BBE “affirm them all,” CSB “believe in all these things,” GWN “accept all three,” NJB “grant both,” TNT “acknowledge the existence of both,” WEYMOUTH and “acknowledging [their belief in] them both.” AMPLIFIED

The different versions represent the following: “both,” “all three,” and “all these.” The Greek word

from which the expression is translated has the following lexical meaning: “both of two, both the one and the other.” THAYER There is no disparity here. It is true, there were three things mentioned in defining the Sadducees: (1) no resurrection, (2) nor angel, and (3) no spirit (verse 8). However, only two categories were included, the resurrection and spirits, for angels are categorically said to be “spirits” (Psa 104:4; Heb 1:7). Of course, the resurrection of the dead postulates the existence of spirits, for in the resurrection, the spirit reenters the body. In resurrections accomplished prior to the end of the world, the spirit is said to have reentered into the body (1 Kgs 12:22). Jesus referred to this circumstance when He said, “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt 22:31-32). At the time, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were in the category of “spirits,” – absent from the body. But, in the resurrection, they would be united with their immortal bodies when all of the dead are raised.

Thus, the Pharisees are declared to have acknowledged the reality of the resurrection, and the existence of spirits. Whatever bad things that were found in this body of people, their acknowledgment of the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirits was a comely quality.

The irony here is that two bodies of people, so far apart theologically, would work together in sectarian interests (Matt 3:7; 16:1,6,11-12; 22:34; Acts 23:6-8). That is one of the fundamental weaknesses of sectarianism, or denominationalism. The interests of the institution reduce the necessity of having one mind in matters that have been revealed by God. There are some people who endeavor to get those of divers theological views to unite together, shelving their differences in the interest of perceived unity. It is questionable that this is noble.

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES RESPOND

“ 9 And there arose a great cry: and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man: but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.”

Paul's words have instantly changed the climate of the assembly. Suddenly, a significant number of those who were solidly against him are speaking in favor of Paul. Strictly speaking, this is not because of Paul's words. Rather, he spoke words through which God could work. He made no reference to the persuasions of either Pharisees or the Sadducees. He only referred to “the hope and resurrection of the dead” (verse 6). Yet, these were words that summoned Divine power into the situation – so much so, that a number of men were turned to favor Paul, forgetting the grievance that had been raised against him. It is written, “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD” (Prov 16:1). THE Lord can also put things into the heart of a person (Ezra 7:27; Rev 17:17). God is noted for putting wisdom into the hearts of men (Ex 31:6), as well as His law (Jer 31:33), and His fear (Jer 32:40). Within the framework of religious argumentation, such things may not sound good. However, in the context of trouble and opposition, the knowledge of this Divine aptitude is most comforting.

THERE AROSE A GREAT CRY

“And there arose a great cry . . .” Other versions read, “a great uproar,” NKJV “a loud outcry,” NASB “a great clamor,” NRSV “the shouting grew loud,” CSB “a great commotion,” NET “began shouting louder and louder,” IE and “vociferous [boistrous] yelling.” WILLIAMS

Here was a body of religious people that were anything but casual about their persuasions. It was a people that had been cultured by God through the means of the Law of Moses, sundry blessings, and various curses. Some of their conclusions were wrong, and they often found themselves in outright opposition to the Lord. They had a zeal, to be sure, but, as Paul stated it, it was “not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own

righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God” (Rom 10:2-3). These were among those who “followed after the law of righteousness,” yet had “not attained unto the law of righteousness” (Rom 9:32). This was because, as it is written, “they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law” (Rom 9:33).

The point here is that this kind of zeal is not common among many professing Christians. Perhaps that is why those so characterized remain in a state of spiritual ignorance. The landscape of contemporary religion is not at all conducive to aggressive preaching and teaching. A lot of such religion is characterized by a state of lukewarmness, much like that of Laodicea, whom Jesus said were “neither cold nor hot” (Rev 3:15a). The gravity of that circumstance is seen in the further word of Jesus: “I would that you were cold not” (Rev 3:15b). Other churches were characterized by this trait. The church at Pergamos was indifferent toward some in their number who held to the libertine doctrine of the Nicolaitines (Rev 2:14-15). The church at Thyatira was upbraided for allowing a false prophetess to flourish in their presence (Rev 2:20-24). Sardis is said to have had a name that it was alive, when it was really dead (Rev 3:1-3).

Such a description certainly did not apply to the crowd standing before Paul. They were anything but indifferent about the things they had formally embraced.

THE SCRIBES THAT WERE OF THE PHARISEES

“ . . . and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove . . .” Other versions read, “some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party,” NKJV “some of the teachers of the Law who were Pharisees,” NIV “certain scribes of the Pharisees' group.” NRSV

These persons (called in Heb. **uyrip]wOs** , *sopherim*; Gr. *grammatei~v*) were originally merely writers or copyists of the law, who followed this business as a mode of livelihood; but eventually they rose to the rank of a learned profession — becoming the doctors of the law and interpreters of the Scriptures . . . The period of the Sopherim begins with the return of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity, and ends with the death of Simon the Just (B.C. cir. 458-300), embracing nearly a hundred and sixty years.

McCLINTOK & STRONG

Originally, scribes copied the Scripture, and, in the process, became unusual in their acquaintance with the text of Scripture. Because of this, many of them became teachers. Of old time, a king had a scribe who inscribed things related to his reign (2 Kgs 12:10; 22:9,10; 25:19; 2 Chron 24:11).

Ezra the Scribe

Ezra was one of the better known scribes, and is described as “a ready scribe in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6), and “Ezra the priest, scribe, even a scribe of the words of the commandments of the LORD, and of His statutes to Israel” (Ezra 7:11; Neh 12:26,36). Again, he is referred to as “Ezra the priest, a scribe of the law of the God of heaven” (Ezra 7:12;21). During the time of Nehemiah, Ezra read the Law to the people (Neh 8:1-4). He was a specialist in Scripture.

Example of the Teaching of the Scribes

After beholding Elijah appearing “in glory” with Jesus, and when coming down the mount of transfiguration, the disciples referred to something taught by the scribes. “And His disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias must first come?” (Matt 17:10; Mal 4:5). Jesus declared that the teaching was correct, and that Elijah would come and restore all things. He then added that John the Baptist was a precursor to that event, with one exception. John the Baptist did not restore all things or turn the hearts of the fathers. Instead, the people “knew him not,” and “did to him

whatever they wished” (Matt 17:10; Mk 9:13).

When Herod learned of the birth of a Babe who was born “King of the Jews,” he sought counsel concerning “where Christ should be born.” That group included scribes: “And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born” (Matt 2:4).

In the thinking of these scribes, Paul’s agreement with a basic tenet of Scripture trumped the charges they had initially brought against him. Doubtless, God was at work in this matter, yet we have here the advantage of embracing the truth of Scripture.

While Jesus did not criticize the scribes for their knowledge of Scripture, He did point out their lack of righteousness: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). When comparing the teaching of the scribes with that of Jesus, the people observed that Jesus “taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt 7:29). When speaking of His suffering and death, Jesus told His disciples the “scribes” would play prominent role in it all: “From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt 16:21; 20:18). Our Lord’s scathing denunciation of the “scribes and Pharisees” is one of the premier examples of Divine rebuke (Matt 23:2-34).

In most of the references to the scribes and Pharisees, the scribes are mentioned first (Matt 5:20; 12:38; 15:1; 23:2, 13,14,15,23,25,27,29; Lk 5:21,30; 6:7; 11:44, 53; John 8:3; 23:9). Exceptions are Mk 7:1,5; Lk 14:2). My only point here is that the Jews, as a rule, held a higher regard for experts in Scripture, and that this was the result of the culture developed among those who took the Word of God seriously.

A Good Standard

Although the scribes were not the paragons of virtue, the idea set forth by noteworthy scribes represents a kind of Kingdom standard. It is those who have a grasp of the Word of God, and spend time in it, that are “worthy of double honor” (1 Tim 5:17). The idea of a spiritual leader preacher, or teacher that lacks a holy familiarity with the Word of God, is flawed to the core.

WE FIND NO EVIL IN THIS MAN

“ . . . saying, We find no evil in this man . . .” Having heard Paul mention “the hope of the resurrection,” these scribes immediately made an association with the Scriptures. They knew that holy men like Job and David anticipated the resurrection of the dead (Job 14:12-15; 19:25-27; Psa 17:15; 49:15). Isaiah prophesied of the resurrection (Isa 25:8; 26:19). Daniel prophesied of the resurrection (Dan 12:2,3), and was told to live out the rest of his life in such a hope (Dan 12:13). Hosea also spoke of the dead being raised (Hos 13:14).

Suddenly, these men forget about the charges that had been leveled against Paul, of being a rabble-rouser, trying to change the customs of the people, and defiling the Temple by bringing a Gentile into it. Now they conclude, “We find no evil in this man!” Other versions read, “We find nothing wrong with this man,” NASB/NIV and “We find nothing evil or wrong in this man.” AMPLIFIED

In the thinking of these scribes, Paul’s agreement with a basic tenet of Scripture trumped the charges they had initially brought against him. Doubtless, God was at work in this matter, yet we have here the advantage of embracing the truth of Scripture. God can use such people in purposes that lie beyond the narrow perimeter of their sect.

IF A SPIRIT OR AN ANGEL

“ . . . but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him . . .” Other versions read, “suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him,” NKJV “What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him,” NIV “what if he has had a revelation from an angel or a spirit?” BBE “Maybe a spirit or an angel actually spoke to him!” GWN “a spirit or an angel hath appeared to him,” TNT “if a spirit spake to him, or a messenger,” YLT and “But if a spirit or an angel [really] spoke to him—?” AMPLIFIED

These men were probably referring to Paul’s testimony as recorded in Acts 22:17-18: “And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me” (Acts 22:17-18). They could also have been referring to Paul’s initial testimony about the glorified Christ appearing to Him (Acts 22:6-11).

During Christ’s ministry, He once came to His disciples walking on the stormy waters in which they were attempting to sail. Upon seeing the Lord it is written, “they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit ; and they cried out for fear” (Mat 14:26; Mk 6:49). Again, following His resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples, who were assembled with many others. Upon seeing Him, “they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit ” (Luke 24:37). Additionally, the Jews had Scriptures that gave accounts of people seeing angels (Numbers 22:31; Judges 6:11,22; 13:6,16,21; 2 Sam 24:17; 1 Chron 21:16; 1 Kgs 13:13,18; 19:5; 1 Chron 21:15-16,20). The Jews were a body of people that were cultured to be cognizant of the existence of angels and spirits – ordinarily unseen to the human eye. This is not a persuasion that was learned from the Babylonians, Greeks or the Romans.

As a general rule, there is presently a near-total absence of the awareness of a spiritual world that is occupied by both congenial and hostile spirits. There is also too much speculative thinking about the Holy Spirit, and not enough sharing in the life and endowments that He gives. These conditions reflect the effects of the preaching and teaching of our time. It is too earth-centric, and does not move people to contend for some aspect of the truth as the scribes of our text did. They deferred to the Word of God, and as they did, they saw the injustice of what was happening – something in which they themselves had participated.

LET US NOT FIGHT AGAINST GOD

“ . . . let us not fight against God.” Other versions read, “found fighting against God,” NKJV “opposing God,” RSV “Let us not fight against God,” GENEVA “Let us not strive against God,” PNT “we may not fight against God,” YLT and “What if it turns out we’re fighting against God?” MESSAGE Most modern translations omit this expression.

This is precisely the same observation made by Gamaliel when the Jewish council were opposing the apostles: “But if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God ” (Acts 5:39). Another similar expression is “ withstand God” (Acts 11:17). One additional reflection addressed to those who stand against the Lord in their conduct is, “Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than He?” (1 Cor 10:22).

During times when religious people are heaping to themselves teachers after their own lusts (2 Tim 4:3), the awareness of fighting against, withstanding, or provoking the God of heaven is a foreign thought. Those who are not committed to the Lord simply do not think in this manner. Notice, with both Gamaliel and the scribes, fighting against God had to do with rejecting what was being preached in Jesus’ name. In both cases, the opponents thought they were resisting men. However, this was not the case. They were actually engaged in warfare against the God of heaven! I understand that Luke’s inclusion of these words without an explanation amounts to an affirmation that what they said was true. If this is not the case, he would have included a disclaimer.

PAUL IS REMOVED FROM THE TUMULT

“ 10 And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.”

THERE AROSE A GREAT DISSENSION

“And when there arose a great dissension . . .” Other versions read, “the dispute became so violent,” NIV “the argument became very violent,” BBE “a great tumult having arisen,” DARBY “the quarrel was becoming violent,” GWN “there was a great commotion among them,” MRD “Feeling was running high,” NJB “the conflict grew more violent,” NLT “there arose a great debate,” PNT “when the strife became more and more tense and violent,” AMPLIFIED and “ That was fuel on the fire. The quarrel flamed up and became so violent.” MESSAGE

A tremendous outbreak of controversy occurred when the scribes made their recommendation. The very notion of angels and spirits existing was more than the Sadducees could handle. Their respect was for their tradition, not for the Word of God. Even though the Scriptures they professed to have embraced contradicted what they had espoused, they could not see it. There is a reason for this. The god of this world had blinded their minds so the truth could not be seen on these matters (2 Cor 4:4).

The Holy Spirit works within the perimeter of truth. Satan works within the boundary of the lie, for he is the “father” of the lie (John 8:44). Because of what the Sadducees had chosen to accept concerning the resurrection, angels, and spirits, they were now bondslaves of the wicked one, and there was not a thing they themselves could do about their situation. Of course, many of the Pharisees had their areas of falsity also – such as that Jesus is the Christ. However, on these two matters – the resurrection of the dead and the existence of spirits – their view was correct. It was practical also, for they conceded the possibility that an angel or a spirit had spoken to Paul. Until now, they entertained no such consideration.

While the Sadducees and scribes were concerned about which position was superior, the captain was thinking of Paul’s rights as a Roman citizen, and of his own responsibility to maintain order and protect him. God had appointed this considerate leader to care of Paul. Therefore, he remained fully alert to the circumstance, and ready to take immediate action when it was required.

It ought to be noted that just as the Holy Spirit surely works with the truth, so Satan always works through the lie and misrepresentation. This is why false doctrine is such a dangerous thing. Not only is there such a thing as “doctrines of demons” (1Tim 4:1), such doctrines are like a portal through which Satan gains dominance over the people.

I do not doubt that much of the increase of immorality in the professing church is directly owing to the false doctrine that is being taught concern the nature of salvation, how to obtain salvation, the nature of spiritual life, the prominence of life in this present evil world, etc. If what is declared is, in fact, a lie, it provides an opportunity for the devil to enter, and he will not pass by such a chance.

Even in the gathering of our text, although one part of the crowd held a proper view of the subjects being disputed, yet the Sadducees provided a gaping hole through which Satan could enter, causing confusion and danger to the apostle Paul.

FEARING

“ . . . the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them . . .” Other

versions read, “was afraid Paul would be torn in pieces,” NKJV “fearing Paul would be pulled in two by them,” BBE and “the captain was afraid they would tear Paul apart, limb from limb.” MESSENGER

While the Sadducees and scribes were concerned about which position was superior, the captain was thinking of Paul’s rights as a Roman citizen, and of his own responsibility to maintain order and protect him. God had appointed this considerate leader to care of Paul. Therefore, he remained fully alert to the circumstance, and ready to take immediate action when it was required. We should not doubt that the same care is focused upon us as we are engaged in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Rom 12:1-2).

PAUL IS FORCEFULLY REMOVED

“ . . . commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.” Other versions read, “take him away by force,” NKJV “rescue him from them,” CSB “take him from among them,” GENEVA “drag Paul back,” GWN “take him forcibly from among them,” AMPLIFIED “snatch him out of their midst,” LITV and “get him out of there.” MESSAGE

To take someone by force is to master the situation, rescuing the potential victim without regard for those who would do him harm. These soldiers were prepared to fight if necessary. They took charge of the situation, bursting through the tumultuous crowd and whisking Paul away to safety. In this case, and at the command of the captain, the soldiers forced their wills upon the crowd, refusing to give place to the will of the people. Paul is now removed to the barracks where he would be safe and under the continual protection of the military.

Behold how God can work among men for the good of His people. It is no wonder that it is written, “My times are in Thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me” (Psa 31:15). Each believer, particularly those who are on the front lines of spiritual battle, do well to remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:39) – i.e. no adversarial influence. It is in this sense that we are “more than conquerors” (Rom 8:37). That is view of life from two vantage points: (1) The purpose of God. (2) The ultimate outcome.

CONCLUSION

This passage has confirmed the manner in which God protects His servants. His protection does not mean a lack of inconvenience, or even pain and serious threats. However, the Lord can marshal all the forces on earth and in heaven as well to guarantee that His servants will complete the work to which they have been called. Protection and guidance are not ends of themselves. That is, the comfort and convenience of His children are not what determine His gracious direction and ultimate protection. It is as the believer is fulfilling the role to which he has been appointed that these benefits are realized. No person who names the name of Christ should expect to sail through life comfortably and in ease for his sake alone.

Christ’s total life was wrapped up in His Father’s will. This was essential, because the chief work He was going to do involved laying down His life, and taking it up again (John 10:17-18). In order to do this, He had to focus the entirety of His life upon maintaining His association with the Father, speaking the words He was given to say, and doing the works assigned to Him.

The standard for God’s involvement with His children is set forth in the Lord Jesus Christ. While His youth was characterized by growing in wisdom, and stature, and favor with God and man, there is a sense in which it was incidental and preparatory. That is why so little is known of the first thirty years of His life. But when He commenced His ministry, and drew the sword out of its scabbard on the banks of the Jordan River, His life was marked by doing the will of God. For example, Jesus said

of His words, “For I have not spoken of Myself; but the Father which sent Me, He gave Me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak” (John 12:49). And again, “the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:10). He said of His works, “the works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me” (John 5:36). And again, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work” (John 9:4).

Christ’s total life was wrapped up in His Father’s will. This was essential, because the chief work He was going to do involved laying down His life, and taking it up again (John 10:17-18). In order to do this, He had to focus the entirety of His life upon maintaining His association with the Father, speaking the words He was given to say, and doing the works assigned to Him. In this, He has left the ultimate example for us all. That is one reason we are told, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus . . . And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil 2:5-8).

Paul later confessed in the same epistle that this is the way he lived, seeking to know and appropriate as much of Christ Jesus as possible. “But whatever former things I had that might have been gains to me, I have come to consider as [one combined] loss for Christ’s sake. Yes, furthermore, I count everything as loss compared to the possession of the priceless privilege (the overwhelming preciousness, the surpassing worth, and supreme advantage) of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord and of progressively becoming more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him [of perceiving and recognizing and understanding Him more fully and clearly]. For His sake I have lost everything and consider it all to be mere rubbish (refuse, dregs), in order that I may win (gain) Christ (the Anointed One), And that I may [actually] be found and known as in Him, not having any [self-achieved] righteousness that can be called my own, based on my obedience to the Law’s demands (ritualistic uprightness and supposed right standing with God thus acquired), but possessing that [genuine righteousness] which comes through faith in Christ (the Anointed One), the [truly] right standing with God, which comes from God by [saving] faith. [For my determined purpose is] that I may know Him [that I may progressively become more deeply and intimately acquainted with Him, perceiving and recognizing and understanding the wonders of His Person more strongly and more clearly], and that I may in that same way come to know the power outflowing from His resurrection [1 which it exerts over believers], and that I may so share His sufferings as to be continually transformed [in spirit into His likeness even] to His death, [in the hope], That if possible I may attain to the [2 spiritual and moral] resurrection [that lifts me] out from among the dead [even while in the body]. Not that I have now attained [this ideal], or have already been made perfect, but I press on to lay hold of (grasp) and make my own, that for which Christ Jesus (the Messiah) has laid hold of me and made me His own. I do not consider, brethren, that I have captured and made it my own [yet]; but one thing I do [it is my one aspiration]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward. So let those [of us] who are spiritually mature and full-grown have this mind and hold these convictions; and if in any respect you have a different attitude of mind, God will make that clear to you also. Only let us hold true to what we have already attained and walk and order our lives by that. Brethren, together follow my example and observe those who live after the pattern we have set for you.” AMPLIFIED (Phil 3:7-17).

My point is that life lived in this manner gets the attention of heaven. There are Divine commitments that cannot be fulfilled unless a person grows up into Christ and lives in this way. As long as this type of life is not lived, the person is out of harmony with Jesus. I do not know how it is possible to justify any other conclusion.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #94

A PLEA TO THE GOVERNOR

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

The night following the rescue of Paul from a confused and violent crowd, the Lord stood by him, assuring him that all would be well, and he would testify of Christ in Rome. However, during that night the prince of darkness was also working, moving more than forty men to make a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They made their intentions known to the council, asking them to have the captain bring Paul down so they could inquire of him. When he appeared, they thought, they would kill him. However, Paul's nephew heard the plot and told Paul, who informed one of the centurions to bring the young man to the chief captain, who then took appropriate action. He commissioned two centurions to marshal two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen, and safely conduct Paul to the governor Felix, doing so at the third hour of the night. A beast was also to be provided Paul for the trip. An accompanying letter of explanation was also sent.

GOD IS IN THE MATTER

As will be confirmed in the events that follow, and in spite of appearance, God was in this whole matter. As the "Governor among the nations" (Psa 22:28), He is present in the affairs of men, particularly when they involve His children. Up to this point, as well as in what is now reported, the Lord has been Paul's "Shield" (Psa 28:7; 119:114; 144:2). The believer knows the Lord has been his shield when he is able to exit from trouble, thereby frustrating the efforts of the wicked one to kill and destroy.

When the Scriptures affirm "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Psa 37:23), they do not mean trouble, pain, and inconvenience are not experienced. When Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees to go to a land that was promised to him, he faced a famine in the promised land (Gen 12:10). When he went down to Egypt to survive, he faced a king who wanted his wife for himself (Gen 12:15-16). When it came to his progeny Israel being delivered from Egypt, even for those who believed, the way to the promised land led through a desert "wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water" (Deut 8:15).

When these things are not understood, life becomes confusing – especially for those who are in Christ, yet lack understanding. This is precisely why faith must be nourished, and believers must grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). No one in Christ can afford to be naive. The nature of spiritual of life in Christ Jesus demands that eventually the individual is "filled with all knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9). This is why Paul prayed for the

churches, that the God of heaven would give unto them “the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,” the eyes of their understanding “being enlightened,” that they might “know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of the power to usward who believe” (Eph 1:17-19). No believer can afford to ignorant of these critical matters.

“ 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. 12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. 14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him. 16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul. 17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. 19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. 22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me. 23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; 24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor. 25 And he wrote a letter after this manner: 26

Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. 27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. 28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: 29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. 30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell. 31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. 34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; 35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.” (Acts 23:11-35)

THE LORD STANDS BY PAUL

“ 23:11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”

At this point we will see the value of maintaining the fellowship with Christ into which we have been called. That fellowship includes the matter of Divine direction, for “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23). Before us is an example of the Lord directing the way of Paul to a specific place. We also read of such direction in regard to the Thessalonians. “Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you” (1 Thess 3:11). In our text, the direction has to do with going to Rome. The details of how this will be accomplished are not provided – just the fact that the appointment is sure. It is enough to know the Lord will bring us safely to our appointed destination. We do not need to know all of the details. That is where faith and trust come in. As it is written, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own

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- **THE COUNSEL OF PAUL (23:17-22)**
- **THE CHIEF CAPTAIN ACTS IN FAVOR OF PAUL (23:17-18)**

- **THE ACCOMPANYING LETTER (23:25-30)**
- **THE SOLDIERS DELIVER PAUL SAFELY TO THE GOVERNOR (23:1-35)**
- **CONCLUSION**

understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Prov 3:5-6). Proper preaching and teaching will lead people to this conclusion , thereby relieving them of undue worry and fretting.

THE LORD STOOD BY HIM

“And the night following the Lord stood by him . . .” Other versions read, “the Lord stood at his side,” NKJV “stood near Paul,” NIV “appeared to Paul.” MRD

The presence of the Lord and the manifestation of that presence are two different things. The presence of the Lord is sure. As it is written, “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee ; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa 43:2). And again, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:5-6). Faith takes hold of this reality, and lives accordingly. However, as confirmed in this text, there are times when the Lord draws especially near and confirms this truth to our hearts, lest we be discouraged and faint because of unusual adversity.

This whole ordeal commenced in Acts 21:30 where Paul was forcibly removed from the Temple and the people sought to kill him. Beginning at that point, the following has taken place.

- Paul was beaten (Acts 21:32).
- He was rescued by a Roman captain and his soldiers (21:33a).
- He was bound with two chains (21:33b).
- A tumult resulted among the Jews which required that Paul be removed to the military barracks (21:34a).
- He was protected from the violence of the Jews (21:34b-35).
- Paul asked to speak to the people, and was given leave to do so (21:39-22:21).
- The Jews, hearing Paul speak of going to the Gentiles, erupted in anger, calling for his death (22:22-23).
- Paul is taken into the barracks for protection, where he was to be examined by scourging (22:24).
- Paul is bound with thongs (22:25).
- Having learned Paul was a Roman, he was delivered from the appointed scourging (22:25-29).
- The next day, Paul having been loosed, was brought down to appear before the Jewish council (22:30).
- Paul begins speaking to the council, and Ananias commands that he be struck on the mouth (23:1-2).

It will require diligence and spiritual discipline, but the people of God must extricate themselves from the misconception that the blessing of the Lord always means exemption from trouble.

- Paul rebukes the high priest, and is upbraided for speaking in such a manner to

“God’s high priest” (23:3-4).

- Paul acknowledges that it is improper to speak evil of the rulers, yet does not retract what he said, apparently not perceiving Ananias as being “God’s high priest” (23:5).

- Perceiving that the crowd is divided between Sadducees and Pharisees, Paul sets them against one another by saying he has been called into question concerning the hope of the resurrection (23:6).

- The crowd is divided, and a tumult arises that requires the rescue of Paul from being torn in two (23:7-10).

- Our text records the events of the second night of Paul’s incarceration, and preparations for the third day of the whole affair.

Now, how does your latest trial look compared to this solitary experience of Paul – which was by no means the most grievous of his trials? Learn from the text that Christ being with you does not translate into ease and convenience. The words of Eliphaz to Job are certainly applicable here: “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee” (Job 5:19). Sometimes the appointed path of the people of God leads through rivers and fire (Isa 43:2). For some, it leads them through the Red Sea and a scorching desert. For others, the appointed path leads through a lions den or a furnace of fire.

It will require diligence and spiritual discipline, but the people of God must extricate themselves from the misconception that the blessing of the Lord always means exemption from trouble. Sometimes it means being sustained through trouble – traveling through the sea and desert, and spending the night in prison, with your feet in stocks.

APPEARANCE OF JESUS TO PAUL

This is not the first or last time the Lord appeared to Paul. Few souls have been visited as frequently by the glorified Christ!

- **Appeared to him on the road to Damascus prior to his conversion** (Acts 9:3-22; 22:4-19; 26:13-15).

- **Appeared to him in the Temple** (Acts 22:17-21).

- **Stood by him while in confinement** (Acts 23:11).

- **Jesus tells Paul His grace is sufficient** (2 Cor 12:8-9).

Actually, the Lord was with Him all along, for we have been called into His fellowship. However, because of the extensiveness and vital nature of Paul’s ministry, these special appearances were granted. This is not the ordinary lot of those who are believers, but is reserved for those who have been called into unusual activity for the Lord. Those who boast of having Jesus talk to them, yet who are not engaged in a lofty work for the Lord, have probably not told the truth. That simply is not how Jesus has been revealed to us in Scripture.

BE OF GOOD CHEER

“ . . . and said, Be of good cheer, Paul . . . ’ ” Other versions read, “take courage,” NKJV “Keep up your courage,” NRSV “be constant,” DOUAY “don’t lose your courage,” GWN “be strong,” MRD “don’t worry,” CEV “don’t be afraid,” GNB “Be cheered,” LITV and “it’s going to be all right.” MESSAGE

One of the things that is clarified in the Scriptural presentation of Paul is that he thought in concert with the Lord. He did not suffer the distractions of professionalized religion and purely selfish ambition.

The words “be of good cheer” are translated from a single Greek word: **Qa,rsei** . The lexical meaning of the word is, “be of good courage, be of good cheer,” THAYER “don’t be afraid, take courage,” FRIBERG “cheer up,” UBS and “to have confidence and firmness of purpose in the face of danger or testing - to be courageous, to have courage, to be bold” LOUW-NIDA

This expression is used eight times in Scripture.

- Matthew 9:2: “Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee” (Matt 9:2).
- Matthew 9:22: “ Daughter, be of good comfort . . .” (Matt 9:22; Lk 8:48).
- Matt 14:27; Mk 6:50: “ Be of good cheer ; it is I; be not afraid” (Mat 14:27; Mk 6:50).
- Mark 10:49: “And they call the blind man, saying unto him, Be of good comfort , rise; he calleth thee” (Mark 10:49).
- John 16:33: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).
- Acts 23:11: “And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul ” (Acts 23:11).

Being of good cheer relates to having confidence, being courageous in the face of trouble or sorrow, and not being afraid. It has to do with going forward when the winds of adversity are against you, and possessing a stabilizing hope when circumstance appears to contradict the logic and expectation of hope.

This is a word – “Be of good cheer” – that reminds the hearer that the Lord is in control , and that nothing is too hard for Him. It relates to Him fulfilling His purpose even though it seems everything is working against it. It is a call to look away from the circumstances to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, who is bringing us to glory, and working all things together for our good. It reminds us that it is God’s purpose that is being brought to completion, not the projects and intentions of men. Every other will, whether it be that of our adversary the devil, or our peers, is subject to the will of God. That is simply the truth of the matter. When the Lord said to Paul, “Be of good cheer,” it was a revelation that he was in the center of the will of God, and therefore had no reason to fear the reappraisals of men.

YOU MUST BEAR WITNESS AT ROME

“ . . . for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.”

One of the things that is clarified in the Scriptural presentation of Paul is that he thought in concert with the Lord. He did not suffer the distractions of professionalized religion and purely selfish ambition. When he confessed, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21), he was telling the truth. Again he confessed, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). In our time, this is an exceedingly rare posture of life. Yet, it is really the only one that is acceptable. After all, Jesus “died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). It is staggering to the sensitive soul to hear preachers and teachers accenting what people want to do : the fulfilling of their dreams, etc. This is a fulfillment of the apostolic warning, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears ” (2 Tim 4:3). In other words, the time when preachers will deliver the message that is desired by men. That day has surely arrived! The fare that is being served up ranges from purely sectarian interests, to addressing subjects that have gained the attention of covetous

people and those anchored firmly to this world .

As Thou Hast Testified

Other versions read, “But on the night immediately following, the Lord stood at his side and said, as you have solemnly witnessed to My cause at Jerusalem,” NKJV As you have testified for Me in Jerusalem,” NRSV “as you have borne a faithful witness to Me in Jerusalem,” CJB and “You've told the truth about Me in Jerusalem” GWN Candidly, that is not the way Jesus speaks to those who are disobedient and out of His will!

Remember, when Paul had determined to go to Jerusalem, some brethren had attempted to dissuade him from going.

- “And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem ” (Acts 21:4).
- “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem ” (Acts 21:12).

Reasoning on these texts, some have affirmed that Paul was out of the will of God by going to Jerusalem. However, this was not the case as the word before us confirms. The Lord Jesus Himself stood by Paul and told him that he was going to testify in Rome, just as he had done in Jerusalem. It is inconceivable that the glorified Christ would have spoken in this manner if Paul had been out of his will in going to Jerusalem. The truth of the matter is that Paul had more understanding of that trip than those who sought to convince him he should not go. From the higher vantage point, their words had to do with the adversity he would face in Jerusalem. It was, in a sense, a test to Paul, to see if he was wholehearted in his commitment to serve the Lord. His response confirmed that he was.

We know from Paul’s letter to the Philippians that he was resolved to participate in the sufferings of Christ. “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ . . . That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil 3:9-10). Here, being conformed to Christ’s death has to do with crucifying the flesh – choosing Christ’s interests over personal interests. That is precisely what Paul did when he went to Jerusalem.

By saying Paul would testify in Rome in the same manner as he did in Jerusalem, Jesus meant that the testimony would be attended by suffering, just as it was in Jerusalem, and other places where he had ministered.

You Must Bear Witness in Rome

Other versions read, “so will you be My witness in Rome,” BBE “you must testify also in Rome,” ESV “Now you must tell the truth about Me in Rome,” GWN “so also art thou to testify at Rome,” MRD “now you must do the same in Rome,” NJB “so it behoveth thee also at Rome to testify,” YLT and “You must also go to Rome to do the same thing there!” IE

This is the language of Divine appointment. The word “must” is translated from the Greek word **dei** . The meaning of this word is, “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper,” THAYER “as expressing compulsion, necessity, or inevitability in an event it is necessary, one must, one has to,” FRIBERG “be necessary, must; should, ought; be proper; impf. had to, should have,” UBS and “be necessary, must; should, ought; be proper; impf. had to, should have.” LOUW-NIDA

Resident in the word “must” is Divine appointment, obedience, willingness, and requirement. It is a strong word that reflects the reality of Divine government and direction. The very use of the word

assumes a certain sensitivity on the part of the hearer, which brings assurance to him.

Some of the blessed promises that are fulfilled in this text are as follows.

- “The meek will He guide in judgment: and the meek will He teach His way ” (Psa 25:9).
- “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye” (Psa 32:8).
- “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD : and he delighteth in his way” (Psa 37:23).
- “In all thy ways acknowledge him, and He shall direct thy paths ” (Prov 3:6).
- “ Man's goings are of the LORD ; how can a man then understand his own way?” (Prov 20:24).
- “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it , when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa 30:21).
- “Thus saith the LORD, thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; I am the LORD thy God which teacheth thee to profit, which leadeth thee by the way that thou shouldest go ” (Isa 48:17).
- “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself : it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps” (Jer 10:23).
- “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

There is a sense in which God’s path is in the sea (Psa 77:19). That is, it is not clear or discernible to those who live at a distance from Him, choosing not to live by faith and walk in the Spirit. However, for those who crucify the flesh, forget the past, and faithfully press toward the mark, the will of the Lord becomes more apparent through the ministry of the Lord. That is, Divine direction takes place while we are involved in what we do know. For example, when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees, and as he traveled, he was given further directions. The same was true when he was commanded to offer up Isaac. He learned where he was going only after he had set out on the journey. When Israel came out of Egypt, they received further directions as they journeyed.

It is precisely at this point that many professing Christians are confined to ignorance concerning the will of the Lord. That, of course is the point of Romans 12:1-2. “I APPEAL to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies [presenting all your members and faculties] as a living sacrifice, holy (devoted, consecrated) and well pleasing to God , which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world (this age), [fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs], but be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind [by its new ideals and its new attitude], so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God , even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in His sight for you].” AMPLIFIED

Legion is the name of those poor souls who remain shackled to the affairs of this world, when they have been called to higher things. They wander in a state of perpetual spiritual confusion, never sure of what they are to do, and falling into one pit after another. They do not know that when a person walks in the dark, they stumble because they do not know where they are going. Jesus said, “he that walketh in darkness knoweth not whither he goeth” (John 12:35). And again, “But if a man walk in the night, he stumbleth, because there is no light in him” (John 11:10).

THE JEWS BIND THEMSELVES UNDER A CURSE

“ 12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.”

The aggression of the enemies of the saints is a matter with which they must learn to contend. Some may labor under the misconception that God will always see to it that our enemies do not assert themselves – but that is only an imagination that has to be cast down.

The aggression of the enemies of the saints is a matter with which they must learn to contend. Some may labor under the misconception that God will always see to it that our enemies do not assert themselves – but that is only an imagination that has to be cast down. The “ sweet psalmist of Israel” frequently spoke to the Lord about his enemies.

- “Pull me out of the net that they have laid privily for me : for thou art my strength” (Psa 31:4).
- “For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit , which without cause they have digged for my soul” (Psa 35:7).
- “They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul ” (Psa 56:6).
- “The wicked have laid a snare for me : yet I erred not from thy precepts” (Psa 119:110).
- “The proud have hid a snare for me , and cords; they have spread a net by the wayside ; they have set gins for me. Selah” (Psa 140:5).
- “In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me ” (Psa 142:3).

Notable servants of God have endured persecution, and even martyrdom. The list includes

- Abel (Gen 4:8)
- Lot (Gen 19:9)
- Moses (Ex 2:15; 17:4)
- David (Psa 31:13; 59:1)
- Gideon (Judges 6:28-32)
- Elijah (1 Kgs 18:10; 19:1-21; 2 Kgs 1:9; 2:23)
- Micaiah (1 Kgs 22:26; 2 Chron 18:26)
- Elisha (2 Kgs 6:31)
- Hanani (2 Chron 16:10)
- Zachariah (2 Chron 24:21; Matt 23:35)
- Job (Job 13:4-13; 16:1-4; 17:2; 19:1-5; 30:1-10)
- Jeremiah (Jer 15:10,15-23; 26:1-24; 37:1-21; 38:1-6)
- Urijah (Jer 26:23)
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:8-23)
- Daniel (Dan 6:1-28)
- John the Baptist (Matt 14:3-12)
- James (Acts 12:2)
- Simon Peter (Mk 15:21)

- Peter and John (Acts 4:6-21)
- Lazarus (John 12:10)
- Stephen (Acts 6:9-15; 1:1-60)
- Paul (2 Cor 4:8-12; 11:24-33)
- Silas (Acts 16:23-25)
- Timothy (Heb 13:23)
- John the beloved (John 1:9)
- Antipas (Rev 2:13).

No believer should draw back when facing opposition, regardless of its source. God does not guarantee a life of ease, and we ought not expect such a condition. Of course, it is one thing to say this, it is quite another thing to behold it being lived out as it is in Paul.

CERTAIN OF THE JEWS BANDED TOGETHER

“And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul . . .”

Other versions read, “formed a conspiracy and bound themselves under an oath,” NKJV “made a plot and bound themselves by an oath,” NIV “They asked God to curse them if they ate or drank anything before they had killed Paul,” GWN “made a vow,” TNT and “did anathematize themselves.” YLT

As tutored by the Law, a certain sobriety existed in the Jewish community that is strange to the

To participate in evil causes will result in the sharing in their judgment. That was taught under the Law, confirmed by Jesus, and taught by the apostles.

culture of our time. Although they were driven by hatred, and were wrong in their intentions, it was a corrupted view of religion that drove them. This, in my estimation, is the worst of all delusion, transcending political misconceptions, social delusions, and a view of life that accents this present evil world. The reason for the seriousness of religious delusion is that it acts as a kind of blanket that, in the eyes of those who are deceived, justifies what they are doing. It is like a spiritual narcotic that has put them to sleep, and allows them to oppose the truth and malign the saints with an uncondemning conscience.

THEY WERE MORE THAN FORTY

“And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.” Other versions read, “about forty.” TNT The rest of the versions read “over forty.” These words are translated from two Greek words. **plei,ouj** (“greater in quantity . . . more than”), THAYER **tessera,konta** (“as a cardinal number forty”). FRIBERG

These men doubtless thought themselves capable of carrying out their diabolical scheme. Unwittingly, they had set themselves in opposition to what was contained in their Scripture, “Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished: but the seed of the righteous shall be delivered” (Prov 11:21). And again, “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished” (Prov 16:5). Again, the Law contained this warning, “Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment” (Ex 23:2). To participate in evil causes will result in the sharing in their judgment. That was taught under the Law, confirmed by Jesus, and taught by the apostles.

THE JEWS GO TO THE JEWISH COUNCIL WITH THEIR PLAN

“ 14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15 Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.”

THEY CAME TO THE CHIEF PRIESTS AND ELDERS

“And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul . . . ”

Other versions read, “We have taken a solemn oath,” NIV “We have strictly bound ourselves,” NRSV “We have taken a great oath,” BBE “We have cursed ourselves with a curse,” “We have asked God to curse us,” GWN “We have bound ourselves with imprecations,” MRD “With an anathema we did anathematize ourselves,” YLT and “We have strictly bound ourselves by an oath and under a curse.” AMPLIFIED

It is to be assumed that these Jews were members of the Sadducees party, since the scribes, speaking for the Pharisees, had said that no longer were willing to pursue charges against Paul. However, even though the Sadducees had apparently been quelled by the removal of Paul into the protection of a Roman “army” or “troops” NASB (Acts 23:27), these enemies formed something like a special hit squad who was determined to kill Paul before they ate or drank again.

Here is another example of people who are fundamentally disagreed joining together in their opposition to the servants of God. This same circumstance attended the rejection of Jesus (Matt 26:3; 27:1), Peter and John (Acts 4:13-20), and the Apostles as a whole (Acts 5:18-34). This confirms that the wicked, no matter how diverse they may appear to be, are united in their insurrection against the Lord and His Christ. Even though there may appear to be some who favor the elect, yet they do not step forward to defend them. Their supposed friendliness is only in word, not in action. In reality, the wicked have one heartbeat. Any apparent distinctions between them is only on the surface.

SIGNIFY TO THE CHIEF CAPTAIN

“Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would inquire something more perfectly concerning him . . . ”

Other versions read, “as though you were going to determine his case by a more thorough investigation,” NKJV “were going to make further inquiries, NASB “the pretext of wanting more accurate information,” NIV and “as if you were going to investigate his case more accurately.” AMPLIFIED

There is a certain naivety in the flesh that is most uncomely. These men assume that the captain will not see through their schemes, or that they will not in some way be interrupted. Of course, the captain had become acquainted with their devious ways, and would at least be suspicious of their intentions. This is not to consider the God of heaven who does “according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth,” with none being able to “stay His hand, or say unto Him, ‘What doest Thou’” (Dan 4:35).

In other words, “the flesh” thinks that it is invincible, and can carry out its intentions. Like Israel of old they reason, “They have belied the LORD, and said, It is not he; neither shall evil come upon us; neither shall we see sword nor famine” (Jer 5:12). The wicked man imagines, “I shall not be moved: for I shall never be in adversity” (Psa 10:6). Notice with what confidence these opponents of the Lord and His Christ speak. Yet, their words are nothing more than puffs of smoke.

WE ARE READY TO KILL HIM

“ . . . and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.” Other versions read, “slay him before he comes near the place,” NKJV and “before he gets here.” NRSV

Not only have these men hatched a plan, they are convinced they are fully competent to carry it out. They have a certain ignorance of God that does allow them to think soberly and soundly. They cannot imagine they will be thwarted in their plans.

Learn that the enemy is aggressive. The arch foe, the devil, “as a roaring lion, walking about seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:7). He can disguise himself as an “angel of light,” and “his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15). In our text, his servants were leading religious men who operated in the name of the Lord.

If you are not aggressive Godward, taking the Kingdom by violence, there is no hope of you winning the good fight of faith. Many a poor soul has been cast down because they simply were too casual and uninvolved.

PAUL’S NEPHEW HEARS THE PLOT

“ 16 And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.”

Never underestimate how the Lord can work in your behalf. In this case, a young man overhears the plot of some wicked men, and knows how to react to it. This, of course, was all orchestrated by the Lord. He can use a flying bird to blaze abroad a matter (Eccl 10:20). Truly, the “camp” of God “is very great” (Joel 2:11). In Joel’s prophecy that camp included “the locust, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm.” God refers to these as “ my great army which I sent among you” (Joel 2:25). In this text, the Lord’s army includes a young man, probably a boy.

PAUL’S SISTER’S SON

“And when Paul's sister's son . . .” Other versions read, “Paul’s nephew.” GWN/NLT

This is the only place in the Scriptures where these two people are mentioned: Paul’s sister and her son. Neither one of them are identified by name. We learn from this that Paul had no doubt witnessed powerfully to his family, so that at least some of them were inclined to him.

This is the only place in the Scriptures where these two people are mentioned: Paul’s sister and her son. Neither one of them are identified by name. We learn from this that Paul had no doubt witnessed powerfully to his family, so that at least some of them were inclined to him.

What is said of Paul’s nephew leads us to believe that he was rather young. Later, when he reports to the captain, it is written he took this boy “by the hand,” suggesting that he was but a youth.

We are given no information concerning how or why this young man was in Jerusalem. Perhaps he had been following the events concerning Paul, or was being schooled in Jerusalem. The thing to be seen here is the Headship of Christ, who is protecting His servant Paul.

HE HEARD OF THEIR LYING IN WAIT

“ . . . heard of their lying in wait . . .” Other versions read, “heard of their ambush,” NASB “heard of this plot,” NIV and “heard of their intended attack.” AMPLIFIED

What a remarkable thing! This young man gained knowledge about the wicked plot of these Jews.

They doubtless thought the whole matter was secret. However, the Lord controlled the situation so their plans would be thwarted by the activity of a youth.

Of course, we learn something about Paul's nephew as well. For one thing, he was apparently not among his peers when he gained this knowledge. He was either privy to the original discussion of these Jews, or somehow gained knowledge of their caucus with the chief priests and elders. This suggests his interest in Paul, as well as his familiarity with the leadership of the Jews.

The whole event stirs up memories of young Miriam, who was placed in charge of watching her infant brother when he was placed in a basket, and positioned among the reeds along the banks of the Nile. There this young girl watched, and upon seeing Pharaoh's daughter take up young Moses, went to her and asked if she should go to get a nurse of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for her (Ex 2:3-9).

There is also the record of a young boy Samuel, who was given a message from God to deliver to Eli, the priest who was tutoring him, and under whom he served in the tabernacle (1 Sam 2:18-3:19).

Another similar incident took place when Naaman, captain of the host of king of Syria, had leprosy. A certain captive girl served Naaman's wife. This young maiden told Naaman's wife, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." This set in motion a series of events that led to the healing of Naaman (2 Kgs 5:3-14).

All these young people were taught of the Lord from their youth, and were used at a tender age. Each of them was discerning, and acted appropriately, confirming that God used them for His own glory.

The modern church is not producing children like this. Further, it is tragically true that many Christian parents do not raise their children to actually serve the Lord. They are not taught to be alert, nor can they be trusted to think and act correctly. Such things ought not to be. Admittedly, these were probably unusual children, but who are we to imagine that such children cannot be placed in our care? They are, after all, "the heritage of the Lord."

HE TOLD PAUL

"... he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul." Other versions read, "he went and entered the barracks and told Paul," NKJV "he went and gained entrance to the barracks and told Paul," NRSV "he came into the army building and gave news of it to Paul," BBE "came and entered into the fortress and reported it to Paul," DARBY and "he went and got into the barracks and told Paul." AMPLIFIED

How did Paul's nephew get into barracks? The Jews were denied entrance, for it was a place of protection for Paul. First, the Lord was behind this, bringing it all to pass. That is why Solomon wrote, "There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD" (Prov 21:30). Again Isaiah prophesied, "Take counsel together, and it shall come to nought; speak the word, and it shall not stand: for God is with us" (Isa 8:10). The Lord brings the "counsel of the heathen to nought" (Psa 33:10). Thus did Isaiah write, "That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish" (Isa 44:25). Here He did it with the hearing and response of a young boy.

Someone had to admit the boy to the barracks, for it was not accessible to everyone. Nor, indeed, could someone sneak into that area. I thus conclude that Paul's nephew was given favor in the sight of those who were securing the barracks. No one suspected he was intending to do Paul harm. Thus, we see that the Lord made a way where there was no way, using a servant that would have been overlooked by men.

THE COUNSEL OF PAUL

“ 17 Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18 So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee. 19 Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee. 22 So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me.”

Conducting his life as a king and a priest, you sense there is a way in which Paul is in charge of the situation. He is given wisdom, and is therefore able to handle the situation in an expeditious manner. That is one of the marvelous results of living by faith and walking in the Spirit. It is also the outcome of maintaining the fellowship with Christ into which God has called us (1 Cor 1:9). This is also an example of what happens when men “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7). It ought to be noted that many professing

When an individual lives by faith and walks in the Spirit, their own spirit is sensitized to Divine direction. When anyone fails to live in this manner, they have cut themselves off from God, for faith and the Spirit are the appointed means through which the Lord directs one’s life for the good.

Christians are confused by life’s circumstances because they do not walk in the light. They are too close to the world.

PAUL CALLED ONE OF THE CENTURIONS

“Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him . . .” Other versions read, “Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him,” NASB “Take this youth to the chiliarch, for he has something to report to him,” DARBY and “Take this boy to the commander. He has something important to tell him.” LIVING

The words “young man” are translated from the Greek word **neani,an** , which has the following lexical meaning: “used of an older boy, young (unmarried) man,” FRIBERG “a young man beyond the age of puberty, but normally before marriage,” LOUW-NIDA and “children, youth,” LEH

There is no certain way of determining the age of Paul’s nephew. It was somewhere after puberty, and prior to marriage. At the least it would be around fourteen years of age, and at the most, the early twenties.

Something of the nature of trials of faith is seen in this text. Sometimes it is necessary to assess the situation, and take an action that is compatible with holiness, and to the maintenance of our calling. Answers to a dilemma do not always lie on the surface of life. There are also times when it is inappropriate to seek counsel from another. Some trials are designed for the individual to work them out, calling upon the resources that faith has brought.

Paul immediately knows what to do. He is aware that this is not something he can resolve on his own. I do not question that the Lord provided the answer to him at that very hour. This is what happens when a person lives “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). When an individual

lives by faith and walks in the Spirit, their own spirit is sensitized to Divine direction. When anyone fails to live in this manner, they have cut themselves off from God, for faith and the Spirit are the appointed means through which the Lord directs one's life for the good.

HE TOOK HIM TO THE CHIEF CAPTAIN

“So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee . . .”

It is remarkable how there is a total absence of obstacles in this account. Paul's nephew enters and speaks to Paul. Paul calls one of the centurions and asks him to take the young man to the captain. The centurion then presents the young man to the chief captain, who cordially welcomes and listens to him.

DO NOT YIELD TO THEM

“Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20 And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would inquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21 But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee . . .”

The young nephew does not forget a single thing that he had heard, but gives a thorough report to the captain. So far as the text is concerned, Paul did not spell out what the young man was to say to the captain. He even delivers an exhortation to the captain to see to it that he does not yield to the request of the chief priests and elders. Notice the details of the report.

- The Jews agreed to ask the captain to bring Paul into the council.
- The Jews left the impression that their desire was to inquire further into the circumstances of Paul's arrest.
- The nephew then admonished the captain not to yield to the request of these Jews.
- More than forty men were lying in wait for Paul, ready to kill him.
- These Jews had bound themselves with an oath not to eat nor drink until they had killed Paul.

These Jews were fully prepared and awaiting a promise from the captain. Then they would set their plan in motion, they thought, and rid themselves of Paul and his influence.

Behind the circumstances, the Lord was at work, causing all things to harmoniously work for the ultimate good of Paul. This kind of working, we are told, is in the behalf of those who “love God, to them who are THE called according to His purpose” (Rom 8:28). It is axiomatic that such people are actually involved in the working of the purpose of God. For such precious souls, the Lord turns everything into an ultimate advantage. If the work of such an individual is not yet concluded, the Sovereign Lord will see to it that it is completed. If those opposing that individual appear to be gaining the upper hand, their cause will be overridden by the Lord, and cast down to the ground. Wherever required, others will rise to the defense of the Lord's workman.

Our text is providing some of the details of such marvelous working, and we do well to take note of them.

TELL NO MAN

“So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast showed these things to me.” Other versions read, “Tell no one that you have revealed these things to me,” NKJV “notified me of these things,” NASB “reported this to me,” NIV “informed me of this,” NRSV and “Do not disclose to anyone that you have given me this information.”
AMPLIFIED

There are some things that the general populous do not need to know. Such decisions are made in the interest of the truth and the will of the Lord. There is no room for naivety in such matters. The Gospel’s contain eight references to Jesus saying, “Tell no man” (Matt 8:4; 16:20; Mk 7:36; 8:30; 9:9; Lk 5:14; 8:56; 9:21). In each case Divine intention was the fundamental thing. In the above cases, there would come a time when it would be appropriate to disclose the information of reference. That disclosure, however, must not be premature. In this text, it would be years later that the details described would be revealed in the writing of Luke. But at the time these things were occurring, what was told must not be made known to anyone. Such knowledge would turn to the disadvantage of Paul.

Here we also see another facet of Divine working. Although the Lord is fully able of subduing all enemies, His will does not always center in such marvelous capability. Some matters are left to be worked out in the crucible of human conflict. In this way the circumstances may be studied with a mind to behold the working of the Lord according to what God has revealed of Himself.

Part of the newness of life is a proper assessment of circumstance. The people of God are not to be simple in this assessment. That is precisely why Jesus said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). That word postulates that circumstance can appear to contradict the truth of the matter. Yet, when the condition is duly considered, faith will enable the believer to see behind the scenes that all things are being worked together for the good of the people of God. Of course, such a circumstance requires a working knowledge of the Word of God, and a familiarity with the ways and purpose of the Lord. Where this kind of awareness is not found, a sound judgment is not possible. Confusion, in such a case, is inevitable.

THE CHIEF CAPTAIN ACTS IN FAVOR OF PAUL

“ 23 And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night; 24 And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.”

The captain acts on this new knowledge immediately – which itself is a most marvelous thing. He engaged in a rather complicated procedure on the word of a young man – a young man he apparently did not know. Furthermore, he came to know of Paul’s nephew in the hour of crisis, which is not always conducive to soundness of thought. The captain is not a Jew, and he is not a Christian. His primary interest is in his responsibilities as a Roman military leader. Yet, he treats the word of Paul’s nephew just as though it had come down from Caesar himself. This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

The Lord deals with the hearts of men, turning them when He wills to do so, even if the person is a king (Prov 21:1). On the surface, it often appears as though men have the total responsibility.

The Lord deals with the hearts of men, turning them when He wills to do so, even if the person is a king (Prov 21:1). On the surface, it often appears as though men have the total responsibility. Yet the Lord Himself works out the matter. Thus Solomon wrote, “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD ” (Prov 16:33). The Amplified Bible reads, “The lot is cast into the lap, but the decision is wholly of the Lord [even the events that seem accidental are really ordered by Him].” Thus, we have an inspired interpretation of the events of this text. God is at work, carrying out His own purpose in the midst of human circumstance.

HE CALLED TWO CENTURIONS

“And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Caesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night . . .”

The Amplified Bible reads, “Have two hundred footmen ready by the third hour of the night (about 9:00 p.m.) to go as far as Caesarea, with seventy horsemen and two hundred spearmen.”

The captain immediately makes provision for the transfer of Paul. He knows there are forty men awaiting an opportunity to kill Paul. He offsets their presence with an impressive number of soldiers. Two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen – four hundred and seventy in all. What are forty angry Jews in comparison to that? These Jews are not like Samson or Gideon’s small army. They are set in opposition to Christ Jesus and His servant Paul. They could not win against Paul’s nephew, let alone four hundred and seventy trained and seasoned soldiers.

God has thus marshaled an impressive army to deliver Paul, and they will move out at nine o’clock in the evening, putting the Jews at an even great disadvantage.

BRING HIM SAFE TO FELIX THE GOVERNOR

“And provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.” Other versions read, “and provide mounts to set Paul on,” NKJV “mounts for Paul to ride,” NRSV and “Also provide beasts for mounts for Paul to ride.” AMPLIFIED

Notice with what care Paul is transferred to Felix the governor. It does not appear that this was always the manner in which prisoners were treated. Neither Pilate nor Herod had such care when the Lord Jesus was in their custody. Herod did not take special precautions when James was in his care, and then Peter. In Philippi, which was a Roman province, Paul and Silas were beaten and placed in an inner prison with their feet in stocks. Later, Felix would leave Paul bound in prison for two full years (Acts 24:27). Thus we see that government officials did not always have such care for Paul and others who preached the Gospel.

The special treatment of Paul was owing to Divine intervention. The Lord had appeared to Paul telling him he would bear witness of Him in Rome, just as surely as he did in Jerusalem. This promise now is attended by the hearts and minds of men being impacted by the Lord Himself. Thusfar, the thinking and conduct of the following people have been impacted.

- The Pharisees disagreeing with the Sadducees.
- The captain favoring Paul.
- Paul’s nephew overhearing a plot.
- A Centurion who listens to Paul.
- The soldiers assigned to protect Paul.

In each case, there was an accelerated concern for Paul – a concern that flesh could not possibly have anticipated. God was working in the behalf of His servant, ensuring that His will would be done. The exalted Christ had determined that Paul would testify of Him in Rome, and nothing could deter it!

THE ACCOMPANYING LETTER

“ 25 And he wrote a letter after this manner: 26 Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. 27 This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then

came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman. 28 And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council: 29 Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. 30 And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.”

The orderliness of this whole affair is interesting to ponder. The opposition that was raised against Paul was characterized within the context of chaos and irrationality.

- The Jews stirred up the people with irrational and uninformed speech (Acts 21:27-29).
- The city was in a state of uproar, and Paul was dragged out of the Temple (Acts 21:30a).
- The Temple doors were shut (Acts 21:30b).
- All Jerusalem was in an uproar (Acts 21:31).
- When Paul was rescued by an army, discordant cries erupted from the people with some crying one thing, while others cried another (Acts 21:34A).
- There was a tumult among the people (Acts 21:34b).
- When Paul delivered his first defense to the people, they responded by casting off their clothes and throwing dust into the air (Acts 21:23).
- A dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the opposing multitude “was divided” (Acts 23:7).

Once again, I want to emphasize that the historical accounts of Scripture are more than a mere record of the activities and responses of men. The truth of God is lived out in these accounts, revealing the manner of Divine workings, as well as the mode of working that characterizes our adversary the devil.

An even greater dissension took place when some of the Pharisees spoke in defense of Paul (Acts 23:10).

Thus, the words of James were fulfilled in Paul’s accusers: “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16).

By way of comparison, the heathen, as represented by the Captain and his army, go about things in a very orderly and thoughtful manner. In them the word of Jesus is fulfilled: “the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8).

Once again, I want to emphasize that the historical accounts of Scripture are more than a mere record of the activities and responses of men. The truth of God is lived out in these accounts, revealing the manner of Divine workings, as well as the mode of working that characterizes our adversary the devil.

One other thing needs to be noted. If a heathen captain went to such a great extent to deliver Paul safely to the appointed destination, what care must the Lord Jesus take in bringing “many sons to glory” (Heb 2:10a). What of the considerate care of the “Good Shepherd,” who is also “the Captain of” our “salvation” (John 10:11,14; Heb 2:10b).

HE WROTE A LETTER

“And he wrote a letter after this manner . . .” Other versions read, “He wrote a letter having this

form,” NASB “He wrote a letter to this effect,” NRSV “having written a letter, couched in this form,” DARBY “wrote a letter . . . with the following message,” GWN and “having written a letter after this description.” YLT

The purpose of this section is not to supply a verbatim account of the letter written by the captain. It is rather to give the sense and thrust of the letter: “after this manner.” These are the exact words Jesus said in answer to the disciples request to teach them to pray: “After this manner therefore pray ye” (Matt 6:9; Lk 11:1). When the brethren in Jerusalem wrote letters to the Gentile believers concerning the matter of circumcision, Luke reports, “and they wrote letters by them after this manner” (Acts 15:23). This language does not suggest a human interpretation of the message of reference. Rather, it emphasizes the intent of the letter of reference. It is not meant to be a word-for-word report, but is intended to promote an understanding of what was written. On a practical level, this suggests that extended personal greetings and references would not be included in their entirety.

CLAUDIUS LYSIAS

“Claudius Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting . . .” Here the captain is first identified by name. Later, he is mentioned twice more (Acts 24:7,22). He is the “chief captain” referenced seventeen times in Acts 21:31,32,33,37; 22:24,26,27,28,29; 23:10,15,17,18,19,22; 24:7,22. He is certainly a key figure in this phase of Paul’s ministry. Although a heathen that did not know God, he was used by God to ensure the safety of Paul, and that he would arrive safely in Rome where he would bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ.

God has often used heathen people to protect His own people.

- Abraham was sustained in Egypt ().
- Joseph was exalted to prominence in order to save his own people alive during the time of famine (Psa 105:17).
- The Pharaoh of Egypt gave Israel the land of Goshen, and nourished them during the time of famine (Gen 45:-9-11).
- Moses was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter (Ex 2:10).
- Israel developed as a nation in Egypt (Ex 1:7; Psa 105:24).
- God used Nebuchadnezzar to chasten Israel, referring to this heathen king as His “servant” (Jer 25:9; 27:6; 43:10)
- Daniel received favor from the Babylonian that was appointed over him and other Jewish captives (Dan 1:9).
- Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were exalted sustained in Babylon (Dan 1:19).
- Daniel was exalted and favored by Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar Darius, and Cyrus (Dan 2:48; 5:29; 6:1-2,28).
- Nehemiah was cared for in the court of king (Neh 1:1; 2:1-8).
- Esther was protected as the wife of king Ahasuerus, who reigned “from India to Ethiopia” (Esth 1:1; 2:17).
- In the capacity of the king’s wife, Esther was used to save the Jews from extinction (Esth 8:1-17).
- Cyrus was used to initiate and fund the rebuilding of the Temple (2 Chron 36:22-23). God referred to Cyrus as “My shepherd” (Isa 44:28).
- Darius and Artaxerxes joined with Cyrus in commanding the rebuilding of the

Temple (Ezra 6:14).

The above circumstances are a confirmation of the truth Paul wrote to Timothy: “But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor, and some to dishonor” (2 Tim 2:20). Truly, “The earth is the LORD’S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1). The perception of this will produce a strong confidence in the hearts of God’s people.

It is not possible to overstate the practical value of knowing God is working all things together for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. The supporting pillars of that knowledge include that fact that God is, in fact, “the Governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28), and that He works His will “in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth” (Dan 4:35). Add to that the fact that Satan, our “adversary” is controlled by God to such an extent that he cannot lift a finger against the saints of God without Divine approval. This is clearly confirmed in the inspired record of Job (Job 1:1-2; 2:1-7).

Our text provides the outworking of Divine purpose, and the fact of God’s Sovereignty. In the blazing glory of the New Covenant, it is not necessary for Luke to affirm that God is behind Paul’s protection. In Christ, and in strict accord with the New Covenant itself, the saved “know” the Lord, and are able to recognize His working. It is quite true that the Roman captain, “Claudius Lysias” does not speak of the hand of the Lord – but that is only because he was not able to see it. His reports confirm that he thought he was acting strictly by his own volition and understanding.

I RESCUED HIM

“This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman . . .”

Given the original circumstances of this case, it could have been concluded that Paul would be safely delivered from the Jews, and actually go forward in carrying out the will of God. However, when the Jews found Paul in the Temple, and dragged him out, shutting the Temple doors, and commencing to beat him, it appeared as though they were in charge . When the captain sought to identify the situation, and was only met with angry Jews and a noisy tumult, it appeared as though things were out of control . When forty angry Jews conspired to kill Paul, hatching a supposedly fool-proof scheme , it appeared on the surface as though a tremendous obstacle was introduced. However, what appears as a crisis on the earth, does not so appear in the heavenly realms. Concerning those who oppose the Lord’s Christ and those who are in Him, their oppositions are viewed like this by the Lord of glory: “He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision” (Psa 2:4).

Notice the accuracy of this letter. The facts are not embellished, but the report perfectly agrees with the inspired report of Luke (Acts 21:31-23:24). Carnal embellishment is never in order when reporting matters related to the Lord and His servants.

I WOULD HAVE KNOWN

“And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council . . .” Other versions read, “when I wanted to know the reason,” NKJV “wanting to ascertain the charge,” NASB “I wanted to know why they were accusing him,.” NIV and “wishing to know the exact accusation which they were making against him.” AMPLIFIED

It is a sad day when the heathen who “know not God,” are more discerning of right and wrong than those who are in covenant with God. Those who have been identified with religious institutions can testify to the continuance of this kind of thing.

The captain wanted to establish the legitimacy of the charges being brought against Paul. Therefore, he called the council to have them give an accounting of their cause. It was an honest effort to do what was right. However, he soon discovered the remarkable degree of prejudice and hatred that existed among Paul's accusers. However, he did not wash his hands like Pilate, and back away from the whole incident, giving place to the contentious Jews. He rather pursued justice. Although he was himself unaware of it, the Lord was directing this whole affair.

ACCUSED OF QUESTIONS OF THEIR LAW

“Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds . . .”

The captain approached his duties with integrity, and in conformity with the laws of the land. He saw that Paul had done nothing in violation of Roman law, and so he candidly acknowledged that this was a matter pertaining to Jewish law. Yet, his accusers “laid nothing to his charge worthy of death or bonds.”

It is a sad day when the heathen who “know not God” (1 Thess 4:5), are more discerning of right and wrong than those who are in covenant with God. Those who have been identified with religious institutions can testify to the continuance of this kind of thing. From experience, I can tell you that the most unfair and unreasonable opposition I have experienced has been from the professed church and the institutions associated with it. The number of people that I personally know who have experienced the same is staggering for size. The religious landscape is cluttered with broken hearts and wounded spirits that have been battered by sectarian Christianity.

This kind of thing is owing to the stultifying effects of religious institutionalism. The more humanly-devised organization is found in the professed church, the more spiritually illogical and unreasonable it becomes. The input of worldly wisdom causes a lessening of sound reasoning, and pushes holy interests into the background .

I GAVE COMMANDMENT TO HIS ACCUSERS

“And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.”

Politically speaking, Lysias appealed to a higher power when his own aptitude became limited. He was not willing to let this whole matter go, as Pilate did with Jesus. He did not allow the Jewish council to have their own way, but insisted they present their cause to a higher court. His quest was for justice to be properly administered. Too, in the presentation of the matter, he confined himself to the facts and an accurate portrayal of them. He is an example of a faithful steward – someone who faithfully fulfilled his responsibility.

In this, Claudius Lysias is a most excellent example of Christ's own good and faithful stewards. Such carry out their responsibilities even though it may have to be done in the midst of difficulty and tumult. They also know how to cast their burden upon the Lord without abandoning their own responsibility. See, even in the account of a gentile captain, there is a kind of exhortation embedded in the report that speaks to the heart of the people of God.

Knowing how to interact with appointed authorities is a matter in which the people of God should obtain some level of expertise.

THE SOLDIERS DELIVER PAUL SAFELY TO THE GOVERNOR

“ 31 Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32 On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33

Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. 34 And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; 35 I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.”

Again, we have an example of faithful service. Those who offer convenient excuses for being unfaithful or retarded in their service have stooped beneath the level of the heathen of this text.

BROUGHT BY NIGHT TO ANTIPATRIS

“Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul, and brought him by night to Antipatris . . .”

Remember the disorder that had characterized the Jews’ confrontation of and opposition to Paul.

- The Jews from Asia saw Paul in the temple and stirred up the people (Acts 21:27-28).
- “All the city” of Jerusalem was adversely moved, and the frenzied people “ran together,” seized Paul, dragging him out of the Temple, and shut the Temple doors (Acts 21:30).
- The Jews “went about to kill” Paul (Acts 21:31a).
- “All Jerusalem was in an uproar” (Acts 21:31b).
- The Jews were beating Paul when they were interrupted by a Roman army (Acts 21:31-32).
- When the Roman captain inquired concerning the cause, “some cried one thing, some another,” and a tumult ensued (Acts 21:33-34).
- As Paul was carried away to a place of safety, the Jews followed “crying, ‘Away with him’” (Acts 21:35-36).
- After hearing Paul speak in his own defense, and upon hearing him say the word “Gentiles,” the Jews “cast off their clothes” to stone him, “and threw dust into the air” (Acts 21:22-23).
- At Paul’s second defense, when he said he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and had been called into question concerning resurrection of the dead, the multitude of Jews “was divided” (Acts 22:6-8).
- There was a “great cry” among the people, and when certain scribes spoke in defense of Paul, “a great dissension” resulted among the Jews (Acts 22:9-10).
- Fearing that Paul would be “pulled in pieces,” the captain had him removed to the interior of the barracks (Acts 22:10).
- Certain of the Jews, more than forty in number, banded together and took an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 22:12-13).

It is no wonder that James wrote, “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (James 3:16). By way of comparison, the Roman captain maintained thoughtful composure, taking care not to violate any of the Roman laws. He acted wisely in protecting Paul without breaking the law, doing so in the interest of justice.

In this case, someone with less knowledge, who did not know God, conducted himself more honorably than those who had been designated as stewards of the things of God. It is said of the Jews, “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving

of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen” (Rom 9:4-5).

I do not doubt that this Roman captain and those who were under him will rise in the judgment with the Queen of Sheba and Nineveh to testify against those who claimed to know God, yet conducted their lives in an unacceptable manner.

As It Was Commanded Them

This group of soldiers did exactly as they were told, working together in a common cause – four hundred and seventy men: 200 soldiers, 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen. This entire group did “as it was commanded them.” Two centurions were commanded to assemble the troops, provide mounts for Paul, and “bring him safe unto Felix the governor” – and they did so.

One would be hard pressed to find a group of professing Christians that size who were doing what the Lord had commanded, and doing so with harmony and exactness. There are some who think that special training is required to accomplish such a feat. Yet, this very incident testifies to the natural capacities of the only creation made in the image, and after the similitude, of God (Gen 1:27; 9:6; James 3:9).

That capacity is elevated in Christ Jesus, so that it is possible for those in Him to be “of one mind” (Rom 15:6; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 1:27; 2:2; 1 Pet 3:8). This is precisely why believers are admonished to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment ” (1 Cor 1:10). Early believers are described as being “of one heart and of one soul” (Acts 4:32), and “of one accord” (Acts 5:12). It is a transgression of the greatest magnitude when professing Christians learn to live with division as though it was sanctioned by the Lord. Even a heathen government like Rome saw the value and necessity of its constituents being of one accord.

Brought Him By Night

During the night, when society was generally inactive, Paul was taken safely to the appointed destination. From the standpoint of the Roman captain, this whole thing was a requirement to establish the facts in the case. However, from the heavenly vantage point, this was the appointed means of getting Paul to Rome, where he would testify of Christ.

To this point, there were several barriers raised up, designed by the wicked

Ponder how Moses, and the judges who later joined him, had to respond to the many cases that were brought to them (Ex 18:13-26). Recall how Solomon had to react immediately to two women who claimed the same child as their own (1 Kgs 3:17-28). Ponder how Peter had to discern and act quickly in reference to Ananas and Sapphira.

one to stop the spread of the Gospel. Paul was seized in the Temple, and supposedly taken out of activity. He was beaten, which would have been a great discouragement to many. He was arrested, which appeared to be successful deterrent. A plot was calculated against him that appeared to be foolproof. Now he is scheduled for a trial before Felix the governor. Charges will be leveled against him in a professional manner. Everything seems to be working against Paul testifying of Christ Jesus in Rome. But that is only appearance, and men are not to judge according to appearance (John 7:24). The closer men live to the surface of life, the more apt they are to be deceived. The more they are enamored of, or devoted to, appearance, the more they are prone to error.

Antipatris was “a station between Jerusalem and Caesarea where the soldiers left Paul, after their night march, in charge of the horsemen who were to take him forward to Caesarea on the morrow.” McClintok & Strong's' It was apparently far enough away to be safe from the Jews who were

laying in wait for Paul elsewhere.

THEY DELIVERED THE EPISTLE TO THE GOVERNOR

“ On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle: 33 Who, when they came to Caesarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him . . .”

After a night’s rest, the horsemen, and possibly the spearmen, continued on, taking Paul to Felix the governor.

Faithful to their charge, they have kept the letter to Felix safe, and deliver it with Paul to the governor, their mission being accomplished. Caesarea was about seventy miles northwest of Jerusalem. A days journey by horseback was six to eight hours in length, and twenty-five to thirty miles. We do not know how long the travelers remained in Antipatris, but it could not have been long. They probably traveled through most of the night, finishing the trip the next day. Any way you look at it, it was an aggressive trip. Like the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, Paul’s deliverance was certainly not attended with ease and comfort. It seems to me that this is not uncommon in the working of the Lord.

Now Paul is presented before the governor. The text reads as though this was done immediately. First, however, they delivered the letter the captain had written to the governor to familiarize him with the case. He had no advance warning of this, so had to react in an impromptu manner. That is, I have observed, a mark of true leaders. If this is true in the world, it is even more true in matters pertaining to life and godliness.

Ponder how Moses, and the judges who later joined him, had to respond to the many cases that were brought to them (Ex 18:13-26). Recall how Solomon had to react immediately to two women who claimed the same child as their own (1 Kgs 3:17-28). Ponder how Peter had to discern and act quickly in reference to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10). Jesus once said to His disciples, “But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak” (Matt 10:19).

OF WHAT PROVINCE

“And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia . . .” Other versions read, “What part of the country do you come from?” BBE “asked of what eparchy he was,” DARBY and “he asked of what country he was.” TNT

A “province” is defined as “the region subject to a prefect; a province of the Roman empire.” THAYER Felix knew from Lysias’ letter that Paul was a Roman, but he did not know the country with which Paul was identified. He doubtless asked so he could determine whether or not Paul was from a country that was under his jurisdiction.

Notice that although the charges brought against Paul originated in Judea, yet Paul’s country is reckoned to be the one in which he was born, and which was properly called his country. He would be judged as a citizen of Rome by the procurator that was responsible for that region. We know from the answer of Felix, that he was that ruler.

Paul answers that he was from Cilicia, where Tarsus was located. This was apparently a region that was under Felix.

There is a parallel here with life in Christ Jesus. In the final judgment, men will be judged in accordance with the kingdom with which they are identified, whether it is the domain over which Satan rules, or the Kingdom of Christ. Just as it was in our text, the determination will be made

according to where a person was born. The eighty-seventh Psalm refers to this principle in these words: "I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know Me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there . And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the Highest Himself shall establish her" (Psa 87:4-5).

I WILL HEAR

"I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall." Other versions read, "kept in Herod's Praetorium," NKJV "in Herod's palace," NIV "guard in Herod's headquarters," NRSV and "And he ordered that an eye be kept on him in Herod's palace (the Praetorium)." AMPLIFIED

Thus the stage is set for the next phase of this event. To guarantee Paul's safety, he is kept in Herod's headquarters, which doubtless was guarded well. The "praetorium" was the place where judgment was rendered. Hence the Authorized refers to it as "Herod's judgment hall."

It is important to remember that there is a place where ultimate judgment will be made of every man. Scripture refers to it as "the judgment seat of Christ" (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). It is so identified because God "will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). Jesus Himself affirmed, "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22). Of course, there is a distinction in the day of judgment over which Jesus will reside. Those who have lived by faith will have no accusers. However, those who have had unique privileges and advantages, yet lived in contradiction of them, will have accusers like the Queen of Sheba and Nineveh (Lk 11:31-32). Their testimony will not determine the judgment rendered toward the slothful. It will, however, justify God by corroborating the judgment determined against them. It is good to prepare for that appointed time.

CONCLUSION

The government of Jesus is seen in this whole event. Various vessels are used for His glory – some are vessels "to honor," and some are vessels "to dishonor" (2 Tim 2:20).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A NET. Jesus taught that the kingdom of God was like a net which caught fish "of every kind." At the conclusion of the expedition, the net was drawn to shore: "Which, when it was full, was drawn to shore," and "they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away" (Matt 13:47-48).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A FIELD OF MIXED SEED. Again, the kingdom of God is likened to "a man sowed good seed in his field." At night, while men slept, an enemy came in and "sowed tares among the wheat." The field remained under the management of the owner until "the time of harvest." Then, Jesus said, "I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn" (Mat 13:30).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE WISE AND FOOLISH VIRGINS. Again, the Kingdom of God is like "unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Matt 25:1). The "foolish" were not fully exposed until the Bridegroom appeared. It was at that time that they were eliminated, although they were under His supervision all along (Matt 25:2-12).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE A VINEYARD WITH UNFAITHFUL STEWARDS. The Kingdom is also like a "certain householder" who planted a vineyard, preparing it adequately, and then leaving for a "far country." The vineyard was left in the care his servants, some of whom were wicked. Although they were under the government of the owner of the vineyard, they were not exposed and removed until he returned (Matt 21:33-41).

THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS LIKE FAITHFUL AND UNFAITHFUL STEWARDS. Again, the Kingdom of God is like a man who

In each of these parables the Kingdom is depicted as under the control of the Lord, even though wicked, slothful, and unfaithful men were involved in His work. However, the time of reckoning came when they faced the ultimate Owner, to whom they had to give an account. Not a single unfaithful servant gained the master's approval, and there was not a faithful servant who did not. This is the manner of the Kingdom.

distributed his goods to his servants to manage them until he returned from a far country. One of those servants was unfaithful, even though he received a portion of his master's goods to manage. That servant was exposed and eliminated when the owner returned (Matt 25:14-30).

In each of these parables the Kingdom is depicted as under the control of the Lord, even though wicked, slothful, and unfaithful men were involved in His work. However, the time of reckoning came when they faced the ultimate Owner, to whom they had to give an account. Not a single unfaithful servant gained the master's approval, and there was not a faithful servant who did not. This is the manner of the Kingdom.

The principle made known in these parables is lived out in our text. Ponder all of the people who were involved.

- Jews from Asia (Acts 21:27a).
- Jews in the Temple who were stirred up by the Jews from Asia (Acts 21:27b).
- All the city of Jerusalem who ran together and took Paul out of the Temple (Acts 21:30).
- A chief captain of the Roman government (Acts 21:31).
- The soldiers that were marshaled by this captain (Acts 21:32a).
- Centurions (Acts 21:32b; 23:10,23).
- A multitude of Jews crying out different things when asked by the captain the reason for the tumult (21:33-34).
- A centurion to whom Paul spoke, asking if it was lawful to scourge a Roman when he was uncondemned (Acts 21:25).
- The chief priests (Acts 22:30a).
- The Jewish council (Acts 22:30b).
- Ananias the high priest (Acts 23:2).
- The one who struck Paul on the mouth at the command of Ananias (Acts 23:2-3).
- Those who "stood by," who asked Paul why he dared to revile God's high priest (23:4).
- Sadducees (Acts 23:6a,7).
- Pharisees (Acts 23:6b,7).
- Scribes (Acts 23:9).
- Forty Jews who bound themselves under a curse not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-13).
- The Jewish elders (Acts 23:14).
- Paul's nephew – his sister's son (Acts 23:16-17).

- A specific centurion whom Paul told to take his nephew to the chief captain (Acts 23:17).
- Two hundred soldiers (Acts 23:23a).
- Seventy horsemen (Acts 23:23b).
- Two hundred spearmen (Acts 23:23c).
- Felix the governor (Acts 23:33-35).

There are twenty-four classes of individuals and groups involved in two or three days of activity. They differed in theology, rank, and responsibility. Yet, one senses a certain order in the events in which they took part. There was a very definite sense in which they were all vessels in the Lord's house. Some of them would eventually be cast away, while others would be identified with the One who governs the kingdom. None of them used the Lord, but the Lord used them.

It is comforting to know that the same Lord is working all things together for our good (Rom 8:28). That is not as possibility, it is the guarantee Divine posture of those who love God and are the called.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #95

THE CHARGES AGAINST PAUL

“ 24:1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul. 2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words. 5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes: 6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. 7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, 8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him. 9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so. 10 Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself: 11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship. 12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: 13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.” (Acts 24:1-13)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

After a five-day wait, their intentions having been providentially subverted by a Roman captain, and, as a matter of legality, the Jews now prepare to substantiate their charges against Paul. They bring an orator with them to present the case in a colorful and convincing manner. The presentation is made, with the Jews consenting to its accuracy. Now Paul is given an opportunity to answer the false charges. He commences by stating that he knows Felix has been a judge to the Jewish nation for “many years.” He knows that during those years he has become familiar with Jewish manners. He also begins by saying he had only been in Jerusalem for twelve days – hardly long enough to do what the Jews have alleged – not even two weeks. The composure of Paul is evident in the manner and content of his speech. He has been prepared for this time, and fortified within by an appearance of the Lord Himself. He knows his work will not end in Judea, and thus speaks with the confidence that is birthed by faith.

THE CONSTRAINING INFLUENCE OF

CONTENTS

- **ANANIAS, THE ELDERS AND TERTULLUS (24:1)**
- **TERTULLUS IS CALLED FORTH TO PRESENT THE CASE (24:2-3)**
- **HEAR US OF THY CLEMENCY (24:4)**
- **A PESTILENT FELLOW AND A MOVER OF SEDITION (24:5)**
- **WE WOULD HAVE JUDGED HIM OURSELVES (24:6-8)**
- **THE JEWS AGREE (24:9)**
- **PAUL IS BECKONED TO SPEAK (24:10)**
- **IT HAS ONLY BEEN TWELVE DAYS SINCE PAUL WENT TO JERUSALEM (24:11)**
- **I WAS NOT DISPUTING OR RAISING UP THE PEOPLE (24:12)**
- **THEIR CASE CANNOT BE PROVED (24:13)**
- **CONCLUSION**

SPIRITUAL INSIGHT

When Paul wrote that “the love of Christ constrains,” he was careful to say “us” instead of “me” (2 Cor 5:14). That is because it is the very nature of the love of Christ to constrain, compel or press the one who discerns it. When that love is seen for what it really is, it outshines every other influence. It is superior because it is absolutely unique. There is no adversarial influence that is capable of separating us from it (Rom 8:35). That is because it is not founded on Christ’s reaction to you personally. His love for humanity proceeds from His love for and commitment to the Father. That is why it is said of “the love of Christ” that is “passeth knowledge,” or “surpasses knowledge.” NASB

This is a love that passes all knowledge, or extends beyond the perimeter of natural aptitude, because it has no earthly parallel. Christ’s love transcends a mother’s love, which is not powerful enough to guarantee she will not have compassion on the son of her love (Isa 49:15). Thus, God said of His love for His people, which is of the same class as the love of Christ, “Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me” (Isa 49:15-16).

By faith, Paul saw more deeply into this love than others. That is why his labors were more prodigious, and his patience more exemplary. Here is his own testimony on this matter: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). This love was so compelling that it prompted Paul to forsake all competing interests, laying himself upon the altar of sacrifice. That is why he wrote, "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord . . . That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death" (Phil 3:7-10).

THE CONNECTION

No person who is actually living by faith will be astounded at the composure of Paul. They know by experience how faith impacts upon the human spirit. When people are confused and astounded at the Scriptural record of the reactions of saints, they are betraying their own lack of acquaintance with a life that is lived by faith.

Paul's unparalleled devotion and endurance can be traced to the comprehension of the love of Christ. That perception is what enabled him to go through trials that were of an extraordinary nature, and do so confidently. On one occasion, when he "despaired even of life," he held on his way, knowing that the sentence of death came "that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead" (2 Cor 1:8). Another time, when he was incarcerated, he wrote to the brethren at Philippi, "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:19). Another time he wrote to the saints in Rome, "And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience" (Rom 5:3). When he was given a "thorn in the flesh" that was of sufficient aggravation that he thrice asked for its removal, he said this: "And He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

All of that is being lived out in our text. That is why Paul has the presence of mind to speak wisely, act discreetly, and seize every opportunity set before him. When he was tempted, he was able to find the door of escape that accompanies every temptation (1 Cor 10:13). He maintained courage, and did not faint in the day of adversity. It is written, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small" (Prov 24:10).

The person who knows the love of Christ is the one who knows "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31). It is the person who can "boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb 13:6).

This kind of confidence, boldness, and assurance cannot be taught in the schools of men. It is not the result of forming new habits, or repeating a saying over and over. It is not the result of special training in the way to think. This is rather the result of a faith that extends into heaven itself, taking hold of the love of Christ. This is a love that convinces the heart, so that it knows beyond all controversy that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). This is a very precise statement of the case, and can be received without fear.

No person who is actually living by faith will be astounded at the composure of Paul. They know by experience how faith impacts upon the human spirit. When people are confused and astounded at the Scriptural record of the reactions of saints, they are betraying their own lack of acquaintance with a life that is lived by faith. The foes ought not be fed with expressions that reflect consternation at the

unwavering faith of Noah, Abraham, the Prophets, and the Apostles. When teachers and preachers make remarks like, “That is certainly not the way we would react,” they have fueled doubt and invited an “evil heart of unbelief” to enter. They have represented today’s stumbling religious generation as normal, while painting the saints of old as something like heroes. The truth of the matter is that saints like those listed in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews represent those who really do live by faith. The results found in their lives were not the result of super-discipline, but were the result of believing God.

Who is able to calculate the effects of sayings that concede to the flesh and represent the thinking of the carnal mind? They are not innocent, and are not to be tolerated. We have a word from God on this matter: “If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11). No person is right who claims to represent the living God, yet speaks in a manner that is out of synch with the nature of genuine spiritual life.

The consciousness of the effects of preaching, both valid and invalid, are little known these days. Many religious professionals speak more like comedians and entertainers than men of God. This is done even though the Holy Spirit has made quite clear how we are to address the saints of God. Illuminated men speak “unto men to edification, exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3). Not one of those objectives can be realized through speaking that appeals to the flesh. Such speech assumes the normality of carnality, unbelief, and fundamental unspirituality. However, such assumptions are a flagrant denial of the reality of regeneration, the new creation, and being born again. To attempt to placate those who are living at a distance from God is a transgression of the greatest magnitude. No effort should be extended to make a person living in the flesh comfortable. Such people are in a state of condemnation, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die : but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13).

Spiritual words, or words that the Holy Spirit teaches (1 Cor 12:13) , will never pacify the flesh. Such words are never calculated to make carnal people laugh, or worldly-minded people to feel comfortable in their state. Such things simply cannot occur when men speak “as the oracles of God.”

When considering a passage like the one now before us, care must be taken to get out of a merely historical mindset. Men of God like Paul are not to be considered as mere heroes living beyond the perimeter of practical spirituality. In the case of Paul, his ministry was unique, but his manner of life was not. After describing the way he thought about himself and living for the Lord (both of which appear to the carnal as unique), Paul said, “Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded : and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you” (Phil 3:15). Any other kind of mindset is not acceptable. That is why the Lord will “reveal” the necessity and validity of a life wholly lived for Him.

Thus, it is incumbent upon us to view this passage as an evidence of the minds and hearts of men. We are beholding the effects of religious bigotry and unbelief, as well as a life lived by faith. There is also the revelation of people who want to do what is right, even though they are not believers. Yet, they have enough understanding to want fairness for men. These various dispositions are all duly noted, controlled, and orchestrated by “the Lord of all.”

ANANIAS, THE ELDERS, AND TERTULLUS

“ 24:1 And after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.”

The Spirit now leaps over a five-day period, saying nothing about what took place during that time, whether good or bad. This again confirms that the book of Acts, strictly speaking, is not a chronological journal of the travels and experiences of holy men. It is rather a record of the activities of the Head of the church, who was working through His servants to fulfill the will of God. Within

that context, some matters were relevant, and some were not.

AFTER FIVE DAYS

“And after five days . . .” Other versions read, “five days later,” NIV and “five days after this.”
WEYMOUTH

Paul was left in “Herod’s judgment hall” for this period of time. The NRSV reads that Paul was “kept under guard in Herod’s headquarters.” He was, in fact, a prisoner – whether bound or not we do not know.

ANANIAS DESCENDS WITH THE ELDERS

“Ananias the high priest descended with the elders . . .” Other versions read, “came down with,” NKJV “came down to Caesarea,” NIV “went to the city of Caesarea with some leaders of the people,” GWN “went down,” MRD “arrived with,” NLT and “came down [from Jerusalem to Caesarea].”
AMPLIFIED

Although I have mentioned this before, it seems appropriate to draw attention to it again. Actually, Caesarea was north of Jerusalem, yet Ananias and the elders are said to have “descended,” or “went down” to that city from Jerusalem. The phrase “UP to Jerusalem” occurs twenty-five times in Scripture (1 Kgs 12:19; 2 Kgs 12:17; 16:6; 2 Chron 2:16; Ezra 1:3; 7:13; Matt 20:17,18; 10:32-33; Lk 2:42; 18:31; 19:28; John 2:13; 5:1; 11:55; Acts 11:2; 15:2; 21:4,12,15; 24:11; 25:9; Gal 1:17,18). The phrase “down from Jerusalem” occurs four times in Scripture (Mk 3:22; Lk 10:30; Acts 8:26; 25:7).

This is not language denoting direction. It is rather the language of perspective, for Jerusalem was positioned in high places. God referred to Jerusalem as “My holy mountain, Jerusalem” (Isa 66:20). Daniel said of this city, “Thy city, Thy holy mountain” (Dan 9:16). Zechariah wrote, “Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain” (Zech 8:3). The Psalmist spoke “the mountains” that were “about Jerusalem” (Psa 126:2). The lofty heights of Jerusalem required that those going to it ascend – wherever they were coming from. Those leaving Jerusalem were required to descend – wherever they were going.

In this, Jerusalem proved to be a most accurate type of the place to which those in Christ are elevated. The epistle to the Hebrews affirms that the saved “are come to mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22). Ephesians refers to this location as the “heavenly places” where the redeemed have been made to “sit together” (Eph 2:6). Any person occupying this blessed residence must be raised up, leaving the low places of carnality, and rise higher than this present evil world. Anyone who retrogresses spiritually, allows an evil heart of belief to enter them, departing from the living God. They have to come down to do this.

Therefore, Ananias and the elders left the high place of Jerusalem, and descended from it to the lower realm of Caesarea. They came to formally present their charges against Paul, doing so at the behest of the chief captain and Felix the governor.

A CERTAIN ORATOR

“ . . . and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.” Other versions read, “a certain attorney,” NASB “a lawyer,” NIV “a spokesman,” RSV “an expert talker,” BBE “an advocate,” NAB “a pleader,” WEYMOUTH “prosecuting attorney,” WILLIAMS and “spokesman and counsel.”
AMPLIFIED

The word “orator” is translated from the Greek word **ῥῆτορ**, which means, “a speaker, orator,” THAYER “orator, public speaker; as a court speaker attorney, lawyer,” FRIBERG and “one who

speaks in court as an attorney or advocate (either for the prosecution or for the defense) - 'lawyer, attorney, advocate.'" LOUW-NIDA The idea here is that of a speaker that lays forth a case in an expert or skilled manner. He was probably knowledgeable of Roman court procedures, as well as being skilled in both the Greek and Latin languages.

The name Tertullus is a Roman name, and the man was probably a Roman. Such a man, together with the Jewish officials, was thought to tip the scales in favor of the Jews. To a accused person who was not of faith, it would have been an intimidating situation. But this was certainly not the case with Paul. He could say with David, "Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear: though war should rise against me, in this will I be confident" (Psa 27:3). Faith neutralizes the power of the enemy, making the believer superior to circumstance. Oh, that this was better known among professing Christians. In our time, there is a marked dependence upon the men of this world and their wisdom, which is "from beneath."

TERTULLUS IS CALLED FORTH TO PRESENT THE CASE

" 2 And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness."

There is a certain order in this court that was totally absent when the Jews first dragged Paul out of the Temple. No formal charges were registered against him at that time, but they had begun to beat him. From its very beginning, the Law given to the Jews required that grievances be presented before a judge (Ex 18:22; Deut 1:16) – a cause was to be presented. This judgment was not to be wrested, and no respect of persons was allowed (Deut 16:19). A "sentence of judgment" was to be rendered by the judge, and only then was due punishment to be administered. It is ironic that the only way this procedure could be followed by the accusers of Paul was for it to be managed by a heathen government.

HE WAS CALLED FORTH

"And when he was called forth . . ." Other versions read, "when he was called upon," NKJV "after Paul had been summoned," NASB "when Paul was called in," NIV "when he had been sent for," BBE "Saul was called, and," CJB and "when Paul was called in." NIB

It might appear as though Tertullus was summoned before the governor. That, however, is not the case. It is Paul that is brought forth to hear the charges against him. He is the "him" that Tertullus begins to accuse. Thus his incarceration of five days was brought to a momentary conclusion.

TERTULLUS BEGAN TO ACCUSE HIM

"Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3 We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness."

This is certainly an oratorical beginning, with the accent being placed on flattery. Thus, the Jews thought to gain some advantage with the governor, as though they had been living in thankfulness for his expert manner of government.

By Thee We Enjoy Great Quietness

Other versions read, "great peace," "much peace," NASB and "a long period of peace." NIV

Tertullus, although not a Jew himself, speaks for the area of Judea, and Jerusalem in particular. He

flatters Felix by declaring a long era of peace had attended his reign. This does agree with the history of that time.

However, the Jews had been cultured to associate peace and well being with Divine care. Solomon once said, "The horse is prepared against the day of battle, but safety is of the Lord" (Prov 21:31). David wrote, "It is He that giveth salvation unto kings: who delivereth David His servant from the hurtful sword" (Psa 144:10). And again he wrote, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou, LORD, only makest me dwell in safety" (Psa 4:8). However, Tertullus gives the total credit for well being to Felix, ignoring God altogether. What is even more, he does this with the sanction of Ananias and the elders.

INFORMATION ON FELIX THE GOVERNOR

Though it was said for flattery, and though Felix was in many respects an unprincipled man, yet it was true that his administration had been the means of producing much peace and order in Judea, and that he had done many things that tended to promote the welfare of the nation. In particular, he had arrested a band of robbers, with Eleazar at their head, whom he had sent to Rome to be punished (Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 8); he had arrested the Egyptian false prophet who had led out 4,000 men into the wilderness, and who threatened the peace of Judea; and he had repressed a sedition which arose between the inhabitants of Caesarea and of Syria (Josephus, Jewish Wars, book 2, chapter 13, section 2). ALBERT BARNES COMMENTARY

Very Worthy Deeds are Done

Other versions read, "prosperity is being brought," NKJV "by your providence reforms are being carried out for this nation," NASB "your foresight has brought about reforms," NIV "through your wisdom wrongs are put right," BBE "excellent measures are executed for this nation by thy forethought," DARBY "evils are corrected," ERV and "by your foresight and provision wonderful reforms (amendments and improvements) are introduced and effected on behalf of this nation." AMPLIFIED

It is generally understood that Tertullus here refers to the routing of robbers from the land, together with insurrectionists. I can understand a Roman thinking in this manner but not the Jews, who had such a rich history of Divine protection and provision.

Too many times professed believers who have become unduly influenced by politics and the worldly-wise, give credit to men for things that should have been traced back to the mercies of the Lord. This reminds me of the conduct of Israel during the time of Hosea, and what the Lord had to say about it. "For she did not know that I gave her corn, and wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold, which they prepared for Baal . Therefore will I return, and take away my corn in the time thereof, and my wine in the season thereof, and will recover my wool and my flax given to cover her nakedness" (Hosea 2:9).

Due note ought to be made of the Lord's reaction to an incorrect assessment of the source of prosperity and safety.

We Accept It Always

Other versions read, "Everywhere and in every way, most excellent Felix, we acknowledge this with profound gratitude" NIV and "we accept and acknowledge this with deep appreciation and with all gratitude." AMPLIFIED

Speaking for the consenting Jews, Tertullus addressed Felix on the matter social peace and benefits just as though God did not even exist. As Israel offered the grain God gave her to Baal (Hos 2:9), so

these accusers, with an orator giving them assistance, offered praise to Felix that was really due to God. Jerusalem, “the city of the Lord of hosts” (Psa 48:8) was being outwardly managed by a heathen government. Yet, they had given favor to the Jews, making a peaceful environment and benefitting them with various conveniences. It was not that the Romans had such a high regard for Israel, as would be confirmed some years later. This was God being kind to them, but like Samson, they “wist not” the true circumstances.

Let the people of God of our time be quick to recognize the favor of the Lord, and give Him glory for it.

HEAR US OF THY CLEMENCY

“ 4 Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.”

As Tertullus commences his presentation, one senses that he is in earnest quest of the favor of men, as opposed to the establishment of the truth. The “love of the truth” frees a person from such vain ambitions and quests. The attempt to manipulate people by flattery is not proper, and is to be avoided at all cost.

THAT I BE NOT FURTHER TEDIOUS

“Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee . . .” Other versions read, “weary you any further,” NASB “detain you no further,” NRSV “make you tired,” BBE “take up too much of your time,” CJB “keep you too, long,” GWN “delay you any further,” NET “don’t want to bore you,” NLT “be patient with us,” CEV and “tire you out with a long speech.” MESSAGE

There is a message between the lines, so to speak, of this text. It is this: dealing with peripheral and incidental matters is an imposition upon men of thought and responsibility. Who is able to estimate the amount of time that is wasted concerning matters that are nothing more than weightless motes on the ocean of life. When our attention is drawn to lesser things, our thoughts tend to deteriorate, and truth moves further from us. If it is true that we are to love the Lord with all of our mind (Matt 22:37), then we are certainly stewards of our minds, and must use them profitably.

Even Tertullus seems to perceive that there is a certain tediousness involved in majoring on minors. I realize that he was speaking in a flattering manner, yet his words reveal something of an awareness that this occasion could very well irritate the governor.

And what can be said concerning matters pertaining to prayer and supplication? How conscious we ought to be of Divine inclinations and proper priorities when we pray. In other words no person should approach the Lord without a due awareness of who He is and what pleases Him. There may be varying degrees of these perceptions, but it seems to me that some grasp of them is to be preferred.

HEAR US OF THY CLEMENCY

“ . . . I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.” Other versions read, “your courtesy,” NKJV “your kindness,” NASB “be kind enough to hear us briefly,” NIV “your customary graciousness,” NRSV and “your clemency and courtesy and kindness.” AMPLIFIED

Again, this is flattering language, and does not reflect a deep respect for Felix. It is an approach that is more expedient than insightful and preferred. You might call it a kind of political protocol.

Making the transition to matters pertaining to life and godliness, God Almighty is also to be approached a certain way. This is not a mere formality, but is associated with discernment. Here are

some considerations.

- Jesus taught us to pray in a certain manner. The introductory part of that manner is as follows: “After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name” (Matt6:9).

- When praying concerning the replacement of the bishopric vacated by Judas, the disciples prayed, “And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men . . .” (Acts 1:24).

- When the early disciples prayed, they approached the Lord with a certain keen awareness of His Person. “Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is” (Acts 4:24).

While I must admit that all of this is rather rudimentary, I say these things because there is a gospel being preached these days that absolutely fails to affirm how God is to be approached. He is being presented as a God that is anxious to hear from everyone.

Doctrinally, the approach to God is described in the following manner. “Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience , and our bodies washed with pure water ” (Heb 10:22).

These few words confirm that the following awareness ought to be present when prayers are offered to God.

- God is OUR Father, indicating that prayer is to be made with an acute awareness that we are not the only ones.

- God is IN HEAVEN, which requires an adjustment in our thinking.

- The name of the Lord is to be HALLOWED, or held in the highest regard. It is to be venerated, and perceived as holy.

- God KNOWS the hearts of all men, especially those who are praying to Him. This must not elude us.

- The Lord created all things, particular referring to the domain that we presently occupy. Knowing that this world and everything in it BELONGS TO GOD will shape how we pray.

- God must be approached with a “TRUE HEART,” or in absolute sincerity and the total absence of hypocrisy.

- It is also imperative that our CONSCIENCE BE CLEANSED, so that the goading effects of sin and transgression are not found. If that condition does not exist, then the matter is to be addressed before going any further (1 John 1:9).

- The person who approaches the throne of all grace must have had his BODY WASHED WITH PURE WATER. This is reference to baptism, also referred to as “the washing of regeneration” (Tit 3:5). In other words, those who present their supplications to the Lord ought to have received the atonement and availed themselves of His great salvation. If that has not been done, then that is the matter that needs to be addressed – and the obtaining of salvation is nowhere associated with prayer. It is rather identified with believing and obeying the Gospel of Christ.

While I must admit that all of this is rather rudimentary, I say these things because there is a gospel being preached these days that absolutely fails to affirm how God is to be approached. He is being presented as a God that is anxious to hear from everyone. This, however, is not the case. While He would that all men be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4), seeking mercy and grace to help in the time of need is a privilege vouchsafed exclusively to the family, or household, of

God. This is not how men are initially saved, as confirmed on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Samaria, in the case of the Ethiopian eunuch, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus, at the house of Cornelius, with Lydia and her household, the Philippian jailer, etc. In every case, the favorable response of men was the result of believing the Gospel, which was preached to them by means of a minister, “even as the Lord gave to every man” (1 Cor 3:5).

A PESTILENT FELLOW AND A MOVER OF SEDITION

“ 5 For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes . ”

The illegitimacy of the charges against Paul are confirmed by their ambiguity. It should be recognized that in a court of law, vagueness is out of place. In matters that require a judgment, and the pronouncement of a penalty, general charges must be supported by detailed facts, else they have no value.

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A PESTILENT FELLOW

“For we have found this man a pestilent fellow . . .” Other versions read, “a plague,” NKJV “a real pest,” NASB “a troublemaker,” NIV “a cause of trouble,” BBE “an agitator,” CJB “an assassin,” MRD “a perfect pest,” NJB “a perfect pest (a real plague),” AMPLIFIED “dangerous nuisance,” GNB and “time and again disturbing the peace.” MESSAGE

A “pestilent fellow” is to a culture what a disease is to a society. Such a person causes mental and moral deterioration among men. He is an infection among men, introducing liability, false notions, and moral degradation.

Of course, Paul was not guilty of being such a person. Only those who rejected what he said were disturbed. Those who received what he said experienced peace, and no longer were a liability to society. In his preaching and teaching Paul had revealed the fallaciousness of the Jews’ self-conceived traditions, and that had caused a tumult.

A MOVER OF SEDITION AMONG ALL JEWS THROUGHOUT THE WORLD

“ . . . and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world . . .” Other versions read, “creator of dissension,” NKJV “stirs up dissension,” NASB “stirring up riots,” NIV “an agitator,” NRSV “a mover of insurrections,” ASV “a maker of attacks upon the government,” BBE “moving sedition,” DARBY “starts quarrels,” GWN “stirs up trouble,” NJB “a mover of debate,” PNT “an agitator and source of disturbance,” AMPLIFIED and “constantly inciting the Jews.” LIVING

This same charge was brought against Paul and Silas at Philippi: “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city” (Acts 16:20). In Thessalonica Paul and Silas were charged with turning the world “upside down” (Acts 17:8). However, in every case, it was the unbelievers that caused the trouble.

The word “sedition” suggests rebellion against the government – such as was fomented by Barabbas (Mk 15:7; Lk 23:8-9). For this reason, and with the full knowledge of Tertullus and the Jews he represented, Felix would interpret this as Paul fomenting political rebellion. However, no man of God ever fomented such a rebellion.

A similar charge was raised against Jesus when the Jewish leaders delivered Him to Pilate. They said, “We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar , saying that he himself is Christ a King” (Luke 23:2). However, Jesus never did forbid the paying of taxes. In fact, it was He who taught, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's” (Mark 12:17).

There are environments where trouble is more apt to break out when the truth is preached. This is owing to the presence of those who are devoted to things other than the truth. However, the people of God are not to close their mouths or modify their lives in such surroundings. Solemnly we are admonished, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph 5:11). Other versions read “expose them,” NKJV “make their true quality clear,” BBE “show them up for what they are,” NJB “even rebuke them,” PNT “even convict,” YLT and “[let your lives be so in contrast as to] expose and reprove and convict them.” AMPLIFIED This admonition is fulfilled by speaking the truth, and living lives that are in concert with it.

Compromisers do not speak the truth (if they even know it), in the face of such altercations. Such men are quite willing to tailor the message so it will not cause offense in those who disagree with it. This, however, is not a Divine manner, nor is such encouraged among those who declare the truth publically.

A RINGLEADER OF THE SECT OF THE NAZARENES

“ . . . and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes . ” Other versions read, “a chief mover in the society of the Nazarenes,” BBE “a leader,” DARBY “author of the seditions,” DOUAY “a chief maintainer,” GENEVA and “a ringleader of the [heretical, division-producing] sect of the Nazarenes.” AMPLIFIED

By definition a “sect” is “a body of men following their own tenets,” STRONG’S and “that which is chosen, a chosen course of thought and action; hence one's chosen opinion, tenet; according to the context, an opinion varying from the true exposition of the Christian faith.” THAYER The Greek word from which “sect” is derived is the same word translated “heresies” – **ai`re,sewj** [hair-e-ses]. It speaks of a body of people who have departed from sound doctrine to embrace human tradition. That is how the word is used in Scripture.

Here the charge is that Paul was a key man in a sectarian group that had broken away from the truth. He is depicted as promoting an aberrant form of theology –

Thus we see that if it was not for the Lord Jesus Christ, there would have been no mention of Nazareth in the Scriptures. He is the One who gave significance to that city.

in particular, something that was wholly incompatible with the revelation given to the Jews. All of this must have sounded foolish and irrelevant to Felix the governor.

The phrase “sect of the Nazarenes” is an interesting one. Since Jesus was referred to “the Nazarene” (Matt 2:23; 26:71), his followers were said to be “Nazarenes.” All of this accents the uniqueness of Jesus. The city of Nazareth is mentioned twenty-nine times in Scripture (Matt 2:23; 4:13; 21:11; 26:71; Mk 1:9,24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; Lk 1:26; 2:4,39,51; 4:16,34; 18:37; 24:19; John 1:45,46; 18:5,7; 19:19; Acts 2:22; 3:6; 4:10; 6:14; 10:38; 22:8; 26:9). “Jesus” is mentioned by name in twenty-one of those references. He is indirectly mentioned in five of them (Matt 2:23; 4:13; Lk 2:51; 4:16; John 1:46). One of these texts refers to the angel Gabriel; being sent to Nazareth to Mark, to announce she would bear the Son of God (Lk 1:26). One reference is to Joseph, when he and Mary went to Bethlehem “to be taxed,” at which time Jesus was born (Lk 2:4). Nazareth is referred to as the city of Joseph and Mary (Lk 2:39).

Thus we see that if it was not for the Lord Jesus Christ, there would have been no mention of

Nazareth in the Scriptures. He is the One who gave significance to that city.

When Jesus is actually prominent in the professed church, He will be clearly identified with it, just as surely as He was identified with Nazareth. One of the monumental difficulties of our time is that there is no apparent association of the nominal church with Jesus. That is one of the chief evidences that suggests He is not there! I realize this is most arresting to ponder, but the matter is worthy of thought. The condition most certainly exists, as every honest and good heart knows.

WE WOULD HAVE JUDGED HIM OURSELVES

“ 6 Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law. 7 But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, 8 Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.”

Now, Tertullus presents the case as though the plea for the clemency of Felix could have been avoided altogether if they had been allowed the freedom to do what they willed. He makes no mention of the whole city being in an uproar because of the allegations of the Jews against Paul, NOT because of the activities of Paul. Neither, indeed, does he mention that Paul's life was in jeopardy before any charges had been researched and proved – something that God's Law (Deut 1:17; 17:8-11; John 7:51) and Roman law required (Acts 22:25-26). Such a proceeding also violated the tenets of wisdom. Solomon wrote, “He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him” (Prov 18:13).

The “carnal mind” does not permit the individual dominated by it to deal with critical issues in an orderly and just manner. In fact, it blocks out the truth itself, and the wisdom that enables people to process the truth. It blinds both heart and mind so that the real situation cannot be seen. This is particularly true in matters of religion. When it comes to speaking the truth of God, or calling for just and equitable treatment, a person cannot appeal to the minds or thinking processes of carnal people. Such a mindset is not able to traffic in truth.

Throughout the history of those who lived by faith, opposition to them was characterized by injustice, such as is revealed in our text. The opposition of Cain to Abel, Ishmael to Isaac, and Esau to Jacob, confirm this to be true. There was also the opposition of Egypt to Israel, Pharaoh to Moses, the unbelieving spies, and those who opposed and persecuted the prophets.

In an age that has unduly exalted education, there remains this false assumption that men will always process the truth correctly. Thus drunkards are taught what liquor will do to them, and fornicators are shown the dangers of promiscuity to both health and the mind.

HE WENT ABOUT TO PROFANE THE TEMPLE

“Who also hath gone about to profane the temple . . .” Other versions read “desecrate the Temple,” NASB “make the Temple unclean,” BBE “pollute the temple,” GENEVA “violates our tradition,” GWN “defile the Temple,” LIVING and “tried to desecrate and defile the temple.” AMPLIFIED

This was nothing more than a groundless rumor. Earlier we are told that this charge was based on the report that Trophimus, an Ephesian, was brought into the Temple by Paul. However this was nothing more than a supposition. It is written, “For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple” (Acts 21:29). Other versions read that they “assumed,” NIV and “had the idea that,” BBE “ and thought.” GWN

The word “supposed” has the following lexical meaning: “to deem, think,” THAYER “as regarding something as already settled or established suppose, think, presume,” FRIBERG and “to

regard something as presumably true, but without particular certainty - 'to suppose, to presume, to assume, to imagine, to believe, to think.' LOUW-NIDA In the case of supposition, there is no examination or test to determine if the conclusion reached is true. What is concluded is assumed to be true, and procedures are set in place just as though what is assumed is a settled fact.

There is a phenomenal amount of this kind of thinking in the modern Christian community. Pervasive doctrines are both taught and embraced that assume things that have by no means been confirmed. Examples of such assumptions are as follows

There is a phenomenal amount of this kind of thinking in the modern Christian community. Pervasive doctrines are both taught and embraced that assume things that have by no means been confirmed. Examples of such assumptions are as follows.

- That baptism has nothing whatsoever to do with salvation.
- That the fundamental work of the church is evangelism.
- That Jesus is returning to earth to set up a Kingdom in the realm of flesh and blood.
- That the love of God is strictly unconditional.
- That the church is devoted to the correction and reformation of society.
- That there is a hierarchy of authority within the church that resembles worldly government.
- That God wants everyone to be happy and to see their dreams fulfilled.

Although unproved in every sense of the word, these suppositions are used to develop whole bodies of theology. Procedures are developed with them in mind, and professed believers are directed to do this or that upon the imagined postulate that such things are true.

This is the kind of circumstance Jesus faced when He walked among men. He had some things to say about the traditions of men, and they are startling to the flesh.

- Human traditions cause people to “transgress the commandment of God” (Matt 15:3).
- Men’s tradition make “the commandment of God of none effect” (Matt 15:6; Mk 7:13).
- The commandment of God must be “laid aside” to keep the tradition of men (Mk 7:8).
- In order to keep men’s tradition, the commandment of God must be rejected (Mk 7:9).

It is difficult to imagine anything being more serious than the revealed effects of following religious tradition. And yet, it supports every denomination, and every erroneous doctrine. Sadly, the words of the Head of the church are placed aside, and some are not even aware of them.

It also ought to be noted that countless ministers of the Word have been, and continue to be, maligned because they do not hold the traditions of men. They are charged with being arrogant, false teachers, and the likes, simply because their message does not mesh with sectarian tradition.

WE TOOK HIM AND WOULD HAVE JUDGED HIM

“ . . . whom we took, and would have judged according to our law . . .” Other versions read, “wanted to judge him according to our law,” NKJV “would have given him what he justly deserves,” LIVING and “and would have sentenced him by our Law.” AMPLIFIED Most of the modern

translations (after 1885) omit this phrase (NIV (1984), NRSV (1986), RSV (1952), BBE (1949), ERV (1885), ESV (2001), GWN (1995), NAB (2002), NET (2004), NJB (1985), NLT (1996), CEV (1995), EMTV (2003), GNB (1966), IE (?), WEYMOUTH (1903), WILLIAMS (1937), MONTGOMERY (2001) . Versions including the phrase include the following: KJV (1611), NKJV (1979), ASV (1901), NASB (1977), CSB (1998), DARBY (1884), DOUAY (1899), GENEVA (1599), MRD (1852), PNT (1595), RWB (1995), TNT (1526), WEB (1833), YLT (1862), LIVING (1971), AMPLIFIED (1965), LITV (1976).

I have taken time to list the versions that omit and include this phrase in order to make a practical point. After 1885, there is by no means unanimity among Bible translators on this subject. To me, this confirms the tenuous nature of the language, “oldest and best manuscripts,” etc. The authorities on this are not agreed, which means the purported evidence is not that clear. It seems to me that under such a condition, the default should be determined by the thrust of Scripture rather than a specific set of manuscripts. This is compounded by the fact that there is no such thing as an original manuscript of any book of Scripture. Although I hold this as a personal persuasion, I do not believe the multiplicity of translations has yielded results that justify their existence. Although claims are made of them simplifying the Scriptures, and allowing people to understand them more perfectly, the prevailing prevalence of Scriptural ignorance exists in the churches. I do not know of a solitary person who claims professing Christians are now noted for their superior use and understanding of the Word of God. If a tree is known by its “fruit,” the claims of the advantages of these many new translations stand in need of confirmation. The claims should not be made if they are not supported by corresponding fruit.

I will take this verse as it is represented in the conservative translations. It certainly does not violate the context, or the general teaching of scripture.

BUT THE CAPTAIN LYSIAS CAME UPON US

“ . . . But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands . . . ”

This verse is completely omitted by the following translations: NIV, NRSV, RSV, BBE, CJB, ERV, ESV, GWN, NAB, NET, NIV, NLT, WEYMOUTH, WILLIAMS, IE, CEV, GNB . The sense of the text itself, and the context as well, does not justify this omission. Thus, I will proceed in the persuasion that its presence is altogether proper.

This statement by Tertullus is not altogether true. Lysias did not interrupt a trial, or some kind of legal proceedings. Instead, the whole city was in a tumult. Here is what was said of the circumstances at the time Lysias arrived on the scene.

- The Jews from Asia, seeing Paul in the Temple, had “stirred up all the people” (Acts 21:27a).
- They had laid hands on Paul (Acts 21:27b).
- The Asian Jews had informed the others that Paul had taught against the Jews, the Law, and the Temple (Acts 21:28).
- They charged that Paul had polluted the holy place (Acts 21:28).
- All of Jerusalem was moved, put into a state of agitation (Acts 21:30a).
- The people came and dragged Paul out of the Temple (Acts 21:30b).
- The Temple doors were shut (Acts 21:30c).
- The Jews went about to kill Paul (Acts 21:31).

- The Jews were in the process of beating Paul when the chief captain and his army came on the scene (Acts 21:32).

There was no legal proceedings taking place among the Jews. Instead, they had incited a riot, and were proceeding with the beating of Paul, no doubt preparing to stone him. Their law did not allow for such proceedings.

Now, using oratory, Tertullus says that Felix, being an astute man, will find the charges verified when he examines Paul. Assumption, or supposition, is one of the principle characteristics of the carnal mind.

HE COMMANDED HIS ACCUSERS TO COME TO THEE

“Commanding his accusers to come unto thee: by examining of whom thyself mayest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.”

Tertullus paints the Jews as being obedient to the political rulers over them. Therefore, as good citizens, they were appearing before the governor as they were requested to do. Lysias made reference to this in his letter, else it probably would not have been mentioned by Tertullus. “And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell” (Acts 23:30).

Imagining that he is presenting a compelling argument, Tertullus tells Felix that by examining Paul himself, it will become clear that the charges leveled against him were true. Once again, those charges were as follows.

- He infected society in an adverse manner. Paul is said to have been found to be a “pestilent fellow.”

- He tended to cause people to rebel against authority, and to organize in hostile manner. He was a “mover of sedition among all Jews throughout the world.”

- He was a sectarian promoter of a growing, but unpopular religious group. He was a “ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”

Now, using oratory, Tertullus says that Felix, being an astute man, will find the charges verified when he examines Paul. Assumption, or supposition, is one of the principle characteristics of the carnal mind. This should not surprise us, for when considering the God of heaven, such a mind imagines that God is like men. Thus the Lord said to the Israelites, “These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself : but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (Psa 50:21). Therefore, when dealing with others, the flesh also tends to think others will agree with those who perpetrate lies. In fact, those who are carnal are often surprised when their lies are not believed. This attitude is frequently the catalyst for persecution against those who declare the truth of God.

It is good for us to be wise about the manners of the flesh, lest we fall into the pits and snares it lays for us.

THE JEWS AGREE

“ 9 And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.” Other versions read, “maintaining that these things were so,” NKJV “joined the attack, asserting that these things were so,” NASB “joined in the accusation,” NIV “affirming that all this was so,” RSV “were in agreement with his statement,” BBE “alleged that these were the facts,” CJB “joined in pressing the matter against Paul,” DARBY “asserted that everything Tertullus said was true,” GWN and “declaring that all these things were exactly so.” AMPLIFIED

Here, as in other instances, those who oppose the truth are joined together. Within the council itself, Sadducees and Pharisees joined together, even though their theology radically differed (Acts 23:6). Earlier Pilate and Herod joined together as friends through their rejection of Christ and the truth that He declared (Lk 23:12). There is a sense in which the “truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:5) promotes unity wherever it is preached. Men either unite together against the truth or for the truth. There really is no neutral ground. There are wheat or tares (Matt 13:39), good fish or bad fish (Matt 13:47-50), the election and the rest (Rom 11:7), those who mind the things of the Spirit, and those who mind the things of the flesh (Rom 8:5), and the righteous and those who do evil (1 Pet 3:12). There are those who dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) and those who are alive unto God (Rom 6:11). There are those who are of the day (1 Thess 5:5,8), and those who are of the night (1 Thess 5:5).

There is a point where both the righteous and the unrighteous come together, united by their nature. In our text, the unrighteous combined upon basis of lies, for there was not a single charge leveled against Paul that was true.

There is a point where both the righteous and the unrighteous come together, united by their nature. In our text, the unrighteous combined upon basis of lies, for there was not a single charge leveled against Paul that was true. Not only is it written that the Jews “assented” to, or acquiesced with, what Tertullus said, they SAID “these things were so.” What they said is not only recorded in “the volume of the book” of Scripture, it is also recorded in the heavenly books that will be opened on the of judgment (Rev 10:12).

SOMETHING TO BE NOTED

There has been a certain culturing of our society that ought to be noted at this point. Stress is place upon the right of the individual to speak their minds – i.e. freedom of speech. This has spilled over into the professed church as well, so that human opinions are now expressed more than the Word of God itself. It is not uncommon to find the words of men equated with Scripture, forming the basis of acceptance or rejection. Actually, no person has a “right” to say something that is untrue or foolish. In a political environment, it may appear as though that is the case – but it is not. Men will held in strict account for “idle,” or careless NASB words they have spoken (Matt 12:36). Solomon referred to man’s “work,” which includes what he says: “For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl 12:14). Paul said that God would even judge the secrets of men (Rom 2:16). Jude affirmed that God would “execute judgment” upon men for “all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him” (Jude 1:15).

Tertullus and the Jews who declared what he said was so, will someday stand before the Judge of all the earth to give an account for what they have said. The fact that they were apparently ignorant of this has no bearing whatsoever on the subject. The Jewish Scriptures announced the coming of Divine judgment (1 Chron 16:33; Psa 96:13; 98:9). Solomon announced, “God will bring thee into judgment” (Eccl 11:9). And again, “God will bring every work into judgment” (Eccl 12:14).

The person who is dominated by the carnal mind will never think for any extended period concerning the day of judgment. Such live only for this world, with no cognitive thought about the passing of this world, the appearance of the world to come, and the day of judgment. There is no way for these failures to be avoided if one is carnally minded, and insists on remaining so (Rom 8:6).

Given these considerations, it at once becomes apparent that preaching or teaching that is tailored for “the flesh” and those dominated by it is nothing more than an exercise in vanity. The Gospel cannot be carried in such a container! Nothing good can come from such an approach to preaching and teaching. It is altogether a “corrupt tree” (Matt 7:18).

PAUL IS BECKONED TO SPEAK

“ 10 Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself . . .”

The details of this proceeding are not to be viewed as merely incidental. They are the result of God working things together for the good of Paul, even in a surrounding governed by heathen, and occupied by hostile Jews. God will have His way in any environment, even if it involves frustrating the ambitions of the Jews, and turning the hearts of the heathen to favor Paul.

THE GOVERNOR BECKONS TO PAUL TO SPEAK

“Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered . . .” Other versions read, “nodded for him to speak,” NASB “motioned,” NIV “given him a sign,” BBE “gestured,” NET and “signaled.” IE

There is something to especially note in this text. Observe the quietness and orderliness that took place in the court of Felix, as compared with the tumult that broken out among the Jews who opposed Paul.

- The Jews from Asia “stirred up all the people” (Acts 21:27).
- They cried out, “Men of Israel, help!” (Acts 21:28).
- “All the city was moved, and the people ran together,” took hold of Paul and dragged him out of the Temple, then shutting the temple doors (Acts 21:30).
- They “went about to kill” Paul (Acts 21:31a).
- All the city of Jerusalem was “in an uproar” (Acts 21:31).
- When asked by the chief captain concerning the cause of opposing Paul, there was utter confusion with some crying “one thing, some another” (Acts 21:34a).
- The whole affair was so confusing that the captain “could not know the certainty for the tumult” (Acts 21:34b).
- Paul had to be carried to safety because of “the violence of the people” (Acts 21:35).
- When Paul was being escorted to the barracks, the Jews followed crying out, “Away with him!” (Acts 21:36).
- In response to Paul’s first defense the Jews “lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live” (Acts 22:22).
- The Jews “cried out, and cast off their clothes, and the dust into the air” (22:23).
- During his next defense, Ananias the high priest commanded that Paul be struck on the mouth (Acts 23:2).
- When Paul said he was called into question because of the hope of the resurrection there “arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Acts 23:7).
- As things intensified “there arose a great cry” and more striving (Acts 23:9).
- There “arose a great dissension” that caused Paul’s very life to be threatened (Acts 23:10).

Compare this with the orderliness of this heathen courtroom. The environment is so calm externally that Felix could summon Paul to speak with but a gesture – a nod of the head, or a wave of the hand. The religious environment was volatile and tumultuous, and the proceedings of a heathen court orderly! There is also more of an awareness of equity and the need for substantial proof that the charges brought against Paul are true. No wonder our blessed Lord said, “the children of this world

are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (Luke 16:8). This does not suggest that all heathen proceedings are peaceful, anymore than it does that all religious gatherings are tumultuous.

THE PREFERRED ENVIRONMENT OF THE WORK OF GOD

Even though God continues to work salvation in the midst of the earth (Psa 74:12), when it comes to the initiatives of the godly, and when they are free to make a choice concerning that work, there is a preferred environment. What is taking place in our text – a presentation by a believer in a heathen court – is not a Kingdom standard, or to be zealously sought. When Paul went to a city, operating with some degree of freedom, he did not attempt to present the Gospel in a heathen court, or even to kings and princes. His testimony before kings, according to the commission of Jesus Himself (Acts 9:15) was not fulfilled by seeking out amiable kings. All of the recorded testimonies before political dignitaries were the result of arrest and/or imprisonment (Acts 23:24; 24:10; 25:1-13; 26:19-26; Phil 4:22). One official, Sergius Paulus, called for Paul and Barnabas “and desired to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:7). However, there is no record in Scripture of a special Gospel initiative toward political dignitaries. This by no means suggests that it is wrong to approach such personalities with the Gospel. It does mean it is wrong to shape ones ministry around such objectives, noble though they may appear.

As a general rule, the work of the Lord is conducted outside the perimeter of the flesh, or the carnal mind (Rom 8:7). When this is not the preferred environment, and the individual exercises himself to avoid such a surrounding as much as possible, God can so orchestrate things that a spiritual setback will not be experienced.

PAUL APPEALS TO HIM BEING A JUDGE UNTO THE JEWISH NATION

“ . . . Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation . . .” Other versions read, “a judge to this nation,” NKJV “a judge over this nation,” NIV “a judge over this nation,” NRSV “a judge of Jewish affairs,” NLT “administered justice to this nation,” WEYMOUTH “judged the people of our nation,” CEV and “knowing how fair-minded you've been in judging us all these years.” MESSAGE

Notice the difference in the way Tertullus addressed Felix, and the manner of Paul. Tertullus resorts to flattery: “And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence , We accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness” (Acts 24:2-3). Tertullus appeals to external advantages granted by Felix. Paul appeals to a sense of justice and social, equity: “Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation” (Acts 24:10).

Historians estimate that Paul was speaking during the year of 58 A.D. Felix had been governor since 53 A.D. “But Tacitus expressly states that Felix was joint procurator with Cumanus; and therefore he had been a judge to the Jewish nation long before the banishment of Cumanus. Tacitus’s authority is infinitely superior to that of Josephus, and this passage strongly supports the statement of Tacitus (‘Annal.,’ 12:54).” PULPIT COMMENTARY

During this significantly lengthy period, the Jews had not been oppressed, and there had been a general environment of safety and political concern. Doubtless, from Felix’s viewpoint, this had to do with maintaining order, as opposed to actually favoring the Jews.

At this point Paul will not give the account of his conversion, or the commission that was delivered to him. He did give an accounting of those things before Agrippa (Acts 26:4-23), but not before Felix. When he did speak of the faith, he did so in general terms (Acts 24:14-16,21), finally reasoning with Felix and his wife Drusilla concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts

24:24-25).

Instead, Paul will address the matter of the charges brought against him. That is what he has been summoned before Felix to do, and that is what he will do.

A Separate Identity

Notice how both Tertullus and Paul referred to the Jews as a “nation” (Acts 24:2,10). Here was a nation within a nation – a body of people that maintained their identity, and refused to become absorbed by the Roman culture. To this very day, the Jews have maintained their identity, wherever they are found. They are a different culture that live in a unique manner. That is the result of being chosen and cultured by the Lord Himself. With all of their faults and foibles, they have remained separate from general society without being hostile against it. As unique as this is, it is not the clearest example of such separation.

Once again, even though the Jews were subject to the Roman government, they remained separate from it. They trafficked in society, yet stood apart from it.

The Church Is the Ultimate Example

Actually, the church is the most unique and separated people. They are properly called, “a peculiar people,” or “His own special people,” NKJV or “a people for His own possession.” NASB (Tit 2:14). Again, this uniqueness is depicted in the following expressions: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people” (1 Pet 2:9). Referring to this singularity Jesus said to His disciples, “ye are not of the world” (John 15:19; 17:14,16).

Those in Christ are admonished concerning being identified with an idolatrous society, which, in their case, was the majority of their social surroundings. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you” (2 Cor 6:17). In the very beginning of the church Peter exhorted his audience, “Save yourselves from this untoward generation” (Acts 2:40).

One of the great sins of the modern church is its obvious affinity with the world. Observing people frequently claim that professing Christians often look too much like the world, dress too much like it, talk like it, and conduct their lives as though this world was the main world. In our time, an approach has been taken to Christianity that actually allows for an attempted merger with the world. There is nothing right about such a view. In Christ we are primarily citizens of heaven (Phil 3:20-21), and that circumstance is to be clearly made known in their manner of life. If appearance does not confirm such a status, it is doubtful that it exists. A failure to live in such a posture will be duly addressed on the day of judgment.

CHEERFULLY ANSWERING FOR HIMSELF

Felix was not a righteous man, for it is written that he expected a bribe from Paul, and therefore granted him several audiences in hope of receiving a bribe from Paul.

“ . . . I do the more cheerfully answer for myself . . .” Other versions read, “I cheerfully make my defense,” NASB “I gladly make my defense,” NIV “I am glad to make my answer,” BBE “I answer readily as to the things which concern myself,” DARBY “So I’m pleased to present my case to you,” GWN “I shall with a more quiet mind answer for my self,” TNT and “I find it easier to make my defense and do it cheerfully and with good courage.” AMPLIFIED

As it is used here, the word “cheerfully” means, “well disposed . . . of good cheer, of good courage,” THAYER “cheerfully, gladly, with encouragement,” FRIBERG “pertaining to being encouraged,” LOUW-NIDA “in good spirits” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “1) well disposed, kind 2) of

good cheer, of good courage.” STRONG’S

Paul’s encouraging and cheerful disposition can be viewed from two perspectives, with one being superior to the other.

- First, he knew that his cause was in perfect harmony with the faith by which he was justified. There was no pressure to compromise his spiritual stance. He possessed a pure and good conscience, and was confident that heaven fully supported him.

- Secondly, He was encouraged by the lack of apparent bias on the part of Felix. He apparently had the reputation of being just and fair toward the Jews in particular, and society in general.

Felix Was Not A Righteous Man

Felix was not a righteous man, for it is written that he expected a bribe from Paul, and therefore granted him several audiences in hope of receiving a bribe from Paul. “He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him” (Acts 24:26).

In spite of this ignoble motive, God used the occasion to give Paul a greater opportunity to speak, and eventually to make strong spiritual appeals to Felix himself. This whole circumstance was under the control of heaven, for “the heavens do rule” (Dan 4:26). Thus we read the following descriptions of Deity – whether the Father or the Son.

- God is “the most high God” (Gen 14:18,,20).
- God is “the Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen 14:19,22).
- “The God of the earth” (Gen 24:3).
- God is “the Lord in the midst of the earth” (Ex 8:22).
- “The earth is the Lord’s” (Ex 9:29).
- “The Lord shall reign for ever and ever” (Ex 15:16).
- “The Lord is greater than all gods” (Ex 18:11).
- God says, “All the earth is Mine” (Ex 19:5).
- God is “the God of the spirits of all flesh” (Num 27:16).
- “He is the God in heaven above, and upon the earth beneath” (Deut 4:39).
- “The heaven and heavens is the LORD’S thy God, the earth also with all that therein is” (Deut 10:14).
- “God is the God of gods” (Deut 10:17).
- God declares, “See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand” (Deut 32:39).
- “The LORD killeth, and maketh alive: He bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up. The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He hath set the world upon them” (1 Sam 2:6-8).
- God is “the God, even Thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth” (2 Kgs 19:15).

- “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as head above all” (1 Chron 29:11).
- “For the kingdom is the LORD'S: and He is the governor among the nations” (Psa 22:28).
- “The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein” (Psa 24:1).
- “For the LORD most high is terrible; He is a great King over all the earth” (Psa 47:2).
- “But God is the judge: He putteth down one, and setteth up another” (Psa 75:7).
- “That men may know that Thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth” (Psa 83:18).
- “But the LORD is the true God, He is the living God, and an everlasting king: at His wrath the earth shall tremble, and the nations shall not be able to abide His indignation” (Jer 10:10).
- “Daniel answered and said, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are His: and He changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding” (Dan 2:20-21).
- “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation” (Acts 17:26).
- “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph 4:6).
- “Which in His times he shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim 6:15).
- “Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power.” (Heb 1:3).

When a person is knowingly reconciled to that God, having free access to Him by faith, it alters the way circumstances are viewed. This understanding is an integral part of knowing God, which is inherent in the New Covenant (Heb 8:11), and is the appointed means of appropriating everything having to do with life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3).

Paul's calmness is evidence he had grasped the truth concerning both the nature and will of God.

IT HAS ONLY BEEN TWELVE DAYS SINCE PAUL WENT TO JERUSALEM

“ 11 Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.”

The record of Paul's activities since arriving at Jerusalem are recorded in Acts 21:15-23:33. This is probably a summation of the activity, but it provides enough of the details to confirm the remarkable level of activity that took place in less than two weeks.

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- Lodged with Mnason of Cyprus (21:16).

- The brethren in Jerusalem received them gladly (21:17).
- The next day went in to James and the elders (21:18).
- Declared all the things God had wrought among the Gentiles through his ministry (21:19a).
- James informed Paul of the “many thousands” of Jews there who did “believe,” yet were “zealous for the Law” (21:19b).
- The brethren rejoiced at the news (21:20).
- Reported to Paul that these Jews had been told that Paul was teaching the Jews to forsake Moses, not to circumcise their children, and not to walk after the customs of the people” (21:21).
- Paul is informed the Jews will come together as soon as they know he is in Jerusalem (21:22).
- Paul is told of four men there who had a vow upon them. He is then advised to “pay their expenses,” NIV so they can have their heads shaved, signifying the fulfillment of their vow (21:23-24a).
- Then, they advised Paul, the Jews would know what they had heard about Paul was not the truth (21:24b).
- Paul is then informed that the Jerusalem brethren had already written to the Gentile brethren informing them they were under no obligation circumcise their children, “save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication” (21:25).
- Paul then takes the men, and the next day purified himself with them, signifying the accomplishment of the days of purification (21:26).
- When “seven days were almost ended,” the Jews from Asia saw Paul in the Temple, and stirred up the people (21:27a).
- The Asian Jews cried out, telling the people that Paul was teaching everywhere “against the people, and the law, and this place” (the Temple). They also said he had brought Greeks into the Temple, thereby polluting the holy place (21:28-29).
- The city was moved, came together, dragged Paul out of the Temple, and shut the Temple doors (21:30-31).
- As they “went about to kill” Paul, a chief Roman captain is informed of the disturbance (21:31).
- Immediately the captain interrupted the beating of Paul and took charge of the situation (21:31-32).
- The captain had Paul bound with two chains, and demanded who Paul was and what he had done (21:33).
- A tumult ensued, moving the captain to have Paul removed to the military barracks (21:34-35).
- En route to the barracks, the Jews followed shouting, “Away with him” (21:36).
- As the group was headed for the barracks, Paul asked to speak to the chief captain, who then found that Paul was not an Egyptian insurrectionist of that time (21:37-39).
- Paul is then given license to speak to the Jews, and he presents his first defense (21:40-22:21).
- As soon as Paul reported that he was going to be sent to the Gentiles, another tumult

arose among the Jews (22:22-23).

- The chief captain then commands Paul to be removed to the barracks where he was to be examined by scourging (22:24).
- As Paul was being bound, he asked the centurion if it was lawful for a Roman citizen to be beaten before any charges had been confirmed against him (22:25).
- Upon hearing this, the centurion told the captain to take heed what he was doing, for Paul was a Roman citizen (22:26).
- The captain spoke to Paul, confirming that he was, in fact, a Roman citizen (22:26-28).
- The scourging was then called off, for the captain was afraid after he knew Paul was a Roman (22:29).
- The next day, Paul was loosed from his bonds, the Jewish chief priests and all their council was called, and Paul was brought down and set before them (22:30).
- Paul commences to speak, affirming that he had lived “in all good conscience before God” until that very day (23:1).
- The high priest commands Paul to be struck on the mouth, Paul responds that he has done so contrary to the law, and he is asked by those standing by why he has spoken in such a manner to “God’s high priest” (23:2-4).
- Paul responds that he was unaware Ananias was the high priest, yet does not retract what he has said (23:5).
- Perceiving that the council before him as comprised of Pharisees and Sadducees, and knowing they were not agreed in their theology, Paul says he was a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee, and had been called into question for “the hope of the resurrection” (23:6).
- At this word dissension spread throughout the ranks, for the Sadducees said there was no resurrection, and that there was no such thing as a spirit or an angel. (23:7-8).
- At this outbreak, certain of the scribes, who were Pharisees, spoke in defense of Paul, saying that if an angel or a spirit had spoken to Paul, their opposition would be nothing more than fighting against God (23:9).
- The dissension grew so fierce that the captain had to remove Paul once again, lest he be torn in piece by the hostile crowd (23:10).
- The following night the Lord appeared to Paul telling him to be of good cheer – that just as surely as he had testified of Jesus in Jerusalem, so would he also do in Rome (23:11).
- The next day, more than forty Jews took a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul. They also informed the chief priests and elders of their plan, telling them to ask the captain to bring Paul down to them so they could gather some more information. At the time he appeared, they said, they would kill him (23:12-15).
- Paul’s nephew overhears the plan and goes into the barracks to tell Paul (23:16).
- Paul called one of the centurions, telling him to take the young man to the captain and tell him he has something to say (23:17).
- When the young man told the captain of the plot. The captain immediately made plans to have Paul transported to Felix the governor who could make an official ruling on the whole matter. He also wrote a letter to Felix informing him of the nature of this case (23:18-30).
- With an army of 470, Paul was escorted to the city of Antipatris (23:31).

- The next day they resumed their journey to Felix, arrived safely, and delivered the letter to Felix (23:32-34).

- Felix said he would hear the case as soon as the accusing Jews arrived in Caesarea (32:35).

- Now, after five days, the case has been resumed (24:1)

I have listed forty-five activities that extended over a period of twelve days. That is nearly four significant happenings per day. A life that is so filled with events, many of which were epochal in nature, requires a strong faith and a consistent hope. I do not know how a person could otherwise survive such a series of events.

It ought to be noted that when a person becomes willingly involved in the good and accept able and perfect will of God, there is a certain acceleration that characterizes life. Labors become more abundant.

ACTIVITY

DAYS

TOTAL

Paul arrives at the home of Mnason, and is greeted by the brethren in Jerusalem

1

1

Visits with James and the elders

?

Nears time of completion of vow with four men

2

3

Paul initially in the barracks

1

4

Paul speaks to Jews, and that night the Lord appears to Paul

1

5

Trip to Felix

2

7

Felix waits for Jew

All of this, from Paul's arrival in Jerusalem until the trial commences, covered a period of twelve days. The above table is only an estimation, but it gives some idea of the activities during the twelve-day period Paul mentions. This twelve-day slice of Paul's life confirms that he did, indeed, "labor more abundantly than they all" (1 Cor 15:10).

In this record, Paul's labors included giving a valid reason for the hope that was in him, keeping the faith under duress, and giving a proper example of how those in Christ react to opposition and persecution. In all of this his faith was strong and his discernment keen. Patience and hope characterize him throughout it all.

I WAS NOT DISPUTING OR RAISING UP THE PEOPLE

" 12 And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city . . ."

While Tertullus spoke for the Jews, Paul will speak for himself. Knowing that his words are subject to examination, he reports the unvarnished truth. He will give an account that is in perfect harmony with the nature of spiritual life, and the great salvation that is in Christ Jesus. He will not have to confess to conduct that was unbecoming of a person who has been made a "partaker of Christ" (Heb 3:14). He will not suffer "as an evil doer," but as one who lives righteously (1 Pet 4:15-16).

It is true that Paul will be charged with being an "evil doer," and will have a measure of sufferings because of that false charge. As he wrote to Timothy, "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound" (2 Tim 2:9). Yet, the charge was false, and in the books of heaven, this suffering was "for righteousness' sake" (Matt 5:10; 1 Pet 3:14).

Because there is so much iniquity in the professed church of our day, a major strain of teaching pertains to the acknowledgment and confession of sin. The subject is addressed as though it was virtuous to confess sin. However, this is a wholly inappropriate representation. No person is better because he has confessed his sin. That is something that must be done, but it only puts the person back at the starting line. Technically speaking, there is a difference in doing righteousness and confessing sin. Doing righteousness has to do with obtaining more, so to speak, "of the Divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4). The confession of sin, while mandatory, is not technically an expression of the Divine nature, for Jesus never sinned, and thus made no confession of it. However, He did suffer for righteousness' sake, leaving us an example, that we should "follow in His steps" (1 Pet 2:21).

The confession of sin, while mandatory, is not technically an expression of the Divine nature, for Jesus never sinned, and thus made no confession of it.

I realize that this may appear to be nothing more than a technicality. However, I see this as something that must be said to this generation. The failure of professing Christians to be more involved with the life of Christ is owing more to sin than anything else. When a professing Christian lives in such a manner that constant confession of sin is required, a fundamental flaw exists. Those in Christ are required to cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of flesh and spirit" (2 Cor 7:1). They are to take seriously the admonition to "sin not" (1 Cor 15:34; Eph 4:26; 1 John 2:1), and not philosophize about that requirement. Admittedly, when the people of God take that injunction seriously and earnestly and consistently set out to "lay aside every weight and sin that doth so easily beset us" (Heb 12:1), it will put a lot of religious professionals out of business. However, any profession or business that depends on failure and flaw in professing Christians ought to be put out of business! It certainly should not be afforded any dignity.

NOT DISPUTING WITH ANY MAN

“And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man . . .” Other versions read, Other versions read, “carrying on a discussion,” NASB “arguing with anyone,” NIV “in argument with any man,” BBE “discoursing to any one,” DARBY “talking with any person,” MRD “reasoning with any one,” YLT and “debating with anybody.” WILLIAMS

In my judgment, some of the versions misrepresent what Paul was saying, by translating the word “discussion,” or “discoursing,” or “reasoning.” While it is no doubt true that Paul was not reasoning in the Temple at the time of his arrest, such a procedure was frequently found in the synagogues or other precincts of the city of Jerusalem. The impression must not be left that this kind of speaking was out of order.

The word translated “disputing,” is the most common translation (KJV, NKJV, NRSV, RSV, ASV, CSB, DOUAY, ERV, ESV, GENEVA, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, WYCLIFFE). As the word is used here, the meaning of the Greek word from which it is translated (**dialegomenon**) is: “to converse, discourse with one, argue, discuss: absolutely . . . drawing arguments from the Scriptures, with the idea of disputing prominent” THAYER “disputations contend, argue, dispute,” FRIBERG “debate,” UBS and “to argue about differences of opinion - 'to argue, to dispute, argument.” LOUW-NIDA

At the time of our text, Paul had gone into the Temple to purify himself, joining with four Jewish men in a vow (Acts 21:24,26; 24:18). Prior to that, he also was in the Temple praying (Acts 22:17). When, therefore, the Jews found him, he was not testifying, preaching, or reasoning with the people. There is no record of Paul himself ever going into the Temple for this purpose. The charge, therefore, was false. Even when the Jews at first incited the people against Paul, they brought up what he has been teaching outside of the Temple, in other regions (Acts 21:28).

NOT RAISING UP THE PEOPLE

“ . . . neither raising up the people . . .” Other versions read, “inciting the crowd,” NKJV “causing a riot,” NASB “stirring up a crowd,” NIV “working up the feelings of the people,” BBE “collecting a crowd,” CJB , “causing a disturbance among the crowd,” CSB “making any tumultuous gathering,” DARBY “causing any concourse DOUAY “making uproar among the people,” GENEVA “instigating a riot among the people,” NAB “making a dissension of the multitude,” YLT and “or bring together a seditious crowd.” AMPLIFIED

A tumult had been raised in the Temple courts, but it had been caused by the Jews from Asia, not Paul (Acts 21:27-21). This fact was attested to in the letter sent by Lysias the captain to Felix. In that letter he said, “This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them: then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman” (Acts 23:27). He had not rescued the people from Paul, but Paul from the people. Now, Paul’s testimony perfectly coincides with the letter sent by Lysias to the governor. There is no evidence that Paul knew what was in that letter. It was the Spirit who directed Paul what to say, fulfilling Matthew 10:19. He was not motivated by a thorough knowledge of the circumstances.

SUCH ACTIVITY WAS NOT FOUND IN THE SYNAGOGUE OR IN THE CITY

“ . . . neither in the synagogues, nor in the city . . .” Other versions read, “nor in the synagogues, nor in the city itself,” NASB “the synagogues or anywhere else in the city,” NIV “synagogues or throughout the city,” NRSV “the synagogues throughout the city,” GWN and “any synagogue or on the streets.” NLT

There were times when Paul disputed in the synagogues. He did so in Damascus (Acts 9:20), in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14-41), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-5), Athens (Acts 17:17), Corinth (Acts

18:4-6), and Ephesus (Acts 18:19; 19:8), There is no record of Paul teaching, reasoning, or disputing, in one of the synagogues of Jerusalem. When he first went to Jerusalem, he was with the apostles, “coming in and going out at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:27-28). It is written that during that time Paul “spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him” (Acts 9:29). It might be assumed that this was done in the synagogue, but the record does not say so. Of course, this was a considerable time before Paul’s travels throughout the world, which was the point of reference of the accusing Jews: “For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Paul now affirms that the charge that he had caused trouble in Jerusalem was not true. It was the Jews that caused the trouble, not Paul.

THEIR CASE CANNOT BE PROVED

Thus, in a display of wisdom, Paul transfers the responsibility to his accusers, for they are the ones who must present the burden of the evidence.

“ 13 Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.” Other versions read, “Other versions read, “And they cannot prove to you the charges they are now making against me,” NIV “they are not able to give facts in support of the things which they say against me now,” BBE “Nor can they give any proof of the things of which they are accusing,” CJB and “Neither can they present argument or evidence to prove to you what they now bring against me.” AMPLIFIED

Thus, in a display of wisdom, Paul transfers the responsibility to his accusers, for they are the ones who must present the burden of the evidence. In fact, that is why they have been summoned to come before Felix. Tertullus has presented the case for the Jews, but has furnished no evidence or corroborating witnesses. He presented the following charges.

- **INFECTING SOCIETY.** We have found this man a pestilent fellow.
- **CAUSING INSURRECTION.** We have found this man a mover of sedition among the Jews.
- **LEADING A DAMAGING SECT.** We have found this man a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes.
- **DESECRATING THE TEMPLE.** Paul went about to profane the temple.

The only charge that could possibly have any relevance in the context of Roman government was that of fomenting some kind of insurrection. The other matters were strictly issues to unbelieving Jews. This would further buttress the testimony of Lysias who had assessed the whole matter of opposing Paul as “questions of their law,” not of Roman law (Acts 23:29).

Although Tertullus was a legal orator, and able to speak in an outwardly convincing manner, he actually had presented a poor case. Now Paul draws attention to that fact.

The kind of circumstance that deals with false charges is referred to in the following words.

The word of the Lord is clear about our responsibility to avoid suffering because of wrong doing. “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet 4:15). It is not virtuous to submit to punishment for wrong doing – even though that is something that must be done.

“ False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not” (Psa 35:11).

- “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake” (Matt 5:11).
- “Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers,

they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet 3:16).

CHRISTIANS ARE RESPONSIBLE TO CONDUCT THEIR LIVES PROPERLY

The word of the Lord is clear about our responsibility to avoid suffering because of wrong doing. “But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet 4:15). It is not virtuous to submit to punishment for wrong doing – even though that is something that must be done. Peter reasons, “ For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God” (1 Pet 2:20). God is not glorified because His people patiently endure punishment that is proper. Their responsibility is to zealously avoid such penalization.

CONCLUSION

The nature of life devoted to the service of Christ (which is the only valid expression of real life in Christ) is seen in this account.

- Not only is God well pleased, Satan is displeased.
- Not only are the people of God comforted, the children of the wicked one are agitated.
- While believers become more reasonable, unbelievers become more unreasonable.
- Sound teaching enables disciples to be more aggressive in the commitment to the Lord, while it moves the wicked to be more aggressive in their expression of wickedness.
- Within the context of religion, sin becomes more sinful, and wickedness becomes more wicked.
- The worst of all sinners are religious sinners, for their religion tends to anesthetize them.
- Opposition, regardless of its strength, cannot overthrow the faith of God's elect.

Every person who is in Christ is, by virtue of their union with Him, in an enviable condition. When they live by faith and walk in the Spirit, they are perfectly suitable to be used by God.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #96

STANDING BEFORE FELIX

“ 24:14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: 15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust. 16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. 17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. 18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. 19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. 20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, 21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day. 22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. 23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him. 24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ. 25 And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee. 26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” (Acts 24:14-27)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Paul now commences his defense before Felix. The manner in which he does this, as well as the words that he chooses, is of especial significance. Here is a sterling example of a man that is close enough to the Lord to be consciously directed by Him. His words will be straightforward, with no attempt to minimize his faith. He will not be ashamed to identify himself with a group that is by no means popular or even condoned by the Jewish leaders. There is a boldness in his words that can only come from faith, and it is coupled with a precision that glorifies God and appeals to those who are of tender

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- **HOPE TOWARD GOD (24:15)**
- **SOMETHING TO BE MAINTAINED (24:16)**
- **I CAME TO BRING ALMS (24:17)**
- **THEY FOUND ME PURIFIED IN THE TEMPLE (24:18-19)**
- **TESTIFY OF ANY EVIL FOUND IN ME (24:20)**
- **THE SINGLE EXCEPTION (24:21)**
- **FELIX HAD A MORE PERFECT KNOWLEDGE (24:22)**
- **KEEP PAUL, AND LET HIM HAVE LIBERTY (24:23)**
- **FELIX COMES AND SENDS FOR PAUL (24:24)**
- **THE MANNER OF PAUL'S REASONING (24:25a)**
- **FELIX HEARS AND TREMBLES (24:25b)**
- **FELIX WAS LOOKING FOR A PAYOFF (24:26)**
- **FESTUS COMES, BUT FELIX IS WILLING TO PLEASE THE JEWS (24:27)**
- **CONCLUSION**

heart. Paul does not allow himself to be sidetracked to inconsequential matters, or to become absorbed with an effort to impress Felix. He tells the unvarnished truth concerning his activity, and the reason for it. It is clear from his presentation that he is not a religious opportunist. Also, he speaks in a manner that will not bring reproach on the Lord Jesus Christ.

THE TRUTH OF GOD

The Scriptures, are comprised of the writings of an estimated forty different men, over a period of 1,600 years. Yet there is nothing fragmented about its contents. They have a solitary focus, and fit together under the umbrella of Divine purpose. The understanding of the harmony of the Scriptures is determined by the extent of one's knowledge of God. The greater familiarity there is with the Lord, through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, the more the Scriptures are seen as a single unit.

PROGRESSION IS SEEN

There is a progression seen in Scripture that strictly parallels the revelation given to men. The beginning of the Scriptures establishes that God is the Architect, Creator, and Sustainer of everything that is made.

IN THE CREATION, the nature and ability of God is seen: His “eternal power and Godhead,” or Divinity (Rom 1:20). Enough is revealed to lead men to worship God, and to ascribe causes to Him. However, Fallen man “changed the glory of God” into something that reflected their own desires or fears. No one concluded the right thing when they observed nature, thus confirming that the human race had, indeed, fallen.

AFTER THE EXPULSION AND BEFORE THE OLD COVENANT. In and after the expulsion of our parents from the garden, and until the giving of the Law, God revealed much of Himself. His intolerance of sin was seen.

- In the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden (Gen 3:24).
- It was seen again in God’s dealings with Cain (Gen 4:12).
- In the flood (Gen 6:13,17).
- In the cursing of Canaan (Gen 9:25).
- In the judgment in the plain of Shinar where the people sought to built a tower that reached into heaven. (Gen 11:8).
- In the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities of the plain (Gen 19:24-25).
- In the threat to take king Abimilech’s life because he sought Sarah, Abraham’s wife (Gen 20:3-6).

During this period, the possibility of identity with God was demonstrated in both Enoch and Noah walking with God (Gen 5:22; 5:24; 6:9). In Noah and Abraham God also revealed that He made covenants with people (Gen 6:18; 9:9,11,15; 17:2). In Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob God confirmed that He told men things that would happen in the future, both near and far (Gen 6:17; 12:2; 15:12-14; 18:17; 26:3; 28:13-14; 35:12).

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OLD COVENANT. Here God focused not only on the sin of man, but upon his sinful nature. It was a condition that could not remain in the dark recesses of ignorance. Therefore in preparation for a Savior from sin, the Law defined sin, making men knowledgeable of its nature and of man’s desperate for a Savior (Rom 3:20). Men were also made more knowledgeable of Divine purpose, the wages of sin, and the need for a Redeemer. The absolute necessity of righteousness was seen, as well as man’s impotence to make himself righteous.

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST. At the appointed time, John the Baptist appeared on the Judean scene. He had a fresh message that consisted of two key elements: men must repent, and the Kingdom of God was about to appear (Matt 3:23). In this men saw that it was God’s nature not to do something until He had first revealed it to His prophets (Amos 3:7). In John’s ministry the Lord made known that He makes preparations among men for what He is going to do (Lk 1:76).

THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST. Jesus was a bodily depiction of God Himself – Emmanuel (Matt 1:23). He translated the Divine nature into life – life that could be seen. In Him the goodness of God was seen, for He went about “doing good and healing, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38). He confirmed the inferiority of the devil and his hosts, which could not do a thing to inhibit or in any way to restrain His ministry (Matt 8:16; Lk 11:20). He personified the grace of God (John 1:17), and in his teaching confirmed the abhorrence of Deity for hypocrisy and lifeless religion (Matt 17:7-9; 23:13-29).

As is true of all revelation, there is a certain progression in it that glorifies God. What Moses received was greater than what Noah and others before him received. The prophets received more than Moses, and John the Baptist was given to see more than the prophets before him.

THE NEW COVENANT. In the New Covenant, the Divine requirements for the acceptance of men were established and confirmed. Because of the atoning death of Christ and His triumphant resurrection, God could now write His laws upon the hearts of men and put them into their minds. He could now be their God by choice, and they could be His people. Their sins would be remembered no more, and He would be merciful to their unrighteousness (Heb 10:16). Men could now be born again (1 Pet 1:23), partake of Christ (Heb 3:14), and become a new creation (1 Cor 5:17). This confirmed that God could not receive men as they were. Further He could not save them unless it was righteous to do so. The New Covenant is established within the framework of the preparatory and continued work of Christ.

LIVED OUT IN THE BOOK OF ACTS. The book of Acts is the chronicles of newness of life being lived out. Men were involved in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. The role of preaching, the essentiality of believing, and the triumphant nature of faith is seen. How do godly people go about making decisions concerning the will of God? It is lived out in the selecting of a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:24-25), responding to persecution (Acts 4:24-31), and where to preach the Gospel (Acts 13:2-3). How do people live when the Holy Spirit, takes up residence in them, and they yield to His influences? It is lived out in the book of Acts. If there are any questions about how God reacts to hypocrisy in His church, it is made quite clear in the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). In all of this we see God's willingness and forwardness to employ His people in His service.

EXPOUNDED IN DOCTRINE. Confirming that God desires His Person and will to be known, these realities are expounded in the epistles. While human conduct is addressed in the epistles, that is not the heart of them. They are rather an exposition of Christ Jesus, the Gospel, the purpose of God, and the nature of spiritual life. These are the matters that are to be understood or comprehended – something that can only be accomplished by faith.

A WHOLLY UNITED BOOK

There is a unity in Scripture that could not possible have been achieved by human effort alone. The golden thread of Divine Purpose and the scarlet strand of redemption are woven throughout Scripture. The promises are reflected in the accounts of Scripture, as well as the true nature of spiritual life. There is a Divine cause made known in all revelation. In the various accounts the truth of God's sovereignty, the immutability of His counsel, and the effectiveness of His work are seen.

The record before us is no different. In it we are beholding the fulfillment of God's word, confirmation of His power, and the impact of faith upon those possessing it. We are also being exposed to the nature of the devil's work, as well as its absolute inferiority.

As is true of all revelation, there is a certain progression in it that glorifies God. What Moses received was greater than what Noah and others before him received. The prophets received more than Moses, and John the Baptist was given to see more than the prophets before him.

Unlike the world, "more" revelation does not involve the abrogation of previous revelations. For example, the Law has been ended as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4), but remains "for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine" (1 Tim 1:9-10).

The progress revelations of God are like a light that gets brighter and brighter, providing a proper

perspective of the past as well as the future. They are like the river of Ezekiel's vision that became wider and deeper as it progressed (Ezek 47).

No succeeding revelation contradicts a previous one. Rather, in fuller light we discern more clearly lesser lights, comprehending their purpose, which is not always eternal. Scripture refers to this kind of comprehension in these words: "For with Thee is the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light" (Psa 36:9). This is an indispensable form of vision.

I CONFESS UNTO THEE

" 24:14 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets."

This is now Paul's third defense concerning the Jews dragging him out of the Temple and making false charges against him.

- Acts 22:1-21 – Before the Jewish council.
- Acts 23:1-6 – Before the Jewish council
- Acts 24:10-21 – Before Felix

The things included in this three-fold defense are worthy of your perusal.

ACTS 22:1-21

1. Paul was a Jew.
2. He was born in Tarsus.
3. He was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel according to the perfect manner of the Law.
4. He was zealous toward God.
5. He persecuted the "the way" unto death, binding and delivering to prison both men and women.
6. He received letters from the high priest and the elders to bring believers from Damascus bound to Jerusalem.
7. He was confronted by the glorified Jesus en route to Damascus, whom he did not know.
8. He inquired who He was, and was told it was Jesus of Nazareth whom he was persecuting.
9. The men who were with him saw the light, were afraid, but did not understand the voice that was speaking to him.
10. Upon inquiry, he was told to go into Damascus where someone would tell him what he ought to do.
11. Being blinded by the bright light, he was led into the city by those who were with him.
12. A devout Jew named Ananias came to him to recover his sight, and telling him he was a chosen vessel to be Christ's witness.
13. At the word of Ananas, he was baptized, washing away his sins.
14. Later, when he came into Jerusalem, while he was praying in the Temple, the Lord appeared to him, instructing him to leave Jerusalem, for they would not receive Him.

15. He confessed to Jesus that he had imprisoned and beat believers in every synagogue, and had consented to the death of Stephen.

16. Jesus told him he would be sent to the Gentiles.

ACTS 23:1-6

17. Paul declared he had lived in all good conscience until that very day.

18. Perceiving that one part of the council was Pharisees, and the other Sadducees, Paul declared he had been called into question concerning the hope of the resurrection.

ACTS 24:10-21

19. He had only been in Jerusalem for twelve days.

20. He was not found disputing or raising up the people in the Temple, in the synagogues, or in the city.

21. The Jews could not prove their allegations against him.

22. He worshiped God after the way the Jews called heresy.

23. He believed all things written in Moses and the prophets.

24. He had hope toward God, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead. Both of the just and the unjust.

25. He exercised himself to always have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

26. He had brought alms for his nation, and offerings.

27. Jews from Asia found him purified in the Temple, and he was not with a multitude or attended by tumult.

28. The original accusers should have been present at this hearing.

29. He challenges those at the hearing to make known any evil doing in him, exempting the tumult caused by him confessing he held to the hope of the resurrection.

I CONFESS UNTO THEE

“But this I confess unto thee . . .” Other versions read, “I admit,” NASB “I will say openly,” BBE “I avow,” DARBY “I acknowledge,” MRD “freely admit,” MESSAGE “certainly admit.” WILLIAMS and “I am avowing.” INTERLINEAR

What is a confession? It is an admission of something true. It is an acknowledgment of a certain condition or truth that has been embraced.

The etymological meaning of the word “confess” is, “to say the same thing as another, I. e. to agree with, assent . . . to profess,” THAYER “admit; declare, say plainly; promise; claim,” UBS and “to express openly one's allegiance to a proposition or person - 'to profess, to confess, confession.’” LOUW-NIDA

Paul has no shame concerning the truth he has embraced, and the way with which he has chosen to be identified. He knew that Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when

he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). Even if his life appears to be jeopardized by his acknowledgment of being identified with a way that is unapproved by the Jewish leaders, and unknown by Gentile rulers, yet Paul will not hesitate to articulate openly what is in his heart.

THE WAY WHICH THEY CALL HERESY

“ . . . that after the way which they call heresy . . .” Other versions read, “the Way which they call a sect,” NKJV “after that Way, which to them is not the true religion,” BBE “the Way [of the Lord], which they call a [heretical, division-producing] sect,” AMPLIFIED “their leaders think that the Lord’s Way which I follow is based on wrong beliefs,” CEV “that Way which they say is false,” GNB and “the Way, which they malign as a dead-end street.” MESSAGE

One thing that can be said for the Jewish council – they did know that Paul’s commitment was to something radically different than their own. They chose to refer to “the way” he had embraced as a “heresy,” or division based upon things that were not true. It seems to me that it is in order to point out that “the way” has been greatly obscured in our day. This is “the way” that is “narrow,” and is entered at a “strait,” or “small” NASB gate and leads “unto life” (Matt 7:14). It is a “high way” that is called “The way of holiness,” and will not allow the “unclean” to walk upon it (Isa 35:8). This “way” is personified by Jesus Christ Himself, who is “the Way” (John 14:6). Whatever is unlike Christ, or contradicts His Person, character, and work, has nothing whatsoever to do with this “way.” Fulfilling the word of Peter, the Jewish leaders had spoken evil of “the way of truth” (2 Pet 2:2), even though that perspective was hidden from them. The way they called “heresy” was actually “the way of righteousness” (2 Pet 2:21) and “the way of God in truth” (Matt 22:16; Mk 12:14). It is “the way of peace” in which God and man are reconciled (Lk 1:79).

It was actually Paul’s opponents that were sectarian, having chosen to embrace their own heresy.

I WORSHIP THE GOD OF MY FATHERS

“ . . . so worship I the God of my fathers . . .” Other versions read, “I do serve,” NASB “so serve I,” ASV “I do give worship,” BBE “I worship (serve),” AMPLIFIED and “I am offering Divine service.” INTERLINEAR

In some circles, the word “worship” sparks a lot of controversy. In other circles, it is equated with a certain type of singing, referred to as “praise and worship.” In New Covenant writings, the word “worship” is never used in a stereotyped manner, or confined to a certain kind of gathering. The following table reflects its various tenses in some of the standard versions.

VERSION

TIMES USED

King James Version

44

New King James

43

New American Standard

42

New International

50

New Revised Standard

56

Revised Standard

52

Greek words translated “worship” include:

- **latreu,sousi,n** (latreuo). Translated “serve,” KJV/NKJV/NASB and “worship” NIV/NRSV/RSV

- **proskunei/n** (proskuneo). Translated “worship,” KJV/NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSBV/RSV

- **leitourgou,ntwn** (leitourgeo). Translated “ministered to,” KJV/NKJV/NASB “worshiping.” NIV/NRSV/RSV

- **sebome,nh** (sebomai). Translated “weorshipped” KJV/NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV/RSV

- **euvsebei/te** (sebasma). Translated “devotions,” KJV “worship,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV/RSV

- **latrei,a** (latreuo). Translated “worship,” KJV/NKJV/NIV/NRSV/RSV/NIV/NRSV/RSV “serve,” NASB “service.” KJV/NKJV/NASB/NIV

- **eivdwlolatri,aj** (eidolatreia). Translated, “idolatry,” KJV/NKJV/NASB/NIV “worship of idols,” NRSV/RSV

- **qrhskei,a l** (threskeia). Translated “worshiping,” KJV “worship,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/ NRSV/RSV

As you can see, the word “worship” is used in a variety of ways.

- Often it is associated with an outward motion, such as bowing the head (Gen 24:26,48; Ex 4:31;2:27).

- Bowing down to the earth (2 Chron 7:3).

- Lying prostrate with the face toward the earth (John 5:14; 2 Chron 20:18; 1 Cor 14:25).

- Jacob worshiped God, “leaning on the top of his staff” (Heb 11:21).

- Worship is also associated with speaking to the Lord (2 Chron 7:3; Matt 8:2).

- The Ethiopian eunuch came to Jerusalem “for to worship” (Acts 8:27). Years later Paul said he came to Jerusalem “for to worship” (Acts 24:11).

However, in this text, and in most apostolic doctrine, “worship” has to do with serving God – i.e. yielding up our lives to Him (John 4:23-24; John 9:31; Acts 16:14; 18:7; 24:14; Phil 3:3; Heb 10:2). It is in this sense that Paul confessed before Felix, “I worship the God of my fathers.”

Worship Under the Law

Under the Law worship was associated with ceremonies, times, and seasons. The vast majority of the Exodus- through-Malachi texts using the various forms of “worship” had to do with NOT worshipping other gods. At least seven uses of the term were prophetic in nature, foretelling the era of the New Covenant (Psa 22:27; 65:4; Isa 27:13; 49:7; Ezek 46:2-3; Zeph 2:11). In the Old Covenant writings, a significant number of references have to do with seasons and ceremonies (i.e. Deut 26:10; 1 Sam 1:3; 2 Kgs 17:36; Jer 7:2).

Worship in the Gospels

There are twenty-four references to “worship” (in all of its varied forms) in the Gospels. Nine of them have to do with people worshipping Jesus, bowing to Him, and generally asking Him for a blessing (Matt 2:2,11; 8:2;14:33; 15:25; 20:20; 28:17; Lk 24:52; John 9:38). Jesus told the woman at the well that God was seeking “true worshipers” who worshiped Him “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). That is, that really did worship Him, in keeping with the truth made known about God, and their own character. He also told her that this kind of worship was not associated with a place.

Worship in the Book of Acts

There are eleven references to “worship” in the book of Acts. The eunuch went to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 8:27). Cornelius worshiped Peter, and Peter told him to stand up and cease such action (Acts 10:25-26). Lydia is said to be one “which worshiped God” (Acts 16:14). The same is said of Justus (Acts 18:7). Paul told the Athenian philosophers that God is not worshiped with men’s hands (Acts 17:25). Paul said he came to Jerusalem to worship (Acts 24:11), and that he was one that “worshiped the God of [his] fathers” (Acts 24:14).

Worship in the Epistles

The epistles contain nine reference to worship. Some of the references have to do with the worship of other gods, or NOT worshipping the true God (Rom 1:25; Col 2:19,23; 2 Thess 2:4). There is a record of angels being told to worship Jesus when He came into the world (Heb 1:6). The book of Hebrews mentions the “worshipers” that were under the Old Covenant, whose conscience was not purged by the sacrifices of old (Heb 10:2). It is also written that Jacob worshiped God while he was leaning His staff (Heb 11:21). Those who are in Christ are said to “worship God in the Spirit” (Phil 3:3).

Worship in the Book of the Revelation

The book of the Revelation contains thirteen references to worship. Heavenly personalities are said to worship God (Rev 4:10; 5:6; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). Those on the earth are challenged to “worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountain of waters” (Rev 14:7). It is prophesied that “all nations shall come and worship before” the Lord (Rev 15:4). John fell down before an angel to worship him, and was rebuked for it (Rev 19:10).

Paul Worshiped God

This statement is made in view of the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Paul was not speaking of routines, places, and periodic activities. He was rather speaking of his service to God – how that he conducted his life within an acute awareness of God, through Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit. This is the kind of life the saved of the Lord live. It is not a goal, but a reality. This is confirmed by the word of Paul concerning the identity of the people of God: “For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the Spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:3). Some of the things involved in this worship are as follows. This is only representative of the nature of worship, but will provide a perspective that will assist the good and honest heart in a proper consideration of this grand reality – worship.

- Living unto the One who died for us and rose again (2 Cor 5:15).
- Yielding our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, and refusing to be conformed to this world (Rom 12:1-2).
- Seeking the things that are above, and setting our affection upon them (Col 3:1-2).
- Coming boldly to the throne of all grace (Heb 4:16).
- Drawing nigh to God (Heb 7:19; James 4:8).
- Expressing charity out of a pure heart, and maintaining a good conscience (1 Tim 1:5).
- Perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:2).
- Yielding our members as instruments of righteousness unto God (Rom 6:13,16,19).
- Reckoning ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, and alive unto God (Rom 6:11).
- Running the race set before us with patience, looking to Jesus (Heb 12:1-2).

This is a description of a manner of life that is characteristic of those who are living by faith and walking in the Spirit. No person who falls short in these areas is really capable of consistently worshipping God. Further, I do not know how you could offer hope to those who are not living in this manner. Failing in these critical areas is a matter that must be corrected, for they all depend upon the resources provided in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Modern Worship

We are living in a period of time when the preachers, teachers, and spiritual leaders of the churches have allowed a spurious definition of worship to assume dominance in the churches. It is the kind of worship that can be turned on and off like a light switch. It has also been allowed to upstage the preaching of the Word, so that people are brought to imagine that frothy words repeated like a Hindu mantra are worship. People who obviously live at a distance from God can participate in such expressions, imagining they are the better for it. Now there is a new jargon in the churches – “praise and worship” – and it is imagined that it represents a revival of sorts. Of course, it has not stemmed the tide of iniquity that is pouring into the church, or resulted in a better understanding of the Person, purpose, and salvation of God.

What is called “praise and worship” in our time is more like the manner in which Israel worshiped the Lord. They honored Him with their lips, but their hearts were far from Him (Isa 29:13; Matt 15:7-9). Jesus soundly rebuked the generation extant at the time of His ministry, declaring that their worship was “vain,” or pointless and without profit. Yet, there has been an astounding revival of that kind of honor in our time.

Given what Jesus and apostolic doctrine says about “worship” such an approach to worship can by no means be justified. The thrust of the New Covenant must be ignored to entertain such shallow notions.

Even concerning God’s “great salvation” and the message of the Gospel, what is preached is in strict accord with what was written by Moses and the Prophets. This is declared in a number of places.

Further, if Paul were to stand in the average church and say, “so worship I the God of my fathers,” the people would not have the faintest idea what he was talking about. Some might think he was speaking about a certain style of music. Notice, that Paul relates “worship” with what was taught. That is why the Jews referred to the “way” in which he worshiped God as “heresy” – which is a doctrinal thrust the Jews perceived as incorrect. If Paul had merely been in the Temple and

synagogues as an idle listener, he would have received no opposition. It is the doctrine that he preached and that directed his life that brought the opposition. In this regard, he mirrored the Lord Jesus Himself.

BELIEVING ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN MOSES AND THE PROPHETS

“ . . .believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets.” Other versions read, “believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets,” NASB “I believe everything that agrees with the Law and that is written in the Prophets,” NIV “believing everything laid down according to the law or written in the prophets,” NRSV and “still persuaded of the truth of and believing in and placing full confidence in everything laid down in the Law [of Moses] or written in the prophets.” AMPLIFIED

This is a challenging statement. Paul is saying more than, “I believe every word of the Bible.” He certainly did believe every word in the Scriptures, but his words reflect a larger consideration. He was saying that he shaped his understanding and perspective according to the Scriptures. That was the standard by which he measured all other expressions. In him the saying was fulfilled, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa 8:20).

Even concerning God’s “great salvation” and the message of the Gospel, what is preached is in strict accord with what was written by Moses and the Prophets. This is declared in a number of places.

- **PHILIP TESTIFIES TO NATHANAEL.** “Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45).

- **JESUS TO THE TWO ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS.** “And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. (Luke 24:27).

- **JESUS TO THE ELEVEN AND THOSE WITH THEM.** “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. (Luke 24:44).

- **THE PREACHING OF PAUL.** “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22). “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23).

It was owing to the writings of Moses and the Prophets that those of honest and good hearts were able to recognize the Christ and embrace Him. That was the indispensable and primary ministry of Moses and the Prophets.

PETER IN THE TEMPLE. “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:24).

- **PETER AT THE HOUSE OF CORNELIUS.** “To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43).

- **JAMES TO THE JERUSALEM CONFERENCE.** “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written” (Acts 15:14-15)

• **PAUL TO THE BELIEVERS IN ROME.** “But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets ” (Rom 3:21). “But now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets , according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith” (Rom 16:26).

• **PETER TO THE SCATTERED JEWISH BELIEVERS.** “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11).

• **PAUL TO TIMOTHY.** “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures , which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15).

It was owing to the writings of Moses and the Prophets that those of honest and good hearts were able to recognize the Christ and embrace Him. That was the indispensable and primary ministry of Moses and the Prophets.

What of Our Time?

Although the clear teaching of the apostles is that the Christ Himself, together with the salvation of God, was announced by Moses and the Prophets, one can scarcely find a professing believer that has an intelligent grasp of these things. A Jesus is being preached that cannot be confirmed by Moses and the Prophets. It is really “another Jesus” – a spurious one. A way of salvation is being preached that cannot be confirmed by Moses and the Prophets. One rarely hears what Moses and the Prophets foretold about the character and lives of those who are being saved – those associated with Christ and the New Covenant. Wholly erroneous ideas about these matters have easily arisen and been perpetrated with little objection or inquiry.

However, this was not the manner of preaching and profession in the beginning of the day of salvation. There was an acute awareness among the informed of the proclamation of “another Jesus,” “another Spirit,” and “another gospel” (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). In order to decipher the true from the false, at least two things were required. First, “the anointing” that teaches believers to distinguish the true from the false (1 John 2:20,27). Second, a knowledge of the prophecies of Moses and the Prophets. These were used by the Holy Spirit to teach distinctions to the people.

Where such a knowledge is lacking, it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to know that the Jesus one has embraced is “the Lord’s Christ.” The modern church has not done well in assisting the people to take hold of this perspective. Much of what it is saying actually clouds the truth.

HOPE TOWARD GOD

“ 15 And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”

It is good to consider where Paul places the accent in this defense. This is not the first time he spoke in such a manner, or with such a thrust. You will find that, within the context of the contemporary Christian emphasis, there is a strange ring to what the apostle says. But that strangeness is only owing to the religious climate that has been produced by the preaching and teaching of our time.

HOPE TOWARD GOD

“And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow . . .” Other versions read, “I have hope in God,” NKJV “having hope in God,” NASB “hoping in God,” BBE “hope towards God,” DARBY “and I believe,” LIVING “belief in God,” IE “a hope directed towards God,” WEYMOUTH “look for,” MONTGOMERY “I am just as sure,” CEV “living in hopeful anticipation,” MESSAGE and “having expectation.” INTERLINEAR

Although some versions use the words “believe,” LIVING and “belief,” IE that is not a proper translation of the word used here. The Greek word is **evlpi,da** , which, as used here, has the following lexical meaning: “expectation of good . . . joyful and confident expectation,” THAYER “expected and awaited . . . prospect . . . expectation of a divinely provided future,” FRIBERG and “to look forward with confidence to that which is good and beneficial.” LOUW-NIDA

This Greek word is used fifty-three times from Acts through First John. It is not used a single time in the Gospels, or the book of the Revelation. An alternative word for hope (*evlpi,zete*) is used one time from Matthew through Revelation, where it speaks of lending to people in hope of gaining (Lk 6:34).

Hope in Genesis Through Malachi

The reality of hoping in God was introduced by Abraham, who is said to have “believed in hope” (Rom 4:18), although no reference is made directly to “hope” from Genesis through Judges. The first mentioning of “hope” in any tense is Ruth 1:12 – and there it refers to Naomi not hoping for a husband. Ezra referred to “hope” in regards to Israel refraining from marrying heathen women (Ezra 10:2). The book of Esther refers to “hope.” affirming that the Jew’s enemies “hoped” to have the rule over them (Esth 9:1). The book of Job contains sixteen reference to “hope” (4:6; 5:16; 6:11,20; 7:6; 8:13,14; 11:18,20; 14:7; 17:15; 19:20; 27:8; 31:24; 41:9). Most of the references were an expression of favor in the future.

The Psalms contain twenty-six references to hope. Some of them were prophecies of the coming Messiah (16:9; 22:9). Most of them are expressions of reliance upon the Lord (31:24; 33:18; 38:15; 39:7; 42:5,11; 43:5; 71:5,14; 78:7; 119:43, 49,74,81,114,116,147,165; 130:5,7; 131:3; 146:5; 147:11).

Proverbs contains seven references to hope, most of which are very general in nature (10:28; 11:7; 13:12; 14:32; 19:18; 26:12; 29:20).

There are twenty-seven references to hope in Isaiah through Malachi. The Lord is referred to as “the hope of Israel” (Jer 14:8; 17:13; 50:7). There are a number of references that accent conditions in which there was “no hope” (Isa 38:18; 57:10; Jer 2:25; 3:23; 18:12; Lam 3:18; Ezek 13:6; 19:5; 37:11). The blessing of hoping in the Lord is mentioned (Jer 17:7,17; Lam 3:21,24,26,29). God announces that there is hope for His people (Jer 31:17). Hosea mentioned “a door of hope” (Hos 2:15). Joel promised the Lord would be “the hope of His people” (Joel 3:16). Zechariah wrote of the “prisoners of hope” (Zech 9:12).

Romans through Jude contain forty-seven referemces to hope. Apostolic doctrine announces that we are “saved by hope” (Rom 8:24). There is “rejoicing in hope” (Rom 12:12; Heb 3:6), and “hope” that proceeds from the “patience and comfort” generated by “the Scriptures” (Rom 15:4). We read of “the God of hope” (Rom 15:13), hoping “all things” (1 Cor 13:7), and having “hope in Christ” (1 Cor 15:19). “Hope” is declared to be something we possess (2 Cor 3:12). There is “the hope of righteousness” for which we patiently wait through the ministry of the Holy Spirit (Gal 5:5). We read of “the hope of His calling” (Eph 1:18), “one hope” (Eph 4:4), and “the hope that is laid up for you in heaven” (Col 1:5). There is “the hope” that is generated through the Gospel (Col 1:23), “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27), and the “patience of hope” (1 Thess 1:3). We read of “the hope of salvation” that is a helmet to protect the mind (1 Thess 5:5). God has given to the

saints “everlasting consolation and good hope through grace” (2 Thess 2:16). Jesus is referred to as “our hope” (1 Tim 1:1). There is “the hope of eternal life” (Tit 1:2; 3:7), and “the blessed hope” of “the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:13). We are told of “the full assurance of hope” (Heb 6:11), laying hold on “the hope set before us” (Heb 6:18), and “hope” that is an “anchor of the soul” (Heb 6:19). We have been “begotten again unto a lively hope” (1 Pet 1:3). Believers “hope unto the end” (1 Pet 1:13), and are to live so they can “give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that in you” (1 Pet 3:15).

The Uniqueness of Hope Under the New Covenant

Notice the clarity and certitude that is related to hope now that sin has been put away, and Jesus is seated at the right hand of God. Hope is now fuller than it ever was before. No one prior to the enthronement of Jesus had such a strong hope concerning the end of the world and entrance into eternity. These things had simply not been brought to light as they have been in Christ Jesus. The best of believers prior to Jesus simply could not see as far as the saints can now. That is why it is written, “. . . God; Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel ” (2 Tim 1:8-10).

Paul now speaks of hope in this lofty sense. While he will acknowledge that the Jews had this hope, it was, because of limited revelation, not as mature and precise as Paul’s.

THERE SHALL BE A RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

“. . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead . . .” Other versions read, “shall certainly be a resurrection,” NASB “a coming back from the dead,” BBE “there is to be a resurrection,” DARBY “will come back to life,” GWN “He will raise,” NLT “the same resurrection from death,” TNT and “a rising again from the dead.” YLT

The resurrection of the dead will occur when Jesus comes – at the “last trump, when “the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” At that time,. There will be no more enemies to defeat, for death is “the last enemy.” That means the present heavens and earth will also pass away, for they are in a state of decline

The resurrection of the dead will occur when Jesus comes – at the “last trump, when “the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:52). At that time,. There will be no more enemies to defeat, for death is “the last enemy” (1 Cor 15:26). That means the present heavens and earth will also pass away, for they are in a state of decline, having been made “subject to vanity” (Rom 8:20). It also means the end of Satan’s influence, for the domain in which he rules will have been done away.

Hope is faith in its forward posture. It looks forward with confidence to the consummation of the great salvation. In our text, Paul relates that “hope” to the resurrection of the dead – the appointed time when the saints will be made complete, with no vestige of the flesh remaining.

Revelation About the Resurrection Prior to Christ Jesus

Although the resurrection of the dead was not a frequent subject by the prophets, they did declare its reality in no uncertain words. It was a coming epoch that God Almighty did not want to be hidden from men.

• **MEN SHALL LIVE AGAIN.** “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (Job 14:14-15).

• **THE DEAD SHALL SEE GOD.** “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me” (Job 19:25-27).

• **AWAKING WITH THE LORD’S LIKENESS.** “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness” (Psa 17:15).

• **REDEEMED FROM THE POWER OF THE GRAVE.** “But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah” (Psa 49:15).

• **DEATH SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY.** “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it” (Isa 25:8).

• **DEAD MEN SHALL LIVE.** “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead” (Isa 26:19).

• **THOSE IN THE DUST OF THE EARTH SHALL AWAKE.** “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Dan 12:2-3).

• **RANSOMED FROM THE POWER OF THE GRAVE.** “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes” (Hosea 13:14).

Regarding the resurrection, it is tragic beyond description that many professing Christians speak less of, and lack the knowledge of, those living prior to “the day of salvation.” It is a condition that should cause great shame and aggressive repentance.

Proclamation of the Resurrection After the Enthronement of Jesus

Although there is not much talk about the resurrection of the dead in the church of our day, that event was frequently addressed in the apostolic writings and the record their preaching. Here is a sampling of those references.

• **THE APOSTLES PREACHED THE RESURRECTION.** “And as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, Being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:1-2).

• **THE SKEPTICS SCOFFED AT THE PROCLAMATION OF THE RESURRECTION.** “Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection” (Acts 17:18) . . . “And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter” (Acts 17:32).

• **PAUL CONFESSED TO BELIEVING THE DEAD WOULD BE RAISED.** “But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” (Acts 23:6).

• **PAUL TO AGRIPPA.** “Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?” (Acts 26:8).

• **THE REDEMPTION OF THE BODY.** “And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body” (Rom 8:23).

• **GOD WILL RAISE US UP.** “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power” (1 Cor 6:14).

• **THE DEAD SHALL BE RAISED.** “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor 15:52).

• **GOD WILL RAISE US BY JESUS.** “Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you ” (2 Cor 4:14).

• **THE DESIRE TO KNOW THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION, AND TO ATTAIN UNTO THE RESURRECTION.** “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:10-11).

• **THE CHANGE OF THE VILE BODY.** “Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself” (Phil 3:21).

• **THOSE WHO HAVE DIED WILL BE BROUGHT BACK.** “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him” (1 Thess 4:14).

THE RESURRECTION, PART OF THE PRINCIPLES OF DOCTRINE. “Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment” (Heb 6:1-2).

BOTH OF THE JUST AND THE UNJUST

“ . . . both of the just and unjust.” Other versions read, “the righteous and the wicked,” NASB “the righteous and the unrighteous,” NRSV “upright men and wrongdoers,” BBE “that people with God's approval and those without it,” GWN “good and bad,” IE “the upright and the wicked,” WILLIAMS and “the righteous and the unrighteous (the just and the unjust).” AMPLIFIED

Some of the versions are a bit misleading at this point: “upright men and wrongdoers,” BBE and “good and bad.” GWN Whether intentional or not, this might leave people thinking that this is only a description of the outward conduct of the people. That is involved, to be sure, for a salvation that does not alter the conduct of those participating in it is really no salvation at all. The words “just” and “unjust” equate to “righteous” and “unrighteous,” or those who have been justified and those who have not.

In the broadest sense of the word, this means those whose life passes Divine scrutiny and those who do not. In the strictest sense, being righteous must be seen as the result of God's own work through Christ Jesus, for men are “made righteous” (Rom 5:19). The unjust are those who have not been made righteous.

Both of these categories will be raised at the same time, in a single resurrection. Jesus referred to this when speaking of His return, “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29).

The word “resurrections” does not appear in any standard translation of Scripture. “Resurrection” is nowhere mentioned in the plural – nowhere. We do read of a “first resurrection,” but never of a

“second resurrection.” The expression “first resurrection” denotes an order or kind of resurrection. It is not a term indicating chronology. With consistency Scripture refers to “THE resurrection” (Matt 22:28,30,31; Mk 12:33; Lk 14:14; 20:33,35,36; Lk 20:36; John 5:29; John 11:24,25; Acts 4:2,33; 17:18,32; 23:6; 24:21; 1 Cor 15:21,42; Phil 3:11; 2 Tim 2:18; Heb 6:2). In all of these texts, the definite article for “the” appears, signifying a singular, not a plural, expression.

In spite of the clarity of Scripture, the popular idea of the resurrection of the dead is that there will be two resurrections – one of the just, and one of the unjust. These two resurrections are taught to be separated by a thousand years. During that time, the saints will be absent from the earth, having been raptured. Jesus, however, associated ultimate life and damnation with a single resurrection.

SOMETHING TO BE MAINTAINED

“ 16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.”

Paul now confesses to a manner of living that is counter to the culture in which we live. Even within the professing church, this is an exceedingly rare admission. Indeed, some people have never heard a human being speak in this manner. However, this IS the manner of spiritual life

I EXERCISE MYSELF

“And herein do I exercise myself . . .” Other versions read, “I myself always strive,” NKJV “I do my best,” NASB “I strive always,” NIV “I always take pains,” RSV “I make a point of,” CJB “I endeavor,” DOUAY “I also labor,” MRD “I always try,” NLT “herein study I,” PNT “I try with all my strength,” LIVING “my own earnest endeavor,” WEYMOUTH and “I always exercise and discipline myself [mortifying my body, deadening my carnal affections, bodily appetites, and worldly desires, endeavoring in all respects].” AMPLIFIED

The Greek word translated “exercise” is **avskw/** , which has the following lexical meaning: “to exercise (oneself), take pains, labor, strive,” THAYER “do one's best to, strive to, exert oneself to,” FRIBERG “endeavor, do one's best,” UBS and “engage in some activity, with both continuity and effort - 'to do one's best, to endeavor.” LOUW-NIDA

As used here, “exercise” involves extensive and consistent effort. The kind of life Paul described is elsewhere stated this way: “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). Again he confessed, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Stated yet another way it is living “unto Him which died for them and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). Jesus spoke of this manner of life when He revealed what was required to be His disciple. “ Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it” (Matt 16:24-25).

The kind of life Paul describes is not a more advanced kind of life. In fact, he himself stated that this kind of life was the objective of the commandment of God. “Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith” NKJV (1 Tim 1:5). True spiritual life has no room for erratic and thoughtless living. Self-centeredness and a lack of proper spiritual focus are all traits of the flesh, and they are not acceptable before God. The absence of these qualities is always owing to some kind of distraction or temptation.

A CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENSE

“ . . . to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.” Other versions

read, “to have a conscience without offense toward God and men,” NKJV “to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men,” NASB “always to keep my conscience clear before God and man,” NIV “to have no reason for shame before God or men,” BBE “to have in everything a conscience without offence towards God and men,” DARBY “to have always a pure conscience before God, and before men,” MRD “do what I believe is right before God and men,” LIVING and “to have a clear (unshaken, blameless) conscience, void of offense toward God and toward men.” AMPLIFIED

This way of thinking is not to be confused with pleasing men, for, as Paul wrote, “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). It is never right to cater to the whims of men.

As concerns being void of “offense toward man,” Paul is referring to the sense of right and wrong that is maintained by men of moral integrity. This perspective is stated in Romans 14:17-18: “For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men .” In his epistle to Titus, Paul stated it this way: “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you ” (Titus 2:7-8). This is also the condition described in Paul’s letter to the Philippians: “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world ” (Phil 2:15).

There is such a thing as “having favor with all he people” (Acts 2:47). When this favor involves unregenerate people, it has to do with a helpful and productive life that brings benefit to society. It is understood that this does not exclude the possibility of rejection and persecution. But such responses will not be because of wrongdoing. No believer is to “suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet 4:15). Thus Paul extended himself so as not to cause men to have a distorted view of God, or to live in such a way as to earn men’s disfavor by an ungodly manner of life. This frame of mind is one required of all believers.

They simply cannot approach life with themselves being the chief consideration.

It is not how they are treated that is the point, but if they are living above reproach. Godliness is an absolute requirement (Heb 12:14).

I CAME TO BRING ALMS

“ 17 Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings.”

Paul is defending himself against the false charges of the Jews. They have charged him with being a trouble-maker among the Jews. If that was really the case, he would have spent a lot of time in Jerusalem, their chief city. However, instead of being a frequent visitor to Jerusalem, Paul now informs Felix of the facts.

I CAME AFTER MANY YEARS

“Now after many years I came . . .” Other versions read, “after several years,” NASB “after an absence of several years,” NIV “after some years,” NRSV “after a number of years,” BBE “after a lapse of many years,” DARBY and “I was away for many years.” IE

If Paul was really a troubler of the Jews, he would not have stayed away from the center of Jewish activity for “several years.” NASB Translated from the word **pleio,nwn** , the word “many” means, “greater in quantity: the object with which the comparison is made being,” THAYER “many, a larger

number; greater (greater than of comparison),” UBS and “a relatively large quantity of objects or events - 'many, a great deal of, a great number of.’” LOUW-NIDA

The point of comparison is with the “twelve days” Paul had been in Jerusalem. If the charges that were leveled against him were true, it would prove exceedingly difficult to account for his absence from Jerusalem for a number of years.

Concerning the probable length of this period of absence, I will simply pass along an explanation provided in the Pulpit Commentary: “St. Paul’s last visit to Jerusalem was that mentioned in Acts 18:22. Since then he had spent “some time” (*cro>non tina>*) at Antioch, had gone over all the country of Phrygia and Galatia, had come to Ephesus, and stopped between two and three years there, had gone through Macedonia, had spent three months at Corinth, had returned to Macedonia, and from thence had come to Jerusalem in about fifty days. All which must have occupied four or five years — from A.D. 54 to A.D. 58 — according to most chronologers.”

Paul’s point is that his manner of life would not support the charges leveled against him.

TO BRING ALMS AND OFFERINGS

“ . . . to bring alms . . . and offerings.” Other versions read, “gifts for the poor . . . and offerings,” NIV “alms . . . and to offer sacrifices,” NRSV “give help and offerings,” BBE “bring charitable gifts and offerings,” CSB “gifts for the poor and offerings for God,” GWN “impart alms and present an offering,” MRD “do kind acts to my nation, and offerings,” YLT “money to aid . . . to offer a sacrifice to God,” LIVING “bring money . . . and to give some offerings,” IE “bring contributions of . . . and to offer sacrifices,” WILLIAMS and “bring . . . contributions of charity and offerings.” AMPLIFIED

As you can see, there are two completely different ideas reflected in the various versions.

- That both the alms and the offerings were presented to Paul’s nation – the Jews (NIV/BBE/CSB/IE/AMPLIFIED) .
- That alms were presented to the people, And a sacrifice was presented to God (NRSV/GWN/MRD/LIVING/WILLIAMS) .

The charitable gift of which he speaks consisted of the offerings gathered from various churches (1 Cor 16:1-2; 2 Cor 8; Rom 15:25-26,31). It is not likely that the offering he presented was the one related to the four men who had taken a vow (Acts 21:26). Paul did not come to Jerusalem to present that offering. It was made at the suggestion of James and the brethren after he had arrived in Jerusalem (Acts 21:22-24).

It seems to me to be best to consider the “offerings” to be but another view of the “alms.” In delineating this offering to the Corinthians, Paul wrote that what the people gave was really being given to God Himself. “Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not” (2 Cor 8:11-12). Although I am not willing to be contentious about it, I am persuaded that the “alms” and “offerings” were both referring to the gifts brought to the poor saints in Jerusalem.

TO MY NATION

“ . . . to my nation.” Other versions read, “my people,” NIV “the people of my own nation,” MRD “the Jews.” LIVING

This is a wise presentation of the case. Actually, the alms Paul had brought were not for the Jews in general, but for “the poor saints which are at Jerusalem” (Rom 15:26). In his exhortation to the Corinthians concerning this matter, this type of work is referred to as “the ministry to the saints ”

NASB (1 Cor 16:15). He also wrote to the Corinthians that this offering “supplieth the want of the saints ” (2 Cor 9:12). Jesus referred to such acts of philanthropy as ministering to “the least of these My brethren” (Matt 25:40). When rebuking professed believers that lacked the required evidence of sonship, James wrote, “If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?” (James 2:15-16). So, there is really no question about the intended recipients of the “alms” and “offerings” Paul brought to Jerusalem.

Yet Paul generalizes by saying he brought the alms to his “nation” – which he most assuredly did, even though only a part of the nation received them. Of course, it would have been no different if he had brought the offerings for the unbelieving Jews who were poor – only a part of the nation would have received them – the poor. However, this is not a matter on which to split hairs. Paul had been charged with being a defiling influence and one that fomented insurrection “among the Jews.” However, instead of causing agitation among his nation, he had assisted them in the hour of need. This is further something that could be corroborated. The charges, therefore, were not at all consistent with the real facts in the matter. Paul had been wholly misrepresented, and he wisely gives just enough information as can be fully corroborated.

THEY FOUND ME PURIFIED IN THE TEMPLE

“ 18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. 19 Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.”

Paul now spells out the circumstances at the time he was found by the Jews. Tertullus had been very general in his presentation – particularly regarding how the Jews had actually found Paul: “ Who also hath gone about to profane the temple: whom we took, and would have judged according to our law” (Acts 24:6). The clear implication is that they had found him profaning, or defiling, the Temple.

CERTAIN JEWS FROM ASIA

“Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me . . .” This was conveniently omitted from Tertullus’ charges. He spoke for the ones who were present – “whom WE took” – as though this whole matter had been detected and addressed by the Jews from Jerusalem. The true sequence of events was as follows.

- The Jews from Asia saw Paul “in the Temple” (Acts 21:27a).
- The Jews from Asia “stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him” (Acts 21:27b).

Instead of stirring up a tumult, Paul had been engaged in an activity directed toward God alone. That action had to do with a vow he had made to the Lord. He was living his life in view of the Lord, not with a mind to promote a sect, as his accusers alleged.

- The Jews from Asia cried out, calling upon the men of Israel to “help” them (Acts 21:28a).
- The Jews from Asia told the people Paul was teaching in every place “against the people, and the Law, and this place” [the Temple] (Acts 21:28b).
- The Jews from Asia told the people Paul had “brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place” (Acts 21:28c).

Tertullus made no reference to the Jews from Asia, or the fact that the local Jews had not entered into public opposition of Paul until they were provoked, by the Jews from Asia. Now Paul refers to

this fact that had not been set before the court.

It ought to be noted that the only charges that should be brought against the people of God are those that are false. No child of God should “suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters” (1 Pet 4:15). That is, such things should never be charged against the people of God in truth.

FOUND ME PURIFIED IN THE TEMPLE

“ . . . purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult . . .” Other versions read, “occupied in the temple, having been purified, without any crowd or uproar,” NASB “I was ceremonially clean when they found me in the temple courts doing this. There was no crowd with me, nor was I involved in any disturbance,” NIV “they found me in the temple, completing the rite of purification, without any crowd or disturbance,” NRSV and “they found me [occupied in the rites of purification] in the temple, without any crowd or uproar.” AMPLIFIED

Instead of stirring up a tumult, Paul had been engaged in an activity directed toward God alone. That action had to do with a vow he had made to the Lord. He was living his life in view of the Lord, not with a mind to promote a sect, as his accusers alleged.

Tertullus had made no mention of this vow, or the fact that Paul was there with four Jewish men who also were completing a vow to the Lord. This was not a private thing for Paul, for, as James and the elders had suggested, it was also done in order that others might see and know that Paul was not engaged in disrupting the Jews and their customs. The Jews from Asia had seen this suggestion being carried out, but made no association at all of the activity with a consciousness of God.

So it is that when deeds are done in the presence of unbelievers with an interest to pleasing God and confirming the nature of spiritual life, it may not solicit their approbation. The children of God cannot afford to be naive about this situation.

THEY OUGHT TO HAVE BEEN HERE

“ . . . Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.” Other versions read, “who ought to have been present before you, and to make accusation, if they should have anything against me,” NASB “it would have been better if they had come here to make a statement, if they have anything against me,” BBE “It is they who ought to be here before you to bring charges, if they have anything against me,” CSB and “whom it behoveth to be present before thee, and to accuse, if they had anything against me.” YLT

The reference is to the Jews from Asia who had raised the charges against Paul. Instead of the original accusers being there, Ananias and the council, or sanhedrin, were there, with Tertullus being their spokesman. The first time Ananias the high priest is mentioned is Acts 23:2. The council and the chief priests were summoned into the matter in Acts 22:39, well after the charges had been made. There is no record of Tertullus' involvement until the event that is now being reported.

Therefore, none of the original accusers were present at this trial. Well does Paul affirm they ought to have been there. This is a trial based upon hearsay and second and third reports, which violated both Jewish and Roman law. Jewish law required at least two witnesses to be present (Deut 17:6). The whole affair was nothing but a sham.

TESTIFY OF ANY EVIL FOUND IN ME

“ 20 Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council.” Other versions read, “any wrongdoing,” NKJV “misdeed,” NASB “what crime they

found in me,” NIV “any iniquity,” DOUAY “any unjust thing,” GENEVA “what I was charged with while I stood in the council,” GWN “evil doing,” TNT “any unrighteousness,” YLT “they didn't find me guilty of anything when I was tried by their own council,” CEV and “So ask these others what crime they've caught me in. Don't let them hide behind this smooth-talking Tertullus.” MESSAGE

To this point, nothing specific has been presented against Paul – only vague generalities (Acts 24:5-6).

- Paul is charged with being a “pestilent fellow.”
- He is said to have been “a mover of sedition among the Jews throughout the world.”
- He is charged with being “a ring leader of the sect of the Nazarenes.”
- Paul is also said to have “gone about to profane the Temple.”

Thus, no specific charge has been laid against the apostle. A specific act that proved him to be a “pestilent fellow” has not been cited. No particular act of sedition has been mentioned. What is intended by the expression that he was a “ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” has not been specified. Precisely how he went about to “profane the Temple” has not been particularized.

Such a sloppy procedure violated the Law given to the Jews. They were not permitted to simply make allegations against a person, but had to have more than one witness to a particular charge. It is not that the Jewish leaders were ignorant of this requirement. When they brought Jesus before Caiaphas, they relied on “two false witnesses” (Matt 26:60). When they tried Stephen, they saw to it that a plurality of “false witnesses” spoke against him (Acts 6:13). But in the case of Paul, they did not present a single witness to corroborate their charges. Paul now clarifies this to Felix.

THE SINGLE EXCEPTION

“21 Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.”

Paul has nothing to hide, and so will acknowledge anything that may, on the surface, appear to justify the allegation that he is a “Pestilent fellow” and caused insurrection among the people.

EXCEPT . . . FOR THIS ONE VOICE

“Except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them . . .” Other versions read, “this one statement which I shouted,” NKJV “this one sentence that I called out,” NRSV “this one thing which I said among them in a loud voice,” BBE “for this one voice only that I cried,” DOUAY “They could accuse me of only one thing. As I stood among them, I shouted,” GWN “unless it was my one outcry as I stood among them,” NAB and “unless it was in that one expression which I made use of,” LIVING

The statement to which Paul refers was not expressed in the Temple, nor was it addressed to the Jews in general. This was affirmed before the Jewish council, not as from an intruder, but as one who was defending himself before false charges. That council was comprised of Pharisees and Sadducees who differed significantly in their theology. Yet, they were quite willing to live with the variance, even though they were together hostile against Paul. The statement Paul made did cause a tumult in that assembly, and therefore Paul adds a one-sentence explanation.

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

“Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.” Other versions read, “concerning the resurrection of the dead,” NKJV “other than for this one statement which I

shouted out while standing among them, ‘For the resurrection of the dead I am on trial before you today,’” NASB and “In regard to the resurrection of the dead I am indicted and on trial before you this day!” AMPLIFIED

Notice, this statement that caused such an agitation in the council did not fall into any of the categories Tertullus presented before Felix. It did not confirm he was a pestilent fellow, for he acknowledge something that was common among the Jews – something that was revealed in their holy Scriptures. It certainly did not contribute to any political anarchy, and it was not a criminal offense.

Yet, by mentioning this pivotal fact, Paul has planted a seed, making reference to the resurrection of the dead. This will have an impact upon the council itself, as well as Felix. It will actually draw the attention away from him.

FELIX HAD A MORE PERFECT KNOWLEDGE

“ 22 And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.”

The text suggests that Paul knew the extent of Felix’s knowledge of “these things.” He therefore spoke in such a manner as to provoke Felix to serious thought about his case, thus avoiding Felix having to deal extensively with the Jews who were standing before him.

FELIX HAD A MORE PERFECT KNOWLEDGE

“And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way . . .” Other versions read, “more accurate knowledge of that way,” NASB “being well acquainted with the Way,” NIV “Rather well informed about the Way,” NRSV “more exact knowledge concerning the WAY,” ASV “a more detailed knowledge,” BBE “of things connected with the Way,” CJB “having most certain knowledge of this way,” DOUAY “who knew Christians,” LIVING “understood much about the way,” IE “fairly well informed about the new life,” WEYMOUTH “a fairly clear conception of the principles involved in The Way,” WEYMOUTH and “a pretty accurate knowledge of the Way.” MONTGOMERY

Felix was in Caesarea, the same city a certain centurion named Cornelius had been converted (Acts 10:1-48). Philip also came to this city, no doubt continuing “preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 8:12). It appears to me that possible exposure to those events, were now coupled with Paul’s testimony.

Once again, the doctrine and manner of life in Christ Jesus is referred to as “the Way.” This is an all-encompassing description that involves the purpose of God, the doctrine of Christ, and the manner of life of the believers. The purpose of God begins with a remedy for sin, and ends with conformity to the image of Christ in glory. The means through which this is accomplished is “the doctrine of Christ” (Heb 6:1; 2 John 1:9). Elsewhere it is referred to as “the record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11), and “the Gospel of Christ” (Rom 1:16).

These three components work harmoniously together. None of them is at variance with another. Further, “the Way” requires the presence of them all. The purpose of God cannot be fulfilled by “another gospel,” or false way. Neither, indeed, does the Gospel yield a manner of life that is contrary to it. A holy Word cannot produce an unholy people, and an unholy people cannot present an accurate picture of Christ.

During the time of our text, the followers of Jesus had made such an impact on society that people

knew about “the way.”

In Our Time

In our time, and in this generation, certain concepts of “the way” have been formed in those who are beholding professing Christians. Is there a person of sound mind who does not know that the modern church has left a bad taste in the mouths of society? It is not their righteousness that has caused these reactions, but their unrighteousness.

More and more it is becoming fashionable for professing Christians to speak more of what they are not than what they are in Christ Jesus. This approach is thought to be humble, but that conclusion is questionable, to say the least. If it is true that those in Christ are a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17 Gal 6:15), “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10), “born of God” (1 John 3:9), and “made the righteousness of God” in Christ, they we ought to expect some kind of change to be wrought in the character and conduct of such people. If it is remotely possible that such statements are really nothing more than a metaphor, then Jesus has not spoken to us plainly as He promised He would: “These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father” (John 16:25).

Every insightful believer can confess with Paul, “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:12). This does not mean he slipped now and then, committing adultery, murder, lying, or some other outward sin. He did not even do that when he lived under the Law and without Jesus. He confessed, and the Spirit did not put a disclaimer on it, “touching the righteousness which is in the law, [I was] blameless” (Phil 3:6). Again he testified, “I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1). His conscience was not perfect, to be sure, but he was outwardly living up to what he thought God required. When the Law did convict him of sin, it was not some act of outward immorality, but covetousness (Rom 7:7).

It is tragic that many professing Christians have more trouble maintaining a moral life than Paul did under the Law – or Zecharias and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptist. It is said of them, “And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless” (Luke 1:6).

The concept of “the way” postulates an outward life that is not riddled with defects. Perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1) is certainly not a casual work, but it is underwritten by Divine power wherever such an effort is extended. I do not know that the Scriptures ever make a point of believers always sinning, being dominated by sin, captured by habits, helpless, or unable to successfully resist the devil. If that assessment is true, those who affirm such things owe us an explanation.

HE DEFERRED THEM

“ . . . he deferred them . . .” Other versions read, “he adjourned the proceedings,” NKJV “put them off,” NASB “adjourned the hearing,” NRSV “postponed the trial,” NAB “delayed them,” YLT and “told the Jews to wait.” LIVING

Even though Ananias and the council had traveled about seventy miles to stand before Felix and make their charges against Paul known, Felix simply dismisses the proceedings. He knows that he will need more information about these charges that have been delivered by the council. He also knows that what they have said did not agree with what he knew about those who were of “the Way.”

I WILL KNOW THE UTTERMOST OF YOUR MATTER

“ . . . and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter.” Other versions read, “I will make a decision on your case,” NKJV “I will decide the case,” NASB “I will determine your matter,” ASV “I will give attention to your business,” BBE “I will hear you,” DOUAY “I will give hearing between you,” MRD “I will know the utmost of your matter,” PNT “I will know fully the things concerning you,” YLT and “I will determine your case more fully.” AMPLIFIED

Felix felt that when Lysias came and gave his report, he would have a full picture of the circumstances and be able to render a verdict. Although we will find his conduct was mixed with other motives, he did refuse to proceed any further until he was satisfied he knew all the facts in the case. Proper judgments cannot be rendered until all of the facts have been assessed.

KEEP PAUL, AND LET HIM HAVE LIBERTY

Paul, then, was a prisoner with special privileges. This indicates that Felix had, in fact, seen through the false charges of the Jews. More specifically, God had enabled him to see through those false charges, and to actually have sympathy for Paul. God is revealed as moving men to favor His people

“ 23 And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.”

The trial being temporarily adjourned, what will Felix do with Paul? The verse that follows shows how God can give a man favor in the eyes of others who are not members of the household of faith. Remember, in Felix we do not find the paragon of virtue.

KEEP PAUL AND LET HIM HAVE LIBERTY

“And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty . . .” Other versions read, “ be kept in custody and yet have some freedom,” NASB “keep Paul under guard but to give him some freedom,” NIV “he should be kept in charge, and should have indulgence,” ASV “keep Paul under his control, and to let him have everything he had need of,” BBE “keep Paul in custody, but to let him have considerable liberty,” CJB “to keep Paul, and that he should have ease,” GENEVA “should be kept under arrest but free from restriction,” NJB and “keep [Paul] in custody, but to treat him with indulgence [giving him some liberty]” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “liberty” is **anesisin**, , which has the following lexical meaning, “a loosening, relaxing, spoken of a more tolerable condition in captivity . . . relief, rest,” THAYER “relaxation of custody mitigation, measure of freedom,” FRIBERG and “relaxation of custody mitigation, measure of freedom.” LOUW-NIDA This word can also mean relief from disease as well as pain. The Pulpit Commentary offers this word: “It is also a common medical term for the cessation or remission of pain or disease. St. Paul uses it four times in his Epistles for “rest” or “ease” (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:5; 8:13; 2 Thessalonians 1:7).”

This provides a rather large consideration, ranging from the discomforts of incarceration to one of Paul’s chronic infirmities (2 Cor 11:30; 12:5,9,10), to the normal needs for nourishment and comfort.

Paul, then, was a prisoner with special privileges. This indicates that Felix had, in fact, seen through the false charges of the Jews. More specifically, God had enabled him to see through those false charges, and to actually have sympathy for Paul. God is revealed as moving men to favor His people.

• **JOSEPH.** “But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen 39:21). “And delivered him out of all his

afflictions, and gave him favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house” (Acts 7:10).

• **ISRAEL.** “And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians. Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants, and in the sight of the people” (Ex 11:3). “And the LORD gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians” (Ex 12:36).

• **DANIEL.** “Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs” (Dan 1:9).

That is precisely what took place in this text. The Lord turned the heart of Felix so he arranged for Paul's care and comfort – all at the government's expense.

FORBID NONE OF HIS ACQUAINTANCE

“ . . . and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.” Other versions read, “not to forbid any of his friends to provide for or visit him,” NKJV “not to prevent any of his friends from ministering to him,” NASB “permit his friends to take care of his needs,” NIV and “not to hinder his friends from ministering to his needs and serving him.” AMPLIFIED

Paul's “acquaintance” was doubtless the brethren – fellow believers. And why did Felix make such an arrangement? There is no record of any of them being present at the trial. Luke, who is writing this narrative, was no doubt among these acquaintances. In the report of this whole episode, Luke writes, “when WE were come to Jerusalem” (Lk 21:17). Some are of the opinion his ministry included some kind of care for Paul's infirmities. This is more than a mere possibility, as Paul referred to Luke as “the beloved physician” (Col 4:14).

We see in this a demonstration of the love of the brethren, by which we know we have passed from death unto life (1 John 3:14). The text also suggests that certain brethren were keeping abreast of the situation, and were there to help.

FELIX COMES AND SENDS FOR PAUL

“ 24 And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.”

Now, after a period of time, Felix comes again. This time, however, he does not come to resume the trial. As far as the trial is concerned he is still waiting for Lysias to show up. His reason for coming is most arresting.

FELIX COMES AGAIN WITH HIS WIFE

Drusilla was the daughter of Herod Agrippa the elder, and was engaged to be married to Epiphanes, the son of King Antiochus, on condition that he would embrace the Jewish religion; but as he afterward refused to do that, the contract was broken off. Afterward she was given in marriage, by her brother Agrippa the younger, to Azizus, king of Emesa, upon his consent to be circumcised. When Felix was governor of Judea, he saw Drusilla and fell in love with her, and sent to her Simon, one of his friends, a Jew, by birth a Cyprian, who pretended to be a magician, to endeavour to persuade her to forsake her husband and to marry Felix. Accordingly, in order to avoid the envy of her sister Bernice, who treated her ill on account of her beauty, “she was prevailed on,” says Josephus, “to transgress the laws of her forefathers, and to marry Felix” (Josephus, Antiq., book 20, chapter 7, sections 1 and 2). – ALBERT BARNES

“And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla which was a Jewess . . .” Other

versions read, “but some days later,” NASB “Several days later,” NIV “a few days later,” LIVING and “Not long after this.” WEYMOUTH

An English parallel for “certain days” is “a little while” – an unspecified period of time that was relatively brief. It was measured in terms of days, but only involved a few of them.

This time Felix has no intention of addressing the court case before him. Further, he comes with his wife, Drusilla, “which was a Jewess.” History records that she was the daughter of the Herod that was eaten of worms (Acts 12:23), and the sister of Agrippa, who will be mentioned in the next chapter. The text states that she was a Jewess – like Timothy’s mother (Acts 16:1). I do not have a satisfactory explanation for her being the daughter of Herod, and yet a Jewess, nor have I read one. Commentators tend to skirt the matter, as well as the dictionary and encyclopedic references I have. I have found no one who endeavors to explain how it is that she was called a “Jewess.” I do not understand that this term was ordinarily applied to a proselyte. It is generally understood that Herod was a descendant of Esau – an Edomite. Yet, by profession, the Herodian dynasty was Jewish, making it the religion of the state, and seeking to exploit it for personal advantage. With that, I will leave this subject, receiving the statement of Luke that Drusilla was a Jewess. I see no alternative to this procedure.

It is assumed that she is the one who compelled Felix to call for Paul. However, it can also be assumed that Felix was intrigued by Paul’s defense, and was thus prompted to make further inquiry into “the Way.”

HE SENT FOR PAUL AND HEARD HIM CONCERNING THE FAITH IN CHRIST

“ . . . he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.” Other versions read, “and heard him speak about faith in Christ Jesus,” NASB and “listened to him [talk] about faith in Christ Jesus.” AMPLIFIED

There have not been many dignitaries that have extended themselves to hear of faith in Christ. A certain “deputy,” or “proconsul,” NKJV once called for Barnabas and Saul “and desired to hear the Word of God” (Acts 13:7). Now, however, Felix makes a special trip, bringing his wife, and hears Paul speak “concerning the faith in Christ.”

When I read this, I pondered who Felix might go to hear in our day, and what he would hear as well. I venture to say that many preachers would be found speechless if they were asked to speak “about faith in Christ.” NASB That is the essence of “the Way.” Remove “Christ” and “faith,” and there really is nothing left to talk about.

THE MANNER OF PAUL’S REASONING

“ 25a And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come . . . ”

What will Paul say? How will he speak? What will be his focus? Will he present an apologetic speech for becoming a disciple of Jesus? Will he cite proofs that Christ rose from the dead? Will he present the official doctrine of the church in Jerusalem? Or, will he adapt the message to every day life, telling Felix and his wife that Jesus is the answer to all of their problems, or that He is the secret to happiness? Perhaps he will major on the subject of marriage, seeing that a lot of unacceptable circumstances were related to their marriage. Then, he might give a dissertation on what is referred to by some as “the plan of salvation.” Does all of this sound a bit foolish? If so, that is because it is. Yet, who does not know that these are the kind of approaches he would hear in our day.

HE REASONED OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

“And as he reasoned of righteousness . . . ” Other versions read, “justice,” NRSV “God’s approval,” GWN “uprightness,” NJB “morality,” MONTGOMERY “doing right,” CEV “goodness,”

GNB and “right relations with God.” MESSAGE

As it is used here, the word “righteousness” has the following lexical meaning. “Equity of character of act,” STRONG’S “the state of him who is such as he ought to be . . . the condition acceptable to God,” THAYER “of the right behavior that God requires of persons righteousness, good behavior, uprightness,” FRIBERG “what God requires; what is right, righteousness, uprightness, justice; righting wrong,” UBS and “the act of doing what God requires -'righteousness, doing what God requires, doing what is right.” LOUW-NIDA

This has to do with human conduct. Jesus spoke of it in these words, “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:20). Other versions read, “surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees,” NASB “is not greater,” BBE and “is more than.” AMPLIFIED This does involve the unseen qualities of character, sincerity, devotion, and fervency. However, this is not to the exclusion of upright conduct.

While it is true that righteousness is imputed to those having faith, that righteousness is not surreal. It is what enables the one in Christ to live righteously, or in a righteous manner. This is essential, for “the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God” (1 Cor 6:9). Furthermore, that statement is followed by a reference to the outbreak of sin in human conduct: “fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind” – all evidence themselves in human behavior.

A salvation that does not impact upon the conduct of the individual is no salvation at all. A righteousness that is not confirmed in the behavior of the individual is really not righteousness. Men have invented a salvation that leaves the saved under the dominion of sin, even though such a condition belies what God has said about His great salvation.

In his first epistle John defined righteous by teaching it is confirmed in the doing of it. “If ye know that He is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of Him” (1 John 2:29). And again, “Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous” (1 John 3:7). And again, “In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother” (1 John 3:10). There should be no further need to establish the essentiality of a righteousness that is confirmed by conduct. A salvation that does not impact upon the conduct of the individual is no salvation at all. A righteousness that is not confirmed in the behavior of the individual is really not righteousness. Men have invented a salvation that leaves the saved under the dominion of sin, even though such a condition belies what God has said about His great salvation.

If these things were not so, precisely how could Paul reason with Felix concerning righteousness? Is it remotely possible that such reasoning could be achieved if God was really tolerant and understanding of unrighteousness? Such a thought is an insult to our intelligence. Paul reasoned with Felix about the necessity of righteousness, no doubt expounding the results of being unrighteous – as defined in apostolic doctrine.

HE REASONED OF TEMPERANCE

“And as he reasoned of . . . temperance . . .” Other versions reads, “self-control,” NKJV “chastity,” DOUAY “holiness,” MRD “self-restraint,” NAB and “purity of life (the control of the passions).” AMPLIFIED

The word “temperance” has the following lexical meaning: “self-control . . . the virtue of one who masters his desires and passions, especially his sensual appetites,” THAYER and “to exercise complete control over one's desires and actions - 'to control oneself, to exercise self- control, self-control.” LOUW-NIDA

The perception of the necessity of this virtue has nearly been obliterated by the religion of our day. There are religious systems that develop in those who adopt them a kind of sympathy for the person who cannot control their passions. In fact, some well known and popular recovery programs teach people to say they are believers in Christ, yet their lives are “out of control.”

“Temperance” is affirmed to be part of “the fruit of the Spirit” (Gal 5:23). That does not mean that it is a luxury, or that men can be saved without it. It is its essentiality that accounts for it being included in “the fruit of the Spirit.” In the working out of their salvation, believers are admonished to “add” temperance to their knowledge of the Lord (2 Pet 1:6). This admonition does not suggest that God will receive people without this quality. Rather, the reasoning is that He will not – that is why the virtue must be found in the professing Christian.

Intemperance is not all right in sinners, but unacceptable in saints. Under no condition is it acceptable. That is why Paul could reason on the matter. It is true that such a quality can openly be realized in Christ and through the Spirit. However, it is the necessity of this quality within men that makes such a circumstance such a blessing.

In reasoning with Felix concerning temperance, Paul was highlighting the necessity of controlling fleshly appetites. He did not tell Felix he could not possibly do this, anymore than the Law announced that no man could really keepm it. The point is that this is something God absolutely requires. Temperance is not a quality for the more advanced. Every person, whether in or out of Christ, is required to stop the outbreak of wicked inner desires. This why Paul, even after he was converted, kept under his body, bringing it under control (1 Cor 9:27). It is why grace teaches us to effectively reject the call of fleshly lusts (Tit 2:11-12). It is why believers are admonished to “abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11). It is why believers are told to “mortify” their members that are upon the earth (Col 3:5), and put to death “the deeds of the body” (Rom 8:13). It is because this is necessary – not just for the saints, but for all men! Intemperance is not all right in sinners, but unacceptable in saints. Under no condition is it acceptable. That is why Paul could reason on the matter. It is true that such a quality can openly be realized in Christ and through the Spirit. However, it is the necessity of this quality within men that makes such a circumstance such a blessing.

I do not believe most professing Christians are aware of this requirement. And, with the rise of psychiatry and counseling, there appears to be a prevailing notion that God understands and is tolerant of the person who is lacking in this area.

HE REASONED OF JUDGMENT TO COME

“And as he reasoned of . . . judgment to come . . .” Other versions read, “the coming judgment,” NRSV “future judgment,” RSV “the judging which was to come,” BBE “the judgment about to come,” DARBY and “the judgment that is about to be.” YLT

This is another much neglected subject: “the day of judgment.” The Gospels present Jesus referring to this day no less than five times (Matt 10:15; 11:22,24; 12:36; Mk 6:11). He referred to “the judgment” seven times (Matt 5:21,22; 12:42; 27:19; Lk 10:14; 11:31,32; John 12:31). Peter mentions “the day of judgment” two times (2 Pet 2:9; 3:7). The epistles refer “the judgment” six times (Rom 2:2,3; 14:10; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 9:27; Jude 1:6).

Solemnly the Spirit announces there are two appointments that every man will meet: death, and the judgment (Heb. 9:27). Jesus said that men would give an account to God for “every idle word” (Matt 12:36). Solomon said God would bring “every work into judgment” (Eccl 12:14). Paul said “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (Rom 14:10; 2 Cor 5:10). There is an appointed day when “the books will be opened,” and “the dead . . . will be judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works” (Rev 20:12). This is an “appointed day”

(Heb 9:27), during which every word that God has ever spoken will be fully vindicated (Rom 3:4). Every person who has refused to believe the Gospel will be judged for not doing so. Every person who has failed to be “temperate in all things” (1 Cor 9:25) will be judged for not doing so. All who refused to restrain the flesh will be judged for that refusal.

In the day of judgment, only those who believed the Gospel and lived by faith, walking in the Spirit, will have “boldness,” or confidence (1 John 4:17). Men will be called into account before an assembled universe for living for themselves instead of for the One who died and rose again for them. Those who have received the love of the truth and lived in strict accord with it will be exonerated before all – even though the world had considered them foolish and impractical.

How does one account for the glaring absence of preaching and testifying about the day of judgment? Why are sinners like Felix not being told of this? In all of the religious tutelage about witnessing to the lost, why is this approach rarely, if ever, mentioned? Was not Felix a sinner? Had he not called for Paul to have him speak “concerning the faith in Christ,” or “faith in Christ” (Acts 24:24). Yet, this reasoning is what Paul presented to him, which means his words were directly related to faith in Christ. Today, it would be quite challenging to find a person who would reason in such a manner.

FELIX HEARS AND TREMBLES

“ 25b Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.”

The reaction of Felix to the words of Paul reveals at least two things. First, they confirm the fervency and exactness with which Paul spoke. Second, they are proof that the Holy Spirit worked with the words Paul used.

FELIX TREMBLED

“Felix trembled . . .” Other versions read, “was afraid,” NKJV “became frightened,” NASB “was alarmed,” RSV “was terrified,” ASV “had great fear,” BBE “filled with fear,” DARBY “took fright,” NJB “became alarmed and terrified,” AMPLIFIED and “ felt things getting a little too close for comfort.” MESSAGE

After hearing Paul’s reasoning, Felix was shaken to the core of his being. He had not heard accommodating words that left him thinking how very much God loved him. Rather, the thoughts of his heart were made known (Heb 4:12). If he would react properly to the fear that now gripped him, it would prepare him for a blessing. If he did not, his condemned state would only be accentuated.

In our time, a line of reasoning that produces trembling, fear, alarm, and being terrified, would be considered wholly unacceptable. Such a message would be perceived as too negative. Why didn’t Paul speak about how much God loved Felix? Why didn’t he tell the ruler that Jesus loved him so much He died for him? The answer to these such questions is straightforward. It is because such words did not match the circumstance. It would not have been appropriate to speak to Felix like Peter did to those on the day of Pentecost. His words had to be appropriate for the occasion.

Sinners ought to be afraid of their situation. They are not righteous, not temperate, and not ready for the day of judgment. After all, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). The thought of facing God in an unrighteous state ought to terrify the individual. The very thought of standing before the Lord having indulged fleshly appetites rather than subduing them, ought to cause a person to shake with fear – to tremble. To stand at the day of judgment without preparing for the occasion is frightening to any soul who takes the word of God seriously.

Our day is tainted by erroneous presentations of God, a minimization of the enormity of sin, and the ignoring of the necessity to refuse to allow lusts to express themselves.

Our day is tainted by erroneous presentations of God, a minimization of the enormity of sin, and the ignoring of the necessity to refuse to allow lusts to express themselves. Uninformed souls will say, “Well, it is just as bad to think it as to do it.” However, this only contains an element of truth. It is only true if the thought is welcomed and dwelt upon. Thoughts can be subdued, rejected, taken captive, and even cast down with spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:3-5; Tit 2:11-12).

GO THY WAY FOR THIS TIME

“ . . . and answered, Go thy way for this time . . .” Other versions read, “go away for now,” NKJV “go away for the present,” NASB “that’s enough for now,” NIV “For the time being, go away!,” CJB “Leave for now,” CSB and “thou hast done enough at this time.” TNT

Instead of capitalizing upon this opportunity, Felix sought to delay his decision. He had heard enough for now, and did not want to hear any more. The sophist would say that he had reached his capacity, but that is not the truth. Felix assumed he was going to live. He assumed that Paul would be available to him in the future. He thought he would actually have another opportunity to talk to Paul.

WHEN I HAVE A CONVENIENT SEASON

“ . . . when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.” Other versions read, “when I have a convenient time,” NKJV “when I find time,” NASB “when I find it convenient,” NIV “when I have an opportunity,” NRSV “when the right time comes,” BBE and “when I have time,” IE “when I can find a convenient opportunity.” WEYMOUTH

A “convenient season” is one that does not interfere with the preferred way of living. Actually, from a higher point of view, the time could not have been more convenient for Felix than that very hour. A preacher had been sent to him from God, and if he would heed what he said, he was not far from the Kingdom of God. But Felix did not see this. His heart had been “hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13). He would continue living as he had been doing, and wait for a convenient time to hear more – a time that would not interfere with the normality of his life.

There is no record of Felix ever calling for Paul speak of the faith again. The only other time Felix is mentioned is found in Acts 25:14. Even then, the mention of his name was by Festus, who told Agrippa of Paul saying, “There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix.” Again, and for the final time, he was mentioned as being willing to please the Jews by leaving Paul in prison (Acts 24:27). What a foolish decision this man made at this most critical hour!

FELIX WAS LOOKING FOR A PAYOFF

“ 26 He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.”

The Spirit now takes us behind the scenes, showing us the heart of Felix. This is something that Felix apparently did not express. He actually surmised that Paul was the same kind of man as himself, assuming he would do anything to be free.

HE HOPED HE WOULD RECEIVE MONEY

“He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him . . .” Other versions read, “he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe,” NIV and “he had hopes of receiving money from Paul.” NJB

Now we learn there was an ulterior motive that was driving Felix. Paul must have discerned this to some extent, which perception shaped what he had to say to Felix. Felix saw Paul as an opportunity to gain some wealth. Although he had heard Paul's defense, he did not grasp its meaning at all. He knew nothing of living with a conscience toward God, and thus actually thought Paul would pay him a bribe to gain release from prison. The carnal mind cannot receive the things of God – not even when it regards the motives of those who are living for the Lord. It is spiritually inept.

HE SENT THE OFTENER

“ . . . wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.” Other versions read, “ more often,” NKJV “quite often,” NASB “frequently,” NIV “very often,” NRSV “from time to time,” LIVING and “he continued to send for him and was in his company and conversed with him often.”
AMPLIFIED

Although these were occasions that might be considered “more convenient,” it seems to me that this is not the case. At first, Felix wanted to hear about “the faith of Christ.” Now, the overriding concern was obtaining money. It successfully subdued any interest in knowing about faith in Christ or engaging in a fervent quest for righteousness, temperance, and readiness for the day of judgment. Thus, the interest he may have had in Christ was smothered.

FESTUS COMES, BUT FELIX IS WILLING TO PLEASE THE JEWS

“ 27 But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.”

Luke now passes over a period of two years, not informing us of what may have occurred during that time. Although I have noted this before, I do so again. In Scripture, a point is made of especially significant happenings. The history that is recorded in Scripture is not intended to be thorough as men consider it. Only people and events that are in some way related to the purpose of God are recorded.

AFTER TWO YEARS

“But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room. . .” Other versions read, “succeeded Felix,” NKJV “Felix was succeeded by,” NASB “took the place of Felix,” BBE “Felix received a successor,” CSB “Felix was relieved,” DARBY and “Festus became governor.” IE

The word “room,” as used in the Authorized Version, refers to a place of occupancy. In this case a place that was filled by another – a “room,” so to speak, of responsibility. We use the word “room” in this general sense. “Is there room for me?” One song of the faith affirms, “There's room at the cross for you.” Here, of course, it is a political room, or area of responsibility.

“Porcius festus was put into the government of Judea in the sixth or seventh year of Nero.”
TREASURY OF SCRIPTURAL KNOWLEDGE We know little more of him, and he is only mentioned here because of Paul, Christ's messenger to the Gentiles.

WILLING TO SHOW THE JEWS A PLEASURE

“ . . . and Felix willing to show the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.” Other versions read, “wanting to do the Jews a favor,” NKJV “wanting to grant a favor to the Jews,” NIV “desiring to gain favor with the Jews,” ASV , “desiring to have the approval of the Jews,” BBE and “wishing to gain favor with the Jews.” AMPLIFIED

This text reminds us of Herod, who, when he “saw” that killing James “pleased the Jews, [and] proceeded further to take Peter also,” fully intending to do the same with him (Acts 12:3). The Jews

of reference are not the believing Jews, but the ones who did not believe – particularly those who had leveled charges against Paul.

All of this was an effort to be well pleasing in the eyes of the Jews. The Jews would be glad because Paul, they thought, was at least taken out of commission. They no doubt reasoned that they would now have done with his influence. However, the Lord was in charge of this circumstance, and His will would be done, not theirs!

The hardness of Felix is seen in the fact that he left Paul in prison for two full years, only calling him out in expectation of receiving a bribe from him. He apparently could have set him free at any time, but chose not to do so. Under the dominion of sin, this man thought only of himself, which is the identifying mark of sin.

CONCLUSION

We have been exposed to the “narrow way” that makes no room for the flesh. In all of the oppression aimed at Paul, together with the refusal to release him from prison, it was only the outward man that was put at an inconvenience. Within, the peace of God was ruling (Col 3:15). That is one of the key factors that enabled Paul to respond in a godly manner to these experiences.

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The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #97

PAUL APPEALS TO CAESAR

“ 25:1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. 2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, 3 And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. 4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. 5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him. 6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. 7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove. 8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all. 9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me? 10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. 11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar. 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.” (Acts 25:1-12)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Paul now appears before Festus, who will ask him if he is willing to go to Jerusalem and be judged by him. He did this to pacify the Jews, catering to them for personal aggrandizement. Paul then stated that he was not willing to do so, because he is in Caesar's court, not that of the Jews. He affirmed that Festus knows very well he has done "no wrong" to the Jews. Conscientiously he stated that he was willing to die if he had done something that was worthy of death. If, on the other hand, the charges against him were totally false, no man had the right to deliver him to the Jews. He then appealed to the higher court, saying "I appeal to Caesar." Festus then conferred with the council and answered, "Hast thou appealed to Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go." Thus, the word of Jesus to Paul, that he would "bear witness also at Rome" is set in motion. A series of events will follow that will clear the way for the fulfillment of that word. God was working all things together for good of Paul.

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THE WORKING OF THE LORD

Throughout the book of Acts the hand of the Lord is seen at work – causing all things to work together for the good of His people, and ultimately, for the fulfillment of His "eternal purpose."

The Scriptures inform us that God uses all manner of people in the working out of His purpose. Some of them benefit from this use, and others do not. For example, Pharaoh was raised up that God's "name might be declared throughout the earth" (Ex 9:16; Rom 9:17). That purpose, however, did not work out for the benefit of Pharaoh himself. He was a vessel in the house, but one that was suited "for destruction" (Rom 9:22). Solomon wrote, "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Prov 16:4). Other versions read, "for the day of doom," NKJV "for the day of disaster," NIV "for the day of trouble," NRSV and "[are fitted for their role] for the day of calamity and evil." AMPLIFIED

The "Kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just" (Matt 13:47-49). The wicked are, indeed, "among the righteous" – not as an integral part of them, but as an admixture that will be removed at "the end of the world." Until then, they are "in the net," governed by God and used at His discretion. It is true that Satan works in and through such people, but all of that work is contained by the purpose of God. Ponder the different characters that have been involved in this episode of Paul.

- James and the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18-22).
- Four Jewish men who had taken a vow (Acts 21:23).
- Jews from Asia (Acts 21:27-28).
- Trophimus, who was traveling with Paul (Acts 21:29).
- The people of Jerusalem (Acts 21:30-31).
- A Roman captain, Lysias by name (Acts 21:31).
- Roman soldiers and centurions (Acts 21:32).
- The chief priests of the Jews (Acts 21:30).
- The Jewish council, or Sanhedrin (Acts 21:30).
- The high priest Ananias (Acts 23:2a).
- The man who struck Paul on the mouth (Acts 23:2b).
- Those who stood by, responding to Paul's reaction to the smiting (Acts 23:3).
- The Pharisees (Acts 23:6).
- The Sadducees (Acts 23:6).
- The scribes (Acts 23:9).
- Forty Jewish men who took a vow to kill Paul (Acts 23:12-13).

Who but God could manage such a conglomeration of people, working out His own will, protecting His servant, and arranging for him to transported to his next place of ministry?

The chief priests and elders who sanctioned the vow (Acts 23:14-15).

- Paul's nephew (Acts 23:18).
- One of the centurions to whom Paul sent his nephew (Acts 23: 17).
- Two hundred soldiers (Acts 23:23a).
- Seventy horsemen (Acts 23:23b).
- Two hundred spearmen (Acts 23:23c).
- The governor Felix (Acts 23:26).
- An army (Acts 23:27).
- Tertullus (Acts 24:1).
- A centurion charged with keeping Paul safe (Acts 24:23).
- Drusilla, Felix's wife (Acts 24:24).
- Festus, who replaced Felix (Acts 24:27).
- Caesar Augustus (Acts 25:1).
- Agrippa (Acts 25:13a).
- Bernice, Agrippa's wife (Acts 25:13b).

There are twenty-one individuals, and hundreds of others: all Jerusalem, hundreds of Jews, hundreds of soldiers, the Sanhedrin numbering seventy, forty Jews who took a vow, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen). Who but God could manage such a conglomeration of people, working out His own will, protecting His servant, and arranging for him to transported to his next place of ministry?

The Scriptures rarely spell out in doctrine how God is working everything together for good. An example of when this was done is the case of Joseph.

- When referring to his time in prison because of false charges, it is written, “But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison” (Gen 39:21).

- Concerning the sins of his brothers against him, he said: “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20).

- Speaking of Joseph’s tenure in Egypt, the Psalmist wrote: “ He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they hurt with fetters: he was laid in iron: Until the time that his word came: the word of the LORD tried him. The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free. He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all his substance: To bind his princes at his pleasure; and teach his senators wisdom” (Psa 105:17-22).

Such explanations are not always expressed in Scripture. However, for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, they are evident in accounts such as the one before us. When Asaph wrote, “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12), the working of reference included various and sundry interventions in behalf of His people. That is one reason why it is written, “If God before us, who can be against us” (Rom 8:31).

While this applies to all of the children of God, it is particularly true of those who are engaged in His business. I do not know of any inspired expression that pledges such blessings will come to those with a divided heart (Hos 10:2), whose interests are slanted toward the earth ..

THREE DAYS LATER

“ 25:1 Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.”

Remembering that God is working all things together for Paul’s good, and that Jesus is preparing Paul to bear witness to Him in Rome, we learn something of God’s manners in this text

It is fashionable these days to find people who are crisis-driven. That is, their lives lack objectivity. As a result of this lack, there is a tendency to hurry, rush, and seek to finish things quickly.

It is fashionable these days to find people who are crisis-driven. That is, their lives lack objectivity. As a result of this lack, there is a tendency to hurry, rush, and seek to finish things quickly. To be sure, there are times when things must be done immediately – like Jesus raising Peter to the surface of the water during a fierce storm (Matt 14:30-31). However, this is not always the way the Lord works.

- Noah was commissioned to build an ark to the saving of his house, and the project extended over a period of one hundred and twenty years (Gen 6:3). Scripture describes that as a period of time in which God was waiting (1 Pet 3:20).

- Abraham was promised an offspring through whose lineage all the world would be blessed (Gen 12:4), yet had to wait twenty-five years to successfully father the promised child (Gen 21:5).

- Joseph was sent down to Egypt (Psa 105:17), “to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20). However, he had to wait for thirteen years for that mission to come to fruition – from when he was seventeen (Gen 37:2) until he was thirty (Gen 41:46).

- Moses told Israel a Prophet would be raised up to whom, the people would hearken (Deut 18:15,18). Yet, that Prophet did not come until two thousand years later (Acts 3:22-23).

- Isaiah prophesied that God would give Israel a child, and a Son upon whose shoulders the government would rest (Isa 9:6) – one whose name would be Emmanuel (Isa 7:14). Yet, that Holy Child was not born for over eight hundred years before that child was born (Matt 1:23).

Now we behold a similar manner in Paul's experience. What appears to the flesh as delays and unscheduled time-lags were actually God working out His purpose for Paul. It is not that God requires a lot of time to accomplish His will, and God forbid that we should entertain such a thought. What appears to be delays is actually the trying of the faith of those involved. Faith will stand the test of time, but men will not know this to be true unless they have to wait. All of those who were noted for going through delays kept the faith, and the faith kept them. Faith will stand the test of time, which is one of the most formidable tests of all.

Following are some of the supposed delays that have taken place in this incident alone.

PERIOD OF DELAY LENGTH

Twelve days (24:11) 12

After certain days (24:24) ?

Two years (24:27) 720

After certain days (25:13) ?

Three days (25:1) 3

Ten days (25:6) 10

Certain days (25:13) ?

Many days (25:14) ?

After having arrived in Caesarea, Festus lingers for three days, then “ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem.” Note that once again a point is made of the high domain of Jerusalem, so that going to that city from the North, South, East, or West, involved an ascent.

At this point it is enough to say this is a most accurate and consistent depiction of the “Jerusalem that is above” (Gal 4:26). As with the natural Jerusalem, entry into the Jerusalem that is above involves an ascent – a going up: above the affairs of this world and life in it. Backsliding and all forms of spiritual retrogression involve a descent – going down to lower realms that are defiled and covered with the veil of flesh.

THE JEWS DESIRE A FAVOR

“ 2 Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, 3 And desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.”

Now, after a rather lengthy period of time, the Jewish leaders are again standing before a Roman official. One might imagine that hatred for Paul was no longer so hot, and that time had tempered their feelings. But, alas, this was not the case at all.

THE HIGH PRIEST AND THE CHIEF OF THE JEWS INFORMED HIM

“Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him . . .” Other versions read, “brought charges against Paul,” NASB “presented the charges,” NIV “gave a report,” NRSV “presented their case,” BBE “laid out their case,” ESV “presented their formal charges,” NAB “made their accusations,” NLT and “made manifest to him the things.” YLT

It has been well over two years since the original charges had been presented against Paul. So far as the record is concerned, the Jewish leaders had no contact with the Roman officials during that period of time. Yet, their hatred of Paul had not diminished one whit. Even though Paul had not been among them during that time, bitterness and hatred continued to seethe in their hearts.

Now they stand before Festus, and present their case against Paul. He has come to Jerusalem rather than send for them to come to Caesarea. Apparently Tertullus did not present their case for them this time, as he did before Felix (Acts 24:1-2).

It is evident that time does not cause the world’s hatred to decrease. In the case of these opposing Jews, opposition to Paul continued with all of its initial fervor.

When the will, words, and works of men contradict, and even oppose, the purpose of God, it is just a matter of time – they will end up in the trash-heap of things that men were not able to do.

That is the nature of sin. It does not grow feeble with age, but becomes more and more robust. That is one treason delayed repentance from, and confession of sin is so dangerous. A “root of bitterness” tends to spread, not only among those subjected to it, but within the hearts of those who entertain such notions.

THEY DESIRED A FAVOR AGAINST PAUL

“And desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “requesting a concession against Paul,” NASB “requested, as a favor to them against Paul,” NRSV “Requesting Festus to give effect to their design against him,” BBE and “Asking as a favor that he would have him brought to Jerusalem.” AMPLIFIED

These men are attempting to manipulate Festus for their own personal interests. They are insinuating they will stand behind Festus, and make his rule more satisfying and secure. The Jews did the same things in a more blatant way when they were accusing Jesus before Pilate: “If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (John 19:12). Although , in our text, there is a slight difference in the request of the Jews, the principle under which they operated is still the same. Their own interests were primary, and all of their requests were shaped by them. There was no interest in justice or hearing and presenting the facts in the case. That is what sin does to those dominated by it.

LAYING WAIT TO KILL HIM

“ . . . laying wait in the way to kill him.” Other versions read, “lay in ambush,” NKJV “setting an ambush,” NASB and “planning an ambush.” NRSV

More than two years before this, above forty Jews “banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul” (Acts 23:12). I assume they did not keep their vow, yielding to the need to eat and drink. However, their intention remained as strong as it ever was – perhaps stronger. Now they ask Festus to send Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Should he consent to do so, they will set an ambush along the way and kill Paul – at least, that is what they purposed to do.

However, God is “for” Paul, which means that no one can effectively be “against” him (Rom 8:31). Even though forty men join hand in hand conspiring against this apostle of Christ, it is they that will be “punished,” not Paul (Prov 11:21; 16:5). Their purpose will fall to the ground! God will make it fall to the ground! When the will, words, and works of men contradict, and even oppose, the purpose of God, it is just a matter of time – they will end up in the trash-heap of things that men were not able to do.

Faith reckons on this reality, and thus sustains the weary soul during times of outward hardship. In my judgment all recovery proclaims, counseling groups, and how-to literature tend to cloud the fact that God sustains those who live by faith and walk in the Spirit. They teach professing believers to actually rely on the flesh, and thus push them into the area of flesh where effort of vain, and hopes are dashed upon the rocks of futility. Admittedly this is an enormously lucrative business enterprise. Yet, it is destined to ultimate failure, for it is not on The Foundation, nor is it an expression of God’s eternal purpose..

PAUL SHOULD BE KEPT IN CAESAREA

“ 4 But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. 5 Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.”

All of these things are being done in the world, which is, on a lower level, under the control of Satan (1 John 5:19). They are often worked out in the crucible of conflict, where the odds seem to be against His people. However formidable foes may appear, they are utterly impotent before the Lord. He rules over them, and they are only His vassals.

As we consider this report, we must look behind the scenes, for what is taking place is being done through Divine influences and workings. This global aspect of the working of the Lord is confirmed in several affirmations. Here is a sampling of them.

- **HE IS WORKING SALVATION.** “For God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12).

- **HE IS PERFECTING HIS PEOPLE.** “The LORD will perfect that which concerneth me: Thy mercy, O LORD, endureth for ever: forsake not the works of Thine own hands” (Psa 138:8).

- **HE IS WEIGHING THE SPIRITS.** “. . . the LORD weigheth the spirits” (Prov 16:2).

- **HE IS TURNING MEN’S HEARTS.** “The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Prov 21:1).

- **HE IS FRUSTRATING THE FOOLISH.** “That frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish; That confirmeth the word of his servant, and performeth the counsel of His messengers . . .” (Isa 44:25-26).

- **HE IS DOING HIS WILL.** “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?” (Dan 4:35).

- **HE IS WORKING ALL THINGS TOGETHER.** “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

- **JESUS IS BRINGING MANY SONS TO GLORY.** “For it became Him, for

whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10).

All of these things are being done in the world, which is, on a lower level, under the control of Satan (1 John 5:19). They are often worked out in the crucible of conflict, where the odds seem to be against His people. However formidable foes may appear, they are utterly impotent before the Lord. He rules over them, and they are only His vassals.

When these realities are discerned, a tranquility settles over the soul that cannot be comprehended or explained by the wisdom of this world. When they are perceived, the one perceiving them conducts himself as Paul is doing. One senses Paul himself is actually in control of the situation, even though Festus imagines that he is the one who will decide the outcome.

FESTUS ANSWERS

“But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither . . .” Other versions read, “was being kept in custody in Caesarea” NASB “is being held,” NIV “was kept under guard,” CJB and “would keep Paul there.” GWN

With one brief word, Festus dismisses the words and the schemes of the Jews. He was going to return to Caesarea, and the proceedings would be held there. While he tarried briefly, Paul was in custody, and there really was no reason for bringing him to Jerusalem – even though that was the place where the complaint was raised against him. Thus their plot to kill Paul en route from Caesarea to Jerusalem was cast down to the ground, just as though it did not even exist. Paul had waited for the Lord, and God was honoring his faith, just as Isaiah promised: “. . . they shall not be ashamed that wait for Me” (Isa 49:23).

Child of God, this is the “children’s bread,” being their heritage. This text is a remarkable example of the faithfulness of God and the effectiveness of “the faith of God’s elect” (Tit 1:1).

GO DOWN WITH ME

“. . . Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.” Other versions read, “let the influential men among you go there with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them prosecute him,” NASB “Let some of your leaders come with me and press charges against the man there, if he has done anything wrong.” NIV “let those of you who have the authority come down with me, and if there is anything wrong about the man, let them accuse him,” NRSV and “let those who are in a position of authority and are influential among you go down with me, and if there is anything amiss or criminal about the man, let them so charge him.” AMPLIFIED

In a sense, he being in charge of the situation, the Jews have to bend to the desires of Festus, and not the contrary. Festus also insisted that they bring the most influential among them. The objective: to testify of any “wickedness,” “wrong,” “amiss,” or “criminal” in Paul. It had to be something of social or political transgression, and not simply a matter of their Law. Further, they could not come at their leisure, or ahead of him, or after he had departed. They were expected to travel with him in his return to Caesarea. That effectively thwarted the aim of the Jews to set an ambush in which they could kill Paul.

HE TARRIED TEN DAYS

“ 6 And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought.”

After declaring his determination, that Paul must be tried in Caesarea, and following his orders

that some of the chief men among the Jews accompany him to express their cause against Paul, Festus tarries in Jerusalem a few days longer. He was probably conducting some business there.

HE TARRIED AMONG THEM

“And when he had tarried among them more than ten days . . .” Other versions read, “And after he had spent not more than eight or ten days among them,” NASB “stayed in Jerusalem another eight or ten days” LIVING Thirty versions in my possession read, “eight or ten days.” Some precede these words with, “not more than,” NASB/NRSV/RSV/ASV/BBE/CSB/DARBY/RV/ESV/NET “at the most,” CJB/GWN/NJB “no more than,” DOUAY “about,” NLT/MESSAGE “another.” GNB

The phrase “among them” indicates that he remained in Jerusalem, as opposed to staying with the Jews who requested that he have Paul transferred from Caesarea to Jerusalem.

Other versions read, “no more than ten days.” GENEVA Still others read, “more than ten days,” KJV/NKJV/PNT/RWB/TNT/WEB/YLT/EMTV/ LITV

Thus, we have the following depictions of the period of time Festus remained in Jerusalem.

- More than ten days.
- Not more than eight or ten days.
- Eight or ten days.
- At the most eight or ten days.
- Another eight or ten days.
- Eight or ten days more.
- About eight or ten days.

These varying views have been duly noted by the commentators. A sampling of their observations follows. “The Alexandrian copy, and three of Beza’s copies, and some others, and the Vulgate Latin version read, “no more than eight or ten days.” JOHN GILL “The Syriac reads it, “eight or ten.” The Vulgate, “not more than eight or ten.” The Coptic, “eight or ten.” Griesbach supposes this to be the true reading, and has admitted it into the text.” ALBERT BARNES

While this may appear to be something inconsequential, the way in which this verse is represented changes its meaning slightly. If the “no more” view is taken, then it suggests that Festus headed back to Caesarea sooner than he had intended, to avoid a continued subjection to the Jew’s request. If the “more than” view is taken, then he remained for a while without undue concern about pressure from the Jews.

Thus we have a formal proceeding initiated, much like a case being tried in a court, under the guideline of certain rules and procedures. As in any civilized court, this is the proper way to establish the guilt or innocence of one that has been charged with a fault or crime.

The latter view appears to me to be more in keeping with the government of God over the situation. I say this knowing that the same thing could be said about him leaving earlier than he expected, as though God saw to it that he was removed from the scene. However, seeing that Festus insisted that the Jews travel with him, this does not seem to me to be a likely scenario. Notwithstanding, this is not a cause worthy of contention. Here, I merely point out that the translation of Scripture does involve a perception of the nature of Divine workings. When there is a choice to be made between certain Greek texts, the one should be chosen that is most in keeping with what God has made known concerning Himself and His purpose.

HE WENT DOWN TO CAESAREA

“ . . . he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat . . .” Other versions read, “took his seat on the tribunal,” NASB “convened the court,” NIV “the judge’s seat,” BBE “took his seat in court,” CJB “the judge’s bench,” CSB “open’s Paul’s trial,” LIVING “the judgment bench,” AMPLIFIED “took his place as judge,” CEV and “Sat down in the judgment court.” GNB

Perhaps you have heard people refer to the “judgement seat of Christ” as the “bema seat” – a special place for believers only, where they will receive various rewards. Much is made of “the bema seat” and that it is not the same as the great white throne judgment. It is of more than passing interest that in this text the word translated “judgment seat” is, in fact the Greek word “bema” (**bh,mato j**). In this case, it certainly was not a place for delivering rewards. Instead, it was a place where guilt or innocence was determined.

Thus we have a formal proceeding initiated, much like a case being tried in a court, under the guideline of certain rules and procedures. As in any civilized court, this is the proper way to establish the guilt or innocence of one that has been charged with a fault or crime.

Those who are familiar with the contemporary methods of the settling of church or religious institutional matters are keenly aware of the general absence of such an approach. Bigotry and prejudice play a large role in making determinations among professing Christians. This is a sad condition that testifies to the dominance of the flesh.

HE COMMANDED PAUL TO BE BROUGHT

“ . . . commanded Paul to be brought. Other versions read, “order Paul io be brought,” NASB “ordered that Paul be brought before him,” NIV “sent for Paul,” BBE “summoned Paul.” GWN

The language suggests that Paul was being held elsewhere, and had to be brought to the place where Festus’ judgment seat was located. We know that he was in the area of a centurion that was ordered to allow him some liberty, and permit his acquaintances to minister to him, and care for his needs NIV (Acts 24:23). This circumstance had continued for two consecutive years by Felix (Acts 24:27). Now, for the first time, Festus will confront Paul personally, together with the Jews who had spoken against him, spouting false charges they had not managed to substantiate. However, all of this is being done under the administration of “the heavens” (Dan 4:26).

MANY GRIEVOUS COMPLAINTS

“ 7 And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.”

This is Paul’s fourth defense against the same trumped up charges. To this point none of the charges have been substantiated. To this point he has delivered a defense 1 to the crowd of angry Jews that had dragged him from the Temple (Acts 21:40-22:21), 2 the Jewish council (Acts 23:1-10), and 3 before Felix (Acts 24:10-21). Now, 4 he stands before Festus.

THE JEWS STOOD ROUND ABOUT

“And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about . . .” Other versions read, “stood about him,” NKJV “stood around him,” NASB “surrounded him,” NRSV “came around him,” BBE “gathered around,” NLT and “stood all around him,” AMPLIFIED

Were these Jews standing around Festus, or around Paul. I gather that the answer is “both.” Paul was standing before Festus, and the Jews were gathered around that area to make their case known.

Suffice it to say, it was a potentially intimidating situation. Those who were timorous would be tempted to make some kind of compromise to reduce the weight of the situation. But such a thing is not in the mind of Paul. He had embraced the Gospel he had preached, and obtained the faith that was resident in his doctrine. He is a man at peace with God, and can confidently say, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my Helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6).

THEY LAID MANY AND GRIEVOUS COMPLAINTS AGAINST PAUL

“ . . . and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul . . .” Other versions read, “Many serious complaints,” NKJV “many and serious charges,” NASB “all sorts of serious statements,” BBE “a lot of serious accusations,” GWN “many and weighty charges,” MRD “many serious accusations,” NLT and “many grave accusations.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “grievous” has the following lexical meaning. “Heavy . . . burdensome . . . impressive . . . weighty, of great moment . . . cruel, unsparing,” THAYER and “of important matters very significant, serious, momentous.” FRIBERG

I gather that the charges were weighty from a civil point of view, and that, if proved, they would justify the involvement and imposition of Festus. To this point, the charges that have been made against Paul include the following.

- **TO THE JEWS.** They charged that Paul taught everywhere “against the people [the Jews] , and the law, and this place [the Temple] .” Also, that he “brought Greeks into the Temple and hath polluted this holy place” (Acts 21:28).

- **BEFORE FELIX.** That Paul was “a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5).

Perhaps in the intervening two years these accusing Jews have been able to invent some new charges that would sound more pertinent to the case. If so, those charges are not specified. However, the whole incident does confirm how flesh operates. No child of God should be naive about the persistence and subtlety of the flesh and those dominated by it.

WHICH THEY COULD NOT PROVE

“ . . . which they could not prove.” Other versions read, “which were not supported by the facts,” BBE “were not able to prove,” CSB “could make no plain proof,” GENEVA “were unable to substantiate,” MRD and “they couldn't prove any of them.” IE

Paul’s accusers could not substantiate any of the charges they leveled against him. All of them proved to be nothing more than opinions and imaginations.

Erroneous allegations against the saints are the only kind of charges that should be leveled against the saints of God. Peter had this in mind when he wrote, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ ” (1 Pet 3:16). Jesus also spoke to this matter with characteristic clarity: “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely , for My sake” (Matt 5:11).

No believer has a right to suggest that people not look at what they can see them doing, insisting that they should not look at their flesh. That is loose thinking, and it is not becoming of one identified with Jesus Christ.

It is obvious that opinions, imaginations, and philosophizing are still very prominent in religion. We ought to expect such things in heathen religions, for they are the products of such expressions. But when it comes to the Scriptures and things pertaining to life and godliness, the theological woods are still filled with these aberrant modes of thought. There are too many things being said about God, Jesus, and salvation, that cannot be proved by the Scriptures. Yet, they are being taught as though they were the unvarnished truth. This circumstance cannot be glossed.

HE ANSWERS FOR HIMSELF

“ 8 While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.”

Paul’s trial is under way, and we are exposed to the Roman approach to justice. Speaking as a man, and without consideration being given to God’s control of the situation, the approach was fair. The charges were made, and the party being charged was given an opportunity to reply to the charges. This was precisely the manner in which Pilate conducted the trial of Jesus (John 18:29-38). Yet Pilate convened his trial with a mind to please the Jews rather than to adjudicate a proper judgment. Of course, there was a higher agenda being served that day. As the disciples said later when they prayed concerning boldness to speak the Word, “For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done ” (Acts 4:27-28).

My point here is that the Roman law itself was fair in its approach to charges, even though some who handled it were not. Of course, the true God was also governing the trial of which we are now reading. That is why the outcome of it will be different than the trial of the Lord Jesus, which was also governed by God..

HE ANSWERED FOR HIMSELF

“While he answered for himself . . .” Other versions read, “while Paul answered in his own defense,” NASB “Then Paul made his defense,” NIV “Paul said in his defense,” NRSV “Then Paul, in his answer to them, said,” BBE “In reply Paul said,” CJB “while Paul made the defense that,” CSB “Paul answering for himself,” DARBY “Paul argued in his defense,” ESV “Forasmuch as he answered,” GENEVA “meanwhile Paul maintained,” MRD “in defending himself Paul said,” NAB “Paul denied the charges,” LIVING and “Paul continued to maintain.” WILLIAMS

How will Paul answer these “many and grievous complaints?” He has heard the charges against him, and has doubtless took note of the absence of any proof of them. They were allegations that His opponents “could not prove.” Under those circumstances, it is not necessary for Paul to again declare why he came to Jerusalem, and what he was doing when the Jews from Asia found him. He will simply transfer the responsibility to his accusers.

HE HAD NOT OFFENDED IN ANYTHING

As I pondered this text, the thought occurred to me how few people could respond in this manner – that they had not offended in any way at all. It also was apparent to me that Paul had not embraced the “we-all-continue-to-sin” view that is currently being taught in the name of the Lord.

“ . . . Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all.” Other versions read, “I have committed no offense,” NASB “I have done nothing wrong,” NIV “I have in no way committed an offense,” NRSV “Neither . . . have I sinned at all,” ASV “have committed no offense- not against the Torah to which the Jews hold, not against

the Temple, and not against the Emperor,” CJB “Neither . . . have I offended in anything,” DARBY “Paul maintained, that he had committed no offence,” MRD and “Neither . . . have I offended in any way.” AMPLIFIED

As I pondered this text, the thought occurred to me how few people could respond in this manner – that they had not offended in any way at all. It also was apparent to me that Paul had not embraced the “we-all-continue-to-sin” view that is currently being taught in the name of the Lord. Paul conducted his life in such a manner as to avoid offenses against both God and man (Acts 24:16). That was a confession that was fully supported by his manner of life. Ponder some of the statements Paul made concerning how he lived.

- “I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me” (Acts 20:33-34).

- “If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12).

- “Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void” (1 Cor 9:15).

- “What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more” (1 Cor 9:18-19).

- “Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man” (2 Cor 7:2).

- “And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself” (2 Cor 11:9).

- “Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not yours, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children” (2 Cor 12:14).

- “Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you?” (2 Cor 12:17).

Paul’s life was lived in a manner that was consistent with the Gospel that he preached. Thus he spoke of counting all competing interests as nothing more than “dung,” in order that he might “gain Christ” NASB (Phil 3:7-14). He acknowledged that he was “crucified with Christ,” and that the life he now lived “in the flesh” was lived by “faith in the Son of God” (Gal 2:20).

Actually, this is the only kind of life that is acceptable to God. There is no such thing as a salvation that allows the recipient to maintain selfish priorities, or to live solely for himself. Paul is an excellent example of someone who believed the Gospel, was sensitive to the requirements of the Lord, and lived in a manner that was consistent with them. It is this posture of life that enabled him to speak so confidently before all men, whether the general populous, religious leaders, or political dignitaries.

WILLING TO PLEASE THE JEWS

“ 9 But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to

Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?”

How does God work in the arena of conflict – where there are contradicting personalities. Ponder the kind of people that are present.

- First, there are the unbelieving Jews , who are relentless in their determination to kill Paul. They appear to have the upper hand, for this trial is allowing for them to make charges against Paul.

Political officials in all forms of government, even that of the United States, are often found catering to special interest groups in the hopes of gaining their favor. It is not that they are really interested in their cause. Rather, they seek to gain their favor for their own political advantage.

Second, there is a political ruler who has no particular interest in Paul himself. As we will see, he is really a compromiser at heart, and his interest on judicial propriety is, at the very best, secondary.

- Third, we have a prisoner who has been charged with acting in a criminal manner. He is a prisoner, is bound, and appears to be at the great disadvantage. No one is present to speak in his behalf, and no one present is really seeking his exoneration of the charges placed against him.

According to appearance, everything is stacked against Paul. But faith has enabled him to rise above such an assessment. He is a servant of God, with whom “all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). That is more than a mere theological statement. It is a truth upon which the saved can reckon. That is precisely the reason Paul is able to think clearly, and in concert with the fact that Jesus promised him he would preach the Gospel in Rome. Paul believed that word, and, as a result, the peace of God was keeping both his heart and his mind (Phil 4:7).

WILLING TO DO THE JEWS A PLEASURE

“But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul . . .” Other versions read, “willing to do the Jews a favor,” NKJV “wishing to do the Jews a favor,” NIV “desiring to gain favor with the Jews,” ASV “desiring to get the approval of the Jews,” BBE “desirous of obliging the Jews,” DARBY “disposed to conciliate the favor of the Jews,” MRD “wanting to please the Jews,” NLT and “wishing to ingratiate himself with the Jews.” AMPLIFIED

Political officials in all forms of government, even that of the United States, are often found catering to special interest groups in the hopes of gaining their favor. It is not that they are really interested in their cause. Rather, they seek to gain their favor for their own political advantage.

Festus, we find, is doing this very thing. He is desiring to do something special for the Jews in order that he might gain their favor, and have a good report among them as the kind of ruler they would like to continue.

Think of other rulers that aligned themselves against God and His people in order to placate the Jews.

- **PILATE:** “And so Pilate, willing to content the people , released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified” (Mark 15:15).

- **HEROD:** “And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews , he proceeded further to take Peter also . . .” (Acts 12:2-3).

- **FELIX:** “But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to show the Jews a pleasure , left Paul bound” (Acts 24:27).

Now, as the fourth person, Festus, joins this unholy group who, by virtue of its predilection to please the unbelieving Jews, had aligned itself against the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Here is a test of the will of man versus the will of God. How will those champions of the free will of natural men handle this incident? Are men really free to overturn the will of the Lord? And if they cannot do so, how can anyone postulate that their will is free? In this case you have the Jews who have willed to take the life of Paul. And, in this episode alone, you have three political rulers who are quite willing to please the Jews. How will all of this play out, and whose will is to triumph? Behold how subtle Festus is in his statement.

WILT THOU GO UP TO JERUSALEM?

“ . . . and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?” Other versions read, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?,” NASB and “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and there be put on trial [before the Jewish Sanhedrin] in my presence concerning these charges?” AMPLIFIED

The question of Festus is draped with hope – but it is pretentious. By saying he would be tried before the Sanhedrin, yet judged by himself, Festus is suggesting that everything would be fair. Of course, he did not know that the Jews had already determined to kill Paul while he was en route to Jerusalem. Festus did not know this, but the Lord did. Thus the King of kings will impose his will in this situation. Using the very words of his own faithful servant, he will cause the whole situation to be altered. He will frustrate the plans of the Jews, will give Festus something else to consider, and will turn his heart to agree with what Paul states. That is Sovereignty at work!

PAUL HAD DONE THE JEWS NO WRONG

“ 10 Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.”

Again, it is evident that Paul has a sound and peaceful mind. There is a sense in which he was, as a king and priest unto God, in charge of the proceedings. I understand that such a status cannot be guaranteed for every professing Christian, nor can it be codified, putting it in the reach of all. However, this is a possibility upon which faith can reckon. When the children of God are opposed, and even persecuted, they are not mere victims, and ought not to so regard themselves.

Paul did not ask for legal counsel, for he already had the highest Counselor on his side – and he knew it. Every believer must strive to know when it is proper to seek human assistance, and when it is not. There was a time when the people of God could go down to Egypt for help and protection. Abraham did it during the time of famine (Gen 12:10). Under the same kind of circumstances, however, it was not proper for Isaac to go down to Egypt during a famine (Gen 26:2). During yet another famine, it was proper for Jacob to depend upon Egypt for help (Gen 42:1-2). Later, the prophet Isaiah pronounced a woe to those who went “down to Egypt for help” (Isa 31:1). It was proper for Joseph, the husband of Mary, to flee with Mary and the Holy Child “into Egypt” (Matt 2:13-15).

Now, we will see a man who is believing and in subjection to Jesus, make correct decisions about what is proper.

I STAND AT CAESAR'S SEAT

“Then said Paul, I stand at Caesar's judgment seat . . .” Other versions read, “Caesar’s tribunal,” NASB “Caesar’s court,” NIV “ emperor’s tribunal,” NRSV “seat of Caesar’s authority,” BBE “court of the Emperor,” and “official Roman court.” NLT

This is the effect of living “unto Him which died for them, and rose again.” This is evidence that Christ was living in Paul, and the life he was living was not viewed as his own. This kind of thinking is the result of one yielding his body as a living sacrifice to God, and coming to know “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God”

The word translated “Caesar’s” is **Kai,saro,j** , which is lexically defined as “Caesar (properly, the surname of Julius Caesar, which being adopted by Octavianus Augustus and his successors afterward became an appellative, and was appropriated by the Roman emperors as a part of their title.” THAYER

Paul was being tried under the jurisdiction of Caesar and the courts of Rome. Although this was fully known by Festus, Paul states it plainly, for he is going to found a plea upon that fact.

WHERE I OUGHT TO BE JUDGED

“ . . . where I ought to be judged . . .” Other versions read, “ought to be tried,” NASB “should be tried,” NRSV “where it is right for me to be judged,” BBE “must be tried,” GWN “where it behoveth me to be judged,” YLT and “it behoveth me to be judged,” WEYMOUTH

Because this was Caesar’s tribunal, it would not have been right to hand Paul over to a Jewish court – the Sanhedrin. Being familiar with Roman law, Paul knew this. Festus knew it also. That is why he asked Paul if he would consent to such a procedure. He knew he could not impose that circumstance on Paul without violating Roman law.

However, it ought to be remembered that although Paul knew this, he was motivated by something else. The Lord Jesus had promised him he would testify of Him in Rome (Acts 23:11). That promise is what was driving Paul – not a fear of a trial in Jerusalem. He had no doubt remembered what his nephew had heard when the Jews were plotting to kill him on

As it is written, “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.” By saying that all “belong” to us, Paul is confirming that, properly approached, we can be advantaged by them all. None of them are ultimately intended to make us fall, or pull us away from Christ.

the road. But his remembrance of the promise of the Lord had the greatest constraining power.

This is the effect of living “unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). This is evidence that Christ was living in Paul, and the life he was living was not viewed as his own (Gal 2:20). This kind of thinking is the result of one yielding his body as a living sacrifice to God, and coming to know “what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God” (Rom 12:2).

It is one thing to theoretically know these facts, but it is quite another to live in conformity with them. Faith is the enabling factor in all of this.

Although Paul was primarily a citizen of heaven (Phil 3:20), he knew that, in Christ, “all things” belonged to him. As it is written, “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours ; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:23). By saying that all “belong” to us, Paul is confirming that, properly approached, we can be advantaged by them all. None of them are ultimately intended to make us fall, or pull us away from Christ. In the text before us, things that belonged to Paul included “ the world,” “life,” “death,” “things present,” and “things to come.” He thus seized them, using them to bring legitimate advantages in the carrying out of the will of God. It appears that very few people are aware of this facet of the Kingdom. However, there is no need for it to be so. The eyes of understanding can be opened to see and appropriate these benefits.

AS YOU KNOW, I HAVE NOT WRONGED THE JEWS

“ . . . to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest.” Other versions read, “I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know,” NASB “I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you are well able to see,” BBE “To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you yourselves know very well,” ESV “to Jews I did no unrighteousness, as thou dost also very well know,” YLT and “To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you know better [than your question implies].” AMPLIFIED

Had it been proven that Paul had, in fact, wronged the Jews in any way, it would have been proper for him to be tried in their court. However, if this was not true, it would have been out of order. Paul is now being tried as a Roman citizen charged with crimes that impacted upon that citizenship. It is right, therefore, that Paul brings up this matter of correctitude. It is never right to do wrong, and it would be wrong to conduct these hearings in Jerusalem.

Although the charges had originated in Jerusalem, the captain, Lysias, had already heard all of the evidence presented against Paul. He, as a Roman authority, concluded that the Jews did not have a legitimate case against Paul. He had therefore had Paul transferred to Caesarea, where the case would be resumed. For Festus to have returned Paul to Jerusalem, he would have been discounting the conclusions of a Roman authority. That itself would have been a crime. Thus, Festus approaches this matter with understandable caution – and behind it all, God is working things out.

Paul states that Festus is well aware that he has not wronged the Jews. It is not that he had been involved in the case, or was present when the original charges were made. Nor does this statement suggest that he had an understanding of Paul himself, his ministry, and his manner of life. Rather, he was aware of the letter from Lysias to his predecessor. Felix had probably spoken to Festus about Paul also. And now he had heard the charges of the Jews, and discerned they could not prove their allegations. The text also appears to include the idea of Festus knowing these things better than it appeared. Yet, God’s will in the matter will be done.

I APPEAL TO CAESAR

“ 11 For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar.”

Once again, I want to point out who is actually in charge of this hearing. Paul not only sounds as though he is in control of things, but there is a sense in which he is, even though he is a prisoner. Just as surely as he will be given charge of the ship on which was a prisoner (Acts 27:22-23), so there is a sense in which he is in charge of this situation. He was announcing the determined will of God, even though it took the form of what appeared to be a suggestion.

I REFUSE NOT TO DIE

“For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die . . .” Other versions read, “I do not object to dying,” NJKV “I do not refuse to die,” NASB “I am not trying to escape death,” NRSV “I am ready for death,” BBE “I do not deprecate dying,” DARBY “I don't reject the idea of dying,” GWN and “I do not beg off and seek to escape death.” AMPLIFIED

Paul calls for any proof that he is a lawbreaker, and has committed any offense that is worthy of death. He says this because the Jews have, in fact, called for his death. When the captain Lysias gave him the right to speak to the Jews, they responded, “it is not fit that he should live” (Acts 22:22). Later, Festus will say to Agrippa, “all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer” (Acts 25:24). The Jews had charged him with capital offenses, and were seeking his death. He was not brought there to deal with some minor

demeanor.

In Paul's words, we see that he condones the death penalty when properly administered. He knows why government has been established by God, for the political ruler is "the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil" (Rom 13:4). His administration includes the use of the "sword," which he does not bear in vain. That is, it is not just for looks, but for the execution of justice.

Those who, in the name of Jesus, oppose capital punishment will have to give an account of their words, since God Himself is the one who authored this mode of punishment (Gen 9:6). Of course, that is not the punishment for every infraction, but it is for some. That is why Paul did not refuse to die if he had done anything "worthy of death."

The punishment of the wicked, whether by death, imprisonment, stripes, etc, is not only for the offender. It is also for the sake of others, who may be tempted to be aggressive to break the law. Speaking of a wicked person who was put to death, the Lord said through Moses, "And all the people shall hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously" (Deut 17:13). Again, speaking of the same kind of circumstance Moses said, "And those which remain shall hear, and fear, and shall henceforth commit no more any such evil among you" (Deu 19:20). When a disobedient child was stoned. Moses said, "And all the men of his city shall stone him with stones, that he die: so shalt thou put evil away from among you; and all Israel shall hear, and fear" (Deut 21:21).

I realize there are those who affirm that capital punishment is not a deterrent to the committing of that crime. In so saying, they have disagreed with God. Of course, God will be justified in all of His sayings, and overcome all of His critics (Rom 3:4).

IF NONE OF THESE THINGS ARE TRUE

" . . . but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them." Other versions read, "no man can hand me over to them," NASB "No man has the right to hand me over to them," NIV "no one can give me up and make a present of me [give me up freely] to them." AMPLIFIED

Paul applies the pressure where it ought to be placed. When charges are made against an individual there is a moral obligation to substantiate those claims.

There is also a corresponding responsibility placed on all believers to live above reproach. It is not common in this day of Indian rubber theology to hear a point being made of this. It is quite common to hear godly living spoken of as though it was a kind of goal that remains very distant in the future.

There is also a corresponding responsibility placed on all believers to live above reproach. It is not common in this day of Indian rubber theology to hear a point being made of this. It is quite common to hear godly living spoken of as though it was a kind of goal that remains very distant in the future. In the meantime, transgressors are placated with mindless chatter that reminds them we are all sinners, sin habitually, and are plagued with hurts, hangups, and habits. No one is really expected to be free from such things, but are rather told that God is eternally longsuffering while they work on their moral failures. Rather than mortifying their members that are upon the earth, as they are told to do (Col 3:5), and as those who are in Christ really do (Gal 5:24), they are encouraged to manage the flesh as best they can, expecting to fail now and then. However, the King has spoken on this matter, and we do well to hear it.

• **BE HOLY:** "But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of

conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy” (1 Pet 1:15-16).

• **WALK AS CHILDREN OF LIGHT.** “For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light: (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth); Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord” (Eph 5:9-10).

• **BE BLAMELESS AND HARMLESS.** “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15).

• **YOUR WHOLE SPIRIT, SOUL, AND BODY BE PRESERVED BLAMELESS.** “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

• **BE FOUND SPOTLESS AND BLAMELESS.** “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless” (2 Pet 3:14).

• **ABSTAIN FROM FLESHLY LUSTS.** “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation ”(1 Pet 2:11).

The professing Christian who does not take these admonitions seriously will not be able to remain in the love of God and Christ. Jesus said, “He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him , and will manifest Myself to him” (John 14:21). Again it is written, “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him , and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him” (John 14:23). Yet again He said, “If ye keep My commandments, ye shall abide in My love; even as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love” (John 15:10).

My point here is simply this: Paul is able to conduct himself in this trial with spiritual poise because he had really lived for Jesus, has really crucified the flesh, and is really living by faith. Because he loves the Lord Jesus, and had confirmed it by keeping His word, Jesus was manifesting Himself to Paul, and He and the Father have taken up their abode in him.

The person who ignores these sayings, regardless of their profession, has revealed they do not love the Lord Jesus or keep of His commandments. They may salve their conscience by saying they believe in Jesus, and that is really enough. But they have only deceived themselves.

My point here is simply this: Paul is able to conduct himself in this trial with spiritual poise because he had really lived for Jesus, has really crucified the flesh, and is really living by faith. Because he loves the Lord Jesus, and had confirmed it by keeping His word, Jesus was manifesting Himself to Paul, and He and the Father have taken up their abode in him.

I APPEAL TO CAESAR

“ . . . I appeal unto Caesar.” Other versions read, “I appeal to the emperor,” NRSV “Let my cause come before Caesar,” BBE “I appeal my case to the emperor!,” GWN and “I announce an appeal to Caesar.” MRD

Paul recognizes that Festus, together with his predecessor Felix, are not able to satisfactorily

conduct this trial. He also knows that Jesus has affirmed he is going to testify of Christ in Rome as he did in Jerusalem. In my judgment, this is the factor that most compelled Paul to appeal to Caesar. He was seeking more than civil rights or being cleared from the charges made against him.

This is an example of Divine direction, realized as one is living by faith and walking in the Spirit. There is enough said about this to encourage the trusting ones, but not enough to lead to the imagination that those who live after the flesh will be blessed with guidance from above.

- “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in His way” (Psa 37:23).
- “A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps” (Prov 16:9).
- “And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left” (Isa 30:21).

These poignant expressions confirm that those who are directed come to the point where they know what to do. Their faith perceives the direction in which the Lord is leading, and the Spirit gives them words appropriate to their circumstances. In the text before us, the steps of Paul were directed to a political ruler that would play a key role in getting Paul to Rome. Paul recognized the hand of the Lord and immediately appealed to Caesar. Oh, the blessedness of living unto the Lord rather than for self!

UNTO CAESAR THOU SHALT GO

“ 12 Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.”

Here we are witnessing the turning of a ruler’s heart (Prov 21:1). Festus had a predilection to do a special favor for the Jews. Yet, out of his own mouth he sends Paul to another area of the world, where they would not have access to him. Oh, the joy of having acquaintance with the God of heaven through Jesus Christ. He is everything He has represented Himself to be, and that the Spirit has moved holy men to say about Him. He is worthy of a trust that liberates the soul from the tyranny of fretting and worrying.

WHEN HE HAD CONFERRED WITH THE COUNCIL

“Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered . . .” Other versions read, “when he had conferred with his council,” NASB “having had a discussion with the Jews,” BBE “after talking with his advisers,” CJB “conferred with his counselor,” MRD “Then spake Festus with deliberation ,” TNT and “consulted with the [men who formed his] council.” AMPLIFIED

The various versions are not agreed on this verse. Some specifically state that the ones with whom Festus conferred were the Jews (BBE, LITV) . Others say it was his own political council (NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, CSV, CSB, ESV, GWN, MRD, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NIB, NJB, NJB, NLT, LIVING, IE, CEV, GNB, MESSAGE) . Some are neutral, referring simply to “the council” (KJV, NKJV, ASV, DARBY, DOUAY, ERV, GENEVA, PNT, RWB, WEB, YLT, WEYMOUTH, WILLIAMS, MONTGOMERY, WYCLIFFE, EMTV, INTERLINEAR) .

It appears to me that the council of reference was a political one, not the Jewish Sanhedrin, as indicated by some versions. The text does not specify the council of reference, but merely refers to it as “the council.” It is not likely that he conferred with the Jewish council. He had already turned down their suggestion to have Paul transferred to Jerusalem. It is unreasonable to think that he conferred with them about sending Paul to Rome. He no doubt conferred with his own counsel to ensure that he was not violating any aspect of Roman law.

UNTO CAESAR THOU SHALT GO

“Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go.” Other versions read, “to the Emperor you will go,” NRSV and “you will go to the Emperor.” CJB

As a citizen of Rome, Paul has claimed his legal rights, and Festus will not be able to grant the Jews their favor, for it would be in contradiction of Roman law. From the viewpoint of Herod, sending Paul to Rome relieved him of the responsibility of trying him. Now he would not have to hear the conflicting testimonies, or make special concessions to prejudiced Jews. However, that was only according to appearance. Behind the scenes, and in the perception of Paul, several things were accomplished.

- Paul would be put out of reach of the Jews.
- He would not have to return to Jerusalem and listen to further charges.
- He would now be on his way to Rome to fulfill the determination of King Jesus.
- He would be granted free passage all the way.
- He was granted governmental protection throughout the trip.

CONCLUSION

We are being exposed to the details of one event in Paul’s life. The particulars that are involved in this event are an account of how God worked things together to get Paul to Rome. He could have moved him there like He did Philip to Azotus (Acts 8:40). Instead, He chose to work by orchestrating a series of events that stretched over a period of well over two years – and we have not yet got to the voyages by ship. In order to appreciate the meticulous control God exercised throughout this whole affair, consider the following sequence of events.

- Against the advise of the brethren, Paul determines to go to Jerusalem (Acts 12:13-14).
- He arrives in Jerusalem, and the brethren receive him gladly (Acts 21:17).
- § *Paul reports the things God had done through his ministry.* Paul goes in to James, and, in the presence of all the elders, reports the things God had wrought through his ministry (Acts 21:19).
- James tells Paul of false reports that have been circulated among the Jews concerning his ministry (Acts 21:21-22).
- Paul is advised to join with four Jewish men in the completion of their vows in order to confirm to the Jews that what they had heard about Paul was not true (Acts 21:23-25).
- Paul purifies himself with four men and enters the Temple, signifying when an offering would be presented for the completion of the vow (Acts 21:26).
- When the seven days for the completion of the vow were almost completed, some Jews from Asia see Paul in the Temple, and stirred up all of the people, laying hands on him (Acts 21:27).

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The Jews from Asia charge that Paul has been teaching everywhere against the Jews, against the

Law, and against the Temple (Acts 21:28a).

- The Jews charge that Paul is defiling the Temple by bringing Greeks into it (Acts 21:28b).
- The whole city of Jerusalem is moved, the people ran together, dragged Paul out of the Temple, and shut the Temple doors (Acts 21:30).
- The Jews set out to kill Paul (Acts 21:31a).
- **A military leader hears of the activities.** News of the tumult came to a chief captain of Rome (Acts 21:31b).
- **The activities of the Jews are interrupted.** The captain immediately takes some soldiers, stopped Paul from being beaten, and took him into custody (Acts 21:32-33a).
- The captain demanded to know who Paul was, and what he had done (Acts 21:33b).
- Confusion erupted with some Jews saying one thing, and some another (Acts 21:34a).
- **Adversarial conditions are aborted.** When he could not ascertain for certain the answer to his questions, the captain took Paul to the military barracks (Acts 21:34b).
- **Protection of Paul enforced.** Soldiers protected Paul from the violence of the people, and he came to the stairs leading into the barracks (21:35).
- The multitude of people had followed Paul crying out, “Away with him!” (Acts 21:36).
- Paul asks to speak to the chief captain, who makes known that he thought Paul was a certain Egyptian who had made an uproar in Jerusalem (Acts 21:37-38).
- Paul makes known that he is a Roman citizen, and asks for permission to speak to the people (Acts 21:39).
- **An unpredictable opportunity to speak to the people.** Paul is granted permission, and begins to speak to the people in the Hebrew tongue (Acts 21:40).
- § *Paul is granted the right to speak to his accusers, testifying of his calling and mission.* Paul delivers his first defense to the people, identifying who he was, and testifying to his conversion (22:1-16).
- § *Paul testifies of the Lord’s personal word to him.* He tells of being in the Temple later, and of a special word that was delivered to him while he was in a trance (Acts 22:17-21).
- Upon hearing Paul say that Jesus said he would be sent to the Gentiles, the Jews begin to cast of their clothes and throw dust into the air (Acts 22:22-23).
- **Protection of Paul forcefully implemented.** The chief captain commands Paul to be brought into the barracks where he would be examined by scourging (Acts 22:24).
- As they were binding Paul with thongs, he asked the centurion if it was lawful to scourge a man who was a Roman when he was uncondemned (Acts 22:25).
- The centurion told the chief captain to be careful what he was doing – that Paul was a Roman citizen (Acts 22:26).
- **The scheduled scourging of Paul is aborted.** When he had verified that Paul was a Roman citizen, the captain terminated the scheduled examination by scourging (Acts 22:27-29).
- **Convenience is mandated for Paul the prisoner.** The next day Paul was loosed from his bonds, and the Jewish elders and council was called, with Paul being set before

them (Acts 22:30).

- **§ *Paul testifies of the maintenance of a good conscience before God.*** Paul begins to speak to the council, and the high priest commanded him to be struck on the mouth. Paul responded and a brief exchange took place (Acts 23:1-5).

- **§ *Paul testifies of the hope of the resurrection.*** Paul discerns that part of the council was Pharisees and part Sadducees. Knowing they were divided, he said he had been called into question because of his hope of the resurrection (Acts 23:6).

- A tumult resulted because the Sadducees did not accept the resurrection of the dead, or the existence of angels and spirits, while the Pharisees did accept these things (Acts 23:7-9).

- **Paul forcefully removed from danger.** The dissension was so great that the captain had Paul removed by force, placing him inside the barracks (Acts 23:10).

- **The Lord stands by Paul, comforting him.** The next night, the Lord stood by Paul, telling him to be of good cheer, that he would testify of Him in Rome, just as he had in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11).

- When it was day, forty Jews bound themselves under a curse to not eat or drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-13).

- These forty men went to the Jewish council and told them their plans, telling the leaders to ask the captain to bring Paul down so they could inquire of him. Then, they said, they would kill him (Acts 23:14-15).

- **The secret plans of the enemy overheard.** Paul's nephew overhears the plot, and enters into the barracks, telling Paul of the plans of the Jews (Acts 23:16).

- **A centurion listens and gives heed to Paul.** Paul calls one of the centurions and tells him to take his nephew to the captain because he had something to tell him (Acts 23:17).

- **A boy is taken to the one who can stop the plans of the Jews.** The centurion took the boy to the captain and told him Paul had asked him to bring his nephew to tell him something (Acts 23:18).

- **An army captain gives heed to the boy's advice.** The captain took the boy aside privately and asked what he had to say. The boy told him of the plot, and then admonished the captain not to yield to the Jews' request. The captain received the boy's words, and told him not to tell anyone that he had told the captain these things (Acts 23:19-21).

- **Paul escorted to Caesarea with a military group of 470 men.** The captain quickly dispatched two centurions to gather two hundred soldiers, seventy horsemen, and two hundred spearmen, and take Paul to Felix the governor. They were also to provide mounts for Paul so he could be safely conducted to the governor (Acts 23:23-24).

- **A military captain thinks to write an introductory letter to a governor.** The captain wrote a letter to Felix, explaining the whole situation (Acts 23:25-30).

- **A military escort takes Paul all the way to Caesarea.** The soldiers took Paul and began their journey, stopping at Antipatris, then continuing to Caesarea with the soldiers returning to the barracks (Acts 23:31-32).

- Upon arriving in Caesarea, they delivered both the letter and Paul to Felix (Acts 23:33).

- When Felix had read the letter, he asked from what province Paul had come. Hearing that it was Cilicia, he consented to hear the case (Acts 23:34-35a).

- Felix commanded that Paul be kept in Herod’s judgment hall (Acts 23:35b).
- Five days later Ananias the high priest and the elders showed up with Tertullus, who presented the charges against Paul (Acts 24:1-9).
- § *Paul provides the details involved in his return to Jerusalem, and of his hope.* Upon a sign from Felix, Paul presented his defense (Acts 24:10-21).
- **A scheduled hearing is forthrightly dismissed by Felix.** After hearing Paul’s defense, Felix dismissed the hearing, saying he would wait until Lysias the captain came. Then he would have a fuller picture of the circumstances (Acts 24:22).
- **Special privileges are vouchsafed to Paul the prisoner.** Felix commands Paul to be guarded by a centurion, yet given some liberty, with his acquaintances being allowed to minister to him (Acts 24:23).
- **Felix schedules a time when he can hear Paul concerning faith in Christ, his wife also being present.** After certain days, Felix returned with his wife, and sent for Paul, hearing him concerning the faith in Christ (Acts 24:24).
- § *Paul reasons with Felix concerning pivotal spiritual matters.* Paul reasons with Felix of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come – causing Felix to “tremble” (Acts 24:25a).
- Felix dismissed Paul, saying he would call for him when he had a convenient season (Acts 24:25b).
- § *Multiple opportunities are given for Paul to speak to Felix.* Thinking Paul would offer him a bribe, Felix often called for Paul “and communed with him” (Acts 24:26).
- As a favor to the Jews, Felix left Paul bound in prison for two years (Acts 24:27b).
- A full two years later, Festus replaces Felix and comes to Jerusalem (Acts 25:1).
- Like lions coming in for the kill, the high priest and the chief of the Jews inform Festus “against Paul,” asking him to have Paul brought to Jerusalem (Acts 25:2-3a).
- The Jews sought to kill Paul while he was on the way to Jerusalem (Acts 25:3b).
- **A ruler who was seeking the favor of the Jews denies their request.** Festus denies the request, saying that Paul “should be kept in Caesarea” (Acts 25:4).
- **Festus demands that the Jews who asked him to bring Paul to Jerusalem accompany him to Caesarea.** Festus says he will leave for Caesarea shortly, and that the most capable among the Jews should accompany him, presenting their accusations formally when they arrive (Acts 25:5).
- After remaining in Jerusalem for more than ten days, he returns to Caesarea with the accompanying Jews, and calls for Paul to be brought (Acts 25:6).
- Upon Paul’s arrival, the Jews surround him and present their charges, none of which were accompanied by proof (Acts 25:7).
- § *Paul boldly announces he has committed no offense.* Paul answers for himself, stating he had committed no offence against the Jews, the Temple, or Caesar (Acts 25:8).
- Willing to make a concession to the Jews, Festus asked Paul if he was willing to go to Jerusalem to be tried before Festus himself (Acts 25:9).
- Paul refuses, declaring he was standing in Caesar’s court, where he ought to be judged (Acts 25:10a).
- Paul reaffirms that he has done nothing against the Jews, which, he said, Festus knew very well (Acts 25:10b).

- Paul states that he is willing to die if he has done anything worthy of death, but if such was not the case, he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:11).

- **Even though he was seeking to please the Jews, Festus agrees to send Paul to Rome** . Festus confers with his own council, and agrees with Paul's assessment saying, "unto Caesar thou shalt go" (Acts 25:12).

I have listed sixty-nine segments of this whole episode. Hundreds of people have been involved, including groups of Jews (70 in the Sanhedrin and 40 who conspired to kill Paul), religious and political rulers, an army, Paul's nephew, and acquaintances that ministered to Paul during his two-year confinement.

Where it is obvious that some kind of intervention took place , I have preceded the point with a . Those times when Paul was able to speak or testify have been preceded by a §.

Now, I ask you, who but God could cause such a diversity of things – sixty-nine of them – to work out for the fulfillment of His own purpose and the good of Paul? Truly, this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #98

PAUL INTRODUCED TO AGRIPPA

“ 25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. 14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix: 15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. 16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him. 17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. 18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: 19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. 20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar. 22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him. 23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth. 24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that

he ought not to live any longer. 25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. 26 Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. 27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.” (Acts 25:13-27)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

King Agrippa and his wife came to Caesarea to pay their respects to Festus. After several days, Festus brought up the matter of Paul, who had been “left in bonds by Felix.” After providing a rather lengthy report of the case, Agrippa replied that he wanted to hear Paul for himself. Festus replied that arrangements would be made the very next day for Agrippa to hear him. On the next day Agrippa and his wife arrived in a great display, accompanied by military

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- **AGRIPPA AND BERNICE ARRIVE IN CAESAREA (25:13-14)**
- **FESTUS TELLS AGRIPPA OF PAUL (25:15-16)**
- **FESTUS SUMMARIZES THE CHARGES AGAINST PAUL (25:17-19)**
- **FESTUS DOUBTED THE MANNER OF THEIR QUESTIONS (25:20-21)**
- **AGRIPPA WANTS TO HEAR PAUL FOR HIMSELF (25:22))**
- **AGRIPPA AND BERNICE ARRIVE WITH GREAT POMP (25:23)**
- **FESTUS DRAWS ATTENTION TO PAUL (25:24-26a)**
- **THE AIM OF THE PRESENTATION (25:26b-27)**
- **CONCLUSION**

commandants. The chief men of the city were also there at the commandment of Felix. Paul was called into the presence of this impressive and august assembly. Festus then told the assembly to behold Paul, concerning whom the Jews had been dealing with him. He told them he had found nothing worthy of death in Paul, and that this prisoner had appealed to Caesar. He further told the crowd that he had determined to send him to Caesar. However, he had convened this session in order to write something that identified the charges laid against him.

PAUL BELONGS TO US!

Among the “gifts” given to men are “apostles” (Eph 4:11) – and Paul is an apostle, particularly to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13). Paul, classing himself with Apollos and Cephas (Peter), said he was among the category of things belonging to us – i.e. the household of faith. “Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours; Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's” (1 Cor 3:21-23). This is a most challenging thought, enlarging upon the diversity of resources that have been given to those who are in Christ Jesus. A brief review of them will enhance the value of Paul in our hearts and minds.

• **PAUL.** In the role of an apostle, Paul belongs to the body of Christ. His teachings belong to the members of Christ's body. The revelations given to him belong to them. All of his letters belong to us, and we can profit from them. His experiences belong to us as examples, testimonies, and confirmations of Divine direction. Paul is intended to bring us spiritual advantages, not questions or things beyond the capacity of our understanding.

• **APOLLOS.** What we know about Apollos belongs to us. We can learn of being "mighty in the Scriptures," although he was not an apostle. We can also benefit from beholding him as one who was "instructed in the way of the Lord, and fervent in Spirit." There is also the matter of him teaching "diligently" what he had been given to see (Acts 18:24-25). Apollos belongs to believers.

• **CEPHAS.** Cephas, or Peter, belongs to the whole church. Although "the ministry of the circumcision" was given to him, the Jews were not the only ones to profit from what he was given to see. His two letters belong to us, and his recorded messages are ours (Acts 2:14-41; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43).

• **THE WORLD.** Although we are "not of the world" (John 15:19; 17:14,16), it belongs to us. We have been delivered from it (Gal 1:4), and yet it belongs to us. Nothing that takes place in the world can "separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:39). God is working everything together for our good while we journey through the world (Rom 8:28). Because the world belongs to the saints, they can "use" it, and not abuse it (1 Cor 7:31).

I cannot leave this point without drawing attention to the advantages that are being worked out for Paul. They are not accruing for financial prosperity, political advantage, or the increase of pleasantries in this world.

• **LIFE.** In Christ "life" belongs to us, so that we, by the grace of God, can "reign in life" by Jesus Christ (Rom 5:17). The experiences of life do not need to throw us to the ground so that we cannot rise again.

• **DEATH.** Death is an appointment, yet it belongs to us. That is why it is turned to an unspeakable advantage, for to be "absent from the body" is to be "present with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8). We no longer need to live in the "fear of death."

• **THINGS PRESENT.** Other versions read, "the present," NIV and "the immediate and threatening present." AMPLIFIED This can be viewed as present circumstances, particularly threatening ones – such as the one in which Paul finds himself. Circumstances are ultimately managed and orchestrated in heaven in the interest of the children of God. They have no power to separate us from the love of God, and thus there is no need to fear them. They are ours in the sense of being worked together for our good.

• **THINGS TO COME.** This refers to our future upon the earth in general, and specifically the ultimate passing of the earth and everything that goes with it. For those who love the truth and walk in it, the future belongs to them. The worldly fear those things "that are coming upon the earth" (Lk 21:26). But the saints look at such things quite differently. They see those as the times when their "redemption draweth nigh" (Lk 21:28).

The point here is that all of these realities are being lived out in our text. That is why everything is working out so Paul can bear witness to Christ in Rome.

WORLDLY INTERESTS ARE NOT THE POINT

I cannot leave this point without drawing attention to the advantages that are being worked out for Paul. They are not accruing for financial prosperity, political advantage, or the increase of pleasantries in this world. Not even Paul's health was guaranteed, as he suffered from infirmities in general, and

a thorn in the flesh in particular (2 Cor 11:30; 12:5,7,9-10). For extended periods he endured hunger and thirst, nakedness and buffeting, and had “no certain dwelling place” (1 Cor 4:11).

Jesus told the other apostles, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). This was divulged on the night of Jesus’ betrayal, and AFTER Judas had been dismissed from the group. He told them that world hated them because He had chosen them out of the world (John 15:19). He also told them they would be persecuted (John 15:20). The world was the domain in which they would experience difficulties. However, as Paul taught elsewhere, those very hardships and trials would be properly called “light afflictions,” and would work for them “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory” (2 Cor 4:17). This too is being lived out in our text, and should assist in shaping a proper perspective of salvation.

The leading of the Lord sometimes requires passing through both mountains and valleys – extraordinary times of spiritual exhilaration, and profound testing. There are times of triumph, as when Israel passed through the Red Sea (Ex 14:22), defeated the Amalekites (Ex 17:10-13), and overthrew Og and Sihon (Josh 2:10). There was the refreshment of an oasis in which were “twelve fountains of water and threescore and ten palm trees” (Num 33:9), But there was also that “great and terrible wilderness, wherein were fiery serpents, and scorpions, and drought, where there was no water” (Deut 8:15). All of these were between Egypt and Canaan, and all of them were experienced by the Israelites. Those who were faithful made it through them all, arriving safely in Canaan, and coming into the possession of their inheritance.

John the Baptist was led through “the deserts till the day of his showing” (Lk 1:80). We are not told of the things that took place during that time, but assume he was tried and readied for his brief but essential ministry.

The Lord Jesus Himself was prepared for His ministry, when He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil (Acts 10:38). He spent “forty days” in the wilderness, “tempted of Satan; and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered unto him” (Mark 1:13). Mark says “the Spirit drove Him into the wilderness” NKJV Mk 1:12). Matthew says He was “led up of the Spirit into the wilderness” (Matt 4:1). During that forty days, He was “tempted” by Satan (Mk 1:13), for the Spirit led Him into the wilderness “to be tempted of the devil” (Matt 4:1).

So it is with ministry for the Lord now, and the journey to glory, our promised land. Both are attended with trials and blessings, challenges and benefits, joys and sorrows. There are mountains to cross, that cannot be overcome with resources from this world. They are also valleys through which we must traverse where the light is not as profuse as we prefer. And, there are also those deserts in which our faith is tested and we learn more fully of Divine sustenance and preservation. All of this is seen in the trek of Paul from Jerusalem to Rome. A diversity of experiences are all being worked together.

AGRIPPA AND BERNICE ARRIVE IN CAESAREA

“25:13 And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus. 14 And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix . . .”

This is the first mention of “Agrippa” in the Bible. He was a member of the Herodian family, and is mentioned twelve times from Acts 25:13 through Acts 26:32.

“The Agrippa before whom Paul was brought (Acts 25:13, 26) was the son of the foregoing [Herod who was smitten by an angel and eaten of worms] who died when he [Agrippa] was only seventeen years old (Josephus, *Ant.* 19, 9, 1), and hence he did not succeed to his father's dominions (Joseph. *Ant.* 19, 9, 2); but he was allowed by Claudius (A.D. 48) to enjoy the principality of Chalcis, which

his uncle Herod had held (Josephus, *Ant.* 20, 5, 2; *War*, 2, 12, 1), together with the superintendence of the Temple at Jerusalem, and the privilege of nominating the high-priest (Josephus, *Ant.* 20, 1, 3).”
McCLINTOK AND STRONG’S

KING AGRIPPA AND BERNICE

“And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Caesarea to salute Festus.”

FESTUS DECLARED PAUL’S CAUSE

“And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix . . .”

This was Agrippa II, the son of Agrippa I (Acts 12) [who killed the James, the brother of John], and consequently was the brother of Drusilla (Acts 24:24). PULPIT COMMENTARY Historians say that she was not the wife of this Agrippa, but was rather his sister – which could account for why she is not referred to as the “wife” of Agrippa, as Drusilla was of Felix (Acts 24:24). John Gill writes that Bernice “lived in too great familiarity with her brother Agrippa,” apparently living in an incestuous relationship with him.

The eldest daughter of Agrippa I (q.v.) by his wife Cypros: she was espoused at a very early age to Marcus, son of Alexander the Alabarch; but he died before the consummation of the marriage, and she then became the wife of her uncle Herod, king of Chalcis, by whom she had two sons (Josephus, *Ant.* 18, 5, 4; 19:5, 1; 9,1; 20:5, 2; 7, 3; *War*, 2, 11, 6). After the death of this Herod, A.D. 48, Bernice, then but 20 years old, lived for a considerable time with her own brother, Agrippa II (q.v.), and not without just suspicion of an incestuous commerce with him to avoid the scandal of which she induced Polemon, king of Cilicia, to marry her; but she soon deserted him and returned again to her brother (Joseph. *Ant.* 20, 7, 3; Juvenal, 6, 156), in connection with whom she is mentioned (Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30), as having visited Festus at Caesarea on his appointment as procurator of Judaea, when Paul defended himself before them all, A.D. 55.

Festus was newly appointed to the position formerly occupied by Felix. Agrippa and Bernice apparently came to Caesarea as a courteous gesture, as well as an official recognition of his appointment.

PAUL LEFT IN BONDS

During this occasion, Festus is moved to bring up the matter of Paul. He had been “left in bonds by Felix” – conveniently forgotten, because Felix “was willing to show the Jews a pleasure” (Acts 24:27). It appears as though Festus did not agree with this neglect, and thus brought it up to Agrippa. Of course, God is working in all of this for the good of Paul.

ACCORDING TO APPEARANCE

According to appearance, the visit of Agrippa and Bernice was a political activity that had little to do with the Kingdom of God or the working out of an eternal purpose. However, we must remember the words of our Lord: “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24).

This occasion would prove to be a setting in which Paul would speak of the things of God, doing so with great persuasive power. This is a slice of time in which God was “working salvation in the midst of the earth” (Psa 74:12). The details of Paul’s arrest and the circumstances that attended it, will be given to a political ruler. A point will be made of the injustice of it all, and of the total lack of any evidence that the charges brought against Paul were true.

These conversations between Festus and Agrippa will actually provoke the king to want to hear what Paul had to say. Further, Jesus had placed Paul into the ministry because He “counted,” or “considers,” NIV Paul to be “faithful” (1 Tim 1:12). Like Abraham, Paul could be trusted to handle what was given him correctly, passing it along to others (Gen 18:17-19). He was a faithful steward, which involves recognizing open doors. When an ordained opportunity was set before him, he would see it and respond accordingly.

OPPORTUNITIES

The Scriptural word “opportunity” is lexically defined as, “opportune or seasonable time: with verbs suggestive of the idea of advantage.” THAYER and “the right, proper, favorable time.” GINGRICH

Opportunities can be used for evil or for good, but it is imperative that they be recognized. By their very nature, they are for a limited time. If they are missed, they have been in vain, for they will be closed. This is why the culturing of a generation that is not alert to their surroundings is the work of the evil one. It cannot be treated as some inconsequential thing. Oh, that men could see it! I shutter to think of the impact when the record of missed opportunities is divulged on the day of judgment.

Even the wicked can be alert for opportunities to fulfill their corrupt devices. Think of when Judas “sought opportunity to betray” Jesus (Matt 26:16). He even “sought opportunity to betray him . . . in the absence of the multitude” (Lk 22:6).

We are admonished, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10). That postulates that we are alert, and in a posture of awareness. Paul commended the Philippians for their alertness, and fervent desire to meet the needs of himself, pointing out that they only lacked the opportunity to do so. “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity” (Phil 4:10). That too posits a state of alertness, else the words are meaningless.

An Aspect of Selflessness

When applied to Kingdom interests and spiritual life, this state of mind and posture of soul is an aspect of selflessness. The individual whose life is described as “Christ living in me,” and who is living “by faith in the Son of God” sees life differently (Gal 2:20). He is not living for the promotion of self, the attainment of riches, or some other selfish motive. Faith sharpens one's spiritual vision, so that doors that are opened by the Lord can be seen, and Divinely ordained opportunities can be seized to the glory of God.

Because one rarely hears any kind of extended word on this, I want to point to several examples of Paul's selfless life, confirming that he had, in fact, denied himself, taken up his cross, and followed Jesus.

- **DAMASCUS.** He preached Christ boldly, and disputed with those who contradicted him, even though it endangered his life (Acts 9:29-30)
- **ANTIOCH.** He preached boldly, enduring aggressive opposition. Yet, he told them the truth, and warned them of the judgment of God coming upon them (Acts 13:40-41, 44-46, 50).
- **ICONIUM.** He preached in the synagogue, and when the Jews stirred up the people, making them “evil affected against the brethren,” he remained “a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord” (Acts 14:1-3).

• **LYSTRA.** After being stoned in Lystra, and left for dead, he was raised up, went to Derbe, and preached the Gospel, also “Confirming the souls of the disciples” (Acts 14:19-22).

• **THESSALONICA.** In the synagogue of Thessalonica, Paul opened and alleged that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead – eventhough there were Jews who set the entire city in an uproar in opposition to Paul (Acts 17:1-5).

• **ATHENS.** Provoked by the dominance of idolatry in the city, Paul extended himself to show the absolute unreasonableness of idolatry. He was not thanked for his efforts, but called a “babblers.” When he was asked to say more on the subject, he did, and was “mocked” (Acts 17:16-32).

• **CORINTH.** In Corinth Paul was “pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that when they heard his message. However, the chief ruler of the synagogue “believed on the Lord with all his house.” Further, Jesus appeared to him saying that he should remain in Corinth, for He had “much people in this city” (Acts 18:1-10).

• **EPHESUS.** Paul spoke boldly in the Ephesian synagogue for three months, “disputing and persuading the things concerning the Kingdom of God.” When many were hardened and believed not, he took the disciples and moved to the school of Tyrannus, where he continued to teach every day for two years. As a result “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:8-10).

• **TROAS.** When sailing to Jerusalem, Paul stopped by Troas, spending seven days there. Finding disciples that were meeting on the first day of the week, he gathered with them and preached to them, bringing much comfort to them (Acts 20:6-12).

• **TYRE.** During their continued journey by boat, they came to Tyre, where the ship was to unload its cargo. Finding certain disciples, they remained there for seven days with them (Acts 21:3-6).

• **PTOLEMAIS.** Having arrived in Ptolemais, they saluted certain brethren, and continued with them for one day (Acts 21:7).

• **CAESAREA.** Arriving in Caesarea, Paul and company spent many days at the home of Philip the evangelist. At that time Agabus the prophet said that Paul would be delivered to the Gentiles in Jerusalem (Acts 21:8-13).

• **JERUSALEM.** Having arrived in Jerusalem, Paul reported “particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.” He also received wise counsel concerning how to address some false reports that had been circulated about him (Acts 21:17-26).

• **JERUSALEM AND CAESAREA.** In the temple, Paul was opposed by the Jews, and dragged from the temple, being beaten and maligned. The events that follow, which our text is still relating, resulted in a number of opportunities.

• Paul testified to the Jews that accused him, with a military captain being present (Acts 21:39-22:21).

• He testified to the high priest and the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1-10).

• He saw an opportunity to inform the Roman authorities of a plot to kill him (Acts 23:13-30).

• He testified before the Jewish council and Felix the governor (Acts 24:10-21).

• He reasoned with Felix and his wife about “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:24-25).

• He testified before the accusing Jews and Festus the governor (Acts 25:8-11).

• Now King Agrippa arrives with Bernice, and Paul will testify before them (Acts 26:1-259).

In all of these opportunities, Paul was able to enter into them with confidence. This is because he was not living for himself, but for the Lord. No person whose life is wrapped up in himself could discern these opportunities. They did not look like open doors – but they were.

Suffice it to say, many professing Christians rarely become involved in the work of the Lord. They have not denied themselves, nor have they taken up their cross. They are content to murmur and complain because, as they see it, life has not treated them fairly. But in their hard times, had they been living by faith, they would have seen open doors that would have brought joy to their hearts, advantages to others, and glory to God.

Opportunities to participate in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God may exist all about a person, and yet not be perceived. This is because the closer one is to the world, and the more absorbed they are in things wholly related to the world, the less apt they are to see open doors set before them. At the center of the life of self-denial spiritual matters become clearer. The more one is absorbed with self, the more such things are obscured – like being in a fog at first, and finally descending into the blackness of night.

Further, the very thought that only a few of the members of the body of Christ are involved in His will must be thrust from us, for it is a devilish delusion. There are no vestigial members of the body of Christ – parts that have no value, or cannot be used. Whether Paul, his nephew, or the brethren who ministered to him while he was incarcerated, there is work for all to do.

This is one of several reasons why I have such a detestation for “Babylon the Great,” that impressive harlot which is nothing more than Satan’s fabricated church (Rev 17:1-6; 18:1-20). This is the false church that has forged an alliance with the world, and therein have rejected the Lord’s Christ. It is a place of spiritual bondage and ignorance, dominated by pretentious leaders who have no genuine care for the “flock of God.” To them, being used by the Lord equates to cleaning buildings, mowing lawns, serving in soup-kitchens, and the likes. While this may be of some measured value, it certainly does not reflect the manners declared in the Scriptures. Such works are generally more associated with the institution than the revealed work of God.

The point is that the unseen superstructure of spiritual Babylon is not tailored for the involvement of the “body of Christ.” It does not allow for the free expression of spiritual insights, or the ministration of edification by the members within the assembly of the saints. Leadership has little or nothing to do with equipping the saints for the work of the ministry (Eph 4:11-16). In most churches, Paul would not even have an opportunity to speak, to say nothing of Barnabas, Silas, Timothy, and others. Relatively new converts like Stephen and Philip would be advised to go to Bible College, and perhaps seminary. In so doing, they would become vassals of Babylon, and assist in establishing her priorities.

Of course, during the time being covered by our text, such a surrounding did not exist – although it was found within the framework of Judaism.

Paul’s maintenance of his faith enabled him to capitalize on a great number of opportunities, and we are still reaping the benefit of his alertness.

FESTUS TELLS AGRIPPA OF PAUL

“ 14b . . . Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix 15 About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. 16 To whom I answered, It is not the manner of

the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.”

This is a most remarkable occurrence. Here, one non-Christian ruler speaks to another about the “cause” of a servant of God, who was hated by his own people. Unlike many political despots of our day, these two men will concur that Paul had not been treated justly, and that he accusers were unjustified in their charges against him. Today, in our very government, political leaders are passing laws, making rules, and passing ordinances that are oppressive to those who believe in Christ . They are listening to their opponents as though their charges were true, and caving in to the demands of the enemies of Jesus. In so doing, they reveal they are ranked beneath those who heard charges against Paul. That includes Lysias the captain, Felix the governor, Festus the governor, and now Agrippa the king. And how do you suppose it will go for such men on the day of judgment?

WHEN I WAS AT JERUSALEM

“About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him . . .”

Notice how accurate a report is given by Festus. He does not embellish the report with all manner of false statements, giving the advantage to himself. He tells it precisely as it happened.

Of the event it is written, “Now when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul . . .” (Acts 25:1-3). Festus was not privy to their determination to kill Paul: “And desired favor against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him” (Acts 25:3). However, he was aware that no proven charges had been leveled against Paul. I do not doubt that he was suspicious of their motives. Over and above these circumstances, God was orchestrating this whole series of events for the good of Paul.

IT IS NOT THE MANNER OF THE ROMANS

“To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face . . .”

The actual account of Festus’ response agrees with what he tells Agrippa. “But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him” (Acts 25:4-5).

Often the Jews, and even the professed church has operated beneath the dignity revealed in civil law. In the mock trials of Jesus and Stephen, the accusers did not approach the involved trials with the laws enunciated by Romans. In history, the trials of such men as Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther, and others, were not attended by an insistence upon justice and proper procedure. Many modern ministers have been tried by groups of elders and church boards that would not have been allowed in the court of Felix, Festus, or Agrippa. This is not to mention that injustices that have been administered by educational institutions that exist under the banner of “Christian.”

- The Law of Moses demanded justice (Ex 23:11-8; Lev 19:13-20; Deut 25:1-4).
- The prophets delivered stern words concerning justice (Isa 1:17; 56:1; 59:14-15; Jer 22:1-4; Lam 3:35-36; Amos 5:11-12; Hab 1:4; Zech 8:16).
- Even Nicodemus knew the Divine requirement of justice (John 7:51).
- Jesus affirmed the necessity of judging righteously (John 7:24).

In Christ Jesus, the matter of justice is addressed at the highest level – through “charity,” or

spiritual love. It is said of this godly virtue, “Charity . . . Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things” (1 Cor 13:6-7). This does not mean that love is gullible, but that it is not willing to accept things that cannot be substantiated. When faced with things difficult to discern, it defaults to the best conclusion, not the worst.

LICENSE TO ANSWER FOR HIMSELF

“ . . . and have licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.” Other versions read, “has the opportunity to answer for himself,” NKJV “has the opportunity to make his defense,” NASB “has had an opportunity to defend himself.” NIV

Albert Barnes writes, “Tyrants permit people to be accused without knowing who the accusers are, and without an opportunity of meeting the charges. It is one great principle of modern jurisprudence that the accused may know the accusers, and be permitted to confront the witnesses, and to adduce all the testimony possible in his own defense.” ALBERT BARNES ON ACTS I might add that the Romans played a key role in establishing this approach within the context of government.

If the Jews had their way at the very beginning, they would not have allowed a single word to be uttered by Paul. Arousing the Jews in Jerusalem with their false allegations, they had seized him, dragged him out of the temple, and commenced beating him. Their aim, as they made abundantly clear, was to kill him. In so doing, they broke both their own law, and the law of the Romans as well.

OUR OWN SITUATION IN JOPLIN

I do not intend to make too much of this, but myself and The word of Truth Fellowship have experienced being charged falsely by some citizens of Joplin – people who are professed Christians. Over the last eighteen years some have referred to us as a cult, Blakelyites, those who have no grace, and only preach Law, and myself as being the origin of much controversy.

During these nearly two decades, not a single one of those to have painted us in such a manner have asked us about the charges. The rumors continue to this day to be circulated with only those who know us well making any effort to present a defense – and that is not because they have been asked.

Let it be clear that we have not been thrown into a state of consternation because of these charges. I personally view them as troublesome little gnats who lack both power and sense, buzzing here and there chattering about things of which they know nothing. In making their charges, they only confirm to the hearers that we are different from the established religious community. That only causes us to rejoice, because we have some understanding of the uniqueness of the things we have been given to see – things that are not especially for us, but are available to who all who are in Christ Jesus.

My point here is simply this: we are not to count it a “strange thing” when the world hates us – even if it is unjust in doing so. Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated Me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you” (John 15:18-19). John wrote, “Marvel not, My brethren, if the world hate you. (1 John 3:13)

Those who imagine that believers become unsettled when they are maligned and falsely accused are only captured by vain imagination. Actually, when such people speak as they do, it enhances our joy, and brings more confidence to our hearts. That will, in turn, make us more determined to speak. Thus, the Scripture is fulfilled, “We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;

knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you” (2 Cor 4:13-14). We can actually be helped by opposition.

FESTUS SUMMARIZES THE CHARGES AGAINST PAUL

“ 17 Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth. 18 Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: 19 But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.”

Now Paul will have the opportunity to speak to a political dignitary, and he will do so zealously and extensively. This is not the result of an evangelistic outreach, but is introduced by an inquiry. That inquiry is not stimulated by the testimony of other believers, but by the report of another political figure.

Considering that Paul was not a political prisoner, like Barabbas, and looking at it as mere history, makes this account all the more remarkable. To the body of Christ, Paul is a most remarkable man with unusual spiritual insights that were revealed to him. But to the Romans, he was a nobody – at least politically speaking. Now, he had drawn the curiosity of at least four notable Roman officials: a military captain, two governors, and one king. Festus even calls Paul by name (Acts 25:19,21). Earlier, when he was in the charge of Lysias the captain, a centurion came to him and referred to Paul as “Paul the prisoner” (Acts 23:18).

Even though Lysias the captain, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa knew that no valid charges had been brought against Paul, yet he was the subject of conversation in higher government circles. This was in strict accord with the words Jesus said to Ananias when he was called to minister to Paul (then Saul of Tarsus): “But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

When addressing the twelve, Jesus spoke of them also speaking before government officials. He even elaborated on the reason for this circumstance: “And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles” (Matt 10:18).

Now Paul will have the opportunity to speak to a political dignitary, and he will do so zealously and extensively. This is not the result of an evangelistic outreach, but is introduced by an inquiry. That inquiry is not stimulated by the testimony of other believers, but by the report of another political figure.

HE SAT ON THE JUDGMENT SEAT WITHOUT DELAY

“Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.”

The historical record of the above statement reads, “And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Caesarea; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought” (Acts 25:6).

Even though Festus was a subordinate of Agrippa, he presented his case factually and without embellishment. I do not doubt that this was a bit unusual. No delay was made in this matter, even though it was not a highly publicized political trial. The matter was given precedence because it was being orchestrated from above.

THEY HAD NO VALID ACCUSATIONS

“Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed . . .” Other versions read, “bringing charges against him not of such crimes as I was expecting,” NASB “they did not charge him with any of the crimes I had expected,” NIV and “they brought forward no accusation [in his case] of any such misconduct as I was expecting.” AMPLIFIED

The fact that Paul had been left in prison for two years probably led Festus to think he had been charged with some serious crimes: political insurrection, rabble-rousing, murder, or some other all-important infraction of civil law. Technically, of course, they had said that Paul was “a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world” (Acts 24:5). However, the charges of the Jews were not taken seriously by Lysias the captain, Felix the governor, nor Festus the governor. They were utterly lacking of any evidence, and were thus dismissed just as though they had never been spoken.

Had Paul’s life been marked by inconsistency and trouble-making, the charges against him could have easily been established. However, his life was flawless, frustrating his adversaries. This is as it should be with all believers. Thus Paul admonished Titus, “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:7-8). The target for all believers is to be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in he midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). Peter wrote, “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12). And again he wrote, “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ” (1 Pet 2:15). And yet again, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ ” (1 Pet 3:15-16).

Owing to the contemporary approach to working constantly with flawed living among professed believers, these words have been largely ignored and forgotten. Even though they were written with most sober tones, leaving no room for violating them, in the average church it is as though they were not even in the Scriptures. While sophists are busy explaining why people are dominated by sin, living reproachful lives, and living at a distance from God, that very God has made it quite clear that it is not acceptable to dabble in sin, or leave the impression that Christians are really no different than anyone else.

Well, this was certainly not the mindset within the early church. Those who thought in such a manner were generally eliminated from the body – like Ananias and Sapphira, who were clearly the exception to the rule of righteousness.

Even more so, competent spiritual leaders and thinkers should not spend their time in trivial pursuits, and dealing extensively with those who insist on walking in the dark. No minister of the Word should consume his time dabbling in the personal affairs of men.

In addition to this, there is something else to be noted here. It is clear that Festus saw no value in continuing to deal with false and unsubstantiated reports. It was a waste of his time, and he knew it. Even more so, competent spiritual leaders and thinkers should not spend their time in trivial pursuits, and dealing extensively with those who insist on walking in the dark. No minister of the Word should consume his time dabbling in the personal affairs of men. Understand there are things that occasionally must be addressed – like a person taking heed to their ministry (Col 4:17)), or someone who is immoral continuing to be identified with the assembly (1 Cor 5:1-5). But such things must be dealt with forthrightly and without undue tolerance. Under the Law, where people

were unconverted and God's laws were not written upon their hearts, provision was made for judges among the people – generally to settle disputes (Ex 21:6-22; 22:8-9; Deut 1:16-17). Even then, we have no record of such things as marriage counseling and the rearing of children being addressed on a personal basis.

All such things may have a “show of wisdom,” but they are really career-driven . In Christ provision has been made to address any personal or domestic difficulties. People have the Word of God (1 Pet 2:2), the Holy Spirit (Gal 4:6; 1 John 2:20,27), and access to God (Eph 3:12). They are implored to obtain the wisdom that is from above (James 1:5-6), and to let their requests be made known unto God (Phil 4:6). It is not right for remain in a fundamentally unlearned state. It is also out of order to continue working with those who have remained without spiritual understanding for an inordinately long period of time. Even Festus called a halt to fruitless proceedings, and believers should have even more wisdom than him.

SUPERSTITIONS, AND ONE JESUS

“But had certain questions against him of their own superstition . . . ” Other versions read, “about their own religion, and about a certain Jesus,” NKJV “about their own religion and a dead man, Jesus,” NASB “certain questions of their own system of worship, and concerning a certain Jesus who is dead,” DARBY and “about their own religion or superstition and concerning one Jesus.” AMPLIFIED

The word translated “superstition” is **deisidaimoni,aj** , and has the following lexical meaning: “in a good sense, reverence for the good piety, religion . . . superstition . . . employs the word ambiguously and cautiously, in Acts 25:19, of the Jewish religion, viz. so as to leave his own judgment concerning its truth in suspense,” THAYER “in a bad sense superstition; in a neutral sense, a system of beliefs religion,” FRIBERG

This Greek word, in all of its varied forms, is found only two times in Scripture. Once in Acts 17:22 (“too superstitious”), and once in our text (Acts 25:19 – “superstitious”).The English words “religion” and “religious” are used six times in the KJV, NKJV and NASB (Acts 13:43; 26:5; Gal 1:13-14; James 1:26,27). The NIV contains those words ten times (Amos 5:21; 8:10; Acts 17:22; 25:29; 26:5; Col 2:16; 1 Tim 5:4; Hen 10:11; James 1:26,27). The NRSV standard version uses them seven times (Acts 17:22; 25:19; 26:5; 1 Tim 3:16; 5:4; James 1:26-27). As used in the KJV, NKJV, and NASB, the words “religion” and “religious” refer to outward actions – some legitimate, and some pretentious. There is a form of “religion” that allows one to conduct himself improperly, and James says such a religion is “vain,” or pointless (James 1:26).

The Herodian Family

In our text, it appears to me that “superstitious” is the proper word. While it may include the idea of activities of the body, it seems to me to be emphasizing what they had embraced in their minds. There is also a hint of denigration in it. We understand that Agrippa was a Jew by profession, but it was only for political advantage. McClintok and Strong's Cyclopedia says of Herod Agrippa, a member of the Herodian family, “In the fulness of time a descendant of Esau established a false counterpart of the promised glories of the Messiah . . . The general policy of the whole Herodian family, though modified by the personal characteristics of the successive rulers, was the same. It centered in the endeavor to found a great and independent kingdom, in which the power of Judaism should subserve the consolidation of a state.”

Herodian predecessors of Agrippa revealed their sectarian priorities. His grandfather slaughtered the innocents around Bethlehem in an attempt to kill the infant Jesus. His father killed James, the brother of John, and would have done the same to Peter had not the Lord delivered him. The government of that family was much like spiritual Babylon. It was an attempt to adopt a revealed

religion for the promotion of earthly interests.

At any rate, Herod did not speak as a faithful Jew when he referred to the Jews charges against Paul being “of their own superstition.” Although he had adopted their religion to “subserve the consolidation of a state,” he now made clear that he was not at all attracted to their theological tenets, or the fact that they had received their Law from God Almighty.

Two Perspectives

In Herod and Paul we see two different perspectives – two different ways to look at life in this world, theology, and religion. In using these expressions I mean the following.

- **LIFE IN THIS WORLD.** Life in the body, and the activities that are associated with this world. This is the framework within which basic things, objectives, and benefits are defined and evaluated.
- **THEOLOGY.** Theology has to do with the knowledge of (ology) God (theo). It defines the perspective of an individual, or how he looks at things. It is the framework within which the concept of religion is developed.
- **RELIGION.** Religion has to do with outward living, or expression. It relates to how people structure their lives, what they do, when they do it, and why they do it. It relates specifically to one’s perception of God and His requirements.

The particular kind of living that is being accented in our time posits that the here and now is the most important thing. The realization of plans for living in this world are considered primary. It is a disastrous way of living, as is confirmed by the rapid proliferation of greed, pleasure, and immorality.

Paul lived knowing that the world was created and sustained by the Lord – specifically the Lord Jesus Christ. He knew that it was a place in which preparations were to be made for eternity. He was also keenly aware of the contaminating influences of the world and of its spiritual gravitation pull downward – away from God and His great salvation. Rather than the world using him, he use the world (1 Cor 7:31), but he held it loosely, knowing that his tenure here was comparatively brief. Christ had given him a work to do, and that, together with the maintenance and maturity of the newness of life, was his priority. He made no attempt to merge worldly concepts with his theology, or worldly manners with his religion.

Festus and his predecessors, on the other hand, thought quite differently. To them, theology meant very little at all. Religion, or the outward expression of theology, was perceived as helpful to the government. He saw it as a means of uniting the people under the Roman rule. Thus he, together with his predecessors, provided many outward advantages for the Jews, including the construction of the magnificent Temple. He sought to please the Jews, not because he had any respect for their Law or the manner in which they went about serving God. He only sought to make good Roman citizens out of them, leaving a good impression in his superiors.

The Herodian view is reflected with remarkable precision in Babylon the Great, that great fornicating fabrication that seeks to emulate the true church. We have lived to see concessions to the flesh that were unimaginable a few decades in the past. Now, the majority – the vast majority – of the activity of the average church has to do with life in the world. Activities range from diet and exercising, to politics and outings for the seniors. A sizeable budget is allocated for the entertainment of the youth. Gymnasiums are now used more extensively than auditoriums, and bandstands have replace pulpits.

The theology, which drives all of this religious activity, now presents a tolerating God who is able to handle sin among His people, loving everyone, and not being insistent that they cleanse themselves

of all filthiness of the flesh, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord. Sophistry is at such a high level that the new birth, regeneration, and transformation are, for all practical purposes, denied. There is not a clear distinction between the righteous and the unrighteous, unless it be that Christians are “forgiven” – even though there is little, if any, evidence that this is true.

By the middle of the first century, this erroneous way of thinking was already being developed. It is seen in Agrippa the pretender – but there were others.

- **CORINTH.** It is seen in Corinth, and the presence of immorality (1 Cor 6:1-5), self-centeredness (1 Cor 6:5-8; 11:21), despising the table of the Lord (1 Cor 20:21; 11:20-30), inconsideration of weaker believers (1 Cor 8:1-13), doubting that Paul was an apostle (1 Cor 9:1-5), the toleration and even acceptance of those teaching “another Jesus,” “another gospel,” and “another Spirit” (2 Cor 11:4), and even declaring there was no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:12-13).

- **GALATIA.** The churches in Galatia had removed themselves from Him, who had called them into the grace of Christ (Gal 1:6), had been bewitched by false teachers (Gal 3:1), had embraced “another gospel” (Gal 1:6-7), and had lost their spiritual bearings. They were reverting to a system of Law for justification, after they had been delivered from the Law (Gal 1:4; 2:16).

- **COLOSSAE.** The church at Colossae was being subjected to philosophy and vaion deceit (Col 2:8), was being lured into obeying ordinances that were developed for those who had not died with Christ (Col 2:20-23).

Furthermore, if you do not behold the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ, you will not be changed from one increasing stage of glory to another, for that gaze is the appointed means of the God-ordained change

And what did all of these departures have in common? They all focused on the world and life in it. Because of that, Jesus Christ Himself was minimized, being glorified was thrust into the background, and standing before the judgment seat of Christ was no longer a primary consideration.

“This present evil world” (Gal 1:4) casts a long and obscuring shadow. If you insist on walking in that shadow, you will not be able to look intently to Jesus, running the race with patience that has been set before you (Heb 12:1-2). Furthermore, if you do not behold the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ, you will not be changed from one increasing stage of glory to another, for that gaze is the appointed means of the God-ordained change (2 Cor 3:18).

A whole host of people are not growing spiritually because they are not beholding the glory of the Lord in the face of Jesus Christ. Their worldly interests have shifted their vision, and now they see too much of the world and too little of Jesus. They are unwittingly caught in the same trap in which Felix and Festus found themselves. The Christian life is interesting, but not the fundamental concern. They have some casual interest in the Bible, but not enough to “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4).

Such people are more like Felix, Festus, and Agrippa than they are like Paul. And, unless they change their focus, they will soon be making evaluations like those men did. Instead of fellowshiping with the saints, they will be obliged to make an effort to judge them, not knowing what they are doing.

PAUL AFFIRMED TO BE ALIVE

“ . . . and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.” Other versions read, “asserted to be alive,” NASB “claimed was alive,” NIV and “Whom Paul kept asserting [over and over] to be alive.” AMPLIFIED

Notice Festus’ perception of the emphasis of Paul: “a certain Jesus, who had died, whom Paul

affirmed to be alive.” NKJV This is a key point of Apostolic doctrine – not merely what Jesus can do for you, but who He is: a risen and exalted Savior. Ponder what has been written about the risen Lord.

THE PROPHETS

- “I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee” (Psa 2:7). “So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee” (Heb 5:5).
- “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Psa 16:9-10). “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption” (Acts 2:24-27).

THE TESTIMONY OF JESUS

- “For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:40).

How marvelous it is to ponder the extensive application of Christ’s resurrection to the life of faith. His resurrection life is what saves us, and confirms everything said about Him.

“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day” (Matt 16:21).

- “And they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry” (Matt 17:23),
- “And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him: and the third day he shall rise again” (Matt 20:19).
- “But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee” (Matt 26:32).

THE APOSTLES

- “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it” (Acts 2:24)
- “And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses” (Acts 3:15).
- “Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole” (Acts 4:10).
- “The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree” (Acts 5:30).
- “Him God raised up the third day, and showed him openly” (Acts 10:40).
- “And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulcher. But God raised him from the dead” (Acts 13:29-30).
- “Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3).

- “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31).

- “That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:23).

PIVOTAL TO APOSTOLIC DOCTRINE

How marvelous it is to ponder the extensive application of Christ’s resurrection to the life of faith. His resurrection life is what saves us, and confirms everything said about Him.

- **Declared to be the Son of God with Power.** “And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead” (Rom 1:4).

- **The imputation of righteousness.** “But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom 4:25).

- **Saved by His resurrection life.** “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life” (Rom 5:10).

- **Makes baptism effective.** “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). “The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21).

- **The sanctified life.** “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom 8:11). “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body” (2 Cor 4:10).

- **Christ’s intercession.** “Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom 8:34).

- **Believing unto salvation.** “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” (Rom 10:9).

- **Our own resurrection from the dead.** “And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by His own power” (1 Cor 6:14).

- **The power that is toward us.** “And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which He wrought in Christ, when he raised Him from the dead, and set him at His own right hand in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:20).

- **Being the Head of the body.** “And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18).

- **Deliverance from the wrath to come.** “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).

- **to be remembered.** “Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel” (2 Tim 2:8).

• **Being he Great Shepherd of the sheep.** “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant” (Heb 13:20).

• **Being begotten by God.** “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).

• **Believing in God.** “Who by Him do believe in God, that raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Pet 1:21).

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

• **Having the keys of Hades and the grave.** “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death” (Rev 1:18).

These days enough is not being said about the resurrected Christ. It is not being given its proper place, because it cannot be exploited for fleshy advantage. Paul said if Christ is not risen from the dead preaching is vain, faith is vain, the apostles are liars, we are yet in our sins, and the dead are perished (1 Cor 15:14-18). The fact that Festus summarized what Paul said by referring to Christ’s death and resurrection says a lot! It stands in stark contrast with “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4).

FESTUS DOUBTED THE MANNER OF QUESTIONS

“ 20 And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. 21 But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.”

Festus is giving a rather lengthy and precise account of his exposure to Paul. Politically, this makes no sense, for Paul has really introduced no social or political disruption. However, Paul was a servant of the Lord, who is working salvation in the midst of the earth. The “eternal purpose” being brought to fruition by the Lord trumps all other purposes and dwarfs all other priorities. The Lord is using these men, who are really nothing more than vessels in His house, even though, at the time, they were vessels “to dishonor” (2 Tim 2:20). That is, these were men who were not immediately and intimately involved in the work of the Lord, but were like unwitting slaves that were carrying out His will. We are reading of some of the details involved in God working all things together for the good of His servant, Paul.

Incidentally, for those who stand in criticism of Paul, it is most advantageous to behold how God works in his behalf. For the most part, that contradicts many speak of Paul disparagingly. It is also a stirring rebuke to those who conveniently and consistently ignore what he taught.

I DOUBTED THE MANNER

One of the invariable traits of the wicked is their tendency to present themselves in the view most favored by men. This is what Festus was doing. However, behind the scenes God was orchestrating this whole matter. He was working in such a way as to make these two dignitaries “willing in the day of His power.”

“And because I doubted of such manner of questions . . .” Other versions read, “I was uncertain of such questions,” NKJV “being at a loss how to investigate such matters,” NASB “being perplexed how to inquire concerning these things,” ASV “as I had not enough knowledge for the discussion of these things,” BBE “Their debate about these things left me puzzled,” GWN “Not feeling qualified to deal with questions of this sort,” NJB and “And I, being puzzled to know how to make inquiries

into such questions.” AMPLIFIED

At this point, Festus departs from his hitherto honest and forthright report. He tells Agrippa that he was not sure how to handle the case, and therefore asked Paul if he would consent to be tried by himself in Jerusalem. This was not the whole truth . Luke reports it this way – and his account is inspired: “But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure , answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?” (Acts 25:9). Actually, therefore, he was conceding to the pressure of the Jews, not attempting to find a place for the trial that was more conducive to understanding the case.

When speaking to Agrippa, Festus says something that is politically expedient. He is attempting to justify his decision to send Paul to Rome. Rather than acknowledging that, speaking as a man, he really had no other alternative, he chose to represent the case as too difficult for himself, painting the picture as though Paul would have a better chance to receive a just judgment in Caesar’ court.

One of the invariable traits of the wicked is their tendency to present themselves in the view most favored by men. This is what Festus was doing. However, behind the scenes God was orchestrating this whole matter. He was working in such a way as to make these two dignitaries “willing in the day of His power” (Psa 110:3). He turned their hearts (Prov 21:1) to act as though they were actually seeking Paul’s best interests.

Festus conveniently omits conferring with his council, and the fact that he said Paul was going to go to Caesar. There was no hint of delay in the words he said to Paul, even though I suppose it might be surmised that it would require time to carry out the decree. The point is that in his report, Festus gave himself every advantage, not highlighting the injustice of the whole charade.

I ASKED WHETHER HE WOULD GO TO JERUSALEM

“ . . . I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters . . . ”

Festus returns to a more factual presentation of the case. Of this incident Luke wrote, “But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?” (Acts 25:9). It is assumed that Agrippa understood that the trial would be before Festus, although here he did not say so. Luke reported the incident with characteristic accuracy.

PAUL APPEALED

“ . . . But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus . . . ” Other versions read, “reserved for the decision of Augustus,” NKJV “to be held in custody for the Emperor's decision,” NASB “made a request that he might be judged by Caesar,” BBE “to be held for trial by the Emperor,” CSB “to be kept for the cognisance of Augustus,” DARBY and “to be reserved to the examination of Augustus.” GENEVA

Luke’s account of Paul’s response reads, “ I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged: to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar” (Acts 25:10-11).

That is certainly a more extensive report than the one Festus gave to Agrippa. Paul did not say he consented to be “reserved,” or “held in custody,” until he could have a hearing before Caesar – although I suppose that could be assumed. The thrust of his word suggested that there be no delay in the matter. Paul presented the case as a matter of propriety and legality. This, however, is not how Festus presented the matter to Agrippa.

I COMMANDED HIM TO BE KEPT

“ . . . I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.” Other versions read, “kept in custody until I send him to Caesar,” NASB and “ordered him to be held until I could send him to the emperor.” NRSV

Luke’s account reads, “Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? unto Caesar shalt thou go” (Acts 25:12). Festus conveniently omits conferring with his council, and the fact that he said Paul was going to go to Caesar. There was no hint of delay in the words he said to Paul, even though I suppose it might be surmised that it would require time to carry out the decree. The point is that in his report, Festus gave himself every advantage, not highlighting the injustice of the whole charade.

Thus we once again see the propensities of the flesh to justify itself and, for that reason, slant the truth, if possible, to give self the ultimate advantage. Such approaches are not to be found among the people of God. They are always to defer to the truth, in both thought and expression. Preaching and testimony are both to be correct and precise. There really is no reason for either of them if this is not the case. Preaching that does not center in Christ is only “talk.”

AGRIPPA WANTS TO HEAR PAUL FOR HIMSELF

“ 22 Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.”

Do not miss the obvious willingness that is evidenced in both Agrippa and Festus. It is almost as though they were being moved by some unapparent power. And, of course, that is precisely what was happening. It may appear on the surface as though this was all the exercise of free moral agents. However, that explanation is far too simplistic for those who have understanding. This is God at work, not the merely the human intellect. It is He who is moving things in a certain direction – a direction that clearly reflects His priorities and purpose.

AGRIPPA WANTS TO HEAR PAUL

“Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself . . .” Other versions read, “I would like to hear this man myself.” NIV

What moved Agrippa to want to hear Paul for himself. There really was nothing about the case that demanded his attention, and the decision had already been made that he would go to Caesar. He had not come to Caesarea to hear about this case, but to officially visit Festus in his new capacity as Felix’s replacement. His only knowledge of Paul came through a casual and unofficial conversation with Festus.

Yet, through the providence of God he will now be exposed to the Gospel, as well as to the calling of its premier proclaimer. A door will be opened to him, and he will be given an opportunity to enter into it.

None of this would have taken place if Paul had not been alert and pressed the issue. After Jesus told him he would testify in Rome, Paul did not forget what was told him. It shaped how he thought and what he said.

It appears to me that a great deal of spiritual deficiency experienced by professed believers is owing to them forgetting what the Gospel has announced. Also, there is a professed gospel that is being preached by many that does not accent Jesus Himself. He is set within the context of everyday human problems, and treated as though He existed primarily to assist us to live in this world. Actually,

He is bringing the sons to glory (Heb 2:10), and bringing them to God as well (1 Pet 3:18). If this is not being declared with power, there really is little reason to mention Jesus at all. For if we are not brought to God now, and eventually brought to glory, life has really been lived in vain – no matter how blessed it may appear to have been.

TOMORROW, HE WOULD HEAR PAUL

“ . . . To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.” Felix kept Paul bound for two whole years. Festus will release him in a day. That circumstance is reminiscent of Joseph’s sudden release from prison (Gen 41:14). What was the difference between Felix and Festus? Actually, very little. Both of them were quite content with pleasing the Jews (Acts 24:27; 25:9). The real difference was the time – a time when the Divine agenda would take the precedence. We do not know anything about what occurred during the two years Paul was held bound. But we will come to know very much about what takes place after he is released. Paul’s time had come, and he would take full advantage of it. Agrippa will probably remember what Paul says to him for a long time.

THE DANGER OF LITTLE FOXES

The Shulamite woman said, “Catch us the foxes, The little foxes that spoil the vines, For our vines have tender grapes” NKJV (Song of Sol 2:15).

There are many cares and concerns that are, comparatively speaking, like “little foxes” nibbling at the vine of spiritual life, and gradually weakening it. They look like they are major concerns, but they have nothing to do with laying up treasures in heaven, preparing for the coming of the Lord, and being a good and faithful servant of God. For example, Paul could have spent two years in prison thinking about the conditions there, which were no doubt not the best. Who knows what fiery darts were hurled at him by the wicked one, in an attempt to get his mind off of what Jesus said and on to the things men had said. It is apparent from this text that Paul quenched those fiery darts with the shield of faith, else he would not have been prepared to speak as he did.

This is an area of life where men cannot legislate. But they can exhort the people of God to put their affection where it belongs – on things above, and NOT on things on the earth. An inordinate amount of time must not be consumed on people and things that do not yield glory to God. The individual himself must determine what is inordinate, and none other can do it for him. However, if your thoughts and words are wrapped around something other than working out your own salvation with fear and trembling, take care to note the signs of danger.

If your joy is fleeting, discouragement is turning into a kind of monster, and there are more questions than answers, the “little foxes” are at work. Catch them, lest they leave you with no fruit at all! Oh, that believers would take more care for consuming locusts and foxes! Be a follower of Paul, as he also was of Christ (1 Cor 11:1).

AGRIPPA AND BERNICE ARRIVE WITH GREAT POMP

“ 23 And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.”

The purpose of this gathering is for Agrippa to hear Paul. Already Felix had come with his wife Drusilla to hear “him concerning the faith in Christ,” and Paul had reasoned with him “of righteousness, of temperance, and of judgment to come” (Acts 24:24-25). There is no record of Paul preaching or reasoning with Festus to this point. So far as the record is concerned, Paul only said he had done nothing “against the Jews, neither against the Temple, nor yet against Caesar.” When Festus asked if he was willing to go to Jerusalem, Paul declined, saying he was in Caesar’s judgment seat

where he ought to be. He then appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:8-11). What Festus knew about Paul was apparently learned from Felix. Now, however, Festus would hear an extended defense, and considerable detail about Paul's calling and work.

A LOT OF POMP

“And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city . . .” Other versions read, “in great glory had come into the public place of hearing,” BBE “with much pageantry,” CJB “with a lot of fanfare,” GWN “with great ceremony,” NAB “in great state,” NJB “with much display,” YLT “dressed and acted like very important people,” IE “made a great show,” CEV and “made a flourishing grand entrance.” MESSAGE

Most of the versions use the word “pomp.” This comes from a word that has the following lexical meaning, “show, showy appearance, display, pomp,” THAYER “an appearance made for effect, for showing off cheap display, pomp, pageantry,” FRIBERG “a pompous ceremony, implying a cheap display of high status - 'pomp and ceremony, pompous display.” LOUW-NIDA In his Word Pictures, Robertson

Now, with all of these dignitaries present, a prisoner is brought in. He will not be interrogated, but will speak in defense of himself, giving an account of why he was there. But Paul is not seeking for attention to be drawn to himself, so he will speak quite differently than those before whom he now stands. He no doubt looked composed, unafraid, and not intimidated by this impressive gathering of officials.

says of this occasion , “Festus decided to gratify the wish of Agrippa by making the ‘hearing’ of Paul the prisoner (verse 22) an occasion for paying a compliment to Agrippa (Rackham) by a public gathering of the notables in Caesarea. Festus just assumed that Paul would fall in with this plan for a grand entertainment though he did not have to do it.”

This is the manner of the flesh, to draw attention to itself, glorying in appearance. Although it is a worldly tendency, it was found in the religious arena, among scribes and Pharisees. Jesus said of them, “But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi” (Matt 23:5-7). Paul wrote that this carnal tendency had also penetrated the church. He wrote of those who “glory in appearance, and not in heart” (2 Cor 5:12). Elsewhere he spoke of those who “desire to make a fair show in the flesh” (Gal 6:12). Paul said of that kind of people, “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Cor 10:12).

What a gallery of dignitaries was present: “chief captains and principle men of the city.” Other versions read, “commanders and prominent men of the city,” NKJV “high ranking officers and the leading men of the city,” NIV and “the military commandants and the prominent citizens of the city.” AMPLIFIED Thus both military and political officials of the city of Caesarea were gathered together in the hall. Felix had gathered them to appeal to the pride of Agrippa, but God had gathered them to hear Paul!

PAUL WAS BROUGHT FORTH

“ . . . at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.”

Now, with all of these dignitaries present, a prisoner is brought in. He will not be interrogated, but will speak in defense of himself, giving an account of why he was there. But Paul is not seeking for

attention to be drawn to himself, so he will speak quite differently than those before whom he now stands. He no doubt looked composed, unafraid, and not intimidated by this impressive gathering of officials. Several years earlier Jesus had told Ananias Paul would speak before “kings.” Now he is doing it.

One can only imagine how Paul must have appeared to this august and pompous assembly. He himself said he was “base” among the cultured Corinthians (2 Cor 10:1). The Corinthians said “his bodily appearance is weak” (2 Cor 10:10). As time pushes forward, however, those with discernment will sense he is in charge of this situation.

FESTUS DRAWS ATTENTION TO PAUL

“ 24 And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer. 25 But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. 26a Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord.”

Having called Paul before them all, Festus now introduces him, stating the case before him, and confessing he does not have anything to write to Caesar introducing the case he is sending to him. It all must have sounded a bit strange to officials gathered there. But they will doubtless be stricken with the fact that no valid charge can be brought against this man. He had maintained a spotless character, and no one could successfully contradict it.

In other words, Paul had lived out what he preached. In his letter to the Philippians he wrote, “be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life . . .” (Phil 2:15-16). He wrote to the Thessalonians, “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

These were not mere words. They were spoken with a keen awareness that salvation provides those who possess it the things required to live in a blameless manner. He who has glaring faults is not apt to be heard if he dares to speak for Jesus. It will do no good to say that we all sin, or that no one is perfect. Solemnly believers are told, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).

Paul had lived in that manner, and now when his opponents searched for some cause to rid themselves of him, they could find none. Political figures who were expert in finding flaws could find none in Paul, and they admitted it. Pilate said of Jesus, “I find no fault in this man” (Lk 23:4). Festus said essentially the same thing when he said he had found Paul had not committed anything worthy of death – which his accusers were demanding.

Paul urged this he taught us to live in this manner. To Titus he wrote, “In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you” (Titus 2:8).

And why did he say such things? Because when sin erupts outwardly, it gives the enemies of Christ cause to blaspheme His worthy name and word (James 2:7). It is possible for the word of God to be blasphemed because of the sloppy lives of professing Christians (Tit 2:5). The same is true of the name of God, which is blasphemed because of certain people (Rom 2:5).

Our generation needs to hear about these things, because a Gospel is being preached that makes

men comfortable in sin. Men are being led to believe that sin is not as serious as the Lord has said. The result is that the name of the Lord and His word are being blasphemed.

Our generation needs to hear about these things, because a Gospel is being preached that makes men comfortable in sin. Men are being led to believe that sin is not as serious as the Lord has said. The result is that the name of the Lord and His word are being blasphemed. However, when Paul is examined by the Jews, the Roman captain, Felix, Festus, and now Agrippa, they will not be able to point out any moral flaw.

Today certain recovery programs teach people to dismiss their failures by saying they are not God. Well, Paul was not God either, yet no man was able to support a legitimate charge against him. His life is a giant negation of the false gospels of our time.

YE SEE THIS MAN

“And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man , about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer . . .”

Notice that Festus calls for the attention of all “who are present, focusing their attention upon Paul himself. Furthermore, Paul has been brought here to speak in his defense. Can you imagine him objecting to the public nature of the whole gathering, saying he was fatigued with a two-year imprisonment, and was not prepared to speak to such an impressive assembly. I personally know of an staggering number of professed preachers and teachers who simply could not take advantage of such an opportunity. However, you may rest assured that Paul will be up for the occasion. The reason – he had been living by faith and walking in the Spirit. He had been basking in the fellowship of the Son, and had been thinking of proper things, having set his affection on things above, and not on things on the earth.

Some people see exhortations to come higher, think more consistently, and live with more focus, as commandments that are too difficult to keep. They cringe when they hear the following.

- Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).
- Be followers of God as dear children (Eph 5:1).
- Seek the things that are above (Col 3:1-2).
- Let us cleanse ourselves of all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1).
- Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might (Eph 6:10).
- Resist the devil (James 4:7).
- Be not weary in well doing (2 Thess 3:13).

However, those with faith extend themselves to do what the King requires, and as they do, Christ gives them a discernible measure of success. It is in this manner of living that a person is prepared to “give an answer to every man who asketh a reason for the hope that is within him” (1 Pet). This is why Paul was able to speak so boldly and extensively during this occasion. Being an apostle does not exclude the necessity of the above admonitions, and Paul knew it.

Attempting to live for the Lord erratically will not yield a satisfying or effective life.

I FOUND THAT HE HAD COMMITTED NOTHING WORTHY OF DEATH

“ . . . But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death . . .”

Everything would have been greatly simplified for Festus if a fundamental moral flaw could have been found in Paul. According to Roman law, he could have moved forward with a punitive judgment without any delay. But he could not find such a flaw, or anyone who could testify and prove that they had seen one. Is it possible that the enemies of God could actually be confounded in their quest to find outward moral blemishes in the people of God?

The Case of Daniel

Once, when the enemies of Daniel sought some cause worthy of exploitation and punishment in Daniel. It is said of that effort, “they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him” (Dan 6:4). The only way they felt they could trap him was to find some kind of conflict with the Babylonish manner of life that was caused by Daniel’s devotion to his God (Dan 6:5). Even then, they had to have a special law passed that required Daniel to do something that was against the Law of his God. From the very beginning, they knew Daniel would not obey that Law.

The revealed history of Daniel forever dispels any arguments against the possibility of moral purity. Oh, if you were to have asked Daniel what he thought of himself, he would not have declared that he had no fault or flaw – but it certainly was not apparent to others, even though he, like Paul, was keenly aware of a condition from which he had to be delivered (Rom 7:24-25).

So far as our appearance before men is concerned, we are told, “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:14-15). You must make it your business to so live that your peers can have “no evil thing to say of you” (Tit 2:8). The aspiration of every person living by faith is to conduct their lives in such a manner that any criticism leveled against them must be a false accusation (Matt 5:11; 1 Pet 3:16). My point here is simply that Paul’s boldness in the faith was partly owing to the purity and consistency of his life before God. Salvation provides resources for living in such a manner, and they are to be faithfully declared to the people of God. The church must once and for all be purged of any and all teachers who provide convenient explanations for sin, and teach men to manage sin, rather than to live in the power of the Spirit.

HE HATH APPEALED TO AUGUSTUS

“ . . . and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him . . . ”

Festus did not have the faintest idea concerning the reason for Paul appealing to Caesar. It was not primarily for justice, but in order to the fulfillment of Christ’s promise to him that he would bear testimony to Him in Rome – and Caesar was in Rome.

However, Paul’s request was made with his knowledge of how Roman law worked, and what alternatives were open to him. He saw an open door concerning how to get to Rome, and quickly took advantage of it. He also knew that Festus knew the law as well, and could not turn down his request without violating that law.

Without spending an inordinate amount of time on this matter, there are professing Christians who are living at a distance from God. Because of that circumstance they are unable to see advantages that are set before them, and thus they continue to stumble on in the dark.

I HAVE NO CERTAIN THING TO WRITE

“ . . . Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord.” Other versions read, “I have nothing definite about him to write to my lord,” NASB “I have nothing definite to write to His Majesty about

him,” NIV and “I have nothing in particular and definite to write to my lord concerning him.”
AMPLIFIED

It must have been a frightening thought to Festus to send a prisoner to Caesar for examination, and yet provide no written reason for doing so. After all, even when Lysias the captain sent Paul to Felix, he also sent a letter detailing the reason for sending him there (Acts 23:25-30). Lysias said he could find “nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or bonds” (Acts 23:29). Festus’ predecessor, Felix, could find no fault in Paul – in fact he even “trembled” when Paul had reasoned with him concerning “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25).

Do not fail to see the utter helplessness of Paul’s enemies and those to whom they appealed. If there was so much as a speck in Paul’s eye, they would have found it. However they were totally powerless and thus incapable of raising any just accusation against him. They were, as it was, grasping for straws, and any charge, no matter how small on the Roman scale of infractions, would suffice.

Now, after hearing from Felix the details of Paul’s case, Festus, with all of his governmental expertise, could find no fault with Paul. But he knew that it would not be a wise thing to send Paul to Caesar with no accompanying explanation, concerning a case that had stretched over a period of more than two years. Perhaps with Agrippa, military dignitaries, and the chief men of the city, something could be discovered about Paul that could be written down and sent to Caesar. Surely, with this impressive cortege of dignitaries some helpful information could be garnered that would make the transport of Paul to Rome more comfortable for Festus.

Do not fail to see the utter helplessness of Paul’s enemies and those to whom they appealed. If there was so much as a speck in Paul’s eye, they would have found it. However they were totally powerless and thus incapable of raising any just accusation against him. They were, as it was, grasping for straws, and any charge, no matter how small on the Roman scale of infractions, would suffice. But, like the Babylonian wise men who opposed Daniel, they could not find a thing.

Of course, Paul was not the first person who could challenge his opponents to find something blameable in him.

When the people chided Moses as though he had committed an infraction against the people, he became angry and said to the Lord, “Respect not thou their offering: I have not taken one ass from them, neither have I hurt one of them” (Num 16:15).

Samuel did the same when he said to a discontent Israel, “Behold, here I am: witness against me before the LORD, and before his anointed: whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you” (1 Sam 12:3). With shamefacedness the people answered, “Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand” (1 Sam 12:4).

Paul said to the elders of Ephesus, “I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel” (Acts 20:33). He wrote to the Corinthians, “Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man” (2 Cor 7:2).

If Paul had committed some evil against the Jews, exploited them in any way, or brought disadvantage to them, that would have substantiated their charge that he had taught “all men everywhere against the people” [the Jews] (Acts 21:28), and was “a mover of sedition among all Jews” (Acts 24:5). In such a case, in the interest of maintaining order in the empire, the arrest and punishment of Paul could be justified. But, alas, no charge could be substantiated.

THE AIM OF THE PRESENTATION

“ 26b Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write. 27 For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.”

It is as though Festus had laid the whole matter of Paul in the lap of Agrippa, doing so amidst much pomp and splendor, appealing to his pride. Actually, he was thinking of himself, imagining that he could gain some advantage by this whole process.

I HAVE BROUGHT HIM FORTH

“Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa . . .” Another version reads, “I have brought him before you all and especially before you, King Agrippa,” NASB

Festus addresses the entire assembly: “the chief captains, and principal men of the city.” Then, in the presence of them all, he said, “King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us , ye see this man” (Acts 25:23-24).

Now Festus again appeals to the entire crowd of officials, drawing their particular attention to Paul the prisoner. His motive was to marshal all of their legal expertise for the purpose of establishing a valid charge against Paul. However, behind the scenes, God was preparing them to hear what Paul would say. What a focused congregation he would have at that time ! They would carefully weigh every word that he said, looking for a flaw, yet being exposed to a word that would discover the thoughts and intents of their hearts (Heb 4:12).

THAT I MAY HAVE SOMEWHAT TO WRITE

“ . . . that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write . . .”

Here Festus states his motive, neutralizing its abrasiveness by appealing to the pride of the officials. He wants to prepare a letter to accompany Paul when he is sent to the head of the Roman empire.

IT SEEMED TO ME TO BE UNREASONABLE

“ . . . For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.” Other versions read, “For it seems absurd to me in sending a prisoner, not to indicate also the charges against him,” NASB “For it seems to me senseless and absurd to send a prisoner and not state the accusations against him.” AMPLIFIED

Festus means by this that, at that time, he could not establish the truth of any charges that had been made. He refused to simply repeat what the Jews had said. There had already been four Roman officials who had heard them – Lysias, Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. All of them knew the charges could not be substantiated, so it would have been foolish and even dangerous to send them along to Caesar.

I have noticed over the years that within the Christian community there often is no reluctance to pass along unprovable charges. Many a child of God has suffered at the hands of his peers because of unsubstantiated charges. In fact, the mere repetition of a false charge has often resulted in the denigration, and often expulsion, of good and honest men of God. It is one thing to see this take place among the unregenerate. But among the saints?

CONCLUSION

Thus the stage is set for Paul's most lengthy defense – and it is before a crowd of politically elite people. Luke devotes twenty-one verses to Paul's defense before his Jewish accusers (Acts 22:1-21). He devotes eleven verses to his defense before Felix (Acts 24:10-21). Now Paul will commence a defense that is represented by twenty-nine verses (Acts 26:1-29). He will reveal things that were not made known in the record of his former defenses. Further, none of the defenses were exactly the same. They were a living testimony, forged in the crucible of the furnace of affliction. This is a marvelous confirmation that those who wait upon the Lord increasing in strength, mounting up with wings like eagles, running and not being weary, and walking, yet not fainting (Isa 40:31). Take heart when you read it, for the same resources available to Paul are for you also.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #99

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA, #1

“ 26:1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself: 2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: 3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently. 4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; 5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. 6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: 7 Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews. 8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead? 9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. 10 Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities. 12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests.” (Acts 26:1-12)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Given the opportunity to speak for himself, Paul does not hesitate to do so. He provides an overview of his life, accenting the time when Jesus Christ apprehended him en route to Damascus. It should not surprise us that some professing Christian teachers have criticized this defense, charging Paul with embellishing the account, and misrepresenting what took place when the exalted Christ confronted him when he was on his way to persecute believers. This lesson will confirm the absurdity of that claim. Standing before Agrippa, Paul faithfully presented himself, fellow believers in Christ, and conscientious Jews. He accents the fact of redemptive change, and sets before his audience the fact that he is no longer the man he was. He further places stress upon the centrality of Christ and the hope of the resurrection. This will provide ample proof that he has been misrepresented by his Jewish enemies. The expertise with which he speaks is noteworthy.

GIVING AN ANSWER

Peter admonished believers concerning readiness: “But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a

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- **I WENT TO DAMASCUS WITH AUTHORITY (26:12)**
- **CONCLUSION**

reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing” (1 Pet 3:15-17).

First , note that the context of this statement is suffering “for righteousness’ sake” (v 14) – i.e. suffering for doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. First, the declaration is made: “happy are ye.” Other versions read , “you are blessed,” NKJV “God will reward you for it,” NLT “you are to be envied,” LIVING “you should be happy,” IE and “[you are] blessed (happy, to be envied).” AMPLIFIED And why is it that those who are suffering because of their righteousness are said to be happy, blessed, or to be envied? It is because of what the suffering confirms to the heart of the

suffering one.

- The fact that they are not of the world has been recognized (John 15:19).
- The sufferer is realizing the fellowship of Christ's sufferings (Phil 3:10).
- The sufferer is partaking of the sufferings that have been left behind (Col 1:24).
- God is with the sufferer "in trouble" (Psa 91:15).
- To the degree the sufferings abound in us, so it is with the consolation by Christ (2 Cor 1:5).
- The suffering brightens the prospect of reigning with Christ (Rom 8:17).

Second , the suffering ones must not be afraid of their oppressors or their "terror." Nor, indeed, are they to be "troubled" over the circumstances in which they find themselves. They can have "perfect peace" during the circumstance (Isa 26:3), knowing that He that is in them "is greater than he that is in the world" (1 John 4:4).

Third , the believer is required to sanctify the Lord God in their heart, making Him their chief joy and unquestionable Master. They are to be prepared at all times to give an answer of the hope that is within them, hereby accounting for their difference.

Fourth , their answer is to be attended by meekness before men, and fear before God. It is also to flow from a good conscience.

Sixth , the appointed outcome is that the persecutors may be ashamed, not being able to establish a legitimate charge against their holy manner of life. They may accuse falsely, and launch what appears to be an effective persecution. But in the end, if not during the process of time, they will ultimately be ashamed for what they have done.

These things are being lived out by Paul. He has conducted his life within the circumference of an acute awareness of God, and has ordered his life so as to maintain that posture. He did this while he was preaching in foreign countries, among the Gentiles. He did it when he was laboring with the Jews. He did it as a free man, and when he was incarcerated as well. He did it when he was received by the brethren, or persecuted by his enemies. He did not alter his message when men could not receive it. He did not embellish it when men did receive it. He did it when he had all that he needed, and he did it when he was suffering need.

THE EFFECT OF CORRUPT RELIGION

One of the dreadful effects of a corrupt religion is that it leaves the people fundamentally unprepared. Under such influence, the people are not prepared to be persecuted for righteousness' sake. They are not prepared to give an answer for the hope, which may or may not be in them. They are not prepared to serve the Lord. They are not prepared to die. They are not prepared to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, and, they are not prepared for eternity. Additionally, they are not prepared for varied trials. They are not prepared to take advantage of holy opportunities and open doors. They are not prepared for temptation, and, they are not prepared for the complexities of life. If the Lord is calling them, they are not prepared to hear. If the devil is wooing them, they are not prepared to resist. They are not prepared to put on the whole armor of God, and they are not prepared to come boldly to the throne of all grace to obtain mercy and find grace to help in the time of need. They are not prepared to find the door of escape that accompanies every temptation. They are not prepared to throw down imaginations, and take captive every thought to the obedience of Christ. They are not prepared to fight the good of faith and to lay hold on eternal life.

Is there any person of sound mind who imagines that those whose preaching and teaching has left

people in such a shape will be overlooked by the Savior of the body? If a message has been preached that did not prepare people to present their bodies a living sacrifice unto God, will that circumstance be ignored? Speaking of this very thing, the Holy Spirit moved Paul to write, “Know ye not that ye [plural] are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy ; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are” (1 Cor 3:17). That is not an overstatement, and no person who defiles the temple of God with unsuitable people will escape the judgment that is foretold. This is a solemn warning to be taken seriously.

PAUL IS PREPARED

Having been living by faith and walking in the Spirit, maintaining fellowship with Christ, and fighting the good fight of faith, Paul is fully prepared for the opportunity now set before him. He is ready to give an answer for his hope.

PERMITTED TO SPEAK FOR HIMSELF

“ 26:1 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself.”

PERMITTED TO SPEAK FOR HIMSELF

“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself . . .” Other versions read, “You have permission to speak for yourself,” NIV “You may put your cause before us,” BBE “You're free to speak for yourself,” GWN and “You may speak in your defense .” NLT

Under Roman law, Paul could not begin speaking on his own. He had to be granted permission to do so. This was not a privilege he was given when standing before the Jews. However, more is involved here than Paul answering for himself. This is an opportunity to bear witness to the grace of God that was extended to Paul. It is also a chance to testify to the nature of the Lord's Christ, and to the purpose of God Himself. Paul will seize this opportunity, taking the kingdom by force (Matt 11:12).

THEN PAUL ANSWERED FOR HIMSELF

“ . . . Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself.”

Immediately Paul answers, speaking for himself. In unparalleled confidence, he stretches forth his hand in a gesture that denoted the sureness he possessed, and the boldness with which he will speak.

As when he spoke to others, he will not come “with excellency of speech or of wisdom” recognized by the world (1 Cor 2:1). His speech will be “seasoned with salt,” and he will know how he “ought to answer every man” (Col 4:6), using “sound speech that cannot be condemned” (Tit 2:8). He will “walk in wisdom toward them that are without” (Col 4:5), and will “walk honestly toward them” (1 Thess 4:12). His answer will be clothed with insight and wisdom.

I SHALL ANSWER FOR MYSELF

“ 2 I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews:”

I THINK MYSELF HAPPY

“I think myself happy, king Agrippa . . .” Other versions read, “I consider myself fortunate,” NASB “In my opinion, I am happy,” BBE “I consider myself highly favored,” MRD “I think it is a privilege,” IE “I am glad for this chance,” CEV and “I can't think of anyone, King Agrippa, before whom I'd

rather be answering.” MESSAGE

As used here, the word “happy” is translated from the Greek word **maka,rion** , which means , “of persons characterized by transcendent happiness or religious joy blessed, happy (MT 5.3); without religious connotation fortunate,” FRIBERG “pertaining to being happy, with the implication of enjoying favorable circumstances - ‘happy.’” LOUW-NIDA “blessed, fortunate, happy usually in the sense of privileged recipient of Divine favor.” GINGRICH

This is the same word translated “blessed” in the beatitudes (Matt 5:5-11). Paul employed the word in regard to unparalleled blessings from the Lord (Rom 4:7-8). James did the same (James 1:12,25). Peter also used the word in this way (1 Pet 4:14; 4:14). But it is also used to denote a state of privilege or advantage in this world (Rom 14:22; 1 Cor 7:40).

Here the word can be understood both ways. One is from the viewpoint of Paul – being blessed by God. The other is as it is perceived by Agrippa – fortunate or privileged. I understand that Paul used the word so it could be perceived both ways. So far as Agrippa was concerned, Paul considered it a privilege to speak before him. So far as his own heart was concerned, he knew that this was a door opened by the Lord, and was thus a blessing. The manner in which he lived made him adequate.

BECAUSE I SHALL ANSWER FOR MYSELF

“ . . . because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews.” Other versions read, “make my defense against the accusations of the Jews,” NIV “to give my answer before you today to all these things which the Jews say against me,” BBE and “am defending myself against all the charges made against me by Jews.” CJB

In his defense, Paul will conduct himself in strict keeping with the nature of spiritual life. He will not employ the wisdom of this world, nor will he appeal to it for certification of his innocence. On another occasion, when he was being criticized and questioned by some within the Corinthian church, he said he did not even dare to proceed in such a manner. “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise” (2 Cor 10:12).

He will not compare himself with others who spend their time boasting and commending themselves. He will not join the league of those who compare themselves with one another, imagining that such a means of measurement is not flawed to the core. This devastates the ideas of heroes and those who model life after the flesh. All of that is worldly wisdom, and Paul will not descend into the plains of Ono (Neh 6:2) to indulge in such vanity. He will make no attempt to outboast those who are noted for commending themselves, who even “call their own lands after their own names” (Psa 49:11).

Neither will Paul speak of things that lie outside the circumference of the ministry to which he had been appointed. As he said elsewhere, “But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us” (2 Cor 10:13). That is, he will not glory in something that lies outside of his own ministry and commission.

A KINGDOM APPROACH

Paul’s approach is that of the Kingdom of God, which is in “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17). This kind of mind-set is rarely seen in our time. This is because of the fierce competition that exists between sectarian bodies and purported ministries. It is not unusual to find scores of “ministries” appealing to the same people for support. This is highlighted by generally confining their appeals to members and organizations belonging to their sect. This very circumstance forces them into making the kind of comparisons Paul intentionally, zealously, and consistently

avoided. Such things cannot possibly be right.

I KNOW YOU ARE AN EXPERT

“ 3 Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.”

Paul introduces his defense by appealing to Agrippa’s knowledge of the customs and questions of the Jews.

I KNOW YOU ARE EXPERT

“Especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews . . .” Other versions read, “customs and controversies,” NIV “all questions to do with the Jews and their way,” BBE “controversies and laws of the Jews,” MRD “customs and speculations that prevail among the Jews,” IE “religious customs and the beliefs that divide us,” CEV “Jewish customs and disputes,” GNB and “Jewish ways and all our family quarrels.” MESSAGE

First, note they were a people identified by their manners and controversies – the Jews. They were apparently not caught up in the issues of the day – at least that is not how they were identified. They had their own social identity, and could be easily distinguished from the rest of the people. In fact, the very city of Jerusalem was a testimony to the identity of the Jews. It was not a mere tourist attraction, but a place occupied largely by Jews, and was the place where devout Jews from around the world gathered for special occasions. It was the city where God Himself had placed His name (1 Kgs 11:36). Non-Jews who did not live there were referred to as “strangers.” The prophet Joel even spoke of a time when such people would not pass through Jerusalem any more. “So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more ” (Joel 3:17). I realize that has a strange sound, yet, its strangeness is only owing to the adoption of strange spiritual concepts.

Politically speaking, Agrippa was over Judaea, in which Jerusalem was located. Unlike some who had been over the Jews, Agrippa made it his business to know of their religion – of all their “customs and questions.” He doubtless did it for political advantage, yet Paul now makes a special note of his expertise in the Jewish way of life, and the kind of controversies they had among themselves. There was obviously a clear distinction between them and the Gentiles, “which know not God” (1 Thess 4:5), else there would have been no point to Paul’s words.

Speaking of the time when the veil will be lifted from Israel, the prophets said, “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you” (Zech 8:23). Although this was not fulfilled in Agrippa, we see a type of such inquiry in him. He made it his business to learn the ways of the people over whom he had political authority, and now Paul appeals to that knowledge

When truth is available to a person, they are responsible for diligently seeking it out. Jesus said that the Queen of the south would rise up in the day of judgment with the generation of that time, “and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here” (Matt 12:42).

When John the Baptist came on the scene, the people came to him (Matt 3:5; Mk 1:5; Lk 3:7; John 3:23).

Those living in the time when Jesus went about “doing good and healing all who were oppressed of the devil” were responsible to find Him, and hear what He had to say. Indeed, that is what people

did (Matt 4:25; 8:1; 12:15; 13:2; 15:30; 19:2; Lk 5:15; 14:26).

The Case of the Lions

Here it is in order to mention an incident recorded in Scripture that reveals something of the Divine nature. The event relates to people being in God's land that did not know God's ways. It is recorded in the seventh chapter of Second Kings. Verse twenty-five of that chapter reads, "And so it was at the beginning of their dwelling there, that they feared not the LORD: therefore the LORD sent lions among them, which slew some of them."

In the inordinate quest to get sinners into the congregations, could it be that we now have a situation where the people are no longer acquainted with the Head of the church, and what He requires of the people?

During the time of this text, the Lord had "removed Israel" out of the land of Canaan because of their sin, as He said He would do through Moses and the prophets (Lev 18:26-28; Jer 9:19; 16:17; Ezek 36:17-18). Only the tribe of Judah was left in the land (2 Kgs 17:18). Judah, however, did not keep the commandments of God either, but chose to walk in the statutes "which they made" (2 Kgs 17:19). That is when the Lord removed them from the land.

Having overcome Israel, the king of Assyria "brought men from Babylon, and from Cuthah, and from Ava, and from Hamath, and from Sepharvaim, and placed them in the cities of Samaria instead of the children of Israel: and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in the cities thereof." (2 Kgs 17:24). What he did not know is that these people were dwelling in God's own land (Isa 14:25; Jer 2:7). During the beginning of their occupancy of the land, "it came about at the beginning of their living there, that they did not fear the LORD; therefore the LORD sent lions among them which killed some of them" NASB (2 Kgs 17:25).

Although they were heathen, and quite unlike the people of our nation, the occupants of the land figured out what the trouble was. They said to the king of Assyria, "The nations which thou hast removed, and placed in the cities of Samaria, know not the manner of the God of the land: therefore He hath sent lions among them, and, behold, they slay them, because they know not the manner of the God of the land" (2 Kgs 17:26). The king commanded to find one of the priests and let him go and dwell in the land "to teach them the manner of the God of the land." Then one of the priests came and "taught them how they should fear the Lord" (2 Kgs 17:27-28).

The people of that text are to be commended for their wisdom. They did not ask the king to send someone to teach them how to trap lions, or show them some way to repel them, or even hunt them down and kill them. They did not ask for the scholars to write a book on "How to Handle an Invasion of Lions," or to have a series of workshops on the subject.

Do you see any similarities to the condition of the churches of our day? Is there not a prevailing ignorance of the Head of the church and of what He requires? And, is it not time for something to be done about it?

In the inordinate quest to get sinners into the congregations, could it be that we now have a situation where the people are no longer acquainted with the Head of the church, and what He requires of the people? The modern church has hired all manner of professed experts who are basically ignorant of the nature of God and Jesus, the accomplishments and provisions of salvation, and the objectives that are being fulfilled in Christ Jesus. So, in a manner of speaking lions have entered among the people and are devouring them. The youth are in a pitiful condition, marriages are falling apart, an astounding amount of divisions exist, immorality is pouring into the churches, and basic disinterest is sitting on the throne. Entertainment has been vaulted into prominence. Even though faith "comes by hearing," visuals are the thing of the day. The professed church is no longer a token of God's grace, but is rather

a disgrace to the name of Jesus, and a cause for blaspheming the Word of God.

All of this has happened because the sheep have not been fed, the church has not been edified and built up, and the stress has been placed on recruitment – which is never mentioned to any of the churches of Scriptural record. These include Jerusalem, Samaria, Antioch, Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, and Thessalonica. No personal letters stress recruitment, including letters to Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Gaius, and the elect lady. The stress is always placed on edification, strengthening the believers, and growing up into Christ in all things. No congregation of Scriptural record was ever chided for being too small, or commended for being large. No group of believers was ever rebuked for not bringing others into the fold, or commended for being especially productive in that area. Yet, such a marked emphasis has been placed upon enlarging the number of people that we now have a sea of spiritual infants who are unlearned and untaught. They simply do not know the manner of the kingdom.

What we sorely need is faithful men who have the mind of Christ, who know the Lord, and are acquainted with the manner of the Kingdom. Unless the people are taught of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of the Head of the body, the lions that have been loosed upon the church will continue to consume them.

I know full well that this will not set well with some people, but these things still have to be said. The wrong people are leading the thinking of the Christian masses, and their fruit confirms that to be the case. At some point, the right people have to be asked about the situation – like those of the house of Chloe inquired of Paul (1 Cor 1:11).

HEAR ME PATIENTLY

“ . . . wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.” Other versions read, “listen to me patiently,” NIV “give me a hearing to the end,” BBE and “hear me with indulgence.” MRD

The word “patiently” comes from the Greek word **makroqumw**, which has the following lexical meaning: “with longanimity.” THAYER and “therefore I beg you to listen to me without interrupting' or '... without stopping me.” LOUW-NIDA The idea here is not merely enduring a lengthy speech, but permitting the presentation to be made in its entirety. The reason the request is made is that the words of Paul will be an intricately woven tapestry of thought. It will all fit together, being perfectly cohesive. The facts that are related will not only fit together in a logical manner, they will also be perfectly harmonious with the nature of the God he serves and with the eternal purpose into which he had been called.

One of the great incongruities found in contemporary preaching and teaching is that a considerable percentage of it is out of harmony with the nature of God and Christ, the eternal purpose of God, the work and ministry of Christ, and the various ministries that have been placed in the church. Firmly resolved to bring help to people, as opposed to doing the will of God, men do not often ponder the Divine nature, what God has purposed, what Christ has and is doing, and the intention of the gifts placed within the body of Christ. Having adopted another agenda, and given priority to other things, much labor is expended just as though God did not exist, and His purpose had never been determined.

Therefore, in a quest for the glory of God, Paul pleads with Agrippa to hear him without interruption as he testifies to the nature of his calling, his life, and his ministry. It will all blend perfectly with both the nature and the purpose of God.

MY MANNER OF LIFE FROM A YOUTH

“ 4 My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews. ”

Here we are exposed to a Jewish family whose lives were shaped around the Law and identity with God. This is how the Jews were divinely cultured – to be around their own people, and learn the manner of life taught under the Law. Solemnly they were told not to learn the way of the heathen (Deut 12:29-30; 18:26-30), or intermarry with them (Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3-4; Josh 23:12-13). When they about to enter the promised land, God commanded the people, “When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations ” (Deut 18:9).

In the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, many Israelites had failed to live isolated lives from the heathen, and a point was made of it by those noble leaders (Ezra 9:1-7; Neh 13:23-28). They had lived in contradiction of the manner of the Jews – a manner that God had commanded.

The American church has not done well in teaching this kind of mindset. In fact, they have brought the ways of the world into the church. Worldly concepts of music have been brought in, together with a worldly manner of dress. There was a time, for example, when harlots were known by the way they dressed –i.e. “The attire of an harlot” (Prov 7:10). In our time, however, and even in some congregations, it would be difficult to distinguish a harlot from some of the other women in the congregation. This is not to mention importing the world’s manner of raising money, appealing to the minds of people, and many other such things.

In the thunderous words of Paul it is written, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:14-18).

One can hardly misunderstand such a strong affirmation – written to the church at Corinth. God’s reception of them as sons and daughters was conditioned on their separateness from unbelievers. There may be those who feel this is too strong, but it is nevertheless the truth, and they will be judged by it in the day of the Lord.

My point here is that Paul was reared with this kind of perspective. Those who are sloppy about their association with the ungodly – no matter who they are – are far beneath the manner in which the family of Paul lived. This is not to mention how men are to live within the conscience framework of the New Covenant. The notion that you must become friends with worldly people to win them to Christ is wholly unsupported by the Word of God. It is nothing more than the utterance of worldly wisdom which is not from above.

Paul now founds his defense on his separateness from the heathen from the time he was a child. If this was an unwise manner in which to have been raised, it would certainly not have been a good way to testify before king Agrippa. The effects of Paul’s testimony will demolish any imagination that sees the manner in which he was raised being an unwise and unproductive one.

MY MANNER OF LIFE FROM MY YOUTH

“My manner of life from my youth . . .” Other versions read, “from my youth up,” NASB “ever since I was a child,” NIV “from my early years,” BBE “from my childhood,” GENEVA “the earliest days of my youth,” GWN “from my earliest childhood,” LIVING and “since I was young.” GNB

Paul testified to this period of life before the Jews who at first had accused him. This opposition was fomented by the Jews from Asia, who probably were not acquainted with Paul’s past life. “I am

verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day” (Acts 22:3).

The word “youth” is translated from the Greek word **neotētoj** . The lexical definition of this word is “youthful age . . . boyhood,” THAYER and “an early period of life, youth.” FRIBERG This word is also used to describe Timothy: “Let no man despise thy youth ; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). If this is considered according to the flesh, it would be the final stage of youthfulness. However, even with Timothy. It was his rearing when he was a child that is accredited with making him “wise unto salvation” (2 Tim 3:15).

The rich young ruler who asked Jesus what to do to obtain eternal life was told to keep the commandments. When Jesus specified some of them, the young man replied, “All these things have I kept from my youth up” (Matt 19:20; Mk 10:20; Lk18:21). The word that describes the man being “young” at the time is a different word: **neani,skoj** . This word is said to be descriptive of a man under forty years of age. STRONG’S and is lexically defined as “a young **man** .” THAYER/UBS “ a young man beyond the age of puberty, but normally before marriage - ‘young **man** .’” LOUW-NIDA

I have observed over the years the damaging effects of children not being among God’s people. While there are varying views on this subject, the people of God are to take the greatest care concerning the influences brought to bear upon their children.

However, the word used in our text accents the period of life prior to manhood – a time beyond infancy, and when the mind could be shaped by being subjected to the teaching of the Law.

Another example of someone who was raised among the people of God and according to the Law from a very young age was Samuel (1 Sam 1:22-28; 2:18).

AT JERUSALEM

“ . . . which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem . . . ” Other versions read, “was spent among my own nation and at Jerusalem,” NASB “in my own country and also in Jerusalem,” NIV “among my own people and in Jerusalem,” NRSV ““among my own nation in Jerusalem,” DARBY and “among my own nation at Jerusalem ,” GENEVA/NAB/PNT/RWB/TNT/WEB/YLT/EMTV/ LITV/MESSAGE

There is a difference in the way the various versions represent this verse. Some read, “in my own country AND also at Jerusalem.” NIV Other versions reflecting this view include the following: NASB, NRSV, RSV, ASV, BBE, CJB, CSB, ERV, ESV, GWN, MRD, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NIB, NJB, NLT, LIVING, IE, WEYMOUTH, WILLIAMS, MONTGOMERY, CEV, GNB. Those representing the text as saying the people among whom he was raised were “IN” or “AT” Jerusalem include the following: KJV, NKJV, DARBY, DOUAY, GENEVA, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, NLT, AMPLIFIED, EMTV, LITV, MESSAGE.

Earlier, when speaking to the Jews, Paul specified more of the details, saying that he was “brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel , and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers ” (Acts 22:3). The distance from Jerusalem to Tarsus was slightly more than 376 miles. That would make it highly unlikely that there were seasonal visits to Jerusalem. I take it that the text means precisely what is represented by the older versions – namely, that Paul was brought up among the Jews in Jerusalem , specially at the feet of Gamaliel.

Of course, this is a strange sound to the average professing Christian of our time, just as the raising of Samuel and Timothy. Professing Christians are sorely lacking in their perception of influences

upon their young children. Paul does not say he was raised among mere relatives, but among his people at Jerusalem. That is not the manner in which relatives according to the flesh would be described.

I have observed over the years the damaging effects of children not being among God's people. While there are varying views on this subject, the people of God are to take the greatest care concerning the influences brought to bear upon their children.

A mind shaped by the Word of God is more disciplined, versatile, and is more apt to serve the Lord. This is because the most advanced expression of thought is found in Scripture, which is God-breathed. Oh, that more professing Christian parents were keenly aware of this.

KNOW ALL THE JEWS

“. . . know all the Jews.” Other versions read, “all the Jews know,” NKJV “the Jews all know,” NIV “is known by all the Jews,” RSV “all the Jews have knowledge of,” BBE “the Jewish leaders are well aware,” and “is known by all the Jews; [they are aware].” AMPLIFIED

Just as Timothy, when young, was known among all the brethren (Acts 16:1-2), so Paul in his youth was known among all the Jews. With the help of proper parental direction, he had been given the advantage of the spiritual resources available to him – and all of the Jews knew it. That is why those who stoned Stephen laid their garments at his feet as the stoning began (Acts 7:58).

THEY KNEW, IF THEY WOULD TESTIFY

“ 5 Which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.”

The modern Christian culture is not even conducive to this kind of development. Provisions for the young are by no means found in men of the caliber of Gamaliel. There are rather game rooms, retreats of pleasure, and a plethora of activities in which the teaching of Scripture is a strange thing.

Paul is building a case that accounts for his moral and spiritual change. Yet, it did not change the fact that he was living in all good conscience before God, unless it be that this was clarified and enhanced by the newness of life. This explanation will serve to show the falsity of the charges laid against him.

THEY KNEW ME FROM THE BEGINNING

“Which knew me from the beginning . . .” Other versions read, “from the first,” NKJV “for a long time previously,” NASB “for a long time,” NIV “for quite some time,” CSB “from the outset of my life,” DARBY “heretofore,” GENEVA “from the start,” NAB “from time past,” NET “that I have always been,” LIVING “of old,” WEYMOUTH “have always known,” GNB and “who watched me grow up.” MESSAGE

When was “the beginning” to which he refers? It is the time when he was a youth, brought up in the city of Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel. He was apparently the kind of young man that stood out, noted for his seriousness, attentiveness, and devotion.

Occasionally, in our society, unusual children can be noted who devote themselves to some noble pursuit. However, it is most unusual when such a youth can be found that is devoted to religion – particularly a study of the Scriptures. Yet, this is the kind of person Paul was from a youth. In this respect he bore a marked resemblance to the Lord Himself, who was found in the Temple, talking to the doctors of the Law, at the age of twelve (Lk 12:42-47). Judaism was a framework in which such

a youthful posture was encouraged, and for which abundant provision was made. If men took due advantage of it, a Joseph could assume significant responsibilities at the age of seventeen, and an Aaron, Miriam, or Moses could be raised to lead. A young Samuel could serve in the tabernacle. A young David could be ready for exploits while still in his teens. A young Josiah could be reared for kingship. If there was no other reason for this manner of culturing, Jesus Christ was reason enough.

The modern Christian culture is not even conducive to this kind of development. Provisions for the young are by no means found in men of the caliber of Gamaliel. There are rather game rooms, retreats of pleasure, and a plethora of activities in which the teaching of Scripture is a strange thing. In other words, even though the era of the New Covenant is one of superior provision and opportunities, the Gentile church has managed to occupy a position that is much lower than that which existed under an inferior covenant. All of this has happened under the watch of a supposedly professionally trained and educated clergy. It will be a sad day, indeed, when they are called to give an account for the environment they produced, either directly or indirectly. One thing is for sure, Paul would have had no decided advantage in the nominal church of our day, or the educational institutions associated with it.

IF THEY WOULD TESTIFY

“ . . . if they would testify . . .” Other versions read, “if they were willing to testify,” NKJV “and can testify if they are willing,” NIV “if they would give witness,” BBE “if they want to,” IE and “if they would but testify to it.” WILLIAMS

The argument Paul is presenting is simply this: what he has said is glaringly obvious. He is not boasting in himself, but stating the obvious. He made it obvious elsewhere that he refused to boast in something about himself that was not true. Thus he wrote.

• **REMAINING WITHIN THE CONFINES OF HIS COMMISSION.** “But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you” (2 Cor 10:13). The Amplified Bible reads, “We, on the other hand, will not boast beyond our legitimate province and proper limit, but will keep within the limits [of our commission which] God has allotted us as our measuring line and which reaches and includes even you.”

Integral to his commission was the insight he had been granted concerning God’s eternal purpose, the nature of justification by faith, the accomplishments of Jesus, etc. He did not speak about things he did not understand, or that he had not been given to see. When Jesus made Paul a minister “to make all men see,” He first illuminated Paul. What was made clear to Paul is what he labored to “make all men see” (Eph 3:2-12).

• **NOT BOASTING IN ANOTHER MAN’S LABORS.** “Not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labors; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly” (2 Cor 10:15). The Amplified Bible reads, “We do not boast therefore, beyond our proper limit, over other men’s labors , but we have the hope and confident expectation that as your faith continues to grow, our field among you may be greatly enlarged, still within the limits of our commission.”

In this regard, Paul was not propagating a movement that someone else had started – a practice that is common in our day.

When the person speaking for God confines himself to what he has been given to see, and refuses to boast in what someone else has done, he will be used of God to strengthen the disciples and minister to those who are of a humble and contrite spirit. He will also be blessed by the Lord, who remains with those He has illuminated and sent out. This circumstance changes the way a person looks at,

what is called, a theological education. While there is certainly a place for benefitting from what others have seen, all preaching and teaching must be confined to what the speaker has personally seen and heard from the Lord.

All of this has a great deal to do with Paul's defense, for he is going to show that he was not motivated by a hatred for the Jews, or a desire to oppose their customs. He was doing what he had been commissioned by the Lord to do.

I LIVED A PHARISEE

“ . . . that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.” Other versions read, “strictest sect of our religion,” NKJV “that division of our religion which is most regular in the keeping of the law,” BBE “the most exact sect of our worship,” YLT “the strictest of Pharisees when it comes to obedience to Jewish laws and customs,” LIVING and “the Pharisees obey the laws of the Jewish faith more carefully than any other group of Jewish people.” IE

McClintok and Strong's Cyclopaedia says of the word Pharisee, “. . . properly denotes *one who is separated*, i.e., by special practices; or, as the dictionary called *Aruch* (s.v.) defines it, "one who separated himself from Levitical impurity and Levitically impure food" (comp. also Talmud, *Chagigah*, 18 b; *Sabbath*, 13 a). The derivation of it from **vriP;**, in the sense of *unfolding, explaining*, and the assertion that the followers of this sect were called *Pharisees — interpreters of the Bible*, in contradistinction to the Sadducees, who adhered to the letter of the Scriptures.”

In his former life, Paul even excelled as a Pharisee, which was the most disciplined part of the Jewish family. Many of these men gloried in appearance, appearing righteous outwardly, but inwardly full of dead men's bones (Matt 23:28). However, there is no record of Paul, when Saul of Tarsus, being such a man. His life was marked by an acute consciousness of God (Acts 23:1). He advanced “in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” (Gal 1:14). He not only excelled among the Jewish populous, but among the Pharisees themselves.

While many professed servants of God point out their immoral and iniquitous past, Paul pointed out his zealotry among the Jews, and wholehearted devotion to the Lord. Elsewhere he affirms he “was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13). The instant he was confronted with the risen Christ, he ended his campaign against him. Paul will testify powerfully to this fact.

The point here is that Paul was never known for being a profligate, hypocritical, or causing a tumult among the Jews. Charges against him that affirmed such things could not be substantiated in any phase of his life – before or after his conversion.

While many professed servants of God point out their immoral and iniquitous past, Paul pointed out his zealotry among the Jews, and wholehearted devotion to the Lord.

Paul's defense will rest upon the powerful witness of moral and spiritual change – even when the past involved a zealotry for God that is marked by ignorance. We have among us some who earnestly sought to please God while entertaining a misapprehension of the nature of God and of His requirements for men. Such people are not at all common in our time, but methinks they are duly noted in the heavenly realms.

A word ought to be said concerning the hypocrisy of a claim of being a professing Christian, yet remaining basically unchanged. When a person is more like the world than Jesus, it is questionable that they have been converted. Nothing in Scripture suggests a continuance in worldly ways follows being born again, or becoming a new creation. Someone who is “weak in the faith” is not noted for

immorality and ungodliness. That condition is one that describes a deficiency in understanding, as expounded in the fourteenth chapter of Romans (Rom 14:1-15; 1 Cor 8:1-7).

When it comes to immorality, or the outward overflow of iniquity, we are told, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them” (Eph 5:3-7). There is to be a total intolerance of such expressions in the household of faith (1 Cor 5:9-12). This is not a sign of weakness in the faith, but of the dominance of the flesh, which was crucified when we were baptized into Christ (Rom 6:6; Gal 5:24).

Had Paul formerly been an immoral person who indulged the sins of the flesh, his testimony would have been less strong. However, as all Jews knew, he was noted for his devotion to the Lord and commitment to Jewish manners. It is not likely that a man such as this would be noted for agitating and denigrating the Jews “throughout the world,” as the Jews had charged (Acts 24:5). Not only were their charges unfounded, they contradicted the life and conduct of Paul from the time of his youth.

How we raise our children can be a distinct advantage or disadvantage to them when they come of age.

THE HOPE OF THE PROMISE

“ 6 And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers.”

Paul will now show that he has actually embraced what was promised by God to the Jewish fathers – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Rather than being a renegade Jew who had abandoned Jewish manners, he was really a genuine Jew who had taken the promise of God seriously and embraced what was made known of it to him. By inference, this means that the Jews who were accusing him were actually the renegades, who had refused to believe the promises, even though Paul himself had declared the fulfillment of them to the very crowd that was accusing him.

THE HOPE OF THE PROMISE

“And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise . . .” Other versions read, “because of my hope in what God has promised our fathers,” NIV “on account of my hope in the promise made by God to our ancestors,” NRSV and “on the ground] of the hope of that promise made to our forefathers by God.” AMPLIFIED

Paul’s life was ordered by his embrace of the promises God made to the fathers. It was the interpretation of that circumstance that dictated the charges raised by the Jews. What they had seen in Paul was his zeal for the promise. What they thought, is that it was opposition to the Jews.

Some, because of their own ignorance, view this as a total misrepresentation of the charges leveled against Paul. However, this is in perfect keeping with the circumstances. Paul’s life was ordered by his embrace of the promises God made to the fathers. It was the interpretation of that circumstance that dictated the charges raised by the Jews. What they had seen in Paul was his zeal for the promise. What they thought, is that it was opposition to the Jews.

The phrase “the hope of the promise” is an interesting one. It not only speaks of believing “the promise,” but of shaping one’s life around it, so that the whole of life is lived in expectation of what God promised. From Adam to Abraham (approximately 1900 years), the godly lived in anticipation

of the fulfillment of a single promise: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen 3:15). Ironically, this word was delivered to the devil, with the whole human race being present. Technically, Adam and Eve overheard this word, but they apparently took hold of it, and passed it along to succeeding generations, keeping hope alive.

Technically, “hope” is produced by believing the promise of God. In our text, it is specifically, “the promise” pertaining to the coming Seed of Abraham, and to His administration of the New Covenant. Thus Peter declared, “Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days” (Acts 3:24). Paul also preached this powerfully in the synagogue of Antioch of Pisidia: “And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David” (Acts 13:34).

There are other references to this promise.

- “And hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David; as He spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began” (Luke 1:69-70).
- “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers” (Rom 15:8).
- “And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise : but God gave it to Abraham by promise ” (Gal 3:17-18).

The prophets were given to see various aspects of the promise made to the fathers, and they declared it, even though its fulness was not known to them (1 Pet 1:11-12). Here is a brief sampling of their words.

- **MOSES – A Prophet.** “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken” (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22-23).
- **DAVID – A King.** “Yet have I set My king upon My holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto Me, Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee” (Psa 2:6-7; Matt 3:17; Heb 1:5).
- **ISAIAH – A Glorious Branch.** “In that day shall the Branch of the LORD be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth shall be excellent and comely for them that are escaped of Israel” (Isa 4:2; 11:1; Jer 33:5; Zech 3:8; 6:12; John 1:14).

The Government will be Upon His Shoulder. “For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon His shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this” (Isa 9:6-7).

- **JEREMIAH – A Means to Righteousness.** “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In His days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is His name whereby He shall be called, THE LORD OUR

RIGHTEOUSNESS” (Jer 23:5-6; Rom 3:22; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Phil 3:9).

• **EZEKIEL – A Shepherd.** “And I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, even My servant David; He shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd” (Ezek 34:23; John 10:11; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25; 5:4).

• **DANIEL – One with Dominion.** “I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought Him near before him. And there was given Him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him: His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed” (Dan 7:13-14; Matt 28:18; 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:20-22; Phil 2:9-11; 1 Pet 3:22).

• **MALACHI – Healing and Restoration.** “But unto you that fear My name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in His wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall” (Mal 4:2; John 1:4,8; 8:12; Acts 13:47; 26:18; 1 John 2:8).

When promises such as these are believed, they generate a hope that does not make ashamed.

The promise and the promises were all summarized in a person: The Lord Jesus Christ. Commensurate with His exaltation the “day of salvation” began, the New Covenant was inaugurated, and a state of imputed, yet genuine, righteousness was found in those who were joined to Him. The promise would culminate in the resurrection from the dead, when the last remnants of Adam, the body, would be exchanged for an immortal body – “a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1).

MADE OF GOD UNTO OUR FATHERS

“ . . . made of God unto our fathers.” Other versions read, “what God has promised our fathers,” NIV ‘made by God to our ancestors,’ NRSV “made by God to our forefathers,” WEYMOUTH and “that promise Made to our forefathers by God.” AMPLIFIED

The words translated “the fathers” (**tou.j pate,raj**) has the following lexical meaning: “literally, nourisher, protector, upholder . . . properly, equivalent to generator or male ancestor . . . the founder of a race or tribe, progenitor of a people, forefather so Abraham is called” THAYER “originator.” LEH

When it comes to the matter of God revealing His purpose, He does not reveal it directly to everyone. That is why our text says that Paul and others lived in the hope of the promise – a promise that was given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They held on to that ancient promise, and to the periodic development of it by the prophets.

As used here, there are several things inherent in the word “fathers” (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), of whom, Abraham was the progenitor, or the one from whom the Jewish race came.

• **Progenitor.** Abraham is the one from whom the race came. Isaac and Jacob were the ones through whom the race was narrowed. This was a miraculous beginning, for Abraham “was as good as dead” when the promise was given to him (Heb 11:12). Yet, his faith was strong, and he “being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah’s womb: he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20).

• **Nourisher.** Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the nourishers of the race, because the root-promise was given directly to them (Ex 3:6; 4:5; Matt 22:32; Acts 3:13). This circumstance is what accounts for “the root and fatness” of the natural olive tree of Israel (Rom 11:17).

• **Protector.** It was the remembrance of Abraham that kept these people from being destroyed, even though were a wicked and gainsaying people. There were times when Israel's protection was traced to God remembering "his covenant with Abraham" (Ex 2:24; 32:13; Psa 105:42; Deut 9:5,27; Mic 7:20).

• **Upholder.** The promise of the Jews in the working of the Lord was largely owing to Abraham. He is the one with whom the covenant was originally made. It was the covenant made with Abraham that was renewed to Isaac and Jacob (Lev 26:42; 2 Kgs 13:23).

When it comes to the matter of God revealing His purpose, He does not reveal it directly to everyone. That is why our text says that Paul and others lived in the hope of the promise – a promise that was given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They held on to that ancient promise, and to the periodic development of it by the prophets.

In this defense, Paul gives no recognition to Jews who were not holding to the promise, and living in the hope of its fulfillment. He knew very well that "they are not all Israel, which are of Israel" (Rom 9:6). While this may appear to be a small point, it does reveal the manner of the Kingdom. This is also true of all of his writings. He never gives official recognition to those who have no evidences of belonging to Christ. His letters, however, are written so that such people must evaluate themselves, or examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. He does not go out of his way to condemn those whose lives are questionable. He does, however, speak and write in such a manner that will never leave the indolent and disobedient thinking they are approved.

INSTANTLY SERVING GOD DAY AND NIGHT

"7a Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come."

OUR TWELVE TRIBES

"Unto which promise our twelve tribes . . ." Other versions read, "to this promise our twelve tribes," NKJV "our whole twelve tribes," DARBY "the twelve tribes of Israel," NLT/LIVING/GNB/MESSAGE and "all the twelve tribes." IE The literal translation of this clause reads, "into which the two-ten tribes of us." INTERLINEAR

The idea here is that all of the true Israelites with the twelve tribes have been focused upon the fulfillment of the promise of reference. This equates with the expression, "all the tribes of the children of Israel" (Rev 7:4), "all Israel" (Rom 11:26), and "the whole house of Israel" (Ezek 37:11). The commitment of God is this, "And so all Israel shall be saved : as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob : for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins" (Rom 11:26-27). Jeremiah related this to the New Covenant. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. Thus saith the LORD, which giveth the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of the moon and of the stars for a light by night, which divideth the sea when the waves thereof roar; The LORD of hosts is his name: If those ordinances depart from before me, saith the LORD, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before me for ever. Thus saith the LORD; If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the

LORD ” (Jer 31:31-37).

This is a high view, and Paul is speaking in strict accord with the revelation of God concerning Israel. In the Revelation, Jesus revealed to John that the earth would not be destroyed until the servants of God were sealed. He then heard a voice saying that 144,000 were sealed as God intended. This vast number was specifically identified as “all the tribes of the children of Israel.” Showing the completeness of the work, each tribe is said to have had 12,000 who were sealed. This is a picture of all Israel being saved – that is, the true Israel that was within the fleshly Israel. This is not a prophecy of the Gentiles, but of the natural olive tree into which they have been grafted.

INSTANTLY SERVING GOD DAY AND NIGHT

“ . . . instantly serving God day and night . . . ” Other versions read, “earnestly serving,” NKJV “they earnestly serve God,” NASB “Earnestly worship,” NRSV “working and waiting,” BBE “serving incessantly,” DARBY “worship with intense devotion,” GWN “with earnest prayers,” MRD “fervently worship,” NAB “constant in worship,” NJB “zealously worship,” NLT “assiduously serving,” WEB “intently night and day serving, YLT “strive night and day,” LIVING “intense devotedness,” WEYMOUTH and “fervently worship [without ceasing] night and day.” AMPLIFIED

Every professing Jew was not living in such a manner – but the real Jews were – everyone who was “a Jew inwardly” (Rom 2:28).

HOPE TO COME

“ . . . hope to come.” This was the hope related to the coming Messiah through whom the Abrahamic promise of blessing would be realized.

Conscientious Jews were alert, and watching for the fulfillment of the promise. When Jesus was born, aged Anna was present when Simeon blessed Mary, Joseph, and the Holy Child. Immediately she left the Temple and “spoke of Him that looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Lk 2:38). When John the Baptist commenced to prepare the way of the Lord, “the people were in expectation” (Lk 3:15). After Philip had heard Jesus he found Nathanael, “and saith unto him, We have found Him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph” (John 1:45). When the woman of Samaria had conversed with Jesus at the well of Jacob she said, “is not this the Christ?” (John 4:29). When other Samaritans had heard Jesus they said, “we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world” (John 4:42).

Now Paul is identifying himself with those who believed the promise and were waiting for its fulfillment. He testifies of the ideal, not the faltering. He does not recognize those who are not serving God in this hope as legitimate Jews, even though their lineage went back to Abraham.

However, there are certain evidences that a person is a real follower of Christ, and has really been accepted by God. It is not fashionable to review such matters, and some even think it is intrusive to do so, charging the person who looks for such evidences as being judgmental.

This is now a foreign way of thinking. Today, people assume others are believers, living in hope, without any substantial evidence of such a condition. In fact few people look for any kind of confirmed evidence of people being in Christ. It is enough that they are identified with a particular sect.

However, there are certain evidences that a person is a real follower of Christ, and has really been accepted by God. It is not fashionable to review such matters, and some even think it is intrusive to do so, charging the person who looks for such evidences as being judgmental. However, through Moses, the Prophets, the Lord Jesus, and the Apostles, the Lord has addressed this matter, and it is our business to be knowledgeable of what has been said, and to receive it without doubting or

equivocation.

MARKS OF THOSE WHO ARE IN CHRIST JESUS

None of these are declared to be things those in Christ should be. They are not a statement of goals, but of reality. These are distinguishing traits that have resulted from the “operation,” or working, of the Lord.

- They have a new heart (Ezek 36:26).
- They have a new spirit (Ezek 36:26).
- Their stony heart has been removed (Ezek 36:26).
- Their hearts have been circumcised (Deut 30:6; Phil 3:3; Col 2:11).
- They are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13-14).
- They have forsaken all to follow Christ (Lk 14:33).
- They are taught by God (John 6:45; Eph 4:20-21).
- They have been chosen out of the world, therefore the world hates them (John 15:19; 17:14,16).
- They are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit (Rom 8:9).
- They are washed, sanctified, and justified (1 Cor 6:11).
- They are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15).
- They are the children of God by faith (Gal 3:26).
- They have been baptized into Christ and put on Christ (Gal 3:27).
- God has sent the Holy Spirit into their hearts because they are sons (Gal 4:6).
- They have crucified the flesh (Gal 5:24).
- They have been raised up and made to sit together with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6).
- They are created for good works (Eph 2:10).
- They worship God in the Spirit (Phil 3:3).
- They rejoice in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:3).
- They have no confidence in the flesh (Phil 3:3).
- They are complete in Christ (Col 2:10).
- They are dead, and their lives are hid with Christ in God (Col 3:3).
- They have been made partakers of Christ (Heb 3:14).
- They have been enlightened (Heb 6:4).
- They have tasted of the heavenly gift (Heb 6:4).
- They have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit (Heb 6:4).
- They have tasted of the good word of God (Heb 6:5).
- They have tasted of the powers of the world to come (Heb 6:5).
- God’s laws have been put into their minds (Heb 8:10).
- God’s laws have been written upon their hearts (Heb 8:10).

- They know the Lord (Heb 8:11).
- They have been illuminated (Heb 10:32).
- They are “not of them that draw back unto perdition” (Heb 10:39).
- They are come “unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24).
- They have been born again (1 Pet 1:23).
- They are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a peculiar people (1 Pet 2:9).
- They are strangers and pilgrims in the world (1 Pet 2:11).
- They have “escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet 1:4).
- Being saved by hope (Rom 8:25), they are purifying themselves even as Jesus is pure (1 John 3:1-3).
- They do not remain in sin, and cannot go on sinning (1 John 3:9).

Is it possible to be a child of God who is in Christ Jesus, or accepted by God, yet any of these be missing? Is there a single one of these benefits that make the saints vulnerable, or contribute to a slothful manner of life? Do any of them encourage sin, excuse sin, and leave one susceptible to the devil?

- They have passed from death unto life (1 John 4:14; John 5:24).
- They love others who are begotten of God (1 John 5:1).
- They overcome the world (1 John 5:4).
- They do not live in sin, they keep themselves from sin, and the wicked one does not touch them (1 John 5:18).

Is it possible to be a child of God who is in Christ Jesus, or accepted by God, yet any of these be missing? Is there a single one of these benefits that make the saints vulnerable, or contribute to a slothful manner of life? Do any of them encourage sin, excuse sin, and leave one susceptible to the devil? Is it remotely possibly that such marvelous things could be possessed, yet emit no evidence of their presence? It is true that there is growth in these matters. However, that does not erase the fact of their presence.

If they are true – and that is unquestionably the case – they will assist in fulfilling the Divine requirement: “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?” (2 Cor 13:5). If they are too difficult to receive, then do whatever is necessary for them to be received without doubting or equivocation.

A people without an identity is not a people. Yet, the modern church is increasingly being noted for a near-total lack of evidence of being indwelt by Deity and possessing a motivating hope.

ACCUSED FOR THE HOPE

“7b For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.” Other versions read, “and for this hope,” NASB “because of this hope,” NIV “concerning this hope,” ASV “in connection with this hope,” BBE and “and for that hope.” AMPLIFIED

As I have already pointed out, some commentators are persuaded that Paul misrepresented his case in these words. But they are wrong – seriously wrong. Paul is not looking at his arrest from the Jews point of view. Rather, he is considering the actions to which they have objected as springing from his hope. He is viewing the events through the lense of spirituality reality.

Hope – the kind of hope that is based upon the revelation of Divine intention in the Scriptures – has a vivifying impact upon the soul. John says that it compels the one possessing it to “purify himself even as He is pure” (1 John 3:3). Elsewhere, Paul says that we are “saved by hope” (Rom 8:24). That is, the life of the saved is shaped by what they are anticipating at the coming of the Lord. At that time they will be loosed from the bondage of corruption – this vile body (Phil 3:20-21). Spiritual haziness and knowing in part will be a thing of the past (1 Cor 3:12). All of the effects of sin will be removed, including tears, pain, sorrow, death, crying, the curse, and night (Rev 21:4; 22:3-4).

Such things as being confessed by Jesus before God and the holy angels (Lk 12:8; Rev 3:5), being praised by God (1 Cor 4:5), and Jesus coming forth to serve us (Lk 12:37) compel us to live differently. Those who live in hope ponder reigning with Christ (2 Tim 2:12; Rev 22:5), judging the world and angels (1 Cor 6:2-3), and receiving the kingdom (Dan 7:18,22,27; Lk 12:32). When they look at the difficulties and vicissitudes of this life, they conclude that they “are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom 8:18). Their minds have been so impacted that they think of “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil 4:8). Their affection is set on things above, and not on things on the earth (Col 3:1-2), and they are looking “for a city which hath foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God” (Heb 11:10). They are willing to forfeit all competing interests to “win Christ,” and be “found in Him” not having a righteousness of their own (Phil 3:7-9). Because of their hope they “abstain from fleshly lusts that war against the soul” (1 Pet 2:11). When they consider life, they conclude that it is better to be “absent from the body and present with the Lord” (2 Cor 5:8).

Peter reminds us that God “according to His abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3). Paul tells us that the same grace that saves us teaches us to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts, living “soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world,” all the while “looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:11-13). Further “having no hope” is a mark of those who are “without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). There simply is no excuse for a failure to proclaim this hope, or for it to be absent within the professing Christian.

PAUL’S HOPE MADE HIM

WHAT HE WAS

Paul was not a political reactionist, nor was he a religious sectarian. He did not bring a rabble-raising message, nor had his attention been captured by political or social circumstances. Whether it was coming to Jerusalem, going into the Temple, or attending the synagogues – it was his hope that compelled him to do as he did.

He would not have lived or spoken as he did were it not for the hope he possessed. That is precisely why he said his hope was the cause for which the Jews had falsely accused him.

THE MODERN ABSENCE OF A DOMINATING HOPE

The absence of this dominating hope within nominal Christendom is a betrayal of its alienation from God. Preaching about the coming of the Lord and the consequent glory to be enjoyed by the elect is nearly a thing of the past. Songs of heaven are disappearing from the song books – at least

where Christians dare to use hymn books, refusing to cave in to the demands of spiritual juveniles – and that is the most polite way of referring to them.

The modern church has shifted its focus from the body to the individual, and from conformity to the image of God to the resolution of personal problems. The earthly family has now upstaged the family of God, and husbands and wives are now given more attention than Christ and His betrothed bride. The world is stressed more than the world to come, and involvement in politics has been deemed more important than involvement in the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Is all of this simply an innocent departure from the most noble. Is it something the church has been commissioned to do? Indeed not! This is evidence that the masses of professing Christendom had removed themselves from the one who called them into the grace of Christ, just as surely as the Galatians (Gal 1:6). God is known less now than He was at the commencement of the church. The incident involving Ananias and Sapphira appears to be totally acceptable when compared with what the conditions that are being made known in the modern church. In today's society they probably would have been counseled about stewardship. However, their offense would certainly not have been viewed as a critical one.

This is the era of religious talk and powerless form. The body of Christ is no longer viewed as the vehicle through whom Christ is working. Now it is a body of people that contribute to career development and the amassment of riches.

And why is this so? It is because of the absence of hope – sanctifying hope! It may be affirmed in creedal statements. However, if a person is not purifying himself, it is because he is lacking hope. If he is steadfast, it is because he has the anchor of hope, firmly fixed in the heavenly realm. We are, indeed, saved by hope.

WHAT IS SO INCREDIBLE ABOUT IT?

“ 8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?”

The candor of Paul is refreshing. He is speaking with a king and before a number of political and military dignitaries. Yet, he reasons with them without any apparent restraint. This is because stands up under any kind of assault, and it challenges the greatest of intellects. There is no cause for any believer to fear affirming the truth before those who are skeptical of it.

WHY SHOULD IT BE THOUGHT A THING INCREDIBLE?

“Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you . . .” Other versions read, “incredible among you?” NASB “why should any of you consider it incredible?” NIV “thought incredible by any of you?” NRSV “why is it judged incredible with you?” ASV “Why, in your opinion, is it outside belief?” BBE “Why do you people consider it incredible,” CJB “Why do all of you refuse to believe?” GWN “Why is it thought unbelievable among you,” NAB “But is it a crime to believe in the resurrection of the dead? Does it seem incredible to you” LIVING “Why do you think it is impossible,” IE “Why is it deemed with all of you a thing past belief,” WEYMOUTH “Why should any of you doubt,” CEV and “I can't see why it's a criminal offense to believe.” MESSAGE

The word “incredible” is translated from the Greek word **apiston** which is the negative of faith: not faith, or unbelievable. It's lexical meaning is, “1– not to be trusted, perfidious; 2– incredible; 3– incredulous,” THAYER and “impossible to be true . . . untrustworthy, substantially unreliable.” FRIBERG Something that is “incredible” is perceived as outside the boundary of human reasoning. That is why no significant thought is given to the matter thought to be so classified. English synonyms are, “incogitable, inconceivable, insupposable, unbelievable, unimaginable, unthinkable.”

Related words are specified as “absurd, outlandish, preposterous, ridiculous; impossible, untenable.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

Worldly wisdom cannot extend one millimeter beyond the creation. The domain from which it gathers temporal. The sole

Perhaps of the resurrection of the dead was actually preached as it should be, we would find that many people claiming to be Christian think it is an incredible thing. After all, there were some in Corinth who said “there is no resurrection of the dead”

means of acquiring valid information is the human senses. Confined to such a realm, and to senses related exclusively with the body, the man of this world considers anything outside of that domain to be “incredible,” or “unbelievable.” Worldly wisdom does not think within the context of Almighty God. It has no access to faith, which enables the one possessing it to believe God without any equivocation whatsoever.

Unbelief is to be challenged, for it is totally unreasonable. This is particularly true because of how God views worldly wisdom – as “foolishness.” Thus it is written, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain” (1 Cor 3:19-20). Rather than attempting to establish the wisdom of God, Paul simply asks why anyone would think what God has affirmed is incredible.

THAT GOD SHOULD RAISE THE DEAD

“... that God should raise the dead?” Other versions read, “that God raises the dead,” NKJV “if God does raise the dead,” NASB “for God to make the dead come to life again?” BBE and “that God can bring dead people back to life?” GENEVA

This is the that offended the Athenian philosophers, causing some of them to mock what Paul preached (Acts 17:18,21). Throughout the book of Acts, much is said about the resurrection of the dead being preached, with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead being pivotal (Acts 2:31; 3:15; 4:2,33; 17:18,32). The apostles also make a point of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 6:14; 15:12-57; 2 Cor 4:14; Phil 3:10-11,21; 1 Thess 4:14-16; 2 Tim 2:18; Heb 6:2).

One cannot help but wonder why so very little is being said these days about the resurrection of the dead. Perhaps it is because it seems to incredible to be the subject of preaching. I have noticed over the years that as soon as the theological spotlight is turned to things beyond this world, many preachers and teachers become noticeably uncomfortable. They do not appear able to traffic in the realms of the unseen, or deal with matters that follow death and the passing of the present heavens and the earth.

I remember several years ago when I attended a local Preaching and Teaching. Various topics had been assigned to each speaker concerning the fundamentals of the faith. One speaker had been assigned the subject of the resurrection of the dead. When this up-and-coming preacher began to speak, he stated that if he had a choice in the matter, he would have chosen a subject that was more relevant. In a classic error of judgment, the allowed the speaker to continue.

Actually, that young man had given utterance to the opinion of many better known preachers who rarely, if ever, speak on the subject of the resurrection of the dead. The Master Teacher, Jesus Christ the Lord, addressed this subject several times (Matt 22:23-32; 24:31; 25:1-13; Mk 12:18-27; Lk 14:14; 20:27-38; John 5:21,25,28-28; 6:49,40,44,54; 11:23-25; 14:19).

If God is going to raise the dead, that fact alters how life is viewed.

- It means men will give an account for how they lived.
- It means God will be vindicated in everything He has said.
- It means that the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished.
- It means that death does not end it all.
- It implies that it is on the part of wisdom to prepare for the resurrection. Or, as Paul put it, to “attain to the resurrection of the dead” (Phil 3:9).

Perhaps of the resurrection of the dead was actually preached as it should be, we would find that many people claiming to be Christian think it is an incredible thing. After all, there were some in Corinth who said “there is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:12).

CONSCIENTIOUS IN OPPOSITION

“ 9 I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”

I THOUGHT WITH MYSELF

“I verily thought with myself . . .” Other versions read, “I myself thought,” NKJV “I thought to myself,” NASB “I too was convinced,” NIV “I myself was convinced,” NRSV “truly, I was of the opinion,” BBE “I used to think,” CJB “I myself supposed,” CSB “I indeed did formerly think,” DOUAY “at first, resolved in my own mind,” MRD and “I myself indeed was [once] persuaded.”
AMPLIFIED

Paul is confessing to a former way of thinking. With him, this was not merely a matter of hatred, or objecting to a message that was contrary to what he had embraced. This was a matter of conscience – conscience toward God. Individuals who live for themselves alone will not be able to comprehend what motivated Paul. Even though his view was wrong, he held it as a proper view before God Almighty. This confirms the truth of what he had formerly confessed to the Jews who sought to kill him: “Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day” (Acts 23:1).

The extreme rarity of this kind of mind-set in our time makes it most difficult for some to receive what Paul is saying. He was living purposefully for the Lord, and considered it his duty before the Lord to “do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” NIV He was wrong, but he was not hypocritical. His conclusions were incorrect, but they were not the result of a devotion to sectarianism.

THAT I OUGHT TO DO MANY THINGS

“ . . . that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.” Other versions read, “ had to do many things hostile,” NASB “ ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth,” NIV “ it was right for me to do a number of things against the name of Jesus of Nazareth,” BBE “ it was my duty to do all I could to combat,” CJB and “ I must do many things against.” IE

Saul of Tarsus thought he was doing what was right. He knew what the Law had said about false prophets, and felt that Jesus of Nazareth was in that category. Concerning false prophets, Moses wrote: “But the prophet, which shall presume to speak a word in my name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or that shall speak in the name of other gods, even that prophet shall die ” (Deut 18:20).

Concerning those who followed other gods, the Law was clear. “If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own

soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people ” (Deut 13:9). In his former mind-set, Paul thought he was carrying out those Divine mandates in arresting those who were followers of Jesus. This accounts for the words that follow. He had never set out to be a trouble maker, but one who served God.

The historical account of his activity confirms his zeal in this matter. “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word” (Acts 8:3-4). And again, “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest” (Acts 9:1).

I SHUT THE SAINTS IN PRISON

“ 10a Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests.”

With great power Paul is bearing witness to a former way of thinking – one that he had long ago abandoned, having seen the truth as it is in Christ Jesus.

I DID IT IN JERUSALEM

“Which thing I also did in Jerusalem . . .” Other versions read, “this is just what I did in Jerusalem,” NASB “and in Jerusalem I did so,” CJB “this I actually did in Jerusalem,” CSB and “that was how I acted in Jerusalem.” WEYMOUTH

Paul not only thought he should do whatever he could against the name of Jesus of Nazareth, he conducted his life in strict harmony with his conviction. He did this “even in Jerusalem,” where a mighty move of God had taken place, and where he was well known, having been brought up there.

“ . . . and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests.” Other versions read, “many of God’s people,” CJB “many Christians,” GWN “the holy ones,” NAB “God’s holy people,” NJB “many believers,” NLT and “many of the [faithful] saints (holy ones).” AMPLIFIED

It appears that Paul was designated by the Jewish officials as the leader of a persecution against the saints in Jerusalem. Later he will say that he expanded the persecution by obtaining letters of approval to go into other regions.

Here again, the sloppiness of some of the versions is made known: i.e. “Christians,” GWN and “believers.” NLT The words translated “the saints” are *tw/n a`gi,wn* , which means, “pure, sinless, upright, holy . . . set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively his . . . saints,” THAYER “as human beings belonging to God; saints, God’s people,” FRIBERG “pertaining to being holy in the sense of superior moral qualities and possessing certain essentially divine qualities in contrast with what is human - 'holy, pure, divine,' ” LOUW-NIDA and “set apart for God . . . holy . . . pure upright.” GINGRICH There is no way the Greek words used here can be properly translated “Christians” or “believers.” There are specific Greek words for these terms, and they are not even remotely connected with the word used here.

Observe how Paul refers to the people he once opposed: “saints,” or “holy ones.” This is certainly

not how Paul thought of them when he persecuted these people – even though that is precisely what they were. He now saw them as they really were – so closely knit to the Jesus, whom he formerly thought he should oppose. That very Jesus said of Saul’s persecution of them, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou ME ?” (Acts 9:4). Paul now has “the mind of Christ” concerning His people, and therefore refers to them as they really are.

THE SAINTS IMPRISONED BY AUTHORITY FROM THE CHIEF PRIESTS

Other versions read, “did I lock up . . . in prison,” NASB “put many . . . in prison,” NIV and “threw many . . . in prison.” CJB

This was done in Jerusalem by authority of the chief priests. The record of this persecution does not detail the matter of imprisonment, although it is inferred. It is written, he had “authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name” (Acts 9:14).

It appears that Paul was designated by the Jewish officials as the leader of a persecution against the saints in Jerusalem. Later he will say that he expanded the persecution by obtaining letters of approval to go into other regions that were in other countries, extending the persecution..

I GAVE MY VOICE AGAINST THEM

“ 10b . . . and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them.” Other versions read, “and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them,” NKJV “and when they were put to death, I gave my decision against them,” BBE “and when they were put to death, I brought the sentence,” DOUAY “I voted to have them killed every time a vote was taken,” GWN and “when they were put to death by them, I took part with those that condemned them.” MRD

This describes Paul activity in Jerusalem. The record in Acts reads, “As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Pointing out that this went on for an extended period in Jerusalem Luke reports, “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord . . .” (Acts 9:1).

Speaking of his past, Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9). He wrote to the Galatians, “I persecuted the church of God and wasted it” (Gal 1:13). To the Philippians he wrote of his past life, “concerning zeal, persecuting the church” (Phil 3:6). He testified to Timothy, “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

Perhaps you have heard some refer to Paul as a former murderer. It is interesting to note that he is never so identified in Scripture, nor does Paul confess to ever having killed a Christian. Such a thing may be possible, but a point is never made of Paul being such a man.

I PUNISHED THEM, COMPELLED THEM TO BLASPHEME, AND PERSECUTED THEM

“ 11 And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.”

Paul now provides some details that are not provided by Luke in earlier accounts. The extent of his persecution is a testimony to how zealous he was, even though it was wrongly directed.

I PUNISHED THEM OFT IN EVERY SYNAGOGUE

“And I punished them oft in every synagogue . . .” Other versions read, “I punished them often in all the synagogues,” NASB and “many a time I went from one synagogue to another to have them

punished.” NIV

It is estimated by Josephus that there were fifty-eight synagogues in old Jerusalem. WIKIPEDIA It is not certain how many synagogues existed in Jerusalem during the time of Saul’s persecution, but it appears as though there were many.

Those who oppose believers gathering in special buildings often say the early church met in the homes of individuals. That this did occur cannot be denied (Acts 2:46; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phile 1:2). Those references, however, hardly justify the development of a teaching that confines the gathering of the people of God to a house. Believers are also said to have gathered in the Temple (Luke 24:53; Acts 2:46; 5:42). In this text we find they were also known to meet in the synagogues.

Saul was relentless in his opposition of the followers of Christ. He pursued them “in every synagogue,” where they were apparently prone to meet. Many of them no doubt bore witness to their faith, else I do not know how Saul would have been able to identify them. The synagogue did provide an environment in which the people could speak and testify to what they had seen.

I COMPELLED THEM TO BLASPHEME

“ . . . and compelled them to blaspheme . . .” Other versions read, “tried to force them to blaspheme,” NASB “tried to make them blaspheme,” NRSV “I strove to make them blaspheme,” ASV “forcing them to say things against God,” BBE “forced them to curse the name of Jesus,” GWN “I punished them in an attempt to force them to blaspheme,” NAB and “I was constraining them to speak evil” YLT

The word “compelled” means “to constrain by force and threats.” STRONG’S It appears that here the emphasis is on the intention of Saul rather than the accomplishment of that intention. It may very well be that a few weak souls did actually deny Christ, but I doubt that it was many, if, indeed, any at all. Else there would be little point to referring to the saints being imprisoned and finally put to death.

BEING EXCEEDINGLY MAD AGAINST THEM

“ . . . and being exceedingly mad against them . . .” Other versions read, “exceedingly enraged,” NKJV “furiously enraged,” NASB “obsession against them,” NIV “in raging fury,” RSV “burning with passion,” BBE “wild fury,” CJB “more and more against them,” DOUAY “violently opposed,” LIVING “crazed against,” IE and “in my bitter fury.” AMPLIFIED

The words “exceedingly mad” are translated from a single Greek word (**perissw/j**). Its lexical meaning is, “over and above, more than is necessary, superadded . . . superior, extraordinary, surpassing, uncommon,” THAYER “of what exceeds usual expectation extraordinary, remarkable.” FRIBERG Like a blazing inferno that intensified in heat, so the opposition of Saul of Tarsus to “the saints” kept growing, and never waned. This was not the rage of maniac, but a

In other words, this was not simply an authorization to arrest followers of Christ, but a mandate to do so. It appears that the chief priests designated Saul to head up this mission of opposition.

calculated and intelligent opposition that looked for opportunities to harass the followers of Christ.

Saul did this out of devotion to God, thinking that this rapidly spreading movement was an encroachment upon the truth that had been vouchsafed to the Jews. He was increasingly zealous in his opposition, but it was not a good cause. By the grace of God, he was forgiven of this outrageous conduct, because he did it “ignorantly and in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13).

This confirms what ignorance and unbelief can prompt an otherwise devoted person to do.

I PERSECUTED THEME UNTO STRANGE CITIES

“ . . . I persecuted them even unto strange cities.” Other versions read, “foreign cities,” NKJV “far-away towns,” BBE “cities outside the country,” CJB “cities out of our own land,” DARBY “cities outside Jerusalem,” GWN “cities in foreign lands,” LIVING “other towns,” IE and “distant towns.” WILLIAMS

Here again, some of the versions do little more than document the ignorance of the translators. Inappropriate expressions include “cities outside Jerusalem,” “other towns,” and “distant towns.” The reference is to cities outside of “the land of the Jews” (Acts 10:39). The next verse will name one of those cities, which was in Syria.

It ought to be noted that following Saul’s conversion, and commencing with him being referred to as “Paul,” this same man was as zealous to strengthen the people of God as he once was to oppress them. He focused his energy on another cause.

I WENT TO DAMASCUS WITH AUTHORITY

“ 12 Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests.”

I WENT TO DAMASCUS WITH AUTHORITY AND COMMISSION

Other versions read, “authority and orders,” BBE “authority and power,” CJB “authority and permission,” DOUAY “authority and license,” MRD “authorization and commission,” NAB and “full powers and a commission.” NJB

The lexical meaning of the word translated “commission” is “full authority to carry out an assignment, commission, trust.” FRIBERG In other words, this was not simply an authorization to arrest followers of Christ, but a mandate to do so. It appears that the chief priests designated Saul to head up this mission of opposition.

The actual account of this commission reports that Saul was on the initiative to seek such authority. “And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1-2). Paul also referred to this when testifying before the Jews who had dragged him from the Temple, initiating this whole episode. “As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished” (Acts 22:5).

Although the circumstance is anything but ideal, we see here how the chief priests sought to protect the sanctity of synagogue gatherings. They granted the needed authority, as well as orders to carry out the mandate, to interrupt synagogue proceedings by arresting and binding those who were of “this way” – the path involved in following Jesus Christ.

Those who heard of his mission said that he “destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?” (Acts 9:21).

Early believers were alert to the dangers facing them, and communicated with one another concerning them. This is indication of how they were knit tightly together – a circumstance that is rarely found in our time. Today, the shift has been made to individuals rather than the body.

CONCLUSION

The whole point of Paul's testimony is that he has changed. He has always been devoted to God, as those who knew him could testify. However, something has altered the way he thought, and he has become another man. It is that change that accounts for what he preached and how he went about it. That is what brought an end to his opposition of "the saints." He now had embraced the Jesus whom he once opposed.

We are now living in an era in which moral and spiritual change is, for all practical purposes, ignored. Were Paul to be accepted into a modern recovery group, he would be required to say, "I am a persecutor, that is my nature, and I confess I am unable to control this tendency." He would probably become a part of a special "persecutors" group that was struggling with overcoming this wretched tendency that continued to dominate them.

If all of that sounds ridiculous, it is because it is. Paul not only ceased to be a persecutor, he became the most prolific edifier and strengthener of the body of Christ the world has ever known. He was genuinely changed, given a new heart and a new spirit. His heart had been circumcised, and he had been made a partaker of Christ. That is the point he is making in this defenses, and it is a point that was beyond all controversy. Such is the manner of the Kingdom.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #100

PAUL'S DEFENSE BEFORE AGRIPPA, #2

“ 26:13 At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me. 14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me. 19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. 21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me. 22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: 23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.” (Acts 26:13-23)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

In his defense, Paul relates the Lord's appearance to him on the road to Damascus. He spells out the commission that was delivered to him, and boldly declares that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. In relating the details of his calling and commission, Paul also affirms that this is what he was found doing when the Jews "caught" him "in the Temple." He was not causing dissension, or inciting to riot those who were in the Temple. Instead, he was about serving the Lord. Notwithstanding, he tells Agrippa and those with him that he had obtained help from God, and was witnessing to both small and great, declaring only what the prophets and Moses said would come to pass. This was in stark contrast with the charges that he was speaking against the Jews and their customs. If they were sincere, they would have paid attention to, and recognized, the truth of what he was saying. Thus, the spotlight has been turned on his accusers.

THOUGHTS CONCERNING DEFENSE

The idea of giving a defense of oneself is worthy of some consideration. Of old time Tola defended Israel (Judges 10:1). God's people were admonished to "defend the

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- **I HEARD A VOICE (26:14)**
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- **CONCLUSION**

poor" (Psa 82:3). Paul defended himself before the accusing Jews (Acts 22:1). He also said he defended and confirmed the Gospel (Phil 1:7). He even declared that he was "set for," or "appointed for," NKJV "the defense of Gospel" (Phil 1:17).

The word "defense" is translated from the Greek word **avpologi,an** (apologeeah) – which is transliterated "apology." The lexical meaning of the word is, "verbal defense, speech in defense," THAYER and "to speak on behalf of oneself or of others against accusations presumed to be false." LOUW-NIDA This is the same word employed in First Peter 3:15, where it is translated, "give an answer to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in you."

Other Uses of This Word

In his first epistle to the Corinthians Paul defended himself against those were examining him and questioning his apostleship. As in the First Peter text, here the word "answer" is used to translate the Greek word: "Mine answer to them that do examine me is this" (1 Cor 9:3). In his second letter to Timothy, Paul referred to a time when no man stood with him, and all forsook him: "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their

charge. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim 4:16-17). The time during which this occurred is not specified. I assume that it was a trial that took place in Rome. Paul was not actually on trial in any of the cases covered thus far (before the Jews, Felix, and nor Agrippa).

I understand that Peter (1 Pet 3:15) is admonishing all believers to prepare to give an account of their hope before anyone who inquires concerning its reason. It is not common to hear this admonition in our day.

Involved in Confessing Christ

Giving an answer for the hope that is in you, which is what Paul is doing in this text, is involved in confessing Christ before men. Jesus said, “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven” (Mat 10:32-33). The context of these words indicates that Jesus was speaking about the response of His disciples to opposition. “What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops . And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Mat 10:27-28).

Therefore, Paul is underscoring his association with Christ, and his commitment to the preaching of the Gospel. He is further doing so with unquestionable certainty and commitment to Jesus.

It is clear that when the followers of Jesus are maligned and opposed because of what they have declared, they are to take care not to mitigate their profession of faith. Their alliance with and allegiance to Christ is not to be hidden. They are not to react in such a manner as to reduce the significance of their embrace of, and commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, Paul is underscoring his association with Christ, and his commitment to the preaching of the Gospel. He is further doing so with unquestionable certainty and commitment to Jesus. He is not ashamed of Christ or of the Gospel. He chooses not to minimize the commission that was delivered to him by the Lord’s Christ. He does not agree to keep silence, or the refrain from preaching the Gospel.

There are many professing Christians who have ceased to declare the Gospel because it has chaffed against those to whom they made it known. Others have minimized their association with Christ, and sought to paint themselves as a friend to those who do not believe. They have winked the eye at sin, and even blasphemy, imagining that God will strengthen their toned-down witness. But it is all nothing more than a denial of Christ, and is so regarded in heaven. It is a less-than-subtle way of saying, “I know not the man.”

SOMETHING TO BE CONSIDERED

To “deny” Christ is not limited to affirming a lack of faith in Him, or the repudiation of His Person and position. There are at least two ways this denial takes place.

• **REFUSING TO SUFFER FOR HIM.** “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:12-13). Here, denial is presented as the opposite of suffering, or bearing opposition and persecution that result from being steadfast in the faith. When a person modifies their speech and conduct to avoid the reaction of the ungodly, Christ has been denied.

• **DENYING THE LORD IN OUR WORKS.** “They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate” (Titus 1:16). A professing Christian that is lacking in the “good works,” which have been ordained for us to walk in them (Eph 2:10), has, in fact, denied the Lord. Those who fail to do what the Lord has required of them are denying him. That is just the way things are.

In our text, we have Paul who has been vigorously opposed for serving the Lord, speaking His Word, and not being ashamed to acknowledge that he lives in the hope of the resurrection of the dead. In order to avoid being dragged from the Temple, and finally incarcerated in prison for two years, all he had to do was cease expressing his faith. However, he refused to do so, even though that resulted in an enormous amount of inconvenience and hardship. It also apparently took him away from his arduous travels and labors. However, he does not balk at any of this, but continues to seize every opportunity to identify himself with Jesus Christ, and declare himself to be faithful to the commission delivered to him.

In doing this, Paul distances himself from all religious pretension. He disassociates himself from lukewarmness and spiritual indolence. Both his stance and his words are a stirring rebuke to half-heartedness, casualness, and carnal convenience. In this, he sets a godly example before us – one we should imitate. Our faith will be put to the test, just as surely as Paul’s faith was tested. Be ready for the test! Be ready to stand, and to answer.

I SAW A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

“**26:13** At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.”

Remember, Paul is accounting for the change that has taken place in him – an effective moral and spiritual change. Nothing prior to Paul’s confrontation of the Christ of God had wrought a spiritual change in Paul. The Law was not designed to work such a change, but was a system of outward regimentation. The Spirit affirms that the entire service of the Tabernacle “stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation” (Heb 9:10). Remember, the Law itself did not allow the people to draw near to God. The high priest was appointed to represent the people before God, for they could not come into the precincts of the Divine presence themselves (Lev 9:7,15,18; 16:15,24; Num 16:47).

It had been about twenty-one years since the event Paul now describes had taken place. He had traveled extensively, preaching the Gospel in Syria, Crete, Pisidia, Galatia, Phrygia, Macedonia, Greece, and Asia. He had written epistles to believers in Thessalonica, Corinth, Galatia, and Rome. He had been beaten by the Jews five times, beaten three times with rods, stoned once, spent a day and night in the deep, and been in three shipwrecks. This is not to mention perils he had faced in waters, among robbers, among his own countrymen, among the heathen, in the city, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren. He had also experienced weariness, painfulness, sleeplessness, hunger and thirst, being without food, and being cold and without proper clothing (2 Cor 11:24-27).

Yet, Paul never forgot that memorable day when he was met by the Lord’s Christ, while he was on a mission to make havoc of the Lord’s church! You must never forget that conversion is of such a nature that it will always appear greater than the adversities of life. Many a believing soul has been sustained by the holy recollection of when he passed from death to life, and from being condemned to being justified freely.

I SAW A LIGHT FROM HEAVEN

“At midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun . . .” Other versions read, “brighter than the sun,” NASB “about noon,” NIV “shining more brilliantly than

the sun,” NJB and “surpassing the brightness of the sun.” WEB

Luke records the event in the following manner. “. . . suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven” (Acts 9:3). Before his Jewish accusers Paul said, “about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me” (Acts 22:6).

This light was a revelation of Divine glory – a glory that supercedes the brilliance of any created light. It was the kind of glory that burst forth from Jesus when He was transfigured, and “His face did shine as the sun” (Matt 17:1). When the sun was at its highest and brightest, a light from heaven dwarfed it in sheer magnitude. Something similar appeared at Mount Sinai – “lightnings,” or “lightning flashes” NASB (Ex 19:16; 20:18).

SHINING ROUND ABOUT ME AND THEM WHICH JOURNEYED WITH ME

“. . . shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.” Other versions read, “blazing all around me and my companions,” NIV and “flashing about me and those who were traveling with me.” AMPLIFIED

What a scene that must have been! Flashes of blinding light all around Saul and those traveling with him.

Luke’s record of the account reads, “And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven” (Acts 9:3). Paul gave this account before the Jews: “And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me” (Acts 22:6).

The light was focused upon Saul, and yet it affected those who were traveling with him as well. Here was a Divine intrusion that halted what Saul was doing, and struck fear onto the hearts of those who were with him. Let no one doubt whether or not the glorified Christ can cause evil intentions to immediately abort, and capture the unmitigated attention of those he is apprehending. This is the event to which Paul referred when he said he had been “apprehended” (Phil 3:12). It was the time when Christ “took hold of” him. NIV Other versions read, “laid hold of by Christ Jesus,” NASB and “laid hold of me and made me His own.” AMPLIFIED Whether or not a person’s theology will allow the acknowledgment of this or not, here is a case where a sinner was forced to confront Jesus, even though he was not seeking Him.

The Lord captured his attention in a manner than could not be contested, and was not resisted.

I HEARD A VOICE

“ 14 And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.”

WE WERE ALL FALLEN TO THE EARTH

“And when we were all fallen to the earth . . .” Other versions read, “when we all had fallen to the ground,” NASB and “all gone down on the earth.” BBE

The entire entourage traveling with Paul, fell down to the earth with him. This was a Divine intrusion they could not ignore, and the flesh crumbled beneath the shear weight of the glory of Jesus. It was only owing to the mercy and purpose of the Lord that they were not all consumed. Saul was being “apprehended,” and all who were traveling with him were witnesses.

In Christian gatherings, the spirit of casualness and a general lack of interest suggests the absence of the awareness of the Lord Himself. If it is true that Jesus Himself is in the midst of

those who have gathered together in His name, then being unaware of that circumstance is a transgression of the greatest magnitude.

This had often been the reaction of those on earth to a heavenly presence injecting itself into the domain of men. Even Balaam's donkey "fell down" at the sight of an angel (Num 22:27). Moses twice "fell down" in the presence of the Lord (Deut 9:18,25). Job "fell down upon the ground" after hearing of the loss of his possessions and children (Job 1:20). When the wise men from the east saw the infant Messiah, they "fell down and worshiped Him" (Matt 1:20). Unclean spirits "fell down before Him" when they saw Jesus (Mk 3:11). When the woman with an issue of blood was healed by Jesus, she "came and fell down before Him" (Mk 5:33). When the knowledge of the Person of Christ dawned upon Peter, "he fell down at Jesus' knees" (Lk 5:8). When Jairus confronted Jesus, he "fell down at Jesus' feet" (Lk 8:41). A healed leper returned to Jesus and "fell down on his face at His feet" (Lk 17:16). Mary, Lazarus' sister, "fell down" at the feet of Jesus (John 11:32). Paul said that when a stranger or unbeliever entered the assembly of the saints, and the "secrets of his heart" were made known by the insightful words of the members of Christ's body, he would be seen "falling down on his face" and worshipping God (1 Cor 14:25). The twenty-four elders of Revelation "fell down before the Lamb" (Rev 5:8,14). The four living creatures of Revelation "fell down and worshiped God" (Rev 19:4). When John saw an angel, he "fell down" (Rev 22:8).

The idea is that of the superiority of the glory of God and the words that are sent by Him to men. The more aware men are of the Lord and the things and personalities in heaven, the more they are humbled, and the less power and dominion their flesh has. By the same token, where there is no consciousness of God or of heavenly influences, the fear of the Lord will not be present. In Christian gatherings, the spirit of casualness and a general lack of interest suggests the absence of the awareness of the Lord Himself. If it is true that Jesus Himself is in the midst of those who have gathered together in His name, then being unaware of that circumstance is a transgression of the greatest magnitude. During the ministry of Jesus, there were some people who were less cognizant of His person than the demons.

The Lord can strike people down to the ground with His glory. Eventually, "when He shall come in His own glory, and in the Father's, and of the holy angels" (Lk 9:26), there will not be a dissenting voice in the universe. No people will gather against Him then, and there will be no blaspheming of His holy name. He will force Himself into the affairs of men. The saints will rejoice, and all of the others will tremble, pleading for something or someone to hide them from the wrath of the Lamb (Rev 6:16-17). Until that time, those with faith are preparing for the day when they will "be like Him," for they will "see Him as He is" (1 John 3:1-3). Now, they bow. Then, every knee shall bow (Rom 14:11; Phil 2:10).

I HEARD A VOICE SPEAKING TO ME

" . . . I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue . . ." Other versions read, "the Hebrew language," NKJV "the Hebrew dialect," NASB "in Aramaic," NIV/NET/NLT/IE/CEV "in Hebrew," CJB and "Hebrews vernacular." INTERLINEAR

Here again, the varied versions introduce some confusion on the matter, some of the Greek lexicons doing the same thing. Even though the word translated "Hebrew" is clearly stated (~Ebrai<di dialektwl – "Hebrew dialect" or language – yet some Greek lexicons add the following: "Hebrew, the Hebrew language; not that however in which the O. T. was written, but the Chaldee (not Syro-Chaldaic, as it is commonly but incorrectly called; cf. A. Th. Hoffmann, *Grammat. Syriac.*, p. 14), which at the time of Jesus and the apostles had long superseded it in Palestine," THAYER "the Hebrew dialect, referring to the particular form of Hebrew (possibly Aramaic) spoken in Palestine," FRIBERG "Hebrew language (i.e. Aramaic), UBS and "Hebrew language, i.e. the Aramaic spoken at that time in Palestine. " GINGRICH The Louw-Nida lexicon presents a better view: "(derivative of ~ Ebrai/oj 'a Hebrew,' 93.105) pertaining to the Hebrews - 'Hebrew' (Lk 23.38, apparatus). The

addition of grammasin in some manuscripts literally applies to Hebrew letters, though the reference seems to be to the language, probably Aramaic. In Ac 21.40, 22.2, and 26.14 a peculiar form of ~Ebrai?ko,j, h., o,n occurs, namely, ~Ebrai<di syholarj, hosewer, ecplain it aj from ~Ebrai<j , i<doj relating it to ~Ebrai/oj ou (93.105) .

This rather tedious explanation has been given for a purpose. First, there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that the purity of the Hebrew language was not maintained by devout Jews – particularly sinse their language had been a point of contention and rebuke during their history (Neh 13:24-26). Second, the Aramaic language is not once mentioned in Scripture. Some are of the opinion that the language of the Chaldees was synonymous with “Aramaic.” Third, the Aramaic language was the language of Syria, and was anything but unique to the Hebrews. INTERNATIONAL STANDARD BIBLE DICTIONARY Fourth, the fact that Jesus spoke to Saul in the Hebrew tongue made His communication unique and not common, which appears to be the reason for the Lord speaking in such a manner. Fifth, special note is made of the Hebrews tongue in the Gospels and the book of the Revelation. In John 5:2 the sheep-market pool was called “Bethesda” in the “Hebrew tongue.” The angel of the bottomless pit in the Revelation was called “Apollyon” in the Greek language, but “Abaddon” on the “Hebrew tongue” (Rev 9:11). Also the gathering of the enemies of the Lord is said to be in a place called “Armageddon” in the “Hebrew tongue” (Rev 16:16).

I therefore conclude that the text means precisely what it says.

WHY PERSECUTEST THOU ME?

“ . . . Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me? . . .” Other versions read, “Why are you persecuting Me?” NASB “Why do you persecute Me?” NIV “why are you attacking me so cruelly,” BBE “Why do you keep persecuting me?” CJB “Why do you continue to persecute me?” WILLIAMS and “why do you continue to persecute Me [to harass and trouble and molest Me]?” AMPLIFIED

Here is a perspective of persecution that is hidden from every single person who makes it difficult for the saints of God, or that in any way opposes or afflicts them. This is the ultimate outcome of unbelief, which puts people into the hands of the devil.

The question that is asked is not one to which the glorified Christ is seeking an answer. It rather shines the light upon the ignorance that then dominated Saul (1 Tim 1:13). The question highlighted what Saul of Tarsus did not know, for as soon as he did know who Jesus of Nazareth was, he ceased his campaign against those who believed on Him.

IT IS HARD FOR THEE TO KICK AGAINST THE PRICKS

THE OX GOAD

“Twas observable that in plowing they used goads of an extraordinary size; upon measuring of several I found them to be about eight feet long, and at the bigger end six inches in circumference. They are armed at the lesser end with a sharp prickle for driving the oxen, and at the other end with a small spade or paddle of iron, strong and massy, to clear thee plough from the clay that encumbers it in working” McCLINTOK and STRONG’S CYCLOPEDIA

“ . . . it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Other versions read, “It is hard for you to kick against the goads,” NKJV “It hurts you to kick against the goads,” NRSV “It is hard for you to go against the impulse which is driving you,” BBE “It's hard on you to be kicking against the ox-goads!” CJB “It's hard for a mortal like you to resist God,” GWN and “It is dangerous and turns out badly for you to keep kicking against the goads [to keep offering vain and perilous resistance].” AMPLIFIED

3 Now we come to a circumstance that was within. There was a goading that was taking place in Saul of Tarsus – a goading of the conscience that was sharp and difficult to bear. The specific cause of the pricking of conscience is not spelled out. Perhaps it was witnessing the stoning of Stephen and the spiritual composure he maintained until he breathed his last breath. It could have been the call of Stephen to the glorified Christ, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:60).

Perhaps it was some of the experiences that took place when he hauled both men and women out of their homes and synagogues, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against them. What images had been stamped upon his soul as he relentlessly sought to make them blaspheme the name of the Lord, disowning Him in a public manner?

And, who was it that was wielding this tormenting goad? This was doubtless the Holy Spirit, convicting Saul of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. If so, it was all associated with his opposition to Christ Jesus and those who were believing on Him. As Jesus opened more fully to Saul, there is a dissoluble unity between Himself and His people.

The fact that Saul did not deny the existence of the goads tells us something. He knew at this time that whoever he had confronted, it was certainly not an ordinary man. Here was a Person who reached back more than two decades, and with penetrating insight probes the conscience of this Jewish zealot.

Jesus can certainly do such things, and there is no indication that this ability has been relegated to the past. The Lord is still known as “He that searcheth the hearts” (Rom 8:27). The glorified Christ Himself said to the seven churches of Asia, “I am He which searcheth the reins and hearts” (Rev 2:23). Elsewhere it is said of Him, “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom, we have to do” (Heb 4:13). When the disciples were about to choose a replacement for the bishopric vacated by Judas, they addressed the Lord in this manner: “Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men” (Acts 1:24).

Saul of Tarsus, knowing the Scriptures, knew that the prophets spoke of this Divine attribute. “But the righteous God trieth the hearts and reigns” (Psa 7:8). And again, “He knoweth the secrets of the heart” (Psa 44:21). Jeremiah said God “tries the reins and the heart” (Jer 11:20). God Himself said, “I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins” (Jer 17:10). He “sees the reins and the heart” (Jer 20:12). Even when Jesus walked among men, “He knew what was in man” (John 2:25).

I do not believe enough is made of this in our time – a time when men appear more interested in psychoanalyzing the people, rather than informing them that God knows their thoughts, their motives, and their intentions. Perhaps these things are known theoretically, or even acknowledged in a creedal form. However, the academic knowledge of the fact of the discerning and probing eye of the Lord has not produced fruit that glorifies God. It appears to me that a significant number of religious people have not been exposed to enough truth concerning God Himself to cause their conscience to be pricked. A concept of God has been produced that does not allow for conviction, which means that it is a false concept.

I SAID, “WHO ART THOU, LORD?”

“ 15 And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.”

Saul immediately responded to the voice of the Lord. He did not faint with fear, although fear had unquestionably come upon him. The glory that threw him to the ground, as it were, did not rob him of sound thought. Not knowing who he had confronted, he inquired with humility who was speaking to him.

WHO ART THOU LORD?

“And I said, Who art thou, Lord? . . . ” Other versions read, “who are you, sir,” CJB/GWN/NAB/LIVING/WILLIAMS and “My Lord, who art thou?” MRD The word translated “Lord” is the customary Greek word for this expression – **ku,rioj** . The lexical meaning of the word is, “having power or authority) (from Pindar down), he to whom a person or thing belongs, about which he has the power of deciding; master, lord; used a. universally, of the possessor and disposer of a thing, the owner . . . one who has control of the person,” THAYER “(strong, authoritative); hence, one having legal power lord, master,” FRIBERG and “a title for God and for Christ) one who exercises supernatural authority over mankind - Lord, Ruler, One who commands.” LOUW-NIDA

At the very least, Saul’s use of this word was a recognition of the superiority personality that had confronted him, whether perceived as an angel or the Lord of glory. Saul had immediately recognized that he was vastly inferior to the one who appeared to him. It was obvious He was not one of his peers.

Luke’s recounting of this incident represents Saul as saying, “Who art thou, Lord?” (Acts 9:5). When Paul testified to the Jews, he reported the same thing: “Who art thou, Lord?”

The term Lord (**ku,rioj**) is used 747 times from Matthew through Revelation. Its prevailing use is applied to Deity, and infrequently to holy and glorious angels. It is used 113 times in the book of Acts. In those instances, with only three exceptions, the word always applies to Deity. The three exceptions are as follows.

- Cornelius to the angel of the Lord: “What is it Lord ?” (Acts 10:4).
- The “ masters ” who had enslaved the woman with a demon in Macedonia (Acts 16:19).
- The jailer to Paul and Silas: “ sirs , what must I do to be saved” (Acts 16:30).

Even in the exceptions, the persons being addressed were perceived as being in control of the situation, and were seen as greater than the person with whom they were associated. The English word “sir” once meant “a man of rank or position.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER Today, however, it is usually used to denote respect for an individual. It is too weak of a word for this text, as represented in several modern versions (CJB/GWN/NAB/LIVING/ WILLIAMS). At the very least, Saul’s use of this word was a recognition of the superiority personality that had confronted him, whether perceived as an angel or the Lord of glory. Saul had immediately recognized that he was vastly inferior to the one who appeared to him. It was obvious He was not one of his peers.

I AM JESUS WHOM THOU PERSECUTEST

“ . . . And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” Other versions read, “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting,” NKJV “I am Jesus, whom you are attacking,” BBE “I am Yeshua, and you are persecuting me!,” CJB and “I am Jesus, the one you're persecuting.” GWN

When Paul reported this incident to the Jews, he said, “And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest” (Acts 22:8). Earlier, Paul had told Agrippa that he had thought within himself that he “ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth” (Acts 26:9). This distinguished Jesus of Nazareth from others who had the same name (Colossians 4:11, surnamed Justus, and Hebrews 4:8, Joshua).

Again, the identity of the saints with the Lord Jesus is quite clear. Of old time, it was said of the Israelites, “He kept him as the apple of His eye” (Deut 32:10). Again, Zechariah the prophet declared, “he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye” (Zech 2:8).

In redemption, however, the relationship of the saved with the Savior is much closer.

• **THEY ARE ONE SPIRIT WITH THE LORD.** “But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17).

• **THEY ARE OF CHRIST’S FLESH, AND OF HIS BONE.** “For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones” (Eph 5:30).

• **THEY HAVE BEEN ADDED TO THE LORD.** “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

• **THEY HAVE BEEN BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST.** “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Gal 3:27).

• **THEY ARE ONE WITH THE FATHER AND THE SON.** “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).

• **THEY ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST.** “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18). “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27).

+ This revealed affinity is why Jesus could say, “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.” It is a very real association, and not merely a figurative one. That is what makes the persecution of believers, and causing them grief, so serious. It reveals what the offenders really think of the Lord Jesus, and of God the Father. Jesus said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (John 13:20). Again He said, “He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me” (Luke 10:16). That is how closely we are united with the Lord.

When the people of God are harmed in any way, or maligned, or despised, or hated, it is duly noted in heaven. No such treatment is ignored in the pure and holy precincts of heaven! It is duly noted, and is taken personally by Jesus. It will help you to survive the assaults of the wicked if you will keep this in mind.

I HAVE APPEARED UNTO THEE FOR THIS PURPOSE

“ 16 But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.”

The words Paul now relates must have been especially sweet to him when they were spoken. Upon hearing that this was Jesus who, he was persecuting, there is no note of vengeance in the Lord’s word. It is rather a consoling words that accentuated the marvelous grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

RISE AND STAND UPON THY FEET

“But rise, and stand upon thy feet . . .” Other versions read, “Now get up and stand on your feet,” NIV and “Stand up!” GWN Thus the words of the Psalmist were fulfilled: “The Lord . . . raiseth up all those that be bowed down” (Psa 145:14). A salient statement in the prayer of Hannah was also fulfilled: “He bringeth low and lifteth up” (1 Sam 2:7). The word of Hosea was also seen in our Lord’s dealing with Saul: “He hath smitten and He will bind us up” (Hos 6:1).

Blessed is the person who realizes that holy alertness always follows being perceptibly humbled!

I HAVE APPEARED UNTO THEE FOR THIS PURPOSE

“ . . . for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose . . .” Other versions read, “for this purpose I

have appeared to you,” NASB “to this end have I appeared unto thee,” ASV “I have appeared to you for a reason,” GWN “for this very purpose,” WEYMOUTH and “in order to.” MONTGOMERY

This account is not given in Luke’s record of the appearance of Jesus to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:6). Some have conjectured that Paul combined what was said directly by Jesus, and what was said through Ananias.

Experience is not an end of itself. I do not receive this explanation. I prefer to take Paul at his word, that this was said to him on the road to Damascus, and that Ananias provided a confirming testimony regarding the reason for Christ’s appearance to Saul.

Valid experience is not an end of itself. Some entertain the notion that experience stands by itself, without regard to purpose or Divine intent. This is not, however, the manner of the Kingdom. The Lord Himself makes this inclusive statement: “ye shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, saith the Lord GOD” (Ezek 14:23). All of God’s callings are associated with a purpose, or objective.

TO MAKE THEE A MINISTER AND A WITNESS

“ . . . to make thee a minister and a witness . . .” Other versions read, “servant and as a witness,” NIV “to serve and testify,” NRSV “serve and bear witness,” RSV “designate you in advance as a servant and witness,” NET “appoint you as My servant and as witness,” NJB “appoint thee an officer and a witness,” YLT “chosen you to be My servant. You will be My witness,” IE and “to serve as [My] minister, and to bear witness,” AMPLIFIED

The original word translated “make” means, “to choose, to appoint,” THAYER “to choose, elect,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “choose for oneself, select, appoint.” GINGRICH This word is used only twice in the Greek Scriptures (Acts 22:14; 26:15). Both instances refer to the calling of Paul.

The Scriptures record that Ananias also confirmed this testimony to Saul: “And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee , that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth” (Acts 22:14).

Right here we are exposed to the Kingdom concept of a “servant.” The word means more than a mere slave. As defined by the word of Ananias, it involves being chosen to KNOW Christ’s will. Thus Jesus distinguished His servants from mere slaves who went about doing what they were told, yet without any understanding of the purpose of their master. “Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in My name, He may give it you” (John 15:15-16). The word to the eleven apostles is an exact parallel of the word delivered to Saul.

This includes Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus, what was told him by Jesus, the insight that was received from it, and the commission given to him. In short, he was to testify as to how the Lord Jesus had apprehended him, and the purpose for that apprehension.

This refers to the sending of insightful proclaimers as stated in Romans 10:14-15: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent ? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” Such messengers are not sent out by missionary boards and other humanly devised organizations. In my judgment, the telling difference between those who can effectively communicate the Gospel and those who cannot is traced back to their appointment by

the Head of the church. This is also involved in the placement of the various members of the body where it has pleased God (1 Cor 12:18).

From a human point of view, how likely is it that Saul of Tarsus would be so appointed? There certainly is no indication that any of the believers suspected this would happen. In fact, at the first, Ananias, who was called by Jesus to minister to Saul, found it difficult to see Paul as a “chosen vessel” (Acts 9:15).

The Concept of Serving Christ

Our day is marked by an astounding ignorance of what it means to “serve” Christ. Some perceive this as doing some Christian work that they themselves have birthed. Jesus said of such people, “If any man serve me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honor” (John 12:26).

A servant of Christ is noted for following Him, and being where Jesus is. He is carrying out the Savior’s will, being taught by Him, and directed by Him as well.

THESE THINGS WHICH THOU HAST SEEN

“ . . . both of these things which thou hast seen . . .” Other versions read, “of what you have seen of Me,” NIV “the things in which You have seen Me,” NRSV “wherein thou hast seen Me,” ASV “what you have already seen of Me,” CJB “a witness of this thy seeing me,” MRD and “as a witness of this vision in which you have seen me.” NJB

This includes Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus, what was told him by Jesus, the insight that was received from it, and the commission given to him. In short, he was to testify as to how the Lord Jesus had apprehended him, and the purpose for that apprehension.

It is a principle woven throughout the Lord’s dealings with men, that what they have been given to see is to be declared. This is in order that He might be properly glorified. In the episode recorded in Acts chapters 22-26, Paul has already testified of what he first saw two times (Acts 22:6-11; 26:13-18).

THOSE THINGS IN WHICH I WILL APPEAR UNTO THEE

“ . . . and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee.” Other versions read, “things which I will yet reveal to you,” NKJV “the things in which I will appear to you,” NASB “and what I will show you,” NIV “and of those in which you will see Me,” BBE “what you will see when I appear to you in the future,” CJB and “what I will show you.” GWN

The glorified Christ would show Paul more. As a faithful steward, counted to be “faithful” (1 Tim 1:12), Paul would declare those coming revelations. In spiritual life, there is a twofold perspective: what you have seen, and what you will see. We have records of him doing precisely this. Here are three rather broad categories.

- **CONCERNING THE LORD’S SUPPER** – 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.
- **CONCERNING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST** – Ephesians 3:4-7.
- **CONCERNING THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST** – Ephesians 3:7.

I have compiled a partial listing of teachings that are, for the most part, unique to Paul. I list them here in order to emphasize the extensive revelation that was vouchsafed to Paul.

PAUL'S UNIQUE TEACHING

THINGS GIVEN FOR ALL MEN TO HEAR

1. That the church is the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4,12-16; 5:23,30; Col 1:16; 2:19; 3:15).
2. Jesus Christ as the Head of the body (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19).
3. The merging of Jew and Gentile in Christ (Eph 2:15-16,19).
4. The exposition of justification by faith (Rom 3:20-5:18; Gal 2:16-17; 3:8-24).
5. The distinction between the Old and New Covenants (2 Cor 3:6-14; 7:22; 8:8-13; 10:16-17; Gal 3:15-17; 4:22-28; Heb 9:15-20).
6. The reality of "*the old man*" and "*the new man*" (Rom 6:6; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:9-10).
7. The inner warfare experienced by those who live by faith (Rom 7:15-25; Gal 5:17).
8. The spiritual logic that declares the coming conversion of the Jews (Romans chapters 9-11).
9. The High Priesthood of Christ (Heb 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21).
10. The relation of Abraham to those who believe (Rom 4:1-16; Gal 3:6-18).
11. The significance of Melchizedec (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-21).
12. The eternal purpose of God (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9).
13. What took place behind the scenes when Jesus died (Col 1:20; 2:14-15; Heb 2:14; 9:26).
14. The whole armor of God (Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:7; Eph 6:10-18).
15. Spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:4-5; Eph 6:17).
16. Believers battling with principalities and powers (Eph 6:12).
17. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9).
18. The works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21).
19. The office of a Bishop (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:7-11).
20. The office of a deacon (1 Tim 3:10-13).
21. The exposition of spiritual gifts, and how they are administered (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31; 14:1-12; Eph 4:11-16).
22. Why men cannot be justified by works (Rom 3:26; 4:2; Gal 2:16; 3:2-5).
23. The imputation of righteousness upon the basis of faith (Rom 1:7; 3:22-25; 4:5-25; 10:6-10; Phil 3:9).
24. Extensive teaching concerning baptism into Christ (Rom 6:1-23; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:11-15).
25. The comparison of Adam and Christ (Rom 5:14-21; 1 Cor 15:22,45).
26. Extensive teaching on the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:15-57).
27. The ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11-14, 26-27; 2 Cor 3:3-18; Gal 4:6, 29; 5:5,16-18,22-24; 6:8; Eph 2:22; Eph 5:9).

28. The intercession and mediation of Christ Jesus (Heb 7:25; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).
29. The intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27).
30. Predestination and election (Rom 8:29-33; 9:11; 11:5-7,28; Eph 1:5,11; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 2:10; Tit 1:1).
31. The body being for the Lord (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:-13-20).
32. God's objective for believers (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 3:15-30; 4:12-16; Col 1:9-11).
33. The resurrection body (2 Cor 5:1-5).
34. The accomplishments of the cross (Eph 2:16; Phil 2:8; Col 1:20; 2:14-15).
35. Extensive teaching concerning the Lord's Table (1 Cor 10:21; 11:23-29).
36. Types and shadows (Gal 4:24; Col 2:17; Heb 8:5; 9:24; 10:1).
37. Extensive teaching of the grace of God (Rom 3:24; 4:4,16; 5:2, 15-17, 20-21; 6:14-15; ; 11:5-6; 12:3-6; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 1:15; Eph 2:5-8; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 2:11-12; Tit 3:7; Heb 2:9; 4:16; 12:28).
38. Heavenly hosts being tutored concerning God's wisdom through the church (Eph 3:10).
39. Angels being present in the assembly of the saints (1 Cor 11:10; Heb 12:22).
40. How the church is to respond to immoral people among them (1 Cor 5:1-9).
41. With the exceptions of six references to the "Gospel" in the book of Acts, and five references in the epistles and Revelation, every mention of that word from in Romans through Revelation (seventy-five) is found in Paul's writings.
42. The ascension of Jesus and its bearing on the gifts given to the church (Eph 1:20; 4:8-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3; 4:14; 9:14).
43. The use of the word "heavenly" (1 Cor 15:48,49; Eph 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 3:1; 6:4; 8:5).
44. The degeneracy of the Gentile world without Christ (Rom 1:19-32).
45. With the exception of two references in First Peter, and one in Third John, the remaining teaching concerning Gentiles is given by Paul (48 references).
46. The fact that some of the Jewish branches were broken off, and some Gentiles were grafted into the Jewish olive tree (Rom 11:11-24).
47. The "man of sin" and the "son of perdition" (2 Thess 2:3).
48. The destruction of the man of sin at the coming of the Lord (2 Thess 2:3-10).
49. Receiving the love of the truth, and the consequences of not doing so (2 Thess 2:10-12).
50. What was involved in the condescension of Christ coming into the world (Phil 2:5-8).
51. What we are "come to" in Christ Jesus (Heb 12:22-24).

The fact that the vast majority of Christendom is abysmally ignorant of nearly all of these subjects confirms that the ministry of Paul has been largely rejected in our day.

52. +In showing the folly of seeking to be justified by Law, the allegory of Hagar and Sarah in explaining the distinction of the New Covenant (Gal 4:21-31).

53. The circumcision of Christ and of the heart (Rom 2:29; Col 2:11-12).
54. Newness of life and newness of spirit (Rom 6:4; 7:6).
55. The church is the Temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17).
56. The church is built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph 2:22).
57. A warning to take heed how one builds upon the foundation of Christ (1 Cor 3:10-11).
58. Products of preaching referred to as wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver, and precious stones – some to be ultimately rejected, some to be received (1 Cor 3:12-16).
59. Whoever defiles the temple of God with inferior converts will be destroyed (1 Cor 3:17).
60. Delivering a professing Christian to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor 5:5).
61. The means of supporting the proclaimer of Word as being typified under the Law (1 Cor 9:11-14).
62. The faithful receiving praise from God (1 Cor 4:5).
63. The purpose for civil government (Rom 13:1-7).
64. That the grace of God teaches the saved to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit 2:11-12).
65. That “the flesh,” or the “old man” is to be crucified (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14).
66. That we can walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25).
67. That is we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal 5:16,25).
68. That there is “no condemnation” to them which are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).
69. That we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).
70. All of the teaching on reconciliation to God (Rom 5:10; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-21; Heb 2:17).
71. With the exception of two brief references by Peter (1 Pet 1:2; 3:15), and one by Jude (Jude 1:1), all of the doctrine concerning sanctification comes from Paul (Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph 5:26; 1 Thess 4:3-4; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:21; Heb 2:11; 10:10,14,29; 13:12).
72. A comparison of the glory of the Old Covenant as compared with the glory of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:7-11).
73. That those who indulge the flesh will have no part in the inheritance reserved for those in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5-7).
74. On the subject of reprobacy (Rom 1:18; 2 Cor 13:5-6; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:6).

The fact that the vast majority of Christendom is abysmally ignorant of nearly all of these subjects confirms that the ministry of Paul has been largely rejected in our day. These revelations were given to him to make them known, particularly to the church. Jesus did what He said He was going to do – show Paul many things. Paul did what he was supposed to do – make them known. Now it is the solemn responsibility of every believer to not be ignorant in these areas. To remain in a state of ignorance after such a phenomenal outpouring of Divine wisdom and insight is inexcusable! It is a betrayal of the heart and the low level of understanding.

DELIVERING AND SENDING

“ 17 Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee.”

The Lord Jesus pledged to protect Paul, so that nothing would ultimately interfere with carrying out the commission that will be delivered to him. This equates to the promise made to the twelve apostles: “lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen” (Matt 28:20).

DELIVERING THEE FROM THE PEOPLE

“Delivering thee from the people . . .” Other versions read, “to deliver you from the Jewish people,” NKJV “I will rescue you from your own people,” NIV “keep you safe from the people,” BBE “taking thee out from among the people,” DARBY “Delivering thee from this people,” GENEVA “protect you from . . . your own people,” LIVING “save you from the Jewish people,” IE and “continue to rescue you from the Jewish people.” WILLIAMS

How many times the Lord did deliver Paul from the malicious intentions of the Jews! While he did endure five beatings from them (2 Cor 11:24), they could not carry out their determination to kill him. Here are some of those deliverances.

- The Jews in Damascus (Acts 9:23-25).
- The Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 9:29-30).
- The Jews in Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:50-51).
- The Jews in Iconium (Acts 14:5-6).
- When he was stoned by the Jews in Lystra (Acts 14:19-20).
- The Jews in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10).
- The Jews from Thessalonica who sought Paul out in Berea (Acts 17:13-15).
- The Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:8-10).
- The Jews who charged Paul before Gallio (Acts 18:12-16).
- The Jews who sought to kill him when he went into the Temple (Acts 21:18-31).
- The Jews who charged him before the Roman captain (Acts 22:21-24; 23:10).
- The Jews who sought to have Festus transport him from Caesarea to Jerusalem (Acts 25:3-4).

DELIVERING THEE FROM THE GENTILES

“ . . . and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee.”

There were also deliverances from Gentile idol-worshippers.

- The Gentiles in Iconium who were stirred up by the Jews (Acts 14:5-6)
- The Gentiles in Philippi (Acts 16:26-39).
- The Gentiles in Ephesus (Acts 19:28-41).
- The Gentiles soldiers who had determined to kill the prisoners on their boat during a storm (Acts 27:42-43).
- From the beasts in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32).
- From three shipwrecks (2 Cor 11:25).

- From perils among the heathen (2 Cor 11:28).

This is not to mention the times Paul was delivered from perils in waters, among robbers, in the wilderness, in the sea, and among false brethren (2 Cor 11:26-27).

Behold the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus in the preservation of Paul! Nothing was able to separate him from the love God, thwart his ministry, or pluck him from the hand of Jesus. Paul's faith sustained him as he was being "kept by the power of God" (1 Pet 1: 5). He put on the whole armor of God, and thus survived assault after assault. He was delivered, was being delivered, and would be delivered.

THE COMMISSION

" 18 To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

Here is a commission that is omitted in other accounts of Paul being apprehended by Jesus (Acts 9:6-18; 22:10-18). This does not mean the other accounts are in any way deficient. Further, this was a unique opportunity to bear witness to the things he had been given to see. Before him stands a gathering of dignitaries that are not seeking his life. He will share with them some things he was not able to share with others. There are people whose condition robs them of the right to the "unsearchable riches of Christ."

TO OPEN THEIR EYES

"To open their eyes . . ." Other versions read, "to make their eyes open," BBE "you will open their eyes," GWN "you are to open their eyes," CEV "to open the eyes of the outsiders so they can see the difference," MESSAGE and "to up-open viewers." INTERLINEAR

It ought to be apparent that everyone does not have such a commission – but Paul did. He was granted a dispensation of grace that enabled him to cause people to have spiritual comprehension – to see the sense of redemption and take hold of the message of salvation by grace through faith.

Paul did not do this by laying hands upon people and thus enabling them to see the things of God. He did it by preaching and teaching what He had seen and heard. The truth of the matter is that if people will hear what Paul declares, and receive it as from God, their eyes will be opened. This is what took place among the Thessalonians. "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe " (1 Thess 2:13).

If, however, the teaching of Paul is neglected or rejected, there is no other way to arrive at the truth he was uniquely given to see. He was appointed by Jesus to open the eyes of those willingly and eagerly subjected to his word.

To clarify once again, the opening of men's eyes has to do with comprehension, discernment, and understanding. It is bringing men to a point where they are "able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God" (Eph 3:18-19). It is a condition where the "eyes of" their "understanding" are opened (Eph 1:18), and they are "filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding" (Col 1:9).

All of this has particularly to do with discerning what God has and is doing through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not a kind of novel knowledge, but what is required to sustain the good fight of faith, and finish the race that is set before us.

All of this has particularly to do with discerning what God has and is doing through the Lord Jesus Christ. This is not a kind of novel knowledge, but what is required to sustain the good fight of faith, and finish the race that is set before us.

TO TURN THEM FROM DARKNESS TO LIGHT

“ . . . and to turn them from darkness to light . . .” Other versions read, “so that they may turn from darkness to light,” NASB and “that they may turn from darkness to light.” AMPLIFIED

This is the reason for opening the eyes of the people – that they may turn from darkness to light. This “light” is elsewhere described as “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6), and “beholding as in a glass [mirror] the glory of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18). As stated in Second Corinthians 3:18, this is the means by which we “are constantly being transfigured into His very own image in ever increasing splendor and from one degree of glory to another; [for this comes] from the Lord [Who is] the Spirit.” AMPLIFIED

This change is facilitated by the opening of the eyes of our understanding, when what God has and is doing through Jesus Christ is seen with holy clarity. Until this understanding is obtained, no measurable change into the likeness of Christ can occur.

The lack of this understanding is cause for great concern. To be “without understanding” is a mark of the heathen (Rom 1:31), and is a sure mark of being lost (Eph 4:18). The “church world” is quite content for this condition to exist, but heaven is not! An ignorant and untaught church is a contradiction of the salvation of God. To a significant degree, this condition in the Gentile church exists because what was revealed to Paul is not being made known to the people. I do not know how this can this conclusion can be successfully contradicted.

TO TURN THEM FROM THE POWER OF SATAN UNTO GOD

“ . . . and from the power of Satan unto God . . .” Other versions read, “from the dominion of Satan to God,” NASB “from the power of the adversary to God,” CJB “from Satan’s control to God’s,” GWN “from the authority of the adversary unto God,” YLT “live in the light of God instead of in Satan's darkness,” LIVING “from the obedience to Satan to God,” WEYMOUTH and “see the difference between Satan and God.” MESSAGE

Why does sin appear to be flourishing in the church? Why are families falling apart, and people remaining in bondage to all manner of sin? What is the cause of this? Why is there such a seeming need for counselors, recovery programs, and various forms of human discipline? The situation may be glossed by cursory observations. However, the truth of the matter is that masses of professing Christians have not been turned from the power of Satan under God. They are enslaved by gross appetites, and are being taken captive by Satan “at his will” (2 Tim 2:26).

Why should such a condition continue when Jesus has appointed an effective minister with a message that can turn men from the power of Satan unto God, and from being dominated by Satan to being willingly governed by God? Why is Paul’s teaching being neglected, and sometimes rejected by the very people to whom he has been sent – the Gentiles?

Just as with Corinth and Galatia, “another gospel” has been preached – another message (2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6-7). However, this corrupt message has no power. It is a “form of godliness that denies,” or rejects, “the power” (2 Tim 3:5). This is precisely why professing Christians remain enslaved to Satan and sin. Simply put, Jesus does not work through these watered down worldly-wise messages! Any message that, when received, does not produce freedom from the guilt and power of sin, and liberty from the dominion of Satan, is a spurious message. Such a word has come from the devil himself, and is calculated to keep men in bondage to him.

Men may banter on and on about which message is true, and which church is valid. But the fruit tells the whole story, and blessed is the person who can see it.

THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE FORGIVENESS OF SINS

“ . . . that they may receive forgiveness of sins . . .” Other versions read, “receive remission of sins,” ASV “receive, through faith in me, forgiveness of their sins,” NJB “receive forgiveness for their sins,” LIVING “have their sins forgiven,” WILLIAMS and “receive forgiveness and release from their sins.” AMPLIFIED

Observe, the forgiveness of sins follows the opening of the eyes, being turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God! This forgiveness cannot be obtained independently of the opening and turning of reference.

What does it mean to receive the forgiveness of sins? Perhaps you have heard the psycho-babel that says, “I know God has forgiven me, but I have not been able to forgive myself.” And what kind of miserable work is that? What inspired man ever uttered or wrote such an absurdity?

The forgiveness of sins involves the conscience of the forgiven one. In fact, in baptism, which is declared to be “for the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38), and the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16), there is an appeal to God for a “good conscience.” Peter wrote that “baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21). The Amplified Bible reads, “by [providing you with] the answer of a good and clear conscience (inward cleanness and peace) before God.” Other versions read , “an appeal to God for a good conscience,” NASB “An appeal to God for a clear conscience,” RSV “the interrogation of a good conscience toward God,” ASV and “a confident demanding which a good conscience maketh to God.” GENEVA

Peter also points out the difference between a mere ceremonial washing, as under the Law, and the effective cleansing of the conscience: “not the putting away of the filth of the flesh.” Several of the versions butcher this text, like unlearned novices hacking away at the sacred text. “The removal of dirt from the flesh,” NASB “the removal of dirt from the body,” NIV “the removing of outward body filth [bathing],” AMPLIFIED and “ the removing of outward body filth [bathing].” BBE

Peter is saying that baptism bears no similarity to the ceremonial washings that took place under the Law (Heb 9:10). Those only had to do with qualifying a person to walk among the people of God. They had nothing whatsoever to do with the purging, or cleansing, of the conscience. Thus it is written of the highest and most holy day of atonement, “Which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience ” (Heb 9:9). And again, “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins ” (Heb 10:1-2). Thus, the ancient sacrifices stirred to the “remembrance of sin” (Heb 10:3).

By way of comparison, the forgiveness of sins has to do with remembering that sins have been forgiven, and that the person has been “justified from all things” (Acts 13:39). This has to do with knowing there “is therefore now no condemnation” (Rom 8:1). The person who labors under the condemning goad of the conscience has not received the forgiveness of reference – even though they may have “obeyed the Gospel” (Rom 10:16). Thus believers are told, “For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb 9:14).

In my understanding, everyone that is baptized into Christ begins newness of life with this cleansed conscience. They begin with the “rejoicing of the hope” that is to be kept “firm unto the end” (Heb 3:6). It is quite true that this can be more intuitive than cognitive. However, through the insightful teaching of Paul every believer can obtain a more firm grasp on the truth of forgiveness, and thus begin to “reign in life” (Rom 5:17). Oh, the blessedness of receiving the forgiveness of sins!

THAT THEY MAY RECEIVE INHERITANCE

There is no advantage whatsoever in an approach to spiritual life that excludes or minimizes the inheritance.

“ . . . and inheritance . . .” Other versions read, “and a place among those,” NIV “and an inheritance,” ASV “a heritage,” BBE “a share among those,” CSB “a lot among,” DOUAY “a portion with,” MRD “a share in the inheritance,” NJB “and God’s inheritance,” LIVING “have a possession among,” WILLIAMS “a place and portion among,” AMPLIFIED “become a part of,” CEV and “inviting them into the company of.” MESSAGE

As used in this text the word “inheritance” means, “what is obtained by lot, allotted portion,” THAYER “as what is assigned or allotted portion, share, possession,” FRIBERG “share, part, place,” UBS “share, portion Dt 10,9; that which is assigned by lot, office, service Neh 10,35; plot of land 1 Ezzr 4,56; inheritance,” LEH “that which is assigned by lot, portion, share, place.” GINGRICH

The word can also mean the means by which the lot was determined – a pebble, stone, or some other object. But that is not the meaning of the word here. The point is WHAT is inherited, not the means by which the determination is made. It is the inheritance itself, not the people with whom it is shared. Those with whom the inheritance is shared are mentioned in the next clause.

Some versions place the emphasis upon the people receiving the inheritance rather than the inheritance itself. This makes the expression a redundancy. It is the business of translators to know the message they are translating.

The inheritance of the people of God is declared in several expressions.

- They will “inherit the earth” (Matt 5:5).
- “Everlasting life” is an inheritance (Matt 19:28).
- “The Kingdom of God” is said to be the inheritance (1 Cor 6:10).
- The inheritance is said to be “in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph 5:5).
- We are speaking of an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15).
- It is also referred to as being “incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:4).
- Those who overcome are said to “inherit all things” (Rev 21:7).

There is no advantage whatsoever in an approach to spiritual life that excludes or minimizes the inheritance. For Paul, a necessary part of his ministry was preparing people for their inheritance – their “eternal inheritance.” This involved acquainting them with the inheritance itself. Of course, to the carnally minded, this makes no sense at all, for they are living for “this present evil world,” and that is not the inheritance God has for His children.

If men do not receive the inheritance, it really makes no difference what they may have done with their lives. All of their effort has been wasted, and will all go up in flames. Those who know this will take great care in the manner in which they live, and what they choose to occupy their time and capture their attention.

AMONG THEM WHICH ARE SANCTIFIED

“ . . . among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Me.” Other versions read, “those who have been sanctified by faith,” NASB “those who are made holy by faith in Me,” BBE “those who have been separated for holiness by putting their trust in Me,” CJB “people who are made holy by believing in Me,” GWN “those who have been consecrated by faith in Me,” NAB “God's people, who are set apart by faith in Me,” NLT “been sanctified, by faith that is toward Me,” YLT “all people everywhere whose sins are cleansed away, who are set apart by faith in Me,” LIVING and “those who are consecrated and purified by faith in Me.” AMPLIFIED

In redemption, the people with whom you are identified is a critical matter. If they are not people whose faith has made them peculiarly God's, then they are not the people with whom you are to be identified. The people who are promised the inheritance are to be your closest friends and acquaintance – the people of preference. These are the people with whom God is identified. They are His own inheritance (Eph 1:18). They are His “household” (Eph 2:19), the “temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16-17), “God's heritage” (1 Pet 5:3), and His “family” (Eph 3:15). Their faith is what has set them apart from all other people – not their creed, not the denomination, and not their claim.

Where people do not exhibit faith, there is no proof they are among God's people. In such a case, there is no evidence that they have been set apart for Him, that He has received them, or that their names are written in heaven.

The appointed inheritance will be divided to the children of God, with each one receiving his portion. That portion will be in strict comportment with what they have been given, and how they handled their stewardship.

THE IMPACT OF PROPER MOTIVATION

The commission Jesus delivered to Paul became his motivation. He ministered with the intention of opening men's eyes, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God. His aim was that his hearers would receive the forgiveness of sins here and now, and the inheritance then and there. He sought to bring people into identity with the ones who have been, and are, sanctified by faith that is in Christ Jesus.

THIS IS A TIME OF RARE LABORERS

I will tell you that this kind of motivation is exceedingly rare in this day of apostasy. Scarcely will you be able to find a preacher or teacher who is devoted to such things. When and if you do find such a person, they are invariably at odds with the institution, and are spiritual renegades of sorts. This is because the professing church has been hijacked by charlatans, and is being exploited for the personal advantage of men who are eager for the wrong things, and an institution that serves the wrong purposes. This is a most grievous circumstance, yet is one with which we have to deal!

I WAS NOT DISOBEDIENT

“ 19 Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: 20 But showed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”

The apostle is rather showing that his life had not only been radically changed, but that he had been, and continued to, live consistently with his calling. The value of such a testimony cannot be overstated.

Because Paul's life was like an open book, what he now confesses can be readily substantiated.

This it not a vain boast, nor is it an attempt to elevate what king Agrippa thinks of Paul . The apostle is rather showing that his life had not only been radically changed, but that he had been, and continued to, live consistently with his calling. The value of such a testimony cannot be overstated.

I WAS NOT DISOBEDIENT

“Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision . . .” Other versions read, “I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision,” NASB “I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven,” NIV “I did not go against the vision from heaven,” BBE “I did not disobey the vision from heaven!” CJB “I was not incredulous to the heavenly vision,” DOUAY “I did not contumaciously [stubbornly] withstand the heavenly vision,” MRD “I could not disobey the heavenly vision,” NJB and “I obeyed that vision from heaven.” NLT

When the magnitude of the message delivered to Paul is seen, the significance of his obedience to it is greatly appreciated. While such obedience is unusual in the modern church, it ought not to be so.

I SHOWED FIRST UNTO THEM OF DAMASCUS

“ . . . But showed first unto them of Damascus . . .” Other versions read, “declared first to those in Damascus,” NKJV “I preached to those in Damascus first,” CSB “I spread the message that I first told to the Jewish people in Damascus,” GWN “I started preaching, first to the people of Damascus,” NJB and “made known openly first of all to those at Damascus.” AMPLIFIED

The account of Paul first preaching in Damascus is recorded in Acts 9:19-22. It followed his confrontation of Jesus on the road to Damascus, the word delivered to him by Ananias, and his baptism into Christ. “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God . . . But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ ” (Acts 9:20,22).

AND AT JERUSALEM AND THROUGHOUT ALL THE COASTS OF JUDAEA

“ . . . and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea . . .”

The account of Paul’s preaching in Jerusalem and all the coasts of Judea is recorded in Acts 9:28-29.

AND THEN TO THE GENTILES

“ . . . and then to the Gentiles . . .”

The record of Paul preaching to the Gentiles is recorded in Acts 13:6-7,46-48; 14:18-21; 16:6,9-12; 18:5-8,11,23; 19:21-22; 20:1-3.

THAT THEY SHOULD REPENT

“ . . . that they should repent and turn to God . . .” Other versions read, “that they should repent, turn to God . . .” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NASB/A,MPLIFIED

This is a kind of summation of what Paul preached, and is not intended to be a detailed account of everything he declared. This is an example of him being obedient to the heavenly vision. It is what is involved in opening men’s eyes in order that they might turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, It also is involved in appropriating the forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith.

Repenting and turning to God is descriptive of a change – a very real change. Repentance is

something that God requires of all men, and He commands them to “repent” (Acts 17:30-31).

The word “repent” is an especially strong word. Lexically it is defined as follows: “to change one's mind, I. e. to repent (to feel sorry that one has done this or that . . . to change one's mind for the better, heartily to amend with abhorrence of one's past . . . conduct worthy of a heart changed and abhorring sin,” THAYER “predominately of a religious and ethical change in the way one thinks about acts,” FRIBERG “have a change of heart, turn from one's sins, change one's ways,” UBS and “change one's way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness - 'to repent, to change one's way, repentance.’” LOUW-NIDA

This is not a mere sorrow for transgressing the word and will of the Lord. It is rather the result of a godly sorrow. As it is written, “For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death” (2 Cor 7:10). This is the repentance that leads salvation. It causes the heart of the sinner to break, a condition from which he could never recover if God was not in the matter.

This is not a goal for Christians, but is a requirement to become a Christian in the first place. These days, this kind of message is not being heard as it should. It must be affirmed that men are to repent AND turn to God – turn to Him for grace, forgiveness, and direction. Until that is done, salvation cannot be experienced.

AND DO WORKS MEET FOR REPENTANCE

“ . . . and do works meet for repentance.” Other versions read, “ and do works befitting repentance,” NKJV “performing deeds appropriate to repentance,” NASB “and prove their repentance by their deeds,” NIV “and do deeds consistent with repentance,” NRSV and “and do works and live lives consistent with and worthy of their repentance.” AMPLIFIED

Here is a matter that is said even less frequently than the requirement to repent. John the Baptist first introduced this requirement. When he was confronted by some who sought to be baptized, he boldly said, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance,” or “fruit in keeping with repentance” NIV (Matt 3:8). This is the same thing Paul preached. What is the meaning of this requirement?

A person's outward conduct has got to change before salvation can be realized. That change of conduct confirms the person has, in fact, repented. If the individual continues to transgress, allowing lust to express itself in conduct, he has not repented. If, for example, a person is a drunkard, that has to stop before any further benefit from God can be realized.

If it is countered that the person has no power to do such a thing, it must be seen that God will grant the power to those who extend the effort. A lame man will be able to pick up his bed and then commence walking. There is no legitimate response to God that is not attended with Divine power.

Even though it is true that God gives repentance, and that Jesus has been exalted to give repentance, it is the commandment to repent that sets the whole work into motion. When that commandment is taken seriously, and a conscientious effort is expended to obey it, a very real repentance will be realized, and confirmed in deed. Where this does not occur, a state of lostness exists.

FOR THESE CAUSES

“ 21 For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.”

Paul will now accentuate that his life was lived in view of the commission that had been delivered to him. He was wholly committed to fulfilling this mission.

FOR THESE CAUSES

“For these causes . . .” Other versions read, “for these reasons,” NKJV “for this reason,” NASB “that is why,” NIV “it was because of these things,” CJB “on account of these things,” DARBY and “for preaching this.” NLT

Embedded in Jesus’ words to Paul was the promise that He would deliver Paul from the Jews. That is included in the “causes” to which he refers. Because of the promise of the glorified Christ, Paul had not feared the Jews, apparently even anticipating their opposition.

Thus the conscientiousness of Paul has been established. The basis for that careful and deliberate action has been established as a word from the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Jews are seen as opposing Jesus, not merely Paul.

When he was apprehended by the Jews, there is no record of him preaching at the time. Further, Paul is not suggesting that he was arrested for preaching, although efforts to do this frequently arose. He is rather accenting that as he was involved in carrying out the mission of the Lord, he had went to Jerusalem, where he gave an account of what he was preaching and how the Lord had worked through his ministry. His presence in the Temple resulted from counsel that was given him by James and the elders. At that time, he had been misrepresented by the Jews, and therefore took he measures to confirm to the Jews that they had heard false reports of him.

You may recall that when the Jews from Asia stirred up the people, they said, “Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place . . .” (Acts 21:28). In Paul’s teaching “everywhere,” he was carrying out the work Jesus gave him to do. Were it not for that, the Jews from Asia would have had nothing to say. Thus, Paul precisely represented the case. It was because he was fulfilling the word of Jesus that they came against him.

THE JEWS CAUGHT ME AND WENT ABOUT TO KILL ME

“ . . . the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.” Other versions read, “seized me in the Temple and tried to kill me,” NKJV “some Jews seized me in the Temple and tried to put me to death,” NASB and “the Jews seized me in the temple [enclosure] and tried to do away with me.” AMPLIFIED

Thus the conscientiousness of Paul has been established. The basis for that careful and deliberate action has been established as a word from the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the Jews are seen as opposing Jesus, not merely Paul.

HAVING OBTAINED HELP FROM GOD

“ 22 Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.”

Not content to let the matter rest there, Paul continues to draw attention to the Lord Jesus who apprehended and commissioned him to open men’s eyes, that they might turn from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God; that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and the inheritance that will be given to all who are sanctified by faith.

It will be challenging to see how he states the case. It will be at once apparent that he had not been captured by the traditions of men. His answer will not blend with any form of sectarianism or heresy. He will be able to summarize his activity in a God-honoring manner.

HAVING THEREFORE OBTAINED HELP FROM GOD

“Having therefore obtained help of God . . .” Other versions read, “I have had God’s help,” NIV “I have had help from God,” NRSV “and so, by God’s help,” BBE “I have obtained help that comes from God,” CSB “having therefore met with the help which is from God,” DARBY “being aided by the help of God,” DOUAY “God has been helping me,” GWN “I have experienced help from God,” NET and “I have had the help which comes from God [as my ally].” AMPLIFIED

Notice what Paul does NOT say.

- He DOES NOT SAY he had been rescued from the Jews’ intentions by captain Lysias.
- He DOES NOT say that Gallio refused to hear the charges of the Jews against Paul.
- He DOES NOT SAY that he alerted the centurion and Lysias that he was a Roman citizen.
- He DOES NOT SAY that his nephew had overheard a plot by the Jews which led to him informing the captain.
- He DOES NOT say that Lysias provided four hundred and seventy soldiers to escort him to Caesarea.
- He DOES NOT say that Felix told the Jews he would wait for Lysias to come and inform him of the real circumstances.
- He DOES NOT say that he told Festus that he appealed to Caesar, and that Festus honored his request.
- He DOES NOT say that when the Jews asked Festus to have Paul tried in Jerusalem, Festus refused to do so, choosing rather to hear the case in Caesarea.

All of the above things really did happen, but none of them were the real causes for Paul’s safety. It was God who had helped him, moving men to rule in favor of Paul, and refuse to honor the request of the Jews. Paul traces his safety to its ultimate source, for “safety is of the Lord” (Prov 21:31). Through the prophet Isaiah God promised, “I will help thee” (Isa 41:10,13,14; 44:2). Paul was able to see his circumstances through the lens of God’s promise.

I CONTINUE TO THIS DAY

“ . . . I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great . . .” Other versions read, “to this day I stand,” NKJV “testifying both to small and great,” NASB and “so I stand here and testify to small and great alike.” NIV

Notice the constancy, diligence, and continuance that characterized Paul’s life. This is the common trait of faith, but not of the generation in which we live. It has become exceedingly rare to find a professing believer that is steadfast in their commitment to the Lord. The so called Christian life is often characterized by vacillation, wavering, fluctuation, and variation. People blow hot and cold, go from dependability to a lack thereof, and are quite often unreliable. I could not begin to estimate the number of ministries that I have witnessed in their beginning and in their demise. There are people who once appeared strong, who are now noted for their weakness.

There is a religious system in place that makes erratic spiritual behavior appear common and usual. But this is not the manner of the Kingdom. It is said of Abraham, “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God” (Rom 4:20). Believers are exhorted, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)” (Heb 10:23). And again it is written, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed”

(James 1:5-6). James traces instability to a double mind: “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (James 1:8). Peter says such poor souls bare more easily beguiled: “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls . . .” (2 Pet 2:14). He also affirms that such souls tend to wrest the Scriptures: “As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest , as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction” (2 Pet 3:16).

However, this was not the manner of Paul. There is a consistency to his ministry that continued from its beginning to the day he departed from this world. He took advantage of the grace that is available to all who are in Christ Jesus.

Small and Great

This expression can apply to age (young and old), social rank (servants and kings), or spiritual status (babes and mature). While Paul often addressed some traits unique to those categories, his fundamental message was the same to all . The Gospel of Christ addresses men at the point where commonality exists. Outside of Christ, it addresses men as sinners, those who are alienated, and who are strangers in the courts of the Lord. In Christ, they are addressed as members of the household of faith, those who are reconciled to God, who have been washed, sanctified, and justified. Those who tailor their preaching and teaching for certain fleshly distinctions have no precedent for such an approach in Scripture. There is not a Gospel for the young, and another for the old; one for servants, and another for kings; one for man and another for woman; one for Jews and another for Gentiles.. “Small and great” takes in everyone, regardless of fleshly distinctions. Such a stance does not make for career development, special training, and a unique education. But such things have no validity at all in the Kingdom of God.

SAYING NONE OTHER THINGS THAN THOSE WHICH THE PROPHETS AND MOSES DID SAY SHOULD COME

“ . . . saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come.” other versions read, “saying no other things,” NKJV “stating nothing but,” NASB “I am saying nothing beyond,” NIV “I tell them only what,” GWN “Saying nothing different from,” NAB “saying nothing except,” NET “I teach nothing except,” NLT “saying nothing besides,” YLT and “asserting nothing beyond.” AMPLIFIED

Right here we confront the heart of the message delivered by those commissioned by Jesus. Inspired men confined themselves to what Moses and the Prophets “did say should come.” This was in strict keeping with something God had revealed about what He purposed. “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7). Other versions read, “Surely the Sovereign LORD does nothing without revealing his plan to his servants the prophets,” NIV and “Surely the Lord God will do nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets.” AMPLIFIED On the Isle of Patmos, John was told the same thing: “But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as He hath declared to his servants the prophets ” (Rev 10:7). This is, then, a Divine manner.

Later, when Paul was in Rome, he was given his own “hired house” in which he taught those who came to him. Concerning his message it is written, “And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets , from morning till evening” (Acts 28:23). When Jesus expounded His own Person to the two on the road to Emmaus, He did so “beginning at Moses and all the prophets” (Luke 24:27). When He appeared to His disciples, He said to them, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms , concerning Me” (Luke 24:44). When Philip heard Jesus, he found Nathanael and said

to him, “We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write . . .” (John 1:45).

This Jesus is virtually unknown in our time. “Another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4) has been created that reflects the preferences of those who walk after the flesh. In speaking of the Lord Jesus, there are numerous references to the fulfillment of prophecies given by Moses and the Prophets.

- He was born of a virgin (Matt 1:22-23; Isa 7:14).
- He was called out of Egypt (Matt 2:15; Hos 11:1).
- He was called a Nazarene (Matt 2:23; Isa 53:1-2).
- He ministered in Galilee (Matt 4:14-16; Isa 9:1-2).
- He carried men’s sicknesses (Matt 8:17; Isa 53:4).
- Concerning His reaction to men, not breaking a bruised reed or quenching a smoking flax (Matt 12:16-21; Isa 42:3-4).
- Speaking in parables (Matt 13:34-35; Psa 78:2).
- His triumphal enter into Jerusalem (Matt 21:4-5; Zech 9:9).
- The disciples forsaking Him when He was arrested (Matt 26:58; Zech 13:7).
- The casting of lots for His garments when He was crucified (Matt 27:35; Psa 22:18).
- The failure of those to whom He spoke to believe Him (John 12:37-41; Isa 53:1).

Paul did not preach a Jesus whom He personally defined. He did not tailor a special Jesus for the society in which he lived. He rather correlated the activities of the Lord Jesus with what Moses and the Prophets foretold of Him. This is how Jesus is to be known.

- Being hated without a cause (John 15:25; Psa 35:19).
- The betrayal of Judas (John 17:12; Psa 109:6-19).
- Jesus saying “I thirst” upon the cross (John 19:28; Psa 22:15; 60:21).

Particular aspects of the accomplishments and ministry of Jesus were detailed by Moses and the prophets. Here are a few of them.

- The people would hearken to Him, and whoever refused to do so would be destroyed from among the people (Gen Deut 18:18-19; Acts 3:22-23).
- The people would be gathered to Him (Gen 49:10).
- He would come to do God’s will (Psa 40:6-10; Heb 10:5-12).
- He would ascend into heaven and give gifts to men (Psa 68:18; Eph 4:8-11).
- A Stone which the builders rejected (Psa 118:22,26; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:4-8).
- The government would be placed upon His shoulder (Isa 9:6-7; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20-22).
- A root springing out from Jesse (Isa 11:1-16; Rev 5:5; 22:16).
- A foundation and a sure foundation (1 Pet 2:6-8).
- A tender and good shepherd (Isa 40:11; John 10:11-16; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25).
- When oppressed, He would not cry nor lift up His voice in the streets (Isa 42:1-2; Matt 12:19-20).
- Inhibiting influences would be overcome: mountains leveled and valleys raised (Isa 49:11; Lk 3:4-5).

- He would make intercession for the people (Isa 53:12; Heb 7:25).
- He would be called “The Lord Our Righteousness” (Jer 23:6; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21).
- The Kingdom and all dominion would be given to Him (Dan 7:13-14; Matt 28:18; 1 Pet 3:22).
- He would make an end of sins, make reconciliation for iniquity, and bring in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24; Heb 9:26; Col 1:20; 2 Cor 5:21).
- He would be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).

Paul did not preach a Jesus whom He personally defined. He did not tailor a special Jesus for the society in which he lived. He rather correlated the activities of the Lord Jesus with what Moses and the Prophets foretold of Him. This is how Jesus is to be known. As the Servant of God (Isa 42:1), He is primarily carrying out the will of God, not the will of man. It is a serious error in judgment to present a Jesus that is purported to be the resolution to problems peculiar to our generation. Though this practice is quite common, it is one in which the power of God is not resident, and the will of God will not be accomplished. Jesus was not sent from God at the behest of humanity.

A SUMMATION OF WHAT MOSES AND THE PROPHETS SAID SHOULD COME

“ 23 That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.”

Here is a marvelous and appropriate summation of what Moses and the prophets foretold of the Christ. This is also a summing up of what Paul preached.

THAT CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER

“That Christ should suffer . . .” Other versions read, “would suffer,” NKJV “was to suffer,” NASB “must suffer,” NRSV “would go through pain,” BBE “would die,” CJB “is to suffer,” YLT “was to be a suffering Christ.” IE

Precisely how is prophecy to be viewed? Is it a mere look into the future, then foretelling what is seen. Or, is prophecy the declaration of what God has determined to do? If the former is a proper definition, then there is a theoretic risk that it may not be fulfilled. Not only is vacillating humanity involved, the crafty devil is also involved, together with principalities, powers, the rulers of darkness, and spiritual wickedness in high places. Without some kind of Divine control, I do not know how a person can substantiate the sureness of prophecy.

If, however, the latter is a proper definition – namely that prophecy is a declaration of what the Lord is going to do – the prophecies of a suffering Christ were a declaration of the will of God. That this is true is substantiated by a number of declarations.

- **AS IT WAS DETERMINED.** “And truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined : but woe unto that man by whom he is betrayed!” (Luke 22:22).
- **MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED.** “For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end” (Luke 22:37).
- **MUST BE FULFILLED.** “And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled , which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the

third day” (Luke 24:44-46).

• **COMMANDED TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE.** “Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of My Father ” (John 10:17-18).

• **DELIVERED BY THE DETERMINATE COUNSEL AND FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD.** “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain” (Acts 2:23).

• **CHRIST SHOULD SUFFER.** “But those things, which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, He hath so fulfilled ” (Acts 3:18).

• **GOD’S COUNSEL DETERMINED BEFORE TO BE DONE.** “For of a truth against Thy Holy Child Jesus, whom Thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, for to do whatsoever Thy hand and Thy counsel determined before to be done ” (Acts 4:28).

• **MUST NEEDS HAVE SUFFERED .** “Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered , and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ” (Acts 17:3).

• **FOR THE SUFFERING OF DEATH.** “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death , crowned with glory and honor; that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb 2:9).

• **CAME TO DO GOD’S WILL.** “Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of Me,) to do Thy will, O God. Above when He said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin Thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; Then said He, Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that He may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all” (Heb 10:7-10).

• **TESTIFIED BEFOREHAND.** “Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pet 1:11).

• **FOREORDAINED BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD.** “Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world , but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet 1:20).

Some might imagine that it makes no difference whether or not the matter of Divine determination is comprehended. If such a thing is true, why did Jesus and His messengers say so much about the matter? Certainly it was not because it was really of no consequence.

+SLAIN FROM THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world ” (Rev 13:8).

Does This Make Any Difference

Some might imagine that it makes no difference whether or not the matter of Divine determination is comprehended. If such a thing is true, why did Jesus and His messengers say so much about the matter? Certainly it was not because it was really of no consequence.

There is a frothy view of the sufferings and death of Jesus that presents Him more as a martyr than a Savior. His profound love for mankind is seen as the compelling factor in Christ’s submission to

suffering and death. Jesus, however, presented it as a matter of obeying the commandment of the Father, and doing the will of God.

It is wrong to view the sufferings and death of the Lord Jesus as something men did, only to have God convert it all to something good. Were it not for the will of God in the matter, no man could have been able to beat Jesus, spit in His face, or crucify Him. He said, “No man taketh is [His life] from Me” (John 10:18).

Therefore Paul preached that “Christ should suffer.” Moses and the prophets declared it before hand, not simply as a matter that would happen, but as something God had determined. All of this was done in order to satisfy the justice of God, which cannot continue to “wink” at sin. Sin had to be judged in order for God to be righteous in justifying sinners (Rom 3:26).

It is a terrible display of gross ignorance that this revealed perspective is heard so little in our time. As long as that circumstance continues, men will keep on developing erroneous concepts of God, of Christ, and the great salvation that is offered to men through Jesus Christ. I do not believe it is possible to fully state the magnitude of the distortion of the Gospel.

THAT CHRIST SHOULD BE THE FIRST TO RISE FROM THE DEAD

“ . . . and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead . . . ” Other versions read, “the first to rise from the dead,” NIV “the first to come back from the dead,” BBE “become the first fruits of the resurrection from the dead.” MRD

The resurrection of Christ is a key point in apostolic doctrine (Acts 2:24,31-32; 3:15; 4:10,33; 5:30-31; 10:40-41; 13:30-34; 17:3,31; Rom 1:4; 4:24,25; 5:10; 6:4-5,9-11; 10:9; ; 1 Cor 6:14; 15:3-8,12-23;; 2 Cor 4:10-11,14; 5:15; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:20; 3:10; 3:10; 2:21; 1 Thess 1:10; 4:14; 2 Tim 2:8; Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 1:3,21; 3:18,21; Rev 1:5,18).

The resurrected Christ is the One with whom we now have to do.

- It is His resurrected “life” that saves us (Rom 5:10).
- It is the “power of His resurrection” that is to be experienced now (Phil 3:10).
- The power that is “toward us” is the very power that raised Jesus from the dead (Eph 1:19-20).
- He is the “firstborn from the dead that in all things He might have the preeminence” (Col 1:18).
- In being raised from the dead, Jesus “delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).
- God has begotten us to a living hope “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead” (1 Pet 1:3).
- Jesus was raised from the dead “that your faith and hope might be in God” (1 Pet 1:21).
- Baptism “saves us . . . by the resurrection of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 3:21).

The fact that so little is being said these days concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ defines the nature of the times in which we live. The Christ that is being preached is too often not the One concerning which Moses and the Prophets testified.

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concerning which Moses and the Prophets testified.

THAT CHRIST SHOULD SHOW LIGHT UNTO THE PEOPLE

“ . . . and should show light unto the people. . . ” Other versions read, “proclaim light to the Jewish people,” NKJV “proclaim light to His own people,” NIV “give light to the people,” BBE “should announce light . . . to the people,” DARBY “spread light to Jewish . . . people,” GWN “announce God’s light to Jew,” NLT “bring light to Jews,” LIVING “proclaim a message of light . . . to the Jewish people,” IE “announce the light of salvation to the Jews,” GNB and “He would be the first rays of God's daylight shining on people far and near.” MESSAGE

When Jesus began His ministry in Judea, it is written, “The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up” (Matt 4:16). This, Matthew records, fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah (Isa 9:1-2). Zechariah, father of John the Baptist said of Jesus’ coming into the world, “Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:78-79). When aged Simeon saw the infant Christ he referred to Him as “the glory of Thy people Israel” (Lk 2:32).

That marvelous light was but an introduction to the light that was shed forth after Jesus was raised from the dead and returned to heaven. Now the light of the Gospel is preached “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16). And why so? Because “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22). They were prepared for it, being tutored by the Prophets concerning the coming Savior, and the nature of His exalted ministry.

This necessarily infers that the Jews, have not been written off as some allege. God still has a covenant with them. As it is written, “And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins” (Rom 11:26-27). Incidentally, the term “Jacob” is nowhere applied to the body of Christ as a whole – and neither is “Israel.” Both of those terms are derived from Jacob, grandson to Abraham. I do not believe the church is ever associated directly with Jacob. Those who believe on Christ are referred to as “the children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7). However, they are never called the children of “Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” or “the children of Isaac,” or “the children of Jacob.” Also, those who teach that a special gospel will be preached to the Jews that is distinct from the one preached to the Gentiles, have attempted to impose their theology upon the Scriptures. However, they are not able to do it. The light Jesus dispensed is the same for both the Jews and the Gentiles, as this text unquestionably affirms.

• **RISEN CHRIST SENT TO BLESS ISRAEL FIRST.** “Unto you first God, having raised up His Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities” (Acts 3:26).

• **IT WAS NECESSARY TO FIRST DECLARE THE GOSPEL TO THE JEWS.** “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46).

THAT CHRIST SHOULD SHOW LIGHT UNTO THE GENTILES

“ . . . and should show light . . . to the Gentiles.” Other versions read, “and to the nations,” DARBY “and non-Jewish people,” GWN “and Gentiles alike,” NLT “and to the heathen,” WILLIAMS and “godless.” MESSAGE

Both Moses and the Prophets spoke of the Gentiles being blessed by God. Moses alluded to this circumstance, but the Prophets wrote of it in detail.

• **GOD WOULD PROVOKE THE JEWS.** Through Moses, God spoke of provoking the Jews to jealousy by giving attention to those who were not a people. “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deu 32:21). Paul cited this prophecy when speaking of the preaching of the Gospel. “But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you” (Rom 10:19).

• **THE HEATHEN PROMISED TO THE MESSIAH.** “Ask of Me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession” (Psa 2:8).

• **ALL THE ENDS OF THE EARTH.** “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before Thee” (Psa 22:27).

• **THE GENTILES WOULD SEEK.** “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious” (Isa 11:10).

• **GIVEN FOR A COVENANT TO THE GENTILES.** “I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles” (Isa 42:6).

• **A LIGHT TO THE GENTILES.** “And he said, It is a light thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

• **GOD’S HAND LIFTED UP TO THE GENTILES.** “Thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, I will lift up Mine hand to the Gentiles, and set up My standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders” (Isa 49:22).

• **ISRAEL TOO SMALL TO BE THE ONLY ONES.** “Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isa 49:6).

The risen Christ is the Administrator of a Kingdom of light. Ignorance has no place where Jesus is ministering. Now there is:

• **illumination** (Heb 10:32).

• **enlightenment** (Eph 1:18; Heb 6:4).

• **comprehension** (Eph 3:18).

• **discernment** (1 Cor 2:14; 1 Cor 11:29; 12:10; Heb 5:14).

• **understanding** (Matt 13:23; Acts 8:30; Rom 15:21; 1 Cor 12:3; 14:15,19,20; Eph 1:18; 3:4; 5:17; Col 1:9; 2:22; Tim 2:7; Heb 11:3; 1 John 5:20).

• **knowledge** (Acts 2:14,36; 4:10; 13:38; Rom 3:19; 5:3; 6:3,6,9,16; 7:18; 8:22,28; 9:23; 13:11; 15:14; 1 Cor 2:12; 1 Cor 6:2-3,9; 8:1; 14:34; 15:58; 2 Cor 4:6; 5:1; 8:9; Gal 2:16; 3:7; 4:9; Eph 1:9,17,18; 3:3-5,19; 4:13; 5:5; 6:8-9,19; Phil 1:9; 3:8,10; Col 1:9-10,27; 3:10,24; 4:6; 1 Thess 1:4; 4:4; 1 Tim 1:8-9; 3:15; 4:3; Heb 10:30,34; James 4:4; 5:20; 1 Pet 1:18; 5:9; 2 Pet 1:2,3,5,20,20; 3:3,17,18; 1 John 2:3-5,13,14,18,20,21,29; 3:2,5,14, 15,19,24; 4:2,6,7,13,16; 5:2,13,15,18-20; 2 John 1:1).

• **seeing** (Rom 3:30; 2 Cor 3:12; 4:1; Col 3:9; 2 Thess 1:6; Heb 4:6,14; 6:6; 7:25; 12:1; 1 Pet 1:22; 3:11,14,17).

An unilluminated people who profess to be Christian are a living contradiction. Among professed believers, a continued state of ignorance contradicts the very nature of salvation. To continue walking in darkness when the greatest light is shining betrays a hard heart and a rebellious spirit. Although this condition is common among the churches of our day. It is not at all common in heaven. In Christ Jesus, and because of justification and reconciliation, God has placed the truth within the reach of every humble and contrite spirit. The way has been cleared to the Divine classroom, and the heavenly Teacher stands ready to teach whoever will come to Him. Jesus explained the failure of men to take advantage of this light. “And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God” (John 3:19-21).

That is the real situation, contrary claims notwithstanding.

CONCLUSION

The wisdom and thoroughness with which Paul gave his defense is most arresting. Paul introduced his defense by saying, “I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews” (Acts 26:2). Yet, in all of his defense, he spends no extensive time either mentioning or directly contradicting the charges brought against him. Instead, he introduces a body of evidence that contradicts what was said of him. In so doing he is providing a context in which the charges will be seen as incredulous and absurd. Ponder the remarkable scope of Paul’s defense.

1. His manner of life was known publically since he was young (26:4).
2. His manner of life was known to all of the Jews, who knew him from the beginning (26:5a).
3. He lived as a Pharisee, the strictest sect of the Jewish religion (26:5b).
4. He is being judged for the hope of the promise that was made to the Jewish fathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (26:6).
5. All faithful Jews – the twelve tribes – lived with this hope. It was not a strange thing among them (26:7a).
6. It was this hope that caused the Jews to make their accusation against Paul – a hope that was being lived out with consistency and zeal (26:7b).
7. He asks Agrippa and those with him why they would think it incredible that God would raise the dead (26:8).
8. In his prior life, he was convinced he ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus (26:9).
9. He lived consistent with this thought shutting many saints in prison (26:10a).
10. He did not go about this opposition in a disorderly way, or in any kind of opposition to Jewish authorities. He rather obtained authority from the chief priests to do so (26:10b).
11. When these saints were put to death for their allegiance to Christ, Paul gave his voice against them (26:10c).
12. Pursuing his conviction, he punished believers in the synagogues, pressuring them blaspheme (26:11a).

13. He even launched an initiative against the believers in cities outside of his own country (26:11b).

14. Jesus Himself accosted Paul as he went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests (26:12).

15. At midday, when the sun was at its highest, a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, focused on him, also shining around those who were with him (26:13).

16. Both Paul and those with him were struck to the ground by something and someone that was superior to them (26:14a).

17. He heard a voice speaking to him in the Hebrew tongue asking why he was persecuting the Speaker (26:14b).

18. With penetrating insight, the voice said it was difficulty for him to kick against the goads of his conscience (26:14c).

19. He asked who was speaking to him (26:15a).

20. The voice replied that He was Jesus whom he was persecuting (26:15b).

21. Jesus told him to get up on his feet (26:16a).

22. Jesus told him why He had appeared to him (26:16b).

23. Jesus had appeared to him to make him a minister and a witness of what he had seen (26:16c).

24. Jesus was also making him a minister and a witness to the things he would show him in the future (26:16d).

25. Jesus told him He would deliver him from the Jews (26:17a).

26. Jesus told him he would deliver him from the Gentiles, to whom, He would now send him (26:17b).

27. Jesus appointed him to open men's eyes (26:18a).

28. Jesus appointed him to turn men from darkness to light (16:18b).

29. Jesus appointed him to turn men from the power of Satan unto God (26:18c).

30. Jesus appointed him to turn men so they could receive forgiveness of sins (26:18d).

31. Jesus appointed him to turn men so they could receive an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith (26:18e).

32. He was not disobedient to the heavenly vision (26:19).

33. First he showed these things to the Jews in Damascus (26:20a).

34. Then he showed them at Jerusalem (26:20b).

35. Then he showed them throughout the coasts of Judea (26:20c).

36. They he showed them to the Gentiles (26:20d).

37. He declared that they should repent and turn to God (26:20e).

38. He declared that they should do works appropriate for repentance (26:20f).

39. It is for these causes, while he was engaged in fulfilling the mandate of Jesus, that the Jews caught him in the Temple and sought to kill him (26:21).

40. He had obtained help from God (26:22a).

41. Until that very day he had continued witnessing to both small and great (26:22b).

42. He said nothing except what the Prophets and Moses said should come (26:22c).
43. He declared that Christ had to suffer (26:23a).
44. He declared that Christ had to be the first to rise from the dead (26:23b).
45. He declared that Christ had to show light to the Jews (26:23c).
46. He declared that Christ had to show light to the Gentiles (26:23d).

Of these forty-six points, note the following.

- Four refer to his strict Jewish upbringing.
- Three refer to the “hope” in the promises of God.
- Two refer to the resurrection of the dead.
- One refers to his persuasion that he should oppose Jesus.
- Six refer to his zealous initiative against believers in Christ.
- Eighteen refer to Jesus apprehending and commissioning him.
- One refers to the difficulty he had kicking against a goading conscience.
- Twenty-one directly refer to Jesus Christ.
- Seven refer to his faithfulness in carrying out the commission of Jesus.
- One refers to the Jews apprehending him while he was carrying out Jesus’ commission.
- Two refer to the fact that God helped him.
- One refers to the totality of the people to whom he witnessed.
- Five refer to the summation of what the Prophets and Moses said about Jesus.

That is an example of being ready to give an answer for the hope that is within!

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

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Lesson #101

RESPONSES BY FESTUS AND AGRIPPA

“ 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad. 25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. 26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. 28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. 29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds. 30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: 31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.” (Acts 26:24-32)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Upon hearing the testimony of Paul, Festus shouts out in derision that Paul's much learning has made him mad, or insane. Paul answers that he was not mad, and that this ought to be evident, for the things of which he had spoken were done publicly, and not in privacy. He then focuses his attention on Agrippa, he apparently being more alert and sensitive. He asks him if he believes the prophets, also stating that he knows Agrippa does. The king then confesses that he, because of Paul's words, was almost persuaded to be a Christian. Paul then expressed his desire that Agrippa and those with him were altogether persuaded to be as himself – except for his bonds. Agrippa, Festus, Bernice and those who were with them then arose and went into another area privately. Agrippa then acknowledged Paul had done nothing worthy of death, and could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. Little did he know that this was all being worked by God.

LIVING SOLELY FOR THE LORD

There is only one kind of life that is acceptable to God – one that is lived solely for the Lord. It is written that Jesus “died

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for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). This is something that both the novice and the mature can do. The new convert and the one seasoned in the ways of the Lord can live solely for the Lord. When it comes to priorities, Jesus said the first things to be sought are “the Kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matt 6:33). No other quest can be allowed to be primary!

This solitary manner of living is found throughout the apostolic doctrine. Redemption does not simply set men free to roam in the open field of self satisfaction. It rather frees to live unto the Lord without a condemning conscience, and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

• **WALK IN NEWNESS OF LIFE.** “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also SHOULD walk in newness of life ” (Rom 6:4).

• **TO BE MARRIED TO CHRIST AND BEAR FRUIT UNTO GOD.** “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye SHOULD be married to another , even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we SHOULD bring forth fruit unto God ” (Rom 7:4).

• **TO SERVE IN NEWNESS OF SPIRIT.** “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we SHOULD serve in newness of spirit , and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6).

• **NOT LIVE FOR SELF, BUT UNTO JESUS.** “And that He died for all, that they

which live **SHOULD** not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them, and rose again ” (2 Cor 5:15).

- **TO BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME.** “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we **SHOULD** be holy and without blame before Him in love ” (Eph 1:4).

- **WALK IN THE WORKS GOD ORDAINED.** “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we **SHOULD** walk in them ” (Eph 2:10).

- **BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLEMISH.** “That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish ” (Eph 5:27).

- **ABSTAIN FROM FORNICATION AND KNOW HOW TO POSSESS OUR VESSELS IN SANCTIFICATION AND HONOR.** “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication : that every one of you **SHOULD** know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor ” (1 Thess 4:4).

- **LIVE TOGETHER WITH CHRIST.** “Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we **SHOULD** live together with Him ” (1 Thess 5:10).

- **LIVE SOBERLY, GODLY, AND RIGHTEOUSLY.** “Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we **SHOULD** live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ” (Titus 2:12).

- **THAT WE SHOULD BE A KIND OF FIRSTFRUITS OF HIS CREATION.** “Of His own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we **SHOULD** be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures ” (James 1:18).

- **TO SHOW FORTH THE PRAISES OF GOD.** “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye **SHOULD** show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet 2:9).

- **TO FOLLOW IN CHRIST’S STEPS.** “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye **SHOULD** follow his steps ” (1 Pet 2:21).

- **TO LIVE UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS.** “Who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, **SHOULD** live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye were healed” (1 Pet 2:24).

- **LIVE THE REST OF OUR TIME TO THE WILL OF GOD.** “That he no longer **SHOULD** live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God ” (1 Pet 4:2).

That will suffice to confirm that the intention of salvation has been spelled out in remarkable detail. The question occurs to me if it is even possible to conclude a person is saved if they are consistently lacking the things declared to be the objective of salvation. I understand this is very difficult for some to receive, and I certainly am not going to sit in the Judges chair – at least not until Jesus comes. However, it seems to me that the examination of self should include a survey for the presence of these stated objectives.

THE POINT OF IT ALL

The point of bringing up these matters is that they were actually lived out by Paul. That is precisely why he was able to seize the opportunity set before him, and give a defense that would glorify God, edify the saints, and convict sinners.

Many people are unable to enter open doors set before them because they are not actually living for God. They have adopted an inferior agenda for their lives, and are too close to the world. As a result, they are not able to recognize when an opportunity is placed before them to bring glory to God and be used in His work. In fact, they do not think of life from this perspective.

One of the key aspects of the “falling away” of which the apostle speaks (2 Thess 2:2; 2 Tim 3:1-5) is the impact of false teaching. The fact that it is false, and even a “lie,” is not its only trait. It also produces lives that are, at the very least, skewed in the wrong direction – toward this present evil world. Truth sanctifies (John 17:17). The lie defiles and subverts. Whether men wish to acknowledge it or not, the way professing Christians live is the direct result of the doctrine they have embraced. Their view of what God is doing in Christ directly impacts on how they live.

Paul sets a sterling example for us, maintaining his faith under great duress, and immediately laying hold of the opportunities set before him. Now, we will see the effectiveness of his insightful defense.

FESTUS SAID WITH A LOUD VOICE

“ 26:24 And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.”

Now, Festus can be quiet no longer. He has heard so much about Jesus, His apprehension of Paul, and His commission to Paul, that he cannot hold his peace.

Keep in mind what Paul has just finished saying! He has outlined how Jesus apprehended him, and what He commissioned him to do. He has provided a summation of what the Prophets and Moses said about Jesus, and has testified concerning what he consistently preached. He has addressed no exhortation to the crowd before him – unless it be that Agrippa listen to what he said without interruption. He has offered no invitation. He has not diagnosed the crowd before him, or sought to psychoanalyze any of them. In a sense, what he said was not personally about them. He made no offer to them. He held forth no promise to them. He did tell them that everyone was required to repent, turn to God, and do works appropriate for repentance. Now, how will all of this set with the people – particularly Festus and Agrippa?

HE SPAKE FOR HIMSELF

“And as he thus spake for himself . . .” Other versions read, “as he thus made his defense,” NKJV “while Paul was saying this in his defense,” NASB “At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense,” NIV “just as he reached this point in his defense,” BBE and “As Paul was defending himself in this way,” GWN “as he thus proceeded with his defense.” AMPLIFIED

Thus Paul’s defense is interrupted. And at what point was this? What was Paul saying that moved the interruption to take place? Here is what he had just finished saying. “Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come: That Christ should suffer, and that He should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should show light unto the people, and to the Gentiles” (Acts 26:22-23).

Later Paul will say of the Lord, “whose I am, and whom I serve” (Acts 27:23). That, in effect, is what he has said to this group of dignitaries. Further, he has said it for himself, not requiring someone else to speak for him, as the Jews did when they brought Tertullus to state their case against Paul before Felix.

Now, Festus can be quiet no longer. He has heard so much about Jesus, His apprehension of Paul,

and His commission to Paul, that he cannot hold his peace.

THOU ART BESIDE THYSELF

“ . . . Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself . . . ” Other versions read, “you are out of your mind,” NASB “you are mad,” RSV “you are off your head,” BBE “you’re crazy,” GWN “you have lost your mind,” NET “you are insane,” NLT and “You rave.” LITV

This is the same charge some of the people made against Jesus (John 10:20). When Rhoda reported to the disciples that Peter, who had been imprisoned, was at the door, they responded, “Thou art mad” (Acts 12:15). Paul said if a stranger or unbeliever came into their assembly, and they all were speaking in tongues, the stranger would “say that ye are mad” (1 Cor 14:23). What does this expression mean?

This expression simply means Festus thought Paul was not in control of his mind. He was not in his right mind, and was not being rational or logical in what he was saying. To Festus, Paul’s presentation was not reasonable. That was the assessment of Festus when he heard of a vision of a risen Jesus, the commission of one who had died, and of angels, and the resurrection of the dead. Perhaps if there was more talk about these things today, we would find that this kind of assessment is still quite common. That is because the truth concerning Jesus Christ does not fit within the framework of human opinion. It is something that has to be received by faith, not by human reasoning.

THY MUCH LEARNING HATH MADE THEE MAD

“ . . . much learning doth make thee mad.” Other versions read, “much learning is driving you mad,” NKJV “your great learning is driving you insane,” NIV “too much learning is driving you insane,” NRSV “your great learning has made you unbalanced,” BBE “too much study is driving you mad,” CSB and “much study hath enraged thee.” MRD

With a brashness that is fostered by unbelief, Festus writes off everything Paul has said by alleging that he is out of his mind. He also charges that what he had learned had made him insane.

It ought to be noted that the expression “much learning” does not refer to advanced education in the schools of men. What schools of men ever have taught them to rely upon what Moses and the Prophets said would come to pass? What secular education majors on Jesus Christ, or testifies to His resurrection, or the resurrection of all of the dead? The “learning” to which Festus refers included his Jewish upbringing, and exposure to Moses and the Prophets. There is not one whit of evidence in Scripture that Paul was ever trained in the schools of the heathen.

What Prompted this Response of Festus?

What would move a political official to shout out such thing? He was evidently stirred by what Paul had said – not the way he said it, or the intonation of his voice, but the actual words that he said.

Consider Paul’s defense, and behold how the governor Festus was offended by it. Here is a classic example of the flesh’s response to truth.

- Paul has testified of his strict upbringing (26:4-5).
- He has declared his hope in the promise made by God to the Jewish fathers, which hope was common among all believing Jews (26:6-7).
- He asked Agrippa and those with him why it should be thought incredible that God would raise the dead (26:8).
- He testified that he once thought it was proper to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth, and therefore zealously persecuted those who believed on Him

(26:9-12).

- He declared Christ's apprehension of him, and of the vision that attended it (26:13-16a).
- He related the commission Jesus delivered to him (26:16b-18).
- He affirmed he had not been disobedient to the heavenly vision (26:19-20).

As Paul declared these things in a spiritually expert manner, and in words that were taught by the Holy Spirit, the listeners were divided into classes: those with good inclinations toward the truth, and those with no interest in the truth.

- He told how the Jews caught him in the Temple while he was carrying out the commission Jesus gave him (26:21).
- He affirmed that he had obtained help from God to continue to that very day faithfully witnessing to both small and great (26:22a).
- He detailed the message that he preached, declaring that it was in strict conformity with the things the Prophets and Moses said would come to pass (26:22b).
- He summarized the Gospel concerning Christ (26:23).

Observe the unnatural things to which Paul had testified – things that were foreign to the way flesh thinks.

- A supernatural light greater than the most magnificent natural light to which men are exposed.
- The words and commission of a Living Man who was dead, and had raised from the dead
- A vision from heaven.
- The resurrection of the dead.
- Being turned from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.
- Receiving an inheritance that was not specified, yet was declared to belong to all who had faith.

As Paul declared these things in a spiritually expert manner, and in words that were taught by the Holy Spirit, the listeners were divided into classes: those with good inclinations toward the truth, and those with no interest in the truth. What Paul said will be used to reveal the hearts and preferences of men. It is the peculiar prerogative of truth to make such distinctions.

Additionally, it is quite possible it irritated Festus that Paul did not directly address him as he did Agrippa during his defense (26:2,7,19,27). It is the nature of flesh to be proud, and to be irritated when it is not afforded the attention it desires.

WORDS OF TRUTH AND SOBERNESS

“ 25 But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.”

Paul is quick to respond to the outburst of Festus, yet his answer is tempered with godly wisdom, and saturated with his love of the truth. He recognizes that Festus is a political dignitary, yet is not hesitant to deny that there was any truth in what he said. This is something someone who fears man cannot do. He knew what Solomon had said, perhaps even better than Solomon knew it: “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov 29:25). It is never

right to fear man, and it is never wrong to fear God.

I AM NOT MAD

“But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus . . .” Other versions read, “I am not out of my mind, most excellent Festus,” NASB “I am not insane,” NIV “I am not off my head,” BBE “No, I am not 'crazy,' Festus, your Excellency.” CSB and “I am not deranged, excellent Festus.” MRD

Sometimes it is good to simply deny false charges: “I am not . . .” I am aware that this is the way the worldly-minded also replies to allegations made against them. Often, however, the charges are verified by some evidence that contradicts such denials. However, this is not the manner of the Kingdom. In Christ Jesus, the evidence always perfectly accords with the claim. There is no such thing as a real salvation that is controverted by the way those claiming to possess it speak and live. Tritely the carnal will spout, “You cannot judge a book by its cover.” You will never hear such benighted souls say, “You cannot judge a tree by its fruit.” Of course, there is such a thing as the appearance contradicting the claim. But that is only when corruptness is within, and the claim is false. That is never said of those who are clean within having a contradicting and worldly appearance. Those who insist on saying that such a condition does exist – clean within, yet defiled without – are simply wrong. Were such a thing possible, the work of God would be properly maligned.

Therefore, Paul affirms that in speaking he has not departed from reason. He has not spoken to give himself the advantage, or present himself as other than he really is. He has been in full possession of all of his mental faculties as he spoke. He was not overcharged with emotion. He was not hastily reacting to the circumstances.

WORDS OF TRUTH AND SOBERNESS

“ . . . but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.” Other versions read, “but speak the words of truth and reason,” NKJV “but I utter sober truth,” NASB “my words are true and wise,” BBE “I am speaking words of truth and honesty,” CSB “I am speaking true and rational words,” ESV “and speak words of truth and rectitude,” MRD and “I am uttering the straight, sound truth.” AMPLIFIED

“Words of truth” are expressions that perfectly match reality. They are words that depict a very real situation. As used here, they are utterances that are in perfect harmony with the nature of God, the reality of salvation, and the word of the Gospel. They contradict neither the text of Scripture, nor the purpose of God. They do not contravene what Paul had actually experienced, or what Jesus had really said to him. They reflected the mind of Christ, and were in strict accord with the eternal purpose of God. Paul had spoken as the “oracles of God” (1 Pet 4:11). Because of this circumstance, the Lord will work through what Paul has said – a privilege that is withheld from all who use improper and self-conceived words.

“Words of . . . soberness” are words that have result in men being sober-minded. They are not words that are characterized by levity, or tend to make men scatterbrained. “Soberness,” “sobriety,” or being “sober” refers to, “soundness of mind, self-control,” THAYER “sensibleness, intellectual soundness, rationality, reasonableness, good sense,” FRIBERG and “to have understanding about practical matters and thus be able to act sensibly - to have sound judgment, to be sensible, to use good sense, sound judgment.” LOUW-NIDA

As used in this text, “words of truth and soberness” are words that are perfectly aligned with God and what He has purposed. These are not to be construed as words that are politically correct, or are designed to placate men, or makes friends with them. They are in harmony with both the nature of God and the purpose of God. They blend with the salvation of God and the true sanctification of men. They are in no way at a variance with the Scriptures, and reflect the reality of the situation or subject of which they speak.

Words such as this do not blend with the flesh, the ways of the world, or the exaltation of self. They do not commingle with the wisdom of this world. They sharply contradict the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life. It is for this reason that those who are of the world consider “words of truth and soberness” to be the expression of madness. When a person speaks such words to them, they at once think that he is beside himself, and is not speaking in accord with the way things really are. However, these are wholly foolish assessments, and the people making them do not know what they are talking about.

In the end, when the world to which their minds are nailed, has passed away, the risen and exalted Christ is confronted, and the people they maligned are seen as they really are, then they will know how wrong they were – but it will be too late. Even though they are to be expelled from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His power, they will make certain confessions before they are banished. Before an assembled universe, they will bow the knee to Jesus, and confess that He is, in fact, Lord of all. They will acknowledge they have been wrong, and that God was right. They will also bow before those who brought the truth of God to them, and will acknowledge before every created personality that the ones they hated were the very ones God loved. They will also give an account of all of their idle words, all their sayings, and for all their deeds. None will be overlooked.

This sort of thing was told to Felix by Paul, when he reasoned with Him about righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come (Acts 24:25). Jesus spoke of similar things when He announced to the generation among whom he walked, that in the day of judgment the men of Nineveh who repented at the preaching of Jonah would rise up and condemn them, because they did not hear the One who is “greater than Jonah” (Matt 12:41). He also said the Queen of Sheba would rise up and condemn their generation, because she came from afar to hear the wisdom of Solomon, but they refused to hear the One who is “greater than Solomon” (Matt 12:42). He said that it would more “more tolerable” for the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment, than for a city who did not receive the messengers He sent to them (Matt 10:15). He told the citizens of Capernaum that they would be “brought down to hell” because they had ignored the mighty works that had been done among them (Matt 11:23).

Words “of truth and soberness” do not seem to me to allow much room for levity – the presence of which is quite prominent in our time. The people of God should take care not to give their attention to sayings or matters that find their terminus in laughter alone. A manner of speaking is legitimate only to the degree that it makes for a sober mind.

What will be the outcome of those who hear “words of truth and soberness,” and view them as the words of a person who is not in their right mind? That is certainly something worth thinking about! I cannot imagine a person in heaven is lacking in seriousness, one that was lighthearted, or one that took God’s word lightly. The environment will not be conducive to that.

NOT DONE IN A CORNER

“ 26 For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.”

The governor has heard the testimony of a man who has been commissioned by the Savior of the world, and has written it off as madness, insanity, and the display of a deranged mind. No further words will be said to him!

Now Paul turns his attention once again to Agrippa. He does not speak long with Festus because of the manifested hardness of his heart. The governor has heard the testimony of a man who has been commissioned by the Savior of the world, and has written it off as madness, insanity, and the display of a deranged mind. No further words will be said to him! Throughout all of Scripture, the only other words addressed to Festus came from Agrippa, which report is the last mentioning of his

name (Acts 26:32). So far as the record is concerned, not one more word was uttered to him by Paul.

While this is a sensitive subject, there does come a time when the witness is withdrawn from those with hardened hearts. There are examples in Scripture of such a time, both with the world, cities, large bodies of people, and individuals. When this occurs, there is no further opportunity granted. It fulfills words stated by Solomon: "He, that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov 29:1). Again, he stated in Proverbs 6:14-15, where it says of a "wicked man," "Frowardness is in his heart, he deviseth mischief continually; he soweth discord. Therefore shall his calamity come suddenly; suddenly shall he be broken without remedy."

Scriptural examples of those whose time ran out include the following.

- **CAIN.** "And now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Gen 4:11-12).

- **THE WORLD.** "And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years" (Gen 6:3).

- **SODOM AND THE CITIES OF THE PLAIN.** "And the LORD said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous; I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know . . . For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the LORD; and the LORD hath sent us to destroy it" (Gen 18:20-21; 19:13).

- **GENERATIONS OF THE GENTILE WORLD.** "Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves . . . For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature . . . And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient" (Rom 1:24,26,28)

- **THE TEN UNFAITHFUL SPIES AND ALL THOSE WHO BELIEVED THEM.** "I the LORD have said, I will surely do it unto all this evil congregation, that are gathered together against me: in this wilderness they shall be consumed, and there they shall die" (Num 14:35).

- **ELI'S HOUSE.** "And therefore I have sworn unto the house of Eli, that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be purged with sacrifice nor offering for ever" (1 Sam 3:14).

- **WHOLE GENERATIONS OF THE JEWS.** "Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee" (Jer 7:16). "For as Jonas was a sign unto the Ninevites, so shall also the Son of man be to this generation. The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Luke 11:30-32).

- **CERTAIN INHABITANTS OF JERUSALEM.** "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (Mat 23:38-39).

- **UNBELIEVING JEWS IN ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA.** "Then Paul and Barnabas

waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles . . . But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium” (Acts 13:46,51).

• **HYMENAËUS AND ALEXANDER.** “Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:20).

• **GOD HAS BEEN KNOWN TO WITHDRAW HIMSELF FROM PEOPLE.** “They shall go with their flocks and with their herds to seek the LORD; but they shall not find him; he hath withdrawn himself from them” (Hosea 5:6).

This is not an area in which men can speculate, to be sure. The best thing to do is take these warnings seriously, and endeavor with all of your might not to tempt the Lord with unseemly conduct, words, or thoughts. Holy men have spoken solemnly about this Divine trait. Joshua warned the people, “ If ye forsake the LORD, and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that He hath done you good” (Josh 24:20). Azariah told Asa the king, “Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with Him; and if ye seek Him, He will be found of you; but if ye forsake Him, He will forsake you ” (2 Chron 15:2). Ezra declared, “The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek Him; but His power and His wrath is against all them that forsake Him ” (Ezra 8:22). Isaiah affirmed, “And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall be consumed ” (Isa 1:28).

To this day, there are multitudes that do not believe God will fulfill those words. They imagine that they can reject the Lord, deny His Word, and do the things He has forbidden – all with impunity. But they are deceived. They have reacted to the truth of God in precisely the same manner as Festus, viewing His Word and work as unreasonable. What a tragic error in judgment! Men cannot trifle with God without paying a most grievous penalty. They cannot view the words of His servants as insane and unmeaningful without the God of heaven noting it, and eventually responding to it in judgment.

THE KING KNOWETH

“For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely . . .” Other versions read, “is familiar with these

At this point it is necessary to say that those who are lacking in a acquaintance with Scripture are at a decided disadvantage. It is not insurmountable, but such ignorance must be dissipated before any fruit can be expected.

things,” NIV “has knowledge of these things,” BBE “understands these matters,” CJB “is informed about these things,” DARBY “well acquainted with these things,” MRD “knows what I am talking about,” CEV and “understands about these things well enough.” AMPLIFIED

What “things” did Herod know? They probably included some knowledge of the life and ministry of Jesus, the change of Saul of Tarsus, the persecution of believers, as well as some knowledge of the writings of the Moses and the Prophets. Agrippa did not know the truth in the sense affirmed by Jesus: “And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32). At this point he had not acknowledged the truth, as stated in Second Timothy 2:25. His knowledge appears to have been an academic one. That was not enough to save the man, although a person must begin with that kind of knowledge in order to acknowledge truth and be made free by it.

Paul knew that you can reason with a person who has been exposed to the truth of God, and is at least familiar with what God has said. However, you cannot reason concerning the salvation of God with someone who has no knowledge of what God has said about salvation. That is precisely why Paul spoke as he did to the Athenian philosophers (Acts 17:22-31). For example, they were hearing

for the first time about the resurrection of the dead (Acts 17:18,32). However, this was not the case with Agrippa. He was acquainted with what the Jews taught, as well as with their manners.

I have observed over the years that a lot of the purported witnessing that is done in the name of Jesus assumes that the people know more than they actually do. Under such conditions, at the very best, any commitment that is made is shallow – too shallow to sustain the professed believer. For example, knowing what the Scriptures say is imperative, but not enough. Satan knows what they say, but the Word of God has no sanctifying power upon him. The word of God must do its work within for it to be profitable. Therefore, it is said of the Word, “as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). It is good to bear witness to someone who is aware of what the Word says, yet that is not sufficient of itself. It appears from the text that the knowledge of these things distinguished Agrippa from Festus. Paul speaks to him with these things in mind.

At this point it is necessary to say that those who are lacking in a acquaintance with Scripture are at a decided disadvantage. It is not insurmountable, but such ignorance must be dissipated before any fruit can be expected. Judging from the content of much of the preaching and teaching in our time, this is not generally known – at least not with discernment.

I SPEAK FREELY

“ . . . before whom also I speak freely . . .” Other versions read, “I speak to him also with confidence,” NASB “I can speak freely with him,” NIV “It is to him I am actually speaking boldly,” CSB “I therefore speak confidently before him,” MRD “to him I now speak fearlessly,” NJB “I speak frankly,” LIVING and “[therefore] to him I speak with bold frankness and confidence.” AMPLIFIED

Lexically, the word “freely” is translated (**parrhiazomenoj**) from a word meaning, “to bear oneself boldly or confidently . . . to use freedom in speaking . . . to grow confident, have boldness, show assurance, assume a bold bearing,” THAYER “as acting with an attitude of openness that comes from freedom and lack of fear,” FRIBERG and “as acting with an attitude of openness that comes from freedom and lack of fear.” LOUW-NIDA

In the English language, and as it is used here, “freely” means, “ in a free manner: a. as of one's own accord; b: with freedom from external control c: without restraint or reservation.” MERIAM-WEBSTER

It was the knowledge that Agrippa possessed that permitted Paul to speak with such liberty – without having to guard every word he said, carefully weighing whether or not he was casting pearls before a swine (Matt 7:6). For one thing, when he appealed to Moses and the Prophets, Agrippa would be able to pick up on the general sense of what Paul was saying. This was to his advantage if he would but give heed to it. We might liken it to someone having a wholesome respect for the Bible, so that he would not speak against it.

When a person speaks the truth of God to an uninformed audience – like the group at Athens (Acts 17:22-32), or the idolaters in Lystra (Acts 14:14-17) – the speaker is actually limited in what he can say. For example, it is pointless to speak about Jesus or Christ if there is no cursory knowledge of who He is. If, on the other hand, one is acquainted with Moses and the Prophets, and what they foretold about the coming Messiah, the speaker has something to work with – and so does the Holy Spirit.

The Danger of a Private Interpretation of Jesus Christ

Right here, a word must be said about the danger of preaching a human interpretation of Jesus Christ, what He did, and why He did it. There is a lot of this happening in our time, so that the

understanding of people is being shaped by an erroneous view of Jesus, His love, His work, and what He is doing at this time.

Right here, a word must be said about the danger of preaching a human interpretation of Jesus Christ, what He did, and why He did it. There is a lot of this happening in our time, so that the understanding of people is being shaped by an erroneous view of Jesus, His love, His work, and what He is doing at this time. All of this is done in order to supposedly make Jesus relevant to the hearers. However, what is actually being done is that the real Jesus is being further obscured, with men being led to think of Him as a kind of hero that is waging a war against poverty, disease, and marital and social disorder. Scripture refers these kind of presentations as “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4), or “false Christs” (Matt 24:24).

It is important to again mention that the true Jesus is the One who fulfilled the prophecies of Moses and the Prophets. Any Jesus who does not precisely fulfill those prophecies cannot possibly be the real Jesus, and to lead men to believe that it is, is to lead them astray.

- The factual Jesus is the One who magnified the Law and made it honorable (Isa 42:21).
- It is One that loves righteousness and hates iniquity (Heb 1:9).
- It is the One who will come in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who know not God and obey not the Gospel (2 Thess 1:8).
- It is one who reconciles men to God, so that they are in harmony with Him (Col 1:20-21).
- This is the Jesus who made an end of sin and brought in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24; Heb 9:26; 1 Cor 1:30).
- It is one in whom we die to sin and are made alive unto God (Rom 6:11).
- This is the Jesus who comes to give us an understanding, that we might know Him that is true (1 John 5:20).
- It is the One who says “sin no more!” (John 5:13; 8:11).
- He speaks of abiding in His love (John 15:10), bearing fruit (John 15:2-8), and taking up your cross and following Him (Lk 9:23).
- He tells men that if they do not forsake all that they have, they cannot be His disciples (Lk 14:33).

This is all in keeping with Moses’ prophecy of Jesus: that He would be a Prophet to whom the people would hearken. Those who refused to hearken to Him would be destroyed from among the people (Deut 18:15, 18-19; Acts 2:22-23). For those of tender heart, and according to Isaiah, He is the One who will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoking flax (Isa 42:3; Matt 12:20).

Because Agrippa had some knowledge of Jewish manners and of Moses and the Prophets, Paul was able to speak more freely than he apparently could to Festus.

I AM PERSUADED

“ . . . for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him . . .” Other versions read, “for I am convinced that none of these things escapes his attention,” NKJV “I am persuaded that none of these things escape his notice,” NASB “being certain that all this is common knowledge to him,” BBE “because I am sure that none of these things have been hidden from him.” CJB “I am sure these events are all familiar to him, NLT and “I am convinced that not one of these things has escaped his notice.” AMPLIFIED

Once again, the things that were rehearsed to Agrippa include the following. Paul infers they were all of a public nature, and that word of them had been heard by the king. This was no doubt owing to the fact that Judea was the domain over which he presided, and he kept abreast of any events that could potentially cause disruption of the peace. Although these happenings included the manner in which Paul was raised, and his zeal for the Lord, it seems to me that his focus was on the Lord Jesus Christ and the particular prophecies that related to Him.

- The promise made to the fathers (26:6-7).
- That God should raise the dead (26:8).
- The name of Jesus of Nazareth (26:9).
- The appearance of Jesus to Paul on the road to Damascus (26:12-18).
- The preaching of Christ throughout the coasts of Judea (26:20).
- That Christ should suffer (26:23a).
- That Christ should be the first to rise from the dead (26:23b).
- That Christ should show light to the Jewish people (26:23c).
- That Christ should show light to the Gentiles (26:23d).

These were all matters with which anyone attending the synagogues, or subjected to the Scriptures would have some familiarity. That was enough to have provoked earnest inquiry as it did in Cornelius and other proselytes from that region.

THESE THINGS WERE NOT DONE IN A CORNER

“ . . . for this thing was not done in a corner.” Other versions read, “since this thing was not done in a corner.” NKJV “for this has not been done in a corner.” NASB “for it has not been done in secret.” BBE “they didn't happen in some back alley.” CJB “for all this did not take place in a corner [in secret].” AMPLIFIED

This had particular regard to what the Living God had done among the people – things pertaining to Jesus Christ. They included at least the following public matters.

- The news of the birth of Jesus, which the angels affirmed was intended for “all people” (Lk 2:10).
- At the time of Jesus’ dedication as the firstfruit of the womb, Anna the prophetess also proclaimed Christ also declared Him to those who “looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Lk 38).
- The ministry of Jesus, who “went about doing good, and healing all who were that were oppressed of the devil” (Acts 10:38).
- During Christ’s prodigious ministry “His fame” even went “throughout all Syria” (Matt 4:24). It was also spread through all the “land” of the Jews (Matt 9:26), and throughout “all that country” (Matt 9:31).
- Even Herod the Tetrarch, a relative of Agrippa, “heard of the fame of Jesus” (Matt 14:1).

And what may be said now that over two millennia have past? If the knowledge of those happenings was more than enough to provoke earnest inquiry, what can be said of our time, when the fulness of Scripture is available to men, and enough is said about Jesus every day to move men to seek Him?

The fame of Jesus spread through all of Galilee (Mk 1:28), spreading “out into every place of the country round about” (Lk 4:37).

- The fame of Jesus also went “abroad” (Lk 5:15).
- The events of the day of Pentecost, and the proclamation of Jesus was a public matter (Acts 2:2:6).
- In all of this, especially in the preaching of the Gospel, God Himself “set forth,” or “declared publicly,” NASB Jesus as “a propitiation through faith in His blood” (Rom 3:25).
- Add to that the fact that in every synagogue, on every Sabbath, throughout the land, the Scriptures of both Moses and the Prophets were read publicly (Acts 15:21,27).

Indeed, the things that were wrought for the salvation of men were “not done in a corner.”

And what may be said now that over two millennia have past? If the knowledge of those happenings was more than enough to provoke earnest inquiry, what can be said of our time, when the fulness of Scripture is available to men, and enough is said about Jesus every day to move men to seek Him? Even though there is corruptness throughout the Christian world, yet, even under those less-than-ideal circumstances, enough of the truth has been made known to leave men without excuse. There simply is no satisfactory reason for not seeking the Lord, and striving to obtain an understanding of Him.

BELIEVEST THOU THE PROPHETS?

“ 27 King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.”

Behold how Paul presses the matter upon Agrippa. He does not draw back from one who is paying attention to him. He knows nothing of toning down the message to awaken interest, but beholds in Agrippa a man who is wrestling with the truth. He does not shout out in derision like Festus, but displays some interest, even though it will prove to not be enough.

BELIEVEST THOU THE PROPHETS?

“King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets?” Other versions read, “Do you believe the Prophets?” NASB “have you faith in the prophets?” BBE and “do you believe the prophets? [Do you give credence to God’s messengers and their words?]” AMPLIFIED

In asking this question, Paul is not inquiring about the whole of the Prophets, but particularly of what they declared about the coming Christ. That is what Paul affirmed he consistently preached: “saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come” (Acts 26:22).

Some of the Prophets Prophecies

- A “Righteous Branch” who would reign and prosper (Jer 23:5; Zech 3:8).
- A “Child” upon whose shoulder the government would be placed (Isa 9:6).
- One whose name would appropriately be called “Wonderful, Counselor, The Mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6).
- A “Witness,” “a Leader,” and “a Commander” (Isa 55:4).
- A “covenant of the people and a light to the Gentiles” (Isa 42:5).
- “David their king,” raised up for Israel (Jer 30:9).
- He would be called “Messiah the Prince” (Dan 9:25).

- He would be the “Plant of Renown” who would satisfy man’s deepest hunger (Ezek 34:29).
- For those who believe on Him, He would be “a Sanctuary.” For those who do not, He would be “ Stumblingstone ” (Isa 8:14).
- He was the “Shiloh” unto whom the people would gather (Gen 49:10).
- He would be “the Son of righteousness,” who would arise “with healing in His wings” (Mal 4:2).

And what may be said now that over two millennia have past? If the knowledge of those happenings was more than enough to provoke earnest inquiry, what can be said of our time, when the fulness of Scripture is available to men, and enough is said about Jesus every day to move men to seek Him?

He would be “despised and rejected of men” (Isa 53:3).

- He would bear “our griefs,” and carry our “sorrows” (Isa 53:4).
- He was “wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5).
- The “Desire of all nations” (Hag 2:7).
- God’s “Servant,” His “Elect” (Isa 42:1).
- His name would be “Immanuel,” God with us (Isa 7:14).
- As a root, He will spring from Jesse, shall stand for “an ensign of the people,” the Gentiles will “seek” Him, and His rest will be glorious (Isa 11:10).
- He will be a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, and a sure foundation. Because of this, “He that believeth shall not make haste,” or be disturbed NASB (Isa 28:16).
- In Him a fountain will be opened “for sin and uncleanness” (Zech 13:1).
- He would be God’s own “fellow,” who would be smitten by the Lord’s own sword (Zech 13:7).
- He would be called, “the Lord our Righteousness” (Jer 23:6).
- He would be noted as “a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3).
- He would be “the Messenger of the Covenant ” (Mal 3:1).

Now, in the light of that sampling of the Prophets, how does this question sound? “Do you believe the prophets?” NIV

A Point of Profound Concern

I am stricken with a sense of shame for the church of our generation because it is largely behind Agrippa in its knowledge of the prophets – particularly what they said about the coming Christ. I do not doubt that Agrippa will stand up with this generation like the Queen of the south will stand up with the generation that was exposed to the bodily presence of the Son of God. Regardless of the opinions of men, God will hold men responsible for being knowledgeable of what has been revealed to their generation. While there are men who chide religious sloths for leaving the Bibles on the shelf, so to speak, they ought to be reminding them of their answerability for that circumstance. This also applies to the exposure of people to faithful preachers and teachers of the Word of God. Sound preaching and teaching is like a Divine invitation to come to the feast of salvation that God has prepared. Those who imagine they have their own personal business to which they must attend have, by that posture, been excluded from participation in the salvation of God. That is the particular point

of the parable of a man making a great supper, and inviting many. When those who were invited “began to make excuse,” the master of the supper became “angry.” He said of those who declined his invitation, “For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper” (Luke 14:24).

Two invitations were sent out to those servants. The first informed them that a great supper was being prepared, and they were invited to it (Lk 14:16). The second came when the supper was prepared, and the table set – “for all things are now ready” (Lk 14:17). Their excuses confirmed they had not taken the first invitation seriously. It was not, so to speak, marked on their calendars.

The messages of the Prophets concerning the coming Christ were like the first invitation. They were designed to whet the appetite of the people, and awaken them to the necessity of preparation. Then, when Jesus actually arrived on the scene, the people were expected to come to Him.

But what of those who, with Bibles in their homes, are still unaware of the first invitation? What can really be said about those who have taken no time to probe into what the prophets said about a coming Savior, and to culture an appetite for Him? And what of preachers, teachers, and elders who have long been so known, yet have not apprised “the flock of God” of the revelations God gave of Christ through the prophets? Are these conditions something that can be excused? Are they not matters concerning which God has spoken with remarkable clarity?

Add to that the Gospel of Christ, and the exposition of that Gospel in the Epistles. What of those who have neglected all of that revelation, both by hearing and the personal ingestion of the Word of God? Do you suppose leaving such noble pursuits to culture earthly relationships, occupations, and pleasures will be met with a heavenly smile and toleration?

It must be acknowledged that if the question Paul asked Agrippa was asked of the average American church member, it would be met with a questionable and befuddled stare. “Do you believe the prophets?” NKJV Some would blurt out, “Of course!” – even though they would have no idea what the interrogator was talking about. It would be an affirmation similar to the way they would answer, “Do you believe every word of the Bible?” – even though had read very little of it.

I KNOW THAT THOU BELIEVEST

“ . . . I know that thou believest.”

Paul is not speaking of believing like Abraham, who acted upon the Word of the Lord. This is rather an acknowledgment of the truth of Scripture – not formally questioning what it says. In the last 50-55 years, with an amazing plethora of translations designed to make it easier for simpletons to understand, there has actually been a rise in Scriptural illiteracy. As if that were not enough, there has been an explosion of doubt unleashed in the Christian community that has questioned the reliability of the Scriptures themselves. Add to that the environment of a significant percentage of higher and specialized Christian education to read and study more non-Biblical writings than the Scriptures themselves. As a result, a torrent of religious sewage is being dumped on congregations both directly, and through electronic media.

In other words, even though they did not live up to what they knew of the Scriptures, at least they kept the knowledge of the them alive both among themselves, and the social environment in which they existed.

What I am saying in all of this is that what Paul said to Agrippa could not now be said to a staggering number of professing Christians. Add to that the political officials who say they are Christians who have far from a working knowledge of the Scriptures. What man of God could stand before the highest political officials in the land and say, “I know that you do believe”?

Although the Jewish leaders had developed a lot of hoary tradition, and had nullified the commands of God with their tradition, the Scriptures were still read in their gatherings, and a general acquaintance with Scripture was maintained. That is why most of Paul's preaching and teaching was in the synagogues, not in amphitheaters, coliseums, and other social gathering places.

The same was seen in the ministry of Jesus, who regularly went to the synagogues, and often spent every day in the Temple. In other words, even though they did not live up to what they knew of the Scriptures, at least they kept the knowledge of the them alive both among themselves, and the social environment in which they existed. King Agrippa is a testimony to that fact, as well as every proselyte who embraced the Scriptures placed in the hands of the Jews (Rom 9:4).

In this day of greater light, the availability of greater understanding, and the development of Moses and the Prophets by the apostles, there should be a better and more productive understanding of the Prophets. Further, this level of ignorance has taken place in the midst of religious professionals, specialized ministers, extensive Christian education, and an explosion of supposed Christian writing. And what has all of this wave of new knowledge produced? What fruit has it borne? How has God been glorified by it all? A proper answer to such questions will reveal the nature of the times in which we live.

ALMOST THOU PERSUADEST ME

“ 28 Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

ALMOST

“Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost . . .” Other versions read, “In a short time you will,” NASB “Do you think that in a short time you can,” NIV “Are you so quickly,” NRSV “in a short time you think,” RSV “with but a little,” ASV “a little more,” BBE “Somewhat thou,” PNT “with trivial proofs like these,” LIVING “in brief, you are doing your best,” WEYMOUTH “You think it a small task to make a Christian of me [just offhand to induce me with little ado,” AMPLIFIED and “keep this up much longer.” MESSAGE

Once again, the differing versions throw dust on the passage, obscuring its meaning. It is like the men providing such miserable translations forgot to read the next verse. Ponder the diversity displayed in the English versions of this text.

- Agrippa is depicted as asking a question, not making a statement.
- Agrippa suggests what Paul said was trivial, and thus incapable of inducing him to be a Christian.
- Agrippa charged Paul with doing his best in a short period of time that could not possibly move Agrippa to change his mind about Christ.
- If Paul kept on, Agrippa might be convinced.
- Agrippa asks Paul if he actually thinks he can convince Agrippa with such a brief presentation.

The Greek word translated “almost” is **ovli,gwl** . In his Word Pictures, Robertson points out that the meaning of the word, as used in this text, is not easy for the linguist to comprehend. He points out the manner in which Tyndale translates the word: “somewhat.” The Bishop's Bible translates it the same way. The word itself means “of degree or intensity, slight . . . profitable for little,” THAYER “of degree little, mild, slight . . . to a small extent,” FRIBERG and “for a little while, in only a small way.” UBS

In order to arrive at the meaning, it must be determined if Agrippa was referring to the amount of

time Paul used in his defense, or if he was speaking of the impact of Paul's words upon himself. The versions that I have questioned defer to the first meaning. In this, however, I think they are incorrect. I adduce the following reasons for this conclusion.

- First, it was the weight of Paul's words that made them so effective, not the amount of time he spent giving them.
- Second, it is the Word of God that works effectively, disclosing the thoughts and intents of the heart, not the words of men.
- Third, Paul was not trying to persuade Agrippa to become a Christian, but was giving an account of his own life.
- Fourth, if Agrippa was chiding Paul for thinking such a brief presentation would convince him, he would have fallen into the same category as Festus.
- Fifth, the answer of Paul suggests that Paul took the words of Agrippa precisely as the Authorized Version presents them – a statement of Agrippa being “almost,” or nearly, persuaded.

PERSUADEST ME TO BE A CHRISTIAN

“ . . . Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.” Other versions read, “to become a Christian,” NKJV “make me a Christian,” RSV “become Messianic,” CJB “to play the Christian,” NAB and “make a Christian of me.” NJB

There are still many people who are in this “almost” category. They know there are Divinely prepared options available to them, and sense that they ought to avail themselves of them. Yet, they are too firmly fixed to this present evil world to break loose from it.

Again, the various versions tend to muddle the text. As you can see, some paint the text as Paul doing something – making Agrippa a Christian. Others represent Agrippa as being moved by what Paul said to almost become a Christian. In my judgment, the latter is the true sense of the text.

This text is one of three verses in the entire Bible in which the word “Christian” appears. The word means, “follower of Christ,” STRONG'S/THAYER and “one who is identified as a believer in and follower of Christ.” LOUW-NIDA

- “And when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). This is how believers came to be known by the Gentiles, who were not themselves joined to the Lord. Some allege that this verse is a fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah, “and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall name” (Isa 62:2). However, the fact that no inspired man ever addressed believers as “Christians,” or admonished unbelievers to become “Christians,” dispels this myth. That God would call His people by a name He never uses is an absurdity unworthy of any further consideration.

- “Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian” (Acts 26:28). Again, this term was used by someone who was not himself a follower of Jesus.

- “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet 4:16). Once again, this is the persecutors' view the believers. It is not an inside view.

Thus, Agrippa interrupts Paul's defense, indicating that he felt the nudging of his conscience, yet did not yield to it.

There are still many people who are in this “almost” category. They know there are Divinely prepared options available to them, and sense that they ought to avail themselves of them. Yet, they are too firmly fixed to this present evil world to break loose from it. They are willing to be a church member, as ordinarily perceived, and even to frequent the gatherings of believers when they have nothing else they prefer to do. However, a “follower of Jesus?” – Well, they are not prepared to make a commitment of that magnitude. That would mean they would have to remain with Jesus – all of the time – and they simply are not prepared to go that far!

- Sometimes following Jesus requires the abandonment of cherished human responsibilities. Jesus indicated this when He told a would-be disciple who asked to remain at home until he could bury his father, “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Matt 8:22).

- In order to follow Him, Jesus said one must “deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Matt 16:24; Mk 8:34; Lk 9:23).

- Jesus told a covetous rich man who had inquired about obtaining eternal life, “If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me” (Matt 19:21-24).

- Jesus also said that serving Him required following Him, and that where He was, His servant would also be: “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor” (John 12:26).

Paul is an example of someone who followed Christ. Jesus, “If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honor” (John 12:26). See if you can find anything in the Scriptures that Paul did after He was apprehended by Jesus, that was not directly related to Jesus.

I WOULD TO GOD

“ 29 And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”

The answer of Paul confirms that Agrippa had indicated a very real attraction to what Paul had said. He was not, as some versions suggest, merely mocking Paul by suggesting he could not convince him to be a Christian with such a brief presentation. In the first place, so far as the record is concerned, I am not sure it would be proper to view Paul’s defense before Agrippa as something that was brief, or in any manner inadequate. I have already shown the remarkable concentration of truth that was made known in what Paul said. Now, let us make a cursory comparison of the number of words contained in his speech.

- Stephen’s defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:2-53) **1,268 words**
- Paul’s words at Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:16-)
 - **611 words**
 - **Paul’s words to Agrippa** , before the interruption of Festus (Acts 26:2-23) **564 words**
- Paul’s defense before the Jewish Sanhedrin (Acts 22:1-21) **526 words**
- Peter on Pentecost (Acts 2:14-36) **531 words**
- Peter in Solomon’s porch after healing the lame man: (Acts 3:12-26) **390 words**
- Paul at Athens (Acts 17:22-31): **266 words** .
- Paul and Barnabas to the idolaters in Lystra (Acts 14:15-17) **85 words**

• Paul’s words to Festus after his allegation that Paul was “mad (Acts 26:25-26) **51**
words

So far as recorded content is concerned, Paul’s defense before Agrippa ranks third in volume of the speeches recorded in the book of Acts. I do not know what form of reasoning would justify Agrippa thinking it was “a short time,” NASB/NIV “quickly,” NRSV “a little,” ASV “brief,” WEYMOUTH or “trivial.” LIVING

What Exactly Did Paul Proclaim

What did Paul declare that had an impact upon Agrippa? Excluding his own background and experience, here are some of the things Paul confidently affirmed.

- That hope in the promise of God had been the driving factor in himself, and among all serious Jews (26:6-7).
- That God raises the dead (26:8).
- That Jesus was the one Paul was persecuting in his opposition to the saints (26:14-15).
- That Jesus had commissioned him to “open men’s eyes.” (26:18a).
- That Jesus had commissioned him to turn men “from darkness to light.”
- That Jesus had commissioned him to turn men “from the power of Satan unto God” (26:18b).
- That Jesus had commissioned him to so speak as to bring men to “receive forgiveness of sins” (26:18c).
- That Jesus had commissioned him to so speak as to qualify men to obtain an “inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith” (26:18d).
- That, in keeping with Jesus commission, he had declared to men that they ought to “repent and turn to God” (26:20a).
- That he had declared to men that they ought to “do works meet for repentance” (26:20b).
- That, according to the Prophets, Jesus “should suffer” (26:23a).
- That, according to the Prophets, Jesus should “be the first that should rise from the dead” (26:23b).
- That, according to the Prophets, Jesus should “show light” to the Jewish people (26:23c).
- That, according to the Prophets, Jesus should show light “to the Gentiles” (26:23d).

Whatever you may think about those words, heaven was well pleased with them, and used them to discern the thoughts and intent of Agrippa’s heart. Like all valid witnessing, words must be employed that can be used by the Holy Spirit to reach into the hearts and consciences of men. This cannot be accomplished by subjects and words that are not fully supported by the Word of God.

I WOULD TO GOD

“And Paul said, I would to God . . .” Other versions read, “I pray God,” NIV “I pray to God,” NRSV “It is my prayer to God,” BBE “I wish to God,” CJB “I wish before God,” CSB “I would pray to God,” NAB “I wish before God,” NJB “I would have wished to God,” YLT “I wish,” CEV and “That’s what I’m praying for.” MESSAGE

The phrase “would to God” is translated from the Greek expression **Ευχαι,μην α'ν tw/l qew/l** . Lexically, and as used in this text, this phrase is defined as, “to pray to God . . . to pray, to pray for;” THAYER “of petitionary prayer or appeal to God pray, offer prayer, ask; (2) of a strong desire for something; want, wish for;” FRIBERG “pray; wish, long;” UBS “to speak to or to make requests of God - 'to pray, to speak to God, to ask God for, prayer;” LOUW-NIDA “to pray for a thing, long or wish for;” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “wish (for).” GINGRICH

This Greek word appears seven times in Acts through First John – and nowhere else. In the texts below, I have put the words translated from this Greek word in bold type.

- “And Paul said, I would to God , that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (Acts 26:29). Other versions read, “pray God,” NIV and “pray to God,” NRSV The Greek word for “God” is used in this text – “to GOD.”

- “Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day” (Acts 27:29). Other versions read, “prayed for,” NKJV/NIV//RSVNRSV

- “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3). Other versions read, “have a desire.” BBE The word for God is not used in this text.

- “Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates” (2 Cor 13:7). Most versions read “pray to God.” This is because the Greek word for God (**qeo.n**)is used in the text: “pray to GOD.”

- “For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish , even your perfection” (2 Cor 13:9). Other versions read, “pray,” NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV/RSV/ASV “God” is not specified in the text.

- “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16). Most versions read “pray.” The word “God” is not in this text.

- “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 1:2). Other versions read, “pray,” NKJV/ NASB/NIV/NRSV/RSV “desire,” DARBY “hope,” NAB/NJB

Based on the use of the word, I conclude that “wish” speaks of an especially strong and compelling desire. There is nothing casual or uncertain about the word. As used here, the desire is toward the Lord, seeking His will and power in the matter. In some of the other texts, prayer to God may be assumed, but it is not integral to the text. When the men aboard the vessel in a fierce storm are said to have “wished for the day,” the emphasis was that they were fervently looking for the passing of the storm, when the light would no longer be hidden by the dark clouds. For Paul and Luke, prayer to God was no doubt made. For the others, they may very well have prayed to their gods. The point of the text, however, was the strength of their desire.

In the text before us, Paul is expressing his heart’s desire – something for which he fervently longed. This was a desire that shaped his speech, moving him to speak with words the Lord could use to turn the heart of the king toward the Lord Jesus.

One of the Jeopardies of Our Time

One of the jeopardies of our time is the dulling effect that entertainment and pleasure have upon the hearts of men. With such a variety of things being served up to the masses, a fervent desire for

one thing, particularly the right thing, is exceedingly rare.

Strong spiritual desires are not at all common in the professed Christian community. This is involved in being “fervent in spirit” (Acts 18:25; Rom 12:11). Is an aspect of “laboring fervently in prayers” (Col 4:12). We do well to remember that it is an “effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man” that “availeth much” (James 5:16). We are to “love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Pet 1:22), having “fervent charity among” ourselves (1 Pet 4:8).

Such holy traits are neutralized by religious entertainment, distractions, and childish simplicity. People who cave in to such pressures will not have compelling desires such as those Paul expresses in this text. They will be locked into mediocrity.

ALSO ALL THAT HEAR ME THIS DAY

“ . . . that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day . . .” Other versions read, “not only you but all who are listening to me today,” NIV “not only thou, but all who have heard me this day,” DARBY and “both you and everyone here in this audience,” NLT

With one sweeping word, Paul addresses an entire assembly of political and military dignitaries, stating his fervent desire that they would be fully persuaded of the things he had spoken.

Salvation Is Universal in Its Provision

Men are very prone to sift truth through their own conclusions, rather than sifting their conclusions through the truth of God. If a person is going to have peace within, and do the work of the Lord with a good conscience, he must do the latter.

Paul’s words underscore the universality of salvation’s provision. No member of Adam’s race has been excluded, for “the iniquity of us all” were laid upon Christ (Isa 53:6). Jesus did, in fact, take away “the sin of the world” (John 1:29), and “put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb 9:26). Jesus partook of flesh and blood in order “that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil,” thus providing for the thorough deliverance of all who believe (Heb 2:14). With remarkable precision it is written that Christ “died for all ” (2 Cor 5:14-15).

The remedy for sin reaches as far as the transgression, which defiled all men, and even all creation (Rom 5:12-19).

When Jesus entered into the world, an angel announced this was an era of “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people ” (Lk 2:10). Jesus is said to have given Himself “a ransom for all ” (1 Tim 2:4). There is a sense in which God is “the Savior of all men ” (1 Tim 4:10). The grace of God that brings salvation “hath appeared to all men ” (Tit 2:11). So far as potentiality is concerned, no offspring of Adam has been excluded from the provision of salvation. Whoever believes will receive it – “ everyone that believeth” (Rom 1:16; 10:4).

It is the knowledge of this glorious circumstance that enabled Paul to express his desire for everyone within the sound of his voice: “not only you, but also all who are listening to me today.”
AMPLIFIED

There is such a thing as “the election of grace” (Rom 11:5), and those who were foreknown (Rom 8:29). Predestination is not merely a theological term, but is a revealed reality (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 1:5,11). There are those who are “chosen . . . to salvation” (2 Thess 2:13).

However, the knowledge of these facts is not to impact on the manner in which the Gospel is preached. This is because the details of such things have not yet been revealed. By its very nature, the Gospel is designed for all men – “ every creature” (Mk 16:15). It is in the preaching of this Gospel

that the election of God is made known. Those who have the Spirit of God will have His attitude as well: “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). How men handle this truth may very well vary, but the truth itself remains constant. It may prove difficult for some to even think in such a manner, but they do well to learn to adjust their thinking to be in agreement with the God who made and saved them.

Men are very prone to sift truth through their own conclusions, rather than sifting their conclusions through the truth of God. If a person is going to have peace within, and do the work of the Lord with a good conscience, he must do the latter.

All of this is to say that Paul was not simply spouting rhetoric when he declared his desire for everyone listening to him. This is really the way he thought, and his heart was in his words.

BOTH ALMOST AND ALTOGETHER AS I AM

“ . . . were both almost, and altogether such as I am . . .” Other versions read, “might become both almost and altogether,” NKJV “whether in a short or a long time . . . might become such as I am,” NASB “Short time or long . . . may become what I am,” NIV “Whether it takes a short time or a long time . . . might become just like me,” CJB “either easily or with difficulty . . . might become as I am,” CSB “whether with little or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am,” ASV “were both almost, and altogether such as I am,” GENEVA “sooner or later not only you but all who listen to me today might become as I am,” NAB “Whether quickly or not, I pray to God that both you and everyone here in this audience might become the same as I am,” NLT “both somewhat, and also in a great deal, such as I am,” PNT “were not somewhat only but altogether such as I am.” TNT

The point of being like Paul refers to the advantages realized in Christ Jesus: being justified from all things, forgiven, sanctified, and having access to God. Being made free, being made an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ, and having his name written in heaven. He is not talking about social status, but of heavenly Divine acceptance.

Furthermore, the point is not the length of time it would take to bring the people to such a state. In my judgment, the many translations that leave this impression are 100% wrong. Paul is speaking about the level of their persuasion, not of the length of time or number of words required to obtain that persuasion.

Once again, the alarming absence of persuasion among professed believers is of great concern. Too many questions are being asked, which betrays the absence of, or at least a deficiency in, persuasion. This is not good. The Scriptures confirm that those who were accepted by God were a persuaded people.

- It is said of Paul and Barnabas that they “ persuaded ” many Jews and proselytes to “continue in the grace of God” (Acts 13:43).
- While in Corinth, Paul went into the synagogue “and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks” (Acts 18:4).
- In Ephesus Paul “ persuaded . . . much people” (Acts 19:26).
- It is said of Abraham that he was “fully persuaded that” what God had “promised, He was able also to perform” (Rom 4:21).
- Paul was “ persuaded , that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39).

- Believers who hold to conflicting views are admonished to be “fully persuaded ” in their own mind (Rom 14:5).

- Paul was “ persuaded ” that God was “able to keep” what he had “committed to Him against that day” (2 Tim 1:12).

- Those who lived prior to Christ, and even prior to the Law, saw the promises “afar off, and were persuaded of them” (Heb 11:13).

Make no mistake about it, a lack of persuasion is a fundamental lack. Such a condition must not be allowed to continue, for it puts the individual lacking such persuasion in a vulnerable situation.

EXCEPT THESE BONDS

“ . . . except these bonds.” Other versions read, “except for these chains,” NKJV and “except for being a prisoner.” GWN

Paul knew well what it meant to suffer “for righteousness’ sake” (Matt 5:10). He did not mitigate his testimony to avoid incarceration, nor was he ashamed of his chain. He wrote to Timothy, saying that Onesiphorus was not ashamed of his chain: “The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain” (2 Tim 1:16). He also admonished Timothy not to be ashamed of the fact that he (Paul) was a prisoner: “Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God” (2 Tim 1:8). Like the apostles, he no doubt was rejoicing that he was “counted worthy to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41).

Notwithstanding this man of God did not desire for any one else to be in chains because of their persuasion. He knew there was no glory in suffering itself, for a person can suffer because he is an “evildoer, or as a busybody in other men’s matters” (1 Pet 4:15). That is the kind of suffering that must be avoided, for it reproaches Christ and demeans the Gospel. A Gospel that has no power, and does not change those who embrace it, ought not to be preached to anyone, much less everyone.

Paul knows that those who “live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12), yet he does not desire the saints to be persecuted or placed in chains.

For those unacquainted with the ways of the Lord, this is a difficult thing to harmonize. This is particularly true of those who have a bent toward Law, which views everything from a strictly legal point of view. Such people are unable to distinguish between results and responsibilities – and they are not always synonymous.

There appears to be another lesser reason for Paul referring to his chains – holding them up before the audience, so to speak. He was in chains unjustly, and he would not let the officials forget it. Throughout this episode, he has made frequent reference to his innocence.

- To Felix he said, “And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city: Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me ” Acts 24:12-13).

- Again he said to Felix, “Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council ” (Acts 24:18-20).

- Paul told Festus, “Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Caesar, have I offended any thing at all ” (Acts 25:8).

- To Festus he said, “to the Jews I have done no wrong ” (25:10).

- “For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die: but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Caesar ” (Acts 25:11).

The point is that the people of God are to live above reproach, so that no charges against them can be confirmed. The admonitions to see to it that we live in such a manner are numerous. These expose those who excuse sin and tell us that believers all sin all of the time, and constantly need to have their hearts broken and to repent.

In addition to his own testimony,

- Lysias the captain had reported, “Whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds ” (Acts 23:29).
- When charges were brought against Paul before Festus, it was observed, “And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove ” (Acts 25:7).
- Festus told Agrippa, “Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed ” (Acts 25:18).
- He also said to Agrippa, “But had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive. And because I doubted of such manner of questions , I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters” (Acts 25:20).

The Example of Jesus

The Lord Jesus Himself challenged His opponents to raise a legitimate charge against Him.

- “Which of you convinceth Me of sin? And if I say the truth, why do ye not believe Me?” (John 8:46).
- “Many good works have I showed you from My Father; for which of those works do ye stone Me?” (John 10:32).

The point is that the people of God are to live above reproach, so that no charges against them can be confirmed. The admonitions to see to it that we live in such a manner are numerous. These expose those who excuse sin and tell us that believers all sin all of the time, and constantly need to have their hearts broken and to repent. That such action should take place when sin is committed is certainly true. However, it is wise not to neglect the admonitions directed to the saints.

- “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely , for My sake” (Matt 5:11).
- “Awake to righteousness, and sin not ; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame” (1 Cor 15:34)
- “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).
- “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you , as becometh saints: neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph 5:3-4).
- “That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ” (Phil 1:10).
- “Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless , the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation,

among whom ye shine as lights in the world” (Phil 2:14-15).

- “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:23).

- “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ ” (1 Pet 3:15-16).

- “Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless ” (2 Pet 3:14).

- “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not . And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

There is more to a holy life than simply doing what we have been commanded to do. Such a life is a visible witness to the effectiveness of grace. Those who are honest will be forced to acknowledge the effectiveness of the grace of God – even though that is not precisely how they view it. In this extended episode the innocence of Paul has been both witnessed and confessed by Lysias the captain, Felix, Festus, and now Agrippa.

Scripture also attests that false accusers will be brought to shame for leveling false accusations at the righteous (1 Pet 3:16). False accusers will also “glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet 2:12). Ultimately, this will take place when Jesus confesses the saints to God and before the holy angels (Rev 3:5). It can also occur if Jesus visits the accusers as He did Saul of Tarsus. During that visitation, Saul instantly ceased his opposition to the saints, and heartily embraced their Savior and cause. Jesus also reminded the persecuted church in Philadelphia, “Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee ” (Rev 3:9). None of these promises apply to those who fail to mortify their members, subduing fleshly inclinations. An unholy life actually disqualifies one from obtaining the promises of reference.

THIS MAN MIGHT HAVE BEEN SET AT LIBERTY

“ 30 And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them: 31 And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32 Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.”

Having heard the witness of Paul, this meeting was dismissed. No further questions were asked of Paul. He had given a reason for the hope that was within him, and had done so in an effective manner, thereby bringing honor to both God and Christ.

THEY TALKED AMONG THEMSELVES

“And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them.”

Agrippa, Festus, and Bernice got up, and “those who were sitting with them.” NASB Thus, we are apprised that the whole group had been sitting, with their attention fastened upon Paul. Technically, it was an evaluation session, but this group of people, probably, significant in number, had heard more than they thought they would. Earlier this group of people were defined as , “Agrippa . . . and Bernice . . . with the chief captains, and principal men of the city” (Acts 25:23). Festus was there as well. In our day, this would be like speaking to the president, the whitehouse staff, and the senators

and representatives. Jesus had told Ananias that Paul would bear His name “before kings” (Acts 9:15). But who could have imagined something of this magnitude?

The last words Paul said to them all were, “And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (Acts 26:29).

Keep in mind that at this gathering no accusing Jews were present. They had already heard Paul’s witness and rejected it. Now he had been able to bear witness to Agrippa without the encumbering presence of the unbelieving Jews. This too was ordered by the Lord, fulfilling the word of Solomon: “The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD” (Prov 16:33).

NOTHING WORTHY OF DEATH OR OF BONDS

But there was more to this matter than Paul’s personal experience. Neither, indeed, was this strictly a matter of justice and social correctness. Jesus had personally revealed to Paul, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome”

“And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds.” Other versions read, “when they had drawn aside, they began talking with one another, saying, This man is not doing anything worthy of death or imprisonment,” NASB “while talking with one another they said,” NIV “as they were leaving,” NRSV “As they talked it over afterwards they agreed,” LIVING “as they continued to talk the matter over together,” WILLIAMS “They quickly agreed on Paul’s innocence saying, “There’s nothing in this man deserving prison, let alone death,” MESSAGE “This man practices nothing worthy of death or chains,” EMTV and “after they had gone out, they said to one another, This man is doing nothing deserving of death or [even] of imprisonment.” AMPLIFIED

The hearers were all in perfect accord: Paul had not done, nor was he practicing, anything deserving of either death or imprisonment. Festus did not speak up again, saying Paul was “mad,” as he had earlier. Had he done so, he would have been in disagreement with the king, and that would not have been wise. Thus his mouth was stopped, so that he raised no contention about the matter.

This group of heathens, uncultured for truth, were more sensitive to it than the accusing Jews were, who had been cultured to receive the truth.

MIGHT HAVE BEEN SET AT LIBERTY

“Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar.” Other versions read, “might have been set free,” NKJV “might have been made free,” BBE “could have been released,” CJB “might have been let go,” DARBY and “might have been loosed.” GENEVA

So far as legality was concerned, king Agrippa saw that the death or incarceration of Paul could in no way be justified. Had Paul not appealed to Caesar, which right would not be withdrawn from him, he might have been fully exonerated from all charges, and consequently freed.

But there was more to this matter than Paul’s personal experience. Neither, indeed, was this strictly a matter of justice and social correctness. Jesus had personally revealed to Paul, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). While under house arrest, he would preach there “for two whole years,” with Rome paying the bills (Acts 28:30-31). It is the promise of this

Thus, in the midst of a distracting, and even painful experience, Divine direction was realized.

Among other things, this confirms the need for spiritual alertness during difficult times. Care must be taken not to become absorbed with our trials, lest we miss something from heaven that may be intended by them. This is the sort of thing that cannot be outlined or legislated.

opportunity that was driving Paul.

The revelation was not given to Paul until this entire episode was well under way. He had been dragged from the Temple, beaten, rescued by captain Lysias, and made a defense before the Jews. During that time, he had set his accusers against themselves by pointing out that he was a Pharisee, and affirmed that he had been called into question because of “the hope and resurrection of the dead” (Acts 23:8). The tumult grew so intense that Paul was sequestered away from the crowd. It was the following night that Jesus told him he would testify about Him in Rome.

Thus, in the midst of a distracting, and even painful experience, Divine direction was realized. Among other things, this confirms the need for spiritual alertness during difficult times. Care must be taken not to become absorbed with our trials, lest we miss something from heaven that may be intended by them. This is the sort of thing that cannot be outlined or legislated. Nevertheless, it is involved in being “sober” (1 Thess 5:6,8), “awake” (Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 15:34; Eph 5:14), and properly focused (2 Cor 4:18; Heb 12:1-2). The Kingdom of God does not center around us; we are not the main persons. We are participants, but the focus is not upon us. However, if, in our trials, we become absorbed with what is happening to us, we have, in fact, shifted the focus to ourselves. That will yield no good thing.

CONCLUSION

This entire account, commencing in Acts 21:27, is a macro view of Jesus governing His Kingdom. The government has been placed upon His shoulder (Isa 9:6-7), and this is an example of His administration. Notice the people that have been involved thus far.

- Jews from Asia (21:27).
- “All the people” who were in the Temple complex at that time (21:27b-28).
- Trophimus, who was traveling with Paul, and was a Greek (21:29).
- All the city of Jerusalem (21:30).
- A chief captain of the Roman army (21:31).
- The soldiers and centurions that came with the captain (21:32).
- The soldiers who carried Paul to safety (21:35).
- A centurion to whom Paul spoke concerning Roman law (21:25-26).
- The chief priests (21:30).
- The Jewish council (21:30).
- The high priest Ananias (23:2).
- The servant who struck Paul on the mouth (23:2-3).
- Those who were standing by when Paul responded to the action, challenging what he said (23:4).
- Sadducees (23:6).
- Pharisees (23:6).
- Forty Jews who banded together and plotted to kill Paul (23:12-13).
- The elders (23:14).

- Paul's sister (23:16).
- Paul's sister's son (23:16).
- One of the centurions whom Paul instructed to take his nephew to the captain, informing him of the plot against him (23:17).
- Two centurions that Lysias called to arrange for Paul being conducted to Caesarea (23:23).
 - Two hundred soldiers (23:23).
 - Seventy horsemen (23:23).
 - Two hundred spearmen (23:23).
 - Felix the governor (23:26).
 - Tertullus, an orator (24:1-2),
 - The Jews that brought Tertullus (24:9).
 - Drusilla, Felix's wife (24:24).
 - Festus, who replaced Felix (25:27).
 - Caesar (25:11-12).
 - Agrippa (25:13).
 - Bernice (25:13).
 - The chief captains of Caesarea (25:23).
 - The chief men of the city of Caesarea (25:23).

There is a brief listing of hundreds, and even thousands of people, that became involved in this affair. They included foreign Jews, the entire city of Jerusalem, Jewish authorities, an army, military leaders, governors, a governor's wife, a king, and a king's sister.

There are also places involved: the Temple, the city of Jerusalem, the city of Antipatris, the city of Caesarea, and the governor's mansion.

Which of these individuals, groups, or places was not under the government of Jesus? Could any of them successfully void the will of the Lord? Indeed not! There was a sense in which they were all pawns in the hands of the Lord – vessels to be used as He saw fit. In it all, the Lord was working all things together for the good of Paul. Over and above that, He was so working as to cause praise in heaven and among the discerning on earth. He was also revealing His control of the wicked one and all of his seen and unseen forces. Indeed, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #102

PAUL WARNS OF IMPENDING DANGER

“ 21:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. 2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. 3 And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself. 4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. 6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein. 7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; 8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea. 9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, 10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives. 11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by

Paul.” (Acts 27:1-11)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Paul having appealed to Caesar, arrangements are now made to transport him, together with some other prisoners, to Italy. Considerable authority will be given to a certain military man who is in charge of the trip. He will arrange for different ships as needed, and will manifest, by Divine providence, a certain special care for Paul. A brother in the Lord from Thessalonica joins Paul in the journey, thereby confirming his love for this man of God. Along the way, contrary winds were encountered, which called for further unplanned decisions. Confirming that godliness does not rob an individual of practical discretionary powers, Paul warns those in charge that he perceives this voyage will be with much hurt and damage, not only to the ship, but also endangering the lives of its occupants. However, the centurion in charge believed the master and owner of the ship more than the words of Paul. As the trip proceeds, it will be confirmed that Paul had given a proper assessment.

DIVINE DIRECTION

Throughout this entire episode, the providence and direction of the mighty God of heaven has been evident. Satan has been

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aggressive against Paul, working through those enslaved to him, seeking to hinder the work of the Lord. However, Jesus, being Lord over Satan, and in charge of His appointed demise, has called Paul out of darkness into light, and turned him from the power of Satan unto God. He has charged Paul with a most aggressive mission, and done so in such a manner as to challenge the adversary and all of his cohorts to stop it. The devil has been totally powerless to turn Paul away from the strait and narrow way, or to abort his mission. All of that is involved in Divine providence and direction. The Lord could not successfully direct or protect His people if He was not “over all” (Rom 9:5). Men may philosophize about whether or not God intervenes in the affairs of men, or the role of free will in men, but when all is said and done, “all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest thou?” (Dan 4:35). Even among the hosts of darkness, there is not a single word that depicts them as saying to God, “What do you think you are doing?” Men have waxed bold and said such things, but they have been nothing more than puffs of harmless smoke. All of this is being lived out in this extended episode, the record of which commences in Acts 21:27, and will continue to the close of this book

(Acts 28:31). Here is some of the potentially hindering influences.

- The Jews of Asia were not able stop Paul.
- The Jews who joined them could not abort the purpose of God for Paul.
- Those forty men who conspired to kill Paul could not do what they had willed.
- Ananias the high priest was powerless to abort Paul's mission.
- The elders could not stop the work.
- The Sanhedrin with all of their pretended power could not cut Paul's work short.
- The Pharisees proved powerless to interfere with the work of God.
- The Sadducees were totally frustrated in their attempts.
- Tertullus could not move the governor against Paul.
- Felix could not cause Paul to move out on his own, purchasing freedom for himself.
- The indecision of Festus, and his shouts of Paul being a madman had no effect on the work.
- Two years in prison had no deterring effect upon Paul.

While all of this involved Paul's determination and resolve, the greater cause was the working of the Lord. His providence was a key factor, as it is in all of His dealings with those of whom He approves. The word "providence" is not used in Scripture, but evidence of this kind of work is everywhere. It is a theological word that began to be employed in the fourteenth century. In the English language, it is defined as follows: "Divine guidance or care capitalized : God conceived as the power sustaining and guiding human destiny." MERRIAM-WEBSTER It involves the idea of Divine purpose, and the carrying out of the same through the working of God. It assumes the superiority of God, the invincibility of His purpose, and, as regards that purpose, His immediate involvement in the affairs of men. The presence of God is integral to His will. Some Scriptural expressions of this are as follows.

• **THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM.** "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen 22:17).

• **THE BLESSING OF ISAAC.** "And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed " (Gen 26:4).

• **PRESERVING ISRAEL THROUGH JOSEPH.** "Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:5). "But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good , to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive" (Gen 50:20).

• **JACOB'S BLESSING OF JOSEPH.** "Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee ; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb" (Gen 49:25).

• **SUSTAINING ISRAEL IN THE WILDERNESS.** "For the LORD thy God hath blessed thee in all the works of thy hand: he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness: these forty years the LORD thy God hath been with thee ; thou hast lacked nothing" (Deut 2:7).

• **GENERAL BLESSINGS FOR MEN.** "Nevertheless he left not Himself without witness, in that He did good , and gave us rain from heaven, and **What God has determined**

will be carried out. This is written in every line of this record, and accounts for the

fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness” (Acts 14:17).

• **WORKING ALL THINGS TOGETHER FOR THE GOOD OF HIS PEOPLE.**

“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28).

• **THE BLESSING OF THOSE IN CHRIST WITH ADEQUACY.** “And God is able to make all grace abound toward you ; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work” (2 Cor 9:8).

• **THE FURTHERANCE OF THE GOSPEL.** “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel ” (Phil 1:12).

• **THINGS TURNING OUT FOR OUR SALVATION.** “For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:19).

When the Lord Jesus apprehended Paul He said, “But rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee , To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:16-18). That purpose was not simply left in the hands of Paul. He was responsible for devoting himself to it, and being faithful to his calling. However, the actual carrying out of that purpose was governed by, what we call, the providence of God. There is an overriding fact that pervades every facet of God’s will: “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). If necessary, He will turn the hearts of kings (Prov 21:1), frustrate the devices of the ungodly (Isa 44:25), and make a way even in the wilderness of impossibility (Isa 43:19). If there are temptations, He will “ make a way to escape” (1 Cor 10:13). If His people need “strength and power,” He will give it (Psa 68:35). He is fully able to effectively “rebuke the devourer” (Mal 3:11), and “command deliverances” (Psa 44:4).

What God has determined will be carried out. This is written in every line of this record, and accounts for the steady progress of Paul in the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. What is contained in doctrine is lived out in this history.

DETERMINED WE SHOULD SAIL TO ITALY

“ 21:1 And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.”

Now the trip to Italy begins. Paul is one of many being transported, along with special cargo. The trip will take a while, and various decisions will have to be made: whether the weather is acceptable for sailing, where to stop over for the winter, and selecting a change of vessels when required.

As the crow flies, this trip would be well over 1,300 miles. By boat it would, at the very least, be 1,750 miles, and could possibly be near 2,000 miles – by sea! This would be a challenging trip in one of the large vessels of our day. A boat today can travel 112 miles in four hours. Against the wind, it requires six hours to travel 48 miles. By today’s standards, therefore, this trip would require from 2-2.5 months, 62.5-71.4 days. To that can be added at least 82 days, not counting two periods (listed below) referred to as “many days.” That would make the trip somewhere between 4.7 and 5.1 months, or between 141 and 153 days – nearly half a year!

“A day” in Sidon Acts 27:3

“Many days” Acts 27:7

“Many days” Acts 27:20

“Fourteen nights” Acts 27:35

“Three days” Acts 28:7

“Three months” Acts 28:11

“Three days” Acts 28:12

“One day” Acts 28:13

“Seven days” Acts 28:14

Think About It

Does that not define more fully what Paul meant when he said he faced “perils in the sea” (2 Cor 11:26). During that time the devil must have sought for any kind of opportunity to destroy Paul. He could not do it when Paul was on the land. He could not do it while Paul was in prison. And, he could not do it when Paul was on the sea! God was protecting this man, and not a hair of his head would perish (Lk 21:18). Of course, had Paul plotted his own path, and taken matters into his own hand, as some are prone to do, all of this would have been forfeited.

The glory of this whole matter is that Paul knew what Jesus was doing. He may not have known all of the details, but he did know he was going to bear witness to Christ in Rome – even though over 1,300 miles of water separated him from that destination. Further, he did not own anything that could enable him to get to Rome, and did not have the finances either. Yet, he will land safely in Italy, and do precisely what Jesus said he would do.

IT WAS DETERMINED

“And when it was determined that we should sail into Italy . . .” Other versions read, “it was decided,” NKJV “the decision had been made,” BBE “it was concluded,” GENEVA “arrangements were finally made,” LIVING “Now when it was determined that we [including Luke] should sail for Italy,” AMPLIFIED “when it was time for us to sail to Rome,” CEV “decided for us,” LITV and “As soon as arrangements were complete.” MESSAGE

It is not stated who made the determination that Paul would be transported to Italy, but I suspect that the original decision was made by Festus. It was to him that Paul made his request known: “I appeal to Caesar,” and it was Festus who said, “Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go” (Acts 25:11-12).

Luke, who is writing this account, said it was determined that “WE should sail, to Italy.” Luke was, then, with them as they commenced this trip. It is apparent that the political and military officials condoned Luke going along, being favorably inclined to him. Here is another example of someone obtaining favor with men due to Divine influence (Ex 3:21; 11:3; ; 12:36; Dan 1:4,9; Acts 7:10).

The presence of Luke is referenced frequently in the travels of Paul by the use of the pronouns “we” and “us.” If we are not alert to this, we will miss the fact that Luke was with Paul.

- When Paul went to Macedonia (Acts 16:10-11).

- In Philippi, and when Paul preached to the Lydia and those who were with her (Acts 16:12-13).
- When Paul confronted the woman with a spirit of divination (Acts 16:16).
- When Paul sailed from Philippi to Troas, and when he preached in Troas, also raising Eutychus from the dead (Acts 16:6-11).
- When Paul left Troas, Luke and others met him at Assos, where they continued to sail with him (Acts 20:13-15).
- Sailing to Coos, Rhodes, Patara, Phenicia, Syria, Tyre, Ptolemais, and Caesarea (Acts 21:1-7).
- When they remained in the house of Philip the evangelist (Acts 21:8-9).
- Luke was present when Agabus prophesied of Paul being bound in Jerusalem (Acts 21:14).
- He was with Paul when he went to Jerusalem (Acts 21:15-19).
- In our text, he sets out with Paul for Italy (Acts 27:1-7).
- He went through the storm Euroclydon with Paul (Acts 27:8-26).
- He was in the ship that wrecked, and made it safely with the others to the Isle of Melita (Acts 27:27-44).
- He was there when the Barbarous people treated shipwrecked victims kindly, and when Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 28:1-6).
- He was there when Publius and healed, and many islanders came to Paul and were healed as well (Acts 28:7-10).
- He continued the trip with Paul, landing at Syracuse. Going to Rhegium, and Puteoli where they found brethren and continued for seven days (Acts 28:14).
- He was with Paul when brethren came from Rome, meeting them in Appii Forum. At that time Paul thanked God and took courage. (Acts 28:15).
- He arrived in Rome with Paul (Acts 28:16).

Considering that Luke was a physician (Col 4:14), this must have involved considerable inconvenience to the flesh. Yet, it appears from what is said of him that he devoted his medical skills to the care of Paul during this time. There were also times when “only Luke” remained with Paul (2 Tim 4:11). He was also a worker together with Paul, who referred to him as among “my fellowlaborers” (Phile 1:24).

A Word Concerning Serving the Lord

In Luke, we find an excellent example of a professional man who fully gave himself to the Lord. The fact that there is only a single reference to him being a “physician” served to underscore this fact.

As used in Scripture, the word “physician” has the following lexical meaning: “a physician,” THAYER “healer,” FRIBERG “doctor,” UBS “one who causes someone to be healed - physician, doctor, healer,” LOUW-NIDA and “one who heals, a mediciner, physician or surgeon (for there seems to have been no professional distinction).” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Perhaps you are not aware of the history of medicine. This includes surgical procedures, ophthalmology, skeletal procedures, and the use of medical drugs. I only show this to confirm that this was a respected profession, well developed, and of great value. While there may have been some superstitious practices among some barbaric people, this science had been well developed with

extensive textbooks being written around 3000 B.C.

HISTORY OF MEDICINE

Egyptian medicine 3290 B.C.

Babylonian medicine 1069 B.C.

Medicine in India 2000-1000 B.C.

Chinese Medicine 2698 B.C.

Greek medicine 700 B.C.

Roman medicine 500 B.C.

Surgical procedures 3300 B.C.

Medical drugs 3200 B.C.

I do not doubt that, under normal circumstances, Luke could well have been in great demand, and that his skills were sought. Yet, he apparently devoted himself entirely to Paul for a significant period of time, possibly as long as ten years (from the original trip to Macedonia (Acts 16:9-11) until their arrival in Rome (Acts 28:16). His commitment to the Lord led him to devote his skills related to being a physician to the Lord.

Throughout modern history, there have been men with unusual professional skills devote them to the Lord. Men with astute minds have done so: Luther, Calvin, Clarke, Henry, Campbell, etc. Poets have done so: Fortunates, John Milton, and George Herbert, John Greenleaf Whittier. Men with persuasive and oratorical skills : Spurgeon, Whitefield, Campbell. Those with song-writing skills : Isaac Watts, Fanny Crosby, John and Charles Wesley. Great musicians : Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Mendelssohn. The point is that throughout history there have been unusually gifted men who gave their talents to the Lord.

A Man Named Sterling Theobald

I well remember a eminent heart surgeon and specialist from the Chicago area. I came into contact with him when he was treating one of our brethren in Indiana. He was in high demand, and was noted for his special knowledge and treatment of the heart. At the time, we had just started meeting as “The Church at 26 th and Colfax, in Gary, Indiana. There were about thirty of us meeting at the time. This physician, Sterling Theobald, was drawn to us by the testimony of brother Harold Lohse, whom he was treating. He began meeting with us in a small structure, about 40' X 20'. His family came with him – a wife and two children in their early teens. Although people of means, they did not hesitate to be identified with us. I was about twenty-five years of age at the time. In the process of time, brother Theobald felt that he should give his medical abilities to the Lord. He took his family and became identified with New Tribes Mission – a community that focuses on people groups that have not heard the Gospel during recent times. He took their training, which consisted of survival techniques in remote regions of the earth, as well as of extensive exposure to the text of Scripture. When he finally went to some of these remote areas, he treated all of the missionaries free of charge, while joining in the preaching and teaching of the Word. Brother Theobald is in his eighties now, and I have neither seen nor heard from him for at least four decades. However, I have never forgotten the testimony that he left of the impact of the love of Christ upon those who discern it.

I have known precious few men of this caliber, and I should suppose such souls have always been relatively rare. My beloved father was one such person, gifted with an astute and disciplined mind,

which he gave to the Lord for the Lord's work.

The Roman Empire had some characteristics that were particularly significant. Among other things, there was a division of authority, so that various men were made leaders of certain segments of the Empire. Although this was not totally unique to Rome, it seems to have been accentuated by them.

Luke was such a man, setting forth a most vivid example of the possibilities that are placed before believers. The conduct of many professing believers confirms that the allurements of this world are stronger than some have been led to believe. It is a noble person, indeed, who takes the gifts God has given to him, and devotes them directly to the Lord for the advancement of His Kingdom.

THEY DELIVERED PAUL AND CERTAIN OTHER PRISONERS

“ . . . they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band.” Other versions read, “Paul and some other prisoners were handed over,” NIV “transferred Paul and some other prisoners,” NRSV “they gave Paul and certain other prisoners into the care of,” BBE and “Paul and several other prisoners were placed in the custody of.” LIVING

A Centurion of Augustus' Band

Other versions read, “the Augustan Regiment,” NKJV “the Augustan cohort,” NASB “the Imperial Regiment,” NIV “the Emperor's Regiment,” CJB “Augustus' company,” DARBY “the band of Augustus,” GENEVA “Caesars' soldiers,” TNT “the band of Sebastus,” YLT “a member of the imperial guard,” LIVING and “the Augustan battalian.” IE

The word “Augustus” is a title of honor, translated from the Greek word **Sebasth/j** (transliterated Sebastas,” which term is used in Young's Literal Translation). It is said that it was applied to certain military “legions, or cohorts, or battalions “for valour.” STRONG'S/THAYER In this text the word “band” means “the group of soldiers who protected the Emperor' or ... who were under the direct command of the Emperor.” LOUW-NIDA

There is no mention of notable political prisoners being in the group with Paul. However, this unusual arrangement is to be considered the hand of God being upon Paul. As the trip proceeds, it will become apparent that he is, in fact, the most notable prisoner of all. The ship will even be delivered into his hands, and he will announce the means of divinely appointed safety.

Julius, A Centurion: A Type of Servants in the Kingdom of God

The responsibilities assigned to Julius are interesting to consider. They are rather significant. He will make all of the decisions, including the choice of vessels, the route, and the manner in which the prisoners are handled.

The significant thing about this is its relation to the prophecy of Daniel concerning global governments that would arise, and during which God would set up His Kingdom. There were four of these global kingdoms that are mentioned in particular. The first three are mentioned by name, and the last one is left unnamed. It would supplant the Grecian Empire, and would be a kingdom of uniqueness. That was the kingdom during which the prophecy of Daniel was fulfilled. “And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever” (Dan 2:44).

The Roman Empire had some characteristics that were particularly significant. Among other things, there was a division of authority, so that various men were made leaders of certain segments of the Empire. Although this was not totally unique to Rome, it seems to have been accentuated by

them. Julius is a case in point – a man with significant authority, whose judgment was apparently trusted by the Emperor himself.

A similar situation exists in the Kingdom of God. Jesus affirmed this in one of His parables. “For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch” (Mark 13:34). Again, in the parable of the talents He said, “For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey” (Mat 25:14-15).

While I am aware this is not a point to be stressed overly much, it seems to me that it contains an aspect of the Kingdom that must not be overlooked. There are at least two approaches to authority that exist in the professed Christian community. The first revolves around authorities that are over every aspect of religious responsibility. At the most obvious level, this would be seen in the Roman Pope, and the vicars that are in charge of the various Orthodox branches of certain churches. At the local level, this is seen in the various views of ministers, elders, and church boards. In spiritual Babylon, everyone, small and great, are subordinate to these entities. However, this is not the manner of the Kingdom of God. It is rather the manner of this world.

In the body of Christ, various gifts are given to the members that denote responsibility more than authority – although there is a degree of authority associated with them. The concept is that of a “steward,” as compared to a mere slave. A steward is responsible for the area assigned to him, whether it be that of a prophet, an evangelist, a pastor/teacher, an exhorter, one showing mercy, one speaking a word of wisdom, a deacon, etc. Such individuals are like those who received a talent of money for which they were responsible. It was given to them in strict accord with their God-given ability and appointment, and they are expected to be faithful in their handling of it.

If they are a poet and a songster like David, then they are expected to be faithful in the stewardship of that ability, just as he was. If it is unusual wisdom, then they are to be faithful over it as Solomon was in his wisdom, speaking and writing it for others. If it involves the distribution of unusual insights, as with Paul, they are expected to be faithful and productive in the handling of such things, as Paul was. If it is putting things together and arriving at a valid conclusion concerning Kingdom matters, they are to respond faithfully as James did during the controversy about circumcision.

Stewards are required to trade and increase what they have been given (Lk 19:15,23). The degree of success of the steward will be measured by the impact of their gift upon the body of Christ, for that is the reason for all of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12:7). Strict accountability is demanded, for “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful” (1 Cor 4:2). No attempt must be made to prostitute a God-given ability by giving it to the world, or using it only for self.

I do not believe this is generally understood among professed believers. Too often those with God-given aptitudes are giving them to the world. I do realize that we cannot make laws in this area. However, it is the responsibility of the church to apprise the people of what is expected of them. They are to be faithful to God, as Julius was to Rome. I further recognize that God has various ways of honing the ability he gives that, at the first, appear relatively unrelated to the work of the Lord. However, such training bears resemblance to a college education in preparation for a certain role. To be more specific, Joseph’s skills were honed to a fine edge in Potiphar’s house and in Pharaoh’s prison. Moses’ skills were developed in a desert, watching over flocks, as well as were the skills of David. However, when those aptitudes were duly developed, they no longer remained in those training places, but began working more directly with the Lord in fulfilling His purposes.

ARISTARCHUS WAS WITH US

“ 2 And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.”

Notice the manner in which this trip is recorded. If one was exposed to this text alone, it would appear as though they were merely going on a trip together, even though Paul was a “prisoner” (Acts 23:18; 25:27; 27:1,42; 28:16-17). However, the report does not accentuate the fact of Paul being a prisoner, but rather highlights that he is going to Rome to bear witness of Jesus. Although he was very much a prisoner, he preferred to think of himself as “the prisoner of Jesus Christ” (Eph 3:1; Phile 1:1,9), “the prisoner of the Lord” (Eph 4:1), and “His prisoner” (2 Tim 1:6). He does not mean that Jesus had captured and incarcerated him, but that his prisonership was the result of serving the Lord Jesus Christ, and that the Savior was with him in the experience. That means he will be productive for the Lord in the status of “prisoner.”

For many professing Christians, it is very difficult to associate the experience of hardship with the Lord Jesus Christ. However, suffering “for righteousness’ sake” (Matt 5:10; 1 Pet 3:14) is a very real circumstance, and the blessing of God is upon those who suffer because of their faith. When the suffering is induced by those that are particularly close to us, perhaps even in our own families, it will be helpful to consider it suffering “for righteousness’ sake,” or “for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor 4:11). That is, after all, a very appropriate description of such suffering, regardless of those who cause it.

WE LAUNCHED

“And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia . . .” Other versions read, “And embarking in an Adramyttian ship, which was about to sail to the regions along the coast of Asia,” NASB “We boarded a ship from Adramyttium about to sail for ports along the coast of the province of Asia, and we put out to sea,” NIV and “going aboard a ship from Adramyttium which was about to sail for the ports along the coast of [the province of] Asia, we put out to sea.” AMPLIFIED

The actual place of boarding was Caesarea. The vessel into which they entered was “from Adramyttium ,” a sea-port city in the region of Mysia, which was in the northern part of Asia. This would be a trip that would carry them as far as 2,000 miles away. They would travel close to the coast of Asia until they come to Cnidus. Then they would head toward the island of Crete, from which they would launch into the open sea (Acts 27:7). All of this required some understanding of sailing schedules and destinations that would bring them eventually to Rome. According to appearance, this would all be handled by Julius. However, behind the scenes, the Lord was orchestrating things to fulfill his word to Paul – that he would bear witness of Him in Rome.

ARISTARCHUS BEING WITH US

“ . . . one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.” Other versions read, “accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica,” NASB “Aristarchus out of Macedonia, of the country of Thessalonica, tarrying still with us,” PNT “Aristarchus, the Macedonian, from Thessalonica, forming one of our party,” WEYMOUTH “On board with us was Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica,” WILLIAMS “Aristarchus from Thessalonica in Macedonia sailed on the ship with us,” CEV and “Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica, went with us.” MESSAGE

Aristarchus is notable for his devotion to the Lord and His servant Paul. He is first mentioned in Acts 19:29, where he is described as being with Paul in Ephesus. There he is described as one of “Paul’s companions in travel.” There he, together with Gaius, was “seized” and dragged into “the theater,” or “amphitheater.” AMPLIFIED

In Acts 20:4 he is said to have accompanied Paul from Greece, where Paul; had spent three months,

when he went to Asia. At that time, others traveling with Paul included Sopater of Berea; Secundus; of Thessalonica, Gaius of Derbe, Timotheus, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia.

Not only did Aristarchus travel with Paul, he was also imprisoned with him when he wrote to the Colossians (Col 4:10). When Paul wrote to Philemon, Aristarchus was with him, together with Mark. Demas, and Luke (Phile 1:24).

Now, in the voyage to Rome, with several other prisoners, Aristarchus it still with Paul. There is no hint of inconvenience, or an encroachment upon the time of this disciple. He was clearly devoted to the work of the Lord, which, in this case, included remaining with Paul while he was a prisoner en route to Rome. It is also quite possible that he remained with Paul during his two-year imprisonment in Rome.

In his journeys, several of his companions are mentioned. These are men who sacrificed their personal interests in favor of being with Paul and ministering to him. They include the following.

- Aristarchus, from Thessalonica (Acts 19:29; 20:4; 27:1)
- Erastus, from Corinth (Acts 19:22)
- Gaius, from Derbe (Acts 20:4)
- Luke, Homeland unknown (Lk 1:1-3; Acts 1:1; 2 Tim 4:11)
- Secundus, from Thessalonica (Acts 20:4)
- Sopater, from Berea (Acts 20:4)
- Timotheus, from Derbe (Acts 20:4)
- Trophimus, from Asia (Acts 20:4; 2 Tim 4:20)
- Tychicus, from Asia (Acst 20:4)
- Paul and his company (Acts 13:13).
- Paul's company (Acts 21:8).

To me, it is evident that Paul added brethren to this group as he preached here and there. These were no doubt men who evidenced an above-average interest in the things of God, and would not be a distraction to Paul's prodigious ministry. With the advent of higher Christian education, there appears to be little need for discerning the caliber of disciples in order that they might travel along with men of God, aiding them in the work. To a very significant degree, that work is now left to religious professionals.

The result of this methodology, however, has not proved effective for the glory of God and the advancement of His work.

COURTEOUSLY ENTREATED

“ 3 And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.”

The trip commences at Caesarea, which was a seaport city. Luke now records their first stop, and what took place at that time. That these events are being orchestrated from heaven will be evident.

WE TOUCHED AT SIDON

“And the next day we touched at Sidon . . .” Other versions read, “landed at Sidon,” NKJV “put in at Sison,” NASB “arrived at Sidon,” DARBY and “docked at Sidon,” NLT

The idea is that they docked at Sidon, most likely unloading or taking on some cargo at that point. Sidon was located about 65 miles from Caesarea, their starting point. The length of time required to sail for that distance would be somewhere around twelve hours, or one half of a day. A little more than 3% of the total distance had been traveled.

Sidon was an ancient city, being first mentioned in Genesis 10:19 as one being one of the border-points of Canaan. Tyre (a little south of Sidon) and Sidon are mentioned nine times in the Gospels (Matt 11:21,22; 15:21; Mk 3:8; 7:24,31; Lk 9:17; 10:13,14). Jesus went to that territory during His ministry. In fact, the woman who came to Him for her demon-possessed daughter besought Jesus in her behalf while He was there (Matt 15:21-22). A great multitude also came from that area to hear Jesus (Mk 3:8). Once Jesus healed a great multitude from that area (Lk 6:17-19).

As you must know, that part of the world is rich with Divine history, being the part of the world in which the Garden of Eden was located. Abraham was called from that area, and the rich history of Israel, including the Babylonian captivity, was in that part of the world.

JULIUS COURTEOUSLY ENTREATED PAUL

Other versions read, “treated Paul kindly,” NKJV “treated Paul with consideration,” NASB and “treated Paul in a loving way, with much consideration (kindness and care).” AMPLIFIED

I fear that many of this generation would not have noted the kindness of Julius. They would rather have expected such kindness was deserved, since Paul had done nothing wrong. However, Luke took note of this, doubtless seeing the hand of God in the matter. Why did he give special favor to Paul? This was the Lord providing mercy for His servant, working through the heart of a heathen.

We do not know if this was the same Centurion whom Felix commanded to let Paul “have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come to him” (Acts 24:23).

Other examples of this kind of kindness and consideration are as follows.

- Potiphar was inclined to young Joseph, making him overseer over all of his house (Gen 39:1-6).
- Pharaoh sanctioning Joseph giving Jacob and his family the choice land of Goshen. He consented to this because the land was conducive to shepherding, yet the Egyptians considered shepherds an abomination (Gen 46:34-47:6).
- The prisoner keeper where Joseph was incarcerated showed him mercy, and gave him favor – this coming from the Lord (Gen 39:21).
- God gave Joseph favor and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh, who “made him governor over Egypt and all of his house” (Acts 7:10).
- When Israel left Egypt the people favored them, giving them everything they needed (Ex 3:21; 11:3; 12:36).
- King Artaxerxes showed Nehemish favor when he asked leave from being his cupbearer, to go and rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem (Neh 2:5-8).
- The prince of the eunuchs which was over the young Israelite captives in Babylon, especially favored Daniel (Dan 1:9-14).
- Nebuchadnezzar made Daniel ruler over all the province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon (Dan 2:48).
- King Darius preferred Daniel above all of the other political figures in Babylon (Dan 6:3).

- Belshazzar made Daniel the third ruler in the kingdom of Babylon (Dan 5:29).
- Daniel prospered in the reign of Cyrus the Persian, as well as during the reign of Darius (Dan 6:28).

It is still true, “Man’s goings are of the Lord” (Prov 20:24), and “the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23). “It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps,” and no one should proceed in life as though that was not the truth (Jer 10:23). When the Lord sends a person on a mission, he clears the way for the fulfillment of that mission. This clearing of the way includes deliverance, provisions, and even causing potential adversaries to be inclined to help the servant of the Lord. This is why it is wrong to be consumed with concern about potential dangers. It is not that we are indifferent to such things. Rather, it is that we choose to trust the one who governs circumstances. He will direct those who walk in the light, and maintain their fellowship with Christ, to know when it is time to flee, have the brethren aid you in an escape, or stay and stand for the Lord. All of this is lived out in the events recorded in this book.

HE GAVE HIM LIBERTY

“ . . . gave him liberty to go unto his friends” Other versions read, “allowed him to go to his friends,” NIV “gave him leave to go to his friends,” RSV “to go visit his friends,” CSB “let him go ashore to visit with friends,” NLT and “did permit him, having gone on unto friends.” YLT

Remember, Paul is a prisoner. I cannot see any logical reason according to the flesh why a military official would allow such freedom for a prisoner. Yet, he is allowed to go to shore, visit his friends, and receive what he needed, being refreshed.

There is a certain spiritual logic to be seen when those who do not know the Lord favor the servants of God. First, the faithful are surrounded by Divine favor and preference. This supercedes all circumstance and all enemies. There is also angelic protection, for “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them” (Psa 34:7). These holy personalities are vastly superior to humanity, whether we are speaking of a single powerful individual, or thousands of inimical hosts. If these angels are commissioned to stop the enemy, that is precisely what will happen. Further, the closer a person is to the Lord, the more pleasing he is to the Lord, and the more involved he is in the work of the Lord, the more active these angels become.

Nothing can touch those who are pleasing to the Lord that is not first approved by Him. If it is approved, there is a purpose for it. It may be a matter of testing. It may also be the development of an example that can be seen by others. There is also the matter of confirming the superiority of faith, as well as displaying the manifold wisdom of God to heavenly principalities and powers. Sometimes there are opportunities developed that lead to inquiry by those who are otherwise contrary.

Those who are surrounded by Divine favor, and protected by angelic hosts, move otherwise hostile persons to show mercy, and be inclined to be lenient. They favor such people – not merely because they like them, but because the favor of the Lord can impact upon how a person appears to others. There is no inviolable rule involved here. The enemies may stone Stephen, beat Paul, and kill James. The favor of which I speak is an explanation for the mercy that is shown the servants of the Lord. It is not intended to guarantee our enemies will always treat us in such a manner.

To Go To His Friends

So far as the Scriptural record goes, this was Paul’s first visit to Sidon – and yet there were believers there with whom he could easily connect. With the exception of the literal Interlinear, all of the versions read “friends.” The Interlinear reads “fond ones.”

It is obvious that these were not casual acquaintances – like fellow church-members, or coming

from the same region, or fellow-citizens. These “friends” were not business associates, national acquaintances, or family members. These were saints of God who not only could minister to Paul, but wanted to do so.

As used here, the lexical meaning of the Greek word translated “friends” is, “associate . . . near friend . . . he who associates familiarly with one, a companion,” THAYER “beloved, dear, loving, friendly, devoted . . . congenial associate, close companion,” FRIBERG “person with whom one associates and for whom there is affection or personal regard,” LOUW-NIDA and “kindly disposed, devoted.” GINGRICH

It is obvious that these were not casual acquaintances – like fellow church-members, or coming from the same region, or fellow-citizens. These “friends” were not business associates, national acquaintances, or family members. These were saints of God who not only could minister to Paul, but wanted to do so.

As previously noted, this appears to be the first time that Paul visited Sidon – and even now, it was as a Roman prisoner. Yet, he was able to connect with brethren of “like precious faith” (2 Pet 1:1), the “common faith” (Tit 1:4) – those who had tasted of a “common salvation” (Jude 1:3).

- In Antioch, Paul and Barnabas “abode long time with the disciples” (Acts 14:26-27).
- Paul determined to visit the “brethren in every city where” they had “preached the word of the Lord” (Acts 15:36).
- Paul and Silas “entered the house of Lydia,” who had obeyed the Gospel earlier, saw the brethren, and “comforted them” (Acts 16:40).
- Paul went “over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia . . . strengthening all the disciples” (Acts 18:23).
- The brethren wrote certain brethren in Achaia, “exhorting the disciples to receive” Apollos (Acts 18:27).
- Paul found “certain disciples” in Ephesus who needed to be instructed more perfectly in the way of the Lord (Acts 19:1-5).
- Certain chief men of Asia, brethren in Christ,” sent into him, desiring him that he would not enter into the theater,” where a tumult was taking pace (Acts 19:31).
- In Troas, Paul sought out the disciples, and preached to them on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7).
- From Miletus, Paul called for the elders of the church in Ephesus, and delivered a stirring exhortation to them (Acts 20:17-38).
- In Tyre, Paul found “disciples,” and tarried with them for seven days (Acts 21:3-4).
- In Ptolemais, Paul saluted the brethren, and stayed with them for one day (Acts 21:7).
- Certain disciples from Caesarea joined Paul when he “went up to Jerusalem” (Acts 21:15-16).
- In our text, Paul went to “his friends” in Sidon, who refreshed him (Acts 27:3).
- In Puteoli Paul and company “found brethren, and were desirous to tarry with them seven days” (Acts 28:13-14).
- Brethren from Rome came to meet with Paul on the last leg of his journey to Rome (Acts 28:15).

The point to be seen in all of this is that Paul, like the brethren chronicled earlier in the book of Acts (chapters one through twelve), cultured their association with the people of God.

Sadly, I have known a number of professing believers who did not do this. They confined themselves to their own relatives, or perhaps to the particular fellowship with whom they were identified. Consequently, they have not been helped like others who have preferred God's people above all others. That, of course, is the very way the entire Godhead views humanity. Their preference is the saints, to whom they minister, and with whom they dwell.

That He Might Refresh Himself

“. . . to refresh himself.” Other versions read, “and receive care,” NASB “so they might provide for his needs,” NIV “and be cared for,” RSV “and receive what he needed,” CSB “so they could provide for his needs,” NLT and “to receive their care.” YLT

The language strongly suggests that Paul was suffering from some infirmity. Perhaps some of it was associated with being in prison in Caesarea for two years. The prison accommodations during those times were certainly not conducive to comfort. Besides that he had been in chains the whole time. Now, Julius is moved by the Lord to see to it that Paul receives the care that he required – something that probably was not the portion of most prisoners. Had Paul not cultured holy associations, such provision would have been less likely. However, since he had preferred Jesus and the company of His people, now he realized the benefit of receiving “an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands,” as well as the persecutions that accompanied such preferences (Mark 10:30).

This manner of life is not one that can be forced by law upon people. It is the result of spiritual understanding and a total commitment to the Lord. However, for those who are willing to make the sacrifices required for closeness with Christ and His people, there will be times when a harvest of care, comfort, and refreshment will be realized. This is, what we might call, “body life.”

THE WINDS WERE CONTRARY

“ 4 And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.”

Paul having been refreshed, and the ship have been loaded/unloaded, the trip now continues to Rome Italy.

WE LAUNCHED FROM THENCE

“And when we had launched from thence . . .” Other versions read, “put out to sea from there,” NKJV “put out to sea again,” NIV “putting out to sea from there.” NRSV

Apparently, those who had joined Paul on the initiation of this journey remained with him. We do not know how many brethren were with him. However, as indicated earlier, it could have been more than just Luke. We know Luke was there, recording the events. Luke's frequent use of “we” and “us” suggests there could have been other brethren with them. Of course, it also could have been intended to denote the other prisoners and military men. However, I would think it would be a bit unusual to speak of Paul and Luke as being part of the general group.

WE SAILED UNDER CYPRUS BECAUSE THE WINDS WERE CONTRARY

“. . . we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary.” Other versions read, “under the shelter of Cyprus, because the winds were contrary” NKJV “passed to the lee of Cyprus because the

winds were against us,” NIV “we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us,” NRSV “we went on under cover of Cyprus,” BBE “we sailed close to the sheltered side of Cyprus,” CJB “sailed hard by Cyprus,” GENEVA “we sailed on the northern side of the island of Cyprus,” GWN and “so we sailed north of Cyprus between the island and the mainland” NLT The words “lee” NIV/NRSV and “leeward,” AMPLIFIED used by several versions, means “protecting shelter . . . the side of the ship that is sheltered from the wind.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

The contrary winds, as depicted in the chart above, were on the open sea, pushing toward the land. We still have hurricanes and the likes that head toward shore from the open sea. The island of Cyprus was a natural barrier that diminished the force of the winds. Therefore, the captain of the ship sailed between the mainland and Cyprus, taking advantage of the shelter of the island.

THE CENTURION FOUND A SHIP

“ 5 And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia. 6 And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.”

WE SAILED OVER THE SEA OF CILICIA

“And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia we came to Myra, a city of Lycia . . .” Other versions read, “over the sea which is off Cilicia and Pamphylia,” NKJV and “through the sea along the coast of Cilicia and Pamphylia,” NASB “over [the whole length] of sea which lies off Cilicia and Pamphylia.” AMPLIFIED

Sailing around Cyprus, the port of Myra was around 300 miles from Sidon. Considering that they were battling contrary winds, this could have required, at the very least, from 6-7 days.

Myra was one of the chief cities of Lycia, and was a port in which ships docked, loaded, and unloaded.

THE CENTURION FOUND A SHIP

“ . . . And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy; and he put us therein.”

Alexandria was in Egypt, and was located about 300 miles due south of Myra. Here the group disembarked from a ship based in Adramyrium and boarded one that was based in Alexandria. This particular ship was sailing for Italy, the destination of Julius and his band of prisoners.

It must be remembered that the fine-tuned schedules of vessels were probably not published regularly during those ancient times, there being too many variables to allow for such a thing. Yet, Julius had set out for Italy in an orderly manner, no doubt hoping to find a vessel that would take them to their ultimate destination.

That some effort was required on the part of Julius is evidenced by the language, “the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy.” Another version reads, “came across a ship.” BBE

As used here, the word “found” means, “to come upon, hit upon, to meet with; after searching, to find a thing sought,” THAYER and “to find after searching discover, come on.” FRIBERG

Notice not only the responsibility given to Julius, but his faithfulness to fulfill it. Festus did not provide Julius with a fine tuned schedule and reservations on known vessels headed for Italy. That was something the Centurion would discover along the way. He knew the original port of departure, and the final destination. Along the way He would have to develop the various means required to fulfill that mission.

I cannot ignore the remarkable parallel to spiritual life. We are apprised of where our journey begins – in this world, and at the point when we “first trusted in Christ” (Eph 1:12), and were “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27). We are also told of the appointed destination. We are being brought to “to glory” (Heb 2:10). We are being prepared for the revelation of Jesus Christ, and the grace that He will bring to us (1 Pet 1:13). We are being cultured for marriage to Jesus Christ (Rev 19:7; 21:9), when we will be with Him where He is (John 14:3; 17:24). We will all land at the port of judgment, which will be the point from which we will enter our eternal destiny (2 Cor 5:10; Heb 9:27).

Along the way we must make judgments that precisely relate to our appointed destination. To become involved in things that lead away from Christ and glory would be like Julius taking his group and boarding a ship headed for Nineveh. Our choices must have something to do with where we are going – where we will spend eternity. As simplistic as that may appear, many professing Christians are, so to speak, boarding ships that are not headed for glory.

A Vain Imagination

There is also the vain imagination that supposes the beginning of the voyage to glory is the primary thing. A theology has been developed that leads people to think in this manner, as though once you are on the ship, you are always on it. But this is not at all the case. There are points along the way when major decisions are made that impact where we will finally land. Tests of faith are like ports of entry where a proper vessel must be chosen. Temptations are points at which something must take place that will ensure we remain on the right course.

Those who have been called by God to do something have always been directed while the journey was in progress. The details of Abraham’s trip to the promised land were divulged while he was on the way. The specifics concerning the commanded sacrifice of Isaac were made known on the way. This was true of Israel being delivered from Egypt to go to Canaan. Joseph was sent by God into Egypt, but the details were revealed during his tenure in Egypt.

The main thing is really not to enter the original ship, although that is essential. It is rather to arrive at the proper destination. This places the emphasis on the trip itself, and not on its commencement. However, there is a theological posture that makes too much of starting the trip, and not enough of properly concluding it.

Another Danger

There is also the danger of making too much of the details of the trip, so that men become bogged down with the appearance of the vessel, or the storms through which it must sail. Decisions involved in the life of faith are not always a once-for-all thing. Sometimes plans have to be adjusted when unforeseen difficulties arise. Sometimes enemies confront us that must be fought. There are trials of our faith that we never imagined we would face. Sometimes there are successes that tend to distract us, and move us to glory in the wrong thing.

When all is said and done, the person en route to glory must look for a proper vessel, like Lucius searched for, and found, a proper ship. Part of salvation is the responsibility to make proper choices. According to Scripture, this is working out our own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).

Those who have been called by God to do something have always been directed while the journey was in progress. The details of Abraham’s trip to the promised land were divulged while he was on the way. The specifics concerning the commanded sacrifice of Isaac were made known on the way. This was true of Israel being delivered from Egypt to go to Canaan. Joseph was sent by God into Egypt (Psa 105:17), but the details were revealed during his tenure in Egypt. This pattern is revealed throughout Scripture.

The person who does not engage in “the good fight of faith” (1 Tim 6:12), “run with patience the race” set before him (Heb 12:1-2), and “perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord ” (2 Cor 7:1), will always be confused about what he is to do. Those who do not “add to their faith” (2 Pet 1:5-8), work out their “own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12), putting “on the new man,” and putting “off the old man” (Eph 4:22-24) will never experience the satisfying direction of the Lord. Such are living their lives in contradiction of the Kingdom manner. They are like Abraham leaving Ur of the Chaldees and settling down in the next town. They are like Abraham attempting to offer up Isaac a short distance from his home, or like Joseph seeking to make a career out of being the steward of Potiphar’s house, or the permanent manager of the prisoners in the prison. They are like Israel leaving Egypt, and building a city just on the other side of Red Sea. They are like Lucius landing in Myra and waiting for a ship master to come to him, informing him of the next ship that was going to Egypt.

Does all of that sound absurd? Know that the parallels are remarkably precise.

THE WIND NOT SUFFERING US

“ 7 And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; 8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.”

Luke now provides some more details about the voyage, and the difficulties that were faced.

WE SAILED SLOWLY MANY DAYS

“And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus . . .” Other versions read, “sailed slowly for a good many days,” NASB “made slow headway for many days,” NIV “sailed slowly for a number of days,” NRSV and “For a number of days we made slow progress and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus.” AMPLIFIED

By sea, the trip from Myra to Cnidus was about 150 miles. Sailing against contrary winds, that would require about three days. However, the storm was apparently growing worse, and thus it took them a significant number of days to complete this leg of their journey – possibly five to ten days.

Of course, these ancient vessels did not have automatic pilots, and were not driven by engines. The amount of time keeping the sails hoisted, and placing them properly must have been staggering. Yet, the sailors of those times were prepared for such adversity, and knew how to handle it. Not only was the progress slow, but the work required was much more. The sailors had to throw themselves more fully into the work, and do so for greater lengths of time. Sailing in a storm is not at all like sailing on a calm and tranquil sea! That also is like our journey to glory.

THE WIND NOT SUFFERING US

“ . . . the wind not suffering us . . .” Other versions read, “the wind not permitting us to proceed,” NKJV “the wind did not permit us to go farther,” NASB “the wind did not allow us to hold our course,” NIV “the wind was against us,” BBE and “But since the wind did not allow us to approach it” [Cnidus]. CSB

The wind did not allow the vessel to dock at Cnidus, so they had to pass it by. They had to adapt to the storm, and do so without getting off course.

WE SAILED UNDER CRETE

“ . . . we sailed under Crete, over against Salmone; 8 And, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.” Other versions read, “passing it with difficulty,” NKJV “we moved along the coast with difficulty,” NIV and “coasting along it

with difficulty.” AMPLIFIED

The trip from Cnidus to Fair Havens was about 250 miles – a trip that would have required over five days with some contrary winds. In the fierce gales they were facing, a significant number of days were required – possibly even measured in terms of weeks. They sailed “under” Crete, or close to the southern portion of the island, in order to arrive at the port at Fair Havens.

Several versions use the term “coasting” for “hardly passing it” (Salome). I am not sure of the appropriateness of such a word, unless it is intended to denote that they were at the mercy of the wind, being carried along wherever it led them. However, this does not make sense, because very real progress was made with difficulty. To me, that does not describe a situation where the wind is simply carrying the boat along without any direction. Making slow progress presumes they were making progress in reaching their goal, and were not hopelessly adrift.

Thus, having made very slow progress, they finally arrived at Fair Havens, which required considerable effort.

The Parallel to Spiritual Life

Again, this trip bears a remarkable resemblance to the nature of spiritual life. Some trials are unusually fierce, and the desired progress is not made throughout their duration. They are, in a manner of speaking, tests, to determine the moral strength, spiritual stamina and commitment of the individual. This is not for the purpose of informing God, but to assist the believer in the examination of self. It also serves to demonstrate to principalities and powers in heavenly places the outcome of Divine choice and the effectiveness of faith.

- **Developing Toughness.** Spiritual life requires a kind of toughness, stamina, or staying power. If believers were being led to glory on flowery beds of ease, their lives would not accrue to God’s glory as they do when placed under oppression, restriction, and difficulty. The Scriptures do not speak commendably of those who faint in “the day of adversity,” declaring that those who faint during such times have “small” strength (Prov 24:10). Solomon also affirmed that the thing to do in the day of adversity is “consider” (Eccl 7:14). It is essential that those in Christ learn to contend with horses as well as with footmen. Jeremiah said, “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?” (Jer 12:5).

- **Maturing Wisdom.** Wisdom is hammered out on the anvil of affliction, and blessed is the person who knows it. In trouble we can learn more about God, life, trouble, faith, and ourselves as well. It is good to know how to handle the ship of life in a storm, as well as upon a placid sea. During especially trying moral and spiritual storms, we learn not only what is really needed, but what can be expended as well.

- **Honing up determination.** One of the liabilities of a life of ease is that godly determination often wanes. Outward tranquility can lead us to feel more at home in this present evil world. Trouble, on the other hand, awakens determination, moving those who believe to apply more effort to reaching the goal, fastening on the future rather than present experience.

- **Developing spiritual stamina.** Trouble can wear people out, sap their strength, and move them to view godliness as pointless. Faith will overcome these inclinations – but without faith the person will be crushed. When the individual maintains a godly course when the storms are blowing, a certain godly stamina is perfected. Endurance is one thing, enduring during storms is quite another. Those whose faith has been tried in the furnace of affliction are more apt to endure to the end. This is the meaning of the expression,

“tribulation worketh patience” (Rom 5:3). Other versions read, “tribulation produces perseverance,” NKJV “suffering produces endurance,” NRSV and “pressure and affliction and hardship produce patient and unswerving endurance.” AMPLIFIED

SAILING WAS NOW DANGEROUS

“ 9 Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, 10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.”

The storm through which the vessel was sailing had slowed the journey considerably. Much wisdom and stamina had to be employed to maintain any degree of progress. Now, a point arrives when a decision must be made.

WHEN MUCH TIME HAD BEEN SPENT

“Now when much time was spent . . .” Other versions read, “considerable time had passed,” NASB “much time had been lost,” NIV “a long time had gone by,” BBE “had lost so much time,” GWN “we were there a long time,” MRD “much time being spent,” YLT “There we stayed or several days,” LIVING “Our voyage thus far had occupied a considerable time,” WEYMOUTH and “By this time the season was far advanced.” MONTGOMERY

This text refers to the time they spent in Fair Havens, a harbor in the island of Crete, where the boat was apparently docked. It is quite possible that Paul was given liberty to preach the Gospel in Lasea, the nearby city. However, no details of their stay in this place are provided. It is only said that they spent “much time” there, apparently waiting for the storm to subside.

SAILING WAS NOW DANGEROUS

“ . . . and when sailing was now dangerous . . .” Other versions read, “the voyage was now dangerous,” NASB “sailing had already become dangerous,” NIV “the journey was now full of danger,” BBE “navigation being already dangerous,” DARBY “sailing was now jeopardous,” GENEVA “it was hazardous [then] for any one to go by sea,” MRD “The weather was becoming dangerous for sea travel,” NLT “The weather was becoming dangerous for long voyages by then,” LIVING and “the navigation being now unsafe,” WEYMOUTH

The storm did not let up, but appears to have gotten even worse. Now sailing involved more than making slow and tedious progress. It was now dangerous to set out to sea. As used here, the word “dangerous” means “to cause to fall,” or “prone to fall,” THAYER “insecure, unsafe,” FRIBERG and “unstable, precarious,” LIDDELL-SCOTT

Crete was an island in the midst of the sea, about 70 miles from Asia, 50 miles from Greece, and several hundred miles from Sicily and Italy. This compounded the whole situation, as the open sea would be much more dangerous than in the immediate vicinity of Crete. Yet, as will see, a decision will have to be made concerning staying in Fair Havens, or finding a more suitable place to dock for the winter.

THE FAST WAS ALREADY PAST

“ . . . because the fast was now already past . . .” Other versions read, “the Fast was already over,” NKJV “by now it was after the Fast,” NIV “even the Fast had already gone by,” NRSV “because it was late in the year,” BBE/LIVING “because it was already past Yom-Kippur,” CJB “the day of fasting had already past,” GWN “after the day of the Jewish fast,” MRD “it was after the Fast. {That is, the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur)}.” NIB “because it was so late in the fall,” NLT “they had overlong fasted,” PNT/TNT “for the Autumn Fast was past,” MONTGOMERY “for the time for the

Fast [the Day of Atonement, about the beginning of October] had already gone by,” AMPLIFIED “In fact, even the Great Day of Forgiveness was past,” CEV “for by now the Day of Atonement was already past,” GNB and “We had passed the autumn equinox.” MESSAGE

Here the various versions present quite a distorted picture concerning what is intended by the words “the fast.”

- Some present it as merely referring to the latter part of the year. BBE/LIVING
- One says it was “late in the fall.” NLT
- Others present it as being the time of an Autumn Fast. MONTGOMERY
- Still others say it was Yom-Kippur – the Day of Atonement. CJB/NIB
- One version says it was the equinox, probably the one in the Fall, when the sun crosses the equator, and day and night everywhere on earth are approximately equal. MESSAGE

• Other versions present it as a period of time in which they had simply been fasting, PNT/TNT with no formal cause being identified. In such a case, it may very well have been a time given to prayer, such as took place later in the trip (Acts 27:33).

I am rather inclined to the latter view – that “the fast” refers to the abstinence from food that was stimulated by a certain fear of the storm – such as occurred later. You may recall that when the Lord sent a storm upon the boat in which fleeing Jonah was found, “the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god” (Jonah 1:5). However, in the absence of any solid statement on this matter, I will simply state my preference and proceed.

PAUL ADMONISHED THEM

“Paul admonished them, 10 And said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.” Other versions read, “I perceive that this voyage will end with disaster and much loss, not only of the cargo and ship, but also our lives,” NKJV “I can see that our voyage is going to be disastrous and bring great loss to ship and cargo, and to our own lives also,” NIV “I can see that our voyage is going to be a catastrophe, not only with huge losses to the cargo and the ship but with loss of our lives as well,” CJB “Men, we’re going to face a disaster and heavy losses on this voyage. This disaster will cause damage to the cargo and the ship, and it will affect our lives,” GWN and “I perceive [after careful observation] that this voyage will be attended with disaster and much heavy loss, not only of the cargo and the ship but of our lives also.” AMPLIFIED

As they were waiting in Fair Havens, Paul had been assessing the situation. I do not doubt that he prayed about the matter. Even though a specific answer may not have been given to him from heaven, as would be the case later (Acts 27:23-25), his great mind had been bathed in the glory of the Lord. If any man was capable of rendering a wise assessment of the situation, it would be one that had been in the presence of the Lord, and had shaped his life around His will.

Spiritual understanding is superior understanding. Because of that, it can enable a person to perceive more in certain areas than those who have been trained to be experts in them.

Paul stated that what he was about to say was something he had “perceived.” Other versions read, “I can see,” NIV and “I believe.” NLT As used here, the word “perceived” means “to perceive with the eyes . . . to ascertain, find out, by seeing,” THAYER and “through mental perception understand, perceive,” FRIBERG This was a perception that came by seeing something, then assessing it, and comprehending the implications involved. Other places where the Greek word used here (**qewrw** /) is found include the following.

- The women who beheld Jesus on the cross (Matt 27:55).
- Mary Magdalene coming to see the sepulcher where Jesus was buried (Matt 28:1).
- Unclean spirits seeing Jesus, and falling down before him (Mk 3:11).
- Those who came to see the restored maniac from Gadara (Mk 5:15).
- Jesus beholding how men cast their money into the Temple treasury (Mk 12:41).
- Considering how great Jesus is (Heb 7:4).
- Seeing that a brother has need (1 John 3:17).

That will suffice to confirm that this is speaking of something that was really seen, or perceived. This word is not used to describe a vain imagination or a mere human opinion.

Of course, Paul was not an official mariner, and he was not speaking as though he was. Nor, indeed, has he been licensed to diagnose storms. However, his prodigious mind had been honed to a fine point in courts of the Lord, and he could see more in things and events than others.

Here is a case where a man of God knew more than the experts on storms and sailing. He could say with David, “I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation” (Psa 119:99).

Spiritual understanding is superior understanding. Because of that, it can enable a person to perceive more in certain areas than those who have been trained to be experts in them. I have personally experienced this kind of wisdom, as well as many others with whom I am acquainted. When a person lives by faith and walks in the Spirit, a harvest is reaped in every legitimate aspect of life. Throughout the ages, there have been those who can attest to this fact.

THE CENTURION BELIEVED THE MASTER OF THE SHIP

“ 11 Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.”

Paul has given a wise word concerning sailing in this storm. Notwithstanding, he was not the only one that had given some advice. The centurion, Julius, must now decide who he will listen to, for the ship is apparently being driven by an agenda he sets. Of itself, and on the surface, that is a most peculiar situation. However, when you take into account that the ultimate agenda has been set by the Lord, all of this makes perfect sense.

So far as heaven was concerned, the fundamental passenger on this ship was Paul. If heaven gives a word concerning the propriety of sailing at this time, it will come through Paul, not those who appear to be in charge of the voyage.

There are bodies of people among whom representatives from the Lord are found. It is not unusual for the entire group to be forced to adapt to the heavenly agenda – like Egypt preparing for a seven-year famine, in order that the children of Israel might be preserved, multiplied, and delivered. As Joseph told his brothers concerning his stint in Egypt, “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive” (Gen 50:20). Heaven does not shape its agenda around the ungodly who are really “not a people” (1 Pet 2:10).

THE DANGER OF SECULARIZATION

By “secularization,” I mean precisely what the dictionary says of this term: “1. To make secular. 2. To transfer from ecclesiastical to civil or lay use, possession, or control. 3. To convert to or imbue with secularism.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER The word “secular” means, “1 a. Of or relating to the

worldly or temporal [secular concerns] b. Not overtly or specifically religious.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

When life, and the objectives of life, are defined without God being at the center of things, it has been secularized. When careers, earning money, and rising to the top of the economic and business heap becomes the fundamental thing, secularization has taken place. The undue vaunting of pleasure, and even the maintenance of a sectarian religious structure necessitates the abandonment of God-centeredness. As a result, preparing to please and stand before God is no longer important enough to abandon any pursuit of emphasis that does not allow for such preparation.

Now, all of this is pictured in the text before us. I suppose the ship on which these souls were traveling was carrying some precious cargo: goods that were to be sold and meet the needs of the people. However, before the voyage is over, they will be thrown overboard in the interest of preserving life.

Over and above those more practical matters, there was a man on board this ship who had been called and commissioned by the glorified Christ. He was given a message that would change the lives of individuals, stabilize the church, and significantly impact the entire world. The exalted Lord will manage this entire voyage with this man in mind, together with those helpers who were with him. The world would be able to do without the goods this ship was carrying. It could manage well without Julius the centurion, or the pilot and owner of the ship. But it could not do without Paul. The vast majority of the knowledge of the purpose of God would be expounded by this man.

Of course, little of this was known by the passengers aboard this vessel – certainly it was not known by Julius and, the pilot and owner of the ship. Nevertheless, it was the truth, and ultimately the will of the Lord will be done, and Paul will bear witness to Jesus in Rome.

A Practical Observation

In our society diversion to the inferior is aggressively promoted. It is in the educational and religious structures, and the entertainment and business worlds as well. Those in Christ are to heed the words of Jesus: “In your patience possess ye your souls” (Luke 21:19). We are not to allow worldly priorities to be found in us. Our lives are not to be driven by inferior and decaying agendas.

This is not something that can be accomplished by following a routine, or developing new habits. It is part and parcel of working out your own salvation with fear and trembling. It is a posture you are responsible for developing, and no man can force you to do so.

NEVERTHELESS

“Nevertheless . . .” Other versions read, “But,” NASB and “However.” CJB

Life is structured in such a manner as requires choices. This cannot be avoided, for it is integral to life itself. For the believer, these times are tests. For the unbelievers, they are times that reveal the inadequacy of worldly wisdom.

It is my persuasion that every major decision made by men is preceded by advice or suggestions that are opposed to each other. One leads to advantage, and one to disadvantage. In our text, in the crucible of physical danger, two pieces of advice were given to the centurion. One came from Paul who said that if this voyage continued, it would be at the peril of the vessel, what was in it, and the lives of those on board. The other piece of advice came from the pilot and the owner of the ship. It appears these were two different men, the pilot, or helmsman, working for the owner. They advised that they move ahead to the next port, which, we will find, was thought to be more commodious.

MORE THAN THE THINGS WHICH WERE SPOKEN BY PAUL

“ . . . the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.” Other versions read, “was more persuaded by the helmsman and the owner of the ship,” NKJV “by the pilot and captain of the ship,” NASB “followed the advice of the pilot and the owner,” NIV “paid more attention to the pilot and the owner,” NRSV and “to the captain and the owner.” RSV

The centurion, Julius, chose to believe the pilot and the owner. After all, the sea was their domain, and they surely would know the best course to take. You may recall when Jesus, a carpenter by trade (Mk 6:3), twice advised professional fisherman where to cast their nets (Lk 5:4-5; John 21:5-6). Those with legitimate worldly wisdom sometimes have to told what is best for them to do in the very field in which they are experts. Examples of this are Joseph, Moses, and Daniel.

God still works in this way, choosing to work through what the world considers to be foolishness. As it is written, “But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence ” (1 Cor 1:27-29). This is simply the way the Lord works.

In this case, Julius was overly confident in the wisdom of the pilot and owner. He did not recognize Paul as possessing wisdom in this matter. However, he was wrong – seriously wrong. Unknown to him was the fact that the highest form of worldly wisdom has a boundary beyond which it cannot go. Men are hesitant, to say the least, to acknowledge this. However, experience will prove it to be true. This was one such occasion.

CONCLUSION

The witness of Jesus to Paul was straightforward. He had been dragged from the Temple, rescued by Lysias and his army, testified to the Jews, rescued from them again, for they sought to kill him, and spent the night in the military barracks. The following night Jesus said to him, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). Surely that would bring an end to the trouble he had endured, being beaten, and endured aggression that would have torn him in pieces if he had not been rescued. However, the fulfilling of that word was not simplistic. Ponder what Paul has experienced since that words was spoken to him.

Surely that would bring an end to the trouble he had endured, being beaten, and endured aggression that would have torn him in pieces if he had not been rescued. However, the fulfilling of that word was not simplistic.

- The day following that word from Jesus, forty Jews bound themselves with an oath that they would neither eat nor drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12).
- Those forty men came to the chief priests and elders, requesting that they speak to the chief captain, and ask him to bring Paul to them as though they were going to inquire about something. When he brought Paul, they would kill him on the way (Acts 23:15).
- Paul’s sister’s son overheard the plot and told Paul, who in turn told one of the centurions to take the boy to the chief captain, telling him he had something to say that he ought to hear (Acts 23:15-22).
- The chief captain then arranged for Paul to be transported to Caesarea, escorted by four hundred and seventy soldiers (Acts 23:23-24).
- Lysias wrote an accompanying letter detailing the case about Paul (Acts 23:25-32).
- When Paul arrived and Felix the governor had read the letter, he informed Paul that

he would hear his case when his accusers arrived from Jerusalem. He then commanded that Paul be incarcerated in the judgment hall (Acts 23:33-35).

- Five days later Ananias the high priest arrived with his entourage, and an orator by the name of Tertullus presented the Jews' case against Paul (Acts 24:1-9).

- After the presentation of the charges, the governor gave Paul an opportunity to defend himself before his accusers (Acts 24:10).

- Paul presented his case, pointing out that no charges against him had been verified (Acts 24:10-21).

- Felix then told Paul he would wait until Lysias the captain came, and see what he had to say about the whole matter (Acts 24:22).

- Felix then remanded Paul to be temporarily incarcerated, commanded that he be given liberty to move about, and that his friends should be permitted to minister to him (Acts 24:23).

- After some days had passed, Felix brought his wife Drusilla, sent for Paul, and heard him speak concerning faith in Christ (Acts 24:24).

- Paul reasoned with Felix concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgement to come, moving Felix to tremble. He said he would call for Paul at a more convenient season (Acts 24:25).

- Felix often called for Paul to appear before him, hoping he would offer him some money to obtain freedom (Acts 24:26).

- Paul was left bound in prison for two years (Acts 24:27).

- Festus, who replaced Felix went up to Jerusalem, where he heard charges once again leveled against Paul. The Jews asked him to bring Paul to Jerusalem for trial, fully intending to kill Paul along the way (Acts 25:1-3).

- Festus replied that Paul would be kept in Caesarea where he ought to be, and that they would have to journey to Caesarea to present their charges. (Acts 25:4-6).

- Festus remained in Jerusalem for more than ten days, at which time he departed for Caesarea (Acts 25:6-7).

- Upon arrival, he commanded Paul to be brought before him, where the Jews would present their case. Paul was given an opportunity to defend himself against the charges (Acts 25:8).

- Attempting to do the Jews a favor, Festus asked Paul if he would be willing to go to Jerusalem and be tried there. Paul said he was not willing, and could not be compelled to do so. He then appealed to Caesar. Festus agreed, saying "Hast thou appealed unto Caesar? Unto Caesar shalt thou go" (Acts 25:9-12).

- After many days, king Agrippa and Bernice showed up, and Festus spoke to him about the case of Paul. Agrippa said he wanted to hear Paul for himself (Acts 25:13-22).

- The next day Paul was summoned before Agrippa, Bernice, Festus, the chief men of the city, and the military leaders. He delivered his most lengthy defense at that time, eliciting responses from both Festus and Agrippa. In conference the audience agreed that Paul had done nothing worthy of imprisonment or death. If he had not appealed to Caesar he could have been set free (Acts 25:23-26:29).

- At this point, the lengthy trip to Italy commenced. At the time of our text, it had been in progress for some time, and would continue for a few more months.

I have taken the time to provide these general details to confirm the nature of the manner and

works of the Lord. He does not fulfill His will in the context of convenience and ease, and men are not wise to imagine that He does. For a person who is hasty in his judgments, this would have proved very distracting. However, this has not been the case with Paul. He has seized every opportunity put before him, and entered into every opened door. He has been able to speak insightfully and effectively, and has not been caught up in the controversies presented by the Jews, or the insults thrown at him by Festus, or the casual interest of Agrippa.

May you be able to correlate these events with your own life, enabling you to detect how and when the Lord is working with you. Be imitators of Paul in the matter of maintaining your composure, keeping the faith, and clinging to the promises of God. These things are all within the grasp of those who are living by faith.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #103

A COMFORTING WORD IN THE STORM

“ 27:12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west. 13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete. 14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. 15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive. 16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: 17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, struck sail, and so were driven. 18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; 19 And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. 20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away. 21 But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. 22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship. 23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. 25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.” (Acts 27:12-26)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

By now, the winter was coming on, and it was apparently not possible to travel by ship at that time. The pilot and ship master judged that Fair Havens was not a good place to spend the winter, and they should move to a more convenient location. Having set out for the next port, they encountered some violent wind that required a stopover at the small island of Clauda. There they had to undergird the ship. Because they were in danger of sinking into quicksands, or sandbars, they had to lower the sails and be driven along by the raging sea. They were forced to lighten the boat by throwing its cargo and tackling overboard. After spending a long time without food, Paul stood forth and announced that the angel of the Lord had appeared to him, informing him that he would stand before Caesar. The boat would be lost, but all of the people on board would be saved. The board would be wrecked, and they would end up on a certain island, tried and tired, but safe. He

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- **CONCLUSION**

told them to be of good cheer.

WISDOM IN PRACTICAL MATTERS

There is a wisdom dispensed from heaven that has to do with practical matters. The wisdom given to Solomon is an example of this type of soundness of mind. Twenty-nine times the book of Ecclesiastes refers to this kind of wisdom as pertaining to things “under the sun.” It has to do with practicalities relating to life in this world. This is valid wisdom, but does not directly integrate with the salvation that is in Christ Jesus. By that, I mean it does not contribute to the effectiveness of salvation. Paul spoke of times and circumstances in which it was not wise to marry, for it would cause “trouble in the flesh” (1 Cor 7:26-28). If men did marry, they were not sinning in doing so, but would experience some inconvenience that might very well impact upon living unto God.

- When He sent out His disciples, Jesus told them, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Mat 10:16).
- There are matters that are technically lawful, yet, from the standpoint of this kind of wisdom, they are not expedient. “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not

expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any” (1 Cor 6:12).

- There are other matters that are technically permissible. However, from the standpoint of this kind of wisdom, they are not expedient. “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not” (1 Cor 10:23).

- Paul advised the Corinthians on a wise way of fulfilling their commitment to send aid to the poor saints in Jerusalem. “And herein I give my advice: for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago” (2 Cor 8:10).

- The saints are admonished to “be wise unto that which is good” (Rom 16:19).

- Paul was a “wise masterbuilder” (1 Cor 3:10).

- Believers are to “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil” (Eph 5:15-16).

- Paul warned and taught every man “in all wisdom” (Col 1:28).

- Those in Christ are to “walk I wisdom toward those who are without” (Col 4:5).

It is true that there is a kind of wisdom that is directly related to salvation. It has to do with avoiding sin and being involved in righteousness. This is a higher form of wisdom, and impacts directly on whether a person goes to heaven or hell.

- James admonished that if, in the matter of being perfect and entire, wanting nothing, any believer lacked wisdom, we are to “ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

Wisdom in these areas does not elevate one’s fellowship with Christ. It is not the level at which salvation or damnation is determined. This does not mean there is no need for such wisdom, for often the lack of it makes one more vulnerable to the attacks of the wicked one, and puts one at an unnecessary disadvantage. This kind of wisdom does not promote growth in Christ. It is not the appointed means of overcoming the devil, or gaining an eternal inheritance. Yet, no person of God should be content to be without it.

Again, there is a practical wisdom that comes down from above – wisdom that is not bound on every soul, for it does not immediately pertain to God’s great salvation. Nor, indeed, does it deal with matters that are common to everyone. In our text, it pertained to people in an earthly storm. In Corinthians it had to do with people considering marriage, and the considerate gathering of a collection. However, it is very real wisdom, and assists God’s children in avoiding many unnecessary hardships and difficulties.

This is the kind of wisdom Paul exhibited when he said the voyage would be with peril to the cargo, the ship, and the people. It is lower form of wisdom that has been sanctified by the Lord. It has to do with living wisely in this present evil world.

THERE IS A HIGHER WISDOM

It is true that there is a kind of wisdom that is directly related to salvation. It has to do with avoiding sin and being involved in righteousness. This is a higher form of wisdom, and impacts directly on whether a person goes to heaven or hell. Of this wisdom it is written:

- “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).

- “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the

spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him” (Eph 1:17).

- “For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

- “In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3).

This is a wisdom that is associated with the appropriation and maintenance of eternal life. It has to do with recognizing the ploys of the devil and the promises of God. It has to do with how men conduct themselves before God, and what they do with the work He has given them to do – whether they are faithful or unfaithful servants.

The wisdom expressed in this text had to do with surviving a storm. The higher wisdom had to do with bearing witness to Jesus in Rome. The first had to do with surviving a natural storm, the second with surviving the assaults of the devil.

The person who can distinguish between these two forms of wisdom, and assign proper priorities to them, is one who will be able to navigate through difficulties in the best manner, and land at last on the eternal shore.

THE HAVEN WAS NOT COMMODIOUS

“ 27:12 And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.”

The decision to move ahead, even though sailing was “dangerous,” apparently involved considerable consultation and reasoning. The fact that Julius yielded to the opinions of the pilot and the owner, choosing to reject the counsel of Paul, let to some further reasoning that involved others. It appears from the text that there was some kind of consensus reached that involved quite a few people.

THE HAVEN WAS NOT COMMODIOUS

“And because the haven was not commodious to winter in . . .” Other versions read, “was not suitable to winter in,” NKJV “was not suitable for wintering,” NASB “not suitable for spending the winter,” NRSV “not a good one in which to be for the winter,” BBE “not well suited to sitting out the winter,” CJB “being ill adapted to winter in,” DARBY and “was not well situated and so unsuitable to winter in.” AMPLIFIED

Here, the advisors thought of the whole trip rather than the portion of it they were then experiencing. It was apparently known that while on the trip to Rome, they would have to spend the winter someplace. From that perspective, Fair Havens was suited better for the non-winter seasons. It does not appear that it was an intended haven for ships at all times of the year.

In order to think in this manner, they had to forget their present peril. They also had to treat the word of Paul as though it was not true. Additionally, they had to view the storm as lasting briefly, and that it would allow them to safely make it to a better place for the future. As their experience will confirm, this was nothing more than an exercise in vain thinking. They had been warned by Paul that moving on to the next port would involve the loss of their cargo, the loss of the ship, and possibly the loss of their lives. But all of that was meaningless to them, because they were thinking within the wrong context.

A PARALLEL TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

There is a parallel here to spiritual life, and it is worthy of special consideration. When the children of God are passing through trials, the most important consideration is getting safely through them. This will require obtaining mercy and grace to help in the time of need (Heb 4:16). It will necessitate trusting in God during the present distress, realizing that it is their faith that is being tested (1 Pet 1:7). Satan will also be present during the times of testing, seeking to allure us out of the safety zone, and into the broad road that leads to destruction (1 Pet 5:7-8).

If ever there is a time to avoid carnal assumptions, it is during the time of trial. It is possible to think of the future from an earthly point of view, assuming that you will soon be through the trial. However, that may not at all be the case. While there is a sense in which you must focus on the future, it must be an eternal future, not a temporal one. From this perspective, the trying of your faith is in order that it might be found “unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:7). That means that we must conduct ourselves properly throughout the trial, not living by assumption, but by faith. It is faith that must be maintained in trial, and that is why it is imperative that we approach such times with wisdom and godly determination.

THE MORE PART ADVISED

“ . . . the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.”

Paul did not categorically tell the pilot and owner of the ship what to do. He did, however, warn them that proceeding with the trip at that time would bring them into certain danger of losing their cargo, the ship, and their lives as well. Now, it appears that there was further discussion on the matter that swayed Julius to proceed to a supposedly more convenient port.

The More Part Advised

Other versions read, “the majority advised,” NKJV “The majority reached the conclusion,” NASB “the majority was in favor of” NIV “the greater number of them were for going out to sea,” BBE and “the majority favored the plan of putting to sea again from there.” AMPLIFIED

This is what is called consensus, or general agreement. It is the principle by which certain countries determine who will be their president. Some view it as a democratic process, and value it very highly. It is, in fact, considered by some to be a vital element of political freedom.

However, the majority is not always right – in fact they rarely can be so described. In Noah’s day, the majority were wrong. The same was true of the cities of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim. When the “children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron,” although they were in the majority, they were totally wrong. For the majority to be right, they must be righteous, and have a grasp of the truth – and that is a circumstance that has rarely, if ever, been found among the sons of men.

+ It is true that Solomon wrote, “Where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14). And again, “Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established” (Prov 15:22). And yet again, “For by wise counsel thou shalt make thy war: and in multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 24:6). However, is this set forth as proper protocol in Christ Jesus? In the salvation of God, “wise counselors” are those who know the ways and will of the Lord. They are people who, like penitent Israel, “asked counsel of the Lord” (Judges 20:23). At no point can the work of the Lord be approached as though it involved a democracy. I say this knowing full well that it is possible for the saints to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor 1:10). However, that is not the kind of oneness that is described in this text.

Attain Unto Phenice

“ . . . the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.” Other versions read, “if by any means they could reach Phoenix,” NKJV “if somehow they could reach Phoenix,” NASB “hoping to reach Phoenix and to winter there,” NIV and “on the chance that somehow they could reach Phoenix.” NRSV

The trip from Fair Havens to Phoenix, or Phenice, was from 50-60 miles as the crow flies. “Phoenix” is a transliteration of the name used here, while “Phenice” is a translation of it.

The majority felt as though it would be best to winter in that harbor, which was more commodious, comfortable, and conveniently spacious. Apparently it was situated so the winds of the winter would not have as great an impact on the vessel as they would in Fair Havens. At least, that is what the people thought.

It seems to me that Luke records this in vindication of Paul – to confirm that he had access to superior wisdom on the matter. The record will show that this is precisely correct.

When decisions are made like those of the greater number of people in this text, there is too much assumption.

- They assume the conditions will remain as they are.
- They assume conditions will not get worse.
- They assume they will be able to safely navigate for a short while on the tempestuous sea of life.
- They overestimate their ability.
- They underestimate the danger that confronts them.

A PARALLEL OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

What do the children of God do in times of danger and stress – when it seems as though everything is against them? Is that really the time to seek convenience, more freedom to move about, and more external protection? Nearly all worldly counselors advise such a procedure. That is why those who deal with the mind often offer sedatives to calm the oppressed. It is why there are such things as retreats, and havens for the weary. I would not venture to say such things are of themselves wrong. The point here is whether or not they are right.

When we are under fire should we not seek to resist the encroachments of the devil rather than to hide from them. Ought we not to cast down imaginations, rather than to flee to a cave where they are least apt to bother us? Was Israel right in withdrawing from the battle when the Philistine giant appeared and intimidated them with his shouting?

Convenience is a thing that is to be assessed – filtered through the will of the Lord, and attended by much prayer and supplication. Felix told Paul he would call for him when he had “a convenient season” (Acts 24:25). He was, so to speak, seeking another harbor he felt was more “commodious.” The Gentile world, having refused to “retain God in their knowledge,” resorted to another harbor in which they could do things that were not really “convenient” as regards their eternal welfare (Rom 1:28).

Paul warned of conduct that is preferred by many, and portrays a kind of lifestyle that seems to have more freedom, and be more commodious. However that is not really the case at all. He wrote, “But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as

becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks” (Eph 5:3-4).

Some, who are feeling the winds of conviction, seek to locate in another place where they imagine they will be more comfortable. They listen to the testimony of others who say they are happy, and are having more fun. Thus they seek to relocate in an environment that gives the flesh the upper hand. Consequently, they are in greater danger than they have ever been before.

When called to go to Nineveh, Jonah thought it more convenient to get in a boat at his own expense, and head for another place. Because of his choice, he had a terrible experience, and when he was graciously delivered from it, he had still had to go to Nineveh, just as God had said.

There is a most intriguing word in the book of First Kings concerning a prophet who gave heed to the contradicting word of another prophet. It confirms the necessity of giving heed to the Lord, as opposed to listening to the counsel of others. This record concerns the prophet sent to king Jeroboam, restoring his hand that withered when he cried out against the altar (1 Kgs 13:1-7). This text commences with the king's request for the prophet to enter his house so he could receive refreshment and a reward. I am quoting the text from the New King James Version.

Some, who are feeling the winds of conviction, seek to locate in another place where they imagine they will be more comfortable. They listen to the testimony of others who say they are happy, and are having more fun. Thus they seek to relocate in an environment that gives the flesh the upper hand. Consequently, they are in greater danger than they have ever been before.

“But the man of God said to the king, If you were to give me half your house, I would not go in with you; nor would I eat bread nor drink water in this place. For so it was commanded me by the word of the LORD, saying, 'You shall not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the same way you came.' So he went another way and did not return by the way he came to Bethel. Now an old prophet dwelt in Bethel, and his sons came and told him all the works that the man of God had done that day in Bethel; they also told their father the words which he had spoken to the king. And their father said to them, "Which way did he go?" For his sons had seen which way the man of God went who came from Judah. Then he said to his sons, 'Saddle the donkey for me.' So they saddled the donkey for him; and he rode on it, and went after the man of God, and found him sitting under an oak. Then he said to him, 'Are you the man of God who came from Judah?' And he said, 'I am.' Then he said to him, "Come home with me and eat bread. And he said, "I cannot return with you nor go in with you; neither can I eat bread nor drink water with you in this place. For I have been told by the word of the LORD, 'You shall not eat bread nor drink water there, nor return by going the way you came.' He said to him, 'I too am a prophet as you are, and an angel spoke to me by the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with you to your house, that he may eat bread and drink water.' (He was lying to him.) So he went back with him, and ate bread in his house, and drank water. Now it happened, as they sat at the table, that the word of the LORD came to the prophet who had brought him back; and he cried out to the man of God who came from Judah, saying, 'Thus says the LORD: Because you have disobeyed the word of the LORD, and have not kept the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, but you came back, ate bread, and drank water in the place of which the Lord said to you, Eat no bread and drink no water, your corpse shall not come to the tomb of your fathers.' So it was, after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled the donkey for him, the prophet whom he had brought back. When he was gone, a lion met him on the road and killed him. And his corpse was thrown on the road, and the donkey stood by it. The lion also stood by the corpse. And there, men passed by and saw the corpse thrown on the road, and the lion standing by the corpse. Then they went and told it in the city where the old prophet dwelt. Now when the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard it, he said, 'It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the LORD. Therefore the LORD has delivered him to the lion, which has torn him and killed him, according to the word of

the LORD which He spoke to him” (1 Kgs 13:8-26).

The penalty for not giving heed to the word of Paul will not be as harsh as the one paid by that prophet, who believed a lie. That is only because Paul’s word did not concern specific directions from God. However, the events that follow clarify how serious it is to ignore a word delivered by a man of God. It is only because Paul was on board the boat that the repercussions were not more serious.

THEY SUPPOSED

“ 13 And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.”

Now, giving heed to those who agreed it was appropriate to proceed to the next port, the ship and its occupants commence the journey to that more convenient port. Things will appear at first to justify their conclusion, but time will confirm they had made a big mistake.

WHEN THE SOUTH WIND BLEW SOFTLY

“And when the south wind blew softly . . .” Other versions read, “when a moderate wind came up,” NASB “when a gentle wind began to blow,” NIV and “when the south wind blew gently.” RSV

There was a sudden change in the weather, with the storm apparently subsiding. Sailing would now be much easier, with the wind softly blowing upon the hoisted sails. Everything was favorable – at least that is the way it appeared.

THEY SUPPOSED THEY WERE RIGHT

“ . . . supposing that they had obtained their purpose . . .” Other versions read, “supposing they had obtained their desire,” NKJV “they thought they had obtained what they wanted,” NIV “they thought they could achieve their purpose,” NRSV “supposing they were gaining their object.” AMPLIFIED

Having made the determination that they should sail to the next port, the circumstance appeared to justify their view. The wind was ideal, and therefore they concluded they were right. Any hesitation to carry out their will was dissolved, and they proceeded to do what they had determined.

THEY SAILED CLOSE TO CRETE

“ . . . loosing thence, they sailed close by Crete.” Other versions read, “putting out to sea,” NKJV “weighed anchor and began sailing along Crete,” NASB “so they weighed anchor and sailed along the shore of Crete,” NIV and “they weighed anchor and sailed along Crete, hugging the coast.” AMPLIFIED

Experience in the sea caused them to use some caution, not venturing into the deep. Thus they sailed as close to the shore of Crete as they could, apparently judging that if the weather changed, they could maintain some degree of safety.

The expression “weigh anchor” is a nautical term, and means the following. “Weigh anchor is a nautical term indicating the final preparation of a sea vessel for getting underway. Weighing anchor literally means raising the anchor of the vessel from the sea floor and pulling it up to the side of the vessel after the engines have been brought up to operating power.” WIKIPEDIA “put up the anchor: Synonyms: bring the anchor home, cast off, loose for sea, put to sea, unmoor, up-anchor.” VISUAL THESAURUS “To weigh anchor means to take up or lift the anchor off the sea bed when getting underway or ‘under weigh.’” NAUTICAL TERMS

Preparing to sail took considerable effort, for this was no small vessel. In addition to cargo and

ship tackling, there were 276 people on board. An idea of the size of this vessel is provided by Bible History On Line : “The Apostle Paul's ship was actually a grain ship . . . It was of enormous size and the corn ship that Paul traveled on carried 276 men. Ships of this size had a tonnage of 2,600 tons. The hull ran up to a bird's-head carving above the bows and a bird's-tail at the stern. In the midst was a high mast, usually of cedar wood and near the prow was a smaller one for hoisting a small sail. Two large oars were used to steer. On the deck was a wooden hut for the helmsman which was also used as a temple of worship containing an idol.” BIBLE HISTORY ON LINE

I provide this information, that is admittedly not precisely accurate, to confirm the magnitude of the effort required to sail, as well as the enormity of the danger associated with sailing the open seas.

Above is an ancient artist’s drawing of the kind of ship involved in our text. Estimates of the size of these ships as provided by ship specialists, estimated to be 413-424 feet in length, and 62 feet in breadth (top to bottom). WAPEDIA, SHIPS That would be equivalent to a six story building, with a surface significantly larger in length than a football field. This is only an estimate, but provides a rational idea concerning the size of the ship involved in this text. It was doubtless considered strong enough to withstand considerable waves of water.

PARALLEL TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

There is a remarkable parallel to spiritual life in this account. As you probably know already, one of the characteristics of crises is that they tend to reveal the scope of one’s understanding. Also a sense of values is made known. Because of a weakness in their faith, and a consequent lack of familiarity with both the nature of God and of the life that is in Christ Jesus, many professed believers venture into dangerous territory, when there is no need to do so. They experience unnecessary hardship, and fall into snares they could have been avoided. They are too hasty in many things, and thus are unable to see the larger picture. Trouble rushes upon them, and, having acted unwisely, they do not know why.

There are also those who are devoted more to institutions than to Christ Himself. Like mariners of our text, the largeness of the institution affords some sense of safety to them. However, this runs counter to every aspect of Divine revelation. Noah and his family were in the minority. Lot and those who escaped with him were in the minority. The Israelites were the smallest of all nations. Gideon’s army was far too large at first, and had to be whittled down from 32,000 to 300 before it could be used by God. Jesus said the way that leads to life is found only by a “few.” Yet, in all of these instances, safety was found among those who were approved by God. It is never wise to glory in largeness, or boast in bigness. It is not that there is some virtue in smallness. Rather, throughout history,. God receives the greater glory from the few of any given generation. Their outward smallness is one reason why they live by faith.

BUT NOT LONG AFTER

“ 14 But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.”

Suddenly, in a moment of time, the environment was changed, and something the mariners did not expect happened. It is something on which they did not reckon, and so it caught them by complete surprise.

NOT LONG AFTER

“But not long after . . .” Other versions read, “But before very long,” NASB “But soon,” NRSV and “But soon afterward.” AMPLIFIED

Hardly had the crew launched their ship, sailing close to the island of Crete, when they faced

something that apparently had not entered their minds. Apart from faith, the mind of man is not astute enough to account for every possible circumstance or adversity. It can only reckon on what they have gone through. Most men have learned this by experience, but few men live with this in mind.

AGAINST IT

“ . . . there arose against it . . .” Other versions read, “there rushed down from the land,” NASB “a wind of hurricane force . . . swept down from the island,” NIV “rushed down from Crete,” NRSV and “came bursting down from the island.” AMPLIFIED

The fierce wind seemed to focus on the ship itself, as though there was no other objective than it.

A TEMPESTUOUS WIND

“ . . . a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon.” Other versions read, “a violent wind, called Euraquilo,” NASB “a wind of hurricane force, called the "northeaster,” NIV “a violent wind, called the northeaster, rushed down from Crete,” NRSV and “a violent wind [of the character of a typhoon], called a northeaster.” AMPLIFIED

The wind against which they had been battling came from the sea, and therefore in attempting to go from Fair Havens to Phenice, they sailed close to the island of Crete. Now, however, they faced something on which they had not reckoned: a wind coming at them from the land – and it was apparently of greater ferocity than the one that was generated on the sea. Rather than sailing out of danger, they had actually sailed into danger.

THE PARALLEL TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

It is not a stretch of the imagination to liken this voyage to our pilgrimage through this present evil world. It is a grand lesson when we learn that temporal life is tailored to acquaint us with spiritual life. Spiritual life is not a mere duplication of earthly life, only on a higher level. Sound reasoning must not begin with the earth – the eternal cannot be patterned after the temporal. It should require nothing more than an affirmation to establish that to insightful souls.

There is a certain liberty permitted the believer that allows for making decisions. The purpose of God is not shaped by those determinations, but the participation of the saints is. In our text Paul going to Rome was, as it were, cast in stone. How he arrived there allowed for some decisions by the people involved. Paul chose wisely, seeing that proceeding with the proposed trip to Phenice was too perilous. The Centurion, however, made a harmful choice, and was allowed by heaven to do so.

The Case of the Printer from New Elliott

I personally know of the danger of wrong choices. I also know by experience of the Lord’s deliverance from the consequences of such choices. During the early part of 1970, myself and my father, Fred O. Blakely, were faced with the results of a burgeoning mailing list for The Banner of Truth and The Word of Truth. The costs for these publications had escalated due to increasing printing and mailing costs. My father was ministering at a congregation in New Elliott Indiana, while I was ministering in Merrillville, a nearby community. During that time, a new family came to fellowship in New Elliott. The man was a professional printer, and owned a local print shop. Having been apprized of our publications, he offered to have them printed for the cost of the paper alone. The only stipulation was that we perform the labor required to set the type. My father and I talked about the matter, and entered into fervent prayer about it. The cost savings would be thousands of dollars each month for the two publications.

We finally concluded that this was the Lord’s will, and that He had provided this convenient outlet. We determined to announce our decision the next Lord’s Day, and inform the printer we would

proceed in formalizing the agreement.

On the Friday prior to the Lord's Day, the local newspaper, The Hammond Times, featured a special article on the front page. We both recognized the accompanying picture to be that of the printer with whom we were going to make the agreement. The article chronicled this man's arrest and the seizure of his printing establishment. He was guilty of printing bogus bonds and other financial documents, and was subsequently imprisoned.

After again meeting, my father and I concluded that this had all been a test, and that we had made the wrong decision out of haste, and an undue regard for financial advantage. The Lord graciously delivered us from a circumstance that would have seriously impacted our ministry for years to come. We had been momentarily diverted by the apparently good sound of a temporary advantage.

An Application

Many a poor soul has suffered needlessly because of poor decisions. Their thinking was too hasty, and did not duly consider the circumstances set before them. As a result, some people had to suffer unspeakable inconvenience, as will be the case with the voyage covered in this text.

THE SHIP COULD NOT BEAR UP

“ 15 And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.”

The northeastern wind forced the ship further away from the island of Crete, and the pilot found he could not control the ship any longer.

WHEN THE SHIP WAS CAUGHT

“And when the ship was caught . . .”

+Other versions read, “the ship was caught by the storm,” NIV “the ship got into the grip of it,” BBE “caught and driven,” DARBY “the wind carried the ship away,” GWN “the ship was whirled about by the wind,” MRD “the ship was snatched along by it,” WILLIAMS and “the ship was seized by it.” EMTV

Those who thought they could make it to Phenice imagined they could maintain control of the ship all along the way, even though they probably knew it would require a lot of effort. However, there were seasoned sailors among them, and they felt confident of their abilities. They had probably navigated through many storms, and were sure they could do so through this one.

However, they were wrong – seriously wrong. Instead of mastering the storm, the storm now had the mastery over them. Having ventured into the domain in which the storm ruled, the ship was seized by the storm, and was pulled into its ferocity, all of the efforts of the sailors notwithstanding.

COULD NOT BEAR UP INTO THE WIND

“ . . . and could not bear up into the wind . . .” Other versions read, “could not head into the wind,” NKJV “could not be turned head-on into the wind,” NRSV “could not face the wind,” RSV “was not able to make headway into the wind,” BBE “not able to bring her head into the wind,” DARBY “could not resist the wind,” GENEVA “couldn't sail against the wind,” GWN and “could not resist the wind.” TNT

Suddenly, the mariners had entered an impossible situation. They could not navigate the ship under these circumstances. All of their expertise withered, and they were absolutely impotent to manage the situation.

There was a certain technique employed to capitalize on the wind. This was accomplished by various sails. By independent, yet coordinated settings, they would cause the wind to serve their purposes, and drive the ship in the precise direction they desired. Large vessels had rather complex sails-systems, as the ship graphics image indicates.

Every possible scenario was addressed by the size and position of these sails so that, ordinarily, the ship could progress through the waters toward its destination, whether the winds were gentle or fierce. Those in charge of the ship based their decision to sail on the existent weather conditions plus their expertise, and in view of the equipment on board the ship. It all seemed to make perfect sense.

Now, however, they faced a storm of extraordinary proportions. Their expertise was no longer valid. The equipment they had was not adequate. The pilot could not steer the ship, and thus they could not advance toward their goal. The wind had captured their vessel, and there was not a thing they could do about it.

WE LET HER DRIVE

“ . . . we let her drive.” Other versions read, “let ourselves be driven along,” NASB “gave way to it and were driven,” NRSV “giving up the ship to the winds, we were driven,” DOUAY “were carried away,” GENEVA “were carried along by the wind,” GWN “resigned [the ship] to its power,” MRD “were driven by the weather,” PNT “let go, and were drave by the weather,” TNT “we stopped trying to resist and let the wind blow us,” LIVING “we gave up and were swept along,” ISV and “we gave up and, letting her drift, were borne along.” AMPLIFIED

It is to be assumed that the mariners did everything they knew to do. They used every tool available to them. Yet, it was all in vain. They finally had to give up, for there was nothing left in their arsenal, or sea-wisdom and equipment. The sails did not function correctly. The rudder was useless. The pilot’s hands were tied, so there was nothing left to do but submit to the wind, and let it carry the vessel without any effective human intervention.

PARALLEL TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

The parallel to spiritual life is most arresting. It simply cannot be mere coincidence.

Spiritual trouble and danger are like a whirlpool that draws the individual into it, like the storm seized the ship. There is a kind of perimeter to this danger that will protect us if we maintain a distance from it. But should a person venture too close to that perimeter, he will be drawn into the vortex of the whirlpool, just as surely was the ship of our text was drawn into the storm. Once they are caught in that vortex, there no hope of working out of it by human strength of wisdom.

This perimeter is not clearly marked. It may appear as though favorable and gentle circumstances lie all about it – like the gentle wind of in text seemed to nullify any supposed danger. Should a person imagine they can get close to contaminating influences without being affected by them, they have not thought correctly. “Evil communications corrupt good manners” – that is the unmitigated truth (1 Cor 15:33). Other versions read, “Bad company corrupts good morals,” NASB “Bad company corrupts good character,” NIV and “Evil companionships (communion, associations) corrupt and deprave good manners and morals and character.” AMPLIFIED Many a poor soul has been overcome by evil in some form because they ventured too close to it. They made the wrong friends, went to the wrong places, and subjected themselves to the wrong influences. Suddenly they were seized, like the ship on which Paul was sailing was seized a fierce wind.

Apostolic Doctrine

A vivid picture of this sort of thing is declared in the apostles’ doctrine. In it the purpose of God is stated as involving the growth and maturity of His people. The intended objective for the various

teaching ministries is stated this way: “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into Him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph 4:14-15).

The implications are clear: growth into Christ is not possible if we are being tossed to and fro by the winds of man-made doctrines. Those doctrines can take hold of a person’s life and throw them about like the Euroclydon tossed the Alexandrian ship of our text. How many times I have witnessed professing Christians immersed in confusion because of what they have been taught by pretentious preachers and teachers. It is no wonder that we are warned about getting involved in matters that minister questions instead of godly edifying. As it is written, “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do” (1 Tim 1:4). And again, “But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes” (2 Tim 2:23).

Concerning those who teach things that minister questions, as well as our response to them, it is written, “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting [to be lavish or excessive in one’s attention, fondness, or affection MERRIAM-WEBSTER] about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself” (1 Tim 6:3-5).

God’s ministers bring affirmations, not questions, and they are to be seriously pondered.

A CERTAIN ISLAND CALLED CLAUDA

“ 16 And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: 17 Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, struck sail, and so were driven.”

Having put out to sea against the advise of Paul, they not only will endure more danger, but will have to work the harder to get to their intended destination.

RUNNING UNDER A CERTAIN ISLAND

“And running under a certain island which is called Clauda . . .” Other versions read, “And running under the shelter of a small island called Clauda,” NASB “As we passed to the lee of a small island called Clauda.” NIV

Clauda was several miles off the coast of Crete, the wind having carried them a considerable distance off course. Using the island as a shelter from the wind, they sailed to the south of it. This island is seven miles long, and three miles wide. McCLINTOK-STRONG’S

WE HAD MUCH WORK

“. . . we had much work to come by the boat . . .” Other versions read, “we secured the skiff with difficulty,” NKJV “we scarcely were able to get the ship’s boat under control,” NIV and “we managed with [much] difficulty to draw the [ship’s small] boat on deck and secure it.” AMPLIFIED

The “boat” of reference is not the ship itself, but the skiff, or lifeboat that was probably hanging on the side. They hoisted it onboard for at least two reasons. First, they probably were thinking of possibly using it should the ship be wrecked at sea. Second, it was no doubt used to assist in girding the ship, which is referenced in the next clause.

UNDERGIRDING THE SHIP

“ . . . Which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship . . .” Other versions read, “had hoisted it aboard, they passed ropes under the ship to hold it together,” NIV “hoisting it up, they took measure to undergird the ship,” NRSV “After hoisting it on board, they used supports with ropes to undergird and brace the ship,” AMPLIFIED “banded the ship with ropes to strengthen the hull,” LIVING “After the men took the lifeboat in, they tied ropes around the ship to hold the ship together,” IE “They pulled it up on deck and used ropes to brace the ship.” ISV

GIRDING OR FRAPPING

“To draw together, to bind with a view to secure and strengthen, as a vessel by passing cables around it; as a tackle by drawing the lines together.” Tottem [1913 - Webster

Nautical girding is a technique called “frapping.” It is accomplished by passing ropes under the vessel and drawing them tight in order to strength the hull of the ship. Considering the amount of the vessel that was under the water (possibly as much as 20-30 feet), this was a sizeable undertaking, and no doubt associated with danger. Yet, these seasoned sailors knew how to do the proper things in the hour of crisis.

Notice how they strengthened the unseen part of the ship – the hull. They did not simply reorganize the deck. The part of the ship that supported it was made stronger.

FEARING THE SANDS

“ . . . and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands . . .” Other versions read, “and fearing they should run aground on the Syrtis sands,” NKJV “and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis,” NASB “fearing that they would run aground on the sandbars of Syrtis,” NIV “fearing they would run on the Syrtus,” NRSV and “afraid it might hit the sandbanks in the gulf of Syrtis,” CEV “afraid that they might run into the sandbanks off the coast of Libya,” GNB “afraid that they would be driven into the Syrtis [quicksands off the north coast of Africa].” AMPLIFIED

The coast of Africa was about 350 southwest of Clauda. Along its coast, and between it and Cyrene, were two “quicksands” – sandy areas barely covered by water.

THE QUICKSANDS OF SYRTIS

“Modern explorations find both of them to be highly dangerous bays, where the treacherous sandy shore is barely covered with water, and where terrific clouds of sand are suddenly raised by the wind, obscuring then sight and overwhelming men and even ships, The Greater Syrtis is now called the *Gulf of Sidra*, between Tripoli and Barea; and the Lesser the *Gulf of Cabes*. The former

is specially intended in the account of Paul’s shipwreck .” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S

The winds were of such ferocity, and characterized by an obvious longevity, that the mariners feared being mired in the quicksands just off the coasts of Africa. Yet, these seamen did not fall apart or despair – at least not yet. They still had some things they could do, and they set out to do them.

WE STRUCK SAIL, AND SO WERE DRIVEN

“ . . . struck sail and so were driven.” Other versions read, “let down the sea anchor, and so let themselves be driven along,” NASB “they lowered the gear, and so were driven,” RSV “they let down the sails and so went running before the wind,” BBE “they lowered the topsails and thus continued drifting,” CJB “they lowered the drift-anchor, and in this way they were driven along,” CSB “they let down the sail yard, and so were driven,” DOUAY “they strake sail, and so were carried,” GENEVA

“floated out the sea-anchor and so let themselves drift,” NJB “they let down a vessel, and were carried,” PNT “having let down the mast -- so were borne on,” YLT “they lowered the gear (sails and ropes) and so were driven along.” AMPLIFIED “let down the driving anchor, thus they were being driven along by the wind,” CEV “lowering the tackle, so they were borne along,” LITV and “We only managed to avoid them by throwing out drift anchors,” MESSAGE

The various versions present thirteen views of what “struck sail” means.

- Let down the sea anchor. The main anchor let down to the sea floor.
- Lowered the gear.
- Let down the sails.
- Lowered the top sails.
- Lowered the drift anchor. This was pulled behind the ship, consisting of canvas or other materials, and designed to slow the vessel down.
- Let down the sail guard. Similiar to, if not identical with the drift anchor.
- Floated out the sea anchor. Similiar to, if not identical to the drift anchor.
- Let down a vessel.
- Let down the mast – The pole holding the main sail.
- Lowered the gear (sails and ropes).
- Let down the driving anchor. Similiar to, if not identical to the drift anchor.
- Lowering the tackle.
- Throwing out drift anchors. Similiar to, if not identical to the drift anchor.

While this may appear quite incidental, here is how I view the matter. First, if something is written by the inspiration of God, I want to know what it means. As you can see, if one confines himself to searching the various versions of the English Scripture, this sometimes becomes an impossible task. Second if we can substantiate that historical incidents have spiritual parallels, it is imperative that we obtain a proper understanding of what is written concerning those events.

Albert Barnes says of this passage, “There has been a great variety of interpretations proposed on this passage. The most probable is that they took down the mast, by cutting or otherwise, as is now done in storms at sea, to save the ship. They were at the mercy of the winds and waves, and their only hope was by taking away the sails.”

Adam Clarke says, “Some think that lowering the yards, and taking down the top-mast, is what is intended; but in such a perilous situation this would have been of little service. Others think, letting go their main or sheet anchor, is what is meant; but this seems without foundation, as it would have been foolishness in the extreme to have hoped to ride out the storm in such a sea. Passing by a variety of meanings, I suppose cutting away, or by some means letting down the mast, is the action intended to be expressed here; and this would be the most likely means of saving the vessel from foundering.”

John Gill notes, “the mast is never cut down before the loss of other things; wherefore this is to be understood of letting down the sail yard, and contracting the sails; the Syriac version renders it, “we let down the main sail”; or, “the sail”, using the Greek word ‘Armenon,’ which signifies ‘a sail.’”

The passage informs us WHY they performed this action – it was because they feared being run aground in the quicksands of Syrtis. Therefore, in my judgment, this had to do with lowering the sails, particularly the most prominent ones, to slow the progress of the ship. It would be better for the winds to simply carry the ship, rather than be aided by hoisted sails.

There are circumstances where luxuries and conveniences make things more difficult. Such times are made even more difficult when an appetite for such things has been cultured and preferred above all else.

THE SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

When believers are being carried along by circumstance, and are alert to their situation, they should do everything possible to slow the speed of carrying away.

Because of the nature of life in this world, believers are to be as expert as possible in handling crises. As you know, all such circumstances are not apparently, or obviously, solvable. But we must do everything possible to avoid being mired in the quicksands of carnality.

As in this event, the storm itself cannot be managed by those who are in it. Storms, whether natural or spiritual, can only be managed by God. It is possible for believers to waste a lot of time trying to control the circumstance, when it is best to make every effort to survive the experience. That, to me, is one of the geniuses of spiritual life – learning to live unto the Lord. This will appear to many to be an effort to ignore the circumstance. However, when something cannot be controlled or managed, it is less than wise to expend a lot of effort thinking about it. In such a case, it is best to endeavor to pass through the thing with the Lord.

Little Sails

These gigantic ships had a variety of sails. Some of them were very large, and determined the speed with which the craft traveled, and any major directional adjustments that had to be made. Other sails were small, and did not play a major part in either direction of speed. Yet, they allowed for minor adjustments that bore on the ultimate destination of the ship. If they were not set properly, they would cause the ship to gradually be pulled off course. In dangerous storms, such as that of our text, they had to be lowered altogether.

Likewise, in the voyage of life there are matters that, under ordinary circumstances, are rather inconsequential. It is not that such things are wrong, or evil of themselves. However, under certain circumstances – like a severe trial – they can cause the individual to get off course. For example, if, during his trial, Job had insisted on eating regularly, or carrying out some of his mundane tasks, it would have been spiritually disastrous. Time was better spent in an earnest quest to hear from the Lord.

Many a poor soul has experienced unnecessary hardships, and even spiritual shipwreck, when they were occupied with smaller matters during the hour of trial. They have, so to speak, left their smaller sails aloft when they should have taken them down. This is because they have overestimated their strength, and have considered themselves to be more in control of their life than they really are.

If the professed believer will allow circumstance to testify to the conscience, it will discover certain frailties and ineptitude that must be known. It will also identify what is essential and what is not, what should be emphasized, and what should be considered secondary. The things that determine how you live must be carefully and regularly reviewed. There are things that must be put into the background during trials.

THEY LIGHTENED THE SHIP

“ 18 And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; 19 And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.”

The vessel on which Paul and company are sailing to Rome, continues to be buffeted by a fierce

storm. They have girded the ship, making its hull more stable against the battering waves. They have also lowered the sails, and taken measures to ensure that the ship is not propelled at an unwarranted pace into the dangerous quicksands of Africa. But it is still not enough.

EXCEEDINGLY TOSSED WITH A TEMPEST

“And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest . . .” Other versions read, “exceedingly tempest-tossed,” NKJV “being violently storm-tossed,” NASB “we took such a battering from the storm,” NIV “being pounded by the storm so violently,” NRSV and “being dangerously tossed about by the violence of the storm.” AMPLIFIED

One thing to be noted about a storm of this magnitude: you would not want to be in a small or frail vessel. It is good that they are at least in a ship that is sea-worthy. Now the battering reaches into a second and then third day. The storm is without interruption, and the vessel cannot continue to carry the same weight. The storm will not adapt to the ship, so it must be adapted to handle the storm.

THEY LIGHTENED THE SHIP

“ . . . the next day they lightened the ship . . .” Other versions read, “they began to jettison the cargo,” NASB “began to throw the cargo overboard,” NIV “began to throw the freight overboard,” ASV and “made a start at getting the goods out of the ship.” BBE

Once again, there is a parallel to spiritual life. In the hour of crisis, when remaining alive unto God is jeopardized, there are some things that must be abandoned. They may be friendships, certain neutral habits or places, forms of entertainment, means of occupying leisurely times, etc.

These were goods the ship was transporting for other people – most likely businesses. When it came to a wise course of action, the first thing determined was to save the people. The first thing to go is what did not belong to those people – things that constituted the greatest weight, probably bulk goods. In the interest of preserving the people and the vessel that was carrying them, they began throwing the cargo overboard – casting it into the raging sea. Perhaps now they will be able to navigate the ship in a more acceptable manner. However, alas, that is not how it all turned out, as the third day will confirm.

THEY CAST OUT THE TACKLING

“ . . . And the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship.” Other versions read, “the ship’s tackle,” NKJV “the sailing apparatus,” BBE “the ship’s sailing equipment,” CJB “the ship’s gear,” CSB “the ship’s equipment (the tackle and the furniture),” AMPLIFIED “the ship’s spare gear,” WEYMOUTH and “throwing off all the tackle and provisions.” MESSAGE

A ship’s tackling, according to McClintok & Strong’s Cyclopaedia, consists of “the spars, ropes, chains, etc., of a vessel’s furniture.” Easton’s Bible Dictionary says the tackling is “all that could be removed from the ship.” That is, this was apparatus that was unique to the ship, but was not a part of the construction itself. It was used to adapt to various circumstances associated with the sailing and maintenance of the ship. This could be used to raise and lower the sails, secure them, etc. But now, in the midst of a fierce storm, the equipment that was ordinarily helpful became a hindrance. Not only was it not required at that time, but its presence jeopardized the lives of the passengers, and the survival of the vessel as well.

THE SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

Once again, there is a parallel to spiritual life. In the hour of crisis, when remaining alive unto God is jeopardized, there are some things that must be abandoned. They may be friendships, certain neutral

habits or places, forms of entertainment, means of occupying leisurely times, etc. Under ordinary circumstances these things can be integrated into life without any undue distraction.

There is a certain liberty in spiritual life that allows for such things if they are not distracting to the soul. However, in the times of testing, things must be thrown overboard that ordinarily could be kept. To do this, valid priorities must be maintained.

ALL HOPE WAS TAKEN AWAY

“ 20 And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.”

There are storms, and there are STORMS. Some are small, some are large, and some reduce men to a state of hopelessness as concerns their own endeavors. The storm in this text was in the latter category. The mariners had done everything they knew to do. They had no doubt been in many storms before, and had gained some expertise in surviving fierce winds upon the sea. But their proficiency was not adequate for this storm.

THE CIRCUMSTANCE

“And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us . . .” Other versions read, “and the storm continued raging,” NIV “a great storm was on us,” BBE “the severe storm kept raging,” CSB “The storm wouldn't let up,” GWN “the storm held on for many days,” MRD “no small storm was assailing us,” NAB “The terrible storm raged unabated many day,” LIVING “the terrific gale still harassed us,” WEYMOUTH and “a great tempest still beat upon us.” MONTGOMERY

As if the wind itself was not enough, dark clouds had blotted out all light, so that neither the sun nor the stars, by which men navigated, was not seen for many days. The condition of the sea could be felt, but it could not be seen.

As if the wind itself was not enough, dark clouds had blotted out all light, so that neither the sun nor the stars, by which men navigated, was not seen for many days. The condition of the sea could be felt, but it could not be seen. They did not know precisely where they were, if they were within range of land, or in the midst of the sea. They could not assess their situation with the aid of vision, which is nearly always essential for evaluating difficult outward situations. Being in a boat during a fierce and relentless storm is one thing, being in the dark all the while is something else.

The tempest “lay” on the vessel. That is, it did not let up for even a moment. If anything, it kept getting stronger and stronger, and “many days” passed. Prior to this storm, they had sailed slowly for “many days,” finally coming into “The Fair Havens” on the southern part of Crete (Acts 27:7). A little later Paul will speak up “when the fourteenth night was come” (Acts 27:27). That means at the time of this text they had been tossed about in the relentless storm for about two weeks.

ALL HOPE WAS TAKEN AWAY

“ . . . all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.” Other versions read, “all hope that we would be saved was finally given up,” NKJV “all hope of our being saved was gradually abandoned,” NASB “all hope of our being saved was at last abandoned,” NRSV “until gradually all hope of survival vanished,” CJB and “all hope of our surviving was wholly cut off.” MRD

Hope was not instantly taken away, but gradually faded away. As long as there was something they thought they could do about the situation, hope remained alive. However, it gradually became apparent that this circumstance was beyond their control. No matter how much they knew about sailing and navigating in storms, it was not adequate for this situation.

Some people do not believe it is possible to get into such a situation. They cling to the notion that if they can only see more and know more, they will be able to control the situation. However, life will confirm that this is a false assumption.

THE SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

On the strait way that leads to life, there are some difficult experiences that last for a long time. They are like tests to confirm our continual need of a Savior, Intercessor, Captain, Shepherd, and High Priest. Most trials can be safely negotiated with the benefits we have already received: the whole armor of God, spiritual weaponry, the fruit of the Spirit, wisdom from above, etc. However, there are some winds of adversity that are of such strength that all hope of a rescue from them is removed. Paul spoke of such an experience in his second letter to the Corinthians. “For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life : But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead : Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us” (2 Cor 1:8-10).

There is a holy rationale in such trials. They are designed to push us beyond our present capacity in order that we do not trust in ourselves – even though we ourselves have much from the Lord to sustain us. However, our faith is to be in the Giver, not the gift – and men are prone to place their trust in what has been provided rather than the One who has provided it. Our faith, for example, is not in “the whole armor of God,” but in the God who supplies it.

It is quite true that God will not allow us to be tempted beyond our ability, but will provide way of escape with every temptation that we may be able to bear it. Sometimes, however, that way of escape is not readily apparent, and we are required to wait long for its appearance. Even then the escape may involve the wrecking of a vessel, and a treacherous trip to shore by swimming or hanging on to some plank of grace.

On a more practical note, sometimes hope is held out too soon – before conviction has taken place, or a perception of the real situation. Take, for example, the day of Pentecost and the insightful words of Peter. He first interpreted what was taking place among the disciples (Acts 2:14-21). He then affirmed the guilt of the people in rejecting Christ and having Him slain through the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:22-23). He announced that God has raised Jesus from the dead, and enthroned Him at His own right hand (Acts 2:24-37). Until that point he held out no specific hope to the people, but rather left them in the wake of conviction (Acts 2:39-40).

It is certainly not in order to develop a procedural manner of preaching in this regard. However, it is important to have some cogent thought about the state of the people before announcing a remedy for their situation. Too often, I fear, people are being told what to do before they have any interest in being saved.

In the text before us, Paul will not announce the revealed answer to the situation until it becomes apparent that there is no way the mariners can work themselves out of the dilemma of the storm. Further, the mariners themselves will know this.

AFTER LONG ABSTINENCE

“ 21a But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them . . . ”

Throughout this ordeal Paul has apparently maintained silence. I do not doubt that he assisted in any tasks possible. However, now the time has come to speak, for the Lord has spoken to him about this very circumstance.

AFTER A LONG ABSTINENCE

“But after long abstinence . . .” Other versions read, “when they had gone a long time without food,” NASB “as they had been long without food,” NRSV “when they had gone a long time without eating,” CJB “after they had fasted a long time,” DOUAY “Since hardly anyone wanted to eat,” GWN “And as no one had taken a meal of food,” MRD “When many would no longer eat,” NAB and “they had eaten nothing for a long time.” AMPLIFIED

“The literal rendering is, *when there was a great (or, general) loss of appetite* among the crew. The terror, the discomfort, the sea-sickness, the constant pressure of danger and labor, the difficulty of cooking, the unpalatableness of the food, combined to take away relish of their food, and they were becoming weak for want of nourishment.” PULPIT COMMENTARY

While men are prone to eat regularly whenever it is possible, a fierce and unrelenting storm can redefine what is deemed necessary or essential. During this hour of trial, the mariners and passengers no doubt lost their appetite for food. When one’s life is in danger, there is a rearranging of priorities.

PAUL STOOD FORTH IN THE MIDST

“Paul stood forth in the midst of them . . .” Other versions read, “Paul stood up before them,” NIV “Paul then stood among them,” NRSV “Paul then came forward among them,” RSV “Paul stood in front of them,” CJB and “Paul came forward into their midst.” AMPLIFIED

Having been in the background, so far as speaking is concerned, Paul now has something to say – and it is at a time when there was apparently very little being said. Prior to this, there had been speaking and agreement on the matter of whether or not they should make an effort to reach the commodious port in Phenice. It is not likely that there will be an decision on that subject now, for the circumstance in which they found themselves was testimony enough about the folly of the choice they had made.

YOU SHOULD HAVE HEARKENED UNTO ME

“ 21b . . . and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.”

The manner in which Paul speaks reflects the Divine nature. He is not accommodating to his listeners, as though they had made their choice in the environment of freedom and moral right. From heaven’s point of view, men never have the right to be wrong. That is a “right” the Lord does not give to men. Doing wrong is always a result of being deceived. Much more is involved than simply making a foolish choice. This is God’s world, and He is ruling in it. He created and positioned men in order that they might seek Him, and feel after Him in a conscientious effort to find Him (Acts 17:26-27).

That is a hard lesson for some to learn, for they are regularly taught that man is free to do what he wants. Indeed, it may look that way, but men are not to judge according to appearance. The pilot and owner of this ship had been given sound advice by a man of God. They chose to confer with one another, rather than inquire why Paul issued his warning.

YOU SHOULD HAVE HEARKENED UNTO ME

“ . . . and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete . . .” Other versions read, “Men, you should have listened to me, and not have sailed from Crete” NKJV “Men, you ought to have followed my advice and not to have set sail from Crete,” NASB “Friends, it would have been better if you had given attention to me and not gone sailing out from Crete,” BBE “It behoved you, indeed, O men – having hearkened to me – not to set sail from Crete.” YLT

For several days, Paul has kept silence, not speaking prematurely. This was not owing to any doubt he had entertained concerning his advice. Rather, he did not speak until it was readily apparent that he was correct in his assessment of the situation.

Now, it was obvious to all that Paul had spoken wisely when he advised them not to sail from Crete. In the midst of the crisis, it is quite probable that those on board had forgotten what Paul said. That, of course, is because they did not value his advice in the first place. Paul, however, will not let them forget what he had said, for he knew that he had spoken the truth. In fact, we have every reason to believe that he had been given wisdom “from above” on this matter. I do not know how you could otherwise account for Paul having confirmed understanding in this matter.

Under any other circumstances, it seems to me that Paul’s words would have counted for nothing in the minds of the hearers. Now, however, the situation is different, and Paul knows it very well. He will speak now to bring the greatest advantage to the people, reminding them of the wise counsel he had given them several days prior. Now, they have expended much energy, lost much of the cargo, and even threw the ship tackling overboard. Their self-confidence had run out, and it was apparent to them that all of their efforts were for nothing. No matter what they did, they could not improve their situation.

Paul does not step forward and command the storm to cease – something Jesus twice did, but only for His disciples (Matt 4:39; 14:32). Even then, He rebuked them for their lack of faith (Matt 14:31; Lk 8:25). This was not a time to halt the storm, for more of the working of the Lord had to be seen.

An Application to Spiritual Life

In dealing with people who insist on pursuing a wayward course of life, there does come a time when they must be reminded of any warnings that were issued to them. This is not always easy to do, but it is often necessary to nail wise counsel into their conscience, so they will be less apt to forget it. After duly warning Israel of their unacceptable manners, God said to them, “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind: it hath no stalk: the bud shall yield no meal: if so be it yield, the strangers shall swallow it up” (Hosea 8:7). He then added, “Israel is swallowed up: now shall they be among the Gentiles as a vessel wherein is no pleasure” (Hosea 8:8).

Those who recover from the snare of the devil must first be brought to the point where they acknowledge the truth. It is not enough to simply seek deliverance from the trouble brought upon them because of their sin. This is written, “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Tim 2:24-26).

In our text, Paul is an excellent example of someone who did not strive, or be quarrelsome, NASB with the people. He simply affirmed the truth, and did not enter into an argument with the people. Really, there was nothing to argue about. A wrong choice had been made, and Paul apprised them of it, doing so gently, and not lingering on the subject.

I doubt that very many people on that Alexandrian ship remembered the words of Paul. I say this because they did not value the person who had spoken to them, and therefore it was easier to forget his words. They might not have liked what Paul said, but he said it anyway, because it was the truth.

Although some may not consider this to be a wise course of action, it is one that allows for the honor of God, speaking a word through which God can work, and inducing people to consider their wayward manners.

THE NEEDLESSNESS OF REALIZING SUCH HARM AND LOSS

“ . . . and to have gained this harm and loss.” Other versions read, “incurred this disaster and loss,” NKJV “incurred this damage and loss,” NASB “this injury and loss,” RSV “this disastrous loss,” CJB “all this trouble and loss,” IE “hardship and damage,” ISV and “this disaster and harm and misery and loss.” AMPLIFIED

Think of the results that have been experienced because of the decision to sail from Crete to Phenice.

- The ship has suffered damage.
- Time had to be spent undergirding the ship.
- An extraordinary amount of labor had to be exerted by the mariners.
- Cargo which was being transported for other people was lost.
- The tackling of the ship was thrown overboard.
- Misery had been experienced that could easily have been avoided.

Now Paul reminds them that all of this could have been avoided if they would hearkened to his words and not have said from Crete. This is not an expression of pride, but one of wisdom.

Failing to heed wise counsel is always attended by some form of loss. Furthermore, it is good to remind those who ignored good counsel that this is why they are having such difficulty. I doubt that very many people on that Alexandrian ship remembered the words of Paul. I say this because they did not value the person who had spoken to them, and therefore it was easier to forget his words. They might not have liked what Paul said, but he said it anyway, because it was the truth.

Of course, all of this postulates that wise counsel is spoken, and men are not left to their own devices without due warning. Solemnly the church is told, “warn them that are unruly” (1 Thess 5:14). Other versions read “disorderly,” ASV “not well ordered,” BBE “lazy,” CJB “not living right,” GWN “undisciplined,” NET and “admonish (warn and seriously advise) those who are out of line [the loafers, the disorderly, and the unruly].” AMPLIFIED

It ought to be noted that all of this postulates a fellowship with Christ Jesus on the part of the speaker. Effective warnings are not the expressions of mere human opinion, but of a person who has received wisdom from above. Time will prove that the expression of such wisdom precisely accorded with the truth. Most of us have at some time spoken warnings that did not prove to be on target. Our aim must be to reduce such occurrences, which reduction will take place to the degree that we walk in the light as He is in the light, always judging “righteous judgment” (John 7:24). Those who live in aloofness from the Lord forfeit their usefulness to Him.

May the Lord so work in those who walk with Him as to enable them to be expert in the issuance of warnings, and faithful in drawing attention to their fulfillment, doing so with humility and without a spirit of vindictiveness.

BE OF GOOD CHEER, ONLY THE SHIP WILL BE LOST

“ 22 And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.”

Good ministers do not take delight in delivering bad news. When speaking of the demise of Jerusalem under the besieging of the Romans, Jesus “wept over it” (Lk 19:41). By the same token, good news from heaven is always cheerful news to such an individual, as Paul will now confirm.

BE OF GOOD CHEER

“And now I exhort you to be of good cheer . . .” Other versions read, “I urge you to take heart,” NKJV “I urge you to keep up your courage,” NASB “I counsel you to be without anxiety,” MRD “I ask you not to give way to despair,” NJB “I am telling you to cheer up,” IE and “I beg you to be in good spirits and take heart.” AMPLIFIED

How utterly contradictory of their experience this must have sounded. They were thinking everyone was going to die! They were miles from any shore, and to this point their only protection was the ship in which they were being tossed about. Now Paul boldly announces that not so much as a single life will be lost as a result of this storm.

Paul is speaking to a body of people who have lost all hope. They have lost hope after doing everything they could possibly do under the circumstances, and yet their condition was no better. They were being driven by a ferocious storm over which they had no power. Their condition was complicated by the fact that they had been duly warned, and yet had chosen to ignore the warning. Now Paul boldly tells them to be of good cheer, take heart, and be courageous. He is affirming that things are not as bad as they seem, and, at this point, they have nothing more than his word on the matter. Yet, now, after spending nearly two solid weeks in the grip of an unrelenting and life-threatening storm, they can assign a greater value to Paul’s words than they did before. They have experienced precisely what he said they would experience. Now, they will listen with an attentiveness they did not have before, even though they are standing at the door of death.

NO LOSS OF LIFE

“ . . . for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you . . .” Other versions read, “not one of you will be lost,” NIV “there will be no loss of life among you,” NRSV “Not one of us will lose our lives,” LIVING and “None of you will die!” IE

How utterly contradictory of their experience this must have sounded. They were thinking everyone was going to die! They were miles from any shore, and to this point their only protection was the ship in which they were being tossed about. Now Paul boldly announces that not so much as a single life will be lost as a result of this storm.

THE LOSS OF THE SHIP

“ . . . but of the ship.” Other versions read, “but only of the ship,” NKJV “only the ship will be destroyed,” NIV and “only the ship will be lost.” CJB

Under the circumstances, this would call for some kind of miraculous intervention. If a great ship could not survive the storm, how could frail persons survive the storm in the midst of the sea? At this point they are in the open sea, nearly 500 miles away from Clauda. They are enveloped by darkness, and can only feel and hear the crashing waves and roaring wind. Yet, Paul stands boldly before them and says not a single soul will perish, even though the ship will be lost.

A SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

We are also in a tenuous situation. The storms of life confirm that the world is going down, and our present bodies are destined for corruption. We can pour ourselves into efforts to keep the world here, and ensure that our bodies are in the best state of health possible. But they will both finally give way to the storm of mortality.

But there is no need for any soul to perish. Provision has been made to survive the demise of both the world and our bodies, and do so safely. In the process of the storm, insightful souls are learning what they can throw overboard, dispensing with it in order to their survival. Those who have formed

an inordinate attachment to the cargo and tackling of life will find this most difficult to do. But once a person has settled it in his mind that his own survival depends upon such decisive action, he will throw certain things out of his life. The desire to survive, attaining to the resurrection of the dead, causes everything to be seen differently, and with greater clarity.

FOR THERE STOOD BY ME THIS NIGHT

“ 23 For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, 24 Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.”

THERE STOOD BY ME

“For there stood by me this night . . .” Other versions read, “this very night,” NASB and “last night.” NIV

While the storm was raging, and the ship was being lightened, and all hope had faded away, special attention had been given to Paul by heaven. When the hearts of others were failing them for fear, someone greater than the storm stood by Paul. Something was vouchsafed to him that was not given to others. An insight was ministered to him exclusively, and the only way others would hear of it was for Paul to tell it.

There is a sense in which God does not treat all men alike. There are times when everyone who needs help does not hear from the Lord. There are times when the destiny of people absolutely depends upon someone being among them who is reconciled to God, and to whom He makes known His will.

Away with the spirit of independence, when men think they do not need the interposition of others – others who know the Lord, and are walking in the light!

THE ANGEL OF GOD

“ . . . the angel of God . . .” Other versions read, “the angel of God,” GENEVA and “the angel of that God.” MRD

This was a heavenly messenger, for an angel is “a messenger, envoy, one who is sent” THAYER by God from heaven. They bring a word to men that could not otherwise be known. It is not possible to deduce with the human mind the word that is delivered by angels – “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14). Angels have appeared to the following.

- Abraham (Gen 18:2; 22:11-18)
- Hagar (Gen 16:7)
- Lot (Gen 19:1-17)
- Jacob (Gen 28:12)
- Moses (Ex 3:2)
- The Israelites (Ex 14:19; Judges 2:1-4)
- Balaam (Num 22:31)
- Joshua (Josh 5:15)
- Gideon (Judges 6:11-22)

- Manoah (Judges 13:6, 15-20)
- David (2 Sam 24:16-17; 1 Chron 21:15-16)
- Elijah (1 Kgs 19:5)
- Elisha (2 Kgs 6:16-17)
- Daniel (Dan 6:22; 8:16; 9:21; 10:5-10, 16-18; 12:5-7)
- Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3:25,28)
- Zechariah (Zech 2:3; 3:1-2; 4:1)
- Joseph, Mary's husband (Matt 1:20; 2:13,19)
- Mary (Lk 1:26-38)
- Zecharias (Lk 1:11-38)
- Certain shepherds (Lk 2:9-14)
- Jesus (Matt 4:11; Lk 22:43)
- At the sepulcher of Jesus (Matt 28:2-5; Mk 16:5-7; Lk 24:23; John 20:12)
- At the ascension of Christ (Acts 1:10-11)
- The apostles John (Acts 5:18-19)
- Philip (Acts 8:26)
- Cornelius (Acts 10:3, 30-32)
- Peter (Acts 12:7-11)
- Paul (Acts 27:23)
- John (Rev 1:1; 5:2; 7:11; 10:9; 11:1; 17:7; 19:10; 22:8)

None of the above cases involved the appropriation of information that could have been obtained from an earthly resource or natural aptitude. These incidents, along with our text, are examples of heavenly government – of God doing His will among the inhabitants of the earth.

However, this was not the case with Paul. The reason for his life was obvious, and that is precisely why he could speak so candidly about it. When he said, “I labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10), no one stepped forward to dispute the statement.

It ought to be noted, that mariners of old were sometimes noted for calling upon their gods when in the midst of a storm. It is written of those manning the ship on which Jonah was fleeing from the Lord, “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them” (Jonah 1:5). The prophets of Baal vainly called upon Baal, but heard nothing from him (1 Kgs 18:28). Isaiah said men other than the Israelites “maketh a god, even his graven image: he falleth down unto it, and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me ; for thou art my god” (Isa 44:17). Later he said they “pray unto a god that cannot save” (Isa 45:20). Jeremiah chided Israel for creating false gods: “But where are thy gods that thou hast made thee? let them arise, if they can save thee in the time of thy trouble: for according to the number of thy cities are thy gods, O Judah” (Jer 2:28). But none of those gods answered or delivered the oppressed.

Therefore, Paul will further identify the God of whom he speaks, lest there be any doubts among the listeners.

WHOSE I AM AND WHOM I SERVE

“...whose I am, and whom I serve ...” Other versions read, “to whom I belong and whom I serve,” NKJV “to whom I belong and whom I worship,” NRSV “who is my Master and whose servant I am,” BBE and “to Whom I belong and Whom I serve and worship .” AMPLIFIED

Here Paul encapsulates true discipleship. It involves discernment: “whose I am.” It also involves total commitment: “whom I serve.”

“Whose I Am”

As one who has been purchased, or “bought with a price,” Paul belonged God, through the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:19-20). He was “redeemed” (Gal 3:13; Tit 2:14), “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10), and “delivered from the power of darkness” (Col 1:13). Those are the facts of the case. However, Paul perceived this, and that is what made the difference. This was not merely a creedal statement, but a confession from the heart.

“Whom I Serve”

This is the confession lived out. Elsewhere Paul states it this way: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). The very “life of Jesus” was made manifest in his “mortal flesh” (2 Cor 4:11). Peter referred to this as living “to the will of God” (1 Pet 4:2).

Here is the weakness of modern Christianity. There is too much of self in it, and too little of Christ. Underlying much of the teaching that is being offered in the name of the Lord is the sanctity of the human will, and God’s desire to grant people what they want. In other words there is a strong appeal to covetousness, just as Peter foretold: “And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you : whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet 2:3).

However, this was not the case with Paul. The reason for his life was obvious, and that is precisely why he could speak so candidly about it. When he said, “I labored more abundantly than they all” (1 Cor 15:10), no one stepped forward to dispute the statement.

He no doubt states this because it accounts for why an angel of God stood by him instead of the pilot of the vessel, or the owner of the ship. The word was actually for them all, but it was given to the one who was being conducted to Rome for the work of the Lord.

FEAR NOT, PAUL

“Saying, Fear not, Paul . . .” Other versions read, “Do not be afraid, Paul” NKJV “Have no fear, Paul,” BBE “Dismiss all fear, Paul,” WEYMOUTH “Stop being afraid, Paul!” WILLIAMS “Do not be frightened, Paul!” AMPLIFIED and “Don't give up, Paul.” MESSAGE

Now Paul speaks so when deliverance is realized, the people will know its cause. It will not come by the storm ceasing, but by a miraculous deliverance while in the very midst of it. They will not suddenly and peacefully land on a convenient shore with everything kept in tact.

Notice how personal this messenger is. He addresses his words to Paul, the spokesman that has been chosen by heaven for this occasion. Now Paul speaks so when deliverance is realized, the people will know its cause. It will not come by the storm ceasing, but by a miraculous deliverance while in the very midst of it. They will not suddenly and peacefully land on a convenient shore with everything kept in tact.

THOU MUST BE BROUGHT BEFORE CAESAR

“ . . . thou must be brought before Caesar . . .” Other versions read, “you must stand before Caesar,” NASB “you must stand trial before Caesar,” NIV “you must stand before the emperor,” NRSV “you have to stand before the emperor,” CJB “You must present your case to the emperor,” GWN “You are destined to stand before Caesar,” NAB “you will surely stand trial before Caesar,” NLT and “It is necessary for you to stand before Caesar.” AMPLIFIED

Paul does not provide the details of his trip to Rome. Jesus had told him, “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome ” (Acts 23:11). It would not have been appropriate, however, for Paul to relate this to the crowd before him. They would not be able to understand why a person called to witness for their Lord had been arrested, and was to be tried before Casesar. It was enough to limit his remarks to the known reason why he was going to Rome – he had appealed to Caesar, and to Caesar he was going.

However, Paul now adds something that had not been revealed before the prior night. The angel had divulged a heavenly decision that had not be known before.

GOD HAS GIVEN YOU ALL WHO ARE SAILING WITH YOU

“ . . . and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.” Other versions read, “indeed, God has granted you all those who sail with you,” NKJV God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you,” NIV “God has granted safety to those who are sailing with you,” NRSV “God has granted your request and will save the lives of all those sailing with you,” LIVING “And God to give you something good: He will save the lives of all those sailing with you,” IE “because of you, God will save the lives of everyone on the ship,” CEV “God in his goodness to you has spared the lives of all those who are sailing with you,” GNB and “and everyone sailing with you is also going to make it.” MESSAGE

Here is an arresting revelation: some people are spared because of those with whom they are traveling. This is a Divine manner, and is to be duly noted. Moses once said to the son of his father-in-law, “We are journeying unto the place of which the LORD said, I will give it you: come thou with us, and we will do thee good: for the LORD hath spoken good concerning Israel ” (Num 10:29). The people of the world might consider this a proud statement, and yet it was the truth. Even though they eventually rebelled against the Lord, there was a “mixed multitude” that came out of Egypt with Israel (Ex 12:38). At the time of their departure, these people no doubt sought to gain the advantage of being with the Israelites, whom God had singularly blessed.

There is a kind of circumference that surrounds those who are approved and blessed by the Lord. One of the more obvious manifestations of this are godly parents. There is a sense in which young children are protected and advanced because of the faith of their parents – like Timothy in his youth. Paul said of him, “When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Tim 1:5). Timothy took advantage of the environment in which raised, appropriating the faith that first dwelt in his grandmother and mother.

This is the kind of thing that men cannot capitalize on for personal gain, but it is a truth upon which we can reckon. Of course, if a person is not living by faith and walking in the Spirit, there is no circumference of blessing around him. Also, a statement such as this must not be uttered hastily, and without some obvious support. It is not something that takes place automatically, so that anywhere a child of God is found, those about that person are guaranteed safety. All of those around Noah, who found grace in the eyes of the Lord, were destroyed except for his wife, his sons, and their wives. Sodom was not spared because Lot, “that righteous man” (2 Pet 2:8), was there. However, in the text before us, those onboard the ship in which Paul was traveling, were guaranteed safety because of him. As the passage will verify, this involved following his counsel, and not violating what he told them

to do. By heaven's decree, their lives were in his hands.

BE OF GOOD CHEER, FOR I BELIEVE GOD

“ 25 Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.”

It is imperative that believers know what to do with what is made known to them. Here Paul expresses a word that is designed to conquer despair. He speaks it in the midst of a devastating storm, when blackness is hiding the sun by day and the stars by night. Yet he speaks with the confidence of faith.

BE OF GOOD CHEER

“Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer . . .” Other versions read, “take heart,” NKJV “keep up your courage,” NASB “be of good courage,” GENEVA “be ye courageous,” MRD “cheer up,” IE and “be cheered.” LITV

The word translated “cheer” (**ευφουμει/τε**) is lexically defined as, “to put in good spirits, gladden, make cheerful . . . to be joyful, be of good cheer, of good courage.” THAYER It is used four times in Scripture, three of which are in this chapter (Acts 27:22,25,36), and one in James 5:13, where it is translated “merry.”

This was spoken to people of whom it was said, “all hope that we should be saved was taken away” (Acts 27:20). A fierce, protracted, and unrelenting storm caused that despair. Can a mere word from a prisoner enable the emotions of the people to change so radically and so suddenly? Yes, it can, depending upon the reliability of the word, and the enablement of the people to believe it. It is in this sense that Solomon wrote, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold In settings of silver” (Prov 25:11).

FOR I BELIEVE GOD

“ . . . for I believe God . . .” Other versions read, “I have faith in God,” NIV “I trust God and believe,” CJB “I trust God,” GWN “I confide in God,” MRD “I have confidence in my God,” WILLIAMS “I have faith (complete confidence) in God,” AMPLIFIED and “I am sure.” CEV

When men falter, it is because of unbelief. When they doubt, it can be traced back to not believing. There can be no true confidence or trust where there is no faith, and there can be no wavering or doubt where there is faith.

See, “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Heb 11:1). Faith is convinced of the truth of what God has said, and proceeds in life upon the basis of that persuasion. When men falter, it is because of unbelief. When they doubt, it can be traced back to not believing. There can be no true confidence or trust where there is no faith, and there can be no wavering or doubt where there is faith. Keep in mind, that Paul said these words when there was not the slightest bit of visible evidence that they were true. It was in the midst of the storm that he expressed his confidence in God – a confidence that was based upon what God said.

The “good fight of faith” has to do with extending effort to keep the faith, and not lose trust in the Lord. This requires the use of spiritual weaponry designed to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. It also necessitates bringing into captivity every thought, making it obedient to Christ (2 Cor 10:5). Other versions read, “We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ,” NASB “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ,” NIV and “refute arguments and theories and reasonings and every proud and lofty thing

that sets itself up against the [true] knowledge of God; and we lead every thought and purpose away captive into the obedience of Christ (the Messiah, the Anointed One).” AMPLIFIED

Paul had used these weapons to throw down the contrary thoughts of the pilot and owner of the ship, and the suggestions that were thrown at him by the sight and sound of the storm in which they found themselves. He placed a greater value on what the angel of the Lord said than upon what men and nature were declaring. I am going to wax bold and affirm that much of modern Christianity does not encourage such determination. It is too humanistic.

IT SHALL BE EVEN AS IT WAS TOLD ME

“ . . . that it shall be even as it was told me.” Other versions read, “it will be just as it was told me,” NKJV “exactly as I have been told,” NASB “what I have been told will come true,” CJB “it will turn out exactly as I have been told,” NAS and “Everything will happen just as His angel told me.” LIVING

Paul does not take a portion of what the angel said, but accepts every word declared to him. There is no generality in his faith. He has confidence that things will turn out precisely as the angel has said. That is how faith reasons: whatever is declared by the Lord is accepted without reservation or staggering. Even though the storm shouts “No!” faith responds, “It shall be so!”

How must such an outburst of confidence have sounded to those mariners and passengers? The details of their response are not made known, but I have no doubt that Paul’s word was the best word they had heard in a long time. It is apparent that his conduct during the voyage in no way contradicted what he has now declared to them. Some testimonies are rejected because of the life of the one testifying.

WE MUST BE CAST UPON A CERTAIN ISLAND

“ 26 Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.”

Paul now reveals, something that was apparently revealed to him, even though he previously made no reference to it. He introduces what may, to the shallow thinker, appear on the surface to be a contradiction of what he just said.

HOWBEIT

“Howbeit . . .” Other versions read, “However,” NKJV “But,” NASB “Nevertheless,” NIV and “Yet.” MRD As used in this text, “Howbeit” means “by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement,” THAYER “to emphasize contrast; as a correlative with (on the one hand) . . . but (on the other hand).” FRIBERG

This is an elaboration of the testimony he has given, which involved more than the loss of the ship, yet the saving of the lives of all who were aboard it. Paul now testifies to the fact that there will be a difficult end to this experience, yet the lives of none will be lost because of it.

WE MUST BE CAST UPON A CERTAIN ISLAND

“ . . . we must be cast upon a certain island.” Other versions read, “we must run aground on a certain island,” NKJV “we shall have to run on some island,” RSV “we will be sent on a certain island,” BBE “we have to run aground on some island,” CJB “we are destined to run aground on some island,” NAB “we are to be stranded on some island,” NJB “we will be shipwrecked on an island,” NLT “on a certain island it behoveth us to be cast,” YLT “we shall have to be stranded on some island,” AMPLIFIED “we will first be shipwrecked on some island,” CEV and “It is

necessary for us to run aground on a certain island.” EMTV

At the time of this word, they appeared to be in the open sea, having no knowledge at all concerning the location. The island on which they will be stranded is later identified as Melita. It was about five hundred miles from Clauda, which gives some idea of the strength and duration of the wind that was pushing them westward, and slightly to the north.

Paul’s language suggests that this was more than the foretelling of an event. There was a Divine purpose that was driving this matter. God intended all along that people disembark from the boat and go to this island. The purpose of it all will be made known in the narrative that follows.

The English word “must” is certainly a proper word here. It is translated from the Greek word **dei** / which means, “it is necessary, there is need of, it behooves, is right and proper,” THAYER “as expressing compulsion, necessity, or inevitability in an event it is necessary, one must, one has to,” FRIBERG and “as expressing compulsion, necessity, or inevitability in an event it is necessary, one must, one has to” LOUW-NIDA

Here is a classic fulfillment of the following description of God, “the LORD hath His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet” (Nahum 1:3). It might be argued that this was a necessary consequence of the bad decision of the pilot and the owner of the ship. However, the word is too certain to express such a generality. They will not simply be cast upon a island, but “a certain island.”

Whether it is readily apparent to the reader or not, this whole event was being controlled and orchestrated by God. An aspect of His purpose will be fulfilled that just a few days earlier would have seemed impossible.

CONCLUSION

This text has confirmed the practicality of faith: how diagnosis and awareness of circumstances are integral to living by faith and walking in the Spirit. This is an aspect of spiritual life that is not common among professing believers of our time. Instead of living by faith, Christians are often taught to live by routine and fleshly regimen. Key aspects of living in the flesh – marriage, the home, etc. – are represented as best lived out within the context of a systematic plan. This is also carried over into the maintenance of spiritual life and the activities of the assembly of the saints. It is even projected into the realm of witnessing for Christ and seeking to constrain others to come to Him. Who is able to estimate the volumes of books, the number of workshops, and the development of sure-fire plans that have flooded the Christian world on these matters?

From a business point of view, we are speaking of a religious financial empire that is staggering in size. Rather than faith being associated with one’s identity with God Himself, His great salvation, and the procurement of an eternal inheritance, it is confined to temporal life. This approach has satisfied the religious multitudes, and they have poured their money and devotion into it. In terms of Scripture, this fulfills the word of Paul: “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Tim 4:3-4).

Thus the people have defined what they want to hear, and have given their allegiance to those who meet their wishes. Jesus defined such a generation in these words: “Whereunto then shall I liken the men of this generation? and to what are they like? They are like unto children sitting in the marketplace, and calling one to another, and saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned to you, and ye have not wept” (Luke 7:31-32). After hearing some word from God, such a generation might reply, “What has this got to do with us today?” Or, “We want something that is more practical.” Or “We need something that is relevant to everyday life.”

It all has a sound of wisdom, and has thus snared many a immature soul. But who has been able to work up a system for encountering a sudden storm, or a sinking ship, or being lost in the midst of the sea? Everyone who is familiar with these canned systems knows there are situations that arise that cannot be resolved by such an approach. So, those who market them to the people are really the people who are dealing with things that are not relevant.

Right here is where our text takes on special meaning. It confirms that faith can adapt to any circumstance, enabling its possessor to keep afloat, so to speak and adapt to the circumstance in an effective manner. There simply is no situation for which faith – real faith – is unequal. No person who believes that Jesus is the Son of God can get into a situation where such a posture has no applicability. In confirmation of this it is written, “For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:4-5).

That is what is being lived out in this text. It is the faith of Paul that is both being tried and put on display. Its versatility can be seen, as well as its calming and stabilizing impact upon those who possess it.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #104

SHIPWRECKED, BUT ALL SAVED ALIVE

“ 27:27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; 28 And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. 29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day. 30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, 31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off. 33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. 35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. 36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. 37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. 38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea. 39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore. 41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. 43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: 44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.” (Acts 27:27-44)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

Sensing that they were near land, the mariners confirmed that by testing the waters. They anchored the ship, lest they be dashed upon the rocks. Some tried to escape in a boat, but were told by Paul that unless they stayed on board, they could not be saved. Immediately, the boat was cut off, removing the temptation to escape the ship prematurely. A considerable amount of effort was required to prepare the ship to navigate toward shore in the storm. The anchors that had been lowered to stabilize the ship were raised, the rudders again placed into the water, and the main sail hoisted, with the nose of the ship pointing into the island inlet. As they made their way to a piece of land that jutted out from the island, they ran aground on a sandbar. The waves were so

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- **WHEN THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT WAS COME (27:27-28)**
- **THEY CAST FOUR ANCHORS (27:29)**
- **THEY HAD TO STAY ON THE SHIP (27:30-32)**
- **WHILE THE DAY WAS COMING ON (27:33-38)**
- **THEY DISCOVERED A CERTAIN CREEK WITH A SHORE (27:39-40)**
- **A PLACE WHERE TWO SEAS MET (27:41)**
- **MAN’S PLAN IS THWARTED, WHILE GOD’S PURPOSE MARCHES ON (27:43-44)**
- **CONCLUSION**

violent, they tore off the back part of the vessel. Eventually, the boat was destroyed. Yet, everyone made it safe to shore, some swimming, and some using boards from the wrecked vessel. It was a harrowing experience, but not a hopeless one.

DIVINE DIRECTION

The voyage of Paul from Caesarea to Rome provides an index to the manner in which the Lord leads or directs His people. Sometimes it is by a specific word, as when the Lord Jesus Himself spoke to Paul (Acts 23:11), and when the angel of God spoke to him (Acts 27:23-24). Sometimes it is through a governor, such as Felix, who told him he was going to Caesar (Acts 25:21). It is the business of those being directed by the Lord to remain spiritually alert and sensitive of the circumstances in which they find themselves. There really is no time when the disciple can be slothful or asleep, without paying a great price.

The directions are generally not through calm and restful circumstances, although from time to time that may be the experience of the one being directed by God. Take, for example the lengthy trip of Paul.

- On the second leg of the journey, when they left Sidon, when passing Cyprus “the winds were contrary” (Acts 27:4).
- They sailed “slowly many days,” hardly able to pass by Cnidus, sailing under Crete, against Salmone, and into Fair Havens (Acts 27:7-8).
- Ignoring the counsel of Paul, the ship set out for Phenice, encountering a fierce storm that required them to gird the ship near Clauda (Acts 27:13-17).
- Being “exceedingly tossed with a tempest,” they had to lighten the ship, throwing some of the cargo overboard (Acts 27:18).
- The third day, they had to throw the ship’s tackling overboard (Acts 27:19).
- For “many days” neither the sun nor the stars could be seen, and all hope of survival was taken away (Acts 27:20).
- A special messenger was sent from heaven to Paul, announcing that he would arrive safely in Rome, and that those on board the ship were now in his charge, and that none of them would be lost owing to this storm (Acts 27:21-25).
- In our text, the ship runs aground, is wrecked, and the passengers have to make it to the shore of Melita, an island that was hundreds of miles from where they first encountered hindering winds. Some swam to shore, while those that could not do that came in on pieces of the boat (Acts 27:43-44). This was done even though Julius was advised to kill all of the prisoners, lest some of them escape.
- While Paul is gathering some firewood, he is bitten by a poisonous snake (Acts 28:3-4).
- They remain among some barbarians for three months, although those very people treated them kindly, and provided them with the supplies necessary to continue their trip (Acts 28:1-11).
- The trip continued through Syracuse (Acts 28:12), Rhegium (Acts 28:13), and Puteoli, where they spent seven days with brethren (Acts 28:13-14).
- Brethren came to meet them, encouraging the heart of Paul (Acts 28:15).
- They finally arrived in Rome (Acts 28:16).

All of this took at least six months, and possibly more.

THE TRIP FROM CAESAREA TO ROME

“A day” in Sidon Acts 27:3

“Many days” Acts 27:7

“Many days” Acts 27:20

“Fourteen nights” Acts 27:35

“Three days” Acts 28:7

“Three months” Acts 28:11

“Three days” Acts 28:12

“One day” Acts 28:13

“Seven days” Acts 28:14

Four months are accounted for, with two periods of “*many days*.” A trip of that length (about 2,000 miles), under ideal conditions, would require approximately half a year.

All of this fits in with Paul’s testimony of the things he experienced while engaged in carrying out Christ’s commission to him. Those experiences involved unusual labors, an abundance of stripes, frequent imprisonments, and often confronting death. Five times he was beaten by the Jews with thirty-nine stripes, and three times he was beaten with rods. Once he was stoned, and three times he was shipwrecked, apparently in addition to the one of which we are now reading. He even spent “a day and a night in the open sea.” NIV He was constantly on the move, NIV experiencing perils among robbers, his own countrymen, and the heathen. He confronted perils in the city, the wilderness, the sea, and among false brethren. He experienced weariness, painfulness, going without sleep, hungering and thirsting, going without food, being cold, and not having adequate clothing (2 Cor 11:23-28).

All of these things, together with our text, were experienced while Paul was faithfully and zealously involved in the work of the Lord. This is not to mention tumults, dishonor, evil reports, being unknown, chastened, being sorrowful, and having nothing (2 Cor 6:9-10). Add to that being “troubled on every side,” being “perplexed,” “persecuted,” and “cast down” (2 Cor 4:8-9). How does all of that fit in with aiming for a religious career, popularity with the masses, a lot of wealth, and spotless health? This is one of the princes of the Kingdom – one who did more work than anyone else, wrote more than any other apostle, and traveled extensively, often at his own expense.

This was a man directed by the Lord. He did not go through anything that was not on the Divine agenda, or was without purpose or heavenly objective. The map shown on this page represents the travels of Paul for about six months – travels in which he was a prisoner. Conservative estimates have his ministry extending over a period of about thirty years (37 AD through 67 AD [Acts 9-28], when he was martyred under the reign of Nero).

There were few times during that entire period when he was not being opposed, oppressed, or in some way severely inconvenienced. In addition to the physical abuse he endured, it is estimated that he spent at least five years in prison (one sixth of the time of his ministry). This does not take into consideration any brief imprisonments like that experienced in Philippi.

In the record of this single episode, extending from Acts 21:27 thru 28:31, he endured the following.

- He was dragged out of the temple (Acts 21:30).
- He was beaten (Acts 21:32).
- The multitudes of Jews sought to kill him (Acts 21:36; 22:23).
- He was incarcerated in army barracks in Jerusalem (Acts 22:24; 23:10).
- He was bound with thongs (Acts 22:25).
- Charges were formally leveled against him by the Jews (Acts 22:30).
- At the order of Ananias the high priest, he was struck on the mouth (Acts 23:2).
- Forty Jews bound themselves with a curse not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-15).
- He was transported under armed guards from Jerusalem to Caesarea (Acts 23:22-24).
- He was incarcerated in Herod’s judgment hall for five days (Acts 23:35-24:1).
- Formal charges were presented against him by Tertullus, an orator who spoke for

the Jews (Acts 24:1-9).

- Paul was incarcerated by Felix, who gave him special liberties (Acts 24:23).
- He is left in prison for two years by Felix (Acts 24:26-27).
- The high priest requested Festus to bring Paul from Caesarea to Jerusalem, plotting to kill him along the way (Acts 25:1-3).
- Hearing Paul's testimony, Festus publically shouts out that he is mad (Acts 26:24).
- Paul is delivered as a prisoner to Julius, to be transported to Rome (Acts 27:1-2).
- They sailed through contrary winds from Sidon to Myra (Acts 27:4-5).
- They sailed slowly for many days until they arrived at Fair Havens harbor in Crete (Acts 27:7-8).
- Against the advice of Paul, when sailing was dangerous, they set sail for Phenice, supposing it to be a better port in which to winter (Acts 27:9-12).
- They encountered a fierce storm, Euroclydon, that forced them to lighten the ship, gird the ship, throw their tackling overboard, and be shrouded in darkness for fourteen days (Acts 27:14-20).
- The vessel is finally dashed against the rocks and destroyed, all 276 occupants of the boat having to make it through the storm to the shore of Melita (Acts 27:41-44).

All of this was under the government of Christ Jesus, and in order to the fulfillment of His will. At no time was Paul's life out of control, or his ministry put on hold. Yet. His work was fulfilled in the midst of seeming turmoil and restriction. At least five years of his thirty-year ministry was spent in prison (17%) – two years in Caesarea, three years in Rome, and a few more unidentifiable years prior to him being martyred in Rome.

Thus we see that more abundant labors also yield more abundant sufferings. As Paul said of his own ministry, "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft" (2 Cor 11:23).

As indicated in the above image, grace sets the tone for everything in Christ Jesus. One's labors are in direct proportion to the grace he has received. Valid suffering is determined by how much a person labors. The extent of comfort is according to the degree of suffering. The final reward is according to the amount of productive labor. All of these things work together for the glory of God and the benefit of the believer. One should not associate serving the Lord with a life of luxury and ease.

Today we are faced with a cross-less form of Christianity. It does not involve suffering because it does not require much effort, nor is spiritual life represented as being in conflict with the world. The ministry of Paul stands in stark contrast to this empty form of religion.

WHEN THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT WAS COME

" 27:27 But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country; 28 And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms."

For two solid weeks they have been battling this storm. Part of the time was spent in utter hopelessness. However, Paul had spoken comfortably to them, affirming that an angel of God had assured that no person would die in this storm, and that they would all arrive safely on a certain island. Our text will confirm that the spirits of the people were lifted, and their alertness honed to a fine edge.

THE FOURTEENTH NIGHT

“But when the fourteenth night was come . . .” Other versions read, “about midnight of the fourteenth night of the storm,” NLT “It was now the fourteenth night.” ISV This was fourteen days of storm, from the time they had left Fair Havens. How did the men know it was the fourteenth night? Remember, the sun and the stars had not appeared “for many days” (Acts 27:20) – how many, we do not know. However, even though the ordinary means of marking time could not bring them to this conclusion, they had found a way to count the nights. While the method they used is not specified, we are to understand that God so directs His people that they can maintain certain sound assessments that are relevant to their survival.

DRIVEN UP AND DOWN IN ADRIA

“ . . . as we were driven up and down in Adria . . .” Other versions read, “driven up and down in the Adriatic Sea,” NKJV “driven about in the Adriatic Sea,” NASB “driven across the Adriatic Sea,” NIV and “drifting across the sea of Adria.” NRSV

Being in an area where two seas met, there apparently were two different flows of water that, coupled with the wind, moved the ship “up and down,” or directionally two and fro. The dominate part of the water at that point was that of the Adriatic Sea. According to the Columbia Encyclopedia, The “ **Adriatic Sea** , [is an] arm of the Mediterranean Sea, between Italy and the Balkan Peninsula. It extends 500 miles from the Gulf of Venice, at its head, SE to the Strait of Otranto, which leads to the Ionian Sea. It is from 58 to 140 miles, with a maximum depth of 4,100 ft.” Therefore, this was a sizeable body of water. At the point it merged with the Mediterranean sea, it was 140 miles wide, 500 miles from north to south, being 4,100 feet deep [well over 8/10 ths of a mile].

In the midst of such a large body of water, with the motions associated with two seas meeting, and a fierce wind of hurricane strength, the passengers were in an absolutely uncontrollable situation – at least from a human point of view. Yet, a certain change of attitude has occurred because Paul has related a message he has received from heaven. At his advice, they have taken some nourishment, and now they are more alert to their situation, and will be more sensitive to windows of opportunity that the hand of the Lord will set before them.

A Parallel to Spiritual Life

One of the characteristics of edification is that it tends to encourage, build up, and enable the believer to be more alert and sensitive. It is the Divine manner to draw the attention of those who are to be delivered to their destiny, so they can respond to His direction in a more thorough and effective manner. Many professed believers have had gaping doors of opportunity set before them, yet because their minds were nailed to the earth, they have passed them by, unaware of Divine direction, and unable to hear.

Our assemblies must be such as sharpen both mind and spirit, ministering encouragement, enlightenment, and rebuke as it is necessary. The impact of such an assembly will bear directly upon the entirety of life, and yield benefits that can scarcely be imagined.

THE SHIPMEN DEEMED

“ . . . about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country . . .” Other versions read, “sensed they were drawing near some land,” NKJV “began to surmise that they were approaching some land,” NASB “suspected that they were nearing land,” NRSV “had an idea that they were getting near land,” BBE “thought they were approaching land,” CSB and conceived that they approached land.” MRD

The lexical meaning of the Greek word (**u`peno,oun**) translated “deemed” is, “to suppose, surmise,” THAYER “generally suppose, conjecture, assume,” FRIBERG “suppose, think, suspect.” UBS

Although the word is not always used in this manner, in this text “deemed” is more than a mere opinion or suspicion. This was the kind of sense sailors had, and was a aptitude that had been cultured on the seas. Some of the indications with which sailors were familiar are suggested by certain writers.

- Heard the waves breaking upon the shore. PULPIT COMMENTARY
- The faint outline of land. JOHN GILL
- Agitation of the water. ALBERT BARNES
- Flight of sea-birds. ADAM CLARKE
- Smell of the land. ADAM CLARKE

At any rate, this was not a mere fleeting thought that was wholly unsupported by any form of evidence. This had to do with senses that were the unique property of sailors. Paul had told them they would be cast upon an island, so their minds were the more alert for any evidence of land, and their developed senses equipped them to have the needed advantage in this circumstance.

THEY SOUNDED

“ . . . and sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms.” Other versions read, “they took soundings,” NASB “let down the lead,” BBE “dropped a plumbline,” CJB “threw a line with a weight on it into the water.” GWN

The word “sounded” comes from a word having the following meaning: “a line and plummet with which mariners sound the depth of the sea, a sounding-lead,” THAYER “as a nautical technical term heave the lead **bolij**) ; hence take soundings, drop a weighted line.” FRIBERG In English the word means, “to measure the depth of (as a body of water) typically with a weighted line <sounding the distance to the bottom.>” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

Two times they took a measurement of the depth of the waters. The first time it was twenty fathoms, and the second time fifteen fathoms. A fathom is six feet. Thus the first measurement confirmed the water was 120 feet deep, and the second 90 feet. They were, indeed, approaching a shore.

THE PARALLEL OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Living by faith also requires the development of certain spiritual senses. If these senses are not properly acquired, the person will suffer disadvantages and setbacks that could have been avoided. Paul wrote of such aptitudes. “But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil ” (Heb 5:14). Other versions represent “senses” as “faculties,” NRSV “their powers of discernment,” ESV “wits,” GENEVA “minds,” GWN “perceptions,” NET “spiritual faculties,” WEYMOUTH and “mental faculties,” AMPLIFIED

As noted in this text, these “senses” have to be “exercised.” Other versions read, “trained,” NASB “trained by practice,” NRSV “trained by continuous exercise,” CJB “trained by constant practice,” ESV and “carefully trained.” WEMOUTH

The use or training results in the ability to “discern both good and evil.” Other versions read,

“distinguish good from evil,” NIV “see what is good and what is evil,” BBE “know the difference between good and evil, GWN “discriminate good and evil,” MRD “recognize the difference between right and wrong,” NLT and “discriminate and distinguish between what is morally good and noble and what is evil and contrary either to divine or human law.” AMPLIFIED

It is at this point that much confusion exists in the Christian community. Due to distorted teaching, how salvation commences, and the objective of that salvation, have been nearly totally obscured. Those who have been “baptized into Christ” (Gal 3:27), “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), “joined unto the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), and “delivered from the power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of God’s dear Son” (Col 1:13) are appropriately described as a “new “creature,” or “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17). They have been “created in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:10), and ’ have been “born again of incorruptible seed” (1 Pet 1:23).

They all commenced with all of their trespasses forgiven (Col 2:13), being “justified from all things” (Acts 13:39), “reconciled” to God (Col 1:21), and their names written in heaven (Heb 12:23).

They were raised up and made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph 2:6). Moreover, that is the exact place where God has blessed them “with all spiritual blessings” (Eph 1:3). They have been “made partakers of Christ” (Heb 3:14), and by means of “exceeding great and precious promises,” and “made partakers of the Divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4). God Himself placed them in the body where it has pleased Him (1 Cor 12:28), and each has been given the “measure of faith,” which enables them to contribute to the edification of the body of Christ (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:6-7).

All of the benefits received at the point we are born again, are in an undeveloped state. Just as Jesus Himself, when entering into the world, “increased in wisdom and in stature, and in favor with God and man” (Lk 2:52), so a growth process has been ordained for all who are in Christ Jesus. It is referred to as growing “up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15), being “conformed to the image” of God’s Son (Rom 8:29), and being changed by the Holy Spirit “from glory unto glory” (2 Cor 3:18).

There is no way to participate in the process of glorification, without going through the motions of growth, or being conformed to the image of God’s Son. The omission of this necessity in much of the teaching of our day is very serious. Shallow teaching, frothy views, and a spirit of casualness are spiritually counter-productive. That is, they interfere with Divine objectives, and are more related to the seduction in Eden than to the work of the Lord. Such has robbed many believers of the things that are essential to the necessary exercise of their spiritual senses. As a consequence, they cannot discern good from evil. Unlike the sailors aboard the vessel of our text, they cannot sense when they are near spiritual land, where safety and nourishment can be realized. They hoist their sails when it is out of order to do so, and leave them down when they ought to be raised. I do not believe there is a thoroughly satisfying way of expressing the gravity of that situation.

Taking A Measurement

The sailors knew how to take a measurement of the depth of the water. Without that measurement they had no sure way of knowing whether they were going further into the sea, or nearing a shore.

Even though believers are told to “examine” themselves (2 Cor 13:5), “try the spirits” (1 John 4:1), and note those who “cause divisions” (Rom 16:17), yet it appears that few know how to take a spiritual measurement. Further, it is not possible to arrive at such a knowledge academically. Some people are “not far from the Kingdom of God” (Mk 12:34), but do not know it. Others are drifting in the open sea of flesh, and seem blissfully unaware of it.

Every assembly of the godly should be an occasion when a depth-reading can be taken, and some kind of assessment can be made of whether we are closer to, or further from the living God.

The necessity of spiritual measurement is confirmed in the Revelation of Jesus to the churches of Asia. In that revelation John was given a measuring rod, something like a yardstick, with which certain measurements were to be made. He was even told what was NOT to be measured. “And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months” (Rev 11:1-2).

The Temple of God

And what is the area the Gentiles have corrupted? It is not the holy of holies into which believers are urged to come. They have rather stressed “how” to be saved, and “how” to clean up human conduct. The methods that are presented for these tasks are as numerous as the number of denominations.

The “temple of God” is the church which is categorically referred to as that temple (1 Cor 3:16-17). Does the professed church measure up to Divine requirements. Is it the kind of place in which God dwells, or takes up residence (John 14:23; 2 Cor 6:16)? Is it shining “as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). Has it been crucified unto the world, and the world unto it (Gal 6:14). Is it realizing the victory that overcomes the world (1 John 5:4-5)? Is the Holy Spirit producing His fruit in her (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9). Is it crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts (Gal 5:24)? Is she running the race with patience that has been set before her (Heb 12:1-2)? Is she fighting the good fight of faith and laying hold on eternal life (1 Tim 6:12)? Is she resisting the devil, steadfast in the faith (1 Pet 5:8-9). Is she growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15)? Measure the church! Put the Divine plumbline to it! Where is she at in regards to Divine requirements?

The Altar

The altar speaks of the means of atonement (Rom 5:12). It is where reconciliation is made (2 Cor 5:18-19), and sins taken away (Heb 9:26). Here, at the altar, is where peace has been made (Col 1:20). It is where the people are sanctified (Heb 10:14). What is the church presenting as the means through which men are made suitable to stand before God? Measure her message! Put it to the test! Is she properly presenting the means through which men draw nigh unto God? Is the Gospel of Christ her core message? Does the cross of Christ occupy a prominent place?

They That Worship

Measure the worshipers! Put the Divine plumbline to them. Is the law written on their hearts and put into their minds (Heb 8:10; 10:16)? Are they living by faith (Heb 10:38), and walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25)? Are they “true worshipers” who worship the God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24)? Have they crucified the flesh (Gal 3:24), and do they rejoice in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:3). Measure the worshipers, even though some may object, shouting out, “Judge not!” Are they pressing toward the mark (Phil 3:14), growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), and looking the blessed hope and glorious appearing of the Great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Tit 2:12)? Measure the worshipers, and use the Divine standard to do so!

Do Not Measure the Outer Court

John was told NOT to measure the outer court – the area of approach. That area, he was told, had been “give unto the Gentiles” (Rev 11:2). And what is the area the Gentiles have corrupted? It is not the holy of holies into which believers are urged to come (Heb 10:19). They have rather stressed “how” to be saved, and “how” to clean up human conduct. The methods that are presented for these tasks are as numerous as the number of denominations. And how is it that they have been able to so corrupt the truth in these matters of approach? It is because that is the area God has given over to

them. The fact that they have distorted matters pertaining to approaching the Lord is proof enough of their own depravity. Do not measure the era of approach. Rather, resign yourself to the fact that it has been corrupted – and that by Divine permission, so to speak. Set forth the truth concerning the Temple, the Altar, and the Worshipers. Within that context, the approach is made clear for those who are of a humble and contrite spirit. Once those things are seen, no one will have trouble responding correctly to what they ought to do. It is wrong to linger in the outer court – for any reason, according to a word from heaven, corrupted, being given to the Gentiles.

THEY CAST FOUR ANCHORS

“ 29 Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.”

Behold what is required because the counsel of Paul was ignored: extra work, ship damage, loss of the cargo, fatigue, and even despair. Yet, after Paul had told them of the word he received from an angel of God, and they had eaten, they were better able to confront the crisis in which they found themselves.

MOVED BY FEAR

“Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks . . .” Other versions read, “Then, fearing lest we should run aground on the rocks,” NKJV “Fearing that we would be dashed against the rocks,” NIV “fearing lest we should be cast on rocky places,” DARBY “we feared lest we should be caught in places where were rock,” MRD and “Then fearing that we might fall off [our course] onto rocks.” AMPLIFIED

Even though Paul had told them the ship would be lost, and they would all be saved, yet wisdom was needed before they could safely disembark. To have the ship dashed upon the rocks, and there be no solid land accessible to them would leave them stranded on rocks in the sea. They would have to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, looking for the opportunity of which Paul spoke to appear.

FOUR ANCHORS

“ . . . they cast four anchors out of the stern . . .” Other versions read, “we dropped four anchors from the stern,” NKJV “they let down four hooks from the back of the ship,” BBE and “dropped four anchors from the back of the ship.” GWN

The last time they determined the depth of the water, it was ninety feet deep. We do not know how much further they had gone since then. However, in order to go through the night with some degree of safety, they dropped four anchors to stop the ship from going any further. They dropped them from the hinder part of the ship so the boat would not be tipped to the side by being secured to the floor of the sea. The ship would also be kept in a position that would enable them to more readily advance to the shore in the light.

Behold what wisdom these men used, and their presence of mind, so they were able to think clearly and make the appropriate adjustments. It was before this that they languished in despair, having given up all hope. However, because of a word of hope spoken by Paul, the whole environment of the ship was changed. Now they were working as those with hope, looking forward to being out of the storm and on a stable shore. See what a good word can do!

WISHED FOR A DAY

“ . . . and wished for the day.” Other versions read, “prayed for day to come,” NKJV “wished for

daybreak,” NASB “prayed for the daylight,” NIV “made prayers for the coming of day,” BBE “prayed for morning to come,” GWN and “kept wishing for daybreak to come.” AMPLIFIED

The word “wished” is translated from the Greek word **hu;conto** . Its lexical meaning is, “to pray to God . . . wish: adhere to the religious sense, to pray, pray for,” THAYER “of petitionary prayer or appeal to God pray, offer prayer, ask,” FRIBERG “of petitionary prayer or appeal to God pray, offer prayer, ask.” LOUW-NIDA The apparent accent of the word is placed on a strong and fervent desire. While “wishing” is properly seen as praying, it is a fervent prayer that is intended. That is why several versions use the word “wish” – as something that is fervently sought.

This Greek word is used seven times in the Scriptures.

- **ACTS 26:29.** “And Paul said, I would to God , that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds” (Acts 26:29).

- **ACTS 27:29.** “Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day” (Acts 27:29).

- **ROMANS 9:3.** “For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom 9:3).

- **2 CORINTHIANS 13:7.** “Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates” (2 Cor 13:7).

- **2 CORINTHIANS 13:9.** “For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish , even your perfection” (2 Cor 13:9).

- **JAMES 5:16.** “Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (James 5:16).

- **3 JOHN1:2.** “Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth” (3 John 1:2).

As in the case with those aboard the boat on which Jonah was fleeing the presence of the Lord, the mariners were no doubt calling upon their god, while those with Paul were calling upon the true God. It is said of those on Jonah’s ship, “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god , and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God , if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not” (Jonah 1:5-6).

In this text, the people were no doubt praying for the day to come – i.e. they were praying to be able to make it through the night until they were able to see more clearly. When the night seems long, and the future is threatening, prayer is in order. It is clear that the prayers of Paul and his companions were indicative of prayers that would be heard by God. Prayers to other gods simply fell on deaf ears, for such gods “have ears, but they hear not” (Psa 115:6).

AN OBSERVATION

It ought to be noted that the nearer we are to the shore, the more important stability becomes. In our text, it would have been a tragedy to be so near to the shore, yet be destroyed needlessly by not giving heed to necessary things. There are some things to be done while waiting for the final day to dawn. There is securing the vessel so it is not dashed upon the rocks, or drug back out to sea. There is also the matter of prayer, and the resistance of false and damaging thoughts.

Many a poor soul has been pulled off course at the last minute of their lives by giving their attention to the wrong things.

THEY HAD TO STAY ON THE SHIP

“ 30 And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, 31 Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved. 32 Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.”

Paul had announced that no lives of those on board the ship would be lost. But that declaration would not automatically be carried out. Satan will move some to challenge the saying by maintaining their own lives, independent of the working of God. Paul, however, will be alert to the situation, and elaborate on the salvation that had been promised.

THE SHIPMEN WERE ABOUT TO FLEE OUT OF THE SHIP

“And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship . . .”

It was night, and the storm was still raging. Preparation had been made to keep the ship stable until the day dawned. Yet, the “shipmen,” or “sailors,” NKJV were not at all content with the situation. Ignoring the rest of the souls on the ship, they sought to get off of it immediately. In order to do this, they deliberately misrepresented themselves. Moving as though they were going to throw some anchors out of the front part of the ship, they fully intended to lower the boat into the sea that had previously been hoisted on board (Acts 27:16).

They started letting the boat down into the sea “under colors, as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship.” Other versions read, “under pretense of putting out anchors from the prow,” NKJV “pretending they were going to lower some anchors from the bow,” NIV “under color as though they would lay out anchors from the foreship,” ASV and “as if they were about to put down hooks from the front of the ship,” BBE

Scripture twice translates the word “cloak,” as though a royal garment had covered up an abominable deed. The Revelation depicts the false church as a harlot woman who clothed herself in royal apparel of “scarlet color.”

+ The words “under color” are a translation of the Greek word **profa,sei** , which means, “a pretext (alleged reason, pretended cause),” THAYER and “ generally, of what is made to appear to others to hide the true state of things, opposite **avlh,qeia** (truth); (1) as what is said pretext, excuse; (2) as what is done pretense, cover-up.” FRIBERG

This Greek word is used eight times in Scripture.

• **TRANSLATED “PRETENSE.”** “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation” (Matt 23:14; Mk 12:40; Lk 20:47)

“What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretense , or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice” (Phil 1:18).

• **TRANSLATED “CLOAK.”** “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin” (John 15:22).

“For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness” (1 Thess 2:5).

• **TRANSLATED “UNDER COLOR.”** “And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under color as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship” (Acts 27:30).

• **TRANSLATED “COLOR.”** “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication” (Rev 17:4).

Actually, the words “under colors” are a good translation. People still speak of something that has been deliberately misrepresented as something that is “tainted,” or “colored.” Scripture twice translates the word “cloak,” as though a royal garment had covered up an abominable deed. The Revelation depicts the false church as a harlot woman who clothed herself in royal apparel of “scarlet color.”

Thus these “shipmen” went about to flee from the ship, going through whatever motions were required to lower anchors into the sea.

EXCEPT THESE ABODE ON THE SHIP

“Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.”

The church is like a vessel sailing on a stormy ocean. It has already passed through many a storm, and yet it is afloat. Some, seeing the damage that has been rendered to the vessel, imagine that they ought to leave it, and strike out on their own.

Paul is alert to the attempt of the shipmen to escape from the ship. He quickly speaks, not because he has such a high regard for shipmen, but for the honor and glory of God. He knows the angel of God has announced that no one on board the ship would lose their lives. He also knows the angel had delivered them into his hands. He therefore announces that they “cannot be saved” except they “abide in the ship.” There will be no salvation outside of the ship, whether the people are seasoned shipmen or not.

Their lives will only be saved if they remain with the one who has been charged with their care – given that commission from heaven.

Paul does not shout this to the shipmen, but to the centurion and soldiers, who are the government officials charged with the care of the prisoners. So far as appearance was concerned, Julius and his soldiers were managing the boat. Already, Julius has no doubt seen how wrong he was to consent to the advice of the pilot and the owner of the ship. He order the boat to sail, and now he has seen the error of his way. This time, he will choose to honor the words of Paul. The Lord turned his heart.

THE SOLDIERS CUT THE ROPES

“Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.”

The boat was in the process of being lowered into the water, and, as yet, no one was in it. Julius does not shout out to the sailors, but simply orders the ropes that were holding the boat to be “cut off.” Thus, it fell into the raging sea where it could by no means be retrieved, thereby terminating any imagined usefulness.

A SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

Although the parallel is not exact in every detail, there is in it a most vivid depiction of some essentials. I gather that this is not something that is mere happenstance.

The church is like a vessel sailing on a stormy ocean. It has already passed through many a storm,

and yet it is afloat. Some, seeing the damage that has been rendered to the vessel, imagine that they ought to leave it, and strike out on their own. But the call of the Spirit goes out much like the words of Paul, “Except ye abide . . . ye cannot be saved” (John 15:4). Of course, this vessel will not be dashed upon the rocks, but will arrive safely on the shores of glory, so to speak.

Even in a more exact way, some poor souls have become so fatigued, they imagine they would be better off if they just took their lives, and launched out into eternity. But such people are like the sailors, lowering a boat and imagining they can get to shore safely in some other way. Except we remain in this temporal body, considering it to be a member of Christ (1 Cor 6:15), one cannot be saved. Our times are in the Lord’s hands, not on our own, and we cannot plan, so to speak, the time when we will leave the body. We can experience the salvation of God in this frail body, fighting the good fight of faith, and enduring all manner of storms and afflictions.

Ride out the storm, brethren. Ride it out! Stay aboard during the night, and until the time for our appointed disembarkment comes to pass.

Don’t quit! There may be things to throw overboard that will lighten your load. Some of the tackling that is ordinarily used for repairs and navigation may have to be cast into the sea as well. Sometimes the sails have to be lowered, and other times they must be hoisted – and it is imperative that proper times be known. However, unless we stay on the ship, we cannot be saved. It is imperative to stay where God has put you.

WHILE THE DAY WAS COMING ON

“ 33 And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. 34 Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you. 35 And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat. 36 Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. 37 And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls. 38 And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.”

Since those on board the ship had been given into the hands of Paul, he immediately sought their welfare. His first word dealt with the necessity for them to be strong, and not remain weakened by a fast of about two weeks. Strength would be needed to prepare to go to land, and to safely make it there as well.

WHILE THE DAY WAS COMING ON

“And while the day was coming on . . .” Other versions read, “as day was about to dawn,” NKJV “just before dawn,” NIV “just before daybreak,” NRSV “and when the dawn was near,” BBE “betwixt that and day,” TNT “till the day was about to be,” YLT and “While they waited until it should become day.” AMPLIFIED

The idea here is that as night passed away and the day was beginning to dawn, Paul kept exhorting the people. He was preparing them for the day, when they would make their way to the land.

This implies that the overcast sky had ended. Prior to this, for many days, neither the sun nor the stars had appeared (Acts 27:20). Now that they are about to be delivered, God will give some light so they will not have to suffer the terrors of darkness any longer. There is something about the dawning of the day that awakens hope.

PAUL BESOUGHT THEM

“ . . . Paul besought them all to take meat, saying . . . ” Other versions read, “Paul implored them,” NKJV “Paul was encouraging them,” NASB “Paul urged them,” NIV “Paul gave them all orders,” BBE “Paul exhorted them,” DARBY “Paul advised them,” MRD “Paul kept urging all,” NAB “Paul was calling upon all,” YLT and “Paul entreated them.” AMPLIFIED

Those who have been thrown to the ground by hopelessness require much exhortation and pleading to make adequate preparations. There are also times when urging is necessary. When Jacob met Esau, he sought to give him a gift. Esau responded, “I have enough, my brother, keep that thou hast to thyself.” Jacob, however, was not content to let the matter pass. God had dealt graciously with him, and thus he responded to Esau, “Nay, I pray thee, if now I have found grace in thy sight, then receive my present at my hand: for therefore I have seen thy face, as though I had seen the face of God, and thou wast pleased with me. Take, I pray thee, my blessing that is brought to thee; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.” It is then written, “ And he urged him, and he took it ” (Gen 33:9-11).

That is the kind of urging Paul was doing. It was fervent, and it was continual.

THIS IS THE FOURTEENTH DAY

“This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat: for this is for your health: for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you . . . ”

Solemnly, yet sounding the note of hope, Paul reasoned with them. For fourteen days they had “continued without food, and eaten nothing.” NKJV He therefore reasoned with them, “. . . take some food. You need it to survive. Not one of you will lose a single hair from his head.” NIV They are not to eat in hopes that somehow they will survive, but with the assurance that they WILL survive, without so much as a hair perishing from any of their heads.

Paul knew that although their deliverance was guaranteed by the Almighty, yet it would require considerable effort on their part. However, that effort would not be in vain.

HE TOOK BREAD

“ . . . And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all: and when he had broken it, he began to eat . . . ”

My point here is that they all heard Paul. They all saw him take bread. They all heard him thank God. They all saw him eat the bread. That means their attention was riveted upon Paul – something that is exceedingly rare, for example, in a church gathering of that size.

Paul himself would be the example of what they should do. He would not conduct himself in private, but in the presence of them all. Therefore, “he took some bread, thanked God in front of everyone, broke it, and began to eat.” GWN He was not ashamed to own the true God as his God, doing so in their very presence. There were Roman military men there, prisoners, sailors, the pilot of the ship, and the owner of the ship. It is doubtless true that many, if not all of them, worshiped other gods. But Paul stands before them all and thanks the God who had sent the comforting angel to him. In so doing, he was confessing the Lord before men (Matt 10:32).

THEY ALL WERE OF GOOD CHEER

“ . . . Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat . . . ” Other versions read, “they were all encouraged, and also took food themselves” NKJV “they all took heart and did the same” BBE and “They all plucked up courage and took something to eat themselves.” NJB

For several days the people, particularly the sailors, had displayed great courage. They adjusted and lowered sails, climbing the masts in a treacherous storm. They had thrown cargo overboard, and even the tackling of the ship, which itself must have been no small task. Now, however, it was as though their courage had fallen to the ground, and they were no longer able to maintain it. But at Paul's word, they reached down and picked it up again, as hope began to pulse within them.

And how did all of this take place? What was the means through which courage and hope were renewed? All of this was because of a word! There had been no visible miraculous intervention. The storm had not ceased. The waves have not stopped crashing against the hull of the ship. The anchors were not withdrawn. The burst of morning light had not yet taken place. Yet hope had been renewed by a word – a word from a man of God who lived out a peaceful spirit before them all

Never doubt the power of insightful words! They have restored joy and anticipation to many a weary soul!

NO SMALL NUMBER OF PEOPLE

“And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls . . .” Other versions read, “And in all we were two hundred and seventy-six persons on the ship.” NKJV

If each person only took up three square feet, the floor space required to contain them would be 828 square feet – a space about forty feet long and twenty-one feet wide. My point here is that they all heard Paul. They all saw him take bread. They all heard him thank God. They all saw him eat the bread. That means their attention was riveted upon Paul – something that is exceedingly rare, for example, in a church gathering of that size. You might say the people on board that ship, at least in this moment of time, were of one mind.

THEY LIGHTENED THE SHIP

“ . . . And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.” Other versions read, “eaten as much as they wanted,” NIV “satisfied their hunger,” NRSV “having eaten sufficient nourishment,” YLT and “had eaten sufficiently.” AMPLIFIED

The people all ate until they had “enough” – enough to strengthen them, and ready them for rigorous activity. None was lacking in nourishment. Then, they threw the wheat into the sea – but only after they had eaten. It is assumed that this wheat comprised some of the food they ate. After eating, there was no further need for this cargo.

THE SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

The spiritual parallels in this passage are powerful and numerous for those who can perceive them.

There Is A Time to Be Encouraged

This is no time for the saints to be pining away, without hope, and in a spirit of slumber. Men must arise who can insightfully and powerfully declare, “ now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:11-12).

Just as surely as day was coming on in our text, so the bursting forth of the day of the Lord is fast approaching. This is not the time to lose hope.

Progress Must Be Made in the Light

The sailors knew that any progress toward land must be made in the light, when the goal was, to

some measurable degree, seen. So it is with spiritual life. Advancement in the Lord not be made in the darkness. Some imagine that faith navigates in the dark, but this is not a proper perception. Faith itself sheds light around those who possess it. This is because faith is in God, and God directs by means of light.

As much as possible, those in Christ need to get guessing, surmising, and conjecture out of their lives. Where this is not totally possible, extreme caution must be exercised, and haste must be avoided – all the while calling upon the name of the Lord.

Much of the crisis found in the lives of professing believers is directly related to a decision to proceed in life like a sailor navigating in the dark. Such an approach to life will result in them ending up in strange places, and far off course from the appointed destination.

Incentives for Encouragement

It is not enough simply to tell people they ought to be optimistic. There is a reason for staying on board the ship to glory, and doing so with expectation. Jesus has also promised His followers, just as Paul did those on board the ship, “But there shall not an hair of your head perish” (Luke 21:18). Everyone who is in the hand of Christ will make it safely home, and nothing will be able to pluck them out of His hand – whether person or storm.

Everyone Must Be Fed

It is a principle in the Kingdom of God that enough is provided for every person to ingest what they need. The gathering of the manna is specified as “according to each one’s need” NKJV (Ex 16:18). The capacities of all the people were not the same, but everyone’s need was met. When Jesus twice fed the multitudes, “they did all eat, and were filled” (Matt 14:20; 15:37).

The Lord always spreads a table with sufficient nourishment for all who are sitting there. Whether man or woman, young or aged, everyone eats from the same source, fully meeting what is required to sustain them. This is why shallow and childish preaching and teaching is so wrong. It disgraces the Lord when enough spiritual bread is not put forth so the youthful and mature can be filled; so the novice and those of full age can be nourished and grow. For a church to tailor its gatherings for the uninformed is a grievous sin, and it ought not be tolerated. As demonstrated in the giving of manna and the feeding of the five thousand and four thousand, the children ate the same bread the adults ate – only in smaller measure. Or, to put it another way, the mature ate the same bread as the immature, only in larger measure.

When Jesus told Nicodemus of the new birth, He said He was speaking of “earthly things” (John 3:12). Yet, his words provide food for thought among the most advanced disciples. When Paul taught the Corinthians, He said, “I have fed you with milk” (1 Cor 3:2), and yet his words continue to challenge the most mature.

I realize this parallel is not exact in every detail. There are some things that spiritual juvenileness withholds from the people, as described in Paul’s letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1-2), and his letter to the Hebrews (Heb 5:11-12). However, as confirmed in those two letters, this does NOT justify failing to declare the profound realities of the Kingdom of God.

THEY DISCOVERED A CERTAIN CREEK WITH A SHORE

“39 And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40 And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.”

Paul had told those on the ship that none of them would die as a result of this ordeal (Acts 27:22). He told them they would be “cast upon a certain island” (Acts 27:26), and expressed their safety in these words: “there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you” (Acts 27:34). Now we will see how all of this plays out – what is involved in a body of people being delivered safely from a raging sea-storm.

WHEN IT WAS DAY, THEY KNEW NOT

“And when it was day, they knew not the land . . .” Other versions read, “they did not recognize the land,” NKJV “they could not recognize the land,” NASB “they had no knowledge of the land,” BBE “they knew not the country,” GENEVA “the sailors knew not what land it was,” MRD “they didn't recognize the coastline,” LIVING and “they did not know where we were.” IE

Apparently the sailors and ship pilot had never been this way before. They did not recognize the island, which indicates they had never before docked there. Any knowledge they will have about this island must be appropriated now. They will have to be alert, assuming this is the island God has appointed as their landing place. That is something that will be confirmed when and if they safely reach the land.

THEY DISCOVERED A CERTAIN CREEK

“ . . . but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship . . .” Other versions read, “they observed a bay with a beach,” NKJV “a bay with a sandy beach,” NIV “they saw an inlet of the sea with a floor of sand,” BBE “but they perceived a certain bay having a strand,” DARBY “a certain creek with a bank,” GENEVA “they saw on the margin of the land an inlet of the sea,” MRD and “they spied a certain haven with a bank.” PNT

The island of Melita is today called Malata. There is a section of the island that is called “Saint Paul’s Bay.” It is the inlet described in our text as “a certain creek,” or sea inlet to the island. The island is purported, as a whole, to have been very rocky. McCLINTOK & STRONG’S However, there was a little finger of land jutting out into the “creek” that apparently had a sandy beach, and a soft floor that would be more conducive to landing a vessel – particularly in a fierce storm.

Keep in mind that these observations have been made during a life-threatening storm at sea. Yet these men had the presence of mind to assess their situation and make, what they deemed to be, appropriate plans.

THEY TOOK UP THE ANCHORS, LOOSED THE RUDDER BANDS AND HOISTED UP THE MAINSAIL

“And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoisted up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.”

They Had Taken Up the Anchors

Other versions read, “let go the anchors,” NKJV “casting off their anchors,” NASB “cutting loose the anchors,” NIV “cutting away the hooks,” BBE “taken up the anchors,” GENEVA/PNT/RWB/TNT/YLT “slipped the anchors,” NJB and “they cut the cables and severed the anchors.” AMPLIFIED

The words “taken up” are translated from a words that means, “to take away, to take up,” STRONG’S “to take away altogether and entirely,” THAYER “as a nautical technical term, of an anchor lift, raise; cut off, cast off,” FRIBERG and “take away, remove; cut away (of anchors).” UBS

It is not clear whether the text means they took the anchors away from the sea floor, or cut them off from the boat. Considering that they knew the ship would be lost, and they would have no further need for them, they probably removed them from the ship.

They Committed Themselves to the Sea

Other versions read, “and left them in the sea,” NKJV “letting them go into the sea,” BBE “they committed themselves to the sea, DARBY/PNT/RWB/TNT/WEB “they committed the ship unto the sea,” GENEVA “let them fall into the sea,” NJB and “they were committing it to the sea.” YLT

It seems to me that the idea here is that they committed themselves to the sea, to manage the ship rather than secure it with anchors. In other words, they were doing what was necessary to commence navigating intelligently to the shore.

They Loosed the Rudder Bands

Other versions read, “loosing the rudder ropes,” NKJV “untied the ropes that held the rudders,” NIV and “freeing the cords of the guiding blades.” BBE

In ancient ships, the “rudders” were large oars used to steer the ship. When these oars not in use, they were hoisted out of the water and secured. This verse speaks of untying these oars so they could be lowered into the water and used expeditiously to guide the ship.

They Hoisted Up the Mainsail

Therefore, they had not cut down the mast as some commentators have suggested. They do not hoist the sail for lengthy voyage on the raging sea, but to enable them to navigate into the narrow strait, referred as a “creek” in verse thirty-nine.

They Made Toward Shore

Other versions read, “headed for the beach,” NASB “made for the beach,” NIV “went in the direction of the inlet,” BBE “made for the strand,” DARBY “drew to the shore,” GENEVA “made way towards the land,” MRD and “steered toward the beach.” NET

When they sailed from Sidon to Myra, the winds were “contrary” to them – a trip of over 250 miles. From Myra to Cnidus, progress was unusually slow – for about 125 miles. From Cnidus, sailing under the protection of Crete, they had barely made it to Fair Havens – a trip of about 150 miles. They had set out on this leg of the journey from Fair Havens to Phenice – a trip of 50-60 miles. Encountering Euroclydon they had been blown off course around 500 miles away. Thus they had already sailed over 1,000 miles. Now they are attempting to simply make it to some land that they can see – perhaps measured in terms of yards rather than miles. Further, it will take all of the expertise and all of the helps they have to make it this short distance.

All of the hardship and loss that have been experienced since they left Fair Havens (above two weeks ago), has been owing to them ignoring the counsel of Paul.

- They had to work hard to make any progress at all.
- They were about 500 miles off course.
- They went without eating for two weeks.
- They got into a situation where they were at the mercy of the sea.
- They were in a situation where all of the expertise on the seas was of little value.
- They had to throw much of the cargo overboard.

- They had to throw the tackling out of the ship.
- Although the sailors were seasoned veterans of the sea, yet they, along with the others, were reduced to a state of hopelessness.
- They arrived at a point where the mere sight of land was a refreshing sight.

It is no wonder that before relating the word delivered to him by an angel, Paul said, “Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss” (Acts 27:21). Not to be forgotten is this: they could battle the sea for two weeks without eating, but they had to eat their fill in order to make it to the shore that was within sight.

THE SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

In fierce trials, it will require all of our resources to make it a small amount of progress. This is particularly true of trials that have resulted from not following the will of the Lord. In the case of required chastening, it is only “afterward” that spiritual growth is realized. As it is written, “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but He for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness . Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb 12:9-11).

Personal holiness is not some-thing that is easily obtained. That is precisely why chastening is associated with its attainment. It is true, “if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged” (1 Cor 11:31). Yet, I have never known a believer who has managed to totally escape the chastening of the Lord. This is a testimony to the pervasive nature of sin, the total lack of goodness in the flesh, and the subtlety of the wicked one.

The necessity for chastening is reduced (although it cannot be totally eliminated), when the individual is living “unto the Lord” – the norm for those who are in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:15). However, as soon as self-will enters into the picture, and there is a deference to the flesh, life becomes more complicated.

In all of this there is a knottiness that must not be overlooked. When a person is lured into a manner of life that places self-interests at the top, a kind of paralysis takes place in the soul. Sound thought becomes very difficult at the inception of such a manner of life, and proceeds to a state of impossibility. So far as one’s identity with God is concerned, sleep settles on the soul, hearing becomes dull, and eyes are closed. This is why it is so difficult to deal with those whose minds are nailed like Sisera’s head to the earth, and are caught up in minding earthly things.

When one’s chief concerns relate to life in the flesh and the here and now, storm clouds begin loom on the horizon of life. What honest and good heart has not found it to be so?

A PLACE WHERE TWO SEAS MET

“ 41 And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.”

Here is a technical explanation that accounts for why the ship ran aground and was eventually broken. The high explanation is found in the working of the Lord. Here we read of the means He employed to bring the ship within reach of land.

WHERE TWO SEAS MET

“And falling into a place where two seas met . . .” Other versions read, “coming to a point between two seas,” BBE “where two currents meet,” CJB “between two channels of the sea,” MRD “a patch of crosscurrents,” NET “the cross currents,” NJB “a place which had the sea on both sides,” PNT and “striking a crosscurrent (a place open to two seas).” AMPLIFIED

A number of versions omit this reference to “where two seas met.”

- New Internal Version
- Revised Standard Version
- New Revised Standard Version
- Holman Christian Standard Bible
- English Standard Version
- God’s Word
- New American Bible
- New Living Translation
- Living Bible
- International English Bible
- International Standard Version
- Williams New Testament
- Contemporary English Version
- English Majority Text Version
- Good News Bible
- The Message

By way of contrast, the versions including this description are as follows:

- King James Version
- New King James Version
- American Standard Version
- New American Standard Version
- Complete Jewish Bible
- The English Darby Bible
- The Douay-Rheims 1899
- English Revised Version
- Geneva Bible
- The NET Bible
- New Jerusalem Bible
- Bishop’s Bible
- Webster Bible
- Revised Webster Bible

- The Tyndale New Testament
- Weymouth's New Testament
- Montgomery New Testament
- Amplified Bible
- Literal Translation of the Holy Bible

Because of the nature of this text, it seems to me that it is best to retain the text as represented in the Authorized Version. Being in the vicinity where two seas (the Adriatic and the Mediterranean) met, was the circumstance that caused the events that follow.

The graphic on this page shows some photographs of oceanic places where two seas meet. As may be noted, it is place of much agitation under ordinary circumstances. The fierceness of the storm in which this ship was found greatly compounded the problem.

A place where two seas meet is one in which contradicting flows of water meet. Such a condition does not exist throughout the sea, but is only found in certain locations. I am not acquainted with the accepted rules of oceanic sailing, but it seems to me that such places would be voided because of the turbulence associated with them.

In this text, the ship was driven by a raging storm into this uncomfortable place. This was the result of not following the counsel of Paul.

THEY RAN THE SHIP AGROUND AND IT REMAINED UNMOVEABLE

“ . . . they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable . . .” Other versions read, “the prow stuck fast and remained unmoveable,” NKJV “the bow stuck fast and would not move,” NIV “the foreship struck and remained unmoveable,” ASV “The bow jammed fast and remained immovable,” CSB and “and the forepart stuck fast, and could not be moved.” GENEVA

Having hoisted the sail, and put the rudders into the water, the ship had properly advanced into the small “creek” or bay they had targeted. The vessel entered the area as was intended. Now, however, the front part of the ship run aground, probably into a sand bar of some sort. It must have been traveling at a fair rate of speed, being driven by the storm. As a consequence, the bow of the ship was mired in the sand, and could not be moved away from it.

Whereas they had been tossed on the open sea by the stormy waves, now they were grounded by the same storm. With the ship unable to be moved, it would eventually be dashed to pieces by the very waves that were once carrying it.

THE HINDER PART WAS BROKEN

“ . . . but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.” Other versions read, “the stern was being broken up by the violence of the waves,” NKJV “the stern began to be broken up by the force of the waves,” NASB “the stern was broken to pieces by the pounding of the surf,” NIV and “the stern began to break up under the violent force of the waves.” AMPLIFIED

When you consider the size of this vessel, with much cargo, and two hundred and seventy six persons on board, you get an idea of the fierceness of this storm. Remember, it had been blowing across the sea for about five hundred miles, and apparently had still retained its strength, maybe even increasing in magnitude.

At this point, no one is saved yet. No one has left the ship, even though the shore was within view. Paul had said no one could be saved unless they remained on the ship, and thus they were remaining.

Very soon, however, the time for disembarking will come. Those on board must patiently wait for the appointed time.

PARALLELS TO SPIRITUAL LIFE

The parallels to spiritual life are remarkable. Have gone through hard trials know how they tend to increase and drain the strength of those who experience them. Paul spoke of a hurricane-like trial in which he and others with him “were pressed beyond measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor 1:8). This is a depiction of trials that increase in magnitude. Paul also shares the purpose of such trials, referring to that particular trial as having the sentence of death in themselves, “that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead” (2 Cor 1:9).

There are some trials from which you cannot escape – like a boat that is stuck fast and cannot be removed.

There are some trials from which you cannot escape – like a boat that is stuck fast and cannot be removed.

But there is another kind of trial that is the result of being where two conflicting moral influences crash against each other, creating spiritual turbulence.

Some of these occasions cannot easily be avoided. You may confront moneychangers and merchandisers in the Temple of God, or Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. However, there are other times when men walk too close to the world, and put themselves in a close proximity to unwholesome influences. This is generally the result of failing to heed words of exhortation or admonition. Men are thus brought into an area where two varying seas of spiritual and carnal thought clash, creating spiritual havoc and danger.

For example, one may choose to ignore the solemn warning, “Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners” (1 Cor 15:33), by choosing to gather with religious people they know are not of one mind in the Lord. Even though the Lord says “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14), they forge an alliance with them anyway – all in the hopes of influencing them for the good. Now, when they are in the presence of such people, and throw out some precious pearl of truth, there is a thunderous clash of right and wrong, like a storm on the sea of life. Suddenly the vessel of life is carried far away from shore, and precious things like peace and assurance are threatened. It is important to have an understanding what to do at that time.

Let it be clear, that a walk in the Spirit has directly to do with the companions we choose, and the amount of time we invest in the lives of others. It may require that a bold proclaimer of the Word call out to the opponents of the faith, and thus lose his life rather than remaining tolerant of them in hopes of preserving it (Acts 7:51-53). It will determine whether Paul and Silas stay in Antioch, urging recalcitrant Jews, or whether they move on to a more tranquil setting (Acts 13:46). It will determine whether Paul stays in a synagogue in Ephesus among volatile Jews, or takes the disciples and moves to the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:9).

True peacemakers do not choose to sail where two seas meet! They do not prefer to strive (2 Tim 2:21), or to remain in unnecessary contact with those who “resist the truth” (2 Tim 3:6). They know very well that such environments are fraught with danger – like a body of water where two seas meet.

This is not an area of life where men are to make rules, imposing a manner of life that is really not discerned by the people. However, it is the responsibility every believer to maintain a sensitive heart – one that can pick up on valid warnings and admonitions.

Believers are admonished, “And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation” (Heb

13:22). And again, “Despise not prophesyings” (1 Thess 5:20). Discerning people see the sense of such words, and give due heed to them. Others pass on and find themselves in great trouble.

MAN’S PLAN IS THWARTED, WHILE GOD’S PURPOSE MARCHES ON

“ 42 And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape. 43 But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: 44 And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.”

The hand of the Lord will be at work in this whole event – and it will be primarily in the interest of Paul, whom He is sending to Rome.

THE SOLDIERS’ COUNSEL

“And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape . . .” Other versions read, “the soldiers planned to kill the prisoners,” NIV “the soldiers were disposed to slay the prisoners,” MRD “The soldiers advised their commanding officer to let them kill the prisoners,” LIVING “The soldiers decided to kill the prisoners,” IE and “the soldiers recommended that the prisoners should be killed.” WEYMOUTH

To the soldiers, this seemed like the best thing to do. Under th circumstances, each person would obviously be intent on saving himself. Why take the chance of the prisoners, for whom they were responsible, getting to land first, and somehow escaping. It would certainly not go well with them when they reported such a thing.

And what was there that could stop their plan. It was a good plan militarily, and was thought up in consideration of the responsibilities that belonged to them. However, there was a special prisoner on board, and God had placed him in charge this landing. Now, let us see how God will protect His servant.

“BUT”

“But . . .” One version reads, “However.” GWN All of the other versions I possess read “but.”

Translated from a Greek word , “but” is defined as follows: “universally, by way of opposition and distinction; it is added to statements opposed to a preceding statement.” THAYER It introduces a condition that differs from the preceding statement. In this case, it is a condition that overrode the counsel of the soldiers.

So far as Scripture is concerned, this is a general a word that introduces Divine control and providence. In the New Covenant writings, it reveals the offsetting influence of the will of God, which is the controlling factor. Here are some examples of its use.

• **IN THE CASE OF JOSEPH.** “And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him” (Acts 7:9).

• **IN THE CHANGING OF PETER’S MIND.** “And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean” (Acts 10:28).

• **IN THE JEWS KILLING OF JESUS.** “ But God raised him from the dead” (Acts 13:30).

• **IN THE UNIVERSAL SINFULNESS OF MEN.** “ But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8).

• **IN THE CHANGE OF THE SAVED.** “ But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you” (Rom 6:17).

• **IN THE COMPETING WISDOM OF THIS WORLD.** “ But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty” (1 Cor 1:27).

• **IN REGARD TO THE HIDDEN PURPOSE OF GOD.** “ But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (1 Cor 2:10).

• **IN THE MATTER OF TEMPTATION.** “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13).

• **REGARDING OUR DEATH IN TRESPASSES AND SINS.** “ But God , who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved)” (Eph 2:4-5).

Jesus had determined that Paul would bear witness of Him in Rome, and noone would thwart that determination – not even soldiers who thought they knew what course of action was the best.

Suffice it to say, the person who knows of the greatness of God, the invincibility of His purpose, and His power to change circumstance sees life from a different perspective. One thrown into a lion’s den will see that all is not loss. If three faithful servants of God are threatened with being thrown into a fiery furnace, they will think differently of the matter. If Peter is cast into prison, he will sleep soundly. If Paul and Silas are beaten and thrown into prison, they will sing loudly.

With all of the professed experts in human behavior in the religious arena, the greatness of our God has been minimized, and the emphasis placed upon human wisdom. However, it had not altered the moral landscape. In fact, it appears as though things have actually gotten worse under these merchants of worldly wisdom.

Our text is not one of doctrine, but of how the will of God was worked out among men – even hostile men. It confirms what the doctrine teaches: “If God be for us, who can be against us” (Rom 8:31). And again, “The Lord is my Helper. I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6).

This does not mean that nothing harmful will ever happen to the saints. Joseph was imprisoned, and his feet placed in fetters. Peter and John were beaten and imprisoned. Paul and Silas were in prison. The saints were persecuted and scattered abroad out of Jerusalem. We should not be naive about such matters.

However, when it comes to the fulfillment of God’s purpose, it will be done, whether men oppose it or not. Those who are faithfully laboring in the Kingdom will not be overcome and their labors aborted by the devil. If an apostle is in a powerful and unrelenting storm, he will still make it to the destination His Lord has determined!

Of course, all of this means nothing if people live unto themselves, establish their own agenda, and neglect their souls in the process.

THE CENTURION WAS WILLING TO SAVE PAUL

“ . . . the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose . . .” Other versions read, “wanting to save Paul,” NKJV “wanting to bring Paul safely through,” NASB “wanted to spare Paul’s life,” NIV “desiring to keep Paul safe,” BBE and “was determined to bring Paul safely through” NJB

How do you account for the willingness of Julius to save the life of Paul? And why did he not think of all of the other prisoners? It was because God gave Paul favor with men, as with He did with Joseph (Gen 39:6; 41:43-44; Acts 7:10), Daniel (Dan 1:9; 2:48; 6:1), and others.

Julius was inclined to protect Paul. Perhaps the great apostle had witnessed to him, or even was used of God to bring faith to him. We do not know the details – but we do know the reason for this inclination. Jesus had determined that Paul would bear witness of Him in Rome, and no one would thwart that determination – not even soldiers who thought they knew what course of action was the best.

However, Paul was not the only one exempted from the purpose of the soldiers. The plan was to kill them all, Paul included. However, because of Paul – or for his sake – all of them were spared.

Of course, this is a Divine manner – to spare certain people because of His inclination to others. Those who present God as loving everyone “so much,” and therefore seeks their earthly good, overlook this key factor. Often unworthy souls are saved and blessed because of someone else.

Abraham

Take, for example, the blessings that were dispensed for Abraham’s sake (Gen 19:29; 26:24). God told Isaac He would multiply his seed “for My servant Abraham’s sake” (Gen 26:24). When God sent Lot out of Sodom prior to its destruction, we are told it was because He “remembered Abraham” (Gen 19:29). Moses told Israel God would drive the heathen out of Canaan, “Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee, and that He may perform the word which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob ” (Deut 9:5).

Joseph

Then, there was the matter of Potiphar. Joseph became his slave, and was eventually set over all of his house, because Potiphar saw that everything Joseph did prospered. However, the Spirit provided an explanation for that circumstance. “And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake ; and the blessing of the LORD was upon all that he had in the house, and in the field” (Gen 39:5).

Jonathan

The souls of David and Jonathan were knit together (1 Sam 18:1). Following the death of Saul and Jonathan, David determined to bless whoever he could find of the house of Saul. In describing his intention he said, “Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake ?” (2 Sam 9:1). When he found the lame son of Jonathan Mephibosheth in Lodebar, he detected the boy was afraid. He said to him, “ Fear not: for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake , and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually” (2 Sam 9:7).

David

The number of people who were blessed for the sake of David, the man after God’s own heart, was significant. They included Solomon, the tribe of Judah, the kingly part of David’s family,

Jerusalem, and kings (1 Kgs 11:12,32,34; 15:4; 2 Kgs 8:19; 2 Kgs 19:34; Psa 132:10; Isa 37:35).

The Ultimate Example

The ultimate example of people being blessed because of someone else is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Those who are blessed with salvation must realize that it has been for Jesus sake. Were it not for Him, there would be no “eternal salvation” (Heb 5:9).

- God, we are told, has forgiven us “for Christ’s sake” (Eph 4:32).
- John reminded us, “your sins are forgiven you, for His name’s sake” (1 John 2:12).
- That is why redemption is said to be “in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:24).
- It is why the love of God is declared to be “in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39).
- This is the reason God put us into Christ Jesus (1 Cor 1:30).
- It accounts for why God establishes us (2 Cor 1:21).
- It is why we are caused to triumph (2 Cor 2:14).
- Jesus is the explanation for our calling (1 Pet 5:10).
- Christ Jesus is why, and the appointed means through which, we believe in God (1 Pet 1:21).

The modern church has not made much of the essentiality of Christ, who Himself is:

- The First and the Last (Rev 1:1,17; 2:8; 22:13).
- The Beginning and the Ending (Rev 1:8).
- The Beginning and the End (Rev 21:6; 22:13).
- The Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:8,11; 21:6; 22:13).
- The Author of eternal salvation (Heb 5:9).
- The Author and the Finisher of our faith (Heb 12:2).
- The One who made all things, and for whom they were made (Col 1:16).
- He upholds all things by the Word of His power (Heb 1:3).
- In Him all consist, or are held together (Col 1:17).
- The fulness of the Godhead dwells in Him (Col 1:19; 2:9).

How is it that the Son of God ranks so low in modern preaching and teaching? Why have ministries to temporal needs upstaged the proclamation and exposition of His great salvation? Why is so very little known of Him, what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do?

These grievous conditions are the direct result of the failure to comprehend the absolute centrality of Jesus Christ. Further, this is owing to the general failure of those who have been charged with feeding the flock of God. In other words, we have a situation in which God is under no obligation to bless, lead, guard, and direct many professing Christians. The appointed means of blessing remains Jesus Himself, and where there is an ignorance of Him, the salvation of God becomes virtually impossible.

SWIMMERS IN FIRST

“ . . . and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land . . .” Other versions read, “He ordered those who could swim to jump overboard first and get to land,” NIV and “gave orders that those who had knowledge of swimming were to go off the

ship and get first to land.” BBE

Remember, this was a swim in a fierce storm, with waves so strong they broke off the hinder part of the ship (Acts 27:41). It would require considerable effort to make it to the shore by swimming. Nevertheless, it was a wise word given by Julius. Perhaps he recalled that Paul had declared no life would be lost. Notwithstanding, it would take a lot of effort to work out their salvation, so to speak, with fear and trembling. By swimming to shore, these more able sailors would be able to assist those who arrived their with various helps. They could also prepare the land, for nearly three hundred people would be coming ashore.

Spiritual Parallel

Those who can do more are expected to do so. This applies to matters of the Kingdom as well as those related to this world. Oftentimes, because of the suffocating effects of sectarianism, those with superior spiritual aptitudes are not required to do much at all . There are churches in this very area that have capable people sitting idly in the pews, doing little or nothing, although they are quite capable of doing a lot.

Jesus taught us, “For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more” (Luke 12:48). Yet I have often seen capable spiritual leaders asked to refrain from contributing their thoughts, seeing it was disruptive to the church environment. I myself have frequented numerous assemblies where it was apparent very little was known of the manner of the Kingdom. Yet, if I did desire to say anything, I almost had to force myself into the discussion. That must never be said of a godly assembly.

Also, those who have received much should not require the attention and assistance reserved for those who have received little. They should not be coddled, or served up infant-food. They should be required to swim, so to speak, and get to the truth so they can assist others in appropriating it. But, alas, this is not the manner of Babylon the Great!

AND THE REST

“And the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship . . .” Other versions read, “some on planks, and others on various things from the ship,” NASB “planks or on pieces of the ship,” NIV “planks or whatever they could find from the ship,” CJB “some on planks, others on debris from the ship,” NAB “either on planks or on pieces of wreckage,” NJB and “heavy boards or pieces of the vessel.” AMPLIFIED

For those who could not swim, the breaking up of the ship was an advantage, providing them pieces of wood that could float, and on which they could make it safely to shore. For them. A way of escape was provided from the breaking of the vessel on which they had been sailing.

It is likely that many of the materials used to convey the non-swimmers to shore, were already in the sea. They probably could be accessed with considerable effort, whether from the brink of the ship or while they were in the water. It is also possible that those who swam to shore first provided some floating materials for those who could not swim. The point to be seen is that it took a lot of effort for the deliverance to be accomplished. The fact that none of the passengers would be lost was something appointed by God. However, for it to be fulfilled, a lot was required of those who were delivered.

Spiritual Parallel

Just as surely as there was a means for escaping that sinking ship, so there is an appointed means for escaping the sinking ship of spiritual Babylon – or any other moral or spiritual wrecked vessel. Peter alluded to this when he said concerning our redemption, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were

not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” (1 Pet 1:18). No person has to go down with a broken spiritual vessel. When erroneous forms of religion fail, the people caught in the snare do not have to go down with it.

It is fashionable these days for salvation to be oversimplified. In fact, it is often said, “There is nothing you can do. It has all been done for you.” However, this is not at all an accurate statement. It is true that the foundations and basis for salvation have all been done by Jesus. He has “made peace” (Col 1:20). He has taken away sin (Heb 9:26). He has opened a new and living way (Heb 10:20). He has destroyed the devil (Heb 2:14), and spoiled principalities and powers (Col 2:15). He has reconciled us to God (Col 1:21), and ended the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).

But there are some things Jesus did not do for us. He did not repent for us (Acts 17:30). He did not believe for us (Heb 10:39). He did not confess His name for us (Rom 10:9-10). He was not baptized for us (Col 2:11-12). He did not obey the truth for us (Rom 2:8). He did not bring forth fruit meet for repentance for us (Acts 26:20). He did not perfect holiness in the fear of the Lord for us (2 Cor 7:1). He did not deny ungodliness and worldly lusts for us (Tit 2:11-12). He did not run the race for us (Heb 12:1-2). Those are all matters we must do. It is true that He strengthens and enables us to do these things, but in the end, we must do them, just as surely as those passengers had to extend themselves to get to shore.

God directed Abraham to come away from Ur of the Chaldees and all of his relation – but Abraham had to do it. God delivered Israel from Egypt, but they had to personally prepare, and come out, and walk through the midst of the Red Sea. God promised to overcome the enemies of Israel, but they had to fight. Jesus delivered us from the dominion of Satan but we have to resist him. This is the manner of the kingdom.

SO IT CAME TO PASS

“ . . . And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.” Other versions read, “they were all brought safely to land,” NASB “everyone reached land in safety,” NIV “every soul got safe to land,” DOUAY and “all came safe and sound to land,” NJB

We do not know how long this took – two hundred and seventy-six making it safely to shore. I can see how they would have been greatly wearied, and perhaps some of them sustained some minor injuries. I do not doubt that many of them assisted one another. Perhaps some of them were old. Paul himself was probably feeble, and may even have been ill at the time. In order to make it through those agitated and murky waters, fear had to be overcome. They probably had to keep their eye on the shore in order not to be overly discouraged by the task before them. Some of them may very well have wrestled with the thought that it was not possible for them to make it. But they all made it safely to land, and none of them were lost – just as Paul had told them. I do not doubt that on the way to shore many recalled his words and were encouraged.

CONCLUSION

THE EVENTFUL VOYAGE

“And thus ended the eventful voyage of about four hundred and eighty miles (as laid down in the charts) from Clauda to the Point of Koura on the north coast of Malta. It is one of the striking proofs of the identity of Melita with Malta, that the rate at which it is calculated that a large ship laying to in a gale would drift in twenty-four hours, viz. thirty-six miles, multiplied by thirteen and a half (the number of days occupied by the voyage), gives four hundred and eighty-six miles as the whole distance. (36X13.5 = 486). Smith thinks that the coincidence between “the actual bearing of St. Paul’s Bay from Clauda, and the direction in which the ship must have driven,” with the wind blowing in the quarter we know it did,” is, if possible, still more striking.” PULPIT COMMENTARY

Having disembarked from Caesarea some weeks prior, and changed ships at Myra [at least a 5-6 day trip], Paul and company had finally landed where they will spend the winter. They had sailed “slowly many days” past Cnidus, and under Crete, until they finally arrived at Fair Havens, which was on the southern coast of Crete. From there, and against the advice of Paul, they had set out to get to Phenice, where they thought it would be best to spend the winter. That voyage proved to be a disastrous one. After at least two weeks in a raging storm, they were shipwrecked on the island of Melita, having lost their cargo and the ship. Thus far, they had spent about one month on the water [5-6 days + many days + 14 days).

This entire trip bears remarkable similarity to the believers voyage through life. I cannot help but believe this is intentional, and not coincidental.

- **A change of ship was required to get to their ultimate destination.** At Myra, about 300 miles into the journey to Rome, the centurion found a ship going to Italy, and they placed everyone on that vessel (27:5-6). Similarly, many of the saints, after being in Christ for a season, found it necessary to change their environment, choosing one that was more conducive to landing safe in heaven to forever be with the Lord.

- **After a good beginning, they made slow progress because of contrary winds.** Having encountered some contrary winds, the ship on which Paul was traveling “sailed slowly many days,” not making rapid progress (Acts 27:7-8). This parallels a rather common experience among believers, when living for the Lord became more tedious because of opposing forces.

- **They had to navigate with wisdom and discretion.** Especially after they encountered opposing winds, and finally a fierce and unrelenting storm, wisdom was required to navigate successfully (Acts 27:10). Such wisdom is also required in the voyage to glory. It is no wonder Paul prayed that believers would be “filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Col 1:9).

- **They had to choose between conflicting ideas.** When Paul gave his advice, some conflicting advice was given by the pilot and the owner of the ship. A choice had to be made between these conflicting views (Acts 27:10-12). Likewise, there comes a time when opposing ideas must be cast down (2 Cor 10:4-5), and a preference for eternal things carried out (Col 3:1-2). They must be “wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil” (Rom 16:19). There must be a discernment between good and evil (Heb 5:14).

- **Making the wrong choice, they had to ensure a storm unnecessarily.** When they decided to make an attempt to reach the next harbor, they encountered a storm worse than the one in which they had been sailing (Acts 27:13-14). It is ever true that if we judge ourselves, we should be judged. If, on the other hand, we choose not to do this, “we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor 11:32).

- **They had to work harder in the storm.** Making progress in a raging storm required an unusual amount of work (Acts 27:15-17). Everyone has to work out their own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). However, wrong choices often thrust men into a position where they “have trouble in the flesh” (1 Cor 7:28).

- **They had to decide how to lighten their load, and what to throw overboard.** Having chosen to ignore the advice of Paul, not they were faced with the need to throw some of their cargo, and the tackling of the ship as well, into the sea (Acts 27:18-19). Even so, many a child of God, failing to follow spiritual godly inclinations, has come to a point where certain things have to be discarded – things that could have been kept had they kept to the proper course of life.

- **Under fierce adversity, all hope was finally lost.** Navigating in the wisdom of men, traveling in darkness and tempest, all hope finally was dissipated (Acts 27:20). When

men are not motivated by faith, adversity finally whips all confidence and hope out of the hearts of men. Caught in the downward spiral of flesh, hope finally withers and dies.

- **In their trial, God sent a word of comfort to His servant.** God did not speak out of the sky to everyone aboard this vessel, but sent a message to His servant concerning the dilemma (Acts 27:22-26). Even so, in times of testing, answers cannot be found in books, worldly wisdom, or other fleshly resources. Legitimate assessments and answers will be given to those who are walking in the light, and it is their word that is to be followed.

- **They had to take nourishment to prepare for survival.** Before they could escape from the situation, it was necessary for them to eat and be strengthened (Acts 27:33-34). One of the sad results of spiritual malnourishment is that it puts a person in a condition where they cannot escape danger, or face the inevitability or death. It is essential that any effective action be performed in a strengthened condition, where the soul has been fed.

- **They had to know when to lower and when to hoist their sails.** The varying circumstances required some understanding of when to use the sails, and when they would be a detriment – when to attempt to steer the ship, and when it was best to let it be carried by the storm (Acts 27:15,17,40). There are trials through which the saints can navigate deliberately. There are others that are like storms that carry us along. Blessed is the person who can distinguish between the two. There are things that are “lawful,” but under certain circumstances “are not expedient” (1 Cor 6:12; 10:23).

safety. When those in charge of the ship saw land, they had to know how to safely get within its proximity without endangering the occupants of the ship (Acts 27:27-29, 38-40). It is good to “know how to abound,” as well as “how to be abased,” and “be instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and suffer need” (Phil 4:12). What you do in the difficult times, and in crises, reveals the mount of real wisdom you possess.

- **To be saved, they had to lose most, if not all, of their possessions.** During the storm, they had to throw the cargo, the tacklings, and the wheat overboard (Acts 27:18-19,38). Jesus said that in order to be His disciple one had to “forsake all” (Lk 14:33). Walking in the light and living by faith clarifies this every time a circumstance of life arises that requires the discarding of some possession or preference that proves to be a hindering factor during stress.

- **Those who could swim had to do so in stormy waters.** Two classes of people were saved: those who could swim and those who could not. The swimmers were required to use all of their capacities to save themselves – swimming in a stormy sea (Acts 27:43-44). The abilities of the mature child of God are not always exercised under quiet and favorable circumstances. Often they must be employed under the most difficult of circumstances, which tend to confirm just how able believers are. But if they will use what they have from God, they will arrive safely.

- **Those who could not swim had to use helps to get to shore.** Those who could not swim were provided a means by which they could get to shore. That means had to be appropriated and employed all the way to the shore (Acts 27:44). It is sometimes necessary for those lacking certain abilities to employ “helps” in order to survive. It may require relying on some word from a fellow believer, or visiting a certain Ebenezer where the blessing of the Lord was once experienced. It may be retiring to some secret place for prayer, or rehearsing the wonderful works of God. Such activities are like priming a pump when the water is not flowing freely, and holy thoughts do not come easily. Properly used, they will enable the believer to navigate to safety.

- **Everyone did all that they could under the circumstances, and they all made it safely to shore.** In a sense, every man was for himself in getting to the shore, having to use everything accessible to him (Acts 27:43-44). We should not expect salvation to be

accomplished easily, with minimal or occasional effort. Working out your own salvation with fear and trembling always requires the “whole armor of God,” “all spiritual blessings,” and “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (Eph 6:10-18; 1:3; 2 Pet 1:3). The believer must bring all of his heart, soul, mind, and strength into the race to glory, and leave nothing undone.

Just as Paul’s voyage to Rome was not in stormy weather all of the way, and was often attended by special visitations from the Lord, and contact with various brethren, so the trip to glory is not through an uninterrupted storm. Like the early church who went through persecutions and hardships, so the Lord has ordained that individuals and whole churches experience “rest,” and are “edified, walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, even being “multiplied” (Acts 9:31). How thankful we are that our times are in His hands (Psa 31:15), and He is working everything together for our good (Rom 8:28).

Notwithstanding those seasons of refreshment, there are perils on the way to glory – moral and spiritual storms. It is the nature of the life of faith to work out our salvation in the midst of such trials, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord, and walking in the light, though all about us often appears to be pervasive darkness. The caliber and strength of our faith is being tested, like the storms testing the sailing expertise of the mariners in our text.

What will it take to cause hope to wither? What will cause despair to set in, battering the heart and causing grief to the soul? Everything that is required to confront and overcome these circumstances is supplied in Christ Jesus, and faith is fully able to take hold of them and use them. That is involved in being “complete” in Christ.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #105

EXPERIENCES ON MELITA

“ 28:1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. 2 And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold. 3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. 5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm. 6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god. 7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. 8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him. 9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed: 10 Who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary. 11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.” (Acts 28:1-11)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

When all of the passengers arrived safely on the island, they found a barbarous people. Yet, the

people were inclined to them and treated them graciously. While assisting in the gathering of wood for a fire, Paul is unexpectedly bitten by a poisonous viper which was hidden in the wood. Because the snake fastened itself on Paul's hand, the whole event was very public, and the natives watched him, convinced that he was a murderer who was being judged, and would therefore die. When Paul does not, or show any signs of harm whatsoever, they think he is a god. This shows how rapidly the minds of people can change when they honestly consider what they behold. The governor of the island received the travelers into his home for three days, and there Paul finds the leader's father ill. Going in to him, he prayed, laid his hands on him, and healed him. Following this many from the island who had diseases came to Paul, and they also were healed. When they left the governor's home, the people honored them in many ways. When they got ready to depart, the people furnished them with all of the supplies they needed. After three months, apparently spent in some other quarters, and the winter being over, they resumed their journey to Rome in another ship from Alexandria Egypt. God had graciously cared for them., and has done so through trials fatigue, challenge, severe tests, losses, lengthy trials, and timely favors.

THE CONTEXT OF LIFE

Life itself is maintained in a certain context, with certain things being involved. For mankind, nothing about the maintenance of life is robot-like, or reflexive. There are dangers and benefits, hurts and comforts, losses and gains. A normal life is maintained through eating, sleeping, and exercise. The mind faces challenges, and the body adverse circumstances. There are periods of elation, and times of sorrows. We face friend and foe, helpers and those who hinder. Our bodies are subject to the elements, and must be nourished by food and water. There is refreshment and fatigue, rejoicing and mourning, heights and depths of emotion. An appetite that is left unassuaged cries out, creating discomfort. All of these, and much more, are simply part of the process of life, and most people know it.

However, when it comes to the maintenance of spiritual life, the knowledge of its manner is not commonly known. In doctrine, insinuation, and mental tone, a myriad people have been left with the impression that spiritual life proceeds on its own, without any involvement from men. It is this persuasion that birthed the heresy referred to as "once saved, always saved." and "eternal security." In these, and other such doctrines, the necessity of faith is conveniently overlooked – the means by which newness of life is both received and maintained. Other things that pertain to "this present evil world," become dominant.

Faith must be "kept" (2 Tim 4:7; Rev 14:12), and not thrown overboard like the cargo on the ship on which Paul and others were sailing (2 Tim 2:18; Acts 27:18,38). Faith, like a mustard seed, grows, advances, and becomes mature (Lk 17:5; 2 Thess 1:3). It must be finished by Jesus as well as authored by Him (Heb 12:2). It is important to be like Abraham, of whom it is written, "being not weak in faith" (Rom 4:19), but rather being "strong in faith" (Rom 4:20).

And how is faith actually maintained? What are the influences that bring it to maturity? Men are, after all, exhorted to "continue in the faith" (Acts 14:22). There are such things as being "established in the faith" (Acts 16:5; Col 2:7), standing "fast in the faith" (1 Cor 16:13), being "grounded and settled" in the faith (Col 1:23), and being "steadfast in the faith" (1 Pet 5:9). Is there a person of sound mind that imagines that men will be wafted into heaven without these qualities being addressed? And what of the admonition to do something with your faith, adding to it certain indispensable traits of rectitude: virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity (2 Pet 1:5-7). Can the promise attached to that activity be experienced without the addition of such things? "For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . if ye do these things, ye shall never fall" (2 Pet 1:8-10). Is this not one of the means by which life is maintained, in order to realize its objective to "bring forth fruit unto God" Rom 7:4)?

God never intended for spiritual life to be maintained in a moral and spiritual vacuum – where there is little activity, no hostility, and no tests.

God never intended for spiritual life to be maintained in a moral and spiritual vacuum – where there is little activity, no hostility, and no tests. Instead, it is like Paul’s divinely determined voyage to Rome. There are trials of various intensity, aggressive oppositions, and seasons of darkness to endure. These are all designed to show the validity of the faith one claims to possess. It is at the time of testing that the absence of faith, of its inadequacy is revealed. Conversely, during the same tests a strong faith is made known that does not waver or doubt. This is done in the presence of principalities and power in heavenly places who are, in these situations, the ones to whom the “manifold wisdom of God” is being made known (Eph 3:10).

There is a certain separation that takes place during the pilgrimage to glory. Some things have to go in order that other things may be obtained. This matter is addressed in several ways in Scripture.

- “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:12).
- “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Heb 12:1).
- “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).
- “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph 4:22).
- “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet 2:1-2).

Those en route to glory are especially reminded of these requirements when they are in the midst of moral; and spiritual storms. For the immature, it then becomes more apparent that there are certain hindrances to spiritual progress that must be thrust from us. God has a way of directing our lives so that this can become very obvious. It is then that there is no sense of loss when casting such things out of our lives. That action rather brings refreshment and hope. Vision is clarified, and spiritual senses exercised.

TREATED WITH KINDNESS BY A BARBAROUS PEOPLE

“ 28:1 And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. 2 And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.”

Everyone had made it safely to shore. As it is written, “And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land” (Acts 27:44). Now Luke provides some details that confirm the hand of the Lord was with them. Every legitimate need will be met, kindness will be realized from strangers, and an event that would have caused death under any other circumstance will have no power. All of this was the doing of the Lord.

WHEN THEY WERE ESCAPED

“And when they were escaped . . .” Other versions read, “and when they had been brought safely through,” NASB “once safely on shore,” NIV “had reached safety,” NRSV “got safe to land,” DARBY “having been saved,” YLT “Our lives having been thus preserved,” WEYMOUTH and “had been rescued,” WILLIAMS

The word “escaped” is translated

from the Greek word **διασωγε,ντεj** This word means, “preserve through danger, to bring safe through; to save . . . bring him through . . . keep safe, keep from perishing . . . to save out of danger, rescue,” THAYER and “to rescue completely from danger - 'to save, to rescue.” LOUW-NIDA

There is a lot in this word “escape.” It involves being preserved in the midst of the circumstance from which one is ultimately delivered. It also includes being brought out of a dangerous environment – the act of deliverance itself. Then there is the objective of the deliverance, which is to arrive safely at the appointed destination. No one escapes who is finally overcome by the oppressive environment. No one escapes who does not eventually come out of the situation in which life is threatened. Escape also postulates the safe arrival at a place where the former danger does not exist.

Thus, for those in our text, escaping, or deliverance involved not being destroyed by the storm while they were on the sea. It included the provision of a means to get from the boat to the shore. There was also preservation while they were on their way. Finally, the deliverance included the safe arrival of everyone on the land.

An Application

Having said that, there is an uncomfortable amount of teaching these days that claims deliverance that does not meet these conditions. Those who claim healing that leaves the person with the symptoms of the disease from which he was purportedly healed are among those who teach such absurdities. As if that was not enough, there are a growing number of religious pretenders who boast of being saved, yet who continue to be dominated by sin.

There a number of deliverances described in Scripture to which these principles can be applied.

- **DELIVERED FROM THIS PRESENT EVIL WORLD.** “Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father” (Gal 1:4).

- **DELIVERED FROM THE LAW.** “But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter” (Rom 7:6).

- **ESCAPING FROM TEMPTATION.** “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Cor 10:13).

- **DELIVERED FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS.** “Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son” (Col 1:13).

- **DELIVERED FROM THE WRATH TO COME.** “And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess 1:10).

- **DELIVERANCE FROM BONDAGE.** “And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb 2:15).

- **ESCAPING THE CORRUPTION THAT IS IN THE WORLD THROUGH LUST.** “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet 1:4).

- **DELIVERED OUT OF TEMPTATION.** “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the

godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Pet 2:9)

• **ESCAPED FROM THOSE WHO LIVE IN ERROR.** “For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error” (2 Pet 2:18).

• **ESCAPING THE POLLUTIONS OF THE WORLD.** “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Pet 2:20).

What would we say of the people who were languishing in the storm, lightening the ship, and having all hope removed from them, if they shouted out, “We have been delivered?” We would consider them to be lacking in perception at the best, and totally dishonest at the worst. And what if they had cried out, “We have escaped,” when the helm of the boat was stuck fast in the sand, and the hinder part of the boat was being dashed to pieces? Or what if while they were making their way to the shore, some swimming, and some on pieces of the ship, relaxed their effort and said, “Finally, we have been saved” – what would we think of such a testimonial? The truth of the matter is that until they arrived safely on that shore, they were in jeopardy, and it was foolish to pretend as though this was not the case.

We have entered an era of Christianity where men feel more free to boast of identity with Christ without showing any indications of escape or deliverance from sin. Now there is a new kind of Christian business that allows for people to maintain their profession of faith, while at the same time confessing to their lives being out of control. It is a most lamentable condition, to say the least, for it sets before the world a kind of salvation that leaves the people essentially the same as those who admittedly are not Christians. Such a salvation is not real, and is not to be recognized as though it was.

THEN THEY KNEW

“ . . . then they knew that the island was called Melita.” Other versions read, “they found out,” NKJV “we then learned,” NRSV “we made the discovery that the island was named Melita,” BBE and “We soon learned.” LIVING

The text reads as though they had asked the natives the name of the island, and thus the name of it was “learned” – was made known to them.

FACTS CONCERNING MELITA

Cicero says, here pirates used to winter almost every year, and yet did not spoil the temple of Juno, as Verres did: though some say it was so called from the great abundance of honey found in it; for it was a very pleasant and fruitful island, bringing forth great plenty of wheat, rye, flax, cummin, cotton, figs, wine, roses, thyme, lavender, and many other sweet and delightful herbs, from whence bees did gather great plenty of honey. It was, according to Pliny, distant from Camerina eighty four miles, and from Lilybaeum a hundred and thirteen; and it is said to be distant from the promontory of Sicily an hundred miles, though others say sixty; and that it was so far from Syracuse, which is the next place the apostle came to in this voyage, was from Africa an hundred and ninety miles. On the east side, a little from the chief city of it, now called Malta, was a famous temple of Juno, spoiled by Verres, as before observed; and on the south side another of Hercules, the ruins of both which are yet to be seen. The compass of the island is about sixty miles, the length twenty, and the breadth twelve, and has in it five ports, and about sixty villages. JOHN GILL

A Spiritual Application

Due to inferior teaching, as well as to the nature of the beginning of newness of life, many who come into Christ do not know yet know where they are. The benefits of being in Christ may not be known, and a clear definition of what has taken place in them may not be discerned. Many of us remember very well when we were in just such a state. It took someone who was familiar with life in Christ to give us some perception the lay of the spiritual land, to help us form an adequate perception of the glory of Emmanuel's land (Isa 8:8).

One can only imagine how foolish it would have been to inquire from some long-time natives of the land what it was called, and where it was, only to have them respond that they did not know. They might have told the people they had been there a long time, but simply had not taken the time to find out where they were, or what resources were there. Anyone confronting such a situation would realize the foolishness of the circumstance. The only justification for being in such a stance would be that the people were blind and deaf, and perhaps did not possess good rational faculties. At any rate, no person of sound mind would expect a long-time citizen of a county to be ignorant of what it was, where it was at, and what was available to its citizens.

Yet, we are faced with countless numbers of professing Christians who have very little understanding of where they are, and of the privileges that have been vouchsafed to those who are "in Christ Jesus." There is a lot of good work to be done in this area – assisting the saints of God in coming to an understanding of what has taken place in salvation, and the plethora of spiritual resources that are available to them. If you have a lucid view of where you are in Christ Jesus, and of the abundance that is accessible to you, there is certainly a place for you to ministry to many very real brothers and sisters in Christ who do not yet have this kind of understanding.

THE BARBAROUS PEOPLE

"And the barbarous people . . ." Other versions read, "the natives," NKJV "islanders," NIV "simple people," BBE "local people," CSB "the people who lived on the island," GWN "local inhabitants," NET "the strangers," PNT and "the foreigners." YLT

Several of the newer versions, in my judgment, give an incorrect translation of the word, making it refer to the habitat of the people (natives, islanders, local people, people who lived on the island, local inhabitants). This is not at all the point of the text, even though the people did live on the island. The word "barbarous" is a transliteration of **ba,rbaroi** (barb aroi). Its etymology includes "foreigner," STRONG'S "properly, one whose speech is rude, rough, harsh, as if repeating the syllables . . . one who speaks a foreign or strange language which is not understood by another." THAYER "barbarian, foreign, strange; as a substantive non-Greek, uncivilized person, barbarian," FRIBERG "non-Greek; uncivilized; foreigner; native," UBS and "non-Greek; uncivilized; foreigner; native." LOUW-NIDA In no case is it meant to connote a geographical area. This term is set within the context of Greek being the universal language at that time, as well as being separate from the Jews, who had their own language primary language, which was not Greek.

Other texts using this word indicate that it is a cultural term rather than of denoting place or environment.

• **ROMANS 1:14** : "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise" (Rom 1:14).

• **1 CORINTHIANS 14:11** : "Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me" (1 Cor 14:11).

• **COLOSSIANS 3:11** : "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col 3:11).

Hebrew was the language of the Jews, Greek was the universal language, and Latin was the language of the Roman empire. Yet, these people apparently had their own language, not speaking any of those languages. Perhaps this is why there is no record of a single word being spoken by Paul while he was on this island (Acts 28:1-11). He gathered sticks (28:3), shook a viper off in the fire (28:5), healed the father of Publius (28:8), and healed others of the island who had diseases (28:9). This does not mean there was no preaching and teaching – but if there was, Paul must have spoken in tongues, as Peter and the others did on Pentecost, so the people could understand.

Yet, the people of the island recognized the dilemma of those who had escaped the sinking ship, and treated them with kindness, which itself is a universal language.

Typology Seen in Different Languages

At its root, and in the religious world, there are three different ways of speaking.

- There is the language of the world, universally understood by sinners. This is a language those with faith do not choose as their means of communication (1 Cor 2:1-6). Those who are of the world, John wrote, speak “of the world, and the world heareth them” (1 John 4:5).
- There is religious jargon – the speech of spiritual Babylon. It is an admixture that attempts to mingle the vocabulary of the world with the words taught by the Holy Spirit. It is the language of human tradition (Matt 15:3,6; Col 2:8; 1 Pet 1:18), philosophy (Col 2:8), and attempts to bind law upon people (1 Tim 1:7).
- There is also the language that employs words “taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words” NASB (1 Cor 2:13).

To the world, the language taught by the Spirit seems barbaric. Traditional religious language that has its roots in flesh also appears to the world to be barbaric. Yet there is enough of the world in it for so that it is not altogether strange. To those who “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), and “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4), both the language of the world and that of spiritual Babylon is barbaric.

NO LITTLE KINDNESS

“And the barbarous people showed us no little kindness . . .” Other versions read, “showed us unusual kindness,” NKJV “Showed us extraordinary kindness,” NASB “showed us no common kindness,” ASV “were uncommonly kind to us,” BBE “showed us no small courtesy,” DOUAY “showed us many kindnesses,” MRD “showed us extraordinary hospitality,” NAB “Were very kind to us,” NLT “showed us remarkable kindness,” WEYMOUTH and “showed us unusual and remarkable kindness.” AMPLIFIED

Ordinarily hostility exists between people who do not understand each other – at least some kind of aversion. This was the primary means through which the people in the land of Shinar were scattered “upon the face of the earth” (Gen 11:7-9).

In this manner, God provided the immediate needs of all the people. However, in the last analysis, it was really for Paul’s sake that this was all done, for he is the one Jesus was sending to Rome. Those who were with him were therefore blessed because of him.

In this circumstance, the people were kindly disposed to the people who were not on their island – two hundred and seventy-six of them! Some of these people, probably the majority, were military men. Yet, the natives did not consider their land to have been invaded, or that this large number of people posed a threat to them. Instead, they lavished kindness upon them in various and effective

ways.

THEY RECEIVED EVERYONE

“ . . . for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.”

The islanders did not leave it to the

survivors to make their own fire, but made one for them, receiving “everyone” of them. In relating why they did this, Luke informs us that it was raining, and was cold, owing to the winter coming on. Other versions read, “because of the rain that was falling and because of the cold.” That means the survivors not only made their way to land during a storm, but during rain and coldness as well. They were probably soaked to the bone with frigid waters, and, so far as the record is concerned, the storm was still in progress, probably sending sheets of rain upon them. Also, the waters had been agitated by the storm, and all sorts of filth and contamination were probably on all two hundred and seventy-six of the people.

What a congregation that was! A ship pilot, the owner of the ship, a considerable number of sailors, some prisoners, and the brethren that were with Paul. However, the natives made a fire for them all, so they could dry out and be warmed. It was no doubt a sizeable fire, for I cannot imagine a campfire being sufficient to dry out and warm nearly three hundred souls. I assume that it was also built in some sheltered area of either rocks or trees.

In this manner, God provided the immediate needs of all the people. However, in the last analysis, it was really for Paul’s sake that this was all done, for he is the one Jesus was sending to Rome. Those who were with him were therefore blessed because of him.

The parallel to life in Christ Jesus is so apparent, there is no need for extensive elaboration on the matter. Whatever benefits we receive from God are “for Jesus’ sake,” and not merely because of who we are. God is no closer us than we are to His Son.

PAUL IS BITTEN BY A POISONOUS SNAKE

“ 3 And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand. 4 And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live. 5 And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.”

Even though Paul has been through a harrowing and exhaustive experience, and even though he was a prisoner, yet he joins in the labor to provides warmth to the multitude. His faith has made him considerate, thoughtful, and industrious, and it will do no less in those who are joined to the Lord by their faith.

I want to keep before you the fact that other brethren were with Paul, endured the shipwreck, and made it safely to shore. We do not know precisely how many brethren were traveling with him, but we do know two of them: Luke and Aristarchus (Acts 27:2). It seems to me that this was a most unusual circumstance – for close friends to accompany the transport of a prisoner. Yet, this afforded Paul sustaining companionship along the way.

PAUL GATHERED A BUNDLE OF STICKS

“And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire . . .” Other versions read, “gathered a pile of brushwood and, as he put it on the fire,” NIV “got some sticks together and

put them on the fire,” BBE “was adding them to the fire,” CJB “gathered a certain quantity of sticks together in a bundle and laid it on the fire,” DARBY “picked up a pile of sticks for the fire,” IE “ and thrown them on the fire.” MONTGOMERY

Considering that Paul was noted for his infirmities (2 Cor 11:30; 12:5), this account is all the more remarkable. We do not know if Paul swam to shore, or was one of those riding in on a plank or piece of the ship. Yet, after the fatiguing trip to shore, we find Paul gathering a bundle of sticks for the fire. What an index to his magnanimous character! No task was too lowly for him. That is how faith impacts upon the human character.

The sticks that were gathered required some discretion, for they had to be dry – and it was raining.

THERE CAME A VIPER OUT OF THE HEAT

“ . . . there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand . . .” Other versions read, “a viper came out because of the heat,” NKJV “a viper, driven out by the heat.” NIV

Here was a public event – something that would be noted by everyone present. While doing a good work, assisting in the need of the moment. Paul is bitten by a poisonous snake – not just an ordinary snake, but an especially venomous one. This event will prove to be an effective introduction of Paul to the natives of the island. It will establish that he, not Julius, is the most significant person of the group that has just made it safely to shore. I do not doubt that there were other men who appeared more impressive, stronger, and of more influence. But the mind-set of the group around that fire will now be focused upon Paul the apostle. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

It is not unusual for a crisis of great magnitude to cause those with strong faith and insight to surface. Those who are defeated by circumstance are not Kingdom leaders, for a true leader takes the people through crises as well as blessings – like Moses, Joshua, David, etc.

ABOUT THE VIPER

“It is said that this remarkable reptile has the biggest and flattest head of all the serpent kind; its usual length is about half an ell, and its thickness an inch; its snout is not unlike that of a hog; it has sixteen small immovable teeth in each jaw, besides two other large, sharp, hooked, hollow, transparent, canine teeth, situate at each side of the upper jaw, which are those that do the mischief: these are flexible in their articulation, and are ordinarily laid flat along the jaw, the animal never raising them but when it would bite The roots or bases of these teeth, or fangs, are encompassed with a vesicle or bladder, containing the quantity of a large drop of a yellow insipid salivous juice. — It has only one row of teeth, whereas all other serpents have two; its body is not at all fetid, whereas the inner parts of the bodies of other serpents are intolerable. — It creeps very slowly, and never leaps like other serpents, though it is nimble enough to bite when provoked. — Its body is of two colours, ash coloured or yellow, and the ground speckled with longish brown spots; the scales under its belly are of the color of well polished steel. Its bite is exceeding venomous, and its poison the most dangerous.” CHAMBER’S CYCLOPAEDIA

A “viper” has always been known for its venomous bite. It is noted for being the most “venomous serpent in Northern Africa and South-western-Asia,” McCLINTOK & STRONG’S It is therefore used as a type of spiritually dangerous people and obnoxious people. John the Baptist referred to certain Pharisees and Sadducees as a “generation of vipers” (Matt 3:7; Lk 3:7). Jesus did the same in regards to the Pharisees (Matt 12:34), and the scribes and Pharisees (Matt 23:33).

In the text before us, one of these particularly poison snakes was driven out of the sticks by the heat of the fire upon which they were placed. The narrative suggests it was in the bundle of sticks that Paul had picked up. When he placed that bundle upon the fire, the viper was forced into the open, and, having bitten Paul, was fastened on his hand. Apparently the many teeth that it had were so

embedded in the hand of Paul that the viper could not withdraw itself. This allowed the maximum amount of poison to pass into Paul's body, making the bite especially lethal.

A Lesson to be Learned

Sometimes the very things we are carrying about with us appear to be harmless. Yet, in the heat of spiritual exposure, evil things surface, seeking, to do damage to the individual carrying them.

While this circumstance, like that in which Paul was found, cannot always be avoided, we are to understand that anything picked up from the earth has the potential of containing harmful influences. It is only as a person is identified with the Lord and engaged in his work that protection can be granted. Jesus gave an example of this in His words to the seventy whom He sent forth: "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19). His words to His disciples following His resurrection were much the same. "They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them" (Mark 16:18). As indicated in our text, this was not something intentionally done to attract the attention of men. It was rather something that would occur while they were engaged in the work of the Lord. This promise was fulfilled in Paul, as well as those who Jesus sent out before him.

THE BARBARIANS SAW

"And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live . . ." Other versions read, "Undoubtedly this man is a murderer, and though he has been saved from the sea, justice has not allowed him to live," NASB "Doubtless this man is a murderer, for though he has been saved from the sea, Justice [the goddess of avenging] has not permitted that he should live." AMPLIFIED "Justice hath not suffered him to live," ASV/NIV/ERV not let him go on living," BBE "Nemesis has not allowed to live," DARBY "Vengeance," GENEVA/RWB "Justice herself," NET and "the goddess of justice." CEV

Some of translations indicate that "Justice" or "Vengeance" was the name of a god, rather than simply the statement of the principle of justice. Some commentators do not see this as a valid point. I am not sure that this is what is intended by the text, but it does make a lot of sense.

ON THE WORD JUSTICE

"The Greek word "Dice" rendered "vengeance", is the name of a goddess among the Heathens, said to be the daughter of Jupiter and Themis. Apollodorus de Deorum Origin. 50:1. p. 6. Phurnutus de Natura Deorum, p. 80 She is represented as sitting by her father Jupiter; and when anyone does injury to another, informs him of it. She is painted sorrowful, and with a contracted forehead, a grave countenance, and a rough aspect, to strike terror in unrighteous persons, and give confidence to righteous ones, agreeably to her name, which signifies "justice". This deity the barbarians supposed pursued Paul; and though she let him escape the sea, she will not suffer him to live any longer; for they looked upon the viper's fastening on him, as to be sent by her, so to be immediate death to him." JOHN GILL

These islanders had a sense of morality and accountability that is nearly defunct in our country. Even within the professed church, there is a glaring absence of the perception of strict accountability and Divine retribution. Joseph's brothers thought of this when they confronted Joseph years after they had sold him (Gen 42:21-22). The sailors on the ship in which Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord considered the fierce storm they were facing as having been brought on because of someone who did wrong (Jonah 1:7,14).

AN ASPECT OF THE DIVINE NATURE

Of course, there is more to the matter of retribution than the intuitions and traditions of men. God has revealed that He repays. To Moses He revealed, “Know therefore that the LORD thy God, He is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love Him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations; and repayeth them that hate him to their face, to destroy them: he will not be slack to him that hateth him, he will repay him to his face” (Deut 7:9-10). Isaiah affirmed, “According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands He will repay recompense” (Isa 59:18). Apostolic doctrine affirms, “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Rom 12:19).

This is God’s nature, and, from the very beginning, has been revealed in the Scriptural record in His dealings with men.

- The sin of Adam and Eve (Gen 2:17; 3:16-19).
- The sin of Cain (Gen 4:10-12).
- The world of Noah’s day (Gen 6:3-7).
- The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18:20; 19:13,24-25).
- Israel (Ex 32:34; Psa 95:11).
- Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10).
- Herod (Acts 12:23).

In these few examples, we see that this aspect of the Divine nature was revealed at the beginning of time, before the Law, during the Law, and after the Law – even during the day of salvation.

It appears that a sense of this is built into the Divine imagery that is within mankind. There is a sense of Divine retribution resident in the conscience of men. Admittedly, this can be ignored and even subdued, as is evidenced in our time. That, of course, compounds the problem.

Salvation is a means provided by God to address this aspect of His nature. Sin was atoned for by God visiting the iniquity of humanity in the Person of Christ, upon whom the sins of the world were laid. To ignore that provision will cause one to incur the wrath of God “without mixture” (Rev 14:10).

HE SHOOK OFF THE BEAST

“And he shook off the beast into the fire . . .” Other versions read, “But Paul shook the snake off into the fire,” NIV and “Then [Paul simply] shook off the small creature into the fire.” AMPLIFIED

There is a calmness in Paul’s reaction that is baffling to the flesh. The text conveys no idea of crisis or fear. The Amplified Bible captures this sense by reading “Then [Paul simply] shook off the small creature into the fire.”

However, note where he “shook off” the viper. This was a very deliberate act, for he shook off the snake “into the fire,” where it could be the more easily destroyed. He did not shake it off at random, so it could bite someone else. Paul was, indeed, thinking and acting with a sound and considerate mind.

AND FELT NO HARM

“ . . . and felt no harm.” Other versions read, “suffered no ill effects,” NIV “he got no damage,” BBE “suffered no evil,” YLT “was not hurt,” IE “suffered no evil effects,” AMPLIFIED “without being harmed at all,” GNB and “none the worse for wear.” MESSAGE

Consider what was against Paul not being harmed. He was probably in a physically weakened state after coming safely to shore. The viper was an especially poisonous snake. The snake had fastened itself on Paul's hand, probably emptying the maximum amount of venom into the apostle. Yet, so far as the condition of Paul was concerned, it was as though the event had never even taken place. There were no immediate or after-effects of the bite. There were no symptoms of a snake-bite, unless it be fang marks in his hand.

A SPIRITUAL PARALLEL

It is possible for the people of God to endure very real afflictions without there being any observable evidence of them.

- When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the fiery furnace it is written of them, "upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them" (Dan 3:27).
- When Daniel came out of the lion's den, there was no indication that he had ever been in such an environment. As it is written, "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God" (Dan 6:23).

While we are not guarantee we will always surface from trials without any evidence that we have been in them, such a condition is possible. Jesus promised His disciples, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18). I understand that this is not a guarantee that we will never be harmed, but it is something we may very well experience at the Lord's discretion.

Paul did not always surface from trials with no evidence he had been in them. Speaking of some of the things he had endured for Jesus' sake, he wrote: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (Gal 6:17). These were marks that could be seen. They were in his body. He carried these marks with him wherever he went, and they could be seen by others. However, the snake-bite on Melita was not such an occasion. There was no evidence of harm upon him.

PAUL'S CONDITION IS NOTED BY THE PEOPLE

"6 Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly: but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god."

To this point, the natives had observed the viper clinging to Paul's hand, concluding that he was being punished for being a murderer. However, the event had not yet been concluded. They continued to observe Paul to see the outcome of it all.

HE SHOULD HAVE SWOLLEN

"Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly . . ." Other versions read, "they were expecting that he would swell up or suddenly fall down dead," NKJV "were expecting that he was about to swell up or suddenly fall down dead," NASB and "they had the idea that they would see him becoming ill, or suddenly falling down dead." BBE

Evidently, these people had no doubt witnessed others being bitten by a viper, and knew the sure results that would take place. They made no attempt to treat the bite, for it was evidently known that any bite from such a snake was lethal, and death would follow shortly. Therefore, they just waited for the anticipated results, unable to do anything to correct or neutralize the situation. This was a moment when, so far as they were concerned, human wisdom was totally useless. What had taken

place put them into a situation where intellectuality and every form of the wisdom of men had been excluded – totally shut out.

THEY LOOKED A GREAT WHILE

“ . . . but after they had looked a great

Amidst the sorrow, lament, and tears that are brought on by the death of brethren in Jesus, the candle of hope is still aglow. We do not sorrow as though there is no hope.

while, and saw no harm come to him . . .” Other versions read, “But after they had waited a long time and had seen nothing unusual happen to him,” NASB “but when they had waited a long time and saw no misfortune come to him,” RSV “but when they were long in expectation and beheld nothing amiss come to him,” ASV “but after they had looked a great while, and saw no inconvenience come to him,” GENEVA and “but when they had watched him a long time and saw nothing fatal or harmful come to him.” AMPLIFIED

How long they waited is stated in general terms – “a great while.” It was probably in terms of a few hours. They looked for some of the signs that accompanied a bite from such a viper. The beginning of such signs would assure them that the bite was, in fact, lethal. However, there was not the faintest sign or indication that Paul had even been bitten by a poisonous snake. There was no soreness, no redness, and no dissipation of strength: no vomiting, no pain, no change in the color of Paul’s skin, and no sweat. Yet, there was no doubt that he had been bitten by a viper, for they had seen the snake fastened to his hand, remaining there until Paul had shaken it off in the fire. They were witnessing something that, according to their firm persuasion, only a god could do. These results were not possible within the circumference of human strength and wisdom, and they knew it.

A Spiritual Application

It ought to be noted here that due attention is paid to professing Christians during the times of trial – times when the world knows how it would react. When, in times of crisis and sorrow, the same kind of reactions are seen in Christians as those seen among unbelievers, a certain reproach is brought upon God. That is why Paul spoke of the reaction of believers to the death of their companions in Christ. “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope” (1 Thess 4:13). There is sorrow at the passing of members of the body of Christ, to be sure. However, it is sorrow of another sort – a sorrow that is totally unknown to the world.

Amidst the sorrow, lament, and tears that are brought on by the death of brethren in Jesus, the candle of hope is still aglow. We do not sorrow as though there is no hope. However, those who struggle through the death of their brethren without the evidence of hope do greatly err. They are leaving a witness that mitigates anything they may have to say about Christ, the Bible, or believing God. If Jesus could say to the widow of Nain as she marched in the funeral procession of her own son, “Weep not” (Lk 7:13), what must He say to those who have lost someone close to them who is in Christ Jesus? He said the very same words – “Weep not” – to those we mourned the death of Jairus’ twelve year old daughter (Lk 8:52). And why did He say such words? It is because there was hope! For those to whom He spoke, that hope would be realized immediately. But whether immediate or not, hope can wait expectantly. Hope can ignite rejoicing in what will yet take place (Rom 12:12), even though the individual may weep “for a night” (Psa 30:5).

Death is only one circumstance in which those who are of the world crumble and fall in discouragement. Any trial encountered by a believer that is also common to those who are of this world ought to be accompanied by the distinguishing response of faith and hope. Where these are not obvious a spiritual swelling and redness takes place that contradicts the claim of faith. This is a

sobering reality, and worthy of much consideration. In my judgment, there is far too much worldly response to difficulties that is found among professing believers. It has had a profound effect upon the unbelievers who have heard the profession of faith. This is especially true when professing Christian leaders invent doctrines that justify such responses, affirming that they are common to all believers.

THEY CHANGED THEIR MINDS

“ . . . they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.” Other versions read, “changing their opinion, they said he was a god,” BBE “they reversed their opinion and said he was a god,” CJB “they changed their language, and said, that he was a god,” MRD “they changed their minds and kept saying over and over that he was a god,” AMPLIFIED and “they jumped to the conclusion that he was a god!” MESSAGE

Although this was a wrong conclusion, it was driven by the persuasion that Deity does exist. There was no question in the minds of these natives concerning the reality of God. They certainly had not embraced the philosophy of the fool who affirms, “There is no God” (Psa 14:1; 53:1).

This was the same conclusion reached by those in Lystra when they witnessed Paul heal a man who had been “a cripple from his mother’s womb.” Barnabas and Saul aborted their attempts to offer sacrifices to them with insightful words (Acts 14:8-18). However, there is no record of such effort being expended here. I gather this was because the natives made no effort to make sacrifice to Paul. Also, whereas Paul and Barnabas left Lystra, Paul was going to remain on the island of Melita for three months. That altered the whole situation. He would be given time to confirm the true nature of what had happened, and to clarify the reality of the living God. Much of this would be done by example.

HOSPITALITY AND AN ACT OF MERCY

“ 7 In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously. 8 And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.”

The care of the Lord for His own will now be manifested. He will use a barbarous people to take care of Paul and his companions. These people have already seen that Paul was no ordinary man. Now they will learn that the presence of him and all of the people with him will pose no threat to their island.

The care of the Lord for His own will now be manifested. He will use a barbarous people to take care of Paul and his companions. These people have already seen that Paul was no ordinary man. Now they will learn that the presence of him and all of the people with him will pose no threat to their island. No attempt will be made to take over the environment or abuse the people. In fact, help will be ministered to them in the name of the Lord.

From this text throughout their duration on the island, there will not be a solitary word mentioned about the ship pilot, the owner of the ship, the sailors, Julius the centurion, the soldiers, or the prisoners. The text reads as though the only people present were Paul and those aligned with him.

And why is this so? Because, from heaven’s point of view, they were the principle occupants of the island. The activities of Melita will now center around Paul the apostle.

POSSESSIONS OF THE CHIEF MAN

“In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius;

who received us, and lodged us three days courteously . . .” Other versions read, “In that region there was an estate of the leading citizen of the island, whose name was Publius, who received us and entertained us courteously for three days,” NKJV “Now in the neighborhood of that place were lands belonging to the leading man of the island, named Publius, who welcomed us and entertained us courteously three days,” NASB and “In the vicinity of that place there were estates belonging to the head man of the island, named Publius, who accepted and welcomed and entertained us with hearty hospitality for three days.” AMPLIFIED

Publius is described as “the chief man of the island,” the “leading man,” NASB or the “head man of the island.” AMPLIFIED It is generally understood that this man was the “deputy,” KJV “proconsul,” NASB “ruler,” BBE or “governor” BBE of the island, as Sergius Paulus was of Cyprus (Acts 13:7). This man was evidently a man of unusual means, as the reference to his “possessions,” or “estates,” AMPLIFIED indicates.

For three days this man considerately lodged Paul and company. There is a divergence of opinion here concerning who is intended by the words “us.” Some are of the opinion that it was “the centurion, St. Paul, St. Luke, Aristarchus, and possibly one or two others, but not the whole two hundred and seventy-six.” PULPIT COMMENTARY Others conclude, “this was a very considerable instance of humanity and hospitality, to receive so many strangers at once into his houses, as two hundred three score and sixteen; and give them food and lodging, for three days together, and that in such a kind, friendly, and cheerful manner.” JOHN GILL

It appears to me that there is no point of mentioning the many possessions of Publius if he only entertained four or five people. That does not seem to fit well into the account Luke is giving. Further, if this man did not entertain the entire group, what point is there in mentioning “three days” of courteous treatment. How could it be virtuous for a man of such means to house less than two percent of the people who were stranded on the island he governed? I rather prefer to see this as Publius taking care of all of the people for three days, supposing that during that time they could find suitable lodging for the group for the next three months. The maintenance of prisoners during the winter, it seems to me, would require special provisions that were not readily available in the estate of Publius.

This is a classic example of the principle taught in Hebrews 13:2: “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” While this particular text is not speaking of entertaining angels, Publius did not know the manner of man Paul was, nor was he aware of the true natures of Luke and Aristarchus. Yet, under Divine compulsion, he cared for people he had never met before, and with whom he had no knowledge other than their shipwreck and Paul’s encounter with a viper.

The Virtue of Hospitality

We live in a day when hospitality is not common. Many professed believers have never offered their homes as a haven to anyone except themselves and their family. However, hospitality is a godly virtue.

- Apostolic doctrine admonishes believers to be “given to hospitality” (Rom 12:12).
- A “bishop” or “elder” is to be one who is “given to hospitality” (1 Tim 3:2). He is even to be described as “a lover of hospitality” (Tit 1:8).
- One of the qualifications for a widow to be regularly supported by the church is, “if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints feet” (1 Tim 5:10).
- Solemnly, the saints are admonished, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb 13:2).
- Peter admonishes, “Use hospitality one to another without grudging” (1 Pet 4:9).

In this text, Publius was hospitable, and during the time Paul was with him, his father was graciously healed.

THE FATHER OF PUBLIUS

“And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux . . .” Other versions read, “And it happened that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and dysentery,” NKJV “And it came about that the father of Publius was lying in bed afflicted with recurrent fever and dysentery,” NASB “And the father of Publius was ill, with a disease of the stomach,” BBE and “And it happened that the father of Publius was sick in bed with recurring attacks of fever and dysentery.” AMPLIFIED

The words “bloody flux” are translated from the Greek word **dusenteri,wl** , which is transliterated “dusentario.” or “dysentery.” The lexical meaning of this word is, “as an infectious intestinal disease dysentery,” FRIBERG and “as an infectious intestinal disease dysentery,” LOUW-NIDA The English word “dysentery” is defined as “a disease characterized by severe diarrhea with passage of mucus and blood and usually caused by infection.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER

The language of the text indicates this was an ongoing, or reoccurring, disease, NASB/AMPLIFIED resulting in the man being confined to a bed.

Note the confidence of the apostle. He “went to see” the man, entering into the place where he laid sick and dissipated. He apparently did not wonder whether or not he should do this, but appeared constrained to do so.

PAUL HEALED HIM

“ . . . to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.” Other versions read, “Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, placed his hands on him and healed him,” NIV “Paul visited him and cured him by praying and putting his hands on him,” NRSV and “Paul went to see him, and after praying and laying his hands on him, he healed him.” AMPLIFIED

Paul Entered In

Note the confidence of the apostle. He “went to see” the man, entering into the place where he laid sick and dissipated. He apparently did not wonder whether or not he should do this, but appeared constrained to do so. Even though he had escaped from a storm over which he had no control, yet he did not hesitate to enter into this open door.

During His earthly ministry, when Jesus had sent out the twelve, He spoke of a person and their house being worthy. “And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, inquire who in it is worthy ; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy , let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you” (Matt 10:11-13). Publius and the house in which he dwelt were certainly worthy. He had received Paul and company courteously, supplying their needs and a place to stay for three days. Now, Paul will bring a blessing to his house.

Paul Prayed

The absolute dependence of those early saints upon the Lord is revealed in the times and nature of their prayers.

- When choosing a replacement for Judas (Acts 1:24).
- When threatened by the Jewish leaders (Acts 4:31).

- When setting apart those who had charge of the daily distribution to the believing widows (Acts 6:6).
- When Peter and John prayed that the Samaritans would receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:15).
- When Peter raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:40).
- When the church in Antioch sent forth Barnabas and Saul, after being instructed by the Spirit to do so (Acts 13:3).
- When Paul and Barnabas ordained elders in every church (Acts 14:23).
- When Paul and Silas were in prison (Acts 16:25).
- When Paul left the elders from Ephesus (Acts 20:36).
- When Paul left the brethren and families in Tyre (Acts 21:5).

Now, in a display of dependence upon the Lord, Paul prays concerning the father of Publius.

Paul Laid His Hands on the Man

The laying of hands upon the sick was practiced by the Lord Jesus Himself (Mk 6:5; 7:32-34; Lk 4:40; 5:15). When He sent out His disciples to preach the Gospel to every creature, He said certain signs would follow those who believe. One of them was, “they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover” (Mk 16:18). There was even an occasion when “God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them” (Acts 19:11-12).

It ought to be obvious that there is a not a certain procedure that is common in all healing. Some people were apparently never healed of their infirmities – like Paul (2 Cor 11:30; 12:5) and Timothy (1 Tim 5:23).

There is no need to attempt to establish that the laying on of hands was intended to be a consistent action that accompanied the healing of the sick. James spoke of praying over, and anointing the sick with oil (James 5:14). At the direction of the Lord, the prophet Isaiah used “a lump of figs” to heal a dangerous boil (2 Kgs 20:7; Isa 38:21). Jesus healed the servant of a certain centurion by simply speaking a word (Matt 8:13). One woman was healed by touching His clothing (Mk 5:27-29). Other sick people sought to touch Jesus Himself, and when they did, virtue went out from Him, and they were healed (Lk 6:17-19). Some lepers were healed by Jesus as they went to show themselves to the priest (Lk 17:14-15). Paul healed an impotent man who was cripple from his mother’s womb by simply telling him to stand up (Acts 14:9-10). In this case, Paul prayed, laid his hands on the man, and healed him.

It ought to be obvious that there is a not a certain procedure that is common in all healing. Some people were apparently never healed of their infirmities – like Paul (2 Cor 11:30; 12:5) and Timothy (1 Tim 5:23).

It is enough to say that healing, like all other spiritual gifts, is traced back to the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:4). Such gifts are administrated by the Lord (1 Cor 12:5). It is God who works them wherever they are found (1 Cor 12:5). There is a diversity of operations found in these gifts, but the same God works in them all (1 Cor 12:6). The purpose of all of these gifts is the “profit” of all of the members of the body (1 Cor 12:7). “Gifts of healing” is one of these gifts, and it is “by the same Spirit” (1 Cor 12:9).

Questions about whether of not people can be healed are all foolish. Healing has always been at the discretion of the Lord, and there were even some places where none, or only a very limited number, of this type of miracle could be done (Mk 6:5).

Paul maintained his life so that should the Lord have a work of this kind to do, he was available and suitable to be the vessel through which it was accomplished. That, in my judgment, is to be the stance of the believer – to be “prepared unto every good work.” or “prepared to do any good work” NIV (2 Tim 2:21).

When you are addressing the matter of Divine expression, it is not wise to think of it in terms of a limited period of time, or only in association with certain regions. Those of any age do well to remember “the mighty acts of God” (Psa 106:2; 145:4,12; 150:2). It is a grievous transgression to attempt to deprive the people of God of the persuasion that God can and does work in a manner that is transcendent to nature. God has urged His people to let their “requests be made known unto God” (Phil 4:6). If that requests is for the miraculous intervention of God in the life and affairs of men, it is not to be subdued. If it was not proper to ask for such things, God certainly would not guarantee that His peace would keep their hearts and minds through Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). It is still true, “all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mk 9:23), and “The things which are impossible with men are possible with God” (Luke 18:27).

Paul Healed the Man

The text is clear in what it states. Paul “healed him.” The one who prayed “healed him.” The one who laid his hands on Publius’ father “healed him.” Like Peter, Paul could say “why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?” (Acts 3:12). We understand that it was the exalted Christ who did this – but He did it through His servant Paul. That is the point Luke is making.

When Jesus, prior to dying and being raised from the dead, send out the twelve, He said to them, “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give” (Mat 10:8). It is understood that “He gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of disease” (Matt 10:1). Not limiting such power to the twelve, the Lord also sent out “other seventy also” – that is, in addition to the twelve, and at another time. When these men returned, they confessed, “even the demons are subject to us in Your name.” Jesus explained why this was the case. “Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you” (Luke 10:17-19).

Later, after Jesus had ascended into glory, “Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people” (Acts 6:8). I realize that some declare this was because the apostles laid hands on him, transferring, as it were, the power to do such things. However, the Word of God does not say this. It rather says they were brought to the apostles to be “appointed” over the work of administration, at which time they “prayed” and “laid their hands on them” (Acts 6:6). However, Stephen was full of the Holy Spirit before the apostles laid hands on him (Acts 6:5).

Later, Philip did “miracles” in the city of Samaria. It is written of that occasion, “And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city” (Acts 8:6-8).

The gifts God put in the church includes “the working of miracles” and “gifts of healing.” These are mentioned in the same breath with “the word of wisdom,” “the word of knowledge,” “faith,” “prophecy,” “the discerning of spirits,” “teachers,” and “governments” (1 Cor 12:10,28-29). The point here is that it is exceedingly difficult to sweep aside “spiritual gifts” as though they were limited to a certain period of time. This is particularly true in view of the mentioning of them in other apostolic writings. Ephesians 4:11 mentions “gifts,” including “evangelists, pastors and teacher.” The twelfth chapter of Romans also mentioned gifts, including “ministering,” or serving, NIV exhorting,”

“giving,” “ruling,” and “showing mercy” (Rom 12:6-8). Peter also refers to the “gifts,” including “speaking,” and “ministering” or serving (1 Pet 4:10-11). With the exception of the apostles, I do not believe contends for the cessation of these.

In all of these gifts, the point is not their miraculous nature, but the contribution they make to the people of God. To speak of them as nothing more than a passing fad is to open the door for unbelief, and make life even more difficult for the saints than it already is. If someone responds that they will pass away, we acknowledge this to be true. But faith and hope will also pass away, giving way to the obtaining of the things for which we both long and hope. These things are in the hands of the Lord, and we must view them in that way.

GRACIOUS BENEFITS FOR ALL THE PEOPLE

“ 9 So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.”

The healing of the father of Publius was a kind of spiritual catalyst that quickly spread throughout the island.

WHEN THIS WAS DONE

“So when this was done . . .” Other versions read, “after this had happened,” NASB “when this had taken place,” RSV “after this,” CSB “after this event,” MRD “this, therefore, being done,” YLT “after this occurred,” IE “because this cure was performed,” WILLIAMS and “This, then, having taken place.” ABP

A lot of, for want of a better expression, contemporary Christianity is really nothing more than talk. Men banter back and forth about ideas, interpretations, and philosophies, without much of the truth of God being lived out. In distinction to this circumstance, our text speaks of something that was “done” – something that was externalized, and made visible to the sons of men.

Jesus spoke to His disciples about “good works” that could be seen (Matt 5:16). It is also interesting to note that the expression “good works” is never used in a derogatory or unprofitable manner (Matt 5:16; 26:10; Mk 14:6; John 10:32,33; Acts 9:36; Rom 13:3; 2 Cor 9:8; Eph 2:10; Phil 1:6; Col 1:10; 1 Tim 2:10; 3:1; 5:10; 6:18; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Tit 1:16; 2:7,14; 3:1,8,14; Heb 10:24; 13:21; 1 Pet 2:12). In the KJV, NKJV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, and RSV there is only one use of the expression “good work” from Genesis through Malachi. It is found in Nehemiah 2:18, where Nehemiah affirmed the Lord had strengthened the hand of the people to do a “good work.”

The era of the New Covenant is one of godly doing! With hearts made new, the laws of God written upon the heart, and the Holy Spirit living within, men have been equipped to do righteousness, not simply talk about it. Furthermore, when good is done, and righteousness expressed, it provides an environment in which the Lord can work for His own glory.

OTHERS ALSO

When diseased people from all over this island came to Paul and were healed, the word must have quickly spread. Also, there was at least one other ship docked on the island at this time, and may very well have been others. That made the potential for making this work done very large.

“ . . . others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed.” Other versions read, “the rest of those on the island who had diseases also came and were healed,” NKJV “the rest of the people on the island who had diseases were coming to him and getting cured,” NASB “other also in the Isle, which had diseases, came to him, and were healed,” GENEVA “other sick people on the

island went to Paul and were made well,” GWN “the other people on the island who had diseases also kept coming and were cured,” AMPLIFIED “began to come to Paul. Paul healed them, too,” IE “the other sick people on the island came, and continued to be restored to health,” MONTGOMERY and “having sicknesses in the land came forward, and were cured.” ABP

The word of the healing of Publius’ father quickly spread, and those on the island who had diseases came, and all of them were healed. This is obviously something to which they were not accustomed, for false gods cannot do such things. The clear insinuation of the verse is that everyone that came was healed – all who extended themselves to get to Paul were blessed with being made well. Note that the people came to Paul, as opposed to others bringing them.

Further, the language indicates continuity – they kept on coming, probably in droves from various parts of the island. This island is seventeen miles in length, and nine to ten miles in breadth. McCLINTOK & STRONG’S That makes it an area of about 170 square miles. It was located about sixty miles from Sicily, and was a kind of crossroads for those traveling by sea. What was done in this island could easily be made known over an extensive territory, ranging from Asia to Africa, and Italy. When diseased people from all over this island came to Paul and were healed, the word must have quickly spread. Also, there was at least one other ship docked on the island at this time, and may very well have been others. That made the potential for making this work done very large.

Throughout Scriptural history, there have been a number of mass healings. During the plague of the serpents, with great numbers of people being bitten, “everyone that was bitten” was promised they would live if they looked upon a brazen serpent that Moses was commanded to make. It came to pass that “if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived” (Num 21:9). We have no idea how many people were healed/ However, in light of the fact that “much people of Israel died” before the Moses made the serpent (Num 21:6), it must have been a large number. This was by no means a common occurrence.

All of this is a picture of an even greater healing of the soul (Psa 41:4). Bodily healings are not to compared with occasions when multitudes of people believed on Jesus and were delivered from the guilt and power of sin.

However, commensurate with the ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, such things happened with alarming frequency.

- “And His fame went throughout all Syria: and they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy; and He healed them ” (Matt 4:24).
- “When the even was come, they brought unto Him many that were possessed with devils: and He cast out the spirits with His word, and healed all that were sick ” (Matt 8:16).
- “But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all ” (Matt 12:15).
- “Now when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them ” (Luke 4:40).
- “And the whole multitude sought to touch Him: for there went virtue out of Him, and healed them all ” (Luke 6:19).
- “And the people, when they knew it, followed Him: and He received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing ” (Luke 9:11).
- “Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds

and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them ” (Acts 5:15).

- “There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one ” (Acts 5:16).

- “And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them ” (Acts 19:11-12).

MASS CONVERSIONS

All of this is a picture of an even greater healing of the soul (Psa 41:4). Bodily healings are not to compared with occasions when multitudes of people believed on Jesus and were delivered from the guilt and power of sin.

- “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls ” (Acts 2:41).

- “Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand ” (Acts 4:4).

- “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (Acts 5:14).

- “And the word of God increased ; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith” (Acts 6:7).

- “Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake , hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city ” (Acts 8:5-8).

- “Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied ” (Acts 9:31).

- “And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord” (Acts 9:35).

- “And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed , and turned unto the Lord” (Acts 11:21).

- “But the word of God grew and multiplied ” (Acts 12:24).

- “And it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed ” (Acts 14:1).

- “And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few ” (Acts 17:4).

That is the kind of power that is resident in the Gospel! When it is preached in its purity, by those in whom the purpose of God is being worked out, there is no known limit of its influence. Former occultists have been known to at once abandon their views and burn their books of curious arts (Acts 19:19). If a whole city of considerable size could repent when hearing a message of doom (Jonah 3:5-10; Matt 12:41), what can take place when glad tidings of good things are insightfully declared?

In our time much of this power has been forfeited because men insist on attempting to mingle their

thoughts with those of the Lord, then declaring their own conclusions as though they were true. Such an admixture makes the word of God “of none effect” (Matt 15:6; Mk 7:13), rendering it powerless in the matter of salvation.

The salvational working of the Lord will only be found where the truth of the Gospel is being declared. The marvelous benefits of salvation cannot be realized through the proclamation of a lie. That is why the Scriptures refer to “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal 2:5,14; Col 1:5). Furthermore, the effective witness of the truth – referred to as shining as lights (Matt 5:14; Phil 2:15), being the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13), and being the epistles of Christ (2 Cor 3:2-3) – is only possible when the truth of the Gospel is lived out. That involves both the death and life of Christ being made known in our bodies (2 Cor 4:10-11).

This was effectively done through Paul, as the Divine nature was made known on Melita through what he did. Here is an example of a city set on a hill.

HONORED BY THE PEOPLE

“ 10 Who also honored us with many honors; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.”

When one considers this whole event without the Lord in mind, the possibilities for anything good taking place is almost nil.

- All of the people on board the had survived a fierce storm on the sea.
- No contention broke out among the passengers, even though there came a time when supplies were sparse, and the possibility of escaping by a small ship was set before them.
- Anarchy did not break out because they found themselves in a physically impossible situation because sound advise had not been honored.
- Everyone survived the wreck of their vessel.
- Everyone made it safely to shore.
- Barbarous people confronted them, and even though they did not know who they were, they treated them considerately.
- No one tried to exploit the stranded people.
- Only one person was bitten by a viper, and he survived without any harm.
- The islanders, and especially the chief of the island, did not leave them to find shelter for themselves.
- No attempt was made to have the stranded group work out the cost of their food and supplies. It was all given to them.

The idea is that the islanders placed a high value upon Paul and his fellows, and thus provided them with many things that were also assessed as having value.

The epitaph over the whole affair is stated in the words of Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” This was the particular lot of Paul, Luke, and Aristarchus. The rest also partook of the benefits because they were with the right person – Paul.

It is not without cause that it is written, “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb 13:6; Psa 56:4). Even as the record of the wayward Israelites is written “for our admonition” (1 Cor 10:11), to learn what to avoid, so this record is written

to assure us of the care of the Lord for His own (1 Pet 5:7).

HONORED WITH MANY HONORS

“Who also honored us with many honors . . .” Other versions read, “honored us in many ways,” NKJV “honored us with many marks of respect,” NASB “bestowed many honors on us,” NRSV “presented many gifts to us,” RSV “gave us great honor,” BBE “heaped honors on us,” CJB “showed respect for us in many ways,” GWN “showered us with gifts,” LIVING “loaded us with honors,” WEYMOUTH “They treated us royally,” MESSAGE and “showed us every respect and presented many gifts to us, honoring us with many honors.” AMPLIFIED

The word “honored” has the following lexical meaning: “honor which belongs or is shown to one: the honor of one who outranks others, pre-eminence . . . preciousness,” THAYER and “honor, reverence, respect; passive recognition . . . esteem.” FRIBERG

The word “honors” is translated from a word that means, “assigning value to something or to a person considered as property.” FRIBERG

The idea is that the islanders placed a high value upon Paul and his fellows, and thus provided them with many things that were also assessed as having value.

In his letter to Timothy, Paul spoke of bestowing “double honor” on those elders who “labored in the word and in the doctrine” (1 Tim 5:17). The Amplified Bible reads, “Let the elders who perform the duties of their office well be considered doubly worthy of honor [and of adequate financial support], especially those who labor faithfully in preaching and teaching.” Paul also wrote to the Thessalonians, “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thess 5:12-13). In other words, those faithful leaders who excel in preaching and teaching are not only to be respected, but provided with honors that are valuable in the sight of the giver as well as the receiver.

Our text provides us with an excellent example of this actually being done by the beneficiaries of Paul’s ministry. The irony of it is that these people did not know the Lord, while some who did know Him failed to so honor Paul. As it is written, “Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only” (Phil 4:15). By comparison, here is what he wrote to the Corinthians concerning his presence with them. “I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man: for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied: and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself” (2 Cor 11:8-9).

While Paul did not insist in receiving such support, choosing rather to preach among them “without charge,” the miserable response that some churches yielded toward Paul places them in a rank that is lower than the response of the heathen from Melita.

While Paul did not insist in receiving such support, choosing rather to preach among them “without charge,” the miserable response that some churches yielded toward Paul places them in a rank that is lower than the response of the heathen from Melita.

AND WHEN WE DEPARTED

“ . . . and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.” Other versions read, “they supplied us with all we needed,” NASB “they put on board all the provisions we needed,” NRSV “they made presents to us of what should minister to our wants,” DARBY “supplied us with

everything we would need for the trip,” NLT and “they provided and put on [board our ship] everything we needed.” LIVING

There are at least two possibilities here.

- They provided what was required to sustain the group during the three months of winter.
- They provided what was required to complete the trip to Rome.

In my judgment both the needs for the three-month stay, and what was required to complete the trip to Rome are included. The fact that Luke adds, “when we departed,” confirms that the latter needs were met. Although he makes no mention of their needs being met during the winter months, it seems to me that this is also included in the manner in which the natives honored them.

NECESSARY USES

The Scriptures speak of daily needs as “necessary uses,” which refers to food, shelter, and clothing.

The Lord Jesus Speaks

Jesus told His disciples not to fret about these needs: “Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (Matt 6:25). And again, “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?” (Matt 6:31). And again, “And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment” (Luke 12:22-23).

Jesus spoke against the backdrop of certain commitments God made to Israel. “And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year? behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: then I will command My blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years” (Lev 25:21). He also confirmed this in the sending of daily manna for the people, and commanding water to flow from the flinty rock (Deut 8:3,16; Psa 114:8).

It was not that Israel did nothing, or was not industrious during their journey through their wilderness. They still had to care for their children and their livestock. They had take down the whole camp every time the cloud moved, and set it up when the cloud stopped. However, God taught them that what they gained really came from Him, not from their labors.

Sometimes God would let the Israelites work hard, then put their money into a bag with holes (Hag 1:6). Other times, after toiling in planting and cultivating their crops, their enemies either destroyed them, or took the harvest for themselves (Lev 26:16; Mal 3:11). Other times, when the Lord was displeased with Israel, their seed rotted in the ground, never producing fruit (Joel 1:17). There were even times when insects were sent to destroy their crops (Amos 4:9).

Apostolic Doctrine

The saints are reminded, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have : for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb 13:5).

Paul wrote to Timothy, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content” (1 Tim 6:6-8).

As a personal testimony to the glorious effect of contentment, Paul wrote, “Not that I speak in

respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil 4:11-13). Precious few people know “how to abound,” for an excessive amount of money and resources has destroyed many a soul. Others do not know how to “be abased,” when they do not appear to have enough, and resources are sparse.

The point is that provisions for the sustenance of life are not to be taken for granted, as though they were strictly owing to man’s productivity. In the text before us, two hundred and seventy-six people needed to be sustained for three months on the island of Melita, and for the duration of the trip to Rome. God brought them to a distant island, where He commanded the blessing upon them through a barbarous people.

Necessary Uses

Believers are reminded to be as industrious as is possible, without mitigating their fellowship with Christ. Paul wrote to Titus about this matter. “Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives” NIV (Titus 3:14).

Some people labor for luxuries, and in the process starve their souls. They plan for a lucrative career without giving due regard to their spiritual needs. I am careful to say that having more than enough is not of itself wrong. Nevertheless, those who are in such a case are exhorted to use their resources in a godly manner. “Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed” NASB (1 Tim 6:17-19).

Every believer is to “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). Those, however, who have an abundance, must extend themselves to do so, overcoming covetousness, and using their resources to “do good,” being “generous to share.” This is not a common word in our time.

We have a noble example of this kind of sharing in our text, both by the governor of the island, and its citizens. In this case, the sharing was done without an exhortation to do so.

AFTER THREE MONTHS THEY DEPARTED

” 11 And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.”

AFTER THREE MONTHS

“And after three months . . .” There are at least five other records of a three month period in Scripture.

- The ark of the covenant was kept in the house of Obededom for three months, during which the Lord blessed his house (2 Sam 6:11; 1 Chron 13:14).
- Mary, the mother of Jesus, spent three months with Elizabeth, until the time of the birth of John the Baptist (Lk 1:56).
- After Moses was born, he remained in his father’s house for three months (Ex 2:2; Acts 7:20; Heb 11:23).
- Paul reasoned in the synagogue of Ephesus for three months, then, because of the

hardness of the Jews taking the disciples and removing to the school of Tyrannus (Acts 19:8-9).

- Paul spent three months in Greece after going over the region of Macedonia (Acts 20:3).

The three months of our text was the time of winter, when the ships did not go out to sea (Acts 27:12).

We are given no information of the

Melita, then, was a kind of stopover for ships sailing to Italy. How many ships were there is not known. It ought to be noted that Julius was alert to the circumstances of the island, always seeking to carry out his responsibilities in a timely manner.

activities taking place during This period of time. Some kind of communication with the people continued, for they loaded necessary supplies for the travelers in the ship of departure. Perhaps the sick and diseased were continually coming to Paul from various parts of the island. However, I find it difficult to believe that Paul was idle during this period of time. There is no record of him preaching on the island, although I do not find it difficult to think of him doing so.

We learn from this that there are details that do not need to be known. O, that there was more wisdom among professing Christians on the matter of knowing what to report and what not to report.

WE DEPARTED IN A SHIP OF ALEXANDRIA

“ . . . we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle . . .” Other versions read, “an Alexandrian ship . . . which had wintered at the island,” NKJV and “a ship which had wintered in the island, an Alexandrian ship.” AMPLIFIED

Melita, then, was a kind of stopover for ships sailing to Italy. How many ships were there is not known. It ought to be noted that Julius was alert to the circumstances of the island, always seeking to carry out his responsibilities in a timely manner . Sometime during the three months they were on the island, Julius had learned of this ship, and made arrangements to transport the passengers for which he was responsible to Italy.

This must have been a sizeable ship to have taken on board two hundred and seventy-six additional passengers, in addition to the supplies that were loaded by the natives of the island.

WHOSE SIGN WAS CASTOR AND POLLUX

“ . . . whose sign was Castor and Pollux.” Other versions read, “Whose figurehead was The Twin Brothers,” NKJV “with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux,” NIV “under the sign of the Dioscuri,” BBE “called "Twin Gods," CJB “with the Dioscuri for its ensign,” DARBY “whose badge was Castor and Pollux,” GENEVA “had the gods Castor and Pollux carved on its front,” GWN “It was three months after the shipwreck before we set sail again, and this time it was in The Twin Brothers of Alexandria,” LIVING “an Alexandrian vessel, called the "Twin Brothers,” WEYMOUTH “an Alexandrian ship named The Twin Brothers,” WILLIAMS “an Alexandrian marked by the ensign Dioscuri,” ABP “The ship was from Alexandria in Egypt and was known as "The Twin Gods,” CEV and “The ship had a carved Gemini for its figurehead: "the Heavenly Twins.” MESSAGE

I have taken the time to list the various translations of this verse in order to confirm the liberty translators have taken with the text. The plethora of Bible versions reflects the state of the modern church – divided, and not seeing the Scriptures alike. Of old time, it was easier for men to at least agree on what the Scriptures said. These days it is well nigh impossible for such agreement to be had. At least ancient scribes took care to relate what was said in the text, preserving the various expressions

with which believers had become accustomed. But this is not at all philosophy of modern translators. Many of them have actually reshaped the text, even leaving out certain texts in the name of scholarship.

THE SHIP'S SIGN

Whose sign was The Twin Brothers (**Di>oskouroi** , Latin the constellation *Gemini*) . The twin sons of Jupiter and Leda, Castor and Pollux, brothers of Helena (“fratres Helenis, lucida sidera,” Horace, ‘Od.,’ 1:3, 2), were called by the Greeks *Dioscuri*, the sons of Jove. It was their special office to assist sailors in danger of shipwreck. Hence Horace, in the ode just quoted, prays that Castor and Pollux, in conjunction with other deities, would carry the ship in which Virgil sailed safe to Attica. And in Ode 12:27, etc., he describes the subsidence of the storm, and the calming of the waves, at the appearance of the twin stars, of Leda’s sons. It was, therefore, very natural to have the Dioscuri for the **para>shmon** , the sign of the ship. Every ancient ship had a **para>shmon** , “a painted or carved representation of the *sign* which furnished its name on the prow, and at the stern a similar one of their tutelary deity.”

This is not the place to engage in an apologetic for the nature of Scripture translation. However, suffice it to say, men have not been freed to manipulate the text of Scripture, or to in any way change what men have been accustomed to reading. It is the business of preachers and teachers to expound the Word, elaborating on the proper meaning of the text, integrating it with the rest of Scripture, and showing how it reveals the nature and purpose of God, and how it bears upon the testimony of Jesus. All of this requires a knowledge of the text itself that is common among believers.

The Philosophy of Scripture Translation

This reflects my own understanding of this matter. Yet, I feel compelled to share it, for I think there is far too much confusion on this issue. No translation of Scripture is to be an interpretation of the Scriptures themselves. The proper translation of Scripture is to project what is said, not what is intended by what is said. It is precisely at this point that many versions of the Bible fall to the ground. They attempt to project the meaning of the text rather than the affirmation of the text – and there is great difference between the two.

A proper translation of the Bible can only be done by those who have a wide scope of knowledge. Among the things that must be known are:

- The language of the original text.
- The best and most precise form of the language into which it is translated.
- A working knowledge of the Scriptures themselves.
- An understanding of God and His eternal purpose.
- The Divine intention of the Scriptures.

Where there are alternative meanings to words, the definition that best suites the rest of Scripture, the nature of God, and the revealed intention of Scripture must be chosen. In my judgment there was a greater awareness of matters of this sort in earlier years. Today there is a sort of pseudo-scholarship that appears to have dictated the compilation of many Bible versions. I do not believe such translations have been driven by either the awareness of God, and insight into the divinely appointed needs of the people of God.

The “sign,” or figurehead, that was on this ship was an image of Castor and Pollux, the mythical twin gods who were purported to be twin sons of Jupiter ad Leda. According to the times, these were special gods who were devoted to protecting sailors who were in danger of shipwreck. In

some way, carvings of metallic castings had been made of these figures, and were on the forepart of the ship.

SOMETHING TO BE SEEN

Here was a ship that carried an idol as its ensign. How is it that Paul did not raise an objection to this circumstance? Elsewhere Paul addressed the matter of purchasing something that had been devoted to an idol. There was, for example, meat sold in the market that had actually been offered to idols. What should the believer do? Paul wrote, "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake" NKJV (1 Cor 10:25). It is understood that if the person knew it was offered to idols, he would not eat it – not because it was strictly unlawful, but because it was not expedient (1 Cor 10:23). If the meat was of an excellent quality, and the price was right, yet it was known that it was offered to idols, Paul adds, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth" (1 Cor 10:24). The believer is to consider how this will look to a weaker brother who still does not know there is only one God (1 Cor 8:1-7). This, of course, calls for spiritual sensitivity and alertness.

Paul then paints another scenario. In this one, a brother is invited to a feast where it is possible meat offered to idols would be served. Here is his counsel. "If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake that showed it, and for conscience sake: for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof: conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience?" (1 Cor 10:29).

In this text, Paul has already made known whom he serves – and it is not these idols (Acts 27:23). None of those traveling with him will conclude that he condones the idols of Castor and Pollux.

I have briefly dealt with this matter because there are believers who avoid conducting business where unacceptable things are done. While no person can make a law for another in such matters, every person in Christ is responsible for conducting their lives so people will not be led to wrong conclusions about them. This is part of working out your own salvation with fear and trembling. You must be guided by your own conscience on the matter, and a spiritual alertness concerning how your actions will be viewed by others. This requires both faith and love.

CONCLUSION

In fifty-five verses (Acts 27:1-44; Acts 28:1-11), about four months have been summarized ["The next day" (27:3); "The next day" (27:18); "Many days" (27:7); "many days" (27:20); "a day" (27:29); "fourteen days" (27:33); "three days" (28:7); "three months" (28:11)]. It should be noted that the Divine manner is to touch only briefly on incidentals, but elaborate upon this directly bearing upon His purpose. It is good for the people of God to learn to assess their lives in such a manner. By so doing, the working of the Lord becomes more evident. Those who major on incidentals, and allow their attention to be drawn to things that do not directly bear upon their eternal destiny, will find it most difficult to detect the hand of the Lord in their lives.

One of the great jeopardies of our time is the penchant for trivia, incidentals, and things that have little to do with seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt 6:33). Things that, technically speaking, are not wrong can rob the soul of fundamental realities – like eternal life, fellowship with Christ, and growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. A person can become absorbed with making a living, getting an education, and obtaining conveniences. In the process, spiritual life bleeds away, affection for the things of God cools, and soon the individual hardly thinks of the Lord at all. It takes some kind of crisis to awaken the slumbering soul, and even then, the person may awaken with an improper attitude, perspective, and intention.

In this matter, spiritual focus is greatly to be sought and maintained. Like the record of Paul's journey to Rome, the things that pertain to being brought to glory must become our accent.

There really is no regimen or human discipline that can successfully maintain such a focus. Rather, it is living by faith, walking in the Spirit, and pressing toward the mark that keeps the soul awake. Continual exposure to the word of God and the fellowship of God's people are indispensable to the maintenance of a proper focus – one that will sustain the soul, keep the heart tender, and enable good spiritual sight and hearing.

When we stand before the judgment seat of Christ, I do not doubt that our lives will be reviewed in the manner revealed in the Scriptural records of godly men and women. Key things will be shown that explain why men were steadfast, or why they fell by the wayside. Those who fell from grace (Gal 5:4) did so because they were diverted by lesser things.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #106

PAUL ARRIVES IN ROME

“ 28:12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. 13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: 14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome. 15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage. 16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him. 17 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of. 20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain. 21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee. 22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.” (Acts 28:12-22)

INTRODUCTION

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

On the way to Rome there were refreshing visits with brethren in Puteopli, Appii Forum, and The Three Taverns. The closeness of the saints of God during that time was very evident, and there was a certain reliance upon them for encouragement and refreshment. Believers were not only eager to be with those through whom grace was ministered, but were willing to inconvenience themselves for that benefit. Having arrived in Rome, special provisions were made for Paul to dwell alone – an extraordinary benefit for a prisoner. This was not like solitary confinement, but was a provision that allowed him to have visitors. Paul first called the chief of the Jews together to explain the reason for his presence. He sought to dispel any false rumors about his circumstance, acquainting the Jews with the truth of the matter. The Jews made clear that they had not received any bad reports about him, but were desirous to know more. They particularly wanted to know more about “this sect,” elsewhere called “the way.” Apparently, among the Jews, there was not much familiarity in

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- **WE FOUND BRETHREN (28:13-14)**
- **THEY CAME TO MEET US (28:15)**
- **PAUL PERMITTED TO DWELL BY HIMSELF (28:16)**
- **PAUL CALLED THE CHIEF OF THE JEWS TOGETHER (28:17-19)**
- **FOR THE HOPE OF ISRAEL I AM BOUND (28:20)**
- **THEY WANTED TO HEAR (28:21-22)**
- **CONCLUSION**

Rome with the nature of those who were ardent followers of Jesus. Christ.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE SAINTS

Here is a Kingdom benefit that has not been properly presented or lived out in our times. Much of what is being offered to professed believers conveniently ignores the people themselves, focusing on some popular speaker, or some form of religious entertainment. In the Christian media, the thrust is not the people being addressed, but to the various ministries that are doing the presentation. As a result, the modern church is much like a Ezekiel’s valley of dry bones, which were scattered and very dry.

However, this is not at all what salvation is calculated to do. One of the primary things we learn about the real “church” is that it is “the body of Christ.” That is, it is the means through which Christ expresses Himself. There the church, or His body, is referred to as “the fulness of Him which filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23).

- Our personal identity is tied to the church – Christ’s body. “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Cor 12:27). It is true that each member is “joined unto the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), and is personally responsible for “holding the Head” (Col 2:19). The effectiveness of that personal union, however, is wrought out within the body of Christ. This is so because all the fulness of Christ is not given to a single member. Each member of the body has a “measure” of faith that is designed to benefit the other members (Rom 12:3).

- In the capacity of Head over all things, Christ has been given to the church – His body. “And hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in al” (Eph 1:22-23). Jesus has not been made the Head over all things for the individual. The target of His ministry is

the whole body – not necessarily simultaneously, but within the grand scope of fulfilling God’s eternal purpose.

- The various teaching ministries Jesus has given, have been given to the church – Christ’s body. “And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12). Spiritual growth and maturity are not intended to be realized independently of Christ’s body, the church. That is why believers are “added to the church” (Acts 2:47), and “set . . . in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18).

- Nourishment is ministered to the church – Christ’s body. “For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones” (Eph 5:30). There is a personal aspect to salvation. As Paul well stated, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20). This, however, is from the viewpoint of output, not input. While Jesus does minister to the individual, it is the church as a whole that is His “body,” is presently betrothed to Him (2 Cor 11:2), and is destined to be His “wife” (Rev 19:7).

Because of the deficiency of, and corruption within, the modern church, an inappropriate attitude toward the collective people of God is being developed. More and more, because it is so difficult to find a gathering of devoted disciples of Jesus, serious people are withdrawing from the assembly of the godly. However, as will be demonstrated in our text, those in Christ Jesus must seek out kindred spirits in order that proper spiritual growth may be realized.

The number of disciples that come together is not the most important factor. Jesus pledged His presence wherever “two or three are gathered together in My name” (Matt 18:20).

There is no substitute for the assembly of the saints of God. This is indicated in the 133rd Psalm, which speaks of God commanding a blessing upon His people. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; as the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore. (Psa 133:1-3).

Matters that needed to be resolved before the disciples were “endued with power” were addressed when continuing in “one accord,” the number of them being “about an hundred and twenty” (Acts 1:14). When the day of Pentecost arrived, and the prophecy of Joel was fulfilled, the disciples were “all with one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). After the three thousand were baptized “all that believed were together” (Acts 2:44). When the disciples were empowered to preach the Word in the face of persecution, “they were assembled together” (Acts 4:31).

When Paul met with the brethren in Troaz, “they were gathered together” (Acts 20:8). Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome about being “comforted together with you by the mutual faith of both you and me” (Rom 1:12). This confirms there is participation in the assembly, as opposed to there being a kind of one-man show for the people. Paul twice spoke to the Corinthians about being “gathered together” “into one place” (1 Cor 11:20; 14:23). He also wrote to them of a kind of spiritual productivity that should take place when they came together: “How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26). Everything that was spoken was to be understandable, even if it required an interpreter (1 Cor 14:27-28). All of this was known very well by Paul, and accounts for his constant recourse to the brethren. There is a certain consistency in this manner of life throughout the revealed history of Paul.

LANDING IN SYRACUSE

“ 28:12 And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.” Other versions read, “We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days,” NIV and “We landed at Syracuse and remained there three days.” AMPLIFIED

Having resumed their journey after the passing of winter, they sailed about one hundred miles to the capital city of Sicily, Syracuse.

LANDING IN SYRACUSE

Syracuse was the capital city of Sicily, which was an island of Italy, “the largest and one of the most densely populated in the Mediterranean Sea.” BRITANNICA Adam Clarke says of this city, “Syracuse is one of the most famous cities of antiquity: it is the capital of the island of Sicily, and was built about 730 years before the Christian era. It lies 72 miles S. by E. of Messina, and about 112 of Palermo . . . In its ancient state, it was about 22 English miles in circumference; and was highly celebrated for the martial spirit of its inhabitants. . . . This city was almost totally destroyed by an earthquake in 1693: its present population amounts to but about 18,000. Christianity, in some form or other, has existed here ever since St. Paul spent the three days in it, mentioned in the text. ”

Although this was a prominent city, you will note that there is no mention of the group sight-seeing, or casual meanderings about the city, which was twenty-two miles in circumference. I understand that Paul was a prisoner, yet we will find occasions when he was allowed to spend time with various brethren. This is a clear indication of his preferred company.

WE TARRIED THERE THREE DAYS

During this period, we do not know if Paul spoke the word of the Lord, or reasoned with some people concerning the things of God. I would not be surprised if he did so. The period apparently has no immediate relevance to the mission of Paul. The three day layover was probably related to unloading and loading cargo.

We learn from this that there are incidentals of life that do not require elaboration. In making reports of works being done for the Lord, it is important to confine ourselves to relevant matters so as not to arouse a kind of fleshly curiosity. In the Kingdom of God, mere incidentals are distracting, and tend to hide the realities that are required to sustain life. Frankly, some things are not worth talking about.

WE FOUND BRETHERN

“ 13 And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: 14 Where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.”

WE FETCHED A COMPASS

“And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium . . .” Other versions read, “From there we circled round and reached Rhegium,” NKJV “we sailed around and arrived,” NASB “we set sail and arrived,” NIV “we weighed anchor and came,” NRSV “we made a circuit and arrived,” RSV “going about in a curve. We came,” BBE “we arrived at Rhegium by tacking,” CSB “going in a circuitous course, we arrived,” DARBY “compassing by the shore, we came,” DOUAY “we sailed round the coast and arrived,” NAB “we cast off and arrived,” NET “we set sail and arrived,” NIB “we followed the coast up to Rhegium,” NJB “we set a compass and came to,” TNT and “we made a circuit [following the coast] and reached.” AMPLIFIED

Here, the word “compass” does not refer to “a device for determining directions by means of a magnetic needle or group of needles turning freely on a pivot and pointing to the magnetic north.” MERRIAM-WEBSTER It is realized in the second definition of the noun: “: a curved or roundabout course; i.e. a compass of seven days' journey. MERRIAM- WEBSTER

As indicated in the graphic marked “To Rhegium,” apparently there was no safe direct course from Syracuse to Rhegium. Therefore they sailed close to Sicilia, following its shoreline until they arrived at Rhegium. The phrase “from thence we fetched a compass,” is translated from two Greek words, and is standard sea-faring terminology ([**qen perielo,ntej**]). The first word means “from which,” that is, from Syracuse. The second word means “made a circuit,” or moved from that location, circuiting, or following the shoreline to their next location.

It also appears from the text that this particular routing was dictated by the manner in which the wind was blowing, as indicated in the next clause. There was an apparent shift in the wind that made the last leg of the trip less difficult. After they had arrived in Rhegium, they were able to sail the more easily to Puteoli.

A Spiritual Application

In this brief account, there is a vivid depiction of the manner in which we are changed from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18), pressing toward the mark (Phil 3:14), running the race set before us (Heb 12:1-2), and working out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12-13). While the Lord is directing us, leading us, and bringing us, we are not being pulled along by some irresistible force. We have been brought into the process. That involvement is so significant that sometimes it appears that we are in the total charge of it, even though that is not at all the case.

Just as it was necessary for the pilot of the ship on which Paul was sailing to navigate through the waters wisely, so it is essential that those in Christ know how to live wisely. It is imperative that they remain close to what they can see – like the ship following the path of the shoreline of Sicilia. Believers must be “wise unto that which is good” (Rom 16:12). They are to “walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise” (Eph 5:15). They are to “walk in wisdom toward them that are without” (Col 4:5), “abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thess 5:22), and “be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is” (Eph 5:17).

Those who being brought to glory are required to “ follow after the things that make for peace” (Rom 14:19), “ follow after charity” (1 Cor 14:1), and “ever follow that which is good” (1 Thess 5:15). They are to “ follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, and meekness” (1 Tim 6:11). It is also required that they “ follow peace with all men, and holiness” (Heb 12:14). When it comes to the inevitability of suffering, the saints are to “follow” in the “steps” of Jesus (1 Pet 2:21).

All of this is akin to navigating a ship with discretion. Many a professing believer has, so to speak, steered their ship into dangerous waters, as when the managers of the voyage decided to ignore Paul’s advice, and attempt to sail to a more convenient location.

THE SOUTH WIND BLEW

“ , , , and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli . . .” Other versions read, “a south wind sprang up,” NASB “a south wind came up,” NIV “the wind having changed to south,” DARBY “the south wind blowing,” DOUAY “a south wind began to blow” GWN

With the aid of the south wind, they were able to sail to Puteoli in two days – a distance of about 375 miles. It had taken one day to sail from Syracuse to Rhegium, a distance of around 100 miles. Speaking from a general mathematical view, the trip from Syracuse to Rhegium found them traveling at around four miles an hour. From Rhegium to Puteoli, they traveled at around seven miles per hour

– almost twice as fast. The difference – a favorable wind.

A Spiritual Application

The above circumstance perfectly fits the nature of spiritual progress, which is always toward a final destination.

RHEGIUM

01–Scylla

02–Medma

03–Bruttius Sinus

04–Hipponium

05–Temesa

06–Clampeticia

07–Cerillae

08–Laus

09–Buxentum

10–elia

11–Paestum

12–Picentia

13–Salernum

14–Neapolis

15–Pompeii

PUTEOLI

Sometimes progress is slow, with contrary winds, and the necessity of carefully following what can be more clearly seen. Other times, there are “times of refreshing” (Acts 3:19), that are like south winds that move us toward “the mark” more quickly.

During such times, frequent docking is out of order. For example, as far as I can detect, there were fifteen places to stop between Rhegium and Puteoli. From the practical point of view, had they docked frequently for convenience, they may not have arrived at their destination at all. If they did arrive, it would not have been in a timely manner.

Suffice it to say, Satan will tempt those in Christ to stop their progress in the Lord for one reason or another. The reason may appear to be innocent and harmless. Yet, when the favorable wind of grace is blowing, it is not a time for distracting docking. Those who are serious about following the Lord have learned that the winds that carry us to Zion cannot be scheduled, nor is it wise to use the advantages they yield for only a brief time.

Take the assembly of the godly for an example – assemblies where two or more people “are gathered together” in the name of the Lord (Matt 18:20). They have gathered together “in one place,” and are with “one accord” (Acts 2:1). If the apostle Paul is in their midst, they will listen carefully with him “until midnight” (Acts 20:7). If it is a large body of people listening to the Son of God, they will go three days without eating for the privilege of hearing Him (Matt 15:32).

If, when the saints come together and are so described: “every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation,” and all things are being “done unto edifying” (1 Cor 14:26), the wind is blowing! If, by the grace of God, this is happening frequently, is it really proper to allow for brief spiritual excursions and frequent cessations of periods of progress? Of, is it wiser to continue the trip while the wind is blowing, and make as much progress as possible?

I realize that care must be taken when speaking about things like this, for there may very well be a lack of kindred perception. But notwithstanding the possibility of disagreement, the thrust of apostolic doctrine is in favor of capitalizing upon spiritual advantage. Each person must arrive at their own conclusion. However, in arriving at it, it seems to me that there is a solemn obligation to consider both the nature and purpose of spiritual life and holy gatherings. No person can afford to overlook the fact that life is really like a voyage on the sea, and how we sail it is a critical factor.

WE FOUND BRETHREN

“ . . . Where we found brethren . . .” Other versions read, “we found some brothers,” NIV “we found believers,” NRSV “came across some of the brothers,” BBE “discovered some believers,” GWN “found some [Christian] brethren,” AMPLIFIED “found some of the Lord's followers,” CEV and “found Christian friends.” MESSAGE

PAUL'S CONTACT WITH BRETHREN

- Disciples in Iconium filled with joy (Acts 13:52).
- When stoned at Lystra, the disciples stood around Paul (Acts 14:20).
- Confirmed souls of the disciples (Acts 14:20).
- Confirmed the souls of the disciples in Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch (Acts 14:22).
- Abode a long time with the disciples in Antioch (Acts 14:28).
- Caused great joy among the brethren Phenice and Samaria (Acts 15:3).
- Determined to visit the brethren in every where they had preached (Acts 15:36).
- Confirmed the churches in Syria and Celicia (Acts 15:41).
- Established the churches as they went through the cities (Acts 16:5).
- Comforted the brethren in the house of Lydia (Acts 16:40).
- The brethren in Thessalonica protected Paul and Silas (Acts 17:10).
- Brethren in Berea protected Paul (Acts 17:14).
- Spent a year and six months with brethren in Corinth (Acts 18:11).
- Continued with the brethren in Corinth for as good while (Acts 18:18).
- Spent sometime with the brethren in Antioch (Acts 18:23a).
- Went over the regions of Galatia and Phrygia strengthening the disciples (Acts 18:23b).
- Spent two years in Ephesus at the school of Tyrannus with the disciples (Acts 19:9).

- Disciples in Ephesus protected Paul (Acts 19:30).
- In Ephesus, Paul called the disciples and embraced them (Acts 20:1).
- Abode seven days with the disciples in Troas (Acts 20:6-7).
- From Miletus called the elders from Ephesus and admonished them (Acts 20:17-32).
- Found disciples in Tyre, and tarried seven days with them (Acts 21:4).
- Spent a day with the disciples in Ptolemais (Acts 21:7).
- Disciples from Caesarea joined Paul in his trip to Jerusalem (Acts 21:16).
- Received by the brethren in Jerusalem (Acts 21:17).
- Found brethren in Puteoli, and spent seven days with them (Acts 28:14).
- Brethren from Rome came to meet Paul as far as Apii Forum and the Three Taverns (Acts 28:15).

These words captured my attention: “Where we found brethren!” This involved some kind of quest or search, as the various versions suggest : “came across some of the brothers,” BBE and “discovered some believers.” GWN The Greek word translated “found” is **eu`ro,ntej** , which, as it is used here, has the following lexical meaning: “to find . . . to come upon, hit upon, to meet with; after searching, to find a thing sought,” THAYER “to find after searching discover, come on,” FRIBERG and “to learn the whereabouts of something, to find, to discover.” LOUW-NIDA

Keeping in mind that Paul was a prisoner, and probably was not allowed to roam about at will, the value of Luke and Aristarchus being with him is now seen even more clearly. Not only were they good companions to him, fellowshipping in the Lord, and speaking of things that made for edification. They were also key factors in finding kindred brethren in Italy, hundreds of miles from their own homeland. Paul was from Judea. Aristarchus was a “Macedonian from Thessalonica” (Acts 27:2), which was in Asia, at least 750 miles from Puteoli, as the crow flies, and probably well over 1,000 miles by ship. There is no evidence that any of this group had ever been in Italy.

Brethren in Puteoli

How is it that “brethren” were found in Italy? The truth of the matter is that we do not know. There is absolutely no record of anyone carrying the Gospel this far. When the believers were “scattered abroad” by persecution in Jerusalem, they “went every where preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4). Philip “went down to the city of Samaria and preached Christ unto them” (Acts 8:5). Others, we are told, “traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only” (Acts 11:19). There was also a period of two years in which “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). However, all of those places were a great distance from Italy.

It is precisely at this point that the nature of spiritual life is once again confirmed. Jesus affirmed, “A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid” (Matt 5:14). Paul declared to the faithful brethren at Philippi that they were shining “as lights in the world” (Phil 2:15). He wrote to the brethren at Rome affirming that their faith their faith was “spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8). He wrote to the Thessalonians, “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing” (1 Thess 1:8).

Newness of life cannot be hidden! Wherever God is genuinely at work, the word will get out, and kingdom initiatives will be carried out without human organization and programs. The book of Acts is a sterling example of this truth. The God who leads the work will see to it that proper reports of it are made known.

I cannot help but note the difficulty with which the modern church spreads. There is a need for all manner of programs and the development of techniques. The religious air is filled with constant pleas for money to do the Lord's work. Great sections of the world, according to modern claims, have still not heard the Gospel. This condition has stretched over sixty years of which I have personal knowledge. Yet, 30-35 years after Pentecost Paul wrote to the Colossians, "If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven ; whereof I Paul am made a minister" (Col 1:23). Men may choose to mitigate this by saying the "then known world" was meant. But that does not diminish the power of the statement one whit. The truth of the matter is that by the middle of the first century the Gospel had proliferated more extensively than it has in the nearly two thousand years that followed.

Why was this so? It was because the people had real spiritual life – newness of life. They were not in the grip of human organization, but were being led by the Holy Spirit. They really were "the light of the world" and "the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13-14). The disciples that they made (Matt 28:19) were the kind that left all to follow Jesus. The Gospel they preached was "power of God unto salvation."

The truth of the matter is that when the emphasis was switched to recruitment instead of edifying the body of Christ, the rapid spread of the Gospel was halted. I do not know of any pattern of sound thought that can successfully negate that proposition. If this is not the case, then the blessing God somehow has been diminished, and the power of the Gospel dissipated.

The brethren in Puteoli, and others who will surface from Rome are powerful confirmations of the nature of spiritual life and the power of the Gospel.

Paul's Contact with Brethren

The details of Paul's contact with "brethren" are numerous throughout Luke's record of his travels. His most lengthy periods of time were spent among brethren. Often he would extend his stay in a place to be with the brethren, as when he was among the disciples in Antioch (Acts 14:28), Ephesus (Acts 19:10; 20:31), Corinth (Acts 18:11), Troas (Acts 20:7), Tyre (Acts 21:4), and now in the city of Puteoli (Acts 28:14). He spent time visiting the churches in large regions (Acts 15:3,41; 16:5; 18:5,23).

The Priority of Brethren

Somehow, with the popularity of religious recruitment and the quest for numerical church growth, the priority of the people of God has been overlooked – and that is a very charitable statement of the situation. When we refer to "brethren," we are speaking of those who are in Christ Jesus. They are primarily HIS brethren (Heb 2:11). Ponder what He said about this unique body of people.

- When told that His mother and brethren wanted to speak with him, He replied, "Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!" (Mat 12:48-49).

- "But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren" (Mat 23:8).

- "And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me" (Mat 25:40).

- "My mother and My brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it" (Luke 8:21).

One of the signs that we have “passed from death unto life: is that “we love the brethren” (1 John 3:14).

When writing to the churches, Paul referred to believers as “brethren” over one hundred times . As a cluster of people those in Christ are referred to as “the brethren” forty-six times from Acts through Third John. By way of comparison, no inspired man ever addressed those in Christ as “Christians.” They are called “followers of God” (Eph 5:1), “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12), and those who “are sanctified” (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11; Heb 2:11; 10:10,14; Jude 1:1). Twenty-five times they are identified as “disciples.” Thirty-nine times they are referred to as “the saints,” and twenty-one times as simply “saints.”

The Manner of Closeness

The manner of closeness between brethren in Christ Jesus transcends all other relationships. It is deeper than the bond realized in marriage and family associations. There are social and political causes that knit men together, but they are vastly inferior to brethren in Christ, whose hearts are “knit together in love” (Col 2:2). By demonstration, Jesus confirmed that He was closer to those who did the will of His Father than He was to His own mother and half-brothers (Matt 12:50). Stretching forth His hand toward His disciples He said, “Behold my mother and my brethren!” (Mat 12:49).

Speaking of the superior relationship believers have with one another, apostolic doctrine affirms, “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom 12:5). And again, “ we are members one of another ” (Eph 4:25).

This body of people is not distinguished by their attitude toward men in general, or the kindness they may express toward sinners – although they are noted for such things. Their real mark of distinction is that they “love the brethren”

These are the people who enjoy “the unity of the Spirit” (Eph 4:3), and “the unity of the faith” (Eph 4:13). Together, they are described as “the household of faith” (Gal 6:10), “the household of God” (Eph 2:19), and Christ’s own “house” (Heb 3:6). As a group of people, they are “the body of Christ” (1 Cor 12:27), “the temple of God” (1 Cor 3:16-17), and “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph 3:15). They are “the people of God” (1 Pet 2:10), “ the children of God” (Rom 8:16), “the children of Abraham” (Gal 3:7), “the children of promise” (Gal 4:28), and “the children of light” (Eph 5:8; 1 Thess 5:5).

This body of people is not distinguished by their attitude toward men in general, or the kindness they may express toward sinners – although they are noted for such things. Their real mark of distinction is that they “love the brethren” (1 John 3:14). Jesus said the mark of distinction among them that would identify them as His disciples was “if ye have love one for another” (John 13:35). As careful as they are to be about honoring God in their conduct toward sinners, the acid test of whether or not they are the children of God is whether or not he “loves his brother” (1 John 4:20). John summarized the commandment that we have received from God: “And this commandment have we from Him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:21).

The eternal destiny of all men will, in part, be determined by how they viewed the brethren of Jesus – those who were begotten of God (Matt 25:40,45).

There is such a unanimity of proclamation on this matter that it is astounding so little is made of it in our time. It is commonly taught that our affiliation with God is confirmed by our response to the poor of this world, how friendly we are with the ungodly, and how we blend in with humanitarian causes. That there is a place for such expressions we cannot deny. That they are where the test is applied concerning the validity of identity with God is emphatically denied. In his first epistle the apostle John refers to the necessity of loving one’s brother in Christ (2:9-11; 3:10,12,14,15,17;

4:20,21,21; 5:16).

Let no man come short in the duty of “doing good unto all men.” But let them do so remembering that good is to be done “ especially unto them that are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

It is Paul’s perception of these priorities that led him and those with him to seek out the company of those who were reconciled to God, and members of the household of faith. This is an unvarying trait of the Kingdom of God.

DESIRED TO TARRY WITH THEM

“ . . . and were desired to tarry with them seven days . . .” Other versions read, “were invited to stay,” NKJV “invited us to spend a week,” NIV “were entreated to tarry,” ASV “who kept us with them,” BBE “begged us to stay,” DARBY “urged us to stay,” NAB “had the great encouragement of staying,” NJB “were called upon to remain with them,” YLT “asked us to stay,” IE and “we were appealed upon by them.” ABP

This was no doubt the first time these particular brethren had met Paul. Prior to this, his global fame was realized in both Asia and Greece, but not, so far as we know, in Italy. Yet here, as well as everywhere else Paul went, the love of the brethren was clearly possessed. They had doubtless heard of Paul, and now they had the advantage of being with him for a brief period of time. They made a strong appeal to him to remain with them for seven days, apparently the period of time in which their ship would be docked at that port.

This kind of brotherly love was often exhibited during the journeys of Paul.

- Sergius Paulus called for Barnabas and Saul, desiring to hear the word of the Lord (Acts 13:7).
- Lydia asked Paul and Silas to abide in her house (Acts 16:15).
- Brethren in Ephesus desired that he remain with them (Acts 18:20).
- He tarried with disciples at Tyre (Acts 21:4).
- Paul and company remained at the house of Philip for “many days” (Acts 21:10).
- The brethren in Puteoli begged them to remain for one week (Acts 28:14).

This is not to mention converted Jews from throughout the world who chose to remain in Jerusalem with the brethren after their conversion (Acts 2:44; 4:32). After ministering to many people at the house of Cornelius, the people asked Peter to remain with them for “certain days” (Acts 10:48). There were also the extended stays of Paul with the brethren in Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and Troas.

Wherever there is a record of an increase of believers, there is the expression of brotherly love – a demonstrable preference for the people of God. This sort of thing is becoming more and more rare in the Christian world of our day. There is considerable pressure placed on some of God’s people to meet with less frequency and in more brief gatherings. In my judgment, there is no way to reconcile this kind of circumstance with the reports of genuine conversions that are record in Scripture.

AND SO

“ . . . and so . . .” Other versions read, “and thus,” NASB “,” CJB “then ,” MRD and “in this way,” NET/WILLIAMS

The words “and so” are not a mere English filler. They are translated from the Greek word **ou[twj** , which has the following lexical meaning: “in this manner, thus,” GINGRICH “in the manner spoken of; in the way described; in the way it was done; in this manner; in such a manner; thus, so,” THAYER

“in the same way, like this,” UBS and “so, in this way (referring to what precedes).” LEH

“From Puteoli they would go twelve miles eastward to intersect the great Appian Way at Capua, (see map,) the luxurious city which melted away the hardihood of Hannibal’s veteran army. The *Appian Way* was titled in ancient times the “Queen of Great Thoroughfares.” It was built by Appius Claudius four hundred and eleven years after the founding of the city. It stretched from Rome, the length of southern Italy, until, as seen on the map, it reached Brundisium at the extremity of the heel of the boot-like shape of Italy.” DANIEL WHEDON

Some understand that the group journeyed by foot from Puteoli to Three Taverns, and from there took a ship to Rome. Others are of the persuasion that they journeyed all the way to Rome by foot, or on the land, taking the great Appian Way.

“Three Taverns was a place in the Appian way, thirty miles from Rome.” TSK I gather, therefore, that “so” indicates the following. They continued their travels on the ground, AND with various encouragements from the brethren who accompanied them.

This is also a confirmation of the Lord moving the heart of Julius the centurion. How is it that he was so gracious toward Paul, permitting him and his brethren to remain a whole week in Puteoli? That would require care of the other prisoners, of which no mention is made. The walk on the road would also appear to introduce the danger of prisoners escaping. If the soldiers were concerned about them escaping from a ship during a vicious storm, what about them escaping while walking on the open road? These are all matters that were governed by the Lord in the interest of His servant, Paul, getting to Rome. The steps of a good man are, of a truth, “ordered by the Lord” (Psa 37:23).

WE WENT TOWARD ROME

“ . . . we went toward Rome.” Other versions read, “we came,” NASB/NIV “we went on toward,” CJB “we proceeded towards,” MRD “we came,” NET and “we finally reached.” WILLIAMS

This verse does not say that they actually arrived in Rome at that time, something that is declared in several versions (NET, WILLIAMS, ASV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, CSB, ERV, ESV, NAB, NAU, NIB, NJB, NLT, TNT, YLT, IE, WEYMOUTH, ISV, MONTGOMERY, AMPLIFIED). The word translated “toward” can also be translated “into,” or “to.” STRONG’S Here, however, the meaning of “unto” or “towards” is the proper rendering. The idea is first that they resumed their journey to Rome, and secondarily that their journey was marked by contact with the brethren.

The particular point to be seen here is that as the journey drew to a close, Paul was being encouraged and strengthened by the brethren. This was in order that when he arrived he would be in a sound state of mind, and ready to engage in the work of the Lord immediately. He was aware that the real purpose for going to Rome was to “bear witness” of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 23:11). This would be the ultimate reason for him appearing “before Caesar” (Acts 27:24).

I do not doubt that from the beginning of his arrest until this last leg of the journey, Satan buffeted Paul with all manner of tempting thoughts. However, his efforts were all neutralized by Paul’s timely contact with Christ’s brethren. It must have been similar to his experience when he came into Macedonia. At that time, Paul wrote, “For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus ; and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me; so that I rejoiced the more” (2 Cor 7:5-7).

You see the effects of timely contact with the saints of the Lord. Not only is their personal presence and words of encouragement comforting, but their reports of the working of the Lord added strength and joy to the apostle. It readied him to enter into the work to which he had been called.

All of this activity was directed by the Lord, and is indicative of the manner in which he leads His people. Those who are reconciled to God and walking in the Spirit have an incalculable effect upon Kingdom laborers – and designedly so. This is precisely why the Spirit makes much of the love of, and fellowship with, the people of God. They are nothing less than the extension of Jesus Himself – His body.

THEY CAME TO MEET US

“ 15 And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.”

On the last leg of the journey brethren will come to Paul, instead of Paul finding them as he has done throughout the journey. It is important that he arrive in Rome in a proper frame of mind, and the fellowship of the saints and the expression of their mutual faith is a powerful means of accomplishing this.

FROM THENCE

“And from thence . . .” Other versions read, “and from there,” NKJV “Believers in Rome,” GWN “The brothers and sisters in Rome,” NLT and “the brothers in Rome.” LIVING

The words “from thence” refer to the “Rome” of the previous verse: “. . . and so we went toward Rome ” (Acts 28:14). Here again, brethren were found, even though, to this point, there is no Scriptural record of anyone preaching the Gospel there. This circumstance again confirms the relative rapidity with which the Word of God spread during the first 25-30 years of church history.

On the day of Pentecost, “Rome” is one of the places from which people had come to Jerusalem for the Passover and Pentecost feasts: “Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome , Jews and proselytes ” (Acts 2:10). The fact that they are called “strangers” suggests they were proselytes. Church tradition says that Peter founded the church, but the claim cannot be substantiated. If this were the case, Paul would certainly have mentioned him in his letter to the Romans.

In his letter to Rome, Paul mentions a couple there who were in Christ before him: “Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellowprisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me” (Rom 16:7). Priscilla and Aquila were also there, who were Paul’s “helpers in Christ Jesus” (Rom 16:3).

Thus we are left with no sure word concerning those involved in the formation of this notable church, whose faith was reported throughout the world (Rom 1:8). In the church in Rome we have an example of the gravitation of believers to one another, just as occurred on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:44,46; 4:31; 5:12). Neither Jesus nor His apostles instructed men in a methodology to be used in establishing a church. Men have imagined, however, that there is a need for such strategy, and have therefore introduced various approaches to the matter, even marketing them.

But here we are faced with a church that sprang up, becoming prominent in the Christian world, and having numerous laborers among them (Rom 16:3-15). No apostles were involved in its beginning, and it is even possible that some proselytes were involved in its start. That is the effect of newness of life! It exposes the profound inferiority of the professed church of our time.

WHEN THE BRETHREN HEARD OF US

“ . . . when the brethren heard of us . . .” Other versions read, “heard about us,” NKJV “heard that we were coming,” NIV “had news of us,” BBE “heard the news about us,” CSB “ hearing [of our approach],” MRD “having heard the things concerning us,” YLT “hearing of our movements,”

WEYMOUTH “having had news of us,” AMPLIFIED “heard about our circumstances,” EMTV and “heard we were on the way.” MESSAGE

Behold the love of the brethren made known in their communications concerning the circumstances of their brethren. It is exceeding difficult to imagine this happening in our time, even though there are advanced means of communication. However, a great falling away has occurred in which professed believers are divided, and thus their interest in the whole body has been mitigated, if not altogether eradicated.

Ponder how much is said about the saints sharing knowledge about key people, whether friend or foe, and issues that needed to be known among the saints.

- The suicide of Judas was known throughout Jerusalem (Acts 1:19).
- The events that took place on the day of Pentecost were “noised abroad” (Acts 2:6).
- When Peter and John were released from prison, they went to “their own” and “reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them” (Acts 4:23).
- The sudden death of Ananias and Sapphira was heard throughout Jerusalem (Acts 5:5,11).
- Word concerning the conversion of the city of Samaria was heard in Jerusalem (Acts 8:14).
- The disciples in Damascus had heard about the threat of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:13).
- The disciples in Joppa heard that Peter was in Lydda (Acts 38).
- It was known throughout Joppa that many had believed in the Lord (Acts 9:42).
- The brethren in Judea heard about the conversion of those who met at the house of Cornelius to hear Peter (Acts 11:1).
- When certain from Jerusalem troubled the Gentile believers, they determined to do something about it (Acts 15:24).
- Timothy was well reported of by the brethren in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:2).
- All in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus (Acts 19:10).
- The event in which a demon possessed man overcame the seven sons of Sceva was known throughout the region (Acts 19:17).
- The faith of the church at Rome was spoken of throughout the world (Rom 1:8).
- Paul said there were some who had slanderously reported that he was saying we ought to do evil that good may come, adding that their damnation was just (Rom 3:8).
- It was reported that a fornicator was in the Corinthian church, and was guilty of a sin so reprehensible that even the Gentiles avoided such an involvement (1 Cor 5:1).
- Paul heard about the divisions at Corinth (1 Cor 11:18).
- Paul heard that some in Corinth were saying there is no resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:17).

There should be no hesitancy to report matters that bring glory to God, things tend to clarify the truth, and things that bring a certain jeopardy to the saints. People who build up the saints are to be recommended, and those who spread spiritual poison are to be exposed.

Brethren had heard of Paul’s past (Gal 1:13,23)

- Paul had heard of the Ephesians faith and love (Eph 1:15).

- Brethren had heard of the dispensation of grace that had been given to Paul (Eph 3:2).
- The brethren at Philippi had heard that Epaphroditus was sick (Phil 2:26).
- Paul had heard of the faith and love of the Colossian brethren (Col 1:4).
- Paul reported that Hymenaeus and Alexander had made shipwreck of the faith (1 Tim 1:20).
- Paul identified the false doctrine being taught by Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Tim 2:17).
- Paul reported the evil Alexander did to him (2 Tim 4:14).
- John reports that Diotrephes loved to have the preeminence among the brethren (3 John 1:9).

Among those early saints, newness of life was prominent, and people and matters that touched upon the Lord and His people were reported without shame or fear. Their life centered in Christ, and their love for one another compelled them to report the working of the Lord, as well as special initiatives of the wicked one.

In our times, many of the things that I have listed would be considered nothing more than gossip, or prying into matters that were none of their business. Notwithstanding these foolish charges, the record of such reports have been written, and are to be duly noted.

When a person or people are living unto the Lord, there is no difficulty with these matters. However, when such buy into the world's system of values, and the psychological jargon of the times, a certain disdain will be held for those reporting such things. There should be no hesitancy to report matters that bring glory to God, things tend to clarify the truth, and things that bring a certain jeopardy to the saints. People who build up the saints are to be recommended, and those who spread spiritual poison are to be exposed.

Word Got Out Paul was Coming

We do not know exactly how word got out that Paul and those with him were coming. It certainly was not because of a daily newspaper, electronic media, the Internet, telephone, or some other electronic media. Rather, it was because the people were not only doctrinally members one of another (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 12:25), but were experientially that as well. They had "the same care one for another" (1 Cor 12:25). They placed a high value on laborers such as Paul. Of course, that is what believers are admonished to do. As it is written, "And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake" (1 Thess 5:13).

All of this postulates that the people are not neglecting "so great salvation" (Heb 2:3), are fighting "the good fight of faith" (1 Tim 6:12), and pressing "toward the mark" (Phil 3:14).

A Spiritual Network Among Believers

There is a kind of spiritual network that links the sons of God together. You have no doubt noted that as soon as you are certain an individual is "born of God," you obtain a keen interest in them, are glad to hear of their well being, and concerned when they are "in any trouble" (2 Cor 1:4). There is also a complementary desire to see these people "face to face," and to enjoy their immediate fellowship. Thus John desired to speak with the "elect lady" "face to face" (2 John 1:12). He wrote to Gaius of the time when he would "speak face to face" with him (3 John 1:14). The elders at Ephesus lamented when they heard they would see Paul's face "no more" (Acts 20:36). Paul declared he

“endeavored the more abundantly to see” the face of the Thessalonians “with great desire” (1 Thess 2:17). “Night and day,” he wrote, he and his co-laborers were “praying exceedingly that we might see your face” (1 Thess 3:10). Paul wrote to the brethren in Rome, “I long to see you” (Rom 1:11). To the Philippians he wrote, “I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:8).

Paul wrote to the saints in Rome of his desire to be “comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Rom 1:13). He also mentioned his anticipation of being “refreshed” when with them (Rom 15:32). Even the recalcitrant Corinthians were told that Paul could possibly spend the “winter” with them (1 Cor 16:6), and “tarry a while” with them (1 Cor 16:7). Seeking to more firmly establish them in the faith, Paul wrote to the backsliding Galatians, “I desire to be present with you now” (Gal 4:20).

And what shall we say of those who complain about the times they are with fellow believers, or that cast aspersions upon them as though they were seeking their own interests? What of those who are quick to believe the evil reports that are raised by evil people who have defected from the faith? It may be said of such people that they are a breed of Christians that are

Whatever moves a person to look with suspicion upon those who are obviously devoted to the Lord, have left the course of the world, and prefer the people of God, cannot be good. Nor, indeed, can it be successfully defended.

nowhere mentioned in Scripture. If they have a penchant for spending time with the ungodly, they may do their best to defend their action. However, that kind of attitude clashes with the Divine mandate to “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another” (Rom 12:10). Such benighted souls may chide the people of God for not treating the ungodly with a certain preference, as though blasphemers who once honored the name of Jesus, and those who depart from the faith were innocent victims. God, however, will publically rebuke them for their despicable attitude toward His people. When they take the side of the ungodly, they at once are classed as enemies of God, and will be duly requited by Him.

If this seems rather strong, consider that it is something that needs to be said in this day of ungodly toleration. Whatever moves a person to look with suspicion upon those who are obviously devoted to the Lord, have left the course of the world, and prefer the people of God, cannot be good. Nor, indeed, can it be successfully defended.

Tertullian was a noted Christian leader during the second century, being born around 160 A.D. In one of his writings, he made reference how Christians were regarded in his adult life. “See how they love one another”; these are the words Tertullian noted (*Apology* [39.6]) in the Third Century, as spoken by some of the Pagans of the time regarding Christian communities.” REGIA ECCLESIA

Septimius Florens Tertullianus anglicised as Tertullian (160 – ca. 220 A.D.) He was a prolific early Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. He is the first Christian author to produce an extensive corpus of Christian literature. He also was a notable early Christian apologist and a polemicist against heresy. Tertullian has been called "the father of Latin Christianity. WIKIPEDIA

Lest anyone consider this to be a flawed view of those who are in Christ Jesus, the King Himself has spoken on the subject. “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another ” (John 13:35). The distinguishing mark of God’s people is not their love for the ungodly, but their love for one another. It is not their concern for the poor, or their quest for the young, or their respect for life itself. None of those things are wrong, but they are not what distinguishes the disciples of Jesus.

John writes that any person lacking this love lies if he says he loves God (1 John 4:20). He further states that the saints have received a commandment from God. “And this commandment have we

from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also” (1 John 4:21). He goes so far as to say that the love of the brethren is the proof that we have “passed from death unto life” (1 John 3:14).

The Responsibility of Believers

It is vital that those professing to be followers of Jesus leave the proper testimony with the people around them. The pillars that support that testimony are summarized in a single commandment. “And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight. And this is His commandment , That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as He gave us commandment” (1 John 3:22-23).

THEY CAME TO MEET US

“ . . . they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns . . .”

“Appi Forum” was at least 43 miles from Rome. Some estimate it being farther. “Three Taverns,” or “Three Inns,” NKJV/NASB was at least 33 miles from Rome. “Three Taverns” was “the name of a halting place on the Appian way between Rome and the Market of Appius; it was 10 miles (16 km) from the latter place and 33 miles (50 km) from Rome.” STRONG’S

Some feel there were two different groups that came – one as far as Three Taverns, and the other as far as Appii Forum. It seems more probable that one group came, stopping at Three Taverns, and meeting Paul at Appii Forum. Keep in mind that this was a journey on a road, and was probably by foot. I am sure their love for the Lord, and for His servant, caused them to see this as a relatively short trip.

Behind the scenes, the Lord was moving these saints to meet his servant face to face encouraging his heart. To me, any approach to living for the Lord that relegates the saints to the back seat of life cannot possibly be on target. A love for one another is what distinguishes people as Christ’s disciples (John 13:35).

Even kindness is focused upon the people of God, although they are not to be the exclusive recipients of it. Even God is “kind unto the unthankful and the evil” (Lk 6:35b), although that kindness is made known in things common to man. We are to love our enemies, “and do good and lend, hoping for nothing again” (Lk 6:35a). However, throughout these normal kindnesses and civility, there is to be no neglect of the people of God. Kindness is commanded toward them in a higher and more thorough way. Thus it is written:

- “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ; in honor preferring one another” (Rom 12:10).
- “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another , even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you” (Eph 4:32).
- “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness , humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another , if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye” (Col 3:13).
- “And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity” (2 Pet 1:7).

We do not apologize for this Divine emphasis, nor will we allow other tests of affiliation with Christ to be superimposed upon this requirement concerning our associations with the people of God. Let it be clear that we are speaking of emphasis, preference, and superior expressions – not exclusive ones.

This is what we see being made known in the brethren from Rome, who inconvenienced

themselves to meet Paul well before he arrived in their city. It is as though they could not wait to see him.

PAUL THANKED GOD AND TOOK COURAGE

“ . . . whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.”

Paul Saw

Other versions read, “at the sight of these men,.” NIV “on seeing them,.” NRSV “having seen,.” YLT and “as soon as Paul caught sight of them.” WILLIAMS

Just the sight of these brethren brought refreshment to Paul – even though he had not been to Rome previously. Perhaps some that he knew were in the number – like “Priscilla and Aquila” who had labored with him; Epaphroditus “the firstfruits of Achaia;” “Mary, who bestowed much labor” on him, or “Herodion,” a relative of his. He greeted all of these brethren in his letter to Rome, written from Corinth about three years earlier (58 A.D.). At any rate, whether he knew some of them or they clearly identified themselves, Paul saw them, and it had an immediate impact upon him.

Have you not experienced the same thing – seeing someone you knew was a child of God, and the insight itself cheering your heart? A favorable impact would certainly not be realized by Paul if he had seen Hymenaeus, Philetus, Hermogenes, or Alexander the coppersmith. This was not his reaction to seeing a company of Jews who had determined to kill him.

This is the kind of effect that is wrought in the hearts of the people of God. When they see kindred spirits who are running the race and fighting the fight, they are refreshed by the sight of them.

Paul Thanked God

Other versions read, “gave praise to God,.” BBE “having given thanks to God,.” YLT “gave thanks to God,.” EMTV and “led us in prayers of thanksgiving.” MESSAGE

In his letter to the brethren in Rome, written three years earlier, he had said, “ I make mention of you in my prayers. . . Making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you . For I long to see you , that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established. That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me” (Rom 1:9-12). Now, an initial answer to those prayers is being realized, as he beholds with his eyes fellow-heirs from Rome approaching unto him. It is no wonder than he gives thanks! If Paul could give thanks at the “remembrance” of holy brethren (Phil 1:3), how much more will he do so when he actually sees them face to face.

It is to be understood that we give thanks to God for what He does. It is inappropriate to give thanks to God for what men of themselves do. To provide a view of the scope of thanksgiving, here are some things for which the apostle Paul gave thanks.

- For the brethren at Rome (Rom 1:8).
- For the prospect of being delivered from the body of this death (Rom 7:24-25).
- For Priscilla and Aquila , his “helpers in Christ Jesus” (Rom 16:4).
- For the grace given to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:4).
- For the victory God gives us through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:57).
- For God causing us to triumph in Christ (2 Cor 2:14).
- For those in whose hearts God had placed an earnest care like that of Paul (2 Cor

8:16).

- For God's "unspeakable gift" (2 Cor 9:15).
- For the Ephesian brethren (Eph 1:16).
- For the remembrance of the Philippians (Phil 1:3).

While Paul did know he was going to bear witness of Jesus in Rome, there was little else that had been revealed to him. Speaking as a man, there were a lot of uncertainties, and uncertainty is a field in which Satan can sow seeds of doubt and fear.

For the Colossian brethren (Col 1:3).

- For the Thessalonian brethren (1 Thess 1:2; 2 Thess 2:13).
- For the enablement of God (1 Tim 1:12).
- For the remembrance of Timothy (2 Tim 1:3).
- For the recollection of Philemon (Phile 1:4).

Notice the prominence of the brethren in Paul's thanksgiving. It was through them that God strengthened and edified Paul, enabling him to fulfill his ministry with joy.

I have noticed over the years that, with very few exceptions, there is not a lot of thanksgiving for the saints of God among professed believers. Judging from the expression of many, it appears as though there is frequently more thanksgiving for rain and flowers than for the saints of the living God. This, however, was not the case with Paul. This was owing to his understanding and spiritual insight, as well as a dominating love for the Head of the church.

Paul Took Courage

Other versions read, "was encouraged," NIV "took heart," BBE "waxed bold," GENEVA "felt encouraged," GWN "felt better," IE "received new courage," AMPLIFIED "was greatly encouraged," GNB "brimming over with praise," MESSAGE and "got courage." INTERLINEAR

Translated from the Greek word **εἰλαβην**, and, as used here, the word "took" means "to take . . . to lay hold of . . . anything, to use it," THAYER "take for oneself, take into possession," FRIBERG and "to get, obtain," UBS "seize." LIDDELL-SCOTT

And what is it that Paul took hold of, or seized, when he saw the brethren from Rome? It was "courage," or "confidence," THAYER "to become confident or courageous in the face of real or possible danger," LOUW-NIDA and "boldness," LIDDELL-SCOTT

While Paul did know he was going to bear witness of Jesus in Rome, there was little else that had been revealed to him. Speaking as a man, there were a lot of uncertainties, and uncertainty is a field in which Satan can sow seeds of doubt and fear. Paul knew what it was like to be beaten mercilessly (Acts 16:37; 2 Cor 11:23-25), be stoned (Acts 14:19), be put into circumstances where he despaired of life (2 Cor 1:8), and even to fight with beasts after the manner of men (1 Cor 15:32). He did not know if he would face such things in Rome while witnessing of the Lord Jesus.

I see Satan as attempting to cast the mantel of fear upon Paul. But his efforts are overthrown – not by a great display of overt power, but by the coming of some saints from Jerusalem! Who but God can do such a thing?

The principle of living by faith applies here, for faith alone enables the believer to take hold of courage – confident courage! What mere work of man can accomplish this? What routine or human disciple can so strength the person that they can become courageous when about to enter Rome as a

prisoner – and do so when Nero is the emperor? He was emperor of Rome from 54-64 A.D., the period covered in this text. His official title was Nero Claudius Augustus Germanicus.

Another example of the role of the saints in ministering comfort and confidence to other believers is found in Paul’s reference to Titus. Paul had been concerned about the state of the Corinthian church, so much so that he had determined not to go anywhere else until he had realized some satisfaction concerning the deteriorating Corinthians. Of that occasion he wrote, “For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus” (2 Cor 7:6).

We must not allow ourselves to be robbed of the elixir of comfort and encourage by those who would chide the saints for not paying enough attention to the ungodly. Those who insinuate that devotion to the Lord, and the edifying of the body of Christ jeopardizes the chances of sinners receiving a good witness have only exposed their ignorance. Pay them no heed!

PAUL PERMITTED TO DWELL BY HIMSELF

“ 16 And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.”

THE TRIP FROM CAESAREA TO ROME

“A day” in Sidon Acts 27:3

“Many days” Acts 27:7

“Many days” Acts 27:20

“Fourteen nights” Acts 27:35

“Three days” Acts 28:7

“Three months” Acts 28:11

“Three days” Acts 28:12

“One day” Acts 28:13

“Seven days” Acts 28:14

Four months are accounted for, with two periods of “*many days*.” A trip of that length (about 2,000 miles), under ideal conditions, would require approximately half a year.

At last Paul arrived at Rome –something that was promised three years earlier , when he was arrested in Jerusalem (Acts 23:11). How patient he had been, spending two of those years chained in prison by an unthoughtful and prideful governor. Yet, he was steadfast, refusing to have his faith overthrown, or to despair of hope. He waited patiently for the Lord (Psa 37:7), enduring verbal opposition, physical abuse, incarceration, a fourteen day storm, shipwreck, and a venomous snakebite. The trip had taken at least half a year, and possibly more, which covered nearly 2,000 miles by sea. At the last, it probably involved a walk of at least sixty-five miles.

AND WHEN WE CAME TO ROME

“And when we came to Rome . . .”

Nearly four years earlier Paul had said as he passed through Macedonia and Achaia to go to Jerusalem, “After I have been there, I must also see Rome” (Acts 19:21). Prior to the trip to Rome, the Lord stood by Paul and said, “Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11). On the way to Rome, during a fierce storm, the “angel of God” stood by him and said, “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar” (Acts 27:24).

Now the desire of Paul, the promise of Jesus, and the word of the angel has been answered, and Paul is in Rome. Praise the Lord! His desire was in perfect accord with Christ’s determination, and the angel’s elaboration.

This is a noteworthy example of a promise written by John the beloved. “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 John 5:14-15). I do not believe it is a stretch of the imagination to assume that Paul prayed about the desire he expressed. He found that it was in perfect accord with the will of the Lord.

I do not know how extensive Paul’s prayers were about the matter of going to Rome. However, the text before us suggests that God especially blessed that time in ways beyond expectation. Here again is a confirmation of the statement, “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us” (Eph 3:20).

Faith lays hold of the promise, and does not demand to have the specification of details. For example, Abraham believed God about having multitudinous offspring before any of the details were made known (Gen 15:6; Rom 4:3,19; Gal 3:6; James 2:23). Again, when God commanded Abraham to offer up Isaac, he set out to do precisely that, even though he did not know the details involved. Yet, he believed God’s promise concerning Isaac being the child of promise through whom the promised Seed would come (Heb 11:17-19). The outcome in both instances exceeded the understanding of Abraham. That is, there was no way Abraham could have thought upon the promise and concluded what finally came to pass.

It is important to note this, because God works in such a manner as to remove any doubt about why His work was done. It was not merely in answer to a request, for His answers invariably exceed the request raised to Him in faith. That is why it is wrong to teach people to think of asking as establishing the boundaries within which God will work. In the very best view, our requests only touch the border of Divine capability. Once this is seen, there is a certain liberty of spirit that allows for a more God-honoring expectation than Him merely fulfilling our godly desires.

THE PRISONERS DELIVERED TO THE CAPTAIN OF THE GUARD

“ . . . the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard . . .” Other versions read, “the centurion delivered up the prisoners to the praetorian prefect,” DARBY “the Centurion delivered the prisoners to the general Captain,” GENEVA “ye under captain delivered the prisoners to the chief captain of the host,” PNT/TNT “the centurion delivered up the prisoners to the captain of the barrack,” YLT “the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard,” AMPLIFIED “the centurion delivered up the prisoners to the commander of the camp,” ABP “the centurion handed over the prisoners to the captain of the guard,” EMTV “the centurion delivered the prisoners to the camp commander,” LITV and “the hundred-chief beside-gives the bound-ones to the war-foot chief.” INTERLINEAR

This clause is omitted by the following versions: ASV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, RSV, BBE, CJB, CSB, DOUAY, ESV, ERV, GWN, MRD, NAB, NAS, NAU, NET, NIB, NJB, NLT, LIVING, IE, WEYMOUTH, ISV, WILLIAMS, MONTGOMERY, CEV, GNB, and MESSAGE.

Although this may appear to be an unwarranted diversion, I have a purpose for citing the observations of several notable commentators on this verse.

• **JOHN GILL.** Although he does not concur with these omissions, John Gill explains their absence by saying, “this clause is wanting in the Alexandrian copy, and in the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions.”

• **JOHN CALVIN.** In his commentary on Acts, John Calvin says of this verses, “Luke doth signify that Paul had more liberty granted him than the rest; for his condition and estate was peculiar. For he was suffered to dwell in an house by himself, having one keeper with him, whereas the rest were shut up in the common prison. For the general captain knew by Festus’ report that Paul was guiltless; and the centurion, as it is likely, did faithfully rehearse such things as might serve to bring him into favor.”

• **DANIEL WHEDON.** Daniel Whedon observes, “ **The guard** — Every absolute monarch usually finds it necessary to secure a competent body of troops upon whose fidelity to his own person he can rely in case of rebellion. Such for the emperor of Rome were the pretorian troops. The Pretorian Camp, situated outside of the northwest wall of the city, was a large square lined with military barracks, the lodgings of the soldiery, and strongly fortified on all sides. Its commander, **captain of the guard** , at this time was the celebrated Burrhus, who, in connection with Seneca, endeavoured to support the fortunes of the empire under the reign of the mad and bloody Nero. But in fact the whole clause — **the centurion... but** — is omitted from so many manuscripts that Tischendorf and other high authorities reject it as spurious.”

• **ALBERT BARNES.** Albert Barnes writes, “The commander of the Praetorian cohort, or guard. The custom was, that those who were sent from the provinces to Rome for trial were delivered to the custody of this guard. The name of the prefect or captain of the guard at this time was Burrhus Afranius (Tacitus, History, 12,42,1).”

• **ADAM CLARKE.** Adam Clarke writes, “This word properly means the commander of a camp; but it signifies the prefect, or commander of the pretorian cohorts, or emperor’s guards. Tacitus (Annal. lib. iv. cap. 2) informs us that, in the reign of Tiberius, Sejanus, who was then prefect of these troops, did, in order to accomplish his ambitious designs, cause them to be assembled from their quarters in the city, and stationed in a fortified camp near it; so that their commander is with peculiar propriety styled by St. Luke stratopedarchv , the commander of the camp. For the arrival of St. Paul at Rome was in the seventh year of Nero; and it is certain, from Suetonius, (in Tiber. cap. 37.) that the custom of keeping the pretorian soldiers in a camp, near the city, was retained by the emperors succeeding Tiberius; for the historian observes that Claudius, at his accession to the empire, was received into the camp, in castra delatus est, namely, of the pretorian cohorts; and so Tacitus says of Nero, An. lib. xii. cap. 69, that on the same occasions illatus castris, he was brought into the camp. Dr. Doddridge observes that it was customary for prisoners who were brought to Rome to be delivered to this officer, who had the charge of the state prisoners, as appears from the instance of Agrippa, who was taken into custody by Macro, the pretorian prefect, who succeeded Sejanus; (Joseph. Ant. lib. xviii. cap. 7. sec. 6;) and from Trajan’s order to Pliny, when two were in commission, Plin. lib. x. ep. 65. Vincetus mitti ad praefectos praetorii mei debet: he should be sent bound to the prefects of my guards. The person who now had that office was the noted Afranius Burrhus; but both before and after him it was held by two: Tacit. An. lib. xii. sec. 42; lib. xiv. sec. 51.”

Let it be clear that these quotations add no weight to the text, and that is not my reason for giving them. They do confirm, however, that there is by no means unanimity among insightful handlers of Scripture concerning the omission of this phrase.

MATTHEW HENRY. Matthew Henry writes, “He is still a prisoner. He had longed to see Rome, but, when he comes there, he is delivered, with other prisoners, to the captain of the guard, and can see no more of Rome than he will permit him. How many great men had made their entry into Rome, crowned and in triumph, who really were the plagues of their generation! But here a good man makes his entry into Rome, chained and triumphed over as a poor captive, who was really the greatest blessing to his generation. This thought is enough to put one for ever out of conceit with this world.”

• **JAMIESON, FAUSSET, AND BROWN.** Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown says of this verse, “the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard — the Praetorian Prefect, to whose custody, as commander of the Praetorian guard, the highest military authority in the city, were committed all who were to come before the emperor for trial. Ordinarily there were two such prefects; but from A.D. 51 to 62, one distinguished general — Burrus Aframus, who had been Nero’s tutor — held that office; and as our historian speaks of “the captain,” as if there were but one, it is thought that this fixes the apostle’s arrival at Rome to be not later than the year 62 [WIES]. But even though there had been two when Paul arrived, he would be committed only to one of them, who would be “the captain’ who got charge of him. (At most, therefore, this can furnish no more than confirmation to the chronological evidence otherwise obtained).

• **W.B. GODBEY.** W.B. Godbey writes, “This continues two years daily, and was then discontinued by the untimely death of Marius, the commander-in-chief of the praetorian army, which guarded the royal palace and the emperor’s person. Of course, the emperor was too great a man to give personal attention to a prisoner. Hence Marius received Paul, and gave him perfect liberty as long as he lived. This was owing to the excellent and even wonderful report given him by Julius, the centurion, who told about the storm and thrice miraculous deliverance through this paradoxical man, and the letter of Festus, simply stating that there was nothing against him criminal in Roman law, but simply complicated matters connected with the Jews’ religion.”

• **JOSEPH BENSON.** Joseph Benson observes, “And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard — Or prefect of the pretorian band, according to his commission. It was customary for prisoners who were brought to Rome, to be delivered to this officer, who had the charge of the state prisoners. The person who now held this office was the noted Afranius Burrhus.”

• **JOSEPH SUTCLIFFE.** Joseph Sutcliffe writes, “When we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard; the captain of the praetorian cohort. The guard was a fortified camp in the suburbs of Rome. A wise and regular government will not leave the lives and property of a metropolis to the mercy of an infuriated and drunken mob, which a spark may kindle to vengeance in a moment. Robbers and murderers must be afraid of the sword, which supports the magistrate in the severer exercises of duty.”

The Reason for These Citations

Let it be clear that these quotations add no weight to the text, and that is not my reason for giving them. They do confirm, however, that there is by no means unanimity among insightful handlers of Scripture concerning the omission of this phrase. Yet, the Bibles that omit this passage leave their readers completely oblivious of the message it contains – or that anything more was written by Luke than is represented by this text.

Additionally, there is a certain flow of logic that is reflected in these words. Paul receives special treatment, which you would never conclude reading the versions that omit the explanation provided in this verse. The fact that it is omitted in several manuscripts that were written a considerable time

after the original writing of the text, is, in my own judgment, not sufficient reason to exclude it from our English Bible. Its inclusion adds sense to the text, and takes nothing from the facts. It also highlights the discretionary judgment of the “captain of the guard,” who gave a special privilege to Paul. All of this, of course, was the working of the Lord, who was protecting His servant in order that he might bear witness to Him in Rome, just as He had promised.

It seems to me that there is a certain obligation laid upon translators to provide a text that best gives honor to God, and more precisely states the case. I do not know what form of reasoning would insist that a variant manuscript, written at a later date, necessarily implies a scribal interpolation. Why could not the later variation be owing to a scribal omission, thinking the text was redundant, or lacked any value?

At any rate, I choose to accept the text as it stands in the Authorized Version, and ascribe wisdom and insight to those who so translated it. There really can be no successful refutation of that stance.

PAUL PERMITTED TO DWELL BY HIMSELF

“ . . . but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.” Other versions read, “BUT Paul was permitted to dwell by himself,” NKJV “Paul was allowed to stay by himself,” NASB “allowed to live by himself,” NRSV and “but Paul was allowed to remain by himself.” DARBY

This is a most remarkable circumstance. It indicates that Julius delivered a good report of Paul. He could attest to his wisdom in warning of the dangers of sailing from Crete. There was also his wise council about staying on the ship, and bringing encouragement to all who were on board the ship. He may very well have shared the incident of Paul being bitten by an extremely venomous snake, and the healing the father of Publius, as well as the healing of many of the diseased of the island of Melita. Then, there was the fact that none of the charges against Paul could be substantiated, and had he not appealed to Caesar, he would have been released by the king Agrippa. There was also the letter of Lysias to Felix the governor. If this also was made known to the captain of the guard, it is not difficult to understand why he allowed Paul to dwell in his own quarters with a special soldier being assigned to him.

The Hand of the Lord Was With Him

Thus, it is obvious that the hand of the Lord was with Paul. Now he could bear witness to Christ without hostile Jews being present. Accommodations were also provided so he would not have to speak within the framework of a jail cell. Remember, he had been confined to a prison for two years in Caesarea, and there is no record of him being able to bear special witness concerning the savior at that time – unless it be when he was called by Felix in hopes of receiving a bribe from him to be loosed (Acts 24:26). Now, although a prisoner, he had liberty.

PAUL CALLED THE CHIEF OF THE JEWS TOGETHER

In the Jewish economy, the “chief” men were the ones most learned in “the Jew’s religion.” These were not political figures, or mere men of wealth. Rather, they were the ones who had the leadership because of their Scriptural understanding, and leading roles in religious places and affairs. In this way, as well as in other facets of life, the Jews were distinguished from the rest of the peoples.

“ 17 And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. 18 Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19 But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal

unto Caesar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.”

The wisdom of the priorities of Paul are evident in this passage. He moved about with godly intentions, not intending to give a cause for reproach to Christ, and not seeking to make it more difficult for the Jews. He did not seek to merely vindicate himself, but to reduce the amount of friction that could occur when he began witnessing of the Christ. He did all of this without compromising the truth.

HE CALLED THE CHIEF OF THE JEWS TOGETHER

“And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together . . .” Other versions read, “called the leaders of the Jews,” NKJV “those who were the leading men,” NASB “the local leaders of the Jews,” NRSV “the most influential Jews,” GWN “the principle Jews,” MRD “the most important Jewish leaders,” IE “the ones being of the Jews foremost,” ABP and “those who were prominent among the Jews.” EMTV

In the Jewish economy, the “chief” men were the ones most learned in “the Jew’s religion” (Gal 1:13,4). These were not political figures, or mere men of wealth. Rather, they were the ones who had the leadership because of their Scriptural understanding, and leading roles in religious places and affairs. In this way, as well as in other facets of life, the Jews were distinguished from the rest of the peoples. Their lives revolved around the Temple in Jerusalem, and the synagogues where they were located. They were not noted for having coliseums, or other places of non-religious gatherings. Their feasts were religious in nature. In this way they established that God intended for the people identified with Himself to be distinguished for that identity. They were not noted for their involvement in the civil and social affairs of the world.

Before going any further, I want to draw attention to the fact that the Jews maintained their unique identity while in Rome, Italy – a long way from Jerusalem. As in every nation in which they were found, they were never absorbed, so to speak, by the culture, thereby losing their identity. This continues to this very day. Although apparently taking advantage of the benefits of any heathen society, there was a sense in which they remained separate from it.

God has not departed from this standard in the church. While unlearned men are often eager to get Christians to be a part of the society in which they find themselves, this has not yet been established as a Divine strategy.

These days it is not unusual to hear professed Christ leaders challenge Christians to become light and salt in the world by being involved in political and social causes. This entire approach is questionable, to say the least. The influence God intends for His people to have in the world is the result of making clear by their manner of life that they have a primary association with God. It is “unto Him” that they live (2 Cor 5:15), presenting their bodies a living sacrifice to Him (Rom 12:1-2).

A second consideration here is the fact that Paul knew the Gospel, was God’s power unto salvation “to the Jew first” (Rom 1:16). Therefore, most generally, wherever he found himself, his first contacts were made with the Jews.

A third factor in this matter is the fact that Jesus had called him to testify to the Jews, and not only to the Gentiles. Jesus had revealed to Ananias, “he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

The social climate had apparently changed in Rome. Earlier in this book, our attention was drawn to the presence of Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. Formerly having made their home in Italy, they were among those Jews whom Claudius had commanded “to depart from Rome” (Acts 18:2). That

expulsion took place in 52-53 A.D., about nine years prior to this event. They had now returned to Rome. The particulars of that allowance are not provided to us.

PAUL'S EXPLANATION #1

I HAVE COMMITTED NOTHING AGAINST THE PEOPLE

“ . . . and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers . . .”

At this point, Paul does not know if the Jews in Rome had heard of his arrest and the charges brought against him. However, he did want to make sure they knew the truth of the matter, lest he be put at an unnecessary disadvantage.

Even though the Jews had vigorously opposed and harmed Paul, yet he did not seek vengeance against them. He lived out what the doctrine taught: “Recompense to no man evil for evil” (Rom 12:17). And again, “See that none render evil for evil unto any man” (1 Thess 5:15). Peter also taught, “Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing” (1 Pet 3:9).

Paul makes clear that he was not engaged in some kind of retaliation or revenge. He was not delivering formal charges against Israel, although they had sought his life without a just cause. He would leave the matter of vengeance with the Lord, for it belonged to Him. He only sought to confirm that he had been charged falsely, and that any unbiased person was able to see that clearly.

Notwithstanding, he would not let their lies against him go unchallenged, though he did not do evil to them. He saw this as a necessary means of neutralizing damaging influences. Paul boldly said to Felix, “Neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me . . . Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council” (Acts 24:13,18-20).

PAUL'S EXPLANATION #2

I WAS DELIVERED A PRISONER

“ . . . yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me . . .”

Again, Paul makes clear that the charges brought against him could not be proved. Even the governmental authorities of the meticulous manner of Roman law, after both hearing and weighing the charges brought against him had acknowledged they were without any genuine basis. He had done nothing worthy of death.

PAUL'S EXPLANATION #3

CONSTRAINED TO APPEAL UNTO CAESAR

“But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar . . .” Other versions read, “when the Jews objected, I was forced to appeal to Caesar,” NASB “when the Jews made protest against it, I had to put my cause into Caesar's hands,” BBE “the Jews contradicting it, I was constrained to appeal unto Caesar,” DOUAY and “when the Jewish leaders protested the decision, I felt it necessary to appeal to Caesar.” NLT

Even though Felix, Festus, and Agrippa had rendered the verdict of “not guilty,” the Jew continued to press the issue, even asking Agrippa to bring Paul to Jerusalem to be tried. They plotted to kill him along the way. From a practical point of view, this left Paul no recourse except to Caesar. Of course, there was more to it than that. Jesus had promised he would bear witness to Him in Rome, and an angel confirmed that he would stand before Caesar. However, those were pearls he would not cast before everyone.

PAUL’S EXPLANATION #4

CONSTRAINED TO APPEAL UNTO CAESAR

“ . . . not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.” Other versions read, “not that I had any accusation against my nation,” NASB “not that I had any charge to bring against my own people,” NIV “even though I had no desire to press charges against my own people,” NLT and “though it was not because I had any charge to make against my nation.” AMPLIFIED

Paul makes clear that he was not engaged in some kind of retaliation or revenge. He was not delivering formal charges against Israel, although they had sought his life without a just cause. He would leave the matter of vengeance with the Lord, for it belonged to Him (Rom 12:19; Heb 10:30; Rev 2:23). He only sought to confirm that he had been charged falsely, and that any unbiased person was able to see that clearly.

The Protection of His Witness and Character

Some people are overly naive at this point. They feel as though no person should ever defend themselves against erroneous charges. However, this view is too simplistic. When Paul’s doctrine was attacked, or the reality of his apostleship questioned, he addressed the matter.

- When he was charged with teaching that by doing evil good would come (Rom 3:8).
- When some in Corinth questioned the validity of his claim to apostleship (1 Cor 9:1-27; 2 Cor 12:12).
- When the Gospel that he preached was questioned by some in Galatia (Gal 1:11-12; 2:7).

Paul would not allow anything false being said against him that would possibly impede the progress of the Gospel. He even went so far as to silence a woman with a spirit of divination who publically said he was a servant of God, and was showing her people the way of salvation. Such a confession could not be allowed from such a person, lest the Gospel be associated with Satan’s empire of darkness (Acts 16:16-18). Had Paul let that matter go, it would have appeared as though he was working for that woman’s masters.

Along these same lines, Jesus did not permit the demons to confess Him publically (Mk 1:24-25; Lk 4:34,41). God’s people need to learn to conduct themselves wisely in this area. There are people who seek to tarnish our reputation, and we must not ignore it.

FOR THE HOPE OF ISRAEL I AM BOUND

“ 20 For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.”

The Jewish leaders came to meet Paul – which is quite a testimony of itself. I seriously doubt that anyone calling for a meeting of Christian leaders in our relatively small city would meet with much success. Several of us have been involved in an effort to bring only preachers of a particular sect together, and have not done well in their sincere efforts. That is because the religious culture of our

day does not promote that kind of closeness. However, it did exist in Israel, who was cultured by God to be interdependent.

FOR THIS CAUSE I HAVE CALLED FOR YOU

“For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you . . .” Other versions read, “this reason,” NKJV and “this is why” CJB

Note, it was a “cause” that drove this meeting, not mere friendship. There was a purpose behind this gathering, and it did not center in Paul himself. It rather related to the commission that Jesus had given him in the beginning. “I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me” (Acts 26:16-18). Were it not for the carrying out of that commission, Paul would never have been arrested, or even opposed by the Jews.

First, he explains why he was there under these particular circumstances, for it did not look as though he had come to minister. In fact, it did not appear he came of his own will, but was rather forced to come to Rome, bound by chains.

FOR THE HOPE OF ISRAEL

“ . . . because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.” Other versions read, “I am wearing this chain for the sake of the hope of Israel,” NASB “for on account of the hope of Israel I have this chain about me,” DARBY “I’m wearing these chains because of what Israel hopes for,” GWN and “I am bound with this chain because I believe that the hope of Israel – the Messiah -- has already come.” NLT

This is the third time in this episode that Paul has referred to hope, always relating it to the Abraham and the Jews.

- **BEFORE THE JEWISH COUNCIL IN JERUSALEM.** “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question” (Acts 23:6).

- **BEFORE AGRIPPA IN CAESAREA.** “And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews” (Acts 26:6-7).

- **BEFORE THE JEWISH LEADERS IN ROME.** “ . . . because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain” (Acts 28:20).

This is a view of Judaism from the perspective of Divine intent . It is not meant to suggest that every Jew lived with the hope of reference – but every Jew of honest and good heart did so.

For Abraham and those with the “faith of Abraham” (Rom 4:16), everything hinged on the coming of the Messiah. So far as the culmination of human experience was concerned, it was encapsulated in the resurrection of the dead, as it was confirmed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The difference between Paul and the unbelieving Jews was not in the hope itself, but in the One who fulfilled the hope – Jesus Christ. The fact that Paul embraced Jesus, “who is our hope” (1 Tim 1:1), shaped everything he did, and directed the manner in which he thought. The Jews were looking for the Messiah, but Paul had found Him. The Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah, but Paul received

Him in that capacity.

Under the Old Covenant, the Law confirmed the absolute need for a Savior and Liberator. Those who took it seriously soon found that they were morally and spiritually impotent to perfectly fulfill the law, as was demanded of them. That circumstance made the coming Messiah relevant – as compared with looking for someone to give man an earthly advantage and answer all of their carnal desires. Therefore, the Law did its work by convincing of sin, and that is what opened the door for hope, for men who do not think they are sinners have no mind for a Savior.

The language Paul uses is very wise, for he appeals to something honest Jews longed for. Now they face a man who was willing to suffer, be incarcerated, and bound with a chain because of the hope that he possessed.

This is a sterling example of what is meant by the phrase, “We are saved by hope” (Rom 8:24). The individuals who possess that hope, abounding in it by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 15:13), will shape their lives around it. There is no inhibition they will not abandon (Rom 13:12), no weight they will not throw off (Heb 12:2) no defilement from which they will not cleanse themselves (2 Cor 7:1). There is no sacrifice too great, and no effort that is considered too difficult. Hope is a driving force in the believer, and is an anchor for the soul, both steadfast and sure (Heb 6:19). It keeps the one possessing it do avoid drifting into forbidden waters.

THEY WANTED TO HEAR

“ 21 And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee. 22 But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.”

By Divine providence, the Jewish hostility that was found in Jerusalem was apparently not found in Rome, Italy. The stage is being set for a proclamation of the truth. The response of these men to the truth will reveal where they stand.

THEY HAD NOT HEARD ANYTHING BAD ABOUT PAUL

“And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee . . .” Other versions read, “reported or spoken any evil of you,” NKJV “reported or spoken anything bad about you,” NASB “to give an account or say any evil about you,” BBE “any report or story of anything to your discredit,” NJB “We have heard nothing against you!,” LIVING “reported or stated anything to your disadvantage,” WEYMOUTH and “Nobody wrote warning us about you. And no one has shown up saying anything bad about you.” MESSAGE

Considering the aggressive opposition that Paul experienced from the Jews, this is a most remarkable statement.

No Jew from Judea sent them letters warning them of Paul. Furthermore, no Jew came to Rome reporting something evil against Paul, or trying in any way to discredit him. How could this be? It was because God did not allow it to happen. Those who were Paul’s enemies did not think about writing to their fellow Jews in Rome, warning them about Paul.

No Jew from Judea sent them letters warning them of Paul. Furthermore, no Jew came to Rome reporting something evil against Paul, or trying in any way to discredit him. How could this be? It was because God did not allow it to happen. Those who were Paul’s enemies did not think about writing to their fellow Jews in Rome, warning them about Paul. No traveling Jew came to Rome spouting off about Paul, and the purported damage he had done among the Jews. God had, so to

speaking, broken their teeth, so they could not speak against His servant (Psa 58:6). He had clouded their minds so they could not think up ways to discredit Paul. Just as God kept the Israelite women and children safe when all of the men went to certain appointed feasts (Ex 34:24), so God kept Paul's enemies from fomenting trouble against Paul in Rome.

In this way, Paul would be able to witness in Rome without facing the kind of opposition he did elsewhere.

Paul admonished Titus to so conduct his life so that no one would have anything evil to say about him. "In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine showing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you" (Titus 2:7-8). Paul wrote to the Philippians about being "blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Phil 2:15).

The work of God is important enough that everyone involved in it must be clean, lest the name of Christ be blasphemed (Rom 2:24; 1 Tim 6:1).

THEY WANTED TO KNOW WHAT PAUL THOUGHT

These men were not asking for Paul's views on the Roman government, Nero's rule, taxation, or other social issues. They were not asking for his views on marriage or immorality, as the Roman citizens were in a state of moral decline. They had no mind to ask Paul what he thought about Jerusalem being under the control of Rome, and the citizens having to pay taxes to Caesar.

"... But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest..." Other versions read, "we desire to hear from you what your views are," NASB "we would like to hear from you what you think," NRSV "we consider it suitable to hear from you what you think," CSB "we beg to hear of thee what thou thinkest," DARBY and "we think it fitting and are eager to hear from you what it is that you have in mind and believe and what your opinion is." AMPLIFIED

These men were not asking for Paul's views on the Roman government, Nero's rule, taxation, or other social issues. They were not asking for his views on marriage or immorality, as the Roman citizens were in a state of moral decline. They had no mind to ask Paul what he thought about Jerusalem being under the control of Rome, and the citizens having to pay taxes to Caesar.

As they will clarify, they particularly wanted to hear about the disciples of Jesus – people of the way. What kind of reasoning supported their views, and Paul's in particular? What comprised his theological thinking?

A Local Application

We have had our share of evil reports and false charges. But most, if not all, of us have yet to have a local person ask us to explain what we think about life in Christ Jesus, and why we do so.

THEY WANTED TO KNOW OF THIS SECT

"... for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against." Other versions read, "for concerning this sect, it is known to us that it is spoken against everywhere," NASB "for we know that people everywhere are talking against this sect," NIV "for as to this form of religion, we have knowledge that in all places it is attacked," BBE "the only thing we know about this movement is that it is denounced everywhere," NLT and "The only thing we know about this Christian sect is that nobody seems to have anything good to say about it." MESSAGE

Everyone was not speaking against those who were disciples of Jesus. It was the Jews that were doing so. The natives on the island of Melita certainly were not speaking against this group of people. There were thousands, perhaps millions, who were speaking favorably of the faith and love of certain brethren in Rome itself (Rom 1:8). The same was reported of the believers in Thessalonica (1 Thess 1:8-9).

The Jews, however, had been fairly consistent in their opposition to believers, and their hostility toward the Gospel. Now, these Jews were more noble than those critics, and wanted to know more about this body of people – people of “the way” (Acts 24:14). What did they believe, and why did they believe it? What made them what they were, and what kind of power had they experienced? They wanted to know.

It is refreshing when someone – anyone – asks why we believe the things we have embraced? Why do we speak the way we do? What is the reason for our hope? Peter writes, “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ” (1 Pet 3:16).

Paul was ready to give an answer for the hope that was in him, and to do it confidently and with power. He had sanctified the Lord God in his heart.

CONCLUSION

We learn of the ways of God from this entire account. When He directs people along a certain path, the destination is the primary thing, but it is not the only thing. There are blessings and opportunities all along the way – things that bring glory to the Lord and encouragement to the traveler. Ponder some of the opportunities that were granted to Paul from his arrest to his arrival in Rome – a period that stretched over three years.

- In Jerusalem he was given license to speak to the Jews about his life (Acts 21:1-5).
- In Jerusalem he testified to the Jews concerning his conversion (Acts 21:6-13).
- In Jerusalem he testified to the Jews of the commission given to him by Jesus (Acts 21:24-16).
- In Jerusalem he testified to the Jews of his baptism into Christ (Acts 21:16).
- In Jerusalem he testified to the Jews of Jesus’ appearance to him in the Temple (Acts 21:17-21).
- In Jerusalem he testified to the Jewish council (Acts 23:1-10).
- In Caesarea he testified before Felix (Acts 24:10-21).
- In Caesarea he reasoned with Felix and Druscilla concerning righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come (Acts 24:24-25).
- In Caesarea he testified of his innocence to Festus (Acts 25:10-11).
- In Caesarea he gave an extensive testimony to Agrippa of his life and conversion (Acts 26:1-15).
- In Caesarea he gave an extensive testimony to Agrippa of Jesus’ commission to him (Acts 26:16-18).
- In Caesarea he gave testimony to Agrippa of the message he preached (Acts 26:21-23).

- In Caesarea he reminded Agrippa of the testimony of the prophets (Acts 26:27).
- While sailing to Italy, Paul warned them of the danger of sailing at that time, and that much harm would be caused by doing so (Acts 27:10).
- In the midst of a fierce storm, Paul testified of the appearance of the angel of God to him, assuring that only the ship would be lost, and that they would be shipwrecked on a certain island (Acts 27:21-26).
- Before a frightened group of people, Paul assured them they would all be saved from the storm. He then took bread, prayed before them all, and encouraged them to eat (Acts 27:33-35).
- On the island of Melita, before several hundred people, Paul showed great faith when he was bitten of a venomous snake (Acts 28:3-6).
- On Melita, Paul healed the father of Publius, showing the superior power of Christ (Acts 28:8).
- On Melita, Paul healed many of the islanders who were sick (Acts 28:9).
- En route to Rome, Paul and company found brethren in Puteoli, and remained with them for seven days (Acts 28:14).
- En route to Rome Paul was refreshed by the coming of several brethren from Rome, who met them in The Three Taverns, and Appii Forum (Acts 28:15).
- In Rome he was given private quarters where he was able to call for the chief of the local Jews and give witness to them (Acts 28:17-20).

Thus we have a brief summation of a three-year trek to Rome, laden with various kinds of opportunities to bring glory to God and help to the people.

A path that has no opportunities to witness for the Lord is probably not a Divinely ordered one. The people of God should be careful not to be caught up with goals and ambitions that are not attended by open doors! In the Kingdom of God, waiting and inactivity are an admixture. Those who are waiting for a special blessing may very well miss a special opportunity to be a blessing.

Word Of Truth Fellowship, Associated

Presents

The Acts of the Apostles

Commentary

By: Given, O. Blakely

Lesson #107

PAUL PREACHES IN ROME

“ 28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening. 24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not. 25 And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, 26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves. 30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” (Acts 28:23-31)

INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY OF HOLY ACTIVITY

The book of Acts is summation of the activity of the church for the first thirty-five years of its existence (29-64 A.D.). During that time the mandate of the King was being carried out in the manner He desires, with repeated accounts of His direction (1:7-8; 2:4; 4:8,31; 8:26,29; 9:5-17; 10:4,19; 11:28; 12:8, 17; 13:2,9; 16:9; 22:10,14,21; 23:11; 26:15, 16;7:23). Precisely what kind of activities

were the object of our Lord's direction? What kind of people were the focus of attention? Where did the apostles spend most of their time?

It is not unusual to hear men present the book of Acts as though reaching the lost was nearly the only thing that was done? That this is was done cannot be denied – but was that the thrust of recorded efforts of the early church? Where was the quality time spent, and who was generally the focus of attention?

The following two pages records the majority of contacts recorded in the book of Acts. They speak for themselves. I provide them here with full knowledge that I may have inadvertently missed some. However, they will be representative of the kind of thrust, or emphasis, that occupied the early church that filled the earth with the Gospel by the middle of the first century.

#

TEXT

PERSON

PLACE

LOCATION

ACTIVITY

RECIPIENTS AND RESULTS

1

2:14-41

Peter

House

Jerusalem

Preached to Jews

3,000 Jews converted

2

3:12-4:4

Peter

Temple

Jerusalem

Man Healed

5,000 Jewish men believed

3

4:8-12

Peter

Council

Jerusalem

Accountability

Jews

4

4:19-20

Peter & John

Council

Jerusalem

Accountability

Jews

5

5:20-21

Apostles

Temple

Jerusalem

Commanded

Jews

6

5:29-32

Peter & Apostles

Council

Jerusalem

Accountability

Jews

7

5:42

Apostles

Temple/Houses

Jerusalem

Continuance

Jews

8

6:9-10

Stephen

Synagogue

Jerusalem

Disputing

Jews

9

7:2-53

Stephen

Council

Jerusalem

Defense

Jews

10

8:4

Those scattered

Everywhere

Nations/Regions

Preaching

Jews only (Acts 11:19)

11

8:5-8,12

Philip

City

Samaria

Preaching

Samaritans

12

8:25

Peter & John

Villages

Samaria

Preaching

Samaritans

13

8:26-39

Philip

Desert Road

To Gaza

Preached

Ethiopian Eunuch

14

8:40

Philip

Cities

Azotus

Preached

Everyone in Palestine

15

9:17-19

Ananas

House

Damascus

Called apostle

Saul

16

9:20-22

Saul

Synagogues

Damascus

Preached

Jews

17

9:29

Saul

City

Jerusalem

Disputed

Jews

18

10:26-48

Peter

House

Caesarea

Preached

Gentiles – Cornelius

19

11:19-21

Those scattered

Cities

Phrygia/Cyprus/Antioch

Preached

Citizenry, with emphasis on Jews

21

11:26

Barnabas & Saul

City

Antioch

Taught

Believers

22

13:4-5

Barnabas & Saul

Synagogues

Salamis

Preached Word

Jews

23

13:12

Saul

Governor's house

Paphos

Doctrine

Governor

24

13:14-41

Saul

Synagogue

Antioch

Preached

Jews/Gentiles

25

13:43-48

Barnabas & Saul

City

Antioch

Persuaded

Jews/Gentiles

26

13:49

Many

Region

Antioch

Word published

Jews/Gentiles

27

14:1-3

Paul & Barnabas

Synagogue

Iconium

Preached

Jews/Greeks

28

14:6-18

Paul & Barnabas

Cities

Lystra/Derby/Lyconia

Preached

Citizenry

29

14:21

Paul & Barnabas

City

Derbe

Preached

Citizenry

30

14:21-23

Paul & Barnabas

Cities

Lystra/Conium/Antioch

Confirmed

Believers

31

14:25

Paul & Barnabas

City

Perga

Preached

Citizenry

32

15:3

Paul & Barnabas

Cities

Phenice/Samaria

Reported

Believers

33

15:32

Judas & Silas

City

Antioch

Confirmed

Believers

34

15:35

Paul & Barnabas

City

Antioch

Preached/Taught

Believers

35

15:41

Paul & Silas

Region

Syria/Cilicia

Confirming

Churches

36

16:5

Paul & Silas

Cities

Syria/Cilicia

Established

Churches

37

16:6

Paul & Silas

Regions

Phrygia & Galatia

Established

Churches

38

16:13-15

Paul & Silas

City

Philippi

Taught

Jewish women

39

16:30-34

Paul & Silas

City

Philippi

Spoke Word

Gentile Jailer & House

40

16:40

Paul & Silas

House

Philippi

Comforted

Believers

41

17:1-9

Paul & Silas

Synagogue

Thessalonica

Preached

Jews/Greeks

42

17:10-12

Paul & Silas

Synagogue

Berea

Preached

Jews/Greek

43

17:17-18

Paul

Synagogue/Market

Athens

Disputed

Jews/Devout men

44

17:17-19

Paul

Market Place

Athens

Disputed

Devout men

45

17:22-33

Paul

Areopagus

Athens

Preached

Certain devout men clave to him

46

18:4-6-

Paul

Synagogue

Corinth

Reasoned

Jews

47

18:7-8

Paul

House

Corinth

No details

Jews, Cripus/house believed

48

18:11-18

Paul

City

Corinth

1-1/2 yrs teaching

Believers

49

18:19-20

Paul

Synagogue

Ephesus

Reasoned

Jews

50

18:22

Paul

“The church”

Jerusalem

Saluted

Church

51

18:23

Paul

Region

Galatia & Phrygia

Strengthening

Disciples

52

18:24

Apollos

Synagogue

Ephesus

Spoke boldly

He was taught by Aquila/Priscilla

53

18:26

Aquila/Priscilla

Home

Ephesus

Taught more perfectly

Apollos increased

54

18:27

Apollos

Region

Achaia

Strengthened

Disciples

55

18:28

Apollos

Synagogue

Corinth

Mightily convinced

Jews

56

19:1-7

Paul

City

Ephesus

Taught

Disciples baptized

57

19:8-9

Paul

Synagogue

Ephesus

Disputed 3 mths

Mixed results – Jews

58

19:9-10

Paul

School

Ephesus

Continued for 2 yrs

All in Asia heard (Jews/Gentiles)

59

19:11-12

Paul

School

Ephesus

Special miracles

Jews/Gentiles: Many healed

#

TEXT

PERSON

PLACE

LOCATION

ACTIVITY

RECIPIENTS AND RESULTS

60

19:17-20

Paul

School

Ephesus

Word of God spread

Citizenry: Great book burning

61

19:22-41

Paul

Asia

Ephesus

True God declared

Idol worshipers opposed

62

20:1-2

Paul

Macedonia

Various parts

Gave much exhortation

Believers

63

20:6-12

Paul

Upper chamber

Troas

Preached

Ministered to disciples

64

20:17-38

Paul

Unknown

Miletus

Exhorted elders

Disciples wept when he departed

65

21:3-6

Paul

Unknown

Tyre

Tarried with disciples

Disciples accompanied to ship

66

21:8-16

Paul

Philips house

Caesarea

Tarried certain days

Disciples spoke, some joined Paul

67

21:17-20

Paul

Unknown

Jerusalem

Declared his ministry

Disciples glorified the Lord

68

21:21-39

Paul

Temple

Jerusalem

Joined Jews in vow

Falsely charged by Asian Jews

69

22:1-22:21

Paul

Steps of barracks

Jerusalem

Testified to Jews

Zealously opposed by Jews

70

23:1-10

Paul

Barracks

Jerusalem

Testified to Council

Great dissension arose among Jews

71

23:33-24:23

Paul

Governor's mansion

Caesarea

Gave testimony to Felix

Incarcerated Paul, giving liberty

72

24:24-25

Paul

Governor's mansion

Caesarea

Reasoned with Felix

Felix trembled, sought anothe time

73

25:6-12

Paul

Before Festus

Caesarea

Appealed to Caesar

Festus ordered he go to Caesar

74

26:1-29

Paul

Before Agrippa

Caesarea

Testified to Agrippa

Agrippa concluded Paul innocent

75

27:3

Paul

Visited brethren

Sidon

Was refreshed

Continued on journey to Rome

76

27:9-12

Paul

Ship

At Sea

Gave counsel

His counsel was ignored

77

27:21-26

Paul

Ship in storm

At Sea

Related vision

Continued journey

78

27:30-31

Paul

Ship in storm

At Sea

Spoke to centurion

Had to remain on ship to be saved

79

27:33-36

Paul

Ship in storm

At Sea

Urged people to eat

People cheered up and ate

80

28:7-8

Paul

House of Publius

Island of Melia

Healed father

Gentiles: sick healed

81

28:9-10

Paul

House of Publius

Island of Melita

Healed sick of island

Gave them needed supplies

82

28:14

Paul

Unknown

Puteoli, Italy

Found certain brethren

Spent seven days with brethren

83

28:15

Paul

Unknown

Three Taverns, Appii Forum

Roman brethren met

Paul thanks God and took courage

84

28:17-29

Paul

Special house

Rome

Called chief Jews

Testified to Jews

85

28:30-31

Paul

Rented house

Rome

All who came to him

Testified of Kingdom for two years

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE TEXT

In a grand display of the Sovereign direction of the Lord, Paul is granted a single day to speak particularly to the Jews. He seizes the opportunity, and many come to his lodging on that day. During the day he expounded and testified of the Kingdom of God, persuading them of Jesus out of Moses and the Prophets. He continued to do this from morning until evening. Because some believed and some did not, Paul delivers a word of solemn warning, which was followed by the departure of the Jews. They reasoned among themselves concerning what they had heard that memorable day. Paul is then said to have continued for two consecutive years in his own hired house, receiving everyone that came to him. This method of disseminating the Word had also been employed in Ephesus, as compared with a formalized outreach program so common in our time. The substance of Paul's preaching and teaching is identified, together with a special notation that he did this with confidence, with no man forbidding him.

SPIRITUAL CONSISTENCY

There is a certain spiritual consistency that is seen throughout the book of Acts. The substance of preaching is invariably Christ and/or the Kingdom of God. This could be called theo-centricity, or God-centeredness. The focus of attention is never placed upon human duty. Whenever the requirements for men are addressed, it is always within the context of the Gospel and man's accountability to God.

The church itself is never at the heart of the proclamation. There is no report of an effort to increase her numbers, or to plant new churches, or to restore the one that was first found in Jerusalem. There is no emphasis placed upon the family, the government, social equity, or the state of society in general. Political issues were never emphasized, nor was the social inequities of the day – like slavery.

There was no stress placed on personal problems, domestic issues, or the general state of young people, or men, or women. Worldly authorities were not consulted or used to buttress what was being preached and taught. Higher education was not accentuated among the people of God. There was no plea for funds having to do with outreach, or the maintenance of an institutional agenda. The only special offering that was gathered from the churches was for the support of the "poor saints" which were at Jerusalem. There was no promotion of Christian music, or teaching concerning "praise and worship." There was no call for the general support of the poor nations of the world, or for the socially deprived.

The record of the activities of the early church and its leaders is available to every literate person in the world. There is no need for surmising and speculation on matters that have so captured the attention of modern Christians.

This observation is not to be construed as an expression of opposition to philanthropic works that target the poor and oppressed of this world. God forbid that such a conclusion should be drawn. It is meant to affirm that such works are not primary ones, nor are the people of God to be judged in regard to their response to such promotions. They are not to be foisted upon the church as though heaven had placed such an obligation upon the saints of the living God. It is enough to say that we are to "do good unto all men," but it is also necessary to add, as does the Spirit, "especially to them that are of the household of faith" (Gal 6:10).

All of these things are lived out in the book of Acts. The main people are obviously the people of God, and the main message pertains to the Gospel of Christ. If those emphases are not reflected in the modern church, it is walking outside of the will of God, and is competing with the God-revealed emphasis for His people. These observations are plain enough to be seen and received by all who are of humble spirit.

THEY APPOINTED HIM A DAY

CONTENTS

- **THEY APPOINTED HIM A DAY (28:23)**
- **HE EXPOUNDED AND TESTIFIED (28:24a)**
- **SOME BELIEVED AND SOME DID NOT (28:24b)**
- **THEY AGREED NOT AMONG THEMSELVES (28:25a)**
- **THE CATALYST FOR DEPARTURE (28:25b-28)**
- **THEY HAD GREAT REASONING AMONG THEMSELVES (28:29)**
- **TO FULL YEARS IN HIS OWN HIRED HOUSE (28:30)**
- **PREACHING AND TEACHING (28:31)**
- **CONCLUSION**

“ 28:23 And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging . . .”

THEY APPOINTED HIM A DAY

“And when they had appointed him a day . . .” Other versions read, “set a day for him,” NASB “arranged to meet Paul on a certain day,” NIV “when a day had been fixed,” BBE “they arranged a day with him,” CJB “on a designated day,” GWN “So a time was set,” NLT “Paul and the Jewish leaders set a day for a meeting,” LIVING “They agreed on a time to meet with Paul,” CEV “So they set a date with Paul,” GNB and “They agreed on a time.” MESSAGE

This was a formal arrangement – a special day, a special time, and a special place. Who did the appointing? The Roman authorities? The guard assigned to him? Paul himself? The Jews? Or was it something jointly done between Paul and the Jews. All of the versions, and all of the commentators I reviewed assume the time was set by Paul and the Jews. I am not sure this is the case. When they came to Rome, it is written that the authorities “permitted him to dwell by himself with a soldier who guarded him” (Acts 28:18). If this is the same house he rented, which is mentioned in verse 30, it is probable that Paul had been allowed to set times when he could be visited. It is also possible that this was cleared by the Roman authorities, which, to me, seems more reasonable. However a person looks at this text, there did have to be an agreement between the Jews and Paul.

There was doubtless some sense in which both parties had to be prepared for the meeting, for everything was to be done in a day. The fact that this could happen seems to me to require Divine intervention. The willingness on the part of the Jews is itself most remarkable. The fact that no one interfered with this meeting suggests that Satan was restrained at this time. He was not able to foment agitation as he did in the Temple, on the stairs of the barracks, in the judgment hall of Felix, and before Festus. But at this time, when Paul, by the direction of Jesus Himself, was to bear witness of Him to Rome, Satan is shackled, and able to “do nothing against the truth” (2 Cor 13:8).

Satan, then, although “as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet 5:8), is still restrained. He cannot venture one millimeter beyond the boundary of Divine permission. That is a precious piece of knowledge to stow away in our hearts as we journey through this world. You are not the only one with limitations! Your adversary has them also. They have been imposed upon him by the same Lord whose heel he bruised.

But from the higher perspective, they were gathered together by the Lord to be exposed to the

Gospel. This was the same kind of circumstance that existed on that memorable day of Pentecost. There were “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” gathered in Jerusalem.

Satan has never been able to operate without Divine limitation, as confirmed in the case of Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). That circumstance has not been solidified even more. Not only is he strictly subject to the will of the Lord, but the children of God can successfully “resist” Him (1 Pet 5:7-8; James 4:4). They have been given “the whole armor of God,” and weapons of “warfare” that are capable or repulsing his vicious attacks (Eph 6:10-18; 2 Cor 10:3-4).

Yet, in the employment of this weaponry, we are wholly dependent upon the Lord. This does not mean that we can live trouble-free lives. Paul had all of these weapons available to him, in this three-year episode, yet he endured beating, incarceration, being shackled with a chain, enduring an unprecedented storm, and being bitten by an extremely venomous snake. Yet, even “in all these things,” he continued “more than a conqueror through Him that loved” him (Rom 8:37). His survival, and also this appointment to meet with the Jews proved that it is precisely the truth: “greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

THERE CAME MANY INTO HIS LODGING

“ . . . there came many to him into his lodging . . . ” Other versions read, “they came to him at his lodging in large numbers,” NASB “came in even larger numbers,” NIV “came to him at his lodgings in great numbers,” NRSV “a larger number of influential Jews than expected,” GWN and “they came back to his home with a number of their friends.” MESSAGE

When the Jews came to Paul, they were larger in number than when he first met them. These were not mere children or casual Jews (if there be such a thing), but chief men of the Jews. I gather than those who came were devoted to the Law, and were expert in the contents of Scripture. Their motivation for coming was to hear what Paul thought, and to learn more of this sect that was everywhere spoken against. But from the higher perspective, they were gathered together by the Lord to be exposed to the Gospel. This was the same kind of circumstance that existed on that memorable day of Pentecost. There were “Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven” gathered in Jerusalem. They thought they were there to observe the feasts of the Passover and Pentecost. However, they had really been drawn together by the Lord to hear the inaugural address of the day of salvation. The disciples had not brought them together. It was the work of the Lord.

Similarly, Paul had agreed to meet with a certain group of Jews, but more came than he at first expected. This was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes (Psa 118:23).

A Spiritual Application

The same Lord and the same power that brought this large number of leading Jews to Paul is still at work. However, to enjoy the benefits of such power, men must be within the circumference where it is made known.

Those who live by faith can expect the Lord to do more than they can “ask or think” (Eph 3:20). Babylon the Great has taught men to rejoice when their own plans appear to have been brought to fruition. But there is a rejoicing that transcends such meager pursuits. It happens when in a moment of time, and entirely apart from human plans, the number of disciples explodes from 120 to 3,120, and a few days later 5,000 men are added to the number (Acts 2:41; 4:4). It is the kind of rejoicing that results from a deacon going down to the city of Samaria when the disciples are scattered owing to persecution. When he preaches Christ there, the entire city “with one accord” give heed to his message (Acts 8:5-8).

I understand that this does not happen all of the time. But it is possible where there are people who

are living by faith and walking in the Spirit. Take, for example, our own fellowship here in Joplin: The Word of Truth Fellowship. There are thousands of people who have believed and been baptized because of the message that has sounded from this place. In Pakistan alone the number is in the hundreds of thousands. While there is one “Word of Truth Fellowship” in Joplin, there are about 567 in Pakistan. The message has also reaped large numbers in Burkina Faso, West Africa. The message God has given us to see and declare has reaped far greater results in Kenya Africa than it has in Joplin, Missouri.

And why is this so? It is certainly not traceable to any expertise we have had. It is not because we developed strategies to reach these people. Christian leaders from these areas came to us, and men from other regions continue to come to us (i.e. Philippines, Ghana, and Myanmar).

The same Lord and the same power that brought this large number of leading Jews to Paul is still at work. However, to enjoy the benefits of such power, men must be within the circumference where it is made known. This involves:

- Living by faith (Heb 10:38).
- Walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25).
- Abiding in the Son (John 15:4,7; 1 John 2:24).
- Through the Spirit mortifying the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13).
- Presenting your body a living sacrifice unto God (Rom 12:1-2).
- Maintaining fellowship with the Son (1 Cor 1:9).
- Keeping the Gospel in memory (1 Cor 15:2).
- Standing fast in the Lord (1 Thess 3:8).
- Walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7).
- Setting our affection on things above and not on things on the earth (Col 1:1-2).
- Continuing in the faith, grounded and settled (Col 1:23).
- Fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12).
- Running the race with patience that has been set before us, while looking unto Jesus (Heb 12:1-2).
- Holding fast the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end (Heb 3:6).
- Holding the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end (Heb 3:14).

These are things to which Paul had devoted himself. They, and other things related to them, are what keeps one within the circle of usability.

This is also why Paul sought brethren wherever he went, preferring them and spending extended periods with them wherever possible. Such fellowship is one of the means of maintaining the perspective reflected in the above listing. It is why the exhortation is given, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor 15:58). Let every soul meditate on that!

HE EXPOUNDED AND TESTIFIED

“ . . . to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.”

Remember, the Jews said they wanted to know what Paul thought, and more concerning the sect

that “everywhere is spoken against” (Acts 28:22). It is worthy of extended consideration to note how Paul responded to this request. He does not commence by telling them what he thought about this or that. Neither, indeed, does he launch into a discourse about the group with which he had been identified. He was so wholly devoted to the Lord that he could speak about the what was contained in Scripture, and by doing so would precisely answer both of these requests. He will not draw their attention to himself or to the body of believers – even though he was fully devoted to the Lord, together with all those who called upon the name of the Lord. This clearly confirms that he was not engaged in promoting a certain group – even the one truthfully referred to as “the body of Christ.” His thinking was in strict concert with the Scriptures, and thus it could best be explained by drawing their attention to those Scriptures.

It ought to be noted that the Scriptures are not designed to promote a sect. Those who endeavor to use them in such a manner, attempting to confirm their superiority, have not conducted themselves wisely. If the Scriptures do not define what the people see in us, then we are living in error and hardness of heart. If we say Christ is “over all” (Rom 9:5), yet we live without due regard to that circumstance, we will not be able to use the Scriptures to define what we think and who we are. In such a case, the Scriptures, at the very best, will be appealed to as an “ought to” manual of conduct.

HE EXPOUNDED AND TESTIFIED

“ . . . to whom he expounded and testified . . .” Other versions read, “explained and solemnly testified,” NKJV “explaining to them and solemnly testifying,” NASB “explained and declared,” NIV “testifying to,” NRSV “gave them teaching, giving witness,” BBE “explained . . . giving a thorough witness,” CJB “testifying of,” DARBY “expounded his position,” NAB “expounding, testifying fully,” YLT and “He explained to them the truth .” IE

He Expounded

The word “expounded” has the following lexical meaning: “to place or set out, expose . . . set forth, declare,” THAYER “to set up in public, exhibit publicly,” LIDDELL-SCOTT “to make manifest; to publish,” LEH and “to explain, set forth.”

He Testified

As used here, the word “testified” means “to testify, I. e. earnestly, religiously to charge . . . to attest, testify to, solemnly affirm . . . to confirm a thing by (the interposition of) testimony, to testify, cause it to be believed,” THAYER “to make a serious declaration on the basis of presumed personal knowledge - ‘to declare, to assert, to testify,” LOUW-NIDA and “charge, warn, adjure . . . testify to, hear witness (to) solemnly.” GINGRICH

This was not a mere academic lecture, word study, or lectureship. This was the passionate testimony of a spiritual man who had understanding of the subject.

Even more than this, the truth of God had so permeated the heart and mind of Paul that his words accurately revealed how he thought. The Jewish leaders had said, “we desire to hear from you what you think” NKJV (Acts 28:22). Therefore, he spoke out of the abundance of his heart, telling him how he thought about the matter of “the Kingdom of God.” He was not among those sophists who tell us what the Bible says, then add that its words were not the way they would have said it, but they made themselves believe it, so to speak, because God had said it – i.e. it really did not make sense to them, but their deep humility caused them to publically to acquiesce with the truth of God. Such men are miserable representatives of the Lord of glory!

He was not among those sophists who tell us what the Bible says, then add that its words were not the way they would have said it, but they made themselves believe it, so to speak, because

God had said it – i.e. it really did not make sense to them, but their deep humility caused them to publically acquiesce with the truth of God.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD

And what was the theme of Paul's expounding and testifying? It was "the Kingdom of God." Other versions read, "about the Kingdom of God," NASB "the reign of God," YLT and "the truth about the kingdom of God." IE

The expression "the Kingdom of God" is unique to the New Covenant writings. There are indirect references to this kingdom in the Prophets. There are references to "His Kingdom" (2 Sam 5:12; Psa 103:19; 145:12; Isa 9:7; Dan 4:3,34; 6:26; 7:14,27). A Kingdom was revealed to Daniel that would "never be destroyed," would "break in pieces and consume" all the kingdoms of the world, and "stand forever" (Dan 2:44). This was the same Kingdom of which our text speaks, though not revealed to the extent it is now made known.

- The Gospels refer to the "kingdom of God" fifty-five times.
- The Gospels refer to the "the Kingdom of heaven" thirty-four times.
- Jesus referred to "My Kingdom" three times (Mk 6:23; Lk 22:30; John 18:36).
- Jesus referred to "the Kingdom" fourteen times (Matt 4:23; 6:13; 8:12; 9:35; 13:19; 13:38,43; 19:12-24:14; 25:34; Mk 11:10; Lk 12:32; 18:29; 19:16).
- He spoke of the saints and "the Kingdom of their Father" (Matt 13:43).
- Relating it to the Father, He referred to "Thy Kingdom" (Lk 11:2).
- Referencing the Father, Jesus referred to "His Kingdom" (Matt 13:41).
- Connecting it with the Son, He referred to "His Kingdom" (Matt 16:28; Lk 11:18).
- The insightful proclamation of this Kingdom began it John the Baptist (Matt 3:1; Mk 1:14-15)
 - This continued throughout Jesus' prodigious ministry (Lk 4:43).
 - The book of Acts refers to "the Kingdom of God" seven times (Acts 1:3; 8:12; 14:22; 19:6; 20:25; 28:23,31).
 - The epistles refer to it eight times (Rom 14:17; 6:9,10; 15:50; Gal 5:21; Col 4:11; 2 Thess 1:5).
 - There is also reference to "the Kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5).
 - It is referred to as "the Kingdom of His dear Son" (Col 1:13).
 - There is also "the Kingdom which He hath promised" (James 2:5).
 - Add "the Kingdom of our God" (Rev 12:10).
 - There is also "His Kingdom" (1 Thess 2:12; 2 Tim 4:1).
 - Included is "His heavenly Kingdom" (2 Tim 4:18).
 - There is "Thy Kingdom" (Heb 1:8).
 - There is also "a Kingdom which cannot be moved" (Heb 12:28).
 - Who can forget "the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 1:11).
 - There is also "the Kingdom and patience of Jesus" (Rev 1:9).

All of these are speaking of the same Kingdom. When referring to the heavenly government,

Kingdom never appears in the plural.

Ponder what is said of this Kingdom that Paul preached.

- This Kingdom belongs to the poor in spirit (Matt 5:3).
- This Kingdom belongs to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matt5:10).
- Men are to seek this Kingdom “first” (Matt 6:33).
- He that is least in this Kingdom is greater than John the Baptist (Matt 11:11).
- It is given to some to know the mysteries of this Kingdom (Matt 13:11).

With so much being said through the Holy Spirit concerning the Kingdom of God, one wonders why do very little is being said about it in the modern church. An unbelievable number of Bible College and Seminary graduates appear to have little interest in the subject, and have little understanding of it.

We can be instructed concerning this Kingdom (Matt 13:62).

- It is difficult for a rich man to enter this Kingdom (Matt 19:23-24).
- There are “things concerning the Kingdom” (Acts 8:12; 9:8).
- There is entering the Kingdom “through much tribulation” (Acts 14:22).
- This is a Kingdom that is “in righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).
- It is not merely in word, but in power (1 Cor 4:20).
- It is a Kingdom that is inherited (1 Cor 6:9,10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5).
- Flesh and blood cannot inherit this Kingdom (1 Cor 15:50).
- Men are translated into this Kingdom (Col 1:13).
- There are those who work for this Kingdom (Col 4:11).
- We are called unto this Kingdom (1 Thess 2:12).
- Suffering for righteousness sake qualifies for this Kingdom (2 Thess 1:5).
- This Kingdom will appear when Jesus appears (2 Tim 4:1).
- We are preserved unto this heavenly Kingdom (2 Tim 4:18).
- We have received this Kingdom (Heb 12:28).
- We are heirs of this Kingdom (James 2:5).
- An abundant entrance into this Kingdom will be ministered to us (2 Pet 1:11).

Why???

With so much being said through the Holy Spirit concerning the Kingdom of God, one wonders why do very little is being said about it in the modern church. An unbelievable number of Bible College and Seminary graduates appear to have little interest in the subject, and have little understanding of it. There is some talk about Christ’s “soon coming Kingdom,” a Kingdom that will dominate for one thousand years, and a Savior that is “coming to reign.” However, there is a suspiciously small amount of teaching about the Kingdom of Christ, into which all believers have already been translated (Col 1:13). Something is seriously wrong with an approach to Christianity that leaves out such a glaringly inspired subject.

What Is the Kingdom of God?

Because more will be said on this matter in the commentary on verse 31, I will here make only a few introductory statements.

- This is the Kingdom that Isaiah prophesied would be placed upon Christ's shoulder. "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his Kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this. (Isa 9:7). The angel Gabriel revealed to Mary that this would be fulfilled in Jesus, the Son to whom she would give birth (Lk 1:31-33).

- It is the Kingdom Daniel prophesied would be set up during the times of the Kingdoms of Babylon, Medes-Persians, Greece, and Rome. "And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan 2:44). Paul taught that commensurate with Christ's enthronement in heaven, this dominion was set in place (Eph 1:20-22).

- It is the Kingdom that was given to Jesus when He returned to heaven in the clouds. "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed" (Dan 7:13-14).

- It is described by David as the Messiah ruling in the midst of His enemies. "LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies" (Psa 110:1-2). Peter said this was fulfilled following the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2:34-36).

- This is the Kingdom of which David spoke, declaring the righteousness would be its scepter. "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the scepter of thy kingdom is a right scepter" (Psa 45:6). The writer of Hebrews affirms this prophecy has been fulfilled in Christ (Heb 1:8).

From these few texts, we may conclude the following concerning "the Kingdom of God."

- It relates specifically to Christ's redemptive role, being associated with His birth and ascension into glory.
- This is a Kingdom noted for sure increase, judgment, and stability.
- It is a government of peace.
- It will eventually, in the process of time, decimate all other kingdoms.
- It is a universal dominion, over all people, nations, and languages. None of them can operate independently of the government of Jesus.
- Having been exalted to the right hand of God, Jesus is presently ruling in the midst of His enemies, bringing His purposes to culmination in spite of seeming opposition.
- The sign of the rule of Jesus is not an overt show of power, but righteousness – a righteous that is found in those who were previously the enemies of God, alienated from Him through their ignorance.

This Kingdom belongs to God, and He has given it to Christ, laying its government upon His shoulder. For this reason, it is referred to as "the Kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph 5:5).

This is the Kingdom Paul expounded, and to which he testified. He showed the Jews that the Kingdom of which the prophets prophesied had been placed in the hands of Jesus.

PERSUADING THEM CONCERNING JESUS

“ . . . persuading them concerning Jesus . . .” Other versions read, “trying to persuade them concerning Jesus,” NASB “tried to convince them about Jesus,” NIV “having discussions with them about Jesus,” BBE “He persuaded them concerning Jesus,” CSB “persuading them those things that concern Jesus,” GENEVA “persuading them also of the things concerning Jesus,” YLT “taught them about Jesus,” LIVING “endeavoring from morning till evening to convince them about Jesus,” WEYMOUTH “try to win them over to Jesus,” CEV and “trying to persuade them all about Jesus.” MESSAGE

One of the acid tests of genuine rule is the ability to rule over the god of this world and the powers of darkness. While in a humbled state, Jesus did precisely that. For the first time in history, Satan confronted a Man who did not yield to his finely crafted temptations

As used here, the word “persuading” means, “persuasive power, persuasion,” THAYER “convince,” FRIBERG “win over,” UBS and “convince someone to believe something and to act on the basis of what is recommended.” LOUW-NIDA

I gather that Paul particularly related Jesus to the prophecies of God’s Kingdom, and generally to all of the prophecies concerning the Messiah. I will comment on the latter when we touch upon verse thirty-one.

When Pilate asked Jesus if He was a King (and a king has a kingdom), Jesus answered, “Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born , and for this cause came I into the world , that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John 18:37). Prior to this statement Jesus affirmed, “My Kingdom is not of this world . . . but now is My Kingdom not from hence” (John 18:36).

Behold how Jesus associated His kingship with His birth, and entrance into the world. He did not say He would come again to be king, as some teachers and songs affirm. He did not say that he would come the second time to reign, but that He was born for this purpose, entering the world in order to obtain the Kingdom over which He presently presides.

In other words, the Kingdom of God is presently being administered by “the Man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim 2:5) – and that is precisely why Jesus was “born,” to become a man! He certainly did not become a Man in order to be dominant over all, for He fully occupied such a position before coming into the world. Further, His Kingdom was not of this world, but was to be an administration of righteousness, not overt power. That as a Man Jesus was, in fact, superior to all other men was fully demonstrated during His earthly life. There was not situation over which He did not preside – the single exception being found in His death, to which He acquiesced in order that might “destroy him that had the power of death” (Heb 2:14).

Jesus Ruled Over Nature

Nature itself was subordinate to the Man Christ Jesus. He stilled storms (Mk 4:39), walked on a raging sea (Matt 14:25), effectively cursed a fig tree (Matt 21:19), multiplied bread (Matt 14:17; 15:36), commanded catches of fish (Lk 5:4; John 21:6), and commanded a fish to deliver a coin to Peter (Matt 17:27). He also turned water into wine (John 2:8-9).

Jesus Ruled Over Domain of Satan

One of the acid tests of genuine rule is the ability to rule over the god of this world and the powers

of darkness. While in a humbled state, Jesus did precisely that. For the first time in history, Satan confronted a Man who did not yield to his finely crafted temptations (Matt 4:1-14). With his finger, Jesus cast out demons, commanding them to leave those they were controlling (Lk 11:20). Demons acknowledged His superiority over them (Matt 8:29; Mk 1:24). Spirits that caused people to be unclean, blind, deaf, dumb, epileptic, and wild, left people at Jesus' command (Mk 1:6; 5:8; 9:25; Lk 4:35; 8:29; 9:42,55). And finally, in His death, when He was at His weakest state, He "spoiled principalities and powers" (Col 2:15), and "destroyed" the devil (Heb 2:14).

He Healed All Manner of Disease

There was no disease that stymied Jesus. He healed all kinds of sickness and disease (Matt 4:23): deafness (Matt 11:5; Mk 7:32-25), blindness (Matt 9:27-29; 11:5; 20:30; 21:14; Mk 8:22-23; 10:46-51; John 9:1-7), dumbness (Matt 15:31; Mk 7:32-35), impotence (John 5:7-8), flowing blood (Mk 5:25-29), fever (Matt 8:14-15), a withered hand (Mk 3:1-5), the maimed (Matt 15:30), the lame (Matt 21:14), and plagues (Lk 7:21).

He Raised the Dead

Jesus was noted for raising the dead (Matt 11:5). Three specific people are mentioned whom Jesus raised from the dead: Jairus' daughter (Lk 8:52-55), the only son of a widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-15), and Lazarus (John 11:37-44).

He Forgave Sins

Again, in His humble state, prior to His exaltation, Jesus forgave sins. He forgave a man sick of the palsy (Matt 9:2), a sinful woman who anointed His feet (Lk 7:47-50), and a woman taken in the act of adultery (John 8:11).

He Was Impervious to Aggressive Opposition

While in this world, Jesus faced aggressive opposition and evil intentions, yet His enemies were totally and completely frustrated in all of their attempts, until God gave them an hour to do their worst (Lk 22:53). They sought to kill Him, but could not do so (John 5:16-18; 7:1). They sought to lay hands on Him, but could not do so (Matt 21:46; Mk 12:12; John 7:30; 10:39). Once they sought to cast him off the brow of a hill, but Jesus simply walked through them and went His way (Lk 4:29-30).

He Knew the Thoughts of Men

Unlike any other man who had ever lived, Jesus knew the thoughts of men, and what was inside of them (Lk 6:8; John 2:24-25; 13:11).

Summation

Peter summarized Jesus' earthly ministry with these words: "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him" (Acts 10:38). This was done in spite of the devil's opposition, and the seeming dominancy of the powers of darkness.

Let me again emphasize, that all of these manifestations took place when Jesus was in a humbled state. He had come "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom 8:3), humbled Himself by laying aside His equality with God (Phil 2:6-7), taking upon Himself the form of a servant (Phil 2:7), submitting to the experience of temptation (Heb 2:18; 4:15), and becoming "obedient unto death" (Phil 2:6).

But Jesus is no longer in a humbled state. Who is the person who imagines that He is waiting to

exert His power, when He was able to do so in a humbled state, and with not a single case of failure. Now He has been exalted, and it is not possible for Him to be glorified any more than He is at this present time. It is not possible for Him to be Lord in any more fully than He is at this very hour. It only remains for it to be made known, or unveiled. Apostolic doctrine confirms that God is going to make known what Jesus is at this present time. "Which in His times He shall show, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen" (1 Tim 6:15-16).

Paul's words "concerning Jesus" had to do with what and who He IS, not what is was going to be. They were affirmations, not suppositions, declarations, not a philosophical analysis. They were not a representation of what the people were seeking, but the avowal of whom the Father had given, and why He had done so.

OUT OF THE LAW AND OUT OF THE PROPHETS

" . . . both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets . . ." Other versions read, "both from the law of Moses and from the prophets," NKJV making use of both the Torah of Moshe and the Prophets," CJB "from Moses' Teachings and the Prophets," GWN "Using the law of Moses and the books of the prophets," NLT "from the five books of Moses and the books of prophecy," LIVING "quoting from the Law of Moses and the writings of the prophet," GNB and "what Moses and the prophets had written about him." MESSAGE

There are several references to Moses and the Prophets.

- **ABRAHAM SPEAKING TO THE RICH MAN IN HELL.** "Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them . . . And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke 16:-31).

- **JESUS TO THE TWO ON THE ROAD TO EMMAUS,** "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets , he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27).

- **JESUS TO HIS DISCIPLES.** "And he said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms , concerning me" (Luke 24:44).

- **PHILIP TO NATHANIEL.** "Philip findeth NATHANIEL, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets , did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45).

- **PAUL TO AGRIPPA.** "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come" (Acts 26:22).

- **PAUL TO THE JEWISH LEADERS IN ROME.** "And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23).

It is said of the Lord God, "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7). This is particularly true in regards to the coming of Christ into the world, His vicarious death, His resurrection, His ascension, and His enthronement in glory. So far as His entrance into the world is concerned, there were numerous prophecies that were detailed enough to enable the faithful to recognize Him. A Jesus who does not precisely match the words of

Moses and the Prophets concerning Him is “another Jesus” (2 Cor 11:4). Those who lack familiarity with Moses and the Prophets have yet to establish that they have, in fact embraced the real Jesus. They may very well have done so, but they will not know it for sure until they obtain some understanding in this area.

Those who lack familiarity with Moses and the Prophets have yet to establish that they have, in fact embraced the real Jesus. They may very well have done so, but they will not know it for sure until they obtain some understanding in this area.

Some of the Scriptural proofs that Jesus of Nazareth was the promised Messiah include the following.

- His precise fleshly lineage could be traced through the woman (Gen 3:15; Gal 4:4).
- He was born of a virgin (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23).
- He was born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2; Matt 2:1,5).
- He was called out of Egypt (Hos 11:1; Matt 2:15).
- He was reared in Nazareth, which was spiritually “dry ground” (Isa 53:1-2; Matt 2:23; John 1:46).
- His ministry was in Galilee (Isa 9:1-2; Matt 4:13-15).
- He healed the sick (Isa 53:4; Matt 8:17).
- He spoke in parables and uttered things that had not been known since the foundation of the world (Psa 49:4; Matt 13:34-35).
- He rode into Jerusalem on a colt during a high time (Zech 9:9; Matt 21:2-10).
- In the hour of trial, His disciples forsook Him (Zech 13:7; Matt 26:56).
- They parted His vesture when He was crucified (Psa 22:18; Matt 27:35; John 19:24).
- Even though He had done many miracles, the people did not believe on Him (Isa 29:10; 53:1; John 12:37-41).
- The choosing of Judas, and His betrayal of Jesus (Psa 41:9; John 13:18; 17:12).
- The people hated Jesus without a cause (Psa 7:4; 35:19; 69:4; 109:3; John 15:25).
- The safe-keeping of the disciples even during the tumultuous time of Christ’s arrest and death (Psa 109:6-19; John 17:12; 18:8-9).
- The kind of death Jesus died (Deut 21:23; Psa 22:16; John 18:31-32).
- Jesus being thirsty on the cross (Psa 22:15; 69:21; John 19:28).
- None of Jesus’ bones being broken when He died, even those who were crucified with him had their bones broken (Ex 12:46; Num 9:12; Psa 34:20; John 19:33-36).

Outward Manifestations Any Person Could Examine and Ponder

All of these things were outward manifestations. There are a host of other proofs that are confirmed by the experience of faith. Those will be covered in verse 31).

Reasoning out of Moses and the Prophets involved a correlation of what they foretold of the Messiah and Jesus of Nazareth. Although few considered Jesus to be that Messiah, He was, in fact, the very One God had promised.

- He was the “Prophet” of Moses (Deut 18:15,18).

- He was Isaiah's "Man" (Isa 32:2), "Servant" (Isa 42:1), "Sanctuary" (Isa 8:14), "Nail in a sure place" (Isa 22:23-25), and "Redeemer" (Isa 59:20).

- He was the "Righteous Branch" (Jer 23:5), "The Lord our Righteousness" (Jer 23:6), and "David" (Jer 30:9) of Jeremiah.

- He was the "Plant of Renown" of Ezekiel (Ezek 34:29).

- He was Daniel's "the Son of Man" (Dan 7:14) and "Messiah" (Dan 9:24-25).

- He was "David their King" (Hos 3:5), and God's "Son" of Hosea (Heb 11:1).

- He was Micah's "Ruler of Israel" (Mic 5:2).

- He was "the Desire of all nations" of Haggai (Hag 2:7).

- He was Zechariah's "Branch" (Zech 3:8), "Shepherd" (Zech 13:7), and "King over all the earth" (Zech 14:9).

- He is "the Messenger of the Covenant" (Mal 3:1), and "the Sun of Righteousness" (Mal 4:2) of Malachi.

FROM MORNING UNTIL EVENING

" . . . from morning till evening." Other versions read, "from dawn to dusk," CSB "from early morning unto evening," DARBY "from morning to night," GENEVA "He began lecturing in the morning and went on into the evening!," LIVING "all day long," IE and "all day, from morning to evening." MESSAGE

As ordinarily perceived, this would have been twelve hours. Jesus asked, "Are there not twelve hours in a day?" (John 11:9). I gather, therefore, that this discussion filled the entire day.

Other Extended Gatherings

While this is not intended to set a precedent for all generations, there have been occasions when the people of God spent extended times in holy activities, including being taught and discussing the Word of God. This was driven more by interest than by law, and were required by appetite rather than requisite.

- In Nehemiah's day, when they had kept a seven-day feast, "the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers" (Neh 9:2). During that time, they stood up and heard the Law read "one fourth part of the day" (6 hours). This was followed by another "fourth part of the day" (6 hours), when they "confessed, and worshiped the Lord their God" (Neh 9:3).

- The multitudes spent three days with Jesus prior to being miraculously fed by Him (Mk 8:2).

- After having Jesus joined them early in the day, the two on the road to Emmaus spent the rest of the day with Him, extending into the night. Immediately following the departure of Jesus, the two returned to Jerusalem where they "found the eleven gathered together, and them with them." During that time, and after confirming He was really risen from the dead, Jesus appeared to them, and "opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures" (Lk 24:13-49)m.

- Paul spent the first day of the week with the brethren at Troas, and "continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

Sharing his thinking, and speaking of "the way" were matters that could be expounded at length. In all of these cases, and more, the gatherings were tailored for the concerned and interested, not the unconcerned and disinterested.

If this kind of approach was adopted by the churches of our time, the impact would no doubt be startling. I do not question that many facilities would have to be sold for lack of use, and church staff numbers would be significantly reduced, if not altogether dissolved. If these assessments are true, the churches at Sardis and Laodicea have been successfully restored – characterized by lifelessness and lukewarmness.

SOME BELIEVED, AND SOME BELIEVED NOT

“ 24 And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.”

The results of this single day are recorded. They were not produced by a growth program. Paul did not speak with a mind to increase the number of disciples, although he was certainly not averse to obtaining such results. His objective was first to give as faithful witness of Jesus Christ, that is what Jesus said he would do: “Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome” (Acts 23:11).

The interest of the people was strictly secondary. That is because the power is in the Gospel of Christ (Rom 1:16), the Convicting One is the Holy Spirit (John 16:8-11), and the Lord Jesus is “the Author and Finisher” of faith (Heb 12:2). Jesus is the One who gives repentance (Acts 5:31), and sheds forth the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:33). God is the One who opens the heart (Acts 16:14), and who gives men “in the behalf of Christ . . . To believe” (Phil 1:29). The results, therefore, essentially confirm what God did and did not do. This perfectly synchronizes with the purpose of God, and how He perceived the people themselves.

The responses of men reflect two things which are synchronized by the manner in which the Gospel is received. The first preeminent and driving factor is the will of God – what He determines. There is a sense in which this determination is made independent of human response. Thus we read, “Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began” (2 Tim 1:9). If it were not for the inclusion of “called us with a holy calling,” men might be able to conclude the whole of Divine determination is driven by human response. Those words, however, indicate that more is involved in our calling than mere human aptitude.

Jude also speaks of us being “kept for Jesus Christ” NASB before we were called (Jude 1:1). In the epistle to the Romans, Paul speaks of being “called” according to God’s “purpose,” not according to human achievement or desire (Rom 8:28). Additionally, Paul also speaks of this in language of great loftiness. “According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will” (Eph 1:4-5).

In his letter to the Thessalonians, he further affirms that the power of the Gospel toward them, their reception of that Gospel, were evidence of God’s election, and not the cause of it.; “Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” (1 Thess 1:3-6). And again, “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:14).

For many, this is a difficult thing to receive, and yet there is very plain teaching on the subject that is to be believed.

SOME BELIEVED

What is it that distinguished those who believed, and why did they believe. From the lower point of view, it was because the message appealed to them, and resonated most favorably upon their hearts. From the high viewpoint, it was the same as with those Gentiles in Antioch: “And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48). Other versions read, “all who were appointed for eternal life,” NIV “as many as had been destined for eternal life,” NRSV “marked out for eternal life,” BBE “had been prepared for,” GWN “pre-destined to the life of the Ages,” WEYMOUTH “being arranged for,” ABP “destined (appointed and ordained) to eternal life,” AMPLIFIED and “having been set into.” INTERLINEAR Unable to accept the meaning clearly suggested by the text, the Living Bible reads, “as many as wanted eternal life believed” – which is a gross distortion.

When Paul traveled to Thessalonica, he “reasoned with them out of the Scriptures” for three Sabbaths. Although he was forced out of that area, yet it is written that “some of them believed, and consorted,” or joined with, Paul and Silas (Acts 17:4).

This description of the legitimate response to the Gospel – “believed” – is repeatedly reported in the book of Acts.

- In the beginning “all that believed were together” (Acts 2:44).
- Later, five thousand were among “them which heard the Word and believed” (Acts 4:4).
- The city of Samaria “believed Philip preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ,” and “were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).
- When Peter raised Dorcas from the dead, people in that region heard it “and many believed in the Lord” (Acts 9:42).
- When reporting what took place at the house of Cornelius, Peter said the gift of the Spirit was given to those “who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 11:17).
- When the Word was preached in Antioch, “the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number believed and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11:21).
- On the Island of Cyprus, when the governor heard what Paul preached, and witnessed the judgment of Elymas, he “believed” (Acts 13:12).
- In Antioch, the Gentiles who were ordained unto eternal life “believed” (Acts 13:48).

Believing does involve the intellect, yet it is not primarily intellectual. It is not mere intellectual assent. It is not simply accepting what was said, and not engaging in disputation.

In Iconium “a great multitude both of Jews and also of Greeks believed” (Acts 14:1).

- In Berea, upon hearing the Gospel, “many of them believed” (Acts 17:12).
- In Athens “certain men clave unto” Paul, and believed: “among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them” (Acts 17:34).
- In Corinth Cripus and his household, and “many of the Corinthians hearing believed and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).
- In Ephesus “many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds” (Acts 19:18).

And how is it that these people “believed?” It was because God gave them, “in the behalf of

Christ,” to “believe” (Phil 1:29). From the high vantage point, the proper message was preached, and the proper people heard it. In that context, God gave them to believe. Elsewhere it is said of those who believed that they “had through grace” (Acts 18:27).

What Does It Mean to Believe?

Believing does involve the intellect, yet it is not primarily intellectual. It is not mere intellectual assent. It is not simply accepting what was said, and not engaging in disputation.

Here, the word translated “believed” (**evpei,qonto**) means “to persuade, I. e. to induce one by words to believe: absolutely to cause belief in a thing,” THAYER “convince,” FRIBERG “satisfy,” UBS “to convince someone to believe something and to act on the basis of what is recommended – 'to persuade, to convince,” LOUW-NIDA “to prevail upon, win over, persuade,” LIDDELL-SCOTT and “be convinced, be sure, certain.” GINGRICH

This particular word is used fifty-eight times in Scripture. It is translated in different ways (KJV).

- **“Persuaded”** (Matt 27:20; 28:14; Lk 16:31; Lk 20:6; Acts 13:43; 14:19; 18:4; 19:8,26; 21:14; 26:26,28; 28:23,24; Rom 8:38; 14:14; 15:14; 2 Cor 5:11; Gal 1:10; 2 Tim 3:5; 2 Tim 1:12; Heb 6:9; 11:13
- **“Trusted”** (Matt 27:43; Mk 10:24; k 11:22; 18:9; 2 Cor 1:9; 2 Cor 10:7; Phil 2:24; 3:4; Heb 2:13; 13:18
- **“Obeyed”** (Acts 5:36,37; Rom 2:4; Gal 3:1; 5:7; Heb 13:17; James 3:3
- **“Agreed”** (Acts 5:40
- **“With one accord . . . made”** (Acts 12:20
- **“Believed”** (Acts 17:4; 27:11
- **“Yield”** (Acts 23:21
- **“Confident”** (Rom 2:19; 2 Cor 2:3; Gal 5:10; Phil 1:6,14,25; Phil 3:3; 2 Thess 3:4; Phile 1:21
- **“Assure”** (1 John 3:19).

This is not the same word used for believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, or the believing through which eternal life is obtained. It is the persuasion of the mind, as compared with the heart. Some of the ways in which it is used confirms this to be the case. The same original word is used in the following texts is the same used in our text.

- Chief priests “persuaded” the multitude to release Barabbas (Matt 27:20).
- Chief priests said they would “persuade” Pilate the Jews stole the body of Jesus (Matt 28:14).
- Jesus spoke of men who would “trust in riches” (Mk 10:24).
- Jesus spoke of a man who “trusted” in his armor (Lk 11:22).
- There were people who “trusted in themselves” (Lk 18:9).
- The enemies of Jesus spoke of those who might “trust” John the Baptist was a prophet (Lk 20:6).
- They were people who “obeyed” the false prophet Theudas (Acts 5:36-37).
- The Jewish leaders “agreed” to the counsel of Gamaliel, beat the apostles, and let them go (Acts 5:40).

- Certain Jews from Antioch “persuaded” the people to stone Paul (Acts 14:19).
- Julius “believed” the pilot of the ship and its owner above Paul (Acts 27:11).
- Certain “obeyed unrighteousness” (Rom 2:8).
- Some were “persuaded” they were godly guides, yet were blind (Rom 2:19).
- Paul was not among those who “trusted in themselves” (2 Cor 1:9).
- Paul warned about the man who “trusted in himself” (2 Cor 10:7).
- Horses “obey” (James 3:3).

The kind of believing that took place in this text was intellectual persuasion. It was not the kind of believing of which it is written, “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness” (Rom 10:10). When Abraham is said to have been “fully persuaded” that God was able to do what He had promised, yet another Greek word was used (**plhroforhqeij**). The lexical meaning of this word is, “to make one certain, to persuade, convince . . . fully convinced or assured.” THAYER There “fully persuaded” was the prelude to acting upon what was promised, not doubting it, and framing his life around it.

This is more than a mere academic diversion. It is my persuasion that many professed believers in Christ have only believed at the intellectual level – apparently like some to whom James wrote (James 2:19). They appear to not yet have believed with their heart, for they have not acted upon the truth.

Here again we witness the inferiority of the English language. There are words and word-distinctions that are in the Greek and Hebrew language, but are not reflected in the English language. “Love” in another work like this. This is the reason one must be familiar with the doctrine of Scripture, which will spell out the difference – i.e. demons believing, versus believing on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some of the hearers of our text were intellectually convinced that what Paul said was the truth. Yet, they did not cry out, “What shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), or “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30).

You may recall that Luke compares the response of the Berean Jews with those of the Thessalonians. The passage has, in my judgment, not been seen properly. The Jews believed (same word as used in our text), and joined themselves to Paul and Silas. Others “believed not,” and set the city in an uproar, finally forcing Paul and Silas to leave (Acts 17:1-9). Going to a Berean synagogue, the Jews did not react in such a manner. Rather than opposing Paul, they searched the Scriptures to see if what Paul was saying was true (Acts 17:11). They did not assume he was wrong like the majority of the Jews at Thessalonica.

When writing to those who had believed in Thessalonica, Paul described their response without regard to the objecting Jews. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe . For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews” (1 Thess 2:14). The Bereans were not “more noble” than those who are so described. In fact, on the surface, they appear to have come behind them. The Thessalonians who believed received Paul’s word as it was spoken, while the Bereans had to verify it. The comparison is with the Thessalonian Jews who did not believe, and opposed Paul.

How people respond to the Word of God, particularly the Gospel, is a critical matter. Giving intellectual assent to it is necessary and good, but the response must go further than that. To cause the individual to be accepted, believing must be “from the heart” (Rom 10:10).

SOME BELIEVED NOT

Other versions read, “disbelieved,” NKJV “would not believe,” NASB “refused to believe.” NRSV

Some of the Jewish leaders, having heard Paul, did not agree with what he said. They did not intellectually assent to his words. They did not see them as being the truth of God, and thus would make no further inquiry into them – at least not for that time.

The Law specified that God was to be loved “with the mind” (Matt 22:37). The text in Deuteronomy says “with all thy soul” (Deut 6:5; 10:12; 30:6). That speaks of natural aptitude, particularly as it relates to thinking and emotion. The men of our text who “believed not” did not acquiesce with the truth in their minds. Paul’s testimony conflicted with their way of thinking, and thus they rejected what he had to say. This kind of rejection is extant in our day as well, and it is at staggering levels.

If more of the Word of God was declared, men would find that as astounding level of unbelief exists in most churches. The mere mention of some pivotal statement of truth will verify that this is the case.

THEY AGREED NOT AMONG THEMSELVES

“ 25a And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed . . . ”

Here the same thing happened that took place when the Sanhedrin heard Paul. Owing to Paul’s wisdom in identifying that they were fundamentally disagreed among themselves, he spoke so they would turn upon each other rather than himself (Acts 23:6-8). In that case, the contention was over the resurrection of the dead. In this text it was over Jesus being identified with the prophecies of Moses and the Prophets.

THEY AGREED NOT AMONG THEMSELVES

“And when they agreed not among themselves . . . ” Other versions read , “they disagreed among themselves,” NIV “there was a division among them,” BBE “unable to agree among themselves,” GWN and “after they had argued back and forth.” NLT

Here is confirmation that light and darkness cannot be joined. Ignorance and understanding cannot journey together. One thing that Babylon the great has accomplished is the blurring of the line between truth and the lie, illumination and deception, and righteousness and unrighteousness. Actually, it has introduced a kind of church in which demons can easily sit with men, perpetrating their doctrines. The professed followers of Jesus are encouraged to make friends with the carnally minded, and there is no thought about such an effort producing contamination and variance that cannot be resolved in the flesh.

The Jewish leaders evidently talked among themselves about what Paul had declared, seeking some common ground. But they were unable to find it, for the ones who had been persuaded of the truth of what Paul said refused to compromise that persuasion. Those who were not convinced refused to accept the notion that they had embraced something wrong, or that it was remotely possibly that their view of Jesus of Nazareth was incorrect. It even appears as though their dialog began while Paul was speaking, as the remainder of this verse will confirm.

THEY DEPARTED

“ . . . they departed . . . ” Other versions read, “began leaving,” NASB “as they were leaving,” NRSV “they went away,” BBE “they left,” CJB “went out from him,” MRD “were ready to leave,”

IE “they at last left him,” WEYMOUTH and “they started to leave.” WILLIAMS

They had spent a full day with Paul, and had heard much. But at the end of the day, they were no closer to Paul than at the moment they entered where he was staying. The Word of God, as we will see, finally drove them from the one who cared for them.

THE CATALYST FOR DEPARTURE

“ 25b . . . after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, 26 Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27 For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. 28 Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”

Now we will be exposed to how an inspired man of God addresses a mixed audience – one where what he says is intellectually acknowledged as true, while others in the audience refuse to do so. Paul’s response will not fit into man-made methodologies that have been invented by religious bigots, or others who attempt to pass along their worldly way of thinking to professed believers.

AFTER PAUL HAD SPOKEN ONE WORD

“ . . . after that Paul had spoken one word . . .” Other versions read, “began leaving after Paul had spoken one parting word,” NASB “after Paul had made this final statement,” NIV “as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement,” NRSV “after Paul made one statement,” RSV “after Paul had said this one thing,” BBE “left after Paul had quoted this particular passage to them,” GWN and “Paul had one last thing to say to them.” NJB

Keep in mind that we are talking about a single day, obviously chocked full of weighty considerations. Paul had not taught them of family relationships, the way to realize your personal dreams, how to manage your finances, the various nuances required for a happy marriage, or how to raise your children. Make no mistake about this – this is what a significant number of contemporary Christian leaders would have addressed. If there was some political issue, they might have spoke to it, or some matter related to poverty, disease, social disorder, or moral trends. Rather than running down some such convenient path of thought, Paul had spoken to the people, expounding and testifying the kingdom of God, and persuading them concerning Jesus. With a theme like that, there is less tolerance for unbelief!

One of the chief difficulties with the current agendas of the modern church is that what they talk about is of little or no consequence. It simply does not fit into the environment of eternity. If it was not for the news, social issues, and a variety of worldly problems, such men would have nothing to say. By way of comparison, Paul preached a message that was relevant in good or bad times, to the rich and the poor, to male and female, in good governments of despotic ones. His message transcended the affairs of this world – all of them. In view of that, he will, have zero tolerance for the despising of his message, just as he did in other places.

- Antioch (Acts 13:43 – one message).
- Athens (Acts 17:33 – one message)
- Corinthian synagogue (Acts 18:5-6 – unknown number of Sabbaths).
- Ephesian synagogue (Acts 19:9 – (after three months)).

It is apparent that Paul spoke as long as there was some level of genuine interest. Further, he made

no effort to stir up interest by carnal means. There is also no evidence that he ever attempted to form friendships prior to preaching the Gospel.

WELL SPAKE THE HOLY GHOST

“Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers . . .” Other versions read, “The Holy Spirit spoke rightly,” NKJV “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth,” NIV “The Holy Spirit was right in saying,” NRSV “The Holy Spirit correctly spoke,” CSB and “The Holy Spirit beautifully expressed.” WEYMOUTH

Note that in quoting from the book of Isaiah, Paul said “the Holy Spirit spoke.”

This reflects the same perspective declared by Peter: “for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” NKJV (2 Pet 1:21). This was said of a text that was written prior to the Babylonian captivity – well over 750 years prior to event Luke is reporting. The text had probably been copied numerous times, and even translated into Greek in the Septuagint version, which was written and completed prior to 132 B.C. Yet, there was no question about the integrity of the text, which had been in use for over 175 years, and probably copied numerous times as well. O, that there was such trust in the integrity of Scripture in our time, when re-translation (not copying) has become so popular!

By saying Isaiah prophesied “well,” “rightly,” or “correctly,” Paul is saying that what he said was still taking place – and it is today as well.

Remember, this is a Divine assessment. There is no chance that it is not precise in every detail, whether men can see it or agree with it or not.

HEARING YE SHALL HEAR AND NOT UNDERSTAND

“ . . . Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand . . .” Other versions read, “You will keep on hearing, but will not understand,” NASB “you will be ever hearing but never understanding,” NIV “you will indeed listen, but never understand,” NRSV “Though you give ear, you will not get knowledge; and seeing,” BBE and “You will hear clearly but never understand.” GWN

Those who advocate tolerance of the religious ungodly, and gentle and forbearing speech with those who refuse what is provided in Christ Jesus need to pay particular attention to what is said in this text.

In other words, Isaiah was to tell the people they would not comprehend what he was saying – but he was to say it anyway. Isaiah’s commission was much like that delivered to Ezekiel: “For they are impudent children and stiffhearted. I do send thee unto them; and thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD. And they, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear, (for they are a rebellious house,) yet shall know that there hath been a prophet among them. And thou, son of man, be not afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briers and thorns be with thee, and thou dost dwell among scorpions: be not afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they be a rebellious house. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear: for they are most rebellious” (Ezek 2:4-7).

Those who advocate tolerance of the religious ungodly, and gentle and forbearing speech with those who refuse what is provided in Christ Jesus need to pay particular attention to what is said in this text. This was spoken by an Apostle of Christ to those who had heard, so far as this record is concerned, one proclamation of the Savior as prophesied by Moses and the Prophets. Further, these people were Jews who had been cultured by Moses and the Prophets to receive the Lord’s Christ.

Isaiah spoke to a people who had been locked into their condition. They were in a position where they could hear truth in its purity, addressed to understanding, and yet they would not understand.

Spiritual Understanding

Spiritual understanding requires being submitted to the Scriptures, but that will not enable a person to understand. The Jews who were with Paul had been subjected to the Scriptures, hearing them read every Sabbath (Acts 13:27; 15:21), and personally searching them, for their entire lives. Add to of that, they had been exposed to a proper exposition of those Scriptures, and still they did not understand. In fact, the more they heard, the more they were repulsed by the truth. Like the Hebrew\ believers who received the Epistle to the Hebrews, they were “dull of hearing” (Heb 5:11). They just could not take hold of the truth, even though they heard a lot of it. What does Paul say to a people like this?

SEEING YE SHALL SEE AND NOT PERCEIVE

“ . . . and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive . . .” Other versions read, “you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive,” NASB “You will be ever seeing, but never perceiving,” NIV “?you will indeed look, but will never perceive,” NRSV “see but not understand,” LIVING “You will certainly see, but you won't understand!” IE “will look and look, and by no means see,” WEYMOUTH and “you will indeed look and look with your eyes but will not see [not perceive, have knowledge of or become acquainted with what you look at, at all].” AMPLIFIED

It would make no difference how deeply they looked into the words of the prophet, or how diligently they considered them, they would not be able to discern their meaning. Words set before them diligently and with frequency would not change their condition.

THEIR HEARTS ARE WAXED GROSS

“ , , , For the heart of this people is waxed gross . . .” Other versions read, “have grown dull,” NKJV “has become calloused,” NIV “has become fat,” BBE “has grown thick,” CJB “waxed fat,” GENEVA “is stupefied,” MRD “are hardened,” NLT “is grown obtuse,” MONTGOMERY and “has grown dull (stupid, hardened, and calloused).” AMPLIFIED

A gross, or fat, heart is an uncircumcised one. It has been covered over with the fat of sin and transgression, and is impervious to the prods of truth. There was no goad available to men that could pierce through the layer of fat that had enclosed their hearts. They were spiritually stupid, having been deprived of all wisdom and understanding.

The irony of the whole situation is that their religion had made them this way. As they mechanically went through the ordinances and ceremonies of the Law, it only anesthetized them, making it more and more difficult to understand.

THEIR EARS ARE DULL OF HEARING

“ . . . and their ears are dull of hearing . . .” Other versions read, “hard of hearing,” NKJV “they scarcely hear,” NASB “Hardly hear,” NIV “heavy of hearing,” RSV “slow in hearing,” BBE “they barely hear,” CJB “hear heavily with their ears,” DARBY “Cannot hear,” NLT and “thick of hearing.” TNT

Dull ears are also “uncircumcised ears” (Acts 7:51; Jer 6:10). When the trumpet of warning was sounded, they could not hear it. When the shout of exhortation was lifted up, they were impervious to the sound of it.

Dull ears are also “uncircumcised ears.” When the trumpet of warning was sounded, they could not hear it. When the shout of exhortation was lifted up, they were impervious to the sound of it.

What is more, the more they heard, the more they were repulsed by what they heard. They were completely incapable of hearing a word that could save them, a promise that could retrieve them, and a power that could deliver them. And how does the free will of man fit into that scenario?

THEIR EYES THEY HAVE CLOSED

“ . . . and their eyes have they closed . . .” Other versions read, “shut their eyes,” NRSV “their eyes are shut,” BBE “you have closed your eyes against understanding,” LIVING and “shut tight their eyes.” WILLIAMS

Isaiah’s prophecy states that God closed their eyes. “For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes: the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath He covered. And the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed: And the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I am not learned. Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid” (Isa 29:10-14).

Referring to this very passage, Paul told the obstinate Jews in Antioch, “Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you” (Acts 13:40-41).

How is it that Isaiah said God closed their eyes, and Paul quotes the text as saying the Jews closed them? This is the same kind of thing that took place in Pharaoh. God told Moses HE would harden Pharaoh’s heart (Ex 4:21; 7:3; 14:4,17). God, then, is said to have “hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex 7:13-14,22; 9:12; 10:1; 10:20,27; 11:10; 13:8).

Pharaoh’s heart is said to have been hardened, just as the Lord said (Ex 8:19; 9:7).

Pharaoh is also said to have hardened his heart (Ex 8:15,32; 9:34,35).

Some view this as Pharaoh hardening his heart, and after doing this several times, God ratified his action, making it irreversible. However, in God’s words to Moses, He never did say Pharaoh would harden his heart, but rather that He (God) would harden Pharaoh’s heart (Ex 4:21; 7:3; 14:4,17). Pharaoh hardening his heart was the result of Divine judgment, not the cause of it.

An Overview

The condition of which Isaiah spoke, and to which Paul referred is most arresting. It is vividly described as hearing but not understanding, and seeing but not perceiving, The condition is described as hearts being gross, or overgrown with fat, the people having closed their eyes, and being dull, or incapable, of hearing.

All of this is a description of Divine judgment. That is, the people closed their eyes because they had been given up to their own desires, as in Romans. “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not

hear;) unto this day” (Rom 11:7-8). From this higher perspective Isaiah said, “For the LORD hath poured out upon you the spirit of deep sleep, and hath closed your eyes : the prophets and your rulers, the seers hath he covered” (Isa 29:10).

LEST THEY SHOULD

“ . . . lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them . . .” Other versions read, “Otherwise they might,” NIV “so that they might not,” NRSV “for fear that they might,” BBE “otherwise they might,” CSB “lest perhaps,” DOUAY “so that they might not,” NAB “to avoid using,” NJB “For you don’t want to,” LIVING “to prevent their ever,” WEYMOUTH and “so that they may never.” ISV

The condition described is one not only one of Divine judgment, but of human preference as well. The absolute willingness of the people to close their eyes, ignore the words they heard, and stumble on in darkness confirms that God’s judgment was righteous. They did not close their eyes because they had to, but because they wanted to – and that is because God, in judgment, gave them over to their own reprobate desires. Whereas they could have received grace to resist such unholy inclinations, now such grace is put truth beyond their reach.

The word “lest” is translated from a word (**mh,pote**) meaning, “a prohibitory conjunction; lest ever, lest at any time, lest haply,” THAYER and “in order that not (at all), lest.” FRIBERG

From the human point of view, the people closed their eyes so they would not yield to the powerful constraints of the Gospel. From the Divine point of view, God caused this condition in order to put the truth beyond their access.

This is most difficult for some to comprehend, seeing it is revealed that God would have “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:4). The idea here is that all races, nations, and peoples have been included in the provision of salvation. That is why the Gospel is to be preached “to every creature” (Mk 16:15). All of this is not as simplistic as it appears on the surface. There are “vessels of wrath PREPARED for destruction ” NIV (Rom 9:22). They are “vessels . . . unto dishonor” (Rom 9:21; 2 Tim 2:20). There are people who do not receive the “love of the truth,” to whom God sends “strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thess 2:11-12).

Isaiah was sent to people with a legitimate message, yet it would prove to be the means by which their obstinance would be revealed. God gave him this commission, “Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes ; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed. (Isa 6:9-10).

Here, then, are three most arresting perspectives of the hardness of men’s hearts.

- First, the condition is depicted as Divine judgment – the appointment to a state from which man is totally incapable of recovering himself. Isaiah said it was God pouring out the spirit of deep sleep upon the people, closing the eyes of the people, their prophets, and their rulers. He also covered the “seers” so they were unable to see the truth (Isa 29:10).

- The means by which this determination was implemented was the preaching, or declaration of the truth. It was through his words that Isaiah made the heart of the people “fat,” shutting their eyes so they could not see, hear, understand, convert, and be healed (Isa 6:9). Paul and Barnabas told the rejecters at Antioch that “it was necessary” that the Word of God should first have been preached to them (Acts 13:46). This was not merely a “Jew first” technicality, but was also the means of discovering their real condition.

- The revelation of the appointment is seen in the response of the people to the preaching of the Word..

In this way the righteousness of God was made known. His judgment was precise. The people demonstrated their disinterest in His provisions. Further, His great salvation remained available to “whosoever will” (Rev 22:17).

BE IT KNOWN UNTO YOU

“ . . . Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it.”

God did not “send” the Gospel to the Gentiles until the Jews, as a whole, had rejected it. In this way He would also fulfill the word He delivered through Moses: “They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation” (Deu 32:21). Paul confirmed that this is precisely why the Gospel was preached to the Gentiles. “But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you. But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought Me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me. But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:19-21).

Thus the emphasis was changed from Israel to the Gentiles. This by no means indicates that God had abandoned Israel altogether. He did not totally cast away His people, nor has He voided His promise to them (Rom 11:1-11). He did, however, deliver a generation – the non-remnant – to reprobation, while reserving the remnant who exist because of “the election of grace” (Rom 11:5).

THE THEOLOGICAL DILEMMA

This entire circumstance has created a theological dilemma for many Bible students and professed believers. The difficulty comes because of the teaching of men concerning “free will.” This teaching exists even though there is not a syllable of Scripture that affirms the will of men, or another part of the nature make-up of man, is free. In the Authorized Version, in all but a single verse, the word “freewill” applies to offerings given over above the tithe (Lev 22:18,21,23,38; Num 15:3; ; 29:39; Deut 12:6,17; 16:10; 23:23; 2 Chron 31:14; Ezra 1:4,3:5; 7:16; 8:28; Psa 119:108). The exception is Ezra 7:13, where the Israelites from the Babylonian captivity were told by Cyrus, “of their own freewill to go up to Jerusalem.”

The words “free will” occur four times in the NKJV (Lev 1:3; 19:5; 22:19, 29) – all referring to offerings.

“Free will” occurs a single time in the NASB version, referring to Philemon consenting to receive Onesimus back (Phile 1:14).

The NIV and NRSV versions do not contain the words “free will.”

The RSV versions uses “free will” two times (2 Cor 8:3; Phile 1:14). The first has to do with taking a special offering, and the second to Philemon receiving Onesimus.

There is no doctrine concerning the will of man in all of the Bible. Moses, the Prophets, the Psalmists, John the Baptist, Jesus, the Apostles, nor Luke, Mark, James, or Jude delivered any teaching on this subject.

Yet, uninspired and sectarian men have developed a doctrine of their own on this theme. On the

basis of this spurious doctrine, they reject the Scriptural teaching and concept of predestination, election, and Divine foreknowledge. However, after they have presented all of the human reasoning, the Word of God still speaks of people being “chosen . . . to salvation” (2 Thess 2:13), an “election of grace” (Rom 11:5), being “predestinated unto adoption” (Eph 1:5), and having “obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who worketh all things after the counsel of His own will” (Eph 1:11). We still read of people being “appointed” to “obtain salvation” (1 Thess 5:9), and being “ordained to eternal life” (Acts 13:48). We refuse to pretend these texts are not in the Scriptures, nor will we gloss them to make people feel comfortable with the doctrines and traditions of men. If hearing the Word of God is the juncture in time when the hearts of men are made manifest, and the appointments of God are carried out, then how is it possible to ignore those who balk at texts such as the ones we have mentioned?

The Line Upon Line Principle

Religious sophists tell us that men are slow learners, and for that reason there is frequent representation, going over the truth again and again, until it finally sinks in. Some speak of this as teaching “line upon line, and precept upon precept.”

The words “line upon line” are found two times in Scripture. The phrases “precept upon precept” and “here a little and there a little” are included in both references. What do they mean? Here are the texts. Both are found in the twenty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, which was the general context of the passage from which Paul quoted in our text.

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? and whom shall he make to understand doctrine? them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little : For with stammering lips and another tongue will he speak to this people. To whom he said, This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear. But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little ; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (Isa 28:9-13).

The parallel in our time is staggering. There is such froth coming from the pulpits and literature of the land that it boggles the mind. Endless repetitions of what is required to be saved, have a successful marriage, the elemental details of holiness, etc. are pouring forth like an uncontrollable deluge – and that is the best teaching. The people are being taught as though they really had no capacity to learn.

The first mentioning of the phrase follows the question, “Whom, shall He teach knowledge? And whom, shall He make to understand doctrine?” (Verse 9). The Amplified Bible reads, “To whom will He teach knowledge? [Ask the drunkards.] And whom will He make to understand the message? Those who are babies, just weaned from the milk and taken from the breasts? [Is that what He thinks we are?]

That is, this is the response of the Israelites to Isaiah and the Prophets. It is like saying, “They are addressing us as though we were unlearned and ignorant, teaching over and over with simplistic teaching.”

However, as the next verse reads, “No, but [the Lord will teach the rebels in a more humiliating way] by men with stammering lips and another tongue will He speak to this people [says Isaiah, and teach them His lessons]. To these [complaining Jews the Lord] had said, This is the true rest [the way to true comfort and happiness] that you shall give to the weary, and, This is the [true] refreshing—yet they would not listen [to His teaching]” AMPLIFIED (verses 11-12). This was a prophecy of the Babylonian captivity, in which they would become vassals to those whose speech they did not understand. This was a Divine judgment upon them.

It is then that the Lord uses this statement to Israel, confirming that it is the means by which He drove them deep into the darkness which they preferred. “Therefore the word of the Lord will be to them [merely monotonous repetitions of]: precept upon precept, precept upon precept, rule upon rule, rule upon rule; here a little, there a little—that they may go and fall backward, and be broken and snared and taken” AMPLIFIED (verse 13).

By using this way, God closed their eyes by means of repeated elemental teaching. Yet, they also closed their eyes themselves, for the truth declared to them was nothing more than monotonous repetition to them. If they had good hearts, they would have asked for more

THE PARALLEL IN OUR TIME

The parallel in our time is staggering. There is such froth coming from the pulpits and literature of the land that it boggles the mind. Endless repetitions of what is required to be saved, have a successful marriage, the elemental details of holiness, etc. are pouring forth like an uncontrollable deluge – and that is the best teaching. The people are being taught as though they really had no capacity to learn.

The result of it all is that the modern church, just like Israel, has closed its eyes. Further, it is being done with religion in which there are some rudimentary principles being taught. Such elemental teaching is referred to as “the weak and beggarly elements of the world” (Gal 4:9). These were religious teachings –specifically from the Law, centering in circumcision, the observance of days, etc (Col 2:16-20).

Not A Time to Teach As Moses Did

This is “the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2a), when the message of the Gospel is to be preached and expounded – a message that is not only transcendent to the Law of Moses, but yields results that glorify God. It is a message that is tailored for those who will, and do, believe. It is not a message addressed to unbelief or the flesh. This is “the acceptable year” (2 Cor 6:2b). This is not the time to teach after the manner of Moses and the Prophets. They were sent to a “stiffnecked people” (Ex 32:9; Deut 9:13), and those who were “impudent and hardhearted” (Ezek 3:7).

From one point of view, the Lord closed the eyes of the their Prophets and rulers. From the practical point of view, those same prophets lisped to the people in baby talk, teaching elemental things over and over. That was the Divinely appointed means of driving them back, until finally they were “broken, and snared, and taken.”

Paul’s warning to the Jews who came to him in Rome, was to take care that this did not happen to them. Should they reject his message, God would see to it that, at the very best, they would be shut up to a monotonous and repetitious religion that would finally drive them into spiritual oblivion. O, what dangerous times are those in which we are living! It is tragic that so many are not cognizant of the situation.

THEY HAD GREAT REASONING AMONG THEMSELVES

“ 29 And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.”

The following versions omit this verse: NIV, NRSV, RSV, BBE, CJB, ESV, ERV, GWN, NAB, NET, NJB, NLT, LIVING, IE, WEYMOUTH, WILLIAMS, MONTGOMERY, CEV, GNB, MESSAGE. They are included in the following versions: KJV, NKJV, ASV, NASB, CSB, DARBY, DOUAY, GENEVA, MRD, NAS, NIB, PNT, RWB, TNT, WEB, YLT, ISV, AMPLIFIED, EMTV, LITV. It is not possible that this chasm of difference could exist if it were certain from the truly best manuscripts that it should be omitted.

WHEN HE HAD SAID THESE WORDS

“And when he had said these words.” When Paul quoted the words from the prophet Isaiah, a change in the setting took place. It is then that he said, “Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it” (Acts 28:28). These were the specific words that precipitated the breakup of the meeting. It seems to me that it was apparent to Paul that some of the listeners had misgivings about what he had said. His words were not at all clear to them, even though, from an enlightened point of view, they were very plain and spiritually elemental.

THE JEWS DEPARTED

“ . . . the Jews departed . . .” Other versions read, “The Jews went away,” DARBY “the Jews went out from him.” DOUAY “the Jews retired,” MRD “the Jews left,” NIB “went forth the Jews” ABP

All of the versions that omit this verse include the departure of the Jews in verse twenty-five: after Paul said something – “And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers” (Acts 28:25).

The difference in the approaches is that the inclusion of verse twenty-nine has the Jews leaving after Paul said he was going to the Gentiles instead of after his quotation of Isaiah. The inclusion of verse twenty-nine is more in harmony with Paul’s experience when speaking to the Jews in Jerusalem (Acts 22:21-23), and at Antioch (Acts 13:46-50). In both of these instances, it was Paul’s reference to being sent to the Gentiles that aroused the Jews.

THEY HAD GREAT REASONINGS

“ . . . and had great reasoning among themselves.” Other versions read, “had a great dispute among themselves,” NKJV “having mich disputing among themselves,” ASV “engaging in a prolonged debate among themselves,” CSB “much reasoning among themselves,” DOUAY “great disputations among them,” MRD “arguing vigorously among themselves,” NIB “arguing intently among themselves,” ISV “arguing and disputing among themselves,” AMPLIFIED “having among themselves debating,” ABP and “having much discussion among themselves.” LITV

This is an elaboration of the statement made in verse twenty-five: “they agreed not among themselves.”

This was a disputation that centered in Scripture, and was the kind of discussion that was common among the Jews (Acts 6:9; 9:29; 15:2,7; 17:2,17; 18:4,19; 19:8,9; 24:12). Although they lapsed into human traditions, the Jews were a people who took their religion seriously.

This kind of discussion was also common when I was young, but has largely faded from the Christian scenes of our time. The truth of the matter is that growing numbers of people have no settled convictions about Scripture, and have very little interest in the affirmations made therein. It seems to me that this reveals a decadent religious environment.

TWO FULL YEARS IN HIS OWN HIRED HOUSE

“ 30 And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him . . .”

The last words of the book of Acts devote two sentences to a two year period of Paul’s activity. By way of experience sixty verses were devoted to ship voyage from Caesarea to Rome (Acts 27:1-28:16). Among other things, this confirms that Luke is not merely providing a chronology of events

that took place after Jesus' ascension into heaven. He covers a period of at least thirty five years (Christ's ascension until the conclusion of this text). The events have more to do with Divine direction than historicity. The establishment of the church under the leadership of Peter, the inclusion of the Gentiles, and the spreading of the Gospel under Paul were major epochs. The consistency of what was preached from the beginning is seen, and the application of that Gospel to both Jew and Gentile.

Now, Luke concludes the book by leaving us thinking about Paul in Rome – how long he was here, and what he was consistently found doing.

HIS OWN HIRED HOUSE

“And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house . . .” Other versions read, “his own rented house,” NKJV “at his own expense,” NRSV “Paul was living in the house of which he had the use,” BBE “a place he rented for himself,” CJB “his own hired lodging,” DARBY “rented a place to live,” GWN and “ [at his own expense] in his own rented lodging.” AMPLIFIED

Here is a most marvelous thing. First, that the government would allow one of its prisoners to dwell in his own house. Second, that Paul was supplied the resources to rent his own house – apparently large enough to host more than small numbers.

It is generally considered that Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Philemon were written during this two year period. Paul refers to his imprisonment in Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon (Eph 3:1; 4:1; Phil 4:22; Phile 1:1,9). Both Luke and Aristarchus are mentioned in the letters to Philemon and the Colossians (Col 4:10,14; Phile 1:23,24). They are not mentioned in Ephesians and Philippians, which suggest they had left prior Paul's letters to them from Rome. It appears that these were very productive years for the apostle Paul.

In his epistles to the Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, he never pleads for funds, citing the great work that he is doing. He acknowledged that the Philippians had supported him (Phil 4:1-18). Yet, the Lord who had said he would “testify” of Him in Rome, saw to it that he was provided with the needed resources.

With the rise and prominence of financial advisors and fund raisers, it seems to me that this manner of the Kingdom has been largely forgotten – if it ever was believed. Financial campaigns have become so common that some view them as part and parcel of the Christian economy. But they are purely a human invention. Their use is at least to be questioned, and it is imperative that the fruit coming from them be carefully examined.

HE RECEIVED ALL THAT CAME UNTO HIM

“ . . . and received all that came in unto him . . .” Other versions read, “welcoming all who came to him,” NASB “ had talk with all those who went in to see him,” BBE “continued receiving all who came to see him.” CJB

This is the same amount of time Paul spent in the school of Tyrannus in Ephesus. The people also came to him there, and the outcome was that “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks” (Acts 19:10). One man, one place, and “all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord.” It was not because Paul went to Asia, but people from there, or who were going there, came to Paul, heard what he said, and published it abroad.

When Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Melita, the people brought their sick to Paul (Acts 28:9).

Now, there is a fresh and God-honoring approach to missions! It suggests that when a person really

has some God-honoring message and perspective, the Lord will bring the people to him – even if he is under house arrest!

This is not unusual. The people came to John the Baptist, even traveling significant distances to get to him (Matt 3:5-6; 11:8-10; Mk 1:5; Lk 3:7; John 3:23). The same was true of the Lord Jesus. The people came to him (Matt 4:24-25; 5:1; 8:1,16; 9:2,32; 12:15; 13:2; 15:30; 19:2; Mk 1:32; 6:33; 9:20,25; 10:13; Lk 4:42; 5:1,15; 6:17; 9:37; 14:25; 18:15; 21:38; John 6:24; 8:2; 12:9).

People came where Peter was on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:6). They brought the sick to where Peter was (Acts 5:15-16). I understand that this is not the only way contact was made with God's messengers. Philip went to Samaria and the eunuch. Paul and those with him went to Crete, Galatia, Phrygia, Ephesus, Troas, and other places. But there were key times when the people came to where the message was being delivered.

Not Coming to Paul

In our time, there are a number of professing Christians who have apparently never considered coming to Paul – specifically to the inspired writings that have come from his hand to the church. Here are three rather broad categories covered by Paul.

- **CONCERNING THE LORD'S SUPPER** – 1 Corinthians 11:23-32.
- **CONCERNING THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MYSTERY OF CHRIST** – Ephesians 3:4-7.
- **CONCERNING THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST** – Ephesians 3:7.

I have compiled a partial listing of teachings that are, for the most part, unique to Paul. I list them here in order to emphasize the extensive revelation that was vouchsafed to Paul.

PAUL'S UNIQUE TEACHING

THINGS GIVEN FOR ALL MEN TO HEAR

1. That the church is the body of Christ (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:12-27; Eph 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:4,12-16; 5:23,30; Col 1:16; 2:19; 3:15).
2. Jesus Christ as the Head of the body (Eph 5:23; Col 1:18; 1:2:19).
3. The merging of Jew and Gentile in Christ (Eph 2:15-16,19).
4. The exposition of justification by faith (Rom 3:20-5:18; Gal 2:16-17; 3:8-24).
5. The distinction between the Old and New Covenants (2 Cor 3:6-14; 7:22; 8:8-13; 10:16-17; Gal 3:15-17; 4:22-28; Heb 9:15-20).
6. The reality of "*the old man*" and "*the new man*" (Rom 6:6; Eph 5:22-24; Col 3:9-10).
7. The inner warfare experienced by those who live by faith (Rom 7:15-25; Gal 5:17).
8. The spiritual logic that declares the coming conversion of the Jews (Romans chapters 9-11).
9. The High Priesthood of Christ (Heb 3:1; 4:14-15; 5:5,10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1; 9:11; 10:21).
10. The relation of Abraham to those who believe (Rom 4:1-16; Gal 3:6-18).
11. The significance of Melchizedec (Heb 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:1, 10-21).

12. The eternal purpose of God (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9).
13. What took place behind the scenes when Jesus died (Col 1:20; 2:14-15; Heb 2:14; 9:26).
14. The whole armor of God (Rom 13:12; 2 Cor 6:7; Eph 6:10-18).
15. Spiritual weaponry (2 Cor 10:4-5; Eph 6:17).
16. Believers battling with principalities and powers (Eph 6:12).
17. The fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 5:9).
18. The works of the flesh (Gal 5:19-21).
19. The office of a Bishop (1 Tim 3:1-7; Tit 1:7-11).
20. The office of a deacon (1 Tim 3:10-13).
21. The exposition of spiritual gifts, and how they are administered (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:1-31; 14:1-12; Eph 4:11-16).
22. Why men cannot be justified by works (Rom 3:26; 4:2; Gal 2:16; 3:2-5).
23. The imputation of righteousness upon the basis of faith (Rom 1:7; 3:22-25; 4:5-25; 10:6-10; Phil 3:9).
24. Extensive teaching concerning baptism into Christ (Rom 6:1-23; Gal 3:27; Eph 4:5; Col 2:11-15).
25. The comparison of Adam and Christ (Rom 5:14-21; 1 Cor 15:22,45).
26. Extensive teaching on the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:15-57).
27. The ministry of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11-14, 26-27; 2 Cor 3:3-18; Gal 4:6, 29; 5:5,16-18,22-24; 6:8; Eph 2:22; Eph 5:9).
28. The intercession and mediation of Christ Jesus (Heb 7:25; 1 Tim 2:5; Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).
29. The intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:26-27).
30. Predestination and election (Rom 8:29-33; 9:11; 11:5-7,28; Eph 1:5,11; Col 3:12; 1 Thess 1:4; 2 Tim 2:10; Tit 1:1).
31. The body being for the Lord (Rom 12:1-2; 1 Cor 6:-13-20).
32. God's objective for believers (Rom 8:29-30; Eph 3:15-30; 4:12-16; Col 1:9-11).
33. The resurrection body (2 Cor 5:1-5).
34. The accomplishments of the cross (Eph 2:16; Phil 2:8; Col 1:20; 2:14-15).
35. Extensive teaching concerning the Lord's Table (1 Cor 10:21; 11:23-29).
36. Types and shadows (Gal 4:24; Col 2:17; Heb 8:5; 9:24; 10:1).
37. Extensive teaching of the grace of God (Rom 3:24; 4:4,16; 5:2, 15-17, 20-21; 6:14-15; ; 11:5-6; 12:3-6; 1 Cor 15:10; 2 Cor 8:9; Gal 1:15; Eph 2:5-8; 2 Thess 2:16; 1 Tim 1:14; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 2:11-12; Tit 3:7; Heb 2:9; 4:16; 12:28).
38. Heavenly hosts being tutored concerning God's wisdom through the church (Eph 3:10).
39. Angels being present in the assembly of the saints (1 Cor 11:10; Heb 12:22).
40. How the church is to respond to immoral people among them (1 Cor 5:1-9).
41. With the exceptions of six references to the "Gospel" in the book of Acts, and five

references in the epistles and Revelation, every mention of that word from in Romans through Revelation (seventy-five) is found in Paul's writings.

42. The ascension of Jesus and its bearing on the gifts given to the church (Eph 1:20; 4:8-11; 1 Tim 3:16; Heb 1:3; 4:14; 9:14).

43. The use of the word "heavenly" (1 Cor 15:48,49; Eph 1:3,20; 2:6; 3:10; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 3:1; 6:4; 8:5).

44. The degeneracy of the Gentile world without Christ (Rom 1:19-32).

45. With the exception of two references in First Peter, and one in Third John, the remaining teaching concerning Gentiles is given by Paul (48 references).

46. The fact that some of the Jewish branches were broken off, and some Gentiles were grafted into the Jewish olive tree (Rom 11:11-24).

47. The "man of sin" and the "son of perdition" (2 Thess 2:3).

48. The destruction of the man of sin at the coming of the Lord (2 Thess 2:3-10).

49. Receiving the love of the truth, and the consequences of not doing so (2 Thess 2:10-12).

50. What was involved in the condescension of Christ coming into the world (Phil 2:5-8).

51. What we are "come to" in Christ Jesus (Heb 12:22-24).

52. In showing the folly of seeking to be justified by Law, the allegory of Hagar and Sarah in explaining the distinction of the New Covenant (Gal 4:21-31).

53. The circumcision of Christ and of the heart (Rom 2:29; Col 2:11-12).

54. Newness of life and newness of spirit (Rom 6:4; 7:6).

55. The church is the Temple of God (1 Cor 3:16-17).

56. The church is built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph 2:22).

57. A warning to take heed how one builds upon the foundation of Christ (1 Cor 3:10-11).

58. Products of preaching referred to as wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver, and precious stones – some to be ultimately rejected, some to be received (1 Cor 3:12-16).

59. Whoever defiles the temple of God with inferior converts will be destroyed (1 Cor 3:17).

60. Delivering a professing Christian to Satan for the destruction of the flesh (1 Cor 5:5).

61. The means of supporting the proclaimer of Word as being typified under the Law (1 Cor 9:11-14).

62. The faithful receiving praise from God (1 Cor 4:5).

63. The purpose for civil government (Rom 13:1-7).

64. That the grace of God teaches the saved to reject ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world (Tit 2:11-12).

65. That "the flesh," or the "old man" is to be crucified (Rom 6:6; Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14).

66. That we can walk in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,25).

67. That is we walk in the Spirit, we will not fulfill the lust of the flesh (Gal 5:16,25).

68. That there is “no condemnation” to them which are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

69. That we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).

70. All of the teaching on reconciliation to God (Rom 5:10; 11:15; 2 Cor 5:18-20; Eph 2:16; Col 1:20-21; Heb 2:17).

71. With the exception of two brief references by Peter (1 Pet 1:2; 3:15), and one by Jude (Jude 1:1), all of the doctrine concerning sanctification comes from Paul (Rom 15:16; 1 Cor 1:2,30; 6:11; Eph 5:26; 1 Thess 4:3-4; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:21; Heb 2:11; 10:10,14,29; 13:12).

72. A comparison of the glory of the Old Covenant as compared with the glory of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:7-11).

73. That those who indulge the flesh will have no part in the inheritance reserved for those in Christ Jesus (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21; Eph 5:5-7).

74. On the subject of reprobacy (Rom 1:18; 2 Cor 13:5-6; 2 Tim 3:8; Tit 1:6).

The fact that the vast majority of Christendom is abysmally ignorant of nearly all of these subjects confirms that the ministry of Paul has been largely rejected in our day. These revelations were given to him to make them known, particularly to the church. Jesus did what He said He was going to do – show Paul many things. Paul did what he was supposed to do – make them known. Now it is the solemn responsibility of every believer to not be ignorant in these areas. To remain in a state of ignorance after such a phenomenal outpouring of Divine wisdom and insight is inexcusable!

May a new day come to the professed church in which they will seek the wisdom that was given to Paul, and avail themselves of the rich resources given to him.

PREACHING AND TEACHING

31 Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”

Now, we come to the subject matter provided in the teaching of Paul. It is summarized under two grand headings: “the Kingdom of God,” and “those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.” This summation is a fitting way to close the book of Acts.

PREACHING THE KINGDOM OF GOD

“Preaching the kingdom of God . . .” Other versions read, “the message about God’s Kingdom,” GWN “the reign of God” YLT All other versions that I have in my possession read “Kingdom of God.”

The word “Kingdom” is lexically defined as, “royal power, kingship, dominion, rule . . . the territory subject to the rule of a king . . . the rule of God.” THAYER

I find this definition hardly acceptable, because it is so rudimentary. In fact, there is a certain poverty concerning this subject in Christian literature. This is largely owing to the dominance of false doctrine concerning the end times. I have chosen to here include an excerpt from my book, “God’s Everlasting Kingdom,” from the chapter, “Defining the Kingdom of God.”

“The kingdom of God, in its simplest implication, means the reign of the Almighty, the exercise of His authority. This is a rule maintained with specific objectives in mind. It is an intelligent reign, being characterized by perceptible reason. God does nothing “without a cause” (Ezek. 14:23). He

always works with “purpose” in mind (Eph. 1:11). When the power or authority of God is devoted to a specific objective, it is a revelation of His Kingdom!

The kingdom of God functions by divine objective, and objective is implemented by work—effectual work. Work speaks of productivity but in this case of even more—of purposeful productivity—work with a purpose, an objective, and an aim. Work denotes divine initiative—the thrust of God’s influence and His power. The divine kingdom is technically “over all” (Ps. 47:2). The inhabitants of the earth and the armies of heaven together are governed by God—but with objective in mind. “And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and He doeth according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:35).

The kingdom of God is not houses and lands, meat and drink, or military exploits. It is the fulfillment of divine objective, accomplished in a moral arena in an intelligent manner.” CHAPTER ONE

So far as the extent of God’s Kingdom is concerned, there is no place, people, or domain which is not under His control. The Psalmist exclaimed, “His Kingdom ruleth over all” (Psa 103:19). There is a majesty about it that must be proclaimed. “To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations” (Psa 145:13). God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar the nature of His Kingdom, and Nebuchadnezzar published it to the entire world: “His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation” (Dan 4:3). And again, “whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom is from generation to generation” (Dan 4:34). King Darius also made a global decree announcing the nature of God’s Kingdom. “His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and His dominion shall be even unto the end” (Dan 6:26).

However, that is not the substance of what Paul preached. Rather his message identified the purpose God was executing – which purpose cannot possibly fail of fulfillment. All of the hosts of heaven, of earth, and under the earth are employed in the fulfillment of this objective – some willingly, and some who are completely oblivious of what is happening. The purpose being executed in this Kingdom pertains to the salvation of God, and it is being administered by the exalted Christ.

That salvation is the overall theme of all revelation, all inspired preaching, and all writing accomplished by men who were moved by the Holy Spirit of God. The fulness of this revelation has been realized following the death, resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Jesus Christ.

- Philip preached “the things concerning the Kingdom of God” (Acts 8:12).
- Barnabas taught the believers that “we must through much tribulation enter into the Kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).;
- Paul spoke for three months in the Ephesian synagogue “the things concerning the Kingdom of God” (Acts 19:8).
- Paul reminded the elders from Ephesus that he had going among them “preaching the Kingdom of God” (Acts 20:25).
- Previous to our text, Paul had spent an entire day testifying “the Kingdom of God ” (Acts 28:23).
- Paul taught that the Kingdom of God consisted of “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).
- He reminded the Corinthians that “the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power” (1 Cor 4:20).

These texts all related to what God is doing through Jesus Christ. They have to do with His “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11), and how it is being carried out within the framework of His great salvation.

- From one standpoint, He is showing His manifold wisdom to heavenly principalities and powers (Eph 3:10).
- From another perspective, He is preparing a bride for His Son (Rev 21:2,9).
- From yet another view, He is bringing many sons to glory through Jesus (Heb 2:10).
- He is carrying out His determined purpose in the domain of the enemy, calling those He predestinated, justifying them, and readying them for glorification (Rom 8:29).
- He is working everything together for the good of those who love Him, and have been called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28).
- He is redeeming a people “from all iniquity, and purifying unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14).

The message that is to be preached and taught pertains chiefly to what God is doing, not what man should do! The power is in the message of God’s accomplishments, not the message of man’s obligations (Rom 1:16).

The vast majority of the preaching of our day has to do with the kingdoms of men – what they should be doing, and how God can help them do it. While there is room for speaking concerning such matters, they are not to be the thrust of what is declared. Preaching the Kingdom of God is not affirming what ought to be, but what IS!

TEACHING THOSE THINGS WHICH CONCERN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

“ . . . and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ . . .” Other versions read, “about the Lord Jesus Christ.” NIV

What does it mean to teach “those things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ,” or “about the Lord Jesus Christ?” Is there really a person of sound mind who does not readily know what this means? This is not teaching about men, but teaching about Christ. It is not teaching about health and wealth, but teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not teaching about the church, the home, the family, the government, or anything else centering in men. It is teaching that finds its center and substance in the Lord Jesus Christ.

That means that the thrust of teaching is concerning who Jesus is, not what men can be. It is about what Jesus has accomplished, not what man should achieve.

When teaching majors on men and minors on the Lord Jesus Christ, it is wrong, no matter how Biblical it may appear to be. No preaching should center in Proverbs. Further, any use of the Proverbs of Solomon should be within the context of the Lord Jesus Christ. The subject of teaching is not to be the end of the world, the reign of an antichrist, or the danger of a global government. It is to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a mentality present in the professing church that perceives the preaching of Christ to be very limited in scope. Unless Jesus Himself is limited, this is a very foolish and dangerous assumption.

CONSIDER WHAT THE LORD JESUS HAS ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED

- He has made the appointed offering to God that has satisfied Him (Isa 53:11).
- He has perfected forever them that are sanctified (Heb 10:14).

- He has put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself (Heb 9:26).
- He has opened up a new and living way to God (Heb 10:20).
- He has destroyed the devil through His death (Heb 2:14).
- He has made the first covenant “Old” (Heb 8:13).
- He has reconciled men to God (Col 1:20-21).
- He has spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them in His cross (Col 2:15).
- He has ended the Law as a means to righteousness (Rom 10:4).
- He was tempted in all points like as we are, and remained without sin (Heb 4:15).
- He has conquered death, taking back His life, after He offered it to God in death (John 10:17-18).
- He has redeemed us from the curse of the law (Gal 3:13).
- He has delivered us from this present evil world (Gal 1:4).
- He has made us free (Gal 5:1; John 8:36).
- He destroyed the works of the devil (1 John 3:8).
- He brought in everlasting righteousness (Dan 9:24).
- He brought life and immortality to light (2 Tim 1:10).

PONDER WHAT CHRIST IS CURRENTLY DOING

- He is bringing us to God
(1 Pet 3:18).
- He is bringing many sons to glory (Heb 2:10).
- He is making intercession for those who are coming to God through Him (Heb 7:25).
- He is mediating the New Covenant (Heb 9:15; 12:24).
- He is giving repentance (Acts 5:31).
- He is pouring forth His Spirit (Acts 2:33; Tit 3:6).
- He is functioning as the Head of the church (Col 1:18).
- He is nourishing and cherishing the church (Eph 5:29).
- He is authoring and finishing faith (Heb 12:2).
- He is administering the Kingdom into which we have been translated (Col 1:13).
- He is the King of kings, and Lord of lords (1 Tim 6:15).
- He is the Great High Priest (Heb 4:14).
- He is the One Mediator between God and man (1 Tim 2: 5).
- He is giving us an understanding, that we might know Him who is true (1 John 5:20).
- He is teaching His people (Eph 4:20-21).
- He is sending grace, mercy, and peace (2 John 1:3).
- He is dwelling in our hearts by faith (Eph 3:17).

- He is manifesting Himself to those who love Him (John 14:21).

CONSIDER WHO JESUS IS

- The Son of God (Acts 8:37; 1 John 5:10).
- The Christ (Matt 16:16; 1 John 2:22).
- The Lord of all (Acts 10:36).
- The Good Shepherd (John 10:11,14).
- The Great Shepherd of the Sheep (Heb 13:20).
- The Shepherd and Bishop of our souls (1 Pet 2:25).
- The Chief Shepherd (1 Pet 5:4).
- The One Mediator (1 Tim 2:5).
- The Only Potentate (1 Tim 6:15).
- The Son of Man (Acts 7:56).
- The Last Adam (1 Cor 15:45).
- The Second Man (1 Cor 15:47).
- The First and the Last (Rev 1:11).
- The Beginning and the End (Rev 21:6).
- The Alpha and the Omega (Rev 1:8).
- The Word of God (Rev 19:13).
- The King of kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tim 6:15).
- The Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6).
- The True Vine (John 15:1).
- The True Bread (John 6:32).
- The Living Bread (John 6:51).
- The Light of the world (John 8:12).
- The Door of the sheep (John 10:7).
- The Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25).
- The Root and Offspring of David (Rev 22:16).
- The Bright and Morning Star (Rev 21:16).

These few examples reveal something of what is involved in teaching “those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ.” One of the great tragedies of our times is that so many other things are the subjects of preaching and teaching – things that really have little to do with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Other valid considerations only make sense within the context of the Lord Jesus Christ. Remove Him as the center and emphasis of preaching and teaching, and men are pushed into the domain of spiritual confusion and diversion.

WITH ALL CONFIDENCE

“ . . . with all confidence . . .” Other versions read, “with all openness,” NASB “boldly,” NIV “without fear,” BBE “with full boldness,” CSB “all freedom,” DARBY “very boldly,” GWN “with complete assurance,” NAB “complete boldness,” NET “complete fearlessness,” NJB “perfect

boldness,” ISV and “with boldness and quite openly.” AMPLIFIED

Lexically, the word confidence means, “1) Freedom in speaking, unreservedness in speech a) openly, frankly, i.e without concealment b) without ambiguity or circumlocution c) without the use of figures and comparisons 2) free and fearless confidence, cheerful courage, boldness, assurance 3) the deportment by which one becomes conspicuous or secures publicity.” THAYER

“With all confidence” is a weighty expression, indeed. This is something that cannot be taught by procedure. No man can make another man possess this kind of confidence. It is an authoritative confidence that comes from knowing the truth, and how to handle the word of God “aright” (2 Tim 2:15). Those who so speak are intellectually familiar with the panorama of Scripture, and have been illuminated from above. They have the overall picture of things so they can summarize and conclude at the right points and with the proper emphasis. This caliber of preachers and teachers have never been plentiful, but in our time they are exceedingly rare.

If a person has received the love of the truth, they will be able to recognize those who speak “with all confidence” – the chief of which was the Lord Jesus Himself. The people were “astonished” at His doctrine (Matt 7:28; 22:33; Mk 1:22; 11:18; Lk 4:32). They observed that He taught them “as one having authority, and not as the scribes” (Matt 7:29; Mk 1:22). This is because He knew what He was talking about, and the honest people sensed it.

Paul had “the mind of Christ” in his preaching and teaching (1 Cor 2:16). Not only did he have a grasp of the text itself, but he knew how to correlate various Scriptural expressions, associating them with the purpose of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, and God’s “great salvation.” If he spoke or wrote of anything, he knew how to frame it, like a jeweler knows how to set precious stones.

NO MAN FORBIDDING HIM

“ . . . no man forbidding him.” Other versions read, “unhindered,” NASB “without hindrance,” NIV “no orders were given that he was not to do so,” BBE “without prohibition,” DOUAY “no one stopped him,” GWN “without restriction,” NET “no one tried to stop him,” NLT “quite unmolested,” MONTGOMERY and “without being molested or hindered.” AMPLIFIED

Herein is a marvelous thing – no hindrance in preaching the Kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ! Paul was hindered in:

- Jerusalem (Acts 9:29; 21:27)
- Paphos (Acts 13:8)
- Antioch (Acts 13:45,50)
- Iconium (Acts 14:2)
- Lystra (Acts 14:19)
- Philippi (Acts 16:22)
- Ephesus (Acts 19:8-9)
- Thessalonica (Acts 17:5)
- Berea (Acts 17:13)
- Athens (Acts 17:32)
- Corinth (Acts 18:6,12).

Yet in Rome, for a period of two years, no person forbade him to speak of the Kingdom and Jesus, nor is there any recorded opposition against him during that time. Although Jews were present in

Rome, according to the record, they did not launch any initiative against him.

Because his ways pleased the Lord, He made “even his enemies to be at peace with him” (Prov 16:7). While this may be owing, in part, to the protection of Rome, the underlying cause of Paul’s freedom and safety was the working of the Lord. God was, so to speak, “for” him (Rom 8:31). Consequently, none could be against him.

CONCLUSION

Thus, we have completed a most insightful excursion through the book of Acts. We have seen the church instituted and growing in the power of the Lord. We have seen “the newness of life” fleshed out in human experience. A number of Kingdom realities have been lived out in this book. In closing, I will make mention of some them, as I am able to recall them. A profitable reading of this precious book will be realized when these things are perceived. I have listed 169 confirmations. There are many more, but time forbids a further development of this closing word. Suffice it to say, it illustrates the abundance of things made known in this marvelous record.

- Angels, Appearances of
- Angels, Deliverance by
- Angels, Direction by
- Angels, Involvement in the Kingdom
- Boldness, In Proclaiming the Truth
- Believers, Finding in unknown places
- Believers, How quickly can mature
- Believers, United together in one accord and with one mind
- Brethren, The concern that have for one another
- Brethren ,The preference of the people of God for
- Brethren ,The propensity of to gather together
- Christ, Appearance of glorified Christ
- Christ, Giving a special commission
- Christ, Preaching of
- Christ, Revealing the circumstances
- Christ, Teaching things concerning
- Christ, The centrality of
- Christian institutions, The total absence of
- Churches, Being comforted
- Churches, Being exhorted
- Churches, Being instructed more perfectly
- Churches, Exposed to false teaching
- Churches, How churches are established in the faith
- Churches, The superiority of care for the
- Confession, That Jesus is the Son of God
- Convenience, The absence of a preference for

- Corruption, In doctrine
- Corruption, The danger of religious
- Corruption, The potency of religious
- Deliverance, From circumstances
- Deliverance, From enemies
- Deliverance, Miraculous
- Divine approval
- Divine control, Of people
- Divine control, Of circumstances
- Divine direction
- Divine disapproval
- Divine empowerment
- Divine protection
- Divine revelation
- Enemies, How the saints respond to them
- Enemies, How they oppose the preaching of the Gospel
- Enemies, How they attempt to use governmental influences
- Exhortation, To believers
- Exhortation, To sinners
- Faith, The boldness of
- Faith, The confidence of
- Faith, The nature of
- Faith, The obedience of
- Faith, The response of to persecution
- Faith, The responsiveness of
- Faith, The sensitivity of
- Faith, The superiority of
- Faith, The unquenchable initiative of
- Faith, The willingness of
- Faith, Unity of the
- Falling away
- Favor, Of the Lord
- Favor, With the people
- God, Causing the enemies of the saints to be at peace with them
- God, How reacts to evil influences within the church
- God, How reacts to political rulers who refuse to give Him glory
- God's involvement, The explanation of in the death and resurrection of Christ

- Godly Counsel
- Godly men, How react to the introduction of false teaching
- Gospel, How God's enemies view
- Gospel, Suffering for preaching of
- Gospel, The content of
- Gospel, The power of the
- Gospel, The preaching of
- Gospel, The spread of
- Gospel, The superiority of to the Law
- Growth, Spiritual
- History, Spiritually expert review of
- Holy Spirit, Being filled with
- Holy Spirit, The comfort of
- Holy Spirit, The illuminating of
- Holy Spirit, The power of
- Holy Spirit, The convicting ministry of the
- Holy Spirit, The directing of
- Hope, Giving an answer for
- Hope, The dominancy of
- Hope, The nature of
- How holy men react to the rejection of their word
- How to, Encourage the saints
- How to, Respond to those clinging to the Old Testament manner
- Intervention, Heavenly, to reveal
- Intervention, Heavenly, to judge
- Intervention, Heavenly, to bless
- Intervention, To direct
- Jesus, Direction of
- Jesus, How is expounded
- Jesus, Preaching of
- Jesus, Response to
- Judgment, Of the Lord
- Kindness, Brotherly
- Kingdom, Preached
- Kingdom, The absence of a worldly pattern in the matters of the
- Knowledge of the Lord, Advancing in the
- Lord, The protection of

- Love of God, Showing that suffering and difficulty cannot separate us from
- Love, Of the brethren
- Love, Of the truth
- Martyrdom, Attitude in
- Martyrdom, Prayer in
- Ministries, Effective brief
- Ministries, Effective long-term
- New creation, The
- New man, Putting on the
- Newness of life, Walking in
- Obedience, Of faith
- Obedience, The instant nature of true
- Obedience, Willingly rendered
- Old man, Putting off the
- One accord, Disciples of
- One heart, Disciples of
- One mind, Disciples of
- One soul, Disciples of
- People, Being drawn to come to the people having the message
- People, Believing after a single exposure to the Gospel
- People, Divided in their response to truth
- People, Moved to have favor toward the servants of God
- Philosophy, Inferiority of worldly
- Philosophy, Skeptical nature of
- Prayer, For boldness to preach the Word
- Prayer, Gathering to pray
- Prayer, In one accord
- Prayer, The effects of
- Prayer, The power of
- Preaching, The emphasis true
- Preaching, The substance of
- Preaching, To believers
- Preaching, To idolaters
- Preaching, To philosophers
- Preaching, To sinners
- Promises, The fulfillment of God's
- Prophets, Expounding the

- Reasoning, With believers
- Reasoning, With hardened sinners
- Reasoning, With inclined sinners
- Repentance, How God gives
- Repentance, What men do when they repent
- Reports, Faithful of the working of the Lord
- Resurrection, Examples of
- Resurrection, Of the dead, Doctrine of
- Resurrection, The significance of Christ's
- Saints, Faithful and timely communication among
- Saints, Responding to threats
- Saints, Responding to the needs of the brethren
- Saints, Responding to good reports
- Saints, Responding to bad reports
- Saints, Responding to the rejection of the Gospel
- Saints, The importance of establishing
- Satan, How enters into the heart
- Satan, How moves people to oppose the Gospel
- Sinner, The swiftness with which can be turned
- Spirit, Unity of the
- Spiritual life, The absence of naivete in mature
- Spiritual Life – The beginnings, when believers find favor with the people
- Teaching, The substance of
- Temptation, Being tempted and responses to it
- Unbelief, The aggressiveness of
- Unbelief, The persecuting nature of
- Waiting upon the Lord – The virtue of
- Will of God, Properly interpreting the
- Willingness, Being to forgive one's enemies
- Willingness, Being willing in the day of His power
- Wisdom, Practical
- Wisdom, Spiritual
- Wisdom, Spiritual